THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON

BY

GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS

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PROLOGUE.

BETWEEN the 10th and 13th centuries Civilisation withdrew from Egypt and Syria, rested for a little space at Constantinople, and then passed away to the western climes of Europe.

From that period these climes have been the grand laboratory in which Civilisation has wrought out refinement in every art and every science, and whence it has diffused its benefits over the earth. It has taught commerce to plough the waves of every sea with the adventurous keel; it has enabled handfuls of disciplined warriors to subdue the mighty armaments of oriental princes; and its daring sons have planted its banners amidst the eternal ice of the poles. It has cut down the primitive forests of America; carried trade into the interior of Africa; annihilated time and distance by the aid of steam; and now contemplates how to force a passage through Suez and Panama.

The bounties of Civilisation are at present almost everywhere recognised.

Nevertheless, for centuries has Civilisation established, and for centuries will it maintain, its headquarters in the great cities of Western Europe: and with Civilisation does Vice go hand-in-hand.

Amongst these cities there is one in which contrasts of a strange nature exist. The most unbounded wealth is the neighbour of the most hideous poverty; the most gorgeous pomp is placed in strong relief by the most deplorable squalor; the most seducing luxury is only separated by a narrow wall from the most appalling misery.

The crumbs which fall from the tables of the rich would appear delicious viands to starving millions; and yet those millions obtain them not!

In that city there are in all districts five prominent buildings: the church, in which the pious pray; the gin-palace, to which the wretched poor resort to drown their sorrows; the pawnbroker's, where miserable creatures pledge their raiment, and their children's raiment, even unto the last rag, to obtain the means of purchasing food, and—alas! too often—intoxicating drink; the prison, where the victims of a vitiated condition of society expiate the crimes to which they have been driven by starvation and despair; and the workhouse, to which the destitute, the aged, and the friendless hasten to lay down their aching heads—and die!

And, congregated together in one district of this city, in an assemblage of palaces, whence emanate by night the delicious sounds of music; within whose walls the foot treads upon rich carpets; whose sideboards are covered with plate; whose cellars contain the choicest nectar of the temperate and torrid zones; and whose inmates recline beneath velvet canopies, feast at each meal upon the collated produce of four worlds, and scarcely have to breathe a wish before they find it gratified.

Alas! how appalling are these contrasts!

And, as if to hide its infamy from the face of heaven, this city wears upon its brow an everlasting cloud, which even the fresh fan of the morning fails to disperse for a single hour each day!

And in one delicious spot of that mighty city—whose thousand towers point upwards, from horizon to horizon, as an index of its boundless magnitude—stands the dwelling of one before whom all knees bow, and towards whose royal footstool none dares approach save with downcast eyes and subdued voice. The entire world showers its bounties upon the head of that favoured mortal; a nation of millions does homage to the throne whereon that being is exalted. The dominion of this personage so supremely blest extends over an empire on which the sun never sets—an empire greater than Jenghiz Khan achieved or Mohammed conquered.

This is the parent of a mighty nation; and yet around that parent's seat the children crave for bread!

Women press their little ones to their dried-up breasts in the agonies of despair; young delicate creatures waste their energies in toil from the dawn of day till long past the hour of midnight, perpetuating their unavailing labour from the hour of the brilliant sun to that when the dim candle sheds its light around the attic's naked walls; and even the very pavement groans beneath the weight of grief which the poor are doomed to drag over the rough places of this city of sad contrasts.

For in this city the daughter of the peer is nursed in enjoyments, and passes through an uninterrupted avenue of felicity from the cradle to the tomb; while the daughter of poverty opens her eyes at her birth upon destitution in all its most appalling shapes, and at length sells her virtue for a loaf of bread.

There are but two words known in the moral alphabet of this great city; for all virtues are summed up in the one, and all vices in the other: and those words are

WEALTH. | POVERTY.

Crime is abundant in this city: the lazar-house, the prison, the brothel, and the dark alley, are rife with all kinds of enormity; in the same way as the palace, the mansion, the clubhouse, the parliament, and the parsonage, are each and all characterised by their different degrees and shades of vice. But wherefore specify crime and vice by their real names, since in this city of which we speak they are absorbed in the multi-significant words—WEALTH and POVERTY?

Crimes borrow their comparative shade of enormity from the people who perpetrate them: thus is it that the wealthy may commit all social offences with impunity; while the poor are cast into dungeons and coerced with chains, for only following at a humble distance in the pathway of their lordly precedents.

From this city of strange contrasts branch off two roads, leading to two points totally distinct the one from the other.

One winds its tortuous way through all the noisome dens, of crime, chicanery, dissipation, and voluptuousness: the other meanders amidst rugged rocks and wearisome acclivities, it is true, but on the wayside are the resting-places of rectitude and virtue.

Along those roads two youths are journeying.

They have started from the same point; but one pursues the former path, and the other the latter.
Both come from the city of fearful contrasts; and both follow the wheels of fortune in different directions.
Where is that city of fearful contrasts?
Who are those youths that have thus entered upon paths so opposite the one to the other?
And to what destinies do those separate roads conduct them?

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOUSE IN SMITHFIELD.

OUR narrative opens at the commencement of July, 1831.

The night was dark and stormy. The sun had set behind huge piles of dingy purple clouds, which, after losing the golden hue with which they were for awhile tinged, became sombre and menacing. The blue portions of the sky that here and there had appeared before the sunset, were now rapidly covered over with those murky clouds which are the hiding-places of the storm, and which seemed to roll themselves together in dense and compact masses, ere they commenced the elemental war.

In the same manner do the earthly squadrons of cavalry and mighty columns of infantry form themselves into one collected armament, that the power of their onslaught may be the more terrific and irresistible.

That canopy of dark and threatening clouds was formed over London; and a stifling heat, which there was not a breath of wind to allay or mitigate, pervaded the streets of the great metropolis.

Everything portended an awful storm.

In the palace of the peer and the hovel of the artisan the windows were thrown up; and at many, both men and women stood to contemplate the scene—timid children crowding behind them.

The heat became more and more oppressive.

At length large drops of rain fell, at intervals of two or three inches apart, upon the pavement.

And then a flash of lightning, like the forked tongue of one of those fiery serpents of which we read in oriental tales of magic and enchantment, darted forth from the black clouds overhead.

At an interval of a few seconds the roar of the thunder, reverberating through the arches of heaven—now sinking, now exalting its fearful tone, like the iron wheels of a chariot rolled over a road with patches of uneven pavement here and there—stunned every ear, and struck terror into many a heart—the innocent as well as the guilty.

It died away, like the chariot, in the distance; and then all was solemnly still.

The interval of silence which succeeds the protracted thunder-clap is appalling in the extreme.

A little while—and again the lightning illuminated the entire vault above: and again the thunder, in unequal tones,—amongst which was one resembling the rattling of many vast iron bars together,—awoke every echo of the metropolis from north to south, and from east to west.

This time the dread interval of silence was suddenly interrupted by the torrents of rain that now deluged the streets.

There was not a breath of air; and the rain fell as perpendicularly straight as a line. But with it came a sense of freshness and of a pure atmosphere, which formed an agreeable and cheering contrast to the previously suffocating heat. It was like the spring of the oasis to the wanderer in the burning desert.

But still the lightning played, and the thunder rolled, above.

At the first explosion of the storm, amidst the thousands of men and women and children, who were seen hastening hither and thither, in all directions, as if they were flying from the plague, was one person on whose exterior none could gaze without being inspired with a mingled sentiment of admiration and interest.

He was a youth, apparently not more than sixteen years of age, although taller than boys usually are at that period of life. But the tenderness of his years was divined by the extreme effeminacy and juvenile loveliness of his countenance, which was as fair and delicate as that of a young girl. His long luxuriant hair, of a beautiful light chestnut colour, and here and there borrowing dark shades from the frequent undulations in which it rolled, flowed not only over the collar of his closely-buttoned blue frock coat, but also upon his shoulders. Its extreme profusion, and the singular manner in which he wore it, were, however, partially concealed by the breadth of the brim of his hat, that was placed as it were entirely upon the back of his head, and, being thus thrown off his countenance, revealed the high, intelligent, and polished forehead above which that rich hair was carefully parted.

His frock coat, which was single-breasted, and buttoned up to the throat, set off his symmetrical and elegant figure to the greatest advantage. His shoulders were broad, but were characterised by that fine fall or slope which is so much admired in the opposite sex. He wore spurs upon the heels of his diminutive polished boots; and in his hand he carried a light riding-whip. But he was upon foot and alone; and, when the first flash of lightning dazzled his expressive hazel eyes, he was hastily traversing the foul and filthy arena of Smithfield-market.

An imagination poetically inspired would suppose a similitude of a beautiful flower upon a fetid manure heap.

He cast a glance, which may almost be termed one of affright, around; and his cheek became flushed. He had evidently lost his way, and was uncertain where to obtain an asylum against the coming storm.

The thunder burst above his head; and a momentary shudder passed over his frame. He accosted a man to inquire his way; but the answer he received was rude, and associated with a ribald joke.

He had not courage to demand a second time the information he sought; but, with a species of haughty disdain at the threatening storm, and a proud reliance upon himself, proceeded onwards at random.

He even slackened his pace: a contemptuous smile curled his lips, and the glittering white teeth appeared as it were between two rose-leaves.

His chest, which was very prominent, rose up and down almost convulsively; for it was evident that he endeavoured to master conflicting feelings of vexation, alarm, and disgust—all produced by the position in which he found himself.

To one so young, so delicate, and so frank in appearance, the mere fact of losing his way by night in a disgusting neighbourhood, during an impending storm, and insulted by a low-life ruffian, was not the mere trifle which it would have been considered by the hardy and experienced man of the world.

Not a public conveyance was to be seen; and the doors of all the houses around appeared inhospitably closed: and every moment it seemed to grow darker.

Accident conducted the interesting young stranger into that labyrinth of narrow and dirty streets which lies in the immediate vicinity of the north-western angle of Smithfield-market.

It was in this horrible neighbourhood that the youth was now wandering. He was evidently shocked at the idea that human beings could dwell in such fetid and unwholesome dens; for he gazed with wonder, disgust, and alarm upon the houses on either side. It seemed as if he had never beheld till now a labyrinth of dwellings whose very aspect appeared to speak of hideous poverty and fearful crime.

Meantime the lightning flashed, and the thunder rolled; and at length the rain poured down in torrents. Obeying a mechanical impulse, the youth rushed up the steps of a house at the end of one of those dark, narrow, and dirty streets the ominous appearance of which was every now and then revealed to him by a light streaming from a narrow window, or the glare of the lightning. The framework of the door projected somewhat, and appeared to offer a partial protection from the rain. The youth drew as closely up to it as possible; but to his surprise it yielded behind him, and burst open. With difficulty he saved himself from falling backwards into the passage with which the door communicated.

Having recovered from the sudden alarm with which this incident had inspired him, his next sentiment was one of pleasure to think that he had thus found a more secure asylum against the tempest. He, however, felt wearied—desperately wearied; and his was not a frame calculated to bear up against the oppressive and crushing feeling of fatigue. He determined to penetrate, amidst the profound darkness by which he was surrounded, into the dwelling; thinking that if there were any inmates they would not refuse him the accommodation of a chair; and if there were none, he might find a seat upon the staircase.

He advanced along the passage, and groped about. His hand encountered the lock of a door: he opened it, and entered a room. All was dark as pitch. At that moment a flash of lightning, more than usually vivid and prolonged, illuminated the entire scene. The glance which he cast around was as rapid as the glare which made objects visible to him for a few moments. He was in a room entirely empty; but in the middle of the floor—only three feet from the spot where he stood—there was a large square of jet blackness.

The lightning passed away: utter darkness again surrounded him; and he was unable to ascertain what that black square, so well defined and apparent upon the dirty floor, could be.

An indescribable sensation of fear crept over him; and the perspiration broke out upon his forehead in large drops. His knees bent beneath him; and, retreating a few steps, he leaned against the door-posts for support.

He was alone—in an uninhabited house, in the midst of a horrible neighbourhood; and all the fearful tales of midnight murders which he had ever heard or read, rushed to his memory: then, by a strange but natural freak of the fancy, those appalling deeds of blood and crime were suddenly associated with that incomprehensible but ominous black square upon the floor.

He was in the midst of this terrible waking dream—this more than ideal nightmare—when hasty steps approached the front door from the street; and, without stopping, entered the passage. The youth crept silently towards the farther end, the perspiration oozing from every pore. He felt the staircase with his hands; the footsteps advanced; and, light as the fawn, he hurried up the stairs. So noiseless were his motions, that his presence was not noticed by the new-comers, who in their turns also ascended the staircase.

The youth reached a landing, and hastily felt for the doors of the rooms with which it communicated. In another moment he was in a chamber, at the back part of the house. He closed the door, and placed himself against it with all his strength—forgetful, poor youth! that his fragile form was unavailing, with all its power, against even the single arm of a man of only ordinary strength.

Meantime the new-comers ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE OLD HOUSE.

FORTUNATELY for the interesting young stranger, the individuals who had just entered the house did not attempt the door of the room in which he had taken refuge. They proceeded straight—and with a steadiness which seemed to indicate that they knew the locality well—to the front chamber upon the same floor.

In a few moments there was a sharp grating noise along the wall; and then a light suddenly shone into the room where the young stranger was concealed. He cast a terrified glance around, and beheld a small square window in the wall, which separated the two apartments. It was about five feet from the floor—a height which permitted the youth to avail himself of it, in order to reconnoitre the proceedings in the next room.

By means of a candle which had been lighted by the aid of a lucifer-match, and which stood upon a dirty deal table, the young stranger beheld two men, whose outward appearance did not serve to banish his alarm. They were dressed like operatives of the most humble class. One wore a gabardine and coarse leather gaiters, with laced-up boots; the other had on a fustian shooting-jacket and long corduroy trousers. They were both dirty and unshaven. The one with the shooting-jacket had a profusion of hair about his face, but which was evidently not well acquainted with a comb: the other wore no whiskers, but his beard was of three or four days' growth. Both were powerful, thick-set, and muscular men; and the expression of their countenances was dogged, determined, and ferocious.

The room to which they had betaken themselves was cold, gloomy, and dilapidated. It was furnished with the deal table before mentioned, and three old crazy chairs, upon two of which the men now seated themselves. But they were so placed that they commanded, their door being open, a full view of the landing-place; and thus the youthful stranger deemed it impolitic to attempt to take his departure for the moment.

"Now, Bill, out with the bingo," said the man in the gabardine to his companion.

"Oh! you're always for the lush, you are, Dick," answered the latter in a surly tone, producing at the same time a bottle of liquor from the capacious pocket of his fustian coat. "But I wonder how the devil it is that Crankey Jem ain't come yet. Who the deuce could have left that infernal door open?"

"Jem or some of the other blades must have been here and left it so. It don't matter; it lulls suspicion."

"Well, let's make the reglars all square," resumed the man called Bill, after a moment's pause; "we'll then booze a bit, and talk over this here new job of our'n."

"Look alive, then," said Dick; and he forthwith took from beneath his gabardine several small parcels done up in brown paper.

The other man likewise divested the pockets of his fustian coat of divers packages; and all these were piled upon the table.

A strange and mysterious proceeding then took place.

The person in the fustian coat approached the chimney, and applied a small turnscrew, which he took from his pocket, to a screw in the iron frame-work of the rusty grate. In a few moments he was enabled to remove the entire grate with his hands; a square aperture of considerable dimensions was then revealed. Into this place the two men thrust the parcels which they had taken from their pockets: the grate was replaced, the screws were fastened once more, and the work of concealment was complete.

The one in the gabardine then advanced towards that portion of the wall which was between the two windows; and the youth in the adjoining room now observed for the first time that the shutters of those windows were closed, and that coarse brown paper had been pasted all over the chinks and joints. Dick applied his hand in a peculiar manner to the part of the wall just alluded to, and a sliding panel immediately revealed a capacious cupboard. Thence the two men took food of by no means a coarse description, glasses, pipes, and tobacco; and, having hermetically closed the recess once more, seated themselves at the table to partake of the good cheer thus mysteriously supplied.

The alarm of the poor youth in the next chamber, as he contemplated these extraordinary proceedings, may be better conceived than depicted. His common sense told him that he was in the den of lawless thieves—perhaps murderers; in a house abounding with the secret means of concealing every kind of infamy. His eyes wandered away from the little window that had enabled him to observe the above-described proceedings, and glanced fearfully around the room in which he was concealed. He almost expected to see the very floor open beneath his feet. He looked down mechanically as this idea flitted through his imagination; and to his horror and dismay he beheld a trap-door in the floor. There was no mistaking it: there it was—about three feet long and two broad, and a little sunken beneath the level of its frame-work.

Near the edge of the trap-door lay an object which also attracted the youth's attention and added to his fears. It was a knife with a long blade pointed like a dagger. About three inches of this blade was covered with a peculiar rust: the youth shuddered; could it be human blood that had stained that instrument of death?

Every circumstance, however trivial, aided, in such a place as that, to arouse or confirm the worst fears, the most horrible suspicions.

The voices of the two men in the next room fell upon the youth's ear; and, perceiving that escape was still impracticable, he determined to gratify that curiosity which was commingled with his fears.

"Well, now, about this t'other job, Dick?" said Bill.

"It's Jem as started it," was the reply. "But he told me all about it, and so we may as well talk it over. It's up Islington way—up

there between Kentish Town and Lower Holloway."

"Who's crib is it?"

"A swell of the name of Markham. He is an old fellow, and has two sons. One, the eldest, is with his regiment; t'other, the youngest, is only about fifteen, or so—a mere kid."

"Well, there's no danger to be expected from him. But what about the flunkies?"

"Only two man-servants and three vimen. One of the man-servants is the old butler, too fat to do any good; and t'other is a young tLoiger."

"And that's all?"

"That's all. Now you, and I, and Jem is quite enough to crack that there crib. When is it to be done?"

"Let's say to-morrow night; there is no moon now to speak on, and business in other quarters is slack."

"So be it. Here goes, then, to the success of our new job at old Markham's;" and as the burglar uttered these words he tossed off a bumper of brandy.

This example was followed by his worthy companion; and their conversation then turned upon other topics.

"I say, Bill, this old house has seen some jolly games, han't it?"

"I should think it had too. It was Jonathan Wild's favourite crib; and he was no fool at keeping things dark."

"No, surely. I dare say the well-staircase in the next room there, that's covered over with the trap-door, has had many a dead body flung down it into the Fleet."

"Ah! and without telling no tales too. But the trap-door has been nailed over for some years now."

The unfortunate youth in the adjacent chamber was riveted in silent horror to the spot, as these fearful details fell upon his ears.

"Why was the trap-door nailed down?"

"'Cos there's no use for *that* now, since the house is uninhabited, and no more travellers comes to lodge here. Besides, if we wanted to make use of such a conwenience, there's another——"

A loud clap of thunder prevented the remainder of this sentence from reaching the youth's ears.

"I've heard it said that the City is going to make great alterations in this quarter," observed Dick, after a pause. "If so be they comes near us, we must shift our quarters."

"Well, and don't we know other cribs as good as this—and just under the very nose of the authorities too? The nearer you gets to them the safer you finds yourself. Who'd think now that here, and in Peter-street, and on Saffron-hill too, there was such cribs as this? Lord, how such coves as you and me does laugh when them chaps in the Common Council and the House of Commons gets on their legs and praises the blue-bottles up to the skies as the most acutest police in the world, while they wotes away the people's money to maintain 'em!"

"Oh! as for alterations, I don't suppose there'll be any for the next twenty years to come. They always talks of improvements long afore they begins 'em."

"But when they *do* commence, they won't spare this lovely old crib! It 'ud go to my heart to see them pull it about. I'd much sooner take and shove a dozen stiff uns myself down the trap than see a single rafter of the place ill-treated—that I would."

"Ah! if so be as the masons does come to pull its old carcass about, there'll be some fine things made known to the world. Them cellars down stairs, in which a man might hide for fifty years and never be smelt out by the police, will turn up a bone or two, I rather suspect; and not of a sheep, nor a pig, nor a bull neither."

"Why—half the silly folks in this neighbourhood are afeerd to come here even in the daytime, because they say it's haunted," observed Bill, after a brief pause. "But, for my part, I shouldn't be frightened to come here at all hours of the night, and sit here alone too, even if every feller as was scragged at Tyburn or Newgate, and every one wot has been tumbled down these holes into the Fleet, was to start up, and——"

The man stopped short, turned ghastly pale, and fell back stupified and speechless in his chair. His pipe dropped from between his fingers, and broke to pieces upon the floor.

"What the devil's the matter now?" demanded his companion, casting an anxious glance around.

"There! there! don't you see——," gasped the terrified ruffian, pointing towards the little window looking into the next room.

"It's only some d——d gammon of Crankey Jem," ejaculated Dick, who was more courageous in such matters than his companion. "I'll deuced soon put that to rights!"

Seizing the candle, he was hurrying towards the door, when his comrade rushed after him, crying, "No—I won't be left in the dark! I can't bear it! Damme, if you go, I'll go with you!"

The two villains accordingly proceeded together into the next room.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAP-DOOR.

THE youthful stranger had listened with ineffable surprise and horror to the conversation of the two ruffians. His nerves had been worked up by all the circumstances of the evening to a tone bordering upon madness—to that pitch, indeed, when it appeared as if there were no alternative left save to fall upon the floor and yield to the *delirium tremens* of violent emotions.

He had restrained his feelings while he heard the burglary at Mr. Markham's dwelling coolly planned and settled; but when the discourse of those two monsters in human shape developed to his imagination all the horrors of the fearful place in which he had sought an asylum,—when he heard that he was actually standing upon the very verge of that staircase down which innumerable victims had been hurled to the depths of the slimy ditch beneath,—and when he thought how probable it was that his bones were doomed to whiten in the dark and hidden caverns below, along with the remains of other human beings who had been barbarously murdered in cold blood,—reason appeared to forsake him. A cold sweat broke forth all over him; and he seemed about to faint under the impression of a hideous nightmare.

He threw his hat upon the floor—for he felt the want of air. That proud forehead, that beautiful countenance were distorted with indescribable horror; and an ashy pallor spread itself over his features.

Death, in all its most hideous forms, appeared to follow—to surround—to hem him in. There was no escape:—a trap-door here—a well, communicating with the ditch, there—or else the dagger;—no matter in what shape—still Death was before him—behind him—above him—below him—on every side of him.

It was horrible—most horrible!

Then was it that a sudden thought flashed across his brain; he resolved to attempt a desperate effort to escape. He summoned all his courage to his aid, and opened the door so cautiously that, though the hinges were old and rusted, they did not creak.

The crisis was now at hand. If he could clear the landing unperceived, he was safe. It was true that, seen or unseen, he might succeed in escaping from the house by means of his superior agility and nimbleness; but he reflected that these men would capture him, again, in a few minutes, in the midst of a labyrinth of streets with which he was utterly unacquainted, but which they knew so well. He remembered that he had overheard their secrets and witnessed their mysterious modes of concealment; and that, should he fall into their power, death must inevitably await him.

These ideas crossed his brain in a moment, and convinced him of the necessity of prudence and extreme caution. He must leave the house unperceived, and dare the pitiless storm and pelting rain; for the tempest still raged without.

He once more approached the window to ascertain if there were any chance of stealing across the landing-place unseen. Unfortunately he drew too near the window: the light of the candle fell full upon his countenance, which horror and alarm had rendered deadly pale and fearfully convulsed.

It was at this moment that the ruffian, in the midst of his unholy vaunts, had caught sight of that human face—white as a sheet—and with eyes fixed upon him with a glare which his imagination rendered stony and unearthly.

The youth saw that he was discovered; and a full sense of the desperate peril which hung over him, rushed to his mind. He turned, and endeavoured to fly away from the fatal spot; but, as imagination frequently fetters the limbs in a nightmare, and involves the sleeper in danger from which he vainly attempts to run, so did his legs now refuse to perform their office.

His brain whirled—his eyes grew dim: he grasped at the wall to save himself from falling—but his senses were deserting him—and he sank fainting upon the floor.

He awoke from the trance into which he had fallen, and became aware that he was being moved along. Almost at the same instant his eyes fell upon the sinister countenance of Dick, who was carrying him by the feet. The other ruffian was supporting his head.

They were lifting him down the staircase, upon the top step of which the candle was standing.

All the incidents of the evening immediately returned to the memory of the wretched boy, who now only too well comprehended the desperate perils that surrounded him.

The bottom of the staircase was reached: the villains deposited their burden for a moment in the passage, while Dick retraced his steps to fetch down the candle.

And then a horrible conflict of feelings and inclinations took place in the bosom of the unhappy youth. He shut his eyes; and for an instant debating within himself whether he should remain silent or cry out. He dreamt of immediate—instantaneous death; and yet he thought that he was young to die—oh! so young—and that men could not be such barbarians——

But when the two ruffians stooped down to take him up again, fear surmounted all other sentiments, feelings, and inclinations; and his deep—his profound—his heartfelt agony was expressed in one long, loud, and piercing shriek!

And then a fearful scene took place.

The two villains carried the youth into the front room upon the ground-floor, and laid him down for a moment.

It was the same room to which he had first found his way upon entering that house.

It was the room in which, by the glare of the evanescent lightning, he had seen that black square upon the dirty floor.

For a few instants all was dark. At length the candle was brought by the man in the fustian coat.

The youth glanced wildly around him, and speedily recognised that room.

He remembered how deep a sensation of horror seized him when that black square upon the floor first caught his eyes.

He raised himself upon his left arm, and once more looked around.

Great God! was it possible?

That ominous blackness—that sinister square was the mouth of a yawning gulf, the trap-door of which was raised.

A fetid smell rose from the depths below, and the gurgling of a current was faintly heard.

The dread truth was in a moment made apparent to that unhappy boy—much more quickly than it occupies to relate or read. He started from his supine posture, and fell upon his knees at the feet of those merciless villains who had borne him thither.

"Mercy, mercy! I implore you! Oh! do not devote me to so horrible a death! Do not—*do not murder me*!"

"Hold your noisy tongue, you fool," ejaculated Bill, brutally. "You have heard and seen too much for our safety; we can't do otherwise."

"No, certainly not," added Dick. "You are now as fly to the fakement as any one of us."

"Spare me, spare me, and I will never betray you! Oh! do not send me out of this world, so young—so very young! I have money, I have wealth, I am rich, and I will give you all I possess!" ejaculated the agonized youth; his countenance wearing an expression of horrible despair.

"Come; here's enough. Bill, lend a hand!" and Dick seized the boy by one arm, while his companion took a firm hold of the other.

"Mercy, mercy!" shrieked the youth, struggling violently; but struggling vainly. "You will repent when you know—— I am not what I——"

He said no more: his last words were uttered over the mouth of the chasm ere the ruffians loosened their hold;—and then he fell.

The trap-door was closed violently over the aperture, and drowned the scream of agony which burst from his lips.

The two murderers then retraced their steps to the apartment on the first floor.

* * * * *

On the following day, about one o'clock, Mr. Markham, a gentleman of fortune residing in the northern environs of London, received the following letter:—

"The inscrutable decrees of Providence have enabled the undersigned to warn you, that this night a burglarious attempt will be made upon your dwelling. The wretches who contemplate this infamy are capable of a crime of much blacker die. Beware!

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND."

This letter was written in a beautiful feminine hand. Due precaution was adopted at Mr. Markham's mansion; but the attempt alluded to in the warning epistle was, for some reason or another, not made.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO TREES.

It was between eight and nine o'clock, on a delicious evening, about a week after the events related in the preceding chapters, that two youths issued from Mr. Markham's handsome, but somewhat secluded dwelling, in the northern part of the environs of London, And slowly ascended the adjacent hill. There was an interval of four years between the ages of these youths, the elder being upwards of nineteen, and the younger about fifteen; but it was easy to perceive by the resemblance which existed between them that they were brothers. They walked at a short distance from each other, and exchanged not a word as they ascended the somewhat steep path which conducted them to the summit of the eminence that overlooked the mansion they had just left. The elder proceeded first; and from time to time he clenched his fists, and knit his brows, and gave other silent but expressive indications of the angry passions which were concentrated in his breast. His brother followed him with downcast eyes, and with a countenance denoting the deep anguish that oppressed him. In this manner they arrived at the top of the hill, where they seated themselves upon a bench, which stood between two young ash saplings.

For a long time the brothers remained silent; but at length the younger of the two suddenly burst into tears, and exclaimed, "Oh! why, dearest Eugene, did we choose this spot to say farewell—perhaps for ever?"

"We could not select a more appropriate one, Richard," returned the elder brother. "Four years ago those trees were planted by our hands; and we have ever since called them by our own names. When we were wont to separate, to repair to our respective schools, we came hither to talk over our plans, to arrange the periods of our correspondence, and to anticipate the pursuits that should engage us during the vacations. And when we returned from our seminaries, we hastened hither, hand-in-hand, to see how our trees flourished; and he was most joyous and proud whose sapling appeared to expand the more luxuriantly. If ever we quarrelled, Richard, it was here that we made our peace again; and, seated upon this bench, we have concocted plans for the future; which, haply, will never now be realised!"

"You are right, my dear brother," said Richard, after a pause, during which he appeared to reflect profoundly upon Eugene's words; "we could not have selected a better spot. Still it is all those happy days to which you allude that now render this moment the more bitter. Tell me, must you depart? Is there no alternative? Can I not intercede with our father? Surely, surely, he will not discard one so young as you, and whom he has loved—must still love—so tenderly?"

"Intercede with my father!" repeated Eugene, with an irony which seemed extraordinary in one of his tender age; "no, never! He has signified his desire, he has commanded me no longer *to pollute his dwelling*—those were his very words, and he shall be obeyed."

"Our father was incensed, deeply incensed, when he spoke," urged Richard, whose voice was rendered almost inaudible by his sobs; "and to-morrow he will repent of his harshness towards you."

"Our father had no right to blame me," said Eugene violently; "all that has occurred originated in his own conduct towards me. The behaviour of a parent to his son is the element of that son's ruin or success in after life."

"I know not how you can reproach our father, Eugene," said Richard, somewhat reproachfully, "for he has ever conducted himself with tenderness towards us; and since the death of our dear mother——"

"You are yet too young, Richard," interrupted Eugene impatiently, "to comprehend the nature of the accusation which I bring against my father. I will, however, attempt to enable you to understand my meaning, so that you may not imagine that I am acting with duplicity when I endeavour to find a means of extenuation, if not of justification, for my own conduct. My father lavished his gold upon my education, as he also did upon yours; and he taught us from childhood to consider ourselves the sons of wealthy parents who would enable their children to move with éclat in an elevated sphere of life. It was just this day year that I joined my regiment at Knightsbridge. I suddenly found myself thrown amongst gay, dissipated, and wealthy young men—my brother officers. Many of them were old acquaintances, and had been my companions at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. They speedily enlisted me in all their pleasures and debaucheries, and my expenditure soon exceeded my pay and my allowance. I became involved in debts, and was compelled to apply to my father to relieve me from my embarrassments. I wrote a humble and submissive letter, expressing contrition for my faults, and promising to avoid similar pursuits in future. Indeed, I was wearied of the dissipation into which I had plunged, and should have profited well by the experience my short career of pleasure and folly had enabled me to acquire. I trembled upon that verge when my father could either ruin or save me. He did not reply to my letter, and I had not courage to seek an interview with him. Again did I write to him: no answer. I had lost money at private play, and had contracted debts in the same manner. Those, Richard, are called *debts of honour*, and must be paid in full to your creditor, however wealthy he may be, even though your servants and tradesmen should be cheated out of their hard-earned and perhaps much-needed money altogether. I wrote a third time to our father, and still no notice was taken of my appeal. The officers to whom I owed the money lost at play began to look coldly upon me, and I was reduced to a state of desperation. Still I waited for a few days, and for a fourth time wrote to my father. It appears that he was resolved to make me feel the inconvenience of the position in which I had placed myself by my follies; and he sent me no answer. I then called at the house, and he refused to see me. This you know, Richard. What could I do? Driven mad by constant demands for money which I could not pay, and smarting under the chilling glances and taunting allusions of my brother officers, I sold my commission. You are acquainted with the rest. I came home, threw myself at my father's feet, and he spurned me away from him! Richard, was my crime so very great? and has not the unjust, the extreme severity of my father been the cause of all my afflictions?"

"I dare not judge between you," said Richard mildly.

"But what does common sense suggest?" demanded Eugene.

"Doubtless our father knows best," returned the younger brother.

"Old men are often wrong, in spite of their experience—in spite of their years," persisted Eugene.

"My dear brother," said Richard, "I am afraid to exercise my judgment in a case where I stand a chance of rebelling against my father, or questioning his wisdom; and, at the same time, I am anxious to believe everything in your justification."

"I knew that you would not comprehend me," exclaimed Eugene, impatiently. "It is ridiculous not to dare to have an opinion of one's own! My dear brother," he added, turning suddenly round, "you have been to Eton to little purpose: I thought that nearly as much of the world was to be seen there as at Sandhurst. I find that I was mistaken."

And Eugene felt and looked annoyed at the turn which the conversation had taken.

Richard was unhappy, and remained silent.

In the meantime the sun had set; and the darkness was gradually becoming more intense.

Suddenly Eugene grasped his brother's hand, and exclaimed, "Richard, I shall now depart!"

"Impossible!" cried the warm-hearted youth: "you will not leave me thus—you will not abandon your father also, for a hasty word that he has spoken, and which he will gladly recal to-morrow? Oh! no—Eugene, you will not leave the dwelling in which you were born, and where you have passed so many happy hours! What will become of you? What do you purpose? What plan have you in view?"

"I have a few guineas in my pocket," returned Eugene; "and many a princely fortune has been based upon a more slender foundation."

"Yes," said Richard hastily; "you read of fortunes being easily acquired in novels and romances; and in past times persons may have enriched themselves suddenly; but in the great world of the present day, Eugene, I am afraid that such occurrences are rare and seldom seen."

"You know nothing of the world, Richard," said Eugene, almost contemptuously. "There are thousands of persons in London who live well, and keep up splendid establishments, without any apparent resources; and I am man of the world enough to be well aware that those always thrive the best in the long run who have the least to lose at starting. At all events I shall try my fortune. I will not, cannot succumb to a parent who has caused my ruin at my very first entrance into life."

"May God prosper your pursuits, and lend you the fortune which you appear to aim at!" ejaculated Richard fervently. "But once again—and for the last time, let me implore you—let me entreat you not to put this rash and hasty resolve into execution. Do stay—do not leave me, my dearest, dearest brother!"

"Richard, not all the powers of human persuasion shall induce me to abandon my present determination," cried Eugene emphatically, and rising from the bench as he spoke. "It is growing late, and I must depart. Now listen, my dear boy, to what I have to say to you."

"Speak, speak!" murmured Richard, sobbing as if his heart would break.

"All will be yet well," said Eugene, slightly touched by his brother's profound affliction. "I am resolved not to set foot in my father's house again; you must return thither and pack me up my papers and a few necessaries."

"And you will not leave this spot until my return?" said Richard.

"Solemnly I promise *that*," answered Eugene. "But stay; on your part you must faithfully pledge yourself not to seek my father, nor in any way interfere between him and me. Nay, do not remonstrate; you must promise."

"I promise you all—anything you require," said Richard mournfully; and, after affectionately embracing his brother, he hurried down the hill towards the mansion, turning back from time to time to catch a glimpse of Eugene's figure through the increasing gloom, to satisfy himself that he was still there between the two saplings.

Richard entered the house, and stole softly up to the bed-room which his brother usually occupied when at home. He began his mournful task of putting together the few things which Eugene had desired him to select; and while he was thus employed the tears rolled down his cheeks in torrents. At one moment he was inclined to hurry to his father, and implore him to interfere in time to prevent Eugene's departure; but he remembered his solemn promise, and he would not break it. Assuredly this was a sense of honour so extreme, that it might be denominated *false*; but it was, nevertheless, the sentiment which controlled all the actions of him who cherished it. Tenderly, dearly as he loved his brother—bitterly as he deplored his intended departure, he still would not forfeit his word and take the simple step which would probably have averted the much-dreaded evil. Richard's sense of honour and inflexible integrity triumphed, on all occasions, over every other consideration, feeling, and desire; and of this characteristic of his brother's nature Eugene was well aware.

Richard had made a small package of the articles which he had selected, and was about to leave the room to return to his brother, when the sound of a footstep in the passage communicating with the chamber, suddenly fell upon his ear.

Scarcely had he time to recover from the alarm into which this circumstance had thrown him, when the door slowly opened, and the butler entered the apartment.

He was a man of about fifty years of age, with a jolly red face, a somewhat bulbous nose, small laughing eyes, short grey hair standing upright in front, whiskers terminating an inch above his white cravat, and in person considerably inclined to corpulency. In height he was about five feet seven inches, and had a peculiar shuffling rapid walk, which he had learnt by some twenty-five years' practice in little journeys from the sideboard in the dining-room to his own pantry, and back again. He was possessed of an excellent heart, and was a good-humoured companion; but pompous, and swelling with importance in the presence of those whom he considered his inferiors. He was particularly addicted to hard words; and as, to use his own expression, he was "self-taught," it is not to be wondered if he occasionally gave those aforesaid hard words a pronunciation and a meaning which militated a little against received rules. In attire, he was unequalled for the whiteness of his cravat, the exuberance of his shirt-frill, the elegance of his waistcoat, the set of his kerseymere tights, and the punctilious neatness of his black silk stockings, and his well-polished shoes.

"Well, Master Richard," said the butler, as he shuffled into the room, with a white napkin under his left arm, "what in the name of everythink indiwisible is the matter now?"

"Nothing, nothing, Whittingham," replied the youth. "You had better go down stairs—my father may want you."

"If so be your father wants anythink, Tom will despond to the summins as usual," said the butler, leisurely seating himself upon a chair close by the table whereon Richard had placed his package. "But might I be so formiliar as to inquire into the insignification of that bundle of shirts and ankerchers."

"Whittingham, I implore you to ask me no questions: I am in a hurry—and——"

"Master Richard, Master Richard," cried the butler, shaking his head gravely, "I'm very much afeerd that somethink preposterious is going to incur. I could not remain a entire stranger to all that has transpirated this day; and now I know what it is," he added, slapping his right hand smartly upon his thigh; "your brother's a-going to amputate it!"

"To what?"

"To cut it, then, if you reprehend that better. But it shan't be done, Master Richard—it shan't be done!'

"Whittingham——"

"That's my nomenklitter, Master Richard," said the old man, doggedly; "and it was one of the fust you ever learned to pernounce. Behold ye, Master Richard, I have a right to speak—for I have knowed you both from your cradles—and loved you too! Who was it, when you come into this subluminary spear—who was it as nussed you—and——"

"Good Whittingham, I know all that, and——"

"I have no overdue curiosity to satisfy, Master Richard," observed the butler; "but my soul's inflicted to think that you and Master Eugene couldn't make a friend of old Whittingham. I feel it here, Master Richard—here, in my buzzim!"—and the worthy old domestic dealt himself a tremendous blow upon the chest as he uttered these words.

"I must leave you now, Whittingham; and I desire you to remain here until my return," said Richard. "Do you hear, Whittingham?"

"Yes, Master Richard; but I don't choose to do as you would wish in this here instance. I shall foller you."

"What, Whittingham?"

"I shall foller you, sir."

"Well—you can do that," said Richard, suddenly remembering that his brother had in nowise cautioned him against such an intervention as this; "and pray God it may lead to some good."

"Ah! now I see that I am raly wanted," said the butler, a smile of satisfaction playing upon his rubicund countenance.

Richard now led the way from the apartment, the butler following him in a stately manner. They descended the stairs, crossed the garden, and entered the path which led to the top of the hill.

"Two trees, I suppose?" said the old domestic inquiringly.

"Yes—he is there!" answered Richard; "but the reminiscence of the times when we planted those saplings has failed to induce him to abandon a desperate resolution."

"Ah! he ain't got Master Richard's heart—I always knowed that," mused the old man half audibly as he trudged along. "There are them two lads—fine tall youths—both black hair, and intelligible black eyes—admirably formed—straight as arrows—and yet so diversified in disposition!"

Richard and the butler now reached the top of the hill. Eugene was seated upon the bench in a deep reverie; and it was not until his brother and the faithful old domestic stood before him, that he awoke from that fit of abstraction.

"What! Is that you, Whittingham?" he exclaimed, the moment he recognised the butler. "Richard, I did not think you would have done this."

"It wasn't Master Richard's fault, sir," slid Whittingham; "I was raythe too wide awake not to smell what was a-going on by virtue of my factory nerves; and so——"

"My dear Whittingham," hastily interrupted Eugene, "I know that you are a faithful servant to my father, and very much attached to us: on that very account, pray do not interfere!"

"Interfere!" ejaculated Whittingham, thoroughly amazed at being thus addressed, while a tear started into his eye: "not interfere Master Eugene? Well, I'm—I'm—I'm—regularly flabbergasted!"

"My mind is made up," said Eugene, "and no persuasion shall alter its decision. I am my own master—my father's conduct has emancipated me from all deference to parental authority. Richard, you have brought my things? We must now say adieu."

"My dearest brother——"

"Master Eugene——"

"Whither are you going?"

"I am on the road to fame and fortune!"

"Alas!" said Richard mournfully, "you may perhaps find that this world is not so fruitful in resources as you now imagine."

"All remonstrances—all objections are vain," interrupted Eugene impatiently. "We must say adieu! But one word more," he added, after an instant's pause, as a sudden thought seemed to strike him; "*you* doubt the possibility of my success in life, and I feel confident of it. Do *you* pursue your career under the auspices of that parent in whose wisdom you so blindly repose: I will follow *mine*, dependent only on mine own resources. This is the 10th of July, 1831; twelve years hence, on the 10th of July, 1843, we will meet again upon this very spot, between the two trees, if they be still standing. Remember the appointment: we will *then* compare notes relative to our success in life!"

The moment he had uttered these words, Eugene hastily embraced his brother, who struggled in vain to retain him; and, having wrung the hand of the old butler, who was now sobbing like a child, the discarded son threw his little bundle over his shoulder, and hurried away from the spot.

So precipitately did he descend the hill in the direction leading away from the mansion, and towards the multitudinous metropolis at a little distance, that he was out of sight before his brother or Whittingham even thought of pursuing him.

They lingered for some time upon the summit of the hill, without exchanging a word; and then, maintaining the same silence, slowly retraced their steps towards the mansion.

CHAPTER V.

ELIGIBLE ACQUAINTANCES.

FOUR years passed away.

During that interval no tidings of the discarded son reached the disconsolate father and unhappy brother; and all the exertions of the former to discover some trace of the fugitive were fruitless. Vainly did he lavish considerable sums upon that object: uselessly did he despatch emissaries to all the great manufacturing towns of England, as well as to the principal capitals of Europe, to endeavour to procure some information of him whom he would have received as the prodigal son, and to welcome whose return he would have "killed the fatted calf:"—all his measures to discover his son's retreat were unavailing.

At length, after a lapse of four years, he sank into the tomb—the victim of a broken heart!

A few days previous to his death, he made a will in favour of his remaining son, the guardianship of whom he intrusted to a Mr. Monroe, who was an opulent City merchant, and an old and sincere friend.

Thus, at the age of nineteen, Richard found himself his own master, with a handsome allowance to meet his present wants, and with a large fortune in the perspective of two years more. Mr. Monroe, feeling the utmost confidence in the young man's discretion and steadiness, permitted him to reside in the old family mansion, and interfered with him and his pursuits as little as possible.

The ancient abode of the family of Markham was a spacious and commodious building, but of heavy and sombre appearance. This gloomy aspect of the architecture was increased by the venerable trees that formed a dense rampart of verdure around the edifice. The grounds belonging to the house were not extensive, but were tastefully laid out; and within the enclosure over which the dominion of Richard Markham extended, was the green hill surmounted by the two ash trees. From the summit of that eminence the mighty metropolis might be seen in all its vastitude—that metropolis whose one single heart was agitated with so many myriads of conflicting passions, warring interests, and opposite feelings.

Perhaps a dozen pages of laboured description will not afford the reader a better idea of the characters and dispositions of the two brothers than that which has already been conveyed by their conversation and conduct detailed in the preceding chapter. Eugene was all selfishness and egotism, Richard all generosity and frankness: the former deceitful, astute, and crafty; the latter honourable even to a fault.

With Eugene, for the present, we have little to do; the course of our narrative follows the fortunes of Richard Markham.

The disposition of this young man was somewhat reserved, although by no means misanthropical nor melancholy. That characteristic resulted only from the domesticated nature of his habits. He was attached to literary pursuits, and frequently passed entire hours together in his study, poring over works of a scientific and instructive nature. When he stirred abroad for the purpose of air and exercise, he preferred a long ramble upon foot, amongst the fields in the vicinity of his dwelling, to a parade of himself and his fine horse amid the busy haunts of wealth and fashion at the West End of London.

It was, nevertheless, upon a beautiful afternoon in the month of August, 1835, that Richard appeared amongst the loungers in Hyde Park. He was on foot, and attired in deep mourning; but his handsome countenance, symmetrical form, and thoroughly genteel and unassuming air attracted attention.

Parliament had been prorogued a fortnight before; and all London was said to be "out of town." Albeit, it was evident that a considerable portion of London was "in town," for there were many gorgeous equipages rolling along "the drive," and the enclosure was pretty well sprinkled with well-dressed groups and dotted with solitary fashionable gentlemen upon foot.

From the carriages that rolled past many bright eyes were for a moment turned upon Richard; and in these equipages there were not wanting young female bosoms which heaved at the contrast afforded by that tall and elegant youth, so full of vigour and health, and whose countenance beamed with intelligence, and the old, emaciated, and semi-childish husbands seated by their sides, and whose wealth had purchased their hands, but never succeeded in obtaining their hearts.

Richard, wearied with his walk, seated himself upon a bench, and contemplated with some interest the moving pageantry before him. He was thus occupied when he was suddenly accosted by a stranger, who seated himself by his side in an easy manner, and addressed some common-place observation to him.

This individual was a man of about two-and-thirty, elegantly attired, agreeable in his manners, and prepossessing in appearance. Under this superficial tegument of gentility a quicker eye than Richard Markham's would have detected a certain swagger in his gait and a kind of dashing recklessness about him which produced an admirable effect upon the vulgar or the inexperienced, but which were not calculated to inspire immediate confidence in the thorough man of the world. Richard was, however, all frankness and honour himself, and he did not scruple to return such an answer to the stranger's remark as was calculated to encourage farther conversation.

"I see the count is abroad again," observed the stranger, following with his eyes one of the horsemen in "the drive." "Poor fellow! he has been playing at hide-and-seek for a long time."

"Indeed! and wherefore?" exclaimed Richard.

"What! are you a stranger in London, sir?" cried the well-dressed gentleman, transferring his eyes from the horseman to Markham's countenance, on which they were fixed with an expression of surprise and interest.

"Very nearly so, although a resident in its immediate vicinity all my life;" and, with the natural ingenuousness of youth, Richard immediately communicated his entire history, from beginning to end, to his new acquaintance. Of a surety there was not much to relate; but the stranger succeeded in finding out who the young man was, under what circumstances he was now living, and the amount

of his present and future resources.

"Of course you mean to see life?" said the stranger.

"Certainly. I have already studied the great world by the means of books."

"But of course you know that there is nothing like experience."

"I can understand how experience is necessary to a man who is anxious to make a fortune, but not to him who has already got one."

"Oh, decidedly! It is frequently more difficult to keep a fortune than it was to obtain one."

"How—if I do not speculate?"

"No; but others will speculate upon you."

"I really cannot comprehend you. As I do not wish to increase my means, having enough, I shall neither speculate with my own nor allow people to speculate with it for me; and thus I can run no risk of losing what I possess."

The stranger gazed half incredulously upon Markham for a minute; and then his countenance expressed a species of sneer.

"You have never played?"

"Played! at——?"

"At cards; for money, I mean."

"Oh! never!"

"So much the better: never do. Unless," added the stranger, "it is entirely amongst friends and men of honour. But will you avail yourself of my humble vehicle, and take one turn round 'the Drive?'"

The stranger pointed as he spoke to a very handsome phaeton and pair at a little distance, and attended by a dapper-looking servant in light blue livery with silver lace.

"Might I have the honour of being acquainted with the name of a gentleman who exhibits so much kindness——"

"My dear sir, I must really apologise for my sin of omission. You confided your own circumstances so frankly to me that I cannot do otherwise than show you equal confidence in return. Besides, *amongst men of honour*," he continued, laying particular stress upon a word which is only so frequently used to be abused, "such communications, you know, are necessary. I do not like that system of familiarity based upon no tenable grounds, which is now becoming so prevalent in London. For instance, nothing is more common than for one gentleman to meet another in Bond-street, or the Park, or in Burlington Arcade, for example's sake, and for the one to say to the other—'*My dear friend, how are you?*'—'*Quite well, old fellow, thank you; but, by-the-by, I really forget your name!*' However," added the fashionable gentleman with a smile, "here is my card. My town-quarters are Long's Hotel, my country seat is in Berkshire, and my shooting-box is in Scotland, at all of which I shall be most happy to see you."

Richard, who was not only highly satisfied with the candour and openness of his new friend, but also very much pleased and amused with him, returned suitable acknowledgments for this kind invitation; and, glancing his eyes over the card which had been placed in his hands, perceived that he was conversing with the Honourable Arthur Chichester.

As they were moving towards the phaeton, a gentleman, elegantly attired, of about the middle age, and particularly fascinating in his manners, accosted Mr. Chichester.

"Ah! who would have thought of meeting you here—when London is actually empty, and I am ashamed of being yet left in it? Our mutual friend the duke assured me that you were gone to Italy!"

"The duke always has some joke at my expense," returned Mr. Chichester. "He was once the cause of a very lovely girl committing suicide. She was the only one I ever loved; and he one day declared in her presence that I had just embarked for America. Poor thing! she went straight up to her room, and——"

"And!" echoed Richard.

"Took poison!" added Mr. Chichester, turning away his head for a moment, and drawing an elegant cambric handkerchief across his eyes.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Markham.

"Let me not trouble you with my private afflictions. Sir Rupert, allow me to introduce my friend Mr. Markham:—Mr. Markham, Sir Rupert Harborough."

The two gentlemen bowed, and the introduction was effected.

"Whither are you bound?" inquired Sir Rupert.

"We were thinking of an hour's drive," leisurely replied Mr. Chichester; "and it was then my intention to have asked my friend Mr. Markham to dine with me at Long's. Will you join us, Sir Rupert?"

"Upon my honour, nothing would give me greater pleasure; but I am engaged to meet the duke at Tattersall's; and I am then under a solemn promise to dine and pass the evening with Diana."

"Always gallant—always attentive to the ladies!" exclaimed Mr. Chichester.

"You know, my dear fellow, that Diana is so amiable, so talented, so fascinating, so accomplished, and so bewitching, that I can refuse her nothing. It is true her wants and whims are somewhat expensive at times; but——"

"Harborough, I am surprised at you! What! complain of the fantasies of the most beautiful woman in London—if not in England—you a man of seven thousand a year, and who at the death of an uncle——"

"Upon my honour I begrudge her nothing!" interrupted Sir Rupert, complacently stroking his chin with his elegantly-gloved hand. "But, by the way, if you will honour me and Diana with your company this evening—and if Mr. Markham will also condescend

——"

"With much pleasure," said Mr. Chichester; "and I am sure that my friend Mr. Markham will avail himself of this opportunity of forming the acquaintance of the most beautiful and fascinating woman in England."

Richard bowed: he dared not attempt an excuse. He had heard himself dubbed the friend of the Honourable Mr. Arthur Chichester; his ears had caught an intimation of a dinner at Long's, which he knew by report to be the headquarters of that section of the fashionable world that consists of single young gentlemen; and he now found himself suddenly engaged to pass the evening with Sir Rupert Harborough and a lady of whom all he knew was that her name was Diana, and that she was the most beautiful and fascinating creature in England.

Truly, all this was enough to dazzle him; and he accordingly resigned himself to Mr. Arthur Chichester's good will and pleasure.

Sir Rupert Harborough now remembered "that he must not keep the duke waiting;" and having kissed the tip of his lemon-coloured glove to Mr. Chichester, and made a semi-ceremonious, semi-gracious bow to Markham—that kind of bow whose formality is attempered by the blandness of the smile accompanying it—he hastened away.

It may be, however, mentioned as a singular circumstance, and as a proof of how little he cared about keeping "the duke" waiting, that, instead of proceeding towards Tattersall's, he departed in the direction of Oxford-street.

This little incident was, however, unnoticed by Richard—for the simple reason, that at this epoch of his life he did not know where Tattersall's was.

"What do you think of my friend the baronet?" inquired Mr. Chichester, as they rolled leisurely along "the Drive" in the elegant phaeton.

"I am quite delighted with him," answered Richard; "and if her ladyship be only as agreeable as her husband——"

"Excuse me, but you must not call her '*her ladyship*.' Address her and speak of her simply as Mrs. Arlington."

"I am really at a loss to comprehend——"

"My dear friend," said Chichester, sinking his voice, although there was no danger of being overheard, "Diana is not the wife of Sir Rupert Harborough. The baronet is unmarried; and this lady——"

"Is his mistress," added Markham hastily. "In that case I most certainly shall not accept the kind invitation I received for this evening."

"Nonsense, my dear friend! You must adapt your behaviour to the customs of the sphere in which you move. *You* belong to the aristocracy—like *me*—and like *the baronet*! In the upper class, even supposing you have a wife, she is only an encumbrance. Nothing is so characteristic of want of gentility as to marry early; and as for children, pah! they are the very essence of vulgarity! Then, of course, every man of fashion in London has his mistress, even though he only keeps her for the sake of his friends. This is quite allowable amongst the aristocracy. Remember, I am not advocating the cause of immorality: I would not have every butcher, and tea-dealer, and linen-draper do the same. God forbid! *Then* it would, indeed, be the height of depravity!"

"Since it is the fashion, and you assure me that there is nothing wrong in this connexion between the baronet and Mrs. Arlington—at least, that the usages of high life admit it—I will not advance any farther scruples," said Richard; although he had a slight suspicion, like the ringing of far-distant bells in the ears, that the doctrine which his companion had just propounded was not based upon the most tenable grounds.

It was now half-past six o'clock in the evening; and, one after the other, the splendid equipages and gay horsemen withdrew in somewhat rapid succession. The weather was nevertheless still exquisitely fine; indeed, it was the most enchanting portion of the entire day. The sky was of a soft and serene azure, upon which appeared here and there thin vapours of snowy white, motionless and still; for not a breath of wind stirred the leaf upon the tree. Never did Naples, nor Albano, nor Sorrentum, boast a more beautiful horizon; and as the sun sank towards the western verge, he bathed all that the eye could embrace—earth and sky, dwelling and grove, garden and field—in a glorious flood of golden light.

At seven o'clock Mr. Chichester and his new acquaintance sat down to dinner in the coffee-room at Long's Hotel. The turtle was unexceptionable; the iced punch faultless. Then came the succulent neck of venison, and the prime Madeira. The dinner passed off pleasantly enough; and Richard was more and more captivated with his friend. He was, however, somewhat astonished at the vast quantities of wine which the Honourable Mr. Chichester swallowed, apparently without the slightest inconvenience to himself.

Mr. Chichester diverted him with amusing anecdotes, lively sallies, and extraordinary narratives; and Richard found that his new friend had not only travelled all over Europe, but was actually the bosom friend of some of the most powerful of its sovereigns. These statements, moreover, rather appeared to slip forth in the course of conversation, than to be made purposely; and thus they were stamped with an additional air of truth and importance.

At about half-past nine the Honourable Mr. Chichester proposed to adjourn to the lodgings of Mrs. Arlington. Richard, who had been induced by the example of his friend and by the excitement of an interesting conversation, to imbibe more wine than he was accustomed to take, was now delighted with the prospect of passing an agreeable evening; and he readily acceded to Mr. Chichester's proposal.

Mrs. Arlington occupied splendidly furnished apartments on the first and second floors over a music-shop in Bond-street: thither, therefore, did the two gentlemen repair on foot; and in a short time they were introduced into the drawing-room where the baronet and his fair companion were seated.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. ARLINGTON.

THE Honourable Mr. Arthur Chichester had not exaggerated his description of the beauty of the Enchantress—for so she was called by the male portion of her admirers. Indeed, she was of exquisite loveliness. Her dark-brown hair was arranged *en bandeaux*, and parted over a forehead polished as marble. Her eyes were large, and of that soft dark melting blue which seems to form a heaven of promises and bliss to gladden the beholder.

She was not above the middle height of woman; but her form was modelled to the most exquisite and voluptuous symmetry. Her figure reminded the spectator of the body of the wasp, so taper was the waist, and so exuberant was the swell of the bust.

Her mouth was small and pouting; but, when she smiled, the parting roses of the lips displayed a set of teeth white as the pearls of the East.

Her hand would have made the envy of a queen. And yet, above all these charms, a certain something which could not be exactly denominated boldness nor effrontery, but which was the very reverse of extreme reserve, immediately struck Richard Markham.

He could not define the fault he had to find with this beautiful woman; and still there was something in her manners which seemed to proclaim that she did not possess the tranquillity and ease of a wife. She appeared to be constantly aiming at the display of the accomplishments of her mind, or the graces of her attitudes. She seemed to court admiration by every word and every motion; and to keep alive in the mind of the baronet the passion with which she had inspired him. She possessed not that confidence and contented reliance upon the idea of unalienable affections which characterise the wife. She seemed to be well aware that no legal nor religious ties connected the baronet to her; and she, therefore, kept her imagination perpetually upon the rack to weave new artificial bonds to cast around him. And, as if each action or each word of the baronet severed those bonds of silk and wreathed flowers, she found, Penelope-like, that at short intervals her labours were to be achieved over again.

This constant state of mental anxiety and excitement imparted a corresponding restlessness to her body; and those frequent changes of attitude, which were originally intended to develop the graces of her person, or allow her lover's eye to catch short glimpses of her heaving bosom of snow, became now a settled habit.

Nevertheless, she was a lovely and fascinating woman, and one for whom a young heart would undertake a thousand sacrifices.

By accident Richard was seated next to Mrs. Arlington upon the sofa. He soon perceived that she was, indeed, as accomplished as the baronet had represented her to be; and her critical opinions upon the current literature, dramatic novelties, and new music of the day were delivered with judgment and good taste.

Richard could not help glancing from time to time in admiration at her beautiful countenance, animated as it now was with the excitement of the topics of discourse; and whenever her large blue eyes met his, a deep blush suffused his countenance, and he knew not what he said or did.

"Well, what shall we do to amuse ourselves?" said Chichester, at the expiration of about an hour, during which coffee had been handed round.

"Upon my honour," exclaimed the baronet, "I am perfectly indifferent. What say you to a game of whist or *écarté*?"

"Just as you choose," said Chichester carelessly.

At this moment the door opened, and a roguish-looking little tiger—a lad of about fourteen, in a chocolate-coloured livery, with three rows of bright-crested buttons down his Prussian jacket—entered to announce another guest.

A short, stout, vulgar-looking man, about forty years of age, with a blue coat and brass buttons, buff waistcoat, and grey trousers, entered the room.

"Holloa, old chap, how are you?" he exclaimed in a tone of most ineffable vulgarity. "Harborough, how are you? Chichester, my tulip, how goes it?"

The baronet hastened to receive this extraordinary visitor, and, as he shook hands with him, whispered something in his ear. The stranger immediately turned towards Richard, to whom he was introduced by the name of Mr. Augustus Talbot.

This gentleman and the baronet then conversed together for a few moments; and Chichester, drawing near Markham, seized the opportunity of observing, "Talbot is an excellent fellow—a regular John Bull—not over polished, but enormously rich and well connected. You will see that he is not more cultivated in mind than in manners; but he would go to the devil to do any one a service; and, somehow or another, you can't help liking the fellow when once you know him."

"Any friend of yours or of the baronet's will be agreeable to me," said Richard; "and, provided he is a man of honour, a little roughness of manner should be readily overlooked."

"You speak like a man of the world, and as a man of honour yourself," said Mr. Chichester.

Meantime the baronet and Mr. Talbot had seated themselves, and the Honourable Mr. Chichester returned to his own chair.

The conversation then became general.

"I didn't know that you were in town, Talbot," said Mr. Chichester.

"And I forgot to mention it," observed the baronet.

"Or rather," said the lady, "you meditated a little surprise for your friend Mr. Chichester."

"I hope you've been well, ma'am, since I saw you last—that is the day before yesterday," said Mr. Talbot. "You was complaining then of a slight cold, and I recommended a treacle-posset and a stocking tied round the throat."

"My dear Talbot, take some liqueur," cried the baronet, rising hastily, and purposely knocking down his chair to drown the remainder of Mr. Talbot's observation.

"But I dare say you didn't follow my advice, ma'am," pursued Mr. Talbot, with the most imperturbable gravity. "For my part I am suffering dreadful with a bad foot. I'll tell you how it were, ma'am. I've got a nasty soft corn on my little toe; and so what must I do, but yesterday morning I takes my razor, sharpens it upon the paytent strap, and goes for to cut off master corn. But instead of cutting the corn, I nearly sliced my toe off; and——"

"By the way, Diana, has the young gentleman called yet, whom we met the other evening at the Opera?" said the baronet, abruptly interrupting this vulgar tirade.

"Do you mean the effeminate youth whom we dubbed the *Handsome Unknown*?" said the Enchantress.

"Yes: he who was so very mysterious, but who seemed so excessively anxious to form our acquaintance."

"He promised to call some evening this week," answered Diana, "and play a game of *écarté*. He told me that he was invincible at *écarté*."

"Talking of *écarté*, let us play a game," ejaculated Mr. Chichester, who was sitting upon thorns lest Mr. Talbot should commence his vulgarities again.

"Well, I'll take a hand with pleasure," said this individual: then turning towards Diana, he added, "I will tell you the rest of the adventure about the soft corn another time, ma'am."

"What a nuisance this is!" whispered Chichester to the baronet. "The young fellow does stare so."

"You must give him some explanation or another," hastily replied the baronet; "or I'll tell Diana to say something presently that will smooth down matters."

The cards were produced, and Mr. Talbot and the Honourable Mr. Chichester sat down to play.

Sir Rupert backed the former, and considerable sums in gold and notes were placed upon the table. Presently the lady turned towards Richard, and said with a smile, "Are you fond of *écarté*?" "I must venture a guinea upon Mr. Chichester. Sir Rupert is betting against him; and I love to oppose Sir Rupert at cards. You will see how I shall tease him presently."

With these words the Enchantress rose and seated herself near Mr. Chichester. Of course Markham did the same; and in a very short time he was induced by the lady to follow her example, and back the same side which she supported.

Mr. Chichester, however, had a continued run of ill luck, and lost every rubber. Richard was thus the loser of about thirty sovereigns; but he was somewhat consoled by having so fair a companion in his bad fortune. He would have suffered himself to be persuaded by her to persist in backing Mr. Chichester, as she positively assured him that the luck must change, had not that gentleman himself suddenly risen, thrown down the cards, and declared that he would play no more.

"Would you, ma'am, like to take Mr. Chichester's place?" said Mr. Talbot.

Mr. Chichester shook his head to the baronet, and the baronet did the same to Diana, and Diana accordingly declined. The card-table was therefore abandoned; and Mrs. Arlington, at the request of Sir Rupert, seated herself at the piano. Without any affectation she sang and accompanied herself upon the instrument in a manner that quite ravished the heart of Richard Markham.

Suddenly the entire house echoed with the din of the front-door knocker, and almost simultaneously the bell was rung with violence.

In a few moments the young tiger announced Mr. Walter Sydney.

He was a youth apparently not more than nineteen or twenty, of middle height, and very slim. He wore a tight blue military frock coat buttoned up to the throat; ample black kerseymere trousers, which did not, however, conceal the fact that he was the least thing knock-kneed, and a hat with tolerably broad brims. His feet and hands were small to a fault. His long light chestnut hair flowed in luxuriant undulations over the collar of his coat, even upon his shoulders, and gave him a peculiarly feminine appearance. His delicate complexion, upon the pure red and white of which the dark dyes of no beard had yet infringed, wore a deep blush as he entered the room.

"Mr. Sydney, you are welcome," said Mrs. Arlington, in a manner calculated to reassure the bashful youth. "It was but an hour ago that we were talking of you, and wondering why we had not received the pleasure of a visit."

"Madam, you are too kind," replied Mr. Sydney, in a tone which sounded upon the ear like a silver bell—so soft and beautiful was its cadence. "I am afraid that I am intruding: I had hoped to find you alone—I mean yourself and Sir Rupert Harborough—and I perceive that you have company——"

He stammered—became confounded with excuses—and then glanced at his attire, as much as to intimate that he was in a walking dress.

Both the baronet and Diana hastened to welcome him in such a manner as to speedily place him upon comfortable terms with himself once more; and he was then introduced to Mr. Chichester, Mr. Talbot, and Mr. Markham.

The moment the name of Markham was mentioned, the youthful visitor started perceptibly, and then fixed his intelligent hazel eyes upon the countenance of Richard with an expression of the most profound interest mingled with surprise.

Mr. Chichester made an observation at the same moment, and Sydney immediately afterwards entered with ease and apparent pleasure into a conversation which turned upon the most popular topics of the day. Richard was astonished at the extreme modesty, propriety, and good sense with which that effeminate and bashful youth expressed himself; and even the baronet, who was in reality well informed, listened to his interesting visitor with attention and admiration. Still there was a species of extreme delicacy in his tastes, as evidenced by his remarks, which bordered at times upon a fastidiousness, if not an inexperience actually puerile or feminine.

At half-past eleven supper was served up, and the party sat down to that most welcome and sociable of all meals.

It was truly diverting to behold the manner in which Mr. Talbot fell, tooth and nail, upon the delicacies which he heaped upon his plate; and his applications to the wine-bottle were to correspond. At one time he expressed his regret that it was too vulgar to drink half-and-half; and on another he vented his national prejudices against those who maintained that Perigord pies were preferable to rump steaks, or that claret was more exquisite than port or sherry. Once, when, it would appear, Mr. Chichester kicked him under the table, he roared out a request that his soft corn might be remembered; and as his friends were by no means anxious for a second edition of that interesting narrative—especially before Mr. Walter Sydney—they adopted the prudent alternative of conveying their remonstrances to him by means of winks instead of kicks.

After supper Mr. Talbot insisted upon making a huge bowl of punch in his own fashion; but he found that Mr. Chichester would alone aid him in disposing of it. As for Mr. Walter Sydney, he never appeared to do more than touch the brim of the wine-glass with his lips.

In a short time Mr. Talbot insisted upon practising his vocal powers by singing a hunting song, and was deeply indignant with his friends because they would not join in the very impressive but somewhat common chorus of "*Fal de lal lal, fal de lal la*." It is impossible to say what Mr. Talbot would have done next; but, much to the horror of the baronet, Mr. Chichester, and Diana—and equally to the surprise of Richard Markham and Walter Sydney—he suddenly lost his balance, and fell heavily upon the floor and into a sound sleep simultaneously.

"What a pity," said Mr. Chichester, shaking his head mournfully, and glancing down upon the prostrate gentleman, as if he were pronouncing a funeral oration over his remains; "this is his only fault—and, as it happens every night, it begins materially to disfigure his character. Otherwise, he is an excellent fellow, and immensely rich!"

At this moment the eyes of Richard caught those of Walter Sydney. An ill-concealed expression of superlative contempt and ineffable disgust was visible upon the handsome countenance of the latter; and the proud curl of his lip manifested his opinion of the scene he had just witnessed. In a few moments he rose to depart. To Diana he was only coldly polite; to the baronet and Chichester superbly distant and constrained; but towards Markham, as he took leave of him, there was a cordiality in his manner, and a sincerity in the desire which he expressed "that they should meet again," which formed a remarkable contrast with his behaviour towards the others.

That night slumber seemed to evade the eyes of Richard Markham. The image of Mrs. Arlington, and all that she had said, and the various graceful and voluptuous attitudes into which she had thrown herself, occupied his imagination. At times, however, his thoughts wandered to that charming youth—that mere boy—who seemed to court his friendship, and who was so delicate and so fragile to encounter the storms and vicissitudes of that world in whose dizzy vortex he was already found. Nor less did Richard ever and anon experience a sentiment of profound surprise that the elegant and wealthy Sir Rupert Harborough, the accomplished and lovely Diana, and the fastidious Mr. Arthur Chichester, should tolerate the society of such an unmitigated vulgarian as Mr. Talbot.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOUDOIR.

It was the morning after the events related in the last chapter.

The scene changes to a beautiful little villa in the environs of Upper Clapton.

This charming retreat, which consisted of a main building two storeys high, and wings each containing only one apartment, was constructed of yellow bricks that had retained their primitive colour, the dwelling being too far from the metropolis to be affected by its smoky exhalations.

The villa stood in the midst of a small garden, beautifully laid out in the French style of Louis XV.; and around it—interrupted only by the avenue leading to the front door of the dwelling—was a grove of evergreens. This grove formed a complete circle, and bounded the garden; and the entire enclosure was protected by a regular paling, painted white.

This miniature domain, consisting of about four acres, was one of the most beautiful spots in the neighbourhood of London; and behind it—far as the eye could reach—stretched the green fields, smiling and cultivated like those of Tuscany.

In front of the villa was a small grass plot, in the centre of which was a basin of clear and pellucid water, upon whose surface floated two noble swans, and other aquatic birds of a curious species.

Every now and then the silence of the morning was broken by the bay of several sporting-dogs, which occupied, in the rear of the building, kennels more cleanly and more carefully attended upon than the dwellings of many millions of Christians.

And yet the owner of that villa wanted not charity: witness the poor woman and two children who have just emerged from the servants' offices laden with cold provisions, and with a well-filled bundle of other necessaries.

At the door of a stable a groom was seen dismounting from the back of a thorough-bred chestnut mare, which had just returned from an airing, and upon which he cast a glance of mingled pride and affection.

The windows of the villa were embellished with flowers in pots and vases of curious workmanship; and outside the casements of the chambers upon the first floor were suspended cages containing beautiful singing birds.

To the interior of one of those rooms must we direct the attention of the reader. It was an elegant *boudoir*: and yet it could scarcely justify the name; for by a *boudoir* we understand something completely feminine, whereas this contained articles of male and female use and attire strangely commingled—pell-mell—together.

Upon a toilet-table were all the implements necessary for the decoration and embellishment of female beauty; and carelessly thrown over a chair were a coat, waistcoat, and trousers. A diminutive pair of patent-leather Wellington boots kept company with delicate morocco shoes, to which sandals were affixed. A huge press, half-open, disclosed an array of beautiful dresses—silk, satin, and precious stuffs of all kinds; and on a row of pegs were hung a scarlet hunting-coat, a shooting-jacket, a jockey-cap, and other articles of attire connected with field sports and masculine recreations. Parasols, foils, single-sticks, dandy-canes, and hunting-whips, were huddled together in one corner of that bureau. And yet all the confusion of these various and discrepant objects was so regular in appearance—if the phrase can be understood—that it seemed as if some cunning hand had purposely arranged them all so as to strike the eye in a manner calculated to encourage the impression that this elegant boudoir was inhabited by a man of strange feminine tastes, or a woman of extraordinary masculine ones.

There was no pompous nor gorgeous display of wealth in this boudoir: its interior, like that of the whole villa throughout, denoted competence and ease—elegance and taste, but no useless luxury nor profuse expenditure.

The window of the boudoir was half open. A bowl of chrystal water, containing gold and silver fish, stood upon a table in the recess of the casement. The chirrup of the birds echoed through the room, which was perfumed with the odour of sweet flowers.

By the wall facing the window stood a French bed, on the head and foot of which fell pink satin curtains, flowing from a gilt-headed arrow fixed near the ceiling.

It was now nine o'clock, and the sun shed a flood of golden light through the half-open casement upon that couch which was so voluptuous and so downy.

A female of great beauty, and apparently about five-and-twenty years of age, was reading in that bed. Her head reposed upon her hand, and her elbow upon the pillow: and that hand was buried in a mass of luxuriant light chestnut hair, which flowed down upon her back, her shoulders, and her bosom; but not so as altogether to conceal the polished ivory whiteness of the plump fair flesh.

The admirable slope of the shoulders, the swan-like neck, and the exquisite symmetry of the bust, were descried even amidst those masses of luxuriant and shining hair.

A high and ample forehead, hazel eyes, a nose perfectly straight, small but pouting lips, brilliant teeth, and a well rounded chin, were additional charms to augment the attractions of that delightful picture.

The whole scene was one of soft voluptuousness—the birds, the flowers, the vase of gold and silver fish, the tasteful arrangements of the boudoir, the French bed, and the beautiful creature who reclined in that couch, her head supported upon the well-turned and polished arm, the dazzling whiteness of which no envious sleeve concealed!

From time to time the eyes of that sweet creature were raised from the book, and thrown around the room in a manner that denoted, if not mental anxiety, at least a state of mind not completely at ease. Now and then, too, a cloud passed over that brow which seemed the very throne of innocence and candour; and a sigh agitated the breast which the sunbeams covered as it were with kisses.

Presently the door was opened softly, and an elderly female, well but simply dressed, and of placid and reserved aspect, entered the room.

"Mr. Stephens is below," said the servant; "I told him you had not risen yet, and he says he will await your convenience."

"I know not how it is," exclaimed the lady impatiently, "but I never felt less disposed for the visit of him whom I regard as my benefactor. Ah! Louisa," she added, a cloud overspreading her entire countenance, "I feel as if one of those dreadful attacks of despondency—one of those fearful fits of alarm and foreboding—of presentiment of evil, were coming on; and——"

"Pray calm yourself," interrupted the servant, speaking in a kind and imploring tone. "Remember that the very walls have ears; that a word spoken in too high a tone may betray your secret; and heaven alone knows what would be the result of such an appalling discovery!"

"Yes, it is that horrible mystery," ejaculated the lady, "which fills me with the most acute apprehensions. Compelled to sustain a constant cheat—to feel that I am a living, a breathing, a moving falsehood, a walking lie;—forced to crush all the natural amenities—ay, and even the amiable weaknesses of my sex; governed by an imperious necessity against which it is now impossible to rebel,—how can I do otherwise than experience moments of unutterable anguish!"

"You must still have patience—patience only for a few months—three short months,—and the result of all this suspense—the end of all this anxiety, will be no doubt as advantageous—as immensely important and beneficial—as we are led to believe."

"True: we are bound to believe a man who seems so serious in all his actions with regard to me," said the lady, after a short pause, during which she seemed to be wrapped up in a deep reverie. "But why does he keep me in the dark with regard to the true nature of that grand result? Why does he not trust me, who have placed such unbounded, such implicit confidence in him?"

"He is afraid lest an unguarded moment on your part should betray what he assures us to be of the most vital—the last importance," answered the domestic, in a kindly remonstrative tone. "And really, my dearest girl," she added, affectionately,—"pardon me for calling you so——"

"Ah! Louisa, you are my dearest friend!" said the lady energetically. "You, and you alone, have supported my courage during the four years and a half that this horrible deceit has already lasted; your kindness——"

"I have only done my duty, and acted as my heart dictated," mildly replied the female dependant. "But as I was observing, you are so very imprudent, as it is; and can you expect that Mr. Stephens will reveal to you the minute details of a scheme, which——"

"Imprudent!" hastily exclaimed the lady: "how am I imprudent? Do I not follow all *his* directions—all *your* advice? Have I not even learned to talk to the very groom in his own language about the horses and the dogs? and do I not scamper across the country, upon my chestnut mare, with him following upon the bay horse at my heels, as if we were both mad? And then you say that I am imprudent, when I have done all I can to sustain the character which I have assumed? And with the exception of these rides, how seldom do I go abroad? Half-a-dozen names include all my acquaintances: and no one—no one ever comes here! This is, indeed, a hermit's dwelling! How can you say that I am imprudent?"

"Without going out of this very room," began Louisa, with a smile, "I could——"

"Ah! the eternal remonstrances against these habiliments of my sex!" exclaimed the lady, drawing back the satin curtain at the head of the bed with her snow-white arm, and glancing towards the bureau which contained the female dresses: "ever those remonstrances! Alas! I should die—I could not support this appalling deceit—were I not to gratify my woman's feelings from time to time? Do you think that I can altogether rebel against nature, and not experience the effects? And, in occasionally soothing my mind with the occupations natural to my sex, have I ever been imprudent? When I have dressed my hair as it should ever be dressed—when I have put on one of those silk or muslin robes, merely to see myself reflected in my mirror—and, oh! what a pardonable vanity under such circumstances!—have I ever been imprudent enough to set foot outside this retreat—this boudoir, to which you alone are ever

admitted? Do I ever dress with the blinds of the windows raised? No: I have done all that human being can do to support my spirits during this sad trial, and sustain the character I have assumed. But if it be desired that I should altogether forget my sex—and cling to the garb of a man; if I may never—not even for an hour in the evening—follow my fantasy, and relieve my mind by resuming the garb which is natural to me—within these four walls—unseen by a soul save you——"

"Yes, yes, you shall have your way," interrupted Louisa soothingly. "But Mr. Stephens waits: will you not rise and see him?"

"It is my duty," said the lady resignedly. "He has surrounded me with every comfort and every luxury which appetite can desire or money procure; and, however he may ultimately benefit by this proceeding, in the meantime my gratitude is due to him."

"The delicacy of his conduct towards you equals his liberality," observed Louisa pointedly.

"Yes; notwithstanding the peculiarity of our relative position, not a word, not a look disrespectful towards me from the first moment of our acquaintance! He faithfully adheres to his portion of the contract, and I will as religiously observe mine."

"You speak wisely and consistently," said Louisa; "and the result of your honourable conduct towards Mr. Stephens will no doubt be a recompense which will establish your fortunes for life."

"That hope sustains me. Oh! how happy, thrice happy shall I be, when, the period of my emancipation being arrived, I may escape to some distant part of my own native country, or to some foreign clime, resume the garb belonging to my sex, and live in a way consistent with nature, and suitable to my taste. It is in anticipation of those golden moments that I from time to time retire into the impenetrable mystery of this boudoir, and dress myself in the garb which I love, and which is my own. And when that elysian age shall come, oh! how shall I divert my mind with a retrospection upon these long weary weeks and months, during which I have been compelled to study habits opposed to my taste and feeling—to affect a love of horses and dogs, that a manly predilection may avert attention from a feminine countenance,—and to measure each word that falls from my lips, to study each attitude which my form assumes, and to relinquish pursuits and occupations which my mind adores."

The lady threw herself back upon her pillow and gave way to a delicious reverie. Louisa did not attempt to disturb her for some minutes. At length she murmured something about "keeping Mr. Stephens waiting rather longer than usual;" and her mistress, acting by a sudden impulse, rose from her couch.

Then followed the mysterious toilet.

Stays, curiously contrived, gave to that exquisitely modelled form as much as possible the appearance of the figure of a man. The swell of the bosom, slightly compressed, was rendered scarcely apparent by padding skilfully placed, so as to fill up and flatten the undulating bust. The position of the waist was lowered; and all this was effected without causing the subject of so strange a transformation any pain or uneasiness.

The semi-military blue frock coat, buttoned up to the throat, completed the disguise; and as this species of garment is invariably somewhat prominent about the chest, the very fashion of its make materially aided an effectual concealment, by averting surprise at the gentle protuberance of the breast, in the present instance.

Louisa arranged the luxuriant and flowing hair with particular attention, bestowing as much as possible a masculine appearance upon that which would have been a covering worthy of a queen.

The toilet being thus completed, this strange being to whom we have introduced our readers, descended to a parlour on the ground floor.

When Louisa left the boudoir she carefully locked the door and consigned the key to her pocket.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONVERSATION.

THE parlour which that lovely and mysterious creature—who now seemed a youth of about twenty—entered upon the ground floor, was furnished with taste and elegance. Everything was light, airy, and graceful. The windows were crowded with flowers that imparted a delicious perfume to the atmosphere, and afforded a picture upon which the eye rested with pleasure.

A recess was fitted up with book-shelves, which were supplied with the productions of the best poets and novelists of England and France.

Around the walls were suspended several paintings—chiefly consisting of sporting subjects. Over the mantel, however, were two miniatures, executed in water-colours in the first style of the art, and representing the one a lovely youth of sixteen, the other a beautiful girl of twenty.

And never was resemblance more striking. The same soft and intelligent hazel eyes—the same light hair, luxuriant, silky, and shining—the some straight nose—the same vermilion lips, and well-turned chin. At a glance it was easy to perceive that they were brother and sister; and as the countenance of the former was remarkably feminine and delicate, the likeness between them was the more striking.

Beneath the miniature of the brother, in small gilt letters upon the enamelled frame, was the word WALTER: under the portrait of the sister was the name of ELIZA.

Attired as she now was, the mysterious being whom we have introduced to our readers, perfectly resembled the portrait of *Walter*: attired as she ought to have been, consistently with her sex, she would have been the living original of the portrait of *Eliza*.

Upon a sofa in the parlour, some of the leading features of which we have just described, a man, dressed with great neatness, but no ostentatious display, was lounging.

He was in reality not more than three or four and thirty years of age; although a seriousness of countenance—either admirably studied, or else occasioned by habits of business and mental combination—made him appear ten years older. He was handsome, well-formed, and excessively courteous and fascinating in his manners: but, when he was alone, or not engaged in conversation, he seemed plunged in deep thought, as if his brain were working upon numerous plans and schemes of mighty and vital import.

The moment the heroine of the boudoir entered the parlour, Mr. Stephens—for he was the individual whom we have just described—rose and accosted her in a manner expressive of kindness, respect, and patronage.

"My dear Walter," he exclaimed, "it is really an age since I have seen you. Six weeks have elapsed, and I have not been near you. But you received my letter, stating that I was compelled to proceed to Paris upon most particular business?"

"Yes, my dear sir," answered the lady,—or in order that some name may in future characterise her, we will call her Walter, or Mr. Walter Sydney, for that was indeed the appellation by which she was known,—"yes, my dear sir, I received your letter, and the handsome presents and remittances accompanying it. For each and all I return you my sincere thanks: but really, with regard to money, you are far too lavish towards me. Remember that I scarcely have any opportunity of being extravagant," added Walter, with a smile; "for I scarcely ever stir abroad, save to take my daily rides; and you know that I never receive company, that my acquaintances are limited, so limited——"

"I know, my dear Walter, that you follow my advice as closely as can be expected," said Mr. Stephens. "Three short months more and my object will be achieved. We shall then be both of us above the reach of Fortune's caprices and vicissitudes. Oh! how glorious—how grand will be this achievement! how well worth all the sacrifices that I have required you to make."

"Ah! my dear sir," observed Walter, somewhat reproachfully, "you must remember that you are now talking enigmas to me; that I am at present only a blind instrument in your hands—a mere machine—an automaton——"

"Do not press me upon this head, Walter," interrupted Mr. Stephens, hastily. "You must not as yet be led to comprehend the magnitude of my views: you must have patience. Surely I have given you ample proofs of my good feeling and my honourable views towards yourself. Only conceive what would be your present position without me; not a relation, not a friend in the wide world to aid or protect you! I do not say this to vaunt my own conduct: I am merely advancing arguments to prove how confident I am in the success of my plans, and how sincere I am in my friendship towards you. For, remember, Walter—I always forget your sex: I only look upon you as a mere boy—a nephew, or a son, whom I love. Such is my feeling: I am more than a friend; for, I repeat, I feel a paternal attachment towards you!"

"And I entertain feelings of deep—yes, of the deepest gratitude towards you," said Walter. "But the motive of my constant intercession to be admitted more into your confidence, is to be convinced—by my own knowledge—that my present conduct tends to facilitate no dishonest, no dangerous views. Oh! you will pardon me when I say this; for there are times when I am a prey to the most horrible alarms—when fears of an indescribable nature haunt me for hours together—and when I seem to be walking blindfold upon the brink of an abyss!"

"Walter, I am surprised that you should thus give way to suspicions most injurious to my honour," said Mr. Stephens, whose countenance remained perfectly collected and unchanged; "for the hundredth time do I assure you that you have nothing to fear."

"Then wherefore this disguise? why this constant cheat relative to my sex? why this permanent deception?" demanded Walter, in an impassioned tone.

"Cannot the most rigorous honesty be connected with the most profound prudence—the most delicate caution?" said Mr.

Stephens, adopting an attitude and manner of persuasion. "Do not judge of motives by their mere superficial aspect: strange devices—but not the less honourable for being singular—are frequently required in the world to defeat designs of infamy and baseness."

"Pardon my scepticism," said Walter, apparently convinced by this reasoning; "I was wrong, very wrong to suspect you. I will not again urge my anxiety to penetrate your secrets. I feel persuaded that you conceal the means by which our mutual prosperity is to be effected, simply for my good."

"Now you speak rationally, my dear, my faithful and confiding Walter," exclaimed Mr. Stephens. "It was just in this vein that I was anxious to find you; for I have an important communication to make this morning."

"Speak: I am ready to follow your instructions or advice."

"I must inform you, Walter, that in order effectually to work out my plans—in order that there should not exist the slightest chance of failure—a third person is required. It will be necessary that he should be conversant with our secret: he must know all; and, of course, he must be taken care of hereafter. To be brief, I have already fallen in with the very individual who will suit me; and I have acquainted him with the entire matter. You will not object to receive him occasionally as a guest?"

"My dear sir, how can I object? Is not this your house? and am not I in your hands? You know that you can command me in all respects."

"I thought that you would meet my views with this readiness and good will," said Mr. Stephens. "To tell you the real truth, then—I have taken the liberty of inviting him to dine with us here this day."

"To-day!"

"Yes. Are you annoyed?"

"Oh! not at all: only, the preparations——"

"Do not alarm yourself. While you were occupied with your toilet, I gave the necessary instructions to the cook. The old woman is almost blind and deaf, still she knows full well how to serve up a tempting repast; and as I am believed by your three servants to be your guardian, my interference in this respect will not have appeared strange."

"How could they think otherwise?" ejaculated Walter. "Did not you provide those dependants who surround me? Do they not look upon you as their master as well as myself? Are they not aware that the villa is your own property? And have they not been led to believe—with the exception of Louisa, who alone of the three knows the secret—that the state of my health compelled you to place me here for the benefit of a purer air than that which your residence in the city affords?"

"Well, since my arrangements meet with your satisfaction," said Mr. Stephens, smiling, "I am satisfied. But I should tell you that I invited my friend hither not only to dine, but also to pass the day, that we might have an opportunity of conversing together at our leisure. Indeed," added Mr. Stephens, looking at his watch, "I expect him here every moment."

Scarcely were the words uttered when a loud knock at the front door echoed through the house.

In a few minutes Louisa appeared, and introduced "Mr. Montague."

CHAPTER IX.

A CITY MAN.—SMITHFIELD SCENES.

GEORGE Montague was a tall, good-looking young man of about three or four-and-twenty. His hair and eyes were black, his complexion rather dark, and his features perfectly regular.

His manners were certainly polished and agreeable; but there was, nevertheless, a something reserved and mysterious about him—an anxiety to avert the conversation from any topic connected with himself—a studied desire to flatter and gain the good opinions of those about him, by means of compliments at times servile—and an occasional betrayal of a belief in a code of morals not altogether consistent with the well-being of society, which constituted features in his character by no means calculated to render him a favourite with all classes of persons. He was, however, well-informed upon most topics; ambitious of creating a sensation in the world, no matter by what means; resolute in his pursuit after wealth, and careless whether the paths leading to the objects which he sought were tortuous or straightforward. He was addicted to pleasure, but never permitted it to interfere with his business or mar his schemes. *Love* with him was merely the blandishment of beauty; and *friendship* was simply that bond which connected him with those individuals who were necessary to him. He was utterly and completely selfish; but he was somehow or another possessed of sufficient tact to conceal most of his faults—of the existence of which he was well aware. The consequence was that he was usually welcomed as an agreeable companion; some even went so far as to assert that he was a "devilish good fellow;" and all admitted that he was a thorough man of the world. He must have commenced his initiation early, thus to have acquired such a character ere he had completed his four-and-twentieth year!

London abounds with such precocious specimens of thorough heartlessness and worldly-mindedness. The universities and great public schools let loose upon society every half-year a cloud of young men, who think only how soon they can spend their own property in order to prey upon that of others. These are your "young men *about* town:" as they grow older they become "men *upon* the town." In their former capacity they graduate in all the degrees of vice, dissipation, extravagance, and debauchery; and in the latter they become the tutors of the novices who are entering in their turn upon the road to ruin. The transition from the young man about town to the man upon the town is as natural as that of a chrysalis to a butterfly. These men *upon* the town constitute as pestilential a section of male society as the women *of* the town do of the female portion of the community. They are alike the reptiles produced by the great moral dung-heap.

We cannot, however, exactly class Mr. George Montague with the men upon the town in the true meaning of the phrase, inasmuch as he devoted his attention to commercial speculations of all kinds and under all shapes, and his sphere was chiefly the City; whereas men upon the town seldom entertain an idea half "so vulgar" as mercantile pursuits, and never visit the domains of the Lord Mayor save when they want to get a bill discounted, or to obtain cash for a check of too large an amount to be entrusted to any of their high-born and aristocratic companions.

Mr. George Montague was, therefore, one of that multitudinous class called "City men," who possess no regular offices, but have their letters addressed to the Auction Mart or Garraway's, and who make their appointments at such places as "the front of the Bank," "the Custom-house Wharf," and "under the clock at the Docks."

City men are very extraordinary characters. They all know "a certain speculation that would make a sure fortune, if one had but the capital to work upon;" they never fail to observe, while making this assertion, that they *could* apply to a friend if they chose, but that they do not choose to lay themselves under the obligation; and they invariably affirm that nothing is more easy than to make a fortune in the City, although the greater portion of them remain without that happy consummation until the day of their deaths. Now and then, however, one of these City men *does* succeed in "making a hit" by some means or other; and then his old friends, the very men who are constantly enunciating the opinion relative to the facility with which fortunes are obtained in the City, look knowing, wink at each other, and declare "that it never could have been done unless he'd had somebody with plenty of money to back him."

Now Mr. Montague was one of those who adopted a better system of logic than the vulgar reasoning. He knew that there was but little merit in producing bread from flour, for instance; but he perceived that there was immense credit due to those who could produce their bread without any flour at all. Upon this principle he acted, and his plan was not unattended with success. He scorned the idea "that money was necessary to beget money;" he began his "City career," as he sometimes observed, without a farthing; and he was seldom without gold in his pocket.

No one knew where he lived. He was sometimes seen getting into a Hackney omnibus at the Flower Pot, a Camberwell one at the Cross Keys; or running furiously after a Hammersmith one along Cheapside; but as these directions were very opposite, it was difficult to deduce from them any idea of his domiciliary whereabouts.

He was young to be a City man; the class does not often include members under thirty; but of course there are exceptions to all rules; and Mr. George Montague was one.

He was then a City man: but if the reader be anxious to know what sort of *business* he transacted to obtain his living; whether he dabbled in the funds, sold wines upon commission, effected loans and discounts, speculated in shares, got up joint-stock companies, shipped goods to the colonies, purchased land in Australia at eighteen-pence an acre and sold it again at one-and-nine, conducted compromises for insolvent tradesmen, made out the accounts of bankrupts, arbitrated between partners who disagreed, or bought in things in a friendly way at public sales; whether he followed any of these pursuits, or meddled a little with them all, we can no more satisfy our readers than if we attempted the biography of the Man in the Moon.—all we can say is, that he was invariably in the City from eleven to four; that he usually had "an excellent thing in hand just at that moment;" and, in a word, that he belonged to the class

denominated *City Men*!

We have taken some pains to describe this gentleman; for reasons which will appear hereafter.

Having been duly introduced to Walter Sydney by Mr. Stephens, and after a few observations of a general nature, Mr. Montague glided almost imperceptibly into topics upon which he conversed with ease and fluency.

Presently a pause ensued; and Mr. Stephens enquired "if there were anything new in the City?"

"Nothing particular," answered Montague. "I have not of course been in town this morning; but I was not away till late last night. I had a splendid thing in hand, which I succeeded in bringing to a favourable termination. By-the-by, there was a rumour on 'Change yesterday afternoon, just before the close, that Alderman Dumkins is all wrong."

"Indeed," said Stephens; "I thought he was wealthy."

"Oh! no; *I* knew the contrary eighteen months ago! It appears he has been starting a joint-stock company to work the Ercalat tin-mines in Cornwall——"

"And I suppose the mines do not really exist?"

"Oh! yes; they do—upon his maps! However, he has been exhibiting certain specimens of tin, which he has passed off as Ercalat produce; and it is now pretty generally known that the article was supplied him by a house in Aldgate."

"Then he will be compelled to resign his gown?"

"Not he! On the contrary, he stands next in rotation for the honours of the civic chair; and he intends to go boldly forward as if nothing had happened. You must remember that the aldermen of the City of London have degenerated considerably in respectability during late years; and that none of the really influential and wealthy men in the City will have anything to do with the corporation affairs. You do not see any great banker nor merchant wearing the aldermanic gown. The only alderman who really possessed what may be called a large fortune, and whose pecuniary position was above all doubt, resigned his gown the other day in disgust at the treatment which he received from his brother authorities, in consequence of his connexion with the *Weekly Courier*—the only newspaper that boldly, fearlessly, and effectually advocates the people's cause."

"And Dumkins will not resign, you think?"

"Oh! decidedly not. But for my part," added Montague, "I feel convinced that the sooner some change is made in the City administration the better. Only conceive the immense sums which the corporation receives from various sources, and the uses to which they are applied. Look at the beastly guzzling at Guildhall, while there are in the very heart of the City Augean stables of filth, crime, and debauchery to be cleansed—witness Petticoat-lane, Smithfield——"

A species of groan or stifled exclamation of horror issued from the lips of Walter as Montague uttered these words: her countenance grew deadly pale, and her entire frame appeared to writhe under a most painful reminiscence or emotion.

"Compose yourself, compose yourself," said Stephens, hastily. "Shall I ring for a glass of water, or wine, or anything——"

"No, it is past," interrupted Walter Sydney; "but I never think of that horrible—that appalling adventure without feeling my blood curdle in my veins. The mere mention of the word Smithfield——"

"Could I have been indiscreet enough to give utterance to anything calculated to annoy?" said Montague, who was surprised at this scene.

"You were not aware of the reminiscence you awoke in my mind by your remark," answered Walter, smiling; "but were you acquainted with the particulars of that fearful night, you would readily excuse my weakness."

"You have excited Mr. Montague's curiosity," observed Stephens, "and you have now nothing to do but to gratify it."

"It is an adventure of a most romantic kind—an adventure which you will scarcely believe—and yet one that will make your hair stand on end."

"I am now most anxious to learn the details of this mysterious occurrence," said Montague, scarcely knowing whether these remarks were made in jest or earnest.

Walter Sydney appeared to reflect for a few moments; and then commenced the narrative in the following manner:—

"It is now a little more than four years ago—very shortly after I first arrived at this house—that I rode into town, attended by the same groom who is in my service now. I knew little or nothing of the City, and felt my curiosity awakened to view the emporium of the world's commerce. I accordingly determined to indulge in a ramble by myself amidst the streets and thoroughfares of a place of which such marvellous accounts reach those who pass their youth in the country. I left the groom with the horses at a livery-stable in Bishopsgate-street, with a promise to return in the course of two or three hours. I then roved about to my heart's content, and never gave the lapse of time a thought. Evening came, and the weather grew threatening. Then commenced my perplexities. I had forgotten the address of the stables where the groom awaited my return; and I discovered the pleasing fact that I had lost my way just at the moment when an awful storm seemed ready to break over the metropolis. When I solicited information concerning the right path which I should pursue, I was insulted by the low churls to whom I applied. To be brief, I was overtaken by darkness and by the storm, in a place which I have since ascertained to be Smithfield market. I could not have conceived that so filthy and horrible a nuisance could have been allowed to exist in the midst of a city of so much wealth. But, oh! the revolting streets which branch off from that Smithfield. It seemed to me that I was wandering amongst all the haunts of crime and appalling penury of which I had read in romances, but which I never could have believed to exist in the very heart of the metropolis of the world. Civilisation appeared to me to have chosen particular places which it condescended to visit, and to have passed others by without even leaving a foot-print to denote its presence."

"But this horrible adventure?" said Montague.

"Oh! forgive my digression. Surrounded by darkness, exposed to the rage of the storm, and actually sinking with fatigue, I took refuge in an old house, which I am sure I could never find again; but which was situated nearly at the end, and on the right-hand side of

the way, of one of those vile narrow streets branching off from Smithfield. That house was the den of wild beasts in human shape! I was compelled to hear a conversation of a most appalling nature between two ruffians, who made that place the depôt for their plunder. They planned, amongst other atrocious topics, the robbery of a country-seat, somewhere to the north of Islington, and inhabited by a family of the name of Markham."

"Indeed! What—how strange!" ejaculated Montague: then immediately afterwards, he added, "How singular that you should have overheard so vile a scheme!"

"Oh! those villains," continued Walter, "were capable of crimes of a far deeper dye! They discussed horror upon horror, till I thought that I was going raving mad. I made a desperate attempt to escape, and was perceived. What then immediately followed I know not, for I became insensible: in a word, Mr. Montague, I fainted!"

A deep blush suffused her countenance, as she made this avowal—for it seemed to have a direct relation to her sex; and she was well aware that the secret connected therewith had been revealed by her benefactor to George Montague. On his part, he gazed upon her with mingled interest and admiration.

"I awoke to encounter a scene of horror," she continued, after a short pause, "which you must fancy; but the full extent of which I cannot depict. I can only *feel* it even now. Those wretches were conveying me to a room upon the ground-floor—a room to which the cells of the Bastille or the Inquisition could have produced no equal. It had a trap-door communicating with the Fleet Ditch! I begged for mercy—I promised wealth—for I knew that my kind benefactor," she added, glancing towards Mr. Stephens, "would have enabled me to fulfil my pledge to them; but all was in vain. The murderers hurled me down the dark and pestiferous hole!"

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated Montague.

"It would appear that the house in question," proceeded Walter, "stood upon the side of, and not over the Ditch. There can be, however, no doubt that the trap-door was contrived for the horrible purpose of disposing of those victims who fell into the merciless hands of the occupants of the dwelling; for when I had fallen some distance, instead of being immersed in black and filthy mud, I was caught upon a sloping plank which shelved towards a large aperture in the wall of the Ditch. I instinctively clung to this plank, and lay stretched upon it for some moments until I had partially recovered my presence of mind. The circumstance of having thus escaped a dreadful death gave me an amount of courage at which I myself was astonished. At length I began to reason whether it would be better to remain there until morning, and then endeavour to reach the trap-door above my head, or to devise some means of immediate escape. I decided upon the latter proceeding; for I reflected that the morning would not afford light to that subterranean hole to enable me to act with certainty; and I, moreover, dreaded the extreme vengeance of those ruffians who had already given me a sample of their brutality, should I happen to encounter them on emerging from the trap-door. Lastly, I considered that it was also probable that I might not succeed in raising the trap-door at all."

"What a fearful situation!" observed Montague.

"Horrible even to think of," added Stephens, who listened with the deepest attention to this narrative, although he had heard it related on former occasions.

"With my hands and legs I groped about," continued Walter, "and I speedily ascertained my exact position with regard to the locality. My feet were close to a large square aperture in the perpendicular wall overhanging the Ditch; and the floor of the cellar was only a couple of feet below the aperture. I accordingly got cautiously off the board, and stood upon the damp ground. After the lapse of several minutes, during which I nerved myself to adopt the idea that had struck me, I passed my head through the aperture, and looked out over the Ditch. The stream appeared rapid, to judge by its gurgling sound; and the stench that exhaled from it was pestiferous in the extreme. Turning my head to the left I saw hundreds of lights twinkling in the small narrow windows of two lines of houses that overhung the Ditch. The storm had now completely passed away—the rain had ceased—and the night was clear and beautiful. In a few minutes I was perfectly acquainted with the entire geography of the place. The means of escape were within my reach. About three feet above the aperture through which I was now looking, a plank crossed the Ditch; and on the opposite side—for the Ditch in that part was not above two yards wide from wall to wall—was a narrow ledge running along the side of the house facing the one in which I was, and evidently communicating with some lane or street close by. I can scarcely tell you how I contrived to creep through the aperture and reach the plank overhead. Nevertheless, I attempted the dangerous feat, and I accomplished it. I crossed the plank, and reached the ledge of which I have spoken: it terminated in the very street where stood the terrible den from which I had just so miraculously escaped. Indeed, I emerged upon that street only at a distance of a few yards from the door of that detestable place. To hurry away in a contrary direction was my first and most natural impulse; but I had not proceeded far when the door of a house was suddenly thrown violently open, and out poured a crowd of men and women, among whom I was, as it were, immediately hemmed in."

"What! another adventure?" exclaimed Montague.

"One calculated to inspire feelings of deep disgust, if not of alarm," answered Walter. "It appeared that two women had been quarreling and had turned out to fight. They fell upon each other like wild cats, or as you would fancy that tigers would fight. A clear and lovely moon lighted this revolting scene. A circle was formed round the termagants, and for ten minutes did they lacerate themselves with fists and nails in a fearful manner. Their clothes were torn into ribands—their countenances were horribly disfigured with scratches—the blood poured from their noses—and their hair, hanging all dishevelled over their naked shoulders, gave them a wild, ferocious, and savage appearance, such as I never could have expected to encounter in the metropolis of the civilised world."

"And in the very heart of the City," added Mr. Montague.

"Suddenly a cry of '*The Bluebottles!*' was raised, and the crowd, belligerents and all, rushed pell-mell back again into the house. In spite of all my endeavours to escape I was hurried in with that hideous mob of ferocious-looking men and brazen-faced women. In a few moments I found myself in a large room, in which there were at least thirty wretched beds huddled close together, and so revoltingly dirty that the cold pavement or a hedge-side would have seemed a more preferable couch. And, oh! how can I describe the inmates of that den, many of whom were crowding round a fire cooking provender, which filled the place with a sickening and most fetid odour. There were young girls almost naked, without shoes or stockings, and whose sunken checks, dimmed eyes, and miserable

attire contrasted strangely with their boisterous mirth. Some of these unfortunate creatures, nevertheless, retained traces of original beauty prematurely faded. The men were hatless and shoeless; indeed the entire assembly consisted of males and females evidently of the most wretched description. Scarcely had I time to cast a glance around me when I was questioned as to how I came there? what I wanted? and whether I meant to stand anything? 'I will tell you what it is,' said one to his companions, 'he is a swell who is come to have a look at these kind of cribs, and he must pay his footing.' I immediately comprehended the nature of the impression which my presence had created, and presented the individual who had spoken with a couple of half-crowns. The sight of the money produced an immense feeling in my favour. Heaven only knows how many gallons of beer were fetched from a neighbouring public-house; and when the inmates of that lazar-house—for I can scarcely call it anything else—had all partaken of the liquor, I was overwhelmed with offers of service. One declared, that if I merely came to see the neighbourhood he would take me round to every place in the street; another assured me, that if I had committed a forgery or any other 'genteel crime,' he would either help me to lie secure until the matter had blown over, or to escape from the country; and so on. I suffered the wretches to retain the impression that curiosity had alone led me thither; and as soon as I had made this announcement the mistress of the house was summoned to do the honours of the establishment. A blear-eyed old crone made her appearance, and insisted upon showing me over the house. 'These rooms,' said she, meaning the two upon the ground floor, 'are for those who can afford to pay threepence for their bed and who have supper to cook.' We then ascended to the first floor. 'These are the four-penny beds,' said the old woman, pointing with pride and satisfaction to some thirty or forty couches, a shade cleaner, and the least thing further off from each other than those down stairs. The rooms on the first floor were also filled with lodgers; and another demand was made upon my purse. On the third floor and in the attics were the most horrible scenes of wretchedness which I had yet beheld. Those dens were filled with straw beds, separated from each other only by pieces of plank about eight or ten inches in height. Men, women, and children were all crowded together—sleeping pell-mell. Oh! it was a horrible, horrible spectacle. To be brief, I escaped from that moral plague-house; and in a few moments was traversing Smithfield once more. Even the tainted air of that filthy enclosure was refreshing after the foul atmosphere from which I had just emerged."

Louisa entered the room at this moment to announce that luncheon was prepared in another apartment.

"And you never took any steps to root out that nest of villains in the Old House whence you escaped alive so miraculously?" said Montague sipping a glass of exquisite wine after his luncheon.

"I wrote two anonymous letters the very next morning," answered Walter: "one to Mr. Markham, warning him of the contemplated burglar at his house; and another to the Lord Mayor of London. It did not altogether suit Mr. Stephens's plans——"

"No—not to make a fuss about an affair which would have been sure to bring your name into notoriety," added this gentleman hastily.

"That adventure has no doubt given you a distaste for late rambles," said Montague.

"In the City—decidedly so," was the reply. "I seldom go into London, early or late—I have so few inducements—so few acquaintances! By the way, a few evenings ago I treated myself to a visit to the Opera, and there accident threw me into conversation with a gentleman and lady who sat in the same box as myself. The result was an invitation to the abode of the lady—a Mrs. Arlington ——"

"Mrs. Arlington," ejaculated Montague, a light flush animating his countenance.

"The same. She is *the friend* of Sir Rupert Harborough. I am anxious to see something of the world now and then—and to avail myself of my present garb for that purpose. I accordingly called upon Mrs. Arlington last evening, and learnt 'a lesson of life.' I saw an elegant woman, a baronet, a fashionable gentleman, and a very interesting young man, associating with a vulgar wretch of the name, I believe, of Talbot, whose manners would have disgraced a groom. I must, however, observe that the interesting young gentleman to whom I allude did not seem to be more pleased with the conversation and conduct of this vulgarian than myself. One coincidence somewhat extraordinary occurred—that same interesting young man was no other than Mr. Richard Markham, one of the sons of——"

"Ah! indeed—how singular!" exclaimed George Montague, not waiting till Walter finished his sentence; "very singular!" he added; then, having tossed off a bumper of Madeira, he walked up to the window, where he affected to inhale with delight the exquisite fragrance of the flowers that adorned the casement.

CHAPTER X.

THE FRAIL ONE'S NARRATIVE.

We must now return to Richard Markham.

Sir Rupert Harborough and the Honourable Arthur Chichester apparently took a very great fancy to him, for they were constantly making appointments to meet him in town, and hastening to his own house to ferret him out when he did not appear at their usual places of rendezvous. He dined at least three times a week at Mrs. Arlington's, and, to confess the truth, his morning calls were repeated at intervals which gradually grew shorter and shorter.

Richard thus frequently passed hours together alone with Diana. In spite of himself he now and then suffered his eyes to rest tenderly upon her countenance; and by degrees her glances encountered his and were not immediately withdrawn. Those glances were so languishing, and withal so melancholy, that they inspired Richard with a passion amounting almost to a delirium; and he felt at times as if he could have caught that beauteous creature in his arms and clasped her rapturously to his bosom.

One morning, as he took leave of her, he fancied that her hand gently pressed his own. The idea filled him with a joy till then unknown, and which he could not describe even to himself.

On the following morning he called a little earlier than usual. Diana was in a delicious *déshabillé*, which set off her voluptuous person to its very greatest advantage. Richard was more tender than usual—the Enchantress more enchanting.

They were seated upon the sofa together; and a pause in their conversation ensued. Richard heaved a deep sigh, and suddenly exclaimed, "I am always thinking of the period when I must bid adieu to your charming society."

"Bid adieu!" cried Diana; "and wherefore?"

"It must happen, sooner or later, that our ways in the world will be different."

"Then you are not your own master?" said Diana, enquiringly.

"Certainly I am. But all friends must part some time or another."

"True," said Diana; then, in a subdued tone, she added, "There are certain persons who are attracted towards each other by kindred feelings and emotions, and it is painful—very painful, for them to part!"

"Heavens, Diana!" ejaculated Richard; "you feel as I do!"

She turned her face towards him; her cheeks were suffused in blushes, and her eyes were filled with tears. But through those tears she cast upon him a glance which ravished his inmost soul. It seemed fraught with love and tenderness, and inspired him with emotions which he had never known before. The words "You feel as I do," contained the ingenuous and unsophisticated avowal of a new passion on the part of a mind that was as yet as unskilled in the ways of this world as the unfledged bird in the nest of its mother is ignorant of the green woods. But those tears which stood in the lady's eyes, and the blushes which dyed her checks, and the glance which, like a sunbeam in the midst of an April shower, she darted upon the youth at her side, inspired him with courage, awakened undefined hopes, and filled him with an ecstacy of joy.

"Why do you weep, Diana? why do you weep?"

"You love me, Richard," she replied, turning her melting blue eyes fully upon him, and retaining them for some moments fixed upon his countenance: "you love me; and I feel—I know that I am not worthy of your affection!"

Richard started as if he were suddenly aroused from a dream—as if he had abruptly awoke to a stern truth from a pleasing vision. He suffered her hand, which he had taken in his, to fall from his grasp; and for some moments he remained buried in a profound reverie.

"Ah! I knew that I should remind you of your duty towards yourself," said Diana, bitterly. "No—I am not worthy of you. But that you may hereafter give me credit for frankness and candour,—that you may be actually warned by myself *against* myself,—that you may learn to esteem me as a friend, if you will, I shall in a few words relate to you the incidents that made me what I am!"

"Proceed," said Richard, "proceed! Believe me I shall listen with attention,—with the greatest attention!"

"My father was a retired tradesman," began Mrs. Arlington; "and as I was his only child and he enjoyed a competency, he gave me the best education that money could procure. Probably the good old man made up his mind that I should one day espouse a nobleman; and, as my mother had died when I was very young, there was no one near me to correct the vanity with which my father's adulation and ambitious pretensions inspired me. About three years ago I met at the theatre—whither I went with some friends—a young gentleman—tall, handsome, and fascinating like yourself. He contrived to obtain a formal introduction to my father, and was invited to our house, at which he speedily became a constant visitor. He had a happy tact in suiting his humours or tastes to those with whom he came in contact; and he quite won my father's heart by playing chess with him, telling him the news of the City, and reading the evening paper to him. George Montague soon became an established favourite; and my father could do nothing without him. At length Montague proposed to him certain speculations in the funds: my father was allured by the prospect of quadrupling his capital, and consented. I must confess that the young man's handsome person had produced a certain effect upon me—a giddy young girl as I was at that time; and I rather encouraged my father in these schemes than otherwise. At first the speculations were eminently successful; but in a short time they took a turn. Day after day did Montague come to the house to announce fresh losses and the necessity of farther advances. He declared that he should now speculate for a grand stake, which could not fail shortly to turn to his advantage. A species of infatuation seized upon my father; and I was not aware of the ruinous course he was pursuing until it was too late. At length my father was totally ruined; and George come to announce to us the failure of our last chance. My father now repented when it was too late. Eight short months had sufficed to dissipate his whole fortune; he had not even enough left to pay the few debts which he had contracted, and which he had neglected to liquidate, trusting each day to the arrival of the lucky moment when he should find himself the master of millions!"

"Oh! the absurd hope!" exclaimed Richard, deeply interested in this narrative.

"Alas! this event was a fatal blow to my father's health, at the same time that it wrecked his happiness," continued Diana. "He implored Montague not to desert 'his darling child'—for so he called me—in case anything should happen to himself; and that same day—the day on which he saw all his prospects and hopes in this life blasted—he put a period to his existence by means of poison!"

"This was horrible!" cried Markham. "Oh! that villain Montague!"

"My father's creditors came to seize the few effects which remained," said Diana, after a pause; "and I was about to be turned houseless and unprotected into the streets, when Montague arrived. He took gold from his pocket, and satisfied the demands of the creditors. He moreover supplied me with money for my immediate wants. I was totally dependent upon him;—I had no relations—no friends to whom I could apply for succour or comfort. He seemed to commiserate my position——"

"Perhaps," observed Richard, "he was not so very guilty, after all, relative to the loss of your father's property?"

"Judge by the sequel," answered Diana bitterly. "He was as base as he was in reality unfeeling. The transition from that state of dependence upon a young man to a more degraded one still, was to be expected. He no longer talked to me of marriage, as he once had done; but he took advantage of my forlorn situation. I became his mistress."

"Ah! it was base—it was ungenerous—it was unmanly!" ejaculated Richard.

"He seemed to be possessed of ample resources; but he accounted for this circumstance by assuring me that he had found another friend who was backing him in the same speculations in which my poor father had failed. We lived together for four months; and he

then coolly informed me that we must part. I found that I had never really entertained any very sincere affection for him; and the little love which I experienced at first, had been quenched in my bosom by his cold cruelty. He seemed unfeeling to a degree. Observations, calculated to wound most acutely, fell from his lips upon all occasions——"

"The dastard!" exclaimed Richard, profoundly touched by this recital.

"If I wept at this cruelty, he treated me with increased brutality. You may, therefore, suppose that I was not deeply distressed to part with him. He gave me twenty guineas, and bade me a chilling farewell. From that moment I have neither seen nor heard of him. A few weeks after our separation my money was exhausted. I resolved to lead a virtuous and honourable life, and atone for my first fault. O God! I did not then know that society will not receive the penitent frail one;—that society excludes poor deceived woman from all hopes of reparation, all chances of repentance! I endeavoured to obtain a situation as a governess;—I might as well have attempted to make myself queen of England. Character—references! I had neither. Vainly did I implore one lady to whom I applied to give me a month's trial. She insulted me grossly. To another I candidly confessed my entire history: she patiently heard me to the end, and then ordered her lacquey to turn me out of the house. Oh! society does more than punish: it pursues the unfortunate female who has made one false step, with the most avenging and malignant cruelty;—it hunts her to suicide or to new ways of crime. These are the dread alternatives. At that moment, had some friendly hand been stretched out to aid me,—had I met with one kind heart that would have believed in the possibility of repentance,—had I only been blest with the chance of entering upon a career of virtue, I should have been saved! Yes—I should have redeemed my first fault, as far as redemption was possible;—and to accomplish that aim, I would have worked my nails down to the very quick,—I would have accepted any position, however menial,—I would have made any sacrifice, enjoyed any lot, so long as I was assured of earning my bread in a manner which need not make me blush. But society treated me with contempt. Why, in this Christian country, do they preach the Christian maxim, that '*there is more joy over one sinner who repenteth, than over ninety-and-nine just persons who need no repentance*?' Why is this maxim preached, when the entire conduct of society expresses in terms which cannot be misunderstood, a bold denial of its truth?"

"Merciful heavens," ejaculated Richard, "can this be true? are you drawing a correct picture, Diana, or inventing a hideous fiction?"

"God knows how true is all I say!" returned Mrs. Arlington, with profound sincerity of tone and manner. "Want soon stared me in the face: what could I do? Chance threw me in the way of Sir Rupert Harborough:—compelled by an imperious necessity, I became his mistress. This is my history."

"And the baronet treats you kindly?" said Richard, inquiringly.

"The terms upon which our connexion is based do not permit him an opportunity of being either very kind or very cruel."

"I must now say farewell for the present," exclaimed Markham, afraid of trusting himself longer with the Syren who had fascinated him with her misfortunes as well as by her charms. "In a day or two I will see you again. Oh! I cannot blame you for what you have done:—I commiserate—I pity you! Could any sacrifice that I am capable of making, restore you to happiness and—and—"

"Honour, you would say," exclaimed Diana, firmly.

"I would gladly make that sacrifice," added Richard. "From this moment we will be friends—very sincere friends. I will be your brother, dearest Diana—and you shall be my sister!"

The young man rose from the sofa, as he uttered these disjointed sentences in a singularly wild and rapid manner; and Diana, without making any reply, but apparently deeply touched, pressed his hand for some moments between both her own.

Richard then hastily escaped from the presence of that charming and fascinating creature.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE SERVANTS' ARMS."

UPON the same day that this event took place, Mr. Whittingham, the butler of Richard Markham, had solicited and obtained permission to pass the evening with a certain Mr. Thomas Suggett, who occupied the distinguished post of *valet de chambre* about the person of the Honourable Arthur Chichester. Whittingham was determined to enjoy himself:—he seemed suddenly to have cast off twenty years from his back, and to walk the more upright for having rid himself of the burthen;—his hat was slightly cocked on one side; and, as he walked along, with Mr. Thomas Suggett tucked under his arm, he struck his silver-headed bamboo, which he always carried with him when he went abroad on Sundays and holidays, very forcibly upon the pavement. Mr. Suggett declared "that, for his part, he was very well disposed for a spree;" and he threw into his gait a most awful swagger, which certainly excited considerable attention, because all the small boys in the streets laughed at him as he wended on his way.

"I wonder what them urchins are garping at so," said Whittingham. "It mystificates me in no inconsiderable degree. Raly the lower orders of English is exceedingly imperlite. I feel the most inwigorated disgust and the most unboundless contempt for their manners."

"That's jist like me," observed Suggett: "I can't a-bear the lower orders. I hate everythink wulgar.—But, by the bye, Mr. Whittingham, do you smoke?"

"I can't say but what I like a full-flavoured Havannah—a threepenny, mind," added the butler, pompously.

"Just my taste, Mr. Whittingham. If I can't afford threepennies, I won't smoke at all."

Mr. Suggett entered a cigar shop, purchased half-a-dozen *real Havannahs* (manufactured in St. John-street, Clerkenwell), joked with the young lady who served him, and then presented the one which he considered the best to his companion. The two gentlemen's gentlemen accordingly lighted their cigars, and then continued their walk along the New Road, in the vicinity of which Mr. Whittingham had met Mr. Suggett by appointment upon this memorable afternoon.

In a short time Mr. Suggett stopped suddenly at the door of a large white public-house, not a hundred miles distant from the new church, St. Pancras.

"This is a nice crib," said he. "Excellent company; and to-night there is a supper at eleven."

"The very identified thing," acquiesced Mr. Whittingham; and into the public-house they walked.

Nothing could be more neat and cleanly than the bar of the *Servants' Arms*—no one more obliging nor bustling than the "young lady" behind the bar. The *Servants' Arms* was reported to draw the best liquor in all the neighbourhood; and its landlord prided himself upon the superiority of his establishment over those which sold beer "at three-pence a-pot in your own jugs." And then what a rapid draught the landlord had for all his good things; and how crowded was the space before the bar with customers.

"Glass of ale—mild, Miss, if you please," said one.

"A quartern of gin and three outs, Caroline," cried a second, who was more familiar.

"Pint of half-and-half, here," exclaimed a third.

"Six of brandy, warm, Miss—four of gin, cold, and a pint of ale with the chill off—parlour!" ejaculated the waiter, who now made his appearance at the bar.

"Pot of porter; and master's compliments, and can you lend him yesterday's *Advertiser* for half an hour or so?" said a pretty little servant girl, placing a large yellow jug on the bright lead surface of the bar.

"Pot of ale, and a screw, Miss."

"Pint of gin, for mixing, please."

"Bottle of Cape wine, at eighteen, landlord."

"Four-penn'orth of rum, cold without."

"Half pint of porter, and a pipe, Caroline."

Such were the orders, issued from all quarters at the same moment, and to which Caroline responded with incredible alacrity; finding time to crack a joke with the known frequenters of the house, and to make a pleasant observation upon the weather to those whose faces were strange to her;—while the landlord contented himself with looking on, or every now and then drawing a pot of beer, apparently as a great favour and in a lazy independent manner. Nevertheless, he was a good, civil kind of a man; only somewhat independent, because he was growing rich. He was never afraid at the end of month to see Truman and Hanbury's collector, and Nicholson's man, alight from their gigs at his door. They were always sure to find the money ready for them, when they sate down to write their receipts in the little narrow slip of a parlour behind the bar. In fact, the landlord of the *Servants' Arms*, was reported to be doing "a very snug business:"—and so he was.

Messrs. Whittingham and Suggett sauntered leisurely into the parlour of the *Servants' Arms*, and took their seats at the only table which remained unoccupied.

"Good evening, Sir," said the waiter, addressing Mr. Suggett with a sort of semi-familiarity, which showed that the latter gentleman was in the habit of "using the house."

"How are you, William?" cried Mr. Suggett, in a patronising manner. "George been here lately?"

"Not very: I think he's down in the country."

"Oh! Well, what shall we have, Mr. Whittingham—brandy and water?"

"That's my inwariable beverage, Mr. Suggett."

"Two sixes, gentlemen?" said the waiter.

"No," answered Mr. Whittingham, solemnly; "two shillings' worth, to begin with."

The liquor was supplied, and when the two gentlemen had tasted it, and found it to their liking, they glanced around the room to survey the company. It soon appeared that Mr. Suggett was well known to many of the gentlemen present; for, upon making his survey, he acknowledged, with a nod or a short phrase, the bows or salutations of those with whom he was acquainted.

"Ah! Mr. Guffins, always up in the same corner, eh?" said he, addressing a middle-aged man in seedy black: "got a new work in the press, 'spose? You literary men contrive to enjoy yourselves, I know. How do you do, Mr. Mac Chizzle?" looking towards a short, pock-marked man, with a quick grey eye, and black hair combed upright off his forehead: "how get on the clients? Plenty of business, eh? Ah! you lawyers always contrive to do well. Mr. Drummer, your servant, sir. Got a good congregation still, sir?"

"The chapel thriveth well, I thank you—as well as can be expected in these times of heathen abominations," answered a demure-looking middle-aged gentleman, who was clad in deep black and wore a white neck-cloth, which seemed (together with the condition of his shirt and stockings) to denote that although he had gained the confidence of his flock, he had certainly lost that of his washer-woman. After having taken a long draught of a pint of half-and-half which stood before him, he added, "There is a many savoury vessels in my congregation—reputable, pious, and prayer-full people, which pays regular for their sittings and fears the Lord."

"Well, I am glad of that," ejaculated Mr. Suggett. "But, ah!" he cried, observing a thin white-haired old gentleman, with huge silver spectacles hanging half-way down his nose,—"I'm glad to see Mr. Cobbington here. How gets on the circulating library, eh—sir?"

"Pretty well—pretty well, thank'ee," returned the bookseller: "pretty well—considering."

A great many people qualify their observations and answers by the addition of the word "*considering*;" but they seldom vouchsafe an explanation of *what it to be considered*. Sometimes they use the phrase "considering all things;" and then the mind has so much to consider, that it cannot consider any one thing definitively. It would be much more straightforward and satisfactory if persons would relieve their friends of all suspense, and say boldly at once, as the case may be, "*considering* the execution I have got in my house;" or "*considering* the writ that's out against me;" or even "*considering* the trifling annoyance of not having a shilling in my pocket, and not knowing where to look for one." But, somehow or another, people never will be candid now-a-days; and Talleyrand was right when he said that "language was given to man to enable him to conceal his thoughts."

But to continue.

Mr. Suggett glanced a little further around the room, and recognized another old acquaintance.

"Ah! Snoggles, how are you?"

"Very well, thank'ee—how be you?"

"Blooming; but how come you here?"

"I dropped in quite permiscuously," answered Snoggles, "and finding good company, stayed. But it is up'ards o' three years since I see you, Mr. Suggett."

"About. What grade do you now fill in the profession? Any promotion?"

"I'm sorry to say not," replied Mr. Snoggles, shaking his head mournfully. "I've tumbled off the box down to a level with the osses;" which, being interpreted, means that Mr. Snoggles had fallen from the high estate of coachman to the less elevated rank of ostler. "But what rank do you now hold?"

"I left off the uniform of *tiger* last month," answered Mr. Suggett, "and received the brevet of walley-de-chambre."

"That gentleman one of the profession?" demanded Snoggles, alluding to Mr. Whittingham.

"Mr. Markham's butler, sir, at your service," said Whittingham, bowing with awe-inspiring stiffness: "and I may say, without exag-gerating, sir, and in no wise compromising my indefatigable character for weracity, that I'm also Mr. Markham's confidential friend. And what's more, gen'leman," added the butler, glancing proudly around the room, "Mr. Richard Markham is the finest young man about this stupendous city of the whole universe—and that's as true as that this is a hand."

As Mr. Whittingham concluded this sentence, he extended his arm to display the hand relative to which he expressed such confidence; and while he flourished the arm to give weight to his language, the aforesaid hand encountered the right eye of the dissenting parson.

"A case of assault and battery," instantly exclaimed Mr. Mac Chizzle, the lawyer; "and here are upwards of a dozen witnesses for the plaintiff."

"I really beg the gentleman's pardon," said Whittingham.

"Special jury—sittings after term—damages five hundred pounds;" exclaimed Mac Chizzle.

"No harm was intended," observed Suggett.

"Not a bit," added Snoggles.

"Verdict for Plaintiff—enter up judgment—issue execution—*ca. sa.* in no time," said Mac Chizzle doggedly.

"I am used to flagellations and persecutions at the hands of the ungodly," said the Reverend Mr. Drummer, rubbing his eye with his fist, and thereby succeeding in inflaming it.

"Perhaps the reverend gentleman wouldn't take it amiss if I was to offer him my apologies in a extra powerful glass of brandy and water?" exclaimed Whittingham.

"Bribery," murmured Mac Chizzle.

"No, let us have a bowl of punch at once," exclaimed Suggett.

"And corruption," added the lawyer.

The bowl of punch was ordered, and the company generally was invited to partake of it. Even Mr. Mac Chizzle did not hesitate; and the dissenting minister, in order to convince Mr. Whittingham that he entirely forgave him, consented to partake of the punch so often that he at length began slapping Mr. Whittingham upon the back, and declaring that he was the best fellow in the world.

The conversation became general; and some of it is worth recording.

"I hope to have your patronage, sir, for my circulating library," said Mr. Cobbington to the butler.

"Depends, sir, upon the specified nature of the books it contains," was the reply.

"I have nothing but moral romances in which vice is always punished and virtue rewarded."

"That conduct of yours is highly credulous to you."

"All books is trash, except one," observed Mr. Drummer, winking his eyes in an extraordinary manner. "They teaches naught but swearing, lewd conversation, ungodliness, and that worst of all vices—intemperance."

"I beg you to understand, sir," exclaimed Mr. Guffins, who had hitherto remained a silent spectator of the proceedings, although a persevering partaker of the punch; "I beg you to understand, Mr. Drummer, my works, sir, are not the trash you seem to allude to."

"I won't understand nothing nor nobody," answered the reverend gentleman, swaying backwards and forwards in his chair. "Leave me to commune with myself upon the vanities of this wicked world, and—and—drink my punch in quiet."

"Humbug!" exclaimed the literary man, swallowing his resentment and the remainder of his punch simultaneously.

"Ah!" said the bookseller, after a pause; "nothing now succeeds unless it's in the comic line. We have comic Latin grammars, and comic Greek grammars; indeed, I don't know but what English grammar, too, is a comedy altogether. All our tragedies are made into comedies by the way they are performed; and no work sells without comic illustrations to it. I have brought out several new comic works, which have been very successful. For instance, '*The Comic Wealth of Nations*;' '*The Comic Parliamentary Speeches*;' '*The Comic Report of the Poor-Law Commissioners*,' with an Appendix containing the '*Comic Dietary Scale*;' and the '*Comic Distresses of the Industrious Population*.' I even propose to bring out a '*Comic Whole Duty of Man*.' All these books sell well: they do admirably for the nurseries of the children of the aristocracy. In fact they are as good as manuals and text-books."

"This rage for the comic is most unexpressedly remarkable," observed the butler.

"It is indeed!" ejaculated Snoggles; and, in order to illustrate the truth of the statement, he jerked a piece of lemon-peel very cleverly into the dissenting parson's left eye.

"That's right—stone me to death!" murmured the reverend gentleman. "My name is Stephen—and it is all for righteousness' sake! I know I'm a chosen vessel, and may become a martyr. My name is Stephen, I tell you—Stephen Drum—um—ummer!"

He then began an eulogium upon meekness and resignation under injuries, and reiterated his conviction that he was a chosen vessel; but, becoming suddenly excited by a horse-laugh which fell upon his ear, he forgot all about the chosen vessel, and lifted another very savagely from the table. In a word, he seized a pewter pot in his hand, and would have hurled it at Mr. Snoggles' head, had not Mr. Whittingham stopped the dangerous missile in time, and pacified the reverend gentleman by calling for more punch.

"We must certainly have those two men bound over to keep the peace," said Mac Chizzle; "two sureties in fifty, and themselves in a hundred, each."

"I shall dress the whole scene up for one of the *Monthlies*," observed Mr. Guffins.

"If you do, you'll be indictable for libel," said Mac Chizzle. "The greater the truth, the greater the libel."

In the meanwhile Suggett and his friend Snoggles drew close to each other, and entered into conversation.

"It must be about three years since I saw you last," said the latter.

"Three year, come January," observed Suggett.

"Ah! I've seed some strange wicissitudes in the interval," continued Snoggles. "I went abroad as coachman, with a dashing young chap of the name of Winchester—"

"The devil you did! how singular! why my present guvner's name is Chichester."

"Well, I des say they're cousins then," said the ostler; "but I hope your'n won't treat you as mine did me. He seemed to have no end of tin for some months, and lived—my eye, how he lived! King's Bench dinners ain't nothin' to what his'n was; and yet I've heard say that the prisoners live there better than their creditors outside. Howsomever—things didn't always go on swimmingly. We went to Baden—called so cos of the baths; and there my guvner got involved in some gambling transactions, as forced him to make his name *Walker*. Well, he bolted, leaving all his traps behind, and me amongst them, and not a skurrick to pay the hotel bill and find my way back agin to England. The landlord he seized the traps, and I was forced to walk all the way to—I forget the name of the place—"

"Constantinople, perhaps," said Suggett, kindly endeavouring to assist his friend in his little geographical embarrassments.

"No; that ain't it," returned Snoggles. "Howsomever, I had every kind of difficulty to fight up against; and I never see my guvner from that day to this. He owed me eight pound, nineteen, and sixpence for wages; and he was bound by contract to bring me back to England."

"Disgraceful raskel, that he was!" ejaculated Mr. Suggett. "I raly think that we gentlemen ought to establish a society for our protection. The Licensed Witlers have *their* Association; why shouldn't we have the Gentlemen's Gentlemen organized into a society?"

"Why not?" said Snoggles.

The waiter now acquainted the company that supper was ready in an upstairs room for those who liked to partake of it. All the gentlemen whose names have been introduced to the reader in connection with the parlour of the *Servants' Arms*, removed to the

banqueting saloon, where the table was spread with a snow-white cloth and black handled knives and forks. At intervals stood salt-cellars and pepper boxes, the latter resembling in shape the three little domes upon the present National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. A huge round of boiled beef tripe both boiled and fried, and rump steaks, formed the supper. The methodist parson insisted upon being allowed to say grace—or, as he expressed it, "ask a blessing," for which purpose the same neighbours who had kindly helped him up the stairs, now sustained him upon his legs. Dread was the havoc then made upon the various dainties on the table, Mr. Guffins being especially characterised by a good appetite upon this occasion.

The Reverend Mr. Drummer was also far from being behind-hand in this onslaught upon the luxuries supplied by the *Servants' Arms*; and while he bolted huge mouthfuls of boiled beef, he favoured the company with an excellent moral dissertation upon abstemiousness and self-mortification. Mr. Drummer was, however, one of those who content themselves with inculcating morality, and do not consider it necessary to set an example in their own persons; for, after having clearly demonstrated that gluttony and drunkenness lead to blasphemy, ungodliness, and profane swearing, he abruptly turned to the landlord, who presided at the supper-table, and, holding his plate to be filled for the fourth time, exclaimed, "D—n your eyes, don't cut it so infernally thick!"

After supper, "glasses round" of hot brandy and water were introduced, and the conversation was carried on with considerable spirit. It was midnight before the party thought of breaking up, although several of the gentlemen present had already begun to see three or four Dutch clocks staring them in the face besides the one which graced the wall. As for the Reverend Mr. Drummer, he declared that he was so affected by the ungodly proceedings of those present that he should forthwith endeavour to wash away their guilt with his tears; and it is distressing to be compelled to observe that all the reward this truly pious and deserving man experienced at the hands of the ungrateful company, was the cruel accusation that he was "crying drunk." This disgraceful behaviour produced such an effect upon his naturally nervous temperament, that he fell flat upon the floor, and was compelled to be taken in a wheelbarrow to his own house close by.

We may also add here that on the following day this proceeding was rumoured abroad, so that the much injured minister was necessitated to justify his conduct from the pulpit on the ensuing sabbath. This he did so effectually, that two old ladies, who carried small flasks of brandy in their pockets, were conveyed out of the chapel in a peculiar state—no doubt overpowered by the minister's eloquence. They however recovered at the expiration of some hours, and immediately opened a subscription to present a piece of plate to the Reverend Stephen Drummer, together with a vote of thanks and confidence on the part of the congregation. The vote was respectfully, but gratefully declined by this holy man; but, after some little entreaty, he was prevailed upon to accept the plate. From that time to the present day his congregation has been rapidly increasing; and, although envy and jealousy have declared that he himself helped to augment its numbers in the shape of three innocent little children by different servant-girls, he very properly disdained to contradict the report, and is considered by his flock to be a chosen and savoury vessel of the Lord.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BANK-NOTES.

WHEN Richard left the presence of Diana, after the full confession of her frailty, he hurried home on horseback at a rate which kept pace with his thoughts.

Upon reaching his dwelling, he retired to his apartment, and sate himself down seriously to consider all that had taken place.

His eyes were now open to two facts:—in the first instance he saw that he had been giving way to a passion which was dishonourable in respect to the relations existing between its object and another individual—the baronet; and, secondly, he perceived that even if that barrier were removed, Diana was not the being whom he ought to make the partner of his fortunes. He was endowed with feelings and notions of the most scrupulous honour; and he deeply regretted that he should ever have been induced to utter a word or manifest a sentiment towards Diana, which he would have been ashamed for the baronet to become acquainted with. To such an extent did he carry his notions of honour, that if, for instance, he had pledged himself to keep a secret, he would sooner have suffered himself to be put to death than have forfeited his word. Even were a crime communicated to him in confidence, he would not have benefitted society by handing the perpetrator over to justice. He thus fell into an extreme almost as dangerous and fatal as the total absence of moral rectitude.

If the reader should marvel how a young man possessing such punctilious sentiments, could have so far forgotten himself as to declare his affection to one who stood in the light of a friend's wife,—let it be remembered that he was surprised into a partial avowal of that passion: and that a certain impulse, favoured by a rapid succession of visits, parties, and *tête-â-tête* interviews, in which the object thereof was always present, had hurried him onward up to that point when a word was to decide his fate.

Love is a stream so rapid that he who embarks upon it does not observe that his rude boat crushes the beauteous flowers upon the banks between which it passes:—it is a river whose waters are those of oblivion, in which all other passions, sentiments, and ideas are swallowed up.

O woman, what power hast thou over the heart of man! Thou wast born a creature of grace and fascination: to whatever clime thou dost belong, neither habit nor costume can deface in thee that natural charm of witchery and love which characterises thee in all the relations of life.

Richard had not been long alone, when a knock at his door aroused him from the reverie in which had been plunged; and Mr. Chichester entered the room.

"My dear Markham," said he, "you must excuse the liberty which I take in thus intruding upon your privacy; but what is the meaning of this? You were to lunch with Harborough to-day, and we were all to dine together in the evening. You called at Diana's; and from what you said upon leaving, she fancied you were coming straight home. So I have galloped all this way after you. You shut yourself up from your friends as if you had a design upon your life."

"I am not well—I am anxious to be alone."

"But I shall not allow you to remain alone," said Chichester. "If you should feel melancholy, what guarantee have I that you will not commit suicide, or do what is nearly as bad—sit down and write sentimental poetry?"

"I am not very likely to do either."

"You must come and join us: the baronet——"

"I would rather——"

"I can take no excuse. Order round your chestnut, and let us be off."

"Well—at all events I must go straight into the City first," said Markham. "I have occasion to call at my guardian's banker."

"Will you join me at seven precisely this evening, at Harborough's own lodgings in Conduit-street? We shall expect you."

"You may rely upon me," answered Markham who now suddenly experienced an anxiety for society and bustle. "But who will be there?"

"Only the baronet, you, I, and Talbot—a *partie quarre*. Talbot is really a good fellow at heart, and has taken a great liking to you. Besides, he is the most liberal and generous fellow in existence. He sent a hundred pounds to every hospital in London yesterday morning—his annual donations; and he thinks that no one knows anything about it. He always puts himself down as X. Y. Z. in the lists of charitable subscriptions: he is so unostentatious!"

"Those are admirable traits in his character."

"They are, indeed. Just now, for instance, he heard of a horrid case of distress. Only conceive a poor man, with nine small children and a wife just ready to present him with a tenth, dragged to Whitecross Street Prison, for a paltry hundred pounds! Talbot instantly called me aside, and said, '*Chichester, my dear fellow, I have not time to attend to any business to-day. There is a five hundred pound note; have the kindness to get it changed for me, and devote a hundred pounds to save the unhappy family.*' Those were Talbot's own words," added Mr. Chichester surveying Richard in a peculiar manner from under his eyebrows.

"How liberal! how grand! how noble!" exclaimed Richard, forgetting all Mr. Talbot's vulgarity and coarseness, as he listened to these admirable traits of philanthropy. "To be candid with you, I am myself going to the banker's to draw some money; and when I see you this evening, I shall be happy to place twenty pounds in your hands for the use of that poor family."

"No, my dear fellow, keep your money: the baronet and I shall take care of those poor people."

"Nay—I insist—"

"Well—I am sorry now that I told you of the circumstance."

"And I am very glad."

"There—you shall have your own way then. But, by the by," added Chichester, a sudden thought appearing to strike him, "you are going into the City, and to your banker's?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I am anxious to get back to the West End as hastily as possible," answered Chichester. "You could do me a service, if you would?"

"Name it," said Richard.

"Get this note changed for me in the City," returned Chichester: and as he spoke he drew a Bank of England note for five hundred pounds from his pocket.

"Oh! certainly," cried Markham; and he took charge of the note accordingly.

He and Mr. Chichester then separated. Richard mounted his horse and rode towards the City, while his friend proceeded to the West End.

At seven o'clock Richard was ushered into Sir Rupert Harborough's drawing-room in Conduit-street, Hanover Square.

"There!" exclaimed Chichester, who was lounging upon the sofa; "I knew that my melancholy young gentleman would be punctual."

"Delighted to see you, Markham," said the baronet, pressing his hand with more than usual fervour.

"How are you, my tulip?" shouted Talbot. "Why, Chichester said you had the blue devils!"

"I really felt unequal to society to-day," returned Richard; "and I fancied that a little rest——"

"A little humbug!" ejaculated Mr. Talbot. "That's all my eye and my elbow, Markham. A d—d good bottle of champagne will soon put you to rights. But when I'm ill, what do you think I always take?"

"I really can't guess."

"Why, going to bed I always take a pint of dog's nose. There's nothing like dog's-nose for getting into the system. You must have it in the pewter, you know—and nice and hot: you will then sweat a bucket-full in the course of the night, and get up in the morning as right as a trivet. I can assure you there's nothing like dog's-nose."

"And pray what is dog's-nose!" enquired Richard.

"Well, may I be hanged! you are jolly green not to know what dog's-nose is! You take half a pint of the best half-and-half—or you may have ale all alone, if you like—a quartern of blue ruin——"

"It is a mixture of gin, beer, and sugar," said Mr. Chichester, impatiently.

"Well, and why couldn't you let me tell the gentleman how to make dog's-nose in my own manner?" asked Talbot, somewhat sulkily. "However, there's nothing better than dog's-nose for the gripes, or wind on the stomach, or the rheumatics. For my part——"

"D—n your part!" cried the Honourable Arthur Chichester, now absolutely losing all patience.

Fortunately for all parties, the door was at that moment thrown open, and a valet announced that dinner was served up. Richard took advantage of the haste with which Mr. Talbot rushed down stairs to the dining-room, to slip a bundle of Bank of England notes and a quantity of gold into Chichester's hand, whispering at the same time "There is your change, together with my twenty pounds for the poor family."

"Thank you, my boy," said Chichester, and over Markham's shoulder, he exchanged with the baronet a significant glance of satisfaction amounting almost to joy.

Meantime Mr. Talbot had rushed to his place at the dinner-table, declaring that "he was uncommonly peckish," and began sharpening his two knives one against the other. The baronet took his seat at the top of the table; Mr. Chichester at the bottom; and Markham sate opposite to Talbot.

"This soup is unexceptionable," observed Chichester: "I never tasted better save once—and that was at the King of Prussia's table."

"Ah! I once had d—d good pea-soup, I remember, at the Duke of Lambeth's table," ejaculated Mr. Talbot. "But, I say, who the devil's that kicking my unfortunate soft corn?"

"A glass of wine, Markham?" said Chichester "I suppose we'd all better join in," suggested Talbot.

"*I* shall be happy to drink wine with *you*, Mr. Talbot," said the baronet, with a reproving emphasis upon the pronouns.

"Just as you please," returned the man of charity, who certainly required some virtue or another to cover such a multitude of sins of vulgarity. "I wonder what's coming next. I say, Harborough, you haven't ordered any tripe, have you? I am so fond of tripe. There's nothing like tripe and onions for supper."

The dinner passed away; and the bottle was circulated pretty freely. Richard regained his good spirits, and offered no objection when Chichester proposed a stroll up Regent's-street with a cigar.

The baronet and Talbot went together first; and Markham was about to follow, when Chichester drew him back into the dining-room, and said, "Excuse me: but you went to your banker's to-day. If you have much money about you, it is not safe to carry it about the streets of London at night-time."

"I have fifty-five pounds in gold and fifty pounds in notes," answered Markham.

"Notes are safe enough," returned Chichester; "but gold is dangerous. Some one would be sure to *frisk* your purse. Here—I tell

you how we can manage it—give me fifty sovereigns, and I will give you a fifty pound note in exchange. I can then lock up the gold in the baronet's writing-desk, the key of which, I see, he has fortunately left in the lock."

Chichester glanced, as he spoke, to the writing-desk, which stood upon a little table between the windows.

"I am much obliged to you for the thought," said Richard: "it is very considerate of you."

He accordingly handed over his purse of gold to his kind friend, and received in exchange a fifty pound note, which Mr. Chichester selected from a huge roll that he took from his pocket.

The two gentlemen then hastened to rejoin the baronet and Talbot, whom they overtook in Regent-street.

They all walked leisurely along towards the Quadrant; and while Talbot engaged Markham in conversation upon some trivial topic or another, Chichester related in a few words to the baronet the particulars of the little pecuniary arrangement which had just taken place.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HELL.

AFTER having taken a few turns in Regent-street, the baronet observed "that it was devilish slow work;" Mr. Talbot suggested the propriety of "a spree;" and Mr. Chichester declared "that as his friend Markham was anxious to see *life*, the best thing they could all do was to drop in for an hour at No. ——, Quadrant."

"What place is that?" demanded Markham.

"Oh; only an establishment for cards and dice, and other innocent diversions," carelessly answered Chichester.

The Quadrant of an evening is crowded with loungers of both sexes. Beneath those arcades walk the daughters of crime, by ones and twos—dressed in the flaunting garb that tells so forcibly the tale of broken hearts, and blighted promise, and crushed affections,—to lose an hour amidst the haunts of pleasure and of vice, and to court the crime by which alone they live. The young men that saunter arm-in-arm up and down, and the hoary old sinners, whose licentious glances seem to plunge down into the depths of the boddices of those frail but beauteous girls, little think of the amount of mental suffering which is contained beneath those gay satins and rustling silks. They mark the heaving of the voluptuous bosom, but dream not of the worm that gnaws eternally within:—they behold smiles upon the red lips, and are far from suspecting that the hearts of those who laugh so joyfully are all but broken!

Thus is it that in the evening the Quadrant has a characteristic set of loungers of its own:—or, at least, it is frequented after dusk by a population whose characters are easily to be defined.

A bright lamp burnt in the fan-light over the door of No. ——. Mr. Chichester gave a loud and commanding knock; and a policeman standing by, who doubtless had several golden reasons for not noticing anything connected with that establishment, instantly ran across the road after a small boy whom he suspected to be a thief, because the poor wretch wore an uncommonly shabby hat. The summons given by Mr. Chichester was not immediately answered. Five minutes elapsed ere any attention was paid to it; and then the door was only opened to the small extent allowed by a chain inside. A somewhat repulsive looking countenance was at the same time protruded from behind the door.

"Well?" said the man to whom the countenance belonged.

"All right," returned Chichester.

The chain was withdrawn, and the door was opened to its full extent. The party was thereupon admitted, with some manifestations of impatience on the part of the porter, who no doubt thought that the door was kept open too long, into a passage at the end of which was a staircase covered with a handsome carpet.

Chichester led the way, and his companions followed, up to a suite of rooms on the first floor. These were well furnished, and brilliantly lighted; and red moreen curtains, with heavy and rich fringes, were carefully drawn over the windows. Splendid mirrors stood above the mantels, which were also adorned with French timepieces in or molu, and candelabra of the same material. On one side of the front room stood a bouffet covered with wines and liquors of various descriptions.

In the middle of that same front apartment was the *rouge et noir* table. On each side sate a *Croupier*, with a long rake in his hand, and a green shade over his eyes. Before one of them was placed a tin case: this was the *Bank*;—and on each side of that cynosure of all attention, stood little piles of markers, or counters.

Two or three men—well but flashily dressed, and exhibiting a monstrous profusion of Birmingham jewellery about their persons—sate at the table. These were the *Bonnets*—individuals in reality in the pay of the proprietor of the establishment, and whose duties consist in enticing strangers and visitors to play, or in maintaining an appearance of playing deeply when such strangers and visitors first enter the room.

The countenances of the croupiers were cold, passionless, and totally devoid of any animation. They called the game, raked up the winnings, or paid the losings, without changing a muscle of their features. For all that regarded animation or excitement, they might have been easily passed off as automatons.

Not so was it with the Bonnets. These gentlemen were compelled to affect exuberant joy when they won, and profound grief or rage when they lost. From time to time they paid a visit to the sideboard, and helped themselves to wine or spirits, or regaled themselves with cigars. These refreshments were supplied gratuitously to all comers by the proprietor: this apparent liberality was upon the principle of throwing out a sprat to catch a whale.

When none save the Croupiers and Bonnets are present, they throw aside their assumed characters, and laugh, and joke, and chatter, and smoke, and drink; but the moment steps are heard upon the staircase, they all relapse with mechanical exactitude into their business aspect. The Croupiers put on their imperturbable countenances as easily as if they were masks; and the Bonnets appear to be as intent upon the game, as if its results were to them perspective life or death.

The Croupiers are usually trustworthy persons well known to the proprietor, or else shareholders themselves in the establishment. The Bonnets are young men of education and manners, who have probably lost the ample fortunes wherewith they commenced life, in the very whirlpool to which, for a weekly stipend, they are employed to entice others.

In one of the inner rooms there was a roulette-table; but this was seldom used. A young lad held the almost sinecure office of attending upon it.

The front room was tolerably crowded on the evening when Chichester, Markham, the baronet, and Talbot, honoured the establishment with a visit.

The moment they entered the apartment, Richard instinctively drew back, and, catching hold of Chichester's arm, whispered to him in a hurried and anxious manner, "Tell me, is this a Gambling-House? is it what I have heard called a Hell?"

"It is a Gambling-House, if you will, my dear fellow," was the reply; "but a most respectable one. Besides—you must see life, you know!"

With these words he took Markham's arm, and conducted him up to the *rouge et noir* table.

A young officer, whose age could not have exceeded twenty, was seated at the further end of the green-baize covered board. A huge pile of notes and gold lay before him; but at rapid intervals one of the Croupiers raked away the stakes which he deposited; and thus his heap of money was gradually growing smaller.

"Well, this is extraordinary!" ejaculated the young officer; "I never saw the luck set so completely in against me. However—I can afford to lose a little; for I broke your bank for you last night, my boys?"

"What does that mean?" demanded Richard in a whisper.

"He won all the money which the proprietor deposited in that tin case, he means," replied Chichester.

"And how much do you suppose that might be?"

"About fifteen hundred to two thousand pounds."

"Here—waiter!" exclaimed the young officer, who had just lost another stake,—"a glass of claret."

The waiter handed him a glass of the wine so demanded. The young officer did not notice him for a moment, but waited to see the result of the next chance.

He lost again.

He turned round to seize the glass of wine; but when his eyes caught sight of it, his countenance became almost livid with rage.

"Fool! idiot!" he ejaculated, starting from his seat: "bring me a tumbler—a large tumbler full of claret; my mouth is as parched as h—l, and my stomach is like a lime-kiln."

The waiter hastened to comply with the wishes of the young gambler. The tumbler of claret was supplied; and the game continued.

Still the officer lost.

"A cigar!" he shouted, in a fearful state of excitement—"bring me a cigar!"

The waiter handed him a box of choice Havannahs, that he might make his selection.

"Why the devil don't you bring a light at the same time, you d—d infernal rascal?" cried the gamester; and while the domestic hastened to supply this demand also, he poured a volley of most horrible oaths at the bewildered wretch's head.

Again the play proceeded.

And again the young officer lost.

His pile of gold was gone: the Croupier who kept the bank changed one of his remaining notes.

"That makes three thousand that I have lost already, by G—d!" ejaculated the young officer.

"Including the amount you won last night, I believe," said one of the Bonnets.

"Well, sir, and suppose it is—what the deuce is that to you?" demanded the officer fiercely. "Have I not been here night after night for these six weeks? and have I not lost thousands—thousands? When did I ever get a vein of good luck until last night? But never mind—I'll play on—I'll play till the end: I will either win all back, or lose everything together. And then—in the latter case—"

He stopped: he had just lost again. His countenance grew ghastly pale, and he bit his lips convulsively.

"Claret—more claret!" he exclaimed, throwing away the Havannah: "that cigar only makes me the more thirsty."

And again the play proceeded.

"I am really afraid to contemplate that young man's countenance," whispered Markham to Chichester.

"Why so?"

"I have an idea that if he should prove unsuccessful he will commit suicide. I have a great mind just to mention my fears to these men in the green shades, who seem to be winning all his money."

"Pray be quiet. They will only laugh at you."

"But the life of a fellow-creature?"

"What do they care?"

"Do you mean to say they are such wretches—"

"I mean that they do not care one fig what may happen so long as they get the money."

Markham was struck speechless with horror as he heard this cold-blooded announcement. Chichester had however stated nothing but the truth.

The proceedings were now fearfully interesting. The young officer was worked up to a most horrible state of excitement: his losses continued to be unvaried by a single gleam of good fortune. Still he persisted in his ruinous career: note after note was changed. At length his last was melted into gold. He now became absolutely desperate: his countenance was appalling;—the frenzy of gambling and the inflammatory effects of the liquors he had been drinking, rendered his really handsome features positively hideous.

Markham had never beheld such a scene before, and felt afraid. His companions surveyed it with remarkable coolness.

The play proceeded; and in a few moments the officer's last stake was swept away.

Then the croupiers paused, as it were, by common consent; and all eyes were directed towards the object of universal interest.

"Well—I said I would play until I won all or lost all," he said; "and I have done so. Waiter, give me another tumbler of claret: it will compose me."

He laughed bitterly as he uttered these words.

The claret was brought: he drained the tumbler, and threw it upon the table, where it broke into a dozen pieces.

"Clear this away, Thomas," said one of the Croupiers, completely unmoved.

"Yes, sir;" and the fragments of the tumbler disappeared forthwith.

The Bonnets, perceiving the presence of other strangers, were now compelled to withdraw their attention from the ruined gambler, and commence playing.

And so the play again proceeded.

"Where is my hat, waiter?" demanded the young officer, after a pause, during which he had gazed vacantly upon the game.

"In the passage, sir—I believe."

"No—I remember, it is in the inner room. But do not trouble yourself—I will fetch it myself."

"Very good, sir;" and the waiter did not move.

The young officer sauntered, in a seeming leisurely manner, into the innermost room of the suite.

"What a shocking scene!" whispered Markham to Chichester. "I am glad I came hither this once: it will be a lesson for me which I can never forget."

At this instant the report of a pistol echoed sharply through the rooms.

There was a simultaneous rush to the inner apartment:—Markham's presentiments were fulfilled—the young officer had committed suicide.

His brains were literally blown out, and he lay upon the carpet weltering in his blood.

A cry of horror burst from the strangers present; and then, with one accord, they hastened to the door. The baronet, Chichester, and Talbot, were amongst the foremost who made this movement, and were thereby enabled to effect their escape.

Markham stood rivetted to the spot, unaware that his companions had left him, and contemplating with feelings of supreme horror the appalling spectacle before him.

Suddenly the cry of "The police" fell upon his ears; and heavy steps were heard hurrying up the staircase.

"The Bank!" ejaculated one of the Croupiers.

"All right!" cried the other; and in a moment the lights were extinguished, as by magic, throughout the entire suite of rooms.

Obeying a natural impulse, Markham hastened towards the door; but his progress was stopped by a powerful hand, and in an instant the bull's-eye of a lantern glared upon his countenance.

He was in the grasp of a police officer.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STATION-HOUSE.

Of all the persons who were in the gambling-house at the moment when the police, alarmed by the report of the pistol, broke in, Richard Markham was alone captured. The others, aware of the means of egress in emergencies of this kind, had rushed up stairs, entered upon the leads, and thus obtained admittance into the adjacent dwelling, from whose friendly doors they subsequently issued one by one when all was once more quiet in the street.

The police-officer conducted Markham to the nearest station-house. They entered a low dark gloomy apartment, which was divided into two parts by means of a thick wooden bar running across the room, about two feet and a half from the ground. There was a small dull fire in the grate; and in a comfortable arm-chair near it, was seated the inspector—a short, stout, red-faced, consequential-looking man, with a pen stuck behind his left ear. A policeman in uniform was standing at a high desk, turning over the leaves of a large book; and another officer in plain clothes (and very plain and shabby they were too) was lounging before the fire, switching the dust out of his trousers with a thin cane.

"Well, what now?" said the inspector, gruffly, as Markham was conducted into the office, and led behind the bar, towards the fire.

"Me, and Jones, and Jenkins, broke into No.—, in the Quadrant, as we heard a pistol—or else we should ha' known ourselves better; and this young feller is all we caught. Jones and Jenkins is staying in the house along with the dead body of the man as killed his self."

The inspector indulged in a good long stare at Markham; and, when his curiosity was completely gratified, he said, "Now, Crisp, we'll enter that charge, if you please."

The policeman standing at the desk turned to the proper leaf in the large book before him, and then took down the deposition of the officer who had apprehended Markham.

When this was done, the inspector proceeded, in a very pompous and magisterial manner, to question the prisoner.

"What is your name, young man?"

"Richard Markham."

"Oh! Richard Markham. Put that down, Crisp. Where do you live?"

"At Markham Place, near Holloway."

"Put that down, Crisp. Now, do you want to let any of your friends know that you are in trouble?"

"First tell me of what I am accused, and why I am detained."

"You are accused of being in an unlawful house for an unlawful purpose—namely, gambling; and a suicide has been committed there, they say. You will be wanted afore the coroner as well as the magistrate."

"Can I be released until to-morrow by giving security for my appearance?"

"No—I can't part with you. It is said that it is suicide—and I believe it: still it might be murder. But you seem a respectable young gentleman, and so you sha'nt be locked up in a cell all night. You may sit here by the fire, if you'll be quiet."

"I am at least obliged to you for this courtesy. But can you give me any idea of the extent of the penalty to which I am liable? I did not gamble myself—I merely accompanied——"

"You need'nt criminate anybody, you know," interrupted the Inspector. "The Magistrate will fine you a few pounds, and that will be all."

"Then I should prefer not to acquaint my friends with my position," said Markham, "since I can release myself from my present difficulty without their assistance."

Reassured by this conviction, though still strangely excited by the appalling scene which he had witnessed, Richard seated himself by the fire, and soon fell into conversation with the policemen. These men could talk of nothing but themselves or their pursuits: they appeared to live in a world of policeism; all their ideas were circumscribed to station-houses, magistrates' offices, prisons, and criminal courts of justice. Their discourse was moreover garnished with the slang terms of thieves; they could not utter a sentence without interpolating a swell-mob phrase or a Newgate jest. They seemed to be so familiar with crime (though not criminal themselves) that they could not devote a moment to the contemplation of virtue: they only conversed about persons who were "in trouble," but never condescended to lavish a thought to those who were out of it.

"Crankey Jem has done it brown at last, has'nt he?" said Crisp.

"He has indeed," replied the inspector. "But what could he have done with all the swag?"[1]

"Oh! he's fadded[2] that safe enough," observed the officer in plain clothes. "My eye! What a slap-up lily benjamin[3] he had on when he was nabbed."

"Yes—and sich a swell bandanna fogle[4] in the gropus."[5]

"He had'nt any ready tin though; for he wanted to peel,[6] and put the white-poodle up the spout[7] for a drop of max."[8]

"And because you would'nt let him he doubled you up with a wallop in your dumpling-depot,[9] did'nt he?"

"Yes—but I bruised his canister[10] for him though."

"This'll be the third time he's been up afore the beaks[11] at the Old Bailey."

"Consequently he's sartain sure to be lagged."[12]

"Ah! it must be a clever nob in the fur trade[13] who'll get him off."

"Well—talking makes me thirsty," said Crisp. "I wish I'd someot to sluice my ivories[14] with."

Markham entertained a faint idea that Mr. Crisp was athirst; he accordingly offered to pay for anything; which he and his brother policemen chose to drink.

The officer in plain clothes was commissioned to procure some "heavy-wet"—*alias* porter; and even the pompous, and magisterial inspector condescended to take what he called "a drain," but which in reality appeared to be something more than a pint.

The harmony was disturbed by the entrance of a constable dragging in a poor ragged, half-starved, and emaciated lad, without shoes or stockings.

"What's the charge?" demanded the inspector.

"A rogue and vagabond," answered the constable.

"Oh! very well: put that down, Crisp. How do you know?"

"Because he's wandering about and hasn't no where to go to, and no friends to refer to and I saw him begging."

"Very good; put that down, Crisp. And I suppose he's without food and hungry?"

"I have not tasted food—" began the poor wretch, who stood shivering at the bar.

"Come, no lies," ejaculated the inspector.

"No lies!" echoed the constable, giving the poor wretch a tremendous shake.

"Have you put it all down, Crisp?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let him have a bit of bread, and lock him up. He'll get three months of it on the stepper to-morrow."

The poor creature was supplied with a cubic inch of stale bread, and then thrust into a filthy cell.

"What do you think that unfortunate creature will be done to?" enquired Markham.

"Three months on the stepper—the treadmill, to be sure."

"But what for?"

"Why, for a rogue and vagabond."

"A vagabond he may be," said Markham, "because he has no home to go to; but how do you know he is a rogue?"

"Why—he was found begging, wasn't he?"

"And does that make a man a rogue?"

"Certainly it do—in the eye of the law."

"Ah! and that eye can see without spectacles too," added Mr. Crisp with a laugh.

Markham was reflecting profoundly upon the law's definitions of *rogue* and *vagabond*, when another constable entered, leading in an elderly man, belonging to the humbler class, but very cleanly in appearance.

"Well, what's the charge?" demanded the inspector.

"This fellow will come upon my beat with his apple-cart, and I can't keep him off. So I've sent his cart to the Green Yard, and brought him here."

"Please, sir," said the poor fellow, wiping away a tear from his eye, "I endeavour to earn an honest living by selling a little fruit in the streets. I have a wife and seven children to support, and I only stayed out so long to-night because I had had a bad day of it, and the money is so much wanted at home—it is indeed, sir! I do hope you'll let me go, sir: my poor wife will be ready to break her heart when she finds that I don't come home; and my eldest boy always sits up for me. Poor little fellow! he will cry so if he don't kiss *Father* before he goes to bed."

There was something profoundly touching in this poor man's manner and language; and Markham felt inclined to interfere in his behalf. He, however, remembered that he was only allowed to sit in that room by suffrance, and that he was at the mercy of the caprice of ignorant, tyrannical, and hard-hearted men: he accordingly held his tongue.

"Come, Crisp—have you got that down?" said the inspector.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let the man be locked up: the magistrate must decide in the morning."

And the poor fellow, in spite of his remonstrances, was removed to a cell.

"I could not exactly understand what this new prisoner has done," said Markham.

"Obstructed the way and created a nuisance," replied the inspector pompously.

"But he is endeavouring to earn his bread honestly, I think; and the road is open to every one."

"Oh! no such thing. Those little carts frighten the horses in the great folks' carriages, and can't be allowed. He must have a month of it—he's been warned several times, and is incorrigible. I'll tell the magistrate so."

"And what will become of his family?"

"Family! why, go to the workhouse, to be sure!" Presently a third constable made his appearance, accompanied by a poor miserable-looking woman and three small children—all wretchedly clad and careworn.

"What's the charge now?"

"Charge from the workus. This here o'oman was admitted to-night to the Union with them three children; and 'cos the master

ordered her to be separated from her children, she kicked up hell's delight. So the master turned 'em all out together, called me up, and give 'em in charge."

"Put that down, Crisp."

"Yes—and it is true too," sobbed the poor woman. "I am not ashamed to own that I love my children; and up to this blessed hour they have never been separated from me. It would break their poor little hearts to be torn away from me—that it would, God bless them! I love them all, poor—miserable as I am!"

A flood of tears drowned the voice of this wretched mother.

"Inspector," said Markham, touched to the quick by this affecting scene, "you will allow me——"

"Silence, young man. It's a charge from the workus, and the workus is paramount."

"So it appears, indeed!" cried Richard bitterly.

"Silence, I say. Don't interfere, there's a good lad. Crisp, have you got it all down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lock 'em up, then."

"At least we shall be together!" exclaimed the unfortunate mother, to whom the three little children clung with all the tenacity of sincere affection.

An hour elapsed, when another policeman entered, bringing in a man dressed as an ostler, and whose face was all covered with blood.

"Well—what now?"

"Fighting in the *Blue Dragon*: the landlord turned him out, and so I took him up."

"Put that down, Crisp. What's your name, my fine fellow?"

"John Snoggles."

"Put that down, Crisp. He's a nice bird, isn't he, Mr. Markham?" added the inspector.

"Markham!" ejaculated the new prisoner.

"Yes—that is my name," said Richard: "do you know me?"

"Not that I am aweer of sir. Only the name reminded me that I have been this evening in the company of a gentleman as is in the service of a Mr. Markham. I left the *Servants' Arms* at twelve precisely, and walked straight down to this here wicinity—I ain't been more than half an hour coming—when I gets into a row——"

"Well, well," said Richard, somewhat impatiently "and what is the name of the person with whom you have passed the evening?"

"With several gentlemen—but the one I named was Vittingham."

"Whittingham! he is my butler. Poor fellow! how anxious he will be about me."

"He's too drunk to be anxious," said Snoggles drily: "I was the on'y one as come away sober."

"I tell you what he could do, if you like," observed the inspector, who now began to entertain an idea of Markham's standing in society by the mention of the word *butler*: "there is no one here to make any charge against the fellow—the constable will withdraw it, and he can take a note home for you."

"A thousand thanks!" ejaculated Markham. "But you intimated that he was tipsy?"

"He is certainly elevated," answered Snoggles.

"Well, can you be at my house to-morrow morning by six or seven o'clock?"

"Of course I can, sir."

"I need not write: you can say that you have seen me, and that I shall be home in the course of the day. Do not mention where I am: I would not have him coming here to seek me."

Markham slipped half a sovereign into the hands of Snoggles, who took his departure with a faithful promise to execute the commission entrusted to him, and not a little pleased at having so pleasantly escaped a night in the station-house.

It was now past one o'clock; and Markham, feeling rather drowsy, lay down to slumber for a few hours upon a bench, wrapped up in Mr. Crisp's police-coat.

CHAPTER XV.

THE POLICE-OFFICE.

THE morning was rainy, cold, and lowering.

Markham awoke unrefreshed by his sleep, which had been haunted by the ghost of the young officer who had committed suicide at the Hell. He shivered and felt nervous; as if under the impulse of some impending danger whose nature he could not altogether define. By the good offices of Crisp he obtained the means of washing himself and arranging his toilette previous to an appearance at the police-court; and the same intervention procured him a good breakfast. As he, however, could not eat a morsel, Mr. Crisp very kindly and considerately devoured it all for him.

At about half-past nine o'clock the various constables connected with the charges entered in the police-sheet, arrived at the station-house for the purpose of conducting their prisoners to the Police-court. All those persons who were charged with felony were handcuffed; but of this class the most knowing contrived to bring their hands beneath their garments in some way or other, and thus conceal the symbol of ignominy as they passed through the streets.

Richard was astonished at the number of women who were charged with intoxication and disorderly conduct; and the chivalrous admiration of the whole sex which he felt, and which is so natural to youth, was considerably diminished by the hardened appearance and revolting language of these females.

Markham and the constable who had arrested him proceeded in a cab together to the police-office in Marlborough Street. Upon reaching that establishment, the officer said, "The Magistrate will hear the *drunk* and *assault* charges first; so it may be an hour or more before your business will come on. I ought by rights to lock you up; but if you like, we can stay together in the public-house there; and one of my partners will let us know when the case is coming on."

This arrangement was very acceptable to Richard; and to the nearest public-house did he and the constable accordingly adjourn. For this handsome accommodation all that he had to pay was half-a-guinea to the officer, besides liquidating the score for as much liquor as the said officer and every one of his "partners" who happened to drop in, could consume.

For the present we must request the reader to accompany us to the interior of the police-office.

In a small, low, badly-lighted room, sate an elderly gentleman at a desk. This was the Magistrate. Near him was the clerk, whom the worthy functionary consulted so often that it almost seemed as if this clerk were a peripatetic law-manual or text-book. In front of the desk were the bar and the dock; and the space between them and the door was filled with policemen and the friends of those "who had got into trouble."

The first charge was called. A man dressed in the garb of a common labourer was accused of being drunk and incapable of taking care of himself. The Magistrate put on a most awfully severe and frowning countenance, and said in a gruff tone, "Well, my man, what do you say to this charge?"

"Please your worship," observed the prisoner, scratching his head, "I am out of work, and my wife has pawned all our little bits of things for food for the children, and yesterday morning I was forced to go out to look for work without any breakfast. There was but a little bread left, and that I would not touch for all the world. Well, your worship, I was fortunate enough to get the promise of some work for Monday; and meeting a friend, he asked me to have a glass. Now beer upon an empty stomach, your worship——"

The Magistrate, who had been reading a newspaper during this defence, now lifted up his head, and exclaimed, "Well, you do'nt deny the charge: you are fined five shillings. Call the next case."

"But your worship——"

"Call the next case."

The poor fellow was dragged away from the bar by two huge policemen; and an elegantly dressed person of about twenty-six years of age was introduced to the notice of the magistrate.

"What is your name?" enquired the clerk.

"Name! Oh—John Jenkins," was the reply, delivered in a flippant and free-and-easy manner.

The Clerk and the Magistrate whispered together.

A constable then stood forward, and stated the charge. The prisoner at the bar had turned out of a flash tavern in the Haymarket at one in the morning, and commenced crowing like a cock, and ringing at front-door bells, and playing all imaginable kinds of antics. When the constable interfered, the gentleman knocked him down; and had not another policeman come up to the spot at the moment, the said gentleman never would have been taken into custody.

The Magistrate cross-questioned the policeman who gave evidence in this case, with great severity; and then, turning with a bland smile to the prisoner, who was surveying the clerk through his eye glass in as independent a manner as if he were lounging over the front of his box at the opera, the worthy functionary said in a tone of gentle entreaty, "Now really we have reason to suspect that John Jenkins is *not* your name. In fact, my lord, we know you."

"Well, then," exclaimed the prisoner, turning his eye-glass from the clerk upon the magistrate, "chalk me up as Lord Plymouth, since you are down upon me in this way."

"My lord—my lord," said the Magistrate, with parental urbanity of manner, "these little freaks of yours are really not creditable: upon my honour they are not. I sit here to administer justice to the rich as well as to the poor——"

"Oh! you do, do you?" cried the nobleman. "Now I tell you what it is—if you dare talk any of your nonsense about prisons and houses of correction to me, I'll not stand it. You know as well as I do that whenever a barrister is to be appointed magistrate, the Home Secretary sends for him and tells him to mind his P's and Q's towards the aristocracy. So none of your nonsense; but be quick and let me off with the usual fine."

"My lord," ejaculated the Magistrate, glancing with consternation from the prisoner to the clerk, and from the clerk to the prisoner; "did I not say that I sate here to administer equal justice to the rich and the poor? The fine for drunkenness is five shillings, my lord—and in that sum I fine you. As for the assault upon the policeman, I give you leave to speak to him outside."

The nobleman demanded change for a ten pound note, and threw the five shillings in a contemptuous and insolent manner towards the Clerk, who thanked his lordship as if he had just received an especial favour. The assault was easily settled *outside*; and the nobleman drove away in an elegant cab, just as the wife of the poor labourer departed in tears from her husband's cell for the purpose of pledging every remaining article of clothing that could possibly be dispensed with, to raise the five shillings wherewith to procure his liberation.

Several other cases of intoxication, disorderly conduct, and "obstruction of the police in the exercise of their duty"—which last embraced the veriest trifles as well as the most daring attempts at rescue—were then disposed of. In all instances the constables endeavoured to exaggerate the conduct of the accused, and never once attempted to palliate it; and as the Magistrate seemed to place implicit confidence in every word the police uttered (although one or two cases of gross perjury were proved against them), convictions were much more frequent than acquittals.

The cases of the poor starving emaciated beggar, the apple-cart man, and the affectionate mother, who had all three so powerfully excited Markham's attention at the station-house, were called on one after another consecutively. Fortunately the inspector was not present at the time to use his influence against the two first, and the master of the workhouse did not appear to press the charge against the last. They were all three accordingly discharged, with a severe admonition—the first against begging and being houseless—the second against earning an honest livelihood by selling fruit in the streets—and the third against clamouring in a workhouse for the mere trifle of being separated from her children.

As these three individuals emerged from the police-office, they were accosted by Mr. Crisp, who informed them that they were "wanted" by a gentleman at a public-house in the neighbourhood. Thither did the trio of unfortunates, accompanied by the poor woman's children, proceed; and great was their surprise when Mr. Crisp officiously introduced them into a private room which Markham had engaged.

Richard and the police-officer in whose charge he remained, were there; and the moment the poor creatures were shown in, they were accosted by that young man whose ingenuous countenance inspired them with confidence and hope.

"My good friends," said he, "I was in the station-house last night when you arrived; and your sad tales touched me to the quick. Now, with regard to you, my poor lad," he continued, addressing himself to the *rogue and vagabond*, "what prospect have you before you? In what way could a friend aid you?"

"My brother, sir, is well off, and would assist me," replied the poor creature, "if I could but get to him. He lives in Edinburgh, and is well to do as a wheelwright."

"Here are two guineas for you, my friend," said Richard. "They will take you home; and then may your reception be as favourable as you seem to think. There—I do not want you to thank me: go—and commence your journey at once."

The poor fellow pressed Markham's hand with the most enthusiastic gratitude, and took his departure with tears in his eyes and gladness in his heart.

"And now, my good man," said Richard to the owner of the apple-cart, "what do you propose to do?"

"To speak the truth, sir, I don't know. The police seem determined that I shan't earn an honest livelihood: and as I am equally resolved not to see my children starve before me, I have nothing left to do but to become a thief. I shan't be the first whom the police have driven to that last resource in this city."

"You speak bitterly," said Markham.

"Yes—because I tell the truth, sir. My cart is to be returned to me; but of what use is it, or the stock that is in it, since I don't dare go about to sell fruit?"

"Could you not open a little shop?"

"Ah! sir—that requires money!"

"How much?"

"A matter of four or five pounds, sir," replied the man; "and where could a poor devil like me——"

"I will give you five pounds for the purpose;" interrupted Markham; and taking from his pocket-book a bank note, he handed it to the poor man.

We will not attempt to depict his gratitude: words would completely fail to convey an idea of the exuberant joy which filled the heart of that good and affectionate father, who would rather have become a thief than seen his children starve!

"And now, my good woman, what can I do for you?" said Markham, turning to the third object of his charity. "How in the name of heaven, came you reduced, with three children, to such a state of want and destitution?"

"My husband, sir, is in prison," answered the poor creature, bursting into tears, while her children clung the more closely around her.

"In prison! and for what crime?"

"Oh! crime, sir—it is only a crime in the eye of the law, but not in the eye of either man or heaven."

"My good woman, this is absurd. Is there any offence of which the law alone takes cognisance, and which is not reprehensible in

the eye of God?"

"On the contrary, sir—God has given us for our general use and benefit the very thing which the law has forbidden us to take."

"This is trifling!" exclaimed Richard impatiently. "Can you, whom I behold so affectionate to your children, be hardened in guilt?"

"Do not think so, sir! My husband was a hard working man—never spent an hour at the public-house—never deprived his family of a farthing of his wages. He was a pattern to all married men—and his pride was to see his children well-dressed and happy. Alas, sir—we were too happy not to meet with some sad reverse! My husband in an evil hour went out shooting one afternoon, when there was a holiday at the factory where he worked; and he killed a hare upon a nobleman's grounds near Richmond. He was taken up and tried for poaching, and was sentenced to a year's imprisonment with hard labour! This term expires in six weeks; but in the meantime—O God! what have we not suffered!"

"Ah! forgive me," ejaculated Markham, deeply touched by this recital: "I spoke harshly to you, because I did not remember that the law could be guilty of a deed of such inhuman atrocity. And yet I have heard of many—many such cases ere now! Merciful heavens! is it possible that the law, which with the right hand protects the privileges of the aristocracy, can with the left plunge whole families into despair!"

"Alas! it is too true!" responded the poor woman, pointing towards her pale and shivering offspring.

"Well—cheer up—your husband will be restored to you in six weeks," said Markham. "In the meantime here is wherewith to provide for your family."

Another five-pound note was taken from the pocket-book, and transferred to the hand of the poor but tender-hearted mother. The children clung to Richard's knees, and poured forth their gratitude in tears: their parent loaded him with blessings which came from the very bottom of her heart, and called him the saviour of herself and famished little ones. Never until that day had Richard so entirely appreciated the luxury of possessing wealth!

Scarcely was this last matter disposed of, when information arrived that Markham's case would be heard in about ten minutes. To the police-court did he and the constable who had charge of him, proceed accordingly; and in due time the young man found himself standing at the bar in the presence of a magistrate.

The usual questions were put relative to name, age, and residence, to all of which Richard answered in a candid and respectful manner. The constable then stated the nature of the charge, with which the reader is already acquainted. Evidence was also gone into to show that the officer, whose death had led to the irruption into the gambling-house on the part of the police, had died by his own hand, and not in consequence of any violence. This point was sufficiently proved by a medical man.

Markham, in his defence, stated he had accompanied some friends, whose names he declined mentioning, to the gaming-house on the preceding evening; that he had not played himself, nor had he intended to play; and that he had been led into the establishment without previously being acquainted with the exact nature of the place he was about to visit.

The Magistrate remonstrated with him upon the impropriety of being seen in such houses, and inflicted a fine of five pounds, which was of course immediately paid.

As he was leaving the police-court, Markham was informed by a beadle who accosted him, that his presence would be required at the gambling-house that same afternoon, at four o'clock, to give evidence at the coroner's inquest concerning the means by which the deceased officer came by his death.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEGINNING OF MISFORTUNES.

AT eight o'clock in the morning after the scene at the Hell, and while Richard was still in the custody of the police, Sir Rupert Harborough and the Honourable Arthur Chichester were hastening, in a handsome cabriolet, belonging to the former, to Markham Place.

The conversation of these gentlemen during the drive will tend to throw some light upon one or two preceding incidents that may have appeared a little mysterious to the reader.

"I wonder what became of him last night," said Chichester.

"Upon my honour at the moment I did not care," returned the baronet.

"Nor I either. I was only intent upon getting off myself."

"He will not be pleased at our having left him in that unceremonious manner."

"Oh! trust to me—any explanation will do. He is so exceedingly green."

"And so marvellously particular in his conduct. If it had not been for us, he would have remained quite a saint."

"I am not afraid," observed Chichester, "of being able to manage him and of turning him to immense advantage in our plans. But that vulgar beast Talbot will most certainly spoil all. Even the idea of the fellow's wealth and charities will not always induce Markham to put up with his vulgarities. Besides, the wretch has such execrable bad taste. Last evening, for instance, when I casually dropped a neat little lie about the soup at the King of Prussia's table, Talbot instantly paraded the Duke of Lambeth's pea-soup. Only fancy a Duke and pea-soup united together!"

"And then his dog's nose, and sore feet, and boiled tripe," said the baronet. "After all the drilling we gave him in the first instance, when he stipulated upon associating with us in order to see how we worked the thing, he is still incorrigible. Then, when I think of all the money I have already laid out in buying the materials—in getting the proper paper—and in keeping him in feather all the time he was at work, my blood boils to see that he hangs like a millstone round our necks, and threatens by his vulgarity to spoil all."

"But what could we do?" cried Chichester. "You told me in the first instance to find an engraver on whom we could rely; and I was compelled to enlist the fellow Pocock in our cause. He was the very man, so far as knowledge went, having been employed all his life in working for Bankers. But his atrocious vulgarity is his bane; and even his aristocratic name of Talbot which I made him assume, does not help him to pass himself off as a gentleman. It was a pity he could not listen to reason and take the sum of ready money down, which you offered him in the first instance. But, no—he must needs cry *thirds*, and insist upon going about with us to see fair play."

"And get his share," added the baronet.

"Yes. Even the very first night that he ever saw Markham," continued Chichester, "his greediness would have induced him to risk the ruin of everything by winning a few paltry pounds of the young fellow at Diana's lodgings. But I d—d soon stopped *that*. I didn't even want to take the twenty pounds yesterday, which Markham offered for the poor family concerning whom I invented so capital a story."

"No—it is not a few pounds that will do us any good, or remunerate me for my large outlay," said the baronet. "We want thousands—and this Markham is the very instrument we require. The first trial was made yesterday, and succeeded admirably. The note has actually been changed at a banker's: no one can expect a better test than that. Now if this Talbot is to ruin us with Markham—the very person we want—the most excellent medium we could require—himself being above all suspicion, and entertaining no suspicion——"

"It would be enough to break one's heart," added Chichester.

"Besides, my creditors are so clamorous, settle with them I must," continued the baronet. "And then Diana costs me a fortune. I must get rid of her without delay; for I expect that she is getting sentimental on this youth, and will not interest herself in our affair for fear of letting him into a scrape."

"Why, it is very certain," observed Chichester, "that according to the admirable way in which we have arranged our plans, if an explosion took place, we could not possibly be implicated. However—we must make haste and work London, and then off to Paris. We might get rid of four or five thousand pounds worth amongst the money-changers in the Palais-Royal. Then off to Germany in due rotation—Italy next—touch at Spain—and home to England."

"Upon my honour, it is a noble scheme—a grand, a princely scheme!" cried the baronet, elated with the idea. "My God! if it were spoilt in its infancy by any fault of ours or our associates!"

"And Talbot is such a drunken beast, that we can scarcely rely upon him," said Chichester. "He will one day commit himself and us too: the fellow does not know how to get tipsy like a gentleman."

"We will tell him the candid truth and see what he says," pursued the baronet "When he finds that we are determined not to tolerate him with us, and that we will quash the whole thing at once if he insists upon remaining, he must yield. There was that young Walter Sydney who seemed at first to have taken a fancy to Diana. I thought of making use of him too;—but he never called again after that drunken display of Mr. Talbot's. He was evidently disgusted with him for his conduct, and with us for associating with him."

"Well," said Chichester, "let us resolve, then, to have an explanation with Talbot in the sense you have mentioned; and you must also speak seriously to Diana and get her to make use of young Markham."

"And if she will not," added the baronet, "I shall get rid of her without delay. What is the use of having an expensive mistress, unless you can use her either as a *blind* or a *plant*?"

The delectable conversation terminated here, because those who had carried it on, were now arrived at their destination.

The baronet's tiger knocked at the front door, and Mr. Whittingham speedily made his appearance.

"Is your master at home?" demanded Chichester.

"No sir; he has not domesticated himself in his own abode since he went out shortly after you yesterday. But a person of my acquaintance—a man of perfect credibleness—has just come to ensure me that my young master will be here again in the currency of the day."

"Where did this person see your master?" enquired Chichester, struck by the absence of Markham the entire night.

"His respondencies is evasive and dissatisfactory," said Whittingham.

"This is very remarkable!" ejaculated Chichester: then, after a pause, he added, "But we will await Mr. Markham's return; and I will just see this man and interrogate him alone—*alone*, do you hear, Whittingham."

"I hear, sir, because my accoustic propensities is good. I will send this person to you into the library."

Mr. Chichester alighted from the vehicle and hastened to the library, while the baronet repaired to the stables to see that his horse (concerning which he was very particular) was properly cared for.

Mr. Chichester walked up and down the library, reflecting upon the probable causes of Richard's absence. At the moment he fancied that he might have fallen into the hands of the police; but then he thought that, had this been the case, Markham would have sent for himself or the baronet. He did not imagine that the noble nature of the young man whom he was conducting headlong to his ruin, would scorn to take any steps calculated to compromise his friends.

The door of the library opened, and a man entered.

"What? John!" ejaculated Mr. Chichester, turning very pale and manifesting much confusion.

"Mr. Winchester!" cried Snoggles—for it was he.

"Hush, my good fellow—don't say a word!" said Chichester, recovering his presence of mind. "I am really glad to see you—I have often thought of you since that unpleasant affair. I hope it put you to no inconvenience. At all events, I will make matters all right now."

"Better late than never," said Snoggles.

"Well—and you must promise me faithfully not to mention this affair to any one, and I will always stand your friend. And, remember—my name is Chichester *now*—not Winchester. Pray do not forget that."

"No—no: I'm fly enough—I'm down to trap," replied Snoggles, with a leer of insolent familiarity.

"Here is a twenty-pound note—that will cover all your losses, and recompense you into the bargain."

"That'll do."

"It would be better that you should not say that you ever knew me before."

"Just as you like."

"I prefer that course. But now to another point. Where did you see Mr. Richard Markham?"

"At the station-house, in —— street."

"The station-house! And for what?"

"Ah! there you beat me. I can't say! All that I know is that he gave me half-a-sovereign to come and tell his old butler this morning that he should be home in the course of the day."

"And that is all you know?"

"Everything."

"Now can I rely upon you in respect to keeping the other matter secret?" demanded Chichester.

"I have already told you so," answered Snoggles.

"And you need not tell old Whittingham that his master is at the station-house."

Snoggles withdrew and Mr. Chichester was immediately afterwards joined by the baronet.

"Markham is at the station-house in —— street."

"The deuce he is! and for what?"

"I cannot learn. Do you not think it is odd that he did not send for either of us?"

"Yes. We will return to town this moment," said the baronet, "and send some one unknown to him to hear the case at the police-office. We shall then learn whether anything concerning the notes transpires, and what to say to him when we see him."

"Yes: there is not a moment to lose," returned Chichester.

The cabriolet was brought round to the door again in a few minutes, during which interval Chichester assured Whittingham that he had learned nothing concerning his master, and that he and the baronet were only returning to town for the purpose of looking after him.

As soon as the vehicle was out of sight, Mr. Whittingham returned in a disconsolate manner to his pantry, where Mr. Snoggles was occupied with a cold pasty and a jug of good old ale.

"Well, I've learnt someot to-day, I have," observed Snoggles, who could not keep a secret for the life of him.

"What's that?" demanded Whittingham.

"Why that Winchester is Chichester, and Chichester is Winchester."

"They are two irrelevant cities," observed the butler; "and not by no manner of means indentical."

"The cities is different, but the men is the same," said Snoggles.

"I can't apprehend your meaning."

"Well—I will speak plain. Did you hear me tell Suggett the story about my old master, last night at the *Servants' Arms*?"

"No—I was engaged in a colloquial discourse at the time."

"Then I will tell you the adventur' over agin;"—and Mr. Snoggles related the incident accordingly.

Mr. Whittingham was quite astounded; and he delivered himself of many impressive observations upon the affair, but which we shall not be cruel enough to inflict upon our readers.

It was about half-past twelve o'clock when Richard returned home. His countenance was pale and anxious; and he vainly endeavoured to smile as he encountered his faithful old dependant.

"Ah! Master Richard, I was sadly afraid that you had fallen into some trepidation!"

"A very unpleasant adventure, Whittingham—which I will relate to you another time—kept me away from home. I was with Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester——"

"Mr. Chichester ain't no good, sir," interrupted the butler emphatically.

"What do you mean, Whittingham?"

"I mean exactly what I say, Master Richard,—and nothing more nor less. Both the baronet and Mr. Chichester have been here this morning."

Then, with a considerable amount of circumlocution and elaborate comment, the butler related the conduct of Chichester towards Snoggles, and their accidental meeting that morning.

"This is very extraordinary," said Richard, musing.

"I can't say I ever regularly admired this Mr. Chichester," observed Whittingham. "He seems too dashing, too out-and-out, and too—too—circumwenting in his discourse, to be anythink exceeding and excessive good. Now I like the baronet much better; he isn't so formiliar in his manners. Whenever he speaks to me he always says '*Mr. Whittingham*;' but Mr. Chichester calls me plain '*Whittingham*.' As for that wulgar fellow Talbot, who has called here once or twice, he slaps me on the shoulder, and bawls out, '*Well, Whittingham, my tulip, how are you?*' Now, you know, Master Richard, it's not conformant to perceived notions to call a butler a tulip."

"I have been deceived in my acquaintances—no doubt I have been deceived," said Richard, musing audibly, and pacing the library, with agitated steps. "There is something suspicious in the connexion of that man Talbot—however rich he may be—with so elegant a gentleman as the baronet;—then this conduct of Chichester's towards his servant—their taking me to a common gambling-house—their deserting me in the moment of need,—yes, I have been deceived! And then, Diana—I ought never more to see her: her influence, her fascination are too dangerous!"

"A gambling-house!" ejaculated Whittingham, whose ears caught fragments of these reflections.

"My old friend," said Richard, turning suddenly towards the butler, "I am afraid I have been enticed—inveigled into society which is not creditable to me or my position. I will repair my fault. Mr. Monroe, my guardian, advised me some weeks ago to indulge in a tour upon the continent: I will avail myself of this permission. At four o'clock I have an appointment—a pressing appointment to keep in town: by seven at latest I shall return. Have a post-chaise at the door and all things in readiness: we will proceed to Dover to-night. You alone shall accompany me."

"Let's do it, sir—let's do it," exclaimed the faithful old dependant: "it will separate you from them flash fellows which lead young men into scrapes, and from them wulgar persons which call butlers tulips."

Whittingham retired to make the preparations for the contemplated journey, and Richard seated himself at the table to write a couple of letters.

The first was to Mrs. Arlington, and ran thus:—

"Circumstances of a very peculiar nature, and which I cannot at present explain to you, compel me to quit London thus abruptly. I hope you will not imagine that I leave your agreeable society without many regrets. We shall probably meet again, when I may perhaps confide to you the motives of this sudden departure; and you will then understand that I could not have remained in London

another minute with safety to myself. I scarcely know what I write—I am so agitated and uneasy. Pray excuse this scrawl.

"RICHARD MARKHAM."

The second letter was to Mr. Monroe, and was couched in the following terms:—

"You will be surprised, my dear sir, to find that I am immediately about to avail myself of your kind recommendation and permission to visit the continent. I conceive it to be my duty—in consequence of rumours or reports which may shortly reach your ears concerning me—to inform you that I have this moment only awoke to the fearful perils of the career in which I have for same weeks past been blindly hurrying along, till at length yesterday——: but I dare not write any more. I am penitent—deeply penitent: let this statement induce you to defend and protect my reputation,

"Ever your sincerely obliged,
"R. MARKHAM."

Having hastily folded, addressed, and sealed these letters, Markham hurried up to his bed-room to select certain articles of clothing and other necessaries which he should require upon his journey.

He was interrupted in the middle of this occupation, by the entrance of Whittingham, who came to announce that two persons of somewhat strange and suspicious appearance desired an immediate interview with him.

Scarcely was this message delivered, when the two men, who had followed Whittingham up-stairs, walked very unceremoniously into the bed-room.

"This is Richard Markham, 'spose?" said one, advancing towards the young man.

"Yes—my name is Markham: but what means this insolent and unpardonable intrusion?"

"Intrusion indeed!" repeated the foremost of the ill-looking strangers. "However, not to keep you waiting, my young friend, I must inform you that me and this man here are officers; and we've a warrant to take you."

"A warrant!" ejaculated both Richard and Whittingham at the same moment.

"Come, come, now—I dare say you haven't been without your misgivings since yesterday;—but if young gen'lemen will play such pranks, why, they must expect some time or another to be wanted—that's all!"

"But what have I done?" demanded Richard. "There must be some mistake. I cannot be the person whom you require."

"Did you not call at a certain bankers' in the City yesterday?" demanded the officer.

"Certainly—I had some money to receive, which Mr. Monroe my guardian had paid into their hands for my use."

"And you changed a five hundred pound note? The clerk did it for your accommodation."

"I do not deny it: I required change. But how is all this connected with your visit?"

"That five hundred pound note was a forgery!"

"A forgery! Impossible!" cried Richard.

"A forgery!" said Whittingham: "this is really impudence of too consummating a nature!"

"Come, there's no mistake, and all this gammon won't do. Me and my partner came in a hackney-coach, which stands at the corner of the lane so if you're ready, we'll be off to Bow Street at once."

"I am prepared to accompany you," said Richard, "because I am well aware that I shall not be detained many minutes at the magistrate's office."

"That's no business of mine," returned the principal officer: then, addressing his companion, he said, "Jem, you'll stay here and take a survey of the premises; while I get off with the prisoner. You can follow as soon as you've satisfied yourself whether there's any evidence upon the premises."

It was with great difficulty that Richard over-ruled the desire of Whittingham to accompany him; but at length the faithful old man was induced to comprehend the necessity of staying behind, as an officer was about to exercise a strict search throughout the house, and Markham did not choose to leave his property to the mercy of a stranger.

This point having been settled, Richard took his departure with the officer in whose custody he found himself. They entered the hackney-coach, which was waiting at a little distance, and immediately proceeded by the shortest cuts towards the chief office in Bow Street.

Upon their arrival at that ominous establishment, Richard's pocket-book and purse were taken away from him; and he himself was thrust into a cell until the charge at that moment before the magistrate was disposed of.

Here must we leave him for the present; as during the night which followed his arrest, scenes of a terrible nature passed elsewhere.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEN OF HORRORS.

HOWEVER filthy, unhealthy, and repulsive the entire neighbourhood of West Street (Smithfield), Field Lane, and Saffron Hill, may appear at the present day, it was far worse some years ago. There were then but few cesspools; and scarcely any of those which did exist possessed any drains. The knackers' yards of Cow Cross, and the establishments in Castle Street where horses' flesh is boiled down to supply food for the dogs and cats of the metropolis, send forth now, as they did then, a fœtid and sickening odour which could not possibly be borne by a delicate stomach. At the windows of those establishments the bones of the animals are hung to bleach, and offend the eye as much as the horrible stench of the flesh acts repugnantly to the nerves. Upwards of sixty horses a day are frequently slaughtered in each yard; and many of them are in the last stage of disease when sent to their "long home." Should there not be a rapid demand for the "meat" on the part of the itinerant purveyors of that article for canine and feline favourites, it speedily becomes putrid; and a smell, which would alone appear sufficient to create a pestilence, pervades the neighbourhood.

As if nothing should be wanting to render that district as filthy and unhealthy as possible, water is scarce. There is in this absence of a plentiful supply of that wholesome article, an actual apology for dirt. Some of the houses have small back yards, in which the inhabitants keep pigs. A short time ago, an infant belonging to a poor widow, who occupied a back room on the ground-floor of one of these hovels, died, and was laid upon the sacking of the bed while the mother went out to make arrangements for its interment. During her absence a pig entered the room from the yard, and feasted upon the dead child's face!

In that densely populated neighbourhood that we are describing, hundreds of families each live and sleep in one room. When a member of one of these families happens to die, the corpse is kept in the close room where the rest still continue to live and sleep. Poverty frequently compels the unhappy relatives to keep the body for days—aye, and weeks. Rapid decomposition takes place—animal life generates quickly; and in four-and-twenty hours myriads of loathsome animalculæ are seen crawling about. The very undertakers' men fall sick at these disgusting—these revolting spectacles.

The wealthy classes of society are far too ready to reproach the miserable poor for things which are really misfortunes and not faults. The habit of whole families sleeping together in one room destroys all sense of shame in the daughters: and what guardian then remains for their virtue? But, alas! a horrible—an odious crime often results from that poverty which thus huddles brothers and sisters, aunts and nephews, all together in one narrow room—the crime of incest!

When a disease—such as the small-pox or scarlatina—breaks out in one of those crowded houses, and in a densely populated neighbourhood, the consequences are frightful: the mortality is as rapid as that which follows the footsteps of the plague!

These are the fearful mysteries of that hideous district which exists in the very heart of this great metropolis. From St. John-street to Saffron Hill—from West-street to Clerkenwell Green, is a maze of narrow lanes, choked up with dirt, pestiferous with nauseous odours, and swarming with a population that is born, lives, and dies, amidst squalor, penury, wretchedness, and crime.

Leading out of Holborn, between Field Lane and Ely Place, is Upper Union Court—a narrow lane forming a thoroughfare for only foot passengers. The houses in this court are dingy and gloomy: the sunbeams never linger long there; and should an Italian-boy pass through the place, he does not stop to waste his music upon the inhabitants. The dwellings are chiefly let out in lodgings; and through the open windows upon the ground-floor may occasionally be seen the half-starved families of mechanics crowding round the scantily-supplied table. A few of the lower casements are filled with children's books, pictures of actors and highwaymen glaringly coloured, and lucifer-matches, twine, sweet-stuff, cotton, &c. At one door there stands an oyster-stall, when the comestible itself is in season: over another hangs a small board with a mangle painted upon it. Most of the windows on the ground-floors announce rooms to let, or lodgings for single men; and perhaps a notice may be seen better written than the rest, that artificial-flower makers are required at that address.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when two little children—a boy of seven and a girl of five—walked slowly up this court, hand in hand, and crying bitterly. They were both clothed in rags, and had neither shoes nor stockings upon their feet. Every now and then they stopped, and the boy turned towards his little sister, and endeavoured to console her with kind words and kisses.

"Don't cry so, dear," he said: "I'll tell mother that it was all my fault that we couldn't bring home any more money; and so she'll beat me worst. Don't cry—there's a good girl—pray don't!"

And the poor little fellow endeavoured to calm his own grief in order to appease the fears of his sister.

Those children had now reached the door of the house in which their mother occupied an attic; but they paused upon the step, evincing a mortal repugnance to proceed any farther. At length the little boy contrived by promises and caresses to hush the violence of his sister's grief; and they entered the house, the door of which stood open for the accommodation of the lodgers.

Hand in hand these poor children ascended the dark and steep staircase, the boy whispering consolation in the girl's ears. At length they reached the door of the attic: and there they stood for a few moments.

"Now, Fanny dear, don't cry, there's a good girl; pray don't now—and I'll buy you some nice pears to-morrow with the first halfpenny I get, even if I shouldn't get another, and if mother beats me till I'm dead when we come home."

The boy kissed his sister once more, and then opened the attic-door.

A man in a shabby black coat, and with an immense profusion of hair about his hang-dog countenance, was sitting on one side of a good fire, smoking a pipe. A thin, emaciated, but vixenish looking woman was arranging some food upon the table for supper. The entire furniture of the room consisted of that table, three broken chairs, and a filthy mattress in one corner.

As soon as the boy opened the door, he seemed for a moment quite surprised to behold that man at the fireside: then, in another instant, he clapped his little hands joyously together, and exclaimed, "Oh! how glad I am: here's father come home again!"

"Father's come home again!" echoed the girl; and the two children rushed up to their parent with the most pure—the most unfeigned delight.

"Curse your stupidity, you fools," cried the man, brutally repulsing his children; "you've nearly broke my pipe."

The boy fell back, abashed and dismayed: the little girl burst into tears.

"Come, none of this humbug," resumed the man; "let's know what luck you've had to-day, since your mother says that she's been obliged to send you out on the tramp since I've been laid up for this last six months in the jug."

"Yes, and speak out pretty plain, too, Master Harry," said the mother in a shrill menacing tone; "and none of your excuses, or you'll know what you have got to expect."

"Please, mother," said the boy, slowly taking some halfpence from his pocket, "poor little Fanny got all this. I was so cold and hungry I couldn't ask a soul; so if it ain't enough, mother, you must beat me—and not poor little Fanny."

As the boy uttered these words in a tremulous tone, and with tears trickling down his face, he got before his sister, in order to shield her, as it were, from his mother's wrath.

"Give it here, you fool!" cried the woman, darting forward, and seizing hold of the boy's hand containing the halfpence: then, having hastily glanced over the amount, she exclaimed, "You vile young dog! I'll teach you to come home here with your excuses! I'll cut your liver out of ye, I will!"

"How much has he brought?" demanded the man.

"How much! Why not more than enough to pay for the beer," answered the woman indignantly. "Eightpence-halfpenny—and that's every farthing! But won't I take it out in his hide, that's all?"

The woman caught hold of the boy, and dealt him a tremendous blow upon the back with her thin bony fist. He fell upon his knees, and begged for mercy. His unnatural parent levelled a volley of abuse at him, mingled with oaths and filthy expressions, and then beat him—dashed him upon the floor—kicked him—all but stamped upon his poor body as he writhed at her feet.

His screams were appalling.

Then came the turn of the girl. The difference in the years of the children did not cause any with regard to their chastisement; but while the unnatural mother dealt her heavy blows upon the head, neck, breast, and back of the poor little creature, the boy clasped his hands together, exclaiming, "O mother! it was all my fault—pray don't beat little Fanny—pray don't!" Then forgetting his own pain, he threw himself before his sister to protect her—a noble act of self-devotion in so young a boy, and for which he only received additional punishment.

At length the mother sate down exhausted; and the poor lad drew his little sister into a corner, and endeavoured to soothe her.

The husband of that vile woman had remained unmoved in his seat, quietly smoking his pipe, while this horrible scene took place; and if he did not actually enjoy it, he was very far from disapproving of it.

"There," said the woman, gasping for breath, "that'll teach them to mind how they come home another time with less than eighteenpence in their pockets. One would actually think it was the people's fault, and not the children's: but it ain't—for people grows more charitable every day. The more humbug, the more charity."

"Right enough there," growled the man. "A reg'lar knowing beggar can make his five bob a day. He can walk through a matter of sixty streets; and in each street he can get a penny. He's sure o' that. Well, there's his five bob."

"To be sure," cried the woman: "and therefore such nice-looking little children as our'n couldn't help getting eighteen-pence if they was to try, the lazy vagabonds! What would ha' become of me all the time that you was in the Jug this last bout, if they hadn't have worked better than they do now? As it is, every thing's up the spout—all made away with——"

"Well, we'll devilish soon have 'em all down again," interrupted the man. "Dick will be here presently; and he and I shall soon settle some job or another. But hadn't you better give them kids their supper, and make 'em leave off snivellin' afore Dick comes?"

"So I will, Bill," answered the woman; and throwing the children each a piece of bread, she added, in a cross tone, "And now tumble into bed, and make haste about it; and if you don't hold that blubbering row I'll take the poker to you this time."

The little boy gave the larger piece of bread to his sister; and, having divested her of her rags, he made her as comfortable as he could on the filthy mattress, covering her over not only with *her* clothes but also with *his own*. He kissed her affectionately, but without making any noise with his lips, for fear that *that* should irritate his mother; and then lay down beside her.

Clasped in each other's arms, those two children of poverty—the victims of horrible and daily cruelties—repulsed by a father whose neck they had longed to encircle with their little arms, and whose hand they had vainly sought to cover with kisses; trembling even at the looks of a mother whom they loved in spite of all her harshness towards them, and from whose lips one word—one single word of kindness would have gladdened their poor hearts;—under such circumstances, we say, did these persecuted but affectionate infants, still smarting with the pain of cruel blows, and with tears upon their cheeks,—thus did they sink into slumber in each other's arms!

Merciful God! it makes the blood boil to think that this is no over-drawn picture—that there is no exaggeration in these details; but that there really exist monsters in a human form—wearing often, too, the female shape—who make the infancy and early youth of their offspring one continued hell—one perpetual scene of blows, curses, and cruelties! Oh! for how many of our fellow-creatures have we to blush:—how many demons are there who have assumed our mortal appearance, who dwell amongst us, and who set us examples the most hideous—the most appalling!

As soon as the children were in bed, the woman went out, and returned in a few minutes with two pots of strong beer—purchased with the alms that day bestowed by the charitable upon her suffering offspring.

She and her husband then partook of some cold meat, of which there was a plentiful provision—enough to have allowed the boy and the girl each a good slice of bread.

And the bread which this man and this woman ate was new and good; but the morsels thrown to the children were stale and mouldy.

"I tell you what," said the woman, whispering in a mysterious tone to her husband, "I have thought of an excellent plan to make Fanny useful."

"Well, Polly, and what's that?" demanded the man.

"Why," resumed his wife, her countenance wearing an expression of demoniac cruelty and cunning, "I've been thinking that Harry will soon be of use to you in your line. He'll be so handy to shove through a window, or to sneak down a area and hide himself all day in a cellar to open the door at night,—or a thousand things."

"In course he will," said Bill, with an approving nod.

"Well, but then there's Fanny. What good can she do for us for years and years to come? She won't beg—I know she won't. It's all that boy's lies when he says she does: he is very fond of her, and only tells us that to screen her. Now I've a very great mind to do someot that will make her beg—aye, and be glad to beg—and beg too in spite of herself."

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Why, doing *that* to her which will put her entirely at our mercy, and at the same time render her an object of such interest that the people *must* give her money. I'd wager that with my plan she'd get her five bob a day; and what a blessin' that would be."

"But how?" said Bill impatiently.

"And then," continued the woman, without heeding this question, "she wouldn't want Henry with her; and you might begin to make him useful some how or another. All we should have to do would be to take Fanny every day to some good thoroughfare, put her down there of a mornin', and go and fetch her agen at night; and I'll warrant she'd keep as in beer—aye, and in brandy too."

"What the devil are you driving at?" demanded the man.

"Can't you guess?"

"No—blow me if I can."

"Do you fancy the scheme?"

"Am I a fool? Why, of course I do: but how the deuce is all this to be done? You never could learn Fanny to be so fly as that?"

"I don't want to learn her anything at all. What I propose is to force it on her."

"And how is that?" asked the man.

"By putting her eyes out," returned the woman.

Her husband was a robber—yes, and a murderer: but he started when this proposal met his ear.

"There's nothin' like a blind child to excite compassion," added the woman coolly. "I know it for a fact," she continued, after a pause, seeing that her husband did not answer her. "There's old Kate Betts, who got all her money by travelling about the country with two blind girls; and she made 'em blind herself too—she's often told me how she did it; and that has put the idea into my head."

"And how did she do it?" asked the man, lighting his pipe, but not glancing towards his wife; for although her words had made a deep impression upon him, he was yet struggling with the remnant of a parental feeling, which remained in his heart in spite of himself.

"She covered the eyes over with cockle shells, the eye-lids, recollect, being wide open; and in each shell there was a large black beetle. A bandage tied tight round the head, kept the shells in their place; and the shells kept the eyelids open. In a few days the eyes got quite blind, and the pupils had a dull white appearance."

"And you're serious, are you?" demanded the man.

"Quite," returned the woman, boldly: "why not?"

"Why not indeed?" echoed Bill, who approved of the horrible scheme, but shuddered at the cruelty of it, villain as he was.

"Ah! why not?" pursued the female: "one must make one's children useful somehow or another. So, if you don't mind, I'll send Harry out alone to-morrow morning and keep Fanny at home. The moment the boy's out of the way, I'll try my hand at Kate Betts's plan."

The conversation was interrupted by a low knock at the attic-door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOOZING-KEN.

"Come in," exclaimed Bill: "I des say it's Dick Flairer."

"Well, Bill Bolter, old fellow—here you are at last," cried the new comer. "I s'pose you knowed I should come here this evenin'. If you hadn't sent me that message t'other day by the young area-sneak[15] what got his discharge out o' Coldbath Jug,[16] I should ha' come all the same. I remembered very well that you was sentenced to six months on it; and I'd calkilated days and weeks right enough."

"Sit down, Dick, and blow a cloud. Wot news since I see you last?"

"None. You know that Crankey Jem is nabbed. He and the Resurrection Man did a pannie[17] together somewhere up Soho way. They got off safe with the swag; and the Resurrection Man went on to the Mint. Jem took to the Old House in Chick Lane,[18] and let me in for my reglars.[19] But after a week or ten days the Resurrection Man nosed[20] upon him, and will turn King's Evidence afore the benks. So Jem was handed over to the dubsman;[21] and this time he'll get lagged for life."

"In course he will. He has been twice to the floating academy.[22] There ain't no chance this time."

"But as for business," said Dick Flairer, after a pause, during which he lighted his pipe and paid his respects to the beer, "my gropus is as empty as a barrister's bag the day after sessions. I have but one bob left in my cly;[23] and that we'll spend in brandy presently. My mawleys[24] is reg'larly itching for a job."

"Someot must be done—and that soon too," returned Bill Bolter. "By-the-by, s'pose we try that crib which we meant to crack four year or so ago, when you got nabbed the very next mornin' for faking a blowen's flag from her nutty arm."[25]

"What—you mean Markham's up between Kentish Town and Lower Holloway?" said Dick.

"The same. Don't you recollect—we settled it all the wery night as we threw that young fellow down the trap in Chick Lane? But, by goles—Dick—what the deuce is the matter with you?"

Dick Flairer had turned deadly pale at the mention of this circumstance: his knees shook; and he cast an uneasy and rapid glance around him.

"Come, Dick—don't be a fool," said the woman: "you don't think there is any ghosts here, do you?"

"Ghosts!" he exclaimed, with a convulsive start; then, after a moment's silence, during which his two companions surveyed him with curiosity and fear, he added in a low and subdued tone, "Bill, you know there wasn't a man in all the neighbourhood bolder than me up to the time when you got into trouble: you know that I didn't care for ghosts or churchyards, or dark rooms, or anything of that kind. Now it's quite altered. If even a man seed speret of a person, that man was me about two months ago!"

"What the devil does this mean?" cried Bolter, looking uneasily around him in his turn.

"Two months ago," continued Dick Flairer, "I was up Hackney way, expecting to do a little business with Tom the Cracksman,[26] which didn't come off; for Tom had been at the boozing-ken[27] all the night before, and had blowed his hand up in a lark with some davy's-dust.[28] Well, I wus coming home again, infernal sulky at the affair's breaking down, when just as I got to Cambridge-Heath-gate I heerd the gallopin' of horses. I looks round, nat'rally enough;—but who should I see upon a lovely chestnut mare——"

"Who?" said Bill anxiously.

"The speret of that wery same young feller as you and I threw down the trap at the old house in Chick Lane four year and some months ago!"

"Mightn't it have been a mistake, Dick?" demanded Bill.

"Why, of course it was," exclaimed the woman.

"No, it warn't," said Dick very seriously. "I never tell a lie to a pal,[29] Bill—and that you knows well enough. I seed that young man as plain as I can now see you, Bill—as plain as I see you, Polly Bolter. I thought I should have dropped: I fell right against a post in the footpath; but I took another good long look. There he was—the same face—the same hair—the same dress—everything the same! I couldn't be mistaken: I'd swear to it."

"And would you tell this story to the parish-prig,[30] if so be as you was going to Tuck-up Fair[31] to-morrow morning?" demanded Bill.

"I would, by G—d!" cried Dick solemnly, striking his hand upon the table at the same time.

There was a long pause. Even the woman, who was perhaps more hardened in vice and more inaccessible to anything in the shape of sentiment than her male companions, seemed impressed by the positive manner in which the man told his story.

"Well—come, this won't do!" ejaculated Dick, after the lapse of some minutes. "Ghost or no ghost, we can't afford to be honest."

"No—we must be up to someot," returned Bill; "if we went and offered ourselves to the parish prig he wouldn't take us as his clerk and sexton; so if he won't give us a lift, who the devil will? But, about that Markham's place?"

"The old fellow died a few months ago, I heard," said Dick; "the eldest son run away; and that brought about the father's death. As for the young 'un, he was grabbed this arternoon for smashing queer screens.[32]"

"The devil he was! Well, there ain't no good to be done in that quarter, then? Do you know any other spekilation?"

"Tom the Cracksman and me was going to do a pannie in a neat little crib up by Clapton, that time when he blowed his hand

nearly off, larking with his ben-culls.[33] I don't see why it shouldn't be done now. Tom told me about it. A young swell, fond of horses and dogs—lives exceeding quiet—never no company scarcely—but plenty of tin."

"Servants?" said Bill, interrogatively.

"One man—an old groom; and two women—three in all," replied Dick.

"That'll do," observed the woman, approvingly.

"Must we speak to the Cracksman first?" demanded Bill.

"Yes—fair play's a jewel. I don't believe the Resurrection Man would ever have chirped[34] if he had been treated properly. But if this thing is to be done, let it be done to-morrow night; and now let us go to the boozing-ken and speak to the Cracksman."

"I'm your man," said Bill; and the two thieves left the room together.

At the top of Union Court is Bleeding Hart Yard, leading to Kirby Street, at right angles to which is a narrow alley terminating on Great Saffron Hill. This was the road the burglars took.

It was now eleven o'clock, and a thick fog—so dense that it seemed as if it could be cut with a knife—prevailed. The men kept close together, for they could not see a yard before them. Here and there lights glimmered in the miserable casements; and the fog, thus faintly illuminated at intervals, appeared of a dingy copper colour.

The burglars proceeded along Saffron Hill.

The streets were nearly empty; but now and then the pale, squalid, and nameless forms of vice were heard at the door-ways of a few houses, endeavouring to lure the passers-by into their noisome abodes. A great portion of the unwholesome life of that district had sought relief from the pangs of misery and the remorse of crime, in sleep. Alas! the slumbers of the poor and of the guilty are haunted by the lean, lank, and gaunt visages of penury, and all the fearful escort of turpitude!

Through the broken shutters of several windows came the sounds of horrible revelry—ribald and revolting; and from others issued cries, shrieks, oaths, and the sounds of heavy blows—a sad evidence of the brutality of drunken quarrels. Numerous Irish families are crowded together in the small back rooms of the houses on Saffron Hill; and the husbands and fathers gorge themselves, at the expense of broken-hearted wives and famishing children, with the horrible compound of spirit and vitriol, sold at the low gin-shops in the neighbourhood. Hosts of "Italian masters" also congregate in that locality; and the screams of the unfortunate boys, who writhe beneath the lash of their furious employers on their return home after an unsuccessful day with their organs, monkies, white mice, or chalk images, mingle with the other appalling or disgusting sounds, which make night in that district truly hideous.

Even at the late hour at which the two burglars were wending their way over Saffron Hill, boys of ages ranging from seven to fifteen, were lurking in the courts and alleys, watching for any decently dressed persons, who might happen to pass that way. Those boys had for the most part been seduced from the control of their parents by the receivers of stolen goods in Field Lane, or else had been sent into the streets to thieve by those vile parents themselves.

Thus, as the hulks, the convict-ships, the penitentiaries, and the gallows, relieve society of one generation of villains, another is springing up to occupy the vacancy.

And this will always be the case so long as laws tend only to punish—and aim not to reform.

Dick Flairer and Bill Bolter proceeded, without exchanging many words together, through the dense fog, until they reached a low public-house, which they entered.

Nothing could be more filthy nor revolting than the interior of this "boozing-ken." Sweeps, costermongers, Jews, Irish bricklayers, and women of the town were crowding round the bar, drinking various malt and spirituous liquors fearfully adulterated. The beer, having been originally deluged with water to increase the quantity, had been strengthened by drugs of most deleterious qualities—such as tobacco-juice and *cocculus-indicus*. The former is a poison as subtle as that of a viper: the latter is a berry of such venomous properties, that if thrown into a pond, it will speedily send the fish up to the surface to gasp and die. The gin was mixed with vitriol, as hinted above; and the whiskey, called "Paddy's Eye-Water," with spirits of turpentine. The pots and glasses in which the various beverages were served up, were all stood upon double trays, with a cavity between, and numerous holes in the upper surface. The overflowings and drainings were thus caught and saved; and the landlord dispensed the precious compound, which bore the name of "all sorts," at a halfpenny a glass.

The two burglars nodded familiarly to the landlord and his wife, as they passed the bar, and entered a little, low, smoky room, denominated "the parlour." A tremendous fire burnt in the grate, at which a short, thin, dark man, with a most forbidding countenance, was sitting, agreeably occupied in toasting a sausage. The right hand of this man had lost the two middle fingers, the stumps of which were still covered with plaster, as if the injury had been recent. He was dressed in a complete suit of corduroy: the sleeves of his jacket, the lower part of his waistcoat, and the front of his trousers, were covered with grease. On the table near him stood a huge piece of bread and a pot of beer.

This individual was Tom the Cracksman—the most adroit and noted burglar in the metropolis.

He kept a complete list of all the gentlemen's houses in the environs of London, with the numbers of servants and male inhabitants in each. He never attempted any dwelling within a circuit of three miles of the General Post Office: his avocation was invariably exercised in the suburbs of London, where the interference of the police was less probable.

At the moment when we introduce him to our readers, he was somewhat "down in his luck," as he himself expressed it, the accident which had happened to his hand, through playing with gunpowder, having completely disabled him for the preceding two months, and the landlord of the "boozing-ken" having made it an invariable rule never to give credit. Thus, though the Cracksman had spent hundreds of pounds in that house, he could not obtain so much as a glass of "all sorts" without the money.

The Cracksman was alone in the parlour when Dick Flairer and Bill Bolter entered. Having toasted his sausage, the renowned burglar placed it upon the bread, and began eating his supper by means of a formidable clasp-knife, without deigning to cast a glance

around.

At length Bill Bolter burst out into a loud laugh, and exclaimed, "Why, Tom, you're getting proud all on a sudden: you won't speak to your friends."

"Halloo, Bill, is that you?" ejaculated the burglar. "When did they turn you out of the jug?"

"This mornin' at twelve; and with never a brown in my pocket. Luckily the old woman had turned the children to some use during the time I was at the stepper, or else I don't know what would have become on us."

"And I'm as completely stitched up as a man could be if he'd just come out o' the workus," said Tom. "I just now spent my last tanner[35] for this here grub. Ah! it's a d——d hard thing for a man like me to be brought down to cag-mag,[36]"—he added, glancing sulkily at the sausage, which he was eating half raw.

"We all sees ups and downs," observed Dick Flairer. "My opinion is that we are too free when we have the blunt."

"And there's them as is too close when we haven't it," returned the Cracksman bitterly. "There's the landlord of this crib won't give a gen'leman like me tick not for one blessed farden. But things can't go on so: I'm blowed if I won't do a crack that shall be worth while; and then I'll open a ken in opposition to this. You'd see whether I'd refuse a pal tick in the hour of need."

"Well, you don't suppose that we are here just to amuse ourselves," said Dick: "we come to see you."

"Is anythink to be done?" demanded the Cracksman.

"First answer me this," cried Dick: "has that crib at Upper Clapton been cracked yet?"

"What, where there's a young swell——"

"I don't know nothing more about it than wot you told me," interrupted Dick. "Me and you was to have done it; and then you went larking with the davy's-dust——"

"I know the crib you mean," said the Cracksman hastily: "that job is yet to be done. Are you the chaps to have a hand in it."

"That's the very business that we're come for," answered Bill.

"Well," resumed the Cracksman, "it seems we're all stumped up, and can't hold out no longer. We won't put this thing off—it shall be done to-morrow night. Eleven's the hour. I will go Dalston way—you two can arrange about the roads you'll take, so long as you don't go together; and we'll all three meet at the gate of Ben Price's field at eleven o'clock."

"So far, so good," said Dick Flairer. "I've got a darkey:[37] but we want the kifers[38] and tools."

"And a sack," added Bill.

"We must get all these things of old Moses Hart, the fence;[39] and give him a share of the swag," exclaimed the Cracksman. "Don't bother yourselves about *that*; I'll make it all right."

"Well, now that's settled," said Dick. "I've got a bob in my pocket, and we'll have a rinse of the bingo."

The burglar went out to the bar, and returned with some brandy, which he and his companions drank pure.

"So Crankey Jem's in quod?" observed the Cracksman, after a pause.

"Yes—and the Resurrection Man too: but he has chirped, and will be let out after sessions."

"You have heard of his freak over in the Borough I s'pose," said the Cracksman.

"No I haven't," answered Bill. "What was it?"

"Oh! a capital joke. The story's rather long; but it will bear telling. There's a young fellow of the name of Sam Chisney; and his father died about two year ago leaving two thousand pounds in the funds. The widder was to enjoy the interest during *her* life; and then it was to come, principal and interest both, to Sam. Well, the old woman gets into debt, and is arrested. She goes over to the Bench, takes the Rules, and hires a nice lodging on the ground floor in Belvidere Place. The young feller wants his money very bad, and doesn't seem at all disposed to wait for the old lady's death, particklar as she might live another ten years. Well, he comes across the Resurrection Man, and tells him just how he's sitivated. The Resurrection Man thinks over the matter; and, being a bit of a scholar, understands the business. Off they goes and consults a lawyer named Mac Chizzle, who lives up in the New Road, somewhere near the *Servants' Arms* there."

"I know that crib well," observed Bill. "It's a were tidy and respectable one."

"So Mac Chizzle, Sam Chisney, and the Resurrection Man lay their heads together, and settle the whole business. The young chap then goes over to the old woman, and tells her what is to be done. She consents: and all's right. Well, that very day the old lady is taken so bad—so very bad, she thinks she's a goin' to die. She won't have no doctor; but she sends for a nurse as she knows—an old creatur' up'ards of seventy and nearly in her dotage. Then Sam comes; and he's so sorry to see his poor dear mother so ill; and she begins to talk very pious, and to bless him, and tell him as how she feels that she can't live four-and-twenty hours. Sam cries dreadful, and swears he won't leave his poor dear mother—no, not for all the world. He sits up with her all night, and is to exceedin' kind; and he goes out and gets a bottle of medicine—which arter all worn't nothink but gin and peppermint. The old nurse is quite pleased to think that the old woman has got such a attentive son; and he sends out to get a little rum; and the old nurse goes to bed blind drunk."

"What the devil was all that for?" demanded Dick.

"You'll see in a moment," resumed the Cracksman. "Next night at about ten o'clock the young fellow says to the nurse—'Nurse, my poor dear mother is wasting away: she can't last out the night. I do feel so miserable; and I fancy a drop of the rum that they sell at a partickler public, close up by Westminster Bridge.' 'Well, my dear,' says the nurse, 'I'll go and get a bottle there; for I feel that we shall both want someot to cheer us through this blessed night.' So the old nurse toddles off to the rum at the place Sam told her. He had sent her away to a good long distance on purpose. The moment she was gone, Mrs. Chisney gets up, dresses herself as quick as she can, and is all ready just as a hackney-coach drives up to the door. Sam runs down: all was as right as the mail. There was the Resurrection Man in the coach, with the dead body of a old woman that had only been buried the day before, and that he'd had up again during the night.

So Sam and the Resurrection Man they gets the stiff 'un up stairs, and Mrs. Chisney she jumps into the coach and drives away to a comfortable lodging which Mac Chizzle had got for her up in Somers Town."

"Now I begin to twig," exclaimed Dick Flairer.

"Presently the old nurse comes back; and Sam meets her on the stairs, whimpering as hard as he could; and says, 'Oh! nurse—your poor dear missus is gone: your poor dear missus is gone!' So she was; no mistake about that. Well, the nurse begins to cry; but Sam gets her up stairs, and plies her so heartily with the rum that she got blind drunk once more, without ever thinking of laying the body out; so she didn't find out it was quite cold. Next day she washed it, and laid it out properly; and as she was nearly blind, she didn't notice that the features wasn't altogether the same. The body, too, was a remarkable fresh un; and so everything went on as well as could be wished. Sam then stepped over to the Marshal of the Bench, and give him notice of his mother's death; and as she died in the Rules, there must be an inquest. So a jury of prisoners was called: and the old nurse was examined; and she said how exceedin' attentive the young man had been, and all that; and then Sam himself was called. Of course he told a good tale; and then the Coroner says, 'Well, gentlemen, I s'pose you'll like to look at the body.' So over they all goes to Belvidere Place, and the foreman of the Jury just pokes his nose in at the door of the room where the corpse was lying; and no one else even went more than half up the staircase. After this, the jury is quite satisfied, and return a verdict of '*Died from Natural Causes, accelerated by confinement in the Rules of the King's Bench Prison*;' and to this—as they were prisoners themselves—they added some very severe remarks upon '*the deceased's unfeeling and remorseless creditors*.' Then comes the funeral, which was very respectable; and Sam Chisney was chief mourner; and he cried a good deal. All the people who saw it said they never saw a young man so dreadful cut up. In this way they killed the old woman: the son proved her death, got the money, and sold it out every farden; and he and his mother is keeping a public-house together somewhere up Spitalfields way. The Resurrection Man and Mac Chizzle each got a hundred for their share in the business; and the thing passed off as comfortable as possible."

"Well, I'm blowed if that isn't the best lark I ever heard," ejaculated Dick, when the Cracksman had brought his tale to an end.

"So it is," added Bill.

The parlour of the "boozing-ken" now received some additional guests—all belonging to the profession of roguery, though not all following precisely the same line. Thus there were Cracksmen, Magsmen,[40] Area-Sneaks, Public Patterers,[41] Buzgloaks,[42] Dummy-Hunters,[43] Compter-Prigs,[44] Smashers,[45] Flimsy-Kiddies,[46] Macers,[47] Coiners, Begging-Letter Impostors, &c., &c.

The orgies of that motley crew soon became uproarious and revolting. Those who had money lavished it with the most reckless profusion; and thus those who had none were far from being in want of liquor.

The Cracksman was evidently a great man amongst this horrible fraternity: his stories and songs invariably commanded attention.

It is not our purpose to detain the reader much longer in the parlour of the "boozing-ken," we have doubtless narrated enough in this and the preceding chapter to give him a faint idea of some of the horrors of London. We cannot, however, allow the morning scene to pass unnoticed.

CHAPTER XIX.

MORNING.

THE orgie lasted throughout the night in the "boozing-ken." There were plenty of kind guests who, being flush of money, treated those that had none; and thus Tom the Cracksman, Dick Flairer, and Bill Bolter, were enabled to indulge, to their heart's content, in the adulterated liquors sold at the establishment.

The cold raw November morning was ushered in with a fine mizzling rain. The gas-lights were extinguished in the parlour; and the dawn of day fell upon countenances inflamed with debauchery, and rendered hideous by dirt and dark bristling beards.

That was a busy hour for the landlord and landlady of the "boozing-ken." The neighbours who "used the house," came in, one after another—male and female, to take their "morning." This signified their first dram.

Then was it that the "all sorts" was in great demand. Old clothesmen, sweeps, dustmen, knackers, crimps, and women of the town, crowded round the bar, imbibing the strange but potent compound. Even young boys and girls of tender age seemed as a matter of course to require the morning stimulant ere they commenced the avocations or business of the day. Matted hair, blear-eyes, grimy faces, pestiferous breaths, and hollow cheeks, combined with rags and tatters, were the characteristics of the wretches that thronged about the bar of that lowest of low drinking-dens.

Nothing is more revolting to the eye than the unwashed aspect of dissipation by the dingy light of the early dawn. The women had evidently jumped from their beds and huddled on their miserable attire without the slightest regard to decency, in order to lose no time in obtaining their morning dram. The men appeared as if they had slept in their clothes all night; and the pieces of straw in the coarse matted hair of many of them, plainly denoted of what materials their beds were made.

They all entered shivering, cold, depressed, and sullen. The dram instantly produced an extraordinary change in each. Artificial gaiety—a gaiety which developed itself in ribald jokes, profane oaths, and obscene talk—was diffused around. Those who could afford it indulged in a second and a third glass; and some tossed for pots of beer. The men lighted their pipes; and the place was impregnated with the narcotic fumes of the strongest and worst tobacco—that bastard opium of the poor.

Presently the policeman "upon that beat" lounged in, and was complimented by the landlady with a glass of her "best cordial gin." He seemed well acquainted with many of the individuals there, and laughed heartily at the jokes uttered in his presence. When he was gone, the inmates of the "boozing-ken" all declared, with one accord, "that he was the most niblike[48] blue-bottle in the entire force."

In the parlour there were several men occupied in warming beer, toasting herrings, and frying sausages. The tables were smeared over with a rag as black as a hat, by a dirty slip-shod drab of a girl; and with the same cloth she dusted the frame of wire-work which protected the dingy face of the huge Dutch clock. Totally regardless of her presence, the men continued their obscene and filthy discourse; and she proceeded with her work as coolly as if nothing offensive met her ears.

There are, thank God! thousands of British women who constitute the glory of their sex—chaste, virtuous, delicate-minded, and pure in thought and action,—beings who are but one remove from angels now, but who will be angels hereafter when they succeed to their inheritance of immortality. It must be to such as these that the eyes of the poet are turned when he eulogises, in glowing and impassioned language, the entire sex comprehended under the bewitching name of WOMAN! For, oh! how would his mind be shocked, were he to wander for a few hours amidst those haunts of vice and sinks of depravity which we have just described;—his spirit, towering on eagle-wing up into the sunny skies of poesy, would flutter back again to the earth, at the aspect of those foul and loathsome wretches, who, in the female shape, are found in the dwelling-places of poverty and crime!

But to continue.

Bill Bolter took leave of his companions at about eight o'clock in the morning, after a night of boisterous revelry; and rapidly retraced his steps homewards.

Field Lane was now swarming with life. The miserable little shops were all open; and their proprietors were busy in displaying their commodities to the best advantage. Here Jewesses were occupied in suspending innumerable silk handkerchiefs to wires and poles over their doors: there the "translators" of old shoes were employed in spreading their stock upon the shelves that filled the place where the windows ought to have been. In one or two low dark shops women were engaged in arranging herrings, stock-fish, and dried haddocks: in another, coals, vegetables, and oysters were exposed for sale; and not a few were hung with "old clothes as good as new." To this we may add that in the centre of the great metropolis of the mightiest empire in the world—in a city possessing a police which annually costs the nation thousands of pounds—and in a country whose laws are vaunted as being adapted to reach and baffle all degrees of crime—numbers of receivers of stolen goods were boldly, safely, and tranquilly exposing for sale the articles which their agents had "picked up" during the preceding night.

There was, however, nothing in the aspect of Field Lane at all new to the eyes of Bill Bolter. Indeed he merely went down that Jew's bazaar, in his way homewards, because he was anxious to purchase certain luxuries in the shape of red-herrings for his breakfast, he having borrowed a trifle of a friend at the "boozing-ken" to supply his immediate necessities.

When he arrived at his lodgings in Lower Union Court, he was assailed with a storm of reproaches, menaces, and curses, on the part of his wife, for having stayed all night at the "boozing ken." At first that cruel and remorseless man trembled—actually turned pale and trembled in the presence of the virago who thus attacked him. But at length his passion was aroused by her taunts and threats; and, after bandying some horrible abuse and foul epithets with the infuriate woman, he was provoked to blows. With one stroke of his enormous fist, he felled her to the ground, and then brutally kicked her as she lay almost senseless at his feet.

He then coolly sate down by the fire to cook his own breakfast, without paying the least attention to the two poor children, who were crying bitterly in that corner of the room where they had slept.

In a few minutes the woman rose painfully from the floor. Her features were distorted and her lips were livid with rage. She dared not, however, attempt to irritate her furious husband any farther: still her passion required a vent. She looked round, and seemed to reflect for a moment.

Then, in the next instant, all her concentrated rage burst upon the heads of her unhappy offspring.

With a horrible curse at their squalling, the woman leapt, like a tiger-cat, upon the poor little boy and girl. Harry, as usual, covered his sister with his own thin and emaciated form as well as he could; and a torrent of blows rained down upon his naked flesh. The punishment which that maddened wretch thus inflicted upon him, was horrible in the extreme.

A thousand times before that day had Polly Bolter treated her children with demoniac cruelty; and her husband had not attempted to interfere. On the present occasion, however, he took it into his head to meddle in the matter—for the simple reason that, having quarrelled with his wife, he hated her at the moment, and greedily availed himself of any opportunity to thwart or oppose her.

Starting from his chair, he exclaimed, "Come, now—I say, leave those children alone. They haven't done nothing to you."

"You mind your own business," returned the woman, desisting for an instant from her attack upon the boy, and casting a look of mingled defiance and contempt at her husband.

That woman's countenance, naturally ugly and revolting, was now absolutely frightful.

"I say, leave them children alone," cried Bill. "If you touch 'em again, I'll drop down on you."

"Oh, you coward! to hit a woman! I wish I was a man, I'd pay you off for this: and if I was, you wouldn't dare strike me."

"Mind what you say, Poll; I'm in no humour to be teased this morning. Keep your mawleys[49] off the kids, or I'm blessed if I don't do for you."

"Ugh—coward! This is the way I dare you;" and she dealt a tremendous blow upon her boy's shoulder.

The poor lad screamed piteously: the hand of his mother had fallen with the weight of a sledge hammer upon his naked flesh.

But that ferocious blow was echoed by another, at scarcely a moment's interval. The latter was dealt by the fist of Bill Bolter, and fell upon the back part of the ruthless mother's head with stunning force.

The woman fell forward, and struck her face violently against the corner of the deal table.

Her left eye came in contact with the angle of the board, and was literally crushed in its socket—an awful retribution upon her who only a few hours before was planning how to plunge her innocent and helpless daughter into the eternal night of blindness.

She fell upon the floor, and a low moan escaped her lips. She endeavoured to carry her right hand to her now sightless eye; but her strength failed her, and her arm fell lifeless by her side. She was dying.

The man was now alarmed, and hastened to raise her up. The children were struck dumb with unknown fears, and clasped each other in their little arms.

The woman recovered sufficient consciousness, during the two or three seconds which preceded the exhalation of her last breath, to glance with her remaining eye up into her husband's face. She could not, however, utter an articulate sound—not even another moan.

But no pen could depict, and no words describe, the deadly—the malignant—the fiendish hatred which animated her countenance as she thus met her husband's gaze.

The tigress, enveloped in the folds of the boa-constrictor, never darted such a glance of impotent but profound and concentrated rage upon the serpent that held it powerless in its fatal clasp.

She expired with her features still distorted by that horrible expression of vindictive spite.

A few moments elapsed before the man was aware that his wife was dead—that he had murdered her!

He supported her mechanically, as it were; for he was dismayed and appalled by the savage aspect which her countenance had assumed—that countenance which was rendered the more hideous by the bleeding eye-ball crushed in its socket.

At length he perceived that she was no more; and, with a terrible oath, he let her head drop upon the floor.

For a minute he stood and contemplated the corpse:—a whirlwind was in his brain.

The voices of his children aroused him from his reverie.

"Father, what's the matter with mother?" asked the boy, in a timid and subdued tone.

"Mother's hurt herself," said Fanny: "poor mother!"

"Look at mother's eye, father," added the boy: "do look at it! I'm sure something dreadful is the matter."

"Damnation!" ejaculated the murderer: and, after another minute's hesitation, he hurried to the door.

"O, father, father, don't leave us—don't go away from us!" cried the little boy, bursting into an agony of tears: "pray don't go away, father! I think mother's dead," added he with a glance of horror and apprehension towards the corpse: "so don't leave us, father—and I and Fanny will go out and beg, and do anything you like; only pray don't leave us; don't, don't, leave us!"

With profound anguish in his heart, the little fellow clung to his father's knees, and proffered his prayer in a manner the most ingenuous—the most touching.

The man paused, as if he knew not what to do.

His hesitation lasted but a moment. Disengaging himself from the arms of his child, he said in as kind a tone as he could assume—and that tone was kinder than any he had ever used before—"Don't be foolish, boy; I shall be back directly. I'm only going to fetch a doctor—I shan't be a minute."

"Oh, pray don't be long, father!" returned the boy, clasping his little hands imploringly together. In another moment the two children were alone with the corpse of their mother; while the murderer was rapidly descending the stairs to escape from the contemplation of that scene of horror.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VILLA.

AGAIN the scene changes. Our readers must accompany us once more to the villa in the neighbourhood of Upper Clapton.

It was the evening of the day on which was perpetrated the dreadful deed related in the preceding chapter. The curtains were drawn over the dining-room windows; a cheerful fire burned in the grate; and a lamp, placed in the middle of the table, diffused a pleasant and mellowed light around. An air of comfort, almost amounting to luxury, pervaded that apartment; and its general temperature was the better appreciated, as the wind whistled without, and the rain pattered against the windows.

At the table, on which stood a dessert of delicious fruits, conserves, cakes, and wines, sate Walter Sydney and George Montague.

They had now been acquainted nearly three months; and during that period they had met often. Montague had, however, seldom called at the villa, save when expressly invited by his friend Stephens: still, upon those occasions, he and Walter were frequently alone for some time together. Thus, while Stephens was examining into the economy of the stables, or superintending improvements in the garden, Montague and that mysterious lady in man's attire, were thrown upon their own resources to entertain each other.

The reader cannot be surprised if an attachment sprung up between them. So far as that lovely woman was concerned, we can vouch that her predilection towards George Montague was the sincere and pure sentiment of a generous and affectionate heart. How worthy of such a passion his own feelings on the subject might have been, must appear hereafter.

The masculine attire and habits which the lady had assumed, had not destroyed the fine and endearing characteristics of her woman's heart. She was at first struck by Montague's handsome person;—then his varied conversation delighted her;—and, as he soon exerted all his powers to render himself agreeable to the heroine of the villa, it was not long before he completely won her heart.

The peculiarity of her position had taught her—and necessarily so—to exercise an almost complete command over the expression of her feelings. Thus, though an explanation had taken place between herself and Montague, and a mutual avowal of affection made, Stephens remained without a suspicion upon the subject.

On the evening when we again introduce our readers to the villa, Montague was there by the express desire of Mr. Stephens; but this latter individual had been detained by particular business elsewhere. Walter—for so we must continue to call that mysterious being—and Montague had therefore dined *tête-à-tête*; and they were now enjoying together the two or three pleasant hours which succeed the most important meal of the day.

The plans of the lovers will be comprehended by means of the ensuing conversation, better than if drily detailed in our own narrative style:—

"Another fortnight—two short weeks only," said the lady, "and the end of this deception will have arrived."

"Yes—another fortnight," echoed Montague; "and everything will then be favourable to our wishes. The 26th of November——"

"My poor brother, were he alive, would be of age on the 25th," observed the lady, mournfully.

"Of course—precisely!" ejaculated Montague.

"On the 26th, as I was saying, Stephens's plans will be realized; and you will be worth ten thousand pounds."

"Oh! it is not so much for the money that I shall welcome that day: but chiefly because it will be the last on which I shall be doomed to wear this detestable disguise."

"And shall not I be supremely happy to leave this land with you—to call you my own dear beloved wife—and to bear you away to the sunny climes of the south of Europe, where we may live in peace, happiness, and tranquillity to the end of our days?"

"What a charming—what a delicious picture!" ejaculated the lady, her bosom heaving with pleasurable emotions beneath the tight frock which confined it. "But——oh! if the plans of Mr. Stephens should fail;—and that they *might* fail, I am well assured, for he has often said to me, '*Pray be circumspect, Walter: you know not how much depends upon your discretion!*'"

"Those plans *will* not—*cannot* fail!" cried Montague emphatically. "He has told me all—and everything is so well arranged, so admirably provided for!"

"He has told you everything," said the lady, reproachfully; "and he has told me nothing."

"And I dare not enlighten you."

"Oh! I would not hear the secret from your lips. I have a confidence the most blind—the most devoted in Mr. Stephens; and I feel convinced that he must have sound reasons for keeping me thus in the dark with reference to the principal motives of the deception which I am sustaining. I know, moreover—at least, he has declared most solemnly to me, and I believe his word—that no portion of his plan militates against honour and integrity. He is compelled to meet intrigue with intrigue; but all his proceedings are justifiable. There can be no loss of character—no danger from the laws of the country. In all this I am satisfied—because a man who has done so much for me and my poor deceased mother, would not lead me astray, nor involve me either in disgrace or peril."

"You are right," said Montague. "Stephens is incapable of deceiving you."

"And more than all that I have just said," continued Walter, "I am aware that there is an immense fortune at stake; and that should the plans of Mr. Stephens fully succeed, I shall receive ten thousand pounds as a means of comfortable subsistence for the remainder of my life."

"And that sum, joined to what I possess, and to what *I shall have*," added Montague, "will enable us to live in luxury in a foreign land. Oh! how happy shall I be when the time arrives for me to clasp you in my arms—to behold you attired in the garb which suits

your sex, and in which I never yet have seen you dressed—and to call you by the sacred and endearing name of WIFE! How beautiful must you appear in those garments which——"

"Hush, George—no compliments!" cried the lady, with a smile and a blush. "Wait until you see me dressed as you desire; and, perhaps, then—*then*, you may whisper to me the soft and delicious language of love."

The time-piece upon the mantel struck eleven; and Montague rose to depart.

It was an awful night. The violence of the wind had increased during the last hour; and the rain poured in torrents against the windows.

"George, it is impossible that you can venture out in such weather as this," said the lady, in a frank and ingenuous manner: "one would not allow a dog to pass the door on such a night. Fortunately there is a spare room in my humble abode; and that chamber is at your service."

Walter rang the bell, and gave Louisa the necessary instructions.

In another half-hour Montague was conducted to the apartment provided for him, and Walter retired to the luxurious and elegant boudoir which we have before described.

The satin curtains were drawn over the casement against which the rain beat with increasing fury: a cheerful fire actually roared in the grate; and the thick carpet upon the floor, the inviting lounging-chair close by the hearth, and the downy couch with its snow-white sheets and warm clothing, completed the air of comfort which prevailed in that delicious retreat. The vases of sweet flowers were no longer there, it was true; but a fragrant odour of bergamot and lavender filled the boudoir. Nothing could be more charming than this warm, perfumed, and voluptuous chamber—worthy of the lovely and mysterious being who seemed the presiding divinity of that elysian bower.

Walter threw herself into the easy-chair, and dismissed her attendant, saying, "You may retire, Louisa,—I will undress myself without your aid to-night; for as yet I do not feel inclined to sleep. I shall sit here, before this cheerful fire, and indulge in the luxury of hopes and future prospects, ere I retire to rest."

Louisa withdrew, and Walter then plunged into a delicious reverie. The approaching emancipation from the thraldom of an assumed sex—her affection for George Montague—and the anticipated possession of an ample fortune to guard against the future, were golden visions not the less dazzling for being waking ones.

Half an hour had passed away in this manner, when a strange noise startled Walter in the midst of her meditations. She thought that she heard a shutter close violently and a pane of glass smash to pieces almost at the same moment. Alarm was for an instant depicted upon her countenance: she then smiled, and, ashamed of the evanescent fear to which she had yielded, said to herself, "It must be one of the shutters of the dining-room or parlour down stairs, that has blown open."

Taking the lamp in her hand she issued from the boudoir, and hastily descended the stairs leading to the ground floor. In her way thither she could hear, even amidst the howling of the wind, the loud barking of the dogs in the rear of the villa.

The hall, as she crossed it, struck piercing cold, after the genial warmth of the boudoir which she had just left. She cautiously entered the parlour on the left hand of the front door: all was safe. Having satisfied herself that the shutters in that apartment were securely closed and fastened, she proceeded to the dining-room.

She opened the door, and was about to cross the threshold, when—at that moment—the lamp was dashed from her hand by some one inside the room; and she herself was instantly seized by two powerful arms, and dragged into the apartment.

A piercing cry issued from her lips; and then a coarse and hard hand was pressed violently on her mouth. Further utterance was thus stopped.

"Here—Bill—Dick," said a gruff voice; "give me a knife—I must settle this feller's hash—or I'm blessed if he won't alarm the house."

"No more blood—no more blood!" returned another voice, hastily, and with an accent of horror. "I had enough of that this mornin'. Gag him, and tie him up in a heap."

"D—n him, do for him!" cried a third voice. "Don't be such a cursed coward, Bill."

"Hold your jaw, will ye—and give me a knife, Dick," said the first speaker, who was no other than Tom the Cracksman. "The fellow struggles furious—but I've got hold on him by the throat."

Scarcely had these words issued from the lips of the burglar, when the door was thrown open, and Montague entered the room.

He held a lamp in one hand, and a pistol in the other; and it was easy to perceive that he had been alarmed in the midst of his repose, for he had nothing on save his trousers and his shirt.

On the sudden appearance of an individual thus armed, Tom the Cracksman exclaimed, "At him—down with him! We must make a fight of it."

The light of the lamp, which Montague held in his hand, streamed full upon the countenance and person of Walter Sydney, who was struggling violently in the suffocating grasp of the Cracksman.

"Hell and furies!" ejaculated Dick Flairer, dropping his dark lantern and a bunch of skeleton keys upon the floor, while his face was suddenly distorted with an expression of indescribable horror; then, in obedience to the natural impulse of his alarm, he rushed towards the window, the shutters and casement of which had been forced open, leapt through it, and disappeared amidst the darkness of the night.

Astonished by this strange event, Bill Bolter instantly turned his eyes from Montague, whom he was at that moment about to attack, towards the Cracksman and Walter Sydney.

The colour fled from the murderer's cheeks, as if a sudden spell had fallen upon him: his teeth chattered—his knees trembled—and he leant against the table for support.

There was the identical being whom four years and five months before, they had hurled down the trap-door of the old house in Chick Lane:—and who, that had ever met that fate as yet, had survived to tell the tale?

For an instant the entire frame of the murderer was convulsed with alarm: the apparition before him—the vision of his assassinated wife—and the reminiscences of other deeds of the darkest dye, came upon him with the force of a whirlwind. For an instant, we say, was he convulsed with alarm;—in another moment he yielded to his fears, and, profiting by his companion's example, disappeared like an arrow through the window.

Amongst persons engaged in criminal pursuits, a panic-terror is very catching. The Cracksman—formidable and daring as he was—suddenly experienced an unknown and vague fear, when he perceived the horror and unassumed alarm which had taken possession of his comrades. He loosened his grasp upon his intended victim: Walter made a last desperate effort, and released himself from the burglar's power.

"Approach me, and I will blow your brains out," cried Montague, pointing his pistol at the Cracksman.

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the burglar darted forward, dashed the lamp from the hands of Montague, and effected his escape by the window.

Montague rushed to the casement, and snapped the pistol after him: the weapon only flashed in the pan.

Montague closed the window and fastened the shutters. He then called Walter by name; and, receiving no answer, groped his way in the dark towards the door.

His feet encountered an obstacle upon the carpet: he stooped down and felt with his hands;—Walter Sydney had fainted.

Scarcely two minutes had elapsed since Montague had entered the room; for the confusion and flight of the burglars had not occupied near so much time to enact as to describe. The entire scene had moreover passed without any noise calculated to disturb the household.

There were consequently no servants at hand to afford Walter the succour which he required.

For a moment Montague hesitated what course to pursue; but, after one instant's reflection, he took her in his arms, and carried her up into her own enchanting and delicious boudoir.

CHAPTER XXI.

ATROCITY.

GEORGE Montague placed his precious burden upon the bed, and for a moment contemplated her pale but beautiful countenance with mingled feelings of admiration, interest, and desire. The lips were apart, and two rows of pearl glittered beneath. The luxuriant light chesnut hair rolled over his arm, on which he still supported that head of perfect loveliness: his hand thus played with those silken, shining tresses.

Still she remained motionless—lifeless.

Gently withdrawing his arm, Montague hastened to sprinkle her countenance with water. The colour returned faintly, very faintly to her cheeks; and her lips moved gently; but she opened not her eyes.

For a moment he thought of summoning Louisa to her assistance; then, obedient to a second impulse, he hastily loosened the hooks of her semi-military frock-coat.

Scarcely had his hand thus invaded the treasures of her bosom, when she moved, and unclosed the lids of her large melting hazel-eyes.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed, instinctively closing her coat over her breast.

"Fear not, dearest," whispered Montague; "it is I—I who love you."

The scene with the burglars instantly flashed to the mind of the lady; and she cried in a tone rendered tremulous by fear—"And those horrible men—are they all three gone?"

"They are gone—and you are safe."

"Oh! you will pardon me this weakness," continued Walter, hastily moving from the bed to a chair; "but two of those villains—I recognised them but too well—were the men who threw me down the trap-door in the old house near Smithfield."

"Hence their alarm—their panic, when they saw you," exclaimed Montague: "they fancied that they beheld a spirit instead of a reality. This accounts for their sudden and precipitate flight, till this moment unaccountable to me."

"And you, George," said the lady, glancing tenderly toward the young man—"you are my saviour from a horrible death! Another moment, and it would have been too late—they were going to murder me! Oh! how can I sufficiently express my gratitude."

She tendered him her hand, which he pressed rapturously to his lips;—and she did not withdraw it.

"I heard a noise of a shutter closing violently, and of a pane of glass breaking," said Montague: "I started from my bed and listened. In a few moments afterwards I heard footsteps on the stairs——"

"Those were mine, as I descended," interrupted Walter; "for I was alarmed by the same disturbance."

"And, then, while I was hastily slipping on my clothes," added Montague, "I heard a scream. Not another moment did I wait; but ____"

"You came in time, I repeat, to save my life. Never—never shall I sufficiently repay you."

Again did Montague press the fair hand of that enchanting woman to his lips; and then, as he leant over her, their eyes met, and they exchanged glances of love—hers pure and chaste, his ardent and brimful of desire. He was maddened—he was emboldened by those innocent tokens of affection upon her part; and, throwing his arms around her, he imprinted hot and burning kisses upon her lips.

With difficulty did she disengage herself from his embrace; and she cast upon him a look of reproach mingled with melancholy.

"Pardon me, dearest one," he exclaimed, seizing her hand once more and pressing it to his lips; "is it a crime to love you so tenderly—so well?"

"No, George—no: you are my saviour—you soon will be my husband—you need not ask for my forgiveness. But now leave me—retire to your own room as noiselessly as you can; and to-morrow—to-morrow," she added with a blush, "it is not necessary that Louisa should know that you were *here*."

"I understand you, dearest," returned Montague; "your wishes shall ever be my commands. Good night, beloved one!"

"Good night, dear George," said the lady;—and in another moment she was again alone in the boudoir.

Montague returned to his apartment, full of the bliss which he had derived from the caresses enjoyed in a chamber that seemed sacred to mystery and love. He paced his own room with hasty and agitated steps: his brain was on fire.

His own loose ideas of morality induced him to put but little faith in the reality of female virtue. He moreover persuaded himself that the principles of rectitude—supposing that they had ever existed—in the bosom of the enchanting creature he had just left, had been undermined or destroyed by the cheat which she was practising with regard to her sex. And, lastly, he fancied that her affections were too firmly rivetted on him to refuse him anything.

Miserable wretch! he was blinded by his own mad desires. He knew not that woman's virtue is as real, as pure, and as precious as the diamond; he remembered not that the object of his licentious passion was innocent of aught criminal in the disguise which she had assumed;—he reflected not that the caresses which she had ere now permitted him to snatch, were those which the most spotless virgin may honourably award to her lover.

He paced his room in a frenzied manner—allowing his imagination to picture scenes and enjoyments of the most voluptuous kind. By degrees his passion became ungovernable: he was no longer the cool, calculating man he hitherto had been;—a new chord

appeared to have been touched in his heart.

At that moment he would have signed a bond, yielding up all hopes of eternal salvation to the Evil One, for a single hour of love in the arms of that woman whom he had left in the boudoir!

His passion had become a delirium:—he would have plunged into the crater of Vesuvius, or thrown himself from the ridge of the Alpine mountain into the boiling torrent beneath, had she gone before him.

An hour thus passed away, and he attempted not to subdue his feelings: he rather encouraged their wild and wayward course by recalling to his imagination the charms of her whose beauty had thus strangely affected him,—the endearing words which she had uttered,—the thrilling effect of the delicious kisses he had received from her moist vermilion lips,—and the voluptuous contours of that snowy bosom which had been for a moment revealed to his eyes.

An hour passed: he opened the door of his chamber and listened.

A dead silence prevailed throughout the house.

He stole softly along the passage and through the anteroom which led to the boudoir.

When he reached the door of that chamber he paused for a moment. What was he about to do? He waited not to answer the question, nor to reason within himself: he only chose to remember that a thin partition was all that separated him from one of the most beauteous creatures upon whom the sun ever shone in this world.

His fingers grasped the handle of the door: he turned it gently;—the door was not locked!

He entered the boudoir as noiselessly as a spectre. The lamp was extinguished; but the fire still burnt in the grate; and its flickering light played tremulously on the various objects around, bathing in a rich red glare the downy bed whereon reposed the heroine of the villa.

The atmosphere was warm and perfumed.

The head of the sleeper was supported upon one naked arm, which was round, polished, and of exquisite whiteness. The other lay outside the clothes, upon the coverlid. Her long hair flowed in undulations upon the snowy pillows. The fire shone with Rembrandt effect upon her countenance, one side of which was completely irradiated, while the other caught not its mellow light. Thus the perfect regularity of the profile was fully revealed to him who now dared to intrude upon those sacred slumbers.

"She shall be mine! she shall be mine!" murmured Montague; and he advanced toward the bed.

At that moment—whether aroused by a dream, or startled by the almost noiseless tread of feet upon the carpet, we cannot say—the lady awoke.

She opened her large hazel eyes; and they fell upon a figure to whom her imagination, thus suddenly surprised, and the flickering light of the fire, gave a giant stature.

Her fears in one respect were, however, immediately relieved; for the voice of Montague fell upon her ears almost as soon as her eyes caught sight of him.

"Pardon—pardon, dearest one!" he said in a harried and subdued tone.

"Ah! is it so?" quickly ejaculated the lady, who in a moment comprehended how her privacy had been outraged; and passing her arm beneath the pillow, she drew forth a long, sharp, shining dagger.

Montague started back in dismay.

"Villain, that you are—approach this bed, and, without a moment's hesitation, I will plunge this dagger into your heart!"

"Oh! forgive me—forgive me!" ejaculated the young man, cruelly embarrassed. "Dazzled by your beauty—driven mad by your caresses—intoxicated, blinded with passion—I could not command myself—I had no power over my actions."

"Attempt no apology!" said the lady, with a calm and tranquil bitterness of accent that showed how profoundly she felt the outrage—the atrocity, that he, whom she loved so tenderly, had dared to meditate against her: "attempt no apology—but leave this room without an instant's delay, and without another word. Within my reach is a bell-rope—one touch of my finger and I can call my servants to my assistance. Save me that exposure—save yourself that disgrace. To-morrow I will tell you my opinion of your conduct."

There was something so determined—so cool—so resolute in the manner and the matter of this address, that Montague felt abashed—humbled—beaten down to the very dust. Even his grovelling soul at that moment comprehended the Roman mind of the woman whom he would have disgraced: a coward when burglars menaced her life, she was suddenly endowed with lion-daring in defence of her virtue.

The crest-fallen young man again attempted to palliate his intrusion: with superb scorn she waved her hand imperiously, as a signal to leave the room.

Tears of vexation, shame, and rage, started into his eyes, as he obeyed that silent mandate which he now dared no longer to dispute.

The moment the wretch had left the boudoir, the lady sprang from the bed and double-locked the door.

She then returned to her couch, buried her head in the pillow, and burst into an agony of tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOMAN'S MIND.

WHEN Louisa entered the boudoir on the morning which succeeded this eventful night, nothing in Walter's countenance denoted the painful emotions that filled her bosom. She narrated the particulars of the burglarious entry of the dwelling, and Montague's opportune arrival upon the scene of action, with a calmness which surprised her faithful attendant. The truth was, that the attempt of the robbers upon the house, and even the danger in which her own life had been placed, had dwindled, in her own estimation, into events of secondary importance, when compared with that one atrocity which had suddenly wrecked all her hopes of love and happiness for ever.

The usual mysterious toilet was speedily performed; and, with a firm step and a countenance expressive of a stern decision, she descended to the breakfast-parlour.

Montague was already there—pale, haggard, abashed, and trembling. He knew that the chance of possessing a lovely woman and ten thousand pounds was then at stake; and, in addition to this perilous predicament of his nearest and dearest hopes, his position was embarrassing and unpleasant in the extreme. Had he succeeded in his base attempt, he would have been a victor flushed with conquest, and prepared to dictate terms to a woman entirely at his mercy:—but he had been foiled, and he himself was the dejected and baffled being who would be compelled to crave for pardon.

As Louisa entered the room close upon the heels of Walter, the latter greeted George Montague with a most affable morning's welcome, and conversed with him in a manner which seemed to say that she had totally forgotten the occurrence of the night.

But the moment that Louisa had completed the arrangements of the breakfast table, and had left the room, Walter's tone and manner underwent an entire and sudden change.

"You must not think, sir," she said, while a proud smile of scorn and bitterness curled her lips, "that I have this morning tasted of the waters of oblivion. To save you, rather than myself, the shame of being exposed in the presence of my servant, I assumed that friendly and familiar air which appears to have deceived you."

"What! then you have not forgiven me?" exclaimed Montague, profoundly surprised.

"Forgive you!" repeated the lady, almost indignantly: "do you suppose that I think so little of myself, or would give you such scope to think so little of me, as to pass by in silence a crime which was atrocious in a hundred ways? I loved you sincerely—tenderly—oh! God only knows how I loved you; and you would have taken advantage of my sincere and heartfelt affection. The dream in which I had indulged is now dispelled; the vision is over; the illusion is dissipated. Never would I accompany to the altar a man whom I could not esteem; and I can no longer esteem you. Then again, I offered you the hospitality of my abode; and that sacred rite you would have infamously violated. I cannot, therefore, even retain you as a friend. In another sense, too, your conduct was odious. You saved my life—and for that I shall ever remember you with gratitude: but you nevertheless sought to avail yourself of that service as a means of robbing me of my honour. Oh! all this was abominable—detestable on your part; and what is the result? My love can never avail you now; I will crush it—extinguish it in my bosom first. My friendship cannot be awarded; my gratitude alone remains. That shall accompany you; for we must now separate—and for ever."

"Separate—and forever!" ejaculated Montague, who had listened with deep interest and various conflicting emotions to this strange address: "no—you cannot mean it? you will not be thus relentless?"

"Mr. Montague," returned the lady, with great apparent coolness—though in reality she was inflicting excruciating tortures upon her own heart; "no power on earth can alter my resolves. We shall part—here—now—and for ever and may happiness and prosperity attend you."

"But Mr. Stephens?" cried Montague: "what can you say to him? what will he think?"

"He shall never know the truth from *me*," answered Walter solemnly.

"This is absurd!" ejaculated Montague, in despair at the imminent ruin of all his hopes. "Will not my humblest apology—my sheerest excuses—my future conduct,—will nothing atone for one false step, committed under the influence of generous wines and of a passion which obtained a complete mastery over me? Will nothing move your forgiveness?"

"Nothing," answered Walter, with unvaried coolness and determination. "Were I a young girl of sixteen or seventeen, it might be different: *then* I might be deceived by your sophistry. *Now* it is impossible! I am five and twenty years old; and circumstances," she added, glancing over her male attire, "have also tended to augment my experience in the sinuosities of human designs and the phases of the human heart."

"Yes—you are twenty-five, it is true," cried Montague; "but that age has not robbed your charms of any of the grace and freshness of youth. Oh! then let your mind be cautious how it adopts the severe notions of riper years!"

"I thank you for the compliment which you pay me," said Walter, satirically; "and I can assure you that it does not prove a welcome preface to the argument which you would found upon it. Old or young—experienced or ignorant in the ways of the world—a woman were a fool to marry where she could not entertain respect for her husband. I may be wrong: but this is my conviction;—and upon it will I act."

"This is but an excuse to break with me," said Montague: "you no longer love me."

"No—not as I did twelve hours ago."

"You never loved me! It is impossible to divest oneself of that passion so suddenly as this."

"Love in my mind is a species of worship or adoration, and can be damaged by the evil suspicions that may suddenly be thrown upon its object."

"No—that is not love," exclaimed Montague, passionately: "true love will make a woman follow her lover or her husband through all the most hideous paths of crime—even to the scaffold."

"The woman who truly loves, will follow her husband as a duty, but not her lover to countenance him in his crimes. We are not, however, going to argue this point:—for my part, I am not acting according to the prescribed notions of romances or a false sentimentality, but strictly in accordance with my own idea of what is suitable to my happiness and proper to my condition. I repeat, I am not the heroine of a novel in her teens—I am a woman of a certain age, and can reflect calmly in order to act decidedly."

Montague made no reply, but walked towards the window. Strange and conflicting sentiments were agitating in his brain.

'Twas thus he reasoned within himself.

"If I use threats and menaces, I shall merely open her eyes to the real objects which Stephens has in view; and she will shrink from the fearful dangers she is about to encounter. Whether she changes her mind or not with regard to me, and whether I proceed farther in the business or not, the secret is in my hands; and Stephens will pay me handsomely to keep it. Perhaps I had even better stop short where I am: I am still in a position to demand hush-money, and avoid the extreme peril which must accrue to all who appear prominently in the affair on the 26th of the month."

The selfish mind of George Montague thus revolved the various phases of his present position: and in a few moments he was determined how to act.

Turning towards Walter Sydney, he exclaimed, "You are decided not to forgive me?"

"I have made known to you my resolution—that we should now part, for ever."

"How can we part for ever, when your friend and benefactor, Mr. Stephens, requires my services?"

"Mr. Stephens informed me '*that a third person was necessary to the complete success of his designs, and that he had fixed upon you*.' Consequently, another friend may fill the place which he intended you to occupy."

"You seem to have well weighed the results of your resolution to see me no more," said Montague bitterly.

"There is time for thought throughout the live-long night, when sleep is banished from the pillow," returned the lady proudly.

"I can scarcely comprehend your conduct," said Montague, after another pause. "You do not choose that your servants should know what occurred last night: is it your intention to acquaint Mr. Stephens with the real truth?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself. To speak candidly, I do *not* wish to come to any explanation with Mr. Stephens upon the subject. He will blame me for having concealed from him the attachment which has subsisted between us; and he will imagine that some levity on my part must have encouraged you to violate the sanctity of my chamber. If you, sir, are a man of honour," added the lady emphatically,—"and if you have a spark of feeling and generosity left, you will take measures with Mr. Stephens to spare me that last mortification."

"I will do as you require," returned Montague, well pleased with this arrangement. "This very day will I communicate to Mr. Stephens my desire to withdraw from any further interference in his affairs; and I will allege the pressing nature of my own concerns as an excuse."

"Act as you will," said the lady; "but let there remain behind no motive which can lead you to repeat your visits to this house. You comprehend me?"

"Perfectly," replied Montague. "But once more let me implore you—"

"Enough—enough!" exclaimed Walter. "You know not the firmness of the female mind: perhaps I have this morning taught you a lesson in that respect. We must now part, Mr. Montague; and believe me—believe me, that, although no power on earth can alter the resolution to which I came during the long and painful vigil of the past night, I still wish you well;—and, remember, my gratitude accompanies you!"

Walter hesitated for a moment, as if another observation were trembling upon her tongue: then stifling her emotions with a powerful effort, she waved her hand to the delinquent, and abruptly left the room.

"Is this a loftiness of mind of which not even the greatest of men often afford example? or is it the miserable caprice of a vacillating woman?" said Montague to himself, as he prepared to take his departure from the villa in which he had spent some happy hours. "I must candidly admit that this time I am at fault. All appears to be lost in this quarter—and that, too, through my own confounded folly. But Stephens's secret still remains to me; and that secret shall be as good as an annuity for years to come. Let me see—I must have money now to insure my silence, upon breaking off all further connexion with the business. Then I must keep an eye upon him; and should he succeed on the 26th of this month—and he *must* succeed, if this punctilious lady does not see through his designs in the meantime—then can I step forward and demand another sum under a threat of exposing the entire scheme. And then, too," he added, while his countenance wore an expression of mingled revenge and triumph,—"then, too, can I appear before this vain, this scrupulous, this haughty woman, and with one word send her on her knees before me! Then will she stoop her proud brow, and her prayers and intercessions upon that occasion shall be expressed as humbly as her reproaches and her taunts were tyrannically levelled at me to-day! Yes—I will keep my eye upon Walter Sydney and her benefactor Stephens," he said, with an ironical chuckle: "they may obtain their princely fortune, but a due share shall find its way into my pocket!"

These or similar reflections continued to occupy the mind of George Montague, after he had left the villa, and while he was on his way to the nearest point where he could obtain a conveyance to take him into the City.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD HOUSE IN SMITHFIELD AGAIN.

THE visitor to the Polytechnic Institution or the Adelaide Gallery, has doubtless seen the exhibition of the microscope. A drop of the purest water, magnified by that instrument some thousands of times, appears filled with horrible reptiles and monsters of revolting forms.

Such is London.

Fair and attractive as the mighty metropolis may appear to the superficial observer, it swarms with disgusting, loathsome, and venomous objects, wearing human shapes.

Oh! London is a city of strange contrasts!

The bustle of business, and the smile of pleasure,—the peaceful citizen, and the gay soldier,—the splendid shop, and the itinerant pastry-stall,—the gorgeous equipage, and the humble market-cart,—the palaces of nobles, and the hovels of the poor,—the psalm from the chapel, and the shout of laughter from the tavern,—the dandies lounging in the west-end streets, and the paupers cleansing away the mud,—the funeral procession, and the bridal cavalcade,—the wealthy and high-born lady whose reputation is above all cavil, and the lost girl whose shame is below all notice,—the adventurer who defends his honour with a duel, and the poor tradesman whom unavoidable bankruptcy has branded as a rogue,—the elegantly-clad banker whose insolvency must soon transpire, and the ragged old miser whose wealth is not suspected,—the monuments of glory, and the hospitals of the poor,—the temples where men adore a God with affectation, and the shrines at which they lose their gold to a deity whom they adore without affectation,—in a word, grandeur and squalor, wealth and misery, virtue and vice,—honesty which has never been tried, and crime which yielded to the force of irresistible circumstances,—all the features, all the characteristics, all the morals, of a great city, must occupy the attention of him who surveys London with microscopic eye.

And what a splendid subject for the contemplation of the moralist is a mighty city which, at every succeeding hour, presents a new phase of interest to the view;—in the morning, when only the industrious and the thrifty are abroad, and while the wealthy and the great are sleeping off the night's pleasure and dissipation:—at noon, when the streets are swarming with life, as if some secret source without the walls poured at that hour myriads of animated streams into the countless avenues and thoroughfares;—in the evening, when the men of pleasure again venture forth, and music, and dancing, and revelry prevail around;—and at night, when every lazar-house vomits forth its filth, every den lets loose its horrors, and every foul court and alley echoes to the footsteps of crime!

It was about two o'clock in the morning, (three hours after the burglarious attempt upon the villa,) that a man, drenched by the rain which continued to pour in torrents, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and his hands thrust in his pockets to protect them against the cold, crept cautiously down West Street, from Smithfield, dodged past the policeman, and entered the old house which we have described at the opening of our narrative.

Having closed and carefully bolted the front door, he hastily ascended to the room on the first floor where Walter Sydney had seen him and his companion conceal their plunder four years and four months previously.

This man—so wet, so cold, and so miserable—was Bill Bolter, the murderer.

Having groped about for a few moments, he found a match, struck it, and obtained a light. One of the secret recesses furnished a candle; and the flickering glare fell upon the haggard, unshaven, and dirty countenance of the ruffian.

Scarcely had he lighted the candle, when a peculiar whistle was heard in the street, just under the window. The features of Bolter became suddenly animated with joy; and, as he hastily descended the stairs, he muttered to himself, "Well, at all events here's one on 'em."

The individual to whom he opened the door was Dick Flairer—in no better plight, mentally and bodily, than himself.

"Is there any bingo, Bill?" demanded Dick, the moment he set foot in the up-stairs room.

"Not a drain," answered Bolter, after a close inspection of the cupboard in the wall between the windows; "and not a morsel of grub neither."

"Blow the grub," said Dick. "I ain't in no humour for eating; but I could drink a gallon. I've been thinking as I come along, and after the first shock was over, wot cursed fools you and me was to be humbugged in this here affair. Either that young feller was the brother of the one which we threw down the trap——"

"No: I could swear that he is the same," interrupted Bill.

"Well—then he must have made his escape—and that's all," added Dick Flairer.

"That must be it," observed Bolter, after a long pause. "But it was so sudden upon us—and then without no time to think—and all that——"

"You may say what you like, Bill—but I shall never forgive myself. I was the first to bolt; and I was a coward. How shall I ever be able to look the Cracksman in the face again, or go to the parlour of the boozing-ken?"

"It's no use complaining like this, Dick. You was used to be the bold 'un—and now it seems as if it was me that must say 'Cheer up.' The fact is, someot must be done without delay. I told you and Tom what had happened at my crib; and so, lay up for some time I must. Come, now—Dick, you won't desert a pal in trouble?"

"There's my hand, Bill. On'y say wot you want done, and I'm your man."

"In the first place, do you think it's safe for me to stay here? Won't that young feller give the alarm, and say as how his house was attempted by the same cracksmen that wanted to make a stiff 'un of him between four and five years ago at this old crib; and then won't the blue-bottles come and search the place from chimley-pot down to foundation-stone?"

"Let 'em search it," ejaculated Flairer: "they'll on'y do it once; and who cares for that? You can lie as snug down stairs for a week or so as if you was a thousand miles off. Besides, who'd think for a instant that you'd hide yourself in the wery spot that the young feller could point out as one of our haunts? Mark me, Bill—if yer goes up to Rat's Castle in Saint Giles's, you would find too many tongues among them cursed Irishers to ask '*Who is he?*' and '*What is he?*' If you goes over to the Mint, you'll be sure to be twigged by a lot o' them low buzgloaks and broken-down magsmen as swarms there; and they'll nose upon you for a penny. Whitechapel back-slums isn't safe; for the broom-gals, the blacks, and the ballad singers which occupies all that district, is always a quarrelling; and the blue-bottles is constantly poking their nose in every crib in consekvence. Here you are snug; and I can bring you your grub and tell you the news of an evenin' arter dark."

"But to be penned up in that infernal hole for a fortnit or three weeks, till the storm's blowed over, is horrible to think on," said Bill.

"And scragging[50] more horrible still," said Dick, significantly.

Bill Bolter shuddered; and a convulsive motion agitated his neck, as if he already felt the cord around it. His countenance became ashy pale; and, as he glanced fearfully around, he exclaimed, "Yes, you're right, Dick: I'll take myself to the hiding-crib, and you can give me the office[51] at any moment, if things goes wrong. To-morrow you must try and find out whether there's much of a row about the affair in the Court."

The ruffian never expressed the least anxiety relative to the fate of his children.

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Dick: "to-day you mean—for it can't be far off from three o'clock. And now talking about grub is all very easy; but getting it is quite another thing. Neither you nor me hasn't got a scurrick; and where to get a penny loaf on tick I don't know."

"By hell, I shall starve, Dick!" cried the murderer, casting a glance of alarm and horror upon his companion.

"Whatever I get shall be for you first, Bill; and to get anythink at all I must be wide awake. The grass musn't grow under my feet."

At that moment a whistle, similar to the sound by which Dick Flairer had notified his approach to Bill Bolter, emanated from the street and fell upon the ears of those worthies.

Dick hastened to respond to this summons, and in a short time introduced the Cracksman.

The moment this individual entered the room, he demanded if there were anything to eat or to drink upon the premises. He of course received a melancholy negative: but, instead of being disheartened, his countenance appeared to wear a smile of pleasure.

"Now, you see, I never desert a friend in distress," he exclaimed; and, with these words, he produced from his pocket a quantity of cold victuals and a large flask of brandy.

Without waiting to ask questions or give explanations, the three thieves fell tooth and nail upon the provender.

"I knowed you'd come to this here crib, because Bill don't dare go to the boozing-ken till the affair of the Court's blowed over," said the Cracksman, when his meal was terminated; "and so I thought I'd jine you. Arter I left the place out by Clapton——"

"And how the devil did you get away?" demanded Dick.

"Just the same as you did. It would have sarved you right if I'd never spoke to you agin, and blowed you at the ken into the bargain; but I thought to myself, thinks I, 'It must be someot very strange that made the Flairer and the Bolter cut their lucky and leave their pal in the lurch; so let's hear wot they has to say for themselves fust.' Then, as I come along, I found a purse in a gentleman's pocket just opposite Bethnal Green New Church; and that put me into good humour. So I looked in at the ken, got the grub and the bingo, and come on here."

"You're a reg'lar trump, Tom!" ejaculated Dick Flairer; "and I'll stick to you like bricks from this moment till I die. The fact is—me and Bill has told you about that young feller which we throwed down the trap some four or five year back."

"Yes—I remember."

"Well—we seed him to-night."

"To-night! What—at the crib up there?"

"The swell that you got a grip on in the dark, was the very self-same one."

"Then he must have got clear off—that's all!" cried the Cracksman. "It was no ghost—but rale plump flesh and hot blood, I'll swear."

"So we both think now, to be sure," said Dick: "but you don't bear any ill-will, Tom?"

"Not a atom. Here's fifteen couters[52] which was in the purse of the swell which I met at Bethnal-Green; and half that's yourn. But, about Bill there—wot's he a-going to do?"

Dick pointed with his finger downwards: Tom comprehended the signal, and nodded approvingly.

The brandy produced a cheering effect upon the three ruffians: and pipes and tobacco augmented their joviality. Their discourse gradually became coarsely humorous; and their mirth boisterous. At length Bill Bolter, who required every possible means of artificial stimulant and excitement to sustain his spirits in the fearful predicament in which he was placed, called upon the Cracksman for a song.

Tom was famous amongst his companions for his vocal qualifications; and he was not a little proud of the reputation he had acquired in the parlours of the various "boozing-kens" and "patter-cribs"[53] which he was in the habit of frequenting. He was not,

therefore, backward in complying with his friend's request; and, in a somewhat subdued tone, (for fear of making *too much noise*—a complaint not often heard in Chick Lane), he sang the following lines:—

THE THIEVES' ALPHABET.

A was an Area-sneak leary and sly;
B was a Buzgloak, with fingers so fly;
C was a Cracksman, that forked all the plate;
D was a Dubsman, who kept the jug-gate.
For we are rollicking chaps,
All smoking, singing, boozing;
We care not for the traps,
But pass the night carousing!

E was an Efter,[54] that went to the play;
F was a Fogle he knapped on his way;
G was a Gag, which he told to the beak;
H was a Hum-box,[55] where parish-prigs speak.
CHORUS.

I was an Ikey,[56] with swag all encumbered;
J was a Jug, in whose cell he was lumbered;
K was a Kye-bosh,[57] that paid for his treat;
L was a Leaf[58] that fell under his feet.
CHORUS.

M was a Magsman, frequenting Pall-Mall;
N was a Nose that turned chirp on his pal;
O was an Onion,[59] possessed by a swell;
P was a Pannie, done niblike and well.
CHORUS.

Q was a Queer-screen, that served as a blind;[60]
R was a Reader,[61] with flimsies well lined;
S was a Smasher, so nutty and spry;
T was a Ticker,[62] just faked from a cly.
CHORUS.

U was an Up-tucker,[63] fly with the cord;
V was a Varnisher,[64] dressed like a lord;
Y was a Yoxter[65] that eat caper sauce:[66]
Z was a Zift[67] who was flashed on the horse.[68]
For we are rollicking chaps
All smoking, singing, boozing:
We care not for the traps,
But pass the night carousing.[69]

In this manner did the three thieves pass the first hours of morning at the old house in Chick Lane.

At length the heavy and sonorous voice of Saint Paul's proclaimed six o'clock. It still wanted an hour to sun-rise; but they now thought it prudent to separate.

Tom the Cracksman and Dick Flairer arranged together a "little piece of business" for the ensuing night, which they hoped would prove more fortunate than their attempt on the villa at Upper Clapton; but Dick faithfully promised Bill Bolter to return to him in the evening before he set out on the new expedition.

Matters being thus agreed upon, the moment for the murderer's concealment arrived. We have before stated that the entire grate in the room which the villains frequented, could be removed; and that, when taken out of its setting, it revealed an aperture of considerable dimensions. At the bottom of this square recess was a trap-door, communicating with a narrow and spiral staircase, that led into a vault adjoining and upon the same level with the very cellar from which Walter Sydney had so miraculously escaped.

The possibility of such an architectural arrangement being fully carried out, with a view to provide a perfect means of concealment, will be apparent to our readers, when we state that the side of the house farthest from the Fleet Ditch was constructed with a double brick wall, and that the spiral staircase consequently stood between those two partitions. The mode in which the huge chimneys were built, also tended to ensure the complete safety of that strange hiding-place, and to avert any suspicion that might for a moment be entertained of the existence of such a retreat in that old house.

Even in case the secret of the moveable grate should be discovered, the eye of the most acute thief-taker would scarcely detect the trap-door at the bottom of the recess, so admirably was it made to correspond with the brick-work that formed its frame.

The vault with which the spiral staircase corresponded, was about fourteen feet long by two-and-a-half wide. An iron grating of eight inches square, overlooking the Fleet Ditch, was all the means provided to supply that living tomb with fresh—we cannot say pure—air. If the atmosphere of the hiding-place were thus neither wholesome nor pleasant, it did not at least menace existence; and a residence in that vault for even weeks and weeks together was deemed preferable to the less "cribbed, cabined, and confined" sojourn of Newgate.

But connected with the security of this vault was one fearful condition. The individual who sought its dark solitude, could not emancipate himself at will. He was entirely at the mercy of those confederates who were entrusted with his secret. Should anything happen to these men,—should they be suddenly overtaken by the hand of death, then starvation must be the portion of the inmate of that horrible vault: and should they fall into the hands of justice, then the only service they could render their companion in the living tomb, would be to reveal the secret of his hiding-place.

Up to the time of which we are writing, since the formation of that strange lurking-hole in the days of the famous Jonathan Wild, three or four persons had alone availed themselves of the vault as a means of personal concealment. In the first place, the secret existed but with a very few and secondly, it was only in cases where life and death were concerned that a refuge was sought in so fearful an

abode.

When the grate was removed and the trap-door was opened, the entire frame of Bill Bolter became suddenly convulsed with horror. He dreaded to be left to the mercy of his own reflections!

"It's infernally damp," said Bill, his teeth chattering as much with fear as with the cold.

Fearful, however, of exciting the disgust and contempt of his companions at what might be termed his pusillanimous conduct, he mustered up all his courage, shook hands with the Cracksman and Flairer, and then insinuated his person through the aperture.

"You may as well take the pipes and baccy along with you, old feller," returned Dick.

"And here's a thimble-full of brandy left in the flask," added the Cracksman.

"This evenin' I'll bring you a jolly wack of the bingo," said Flairer.

Provided with the little comforts just specified, the murderer descended the spiral staircase into the vault.

The trap-door closed above his head; and the grate was replaced with more than usual care and caution.

The Cracksman and Dick Flairer then took their departure from the old house, in the foundation of which a fellow-creature was thus strangely entombed alive!

CHAPTER XXIV.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

LET us now return to Mr. Whittingham, whom we left in serious and unfeigned tribulation at the moment when his young master was taken into custody upon the charge of passing a forged note.

The Bow Street runner whom the officer had left behind to search the house, first possessed himself of the two letters which were lying upon the table in Markham's library, and which were addressed respectively to Mrs. Arlington and Mr. Monroe. The functionary then commenced a strict investigation of the entire premises; and, at the end, appeared marvellously surprised that he had not found a complete apparatus for printing forged notes, together with a quantity of the false articles themselves. This search, nevertheless, occupied three hours; and, when it was over, he took his departure, quite sulky because he had nothing to offer as evidence save the two sealed letters, which might be valuable in that point of view, or might not.

The moment this unwelcome guest had quitted the house, the butler, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour—for it was now dusk—ordered the market cart to be got ready; and, with the least possible delay, he proceeded into town.

Upon his arrival in Bow Street, he found the police-office closed: but upon enquiry he learnt that the investigation of Richard Markham's case had been postponed until the following morning at eleven o'clock, the prisoner having declared that he could produce a witness who would satisfactorily show his (the prisoner's) entire innocence in the transaction. In the meantime, he had been removed to Clerkenwell Prison.

Without asking another question, Whittingham mounted his cart once more, and drove away at a rattling pace to Clerkenwell Prison. There he began to thunder like a madman at the knocker of the governor's private entrance, and could hardly believe his senses when a servant-girl informed him that it was past the hours to see the prisoners. Whittingham would have remonstrated; but the girl slammed the door in his face. He accordingly had no alternative save to drive direct home again.

The very next morning at nine o'clock Mr. Whittingham entered the *Servants' Arms* Tavern; and with but little of his usual circumlocution and verbosity, enquired the address of Mr. Mac Chizzle, the lawyer, who had been one of the party at that house the evening but one before.

"Here is his card," said the landlord. "He uses my house reglar, and is a out-and-out practitioner."

Whittingham did not wait to hear any further eulogium upon the attorney. It had struck him that his young master might require a "professional adviser:" and having the supreme felicity of being totally unacquainted with the entire fraternity, he had felt himself somewhat puzzled how to supply the *desideratum*. In this dilemma, he had suddenly bethought himself of Mac Chizzle; and, without waiting to ponder upon the propriety of the step he was taking, he rushed off in the manner described to procure that individual's address.

"Well, what do you want?" cried the lawyer, who was astonished at the unceremonious manner in which Whittingham suddenly rushed into his office: "what do you want?"

"Law," was the laconic answer.

"Well, you can have plenty of that here," said Mr. Mac Chizzle. "But—I think you are the gentleman with whom I had the pleasure of passing a pleasant evening at the *Servants' Arms*, a day or two ago."

"The indentical same," returned Whittingham, flinging his hat upon the floor and himself into a chair.

"Take time to breathe, sir," said the lawyer. "If you're come for advice you couldn't have selected a better shop; but I must tell you before-hand that mine is quite a ready money business."

"Very good, sir. I'll tell you my story first and foremost; and you can then explain the most legible means of preceeding. I want law and justice."

"*Law* you can have in welcome; but whether you will obtain *justice* is another consideration."

"I'm bewildered in a labyrinth of mazes, sir," said the butler. "I always opiniated that law and justice was the same thing."

"Quite the reverse, I can assure you. Law is a human invention: justice is a divine inspiration. What is law to-day, is not law to-morrow; and yet everything is still denominated *justice*. A creditor asks for justice when he appeals to a tribunal against his debtor; and how is that justice awarded? Why—if a man can't pay five pounds, the law immediately makes his debt ten pounds; and if he can't live out of doors, the law immediately shuts him up in prison by way of helping him out of his difficulties. That is law, sir; but it is not justice."

"Right, sir—very right."

"*Law*, you see, sir," continued Mac Chizzle, who was particularly fond of hearing himself talk,—"*law* is omnipotent, and beats *justice* to such an extreme, that justice would be justified in bringing an action of assault and battery against law. Law even makes religion, sir; and gives the attributes of the Deity; for no one dares assert that God possesses a quality or a characteristic, unless in conformity with the law. And as these laws are always changing, so of course does the nature of the deity, as established by the law, vary too; so that men may be said to go to heaven or to another place by the turnpike-roads laid down by the law."

"I like your reasonable powers amazingly," said the butler, somewhat impatiently; "and I will now proceed to unfold the momentary object of my visit."

"Give yourself breathing time, my dear sir. As I was observing, *Law* is more powerful than even *Justice* and *Religion*; and I could

now show that it exercises the same predominating influence over *Morality* also. For instance, Law, and not Conscience, defines virtues and vices. If I murder you, I commit a crime; but the executioner who puts me to death for the action, does *not* commit a crime. Neither does the soldier who kills his fellow-creature in battle. Thus, murder is only a crime when it is not legalised by human statutes,—or, in plain terms, when it is not according to law."

"I comprehend, sir," said Whittingham; and, seeing that Mr. Mac Chizzle now paused at length, he narrated the particulars of his master's arrest upon an accusation of passing a forged note for five hundred pounds.

"This is an ugly case, Mr. Whittingham."

"You must go down to him at Bow-Street: his case comes on at eleven o'clock."

"Well, there is plenty of time: it is only half-past nine o'clock. I think we had better instruct counsel."

"Construct counsel!" ejaculated Whittingham; "I want you to get him liberated at once."

"Ah! I dare say you do," said the lawyer, coolly. "That is often more easily said than done. From what you have told me I should not wonder if your master was committed for trial."

"But he is innocent, sir—he is innocent—as the young lamb in the meadows which is unborn!" cried Whittingham. "Master Richard would no more pass a fictious note than I should endeavour to pass a race-horse if I was mounted on a donkey."

Mr. Mac Chizzle smiled, and summoned his clerk by the euphonious name of "Simcox." Mr. Simcox was somewhat slow in making his appearance; and when he did, a very comical one it was—for his hair was red, his eyes were green, his countenance was studded with freckles, and his eye-lashes were white.

"Simcox," said Mr. Mac Chizzle, "I am going out for a few hours. If the gentleman calls about the thousand pound bill, tell him that I can get it discounted for him, for fifty pounds in money and eight hundred in wine—which allows a hundred and fifty for discount and *my* commission. If the lady calls whose husband has run away from her, tell her that I've sent to Paris to make enquiries after him, and that if she'll leave another fifty pounds, I'll send to Vienna. By-the-bye, that bothering fellow Smith is certain to call: tell him I'm gone into the country, and shall be away for a fortnight. If Jenkins calls, tell him I shall be home at five and he must wait, as I want to see him."

"Very well, sir," said Simcox. "And if the gentleman calls about the loan."

"Why, that I shall see a party about it this evening. The first party declines; but I have another party in view."

Somehow or another, men of business have always got a particular "party" in view to accomplish a particular purpose, and they are always being disappointed by their "parties"—- whom, by-the-bye, they never condescended to name. To be "deceived by a party;" or "having a party to meet;" or "being engaged so long with a particular party," are excuses which will last as long as business itself shall exist, and will continue to be received as apologies as long as any apologies are received at all. They will wear out every other lie.

Whittingham was too much occupied by the affairs of his master, to pay any attention to the orders which the solicitor gave his clerk; and he was considerably relieved when he found himself by the side of his professional adviser, rolling along the streets in a cabriolet.

At length the lawyer and the faithful domestic were set down at the Police-Office in Bow Street; and in a few moments they were admitted, in the presence of a policeman, to an interview with Markham in one of the cells attached to the establishment.

Richard's countenance was pale and care-worn: his hair was dishevelled; and his attire seemed put on slovenly. But these circumstances scarcely attracted the eyes of Whittingham:—a more appalling and monstrous spectacle engrossed all the attention of that faithful old dependant; and this was the manacle which confined his reverend master's hands together.

Whittingham wept.

"Oh! Master Richard," he exclaimed in a voice broken by sobs, "what an unforeseen and perfidious adventure is this! You surely never could—no, I know you didn't!"

"Do not grieve yourself, my faithful friend," said Richard, deeply affected: "my innocence will soon be proved. I have sent for Mr. Chichester, who will be here presently: and he can shew in one moment how I became possessed of the two notes."

"Two notes!" cried Whittingham.

"Yes—I had another of fifty pounds' value in my purse, which I also received from Chichester, and which has turned out to be a spurious one. Doubtless he has been deceived himself——"

"Oh! that ere Winchester, or Kidderminster—or whatever his name may be," interrupted the butler, a strange misgiving oppressing his mind: "I'm afeard he won't do the thing that's right. But here is a profound adwiser, Master Richard, that I've brought with me; and he'll see law done, he says—and I believe him too."

Markham and Mac Chizzle then entered into conversation together: but scarcely had the unfortunate young man commenced his account of the peculiar circumstances in which he was involved, when the jailor entered to conduct him into the presence of the magistrate.

Markham was placed in the felon's dock; and Mr. Mac Chizzle intimated to the sitting magistrate, in a simpering tone, that he appeared for the prisoner.

Now we must inform our readers that Mac Chizzle was one of those low pettifoggers, who, without being absolutely the black sheep of the profession, act upon the principle "that all are fish that come to their net," and practise indiscriminately in the civil and the criminal courts—conduct a man's insolvency, or defend him before the magistrate—discount bills and issue no end of writs—act for loan societies and tally shops—in a word, undertake anything that happens to fall in their way, so long as it brings grist to the mill.

Mr. Mac Chizzle was not, therefore, what is termed "a respectable solicitor;" and the magistrate's countenance assumed an appearance of austerity—for he had previously been possessed in Markham's favour—when that individual announced that he appeared for the prisoner. Thus poor Whittingham, in his anxiety to do his beloved master a great deal of good, actually prejudiced his

case materially at its outset.

Though unhappy and care-worn, Richard was not downcast. Conscious innocence supported him. Accordingly when he beheld Mr. Chichester enter the witness-box, he bowed to him in a friendly and even grateful manner; but, to his ineffable surprise, that very fashionable gentleman affected not to notice the salutation.

It is not necessary to enter into details. The nature of the evidence against Markham was that he had called at his guardian's banker's the day but one previously, to receive a sum of money; that he requested the cashier to change a five hundred pound Bank of England note; that, although an unusual proceeding, the demand was complied with; that the prisoner wrote his name at the back of the note, and that in the course of the ensuing morning it was discovered that the said note was a forgery. The prisoner was arrested; and upon his person was found a second note, of fifty pounds' value, which was also a forgery. Two letters were also produced—one to Mrs. Arlington, and another to Mr. Monroe, which not only proved that the prisoner had intended to leave the country with strange abruptness, but the contents of which actually appeared to point at the crime now alleged against him, as the motive of his flight.

Markham was certainly astounded when he heard the stress laid upon those letters by the solicitor for the prosecution, and the manner in which their real meaning was made to tell against him.

The Magistrate called upon him for his defence; and Markham, forgetful that Mac Chizzle was there to represent him, addressed himself in an earnest tone to Mr. Chichester, exclaiming, "You can now set me right in the eyes of the magistrate, and in the opinion of even the prosecuting counsel, who seems so anxious to distort every circumstance to my disadvantage."

"I really am not aware," said Mr. Chichester, caressing his chin in a very *nonchalant* manner, "that I can throw any light upon this subject."

"All I require is the truth," ejaculated Richard, surprised at the tone and manner of his late friend. "Did you not give me that note for five hundred pounds to change for you? and did I not receive the second note from you in exchange for fifty sovereigns?"

Mr. Chichester replied in an indignant negative.

The magistrate shook his head: the prosecuting solicitor took snuff significantly;—Mac Chizzle made a memorandum;—and Whittingham murmured, "Ah! that mitigated villain Axminster."

"What do I hear!" exclaimed Richard: "Mr. Chichester your memory must fail you sadly. I suppose you recollect the occasion upon which Mr. Talbot gave you the five hundred pound note?"

"Mr. Talbot never gave me any note at all," answered Chichester, in a measured and determined manner.

"It is false—false as hell!" cried Markham, more enraged than alarmed; and he forthwith detailed to the magistrate the manner in which he had been induced to change the one note, and had become possessed of the other.

"This is a very lame story, indeed," said the magistrate; "and you must try and see if you can get a jury to believe it. You stand committed."

Before Richard could make any reply, he was lugged out of the dock by the jailor; the next case was called on; and he was hurried back to his cell, whither Mac Chizzle and the butler were permitted to follow him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ENCHANTRESS.

"Oh! how can I prove my innocence now?" exclaimed Richard, wringing his hands, and walking hastily up and down the cell: "how shall I convince the world that a fearful combination of circumstances has so entangled me in this net, that never was man so wronged before? how can I communicate my dread position to Monroe? how ever again look society in the face? how live after this exposure—this disgrace?"

"Master Richard, Master Richard," cried the poor old butler, "don't take on so—don't now! Your innocence must conspire on the day of trial, and the jury will do you justice. Now, don't take on so, Master Richard—pray don't!"

As the faithful domestic uttered these words, the tears chased each other so rapidly down his cheeks that he seemed to need consolation quite as much as his master.

"Oh! that villain Chichester—the wretch—the cheat!" continued Richard; "and no doubt his vulgar companion Talbot is as bad. And the baronet—perhaps he also——"

Markham stopped short, and seated himself upon the bench. He suddenly became very faint and turned ashy pale. Whittingham hastened to loosen his shirt-collar, and the policeman present humanely procured a glass of water.

In a few minutes he recovered: and he then endeavoured to contemplate with calmness the full extent of the perils which environed him. His opinion of Chichester and Talbot was already formed: but the baronet—could he have been a party to their scheme of villany? After a moment's reflection, he answered the question to himself in an affirmative.

He had, then, fallen into a nest of adventurers and swindlers. But Diana—oh! no, she could not have been cognizant of the treacherous designs practised against him: she was doubtless made use of as an instrument to further the plans of the conspirators!

Such were his convictions. Should he, then, give her due warning in time, and afford her an opportunity of abandoning, ere it might be too late, an individual who would doubtless involve her, in the long run, in infamy and peril?

To pen a hasty note to Mrs. Arlington was now a duty which he conceived entailed upon him, and which he immediately performed. He then wrote a letter to Mr. Monroe, detailing the particulars of his unfortunate position, and beseeching him not to be prejudiced against him by the report which he might read in the newspapers the following day.

"Whittingham, my old friend," said Markham, when he had disposed of these matters; "we must now separate for the present. This letter for Mr. Monroe you will forward by post: the other, to Mrs. Arlington, you will take yourself to Bond Street, and deliver into her own hand." Then, addressing himself to Mac Chizzle, he observed, "I thank you, sir, for your attendance here to-day. Whittingham will give you the address of my guardian, Mr. Monroe; and that gentleman will consult with you upon the proper course to be pursued. He will also answer any pecuniary demands you may have occasion to make upon him."

Richard had preserved an unnatural degree of calmness as he uttered these words; and Whittingham was himself astonished at the coolness with which his young master delivered his instructions. The old butler wept bitterly when he took leave of "Master Richard;" and it cost the young man himself no inconsiderable effort to restrain his own tears.

"What is raly your inferential opinion in this matter?" demanded the butler of the lawyer, as they issued from the door of the police-office together.

"Why, that it was a capital scheme to raise the wind, and a very great pity that it did not succeed to a far greater extent," cried the professional adviser.

"Well, if you put that opinion down in your bill and charge six-and-eightpence for it," said Whittingham, with a very serious countenance, "I shall certainly dispute the item, and computate it, when I audit the accounts."

"I am really at a loss to comprehend you," said the lawyer. "Of course there are no secrets between you and me: indeed, you had much better tell me the whole truth——"

"Truth!" ejaculated Whittingham: "of course I shall tell you the truth."

"Allow me to ask a question or two, then," resumed the lawyer. "I suppose that you were in the plant, and divided the swag?"

Mr. Whittingham stared at the professional man with the most unfeigned astonishment, which, indeed, was so great that it checked all reply.

"Well," proceeded the shrewd Mr. Mac Chizzle, "it wasn't a bad dodge either. And I suppose that this Monroe is a party to the whole concern?"

"Is it possible, Mr. Mac Chizzle," exclaimed the butler, "that ——"

"But the business is awkward—very awkward," added the solicitor, shaking his head. "It was however fortunate that nothing transpired to implicate you also. When one pal is at large, he can do much for another who is in lavender. It would have been worse if you had been lumbered too—far worse."

"Plant—pal—lumbered—lavender!" repeated Whittingham, with considerable emphasis on each word as he slowly uttered it. "I suppose you raly think my master is guilty of the crime computed to him?"

"Of course I do," replied Mac Chizzle: "I can see as far into a brick wall as any one."

"Well, it's of no use argufying the pint," said the butler, after a moment's pause. "Here is Mr. Monroe's address: perhaps when you have seen him, you will arrive at new inclusions."

Mr. Whittingham then took leave of the solicitor, and proceeded to Bond Street.

Within a few yards of the house in which Mrs. Arlington resided, the butler ran against an individual who, with his hat perched jauntily on his right ear, was lounging along.

"Holloa, you fellow!" ejaculated Mr. Thomas Sugget—for it was he—"what do you mean by coming bolt agin a gen'leman in that kind of way?"

"Oh! my dear sir," cried Whittingham, "is that you? I am raly perforated with delight to see you."

Mr. Suggett gave a good long stare at Mr. Whittingham, and then exclaimed "Oh! it is you—is it? Well, I must say that your legs are in a very unfinished condition."

"How, sir—how?" demanded the irritated butler.

"Why, they want a pair of fetters, to be sure," said Suggett; and breaking into a horse-laugh, he passed rapidly on.

Whittingham felt humiliated; and the knock that he gave at the door of Diana's lodgings was sneaking and subdued. In a few minutes, however, he was ushered into a back room on the first floor, where Mrs. Arlington received him.

"Here is a letter, ma'am, which I was to deliver only into your own indentical hand."

"Is it—is it from your master?" demanded the Enchantress.

"It is, ma'am."

"Where *is* Mr. Markham?" asked Diana, receiving the letter with a trembling hand.

"He is now in Bow-street Police-Office, ma'am: in the course of the day he will be in Newgate;"—and the old butler wiped away a tear.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Diana; "then it is really too true!"

She immediately tore open the letter, and ran her eye over the contents, which were as follow:—

"The villany of one of the individuals with whom you are constantly associating, and in whom it has been my misfortune to place unlimited confidence, will perhaps involve you in an embarrassment similar to the one in which I am now placed. I cannot, I do not for one moment imagine that you are in any way conversant with their vile schemes:—I can read your heart; I know that you would scorn such a confederacy. Your frankness, your candour are in your favour: your countenance, which is engraven upon my memory, and which I behold at this moment as if it were really before me, forbids all suspicions injurious to your honour. Take a timely warning, then: take warning from one who wishes you well: and dissolve the connexion ere it be too late.

"R. M."

"When shall you see your master again?" enquired Diana of the butler, after the perusal of this letter.

"To-morrow, ma'am—with the blessing of God."

"My compliments to him—my very best remembrances," said Mrs. Arlington; "and I feel deeply grateful for this communication."

Whittingham bowed, and rose to depart.

"And," added Diana, after a moment's pause, "if there be anything in which my humble services can be made available, pray do not hesitate to come to me. Indeed, I hope you will call—often—and let me know how this unfortunate business proceeds."

"Then you don't believe that Master Richard is capable of this obliquity, madam?" cried the butler.

"Oh! no—impossible!" said Diana emphatically.

"Thank 'ee, ma'am, thank 'ee," exclaimed Whittingham: "you have done my poor old heart good. God bless you, ma'am—God bless you!"

And with these words the faithful dependant took his departure, not a little delighted to think that there was at least one person in the world who believed in the innocence of "Master Richard." In fact, the kindness of Diana's manner and the sincerity with which she had expressed herself on that point, effectually wiped away from the mind of the butler the reminiscences of Mac Chizzle's derogatory suspicions, and Suggett's impertinence.

After a few minutes' profound reflection, Diana returned to the drawing-room, where Sir Rupert Harborough, Mr. Chichester, and Talbot were seated.

Her fine countenance wore an expression of melancholy seriousness; and there was a nervous movement of the under lip that denoted the existence of powerful emotions in her bosom.

"Well, Di.," exclaimed the baronet; "you seem annoyed."

"You will be surprised, gentlemen, when I inform you who has been here," she said, resuming her seat upon the sofa.

"Indeed!" cried Chichester, turning pale: "who could it be?"

"Not an officer, I hope?" exclaimed the baronet.

"The chimley-sweeps, perhaps," suggested Mr. Talbot.

"A person from Mr. Markham," said Diana, seriously. "By his appearance I should conceive him to be the faithful old servant of his family, of whom I have heard him speak."

"Whittingham, I'll be bound!" ejaculated Chichester. "And what did he want?"

"He brought me a letter from his master," returned Diana. "You may read it, if you please."

And she tossed it contemptuously towards Chichester.

"Read out," cried Talbot.

Mr. Chichester read the letter aloud, as he was requested.

"And what makes the young spark write to you in that d——d impudent and familiar style?" demanded the baronet, angrily.

"You cannot but admit that his letter is couched in a most friendly manner," said the lady, somewhat bitterly.

"Friendly be hanged!" cried the baronet. "I dare say you feel a most profound and sisterly sympathy for the young gaol-bird. After all, your profuse expenditure and extravagance helped to involve me in no end of pecuniary trouble; and I was compelled to have recourse to any means to obtain money. Somebody must suffer;—better Markham than any one of us."

"You do well, sir, to reproach me for being the cause of your embarrassments," answered Diana, her countenance becoming almost purple with indignation. "Have I not basely lent these rooms to your purposes, and acted as an attraction to the young men whom you have inveigled here to plunder at cards? I have never forgiven myself for the weakness which prompted me thus far to enter into your schemes. But when you informed me of your plans relative to the forged notes, I protested vehemently against so atrocious a measure. Indeed, had it not been for your solemn assurance that you had abandoned the idea—at all events so far as it concerned Markham—I would have placed him upon his guard—in spite of your threats, your menaces, your remonstrances!"

Diana had warmed as she proceeded; and by the time she reached the end of her reply to the baronet's villanous speech, she had worked herself up almost into a fury of rage and indignation. Her bosom heaved convulsively—her eyes dilated; and her lips expressed ineffable scorn.

"Perdition!" exclaimed the baronet: "the world is coming to a pretty pass when one's own mistress undertakes to give lessons in morality."

"A desperate necessity, sir," retorted Diana, "made me your mistress;—but I would sooner seek an asylum at the workhouse this moment, than become a partner in villany of this stamp."

"And, as far as I care," said the baronet, "you may go to the workhouse as soon as you choose."

With these words he rose and put on his hat.

Diana was about to answer this last brutal speech; but she determined not to provoke a discussion which only exposed her to the insolence of the man who was coward enough to reproach her with a frailty which had ministered to his pleasures. She bit her lips to

restrain the burst of emotions which struggled for vent; and at that moment her bearing was as haughty and her aspect as proud as the superb dignity of incensed Juno.

"Come, Chichester," said the baronet, after a pause of a few minutes; "I shall be off. Talbot—this is no longer a place for any one of us. Madam," he added, turning with mock ceremony to Diana, "I wish you a very good afternoon. This is the last time you will ever see me in these apartments."

"I wish it to be so," said Diana, still stifling her rage with difficulty.

"And I need scarcely observe," exclaimed the baronet, "that after all that has passed between us——"

"Oh! I comprehend you, sir," interrupted the Enchantress, scornfully: "you need not fear me—your secrets are safe in my possession."

The baronet bowed and strode out of the room followed by Chichester and Talbot.

The Enchantress was then alone.

She threw herself at full length upon the sofa, and remained for a long time buried in profound thought. A tear started into her large blue eye; but she hastily wiped it away with her snowy handkerchief. From time to time her lips were compressed with scorn; and then a prolonged sigh would escape her breast.

Had she given a free vent to her tears, she would have experienced immediate relief: she endeavoured to stifle her passion—and it nearly suffocated her.

But how beautiful was she during that painful and fierce struggle with her feelings! Her countenance was flushed; and her eyes, usually so mild and melting, seemed to burn like two stars.

"No," she exclaimed, after a long silence, "I must not revenge myself that way! Up to the present moment, I have eaten *his* bread and have been to him as a wife; and I should be guilty of a vile deed of treachery were I to denounce him and his companions. Besides—who would believe my testimony, unsupported by facts, against the indignant denial of a man of rank, family, and title? I must stifle my resentment for the present. The hour of retribution will no doubt arrive, sooner or later; and Harborough shall yet repent the cruel—the cowardly insults he has heaped on my head this day!"

She paused, and again appeared to reflect profoundly. Suddenly a gleam of satisfaction passed over her countenance, and she started up to a sitting posture upon the sofa. The ample skirts of her dress were partly raised by her attitude, and revealed an exquisitely turned leg to the middle of the swell of the calf. The delicate foot, imprisoned in the flesh-coloured stocking of finest silk, tapped upon the carpet, in an agitated manner, with the tip of the glossy leather shoe.

That gleam of satisfaction which had suddenly appeared upon her countenance, gradually expanded into a glow of delight, brilliant and beautiful.

"Perhaps he thinks that I shall endeavour to win him back again to my arms," she said, musing aloud;—"perhaps he imagines that his countenance and support are imperatively necessary to me? Oh! no—Sir Rupert Harborough," she exclaimed, with a smile of triumph; "you may vainly await self-humiliation from me! To-morrow—yes, so soon as to-morrow shall you see that I can command a position more splendid than the one in which you placed me!"

Obeying the impulse of her feelings, she hastened to unlock an elegant rosewood writing-desk, edged with silver; and from a secret drawer she took several letters—or rather notes—written upon paper of different colours. Upon the various envelopes were seals impressed with armorial bearings, some of which were surmounted by coronets.

She glanced over each in a cursory manner, which shewed she was already tolerably familiar with their contents. The greater portion she tossed contemptuously into the fire;—a few she placed one upon the other, quite in a business-like way, upon the table.

When she had gone through the entire file, she again directed her attention to those which she had reserved; and as she perused them one after the other, she mused in the following manner:—

"Count de Lestranges is brilliant in his offers, and immensely rich—no doubt; but he is detestably conceited, and would think more of himself than of his mistress. His appeal must be rejected;" and she threw the French nobleman's perfumed epistle into the fire.

"This," she continued, taking up another, "is from Lord Templeton. Five thousand a-year is certainly handsome; but then he himself is so old and ugly! Away with this suitor at once." The English Peer's *billet-doux* followed that of the French Count.

"Here is a beautiful specimen of calligraphy," resumed Diana, taking up a third letter; "but all the sentiments are copied, word for word, out of the love-scenes in Anne Radcliffe's romances. Never was such gross plagiarism! He merits the punishment I thus inflict upon him;"—and her plump white hand crushed the epistle ere she threw it into the fire.

"But what have we here? Oh! the German baron's killing address—interspersed with remarks upon the philosophy of love. Ah! my lord, love was not made for philosophers—and philosophers are incapable of love; so we will have none of you."

Another offering to the fire.

"Here is the burning address of the Greek *attaché* with a hard name. It is prettily written;—but who could possibly enter upon terms with an individual of the name of Thesaurochrysonichochrysides?"

To the flames went the Greek lover's note also.

"Ah! this seems as if it were to be the successful candidate," said Diana, carefully perusing the last remaining letter. "It is written upon a plain sheet of white paper and without scent. But then the style—how manly! Yes—decidedly, the Earl of Warrington has gained the prize. He is rich—unmarried—handsome—and still in the prime of life! There is no room for hesitation."

The Enchantress immediately penned the following note:

"I should have replied without delay to your lordship's letter of yesterday week, but have been suffering severely from cold and bad spirits. The former has been expelled by my physician: the latter can only be forced to decamp by the presence of your lordship.

"Diana Arlington."

Having despatched this note to the Earl of Warrington, the Enchantress retired to her bed-room to prepare her toilette for the arrival of the nobleman around whom she had thus suddenly decided upon throwing her magic spells.

At eight o'clock that evening, a brilliant equipage stopped at the door of the house in which Mrs. Arlington resided.

The Earl of Warrington alighted, and was forthwith conducted into the presence of the Enchantress.

And never was she more bewitching:—never had she appeared more transcendently lovely.

A dress of the richest black velvet, very low in the *corsage*, set off her voluptuous charms and displayed the pure and brilliant whiteness of the skin to the highest advantage. Her ears were adorned with pendants of diamonds; and a tiara glittering with the same precious stones, encircled her brow. There was a soft and languishing melancholy in her deep blue eyes and in the expression of her countenance, which formed an agreeable contrast to the dazzling loveliness of her person and the splendour of her attire.

She was enchanting indeed.

Need we say that the nobleman, who had already been introduced to her and admired her, was enraptured with the prize that thus surrendered itself to him?

Diana became the mistress of the Earl of Warrington, and the very next day removed to a splendid suite of apartments in Albemarle Street, while his lordship's upholsterers furnished a house for her reception.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEWGATE.

NEWGATE! what an ominous sound has that word.

And yet the horror exists not in the name itself; for it is a very simple compound, and would not grate upon the ear nor produce a shudder throughout the frame, were it applied to any other kind of building.

It is, then, its associations and the ideas which it conjures up that render the word NEWGATE fearful and full of dark menace.

At the mere mention of this name, the mind instantaneously becomes filled with visions of vice in all its most hideous forms, and crime in all its most appalling shapes;—wards and court-yards filled with a population peculiar to themselves,—dark gloomy passages, where the gas burns all day long, and beneath the pavement of which are interred the remains of murderers and other miscreants who have expiated their crimes upon the scaffold,—shelves filled with the casts of the countenances of those wretches, taken the moment after they were cut down from the gibbet,—condemned cells,—the chapel in which funeral sermons are preached upon men yet alive to hear them, but who are doomed to die on the morrow,—the clanking of chains, the banging of huge doors, oaths, prayers, curses, and ejaculations of despair!

Oh! if it were true that the spirits of the departed are allowed to revisit the earth for certain purposes and on particular occasions,—if the belief of superstition were well founded, and night could be peopled with the ghosts and spectres of those who sleep in troubled graves,—what a place of ineffable horrors—what a scene of terrible sights, would Newgate be at midnight! The huge flag-stones of the pavement would rise, to permit the phantoms of the murderers to issue from their graves. Demons would erect a gibbet at the debtor's door; and, amidst the sinister glare of torches, an executioner from hell would hang these miscreants over again. This would be part of their posthumous punishment, and would occur in the long—long nights of winter. There would be no moon; but all the windows of Newgate looking upon the court-yards (and there are none commanding the streets) would be brilliantly lighted with red flames, coming from an unknown source. And throughout the long passages of the prison would resound the orgies of hell; and skeletons wrapped in winding sheets would shake their fetters; and Greenacre and Good—Courvoisier and Pegsworth—Blakesley and Marchant, with all their predecessors in the walks of murder, would come in fearful procession from the gibbet, returning by the very corridors which they traversed in their way to death on the respective mornings of their execution. Banquets would be served up to them in the condemned cells; demons would minister to them; and their food should be the flesh, and their drink the gore, of the victims whom they had assassinated upon earth!

All would be horrible—horrible!

But, heaven be thanked! such scenes are impossible; and never can it be given to the shades of the departed to revisit the haunts which they loved or hated—adored or desecrated, upon earth!

NEWGATE!—fearful name!

And Richard Markham was now in Newgate.

He found, when the massive gates of that terrible prison closed behind him, that the consciousness of innocence will not afford entire consolation, in the dilemma in which unjust suspicions may involve the victim of circumstantial evidence. He scarcely knew in what manner to grapple with the difficulties that beset him;—he dared not contemplate the probability of a condemnation to some infamous punishment;—and he could scarcely hope for an acquittal in the face of the testimony that conspired against him.

He recalled to mind all the events of his infancy and his boyish years, and contrasted his present position with that which he once enjoyed in the society of his father and Eugene.

His brother?—aye—what had become of his brother?—that brother, who had left the paternal roof to seek his own fortunes, and who had made so strange an appointment for a distant date, upon the hill-top where the two trees were planted? Four years and four months had passed away since the day on which that appointment was made; and in seven years and eight months it was to be kept.

They were then to compare notes of their adventures and success in life, and decide who was the more prosperous of the two,—Eugene, who was dependent upon his own resources, and had to climb the ladder of fortune step by step;—or Richard, who, placed by his father's love half-way up that ladder, had only to avail himself, it would have seemed, of his advantageous position to reach the top at his leisure?

But, alas! probably Eugene was a miserable wanderer upon the face of the earth; perhaps he was mouldering beneath the sod that no parental nor fraternal tears had watered;—or haply he was languishing in some loathsome dungeon the doors of which served as barriers between him and all communion with his fellow-men!

It was strange—passing strange that Eugene had never written since his departure; and that from the fatal evening of his separation on the hill-top all traces of him should have been so suddenly lost.

Peradventure he had been frustrated in his sanguine expectations, at his very outset in life;—perchance he had terminated in disgust an existence which was blighted by disappointment?

Such were the topics of Markham's thoughts as he walked up and down the large paved court-yard belonging to that department of the prison to which he had been consigned;—and, of a surety, they were of no pleasurable description. Uncertainty with regard to his own fate—anxiety in respect to his brother—and the dread that his prospects in this life were irretrievably blighted—added to a feverish impatience of a confinement totally unmerited—all these oppressed his mind.

That night he had nothing but a basin of gruel and a piece of bread for his supper. He slept in the same ward with a dozen other

prisoners, also awaiting their trials: his couch was hard, cold, and wretched; and he was compelled to listen to the ribald talk and vaunts of villany of several of his companions. Their conversation was only varied by such remarks as these:—

"Well," said one, "I hope I shan't get before the Common-Serjeant: he's certain to give me toko for yam."

"I shall be sure to go up the first day of sessions, and most likely before the Recorder, as mine is rather a serious matter," observed a second. "He won't give me more than seven years of it, I know."

"For my part," said a third, "I'd much sooner wait till the Wednesday, when the Judges come down: they never give it so severe as them City beaks."

"I tell you what," exclaimed a fourth, "I shouldn't like to have my meat hashed at evening sittings before the Commissioner in the New Court. He's always so devilish sulky, because he has been disturbed at his wine."

"Well, you talk of the regular judges that come down on the Wednesday," cried a fifth; "I can only tell you that Baron Griffin and Justice Spikeman are on the rota for next sessions; and I'm blowed if I wouldn't sooner go before the Common-Serjeant a thousand times, than have old Griffin meddle in my case. Why—if you only look at him, he'll transport you for twenty years."

At this idea all the prisoners who had taken part in this conversation, burst out into a loud guffaw—but not a whit the more hearty for being so boisterous.

"Is it possible," asked Markham, who had listened with some interest to the above discourse,—"is it possible that there can be any advantage to a prisoner to be tried by a particular judge?"

"Why, of course there is," answered one of the prisoners. "If a swell like you gets before Justice Spikeman, he'll let you off with half or a quarter of what the Recorder or Common-Serjeant would give you: but Baron Griffin would give you just double, because you happened to be well-dressed."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Markham, whose ideas of the marvellous equality and admirable even-handedness of English justice, were a little shocked by these revelations.

"Oh! yes," continued his informant, "all the world knows these things. If I go before Spikeman, I shall plead Guilty and whimper a bit, and he'll be very lenient indeed; but if I'm heard by Griffin I'll let the case take its chance, because he wouldn't be softened by any show of penitence. So you see, in these matters, one must shape one's conduct according to the judge that one goes before."

"I understand," said Markham: "even justice is influenced by all kinds of circumstances."

The conversation then turned upon the respective merits of the various counsel practising at the Central Criminal Court.

"I have secured Whiffins," said one: "he's a capital fellow—for if he can't make anything out of your case, he instantly begins to bully the judge."

"Ah! but that produces a bad effect," observed a second; "and old Griffin would soon put him down. I've got Chearnley—he's such a capital fellow to make the witnesses contradict themselves."

"Well, I prefer Barkson," exclaimed a third; "his voice alone frightens a prosecutor into fits."

"Smouch and Slike are the worst," said a fourth: "the judges always read the paper or fall asleep when they address them."

"Yes—because they are such low fellows, and will take a brief from any one," exclaimed a fifth; "whereas it is totally contrary to etiquette for a barrister to receive instructions from any one but an attorney."

"The fact is that such men as Smouch and Slike do a case more harm than good, with the judges," observed a sixth. "They haven't the ear of the Court—and that's the real truth of it."

These remarks diminished still more the immense respect which Markham had hitherto entertained for English justice; and he now saw that the barrister who detailed plain and simple facts, did not stand half such a good chance of saving his client as the favoured one "who possessed the ear of the Court."

By a very natural transition, the discourse turned upon petty juries.

"I think it will go hard with me," said one, "because I am tried in the City. I wish I had been committed for the Middlesex Sessions at Clerkenwell."

"Why so!" demanded another prisoner.

"Because, you see, I'm accused of robbing my master; and as all the jurymen are substantial shopkeepers, they're sure to convict a man in my position,—even if the evidence isn't complete."

"I'm here for swindling tradesmen at the West-End of the town," said another.

"Well," exclaimed the first speaker, "the jury will let you off if there's the slightest pretence, because they're all City tradesmen, and hate the West-End ones."

"And I'm here for what is called '*a murderous assault upon a police-constable*,'" said a third prisoner.

"Was he a Metropolitan or a City-Policeman?"

"A Metropolitan."

"Oh! well—you're safe enough; the jury are sure to believe that he assaulted you first."

"Thank God for that blessing!"

"I tell you what goes a good way with Old Bailey Juries—a good appearance. If a poor devil, clothed in rags and very ugly, appears at the bar, the Foreman of the Jury just says, '*Well, gentlemen, I think we may say* GUILTY; *for my part I never saw such a hang-dog countenance in my life*.' But if a well-dressed and good-looking fellow is placed in the dock, the Foreman is most likely to say, '*Well, gentlemen, far my part I never can nor will believe that the prisoner could be guilty of such meanness: so I suppose we may say* NOT GUILTY, *gentlemen*.'"

"Can this be true?" ejaculated Markham.

"Certainly it is," was the reply. "I will tell you more, too. If a prisoner's counsel don't tip the jury plenty of soft sawder, and tell them that they are enlightened Englishmen, and that they are the main prop, not only of justice, but also of the crown itself, they will be certain to find a verdict of *Guilty*."

"What infamy!" cried Markham, perfectly astounded at these revelations.

"Ah! and what's worse still," added his informant, "is that Old Baily juries always, as a matter of course, convict those poor devils who have no counsel."

"And this is the vaunted palladium of justice and liberty!" said Richard.

In this way did the prisoners in Markham's ward contrive to pass away an hour or two, for they were allowed no candle and no fire, and had consequently been forced to retire to their wretched couches immediately after dusk.

The night was thus painfully long and wearisome.

Markham found upon enquiry that there were two methods of living in Newgate. One was to subsist upon the gaol allowance: the other to provide for oneself. Those who received the allowance were not permitted to have beer, nor were their friends suffered to add the slightest comfort to their sorry meals; and those who paid for their own food, were restricted as to quantity and quality.

Such is the treatment prisoners experience *before* they are tried;—and yet there is an old saying *that every one must be deemed innocent until he be proved guilty*. The old saying is a detestable mockery!

Of course Markham determined upon paying for his own food; and when Whittingham called in the morning, he was sent to make the necessary arrangements with the coffee-house keeper in the Old Bailey who enjoyed the monopoly of supplying that compartment of the prison.

The most painful ordeal which Richard had to undergo during his captivity in Newgate, was his first interview with Mr. Monroe. This gentleman was profoundly affected at the situation of his youthful ward, though not for one moment did he doubt his innocence.

And here let us mention another revolting humiliation and unnecessary cruelty to which the *untried* prisoner is compelled to submit. In each yard is a small enclosure, or cage, of thick iron bars, covered with wire-work; and beyond this fence, at a distance of about two feet, is another row of bars similarly interwoven with wire. The visitor is compelled to stand in this cage to converse with his relative or friend, who is separated from him by the two gratings. All private discourse is consequently impossible.

What can recompense the prisoner who is acquitted, for all the mortifications, insults, indignities, and privations he has undergone in Newgate previous to that trial which triumphantly proclaims his innocence?

Relative to the interview between Markham and Monroe, all that it is necessary to state is that the young man's guardian promised to adopt all possible means to prove his innocence, and spare no expense in securing the most intelligent and influential legal assistance. Mr. Monroe moreover intimated his intention of removing the case from the bands of Mac Chizzle to those of a well-known and highly respectable solicitor. Richard declared that he left himself entirely in his guardian's hands, and expressed his deep gratitude for the interest thus demonstrated by that gentleman in his behalf.

Thus terminated the first interview in Newgate between Markham and his late father's confidential friend.

He felt somewhat relieved by this visit, and entertained strong hopes of being enabled to prove his innocence upon the day of trial.

But it then wanted a whole month to the next sessions—thirty horrible days which he would be compelled to pass in Newgate!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REPUBLICAN AND THE RESURRECTION MAN.

As Richard was walking up and down the yard, an hour or two after his interview with Mr. Monroe, he was attracted by the venerable appearance of an elderly gentleman who was also parading that dismal place to and fro.

This individual was attired in a complete suit of black; and his pale countenance, and long grey hair flowing over his coat-collar, were rendered the more remarkable by the mournful nature of his garb. He stooped considerably in his gait, and walked with his hands joined together behind him. His eyes were cast upon the ground; and his meditations appeared to be of a profound and soul-absorbing nature.

Markham immediately experienced a strange curiosity to become acquainted with this individual, and to ascertain the cause of his imprisonment. He did not, however, choose to interrupt that venerable man's reverie. Accident presently favoured his wishes, and placed within his reach the means of introduction to the object of his curiosity. The old gentleman changed his line of walk in the spacious yard, and tripped over a loose flagstone. His head came suddenly in contact with the ground. Richard hastened to raise him up, and conducted him to a bench. The old gentleman was very grateful for these attentions; and, when he was recovered from the effects of his fell, he surveyed Markham with the utmost interest.

"What circumstance has thrown you into this vile den?" he inquired, in a pleasant tone of voice.

Richard instantly related, from beginning to end, those particulars with which the reader is already acquainted.

The old man remained silent for some minutes, and then fixed his eyes upon Markham in a manner that seemed intended to read the secrets of his soul.

Richard did not quail beneath that eagle-glance; but a deep blush suffused his countenance.

"I believe you, my boy—I believe every word you have uttered," suddenly exclaimed the stranger: "you are the victim of circumstances; and deeply do I commiserate your situation."

"I thank you sincerely—most sincerely for your good opinion," said Richard. "And now, permit me to ask you what has plunged you into a gaol? No crime, I feel convinced before you speak!"

"Never judge hastily, young man," returned the old gentleman. "My conviction of your innocence was principally established by the very circumstance which would have led others to pronounce in favour of your guilt. You blushed—deeply blushed; but it was not the glow of shame: it was the honest flush of conscious integrity unjustly suspected. Now, with regard to myself, I know why you imagine me to be innocent of any crime; but, remember that a mild, peaceable and venerable exterior frequently covers a heart eaten up with every evil passion, and a soul stained with every crime. You were however right in your conjecture relative to myself. I am a person accused of a political offence—a libel upon the government, in a journal of considerable influence which I conduct. I shall be tried next session: my sentence will not be severe, perhaps; but it will not be the less unjust. I am the friend of my fellow-countrymen and my fellow-creatures: the upright and the enlightened denominate me a philanthropist: my enemies denounce me as a disturber of the public peace, a seditious agitator, and a visionary. You have undoubtedly heard of Thomas Armstrong?"

"I have not only heard of you, sir," said Richard, surveying the great Republican writer with profound admiration and respect, "but I have read your works and your essays with pleasure and interest."

"In certain quarters," continued Armstrong, "I am represented as a character who ought to be loathed and shunned by all virtuous and honest people,—that I am a moral pestilence,—a social plague; and that my writings are only deserving of being burnt by the hands of the common hangman. The organs of the rich and aristocratic classes, level every species of coarse invective against me. And yet, O God!" he added enthusiastically, "I only strive to arouse the grovelling spirit of the industrious millions to a sense of the wrongs under which they labour, and to prove to them that they were not sent into this world to lick the dust beneath the feet of majesty and aristocracy!"

"Do you not think," asked Richard, timidly, "that you are somewhat in advance of the age? Do you not imagine that a republic would be dangerously premature?"

"My dear youth, let us not discuss this matter in a den where all our ideas are concentrated in the focus formed by our misfortunes. Let me rather assist you with my advice upon the mode of conduct you should preserve in this prison, so that you may not become too familiar with the common herd, nor offend by being too distant."

Mr. Armstrong then proffered his counsel upon this point.

"I feel deeply indebted to you for your kindness," exclaimed Markham: "very—very grateful!"

"Grateful!" cried the old man, somewhat bitterly. "Oh! how I dislike that word! The enemies who persecute me now, are those who have received the greatest favours from me. But there is one—one whose treachery and base ingratitude I never can forget—although I can forgive him! Almost four years ago, I accidentally learnt that a young man of pleasing appearance, genteel manners, and good acquirements, was in a state of the deepest distress, in an obscure lodging in Hoxton Old Town. I called upon him: the account which had reached my ears was too true. He was bordering upon starvation; and—although he assured me that he had relations and friends moving in a wealthy sphere—he declared that particular reasons, which he implored me not to dive into, compelled him to refrain from addressing them. I relieved his necessities; I gave him money, and procured him clothes. I then took him as my private secretary, and soon put the greatest confidence in him. Alas! how was I recompensed? He betrayed all my political secrets to the government: he literally sold me! At length he absconded, taking with him a considerable sum of money, which he abstracted from my

desk."

"How despicable!" ejaculated Richard.

"That is not all, I met him afterwards, and forgave him!" said Armstrong.

"Ah! you possess, sir, a noble heart," cried Richard: "I hope that this misguided young man gave sincere proofs of repentance!"

"Oh! he was very grateful!" ejaculated Mr. Armstrong, with a satirical smile: "when he heard that there was a warrant issued for my apprehension, upon a charge of libel on the government, he secretly instructed the officers relative to my private haunts, and thus sold me again!"

"The villain!" cried Markham, with unfeigned indignation. "Tell me his name, that I may avoid him as I would a poisonous viper!"

"His name is George Montague," returned Mr. Armstrong.

"George Montague!" cried Richard.

"Do you know him? have you heard of him before? If you happen to be aware of his present abode—"

"You would send and have him arrested for the robbery of the money in your desk?"

"No—write and assure him of my forgiveness once more," replied the noble-hearted republican. "But how came you acquainted with his name?"

"I have heard of that young man before, but not in a way to do him honour. A tale of robbery and seduction—of heartless cruelty and vile deceit—has been communicated to me relative to this George Montague. Can you forgive such a wretch as he is?'

"From the bottom of my heart," answered the republican.

Markham gazed upon that venerable gentleman with profound respect. He remembered to have seen the daily Tory newspapers denounce that same old man as "an unprincipled agitator—the enemy of his country—the foe to morality—a political ruffian—a bloody-minded votary of Robespierre and Danton:"—and he now heard the sweetest and holiest sentiment of Christian morality emanate from the lips of him who had thus been fearfully represented. And that sentiment was uttered without affectation, but with unequivocal sincerity!

For a moment Richard forgot his own sorrows and misfortunes, as he contemplated the benign and holy countenance of him whom a certain class loved to depict as a demon incarnate!

The old man did not notice the interest which he had thus excited, for he had himself fallen into a profound reverie.

Presently the conversation was resumed; and the more that Markham saw of the Republican, the more did he respect and admire him.

In the course of the afternoon Markham was accosted by one of his fellow-prisoners, who beckoned him aside in a somewhat mysterious manner. This individual was a very short, thin, cadaverous-looking man, with coal-black hair and whiskers, and dark piercing eyes half concealed beneath shaggy brows of the deepest jet. He was apparently about five-and thirty years of age. His countenance was downcast; and when he spoke, he seemed as if he could not support the glance of the person whom he addressed. He was dressed in a seedy suit of black, and wore an oil-skin cap with a large shade.

This person, who was very reserved and retired in his habits, and seldom associated with his fellow-prisoners, drew Markham aside, and said, "I've taken a liberty with your name; but I know you won't mind it. In a place like this we must help and assist each other."

"And in what way—" began Markham.

"Oh! nothing very important; only it's just as well to tell you in case the turnkey says a word about it. The fact is, I haven't half enough to eat with this infernal gruel and soup that they give those who, like me, are forced to take the gaol allowance, and my old mother—who is known by the name of the Mummy—has promised to send me in presently a jolly good quartern loaf and three or four pound of Dutch cheese."

"But I thought that those who took the gaol allowance were not permitted to receive any food from outside?" said Markham.

"That's the very thing," said the man: "so I have told the Mummy to direct the parcel to you, as I know that you grub yourself at your own cost."

"So long as it does not involve me——"

"No—not in the least, my good fellow," interrupted the other. "And, in return," he added, after a moment's pause, "if I can ever do you a service, outside or in, you may reckon upon the Resurrection Man."

"The Resurrection Man!" ejaculated Richard, appalled, in spite of himself, at this ominous title.

"Yes—that's my name and profession," said the man. "My godfathers and godmothers called me Anthony, and my parents had previously blessed me with the honourable appellation of Tidkins: so you may know me as Anthony Tidkins, the Resurrection Man."

"And are you really——" began Richard, with a partial shudder; "are you really a——"

"A body-snatcher?" cried Anthony; "of course I am—when there's any work to be done; and when there isn't, then I do a little in another line."

"And what may that be?" demanded Markham.

This time the Resurrection Man *did* look his interlocutor full in the face; but it was only for a moment; and he again averted his glance in a sinister manner, as he jerked his thumb towards the wall of the yard, and exclaimed, "Crankey Jem on t'other side will tell you if you ask him. They would not put us together: no—no," he added, with a species of chuckle; "they know a trick worth two of that. We shall both be tried together: fifteen years for him—freedom for me! That's the way to do it."

With these words the Resurrection Man turned upon his heel, and walked away to the farther end of the yard. We shall now take leave of Markham for the present: when we again call the reader's attention to his case, we shall find him standing in the dock of the Central Criminal Court, to take his trial upon the grave accusation of passing forged notes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DUNGEON.

RETURN we now to Bill Bolter, the murderer, who had taken refuge in the subterranean hiding-place of the Old House in Chick Lane.

Heavily and wearily did the hours drag along. The inmate of that terrible dungeon was enabled to mark their lapse by the deep-mouthed bell of St. Sepulchre's Church, on Snow Hill, the sound of which boomed ominously at regular intervals upon his ear.

That same bell tolls the death-note of the convict on the morning of his execution at the debtors' door of Newgate.

The murderer remembered this, and shuddered.

A faint—faint light glimmered through the little grating at the end of the dungeon; and the man kept his eyes fixed upon it so long, that at length his imagination began to conjure up phantoms to appal him. That small square aperture became a frame in which hideous countenances appeared; and then, one gradually changed into another—horrible dissolving views that they were!

But chiefly he beheld before him the tall gaunt form of his murdered wife—with one eye smashed and bleeding in her head:—the other glared fearfully upon him.

This phantasmagoria became at length so fearful and so real in appearance, that the murderer turned his back towards the little grating through which the light struggled into the dungeon in two long, narrow, and oblique columns.

But then he imagined that there were goblins behind him; and this idea soon grew as insupportable as the first;—so he rose, and groped his way up and down that narrow vault—a vault which might become his tomb!

This horrible thought never left his memory. Even while he reflected upon other things,—amidst the perils which enveloped his career, and the reminiscences of the dread deeds of which he had been guilty,—amongst the reasons which he assembled together to convince himself that the hideous countenances at the grating did not exist in reality,—there was that one idea—unmixed—definite—standing boldly out from all the rest in his imagination,—*that he might be left to die of starvation!*

At one time the brain of this wretch was excited to such a pitch that he actually caught his head in his two hands, and pressed it with all his force—to endeavour to crush the horrible visions which haunted his imagination.

Then he endeavoured to hum a tune; but his voice seemed to choke him. He lighted a pipe, and sate and smoked; but as the thin blue vapour curled upwards, in the faint light of the grating, it assumed shapes and forms appalling to behold. Spectres, clad in long winding sheets—cold grisly corpses, dressed in shrouds, seemed to move noiselessly through the dungeon.

He laid aside the pipe; and, in a state of mind bordering almost upon frenzy, tossed off the brandy that had remained in the flask.

But so full of horrible ideas was his mind at that moment, that it appeared to him as if he had been drinking blood!

He rose from his seat once more, and groped up and down the dungeon, careless of the almost stunning blows which he gave his head, and the violent contusions which his limbs received, against the uneven walls.

Hark! suddenly voices fell upon his ears.

He listened with mingled fear and joy,—fear of being discovered, and joy at the sound of human tones in the midst of that subterranean solitude.

Those voices came from the lower window of the dwelling on the other side of the ditch.

"How silent and quiet everything has been lately in the old home opposite," said a female.

"Last night—or rather early this morning, I heard singing there," replied another voice, which was evidently that of a young woman.

Oh! never had the human tones sounded so sweet and musical upon the murderer's ears before!

"It is very seldom that any one ever goes into that old house now," said the first speaker.

"Strange rumours are abroad concerning it: I heard that there are subterranean places in which men can conceal themselves, and no power on earth could find them save those in the secret."

"How absurd! I was speaking to the policeman about that very thing a few days ago; and he laughed at the idea. He says it is impossible; and of course he knows best."

"I am not so sure of that. Who knows what fearful deeds have those old walls concealed from human eye? For my part, I can very well believe that there are secret cells and caverns. Who knows but that some poor wretch is hiding there this very moment?"

"Perhaps the man that murdered his wife up in Union Court."

"Well—who knows? But at this rate we shall never get on with our work."

The noise of a window being shut down fell upon the murderer's ears: and he heard no more.

But he had heard enough! Those girls had spoken of him:—they had mentioned him as *the man who had murdered his wife*.

The assassination, then, was already known: the dread deed was bruited abroad:—thousands and thousands of tongues had no doubt repeated the tale here and there—conveying it hither and thither—far and wide!

And throughout the vast metropolis was he already spoken of as the *man who had murdered his wife*!

And in a few hours more, would millions in all parts hear of *the man who had murdered his wife*!

And already were the officers of justice actively in search of *the man who had murdered his wife*!

Heavily—heavily passed the hours.

At length the dungeon became pitch dark; and then the murderer saw sights more appalling than when the faint gleam stole through the grating.

In due time the sonorous voice of Saint Sepulchre proclaimed the hour of nine.

Scarcely had the last stroke of that iron tongue died upon the breeze, when a noise at the head of the spiral staircase fell upon the murderer's ears. The trap-door was raised, and the well-known voice of Dick Flairer was heard.

"Well, Bill—alive or dead, eh—old fellow!" exclaimed the burglar.

"Alive—and that's all, Dick," answered Bill Bolter, ascending the staircase.

"My God! how pale you are, Bill," said Dick, the moment the light of the candle fell upon the countenance of the murderer as he emerged from the trap-door.

"Pale, Dick!" ejaculated the wretch, a shudder passing over his entire frame; "I do not believe I can stand a night in that infernal hole."

"You must, Bill—you must," said Flairer: "all is discovered up in Union Court there, and the police are about in all directions."

"When was it found out? Tell me the particulars—speak!" said the murderer, with frenzied impatience.

"Why, it appears that the neighbours heard a devil of a noise in your room, but didn't think nothink about it, cos you and Polly used to spar a bit now and then. But at last the boy—Harry, I mean—went down stairs and said that his mother wouldn't move, and that his father had gone away. So up the neighbours went—and then everything was blown. The children was sent to the workus, and the coroner held his inquest this afternoon at three. Harry was had up before him; and—"

"And what?" demanded Bolter, hastily.

"And, in course," added Dick, "the Coroner got out of the boy ull the particklars: so the jury returned a verdict——"

"Of *Wilful Murder*, eh?" said Bill, sinking his voice almost to a whisper.

"*Wilful Murder against William Bolter*," answered Dick, coolly.

"That little vagabond Harry!" cried the criminal—his entire countenance distorted with rage; "I'll be the death on him!"

"There's no news at all about t'other affair up at Clapton, and no stir made in it at all," said Dick, after a moment's pause: "so that there business is all right. But here's a lot of grub and plenty of lush, Bill: that'll cheer ye, if nothink else will."

"Dick!" exclaimed the murderer, "I cannot go back into that hole—I had rather get nabbed at once. The few hours I have already been there have nearly drove me mad; and I can't—I won't attempt the night in that infernal cold damp vault I feel as if I was in my coffin."

"Well, you know best," said Dick, coolly. "A hempen neckcloth at Tuck-up fair, and a leap from a tree with only one leaf, is what you'll get if you're perverse."

"My God—my God!" ejaculated Bolter, wringing his hands, and throwing glances of extreme terror around the room: "what am I to do? what am I to do?"

"Lie still down below for a few weeks, or go out and be scragged," said Dick Flairer. "Come, Bill, be a man; and don't take on in this here way. Besides, I'm in a hurry, and must be off. I've brought you enough grub for three days, as I shan't come here too often till the business has blowed over a little."

Bill Bolter took a long draught from a quart bottle of rum which his friend had brought with him; and he then felt his spirits revive. Horrible as the prospect of a long sojourn in the dungeon appeared, it was still preferable to the fearful doom which must inevitably follow his capture; and, accordingly, the criminal once more returned to his hiding-place.

Dick Flairer promised to return on the third evening from that time; and the trap-door again closed over the head of the murderer.

Bolter supped off a portion of the provisions which his friend had brought him, and then lay down upon the hard stone bench to sleep. A noisome stench entered the dungeon from the Ditch, and the rats ran over the person of the inmate of that subterranean hole. Repose was impossible; the miserable wretch therefore sate up, and began to smoke.

By accident he kicked his leg a little way beneath the stone bench: the heel of his boot encountered something that yielded to the touch; and a strange noise followed.

That noise was like the rattling of bones!

The pipe fell from the man's grasp; and he himself was stupefied with sudden terror.

At length, exercising immense violence over his feelings, he determined to ascertain whether the horrible suspicions which had entered his mind, were well-founded or not.

He thrust his hand beneath the bench, and encountered the mouldering bones of a human skeleton.

With indescribable feelings of agony and horror he threw himself upon the bench—his hair on end, and his heart palpitating violently.

Heaven only can tell how he passed that long weary night—alone, in the darkness of the dungeon, with his own thoughts, the skeleton of some murdered victim, and the vermin that infected the subterranean hole.

He slept not a wink throughout those live-long hours, the lapse of which was proclaimed by the voice of Saint Sepulchre's solemn and deep toned bell.

And none who heard the bell during that night experienced feelings of such intense anguish and horror as the murderer in his lurking-hole. Not even the neighbouring prison of Newgate, nor the hospital of Saint Bartholomew, nor the death-bed of a parent, knew mental suffering so terrible as that which wrung the heart of this guilty wretch.

The morning dawned; and the light returned to the dungeon.

The clock had just struck eight, and the murderer was endeavouring to force a mouthful of food down his throat, when the voice of a man in the street fell upon his ear. He drew close up to the grating, and clearly heard the following announcement:—

"*Here is a full and perfect account of the horrible assassination committed by the miscreant William Bolter, upon the person of his wife; with a portrait of the murderer, and a representation of the room as it appeared when the deed was first discovered by a neighbour. Only one Penny! The fullest and most perfect account—only one Penny!*"

A pause ensued, and then the voice, bawling more lustily than before, continued thus:—

"*A full and perfect account of the bloody and cruel murder in Upper Union Court; showing how the assassin first dashed out one of his victim's eyes, and then fractured her skull upon the floor. Only one Penny, together with a true portrait of the murderer, for whose apprehension a reward of One Hundred Pounds is offered! Only one Penny!*"

"A reward of one hundred pounds!" cried another voice: "my eye! how I should like to find him!"

"Wouldn't I precious soon give him up!" ejaculated a third.

"I wonder whereabouts he is," said a fourth. "No doubt that he has run away—perhaps to America—perhaps to France."

"That shews how much you know about such things," said a fifth speaker. "It is a very strange fact, that murderers always linger near the scene of their crime; they are attracted towards it, seemingly, as the moth is to the candle. Now, for my part, I shouldn't at all wonder if the miscreant was within a hundred yards of us at the present moment."

"*Only one Penny! The fullest and most perfect account of the horrible and bloody murder*——"

The itinerant vender of pamphlets passed on, followed by the crowd which his vociferations had collected; and his voice soon ceased to break the silence of the morning.

Bolter sank down upon the stone bench, a prey to maddening feelings and fearful emotions.

A hundred pounds were offered for his capture! Such a sum might tempt even Dick Flairer or Tom the Cracksman to betray him.

Instinctively he put his fingers to his neck, to feel if the rope were there yet, and he shook his head violently to ascertain if he were hanging on a gibbet, or could still control his motions.

The words "miscreant," "horrible and bloody murder," and "portrait of the assassin," still rang in his ears—loud—sonorous—deep—and with a prolonged echo like that of a bell!

Already were men speculating upon his whereabouts, and anxious for his apprehension—some for the reward, others to gratify a morbid curiosity: already were the newspapers, the cheap press, and the pamphleteers busy with his name.

None now mentioned him save as *the miscreant William Bolter*.

Oh! if he could but escape to some foreign land,—if he could but avoid the ignominious consequences of his crime in this,—he would dedicate the remainder of his days to penitence,—he would toil from the dawn of morning till sunset to obtain the bread of honesty,—he would use every effort, exert every nerve to atone for the outrage he had committed upon the laws of society!

But—no! it was too late. The blood-hounds of the law were already upon his track.

An hour passed away; and during that interval the murderer sought to compose himself by means of his pipe and the rum-bottle: but he could not banish the horrible ideas which haunted him.

Suddenly a strange noise fell upon his ear.

The blood appeared to run cold to his very heart in a refluent tide; for the steps of many feet, and the sounds of many voices, echoed through the old house.

The truth instantly flashed to his mind: the police had entered the premises.

With hair standing on end, eye-balls glaring, and forehead bathed in perspiration, the murderer sate motionless upon the cold stone bench—afraid even to breathe. Every moment he expected to hear the trap-door at the head of the spiral staircase move: but several minutes elapsed, and his fears in this respect were not accomplished.

At length he heard a sound as of a body falling heavily; and then a voice almost close to him fell upon his ear.

The reader will remember that the vault in which he was concealed, joined the cellar from whence Walter Sydney had escaped. The officers had entered that cellar by means of the trap-door in the floor of the room immediately above it. Bolter could overhear their entire conversation.

"Well, this is a strange crib, this is," said one. "Show the bull's-eye up in that farther corner: there may be a door in one of them dark nooks."

"It will jist end as I said it would," exclaimed another: "the feller wouldn't be sich a fool as to come to a place that's knowed to the Force as one of bad repute."

"I didn't think, myself, there was much good in coming to search this old crib: but the inspector said *yes*, and so we couldn't say *no*."

"Let's be off: the cold of this infernal den strikes to my very bones. But I say—that there shelving board that we first lighted on in getting down, isn't made to help people to come here alive."

"Turn the bull's-eye more on it."

"Now can you see?"

"Yes—plain enough. It leads to a hole that looks on the ditch. But the plank is quite old and rotten; so I dare say it was put there for some purpose or another a long time ago. Pr'aps the thieves used to convey their swag through that there hole into a boat in the ditch, and——"

"No, no," interrupted the other policeman: "it wasn't swag that they tumbled down the plank into the Fleet: it was stiff 'uns."

"Very likely. But there can't be any of that kind of work ever going on now: so let's be off."

The murderer in the adjoining vault could hear the policemen climb up the plank towards the trap-door; and in a few minutes profound silence again reigned throughout the old house.

This time he had escaped detection; and yet the search was keen and penetrating.

The apparent safety of his retreat restored him to something like good spirits; and he began to calculate the chances which he imagined to exist for and against the probability of his escape from the hands of justice.

"There is but five men in the world as knows of this hiding-place," he said to himself; "and them is myself, Dick Flairer, Crankey Jem, the Resurrection Man, and Tom the Cracksman. As for me, I'm here—that's one what won't blab. Dick Flairer isn't likely to sell a pal: Tom the Cracksman I'd rely on even if he was on the rack. Crankey Jem is staunch to the backbone; besides, he's in the Jug: so is the Resurrection Man. They can't do much harm there. I think I'm tolerably safe; and as for frightening myself about ghosts and goblins——"

He was suddenly interrupted by the rattling of the bones beneath the stone-bench. He started; and a profuse perspiration instantly broke out upon his forehead.

A huge rat had disturbed those relics of mortality; but this little incident tended to hurl the murderer back again into all that appalling gloominess of thought from which he had for a moment seemed to be escaping.

Time wore on: and heavily and wearily still passed the hours. At length darkness again came down upon the earth: the light of the little grating disappeared; and the vault was once more enveloped in the deepest obscurity.

The murderer ate a mouthful, and then endeavoured to compose himself to sleep, for he was worn out mentally and bodily.

The clock of Saint Sepulchre's proclaimed the hour of seven, as he awoke from a short and feverish slumber.

He thought he heard a voice calling him in in his dreams; and when he started up he listened with affright.

"Bill—are you asleep?"

It was not, then, a dream: a human voice addressed him in reality.

"Bill—why don't you answer?" said the voice. "It's only me!"

Bolter suddenly felt relieved of an immense load; it was his friend Dick who was calling him from the little trap-door. He instantly hurried up the staircase, and was surprised to find that there was no light in the room.

"My dear feller," said Dick, in a hurried tone, "I didn't mean to come back so soon again, but me and Tom is a-going to do a little business together down Southampton way—someot that he has been told of; and as we may be away a few days, I thought I'd better come this evenin' with a fresh supply. Here's plenty of grub, and rum, and bakker."

"Well, this is a treat—to hear a friendly voice again so soon," said Bill;—"but why the devil don't you light the candle?"

"I'm a-going to do it now," returned Dick; and he struck a lucifer-match as he spoke. "I thought I wouldn't show a light here sooner than was necessary; and we must not keep it burning too long; cos there may be chinks in them shutters, and I des say the blue-bottles is on the scent."

"They come and searched the whole place this mornin'," said Bill: "but they didn't smell me though."

"Then you're all safe now, my boy," cried Dick. "Here, look alive—take this basket, and pitch it down the stairs: it's well tied up, and chock full of cold meat and bread. Put them two bottles into your pocket: there—that's right. Now—do you want anythink else?"

"Yes—a knife. I was forced to gnaw my food like a dog for want of one."

"Here you are," said Dick; and, taking a knife from the secret cupboard between the windows, he handed it to his friend. "Now are you all right?"

"Quite—that is, as right as a feller in my sitivation can be. You won't forget to come——"

Bolter was standing within two or three steps from the top of the staircase; and the greater part of his body was consequently above the trap-door.

He stopped suddenly short in the midst of his injunction to his companion, and staggered in such a way that he nearly lost his footing.

His eye had caught sight of a human countenance peering from behind the half-open door of the room.

"Damnation!" exclaimed the murderer: "I'm sold at last!"—and, rushing up the steps, he fell upon Dick Flairer with the fury of a tiger.

At the same moment four or five officers darted into the room:—but they were too late to prevent another dreadful deed of blood.

Bolter had plunged the knife which he held in his hand, into the heart of Dick Flairer, the burglar.

The blow was given with fatal effect: the unfortunate wretch uttered a horrible cry, and fell at the feet of his assassin, stone dead.

"Villain! what have you done?" ejaculated the serjeant who headed the little detachment of police.

"I've drawn the claret of the rascal that nosed upon me," returned Bolter doggedly.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," said the serjeant.

"How—what do you mean? Wasn't it that scoundrel Dick that chirped against me?"

"No—ten thousand times *No*!" cried the officer: "it was a prisoner in Newgate who split upon this hiding place. Somehow or another he heard of the reward offered to take you; and he told the governor the whole secret of the vault. Without knowing whether we should find you here or not, we came to search it."

"Then it was the Resurrection Man who betrayed me after all!" exclaimed Bolter; and, dashing the palms of his two hands violently against his temples, he added, in a tone of intense agony, "I have murdered my best friend—monster, miscreant that I am!"

The policeman speedily fixed a pair of manacles about his wrists; and in the course of a quarter of an hour he was safely secured in one of the cells at the station-house in Smithfield.

On the following day he was committed to Newgate.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BLACK CHAMBER.

ONCE more does the scene change.

The reader who follows us through the mazes of our narrative, has yet to be introduced to many strange places—many hideous haunts of crime, abodes of poverty, dens of horror, and lurking-holes of perfidy—as well as many seats of wealthy voluptuousness and aristocratic dissipation.

It will be our task to guide those who choose to accompany us, to scenes and places whose very existence may appear to belong to the regions of romance rather than to a city in the midst of civilisation, and whose characteristic features are as yet unknown to even those that are the best acquainted with the realities of life.

About a fortnight had elapsed since the events related in the preceding chapter.

In a small, high, well-lighted room five individuals were seated at a large round oaken table. One of these persons, who appeared to be the superior, was an elderly man with a high forehead, and thin white hair falling over the collar of his black coat. He was short and rather corpulent: his countenance denoted frankness and good-nature; but his eyes, which were small, grey, and sparkling, had a lurking expression of cunning, only perceptible to the acute observer. The other three individuals were young and gentlemanly-looking men, neatly dressed, and very deferential in their manners towards their superior.

The door of this room was carefully bolted. At one end of the table was a large black tray covered with an immense quantity of bread-seals of all sizes. Perhaps the reader may recall to mind that, amongst the pursuits and amusements of his school-days, he diverted himself with moistening the crumb of bread, and kneading it with his fingers into a consistency capable of taking and retaining an accurate impression of a seal upon a letter. The seals—or rather blank bread-stamps—now upon the tray, were of this kind, only more carefully manufactured, and well consolidated with thick gum-water.

Close by this tray, in a large wooden bowl were wafers of all sizes and colours; and in a box also standing on the table, were numbers of wafer-stamps of every dimension used. A second box contained thin blades of steel, set fast in delicate ivory handles, and sharp as razors. A third box was filled with sticks of sealing-wax of all colours, and of foreign as well as British manufacture. A small glass retort fixed over a spirit-lamp, was placed near one of the young men. A tin-box containing a little cushion covered with printer's red ink in one compartment, and several stamps such as the reader may have seen used in post-offices, in another division, lay open near the other articles mentioned. Lastly, an immense pile of letters—some sealed, and others wafered—stood upon that end of the table at which the elderly gentleman was seated.

The occupations of these five individuals may be thus described in a few words.

The old gentleman took up the letters one by one, and bent them open, as it were, in such a way, that he could read a portion of their contents when they were not folded in such a manner as effectually to conceal all the writing. He also examined the addresses, and consulted a long paper of official character which lay upon the table at his right hand. Some of the letters he threw, after as careful a scrutiny as he could devote to them without actually breaking the seals or wafers, into a large wicker basket at his feet. From time to time, however, he passed a letter to the young man who sate nearest to him.

If the letters were closed with wax, an impression of the seal was immediately taken by means of one of the bread stamps. The young man then took the letter and held it near the large fire which burnt in the grate until the sealing-wax became so softened by the heat that the letter could be easily opened without tearing the paper. The third clerk read it aloud, while the fourth took notes of its contents. It was then returned to the first young man, who re-sealed it by means of the impression taken on the bread stamp, and with wax which precisely matched that originally used in closing the letter. When this ceremony was performed, the letter was consigned to the same basket which contained those that had passed unopened through the hands of the Examiner.

If the letter were fastened with a wafer, the second clerk made the water in the little glass retort boil by means of the spirit-lamp; and when the vapour gushed forth from the tube, the young man held the letter to its mouth in such a way that the steam played full upon the identical spot where the wafer was placed. The wafer thus became moistened in a slight degree; and it was only then necessary to pass one of the thin steel blades skilfully beneath the wafer, in order to open the letter. The third young man then read this epistle, and the fourth took notes, as in the former instance. The contents being thus ascertained, the letter was easily fastened again with a very thin wafer of the same colour and size as the original; and if the job were at all clumsily done, the tin-box before noticed furnished the means of imprinting a red stamp upon the back of the letter, in such a way that a portion of the circle fell precisely over the spot beneath which the wafer was placed.

These processes were accomplished in total silence, save when the contents of the letters were read; and then, so accustomed were those five individuals to hear the revelations of the most strange secrets and singular communications, that they seldom appeared surprised or amused—shocked or horrified, at anything which those letters made known to them. Their task seemed purely of a mechanical kind: indeed, automatons could not have shewn less passion or excitement.

Oh! vile—despicable occupation,—performed, too, by men who went forth, with heads erect and confident demeanour, from their atrocious employment—after having violated those secrets which are deemed most sacred, and broken the seals which merchants lovers, parents, relations, and friends, had placed upon their thoughts!

Base and diabolical outrage—perpetrated by the commands of the Ministers of the Sovereign!

Reader, this small, high, well-lighted room, in which such infamous scenes took place with doors well secured by bolts and bars,

was the *Black Chamber of the General Post-Office, Saint Martin's-le-Grand*.

And now, reader, do you ask whether all this be true;—whether, in the very heart of the metropolis of the civilized world, such a system and such a den of infamy can exist;—whether, in a word, the means of transferring thought at a cheap and rapid rate, be really made available to the purposes of government and the ends of party policy? If you ask these questions, to each and all we confidently and boldly answer "YES."

The first letter which the Examiner caused to be opened on the occasion when we introduce our readers to the Black Chamber, was from the State of Castelcicala, in Italy, to the representative of that Grand-Duchy at the English court. Its contents, when translated, ran thus:—

City of Montoni, Castelcicala.

"I am desired by my lord the Marquis of Gerrano, his Highness's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to inform your Excellency that, in consequence of a general amnesty just proclaimed by His Serene Highness, and which includes all political prisoners and emigrants, passports to return to the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala, may be accorded to his Highness Alberto Prince of Castelcicala, nephew of his Serene Highness the Reigning Grand Duke, as well as to all other natives of Castelcicala now resident in England, but who may be desirous of returning to their own country,

"I have the honour to renew to your Excellency assurances of my most perfect consideration.

"BARON RUPERTO,
"Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, &c. &c.

The second letter perused upon this occasion, by the inmates of the Black Chamber, was from a famous London Banker to his father at Manchester:—

"You will be astounded, my dear father, when your eye meets the statement I am now at length compelled to make to you. The world believes my establishment to be as firmly based as the rocks themselves: my credit is unlimited, and thousands have confided their funds to my care. Alas, my dear father, I am totally insolvent: the least drain upon the bank would plunge me into irredeemable ruin and dishonour. I have, however, an opportunity of retrieving myself, and building up my fortunes: a certain government operation is proposed to me; and if I can undertake it, my profits will be immense. Fifty thousand pounds are absolutely necessary for my purposes within six days from the present time. Consider whether you will save your son by making him this advance; or allow him to sink into infamy, disgrace and ruin, by withholding it. Whichever way you may determine breathe not a word to a soul. The authorities in the Treasury have made all possible inquiries concerning me, and believe me to be not only solvent, but immensely rich. I expect your answer by return of post.

"Your affectionate but almost heart-broken son,
"JAMES TOMLINSON."

The writer of this letter flattered himself that the government had already made "all possible enquiries:"—he little dreamt that his own epistle was to furnish the Treasury, through the medium of the Post Office, with the very information which he had so fondly deemed unknown to all save himself.

When the third letter was opened, the clerk whose duty it was to read it, looked at the signature, and, addressing himself to the Examiner, said, "From whom, sir, did you anticipate that this letter came?"

"From Lord Tremordyn. Is it not directed to Lady Tremordyn?" exclaimed the Examiner.

"It is, sir," answered the clerk. "But it is written by that lady's daughter Cecilia."

"I am very sorry for that. The Home Office," said the Examiner, "is particularly anxious to ascertain the intention of Lord Tremordyn in certain party matters; and it is known," he added, referring to the official paper beside him, "that his lordship communicates all his political sentiments to her ladyship, who is now at Bath."

"Then, sir, this letter need not be read?" cried the clerk interrogatively.

"Not read, young man!" ejaculated the Examiner, impatiently. "How often am I to tell you that every letter which is once opened, is to be carefully perused? Have we not been able to afford the government and the police some very valuable information at different times, by noting the contents of letters which we have opened by mistake?"

"Certainly," added the first clerk. "There is that deeply-planned and well-laid scheme of Stephens, and his young lady disguised as a man, who lives at Upper Clapton, which we discovered by the mere accident of opening a wrong letter."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the clerk whose duty it was to read the epistles, and whose apology to the Examiner was delivered in a most deferential manner. "I will now proceed with the letter of the Honourable Miss Cecilia Huntingfield to her mother Lady Tremordyn."

The young clerk then read as follows:—

"Oh! my dear mother, how shall I find words to convey to you the fearful tale of my disgrace and infamy of which I am the unhappy and guilty heroine? A thousand times before you left London, I was on the point of throwing myself at your feet and confessing all! But, no—I could not—I dared not. And now, my dear parent, I can conceal my shame no longer! Oh! how shall I make you comprehend me, without actually entrusting this paper with the fearful secret! My God! I am almost distracted. Surely you can understand my meaning? If not, learn the doleful tidings at once, my dearest and most affectionate parent: I AM ABOUT TO BECOME A MOTHER! Oh! do not spurn me from you—do not curse your child! It has cost me pangs of anguish ineffable, and of mental agony an idea of which I could not convey to you, to sit down and rend your heart with this avowal. But, O heavens! what am I to do? Concealment is no longer possible: IN THREE MONTHS MORE I SHALL BE A MOTHER! That villain Harborough—the friend of our family, Sir Rupert Harborough,—the man in whom my dear father put every confidence,—that wretch has caused my shame! And yet there are times, my dear mother, when I feel that I love him;—for he is the father of the child which must soon publish my disgrace! And now, my fond—confiding—tender parent, you know all. Oh! come to my rescue: adopt some means to conceal my shame;—shield me from my father's wrath! I can write no more at present: but my mind feels relieved now I have thus opened my heart to my mother.

"Your afflicted and almost despairing daughter,
"CECILIA HUNTINGFIELD."

Thus was a secret involving the honour of a noble family,—a secret compromising the most sacred interests—revealed to five men at one moment, by means of the atrocious system pursued in the Black Chamber of the General Post Office.

The fourth letter was from Mr. Robert Stephens of London to his brother Mr. Frederick Stephens of Liverpool:—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"I write you a few hasty instructions, to which I solicit your earnest attention. You are well aware that the 26th instant is my grand day—the day to which I have been so long and so anxiously looking forward. All my schemes are so well organised that detection is impossible. That fellow Montague gave me a little trouble a fortnight or so ago, by suddenly and most unexpectedly declaring that he would not act as the witness of identity; and I was actually compelled to give him five hundred pounds to silence him. What could have been his motive for shirking out of the affair, I cannot tell. Be that as it may, I have supplied his place with another and better man—a lawyer of the name of Mac Chizzle. But now for my instructions. The grand blow will be struck soon after mid-day on the 26th instant. Immediately it is done, I shall give Walter (I always speak of HER as a man) the ten thousand pounds I have promised him; and then off to Liverpool in a post-chaise and four. Now, if there be a packet for America on the 27th, secure me a berth; if not, ascertain if there be a vessel sailing for Havre or Bordeaux on that day, and then secure me a berth in such ship:—but should there be none in this instance also, then obtain a list of all the ships which, according to present arrangements, are to leave Liverpool on the 27th, with their places of destination and all other particulars.

"Burn this letter the moment you have read it: we then know that it cannot possibly have told tales.

"Your affectionate brother,
"ROBERT STEPHENS."

Poor deluded man! he believed that letters confided to the General Post Office administration could "tell no tales" during their progress from the sender to the receiver:—how miserably was he mistaken!

And here we may observe that if the system of opening letters at the General Post Office were merely adopted for the purpose of discovering criminals and preventing crime, we should still deprecate the proceeding, although our objections would lose much of their point in consideration of the motive: but when we find—and know it to be a fact—that the secrets of correspondence are flagrantly violated for political and other purposes, we raise our voice to denounce so atrocious a system, and to excite the indignation of the country against the men who can countenance or avail themselves of it!

Numerous other letters were read upon the occasion referred to in this chapter; and their contents carefully noted down. The whole ceremony was conducted with so much regularity and method, that it proceeded with amazing despatch; and the re-fastening of the letters was managed with such skill that in few, if any instances, were the slightest traces left to excite suspicion of the process to which those epistles had been subjected.

It was horrible to see that old man forgetting the respectability of his years, and those four young ones laying aside the fine feelings which ought to have animated their bosoms,—it was horrible to see them earnestly, systematically, and skilfully devoting themselves to an avocation the most disgraceful, soul-debasing, and morally execrable!

When the ceremony of opening, reading, and re-sealing the letters was concluded, one of the clerks conveyed the basket containing them to that department of the establishment where they were to undergo the process of sorting and sub-sorting for despatch by the evening mails; and the Examiner then proceeded to make his reports to the various offices of the government. The notes of the despatch from Castelcicala were forwarded to the Foreign Secretary: the contents of the Banker's letter to his father were copied and sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: the particulars of Miss Cecilia Huntingfield's affecting epistle to her mother were entered in a private book in case they should be required at a future day;—and an exact copy of Robert Stephens' letter to his brother was forwarded to the Solicitor of the Bank of England.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE 26TH OF NOVEMBER.

As soon as the first gleam of morning penetrated through the curtains of the boudoir in the Villa near Upper Clapton, Walter leapt from her couch.

Conflicting feelings of joy and sorrow filled her bosom. The day—the happy day had at length arrived, when, according to the promise of the man on whom she looked as her benefactor, that grand event was to be accomplished, which would release her from the detestable disguise which she had now maintained for a period of nearly five years. The era had come when she was again to appear in the garb that suited alike her charms and her inclinations. This circumstance inspired her with the most heartfelt happiness.

But, on the other hand, she loved—tenderly loved one who had meditated against her an outrage of a most infamous description. Instead of hailing her approaching return to her female attire as the signal for the consummation of the fond hopes in which she had a few weeks before indulged,—hopes which pictured to her imagination delicious scenes of matrimonial bliss in the society of George Montague,—she was compelled to separate that dream of felicity from the fact of her emancipation from a thraldom repulsive to her delicacy and her tastes.

It was, therefore, with mingled feelings of happiness and melancholy, that she commenced her usual toilette—that masculine toilette which she was that day to wear for the last time.

"You ought to be in good spirits this morning, my dearest mistress," said Louisa, as she entered the room: "the period so anxiously looked forward to by you has at length arrived."

"And to-morrow—to-morrow," exclaimed Walter, her hazel eyes lighting up with a brilliant expression of joy, "you, my excellent Louisa, will assist me to adorn myself with that garb which I have neglected so of late!"

"I shall be happy both for your sake and mine," returned Louisa, who was indeed deeply attached to her mistress; "and when I see you recovering all your usual spirits, in a foreign land——"

"In Switzerland," hastily interrupted Walter; "in Switzerland—whither you will accompany me, my good and faithful Louisa; and to which delightful country we will proceed without delay! There indeed I shall be happy—and, I hope, contented!"

"Mr. Stephens is to be here at ten, is he not?" said Louisa, after a short pause.

"At ten precisely; and we then repair forthwith to the West End of the town, where certain preliminaries are requisite previously to receiving an immense sum of money which will be paid over to us at the Bank of England. This much Mr. Stephens told me yesterday. He had never communicated so much before."

"And this very afternoon it is your determination to leave London?" said Louisa.

"I am now resolved upon that step," replied the lady. "You alone shall accompany me: Mr. Stephens has promised to provide for the groom and the old cook. Therefore, while I am absent this morning about the momentous business—the real nature of which, by-the-bye, has yet to be explained to me—you will make all the preparations that may be necessary for our journey."

This conversation took place while Louisa hastily lighted the fire in the boudoir. In a few minutes the grate sent up a cheering and grateful heat; and the flames roared up the chimney. The lady, with an elegant dressing-gown folded loosely around her, and her delicate white feet thrust into red morocco slippers, threw herself into her luxurious easy-chair while Louisa hastened to serve up breakfast upon a little rose-wood table, covered with a napkin as white as snow. But the meal passed away almost untouched: the lady's heart was too full of hope and tender melancholy to allow her to experience the least appetite.

The mysterious toilette was completed: and Walter descended to the parlour, attired in masculine garments for the last time!

At ten o'clock precisely Mr. Stephens arrived. He was dressed with peculiar neatness and care; but his countenance was very pale, and his eyes vibrated in a restless manner in their sockets. He, however, assumed a bold composure; and thus the profound anxiety to which he was at that moment a prey, was unnoticed by Walter Sydney.

They seated themselves upon the sofa, and looked at each other for an instant without speaking. Those glances on either side expressed, in the ardent language of the eye, the words—"This is the day!"

"Walter," said Mr. Stephens, at length breaking the silence which had prevailed, "your conduct to-day must crown my designs with glorious success, or involve me in irretrievable ruin."

"You may rely with confidence upon my discretion and prudence," answered Walter. "Command me in all respects—consistently with honour."

"Honour!" exclaimed Stephens impatiently: "why do you for ever mention that unmeaning word? *Honour* is a conventional term, and is often used in a manner inconsistently with common sense and sound judgment. *Honour* is all very well when it is brought in contact with *honour* only; but when it has to oppose fraud and deceit, it must succumb if it trust solely to its own force. The most honest lawyer sets chichanery and quibble to work, to counteract the chichanery and quibble of his pettifogging opponent: the politician calls the machinery of intrigue into play, in order to fight his foeman with that foeman's own weapons:—if the French employ the aid of riflemen concealed in the thicket while the fair fight takes place upon the plain, the English must do the same."

"I certainly comprehend the necessity of frequently fighting a man with his own weapons," said Walter; "but I do not see to what point in our affairs your reasoning tends."

"Suppose, Walter," resumed Stephens, speaking very earnestly, and emphatically accentuating every syllable,—"suppose that you

had a friend who was entitled to certain rights which were withheld from him by means of some detestable quibble and low chicanery; suppose that by stating that your friend's name was George instead of William, for instance, you could put him in possession of what is justly and legitimately his due, but which, remember, is shamefully and most dishonestly kept away from him;—in this case, should you hesitate to declare that his name was George, and not William?"

"I think that I should be inclined to make the statement, to serve the cause of justice and to render a friend a signal service," answered Sydney, after a moment's hesitation.

"I could not have expected a different reply," exclaimed Stephens, a gleam of joy animating his pale countenance: "and you would do so with less remorse when you found that you were transferring property from one individual who could well spare what he was never justly entitled to, to a person who would starve without the restoration of his legitimate rights."

"Oh! certainly," said Walter; and this time the reply was given without an instant's meditation.

"Then," continued Stephens, more and more satisfied with the influence of his sophistry, "you would in such a case eschew those maudlin and mawkish ideas of *honour*, which arbitrarily exact that a falsehood must never be told for a good purpose, and that illegitimate means must never—never be adopted to work out virtuous and profitable ends?"

"My conduct in assuming this disguise," returned Sydney, with a smile and a blush, "has proved to you, I should imagine, that I should not hesitate to make use of a deceit comparatively innocent, with a view to oppose fraud and ensure permanent benefit to my friend and myself."

"Oh! Walter, you should have been a man in person as well as in mind!" cried Stephens, enthusiastically. "Now I have no fears of the result of my plans; and before sun-set you shall be worth ten thousand pounds!"

"Ten thousand pounds!" repeated Walter, mechanically. "How much can be done with such a sum as that!"

"You expressed a wish to leave this country, and visit the south of Europe," said Stephens: "you will have ample means to gratify all your tastes, and administer to all your inclinations. Only conceive a beautiful little cottage on the shore of the lake of Brienz—that pearl of the Oberland; the fair boat-women—the daughters of Switzerland—passing in their little shallops beneath your windows, and singing their national songs, full of charming tenderness, while the soft music mingles with the murmuring waves and the sounds of the oars!"

"Oh! what an enchanting picture!" cried Walter. "And have you ever seen such as this?"

"I have; and I feel convinced that the existence I recommend is the one which will best suit you. To-day," continued Stephens, watching his companion's countenance with a little anxiety, "shall you recover your rights;—to-day shall you oppose the innocent deceit to the enormous fraud;—to-day shall you do for *yourself* what you ere now stated you would do for a *friend*!"

"If you have drawn my own case in putting those queries to me,—if immense advantages will be derived from my behaviour in this affair,—if I am merely wresting from the hands of base cupidity that which is justly mine own,—and if the enemy whom we oppose can well afford to restore to me the means of subsistence, and thus render me independent for the remainder of my days,—oh! how can I hesitate for a moment? how can I refuse to entrust myself wholely and solely—blindly and confidently—in your hands,—you who have done so much for me, and who have taught me to respect, honour, and obey you?"

The lady uttered these words with a species of electric enthusiasm, while her eyes brightened, and her cheeks were suffused with the purple glow of animation. The specious arguments and the glowing description of Swiss life, brought forward by Stephens with admirable dexterity, awakened all the ardour of an impassioned soul; and the bosom of that beauteous creature palpitated with hope, with joy, and with excitement, as she gazed upon the future through the mirror presented by Stephens to her view.

She was now exactly in a frame of mind suited to his purpose. Without allowing her ardour time to abate, and while she was animated by the delicious aspirations which he had conjured up, as it were by an enchanter's spell, in her breast, he took her by he hand, and led her up to the mantelpiece; then, pointing to the portrait of her brother, he said in a low, hurried, and yet solemn tone,—"The fortune which must be wrested from the grasp of cupidity this day, would have belonged to your brother; and no power on earth could have deprived him of it; for, had he lived, he would yesterday have attained his twenty-first year! His death is unknown to him who holds this money: but, by a miserable legal technicality, you—*you*, his sister, and *in justice* his heiress—*you* would be deprived of that fortune by the man who now grasps it, and who would chuckle at any plan which made it his own. Now do you comprehend me? You have but to say that your name is *Walter*, instead of *Eliza*,—and you will recover your just rights, defeat the wretched chicanery of the law, and enter into possession of those resources which belong to you in the eyes of God, but which, if you shrink, will be for ever alienated from you and yours!"

"In one word," said the lady, "I am to personate my brother?"

"Precisely! Do you hesitate?" demanded Stephens: "will you allow the property of your family to pass into the hands of a stranger, who possesses not the remotest right to its enjoyment? or will you by one bold effort—an effort that cannot fail—direct that fortune into its just, its proper, and its legitimate channel?"

"The temptation is great," said the lady, earnestly contemplating the portrait of her brother; "but the danger—the danger?" she added hastily: "what would be the result if we were detected?"

"Nothing—nothing, save the total loss of the entire fortune," answered Stephens: "and, therefore, you perceive, that want of nerve—hesitation—awkwardness—blushes—confusion on your part, would ruin all. Be firm—be collected—be calm and resolute—and our plans *must* be crowned with unequivocal success!"

"Oh! if I proceed farther, I will pass through the ordeal with ease and safety," exclaimed the lady: "I can nerve my mind to encounter any danger, when it is well defined, and I know its extent;—it is only when it is vague, uncertain, and indistinct, that I shrink from meeting it. Yes," she continued, after a few moments' reflection, "I will follow your counsel in all respects: you *do* know—you *must* know how much we risk, and how far we compromise ourselves;—and when I see you ready to urge on this matter to the end, how can I fear to accompany you? Yes," she added, after another pause, much longer than the preceding one,—"I will be Walter

Sydney throughout this day at least!"

"My dear friend," ejaculated Stephens, in a transport of joy, "you act in a manner worthy of your noble-hearted brother, I see—he smiles upon you even in his picture-frame."

"I will retrieve from the hands of strangers that which is thine, dear brother," said the lady, addressing herself to the portrait as if it could hear the words which she pronounced with a melancholy solemnity: then, turning towards Stephens, she exclaimed, "But you must acquaint me with the ceremonies we have to fulfil, and the duties which I shall have to perform, in order to accomplish the desired aim."

"I need not instruct you now," returned Stephens: "the forms are nothing, and explain themselves, as it were;—a few papers to sign at a certain person's house in Grosvenor Square—then a ride to the Bank—and all is over. But we must now take our departure: the hackney-coach that brought us hither is waiting to convey us to the West End."

Stephens and Sydney issued from the house together. The former gave certain directions to the coachman; and they then commenced their memorable journey.

Mr. Stephens did not allow his companion a single moment for calm and dispassionate reflection. He continued to expatiate upon the happiness which was within her reach amidst the rural scenery of Switzerland: he conjured up before her mental vision the most ravishing and delightful pictures of domestic tranquillity, so congenial to her tastes:—he fed her imagination with all those fairy visions which were calculated to attract and dazzle a mind tinged with a romantic shade;—and then he skilfully introduced those specious arguments which blinded her as to the real nature of the deceit in which she was so prominent an agent. He thus sustained an artificial state of excitement, bordering upon enthusiasm, in the bosom of that confiding and generous-hearted woman; and not for one moment during that long ride, did she repent of the step she had taken. In fact, such an influence did the reasoning of Stephens exercise upon her mind, that she ceased to think of the possibility of either incurring danger or doing wrong;—she knew not how serious might be the consequences of detection;—she believed that she was combating the chicanery of the law with a similar weapon, the use of which was justified and rendered legitimate by the peculiar circumstances of the case.

The hackney-coach proceeded by way of the New Road, and stopped to take up Mr. Mac Chizzle at his residence near Saint Pancras New Church. The vehicle then proceeded to Grosvenor Square, where it stopped opposite one of those princely dwellings whose dingy exteriors afford to the eye of the foreigner accustomed to the gorgeous edifices of continental cities, but little promise of the wealth, grandeur, and magnificence which exist within.

The door was opened by a footman in splendid livery.

This domestic immediately recognised Mr. Stephens, and said, "His lordship expects you, sir."

The three visitors alighted from the coach: and as Stephens walked with the disguised lady into the hall of the mansion, he said in a hurried whisper, "Courage, my dear Walter: you are now about to appear in the presence of the Earl of Warrington!"

The servant led the way up a wide staircase, and conducted the visitors into a library fitted up in the most luxurious and costly manner. Cases filled with magnificently bound volumes, statues of exquisite sculpture, and pictures of eminent artists, denoted the taste of the aristocratic possessor of that lordly mansion.

Two individuals were seated at a table covered with papers and legal documents. One was a fine, tall, middle-aged man, with a noble and handsome countenance, polished manners, and most kind and affable address:—the other was an old gentleman with a bald head, sharp features, and constant smile upon his lips when he addressed the personage just described.

The first was the Earl of Warrington; the other was his solicitor, Mr. Pakenham.

The Earl rose and greeted Mr. Stephens cordially; then, turning towards Walter, he shook her kindly by the hand, and said, "I need not ask if you are the young gentleman to whom I am to be introduced as Mr. Walter Sydney."

"This is my ward, your lordship," said Mr. Stephens, smiling. "I think it is scarcely necessary to call your lordship's attention to the striking resemblance which he bears to his lamented father."

"Yes—it would be impossible to mistake him," said his lordship hastily, while a cloud passed over his brow. "But sit down—pray sit down; and we will proceed to business. I presume that gentleman is your professional adviser?"

"Mr. Mac Chizzle," observed Stephens, introducing the lawyer. "Mr. Pakenham, I have had the pleasure of seeing you before," he added, addressing the nobleman's attorney with a placid smile.

Mr. Pakenham acknowledged the salutation with a bow; and his eye wandered for a moment, with some surprise, towards Mac Chizzle,—as much as to say, "I am astonished to see a person like you employed in so important an affair."

When every one was seated, the Earl of Warrington referred to some papers placed before him, and said, "The object of this meeting is known to every one present. The duty that devolves upon me is to transfer to Walter Sydney, the only son and heir of the late Stanford Sydney, upon being satisfied with respect to the identity of the claimant, the sum of forty-one thousand pounds now invested in certain stocks in the Bank of England."

"It is needless, I presume," said Mr. Pakenham, "to enter into the particulars of this inheritance. We on our side admit our liability to pay the amount specified by his lordship, to the proper claimant."

"Quite satisfactory," observed Mac Chizzle, to whom these observations were addressed.

"The proofs of identity are, then, all that your lordship now requires?" said Mr. Stephens.

"And I only require them as a mere matter of necessary form and ceremony, Mr. Stephens," returned the Earl of Warrington. "I am well aware of your acquaintance with the late Mrs. Sydney, and of the fact that the deceased lady left her children to your care."

"My lord, here are the various certificates," said Stephens, placing a small packet of papers before the Earl. "In the first instance you have the marriage certificate of Stanford Sydney and Letitia Hardinge, the natural daughter of the late Earl of Warrington, your lordship's uncle."

"Well—well," exclaimed the nobleman, somewhat impatiently, as if he were anxious to get rid as soon as possible of a business by no means pleasant to him. "That certificate is beyond all dispute."

"Here," continued Stephens, "is the certificate of the birth of Eliza Sydney, born October 12th, 1810; and here is the certificate of her death, which took place on the 14th of February, 1831."

"This certificate is not necessary," observed Mr. Pakenham; "as in no case, under the provisions of these deeds," he added, pointing to a pile of documents before him, "could that young lady have instituted even a shadow of a claim to this money."

"We had better possess one deed too many, than one too few," said Mr. Stephens, with another bland smile.

"Oh! certainly," exclaimed the Earl. "And this precaution shows the exact condition of the late Mr. Stanford Sydney's family. The daughter is no more: the son lives, and is present."

"Here, then, my lord," continued Stephens, "is the certificate of the birth of Walter Sydney, on the 25th day of November, 1814."

The nobleman examined this document with far more attention than he had devoted to either of the former. He then handed it to Mr. Pakenham, who also scrutinized it narrowly.

"It is quite correct, my Lord," said this gentleman. "We now require two witnesses as to identity."

"I presume his Lordship will receive me as one," observed Mr. Stephens, "considering my intimate acquaintance with all—"

"Oh certainly—certainly," interrupted the Earl hastily.

"And Mr. Mac Chizzle will tender his evidence in the other instance," said Stephens.

"I have known this young gentleman for the last six years," exclaimed Mac Chizzle, pointing towards Walter, "and I knew his mother also."

"Is your Lordship satisfied?" enquired Mr. Pakenham, after a short pause.

"Perfectly," answered the nobleman, without hesitation. "I am, however, in your hands."

"Oh! as for me," returned Mr. Pakenham, "I have no objection to offer. Your Lordship is acquainted with Mr. Stephens."

"Yes—yes," again interrupted the Earl; "I have known Mr. Stephens for some years—and I know him to be a man of honour."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," observed Pakenham.

"No—nothing," added Mac Chizzle; "but to complete the business."

"I will now read the release," said Mr. Pakenham.

The solicitor settled himself in a comfortable manner in his chair, and taking up a deed consisting of several folios, proceeded to make his hearers as much acquainted with its contents as the multifarious redundancies of law terms would allow.

The disguised lady had now time for reflection. She had been more or less prepared for the assertion of Mr. Stephens that Eliza Sydney was dead, and that Walter was living:—but the bare-faced falsehood uttered by Mac Chizzle (who, so far from having been acquainted with her for years, had never seen her until that morning), shocked and astounded her. She had also just learnt for the first time, that her late mother was the natural daughter of an Earl; and she perceived that she herself could claim a distant kinship with the nobleman in whose presence she then was. This circumstance inspired her with feelings in his favour, which were enhanced by the urbanity of his manners, and the readiness with which he admitted all the proofs submitted to him by Mr. Stephens. She had expected, from the arguments used by this gentleman to convince her that she should not hesitate to fight the law with its own weapons, &c., that every obstacle would be thrown in the way of her claims by him on whom they were to be made;—and she was astonished when she compared all the specious representations of Stephens with the readiness, good-will, and alacrity manifested by the Earl in yielding up an enormous sum of money. Now also, for the first time, it struck her as remarkable that Stephens had promised her ten thousand pounds only—a fourth part of that amount to which, according to his own showing, she alone was justly entitled.

All these reflections passed rapidly through her mind while the lawyer was reading the deed of release, not one word of which was attended to by her. She suddenly felt as if her eyes were opened to a fearful conspiracy, in which she was playing a conspicuous part:—she trembled, as if she were standing upon the edge of a precipice;—and yet she knew not how to act. She was bewildered: but the uppermost idea in her mind was that she had gone too far to retreat.

This was the impression that ruled her thoughts at the precise moment when Mr. Pakenham brought the rending of the long wearisome document to a termination. The buzzing, droning noise which had filled her ears for upwards of twenty minutes, suddenly ceased;—and she heard a voice say in a kind tone. "Will you now please to sign this?"

She started—but immediately recovered her presence of mind, and, taking the pen from the lawyer's hand, applied the signature of *Walter Sydney* to the document. It was next witnessed by Pakenham, Stephens, and Mac Chizzle, and handed to the Earl.

The nobleman then took several papers—familiar to all those who have ever possessed Bank Stock—from an iron safe in one corner of the library, and handing them to the disguised lady, said, "Mr. Walter Sydney, I have much pleasure in putting you in possession of this fortune; and I can assure you that my best—my very best wishes for your health and prosperity, accompany the transfer."

Walter received the documents mechanically as it were, and murmured a few words of thanks and gratitude.

"Perhaps, Mr. Stephens," said the Earl, when the ceremony was thus completed, "you and your friends will do me the honour to accept of a slight refreshment in an adjoining room. You will excuse my absence; but I have a few matters of pressing importance to transact with my solicitor, and which cannot possibly be postponed. You must accept this as my apology; and believe in my regret that I cannot keep you company."

The Earl shook hands with both Stephens and Sydney, and bowed to Mac Chizzle. These three individuals then withdrew.

An elegant collation was prepared for them in another apartment; but Mac Chizzle was the only one who seemed inclined to pay his respects to it. Walter, however, gladly swallowed a glass of wine; for she felt exhausted with the excitement she had passed through. Stephens was too highly elated either to eat or drink, and too anxious to complete the business in the City, to allow Mac Chizzle to waste much time over the delicacies of which the collation consisted.

They were, therefore, all three soon on their way to the Bank of England.

"Well, I think we managed the job very correctly," said Mac Chizzle.

"Everything passed off precisely as I had anticipated," observed Mr. Stephens. "But you, Walter—you are serious."

"I do not look upon the transaction in the same light as I did a couple of hours since," answered she coldly.

"Ah! my dear friend," cried Stephens, "you are deceived by the apparent urbanity of that nobleman, and the mildness of his solicitor. They assumed that appearance because there was no help for them;—they had no good to gain by throwing obstacles in our way."

"But the certificate of *my* death was a forgery," said Walter, bitterly.

"A necessary alteration of names—without which the accomplishment of our plan would have been impossible," answered Stephens. "But let me ease your mind in one respect, my dear Walter. That nobleman is a relation of yours—and yet until this day his name has never been mentioned to you. And why? Because he visits upon you the hatred which he entertained for your deceased mother! Did you not observe that he interrupted me when I spoke of her? did you not notice that he touched with extreme aversion upon the topics connected with your revered parents?"

"I did!—I did!" exclaimed Walter.

"He hates you!—he detests you!" continued Stephens, emphatically; "and he will not countenance any claim which you might advance towards kinship with him. His duties as a nobleman and a gentleman dictated the outward civility with which he treated you; but his heart gave no echo to the words of congratulation which issued from his lips."

"I believe you—I know that you are speaking the truth," cried Walter. "Pardon me, if for a moment I ceased to look upon you as a friend."

Stephens pressed the hand of the too-confiding being, over whom his dangerous eloquence and subtle reasoning possessed an influence so omnipotent for purposes of evil; and he then again launched out into glowing descriptions of the sources and means of happiness within her reach. This reasoning, aided by the hope that in a few hours she should be enabled to quit London for ever, restored the lady's disposition to that same easy and pliant state, to which Stephens had devoted nearly five years to model it.

At length the hackney-coach stopped at the Bank of England. Stephens hurried to the rotunda to obtain the assistance of a stock-broker, for the purpose of transferring and selling out the immense sum which now appeared within his reach, and to obtain which he had devoted his time, his money, and his tranquillity!

Walter and the lawyer awaited his return beneath the porch of the entrance. After the lapse of a few moments he appeared, accompanied by a broker of his acquaintance. They then all four proceeded together to the office where the business was to be transacted.

The broker explained the affair to a clerk, and the clerk, after consulting a huge volume, received the documents which Lord Warrington had handed over to Sydney. Having compared those papers with the entries in the book, the clerk made a sign to three men who were lounging at the upper end of the office, near the stove, and who had the appearance of messengers, or porters.

These men moved hastily forward, and advanced up to Stephens, Mac Chizzle, and Walter Sydney.

A deadly pallor spread over the countenance of Stephens; Mac Chizzle appeared alarmed; but Walter remained still unsuspicious of danger.

"Those are the persons," said the clerk, significantly, as he pointed to the three conspirators, to whom he observed, almost in the same breath, "Your plans are detected—these men are officers!"

"Officers!" ejaculated Sydney; "What does this mean?"

"We are here to apprehend you," answered the foremost of those functionaries. "Resistance will be vain: there are others outside in readiness."

"Merciful heavens!" cried Walter, joining her hands in agony: "Oh! Stephens, to what have you brought me!"

That unhappy man hung down his head, and made no reply. He felt crushed by this unexpected blow, which came upon him at the very instant when the object of his dearest hopes seemed within his reach.

As for Mac Chizzle, he resigned himself with dogged submission to his fate.

The officers and their prisoners now proceeded to the Mansion House, accompanied by the clerk and the stock-broker.

Sydney—a prey to the most dreadful apprehensions and painful remorse—was compelled to lean for support upon the arm of the officer who had charge of her.

Sir Peter Laurie sat for the Lord Mayor.

The worthy knight is the terror of all swindlers, mock companies, and bubble firms existing in the City of London: wherever there is fraud, within the jurisdiction of the civic authorities, he is certain to root it out. He has conferred more benefit upon the commercial world, and has devoted himself more energetically to protect the interests of the trading community, than any other alderman. Unlike the generality of the city magistrates, who are coarse, vulgar, ignorant, and narrow-minded men, Sir Peter Laurie is possessed of a high range of intellect, and is an enlightened, an agreeable, and a polished gentleman.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, when Stephens, Mac Chizzle, and Sydney were placed in the dock of the Mansion House Police-office.

The solicitor of the Bank of England attended for the prosecution.

"With what do you charge these prisoners?" demanded the magistrate.

"With conspiring to obtain the sum of forty-one thousand pounds from the hands of the Earl of Warrington, and the Governor and Company of the Bank of England."

"Is his lordship present?"

"Your worship, he is, at this moment, unaware of the diabolical fraud that has been contemplated, and in part perpetrated upon him. He has given up to the prisoners certain documents, which constituted their authority for transferring and selling out the sum I have mentioned. By certain means the intentions of the prisoners were discovered some time ago; and secret information was given to

the Bank directors upon the subject. The directors were not, however, permitted to communicate with the Earl of Warrington, under penalty of receiving no farther information from the quarter whence the original warning emanated. Under all circumstances, I shall content myself with stating sufficient to support the charge to-day, so that your worship may remand the prisoners until a period when the attendance of the Earl of Warrington can be procured."

"State your case."

"I charge this prisoner," said the solicitor, pointing towards Sydney, "with endeavouring to obtain the sum of forty-one thousand pounds from the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, under pretence of being one Walter Sydney, a man—whereas the prisoner's name is Eliza Sydney, and she is a woman!"

An immense sensation prevailed in the justice-room at this announcement.

The disguised lady moaned audibly, and leant against the bar of the dock for support.

"And I charge the other prisoners, Robert Stephens and Hugh Mac Chizzle, with aiding and abetting in the crime," added the solicitor, after a pause.

The unhappy lady, yielding to emotions and feelings which she was now no longer able to control, threw herself upon her knees, clasped her hands together in an agony of grief, and exclaimed, "It is true! I am not what I seem! I have been guilty of a fearful deception—a horrible cheat: but it was he—he," she cried, pointing to Stephens, "who made me do it!"

There was an universal sentiment of deep sympathy with the female prisoner, throughout the court; and the worthy alderman himself was affected.

"You must remember," he said, in a kind tone, "that anything which you admit here, may be used against you elsewhere."

"I am anxious to confess all that I have done, and all that I know," cried the lady; "and in so doing, I shall in some measure atone for the enormity of my guilt, which I now view in its true light!"

"Under these circumstances," said the alderman, "let the case stand over until to-morrow."

The prisoners were then removed.

In another hour they were inmates of the Giltspur-street Compter.

And how terminated the 26th of November for Walter Sydney? Instead of being in possession of an ample fortune, and about to visit a clime where she hoped to enjoy all the blessings of domestic tranquillity, and the charms of rural bliss, she found herself a prisoner, charged with a crime of deep dye!

Oh! what a sudden reverse was this!

Still, upon that eventful day, there was one hope of hers fulfilled. She threw aside her masculine attire, and assumed the garb adapted to her sex. A messenger was despatched to the villa, to communicate the sad tidings of the arrest to Louisa, and procure suitable clothing for her wretched mistress.

But, alas! that garb in which she had so ardently desired to appear again, was now doomed to be worn, for the first time, in a prison:—the new epoch of her life, which was to be marked by a return to feminine habits, was commenced in a dungeon!

Still that new period had begun; and from henceforth we shall know her only by her real name of Eliza Sydney.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXPLANATIONS.

WITH the greatest forethought and the best taste, Louisa had forwarded to her mistress the most simple and unassuming garb which the boudoir contained, amongst its miscellaneous articles of female attire.

Dressed in the garments which suited her sex, Eliza was a fine and elegant woman—above the common female height, yet graceful in her deportment, and charming in all her movements. Her shoulders possessed that beautiful slope, and the contours of her bust were modelled in that ample and voluptuous mould, which form such essential elements of superb and majestic loveliness.

Although so long accustomed to masculine attire, there was nothing awkward—nothing constrained in her gait; her step was free and light, and her pace short, as if that exquisitely turned ankle, and long narrow foot had never known aught save the softest silken hose, and the most delicate prunella shoes.

In a word, the beauty of Eliza Sydney was of a lofty and imposing order;—a pale high brow, melting hazel eyes, a delicately-chiselled mouth and nose, and a form whose matured expansion and height were rendered more commanding by its exquisite symmetry of proportions.

The morning journals published an account of the extraordinary attempt at fraud detected at the Bank on the previous day; and the utmost curiosity was evinced by an immense crowd that had collected to obtain a view of the prisoners, especially the female one, as they alighted from the separate cabs in which they were conveyed to the Mansion House for re-examination. Eliza's countenance was flushed and animated, and the expression of her eyes denoted profound mental excitement: Stephens was ghastly pale:—the lawyer maintained a species of sullen and reserved composure.

The police-office at the Mansion House was crowded to excess. Sir Peter Laurie presided; and on his right hand was seated the Earl of Warrington. Mr. Pakenham was also present, in company with the solicitor of the Bank of England.

The moment the prisoners appeared in the dock, Eliza in a firm tone addressed the magistrate, and intimated her intention of making the most ample confession, in accordance with her promise of the preceding day. She was accommodated with a chair, and the chief clerk proceeded to take down the narrative which detailed the origin and progress of this most extraordinary conspiracy.

Alas! that so criminal a tale should have been accompanied by the music of that flute-like voice; and that so foul a history should have emanated from so sweet a mouth. Those words of guilt which trembled upon her lips, resembled the slime of the snail upon the leaf of the rose.

When the confession of Eliza Sydney was fully taken down, and signed by her, the Earl of Warrington's solicitor entered into a statement which placed the magistrate in full possession of the facts of the case.

We shall now proceed to acquaint our readers with the complete history formed by these revelations.

"The late Earl of Warrington was a man of eccentric and peculiar habits. An accident in his infancy had rendered his person deformed and stunted his growth; and, being endowed with tender feelings and acute susceptibilities, he could not bear to mingle in that society where his own physical defects were placed in strong contrast with the fine figures, handsome countenances, and manly forms of many of his aristocratic acquaintances. He possessed a magnificent estate in Cambridgeshire; and in the country seat attached to that domain did he pass the greater portion of his time in solitude.

"The bailiff of the Warrington estate was a widower, and possessed an only child—a daughter. Letitia Hardinge was about sixteen years of age when the Earl first took up his abode in Cambridgeshire, in the year 1790. She was not good looking; but she possessed a mild and melancholy expression of countenance, and an amiability of disposition, which rendered her an object of interest to all who knew her. She was fond of reading; and the library at the neighbouring mansion was always open to her inspection.

"The reserved and world-shunning Earl soon became attracted towards Letitia Hardinge. He found that she possessed a high order of intellect; and he delighted to converse with her. By degrees he experienced a deep attachment towards a being whose society often relieved the monotonous routine of his life; and the gratitude which Letitia entertained towards the Earl for his kindness to her, soon partook of a more tender feeling. She found herself interested in a nobleman of high rank and boundless wealth, who was compelled to avoid the great world where the homage shown to his proud name appeared to him to be a mockery of his physical deformity; she ministered to him with all a woman's devotedness, during a tedious and painful malady which seized upon him shortly after his arrival in Cambridgeshire; and at length her presence became as it were necessary to him.

"They loved: and although no priest blessed their union, they entertained unalterable respect and affection for each other. That dread of ridicule which had driven the Earl from society, and which with him was a weakness amounting almost to folly, prevented the solemnization of his nuptials with the woman he loved. She became pregnant: and the day that made the Earl the father of a daughter, robbed him of the mother of that innocent child who was thus born in sin!

"Letitia Hardinge, the Earl's natural child, grew up in health and beauty. The father was dotingly attached to her, and watched her growth with pride and adoration. She was sixteen years of age, when Frederick, the Earl's nephew and heir presumptive to the title and vast estates of the family, arrived in Cambridgeshire to pay his respects to his uncle, on his emancipation from college. The young man's parents had both died in his infancy, and he was entirely dependant upon the Earl.

"Letitia Hardinge passed as the niece of the Earl of Warrington. Frederick was acquainted with the real history of the young lady; and, previous to his arrival at the mansion of his uncle, he was not prepared to treat her with any excess of civility. He was brought up in that aristocratic school which looks upon pure blood as a necessary element of existence, and as alone entitled to respect. But he had

not been many days in the society of Miss Hardinge, before his ideas upon this subject underwent a complete change, and he could not help admiring her. Admiration soon led to love:—he became deeply enamoured of her!

"The Earl beheld this attachment on his part, and was rejoiced. An union between the two cousins would secure to his adored daughter that rank and social position, which he was most anxious for her to occupy. As the wife of the heir presumptive to the richest Earldom in the realm, her origin would never be canvassed nor thought of. But Letitia herself returned not the young man's love. By one of those extraordinary caprices, which so often characterise even the strongest female minds, she had taken a profound aversion to her suitor; and being of a high and independent disposition, not even the dazzling prospect of wealth and title could move her heart in his favour.

"There was a farmer upon the Earl's estate, of the name of Sydney. He had a son whose Christian name was Stanford—a handsome but sickly youth, and by no means comparable to the polished and intellectual Frederick. Nevertheless, Letitia entertained for this young man an affection bordering upon madness. The Earl discovered her secret, and was deeply afflicted at his daughter's predilection. He remonstrated with her, and urged the necessity of conquering her inclinations in this respect. It was then that she showed the temper and the spirit of *a spoiled child*, and declared that she would follow the dictates of her own mind in preference to every other consideration. The Earl swore a most solemn oath, *that if she dared marry Stanford Sydney, neither she nor her husband should ever receive one single shilling from him*!

"Reckless of this threat—indifferent to the feelings of that father who had cherished her so fondly, the perverse girl one morning abandoned the paternal home, and fled with Stanford Sydney, on whom she bestowed her hand. The blow came like a thunderbolt upon the head of the old Earl. He was naturally of a delicate and infirm constitution; and this sudden misfortune proved too much for his debilitated frame. He took to his bed; and a few hours before his death he made a will consistent with his oath. He left all his property to his nephew, with the exception of forty-one thousand pounds—the amount of his savings since he had inherited the title. This will ordained that his nephew should enjoy the interest of this sum; but that, should Letitia bear a male child to Stanford Sydney, such issue should, upon attaining the age of twenty-one years, receive as his portion the above sum of forty-one thousand pounds. Such was the confidence which the old Earl possessed in his nephew, that he left the execution of this provision to him. It was also enacted by that will, that should the said Letitia die without bearing a son to the said Stanford Sydney; or should a son born of her die previously to attaining his twenty-first year, then the sum alluded to should become the property of Frederick.

"The old man died, a prey to the deepest mental affliction—indeed, literally heart-broken—shortly after making this will. Frederick, who was honour and integrity personified, determined upon fulfilling all the instructions of his uncle to the very letter.

"The fruits of the union of Stanford Sydney and Letitia Hardinge were a daughter and a son. The name of the former was Eliza: that of the latter was Walter. Eliza was a strong and healthy child; Walter was sickly and ailing from his birth. Shortly after the birth of Walter, the father, who had long been in a deep decline, paid the debt of nature. Letitia was then left a widow, with two young children, and nothing but a small farm for her support. Her high spirit prevented her from applying to the Earl of Warrington—the man whose love she had slighted and scorned; and thus she had to struggle with poverty and misfortune in rearing and educating her fatherless progeny. The farm which she tenanted was situated in Berkshire, whither she and her husband had removed immediately after the death of the father of Stanford. This farm belonged to a gentleman of the name of Stephens—a merchant of respectability and property, in the City of London.

"It was in the year 1829 that Robert Stephens appeared at the farm-house, to announce the death of his father and his inheritance of all the landed property which had belonged to the deceased. The widow was considerably in arrears of rent: Stephens inquired into her condition and prospects, and learnt from her lips her entire history—that history which, from motives of disappointed pride, she had religiously concealed from her children. She was well aware of the provisions of the late Earl's will; but she had determined not to acquaint either Eliza or Walter with the clause relative to the fortune, until the majority of the latter. Towards Stephens she did not manifest the same reserve, the revelation of that fact being necessary to convince him that she possessed good perspective chances of settling those long arrears, which she was in the meantime totally unable to liquidate.

"Robert Stephens was immediately attracted towards that family. It was not the beauty of Eliza which struck him:—he was a cold, calculating man of the world, and considered female loveliness as mere dross compared to sterling gold. He found that Walter was an amiable and simple-hearted youth, and he hoped to turn to his own advantage the immense inheritance which awaited the lad at his majority. He accordingly treated Mrs. Sydney with every indulgence, forgiving her the arrears already accumulated, and lowering her rent in future. He thus gained an immense influence over the family; and when a sudden malady threw the widow upon her death-bed, it was to Stephens that she recommended her children.

"Stephens manifested the most paternal attention towards the orphans, and secured their unbounded gratitude, attachment, and confidence. But his designs were abruptly menaced in an alarming manner. The seeds of consumption, which had been sown by paternal tradition in the constitution of Walter, germinated with fatal effect; and on the 14th of February, 1841, he surrendered up his spirit.

"Scarcely had the breath left the body of the youth, when Stephens, by that species of magic influence which he had already begun to exercise over Eliza, induced her to assume her brother's garb; and she was taught to believe, even by the very side of his corpse, that immense interests were connected with her compliance with his wish. An old woman was the only female attendant at the farm-house; and she was easily persuaded to spread a report amongst the neighbours that it was the daughter who was dead. Eliza did not stir abroad: Stephens managed the funeral, and gave instructions for the entry in the parish register of the burial of Eliza Sidney; and, as Eliza immediately afterwards repaired to the Villa at Clapton, the fraud was not suspected in the neighbourhood of the Berkshire farm.

"Stephens duly communicated the deaths of Mrs. Sydney and Eliza to the Earl of Warrington, and obtained an introduction to this nobleman. He called occasionally in Grosvenor Square, during this interval of four years and nine months which occurred between the reported death of Eliza and the 26th of November, 1835; and invariably took care to mention not only that Walter was in good health,

but that he was residing at the Villa. His lordship, however, on no occasion expressed a wish to see the young man; for years had failed to wipe away the impression made upon Frederick's mind by the deceased Letitia Hardinge!

"When Stephens introduced the disguised Eliza to the nobleman, as Walter Sydney, upon the morning of the 26th of November, the Earl entertained not the least suspicion of fraud. He knew that Stephens was the son of an eminent merchant, and that he was well spoken of in society; and he was moreover anxious to complete a ceremony which only recalled painful reminiscences to his mind. Thus, so far as his lordship was concerned, the deceit was managed with the most complete success; and there is no doubt that the entire scheme might have been carried out, and the secret have remained for ever undiscovered, had not a private warning been communicated in time to the Bank of England."

Such was the complete narrative formed by the statement of the Earl of Warrington, through his solicitor, and the confession of Eliza Sydney. The history excited the most extraordinary interest in all who heard it; and there was a powerful feeling of sympathy and commiseration in favour of Eliza. Even Lord Warrington himself looked once or twice kindly upon her.

The examination which elicited all the facts detailed in the narrative, and the evidence gone into to prove the attempt to obtain possession of the money at the Bank of England, occupied until four o'clock in the afternoon; when the magistrate committed Robert Stephens, Hugh Mac Chizzle, and Eliza Sydney to Newgate, to take their trials at the approaching session of the Central Criminal Court.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE OLD BAILEY.

THE sessions of the Central Criminal Court commenced.

The street of the Old Bailey was covered with straw; and the pavement in the neighbourhood of the doors of the court on one side, and of the public-houses on the other, was crowded with policemen, the touters of the barristers and attornies practising criminal law, and the friends of the prisoners whose trials were expected to come on that day.

The press-yard, which is situate between the solid granite wall of Newgate and the Court-house, was also flooded with living waves, which rolled onwards from the street to the flight of steps leading into the gallery of the Old Court. In former times, prisoners who refused to plead, were pressed beneath immense weights, until they would consent to declare themselves guilty or not guilty. This odious punishment was inflicted in that enclosure: hence its name of the press-yard.

It cannot be necessary to describe the court-house, with its dark sombre walls, and its huge ventilator at the top. Alas! the golden bowl of hope has been broken within those walls, and the knell of many a miserable wretch has been rung upon its tribunals from the lips of the judge!

The street of the Old Bailey presents quite an animated appearance during the sessions;—but it is horrible to reflect that numbers of the policemen who throng in that thoroughfare upon those occasions, have trumped up the charges for which prisoners have been committed for trial, in order to obtain a holiday, and extort from the county the expenses of attending as witnesses.

At the time of which our tale treats, the sheriffs were accustomed to provide two dinners for the judges every day; one at three, and the other at five o'clock, so that those who could not attend the first, were enabled to take their seats at the second. Marrow puddings, beef-steaks, and boiled rounds of beef, invariably formed the staple commodities of these repasts; and it was the duty of the ordinary chaplains of Newgate to act as vice-presidents at both meals. This ceremony was always performed by those reverend gentlemen: the ecclesiastical gourmands contrived, during sessions, to eat two dinners every day, and wash each down with a very tolerable allowance of wine.

We said that the Sessions commenced. On the Monday and Tuesday, the Recorder in the Old Court, and the Common Sergeant in the New, tried those prisoners who were charged with minor offences: on the Wednesday the Judges upon the *rota* took their seats on the bench of the Old Court.

Richard Markham's name stood first for trial upon the list on that day. He was conducted from Newgate by means of a subterraneous passage, running under the Press-yard, into the dock of the Court.

The Hall was crowded to excess, for the case had produced a profound sensation. The moment Markham appeared in the dock, every eye was fixed upon him. His countenance was very pale; but his demeanour was firm. He cast one glance around, and then looked only towards the twelve men who were to decide upon his fate. Close by the dock stood Mr. Monroe: Whittingham was in the gallery;—the Baronet, Chichester, and Talbot lounged together near the reporters' box.

The Jury were sworn, and the counsel for the prosecution stated the case. He observed that the prisoner at the bar was a young man who, upon his majority, would become possessed of a considerable fortune; but that in the mean time he had no doubt fallen into bad company, for it would be proved that he was arrested by the police at a common gambling house in the evening of the very same day on which he had committed the offence with which he was now charged. It was but natural to presume that this young man had imbibed the habit of gaming, and, having thereby involved himself in pecuniary embarrassments, had adopted the desperate and fatal expedient of obtaining money by means of forged Bank-notes, rather than communicate his situation to his guardian. Where he procured these forged notes, it was impossible to say: it would, however, be satisfactorily proved to the jury that he passed a forged note for five hundred pounds at the banking-house of Messrs. ——, and that when he was arrested a second note for fifty pounds was found upon his person. Several concurrent circumstances established the guilt of the prisoner. On the evening previous to his arrest, the prisoner dined with Sir Rupert Harborough, Mr. Chichester, and Mr. Talbot; and when these gentlemen proposed a walk after dessert, the prisoner requested them to accompany him to a common gaming-house in the Quadrant. They refused; but finding him determined to visit that den, they agreed to go with him, with the friendly intention of taking care that he was not plundered of his money, he being considerably excited by the wine he had been drinking. Ere he set out, the prisoner enquired if either of his companions could change him a fifty pound note; but neither gentleman had sufficient gold to afford the accommodation required. Now was it not fair to presume that the prisoner intended to pass off upon one of his friends the very forged fifty-pound note subsequently found upon him? On the following day, the prisoner—the moment he was released from custody on the charge of being found in a common gaming-house—hurried home, and ordered his servants to prepare for his immediate departure for the continent. He moreover wrote two letters, which would be read to the jury,—one to a lady, and the other to his guardian,—and both containing unequivocal admission of his guilt. The learned counsel then read the letters, and commented upon their contents at some length. There were several expressions (he said) which clearly tended to self-crimination.—"*Circumstances of a very peculiar nature, and which I cannot at present explain, compel me to quit London thus abruptly.*" "*I could not have remained in London another minute with safely to myself.*" "*I conceive it to be my duty—in consequence of rumours which may shortly reach you concerning me—to inform you that I have this moment only awoke to the fearful perils of the career in which I have for some weeks past been blindly hurrying along, till at length yesterday——.*" "*I am penitent, deeply penitent: let this statement induce you to defend and protect my reputation.*" The last paragraph but one, which concluded so abruptly with the words, "*till at length yesterday——* " clearly pointed to the crime with which the prisoner was now charged; and the last paragraph of all undeniably implored Mr. Monroe, the young man's guardian, to hush up the matter the moment it

should reach his ears.

The clerk at the banking-house, who changed the five hundred pound note for the prisoner, then gave his evidence.

At length Sir Rupert Harborough was called into the witness-box; and he deposed that the prisoner had dined with him on the evening previous to his arrest; that he very pressingly solicited him (Sir Rupert), and Mr. Chichester, and Mr. Talbot, to accompany him to the gambling-house; and that he moreover, enquired if either of them could accommodate him with change for a fifty pound note.

Mr. Chichester was called next. He stated the line of defence adopted by the prisoner at Bow-street, and positively denied having ever given the prisoner any notes to change for him.

Markham's counsel cross-examined this witness with great severity.

"What are you, sir?"

"A private gentleman."

"What are your means of subsistence?"

"I receive an allowance from my father."

"Who is your father? Now, take care, sir, how you answer that question."

"He is a commercial man, sir."

"Is he not a tradesman?"

"Well,—he is a tradesman, then—if you like it."

"Yes,—I do like it. Now—upon your oath—is he not a pawnbroker in Brick-lane, Bethnal Green?"

"He is a goldsmith in a large way of business, and lends money occasionally——"

"Ha!" complacently observed the counsel for the defence. "Go on, sir: *lends money occasionally*—"

"Upon real security, I suppose," added Chichester, taken considerably aback by these questions.

"Upon deposits; let us give things their proper names. He lends money upon flannel petticoat:—watches—flat-irons, &c.," observed the barrister, with withering sarcasm. "But I have not done with you yet, sir. Was your father—this very respectable pawnbroker—ever elevated to the peerage?"

"He was not, sir."

"Then how come you by the distinction of *Honourable* prefixed to your name?"

Mr. Chichester hung down his head, and made no reply. The counsel for the prisoner repeated the question in a deliberate and emphatic matter. At length, Mr. Chichester was fairly bullied into a humble acknowledgment "that he had no right to the distinction, but that he had assumed it as a convenient West-End appendage." The cross examination then proceeded.

"Did you not travel under the name of Winchester?"

"I did—in Germany."

"With what motive did you assume a false name?"

"I had no particular motive."

"Did you not leave England in debt? and were you not afraid of your bills of exchange following you abroad?"

"There is some truth in that; but the most honourable men are frequently involved in pecuniary difficulties."

"Answer my questions, sir, and make no observations. You will leave me to do that, if you please. Now sir—tell the jury whether you were not accompanied by a valet or coachman in your German trip?"

"I am always accustomed to travel with a domestic."

"A man who runs away from his creditors, should have more delicacy than to waste his money in such a manner. When you were at Baden-baden, were you not involved in some gambling transactions which compelled you to quit the Grand-Duchy abruptly?"

"I certainly had a dispute with a gentleman at cards: and I left the town next morning."

"Yes—and you left your clothes and your servant behind you—and your bill unpaid at the hotel?"

"But I have since met my servant, and paid him more than double the wages then due."

"You may stand down, sir," said the counsel for the defence—a permission of which the witness availed himself with surprising alacrity.

The counsel for the prosecution now called Mr. Whittingham. The poor butler ascended the witness-box with a rueful countenance; and, after an immense amount of badgering and baiting, admitted that his young master had meditated a sudden and abrupt departure from England, the very day upon which he was arrested. In his cross-examination he declared that the motives of the journey were founded upon certain regrets which Richard entertained at having permitted himself to be led away by Messrs. Chichester and Talbot, and Sir Rupert Harborough.

"And, my Lords," ejaculated the old domestic, elevating his voice, "Master Richard is no more guilty of this here circumwention than either one of your Lordships; but the man that did it all is that there Chichester, which bilked his wally-de-shamble, and that wulgar fellow, Talbot, which called me *a tulip*."

This piece of eloquence was delivered with much feeling; and the Judges smiled—for, they appreciated the motives of the honest old domestic.

The officer who arrested Markham, proved that he found upon his person, when he searched him at Bow Street, a pocket-book, containing between thirty and forty pounds, in notes and gold, together with a note for fifty pounds.

A clerk from the Bank of England proved that both the note for five hundred pounds changed at the bankers, and the one for fifty just alluded to, were forgeries.

The case for the prosecution here closed; and the Judges retired to partake of some refreshment.

Markham had leisure to think over the proceedings of the morning. He was literally astounded when he contemplated the diabolical perjury committed by Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester; but he entertained the most sanguine hope that the discredit thrown upon the character of the latter would render his testimony worthless. He shuddered when he reflected how ingeniously the counsel for the prosecution had grouped together those circumstances which told against him; and then again a ray of satisfaction animated his countenance, when he remembered that his counsel would speedily show those circumstances in a new light.

The Judges returned: silence prevailed throughout the hall; and the prisoner's counsel rose for the defence. Richard seated himself in the dock, and prepared to listen with the greatest attention to the speech of his advocate; and Whittingham placed his hand in a curved position behind his ear, in order to assist that organ on the present important occasion.

The counsel for the defence began by giving some account of the family and social position of the prisoner, who was born of parents accustomed to move in the first rank of life, and who was the heir to a fortune of no inconsiderable amount. During his minority, his guardian, who was then present, had promised to allow the prisoner six hundred pounds a-year. With these pecuniary advantages, it was absurd to suppose that a young man of education—a young man whose noble and honourable feelings had been the object of remark on the part of all his friends, and who had only to express a want to his guardian, in order to receive its immediate gratification—it was absurd to imagine that such an individual would either enter into a conspiracy with others, or plan by himself, for the purpose of raising money upon forged notes. No—this young man was one of a most generous and confiding disposition; and, as he had seen but little of the world, he was totally unacquainted with its wiles and artifices. Thus was he made the dupe of some designing villains, at his very outset upon life. The whole history of the present transaction was to be summed up in a few words. A gang of conspirators had hit upon the desperate mode of passing forged notes, in order to retrieve their ruined fortunes. Not as magnanimous as the highwayman who perils his own existence while he perpetrates a crime, these men required a tool of whom they might make use, and who could be at any time sacrificed to save them. This instrument—this scapegoat, was the prisoner at the bar. The witness, whose real name was Chichester, but who, by his own confession, had travelled on the Continent under another denomination, was not a person on whom the Jury could place any reliance. He had assumed a distinction to which he was by no means entitled—he had affected all the arrogance and importance of a man of rank and fashion,—whereas he was the son of a pawnbroker in the refined locality of Brick-Lane, Bethnal Green! Endowed with much impudence, clever in imitating the manners of his superiors, and well versed in all the intricacies and subtleties of the world, this possessor of assumed distinctions—this swaggering imitator of a class far above him—this adventurer, with fascinating conversation, ready wit, amusing anecdote, and fashionable attire,—this rouè of the present day, with jewellery about his person, and gold in his pocket—allowing ever an engaging smile to play upon his lips, and professing unmitigated disgust at the slightest appearance of vulgarity in another,—this individual—this Mr. Chichester was the principal witness whom the counsel for the prosecution had brought forward. But no English Jury would condemn a fellow creature upon such testimony—the testimony of one who was compelled to fly ignominiously and precipitately from Baden, on account of some rascality at cards, and who left his domestic in a strange land, pennyless, ignorant of the language, and surrounded by the odium which also attached itself to the name of his master. The prisoner had no motive in passing forged notes, because he was wealthy;—but Mr. Chichester had a motive, because he evidently lived far beyond the means which his father could allow him.

The learned counsel here related the manner in which Richard had been induced to change the larger note, and had become possessed of the smaller.

He then proceeded to observe, that the letters addressed to Mrs. Arlington and Mr. Monroe related to the fact that the prisoner's eyes had been suddenly opened to the characters of his associates, and to the career of dissipation in which they were leading him. The phrase upon which so much stress had been laid—"*till at length yesterday*——" alluded to the suicide of a young officer, which had taken place while the prisoner was at the gambling-house, whither he had been inveigled instead of inveigling others. "*He could not have remained in London another minute with safety to himself.*" And why? because these associates whom he had accidently picked up, would not leave him quiet. They regularly beset him. "*He was penitent*;" and he hoped that Mr. Monroe would "*defend and protect his reputation*." Yes—when the newspaper reports conveyed to the knowledge of that gentleman the fact that his ward had been arrested in a common gambling-house, and fined for being there. The letters were written hurriedly, and were ambiguous: thus they were susceptible of more than one interpretation. Let the jury interpret them in favour of the prisoner. It was better to send a dozen guilty men back again into society, terrible as that evil would be, than to condemn *one* innocent person. Then, with regard to the precipitate departure: the witness Whittingham had shown, in his cross-examination, that the prisoner's object was to escape from the three men whose characters were suddenly unveiled to him. It was said, that the prisoner had requested those three individuals to accompany him to the gaming-house, and that they at first refused. Oh! amazing fastidiousness—especially on the part of Chichester, who had been compelled to decamp from Baden, for cheating at cards! Then it was stated that the prisoner asked for change for a fifty-pound note; and it was said, that he would have availed himself of that accommodation to pass a forged note. Why—he (the learned counsel) had already explained how that fifty-pound note came into the prisoner's possession—his own gold having been transferred by Mr. Chichester to Sir Rupert Harborough's writing-desk! The learned counsel concluded, by asking how it happened that no other forged Bank of England notes—no copper-plates to print them with—no materials for such a fraud, were found at the prisoner's house? Could it be supposed that a young man with his prospects would risk his reputation and his safety for a few hundreds of pounds? The idea was preposterous. The prisoner's counsel entered into a few minute points of the evidence which told in favour of his client, and wound up with a powerful appeal to the jury in his behalf.

Richard followed, with absorbing interest, the able defence made for him by his counsel; and his soul was filled with hope as each fact and argument in his favour was divested of all mystery, and lucidly exhibited to the consideration of the court.

Mr. Monroe was summoned to the witness box, and he proved the statements made by the prisoner's counsel relative to the pecuniary position of his ward. Snoggles, the ostler, followed, and very freely stated all the particulars of his late master's precipitate decampment from Baden.

Thus terminated the case for the defence.

The counsel of the prosecution—according to that odious right which gives the accusing party the last word in those instances where the defendant has called witnesses—rose to reply. He stated that neither the wealth nor the social position of an individual afforded a certain guarantee against crime. Besides, the law must not always be swayed by the apparent absence of motives; because some of the most extraordinary deeds of turpitude upon record had never been traced to a source which could satisfactorily account for their origin. The *perpetration* was the object which the jury had to keep in view; and the use of evidence was to prove or deny that perpetration by some particular individual. A forgery had been committed, and money obtained by the prisoner at the bar through the agency of that forgery. The defence had not attempted to deny that the prisoner was the individual who had thus obtained the money. The point to be considered was, whether the prisoner knew the note to be a forged one; and he (the learned counsel) considered that an assemblage of circumstances of a most unequivocal nature stamped the prisoner with that guilt. Mr. Chichester's evidence went to show that he himself never gave any notes to the prisoner. Even if Chichester were proved to be a disreputable person, there was nothing beyond the prisoner's mere assertion (made through his counsel) to prove that he had received the two notes from Chichester. Mr. Chichester had certainly assumed another name during his German tour, but it was for the purpose of avoiding arrest in a foreign land upon bills of exchange which might have been sent from England after him. He had, moreover, assumed the distinction of *Honourable*—a foolish vanity, but by no means a crime; for half the Englishmen who were called *Captain*, were no more captains than he (the learned counsel) was.

The senior judge now summoned up the evidence to the jury; and the most profound interest was still manifested by all present in the proceedings. The learned judge occupied nearly two hours in his charge to the jury, whom he put in possession of all the points of the case which it was necessary to consider.

The jury retired, and debated for a considerable time upon their verdict.

This was the dread interval of suspense. Richard's countenance was deadly pale; and his lips were firmly compressed in order to prevent any sudden ebullition of feeling—a weakness to which he seemed for a moment inclined to yield. Mr. Monroe did not entertain much hope; the summing up of the judge had been unfavourable to Markham. As for Whittingham, he shook his head dolefully from time to time, and murmured, loud enough to be heard by those near him, "Oh! Master Richard, Master Richard! who would ever have propulgated an opinion that you would have been brought into such a fixture as this? It's all along of them fellers which call butlers *tulips*!"

How singularly reckless is the mind of man with regard to the destinies of those to whom he is not connected by any ties of blood or friendship! While the jury were absent, discussing their verdict, the various barristers, assembled round the table, began chattering together, and laughing, and telling pleasant anecdotes, as if the fate of a fellow-creature was by no means compromised at that moment. The counsel for the prosecution, who had done his duty by exerting all his talents, all his energies, and all his eloquence, to obtain the conviction of a youth who had never injured him, and whom he had never seen before, coolly took up a newspaper and perused it with evident gratification; while, at a little distance from him, stood the individual whom he had so zealously and earnestly sought to render miserable for life!

How strange!—how horribly depraved and vitiated must be that state of society in which hundreds of talented men are constantly employed, with large recompense, in procuring the condemnation of their fellow-creatures to the scaffold, the hulks, or eternal banishment! And what an idea must we entertain of our vaunted condition of consummate civilization, when we behold these learned

men calling to their aid every miserable chicanery, every artificial technicality, and every possible exaggeration, to pursue the accused prisoner either to the platform of the gibbet, to loathsome dungeons, or to the horrors of Norfolk Island. Does society avenge?—or does it merely make examples of the wicked to warn others from sin? If the enquirer who asks himself or us these questions, would only attend the Central Criminal Court, he would hear the barristers for the prosecution imploring, coaxing, and commanding the jury to return such a verdict as will either condemn a human being to the scaffold, or separate him for ever from home, wife, children, kindred, and friends! He would find men straining every nerve, availing themselves of every miserable legal quirk and quibble, torturing their imaginations to find arguments, calling subtlety and mystification to their aid, shamefully exaggerating trivial incidents into important facts, dealing in misrepresentation and false deduction, substituting and dovetailing facts to suit their purposes, omitting others which tell against their own case, almost falling upon their knees to the jury, and staking their very reputation on the results,—and all these dishonourable, disgraceful, vile, and inhuman means and efforts exerted and called into action for the sake of sending a fellow-creature to the scaffold, or separating him for ever from the family that is dependant upon him, and that will starve without him!

O God! is it possible that man can have been made for such sad purposes? is it possible that the being *whom thou hast created after thine own image*, should be so demon-like in heart?

Oh! if the prisoner standing in the dock had inflicted some terrible injury upon the honour or the family of the barrister who holds a brief against him, then were it easy to comprehend that profound anxiety on the part of this banister, to send the trembling criminal to the gallows! But, no—that barrister has no revenge to gratify—no hatred to assuage—no malignity to appease; he toils to take away that man's life, with all his strength, with all his talent, and with all his energy, because he has received gold to do his best to obtain a conviction!

Ah! what a hideous traffic in flesh and blood!

And if any one were to say to that barrister, "Thou art a blood-thirsty and merciless wretch," he would answer coolly and confidently, "No: on the other hand, I subscribe to philanthropic institutions!"

The jury returned; and the feeling uppermost in their minds was satisfaction at the prospect of being so speedily dismissed, to their respective homes, where they would pursue their efforts after wealth, and speedily forget the youth whom they had condemned to punishment, and whose prospects they had blasted.

For their verdict was *Guilty*!

And the judges hastened to terminate the proceedings.

Richard was commanded to rise, and receive the sentence of the court. He obeyed with a kind of mechanical precision—for his mental energies were entirely prostrated. The voice of the judge addressing him rang like the chimes of distant bells in his ears;—the numerous persons whom he beheld around, appeared to be all moving and agitating like an immense crowd assembled to witness an execution.

He stood up as he was commanded; and the Judge proceeded to pass sentence upon him. He said that the court took his youth into consideration, and that there were circumstances which would render a very lenient sentence satisfactory to that society which had been outraged. The court accordingly condemned him to two years' imprisonment in the Giltspur Street Compter, without hard labour.

"That's all!" said the spectators to each other; and they appeared disappointed!

The audience then separated.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ANOTHER DAY AT THE OLD BAILEY.

RICHARD was conveyed back to Newgate in a state of mind which can be more easily imagined than described. The Judges returned in their handsome carriages, to their splendid abodes;—the prosecuting barrister, that zealous and enthusiastic defender of social morality, hastened to the Temple to entertain a couple of prostitutes in his chambers;—and the various lawyers engaged about the court, hurried to their respective homes to prepare writs relating to fresh cases of turpitude and crime for the morrow.

Richard had shaken hands with Monroe and Whittingham over the parapet of the dock—he would not be allowed to see them again for three months! They still believed in his innocence—although twelve men that afternoon had declared their conviction of his guilt!

On the ensuing morning the trial of Eliza Sydney, Robert Stephens, and Hugh Mac Chizzle took place. As on the preceding day, the court was crowded from floor to roof. The bench was filled with the ladies and daughters of the aldermen; there was a full attendance of barristers; and extra reporters occupied the box devoted to the gentlemen of the press. The case had created an extraordinary sensation, not only in consequence of the immensity of the stake played for by the prisoners, but also on account of the remarkable fraud practised by one of the most lovely women that had ever breathed the air of this world.

Eliza was dressed with extreme simplicity, but great taste. A straw bonnet with a plain riband, enclosed her pale but charming countenance: there was a soft and bewitching melancholy in her eyes; and her moist red lips were slightly apart as if she breathed with difficulty. She was a woman of a strong mind, as we have said before; and she endeavoured to restrain her emotions to the utmost of her power. She did not condescend to cast a look upon her fellow prisoners; nor during the trial were her glances once turned towards them.

Stephens appeared to be suffering with acute mental pain: his countenance was cadaverous, so pale and altered was it;—even his very lips were white. Mac Chizzle still retained an air of dogged sullenness, approaching to brutal indifference.

The earl of Warrington was in attendance.

When called upon to plead, Stephens and the lawyer replied *Not Guilty*; Eliza answered *Guilty* in a firm and audible voice.

As the entire facts of the case are known to the readers, we need not enter into any fresh details. Suffice it to say, that when the Jury had delivered their verdict of *Guilty* against the two male prisoners, the earl of Warrington rose, and in a most feeling and handsome manner interceded with the court in behalf of Eliza Sydney. Eliza herself was quite overcome with this unexpected generosity, and burst into a flood of tears.

The foreman of the jury also rose and observed that, though the female prisoner had taken her case out of their hands by pleading guilty, the jury were nevertheless unanimous in recommending her to the favourable consideration of the court.

The Judge proceeded to pass sentence. He said, "Robert Stephens, you have been guilty of one of the most serious attempts at fraud, which, in a commercial country and a civilised community, could be perpetrated. You have moreover availed yourself of your influence over a young and confiding woman—an influence obtained by a series of kind actions towards her mother, her late brother, and herself—to convert her into the instrument of your guilty designs. The court cannot pass over your case without inflicting the severest penalty which the law allows. The sentence of the Court is that you be transported beyond the seas for the term of your natural life."

The culprit staggered, and leant against the dock for support. A momentary pause ensued, at the expiration of which he partially recovered himself and said, "My Lord, I acknowledge the justice of my sentence: but permit me to observe that the female prisoner Eliza Sydney is innocent of any attempt to defraud. Up to a few hours before we called upon the Earl of Warrington to sign the release and obtain the bank receipts, she was ignorant of the real object which I had in view. Even then, when I unveiled my designs, she shrank from the part she had to perform; and I was compelled to make use of all the specious arguments and all the sophistry I could call to my aid, to blind her as to the real nature of the transaction. My Lord, I make these few observations in justice to her; I have nothing now to lose or gain by this appeal in her behalf."

Stephens sank back exhausted in a chair which had been placed in the dock for the accommodation of Elisa Sydney; and the lady herself was melted to fresh tears by this proof of latent generosity on the part of the man who had been the means of placing her in her present sad position.

The Judge continued: "Hugh Mac Chizzle, you have been found guilty of aiding and abetting, at the last moment, in the consummation of a deed of almost unpardonable fraud. You have taken advantage of a profession which invests him who practises it with an appearance of respectability, and gives him opportunities of perpetrating, if he be so inclined, enormous breaches and abuses of confidence: You stand second in degree of culpability to the prisoner Stephens. The sentence of the court, therefore, is, that you be transported beyond the seas for the term of fifteen years."

There was another momentary pause; and the Judge then proceeded as follows, while the most breathless silence prevailed:—

"Eliza Sydney, your share in this unfortunate and guilty business has been rather that of an instrument than a principal. Still you had arrived, when you first assumed a masculine disguise, at the years of discretion, which should have taught you to reflect that no deceit can be designed for a good purpose. Your readiness to confess your guilt—the testimony of your fellow prisoner in your behalf—the recommendation of the jury—and the intercession of the prosecutor, however, weigh with the court. Still a severe punishment must be awarded you; for if we were to admit the plea that a person between twenty and thirty is not responsible for his or her actions,

justice would in numerous cases be defeated, and crime would find constant apologies and extenuation. The sentence of the court is that you be imprisoned for the space of two years in her Majesty's gaol of Newgate."

Eliza had anticipated transportation: she had made up her mind to banishment for at least seven years, from her native clime. The observation of the Judge that "a severe punishment must be awarded her," had confirmed her in that impression. The concluding words of that functionary had therefore taken her by surprise—a surprise so sudden that it overcame her. She tottered, and would have fallen; but she felt herself suddenly supported in the arms of a female, who conducted her to a seat in the dock, and whispered kind and consolatory words in her ear.

Eliza raised her eyes towards the countenance of this unexpected friend; and, to her astonishment, encountered the soft and sympathising glance of Diana Arlington.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Sydney," whispered the Enchantress: "the Earl of Warrington will do more for you than you may anticipate. He will use his influence with the Home Secretary, and obtain a mitigation of your sentence."

"Oh! how kind in him thus to interest himself in my behalf," murmured Eliza; "and I—who am so unworthy of his commiseration!"

"Do not say that! we have made enquiries, and we have found how you have been deceived. We have seen your faithful servant Louisa; and she has told us enough to convince us that you was more to be pitied than blamed. One thing I have to communicate which will console you—I have taken Louisa into my service!"

"A thousand thanks, my dear madam," said Eliza. "The thought of what was to become of her has made me very unhappy. This is indeed one subject of comfort. But I saw Louisa yesterday: why did she keep me in the dark in this respect?"

"We enjoined her to maintain the strictest silence," returned Mrs. Arlington. "We were determined to see how you would act up to the very last moment in this distressing business, ere we allowed you to know that you had friends who cared for you."

"And how have I obtained this generous sympathy?" enquired Eliza, pressing Diana's hand with an effusion of gratitude.

"The Earl loved your mother, and blames himself for his neglect of her children, whose welfare would have been dear to his deceased uncle," said Diana gravely. "And for myself," she added, blushing—"anything which interests the Earl, also interests me."

"Believe me, I shall never forget this kindness on your part:—neither shall I ever be able to repay it," observed Eliza. "I am now going to a protracted incarceration, in a terrible prison," she continued mournfully,—"and God only knows whether I may survive it. But until the day of my death shall I pray for you and that good nobleman who forgives, pities, and consoles me."

"He does—he does," said Mrs. Arlington, deeply affected: "but fancy not that your confinement will pass without being relieved by the visits of friends. I shall call and see you as often as the regulations of the prison will permit; and I again renew the promise which the Earl has authorised me to make relative to his intercession with the Secretary of State in your favour."

Eliza again poured forth her gratitude to Diana, and they then separated. The former was conveyed back to Newgate: the latter hastened to the humble hackney-coach which she had purposely hired to take her to the Old Bailey.

As soon as the case of Stephens, Mac Chizzle, and Eliza Sydney was disposed of, William Bolter was placed at the bar to take his trial for the murder of his wife.

"The miscreant"—as the newspapers had called him all along—wore a sullen and hardened appearance; and pleaded *Not Guilty* in a brutal and ferocious manner. The only feature of interest in the case was the examination of his son—his little son—as a witness against him. The poor boy seemed to comprehend the fearful position in which his father was placed; for he gave his evidence with the utmost reluctance. There was, however, a sufficiency of testimony, direct and circumstantial, to induce the jury to find the prisoner guilty without a moment's hesitation.

The Judge put on the black cap, and proceeded to pass upon the culprit the awful sentence of the law. Having expatiated upon the enormity of the prisoner's guilt, and admonished him to use the little time that remained to him in this world for the purpose of making his peace with heaven, he sentenced William Bolter *to be taken back again to the place from whence he came, and thence to a place of execution, where he was to be hanged by the neck until he should be dead*. "And may the Lord," added the Judge solemnly, "have mercy upon your soul."

There was some years ago, amongst ruffians of the very worst description, a custom of abusing the Judge, or "blackguarding the Beak," as it was called, when they received the award due to their crimes, in the felon's dock. This miserable and vain bravado—an affectation of recklessness which even the most hardened could scarcely feel—was revived by Bill Bolter upon the present occasion. "Taking a sight" at the Judge, the murderer commenced a string of horrible abuse—laden with imprecations and epithets of a most shocking and filthy nature. A shudder passed through the audience as if it were one man, at that revolting display on the part of a wretch who stood upon the edge of the tomb!

The officers of the court speedily interfered to put an end to the sad scene; and the convict, after a desperate resistance, was carried back to Newgate, where he was lodged in one of the condemned cells.

While these important cases were being disposed of in the Old Court, two others, which it is necessary to notice, were adjudicated upon in the New Court before the Recorder. The first was that of Thomas Armstrong, who was fortunate enough to be acquitted for want of evidence, George Montague, a principal witness against him, not appearing;—the other was that of Crankey Jem and the Resurrection Man. It is needless to enter into particulars in this matter: suffice it to say that the former was convicted of a daring burglary, upon the testimony of the latter who turned King's evidence. Crankey Jem was sentenced to transportation for life, he having been previously convicted of serious offences; and the Resurrection Man was sent back to Newgate to be discharged at the termination of the sessions.

The business of the Court was concluded in a few days; and Richard was removed to the Giltspur Street Compter. There he was dressed in the prison garb, and forced to submit to a *régime* peculiarly trying to the constitution of those who have been accustomed to tender nurture. The gruel, which constituted his principal aliment, created a nausea upon his stomach; the thin and weak soup was far

from satisfying the cravings of the appetite; the bread was good, but doled out in miserably small quantities; and the meat seemed only offered to tantalise or provoke acuteness of hunger.

The Resurrection Man was set at liberty.

Stephens, Mac Chizzle, and Crankey Jem were removed to the hulks at Woolwich, previous to the sailing of a convict-ship for New South Wales.

Eliza Sydney remained in Newgate.

Bill Bolter, the murderer, also stayed for a short season in the condemned cell of that fearful prison.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LESSON INTERRUPTED.

THE moment the trial of Richard Markham was concluded, Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester bade a cold and hasty adieu to Mr. Talbot, and left the court together.

They wended their way up the Old Bailey, turned into Newgate Street, and thence proceeded down Butcher-hall Lane towards Bartholomew Close; for in that large dreary Square did Mr. Chichester now occupy a cheap lodging.

This lodging consisted of a couple of small and ill-furnished rooms on the second floor. When the two gentlemen arrived there, it was past five o'clock—for the trial had lasted the entire day; and a dirty cloth was laid for dinner in the front apartment. Black-handled knives and forks, a japanned pepper-box, pewter saltcellar and mustard pot, and common white plates with a blue edge, constituted the "service." The dinner itself was equally humble—consisting of mutton-chops and potatoes, flanked by a pot of porter.

The baronet and the fashionable gentleman took their seats in silence, and partook of the meal without much appetite. There was a damp upon their spirits: they were not so utterly depraved as to be altogether unmindful of the detestable part they had played towards Markham; and their own affairs were moreover in a desperate condition.

A slip-shod, dirty, familiar girl cleared away the dinner things; and the gentlemen then took to gin-and-water and cigars. For some minutes they smoked in silence; till at length the baronet, stamping his foot impatiently upon the floor, exclaimed, "My God! Chichester, is nothing to be done?"

"I really don't know," answered that individual. "You heard how deucedly I got exposed to-day in the witness-box; and after that I should not dare show up at the west-end for weeks and months to come—even if the sheriff's officers weren't looking out for me."

"Well, something must be done," observed the baronet. "Here am I, playing at hide-and-seek as well as you—all my horses sold—my furniture seized—my carriages made away with—my plate pawned—and not a guinea—not a guinea left!"

"What should you say to a trip into the country?" demanded Chichester, after a pause. "London is too hot for both of us—at least for the present; indeed my surprise is that we were not arrested on those infernal bills, coming out of the court. But, as I was saying—a trip into the country might do more good. To be sure, this is no time for the watering places: we might, however, pay a visit to Hastings, Bath, and Cheltenham on a venture."

"And what could we do for ourselves there?"

"Why—pick up flats, to be sure!"

"You know, Chichester, that I am not able to work the cards and dice as you can."

"Then you must learn, as I did."

"And who will teach me?"

"Why—myself, to be sure! Could you have a better master than Arthur Chichester?"

"But it would take so long to understand all these manœuvres—I should never have the patience."

"Oh! nonsense, Harborough. Come—what do you say? Three days' practice, and we will be off?"

"But the money—the funds to move with?" cried the baronet, impatiently. "I am literally reduced to my last guinea."

"Oh! as for that," returned Chichester, "I will engage to get a twenty pound note from my father to-morrow; and with that supply we can safely start off on our expedition."

"Well—if you can rely upon doing this," observed the baronet, "we will put your plan into execution. So let us lose no time; but please to give me my first lesson."

"That's what I call business," cried Chichester, rising from his seat and drawing the curtains, while the baronet lighted the two tallow candles that adorned the wooden mantel-piece.

Chichester locked the door of the room, and then produced from his writing-desk the necessary implements of a gambler—packs of cards, dice-boxes, and dice.

Having reseated himself, he took up a pair of dice and a box, and said, "Now, my dear fellow, be a good boy, and learn your lesson well. You will soon meet with your reward."

"I am all attention," observed the baronet.

"In the first place I shall show you how to *secure*," continued Chichester; "and as you know the game of *Hazard* well enough, I need say but little more on that head. There are two ways of *securing*. The first is to hold one of the dice between the fore and middle fingers, or the middle and third fingers, against the side of the box, so that one finger must cover the top of the die—in this way, you see."

"I understand," said the baronet, attentively watching the proceedings of his companion, who by certain clever and adroit manipulations with the dice-box, illustrated his oral descriptions.

"This system is not so easy as the second, which I shall presently show you," continued Chichester; "because the die must be kept cleverly inside the box, so as not to be seen. The second way of *securing* is by taking hold of one of the dice by the little finger, and keeping it firm against the palm of the hand while you shake the box, so as to be able to drop it skilfully upon the table at the proper moment, when it will seem as if it came from the box along with the other. This is the way."

"I shall soon understand," said the baronet. "Of course by being able to *secure* one die, you may make it turn up any number you choose."

"When you mean to practise this dodge," continued Chichester, "call five for *a main*; because you can *secure* the four, and there is only the six on the loose die that can come up against you. If you have a good stake to get, *secure* a five every time; because when the *main* is six to five, or seven to five, or eight to five, or nine to five, or ten to five, you *must* win every time, because you can't possibly throw out while the five is *secured*."

"But will not the ear tell the *pigeon* that there is only one die rattling in the box?" demanded the baronet.

"Look at this box," exclaimed Chichester. "It has two rims cut inside, near the bottom: the one die shaking against them produces the sound of two dice."

"Are there not some peculiarities about these dice?" asked Sir Rupert, pointing to a pair which Chichester had placed apart from the rest.

"Yes—those are *unequal dice*, and are so well made that no one, except a regular sharper, could detect them. They are bigger at one end than the other, and the sixes are placed on the smaller squares, because you must play with these dice to win upon high numbers, which are on those smaller squares. The dice will in nine cases out of ten fall upon the larger squares, and thus show the high numbers uppermost."

"And these dice?" enquired the baronet, taking up two others.

"Loaded ones," replied Chichester. "These are to throw low; and so the two sides which have got four and five on them are loaded."

"How are they loaded?" asked Sir Rupert.

"The corner pip of the four side, next to the five side, is bored very neatly to a certain depth: the same is done to the corner pip of the five side, adjoining the four side. Thus the two holes, so bored, meet each other at right angles. One of the holes is covered over with some strong cement: quicksilver is then poured in; and the other hole is covered over with the cement. The spots are blackened; and your dice are ready for use. These being intended to throw low, you must call a main, and take the odds accordingly."

"Well," said the baronet, "I think I can now safely say that I know enough of the elements of your grammar to enable me to practise myself. Let us devote half an hour to the working of cards."

"The ways of managing the cards," said Chichester, taking up a pack, and shuffling them, "are numerous. These, for instance, are *Longs and Shorts*. All the cards above the eight, are the least thing longer than those below it. I have a machine which was invented on purpose to cut them accurately. Nothing under an eight can be cut, you see, with these cards, lengthways."

"And that pack so carefully wrapped up in the paper?"

"Oh! these are my *Concaves* and *Convexes*. All from the two to the seven are cut concave; and all from the eight to the king are cut convex. By cutting the pack breadthways a convex card is cut; by cutting it lengthways, a concave one is secured."

"I have often heard of *the bridge*," said Sir Rupert; "what does that mean?"

"Oh! *the bridge* is simply and easily done," replied Chichester, shuffling the pack which he held in his hand. "You see it is nothing but slightly curving a card, and introducing it carelessly into the pack. Shuffle the cards as your opponent will, you are sure to be able to cut the bridged one."

"I could do that without study," observed Sir Rupert Harborough. "Is my initiation now complete?"

"There are several other schemes with the cards," answered Chichester, "but I think that I have taught you enough for this evening. One famous device, however, must not be forgotten. You have heard of the way in which Lord de Roos lately attempted to cheat his noble companions at the club? The plan practised by him is called *sauter la coupe*, and enables the dealer to do what he chooses with one particular card, which of course he has selected for this purpose. Now look how it is done; for I can better show practically than explain verbally."

Scarcely was this portion of the lesson accomplished, when steps were heard ascending the stairs; and immediately afterwards a heavy fist knocked with more violence than courtesy at the parlour door.

The baronet and Chichester both turned pale.

"They can't have found us out here?" murmured the one to the other in a hoarse and tremulous tone.

"What shall we do?"

"We must open—happen what will."

Chichester unlocked the door: two ill-looking men entered the room.

"Mr. Arthur Chichester?" said one.

"He isn't here—we don't know him. My name is Davis—ask the landlady if it is not," cried Chichester hurriedly, and in a manner which only served to convince the officer that he was right.

"Come—come, none of that there gammon," said the bailiff. "I knows you well enough: my name's Garnell; and I'll stand the risk of your being Chichester. Here's execution out against you for four hundred and forty-seven pounds. I don't suppose that you can pay—so you'd better come off at once."

"Where to?" demanded Chichester, seeing that it was no use disputing his own identity any longer.

"Where to!" cried the officer; "why—to Whitecross, to be sure! Where the devil would you go to?"

"Can I not be allowed to sleep in a sponging-house?"

"No—this is an execution, and a large sum, mind. I don't dare do it."

"Well, then—here goes for Whitecross Street!" said Chichester; and after exchanging a few words in a whisper with the baronet, he left the house with the sheriff's officers.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHITECROSS-STREET PRISON.

A cold drizzling rain was falling, as Chichester proceeded along the streets leading to the debtors' prison. The noise of pattens upon the pavement; the numbers of umbrellas that were up; the splashing of horses' feet and carriage-wheels in the kennels; the rush of cabs and the shouting of omnibus-cads, were all characteristic of a wet night in a crowded metropolis.

Chichester shivered—more through nervousness than actual cold; and he felt an oppressive sensation at the bottom of his stomach, as well as at the chest.

The officer endeavoured to console him, by observing that "it was lucky he had been taken so close to the prison on such a rainy night."

The ruined young man envied many a poor wretch whom he passed on his way; for he knew that it was far easier to get into a debtors' gaol than to get out of it.

At length they arrived at the prison.

It was now nine o'clock; and the place, viewed by the flickering light of the lamp at the gate of the governor's house, wore a melancholy and sombre appearance. The prisoner was introduced into a small lobby, where an elderly turnkey with knee-breeches and gaiters, thrust a small loaf of bread into his hand, and immediately consigned him to the care of another turnkey, who led him through several alleys to the staircase communicating with the Receiving Ward.

The turnkey pulled a wire, which rang a bell on the first floor.

"Who rings?" cried a voice at the top of the stairs.

"Sheriffs debtor—Arthur Chichester—L. S.," replied the turnkey, in a loud sing-song voice.

Chichester afterwards learnt that he was mentioned as a sheriff's prisoner, in contra-distinction to one arrested by a warrant from the Court of Requests; and that L. S. meant *London side*—an intimation that he had been arrested in the City of London, and not in the County of Middlesex.

Having ascended a flight of stone steps, Chichester was met at the door of the Receiving Ward by the steward thereof. This steward was himself a prisoner, but was considered a trustworthy person, and had therefore been selected by the governor to preside over that department of the prison.

The Receiving Ward was a long low room, with windows secured by bars, at each end. There were two grates, but only one contained any fire. The place was remarkably clean—the floor, the deal tables, and the forms being as white as snow.

The following conversation forthwith took place between the new prisoner and the steward:—

"What is your name?"

"Arthur Chichester."

"Have you got your bread?"

"Yes."

"Well—put it in that pigeon-hole. Do you choose to have sheets to-night on your bed?"

"Certainly."

"Then that will be a shilling the first night, and sixpence every night after, as long as you remain here. You can, moreover, sleep in the inner room, and sit up till twelve o'clock. Those who can't afford to pay for sheets sleep in a room by themselves, and go to bed at a quarter to ten. You see we know how to separate the gentlemen from the riff-raff."

"And how long shall I be allowed to stay up in the Receiving Ward?"

"That depends. Do you mean to live at my table? I charge sixpence for tea, the same for breakfast, a shilling for dinner, and four-pence for supper."

"Well—I shall be most happy to live at your table."

"In that case, write a note to the governor, to say you are certain to be able to settle your affairs in the course of a week; and I will take care he shall have it the very first thing to-morrow morning."

"But I am sure of not being able to settle in a week."

"Do as you like. You won't be allowed to stay up here unless you do."

"Oh! in that case I will do so at once. Can you oblige me with a sheet of writing-paper?"

"Certainly. Here is one. A penny, if you please."

Chichester paid for the paper, wrote the letter, and handed it to the Steward.

He then cast a glance round the room; and saw three or four tolerably decent-looking persons warming themselves at the fire, while fifteen or sixteen wretched-looking men, dressed for the most part as labourers, were sitting on the forms round the walls, at a considerable distance from the blazing grate.

The Steward, perceiving that the new prisoner threw a look of inquiry towards him, said,—"Those *gentlemen* at the fire are Sheriff's Debtors, and live at my table: those *chaps* over there are Court of Requests' Men, and haven't a shilling to bless themselves

with. So, of course, I can't allow them to associate with the others."

"How many prisoners, upon an average, pass through the Receiving Ward in the course of one year?"

"About three thousand three hundred as near as I can guess. All the Debtors receive each so much bread and meat a-week. The prison costs the City close upon nine thousand pounds a year."

"Nine thousand a-year, spent to lock men up, away from their families!" exclaimed Chichester. "That sum would pay the debts of the greater portion of those who are unfortunate enough to be brought here."

"You may well say *that*," returned the Steward. "Why, half the prisoners who come here are poor working-men, snatched away from their labour, and obliged to know that their wives and children will starve during their absence. That man over there, with the little bundle tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief, is only arrested for 8d. The costs are three and sixpence."

"He is actually a prisoner, then, for four and two-pence."

"Exactly. The man next to him is arrested for 3d., the balance of a chandler's shop debt; his costs are five shillings. But the case of that poor devil who is crying so up in the corner, is the worst. It appears that he had an account at a tally-shop, and paid one shilling a-week towards its liquidation. He was in full work, and earned eighteen shillings a week; and so he regularly gave his wife the money every Saturday night to put away for the tally-man. But the woman is fund of tippling, and she spent the money in gin. Well, the tally-man takes out a *summons* from the Court of Requests: the wife receives it, and is afraid to tell her husband. Next week comes the *Rule*: this the woman also hides, hoping, somehow or another, to get together the debt and costs, and settle it unknown to her husband. But no such thing: so this morning, as the poor fellow was going home to dinner, he was arrested for four shillings debt, and six shillings costs."

"This was cruel indeed," observed Chichester, to whom all these details were perfectly new.

"Yes," continued the Steward; "but that is nothing to the things that I have heard men tell up in this room. Loan-Societies, Tally-Shops, and the low pettifogging lawyers, keep this place well-filled."

It was now a quarter to ten; and the poor wretches who could not afford to pay for sheets, were huddled off to bed. Chichester, and the "*gentlemen who boarded at the Steward's table*," remained up, smoking cigars and drinking ale, until twelve.

Chichester was then introduced into a large room, containing ten or a dozen beds, whose frame-work was made of iron. One miserably thin blanket, a horse-cloth, and a straw mattress and pillow, were all provided for each couch, by the Corporation of the City of London!

Oh! how generous—how philanthropic—how noble; to tear men away from their homes and give them straw, wrapped up in coarse ticking, to sleep upon!

On the following morning Chichester awoke early, and rose with every bone aching from the hardness of his bed. He performed his toilette in a species of scullery attached to the Receiving Ward; and the enjoyment of this luxury was attended with the following disbursements:—Towel. 2d.; Use of Soap, 1d.; Loan of Razor and Lather-box, 1d.

Breakfast, consisting of coffee and dry toast, was then served up.

Those who boarded with the steward sate down and commenced a desperate assault upon the provisions: and those who fancied an egg or a rasher of bacon with their meal, paid twopence extra. The conversation was entirely associated with the prison affairs; it appeared as if those men when once they set foot in the prison, discarded all thoughts of the great world without, from which they have been snatched away. Even when the morning newspaper came in, attention was first directed, by a strange kind of sympathy, to the list of Bankrupts and to the Law Notices, the latter of which afforded them the pleasing and interesting intelligence of who were that day to appear before the Commissioners of the Insolvent Court.

At five minutes past nine, a violent ring at the bell called the Steward in haste to the door. This was the summons of a turnkey who came to remove the new prisoners to the respective departments of the establishment to which they belonged. Thus they were classified into Middlesex Sheriffs' Debtors, London Sheriffs' Debtors, and City Freemen who were also Sheriffs' Debtors; and London Court of Requests' Debtors, and Middlesex Court of Requests' Debtors.

Chichester was ordered to remove to the Poultry Ward, on the London side, the governor declining to comply with the request contained in his letter.

It will be seen from what we have already said, that Whitecross-street prison is essentially different from the Bench, descriptions of which have been given in so many different works, and the leading features of which are so familiar to a large portion of the community, either from hearsay or experience. If a man cannot muster four or five pounds to transfer himself from the custody of the Sheriffs to that of the Judges, by a *habeas corpus* writ, he must remain in Whitecross-street prison, while the more wealthy debtor enjoys every luxury and privilege in the Bench. And yet, we are constantly assured that there is the same law for the poor as there is for the rich!

The system of imprisonment for debt is in itself impolitic, unwise, and cruel in the extreme:—it ruins the honest man, and destroys the little remnant of good feeling existing in the heart of the callous one. It establishes the absurd doctrine, that if a man *cannot* pay his debts while he is allowed the exercise of his talents, his labour, and his acquirements, he *can* when shut up in the narrow compass of a prison, where his talents, his labours, and his acquirements are useless. How eminently narrow-sighted are English legislators! They fear totally to abolish this absurd custom, because they dread that credit will suffer. Why—credit is altogether begotten in confidence, and never arises from the preconceived intention on the part of him who gives it, to avail himself of this law against him who receives it. Larceny and theft are punished by a limited imprisonment, with an allowance of food; but debtors, who commit no crime, may linger and languish—and *starve in gaol*.

The Poultry Ward was a long, dark, low room, with seven or eight barred windows on each side, sawdust upon the stone floor, and about a dozen or fourteen small tables arranged, like those of a coffee-house, around the walls. The room was full of debtors of all appearances—from the shabby-genteel down to the absolutely ragged. Here a prisoner was occupied in drawing up his schedule for the Insolvent Debtors' Court;—there an emaciated old man was writing a letter, over which he shed bitter and scalding tears;—at another table a young farmer's labourer-looking man was breakfasting off bread and cheese and onions, which he washed down with porter;—close by was a stout seedy-looking person with grey hair, who did not seem to have any breakfast at all;—in this nook a poor pale wretch was reading a newspaper;—in that corner another individual was examining a pile of letters;—several were gathered round the fire in the scullery or kitchen attached to the Ward, preparing their breakfasts;—and others were lounging up and down the room, laughing and talking over the amusements of the preceding night up in the sleeping rooms.

The steward of the Poultry Ward had just finished his breakfast when the turnkey introduced Mr. Chichester.

"Well, Mr. Thaynes," said the Steward, quite delighted to see the new prisoner, "I began to think we should have had none down this morning. Pray take a seat, sir."

This invitation was addressed to Chichester, who sat down accordingly.

The Steward, after exchanging a few observations with the turnkey, produced a book from a drawer in the table, and, addressing himself in a semi-mysterious tone to Mr. Chichester, said—"These are our rules and regulations. Every new member is required to pay an entrance fee of one pound and sixpence; and this goes towards the fund for paying the officers and servants of the ward, providing coals, and administering generally to the comforts of the place."

"I am quite satisfied with the justice of the charge," said Chichester; and he paid it accordingly.

"I suppose you will live at my table?" enquired the Steward. "Same charges as upstairs in the Receiving Ward."

"Oh! certainly," answered Chichester. "Have you any body here of any consequence at all?"

"Not particularly at this moment. Lord William Priggins stayed a couple of days with us, and went over to the Bench yesterday morning."

"Who is that gentleman walking up and down the narrow court outside?" enquired Chichester, glancing towards the window, through which might be seen a tall slim young man, with black moustachios, a long faded cotton dressing gown, a dingy velvet skull cap, and pantaloons hanging low and loose, because the owner had forgotten his braces.

"Oh! that is Count Pichantoss—a celebrated Russian nobleman, who was cleaned out some weeks since at a West-end Hell, and got put into prison for his hotel bill."

"And who is that respectable old gentleman with the bald head, and dressed in black?"

"That is a clergyman, the Rev. Henry Sharpere: he is an excellent preacher, they say—and the best securer of a die that I ever saw in my life."

"And that very sickly pale-faced youth, who seems to be scarcely twenty?"

"He is only twenty-one and a month. He was arrested the day after he came of age for blank acceptances which he had given, during his minority, to the tune of three thousand pounds, and for which he never received more than three hundred."

"And that quiet-looking old gentleman, at the table opposite?"

"He is a Chancery prisoner—committed for contempt. It appears that he was one morning walking by the Auction Mart, and saw large posting-bills announcing the immediate sale of an estate, consisting of thirteen houses, somewhere in Finsbury, under a decree of the Court of Chancery. My gentleman hadn't a guinea in his pocket, nor the means of raising one at the time. Nevertheless he walked into the Mart as bold as brass, strode up stairs to the auctioneer's rooms, and bid for the estate. There were plenty of competitors; but he didn't care—he bid away; and at last the estate was knocked down to him for four thousand three hundred pounds. When sales are effected under an order of the Chancellor, no deposit-money is required. This may seem strange to you; but it is not the less a fact. So off walks my gentleman, quite rejoiced at his bargain. The first thing he does is to go and collect all the arrears of rent he can from the tenants of the houses, and to distrain upon those who couldn't or wouldn't pay. Lord! what a game he did play, to be sure! He called into request the services of half the brokers in Finsbury, and made the tenants cash up to the very last farthing that was due. Well, the lawyers employed for the sale of the estate, drew up the deeds of conveyance and the abstract of the title; but my gentleman never meant paying—so at last, the Chancery Court, getting tired of his excuses, and finding that he would not disgorge the amount he had already received for rents, nor yet come down with a shilling towards the purchase-money, clapt him into limbo under some form or another;—and so here he is."

In this manner did the steward of the Poultry Ward render the new prisoner familiar with the leading characters of that department of the prison. In addition to the few instances of flagrant dishonesty, or culpable extravagance which were pointed out to Chichester, information was given him of many—very many cases of pure and unadulterated misfortune. The churchyard has known no sorrow—the death-chamber has known no anguish equal to that acute and poignant suffering which many an inmate endures within the walls of that prison. If he be an affectionate father, he thinks of his absent little ones, and he feels shocked at the cold cruelty of the rules which only permit children to visit their incarcerated sire twice a-week—on Wednesday and Sunday—and then only for three hours each time. If he be a kind husband, and possess a tender and a loving wife, he dreads the fatal hour of five of the evening, which is the signal for all strangers and visitors to leave these walls. Misery—lank, lean, palpable misery—is the characteristic of Whitecross Street prison.

The legislature says—"We only allow men to be locked up in order to prevent them from running away without paying the debts they owe."—Then why treat them as felons? Why impose upon them rules and regulations, the severity of which is as galling to their souls as the iron chains of Newgate are to the felons' flesh? Why break their spirits and crush their good and generous feelings, by compelling them all to herd together—the high and the low—the polite and the vulgar—the temperate and the drunkard—the cleanly and the filthy—the religious and the profane—the sedate and the ribald?

O excellent legislators! do you believe that a man ever went out of the debtor's gaol more moral and better disposed than he was when he went in? The answer to this question will, in one word, teach you the efficacy of Imprisonment for Debt.

Chichester walked out into a large stone-paved court attached to his ward, and bearing the attractive but somewhat illusive name of the "Park." At twelve o'clock the beer men from the public-houses in Whitecross Street were allowed admittance; and then commenced the debauchery of the day. The seats round the "Park" were soon crowded with prisoners and visitors, drinking, smoking, laughing, and swearing.

Many poor wretches, who could not boast of much strength of mind, but who were in reality well disposed, took to this occupation to *kill care*.

And who will blame them? Not you, proud peer, who bury your vexations in crystal goblets sparkling with the choicest juice of Epernay's grape—nor you, fine gentleman, who seek in gaming at your club a relief from the anxieties and petty troubles which now and then interrupt the otherwise even tenure of your way!

In the course of the day Mr. Chichester wrote a very penitent letter to his father, the pawnbroker, lamenting past follies, and promising future good conduct. The postscript contained an intimation that prison was bad enough when one possessed plenty of money; but that it was ten thousand times worse when associated with empty pockets.

This precious epistle succeeded in inducing the "old gentleman," as Chichester denominated his father, to loosen his purse airings, and remit a few pounds to supply immediate wants.

Chichester was thus enabled to live at the Steward's table, and smoke his cigars and drink his ale to his heart's content. In a small community like that of a ward in Whitecross Street, as well as in the great world without, he who has the most money is the most "looked up to"—which is a phrase perfectly understood, and almost synonymous with "respected;" and thus Mr. Chichester very speedily became the "star" of that department of the prison to which he had been assigned.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE EXECUTION.

FROM the moment that Bill Bolter had been removed to the condemned cell, after his trial at the Old Bailey for the murder of his wife, he preserved a sullen and moody silence.

Two turnkeys sat up with him constantly, according to the rules of the prison; but he never made the slightest advances towards entering into conversation with them. The Chaplain was frequent in his attendance upon the convict; but no regard was paid to the religious consolations and exhortations of the reverend gentleman.

The murderer ate his meals heartily, and enjoyed sound physical health: he was hale and strong, and might, in the common course of nature, have lived until a good old age.

By day he sate, with folded arms, meditating upon his condition. He scarcely repented of the numerous evil deeds of which he had been guilty: but he trembled at the idea of a future state!

One night he had a horrid dream. He thought that the moment had arrived for his execution, and that he was standing upon the drop. Suddenly the board gave way beneath his feet—and he fell. An agonising feeling of the blood rushing with the fury of a torrent and with a heat of molten lead up into his brain, seized upon him: his eyes shot sparks of fire; and in his ears there was a loud droning sound, like the moan of the ocean on a winter's night. This sensation, he fancied, lasted about two minutes—a short and insignificant space to those who feel not pain, but an age when passed in the endurance of agony the most intense. Then he died: and he thought that his spirit left his body with the last pulsation of the lungs, and was suddenly whirled downwards, with fearful rapidity, upon the wings of a hurricane. He felt himself in total darkness; and yet he had an idea that he was plunging precipitately into a fearful gulf, around the sides of which hideous monsters, immense serpents, formidable bats, and all kinds of slimy reptiles were climbing. At length he reached the bottom of the gulf; and then the faculty of sight was suddenly restored to him. At the same moment he felt fires encircling him all around; and a horrible snake coiled itself about him. He was in the midst of a boundless lake of flame; and far as his eyes could reach, he beheld myriads of spirits all undergoing the same punishment—writhing in quenchless fire and girt by hideous serpents. And he thought that neither himself nor those spirits which he beheld around, wore any shape which he could define; and yet he saw them plainly—palpably. They had no heads—no limbs; and yet they were something more than shapeless trunks,—all naked and flesh-coloured, and unconsumed and indestructible amidst that burning lake, which had no end. In a few moments this dread scene changed, and all was again dark. The murderer fancied that he was now groping about in convulsive agonies upon the bank of a river, the stream of which was tepid and thick like blood. The bank was slimy and moist, and overgrown with huge osiers and dark weeds, amidst which loathsome reptiles and enormous alligators were crowded together. And it was in this frightful place that the murderer was now spiritually groping his way, in total and coal-black darkness. At length he slipped down the slimy bank—and his feet touched the river, which he now knew to be of blood. He grasped convulsively at the osiers to save himself from falling into that horrible stream: a huge serpent sprung from the thicket, and coiled itself about his arms and neck;—and at the same moment an enormous alligator rose from the river of blood, and seized him in the middle between its tremendous jaws. He uttered a fearful cry—and awoke.

This dream made a deep impression upon him. He believed that he had experienced a foretaste of Hell—of that hell, with all its horrors, in which he would be doomed for ever and ever—without hope, without end.

And yet, by a strange idiosyncrasy of conduct, he did not court the consolation of the clergyman: he breathed no prayer, gave no outward and visible sign of repentance: but continued in the same sullen state of reserve before noticed.

Still, after that dream, he dreaded to seek his bed at night. He was afraid of sleep; for when he closed his eyes in slumber, visions of hell, varied in a thousand horrible ways, presented themselves to his mind.

He never thought of his children: and once when the clergyman asked him if he would like to see them, he shook his head impatiently.

Death! he shuddered at the idea—and yet he never sought to escape from its presence by conversation or books. He sate moodily brooding upon death and what would probably occur hereafter, until he conjured up to his imagination all the phantasmagorical displays of demons, spectres, and posthumous horrors ever conceived by human mind.

On another occasion—the Friday before the Monday on which he was executed—he dreamt of heaven. He thought that the moment the drop had fallen from beneath his feet, a brilliant light, such as he had never seen on earth, shone all around him:—the entire atmosphere was illuminated as with gold-dust in the rays of a powerful sun. And the sun and moon and stars all appeared of amazing size—immense orbs of lustrous and shining metal. He fancied that he winged his way upwards with a slow and steady motion, a genial warmth prevailing all around, and sweet odours delighting his senses. In this manner he soared on high—until at length he passed sun, moon, and stars, and beheld them all shining far, far beneath his feet. Presently the sounds of the most ravishing sacred music, accompanied by choral voices hymning to the praise of the Highest, fell upon his ear. His soul was enchanted by these notes of promise, of hope, and of love; and, raising his eyes, he beheld the shining palaces of heaven towering above vast and awe-inspiring piles of clouds. He reached a luminous avenue amidst these clouds, which led to the gates of paradise. He was about to enter upon that glorious and radiant path, when a sudden change came over the entire spirit of his dream; and in a moment he found himself dashing precipitately downwards, amidst darkness increasing in intensity, but through which the sun, moon, and planets might be seen, at immense distances, of a lurid and ominous red. Down—down he continued falling, until he was pitched with violence upon the moist and slimy bank of that river of tepid blood, whose margin was crowded with hideous reptiles, and whose depths swarmed with wide-mouthed alligators.

Thus passed the murderer's time—dread meditations by day, and appalling dreams by night.

Once he thought of committing suicide, and thus avoiding the ignominy of the scaffold. He had no shame; but he dreaded hanging on account of the pain—whereof he had experienced the dread sensations in his dreams. Besides, death is not quite so terrible when inflicted by one's own hand, as it is when dealt by another. He was, however, closely watched; and the only way in which he could have killed himself was by dashing the back of his head violently against the stone-wall. Then he reflected that he might not do this effectually;—and so he abandoned the idea of self-destruction.

On the last Sunday of his life he attended the Chapel. A condemned sermon was preached according to custom. The sacred fane was filled with elegantly dressed ladies—the wives, daughters, and friends of the City authorities. The Clergyman enjoined the prisoner to repentance, and concluded by assuring him *that it was not even then too late to acknowledge his errors and save his soul. God would still forgive him*!

If God could thus forgive him,—why could not Man? Oh! wherefore did that preacher confine his observations to the mercy of the Almighty? why did he not address a terrible lecture to blood-thirsty and avenging mortals? Of what use was the death of that sinner? Surely there is no moral example in a public execution? "There is," says the Legislature. We will see presently.

Oh! why could not the life of that man—stained with crime and red with blood though it were—have been spared, and he himself allowed to live to see the horror of his ways, and learn to admire virtue? He might have been locked up for the remainder of his existence: bars and bolts in English gaols are very strong; there was enough air for him to be allowed to breathe it; and there was enough bread to have spared him a morsel at the expense of the state!

We cannot give life: we have no right to take it away.

On the Sunday afternoon, the murderer's children were taken to see him in the condemned cell. He had not asked for them: but the authorities considered it proper that *they* should take leave of *him*.

The poor little innocents were dressed in the workhouse garb. The boy understood that his father was to be hanged on the following morning; and his grief was heart-rending. The little girl could not understand why her parent was in that gloomy place, nor what horrible fate awaited him:—but she had an undefined and vague sense of peril and misfortune; and she cried also.

The murderer kissed them, and told them to be good children;—but he only thus conducted himself because he was *ashamed* to appear so unfeeling and brutal as he knew himself to be, in the presence of the Ordinary, the Governor, the Sheriffs, and the ladies who were admitted to have a glimpse of him in his dungeon.

* * * * *

The morning of the second Monday after the Sessions dawned.

This was the one fixed by the Sheriffs for the execution of William Bolter, the murderer.

At four o'clock on that fatal morning the huge black stage containing the drop, was wheeled out of a shed in the Press Yard, and stationed opposite the debtors' door of Newgate. A carpenter and his assistant then hastily fitted up the two perpendicular spars, and the one horizontal beam, which formed the gibbet.

There were already several hundreds of persons collected to witness these preliminary arrangements; and from that hour until eight o'clock multitudes continued pouring from every direction towards that spot—the focus of an all-absorbing interest.

Man—that social, domestic, and intelligent animal—will leave his child crying in the cradle, his wife tossing upon a bed of pain and sickness, and his blind old parents to grope their way about in the dark, in order to be present at an exhibition of a fellow creature's disgrace, agony, or death. And the law encourages this morbid taste in all countries termed civilised,—whether it be opposite the debtors' door of Newgate, or around the guillotine erected at the Barriere Saint Jacques of Paris,—whether it be in the midst of ranks of soldiers, drawn up to witness the abominable infliction of the lash in the barracks of Charing Cross, or the buttons cut off a deserter's coat in the Place Vendome,—whether it be to see a malefactor broken on the wheel in the dominions of the tyrant who is called "Europe's Protestant Sovereign," or to behold the military execution of a great general at Madrid,—whether it be to hear an English Judge in the nineteenth century, unblushingly condemn a man to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, and his dissected corpse disposed of according to the will of our Sovereign Lady the Queen; or to witness some miserable peasant expire beneath the knout in the territories of the Czar.

But the Law is vindictive, cowardly, mean, and ignorant. It is *vindictive* because its punishments are more severe than the offences, and because its officers descend to any dirtiness in order to obtain a conviction. It is *cowardly*, because it cuts off from the world, with a rope or an axe, those men whose dispositions it fears to undertake to curb. It is *mean*, because it is all in favour of the wealthy, and reserves its thunders for the poor and obscure who have no powerful interest to protect them; and because itself originates nearly half the crimes which it punishes. And it is *ignorant*, because it erects the gibbet where it should rear the cross,—because it makes no allowance for the cool calculating individual who commits a crime, but takes into its consideration the case of the passionate man who assassinates his neighbour in a momentary and uncontrollable burst of rage,—thus forgetting that the former is the more likely one to be led by reflection to virtue, and that the latter is a demon subject to impulses which he can never subdue.

From an early hour a glittering light was seen through the small grated window above the debtors' door; for the room to which that door belongs, is now the kitchen.

There was something sinister and ominous in that oscillating glare, breaking through the mists of the cold December morning, and playing upon the black spars of the gibbet which stood high above the already dense but still increasing multitudes.

Towards eight o'clock the crowd had congregated to such an extent, that it moved and undulated like the stormy ocean. And, oh! what characters were collected around that gibbet. Every hideous den, every revolting hole—every abode of vice, squalor, and low debauchery, had vomited forth their horrible population. Women, with young children in their arms,—pickpockets of all ages,—swell-mobsmen,—prostitutes, thieves, and villains of all degrees and descriptions, were gathered there on that fatal morning.

And amidst that multitude prevailed mirth, and laughter, and gaiety. Ribald language, obscene jokes, and filthy expressions, were

heard around, even to the very foot of the gallows; and even at that early hour intoxication was depicted upon the countenances of several whom the Law had invited thither to derive an example from the tragedy about to be enacted!

Example, indeed! Listen to those shouts of laughter: they emanate from a group collected round a pickpocket only twelve years old, who is giving an account of how he robbed an elderly lady on the preceding evening. But, ah! what are those moans, accompanied with horrible oaths and imprecations? Two women fighting: they are tearing each other to pieces—and their husbands are backing them. In another direction, a simple-looking countryman suddenly discovers that his handkerchief and purse are gone. In a moment his hat is knocked over his eyes; and he himself is cuffed, and kicked, and pushed about in a most brutal manner.

Near the scaffold the following conversation takes place:—

"I wonder what the man who is going to be hanged is doing at this moment."

"It is now half-past seven. He is about now receiving the sacrament."

"Well—if I was he, I'd send the old parson to the devil, and pitch into the sheriffs."

"Yes—so would I. For my part, I should like to live such a life as Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin did, even if I did get hanged at last."

"There is something noble and exciting in the existence of a highwayman: and then—at last—what admiration on the part of the crowd—what applause when he appears upon the drop!"

"Yes. If this fellow Bolter had contented himself with being a burglar, or had only murdered those who resisted him, I should have cheered him heartily;—but to kill his wife—there's something cowardly in that; and so I shall hiss him."

"And so shall I."

"A quarter to eight! The poor devil's minutes are pretty well numbered."

"I wonder what he is about now."

"The pinioning will begin directly, I dare say."

"That must be the worst part."

"Oh! no—not a bit of it. You may depend upon it that he is not half so miserable as we are inclined to think him. A man makes up his mind to die as well as to anything else. But what the devil noise is that?"

"Oh! only some fool of a fellow singing a patter song about a man hanging, and imitating all the convulsions of the poor wretch. My eyes! how the people do laugh!"

"Five minutes to eight! They won't be long now."

At this moment the bell of Saint Sepulchre's church began to toll the funeral knell—that same bell whose ominous sound had fallen upon the ears of the wretched murderer, when he lay concealed in the vault of the Old House.

The laughing—the joking—the singing—and the fighting now suddenly subsided; and every eye was turned towards the scaffold. The most breathless curiosity prevailed.

Suddenly the entrance of the debtor's door was darkened by a human form: the executioner hastily ascended the steps, and appeared upon the scaffold.

He was followed by the Ordinary in his black gown, walking with slow and measured pace along, and reading the funeral service—while the bell of Saint Sepulchre continued its deep, solemn, and foreboding death-note.

The criminal came next.

His elbows were bound to his sides, and his wrists fastened together, with thin cord. He had on a decent suit of clothes, supplied by the generosity of Tom the Cracksman; and on his head was a white night-cap.

The moment he appeared upon the scaffold, a tremendous shout arose from the thousands and thousands of spectators assembled to witness his punishment.

He cast a hurried and anxious glance around him.

The large open space opposite the northern wing of Newgate seemed literally paved with human faces, which were continued down the Old Bailey and Giltspur Street, as far as he could see. The houses facing the prison were crammed with life—roof and window.

It seemed as if he were posted upon a rock in the midst of an ocean of people.

Ten thousand pairs of eyes were concentrated in him. All was animation and interest, as if some grand national spectacle were about to take place.

"Hats off!" was the universal cry: the multitudes were determined to lose nothing! The cheapness of an amusement augments the pleasure derived from it. We wonder that the government has never attempted to realise funds by charging a penny a-piece for admission to behold the executions at Newgate. In such a country as England, where even religion is made a compulsory matter of taxation, the dues collected at executions would form a fund calculated to thrive bravely.

While the executioner was occupied in fixing the halter round the convict's neck, the Ordinary commenced that portion of the Burial Service, which begins thus:—

"*Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower: he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.*"

The executioner having attached the rope, and drawn the nightcap over the criminal's face, disappeared from the scaffold, and went beneath the platform to draw the bolt that sustained the drop.

"*In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who*—"

Here the drop fell.

A dreadful convulsion appeared to pass through the murderer's frame; and for nearly a minute his hands moved nervously up and down. Perhaps during those fifty seconds, the horrors of his dream were realised, *and he felt the blood rushing with the fury of a torrent and with a heat of molten lead up into his brain; perhaps his eyes shot sparks of fire; and in his ears was a loud droning sound, like the moan of the ocean on a winter's night!*

But the convulsive movement of the hands soon ceased, and the murderer hung a lifeless corpse.

The crowd retained its post till nine o'clock, when the body was cut down: then did that vast assemblage of persons, of both sexes and all ages, begin to disperse.

The public-houses in the Old Bailey and the immediate neighbourhood drove a roaring trade throughout that day.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAPSE OF TWO YEARS.

SHAKSPEARE said, "All the world is a *stage*:" we say, "All the world is an *omnibus*."

The old and young—the virtuous and wicked—the rich and the poor, are invariably thrown and mixed up together; and yet their interests are always separate. Few stretch out a hand to help a ragged or a decrepit man into the vehicle; and the well-dressed draw back and avert their heads as the impoverished wretch forces his way with difficulty past them up to the vacant seat in the farthest corner. The moment a well-dressed individual mounts the steps of the omnibus, every hand is thrust out to help him in, and the most convenient seat is instantaneously accorded to him. And then the World's omnibus hurries along, stopping occasionally at the gates of a church-yard to put down one of its passengers, and calling at some palace or some cottage indiscriminately to fill up the vacant seat.

Away—away thunders the World's omnibus again, crushing the fairest flowers of the earth in its progress, and frequently choosing rough, dreary, and unfrequented roads in preference to paths inviting, even, and pleasant. Sometimes, by the caprice of the passengers, or by the despotic commands of the masters of the World's omnibus, the beggar and the rich man change garments and places; and the former then becomes the object of deference and respect, while the latter is treated with contempt and scorn. In the World's omnibus *might* makes *right*;—but *cunning* frequently secures a more soft and comfortable seat than either.

If a dispute ensues, and the question at issue is referred to the conductor for arbitration, he glances at the personal appearance of the complainant and defendant, and decides in favour of him who wears the better coat. When stones or other impediments obstruct the way of the World's omnibus, the poor and the ragged passengers are commanded to alight and clear them away; and yet, when the vehicle stops for dinner at the inn by the way side, the well-dressed and the affluent appropriate to themselves the luxuries, while those who cleared away the stones and who grease the wheels, get only a sorry crust—and sometimes nothing at all.

And then, away—away the World's omnibus goes again, amidst noise, dust, and all variations of weather. In the inclement seasons extra garments are given to the well-dressed and the rich, but none to the ragged and the poor:—on the contrary, their very rags and tatters are frequently taken from them to pay the prices of the hard crusts at the road-side inns. So goes the World's omnibus; and the moment the driver and conductor, who are its masters and owners, are deposited in their turns at the gates of some cemetery, their sons succeed them, whether competent or not—whether infants in swaddling clothes, or old men in their dotage. And few—very few of those drivers know how to hold the reins;—and thus is it that the World's omnibus is frequently hurried at a thundering rate over broken ground, even unto the very verge of some precipice, down which it would be inevitably dashed, did not some bold intrepid passenger emerge from his obscurity in the corner, rush upon the box, hurl the incompetent driver from his seat, and assume the reins in his stead. But mark the strange opinions of those who journey in the World's omnibus! The passengers, instead of being grateful to him who has thus rescued them from ruin, pronounce him the usurper of a seat to which he has no hereditary claim, and never rest till they have succeeded in displacing him, and restoring the incompetent driver to his functions.

So goes the World's omnibus! None of the passengers are ever contented with their seats, even though they may have originally chosen those seats for themselves. This circumstance leads to a thousand quarrels and mean artifices; and constant shiftings of positions take place. One passenger envies the seat of another; and, when he has succeeded in working his way into it, he finds to his surprise that it is not so agreeable as he imagines, and he either wishes to get back to his old one or to shove himself into another. The passengers in the World's omnibus are divided into different sects and parties, each party professing certain opinions for the authority of which they have no better plea than "the wisdom of their forefathers." Thus one party hates and abhors another; and each confidently imagines itself to be in the right, and all other parties to be in the wrong. And for those differences of opinion the most sanguinary broils ensue; and friendship, honour, virtue, and integrity are all forgotten in the vindictive contention.

But the World's omnibus rolls along all the same; and the Driver and Conductor laugh at the contests amongst the passengers, which they themselves have probably encouraged, and which somehow or another always turn to their individual benefit in the long run.

So goes the World's omnibus;—so it has always hurried onwards;—and in like manner will it ever go!

Oh! say not that Time has a leaden wing while it accompanies the World's omnibus on its way!

Two years elapsed from the date of the Old Bailey trials described in preceding chapters.

It was now the beginning of December, 1837.

The morning was dry, fine, and bright: the ground was as hard as asphalte; and the air was pure, cold, and frosty.

From an early hour a stout, elderly man—well wrapped up in a large great coat, and with a worsted "comforter" coming up to his very nose, which was of a purple colour with the cold—was seen walking up and down the front of the Giltspur Street Compter, apparently dividing his attention between the prison entrance and the clock of Saint Sepulchre's church.

At a quarter to ten o'clock, on that same morning, a private carriage, without armorial bearings upon the panels, and attended by two domestics, whose splendid liveries were concealed beneath drab great-coats, drove up to the door of the house inhabited by the Governor of Newgate. Inside that carriage was seated a lady—wrapped up in the most costly furs, and with a countenance whose beauty was enhanced by the smile of pleasure and satisfaction which illuminated it.

Precisely as the clock of Saint Sepulchre's church struck ten, the doors of the Compter and Newgate opened simultaneously, and with a similar object.

From the Compter issued Richard Markham:—the portal of Newgate gave freedom to Eliza Sydney.

They were both restored to liberty upon the sane day—the terms of their imprisonment dating from the commencement of the sessions during which they were tried.

The moment Richard set foot in the street, he was caught in the arms of the faithful Whittingham, who welcomed him with a kind of paternal affection, and whimpered over him like a child.

Eliza Sydney entered the carriage awaiting her at the door of Newgate, and was clasped to the bosom of Mrs. Arlington. The vehicle immediately drove rapidly away in a north-easterly direction.

"Mr. Monroe is waiting for you at your own house at Holloway," said Whittingham to his young master, when the first ebullition of joy was over. "He has been ailing lately—and he thought that this happy and fortitudinous event would be too much for his nerves."

"Let us make haste home, my excellent friend," observed Markham. "I am dying to behold once more the haunts of my childhood."

Whittingham summoned a cab; and he and his young master were soon rolling along the road which led to *home*.

Two years' imprisonment had produced a great effect upon Richard Markham. The intellectual cast and faultless beauty of his countenance still remained; but the joyous expression, natural to youth, had fled for ever; and in its place was a settled melancholy which proclaimed an early and intimate acquaintance with misfortune. His spirit was broken; but his principles were not undermined:—his heart was lacerated to its very core,—but his integrity remained intact. Even though the gate of his prison had closed behind him, he could not shake off the idea that his very countenance proclaimed him to be a *Freed Convict*.

At length the cab reached Markham Place.

Richard glanced, with a momentary gleam of satisfaction upon his pale countenance, towards the hill on which stood the two trees—the rallying point for the brothers who had separated, more than six years back, beneath their foliage. Tears started to his eyes; and the ray of sunshine upon his brow gave place to a cloud of deep and sombre melancholy. He thought of what he was when he bade adieu to his brother at that period, and what he was at the present moment. *Then* all was blooming and encouraging in his path; and *now* he felt as if the mark of Cain were upon him!

He alighted from the vehicle, and entered the library, where Mr. Monroe awaited him. He and his guardian were at length alone together.

But how altered was Monroe since Richard had last seen him! His form was bowed down, his countenance was haggard, his eyes were sunken, and his brow was covered with wrinkles. He glanced furtively and anxiously around him the instant the young man entered the room; and, instead of hastening forward to welcome him, he sank upon a chair, covering his face with his hands. The tears trickled through his fingers; and his breast was convulsed with deep sobs.

"In the name of heaven, what ails you, sir?" demanded Richard.

"My boy—you have come back at last," exclaimed the old gentleman, scarcely able to articulate a word, through the bitterness of his grief;—"and this much-dreaded day has at length arrived!"

"Much-dreaded day," repeated Markham, in unfeigned astonishment. "I should have thought, sir," he added coldly, "that *you*, who professed yourself so convinced of my innocence, would have received me with a smile of welcome!"

"My dear—dear boy," gasped the old man, "God knows I am rejoiced to hail your freedom; and that same Almighty power can also attest to my sincere conviction of your innocence. Believe me, I would go through fire and water to serve you,—I would lay down my life, miserable and valueless as it is, to benefit you;—but, oh! I cannot—cannot support your presence!"

And the old gentleman seemed absolutely convulsed with agony as he spoke.

"I presume," said Richard, leaning over him, so as to be enabled to whisper in his ear, although there was none else at hand to listen,—"I presume that you scorn the man who has been convicted of felony? It is natural, sir—it is natural; but such a demonstration of aversion is not the less calculated to wound one who never injured you."

"No—no, Richard; you never injured me; and that makes me feel the more acutely now. But—hear me. I take God to witness that I love you as my own son, and that I am above such unnatural conduct as that which you would impute to me."

"My God!" cried Markham, impatiently, "what does all this mean? Are you ill? Has anything unpleasant occurred? If so, we will postpone all discussion upon my affairs until a period more agreeable to yourself."

As Markham uttered these words, he gently disengaged the old man's hands from his countenance, and pressed them in his own. He was then for the first time struck by the altered and care-worn features of his guardian; and, without thinking of the effect his words might produce, he exclaimed, "My dear sir, you have evidently been very—very ill!"

"Ill!" cried the old man, bitterly. "When the mind suffers, the body is sympathetically affected; and this has been my case! If you have suffered much, Richard, during the last two years—so have I; and we have both only the same consolation—our innocence!"

"You speak in enigmas," ejaculated Markham. "What can you have to do with innocence or guilt—you who never wronged a human being?"

So strange became the expression of the old man's countenance, as Richard uttered these words, that the young man was perfectly astonished, and almost horrified; and undefined alarms floated through his brain. He was in a painful state of suspense; and yet he was afraid to ask a question.

"Richard!" suddenly exclaimed the old man, now looking our hero fixedly and fearlessly in the face, "I have a terrible communication to make to you."

"A terrible communication!" repeated Markham; "is it in respect to my brother? If so, do not keep me in suspense—let me know the worst at once—I can bear anything but suspense!"

"I have never heard *from* nor *of* your brother," answered Mr. Monroe; "and cannot say whether he be dead or living."

"Thank God, you have nothing terrible to communicate relative to *him*," exclaimed Markham; for he always had, and still entertained a presentiment that the appointment on the hill, beneath the two trees, would be punctually kept;—and this hope had cheered him during his horrible imprisonment.

"But I will not keep you in suspense, Richard," said the old man; "it is better for me to unburthen my mind at once. You are ruined!"

"Ruined!" said Markham, starting as that dread word fell upon his ears; for the word *ruin* does not express one evil, like other words, such as sickness, poverty, imprisonment; but it comprises and expresses an awful catalogue of all the miseries which can be supposed to afflict humanity. "Ruined!" he cried;—then catching at a straw, he added, "Aye! ruined in reputation, doubtless; but rich in the possessions which this world principally esteems. My property was all vested in you by my deceased father—I was not of age when I was condemned—and consequently the law could not touch my fortune when it filched from me my good name!"

"Ruined—ruined in property and all!" returned Mr. Monroe, solemnly. "Unfortunate speculations on *my* part, but in *your* interest, have consumed the vast property entrusted to me by your father!"

Markham fell into an arm chair; and for a moment he thought that every fibre in his heart would break. A terrible load oppressed his chest and his brain;—he was the victim of deep despair. As one looks forth into the darkness of midnight, and sees it dense and motionless, so did he now survey his own prospects. The single consolation which, besides the hope of again meeting his brother,—the real, the present, the tangible consolation, as it might be called, which would have enabled him to forget a portion of his sufferings and his wrongs,—this was now gone; and, a beggar upon the face of the earth, he found that he had not even the advantage of a good name to help him onwards in his career. Hope was quenched within him!

A long pause ensued.

At its expiration Markham suddenly rose from the arm-chair, approached his guardian, and said in a low and hollow voice. "Tell me how all this has happened; let me know the circumstances which led to this calamity."

"They are brief," said Monroe, "and will convince you that I am more to be pitied than blamed. Long previous to your unfortunate trial I commenced a series of speculations with my own property, all of which turned out unhappily. The year 1832 was a fatal one to many old-established houses; and mine was menaced with absolute ruin. In an evil hour I listened to the advice of a Mr. Allen, a merchant who had been reduced by great losses in America trading; and by his counsel, I employed a small portion of *your* property with the view of recovering my own, and augmenting your wealth at the same time. Allen acted as my agent in these new speculations. At first we were eminently successful; I speedily released myself from difficulty, and doubled the sum that I had borrowed from your fortune. At the beginning of 1836 Mr. Allen heard of a gentleman who required the loan of a considerable sum of money to work a patent which was represented to be a perfect mine of gold. Mr. Allen and I consulted upon the eligibility of embarking money in this enterprise: in a word, we were dazzled by the immense advantages to be derived from the speculation. At that time—it was shortly after your trial and sentence, Richard—I was ill and confined to my bed. Mr. Allen therefore managed this for me; and it is an extraordinary fact that I have never once seen the individual to whom I lent an enormous sum of money—for I *did* advance the sum required by that person; and I drew largely upon your fortune to procure it! Oh! Richard—had this speculation succeeded, I should have been a wealthy man once more, and your property would have been more than doubled. But, alas! this individual to whom I advanced that immense amount, and whose securities I had fancied unexceptionable, defrauded me in the most barefaced manner! And yet the law could not touch him, for he had contrived to associate Allen's name with his own as a partner in the enterprise. Rendered desperate by this appalling loss, I embarked in the most extravagant speculations with the remainder of your money. The infatuation of the gambler seized upon me: and I never stopped until the result was ruin—total ruin to me, and comparative ruin to you!"

"Comparative ruin—only *comparative* ruin!" ejaculated Markham, his countenance suddenly brightening up at these words: "is there any thing left from the wrecks of my property—is there any thing available still remaining? Speak;—and if you answer me in the affirmative—if you announce the existence of never so small a pittance, I will yet forgive you all!"

"This house and the small estate attached to it are left," answered the old man, "and totally unincumbered. I neither could nor would touch your paternal possessions."

Markham felt indescribable relief from this statement; and he wrung his guardian's hand with the same gratitude which he would have shown had he that day received his inheritance entire.

"Thank God, I am not totally ruined!" cried Markham. "I can at least bury myself in this retreat;—I can daily ascend that hill where the memorials of fraternal affection stand;—and I can there hope for the return of my brother! My dear sir, what has been done cannot be recalled: reproaches, even were I inclined to offer any, would be useless; and regrets would be equally unavailing. This estate will produce me a small income—but enough for my wants. Two hundred pounds a-year are certainly a beggar's pittance, when compared with the inheritance which my father left me;—but I am still grateful that even the means of subsistence are left. And you, Mr. Monroe—upon what are you subsisting?"

"I still attend to the wrecks of my affairs," replied the old man; "and then I have my daughter Ellen—who earns a little with her needle——"

"You shall come and take up your abode with me—you and your daughter—and share my income," interrupted the generous young man, who saw not before him an individual that had deprived him of a large fortune, but an old—old man, bent down by the weight of numerous and deep afflictions.

Monroe wept at this noble conduct on the part of his ward, and strenuously refused to accept the proffered kindness and hospitality. Markham urged, begged, and entreated;—but the old man would not accede to his wish.

"You have not told me what became of your friend Mr. Allen," said Richard, after a pause.

"He was an honourable and an upright man," was the reply; "and the ruin which he had been the means of entailing, though innocently, upon me, broke his heart, he died three months ago."

"And what became of the infamous cheat whose schemes have thus killed one person and ruined two others?"

"I know not," answered Mr. Monroe. "I never saw him myself; nor did he even know that there was such a person as myself connected with the loan which he received. Certain commercial reasons—too long to be explained now—made me put forward Allen as the person who advanced the money, and conducted the entire business as a principal, and not as an agent. Thus no communication ever took place between me and this George Montague."

"George Montague!" ejaculated Richard.

"Yes—he was the villain who has plundered us."

"George Montague again!" murmured Richard, as he paced the room with hurried and uneven steps. "Why is it that this name should constantly obtrude itself upon my notice? wherefore should I be perpetually condemned to hear it uttered, and always coupled with epithets of abhorrence and reproach? and why should I be amongst the number of that miscreant's victims? Strange combination of circumstances!"

"Are you acquainted with this Montague?" demanded his guardian: "the name seemed to produce a singular effect upon you."

"I am not acquainted with him: like you, I have never even seen him," said Markham. "But I have heard much concerning him; and all that I *have* heard is evil. Surely—surely justice will some day overtake a miscreant who is constantly preying upon society, and who enriches himself at the expense of his fellow-creatures' happiness!"

Some time longer was devoted to conversation upon topics of interest to Markham and his guardian; and when the former had partially succeeded in tranquillising the mind of the latter, the old man was suffered to take his departure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VISIT.

We purpose to follow the history of Richard Markham a little farther, ere we return to Eliza Sydney, whose adventures, after her release from Newgate, will, it is believed, excite the liveliest interest in the minds of the readers.

As soon as Mr. Monroe had taken his departure, Richard made Whittingham acquainted with his altered prospects; and they two together settled certain economical alterations in the establishment at the Place which were calculated to meet the limited means of its master, who, it will be remembered, was now of age, and, consequently invested with the control of the little property that the villany of George Montague had left him.

Markham then proceeded, attended by Whittingham, to visit the various apartments of the old mansion from which he had been so long absent: and each recalled to his mind reminiscences that circumstances had made painful. In one apartment he had been wont to sit with his revered father of an evening, and survey the adjacent scenery and the mighty city from the windows. In another he had pursued his studies with the dearly loved brother whom he had lost: whichever way he turned, visions calculated to oppress his mind rose before him. He felt like a criminal who had disgraced an honourable name; and even the very pictures of his ancestors appeared to frown upon him from their antique and dust-covered frames.

But when he entered the room where the spirit of his father had taken its leave of this world, his emotions almost overpowered him. He wept aloud; and even the old butler did not now endeavour to comfort him. He had returned, branded with shame, to a house where he had received an existence that was full of hope and honour:—he had come back to a dwelling in the rooms of which were hung the portraits of many great and good men, who were his ancestors, but amongst whom his own likeness could never take a place, for fear that some visitor to that mansion should write the words "*Freed Convict*" upon the frame.

For though conscience reproached him not for guilt, the world would not believe his innocence.

That night he could not sleep; and he hailed the dawn of morning as the shipwrecked mariner upon the raft beholds the signal of assistance in the horizon. He rose, and hastened to the hill, where he seated himself upon the bench between the two trees. There he gave free vent to his tears; and he was relieved.

Suddenly his eye caught sight of letters carved upon the bark of his brother's tree. He looked closer; and, to his indescribable joy, he beheld these characters rudely but deeply cut on the tree:—

Eugene.

Dec. 25, 1836.

"Thank God! my brother lives!" exclaimed Richard, clasping his hands together. "This is an intimation of his remembrance of me! But—oh! why did he desert me in my need? wherefore came he not to see me in my prison? Alas! years must yet elapse ere I clasp him to my heart! Let me not repine—let me not reproach him without hearing his justification! He has revisited the hill; and he chose a sacred day for what he no doubt deemed a sacred duty! It was on the anniversary of the nativity of the Saviour that he came back to the scenes of his youth! Oh, Eugene! I thank thee for this: it is an assurance that the appointment on the 10th of July, 1843, will be punctually kept!"

From the moment when his eyes rested upon the memorial of his lost brother thus carved upon the bark of the tree, Richard's mind became composed, and, indeed, comparatively happy. His habits, however, grew more and more secluded and reserved; and he seldom ventured into that mighty Babylon whose snares had proved so fatal to his happiness.

One day—it was about the middle of March, 1838—Richard was surprised by the arrival of a phaeton and pair at his abode; and he eagerly watched from the window to ascertain who could have thought of paying him a visit. In a few minutes he was delighted to see Mr. Armstrong, the political martyr with whom he had become acquainted in Newgate, alight from the vehicle.

Richard hastened to welcome him with the most unfeigned sincerity.

"You see I have found you out, my dear young friend," said Armstrong. "I miscalculated the date of your release from that abominable hole, and a few weeks ago was waiting for hours one day in Giltspur Street to welcome you to freedom. At length I did what I ought to have done at first—that is, inquired of the turnkeys whether you were to be released that day or not: and, behold—I found that the bird had flown."

"I should have written to you," said Richard, "for you were kind enough to give me your address; but really my mind has been so bent upon solitude——"

"From which solitude," interrupted Armstrong, smiling, "I am come to drag you away. Will you allow me to dispose of the next ten days for you?"

"How do you mean, my good friend?" inquired Markham.

"I mean that you shall pass that time with me at the house of a friend at Richmond. Solitude and seclusion will never wean you from the contemplation of your past sorrows."

"But you know that I cannot go into society again," said Richard.

"This is absurd, Markham. I will hear no apologies: you must and shall place yourself at my disposal," returned the old gentleman, in a kind and yet positive manner.

"But to whom do you wish to introduce me?" inquired Markham.

"To an Italian emigrant, who has only just arrived in this country, with his family, but the honour of whose friendship I have enjoyed for many, many years. I must tell you that I have travelled much; and that Italy has always been a country which has excited my warmest sympathy. It was at Montoni, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala that I first met Count Alteroni; and his extremely liberal political opinions, which completely coincide with my own, were the foundation of a staunch friendship between us. Ten years ago he was compelled to fly from his native land; and he sought refuge in England. His only child—a beautiful girl of the name of Isabella—thus obtained an English education and speaks the language with fluency. Two years ago, he was allowed to return to Castelcicala; but a few months back fresh political events in that state forced him once more to become an exile. He arrived in England a month ago, and has taken a small but commodious and picturesque residence at Richmond. His means are ample, but not vast; and he therefore lives in comparative seclusion—other reasons, moreover, inducing him to avoid the pomp and ostentation which noblemen of his rank usually maintain. Thus, in addressing him, you must drop the formality of *My Lord*; and remember also that his daughter chooses to be called simply, *Miss Isabella*, or the *Signora Isabella*."

"And how can I venture to present myself to this nobleman of high rank, and his wife and daughter, knowing that but a few weeks ago I was liberated from a gaol?" demanded Richard, somewhat bitterly.

"The count has not heard of your misfortune, and is not likely to do so," answered Armstrong. "He pressed me yesterday to pass a few days with him; and I happened to mention that I was about to visit a young friend—meaning yourself—in whom I felt a deep interest. I then gave him such an account of you that he expressed a desire to form your acquaintance. Thus, you perceive, that I am taking no unwarranted liberty in introducing you to his house. As for the danger which you incur of your history being known, that cannot be avoided; and it is a point which you may as well risk now as upon any future occasion. A man of the world must always be prepared for reverses of this kind, and I think that I am not mistaken in you, Markham, when I express my opinion that you would know how to vindicate your character and assert your innocence in a manner which would disarm resentment and conquer prejudice. At least, assume as cheerful an appearance as possible; and, believe me, you will find yourself right welcome at the dwelling of Count Alteroni."

Reassured by remarks of this nature, and warmed by the generous friendship displayed towards him by the Republican writer, Markham's countenance again wore a smile; and he felt more at ease than he had done ever since his misfortune. The presence of one who took an interest in his welfare—the prospect of enjoying pleasant society—and the idea of change of scene, combined to elevate his spirits and create new hopes in his breast. He began to think that he was not altogether the solitary, deserted, and sorrow-doomed being he had so lately considered himself.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon that the phaeton, in which rode Markham and his friend the Republican, entered a spacious shrubbery, through which a wide avenue led to the front-door of a very beautiful country residence near Richmond. The dwelling was not large; but its external appearance seemed to bear ample testimony to its interior comfort.

A domestic, in a plain and unpretending livery, appeared at the door the moment the phaeton stopped; and the count himself met his visitors in the hall, to welcome their arrival.

The nobleman shook hands with Armstrong in the most cordial manner; and, when Richard was introduced to him, he received him with a courtesy and warm affability which showed how much any friend of Armstrong's was valued by the Italian exile.

The guests were ushered into the drawing-room, where the countess and her daughter, and two gentlemen who were also visitors, were seated.

But while we allow Richard time to get acquainted with the family of the Italian noble, we must give the reader a brief description of the new characters now introduced upon the stage.

Count Alteroni was about forty years of age. His hair and whiskers, originally of a deep black, were tinged prematurely with grey; but his moustachios were of the darkest jet. His complexion was of a clear olive. In figure he was tall, well formed, and muscular, though slight. His countenance was expressive of great dignity—one would almost say of conscious superiority; but this softness of aspect and the nobility of demeanour which distinguished him, failed to produce any unpleasant impression, inasmuch as every one who approached the count was charmed by the affability of his manners and the condescending kindness of his tone.

The countess was about two years younger than her husband, and was of a complexion and cast of countenance which denoted her northern origin. In fact, she was a German lady of high birth; but she spoke Italian, French, and English with as much facility as her own tongue.

But what of Isabella? To say that she was beautiful were to say nothing. Her aspect was resplendent with all those graces which innocence lavishly diffuses over the lineaments of loveliness. She was sixteen years old; and her dark black eyes were animated with all the fire of that impassioned age, when even the most rugged paths of life seem adorned and strewed with flowers. Her mouth was small; but the lips were full and pouting, and revealed, when she smiled, a set of beautifully white and even teeth. Her hair was dark as the raven's wing, and was invariably arranged in the most natural and simple manner. Her brows were exquisitely pencilled; and as her large black eyes were the mirror of her pure and guileless soul, when she glanced downwards, and those expressive orbs were concealed by their long black fringes, it seemed as if she were drawing a veil over her thoughts. Her complexion was that of a brunette; but the pure, red blood shone in her vermilion lips and her rose-tinted nostrils, and mantled her pure brow with a crimson hue when any passion was excited. Her sylph-like figure was modelled with the most perfect symmetry. Her waist was so delicate, and her hands and feet so small, that it was easy to perceive she came of patrician blood; and the swell of her bosom gave a proper roundness to her form, without expanding into proportions that might be termed voluptuous.

In manners, disposition, and accomplishments Isabel was equally calculated to charm all her acquaintances. Having finished her education in England, she had united all the solid morality of English manners, with the sprightliness and vivacity of her native clime; and as she was without levity and frivolity, she was also entirely free from any insipid and ridiculous affectations. She was artlessness itself; her manners commanded universal respect; and her bearing alone repressed the impertinence of the libertine's gaze. With a disposition naturally lively, she was still attached to serious pursuits; and her mind was well stored with all useful information, and

embellished with every feminine accomplishment.

The two gentlemen who were present in the drawing room when Armstrong and Richard arrived, were two young *beaux*—members of the aristocracy; and this was their only recommendation. It was not however, on this account that they had obtained a footing in the count's abode; but because they were nearly related to a deceased English general who had taken part with the Italians against the French, during the career of Napoleon, and had been of essential service to the family to which the count belonged. With regard to their exterior, suffice it to say, that they were dressed in the extreme of fashion one was very effeminate in appearance, having neither whiskers nor the slightest appearance of a beard; and the other was rather good-looking, sported an incipient moustachio, and wore an undress military uniform.

The effeminate young gentleman was introduced to Armstrong and Markham by the name of Sir Cherry Bounce, and the moustachioed one as the Honourable Smilax Dapper, a captain (at the age of twenty) in His Majesty's—th Regiment of Hussars.

During the hour which intervened between the arrival of the new guests and the announcement of dinner, a conversation ensued which will serve to throw some light upon the characters of those inmates of the hospitable abode, whom we have as yet only partially introduced to our readers.

"You reside in a very pleasant and healthy part of London, Mr. Markham," said the count; "I am well acquainted with the situation of your mansion and grounds, from the description which my friend Armstrong has given me. The house stands close by a hill, on the summit of which there are two trees."

"Ah, indeed!" ejaculated Sir Cherry Bounce. "The other day I wode by there for the firtht time in my life; and I remember the houth ith veway beautifully thithuate in the neighbourwood of the bill dethwibed by the count, and with two ath tweeth on the top."

"That is my house," said Richard. "But it is an antiquated, gloomy-looking pile; but——"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, thir; it is the thweeteth little plaith I ever thaw. I never thaw it but that time, and wath thwuck with the weway wemarkable appearanth of the hill and the tweeth."

"Those trees were planted many years ago by my brother and myself," said Markham, a deep shade of melancholy suddenly overclouding his countenance; "and they yet remain there as the trysting-mark for a strange appointment."

"Indeed!" said the count; and as Richard saw that Isabella was also interested in his observations, he determined to gratify the sentiment of curiosity which he had excited.

"It is nearly seven years since that event took place. My elder brother disputed with my father, and determined to leave home and choose some career for himself, which he hoped might lead to fortune. He and I parted upon that hill, beneath those trees, with the understanding that in twelve years we were to meet again upon that same spot, and then compare our respective fortunes and worldly positions. On the 10th of July, 1843, that appointment is to be kept."

"And during the seven years which have already elapsed, have you received no tidings of your brother?" inquired Isabella.

"None direct," answered Markham. "All that I know is that on Christmas-day, 1836, he was alive; for he went to the hill, while I was absent from home, and carved his name upon the tree that he himself planted."

"Strike me stupid, if that isn't the most romantic thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Captain Dapper, caressing his moustachio.

"You ought to wite a copy of vertheth upon the wemarkable inthident, in Mith Ithabella'th *Album*," observed Sir Cherry Bounce.

"So I would, strike me! if I was half such a good poet as you, Cherry," returned the captain.

"You wote thum veway pwetty poetry the other day upon the *Gweat Thea Therpenth*, Thmilackth," said the effeminate baronet: "and I don't know why you thouldn't do the thame by the two ath tweeth."

"Yes; but—strike me ugly! Miss Isabella would not let me insert them in her *Album*," observed the captain; "and that was very unkind."

"Bella says that you undertook to finish a butterfly and spoilt it," exclaimed the count laughing.

"And now it theemth for all the world like an enormouth fwog," said Sir Cherry.

"Now, really, Bounce, that is too bad!" drawled the captain, playing with his moustachio. "I appeal to the signora herself, whether the butterfly was so very—very bad?"

"Considering it to be your first attempt," said the young lady, "it was not so very much amiss; and I must say that I preferred the butterfly to the lines upon the Sea Serpent."

"Well, may I perish," cried the hussar, "if I think the lines were so bad. But we will refer them to Mr. Markham;—not that I dispute Miss Isabella's judgment: I'd rather have my moustachios singed than do that! But——"

"The vertheth! the vertheth!" cried Sir Cherry.

"I am afraid that my talent does not justify such a reference to it," said Markham; "and I should rather imagine that Miss Isabella's decision will admit of no appeal."

"My dear thir, we will have your opinion. The vertheth were compothed in a hurway; and they may not be quite tho ekthellent and faultleth ath they might be."

"I only devoted half an hour to them, strike me if I did!"

"Let'th thee—how do they begin?" continued the effeminate young baronet of nineteen. "Oh! I wemember—the opening ith thimple but ekpwethive:

"Thwough the thea the therpenth wollth,
Moving ever 'thwixth the polth,
Fwightning herwinth, pwath, and tholth,
In hith pwogweth wapid;—
Thwallowing up the mighty thipth,
By the thuction of hith lipth,
Onward thill the monthtwer twipth,
Like——"

"Well, strike me!" interrupted the captain, "if ever I heard poetry spouted like that before. Please listen to me, Mr. Markham. This is the way the poem opens:—

"Through the sea the serpent rolls
Moving ever 'twixt the poles,
Fright'ning herrings, sprats, and soles,
In his progress rapid;—
Swallowing up the mighty ships,
By the motion of his lips,
Onward still the monster trips,
Like——"

"No, that ithn't the way," cried Sir Cherry.

"Well, strike me, if I'll say another word more then," returned the captain of hussars, apparently very much inclined to cry.

"I am sure Miss Isabella was wrong not to have inserted these verses in her album," said Armstrong, with a smile of good-natured satire. "But I know that my young friend, Mr. Markham, has a more refined taste with regard to poetry than he chose just now to admit."

"Indeed!" said the beautiful Isabella; "I should be delighted to hear Mr. Markham's sentiments upon the subject of poetry; for I confess that I myself entertain very singular notions in that respect. It is difficult to afford a minute definition of what poetry is; for, like the unearthly visitants which the fears of superstition have occasionally summoned to the world, poetry fascinates the senses, but eludes the grasp of the beholder, and stands before him visible, powerful, and yet impalpable!"

"I concur with your views, Miss Isabella," said Markham, delighted to hear, amidst the frivolity of the conversation, remarks which exhibited sound sense and judgment. "It is impossible to set forth, in any array of words, the subtlety and peculiarity of poetry, which soars above the powers of language and defies the reach of description."

"Yes," said Isabella; "the painter cannot place the rainbow or the glittering dew-drop upon his canvass; the sculptor cannot invest his image with a soul; and it seems equally difficult to define poetry."

"We know of what we are speaking when we allude to it; but there are no definitions which give us views of it sufficiently comprehensive."

"Well, strike me! if I didn't think that every thing with rhymes, or in lines of a certain length, was poetry," observed the captain of hussars.

"My daughter can explain the mystery to you," said the countess, surveying Isabella with pride and maternal enthusiasm.

Isabella blushed deeply. She feared that she had intruded her remarks on the company, and dreaded to be considered vain or anxious for display. Markham immediately perceived the nature of her thoughts, and skilfully turned the conversation to the poetry of her native land, and thence to the leading characteristics and features of Italian life.

Dinner was at length announced, and Richard had the felicity of conducting the lovely daughter of the count to the dining-room, and of occupying a seat by her side during the banquet.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DREAM.

THREE weeks passed away in a most agreeable manner, and Richard frequently expressed his gratitude to Armstrong for the pleasure he had procured him by this visit.

The more he saw of Count Alteroni's daughter, the more he was compelled to admire her personal and mental qualifications. But he felt somewhat annoyed when he discovered that Captain Smilax Dapper was paying his addresses to her: for he was interested in so charming a young lady, and would have regretted to see her throw herself away on such a coxcomb. He did not however find that Isabella gave the captain any encouragement: on the contrary he had frequently seen an erratic smile of contempt upon her lips when the military aspirant to her hand uttered an absurdity or indulged in an air of affectation.

By the constant and unvaried respect, and the absence of all familiarity on the part of Dapper towards the lovely Italian, Markham also argued that he had not as yet declared his sentiments, because had he been a favoured suitor, the truth would have betrayed itself in some trifling manner or another. Moreover, as Isabella conducted herself in only just the same friendly way towards Captain Dapper as she manifested towards her father's other guests, Richard saw no reason to believe that this passion was reciprocal.

Markham was thrown much in the signora's society during his visit at her father's house. He soon perceived that she preferred a conversation upon edifying and intellectual subjects to the frivolous chit-chat of Sir Cherry Bounce and Captain Dapper; and he frequently found himself carrying on a lengthened discourse upon music, poetry, painting and Italian literature, while the others were amusing themselves in the billiard or smoking-rooms. But Isabel was no blue-stocking; she was full of vivacity and life, and her conversation was sprightly and agreeable, even when turning upon those serious subjects.

In a few days after Richard's arrival, it was always he who turned the leaves of Isabella's music-book, "because Captain Dapper didn't know when;" she always took his arm when they walked round the shrubbery and garden after breakfast, "because Captain Dapper was constantly leaving her to play Sir Cherry some trick;" and somehow or another at meal-times, Richard and Isabella were invariably seated next to each other.

Such was the state of things at the expiration of three weeks, to which extent, although contrary to the original proposal of Armstrong, the visit had already extended; and Captain Smilax Dapper more than once fancied that he saw a rival in Richard Markham. At length he determined to communicate his suspicions to his friend Sir Cherry Bounce—a resolution which he carried into effect in the following manner.

"Cherry, my dear fellow," said he, one morning, taking the effeminate young baronet with him into the garden, up the gravel walks of which he walked in a very excited state; "Cherry, my dear fellow, I have something upon my mind, strike me! and I wish to unburden myself to you."

"Do you, Thmilackth? What can pothibly be the matter?" demanded the youth, turning very pale. "Ith it veway terwible? becauth if it ith, I had better call the count, and he will bwing hith blunderbuth."

"Strike me an idiot, Cherry, if you ain't a fool with your counts and blunderbusses. Now listen to me! I love Isabella, and have been doing the agreeable to her——"

"On my thoul I never could thee it!"

"I dare say not! strike me, if I didn't keep it so precious snug and quiet! However I love the girl; and curse me if I don't have her too—that's more! She shall be Mrs. Smilax Dapper, as sure as she's born, and I hope the mother of a whole regiment of little Smilaxes. And then Cherry, you shall stay a month or six weeks with us at a time, and fondle the little ones on your knees, you shall, and every thing will go on comfortable and smooth."

"Oh! veway thmooth!" cried Sir Cherry Bounce, making a slight grimace at the pleasing prospect of fondling the Little Dappers upon his knees.

"And I suppose I am not presumptuous in aspiring to the hand of Isabella? My father is a peer—and my uncle is a peer—and I have three thousand a-year of my own, beside expectations. Strike me, if I'm a man to be sneezed at!"

"Who thinkth of thneething at you?"

"I don't know exactly. And then I am not such a very bad looking fellow either. You are not ugly, Cherry, you are not—that is, not particularly ugly, although you have got pink eyes, and white lashes, and a pug nose;—but I'm more athletic, strike me!"

"I'm thure I don't dithpute what you thay."

"Well then—acknowledging all this," proceeded the captain, "how should I treat a fellow who endeavours to cut me out?"

"Thallenge him to fight with thword and pithtol," answered Sir Cherry. "But who ith he?"

"That upstart fellow, Markham, who was brought here by that odious, republican, seditious, disloyal scoundrel Armstrong, and who talks all day about poetry and music, and God knows what. However, I can't say I admire that plan of yours," continued the hussar; "swords and pistols, you know are so very dangerous; and—and—"

"And what elth?"

"Why, you're a fool, Cherry. I thought you would have hit upon some plan to enable me to secure the prize."

"Well then—thuppothing we carwy the girl off, to Wochethter for inthanth."

"Deuce take Rochester! my regiment is quartered at Chatham."

"Well—to Canterbury then?"

"Yes—that will do—strike me blind if it won't!" ejaculated the captain. "But if I could only get rid of this Markham somehow or another, I should prefer it. The fellow——"

Captain Smilax Dapper stopped short: for at that moment, as he and his companion were turning the angle of a summer-house, they ran against Richard Markham.

"It wath'nt me—it wath'nt me who thpoke!" ejaculated Sir Cherry Bounce; and having uttered these words, he very fairly took to his heels, leaving his friend the captain to settle matters as best he might.

"Who was taking a most unwarrantable liberty with my name?" demanded Richard, walking straight up to Captain Smilax Dapper.

"I certainly made an observation," answered the captain, turning mighty pale, "and I do not hesitate to say, sir——"

"What, sir?"

"Why, sir—that I feel, sir—that strike me, sir!"

"Yes, sir—I *shall* strike you," very coolly answered Markham; "and that will teach you not to speak lightly of one, who is a comparative stranger to you, on another occasion."

As he uttered these words, he seized the captain by the collar, and gave him a couple of boxes on the ears. Dapper endeavoured to pluck up a spirit and resist; but the ceremony was performed before he could release himself from his assailant's clutches and he then returned to the house, muttering threats of vengeance.

That same afternoon Markham took leave of his new friends.

On his return home, he found his dwelling more lonely and cheerless than ever. He felt that he was isolated in the world; and his heart seemed to be pierced with a red-hot iron when the remembrance of all his wrongs returned to his imagination.

Oh! if we would but study the alphabet of fate, and remember that each leaf which falls, each flower that dies, is but the emblem of man's kindred doom, how much of the coldness, the selfishness, the viciousness of life would be swept away, and earth would be but a proof-sheet of heaven's fairer volume—with errors and imperfections, it is true, but still susceptible of correction and amendment, ere its pages be unfolded before the High Chancery of heaven!

Spring now asserted its tranquil reign once more; and May strewed the earth with flowers, and covered the trees with foliage.

One evening Richard sate in his library reading until a very late hour. Night came, and found him at his studies; and the morning dawned ere he thought of retiring to slumber.

He hastened to his bed-room, with the intention of seeking his couch; but he felt no inclination to sleep. He walked up to the window, drew aside the curtain, and gazed forth into the open air. The partial obscurity seemed to hang like a dusky veil against the windows: but by degrees the darkness yielded to the grey light of the dawn.

He glanced in the direction of the hill upon the summit of which stood the two trees; and he thought of his brother. He wondered, for the thousandth time, whether the appointment would be eventually kept, and why Eugene came not to revisit the home of his birth.

He was in the midst of cogitations like these, when his eyes were suddenly struck by an object which seemed to be moving between the trees upon the top of the hill. A superstitious fear seized upon Richard's mind. In the first moment of his surprise he imagined that the apparition of his brother had been led back to the trysting-place by those leafy banners that proclaimed the covenant of the heart. But he speedily divested himself of that momentary alarm, and smiled at his folly in believing it to be extraordinary that any one should visit the hill at that early hour.

The object was still there—it was a human being—and, as the morning gradually grew brighter, he was enabled to distinguish that it was a man.

But that was the hour at which labourers went to their daily toils:—still, why should one of those peasants linger upon the top of the hill, to reach which he must have gone out of his way?

Markham felt an indescribable curiosity to repair to the hill;—but he was ashamed to yield to the superstitious impulse under the influence of which he still more or less laboured;—and the sudden disappearance of the object of his anxiety from the hill confirmed him in his resolution to remain in his chamber. He accordingly closed the blind, and retired to his couch, where he shortly sank into a deep slumber.

Markham was now plunged into the aërial world of dreams. First he saw himself walking by the side of Isabella in a cool and shady grove, where the birds were singing cheerily in the trees; and it seemed to him that there reigned a certain understanding between himself and his fair companion which allowed him to indulge in the most delightful and tender hopes. He pressed her hand—she returned the token of affection and love. Suddenly this scene was rudely interrupted. From a deep recess in the grove appeared a wretch, covered with rags, dirty and revolting in appearance, with matted hair, parched and cracked lips, wild and ferocious eyes, and a demoniac expression of countenance. Isabella screamed: the wretch advanced, grasped Richard's hand, gave utterance to a horrible laugh, and claimed his friendship—the friendship of Newgate! It seemed to Richard that he made a desperate effort to withdraw his hand from that rude grasp;—and the attempt instantly awoke him.

He opened his eyes;—but the horror experienced in his dream was now prolonged, for a human countenance was bending over him!

It was not, however, the distorted, hideous, and fearful one which he had seen in his vision,—but a countenance handsome, though very pale, and whose features were instantly familiar to him.

"Eugene, my brother—Eugene, dearest Eugene!" ejaculated Richard; and he stretched out his arms to embrace him whom he thus adjured.

But scarcely had his eyes opened upon that countenance, when it was instantly withdrawn; and Richard remained for a few

moments in his bed, deprived of all power of motion, and endeavouring to assure himself whether he was awake or in a vision.

A sudden impulse roused him from his lethargy;—he sprang from his couch, rushed towards the door, and called aloud for his brother.

The door was closed when he reached it; and no trace seemed to denote that any visitor had been in that chamber.

He threw on a dressing-gown, hurried down stairs, and found all the doors fast closed and locked as usual at that hour. He opened the front-door, and looked forth,—but no one was to be seen. Bewildered and alarmed, he returned to his bed-chamber, and once more sought his couch. He again fell asleep, in the midst of numerous and conflicting conjectures relative to the incident which had just occurred; and when he awoke two hours afterwards, he was fain to persuade himself that it was all a dream.

He dressed himself, and walked towards the hill. On his arrival at the top, he instinctively cast his eyes upon the name and date carved in the bark of his brother's tree. But how great was his surprise—how ineffable his joy, when he beheld fresh traces of the same hand imprinted on that tree. Beneath the former memento—and still fresh and green, as if they had only been engraved a few hours—were the words—

EUGENE.

May 17th, 1838.

"My God!" exclaimed Richard, "it was then no dream!"

He threw himself upon the seat between the two trees and wept abundantly.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SPECULATION.—AN UNWELCOME MEETING.

FIVE months elapsed; and in the middle of October Richard received an invitation to pass a few days at the abode of Count Alteroni.

He contemplated change of scene with unfeigned delight, and lost no time in repairing to Richmond.

The count received him with the utmost cordiality: the countess expressed a regret that he should wait to be solicited to honour them with his company; and Isabella's countenance wore a smile and a blush as she extended her hand towards him.

"I was anxious to see you again," said the count, after dinner, before the ladies had retired, "if it were only to joke you about the fright into which you threw poor Bounce the last time you were here. Isabel apprehended a duel between you and Dapper; but we never could learn the origin of your dispute."

"Indeed, I scarcely dreaded such an event," said Isabella; "for however capable Mr. Markham may be of fighting, I felt perfectly well convinced that Captain Dapper would not be induced to commit such a breach of the peace."

"Our dispute was a mere trifle," said Markham; "and I am sorry it should have reached your ears."

"The Trojan war sprung from a trifle," cried the count: "but these trifles are frequently very interesting."

"The truth is," said Richard, "that I overheard Captain Dapper abuse me to his companion, heaven only knows why! Sir Cherry Bounce started away; and I was compelled to give the young officer a couple of boxes upon the ears to teach him courtesy in future."

Isabella laughed heartily at this anecdote; and Markham felt indescribably happy when he thus received a convincing proof that the lovely Italian was in no way interested in that aspirant to her hand.

"I shall not invite those gentlemen here very readily again," observed the count. "I thought that they would have helped to pass away the time agreeably; but one was such a fool, and the other such a fop, that I was really glad to get rid of them. However, I have now something else to occupy my attention."

"The count is going to speculate in an English Company," said the countess. "We foreigners, you know, Mr. Markham, are struck with the facility with which enormous fortunes are built up in your country."

"Italy has lost all her commerce," added the count, with a sigh: "poor Italy!"

"With all due deference to your experience," said Markham, "I should counsel you to be particularly careful how you allow yourself to be deluded by visionaries and adventurers."

"Oh! the gentleman who has proposed to me certain schemes for the realization of an immense fortune, is a man of probity and honour. The truth is, that the political condition of Italy may possibly compel me to remain an exile from my native land for the rest of my existence; and I am anxious to turn the means now within my reach to the best advantage for my daughter."

"You know, my dear father," said Isabella, her eyes filling with tears, "that I can be contented with a little—a very little."

"I think I have before informed you that I lost a considerable portion of my own property through the nefarious speculations of an adventurer," observed Richard; "and I must confess that I look with a suspicious eye upon all schemes which induce us to change realities for chances. You possess, count, all that you require to make you happy during your exile;—why should you sigh and languish after immense wealth?"

The signora bestowed a glance of gratitude upon Markham, who also rose considerably in the estimation of the countess. Indeed, both the ladies were very much averse to the count's ideas of speculating; and they were delighted to find in their visitor so able an advocate of their opinions.

"I consider," resumed the count, "that a man is bound to do the best he can to increase the property he has to leave his offspring; and as my own estate in Castelcicala is confiscated, and I have nothing to rely upon but a certain sum of ready-money, I am determined to vest the greater portion of it in an enterprize which will produce immense returns."

"And what may the nature of the undertaking be?" inquired Markham.

"A line of steam-packets between London and Montoni, the capital of Castelcicala. Such an enterprize would absorb all the commerce now enjoyed by Leghorn and Civita Vecchia; and Montoni would be the great mercantile port of Italy."

"The scheme certainly seems plausible," observed Richard; "and, guided by your experience, may realize your expectations. I would rather see you embarking money in such an undertaking than in those desperate and outrageous ones which have nothing but their originality to recommend them."

The count smiled with triumph and satisfaction at having thus disarmed the opposition of his young friend to the projected speculation.

On the following day Count Alteroni repaired to London, and did not return home until dinner-time.

After dinner, when he and Richard were sitting alone together, sipping their claret, the count said in a semi-mysterious and confidential manner, "I have this morning broken the ice: indeed, I have made the first plunge. I have confided the necessary funds to Mr. Greenwood—that is the name of the gentleman with whom I am to co-operate:—and he will immediately busy himself with the foundation of the enterprize. I shall not, however, mention this to the countess and Isabella for a few days; for in commercial matters ladies always entertain apprehensions which give one what you English call the 'blue-devils.'"

Richard made no observation. The evil—if evil it were—was done; and he did not choose to fill the count with apprehensions which might eventually prove to be unfounded. The conversation upon the subject accordingly dropped for the present; and the two gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

Several weeks glided away; and Markham still remained at Richmond. His acquaintance with the count's family rapidly expanded into an intimacy which gave him unfeigned pleasure. The count treated him as a near relative—almost as a son; the countess was charmed with him because he could converse upon German literature and history;—and where the parents were so encouraging, how could the daughter be reserved? Isabella was naturally of a frank and confiding disposition; and she soon learned to consider Markham as a very intimate friend of the family. Whenever he hinted at the necessity of returning to his own home, he expressed his fears that he was intruding upon the hospitality of his kind hosts, Isabella always had some cause ready to delay his departure, as soon as her father and mother had concluded their own entreaties for him to prolong his visit. Markham had nothing to occupy his attention elsewhere; and he was thus easily induced to remain in a mansion where he received so much kindness, and where there was an attraction that daily disclosed new charms and revealed fresh spells.

It was in the middle of December that Markham was walking, on a fine frosty morning, with Isabella along the high road in the immediate vicinity of the count's dwelling, when he noticed a strange and repulsive looking individual following them at a short distance. At first he supposed that the man's way lay in the same direction which he and his fair companion were pursuing; he accordingly turned with Isabella into another path, and, to his misfortune and annoyance, found that he was still followed by the stranger whose dilapidated appearance, long black matted hair, week's beard, filthy person, and sinister expression of countenance, filled him with alarming suspicions.

He remembered his dream; and a shudder passed through his frame.

Determined to ascertain the motive of this man's perseverance in dogging him thus, he conducted Isabella by a short cut back to the house, and retraced his steps to encounter the person who was still following him.

The man advanced towards him with a dogged and determined air, and yet downcast eyes, which were buried beneath his projecting temples and shaggy brows.

"Holloa, my fine fellow!" he exclaimed, when he came within a few yards of Richard; "you don't mean to say that you have forgotten an old pal?"

"What, Anthony—is this you?" said Markham, turning deadly pale as he recognised one of his fellow-prisoners in Newgate.

It was the Resurrection Man.

"Yes—it is me—poor Tony Tidkins. But now permit me to ask you a question or two. What are you doing now? Who lives there? And what young girl was that you were walking about with?"

"And by what right do you dare put those insolent queries to me?" cried Markham, surveying the ruffian with mingled indignation and disgust.

"Oh! if you don't choose to answer my questions, I can precious soon ascertain all the truth for myself," coolly replied the Resurrection Man, who never once looked Markham in the face—then, having uttered these words, he advanced a few paces as if he were about to seek the count's dwelling.

"Wretch! what do you mean to do?" ejaculated Richard, hurrying after him and detaining him by the arm: "you do not know that that abode is sacred—that it is the residence of probity, innocence, and honour—that if you were to breathe a hint who and what you are, you would be spurned from the door?"

"Ah! I am accustomed to *that* in this Christian land—in this land of Bibles and Missionary Societies," said the Resurrection Man bitterly: then, resuming his dogged surliness of tone, he added, "But at all events I can first ask for alms and a morsel of bread at that house, and thereupon state that the gentleman who was just now walking with the young lady belonging to the house, was a companion of mine in Newgate—a communication which will tend to preserve the innocence, honour, probity, and all the rest of it, of that family."

With these words he again set off in the direction of the count's abode.

"Confusion!" exclaimed Markham: "this man will now effect my ruin!"

A second time did he stop the Resurrection Man as he advanced towards the residence of the Italians.

"Well—what now? isn't a man at liberty to walk which way he chooses?"

"You cannot be so base as to betray me? you would not ruin my happiness for ever?" said Richard, in whose mind the particulars of his dream were now uppermost.

"And why should I have any regard for you, since you receive and treat me as if I was a dog?"

"I really did not mean——"

"Oh! bother to all apologies," cried the Resurrection Man ferociously.

"My God! what do you want of me? what can I do for you?" exclaimed Richard, uncertain how to act, and his mind a prey to the most painful emotions; for he already fancied that he saw himself exposed—banished from the count's hospitable roof—separated from Isabella, without a chance of reconciliation—and reproached for having intruded himself upon the society of a virtuous and untainted family.

The mere anticipation of such an afflicting series of incidents was more than he could bear; and he was prepared to make any sacrifices to avert so terrible an occurrence.

"I may obtain from your fears what I should not have got from your generosity," exclaimed the Resurrection Man: "but it doesn't matter what motive produces it, so long as I get it."

"And what is it that you require?" asked Richard hastily. "But let us walk aside—they may see us from the windows."

"And what do I care it they do?" brutally demanded the Resurrection Man. "I suppose I shan't suffer in character by talking to a companion in former misfortunes?" he added, in a sarcastic tone.

There was something peculiarly revolting about that man;—his death-like countenance, jet-black whiskers, shaggy brows, averted glances, and horrible nick-name, all combined to render him a loathsome and disgusting object.

The contact of such a wretch was like plunging one's hand amidst the spawn of toads.

But the savage irony of this monster—oh! that was utterly intolerable. Richard writhed beneath it.

"Now I tell you what it is," said the Resurrection Man, who probably by this time saw that he had reduced the young man to a pliability suitable to his purposes; "if you will only be civil I'll accommodate you to the utmost of my power. Let us walk away from the house—we can then talk more at our ease."

Richard accompanied the miscreant a short distance; and then they again stopped, but no longer within view of the count's residence.

"You can, doubtless, suppose what I want!" said the Resurrection Man, turning suddenly round upon Markham, and looking him full in the face for the first time.

"Money, I presume," replied Richard.

"Yes—money. I know that you were in expectation of a great fortune when you were in Newgate; and I suppose you have not run through it all yet."

"I was almost totally ruined, during my imprisonment, by the unfortunate speculations in which my guardian engaged," answered Markham mournfully.

"That's all my eye! Nevertheless, I won't be hard upon you: I know that you have got a splendid house and a grand estate close by ____"

"A few acres of land, as heaven is my witness!"

"Well—you may try it on as much as you like; but I tell you plainly it won't do for me. Let us cut this matter devilish short, and come to some understanding at once. I am hard up—I don't know what to turn my hand to for a moment; and I can't get orders for the stiff'uns as I used to do."

"All that I have told you about the loss of my property is quite true," said Markham; "and I have now but little more than a bare two hundred a-year to live upon."

"Well, I will be generous and let you off easy," said the Resurrection Man. "You shall give me for the present——"

"For the present!" repeated Markham, all the terror of his mind again betraying itself; "if I make any arrangement with you at all, it would be upon the express condition that you would never molest me more."

"Be it so," said the Resurrection Man, whom the promise cost nothing, and who knew that there was nothing to bind him to its implicit performance; "give me five hundred pounds, and I will never seek you out again."

"Five hundred pounds!" exclaimed Richard: "I cannot command the money!"

"Not a mag less will I take," said the extortioner with a determined air and voice.

"I really cannot comply with the proposal—I have not the money—I do not know where to get it. Why do you persecute me in this way? what harm have I ever done to you? why should you seek to ruin me, and to annihilate all my hopes of again establishing myself in an honourable position in society? Tell me—by what right, by what law, do you now endeavour to extort—vilely, infamously

extort—this money from me?"

No pen could describe—no painter depict the singular expression of countenance which the Resurrection Man wore as these words fell upon his ears. He knew not whether to burst out into a fit of laughter, or to utter a volley of imprecations against his former companion in Newgate; and so, not to be wrong by doing one and omitting the other, he did both. His ironical and ferocious laugh fell horribly upon the ears of Markham, who wad at the same time assailed by such a string of oaths and blasphemies, that he trembled.

"You want to know by what law and right I demand money of you," cried the wretch, when he had indulged in this out-pouring of laughter and imprecations to his heart's content: "well—I will tell you. My law is that practised by all the world—*the oppression of the weak by the strong*; and my right is also that of universal practice—*the right of him who takes what will not dare to be refused*. Now, then, you understand me; and if not, hear my resolution."

"Speak," said Richard, now thoroughly cooled and disarmed; "and let me know the worst at once."

"You have confirmed my suspicion that you are courting the young girl I saw you walking with: you have confirmed that suspicion by your manner and your words. Now, I require five hundred pounds; and if you are anxious that your fair one should remain in ignorance of your Old Bailey adventures, you had better comply with my terms."

"I positively declare that I have not the money," said Richard.

"Make it."

"But how?"

"Borrow it of the young lady's father or mother, or uncle, or aunt."

"Never—impossible!"

"You say that you have a few acres of land left. I believe you have more; but let's take your own statement. Upon those few acres you can easily borrow the money I require."

"And diminish my miserable income still more?"

"Yes—or no, without further wrangling? You must be well aware that this sacrifice is necessary if the girl is worth having."

"In the name of heaven, allude not to—to—to Miss—— to the young lady with whom you saw me ere now;—allude not to her in this disgraceful manner!" cried Markham; for when the lips of that horrible man framed a sentiment which bore reference to Isabella, it seemed to Richard as if a loathsome serpent was pouring its slimy venom upon a sweet and blooming flower.

"Will you give me the money?" demanded the Resurrection Man.

"I will give you two hundred pounds—I have no more—I can get no more—I will not raise any more upon my property."

"Can't be done," returned the ruffian. "I will have the five hundred, or nothing."

"It will take some days to procure the money," said Markham, yielding gradually.

"Never mind. Give me what you have about you for my present purposes, and name the day and place for me to receive the rest."

Markham took his purse from his pocket, and examined its contents. There were seventeen sovereigns at that moment at his command. He retained two, and handed fifteen to the Resurrection Man, who pocketed them with savage glee.

"Now this looks like business," said he, "and is an earnest that you will do the thing that's right. Where and when for the remainder?"

"In a fortnight I will meet you at any place you may name in London," answered Markham.

"Well, make it a fortnight. Do you know the *Dark House*, in Brick Lane, Bethnal Green?"

"What is it?" asked Richard, shuddering at the name.

"A public-house. Any one will tell you where it is. This day fortnight I shall expect to find you there at eight o'clock in the evening. If I don't happen to be punctual, you can wait for me; and if I don't come that night, I shall the next. Remember how much depends upon your fulfilment of the contract."

"I shall not fail," answered Richard, with a sinking of the heart which none can understand who have not been placed in a similar position. "And you, on your part, will adhere to your side of the agreement?"

"Mute as a mouse," said the Resurrection Man; "and should I afterwards meet you by accident, I shall not know you. Farewell."

With these words the Resurrection Man turned away, and pursued his course towards London.

Markham followed him with his eyes until he turned an angle of the road and was no longer to be seen.

Then only did Richard breathe freely.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. GREENWOOD.

About six o'clock in the evening—ten days after the incident which concluded the preceding chapter,—a handsome cabriolet drove up to the door of a house in Spring Gardens.

Down jumped the tiger—an urchin not much bigger than a walking stick—and away went the knocker, rat-tat-tat, for upwards of fifteen seconds. A servant in livery opened the door, and an elegantly-dressed gentleman, about six or seven and twenty years of age, alighted from the vehicle.

This gentleman rushed up stairs to his study, drew forth his cheque-book, wrote an order upon his banker for a thousand pounds, enclosed it in an envelope, and immediately despatched the letter to Lord Tremordyn by one of his numerous domestics. He had that afternoon lost the money to his lordship in some sporting-bet; and, "as it was a debt of honour," he could not possibly think of sitting down to dinner, or even pulling off his boots (which, being fashionable, pinched him excessively) without settling it.

As soon as he had done this, another servant entered the room, and said, "If you please, sir, Mrs. Mangles has called, and is waiting below to see you. She has been here these three hours, and wishes very much to say a few words to you, sir."

"What! that bothering upholsterer's wife!" ejaculated the gentleman, in a tone of indignation which would have induced a stranger to believe that' he was the most persecuted man in the world. "Why—her husband's account hasn't been owing quite a year yet; and here she is boring from morning to night."

"Please, sir, she says that her husband is locked up in a spunging-house."

"Serve him right!"

"But he is a hard-working sober man——"

"He shouldn't run into debt."

"And he has five children."

"It is really disgusting! these lower orders literally swarm with children!"

"And if you would only pay a quarter of the money, he would get out to-night."

"I won't pay a sixpence till January."

"Then he will be totally ruined, sir, his wife says."

"Well—he must be ruined, then. Go and turn her out, and send up Lafleur."

And the fashionable gentleman, who would not owe a *debt of honour* for half an hour, thought no more of the sum which was due to a tradesman, which had been already owing for nearly a year, and which he could have immediately settled without the slightest inconvenience to himself.

For this man was rich; and, having got his money in the City (God knows how), had now come to the West End to make the most of it.

"Lafleur," said the fashionable gentleman to the French valet, "you must dismiss that fellow John to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir."

"He actually had the impertinence to bring me a message from a dun, while I was in a hurry to get dressed for dinner."

"Indeed, sir—you don't say so sir!" ejaculated the valet, who had as much horror of a dun as an overseer has of a pauper. "Yes, sir—I will dismiss him to-morrow, sir—and without a character too."

"Do, Lafleur. And now to dress. Are the company come?"

"Mr. Chichester and Sir Rupert Harborough are in the drawing-room, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Greenwood—for such was the gentleman's name—"very well!"

Having carelessly perused three or four letters which he found upon his table, he repaired to his dressing-room, where he washed his hands in a silver basin, while the poor upholsterer's wife returned to her husband in the lock-up house, to say that their last hope had failed, and that nothing but a debtor's gaol awaited them. Accordingly, while the poor man was being carried off to Whitecross Street Prison, Mr. Greenwood repaired to his elegantly furnished drawing-room to welcome the guests whom he had invited that day to dinner.

"My dear Sir Rupert," said Mr. Greenwood, "I am delighted to see you. Chichester, how are you? Where have you both been for the last six months? Scarcely had I the pleasure of forming your acquaintance, when you were off like shots: and I have never seen nor heard of you till this morning."

"Upon my honour, I hardly know what we have been doing—or indeed, what we have *not* been doing," ejaculated the baronet. "We have been in Paris and Brussels, and enjoyed all the pleasures of the Continent."

"And we found our way into the good graces of the Parisian ladies, and the purses of their husbands," observed Chichester, with a complacent smile.

"Ah! ah!" said Mr. Greenwood, laughing. "Trust you both for allowing yourselves to starve in a land of plenty."

"And so here we are, come back to England quite fresh and ready for new sport," said Chichester. "You see that it is useful to go abroad for a season every now and then. Immediately after I passed through the Insolvents' Court, two years ago, I went to Paris for six

months, and came home again with a new reputation, as it were."

"By the bye, Sir Rupert," exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, "I lost a cool thousand to your father-in-law this afternoon at Tattersall's."

"What! does the old lord do things in so spirited a way as that?" cried the baronet.

"Yes—now and then. I believe you and he are not on very good terms? When I asked him after you a month or two ago, he appeared to evade the conversation."

"The fact is," said the baronet, "old Lord and Lady Tremordyn pretend that I treat their daughter with neglect—just because I cannot and will not be tied to my wife's apron strings. I did not want to marry her; but Lady Tremordyn intrigued to catch me; and the old lord came down handsome—and so the match was made up."

The baronet did not think of informing his friend that he had stipulated for twenty thousand pounds to pay his debts, ere he would do justice to the young and beautiful creature whom he had seduced, and whose pathetic appeal to her mother has been already laid before the reader in the chapter which treats of the *Black Chamber* of the General Post Office.

"Do you know what has become of your old flame Diana Arlington?" inquired Mr. Greenwood of the baronet, after a pause.

"And was she not *your* old flame too?" said Sir Rupert, laughing. "I believe that when you were plain Mr. George Montague, instead of Mr. Montague Greenwood——"

"Oh! I have assumed the name of Greenwood, remember, because a relation of that name has left me a considerable fortune."

"Well—that is a very good story to tell the world, but not friends, my dear fellow," said the baronet, coolly. "But we were talking of the Enchantress. I presume she is still under the protection of the Earl of Warrington?"

"So I understand," replied Greenwood.

"Well—I must say," continued the baronet, "I always liked Diana; and I dare say we should have been together up to the present moment, if it had not been for that infernal affair of Markham's."

"Ah! Richard Markham!" ejaculated Mr. Greenwood hastily. "I have heard of him—but never seen him."

"I and Chichester were compelled to sacrifice him to save ourselves," observed Harborough.

"Yes—yes—it was a pity—a great pity," cried Greenwood, poking the fire violently.

"I wonder what has become of that same Markham?" said Chichester.

"I understand that he lost the greater portion of his property by some unfortunate speculation or another, but the nature of which I have never learnt," replied Greenwood.

"And what about this Steam-Packet Company of which you were speaking this morning?" inquired Sir Rupert Harborough.

"The fact is, I have got a certain Italian count in tow, and I intend to make him useful. He is an emigrant from the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala, having been concerned in some treasonable proceedings with Prince Alberto, who is the Grand Duke's nephew, and who has also been compelled to fly to some other country. Be it as it may, this Count Alteroni and I became acquainted; and, in the course of conversation, he observed that a fortune might be made by the establishment of a line of steam-packets between London and Montoni, the capital of Castelcicala. He added that he should be very willing to embark his own capital in such an enterprise. '*How extraordinary!*' I immediately exclaimed: '*I had myself entertained the very same idea!*' The count was enchanted; and he has already advanced a considerable sum."

At this moment dinner was announced; and the three gentlemen proceeded to the apartment in which it was served up. The repast consisted of all the luxuries in season, and many *out* of season: the choicest wines were produced; and justice was done to each and all, while wit and humour flowed as freely, and sparkled as brightly as the juice of the grape itself. The baronet was more affable than ever;—Mr. Chichester related several amusing anecdotes of midnight sprees, policemen, knockers, station-houses, and magistrates;—and Mr. Greenwood explained his plans relative to the steam-packets.

"I should very much like to have you both in the Direction," said Mr. Montague Greenwood, when he had terminated his elucidations: "but I have learnt that this Richard Markham, of whom we have been talking, is acquainted with the count; and if he saw your names connected with the affair, he would instantly blow upon it. I should then have the count upon me for the fifteen thousand pounds he has already lodged in my hands."

"Let us write an anonymous letter to the count, and inform him that Markham has been convicted at the Old Bailey," suggested Chichester.

"No—no," ejaculated Greenwood emphatically: "you have injured that young man enough already."

"And what do you care about him?" cried Chichester. "You said just now that you had never seen him."

"I did—and I repeat the assertion," answered Greenwood; then, in a very serious tone, he added, "and I will beg you both to remember, gentlemen, that if you wish to co-operate with me in any of those speculations which I know so well how to manage, you will leave Mr. Richard Markham alone; for I have certain private reasons for being rather anxious to do him a service than an injury."

"Well, I will not in any way interfere with your good intentions," said the baronet.

"Nor I," observed Chichester.

"And as it is impossible for you to enter my Steam-Packet Company," added Mr. Greenwood, "I will let you into another good thing which I have in view, and in which a certain banker is concerned. To tell you the real truth, this banker has been insolvent for some time; and if his father had not advanced him about fifty thousand pounds three years ago, he would have gone to smash. As it was, the Lords of the Treasury got hold of his real position, by some means or another—he never could divine how; and they refused a tender which he sent in for a certain money contract—I don't know exactly what. *Now* his petition is more desperate than ever, and he and I are going to do an admirable stroke of business. I will let you both into it."

We need scarcely remind the reader that the banker now alluded to was the writer of one of the letters perused by the Examiner's

clerks in the *Black Chamber*.

The conversation between the three gentlemen was proceeding very comfortably, when a servant entered the room, and, handing his master a card upon a silver tray, said, "This gentleman, sir, requests to be allowed to see you, if perfectly convenient."

"The Count Alteroni!" exclaimed Mr. Greenwood. "What the devil could have brought him to London at this time of night? John—show him into the study—there is a good fire for him; and if that won't warm his heart, perhaps a bottle of Burgundy will."

The servant left the room; and in a few moments Mr. Greenwood hastened to join the count in the elegant apartment which was denominated "the study."

"My dear sir, I have to apologise for calling thus late," said the count; "but the truth is that I had a little business which brought me up to town to-day, and in this neighbourhood too; and I thought——"

"Pray offer no excuses, my dear count," interrupted Mr. Greenwood. "The truth is, I wished to see you very particularly—upon a matter not altogether connected with our enterprise——"

"Indeed," said the count; "you interest me. Pray explain yourself."

"In the first place, allow me to ask whether the ladies are yet acquainted with the undertaking in which you have embarked?"

"Yes—I acquainted them with the fact this very morning."

"And do they approve of it?"

"They approve of every thing of which I think well, and disapprove of all that I abhor."

"And do they know that I am the projector and principal in the enterprise?" demanded Greenwood.

"They are acquainted with every thing," answered the count. "Indeed, they have formed of you the same exalted opinion which I myself entertain. It would be strange if they had not. We met you at the house of Lord Tremordyn; and that nobleman spoke in the highest possible terms of you. But what connection exists between all those questions which you have put to me, and the matter concerning which you desired to see me?"

"I am not sure that I ought to explain myself at present, nor to *you* in the first instance," was the answer, delivered with some embarrassment of manner: "at all events I should wish you to know a little more of me, and to have some reason to thank me for the little service which I shall have the means of rendering you, in enabling you to treble your capital."

The count appeared mystified; and Mr. Greenwood continued:—

"I had the pleasure of seeing the amiable countess and her lovely daughter many times last summer at the house of Lord Tremordyn; and no one could know the Signora Isabella without being forcibly struck by her personal and mental qualifications. To render myself agreeable to Miss Isabella would be the height of my earthly happiness. You will pardon my presumption; but——"

Mr. Greenwood ceased, and looked at the count to ascertain the effect which his words had produced.

The honourable and open-hearted Italian was not averse to this proposition. He considered his own affairs and prospects in Castelcicala to be so desperate that he was bound to make the best provision he could for his daughter in a free, enlightened, and hospitable nation. Mr. Greenwood was good looking, moving in the best society, well spoken of by a peer of the realm (who, by the way, merely judged of Greenwood's character by the punctuality with which he paid his gambling debts), and evidently immensely rich;—his manners were elegant, and his taste refined;—and, in a word, he might be called a most eligible suitor for the hand of the count's daughter. Not being over-well skilled in affairs of the heart himself, the count had not noticed the attachment which decidedly existed between Isabella and Richard Markham; and it never for a moment struck him that his daughter might manifest the most powerful repugnance to Mr. Greenwood.

"I have no doubt," said he, after a long pause, "that Isabella will feel highly flattered by your good opinion of her. Indeed, I shall inform her without delay of the manner in which you have expressed yourself."

"My dear sir," interrupted Greenwood hastily, "in the name of heaven tell the signora nothing at all about our present conversation. Her delicacy would be offended. Rather give me an opportunity of making myself better known to your daughter."

"I understand you. Come and pass a week or two with us at Richmond. We have not a soul staying with us at the present moment, Mr. Markham, who was our last guest, having returned to his own abode about ten days ago."

"This is a busy time with me," began Mr. Greenwood; "and I could scarcely spare a week with justice to yourself and my own interests——"

"True," interrupted the count. "I will bring the ladies up to town at the beginning of the new year. We have a very pressing invitation from the Tremordyns, and I will avail myself of it."

Mr. Greenwood expressed his gratitude to the count for the favour which his suit thus received; and in a few minutes the Italian noble took his leave, more than ever convinced of the honour, wealth, and business-like habits of Mr. Greenwood.

"There," said the man of the world, as he once more seated himself at the table in the dining-room, where he had left the baronet and Chichester, "I have not passed the last hour unprofitably. I have not only demanded the hand of the count's lovely daughter, but have also persuaded the count to pay a few weeks' visit to your father-in-law, Lord Tremordyn," he added, addressing Sir Rupert.

"And what good do you propose by the latter arrangement?" demanded the baronet.

"I shall get the count's family at a house which Richard Markham stands no chance of visiting: for even if the count asked him to call upon him there, Markham would refuse, because he is sure to have read or heard that you, Sir Rupert, have married Lady Cecilia Huntingfield, and he would be afraid of meeting *you* at Lord Tremordyn's residence."

"And why should you be so anxious to separate the count from Markham, since Chichester and I are not to be in the Steam-packet concern?"

"Because I myself could not, for certain reasons, visit the count's family if I stood the chance of meeting that same Richard

Markham."

Mr. Greenwood then immediately changed the conversation, and pushed the bottle briskly about.

CHAPTER XLII.

"THE DARK HOUSE."

Markham did not forget his appointment with the Resurrection Man. Having obtained the necessary sum from his solicitor, he determined to sacrifice it in propitiating a miscreant who possessed the power of wounding him in a tender and almost vital point. Accordingly we find him, on the evening agreed upon, threading his way on foot amidst the maze of narrow streets and crooked alleys which lie in the immediate neighbourhood of Spitalfields Church.

There is not probably in all London—not even in Saint Giles's nor the Mint—so great an amount of squalid misery and fearful crime huddled together, as in the joint districts of Spitalfields and Bethnal Green. Between Shoreditch Church and Wentworth Street the most intense pangs of poverty, the most profligate morals, and the most odious crimes, rage with the fury of a pestilence.

Entire streets that are nought but sinks of misery and vice,—dark courts, fœtid with puddles of black slimy water,—alleys, blocked up with heaps of filth, and nauseating with unwholesome odours, constitute, with but little variety, the vast district of which we are speaking.

The Eastern Counties' Railway intersects Spitalfields and Bethnal Green. The traveller upon this line may catch, from the windows of the carriage in which he journeys, a hasty, but alas! too comprehensive glance of the wretchedness and squalor of that portion of London. He may actually obtain a view of the interior and domestic misery peculiar to the neighbourhood;—he may penetrate, with his eyes, into the secrets of those abodes of sorrow, vice, and destitution. In summer time the poor always have their windows open, and thus the hideous poverty of their rooms can be readily descried from the summit of the arches on which the railroad is constructed.

And in those rooms may be seen women half naked,—some employed in washing the few rags which they possess,—others ironing the linen of a more wealthy neighbour,—a few preparing the sorry meal,—and numbers scolding, swearing, and quarrelling. At many of the windows, men out of work, with matted hair, black beards, and dressed only in filthy shirts and ragged trousers,—lounge all the day long, smoking. From not a few of the open casements hang tattered garments to dry in the sun. Around the doors children, unwashed, uncombed, shoeless, dirty, and uncared for—throng in numbers,—a rising generation of thieves and vagabonds.

In the districts of Spitalfields and Bethnal Green the police are but little particular with regard to street-stalls. These portable shops are therefore great in number and in nuisance. Fish, fresh and fried,—oysters, sweet-stuff, vegetables, fruit, cheap publications, sop-in-the-pan, shrimps and periwinkles, hair-combs, baked potatoes, liver and lights, curds and whey, sheep's heads, haddocks and red-herrings, are the principal comestibles which find vendors and purchasers in the public street. The public-houses and the pawnbrokers also drive an excellent trade in that huge section of London.

In a former chapter we have described the region of Saffron Hill: all the streets and courts of that locality are safe and secure when compared with many in Bethnal Green and Spitalfields. There are lanes and alleys between Shoreditch and Church Street, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the Railway east of Brick Lane, through which a well-dressed person would not wander with a gold chain round his neck, at night, were he prudent.

Leading from the neighbourhood of Church Street up into the Hackney Road, is a sinuous thoroughfare, composed of Tyssen Street, Turk Street, Virginia Street, and the Bird-cage Walk; and in the vicinity of these narrow and perilous ways are the Wellington Road (bordered by a ditch of black mud), and several vile streets, inhabited by the very lowest of the low, the most filthy of the squalid, and the most profligate of the immoral.

We defy any city upon the face of the earth to produce a district equal in vice, dirt, penury, and fear-inspiring dens, to these which we are now describing.

The *Dark House* was a tavern of the lowest description in Brick Lane, a little north of the spot where the railway now intersects the street. The parlour of the *Dark House* was dirty and repulsive in all respects; the gas-lights formed two enormous black patches upon the ceiling; the tables were occupied by ill-looking men, whose principal articles of consumption were tobacco and malt liquor, and the atmosphere was filled with a dense volume of smoke. Markham was ashamed to be seen in such a place and in such society; but he consoled himself with the idea that neither he nor his business was known to those present; and as very little notice was taken of him as he proceeded to seat himself in the most retired and obscure corner, he speedily divested himself of the momentary embarrassment which had seized upon him.

Having satisfied himself by a glance that the Resurrection Man was not there, Richard ordered a glass of spirits and water, and resolved to await with patience the arrival of the extortioner.

By degrees he fell into a train of reflections in which he had never been involved before. He was about to purchase the silence of a villain who had menaced him with exposure to a family whose good opinion he valued. We have said elsewhere that he was a young man of the strictest honour, and that he was ever animated with the most scrupulous integrity of purpose. He could no longer conceal from himself the fact that he entertained a sincere and deep attachment for the Signora Isabella, and he flattered himself that he was not disagreeable to her in return. His transient passion for Mrs. Arlington had faded away with reflection, and he now comprehended the immense difference between an evanescent flame of that nature,—a flame kindled only by animal beauty, and unsustained by moral considerations,—and the pure, chaste, and sacred affection he experienced towards the charming Isabella. From the moment of his release from confinement, he had never inquired after Diana—much less sought after her; he knew not where she was, nor what had become of her, and his heart was totally independent of any inclination in her favour. He now asked himself whether he was pursuing an honourable part in concealing the antecedent adventures of his life from her whose pure and holy love he was so anxious to retain,

whose confidence he would not lose for worlds, and whose peace of mind he would not for a moment sacrifice to his own passion or interest?

He had not satisfactorily answered the question which he had thus put to himself, when he was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a voice at the further end of the room, which appeared familiar to him.

Glancing in that direction, he immediately recognised the well-known form and features of Mr. Talbot, the vulgar companion of Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester.

But how had the mighty fallen! The charitable gentleman now seemed to require the aid of charity himself. His hat, which was originally a gossamer at four-and-nine, was now so fully ventilated about the crown, that it would have fetched nothing at a Jews' auction, even though George Robins himself had put it up for sale. His coat was out at the elbows, his trousers out at the knees, and his shoes out at the toes; he was out of *cash* and out of *spirits*; and as he had none of the former, he trusted to the kindness of the frequenters of the *Dark House* parlour to supply him with some of the latter, diluted with hot water, and rendered more agreeable by means of sugar. Indeed, at the moment when his voice fell upon Markham's ear, he was just about to apply his lips to a tumbler of gin-punch which a butcher had ordered for his behoof.

"Well, Mr. Pocock," (this was Talbot's real name), said the butcher, "how does the world use you now?"

"Very bad, indeed, Mr. Griskin," was the reply. "For the last three year, come Janivary, I havn't known, when I got up in the morning, where the devil I should sleep at night;—and that is God Almighty's truth."

"I'm sorry to hear your affairs don't mend," said the butcher. "For my part, I'm getting on blooming. I was a bankrupt only seven weeks ago."

"A strange manner of being successful in business," thought Markham.

"But all my goods was seized by the landlord," added the butcher, in a triumphant tone of voice; "and so they was saved from the messenger of the Court, when he come down to take possession."

"Ah! I suppose your bankruptcy has put you all right again," said Pocock. "Nothing like a bankruptcy now-a-days—it makes a man's fortune."

"Yes—and no going to quod neither. I made a lot of friends of mine creditors, and so I got my certificate the wery same day as I passed my second examination; and now I'm as right as a trivet. But what ails you, though, old feller, that you can't contrive to get on?"

"The fact is," said Pocock, sipping his gin-and-water, "I was led into bad company about three or four years ago, and I don't care before who I say it, or who knows what infernal scrapes I was partly the means of getting a nice young fellow into."

"I suppose you fell in with flash company?" observed the butcher.

"I did indeed! I went out of my element—out of my proper sphere, as I may say; and when a man does that without the means of keeping in it, he's d——d and done for at once. I fell in with a baronet and a swell cove of the name of Chichester, or Winchester, and who after all turned out to be the son of old Chichester the pawnbroker down the street here. They made a perfect tool of me. I was fed and pampered, and lived on the fat of the land; and then, when the scheme fell through, I was trundled off like a hoop of which a charity schoolboy is tired. I fell into distress; and though I've met this here baronet and that there Chichester riding in their cabs, with tigers behind and horses before, they never so much as said, '*Talbot*,' or '*Pocock, my tulip, here is a quid for you*.'"

"Willanous," ejaculated the butcher. "But of what natur' was the scheme you talk of?"

"Why, I'll tell you that too. I shall certainly proclaim my own crimes; but I don't hesitate to say that I was led away by those two thieves. My name, as you well know, is Bill Pocock, and they made me take the name of Talbot. I was brought up as an engraver, and did pretty well until some four years ago, when I lost my wife and got drinking, and then every thing went wrong. One day I fell in with this Chichester, and he lent me some money. He then began telling me how he knew the way of making an immense fortune with very little trouble, and no risk or expense to myself."

"So far, so good," said the butcher.

"I was hard up—I was rendered desperate by the death of my wife, and, to tell the truth, I wanted to live an idle life. I had got attached to public-house parlours, and couldn't sit down to work with the graver. So I bit at Chichester's proposal, and he introduced me to the baronet."

"Another glass, Pocock," interrupted the butcher, winking to the other inmates of the parlour, who were now all listening with the greatest attention to this narrative—but none with more avidity nor with deeper interest than Richard Markham, who sate unperceived by Pocock in his obscure corner.

"The scheme was certainly a very ingenious one," continued Talbot, "and deserved success. It was nothing more nor less than making bank-notes. I was used to engraving plates of that kind; and so I undertook the job. I don't care if any one here present goes and informs against me; perhaps I should be better off in a prison than out of one. But what goes to my heart—and what I can never forget, and shall reproach myself for as long as I live, was the getting of a nice young fellow into a scrape, and making him stand Moses for the punishment, as you do, Griskin, for the grog."

"And who was this young chap?" demanded the butcher.

"One Markham. You must recollect his case. He was tried just about this time three years ago, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment."

"Can't say I recollect."

"Well—this Markham was as innocent about the notes, as the child unborn!" added Pocock emphatically.

"I raly don't see that you need take on so," remarked the butcher, "for after all, you'd better let another feller get into trouble than be locked up in lavender yourself."

"It was an unfortunate event," said Pocock, shaking his head solemnly, "and nothing has prospered with me since. But what vexes

me as much as all the rest, is to think of the conduct of those two chaps, Chichester and the baronet. They pretended not to know who I was, when I one day stopped them in Regent Street, and wanted to borrow a few pounds of them. The baronet turns round, and says to his pal, '*Who the devil is that fellow?*' and Chichester puts up his eye-glass, stares at me through it for five minutes, and says, '*My good man, we never give alms to people unless they have certificates of good character to show*.'

"Perhaps you wasn't over swell in your toggery?" said the butcher.

"Why—no: I don't think I was so well dressed then as I am now."

"The devil you wasn't! Well then, it ain't no wonder if so be they slighted you; for one wouldn't think as how you was titivated off at present to go to the Queen's le-vee."

"Come, no joking," exclaimed Pocock, "I have told you my story, and if you think it is a good one, and are inclined to do me a service, you can just order in a chop or a steak, for I think I could manage to eat a bit."

"With all my heart," said the butcher, who was a good-natured man in his way, and who, having realised a considerable sum by his late bankruptcy, was disposed to be generous: "you shall have as good a supper, and as much lush as you can stow away. Here, Dick," he cried, addressing himself to the waiter, "run round to my shop, and ask the old 'ooman for a nice steak; and then get it fried for me along with some inguns. And, Dick, let's have some taturs."

The waiter disappeared to execute these orders, and the conversation was then resumed upon the former topic.

Pocock entered into all the details with which the reader is already acquainted; and Markham who had made up his mind how to act, was determined to allow him to disclose spontaneously as much as he thought fit, before he should reveal himself. He sate in his obscure corner, shading his face with his hands, and affecting to be deeply interested in the columns of the *Morning Advertiser*, which lay the wrong way upwards before him.

The moment Pocock had begun to speak upon matters which so deeply interested him, Richard had become an attentive listener, and, as that individual proceeded, and he found within his reach a means of establishing his innocence, his brain seemed to be excited with joy—even to delirium. His pulse throbbed violently—his heart palpitated audibly. Much as he had loathed that den when he first entered it, he would now have fallen down, and kissed its dirty, saw-dust covered floor.

Hour after hour had passed away; the clock had struck eleven, and still the Resurrection Man did not make his appearance.

The butcher and Pocock were discussing their supper, and Markham was just thinking of accosting the latter, when the door was suddenly opened with great violence, and two persons muffled up in pea-coats, carrying enormous sticks, and smoking cigars, precipitated themselves into the parlour of the *Dark House*.

"D—n me, what a lark!" ejaculated one, flinging himself upon a seat, and laughing heartily: "but we're quite safe in here. I know this place; and the policeman lost sight of us, before we reached the door."

"Upon my honour, I cannot say that I admire frolics of this kind," observed the other; "it is really ridiculous to break lamps up at this end of the town. But, my God! what a neighbourhood you have brought me into! I couldn't have suspected that there was such a district in London."

"I told you that you would do good if you would come with me to my father," said the first speaker. "The old boy was quite delighted at the idea of a baronet condescending to sup with him; and you saw how he shelled out the blunt to me when he had imbibed his third glass of the punch."

The latter portion of this conversation was uttered in whispers, and the two gentlemen again laughed heartily—doubtless because they had succeeded in the business which had that evening brought them to the eastern regions of London.

In the midst of that second burst of hilarity, Mr. Pocock rose from his seat and advanced slowly towards the two new-comers.

"Well, gentlemen," he exclaimed, "this is an honour which you do us poor folks in Spitalfields. Come—you needn't stare so confounded hard at me. How are you, Chichester? Been to see the old gentleman at the sign of the Lombardy Arms—three balls, eh? Two chances to one that the things put up the spout will never come down again, eh?"

The butcher burst out into a roar of laughter, which was echoed by several other inmates of the room.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Chichester, recovering his presence of mind sooner than the baronet; for both were astounded at this unexpected and very embarrassing encounter.

"Upon my honour, the man must be mistaken," murmured Sir Rupert Harborough.

"So far from being mistaken," cried Pocock, "you were the very fellows I was talking about just now. Gentlemen," he added, turning towards the people seated at the various tables, "these are the two swells that led me into the scrape I told you about just now. And now they pretend not to know me!"

"What does the fellow mean?" said Chichester, in an impudent tone: "do you know, Harborough?"

"'Pon my honour, not I!"

"Then I will tell you who I am," ejaculated the engraver. "I am the man who forged the plates from which the bank-notes were struck, that got poor Richard Markham condemned to two years' imprisonment in the Compter; and you know as well as possible that *he* suffered for *our* crime."

Chichester and the baronet were stupefied by this sudden and unexpected exposure.

They knew not what to say or do; and their countenances betrayed their guilt.

"Yes, gentlemen," resumed Pocock, growing excited, "these are the men whom some extraordinary chance—some providential or devilish design—has brought here this evening to confirm all I have told you."

"Devil take this impudence!" cried Chichester, now once more recovering his wonted self-possession, and determining to brave the accusation out: "my name isn't Chichester—you're quite mistaken, my good fellow—I can assure you that you are."

"Liar!" cried the engraver, furiously: "I should know you both amongst a million!"

"And so should I," calmly observed Markham, now advancing from his obscure corner, and appearing in the presence of those who so little expected to see him there.

A tremendous sensation now prevailed in the room, and those who were spectators anxiously awaited the result of this strange drama.

"Yes—there are indeed the villains to whom I am indebted for all the miseries I have endured," continued Markham. "But say not that a lucky accident brought *us* all here together this night,—think not that a mere chance occasioned the present meeting of the deceivers and the deceived:—no; it was the will of the Almighty, to establish the innocence of an injured man!"

A solemn silence succeeded these words, which were delivered in a tone which produced an impression of awe upon all who heard them. Even the depraved and hardened men that were present on this occasion, in the parlour of the *Dark House*, gazed with respect upon the young man who dared to speak of the Almighty in that den of dissipation.

Markham continued after a short pause:—

"Were it not that I should be involving in ruin a man who has spontaneously come forward to proclaim his own guilt, to declare his repentance, and to assert my innocence—without hope of reward from me, and even without knowing that God had sent me hither to overhear every word he uttered—were it not that I should be inflicting upon *him* the deepest injury, I would this moment assign you to the custody of the police, as the instigators of the diabolical fraud in which Talbot was your tool, and I your scape-goat. But though I shall take no steps to punish you, heaven will not allow you to triumph in your career of turpitude!"

"Well spoken," said Mr. Chichester, perceiving that he was in no danger, and therefore assuming an air of bravado.

"Upon my honour, I can't comprehend all this," muttered the baronet. "Let us go, my dear fellow—I do not admire your Spitalfields' riff-raff."

"Yes—go—depart!" cried Markham; "or else I shall not be able to restrain my indignation."

"They shan't go without a wolloping, however," said the butcher, very coolly taking off his apron, and turning up the sleeves of his blue stuff jacket. "I'll take one—who'll tackle the other?"

"I will," cried a barber's boy, laying aside his pipe, taking a long pull at the porter, and then advancing towards the two adventurers with clenched fists.

"Stop—stop, I implore you!" ejaculated Markham. "I ask not for such vengeance as this—no violence, I beseech you."

"Let's give it 'em in true John Bull style, and knock all that cursed dandy nonsense out of 'em," cried the butcher; and before Richard could interfere farther, he felled the baronet with one blow of his tremendous fist.

The barber forthwith pitched into the fashionable Mr. Chichester, who struggled in vain to defend himself. The baronet rose; and the butcher instantly took his head "into chancery," and pummelled him to his heart's content.

As soon as Chichester and Sir Rupert were so severely thrashed that they were covered all over with bruises, and could scarcely stand upon their legs, the butcher and the barber kicked them into the open air, amidst the shouts and acclamations of all the inmates of the *Dark House* parlour.

When order was once more restored, Markham addressed himself to the two champions who had avenged him in their own peculiar style, and not only thanked them for their well-meant though mistaken kindness, but also gave them munificent proofs of his bounty.

"And now," said Richard, turning towards Pocock, "are you willing to sign a declaration of my innocence?"

"On condition that the paper shall never be used against me," answered the engraver.

"Could I not this moment give you into custody to the police, upon your own confession of having forged the plate from which the bank-notes were printed?"

"Certainly: I was wrong to make any conditions. You are a man of honour."

Markham proceeded to draw up the declaration referred to; and Pocock signed it with a firm and steady hand.

This ceremony being completed, Richard placed Bank of England notes for fifty pounds in the engraver's hand.

"Accept this," he said, "as a token of my gratitude and a proof of my forgiveness; and, believe me, I regret that my means do not allow me to be more liberal. Endeavour to enter an honest path; and should you ever require a friend, do not hesitate to apply to me."

Pocock wept tears of gratitude and repentance—the only acknowledgment he could offer for this sudden and most welcome aid. His emotions choked his powers of utterance.

Markham hurried from the room, and took his departure from the establishment which possessed such an ominous name, but which had proved the scene of a great benefit to him that evening.

He was hurrying up Brick Lane in a northerly direction—that is to say, towards Church Street, when he was suddenly stopped by an individual whom he encountered in his way, and who carried a large life-preserver in his hand.

"I suppose you were tired of waiting for me," said the Resurrection Man—for it was he.

"I certainly imagined you would not come to-night," answered Richard.

"Well, better late than never. It is fortunate that we met: it will save you another journey to-morrow night, you know."

"Yes—I am glad that we have met, as my time is now too valuable to waste."

"In that case, we can either return to the *Dark House*, which is open all night; or you can give me the money in the street. You don't require any receipt, I suppose?"

"No: neither will you require to give me any."

"So I thought: honour among thieves, eh? Excuse the compliment. But, in the first place, have you got the tin?"

"I had the whole amount just now, in my pocket, when I first went to the *Dark House*."

"Then I suppose it is all there still?"

"Not all. I have parted with fifty pounds out of it."

"The deuce you have! And how came you to do that?" demanded the Resurrection Man gruffly. "I gave you fair warning that I would take nothing less than the entire sum."

"I obtained, in a most extraordinary manner, a proof of my innocence; and I think I purchased it cheaply at that rate. I would have given all I possessed in the world," added Markham, "to procure it."

"The devil!" cried the Resurrection Man, who grew uneasy at the cold and indifferent way in which Markham spoke. "Well, I suppose I must take what you have got left. You can easily leave the remainder for me at the *Dark House*."

"Not a shilling will you now obtain from me," ejaculated Richard firmly; "and I have waited to tell you so. I have made up my mind to reveal the entire truth, without reserve, to those from whom I was before foolishly and dishonourably anxious to conceal it."

"This gammon won't do for me," cried the Resurrection Man. "You want to stall me off; but I'm too wide awake. Give me the tin, or I'll start off to-morrow morning to Richmond, and see the count upon—*you* know what subject. Before I left that neighbourhood the other day, I made all the necessary inquiries about the people of the house which the young lady went into."

"You may save yourself that trouble also," said Markham; "for I shall reveal all that you would unfold. But, in a word, you may do what you choose."

"Come now," ejaculated the Resurrection Man, considerably crest-fallen; "assist an old companion in difficulties: lend me a hundred or so."

"No," returned Richard in a resolute manner; "had you asked me in the first instance to assist you, I would have done so willingly;—but you have endeavoured to extort a considerable sum of money from me—much more than I could spare; and I should not now be justified in yielding to the prayers of a man who has found that his base menaces have failed."

"You do not think I would have done what I said?" cried the Resurrection Man.

"I believe you to be capable of any villany. But we have already conversed too long. I was anxious to show you how a virtuous resolution would enable me to triumph over your base designs;—and I have now nothing more to say to you. Our ways lie in different directions, both at present and in future. Farewell."

With these words Markham continued his way up Brick Lane; but the Resurrection Man was again by his side in a moment.

"You refuse to assist me?" he muttered in a hoarse and savage tone.

"I do. Molest me no further."

"You refuse to assist me?" repeated the villain, grinding his teeth with rage: "then you may mind the consequences! I will very soon show you that you will bitterly—bitterly repent your determination. By God, I will be revenged!"

"I shall know how to be upon my guard," said Markham.

He then walked rapidly on, without looking behind him.

The Resurrection Man stood still for a moment, considering how to act: then, apparently struck by a sudden idea, he hastened stealthily after Richard Markham.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MUMMY.

The district of Spitalfields and Bethnal Green was totally unknown to Markham. Indeed, his visit upon the present occasion was the first he had ever paid to that densely populated and miserable region.

It was now midnight; and the streets were nearly deserted. The lamps, few and far between, only made darkness visible, instead of throwing a useful light upon the intricate maze of narrow thoroughfares.

Markham's object was to reach Shoreditch as soon as possible; for he knew that opposite the church there was a cab-stand where he might procure a vehicle to take him home. Emerging from Brick Lane, he crossed Church Street, and struck into that labyrinth of dirty and dangerous lanes in the vicinity of Bird-cage Walk, which we alluded to at the commencement of the preceding chapter.

He soon perceived that he had mistaken his way; and at length found himself floundering about in a long narrow street, unpaved, and here and there almost blocked up with heaps of putrescent filth. There was not a lamp in this perilous thoroughfare: no moon on high irradiated his path;—black night enveloped every thing above and below in total darkness.

Once or twice he thought he heard footsteps behind him; and then he stopped, hoping to be overtaken by some one of whom he might inquire his way. But either his ears deceived him, or else the person whose steps he heard stopped when he did.

There was not a light in any of the houses on either side; and not a sound of revelry or sorrow escaped from the ill-closed casements.

Richard was bewildered; and—to speak truly—he began to be alarmed. He remembered to have read of the mysterious disappearance of persons in the east end of the metropolis, and also of certain fell deeds of crime which had been lately brought to light in the very district where he was now wandering;—and he could not help wishing that he was in some more secure and less gloomy region.

He was groping his way along, feeling with his hands against the houses to guide him,—now knee-deep in some filthy puddle, now stumbling over some heap of slimy dirt, now floundering up to his ankles in the mud,—when a heavy and crushing blow fell upon his hat from behind.

He staggered and fell against the door of a house. Almost at the same instant that door was thrust open, and two powerful arms hurled the prostrate young man down three or four steps into a passage. The person who thus ferociously attacked him leapt after him, closing the door violently behind him.

All this occupied but a couple of seconds; and though Markham was not completely stunned by the blow, he was too much stupefied by the suddenness and violence of the assault to cry out. To this circumstance he was probably indebted for his life; for the villain who had struck him no doubt conceived the blow to have been fatal; and therefore, instead of renewing the attack, he strode over Markham and entered a room into which the passage opened.

Richard's first idea was to rise and attempt an escape by the front door; but before he had time to consider it even for a moment, the murderous ruffian struck a light in the room, which, as well as a part of the passage, was immediately illuminated by a powerful glare.

Markham had been thrown upon the damp tiles with which the passage was paved, in such a manner that his head was close by the door of the room. The man who had assailed him lighted a piece of candle in a bright tin shade hanging against the wall; and the reflection produced by the metal caused the strong glare that fell so suddenly upon Richard's eyes.

Markham was about to start from his prostrate position when the interior of that room was thus abruptly revealed to him; but for a few moments the spectacle which met his sight paralyzed every limb, and rendered him breathless, speechless, and motionless with horror.

Stretched upon a shutter, which three chairs supported, was a corpse—naked, and of that blueish or livid colour which denotes the beginning of decomposition!

Near this loathsome object was a large tub full of water; and to that part of the ceiling immediately above it were affixed two large hooks, to each of which hung thick cords.

In one corner of the room were long flexible iron rods, spades, pickaxes, wooden levers, coils of thick rope, trowels, saws, hammers, huge chisels, skeleton-keys, &c.

But how great was Richard's astonishment when, glancing from the objects just described towards the villain who had hurled him into that den of horrors, his eyes were struck by the sombre and revolting countenance of the Resurrection Man.

He closed his eyes for a moment, as if he could thus banish both thought and danger.

"Now, then, Mummy," ejaculated the Resurrection Man; "come and hold this light while I rifle the pockets of a new subject."

Scarcely had he uttered these words, when a low knock was heard at the front door of the house.

"D—n the thing!" cried the Resurrection Man, aloud; "here are these fellows come for the stiff 'un."

These words struck fresh dismay into the soul of Richard Markham; for it instantly occurred to him that any friends of the Resurrection Man, who were thus craving admittance, were more likely to aid than to frustrate that villain's designs upon the life and property of a fellow-creature.

"Here, Mummy," cried the Resurrection Man, once more; and, hastily returning into the passage, he reiterated his summons at the

bottom of a staircase at the further end; "here, Mummy, why the hell don't you come down?"

"I'm a comin', I'm a comin'," answered a cracked female voice from the top of the staircase; and in another moment an old, blear-eyed, shrivelled hag made her appearance.

She was so thin, her eyes were so sunken, her skin was so much like dirty parchment, and her entire appearance was so horrible and repulsive, that it was impossible to conceive a more appropriate and expressive nickname than the one which had been conferred upon her.

"Now come, Mummy," said the ruffian, in a hasty whisper; "help me to drag this fellow into the back room; there's good pickings here, and the chaps have come for the stiff 'un."

Another knock was heard at the door.

Markham, well aware that resistance was at present vain, exercised sufficient control over himself to remain motionless, with his eyes nearly closed, while the Resurrection Man and the Mummy dragged him hastily into the back room.

The Mummy turned the key in the lock, while the Resurrection Man hurried to the street door, and admitted two men into the front apartment.

One was Tom the Cracksman; the other was a rogue of the same stamp, and was known amongst his confederates in crime by the name of the Buffer. It was this man's boast that he never robbed any one without stripping him to the very skin; and as a person in a state of nudity is said to be "in buff," the origin of his pseudonym is easily comprehended.

"Well," said the Cracksman, sulkily, "you ain't at all partikler how you keep people at your door—you ain't. For twopence, I'd have sported it[70] with my foot."

"Why, the old Mummy was fast asleep," returned the Resurrection Man; "and I was up stairs trying to awake her. But I didn't expect you till to-morrow night."

"No; and we shouldn't have come either," said the Cracksman, "if there hadn't been thirty quids to earn to-night."

"The devil there is!" cried the Resurrection Man. "Then you ain't come for the stiff 'un to-night?"

"No sich a thing; the Sawbones[71] that it's for don't expect it till to-morrow night; so its no use taking it. But there's t'other Sawbones, which lives down by the Middlesex Hospital, will meet us at half-past one at the back of Shoreditch church——"

"What, to-night!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man.

"To-night—in half an hour—and with all the tools," returned the Cracksman.

"Work for the inside of the church, he says," added the Buffer. "Thirty quids isn't to be sneezed at; that's ten a-piece. I'm blowed if I don't like this here resurrection business better than cracking cribs. What do you say, Tom?"

"Anythink by vay of a change; partikler as when we want a stiff 'un by a certain day, and don't know in which churchyard to dive for one, we hit upon the plan of catching 'em alive in the street."

"It was my idea, though," exclaimed the Buffer. "Don't you remember when we wanted a stiff 'un for the wery same Sawbones which we've got to meet presently, we waited for near two hours at this house-door, and at last we caught hold of a feller that was walking so comfortable along, looking up at the moon?"

"And then I thought of holding him with his head downwards in a tub of water," added the Cracksman, "till he was drownded. That way don't tell no tales;—no wound on the skin—no pison in the stomach; and there ain't too much water inside neither, cos the poor devils don't swaller with their heads downwards."

"Ah! it was a good idea," said the Buffer; "and now we've reduced it to a reg'lar system. Tub of water all ready on the floor—hooks and cords to hold the chaps' feet up to the ceiling; and then, my eye! there they hangs, head downwards, jest for all the world like the carcasses in the butchers' shops, if they hadn't got their clothes on."

"And them we precious soon takes off. But I say, old feller," said the Cracksman, turning to the Resurrection Man, who had remained silent during the colloquy between his two companions; "what the devil are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking," was the answer, "that the Sawbones that you've agreed to meet to-night wants some particular body."

"He does," said the Cracksman; "and the one he wants is buried in a vault."

"Well and good," exclaimed the Resurrection Man; "he is too good a customer to disappoint. We must be off at once."

The Resurrection Man did not for a moment doubt that Richard Markham had been killed by the blow which he had inflicted upon him with his life-preserver; and he therefore did not hesitate to undertake the business just proposed by his two confederates. He knew that, whatever Richard's pockets might contain, he could rely upon the *honesty* of the Mummy, who—horrible to relate—was the miscreant's own mother. Having therefore given a few instructions, in a whisper, to the old woman, he prepared to accompany the Cracksman and the Buffer.

The three worthies provided themselves with some of the long flexible rods and other implements before noticed; and the Resurrection Man took from a cupboard two boxes, each of about six inches square, and which he gave to his companions to carry. He also concealed the tin shade which held the candle, about his person; and, these preliminaries being settled, the three men left the house.

Let us now return to Richard Markham.

The moment he was deposited in the back room, and the door had closed behind the occupants of that fearful den, he started up, a prey to the most indescribable feelings of alarm and horror.

What a lurking hole of enormity—what a haunt of infamy—what a scene of desperate crime—was this in which he now found himself! A feculent smell of the decomposing corpse in the next room reached his nostrils, and produced a nauseating sensation in his stomach. And that corpse—was it the remains of one who had died a natural death, or who had been most foully murdered? He dared

not answer the question which he had thus put to himself; he feared lest the solution of that mystery might prove ominous in respect to his own fate.

Oh! for the means of escape! He must fly—he must fly from that horrible sink of crime—from that human slaughter-house! But how? the door was locked—and the window was closed with a shutter. If he made the slightest noise, the ruffians in the next room would rush in and assassinate him!

But, hark! those men were talking, and he could overhear all they said. Could it be possible? The two who had just come, were going to take the third away with them upon his own revolting business! Hope returned to the bosom of the poor young man: he felt that he might yet be saved!

But—oh, horror! on what topic had the conversation turned? Those men were rejoicing in their own infernal inventions to render murder unsuspected. The object of the tub of water, and the hooks and cords upon the ceiling, were now explained. The unsuspecting individual who passed the door of that accursed dwelling by night was set upon by the murderers, dragged into the house, gagged, and suspended by his feet to these hooks, while his head hung downwards in the water. And thus he delivered up his last breath; and the wretches kept him there until decomposition commenced, that the corpse might not appear too fresh to the surgeon to whom it was to be sold!

Merciful heavens! could such things be? could atrocities of so appalling a nature be perpetrated in a great city, protected by thousands of a well-paid police? Could the voice of murder—murder effected with so much safety, cry up to heaven for vengeance through the atmosphere of London?

At length the three men went out, as before described; and Markham felt an immense weight suddenly lifted from off his mind.

Before the Resurrection Man set out upon his excursion with the Cracksman and the Buffer, he had whispered these words to the Mummy: "While I'm gone, you can clean out the swell's pockets in the back room. He has got about four or five hundred pounds about him—so mind and take care. When you've searched his pockets, strip him, and look at his skull. I'm afraid I've fractured it, for my life-preserver came down precious heavy upon him; and he never spoke a word. If there's the wound, I must bury him to-morrow in the cellar: if not, wash him clean, and I know where to dispose of him."

It was in obedience to these instructions that the Mummy took a candle in her hand, and proceeded to the back-room, as soon as her son and his two companions had left the house.

The horrible old woman was not afraid of the dead: her husband had been a resurrection man, and her only son followed the same business,—she was therefore too familiar with the sight of death in all its most fearful as well as its most interesting shapes to be alarmed at it. The revolting spectacle of a corpse putrid with decomposition produced no more impression upon her than the pale and beautiful remains of any lovely girl whom death had called early to the tomb, and whose form was snatched from its silent couch beneath the sod ere the finger of decay had begun its ravages. That hideous old woman considered corpses an article of commerce, and handled her wares as a trader does his merchandize. She cared no more for the sickly and fetid odour which they sent forth, than the tanner does for the smell of the tan-yard, or the scourer for the fumes of his bleaching-liquid.

The Mummy entered the back-room, holding a candle in her hand.

Markham started forward, and caught her by the wrist.

She uttered a sort of growl of savage disappointment, but gave no sign of alarm.

"Vile wretch!" exclaimed Richard; "God has at length sent me to discover and expose your crimes!"

"Don't do me any harm—don't hurt me," said the old woman; "and I will do any thing you want of me."

"Answer me," cried Markham: "that corpse in the other room——"

"Murdered by my son," replied the hag.

"And the clothes? where are the clothes? They may contain some papers which may throw a light upon the name and residence of your victim."

"Follow me—I will show you."

The old woman turned and walked slowly out of the room. Markham went after her; for he thought that if he could discover who the unfortunate person was that had met his death in that accursed dwelling, he might be enabled to relieve his family at least from the horrors of suspense, although he should be the bearer of fatal news indeed.

The Mummy opened the door of a cupboard formed beneath the staircase, and holding forward the light, pointed to some clothes which hung upon a nail inside.

"There—take them yourself if you want them," said the old woman; "I won't touch them."

With these words she drew back, but still held the candle in such a way as to throw the light into the closet.

Markham stepped forward to reach the clothes, and, in extending his hand to take them from the peg, he advanced one of his feet upon the floor of the closet.

A trap-door instantly gave way beneath his foot: he lost his balance, and fell precipitately into a subterranean excavation.

The trap-door, which moved with a spring, closed by itself above his head, and he heard the triumphant cackling laugh of the old hag, as she fastened it with a large iron bolt.

The Mummy then went and seated herself by the corpse in the front room; and, while she rocked backwards and forwards in her chair, she crooned the following song:—

THE BODY-SNATCHER'S SONG.

In the churchyard the body is laid,
There they inter the beautiful maid:
"Earth to earth" is the solemn sound!
Over the sod where their daughter sleeps,
The father prays, and the mother weeps:
"Ashes to ashes" echoes around!

Come with the axe, and come with the spade;
Come where the beautiful virgin's laid:
Earth from earth must we take back now!
The sod is damp, and the grave is cold:
Lay the white corpse on the dark black mould,
That the pale moonbeam may kiss its brow!

Throw back the earth, and heap up the clay;
This cold white corpse we will bear away,
Now that the moonlight waxes dim;
For the student doth his knife prepare
To hack all over this form so fair,
And sever the virgin limb from limb!

At morn the mother will come to pray
Over the grave where her child she lay,
And freshest flowers thereon will spread:
And on that spot will she kneel and weep,
Nor dream that we have disturbed the sleep
Of her who lay in that narrow bed.

We must leave the Mummy singing her horrible staves, and accompany the body-snatchers in their proceedings at Shoreditch Church.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BODY-SNATCHERS.

THE Resurrection Man, the Cracksman, and the Buffer hastened rapidly along the narrow lanes and filthy alleys leading towards Shoreditch Church. They threaded their way in silence, through the jet-black darkness of the night, and without once hesitating as to the particular turnings which they were to follow. Those men were as familiar with that neighbourhood as a person can be with the rooms and passages in his own house.

At length the body-snatchers reached the low wall surmounted with a high railing which encloses Shoreditch churchyard. They were now at the back part of that burial ground, in a narrow and deserted street, whose dark and lonely appearance tended to aid their designs upon an edifice situated in one of the most populous districts in all London.

For some minutes before their arrival an individual, enveloped in a long cloak, was walking up and down beneath the shadow of the wall.

This was the surgeon, whose thirst after science had called into action the energies of the body-snatchers that night.

The Cracksman advanced first, and ascertained that the surgeon had already arrived, and that the coast was otherwise clear.

He then whistled in a low and peculiar manner; and his two confederates came up.

"You have got all your tools?" said the surgeon in a hasty whisper.

"Every one that we require," answered the Resurrection Man.

"For opening a vault inside the church, mind?" added the surgeon, interrogatively.

"You show us the vault, sir, and we'll soon have out the body," said the Resurrection Man.

"All right," whispered the surgeon; "and my own carriage will be in this street at three precisely. We shall have plenty of time—there's no one stirring till five, and its dark till seven."

The surgeon and the body-snatchers then scaled the railing, and in a few moments stood in the churchyard.

The Resurrection Man addressed himself to his two confederates and the surgeon, and said, "Do you lie snug under the wall here while I go forward and see how we must manage the door." With these words he crept stealthily along, amidst the tomb-stones, towards the church.

The surgeon and the Cracksman seated themselves upon a grave close to the wall; and the Buffer threw himself flat upon his stomach, with his ear towards the ground. He remained in this position for some minutes, and then uttered a species of low growl as if he were answering some signal which caught his ears alone.

"The skeleton-keys won't open the side-door, the Resurrection Man says," whispered the Buffer, raising his head towards the surgeon and the Cracksman.

He then laid his ear close to the ground once more, and resumed his listening posture.

In a few minutes he again replied to a signal; and this time his answer was conveyed by means of a short sharp whistle.

"It appears there is a bolt; and it will take a quarter of an hour to saw through the padlock that holds it," observed the Buffer in a whisper.

Nearly twenty minutes elapsed after this announcement. The surgeon's teeth chattered with the intense cold; and he could not altogether subdue certain feelings of horror at the idea of the business which had brought him thither. The almost mute correspondence which those two men were enabled to carry on together—the methodical precision with which they performed their avocations—and the coolness they exhibited in undertaking a sacrilegious task, made a powerful impression upon his mind. He shuddered from head to foot:—his feelings of aversion were the same as he would have experienced had a loathsome reptile crawled over his naked flesh.

"It's all right now!" suddenly exclaimed the Buffer, rising from the ground. "Come along."

The surgeon and the Cracksman followed the Buffer to the southern side of the church where there was a flight of steps leading up to a side-door in a species of lobby, or lodge. This door was open; and the Resurrection Man was standing inside the lodge.

As soon as they had all entered the sacred edifice, the door was carefully closed once more.

We have before said that the night was cold: but the interior of the church was of a chill so intense, that an icy feeling appeared to penetrate to the very back-bone. The wind murmured down the aisle; and every footstep echoed, like a hollow sound in the distance, throughout the spacious pile.

"Now, sir," said the Resurrection Man to the surgeon, "it is for you to tell us whereabouts we are to begin."

The surgeon groped his way towards the communion-table, and at the northern side of the railings which surrounded it he stopped short.

"I must now be standing," he said, "upon the very stone which you are to remove. You can, however, soon ascertain; for the funeral only took place yesterday morning, and the mortar must be quite soft."

The Resurrection Man stooped down, felt with his hand for the joints of the pavement in that particular spot, and thrust his knife between them.

"Yes," he said, after a few minutes' silence: "this stone has only been put down a day or two. But do you wish, sir, that all traces of our work should disappear?"

"Certainly! I would not for the world that the family of the deceased should learn that this tomb has been violated. Suspicion would immediately fall upon me; for it would be remembered how earnestly I desired to open the body, and how resolutely my request was refused."

"We must use a candle, then, presently," said the Resurrection Man; "and that is the most dangerous part of the whole proceeding."

"It cannot be helped," returned the surgeon, in a decided tone. "The fact that the side-door has been opened by unfair means must transpire in a day or two; and search will then be made inside the church to ascertain whether those who have been guilty of the sacrilege were thieves or resurrection-men. You see, then, how necessary it is that there should remain no proofs of the violation of a tomb."

"Well and good, sir," said the Resurrection Man. "You command—we obey. Now, then, my mates, to work."

In a moment the Resurrection Man lighted a piece of candle, and placed it in the tin shade before alluded to. The glare which it shed was thereby thrown almost entirely downwards. He then carefully, and with surprising rapidity, examined the joints of the large flag-stone which was to be removed, and on which no inscription had yet been engraved. He observed the manner in which the mortar was laid down, and noticed even the places where it spread a little over the adjoining stones: or where it was slightly deficient. This inspection being completed, he extinguished the light, and set to work in company with the Cracksman and the Buffer.

The eyes of the surgeon gradually became accustomed to the obscurity; and he was enabled to observe to some extent the proceedings of the body-snatchers.

These men commenced by pouring vinegar over the mortar round the stone which they were to raise. They then took long clasp-knives, with very thin and flexible blades, from their pockets; and inserted them between the joints of the stones. They moved these knives rapidly backwards and forwards for a few seconds, so as effectually to loosen the mortar, and moistened the interstices several times with the vinegar.

This operation being finished, they introduced the thin and pointed end of a lever between the end of the stone which they were to raise and the one adjoining it. The Resurrection Man, who held the lever, only worked it very gently; but at every fresh effort on his part, the Cracksman and the Buffer introduced each a wedge of wood into the space which thus grew larger and larger. By these means, had the lever suddenly given way, the stone would not have fallen back into its setting. At length it was raised to a sufficient height to admit of its being supported by a thick log about three feet in length.

While these three men were thus proceeding as expeditiously as possible with their task, the surgeon, although a man of a naturally strong mind, could not control the strange feelings which crept upon him. It suddenly appeared to him as if he beheld those men for the first time. That continuation of regular and systematic movements—that silent perseverance, faintly shadowed forth amidst the obscurity of the night, at length assumed so singular a character, that the surgeon felt as if he beheld three demons disinterring a doomed one to carry him off to hell!

He was aroused from this painful reverie by the Resurrection Man, who said to him, "Come and help us remove the stone."

The surgeon applied all his strength to this task; and the huge flag-stone was speedily moved upon two wooden rollers away from the mouth of the grave.

"You are certain that this is the place?" said the Resurrection Man.

"As certain as one can be who stood by the grave for a quarter of an hour in day-light, and who has to recognise it again in total darkness," answered the surgeon. "Besides, the mortar was soft——"

"There might have been another burial close by," interrupted the Resurrection Man; "but we will soon find out whether you are right or not, sir. Was the coffin a wooden one?"

"Yes! an elm coffin, covered with black cloth," replied the surgeon. "I gave the instructions for the funeral myself, being the oldest friend of the family."

The Resurrection Man took one of the long flexible rods which we have before noticed, and thrust it down into the vault. The point penetrated into the lid of a coffin. He drew it back, put the point to his tongue, and tasted it.

"Yes," he said, smacking his lips, "the coffin in this vault is an elm one, and is covered with black cloth."

"I thought I could not be wrong," observed the surgeon.

The body-snatchers then proceeded to raise the coffin, by means of ropes passed underneath it. This was a comparatively easy portion of their task; and in a few moments it was placed upon the flag-stones of the church.

The Resurrection Man took a chisel and opened the lid with considerable care. He then lighted his candle a second time; and the glare fell upon the pale features of the corpse in its narrow shell.

"This is the right one," said the surgeon, casting a hasty glance upon the face of the dead body, which was that of a young girl of about sixteen.

The Resurrection Man extinguished the light; and he and his companions proceeded to lift the corpse out of the coffin.

The polished marble limbs of the deceased were rudely grasped by the sacrilegious hands of the body-snatchers; and, having stripped the corpse stark naked, they tied its neck and heels together by means of a strong cord. They then thrust it into a large sack made for the purpose.

The body-snatchers then applied themselves to the restoration of the vault to its original appearance.

The lid of the coffin was carefully fastened down; and that now tenantless bed was lowered into the tomb. The stone was rolled over the mouth of the vault; and one of the small square boxes previously alluded to, furnished mortar wherewith to till up the joints. The Resurrection Man lighted his candle a third time, and applied the cement in such a way that even the very workman who laid the stone down after the funeral would not have known that it had been disturbed. Then, as this mortar was a shade fresher and lighter than

that originally used, the Resurrection Man scattered over it a thin brown powder, which was furnished by the second box brought away from his house on this occasion. Lastly, a light brush was swept over the scene of these operations, and the necessary precautions were complete.

The clock struck three as the surgeon and the body-snatchers issued from the church, carrying the sack containing the corpse between them.

They reached the wall at the back of the churchyard, and there deposited their burden, while the Cracksman hastened to see if the surgeon's carriage had arrived.

In a few minutes he returned to the railing, and said in a low tone, "All right!"

The body was lifted over the iron barrier and conveyed to the vehicle.

The surgeon counted ten sovereigns into the hands of each of the body-snatchers; and, having taken his seat inside the vehicle, close by his strange freight, was whirled rapidly away towards his own abode.

The three body-snatchers retraced their steps to the house in the vicinity of the Bird-cage Walk; and the Cracksman and Buffer, having deposited the implements of their avocation in the corner of the front room, took their departure.

The moment the Resurrection Man was thus relieved from the observation of his companions, he seized the candle and hastened into the back room, where he expected to find the corpse of Richard Markham stripped and washed.

To his surprise the room was empty.

"What the devil has the old fool been up to?" he exclaimed: then, hastening to the foot of the stairs, he cried, "Mummy, are you awake?"

In a few moments a door on the first floor opened, and the old woman appeared in her night gear at the head of the stairs.

"Is that you, Tony?" she exclaimed.

"Yes! who the hell do you think it could be? But what have you done with the fresh 'un?"

"The fresh 'un came alive again——"

"Gammon! Where is the money? how much was there? and is his skull fractured?" demanded the Resurrection Man.

"I tell you that he came to his senses," returned the old hag: "and that he sprung upon me like a tiger when I went into the back room after you was gone."

"Damnation! what a fool I was not to stick three inches of cold steel into him!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man, stamping his foot. "So I suppose he got clear away—money and all?—gone, may be, to fetch the traps!"

"Don't alarm yourself, Tony," said the old hag, with a horrible cackling laugh; "he's safe enough, I'll warrant it!"

"Safe! where—where?"

"Where his betters have been 'afore him," answered the Mummy.

"What!—in the well in the yard?" exclaimed the Resurrection Man, in a state of horrible suspense.

"No—in the hole under the stairs."

"Wretch!—drivelling fool!—idiot that you are!" cried the Resurrection Man in a voice of thunder: "you decoyed him into the very place from which he was sure to escape!"

"Escape!" exclaimed the Mummy, in a tone of profound alarm.

"Yes—escape!" repeated the Resurrection Man. "Did I not tell you a month or more ago that the wall between the hole and the saw-pit in the empty house next door had given way!"

"No—you never told me! I'll swear you never told me!" cried the old hag, now furious in her turn. "You only say so to throw all the blame on me: it's just like you."

"Don't provoke me, mother!" said the Resurrection Man, grinding his teeth. "You know that I told you about the wall falling down; and you know that I spoke to you about not using the place any more!"

"It's false!" exclaimed the Mummy.

"It's true; for I said to you at the time that I must brick up the wall myself some night, before any new people take the carpenter's yard, or they might wonder what the devil we could want with a place under ground like that; and it would be the means of blowing us!"

"It's a lie! you never told me a word about it," persisted the old harridan doggedly.

"Perdition take you!" cried the man. "The affair of this cursed Markham will be the ruin of us both!"

The Resurrection Man still had a hope left: the subterranean pit beneath the stairs was deep, and Markham might have been stunned by the fall.

He hastened to the trap-door, and raised it. The vivid light of his candle was thrown to the very bottom of the pit by means of the bright reflector of tin.

The hole was empty.

Maddened by disappointment—a prey to the most terrible apprehensions—and uncertain whether to flee or remain in his den, the Resurrection Man paced the passage in a state of mind which would not have been envied by even a criminal on his way to execution.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE FRUITLESS SEARCH.

WHEN Richard Markham was precipitated into the hole beneath the stairs, by the perfidy of the Mummy, he fell with his head against a stone, and became insensible.

He lay in this manner for upwards of half an hour, when a current of air which blew steadily upon his face, revived him; and he awoke to all the horrors of his situation.

He had seen and passed through enough that night to unhinge the strongest mind. The secrets of the accursed den in a subterranean dungeon of which he now lay,—the atrocious mysteries revealed by the conversation of the body-snatchers ere they set out on their expedition to Shoreditch Church,—the cold corpse of some unfortunate being most inhumanly murdered, and all the paraphernalia of a hideous death, in the front-room of that outpost of hell,—haunted his imagination, and worked him up to a pitch of excitement bordering upon frenzy.

He felt that if he did not escape from that hole, he should dash his head against the wall, or go raving mad.

He clenched his fists and struck them against his forehead in an access of despair.

And then he endeavoured to reason with himself, and to look the perils that beset him, in the face.

But he could not remain cool—he could not control his agonising emotions.

"O God!" he exclaimed aloud; "what have I done to be thus afflicted? What sin have I committed to be thus tortured? Have I not served thee in word and deed to the best of my ability? Do I not worship—venerate—adore thee? O God! why wilt thou that I should die thus early—and die, too, so cruel a death? Is there not room on earth enough for a worm like me? Have I not been sufficiently tried, O my God? and in the hour of my deepest—bitterest anguish, did I ever deny thee? Did I repine against thy supreme will when false men encompassed me to destroy me in the opinion of the world? Hear me, O God—hear me! and let me not die this time;—let me not perish, O Lord, thus miserably!"

Such was the fervent, heart-felt prayer which Markham breathed to heaven, in the agony and despair of his soul.

He extended his arms, with his hands clasped together, in the ardour of his appeal; and they encountered an opening in the wall.

A ray of hope penetrated to his heart; and when upon further search, he discovered an aperture sufficiently wide for him to creep through, he exclaimed, "O Lord! I thank thee, thou hast heard my prayer! Pardon—oh! pardon my repinings;—forgive me that I dared to question thy sovereign will!"

At all risks he determined to pass through the opening—lead whithersoever it might; for he knew that he could scarcely be worse off; and he felt a secret influence which prompted him thus to act, and for which he could not wholly account.

He crept through the hole in the partition-wall, and found himself upon a soft damp ground.

Every thing was veiled in the blackest obscurity.

He groped about with his hands, and stepped cautiously forward, pausing at every pace.

Presently his foot encountered what appeared to be a step: to his infinite joy he ascertained, in another moment, that he was at the bottom of a flight of stone stairs.

He ascended them, and came to a door, which yielded to his touch. He proceeded slowly and cautiously along a passage, groping his way with his hands; and, in a few moments he reached another door, which opened with a latch.

He was now in the open street!

Carefully closing the door behind him, he hurried away from that accursed vicinity as if he were pursued by blood-hounds.

He ran—he ran, reckless of the deep pools of stagnant water, careless of the heaps of thick mud through which he passed,—indifferent to the bruises which he sustained against the angles of houses, the corners of streets, and the stone-steps of doors,—unmindful of the dangers which he dared in threading thus wildly those rugged and uneven thoroughfares amidst the dense obscurity which covered the earth.

He ran—he ran, a delirium of joy thrilling in his brain, and thanksgiving in his soul; for now that he had escaped from the peril which so lately beset him, it appeared to his imagination a thousand times more frightful than when it actually impended over him. Oh! he was happy—happy—thrice happy, in the enjoyment of liberty, and the security of life once more;—and he began to look upon the scenes of that eventful night as an accumulation of horrors which could have possibility only in a dream!

He ran—he ran, amidst those filthy lanes and foul streets, where a nauseating atmosphere prevailed;—but had he been threading a labyrinth of rose-trees, amongst the most delicious perfumes, he could not have experienced a more burning—ardent—furious joy! Yes—his delight was madness, frenzy! On, on—splashed with mud—floundering through black puddles—knee-deep in mire,—on, on he went—reckless which direction he pursued, so long as the rapidity of his pace removed him afar from the accursed house that had nearly become his tomb!

For an hour did he thus pursue his way.

At length he stopped through sheer exhaustion, and seated himself upon the steps of a door over which a lamp was flickering.

He collected his scattered ideas as well as he could, and began to wonder whither his wild and reckless course had led him: but no conjecture on his part furnished him with any clue to solve the mystery of his present whereabouts. He knew that he must be somewhere in the eastern district of the metropolis; but in what precise spot it was impossible for him to tell.

While he was thus lost in vain endeavours to unravel the tangled topographical skein which perplexed his imagination, he heard footsteps advancing along the street.

By the light of the lamp he soon distinguished a policeman, walking with slow and measured steps along his beat.

"Will you have the kindness to tell me where I am?" said Richard, accosting the officer: "I have lost my way. What neighbourhood is this?"

"Ratcliff Highway," answered the policeman: "in the middle of Wapping, you know."

"In the midst of Wapping?" ejaculated Markham, in a tone of surprise and vexation.

And, truly enough, there he was in the centre of that immense assemblage of dangerous streets, cutthroat lanes, and filthy alleys, which swarm with crimps ever ready to entrap the reckless and generous-hearted sailor; publicans who farm the unloading of the colliers, and compel those whom they employ to take out half their wages in vile adulterated beer; and poor half-starved coal-heavers whose existence alternates between crushing toil and killing intoxication. It was in this neighbourhood that Richard Markham now was!

Heaven alone can tell what tortuous paths and circuitous routes he had been pursuing during the hour of his precipitate flight; but his feet must have passed over many miles of ground from the instant that he emerged from the murderers' den until he sank exhausted on the steps of a house in Ratcliff Highway.

He was wet and covered with mud, and very cold. But he suddenly remembered that there was a duty which he owed to society—an imperative duty which he dared not neglect. He was impressed with the idea that Providence had that night favoured his escape from the jaws of death, in order that he might become the means of rooting up a den of horrors.

There was not a moment to be lost: the three miscreants, unconscious of peril, had repaired to Shoreditch Church to exercise the least terrible portion of their avocations in that sacred edifice:—it might yet be time to secure them there!

The policeman was still standing near him.

"Which is the way to the station-house?" suddenly exclaimed Markham. "I have matters of the deepest importance to communicate to the police,—I can place them upon the scent of three miscreants—three demons in human form——"

"And how came you to know about them?" asked the officer.

"Oh! it is too long to tell you now—we shall only be wasting time; and the villains may escape," cried Richard, in a tone of excitement and with a wildness of manner which induced the officer to fancy that his brain was turned.

"Well, come along with me," said the policeman; "and you can tell all you know to the Superintendent."

Markham signified his readiness to accompany the officer; and they proceeded to the station-house in the neighbourhood.

There Richard was introduced to the Superintendent.

"I have this night," said the young man, "escaped from the most fearful perils. I was proceeding along a dark, narrow, and dirty street somewhere in the neighbourhood of Shoreditch Church, when I was knocked down, and carried into a house where murder—yes, murder," added Markham, in a tone of fearful excitement, "seems to be committed At this moment there is a corpse—the corpse of some unfortunate man who has been assassinated in a most inhuman manner—lying stretched out in that house! I could tell you how the miscreants who frequent that den dispose of their victims,—how they pounce upon those who pass their door, and drag them into that human slaughter-house,—and how they make away with them;—I could tell you horrors which would make your hair stand on end;—but we should lose time; for you may yet capture the three wretches whose crimes have been this night so providentially revealed to me!"

"And where can we capture these men?" inquired the Superintendent, surveying Markham from head to foot in a strange manner.

"They are at this moment at Shoreditch Church," returned the young man; "they are engaged in exhuming a corpse for a surgeon whom they were to meet at half-past one at the back of the burial-ground."

"And it is now three o'clock," said the Superintendent. "I dare say they have got over their business by this time. You had much better sit down here by the fire and rest yourself; and when it is daylight some one shall see you home to your friends."

"Sit here tranquilly, when justice claims its due!" ejaculated Markham; "impossible! If you will not second my endeavours to expose a most appalling system of wholesale murder——"

"My dear sir," interrupted the Superintendent, "do compose yourself, and get such horrid thoughts out of your head. Come—be reasonable. This is London, you know—and it is impossible that the things you have described could be committed in so populous a city."

"I tell you that every word I have uttered is the strict truth," cried Markham emphatically.

"And how came you to escape from such a place?" demanded the Superintendent.

"The villain who attacked me thought me dead—he fancied that I was killed by the blow; but it had only stunned me for a few moments——"

"Just now there were three murderers," whispered one policeman to another: "now there is only one. He is as mad as a March-hare."

"Then I was decoyed into a deep pit," continued Markham; "and I escaped through an aperture opening into another pit, with stone steps to it, in the next house."

The two policemen turned round to conceal their inclination to laugh; and the Superintendent could scarcely maintain a serious countenance.

"And now will you come with me to Shoreditch Church, and capture the villains?" cried Markham.

"We had better wait till morning. Pray sit down and compose yourself. You are wet and covered with mud—you have evidently

been walking a great distance."

"Oh! now I understand the cause of your hesitation," ejaculated Markham: "you do not believe me—you fancy that I am labouring under a delusion. I conjure you not to suffer justice to be defeated by that idea! The tale is strange; and I myself, had it been communicated to me as it now is to you, should look upon it as improbable. No doubt, too, my appearance is strange; and my manner may be excited, and my tone wild;—but, I swear to you by the great God who hears us, that I am sane—in the possession of my reason,—although, heaven knows! I have this night passed through enough to unhinge the strongest intellects!"

"Can you lead us to the house where you allege that these enormities are committed?" demanded the Superintendent, moved by the solemnity and rationality with which Markham had uttered this last appeal to him.

"No, I cannot," was the reply: "I had lost my way amongst those streets with which I was totally unacquainted: the night was dark—dark as it is now;—and therefore I could not guide you to that den of such black atrocities. But, I repeat the murderers left that house a little after one to commit a deed of sacrilege in Shoreditch Church. You say that it is now three: perhaps their resurrection-labours are not terminated yet; and you might then capture them in the midst of their unholy pursuits."

"And if we do not find that Shoreditch Church has been broken open?" said the Superintendent; "you will admit——"

"Admit that I am mad—that I have deceived you—that I deserve to be consigned to a lunatic asylum," exclaimed Markham, in a tone which inspired the Superintendent with confidence.

That officer accordingly gave instructions to four constables to accompany Markham to Shoreditch Church.

The little party proceeded thither with all possible expedition; but the clock struck four just as they reached the point of destination.

They hastily scaled the railings around the burial-ground, and proceeded to the very door from which the body-snatchers had emerged an hour previously.

One of the policemen tried the door; and it immediately yielded to his touch. At the same moment his foot struck against something upon the top step. He picked it up:—it was a padlock with the semicircular bolt sawed through.

The policemen and Markham entered the church; and the former commenced a strict search by means of their bull's-eye lanterns.

"There's no doubt that the gentleman was right, and all he said was true," observed one of the officers; "but the birds have flown—that's clear."

"Well—they must have done their work pretty cleverly if they haven't left a trace," said another.

"I have heard it stated," remarked Richard, "that resurrection-men are so expert at their calling, that they can defy the most acute eye to discover the spot upon which they have been operating."

"Well, if we don't find out which vault they have opened, it's no matter. We have seen enough to convince us that you were right, sir, in all you told us."

"And as the body-snatchers are not here," added another police-officer, "we had better get back as quick as we can and report the church's having been broke open to our Superintendent."

"And I will return with you," said Markham; "for when it is light I may perhaps be enabled to conduct you to within a short distance of the street—even if not into the very street itself—where the den is situated which those monsters frequent or inhabit."

The officers and Richard accordingly returned to the station-house whence they came; and as soon as the Superintendent heard that the church had really been broken open, he apologised to Markham for his former incredulity.

"You will, however, admit, sir," said this functionary, "that your narrative was calculated to excite strange suspicions relative to the condition of the intellects of the person who told it."

"I presume you fancied that I had escaped from a madhouse?" observed Markham.

"To tell you the truth, I did," answered the Superintendent: "you were in such a dreadful condition! And that reminds me that you are all wet and covered with mud: please to step into my private room, and you will find every thing necessary to make you clean and comfortable."

* * * * *

Day dawned shortly after seven; and at that time might be seen Richard Markham, accompanied by an officer in plain clothes, and followed by others at a distance, threading the streets and alleys in the neighbourhood of the Bird-cage Walk.

The sun rose upon that labyrinth of close, narrow, and wretched thoroughfares, and irradiated those sinks of misery and crime as well as the regal palace and the lordly mansion at the opposite end of London.

But the search after the house in which Markham had witnessed such horrors and endured such intense mental agony on the preceding night, was as vain and fruitless as if its existence were but a dream.

There was not a street which Markham could remember having passed through; there was not a house to which even his suspicions attached.

And yet, may be, he and his official companions proceeded up the very street, and went by the door of the very house, which they sought.

After a useless search throughout that neighbourhood for nearly four hours, Markham declared that he was completely at fault.

The police accordingly abandoned any further proceedings on that occasion. It was however agreed between them and Markham that the strictest secresy should be preserved relative to the entire business, in order that the measures to be subsequently adopted with a view to discover the den of the murderers, might not be defeated by the tattle of busy tongues.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RICHARD AND ISABELLA.

Richard Markham had determined to lose no time in revealing to Count Alteroni those adventures which had rendered him an inmate of the Giltspur Street Compter for two years.

And yet it was hard to dare the destruction of the bright visions which had dawned upon him in respect to the Signora Isabella: it was cruel to dash away from his lips the only cup of enjoyment which he had tasted for a long time.

He knew not how the count would receive such a narrative as he had to tell. Doubtless it would alarm him: "for society," thought Richard, "was too apt to judge rashly by outward appearances." Should the count, however, nobly and generously rise above the prejudices of the world, and believe the statement of Markham's innocence, corroborated as it was by the document signed by Talbot, *alias* Pocock, much would have been gained by a candid and honourable confession. But if the reverse ensued, and the count banished Richard from his friendship, the young man felt that he himself would only have performed a melancholy duty, and broken asunder of his own accord those bonds which, were he to remain silent, an accident might one day snap abruptly and rudely.

"I feel happy," said Markham to himself, as he arose in the morning after the day on which the fruitless search mentioned in the preceding chapter took place,—"I feel happy even while about to consummate a sacrifice which may destroy the most golden of my dreams! The Infinite Being has declared that the days of our life shall be marked with sorrow; and they are—as I can well testify! But the afflictions to which we are subject are attended with blessed antidotes;—moral sources of enjoyment are given to us, as fruits and flowers for the soul; and the teachings of interest, as well as the impulses of gratitude, should lead us to consider with attention those duties we owe each other, for the sake of the bounties the Almighty showers upon us."

So reasoned Richard Markham.

That evening he arrived at the count's abode near Richmond, a few minutes before dinner.

A kind welcome awaited him on the part of the count and countess; and the eyes of Signora Isabella expressed the satisfaction she experienced at his return.

When Markham was seated with the count after dinner, he determined to commence the explanation which he had resolved to give.

He was just about to broach the subject, when the count observed, "By the bye, I am happy to inform you that I received letters from Greenwood this morning; and he assures me that the speculation looks admirably."

"I am delighted to hear it," returned Richard. "But the chief object of my present visit——"

"Was to speak about this Steam Packet business, no doubt," interrupted the count. "Well, if you like to take shares in it, it is not too late. But what do you think? I am going to tell you a secret. You know that I look upon you as a friend of the family; besides, I am well aware that you respect Isabel and love her like a brother——"

"What did you say, count?" stammered Markham.

"I was going to tell you that Mr. Greenwood—who is immensely rich—has taken a liking to Isabella——"

"Indeed!"

"Yes—and I gave him some little encouragement."

"What! without previously ascertaining whether the Signora's feelings are reciprocal?" cried Richard.

"As for that, my dear Markham, remember that a dutiful daughter knows no will and no inclination save those of her parents."

"This is not an English doctrine," said Markham, "so far as the principle applies to affairs of the heart."

"It is nevertheless an Italian doctrine," exclaimed the count, somewhat haughtily; "and I have no doubt that Isabella will ever recognise the authority of her parents in this as in all other matters."

As the count uttered these words, he rose and led the way to the drawing-room; and thus deprived Markham of that opportunity of making the confession he had intended.

Richard was unhappy and dispirited. He perceived that the count was inclined to favour Mr. Greenwood's suit; and he now felt how dear Isabella was to him—how profoundly seated was his love for the beauteous Italian!

Misfortunes never come alone. Richard was destined to receive a crushing blow, although innocently inflicted, the moment he entered the drawing-room.

The countess was conversing with her daughter upon her own family connections.

"Do not let us interrupt your conversation," said the count, as he took his seat upon the sofa near his wife.

"We were only talking about the Chevalier Guilderstein, whose death was mentioned in yesterday's newspaper," observed the countess. "I was saying that I remembered how delighted I was when I discovered a few years ago that the chevalier was not related to our family, as he had always pretended to be."

"And why so?" inquired the count.

"Because the father of the chevalier was put to death in Austria for coining—or rather upon a charge of coining," answered the countess; "and although his innocence was discovered and proclaimed a few years after his death, I should not like to have amongst my ancestors a man who had been criminally convicted, however innocent he may in reality have been."

"Certainly not," said the count. "I should be very sorry for any one whose character had ever been tainted with suspicion, to have the slightest connection with our family."

"I cannot say that I agree with you," observed Isabel. "There can be no disgrace attached to one who has suffered under a false accusation: on the contrary—such a person is rather deserving of our deepest sympathy and——"

"Heavens, Mr. Markham!" ejaculated the countess; "are you ill? Bella, dear—ring the bell—get Mr. Markham a glass of water ——"

"It is nothing—nothing, I can assure you," stammered Richard, whose countenance was as pale as that of a corpse. "Miss Isabella, do not give yourself any trouble! It was only a sudden faintness—a spasm: but it is over now."

With these words Markham hurried to the bed-chamber which was always allotted to him when he visited the count's residence.

All the horrible tortures which man can conceive, harassed him at that moment. He threw himself upon his couch—he writhed—he struggled, as if against a serpent which held him in its embraces. His eyes seemed as if they were about to start from their sockets; his teeth were fast closed—he wrung his hair—he beat his breast—and low moans escaped from his bosom. The *fiat* of the count had gone forth. He who would claim or aspire to connection with his family must be like the wife of Cæsar—beyond all suspicion. It was not enough that such an one should be innocent of any crime: he must never have even been accused of one. Such was the disposition of the count—elicited by an accident, and unexpectedly; and Markham could now divine the nature of the treatment which he would be likely to experience, were he to reveal his misfortunes to a nobleman who entertained such punctilious and extremely scrupulous notions!

"But I was mad to imagine that Isabella would ever become mine," thought Markham within himself, as soon as he became somewhat more tranquillised. "It was folly—supreme folly—rank, idiotic, inconceivable folly, in me to have cherished a hope which could never be realised! All that now remains for me to do, is to abandon myself to my adverse fate—to attempt no more struggles against the destinies that await me,—to leave this house without delay—to return home, and bury myself in a solitude from which no persuasions nor attractions shall henceforth induce me to emerge! Would that I could leave this house this very evening;—but appearances compel me to remain at least until to-morrow! I must endeavour to assume that ease of manner—that friendly confidence, which is reciprocal here:—for a few hours I must consent to act the hypocrite; and to-morrow—to-morrow, I shall be relieved from that dread necessity,—I shall be compelled to bid adieu to Isabella for ever! No avowal of my past sufferings is now required—since I shall to-morrow leave this hospitable mansion, never to return!"

A flood of tears relieved the unfortunate young man; and he descended once more to the drawing-room—very pale, but as calm and tranquil as usual. Isabella glanced towards him from time to time with evident anxiety; and, in spite of all his endeavours to appear cheerful and at his ease, he was embarrassed, cool, and reserved. Isabella was wounded and mortified by his conduct:—she attempted to rally him, and to ascertain whether he was really chilling in his manners on purpose, or only melancholy against his will: but she received frigid and laconic replies, which annoyed and disheartened the poor girl to such an extent that she could scarcely refrain from tears. Markham felt that, as an honourable man, he could no longer aspire to the hand of the signora, after the expression of opinion accidentally conveyed to him by the count and countess; and he therefore forbore from any attempt to render himself agreeable, or to afford the slightest testimony of his passion. Acting with these views, and endeavouring to seem only properly polite, he fell into the opposite extreme, and grew cold and reserved. The count and countess imagined that he was unwell, and were not therefore annoyed by his conduct;—but poor Isabella, who was deeply attached to him, set down his behaviour to indifference. This idea on her part was confirmed, when Markham, in the course of conversation, intimated his intention of returning home on the following day.

"Return home! and what for?" ejaculated the count. "You have no society there, and here you have some—unamusing and tedious though it may be."

"Never did I pass a happier period of my existence than that which I have spent in your hospitable abode," said Richard.

"Then remain with us at least ten days or a fortnight," cried the count. "We shall then be visiting London ourselves, for we have promised to pass a few weeks with Lord and Lady Tremordyn."

"Lord Tremordyn!" exclaimed Richard.

"Yes—do you know him?"

"Only by name. But did not his daughter marry Sir Rupert Harborough?" said Markham, shuddering as he pronounced the abhorred name.

"The same. Sir Robert treats her shamefully—neglects her in every way, and passes whole months away from his home. He has, moreover, expended all the fortune she brought him, and is again, I understand, deeply involved in debt."

"Poor Lady Cecilia!" ejaculated Isabella. "She is deeply to be pitied!"

"But to return to this sudden resolution of yours to depart to-morrow," said the count.

"Which resolution is very suddenly taken," added the signora, affecting to be engaged in contemplating a book of prints which lay upon the table before her, while her beautiful countenance was suffused with a deep blush.

"My resolution is sudden, certainly," observed Richard. "Circumstances over which I have no control, and which it would be useless to communicate to you, frequently compel me to adopt sudden resolutions, and act up to them. Be assured, however, that the memory of your kindness will always be dear to me."

"You speak as if we were never to meet again," exclaimed the count.

"We cannot dispose of events in this world according to our own will," said Markham, emphatically. "Would to God we could!"

"But there are certain circumstances in which we seem to be free agents," said Isabella, still holding down her head; "and remaining in one place, or going to another, appears to be amongst those actions which depend upon our own volition."

At this moment a servant entered the room and informed the count that the private secretary of the envoy of the Grand Duke of

Castelcicala to the English court desired to speak with him in another apartment.

"Oh! I am interested in this," exclaimed the countess; and, upon a signal of approval on the part of her husband, she accompanied him to the room where the secretary was waiting.

Markham was now alone with Isabella.

This was a probable occurrence which he had dreaded all that evening. He felt himself cruelly embarrassed in her presence; and the silence which prevailed between them was awkward to a degree.

At length the signora herself spoke.

"It appears that you are determined to leave us, Mr. Markham?" she said, without glancing towards him, and in a tone which she endeavoured to render as cool and indifferent as possible.

"I feel that I have been too long here already, signora," answered Richard, scarcely knowing what reply to make.

"Do you mean to tax us with inattention to your comfort, Mr. Markham?"

"God forbid, signora! In the name of heaven do not entertain such an idea!"

"Mr. Markham has been treated as well as our humble means would admit; and he leaves us with an abruptness which justifies us in entertaining fears that he is not comfortable."

"How can I convince you of the injustice of your suspicions?" ejaculated Markham. "You would not wantonly wound my feelings, Miss Isabella, by a belief which is totally unfounded? No! that is not the cause of my departure. My own happiness—my own honour—every thing commands me to quit a spot where—where I shall, nevertheless, leave so many reminiscences of joy and tranquil felicity behind me! I dare not explain myself farther at present; perhaps *never* will you know the cause—but, pardon me, signora—I am wandering—I know not what I say!"

"Pray compose yourself, Mr. Markham," said Isabella, now raising her head from the book, and glancing towards him.

"Compose myself, Isabella—signora, I mean," he exclaimed: "*that* is impossible! Oh! if you knew *all*, you would pity me! But I dare not now reveal to you what I wish. A word which this day dropped from your father's lips has banished all hope from my mind. Now I am wandering again! In the name of heaven, take no notice of what I say; I am mad—I am raving!"

"And what was it that my father said to annoy you?" inquired Isabella timidly.

"Oh! nothing—nothing purposely," answered Markham. "He himself was unaware that he fired the arrow from his bow."

"Am I unworthy of your confidence in this instance?" asked Isabella; "and may I not be made acquainted with the nature of the annoyance which my father has thus unintentionally caused you to experience?"

"Oh! why should I repeat words which would only lead to a revelation of what it is now useless to reveal. Your father and mother both delivered the same sentiment—a sentiment that destroys all hope. But, oh! you cannot understand the cause of my anxiety—my grief—my disappointment!"

"And why not entrust me with that cause? I could sympathise with you as a friend."

"As a friend! Alas, Isabella, is it useless for me now to deplore the visions which I had conjured up, and which have been so cruelly destroyed? You yourself know not what is in store for you—what plans your father may have formed concerning you!"

"And are you acquainted with those plans?" asked the beauteous Italian, in a tone of voice rendered almost inaudible by a variety of emotions—for the heart of that innocent and charming being fluttered like a bird in the net of the fowler.

"Do not question me on that head, Isabella! Let me speak of myself—for it is sweet to be commiserated by such as you! My life for some time past has been a scene of almost unceasing misery. When I came of age I found my vast property dissipated by him to whom it was entrusted. And other circumstances gave a new and unpleasant aspect to those places which were dear to me in my childhood. What wild hopes, in early life, had I there indulged,—what dreams for the future had there visited my mind in its boyhood!—what vain wishes, what strong yearnings, what ambitious aspirations had there first found existence! When I returned to those spots, after an absence of two years, and thought of the feelings that there once agitated my bosom, and contrasted them with those which had displaced them,—when I traced the history of each hope from its inception there, and followed it through the vista of years until its final extinction,—when I thought how differently my course in life had been shaped from that career which I had there marked out, and how vain and futile were all the efforts and strivings which I exerted against the tide of events and the force of circumstances,—I awoke, as it were from a long dream,—I opened my eyes upon the path which I should thenceforth have to pursue, and judged of it by the one I had been pursuing;—I saw the nothingness of men's lives in general, and the utter vanity of the main pursuits which engross their minds, and waste their energies;—and I then felt convinced that I was indeed but an instrument in the hands of another, and that the ends which I had obtained had not been those for which I had striven, but which the Almighty willed! So is it with me now, Isabella. I had planned a dream—a dream of Elysium, with which to cheer and bless the remainder of my existence; and, behold! like all the former hopes and aspirations of my life, this one is also suddenly destroyed!"

"How know you that it is destroyed?" inquired Isabella, casting down her eyes.

"Oh! I am unworthy of you, Isabella—I do not deserve you; and yet it was to your hand that I aspired;—you were the star that was to irradiate the remainder of my existence! Oh! I could weep—I could weep, Isabella, when I think of what I might have been, and what I am!"

"You say that you aspired to my hand," murmured the lovely Italian maiden, casting down her large dark eyes and blushing deeply; "you did me honour!"

"Silence, Isabella—silence!" interrupted Richard. "I dare not now hear the words of hope from *your* lips! But I love thee—I love thee—God only knows how sincerely I love thee!"

"And shall I conceal my own feelings with regard to you, Richard?" said Isabella, approaching him and laying her delicate and beautifully modelled hand lightly upon his wrist.

"She loves me in return—she loves me!" ejaculated Markham, half wild with mingled joy and apprehensions;—and, yielding to an impulse which no mortal under such circumstances could have conquered, he caught her in his arms.

He kissed her pure and chaste brow—he felt her fragrant breath upon his cheek—her hair commingled with his own—and he murmured the words, "You love me?"

A gentle voice breathed an affirmative in his ear; and he pressed his lips to hers to ratify that covenant of two fond hearts.

Suddenly he recollected that Count Alteroni had declared that no one against whom there was even a suspicion of crime should ever form a connection with his family. Markham's high sense of honour told him in a moment that he had no right to secure the affections of a confiding and gentle girl whose father would never yield an assent to their union: his brain, already excited, now became inflamed almost to madness;—he abruptly turned aside from her who had just avowed her attachment to him,—he muttered some incoherent words which she did not comprehend, and rushed out of the room.

He hurried to the garden at the back of the house, and walked rapidly up and down a shady avenue of trees which ran along the wall that bounded the enclosure on the side of the public road.

By degrees he grew calm and relaxed the speed of his pace. He then fell into a long and profound meditation upon the occurrences of the last half hour.

He was beloved by Isabella, it was true;—but never might he aspire to her hand;—never could it be accorded to him to lead her to the altar where their attachment might be ratified and *his* happiness confirmed! An inseparable barrier seemed to oppose itself to his wishes; and he felt that no alternative remained to him but to put his former resolution into force, and take his departure homewards on the ensuing morning.

Thus was it that he now reasoned.

The moon shone brightly; and the heavens were studded with stars.

As Markham was about to turn for the twentieth time at that end of the avenue which was the more remote from the house, the beams of the moon suddenly disclosed to him a human face peering over the wall at him.

He started, and was about to utter an exclamation of alarm, when a well-known voice fell upon his ears.

"Hush!" was the word first spoken; "I have just one question to ask you, and then one thing to tell you; and the last will just depend upon the first."

"Wretch—miscreant—murderer!" exclaimed Richard; "nothing shall now prevent me from securing you on the behalf of justice."

"Fool!" coolly returned the Resurrection Man—for it was he; "who can catch me in the darkness and the open fields?"

"True!" cried Markham, stamping his foot with vexation. "But God grant that the day of retribution may come!"

"Come, come—none of this nonsense, my dear boy," said the Resurrection Man, with diabolical irony. "Now, answer me—will you give me a cool hundred and fifty? If not, then I will get swag in spite of you."

"Why do you thus molest and persecute me? I would sooner handle the most venomous serpent, than enter into a compromise with a fiend like you!"

"Then beware of the consequences!"

The moon shone full upon the cadaverous and unearthly countenance of the Resurrection Man, and revealed the expression of ferocious rage which it wore as he uttered these words. That vile and foreboding face then suddenly disappeared behind the wall.

"Who are you talking to, Markham?" cried the voice of the count, who was now advancing down the avenue.

"Talking to?" repeated Richard, alarmed and confused.

"Yes—I heard your voice, and another answering you," said the count.

"It was a man in the road," answered Markham.

"I missed you from the drawing-room on my return; and Bella said she thought you were unwell, and had gone to walk in the garden for the fresh air. The news I have received from Castelcicala, through the Envoy's secretary, are by no means favourable to my hopes of a speedy return to my native land. You therefore see that I have done well to lay out my capital in this. But we will not discuss matters of business now; for there is company up stairs, and we must join them. Who do you think have just made their appearance?"

"Mr. Armstrong and other friends?" said Markham inquiringly.

"No—Armstrong is on the Continent. The visitors are Sir Cherry Bounce and Captain Smilax Dapper; and I am by no means pleased with their company. However, my house *must* always remain open to them in consequence of the services rendered to me by their deceased relative."

Markham accompanied the count back to the drawing-room, where Captain Smilax Dapper had seated himself next to the signora; and Sir Cherry Bounce was endeavouring to divert the countess with an account of their journey that evening from London. They both coloured deeply and bowed very politely when Richard entered the apartment.

"Well, ath I wath thaying," continued Sir Cherry, "one of the twatheth bwoke at the bottom of the hill, and the hortheth took to fwight. Thmilakth thwore like a twooper; but nothing could thwop the thaithe till it wolled thlap down into a dwy dith. Dapper then woared like a bull; and I——"

"And Cherry began to cry, strike me if he didn't!" ejaculated the gallant hussar, caressing his moustache. "A countryman who passed by asked him if his mamma knew he was out: Cherry thought that the fellow was in earnest, and assured him that he had her permission to undertake the journey. I never laughed so much in my life!"

"Oh! naughty Dapper to thay that I cwied! That really ith too cwuel. Well, we got the thaithe lifted out of the dith, and the twathe mended."

"You are the heroes of an adventure," said the count.

"I intend to put it into verse, strike me ugly if I don't!" cried the young officer; "and perhaps the signora will allow me to copy it into her *Album*?"

"Oh! I must read it first," said Isabella, laughing. "But since you speak of my *Album*, I must show you the additions I have received to its treasures."

"This is really a beautiful landscape," observed Captain Dapper, as he turned over the leaves of the book which the beautiful Italian presented to him. "The water flowing over the wheel of the mill is quite natural, strike me! And—may I never know what fair woman's smiles are again, if those trees don't seem actually to be growing out of the paper!"

"Thuperb?" ejaculated Sir Cherry Bounce. "The wiver litewally wo11th along in the picthure. The cowth and the theepe are walking in the gween fieldth. Pway who might have been the artitht of thith mathleth producthion?"

"That is a secret," said the signora. "And now read these lines."

"Read them yourself, Bella," said the count. "No one can do justice to them but you."

Isabella accordingly read the following stanzas in a tone of voice that added a new charm to the words themselves:—

LONDON.

'Twas midnight—and the beam of Cynthia shone
 In company with many a lovely star,
Steeping in silver the huge Babylon
 Whose countless habitations stretch afar,
Plain, valley, hill, and river's bank upon,
 And in whose mighty heart all interests jar!—
O sovereign city of a thousand towers,
What vice is cradled in thy princely bowers!

If thou would'st view fair London-town aright,
 Survey her from the bridge of Waterloo;
And let the hour be at the morning's light,
 When the sun's earliest rays have struggled through
The star-bespangled curtain of the night,
 And when Aurora's locks are moist with dew:
Then take thy stand upon that bridge, and see
London awake in all her majesty!

Then do her greatest features seem to crowd
 Down to the river's brink:—then does she raise
From off her brow the everlasting cloud,
 (Thus with her veil the coquette archly plays)
And for a moment shows her features, proud
 To catch the Rembrandt light of the sun's rays:—
Then may the eye of the beholder dwell
On steeple, column, dome, and pinnacle.

Yes—he may reckon temple, mart, and tower—
 The old historic sites—the halls of kings—
The seats of art—the fortalice of power—
 The ships that waft our commerce on their wings—
All these commingle in that dawning hour;
 And each into one common focus brings
Some separate moral of life's scenes so true,
As all those objects form one point of view!

The ceaseless hum of the huge Babylon
 Has known no silence for a thousand years;
Still does her tide of human life flow on,
 Still is she racked with sorrows, hopes, and fears;
Still the sun sets, still morning dawns upon
 Hearts full of anguish, eye-balls dimmed with tears:—
Still do the millions toil to bless the few—
And hideous Want stalks all her pathways through!

"Beautiful—very beautiful!" exclaimed Captain Dapper. "Strike me if I ever heard more beautiful poetry!"

"Almotht ath good ath your lineth on the Thea Therpent. Wath the poem witten by the thame perthon that painted the landthcape?"

"The very same," answered Isabella. "His, initials are in the corner."

"R. M. Who can that be?" exclaimed Dapper.

"Robert Montgomery, perhaps?" said Isabella, smiling with a charmingly arch expression of countenance.

"No—Wichard Markham!" cried Sir Cherry; and then he and his friend the hussar captain were excessively annoyed to think that they had been extolling to the skies the performances of an individual who had frightened the one out of his wits, and boxed the ears of the other.

Thus passed the evening; but Markham was reserved and melancholy. It was in vain that Isabella exerted herself to instil confidence into his mind, by means of those thousand little attentions and manifestations of preference which lovers know so well how to exhibit, but which those around perceive not. Richard was firm in those resolutions which he deemed consistent with propriety and honour; and he deeply regretted the explanation and its consequences into which the enthusiasm of the moment had that evening led him.

At length the hour for retiring to rest arrived.

Richard repaired to his chamber—but not to sleep. His mind was too much harassed by the events of the evening—the plans which he had pursued, and those which he intended to pursue—the love which he bore to Isabel, and the stern opposition which might be anticipated from her father—the persecution to which he was subject at the hands of the Resurrection Man—and the train of evil fortune which appeared constantly to attend upon him;—of all these he thought; and his painful meditations defied the advance of

slumber.

The window of his bed-chamber overlooked the garden at the back of the house; from which direction a strange and alarming noise suddenly broke in upon his reflections. He listened—and all was quiet: he therefore felt convinced that his terror was unfounded. A few moments elapsed; and he was again alarmed by a sound which seemed like the jarring of an unfastened shutter. A certain uneasiness now took possession of him; and he was determined to ascertain whether all was safe about the premises. He leapt from his bed, raised the window, and looked forth. The night was now pitch dark; and he could distinguish nothing. Not even were the outlines of the trees in the garden discernible amidst that profound and dense obscurity. Markham held his breath; and the whispering of voices met his ears. He could not, however, distinguish a word they uttered:—a low hissing continuous murmur, the nature of which it was impossible to mistake, convinced him that some persons were talking together immediately beneath his window. In a few moments the jarring of a door or shutter, which he had before heard, was repeated; and then the whispering ceased.

By this time his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness; and he could now faintly discern the outlines of three human forms standing together at the back door of the house. He could not, however, distinguish the precise nature of their present employment. It was, nevertheless, evident to him that they were not there with any honest intention in view; and he resolved to adopt immediate measures to defeat their burglarious schemes. He hastily threw on his clothes, struck a light, and issued from his room.

Cautiously advancing along a passage was the count, only half-dressed, with a pistol in each hand and a cutlass under his arm.

"This is fortunate!" whispered the count: "I was coming to alarm you: there are thieves breaking in. You and I can manage them; it is of no use to call Bounce or Dapper. Take this cutlass, and let us descend gently. Here come the men-servants."

The count hurried down stairs, followed by Markham, and the three male domestics of the household.

A noise was heard in the pantry, which was situate at the back of the house on the same level with the hall.

"Douse the darkey, blow the glim, and mizzle," cried a hoarse gruff voice, as the count, Richard, and the servants approached the pantry: "there's five on 'em—it's no use——"

The count rushed forward, and burst open the door of the pantry, closely followed by Markham, holding the candle.

Two of the burglars made a desperate push down the kitchen stairs and escaped: the third was captured in an attempt to follow his companions.

The light of the candle fell upon the villain's countenance, which was literally ghastly with a mingled expression of rage and alarm.

Richard shuddered: for the captured burglar was no other than the Resurrection Man.

"Wretch!" exclaimed Markham, recovering his self-command: "the law will at length reach you."

"What! do you know this fellow?" demanded the count, somewhat surprised by the observation.

"Know me!" cried the Resurrection Man: "of course he does. But supposing someone was to tell you a piece of valuable information, count—about a matter closely concerning yourself and family—would you be inclined to be merciful?"

"Of what nature is that information? It must be very valuable indeed, if you think that I will enter into any compromise with such as you."

"Pledge me your word that you will let me go scot free, and I will tell you something that concerns the peace and happiness—perhaps the honour of your daughter."

"Miscreant!" cried Markham: "profane not that lady by even alluding to her!"

"Stay—curse the fellow's impudence," said the count: "perhaps he may really have somewhat worth communicating. At all events, I will try him. Now, then, my man, what is it that you have to say? If your statement be worth hearing, I swear that I will neither molest you, nor suffer you to be molested."

"Hold, count," exclaimed Markham: "make no rash vow—you know not what a wretch——"

"Silence, my dear friend," said the count authoritatively: "I will hear the man, let him be who or what he may!"

"And you will do well to hear me, sir," continued the Resurrection Man. "You harbour a villain in your house; and that villain is now before you. He boasts of having secured the affections of your daughter, and hopes to gull you into allowing him to marry her."

"Miscreant—murderer!" exclaimed Markham, no longer able to contain his indignation: "pollute not innocence itself by these allusions to a lady whose spotless mind——"

"Hush!" said the count. "Let us hear patiently all this man has to say. I can soon judge whether he be speaking the truth; and if he deceives me, I will show him no mercy."

"But, count—allow me one word—I myself will unfold——"

"Excuse me, Markham," interrupted the Italian noble, with dignified firmness: "I will hear this man first. Proceed!"

"The villain I allude to is of course that Markham," continued the Resurrection Man. "It was him, too, that induced me and my pals, the Cracksman and the Buffer, to make this attempt upon your house to-night."

"What foul—what hideous calumny is this!" almost screamed the distracted Markham, as this totally unexpected and unfounded accusation met his ears.

The count himself was shocked at this announcement; for he suddenly recollected Richard's moody, embarrassed, and thoughtful manner the whole evening, and his sudden intention of departing the next day.

"Go on," said the count.

"I met that man," continued the body-snatcher, pointing contemptuously towards Markham, "a little more than a fortnight ago in this neighbourhood: he was walking with your daughter; and it was in consequence of certain little arrangements with me that he went back to London next day. Oh! I am well acquainted with all his movements."

"And you sought my life in a manner the most base——" began Markham, unable to restrain his feelings.

"Silence, Markham!" exclaimed the count, still more authoritatively than before. "Your time to speak will come."

"We planned this work while he was in London," continued the Resurrection Man; "and this very evening he told me over the garden wall that all was right."

"Merciful God!" cried the count: "this is but too true!"

"Yes, sir—I certainly spoke to him," said Richard,—"and from the garden too——"

"Mr. Markham, this continued interruption is indecent," exclaimed the count emphatically, while a cold perspiration burst out upon his forehead; for he had recalled to mind the incident respecting the garden.

"I have little more to add, count," said the Resurrection Man. "This Markham told me that you had plenty of plate and money always in the house; and as he had lost nearly all his property, he should not be displeased at an opportunity of getting hold of a little swag. It was agreed that we should meet in London to arrange the business; and so we did meet at the *Dark House* in Brick Lane, where we settled the affair along with the Cracksman and the Buffer, who have just made off. This is all I have to say—unless it is that me and your friend Markham first got acquainted in Newgate——"

"Newgate!" ejaculated the count, with a thrill of horror.

"Yes—Newgate; where he was waiting to be tried for forgery, for which he got two years in the Compter. And that's all. Let him deny it if he can."

Scarcely were these terrible words uttered by the Resurrection Man, when a loud—long—and piercing scream was heard, coming from the direction of the staircase; and then some object instantly fell with violence upon the marble floor of the hall.

"Isabella! Isabella!" ejaculated Markham, turning hastily round to hurry to her assistance.

"Stop, sir—seek not my daughter," cried the count, in a stern voice, as he caught Richard's arm and held him back. "Let not a soul stir until my return!"

There was a noble and dignified air of command about Count Alteroni, as he uttered these words, which could not escape the notice of Richard Markham, even amidst the crushing and overwhelming circumstances that surrounded him.

The count took the candle from Markham's hand, and hastened to the aid of his daughter, who, half-dressed, was lying upon the cold marble of the hall. He hastened to raise her; and at that moment the countess appeared upon the stairs, followed by a lady's-maid bearing a lamp.

The count reassured her in respect to the safety of the house, consigned Isabella to her care, and then returned to the pantry, where his presence was awaited in silence.

"Have you any thing more to say?" demanded the count of the Resurrection Man.

"Nothing. Have not I said enough?"—and he glanced with fiendish triumph towards Markham.

"Now, sir," said the count, turning to Richard; "is the statement of this man easy to be refuted?"

"Alas! I am compelled to admit that, the victim of the most extraordinary circumstantial evidence ever known to fix guilt upon an innocent man, I was a prisoner in Newgate and the Compter; but——"

"Say no more! say no more! God forgive me, that I should have allowed such a man to become the friend of my wife and daughter!"

The count uttered these words in a tone of intense agony.

"Count Alteroni, allow me one word of explanation," said Richard. "Only cast your eyes over this paper, and you will be convinced of my innocence!"

Markham handed the document signed by Talbot, *alias* Pocock, to the count; but the nobleman tossed it indignantly on the floor.

"You have confessed that you have been an inmate of the felons' gaols: what explanation can you give that will wipe away so foul a stain? Depart—begone! defile not my house longer with your presence!"

Vainly did Markham endeavour to obtain a hearing. The count silenced him with an air of command and an imposing dignity of manner that struck him with awe. Never did the Italian nobleman appear more really noble than when he was thus performing that which he considered to be an imperious duty. His fine form was drawn up to its full height—his chest expanded—his cheeks were flushed—and his eyes flashed fire. Yes—even beneath his dark complexion was the rich Italian blood seen mantling his countenance.

"Go, sir—hasten your departure—stay not another minute here! A man accused of forgery—condemned to an infamous punishment,—a liberated felon—a freed convict in my family dwelling—— Holy God! I can scarcely restrain myself within the bounds of common patience when I think of the indignity that myself, my wife, and my innocent daughter have endured."

With these words the colonel pushed Markham rudely from the pantry, and ordered a servant to conduct him to the front door.

The blood of the young man boiled in his veins at this ignominious treatment;—and yet he dared not rebel against it!

The Resurrection Man took his departure at the same time by the garden at the back of the house.

As Markham turned down the shrubbery, a window on the third floor of the count's dwelling was thrown open; and the voices of Sir Cherry Bounce and the Honourable Captain Dapper were heard loading him with abuse.

Bowed down to the earth by the weight of the misfortune which had just fallen upon his head,—crushed by unjust and unfounded suspicions,—and sinking beneath a sense of shame and degradation, which all his innocence did not deprive of a single pang,—Markham dragged himself away from the house in which he had passed so many happy hours, and where he left behind him all that he held dear in this life.

He seated himself upon a mile-stone at a little distance from the count's mansion, to which he turned his eyes to take a last farewell of the place where Isabella resided.

Lights were moving about in several rooms;—perhaps she was ill?

Most assuredly she had heard the dread accusations which had issued from the lips of the Resurrection Man against her lover;—and she would haply believe them all?

So thought Richard. Human language cannot convey an adequate idea of the heart-rending misery which the poor oppressed young man endured as he sate by the road-side, and pondered upon all that had just occurred.

Shame upon shame—degradation upon degradation—mountain upon mountain rolled on his breast, as if he were a modern Titan, to crush him and keep him down—never more to rise;—this was now *his* fate!

At length, afraid of being left alone with his own thoughts, which seemed to urge him to end his earthly woes in the blood of a suicide, he rose from the cold stone, turned one last sorrowful and lingering glance towards the mansion in the distance, and then hurried along the road to Richmond as if he were pursued by bloodhounds.

And not more fearful nor more appalling would those bloodhounds have been than the horrible and excruciating thoughts which haunted him upon his way, and of which he could not divest himself; so that at length a species of delirium seized upon him as he ran furiously onward, the mark of Cain appearing to burn like red-hot iron upon his brow, and a terrible voice thundering in his ear —"Freed Convict!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

ELIZA SYDNEY.

THE reader will remember that the events already related have brought us up to the close of 1838.

Thus three years had elapsed since the memorable trial which resulted in the condemnation of Eliza Sydney to an imprisonment of twenty-four long months in Newgate; and a year had passed since her release from that dread abode.

We therefore return to her again in December, 1838—about the same time that those incidents occurred which we detailed in the last few chapters.

Probably to the surprise of the reader, we again find Eliza Sydney the mistress of the beautiful villa at Upper Clapton.

Yes: on the evening when we once more introduce ourselves to her, she was sitting alone in the drawing-room of that home, reading by the side of a cheerful fire.

She was now twenty-eight years of age; and, although somewhat more inclining to *embonpoint* than when we first described her, she was still a lovely and fascinating woman. That slightly increased roundness of form had given her charms a voluptuousness the most ravishing and seductive, but the effects of which upon the beholder were attempered by the dignity that reigned upon her high and noble brow, and the chaste expression of her melting hazel eyes.

She was one of those fine creatures—one of those splendid specimens of the female sex, which are alone seen in the cold climates of the north; for it appears to be a rule in nature that the flowers of our species expand into the most luscious loveliness in the least genial latitudes.

There was a soft melancholy in the expression of her countenance, which might have been mistaken for languor, and which gave an additional charm to her appearance; for it was easy to perceive her mind was now at ease, that delicate shade of sadness being the indelible effect of the adventures of the past.

Her mind was at ease, because she was pure in heart and virtuous in intention,—because she knew that she had erred innocently when she lent herself to the fraud for which she had suffered,—because she possessed a competency that secured her against care for the present and fear for the future,—and because she dwelt in that strict solitude and retirement which she loved, and which was congenial to a soul that had seen enough of the world to learn to dread its cruel artifices and deceptive ways.

We said that it was evening when we again introduce Eliza to the readers. A cold wind whistled without; and a huge Christmas log burnt at the back of the grate, giving an air of supreme comfort to that tastefully-furnished room.

The French porcelain time-piece upon the mantel proclaimed the hour of eight.

Scarcely had the silvery chime ceased, when Louisa entered the room in great haste and excitement.

"Oh, ma'am! who do you think is here?" she cried, closing the door carefully behind her.

"It is impossible for me to guess, Louisa," said Eliza, smiling.

"Mr. Stephens!" exclaimed the servant: "and he earnestly implores to see you!"

"Mr. Stephens!" echoed Eliza. "Impossible!"

"It is him, flesh and blood: but so pale—so ghostly pale—and so altered!"

"Mr. Stephens!" repeated Eliza. "You must be mistaken—you must be dreaming; for you are well aware that, in accordance with his sentence, he most be very—very far from England."

"He is here—he is in London—he is at your door!" said Louisa emphatically; "and as far as I could see by the light of the candle that I had with me when I answered his knock, he is in rags and tatters."

"And he wishes to see me?" said Eliza, musing.

"Yes, ma'am."

There was a pause of a few moments.

"I will see him," exclaimed Eliza, in a decided tone, after some consideration. "He may be in want—in distress; and I cannot forget that he proclaimed my innocence in the dock of the Old Bailey."

Louisa left the room: and in another minute the convict Stephens stood in the presence of Eliza Sydney.

Altered! he was indeed altered. His eyes were sunken and lustreless—his cheeks wan and hollow—his hair prematurely tinged with grey—and his form thin and emaciated. He was moreover clad in rags—absolute rags.

"My God!" ejaculated Eliza: "in what a condition do you return to your native land!"

"And heaven alone knows what sacrifices I have made, and what hardships I have undergone to come back!" said Stephens in a hollow voice.

"You are pardoned, then?"

"Oh, no! crimes like mine are not so readily forgiven. I escaped!"

"Escaped!" exclaimed Eliza: "and are you not afraid of being recaptured?"

"I must run that risk," replied Stephens, sorrowfully. "But give me food—I am hungry—I am starving!"

The unhappy man sank upon a chair as he uttered these words; and Eliza summoned Louisa to bring refreshments.

The servant placed a tray laden with provisions upon the table, and retired.

Stephens then fell ravenously upon the food thus set before him; while tears stood in Eliza's eyes when she thought that the miserable wretch had once commanded in that house where he now craved a morsel of bread!

At length the convict terminated his meal.

"I had eaten nothing," he said, "since yesterday afternoon, when I spent my last penny to procure a roll. Last night I slept in a shed near the docks, a large stone for my pillow. All this day I have been wandering about the most obscure and wretched neighbourhoods of London—not knowing whither to go, and afraid to be seen by any one who may recognise me. Recognise me!" he added, in a strange satirical manner: "that would perhaps be difficult;" then, linking his voice almost to a whisper, he said in a tone of profound and touching melancholy, "Do you not find me much—very much altered?"

"You have doubtless suffered deeply," said Eliza, wiping away the tears from her eyes; for at that moment she remembered not the injury brought by that man upon herself—she saw and knew of nought save the misery of the hapless being before her.

"You weep, Eliza," exclaimed Stephens, "you weep for me who am unworthy even of your notice!"

"Forget the past: I prefer dwelling upon the kindnesses rather than the injuries I have experienced at your hands."

"Excellent woman!" cried the convict, deeply affected. "Oh! you know not what I have endured—what dangers I have incurred—what hardships I have undergone—what privations I have experienced! Compelled to work my passage back to England as a common sailor—a prey to the brutality of a tyrannical and drunken captain—exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather,—no tongue can tell what I have gone through! But I will not weary you with my complaints. Rather let me hear how you yourself have fared."

"My tale is short," answered Eliza. "The two years in Newgate passed away. God knows how they passed away—but they *did* pass! Of that I will say no more—save that the most powerful interest was exerted to obtain a mitigation of my sentence—but in vain! The Secretary of State assured the Earl of Warrington that he could not interfere with the very lenient judgment awarded by the court relative to myself. One more circumstance I must mention. Every three months, when the prison regulations allowed the admission of the friends of those confined, a lady visited me; and though that lady be the mistress of the Earl of Warrington, I would rejoice to call her *sister*."

"Oh! how rejoiced I am to know that you were not without friends!" exclaimed Stephens.

"The Earl of Warrington sent me by this lady assurances of his forgiveness, and even of his intention to befriend me, for the sake of my dear departed mother. But, oh! who could have anticipated the noble—the generous conduct pursued towards me by that nobleman? The day of my liberation dawned. Mrs. Arlington came in the earl's private travelling carriage, and received me at the door of the prison. The carriage rolled away; and, when I had recovered from the first emotions of joy at leaving that horrible place, I found we were proceeding along the Hackney Road. I cast a glance of surprise at Mrs. Arlington; she only smiled, and would not gratify my curiosity. At length we came in sight of the villa, and my astonishment increased. Still Mrs. Arlington only smiled. In a few minutes more the carriage entered the enclosure, and drove up to this door. Mrs. Arlington seemed to enjoy my surprise—and yet tears glistened in her eyes. Oh! the admirable woman: they were tears of joy at the grateful task which the earl had imposed upon her. The front door opened, and Louisa ran forward to welcome me. Mrs. Arlington took my hand, and led me into the dining-room. The furniture was all entirely new. She conducted me over the house: every room was similarly renovated. At length I felt exhausted with pleasure, hope, and alarm, and sank upon the sofa in this apartment. 'My dear Eliza,' said Mrs. Arlington, 'all that you survey is yours. The very house itself is your own property. The Earl of Warrington has purchased it, for you; and his solicitor, Mr. Pakenham, will call upon you to-morrow with the title-deeds.'——I fainted through excess of happiness and gratitude."

"How noble!" exclaimed Stephens. "I knew that the Earl of Warrington had purchased this estate; for I had already mortgaged it to its full value previous to that fatal epoch when all my hopes failed! My brother, who resided in Liverpool, left England six months after my departure, and went out to settle in New South Wales. He told me that the person who had lent me the money upon this property, had disposed of it to the earl. My brother's object was to settle at Sydney, and procure me to be allotted to him as his servant. I should then have been free. But, alas! scarcely had he set foot in the island, when he was seized with a malignant fever, which proved fatal."

"Misfortunes never come singly," said Eliza. Then, after a pause, she added, "Neither do blessings! And if I have been greatly afflicted—I have also enjoyed some happiness. In reference to my own narrative, I must add that Mr. Pakenham called on the following day, as Mrs. Arlington had promised; and he placed the deeds in my hand. I desired him to retain them in his care for me. He then informed me that the Earl of Warrington had purchased for me an annuity of four hundred pounds a-year. Oh! such generosity overwhelmed me. I begged to be allowed to hasten and throw myself at the feet of that excellent nobleman; but Mr. Pakenham intimated that his lordship was averse to an interview. In a word, he made me understand that I might never hope to thank my benefactor to his face, and that a letter expressing my feelings would be equally unwelcome. The good lawyer, however, tranquillised my mind on one point: the earl has no aversion to me—entertains no animosity against me; but he cannot bear to contemplate the offspring of the woman whom he himself loved so madly!"

"Thus you are happy, and blest with kind friends; and I—— I am an outcast!" said Stephens, in a tone of bitter remorse. "Oh! what would I give to be able to recall the past! Blessed, however, be that strange and unaccountable curiosity which led me into this neighbourhood to-night! I say, blessed be it—since it has been the unexpected means for me to hear and know that you at least are happy. Oh! conceive my astonishment when, on approaching the villa, I inquired of a peasant, '*Who dwells there now?*' and he replied, '*Miss Sydney!*' I could not mistake that announcement: I was already prepared by it for the narrative which you have given me of the Earl of Warrington's generosity."

"Without him, what should I be at this moment?" said Eliza. "He has been more than a friend to me,—his kindness was rather that of a father or a brother! And that angel Mrs. Arlington, who visited me in prison—who poured consolation into my soul, and sustained me with hopes that have been more than realised,—oh! how deep a debt of gratitude do I owe to her also. She did not conceal from me

her true position in reference to the Earl of Warrington: she detailed to me the narrative of her sorrows; and I learnt that George Montague was the base deceiver who first taught her to stray from the paths of virtue."

"George Montague!" exclaimed Stephens. "What has become of that man? He is artful, talented, designing, and might perhaps be able to serve me if he would."

"He has assumed, I am told, the name of Greenwood, and dwells in a magnificent house in Spring Gardens. This I learnt from Mrs. Arlington, who called here a few days ago. She also informed me that Montague had circulated a report amongst his acquaintances, that the death of a distant relation had put him in possession of considerable property, and rendered the assumption of the name of Greenwood an indispensable condition of its enjoyment."

"And thus has Montague risen," said Stephens; "while I am humbled to the dust! His intrigues and machinations have enriched him; and the story of the death of a wealthy relation is no doubt the apology for the sudden display of the treasures he has been amassing for the last four or five years. Have you seen him lately?"

"He called here a few days after my release from imprisonment," said Eliza, with a slight blush; "but I did not choose to see him. I love solitude—I prefer retirement."

"And my visit has most disagreeably intruded upon your privacy," observed Stephens.

"I could have wished to have seen you in a more prosperous state, for your own sake," answered Eliza; "but as I observed just now, I would rather remember the kindnesses I have received at your hands, than the miseries which have resulted from your guilty deception. If with my modest and limited means I can assist you, speak! What do you propose to do?"

"My object is to proceed to America, where I might be enabled to obtain an honest livelihood by my mercantile experience and knowledge. Every moment that I prolong my stay in England is fraught with increased peril to my safety; for were I captured, I should be sent back to that far-off clime where so many of my fellow-countrymen endure inconceivable miseries, and where my lot would become terrible indeed."

"I will assist you in your object," said Eliza. "Mr. Pakenham, who acts as my banker, has a hundred pounds of mine in his hands: to-morrow I will draw that amount; and if it will be of any service towards the accomplishment of your plans——"

"Oh, Eliza! how can I sufficiently express my gratitude?" interrupted Stephens, joy and hope animating his care-worn countenance and firing his sunken eyes.

"Do not thank me," said Eliza. "I shall be happy if I can efface one wrinkle from the brow of a fellow-creature. For your present necessities take this,"—and she handed him her purse. "To-morrow evening I shall expect you to call again; and I will then provide you with the means to seek your fortune in another quarter of the world."

Stephens shed tears as he received the purse from the fair hand of that noble-hearted woman.

He then took his departure with a heart far more light than when he had knocked humbly and timidly at the door of that villa an hour before.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MR. GREENWOOD'S VISITORS.

Mr. Greenwood was seated in his study the morning after the event which occupied the last chapter.

He was dressed *en negligé*.

A French velvet skull-cap, embroidered with gold, sate upon his curled and perfumed hair: a sumptuous brocade silk dressing-gown was confined around the waist by a gold cord with large tassels hanging almost to his feet: his shirt collar was turned down over a plain broad black riband, the bow of which was fastened with a diamond broach of immense value; and on his fingers were costly rings, sparkling with stones of corresponding kind and worth.

On the writing-table an elegant French watch attached to a long gold chain, lay amidst a pile of letters, just as if it had been carelessly tossed there. A cheque, partly filled up for a thousand guineas,—several bank-notes, and some loose gold, were lying on an open writing-desk; and, at one end of the table lay, in seeming confusion, a number of visiting cards bearing the names of eminent capitalists, wealthy merchants, peers, and members of Parliament.

All this pell-mell assemblage of proofs of wealth and tokens of high acquaintance, was only apparent—and not real. It was a portion of Mr. Greenwood's system—one of the principles of the art which he practised in deceiving the world. He knew none of the capitalists, and few of the aristocrats whose cards lay upon his table: and his own hand had arranged the manner in which the watch, the cheque-book, and the money were tossing about. Never did a coquet practise a particular glance, attitude, or mannerism, more seriously than did Mr. Greenwood these little artifices which, however trifling they may appear, produced an immense effect upon those with whom he had to deal, and who visited him in that study.

Every thing he did was the result of a calculation, and had an aim: every word he spoke, however rapid the utterance, was duly weighed and measured.

And yet at this time the man who thus carried his knowledge of human nature even to the most ridiculous niceties, was only in his twenty-eighth year. How perverted were great talents—how misapplied an extraordinary quickness of apprehension in this instance!

Mr. Greenwood contemplated the arrangements of his writing-table with calm satisfaction; and a smile of triumph curled his lip as he thought of the position to which such little artifices as those had helped to raise him. He despised the world: he laughed at society; and he cared not for the law—for he walked boldly up to the extreme verge where personal security ceased and peril began; but he never over-stepped the boundary. He had plundered many—he had enriched himself with the wealth of others—he had built his own fortunes upon the ruins of his fellow men's hopes and prospects: but still he had so contrived all his schemes that the law could never reach him, and if one of his victims accused him of villany he had a plausible explanation to offer for his conduct.

If a person said to him, "Your schemes have involved me in utter ruin, and deprived me of every penny I possessed,"—he would unblushingly reply, "What does the man mean? He forgets that I suffered far more than he did; and that where he lost hundreds I lost thousands! It is impossible to control speculations: some turn up well, some badly; and this man might as well blame the keeper of a lottery-office because his ticket did not turn up a prize, as attempt to throw any odium upon me!"

And this language would prove satisfactory and seem straight-forward to all by-standers, save the poor victim himself, who nevertheless would be struck dumb by the other's assurance.

Greenwood had commenced his ways of intrigue and pursuits of duplicity in the City, where he was known as George Montague. The moment he had obtained a considerable fortune, he repaired to the West End, added the name of Greenwood to his other appellations, and thus commenced, as it were, a new existence in a new sphere.

He possessed the great advantage of exercising a complete control over all his feelings, passions, and inclinations—save with respect to women. In this point of view he was a complete sensualist—a heartless voluptuary. He would spare neither expense nor trouble to gratify his amorous desires, where he formed a predilection; and if in any case he would run a risk of involving himself in the complexities of civil or criminal law, the peril would be encountered in an attempt to satisfy his lustful cravings. There are many men of this stamp in the world,—especially in great cities—and, more especially still, in London.

Mr. Greenwood, having completed the arrangements of his study in the manner described, rang the bell.

His French valet Lafleur made his appearance in answer to the summons. Mr. Greenwood then threw himself negligently into the arm-chair at his writing-table, and proceeded to issue his instructions to his dependant.

"Lafleur, the Count Alteroni will call this morning. When he has been here about ten minutes, bring me in this letter."

He handed his valet a letter, sealed, and addressed to himself.

"At about twelve o'clock Lord Tremordyn will call. Let him remain quietly for a quarter of an hour with me; and then come in and say, '*The Duke of Portsmouth has sent round, sir, to know whether he can positively rely upon your company to dinner this evening.*' Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered Lafleur, without the slightest variation of countenance; for he was too politic and too *finished* a valet to attempt to criticise his master's proceedings by means of even a look.

"So far, so good," resumed Mr. Greenwood. "Sir Rupert Harborough will call this morning: you will tell him I am not at home."

"Yes, sir."

"Lady Cecilia Harborough will call at one precisely: you will conduct her to the drawing-room."

"Yes, sir."

"And all the time she is here I shall not be at home to a soul."

"No, sir."

"At four o'clock I shall go out in the cab: you can then pay a visit to Upper Clapton and ascertain by any indirect means you can light upon, whether Miss Sydney still inhabits the villa, and whether she still pursues the same retired and secluded mode of existence as when you last made inquiries in that quarter."

"Yes, sir."

"And you can ride round by Holloway and find out—also by indirect inquiries, remember—whether Mr. Markham is at home, and any other particulars relative to him which you can glean. I have already told you that I have the deepest interest in being acquainted with all that that young man does—his minutest actions even."

"I will attend to your orders, sir."

"To-night, you will dress yourself in mean attire and repair to a low public-house on Saffron-hill, known by the name of the *Boozing Ken* by the thieves and reprobates of that district. You will inquire for a man who frequents that house, and who is called Tom the Cracksman. No one knows him by any other name. You will tell him who your master is, and that I wish to see him upon very particular business. He must be here to-morrow night at nine o'clock. Give him this five-pound note as an earnest of good intentions."

"Yes, sir."

"And now take these duplicates and that bank-note for five hundred pounds, and just go yourself to V——'s the pawnbroker's in the Strand, and redeem the diamonds mentioned in these tickets. You will have time before any one comes."

"Yes, sir."

"And should Lord Tremordyn happen to be here when you return, hand me the packet, which you will have wrapped up in white paper, saying '*With the Duke's compliments, sir.*'"

"Yes, sir."

Thus ended the morning's instructions.

The valet took the letter (which Mr. Greenwood had written to himself,) the duplicates, and the bank notes; and retired.

In half an hour he returned with a small purple morocco case containing a complete set of diamonds, worth at least twelve hundred guineas.

He again withdrew, and returned in a few minutes;—but this time it was to usher in Count Alteroni.

Mr. Greenwood received the Italian noble with more than usual affability and apparent friendship.

"I am delighted to inform you, my dear count," he said, when they were both seated, "that our enterprise is progressing well. I yesterday received a letter from a certain capitalist to whom I applied relative to the loan of two hundred thousand pounds which I informed you it was necessary to raise to carry out our undertaking, in addition to the capital which you and I have both subscribed; and I have no doubt that I shall succeed in this point. Indeed, he is to send me his decision this very morning."

"Then I hope that at length the Company is definitively formed?" said the count.

"Definitively," answered Mr. Greenwood.

"And the deed by which you guarantee to me the safety of the money I have embarked, let the event be what it may?" said the count.

"That will be ready to-morrow evening. Can you dine with me to-morrow, and terminate that portion of the business after dinner? My solicitor will send the deed hither by one of his clerks at half-past eight o'clock."

"With pleasure," said the count, evidently pleased at this arrangement.

"There has been some delay," said Mr. Greenwood; "but really the fault has not existed with me."

"You will excuse my anxiety in this respect: indeed, I have probably pressed you more than I ought for the completion of that security; but you will remember that I have embarked my all in this enterprise."

"Do not attempt an apology. You have acted as a man of prudence and caution; and you will find that I shall behave as a man of business."

"I am perfectly satisfied," said the count. "I should not have advanced my money unless I had been so perfectly satisfied with your representations; for—unless events turn up in my favour in my own country, I must for ever expect to remain an exile from Castelcicala. And that good fortune will shine upon me from that quarter, I can scarcely expect. My liberal principles have offended the Grand-Duke and the old nobility of that state; and now that the aristocracy has there gained the ascendancy, and is likely to retain it, I can hope for nothing. I would gladly have aided the popular cause, and obtained for the people of Castelcicala a constitution; but the idea of representative principles is odious to those now in power."

"I believe that you were a staunch adherent of the Prince of Castelcicala, who is the nephew of the reigning Grand-Duke and the heir-apparent to the throne?" said Mr. Greenwood.

"You have been rightly informed; but if the Pope and the Kings of Naples and Sardinia support the aristocracy of Castelcicala, that prince will be excluded from his inheritance and a foreigner will be placed upon the grand-ducal throne. In this case, the prince will be an exile until his death—without even a pension to support him; so irritated are the old aristocracy against him."

"I believe that Castelcicala is a fine state?"

"A beautiful country—extensive, well-cultivated, and productive. It contains two millions of inhabitants. The capital, Montoni, is a magnificent city, of a hundred thousand souls. The revenues of the Grand-Duke are two hundred thousand pounds sterling a-year; and yet he is not contented! He does not study his people's happiness."

"And where at the present moment is that gallant prince who has thus risked his accession to the throne, for the welfare of his fellow-countrymen?" inquired Greenwood.

"That remains a secret," answered the count. "His partisans alone know."

"Of course I would not attempt to intrude upon matters so sacred," said Greenwood, "were I not deeply interested in yourself, whom I know to be one of his most staunch adherents."

At that moment the door opened; and Lafleur entered, bearing a letter, which he handed to Mr. Greenwood. He then retired.

"Will you excuse me?" said Greenwood to the count; then, opening the letter, he appeared to read it with attention.

At the expiration of a few moments, he said, "This letter is from my capitalist. He gives me both good and bad news. He will advance the loan; but he cannot command the necessary amount for three months."

"Then there will be three months' more delay?" exclaimed the count in a tone of vexation.

"Three months! and what is that? A mere nothing!" cried Mr. Greenwood. "You can satisfy yourself of my friend's sincerity."

With these words he handed to the count the letter which he had written to himself in a feigned hand, and to which he had affixed a fictitious name and address.

The count read the letter and was satisfied.

He then rose to depart.

"To-morrow evening, at seven o'clock punctually, I shall do myself the pleasure of waiting upon you. In a few days, you remember, I and my family are coming up to town to pass some time with Lord Tremordyn."

"And I shall then be bold and presumptuous enough," said Greenwood, "to endeavour to render myself acceptable to the Signora Isabella."

"By the bye," exclaimed the count, "I forgot to inform you of the villany of that Richard Markham, whom I received into the bosom of my family, and treated as a son, or a brother."

"His villany!" ejaculated Greenwood, in a tone of unfeigned surprise.

"Villany the most atrocious!" cried the count. "He is a man branded with the infamy of a felon's gaol!"

"Impossible!" said Greenwood, this time affecting the astonishment expressed by his countenance.

"It is, alas! too true. The night before last, he invited thieves to break into my dwelling: and to those miscreants had he boasted of his intentions to win the favour of my daughter!"

"Oh! no—no," said Greenwood emphatically; "you must have been misinformed!"

"On the contrary, I have received evidence only too corroborative of what I tell you. But when I come to-morrow evening, I will give you the details."

The count then took his departure.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Greenwood to himself, the moment the door had closed behind the Italian nobleman: "I have succeeded in putting off that bothering count for three good months. Much may be done in the mean time; and if I can secure his daughter—all will be well! I can then pension him off upon a hundred and fifty pounds a year—and retain possession of his capital. But this deed—he demands the deed of guarantee: he presses for that! I must give him the security to show my good-will; and then neutralise that concession on my part, in the manner already resolved upon. How strange was the account he gave me of Richard Markham! That unhappy young man appears to be the victim of the most wonderful combination of suspicious circumstances ever known; for guilty he could not be—oh! no—impossible!"

Mr. Greenwood's meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Lord Tremordyn.

This nobleman was a short, stout, good-tempered man. Being a large landholder, he exercised considerable influence in his county, of which he was lord-lieutenant; and he boasted that he could return six members to parliament in spite of the Reform-bill. His wife was moreover allied to one of the richest and most important families in the hierarchy of the aristocracy; and thus Lord Tremordyn—with no talent, no knowledge, no acquirements to recommend him, but with certain political tenets which he inherited along with the family estate, and which he professed for no other reason than because they were those of his ancestors,—Lord Tremordyn, we say, was a very great man in the House of Lords. He seldom spoke, it is true; but then he *voted*—and dictated to others *how to vote*; and in this existed his power. When he *did* speak, he uttered an awful amount of nonsense; but the reporters were very kind—and so his speeches read well. Indeed, he did not know them again when he perused them in print the morning after their delivery. Moreover, his wife was a blue-stocking, and dabbled a little in politics; and she occasionally furnished her noble husband with a few hints which might have been valuable had he clothed them in language a little intelligible. For the rest, Lord Tremordyn was a most hospitable man, was fond of his bottle, and fancied himself a sporting character because he kept hounds and horses, and generally employed an agent to "make up a book" for him at races, whereby he was most amazingly plundered.

"My dear lord," exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, conducting his noble visitor to a seat; "I am delighted to see your lordship look so well. So you have parted with *Electricity*? I heard of it yesterday at Tattersalls'."

"Yes—and a good price I had for him. But, by the way, my dear Greenwood, I must not forget to thank you for the Hock you sent me. It is superb!"

"I am delighted that your lordship is pleased with it. Have you seen Sir Rupert Harborough lately?"

"My scapegrace son-in-law? I wish I had never seen him at all!" ejaculated his lordship. "He is over head and ears in debt again: and I swear most solemnly that I will do nothing more for him—not to the amount of a penny-piece! Cecilia, too, has quarrelled with her mother; and, even if she had not, Lady Tremordyn is the last woman on earth to advance them a shilling."

"It is a pity—a great pity!" said Mr. Greenwood, apparently musing; then, after a brief pause, he added, "You never can guess, my

dear lord, why I wished to see your lordship so particularly this morning?"

"About the match between *Electricity* and *Galvanism*? The odds are three to four."

"That was not exactly my business," said Greenwood, with a bland smile: "the fact is, the representation of Rottenborough will be vacant in a few weeks. I know positively, that the present member intends to accept the Chiltern Hundreds."

"I have received a similar intimation," observed his lordship.

"At present the matter is a profound secret."

"Yes—a profound secret: known only to the member's friends, and me and my friends, and you and your friends," added the nobleman, seriously meaning what he said without any attempt at irony or satire.

"Of course there will be an election in February, shortly after the Houses meet," continued Greenwood. "I was going to observe to your lordship that I should be most happy to offer myself as a candidate——"

"You, Greenwood! What—are you a politician?"

"Not so profound nor so well versed as your lordship; but I flatter myself that, aided by your lordship's advice——"

"Lady Tremordyn would never consent to it!"

"And by Lady Tremordyn's suggestions——"

"It would never do! She *will* have a man of rank and family; and—excuse me, Greenwood—although you are no doubt rich enough far a lord, and well educated, and clever, and so on—the deuce of it is that we don't know who the devil you are!"

"An excellent family—an excellent family, my dear lord," exclaimed Mr. Greenwood; "and although nothing equal to your own, which I know to be the most ancient in England——"

"Or Scotland, or Ireland, either."

"Or Scotland, or Ireland, or even Europe—still——"

"No—it cannot be done, Greenwood;—it cannot be done," interrupted the nobleman. "I would do any thing to oblige you;—but ——"

At that moment the door opened, and Lafleur entered the study.

"If you please, sir," said the French valet, "the Duke of Portsmouth has sent round to know whether he can positively rely upon your company to dinner this evening?"

"My best compliments to his grace, Lafleur," said Mr. Greenwood, affecting to meditate upon this message for a moment, "and I will do myself the honour of waiting on his grace at the usual hour."

"Very good, sir."

And Lafleur retired.

"Well, after all," resumed Lord Tremordyn, who had not lost a word of this message and the answer, "I think I might undertake to arrange the Rottenborough business for you. You have high acquaintances—and they often do more good than high connexions. So we will consider that matter as settled."

"I am deeply obliged to your lordship," said Greenwood, with the calmness of a man who had never entertained a fear of being ultimately enabled to carry his point: "you will see that I shall imitate in the Lower House your lordship's admirable conduct in the Upper, to the very best of my ability."

"Of course you will always support the measures I support, and oppose those which I may oppose?"

"Oh! that is a matter of course! What would become of society—where should we be, if the Commons did not obey the great landholders who allow them to be returned?"

"Ah! what indeed?" said the nobleman, shaking his head ominously. "But really, Greenwood, I wasn't at all aware that you were half so clever a politician as I see you are."

"Your lordship does me honour. I know how to value your lordship's good opinion," said Greenwood, in a meek and submissive manner: then, after a moment's silence, he added, "By the bye, I understand that our mutual friend Alteroni, and his amiable wife, and beautiful daughter, are going to pass the first few weeks of the new year with your lordship and Lady Tremordyn?"

"Yes: we shall be very gay. The signora must pick up a husband amongst the young nobles or scions of great families whom she will meet this winter in London."

"Do you not know, my lord," said Greenwood, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, "that Count Alteroni detests gaiety? are you not aware that he and the ladies have accepted your kind invitation under the impression that they will enjoy the pleasing society of your lordship and Lady Tremordyn, and a few select friends only?"

"I am glad you have told me that!" exclaimed the nobleman "We will have no gaiety at all."

"The count has honoured me with his utmost confidence, and his sincere friendship," said Greenwood.

"Oh! of course you will be welcome on all occasions: do not wait for invitations—I give you a general one."

"I am more than ever indebted to your lordship."

After a little more conversation in the same strain, the nobleman took his leave, more pleased with Mr. Greenwood than ever.

This gentleman, the moment he was alone, threw himself into his chair, and smiled complacently.

"Gained all my points!" he said, musing. "I shall be a member of parliament—the fair Isabella will stand no chance of captivating some wealthy and titled individual who might woo and win her—and, I have obtained a general invitation to Lord Tremordyn's dwelling! I alone shall therefore have an opportunity of paying court to this Italian beauty."

The French valet entered the room.

"Lady Cecilia Harborough is in the drawing-room, sir."

Mr. Greenwood thrust the morocco case containing the diamonds into the pocket of his dressing-gown; and then proceeded to the apartment where the lady was waiting.

Lady Cecilia Harborough was about two-and-twenty, and very beautiful. Her hair was auburn, her eyes blue, and her features regular. Her figure was good; but she was very slightly made—a perfect sylph in symmetry and model. Nursed amidst fashionable pleasure and aristocratic dissipation, she was without those principles which are the very basis of virtue. If she were true and faithful to her husband, it was only because she had not been strongly tempted to prove otherwise: if she had never indulged in an intrigue, it was simply because one to her taste had never come in her way. Her passions were strong—her disposition decidedly sensual. Thus was it that she had become an easy prey to Sir Rupert Harborough; and when she had discovered that she was in a way to become a mother in consequence of that amour, she only repented of her conduct through dread of shame, and not for the mere fact of having deviated from the path of virtue. Her disgrace was concealed by a patched-up marriage with her seducer, a trip to the Continent, and the death of the child at its birth; and thus there was no scandal in society attached to the name of Lady Cecilia Harborough.

Mr. Greenwood had not made her wait many moments when he entered the drawing-room.

Lady Cecilia rose, and hastening towards him, said, "Oh! Mr. Greenwood, what can you think of me after the imprudent step I have taken in coming alone and unattended?"

"I can only think, Lady Cecilia," said Greenwood, handing her to a seat, and taking a chair near her, "that you have done me an honour, the extent of which I can fully appreciate."

"But why insist upon this visit to you? why could you not have called upon me?" inquired the lady impatiently.

"Your ladyship wishes to consult with me upon financial affairs: and every capitalist *receives* visits, and does not *pay* them, when they refer to business only."

"Thank you for this apology for my conduct. I fancied that I was guilty of a very great imprudence; you have reassured me upon that head;"—and a smile played upon the fair patrician's lips.

"In what manner can I be of service to your ladyship? You perceive that I will save you the trouble of even introducing a disagreeable subject."

"Well, Mr. Greenwood," said Lady Cecilia, with that easy familiarity which is always shown towards those who are confidants in cases of pecuniary embarrassment,—"you are well aware of Sir Rupert's unfortunate situation; and of course his position is also mine. We are literally without the means of paying the common weekly bills of the house, and the servants' wages. I have quarrelled with my mother; and my father will not advance another sixpence."

"Your ladyship is well aware that Sir Rupert Harborough has no security to offer; and if he had, I would scarcely advance money to *him*—since I know that *your ladyship* seldom profits by any funds which he may possess."

"Oh! that is true, Mr. Greenwood!" ejaculated Lady Cecilia, emphatically. "Would you believe it—even my very diamonds are gone? Sir Rupert has made away with them!"

"In plain terms he pawned them."

"He did:—but that is such a horrid avowal to make! When one thinks that it is generally supposed that the poor alone have recourse to such means, and that *we* in the upper class do not even know what is meant by a pawnbroker's—— Oh! how false is that idea! how erroneous is that impression!"

"It is, indeed," said Greenwood. "The jewels of half the high-born ladies in London have been deposited at different times in the hands of the very pawnbroker where yours were."

Lady Cecilia stared at Mr. Greenwood in profound astonishment: then, as a sudden idea seemed to flash across her brain, she added, "But Sir Rupert must have told you of this?"

"He did."

"Do you know," continued the lady, "that I have actually lost the receipts or duplicates—or whatever you call them—which the pawnbroker gave when Harborough sent the diamonds by a trusty servant of ours."

"Those duplicates Sir Rupert Harborough handed over to me," said Greenwood. "I lent him a hundred pounds upon them yesterday morning!"

"Oh! how ungrateful he is—how unworthy of one particle of affection!" exclaimed Lady Cecilia. "He knew how distressed—literally distressed I was for ready money; and he never offered me a guinea!"

"Are you so distressed as that?" inquired Mr. Greenwood, drawing his chair closer to that of his fair visitor.

"Why should I conceal any thing from you, when I come to consult you upon my embarrassments?" said Lady Cecilia, tears starting into her eyes. "I am literally disgraced! I cannot go to court, nor appear at any grand *réunion*, for the want of my jewels; and I am indebted to old Lady Marlborough to the amount of two hundred pounds which she lent me. Yesterday she wrote for the sixth time for the money, and actually observed in her letter that she considered my conduct unlady-like in the extreme. If I do not pay her this day, I shall be ruined—exposed—ashamed to show my face in any society whatever!"

"You would therefore make any sacrifice to relieve yourself from these embarrassments?" said Greenwood interrogatively.

"Oh! any sacrifice! To obtain about eight hundred or a thousand pounds, to redeem my jewels and pay my most pressing debts—Lady Marlborough's, for instance—I would do any thing!"

"You would make any sacrifice? You would do any thing, Lady Cecilia?" repeated Greenwood emphatically. "That is saying a great deal; and an impertinent coxcomb—like me, for instance—might perhaps construe your words literally, and be most presumptuous in his demands."

"My God, Mr. Greenwood—what do you mean?" exclaimed the lady, a slight flush appearing upon her cheeks. "My case is so very desperate—I have no security to offer at present—and yet I require money,—money I must have! Tell me to throw myself into the Thames a year hence, so that I have money to-day, and I would willingly subscribe to the contract. I could even sell myself to the Evil One, like Dr. Faustus—I am so bewildered—so truly wretched!"

"Since you have verged into the regions of romance and mentioned improbabilities, or impossibilities," said Mr. Greenwood, "suppose another strange case;—suppose that a man threw himself at your feet—declared his love—sought yours in return—and proffered you his fortune as a proof of the sincerity of his heart?"

"Such generous and noble-minded lovers are not so easily found now-a-days," returned Lady Cecilia: "but, if I must respond to your question, I am almost inclined to think that I should not prove very cruel to the tender swain who would present himself in so truly romantic a manner."

Greenwood caught hold of Lady Cecilia's hand, fell at her feet, and presented her with the purple morocco case containing the diamonds.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, half inclined to suppose that this proceeding was a mere jest,—"what do you mean, Mr. Greenwood? Surely you were not supposing a case in which you yourself were to be the principal actor?"

"Permit me to lay my heart and fortune at your feet!" said Greenwood. "Nay—you cannot repulse me now: you accepted the alternative; your own words have rendered me thus bold, thus presumptuous!"

"Ah! Mr. Greenwood," exclaimed the fair patrician lady, abandoning her left hand to this bold admirer, and receiving the case of diamonds with the right; "you have spread a snare for me—and I have fallen into the tangled meshes!"

"You can have no compunction—you can entertain no remorse in transferring your affections from a man who neglects you, to one who will study your happiness in every way."

"But—merciful heavens! you would not have me leave my husband altogether? Oh! I could not bear the *éclat* of an elopement: no—never—never!"

"Nor would I counsel such a proceeding," said Greenwood, who was himself astonished at the ease with which he had obtained this victory: "you must sustain appearances in society; but when we *can* meet—and when we are together—oh! then we can be to each other as if we alone existed in the world—as if we could indulge in all the joys and sweets of love without fear and without peril!"

"Yes—I will be yours upon these terms—I will be yours!" murmured Cecilia. "And—remember—you must be faithful towards me; and you must never forget the sacrifice I make and the risk I run in thus responding to your attachment! But—above all things—do not think ill of me—do not despise me! I want something to love—and some one to love me;—and you sympathise with my distress—you feel for my unhappiness—you offer me your consolations: oh! yes—it is you whom I must love—and you will love me!"

"Forever," answered the libertine; and he caught that frail but beauteous lady in his arms.

* * * * *

An hour elapsed: Lady Cecilia had taken her departure, richer in purse but poorer in honour;—and Greenwood had returned to his study.

The flush of triumph was upon his brow; and the smile of satisfaction was upon his lip.

Lafleur entered the room.

"While you were engaged, sir," said the valet, "Sir Rupert Harborough called. He was most anxious to see you. I assured him that you were not at home. He said he would call again in an hour."

"You can then admit him."

The valet bowed and withdrew.

Mr. Greenwood then wrote several letters connected with the various schemes which he had in hand. His occupation was interrupted by the entrance of Sir Rupert Harborough.

With what ease and assurance—with what unblushing confidence did the libertine receive the man whose wife he had drawn into the snares of infamy and dishonour!

"You really must excuse my perseverance in seeing you this day," said Sir Rupert, who perceived by Greenwood's attire that he had not been out of the house that morning; "but I am in such a mess of difficulties and embarrassments, I really know not which way to turn."

"I was particularly engaged when you called just now," said Greenwood; "and you are aware that one's valet always answers '*Not at home*' in such cases."

"Oh! deuce take ceremony," exclaimed Sir Rupert. "See if you can do any thing to assist me. Lord Tremordyn has literally cut me; and Lady Tremordyn is as stingy as the devil. Besides, she and Lady Cecilia have quarrelled; and so there is no hope in that quarter."

"I really cannot assist you any farther—at present," observed Greenwood. "In a short time I shall be enabled to let you into a good thing, as I told you a little while ago: but for the moment—"

"Come, Greenwood," interrupted the baronet; "do not refuse me. I will give you a *post-obit* on the old lord: he is sure to leave me something handsome at his death."

"Yes—but he may settle it upon your wife in such a manner that you will not be able to touch it."

"Suppose that Lady Cecilia will join me in the security?"

"Insufficient still. Lord Tremordyn may bequeath her ladyship merely a life interest, without power to touch the capital."

"Well—what the devil can I do?" exclaimed the baronet, almost distracted. "Point out some means—lay down some plan—do any thing you like—but don't refuse some assistance."

Mr. Greenwood reflected for some minutes; and this time his thoughtful manner was not affected. It struck him that he might effect a certain arrangement in this instance by which he might get the baronet completely in his power, and lay out some money at an enormous interest at the same time.

"You see," said Mr. Greenwood, "you have not an atom of security to offer me."

"None—none," answered Sir Rupert: "I know of none—if you will not have the *post-obit*."

"The only means I can think of for the moment," pursued Mr. Greenwood, "is this:—Get me Lord Tremordyn's acceptance to a bill of fifteen hundred pounds at three months, and I will lend you a thousand upon it without an instant's delay."

"Lord Tremordyn's acceptance! Are you mad. Greenwood?"

"No—perfectly sane and serious. Of course I shall not call upon him to ask *if it be his acceptance*—neither shall I put the bill into circulation. It will be in my desk until it is due; and then—if you cannot pay it—"

"What then?" said the baronet, in a subdued tone, as if he breathed with difficulty.

"Why—you must get it renewed, that's all!" replied Mr. Greenwood.

"I understand you—I understand you," exclaimed Sir Rupert Harborough: "it shall be done! When can I see you again?"

"I shall not stir out for another hour."

"Then I shall return this afternoon."

And the baronet departed to forge the name of Lord Tremordyn to a bill of exchange for fifteen hundred pounds.

"I shall hold him in iron chains," said Greenwood to himself, when he was again alone. "This bill will hang constantly over his head. Should he detect my intrigue with his wife, he will not dare open his mouth; and when I am tired of that amour, and care no more for the beautiful Cecilia, I can obtain payment of the entire amount, with interest, from Lord Tremordyn himself; for his lordship will never allow his son-in-law to be ruined and lost for fifteen or sixteen hundred pounds."

Again the study door opened; and again did Lafleur make his appearance.

"A person, sir, who declines to give his name," said the valet, "solicits an interview for a few minutes."

"What sort of a looking person is he?"

"Very pale and sallow; about the middle height; genteel in appearance; respectably clad; and I should say about forty years of age."

"I do not recollect such a person. Show him up."

Lafleur withdrew, and presently introduced Stephens.

For a few moments Greenwood surveyed him in a manner as if he were trying to recollect to whom that pale and altered countenance belonged; for although Stephens had made considerable improvement in his attire, thanks to the contents of Eliza's purse, he still retained upon his features the traces of great suffering, mental and bodily.

"You do not know me?" he said, with a sickly smile.

"Stephens! is it possible?" exclaimed Greenwood, in an accent of the most profound surprise.

"Yes—it is I! No wonder that you did not immediately recognise me: were I not fearfully altered I should not dare thus to venture abroad by daylight."

"Ah! I understand. You have escaped?"

"I have returned from transportation. That is the exact truth. Had it not been for an angel in human shape, I should have died last night of starvation. That generous being who relieved me was Eliza Sydney."

"Eliza Sydney!" cried Greenwood. "She received you with kindness?"

"She gave me food, and money to obtain clothes and lodging. She moreover promised to supply me with the means to reach America. I am to return to her this evening, and receive a certain sum for that purpose."

"And she told you that I was residing here?" said Greenwood inquiringly.

"Yes. I thought that you might be enabled to assist me in my object of commencing the world anew in another quarter of the globe. I shall arrive there with but little money and no friends;—perhaps you can procure me letters of introduction to merchants in New York."

"I think I can assist you," said Greenwood, musing upon a scheme which he was revolving in his mind, and which was as yet only a few minutes old: "yes—I think I can. But, would it not be better for you to take out a few hundred pounds in your pocket? How

can you begin any business in the States without capital?"

"Show me the way to procure those few hundreds," said Stephens, "and I would hold myself ever your debtor."

"And perhaps you would not be very particular as to the way in which you obtained such a sum?" demanded Greenwood, surveying the returned convict in a peculiar manner.

"My condition is too desperate to allow me to stick at trifles," answered Stephens, not shrinking from a glance which seemed to penetrate into his very soul.

"We understand each other," said Greenwood. "I have money—and you want money: you are a returned transport, and in my power. I can serve and save you; or I can ruin and crush you for ever."

"You speak candidly, at all events," observed Stephens, somewhat bitterly. "Try promises first; and should they fail, essay threats."

"I merely wished you to comprehend your true position with regard to me," said Greenwood, coolly.

"And now I understand it but too well. You require of me some service of a certain nature—no matter what: in a word, I agree to the bargain."

"The business regards Eliza Sydney," proceeded Greenwood.

"Eliza Sydney!" exclaimed Stephens, in dismay.

"Yes; I love her—and she detests me. I must therefore gratify two passions at the same moment—vengeance and desire."

"Impossible!" cried Stephens. "You can never accomplish your schemes through my agency!"

"Very good:" and Mr. Greenwood moved towards the bell.

"What would you do?" demanded Stephens, in alarm.

"Summon my servants to hand a returned convict over to justice," answered Greenwood, coolly.

"Villain! you could not do it!"

"I *will* do it:" and Greenwood placed his hand upon the bell-rope.

"Oh! no—no—that must not be!" exclaimed Stephens. "Speak—I will do your bidding."

Mr. Greenwood returned to his seat.

"I must possess Eliza Sydney—and you must be the instrument," he said in his usual calm and measured tone. "You are to return to her this evening?"

"I am. But I implore you—"

"Silence! This evening I am engaged—and to-morrow evening also. The day after to-morrow I shall be at liberty. You will invent some excuse which will enable you to postpone your departure; and you will contrive to pass the evening after to-morrow with Eliza Sydney. Can you do this?"

"I can, no doubt: but, again, I beg—"

"No more of this nonsense! You will adopt some means to get her faithful servant Louisa out of the way; and you will open the front-door of the villa to me at midnight on the evening appointed."

"You never can effect your purpose!" cried Stephens emphatically. "Were you to introduce yourself to her chamber, she would sooner die herself, or slay you, than submit to your purpose!"

"*She must sleep—sleep profoundly!*" said Greenwood, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and regarding his companion in a significant manner.

"My God! what an atrocity!" ejaculated Stephens, with horror depicted upon his countenance.

"Perhaps you prefer a return to the horrors of transportation,—the miseries of Norfolk Island?" said Greenwood satirically.

"No—death, sooner!" cried Stephens, striking the palm of his right hand against his forehead.

Greenwood approached him, and whispered for some time in his ear. Stephens listened in silence; and when the libertine had done, he signified a reluctant assent by means of a slight nod.

"You understand how you are to act?" said Greenwood aloud.

"Perfectly," answered Stephens.

He then took his departure.

Scarcely had he left the house when Sir Rupert Harborough returned.

The baronet was deadly pale, and trembled violently. Greenwood affected not to observe his emotions, but received the bill of exchange which the baronet handed to him, with as much coolness he were concluding a perfectly legitimate transaction.

Having read the document, he handed a pen to the baronet to endorse it.

Sir Rupert affixed his name at the back of the forged instrument with a species of desperate resolution.

Mr. Greenwood consigned the bill to his desk, and then wrote a cheque for a thousand pounds, which he handed to the baronet.

Thus terminated this transaction.

When the baronet had taken his departure, Mr. Greenwood summoned Lafleur, and said, "You need not institute any inquiries relative to Miss Sydney, at Upper Clapton. My orders relative to Mr. Markham remain unchanged; and mind that the fellow known as Tom the Cracksman is here to-morrow evening at nine o'clock."

Mr. Greenwood having thus concluded his morning's business, partook of an elegant luncheon, and then proceeded to dress for his afternoon's ride in the Park.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE DOCUMENT.

THE more civilization progresses, and the more refined becomes the human intellect, so does human iniquity increase.

It is true that heinous and appalling crimes are less frequent;—but every kind of social, domestic, political, and commercial intrigue grows more into vogue: human ingenuity is more continually on the rack to discover the means of defrauding a neighbour or cheating the world;—the sacred name of religion is called in to aid and further the nefarious devices of the schemer;—hypocrisy is the cloak which conceals modern acts of turpitude, as dark nights were trusted to for the concealment of the bloody deeds of old: mere brute force is now less frequently resorted to; but the refinements of education or the exercise of duplicity are the engines chiefly used for purposes of plunder. The steel engraver's art, and the skill of the caligrapher, are mighty implements of modern misdeed:—years and years are expended in calculating the chances of cards and dice;—education, manners, and good looks are essential to the formation of the adventurers of the present day;—the Bankruptcy Court itself is a frequent avenue to the temple of fortune;—and, in order to suit this new and refined system of things, the degrees of vices themselves are qualified by different names, so that he who gambles at a gaming-table is a scamp, and he who propagates a lie upon the Exchange and gambles accordingly, and with success, is a respectable financier. Chicanery, upon a small scale, and in a miserable dark office, is a degradation;—but the delicate and elaborate chicanery of politics, by which a statesman is enabled to outwit parties, or deceive whole nations, is a masterpiece of human talent! To utter a falsehood in private life, to suit a private end, is to cut one's-self off from all honourable society:—but to lie day and night in a public journal—to lie habitually and boldly in print—to lie in a manner the most shameless and barefaced in the editorial columns of a newspaper, is not only admissible, but conventional, and a proof of skill, tact, and talent.

Thus is modern society constituted:—let him deny the truth of the picture who can!

London is filled with Mr. Greenwoods: they are to be found in numbers at the West End. Do not for one moment believe, reader, that our portrait of this character is exaggerated.

In pursuing the thread of a narrative like this, there will naturally be found much to alarm, to astonish, and to shock: but however appalling the picture, it teaches lessons which none can regret to learn. The chart that would describe the course to virtue must point out and lay bare the shoals, the quicksands, and the rocks of vice which render the passage perilous and full of terrors.

With these few remarks, we pursue our history. At seven o'clock in the evening of the day following the one on which we have seen Mr. Greenwood conducting his multifarious schemes and transactions with the precision of a minister of state, Count Alteroni arrived at that gentleman's house in Spring Gardens. He was shown into the elegantly furnished drawing-room, where Mr. Greenwood received him. The count was, however, the only one of all the financier's visitors who did not seem dazzled by the proofs of wealth and luxury that prevailed around. The Italian nobleman remarked these indications of great riches, and considered them the guarantees of Mr. Greenwood's prosperous position in the world: but, apart from this view of the splendour and sumptuousness of the mansion, he neither appeared astonished nor struck with admiration. The truth was, that Mr. Greenwood's abode, with all its magnificent decorations and ornaments, its costly furniture, and its brilliant display of plate, was a mere hovel compared to the count's own palace at Montoni, the capital city of Castelcicala.

Mr. Greenwood and the count had not exchanged many words, ere dinner was announced. The banquet, although only provided for the founder of the feast and his one guest, was of a most magnificent description, every luxury which London could produce appearing upon the table.

At half-past eight o'clock, the clerk of Mr. Greenwood's solicitor arrived, and was introduced into the dining-room. He had brought with him a deed by which Greenwood bound himself to be answerable to Count Alteroni for the sum of fifteen thousand pounds, which the latter had placed in the hands of the former for the purpose of speculation in a certain Steam-packet Company, Greenwood recognising his responsibility towards the count to the above extent whether the company should succeed or not, it having been originally agreed that he (Greenwood) should incur all risks, as he had undertaken the sole direction of the enterprise. This deed was signed by George M. Greenwood, witnessed by the attorney's clerk, and handed to Count Alteroni.

The clerk then withdrew.

Mr. Greenwood ordered a bottle of the very best Burgundy to be opened, and drank a bumper to the health of the Signora Isabella.

Scarcely was this toast disposed of, when Lafleur entered the room, and said, "A courier with despatches from your correspondents in Paris, sir, has just arrived, and requests to see you instantly. I have shown him into the study."

"Very good," exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, suddenly assuming a business air. "Will you excuse me, count, for a few minutes?"

"I shall take my leave, since you are likely to be much occupied," said the nobleman.

"On the contrary—pray remain—I insist upon it! I shall not be long with this messenger," cried Mr. Greenwood: "and we must empty another bottle before I allow you to take your departure."

The count suffered himself to be over-ruled; and Mr. Greenwood repaired to his study, well-knowing that, instead of a courier from Paris, he should there find Tom the Cracksman.

Nor was he mistaken. That individual was sitting very comfortably in an arm-chair near the fire, gazing around him, and wondering, amongst other things, where the master of the house kept his strong-box.

"You are known, I believe," said Greenwood, carefully closing the door, "as the Cracksman?"

"That's my title, sir—for want of a better," answered the villain.

"You are, perhaps, astonished that I have sent for you here," continued Greenwood: "but I wish a certain service performed this very night, and for which I will pay you liberally."

"What's the natur' of the sarvice?" demanded the Cracksman, darting a keen and penetrating glance at Greenwood.

"A highway robbery," coolly answered this individual.

"Well, that's plain enow," said the Cracksman. "But first tell me how you come to know of me, and where I was to be seen: because how can I tell but what this is all a plant of yours to get me into trouble?"

"I will answer you candidly and fairly. A few years ago, when I first entered on a London life, I determined to make myself acquainted with all the ways of the metropolis, high or low, virtuous or vicious. I disguised myself on several occasions, in very mean clothes, and visited all the flash houses and patter-cribs—amongst others, the boozing-ken on Great Saffron-hill. There you were pointed out to me; and your skill, your audacity, and your extraordinary luck in eluding the police, were vaunted by the landlord of that place in no measured terms."

"Well—this is singular:—blow me if it ain't!" cried the Cracksman. "Another person found me out jist in the same way this wery morning, only, and he wants a little private job done for him. But that's for to-morrow night. Howsomever, I never blab to one, of what I have done or am going to do for another. You to-night—him to-morrow night! Arter all, the landlord's a fool to talk so free: how did he know you wasn't a trap in disguise?"

"Because I told him that my object was merely to see life in all its shapes: and I was then so very young I could scarcely have been considered dangerous. However, I have occasionally indulged in such rambles, even very lately; and only a few weeks ago I looked in at the boozing-ken dressed as a poor countryman. There I saw you again; and I overheard you say to a friend of yours whom you called the Buffer, that you were generally there every evening to see what was going on."

"All right!" cried the Cracksman. "Now what's the robbery, and what's the reward?"

"Are you man enough to do it alone?"

"I'm man enow to try it on; but if so be the chap is stronger than me——"

"He is a tall, powerful person, and by no means likely to surrender without a desperate resistance."

"Well, all that can be arranged," said the Cracksman, coolly. "Not knowing what you wanted with me, I brought two of my pals along with me, and they're out in the street, or in the alley leading into the park. If there'd been anythink wrong on your part, they would either have rescued me, or marked you and your house for future punishment."

"I am glad that you have your companions so near. Of course they will assist you?"

"In anythink. The Resurrection Man and the Buffer will stick to me like bricks."

"Very good. I will now explain to you what I want done. Between eleven and twelve o'clock a gentleman will leave London for Richmond. He will be in his own cabriolet, with a tiger, only twelve years old, behind. The cab is light blue—the wheels streaked with white. This is peculiar, and cannot be mistaken. The horse is a tall bay, with silver-mounted harness. This gentleman must be stopped; and every thing his pockets contain—every thing, mind—must be brought to me. Whatever money there may be about him shall be yours; and I will add fifty guineas to the amount:—but all that you find about his person, save the money, must be handed over to me."

"I understand," said the Cracksman. "Does he carry pistols?"

"I should imagine not."

"Never mind: the Resurrection Man has got couple of barkers. But supposing he shouldn't come at all—what then?"

"You shall have twenty guineas for your loss of time. Here are ten as an earnest."

"That's business," said the Cracksman. "Any more instructions?"

"No. I need scarcely say that no unnecessary violence is to be used?"

"Leave all that to me. You will sit up and wait for me?"

"Yes. Give a low single knock at the door, and the same servant who sought you out last night, and let you in just now, will admit you again."

The Cracksman gave a significant nod and took his departure.

Mr. Greenwood returned to the dining-room, where he had left the count.

"My news from Paris is of the most satisfactory nature," he observed. "My correspondents in that city, moreover, promise me their best support in our new enterprise."

"I am delighted to hear that your letters have pleased you," said the count.

The two gentlemen then broached another bottle of Burgundy; and Mr. Greenwood conversed with even more sprightliness than usual. Indeed, the count fancied that he had never found his host so agreeable and entertaining.

At eleven o'clock precisely, the count's cabriolet was announced; and the nobleman took his departure, with the conviction, that, under his present circumstances, Mr. Greenwood was the most eligible suitor for the hand of Isabella that was likely to present himself.

As soon as the count had taken his departure, Mr. Greenwood rang for his slippers and dressing-gown, drew close to the cheerful fire that burnt in the grate, and ordered Lafleur to make him a tumbler of the best pine-apple rum-punch. This exhilarating beverage and a fragrant Havannah cigar enabled Mr. Greenwood to pass the time away in a most comfortable and soul-soothing manner.

And it was thus that he mused as he watched the pale blue transparent smoke of his cigar wreathing upwards to the ceiling:—

"I began the world without a shilling, and at an age when I had no experience in the devious ways of society;—and what am I now? The possessor of sixty thousand pounds! A few years ago I slept in coffee-houses, paying eight-pence a night for my bed: I

breakfasted for three-pence halfpenny; dined for ten-pence; and supped for two-pence. Now the luxuries of the four quarters of the world tempt my palate at every meal. At the outset of my career, my transactions were petty rogueries: now I play my false cards to produce me thousands at a stake. I once purchased my coat for twelve shillings in Holywell-street; there is not now a tailor at the west-end who will not give credit to George Greenwood. My wealth purchases me every kind of pleasure. I can afford to bestow a thousand guineas upon the woman, who, daughter of a peer, and wife of a baronet, throws herself into my arms. One single scheme produces me ten times that amount. And Isabella—beauteous Isabella shall be my wife. I shall receive no dowry with her, it is true—because I have obtained all her father's fortune in advance;—but I shall be proud to introduce a lovely wife—the daughter of a count, and descended from a long line of ancestry, in that fashionable sphere to which I must henceforth belong. I shall be a member of parliament: Lord Tremordyn can easily obtain for me a baronetcy in due time;—and then, the peerage is not a height *too* difficult to aspire to! Oh! if with a coronet upon my brow, and Isabella by my side, I can drive in my chariot to——"

Lafleur entered the room at this moment, and handed a letter to his master. Greenwood opened it, and read as follows:—

"I have done your bidding in every particular up to the present moment. Louisa set off this afternoon for Birmingham, having received a letter stating that her only sister is at the point of death in that town. You will of course understand by whom that letter was written. I have, moreover, invented an excuse, relative to the date of the departure of the New York packets from Liverpool, by which means I am enabled to remain in London without exciting the suspicions of Eliza. I shall pass to-morrow evening with her. You may rely upon being admitted at midnight."

Greenwood full well understood the meaning of this note without a signature; and its contents tended to augment that happiness which the success of his schemes infused into his breast.

Hour after hour passed away;—at length midnight sounded; and all the servants, save Lafleur, were dismissed to their sleeping apartments.

The cigars, the rum-punch, and the pleasurable reflections into which the financier plunged, made the time elapse rapidly. One o'clock struck; and he had not found a single moment tedious. He was not anxious, nor a prey to suspense, as other men would have been; he felt certain that his wishes would be accomplished, and he was therefore as composed as if he had already been assured of their success.

The clock struck two; and a low knock was heard at the front door. Lafleur answered the summons; and in a few moments introduced the Cracksman to the room where his master was sitting.

"All right, sir," said that worthy, the moment Lafleur had withdrawn.

"And no violence, I hope?" cried Greenwood.

"Not a bit," returned the Cracksman. "We was as gentle as lambs. We on'y pitched the small boy into a dry ditch that was by the side of the road; and as for the gentleman, I just tapped him over the head with the butt of a pistol to keep him quiet; but I did it myself to make sure that it wasn't done too hard."

"You surely have not murdered him?" said Greenwood, his whole countenance suddenly convulsed with horror.

"Don't be afeard; he was on'y stunned—you may take my word for that," returned the Cracksman, coolly. "But here's all the papers we found in his pocket; and as for his purse—it had but a few pounds in it."

Mr. Greenwood received the papers from the hands of the Cracksman, and observed with a glance that amongst them was the document which he had given a few hours previously to guarantee the safety of the fifteen thousand pounds placed in his hands by Count Alteroni.

"You are sure," he said, with some uneasiness depicted upon his countenance, "that there is no danger to be apprehended from the blow——"

"Danger be d——d!" cried the Cracksman; "I know from experience exactly what kind o' blow will stun, or break a limb, or kill outright. I'll forfeit my reputation if there's any harm in that there whack which I gave to-night."

"We must hope that you are right in your conjecture," said Greenwood;—then, taking his purse from his pocket, he counted down forty-two sovereigns upon the table, adding, "That will make up the fifty guineas promised."

The Cracksman consigned the money to his fob, and then took leave of his employer, hoping "*that he should have his custom in future*."

The moment he was gone, Greenwood thrust the document, which he had thus got back by a crime of an infamous nature, into the fire. When it was completely consumed, he proceeded to examine the other papers. These consisted chiefly of letters written in cypher, addressed to Count Alteroni, and bearing the post-mark of Montoni, Castelcicala: the rest were notes and memoranda of no consequence whatever.

Mr. Greenwood, being unable to unriddle the letters written in cypher, and considering that they were upon political subjects with which he had little or no interest, consigned the entire packet of papers to the flames.

He then retired to rest, and slept as soundly as if his entire day had been passed in virtuous deeds.

At about ten o'clock in the morning he received the following letter from Richmond:—

"My Dear Mr. Greenwood,

"As I was on my way home last evening, I was suddenly attacked by three villains in a dark and lonely part of the road. One of the miscreants stunned me with the blow of a pistol, and threw the little jockey into a ditch. Fortunately we are neither of us seriously injured. The robbers plundered me of every thing I had about my person—my purse containing thirty-four sovereigns, and all my papers, amongst which was the security I had received from your hands a few hours before. You will perhaps have another drawn.

"I do not think it is worth while to make any disturbance relative to the matter, as, in consequence of the darkness of the night, I should be totally unable to recognise the miscreants.

"Yours faithfully,
"ALTERONI."

"Thank heavens, there is no danger in that quarter!" exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, when he had perused this letter. "He is not hurt—and he will not adopt any means to detect the culprits. As for having another document drawn up—I can take my time about that, and

he will not dare press me for it as he did for the first. Besides, he will consider my honourable intentions in the matter fully proved by having given the one which he has lost! Thus have I obtained fifteen thousand pounds without much trouble—thus have I thrown dust into the eyes of this count, and still do I retain his confidence. And his lovely daughter—the beautiful Isabella, with her large black eyes, her raven hair, her sweet red lips, and her sylph-like form,—she shall be mine! I shall lead her to the altar—that charming Italian virgin, whose very looks are heaven. Every thing progresses well: success attends all my plans;—and to-night—to-night," he added, in a tone of triumph, "to-night will ensure me the gratification of my desires and my vengeance with regard to that haughty fair one of the villa!"

CHAPTER L.

THE DRUGGED WINE-GLASS.

RETURN we once more to the villa at Upper Clapton.

Eliza Sydney's household consisted only of Louisa and a peasant girl of about fifteen. She no longer kept horses and dogs, as she was compelled by Stephens to do during the time of her disguise, previously to her imprisonment. She therefore required no male retainers, save an old gardener who lived in one of the out-houses.

A fictitious letter had caused the faithful Louisa to set out on a long journey; and thus the principal obstacle to the atrocious scheme of the conspirators against Eliza's peace and honour was removed.

At ten o'clock on the evening fixed for the perpetration of the foul deed, the servant-girl carried the supper-tray to the dining-room where Eliza and Stephens were seated. The domestic spread the table with the materials for the most sociable of all meals, and, having placed two decanters upon the hospitable board, withdrew.

The countenance of Stephens was particularly calm, considering the part he had undertaken to play towards a woman whose loveliness alone was sufficient to disarm the hand of enmity, and obtain the friendship of the most lawless. She had, moreover, already suffered so much through him,—she had extended towards him the hand of forgiveness and succour in his dire need,—and she possessed the most generous, the most noble, and the most confiding of dispositions. Oh! should not all these considerations have moved that man in her favour?

He had received from Eliza the hundred pounds which she had promised him. With that sum he might have found his way to America, and still had a considerable balance in his pocket. But he had determined to add to it the two hundred pounds more which Greenwood had promised him.

Although calm, he was very thoughtful.

"You seem unhappy?" said Eliza, observing the pensive air of her guest. "Surely you cannot regret your approaching departure from a land where your safety is so fearfully compromised?"

"And yet the land of which you speak is the one of my birth; and when once I have left it, I may reckon upon being destined to see it never again."

"Yes—it is hard to bid an eternal adieu to one's native country. And yet," continued Eliza, "there is but little to wed the sensitive mind to England. Since my release I have passed nearly all my time in reading; and I am shocked to perceive, from the information I have gleaned, that England is the only civilized country in the world where death from starvation—literal starvation, is common. Indeed, it is an event of such frequent occurrence, that it actually ceases to create astonishment, and almost fails to excite dismay. There must be something radically wrong in that system of society where all the wealth is in the hands of a few, and all the misery is shared by millions."

"You would then, quit England without much regret?" said Stephens.

"For myself," answered Eliza, "I abhor a country in which poverty and destitution prevail to such a fearful extent, while there is so much to spare in the hands of the favoured few. I sometimes look forth from the window, and survey that mighty city which stretches over plain, hill, and valley, and which is ever extending its mighty arms—as if in time it would embrace the entire island:—I gaze upon it at that hour in the morning when the eternal cloud is raised for a little space from its brow; and, as I mark the thousand spires which point up into the cool clear sky, I tremble—I feel oppressed as with a weight, when I reflect upon the hideous misery, the agonising woe, the appalling sorrow that want entails upon the sons and daughters of toil in that vast Babylon."

"And do you not suppose that the same destitution prevails in the other great cities of Europe?"

"Certainly not. Were a person to die of actual starvation in Paris, the entire population would rise up in dismay. With all our immense and cumbersome machinery of Poor Laws, there is more real wretchedness in these islands than in any other country upon the face of the earth, not even excepting the myriads who dwell upon the rivers in China."

"The topic is calculated to distress you, because you enter so deeply and feelingly into it," said Stephens. "Take a glass of wine—it will compose you."

Stephens filled two glasses with Port wine; and almost at the same moment he exclaimed, "What a bad light the lamp gives this evening." Then, in a feigned attempt to raise the wick, he turned the screw the wrong way, and extinguished the light.

"How awkward I am!" he cried; and, while Eliza hastened to re-light the lamp, he poured a few drops from a phial into one of the glasses of wine.

The lamp was lighted once more; and Eliza had resumed her seat.

Stephens handed her the fatal glass.

"May all health and happiness attend you," he said: "and may God reward you for your generosity towards me."

The words did not stick in his throat at he gave them utterance.

"And may you prosper in another clime," exclaimed Eliza in a tone which proved that the wish came from the bottom of her heart.

She then drank a portion of the wine in her glass.

The countenance of Stephens did not change as Eliza imbibed the soporific fluid. He contemplated her beauteous race with as

much calmness as if he had just administered to her a potion calculated to embellish her charms, and add to her health and happiness.

"Either my taste deceives me," said Eliza, placing the half-emptied glass upon the table; "or this wine has some defect which I cannot understand."

"No—it is excellent," returned Stephens.

"I drink so little that I scarcely know the proper taste," observed Eliza. "The pure spring water is my favourite beverage."

"It is considered an unlucky omen to leave unfinished the glass in which you pledge the health of one who is about to traverse the ocean," said Stephens.

"In that case," answered Eliza, with a smile, "I will relieve your superstitious fears;" and she drained her glass.

Half an hour passed in conversation; and Eliza felt an irresistible drowsiness coming over her. She endeavoured to rally against it—but in vain; and at length she would have fallen from her chair fast asleep, had not Stephens rushed forward and caught her.

He then rang the bell for the servant.

"Your mistress is unwell—she has been complaining all the evening; and she has now fallen into a profound sleep. I will assist you to convey her up stairs to her chamber."

Stephens and the servant carried the entranced lady to the boudoir.

Having placed her upon the bed, Stephens left the servant to undress her, and hastily descended to the hall. He opened the front door with caution, and whistled.

Two men emerged from the total darkness without, and glided into the hall. Stephens conducted them into a back parlour, and gave them the key to lock themselves in.

He himself then returned to the dining-room, where he tranquilly awaited the arrival of Mr. Greenwood.

Midnight was proclaimed at length.

A low knock at the front door fell upon Stephens's ear.

He hastened to obey the summons, and admitted Greenwood into the house.

They repaired to the dining-room together.

"Your wishes have been obeyed in all respects," said Stephens. "Eliza is in your power: the servant has retired to her own room. Give me my reward—for I am in a hurry to leave a dwelling to which my presence will have brought so much misery."

And yet this man did not seem appalled nor horror-struck at the infernal nature of the crime for which he thus demanded the recompense.

"You will await me here five minutes," said Greenwood; and he left the room.

At the expiration of that interval he returned, the fire of triumph and lust flashing from his eyes.

"It is all well—you have not deceived me," he observed in a tone of joy and exultation; "I have seen her, buried in a profound sleep—stretched like a beauteous statue in her voluptuous bed! The light of a lamp plays upon her naked bosom; the atmosphere of her chamber is soft, warm, and perfumed. Such charms are worth a kingdom's purchase! She is mine—she is mine: here is your reward!"

Greenwood handed a bank-note to his accomplice—or rather instrument in this atrocious proceeding; and Stephens then took his departure.

But as he passed through the hall, he thrust a letter, addressed to Eliza Sydney, beneath the carpet that covered the stairs.

The moment Greenwood was alone, he paced the dining-room for a few minutes, to feast his imagination with the pleasures of love and triumph which he now beheld within his reach.

"Yes—she is mine," he said: "she is mine—no power on earth can now save her! Oh! how will I triumph over the proud and haughty beauty, when to-morrow she awakes and finds herself in my arms. She will thrust her hand beneath the pillow for her long sharp dagger; it will not be there! She will extend her arm towards the bell-rope; it will be cut! And then she may rave—and weep—and reproach—and pray; I shall smile at her grief—her eyes will be more beautiful when seen through her tears! I shall compel her then to crave to be my mistress—she who refused to be my wife! Oh! what a triumph is within my reach!"

He paused; filled a tumbler half full of wine—and drank the contents at a draught.

"Now for my victory—now for the fruits of my intrigues!" he resumed. "But let me wait one moment longer! let me ask myself whether it be really true that the lovely Eliza Sydney will shortly bless my arms—that she is at this moment in my power. It is—it is; and I shall now no longer delay the enjoyment of that terrestrial paradise!"

With these words, he left the dining-room, and crossed the hall towards the staircase.

He was now about to ascend to the boudoir.

His foot was upon the first step, when he was rudely seized from behind, and instantly gagged with a pocket-handkerchief.

Turning his head partially round, in a vain effort to escape from the powerful grasp in which he found himself, he encountered, by the light of the lamp that hung in the hall, the glance of the Cracksman.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the burglar in a low and subdued tone: "this is a rum go! Working *for* you last night, and *against* you to-night! But, never mind: we must fulfil our agreement, let it be what it will. I can however tell you for your satisfaction that we don't mean to hurt you. So come along quiet; and all will be right."

"What's the meaning of this, Tom?" said the Cracksman's companion, who was no other than the Resurrection Man: "you don't mean to say that you know this fellow?"

"He's the one that we did the job for last night on the Richmond road," answered the Cracksman.

"And he's got plenty of tin," added the Resurrection Man significantly. "We can perhaps make a better bargain with him than what

Stephens has promised us for this night's business."

"Yes—but we can't talk here," returned the Cracksman: "so come along. I've got my plan all cut and dry."

Greenwood conveyed several intimations, by means of signs, that he wished to speak; but the two ruffians hurried him out of the house.

They conducted him across the fields to an empty barn at a distance of about a mile from the villa. During the journey thither they conversed together in a flash language altogether unintelligible to their captive, who was still gagged. A difference of opinion evidently seemed to subsist between the two men, relative to the plan which they should pursue with regard to Greenwood; but they at length appeared to agree upon the point.

With regard to Greenwood himself, he was a prey to a variety of painful feelings,—disappointment in his designs upon Eliza at the moment when he appeared to stand upon the threshhold of success,—bitter malignity against Stephens who had thus duped him,—and alarm at the uncertainty of the fate which might await him at the hands of the villains in whose power he thus strangely found himself.

The night was pitch-dark; but the moment the two ruffians with their captive entered the barn, a lantern in the hands of the Cracksman was suddenly made to throw a bright light forwards.

That light fell upon the countenance of Stephens, who was standing in the middle of the shed.

"All right," said the Cracksman. "We pinioned the bird without trouble; and he ain't a strange one, neither."

"What! do you mean that you know him?" demanded Stephens.

"That's neither here nor there," replied the Cracksman. "We don't tell secrets out of school, 'cos if we did, there'd be no reliance put in us; and we does a great many pretty little jobs now and then for the swell folks. But here is your bird—delivered at this werry spot, accordin' to agreement."

"Well and good," said Stephens. "Tie him hand and foot."

The Cracksman and the Resurrection Man instantly obeyed this command: they threw Greenwood upon a truss of straw, and fastened his hands together, and then his feet, with strong cord.

"Here is your reward," said Stephens, as soon as this was accomplished. "I have now no more need of your services."

He handed them some money as he thus spoke; and, having counted it, the two villains bade him good night and left the barn, which was now enveloped in total darkness.

"Montague Greenwood," said Stephens, as soon as he was alone with his prisoner, "your design upon Eliza Sydney was too atrocious for even a man who has been knocked about in the world, as I have, to permit. You dazzled me with the promise of a reward which my necessities did not permit me to refuse;—and you moreover secured my co-operation by means of menaces. But I was determined to defeat your treacherous designs—to avenge myself for the threats which you uttered against me—and to obtain the recompense you had promised me, at the same time. How well I have succeeded you now know. The whole of yesterday morning did I wander amongst the sinks of iniquity and haunts of crime in Clerkenwell, and the neighbourhood of Saffron Hill; and accident led me into a low public house where I encountered two men who agreed to do my bidding. I tell you all this to convince you that never for a moment was I villain enough—bad though I may be—to pander to infamy of so deep a dye as that which you meditated. I have taken measures to acquaint the noble-hearted woman whose ruin you aimed at, with the entire history of this transaction, so that she may be upon her guard in future. With reference to you, here I shall leave you: in a few hours the labourers of the farm will no doubt discover you, and you will be restored to liberty when Eliza has awakened from her torpor, and I shall be far beyond the danger of pursuit."

Stephens ceased; and taking a long rope from a comer of the barn where he had concealed it, he fastened it to the cord which already confined the hands and feet of Greenwood. He then attached the ends firmly to one of the upright beams of the barn, so as to prevent the captive from crawling away from the place.

This precaution being adopted, Stephens took his departure.

It would be impossible to describe the rage, vexation, and disappointment which filled the breast of Greenwood while Stephens addressed him in the manner described, and then bound him with the cord. Yet during this latter process he lay perfectly quiet—well aware that any attempt at escape on his part would at that moment be totally unavailing.

Five minutes elapsed after Stephens had left the barn, and Greenwood was marvelling within himself how long he should have to remain in that unpleasant position—bound with cords, and gagged in such a way that he could only breathe through his nostrils,—when the sounds of footsteps fell upon his ear, and the light of the Cracksman's lantern again flashed through the barn.

"Well, sir," said the Cracksman, "your *friend* is gone now; and so we can have a word or two together. You see, we couldn't help you afore, 'cos we was obliged to fulfil our agreement with the man which hired us for the evening. Now it is just likely that you may have to remain here for some hours if so be we don't let you loose; so tell us what you'll give us for cutting them cords."

The Cracksman removed the gag from Greenwood's mouth, as he uttered these words.

"I will give you my purse," exclaimed the discomfited financier, "if you will release me this moment. It contains ten or a dozen guineas."

"Thank'ee kindly," said the Cracksman, drily; "we've got that already. We helped ourselves to it as we came across the fields. Don't you see, we always make it a rule to have the plucking of all pigeons which we're hired to snare. You told us we might take all we found on the swell in the sky-blue cab; and that man with the sallow complexion that hired us to do this here business to-night, said, 'I will give you twenty pounds, and you can help yourselves to all you find about the gentleman you're to operate on.'"

"Call upon me to-morrow, and I will give you another twenty pounds to free me from these bonds," said Greenwood.

"That's only the price of a good corpse," said the Resurrection Man. "Make it thirty."

"Yes—make it thirty," added the Cracksman.

"Well—I will give you thirty guineas," cried Greenwood: "only delay not another instant. My limbs are stiffening with the cold and with the confinement of these accursed cords."

"Let it be thirty, then," said the Cracksman. "Here, Tony," he added, turning towards his companion, "hold this here light while I cut the cords. And while I think of it, Mr. Greenwood, I shan't call upon you for the money; but you'll send it to the landlord of the Boozing-ken, where your servant came and found me. Mind it's there by to-morrow night, or else you'll repent it—that's all. Blowed if we haven't had two good nights' work on it, Tony. But, my eye! wasn't I surprised yesterday when the man with the sallow face which hired us for to-night, told me that we was to come to that there villa yonder, and I found out as how it was the same that I'd cracked three year ago along with Bill Bolter and Dick Flairer. Arter all, there's been some curious things about all these matters—partickler our having to tackle to-night the wery gentleman which we served last night."

"Come—don't talk so much, Tom," said the Resurrection Man; "but let's make haste and be off."

"There—it's done," exclaimed the Cracksman, "the cords is all cut: you can get up, sir."

Greenwood arose from the straw upon which he had been lying, and stretched his limbs with as much pleasure as if he had just recovered from a severe cramp.

He then reiterated his promise to the two men relative to the reward to be paid for the service just rendered him; and, having inquired of them which was the nearest way to the West End, he set out upon his long and lonely walk home, depressed, disappointed, and hesitating between plans of vengeance against Stephens and fears of exposure in his own vile and defeated machinations with regard to the beautiful Eliza Sydney.

CHAPTER LI.

DIANA AND ELIZA.

On the morning following the events just narrated, Mrs. Arlington was seated at breakfast in a sweet little parlour of the splendid mansion which the Earl of Warrington had taken and fitted up for her in Dover Street, Piccadilly.

It was about eleven o'clock; and the Enchantress was attired in a delicious *deshabillé*. With her little feet upon an ottoman near the fender, and her fine form reclining in a luxurious large arm-chair, she divided her attention between her chocolate and the columns of the *Morning Herald*. She invariably prolonged the morning's repast as much as possible, simply because it served to wile away the time until the hour for dressing arrived. Then visits received, filled up the interval till three or four o'clock, when the carriage came round to the door. A drive in the park, or shopping (according to the state of the weather) occupied the time until six or seven. Then another toilet in preparation for dinner. In the evening a *tête-à-tête* with the Earl of Warrington, who had, perhaps, arrived in time for dinner,—or a visit to a theatre, the Opera, or a concert,—and to bed at midnight, or frequently much later.

Such was the routine of the Enchantress's existence.

The Earl of Warrington behaved most liberally towards her. On the first day of every month he enclosed her a cheque upon his banker for two hundred guineas. He supplied her cellar with wine, and frequently made her the most splendid presents of jewellery, plate, cachmeres, &c. The furniture for her mansion had cost fifteen hundred pounds; and all the bills were paid in her name. She was not extravagant, as women in her situation usually are; and therefore, so far from incurring debts, she saved money.

We cannot say that the Earl of Warrington positively *loved* her. His first affections in life had experienced such a blight, that they might almost be said to have been interred in the grave of defeated hopes and aspirations. He could therefore never *love* again. But he *liked* Mrs. Arlington; and he had every reason to believe that she was faithful to him. He was charmed with her conversation and her manners: he saw in her a woman who gave herself no airs, but, on the contrary, exerted herself in every way to please him;—she never attempted to excite his jealousy, nor affected gusts of passion merely for the sake of asserting her independence or of proving the hold which she possessed over him;—and in her society he forgot the cares of politics (in which he was profoundly interested) and all those other little annoyances, real or imaginary, to which every one in this world is subject, be his condition never so prosperous!

And Diana *was* faithful to him. She was a woman naturally inclined to virtue:—circumstances had made her what she was. She looked upon the Earl of Warrington as a benefactor; and, although she did not actually *love* him more than he loved her, she *liked* him upon pretty nearly the same principles that he liked her. Her vanity was flattered by having captivated and being able to retain a handsome man, whose wealth and high rank rendered him an object of desire on the part of all ladies situated as was Diana;—she moreover found him an agreeable companion, kind, and indulgent;—and thus their *liaison* continued upon a basis which nothing appeared to threaten, nor even to weaken.

They never spoke of love in reference to their connection. The earl was never upon his knees at the feet of his mistress; nor did he repeat vows of constancy and fidelity every time he saw her. She acted on the same principle towards him. There was a great amount of real friendship and good feeling between those two;—but not an atom of mawkish sentimentality. The earl could *trust* Diana: he consulted her upon many of his plans and proceedings, whether in regard to his political career or the management of his estate; and she invariably tendered him the advice which appeared most consistent with his interests. He therefore placed the fullest confidence in her;—and hence have we seen her carrying out all his generous plans with reference to Eliza Sydney.

But to continue.

Mrs. Arlington was seated at breakfast, as we have before stated, when a servant entered and informed her that Miss Sydney requested a few minutes' conversation with her. Diana immediately ordered Eliza to be admitted.

"Pardon this early and unceremonious visit, my dear friend," said Eliza, affectionately grasping the hand that was stretched out to welcome her.

"I am always at home to you, Eliza," answered the Enchantress. "But how pale you are! Come—sit down here—close by me—and tell me in what way I can be of service to you."

"My dear friend," continued Eliza, "I have a secret to reveal to you—and a deed of infamy to narrate——"

"Oh! you alarm me, Eliza! Has any harm happened to yourself?"

"No, thank heavens! The compunction of one man saved me from disgrace and ruin. But read this—it will explain all."

With these words, Eliza handed to Mrs. Arlington the letter which Stephens had thrust under the stair-carpet at the villa on the preceding evening.

Diana perused the letter with attention; and a flash of indignation animated her fine countenance, as she thus made herself acquainted with the atrocious plot contrived by Greenwood against the honour of Eliza Sydney.

"Such is the villany of George Montague!" cried Diana at the termination of the perusal of that letter.

"Forgive me, dearest friend," said Eliza, taking the hand of Mrs. Arlington and pressing it between her own;—"forgive me if I have kept back one secret of my life from your knowledge. That George Montague—I once loved him!"

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Arlington in surprise.

"Yes, Diana—I once loved that man—before the fatal exposure which led to my imprisonment;—but he behaved like a villain—he endeavoured to take advantage of my affection;—and I smothered the feeling in my bosom!"

"Oh! you did well—you did well thus to triumph over a passion which would have been fatal to your happiness;—for never would your hopes have been fulfilled—with honour to yourself, added Mrs. Arlington, sinking her voice almost to a whisper.

"Alas! you are right! I stood upon the brink of a precipice—I escaped;—but Montague, or Greenwood,—whichever he may choose to call himself,—pursues me with a view of accomplishing my dishonour."

"The crimes of that man are unlimited, and his perseverance is unwearied," said Diana.

"What plan can I adopt," demanded Eliza, "to escape his machinations? What system can I pursue to avoid his persecution? Conceive my affright when upon awaking this morning, I remembered that I had not retired to bed last evening of my own accord—that I could think of nothing that had occurred since supper-time! Then I found that the bell-rope in my sleeping-room was cut, and that a weapon which I have been in the habit of keeping beneath my pillow ever since I first dwelt in the villa, had disappeared! Oh! I was alarmed—I shuddered, although it was broad day-light, and every thing was calm and silent around. At length I summoned the servant—and she entered, bearing a letter which she had discovered a few moments before beneath the stair-carpet. That letter is the one you read ere now;—and it explained all. Tell me—tell me, Diana, how am I to avoid the persecution, and combat the intrigues of this man?"

"Alas! my dear friend," replied Mrs. Arlington, after a few minutes' consideration, "I know of no effectual method save that of leaving London."

"And if I leave London, I will leave England," said Miss Sydney. "But I can do nothing without the consent of him to whom I am under such deep obligations."

"You mean the Earl of Warrington," observed Mrs. Arlington. "I admire the sentiment of gratitude which animates you. The earl will do all he can to forward your views and contribute to your happiness. You shall pass the day with me, Eliza; here at least you are safe;—and I will immediately write a note to the earl, and request him to call upon me without delay."

"His lordship will be perhaps annoyed——"

"Fear nothing, Eliza. I will see the earl in another room. And let not this disinclination to meet you on his part, cause you pain: you well know the motive of his conduct. The memory of your mother——"

"I am well aware he can have no antipathy towards me, on my own account," interrupted Eliza; "else he could not have acted towards me in a way which claims all my gratitude!"

Mrs. Arlington dispatched the note to Lord Warrington, and then hastened to dress to receive him.

In an hour the earl arrived.

He and Mrs. Arlington were then closeted together for a considerable time.

It was four o'clock when the nobleman took his departure, and Diana returned to the room where she had left Eliza Sydney.

"The Earl of Warrington," said the Enchantress, whose countenance was animated with joy, "has listened with attention to the tale of atrocity which I have related to him in respect to George Montague Greenwood. His lordship and myself—for he does me the honour to consult me—have debated upon the best means of ensuring your tranquillity and safety; and we have decided that you had better quit England for a time. The perseverance of that bold bad man, backed by his wealth, may succeed in effecting your ruin—you yourself remaining innocent of guilty participation! The earl has recommended Italy as the country most likely to please you—and the more so because he himself possesses a charming villa in the State of Castelcicala."

"How kind of his lordship!" exclaimed Eliza, tears of gratitude starting into her eyes.

"Some years ago," continued Diana, "the earl set out upon a continental tour, and passed two years at Montoni, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala. So charmed was he with that delightful city, that he purchased a small estate in the suburbs, with the idea of spending the summer from time to time amidst Italian scenery and beneath an Italian sky. The idea has, however, been displaced by others arising from new occupations and fresh interests; and for a long period has the villa at Montoni remained uninhabited, save by an old porter and his wife. The house is situate upon the banks of the river which flows through Montoni, and commands the most delicious views. That villa is to be your residence so long as it may be agreeable; and the earl will make arrangements with his London bankers so that your income may be regularly paid you by their agents at Montoni. His lordship has moreover instructed me to supply you with the necessary funds for your travelling expenses."

"Oh! my dearest friend, how can I ever testify my gratitude——"

"Not a word—not a word!" interrupted Mrs. Arlington, playfully closing Eliza's lips with her hand. "The earl conceives that he is performing a duty, sacred to the memory of his deceased uncle, in thus caring for you, who are the offspring of that uncle's daughter; and, on my part, Eliza—on my part, it is a pleasure to do you a service. But I have not yet finished. The earl has gone straight to Richmond, to call upon a certain Count Alteroni—a noble exile from the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala—with whom it appears the earl was acquainted in Italy. His object is to obtain for you a few letters of introduction to some of the best families of Montoni, so that you may not want society."

"I shall live in so retired a manner," said Eliza, "that this additional act of kindness was scarcely necessary."

"The earl will have his own way; and perhaps those letters may prove useful to you—who can tell?" exclaimed Mrs. Arlington. "But I must observe that I cannot think of parting with you any more until you leave England altogether. In three or four days the necessary preparations for your journey will be completed: meantime you must remain here as my guest. The earl himself recommended this step; that is," added Mrs. Arlington, "if my house be agreeable to you, and my society——"

"Oh! how can you entertain a doubt on that head?" cried Eliza, embracing Diana with the most grateful fervour. "Ah! it is but a few hours since I said how happy I should be to call you by the endearing name of *Sister*!"

"And would you not blush, Eliza, to call me your sister?" said Mrs. Arlington, in a tone deeply affected.

"Blush to call you my sister!" exclaimed Miss Sydney, as if she repelled the idea with indignation: "Oh! no—never, never! You

are the most noble-hearted of women, and as such, I love—I revere you!"

"We will then be sisters in heart, although not in blood," said Diana, warmly returning her friend's embrace; "and perhaps our affection towards each other will be more sincere than that existing between many who are really the offspring of the same parents."

Mrs. Arlington gave directions to her servants that she was not "at home" to a soul, save the Earl of Warrington; and the ride in the park—the shopping—the theatre in the evening—all were sacrificed by Diana to the pleasure of Eliza's society.

Miss Sydney dispatched a note to the villa at Upper Clapton, announcing her intention of staying a few days with Mrs. Arlington. In the evening, Louisa, who had just returned from the journey on which the fictitious letter written by Stephens had sent her, made her appearance in Dover Street, with clothes, &c. for her mistress, and she then received instructions relative to the intended departure for the Continent.

CHAPTER LII.

THE BED OF SICKNESS.

RETURN we to the dwelling of Richard Markham on the same day that Eliza Sydney sought her friend Mrs. Arlington, as related in the preceding chapter.

Richard awoke as from a long and painful dream.

He opened his eyes, and gazed vacantly around him. He was in his own bed, and Whittingham was seated by his side.

"The Lord be praised!" ejaculated the faithful old domestic;—and conceiving it necessary to quote Scripture upon the occasion of this happy recovery, he uttered, in a loud and solemn voice, the first sentence which presented itself to his memory,—"My tongue is the pen of a ready writer!"

"How long have I been ill, Whittingham?" demanded our hero, in a faint tone.

"Four blessed days have you been devoided of your sensations, Master Richard," was the reply; "and most disastrous was my fears that you would never be evanescent no more. I have sustained my vigils by day and my diaries by night at your bed-side, Master Richard; and I may say, without mitigating against truth, that I haven't had my garments off my back since you was first brought home."

"Indeed, Whittingham, I am deeply indebted to you, my good friend," said Richard, pressing the faithful old domestic's hand. "But have I really been so very ill?"

"Ill!" exclaimed Whittingham; "for these four days you have never opened your eyes, save in delirium, until this moment. But you have been a ravaging in your dreams—and sobbing—and moaning so! I suppose, Master Richard, you haven't the most remotest idea of how you come home again?"

"Not in the least, Whittingham. All I recollect was, running along the Richmond Road, in the middle of the night—with a whirlwind in my brain—"

"And you must have fallen down from sheer fatigue," interrupted the butler; "for two drovers picked you up, and took you to a cottage close by. The people at the cottage searched your pockets and found your card, so they sent off a messenger to your own house, and I went in a po-shay, and fetched you home."

"And I have been ill four whole days!" cried Markham.

"Yes, but you don't know yet what has happened during that period," said the butler, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Tell me all the news, Whittingham: let me know what has passed during my illness."

"I'll repeat to you allegorically all that's incurred," resumed Whittingham, preparing to enumerate the various incidents upon his fingers. "In the first place—let me see—yes, it *was* the first incurrence of any consequence—the old sow littered. That's annygoat the first. Then come a terrible buffoon—a tifoon, I mean—and down tumbled the eastern stack of chimbleys. That's annygoat the second. Third, the young water-cress gal was confined with a unlegitimated child; and so I told her mother never to let her call here again, as we didn't encourage immoral karikters. That's annygoat the third. Next, there's poor Ben Halliday, who wouldn't pay the pavement rate at Holloway, 'cause he hasn't got any pavement before his house, sold up, stick and stock; and so I gave him a couple of guineas. Annygoat the fourth. And last of all, a gentleman's livery servant—not that villain Yorkminster's, or whatever his name was—come with a horse and shay and left your pokmanty, without saying a word. That's anny—"

"My portmanteau!" exclaimed Richard, whose countenance was now suddenly animated with a ray of hope: "and have you unpacked it?"

"Not yet: I haven't had no time."

"Bring it to the bed-side, place it upon a couple of chairs, and open it at once," said Markham hastily. "Bestir yourself, good Whittingham: I am anxious to see if there be any note—any letter—any—"

While Richard uttered these words with a considerable degree of impatience, the butler dragged the portmanteau from beneath the bed, where he had deposited it, and placed it close to his master's right hand. It was speedily opened, unpacked, and examined throughout; the clothes and linen were unfolded; and Richard's eyes followed the investigation with the most painful curiosity. But there was no letter—no note from any inmate of the count's abode.

A sudden reminiscence entered his mind. Was the document signed at the *Dark House* amongst his papers? He recollected having handed it to the count; but he could not call to mind what had afterwards become of it. A moment's examination convinced him that it had not been returned to him. At first he was grievously annoyed by this circumstance;—in another minute he was pleased, for it struck him that, after all, its contents might have been perused by the count and his family when the excitement of that fatal night had worn off. But how to wipe away the dread suspicion raised by the Resurrection Man, relative to the burglary—oh! that was the most painful, and yet the most necessary task of all!

Markham sank back upon his pillow, and was lost in thought, when a low knock was heard at the door of his chamber. Whittingham answered it, and introduced Mr. Monroe.

The old man was the very picture of care and wretchedness:—the mark of famine was, moreover, upon his sunken cheeks. His eyes were dead and lustreless;—his neck, his wrists, and his hands seemed nothing but skin and bone. In spite of the cleanliness of his person, the thread-bare shabbiness of his clothes could not escape the eye of even the most superficial observer.

Markham had not seen him for some months; and now, forgetting his own malady and his own cares, he felt shocked at the dreadful alteration wrought upon the old man's person during that interval. On his part, Mr. Monroe was not less surprised to find Richard upon a bed of sickness.

"My dear sir," said Markham, "you are ill—you are suffering—and you do not come to me to—"

"What! you have penetrated my secret, Richard!" exclaimed the old man bitterly. "Well—I will conceal the truth no longer: yes—myself and my poor daughter—we are dying by inches!"

"My God! and you were too proud to come to me! Oh! how sincerely—how eagerly would I have offered you the half of all I possess—"

"How could I come to you, Richard," interrupted the old man, bursting into tears, "when I had already ruined you?"

"No—not you—not you," said Markham: "you were the victim of a scoundrel; and, in acting for the best, you lost all!"

"God knows how truly you speak!" cried the old man fervently. "But tell me—what ails you? and how long have you been upon a bed of sickness?"

"A day or two;—it is nothing! Never mind me—I am now well—at all events, much better:—let us talk of yourself and your own affairs."

"My fate, Richard, is a melancholy one—my destiny is sad, indeed! From the pinnacle of wealth and prosperity I have been dashed down to the lowest abyss of destitution and misery! But it is not for myself that I complain—it is not for myself that I suffer! I am by this time inured to every kind of disappointment and privation:—but my daughter—my poor Ellen! Oh! my God—it was for her sake that I came to you this morning to implore the wherewith to purchase a loaf of bread!"

"Merciful heavens, Mr. Monroe! are you reduced to this?" cried Richard, horror-struck at the piteous tale thus conveyed to him in a few words.

"It is true:—we are starving!" answered the old man, sinking into a chair, and sobbing bitterly.

Whittingham walked towards the window, and wiped his eyes more than once.

"Ah! I am glad you have come to me at last," said Markham. "I will assist you to the utmost of my power—I will never let you want again! Oh! that villain Montague! how many hearts has he already broken—how many more will he yet break!"

"He is the cause of all this deep—deep misery," observed Monroe. "But not alone by me is his name mentioned with loathing and horror: others have doubtless been, and will yet be, his victims. I have learnt—by the merest accident—that he has changed his name, and is now pursuing at the West End, the same course he so successfully practised in the City."

"Changed his name!" ejaculated Markham. "And what does he call himself now?"

"Greenwood," answered Mr. Monroe.

"Greenwood! George Montague and Greenwood one and the same person!" cried Richard, suddenly recalling to mind the name of the individual to whom the count had entrusted his capital. "Ah! you talk of new victims—I know one, whose ruin is perhaps by this time consummated. Quick—quick, Whittingham, give me writing materials: I will send a warning—although I am afraid it is already too late!"

While Whittingham was arranging his master's portfolio upon the coverlid of the bed, Markham reflected upon the best means of communicating to Count Alteroni the character of the man to whom he had confided his fortune, and whom he thought of favourably as a suitor for his daughter's hand. Anonymous letters were detestable to the honourable and open disposition of Richard, and he hesitated at the idea of sending a note direct from himself, fearing that it might be thrown into the fire the moment its signature should be perceived, and thus fail in its proposed aim. To call upon the count was impossible: to send Mr. Monroe was disagreeable. To communicate the important intelligence was imperiously necessary. But how was it to be conveyed? An idea struck across his brain in this perplexity:—he would write to the countess, and trust to the natural curiosity of the female disposition to ensure the perusal of his letter. He accordingly penned the ensuing epistle:—

"MADAM,

"Although calumniated in the presence of Count Alteroni, without being permitted to Justify myself; and although ruined in your estimation, without the freedom of explanation,—believe me, I have still the welfare of your family most sincerely at heart. As a proof of this assertion, allow me to inform you that the Mr. Greenwood, to whom Count Alteroni has entrusted his capital, is an adventurer and a villain. I on several occasions casually mentioned to you that I was plundered of all my property, before I became of an age entitled to enjoy it. My guardian Mr. Monroe, employed a certain Mr. Allen to speculate for him; and this Mr. Allen was mercilessly robbed of all he possessed, and all he could raise, and all his friends who backed him could provide him with, by a miscreant of the name of Montague. These particulars, which I never mentioned to you before, I now deem it requisite to acquaint you with. Madam, that same George Montague is your Mr. Greenwood!

"I remain, Madam, your obedient servant,
"RICHARD MARKHAM."

This letter was dispatched that same evening to Richmond.

CHAPTER LIII.

ACCUSATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS.

It was seven o'clock in the evening.

Count Alteroni was sipping his claret; the countess was reading a new German novel; and the Signora Isabella was sitting in a pensive and melancholy mood, apparently occupied with some embroidery or other fancy-work, but in reality bent only upon her own painful reflections.

The air of this charming girl was languishing and sorrowful; and from time to time a tear started into her large black eye. That crystal drop upon the jet fringe of her eye-lid, seemed like the dew hanging on the ebony frame of a window.

The delicate hue of the rose which usually coloured her cheeks, and appeared as it were beneath the complexion of faint bistre which denoted her Italian origin, had fled; and her sweet vermilion lips were no longer wreathed in smiles.

"Isabel, my love," said the count, "you are thoughtful this evening. What a silly girl you are to oppose that tyrannical little will of your own to my anxious hopes and wishes for your welfare—especially as I must know so much better than you what is for your good and what is not."

"I think," answered Isabella, with a deep sigh, "that I oppose no tyrannical will to your lordship's commands."

"Lordship's commands!" repeated the count, somewhat angrily. "Have I not ordered our rank and station to be forgotten here—in England? And as for commands, Bella," added the nobleman, softening, "I have merely expressed my wish that you should give Mr. Greenwood an opportunity of proving his disinterested affection and securing your esteem—especially on the occasion of our approaching visit to our friends the Tremordyns."

"My dear papa," answered the signora, "I have faithfully promised you that if Mr. Greenwood should gain my affections, he shall not sue in vain for my hand."

"That is a species of compromise which I do not understand," exclaimed the count. "Have you any particular aversion to him?"

"I have no aversion—but I certainly have no love," replied Isabella firmly; "and where there is not love, dear father, you would not have me wed?"

"Oh! as for love," said the count, evading a direct reply to this query, "time invariably thaws away those stern resolves and objections which young ladies sometimes choose to entertain, in opposition to the wishes of their parents."

"My lord, I have no power over volition," exclaimed Isabella, with difficulty restraining her tears.

"This is very provoking, Isabella—very!" said the count, drinking his claret with rapidity. "This man is in every way worthy of you—rich, genteel, and good-looking. As for his rank—it is true that he has no title: but of what avail to us are rank and title—exiled as we are from our native land—"

"Oh! my dear father!" cried Isabella, wiping her eyes; "do not fancy so ill of me as to suppose that I languish for rank, or care for honour! No—let me either possess that title which is a reflection of your own when in Castelcicala;—or let me be plain Signora Isabella in a foreign land. Pomp and banishment—pride and exile, are monstrous incongruities!"

"That is spoken like my own dear daughter," exclaimed the count. "The sorrows of my own lot are mitigated by the philosophy and firmness with which you and your dear mother support our change of fortunes;—and, alas! I see but little chance of another re-action in our favour. O my dear country! shall I ever see thee more? Wilt thou one day recognise those who really love thee?"

A profound silence ensued: neither of the ladies chose to interrupt the meditations of the patriot; and he himself rose and paced the room with agitated steps.

"And it is this despair when I contemplate my future prospects," continued the nobleman, after a long pause, "that induces me to wish to see you speedily settled and provided for, my dearest Isabella. What other motive can I have but your good?"

"Oh! I knew it—I know it, my dear father," cried the charming girl; "and it is that conviction which makes me wretched when I think how reluctant I am to obey you in this instance. But do not grieve yourself, my dear father—and do not be angry with me! I will be as civil and friendly as I can to this Mr. Greenwood; and if—and if——"

The beautiful Italian could say no more: her heart was full—almost to bursting; and throwing herself into her mother's arms, she wept bitterly.

The count, who was passionately attached to his daughter, was deeply affected and greatly shocked by this demonstration of her feelings. He had flattered himself that her repugnance to Mr. Greenwood was far from being deeply rooted, and was merely the result of a young girl's fears and anxieties when she found that she was not romantically attached to her suitor. But he little suspected that she cherished a sincere and tender passion for another—a passion which she might essay in vain to conquer.

"Bella, my darling," he exclaimed, "do not give way to grief: you cannot think that I would sacrifice you to gold—mere gold? No—never, never! Console yourself—you shall never be dragged a victim to the altar!"

"My dearest father," cried Isabella, turning towards the count and embracing him fondly,—"God, who reads all my actions, knows that I would make any sacrifice to please you—to spare you one pang—to forward your views! Oh! believe me, I am too well aware of the deep responsibility under which I exist towards my parents—too deeply imbued with gratitude for all your kindness towards me, not to be prepared to obey your wishes!"

"I will exact no sacrifice, dearest girl," said the count. "Compose yourself—and do not weep!"

At that moment a loud double knock at the front door resounded through the house; and scarcely had Isabella, recovered her self-possession, when Mr. Greenwood was announced.

"Ladies, excuse this late visit," said the financier, sailing into the room with his countenance wreathed into the blandest smiles; "but the truth is, I had business in the neighbourhood, and I could not possibly pass without stopping for a few moments at a mansion where there are such attractions."

These last words were addressed pointedly to Isabella, who only replied to the compliment by a cold bow.

"Count," said Mr. Greenwood, now turning towards the nobleman, "I have not seen you since your adventure upon the highway! But I was delighted to learn that you had received no injury."

"My only regret is that I did not shoot the villains," answered the count. "Have you had another deed prepared, to replace the one stolen from me on that occasion?"

"I have given my solicitors the necessary instructions," answered Greenwood. "In a few days——"

"Every thing with you is in a few days, Greenwood," interrupted the count, somewhat pointedly. "That deed would not occupy one day to engross, now that the copy is at your attorney's office; and it would have been a mark of goodwill on your part—"

"Pray do not blame me!" exclaimed the financier, smiling so as to display his very white teeth, of which he seemed not a little proud. "I believe that for a man who has so much business upon his hands, and the interests of so many to watch and care for, I am as punctual to my appointments as most people."

"I do not speak of want of punctuality in keeping appointments," said the nobleman: "but I allude to the neglect of a matter which to you may appear trivial, but which to me is of importance."

"Oh! my dear count—we will repair this little error the day after to-morrow—or the next day," answered Mr. Greenwood: "I wish that every body was as regular and as punctual with me, as I endeavour to be with others; and that punctuality on my part, my dear sir, has been the origin of my fortune. I do not like to speak of myself, ladies—I hate egotism—but really," he added with another smile, "when one is attacked, you know——"

At that moment a domestic entered the room, and handed a letter to the countess, who immediately opened it, glanced towards the signature, and exclaimed almost involuntarily, "From Richard Markham!"

"Richard Markham!" cried Mr. Greenwood: "I thought I understood you that that gentleman had ceased to visit or correspond with you?"

"So I said—and so I shall maintain!" exclaimed the count. "My dear, we will return that letter without reading it."

"But I have already commenced the perusal of it," said the countess, without taking her eyes off the paper: "and——"

"Then read no more," cried the count, angrily.

"Excuse me—I shall read it all," answered the countess significantly: "and so will you."

"What means this?" ejaculated the count. "Have I lost all authority in my own house? Madam, I command you——"

"There—I have finished it, and I implore you to read it yourself. Its contents are highly important, and do not in any way relate to certain recent events. Indeed he has purposely avoided any thing which may appear obtrusive, either in the shape of explanation or apology."

The count took the letter with a very ill grace, and requested Mr. Greenwood's permission to read it. This was of course awarded; and the nobleman commenced the perusal. He had not, however, read many lines, before he gave a convulsive start, and looked mistrustfully upon Mr. Greenwood (who noticed his emotion), and hastily ran his eye over the remainder of the letter's contents.

He then folded up the letter, and appeared to be absorbed in deep thought for several moments. Mr. Greenwood saw that the note bore some allusion to himself, and prepared his mind for any explanation, or any storm.

The countess sate, pale and unhappy, in deep meditation; and the eyes of Isabella wandered anxiously from one to the other.

At length the count, in a tone which showed with how much difficulty he suppressed an outbreak of his irritated feelings, turned abruptly towards Mr. Greenwood, exclaiming, "Pray, sir, how long is it since you were acquainted with one George Montague?"

Mr. Greenwood was not taken at all aback. This was a question to which he was always liable, and for which he was constantly prepared. He accordingly answered, with his usual smile of complaisance, in the following manner:—

"Oh! my dear sir, I presume you are acquainted with the fact that my name was once Montague, since you ask me that question. I may also suppose that some one has communicated that circumstance to you with a desire to prejudice me in your opinion; but I can assure you that I have not changed my name for any sinister purpose. My only motive was the request of an old lady, who left me a considerable property some time ago, upon that condition."

"And you can also explain, perhaps, the nature of your dealings with a certain Mr. Allen?" demanded the count, staggered at the assurance with which Mr. Greenwood met an accusation that the nobleman imagined would have overwhelmed him with confusion.

"My dear sir," replied the financier, very far from betraying any embarrassment, whatever he might have felt, "I can explain that and every other action of my life. I was myself misled—I was duped—I was involved in an enterprise which entailed ruin upon myself and all connected with me. I suffered along with the others, and gave up all to the creditors. I have, however, been enabled to build up my fortunes again by means of the property left to me, and a series of successful operations. All people in commercial and financial affairs are liable to disappointment and embarrassment: the most cautious may over-speculate or miscalculate; and how can I be blamed more than another?"

"I will admit that a particular enterprise may fail," said the count: "but the writer of this letter explained to me on one or two occasions, enough to enable me to comprehend the whole machinery of fraud which you put into motion to obtain money from the public; and though he never mentioned any names until to-day, in his letter, I might——"

"Every man has his enemies," said Mr. Greenwood, calmly: "I cannot hope to be without mine. They may assert what they choose: upright and impartial men never listen to one-sided statements. But perhaps the writer of that letter——"

"He is the Mr. Markham of whom I have often spoken to you, and concerning whom you were always asking me questions. I could not conceive," proceeded the count, "why you were so curious to pry into his affairs, especially as when I mentioned you to him by the name of Greenwood, he did not seem to know any thing about you. But I can now well understand why *you* should wish to know something of a man whom you ruined!"

"I ruined!" cried Mr. Greenwood, now excited for the first time since the commencement of this dialogue, and speaking with an air of unfeigned astonishment. "There must be some mistake in this! I never had any dealings with him in my life, which could either cause his ruin or establish his prosperity."

"You took very good care, it would appear, not to do the latter," said the count. "But probably Mr. Markham's letter will explain to you that which you appear to have forgotten."

Count Alteroni handed the letter to Mr. Greenwood, who perused its contents with intense interest and anxiety.

The count, the countess, and the signora watched his countenance as he read it. Proficient in the art of duplicity as he was,—skilled in all the wiles of hypocrisy and deceit, he could not conceal his emotions now. There was something in that letter which chased the colour from his cheeks, and convulsed his whole frame with extreme agony.

"This is indeed singular!" he murmured, turning the letter over and over in his hand. "Who would have suspected that Allen was merely an agent? who could have foreseen *where that blow was to strike*? Strange—unaccountable concatenation of unfortunate circumstances!"

"Is the writer of that letter correct in his statement?" demanded the count imperiously.

"The information given to you by Mr. Markham, relative to the losses experienced by a certain Mr. Allen, is correct," returned Mr. Greenwood, apparently labouring under considerable excitement. "But, I take my God to witness, that, until this moment, I was unaware that either Mr. Monroe or Mr. Markham were in the remotest way connected with that affair; and I also solemnly protest that I would have given worlds sooner than have been the means of injuring either of them!"

"You admit, then, that you defrauded the people who at that time placed their funds in your hands?" said the count.

"I admit nothing of the kind," returned the financier, now recovering his presence of mind: "I admit nothing so base as your insinuation implies."

"Then wherefore were you so agitated when you perused that letter from Mr. Richard Markham?"

"Count Alteroni, I am not aware that I owe you any explanation of my own private feelings. It is true, I *was* agitated—and I am still deeply grieved, to think that my want of judgment and foresight in a certain speculation should have involved in ruin those whom I wish well! But I suffered as well as they—I lost as many thousands as they did," continued Mr. Greenwood, passing once more into that system of plausible, specious, and deceptive reasoning, which lulled so many suspicions, and closed the eyes of so many persons with regard to his real character: "and although I have done nothing for which I can be blamed by the world, I may still reproach myself when I find that others whom I care for have suffered by my speculations."

The count was staggered at this expression and honourable manifestation of feeling on the part of one whom he had a few minutes ago begun to look upon as a selfish adventurer, callous to all humane emotions and philanthropic sentiments.

Mr. Greenwood continued:—

"When that unfortunate speculation of mine took place, I was not so experienced in the sinuosities of the commercial and financial worlds as I am now.—I lost my all, and poverty stared me in the face."

Mr. Greenwood's voice faltered, although he was now once more uttering a tissue of falsehoods.

"But by dint of some good fortune and much hard toil and unwearied application to business, I retrieved my circumstances. Now, answer me candidly, Count Alteroni; is there any thing dishonourable in my career? Will you judge a man upon an *ex-parte* statement? Is not one story very good until another be told? Why, if all persons viewed their affairs constantly in the same light, would there be any business for the civil tribunals? Do not plaintiff and defendant invariably survey the point at issue between them under discrepant aspects? If they did not, wherefore do they go to law? You may allow Mr. Markham and Mr. Monroe to entertain their views; you will also permit me to enjoy mine?"

"Mr. Greenwood," said the count, "I am afraid I have been too severe—nay, even rude in my observations. You will forgive me?"

"My dear sir, say not another word," ejaculated the financier, chuckling inwardly at the triumphant victory which he had thus gained over the suspicions of the Italian nobleman.

At that moment a servant entered the room, and informed Count Alteroni "that the Earl of Warrington was in the drawing-room, and requested an interview, at which his lordship would not detain the count above ten minutes."

The count, having desired Mr. Greenwood not to depart until his return, and apologising for his temporary absence, proceeded to the drawing-room, where the Earl of Warrington awaited him.

The earl rose when the count entered the apartment; and that proud, wealthy, and high-born English peer wore an air of profound respect and deference, as he returned the salutation of the Italian exile.

"Your lordship," said the earl, "will, I hope, pardon this intrusion at so unseemly an hour——"

"The Earl of Warrington is always welcome," interrupted Count Alteroni; "and if I cannot give him so princely a reception in England as I was proud to do in Italy, it is my means and not my will, which is the cause."

"My lord, I beseech you not to allude to any discrepancy in that respect—a discrepancy which I can regret for your lordship only, and not for myself," said the earl. "Indeed, I am so far selfish on the present occasion, that I am come to ask a favour."

"Name the matter in which my poor services can avail your lordship," returned the count, "and I pledge myself in advance to meet your wishes."

"My lord," said the Earl of Warrington, "I must inform your lordship that I am somewhat interested in a cousin of mine of the name of Eliza Sydney. This lady loved a man who was unworthy of her—a wretch whose pursuits are villany, and who enriches himself at the expense of the unwary and confiding. The heartless scoundrel to whom I allude, and the full measure of whose infamy was only exposed to me this day, has endeavoured to possess himself of the person of Eliza in a manner the most atrocious and cowardly. My lord, he employed a confederate to administer soporific drugs to her; but Providence moved that confederate's heart, and frustrated the damnable scheme."

"And can such conduct go unpunished in this land of excellent laws and unerring justice?" inquired the count.

"Ah! my lord," replied the earl, "this man is possessed of great wealth, and consequently of great influence; for, in England, *money* is *power*! Moreover, the complete chain of evidence is wanting; and then exposure to the female in such a case is almost equal to a stigma and to shame! To continue my brief tale, my lord—this man, with a demon heart, is one who will persecute my cousin Eliza to the very death. A lady of my acquaintance, who can also tell a tale of the unequalled villany of this George Montague Greenwood ——"

"What!" ejaculated the count; "do I hear aright? or do my ears deceive me? What name did you give the miscreant who administered opiate drugs to a woman with the foulest of motives?"

"George Montague Greenwood," repeated the earl.

"O God!" ejaculated the count, sinking back in his chair, and covering his face with his hands; "I thank thee that thou hast intervened, ere it was too late, to prevent that fearful sacrifice of my daughter!"

"Pardon me, my lord," exclaimed the earl, "if I have awakened any disagreeable reminiscences, or produced impressions——"

"Your lordship has done me an infinite service, in fully opening my eyes to the villany of a man whose damnable sophistry glosses over his crimes with so deceptive a varnish, that the sight is dazzled when contemplating his conduct."

As the count uttered these words he wrung the hands of the English peer with the most friendly and grateful warmth.

"Another time, my lord," continued the Italian noble, "I will explain to you the cause of my present emotions. You will then perceive how confirmed a miscreant is this Greenwood. In the meantime tell me how I can aid your lordship?"

"I was about to inform you, my lord," continued the Earl of Warrington, "that Miss Sydney, alarmed and appalled at the persecution of this man, who seems to spare neither expense nor crime to accomplish any purpose upon which he has once set his mind, has determined to sojourn for a time upon the Continent. Your lordship is aware that I possess a humble villa in the suburbs of Montoni——"

"A beautiful residence, on the contrary," said the count; "and where," he added with a sigh, "in happier times I have partaken of your hospitality."

"Yes, your lordship has honoured me with your society at that retreat," said the earl, with a low and deferential bow. "It is to that villa that I now propose to despatch my cousin, in order that she may escape the persecutions and the plots of this vile Greenwood. The object of my present visit is to solicit your lordship for a few letters of introduction for Miss Sydney to some of those families in Montoni with whom she may experience the charms of profitable and intellectual society."

"With much pleasure," answered the count. "When does Miss Sydney propose to leave England?"

"The day after to-morrow, my lord."

"To-morrow evening your lordship shall receive the letters which Miss Sydney requires. They will of course be unsealed—both in observance of the rules of etiquette, and on account of the custom-house officers in the continental states; but your lordship will take care that they be not opened in England."

"I comprehend you, my lord. The incognito which your lordship chooses to preserve in this country shall not be disturbed by any indiscretion on the part of myself or of those connected with me."

The Earl of Warrington then took his leave.

The moment he had departed, the count rang the bell, and said to the servant who answered the summons, "Request Mr. Greenwood to favour me with his company in this room—*here*!"

In another minute the financier was introduced into the saloon which the count was pacing with uneven and agitated steps.

"Mr. Greenwood," said the Italian nobleman, "I think you recollect the subject of our conversation when I was called away by the visit of the Earl of Warrington?"

"Perfectly," answered the financier, who perceived that there was again something wrong. "I remember that you made many accusations against me, all of which I most satisfactorily explained—insomuch that you very handsomely apologised for the severity of your language."

"Then, sir," continued the count, with difficulty restraining his impatience while Mr. Greenwood thus delivered himself, "if you be really such an honourable and such an injured man as you would represent, and if you be really grieved when you hear that a fellow-creature has been ruined by the failure of your speculations, have the kindness to return me the money which I have confided to you, and I shall be inclined to think of you as you choose to think of yourself. To tell the truth, I am already sick of the uncertainty of speculation; and would rather withdraw from the enterprise altogether."

"Really, my dear sir," said Mr. Greenwood, "this demand is so very irregular—so exceedingly unbusiness-like——"

"We will not place it upon the footing of *business*, sir," interrupted the count emphatically; "we will place it upon the basis of *honour*."

"Honour and business with me, my dear sir, are synonymous," said the financier with a smile.

"So much the better!" ejaculated the count: "I see that we shall not dispute over this matter. The whole is summed up in a few words: return me the money I have placed in your hands."

"These things cannot be done in a hurry, my dear sir," said Mr. Greenwood, playing with a very handsome gold guard-chain which festooned over his waistcoat.

"Either you have made away with my money, or you have it in your possession still," exclaimed the count. "If you have it, give me a cheque upon your banker for the amount: if you have placed it out at interest, give me security.

"I must observe to you that the whole proceeding is most irregular," said Mr. Greenwood: "and the business requires mature reflection. Moreover, all my funds are locked up for the moment."

"Then how would you carry out the enterprise for which I embarked my capital?" demanded the count.

"You must be aware," replied the financier, "that capitalists—like me—always lay out their cash to the greatest advantage, and make use of bills and negotiable paper of various descriptions. Thus, I could build a dozen steam-packets in a few weeks, and pay for them all without actually encroaching upon my capital!"

"I understand you, sir," said the count: "and in order to meet your convenience, I am ready to receive the securities you mention, payable at early dates, instead of specie."

"Oh! well—that alters the question," cried Mr. Greenwood, an idea apparently striking him at that moment. "I am acquainted with one of the richest bankers in London—intimately acquainted with him: would you have any objection for him to take my place in respect to you, and become the holder of your capital—say for a period of six months?"

"Who is the banker?" asked the count.

"James Tomlinson," answered the financier.

"I know the name well. Are you serious in your proposal?"

"Call upon me to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and we will proceed together to Mr. Tomlinson's banking house in the City. I will have the whole affair arranged for you in the course of an hour after our arrival at his establishment."

"I rely upon your word, Mr. Greenwood," returned the count.

The financier then took his departure.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE BANKER.

THE native of London is as proud of the City as if it were his own property. He can afford to be called a cockney for having been born within the sound of Bow bells, for there are merchant-princes, and the peers and monopolists of the commerce of this world, who bear the nickname as well as he.

And well may the Londoner be proud of his city in numerous respects. It is the richest and the most powerful that the world has ever seen! The dingy back parlours in Lombard Street, the upstairs business rooms in Cheapside, and the warehouses with shutters half up the windows in Wood Street and its neighbourhood, are the mysterious places in which the springs of the finance and trade of a mighty empire are set in motion? Half a dozen men in the City can command in an hour more wealth than either Rome or Babylon had to boast of at the respective periods of their greatest prosperity. And neither Rome nor Babylon possessed drapers who cleared their fifty thousand a-year by selling gowns and shawls, nor sugar-bakers with a million in hard cash, nor grocers with a plum in each hand, nor brewers to whom the rise or fall of one halfpenny per pot in the price of beer makes a difference of forty thousand pounds *per annum*! Rome, Babylon, Thebes, and Carthage, could all have been purchased by the East India Company—with perhaps a mortgage upon the India Docks!

But the reader must not imagine that all which glitters is gold. Amongst the most splendid establishments in London, and those most wealthy in appearance, there are some in a hopeless state of insolvency. To one of these we shall now introduce those who may choose to accompany us thither.

The well-known banking-house of James Tomlinson was situated in Lombard Street. The establishment was not extensive; nor were there a great many clerks, because it did little agency business for country banks, but was chiefly a house of deposit. It enjoyed a high reputation, and was considered as safe as the presumed wealth, integrity, and experience of its proprietor were likely to render it. It was moreover believed that the father of James Tomlinson was a sleeping partner; and as the old gentleman had retired from the business of oilman with an immense fortune, the bank was presumed to possess every guarantee of stability. It had existed for upwards of sixty years, having been founded and most successfully carried on by an uncle of James Tomlinson. James himself had originally entered the establishment as a clerk, whence he rose to be a partner, and finally found himself at the head of the concern at his uncle's death.

James Tomlinson was not an extravagant man; but he was not possessed of the ability and experience for which the world gave him credit. In the year 1826, and at the age of forty, he found himself at the head of a flourishing and respectable establishment. He was indeed the sole proprietor, for his father was in reality totally unconnected with it as a partner. James was intimately acquainted with the mechanical routine of the bank business; but he was deficient in those powers of combination and faculties of foresight which were necessary to enable him to lay out to the best advantage the moneys deposited in his hands. With good intentions, he lacked talent. He was an excellent head clerk or junior partner; but he was totally unfitted for supreme management. Thus was it that in two or three years he experienced serious reverses; and, although he carefully concealed the failure of his operations from all human eyes, the very safety of his establishment was seriously compromised. The French Revolution of 1830 ruined a Paris house to which Tomlinson had advanced a considerable sum; and this blow consummated the insolvency of his bank.

He was then compelled to make a confidant of his cashier, an old and faithful servant of his uncle, and of frugal habits, and kind but eccentric disposition. Michael Martin was this individual's name. He was of very repulsive appearance, stooping in his gait, blear-eyed, and dirty in person. He took vast quantities of snuff; but as much lodged upon his shirt-frill and waistcoat as was thrust up his nose. Thus his linen was invariably filthy in the extreme. His dress was a suit of seedy black; and the right thigh of his trousers was brown and grimy with the marks of snuff—for upon that part of his attire did he invariably wipe his finger and thumb after taking a pinch of his brown rappee.

Such was the individual whom Tomlinson took into his confidence, when the affairs of the bank grew desperate. Old Martin was as close and reserved as if he were both deaf and dumb; and he was moreover possessed of a peculiar craftiness and cunning which admirably fitted him for the part that he was now to enact. Although it was next to impossible to retrieve the affairs of the bank, so great was the deficiency,—still Michael Martin assured his master that it was quite probable that they might be enabled to carry on the establishment for a length of time—perhaps even many years, the chances that the draughts upon the bank would not equal the deposits being in their favour.

Thus was this insolvent and ruined establishment carried on, with seeming respectability and success, by the perseverance of Tomlinson, and the skill and craft of old Martin.

We shall now introduce our readers into the parlour of the bank, at ten o'clock in the morning after the incidents related in the preceding chapter.

James Tomlinson had just arrived, and was standing before the fire, glancing over the City Article of *The Times*. He was a fine, tall, good-looking man, plainly dressed, and without the slightest affectation either in manner or attire. The bluntness and apparent straightforwardness of his character had won and secured him many friends amongst a class of men who regard frankness of disposition and plainness of demeanour as qualities indicative of solidity of position and regular habits of business. Then he was always at his post—always to be seen; and hence unlimited confidence was placed in him!

Having glanced over the newspaper which he held in his hand, he rang the bell. A clerk responded to the summons.

"Is Mr. Martin come yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him to step this way."

The clerk withdrew; and the old cashier entered the room, the door of which he carefully closed.

"Good morning, Michael," said the banker. "What news?"

"Worse and worse," answered the old man, with a species of savage grunt. "We have had a sad time of it for the last three months."

"For the last seven or eight years, you may say," observed Tomlinson, with a sigh; and then his countenance suddenly wore an expression of ineffable despair—as evanescent as it was poignant.

"At first the work was easy enough," said Michael: "a little combination and tact enabled us to struggle on; but latterly the concern has fallen into so desperate a condition, that I really fear when I come in the morning that it will never last through the day."

"My God! my God! what a life!" exclaimed Tomlinson. "And there are hundreds and thousands who pass up the street every day, and who say within themselves. '*How I wish I was James Tomlinson!*' Heavens! I would that I were a beggar in the street—a sweeper of a crossing—a pauper in a workhouse——"

"Come—this is folly," interrupted the old cashier impatiently. "We must go on to the end."

"What is the state of your book this morning?" demanded the banker, putting the question with evident alarm—almost amounting to horror.

"Three thousand four hundred pounds, eighteen shillings, in specie—sixteen hundred and thirty-five in notes," answered the cashier.

"Is that all!" ejaculated Tomlinson. "And this morning we have to pay Greenwood the two thousand pounds he lent me six weeks ago."

"We can't part with the money," said the cashier rudely. "Greenwood knows the circumstances of the bank, and must give time."

"You know what Greenwood is, Michael," exclaimed the banker. "If we are not punctual with him, he will never lend us another shilling and what should we have done without him on several occasions?"

"I know all that. But look at the interest be makes you pay," muttered the cashier.

"And look at the risk he runs," added the banker.

"He finds it worth his while. I calculated the other day that we paid him three thousand pounds last year for interest only: we can't go on much longer at that rate."

"I had almost said that the sooner it ends the better," cried Tomlinson. "What low trickery—what meanness—what abominable craft, have we been compelled to resort to! Oh! if that affair with the Treasury three years ago had only turned up well—if we could have secured the operation, we should have retrieved all our losses, enormous as they are—we should have built up the fortunes of the establishment upon a more solid foundation than ever."

"That was indeed a misfortune," observed the cashier, taking a huge pinch of snuff.

"And how the Chancellor of the Exchequer obtained his information about me—at the eleventh hour—after all previous inquiries were known to be satisfactory," continued Tomlinson, "I never could conjecture. At that time the secret was confined to you and me, and my father, to whom I communicated it, you remember, in that letter which I wrote to him soliciting the fifty thousand pounds."

"Which sum saved the bank at that period," observed Michael.

"Never shall I forget the day when I called at the Treasury for the decision of the government relative to my proposal," returned Tomlinson. "The functionary who received me, said in so pointed a manner, '*Mr. Tomlinson, you have not dealt candidly with us relative to your true position; your secret is known to us; but rest assured that, although we decline any negotiation with you, we will not betray you.*' This announcement came upon me like a thunder-stroke: I was literally paralysed. The functionary added with a sort of triumphant and yet mysterious smile, '*There is not a secret connected with the true position of any individual of any consequence in the City which escapes our knowledge. The government, sir, it omniscient!*' God alone can divine the sources of this intimate acquaintance with things locked up, as it were, in one's own bosom!" added the banker, thoughtfully.

"And this is not the only case in which such secret have been discovered by the government," said the old cashier, again regaling his nose with a copious pinch of snuff.

"Yes, I myself have heard of other instances," observed the banker, with a shudder. "I have known great firms expend large sums of money to obtain particular information from Paris, Frankfort, and Madrid, by means of couriers; and this information has been despatched by letter to their agents at Liverpool and Manchester, and elsewhere, to answer certain commercial or financial purposes. Well, that information has been known to government within a few hours, and the government broker has bought or sold stock accordingly!"

"But how *could* the government obtain that information?" demanded Martin. "Some treachery——"

"No—impossible! The government has gleaned its knowledge when every human precaution against treachery and fraud was adopted. Look at my own case!" continued Tomlinson. "You, my father, and myself alone, knew *my* secret. On you I can reckon as a man can reckon upon his own self: my father was incapable of betraying me; and I of course should not have divulged my own ruin. And yet the secret became known to the government. I shudder, Michael—oh! I shudder when I think that we dwell in a country which vaunts its freedom, yet where there exists the secret, dark, and mysterious element of the most hideous despotism!"

At this moment a clerk entered, and informed the cashier that he was wanted in the public office.

As soon as Michael had disappeared, the banker walked up and down his parlour, a prey to the most maddening reflections. There were but five thousand pounds left in the safe; two thousand were to be paid to Greenwood; and every minute a cheque, or two or three

cheques might be presented, which would crush the bank at one blow.

"One hundred and eighty thousand pounds of liability," murmured Tomlinson to himself, "and five thousand pounds to meet it!"

Ah! little thought those who passed by the banking-house at that moment, what heart-felt, horrible tortures were endured by the master of the establishment in his own parlour!

At length Martin returned.

His countenance never revealed any emotions; but he took snuff wholesale—and that was a fearful omen.

"Well?" said Tomlinson, in a hoarse and hollow voice.

"Alderman Phipps just drawn for twelve hundred pounds, and Colonel Brown for eight hundred," replied the cashier.

"Two thousand gone in a minute!" ejaculated the banker.

"Shall I pay any more?" asked the cashier.

"Yes—pay, pay up to the last farthing!" answered Tomlinson. "An accident—a chance may save us, as oftentimes before! And yet methinks, Michael, that we never stood so near the verge of ruin as we do to-day."

"Never," said the old man coldly.

"And is there no expedient by which we can raise a few thousands, or even a few hundreds, for immediate wants?"

"None that I know of," returned Martin, taking more snuff.

At that moment Mr. Greenwood was announced, and Michael withdrew from the parlour.

"You have called for your two thousand pounds?" said the banker, after the usual interchange of civilities.

"Yes: I require that sum particularly this morning," replied the financier; "for I am pledged to pay fifteen thousand at twelve o'clock to Count Alteroni."

"This is very unfortunate," observed Tomlinson. "I am literally in this position—take the money, and I must stop payment the next moment."

"That is disagreeable, no doubt," said Greenwood; "but the count is urgent, and I cannot put him off."

"My God!" cried Tomlinson; "what can I do? Greenwood—my good friend—I know you are rich—I know you can raise any amount you choose: pray do not push me this morning."

"What am I to do, my dear fellow?" said the financier: "I must satisfy this count—and I really cannot manage without the two thousand. I could let you have them again in a fortnight."

"A fortnight!" ejaculated the banker, clenching his fists; "to-morrow it might be too late. Can you suggest no plan? can you devise no scheme? Let me keep these two thousand pounds for six weeks longer—a month longer; and ask me—ask me what you will! I am desperate—I will do any thing you bid me!"

"Tell me how I can satisfy this ravenous Italian," said Greenwood, "and I will let you keep the money for six months."

"You say you have to settle with this count for fifteen thousand pounds?" inquired the banker.

Greenwood nodded an affirmative.

"And does he require it all in hard cash?"

"No—he will take the security of any responsible person, or apparently responsible person," added the financier, with a significant smile, "payable in six months."

Tomlinson appeared to reflect profoundly.

His reverie was interrupted by the entrance of old Martin, taking snuff more vehemently than ever.

The cashier whispered something in the banker's ear, and then again retired.

"Seven hundred and fifty more gone!" cried Tomlinson: "and now, Greenwood, there remains in the safe but a fraction more than your two thousand pounds. Dictate your own terms!"

This was precisely the point to which the financier was anxious to arrive.

"Listen," he said, playing with his watch-chain. "This Count Alteroni will accept of you as his debtor instead of me. Take the responsibility off me on to your own shoulders, and I make you a present of the two thousand pounds!"

"What!" ejaculated Tomlinson; "incur a liability of fifteen thousand to this count! Greenwood, you never can be serious?"

"I never was more serious in my life," returned the financier coolly. "If you fail before the six months have elapsed, fifteen thousand more or less on your books will be nothing: if you contrive to carry on the establishment until the expiration of that period, I will help you out of the dilemma."

"You are not reasonable—you are anxious to crush me at once!" cried Tomlinson. "Well, be it so, Mr. Greenwood! Take your two thousand pounds——"

"And leave you to put up a notice on your doors—eh?" said Greenwood, still playing with his watch-chain.

"Ah! my God—has it come to this?" exclaimed the banker. "Ruin—disgrace—and beggary, all in one day! But better that than submit to such terms those which you dictate."

With these words he rang the bell violently.

Old Martin immediately made his appearance.

"Mr. Martin," said Tomlinson, affecting a calmness which he was far from feeling, "bring two thousand pounds for Mr. Greenwood."

"It can't be done," growled Michael, taking a huge pinch of snuff.

"Can't be done?" ejaculated the banker.

"No," answered the old man, doggedly: "just paid away four hundred and sixty-five more. There is'nt two thousand in the safe."

Tomlinson walked once up the room; then, turning to Greenwood, he said, "I will accept your proposal. Mr. Martin," he added, addressing the cashier, "you can retire: I will settle this matter with Mr. Greenwood."

The old man withdrew.

"When, where, and how is this business to be arranged?" demanded Tomlinson, after a short pause.

"The count is to call at my house at twelve. I have left a note to request him to come on hither."

"You had, then, already arranged this matter in your mind?" said the banker, ironically.

"Certainly," answered Greenwood, with his usual coolness. "I knew you would relieve me of this obligation; because I shall be enabled in return to afford you that assistance of which you stand so much in need."

"I must throw myself upon your generosity," said Tomlinson. "It is now twelve: the count will soon be here."

Half an hour passed away; and the Italian nobleman made his appearance.

"You see that I have kept my word, count," exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, with an ironical smile of triumph. "Mr. Tomlinson holds in his hands certain funds of mine, which, according to the terms of agreement between us, he is to retain in his possession and use for a period of six months and six days from the present day, at an interest of four per cent. If you, Count Alteroni, be willing to accept a transfer of fifteen thousand pounds of such funds in Mr. Tomlinson's hands from my name to your own, the bargain can be completed this moment."

"I cannot hesitate, Mr. Greenwood," said the count, "to accept a guarantee of such known stability at the name of Mr. Tomlinson."

"Then all that remains to be done," exclaimed the financier, "is for you to return me my acknowledgment for the amount specified, and for Mr. Tomlinson to give you his in its place. Mr. Tomlinson has already received my written authority for the transfer."

The business was settled as Mr. Greenwood proposed. The count returned the financier his receipt, and accepted one from the banker.

"Now, that this is concluded, count," said Mr. Greenwood, placing the receipt in his pocket-book, "I hope that our friendship will continue uninterrupted."

"Pardon me, sir," returned the count, his features assuming a stern expression: "although I am bound to admit that you have not wronged me in respect to money, you have dared to talk to me of my daughter, who is innocence and purity itself."

"Count Alteroni," began Mr. Greenwood, "I am not aware——"

"Silence, sir!" cried the Italian noble, imperatively: "I have but one word more to say. Circumstances have revealed to me your profligate character; and never can I be too thankful that my daughter should have escaped an alliance with a man who bribes his agents to administer opiate drugs to an unprotected female for the vilest of purposes. Mr. Tomlinson," added the count, "pardon me for having used such language in your apartment, and in your presence."

Count Alteroni bowed politely to the banker, and, darting a withering glance of mingled contempt and indignation upon the abashed and astounded Greenwood, took his departure.

"He talks of things which are quite new to me," said Greenwood, recovering an outward appearance of composure, though inwardly he was chagrined beyond description.

Tomlinson made no reply: he was too much occupied with his own affairs to be able to afford attention to those of others.

Greenwood shortly took his leave—delighted at having effectually settled his pecuniary obligation with the count, in such a manner that it could never again be the means of molestation in respect to himself,—but vexed at the discovery which the Italian nobleman had evidently made in respect to his conduct towards Eliza Sydney.

Immediately after Mr. Greenwood had left the bank-parlour, old Michael entered. This time he carried his snuff-box open in his left hand; and at every two paces he took a copious pinch with the fore-finger and thumb of his right. This was a fearful omen; and Tomlinson trembled.

"Well, Michael—well?"

"Not a deposit this morning. Draughts come in like wild-fire," said the old cashier. "There is but a hundred pounds left in the safe!"

"A hundred pounds!" ejaculated the banker, clasping his hands together: "and is it come to this at length, Michael?"

"Yes," said the cashier, gruffly.

"Then let us post a notice at once," cried Tomlinson: "the establishment must be closed without another moment's delay."

"Will you write out the notice of stoppage of payment, or shall I?" inquired Michael.

"Do it yourself, my good old friend—do it for me!" said the banker, whose countenance was ashy pale, and whose limbs trembled under him, as if he expected the officers of justice to drag him to a place of execution.

The old cashier seated himself at the table, and wrote out the announcement that the bank was unfortunately compelled to suspend its payments. He then read it to the ruined man who was now pacing the apartment with agitated steps.

"Will that do?"

"Yes," answered the banker; "but, in mercy, let me leave the house ere that notice be made public."

Tomlinson was about to rush distractedly out of the room, when the cashier was summoned into the public department of the establishment.

Five minutes elapsed ere his return—five minutes which appeared five hours to James Tomlinson.

At length the old man came back; and this time he did not carry his snuff-box in his hand.

Without uttering a word, he took the "notice of stoppage" off the table, crushed it in his hand, and threw it into the fire.

"Saved once more," he murmured, as he watched the paper burning to tinder; and when it was completely consumed, he took a long and hearty pinch of snuff.

"Saved!" echoed Tomlinson: "do you mean that we are saved again?"

"Seven thousand four hundred and sixty-seven pounds just paid in to Dobson and Dobbins's account," answered the cashier, coolly and leisurely, as if he himself experienced not the slightest emotion.

In another hour there were fifteen thousand pounds in the safe; and when the bank closed that evening at the usual time, this sum had swollen up to twenty thousand and some hundreds.

This day was a specimen of the life of James Tomlinson, the banker.

Readers, when you past by the grand commercial and financial establishments of this great metropolis, pause and reflect ere you envy their proprietors! In the parlours and offices of those reputed emporiums of wealth are men whose minds are a prey to the most agonising feelings—the most poignant emotions.

There is no situation so full of responsibility as that of a banker—no trust so sacred as that which is confided to him. When he fails, it is not the ruin of one man which is accomplished: it is the ruin of hundreds—perhaps thousands. The effects of that one failure are ramified through a wide section of society: widows and orphans are reduced to beggary—and those who have been well and tenderly nurtured are driven to the workhouse.

And yet the law punishes not the great banker who fails, and who involves thousands in his ruin. The petty trader who breaks for fifty pounds is thrown into prison, and is placed at the tender mercy of the Insolvents' Court, which perhaps remands him to a debtor's gaol for a year, for having contracted debts without a reasonable chance of paying them. But the great banker, who commenced business with a hundred thousand pounds, and who has dissipated five hundred thousand belonging to others, applies to the Bankruptcy Court, never sees the inside of a prison at all, and in due time receives a certificate, which clears him of all his liabilities, and enables him to begin the world anew. The petty trader passes a weary time in gaol, and is then merely emancipated from his confinement—but not from his debts. His future exertions are clogged by an impending weight of liability. One system or the other is wrong:—decide, O ye legislators who vaunt "the wisdom of your ancestors," which should be retained, and which abolished,—or whether both should be modified!

* * * * *

In the course of the evening the Earl of Warrington called upon Mrs. Arlington, with whom he passed a few minutes alone in the drawing-room.

When his lordship had taken his departure, Diana returned to Eliza whom she had left in another apartment, and, placing a quantity of letters, folded, but unsealed, in her hands, said, "These are the means of introduction to some of the first families in Montoni. They are written, I am informed, by an Italian nobleman of great influence, and whose name will act like a talisman in your behalf. They are sent unsealed according to usage; but the earl has earnestly and positively desired that their contents be not examined in this country. He gave this injunction very seriously," added Diana, with a smile, "doubtless because he supposed that he has to deal with two daughters of Eve whose curiosity is invincible. He, however, charged me to deliver this message to you as delicately us possible."

"These letters," answered Eliza, glancing over their superscriptions, "are addressed to strangers and not to me; and although I know that they refer to me, I should not think of penetrating into their contents, either in England or elsewhere. But did you express to the earl all the gratitude that I feel for his numerous and signal deeds of kindness?"

"The earl is well aware of your grateful feelings," replied Mrs. Arlington. "Can you suppose that I would forget to paint all you experience for what he has already done, and what he will still do for you? He will see you for a moment ere your departure to-morrow, to bid you farewell."

"I appreciate that act of condescension on his part," observed Eliza, affected even to tears, "more than all else that he has ever yet done for me!"

* * * * *

On the following day Eliza Sydney, accompanied by the faithful Louisa, and attended by an elderly valet who had been for years in the service of the Earl of Warrington, took her departure from London, on her way to the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala.

CHAPTER LV.

MISERRIMA!!!

We now come to a sad episode in our history—and yet one in which there is perhaps less romance and more truth than in any scene yet depicted.

We have already warned our reader that he will have to accompany us amidst appalling scenes of vice and wretchedness:—we are now about to introduce him to one of destitution and suffering—of powerful struggle and unavailing toil—whose details are so very sad, that we have been able to find no better heading for our chapter than *miserrima*, or "very miserable things."

The reader will remember that we have brought our narrative, in preceding chapters, up to the end of 1838:—we must now go back for a period of two years, in order to commence the harrowing details of our present episode.

In one of the low dark rooms of a gloomy house in a court leading out of Golden Lane, St. Luke's, a young girl of seventeen sate at work. It was about nine o'clock in the evening; and a single candle lighted the miserable chamber, which was almost completely denuded of furniture. The cold wind of December whistled through the ill-closed casement and the broken panes, over which thin paper had been pasted to repel the biting chill. A small deal table, two common chairs, and a mattress were all the articles of furniture which this wretched room contained. A door at the end opposite the window opened into another and smaller chamber: and this latter one was furnished with nothing, save an old mattress. There were no blankets—no coverlids in either room. The occupants had no other covering at night than their own clothes;—and those clothes—God knows they were thin, worn, and scanty enough!

Not a spark of fire burned in the grate;—and yet that front room in which the young girl was seated was as cold as the nave of a vast cathedral in the depth of winter.

The reader has perhaps experienced that icy chill which seems to strike to the very marrow of the bones, when entering a huge stone edifice:—the cold which prevailed in that room, and in which the young creature was at work with her needle, was more intense—more penetrating—more bitter—more frost-like than even that icy chill!

Miserable and cheerless was that chamber: the dull light of the candle only served to render its nakedness the more apparent, without relieving it of any of its gloom. And as the cold draught from the wretched casement caused the flame of that candle to flicker and oscillate, the poor girl was compelled to seat herself between the window and the table, to protect her light from the wind. Thus, the chilling December blast blew upon the back of the young sempstress, whose clothing was so thin and scant—so very scant!

The sempstress was, as we have before said, about seventeen years of age. She was very beautiful; and her features, although pale with want, and wan with care and long vigils, were pleasing and agreeable. The cast of her countenance was purely Grecian—the shape of her head eminently classical—and her form was of a perfect and symmetrical mould. Although clothed in the most scanty and wretched manner, she was singularly neat and clean in her appearance; and her air and demeanour were far above her humble occupation and her impoverished condition.

She had, indeed, seen better days! Reared in the lap of luxury by fond, but too indulgent parents, her education had been of a high order; and thus her qualifications were rather calculated to embellish her in prosperity than to prove of use to her in adversity. She had lost her mother at the age of twelve; and her father—kind and fond, and proud of his only child—had sought to make her shine in that sphere which she had then appeared destined to adorn. But misfortunes came upon them like a thunderbolt: and when poverty—grim poverty stared them in the face—this poor girl had no resource, save her needle! Now and then her father earned a trifle in the City, by making out accounts or copying deeds;—but sorrow and ill-health had almost entirely incapacitated him from labour or occupation of any kind;—and his young and affectionate daughter was compelled to toil from sun-rise until a late hour in the night to earn even a pittance.

One after another, all their little comforts, in the shape of furniture and clothing, disappeared; and after vainly endeavouring to maintain a humble lodging in a cheap but respectable neighbourhood, poverty compelled them to take refuge in that dark, narrow, filthy court leading out of Golden Lane.

Such was the sad fate of Mr. Monroe and his daughter Ellen.

At the time when we introduce the latter to our readers, her father was absent in the City. He had a little occupation in a counting house, which was to last three days, which kept him hard at work from nine in the morning till eleven at night, and for which he was to receive a pittance so small we dare not mention its amount! This is how it was:—an official assignee belonging to the Bankruptcy Court had some heavy accounts to make up by a certain day: he was consequently compelled to employ an accountant to aid him; the accountant employed a petty scrivener to make out the balance-sheet; and the petty scrivener employed Monroe to ease him of a portion of the toil. It is therefore plain that Monroe was not to receive much for his three days' labour.

And so Ellen was compelled to toil and work, and work and toil—to rise early, and go to bed late—so late that she had scarcely fallen asleep, worn out with fatigue, when it appeared time to get up again;—and thus the roses forsook her cheeks—and her health suffered—and her head ached—and her eyes grew dim—and her limbs were stiff with the chill!

And so she worked and tolled, and toiled and worked.

We said it was about nine o'clock in the evening.

Ellen's fingers were almost paralysed with cold and labour; and yet the work which she had in her hands must be done that night; else no supper then—and no breakfast on the morrow; for on the shelf in that cheerless chamber there was not a morsel of bread!

And for sixteen hours had that poor girl fasted already; for she had eaten a crust at five in the morning, when she had risen from

her hard cold couch in the back chamber. She had left the larger portion of the bread that then remained, for her father; and she had assured him that she had a few halfpence to purchase more for herself—but she had therein deceived him! Ah! how noble and generous was that deception;—and how often—how very often did that poor girl practise it!

Ellen had risen at five that morning to embroider a silk shawl with eighty flowers. She had calculated upon finishing it by eight in the evening; but, although she had worked, and worked, and worked hour after hour, without ceasing, save for a moment at long intervals to rest her aching head and stretch her cramped fingers, eight had struck—and nine had struck also—and still the blossoms were not all embroidered.

It was a quarter to ten when the last stitch was put into the last flower.

But then the poor creature could not rest:—not to her was it allowed to repose after that severe day of toil! She was hungry—she was faint—her stomach was sick for want of food; and at eleven her father would come home, hungry, faint, and sick at stomach also!

Rising from her chair—every limb stiff, cramped, and aching with cold and weariness—the poor creature put on her modest straw bonnet with a faded riband, and her thin wretched shawl, to take home her work.

Her employer dwelt upon Finsbury Pavement; and as it was now late, the poor girl was compelled to hasten as fast as her aching limbs would carry her.

The shop to which she repaired was brilliant with lamps and gas-lights. Articles of great variety and large value were piled in the windows, on the counters, on the shelves. Upwards of twenty young men were busily employed in serving the customers. The proprietor of that establishment was at that moment entertaining a party of friends up stairs, at a champagne supper!

The young girl walked timidly into the vast magazine of fashions, and, with downcast eyes, advanced towards an elderly woman who was sitting at a counter at the farther end of the shop. To this female did she present the shawl.

"A pretty time of night to come!" murmured the shopwoman. "This ought to have been done by three or four o'clock."

"I have worked since five this morning, without ceasing," answered Ellen; "and I could not finish it before."

"Ah! I see," exclaimed the shopwoman, turning the shawl over, and examining it critically; "there are fifty or sixty flowers, I see."

"Eighty," said Ellen; "I was ordered to embroider that number."

"Well, Miss—and is there so much difference between sixty and eighty?"

"Difference, ma'am!" ejaculated the young girl, the tears starting into her eyes; "the difference is more than four hours' work!"

"Very likely, very likely, Miss. And how much do you expect for this?"

"I must leave it entirely to you, ma'am."

The poor girl spoke deferentially to this cold-hearted woman, in order to make her generous. Oh! poverty renders even the innocence of seventeen selfish, mundane, and calculating!

"Oh! you leave it to me, do you?" said the woman, turning the shawl over and over, and scrutinising it in all points; but she could not discover a single fault in Ellen's work. "You leave it to me? Well, it isn't so badly done—very tolerably for a girl of your age and inexperience! I presume," she added, thrusting her hand into the till under the counter, and drawing forth sixpence, "I presume that this is sufficient."

"Madam," said Ellen, bursting into tears, "I have worked nearly seventeen hours at that shawl—"

She could say no more: her voice was lost in sobs.

"Come, come," cried the shopwoman harshly, "no whimpering here! Take up your money, if you like it—and if you don't, leave it. Only decide one way or another, and make haste!"

Ellen took up the sixpence, wiped her eyes, and hastily turned to leave the shop.

"Do you not want any more work?" demanded the shopwoman abruptly.

The fact was that the poor girl worked well, and did not "shirk" labour; and the woman knew that it was the interest of her master to retain that young creature's services.

Those words, "Do you not want any more work?" reminded Ellen that she and her father must live—that they could not starve! She accordingly turned towards that uncouth female once more, and received another shawl, to embroider in the same manner, and at the same price!

Eighty blossoms for sixpence!

Sixteen hours' work for sixpence!!

A farthing and a half per hour!!!

The young girl returned to the dirty court in Golden Lane, after purchasing some food, coarse and cheap, on her way home.

On the ground-floor of a house in the same court dwelt an old woman—one of those old women who are the moral sewers of great towns—the sinks towards which flow all the impurities of the human passions. One of those abominable hags was she who dishonour the sanctity of old age. She had hideous wrinkles upon her face; and as she stretched out her huge, dry, and bony hand, and tapped the young girl upon the shoulder, as the latter hurried past her door, the very touch seemed to chill the maiden even through her clothes.

Ellen turned abruptly round, and shuddered—she scarcely knew why—when she found herself confronting that old hag by the dim lustre of the lights which shone through the windows in the narrow court.

That old woman, who was the widow of crime, assumed as pleasant an aspect as her horrible countenance would allow her to put on, and addressed the timid maiden in a strain which the latter scarcely comprehended. All that Ellen could understand was that the old woman suspected how hardly she toiled and how badly she was paid, and offered to point out a more pleasant and profitable mode of earning money.

Without precisely knowing why, Ellen shrank from the contact of that hideous old hag, and trembled at the words which issued from the crone's mouth.

"You do not answer me," said the wretch. "Well, well; when you have no bread to eat—no work—no money to pay your rent—and nothing but the workhouse before you, you will think better of it and come to me."

Thus saying, the old hag turned abruptly into her own den, the door of which she banged violently.

With her heart fluttering like a little bird in its cage, poor Ellen hastened to her own miserable abode.

She placed the food upon the table, but would not touch it until her father should return. She longed for a spark of fire, for she was so cold and so wretched—and even in warm weather misery makes one shiver! But that room was as cold as an ice-house—and the unhappiness of that poor girl was a burden almost too heavy for her to bear.

She sate down, and thought. Oh! how poignant is meditation in such a condition as hers. Her prospects were utterly black and hopeless.

When she and her father had first taken those lodgings, she had obtained work from a "middle-woman." This middle-woman was one who contracted with great drapery and upholstery firms to do their needle-work at certain low rates. The middle-woman had to live, and was therefore compelled to make a decent profit upon the work. So she gave it out to poor creatures like Ellen Monroe, and got it done for next to nothing.

Thus for some weeks had Ellen made shirts—with the collars, wristbands, and fronts all well stitched—for four-pence the shirt.

And it took her twelve hours, without intermission, to make a shirt: and it cost her a penny for needles, and thread, and candle.

She therefore had three-pence for herself!

Twelve hours' unwearied toil for three-pence!!

One farthing an hour!!!

Sometimes she had made dissecting-trousers, which were sold to the medical students at the hospitals; and for those she was paid two-pence halfpenny each.

It occupied her eight hours to make one pair of those trousers!

At length the middle-woman had recommended her to the linen-draper's establishment on Finsbury Pavement; and there she was told that she might have plenty of work, and be well paid.

Well paid!

At the rate of a farthing and a half per hour!!

Oh! it was a mockery—a hideous mockery, to give that young creature gay flowers and blossoms to work—she, who was working her own winding-sheet!

She sate, shivering with the cold, awaiting her father's return. Ever and anon the words of that old crone who had addressed her in the court, rang in her ears. What could she mean? How could she—stern in her own wretchedness herself, and perhaps stern to the wretchedness of others—how could that old hag possess the means of teaching her a pleasant and profitable mode of earning money? The soul of Ellen was purity itself—although she dwelt in that low, obscene, filthy, and disreputable neighbourhood. She seemed like a solitary lily in the midst of a black morass swarming with reptiles!

The words of the old woman were therefore unintelligible to that fair young creature of seventeen:—and yet she intuitively reproached herself for pondering upon them. Oh! mysterious influence of an all-wise and all-seeing Providence, that thus furnishes warnings against dangers yet unseen!

She tried to avert her thoughts from the contemplation of her own misery, and of the tempting offer made to her by the wrinkled harridan in the adjoining house; and so she busied herself with thinking of the condition of the other lodgers in the same tenement which she and her father inhabited. She then perceived that there were others in the world as wretched and as badly off as herself; but, in contradiction to the detestable maxim of Rochefoucauld—she found no consolation in this conviction.

In the attics were Irish families, whose children ran all day, half naked, about the court and lane, paddling with their poor cold bare feet in the puddle or the snow, and apparently thriving in dirt, hunger, and privation. Ellen and her father occupied the two rooms on the second floor. On the first floor, in the front room, lived two families—an elderly man and woman, with their grown-up sons and daughters; and with one of those sons were a wife and young children. Eleven souls thus herded together, without shame, in a room eighteen feet wide! These eleven human beings, dwelling in so swine-like a manner, existed upon twenty-five shillings a week, the joint earnings of all of them who were able to work. In the back chamber on the same floor was a tailor, with a paralytic wife and a complete tribe of children. This poor wretch worked for a celebrated "Clothing Mart," and sometimes toiled for twenty hours a-day—never less than seventeen, Sunday included—to earn—what?

Eight shillings a week.

He made mackintoshes at the rate of one shilling and three-pence each; and he could make one each day. But then he had to find needles and thread; and the cost of these, together with candles, amounted to nine-pence a week.

He thus had eight shillings remaining for himself, after working like a slave, without recreation or rest, even upon the sabbath, seventeen hours every day.

A week contains a hundred and sixty-eight hours.

And he worked a hundred and nineteen hours each week!

And earned eight shillings!!

A decimal more than three farthings an hour!!!

On the ground floor of the house the tenants were no better off. In the front room dwelt a poor costermonger, or hawker of fruit, who earned upon an average seven shillings a week, out of which he was compelled to pay one shilling to treat the policeman upon the beat where he took his stand. His wife did a little washing, and perhaps earned eighteen-pence. And that was all this poor couple with four children had to subsist upon. The back room on the ground floor was occupied by the landlady of the house. She paid twelve shillings a week for rent and taxes, and let the various rooms for an aggregate of twenty-one shillings. She thus had nine shillings to live upon, supposing that every one of her lodgers paid her—which was never the case.

Poor Ellen, in reflecting in this manner upon the condition of her neighbours, found herself surrounded on all sides by misery.

Misery was above—misery below: misery was on the right and on the left. Misery was the genius of that dwelling, and of every other in that court. Misery was the cold and speechless companion of the young girl as she sate in that icy chamber: misery spread her meal, and made her bed, and was her chambermaid at morning and at night!

Eleven o'clock struck by St. Luke's church; and Mr. Monroe returned to his wretched abode. It had begun to rain shortly after Ellen had returned home; and the old man was wet to the skin.

"Oh! my dear father!" exclaimed the poor girl, "you are wet, and there is not a morsel of fire in the grate!"

"And I have no money, dearest," returned the heart-broken father, pressing his thin lips upon the forehead of his daughter. "But I am not cold, Nell—I am not cold!"

Without uttering a word, Ellen hastened out of the room, and begged a few sticks from one lodger, and a little coal from another. It would shame the affluent great, did they know how ready are the miserable—miserable poor to assist each other!

With her delicate taper fingers—with those little white hands which seemed never made to do menial service, the young girl laid the fire; and when she saw the flame blazing cheerfully up the chimney, she turned towards the old man—and smiled!

She would not for worlds have begged any thing for herself—but for her father—oh! she would have submitted to any degradation!

And then for a moment a gleam of something like happiness stole upon that hitherto mournful scene, as the father and daughter partook of their frugal—very frugal and sparing meal together.

As soon as it was concluded, Ellen rose, kissed her parent affectionately, wished him "good night," and retired into her own miserable, cold, and naked chamber.

She extinguished her candle in a few moments, to induce her father to believe that she had sought repose; but when she knew that the old man was asleep, she lighted the candle once more, and seated herself upon the old mattress, to embroider a few blossoms upon the silk which had been confided to her at the establishment in Finsbury.

From the neighbouring houses the sounds of boisterous revelry fell upon her ears. She was too young and inexperienced to know that this mirth emanated from persons perhaps as miserable as herself, and that they were only drowning care in liquor, instead of encountering their miseries face to face. The din of that hilarity and those shouts of laughter, therefore made her sad.

Presently that noise grew fainter and fainter; and at length it altogether ceased. The clock of St. Luke's church struck one; and all was then silent around.

A lovely moon rode high in the heavens; the rain had ceased, and the night was beautiful—but bitter, bitter cold.

Wearied with toil, the young maiden threw down her work, and, opening the casement, looked forth from her wretched chamber. The gentle breeze, though bearing on its wing the chill of ice, refreshed her; and as she gazed upwards to the moon, she wondered within herself whether the spirit of her departed mother was permitted to look down upon her from the empyrean palaces on high. Tears—large tears trickled down her cheeks; and she was too much overcome by her feelings even to pray.

While she was thus endeavouring to divert her thoughts from the appalling miseries of earth to the transcendent glories of heaven, she was diverted from her mournful reverie by the sound of a window opening in a neighbouring house; and in a few moments violent sobs fell upon her ears. Those sobs, evidently coming from a female bosom, were so acute, so heart-rending, so full of anguish, that Ellen was herself overcome with grief. At length those indications of extreme woe ceased gradually, and then these words—"Oh my God! what will become of my starving babes!" fell upon Ellen's ears. She was about to inquire into the cause of that profound affliction, when the voice of a man was heard to exclaim gruffly, "Come—let's have no more of this gammon: we must all go to the workus in the morning—that's all!" And then the window was closed violently.

The workhouse! That word sounded like a fearful knell upon Ellen's ears. Oh! for hours and hours together had that poor girl meditated upon the sad condition of her father and herself, until she had traced, in imagination, their melancholy career up to the very door of the workhouse. And there she had stopped: she dared think no more—or she would have gone mad, raving mad! For she had heard of the horrors of those asylums for the poor; and she knew that she should be separated from her father on the day when their stern destinies should drive them to that much-dreaded refuge. And to part from him—from the parent whom she loved so tenderly, and who loved her so well;—no—death were far preferable!

The workhouse! How was it that the idea of this fearful home—more dreaded than the prison, less formidable than the grave—had taken so strong a hold upon the poor girl's mind? Because the former tenant of the miserable room which now was hers had passed thence to the workhouse: but ere she went away, she left behind her a record of her feelings in anticipation of that removal to the pauper's home!

Impelled by an influence which she could not control—that species of impulse which urges the timid one to gaze upon the corpse of the dead, even while shuddering at the aspect of death—Ellen closed the window, and read for the hundredth time the following lines, which were pencilled in a neat hand upon the whitewashed wall of the naked chamber:—

"I HAD A TENDER MOTHER ONCE."

I HAD a tender mother once,
Whose eyes so sad and mild
Beamed tearfully yet kindly on
Her little orphan child.
A father's care I never knew;
But in that mother dear,
Was centred every thing to love,
To cherish, and revere!

I loved her with that fervent love
Which daughters only know;
And often o'er my little head
Her bitter tears would flow.
Perhaps she knew that death approached
To snatch her from my side;
And on one gloomy winter day
This tender mother died.

They laid her in the pauper's ground,
And hurried o'er the prayer:
It nearly broke my heart to think
That they should place her there.
And now it seems I see her still
Within her snowy shroud;
And in the dark and silent night
My spirit weeps aloud.

I know not how the years have passed
Since my poor mother died;
But I too have an orphan girl,
That grows up by my side.
O God! thou know'st I do not crave
To eat the bread of sloth:
I labour hard both day and night,
To earn enough for both!

But though I starve myself for her,
Yet hunger wastes her form:—
My God! and must that darling child
Soon feed the loathsome worm?
'Tis vain—for I can work no more—
My eyes with toil are dim;
My fingers seem all paralyzed,
And stiff is every limb!

And now there is but one resource;
The pauper's dreaded doom!
To hasten to the workhouse, and
There find a living tomb.
I know that they will separate
My darling child from me;
And though 'twill break our hearts, yet both
Must bow to that decree!

Henceforth our tears must fall apart,
Nor flow together more;
And from to-day our prayers may not
Be mingled as before!
O God! is this the Christian creed,
So merciful and mild?
The daughter from the mother snatched,
The mother from her child!

Ah! we shall ne'er be blessed again
Till death has closed our eyes,
And we meet in the pauper's ground
Where my poor mother lies.—
Though sad this chamber, it is bright
To what must be our doom;
The portal of the workhouse is
The entrance of the tomb!

Ellen read these lines till her eyes were dim with tears. She then retired to her wretched couch; and she slept through sheer fatigue. But dreams of hunger and of cold filled up her slumbers;—and yet those dreams were light beside the waking pangs which realised the visions!

The young maiden slept for three hours, and then arose, unrefreshed, and paler than she was on the preceding day. It was dark: the moon had gone down; and some time would yet elapse ere the dawn. Ellen washed herself in water upon which the ice floated; and the cold piercing breeze of the morning whistled through the window upon her fair and delicate form.

As soon as she was dressed, she lighted her candle and crept gently into her father's room. The old man slept soundly. Ellen flung his clothes over her arm, took his boots up in her hand, and stole noiselessly back to her own chamber. She then brushed those garments, and cleaned those boots, all bespattered with thick mud as they were; and this task—so hard for her delicate and diminutive hands—she performed with the most heart-felt satisfaction.

As soon as this occupation was finished, she sate down once more to work.

Thus that poor girl knew no rest!

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ROAD TO RUIN.

About two months after the period when we first introduced Ellen Monroe to our readers, the old woman of whom we have before spoken, and who dwelt in the same court as that poor maiden and her father, was sitting at work in her chamber.

The old woman was ill-favoured in countenance, and vile in heart. Hers was one of those hardened dispositions which know no pity, no charity, no love, no friendship, no yearning after any thing proper to human fellowship.

She was poor and wretched;—and yet *she*, in all her misery, had a large easy chair left to sit upon, warm blankets to cover her at night, a Dutch clock to tell her the hour, a cupboard in which to keep her food, a mat whereon to set her feet, and a few turves burning in the grate to keep her warm. The walls of her room were covered with cheap prints, coloured with glaring hues, and representing the exploits of celebrated highwaymen and courtezans; scenes upon the stage in which favourite actresses figured, and execrable imitations of Hogarth's "Rake's Progress." The coverlid of her bed was of patchwork, pieces of silk, satin, cotton, and other stuffs, all of different patterns, sizes, and shapes, being sewn together—strange and expressive remnants of a vicious and faded luxury! Upon the chimney-piece were two or three scent-bottles, which for years had contained no perfume; and in the cupboard was a champagne-bottle, in which the hag now kept her gin. The pillow of her couch was stuffed neither with wool nor feathers—but with well-worn silk stockings, tattered lace collars, faded ribands, a piece of a muff and a boa, the velvet off a bonnet, and old kid gloves. And—more singular than all the other features of her room—the old hag had a huge Bible, with silver clasps, upon a shelf!

This horrible woman was darning old stockings, and stooping over her work, when a low knock at the door of her chamber fell upon her ear. That knock was not imperative and commanding, but gentle and timid; and therefore the old woman did not hurry herself to say, "Come in!" Even after the door had opened and the visitor had entered the room, the old hag proceeded with her work for a few moments.

At length raising her head, she beheld Ellen Monroe.

She was not surprised: but as she gazed upon that fair thin face whose roundness had yielded to the hand of starvation, and that blue eye whose fire was subdued by long and painful vigils, she said, "And so you have come at last? I have been expecting you every day!"

"Expecting me! and why?" exclaimed Ellen, surprised at these words, which appeared to contain a sense of dark and mysterious import that was ominous to the young girl.

"Yes—I have expected you," repeated the old woman. "Did I not tell you that when you had no money, no work, and no bread, and owed arrears of rent, you would come to me?"

"Alas! and you predicted truly," said Ellen, with a bitter sigh. "All the miseries which you have detailed have fallen upon me;—and more! for my father lies ill upon the *one mattress* that remains to us!"

"Poor creature!" exclaimed the old woman, endeavouring to assume a soothing tone; then, pointing to a foot-stool near her, she added, "Come and sit near me that we may talk together upon your sad condition."

Ellen really believed that she had excited a feeling of generous and disinterested sympathy in the heart of that hag; and she therefore seated herself confidently upon the stool, saying at the same time, "You told me that you could serve me: if you have still the power, in the name of heaven delay not, for—for—we are starving!"

The old woman glanced round to assure herself that the door of her cupboard was closed; for in that cupboard were bread and meat, and cheese. Then, turning her eyes upwards, the hag exclaimed, "God bless us all, dear child! I am dying of misery myself, and have not a morsel to give you to eat!"

But when she had uttered these words, she cast her eyes upon the young girl who was now seated familiarly as it were, by her side, and scanned her from head to foot, and from foot to head. In spite of the wretched and scanty garments which Ellen wore, the admirable symmetry of her shape was easily descried; and the old woman thought within herself how happy she should be to dress that sweet form in gay and gorgeous garments, for her own unhallowed purposes.

"You do not answer me," said Ellen. "Do not keep me in suspense—but tell me whether it is in your power to procure me work?"

The old hag's countenance wore a singular expression when these last words fell upon her ears. Then she began to talk to the poor starving girl in a manner which the latter could not comprehend, and which we dare not describe. Ellen listened for some time, as if she were hearing a strange language which she was endeavouring to make out; and then she cast a sudden look of doubt and alarm upon the old hag. The wretch grew somewhat more explicit; and the poor girl burst into an agony of tears, exclaiming, as she covered her blushing cheeks with her snow-white hands—"No: never—never!"

Still she did not fly from that den and from the presence of that accursed old hag, because she was so very, very wretched, and had no hope elsewhere.

There was a long pause; and the old hag and the young girl sate close to each other, silent and musing. The harridan cast upon her pale and starving companion a look of mingled anger and surprise; but the poor creature saw it not—for she was intent only on her own despair.

Suddenly a thought struck the hag.

"I can do nothing for you, miss, since you will not follow my advice," she said, after a while: "and yet I am acquainted with a

statuary who would pay you well for casts of your countenance for his Madonnas, his actresses, his Esmeraldas, his queens, his princesses, and his angels."

These words sounded upon the ears of the unhappy girl like a dream; and parting, with her wasted fingers, the ringlets that clustered round her brow, she lifted up her large moist eyes in astonishment towards the face of the aged hag.

But the old woman was serious in her offer.

"I repeat—will you sell your countenance to a statuary?" she said. "It is a good one; and you will obtain a handsome price for it."

Ellen was literally stupefied by this strange proposal; but when she had power to collect her ideas into one focus, she saw her father pining upon a bed of sickness, and surrounded by all the horrors of want and privation;—and she herself—the unhappy girl—had not tasted food for nearly thirty hours. Then, on the other side, was her innate modesty;—but this was nothing in the balance compared to the poignancy of her own and her parent's sufferings.

So she agreed to accompany the old hag to the house of the statuary in Leather Lane, Holborn. But first she hurried home to see if her father required any thing—a vain act of filial tenderness, for if he did she had nothing to give. The old man slept soundly—worn out with suffering, want, and sorrowful meditation; and the landlady of the house promised to attend to him while Ellen was absent.

The young maiden then returned to the old woman and they proceeded together to the house of the statuary.

Up two flights of narrow and dark stairs, precipitate as ladders, did the trembling and almost heartbroken girl follow the hag. They then entered a spacious depository of statues modelled in plaster of Paris. A strange assembly of images was that! Heathen gods seemed to fraternize with angels, Madonnas, and Christian saints; Napoleon and Wellington stood motionless side by side; George the Fourth and Greenacre occupied the same shelf; William Pitt and Cobbett appeared to be contemplating each other with silent admiration; Thomas Paine elbowed a bishop; Lord Castlereagh seemed to be extending his hand to welcome Jack Ketch; Cupid pointed his arrow at the bosom of a pope; in a word, that strange pell-mell of statues was calculated to awaken ideas of a most wild and ludicrous character, in the imagination of one whose thoughts were not otherwise occupied.

The statuary was an Italian; and as he spoke the English language imperfectly, he did not waste much time over the bargain. With the cool criticism of a sportsman examining a horse or a dog, the statuary gazed upon the young maiden; then, taking a rule in his hand, he measured her head; and with a pair of blunt compasses he took the dimensions of her features. Giving a nod of approval, he consulted a large book which lay open upon a desk; and finding that he had orders for a queen, an opera-dancer, and a Madonna, he declared that he would take three casts of his new model's countenance that very morning.

The old woman whispered words of encouragement in Ellen's ear, as they all three repaired to the workshop, where upwards of twenty men were employed in making statues. Some were preparing the clay models over which the plaster of Paris was to be laid: others joined legs and arms to trunks;—some polished the features of the countenances: others effaced the seams that betrayed the various joints in the complete statues. One fixed wings to angels' backs—another swords to warriors' sides: a third repaired a limb that had been broken; a fourth stuck on a new nose in the place of an old one knocked off.

Ellen was stretched at full length upon a table; and a wet cloth was placed over her face. The statuary then covered it with moist clay;—and the process was only complete when she was ready to faint through difficulty of breathing. She rested a little while; and then the second cast was taken. Another interval to recover breath—and the third and last mould was formed.

The statuary seemed well pleased with this trial of his new model; and placing a sovereign in the young maiden's hand, he desired her to return in three days, as he should require her services again. The poor trembling creature's eyes glistened with delight as she balanced the gold in her little hand; and she took her departure, accompanied by the hag, with a heart comparatively light.

"You will have plenty to do there," said the old woman, as they proceeded homewards: "I have introduced you to a good thing. You must therefore divide your first day's earnings with me."

Ellen really felt grateful to the selfish harridan; and having changed her gold for silver coin at a shop where she stopped to buy provisions, she counted ten shillings in the withered and sinewy hand which the hag thrust forth.

Thus for three months did Ellen earn the means of a comfortable subsistence, by selling her countenance to the statuary. And that countenance might be seen belonging to the statues of Madonnas in catholic chapels; opera dancers, and actresses in theatrical clubs; nymphs holding lamps in the halls of public institutions; and queens in the staircase windows of insurance offices.

She never revealed to her father the secret spring of that improved condition which soon restored him to health; but assured him that she had found more needle-work, and was well paid for it. The old man had too good an opinion of his daughter to suspect her of crime or frailty; and he believed her innocent and well-meant falsehood the more readily, inasmuch as he saw her constantly engaged with her needle when he was at home.

Three months passed away; and already had a little air of comfort succeeded to the former dismal aspect of those two chambers which the father and daughter occupied, when the statuary died suddenly.

Ellen's occupation was once more gone; and, after vainly endeavouring to obtain needle-work—for that which she did in the presence of her father was merely a pretence to make good her tale to him—she again repaired to the abode of the old hag who had introduced her to the statuary.

The aged female was, if possible, more wrinkled and hideous than before; the contrast between her and her fair young visitant was the more striking, inasmuch as the cheeks of the latter had recovered their roundness, and her form its plumpness by means of good and sufficient food.

"You have come to me again," said the hag. "Doubtless I should have never seen you more if you had not wanted my services."

"The statuary is dead," returned Ellen, "and has left behind him an immense fortune. His son has therefore declined the business, and has discharged every one in the employment of his late father."

"And what would you have me do for you, miss?" demanded the old woman. "I am not acquainted with another statuary."

Ellen heaved a deep sigh.

The hag contemplated her for some time in silence, and then exclaimed, "Your appearance has improved; you have a tinge of the carnation upon your cheeks; and your eyes have recovered their brightness. I know an artist of great repute, who will be glad of you as a copy for his shepherdesses, his huntresses, his sea-nymphs, and heathen goddesses. Let us lose no time in proceeding to his residence."

This proposal was far more agreeable to the maiden than the one which had led her into the service of the statuary; and she did not for a moment hesitate to accompany the old woman to the abode of the artist.

The great painter was about forty years of age, and dwelt in a splendid house in Bloomsbury Square. The rooms on the third floor were his *studio*, as he required a clear and good light. He accepted the services of Ellen Monroe as a copy, and remunerated the old woman out of his own pocket, for the introduction. But he required the attendance of his copy every day from ten till four; and she was accordingly compelled to tell her father another story to account for these long intervals of absence. She now assured him that she was engaged to work at the residence of a family in Bloomsbury Square; and the old man believed her.

Her countenance having embellished statues, was now transferred to canvass. Her Grecian features and classic head appeared surmounted with the crescent of Diana, the helmet of Minerva, and the crown of Juno. The painter purchased dresses suitable to the characters which he wished her to adopt; and, although she was frequently compelled to appear before him, in a state which at first was strongly repugnant to her modesty—with naked bust, and naked arms, and naked legs—the feeling of shame gradually wore away. Thus, though in body she remained pure and chaste, yet in soul was she gradually hardened to the sentiments of maiden delicacy and female reserve!

It is true that she retained her virtue—because it was not tempted. The artist saw not before him a lovely creature of warm flesh and blood; he beheld nothing but a beautiful and symmetrical statue which served as an original for his heathen divinities and pastoral heroines. And in this light did he treat her.

He paid her handsomely; and her father and herself were enabled to remove to better lodgings, and in a more respectable neighbourhood, than those which had been the scene of so much misery in Golden Lane.

The artist whom Ellen served was a portrait-painter as well as a delineator of classical subjects. When he was employed to paint the likeness of some vain and conceited West End daughter of the aristocracy, it was Ellen's hand—or Ellen's hair—or Ellen's eyes—or Ellen's bust—or some feature or peculiar beauty of the young maiden, in which the fashionable lady somewhat resembled her, that figured upon the canvass. Then when the portrait was finished, the artist would assemble his friends at the same time that the lady and *her* friends called to see it; and the artist's friends—well tutored beforehand—would exclaim, one, "How like is the eye!" another, "The very mouth!" a third, "The hair to the life itself!" a fourth, "The exact profile!"—and so on. And all the while it was Ellen's eye, or Ellen's mouth, or Ellen's hair, or Ellen's profile, which the enthusiasts admired. Then the lady, flattering herself that *she* alone was the original, and little suspecting that the charms of another had been called in to enhance the beauty of *her* portrait, persuaded her fond and uxorious husband to double the amount of the price bargained for, and had the picture set in a very costly frame, to hang in the most conspicuous place in her mansion.

It happened one day that the artist obtained the favour of a marchioness of forty-six by introducing into her portrait the nose, eyes, and mouth of that fair young maiden of seventeen. The great lady recommended him to the Russian Ambassador as the greatest of English painters; and the ambassador immediately retained him to proceed to St. Petersburgh to transfer to canvass the physiognomy of the Czar.

Ellen thus lost her employment once more; and again did she repair to the den of the old hag who had recommended her to the statuary and the artist.

The step of the maiden was less timid than formerly; and her look was more confident. She was also dressed in a style which savoured of coquetry, for her occupation at the artist's had taught her the value of her charms, and prompted her how to enhance them. She had imbibed the idea that her beauty was worth much, and should at least produce her a comfortable livelihood, even if it did not lay the foundation for a fortune. She therefore occupied all her leisure time in studying how to set it off to the greatest advantage. Thus dire necessity had compelled that charming young creature to embrace occupations which awoke all the latent female vanity that had slumbered in her bosom throughout the period of her pinching poverty, and that now shone forth in her manner—her gait—her glance—her speech—and her attire.

The old hag observed this change, and was not surprised—for she was a woman of the world; but she muttered to herself, "A little while, my dear, and you will suit my purposes altogether."

"I am come again, you see," said Ellen, seating herself without waiting to be asked. "My artist has left England suddenly, and I am once more without occupation."

"Have you any money?" demanded the old hag.

"I have three sovereigns left," replied Ellen.

"You must give me two," said the woman; "and you must promise me half your first week's earnings, for the new introduction which I shall presently give you."

Ellen placed two sovereigns in the hand of the beldame; and the old wretch opened her table drawer to search for something which she required.

That drawer contained a strange incongruity of articles. Old valentine letters, knots of faded riband, cards, prophetic almanacs; tooth powder boxes, and scented oil bottles, all alike empty; the visiting cards of several noblemen and gentlemen, play-bills, theatrical journals, masquerade tickets never used, pieces of music, magazines of fashion, a volume of the "Memoirs of Harriett Wilson," immoral prints, a song book, some leaves torn from the "Newgate Calendar," medical drugs wrapped up in papers, a child's caul, pieces of poetry in manuscript, amatory epistles on sheets of various tints, writs from the Court of Requests, summonses from police courts,

&c. &c. The contents of that filthy drawer furnished a complete history of that old hag's former life.

The object of the old woman's search was a card, which, having found it, she handed to the young maiden, saying, "Here is the address of an eminent sculptor: he requires a model of a bust for the statue of a great lady who may be said to have no bust at all. You will suit him."

Ellen received the card, and hastened to Halkin Street, Belgrave Square, where the sculptor resided. She was shown first into a parlour upon the ground floor, then, when the object of her visit was made known, she was requested to walk up stairs to the *studio* of the great man. She found him contemplating with profound satisfaction a head which he had already cut from the top part of a block of marble. He was an old man of sixty, and he stooped in his gait; but his eyes were dark and piercing.

A bargain between the sculptor and Ellen was soon terminated; and the next morning she entered upon her new employment. Stripped to the waist, she had to stand in a certain position, for several hours each day, in the presence of the sculptor. The old man laboured diligently at his statue, and allowed her little rest; but he paid her munificently, and she was contented.

The lady, whose statue was thus *supposed* to be in progress, called daily, and remained at the sculptor's house for hours. She always came alone, and sate in the *studio* the whole time during which her call lasted: it was therefore imagined by all her friends that she really formed the model of the statue which was to bear her name. But Ellen's neck—and Ellen's shoulders—and Ellen's bosom—and Ellen's arms were in truth the pattern of the bust of that statue which was to be a great sculptor's masterpiece, and to hand down the name of a great lady to posterity!

The very day upon which Ellen was to leave the sculptor's employment, her services as a model being no longer required, this great lady happened to observe that she was in want of a nursery governess for her two young daughters. Ellen ventured to offer herself as a candidate for the situation. The lady raised her eyes and hands to heaven in astonishment, exclaiming, "*You*, miss, a companion for my children! a girl who gets her livelihood by standing half naked in the presence of any body, as a model!" And the lady was compelled to have recourse to her scent-bottle to save herself from fainting. She forgot that she would have herself stood to the sculptor if she had possessed a good bust!

The answer and the behaviour of this lady opened the eyes of Ellen to the nature of the opinion which the world must now form of her. She suddenly comprehended the real position which she occupied in society—about one remove above the unfortunate girls who were the avowed daughters of crime. Were she now to speak to the world of her virtue, that world would laugh insultingly in her face. Thus the dire necessity which had urged her upon this career, began by destroying her sense of female delicacy and shame: it now destroyed, in her estimation, every inducement to pursue a virtuous career.

Again she sought the dwelling of the old hag: for the fourth time she demanded the assistance of the beldame.

"It seems, my child," said the old woman, "that my advice has produced beneficial consequences. Each time that you cross my threshold I observe that you are freer and lighter in step, and more choice in your apparel."

"You know that I am not detestably ugly, mother," answered Ellen, with a smile of complacence; "and surely it is as cheap to have a gown well made as badly made, and a becoming bonnet as one altogether out of date."

"Ah! I see that you study the fashions," exclaimed the old woman with a sigh—for she recalled to mind the pleasures and pursuits of her own youthful days, over which she retrospected with regret:—then, after a pause, she said, "How old are you?"

"Eighteen and a half," replied Ellen.

"And, with all that beauty, is your heart still unoccupied by the image of some favoured suitor?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Ellen, laughing heartily, so as to display her brilliant teeth, "I have not thought of *that* yet. I have lately read a great deal about love in novels and romances—for I never do any needle-work now,—but I have not experienced the passion. I dare say my time will come sooner or later;"—and again she laughed. "But, hasten, mother—I am losing my time: tell me, do you know of farther employment for me?"

"I am acquainted with a French gentleman of science at the West End," answered the hag, "who has invented a means of taking likenesses by the aid of the sun. I do not know what the process is: all that concerns me and you is that the Frenchman requires a beautiful woman to serve as a pattern for his experiments."

"Give me his address," said Ellen, "and if he engages me I will pay you liberally. You know that you can rely upon me."

The old woman once more had recourse to her filthy drawer, in which her present memoranda were mingled with the relics of the luxury of former days; and taking thence a letter which she had only received that same morning, she tore off the address for the use of the young maiden.

Ellen, who a few months previously had been accustomed to work for seventeen or eighteen hours without ceasing, now took a cab to proceed from the neighbourhood of St. Luke's to Leicester Square. The French scientific experimentalist was at home; and Ellen was conducted up four flights of stairs to a species of belvidere, or glass cabinet, built upon the roof of the house. The windows of this belvidere, and the paper with which the wood-work of the interior was covered, were of a dark blue, in order to mitigate the strength of the sun's rays.

Within this belvidere the Frenchman was at work. He was a short, middle-aged, sallow-faced, sharp-featured person—entirely devoted to matters of science, and having no soul for love, pleasure, politics, or any kind of excitement save his learned pursuits. He was now busily employed at a table covered with copper plates coated with silver, phials of nitric acid, cotton wool, pounce, a camera obscura, several boxes, each of about two feet square, and other materials necessary for photography.

The Frenchman spoke English tolerably well; and eyeing his fair visitant from head to foot, he expressed himself infinitely obliged to the person who had sent her. He then entered into particulars; and Ellen found, to her surprise, that the photographer was desirous of taking full-length female portraits in a state of nudity. She drew her veil over her countenance, and was about to retire in disgust and indignation, when the Frenchman, who was examining a plate as he spoke, and therefore did not observe the effect his words had produced upon her, mentioned the price which he proposed to pay her. Now the artist paid better than the statuary; the

sculptor better than the artist; and the photographer better than the sculptor. She therefore hesitated no longer; but entered the service of the man of science.

We shall not proceed to any details connected with this new avocation to which that lovely maiden lent herself. Suffice it to say, that having sold her countenance to the statuary, her likeness to the artist, and her bust to the sculptor, she disposed of her whole body to the photographer. Thus her head embellished images white and bronzed; her features and her figure were perpetuated in divers paintings; her bust was immortalized in a splendid statue; and her entire form is preserved, in all attitudes, and on many plates, in the private cabinet of a photographer at one of the metropolitan Galleries of Practical Science.

At length the photographer was satisfied with the results of his experiments regarding the action of light upon every part of the human frame; and Ellen's occupation was again gone.

A tainted soul now resided in a pure body. Every remaining sentiment of decency and delicacy was crushed—obliterated—destroyed by this last service. Pure souls have frequently resided in tainted bodies: witness Lucretia after the outrage perpetrated upon her:—but here was essentially a foul soul in a chaste and virgin form.

And what dread cause had consummated this sad result? Not the will of the poor girl; for when we first saw her in her cold and cheerless chamber, her mind was spotless at the Alpine snow. But dire necessity—that necessity which became an instrument in the old hag's hands to model the young maiden to her purposes. For it was with ulterior views that the designing harridan had introduced the poor girl to that career which, without being actually criminal, led step by step towards criminality. The wretch knew the world well, and was enabled to calculate the influence of exterior circumstances upon the mind and the passions. After the first conversation which she had with Ellen, she perceived that the purity of the virgin was not to be undermined by specious representations, nor by dazzling theories, nor by delusive sophistry: and the hag accordingly placed the confiding girl upon a path which, while it supplied her with the necessaries of life, gradually presented to her mind scenes which were calculated to destroy her purity of thought and chastity of feeling for ever!

When Ellen left the service of the photographer, she repaired for the fifth time to the dwelling of the hag.

The old woman was seated as usual at her work; and she was humming to herself an opera air, which she remembered to have heard many—many years back.

"The Frenchman requires my services no longer," said Ellen. "What next can you do for me?"

"Alas! my poor child," answered the old woman, "the times were never so bad as they are at present! What is to become of us? what is to become of us?"

And the hag rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair, as if overcome by painful reflections.

"You can, then, do nothing for me?" observed Ellen, interrogatively. "That is a pity! for I have not a shilling left in the world. We have lived up to the income which my occupations produced. My poor old father fancies up to the present moment that I have been working at dress-making and embroidery at the houses of great families; and he will wonder how all my engagements should so suddenly cease. Think, mother: are you not acquainted with another artist or sculptor?"

"Why, my child, do you pitch upon the artist and the sculptor?" inquired the hag, regarding Ellen fixedly in the face.

"Oh!" answered the young maiden, lightly, "because I do not like to have my countenance handled about by the dirty fingers of the statuary; and you cannot suppose that out of the four services I should voluntarily prefer that of the photographer?"

The old woman looked disappointed, and muttered to herself, "Not quite yet! not quite yet!"

"What did you say, mother?" inquired Ellen.

"I say," replied the hag, assuming a tone of kindness and conciliation, "that you must come back to me in ten days; and in the mean time I will see what is to be done for you."

"In ten days," observed Ellen: "be it so!"

And she took her departure, downcast and disappointed, from the old hag's abode.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LAST RESOURCE.

POVERTY once again returned—with all its hideous escort of miseries—to the abode of Monroe and his daughter. The articles of comfort which they had lately collected around them were sent to the pawnbroker: necessaries then followed to the same destination.

Ellen no longer sought for needle-work: she had for some time past led a life which incapacitated her for close application to monotonous toil; and she confidently reposed upon the hope that the old woman would procure her more employment with an artist or a sculptor.

But at the expiration of the ten days, the hag put her off for ten days more; and then again for another ten days. Thus a month passed away in idleness for both father and daughter, neither of whom earned a shilling.

They could no longer retain the lodgings which they had occupied for some time in a respectable neighbourhood; and now behold them returning to the very same cold, miserable, and cheerless rooms which we saw them occupying in the first instance, in the court leading out of Golden Lane!

What ups and downs constitute existence!

Two years had now passed away since we first introduced the reader to that destitute lodging in Golden Lane. We have therefore brought up this portion of our narrative, as well as all the other parts of it, to the close of the year 1838.

Misery, more grinding, more pinching, and more acute than any which they had yet known, now surrounded the father and daughter. They had parted with every thing which would produce the wherewith to purchase food. They lay upon straw at night; and for days and days they had not a spark of fire in the grate. They often went six-and-thirty hours together without tasting a morsel of food. They could not even pay the pittance of rent which was claimed for their two chambers: and if it had not been for their compassionate neighbours they must have starved altogether.

Monroe could obtain no employment in the City. When he had failed, during the time of Richard Markham's imprisonment, he lost all his friends, because they took no account of his misfortunes, and looked only to the fact that he had been compelled to give up business. Had he passed through the Bankruptcy Court, and then opened his counting-house again to commence affairs upon credit, he would have found admirers and supporters. But as he had paid his creditors every farthing, left himself a beggar, and spurned the idea of entering upon business without capital of his own, he had not a friend to whom he could apply for a shilling.

At length the day came when the misery of the father and the daughter arrived at an extreme when it became no longer tolerable. They had fasted for forty-eight hours; and their landlady threatened to turn them out of their empty rooms into the street, unless they paid her the arrears of rent which they owed. They had not an article upon which they could raise the price of a loaf:—it was the depth of a cold and severe winter, and Ellen had already parted with all her under-garments.

"My dear child," said the heart-broken father, embracing his daughter affectionately, on the morning when their misery thus reached its utmost limit, "I have one resource left—a resource to which I should never fly save in an extreme like this!"

"What mean you?" inquired the daughter, anxiously glancing in the pale and haggard countenance of her sire.

"I mean that I will apply to Richard Markham," said the old man. "He does not suspect our appalling state of destitution, or he would seek us out—he would fly to our succour."

"And you will apply to him who has already suffered so much by you?" said the daughter, shaking her head. "Alas! he will refuse you the succour you require!"

"No—no—not he!" ejaculated the old man. "Be of good cheer, Ellen—I shall not be long absent; and on my return thou shalt have food, and fire, and clothes!"

"God grant that it may be so!" cried Ellen, clasping her hands together.

"I have moreover a piece of news relative to that villain Montague to communicate to him," added Monroe; "and for that reason—if for none other—should I have called at his residence to-day. While I was roving about in the City yesterday to endeavour to procure employment, I accidentally learnt that Montague is pursuing his old game, at the West End, under the name of Greenwood."

"Ah! why do you not rather call upon this man," cried Ellen, "and represent to him the misery to which his villany has reduced us? He is doubtless wealthy, and might be inclined to give a few pounds to one whom he robbed of thousands."

"Alas! my dear Ellen, you do not know the world as I know it! I have no means of convincing Montague, or Greenwood, that I lost money by him. He only knew Allen in the entire transaction: he never saw me in his life—nor I him,—at least to my knowledge. Allen is dead;—how then can I present myself to this man, whom villany has no doubt rendered hard-hearted and selfish, with mere assertions of losses through his instrumentality? He would eject me ignominiously from his abode! No—I shall repair to Richard Markham; he is my last and only hope!"

With these words the old man embraced his daughter affectionately, and left the room.

The moment he was gone Ellen said to herself, "My father has undertaken a hopeless task! It is not probable that Markham, whom he has reduced to a miserable pittance, will spare from that pittance aught to relieve our necessities. What is to be done? There are no more artists or sculptors who require my services—no more statuaries or photographers who need my aid. And yet we cannot starve! When I last saw the old woman, she spoke out plainly—her meaning could not be misunderstood. I rushed away from her presence, as if she were a venomous reptile! Fool that I was. Starvation is undermining those charms which I have learnt to value: hunger is defacing that beauty which gave me bread for nearly two years, and which may give me bread again in the same way. I am clothed in rags, and shiver with the cold! My hands, once so white, are becoming red: my form, lately so round and plump, is losing its fulness and its freshness; my cheeks grow thin and hollow. And in a few hours my poor old father will return home, wasted with fatigue, and overwhelmed with famine and disappointment. O my God!" she continued, clasping her hands together in an ebullition of intense agony; "pardon—pardon—I can hesitate no longer!"

And straightway she proceeded to the dwelling of the old hag.

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It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when Mr. Monroe returned to the court in Golden Lane.

His countenance was animated with an expression of joy, as he encountered the landlady upon the threshold of the house in which he resided.

"Miss Monroe is not come in yet," said the woman roughly. "Here is the key of your lodgings—*not that I think there is much worth the locking up.* However, this key you don't have again till my rent is paid."

"Here—pay yourself—pay yourself!" cried the old man, taking a handful of gold and silver from his pocket.

The woman's manner instantly changed into cringing politeness. She was not now pressed for the rent. She could wait till it was convenient. She always knew that she had to deal with a gentleman. What did it matter to her when she was paid, since she felt convinced the money was safe?

Monroe cut short her compliments by settling the arrears due, and sending the landlady out to purchase some food. The old man was determined to be extravagant that day—he was so happy! Markham had declared that he and his daughter should never know want again;—and then—he had such a surprise for Ellen. They were to proceed next day to take up their abode with Richard: the young man had insisted upon it—Whittingham had supported the proposal;—and so it was all resolved upon. No more poverty—no more cold—no more hunger!

It was for this that the old gentleman was resolved to be extravagant. He was anxious to provide a delicate little treat for his daughter;—and he was glad that she was not at home when he returned. He felt convinced that she had gone out to seek for work, and hoped that she would not be long ere she returned.

By means of the landlady he procured a cold fowl, a piece of ham, and a bottle of cheap wine; and his own thin and meagre hands spread the dainties upon the table, while the landlady lighted a fire in the grate.

When these arrangements were complete, Monroe dispatched the now obsequious mistress of the house to redeem from pledge the various articles which had been pawned during this latter period of destitution; and when she returned, laden with the necessaries and the comforts which had thus been temporarily disposed of, Monroe felt pleasure in arranging them in such a way that they might strike Ellen's eyes the moment she should return.

The poor old man was so joyful—so happy, as he executed his task, that he did not observe the lapse of time. Six o'clock struck, and the candle had been burning for some time upon the mantelpiece, ere Monroe began to wonder what could keep his daughter so long away.

Another half-hour passed; and her well-known step was heard ascending the staircase. The door opened; and Ellen rushed into the room, exclaiming, "My dear father, here is gold! here is gold!"

"This then appears to be a day of good fortune," said the old man, glancing triumphantly around him. "I also have gold—and these are the fruits of the first use which I have made of it!"

"What!" exclaimed Ellen, gazing wildly upon the well-spread table and the various articles redeemed from the pawnbroker; "Richard Markham——"

"Is an angel!" cried Monroe. "He never will let us know want again!"

"Oh! my God!" ejaculated Ellen, throwing herself upon a chair, and burying her face in her hands: "why did I not wait a few hours? why did I not have patience and hope until your return?"

"Ellen, what mean those words?" demanded the old man: "speak—tell me——"

"Simply, my dear father," she answered, raising her head, and at the same time exercising an almost superhuman control over her inward emotions, "that I have consented to receive work at a price which will scarcely find us in bread; and——"

"You shall not hold to your bargain, dearest," interrupted Monroe. "The money which you may have received in advance,—for

you said, I think, that you had money,—shall be returned to those who would condemn you to a slavery more atrocious than that endured by the negroes in the West Indies! Take courage my beloved Ellen—take courage: a brighter day will yet dawn upon us."

Ellen made no reply: but her countenance wore so singular an expression, that her father was alarmed.

"My dearest daughter," he exclaimed, "you have no longer any hope! I see by your looks that you despair! God knows that we have encountered enough to teach us to place but little reliance upon the smiles of fortune: nevertheless, let us not banish hope altogether from our bosoms! To-morrow we shall leave this dismal abode, and repair to the house of our young benefactor, Markham."

"Markham!" cried Ellen, the very name appearing to arouse agonizing emotions in her mind: "have you promised Mr. Richard Markham that we will reside with him?"

"Yes, dearest Ellen; and in so doing I had hoped to give thee pleasure. You have known each other from infancy. Methinks I see thee now, a little child, climbing up that hill in company with Richard and his brother——"

"His brother!" repeated Ellen, a cold shudder passing over her entire frame.

"My dearest girl, you are not well," said the old man; and, pouring some wine into a glass, he added, "drink this, Ellen; it will revive thee."

The young lady partook of the exhilarating beverage, and appeared refreshed. Her father and herself then seated themselves at the table, and partook of the meal.

Ellen ate but little. She was pensive and melancholy; and every now and then her countenance wore an expression of supreme horror, which denoted intense agony of feeling within her bosom. She, however, contrived to veil from her father's eyes much of the anguish which she thus experienced; and the old man's features were animated with a gleam of joy, as he sate by the cheerful fire and talked to his daughter of brighter prospects and happier days.

On the following morning they took leave of those rooms in which they had experienced so much misery, and repaired to the dwelling of Richard Markham.

CHAPTER LVIII.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

It was the 1st of January, 1839.

The weather was cold and inclement;—Nature in nakedness appeared to recline upon the turfless grave of summer.

The ancient river which intersects the mightiest city upon the surface of the earth, was swollen; and in the country through which it wound its way, the fields were flooded in many parts.

The trees were stripped of their verdure: the singing of birds had ceased.

Gloomy and mournful was the face of nature; sombre and lowering the aspect of the proud city.

So pale—so faint were the beams of the mid-day sun, that the summit of St. Paul's, which a few months back was wont to glitter as if it were crowned with a diadem of gold, was now veiled in a murky cloud; and the myriad pinnacles of the modern Babylon, which erst were each tipped as with a star, pointed upwards to a sky ominous and foreboding.

Nevertheless, the ingenuity and wonderous perseverance of man had adopted all precautions to expel the cold from the palaces of the rich and powerful, and to surround the lordly owners of those splendid mansions with the most delicious wines and the most luxurious food, in doors, to induce them to forget that winter reigned without.

Soft carpets, thick curtains—satin, and velvet, and silk,—downy beds beneath gorgeous canopies,—warm clothing, and cheerful fires, combined to defy the approach of winter, and to render the absence of genial summer a matter of small regret.

Then, when the occupants of these palaces went abroad, there was no bold exertion required for them to face the nipping cold, for they stepped from their thresholds into carriages thickly lined with wool, and supplied with cushions, soft, luxurious, and warm.

But that cold which was thus expelled from the palaces of the rich took refuge in the dwellings of the poor; and there it remained, sharp as a razor, pitiless as an executioner, inexorable as a judge, and keen as the north-western wind that blows from the ice-bound coasts of Labrador.

No silks, nor satins, nor velvets, nor carpets, nor canopies, nor curtains, had the dwellings of the poor to defy, or even mitigate the freezing malignity of that chill which, engendered in the arctic regions of eternal snow, and having swept over the frozen rivers and the mighty forests of America, had come to vent its collected spite upon the islands of Europe.

Shivering, starving, in their miserable hovels, the industrious many, by the sweat of whose brow the indolent few were supplied with their silks, and their satins, and their velvets, wept bitter—bitter tears over their suffering and famished children, and cursed the day on which their little ones were born.

For the winter was a very hard one; and bread—bread was very dear!

Yes—bread, which thou, Almighty God! hast given to feed those whom thou didst create after thine own image,—even bread was too dear for the starving poor to buy!

How long, O Lord! wilt thou permit the few to wrest every thing from the many—to monopolize, accumulate, gripe, snatch, drag forth, cling to, the fruits of the earth, for their own behoof alone?

How long shall there exist such spells in the privilege of birth? how long must all happiness and all misery be summed up in the words—

WEALTH. | POVERTY.

We said that it was New Year's Day, 1839.

In the palaces of the great were rejoicings, and music, and festivity; and diamonds glittered—and feathers waved—and silks rustled;—the elastic floors bent beneath the steps of the dancers; the wine flowed in crystal cups; and the fruits of summer were amongst the dainties spread to tempt the appetite of the aristocracy.

Ah! there was happiness indeed, in thus welcoming the new year; for those who there greeted its presence, were well assured that it would teem with the joys and blandishments which had characterized the one that had just sunk into the grave of Time!

And how was it with the poor of this mighty metropolis—the imperial city, to whose marts whole navies waft the commerce of the world!

The granaries were full; the pastures had surrendered up fat oxen to commemorate the season; the provision-shops teemed with food of the most luxurious and of the humblest kinds alike. A stranger walking through this great city would have wondered where the mouths were that could consume such vast quantities of food.

And yet thousands famished for want of the merest necessaries of life.

The hovels of the poor echoed not to the sounds of mirth and music—but to the wail of hunger and the cry of misery. In those sad abodes there was no joviality to welcome a new year;—for a new year was a curse—a mere prolongation of the acute and poignant horrors of the one gone by.

Alas! that New Year's Day was one of strange contrasts in the social sphere of London.

And as London is the heart of this empire, the disease which prevails in the core is conveyed through every vein and artery over the entire national frame.

The country that contains the greatest wealth of all the territories of the universe, is that which also knows the greatest amount of

hideous, revolting, heart-rending misery.

In England men and women die of starvation in the streets.

In England women murder their children to save them from a lingering death by famine.

In England the poor commit crimes to obtain an asylum in a gaol.

In England aged females die by their own hands, in order to avoid the workhouse.

There is one cause of all these miseries and horrors—one fatal scourge invented by the rich to torture the poor—one infernal principle of mischief and of woe, which has taken root in the land—one element of a cruelty so keen and so refined, that it outdoes the agonies endured in the Inquisition of the olden time.

And this fertile source of misery, and murder, and suicide, and crime, is—

THE TREATMENT OF THE WORKHOUSE.

Alas! when the bees have made the honey, the apiarist comes and takes all away, begrudging the industrious insects even a morsel of the wax!

Let us examine for a moment the social scale of these realms:

The lowest step in the ladder is occupied by the class which is the most numerous, the most useful and which ought to be the most influential.

The average annual incomes of the individuals of each class are as follows:—

The Sovereign	£500,000.
The member of the Aristocracy	£30,000.
The Priest	£7,500.
The member of the middle classes	£300.
The member of the industrious classes	£20.

Is this reasonable? is this just? is this even consistent with common sense?

It was New Year's Day, 1839.

The rich man sate down to a table crowded with every luxury: the pauper in the workhouse had not enough to eat. The contrast may thus be represented:—

Turtle, venison, turkey, hare, pheasant, perigord-pie, plum-pudding, mince-pies, jellies, blancmanger, trifle, preserves, cakes, fruits of all kinds, wines of every description.	½ lb. bread. 4 oz. bacon. ½ lb. potatoes. 1½ pint of gruel.

And this was New Year's Day, 1839!

But to proceed.

It was five o'clock in the evening. Three persons were conversing together on Constitution Hill, beneath the wall of the Palace Gardens.

Two of them, who were wrapped up in warm pilot coats, are well known to our readers: the third was a young lad of about sixteen or seventeen, and very short in stature. He was dressed in a blue jacket, dark waistcoat of coarse materials, and corduroy trousers. His countenance was effeminate and by no means bad-looking; his eyes were dark and intelligent; his teeth good. The name of this youth was Henry Holford.

"Well, my boy," said the Resurrection Man, for he was one of the lad's companions, the other being the redoubtable Cracksman,—"well, my boy, do you feel equal to this undertaking?"

"Quite," answered Holford in a decided tone.

"If we succeed, you know," observed the Cracksman, "it will be a jolly good thing for you; and if you happen to get nabbed, why—all the beaks can do to you will be to send you for a month or two upon the stepper. In that there case Tony and me will take care on you when you come out—won't we, Tony?"

"Certainly," replied the Resurrection Man.—"But if you get scented, Harry," he continued, addressing himself to the lad, "as you

approach the big house, you must have a run for it, and we shall stay here and leave the rope over the wall for two hours. If you don't come back by that time, we shall suppose that you've either got into some quiet corner of the palace, or that you're taken; and then, whichever happens of these two events, we shan't be of any service to you."

"One thing I should like you to bear in mind, youngster," said the Cracksman, "and that is, that if you don't pluck up your courage well, and prepare for all kinds of dangers and difficulties, you'd much better give up the thing at once. We don't want you to run neck and heels into a business that you are afeard on."

"Afraid!" exclaimed the youth, contemptuously: "I shall not fail for want of courage. I have made up my mind to risk the venture; and let the result be what it will, I shall go through with it."

"That's what I call speaking like a man," said the burglar, "though you are but a boy. Take a drop of brandy before you begin."

"Not a drop," answered Holford: "I require a clear head and a quick eye, and dare not drink."

"Well, as you will," said the Cracksman; and he took a tolerably long draught from a case-bottle which he had produced from his pocket.

He then handed the bottle to the Resurrection Man, who also paid his respects to it with a hearty goodwill.

"I am ready," said Holford; "there is no use in delay."

"Not a bit," observed the Cracksman. "Tony and me will help you over the wall in a jiffey."

By the aid of the Resurrection Man and the burglar, the youth scaled the wall of the Palace Gardens, and ere he dropped upon the inner side, he said in a low but firm tone, "Good night."

Holford was now within the enclosure of the royal demesne. The evening was very dark; but at a distance the windows of the palace shone with effulgence.

Thitherward did he proceed, advancing cautiously along, for he knew that there was a piece of water in the pleasure-grounds. This small lake he soon left on his right hand; and he was shortly within fifty yards of the back part of Buckingham Palace.

At that moment he was suddenly startled by hearing voices close to him. He stood still, and listened. Steps approached, and he heard a gardener issue some instructions to a subordinate. There was a tuft of trees near at hand: Holford had not a moment to lose;—he darted into the thicket of evergreens, where he concealed-himself.

"What was that?" said the gardener, stopping short.

"I heard nothing," answered the man.

"Yes—there was a rustling of those trees."

"A cat, perhaps."

"Or one of the aquatic birds."

All was still, and the gardener, accompanied by his man, proceeded on his way. The sounds of their footsteps were soon lost in the distance; and Holford emerged from his hiding-place. Without any farther alarm he reached the back premises of the palace.

He now became involved in a maze of out-houses and offices, and was at a loss which direction to take. He was going cautiously along the wall of one of those buildings, when he suddenly ran against a man who was advancing rapidly in a contrary direction.

"Holloa! who the devil is this?" cried the man; and clutching hold of Holford's collar, he dragged him a few paces, until he brought him beneath a window whence streamed a powerful light. "I suppose you're the new boy that the head-gardener hired this morning?"

"Yes, sir," answered Holford, gladly availing himself of an excuse thus so conveniently suggested by the error of the man who had collared him.

"Then mind which way you go in future, young brocoli-sprout," exclaimed the other; and, dismissing the youth with a slight cuff on the head, he passed on.

Holford hastened away from the light of the window; and, crossing a small court, reached a glass door opening into the back part of the palace. The adventurous lad laid his hand upon the latch: the door was not locked; and he hesitated not a moment to enter the royal abode.

He was now in a low vestibule, well lighted, and at the extremity of which there was a staircase. In one corner of the vestibule was a marble table, on which lay several cloaks, the skirts of which hung down to the ground. This circumstance was particularly fortunate for the safety of the intruder, inasmuch as he had scarcely entered the vestibule, when the sound of footsteps, rapidly descending the staircase, fell upon his ears. He hastened to conceal himself beneath the table, the cloaks serving effectually to veil his person.

Two footmen in gorgeous liveries shortly made their appearance in the vestibule.

"Where did you say her majesty is?" demanded one.

"In the Roman drawing-room," replied the other. "The Sculpture Gallery is to be lighted up this evening. You can attend to that duty at once, if you will."

"Very well," said the first speaker; and he left the vestibule by means of a door on the right-hand side, but which door he neglected to close behind him.

The other servant advanced straight up to the marble table, and, sweeping off the cloaks, threw them all over his left arm. Holford's person was now exposed to the eyes of any one who might happen to glance beneath that table. The domestic was, however, a tall and stately individual, and kept his head elevated. Having taken the cloaks from the table, he slowly retraced his steps up the stairs, and disappeared from Holford's view.

The young adventurer started from his hiding-place. The door, by which one of the servants had left the vestibule for the purpose

of repairing to the Sculpture Gallery, was open. It communicated with a long passage, only feebly lighted. Holford hesitated not a moment, but proceeded in this direction.

He advanced to the end of the passage, and entered a narrow corridor, branching off to the right, and lighted by lamps sustained in the hands of two tall statues. Again the sound of footsteps fell upon Holford's ears; and he had scarcely time to slip behind one of these statues, when the domestic whom he had before seen enter that part of the building, appeared at the end of the corridor. The servant passed without observing him; and the youthful intruder emerged from his lurking-place.

He now pursued his way, without interruption, through several passages and rooms, until he reached a magnificent marble hall, at the farther extremity of which were numerous dependants of the palace, grouped together, and conversing in a low tone. Holford instantly shrank back into the passage by which he had reached the hall. Exactly opposite was the entrance to the Sculpture Gallery. To retrace his steps was useless: he determined to proceed. But how was he to cross the hall? A few moments' reflection suggested to him an expedient. He walked boldly across the hall; and his presence excited no suspicion, it being impossible for the dependants collected together at the other end to observe the nature of his garb at that distance.

He now gained access to the Sculpture Gallery; but there he found no means of concealment. He determined to explore elsewhere, and speedily found himself in a magnificent saloon, adjoining the library, and where he beheld sofas, with the drapery hanging down to the carpet.

It was beneath one of these downy sofas that the daring intruder into the royal dwelling took refuge; and there, comfortably extended at full length, he chuckled triumphantly at the success which had, up to this moment, attended his adventurous undertaking. We have before said that he was of very small stature; he was moreover thin and delicate, and easily packed away.

Some time passed, and no one appeared to interrupt the reflections of Henry Holford. Hour after hour glided by; and at length the palace-clock struck nine. Scarcely had the last chime died away, when the folding doors were thrown open, and a gorgeous procession of nobles and ladies entered the apartment. The magnificence of the dresses worn by England's peeresses and high-born dames—the waving plumes, the glittering jewels, the sparkling diamonds,—combined with a glorious assemblage of female loveliness, formed a spectacle, at once awe-inspiring, ravishing, and delightful. A little in advance of that splendid *cortège*,—conversing easily with the ladies who walked one pace behind her on either hand, and embellished with precious stones of regal price,—moved the sovereign of the mightiest empire in the universe.

Upon her high and polished brow, Victoria wore a tiara of diamonds: diamonds innumerable, and of immense value, studded her stomacher; diamond pendants adorned her ears; and diamonds also glistened upon her wrists. She walked with grace and dignity; and her noble bearing compensated for the shortness of her stature.

The queen advanced to the very sofa beneath which Holford lay concealed, and seated herself upon it. The ladies and nobles of the court, together with the guests present upon the occasion, stood at a respectful distance from the sovereign. The splendour of the scene was enhanced by the brilliant uniforms of several military officers of high rank, and the court-dresses of the foreign ambassadors. The blaze of light in which the room was bathed, was reflected from the diamonds of the ladies, and the stars and orders which the nobles wore upon their breasts.

At that time Victoria was yet a virgin-queen. If not strictly beautiful, her countenance was very pleasing. Her light brown hair was worn quite plain; her blue eyes were animated with intellect; and when she smiled, her lips revealed a set of teeth white as Oriental pearls. Her bust was magnificent, and her figure good, in spite of the lowness of her stature. Her manner was distinguished by somewhat of that impatience which characterised all the family of George the Third, and which seemed to result from a slightly nervous temperament. She appeared to require answers to her questions more promptly than court etiquette permitted those around her to respond to her inquiries. With regard to the condition of the humbler classes of her subjects, she was totally ignorant: she knew that they were suffering some distress; but the fearful amount of that misery was carefully concealed from her. She only read the journals favourable to the ministry; and they took care to report nothing which might offend or wound her. Thus, she who should have known every thing relative to her people, in reality scarcely knew any thing!

Foremost amid the chiefs of foreign diplomacy was the Ambassador from the court of Castelcicala. He was a man of advanced years; and on his breast glittered the stars of all the principal orders of knighthood in Europe—the Cross and Bath of England, the Legion of Honour of France, the Golden Fleece of Spain, the Black Eagle of Prussia, the Sword of Sweden, the Crescent of Turkey, Saint Nepomecenus of Austria, and the Lion Rampant of Castelcicala. The Ambassadors of France and Austria were also present upon this occasion,—Count Sebastiani, the representative of Louis-Philippe, being clad in the splendid uniform of a General in the French army, and wearing the grand cordon of the Legion of Honour,—and Prince Esterhazy, the Austrian Minister, and himself the possessor of estates more extensive than many a German principality, wearing a court dress covered with lace and glittering with stars.

Several members of the English Cabinet were also present. There was one whose good-tempered and handsome countenance, gentlemanly demeanour, stout and sturdy form, and complacent smile, would hardly have induced a stranger to believe that this was Viscount Melbourne, the Prime Minister of England. Next was a short personage, with a refined and intelligent, though by no means an imposing air,—a something sharp and cunning in the curl of the mouth, and the flash of the eye,—and a weak disagreeable voice, frequently stammering and hesitating at a long sentence: this was Lord John Russell, the Secretary for the Home Department. Near Lord John Russell was a tall man of about fifty,—very good-looking, with dark and well-curled locks, glossy whiskers, and an elegant figure,—but excessively foppish in his attire, and somewhat affected in manner;—and this was Lord Palmerston, Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Conversing with this nobleman was a personage with pale and sallow cheeks, luxuriant and naturally-curling locks,—dark and interesting in appearance, and in the prime of life,—whose conversation denoted him to be a man of elegant taste, and whose manners were those of a finished gentleman; but who little suited the idea which a stranger would have formed of a great viceroy or a responsible minister:—nevertheless, this was the Marquis of Normanby, lately Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and at the time of which we are speaking, Secretary for the Colonies.

The conversation turned upon the specimens of art in the gallery of sculpture, which the noble company had just visited. In this

manner an hour passed away; and at the expiration of that period, the queen and her numerous guests repaired to the drawing-rooms on the first floor, where arrangements had been made for a grand musical entertainment.

The entire pageantry was viewed with ease, and the conversation plainly heard, by the plebeian intruder upon that scene of patrician splendour, and glory, and wealth. The musical tones of the queen's voice had fallen upon his ears: he had listened to the words of great lords and high-born ladies. At that moment how little, how contemptible did he feel himself to be! Never had he entertained so humble an opinion of his own worth and value in society as he did at that period. He—a common pot-boy in a public-house—had for an hour been the unseen companion of a queen and her mightiest paladins and loveliest dames;—and had he been discovered in his retreat, he would have been turned ignominiously forth, like the man in the parable who went to the marriage-feast without a wedding-garment.

For two more mortal hours did Holford remain beneath the sofa, crampled by his recumbent and uneasy position, and already more than half inclined to regret the adventure upon which he had so precipitately entered.

At length the palace grew quiet, and servants entered the room in which Holford was concealed, to extinguish the lights. The moment that this duty was performed, and the domestics had withdrawn, Holford emerged from beneath the sofa, and seated himself upon it. He was proud to think that he now occupied the place where royalty had so lately been. The voice of the queen still seemed to ring in his ears; and he felt an unknown and unaccountable species of happiness in recalling to mind and pondering upon all that had fallen from her lips. At that moment how he envied those peers and high-born dames who were privileged to approach the royal presence and bask beneath the smile of the sovereign;—how he wished that his lot had been cast in a different sphere! But—no! it was useless to regret what could not be remedied; and, although he was now in a palace, and seated upon the very cushion which a few hours previously had been pressed by royalty, he was not one atom less Henry Holford, the pot-boy!

The reverie of this extraordinary youth was long. Visions the most wild and fantastical sustained a powerful excitement in his imagination. At length the clock struck two. Holford awoke from his strange meditations, and collected his scattered ideas.

He now felt the cravings of hunger, and determined to explore the palace in search of food. He had already seen enough of its geography to be enabled to guess the precise position of the servants' offices; and thither he now directed his steps. He reached the great marble hall, which was lighted by lamps: there was no one there. He crossed it, and proceeded along those passages which he had already threaded a few hours before. After wandering about for some time, and, to his infinite surprise and joy, without encountering a soul, he reached the servants' offices. A short search conducted him to a well-stored larder. Some of the dishes had evidently been put away in a hurry, for silver spoons and forks had been left in them. Holford might have possessed himself of property of considerable value: but such an idea never for a moment entered his head. He moreover contented himself with the simplest food he could find; then, remembering that four-and-twenty hours might elapse ere he should be enabled to return to the larder, he supplied himself with a sufficient amount of provender to last during that interval.

Having adopted this precaution, he stole back again to the room where the friendly sofa had already afforded a secure hiding-place. He once more crept beneath the costly drapery, extended himself upon his back, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE ROYAL LOVERS.

HOLFORD awoke with a start.

At that moment the time-piece upon the mantel struck five. It was still quite dark.

The young man felt cold and nervous. He had dreamt that he was discovered and ejected from the palace amidst the jeers and taunts of the servants. He now suddenly recollected that the domestics would most probably soon arrive to cleanse and arrange the apartment; and detection in that case must be certain.

It struck him that he had better endeavour to escape at once from the royal dwelling. Then he thought and fondly flattered himself that the same good fortune which had hitherto attended him in this adventure would still follow him. This idea has caused many a hesitating mind to decide upon pursuing a career of crime, or folly, or peril. So was it with Holford; and he resolved to remain in the palace at least a short time longer.

But he perceived the absolute necessity of seeking out a secure place of concealment; and it struck him that the highest storeys of the building were those best calculated for this purpose. Leaving the apartment in which he had availed himself of the friendly sofa, and which, as before stated, was in the immediate vicinity of the Sculpture Gallery upon the ground-floor, he passed through the Library, and returned to the great hall. Ascending a magnificent marble staircase, he reached the Picture Gallery. Every here and there lamps were burning, and thus he was enabled to inspect all the scenes of magnificence and splendour through which he passed.

The Picture Gallery in Buckingham Palace is immediately over the Sculpture Gallery, and forms a wide passage separating the Green Drawing Room, the Throne Room, and other state apartments from the Roman, the Yellow, and the little drawing rooms. The Yellow Drawing Room is the largest and most splendid of the suite. The furniture is all richly carved, and is overlaid with burnished gilding and covered with yellow satin. The wall is surrounded by polished pillars of syenite marble; and on each panel is painted a portrait of some royal personage.

The Dining Room also leads out of the Picture Gallery. This gallery itself is decorated and adorned upon classic models. The frames of the pictures are very plain, but neat, and appropriated to the style of the architecture. There is nothing gorgeous in this gallery: every thing is in good taste; and yet the mouldings and fret-work of the ceiling are of the most elaborate description. The pictures in the gallery are all originals by eminent masters, and are the private property of the sovereign.

It may be here observed that the queen is passionately attached to the Fine Arts, in which, indeed, she is a proficient. In every room of the palace there are some excellent paintings; and in each apartment occupied by the queen, with the exception of the Throne Room, there is a grand pianoforte.

With a lamp in his hand, Henry Holford proceeded through those magnificent apartments which communicated with the Picture Gallery. He was astonished at the assemblage of wealth and splendour that met his eyes on every side. From time to time he seated himself upon the softest ottomans, and in the gilded chairs—in every place where he deemed it probable that the queen might have rested. At length he reached the Throne Room. The imperial seat itself was covered over with a velvet cloth, to protect it against the dust. Holford removed the cloth; and the splendours of the throne were revealed to him.

He hesitated for a moment: he felt as if he were committing a species of sacrilege;—then triumphing over this feeling—a feeling which had appeared like a remorse—he ascended the steps of the throne;—he placed himself in the seat of England's monarch.

Had the sceptre been there he would have grasped it;—had the crown been within his reach, he would have placed it upon his head!

But time pressed; and he was compelled to leave those apartments in which a strange and unaccountable fascination induced him to linger. He ascended a staircase leading to another storey; and now he proceeded with extreme caution, for he conceived that he must be in the immediate vicinity of the royal sleeping apartments. He hastened up to the highest storey he could reach, and entered several passages from which doors opened on either side. One of these doors was ajar; the light of a lamp in the passage enabled him to ascertain that the chamber into which it led was full of old furniture, trunks, boxes, bedding, and other lumber. This was precisely the place which suited the adventurous pot-boy; and he hastened to conceal himself amidst a pile of mattresses which formed a secure, warm, and comfortable berth.

Here he again fell asleep; and when he awoke the sun was shining brightly. He partook of his provisions with a good appetite, and then deliberated within himself what course he should pursue. He felt madly anxious to be near the person of the queen once more: he longed to hear her voice again;—he resolved to risk every thing to gratify these inclinations.

He began to understand that the vast extent of the palace, and the many different ways of reaching the various floors and suites of apartments, constituted the elements of his safety, and greatly diminished the risk of encountering any of the inmates of the royal dwelling. He was insane enough, moreover, to believe that some good genius or especial favour of fortune protected him; and these impressions were sufficiently powerful to induce him to attempt any fresh enterprise within the walls of the palace.

While he was debating within himself how he should proceed in order to satisfy his enthusiastic curiosity, the door suddenly opened, and two female servants of the royal household entered the lumber-room.

Holford's heart sank within him: his limbs seemed paralysed; his breath failed him.

"The entertainment takes place in the Yellow and Roman Drawing Rooms this evening," said one.

"The prince is expected at five o'clock," observed the other. "He and his father the Duke of Saxe Coburg Gotha, are to land at

Woolwich between two and three."

"So I heard. The royal carriages have already left to meet her Majesty's guests."

"Have you ever seen the prince?"

"Once. He was in England, I remember, a short time previous to the accession of her Majesty."

"Is he good looking?"

"Very. Of course you believe as I do, and as every one else does that Prince Albert of Saxe Coburg will——"

"Soon be Prince Albert of England."

"Hush! walls have ears!"

The servants having discovered the article of furniture which was the object of their search, left the room—greatly to the relief of Henry Holford, whose presence they never for a moment suspected.

Holford had thus accidentally learnt some information which served to guide his plans. The evening's entertainment was to take place in the Yellow Drawing Room—an apartment which he could not fail to recognise by the colour, as one which he had visited before day-break that morning. He had heard of Prince Albert, whom rumour had already mentioned as the happy being who had attracted the queen's favour. Every circumstance now lent its aid to induce the enthusiastic lad to resolve upon penetrating into the Yellow Drawing Room, by some means or another, during the afternoon.

It struck the intruder that if the queen intended to receive company in the Yellow Drawing-room in the evening, she would most probably welcome her illustrious guests from Germany in some other apartment. He knew, from the conversation of the two female servants, that the Grand Duke of Saxe-Coburg Gotha and Prince Albert, were to arrive at five: he presumed that the inmates of the palace would assemble in those points where they could command a view of the ducal *cortège*; and he came to the conclusion that the coast would be most clear for his purposes, at five o'clock.

Nor was he wrong in his conjectures; for scarcely had two minutes elapsed after the clock had proclaimed the hour of five, when Henry Holford was safely ensconced beneath a sofa in the Yellow Drawing Room.

At eight o'clock the servants entered and lighted the lamps. The colour of the paper and the satin of the furniture enhanced the splendour of the effulgence thus created in that magnificent saloon.

At half-past nine the door opened again; and Holford's heart beat quickly, for he now expected the appearance of the sovereign and her guests. But, no—not yet. Two ladies attached to the court, entered the drawing-room, and seated themselves upon the sofa beneath which Holford lay concealed.

"Well—what think you of the young prince?" said one. "Your grace was seated next to him."

"Very handsome—and so unassuming," was the reply.

"Does your grace really believe that her Majesty is smitten?"

"No doubt of it. How fortunate for the family of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Coburg!"

"Yes—fortunate on the score of alliance."

"And in a pecuniary point of view."

"Not so much as your grace thinks. There has been an absurd report in circulation that the grand duke's revenues are so small, none of his family could venture to appear at the court of Vienna: and also, that the means of education for the younger branches were always excessively restricted."

"And are not these reports correct, countess?"

"By no means. Your grace probably is aware that the earl and myself visited Germany the year before last; and we remained six weeks at Gotha. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg possesses a considerable civil list, and a large private fortune. His brother Ferdinand espoused the wealthy Princess Kohary of Hungary; and another brother, Leopold, married our lamented Princess Charlotte. It has been stated that Prince Leopold himself was a simple major in the Austrian service, with nothing but his pay, when he was fortunate enough to obtain the favour of the Princess Charlotte: this is so far from being correct, that he never was in the Austrian service at all, but was a general officer in the Russian army, enjoying, in addition to his full pay, a princely allowance from his country."

"Your ladyship has greatly pleased me with these elucidations."

"Your grace honours me with this mark of satisfaction. Prince Albert was educated at Bonn, on the Rhine. His mental qualifications are said to be of a very high order; his disposition is amiable; and he has obtained the affections of all who know him in Germany."

"It is to be hoped that her most gracious Majesty will enjoy a long, prosperous, and happy reign," said the duchess, in a tone of unfeigned sincerity.

"Long and prosperous it may be," returned the countess, with a strange solemnity of voice and manner; "but happy for her—happy for the sovereign whom we all so much love,—no—that is impossible!"

"Alas! I know to what you allude," observed the duchess, her tone also changing. "Merciful heavens! is there, then, no perfect happiness in this world?"

"Where shall perfect happiness be found?" exclaimed the countess, in a voice of deep melancholy, and with a profound sigh. "Never did any sovereign ascend the throne under more favourable circumstances than Victoria. Enshrined in a nation's heart—beloved by millions of human beings,—wearing the proudest diadem in the universe, and swaying the sceptre of a dominion extensive as that of Rome, in her most glorious days,—oh! why should not Victoria be completely happy? Alas! she can command the affections of her people by her conduct:—the valour of her subjects, the prowess of her generals, and the dauntless courage of her admirals, can preserve her empire from all encroachment—all peril;—wealth can surround her with every luxury, and all the potentates of the earth

may seek her friendship;—but no power—no dominion—no wealth—no luxury—no love, can exterminate the seeds——"

"Ah! countess—for God's sake, talk not in this manner!" ejaculated the duchess: "you make me melancholy—so melancholy, that I shall be dispirited the entire evening."

"Pardon me, my dear friend; but I know not how our discourse gradually turned upon so sad a subject. And yet the transition must have been natural," added the countess, in a mournful and plaintive voice; "for, most assuredly, I should not have voluntarily sought to converse upon so sad a theme."

"Sad!" cried the duchess; "'tis sufficient to make one's heart bleed. To think that a young creature whom millions and millions of beings idolize and adore—whose name is upon every lip—whose virtues and qualifications are the theme of every pen—whose slightest wish amounts to a command,—oh! to think that this envied and amiable being should be haunted, day and night—alone, or when surrounded by all that is most noble or most lovely in England's aristocracy,—haunted by that dread fear—that appalling alarm—that dismal apprehension;—oh! it is intolerable!"

"Alas!" said the countess; "what poor—what miserable creatures are we! The hand of the Deity mingles gall with the cup of nectar which is drunk by his elect! There is no situation in life without its vexations."

"Yes—vexations of all kinds!" echoed the duchess; "for those annoyances which are mere trifles to the lower classes, are grievous afflictions to us. But——"

At that moment the time-piece upon the mantel proclaimed the half-hour after ten; and the two ladies rose from the sofa, observing to each other, that it was time to hasten to attend upon the person of their royal mistress. They then withdrew.

It may be supposed that Holford had not lost one word of the above conversation. He had greedily drunk in every word;—but the concluding portion of it had filled him with the most anxious curiosity, and with wonder. To what did those dark, mysterious hints bear reference? And how could the happiness of the sovereign be incomplete? Those two noble ladies had detailed all the elements of felicity which formed the basis of the queen's position; and surely sufficient had been enumerated to prove the perfection of her happiness. And yet, allusion was made to one source of perpetual fear—one cause of unmixed alarm—one object of ever-present dread, by which the queen was haunted on all occasions. What could this be? Conjecture was vain—imagination could suggest nothing calculated to explain this strange mystery.

Shortly after eleven o'clock the doors were thrown open, and the royal train made its appearance. On the queen's right hand walked Prince Albert, the sovereign leaning gently upon his arm. He was dressed in a court-garb, and wore a foreign order upon his breast. Of slight form and slender make, his figure was wanting in manliness; but his deportment was graceful. His eyes beamed kindness; and there was something peculiarly sweet and pleasant in his smile. His countenance was expressive of intellect; his conversation was amusing. He was evidently a very pleasant companion; and when Victoria and Albert walked down the saloon together, there appeared a certain fitness in their union which was calculated to strike the most common beholder.

The queen and the prince seated themselves upon the sofa beneath which the pot-boy was concealed; and their conversation was plainly overheard by him. The noble and beauteous guests—the lords and the ladies of the court—withdrew to a distance; and the royal lovers—for such already were Victoria and Albert—enjoyed the pleasures of a *tête-à-tête*. We shall not record any portion of their discourse—animated, interesting, and tender though it were: suffice it to say, that for a short time they seemed to forget their high rank, and to throw aside the trammels of court etiquette, in order to give vent to those natural feelings which the sovereign has in common with the peasant.

This *tête-à-tête* lasted for nearly an hour: music and dancing then ensued; and the entertainment continued until two o'clock in the morning.

The company retired—the lights were extinguished in the state apartments—and profound silence once more reigned throughout the palace.

Holford paid another visit to the larder, and then retraced his steps unobserved to the lumber-room, where he slept until a late hour in the morning.

CHAPTER LX.

REVELATIONS.

FROM the very first moment that Victoria was called to the throne, she manifested a strict determination to exact a scrupulous observance of all the rules, regulations, and precedents which related to court-etiquette and official dignity. The Presence Chamber is never entered by any one who is not fully conversant with the laws of the court, and the mode of conduct and demeanour which they enforce. The rigid maintenance of these rules is nevertheless calculated to render the queen an isolated being, as it were, amidst her court; for no one is permitted to commence a conversation nor make a remark until first addressed by her Majesty. Then every word must be so measured—every syllable so weighed, that the mere fact of conversing with royalty would be deemed a complete labour, and even a perilous undertaking by those not conversant with the routine of a court.

Holford had seen much to surprise and astonish him. The image of the queen ever haunted his imagination: her voice ever rang in his ears. He disliked Prince Albert: that low, vulgar, uneducated, despised, obscure pot-boy, entertained a feeling of animosity,—he scarcely knew wherefore—against the young German who was evidently destined to become the husband of England's queen. Again and again did he ponder upon the mysterious conversation between the two ladies of the court, which he had overheard;—and he felt an ardent and insuperable longing to fathom their meaning to the bottom. But how was this to be done? He determined to obtain access to the drawing-room once more, and trust to the chapter of accidents to elucidate the mystery.

Accordingly, he contrived that same afternoon, to obtain access to the royal apartments, without detection, once more; and once more, also, did he conceal himself beneath the sofa. Fortune appeared to favour his views and wishes. Not many minutes had elapsed after he had ensconced himself in his hiding-place, when the two ladies, whose conversation had so much interested him on the preceding day, slowly entered the Yellow Drawing-Room.

The following dialogue then took place:—

"How very awkward the viscount was last evening, my dear duchess. He would insist upon turning the pages for me when I sate at the grand pianoforte; and he was always too soon or too late, although he pretended to read the *fantasia* which I played, bar by bar."

"That is very provoking!" said the duchess. "I believe there is to be a Drawing-Room to-morrow, at St. James's?"

"Yes: your grace must have forgotten that her Majesty decided last evening upon holding one."

"How many a young heart is fluttering now with anxiety and eager anticipation of to-morrow!" observed the duchess. "A Drawing-Room is most formidable to the novice in court affairs. But the most entertaining portion of the embarrassment of the novice, is the fear that the gentleman who bears the name of the *Court Circular*, and who is invariably stationed in the Presence Chamber, may omit to mention her presence in the report which he draws up for the newspapers."

"George the Third and his consort held Drawing-Rooms weekly, for many years," said the countess. "George the Fourth held Drawing-Rooms but very seldom. William and Adelaide usually held about five or six in a season. And, after all, what can be more magnificent—what more eminently calculated to sustain the honour and dignity of the crown,[72] than a British Court Drawing-Room? The tasteful dresses of the ladies—the blaze of diamonds—the waving ostrich plumes and lappets—the gold net—the costly tulle, constitute rather the characterstics of an oriental fiction than the reality of the present day."

"The most magnificent Drawing-Rooms, in my opinion," observed the duchess, "are those which we call *Collar Days*. The appearance of the Knights of the Garter, St. Patrick, the Thistle, the Cross and Bath, and all English orders, in their respective collars and jewels, in the presence of the sovereign, is splendid in the extreme."

"And how crowded upon Drawing-Room days are all the passages and corridors of St. James's Palace," continued the countess. "On the last occasion many of the peers and peeresses of the highest rank were compelled thus to wait for nearly three hours before their carriages could reach the palace-gates."

"The most beautiful view of splendid equipages is found in a glance upon the Ambassador's Court at Saint James's, the carriages of the foreign ministers being decidedly the finest and most tasteful that are seen in the vicinity of the palace on those occasions."

"Of a truth, this must be the most splendid court in the world," said the countess,—"since France became half republican (how I hate the odious word *Republic*!), and since Spain was compelled to copy France."

"Yes—our court is the most splendid in the world," echoed the duchess, in a tone of triumph, as if her grace were well aware that of that court she herself formed a brilliant ornament; "and more splendid still will it be when the queen shall have conferred her hand upon the interesting young prince who arrived yesterday."

"Have you heard when the royal intentions to contract an union with his Serene Highness Prince Albert, will be communicated to the country?"

"Not until the close of the year; and the marriage will therefore take place at the commencement of 1840. The prince will pay but a short visit upon this occasion, and then return to Germany until within a short period of the happy day."

"God send that the union may be a happy one!" ejaculated the countess. "But——"

"Oh! my dear friend, do not relapse again into those gloomy forebodings which rendered me melancholy all yesterday evening," interrupted the duchess.

"Alas! your grace is well aware of my devoted attachment to our royal mistress; and if there be times when I tremble for the consequences of——"

"Breathe it not—give not utterance to the bare idea!" cried the duchess, in a tone of the most unfeigned horror. "Providence will never permit an entire empire to experience so great a misfortune as this!"

"Maladies of that kind are hereditary," said the countess, solemnly;—"maladies of that species descend through generations—unsparing—pitiless—regardless of rank, power, or position;—oh! it is horrible to contemplate!"

"Horrible—most horrible!" echoed the duchess. "The mind that thus labours under constant terror of the approach of that fearful malady, requires incessant excitement—perpetual change of scene; and this restlessness which we have observed on the part of our beloved Sovereign—and those intervals of deep gloom and depression of spirits, when that craving after variety and bustle is not indulged—"

"Are all——"

"Oh! I comprehend you too well."

"And marriage in such a case——"

"Perpetuates the disease! Yes—yes—we must surround our sovereign with all our love, all our affection, all our devotion—for bitter, bitter are the moments of solitary meditation experienced at intervals by our adored mistress."

"Such is our duty—such our desire," said the countess. "The entire family of George the Third has inherited the seeds of disease—physical and mental——"

"Scrofula and insanity," said the duchess, with a cold shudder.

"Which were inherent in that monarch," added the countess. "Did your grace ever hear the real cause and spring of that development of mental alienation in George the Third?"

"I know not precisely to what incident your ladyship alludes," said the duchess.

"That unhappy sovereign," resumed the countess, "when Prince of Wales, fell in love with a beautiful young Quakeress, whose name was Hannah Lightfoot, and whom he first beheld at the window of a house in Saint James's Street. For some time his Royal Highness and the young lady met in secret, and enjoyed each other's society. At length the passion of the prince arrived at that point when he discovered that his happiness entirely depended upon his union with Hannah Lightfoot. His Royal Highness confided his secret to his next brother Edward, to Dr. Wilmot (who was really the author of the letters of Junius), and to my mother. Those personages were the only witnesses of the legal marriage of the Prince of Wales with Hannah Lightfoot, which was solemnized by Dr. Wilmot, in Curzon Street Chapel, May Fair, in the year 1759."

"I have heard that such a connection existed," said the duchess; "but I never thought until now that it was of so serious and solemn a nature."

"Your grace may rely upon the truth of what I now tell you. Not long after the prince came to the throne, the Ministers discovered his connection with the Quakeress. The 'Royal Marriage Act' was ultimately framed to prevent such occurrences with regard to future princes; but it did not annul the union between George the Third and Hannah Lightfoot."

"Was there any issue from this marriage?" inquired the duchess.

"There *was* issue," answered the countess solemnly, a deep gloom suddenly passing over her countenance. "At my mother's death I discovered certain papers which revealed to me many, many strange events connected with the court of George the Third; and in which she was a confidant. But the history of Hannah Lightfoot is a sad one—a very melancholy one; and positively can I assert that it led to the subsequent mental aberration of the king."

"And there was issue resulting from that union, your ladyship says?" exclaimed the duchess, deeply interested in these disclosures.

"Yes—there was, there was!" returned the countess. "But do not question me any more at present—on a future occasion I will place in the hands of your grace the papers which my deceased mother left behind her, and which I have carefully treasured up in secret—unknown even to my husband!"

"And are the revelations so very interesting?" demanded the duchess.

"The events which have taken place in the family of George the Third would make your hair stand on end," replied the countess, sinking her voice almost to a whisper. "But, pray—question me no more at present. Another time—another time," she added hastily, "you shall know all that I know!"

There was something so exceedingly mysterious and exciting in the tone and manner of the countess, that the duchess evidently burned with curiosity to make further inquiries. But her fair companion avoided the subject with terror and disgust; and the conversation accordingly reverted to the engagement existing between Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. Nothing more was, however, said which we deem it necessary to record;—but when the two ladies had retired from the apartment, Holford had plenty of food for mental digestion. He had discovered the fatal drawback to the perfect happiness of his sovereign; and he now perceived that those who dwell in palaces, and wear diadems upon their brows, are not beyond the reach of the sharpest arrows of misfortune.

During the remainder of that evening Holford was the uninterrupted possessor of the Yellow Drawing-Room. There was a grand ball in another suite of apartments; but it was not until between three and four o'clock in the morning that the pot-boy considered it safe to quit his hiding-place.

He was now undecided whether to beat a retreat from the royal dwelling, or to favour it with his presence a little longer. The last conversation which he had overheard between the duchess and the countess, had excited within him the most lively interest; and he was anxious to hear more of those strange revelations connected with the family of George the Third, a continuation of which the countess had appeared to promise her noble friend. He was moreover emboldened by the success which had hitherto attended his adventures in the palace; and he consequently resolved upon prolonging his stay in a place where a morbid taste for the romantic encountered such welcome food.

Upon leaving the Yellow Drawing-Room, at about half-past three in the morning, as before stated, Holford proceeded to the pantry to lay in a supply of provender, as usual. He was so pressed with hunger upon this occasion, that he commenced an immediate attack upon the provisions; and was thus pleasantly engaged when, to his horror and dismay, he beheld the shadow of a human form suddenly pass along the wall—for he was standing with his back to the lamp that was burning in the passage.

He turned round—and his eyes encountered the cadaverous and sinister countenance of the Resurrection Man.

"Well this *is* fortunate," said the latter.

"What! you here!" ejaculated Holford, trembling from head to foot.

"Yes—certainly: why not?" said the Resurrection Man. "It struck me that as you never came near me and the Cracksman, you must be still in the royal crib; and I considered that to be a sign that all was right. So I mustered up my courage, and came to look after you. The Cracksman's waiting on the hill."

"Then let us leave this place immediately," cried Holford. "We can do nothing at present—I was going to take my departure within an hour. Come—let us go; and I will tell you every thing when we are in a place of security."

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the Resurrection Man. "You can't have been here all this time without having found out where the plate is kept."

"Listen for one moment," said Holford, a sudden idea striking him: "the queen leaves for Windsor the day after to-morrow—then will be the time to do what you require; and I can give you all the information you will want. At present nothing can be done—nothing; and if we stay here much longer we shall be discovered."

"Well," said the Resurrection Man; "provided that some good will result from your visit——"

"There will—there will."

"Then I must follow your advice; for of course you are better able to judge of what can be done and what can't be done in this crib, than me."

The Resurrection Man glanced around him; but fortunately there was no plate left upon the shelves on this occasion. Holford felt inwardly pleased at this circumstance; for the idea of abstracting anything beyond a morsel of food from the palace was abhorrent to his mind.

The Resurrection Man intimated that he was ready to depart; and the pot-boy was only too glad to be the means of hurrying him away.

They left the palace, and entered the gardens, which they threaded in safety. A profound silence reigned around: the morning air was chill and piercing. The fresh atmosphere was nevertheless most welcome and cheering to the young pot-boy, who had passed so many hours in close and heated rooms.

They reached the wall on Constitution Hill in safety, and in a few moments were beyond the enclosure of the royal domains.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE "BOOZING KEN" ONCE MORE.

MORNING dawned upon the great metropolis.

The landlord and landlady of the "Boozing-Ken" on Saffron Hill were busily employed, as we have seen them upon a former occasion, in dispensing glasses of "all sorts" to their numerous customers. The bar was surrounded by every thing the most revolting, the most hideous, and the most repulsive in human shape.

"Well, Joe," said the landlord to a man dressed like a butcher, and whose clothes emitted a greasy and carrion-like smell, "what news down at Cow Cross?"

"Nothink partikler," answered the man, who followed the pleasant and agreeable calling of a journeyman-knacker. "We have been precious full of work lately—and that's all I knows or cares about. Seventy-nine horses I see knocked down yesterday; and out of them, fifty-three was so awful diseased and glandered when they was brought in, that we was obleeged to kill 'em and cut 'em up with masks and gloves on. It was but three weeks ago that we lost our best man, Ben Biddle:—you recollects Ben Biddle?"

"I knowed him well," said the landlord. "He took his 'morning' here reglar for sixteen years, and never owed a penny."

"But do you know how he died?" demanded the knacker, staring the landlord significantly in the face.

"Can't say that I do."

"He died of a fearful disease which is getting more and more amongst human creeturs every day," continued the knacker:—"he died of the glanders!"

"The glanders!" ejaculated the landlady, with a shudder; and all the persons who were taking their "morning" at the bar crowded around the knacker to hear the particulars of Ben Biddle's death.

"You see," resumed the knacker, now putting on a very solemn and important air, "there is more diseased horses sold in Smithfield-Market than sound 'uns. The art of doctoring a dying horse so that he looks as lively and sound as possible to any one which ain't wery knowing in them matters, is come to sich a pitch, that I'm blowed if the wisest ain't taken in at times. We have horses come into our yard that was bought the same morning in Smithfield, and seemed slap-up animals; but in a few hours the effects of the stimulants given to 'em goes off, the plugs falls out of their noses, and there they are at the point of death. Why—if a horse has got four white feet, they'll paint three, or perhaps all on 'em black; and *that part* of the deception isn't never found out till they're flayed in our yard."

"But about poor Biddle?" said the landlord.

"Well, in comes a horse one day," continued the knacker; "and although we saw he was dead lame and altogether done up, we never suspected that he had the glanders. So Ben Biddle had the killing on him. He drives the pole-axe into the animal's skull; and he takes the wire and thrusts it into the brain as business-like as possible. While he was stooping over the beast, his hat falls off his head, and his handkerchief, which he always carried in his hat, fell just upon the horse's mouth. The brute snorted out a last groan at the wery moment that Ben picks up his handkerchief. So Ben puts the handkerchief again into his hat, and puts his hat upon his head; and away we all goes to the public-house to have a drop of half-and-half."

"Very right too," said the landlord who no doubt spoke feelingly.

"Well," proceeded the knacker, "Ben drinks his share, and presently he takes his handkerchief out of his hat quite permiscuous like, and wipes his face. In a few minutes he feels a strange pain in the eyes just as if some dust had got in;—but he did'nt think much on it, and so we all goes back to the yard. In a few hours Ben was taken so bad he was obliged to give up work; and by eight or nine o'clock we was forced to take him to Bartholomew's Hospital. He was seized with dreadful fits of womiting; and matter come out of his nose, eyes, and month. By the morning his face was all covered over with sores; holes appeared in his eyes, just for all the world as if they had got a most tremendous small-pox in 'em; and his nose fell off. By three o'clock in the arternoon he was a dead man; and I heerd say that he died in the most awful agonies."

"And that was the glanders?" said the landlady.

"Yes: he got 'em by wiping his face with the pocket-handkerchief that had fallen on the horse's nostrils."

"How shocking!" ejaculated several voices.

"And is the glanders increasing?" asked the landlord.

"The glanders *is* increasing," answered the knacker; "and I feel convinced that it will soon become a disease as reglar amongst human beings as the small-pox or measles; 'cos the authorities doesn't do their duty in preventing the sale of diseased animals."

"And how would you remedy the evil?"

"I would have the Lord Mayor and Corporation appoint a proper veterinary surgeon as Inspector in Smithfield Market—a man of great experience and knowledge, who won't let himself be humbugged or gammoned by any of those infernal thieves that gets a living—aye, and makes fortunes too, by selling diseased animals doctored up for the occasion."

"Yes—that's certainly a capital plan of your'n," said the landlord approvingly. "But what becomes of all the flesh of the horses that go to your yards?"

"You may divide the horses that's killed by the knacker into three sorts," answered the man: "that is—first, those horses that is quite healthy but that has met with accidents in their limbs; second, those that is perhaps the least thing diseased, or in the wery last

stage through old age; and third, those that is altogether rotten. The flesh of the first is bought by men whose business it is to boil it carefully, and sell it to the sassage-makers: it makes the sassages firm, and is much better than beef. There isn't a sassage shop in London that don't use it. Then the tongues of these first-rate animals goes to the butchers, who salts and pickles 'em: and I'm blow'd if any one could tell 'em from the best ox-tongues."

"Well, I'll never eat sassages or tongues again!" cried the landlady.

"Oh! nonsense—it's all fancy!" exclaimed the knacker. "Half the tongues that is sold for ox-tongues is horses' tongues. A knowing hand may always tell 'em, 'cos they're rayther longer and thinner: for my part, I like 'em just as well—every bit."

"And the flesh of the second sort of horses?"

"That goes to supply the cat's-meat men in the swell neighbourhoods; and the third sort, that is altogether putrid and rotten, is taken up by the cat's-meat men in the poor neighbourhoods."

"And do you mean to say that there's a difference even in cat's-meat between the rich and the poor customers?" demanded the landlord.

"Do I mean to say so?" repeated the knacker, in a tone which showed that he was surprised at the question being asked: "why, of course I do! The poor may be pisoned—and very often is too—for what the rich cares a fig. I can tell you more too: some of the first class horses'-meat—the sound and good, remember—is made into what's called *hung-beef*; some is potted; some is sold to the boarding-schools round London, where they takes in young gen'lemen and ladies at a wery low rate; and some is disposed of—but, no—I don't dare tell you—"

"Yes—do tell us!" said the landlady, in a coaxing tone.

"Do—there's a good fellow," cried the landlord.

"Come, tell us," exclaimed a dozen voices.

"No—no—I can't—I should get myself into a scrape, perhaps," said the knacker, who was only putting a more keen edge upon the curiosity which he had excited, for he intended to yield all the time.

"We won't say a word," observed the landlady.

"And I'll stand a quartern of blue ruin," added the landlord, "with three outs—for you, me, and the missus."

"Well—if I must, I must," said the knacker, with affected reluctance. "The fact is," he continued slowly, as if he were weighing every word he uttered, "some of the primest bits of the first-rate flesh that goes out of the knackers' yards of this wast metropolis is sent to the workuses!"

"The workhouses!" ejaculated the landlady: "oh, what a horror!"

"An abomination!" cried the landlord, filling three wine-glasses with gin.

"It is God's truth—and now that I've said it, I'll stick to it," said the knacker.

"It's a shame—a burning shame!" screamed a female voice. "My poor old mother's in the Union, after having paid rates and taxes for forty-two year; and if they make her eat horse's flesh, I'd like to know whether this country is governed by savages or not."

"And my brother's in a workus too," said a poor decrepit old man; "and he once kept his carriage and dined in company with George the Third at Guildhall, where he'd no end of turtle and venison. But, lack-a-daisy! this is a sad falling off, if he's to come down to horse-flesh in his old age."

"What's the use of all this here whining and nonsense, eh?" exclaimed the knacker. "Don't I tell you that good horse-flesh answers all the purposes of beef, and is eaten by the rich in the shape of sassages and tongues? What's the use, then, of making a fuss about it? How do you suppose the sassage-shops can afford to sell solid meat, without bone, at the price they do, if they didn't mix it with horses'-flesh? They pays two-pence a-pound for the first-class flesh—and so it must be good."

"Never mind," ejaculated a voice: "it's a shame to give paupers only a few ounces of meat a-week, and let *that* be horses'-flesh. It's high time these things was put an end to. Why don't the people take their own affairs in their own hands?"

"Come, now," said the knacker, assuming a dictatorial air, and placing his arms akimbo; "perhaps you ain't aweer that good first-class horses'-flesh is better than half the meat that is sold in certain markets—I shan't say which—for the benefit of the poor. Now you toddle out on Sunday night, on the Holloway, Liverpool, Mile End, and Hackney roads, and see the sheep, and oxen, and calves, coming into London for the next morning's market. Numbers of the poor beasts fall down and die through sheer fatigue. They're flayed and cut up all the same for the butcher's market. And what do you think becomes of all the beasts that die of disease and so on, in the fields? Do you suppose they're wasted? No such a thing! *They* are all cut up *too* for consumption. Just take a walk on a Saturday night through a certain market, *after* the gas is lighted—not *before*, mind—and look at the meat which is marked cheap. You'll see beef at two-pence half-penny a pound, and veal at three-pence. But what sort of stuff is it? Diseased—rotten! The butchers rub it over with fresh suet or fat, and that gives it a brighter appearance and a better smell. Howsomever, they can't perwent the meat from being quite thin, shrunk, poor, and flabby upon the bone."

"I'll bear witness to the truth of all wot you've been saying this last time," said a butcher's lad, stepping forward.

"Of course you can," exclaimed the knacker, casting a triumphant glance around him. "And do you know," he continued, "that half the diseases and illnesses which takes hold on us without any wisible cause, and which sometimes puzzles the doctors themselves, comes from eating this bad meat that I've been talkin' about. Now, tell me—ain't a bit out of a good healthy horse, that was killed in a reg'lar way, with the blood flowing, better than a joint off a old cow that dropped down dead of the yallows in a field during the night, and wasn't found so till the morning?"

With these words the knacker took his departure, leaving his hearers disgusted, indignant, and astonished at what they had heard.

As the clock struck nine, the Resurrection Man and the Cracksman entered the "Boozing Ken." They repaired straight into the parlour, and seemed disappointed at not finding there some one whom they evidently expected.

"He ain't come yet, the young spark," said the Cracksman. "And yet he's had plenty of time to go home and get a change o' linen and that like."

"May be he has turned into bed and had a good snooze," observed the Resurrection Man. "He is not so accustomed to remain up all night as we are."

"I think his head is rag'lar turned with what he has seen in the great crib yonder. He seemed to give sich exceeding wague answers to the questions we put to him as we walked through the park this morning. I've heerd say that the conwersation of great people is wery gammoning, and that they can't always understand each other: so, if young Holford has been listening to their fine talk, it's no wonder he's got crankey."

"Humbug!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man, sulkily. "Let's have some egg-flip, and we'll wait for him. If he comes he shall give us all the information we want; and if he doesn't, we will lay wait for him, carry him off to the crib, and let the Mummy take care of him till he chooses to speak."

"Yes—that'll be the best plan," said the Cracksman. "But don't you think it's a wery likely thing he wants to have the whole business to himself?"

"That's just what I *do* think," answered the Resurrection Man, "he'll find himself mistaken, though—I rather fancy."

"So do I," echoed the Cracksman. "But let's have this egg-flip."

With these words he ordered the beverage; and, in due time a quart pot filled with the inviting compound, with a foaming head, and exhaling a strong odour of spices, was brought in by a paralytic waiter, who had succeeded the slip-shod girl mentioned on a former occasion.

"Good stuff this," said the Cracksman, smacking his lips. "I wonder whether poor Buffer has got anythink half so good this morning."

"What's to-day? Oh! Friday," mused the Resurrection Man, as he sipped his quantum of flip from a tumbler, with a relish equal to that evinced by his companion: "let's see—what's the fare to-day in Clerkenwell Prison?"

"Lord! don't you recollect all that?" cried the Cracksman; and taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, he wrote the Dietary Table of Clerkenwell New Prison upon the wall:—

	Soup.	Gruel.	Meat.	Bread.
	Pint.	*Pint.*	*Ounces.*	*Ounces.*
Monday	..	2½	..	20
Tuesday	..	1½	6	20
Wednesday	..	2½	..	20
Thursday	..	2½	..	20
Friday	1	1½	..	20
Saturday	..	1½	6	20
Sunday	1	1½	..	20
Total Weekly Allowance	2	13½	12	140

"That's a nice allowance for a strong healthy fellow!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man contemptuously. "One month upon that will make his flesh as soft and flabby as possible. It's a shame, by heavens! to kill human beings by inches in that way!"

"What a precious fool the Buffer *has* made of himself!" said the Cracksman after a pause.

"The Buffer!" ejaculated the paralytic waiter, who had been affecting to dust a table as an excuse to linger in the room with the chance of obtaining an invitation to partake of the flip: "is any thing wrong with the Buffer?"

"Safe in lavender," answered the Cracksman, coolly; "and ten to one he'll swing for it."

"My eyes! I'm very sorry to hear that," cried the waiter. "He was a capital fellow, and never took the change when he gave me a joey[73] to pay for his three-penn'orth of rum of a morning."

"Well, he's done it brown at last, at all events," continued the Cracksman.

"What *has* he done?" asked the waiter.

"Why—what he isn't likely to have a chance of doing again," answered the Cracksman. "I suppose you know that he married Moll Flairer, the sister of him as was killed by Bill Bolter at the Old House in Chick Lane, three years or so ago? Well—he had a child by Moll; and a very pretty little creetur it was. Even a fellow like me that can't be supposed to have much feeling for that kind of thing, used to love to play with that little child. It was a girl; and I never did see such sweet blue eyes, and soft flaxy hair. The moment she

was born, off goes the Buffer and subscribes to half a dozen *burying clubs*. The secretaries and treasurers was all exceedin' glad to see him, took his tin, and put down his name. This was about two year ago. He kept up all his payments reg'lar; and he was also precious reg'lar in keeping up such a system of ill-treatment, that the poor little thing seemed sinking under it. Now, as I said before, I'm not the most remarkablest man in London for feeling; but I'm blow'd if I couldn't have cried sometimes to see the way in which the Buffer and Moll would use that child. I've seen it standing in a pail of cold water, stark naked, in the middle of winter, when the ice was floating on the top; and because it cried, its mother would take a rope, half an inch thick, and belabour its poor back. Then they half starved it, and made it sleep on the bare boards. But the little thing loved its parents for all that; and when the Buffer beat Moll, I've seen that poor child creep up to her, and say in such a soft tone, '*Don't cry, mother!*' Perhaps all the reward it got for that was a good weltering. How the child stood it all so long, I can't say: the Buffer thought she never would die; so he determined to put an end to it at once. And yet he didn't want money, for we had had some good things lately, what with one thing and another. All I know is that he first takes the little child and flings it down stairs; he then puts it to bed, and sends his wife to the doctor's for some medicine, and into the medicine he pours some laudanum. The little creature went to sleep smiling at him; and never woke no more. This was two days ago. Yesterday the Buffer goes round to all the *burying clubs*, and gives notice of the death of the child. But some how or another the thing got wind; one of the secretaries of a club takes a surgeon along with him to the Buffer's lodgings, and all's blown."

"Well—I never heard of such a rig as that before," exclaimed the waiter.

"As for the rig," observed the Cracksman, coolly, "that is common enough. Ever since the *burial societies* and *funeral clubs* came into existence, nothink has been more common than these child-murders. A man in full work can very well afford to pay a few halfpence a-week to each club that he subscribes to, even supposing he puts his name down to a dozen. Then those that don't kill their children right out, do it by means of exposure, neglect, and all kinds of horrible treatment; and so it's easy enough for a man to get forty or fifty pounds in this way at one sweep."

"So it is—so it is," said the waiter: "*burial clubs* afford a regular premium upon the murder of young children. Ah! London's a wonderful place—a wonderful place! Every thing of that kind is invented and got up first in London. I really do think that London beats all other cities in the world for matters of that sort. Look, for instance, what a blessed thing it is that the authorities seldom or never attempt to alter what they call the *low neighbourhoods*: why, it's the low neighbourhoods that make such gentlemen as you two, and affords you the means of concealment, and existence, and occupation, and every thing else. Supposing there was no boozing-kens, and patter-cribs like this, how would such gentlemen as you two get on? Ah! London is a fine place—a very fine place; and I hope I shall never live to see the day when it will be spoilt by improvement!"

"Come, there's a good deal of reason in all that," exclaimed the Resurrection Man. "Here, my good fellow," he added, turning to the waiter, "drink this tumbler of egg-hot for your fine speech."

The waiter did not require to be asked twice, but imbibed the smoking beverage with infinite satisfaction to himself.

"I never heard any thing more true than what that fellow has just said," observed the Resurrection Man to his companion in iniquity. "Only suppose, now, that all Saint Giles's, Clerkenwell, Bethnal Green, and the Mint were *improved*, as they call it, where the devil would crime take refuge?—for no one knows better than you and me that we should uncommon soon have to give up business if we hadn't dark and narrow streets to operate in, cribs like this ken to meet and plan in, and the low courts and alleys to conceal ourselves in. Lord! what indeed would London be to us if it was all like the West-End?"

"And so the fact is that the authorities very kindly leave in existence and undisturbed, those very places which give birth to you gentlemen in the first instance," said the waiter, "and sustain you afterwards."

"Well, you ain't very far wrong, old feller," exclaimed the Cracksman. "But, blow me, if this ever struck me before."

"Nor me, neither," said the Resurrection Man, "till the flunkey started the subject."

"Ah! there's a many things that has struck me since I've been in the waiter-line in flash houses of this kind," observed the paralytic attendant, shaking his head solemnly; "but one curious fact I've noticed,—which is, that in nine cases out of ten the laws themselves make men take to bad ways, and then punish them for acting under their influence."

"I don't understand that," said the Cracksman.

"I do, though," exclaimed the Resurrection Man; "and I mean to say that the flunkey is quite right. We ain't born bad: something then must have made us bad. If I had been in the Duke of Wellington's place, I should be an honourable and upright man like him; and if he had been in my place, he would be—what I am."

"Of course he would," echoed the waiter.

"Now I understand," cried the Cracksman.

"I tell you what we'll do," said the Resurrection Man, after a few moments' reflection; "this devil of a Holford doesn't appear to hurry himself, and the rain has just begun to fall in torrents;—so we'll have another quart of flip, and the flunkey shall sit down with us and enjoy it; and I will just tell you the history of my own life, by way of passing away the time. Perhaps you may find," added the Resurrection Man, "that it helps to bear out the flunkey's remark, *that in nine cases out of ten the laws themselves make us take to bad ways, and then punish us for acting under their influence*."

The second supply of flip was procured; the door of the parlour was shut; room was made for the paralytic waiter near the fire; and the Resurrection Man commenced his narrative in the following manner.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE RESURRECTION MAN'S HISTORY.

"I was born thirty-eight years ago, near the village of Walmer, in Kent. My father and mother occupied a small cottage—or rather hovel, made of the wreck of a ship, upon the sea-coast. Their ostensible employment was that of fishing: but it would appear that smuggling and body-snatching also formed a portion of my father's avocations. The rich inhabitants of Walmer and Deal encouraged him in his contraband pursuits, by purchasing French silks, gloves, and scents of him: the gentlemen, moreover, were excellent customers for French brandy, and the ladies for dresses and perfumes. The clergyman of Walmer and his wife were our best patrons in this way; and in consequence of the frequent visits they paid our cottage, they took a sort of liking to me. The parson made me attend the national school regularly every Sunday; and when I was nine years old he took me into his service to clean the boots and knives, brush the clothes, and so forth. I was then very fond of reading, and used to pass all my leisure time in studying books which he allowed me to take out of his library. This lasted till I was twelve years old, when my father was one morning arrested on a charge of smuggling, and taken to Dover Castle. The whole neighbourhood expressed their surprise that a man who appeared to be so respectable, should turn out such a villain. The gentlemen who used to buy brandy of him talked loudly of the necessity of making an example of him: the ladies, who were accustomed to purchase gloves, silks, and *eau-de-cologne*, wondered that such a desperate ruffian should have allowed them to sleep safe in their beds; and of course the clergyman and his wife kicked me ignominiously out of doors. As all things of this nature create a sensation in a small community, the parson preached a sermon upon the subject on the following Sunday, choosing for his text '*Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's*,' and earnestly enjoining all his congregation to unite in deprecating the conduct of a man who had brought disgrace upon a neighbourhood till then famed for its loyalty, its morality, and its devotion to the laws of the country.

"My father was acquitted for want of evidence, and returned home after having been in prison six months waiting for his trial. In the mean time my mother and myself were compelled to receive parish relief: not one of the fine ladies and gentlemen who had been the indirect means of getting my father into a scrape by encouraging him in his illegal pursuits, would notice us. My mother called upon several; but their doors were banged in her face. When I appeared at the Sunday School, the parson expelled me, declaring that I was only calculated to pollute honest and good boys; and the beadle thrashed me soundly for daring to attempt to enter the church. All this gave me a very strange idea of human nature, and set me a-thinking upon the state of society. Just at that period a baronet in the neighbourhood was proved to be the owner of a smuggling vessel, and to be pretty deep in the contraband business himself. He was compelled to run away: an Exchequer process, I think they call it, issued against his property; and every thing he possessed was swept away. It appeared that he had been smuggling for years, and had defrauded the revenue to an immense amount. He was a widower: but he had three children—two boys and a girl, at school in the neighbourhood. Oh! then what sympathy was created for these '*poor dear bereaved little ones*,' as the parson called them in a charity sermon which he preached for their benefit. And there they were, marshalled into the parson's own pew, by the beadle; and the parson's wife wept over them. Subscriptions were got up for them;—the mayor of Deal took one boy, the banker another, and the clergyman's wife took charge of the girl; and never was seen so much weeping, and consoling, and compassion before!

"Well, at that time my mother had got so thin, and weak, and ill, through want and affliction, that her neighbours gave her the name of the *Mummy*, which she has kept ever since. My father came home, and was shunned by every body. The baronet's uncle happened to die at that period, and left his nephew an immense fortune:—the baronet paid all the fines, settled the Exchequer matters, and returned to Walmer. A triumphal reception awaited him: balls, parties, concerts, and routs took place in honour of the event;—and the mayor, the banker and the clergyman and his wife were held up as the patterns of philanthropy and humanity. Of course the baronet rewarded them liberally for having taken care of his children in the hour of need.

"This business again set me a-thinking; and I began to comprehend that birth and station made an immense difference in the views that the world adopted of men's actions. My father, who had only higgled and fiddled with smuggling affairs upon a miserably small scale, was set down as the most atrocious monster unhung, because he was one of the common herd; but the baronet, who had carried on a systematic contraband trade to an immense amount, was looked upon as a martyr to tyrannical laws, because he was one of the upper classes and possessed a title. So my disposition was soured by these proofs of human injustice, at my very entrance upon life.

"Up to this period, in spite of the contemplation of the lawless trade carried on by my father, I had been a regular attendant at church and at the Sunday-school; and I declare most solemnly that I never went to sleep at night, nor commenced my morning's avocations, without saying my prayers. But when my father got into trouble, the beadle kicked me out of church, and the parson drove me out of the school; and so I began to think that if my religion was only serviceable and available as long as my father remained unharmed by the law, it could not be worth much. From that moment I never said another prayer, and never opened a bible or prayer-book. Still I was inclined to labour to obtain an honest livelihood; and I implored my father, upon my knees, not to force me to assist in his proceedings of smuggling and body-snatching, to both which he was compelled by dire necessity to return the moment he was released from gaol. He told me I was a fool to think of living honestly, as the world would not let me; but he added that I might make the trial.

"Pleased with this permission, and sincerely hoping that I might obtain some occupation, however menial, which would enable me to eat the bread of honest toil, I went round to all the farmers in the neighbourhood, and offered to enter their service as a plough-boy or a stable-boy. The moment they found out who I was, they one and all turned me away from their doors. One said, '*Like father, like son*;'—another asked if I was mad, to think that I could thus thrust myself into an honest family;—a third laughed in my face;—a fourth threatened to have me taken up for wanting to get into his house to commit a felony;—a fifth swore that there was gallows

written upon my countenance;—a sixth ordered his men to loosen the bulldog at me;—and a seventh would have had me ducked in his horse-pond, if I had not run away.

"Dispirited, but not altogether despairing, I returned home. On the following day, I walked into Deal, (which almost joins Walmer) and called at several tradesmen's shops to inquire if they wanted an errand-boy. My reception by these individuals was worse than that which I had met with at the hands of the farmers. One asked me if I thought he would run the risk of having his house indicted as the receptacle for thieves and vagabonds;—a second pointed to his children, and said, '*Do you suppose I want to bring them up in the road to the gallows?*'—a third locked up his till in affright, and threatened to call a constable;—and a fourth lashed me severely with a horse-whip.

"Still I was not totally disheartened. I determined to call upon some of those ladies and gentlemen who had been my father's best customers for his contraband articles. One lady upon hearing my business, seized hold of the poker with one hand and her salts-bottle with the other;—a second was also nearly fainting, and rang the bell for her maid to bring her some *eau-de-cologne*—the very *eau-de-cologne* which my father had smuggled for her;—a third begged me with tears in her eyes to retire, or my very suspicions appearance would frighten her lap-dog into fits;—and a fourth (an old lady, who was my father's best customer for French brandy), held up her hands to heaven, and implored the Lord to protect her from all sabbath-breakers, profane swearers, and drunkards.

"Finding that I had nothing to expect from the ladies, I tried the gentlemen who had been accustomed to patronise my father previous to his *misfortune*. The first swore at me like a trooper, and assured me that he had always prophesied I should go wrong:—the second spoke civilly, and regretted that his excellent advice had been all thrown away upon my father, whom he had vainly endeavered to avert from his wicked courses (it was for smuggling things for this gentleman that my father had been arrested);—and the third made no direct answer, but shook his head solemnly, and wondered what the world was coming to.

"I was now really reduced to despair. I, however, resolved to try some of the very poorest tradesmen in the town. By these miserable creatures I was received with compassionate interest; and my case was fully comprehended by them. Some even gave me a few halfpence; and one made me sit down and dine with him, his wife, and his children. They, however, one and all declared *that they could not take me into their service, for, if they did, they would be sure to offend all their customers*. Thus was it that the overbearing conduct and atrocious tyranny of the more wealthy part of the community, compelled the poorer portion to smother all sympathy in my behalf.

"A sudden thought now struck me. I resolved to call next day upon the very baronet who had himself suffered so much in consequence of the customs-laws. Exhilarated by the new hope awakened within me, I repaired on the following morning to the splendid mansion which he now inhabited. I was shown into a magnificent room, where he received me, lounging before a cheerful fire. He listened very patiently to my tale, and then spoke, as nearly as I can recollect, as follows:—'My good lad, I have not the slightest doubt that you are anxious to eat the bread of honesty, as you very properly express it. But that bread is not within the reach of every body; and if we were all to pick and choose in this world, my God! what would become of us? My dear young man, I occupy a prominent position amidst the gentry of these parts, and I have also a duty to fulfil towards society. Society has condemned you—unheard, I grant you: nevertheless, society *has* condemned you. Under these circumstances I have no alternative, but to decline taking you into my service; and I must moreover request you to remember that if you are ever found loitering upon my grounds, I shall have you put in the stocks. I regret that my duty to society compels me thus to act.'

"You may conceive with what feelings I heard this long tirade. I was literally confounded, and retired without venturing upon a remonstrance. I knew not what course to adopt. To return home and inform my parents that I could obtain no work, was to lay myself under the necessity of becoming a smuggler and a body-snatcher at once. As a desperate resource I thought of calling upon the clergyman, and explaining all my sentiments to him. I hoped to be able to convince him that although my father was bad, or supposed to be bad, yet I abhorred vice in all its shapes, and was anxious only to pursue honest courses. As a Christian minister, he could not, I imagined, be so uncharitable as to infer my guilt in consequence of that of my parent; and, accordingly, to him did I repair. He had just returned to his own house from a funeral, and was in a hurry to be off on a shooting excursion, for he had on his sporting-garb beneath his surplice. He listened to me with great impatience, and asked if my father still pursued his contraband trade. Seeing that I hesitated how to reply, he exclaimed, turning his eyes up to heaven, '*Speak the truth, young man, and shame the devil!*' I answered in the affirmative; and he then said carelessly, 'Well, go and speak to my wife; she will act in the matter as she chooses.' Rejoiced at this hopeful turn in the proceeding, I sought his lady, as I was desired. She heard all that I had to say, and then observed, 'Not for worlds could I receive you into my house again; but if your father has any silks and gloves, very cheap and very good, I do not mind purchasing them. And remember,' she added, as I was about to depart, 'I do not want these things; I only offer to take them for the purpose of doing you a service. My motive is purely a Christian one.'

"I returned home. 'Well,' said my father, 'what luck this morning?'—'None,' I replied.—'And what do you mean to do, lad?'—'To become a smuggler, a body-snatcher, or any thing else that you choose,' was my reply; 'and the sooner we begin, the better, for I am sick and tired of being good.'

"So I became a smuggler and a resurrection man.

"You have heard, perhaps, that Deal is famous for its boatmen and pilots. It is also renowned for the beauty of the sailors' daughters. One of those lovely creatures captivated my heart—for I can even talk sentimentally when I think of those times; and she seemed to like me in return. Her name was Katharine Price—Kate Price, as she was called by her acquaintance; and a prettier creature the sun never shone upon. She was good and virtuous, too—and she alone understood my real disposition, which, even now that I had embarked in lawless pursuits, still panted to be good and virtuous also. At this time I was nineteen, and she was one year younger. We loved in secret—and we met in secret; for her parents would not for one moment have listened to the idea of our union. My hope was to obtain a good sum of money by one desperate venture in the contraband line, and run away with Kate to some distant part of the country, where we could enter upon some way of business that would produce us an honest livelihood. This hope sustained us!

"At this time there were a great many sick sailors in Deal Hospital, and numerous funerals took place in the burial-ground of that establishment. My father and I determined to have up a few of the corpses, for we always knew where to dispose of as many *subjects* as we could obtain. By these means I proposed to raise enough money to purchase in France the articles that I meant to smuggle into England and thereby obtain the necessary funds for carrying out the plans upon which Kate and myself were resolved.

"Good luck attended upon my father and myself in respect to the body-snatching business. We raised thirty pounds; and with that we set sail for France in the boat which we always hired for our smuggling expeditions. We landed at Calais, and made our purchases. We bought an immense quantity of brandy at tenpence a quart; gloves at eightpence a pair; three watches at two pound ten each; and some *eau-de-cologne*, proportionately cheap. Our thirty pounds we calculated would produce us a hundred and twenty. We put out to sea again at about ten o'clock at night. The wind was blowing stiff from the nor'-east; and by the time we had been an hour at sea it increased to a perfect hurricane. Never shall I forget that awful night. The entire ocean was white with foam; but the sky above was as black as pitch. We weathered the tempest until we reached the shore about a mile to the south'ard of Walmer, at a place called Kingsdown. We touched the beach—I thought every thing was safe. A huge billow broke over the stem of the lugger; and in a moment the boat was a complete wreck. My father leapt on shore from the bow at the instant this catastrophe took place: I was swallowed up along with the ill-fated bark. I was, however, an excellent swimmer; and I combated, and fought, and struggled with the ocean, as a man would wrestle with a savage animal that held him in his grasp. I succeeded in gaining the beach; but so weak and enfeebled was I that my father was compelled to carry me to our hovel, close by.

"I was put to bed: a violent fever seized upon me—I became delirious—and for six weeks I lay tossing upon a bed of sickness.

"At length I got well. But what hope remained for me? We were totally ruined—so was the poor fisherman whose boat was wrecked upon that eventful night. I wrote a note to Kate to tell her all that had happened, and to make an appointment for the following Sunday evening, that we might meet and talk over the altered aspect of affairs. Scarcely had I despatched this letter to the care of Kate's sister-in-law, who was in our secret, and managed our little correspondence, when my father came in and asked me if I felt myself well enough to accompany him on a little expedition that evening. I replied in the affirmative. He then told me that a certain surgeon for whom we did business, and who resided in Deal, required a particular subject which had been buried that morning in Walmer Churchyard. I did not ask my father any more questions; but that night I accompanied him to the burial-ground between eleven and twelve o'clock. The surgeon had shown my father the grave in the afternoon; and we had a cart waiting in a lane close by. The church is in a secluded part, surrounded by trees, and at some little distance from any habitations. There was no danger of being

meddled with:—moreover, we had often operated in the same ground before.

"To work we went in the usual manner. We shovelled out the soil, broke open the coffin, thrust the corpse into a sack, filled up the grave once more, and carried our prize safe off to the cart. We then set off at a round pace towards Deal, and arrived at the back door of the surgeon's house by two o'clock. He was up and waiting for us. We carried the corpse into the surgery, and laid it upon a table. 'You are sure it is the right one?' said the surgeon.—'It is the body from the grave that you pointed out,' answered my father.—'The fact is,' resumed the surgeon, 'that this is a very peculiar case. Six days ago, a young female rose in the morning in perfect health; that evening she was a corpse. I opened her, and found no traces of poison; but her family would not permit me to carry the examination any further. They did not wish her to be hacked about. Since her death some love-letters have been found in her drawer; but there is no name attached to any of them.'—I began to feel interested, I scarcely knew why; but this was the manner in which I was accustomed to write to Kate. The surgeon continued: 'I am therefore anxious to make another and more searching investigation than on the former occasion, into the cause of death. But I will soon satisfy myself that this is indeed the corpse I mean.'—With these words the surgeon tore away the shroud from the face of the corpse. I cast an anxious glance upon the pale, cold, marble countenance. My blood ran cold—my legs trembled—my strength seemed to have failed me. Was I mistaken? could it be the beloved of my heart?—'Yes; that is Miss Price,' said the surgeon, coolly. All doubt on my part was now removed. I had exhumed the body of her whom a thousand times I had pressed to my sorrowful breast—whom I had clasped to my aching heart. I felt as if I had committed some horrible crime—a murder, or other deadly deed!

"The surgeon and my father did not notice my emotions, but settled their accounts. The medical man then offered us each a glass of brandy. I drank mine with avidity, and then accompanied my father from the spot—uncertain whether to rush back and claim the body, or not. But I did not do so.

"For some days I wandered about scarcely knowing what I did—and certainly not caring what became of me. One morning I was roving amidst the fields, when I heard a loud voice exclaim, 'I say, you fellow there, open the gate, will you?' I turned round, and recognised the baronet on horseback. He had a large hunting whip in his hand.—'Open the gate!' said I; 'and whom for?' 'Whom for!' repeated the baronet; 'why, for me, to be sure, fellow.'—'Then open it yourself,' said I. The baronet was near enough to me to reach me with his whip; and he dealt me a stinging blow across the face. Maddened with pain, and soured with vexation, I leapt over the gate and attacked the baronet with a stout ash stick which I carried in my hand. I dragged him from his horse, and thrashed him without mercy. When I was tired, I walked quietly away, he roaring after me that he would be revenged upon me as sure as I was born.

"Next day I was arrested and taken before a magistrate. The baronet appeared against me, and—to my surprise—swore that I had assaulted him with a view to rob him, and that he had the greatest difficulty in protecting his purse and watch. I told my story and showed the mark of the baronet's whip across my face. The justice asked me if I could bring forward my witnesses to character. The baronet exclaimed, 'How can he? he has been in Dover Castle for smuggling.'—'Never!' I cried emphatically.—'Well, your father has, then,' said the baronet. This I could not deny.—'Oh! that's just the same thing!' cried the magistrate; and I was committed to gaol for trial at the next Maidstone assizes.

"For three months I lay in prison. I was not, however, completely hardened yet; nor did I associate with those who drank, and sang, and swore. I detested vice in all its shapes; and I longed for an opportunity to be good. It may seem strange to you, who know me *now*, to hear me speak thus;—but you are not aware what I was *then*!

"I was tried, and found guilty. The next two years of my life I passed at the hulks at Woolwich, dressed in dark grey, and wearing a chain round my leg. Even there I did not grow so corrupted, but that I sought for work the moment I was set at liberty again. I resolved not to return home to my parents, for I detested the ways into which they had led me. Turned away from the hulks one fine morning at ten o'clock, without a farthing in my pocket nor the means of obtaining a morsel of bread, my prospects were miserable enough. I could not obtain any employment in Woolwich: evening was coming on—and I was hungry. Suddenly I thought of enlisting. Pleased with this idea, I went to the barracks, and offered myself as a recruit. The regiment stationed there was about to embark for the East Indies in a few days and wanted men. Although certain of being banished, as it were, to a most unhealthy climate for twenty-one years, I preferred that to the life of a vagabond or a criminal in England. The sergeant was delighted with me, because I could read and write well; but the surgeon would not pass me. He said to me, 'You have either been half-starved for a length of time, or you have undergone a long imprisonment, for your flesh is as flabby as possible.' Thus was this hope destroyed.

"Now what pains had the law taken to make me good—even supposing, that I was really bad at the time of my condemnation? The law locked me up for two years, half-starved me, and yet exacted from me as much labour as a strong, healthy, man could have performed: then the law turned me out into the wide world, so weak, reduced, and feeble, that even the last resource of the most wretched—namely, enlisting in a regiment bound for India—was closed against me!

"Well—that night I wandered into the country and slept under a hedge. On the following morning I was compelled to satisfy the ravenous cravings of my hunger with Swedish turnips plucked from the fields. This food lay so cold upon my stomach that I felt ready to drop with illness, misery, and fatigue. And yet, in this Christian land, even that morsel, against which my heart literally heaved, was begrudged me. I was not permitted to satisfy my hunger with the food of beasts. A constable came up and took me into custody for robbing the turnip field. I was conducted before a neighbouring justice of the peace. He asked me what I meant by stealing the turnips? I told him that I had fasted for twenty-four hours, and was hungry. 'Nonsense, hungry!' he exclaimed; 'I'd give five pounds to know what hunger is! you kind of fellows eat turnips by way of luxury, you do—and not because you're hungry.' I assured him that I spoke the truth.—'Well, why don't you go to work?' he demanded.—'So I will, sir, with pleasure, if you will give me employment,' I replied.—'Me give you employment,' he shouted; 'I wouldn't have such a fellow about me, if he'd work for nothing. Where did you sleep last night?'—'Under a hedge, sir,' was my answer.—'Ah! I thought so,' he exclaimed: 'a rogue and vagabond evidently.' And this excellent specimen of the 'Great unpaid' committed me forthwith to the treadmill for one month *as a rogue and vagabond*.

"The treadmill is a horrible punishment: it is too bad even for those that are really rogues and vagabonds. The weak and the strong take the same turn, without any distinction; and I have seen men fall down fainting upon the platform, with the risk of having

their legs or arms smashed by the wheel, through sheer exhaustion. Then the miserable fare that one receives in prison renders him more fit for an hospital than for the violent labour of the treadmill.

"I had been two years at the hulks, and was not hardened: I had been a smuggler and a body-snatcher, and was not hardened:—but this one month's imprisonment and spell at the treadmill *did* harden me—and hardened me completely! I could not see any advantage in being good. I could not find out any inducement to be honest. As for a desire to lead an honourable life, that was absurd. I now laughed the idea to scorn; and I swore within myself that whenever I *did* commence a course of crime, I would be an unsparing demon at my work. Oh! how I then detested the very name of virtue. 'The rich look upon the poor as degraded reptiles that are born in infamy and that cannot possibly possess a good instinct,' I reasoned within myself. 'Let a rich man accuse a poor man before a justice, a jury, or a judge, and see how quick the poor wretch is condemned! The aristocracy hold the lower classes in horror and abhorrence. The legislature thinks that if it does not make the most grinding laws to keep down the poor, the poor will rise up and commit the most unheard-of atrocities. In fact the rich are prepared to believe any infamy which is imputed to the poor.' It was thus that I reasoned; and I looked forward to the day of my release with a burning—maddening—drunken joy!

"That day came. I was turned adrift, as before, without a shilling and without a crust. That alone was as bad as branding the words *rogue and vagabond* upon my forehead. How could I remain honest, even if I had any longer been inclined to do so, when I could not get work and had no money—no bread—no lodging? The legislature does not think of all this. It fancies that all its duty consists in punishing men for crimes, and never dreams of adopting measures to prevent them from committing crimes at all. But I now no more thought of honesty: I went out of prison a confirmed ruffian. I had no money—no conscience—no fear—no hope—no love—no friendship—no sympathy—no kindly feeling of any sort. My soul had turned to the blackness of hell!

"The very first thing I did was to cut myself a good tough ash stick with a heavy knob at one end. The next thing I did was to break into the house of the very justice who had sentenced me to the treadmill for eating a raw turnip; and I feasted jovially upon the cold fowl and ham which I found in his larder. I also drank success to my new career in a bumper of his fine old wine. This compliment was due to him: he had made me what I was!

"I carried off a small quantity of plate—all that I could find, you may be sure—and took my departure from the house of the justice. As I was hurrying away from this scene of my first exploit, I passed by a fine large barn, also belonging to my friend the magistrate. I did not hesitate a moment what to do. I owed him a recompense for my month at the treadmill; and I thought I might as well add *Incendiary* to my other titles of *Rogue* and *Vagabond*. Besides, I longed for mischief—the world had persecuted me quite long enough, the hour of retaliation had arrived. I fired the barn and scampered away as hard as I could. I halted at a distance of about half a mile, and turned to look. A bright column of flame was shooting up to heaven! Oh! how happy did I feel at that moment. Happy! this is not the word! I was mad—intoxicated—delirious with joy. I literally danced as I saw the barn burning. I was avenged on the man who would not allow me to eat a cold turnip to save me from starving:—that one cold turnip cost him dear! The fire spread, and communicated with his dwelling-house; and there was no adequate supply of water. The barn—the stacks—the out-houses—the mansion were all destroyed. But that was not all. The only daughter of the justice—a lovely girl of nineteen—was burnt to death. I read the entire account in the newspapers a few days afterwards!

"And the upper classes wonder that there are so many incendiary fires: my only surprise is, that there are so few! Ah! the Lucifer-match is a fearful weapon in the hands of the man whom the laws, the aristocracy, and the present state of society have ground down to the very dust. I felt all my power—I knew all my strength—I was aware of all my importance as a man, when I read of the awful extent of misery and desolation which I had thus caused. Oh! I was signally avenged!

"I now bethought me of punishing the baronet in the same manner. He had been the means of sending me for two years to the hulks at Woolwich. Pleased with this idea, I jogged merrily on towards Walmer. It was late at night when I reached home. I found my mother watching by my father's death-bed, and arrived just in time to behold him breathe his last. My mother spoke to me about a decent interment for him. I laughed in her face. Had he ever allowed any one to sleep quietly in his grave? No. How could *he* then hope for repose in the tomb? My mother remonstrated: I threatened to dash out her brains with my stout ash stick; and on the following night I sold my father's body to the surgeon who had anatomised poor Kate Price! This was another vengeance on my part.

"Not many hours elapsed before I set fire to the largest barn upon the baronet's estate. I waited in the neighbourhood and glutted myself with a view of the conflagration. The damage was immense. The next day I composed a song upon the subject, which I have never since forgotten. You may laugh at the idea of me becoming a poet; but you know well enough that I received some trifle of education—that I was not a fool by nature—and that in early life I was food of reading. The lines were these:—

"THE INCENDIARY'S SONG.

"The Lucifer-match! the Lucifer-match!
'Tis the weapon for us to wield.
How bonnily burns up rick and thatch,
And the crop just housed from the field!
The proud may oppress and the rich distress,
And drive us from their door;—
But they cannot snatch the Lucifer-match
From the hand of the desperate poor!

"The purse-proud squire and the tyrant peer
May keep their Game Laws still;
And the very glance of the overseer
May continue to freeze and kill.
The wealthy and great, and the chiefs of the state,
May tyrannise more and more;—
But they cannot snatch the Lucifer-match
From the hand of the desperate poor!

"'*Oh! give us bread!*' is the piteous wail
That is murmured far and wide;
And echo takes up and repeats the tale—
But the rich man turns aside.
The Justice of Peace may send his Police
To scour the country o'er;
But they cannot snatch the Lucifer-match
From the hand of the desperate poor!

"Then, hurrah! hurrah! for the Lucifer-match;
'Tis the weapon of despair:—
How bonnily blaze up barn and thatch—
The poor man's revenge is there!
For the *worm* will turn on the feet that spurn—
And surely a *man* is more?—
Oh! none can e'er snatch the Lucifer-match
From the hand of the desperate poor!

"The baronet suspected that I was the cause of the fire, as I had just returned to the neighbourhood; and he had me arrested and taken before a justice; but there was not a shadow of proof against me, nor a pretence to keep me in custody. I was accordingly discharged, with an admonition '*to take care of myself*'—which was as much as to say, '*If I can find an opportunity of sending you to prison, I will*.'

"Walmer and its neighbourhood grew loathsome to me. The image of Kate Price constantly haunted me; and I was moreover shunned by every one who knew that I had been at the hulks. I accordingly sold off all the fishing tackle, and other traps, and came up to London with the old Mummy.

"I need say no more."

"And there's enough in your history to set a man a-thinking," exclaimed the waiter of the boozing-ken; "there is indeed."

"Ah! I b'lieve you, there is," observed the Cracksman, draining the pot which had contained the egg-flip.

The clock struck mid-day when Holford entered the parlour of the boozing-ken.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE PLOT.

"Well, young blade," cried the Cracksman, "you haven't kept us waiting at all, I suppose?"

"And do you fancy that I could wake myself up again in a minute when I had once laid down?" demanded the lad, sulkily.

"Oh! bother to the laying down, Harry," said the Cracksman. "Don't you think me and Tony wants sleep as well as a strong hearty young feller like you? and we haven't put buff in downy[74] since the night afore last."

"Well, never mind chaffing about *that*," cried the Resurrection Man impatiently: then, having dismissed the waiter, he continued, "Now, about this business at the palace? We must have no delay; and when we make appointments in future, they must be better kept. But I won't speak of this one now, because there's some allowance to be made for you, as you were up the best part of the night, and you ain't accustomed to it as we are. But to the point. How is this affair to be managed?"

"I don't see how it is to be managed at all," answered Holford, firmly.

"The devil you don't," cried the Cracksman.

"Then what was you doing all that time in the palace?"

"Running a thousand risks of being found out every minute——"

"So we all do at times."

"And sneaking about at night-time to find food."

"I think you managed to discover the right place for the grist," said the Resurrection Man, his cadaverous countenance wearing an ironical smile; "for you must recollect that I found you in the pantry."

"And the pantry's a good neighbourhood: it can't be far from where the plate's kept," observed the Cracksman.

"The plate is kept where no one can get at it," said Holford.

"How do you know that, youngster?"

"I overheard the servants count it, lock it up in a chest, and take it up to the apartments of—of—the Lord Steward, I think they call him."

"The deuce!" ejaculated the Cracksman, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"Now I tell you what it is, young fellow," said the Resurrection Man; "I think that for some reason or another you're deceiving us."

"You think so?" cried the lad. "And why should you fancy that I am deceiving you?"

"Because your manners tell me so."

"In that case," said Holford, rising from his seat, "it is not of any use for us to talk more upon the subject."

"By G—d, it is of use, though!" exclaimed the Cracksman. "You shall tell us the truth by fair means or foul;" and he produced from his pocket a clasp-knife, the murderous blade of which flew open by means of a spring which was pressed at the back.

Holford turned pale, and resumed his seat.

"Now, you see that it is no use to humbug us," said the Resurrection Man. "Tell us the whole truth, and you will of course get your reg'lars out of the swag. You told me that the Queen was going to Windsor in a day or two; and that was as much as to say that the affair would come off then."

"I told you the Queen was going to Windsor—and I tell you so again," replied Holford. "But I can't help it if they lock up the plate: and I don't know what else there is for you to carry off."

The Resurrection Man and the Cracksman exchanged glances of mingled rage and disappointment. They did not precisely believe what the lad told them, and yet they could not see any motive which he was likely to have for misleading them—unless it were to retain all the profits of his discoveries in the palace for his own sole behoof.

"Now, Holford, my good fellow," said the Cracksman, shutting up his clasp-knife, and returning it to his pocket, "if you fancy that you are able to go through this business alone, and without any help, you're deucedly mistaken."

"I imagine no such thing," returned Holford; "and to prove to you that I am convinced there is nothing to be got by the affair, in any shape or way, do you and Tidkins attempt it alone together. He found his way to the pantry as well as I did, and can tell you what he saw there."

"That's true," said the Resurrection Man, apparently struck by this observation. "So I suppose we must give the thing up as a bad job?"

"I suppose we must," added the Cracksman, grinding his teeth. "But, by G—d, if I thought this younker was humbugging us, I'd plant three inches of cold steel in him, come what would."

"Thank you for your kindness," said Holford, not without a shudder. "Another time, get some person to act for you whose word you will believe. And now," he continued, turning to the Resurrection Man, "please to recollect the terms we agreed upon—a third of all we could get if successful, or five pounds for me in case of failure."

"Well, I shall keep my word," returned the Resurrection Man.

"Blow me if I would, though," exclaimed the Cracksman, fiercely.

"Yes—fair play's a jewel," said the Resurrection Man, darting a significant glance at his companion; then, feeling in his pocket, he added, "Holford is entitled to his five pounds, and he shall have them; but, curse me! if I have enough in my pocket to pay him. I tell you what it is, my lad," he continued, turning towards the young man, "you must meet me somewhere this evening, and I'll give you the money."

"That will do," cried Holford. "Where shall I meet you?"

"Where?" repeated the Resurrection Man, affecting to muse upon the question: "Oh! I will tell you. You know the *Dark-House* in Brick Lane, Spitalfields?"

"I have heard of it, but was never there."

"Well—meet me there to-night at nine o'clock, Harry," said the Resurrection Man, in as kind a tone as he could assume, "and I'll tip you the five couters."

"At nine punctually," returned Holford. "I would not press you, but I have lost my place in consequence of being absent all this time without being able to give any account of myself; and so I am regularly hard up. I'm going to look after a situation up somewhere beyond Camden Town this afternoon, that I heard of by accident: but I am afraid I shall not get it, as I can give no reference for character;—and even if I could, it would be to the public-house where I was pot-boy, and the place I'm going to try for is to clean boots and knives, and make myself generally useful in a gentleman's house. So I am afraid that I am not likely to get the situation."

"I hope you may, my lad, for your sake," cried the Resurrection Man. "At all events the five quids will keep you from starving for the next two months to come; so mind and be punctual this evening at nine."

"I shall not fail," answered Holford; and with these words he departed.

"Well, blow me, if I can make out now what you're up to," exclaimed the Cracksman, as soon as he and his companion in infamy were alone together.

"You never thought that I should be fool enough to give him five coolers for doing nothing but humbug us?" said the Resurrection Man. "No—no: catch a weasel asleep—but not Tony Tidkins! Don't you see that he has been making fools of us? I remember what a devil of a hurry he was in to get me away from the palace, when I lighted upon him in the pantry, and, altogether, I am convinced he has been doing his best to stall us off from the business."

"So I think," said the Cracksman.

"Well," resumed the Resurrection Man, "we'll just try what a few days of the pit under the staircase in my crib will do for him. I have mended up the bole that opens into the saw-pit next door; and there is no chance of his escaping. We must make him drink a glass at the *Dark House*, and drug the grog well, and we needn't fear about being able to get him up into my street."

"Ah! now I understand you," observed the Cracksman: "only see what it is to have a head like your'n. The pit will soon make him tell us the real truth."

"And if not—if he remains obstinate—" mused the Resurrection Man, aloud;—"why—in that case—"

"We shall know what to do with him," added the Cracksman.

And the two miscreants exchanged glances of horrible significancy.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

On the same day that the above conversation took place in the parlour of the boozing-ken on Saffron Hill, Markham was seated in his library, with several books before him. His countenance was pale, and bore the traces of recent illness; and an air of profound melancholy reigned upon his handsome features. He endeavoured to fix his attention on the volume beneath his eyes; but his thoughts were evidently far away from the subject of his studies. At length, as if to compose his mind, he turned abruptly towards his writing-desk, and took thence a note which he had already perused a thousand times, and every word of which was indelibly stamped upon his memory.

We can suppose a traveller upon Saara's burning desert,—sinking beneath fatigue, and oppressed by a thirst, the agony of which becomes maddening. Presently he reaches a well: it is deep and difficult of access;—nevertheless, the traveller's life or death reposes at the bottom of that well. In like manner did Markham's only hope lay in that letter.

No wonder, then, that he read it so often; no marvel that he referred to it when his mind was afflicted, and when the wing of his spirit was oppressed by the dense atmosphere of despair.

And yet the contents of that letter were simple and laconic enough:

"*Richmond.*

"The Countess Alteroni presents her compliments to Mr. Markham, and begs to acknowledge Mr. Markham's letter of yesterday's date.

"The countess expresses her most sincere thinks for a communication which prevented an arrangement that, under the circumstances disclosed, would have proved a serious family calamity."

"Yes—Isabella is saved!" said Markham to himself, as his eyes wandered over the contents of that most welcome note, which he had received some days previously: "it is impossible to mistake the meaning of that last sentence. She is saved—and I have been the instrument of her salvation! I have rescued her from an union with a profligate, an adventurer, a man of infamous heart! Surely—surely her parents will admit that I have paid back a portion of the debt of gratitude which their kindness imposed upon me! Yes—the countess herself seems to hold out a hope of reconciliation;—that note bids me hope! It is more than coldly polite—it is confidential:—it gives me to understand the results of my own letter denouncing the miscreant George Montague Greenwood."

Richard's countenance brightened as he reasoned thus within himself. But in a few moments, a dark cloud again displaced that gleam of happiness.

"Enthusiastic visionary that I am!" he murmured to himself. "I construe common politeness into a ground of hope: I fancy that every bird I see—however ill-omened—is a dove of promise, with an olive-branch in its mouth! Alas! mine is a luckless fate—and God alone can tell what strange destinies yet await me."

He rose from his chair, and walked to the window. The rain, which had poured down in torrents all the morning, had ceased; and the afternoon was fine and unusually warm for the early part of January. He glanced towards the hill, whereon the two trees stood, and thought of his brother—that much-loved brother, of whose fate he was kept so cruelly ignorant!

While he was standing at the window, buried in profound thought, and with his eyes fixed upon the hill, he heard a light step near him; and in a moment Ellen Monroe was by his side.

"Do I intrude, Richard?" she exclaimed. "I knocked twice at the door; and not receiving any reply, imagined that there was no one here. I came to change a book. But you—you are thoughtful and depressed."

"I was meditating upon a topic which to me is always fraught with distressing ideas," answered Markham: "I was thinking of my brother!"

"Your brother!" ejaculated Ellen; and her countenance became ashy pale.

"Yes," continued Richard, not observing her emotion; "I would rather know the worst—if misfortunes have really overtaken him—than remain in this painful state of suspense. If he be prosperous, why should he stay away? if poor, why does he not seek consolation with me?"

"Perhaps," said Ellen, hesitatingly, "perhaps he is—in reality—much better off than—than—any one who feels interested in him."

"Heaven knows!" ejaculated Markham. "But ere now you observed that I was melancholy and dispirited; and I have told you wherefore. Ellen, I must make the same charge against you."

"Against me!" cried the young lady, with a start, while at the same time a deep blush suffused her cheeks.

"Yes, against you," continued Richard, now glancing towards her. "You may think that I am joking—but I never was more serious in my life. For the few days that you have been in this house, you have been subject to intervals of profound depression."

"I!" repeated Ellen, the hue of her blushes becoming more intensely crimson, as her glances sank confusedly beneath those of Markham.

"Alas! Ellen," answered Richard, "I have myself been too deeply initiated in the mysteries of adversity and sorrow,—I have drunk too deeply of the cup of affliction,—I have experienced too much bitter, bitter anguish, not to be able to detect the presence of unhappiness in others. And by many signs, Ellen, have I discovered that you are unhappy. I speak to you as a friend—I do not wish to penetrate into your secrets;—but if there be any thing in which I can aid you—if there be aught wherein my poor services or my counsels may be rendered available,—speak, command me!"

"Oh! Richard," cried Ellen, tears starting into her eyes, "how kind—how generous of you thus to think of me—you who have already done so much for my father and myself!"

"Were you not the companion of my childhood, Ellen? and should I not be to you as a brother, and you to me as a sister? Let me be your brother, then—and tell me how I can alleviate the weight of that unhappiness which is crushing your young heart!"

"A brother!" exclaimed Ellen, almost wildly; "yes—you shall—you must be a brother to me! And I will be your sister! Ah! there is consolation in that idea!"—then, after a moment's pause, she added, "But the time is not yet come when I, as a sister, shall appeal to you as a brother for that aid which a brother alone can give! And until then—ask me no more—speak to me no farther upon the subject—I implore you!"

Ellen pressed Richard's hand convulsively, and then hurried from the room.

Markham had scarcely recovered from the astonishment into which these last words had thrown him,—words which, coming from the lips of a young and beautiful girl, were fraught with additional mystery and interest,—when Whittingham entered the library.

"A young lad, Master Richard," said the old butler, "has called about the situation which is wacated in our household. I took the percaution of leaving word yesterday with the people at a public of most dubitable respectability called the *Servants' Arms*, where I call now and then when I go into town; and it appears that this young lad having called in there quite perspicuously this morning heard of the place."

"Let him step in, Whittingham," said Markham. "I will speak to him—although, to tell you the truth, I do not admire a public-house recommendation."

Whittingham made no reply, but opening the door, exclaimed, "Step in here, young man; step in here."

And Henry Holford stood in the presence of Richard Markham.

Whittingham retired.

"I believe you are in want of a young lad, sir," said Holford, "to assist in the house."

"I am," answered Markham. "Have you over served in that capacity before?"

"No, sir; but if you would take me and give me a trial, I should feel very much obliged. I have neither father or mother, and am totally dependant upon my own exertions."

These words were quite sufficient to command the attention and sympathy of the generous-hearted Richard. The lad was moreover of superior manners, and well-spoken; and there was something in his appeal to Markham which was very touching.

"What have you been before, my good lad?"

"To tell you the truth, sir," was the reply, "I have been a simple pot-boy in a public-house."

"And of course the landlord will give you a character?"

"Yes—for honesty and industry, sir; but—"

"But what?"

"I do not think it is of any use to apply to the landlord for a character, because—"

"Because what?" demanded Markham, seeing that the young man again hesitated. "If you can have a character for honesty and industry, you need not be afraid of any thing else that could be said of you."

"The truth is, sir," answered Holford, "I absented myself without leave, and remained away for two or three days: then, when I returned this morning at a very early hour I refused to give an account of my proceedings. That is the whole truth, sir; and if you will only give me a trial—"

"There is something very straightforward and ingenuous about you," said Markham: "perhaps you would have no objection to tell me how you were occupied during your absence."

"That, sir, is impossible! But I declare most solemnly that I did nothing for which I can reproach myself—unless," added Holford, "it was in leading a couple of villains to believe that I would do a certain thing which I never once intended to do."

"Really your answers are so strange," cried Richard, "that I know not what to say to you. It however appears from your last observation that two villains tempted you to do something wrong—that you lead them to believe you would fall into their plans—and that you never meant to fulfil your promise."

"It is all perfectly true, sir. They proposed a certain scheme in which I was to be an agent: I accepted the office they assigned to me, because it suited my disposition, and promised to gratify my curiosity in a way where it was deeply interested."

"And how did you explain your conduct to the two men whom you speak of?" inquired Richard, not knowing what to think of the young lad, but half inclining to believe that his bruin was affected.

"I invented certain excuses, sir," was Holford's reply, "which completely damped their ardour in the matter alluded to. And now, sir, will you give me a trial? I feel convinced you will: had I not thought so from the very beginning, I should not have spoken so freely as I have done."

"I am disposed to assist you—I am desirous to meet your wishes," said Markham. "Still, your representations are rather calculated to awaken fears than clear up doubts concerning you. What guarantee can you offer that you will never see those two villains again? what security—"

"Sir," said Holford, "your own manner is so frank and kind—so very condescending, indeed, to a poor lad like me—that I would not deceive you for the world. I *had* promised to meet those men to-night—for the last time—"

"To meet them again?"

"Yes, sir—to receive the reward promised for the service which I undertook—"

"Ah! young man," cried Markham, "this is most imprudent—if not actually criminal! and where was this precious interview to take place?"

"At the *Dark-House*, sir—"

"The *Dark-House*!" ejaculated Markham: "what—a low tavern in Brick Lane, Spitalfields?"

"The same, sir."

"And the names of the two men?" demanded Richard hastily.

"Their right names and those by which they are commonly known amongst their own set, are very different," said Holford.

"How are they known? what are they called in their own infamous sphere?" cried Markham, his impatience amounting almost to a fever: "speak!"

"I do not know whether I shall be doing right," said Holford, hesitating,—"perhaps I have already told you too much—"

"Speak, I say!" cried Richard, taking Holford by the collar of his jacket; "speak. You do not know—you cannot guess how necessary it is for me to have my present suspicions cleared up! Speak—I swear no harm shall happen to you: on the contrary—I will reward you, if it should turn out as I suppose. Once more, who are these villains?"

"They are called—"

"What? speak—speak!"

"The Resurrection Man—"

"Ah!"

"And the Cracksman."

"Then I am right—my suspicions are confirmed!" ejaculated Markham, relinquishing his hold upon Holford's jacket, and throwing himself upon a chair. "Sit down, my good lad—sit down: you and I have not done with each other yet."

The young man appeared alarmed by Richard's exclamations and manners, and seemed undecided whether to remain where he was or attempt to escape.

Richard divined what was passing in the lad's bosom, and hastened to reassure him.

"Sit down—and fear nothing. I swear most solemnly that no harm shall happen to you, be you who or what you may: for I cannot suppose that you are a participator in the crimes of these miscreants. You would not have come to me to tell me all this—Oh! no; Providence has sent you hither this day."

Holford took a seat, wondering how this extraordinary scene was to terminate.

"Are you aware of the pursuits of those two men whom you have named—I mean the full extent of the atrocity of their pursuits?" demanded Richard, after a few moments' pause.

"I know that they are body-snatchers and burglars, sir," answered Holford: "indeed it was a burglary of which they would have made me the instrument; but, oh! sir—believe me, I am incapable of such a crime; and the representations I have made to them have induced them to abandon all idea of it."

"And you are not aware, then," continued Richard, "that they are more than body-snatchers and burglars?"

"More, sir!" repeated Holford in a tone of unfeigned surprise: "Oh! no, sir—how can they be more than that?"

"They are more—far more," rejoined Markham, with a shudder: "they are murderers!"

"Murderers!" ejaculated Holford, starting from his chair with mingled emotions of horror and alarm.

"Yes—murderers of the most diabolical and cold-blooded description," said Markham. "But it is too long a tale to tell you now. Let it suffice for you to know that I was myself upon the point of becoming a victim to that most infernal of all miscreants, the Resurrection Man; and I should conceive that the other whom you named is in all respects as bad as he!"

"Murderers!" repeated Holford, his mental eyes fixed, by a horrible and snake-like fascination, upon the fearful idea now suddenly engendered in his imagination.

"Murderers," echoed Markham solemnly; "and through you must they be surrendered up to justice!"

"Through me!" cried Holford.

"Yes—through you. If you be really imbued with such honourable feelings as you ere now professed, you will not hesitate for one moment in discharging this duty towards society."

"But it would be an odious act of treachery on my part," said Holford, "let the men be what they may."

"If you manifest such a reluctance to rid the metropolis of two murderers," cried Markham angrily, "I shall conceive that you are more intimately connected with them than you choose to admit. But if you imagine that these villains are more innocent than I describe them—if you fancy that some motive prompts me to exaggerate their infamy, I will tell you that no language can enhance their guilt—no vengeance be too severe. Have you not heard that men have disappeared in a most strange and mysterious manner within the last year, at the eastern end of the metropolis,—disappeared without leaving a trace behind them,—men who were not in that situation which hurries the despairing wretch on to suicide? You must have heard of this! If not, learn the dismal fact now from my lips! But the assassins—the dark and secret assassins of these numerous victims, are the wretches whom we shall this night lodge in the grasp of justice!"

"As you will, sir," said Holford, awe-inspired by the solemnity of Markham's voice, and the impressiveness of his manner. "I was to meet them at the *Dark-House* at nine o'clock: do you take measures to secure them."

"Most assuredly I will," returned Markham emphatically. "And when I think of all that you have told me, my good lad," continued Richard, "I am inclined to believe that you yourself would have been a victim to those wretches."

"Me!" exclaimed Holford, horror-struck at the mere idea.

"Yes—such is now my conviction. They made an appointment with you at the *Dark-House*, to give you a sum of money you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Foolish boy! Do such men pay their agents or accomplices who fail to fulfil their designs, or who deceive them? do such men part with their money so readily—that money which they encounter so many perils to obtain? And that *Dark-House*—the place of your appointment,—that *Dark-House* is in the immediate neighbourhood of the head-quarters of their crimes! Yes—there cannot be a doubt: you also were to be a victim!"

"My God! what a fearful danger have I incurred!" ejaculated Holford, shuddering from head to foot, as Markham thus addressed him; then, when he called to mind the ferocity with which the Cracksman menaced him with his knife, and the coaxing manner in which the Resurrection Man had engaged him to form the appointment for the evening, he felt convinced that the dread suspicion was a correct one.

"You say that the hour of meeting is fixed for nine?" cried Markham, after a few minutes' reflection.

"Yes, sir; and now let me thank you with the most unfeigned sincerity for having thus saved me from a dreadful death. Your kindness and condescension have led to a lengthy conversation between us; and accident has made me reveal to you those particulars which have led you to form that conclusion relative to the fate destined for myself. You must not imagine for a moment that I would league with such villains in any of their diabolical plans. No, sir—I would sooner be led forth to the place of execution this minute. Although I consented to do their bidding in one respect, I repeat that I had mine own curiosity to gratify—that is, my own inclinations to serve: but when they wished to make me their instrument and tool in forwarding their unholy motives, I shrank back in dismay. Oh! yes, sir—now I comprehend the entire infamy of those men's characters: I see from what a fearful abyss I have escaped."

There was again something so sincere and so natural in the manner and emphasis of this young lad, that Markham surveyed him with sentiments of mingled interest and surprise. Then all the thoughts of our hero were directed towards the one grand object he had in view—that of delivering a horde of ruffians over to justice.

"The gang may be more numerous than I imagine," said Markham; "indeed, I know that there are a third man and hideous woman connected with those two assassins whom you have already named. It will therefore be advisable to lay such a trap that will lead to the capture of them all."

"Oh! by all means, sir," exclaimed Holford, enthusiastically: "I do not wish to show them any mercy now!"

"We have no time to lose: it is now four o'clock," said Markham; "and we must arrange the plan of proceeding with the police. You will accompany me on this enterprise."

"Mr. Markham," returned Holford, respectfully but firmly, "I have no objection to aid you in any shape or way in capturing these miscreants, and rooting out their head quarters; but I must beg of you not to place me in a position where I shall be questioned how I came to make this appointment for to-night with those two wretches. It would compel me to make a revelation of the manner in which I employed my time during the last few days; and *that*—for certain reasons—I could not do!"

Markham appeared to reflect profoundly.

"I do not see how your presence can be dispensed with," he observed at the expiration of some minutes. "In order to discover the exact spot where the murderers dwell, it will be advisable for you to allow yourself to be inveigled thither, and myself and the police would be close behind you."

"Oh! never—never, sir!" cried Holford, turning deadly pale. "Were you to miss us only for a moment—or were you to force an entrance a single instant too late—my life would be sacrificed to those wretches."

"True—true," said Markham: "it would be too great a risk in a dark night—in narrow streets, and with such desperadoes as those. No—I must devise some other means to detect the den of this vile gang. But first of all I must communicate with the police. You can remain here until my return. To-morrow inquiry shall be made relative to your honesty and industry; and, those points satisfactorily ascertained, I will take you into my service, without asking any farther questions."

Holford expressed his gratitude for this kindness on the part of Markham, and was then handed over to the care of Whittingham.

Having partaken of some hasty refreshment, and armed himself with a brace of pistols, in preparation for his enterprise, Richard proceeded with all possible speed into London.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE WRONGS AND CRIMES OF THE POOR.

THE parlour of the *Dark-House* was, as usual, filled with a very tolerable sprinkle of queer-looking customers. One would have thought, to look at their beards, that there was not a barber in the whole district of the Tower Hamlets; and yet it appears to be a social peculiarity, that the lower the neighbourhood, the more numerous the shaving-shops. Amongst the very rich classes, nobles and gentlemen are shaved by their valets: the males of the middle grade shave themselves; and the men of the lower orders are shaved at barbers' shops. Hence the immense number of party-coloured poles projecting over the pavement of miserable and dirty streets, and the total absence of those signs in wealthy districts.

The guests in the *Dark-House* parlour formed about as pleasant an assemblage of scamps as one could wish to behold. The establishment was a notorious resort for thieves and persons of the worst character; and no one who frequented it thought it worth while to shroud his real occupation beneath an air of false modesty. The conversation in the parlour, therefore, usually turned upon the tricks and exploits of the thieves frequenting the place; and many entertaining autobiographical sketches were in this way delivered. Women often constituted a portion of the company in the parlour; and they were invariably the most noisy and quarrelsome of all the guests. Whenever the landlord was compelled to call in the police, to have a clearance of the house—a proceeding to which he only had recourse when his guests were drunk and penniless, and demanded supplies of liquor upon credit,—a woman was sure to be at the bottom of the row; and a virago of Spitalfields would think no more of smashing every window in the house, or dashing out the landlord's brains with one of his own pewter-pots, than of tossing off a tumbler of raw gin without winking.

On the evening of which we are writing there were several women in the parlour of the *Dark-House*. These horrible females were the "blowens" of the thieves frequenting the house, and the principal means of disposing of the property stolen by their paramours. They usually ended by betraying their lovers to the police, in fits of jealousy; and yet—by some strange infatuation on the part of those lawless men—the women who acted in this way speedily obtained fresh husbands upon the morganatic system. For the most part, these females are disfigured by intemperance; and their conversation is far more revolting than that of the males. Oh! there is no barbarism in the whole world so truly horrible and ferocious—so obscene and shameless—as that which is found in the poor districts of London!

Alas! what a wretched mockery it is to hold grand meetings at Exeter Hall, and proclaim, with all due pomp and ceremony, how many savages in the far-off islands of the globe have been converted to Christianity, when here—at home, under our very eyes—even London itself swarms with infidels of a more dangerous character:—how detestable is it for philanthropy to be exercised in clothing negroes or Red Men thousands of miles distant, while our own poor are cold and naked at our very doors:—how monstrously absurd to erect twelve new churches in Bethnal Green, and withhold the education that would alone enable the poor to appreciate the doctrines enunciated from that dozen of freshly-built pulpits!

But to return to the parlour of the *Dark-House*.

In one corner sate the Resurrection Man and the Cracksman, each with a smoking glass of gin-and-water before him. They mingled but little in the conversation, contenting themselves with laughing an approval of any thing good that fell upon their ears, and listening to the discourse that took place around them.

"Now, come, tell us, Joe," said a woman with eyes like saucers, hair like a bundle of tow, and teeth like dominoes, and addressing herself to a man who was dressed like a coal-heaver,—"tell us, Joe, how you come to be a prig?"

"Ah! do, Joe—there's a good feller," echoed a dozen voices, male and female.

"Lor' it's simple enough," cried the man thus appealed to: "every poor devil must become a thief in time."

"That's what you say, Tony," whispered the Cracksman to the Resurrection Man.

"Of course he must," continued the coal-heaver; "more partickler them as follows my old trade—for though I've got on the togs of a whipper, I ain't one no longer. The dress is convenient—that's all."

"The Blue-bottles don't twig—eh?" cried the woman with the domino teeth.

"That's it: but you asked me how I come to be a prig—I'll tell you. My father was a coal-whipper, and had three sons. He brought us all up to be coal-whippers also. My eldest brother was drownded in the pool one night when he was drunk, after only drinking about two pots of the publicans' beer: my other brother died of hunger in Cold-Bath Fields prison, where he was sent for three months for taking home a bit of coal one night to his family when he couldn't get his wages paid him by the publican that hired the gang in which he worked. My father died when he was forty—and any one to have seen him would have fancied he was sixty-five at least—so broke down was he with hard work and drinking. But no coal-whipper lives to an old age: they all die off at about forty—old men in the wery prime of life."

"And why's that?" demanded the large-toothed lady.

"Why not?" repeated the man. "Because a coal-whipper isn't a human being—or if he is, he isn't treated as such: and so I've always thought he must be different from the rest of the world."

"How isn't he treated like any one else?"

"In the first place, he doesn't get paid for his labour in a proper way. Wapping swarms with low public-houses, the landlords of which act as middle-men between the owners of the colliers and the men that's hired to unload 'em. A coal-whipper can't get employment direct from the captain of the collier: the working of the collier is farmed by them landlords I speak of; and the whipper must apply at their houses. Those whippers as drinks the most always gets employment first; and whether a whipper chooses to drink

beer or not, it's always sent three times a-day on board the colliers for the gangs. And, my eye! what stuff it is! Often and often have we throwed it away, 'cos we could'nt possibly drink it—and it must be queer liquor that a coal-whipper won't drink!"

"I should think so too. But go on."

"Well, I used to earn from fifteen to eighteen shillings a-week; and out of that, eight was always stopped for the beer; and if I didn't spend another or two on Saturday night when I received the balance, the landlord set me down as a stingy feller and put a cross agin my name in his book."

"What was that for?"

"Why, not to give me any more work till he was either forced to do so for want of hands, or I made it up with him by standing a crown bowl of punch. So what with one thing and another, I had to keep myself, my wife, and three children, on about seven or eight shillings a-week—after working from light to dark."

"And now your wife and children is better purvided for?" said the woman with the huge teeth.

"Yes—indeed! in the workus," answered the man, sharply. "So now you see what a coal-whipper's life is. He can't be a sober man if he wishes to—because he must pay for a certain quantity of drink; and so of course he won't throw it away, unless it's so bad he can't keep it on his stomach."

"And was that often the case?"

"Often and often. Well—he can't be a saving man, because he has no chance of getting his wages under his own management. He is the publican's slave—the publican's tool and instrument. Negro slavery is nothing to it. No tyranny is equal to the tyranny of them publicans."

"And why isn't the plan altered?"

"Ah! why? What do the owners of the colliers, or the people that the cargo's consigned to, care about the poor devils that unload? The publicans takes the unloading on contract, and employs the whippers in such away as to get an enormous profit. Talk of appealing to the owners—what do they care? There has been meetings got up to change the system—and what's the consekvence? Why, them whippers as attended them became marked men, never got no more employment, and drownded themselves in despair, or turned prigs like me."

"Ah! that's better than suicide."

"Well—I don't know, now! But them meetings as I was a-speaking of, got up deputations to the Court of Aldermen, and the matter was referred to the Coal and Corn Committee—and there was, as usual, a great talk, but nothink done. Then an application was made to some Minister—I don't know which; and he sent back a letter with a seal as big as a crown-piece, just to say that he'd received the application, and would give it his earliest attention. Some time passed away, and no more notice was ever taken of it in that quarter; and so, I s'pose, a Minister's earliest attention means ten or a dozen years."

"What a shame to treat people so."

"It's only the poor that's treated so. And now I think I have said enough to show why I turned prig, like a many more whippers from the port of London. There isn't a more degraded, oppressed, and brutalized set of men in the world than the whippers. They are born with examples of drunken fathers afore their eyes; and drunken fathers makes drunken mothers; and drunken parents makes sons turn out thieves, and daughters prostitutes;—and that's the existence of the coal-whippers of Wapping. It ain't their fault: they haven't edication and self-command to refuse the drink that's forced upon them, and that they must pay for;—and their sons and daughters shouldn't be blamed for turning out bad. How can they help it? And yet one reads in the papers that the upper classes is always a-crying out about the dreadful immorality of the poor!"

"The laws—the laws, you see, Tony," whispered the Cracksman to his companion.

"Of course," answered the Resurrection Man. "Here we are, in this room, upwards of twenty thieves and prostitutes: I'll be bound to say that the laws and the state of society made eighteen of them what they are."

"Nobody knows the miseries of a coal-whipper's life," continued the orator of the evening, "but him that's been in it his-self. He is always dirty—always lurking about public-houses when not at work—always ready to drink—always in debt—and always dissatisfied with his own way of living, which isn't, however, his fault. There's no hope for coal-whippers or their families. The sons that don't turn out thieves must lead the same terrible life of cart-horse labour and constant drinking, with the certainty of dying old men at forty;—and the daughters that don't turn out prostitutes marry whippers, and draw down upon their heads all the horrors and sorrows of the life I have been describing."

"Well—I never knowed all this before!"

"No—and there's a deal of misery of each kind in London that isn't known to them as dwells in the other kinds of wretchedness: and if these things gets represented in Parliament, the cry is, '*Oh! the people's always complaining; they're never satisfied*.'"

"Well, you speak of each person knowing his own species of misery, and being ignorant of the nature of the misery next door," said a young and somewhat prepossessing woman, but upon whose face intemperance and licentiousness had made sad havoc; "all I can say is, that people see girls like us laughing and joking always in public—but they little know how we weep and moan in private."

"Drink gin then, as I do," cried the woman with the large teeth.

"Ah! *you* know well enough," continued the young female who had previously spoken, "that we *do* drink a great deal too much of that! My father used to sell *jiggered gin* in George Yard, Whitechapel."

"And what the devil is jiggered gin?" demanded one of the male guests.

"It's made from molasses, beer, and vitriol. Lor', every one knows what jiggered gin is. Three wine glasses of it will make the strongest man mad drunk. I'll tell you one thing," continued the young woman, "which you do not seem to know—and that is, that the very, very poor people who are driven almost to despair and suicide by their sorrows, are glad to drink this jiggered gin, which is all

that they can afford. For three halfpence they may have enough to send them raving; and then what do they think or care about their miseries?"

"Ah! very true," said the coal whipper. "I've heard of this before."

"Well—my father sold that horrid stuff," resumed the young woman; "and though he was constantly getting into trouble for it, he didn't mind; but the moment he came out of prison, he took to his old trade again. I was his only child; and my mother died when I was about nine years old. She was always drunk with the jiggered gin; and one day she fell into the fire and was burnt to death. I had no one then who cared any thing for me, but used to run about in the streets with all the boys in the neighbourhood. My father took in lodgers; and sixteen or seventeen of us, boys and girls all huddled together, used to sleep in one room not near so big as this. There was fifteen lodging houses of the same kind in George Yard at that time; and it was supposed that about two hundred and seventy-five persons need to sleep in those houses every night, male and female lodgers all pigging together. Every sheet, blanket, and bolster, in my father's house was marked with STOP THIEF, in large letters. Well—at eleven years old I went upon the town; and if I didn't bring home so much money every Saturday night to my father, I used to be well thrashed with a rope's end on my bare back."

"Serve you right too, a pretty girl like you."

"Ah! you may joke about it—but it was no joke to me! I would gladly have done anything in an honest way to get my livelihood __"

"Like me, when I was young," whispered the Resurrection Man to his companion.

"Exactly. Let's hear what the gal has got to say for herself," returned the Cracksman; "the lush has made her sentimental;—she'll soon be crying drunk."

"But I was doomed, it seemed," continued the young woman, "to live in this horrible manner. When I was thirteen or fourteen my father died, and I was then left to shift for myself. I moved down into Wapping, and frequented the long-rooms belonging to the public-houses there. I was then pretty well off; because the sailors that went to these places always had plenty of money and was very generous. But I was one night suspected of hocussing and robbing a sailor, and—though if I was on my death-bed I could swear that I never had any hand in the affair at all—I was so blown upon that I was forced to shift my quarters. So I went to a *dress-house* in Ada Street, Hackney Road. All the remuneration I received there was board and lodging; and I was actually a slave to the old woman that kept it. I was forced to walk the streets at night with a little girl following me to see that I did not run away; and all the money I received I was forced to give up to the old woman. While I was there, several other girls were turned out of doors, and left to die in ditches or on dunghills, because they were no longer serviceable. All this frightened me. And then I was so ill-used, and more than half starved. I was forced to turn out in all weathers—wet or dry—hot or cold—well or ill. Sometimes I have hardly been able to drag myself out of bed with sickness and fatigue—but, no matter, out I must go—the rain perhaps pouring in torrents, or the roads knee-deep in snow—and nothing but a thin cotton gown to wear! Winter and summer, always flaunting dresses—yellow, green, and red! Wet or dry, always silk stockings and thin shoes! Cold or warm, always short skirts and a low body, with strict orders not to fasten the miserable scanty shawl over the bosom! And then the little girl that followed me about was a spy with wits as sharp as needles. Impossible to deceive her! At length I grew completely tired of this kind of life; and so I gave the little spy the slip one fine evening. I was then sixteen, and I came back to this neighbourhood. But one day I met the old woman who kept the dress-house, and she gave me in charge for stealing wearing apparel—the clothes I had on my back when I ran away from her!"

"Always the police—the police—the police, when the poor and miserable are concerned," whispered the Resurrection Man to the Cracksman.

"But did the inspector take the charge?" demanded the coal-heaver.

"He not only took the charge," answered the unfortunate girl, "but the magistrate next morning committed me for trial, although I proved to him that the clothes were bought with the wages of my own prostitution! Well, I was tried at the Central Criminal Court—"

"And of course acquitted?"

"No—found *Guilty*——"

"What—by an English jury?"

"I can show you the newspaper—I have kept the report of the trial ever since."

"Then, by G—d, things are a thousand times worse than I thought they was!" ejaculated the coal-whipper, striking his clenched fist violently upon the table at which he was seated.

"But the jury recommended me to mercy," continued the unfortunate young woman, "and so the Recorder only sentenced me to twenty-one days' imprisonment. His lordship also read me a long lecture about the errors of my ways, and advised me to enter upon a new course of life; but he did not offer to give me a character, nor did he tell me how I was to obtain honest employment without one."

"That's the way with them beaks," cried one of the male inmates of the parlour: "they can talk for an hour; but supposing you'd said to the Recorder, '*My Lord, will your wife take me into her service as scullery-girl?*' he would have stared in astonishment at your imperence."

"When I got out of prison," resumed the girl who was thus sketching the adventures of her wretched life, "I went into Great Titchfield Street. My new abode was a dress-house kept by French people. Every year the husband went over to France, and returned with a famous supply of French girls, and in the mean time his wife decoyed young English women up from the country, under pretence of obtaining situations as nursery-governesses and lady's-maids for them. Many of these poor creatures were the daughters of clergymen and half-pay officers in the marines. The moment a new supply was obtained by these means, circulars was sent round to all the persons that was in the habit of using the house. Different sums, from twenty to a hundred pounds—"

"Ah! I understand," said the coal-whipper. "But did you ever hear say how many unfortunate gals there was in London?"

"Eighty thousand. From Titchfield Street I went into the Almonry, Westminster. The houses there are all occupied by *fences*,

prigs, and gals of the town."

"And the parsons of Westminster Abbey, who is the landlords of the houses, does nothink to put 'em down," said the coal-whipper.

"Not a bit," echoed the young woman, with a laugh. "We had capital fun in the house where I lived—dog-fighting, badger-baiting, and drinking all day long. The police never visits the Almonry—"

"In course not, 'cos it's the property of the parsons. They wouldn't be so rude."

This coarse jest was received with a shout of laughter; and the health of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster was drunk amidst uproarious applause, by the thieves and loose women assembled in the *Dark-House* parlour.[75]

"Well, go on, my dear," said the coal-whipper, when order was somewhat restored.

"I never was in a sentimental humour before to-night—not for many, many years," resumed the young woman; "and I don't know what's making me talk as I am now."

"'Cos you haven't had enough gin, my dear," interrupted a coarse-looking fellow, winking to his companions.

Scarcely was the laughter promoted by this sally beginning to subside, when a short, thick-set, middle-aged man, enveloped in a huge great-coat, with most capacious pockets at the sides, entered the parlour, took his seat near the door, and called for a glass of hot gin-and-water.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE RESULT OF MARKHAM'S ENTERPRISE.

THE reader at all acquainted with German literature may probably remember some of those old tales of demonology and witchcraft, in which assemblies of jovial revellers are frequently dismayed and overawed by the sudden entrance of some mysterious stranger—perhaps a knight in black armour, with his vizor closed, or a monk with his cowl drawn over his countenance. If the recollection of such an episode in the sphere of romance recur to the reader's mind, he will have no difficulty in comprehending us when we state that the presence of the short, thick-set, middle-aged stranger caused an immediate damp to fall upon the spirits of the company in the *Dark-House* parlour.

The stranger seemed to take no notice of any one present, but drank his grog, lighted his cigar, and settled himself in his seat, apparently with the view of making himself very comfortable.

Still there was something sinister and mysterious about this man, which did not exactly please the other inmates of the room; and as we cannot suppose that the consciences of these persons were over pure, the least appearance of ambiguity to them was an instantaneous omen of danger. Like the dog that scents the corpse of the murdered victim, even when buried deep in the earth, those wretches possessed an instinct marvellously sensitive and acute in perceiving the approach or presence of peril.

And yet, to a common beholder, there was nothing very remarkable about that stranger. He was a plain-looking, quiet, shabbily dressed person, and one who seemed anxious to smoke his cigar in peace, and neither speak nor be spoken to.

Good reader—it was the reserve of this man,—his staid and serious demeanour—his tranquil countenance—and his exclusive manner altogether, that created the unpleasant impression we have described. Had he entered the room with a swagger, banged the door behind him, sworn at the waiter, or nodded to one single individual present, he would have produced no embarrassing sensation whatever. But he was unknown:—what, then, could he do there, where all were well known to each other?

However, he continued to smoke, with his eyes intently fixed upon the blueish wreaths that ascended slowly and fantastically from the end of his cigar; and for five minutes after his entrance not a word was spoken.

At length the coal-whipper broke silence.

"Well, my dear," he said, addressing himself to the unfortunate girl who had already narrated a portion of her adventures, "you haven't done your story yet."

"Oh! I do not feel in the humour to go on with it to-night," she exclaimed, glancing uneasily towards the stranger. "Indeed, I recollect—I have an appointment—close by—"

She hesitated; then, apparently mustering up her courage, cried "Good-night, all," and left the room.

"Who the deuce is that feller, Tony?" demanded the Cracksman, in a whisper, of his companion. "I can't say I like his appearance at all."

"Oh! nonsense," answered the Resurrection Man: "he is some quiet chap that doesn't like to smoke and talk at the same time."

"But don't it seem as how he'd throwed a damp on the whole party?" continued the Cracksman, in the same subdued tone.

"Do you take me for a child that's frightened at a shadow?" said the Resurrection Man savagely. "I suppose you're afraid that this young Holford will play us false. Why—what could he do to us? Anything he revealed would only implicate himself. He knows nothing about our games up by the Bird-cage Walk there."

"I forgot *that*;—no more he doesn't," cried the Cracksman. "There's nobody can do us any harm, that I know on."

"One—and one only," answered the Resurrection Man, sinking his already subdued tone to the lowest possible whisper,—"one only, I say, can injure us; and he will not dare to do it!"

"Who the devil do you mean?" demanded the Cracksman.

"I mean the only man that ever escaped out of the crib up by the walk after he had received a blow from my stick," answered the Resurrection Man.

"You don't mean to say, Tony," whispered the Cracksman, his countenance giving the most unequivocal signs of alarm, "that there's a breathing soul which ever went in the door of that crib an intended wictim, and come out alive agin!"

"Never do you mind now. We shall make all the people stare at us if we go on whispering in this way. Supposing any one *did* mean to nose upon us haven't we got our barkers in our pocket?"

"Ah! Tony," said the Cracksman, in whose mind these words of his companion seemed to arouse a sudden and most disagreeable idea,—"talking about *nosing* makes me remember someot that I was told a few days ago up in Rat's Castle in the Rookery."

"And what was that?" asked the Resurrection Man, surveying his friend with his serpent-like eyes in a manner that made him actually quail beneath the glance.

"What was it?" repeated the Cracksman, who appeared to hesitate whether he should proceed, or not: "why—I heard a magsman say that you nosed upon poor Crankey Jem, and that was the reason he got lagged and you was acquitted three year ago at the Old Bailey."

"And what did you say to that?" demanded the Resurrection Man, looking from beneath his bushy brows at the Cracksman, as the ghole in eastern mythology may be supposed to gaze on the countenance of him whom he marks for his victim.

"What did I say?" answered the Cracksman in a hoarse whisper: "why—I knocked the fellow down to be sure."

"And you did what you ought to do, and what I should have done if any one had told me *that* of you," said the Resurrection Man in a tone of the most perfect composure.

While this conversation took place, hurriedly and in whispers, the mysterious stranger continued to smoke his cigar without once glancing around him; and the other inmates of the *Dark-House* parlour, recovering a little from their panic at the entrance of that individual, made a faint attempt to renew the discourse.

But although the eyes of the stranger were apparently occupied in watching the wreaths of smoke, as they curled upwards to the ceiling, they were in reality intent upon the parlour window, the lower part of which alone was darkened by the sliding shutter that lifted up and down. There was a bright lamp over the front door of the public-house; and thus the heads of all the passengers in the street might be descried, as they passed the window, by the inmates of the parlour.

"I say, Ben," exclaimed one reveller to another, "have you heerd that they're a goin' to lay out a park up by Bonner's Road and Hackney Wick?"

"Yes—the Wictoria Park," was the reply. "On'y fancy giving them poor devils of Spitalfields weavers a park to walk in instead o' filling their bellies. But I 'spose they'll make a preshus deep pond in it."

"What for?" demanded the first speaker.

"Why—for the poor creturs to drown theirselves in, to be sure."

At this moment the countenance of a man in the street peered for a single instant over the shutter, and was then immediately withdrawn; but not before a significant glance had been exchanged with the stranger sitting in the neighbourhood of the door.

All this, however, remained entirely unnoticed by the male and female revellers in the parlour.

"Well, it's gone nine," whispered the Cracksman to his companion, "and this fellow Holford don't come. It's my opinion he ain't a-going to."

"We'll give him half an hour's grace," returned the Resurrection Man. "The young fool is hard up, and won't let the hope of five couters slip through his brain quite so easy."

"Half an hour's grace, as you say, Tony," whispered the Cracksman; "and then if he don't come: we'll be off—eh?"

"Oh! just as you like," growled the Resurrection Man. "You seem quite chicken-hearted to-night, Tom."

"I don't know how it is," answered the Cracksman; "but I've got a persentiment—as they calls it—of evil. The sight of that there feller there——" and he nodded towards the stranger.

"Humbug!" interrupted the Resurrection Man, "you haven't had grog enough—that's it."

He accordingly ordered the waiter to supply fresh tumblers of hot liquor; and the next half hour slipped away rapidly enough; but no Henry Holford made his appearance.

At a quarter to ten the two villains rose, and, having settled their score, departed.

Scarcely had the parlour door closed behind them, when the short thick-set stranger also retreated precipitately from the room.

Disappointed and in an ill-humour, the Resurrection Man and the Cracksman hurried away from the *Dark-House* towards the den situate in the immediate vicinity of the Bird-cage Walk.

The streets were ankle-deep in mud: a thin mizzling rain was falling; and neither moon nor stars appeared upon the dark and murky field of heaven.

The two men walked one a little in advance of the other, until they reached the top of Brick Lane, where they separated for the purpose of proceeding by different routes towards the game point—a precaution they invariably adopted after quitting any public place in each other's company.

But so well were the arrangements of the police concocted, that while the Resurrection Man continued his way along Tyssen Street, and the Cracksman turned to the right in Church Street until he reached Samuel Street, up which he proceeded, an active officer followed each: while in the neighbourhood of Virginia Street and the Bird-cage Walk numerous policemen were concealed in dark alleys, lone courts, and obscure nooks, ready to hasten to any point whence the spring of rattles might presently emanate.

Also concealed in a convenient hiding-place, and anxiously awaiting the result of the various combinations effected to discover the den of the murderers, Richard Markham was prepared to aid in the operations of the night.

Meantime, the Resurrection Man pursued one route, and the Cracksman another, both converging towards the same point; but neither individual suspected that danger was on every side! They advanced as confidently as the flies that work their way amidst the tangled web of the spider.

At length the Resurrection Man reached his house; and almost at the same moment the other ruffian arrived at the door.

"All right, Tom."

"All right, Tony."

And the Resurrection Man opened the door, by simply pressing his foot forcibly against it in a peculiar manner.

He entered the passage, followed by the Cracksman, which latter individual turned to close the door, when it was burst wide open and half a dozen policemen rushed into the house.

"Damnation!" cried the Resurrection Man; "we are sold!"—and, darting down the passage, he rushed into the little back room, the door of which he succeeded in closing and fastening against the officers.

But the Cracksman had fallen into the hands of the police, and was immediately secured. Rattles were sprung; and the sudden and unexpected din, breaking upon the solemn silence of the place and hour, startled the poor and the guilty in their wretched abodes.

"Break open the door there!" cried the serjeant who commanded the police, and who was no other than the mysterious stranger of the *Dark-House* parlour: "break open that door—and two of you run up stairs this moment!"

As he spoke, a strong light shone from the top of the staircase. The officers cast their eyes in that direction, and beheld a hideous old woman scowling down upon them. In her hand she carried a candle, the light of which was thrown forward in a vivid flood by the reflection of a huge bright tin shade.

This horrible old woman was the Mummy.

Already were two of the officers half-way up the staircase,—already was the door of the back room on the ground floor yielding to the strength of a constable,—already were Richard Markham and several officers hurrying down the street towards the spot, obedient to the signal conveyed by the springing of the rattles,—when a terrific explosion took place.

"Good God!" ejaculated Markham: "what can that mean?"

"There—there!" cried a policeman near him: "it is all over with the serjeant and my poor comrades!"

Immediately after the explosion, and while Markham and the officer were yet speaking, a bright column of fire shot up into the air:—millions and millions of sparks, glistening vividly, showered down upon the scene of havoc;—for a moment—a single moment—the very heavens seemed on fire;—then all was black—and silent—and doubly sombre.

The den of the assassins had ceased to exist: it had been destroyed by gunpowder.

The blackened remains and dismembered relics of mortality were discovered on the following morning amongst the ruins, or in the immediate neighbourhood;—but it was impossible to ascertain how many persons had perished on this dread occasion.

CHAPTER LXVII.

SCENES IN FASHIONABLE LIFE.

Two months elapsed from the date of the preceding event.

It was now the commencement of March; and bleak winds had succeeded the hoary snows of winter.

The scene changes to the house of Sir Rupert Harborough, in Tavistock Square.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon. The baronet was pacing the drawing-room with uneven steps, while Lady Cecilia lounged upon the sofa, turning over the pages of a new novel.

"Now this is most provoking, Cecilia," exclaimed the baronet: "I never was so much in want of money in my life; and you refuse to adopt the only means which——"

"Yes, Sir Rupert," interrupted the lady impatiently; "I refuse to give you my diamonds to pledge again—and all your arguments shall never persuade me to do so."

"Your heart is too good, Cecilia——"

"Oh! yes—you may try what coaxing will do; but I can assure you that I am proof against both honied and bitter words. Neither will serve your turn now."

"And yet, somehow or another, you *have* the command of money, Cecilia," resumed the baronet, after a pause. "You paid all the tradesmen's bills and servants' wages about two months ago: you found out—though God only knows how—that Greenwood had the duplicate of your diamonds;—you redeemed the ticket from him, and the jewels themselves from V——'s; and from that moment you have never seemed embarrassed for a five-pound note."

"All *that* is perfectly true, Sir Rupert," said Lady Cecilia, blushing slightly, and yet smiling archly,—and never did she seem more beautiful than when the glow of shame thus mantled her cheek and poured flood of light into those eyes that were so expressive of a voluptuous and sensual nature.

"Well, then," continued the baronet, "if you can thus obtain supplies for yourself, surely you can do something in the same way for me."

"I have no ready money at present," said Lady Cecilia; "and I have determined not to part with my jewels. There!"

"Perhaps you think that I am fool enough to be the dupe of your miserable and flimsy artifices, Cecilia?" cried the baronet impatiently: "but I can tell you that I have seen through them all along."

"You!" ejaculated the lady, starting uneasily, while her heart palpitated violently, and she felt that her cheeks were crimson.

"Yes—I, Lady Cecilia," answered the baronet. "I am not quite such a fool as you take me for."

"My God, Sir Rupert! what—how—who——-" stammered the guilty wife, a cold tremor pervading every limb, although her cheeks appeared to be on fire.

"There! you see that all my suspicions are confirmed," cried the baronet; "your confusion proves it."

"You cannot say that—that—I have ever given you any cause, Sir Rupert——"

"What? to doubt your word? Oh! no—I can't say that you are in the habit of telling falsehoods generally; but——"

"Sir Rupert!"

"Nay—I will speak out! The fact is, you pretend to have quarrelled with Lady Tremordyn; and it is all nonsense. Your mother supplies you with as much money as you require—and that is the secret!"

"Oh! Sir Rupert—Sir Rupert!" exclaimed Lady Cecilia, suddenly relieved from a most painful state of apprehension, and now comprehending the error under which he was labouring.

"You cannot deny what I affirm, Cecilia. And now that I bethink me, it is most probable that Greenwood himself told Lord Tremordyn (with whom he was intimate at that time, although they have since quarrelled, God only knows what about) of my having placed the duplicate of the diamonds in his hands, and so your father arranged that matter with Greenwood. It is a gross system of duplicity, Cecilia—a gross system; a pretended quarrel merely to prevent me from visiting at the house of my father-in-law. But, by God! I will stand it no longer!"

"What will you do, then?" demanded Lady Cecilia, ironically.

"What will I do? I will go straight off to Lord and Lady Tremordyn, and tell them my mind."

"And Lord and Lady Tremordyn will tell you theirs in return."

"And what can they say, madam, against me?"

"Nay—Sir Rupert, rather ask what they can say for you."

"Oh! you wish to irritate me, madam—you are anxious to quarrel with me," cried the baronet.—"Well—be it so! As for your father and mother, I will tell them that they do not act honourably, nor even prudently, in allowing their son-in-law to live by his wits and be compelled to raise money where he can."

"And they will tell you in reply, that you did not act honourably nor prudently to squander the large sum they gave you when you married their daughter."

"The devil they will!" exclaimed the baronet. "Then, in that case, I shall remind them of the consideration for which the large sum you allude to was given."

"Monster—coward!" cried Lady Cecilia: "do you dare to throw in my teeth the weakness of which I was guilty through excess of love for you?"

"I am sure you need not be so fastidious, Cecilia. To talk of love now, between a man of the world like me and a woman of the world like you, is an absurdity;—and as for the little weakness of which you speak, I repaired it."

"Yes," said the lady, bitterly. "When you saw me kneeling in despair at your feet—and when my mother implored you to save her daughter's honour, you turned a deaf ear to our entreaties—you scorned our prayers: but when my father offered a golden argument ——"

"Lady Cecilia—silence, I command you!"

"When he offered a golden argument, I say," continued the lady, with withering scorn, "—when he produced his cheque-book, Sir Rupert Harborough pretended to yield to my entreaties; and as he raised me from the ground—condescendingly raised me—me, the daughter of a peer—with one hand,—with the other he clutched the bribe! Ah! Sir Rupert—you spoilt a good heart—you trampled a confiding disposition in the dust—when you would not allow yourself to be purchased by my love, but still consented to sell yourself to me for my father's gold! Oh! it was the vile instance of a man prostituting himself for gain, as poor weak woman has so often been doomed to do!"

"Lady Cecilia—I am astonished—I am amazed at the terms in which you allow yourself to address me!" said Sir Rupert Harborough, humiliated and put to shame by these words of keenly cutting satire.

"And now," continued the indignant lady,—"now you solicit me to ruin myself for you—to part with my very ornaments to supply your extravagances,—you, who had no pity upon my tears, no feeling for my anguish, no respect for my honour! No, Sir Rupert Harborough: I have assisted you once—assisted you twice—assisted you thrice—assisted you a hundred times already; and what return have you made me? When you are penniless, you remain at home: when you are in the possession of funds, you remain absent for weeks and weeks together. You may love me no longer, it is true;—and, with regard to myself, I confess that your conduct has long—long ago destroyed all the romance of affection in my bosom. Still a woman cannot endure neglect—at least I thought so a few months ago;—but now—*now,*" she added emphatically, as her thoughts wandered to Greenwood, "I am indifferent alike as to your attention or your neglect!"

"At least, Lady Cecilia, you are candid and explicit," said Sir Rupert, biting his lips. "But perhaps you have something more to observe."

"No—nothing," answered the lady coldly; and, with these words, she rose and left the room.

Not many minutes had elapsed since the termination of this "scene," when Mr. Chichester was announced.

"Well, what news with the old man?" demanded the baronet hastily.

"My father will not advance me another shilling until June," answered Chichester, throwing himself upon the sofa; "and as for your bill—he won't look at it. Any thing good with you?"

"Nothing. Lady Cecilia positively refuses to part with the jewels again," said the baronet, stamping his foot with rage.

"And can't you——"

"Can't I what?"

"Can't you help yourself to them in spite of her?" demanded Chichester.

"Impossible!" returned Harborough. "She keeps them under lock and key in her own room; and the door of that room she always locks when she goes out."

"How provoking! If we only had some ready money at this moment," observed Chichester, "we might make a little fortune."

"Yes—town is full—and such opportunities as we might have! By Jove, we *must* raise the wine somewhere."

"You do not think that Greenwood——"

"Oh! no—not for a moment!" cried the baronet, turning very pale as the idea of the forged acceptance of Lord Tremordyn, which would be due in another month, flashed across his mind: "no—I cannot apply to Greenwood for a shilling."

"And after all the pains I have taken in perfecting you in the new dodges with the cards and dice, ready for this season," said Mr. Chichester, in a most lachrymose tone; then, taking a small parcel from his pocket, he continued, "Here are the implements we want, too: every thing prepared—except the money."

"Ah!" exclaimed the baronet, "you have got the things, then, at last?"

"Yes," returned Chichester, opening the parcel and displaying its contents upon the table. "Here are the *scratched dice,* you see. These must be used upon a bare table, because it is necessary to judge by the sound of the dice in the box whether they are on the scratched side or not. You understand that a hole has been drilled in the centre pip of the five in this die, and in the ace of the other; a piece of ebony is then inserted, with a very small portion projecting. These dice cannot, therefore, fall perfectly flat, when the five side of the one and the ace of the other are underneath on the table; and it is very easy for the thrower just to move the box the least thing before he lifts it, to that the sound may tell him whether the scratched side is down or not. But you are to recollect that a man must be very drunk when you can use them with any degree of safety."

"I should think so, indeed," said Sir Rupert.

"I can assure you that no implements of our craft are, on certain occasions, more destructive than these," observed Chichester.

"And what is the use of these slight scratches upon the dice?"

"To assist the eye in manipulating them. But here," continued Chichester, holding up a dice-box, and surveying it with a species of paternal admiration,—"here is a famous antidote to fair dice. Don't you see that when fair dice are used, you must introduce an unfair box. Many a greenhorn may have heard of loaded dice, and so on; but very few know that there is such a thing as the *Doctor Dice-box*. Honour to the man, say I, who invented it. If you judge by the outside of this box, it is a very fair-looking one; but just put your finger into it, and you will feel that no less than three-quarters of the inside are filled up, so that there is now only just space enough left in the middle for the dice to fit in. Towards the top the sides grow larger and smoother. The dice, you see, rattle by rising up and down, when shaken briskly, but do not change their position. All that you have to do is to put them in, in the first instance, with a view to the way in which you want them to come up."

"So that if you want to throw a six and a five, put the dice into the box with the ace and the two uppermost," said the baronet.

"Precisely," answered Chichester. "A fair box, you know as well as I do, has one or more rims inside, against which the dice must turn in coming out."

"By the bye," said the baronet, "what is the *Gradus*, Chichester? you promised to show me a great many times, and have forgotten it; but now that we are upon the subject, you may as well enlighten me."

"Certainly, my dear fellow," returned this very complacent Mentor; then, taking up a pack of cards, he said, "nothing is more easy than the *Gradus,* or *Step*. It is often much safer than *Bridging*, too. *Bridging* is known by every snob about town who pretends to set up for a *Greek*. All that you have to do for the *Gradus* is to let any particular card you fancy project a little in this way, so as to make sure that your opponent will turn it up, at whist or ecarté, as the case may be."

"Excellent! I like the plan better than any other you ever yet showed me for effecting the same object."

"*Palming* may sometimes be done successfully," continued Chichester: "but you must have the small French cards to do it. There—all that there is to do is to secrete a particular card under the palm and partially up the sleeve till it is required. When your opponent is well primed, you can easily introduce *a fifth king*, or *fifth ace*, in this way. There is a great deal of art, too, in shuffling, or *Weaving*. At ecarté or whist, always watch which tricks taken up have the best cards; then, when you take up all the cards to shuffle them again, *weave* in the good tricks to suit your purposes."

"I heard a gentleman say the other night," observed the baronet, "that he had been most gloriously fleeced by a fellow who used *pricked cards*."

"Ah! they are capital weapons," exclaimed Chichester. "Just lay the high cards flat on their backs, and then prick them with a very fine needle, so as to raise the slightest possible pimple in the world upon the backs down in one of the corners; but mind, the cards are not to be punctured quite through. The fellow who told me how to do this dodge, used some chemical preparation to the ball of his thumb, which made that part almost raw, and consequently so very sensitive that he could feel the smallest possible pimple on the card with the greatest ease."

"And what have you got there?" demanded Sir Rupert, pointing to a pack of cards which Chichester had just taken from his parcel.

"These are *Reflectors*," replied the Mentor. "They are French cards, you perceive, and are only manufactured in France. They cost two guineas a pack; but then—only think of their utility! Look at the backs of these cards: instead of being plain, they are figured. Now this to a common observer is nothing, most of the French cards being, you know, variegated with flowers or other designs at the back. But to the initiated, the lines upon these cards are every thing. Mark how they run. All the high cards have semicircles in the corners, while all the low cards have the ends of the lines meeting in the corners. Then, by a more minute study still of these cards, it is easy to know kings, queens, knaves, and aces, by the manner in which the lines run upon the back. I hope these weapons are dangerous enough for you."

"They are decidedly the most efficient I have yet seen," answered the baronet. "I think we now know all the mysteries of the gaming world; and, considering how many *flats* there are in London and the watering places, it would be astonishing indeed if we could not pick up a handsome living."

"Of course it would," said Mr. Chichester. "The mania for play is most extraordinary. The moment a young man enters upon life, he fancies that it is very fine to frequent gambling-houses or lose his loose gold at private play: indeed he imagines that he cannot be a *man of the world* without it. There is our advantage. That anxiety to be looked upon as *a fine dashing fellow* is the real cause of the immense increase of gaming propensities. Young men do not begin to play in the first instance because they like it: they commence, simply to gratify their vanity; and then they imbibe the taste and acquire the habit. What they began through pride, they continue through love. There, again, I say, is our pull:—there always will be flats ready to throw themselves head and shoulders into the nets that sharps spread out for them."

"All that is very true, Chichester," said the baronet. "But we don't want a homily on the vice of gambling this afternoon: what we require is the needful to enable us to put our plans into execution. The old tricks that you taught me more than three years ago in that very respectable lodging which you occupied in Bartholomew Close, are well-nigh worn out: we have now studied fresh ones;—but we are totally deficient in the steam to set our new engines in motion."

Chichester was about to reply when a carriage drove up to the front door, and Mr. Greenwood alighted.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE ELECTION.

"Well—it is all right!" exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, the moment he entered the drawing-room, his countenance radiant with joy, and his eyes expressive of triumph.

"What is all right?" demanded both the baronet and Chichester in the same breath.

"Why—have you not heard that the election for Rottenborough took place yesterday?" said Greenwood.

"Oh! to be sure—I forgot that!" observed the baronet. "But you surely never have beaten Lord Tremordyn's candidate?"

"Yes—I was returned triumphantly—814 against 102," said Greenwood.

"I wish you joy, my dear fellow," exclaimed Chichester. "I suppose you astonished the natives of Rottenborough? but how the devil did you manage this victory?"

"I will give you a brief sketch of the whole proceeding," said Greenwood, throwing himself upon the sofa, and playing with his elegant guard-chain. "The fact is, I learnt in the latter part of December that the representative of Rottenborough intended to accept the Chiltern Hundreds when the Houses met in February. You know that I was at that time very intimate with Lord Tremordyn, your worthy and much revered father-in-law, Sir Rupert——"

"Ah! worthy, indeed!" ejaculated the baronet impatiently.

"I accordingly spoke to Lord Tremordyn," continued Greenwood; "and, after a little delicate manœuvring, received his promise to support me,—in fact, to get me in for Rottenborough. It had been arranged that Count Alteroni and his family were to pass the month of January and a portion of February with Lord and Lady Tremordyn; but in the mean time, the count learned something about me, as I before told you, which he did not like; and he rejected me as a suitor for his daughter's hand. That did not grieve me much. My only motives for making up to the signora at all were, because I really liked the girl, and because she is a nobleman's daughter. But the count did not stop there. He sent an apology to Lord and Lady Tremordyn, and declined the invitation. Off goes his lordship to Richmond, and calls upon the count. The count spoke so ill of me, it appears, that his lordship determined to cut me. There seemed at first an insurmountable obstacle to my hopes relative to Rottenborough."

"Yes—but you are never dismayed at any thing," said Chichester.

"Never. There is no such word as *impossible* in my vocabulary," returned Greenwood; "and as for *improbable*—that is a word which can only intimidate cowards. I made up my mind to exert all my energies to obtain the gratification of my wishes. I had set my mind upon becoming an M.P. I had dreamt of it—thought upon it for hours together—and had even based certain calculations and schemes upon the event. I was not to be disappointed. I immediately went down to Rottenborough, and put up at the principal inn. I looked about me for a day or two, and at length saw something that suited me—an old mansion in such a ruined and dilapidated state, that it would require three or four thousand pounds to restore it to a habitable and comfortable condition. It belonged to the banker of the place. I bought it without haggling, and thus made a friend of him. I then set all the masons, carpenters, decorators, and upholsterers in the place to work, paid a considerable sum into the banker's hands, and appointed the head solicitor in the town to be my agent. I moreover gave him certain secret instructions relative to my ultimate views, and returned to London. Every Saturday I went down to Rottenborough—it is only twenty-four miles from London, you know—and paid all the bills without demanding discount. I also sent fifty pounds to the clergyman of the parish to lay out in purchasing blankets for the poor; and paid the coal merchant for fifty tons of coals also for charitable distribution. I always remained at Rottenborough until Monday mornings, and went to church three times on the Sundays. No one spoke the responses louder than I did—no one dwelt with such holy delight upon the clergyman's sermons as myself. I moreover won the hearts of the churchwardens, by placing a ten-pound note in the plate, after a charity sermon; and I secured the overseer by visiting the workhouse with him, tasting the soup, and pronouncing the dietary-scale to amount to absolute luxuries. In this manner, I was soon talked about. 'Who is this Mr. Greenwood?' was the universal question. 'A wealthy capitalist of London,' answered the lawyer. Thus, every thing progressed well."

"So I should imagine," observed the baronet.

"Well—parliament met—the representative of Rottenborough resigned his seat; and the next morning by eight o'clock, my lawyer-agent had secured every inn, tavern, and public-house in Rottenborough in my name. Placards were posted all over the town, announcing my intention to come forward in the liberal interest, Lord Tremordyn having always supported the opposite side. Down goes Lord Tremordyn with his candidate, and is quite astonished to see all the walls and houses covered with posters, on which the name of Greenwood appeared in monster-type. But if he were surprised at first, how much more was he compelled to marvel, and how deeply was he annoyed, when not an inn—not a tavern—not even a public-house, would receive him, or his horses. His lordship drove to the rector's. The parson 'was excessively glad to see his lordship, and hoped his lordship would make his (the rector's) house his home; but he (the rector) could not think of entertaining the Conservative candidate also, as he had promised his vote to a gentleman who intended to settle in the place, and who had already done a vast amount of good there.' Lord Tremordyn was astounded. He went to the banker's. Precisely the same answer. The brewer, the coal-merchant, the Chairman of the Board of Poor Law Guardians (who had heard that I admired the soup and considered gruel at nineteen out of twenty-one meals every week, to be actually encouraging in the poor a taste for luxuries) all spoke well of me. Lord Tremordyn grew livid with rage; and he was compelled to take up his quarters, with the new candidate, at the house of the undertaker, whose services I had neglected to secure, not having known upon what possible pretence to order a few coffins."

"Capital!" ejaculated Sir Rupert: "I am glad the old lord was taken in at last—he who fancied himself omnipotent at Rottenborough."

"Every engine of Tory tactics was now put into execution by Lord Tremordyn, his candidate, and his agents. All his tenants who had not paid up their arrears of rent, were menaced with executions and ejectments if they did not vote for the Conservative. My lawyer knew how to counteract this influence. He found out all the tenants who were in arrears, and proffered them loans payable at very distant dates. This accommodation was gladly accepted; and they were of course given to understand that the assistance emanated from me. 'At the same time,' said my lawyer, 'you must not think that this is a mere electioneering manœuvre to secure your support. No—remain free and independent electors. Mr. Greenwood's wishes and objects were merely to defeat tyranny and annihilate intimidation.' In this way we completely weaned his own tenants away from Lord Tremordyn and his cause."

"All this must have cost you a great deal of money," said Chichester.

"Not near so much as you would fancy. But, whatever it was, it was well spent. The position of an M.P. to me is worth thousands and thousands:—I know how to avail myself of it."

"I wish I had your head, Greenwood," exclaimed Sir Rupert Harborough, with a sigh.

"My dear baronet, if you had my head and lacked my perseverance, my industry, and my power of self-command, you would be but little benefited. Let me, however, continue my narrative of the electioneering proceedings. There was now nothing but placarding and counter-placarding. My canvassers were most eloquent in my cause. 'Do not look,' said they, 'to whether a man be Whig or Tory—Radical or Conservative: ascertain whether he will benefit the town—whether he will be charitable to the poor, will support the tradesmen, and will dwell during the recess amongst the inhabitants of Rottenborough. What good have the candidates of the Tremordyn interest ever done for ye, O Rottenboroughers? Has the present candidate an account at the banker's? has he given away blankets and coals wholesale? has he come regularly on Sunday to attend divine service in our parish church three times? has he employed the greater portion of the tradesmen of the town? No—he appears amongst you as a stranger—making fine promises, but having given an earnest of nothing. Look at Greenwood—a man of enormous wealth—known probity—vast experience—high character—splendid qualifications—unlimited charity—and undoubted piety.'"

"I suppose you wrote out all that for your canvassers?" said Chichester.

"No: my lawyer copied a character for me out of an old romance; and it seemed to be admirably appreciated. At length the eventful day—yesterday—came. You may depend upon it, I was up early. My band and colours commenced parading about the town at seven o'clock; and my lawyer had very prudently hired the clown and pantaloon of Richardson's Theatre to attend the band, and amuse the people with their antics during the intervals between the different airs. This told wonderfully well, and, as I afterwards learnt, won thirty-three votes away from Lord Tremordyn's candidate."

"A fact which speaks volumes in favour of the intellectual qualifications of the people of Rottenborough," observed the baronet.

"But the beauty of it was," continued Greenwood, "that my lawyer had the clown in the Guildhall, when my opponent addressed the electors; and the fellow imitated the gesticulations and the facial contortions of Lord Tremordyn's candidate so well, that the speech was drowned in roars of laughter."

"And I suppose that your speech was listened to with the greatest attention?" said Chichester.

"The very greatest," returned Greenwood; "and I can assure you that I pitched them the gammon in the very finest possible style. 'Gentlemen,' I said, 'it is well known that not a single town in this empire contains a more enlightened, intellectual, and independent population than Rottenborough. The inhabitants of Rottenborough are the envy of surrounding cities, and the admiration of the universe. History has ever been busy with the name of Rottenborough; and never has a gallant Rottenborougher disgraced his name, his country, or his cause. This is the chosen home of freedom: if you seek for independence, you will find it in the peaceful groves and delicious retreats of Rottenborough. Famous also is this town for the loveliness and virtue of its women; and beauteous and faithful wives make their husbands and sons good and great. Oh! supremely blessed is the town of Rottenborough, situate in its happy valley, and through whose streets sweep balmy gales, laden with perfume and delicious odour.'—At this moment, the voice of some purblind Tory exclaimed, 'What do you say to the putrid black ditch at the back of the church?' Of course one of my own supporters smashed this ruffian's hat over his eyes; and I then proceeded thus: 'Gentlemen, free and independent electors of Rottenborough! I offer myself as your representative! I throw myself into your arms! I undertake your cause! Tory influence has long blunted your energies: Tory machinations have for years dimmed the bright and brilliant intellects of the Rottenboroughers. Do you ask me what are my principles? I will tell you. I am a liberal in every sense of the word. I am anxious that every free and independent elector of Rottenborough shall have his beef and beer for nothing—which shall be the case to-morrow, if I am returned to-day. I am desirous that the industrious classes should be improved in condition—that they should have more food and less treadmill, and be supplied with flannel to expel the bleak and nipping cold of winter. This want it shall be my duty to supply. But that is not all: I hope to see the day arrive when every pauper in the workhouse at Rottenborough shall thank God for his happy condition, and receive an extra half ounce of bacon for the dinner of the Sabbath! These are my fond aspirations—these are my aims! If I seem to promise much—I am ready to perform it all. Trust me—try me—place me in a condition to be useful to you. I have now expounded to you all my views—I have laid bare my secret soul to your eyes; and heaven can attest the sincerity of my intentions. Under these circumstances I confidently claim your suffrage;—but if it should happen that I am disappointed—if I am forced to shut up the mansion which I have purchased in this neighbourhood, suspend all the works, and fly for ever from the peaceful retreats and delicious haunts of Rottenborough, I shall at least——.' Here it was arranged between my lawyer and me that my voice was to falter and that I should seem as if I was about to faint. I accordingly wound up the farce with a little bit of melodrama: and from that instant the cause of my opponent was desperate beyond all chances of redemption."

"You deserved success, after that brilliant speech;" said Chichester, laughing heartily at this narrative.

"The polling was continued briskly until four o'clock, when the mayor closed the books and announced that *George Greenwood, Esquire, Gentleman, was duly returned to serve in Parliament as the representative of Rottenborough*."

"When shall you 'take your oaths and your seat,' as the papers say?" demanded Chichester.

"This evening," answered Greenwood.

"And of course you will range yourself amongst the liberals?"

"How can you fancy that I shall be guilty of such egregious folly?" cried the new Member of Parliament. "The reign of the Liberals is drawing to a close: a Tory administration within a year or eighteen months is inevitable."

"But you stood forward as a Liberal, and were returned as such."

"Very true—very true, my dear fellow. But do you imagine that I became a Member of Parliament to meet the interests and wishes of a pack of strangers, or to suit my own?"

"And at the next election——"

"I shall be returned again. Mark my word for that. A politician is not worth a fig who has not a dozen excuses ready for the most flagrant tergiversation; and money—money will purchase all the free and independent electors of Rottenborough."

Lady Cecilia Harborough returned to the drawing-room at this moment. She scarcely noticed Chichester—who was "her aversion"—but welcomed Greenwood in the most cordial manner. The baronet observed "that he should leave Mr. Greenwood to amuse Lady Cecilia with an account of his electioneering exploits;" and then withdrew, accompanied by his "shadow" Mr. Chichester.

"You have succeeded, George?" said Lady Cecilia, the moment they were alone together.

"To my heart's content, dearest Cecilia," answered Greenwood, placing his arm around the delicate waist of the frail fair one, and drawing her close to him as they stood before the fire.

"I am delighted with this result," said Lady Cecilia; "although my own father has sustained a defeat in the person of his candidate."

"All fair in the political world, dear Cecilia," replied the new Member of Parliament. "But you have not yet appeared to understand that I came hither the moment I returned from Rottenborough,—to bear to you, first and foremost, the news of my success."

"Ah! dearest George, how can I ever sufficiently testify my gratitude to thee for all thy proofs of ardent love?" whispered Lady Cecilia, in a soft and melting tone.

"Yes—I love you—I love you well," answered Greenwood, who in a moment of tenderness declared with the lips far more than he really felt with the heart;—and he imprinted a thousand kisses upon her month, her cheeks, and her brow.

She returned them, while her countenance glowed with a deep crimson dye;—but neither the kisses nor the blushes were those of a pure and sacred affection; they were the offspring of a licentious and illicit flame.

A slight noise in the room startled the guilty pair.

They hastily withdrew from each other's embrace, and glanced around.

Mr. Chichester was advancing towards the table in the middle of the apartment.

Lady Cecilia uttered a faint cry, and sank upon the sofa.

"I beg you a thousand pardons," said Chichester, affecting the utmost indifference of manner; "but I had left this parcel behind me;"—— and, taking up the small package containing his dice and cards, he withdrew.

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated Lady Cecilia: "we are discovered—we are betrayed! That wretch will ruin us!"

"Do not fear—do not alarm yourself, sweetest lady," returned Greenwood: "I will undertake to stop that man's mouth! One moment—and I return."

He hurried after Mr. Chichester, whom he overtook half-way down the stairs.

"Chichester, one word with you," said Greenwood.

"A dozen, if you like, my dear fellow."

"You came into the drawing-room a minute ago—unexpectedly——"

"And I apologised for my rudeness."

"Yes—but you are not the less possessed of a secret which involves the honour of a lady—the happiness of an entire family——"

"Greenwood, I am a man of the world: you can rely upon me," interrupted Chichester. "Fear nothing on that score. You have now asked your favour, and obtained it of me: let me request one of you."

"Command me in any way you choose."

"I am at this moment embarrassed for a hundred pounds or so——"

"Say no more: they are yours," returned Greenwood; and he forthwith handed a bank-note for the amount mentioned, to Mr. Chichester.

"Thank you," said that individual; and he hastened to rejoin the baronet, who was waiting for him in the square.

"Well—have you found your implements?" said Sir Rupert, as he took his friend's arm.

"Yes—and a hundred pounds into the bargain," returned Chichester, drily.

"A hundred pounds! Impossible!"

"There is the bank-note. It is just what we required."

"But how——"

"Greenwood was coming down stairs, and I mustered up courage to ask him for a loan. He complied without a moment's hesitation. Indeed," added Chichester, with a sneer, "I almost think that I shall be enabled, in case of emergency, to obtain another supply from the same quarter."

"This is fortunate—most fortunate!" exclaimed Harborough. "Let us go and dine at Long's or Stephen's this evening, and see if we can pick up a flat."

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE "WHIPPERS-IN."

HAVING reassured Lady Cecilia Harborough relative to the alarm inspired by the intrusion of Chichester at so critical a moment, Mr. Greenwood returned to his own residence in Spring Gardens.

"Any one called, Lafleur?" he said to his favourite valet, as he ascended to his study.

"Two gentlemen; sir. Their cards are upon your desk. They both declared that they would call again to day."

Mr. Greenwood hastened to inspect the cards of his two visitors. One contained the following name and address:—

THE HON. V. W. Y. SAWDER, M.P.
Reform-Club.

The other presented the annexed superscription to view:—

SIR T. M. B. MUZZLEHEM, BART., M.P.
Carlton-Club.

"Ah! ha!" exclaimed Mr. Greenwood, chuckling audibly: "I understand what this means! Already at work, eh? No time to be lost, I see." Then turning towards Lafleur, he added, "You see, my good fellow, that when a man like me—a man of—of—consideration, in a word—becomes entrusted with the interests of a free, enlightened, and independent constituency, like that of Rottenborough, the Ministerial party and the Opposition each endeavour to secure me to their cause—you understand, Lafleur—eh?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered the imperturbable valet, with his usual bow.

"Well, then, Lafleur," continued Mr. Greenwood, "you must know farther that each party has its whipper-in. The whippers-in keep lists of those who belong respectively to their own parties, and collect them together when their support is absolutely necessary on a division of the House. In fact, the whippers-in are the huntsmen of the pack: and the members all collect at the sound of their bugles. Do you comprehend, Lafleur?"

"Yes, sir—thank you, sir."

"I must therefore see both these gentlemen—but separately, mind. If they should happen to call at the same time, show one into the drawing-room while I receive the other here."

"Yes, sir."

"And now, Lafleur," proceeded Mr. Greenwood, "while we are upon the subject, I may as well give you a few instructions relative to that deportment which my altered position renders necessary."

Lafleur bowed.

"Placed in a situation of high responsibility and trust, by the confidence of an intelligent and enlightened constituency," resumed Mr. Greenwood, "I am bound to maintain a position which may inspire respect and confidence. In the first place, as it cannot be supposed that I shall receive many epistolary communications until my opinions upon particular measures and questions become known through my parliamentary conduct,—and as, at the same time, it would be disgraceful for the neighbourhood to imagine that my correspondence is limited, you must take care that the two-penny postman never passes my door without leaving a letter."

"Yes, sir. I will have a letter, addressed to you, posted every two hours, sir, so that you cannot fail to receive one by each delivery."

"Good, Lafleur; and you can tell the postman," added Mr. Greenwood, "to knock louder than he has been in the habit of doing ——"

"Yes, sir; because it is difficult to hear from the servants' offices."

"Precisely, Lafleur. And you can tell our newsman to bring me all the *second editions* of the newspapers whenever there are any; and mind you always keep the news-boy waiting a long time at the door. Tell him, moreover, to bawl out '*second edition*' of whatever paper it may be, as loud as he can."

"I will take care he shall do so, sir," answered Lafleur.

"And once a week, or so," proceeded Greenwood, after a pause, "let an express-courier gallop at full speed up to the house, and ring and knock furiously until the door is opened. But, mind that he comes from at least three or four miles distant, so that his horse may be covered with foam, and himself with mud or dust, according to the state of the weather."

"I understand, sir."

"Moreover, Lafleur, at least three or four times a week, go to Leadenhall Market and purchase the game and poultry which we may require for the house, and send it home by the London Parcels Delivery Company, so that the neighbours may say, '*More presents for Mr. Greenwood. Dear me! how popular he must be with his constituents!*'"

"I fully comprehend, sir."

"You can send fish home, too,—and haunches of venison in the same manner," continued the new Member of Parliament; "but mind that the feathers of the pheasants, the tails of the fish, and the feet of the haunches always hang out of the baskets in which they are packed."

"Oh! certainly, sir."

"If you could possibly get a charity-school to wait upon me some morning, to solicit me to become a patron, or any thing of that sort, it would do good, and I should make a handsome donation to the funds."

"That can be managed, sir. I can safely promise that seventy boys and ninety girls shall wait upon you in procession any day you choose to appoint."

"Well and good, Lafleur. And mind that they are kept standing for three quarters of an hour in the street before they are admitted."

"As a matter of course, sir."

"And now I will just mention a few things," continued Mr. Greenwood, "that you most manage with very great nicety. Indeed, I know I can rely upon you in every thing."

Lafleur bowed.

"You must turn away all Italian organ-players. The moment one shows himself under our windows, let one of the footmen rush out and order him off. It is not proper to encourage such vagabonds: the aristocracy don't like them."

"Certainly not, sir."

"Organ-playing is a thing I am determined to put an end to. There is also the hoop nuisance. Give any boy into charge, whatever may be his age, who is caught trundling a hoop in Spring Gardens. That is another thing I am resolved to put an end to. Ballad-singers and broom-girls you will of course have taken into custody without hesitation. In fact you had better give the policeman upon the beat general instructions upon this head; and you can slip a guinea into his hand at the same time."

"Very good, sir."

"At the same time we must be charitable, Lafleur—we must be charitable."

"Decidedly, sir."

"You must find out some decent woman with half a dozen children, to whom the broken victuals can be given every day at about three o'clock, when there are plenty of people in the street;—a woman who does not exactly want the food, but who will not refuse it. The respectability of her appearance will be set down to my benevolence, Lafleur; and she must be careful always to come with her children. By these means we shall gain the reputation of being judiciously particular in respect to vagabonds and impostors, but charitable in the extreme to the deserving poor."

"Just so, sir."

"One word more, Lafleur. When any person calls whom you know I do not want to see, say, '*Mr. Greenwood is engaged with a deputation from his constituents*;' or else, '*Mr. Greenwood has just received very important dispatches, and cannot be disturbed*;'—or, again, '*Mr. Greenwood has just stepped down as far as the Home Office*.' You fully comprehend."

"Perfectly, sir."

"Then you may retire, Lafleur. But—by the bye—Lafleur!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I shall add twenty guineas a year to your wages from this date, Lafleur," said Mr. Greenwood.

"Thank you, sir," answered the valet; and, with a low bow, he retired.

"Another step gained in the ladder of ambition!" said Greenwood to himself, when he was alone. "A Member of Parliament—and in spite of Lord Tremordyn! ha! ha! ha! In spite of Lord Tremordyn! Oh most intelligent and independent electors of Rottenborough: I bought your suffrages with gold, with fine words, with clowns and mountebanks, and with pots of beer! Free and enlightened electors! ha! ha! I shall turn against the very interest in which I was elected; but if my constituents grumble, I will silence them with more gold;—if they reproach, I will use all the sophistry of which language is capable—and that is not a little;—if they repine, I will win them back to good humour with fresh sights, and buffoons, and galas;—if they grow dry with talking against me, I will have whole pipes of wine and butts of beer broached in their streets! Yes—I must join the Tory interest: I see that it is now upon the rise. And yet I know—I feel in my heart—I have the conviction that the popular cause is the true one, the just one. But what of that? I stood forward as a candidate to suit myself, and not for the sake of the free and independent electors of Rottenborough! Yes, all goes well with me! An occasional annoyance—such as my failure in obtaining possession of the person of Eliza Sydney, and of the hand of Isabella, the lovely Italian—cannot be avoided;—but in all great points—in all my important views, I am successful! And yet, Isabella—Isabella! Upon her the eye that is wearied with the contemplation of the rude and discordant scenes of life, could rest—could rest with unfeigned, with ineffable delight! O Isabella, there are times when thine image comes before me, like the vision of a holy and chaste Madonna to the sleep-bound mind of the pious Catholic;—and there have been solitary hours in which the whole earth has seemed to me to be covered with flowers beneath the sweet sunlight of thine eyes! And yet—who knows? The day may come when even thou shalt be mine! I longed to languish in the arms of Diana Arlington;—and I had my wish. I coveted the patrician loveliness of Cecilia Harborough;—and, behold! my wealth purchased it. I sought for change; and accident—a strange accident—surrendered to my embraces *another*—yes, *another*—whom I have never seen since that day—now more than two months ago,—but who, I have since learnt through the medium of my faithful Lafleur, dwells in the same house with—"

Mr. Greenwood's reverie was interrupted by the entrance of his valet, who introduced the Honourable Mr. Sawder into the study. The new Member of Parliament received the Whig whipper-in with his usual courtesy of manner; and, when they were both seated, Mr. Sawder felicitated Mr. Greenwood upon the successful result of the Rottenborough election.

"The liberal cause triumphed most signally," said Mr. Sawder: "the result was hailed with enthusiasm at the Reform Club, I can assure you."

"I have no doubt," answered Mr. Greenwood, already adopting the method of evasion so much in vogue amongst diplomatic and political circles,—"I have no doubt that every true lover of his country must be rejoiced at the victory achieved by straightforward conduct over the system of bribery, intimidation, and corruption practised by the nominee of Lord Tremordyn and his agents."

"Oh! certainly—certainly," returned Mr. Sawder. "The object of my present visit is to ascertain whether you will permit me to introduce you to the House this evening?"

"It is my intention to take the oaths and my seat this evening," answered Mr. Greenwood.

"And my services as *chaperon*—"

"You really confer a great honour upon me."

"Then I may consider that you accept—"

"My dear sir, how can I sufficiently thank you for this kind interest which you take in my behalf?"

"Pray do not mention it, Mr. Greenwood."

"No, Mr. Sawder, I will not allude to it; since it is the more to be appreciated, inasmuch as I never had the pleasure of being known to you previous to this occasion."

"I am therefore to understand," said the whipper-in, who could not precisely fathom the new member through the depths of these ambiguous phrases, "that you will allow me the honour of introducing you—"

"The honour, my dear sir, would be with me," observed Mr. Greenwood, with a gracious bow.

"At what hour, then, will you be prepared—"

"My time shall henceforth always be devoted to the interests of my constituents."

"A very noble sentiment, my dear Mr. Greenwood," said the whipper-in. "Shall we then fix the ceremony for five o'clock?"

"Five o'clock is an excellent hour, Mr. Sawder—an excellent hour. I know no hour that I like more than five o'clock," exclaimed Mr. Greenwood.

"Be it five, then," said the whipper-in. "And now, relative to the Reform club—when will it please you to be proposed a member?"

"It will please me, my dear sir, at any time, to join that fraternity of honourable gentlemen with whom I shall in future co-operate."

"Well and good, my dear sir," said Mr. Sawder; and he slowly and reluctantly took his leave, not knowing what to make of the new member for Rottenborough, nor whether to calculate upon his adhesion to the Whig cause, or not.

Scarcely had the Honourable Mr. V. W. Y. Sawder, M. P., driven away in his beautiful cabriolet from Mr. Greenwood's door, when Sir T. M. B. Muzzlehem, Bart., M. P. arrived in his brougham at the same point. But if Mr. Greenwood were evasive and ambiguous to the Whig whipper-in, he was clear and lucid to the Tory one.

Sir T. Muzzlehem began by felicitating him upon his election, and in a verbose harangue, expressed his hopes that Mr. Greenwood would support that cause "the object of which was to maintain the glorious old constitution inviolate, and uphold the Established Church in its unity and integrity."

"Those are precisely my intentions," said Mr. Greenwood.

"I am delighted to hear you say so, my dear sir," resumed the Tory whipper-in; "but I have one deep cause of uneasiness, which is that you may not entertain precisely the same views of what is necessary to maintain these honourable and ancient institutions, as the men who would gladly lay down their lives to benefit their country."

"I believe, Sir Thomas Muzzlehem," answered Mr. Greenwood, "that I shall act according to the wishes of my constituents, the dictates of my own conscience, and the views of the illustrious men of whom you speak."

"In which case, my dear Mr. Greenwood, I am of course to understand that you will be one of *us*—one of the true defenders of the Throne, the Constitution, and the Church—"

"In other words, a Conservative," added Mr. Greenwood.

"Bravo!" ejaculated the whipper-in, unable to conceal his joy at this unexpected result of a visit whose object he had at first deemed certain of defeat: then, shaking Mr. Greenwood heartily by the hand, he said, "At what hour shall I have the pleasure of introducing you this evening?"

"At a quarter to five precisely," replied Mr. Greenwood.

"And of course you will become a member of the Carlton?" added the whipper-in.

"Of course—whenever you choose—as early as possible," said Mr. Greenwood.

Sir Thomas Muzzlehem again wrung the hand of the new member, and then took his leave.

The moment he had departed, Lafleur repaired to the study, and said, "A lady, sir, is waiting to see you in the drawing-room."

"A lady!" ejaculated Mr. Greenwood: "who is she?"

"I do not know, sir. She refused to give me her name; and I have never seen her before."

"How did she come?"

"On foot, sir. She is neatly, but plainly dressed; and yet her manners seem to indicate that she is a lady."

"Strange! who can she be?" murmured Greenwood, as he hastened to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE IMAGE, THE PICTURE, AND THE STATUE.

UPON the sofa in Mr. Greenwood's elegantly-furnished drawing-room was seated the young lady who so anxiously sought an interview with the owner of that princely mansion.

Her face was very pale: a profound melancholy reigned upon her countenance, and was even discernible in her drooping attitude; her eyes expressed a sorrow bordering upon anguish; and yet, through that veil of dark foreboding, the acute observer might have seen a ray—a feeble ray of hope gleaming faintly, so faintly, that it appeared a flickering lamp burning at the end of a long and gloomy cavern.

Her elbow rested upon one end of the sofa, and her forehead was supported upon her hand, when Greenwood entered the room.

The doors of that luxurious dwelling moved so noiselessly upon their hinges, and the carpets spread upon the floors were so thick, that not a sound, either of door or footstep, announced to that pale and mournful girl the approach of the man whom she so deeply longed to see.

He was close by her ere she was aware of his presence.

With a start, she raised her head, and gazed steadfastly up into his countenance; but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, and refused utterance to the name which she would have spoken.

"Ellen!" ejaculated Greenwood, as his eyes met hers.—"what has brought you hither?"

"Can you not imagine it possible that I should wish to see you again?" answered Miss Monroe—for she was Mr. Greenwood's visitor upon the present occasion.

"But why so much mystery, Ellen? why refuse to give the servant your name? why adopt a course which cannot fail to render your visit a matter of suspicion to my household?" said Greenwood, somewhat impatiently.

"Forgive me—forgive me, if I have done wrong," exclaimed Ellen, the tears gushing to her eyes. "Alas! misfortunes have rendered me so suspicious of human nature, that I feared—I feared lest you should refuse to see me—that you would consider me importunate—"

"Well—well, Ellen: do not cry—that is foolish! I am not angry now; so cheer up, and tell me in what I can serve thee?"

As Greenwood uttered these words, he seated himself upon the sofa by the side of the young lady, and took her hand. We cannot say that her tears had moved him—for his was a heart that was moved by nothing regarding another: but she had looked pretty as she wept, and as her eyes glanced through their tears towards him; and the apparent kindness of his manner was the mechanical impulse of the libertine.

"Oh! if *you* would only smile thus upon me—now and then—" murmured Ellen, gazing tenderly upon him,—"how much of the sorrow of this life would disappear from before my eyes."

"How can one gifted with such charms as you be unhappy?" exclaimed Greenwood.

"What! do you imagine that beauty constitutes felicity?" cried Ellen, in an impassioned tone. "Are not the loveliest flowers exposed to the nipping frosts, as well as the rank and poisonous weeds? Do not clouds obscure the brightest stars, as well as those of a pale and sickly lustre? You ask me if I can be unhappy? Alas! it is now long—long since I knew what perfect happiness was! I need not tell you—*you*—how my father's fortune was swept away;—but I may detail to you the miseries which the loss of it raised up around him and me—and chiefly *me*!"

"But why dwell upon so sad a theme, Ellen? Did you come hither to divert me with a narrative of sorrows which must now be past, since—according to what I have heard—your father and yourself have found an asylum—"

"At Markham Place!" added Miss Monroe, emphatically. "Yes—we have found an asylum there—*there*, in the house of the individual whom my father's speculations and your agency—"

"Speak not of that—speak not of that, I conjure you!" hastily exclaimed Greenwood. "Tell me Ellen—tell me, you have not breathed a word to your father, nor to that young man—"

"No—not for worlds!" cried Ellen, with a shudder: then, after a pause, during which she appeared to reflect deeply, she said, "But you ask me why I wish to narrate to you the history of all the miseries I have endured for two long years, and upwards: you demand of me why I would dwell upon so sad a theme. I will tell you presently. You shall hear me first. But pray, be not impatient: I shall not detain you long;—and, surely—surely, you can spare an hour to one who is so very—very miserable."

"Speak, Ellen—speak!"

"The loss of our fortune plunged us into the most frightful poverty. We were not let down gradually from affluence to penury;—but we fell—as one falls from a height—abruptly, suddenly, and precipitately into the depths of want and starvation. The tree of our happiness lost not its foliage leaf by leaf: it was blighted in an hour. This made the sting so much more sharp—the heavy weight of misfortune so much less tolerable. Nevertheless, I worked, and worked with my needle until my energies were wasted, my eyes grew dim, and my health was sinking fast. Oh! my God, I only asked for work;—and yet, at length, I lost even that resource! Then commenced a strange kind of life for me."

"A strange kind of life, Ellen—what mean you?" exclaimed Greenwood, now interested in the recital.

"I sold myself in detail," answered Ellen, in a tone of the deepest and most touching melancholy.

"I cannot understand you," cried Greenwood. "Surely—surely your mind is not wandering!"

"No: all I tell you is unhappily too true," returned the poor girl, shaking her head; then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, she started from her thoughtful mood, and said, "You have a plaster of Paris image as large as life, in the window of your staircase?"

"Yes—it is a Diana, and holds a lamp which is lighted at night," observed Greenwood. "But what means that strange question—so irrelevant to the subject of our discourse?"

"More—more than you can imagine," answered Ellen, bitterly. "That statue explains one phase in my chequered life;"—then, sinking her tone almost to a whisper, grasping Greenwood's hand convulsively, and regarding him fixedly in the countenance, while her own eyes were suddenly lighted up with a strange wildness of expression, she added, "The face of your beautiful Diana is my own!"

Greenwood gazed upon her in speechless astonishment: he fancied that her reason was unhinged; and—he knew not why—he was afraid!

Ellen glanced around, and her eyes rested upon a magnificent picture that hung against the wall. The subject of this painting, which had no doubt struck her upon first entering that room, was a mythological scene.

Taking Greenwood by the hand, Ellen led him towards the picture.

"Do you see any thing that strikes you strangely there?" she said, pointing towards the work of art.

"The scene is Venus rising from the ocean, surrounded by nereids and nymphs," answered Greenwood.

"And you admire your picture much?"

"Yes—much; or else I should not have purchased it."

"Then have you unwittingly admired me," exclaimed Ellen; "for the face of your Venus is my own!"

Greenwood gazed earnestly upon the picture for a few moments; then, turning towards Ellen, he cried, "True—it is true! There are your eyes—your mouth—your smile—your forehead—your very hair! How strange that I never noticed this before. But—no—it is a dream: it is a mere coincidence! Tell me—how could this have taken place;—speak—is it not a mere delusion—an accidental resemblance which you noticed on entering this room?"

"Come with me," said Ellen in a soft and melancholy tone.

Still retaining him by the hand, she led him into the landing place communicating with the drawing-room and leading to the stairs.

A magnificent marble statue of a female, as large as life, stood in one corner. The model was naked down to the waist, one hand gracefully sustaining the drapery which enveloped the lower part of the form.

"Whence did you obtain that statue!" demanded Ellen, pointing towards the object of her inquiry.

"The ruin of a family long reputed rich, caused the sale of all their effects," answered Greenwood; "and I purchased that statue, amongst other objects of value which were sold, for a mere trifle."

"The lady has paid dearly for her vanity!" cried Ellen: "her fate—or rather the fate of her statue is a just reward for the contempt, the scorn—the withering scorn with which she treated me, when I implored her to take me into her service."

"What do you mean, Ellen?"

"I mean that the bust of your marble statue is my own," answered the young lady, casting down her eyes, and blushing deeply.

"Another enigma!" cried Greenwood.

They returned to the drawing-room, and returned their seats upon the sofa.

A long pause ensued.

"Will you tell me, Ellen," at length exclaimed Greenwood, deeply struck by all he had heard and seen within the last half hour, —"will you tell me, Ellen, whether you have lost your reason, or I am dreaming?"

"Lost my reason!" repeated Ellen, with fearful bitterness of tone; "no—that were perhaps a blessing; and naught save misery awaits me!"

"But the image—the picture—and the statue?" exclaimed Greenwood impatiently.

"They are emblems of phases in my life," answered Ellen. "I told you ere now that my father and myself were reduced to the very lowest depths of poverty. And yet we could not die;—at least I could not see that poor, white-haired, tottering old man perish by inches —die the death of starvation. Oh! no—that was too horrible. I cried for bread—bread—bread! And there was one—an old hag—you know her—"

"Go on—go on."

"Who offered me bread—bread for myself, bread for my father—upon strange and wild conditions. In a word I sold myself in detail."

"Again that strange phrase!" ejaculated Greenwood. "What mean you, Ellen?"

"I mean that I sold my face to the statuary—my likeness to the artist—my bust to the sculptor—my whole form to the photographer—and——"

"And—" repeated Greenwood, strangely excited.

"And my virtue to you!" added the young woman, whose tone, as she enumerated these sacrifices, had gradually risen from a low whisper to the wildness of despair.

"Ah! now I understand," said Greenwood, whose iron heart was for a moment touched: "how horrible!"

"Horrible indeed!" ejaculated Ellen. "But what other women sell first. I sold last: what others give in a moment of delirium, and in an excess of burning, ardent passion, I coolly and deliberately exchanged for the price of bread! But you know this sad—this saddest episode in my strange history! Maddened by the sight of my father's sufferings, I flew to the accursed old hag: I said, '*Give me bread, and do with me as thou wilt*!' She took me with her. I accompanied her, reckless of the way we went, to a house where I was shown into a chamber that was darkened; there I remained an hour alone, a prey to all the horrible ideas that ever yet combined to drive poor mortal mad, and still failed to accomplish their dread aim;—the hour passed—a man came—you know the rest!"

"Say no more, Ellen, on that head: but tell me, to what does all this tend?"

"One word more. Hours passed away, as you are well aware: you would not let me go. At length I returned home. My God! my poor father was happy! He had met an angel, while I had encountered a devil——"

"Ellen! Ellen!"

"He had gold—he was happy, I say! He had purchased a succulent repast—he had spread it with his own hand—he had heaped up his luxuries, in his humble way, to greet the return of his dear—his darling child. Heavens! how did I survive that moment? how dared I stand in the presence of that old man—that good, that kind old man—whose hair was so white with many winters, and whose brow was so wrinkled with many sorrows? I cannot say how passed the few hours that followed my return! Flower after flower had dropped from the garland of my purity—that purity in which he—the kind old man—had nurtured me! And then there was the dread—the crushing—the overwhelming conviction that had I retained my faith in God for a few hours more—had I only exercised my patience until the evening of that fatal day, I had been spared that final guilt—that crowning infamy!"

Ellen covered her face with her hands, and burst into an agony of tears. Deep sobs convulsed her bosom; she groaned in spirit; and never had the libertine by her side beheld female anguish so fearfully exemplified before.

Oh! when fair woman loses the star from her brow, and yet retains the sense of shame, where shall she seek for comfort? whither shall she fly to find consolation?

Greenwood was really alarmed at the violence of the poor girl's grief.

"Ellen, what can I do for you? what would you have with me?" he said, passing his arm around her waist.

She drew hastily away from his embrace, and turning upon him her tearful eyes, exclaimed, "If you touch me under the influence of the sentiment that made you purchase my only jewel, lay not a finger on me—defile me not—let my sorrows make my person sacred! But if you entertain one spark of feeling—one single idea of honour, do me justice—resign me not to despair!"

"Do you justice, Ellen?"

"Yes—do me justice; for I was pure and spotless till want and misery threw me into your arms," continued Ellen, in an impassioned tone; "and if I sinned—if I surrendered myself up to him who offered me a price—it was only that I might obtain bread—bread for my poor father!"

"Ellen, what would you have me do?"

"What would I have you do!" she repeated, bitterly: "oh! cannot you comprehend what I would have you do to save my honour? It is in your power to restore me to happiness;—it is you who this day—this hour—must decide my doom! You ask me what I would have you do? Here, upon my knees I answer you—here, at your feet I implore you, by all your hopes of prosperity in this world and salvation in the next—by all you bold dear, solemn, and sacred—I implore you to bestow a father's honourable name upon the child which I bear in my womb!"

She had thrown herself before him—she grasped his hands—she bedewed them with her tears—she pressed them against her bosom that was convulsed with anguish.

"Rise, Ellen—rise," exclaimed Greenwood: "some one may come—some one may—"

"Never will I rise from this position until your tongue pronounces my fate!"

"You do not—you cannot mean——"

"That you should marry me!" exclaimed Ellen. "Yes—that is the prayer which I now offer to you! Oh! if you will but restore me to the path of honour, I will be your slave. If my presence be an annoyance to you, I will never see you more from the moment when we quit the altar: but if you will admit me to your confidence—if you will make me the partner of your hopes and fears, your joys and sorrows, I will smile when you smile—I will console you when you weep. I will serve you—upon my knees will I serve you;—I will never weary of doing your bidding. But—O God! do not, do not refuse me the only prayer which I have now to offer to mortal man!"

"Ellen, this is impossible! My position—my interest—my plans render marriage—at present—a venture in which I cannot embark."

"You reject my supplication—you throw me back into disgrace and despair," cried Ellen: "Oh! reflect well upon what you are doing!"

"Listen to me," said Mr. Greenwood. "Ask me any thing that money can purchase, and you shall have it. Say the word, and you shall have a house—a home—furnished in all imaginable splendour; and measures shall be taken to conceal your situation from the world."

"No—this is not what I ask," returned Ellen. "The wealth of the universe cannot recompense me if I am to pass as Mr. Greenwood's pensioned mistress!"

"Then what, in the name of heaven, do you now require of me?" demanded the Member of Parliament impatiently.

"That you should do me justice," was the reply, while Ellen still remained upon her knees.

"Do you justice!" repeated Greenwood: "and how have I wronged you? If I deliberately set to work to seduce you—if, by art and treachery, I wiled you away from the paths of duty—if, by false promises, I allured you from a prosperous and happy sphere,—then might you talk to me of justice. But no: I knew not whom I was about to meet when the old hag came to me that day, and said——"

"Enough! enough! I understand you," cried Ellen, rising from her suppliant position, and clasping her hands despairingly together. "You consider that you purchased me as you would have bought any poor girl who, through motives of vanity, gain, or lust, would have sold her person to the highest bidder! Oh—now I understand you! But, one word, Mr. Greenwood! If there were no such voluptuaries—such heartless libertines as you in this world, would there be so many poor unhappy creatures like me? In an access of despair—of folly—and of madness, I rushed upon a path which men like you alone open to women placed as I then was! Perhaps you consider that I am not worthy to become your wife? Fool that I was to seek redress—to hope for consolation at your hands! Your conduct to others—to my father—to—"

"Ellen! I command you to be silent! Remember our solemn compact on that day when we met in so strange and mysterious a manner;—remember that we pledged ourselves to mutual silence—silence with respect to all we know of each other! Do you wish to break that compact?"

"No—no," ejaculated Ellen, convulsively clasping her hands together: "I would not have you publish my disgrace! Happily I have yet friends who will—but no matter. Sir, I now leave you: I have your answer. You refuse to give a father's name to the child which I bear? You may live to repent your decision. For the present, farewell."

And having condensed all her agonising feelings into a moment of unnatural coolness—the awful calmness of despair—Ellen slowly left the room.

But Mr. Greenwood did not breathe freely until he heard the front door close behind her.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

THE building in which the representatives of the nation assemble at Westminster, is about as insignificant, ill-contrived, and inconvenient a place as can be well conceived. It is true that the edifices appropriated to both Lords and Commons are both only temporary ones; nevertheless, it would have been easy to construct halls of assembly more suitable for their purposes than those that now exist.

The House of Commons is an oblong, with rows of plain wooden benches on each side, leaving a space in the middle which is occupied by the table, whereon petitions are laid. At one end of this table is the mace: at the other, sit the clerks who record all proceedings that require to be noted. Close behind the clerks, and at one extremity of the apartment, is the Speaker's chair: galleries surround this hall of assembly;—the one for the reporters is immediately over the Speaker's chair; that for strangers occupies the other extremity of the oblong; and the two side ones are for the use of the members. The ministers and their supporters occupy the benches on the right of the speaker: the opposition members are seated on those to the left of that functionary. There are also cross-benches under the strangers' gallery, where those members who fluctuate between ministerial and opposition opinions, occasionally supporting the one side or the other according to their pleasure or convictions, take their places.

At each extremity of the house there is a lobby—one behind the cross-benches, the other behind the Speaker's chair, between which and the door of this latter lobby there is a high screen surmounted by the arms of the united kingdom. When the House divides upon any question, those who vote for the motion or bill pass into one lobby, and those who vote against the point to question proceed to the other. Each party appoints its *tellers*, who station themselves at the respective doors of the two lobbies and count the members on either side as they return into the house.

The house is illuminated with bude-lights, and is ventilated by means of innumerable holes perforated through the floor, which is covered with thick hair matting.

According to the above-mentioned arrangements of benches, it is evident that the orator, in whatever part he may sit, almost invariably has a considerable number of members behind him, or, at all events, sitting in places extremely inconvenient for hearing. Then, the apartment itself is so miserably confined, that when there is a full attendance of members, a least a fourth cannot obtain seats.

It will scarcely be believed by those previously unaware of the fact, that the reporters for the public press are only allowed to attend and take notes of the proceedings *upon sufferance*. Any one member can procure the clearance of both the reporters' and the strangers' galleries, without assigning any reason whatever.[76]

At half-past four o'clock the members began to enter the home pretty thickly.

Near the table stood a portly happy-looking man, with a somewhat florid and good-natured countenance, grey eyes, and reddish hair. He was well dressed, and wore enormous watch-seals and a massive gold guard-chain. He conversed in an easy and complacent manner with a few members who had gathered around him, and who appeared to receive his opinions with respect and survey him with profound admiration: this was Sir Robert Peel.

One of his principal admirers on this (as on all other occasions) was a very stout gentleman, with dark hair, prominent features, a full round face, eyes of a sleepy expression, and considerable heaviness of tone and manner: this was Sir James Graham.

Close by Sir James Graham, with whom he exchanged frequent signs of approval as Sir Robert Peel was conversing, was a small and somewhat repulsive looking individual, with red hair, little eyes that kept constantly blinking, a fair complexion, and diminutive features,—very restless in manner, and with a disagreeable and ill-tempered expression of countenance. When he spoke, there was for more of gall than honey in his language; and the shafts of his satire, though dealt at his political opponents, not infrequently glanced aside and struck his friends. This was Lord Stanley.

Shortly before the Speaker took the chair, a stout burly man, accompanied by half-a-dozen representatives of the Emerald Isle, entered the house. He was enveloped in a cloak, which he proceeded to doff in a very leisurely manner, and then turned to make some observation to his companions. They immediately burst out into a hearty laugh—for it was a joke that had fallen upon their ears—a joke, too, purposely delivered in the richest Irish brogue, and, accompanied by so comical an expression of his round good-natured countenance that the jest was altogether irresistible. He then proceeded slowly to his seat, saying something good-natured to his various political friends as he passed along. His broad-brimmed hat he retained upon his head, but of his cloak he made a soft seat. His adherents immediately crowded around him; and while he told them some rich racy anecdote, or delivered himself of another jest, his broad Irish countenance expanded into an expression of the most hearty and heart-felt good-humour. And yet that man had much to occupy his thoughts and engage his attention; for he of whom we now speak was Daniel O'Connell.

Close by Mr. O'Connell's place was seated a gentleman of most enormously portly form, though little above the middle height. On the wrong side of sixty, he was as hale, robust, and healthy-looking a man as could be seen. His ample chest, massive limbs, ponderous body, and large head denoted strength of no ordinary kind. His hair was iron-grey, rough, and bushy; his eyes large, grey, and intelligent; his countenance rigid in expression, although broad and round in shape. This was Joseph Hume.

Precisely at a quarter to five the Speaker took the chair; Mr. Greenwood was then introduced by the Tory whipper-in, and (as the papers said next morning) "took the oaths and his seat for Rottenborough."

The Whig whipper-in surveyed him with a glance of indignant disappointment; but Mr. Greenwood affected not to notice the feeling which his conduct had excited. On the contrary, he passed over to the Opposition benches (for it must be remembered that the

Whigs then occupied the ministerial seat) where his accession to the Tory ranks was very warmly greeted—being the more pleasant as it was totally unexpected—by Sir Robert Peel and the other leaders of that party.

Mr. Greenwood was not a man to allow the grass to grow under his feet. He accordingly delivered his "maiden speech" that very evening. The question before the House was connected with the condition of the poor. The new member was fortunate enough to catch the Speaker's eye in the course of the debate; and he accordingly delivered his sentiments upon the topic.

He declared that the idea of a diminution of duties upon foreign produce was a mere delusion. The people, he said, were in a most prosperous condition—they never were more prosperous; but they were eternal grumblers whom nothing could satisfy. Although some of the most enlightened men in the kingdom devoted themselves to the interests of the people—he alluded to the party amongst whom he had the honour to sit—the people were not satisfied. For his part, he thought that there was too much of what was called *freedom*. He would punish all mal-contents with a little wholesome exercise upon the tread-mill. What presumption, he would like to know, could be greater than that of the millions daring to have an opinion of their own, unless it were the audacity of attempting to make that opinion the rule for those who sate in that House? He was astounded when he heard the misrepresentations that had just met his ears from honourable gentlemen opposite relative to the condition of the working classes. He could prove that they ought to put money in the savings-banks; and yet it was coolly alleged that in entire districts they wanted bread. Well—why did they not live upon potatoes? He could demonstrate, by the evidence of chemists and naturalists, that potatoes were far more wholesome than bread; and for his part he was much attached to potatoes. Indeed, he often ate his dinner without touching a single mouthful of bread. There was a worthy alderman at his right hand, who could no doubt prove to the House that bread spoilt the taste of turtle. Was it not, then, a complete delusion to raise such a clamour about bread? He (Mr. Greenwood) was really astonished at honourable gentlemen opposite; and he should give their measure his most strenuous opposition at every stage.

Mr. Greenwood sat down amidst loud cheers from the Tory party; and Sir Robert Peel turned round and gave him a patronising nod of most gracious approval. Indeed his speech must have created a very powerful sensation, for upwards of fifty members who had been previously stretched upon the benches in the galleries, comfortably snoozing, rose up in the middle of their nap to listen to him.

The Conservative papers next morning spoke in raptures of the brilliancy of the new talent which had thus suddenly developed itself in the political heaven; while the Liberal prints denounced Greenwood's language as the most insane farrago of anti-popular trash ever heard during the present century.

Mr. Greenwood cared nothing for these attacks. He had gained his aims: he had already taken a stand amongst the party with whom he had determined to act;—he had won the smiles of the leader of that party; and he chuckled within himself as he saw baronetcies and sinecures in the perspective.

That night he could not sleep. His ideas were reflected back to the time when, poor, obscure, and friendless, he had commenced his extraordinary career in the City of London. A very few years had passed;—he was now rich, and in a fair way to become influential and renowned. The torch of Fortune seemed ever to light him on his way, and never to shine obscurely for him in the momentous affairs of life:—like the fabled light of the Rosicrucian's ever-burning lamp, the halo of that torch appeared constantly to attend upon his steps.

Whether he thus prospered to the end, the sequel of our tale must show.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE BLACK CHAMBER AGAIN.

It was now the beginning of April, and the bleak winds had yielded to the genial breath of an early spring.

At ten o'clock, one morning, an elderly gentleman, with a high forehead, open countenance, thin white hair falling over his coat collar, and dressed in a complete suit of black, ascended the steps of the northern door, leading to the Inland Letter Department of the General Post Office, Saint Martin's-le-Grand.

He paused for a moment, looked at his watch, and then entered the building. Having ascended a narrow staircase, he stopped at a door in that extremity of the building which is the nearer to Aldersgate Street. Taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the door, glanced cautiously behind him, and then entered the *Black Chamber*.

Having carefully secured the door by means of a bolt and chain, he threw himself into the arm-chair which stood near the large round oaken table.

The Examiner—for the reader has doubtless already recognised him to be the same individual whom we introduced in the twenty-ninth chapter of our narrative—glanced complacently around him; and a smile of triumph curled his thin pale lips. At the same time his small, grey, sparkling eyes were lighted up with an expression of diabolical cunning: his whole countenance was animated with a glow of pride and conscious power; and no one would have supposed that this was the same old man who meekly and quietly ascended the steps of the Post-Office a few minutes ago.

Bad deeds, if not the results of bad passions and feelings, soon engender them. This was the case with the Examiner. He was the agent of the Government in the perpetration of deeds which disgraced his white hair and his venerable years;—he held his appointment, not from the Postmaster-General, but direct from the Lords of the Treasury themselves;—he filled a situation of extreme responsibility and trust;—he knew his influence—he was well aware that he controlled an engine of fearful power—and he gloated over the secrets that had been revealed to him in the course of his avocation, and which he treasured up in his bosom.

He had risen from nothing; and yet his influence with the Government was immense. His friends, who believed him to be nothing more than a senior clerk in the Post-Office, were surprised at the great interest which he evidently possessed, and which was demonstrated by the handsome manner in which all his relatives were provided for. But the old man kept his secret. The four clerks who served in his department under him, were all tried and trustworthy young men; and their fidelity was moreover secured by good salaries. Thus every precaution was adopted to render the proceedings of the Black Chamber as secret as possible;—and, at the time of which we are writing, the uses to which that room was appropriated were even unknown to the greater number of the persons employed in the General Post-Office.

The Examiner was omnipotent in his inquisitorial tribunal. There alone the authorities of the Post-Office had no power. None could enter that apartment without his leave:—he was responsible for his proceedings only to those from whom he held his appointment. At the same time, he was compelled to open any letters upon a warrant issued and directed to him by the Secretaries of State for the Home and Foreign Departments, and for the Colonies, as well as in obedience to the Treasury. Thus did he superintend an immense system of *espionnage*, which was extended to every class of society, and had its ramifications through every department of the state.

It must be observed that, although the great powers of Europe usually communicated with their representatives at the English court by means of couriers, still the agency of post-offices was frequently used to convey duplicates of the instructions borne by these express-messengers; and many of the minor courts depended altogether upon the post-office for the transport of their despatches to their envoys and ambassadors. All diplomatic correspondence, thus transmitted, was invariably opened, and notes or entire copies were taken from the despatches, in the Black Chamber. Hence it will be perceived that the English Cabinet became possessed of the nature of the greater part of all the instructions conveyed by foreign powers to their representatives at the court of Saint James's.

But the Government carried its proceedings with regard to the violation of correspondence, much farther than this. It caused to be opened all letters passing between important political personages—the friends as well as the enemies of the Cabinet; and it thus detected party combinations against its existence, ascertained private opinions upon particular measures, and became possessed of an immense mass of information highly serviceable to diplomatic intrigue and general policy.

Truly, this was a mighty engine in the hands of those who swayed the destinies of the British Empire;—but the secret springs of that fearfully complicated machine were all set in motion and controlled by that white-headed and aged man who now sat in the Black Chamber!

Need we wonder if he felt proud of his strange position? can we be astonished if he gloated, like the boa-constrictor over the victim that it retains in its deadly folds, over the mighty secrets stored in his memory?

That man knew enough to overturn a Ministry with one word.

That man could have set an entire empire in a blaze with one syllable of mystic revelation.

That man was acquainted with sufficient to paralyze the policy of many mighty states.

That man treasured in his mind facts a mere hint at which would have overwhelmed entire families—aye, even the noblest and highest in the land—with eternal disgrace.

That man could have ruined bankers—hurled down vast commercial firms—levelled mercantile establishments—destroyed grand institutions.

That man wielded a power which, were it set in motion, would have convulsed society throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Need we wonder if the government gave him all he asked? can we be astonished if all those in whom he felt an interest were well provided for?

When he went into society, he met the possessors of vast estates, whom he could prostrate and beggar with one word—a word that would proclaim the illegitimacy of their birth. He encountered fair dames and titled ladies, walking with head erect and unblushing brow, but whom he could level with the syllable that should announce their frailty and their shame. He conversed with peers and gentlemen who were lauded as the essence of honour and of virtue, but whose fame would have withered like a parched scroll, had his breath, pregnant with fearful revelations, only fanned its surface. There were few, either men or women, of rank and name, of whom he knew not something which they would wish to remain unknown.

Need we wonder if bad passions and feelings had been engendered in his mind? Can we be astonished if he had learnt to look upon human nature as a fruit resembling the apples of the Dead Sea, fair to gaze upon, but ashes at the heart?

Presently a knock at the door was heard. The Examiner opened it, and one of his clerks entered the room. He bowed respectfully to his superior, and proceeded to take his seat at the table. In like manner, at short intervals, the other three subordinates arrived; but the one who came last, brought with him a sealed parcel containing a vast number of letters, which he had received from the President of one of the sorting departments of the establishment. These letters were now heaped upon the table before the Examiner; and the business of this mysterious conclave commenced.

The entire process of opening the letters has been described in detail in the twenty-ninth chapter. We shall therefore now content ourselves, with a record of those letters which were examined upon the present occasion.

The first was from Castelcicala to the representative of that Grand Duchy at the English court, and was marked "Private." It ran as follows:—

"*City of Montoni, Castelcicala.*

"The undersigned is desired by his lordship the Marquis of Gerrano, his Serene Highness's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to inform your Excellency that your despatches marked L 1, M 2, and N 3, were received in due course. His lordship regrets to find that Prince Alberto positively refuses to renounce his claims to the ducal crown of Castelcicala at the death of the reigning Grand Duke, whom God preserve for many years! His lordship is surprised that Prince Alberto should reject the compromise offered; inasmuch as, by complying with the terms thereof, he would receive a pension of twenty thousand pounds sterling *per annum*; whereas, by obstinately refusing the proposals made by the government of Castelcicala, he will obtain nothing. Moreover, it must be apparent to Prince Alberto that his claims will be set aside by the government of Castelcicala; and that a foreign prince will receive an invitation to accept the ducal crown at the death of his present Serene Highness the reigning Grand Duke. It would be well to make fresh representations to Prince Alberto; and assure him that he would act wisely to accept offers made in perfect good will, and that he may probably regret his obstinacy when too late. If the Prince cherishes the idea of enforcing his claims by arms, at the death of the reigning Grand Duke, your Excellency would do well to undeceive him; inasmuch, as his Majesty the King of Naples and his Holiness the Pope, holding in abhorrence the liberal notions entertained by the Prince, will support the government of Castelcicala in its determination to place a foreign prince upon the ducal throne at the death of his Serene Highness now reigning.

"The undersigned is moreover instructed by his lordship the Marquis of Gerrano, to request your Excellency to pay prompt and full attention to the following Instructions:—An English lady, of the name of Eliza Sydney, arrived a month ago at Montoni. She is apparently about twenty seven or twenty-eight years of age, very beautiful, and unmarried. She travelled in a handsome carriage, attended by one female servant and an elderly valet. Although arrived at that mature age, she has preserved all the freshness of her youthful charms—a circumstance which renders her presence here the more dangerous, for certain reasons which the undersigned will detail to your Excellency on a future occasion. This charming English woman brought letters of introduction to certain noble families at Montoni, and immediately obtained admittance into the very first society of this capital. She has taken up her residence at the villa possessed by the Earl of Warrington, in the suburbs of Montoni, and is, it is believed, nearly related to that English nobleman. The service now required of your Excellency is to ascertain all particulars that can be gleaned concerning her. This is of the utmost—the very utmost importance. As a guide to your proceedings, it may be as well to mention that Miss Sydney this morning sent a letter to the post-office addressed to a Mrs. Arlington, residing in Dover Street, London.

"The undersigned avails himself of this note to renew to your Excellency assurances of his most perfect consideration.

"*March 15, 1839.*

BARON RUPERTO,
"Under Secretary of State for Foreign affairs, &c."

"Eliza Sydney!" exclaimed the Examiner. "That is the same young lady whose plot with one Stephens, to defraud the Earl of Warrington, was discovered through the medium of the Black Chamber, and revealed to the solicitor of the Bank of England."

"The very same, no doubt, sir," observed the first clerk.

"Then the letter which Eliza Sydney has sent from Montoni to Mrs. Arlington in London, must be amongst this packet of correspondence," continued the Examiner, glancing at the pile of letters before him, "since it left Castelcicala by the same mail as the document of Lord Ruperto."

The Examiner turned over the letters; and, at length, extracted a particular one from the heap, observing, "Here it is." He then passed it to the clerks, by whom it was opened. The contents were as follows:—

"*Montoni, 15th March, 1839.*

"Exactly a month ago, my dearest Diana, I wrote to you a hasty note to state my safe arrival in this city, after a very pleasant journey through the delicious climes of France, Switzerland, and Northern Italy. It was at about three o'clock in the afternoon of the 13th of February that the carriage reached the brow of a hill from whence the eye commanded a magnificent view of a vast plain, rich with fertility, bounded at the further extremity by the horizon, and on the right hand stretching down to the sea, the blue of which seemed a pure reflection of the cloudless heavens above. At the mouth of a superb river, which, after meandering through that delicious plain, amidst groves and pleasant meadows, flowed into the calm and tranquil sea, the tall towers and white buildings of Montoni met my eyes. It is impossible to conceive any thing more charming or picturesque than the sight of this peerless city of Italy. The river's verdant banks are dotted with magnificent villas and mansions, with which are connected beautiful gardens teeming with the choicest fruits and flowers, even at this season of the year! For here, my dear Diana, it is perfect summer! I ordered the carriage to stop for at least a quarter of an hour upon the hill, that I might enjoy the magnificent view of the vast plain and the beautiful city. Far above the edifices around, rose the two towers of the ancient cathedral of St. Theodosia —their dark and gloomy masses forming a striking contrast with the extensive white buildings of the ducal palace in the immediate foreground. The port of the city was crowded with shipping, the flags of all nations waving from the forest of masts that indicated the existence of an extensive commerce. While I was yet gazing upon the scene, the roar of distant artillery reached my ears. The Grand Duke (as I afterwards learnt) was just coming back from a water excursion in his beautiful yatch, a small steamer rigged as a frigate; and the batteries of the port, and the ships of war in the offing thundered forth a salute in honour of the royal return. Two line-of-battle ships, one French and the other English, and three frigates of the Castelcicalan navy, had all their yards manned, and displayed their gayest colours. Altogether the scene was one of the most enchanting and exhilarating that I have ever yet beheld.

"In three quarters of an hour my carriage entered Montoni by the suburb of Saint Joanna. If I had admired the city from a distant point, how was I enraptured when I could survey it close at hand. It more nearly resembles the Chaussée d'Antin (a fashionable quarter of Paris, which city I had an opportunity of seeing during the four days that I remained there on my way hither) than any other place which I have ever yet beheld. The streets of Montoni are wide, and the buildings elegant. There are numerous fountains, and all the principal mansions, even in the very heart of the town, have gardens attached to them. At length I reached the fashionable quarter, and, having passed the magnificent dwellings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Interior, I passed through the immense arena, on one side of which stands the ducal palace. At that moment a regiment of Horse Guards was returning to its barracks close to the royal residence. The superb black chargers, the glittering helmets and cuirasses of the men, the waving plumes, the clang of armour, and the braying of trumpets, formed a *tout ensemble* so inspiring, that I almost wished I was a man to be able to serve in such a corps.

"The carriage proceeded, crossed the river over a suspension bridge, and, having passed the official dwellings of the Ministers of War, Commerce, Marine, and Finance, entered the southern suburbs of the metropolis of Castelcicala. I could not have conceived that any city could have possibly equalled London or Paris in the magnificence of its shops and the amount of wealth displayed in their windows;—but certainly, Montoni is a miniature counterpart of the finest portions of either the English or French capital.

"At length I reached the villa so generously placed at my disposal by the Earl of Warrington, whom I can never sufficiently thank for all his kindness towards me. The servants, already advertised of my intended visit by letters which his lordship had written from England at the time of my departure, were prepared to receive me. I was immediately comfortable—immediately *at home*. Oh! how

deliciously did I sleep that night;—but before I closed my eyes, how fervently did I pray for the welfare and happiness of the Earl of Warrington and of Diana Arlington!

"And the Earl told you that it was a little villa, Diana! It is a superb mansion. The rooms are magnificently furnished; the gardens are spacious and full of all that is delicious in the shape of fruit or enchanting in the guise of flowers. I wandered for hours in those inviting grounds the morning after my arrival. But would you have me depict my new abode? Listen:—

"Imagine a river half as broad as the Thames at Richmond, and far, far more lovely in its scenery. At a distance of about fifty yards from the stream, on a gentle acclivity rising from its very edge, stands a large square mansion, built of white free-stone. The villa is two storeys high; and the windows on the lower floor open like folding doors down to the ground. The hall and magnificent staircase are of the finest marble. And will you humour me in attending to all my minor details?—I have fitted up my own boudoir in precisely the same style as that in which I passed many happy hours at Clapton! A grove of myrtles almost surrounds the villa, and is musical with the warblings of a thousand birds. A gravel walk, margined with flowers, leads down to the river's bank. Behind the mansion extend the gardens, the acclivity still rising gently, until the summit of the verdant amphitheatre is on a level with the first floor windows. There is a marble basin in the middle of the grounds, filled with crystal water, in which gold and silver fish disport joyously beneath the shade of the overhanging fruit trees on one side, or, on the other, play with their glistening fins, in the brilliant flood of sunlight. Oh! in truth it is a charming spot, and seems as if its barriers could for ever exclude the footsteps of sorrow!

"When I had rested myself for two or three days, and completely recovered from the fatigues of travelling, I delivered my letters of introduction to the families to whom they were addressed. And here I have another instance of the Earl of Warrington's noble conduct to record. The letters all represented me as the near relation of the Earl of Warrington! I was received with open arms by all to whom I was thus introduced; and each kind Italian family seemed only anxious to make me happy! Oh! what virtue must there have been in those letters, which Count Alteroni had written, no doubt according to the dictation of the Earl. But, ah! Diana, relative to those letters there is a secret, which I do not choose to trust to paper, but which the Earl has perhaps already explained to you. Oh! I do not wonder now that I was not to seek to penetrate their contents, in England (neither did I myself ever open them at all); nor is it a matter of marvel that those recommendations should prove such strong passports to the favour of those to whom they were addressed!

"One of those letters was directed to General Grachia, the colonel of that very regiment of Horse Guards which I so much admired on my first entrance into Montoni. He and his amiable family, consisting of a wife and three lovely daughters, overwhelmed me with kindness. But now I am going to state something that will surprise you. A few days after I first became known to this delightful family, there was a grand review in the palace-square. General Grachia commanded the troops, which mustered to the number of about seven thousand. The ladies insisted that I should accompany them in their open carriage to see the manœuvres. The review was to be a very brilliant one, as the Grand Duke himself intended to inspect the troops. I accordingly assented; and to the review we went. Never have I beheld a more magnificent sight. The road around the square was lined with carriages filled with all the rank and beauty of Montoni. The troops presented a splendid appearance—being the choice regiments of the Castelcicalan army, which, I have understood, is seventeen thousand strong. At length the Grand Duke Angelo III., attended by a brilliant staff, arrived upon the arena. He is a fine-looking man for his age, which must be at least sixty. He was dressed in a Field Marshal's uniform, and wore, amongst other orders, the insignia of the English Garter, of which he is a knight. He rode a little in advance of the great officers of state, who attended upon him; and when the troops presented arms, and the band struck up the national air, he took his heron plumed hat completely off, thus remaining bareheaded until the royal salute was ended. He then passed along the lines; but the troops received him in silence, for, to tell you the truth, his Serene Highness is far from popular, in consequence of certain political reasons with which I shall not trouble you at present.

"When the review was over, the Duke, attended by his staff, rode round the square, and graciously replied to the salutations which awaited him on all sides. When he drew near the carriage in which General Grachia's family and myself were seated, he rode up to it, and entered into conversation with the General's lady. Presently he glanced toward me, and immediately bent down and whispered to Signora Grachia. The result was my formal introduction to the Grand Duke of Castelcicala. He inquired very kindly after the Earl of Warrington, whom he remembered perfectly. I blushed deeply as I answered his questions, for I was ashamed of the imperfect manner in which I speak the Italian language—for all that I know, as well as the little French with which I am acquainted, I taught myself during my residence at the villa at Clapton. The Grand Duke, however, seemed to comprehend me perfectly. Having conversed with us at least a quarter of an hour, he again whispered something to General Grachia's lady; and then rode on.

"It appeared that there was to be a grand ball and reception at the ducal palace on the following evening; and this second whisper expressed a positive wish—amounting, you know, on the part of royalty, to a command—that I should accompany General Grachia's family. I could not avoid obedience to this invitation. I therefore expressed my readiness to comply with it. And now, my dearest Diana, pardon a woman's vanity;—but it struck me that I never looked so well as on that evening, when I was dressed for the ducal ball!

"I need scarcely say that the entertainment itself was magnificent. Such a blaze of beauty I never saw before. Oh! what charming creatures are the Italian women; and Montoni is justly famed for its female loveliness! The Grand Duke is a widower, and has no children. The honours of the evening were entrusted to the lady of the Minister of the Interior, who is also the President of the Council. The Duke opened the ball with that lady. You may laugh at the idea of a prince of sixty dancing: but in Italy every body dances. I was invited by the major of General Grachia's regiment for the first quadrille, and by Baron Ruperto, under secretary of state for foreign affairs, for the second. The third and fourth I declined dancing, being somewhat overcome with the heat of the apartments. But the fifth quadrille I danced: *this time* I could not refuse. No—it was not *an invitation* that I received—it was a *command*! I danced with the Grand Duke of Castelcicala!

"I found, on this occasion, that his highness speaks English well. He emigrated, it appears, to England, when the French armies occupied Italy, and resided in London for some years. We accordingly conversed in English. He expressed a hope that I should make a long stay in Montoni, and observed that he should be very angry with General Grachia's lady if she did not always bring me to court with her on the evenings of reception. I was at a loss how to express myself in return for so much condescension; and I am afraid, my dear Diana, that I was very awkward.

"On the following morning, one of the Duke's attendants arrived at the villa with a present of the choicest fruits and flowers for me. He informed me that they were sent by order of his highness, and the messenger was expressly commanded to make inquiries concerning my health. I thanked him most sincerely for this act of kindness on the part of his illustrious master; and when he had taken his departure, I sate in a delicious summer-house the entire morning, wondering to what circumstance I could have been indebted for such a token of royal favour.

"A few days elapsed; and the same messenger returned, bringing me a quantity of the most select Italian works, all beautifully bound, and with the ducal arms printed on the fly-leaf. Beneath this blazonry, were the words—'FROM ANGELO III. TO MISS ELIZA SYDNEY.' And now I asked myself, 'What can all this mean?'

"Two days more passed, when I received an intimation from Signora Grachia that there was to be a select *conversazione* in the evening at the palace, and that I was specially invited. I accompanied General Grachia's family; and the moment we entered the room, the Grand Duke accosted us. After conversing with us for a few moments, he offered me his arm, saying that he would conduct me to inspect his sculpture-gallery. This splendid museum communicated with the apartment wherein the company (which was by no means numerous on the occasion) was assembled. His Highness led me into the gallery, and explained all its curiosities. The works of art, by some of the most eminent masters, are very valuable. His Highness evidently prolonged the inspection as much as possible; and his language was occasionally interspersed with a compliment calculated to flatter me—nay, Diana, to make me very vain! When we returned to the drawing-rooms, the Duke led me to a sofa, seated himself by me, and conversed with me for a considerable time. He asked me many questions relative to my family—whether my father and mother were still living, whether I had any brothers or sisters, and in what degree of relationship I stood towards the Earl of Warrington? He then asked me how it was that I had not as yet launched my fortunes in the bark of matrimony? I blushed deeply at this question, and replied that I had never as yet encountered any one with whom I had chosen to link my destinies. He then spoke of the peculiar position of princes, observing with a deep sigh, that they could not always follow the bent of their inclinations, nor obey the natural dictates of their affections. During the remainder of the evening I was the object of universal attention—I could not *then* conceive wherefore—on the part of the noble and beauteous guests assembled. Every one manifested the most respectful courtesy towards me; and General Grachia's family were more kind to me than ever. Ah! a vague suspicion darted across my mind:—could it be possible? Oh! no—no! that were the height of the most insane presumption!

"Day after day passed; and frequent were the tokens of the Grand Duke's favour which I received—but all of the most delicate description,—flowers, fruits, and books. I was also compelled to accompany the Grachias to all the ducal *soirées* and receptions; and on each occasion, the Duke paid me marked attention. Oh! my dear friend, my heart beats when I remember that only last evening his Serene Highness pressed my hand, and said to me in a low but impressive tone, '*Would that I were not a prince, or that you were a princess!*'

"I can say no more at present, dearest Diana; but you shall speedily hear again from your sincerely attached and ever deeply grateful.

"ELIZA SYDNEY."

"No wonder," said the Examiner, drily, "that Baron Ruperto has desired the Envoy of Castelcicala at the English court to make inquiries relative to Miss Eliza Sydney. Let the contents of both letters be duly noted, and forwarded to her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CAPTAIN DAPPER AND SIR CHERRY BOUNCE.

THE verdure of the early spring re-clothed the trees with their gay garments, and gave back its air of cheerfulness to the residence of Count Alteroni.

It was about mid-day; and the sun beamed brightly from a heaven of unclouded blue. Nature appeared to be reviving from the despotism of winter's rule; and the primrose peeped bashfully forth to welcome the return of the feathered chorister of the grove.

The count and countess, with their lovely daughter, were seated in the breakfast-parlour. The two ladies were occupied with their embroidery: the noble Italian exile himself was reading the *Montoni Gazette*, which that morning's post had brought him.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and then appeared to read with additional interest and attention.

"What news from Castelcicala?" inquired the countess.

"You remember that the Earl of Warrington applied to me between three and four months ago for letters of introduction on behalf of a lady of the name of Eliza Sydney?" said the count.

"And who was about to visit Castelcicala in order to escape the persecution of that vile man who aspired to the hand of Isabella," added the countess.

"The very same. She is a cousin of the Earl of Warrington; and it appears that her presence has created quite a sensation in Montoni. The *Gazette* of the 15th of last month contains the following passage:—'*The fashionable circles of Montoni have lately received a brilliant addition in the person of Miss Eliza Sydney, a near relative of the Earl of Warrington, the noble Englishman who purchased some years ago the beautiful villa at the extremity of the suburbs of Petrarca. Miss Sydney has taken up her abode at the villa; and during the month that she has already honoured our city with her presence, her agreeable manners, amiable qualities, and great personal attractions have won all hearts. It is even rumoured that the highest person in the land has not remained indifferent to the attractions of this charming foreigner.*'"

"Surely this latter sentence cannot allude to the duke?" exclaimed the countess.

"It can allude to none other," answered the count: "'*the highest person in the land*.' Of course it means the duke. But, after all, it is probably only one of those idle reports which so frequently obtain vogue in the fashionable circles of all great cities—"

"Or one engendered in the fertile brain of a newspaper editor," said the countess. "Still it would be strange if, through *your* letters of introduction—"

"Oh! it is too absurd to speculate upon," interrupted the count, impatiently.

"And yet your lordship is not unaccustomed to judge now and then by the mere superficial appearances of things," said the countess severely.

"I!" ejaculated the Italian noble.

"Decidedly," answered the countess. "You believed Mr. Greenwood to be an honest man without examining into his real position —"

"Ah! that one foolish step of mine!"

"And you pronounced Mr. Markham a villain without according him an opportunity of giving an explanation," added the countess.

"Always Richard Markham!" cried the count angrily. "Why do you perpetually throw his name in my teeth?"

"Because I think that you judged him too hastily," said the countess.

"Not at all! did he not admit that he had been in Newgate?"

A cold shudder crept over Isabella's frame.

"Yes; and so has our friend Mr. Armstrong, whom you value so highly, and whose letter from Germany gave you so much pleasure yesterday morning."

"Certainly I was pleased to receive that letter, because I had not heard from Armstrong so long: I fancied that something had happened to him. But, to return to what you were saying," continued the count; "Armstrong was incarcerated merely for a political offence; and there is something honourable in that."

"Mr. Markham may have been more unfortunate than guilty," said the countess. "At all events you have condemned without giving him a fair hearing. I have even asked you to refer to the newspapers of the period and read his case; but you refuse to give him a single chance."

"Your ladyship is very quick to blame," said the count, somewhat sarcastically; "but you forget how rejoiced you were some years ago to discover that the chevalier Gilderstein, whose father was executed for coining, was no relation of your family, as you had long deemed him to be: and yet the chevalier was himself innocent of his father's offence."

"I certainly have expressed myself more than once in the way you mention," returned the countess; "but I had so spoken without due consideration. Now that a case is immediately present to my view, I am inclined to feel and act more charitably."

"But how could Mr. Markham justify himself?" exclaimed the count. "Was not that attempt at burglary in this house so very glaring?"

"Oh!" cried Isabella, colouring deeply; "let Mr. Markham be guilty in other respects, I would pledge my existence he never, *never* could have been a participator in that!"

"You speak warmly, signora," said the count, whose brow contracted. "You forget that I myself overheard him talking with some one over the wall of the garden only a few hours before the entrance of the burglars——"

"We have many cases upon record," interrupted Isabella enthusiastically, "in which men have been unjustly convicted on an almost miraculous combination of adverse circumstances. Suppose that Mr. Markham was, in the first instance, made the victim of rogues and villains, and sacrificed by them to screen their own infamy,—suppose he underwent his punishment in Newgate, being innocent,—will you sympathise with and commiserate him? or will you scorn and repulse him? Oh! my dear father, no kindness would be too great towards a being who has suffered through the fallibility of human laws! Suppose that one of the villains who plunged him —innocent—into all that misery, repented of the evil, and signed a confession of his own enormity and of Mr. Markham's guiltlessness;—then would you remain thus prejudiced? Oh! no—my dear father, you never would! your nature is too noble!"

"My dearest Isabella, let us drop this conversation. In the first place, it is not likely that your romantic idea of one of the villains whom you bring upon your fanciful stage, signing such a confession——"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed Isabella, a ray of joy flashing from her large black eyes; "if such were the case——"

"Well—if such were the case," added the count impatiently, "the entire mystery of the burglary remains to be cleared up to my satisfaction; and therefore, with your permission, we will leave this subject—now, and for ever!"

Isabella's head dropped upon her bosom; and her countenance wore an expression of the most profound disappointment and grief.

Scarcely had the conversation thus received a rude check and the count resumed the perusal of his paper, when Sir Cherry Bounce and Captain Smilax Dapper were announced.

"Here we are—the two inseparables, strike me!" ejaculated the gallant hussar. "How is the signora this morning? somewhat melancholy—blow me!"

"It seems that you have nothing to make you melancholy, Captain Dapper," said the count, who did not experience the greatest possible amount of delight at the arrival of the two young gentlemen, although he was far too well bred to show his annoyance.

"Beg pardon, count—on the contrary, smite me!" returned Captain Dapper: "I have a great deal to be melancholy for. I lost six hundred pounds last night at cards—blow me for a fool that I was! I must confess, however, that I wasn't half awake."

"Yeth—and Thmilackth inthithted upon my thitting down and playing too; and I lotht thwenty poundth."

"And got scolded by your mamma into the bargain, for sitting up too late," said the captain.

"Nonthenth, Thmilackth!" exclaimed Sir Cherry; "I dare thay my mother allowth me ath gweat a lithenth ath your'th."

"Well we won't quarrel, Cherry," said the officer. "But what do you think, count? I and Cherry dined together at the Piazza, Covent-Garden, where we got the most unexceptionable turtle and the most approved venison. The iced punch was superlative—the charges, of course, comparative. Well, in the evening, while I and Cherry were sipping our claret—and Cherry was admitting confidentially to me that he really hates claret, and only drinks it because it is fashionable——"

"Oh! naughty Thmilackth!"

"Hold your tongue, Cherry. Well—a couple of gentlemen came into the coffee-room. There was no one else there besides me and Cherry and the new comers. So they began whispering together for a few moments; and at length one of them rushes forward, catches Cherry in his arms, and cries out, '*Oh! my dear Smith—my friend Smith—how glad I am to meet with you again!*' Cherry coloured up to the eyes——"

"Oh! what an infamouth falthhood!"

"You did, and you were so frightened you could not speak a word. I was obliged to tell the loving gentleman that your name was not Smith; and then he begged pardon, and said he never saw in his life such a resemblance to an old school-fellow of his as Cherry was. Well, we laughed over the mistake: the two gentlemen rang for claret; and we all sate down to the same table together. We drank several bottles of wine, and then adjourned to another place to sink it all with brandy-and-water. Cherry was quite top-heavy; but I was as sober as a judge—"

"Why did you woll in the mud, then?"

"Why? because I tripped against a stone. Well, then we were foolish enough to go to a gambling-house with these gentlemen; and there I lost, and Cherry lost."

"And the two gentlemen won, I suppose?" said the count, drily.

"Oh! of course," answered Captain Dapper.

"How foolish of two mere boys like you to think of going to a gambling-house," exclaimed the count. "Do you not see that the two *gentlemen* who accosted you in so strange a manner in the coffee-room of an hotel, perceived you to be a couple of greenhorns?"

"They might have thought so of Cherry," cried the captain, colouring deeply, and twirling his moustachios; "but they couldn't have formed such an opinion of me—an officer in her majesty's service—strike, smite, and blow me!"

"I'm thure I don't look tho veway gween ath you think," said Sir Cherry Bounce, now falling into a sulky fit with his friend the officer.

"Oh! I know perfectly well that they were regular gentlemen," continued the captain; "for they gave us their cards; and one was Sir Rupert Harborough. The other was Mr. Chichester."

"Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester!" exclaimed Isabella, on whom the mention of these names produced a strange effect.

"Yes," answered Captain Dapper; "and so you see that they were proper gentlemen, and it was all luck. But strike such luck as mine!"

Isabella's countenance was suddenly irradiated with a gleam of the purest and most heart-felt joy;—the tears started to her eyes—but they were tears of happiness;—and, fearful that her emotions would be observed, she hurried from the room.

"Ah! but you didn't hear Cherry's adventure about the bird, did you, count?" demanded Dapper, still continuing the conversation.

The count shook his head.

"Why, this was it," said the gallant captain of hussars. "A waggish friend of mine, whose name is Dawson, dined with me and Cherry the other day; and the conversation turned upon birds. Cherry said he was very fond of choice birds; and Dawson immediately observed, 'If you like to accept of it, I will make you a present of a very beautiful and curious bird. I bought it the other day at Snodkins's, the bird-fancier's in Castle Street; and you may have it:—it is still there. All you have to do is to take a cage with you, call, and ask for Mr. Dawson's *Poluphloisboio*.' Of coarse Cherry was quite delighted;—indeed, he almost hugged my friend Dawson; and all the rest of the evening he could think and talk of nothing but the bird with a hard name. At length he thought of asking how large a cage he ought to take with him. 'The largest you have got,' replied Dawson. So the evening passed away; and next morning, before the clock struck nine, there was Cherry, rattling up Regent Street as fast as he could in a hack-cab, with a huge parrot-cage jolting on his knees. Well, he reached Castle Street, found out Snodkins's, and said, 'Pleathe, I have come for Mithter Dawthon'th *Poluphloithboio*.'—'for Mr. Dawson's what?' cried Snodkins.—'For Mithter Dawthon'th *Poluphloithboio*,' repeated Cherry.—'And what the devil is that? and who the deuce are you?' roared Snodkins, who thought that Cherry had come to make a fool of him.—'The thing ith a bird; and my name ith Thir Cherway Bounthe,' was the reply.—'And my name is Snodkins,' said the fellow; 'and I don't understand being made a fool of by you.'—'Mithter Dawthon bought a bird here a few dayth ago,' persisted Cherry; 'and he thayth I may have it. Here'th the cage: tho give me the bird.'—Snodkins was now inclined to believe that it was all right; so he brought down the bird, put it into the cage, and Cherry drove triumphantly home with it. His mamma was sitting at breakfast when he entered with the cage in his hand. 'Here, ma,' said Cherry——"

"I don't thay *Ma* more than you do, Thmilackth," interrupted the youthful baronet.

"Yes, you do, Cherry," returned Dapper: "I have heard you a hundred times. But let me tell the story out. Well—Cherry's mamma exclaims, 'Lor, boy, what have you got there?'—'A *Poluphloithboio*, ma, that my fwiend Dawthon gave me.'—'A what, Cherry!' shrieks the old lady.—'A *Poluphloithboio*, ma,' answers Cherry, bringing the cage close up to his ma.—'A *Poluphloisboio*!' ejaculates mamma: 'why, you stupid boy, it is nothing more or less than a hideous old owl!'—and so it was: and there the monster sate upon the perch, blinking away at a furious rate and looking as stupid as—as Cherry himself—smite him!"

Isabella had returned to the apartment and resumed her seat a few moments before this story was finished; and Captain Dapper appeared very much annoyed and surprised that she did not condescend to laugh at the recital.

"By the by," he observed, after a moment's pause, "I have something to tell you all—strike me!"

"Oh! yeth—about Wichard Markham," said Sir Cherry.

The count made a movement of impatience; the countess looked up from her embroidery; and a deep blush mantled upon the cheek, and a sudden tremor passed through the frame, of the lovely Isabella.

"Yes—about Richard Markham," continued the hussar officer. "I and Cherry were riding in the neighbourhood of his house the other day—"

"And we thaw the two ath tweeth."

"Yes—and something else too;—for we saw one of the sweetest, prettiest, most interesting young ladies—the signora herself excepted—walking in the garden—"

"Well, well," said the count impatiently; "perhaps Mr. Markham is married, and you saw his wife—that is all."

"No," continued Dapper; "for she was close by the railings that skirt the side of the road running behind his house; and we saw an old butler-looking kind of a fellow go up to her, and I heard him call her '*Miss*.'"

"Mr. Markham and his affairs are not of the slightest interest to us, Captain Dapper," said the count: "we do not even wish to hear his name mentioned. Isabella, my love, let us have some music."

But no reply was given to the request of the count, who was seated in such a way that he could not see his daughter's place at the work-table.

Isabella had again left the room.

Of what nature were the emotions which agitated the bosom of that beauteous—that amiable creature?

Wherefore had she first sought her own chamber to conceal tears of joy?

And why had she now retired once more, to hide the out-pourings of an intense anguish?

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE MEETING.

WHEN Isabella retired to her chamber the second time, she hastily put on her bonnet and shawl, and then hurried to the garden at the back of the mansion; for she felt the necessity of fresh air, to cool her burning brow.

She walked slowly up and down for a few minutes, her mind filled with the most distressing thoughts, when the sounds of voices fell upon her ears. She listened; and the consequential tone of the hussar-captain, alternating with the childish lisp of Sir Cherry Bounce, warned her that the two young coxcombs had also directed their steps towards the garden.

She felt in no humour to listen to their chattering gossip—wearisome at all times, but intolerable in a moment of mental affliction; still she could not return to the house without encountering them in her way. A thought struck her—the gardener had been at work all the morning; and the back-gate of the enclosure had been left open for his convenience. Perhaps it was not locked again? Thither did she hurry; and, to her joy, the means of egress into the fields were open to her.

The delicate foot of that beauteous creature of seventeen scarcely made an impression upon the grass, nor even crushed the daisy, so light was her tread! And yet her heart was heavy. Grief sate upon her brow; and her bosom was agitated with sighs.

She walked onward; and, turning the angle of a grove, was now beyond the view of any one in her father's garden. She relaxed her speed, and moved slowly and mournfully along the outskirts of the grove, vainly endeavouring to conquer the sorrowful ideas that obtruded themselves on her imagination.

But Woe is an enemy that knows no remorse, gives no quarter, while it retains poor mortal in its grasp; and when its victim is a young and innocent girl, whose heart beats with its first, its virgin love,—that direful enemy augments its pangs in proportion to the tenderness and sensibility of that heart which it thus ruthlessly torments.

Isabella's reverie was suddenly interrupted by a deep sigh.

She turned her head; and there, on her left hand—seated upon the trunk of a tree that had been blown down by the late winds,—with his face buried in his hands, was a gentleman apparently absorbed in reflections of no pleasurable nature.

He sighed deeply, and his lips murmured some words, the sound of which, but not the meaning, met her ears.

She was about to retrace her steps, when her own name was pronounced by the lips of the person seated on the tree,—and in a tone, too, which she could not mistake.

"Oh! Isabella, Isabella, thou knowest not how I love thee!"

An exclamation of surprise—almost of alarm—burst from the lips of the beautiful Italian; and she leant for support against a tree.

Richard Markham—for it was by *his* lips that her name had been pronounced—raised his head, and gave vent to a cry of the most wild, the most enthusiastic joy.

In a moment he was by her side.

"Isabella!" he exclaimed: "to what good angel am I indebted for this unexpected joy—this immeasurable happiness?"

"Oh! Mr. Markham—forgive me if I intruded upon you—but, accident—"

"Call it not accident, Isabella: it was heaven!—heaven that prompted me to seek this spot to-day, for the first time since that fatal night—"

"Ah! that fatal night," repeated the signora, with a shudder.

Markham dropped the hand which he had taken—which he had pressed for a moment in his: and he retreated a few paces, his entire manner changing as if he were suddenly awakened to a sense of his humiliating condition.

"Signora," he said, in a low and tremulous tone, "is it possible that *you* can believe me guilty of the terrible deed which a monster imputed to me?"

"Oh! no, Mr. Markham," answered the young lady hastily; "I never for an instant imagined so vile—so absurd an accusation to be based upon truth."

"Thank you, signora—thank you a thousand times for that avowal," exclaimed Richard. "Oh! how have I longed for an opportunity to explain to you all that has hitherto been dark and mysterious relative to myself:—how have I anticipated a moment like this, when I might narrate to you the history of all my sorrows—all my wrongs, and part with you—either bearing away the knowledge of your sympathy to console me, or of your scorn to crush me down into the very dust!"

"Oh! Mr. Markham, I cannot hear you—I dare not stay another moment here," said Isabella, excessively agitated. "My father's anger—"

"I will not detain you, signora," interrupted Richard, coldly. "Obey the will of your parents; and if—some day—you should learn the narrative of my sorrows from some accidental source, then—when you hear how cruelly circumstances combined, and how successfully villains leagued to plunge me into an abyss of infamy and disgrace,—then, signora, then reflect upon my prayer to be allowed to justify myself to you to-day—a prayer which obedience to your parents compels you to reject."

"To me, Mr. Markham, no explanation is necessary," said Isabella, timidly, and with her eyes bent towards the ground so that the long black fringes reposed upon her cheeks.

"Oh! fool that I was to flatter myself that you would hear me—or to hope that you would listen to aught which I might say to

justify myself!" ejaculated Markham. "Pardon me, signora—pardon my presumption; but I judged your heart by mine—I measured your sympathy, your love, by what I feel;—and I have erred—yes, I have erred—but you will pardon me! Oh! how could the *freed convict* dare to hope that the daughter of a noble—a lady of spotless name, and high birth—should for a moment stoop to him? Ah! I indulged in a miserable delusion! And yet how sweet was that dream in my solitary hours! for you must know lady, that I have fed myself with hopes—with wild insane hopes—until my soul has been comforted, and for a season I have forgotten my wrongs, deep—ineffaceable though they be! I thought to myself—'There is one being in this cold and cheerless world who will not put faith in all that calumny proclaims against me,—one being who, having read my heart, will know that I have suffered for a deed which I never committed, and from which my soul revolts,—one being who can understand how it is possible for me to have been unfortunate but never criminal,—one being whose sympathy follows me amidst the hatred and scorn of others,—one being in a word, who would not refuse to hear from my lips a sad history, and who would be prepared to find it filled with sorrows, but not stained with infamy!'—Such were my thoughts—such was my hope—such was my delusive dream: O God! that I had never yielded to so bright a vision! It is now dissipated; and I can well understand, lady—now—that no explanation is indeed necessary!"

"Mr. Markham," said Isabella, in a voice scarcely audible through deep emotion,—"Mr. Markham—you misunderstand me—I did not mean that I would hear no explanation;—Oh! very far from that—"

"But that it would be now useless!" exclaimed Markham, his tone softening, for he saw that the lovely idol of his heart was deeply touched. "You mean, signora, that all explanation would be now too late; that, whether innocent or guilty of the crime for which I suffered two years' cruel imprisonment, I am so surrounded by infamy—my name is so encrusted with odium, and scorn, and disgrace, that to associate with me—to be seen for a moment near me, is a moral contagion—a plague—a pestilence—"

"Oh! spare me—spare me these reproaches," cried Isabella, now weeping bitterly; "for reproaches they are—and most unjust ones, too!"

"Unjust ones!" exclaimed Richard; "what mean you, signora?"

"That by me at least they are undeserved, Mr. Markham," returned the lovely girl.

"How undeserved? how unjust?" said Richard, eagerly catching at the first straw which presented itself upon the ocean that had wrecked all his hopes; "did you not say that no explanation was now necessary?"

"Nor was it ever," answered Isabella, whose voice was almost entirely subdued by her emotions; "for I never—never believed the accusations which you seek to explain away!"

"My God! do I hear aright? or am I again the sport of a delusive vision?" cried Richard; then, advancing towards Isabella, he took her hand, and said, "Signora, repeat what you ere now averred, that I may believe my own ears! You believe that I was the victim of villains, and not a vile—degraded—base criminal?"

"Such has been, and ever would have been my belief—even without a proof," replied Isabella.

"A proof!" ejaculated Markham: "what mean you?"

"The confession of one of the wretches who wronged you—the narrative of the man named Talbot!" answered the Italian, casting a glance of sympathy—of tender sympathy—upon her lover.

"And now, O God, I thank thee!" said Markham, his eyes filling with tears, and his heart a prey to feelings of an indescribable nature: "O God, I thank thee—how sincerely, devoutly I thank thee, thou well knowest, for thou canst read the secrets of my soul! And you, Isabella—dearest Isabella—Oh! can you forgive me, that I dared for a moment to suspect your generous soul—that I doubted your noble disposition?"

"Forgive you, Richard!" exclaimed the charming girl, smiling through her tears: "Oh! how can you ask me?"

"And thus, my Isabella, you know all!"

"I know all—how deeply you were wronged, how fearfully you have suffered."

"Isabella, you are an angel!" cried Markham, rapturously.

"Nay—do not flatter me," said the signora. "I have but obeyed the dictates of my own convictions—and—"

"Speak, Isabella—speak!"

"And of my own heart," she added, casting down her eyes, and blushing. "You left the confession of that Talbot behind you—on the fatal night——"

"Oh! I remember now; and since then, how often have I deplored its loss."

"My own maid found it, and gave it to me on the following morning. Since then, I have read it very—very often!" said Isabella. "But now—I will return it to you—I will find some opportunity to forward it you."

"Not for worlds, Isabella!" cried Markham. "If you still love me—if you still deem me worthy of your regard—keep it, keep it as a pledge that you believe me to be innocent!"

"Yes, Richard, I will keep it—keep it for you," said Isabella. "But do not think that your cause is without advocates at our abode. My mother believes that you were wronged, and not guilty—"

"Oh, Isabella! then there is yet hope!"

"But my father—my father," continued the signora, mournfully; "he will not hear our arguments in your favour. It was only an hour ago that my mother and myself reasoned with him upon the subject; but, alas! he—who is so good and so just in all other respects,—*he* is obdurate and inexorable in this!"

"Time, sweetest girl, will do much; and now my soul is filled with hope! Oh! how I rejoice that accident should have thrown in your way the very proof that confirmed the opinion which your goodness suggested in my favour."

"And not that proof alone," said Isabella; "for even this very morning, a circumstance confirmed the assertion, that the two men

who were associated with Talbot in making you the blind instrument of their infamous schemes, are characters of the very worst description. Captain Dapper and his young friend were plundered by Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester last evening at a gambling-house."

"Oh! there is no enormity of which those villains are not capable!" said Markham.

"But while I speak of Captain Dapper," observed Isabella, suddenly assuming an air of restraint and embarrassment, "I am reminded of another piece of information which he gave me, and which nearly concerns yourself."

"Concerns me, Isabella! What can it be?"

"Nay—I know not whether it would be discreet—indeed, I am confident that——"

"Speak, Isabella—speak unreservedly. Do you wish any explanation from me? have you heard any further aspersions upon my character? Speak, Isabella—speak: your own noble confidence merits an equally unreserved frankness on my part."

"No, Richard—dear Richard," said the lovely Italian, in a bewitching tone of tenderness; "I was wrong—very wrong to allude to so idle, so silly an assertion;—and yet—and yet it grieved me—deeply at the moment."

"My dearest Isabella, I implore you to speak. Let there be no secrets between you and me."

"No—Richard—I will not insult you—"

"Insult me, Isabella? Impossible!"

"Yes—insult you with a suspicion—"

"Ah! some falsehood of that Captain Dapper," exclaimed Markham. "Pray give me an opportunity of explaining away any impression—"

"Oh! no impression, Richard;—only a moment's uneasiness;—and, if you will compel me to tell you—even at the risk of appearing a jealous, suspicious creature in your eyes—"

"Ah, Isabella, if it be nothing but jealousy," said Richard, with a smile of satisfaction, "I am well pleased; for there would not be jealousy without love; and thus, the former is a proof of the latter."

"Then, Captain Dapper observed that he was riding near your abode the other day; and he saw a young and very beautiful lady in your garden——"

"And he said truly, Isabella," interrupted Markham: "he, no doubt, saw Miss Monroe, who, with her venerable father, is residing at my house—through charity, Isabella—through charity! No tongue can tell the miseries which those poor creatures had endured, until I forced them to come and take up their abode with me. Mr. Monroe was my guardian—and by his speculations did I lose my fortune;—but never have I borne him ill-will—and now—"

"Say no more, Richard," exclaimed Isabella: "you have a noble heart—and never, never will I mistrust it!"

"And you love me, Isabella? and you will ever love me? and you will never be another's?"

"Do you require oaths, and vows, and protestations, Richard?" said the young lady, tenderly: "if so, you shall have them. But my own feelings—my own sentiments are the best guarantee of my actions towards you!"

"Oh! I believe you—dearest, dearest Isabella!" cried the young man, enthusiastically, his handsome countenance irradiated with a glow of animation which set off his proud style of male beauty to its fullest extent; "I believe you; and you have rendered me supremely happy, for you have taught me to have confidence in myself—you have led me to believe that I am worthy of even such an angel as you! Oh! dearest Isabella, you know not how sweet it is to be beloved by a pure and virgin heart like yours! If my wrongs—my injuries—my sufferings—have taught thee to feel one particle of sympathy the more for me, then am I proud of the sad destinies that have so touched that tender heart of thine! But say, Isabella—say, when shall we meet again?"

"Richard," answered the Italian lady, "you know how sincerely—how fondly I love you; you know that you—and you alone shall ever accompany me to the altar. But, never—never, dear Richard, can I so far neglect my duty to my father, as to consent to a clandestine meeting. And you, Richard—you possess a soul too noble, and too good, to urge me to do that which would be wrong. The woman who has been a disobedient daughter, may be a disobedient wife; and much as I love you, Richard—much as I dote upon every word that falls from your lips—much as I confide in your own affection for me, I cannot—I dare not—will not diminish myself in my own opinion, nor stand the chance of incurring a suspicion of levity in yours, by a course which is contrary to filial duty. No, Richard—do not ask me to meet you again. Something tells me that all will yet be well: we are young—we can hope;—and God—that God in whom we both trust—will not forget us!"

"Now, Isabella—now," exclaimed Richard, "I comprehend all that is great and noble in your disposition. Yes—it shall be as you say, my ever dear Isabella; and the mental contemplation of your virtue will teach me to appreciate the love of such a heart as yours."

"We must now separate, dear Richard," said Isabella: "I have already remained too long away from home! But one word ere you depart:—that miscreant who made so fearful an accusation against you on the fatal night when you left my father's dwelling——"

"He is no more, Isabella," answered Markham: "at least I have every reason to believe that when the police, instructed by me, discovered his dwelling, three months ago, the villain terminated his existence in a manner that corresponded well with the whole tenour of his life. The den of infamy which he inhabited, was blown up with gunpowder, the moment after the officers of justice entered it; and there can be no doubt that he, together with one of his accomplices, perished in the ruin that was produced by his own hand. Several constables met their death at the same time; and, according to information gathered from the neighbours, an old woman—believed to be the miscreant's mother—was also in the house at the time of the explosion."

"How fearful are the ways of crime!" said Isabella, with a shudder. "May God grant that in future you will have no enemies to cross your path! And now, farewell, Richard—farewell. We shall meet again soon—Providence will not desert us!"

Richard pressed his lips to those of that charming girl, and bade her adieu.

She tore herself—now reluctantly!—away from him, and hastily retraced her steps towards the mansion.

But ere she passed the angle of the grove, she turned and waved her handkerchief to her lover.

The young man kissed his hand fondly to the idol of his heart: and in another moment Isabella was out of sight.

That one half-hour of bliss, which Richard had thus passed with the Italian lady, was a reward for weeks—months—years of anguish and of sorrow!

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE CRISIS.

DURING the ensuing three months nothing occurred worthy of record, in connexion with any character that has figured upon the stage of our narrative.

The month of July arrived: and found Tomlinson, the banker, more deeply involved in difficulties than ever. The result was that the consultations between him and old Michael, the cashier, were of very frequent occurrence; and the latter grew more morose, more dirty, and more addicted to snuff in proportion as the affairs of the bank became the more desperate.

One morning, in the first week of July, Tomlinson arrived at the banking-house half an hour earlier than usual. He had taken home the cash-books with him on the preceding evening, for the purpose of ascertaining his true position; and he brought them back again in the morning before any of the clerks had arrived, with the exception of old Michael Martin, who was already waiting for him when he entered the parlour.

"Well, Michael, my old friend," said Tomlinson, on whose countenance the marks of care and anxiety were now too visibly traced, "I am afraid that the establishment cannot possibly exist many days longer. Mr. Greenwood will be here presently: and he is my only hope."

"Hope indeed!" growled Martin, plunging his fore-finger and thumb into his capacious snuff-box: "how he left you to shift for yourself after you gave that security to Count Alteroni."

"Which security fell due a few days ago; and a note from the count, received yesterday, tells me that he shall call upon me next Saturday at twelve o'clock for the amount."

"He is very welcome to call—and so are a good many others," said Michael; "but they will go back as empty as they came."

"Good God! can nothing be done?" exclaimed Tomlinson, with an expression of blank despair upon his countenance. "Say, Michael—is there any resource? do you know of any plan? can you suggest any method—"

"Not one. You must go to the Bankruptcy Court, and I must go to the workhouse;"—and the old man took a huge pinch of snuff.

"To the workhouse!" cried Tomlinson; "no—impossible! Do not say that, my good old friend."

"I do say it, though;"—and two tears rolled slowly down the cashier's cheeks.

This was the first time that Tomlinson had ever beheld any outward and visible sign of emotion on the part of his faithful clerk.

Tomlinson was not naturally a bad man—at all events, not a bad-hearted man: the cashier had served him with a fidelity rarely equalled; and that announcement of a workhouse-doom in connexion with the old man touched him to the soul.

"Michael," he said, taking the cashier's hand, "you do not mean to tell me that you are totally without resources for yourself? Your salary has been six hundred a year for a long time; and surely you must have saved something out of that—you, who have no family encumbrances of any kind, and whose expenses are so very limited."

The old man slowly opened one of the cash-books, pointed to the page at the head of which stood his own name, ran his finger down a column of payments made to himself, and stopping at the total, said, "That amount runs over nine years; and the amount is £540."

"What—is it possible?" cried Tomlinson: "you have only paid yourself £60 a-year."

"And that was too much for the state of the bank," said the cashier drily, taking a pinch of snuff at the same time.

"Now of all things which combine to make me wretched at this moment," said Tomlinson, "your position is the most afflicting."

"Don't think of me: I'm not worth it," returned Michael. "What will you do yourself?"

"What shall we both do?" cried the banker. "But so long as I have a crust, you shall not want."

"Well—well, there's enough of that," almost growled the cashier, though his furrowed cheeks were still moist with tears. "I am an old man, and my wants are few. A bit of bread and a pinch of snuff are enough for me. But you—you, who have always lived like a gentleman,—how can *you* stand it?"

"And is it literally come to this? Is there no resource?"

"Do you see any? I do not. Will your father help you?"

"Not with another sixpence."

"Will Greenwood?"

"Here he comes to answer for himself."

Mr. Greenwood entered the parlour, and old Michael, taking his cash-books under his arm, withdrew.

The member of parliament threw himself into a chair, and observed what a beautiful morning it was.

Tomlinson made a movement of impatience, and yet dared not ask the question that trembled upon his tongue, and the answer to which would decide his fate.

"Yes," continued Greenwood, "it is a lovely morning: all nature seems enlivened, and every body is inspired with a congenial feeling."

"What nonsense is this, Greenwood?" cried the banker. "Do you come to taunt a man upon the brink of ruin, with the happiness of

others?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, my dear Tomlinson. I really was waiting for you to question me upon matters of business; and in the mean time made use of some observations of common courtesy and politeness."

"The fact is, that since you obtained a seat in Parliament your manners have altogether changed. But please to put me out of suspense at once:—have you considered my proposal?"

"I have—maturely."

"And what is your decision?"

"That I cannot agree to it."

"I thought as much," said Tomlinson. "Well—now I have no alternative. I must close the bank and appear in the *Gazette*."

"And when you are cleared by a certificate, I will enable you to set up in some business again."

"Upon that promise, Mr. Greenwood," said Tomlinson, severely, "I place no reliance—no reliance whatever."

"Just as you please," returned Greenwood coolly.

"How can I?" cried the banker. "When I gave my security for you to Count Alteroni, and relieved you of a burden of fifteen thousand pounds, you faithfully promised to assist me. Did you keep your word?"

"Did I not forgive you a debt which would have ruined you that very day?"

"True. But you were an immense gainer! You obtained twelve thousand pounds by the transaction. However, I shall be compelled to give an account of the transaction to the Bankruptcy Court."

"An avowal which will do you no good, and will only expose me," observed Greenwood, alarmed by this declaration.

"And why should I have any regard for you?" demanded Tomlinson, with that moroseness which men in his desperate condition are so frequently known to manifest towards intriguers more fortunate than themselves.

"I will tell you why you should have some regard for me," answered Greenwood. "In the first place, the mere fact of your having so long carried on this bank when in a helpless state of insolvency, thereby increasing your liabilities in a desperate manner, and receiving deposits the eventual repayment of which each day became less likely, will so irritate the mass of your creditors that you will never obtain your certificate. Secondly, unless you have a friendly trade-assignee, you will obtain no allowance out of the wrecks of the property, and you will find it difficult, considering the state your books *must* be in, to make up a balance sheet that would stand the remotest chance of passing."

"True—true," said Tomlinson: "my condition is really desperate."

"Not so desperate as you imagine," resumed Greenwood: "I will be your friend—I will save you, if you only follow my counsel."

"Ah! my good friend," cried the despairing man, "forgive me the expressions which fell from my lips just now."

"Do not mention that circumstance; I make every allowance for the irritated state of your feelings. In the first place, then, you can make me a creditor to the amount of thirty thousand pounds, and two or three of my friends creditors to an equal amount in the aggregate. We shall be enabled to give you your certificate, together with those persons who will not bear you animosity or whom we can talk over. In the second place, I can apply to be appointed trade-assignee; and I flatter myself—considering my position, representing as I do a free, enlightened, and independent constituency—my nomination will not be opposed."

"If you could only contrive *that*," said Tomlinson, "I might pass my second examination in even a creditable manner; and afterwards—"

"And afterwards open as a stock-broker," added Greenwood. "That is the invariable resource of all bankrupt bankers; and what is more extraordinary, they obtain confidence and succeed too. Tradesmen who are unfortunate, always take to the wine, coal, or discount business, each of which can be commenced without a shilling; but your aim must be a broker's profession. It is so genteel—so comfortable: a hole of an office in the City, and a villa at Clapham or Kensington;—a mutton chop at the Diningrooms in Hercules Passage at one, and turtle and venison at home at six. Ah! the life of a stock-broker is a very pleasant one!"

"I am sure the life of an insolvent banker is not," said Tomlinson, again rendered rather impatient by Mr. Greenwood's discursiveness.

"A thousand pounds will set you up comfortably again," continued Greenwood; "and that you shall have. Only follow my advice—and I will be the making of you. In the meantime, you had better not struggle against fortune any longer in this position. What is to-day? Thursday. Very well. I will strike a docket against you this very afternoon: the *fiat* can be opened to-morrow morning; and to-morrow evening you can be in the *Gazette*. Is that agreed?"

"Agreed!" exclaimed Tomlinson bitterly: "I have no resource left but that! Yes—it shall be as you say. But for God's sake, talk not in so cold and heartless a manner of the mode of procedure."

"Cold and heartless, my dear fellow!" repeated Greenwood: "I speak of your affairs just as I would speak of my own. Keep up your spirits, and come and dine with me this evening. You shall then give me the necessary securities to enable me to prove as your creditor for the amount agreed upon. Meantime, give me a bill for a thousand or so, ante-dated about four months, and due a month ago, so that I may strike the docket upon it presently. Then, as you are not to know that these proceedings are in operation against you, you must keep the bank open until the messenger comes down to-morrow afternoon from the Bankruptcy Court the moment the *fiat* is lawfully proclaimed before the Commissioner. Of course you will pretend to be struck with surprise, and instantly proceed to the Court to obtain your *protection*. Is that agreed upon?"

"I am in your hands," said Tomlinson. "Your advice shall now guide me altogether. But when I think upon the ruin and desolation my failure will cause—the widows and the orphans whom it will reduce to beggary—the poor tradesmen whom it will involve in inextricable difficulties,—it is enough to drive me mad."

"Pooh! pooh! my good fellow," said Greenwood; "these little things happen every day. As for the widows and the orphans, allow me to remind you that the wisdom and goodness of the legislative bodies—to one of which I have the honour to belong as the representative of an intelligent and independent constituency—have established asylums for the reception of persons so reduced, and where they enjoy every comfort, upon the trifling condition of doing a little needle-work, or breaking a few stones."

"Greenwood—Greenwood, do not speak in this heartless manner! Oh! the idea that my failure will render your words literally true—that numbers will be thereby reduced to the workhouse of which you speak,—it is this, it is this that overwhelms me!"

"You are very silly to give way to your feelings in this manner. Why do you know (and I may as well mention it by way of consolation in respect to the widows and orphans whose fate you deplore)—that the workhouses are conducted at present upon the most liberal principle possible? Do you know that the female inmates are handsomely remunerated for the shirts which they make—that they can make a shirt in a day and a half, and that they receive one farthing for each? That is their pocket-money—their little perquisites, my dear fellow;—so you perceive that the workhouse is not such a bad place after all."

Tomlinson was pacing the bank-parlour in an abstracted mood, and paid not the slightest attention to this tirade from the lips of the newly-fledged politician.

Mr. Greenwood saw that his observations were unheeded, and accordingly rose to take his departure. Tomlinson gave him a bill for a thousand pounds to enable him to strike a docket against him; and Mr. Greenwood then withdrew.

The moment he was gone, old Michael entered the room; and Tomlinson communicated to him all that had passed. The cashier made no reply, but took the largest pinch of snuff he had ever yet abstracted from his box or conveyed to his nose.

He had not yet broken silence, when the door opened, and Mr. Greenwood returned. Michael was about to withdraw; but the capitalist stopped him, saying, "Stay—three heads are better than two. I was just entering my cabriolet, when an idea—a brilliant idea struck me."

"An idea!" exclaimed Tomlinson: "what—to save me?"

"To render your failure legitimate—to make you appear an honourable, but an unfortunate man—to avert all blame from you—"

"Ah! if that could be done," interrupted the banker, his countenance animated with hope, "I might yet be spared the execrations of the widow and the orphan!"

"Ever your widows and orphans, my dear fellow," said Greenwood: "you are really quite sickening."

"Well—well—the idea?"

"Nothing is more simple," continued Greenwood. "You leave the bank this afternoon at five, as usual: Michael sees all safe, and takes his departure also. You leave fifty thousand pounds in specie and notes in the strong box, together with securities of foreign houses at Leipzig, Vienna, Turin, New York, Rio Janeiro, Calcutta, Sydney——"

"Greenwood, have you come back to mock a miserable—ruined man?"

"Quite the contrary. Listen! You leave money and securities to the amount of ninety-two thousand, three hundred, and forty-seven pounds—or any odd sum, to look well—safe in the strong box, together with the cash-books. You and Michael come in the morning—or perhaps it would be better to allow one of the clerks to arrive first,—and, behold! the bank has been broken into during the night—the money, the securities, and the books are all gone—and the bank stops as a natural consequence!"

"Impossible—impossible!" exclaimed Tomlinson: "it could never be done! I could not proclaim such a fraud without a blush that would betray me. What say you, Michael?"

The old cashier answered only with a grunt, and took snuff as it were by handfuls.

"What say you, Michael?" repeated Tomlinson, impatiently.

"I say that it *can* be done—ought to be done—and must be done," replied the old man. "I would sooner die than see the honour of the house lost—and *that* will save it."

"Well said, Michael," exclaimed Greenwood. "Now, Tomlinson, your decision?"

"It is a fearful alternative—and yet—and yet, it is preferable to infamy—disgrace——"

"Then you agree?"

"And if I agree—where are the means of executing the scheme? Who will rob—or affect to rob the premises?"

"That must be arranged by yourselves. The back of this house looks upon a court. The thieves can have effected their entrance through these parlour windows: the parlour doors will be found forced; the safe will have been broken open. Nothing can be more simple."

"Yes—I know how to manage it all," exclaimed old Martin, who had been ruminating more seriously than ever for the last few moments. "Mr. Greenwood, you have saved the honour of the bank, which I love as if it was my own child;"—and the cashier wrung the hand of the member of Parliament with a warmth indicative of an amount of feeling which he had never been known to demonstrate before.

"Well—I have given you the hint—do you profit by it," said Greenwood; and with these words he departed.

And as he drove back to the West-End, he said to himself, "Tomlinson will now be completely in my power, and will never dare confess the real nature of the transaction relative to Count Alteroni's fifteen thousand pounds. According to the first arrangement proposed, a bullying counsel or an astute Commissioner might have wormed out of him the exact truth; whereas, now—now his lips are silenced on that head for ever!"

The moment Greenwood had left the bank-parlour, old Michael accosted Tomlinson, and said "Have you full confidence in me?"

"I have, Michael: but why do you ask me that question?"

"Will you place yourself in my hands?"

"I will—in every way."

"Then you will leave the establishment as usual at five this evening; and trust to me to manage every thing. I have my plan ready arranged; but you shall know nothing to-day:—to-morrow—to-morrow——"

The old man stopped short, and had recourse to his snuff-box.

"Be it as you say, Michael," cried Tomlinson, always bewildered by the terrors of his situation, and still half shrinking from the daring plot which Greenwood had opened to his view; "I know that you are my faithful friend—my best, my only friend:—it shall be as you desire!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

COUNT ALTERONI'S FIFTEEN THOUSAND POUNDS.

On the Saturday morning following the Thursday on which the above-mentioned conversation took place, the count and his family were seated at breakfast.

The morning paper was late; and his lordship was one of those persons who cannot enjoy their repast without the intellectual association of a journal.

At length the wished-for print arrived; and the count was soon buried in the preceding night's debate in the House of Commons—for he felt deeply interested in all political affairs, no matter to which country they referred.

"Really this Greenwood is a very clever man," he observed, after a long interval of silence. "He acquitted himself well last evening, notwithstanding the erroneous course he is pursuing in the political sphere. The Tories of this country have obtained a powerful auxiliary in him. It is a pity he is so unprincipled a villain—for, I repeat, he is really very clever."

"It is astonishing how men of his stamp contrive to push themselves forward in the world," said the countess, "while those of honest principles and upright minds are either misunderstood, or vilely persecuted."

"And yet vice only prospers for a time," observed Isabella; "and virtue becomes triumphant at last. Those who are misunderstood to-day will be comprehended and honoured to-morrow."

She thought of Markham as she uttered these words: indeed, the image of her lover was ever uppermost in the mind of the charming and affectionate girl.

"I am afraid," said the count, after a pause, "that the moral you have just advanced, Bella, is rather that of the stage and the romancist than of real life. And yet," he added fervently, "to entertain such in idea as mine is to question the goodness and the justice of Providence. Yes—I must believe in earthly rewards and punishments. You are right, my child—you are right: the wicked man will not ever triumph in his turpitude; nor may the virtuous one be oppressed until the end."

"No—or else were there small hope for us," said the countess solemnly. "The great men of Castelcicala must some day perceive who is their real friend."

"Alas!" exclaimed Isabella, "It is hard to be mistaken and suspected by those whose good opinions we would fain secure."

The count resumed the perusal of the newspaper; but his eyes had not dwelt many minutes upon the page ere he uttered a loud exclamation of mingled astonishment and alarm.

The ladies looked towards him in a state of the most painful suspense: and this feeling was not immediately removed, for the count, with an ashy pale face, continued to read the article that had caught his eyes, for some moments, ere he explained the cause of his emotion.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the countess, "are there any bad tidings from Italy?"

"No—the hand that strikes the blow which ruins us, is not so far distant," answered the nobleman, throwing the paper upon the table. "Ah! we were premature," he continued bitterly, "in founding our hopes upon the justice with which virtue is rewarded and vice punished!"

"The blow which ruins us?" said the countess, a prey to the most acute anxiety.

"Yes—Tomlinson has stopped payment," cried the Italian exile; "and—and we are ruined!"

"My dear father," said Isabella, hastening to fling her arms around the neck of her much-loved sire, "all may not be so bad as you imagine!"

"Ruined!" repeated the countess; and, taking up the newspaper, the following article instantly met her eyes:—

"ROBBERY AND STOPPAGE OF TOMLINSON'S BANK.

"The City was yesterday morning thrown into a state of the greatest fermentation by a rumour which prevailed at about eleven o'clock, that the above-mentioned old-established and well-known banking establishment had been plundered to an enormous amount, and had suspended its payments. Unfortunately the rumour was but too true; and our reporter, upon repairing to Lombard Street, found an immense crowd collected in front of the bank. The doors were closed; and the following notice was posted up;—'James Tomlinson *is under the painful necessity of suspending the affairs of the bank, at least for the present. The flight of the cashier, with money and securities to an amount bordering upon a hundred thousand pounds, is the cause of this unfortunate step. Further particulars will be made known at speedily as possible.*' It is impossible to describe the dismay which was depicted upon the countenances of those amongst the crowd who are sufferers by this calamity; and many very painful scenes took place. One widow lady who had placed her little all in the concern, and who arrived upon the spot, to draw her half yearly interest, only a few moments after the doors were closed, was taken away in a state of madness. We have since learnt that the unfortunate lady has entirely lost her reason.

"Our reporter upon prosecuting his inquiries, gleaned the following particulars of the occurrence which led to the stoppage of the bank; and we have every reason to believe that the narrative which they furnish may be relied upon.

"It appears that the cashier, whose name was Michael Martin, is a very old man, and had been for many years in the service of the present and late proprietors of the bank. His presumed integrity, his known experience, and his general conduct, had led to his elevation to the post of head cashier—a situation which he has filled for upwards of ten years, without exciting a suspicion relative to his proceedings. It is, however, supposed that he must have been pursuing a most nefarious course for a considerable length of time, for reasons which we shall state presently. On Thursday evening, Mr. Tomlinson, who, it appears, is the sole proprietor of the establishment, although the business has been all along carried on under its original denomination of *Tomlinson & Co.*, quitted the bank at five o'clock, as usual, leaving the cashier to see all safe, and close the establishment for the day, according to custom. When Mr. Sanderson, one of the clerks, arrived at the bank at nine o'clock yesterday morning, he was surprised to find that the doors were not yet opened. The other clerks arrived shortly afterwards; and their surprise at length turned into alarm. Still the integrity of the cashier was not for a moment suspected; it was, however, imagined that something most have happened to him—an idea that was strengthened by the fact that the cashier occupied a room in the establishment, and there was consequently no reason to account for the doors remaining closed. The char-woman, who waited upon the cashier and swept out the bank, &c., came up to the door while the clerks were thus deliberating, and stated that she had not been able to obtain admission that morning as usual. It was now determined by Mr. Sanderson to obtain the assistance of a policeman, and force an entrance. This was done; and egress was obtained by breaking through the windows and shutters (which close inside) of the bank parlour. Mr. Sanderson and the constable immediately proceeded to the cashier's private room, which is on the ground-floor, and in which the iron safe was kept. The bed had not been slept in during the night. Attention was then directed to the safe, where it was found that it was open, and its contents had been abstracted. The front door of the bank was opened, and the clerks admitted. Mr. Tomlinson was then immediately sent for. That gentleman arrived by ten o'clock; and a farther investigation took place under his directions. The result of this search was a discovery that not only had the specie, notes, and securities disappeared, but even the cash-books, and all the papers that could throw any light upon the financial affairs of the establishment. It is this circumstance which induces a belief that the cashier must have carried on a system of plunder for a considerable length of time.

"We regret to state that the shock was so great that Mr. Tomlinson was conveyed to his residence in a state bordering upon distraction."

"Further Particulars.

"A reward of £3000 has been offered for the apprehension of the cashier; and a description of his person has been forwarded to all the principal seaports. [For *Description* see our advertising columns.] Our reporter learnt last evening that Mr. Tomlinson was more composed, and had even exerted himself to consult with some friends upon the best course to pursue. It, however, appears that so entirely did he confide in his cashier, that he is only able to give a vague and meagre account of the nature of the securities abstracted. They were, however, the bills and bonds of several great foreign and colonial mercantile houses. We regret to hear that Mr. G. M. Greenwood, M.P., had paid a considerable sum of money into the bank, on Thursday morning. It appears that upwards of fifty thousand pounds in specie and notes (the numbers of which are now unknown, they having been entered in one of the books taken away) and forty-four thousand in securities have disappeared.

"There is every reason to suppose that the delinquent will be speedily captured, as it is impossible for him to travel with a large amount of specie without exciting suspicion."

"Latest Particulars.

"In order to institute the fullest and most complete investigation into the affairs of the bank, it was resolved, at a late hour last evening, at a meeting of the principal creditors, Mr. Greenwood in the chair, that a docket should be struck against Mr. Tomlinson. At the same time, it is our duty to observe that this is done with no ill feeling towards that gentleman, who is deserving only of universal sympathy, and, in no way, of blame."

"The name of that man Greenwood, in connexion with this affair," said the count, "impresses me with the idea that all is not right. Moreover, how could the cashier have removed a large quantity of specie without attracting attention in a thoroughfare so frequented at all hours as Lombard Street? There is something wrong at the foundation of this history of the robbery."

"Alas! little does it matter now to us, whether Mr. Tomlinson be a false or an unfortunate man," said the countess; "there is one thing certain—we are ruined!"

"Yes—my dearest wife, my beloved daughter," exclaimed the count, "we are in a pitiable situation—in a foreign land! It is true that I have friends: the Earl of Warrington—Lord Tremordyn, both of whom know our secret, and have faithfully kept it—would gladly assist me; but I would not—could not apply to them—even though it be to settle the few debts which I owe!"

"Still there remains one course," said the countess, hesitating, and regarding her husband with anxious timidity.

"One course!" ejaculated the count. "Ah! I know full well to what you allude; but never, never will I sell my rights for gold! No, my dear wife—my beloved daughter—we must prepare ourselves to meet our misfortunes in a becoming manner."

"Dear father," murmured Isabella, "your goodness has conferred upon me an excellent education: surely I might turn to advantage some of those accomplishments—"

"You, my sweetest girl!" cried the nobleman, surveying with feelings of ineffable pride the angelic countenance of the lovely being that was leaning upon his shoulder: "you—my own darling girl—a lady of your high rank become a governess! no—never, never!

"Isabella, you are worthy of your noble sire," said the countess enthusiastically.

And, even in the hour of their misfortune, that exiled—ruined family found inexpressible solace in the sweet balm of each other's love!

CHAPTER LXXVII.

A WOMAN'S SECRET.

It was now seven months since Ellen Monroe became the victim of George Greenwood.

She bore in her bosom the fruit of that amour; and until the present time she had managed to conceal her situation from those around her.

She now began to perceive the utter impossibility of veiling her disgrace much longer. Her health was failing; and her father and Markham were constantly urging upon her the necessity of receiving medical advice. This recommendation she invariably combated to the utmost of her power; and in order to give a colour to her assurance that she suffered only from some trivial physical ailment, she was compelled to affect a flow of good spirits which she was far—very far from experiencing.

Markham had frequently questioned her with the most earnest and friendly solicitude relative to the causes of those intervals of deep depression which it was impossible for her to conceal;—he had implored her to open her mind to him, as a sister might to a brother;—he had suggested to her change of scene, diversion, and other means of restoring her lost spirits;—but to all he advanced she returned evasive replies.

Richard and the aged father of the young lady frequently convened together upon the subject, and lost themselves in conjectures relative to the cause of that decaying health and increasing unhappiness for which the sufferer herself would assign no feasible motive. At times Mr. Monroe was inclined to believe that the privations and vicissitudes which his daughter had experienced during the two years previous to their reception at the hospitable dwelling of Richard Markham, had engendered a profound melancholy in a mind that had been so painfully harassed, and had implanted the germs of a subtle malady in a system never constitutionally strong. This belief appeared the more reasonable when the old man called to mind the hours of toil—the wearisome vigils—and the exposure to want, cold, and inclement weather, which had been endured by the poor girl in the court in Golden Lane; and Markham sometimes yielded to the same impression relative to the causes of a mental and physical decline which every day became more apparent.

Then, again, Richard thought that the fresh air of the healthy locality where she now dwelt, and the absence of all care in respect to the wherewithal to sustain life, would have produced a beneficial effect. He enjoined her father to question her whether she cherished some secret affection—some love that had experienced disappointment; but to this demand she returned a positive negative: and her father assured his young friend that Ellen had had no opportunity of obtaining the affection of another, or of bestowing her own upon any being who now slighted it. Of course her true position was never suspected for a moment; and thus the cause of Ellen's unhappiness remained an object of varied and conflicting conjectures.

Seven months had now passed since that fatal day when the accursed old hag, whose name we have not allowed to defile these pages, handed her over to the arms of a ruthless libertine;—seven months of mental anguish and physical suffering had nearly flown;—the close of July was at hand;—and as yet Ellen had decided upon no plan to direct her future proceedings. She sometimes thought of returning to Greenwood, and endeavouring to touch his heart;—but then she remembered the way in which they had parted on the occasion of her visit to his house in Spring-Gardens;—she recalled to mind all she knew of the character of the man;—and she was compelled to abandon this idea. She felt that she would sooner die than accept his succour in the capacity of a mistress;—and there were, moreover, moments when she entertained sentiments of profound hatred, and experienced a longing for revenge, against the man who refused to do her justice. Then, again, she recollected that he was the father of the child which she bore in her bosom; and all her rancorous feelings dissolved in tears.

At other times she thought of throwing herself at her father's feet, and confessing all. But what woman does not shudder at such a step? Moreover, frail mortals invariably place reliance in the chapter of accidents, and entertain hopes, even in situations where it is impossible for those hopes to be realised.

To Richard Markham she would not—dared not breathe a syllable that might lead him to infer her shame;—and yet, where was she to find a friend save in the persons of her father and her benefactor?

Most pitiable was the situation of this poor girl. And yet she already felt a mother's feeling of love and solicitude for her unborn babe. Often—often, in the still hour of night, when others slept, did she sit up and weep in her chamber:—often—often, while others forgot their cares in the arms of slumber, was she a prey to an agony of mind which seemed to admit of no solace. And then, in those hours of intense wretchedness, would the idea of suicide steal into her mind—that idea which suggests a last resource and a sore relief as a term for misery grown too heavy for mortal endurance. But, oh! she trembled—she trembled in the presence of that dread thought, which each night assumed a shape more awfully palpable, more fearfully defined to her imagination. She struggled against the idea: she exclaimed, in the bitterness of her agony, "Get thee behind me, tempter;"—and yet there the tempter stood, more plainly seen, more positive in its allurement than ever! That poor, helpless girl balanced in her mind whether she should dare human scorn, or in one mad moment resign her soul to Satan!

There was a piece of water at the back of the house close by the main road; and thither would her footsteps lead her—almost unvoluntarily, for the tempter pushed her onward from behind;—thither would she repair at noon, to contemplate the sleeping waters of the lake within whose depths lurked one pearl more precious in the eyes of the unhappy than the brightest ornaments set in regal diadems,—the pearl of Oblivion! Thither did the lost one stray: upon the margin of that water did she hover like the ghost of one who had sought repose beneath that silver surface;—and, oh! how she longed to plunge into the shining water—and dared not.

At eve, too, when the sun had set, and every star on the dark vault above was reflected on the bosom of the lake, and the pure argent rays of the lovely moon seemed to fathom its mysterious depths,—then again did she seek the bank; and as she stood gazing

upon the motionless pool, she prepared herself to take the one fatal leap that should terminate her sorrows—and dared not.

No—she shrank from suicide; and yet the time had now come when she most nerve herself to adopt some decided plan; for a prolonged concealment of her condition was impossible.

Markham's household consisted of Whittingham, Holford, and a female domestic of the name of Marian. This woman was a widow, and had been in the service of our hero only since his release from incarceration. She was between forty and fifty; and her disposition was kind, easy, and compassionate.

One night—about an hour after the inmates of the Place had retired to their chambers—Ellen was sitting, as usual, mournfully in her room, pondering upon her unhappy condition, and dreading to seek a couch where her ideas assumed an aspect which made her brain reel as if with incipient madness,—when she heard a low knock at her door. She hastened to open it; and Marian instantly entered the room.

"Hush, my dear young lady," she said in a whisper: "do not be alarmed;"—and she carefully closed the door behind her.

"What is the matter, Marian?" exclaimed Ellen "has any thing happened? is my father ill?"

"No, Miss—do not frighten yourself, I say," replied the servant. "I have come to console you for I can't bear to see you pining away like this—dying by inches."

"What do you mean, Marian?" said Ellen much confused.

"I mean, my dear Miss," continued the servant, "that if you won't think me impertinent. I might befriend you. The eyes of a woman are sharp and penetrating, Miss; and while every body else in the house is wondering what can make you so pale, and low-spirited, I do not want to conjecture to discover the cause."

"My God, Marian!" ejaculated the young lady, sinking into a chair; "you—you really frighten me: you mistake—you—"

And Ellen burst into tears.

The servant took her hand kindly, and said "Miss, forgive my boldness; but I am a woman—and I cannot bear to see one of my own sex suffer as you do. Besides, you are so good and gentle—and when I was ill a few weeks ago, you behaved with so much kindness to me, that my heart bleeds for you—it does indeed. I was coming down to you last night—and the night before—and the night before that too; but I didn't like to intrude upon you. And to-day I saw how very much you was altered; and I could restrain myself no longer. So, Miss, if I have done wrong, forgive me; for I have come with a good intention—and I would go a hundred miles to serve you. In a word, Miss, you require a friend—a faithful friend; and if you will confide in me, Miss, I will give you the best advice, and help you in the best way I can."

"Marian, this is very kind of you—very kind," answered Ellen, to whose ear these words of female sympathy came ineffably sweet; "but I shall be better soon—I shall get well—"

"Ah! Miss," interrupted Marian, soothingly, "don't hesitate to confide in me. I know what ails you—I understand your situation; and I feel for you deeply—indeed, indeed I do."

"Marian—"

"Yes, Miss: you cannot conceal it from others much longer. For God's sake take some step before you kill yourself and your child at the same time."

"Marian—Marian, what do you say?" exclaimed Ellen, sobbing violently, as if her heart would break.

"Miss Monroe, you will shortly become a mother!"

"Ah! my God—kill me, kill me! Save me from this deep degradation—this last disgrace!"

"Calm yourself, Miss—calm yourself; and I will be your friend," said Marian. "I have been thinking of your condition for some time past—and I have already settled in my mind a plan to save you!"

"To save me—to save me!" exclaimed Ellen. "Oh! how can I ever repay you for this kindness?"

"I am but a poor ignorant woman. Miss," answered Marian; "but I hope that I do not possess a bad heart. At all events I can feel for *you*."

"A bad heart, Marian!" repeated Ellen. "Oh! no—you are goodness itself. But you said you had some plan to save me, Marian?"

"Yes, Miss. I have a sister, who is married and lives with her husband a few miles off. He is a market-gardener; and they have a nice little cottage. They will be delighted to do all they can for you."

"But how can I leave this house and remain absent for weeks without acquainting my benefactor Mr. Markham, and my poor old father? You forget, Marian—you forget that were I to steal away, and leave no trace behind me, it would break my father's heart."

"Then, Miss, you had better throw yourself at your father's feet, and tell him all."

"Never—never, Marian!" ejaculated Ellen, clasping her hands together, while her bosom heaved convulsively.

"Trust in Mr. Markham, Miss—let me break the truth to him?"

"Impossible, Marian! I should never dare to look him in the face again."

"And the person—the individual—the father of your child, Miss—" said the servant, hesitatingly.

"Mention not him—allude not to him," cried Ellen; then, after a pause, she added in a low and almost despairing tone, "No!—hope exists not there!"

"And yet, Miss," continued Marian, "you must make up your mind to something—and that soon. You cannot conceal your situation another fortnight without danger to yourself and the little unborn innocent. Besides, you have made no preparations, Miss; and if any sudden accident—"

"Ah! Marian, you remind me of my duty," interrupted Ellen. "I must not sacrifice the life of that being who has not asked me to

give it existence—who is the innocent fruit of my shame,—I must not sacrifice its life to any selfish scruples of mine! Thank you, Marian—thank you! You have reminded me of my duty! come to me again to-morrow night, and I will tell you what step I have determined to take without delay!"

The servant then retired; and Ellen remained alone—alone with the most desolating, heart-breaking reflections.

At length her ideas produced a mental agony which was beyond endurance. She rose from her chair, and advanced towards the window, against the cold glass of which she leant her brow—her burning brow, to cool it. The moon shone brightly, and edged the clouds of night with silver. The eyes of the wretched girl wandered over the landscape, the outlines of which were strongly marked beneath the lustre of the moon; and amongst other objects, she caught sight of the small lake at a little distance. It shone like a pool of quicksilver, and seemed to woo her to its bosom.

Upon that lake her eyes rested long and wistfully; and again the tempter stood behind her, and urged her to seek repose beneath that shining surface.

She asked herself for what she had to live? She did not seek to combat the arguments of the secret tempter; but she collected into one focus all her sorrows; and at length the contemplation of that mass of misery strengthened the deep anxiety which she felt to escape from this world for ever.

And all the while she kept her eyes fixed upon the lake that seemed sleeping beneath the moonlight which kissed its bosom.

But her poor father! and the babe that she bore in her breast! Oh! no—she dared not die! Her suicide would not comprise one death only;—but it would be the death of a second, and the death of a third,—the death of her father, and the death of her still unborn child!

She turned away from the window, and hastened to seek her couch. But slumber did not visit her eyes. She lay pondering on the best course for her to pursue; but the more she reflected upon her condition, the farther off did she seem to wander from any settled point. At length she sank into an uneasy sleep; and her grief pursued her in her dreams.

She rose late; and when she descended to the breakfast-room she learnt that Richard Markham was about to depart immediately for the Continent. Whittingham was busily occupied in packing his master's baggage in the hall; and Holford had been despatched into town to order a post-chaise.

Markham explained this sudden movement on his part by placing a letter in Ellen's hand, saying at the same time, "This is from a man who has been a friend to me: I cannot hesitate a moment to obey his summons."

Ellen cast her eyes over the letter and read as follows:—

"Boulogne-sur-Mer, France,
"July 24, 1839.

"My dear young Friend,

"If you can possibly dispose of your time for a few days, come to me at once. A severe accident—which may prove fatal—renders it prudent that I should attend to my worldly affairs; and to this end I require the assistance of a friend. Such I know you to be.

"THOMAS ARMSTRONG."

"The accident which my friend has met with must have been a serious one," said Markham, "or his letter would be more explicit. I feel deeply anxious to know the whole truth; for it was he who gave me courage to face the world, and taught me how to raise my head again, after my release from imprisonment;—he also introduced me to *one*——"

Markham ceased: and for some moments his thought were bent wholly on Isabella.

At length the post-chaise arrived, and Richard departed on his journey, after bidding adieu to Mr. Monroe and Ellen, and having received a special request from the faithful Whittingham "to mind and not be conglomerated by any such fellers as Kidderminster and them wulgar chaps which called butlers *tulips*."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

MARIAN.

In the evening Ellen retired early to her apartment, for she felt very unwell; and certain sensations which she had experienced during the day had alarmed her.

A short time after she had withdrawn to the seclusion of her own chamber, the faithful and kind-hearted Marian made her appearance.

"This is very good of you, Marian," said Ellen. "I never felt the want of some one to talk to and console me, so much as I do to-night."

"You look very pale and ill, Miss," observed the servant: "had you not better retire to rest?"

"Yes," said Ellen. "I wish to struggle against a sense of weariness and oppression which comes over me; and I cannot."

"Heavens, Miss!—if any thing was to happen to you to-night—"

"It cannot be that, Marian; but I feel very, very ill."

Marian aided Miss Monroe to divest herself of her garments; and the young lady retired to her couch.

"How do you feel now, Miss?"

"Alas! I am not better, good Marian. I feel—I feel—"

"My God, Miss! you are about to become a mother this very night. Oh! what is to be done? what is to be done?"

"Save me, save me, Marian—do not suffer me to be exposed!" cried Ellen wildly.

"Why did I not speak to you before last night? We might have made some arrangement—invented some plan: but now—now, it is impossible!"

"Do not say it is impossible, Marian—do not take away every remaining hope—for I am wretched, very wretched."

"Poor young lady!" said Marian, advancing towards the bed, and taking Ellen's hand.

"It is not for myself that I care so much," continued the unhappy girl; "it is for my poor father. It would break his heart—oh! it would, break his heart!"

"And he is a good, kind old gentleman," observed Marian.

"And he has tasted already so deeply of the bitter cup of adversity," said Ellen, "that a blow like this would send him to his grave. I know him so well—he would never survive my dishonour. He has loved me so tenderly—he has taken such pride in me, it would kill him! Do you hear, Marian?—it would kill him. Ah! you weep—you weep for me, kind Marian!"

"Yes, Miss: I would do any thing I could to serve you. But now—it is too late—"

"Say not that it is too late!" ejaculated Ellen, distractedly: "say not that all chance of avoiding exposure has fled! take compassion on me, Marian; take compassion on my poor old father! Ah! these pains—"

"Tell me how I can serve you, Miss—"

"Alas! I cannot concentrate my ideas, Marian; I am bewildered—I am reduced to despair! Oh! if men only knew what bitter, bitter anguish they entail upon poor woman, when they sacrifice her to their desires—"

"Do not make yourself miserable, dear young lady," interrupted Marian, whose eyes were dimmed with tears. "Something must be done! How do you feel now?"

"I cannot explain my sensations. My mental pangs are so great that they almost absorb my bodily sufferings; and yet, it seems as if the latter were increasing every moment."

"There can be no doubt of it, Miss," said Marian. "Do you know that when I heard this morning of Mr. Markham's intended departure for France, it struck me at the moment that Providence interfered in your behalf. I do not know why such an idea should have come across me; for I could not foresee that you would be so soon overtaken with—"

"I feel that I am getting worse, Marian; can nothing be done? must my poor father know all? Oh! think of his grey hairs—his wrinkles! Think how he loves me—his only child! Alas! can nothing be done to save me from disgrace? How shall I ever be able to meet Mr. Markham again? Ah! Marian, you would not desert me in such a moment as this?"

"No, dear young lady—not for worlds!"

"Thank you, Marian! And yet forgive me if I say again, do not desert me—do not expose me! Oh! let me die rather than have my shame made known. Think, Marian—do you not know of any means of screening me?"

"I am bewildered," exclaimed the poor woman. "How do you feel now?"

"My fears augment, that—"

"Ah! it is premature, you see, Miss! What is to be done? what shall we do?"

"Marian, I beseech you—I implore you not to expose me!" said Ellen in a tone of such intense agony, that the good-hearted woman was touched to the very soul.

A sudden idea seemed to strike her.

"I know a young surgeon in the village—who is just married, and has only set up in business a few weeks—he is very poor—and

he does not know where I am now in service."

"Do any thing you choose, Marian—follow the dictates of your own mind—but do not expose me! Oh! my God! what misery—what misery is this!"

"Yes," continued Marian, musing, "there is no other resource. But, Miss," she added, turning towards the suffering girl, "if I can save you from exposure, you must part with your child, should it be born alive!"

"I am in your hands: save me from exposure—for my poor old father's sake! That is all I ask."

"This, then," said Marian, "is the only alternative; there is nothing else to be done! And perhaps even *he* will not consent—"

"To whom do you allude?" demanded Ellen impatiently.

"To the young surgeon of whom I spoke. But I must try: at all events his assistance must be had. Miss, my plan is too long to tell you now: do you think it is safe to leave you alone for three quarters of an hour?"

"Oh! yes—if it be for my benefit, kind—good Marian," said Ellen. "But I must not be exposed—even to the surgeon!"

"The room must then be quite dark," observed Marian. "Do you mind that?"

Ellen shook her head.

"Then, take courage, Miss—and I think I can promise—but we shall see."

The servant then hastily extinguished the lights and left the room.

She hurried up to her own chamber, took from her box a purse containing forty sovereigns—all her little savings, put on her bonnet and shawl, concealed her face with a thick black veil, and then stole carefully down stairs.

All was quiet; and she left the house by the back door.

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In three quarters of an hour two persons advanced together up the garden at the back of the house.

One was a woman; and she led a man, whose eyes were blindfolded with a black handkerchief.

"Your hand trembles," said Marian—for she was the female alluded to.

"No," answered the surgeon. "But one word—ere I proceed farther."

"Speak—do not delay."

"You gave me forty pounds for this night's work. What guarantee do you offer me that the child—should it survive—will not be left on my hands, altogether unprovided for?"

"Trust to paternal affection, sir," answered Marian. "I can promise you that the child will not even remain long with you."

"Well, I will venture it," said the surgeon. "Your money will save me from being compelled to shut up my establishment after an unsuccessful struggle of only a few weeks; and I ought not to ask too many questions."

"And you remember your solemn promise, sir, not to attempt to obtain any clue to the place to which I am conducting you."

"On my honour as a man—on my solemn word as a gentleman."

"Enough, sir. Let us proceed."

Marian let the surgeon onward, and admitted him into the house by the back door.

All was still quiet.

We have said on a previous occasion that the mansion was a spacious one. Ellen's apartment was far removed from that in which her father slept; and the rooms occupied by Whittingham and Holford were on the uppermost storey. There consequently existed little chance of disturbing any one.

Marian led the surgeon very cautiously up the staircase to Ellen's chamber, which they entered as noiselessly as possible.

Upon advancing into the room, which was quite dark, the surgeon struck against a chest of drawers, and uttered a slight ejaculation of pain; but not loud enough to reach the ears of those from whom it was necessary to conceal this nocturnal proceeding.

Ellen was in the pangs of maternity when Marian and the surgeon came to her assistance; and in a few moments after their arrival, she was the mother of a boy.

Oh! who can express her feelings when the gentle cry of the child fell upon her ears—that child from whom she was to part in a few minutes, perhaps for ever?

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Half an hour afterwards Marian and the surgeon were again threading the garden;—but this time their steps led them away from the house.

Beneath her thick shawl, carefully wrapped up, the servant carried Ellen's child.

She conducted the surgeon to within a short distance of his own abode, placed the child in his arms, and hurried rapidly away.

She returned to the Place, and ascended to Ellen's chamber without disturbing the other inmates.

"Ah! Marian," said Ellen, "how can I ever sufficiently thank you for your kindness of this night?"

"Silence, my dear young lady. Do not mention it! You must keep yourself very tranquil and quiet; and in the morning I must say that you are too unwell to rise."

"And that surgeon—"

"I know what you would ask, Miss," interrupted Marian. "All is safe and secret—the bandage was never raised from the surgeon's eyes from the moment he left his own house until he was far away from here again; nor did he once catch a glimpse of my face, for when I first went to explain the business to him and engage his assistance, he came down from his bed-chamber and spoke to me in the passage where it was quite dark. Moreover, I had taken my thick black veil with me by way of precaution. Therefore, he can never know me again."

"But the means of securing his assistance? how did you contrive that, Marian?"

"Well, Miss, if you must know," said the servant, after some hesitation, "I had saved up forty pounds—"

"And you gave him all!" exclaimed Ellen. "Oh! this was truly noble! However—I shall know how to repay you fourfold."

"We will speak of that another time, Miss," answered Marian. "You must now endeavour to obtain some sleep;—and I shall sit with you all night."

"Tell me one thing, Marian," said Ellen, with tears in her eyes;—"the child—"

"Will be well taken care of, Miss. Do not alarm yourself about that. And now you must try and obtain some repose."

In a few moments the young mother was overtaken by a profound sleep—the first she had enjoyed for many, many weeks. But even this slumber was not attended by dreams of unmixed pleasure: the thoughts of her child—her new-born child, entrusted to the care of strangers, and severed from the maternal bosom—followed her in her visions.

She awoke, considerably refreshed, at about seven o'clock in the morning.

The faithful Marian was still watching by her side, and had prepared her some refreshment, of which Ellen partook.

The young mother then asked for writing materials; and, in spite of the remonstrances of Marian, sate up in her bed, and wrote a letter.

When she had sealed and addressed it, she spoke in the following manner:

"Marian, I have now one favour to ask you. You have already given me such proofs of friendship and fidelity, that I need not implore you to observe the strictest secrecy with respect to the request that I am about to make. At the same time, I shall feel more happy if you will promise me, that under any circumstances—whether my shame remain concealed, or not—you will never disclose, without my consent, the name of the person to whom this letter is addressed, and to whom you must carry it as speedily as possible."

"You know, Miss, that I will do any thing I can to make you happy. Your secret is safe in my keeping."

"Thank you, Marian! My father would curse me—Mr. Markham would scorn me, did they know that I held communication with this man;"—and she showed the address upon the letter to Marian.

"Mr. Greenwood!" exclaimed the servant. "Ah! now I recollect—Whittingham has told me that he is the person who ruined your poor father, and robbed Mr. Markham of nearly all his property."

"And yet, Marian," said Ellen, "that man—that same Mr. Greenwood, who reduced my poor father to beggary, and plundered Mr. Markham—that very same individual is the father of my child!"

"Ah! Miss, now I understand how impossible it was for you to reveal your condition to your father, or to Mr. Markham. The blow would have been too severe upon both!"

"Yes, Marian—Mr. Greenwood is the father of my child; and more than that—he is—but no matter," said Ellen, suddenly checking herself. "You now know my secret, Marian; and you will never reveal it?"

"Never, Miss, I promise you most solemnly."

"And you will take this letter to him to-day—and you will wait for his reply."

"I will go this afternoon, Miss; and I will obey your wishes in every way."

"And now, Marian, hasten to tell my father that I am unwell; and resist any desire on his part to obtain medical assistance."

"Leave that to me, Miss. You already appear so much better that the old gentleman will easily be induced to suppose that a little rest is all you require."

"Ah! Marian—how can I ever reward you for all your goodness towards me?"

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE BILL.—A FATHER.

NOTHING could be more business-like than the study of Mr. Greenwood. The sofa was heaped up with papers tied round with red tape, and endorsed, some "Corn-Laws," others "New Poor Law," a third batch "Rottenborough Union," a fourth "Select Committee on Bribery at Elections;" and so on.

Piles of letters lay upon one table; piles of newspapers upon another; and a number of Reports of various Committees of the House of Commons, easily recognised by their unwieldy shapes and blue covers, was heaped up on the cheffonier between the windows.

The writing-table was also arranged, with a view to effect, in the manner described upon a former occasion; and in his arm-chair lounged Mr. Greenwood, pleasantly engaged in perusing the daily newspaper which contained the oration that he had delivered in the House on the preceding evening.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Greenwood had risen late, for the House had not separated until half-past two in the morning, and the member for Rottenborough was a man of too decidedly business-habits to leave his post in the middle of a debate.

Lafleur entered, and announced Sir Rupert Harborough.

"I have called about that bill again," said the baronet. "When it came due at the end of March, we renewed it for four months. It will be due again to-morrow."

"I am aware of it," said Greenwood. "What do you propose to do?"

"I am in no condition to pay it," answered the baronet.

"You must provide a portion, and renew for the remainder," said Greenwood.

"It is impossible, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Sir Rupert. "I am completely at low water-mark again, upon my honour!"

"And yet I have heard that you and Chichester have not been altogether unsuccessful in the playworld during the last few months," observed Greenwood.

"Not so prosperous as you may fancy," returned the baronet. "Come, what shall we say about this bill?"

"I have told you. The bill was originally given for fifteen hundred pounds—"

"For which I only had a thousand."

"I don't recollect now. At all events, it fell due; and fortunately I had not passed it away."

"Of course not. You promised to retain it in your portfolio."

"I don't recollect. You could not pay it; and I agreed to renew it—"

"On condition of making it sixteen hundred," said the baronet.

"I don't recollect," observed Greenwood again. "Now you come to me, and tell me that you can do nothing towards it. Things cannot go on so."

"But you knew very well, Greenwood, when you took it, that the day of payment might be rather distant."

"I don't recollect. You must bring me the six hundred, and I will renew for the thousand—without interest. There!"

"And where the devil am I to find six hundred pounds on a sudden like this?" exclaimed Sir Rupert.

"I am sure I am not aware of your private resources, my good sir," answered Greenwood, coolly. "You must be well aware that I cannot afford to remain without my money in this manner; and since it would appear you do not wish Lord Tremordyn to know that you have not paid the acceptance which he so kindly lent you—"

"Lent me!" ejaculated Sir Rupert, now really alarmed.

"Of course. He could not possibly have owed you the amount."

"Greenwood, what do you mean by this?" cried the baronet. "Upon my honour, one would almost suppose that you had forgotten the real nature of the transaction."

"Possibly I may not recall to mind some of the minor details. One thing is, however, certain: I have in my possession a bill bearing your endorsement and accepted by Lord Tremordyn, for sixteen hundred pounds; and I offer you the most easy terms I can think of for its payment."

"Greenwood, you cannot have forgotten—"

"Forgotten what?"

"Forgotten that the acceptance—"

"Well?"

"Is not Lord Tremordyn's."

"The acceptance not Lord Tremordyn's!" cried Mr. Greenwood, affecting to be quite confounded by this statement.

"Certainly not," answered the baronet. "You yourself suggested to me—"

"I suggested!" cried Greenwood, now pretending indignation. "Sir Rupert Harborough, what are you aiming at? to what point would you arrive?"

"Oh! if I were not in the power of this man!" thought the baronet, actually grinding his teeth with rage; but suppressing his feelings, he said, "My dear Greenwood, pray renew this bill for four months more, and it shall be paid at maturity."

"No, Sir Rupert Harborough," replied the capitalist, who had not failed to notice the emotions of concentrated rage which filled the mind of the baronet. "I am decided: give me six hundred pounds, and I renew for the thousand; otherwise—"

"Otherwise," repeated Sir Rupert mechanically.

"I shall pay the bill into my banker's this afternoon, and it will be presented for payment at Lord Tremordyn's agent's to-morrow morning."

"You would not wish to ruin me, Greenwood!"

"Such a course will not ruin you: Lord Tremordyn will of course honour his acceptance."

"Greenwood, you drive me mad!"

"I am really very sorry to hear it; but if every one who could not meet his bills were driven mad by being asked for payment of them, every third house in the street would become a lunatic-asylum."

"You can spare your raillery, Mr. Greenwood," said the baronet. "Do you wish to have me transported?"

"Certainly not. I want a proper settlement in this respect."

"And how can I settle the bill? Where am I to procure six hundred pounds at a moment's warning?"

"A moment's warning! you have had four clear months."

"But I fancied—I hoped you would renew the bill from time to time until I could pay it. You said as much when you lent me the money upon it."

"I don't recollect."

"You did indeed; and upon the faith of that promise, I—"

"I don't recollect."

"My God! what am I to do?" cried Sir Rupert, despairingly. "I have no means of raising half the sum you require."

"Then why did you take my money seven months ago?"

"Why did I take the money? why did I take it? Because you yourself proposed the transaction. You said, '*Bring me the acceptance of Lord Tremordyn for fifteen hundred pounds, and I will lend you a thousand upon it immediately.*'"

"I don't recollect."

"And you said emphatically and distinctly that *you should not call upon Lord Tremordyn to inquire if it were his acceptance*."

"Of course not. Amongst gentlemen such a proceeding would be unpardonable."

"Oh! Greenwood, you affect ignorance in all this! and yet it was you who put the infernal idea into my head—"

"Sir Rupert Harborough," said the capitalist, rising from his chair; "enough of this! I put no infernal ideas into any one's head. Settle the bill in the way I propose; or it shall take its course."

"But—my God! you will send me to the Old Bailey!" cried the baronet, whose countenance was actually livid with rage and alarm.

"And did you not send Richard Markham thither?" said Greenwood, fixing his piercing dark eyes upon Sir Rupert Harborough in so strange a manner that the unhappy man shrank from that fearful glance.

"But what matters that to you?" cried the baronet. "In one word, will you ruin me? or will you give me time to pay this accursed bill?"

"I have stated my conditions: I will not depart from them," replied Greenwood in a determined manner. "You have plenty of time before you. I will keep the bill back until to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock."

"Very good, sir," said the baronet, scarcely able to repress his rage.

Sir Rupert Harborough then withdrew, a prey to feelings more easily imagined than described.

"Why should I allow this gambler to retain my money without even paying me the interest?" said Greenwood to himself, when he was again alone. "I can keep him in my power as well with a forged bill for a thousand, as for sixteen hundred pounds. As for his wife, the beautiful Cecilia—I am now wearied of that intrigue, which, moreover, becomes too expensive! Lady Cecilia's extravagance is unbounded. I must put an end to that connexion without delay!"

Lafleur entered the room at this moment, and said, "A female, sir, desires to see you upon particular business."

"Is it anybody whom you know?"

Lafleur replied in the negative.

"Never mind! I will see her," said Greenwood; and, unaware who she might be, he seated himself at his writing-table, where he appeared to be profoundly occupied with some deeds that were lying before him.

In a few moments Marian entered the room.

"Well, my good woman, what is the object of your call?" demanded Greenwood.

"I am the bearer of a letter, sir, from Miss Monroe," was the reply.

"From Miss Monroe!" ejaculated Greenwood; and he hastened to peruse the letter which the servant placed in his hand.

Its contents ran thus:—

"You are the father of a boy. The excellent woman who bears this will explain every thing to you. I should not recall myself to your memory—if you have forgotten the mother of your child—did not a sacred duty towards the female whom I have above alluded to, and towards the helpless infant who perhaps will never know a parent's care, compel me thus to address you. The kind woman who will give you this, expended forty pounds—all her little savings—to save me from disgrace. The surgeon to whose care the child is entrusted, must receive a small allowance for its support. If you ever entertained one generous feeling towards me, relieve my mind on these two subjects.

"ELLEN MONROE."

For some minutes Mr. Greenwood appeared to be absorbed in thought.

He then questioned Marian relative to the particulars of Ellen's accouchement; and she detailed to him every particular with which the reader is already acquainted.

"You managed the matter admirably," said Greenwood. "There are two points to which Miss Monroe directs my attention in this note. In the first place, she speaks of your most disinterested services. Accept this as a trifling mark of my gratitude:"—and he placed six Bank-notes for ten pounds each in Marian's hand.

"I do not desire any remuneration, sir," said the kind-hearted woman. "I will take my forty pounds; but the other two notes I must beg to return."

"No—keep them," exclaimed Greenwood.

"I thank you, sir, most sincerely," said the servant firmly; "but I would rather not. I rendered Miss Monroe that service which one female should afford another in such a case; and I cannot think of accepting any recompense."

With these words she laid two of the notes upon the table.

"You are really a most extraordinary woman," cried Greenwood, who was perfectly astonished at the idea of any one in her class of life refusing money. "Will you not permit me to offer you a ring—a watch—or some trinket—"

"No, sir," replied Marian, with severe firmness of tone and manner. "Miss Monroe is so kind—so good—so gentle, I would go to the end of the world to serve her."

"Well—you must have your own way," said Mr. Greenwood. "The next point in Miss Monroe's letter is a provision for her child. What sum do you suppose would content the surgeon and his wife who have taken care of it?"

"They are poor people, sir—struggling against difficulties—and having their way to make in the world—"

"Suppose we say forty pounds a year for the present," interrupted Greenwood.

"Oh! sir—that will be ample!" exclaimed Marian: "and Miss Monroe will be so rejoiced! Ah! sir—what consolation to the poor young lady!"

"What is the address of the surgeon?" demanded Greenwood.

"*Mr. Wentworth, Lower Holloway*," was the reply.

"My servant shall call upon that gentleman this very evening, and carry him the first quarter's payment," continued Greenwood. "You can say to Miss Monroe—but stay: I will write her a few lines."

"Oh! do, sir. Who knows but it may console her?" ejaculated the kind-hearted Marian.

Mr. Greenwood wrote as follows:—

"Your wishes are attended to in every point. The existence of the child need never be known to either Mr. Monroe or Mr. Richard Markham. Keep faithfully *all the secrets* which are treasured in your bosom; and I will never desert the child. I will watch over its welfare from a distance: trust to me. You were wrong to hesitate to apply to me. My purse is at all times at your disposal—so long as those secrets remain undivulged.

"G. M. G."

Marian, prompted by that inherently kind feeling which had influenced her entire conduct towards Ellen, hesitated for a few moments, after receiving this letter, and seemed anxious to speak. She would have pleaded in behalf of the young mother: she would have implored Greenwood to make her his own in the sight of heaven, and acknowledge their child. But her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth;—and she at length retired, unable to give utterance to a single word in favour of poor Ellen.

As soon as she was gone, Greenwood rang for his faithful French valet.

"Lafleur," said he, "you will take these ten pounds, and proceed without delay to the house of Mr. Wentworth, a surgeon residing in Lower Holloway. You will say to him, '*The father of the child which was entrusted to you last night in so mysterious a manner, will allow you forty pounds a year for its support. As it grows older, and the expenses it incurs augment, this allowance will be proportionately increased. But should you endeavour to find out who are the parents of that child, it will instantly be removed to the care of others who may possess less curious dispositions.*'—You will pay him those ten pounds: you will tell him that every three months you will call with a similar sum; and you will see the child. Remember, you will see the child. If it have any peculiar mark about it, notice that mark: at all events, study it well, that you may know it again. You will moreover direct that its Christian name be *Richard*: its surname is immaterial. In a word, you will neither say nor do a whit more nor less than I have told you."

"I understand, sir," answered Lafleur. "Any further commands?"

"No—not at present. Be cautious how you conduct this business. It is delicate."

"You may depend upon me, sir."

And Lafleur retired.

"Thus far it is well," said Greenwood to himself, when he was again alone. "I am relieved of a subject of frequent annoying reflection and suspense. Ellen's shame is unknown to those from whom I was most anxious it should be concealed. It can never transpire now!"

The clock struck six; and Mr. Greenwood repaired to his dressing-room to arrange his toilet for dinner.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE REVELATION.

THAT same evening Mr. Chichester dined with his friend Sir Rupert Harborough, at the dwelling of the latter in Tavistock Square.

Whenever her husband invited this guest, Lady Cecilia invariably made it a rule to accept an invitation elsewhere.

The baronet and his friend were therefore alone together.

"This is awkward—very awkward," said Chichester, when the cloth was removed, and the two gentlemen were occupied with their wine.

"Awkward! I believe you," exclaimed the baronet. "Upon my honour, that Greenwood ought to be well thrashed!"

"He is an insufferable coxcomb," said Chichester.

"A conceited humbug," added the baronet.

"A self-sufficient fool," remarked Chichester.

"A consummate scoundrel," cried Sir Rupert.

"So he is," observed Chichester.

"But all this will not pay my bill," continued the baronet; "and where to obtain six hundred pounds, the deuce take me if I can tell."

"No—nor I either," said Chichester; "unless we get a couple of horses and ride down towards Hounslow upon a venture."

"You never can be serious, Chichester? What! turn highwaymen!"

"I was only joking. But do you really think that Greenwood will press you so hard?"

"He will send the bill to Lord Tremordyn's banker's to-morrow. Oh! I can assure you he was quite high about it, and pretended to forget all the circumstances that had led to the transaction. To every word I said, it was '*I don't recollect*.' May the devil take him!"

"And so he has got you completely in his power?"

"Completely."

"And you would like to have your revenge?"

"Of course I should. But what is the use of talking in this manner? You know very well that I can do him no injury!"

"I am not quite so sure of that," said Chichester.

"What do you mean?" demanded the baronet. "I can see that there is something in your mind."

"I was only thinking. Suppose we accused him of something that he would not like exposed, and could not very well refute—an intrigue with any particular lady, for instance—"

"Ah! if we could—even though it were with my own wife," exclaimed the baronet. "And, by the bye, he is very intimate with Lady Cecilia."

"Of course he is," said Chichester drily. "Have you never noticed that before."

"It never struck me until now," observed the baronet.

"But it has struck me—frequently," added Chichester.

"And when I think of it," continued Sir Rupert Harborough, "he has often been here for an hour or two together; for I have gone out and left him with Lady Cecilia in the drawing-room; and when I have come back, he has been there still."

"Greenwood is not the man to waste his time at a lady's apron-strings for nothing."

"Chichester—you do not mean—"

"Oh! no—I mean nothing more than you choose to surmise."

"And what would you have me surmise?"

"I do not suppose," said Chichester, "that you care very much for Lady Cecilia."

"You are well aware of my feelings with regard to her."

"And out of all the money she has had lately—an affluence that you yourself have noticed more than once—she has never assisted you."

"No—never. And I have often puzzled myself to think whence came those supplies."

"You cannot suppose that either Lord or Lady Tremordyn replenish her purse?"

"Yes—I have thought so."

"Oh! very well; you know best;" and Chichester sipped his wine with an affected indifference which was in itself most eloquently significant.

"My dear fellow," said the baronet, after a pause, "I feel convinced that you have got some plan in your head, or else that you know more than you choose to say. In either case, Lady Cecilia is concerned. I have told you that I care not one fig about her—on my honour! Have the kindness, then, to speak without reserve."

"And then you may be offended," said Chichester.

"How absurd! Speak."

"What if I was to tell you that Lady Cecilia—"

"Well?"

"Is Greenwood's mistress!"

"The proof! the proof!" ejaculated the baronet.

"I myself saw them in each other's arms."

Sir Rupert Harborough's countenance grew deadly pale, and his lips quivered. He now revolted from the mere idea of what he had just before wished to be a fact.

"You remember the day that Greenwood called to acquaint us with his success at Rottenborough in March last?" said Chichester, after a pause. "You and I had been practising with the dice and cards; and we went out together."

"I recollect," exclaimed the baronet; "and you returned for the dice-boxes which you had left behind."

"It was upon that occasion. Greenwood followed me out of the drawing-room, and gave me a hundred pounds to keep the secret."

"True! you produced a hundred pounds immediately afterwards; and you said that Greenwood had lent you the amount. Why did you never tell me of this before?"

"The deuce! Is it a pleasant thing to communicate to a friend, Harborough? Besides, it always struck me that the discovery would one day or another be of some use."

"Of use indeed!" ejaculated the baronet. "And Lady Cecilia is Greenwood's mistress! Ah! that explains the restoration of her diamonds, as well as the improved condition of her finances. The false creature!"

"You must admit, Harborough," said Chichester, "that you have never been over attentive to your wife; and if—"

"Nonsense, my good fellow," interrupted the baronet sharply. "That is no excuse for a woman. A man may do what he chooses; but a woman—a wife—"

"Come, come—no moralizing," said Chichester. "It is all your own fault. Not one woman out of fifty would go wrong, if the husband behaved properly. But now that I have told you the secret, think what use you can make of it."

"I cannot see how the circumstance can serve me, without farther proof," remarked the baronet. "Ah! Lady Cecilia—what duplicity! what deceit!"

"Why not search her drawers—her boxes?" said Chichester. "She is absent; no one can interrupt you; and perhaps you may find a letter—"

"Excellent thought!" cried Sir Rupert; and, seizing a candle, he hurried from the room.

Twenty minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Chichester sate drinking his wine as comfortably as if he had done a good action, instead of revealing so fearful a secret to his friend.

At length Sir Rupert Harborough returned to the dining-room.

He was very pale; and there was something ghastly in his countenance, and sinister in the expression of his eyes.

"Well—any news?" inquired Chichester.

"No proof—not a note, not a letter," answered the baronet. "But I have found something," he added, with an hysterical kind of laugh, "that will answer my purpose for the moment better still."

"What is that?" asked his friend.

"Lady Cecilia's diamonds and other trinkets—presents, most likely, from Greenwood—together with ninety pounds in notes and gold."

"Capital!" cried Chichester. "You can now settle with Greenwood."

"Yes—I will pay him his six hundred pounds, renew for the remainder for three or four months, and then devise some plot to obtain undeniable proof of his amour with Lady Cecilia. But when I think of that woman, Chichester—not that she is any thing to me—still she is my wife—"

"Nonsense! It is fortunate for you that I told you of the affair, or else you would never have thought of using her property for the purpose of raising the sum you require."

"Ah! I will be revenged on that Greenwood!" cried Sir Rupert, in whose mind one idea was uppermost, in spite of his depraved and selfish disposition: "I will have the most signal vengeance upon the seducer of my wife! But remember, Chichester—I care nothing for *her*;—still the outrage—the dishonour—the perfidy! Yes—by God!" he added, dashing his clenched fist upon the table; "I will be avenged!"

"And in the mean time convert the diamonds and jewels into money," said Chichester. "It is only seven o'clock; we have plenty of time for the pawnbroker's."

"Come," cried the baronet, whose manner continued to be excited and irritable; "I am ready."

The two friends emptied their glasses, and took their departure, the baronet having carefully secured about his person the booty he had plundered from his wife. They then bent their steps towards the pawnbroking-establishment of Mr. V——, in the Strand.

What a strange type of all the luxury, dissipation, extravagance, profligacy, misery, ruin, and want, which characterise the various classes of society, is a pawnbroker's shop! It is the emporium whither go the jewels of the aristocrat, the clothes of the mechanic, the ornaments of the actress, and the necessaries of the poor. Genteel profligacy and pining industry seek, at the same place—the one the means for fresh extravagance, the other the wherewith to purchase food to sustain life. Two broad and direct roads branch off from the pawnbroker's shop in different directions; the first leading to the gaming-table, the second to the gin-palace; and then those paths are

carried onwards, past those half-way houses of destruction, and converge to one point, at which they meet at last, and whose name is Ruin.

Two working men have been seen standing at the corner of a street, whispering together: at length one has taken off his coat, gone to the pawnbroker's, come out with the proceeds, and accompanied the other to the nearest gin-shop, where they have remained until all the money raised upon the garment was expended. Again, during the absence from home of the hard-working mechanic, his intemperate wife has collected together their few necessaries, carried them to the pawnbroker's, and spent the few shillings, thus procured, on gin. The thief, when he has picked a pocket of a watch, finds a ready means of disposing of it at the pawnbroker's. Hundreds of working-men pledge their Sunday garments regularly every Monday morning, and redeem them again on Saturday night.

Are pawnbrokers' shops a necessary evil? To some extent they are. They afford assistance to those whom some pressing urgence suddenly overtakes, or who are temporarily out of work. But are not the facilities which they thus present to all classes liable to an abuse more than commensurate with this occasional advantage? Decidedly. They supply a ready means for drink to those who would hesitate before they sold their little property out-and-out; for every one who pawns, under such circumstances, entertains the hope and intention of redeeming the articles again. The enormous interest charged by pawnbrokers crushes and effectually ruins the poor. We will suppose that a mechanic pledges his best clothes every Monday morning, and redeems them every Saturday night for wear on the Sabbath: we will presume that the pawnbroker lends him one pound each time:—they will thus be in pawn 313 days in each year, for which year he will pay 3*s.* 8*d.* interest, and 4*s.* 4*d.* for duplicates—making a total of 8*s.* Thus he pays 8*s.* for the use of his own clothes for 52 days!

If the government were really a paternal one—if it had the welfare of the industrious community at heart, it would take the system of lending money upon deposits under its own supervision, and establish institutions similar to the Mont de Piété in France. Correctly managed, demanding a small interest upon loans, such institutions would become a blessing:—now the shops of pawnbrokers are an evil and a curse!

Sir Rupert Harborough entered the pawnbroker's shop by the front door, while Mr. Chichester awaited him in the Lowther Arcade. The baronet was well known in that establishment; and he accordingly entered into a friendly and familiar chat with one of the young men behind the counter.

"That is a very handsome painting," said Sir Rupert, pointing to one suspended to the wall.

"Yes, sir. It was pledged fifteen months ago for seven pounds, by a young nobleman who had received it along with fifty pounds in cash the same morning by way of discount for a thousand pound bill."

"And what do you expect for it?"

"Eighty guineas," answered the young man coolly. "But here is one much finer than that," continued the pawnbroker's assistant, turning towards another painting. "That expired a few days ago. It was only pledged for thirty guineas."

"And how much have you the conscience to ask for it?"

"One hundred and twenty," whispered the young man. "There is something peculiar connected with that picture. It belonged to an upholsterer who was once immensely rich, but who was ruined by giving credit to the Duke of York."

"To the Duke of York—eh?"

"Oh! yes, sir: we have received in pledge the goods of many, many tradesmen who were once very wealthy, but who have been reduced to absolute beggary—starvation—by his late Royal Highness. We call the pillar in Saint James's Park the Column of Infamy."

"Well, it was too bad not to pay his debts before they built that monument," said the baronet carelessly. "But, come—give me a cool six hundred for these things."

"What! the diamonds again?" exclaimed the assistant.

"Oh! yes—they come and go, like good and bad fortune—'pon my honour!" said Sir Rupert.

"Like the jewels of many others at the West-End," added the assistant; and, having made out the duplicates, he handed Sir Rupert over the sum required.

On the following morning the baronet paid Mr. Greenwood the six hundred pounds, and gave a new bill for a thousand at four months, for which the capitalist was generous enough not to charge him any interest.

There was nothing in the baronet's conduct to create a suspicion in Mr. Greenwood's mind that his intrigue with Lady Cecilia was detected; but when the transaction was completed, Sir Rupert hastened to consult with his friend Chichester upon some plan for obtaining positive evidence of that amour.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE MYSTERIOUS INSTRUCTIONS.

AT the expiration of ten days from the mysterious accouchement of Ellen Monroe, Richard Markham returned home.

It was late at night when he alighted at his dwelling; but, as he had written two days previously to say when his arrival might be expected, Mr. Monroe and Whittingham were sitting up to receive him.

Richard's countenance was mournful; and he wore a black crape round his hat.

"You have lost a kind friend, Richard," said Mr. Monroe. "Your hasty letter acquainted us with the fact of Mr. Armstrong's death; but you gave us no details connected with that event."

"I will now tell you all that has occurred," said Richard. "You need not leave the room, Whittingham: you knew Mr. Armstrong, and will be, no doubt, interested in the particulars of his last moments."

"I knowed him for a staunched and consisting man in his demmycratical opinions," answered Whittingham; "and what's more comportant, he thought well of you, Master Richard."

"He was an excellent man!" observed Markham, wiping away a tear.

"Worth a thousand Ilchesters, and ten thousand wulgarians which calls butlers *tulips*," added Whittingham, dogmatically.

"I will tell you the particulars of his death," continued Richard, after a pause. "You remember that I received a letter from Mr. Armstrong, written in a hurried manner, and desiring me to repair to him in Boulogne, where he was detained by an accident which, he feared, might proved fatal. I posted to Dover, which town I reached at about five in the evening; and I found that no packet would leave for France until the following morning. The condition of my friend, as I judged of it by his note, seemed too serious to allow me to delay: I accordingly hired a vessel, and proceeded without loss of time to Boulogne, where I arrived at eleven that same night, after a tolerably rough passage. I hurried to the hotel at which my friend was staying, and the card of which he had enclosed in his letter. I found him in bed, suffering from a fearful accident caused by the overturning of the chaise in which he had arrived at Boulogne from Paris, on his way to England. No limbs were broken: but he had sustained internal injuries of a most serious nature. A nurse was seated at his bed-side; and his medical attendant visited him every two or three hours. He was delighted to see me—wept—and said frequently, even up to the moment of his decease, 'Richard, this is very—very kind of you.' I sate up with him all that night, in spite of his entreaties that I would retire to rest; and from the first moment that I set my eyes upon him in that room, I felt convinced he would never leave it alive. I need not tell you that I did all I could to solace and render comfortable the man who had selected me, of all his acquaintances, to receive his last breath. I considered myself honoured by that mark of friendship; and I moreover remembered that he had believed in my innocence when I first told him my sad tale within the walls of Newgate. I never left him, save for one hour, from the instant I arrived in Boulogne until that of his death."

"Poor Master Richard," said Whittingham, surveying the young man with affectionate admiration.

"I said that I left him for one hour," continued Markham: "that was the evening before his death. Five days after my arrival, he called me to his bed-side, and said, 'Richard, I feel that my hours are numbered. You heard what my physician observed ere now; and I am not the man to delude myself with vain and futile hope. I repeat—my moments are now numbered. Leave me alone, Richard, for one hour; that I may commune with myself.' This desire was sacred; and I immediately obeyed it. But I remained away only just one hour, and then hastened back to him. He was very faint and languid; and I saw, with much surprise, that he had been writing. I sate down by his bed-side, and took his emaciated hand. He pressed mine, and said in a slow and calm tone,—'Richard, I need not recall to your mind under what circumstances we first met. I heard your tale; I knew that you were innocent. I could read your heart. In an hour I understood all your good qualities. I formed a friendship for you; and in the name of that friendship, listen to the last words of a dying man.' He paused for a few moments, and then continued thus:—'When I am no more, you will take possession of the few effects that I have with me here. In my desk you will find a sum sufficient to pay all the expenses incurred by my illness and to meet the cost of my interment. I desire to be buried in the Protestant cemetery in the neighbourhood of Boulogne: you and the physician will attend me to my grave. The funeral must be of the most humble description. Do not neglect this desire on my part. I have been all my life opposed to pomp and ostentation, and shall scarcely wish any display to mark my death.' He paused again; and I gave him some refreshing beverage. He then proceeded:—'Beneath my pillow, Richard, there is a paper in a sealed envelope. After my death you will open that envelope and read what is written within it. And now I must exact from you a solemn promise—a promise made to a dying man—a promise which I am not ashamed to ask, and which you need not fear to give, especially as it relates eventually to yourself. I require you to pledge yourself most sacredly that you will obey to the very letter the directions which are written within that envelope, and which relate to the papers that the envelope contains.' I readily gave the promise required. He then directed me to take the sealed packet from beneath his pillow, and retain it safely about my person. He shortly after sank into a deep slumber—from which he never awoke. His spirit glided imperceptibly away!"

"Good old man!" exclaimed Whittingham, applying his snow-white handkerchief to his eyes.

"According to the French laws," continued Richard, "interments must take place within forty-eight hours after death. The funeral of Thomas Armstrong was humble and unostentatious as he desired. The physician and myself alone followed him to the tomb. I then inspected his papers; but found no will—no instructions how his property was to be disposed of; and yet I knew that he was possessed of ample means. Having liquidated his debts with a portion of the money I found in his desk, and which amounted to about a hundred pounds, I gave the remainder to an English charity at Boulogne. And now you are no doubt anxious to know the contents of that packet

so mysteriously delivered to me. When I broke the seal of the envelope, I found a letter addressed thus:—'*To my dear friend Richard Markham*.' This letter was sealed. I then examined the envelope. You shall yourselves see what was written within it."

Markham took a paper from his pocket, and handed it to Monroe, who read its contents aloud as follows:—

"Richard, remember your solemn promise to a dying man; for when I write this, I know you will not refuse to give me that sacred pledge which I shall ask of you.

"When you are destitute of all resources—when adversity or a too generous heart shall have deprived you of all means of subsistence—and when your own exertions fail to supply your wants, open the enclosed letter.

"But should no circumstances of any kind deprive you of the little property which you now possess,—and should you not be plunged into a state of need from which your own talents or exertions cannot relieve you,—then shall you open this letter upon the morning of the 10th, of July, 1843, on which day you have told me that you are to meet your brother.

"These directions I charge you to observe faithfully and solemnly.

"*THOMAS ARMSTRONG.*"

"How very extraordinary!" ejaculated Monroe. "Nevertheless, I have a presentiment that these mysterious instructions intend some eventual good to you, Richard."

"It's a fortin! a fortin! depend upon it," said the old butler.

"Upon that head it is useless to speculate," observed Richard. "I shall obey to the very letter the directions of my late friend, be their tendency what it may. And now that I have told you all that concerns myself, allow me to ask how fares it with you here. Does Ellen's health improve?"

"For the last ten days she has been confined to her bed," answered Monroe, tears starting to his eyes.

"Confined to her bed!" cried Markham. "I hope you have had proper medical advice?"

"I wished to call in the aid of a physician," said Monroe, "but Ellen would not permit me. She declared that she should soon be better; she assured me that her illness was produced only by the privations and mental tortures which she had undergone, poor creature! previous to our taking up our abode in your hospitable dwelling; and then Marian was so kind and attentive, and echoed every thing which Ellen advanced, so readily, that I suffered myself to be over-persuaded."

"You did wrong—you did wrong, Mr. Monroe," exclaimed Markham. "Your daughter should have had medical advice; and she shall have it to-morrow."

"She appears to be mending in health, though not in spirits," observed Monroe. "But my dear young friend, you shall have your own way; and I thank you sincerely for the interest you show in behalf of one who is dear—very dear to me."

Richard pressed the hand of the old man, and retired to his chamber, to seek that repose of which he stood so much in need after his journey. But ere he sought his couch, he sate down and wrote the following note to Count Alteroni, that it might be despatched to Richmond without delay in the morning:—

"Mr. Markham regrets to be the means of communicating news of an afflicting nature to Count Alteroni; nor should he intrude himself again upon Count Alteroni's notice, did he not feel himself urged by a solemn duty to do so in the present instance. Count Alteroni's old and esteemed friend, Thomas Armstrong, is no more. He departed this life four days ago, at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Mr. Markham had the melancholy honour of closing the eyes of a good man and true patriot, and of following his remains to the tomb."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE MEDICAL MAN.

In the morning, when Ellen awoke at about eight o'clock, the first news she heard from Marian's lips was the return of Richard Markham.

The first sentiment which this announcement excited in the mind of the young lady, was one of extreme joy and thankfulness that her accouchement should have occurred so prematurely, and thus have happened during his absence; but this feeling was succeeded by one of vague alarm and undefined dread, lest by some means or other her secret should transpire.

This fear she expressed to Marian.

"No, Miss—that is impossible," said the faithful attendant. "The child is provided for; and the surgeon is totally ignorant of the house to which he was brought the night the poor infant was born. How could Mr. Markham discover your secret?"

"It is perhaps my conscience, Marian, that alarms me," returned Ellen; "but I confess that I tremble. Do you think that Mr. Wentworth is to be relied upon, even if he should suspect or should ever discover—"

"Mr. Greenwood has purchased his silence, Miss. Do not be down-hearted. I declare you are quite white in the face—and you seem to tremble so, the bed shakes. Pray—dear Miss—don't give way to these idle alarms!"

"I shall be more composed presently, Marian."

"And I will just step down stairs and get up your breakfast."

When Ellen was alone, she buried her face in the pillow and wept bitterly; and from time to time her voice, almost choked with sobs, gave utterance to the words—"My child! my child!"

Oh! how happy would she have been, could she have proclaimed herself a mother without shame, and have spoken of her child to her father and her friend without a blush.

In a few minutes Marian returned to the room; and Ellen hastened to assume an air of composure. She wiped away her tears, and sate up in the bed, supported by pillows—for she was yet very weak and sickly—to partake of some refreshment.

"Mr. Markham is up and has already gone out," said Marian, as she attended upon her lovely young patient. "He left word with Whittingham to tell me that he should come up, and see you on his return in half an hour."

"I would that this first interview were over, Marian," exclaimed Ellen.

"So you said, Miss, in the morning after your accouchement, when your father was coming up to see you; and yet all passed off well enough."

"Yes—but I felt that I blushed, and then grew deadly pale again, at least ten times in a minute," observed Ellen.

Marian said all she could to re-assure the young mother; and when the invalid had partaken of some tea, the kind-hearted servant left her, in order to attend to her own domestic duties down stairs.

Ellen than fell into a mournful reverie, during which she reviewed all the events of the last two years and a half of her life. She pondered upon the hideous poverty in which she and her father had been plunged in the court leading out of Golden Lane; she retrospected upon the strange services she had rendered the statuary, the artist, the sculptor, and the photographer; she thought of the old hag who had induced her to enter upon that career;—and then she fixed her thoughts upon Greenwood and her child.

She was thus mentally occupied when she heard footsteps ascending the staircase; and immediately afterwards some one knocked at her door.

In a faint voice she said, "Come in."

The door opened, and Richard Markham entered the apartment; but, as he crossed the threshold, he turned and said to some one who remained upon the landing, "Have the kindness to wait here one moment."

He then advanced towards the bed, and took the young lady's thin white hand.

"Ellen," he exclaimed, "you have been very ill."

"Yes—very ill, Richard," returned the invalid, casting down her eyes; "but I am better—oh! much, very much better now; and, in a day or two, shall be quite well."

"And yet you are very pale, and sadly altered," said Markham.

"I can assure you that I am recovering fast. Indeed, I should have risen to-day; but Marian persuaded me to keep my bed a short time longer."

"And you have had no medical advice, Ellen. I told your father that he had done wrong—"

"Oh! no, Richard," interrupted Ellen eagerly; "he was anxious to call in the aid of a physician; but I was not so ill as he thought."

"Not ill!" ejaculated Markham. "You must have been very—very ill."

"But Marian was so kind to me."

"No doubt! Nevertheless I have no confidence in the nostrums and prescriptions of old servants and nurses; and human existence is too serious a thing to be tampered with."

"I assure you, Richard, that Marian has treated me most judiciously; and I am now very nearly quite well."

"Ah! Ellen," cried Markham, "I can read your heart!"

"You, Richard!" exclaimed the young lady, with a cold shudder that seemed to terminate in a death-chill at the heart.

"Yes," continued Markham, his voice assuming a tone of melancholy interest; "I can well appreciate your motives in combating the desire of your father to procure medical aid. You were afraid of burdening me with an expense which you feared my restricted means would not permit me to afford;—Oh! I understand your good feeling! But this was wrong, Ellen; for I did not invite you to my house to deny to either yourself or father the common attentions which I would bestow upon a stranger who fell sick under my roof. No—thank God! I have yet enough left to meet casualties like these."

"Ah! Richard, how kind—how generous you are," said Ellen; "but I am now really much better;—and to-morrow—to-morrow I shall be quite well."

"No—Ellen, you are very far from well," returned Markham; "but you shall be well soon. I have been myself this morning to procure you proper advice."

"Advice?" repeated Ellen, mechanically.

"Yes: there is a medical gentleman now waiting to see you."

With these words Richard hastened to the door, and said, "Miss Monroe, sir, is now ready to receive you. I will leave you with her."

The medical man then entered the chamber; and Markham immediately retired.

The votary of Æsculapius was a man of apparently five-and-twenty years of age—pale, but good-looking, with light hair, and a somewhat melancholy expression of countenance. He was attired in deep black. His manners were soft and pleasing; but his voice was mournful; and his utterance slow, precise, and solemn.

Approaching the couch, he took the hand of the invalid, and, placing his fingers upon the pulse, said, "How long have you been ill, Miss?"

"Oh! sir—I am not ill now—I am nearly well—I shall rise presently—the fresh air will do me good," exclaimed Ellen, speaking with a rapidity, and almost an incoherence, which somewhat surprised the medical man.

"No, Miss," he said calmly, after a pause, "you cannot leave your bed yet: you are in a state of fever. How long have you been confined to your couch?"

"How long? Oh! only a few days—but, I repeat, I am better now."

"How many days, Miss?" asked the medical man.

"Ten or twelve, sir; and, therefore, you see that I have kept my bed long enough."

"What do you feel?" demanded the surgeon, seating himself by the side of the invalid with the air of a man who is determined to obtain answers to his questions.

"I did feel unwell a few days ago, sir," said Ellen; "but now—oh! now I am quite recovered."

"Perhaps, miss, you will allow me to be the judge of that. You are very feverish—your pulse is rapid. Have you been taking any medicine?"

"No—that is, a little cooling medicine which the servant who attends upon me purchased. But why all these questions, since I shall soon be well?"

"Pardon me, Miss: you must have the kindness to answer all my queries. If, however, you would prefer any other medical adviser, I will at once acquaint Mr. Markham with your desire, and will relieve you of my presence."

"No, sir—as well you as another," cried Ellen, scarcely knowing what she said, and shrinking beneath the glance of mingled curiosity and surprise which the surgeon cast upon her.

"During your illness were you at all delirious?" inquired the medical adviser.

"Oh! no—I have not been so ill as you are led to suppose. All I require is repose—rest—tranquillity——"

"And professional aid," added the surgeon. "Now, I beg of you, Miss Monroe, to tell me without reserve what you feel. How did your illness commence?"

"Ah! sir, I scarcely know," replied Ellen. "I have experienced great mental affliction; and that operated upon my constitution, I suppose."

"And you say that you have been confined to your bed nearly a fortnight?"

"Oh! no—not so long as that," said Ellen fearful of confirming the surgeon's impression that she had been very ill, and consequently stood greatly in need of professional assistance: "not so long as that! Ten days exactly."

"Ten days!" repeated the medical man, as if struck by the coincidence of this statement with something which at that moment occurred to his memory; then glancing rapidly round the room, he started from his chair, and said, "Ten days ago, Miss Monroe! And at what hour were you taken ill?"

"At what hour?" repeated the unhappy young lady, who trembled for her secret.

"Yes—at what hour?" demanded the surgeon, the slow solemnity of his tone changing to a strange rapidity of utterance: "was it not a little before midnight?"

"Sir—what do you mean? why do you question me thus?"

"On that night," continued the surgeon, gazing fixedly upon Ellen's countenance, "a man with his eyes blind-folded—"

"His eyes blindfolded?" repeated Ellen mechanically, while a fearful shudder passed through her frame.

"Led by a servant wearing a black veil—"

"A black veil?"

"Entered this room—"

"Ah! my God—spare me!"

"And delivered a lady of a male child."

"How do you know it, sir? who told you?"

"That man was myself!" cried the surgeon emphatically.

"Oh! kill me—kill me!" exclaimed Ellen; and covering her face with her hands, she burst into an agony of tears and heart-wrung sobs.

"Yes," continued the surgeon, pacing the room, and glancing rapidly on all sides: "there is the chest of drawers against which I dashed my foot—here stood the bed—here the table—I sate down in this chair—Oh! now I remember all!"

And for some moments he walked up and down the room in profound silence.

Suddenly Ellen started up to a sitting posture in the bed, and exclaimed, "My child, sir? Tell me—have you taken care of my child?"

"Yes—Miss—Madam," replied Mr. Wentworth; "the little boy thrives well, although deprived of his natural nourishment."

"Thank you, sir—thank you at least for that assurance," said Ellen. "Oh! sir—you cannot understand how deeply a mother feels to be separated from her child!"

"Poor girl," said the surgeon, in a compassionate tone; "you have then suffered very much?"

"God alone knows what I have endured for months past, mentally and bodily!" cried Ellen, clasping her hands together. "And now you know all, sir—will you betray me? say, sir—will you betray me?"

Mr. Wentworth appeared to reflect deeply for some moments.

Ellen awaited his reply in a state of the most agonising suspense.

"Miss Monroe," at length said Mr. Wentworth, speaking in his usual solemn and grave tone, "you know your own affairs better than I; but would it not be well to confide in those friends by whom you are surrounded?"

"I would die first—die by my own hand!" answered Ellen emphatically. "If you tell me that you will betray me—if you leave this room to communicate my secret to Mr. Markham, who brought you hither, or to my father—I will not hesitate a moment—I will throw myself from the window—"

"Calm yourself, Miss Monroe. Your secret is safe in my hands."

"Oh! thank you, sir—a thousand times I thank you," exclaimed Ellen. "There are circumstances which render it necessary that this secret should not transpire—circumstances, not altogether connected with my own shame, which I cannot, dare not reveal to you."

"Enough, Miss Monroe—I do not seek to penetrate into those mysteries. Your child is with me—I will be a father to him!"

"And heaven will bless you!" said Ellen pressing the surgeon's hand with the warmth of the most fervent gratitude.

"In time you will be able to call at my house," observed Mr. Wentworth; "and you can see your son—you can watch his growth—mark his progress—"

"How kind you are! Oh! now I am rejoiced that you know all!"

"And no one will ever suspect the real motive of your visits," continued the surgeon. "Mrs. Wentworth shall call upon you in a few days; and thus an acquaintance may be commenced. With reference to my visit of this morning, I shall inform Mr. Markham that you will be convalescent in a few days."

Ellen once more expressed her sincere and heartfelt thanks to the surgeon, who shortly took his leave of her, after strictly recommending her to take the medicaments which he should send in the course of the day.

And now the recovery of the young invalid progressed rapidly; and her own mind, relieved of many sources of anxiety and alarm, aided nature in conducting her to convalescence; for she longed to behold and caress her child!

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE BLACK CHAMBER AGAIN.

A FEW days after the incidents just narrated, the following letters were opened in the Black Chamber of the General Post-Office. The first was from the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Castelcicala to the representative of that state at the British court:—

"*Montoni, Castelcicala.*

"The undersigned is desired by his lordship the Marquis of Gerrano, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to inform your excellency that the information you forwarded relative to the Englishwoman Eliza Sydney, has failed to produce the desired effect. Your excellency stated that Mrs. Arlington, the correspondent of the said Eliza Sydney, was the mistress of the Earl of Warrington; and that Eliza Sydney herself had been confined for two years in a criminal prison in England. Your excellency moreover forwarded the English newspapers of the time, containing a full and detailed report of her crime and trial. These statements have failed to produce any effect in a certain quarter, in consequence of the infatuation of a high personage in respect to this Eliza Sydney, and the apparent frankness (as the Marquis of Gerrano has learnt) with which she avowed the entire history of her past life to the high personage alluded to. It is now of the greatest consequence that your excellency should ascertain whether Eliza Sydney's conduct has ever been tainted with incontinence; whether, in a word, she has not indulged in immoral and vicious courses. The result of your excellency's inquiries must be forwarded by courier without delay; as you will perceive, by the inclosed copy of a ducal ordinance issued this morning, that the infatuation above alluded to grows to a very dangerous point.

"The undersigned avails himself of this opportunity to state that the Marquis of Gerrano is greatly afflicted at the perverse and obstinate conduct of the Prince Alberto, in steadily refusing the offers of a pension for life made by the government of his reigning Highness through your excellency. The Marquis of Gerrano desires your Excellency to redouble your assiduity in inducing the prince to accept the terms proposed, for which purpose a farther delay of three months will be granted; and should his reply then continue unfavourable, the government of his Highness will adopt measures to ensure the succession to the ducal throne of Castelcicala to a Neapolitan Prince.

"The undersigned renews his expressions of perfect consideration toward your excellency.

"BARON RUPERTO,
"Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

"*July 13, 1839.*"

The following is a copy of the ducal ordinance to which reference was made in the above letter:—

"ANGELO III., BY THE GRACE OF GOD, GRAND DUKE OF CASTELCICALA,

"To all present and to come, Greeting:

"We have ordered and do order that which follows:—

"I. The style and title of Marchioness of Ziani are conferred upon the Signora Eliza Sydney.

"II. A pension of one thousand ducats annually shall be paid to the Marchioness of Ziani from the public treasury.

"III. Our Minister Secretary of State for the Department of the Interior will execute the first article of this ordinance; and our Minister Secretary of State for the Department of Finance will execute the second article.

"*By the Grand Duke*, ANGELO III.

"MARQUIS OF VINCENZA,
"Minister of the Interior.

"COUNT OF MARCOTTI,
"Minister of Finance.

"*July 13, 1839.*"

The next letter, read in the Black Chamber upon this occasion, ran as follows:—

"*Montoni, Castelcicala.*

"I received your charming letters, my dearest Diana, and return you my most sincere thanks for the kind expressions of love and friendship which they contain, and for the advice which you proffer me. You moreover inform me that you have shown my letters of March, April, and May, to the Earl of Warrington; and that his lordship approves of the cautious manner in which I have acted, and recommends me to accept the honourable offer of marriage made to me by his Highness Angelo III. I assured you that his highness never once insulted me by hinting at the possibility of a connexion upon any other terms than those of marriage; and when he proposed a morganatic union, it was merely in accordance with the practice of many European sovereigns. I however expressed myself firmly to his serene highness upon this head, stating that, although a morganatic marriage was perfectly valid so far as the religious ceremonies went, still it was not strictly legal, and would not please those who wished me well in England.

"In my last letter I informed you that some one had represented to the Grand Duke my misfortunes in England. Happily this announcement failed to produce any change in his conduct or views with regard to me, as I had previously made him acquainted with all those particulars, of my own accord.

"In a word, my dearest Diana, his Serene Highness has offered me his hand,—offered to raise me to a seat by his side on the ducal throne,—offered to make me his bride in sight of the world. Could I refuse? or why should I? You ask me if I can love his Serene Highness? Ah! how can I help revering one who shows such love for me? And then, human nature has its weak points; and rank, honour, wealth, and distinction cannot fail to attract even one naturally so retiring as myself. Oh! how pleasant will it be to possess riches and influence for the mere purpose of doing good!

"Well, then—all is decided: I am to be Grand Duchess of Castelcicala. The marriage is to take place in six weeks from the present date. The daughters of General Grachia are to be my bridesmaids. As a preliminary step towards this high honour, the Grand Duke has conferred upon me a title and a pension. To the world I am now the Marchioness of Ziani: to you, Diana, I am still, and always shall be—Eliza Sydney.

"I was surprised to learn from you that the villain Montague Greenwood has succeeded in obtaining a seat in the English Parliament. Ever since I have had power and wealth in the prospective, I have meditated upon the best means of protecting others from that villany which he designed against me, but which providence so signally frustrated. At length I thought of a plan, and despatched a trusty person to England a few days ago to execute it. This person has instructions from me to call upon you on his arrival in England, and communicate to you my scheme. He is also the bearer of a trifling token of my sincere friendship and gratitude towards you, dear Diana, and which little token I hope you will accept for my sake.

"I need scarcely say that you will oblige me by tendering my best thanks to the Earl of Warrington for the kind advice he sent me through you, and renew to him the expression of my eternal gratitude for all he has done for me.

"You shall hear again shortly from your devoted and attached

"ELIZA SYDNEY.

"*July 13, 1839.*"

The third letter read upon this occasion, was addressed to Count Alteroni, Richmond, and ran in the following manner:—

"*Montoni, Castelcicala*,
"*July 13, 1839.*

"Things, my lord, are growing towards a crisis in this country. No. 29 is literally infatuated with No. 1. He has this morning created her a marchioness: and in a month or six weeks he will, it is said, espouse her. There is no possibility of preventing this, No. 29 being quite despotic; and now his foolish ministers see their mistake in having maintained him in his absolutism, and refused the country a constitution."

"Number 29, you will understand," interrupted the Examiner, "evidently means the Grand Duke; and No. 1 represents Eliza Sidney. Proceed."

The clerk who read the letter continued as follows:—

"The ministers know not what to do. They are at their wits' end. I know for a fact that they obtained from England certain information relative to No. 1, which proved that she had been in a criminal gaol; but No. 29 made no account of it. No. 1 is very beautiful; fascinating in manners; somewhat shy and reserved; and yet amiable. She is also accomplished. When she first came to Montoni she spoke the Italian language imperfectly: she now speaks it fluently;—and this knowledge she has acquired in a few months. There can be no doubt that she will exercise an immense influence over No. 29, if she choose to make use of it. And who knows what a woman, suddenly rising from private life to the first ducal throne in the world, may do? She does not, however, seem to be ambitious. Nevertheless, something ought to be done. If this marriage take place, you are well aware that issue may follow, for No. 1 is young; and in that case * * * * I really think that if your lordship were to land suddenly upon he Castelcicalan coast, without delay, this union might be prevented. I hinted to your lordship in my last letter the immense ascendancy gained by No. 1 over No. 29: your lordship's reply astonished me. Your lordship states that if No. 29 choose to marry according to his fancy, no human power has a right to control him. With due deference, is not this carrying liberality of opinion a little too far? Your lordship expresses a determination to trust to the issue of events, and do nothing that may stand the chance of plunging the country into a civil war. These self-denying sentiments are no doubt highly patriotic and noble;—but is it in human nature to resign without a struggle * * * * In any case I am your lordship's faithful servant, and am anxious only to execute your lordship's wishes. I therefore await your lordship's instructions.

"NUMBER 17."

"You have taken copies of these letters?" said the Examiner.

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk thus addressed.

"Then let them be immediately conveyed to the office of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, as their contents are highly important."

"Yes, sir."

And this order was forthwith obeyed.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE SECOND EXAMINATION.—COUNT ALTERONI.

FORTY-two days after the appearance of Mr. Tomlinson's name in the *Gazette*, among the category of Bankrupts, the second examination of this gentleman took place at the Bankruptcy Court in Basinghall Street.

In an arm-chair, behind a desk raised upon a species of dais, sate the commissioner, embellished with a wig and gown. Close under the desk was placed the registrar, also with wig and gown; and two or three barristers, who were retained in the case, were similarly adorned. In a sort of pew on the right of the commissioner sate the official assignee, with a pile of books and papers before him. About two hundred persons thronged the room—most of whom, by their sullen and sinister looks, might be easily recognised as the creditors of the bankrupt. At a distance from the box in which witnesses were placed during examination, stood Count Alteroni, with folded arms and severe countenance.

A few moments before eleven o'clock a bustle was heard near the door; and a whisper of "Here's the trade assignee," ran through the crowd.

Mr. Greenwood entered the court with a patronising smile upon his countenance, and an easy kind of gait, as if he were by no means dissatisfied with himself. He was dressed in the most elegant manner; and his left hand played negligently, as usual, with the costly gold chain that festooned over his waistcoat.

As he passed through the crowd of his friend's creditors, many of whom were known to him, he addressed a few words in an off-hand and patronising manner to those whom he recognised at the moment.

"Fine day, Mr. Styles. How are Mrs. Styles and those dear children?" (Mr. Styles was an old batchelor.)—"Ah! Mr. Milksop, how are you? quite delighted to see you! Why, upon my word, you are getting quite stout." (Poor Mr. Milksop was as thin as a lath.) "But every thing prospers with you, I suppose!—Well, Mr. Chivers, how do *you* do? Any thing new on the Stock-Exchange? I believe you don't suffer much by this business of Tomlinson's, do you?"

"Only three thousand—that's all!" returned Mr. Chivers, with a smile which would have turned new milk sour.

"Oh! a mere song!" exclaimed Greenwood, tossing up his head. "Well, Vokes, are you here? you don't mean to say that you're wasting your time in this manner, eh?—Ah! Tullett, my good friend—delighted to see you. Why, how well you do look, to be sure!" (Mr. Tullett was in a rapid decline; and he "grinned horribly a ghastly smile" at this salutation.)

In this manner did Mr. Greenwood work his way through the crowd, until he reached the desk of the official assignee, by the side of whom he took a seat.

"Where's the bankrupt?" exclaimed the clerk of the court in a loud and imperious tone of voice, while Mr. Greenwood bestowed one of his patronising smiles upon the Commissioner.

"Here," replied Tomlinson; and he stood forward close by the witness-box.

He was pale and altered; and the marks of care and anxiety were visible upon his countenance. The glance he cast around him, as he took his stand in the presence of the Commissioner, was hurried and fearful:—he almost dreaded that the face of Michael Martin would meet his eyes as he thus hastily scanned the crowd by whom he was surrounded. But his alarm was without foundation: the old cashier was not there.

The examination of the bankrupt then commenced.

In answer to the questions put to him, he stated that had he delivered in to the assignees as full and complete a statement of his affairs as the loss of his books (which had been abstracted by the cashier at the time of the robbery) would permit.

Mr. Greenwood observed that the accounts were highly satisfactory, and would doubtless please every creditor present. It was, however, unfortunate that the estate would not pay a single farthing in the pound.

"Very unfortunate indeed," growled a creditor.

"I would much rather have heard that there was a dividend, than that the accounts are so very satisfactory," murmured another.

"Mr. Tomlinson's creditors cannot complain of him, your Honour," said Mr. Greenwood to the Commissioner: "on the contrary, they have every reason to be perfectly satisfied with him. He has given up every thing—"

"Why, there was nothing left to give up!" ejaculated Mr. Vokes.

"Nothing left to give up!" cried Mr. Greenwood, casting a stern glance upon the unfortunate creditor; "permit me, sir, as the trade-assignee duly chosen at the last meeting—permit me, sir, to inform you that there were the desks, counters, stools, and various fixtures of the bank—all of which Mr. Tomlinson surrendered in the most honourable and straightforward manner, and which have realized a hundred and eighty-one pounds, seventeen shillings, and sixpence, for the benefit of the estate."

"Well—and what has become of that sum?" demanded Mr. Vokes.

"Consumed by the expenses of the *fiat*," answered Mr. Greenwood coolly. "But, as I was observing, your Honour, when I was interrupted—interrupted in a most indecent manner—the position of Mr. Tomlinson is a most honourable one—"

"Perhaps it is even enviable," said the consumptive creditor, drily.

"And I for one," added Mr. Greenwood, "shall certainly sign his certificate."

"Have no tidings been heard of the cashier who absconded?" inquired the Commissioner.

"None, sir," answered the official assignee and Mr. Greenwood simultaneously.

"What has become of the bankrupt's furniture at his private residence?" demanded a creditor.

"His landlord issued a distress for a year's rent the moment the bank stopped," answered Greenwood. "The amount due to this most hard-hearted and unfeeling landlord is a hundred and twenty pounds, and the furniture would not fetch more at an auction. I therefore, with the full concurrence of the official assignee, allowed that very harsh man to keep the goods."

A barrister, who had been retained for one of the creditors, then proceeded to examine Mr. Tomlinson.

"You allege that about ninety-four thousand pounds were abstracted from the bank by the fugitive cashier?"

"I do—or as nearly as I can guess."

"And yet, by this balance-sheet, I perceive that your liabilities are two hundred thousand pounds. Were you not insolvent when the robbery was perpetrated?"

"It would appear so, certainly."

"Then how do you account for that immense deficiency?"

"I can account for it in no other manner than by presuming that my cashier had carried on a systematic mode of plunder for some years past; but as I placed implicit reliance on him, I was never led to an investigation of my actual position."

"Do you mean to say that your cashier embezzled many thousand pounds every year?"

"I am afraid that such was the fact."

The barrister asked no farther questions.

Another opposing counsel interrogated the bankrupt relative to his affairs; but Tomlinson's replies were given in a manner which afforded no scope for suspicion.

Ah! none divined how much it cost that unhappy man thus to heap shame and infamy upon the head of a faithful old clerk, who had never wronged him of a shilling!

The case terminated by the declaration of the commissioner that the bankrupt had passed his second examination.

Tomlinson was glad to escape from the frightful ordeal to which his feelings had been subjected for two mortal hours; and, while he hurried home to conceal his emotions from every eye, and meditate upon his condition in private, Mr. Greenwood busied himself in obtaining signatures for his certificate. This was an easy matter to a man of the financier's powers of persuasion; and that very afternoon the names of four-fifths of the bankrupt's creditors were attached to the parchment which was to relieve him of all past embarrassments.

When Greenwood took the certificate to Tomlinson in the evening, he said, "My dear fellow, you will soon be a new man. In one-and-twenty days this document will have passed the Lord Chancellor and the Court of Review, and be duly registered in Basinghall Street. I will then lend you a thousand pounds, *at only twenty per cent.*, to start you as a stock-broker. You see how well I have managed your business. You have passed through the Court—and you have kept your furniture."

"Which I would have given up to my creditors, had you permitted me," said Tomlinson sorrowfully.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! Never give away what you can keep by a little manœuvring. Your landlord can now withdraw his friendly seizure, and all will be well."

"Nothing will render me happy until I find out that poor old man who has so nobly, so generously sacrificed himself for me," observed Tomlinson in a tone of deep dejection. "What can have become of him?"

"Oh! do not bother yourself about him," cried Greenwood impatiently. "He will turn up one of these days; and then you can remunerate him handsomely."

"Ah! that would indeed be a moment of supreme happiness for me!" ejaculated Tomlinson.

"Yes," continued Greenwood, musing: "a five-pound note will recompense the old fellow well for his conduct."

"A five-pound note!" repeated Tomlinson. "Can you be in earnest, Greenwood?"

"Well, if you think it is too much, give him a couple of sovereigns," said Greenwood, coolly. "But I must take leave of you now: I am compelled to devote a couple of hours this evening to the interests of that free and enlightened body whom I have the honour to represent in parliament. So, adieu, Tomlinson; and when your certificate is registered, come to me."

Mr. Greenwood then took his departure from the bankrupt's abode.

"The heartless villain!" cried Tomlinson, when the door had closed behind the financier; then, after a long pause, he added, "and yet his ingenuity has saved me from eternal degradation and shame!"

In the mean time Count Alteroni returned to his dwelling at Richmond. He reached home at about five o'clock in the evening, and found his wife and daughter anxiously awaiting his arrival. The moment he entered the drawing-room, the ladies cast a timid and yet inquiring glance towards him; and their hearts sank within them when their eyes caught sight of his severe and sombre expression of countenance.

"My dear wife—my beloved daughter," he said, advancing towards them, and taking the hand of each in his own, "my worst fears are confirmed. The bank will not pay one sixpence of dividend: Greenwood has contrived to get his fellow-conspirator clear of the tribunal; and the creditors have not a hope left. It was with the greatest difficulty that I could so far master my feelings as to avoid an interference in those most iniquitous proceedings. But my position—my rank forbade me from attempting aught to expose those villains. And now, my dear wife—now, my charming Isabella—prepare yourselves to hear the worst. We are ruined!"

"Ruined!" exclaimed both the countess and her daughter at the same moment.

"Oh! no," added Isabella: "we have many friends, my dear father."

"To whom I will not apply," said the count, proudly. "No—we must wrestle with our evil fortunes, and trust to the advent of better times. At present every thing seems to conspire to crush us; and should that contemplated marriage take place in Castelcicala——"

"My dearest husband," interrupted the countess, "do not aggravate present griefs by the apprehension of that which as yet only menace us. It is scarcely possible that the Grand Duke will perpetrate such a folly."

"And that title of Marchioness of Ziani—and that pension,—do they not speak volumes?" cried the count bitterly. "Oh! there are moments when I feel inclined to listen to the representations of those faithful friends in my own country with whom I correspond, and who are ever counselling me to——"

"Ah! my dearest father," exclaimed Isabella, bursting into tears; "would you endanger that life which is so precious to my mother and myself? would you plunge your native land in the horrors of a civil war? Oh! let us dare all our present ills with firmness and resolution; and if there be a guardian Providence—as I devoutly believe—he will not allow us to be persecuted for ever!"

"Noble girl!" cried the count; "you teach me my duty;"—and he embraced his lovely daughter with the utmost warmth and tenderness.

"Yes," said the countess, fondly pressing her husband's hand, "we are crushed only for a time. Our course is now clear:—we must give up our present establishment; and—as we have, thank God! no debts——"

"Ah! it is that which cuts me to the very soul!" interrupted the count. "You are not yet acquainted with the extent of our misfortunes. A brave fellow countryman of mine, who supported me in all the plans which I endeavoured to carry out for the welfare of the Castelcicalans, and who was driven into exile on my account, was imprisoned in London a few months ago for a considerable sum of money. I could not leave him to perish in a gaol. I became answerable for him—and the creditor is now pressing me for the payment of the debt."

"And what is the amount of this liability?" inquired the countess, hastily.

"Eighteen hundred pounds," was the reply.

"Do not suffer that to annoy you, my dearest father," exclaimed Isabella. "My jewellery and superfluous wardrobe will produce ____"

"Alas! my dearest child," interrupted the count, "all that we possess would not realize any thing like that sum. But, happen what will, our first step must be to give up this furnished mansion, and retire to a more humble dwelling. That will not cost us many pangs. We shall still be together; and our love for each other constitutes our greatest happiness."

"Yes, my dearest husband," said the countess; "even a prison should not separate us."

"Where my beloved father is—where my parents are—there am I happy," murmured Isabella, the pearly tears trickling down her cheeks.

Oh! in that hour of his sorrow, how sweet—how sweet upon the ears of that noble Italian sounded the words, "husband" and "father," which, coupled with tender syllables of consolation, came from the lips of the two affectionate beings who clung to him so fondly. The lovely countenance of his daughter—so beautiful, that it seemed rather to belong to the ethereal inhabitants of heaven than to a mortal denizen of earth—was upturned to him; and her large black eyes, shining through her tears, beamed with an ineffable expression of tenderness and filial love.

Charming, charming Isabella—how ravishing, how enchanting wast thou at that moment when thou didst offer sweet consolation to thy father! The roses dyed thy cheeks beneath the delicate tinge of transparent bistre which proclaimed thee a daughter of the sunny south;—thy moist red lips apart, disclosed thy teeth white as the orient pearl;—thy young bosom heaved beneath the gauze which veiled it;—purity sat upon thy lofty brow, like a diadem which innocence confers upon its elect! Very beautiful wast thou, Isabella—charming exotic flower from the sweet Italian clime!

"Yes, my beloved wife—my darling daughter," said the count; "we are ruined by my mad confidence in that villain Greenwood. You know that there is one means by which I could obtain wealth and release us from this cruel embarrassment. But never would either of you wish to see me sell my claims and resign my patriotism for gold! No—dearest partakers of my sad destinies, that may not be! I shall ever reject the offers of my persecutors with scorn; and until fortune may choose to smile upon us, we must learn to support her frowns with resignation."

"That same Almighty power which afflicts and chastises, can also restore gladness, and multiply blessings," said Isabella, solemnly.

A servant now entered the room to announce that dinner was served in another apartment.

Assuming a cheerful air, the count led his wife and daughter to the dining-room, and partook of the repast with a forced appetite, in order to avoid giving pain to those who watched all his movements and hung upon all his words with such tender solicitude.

After dinner, the count, still pondering upon the scene in which a tender wife and affectionate daughter had administered to him such sweet consolation, and experiencing a delicious balm in the domestic felicity which he enjoyed, said to Isabella, "Read me from your *Album*, my dear girl, those lines which a poet is supposed to address to his wife, and which always possess new charms for me."

Isabella hastened to obey her father's wishes, and read, in a soft and silver tone, the following stanzas:—

THE POET TO HIS WIFE.

When far away, my memory keeps in view,
 Unweariedly, the image of my wife;
This tribute of my gratitude is due
 To her who seems the angel of my life—
The guiding star that leads me safely through
 The eddies of this world's unceasing strife;—
Hope's beacon, cheering ever from afar,
How beautiful art thou, my guiding star!

Our children have thy countenance, that beams
 With love for him who tells thy virtues now;—
Their eyes have caught the heavenly ray which gleams
 From thine athwart the clouds that shade my brow,
Like sunshine on a night of hideous dreams!—
 The first to wean me from despair art thou;
For all th' endearing sentiments of life
Are summed up in the words *Children* and *Wife*.

The mind, when in a desert state, renews
 Its strength, if by Hope's purest manna fed;
As drooping flowers revive beneath the dews
 Which April mornings bountifully shed.
Mohammed taught (let none the faith abuse)
 That echoes were the voices of the dead
Repeating, in a far-off realm of bliss,
The words of those they loved and left in this.

My well-beloved, should'st thou pass hence away,
 Into another and a happier sphere,
Ere death has also closed my little day,
 And morn may wake no more on my career,
"I love thee," are the words that I shall say
 From hour to hour, during my sojourn here.
That thou in other realms may'st still be found
Prepared to echo back the welcome sound.

Scarcely had Isabella finished these lines, when a servant entered the room, and announced a Mr. Johnson, "who had some pressing business to communicate, and who was very sure that he shouldn't be considered an intruder."

Mr. Johnson—a queer-looking, shabby-genteel, off-hand kind of a man—made his appearance close behind the servant, over whose shoulder he leered ominously.

"I b'lieve you're Count Alteroni, air you?" was Mr. Johnson's first question.

"I am. What is your business with me?"

"I'm come from Rolfe, the attorney, in Clements' Inn," was the reply: "he—"

"Oh! I suppose he has sent you to say that he will accord me the delay I require?" interrupted the count.

"Not quite that there neither," said the man; then, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, and glancing towards the ladies with an air of embarrassment, he added, "The fact is, I've got a execution agin your person—a *ca-sa*, you know, for eighteen hundred and costs."

"A writ—a warrant!" ejaculated the count aloud. "You do not mean to say that you are come to take me to prison?"

"Not exactly that either," replied Mr. Johnson. "You needn't go to quod, you know. You can come to our lock-up in the New-Cut, Lambeth, where you'll be as snug as if you was in your own house, barring liberty."

"I understand you," said the count; then, turning to his wife and daughter, he added, "My dears, the evil moment is arrived. This person is a bailiff come to arrest me; and I must go with him. I implore you not to take this misfortune to heart:—it was sure to happen; and it might just as well occur to-day as a week or a month hence."

"And whither will they take you?" asked the countess, bursting into tears. "Cannot we be allowed to accompany you?"

"You can come, ma'am, and see his lordship to-morrow," said the bailiff; "and you can stay with him from ten in the morning till nine in the evening—or may-be till half-arter ten as a wery partick'lar faviour—for which you'll on'y have to pay half a sufferin extray. But there's my man."

A sneaking kind of knock—something more than a single one, not so much as a double one, and by no means as bold as a postman's—had been heard the moment before the bailiff uttered these last words; and while he went in person to inform his acolyte that the caption was made, and that he might wait in the hall, the count endeavoured to soothe and console the two afflicted ladies who now clung to him in the most impassioned and distracted manner.

"To-morrow, my dear father—to-morrow, the moment the clock strikes ten, we will be with you," said Isabella. "Oh! how miserably will pass the hours until that period!"

"Will you not *now* permit me, my dearest husband, to see the Envoy of Castelcicala, and—"

"No," answered the count firmly. "Did we not agree ere now to support with resignation all that fortune might have in store for us?"

"Ah! pardon me—I forgot," said the countess. "I am overwhelmed with grief. Oh! what a blow—and for *you*!"

"Show yourselves worthy of your high rank and proud name," cried the nobleman; "and all will yet be well."

At this moment the bailiff returned to the room.

"I am now ready to accompany you," said the count.

"So much the better," cried Mr. Johnson. "Me and my man Tim Bunkins come down in a omnibus; I don't know which vay you'd like to go, but I've heerd say you keeps a wery tidy cabrioily."

"It would be a monstrous mockery for any one to proceed to a prison in his own luxurious vehicle," said the count sternly. "As you came, so may you return. I will accompany you in an omnibus." The count embraced his wife and daughter tenderly, and with much difficulty tore himself away, in order to leave a comfortable home for a miserable sponging-house.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

TEN days after the arrest of Count Alteroni, a young lady was proceeding, at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, down the Blackfriars Road.

She was dressed plainly, but with that exquisite taste which denotes a polished mind, and is in itself an aristocracy of sentiment. She looked neither to the right nor to the left: her pace was somewhat rapid, as if she were anxious to arrive at her destination:—and though there was something timid in her manner as she threaded her way along the crowded thoroughfare, few who passed her could help turning round to obtain another glimpse of the sylph-like form of that unassuming girl.

From the opposite direction advanced a young man of tall and handsome appearance, neatly dressed, and with a shade of melancholy upon his countenance.

In a few moments he met the young lady, and was about to pass her, when his eyes happened to catch a glimpse of her lovely features.

He started with surprise, exclaiming, "Signora! is it possible? Do we indeed meet again? Ah! it seems to me that it is an age since I saw you, dearest Isabella!"

"And since we last met, Richard, many unfortunate events have happened. My poor father—"

"Your father! what can have happened to him?" cried Markham, struck by the mournful tone of the beauteous Italian.

"He is in the Queen's Bench Prison," replied Isabella, her eyes filling with tears.

"In the Queen's Bench! And you are going to him now? Oh! Isabella, you must tell me how all this happened: I will escort you a little way;"—and with these words, Richard offered his arm to the signora, who accepted it with a ready confidence in him whom she loved, and whose presence was by no means displeasing to her at that moment when she stood so much in need of consolation.

"You are aware," resumed Isabella, "that my father intrusted a considerable sum of money to Mr. Greenwood."

"The villain!" ejaculated Markham warmly.

"I cannot explain to you exactly how it was that my father accepted the security of Mr. Tomlinson, the banker, for that amount, as I am not acquainted with matters of business;—but he did so, and released Mr. Greenwood."

"And Tomlinson failed—and your father lost all!"

"Alas! he did;—and he is now imprisoned for a sum for which he had become answerable to serve a friend," said Isabella.

"How long has the count been in—in—"

"In prison," added the signora mournfully. "He was arrested ten days ago; and, by the advice of a solicitor, he removed on the following day from the bailiff's private house to the Bench."

"And the countess?"

"My mother is very unwell to-day, and could not leave her room; and I am now on my way to visit my poor father. We have left Richmond altogether; and my mother and myself occupy lodgings in the Blackfriars Road, near the bridge."

"Ten days ago this happened, Isabella," said Richard reproachfully; "and you did not acquaint me with what had occurred?"

"Ah! Richard—you know well that circumstances forbade me;—or else—"

"Or else? Speak—dearest Isabella."

"Or else I believe you would have given my father the best advice how to proceed. He is too proud to apply to his friends; and he cannot—he must not remain in prison. His health would sink under the idea of degradation that has taken possession of him."

"That villain Greenwood!" said Markham, musing. "When will the day of retribution arrive for him?"

"We must now part, Richard," observed Isabella, as they came in view of the dingy wall of the Queen's Bench Prison, crowned by *chevaux-de-frise*.

"Yes—we must part again," said Markham mournfully. "But how happy should I have been had we met this morning under other circumstances! How I should have blessed the accident that brought me thus early this morning on some business of my own, to this neighbourhood! Oh! Isabella, you know not how constantly I think of you—how unceasingly I dwell upon your dear image!"

"And can you suppose, Richard, that I never devote a thought to you?" said Isabella, in a low and plaintive tone. "But we must not talk upon such a subject at present. Let us hope for happier times."

With these words the young lady returned the pressure of her lover's hand, and hurried towards the Queen's Bench.

Markham loitered about the spot for five minutes, and then proceeded to the lobby of the prison. There he inquired into the particulars of Count Alteroni's detention; and ascertained that he had been arrested for eighteen hundred pounds, with costs.

He then left the gloomy precincts of the debtors' gaol, and retraced his steps towards the City.

"Eighteen hundred pounds would procure the count's liberation," he said to himself: "eighteen hundred pounds, which he does not possess, and which he is too proud to borrow,—eighteen hundred pounds, which would restore him to his family, and make Isabella happy! My property is worth four thousand pounds:—if I raise two thousand pounds upon it, I shall curtail my income by exactly one half. I shall have one hundred pounds a-year remaining. But my education was good—my acquirements are not contemptible: surely I can turn them to some account?"

Then it suddenly struck him that he had already raised five hundred pounds upon his estate at the period when the Resurrection Man endeavoured to extort that sum from him; and half of this sum had already disappeared in consequence of the amount given to Talbot (*alias* Pocock) in the *Dark-House*—the assistance rendered to Monroe and Ellen—his journey to Boulogne—and other claims. Then there would be the expenses of deeds to reckon. If he raised two thousand pounds more, his property would only remain worth to him about fifteen hundred pounds. His income would therefore be reduced to seventy-five pounds *per annum*.

But not for one moment did this noble-hearted young man hesitate relative to the course he should pursue; and without delay he proceeded to the office of Mr. Dyson, his solicitor, in the City.

There the business was speedily explained and put in train. It would, however, require, said the solicitor, four days to terminate the affair; but Markham did not leave him until he had fixed the precise moment when the deeds were to be signed and the money paid over.

Richard returned home in a state of mind more truly happy than he had known for some time past. He had resolved upon an immense sacrifice, to benefit those whom he esteemed or loved; and he was prepared to meet any consequences which it might produce. This is human nature. We may inure ourselves to the contemplation of any idea, however appalling or alarming it may appear at first sight, without a shudder and almost without a regret. The convict, under sentence of death in the condemned cell, and his ears ringing with the din of the hammers erecting the scaffold, does not experience such acute mental agony as the world are apt to suppose. We all have the certainty of death, at some date more or less near, before our eyes; and yet this conviction does not trouble our mental equanimity. The convict who is doomed to die, is only worse off than ourselves inasmuch as the precise day, hour, and moment of his fate are revealed to him; but his death, which is to be sudden and only of a moment's pain, must be a thousand times preferable to the long, lingering, agonising throes of sickness which many of those who pity him are eventually doomed to endure before their thread of existence shall be severed for ever!

Yes—we can bring our minds to meet every species of mortal affliction with resignation, and even with cheerfulness;—and there is no sorrow, no malady, no pang, which issued from Pandora's box, that did not bear the imprint of hope along with it!

True to the appointed time, Richard proceeded to the office of Mr. Dyson, on the fourth day from the commencement of the business.

He signed the papers and received two thousand pounds.

The lawyer shook his head, implying his fears that his client was improvident and wasteful.

He was, however, speedily undeceived.

"Will you have the kindness to accompany me in a cab?" said Markham. "You can render me a service in the way in which I am about to dispose of this money."

"Certainly," returned Mr. Dyson, "Are you going far?"

"Not very," answered Richard; and when they were both seated in the vehicle, he told the driver to proceed towards the Queen's Bench Prison, but to stop at some distance from the gates.

These directions were obeyed.

"Now, Mr. Dyson," said Richard, "will you have the kindness to repair to the office of the prison, and inquire the amount of debts for which a certain Count Alteroni is detained in custody?"

Mr. Dyson obeyed the instructions thus given to him, and in ten minutes returned from the prison with a *copy of causes* in his hand.

"Count Alteroni is a prisoner for eighteen hundred and twenty-one pounds," said the lawyer.

"Are there any fees or extra expenses beyond the sum specified in that paper?" asked Richard.

"Yes—merely a few shillings," replied the solicitor.

"I wish, then, that every liability of Count Alteroni be settled in such a way that he may quit the prison without being asked for a single shilling. Here is the necessary amount: pay all that is due—and pay liberally."

"My dear sir," said the lawyer, hesitating, "I hope you have well reflected upon what you are about to do."

"Yes—yes," answered Richard impatiently: "I have well reflected, I can assure you."

"Two thousand pounds—or nearly so—is a large sum, Mr. Markham."

"I have weighed all the consequences."

"At least, then, you have received ample security—"

"Not a scrap of paper."

"Had I not better call and see this nobleman, and obtain from him a warrant of attorney or cognovit—"

"So far from doing any such thing," interrupted Markham, "you must take especial care not to mention to a soul the name of the person who has employed you to effect the count's release—not a syllable must escape your lips on this head; nor need you acquaint the clerks whom you may see, with your own name. In a word, the affair must be buried in profound mystery."

"Since you are determined," said Mr. Dyson, "I will obey your instructions to the very letter. But, once again, excuse me if I request you to reflect whether—"

"My dear sir, I have nothing more to reflect upon; and you will oblige me by terminating this business as speedily as possible."

The solicitor returned to the prison; and Markham, whom he now considered to be foolish or mad, instead of improvident and extravagant, threw himself back in the vehicle, and gave way to his reflections. His eyes were, however, turned towards the road leading to the Bench; for he was anxious to watch for the re-appearance of his agent.

Ten minutes had elapsed, when his attention was directed to two ladies who passed by the cab, and advanced towards the prison-

gate.

He leant forward—he could not be mistaken:—no—it was indeed she—the idol of his adoration—the being whom he loved with a species of worship! She was walking with the countess. They were on their way to visit the count in his confinement; but Richard could not catch a glimpse of their countenances—though he divined full well that they wore not an expression of joy. It was not, however, necessary for him to behold Isabella's face, in order to recognise her:—he knew her by her symmetrical form, the elegant contours of which, even the ample shawl she wore could not hide: he knew her by her step—by her graceful and dignified gesture—by her lady-like, and yet unassuming gait.

Oh! how speedily, thought he within himself, were she and her parents to be restored to happiness again!

In about a quarter of an hour after the ladies had entered the prison, Dyson returned to his client.

"Is it all settled?" demanded Markham.

"Every thing," answered the lawyer.

"And when can the count leave the prison?"

"Almost immediately," replied Dyson, as he entered the vehicle once more.

Markham then ordered the driver to return to the City.

In the mean time the countess and Isabella repaired to the room which the noble exile occupied in the prison. As they ascended the steep stone staircase which led to it, they wondered within themselves when he whom they loved so tenderly would be restored in freedom to them.

The count was seated at a table covered with books and papers, and was busily occupied in arranging the latter when the countess and signora entered the room. They were instantly welcomed with the most affectionate warmth by the noble prisoner: and he endeavoured to assume a cheerful air in their presence.

"Any letters?" said the count, after the usual inquiries concerning health and comfort.

"None this morning," answered the countess. "And now, my dear husband, tell me—have you settled any plan to effect your release?"

"No," said the count. "I must trust to events. Were Armstrong alive, I should not hesitate to accept a loan from him;—but to none other would I apply."

At this moment a knock at the door of the prison chamber was heard; and the two inseparables, Captain Smilax Dapper and Sir Cherry Bounce, made their appearance.

"My dear count, you don't mean to say that it is really true, and that you are here on your own account—strike me!" ejaculated the gallant hussar.

"The newth wath twue—too twue, you thee, Thmilackth," said Sir Cherry, shuddering visibly, and without any affectation too as he glanced around him.

"True indeed!" cried the count, bitterly.

"I wonder whether they will let uth out again?" said Sir Cherry, gazing from the window. "But, I declare, they have got wacket-gwoundth here, and no leth than thwee pumpth. What can the pwithonerth want with tho muth water?"

"What, indeed—confound me!" exclaimed the captain. "For my part, I always heard that they lived upon beer. But tell me—how much is there against you?"

"Yeth—how muth?" echoed Sir Cherry Bounce.

"A mere trifle," answered the count evasively. "I have been cruelly robbed, and my present position is the result."

"Well," continued the captain, with remarkable embarrassment of manner, "we are all here together—and so there is no harm in speaking openly, you know—and Cherry isn't anybody, strike him!—I was thinking that a very satisfactory arrangement might be made. Always strike when the iron's hot! I have long entertained a high respect for your family, count: my late uncle, the general, who introduced me and Cherry to you, always spoke in the best possible terms of you, although he never said much about your past life, and even hinted that there was some mystery—"

"To what is all this to lead, Captain Dapper?" exclaimed the count, somewhat impatiently.

"Simply that—why do you stand there, laughing like a fool, Cherry?"

"Me, Thmilackth?"

"Yes—you. Well, as I was saying when Cherry interrupted me—I have always entertained the highest possible opinion of your family, count, and especially of the signora; and if she would accept my hand and heart—why, strike me! an arrangement could be made in four and twenty hours—"

"Captain Dapper," interrupted the count, "no more of this. I believe that you would not wantonly insult either my daughter or myself; but I cannot listen to the terms to which you allude."

"My dear count—"

"Silence, sir! No more of this!" exclaimed the noble Italian.

There was a pause, which was broken by the entrance of one of the turnkeys.

"Sir, I have the pleasure to inform you that you are discharged," said that functionary.

"Discharged!" ejaculated the count: "impossible! How could I be discharged?"

The countess and Isabella surveyed the turnkey with looks of the most intense and painful anxiety.

"A stranger has sent his solicitor to pay every thing against you at the gate; and all the fees and the little donations to us and the

criers are paid also."

"You are bantering me, sirrah!" cried the count. "You are mistaken. The Envoy from my native land, who alone of all my acquaintances is capable of doing an action of this generous nature, and in so delicate a manner, has been absent from London for the last ten days, and is even unaware of my situation. Who then could have paid my debts?"

A name trembled upon Isabella's tongue; but the word died upon her lips. She dared not pronounce that name—although her heart told her that her surmise was correct, and that Richard Markham was the secret friend to whom her father was indebted for his liberty. Richard! the reward of thy good deed had already commenced by the feelings which now changed the love that the beauteous girl had hitherto experienced for thee, into an adoration and a worship!

"Well, sir," said the turnkey, "we don't know who has done this, and it wasn't our business to inquire. All I can say is, that the debt is paid, the fees settled, and you may leave the place as soon as you like."

"Dapper, this is your doing," cried the count, after a moment's pause. "And yet—"

"No—strike me!—I had nothing to do with it—I wish I had *now*."

We shall not attempt to describe the delight of the Italian family, when they found that the joyful tidings were indeed true; but all the count's conjectures, to fix this generous and noble deed upon any particular member of his acquaintance, were alike unsatisfactory and unavailing:—Isabella alone divined the truth.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE OLD HAG.

MARKHAM was not the man to remain idle now that his circumstances were so desperately reduced. He had a taste for literary pursuits, and he resolved to devote his talents to some advantage. His income was totally insufficient to support his establishment, and yet he knew not how to effect any very great economy in the mode of conducting it. He would not for worlds allow Mr. Monroe and Ellen to leave his house, and again enter upon a struggle with the world. With Whittingham nothing could have induced him to part;—Marian was the only female domestic he kept, and he could not dispense with her services. Holford alone was an incumbrance of which he thought of relieving himself. But before he adopted any measure of economical reform, he summoned the faithful Whittingham to a consultation with him in the library.

When Markham had made the butler acquainted with his altered circumstances, the old man shook his head, and observed—

"Well, Master Richard, all this here ruination—and when I make use of the paragraph *ruination*, I mean to express the common sentence, *flooring*—has been brought round about by your over generosity, and good disposition towards others. I can't a-bear, Master Richard, to see you circumlocuted and circumwented in this manner; and now all your property has gone to the canine species—or, wulgarly speaking, *to the dogs*."

"What is done, is done, Whittingham," said Richard; "nor did I send for you to criticise my conduct."

"Ah! Master Richard; don't go for to scold me—me that saw you bred and born," exclaimed the old butler, tears starting into his eyes. "I wouldn't be an ominous burden to you for all the world; so I'll get employment somewhere else—"

"No—no, my faithful friend," cried Richard, taking the old man's hand, "I would not allow you to leave me on any account. As long as I have a crust you shall share it. My present object is to acquaint you with the necessity of introducing the most rigid economy into our household."

"Ah! now I understand you, Master Richard. And talking of this reminds me that a gentleman in the neighbourhood requires a young youth of the nature of Holford; and so the lad might step quite permiscuous, as the saying is, into a good situation at once."

"Well, let him seek for another place, Whittingham; but tell him that he may stay here until he can succeed in finding one."

Markham and Whittingham then arranged other little methods of economy, and the debate terminated. Fortunately for these plans, Holford procured the place alluded to by Whittingham, and repaired to his new situation in the course of a few days.

Notwithstanding the solicitude with which Markham endeavoured to conceal his altered circumstances from Mr. Monroe and Ellen, the quick perception of the latter soon enabled her to penetrate into the real truth; and she immediately reflected upon the best means of turning her own acquirements to some good purpose. She did not mention to her father her suspicion that they were a burden upon Markham's resources; but she took an early opportunity of hinting to Richard her anxiety to avail herself of her education and accomplishments, in order to add to the general resources of the household. The young man was struck by the delicate manner in which she thus made him comprehend that she was not blind to the limited nature of his means; but he assured her that his property was quite commensurate with his expenditure. Ellen appeared to be satisfied; but she nevertheless determined within herself to lose no time in seeking for profitable employment for her leisure hours.

But where was she to seek for occupation? She knew the miserable rate at which the labours of the needle-women were paid; and she shuddered at the idea of returning to the service of a statuary, an artist, a sculptor, or a photographer. And yet she was resolved not to remain idle. She could not bear the thought that her father and herself were a burden upon the slender resources of their generous and noble-hearted benefactor:—she saw with pain that while Markham forced her father to partake of his wine as usual, he himself now invariably invented an excuse to avoid joining in the indulgence;—she saw that Richard rose earlier than heretofore, and remained in his library the greater portion of the day;—she learned from Marian that the surplus garden produce was sold;—in a word, she beheld a system of the most rigid economy introduced into the establishment, and which was only relaxed on behalf of her father and herself. All this gave her pain; and she was resolved to do somewhat to enable her to contribute towards the resources of the household —even though she should be compelled to return to the service of a statuary, an artist, a sculptor, or a photographer.

At one moment she thought of applying to Greenwood:—but he had already done all she asked in respect to their child. And then, even if she were to obtain money from him, in what manner could she account to her father and to Markham for its possession? for there was a secret—a terrible secret connected with Greenwood, which she dared not reveal—even though such confession were to save her from a death of lingering tortures!

Thus thought Ellen Monroe. Was it extraordinary if the idea of applying to the old hag—that nameless woman—dwelling in a nameless court in Golden Lane, and exercising a nameless avocation—often entered the young lady's imagination? Was it strange that she should gradually overcome her repugnance to seek the presence of the filthy-souled harridan, and at length look upon such a step as the only means through which her ardent desire to obtain employment could be gratified?

It was decided! she would go.

Accordingly, one morning, she dressed herself in the most simple manner, and proceeded by an omnibus into the City. It was mid-day when she reached Golden Lane.

With what strange feelings did she proceed along the narrow and dirty thoroughfare! Pure and spotless was she when, nearly three years back, she had first set foot in that vile lane;—how much had she seen—how much passed through—how much endured since that period? Dishonoured—unwedded—she was a mother. Her virgin purity was gone for ever—the evidence of her shame was living, and could at any moment be brought forward to betray her. And if she now pursued a virtuous course, it was scarcely for virtue's sake, but through dread of the consequences of a fresh fault. The innate chastity of her soul had dissolved, like snow before the mid-day sun's effulgence, beneath the glances of the statuary, the artist, the sculptor, and the photographer. It was true that she looked upon her services to those masters with disgust; but the feeling had little reference to pure and unadulterated feminine modesty. Still she was of a proud spirit in one respect;—she detested a life of slothful dependence upon an individual who had not enough for himself!

Such was Ellen Monroe when she retraced her way, on the present occasion, to the dwelling of the old hag—that way which had led her to so frightful a precipice before!

The old woman was sitting in her great easy chair, watching the steam that rose from a large saucepan upon the hob. That saucepan contained the harridan's dinner—tripe and cow-heel stewing with onions, and filling the close apartment with a sickly odour. But the hag savoured that smell with a hideous expression of delight; to her nostrils it was a delicious perfume. From time to time she glanced—almost impatiently—towards her Dutch clock, as if anxious for the arrival of the happy moment when she might serve up her mess. She was just spreading a filthy napkin upon one corner of her table, when a knock was heard at her door.

Instead of inviting the visitor, whoever it might be, to enter, the hag hastened to answer the summons by opening the door a few inches. She was already afraid that some poor neighbour might seek a portion of her dainty meal!

But when she recognised Ellen Monroe, a gleam of joy suddenly illumined her lowering countenance, and the young lady immediately obtained admittance, for the hag thought within herself—"There is gold yet to be gained by her!"

Re-assured as to the undivided enjoyment of the stew, and having satisfied herself with a glance that Ellen was above immediate want, the old woman conducted her fair visitant to a seat, saying—

"My bird of beauty, you have come back to me again; I have been waiting for your return a long long time."

"Waiting for me?" cried Ellen, with surprise.

"Yes, miss—certainly. I know the world—and I felt convinced that you could not always contrive for yourself, without me."

"I am at a loss to understand you," said Ellen.

"Well—well, no matter!" exclaimed the hag, lifting off the lid of her saucepan, and ogling the stew. "At all events," she continued, after a pause, "you require my services now—else why are you come?"

"Yes—I require your services," answered the young lady. "I want employment—can you tell me of any thing likely to suit me?"

"In what way?" demanded the hag, with an impudent leer.

Ellen remained silent—absorbed in thought. That question recalled to her mind the difficulties of her position, and convinced her how little scope there was for the exercise of choice in respect to employment.

The old woman surveyed her fair visitant with attention; the sardonic expression of her countenance changed into one of admiration, as she contemplated that lovely girl. Her head was so gracefully inclined the least thing over one shoulder as she sat wrapt up in her reflections;—there was a shade of such bewitching melancholy upon her classic countenance: the long, dark fringes that shadowed her deep blue eyes, gave so Murillo-like a softness to her cheek as she glanced downwards; her bust, since she had become a mother, had expanded into such fine proportions, yet without destroying the perfect symmetry of her shape;—and her entire air had something so languishing—something of an only partially-subdued voluptuousness—that the old hag regarded her with mingled sentiments of admiration, envy, and pleasure.

"In what way can I serve you?" said the harridan again, after a long time.

"Alas! I have scarcely made up my mind how to answer the question," replied Ellen, smiling in spite of her melancholy thoughts. "I am not actually in want; but my father and myself are dependent upon the bounty of one who is by no means able to support us in idleness. My father can do nothing; he is old—infirm, and broken down by affliction. It therefore remains for me to do something to earn at least a trifle."

"A young lady of your beauty cannot be at a loss for friends who will treat her nobly," said the old woman, affecting to busy herself with her stew, but in reality watching Ellen's countenance with a reptile-like gaze as she spoke.

"Ah! I know that I am not the ugliest person in existence," exclaimed the young lady, smiling once more; "but I am anxious," she added, her countenance suddenly assuming a serious expression, "to live a quiet—an honourable—and a virtuous life. I know there is nothing to be gained by the needle. I dislike the menial and degrading situation of a copy or a model:—are you aware of no other occupation that will suit me?"

"Have you any money in your pocket?" demanded the hag, after a few moments' reflection.

"I have three sovereigns and a few shillings," answered Ellen, taking her purse from her reticule.

"I know of an employment that will suit you well," continued the old woman; "and my price for putting it in your way will be the three sovereigns in your purse."

"Of what nature is the employment?" asked Ellen.

"That of patient to a Mesmerist," was the reply.

"Patient to a mesmerist!" exclaimed the young lady: "I do not understand you."

"There is a French gentleman who has lately arrived in London, and who lectures upon Animal Magnetism at the West End," said the hag. "He has created a powerful sensation; and all the world are running after him. But he requires patients to operate upon; and the photographer, with whom he is acquainted, recommended him to apply to me. You will answer his purpose; and you well know that I have always performed my promises to you hitherto; so you need not be afraid to pay me my price at once. I will then give you the mesmerist's card."

"First explain the nature of the services that will be demanded of me," said Ellen.

"You will be placed in a chair, and the magnetiser will pass his hands backwards and forwards in a particular way before your eyes; you will then have to fall asleep—or pretend to do so, whichever you like; and the professor will ask you questions, to which you must reply. This is the main business which he will require at your hands."

"But it is a gross deception," said Ellen.

"You may embrace or refuse my offer, just as you choose. If you are so very particular, Miss," added the old woman ironically, "why do you not obtain the situation of a governess, or go out and give lessons in music and drawing?"

"Because I should be asked for references, which I cannot give;—because there would be a perpetual danger of my former occupations transpiring;—and because——"

"Because—because you do not fancy that employment," exclaimed the hag impatiently. "See now—my dinner is ready—you are wasting my time—I have other business to attend to anon. Do you refuse or accept my offer?"

"What remuneration shall I be enabled to earn?" demanded Ellen, hesitatingly.

"Thirty shillings a-week."

"And how long shall I be occupied each day?"

"About two hours at the evening lectures three times a week; and perhaps an hour every day to study your part."

"Then I accept your offer," said Ellen; and she placed three sovereigns upon the table.

The eyes of the old woman glistened at the sight of the gold, which she clutched hastily from the table for fear that Ellen might suddenly repent of her bargain. She wrapped the three pieces carefully up in a piece of paper, and hastened to conceal them in the interior of her old Dutch clock. She then opened her table-drawer, and begin to rummage, as on former occasions when Ellen visited

her, amongst its filthy contents.

The search occupied several minutes; for the old woman had numerous cards and notes scattered about in her drawer.

"You see that I have a good connexion," she observed, with a horrible smile of self-gratulation, as she turned the cards and notes over and over with her long bony hands: "all the fashionable young men about town know me, and do not hesitate to engage my services on particular occasions. Then they recommend me, because I give them satisfaction; and so I always have enough to do to give me bread. I am not idle, my dear child—I am not idle, I can assure you. Day and night I am at the beck and call of my patrons. I help gentlemen to mistresses, and ladies to lovers. But, ah! the pay is not what it used to be—it is not what it used to be!" repeated the old hag, shaking her head dolefully. "There is a great competition, even in my profession, miss—a very great competition. The shoemakers, the tailors, the publicans, the butchers, the bakers, all complain of competition;—but they have not half so much right to complain as I have. Now and then I pick up a handsome sum in one way;—and, while I think of it, miss, I may as well mention to you—for who can tell what may happen?—you are young, and beautiful, and warm—and such a thing is almost sure to befall you as well as any other woman. But, as I was saying, miss—I may as well mention to you, that if you should happen—in consequence of a fault—to——"

The old woman leant forward, and whispered something in Ellen's ear.

The young lady started; and an exclamation of mingled disgust and horror escaped her lips.

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear child," said the old hag, resuming her search with the most imperturbable coolness: "I did not mean to offend you. I can assure you that many a young lady, of higher birth than yours, and dwelling in the most fashionable quarters of London, has been glad to avail herself of my services. What would often become of the indiscreet miss if it wasn't for me? what, indeed?—what, indeed?"

"Haste and give me the card," exclaimed Ellen, in a tone of ill concealed disgust and aversion; "I am in a hurry—I can wait no longer."

"There it is, my dear," said the old hag. "I know the situation will suit you. When you require another, come to me."

Miss Monroe received the card, and took her departure without another moment's delay.

As soon as the young lady had left that den, the old hag proceeded to serve up her stew, muttering to herself all the while, "One of my stray sheep come back to me again! This is as it should be. There is yet much gold to be made by that girl: she cannot do long without me!"

Then the horrible wretch fetched from the cupboard the champagne-bottle which contained her gin; and she seated herself cheerfully at the table covered with the dainties that she loved.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE PROFESSOR OF MESMERISM.

ELLEN had already been long enough from home to incur the chance of exciting surprise or alarm at her absence; she was therefore compelled to postpone her visit to the Professor of Mesmerism until the following day.

On her return to the Place, after an absence of nearly three hours, her fears were to some extent realised, her father being uneasy at her disappearance for so long a period. She availed herself of this opportunity to acquaint Mr. Monroe with her anxiety to devote her talents to some useful purpose, in order to earn at least sufficient to supply them both with clothes, and thus spare as much as possible the purse of their benefactor. Her father highly approved of this laudable aim; and Ellen assured him that one of the families, for whom she had once worked at the West End, had promised to engage her as a teacher of music and drawing for a few hours every week. It will be recollected that the old man had invariably been led to believe that his daughter was occupied in private houses with her needle, when she was really in the service of the statuary, the artist, the sculptor, and the photographer: he therefore now readily put faith in the tale which Ellen told him, and even undertook not only to communicate her intention to Markham, but also to prevent him from throwing any obstacle in its way. This task the old man accomplished that very day; and thus Ellen triumphed over the chief difficulty which she had foreseen—namely, that of accounting for the frequent absence from home which her new pursuits would render imperative. And this duplicity towards her sire she practised without a blush. Oh! what a wreck of virtue and chastity had the mind of that young female become!

The Professor of Mesmerism occupied a handsome suite of apartments in New Burlington Street. He was a man of about fifty, of prepossessing exterior, elegant manners, and intelligent mind. He spoke English fluently, and was acquainted with many continental languages besides his own.

It was mid-day when Miss Monroe was ushered into his presence.

The Professor was evidently struck by the beauty of her appearance; but he held her virtue at no high estimation, in consequence of the source of her recommendation to him. Little cared he, however, whether she were a paragon of moral excellence, or an example of female degradation: his connexion with her was to be based upon a purely commercial ground; and he accordingly set about an explanation of his views and objects. Ellen listened with attention, and agreed to become the patient of the mesmerist.

Thus, having sold her countenance to the statuary, her likeness to the artist, her bust to the sculptor, her entire form to the photographer, and her virtue to a libertine, she disposed of her dreams to the mesmerist.

Several days were spent in taking lessons and studying her part, under the tutelage of the Professor. She was naturally of quick comprehension; and this practice was easy to her. Her initiation was therefore soon complete; and the Professor at length resolved upon giving a private exhibition of "the truths of Mesmerism practically illustrated" to a few friends. Ellen took a feigned name; and all the preliminary arrangements were settled.

The memorable evening arrived; and by eight o'clock the Professor's drawing-room was filled with certain select individuals, all of whom were favourably inclined towards the "science" of Mesmerism. Some of them, indeed, were perfectly enthusiastic in behalf of this newly-revived doctrine. The reporters of the press were rigidly excluded from this meeting, with two or three exceptions in favour of journals which were known to be friendly to the principle of Animal Magnetism.

When the guests were thus assembled, Ellen was led into the apartment. She was desired to seat herself comfortably in an easy arm-chair; and the Professor then commenced his manipulations, "with a view to produce *coma*, or mesmeric sleep." In about five minutes Ellen sank back, apparently in a profound sleep, with the eyes tightly closed.

The Professor then expatiated upon the truths of the science of Mesmerism; and the assembled guests eagerly drank in every word he uttered. At length he touched upon *Clairvoyance*, which he explained in the following manner:—

"*Clairvoyance*," he said, "is the most extraordinary result of Animal Magnetism. It enables the person magnetised to foretel events relating both to themselves and others; to describe places which they have never visited, and houses the interior of which they have never seen; to read books opened and held behind their heads; to delineate the leading points of pictures in a similar position; to read a letter through its envelope; to describe the motions or actions of a person in another room, with a wall intervening; and to narrate events passing in far distant places."

The Professor then proposed to give practical illustrations of the phenomena which he had just described.

The visitors were now all on the tiptoe of expectation; and the reporters prepared their note-books. Meantime Ellen remained apparently wrapped up in a profound slumber; and more than one admiring glance was turned upon her beautiful classic features and the exuberant richness of her bust.

"I shall now question the patient," said the Professor, "in a manner which will prove the first phenomenon *of clairvoyance*; namely, *the power of foretelling events relative to themselves and others*."

He paused for a moment, performed a few more manipulations, and then said, "Can you tell me any thing in reference to future events which are likely to happen to myself?"

"Within a week from this moment you will hear of the death of a relation!" replied Ellen in slow and measured terms.

"Of what sex is that relation?"

"A lady: she is now dangerously ill."

"How old is she?"

"Between sixty and seventy. I can see her lying upon her sick-couch with two doctors by her side. She has just undergone a most painful operation."

"It is perfectly true," whispered the Professor to his friends, "that I have an aunt of that age; but I am not aware that she is even ill—much less at the point of death."

"It is wonderful—truly wonderful!" exclaimed several voices, in a perfect enthusiasm of admiration.

"Let us now test her in reference to the second phenomenon I mentioned," said the Professor; "which will show *the power of describing places she has never visited, and houses whose interiors she has never seen*."

"Ah! that will be curious, indeed," cried several guests.

"Perhaps you, Mr. Wilmot," said the Professor, addressing a gentleman standing next to him, "will have the kindness to examine the patient relative to your own abode."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Wilmot then, turning towards Ellen, he said, "Will you visit me at my house?"

"With much pleasure," was her immediate answer.

"Where is it situated?"

"In Park Lane."

"Come in with me. What do you see?"

"A splendid hall, with a marble table between two pillars on one side, and a wide flight of stairs, also of marble, on the other."

"Come with me into the dining room of my house. Now what do you see?"

"Seven large pictures."

"Where are the windows?"

"There are three at the bottom of the room."

"What colour are the curtains?"

"A rich red."

"What is the subject of the large picture facing the fire-place?"

"The battle of Trafalgar."

"How do you know it is that battle?"

"Because I can read on the flag of one of the ships the words, '*England expects that every man will do his duty*.'"

"I shall not ask her any more questions," said Mr. Wilmot, evidently quite amazed by these answers. "Every one of her replies is true to the very letter. And I think," he added, turning towards the other guests, "that you all know me well enough to believe me, when I declare most solemnly that this young person has never, to my knowledge, been in my house in her life."

A murmur of satisfaction arose amongst the guests, who were all perfectly astounded at the phenomena now illustrated—although they had come, as before said, with a predisposition in favour of Mesmerism.

"We will have another proof yet," said the Professor. "Perhaps Mr. Parke will have the kindness to question the patient."

Mr. Parke stepped forward, and said, "Will you do me the favour to walk with me to my house."

"Thank you, I will," answered Ellen, still apparently remaining in a profound mesmeric sleep.

"Where is my house?"

"In Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square."

"How many windows has it in front?"

"Thirteen."

"Where are the two statues of Napoleon?"

"In the library."

"What else do you see in that room?"

"Immense quantities of books on shelves in glass cases."

"Are there any pictures?"

"Yes—seven."

"What is the subject of the one over the mantelpiece?"

"A beautiful view of London, by moonlight, from one of the bridges."

"Wonderful!" ejaculated Mr. Parke. "All she has said is perfectly correct. It is not necessary to ask her any more questions on this subject."

"Gentlemen," said the Professor, casting a triumphant glance around him, "I am delighted to perceive that you are satisfied with this mode of illustrating the phenomena of *clairvoyance*. I will now prove to you that the patient *can read a book held open behind her head*."

He then performed some more manipulations to plunge his patient into as deep a mesmeric sleep as possible, although she had given no symptom of an inclination to awake throughout the preceding examination. Having thus confirmed, as he said, her perfect state of *coma*, the Professor took up a book—apparently pitched upon at random amongst a heap of volumes upon the table; and, holding it open behind the head of the patient, he said, "What is this?"

"A book," was the immediate reply.

"What book?"

"Milton's *Paradise Lost*."

"At what page have I opened it?"

"I can read pages 110 and 111."

"Read a few lines."

Ellen accordingly repeated the following passage in a slow and beautifully mellifluous tone:—

"Now morn, her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearl,
When Adam waked, so 'customed, for his sleep
Was airy light, from pure digestion bred,
And temperate vapours bland, which th' only sound
Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan,
Lightly dispersed, and the shrill matin song
Of birds on every bough."[77]

"That is sufficient," cried several voices. "Do not fatigue her. We are perfectly satisfied. It is really marvellous. Who will now dare to doubt the phenomena of *clairvoyance*?"

"Let us take a picture," said the Professor; "*and she will delineate all the leading points in it*."

The mesmerist took an engraving from a portfolio, and held it behind Ellen's head.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"A picture."

"What is the subject?"

"I do not know the subject; but I can see two figures in the fore-ground, with a camel. The back-ground has elevated buildings. Oh! now I can see it plainer: it is a scene in Egypt; and those buildings are the pyramids."

"Extraordinary!" cried Mr. Wilmot.

"And that little hesitation was a proof of the fact that she could really see the picture," added Mr. Parke.

"Wonderful! extraordinary!" exclaimed numerous voices.

At this moment a servant entered the room and delivered a letter to his master, the Professor, stating that it had just been left by a friend from Paris.

The mesmerist was about to open it, when a sudden idea seemed to strike him.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, throwing the letter upon the table, "the arrival of this missive affords me an opportunity of proving another phenomenon belonging to *clairvoyance*. *The patient shall read this letter through the envelope.*"

"But if its contents be private?" said a guest.

"Then I am surrounded by gentlemen of honour, who will not publish those contents," returned the professor with a smile.

A murmur of approbation welcomed this happy compliment of the Frenchman.

The mesmerist held the letter at a short distance from Ellen's countenance, and said, "What is this?"

"A letter," she replied. "It is written in French."

"Read it," cried the mesmerist.

"The writing is obscure, and the lines seem to cross each other."

"That is because the letter is in an envelope and folded," said the Professor. "But try and read it."

Ellen then distinctly repeated the contents of the letter, of which the following is a translation:—

"*Paris*.

"HONOURED SIR,—I have to acquaint you with the alarming illness of my beloved mistress, your aunt Madame Delabarre. She was taken suddenly ill four days ago. Two eminent physicians are in constant attendance upon her. It is believed that if she does not get better in a few days, the medical attendants will perform an operation upon her. Should your leisure and occupation permit, you would do well to hasten to France to comfort your venerable relative.

"Your humble servant,
"FELICIE SOLIVEAU."

"Ah! my poor aunt! my poor aunt!" cried the Professor: "she is no more! It was her death that the patient foretold ere now! Yes—the two physicians—the painful operation—Oh! my poor aunt!"

The mesmerist tore open the letter, hastily glanced over it, and handed it to the gentleman who stood nearest to him. This individual perused it attentively, and, turning towards the other guests, said, "It is word for word as the patient read it."

The enthusiasm of the disciples of mesmerism present was only damped by the grief into which the Professor was now plunged by the conviction of the death of his venerable aunt. They, therefore, briefly returned their best thanks for the highly satisfactory illustrations of the truths of mesmeric phenomena which they had witnessed upon the occasion, and took their leave, their minds filled with the marvels that had been developed to them.

The moment the guests and the reporters had taken their departure, the Professor hastened up to Ellen, took her by the hand, and exclaimed in a transport of joy, "You may rise, my good young lady; it is all over! You acquitted yourself admirably! Nothing could be better. I am delighted with you! My fortune is made—my fortune is made! These English blockheads bite at anything!"

Ellen rose from the chair in which she had feigned her mesmeric sleep, and was by no means displeased with the opportunity of stretching her limbs, which were dreadfully cramped through having remained an hour in one unchanged position. The Professor compelled her to drink a glass of wine to refresh her; and in a few minutes she was perfectly at her ease once more.

"Yes," repeated the mesmerist; "you conducted yourself admirably. I really could not have anticipated such perfection at what I may call a mere rehearsal of your part. You remembered every thing I had told you to the very letter. By cleverly selecting to examine you, those persons whose houses I have visited myself, and the leading features of which I am able to explain to you beforehand, I shall make you accomplish such wonders in this respect, that even the most sceptical will be astounded. You have an excellent memory; and that is the essential. Moreover, I shall never mislead you. The book and the print agreed upon between us during the day, shall always be chosen for illustration at the lecture. By the bye, your little hesitation about the engraving was admirable. You may always introduce that *piece of acting* into your *part*: it appears true. The part then is not over-done. I give you great credit for the idea. In a few days I shall tell all my friends that I have received a letter announcing my aunt's death; and that her demise took place at the very moment when you beheld her death-bed in your mesmeric slumber. This will astound them completely. On the next occasion we must introduce into our comedy the scene *of the patient describing what takes place in another room, with a wall intervening*; and as we will settle before-hand all that I shall do in another apartment, upon the occasion, that portion of the task will not be difficult."

"But suppose, sir," said Ellen, "that a gentleman, concerning whose house you have given me no previous description, should wish to examine me,—what must I do in such a case?"

"Remain silent," answered the Professor.

"And would not this excite suspicion?"

"Not a bit of it. I have my answer ready:—'*There is no magnetic affinity, no mesmeric sympathy, between you and your interlocutor.*' That is the way to stave off such a difficulty; and it applies equally to a stranger holding books or prints for you to read with the back of your head."

"I really can scarcely avoid laughing when I think of the nature of the farce," observed Ellen.

"And yet this is not the only doctrine with which the world is duped," said the Professor. "But it is growing late; and you are doubtless anxious to return home. I am so well pleased with you, that I must beg you to accept this five-pound note as an earnest of my liberal intentions. You were very perfect with the poetry and the letter—the letter, by the bye, from my poor old aunt, whose existence is only in my own imagination!—Indeed, altogether, I am delighted with you!"

Ellen received the money tendered her by the mesmerist, and took her departure.

Thus successfully terminated her first essay as a patient to a Professor of Animal Magnetism!

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE FIGURANTE.

THE wonders performed by the Professor of Mesmerism produced an immense sensation. The persons who had been admitted to the "private exhibition," did not fail to proclaim far and wide the particulars of all that they had witnessed; and, as a tale never loses by repetition, the narrative of those marvels became in a very few days a perfect romance. The reporters of the press, who had attended the exhibition, dressed up a magnificent account of the entire proceedings, for the journals with which they were connected; and the fame of the Professor, like that of one of the knights of the olden time, was soon "bruited abroad through the length and breadth of the land."

At length a public lecture was given, and attended with the most complete success. Ellen had an excellent memory; and her part was enacted to admiration. She recollected the most minute particulars detailed to her by the Mesmerist, relative to the interior of the houses of his friends, the contents of letters to be read through envelopes, the subjects of prints, and the lines of poetry or passages of prose in the books to be read when placed behind her. Never was a deception better contrived: the most wary were deluded by it; and the purse of the Professor was well filled with the gold of his dupes.

But all things have an end: and the deceit of the Mesmerist was not an exception to the rule.

One evening, a gentleman—a friend of the Professor—was examining Ellen, who of course was in a perfect state of *coma*, respecting the interior of his library. The patient had gone through the process of questioning uncommonly well, until at length the gentleman said to her, "Whereabouts does the stuffed owl stand in the room you are describing?"

In the abstract there was nothing ludicrous in this query: but, when associated with the absurdity of the part which Ellen was playing, and entering as a link into the chain of curious ideas that occupied her mind at the moment, it assumed a shape so truly ridiculous that her gravity was completely overcome. She burst into an immoderate fit of laughter: her eyes opened wide—the perfect state of coma vanished in a moment—the *clairvoyance* was forgotten—the catalepsy disappeared—and the patient became unmesmerised in a moment, in total defiance of all the prescribed rules and regulations of Animal Magnetism!

Laughter is catching. The audience began to titter—then to indulge in a half-suppressed cachinnation;—and at length a chorus of hilarity succeeded the congenial symphony which emanated from the lips of the patient.

The Professor was astounded.

He was, however, a man of great presence of mind: and he instantaneously pronounced Ellen's conduct to be a phenomenon in Mesmerism, which was certainly rarely illustrated, but for which he was by no means unprepared.

But all his eloquence was useless. The risible inclination which now animated the great majority of his audience, triumphed over the previous prejudice in favour of Mesmerism; the charm was dissolved—the spell was annihilated—"the pitcher had gone so often to the well that it got broken at last"—the voice of the Professor had lost its power.

No sooner did the hilarity subside a little, when it was renewed again; and even the friends and most staunch adherents of the Professor looked at each other with suspicion depicted upon their countenances.

What reason could not do, was effected by ridicule: Mesmerism, like the heathen mythology, ceased to be a worship.

The Professor grew distracted. Confusion ensued; the audience rose from their seats; groups were formed; and the proceedings of the evening were freely discussed by the various different parties into which the company thus split.

Ellen took advantage of the confusion to slip out of the room; and in a few moments she left the house.

Her occupation was now once more gone; and she resolved to pay another visit to the old hag.

Accordingly, in a few days she again sought the miserable court in Golden Lane.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, when the young lady entered the apartment in which the old hag dwelt. The wrinkled wretch was seated at the table, working. She had bought herself a new gown with a portion of the money which she had received from Ellen on the occasion of recommending the latter to the Mesmerist; and the old woman's looks were joyful—as joyful as so hideous an expression of countenance would allow them to be—for she thought of being smart once more, even in her old age. Vanity only ceases with the extinction of life itself.

"Well, my child," said the old woman, gaily; "you have come back to me again. Surely you have not already finished with your Mesmerist?"

"Yes," replied Ellen. "The bubble has burst; and I am once more in search of employment."

"And in such search, miss, will you ever be, until you choose to settle yourself in a manner suitable to your beauty, your accomplishments, and your merits," said the old woman.

"In what way could I thus settle myself?"

"Do you ask me so simple a question? May you not have a handsome house, a carriage, servants, money, rich garments, jewels, and a box at the Opera, for the mere asking?"

"I do not require so much," answered Ellen, with a smile. "If I can earn a guinea or two a week, I shall be contented."

"And do you not feel anxious to set off your charms to the greatest advantage?" demanded the old woman. "How well would pearls become your soft and shining hair! how dazzling would your polished arms appear when clasped by costly bracelets! how lovely would be your little ears with brilliant pendants! how elegant would be your figure when clad in rustling silk or rich satin! how the

whiteness of your bosom would eclipse that of the finest lace! Ah! miss, you are your own enemy—you are your own enemy!"

"You forget that I have a father," said Ellen,—"a father who loves me, and whom I love,—a father who would die if he knew of his daughter's disgrace."

"Fathers do not die so easily," cried the old hag. "They habituate themselves to every thing, as well as other people. And then—think of the luxuries and comforts with which you could surround the old man."

"We will not talk any more upon that subject," said Ellen firmly. "I well understand your meaning; and I am not prudish nor false enough to affect a virtue which I do not possess. But I have my interests to consult; and it does not suit my ideas of happiness to accept the proposal implied by your language. In a word, can you find me any more employment?"

"I know no more Mesmerists," answered the old hag, in a surly tone.

"Then you can do nothing for me?"

"I did not say that—I did not say that," cried the hag. "It is true I can get you upon the stage; but perhaps that pursuit will not please you."

"Upon the stage!" ejaculated Ellen. "In what capacity?"

"As a *figurante*, or dancer in the ballet, at a great theatre," replied the old woman.

"But I should be known—I should be recognised," said Ellen.

"There is no chance of that," returned the hag. "Dressed like a sylph, with rouge upon your cheeks, and surrounded by a blaze of light, you would be altogether a different being. Ah! it seems that I already behold you upon the stage—the point of admiration for a thousand looks—the object of envy and desire, and of every passion which can possibly gratify female vanity."

For some moments Ellen remained lost in thought. The old woman's offer pleased her: she was vain of her beauty and she contemplated with delight the opportunity thus presented to her of displaying it with brilliant effect. She already dreamt of success, applause, and showers of nosegays; and her countenance gradually expended into a smile of pleasure.

"I accept your proposal," she said; "but—"

"Why do you hesitate?" demanded the old woman.

"Oh! I was only thinking that the introduction would be better——"

"If it did not come from me?" added the old woman, her wrinkled face becoming more wrinkled still with a sardonic grin. "Well, make yourself easy upon that score. I am only aware that a celebrated manager has a vacancy in his establishment for a figurante, and you may apply for it."

"But I am ignorant of the modes of dancing practised upon the stage," said Ellen.

"You will soon learn," answered the old woman. "Your beauty will prove your principal recommendation."

"And what shall I give you for your suggestion?" asked Ellen, taking out her purse.

When a bailiff makes a seizure in a house, he assures himself with a glance around, whether there be sufficient property to pay at least *his* expenses;—when a debtor calls upon his creditor to ask for time, the latter surveys the former for a moment, to ascertain by his countenance if he can be trusted;—the wholesale dealer always "takes stock," as it were, of the petty detailer who applies to him for credit;—and thus was it that the old woman scrutinized with a single look the capacity of Ellen's purse, so that she might thereby regulate her demand. And all the while she appeared intent only on her work.

"You can give me a couple of guineas now," the old woman at length said; "and if your engagement proves a good one, you can bring or send me three more in the course of the month."

This arrangement was immediately complied with, and Ellen took leave of the old hag, with the fervent hope that she should never require her aid any more.

On the following day Miss Monroe called upon the manager of the great national theatre where a figurante was required.

She was ushered into the presence of the theatrical monarch, who received her with much urbanity and kindness; and he was evidently pleased with her address, appearance, and manners, as she explained to him the nature of her business.

"Dancing in a ball-room, and dancing upon the stage, are two very different things," said the manager. "You will have to undergo a course of training, the length of which will depend upon your skill and your application. I have known young ladies become proficient in a month—others in a year—many never, in spite of all their exertions. Most of the figurantes have been brought up to their avocation from childhood; but I see no reason why you should not learn to acquit yourself well in a very short time."

"I shall exert myself to the utmost, at all events," observed Ellen.

"How are you circumstanced?" inquired the manager. "Excuse the question; but my object is to ascertain if you can support yourself during your apprenticeship, as we may term the process of study and initiation?"

"I have a comfortable home, and am not without resources for my present wants," answered Ellen.

"So far, so good," said the manager. "I do not seek to pry into your secrets. You know best what motives induce you to adopt the stage: my business is to secure the services of young, handsome, and elegant ladies, to form my *corps de ballet*. It is no compliment to you to say that you will answer my purpose, provided your studies are successful."

"With whom am I to study, sir?"

"My ballet-master will instruct you," replied the manager. "You can attend his class. If you will come to the theatre to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, you can take your first lesson."

Ellen assented to the proposal, and took leave of the manager. They were mutually satisfied with this interview: the manager was pleased with the idea of securing the services of a young lady of great beauty, perfect figure, and exquisite grace;—and, on her side, Ellen was cheered with the prospect of embracing an avocation which, she hoped, would render her independent of the bounty of

others.

And now her training commenced. In the first place her feet were placed in a groove-box, heel to heel, so that they formed only one straight line, and with the knees turned outwards. This process is called "*se tourner*." At first the pain was excruciating—it was a perfect martyrdom; but the fair student supported it without a murmur; and in a very few days her feet accustomed themselves, as it were, to fall in dancing parallel to each other.

The second lesson in the course of training consisted of resting the right foot on a bar, which Ellen was compelled to hold in a horizontal line with her left hand. Then the left foot was placed upon the bar, which was in this case held up by the right hand. By these means the stiffness of the feet was destroyed, and they were rendered as pliant and elastic as if they had steel springs instead of bones. This process is denominated "*se casser*."

Next, the student had to practise walking upon the extreme points of the toes, so that the foot and the leg formed one straight line. Then Ellen had to practise the flings, capers, caprioles, turns, whirls, leaps, balances, borees, and all the various cuts, steps, positions, attitudes, and movements of the dance. During the caprioles the student had to train herself to perform four, six, and even eight steps in the air; and the fatigue produced by these lessons was at times of the most oppressive nature.[78]

When Ellen was perfected in these portions of her training, she had to practise the tricks of the stage. At one time the was suspended to lines of wires; at another she was seated on paste-board clouds; then she learned to disappear through traps, or to make her exit by a window. Some of these manœuvres were of a very dangerous nature; indeed, in some, the *danseuse* actually risked her life—and all, her limbs. The awkwardness of an underling in shifting a trap-door at the precise moment would have led her to dash her head against a plank with fearful violence.

The art of theatrical dancing is divided into two schools, called *Ballonné* and *Tacqueté*. The former is the branch in which Taglioni shines; the latter is that in which Fanny Ellsler excels. The style of the *Ballonné*, takes its name from the airiness of the balloon; it combines lightness with grace, and is principally characterized by a breezy and floating appearance of the figure. The *Tacqueté* is all vivacity and rapidity, distinguished by sparkling steps and twinkling measures, executed with wonderful quickness upon the point of the feet. In both these schools was Ellen instructed.

So intense was the application of Miss Monroe—so unwearied was she in her practice, so quick in comprehending the instructions of the master—so resolute in surmounting all obstacles, that in the short space of two months she was a beautiful dancer. The manager was perfectly astonished at her progress; and he pronounced a most favourable opinion upon her chance of achieving a grand triumph.

Her form became all suppleness and lightness; her powers of relaxation and abandonment of limb were prodigious. When attired in the delicate drapery of the ballet, nothing could be more beautiful—nothing more sylph-like, than the elastic airiness of her rich and rounded figure. The grace of her attitudes—the charm of her dance—the arrangement of that drapery, which revealed or exhibited the exquisite contours of her form—the classic loveliness of her countenance—the admirable symmetry of her limbs—and the brilliant whiteness of her skin, formed a whole so attractive, so ravishing, that even the envy of her sister-figurantes was subdued by a sentiment of uncontrollable admiration.

In obedience to a suggestion from the manager, Ellen agreed to adopt a well-sounding name. She accordingly styled herself Miss Selina Fitzherbert. She then learned that at least two-thirds of the gentlemen and ladies constituting the theatrical company, had changed their original patronymics into convenient pseudonyms. Thus Timothy Jones had become Gerald Montgomery; William Wilkins was announced as William Plantagenet; Simon Snuffles adopted the more aristocratic nomenclature of Emeric Gordon; Benjamin Glasscock was changed into Horatio Mortimer; Betsy Podkins was distinguished as Lucinda Hartington; Mary Smicks was displaced by Clara Maberly; Jane Storks was commuted into Jacintha Runnymede; and so on.

In her relations with the gentlemen and ladies of the corps, Ellen (for we shall continue to call her by her real name) found herself in a new world. Every thing with her present associates might be summed up in the word—*egotism*. To hear them talk, one would have imagined that they were so many princes and princesses in disguise, who had graciously condescended to honour the public by appearing upon the stage. The gentlemen were all descended (according to their own accounts) from the best and most ancient families in the country; the ladies had all brothers, or cousins, or uncles highly placed in the army or navy;—and if any one ventured to express surprise that so many well-connected individuals should be compelled to adopt the stage as a profession, the answer was invariably the same—

"I entered on this career through preference, and have quarrelled with all my friends in consequence. Oh! if I chose," would be added, with a toss of the head, "I might have any thing done for me; I might ride in my carriage; but I am determined to stick to the stage."

Poor creatures! this innocent little vanity was a species of reward, a sort of set-off, for long hours of toil, the miseries of a precarious existence, the moments of bitter anguish produced by the coldness of an audience, and all the thousand causes of sorrow, vexation, and distress which embitter the lives of the actor and actress.

With all their little faults, Ellen found the members of the theatrical company good-natured creatures, ever ready to assist each other, hospitable and generous to a fault. In their gay moments, they were sprightly, full of anecdote, and remarkably entertaining. Many of them were clever, and exhibited much sound judgment in their remarks and critical observations upon new dramas and popular works.

At length the evening arrived when Ellen was to make her first appearance upon the stage in public. The house was well attended; and the audience was thrown into a remarkably good humour by the various performances which preceded the ballet. Ellen was in excellent spirits, and full of confidence. As she surveyed herself in the glass in her little dressing-room a few moments before she appeared, a smile of triumph played upon her lips, and lent fire to her eyes. She was indeed ravishingly beautiful.

Her success was complete. The loveliness of her person at once produced an impression in her favour; and when she executed some of the most difficult measures of the Ballonné school, the enthusiasm of the audience knew no bounds. The eyes of the ancient libertines, aided by opera-glasses and *lorgnettes*, devoured the charms of that beautiful girl;—the young men followed every motion, every gesture, with rapturous attention;—the triumph of the *debutante* was complete.

There was something so graceful and yet so voluptuous in her style of dancing,—something so bewitching in her attitudes and so captivating in her manner, that she could not have failed to please. And then she had so well studied all those positions which set off her symmetrical form to its best advantage,—she had paid such unwearied attention to those measures that were chiefly calculated to invoke attention to her well-rounded, and yet light and elastic limbs,—she had so particularly practised those pauses which afforded her an opportunity of making the most of her fine person, that her dancing excited pleasure in every sense—delighting the eye, producing an effect as of a musical and harmonious feeling in the mind, and exciting in the breasts of the male portion of the spectators passions of rapture and desire.

She literally wantoned in the gay and voluptuous dance; at one moment all rapidity, grace, and airiness; at another suddenly falling into a pause expressive of a soft and languishing fatigue;—then again becoming all energy, activity, and animation,—representing, in all its phases, the soul—the spirit—the very poetry of the dance!

At length the toils of her first performance ended. There was not a dissenting voice, when she was called for before the curtain. And then, as she came forward, led by the manager, flowers fell around her—and handkerchiefs were waved by fair hands—and a thousand enthusiastic voices proclaimed her success. Her hopes were gratified—her aspirations were fulfilled:—she had achieved a brilliant triumph!

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

AND now commenced a gay and busy life for Ellen Monroe. To account for her long absence each day from home, was an easy matter; for her father was readily satisfied, so implicit was the confidence he placed in his daughter's discretion; and Markham was always buried amongst his books in his study, save during the intervals occupied by meals.

Ellen's salary was considerable; and to dispose of it in a manner that was not calculated to excite the suspicion of her parent and benefactor, required more duplicity. She took home with her a small amount weekly; and the remainder she placed in the hands of a man of business, recommended to her by the manager.

Numerous attempts were made by certain young noblemen and gentlemen, who frequented the theatre, to ascertain where she resided. But this secret was unknown to every one save the manager, and he kept it religiously.

Nevertheless, Ellen was persecuted by amatory letters, and by proposals of a tender nature. A certain favoured few, of the youthful fashionables above alluded to, were permitted to lounge behind the scenes during the hours of performance; and with them Ellen was an object of powerful attraction—indeed, *the* object of undivided attention and interest. They perceived that she was as beautiful when surveyed near as she seemed when viewed from a distance. But, although she would lend a willing ear to the nonsense and small talk of her wooers, she gave them no direct encouragement; and, though somewhat free, her manners never afforded a pretence even for the most daring to overstep the bounds of decency towards her. The most brilliant offers were conveyed to her in the most delicate terms; but they were invariably declined with firmness, when oral—and left unanswered, when written.

A species of mystery appeared to hang around the charming *danseuse*, and only served to render her the more interesting. No one knew who she was, or whence she came. Her residence was a secret; and she was seen only at the theatre. Then she was reported to be a very paragon of virtue, and had refused the offers of titled and wealthy men. These circumstances invested her with those artificial attractions which please the public, and which, when united with her real qualifications, raised her to a splendid degree of popularity.

Although her time was fully occupied, she now and then found leisure to call at the house of Mr. Wentworth, the surgeon, and pass half an hour in the company of her child. The little being throve apace; and Ellen felt for it all a mother's tenderness—a love which was not impaired by that callousness towards virtue for virtue's sake, which we have before noticed, and which had been produced in her by the strange scenes through which she had passed.

One evening, a short time before she was to appear in the ballet, the manager informed her that a gentleman desired to speak with her alone in the green-room.

To that apartment did Ellen immediately repair, and, to her surprise, the found herself in the presence of Mr. Greenwood.

"Ah! I am not then mistaken," exclaimed that gentleman, with one of his blandest smiles. "I saw you last night for the first time; and the moment you appeared upon the stage I knew you—that is, I felt almost convinced that it was you. But how happened this strange event in your life?"

"My benefactor, *Richard Markham*," answered Ellen, with singular and mysterious emphasis upon the name, "is not wealthy—*you* best know why; my father is irretrievably ruined—*you* also know how:—and, with all my faults, I could not endure the idea of eating the bread of dependence and idleness."

"But why did you not apply to me?" demanded Greenwood. "I would have placed you above want."

"No—I would not for worlds be dependent upon you," replied Ellen warmly. "I appealed to you to support my child—*our* child; and you did so. There was only one way in which you could have manifested a real generosity towards me—and you refused. The service I asked you once upon my knees—with tears and prayers—you rejected:—I implored you to give a father's honourable name to your child—I besought you to save the reputation of her whose father was ruined through you, and who herself became your victim by a strange combination of circumstances. You refused! What *less* could I accept at *your* hands? Do you think that I have not my little sentiments of pride as well as you? I could not live idly:—I embraced the stage; and my exertions have been crowned with success."

"And your father—and Richard—do they know of your present avocation?" demanded Greenwood, somewhat abashed by the bitterness of the under-current of reproach which had characterised the last speech of the figurante.

"God forbid!" cried Ellen. "And yet," she added, after a moment's thought, "I need not be ashamed of earning my bread by my own honourable exertions."

"And now, Ellen—one more question," said Greenwood. "The child—is he well! Is he taken care of?"

"He is well—and he is duly cared for," was Ellen's reply; and as she delivered it, she felt an emotion—almost of tenderness—in favour of the man who thus inquired, with embarrassment of manner, after the welfare of *their* child.

Greenwood's quick eye noticed the feeling that animated the young mother's bosom. He took her hand, and drew her towards him. She was so exquisitely beautiful—so inviting in the light gauze garb which she wore, that Greenwood's passions were fired, and he longed to make her his mistress.

Her hand lingered in his;—he pressed it gently. She did not seem to notice the circumstance; her eyes were cast down—she was absorbed in thought.

Greenwood imprinted a kiss upon her spotless forehead.

She started, hastily withdrew her hand, and cast upon him a look of mingled curiosity and reproach.

"Are you astonished that I should bestow a mark of kind feeling upon the mother of my child?" asked Greenwood, assuming a soft and tender tone of voice.

"That mother," answered Ellen, "whom you abandoned to shame and dishonour!"

"Do not reproach me for what is past," said Greenwood.

"Would you not act in the same manner over again?" inquired Ellen, darting a searching glance at the member of Parliament.

"Why this question, Ellen?" exclaimed Greenwood. "Will you not believe me if I tell you that I am attached to you? Will you not give me credit for sincerity, when I declare that I would gladly exert all the means in my power to make you happy? Why do you look so coldly upon me? Listen for a moment, Ellen, to what I am about to say. A few miles from London there is a delicious spot—a perfect Paradise upon earth, a villa surrounded by charming grounds, and commanding views of the most lovely scenery. That property is for sale: say but the word—I will purchase it—it shall be yours; and all the time that I can spare from my numerous avocations shall be devoted to Ellen and to love."

"The way to that charming villa, so far as you and I are concerned," said Ellen, "must lead through the church. Is it thus that you understand it?"

"Why destroy the dream of love and happiness which I had formed, by allusion to the formal ceremonies of this cold world?" exclaimed Greenwood.

"That is the language of every libertine, sir," replied Ellen, with bitter irony. "Do not deceive yourself—you cannot deceive me. I would accept the title of your wife, for the sake of our child;—but to be your mistress—no, never—never."

With these words Ellen left the green-room; and in a few minutes she appeared upon the stage—gay, animated, radiant with beauty and with smiles—the very personification of the voluptuous dance in which she shone with such unrivalled splendour.

Five or six evenings after the one on which she had this interview with Greenwood, Ellen received a note by the post. It was addressed to her at the theatre, by the name which she had assumed; and its contents ran as follows:—

"A certain person who is enamoured of you, and who is not accustomed to allow trivial obstacles to stand in the way of his designs, has determined upon carrying you forcibly off to a secluded spot in the country. He knows where you reside, and has ascertained that you return every evening from the theatre in a hackney cab to within a short distance of your abode. His plan is to way-lay you during your walk from the place where you descend from the vehicle, to your residence. If your suspicions fall upon any person of your acquaintance, after a perusal of this note, beware how you tax him with the vile intent;—beware how you communicate this warning, for by any imprudence on your part, you may deprive the writer of the means of counteracting in future the infamous designs which the individual above alluded to may form against yourself or others."

This note was written in a neat but curious hand, which seemed to be that of a foreigner. The reader can well imagine the painful surprise which its contents produced upon the young figurante. She however had no difficulty in fixing upon Greenwood as the person who contemplated the atrocity revealed in that note.

He alone (save the manager, who was an honourable and discreet man) knew where she lived; unless, indeed, some other amatory swain had followed her homeward. This idea perplexed her—it was possible; and yet she could not help thinking that Greenwood was the person against whom she was thus warned.

But who had sent her that friendly notice? Who was the mysterious individual that had thus generously placed her upon her guard? Conjecture was useless. She must think only of how she ought to act!

Her mind was speedily made up. She resolved to ride in the vehicle of an evening up to the very door of Markham's house, and trust to her ingenuity for an excuse to satisfy her father relative to this apparent extravagance on her part. Both Richard and Mr. Monroe put implicit confidence in her word;—she had already satisfactorily accounted for the late hours which her attendance at the theatre compelled her to keep, by stating that she was engaged to attend private concerts and musical conversaziones at the West End—sometimes, even, at Blackheath, Kensington, and Clapham—where she presided at the piano, in which she was a proficient. Then, when she was compelled to be present at rehearsals at the theatre, she stated that she had morning concerts to attend; and as she was not absent from home every day (her engagement with the manager being merely to appear three nights a-week) this system of deception on her part readily obtained credit with both Markham and her father, neither of whom could seriously object to what they were induced to believe was the legitimate exercise of her accomplishments. Accordingly, when, on the morning after the receipt of the mysterious letter, she casually mentioned that she should no longer return home of an evening by the omnibus, as she disliked the lonely walk from the main-road, where it set her down, to the Place, and that her emoluments would now permit her to enjoy the comfort and safety of a cab, both Richard and her father earnestly commended her resolution.

And why did she not tell the truth at once? wherefore did she not acknowledge the career which she was pursuing, and reveal the triumph which she had achieved?

Because she knew that both her father and Markham would oppose themselves to the idea of her exercising the profession of a dancer;—because she had commenced a system of duplicity, and was almost necessitated to persevere in it;—and because she really loved—ardently loved—the course upon which she had entered. The applause of crowded audiences—the smiles of the manager—the adulation of the young nobles and gentlemen who, behind the scenes, complimented her upon her success, her talents, and her beauty,—these were delights which she would not very readily abandon.

CHAPTER XC.

MARKHAM'S OCCUPATIONS.

SINCE the period when Markham had made so great a sacrifice of his pecuniary resources, in order to effect the liberation of Count Alteroni from a debtor's prison, he had devoted himself to literary pursuits. He aspired to the honours of authorship, and composed a tragedy.

All young authors, while yet nibbling the grass at the foot of Parnassus (and how many never reach any higher!) attempt either poetry or the drama. They invariably fix upon the most difficult tasks; and yet they did not begin learning Greek with Euripides, nor enter upon their initiation into the mysteries of the Latin tongue with Juvenal.

There is also another fault into which they invariably fall;—and that is an extraordinary tendency to three meretricious ornaments which they seem to mistake for fine writing. Truth and nature may be regarded as a noble flock, furnishing the richest fleece to mankind; but when a series of good writers have exhausted their fleece in weaving the fabrics of genius, their successors are tempted to have recourse to swine for a supply of materials; and we know, besides, that in this attempt, as in the rude dramas called "Moralities" in the middle ages, there is great cry and little wool. It is also liable to the objection that no skill in the workmanship, or adjustment in the machinery, can give it the beauty and perfection of the raw material which nature has appropriated to the purpose of clothing her favoured offspring.

Too many writers of the present day, instead of attempting to rival their predecessors in endeavouring to fabricate the genuine fleece derived from this flock of truth and nature, into new and exquisite forms, are engaged in shearing the swine. In this labour they can obtain, at best, nothing more than erroneous principles of science, worthless paradoxes, unnatural fictions, tinsel poetry and prose, and unnumbered crudities.

Richard Markham was not exempted from these faults. He wrote a tragedy—abounding in beauties, and abounding in faults.

The most delicious sweets, used in undue proportions with our food and drink, soon become in a high degree offensive and disgusting. Markham heaped figure upon figure—crammed his speeches with metaphors—and travelled many thousands of miles out of his way in search of a similitude, when he had a much better and more simple one close at hand. Nevertheless, his tragedy contained proofs of a brilliant talent, and, with much judicious pruning, every element of triumphant success.

Having obtained the address of the private residence of the manager of one of the principal metropolitan theatres, Richard sent his tragedy to the great man. He, however, withheld his real name, for he had determined to commence his literary career under a feigned one; so that, in case he should prove unsuccessful, his failure might not become known to his friends the Monroes, or reach the ears of his well-beloved Isabella. For the same reason he did not give his proper address in the letter which accompanied the drama; but requested that a reply might be sent to *Edward Preston, to the care of Mr. Dyson* (his solicitor).

He did not mention to a single soul—not even to Monroe or the faithful Whittingham—the circumstance of his authorship. He reflected that if he succeeded, it would then be time to communicate his happiness; but, that if he failed, it would be useless to wound others by imparting to them his disappointments. He had ceased to be sanguine about any thing in this world; for he had met with too many misfortunes to anticipate much success in life; and his only ambition was to obtain an honourable livelihood.

Scarcely a week had elapsed after Markham had sent his drama to the manager, when he received a letter from this gentleman. The contents were laconic enough, but explicit. The manager "had perused the tragedy with feelings of extreme satisfaction;"—he congratulated the writer upon "the skill which he had made his combinations to produce stage effect;"—he suggested "a few alterations and considerable abbreviations;" and concluded by stating that "he should be most happy to introduce so promising an author to the public." A postscript appointed a time for an interview at the manager's own private residence.

At eleven o'clock the next morning Markham was ushered into the presence of the manager.

The great man was seated in his study, dressed in a magnificent Turkish dressing-gown, with a French skull-cap upon his head, and red morocco slippers upon his feet. He was a man of middle age—gentlemanly and affable in manner—and possessed of considerable literary abilities.

"Sit down, sir—pray, sit down," said the manager, when Markham was introduced. "I have perused your tragedy with great attention, and am pleased with it. I am, moreover, perfectly willing to undertake the risk of bringing it out, although tragedy is at a terrible discount now-a-days. But, first and foremost, we most make arrangements about terms. What price do you put upon your manuscript?"

"I have formed no idea upon that subject," replied Markham. "I would rather leave myself entirely in your hands."

"Nay—you must know the hope you have entertained in this respect?" said the manager.

"To tell you the candid truth, this is my first essay," returned Markham; "and I am totally unacquainted with the ordinary value of such labour."

"If this be your first essay, sir," said the manager, surveying Markham with some astonishment, "I can only assure you that it is a most promising one. But once again—name your price."

"The manner in which you speak to me shows that if I trust to your generosity, I shall not do wrong."

"Well, Mr. Preston," cried the manager, pleased at this compliment, "I shall use you in an equally liberal manner. You must be informed that you will have certain pecuniary privileges, in respect to any provincial theatres at which your piece may be performed should it prove successful; and you will also have the benefit of the publication of the work in a volume. What, then, should you say if

I were to give you fifty guineas for the play, and five guineas a-night for every time of its performance, after the first fortnight?"

"I should esteem your offer a very liberal one," answered Richard, overjoyed at the proposal.

"In that case the bargain is concluded at once, and without any more words," said the manager; then, taking a well-filled canvass bag from his desk, he counted down fifty guineas in notes, gold, and silver.

Markham gave a receipt, and they exchanged undertakings specifying the conditions proposed by the manager.

"When do you propose to bring out the piece?" inquired Richard, when this business was concluded.

"In about six weeks," said the manager. "Shall you have any objection to attend the rehearsals, and see that the gentlemen and ladies of the company fully appreciate the spirit of the parts that will be assigned to them?"

"I shall not have the least objection," answered Markham; "but I am afraid that my experience——"

"Well, well," said the manager, smiling, "I will not press you. Leave it all to me—I will see justice done to your design, which I think I understand pretty well. If I want you I will let you know; and if you do not hear from me, you will see by the advertisements in the newspapers for what night the first representation will be announced."

Markham expressed his gratitude to the manager for the kindness with which he had received him, and then took his leave, his heart elated with hope, and his mind relieved from much anxiety respecting the future.

When he left the manager's residence he repaired to an adjacent tavern to procure some refreshment; and there, while engaged in the discussion of a sandwich and a glass of sherry, he cast his eyes over *The Times* newspaper.

A particular advertisement arrested his attention.

A gentleman—a widower—required a daily tutor for his two young sons, whom he was desirous of having instructed in Latin, history, drawing, arithmetic, &c. The boys were respectively nine and eleven years old. The advertiser stated that any individual who could himself teach the various branches of education specified, would be preferred to a plurality of masters, each proficient only in one particular study. Personal application was to be made between certain hours.

The residence of the advertiser was in Kentish Town; and this vicinity to Markham's own abode induced him to think seriously of offering his services. He did not feel disposed to pursue his literary labours until after the representation of his drama, as he was as yet unaware of the reception it might experience at the hands of the public;—and he was also by no means inclined to remain idle. The occupation of daily tutor in a respectable family appeared congenial to his tastes; and he resolved to proceed forthwith to the residence of Mr. Gregory, in Kentish Town.

Arrived at the house, he was admitted into the presence of a gentleman of about fifty, with a serious and melancholy countenance, prepossessing manners, and a peculiar suavity of voice that gave encouragement to the applicant.

Markham told him in a few words that he was once possessed of considerable property, the greater portion of which he had lost through the unfortunate speculations of his guardian, and that he was now anxious to turn the excellent education which he had received to some advantage.

Mr. Gregory had only lately arrived in London with his family, from a very distant part of the country, where he had a house and small estate; but the recent death of a beloved wife had rendered the scenes of their wedded happiness disagreeable to him;—and this was the cause of his removal and his settlement in London. He lived in a very retired manner, and had previously known nothing of Markham—not even his name. He was therefore totally ignorant of Richard's trial and condemnation for forgery. The young man felt the greatest possible inclination to reveal the entire facts to Mr. Gregory, whose amiable manners gave him confidence; but he restrained himself—for it struck him that others were dependent upon him—that he ought not to stand in his own light—and that his innocence of the crime imputed to him, and the consciousness of those upright and honourable intentions which on all occasions filled his breast, were a sufficient extenuation for this silence.

Mr. Gregory, who was himself a highly-educated man, soon saw that Markham was competent to teach his children all that it was desirable for them to acquire; and he agreed to engage the applicant as his sons' tutor. Richard offered to give him a reference to his solicitor; but Mr. Gregory declined to take it, saying, "Your appearance, Mr. Markham, is sufficient."

On the following day Richard entered upon his new avocation. He was engaged to attend at Mr. Gregory's house from ten till three every day. The employment was a pleasant one; and the pecuniary terms were liberal in the extreme.

Gustavus and Lionel Gregory were two intelligent and handsome youths; and they soon became greatly attached to their tutor.

From the mere fact of having never been accustomed to tuition, Richard took the greater pains to explain all difficult subjects to them; and so well did he adapt his plan of instruction to their juvenile capacities, that in the short space of a month, Mr. Gregory was himself perfectly astonished at the advance which his sons had made in their studies. He then determined that the advantages of the tutor's abilities should be extended to his daughter, in respect to drawing; and Miss Mary-Anne Gregory was accordingly added to the number of Markham's pupils.

Mary-Anne was, at the time of which we are writing, sixteen years of age. Delicate in constitution, and of a sweet and amiable disposition, she was an object of peculiar interest to all who knew her. Her long flaxen hair, soft blue eyes, pale countenance, and vermilion lips, gave her the appearance of a wax figure; and her light and airy form, flitting ever hither and thither in obedience to the innocent gaiety and vivacity of her disposition, seemed that of some fairy whose destinies belonged not to the common lot of mortals.

Although she was sixteen, she was considered but a mere girl; and she romped with her brothers, and with the young female friends who occasionally visited her, with all the joyousness and glee of a child of ten years old.

The animation of her countenance was on those occasions radiant and brilliant in the extreme:—a spectator could have snatched her to his arms and embraced her fondly,—not with a single gross desire—not with the shadow of an unhallowed motive; but, in the same way as a man, who, being a parent himself, is attached to children, suddenly seizes upon a lovely little boy or girl of two or three years old, and covers its cheeks with kisses.

Mary-Anne was by no means beautiful—not even pretty; and yet there was something altogether unearthly in the whole character and expression of her countenance. It was a face of angelic interest—indicative of a mental amiability and serenity truly divine.

Without possessing the ingredients of physical beauty—without regularity of feature or classical formation of head,—there was still about her an abstract loveliness, apart from shape and features, which was of itself positive and distinct, and seemed an emanation of mental qualities, infantine joyousness, and winning manners. It produced a sort of atmosphere of light around her—enveloping her as with a halo of innocence.

Her face was as pale—as colourless as the finest Parian marble, but also, like the surface of that beautiful material, spotless and devoid of blemish. Her pure forehead was streaked with small azure veins: her lips were thin, and of the brightest vermilion; and these hues placed in contrast with that delicate complexion, gave a sentiment and expression to her countenance altogether peculiar to itself.

Her eyes, of a light and yet too positive a blue to be mistaken for grey, were fringed with long dark lashes, which imparted to them—ever gay and sparkling as they were—a magic eloquence as powerful as that of the most faultless beauty. And, again, in strange contrast with those dark lashes was her flaxen hair, the whole of which fell in ringlets and in waves over her shoulders and her back, no portion of it being collected in a knot behind.

Then her form—it was so slight as to appear almost etherealised, and yet there was no mistaking the symmetry of its proportions.

Thus—without being actually beautiful—Mary-Anne was a creature of light and joy who was calculated to interest, fascinate, and win, in a manner which produced feelings of admiration and of love. Her appearance therefore produced upon the mind an impression that she *was* beautiful—very beautiful; and yet, if any one had paused to analyse her features, she would have been found to possess no real elements of physical loveliness. She was charming—fascinating—bewitching—interesting; therefore lovely in one sense, and loveable in all respects!

Mary-Anne was a very difficult pupil to teach. In the midst of the most serious study, that charming and volatile creature would start from her chair, run to her piano, and commence a lively air, which she would leave also unfinished, and then narrate some sprightly anecdote, or utter some artless sally, which would create a general laugh.

The seriousness of the tutor would be disturbed in spite of himself: and even her father, if present, could not find it in his heart to scold.

The drawing would at length be resumed; and for half an hour, the application of Mary-Anne would be intense. Then away would be flung the pencil; and a new freak must be accomplished before the study would be resumed.

Richard could not help liking this volatile, but artless and innocent creature,—as a man likes his daughter or his sister; and she, on her part, appeared to become greatly attached to her tutor.

Although Mr. Gregory followed no profession, being a man of considerable independent property, he was nevertheless much from home, passing his time either at the library of the British Museum or at his Club. Richard and Mary-Anne were thus much together,—too much for the peace of that innocent and fascinating girl!

She speedily conceived a violent passion for her tutor, which he, however, neither perceived nor returned.

She was herself unaware of the nature of her own feelings towards him;—she knew as much of love and its sensations as a beauteous savage girl, in some far-off isle, knows of Christianity;—and hers was an attachment which could only be revealed to herself by some accident, which might excite her jealousy or awaken her grief.

One morning, before the usual lessons of the day commenced, Mr. Gregory entered the study, and, addressing himself to Markham, said, "We must now give the young people a holiday for a short time. Proper relaxation is as necessary to their bodily welfare as education to their mental well-being. We will suspend their studies for a month, if you be agreeable, Mr. Markham. I shall, however, be always pleased to see you as often as you choose to call during that interval; and every Sunday, at all events, we shall expect the pleasure of your company to dinner as usual."

"What!" cried Mary-Anne; "is Mr. Markham to discontinue his daily visits for a whole month?"

"Certainly, my dear," said her father. "Mr. Markham requires a holiday as well as you."

"I want no holiday," exclaimed Mary-Anne, pouting her lips in a manner that was quite charming, and which might remind the reader of the *petite moue* that Esmeralda was accustomed to make in Victor Hugo's admirable novel *Notre Dame de Paris*.

"But *you* always take a holiday, my dear," returned her father with a smile; "and therefore you fancy that others do not require a temporary relaxation. Gustavus and Lionel want a holiday; and Mr. Markham cannot be always poring over books and drawings."

"Well, I wish Mr. Markham to take the trouble to come every morning and give me my drawing lesson," said the young lady, with a little air of decision and firmness, which was quite comic in its way; "and if he will not," she added, "then I will never learn to draw any more—and that is decided."

Mr. Gregory surveyed his daughter with an air of astonishment.

Probably he half penetrated *the* secret—for her passion could not be called *her* secret, because she was totally unconscious of the nature of her feelings, and sought to conceal nothing.

Had she been aware of the real sentiment which she experienced, she would have at once revealed it; for she was guileless and unsuspicious—ignorant of all deceit—devoid of all hypocrisy—and endowed with as much simplicity and artlessness as a child of six years old.

"Mr. Markham must have a holiday, my dear," said Mr. Gregory, at length, with a peculiar emphasis; "and I beg that no further objection may be offered."

Mary-Anne instantly burst into tears, exclaiming, in a voice almost choked with sobs, "Mr. Markham *may* have *his* holiday, if he likes; but I will not learn any thing more of him when the studies begin again."

And she retired in a pet to another apartment.

Markham was himself astonished at this singular behaviour on the part of his interesting pupil.

He was, however, far from suspecting the real cause, and took his leave with a promise to return to dinner on the following Sunday, until which time there was then an interval of five days.

Three days after the one on which the above conversation took place, Markham was about to issue from his dwelling to proceed into town for the purpose of calling upon the manager, as he had that morning seen his drama advertised for early representation,—when Whittingham informed him that a young lady desired to speak to him In the drawing-room.

The idea of Isabella instantly flashed through the mind of Richard:—but would *she* call upon him, alone and unattended? No—for Isabella, was modesty and prudence personified.

Then, who could it be?

Markham asked this question of his butler.

"A remarkable sweet creatur," said Whittingham; "and come quite spontaneous like. Beautiful flaxy hair—blue eyes—pale complexion—"

"Impossible! you do not say *that*, Whittingham?" cried Markham, on whom a light now broke.

"Do I look like a man that speaks evasiously, Master Richard?" demanded the butler, shifting his inseparable companion—the white napkin—from beneath one arm to the other.

Markham repaired to the drawing-room:—his suspicions were verified;—the moment he entered the apartment, he beheld Miss Gregory seated upon the sofa.

"Well, Mr. Markham," she said, extending to him her hand, and smiling so sweetly with her vermilion lips, which disclosed a set of teeth not quite even, but as white as ivory, that Richard could not find it in his heart to be angry with her; "I was resolved not to pass the day without seeing you; and as you would not come to me, I was compelled to come to you."

"But, Miss Gregory," said Markham, "are you not aware that you have taken a most imprudent step, and that the world would highly censure your conduct?"

"Why?" demanded Mary-Anne, in astonishment.

"Because ladies, no matter whether single or married, never call upon single gentlemen; and society has laid down certain rules in this respect, which—"

"My dear Mr. Markham, you are not giving me a lesson now, remember, in my father's study," interrupted Mary-Anne, laughing heartily. "I know nothing about the rules of society in this respect, or that respect, or any other respect. All I know is, that I cried all night long after you left us the other day; and I have been very miserable until this morning, when I suddenly recollected that I knew your address, and could come and call on you."

"If your father were to know that you came hither," said Richard, "he would never forgive you, nor ever see me again."

"Well, then, all we have to do is not to tell my father any thing about the matter," said Mary-Anne, with considerable ingenuousness. "But how cross you look; and I—I thought," she added, ready to cry, "that you would be as pleased to see me as I am to see you."

"Yes, Miss Gregory—I *am* pleased to see you—I am always pleased to see you," answered Markham, by way of soothing the poor girl; "but you must allow me to assure you that this step is the most imprudent—the most thoughtless in the world. I really tremble for the consequences—should your father happen to hear of it."

"I tell you over and over again," persisted Miss Gregory, "that my papa shall never know any thing at all about the matter. Now, then, pray don't be cross; but tell me that you are glad to see me. Speak, Mr. Markham—are you glad to see me?"

"How shall I ever be able to convince this artless young creature of the impropriety of her conduct?" murmured Richard within himself. "To argue with her too long and too forcibly upon the subject would be to instruct her innocent mind in the evils and vices of society, and to imbue her with ideas which are as yet like a foreign and a strange tongue to her! Innocence, then, is not a pearl of invaluable price to its possessor, in this world,—since it can so readily prepare the path which *might* lead to ruin!"

"You do not answer me—you are thoughtful—you will not speak to me," said Mary Ann, rising from the sofa, with tears in her eyes, and preparing—or rather affecting an intention to depart.

Markham still gave her no reply.

He was grieved—deeply grieved to wound her feelings; but he thought that it would be better to allow her to return home at once, with sentiments of pique and wounded pride which would prevent a repetition of the same step, than to initiate her into those social mysteries which would only give an impulse to her lively imagination that would probably prove morally injurious to her.

But Mary Anne was incapable of harbouring resentment; and she burst into an agony of grief.

"Oh! how unkind you are, Mr. Markham," she exclaimed, "after all my endeavours to please you! I thought that you would have experienced as much joy to see me, as I felt when I saw you enter the room. Since the day that I lost my dear mother—upwards of nine years ago—I have never loved any one so much as I love you—no, not even my father; for I feel that at this moment I could dare even *his* anger, if you were to shelter me! I have long thought that I had no friend but God, to whom I could communicate my little secrets; and now I feel as if I could bestow all my confidence upon you. Since the death of my mother I have never sought my couch without resigning my soul into the hands of God, and without demanding of him an insight into truth and virtue. But now I would rather entrust my safety to you; and I would rather learn all I should know from your lips than from those of another! You ought, therefore, to treat me with more kindness and consideration than you have done up to this moment;—you should bestow upon me an additional share of your attention and notice,—because I am anxious to please you—I would do any thing to save you pain—I would lay down my life to ensure a prolongation of yours!"

Mary-Anne had never spoken so seriously, nor in so impassioned a manner, in her life before. She was even astonished herself at

the very ideas which she was now expressing for the first time, and which seemed to flow from some inward fountain whose springs she could not check.

Markham was astounded.

He suddenly comprehended the true situation of the innocent and artless girl in respect to himself.

A pang shot through his heart when he considered the impossibility of her happiness ever being ensured by his means; and he thought within himself, "Alas! poor child, she does not rightly comprehend the state of her own mind!"

But how could this love of hers be stifled? how could that passion be suppressed?

All the remedies yet essayed to quench and annihilate love, have changed into poisons;—even violent and unexpected lessons will not always make the heart reflect.

The more the slave bends, the heavier becomes the yoke: the more a man employs an unjust force, the more will injustice become necessary to his views. No one should attempt to exercise tyranny upon proud souls; for he will readily learn that it is not easy to triumph over and trample on a noble love. Error succeeds error—outrage follows upon outrage—and bitterness increases like a torrent whose embankments have given way. Who can define the termination of these ravages? Will not the tender and affectionate woman, whose love man may endeavour to stifle by coldness or neglect, perish in the ruin? *She* will succumb to tears and to devouring cares—even while the *love* which she cherishes still preserves all its vigour, and loses nothing of its ardour through intense suffering!

Markham knew not how to reply to that affectionate girl, whose spirit he dared not break by his unkindness,—whose passion he could not return, because his heart was devoted to another,—and whose mind he was afraid to enlighten with regard to those social duties which originated in reasons and motives totally unknown to her.

"Mr. Markham," said Mary-Anne, wiping away her tears, "tell me that you are not angry with me for calling: and, as you say it is not right, I will never come again."

"Angry with you, Miss Gregory, I cannot be," exclaimed Markham. "But I ought to tell you that you must not give way to that feeling of—of—preference towards me—"

"Oh! I suppose that the rules of society also prevent a single lady from liking a single gentleman?" interrupted Mary-Anne pettishly.

"No rules can control volition, Miss Gregory," said Richard, cruelly embarrassed how to explain himself to the young lady; "but if you tell me that you prefer me to your father—"

"And so I do," exclaimed Mary-Anne quickly.

"Then you are wrong," returned Markham.

"Wrong, indeed! and yet you have just told me that no rules can control volition."

"True; but we must endeavour to conquer those feelings. You say that you like me?—suppose that we were never to meet again; would you not then learn to forget that you ever knew such a being?"

"Impossible! never—never!" cried Mary-Anne enthusiastically. "I am always thinking of you!"

"But the time must come, some day or another—whether now, or a year, or ten years hence—when we must cease to meet. I may be married—or you yourself may marry—"

"Married!" ejaculated Mary-Anne: "do you think of marrying, then, Mr. Markham?"

"I am certainly attached to a young lady," replied Richard; "but there are circumstances which—"

"You are attached to a young lady? Is she beautiful—very beautiful?"

"Very beautiful," answered Richard.

Mary-Anne remained silent for some moments: she appeared to reflect profoundly.

A sudden glow of animation flushed her cheek:—was it a light that dawned in upon her soul?

Richard sincerely hoped so.

"Mr. Markham," said Mary-Anne, rising from her seat, and speaking in a tone so serious that Richard could scarcely believe he was now listening to the once volatile, sprightly, thoughtless, and playful creature he had known,—"Mr. Markham, I have to apologise most sincerely for the trouble I have given you, and the intrusion of which I have been guilty. A veil has suddenly fallen from my eyes; and I now comprehend the impropriety of my conduct. Ah! I see what you mean by the laws of society. But God—and you also, Mr. Markham, well know the innocence of my motives in calling this morning upon you; and if my friendship for you has betrayed me into error, I beseech you to forget that such a scene has ever taken place."

She shook hands with Richard with her usual cordiality and warmth, and then took her departure—no longer skipping like the young fawn, but with steady and measured pace.

And still that young girl did not dream that love had influenced her conduct;—she continued to believe that the sentiment she experienced was one of friendship. The idea of Richard's marriage with another had only enlightened her in respect to those laws which, as social and sympathetic beings, we have conventionally enacted.

On the ensuing Sunday Markham dined, according to engagement, with Mr. Gregory.

Mary-Anne was present; and striking was the change which had taken place in her!

Her manners were no longer gay, joyous, confiding, and full of animation. As sickness chases from the cheek the flush of hoyden health, so had a new sentiment banished that sprightliness of disposition and that liveliness of temperament which so lately had characterised this *child of nature*.

Love, then, is omnipotent, if he can effect such changes as these! Alas! Love can work much for our unhappiness, but little for our felicity:—he may make the gladsome companion melancholy and serious; but he seldom covers the countenance of the morose one

with smiles!

Mary-Anne endeavoured to seem as reserved as possible with Richard; and yet, from time to time, when she thought he did not notice her, she fixed her eyes upon him with an expression of such heart-devoted tenderness, that it seemed as if she were pouring forth her entire soul to the divinity whom she worshipped.

In the grotesque and colossal sculptures, and the mountainous architectural piles of the East, we seem to behold the products of an imagination struggling with conceptions too vast for its compass, and hence endeavouring to make some approximation to the reality by heaping up the irregular and huge invisible forms;—and thus did the tortured and embarrassed mind of this poor girl, unacquainted with the precise nature of the sentiment it cherished, maintain a conflict with the feelings which oppressed it, and offer up an idolatry of its own invention to the object of its unbounded veneration.

Mr. Gregory could not but perceive this change in his daughter's behaviour; and he was more or less at a loss to conceive the cause.

He had entertained, for a few days previously, a faint suspicion that Mary-Anne had peradventure formed an attachment, which would thus account for her altered demeanour; for since her call upon Markham, had her manners changed. But the good-hearted father was still loth to believe that his daughter's young heart had been smitten—and for the simple reason because he did not wish it to be so.

Although he respected Markham, he was like all parents, who, possessing fortunes themselves, are anxious that the suitors for their daughters' hands should also be enabled to produce a modicum of this world's lucre.

He was therefore unwilling to admit in his own mind the conviction that his suspicion was well-founded: he fancied that change of scene or amusement would probably operate favourably upon his daughter's mind, and bring her spirits back to their proper tone; and in this resolution was he confirmed, when in the course of that Sunday evening, he saw the confirmation of his suspicion. He could no longer doubt:—a thousand little incidents proved to him the attachment of his daughter to Richard Markham; and his quick glance convinced him that she was *not* loved by her tutor in return.

That night Mr. Gregory lay awake, pondering upon the best course to pursue. At one moment he thought of communicating to Markham the state of his daughter's heart (for he could not suppose that Richard was aware of the passion of which he was the object), and permitting the young couple to look upon each other as destined to be one day united:—at another moment, he imagined that it would be better to allow things to take their chance for a short time, and thereby ascertain whether the attachment gained ground on the part of his daughter, and whether it would become mutual (for he was entirely ignorant of Markham's love for another); and at length he resolved upon dispensing with the services of Richard, and trusting to time to eradicate the seeds of the unfortunate passion from the heart of Mary-Anne.

This plan Mr. Gregory put into execution in the course of a few days—indeed, the very next time that Richard called at his house.

"Mr. Markham," said the father, "I deeply regret that certain circumstances, which it is not necessary for me to explain to you, compel me to dispense with your farther attendance upon my children."

"I hope," said Markham, "that I have given you no cause——"

"Not at all—not in the least," interrupted Mr. Gregory, shaking Richard cordially by the hand: then, in a serious tone, he added, "my daughter's health requires rest—repose—and quiet. I shall see no visitors for some time."

Markham was satisfied. Mr. Gregory had heard nothing prejudicial to his character; but he had evidently penetrated into the state of Mary-Anne's feelings. Richard was delighted to be thus dismissed from a house where his presence was only calculated to destroy the more profoundly the peace of one of its inmates:—indeed, he himself had already entertained serious ideas of severing his connexion with that family.

"If I can at any time be of service to you, Mr. Markham, in any way, you may command me," said Mr. Gregory, when the former rose to depart; "and do not think that I am merely uttering a cold ceremonial phrase, when I desire you to make use of me as a friend, should you ever require one."

Richard thanked Mr. Gregory for his kindness, and took leave of him. He also bade adieu to Gustavus and Lionel, both of whom were deeply affected at the idea of losing the visits of their tutor:—but Mary-Anne had been purposely sent to pass a few days with some friends in the country.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE TRAGEDY.

AT length the evening, upon which the tragedy was to be represented for the first time, arrived.

Markham in the mean time had seen little of the manager, and had not attended a single rehearsal, his presence for that purpose not having been required. Moreover, true to his original intentions, he had not acquainted a soul with his secret relative to the drama. The manager still knew him only as Edward Preston; and the advertisements in the newspapers had announced the "forth-coming tragedy" as one that had "emanated from the pen of a young author of considerable promise, but who had determined to maintain a strict *incognito* until the public verdict should have been pronounced upon his piece."

A short time before the doors opened, Richard proceeded to the theatre, and called upon the manager, who received him in his own private apartment.

"Well, Mr. Preston," said the theatrical monarch, "this evening will decide the fate of the tragedy. A few hours, and we shall know more."

"I hope you still think well of it," returned Markham.

"My candid opinion is that the success will be triumphant," said the manager. "I have spared no expense to get up the piece well; and I am very sanguine. Besides, I have another element of success."

"What is that?" inquired Richard.

"My principal ballet-dancer, who is a beautiful creature and a general favourite—Miss Selina Fitzherbert—"

"I have heard of her fame," said Markham, "but have never seen her. Strange as it may appear, I never visit theatres—I have not done so for years."

"You will visit them often enough if your productions succeed," observed the manager with a smile. "But, as I was saying, Miss Fitzherbert has lately manifested a passionate desire to shine in tragedy; and she will make her *debut* in that sphere to-night, in your piece. She will play the *Baron's Daughter*."

"Which character does not appear until the commencement of the third act," said Markham.

"Precisely," observed the manager. "But time is now drawing on. Where will you remain during the performance?"

"I shall proceed into the body of the house," returned Markham, "and take my seat in one of the central boxes—I mean those precisely fronting the stage. I shall be able to judge of the effect better in that part of the house than elsewhere."

"As you please," said the manager. "But mind and let me see you after the performance."

Richard promised compliance with this request, and then proceeded into the house, where he took a seat in the centre of the amphitheatre.

The doors had been opened a few minutes previously, and the house was filling fast. By half-past six it was crowded from pit to roof. The boxes were filled with elegantly-dressed ladies and fashionable gentlemen: there was not room to thrust another spectator into any one point at the moment when the curtain drew up.

The overture commenced. How long it appeared to Markham, passionately fond of music though he was!

At length it ceased; and the First Act commenced.

For some time a profound silence pervaded the audience:—not a voice, not a murmur, not a sigh, gave the slightest demonstration of either approbation or dislike.

But, at length, at the conclusion of a most impressive soliloquy, which was delivered by the hero of the piece, one universal burst of applause broke forth; and the theatre rang with the sounds of human tongues and the clapping of hands. When the First Act ended, the opinion of the audience was decisive in favour of the piece; and the manager felt persuaded that "it was a hit."

This was one of the happiest moments of Markham's existence—that existence which had latterly presented so few green spots to please the mental eye of the wanderer in the world's desert. His veins seemed to run with liquid fire!—a delirium of joy seized upon him—he was inebriated with excess of bliss.

Around him the spectators were expressing their opinions of the first act, little suspecting that the author of the piece was so near. All those sentiments were unequivocally in favour of the tragedy.

The Second Act began—progressed—terminated.

No pen can describe the enthusiasm with which the audience received the development of the drama, nor the interest which it seemed to excite.

Inspired by the applause that greeted them, the performers exerted all their efforts; and the excellence of the tragedy, united with the talent of the actors and the beauty of the scenery, achieved a triumph not often witnessed within the walls of that or any other theatre.

The Third Act commenced. Selina Fitzherbert appeared upon the stage; and her presence was welcomed with rapturous applause.

She came forward, and acknowledged the kindness of the audience with a graceful curtsey.

Markham surveyed her with interest, in consequence of the manner in which her name had been mentioned to him by the manager;—but that interest grew more profound, and was gradually associated with feelings of extreme surprise, suspense, and

uncertainty, for he fancied that if ever he saw Ellen Monroe in his life, there was she—or else her living counterpart—before him—an actress playing a part in his own drama!

He was stupefied;—he strained his eyes—he leant forward—he borrowed the opera-glass of a gentleman seated next to him;—and the more he gazed, the more he felt convinced that he beheld Ellen Monroe in the person of Selina Fitzherbert.

At length the actress spoke: wonder upon wonder—it was Ellen's voice—her intonation—her accent—her style of speaking.

Markham was amazed—confounded.

He inquired of his neighbour whether Selina Fitzherbert was the young lady's real name, or an assumed one.

The gentleman to whom he spoke did not know.

"How long has she been upon the stage?"

"Between two and three months; and, strange to say, it is rumoured that she only took two months to render herself so proficient a dancer as she is. But she now appears to be equally fine in tragedy. Listen!"

Markham could ask no more questions; for his neighbour became all attention towards the piece.

Richard reviewed in a moment, in his mind, all the principal appearances and characteristics of Ellen's life during the last few months,—the lateness of her hours—the constancy of her employment—and a variety of circumstances, which only now struck him, but which tended to ratify his suspicion that she was indeed Selina Fitzherbert.

His attention was withdrawn from his own piece; and he determined to convince himself at once upon this head.

Taking advantage of the termination of the first scene in the third act, he left the box, and proceeded behind the scenes of the theatre. But while he was on his way thither, it struck him that if his suspicions were correct, and if he appeared too suddenly in the presence of Ellen, he would perhaps so disconcert her as to render her unfit to proceed with the part entrusted to her. He accordingly concealed himself in a dark corner, behind some scene-boards, and whence he could see plainly, but where he himself could not be very readily discovered.

He did not wait long ere his doubts were cleared up. In a few minutes after he had taken his post in the obscure nook, Ellen passed close by him. She was conversing with another actress.

"Have you seen the author?" said the latter.

"No—not yet," replied Ellen. "But the manager has promised us that pleasure when the curtain fails."

"He has made a brilliant hit."

"Yes," said Ellen. "He need not have been so bashful if he had known his own powers, or foreseen this success. The greatest mystery has been preserved about him: he never once came to rehearsal; and the prompter who copied out my part for me from the original manuscript, tells me that he is convinced the author is quite a novice in dramatic composition, by the way in which the piece was written—I mean, there were not in the manuscript any of those hints and suggestions which an experienced writer would have introduced."

"I really quite long to see him," said Ellen's companion: "he must be quite—"

The two ladies passed on; and Richard heard no more.

His doubts were, however, cleared up:—Ellen Monroe was a figurante and an actress!

He was not so annoyed at this discovery as Ellen had imagined he would have been when she took such precautions to conceal the fact from the knowledge of him and her father. Richard could not help admiring the independent spirit which had induced her to seek the means of earning her own livelihood, and which he now fully comprehended:—at the same time, he was sorry that she had withheld the truth, and that she had embraced the stage in preference to any other avocation. Alas! he little suspected what scenes that poor girl had passed through:—he knew nothing of her connexion with the statuary, the artist, the sculptor, the photographer, Greenwood, and the mesmerist!

Having satisfied himself that Selina Fitzherbert and Ellen Monroe were one and the same person, and still amazed and bewildered by the discovery, Markham returned to the body of the theatre; but, instead of proceeding to his former seat, he repaired to the "author's box," which he found unoccupied, and which, being close to the stage, commanded a full view of the scene.

The tragedy proceeded with unabated success: the performance of Ellen was alone sufficient to give it an extraordinary *éclat*. Her beautiful countenance—the noble and dignified manner in which she carried her classic head—her elegant form—the natural grace and suavity of her manners—her musical voice—and the correct appreciation she evinced of the character in which she appeared,—these were the elements of an irresistible appeal to the public heart. The tragedy would have been eminently successful by reason of its own intrinsic merits, and *without* Ellen:—but *with* her, that success was brilliant—triumphant—unparalleled in the annals of the modern stage!

The entire audience was enraptured with the charming woman who shone in two ways so essentially distinct,—who had first captivated the sense as a dancer, and who now came forth a great tragic actress. Her lovely person and her talents united, formed a passport to favour which not a dissentient voice could question;—and when the curtain fell at the close of the fifth act, the approbation of the spectators was expressed with clapping of hands, waving of handkerchiefs, and shouts of applause—all prolonged to an unusual length of time, and frequently renewed with additional enthusiasm.

The moment the curtain fell Markham hastened behind the scenes, and encountered Ellen in one of the slips.

Hastily grasping her by the hand, he said in a low but hurried tone "Do not be alarmed—I know all—I am here to thank you—not to blame you."

"Thank *me*, Richard!" exclaimed the young actress, partially recovering from the almost overwhelming state of alarm into which the sudden apparition of Markham had thrown her: "why should you thank *me*?"

"Thank you, Ellen—Oh! how can I do otherwise than thank you?" said Markham. "You have carried my tragedy through the ordeal—"

"*Your* tragedy, Richard?" cried Miss Monroe more and more bewildered.

"Yes, *my* tragedy, Ellen—it is mine! But, ah! there is a call for you—"

A moment's silence had succeeded the flattering expression of public opinion which arose at the termination of the performance; and then arose a loud cry for Selina Fitzherbert.

This was followed by a call for the author, and then a thousand voices ejaculated—"Selina Fitzherbert and the Author! Let them come together!"

The manager now hastened up to the place where Ellen and Richard were standing, and where the above hurried words had been exchanged between them.

"You must go forward, Miss Fitzherbert—and you too, Mr. Preston—"

Ellen glanced with an arch smile towards Richard, as much as to say, "*You* also have taken an assumed name."

Markham begged and implored the manager not to force him upon the stage;—but the call for "Selina Fitzherbert and the Author" was peremptory; and the "gods" were growing clamorous.

Popular will is never more arbitrary than in a theatre.

Markham accordingly took Ellen's hand:—the curtain rose, and he led her forward.

The appearance of that handsome couple—a fine dark-eyed and genteel young man leading by the hand a lovely woman,—a successful author, and a favourite actress,—this was the signal for a fresh burst of applause.

Richard was dazzled with the glare of light, and for some time could see nothing distinctly.

Myriads of human countenances, heaped together, danced before him; and yet the aspect and features of none were accurately delineated to his eyes. He could not have selected from amongst those countenances, even that of his long-lost brother, or that of his dearly beloved Isabella, had they been both or either of them prominent in that multitude of faces.

And Isabella *was* there, with her parents—impelled by the curiosity which had taken so many thither that evening.

Her surprise, and that of her father and mother, may therefore well be conceived, when, in the author of one of the most successful and beautiful dramatic compositions of modern times, they recognised Richard Markham!

The applause continued for three or four minutes—uninterrupted and enthusiastic—as if some mighty conqueror, who had just released his country from the thraldom of a foreign foe, was the object of adulation.

At length this expression of approbation ceased; and the spectators awaited in suspense, and with curiosity depicted upon their countenances, the acknowledgment of the honours showered upon the author.

At that moment the manager stepped forward, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honour to inform you that Mr. Edward Preston is the author of the successful tragedy upon which you have been pleased to bestow your approval. I consider it to be my duty to mention a name which the author's own modesty—a modesty which you will agree with me in pronouncing to be unnecessary under such circumstances—would not probably have allowed him to reveal to you."

The manager bowed and retired.

Fresh applause welcomed the announcement of the tragic author's name; and a thousand voices exclaimed, "Bravo, Edward Preston!"

By this time Markham had recovered his presence of mind and self-possession: and his joy was extreme when he suddenly recognised Isabella in a box close by the stage.

Oh! that was a glorious moment for him: *she* was there—*she* beheld his triumph—and doubtless *she* participated in his own happy feelings.

"Bravo, Edward Preston!" was re-echoed through the house.

And then a dead silence prevailed.

All were anxious to hear Richard speak.

But just at the moment when he was about to acknowledge the honours conferred upon him and his fair companion by the audience, a strange voice broke upon the stillness of the scene.

"It is false! his name is not Preston——"

"Silence!" cried numerous voices.

"His name is——"

"Turn out that brawler! turn him out!"

"His name is——"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Silence!"

"Turn him out! turn him out!"

"His name is Richard Markham—the Forger!"

A burst of indignation, mingled with strong expressions of incredulity, rose against the individual, who, from an obscure nook in the gallery, had interrupted the harmony of the evening.

"It is true—I say! he is Richard Markham who was condemned to two years' imprisonment for forgery!" thundered forth the hoarse and unpleasant voice.

A piercing scream—the scream of a female tone—echoed through the house: all eyes were turned towards the box whence it issued; and a young lady, with flaxen hair and pale complexion, was seen to sink senseless in the arms of the elderly gentleman who accompanied her.

And in another part of the house a young lady also sank, pale, trembling, and overcome with feelings of acute anguish, upon her father's bosom.

So deeply did that dread accusing voice affect the sensitive and astonished Mary-Anne, and the faithful Isabella!

All was now confusion. The audience rose from their seats in all directions; and the theatre suddenly appeared to be converted into a modern Babel.

Overwhelmed with shame, and so bewildered by this cruel blow, that he knew not how to act, Markham stood for some moments like a criminal before his judges. Ellen, forgetting where she was, clung to him for support.

At length, the unhappy young man seized Ellen abruptly by the hand, and led her from the public gaze.

The curtain fell as they passed behind the scenes.

The audience then grew more clamorous—none scarcely knew why. Some demanded that the man who had caused the interruption should be arrested by the police; but those in the gallery shouted out that he had suddenly disappeared. Others declared that the accusation ought to be investigated;—people in the pit maintained that, even if the story were true, it had nothing to do with the success of the accused as a dramatic author;—and gentlemen in the boxes expressed their determination never to support a man, in a public institution and in a public capacity, who had been condemned to infamous penalties for an enormous crime.

Thus all was noise, confusion, and uproar,—argument, accusation, and recrimination,—the buzzing of hundreds of tongues,—the clamour of thousands of voices.

Some called "Shame!" upon the manager for introducing a discharged convict to the notice of Englishmen's wives and daughters,—although the persons who thus clamoured did not utter a reproach against the immoral females who made no secret of their profligacy, and who appeared nightly upon the stage as its brightest ornaments—nor did they condescend to recall to mind the vicinity of that infamous saloon which vomited forth numbers of impure characters to occupy seats by the sides of those wives and daughters, whose purity was now supposed to be tainted because a man who had undergone an infamous punishment, but who could *there* set no bad example, had contributed to their entertainment!

And then commenced a riot in the theatre. The respectable portion of the audience escaped from the scene with the utmost precipitation:—but the occupants of the upper region, and some of the tenants of the pit, remained to exhibit their inclination for what they were pleased to term "a lark." The benches were torn up, and hurled upon the stage:—hats and orange-peel flew about in all directions;—and serious damage would have been done to the theatre, had not a body of police succeeded in restoring order.

In the mean time Markham and Ellen had been conducted to the Green Room, where a glass of wine was administered to each to restore their self-possession.

The manager was alone with them; and when Richard had time to collect his scattered ideas, he seemed to awake as from a horrible dream. But the ominous countenance of the manager met his glance;—and he knew that it was all a fearful reality.

Then did Markham bury his face in his hands, and weep bitterly—bitterly.

"Alas! young man," said the manager, "it was an evil day for both you and me, when you sought and I accorded my patronage. This business will no doubt injure me seriously. You are a young man of extraordinary talent;—but it will not avail you in this sphere again. You have enjoyed one signal triumph—you have experienced a most heart-rending overthrow. Never did defeat follow upon conquest so rapidly. The power of your genius will not vanquish the opinion of the public. I do not blame you: you were not compelled to communicate your former history to me;—and it was I who forced you to go forward."

Markham was consoled by the language of the manager, who spoke in a kind and sympathising tone of voice.

Thus the only man who would suffer in a pecuniary point of view—or, at least, he who would suffer most—by the fatal occurrence of that evening, was also the only one who attempted to solace the unhappy Markham.

As for poor Ellen—she was overwhelmed with grief.

"You gave me fifty guineas for that fatal—fatal drama," said Richard, after a long pause. "The money shall be returned to you to-morrow."

"No, my young friend,—that must not be done!" exclaimed the manager, taking Richard's hand. "Your noble conduct in this respect raises you fifty per cent, in my opinion."

"Yes—he is noble, he is generous!" cried Ellen. "He has been a benefactor to myself and my father: it is at his house that we live; and never until this evening were we aware of each other's avocations, in respect to the stage."

"How singular a coincidence!" exclaimed the manager. "But I hope that I shall not lose the services of the principal attraction of my company?"

"Yes," said Ellen firmly: "I shall never more appear in public in that capacity of which I was lately so enamoured, but for which I have suddenly entertained an abhorrence."

"A few days' repose and rest will induce you to change your mind, I hope?" said the manager, who was really alarmed at the prospect of losing a figurante of such talent and an actress of such great promise.

"We shall see—I will reflect," returned Ellen, unwilling to add to the annoyances of the kind-hearted manager.

"You must not desert me," said this gentleman, "especially at a time when I shall require all the attractions possible to restore the reputation of my house."

Markham now rose to take his departure.

"I should not advise you to leave the house together," said the manager. "There may be a few mal-contents in the street;—and, at all events, it will be as well that the ladies and gentlemen of my company should not know of your intimate acquaintance with each other. Such a proceeding might only compromise Miss Fitzherbert."

Markham cordially acceded to this suggestion; and it was agreed that he should depart by the private door, and that Ellen should return home in the usual manner by herself.

But before they separated, the two young people agreed with each other that the strictest silence should be preserved at the Place, not only with respect to the events of that evening, but also in regard to the nature of the avocations in which they had both lately been engaged.

Markham succeeded in escaping unobserved from the theatre;—and, humiliated, cast down, heartbroken,—bending beneath an insupportable burden of ignominy and shame,—with the fainting form of Isabella before his eyes, and the piercing shriek of Mary-Anne, whom he had also recognised, in his ears,—he pursued his precipitate retreat homewards.

But what a dread revelation had been made to him that evening! His mortal enemy—his inveterate foe had escaped from the death which, it was hitherto supposed, the miscreant had met in the den of infamy near Bird-Cage Walk some months previously:—his ominous voice still thundered in Markham's ears;—and our unhappy hero once more saw all his prospects ruined by the unmitigated hatred of the Resurrection Man.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE ITALIAN VALET.

ELLEN retired to her private dressing-room, and hastily threw aside her theatrical garb.

She assumed her usual attire, and then stole away from the establishment, without waiting to say farewell either to the manager or any of her acquaintances belonging to the company.

As she left the private door of the theatre, she saw several persons loitering about—probably in hopes of catching a glimpse of the author who had been so signally disgraced that evening, and whose previous departure from the house was unperceived.

She drew her veil closely over her countenance; but not before one fellow, more impudent than the rest, and whose cadaverous countenance, shaggy eye-brows, and sinister expression, struck a momentary terror into her soul, had peered beneath her bonnet.

Fortunately, as Ellen considered it, a cab was close by; and the driver was standing on the pavement with his hand grasping the door-latch, as if he were expecting some one.

"Cab, ma'am?" said he, as Ellen approached.

Ellen answered in the affirmative, mentioned her address, and stepped into the vehicle.

The driver banged the door, and mounted his box.

The man with the cadaverous countenance watched Ellen into the vehicle, and exchanged a sign of intelligence with the driver.

The cab then drove rapidly away.

Another cab was standing at a little distance; and into this the man with the cadaverous countenance stepped. There was already an individual in it, who, when the former opened the door, said, "All right?"

"All right," was the reply.

This second cab, containing these two individuals, then followed rapidly in the traces of the first.

Meantime Ellen had thrown herself back in the vehicle, and had given way to her reflections.

The events of that memorable evening occupied her attention. A coincidence, of a nature fitted only for the pages of a romance, had revealed to Markham and herself the history of each other's pursuits. While she had been following the occupation of a figurante, he was devoting his time to dramatic composition. He had retained his employment a secret: she had dissembled hers. He had accidentally applied for the patronage of the same manager who had taken her by the hand. He had assumed a false name: so had she. Chance led her to take a part in his drama;—her talent had materially contributed to its success. A triumph was achieved by each;—and then came the overwhelming, crushing denunciation which turned his joy to mourning—his honour to disgrace—his glory to shame. She felt as if she were identified with his fate in this one respect:—he was her benefactor; she esteemed him: and she seemed to partake in his most painful emotions as she pondered upon the incidents of that evening.

And then she retrospected over the recent events which had chequered her own life. The cast of her countenance embellished statues;—her likeness lent its attraction to pictures;—her bust was preserved in marble;—her entire form feasted the eyes of many a libertine in the private room of the photographic department of a gallery of science;—her virtue had become the prey of one who gave her a few pieces of paltry gold in exchange for the inestimable jewel of her purity;—her dreams had been sold to a mesmerist;—her dancing had captivated thousands;—her tragic talent had crowned the success of a drama. What remained for her now to sell? what talent did she possess which could now be turned to advantage? Alas! she knew not!

Her meditations were painful; and some time elapsed ere she awoke from her reverie.

At length she glanced towards the window: the night was beautifully clear, though piercing cold—for it was now the month of December; and the year 1839 was drawing to a close.

The vehicle was proceeding along a road skirted only by a few leafless trees, and wearing an aspect strange and new to her.

The country beyond, on either side, seemed to present to her view different outlines from those which frequent passage along the road leading to Markham Place had rendered familiar to her eyes. Again she gazed wistfully forth:—she lowered the window, and surveyed the adjacent scenery with redoubled interest.

And now she felt really alarmed; for she was convinced that the driver had mistaken the road.

She called to him, and expressed her fears.

"No—no, ma'am," he exclaimed, without relaxing the speed at which the vehicle was proceeding; "there's more ways than one of reaching the place where you live. Don't be afraid, ma'am—it's all right."

Ellen's fears were hushed for a short time; but as she leant partially out of the window to survey the country through which she was passing, the sounds of another vehicle behind her own fell upon her ears.

At any other time this circumstance would not have produced a second thought; but on this occasion Ellen felt a presentiment of evil. Whether the mournful catastrophe of the evening, or her recent sad reflections,—or both united, had produced this morbid feeling, we cannot say. Sufficient is it for us to know that such was the state of her mind; and then she remembered the warning contained in the letter so mysteriously sent to her a short time previously at the theatre.

Again she addressed the cabman; but this time he made no answer; and in a few minutes he drove up to the door of a small house which stood alone by the side of that dreary road.

Scarcely had he alighted from his box, when the second cab came up and stopped also.

"Where am I?" demanded Ellen, now seriously alarmed.

An individual, who had alighted from the second cab, hastened to open the door of the first, and assist Ellen to alight.

"You must get down here, Miss," he said, in a dialect and tone which denoted him to be a foreigner.

Ellen saw at a glance that he was a tall elderly man, with a dark olive complexion, piercing black eyes, but by no means an unpleasant expression of countenance. He was dressed in black, and wore a large cloak hanging loosely over his shoulders.

"Get down here!" repeated Ellen. "And why? where am I? who are you? Speak."

"No harm will happen to you, Miss," replied the tall stranger. "A gentleman is waiting in this house to see you."

"A gentleman!" cried Ellen. "Ah! can it be Mr. Greenwood?"

"It is, Miss: you need fear nothing."

Ellen was naturally of a courageous disposition; and the circumstances of her life had tended to strengthen her mind. It instantly struck her that she was in the power of her persecutor's myrmidons, and that resistance against them was calculated to produce effects much less beneficial for her than those which remonstrance and firmness might lead to with their employer.

She accordingly accompanied the tall stranger into the house.

But what was the astonishment of the poor creature when she encountered in the hall the very old hag whom she had known in the court in Goldenlane, and who had originally introduced her to the embraces of Mr. Greenwood!

The horrible wrinkled wretch grinned significantly, at she conducted Ellen into a parlour very neatly furnished, and where a cheerful fire was burning in the grate.

Meantime the tall stranger issued forth again, and ordered the driver of the cab in which Ellen had arrived to await further instructions. He then accosted the cadaverous looking man who had accompanied him in the second cab, and who was now loitering about in front of the house.

"Tidkins," said he, "we do not require your services any further. The young lady made no resistance, and consequently there has been no need for the exercise of your strong arm. Here is your reward. You can return to London in the same cab that brought you hither."

"Thank you, my friend," exclaimed the Resurrection Man. "Your master knows my address, the next time he requires my services. Good night."

"Good night," said the tall man: and when he had seen the second cab depart, he re-entered the house.

In the hall he met Mr. Greenwood.

"Well, Filippo—all right, eh?" said this gentleman, in a whisper.

"All right, sir. We managed it without violence; and the lady is in your power."

"Ah! I thought you would do the business genteelly for me. Lafleur is a faithful fellow, and would do any thing to serve me; but he is clumsy and awkward in an intrigue of this kind. No one can manage these little matters so well as a foreigner. A Frenchman is clever—but an Italian incomparable."

"Thank you, sir, for the compliment," said Filippo, with a low bow.

"Oh! it is no compliment," returned Greenwood. "Three or four little things that I have entrusted to you since you have been in my service, were all admirably managed so far as you were concerned; and though they every one failed afterwards, yet it was no fault of yours. I am well aware of that."

The Italian bowed.

"And now I must present myself to this haughty beauty," said Greenwood.

"Am I to dismiss the vehicle which brought her hither, sir?" demanded Filippo.

"Yes: you will stay here to-night."

The Italian valet bowed once more, and returned to the driver of the vehicle that brought Ellen thither.

"My good fellow," said Filippo, in a hurried tone, "here is your money for the service rendered up to this moment. Are you now disposed to earn five guineas in addition?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the man.

"Then drive to the bend in the road yonder," continued Filippo. "There you will find a large barn, belonging to my master's property here. You can house your horse and cab comfortably there. But do not unharness the animal. There is a pond close by; and you will find a bucket in the barn. There is also hay for your horse. Wait there patiently till I come to you."

The cabman signified acquiescence; and Filippo returned to the house.

Meantime the old hag, as before stated, had conducted Ellen to a parlour, where the young lady threw herself upon a sofa, her mind and body being alike fatigued with the events and anxieties of the evening.

"We meet again, Miss," said the old woman, lingering near the table, on which refreshments of several luxurious kinds were placed. "You came no more to visit me in the court; and yet I watched from a distance the brilliancy of your career. Ah! what fine things—what fine things I have introduced you to, since first I knew you."

"If you wish to serve me," said Ellen, "help me away from this place, and I will recompense you largely."

"For every guinea that you would give me to let you go, I shall receive two for keeping you in safe custody," returned the hag.

"Name the price that you are to have from your employer," cried Ellen; "and I will double it."

"That you cannot do. Miss. Besides, have I not your interests to consider? Do I not know what is good for you? I tell you that you

may become a great lady—ride in a magnificent carriage—have fine clothes and sparkling jewels—and never know again what toil is. I should not be so squeamish if I were you."

"Silence, wretch!" cried Ellen, exasperated more at the cool language of calculation in which the old woman spoke, than with the prospects she held out and the arguments she used.

"Ah! Miss," resumed the hag, nothing discomfited, "I am not annoyed with you, for the harsh way in which you speak to me. I have seen too much of your stubborn beauties in my life to be abashed with a word. Lack-a-day! they all yield in time—they all yield in time!"

And the old hag shook her head seriously, as if she had arrived at some great moral conclusion.

Ellen paid no attention to her.

"Ah! Miss," continued the hag, "I was once young like you—and as beautiful too, wrinkled and tanned as I now appear. But I was not such a fool to my own interests as you. I lived luxuriously for many, many years—God knows how many—I can't count them now—I don't like to think of those happy times. I ought to have saved money—much money; but I frittered it all away as quick as I got it. Now, do you take my advice: accept Mr. Greenwood's offers;—he is a handsome man, and pays like a prince."

The argument of the old hag was cut short by the entrance of the individual of whom she was just speaking.

She left the room; and Ellen was now alone with Greenwood.

"Sir, are you the author of this cowardly outrage which has been perpetrated upon me?" demanded Ellen, rising from the sofa, and speaking in a firm but cold tone.

"Call it not an outrage, dearest Ellen—"

"It is nothing else, sir; and if you have one spark of honour left—one feeling of respect for the mother of your child," added Miss Monroe, sinking her voice, "you will allow me to depart without delay. On that condition I will forget all that has transpired this evening."

"My dear girl, you cannot think that I have taken all this trouble to be thwarted by a trifling obstacle at the end, or that I have merely had you brought hither to have the pleasure of letting you depart again after one minute's conversation. No, Ellen: listen to me! I have conceived a deep—profound—a fervent affection for you——"

"Cease this libertine's jargon, Mr. Greenwood," interrupted Ellen. "You must know that your sophistry cannot deceive me as it has done so many—many others."

"Then in plain terms, Ellen, you shall be mine—wholly and solely mine—and I will remain faithful to you until death."

"I will become your wife, for the sake of my child: on no other terms will I consort with you. As surely as you attempt to force me to compliance with your will, so certainly will I unmask you sooner or later. I will expose you—I will tell the world who you are—I will proclaim how you obtained your fortune by the plunder of your own—"

"Silence, Ellen!" thundered Greenwood, his face becoming purple with indignation. "Remember that the least word calculated to betray my secret, would lead to a revelation of yours; and the result would be the execrations of your father showered down upon your devoted head."

"I care not for that catastrophe—I care not for mine own past dishonour—I care not for the existence of that child of whom you are the father," exclaimed Ellen in a rapid and impassioned tone. "I will not be immolated to your desires—I will not succumb to your wishes, without revenge! Oh! full well do I comprehend you—full well do I know how you calculated when you resolved to perpetrate this outrage. You thought that I must suffer every thing at your hands, and not dare proclaim my wrongs:—you fancied that my lips are sealed against all and every thing connected with *you*! Mark me, you have reckoned erroneously upon the extent of my dread of my father and my benefactor! There is one thing that will make me fall at their feet and reveal—all and that is the consummation on your part of this vile outrage upon me!"

"Be it so, Ellen," said Greenwood. "I am as determined as you. I will use no force against you; but I will keep you a prisoner here; and believe me—for I know the world well—your stern resolves will soon melt in the presence of solitude and monotony. You will then solicit me to come to you—if it be only to bear you company! Escape is impossible—my spies are around the house. Day and night will you be watched as if you were a criminal. And when you consent to become mine, in all save the vain ties which priestcraft has invented, and the shackles of which shall never curb my proud spirit,—then will I surround you with every luxury, gratify your slightest wishes, study your pleasures unceasingly, and do all to make you cling to me more fervently than if I were your husband according to monkish ceremony. This is my resolve. In the mean time, if you choose to console your father for your absence, write a note telling him that you are happy, but that circumstances at present compel you to withhold from him the place of your residence; and that letter shall be delivered to-morrow morning at Markham Place. I now leave you. This is your sitting-room; your sleeping apartment is above. The servant—the old woman whom you know so well," added Greenwood, in a tone slightly ironical, "will attend upon you. The house contains every luxury that may gratify the appetite; all your wishes shall be complied with. But, again I say, think not of escape; that is impossible. And if you feel inclined to write the note of which I have spoken, do so, and give it to your attendant. It is now late—the clock has struck one: I leave you to yourself."

Ellen made no reply; and Greenwood left the room.

The moment she was alone, Ellen rose and hastened to the window. She drew aside the curtain, and was somewhat surprised to perceive that the casements were not barred; for she had expected to find every precaution against escape adopted after the confident manner in which Greenwood had spoken upon that head. But her heart sank within her; for she remembered his assurance that the house was surrounded by spies. She therefore made up her mind, after some reflection, to remain quiet until the next day, and then regulate her endeavours to escape by the aspect of the house and its locality when seen by day-light.

She felt exhausted and wearied, and partook of a light refreshment. She then took a candle from the table, and proceeded up-stairs

to the bed-room prepared for her. Having carefully bolted the door, she sate down to reflect upon the propriety of writing to her father the note suggested by Greenwood. She felt most acutely on the old man's account; and she knew that she would not be permitted to communicate with him in terms more explicit than those mentioned by her persecutor. Such terms were too vague and equivocal to be satisfactory;—and she concluded in her own mind that silence was the better alternative of the two.

Having once more satisfied herself that the room was safe against all chances of intrusion, she thought of retiring to rest. She laid aside her bonnet and shawl, which she had hitherto kept on, and then took off her gown. She approached a long Psyche, or full-length mirror, that stood near the dressing-table (for the room was elegantly furnished), and for a moment contemplated herself with feelings of pride and pleasure—in spite of the vexatious position in which she found herself. But vanity was now an essential ingredient of her character. It had been engendered, nurtured, and matured by the mode of life she had been compelled to adopt.

And, assuredly, hers were charms of which she had full right to be proud. The mirror reflected to her eyes a countenance that had been deemed worthy to embellish a Venus on the canvass of a great painter. In that same faithful glass was also seen a form the beautiful undulations and rich contours of which were perfectly symmetrical, and yet voluptuously matured. The delicate white corset yielded with docile elasticity to the shape which no invention of art could improve. The form reduced that corset to suit its own proportions; and in no way did the corset shape the form. Those swelling globes of snow, each adorned as with a delicate rose-bud, needed no support to maintain them in their full and natural rotundity;—the curvatures which formed the waist, were not drawn nearer to each other by the compression of the stay;—the graceful swell of the hips required no art to improve or augment its copiousness. Ellen smiled—in spite of herself,—smiled complacently—smiled almost proudly, as she surveyed her perfect form in that mirror.

But, hark! what sound is that which suddenly falls upon her ear?

She starts—looks round—and listens.

Again!—that sound is repeated.

This time she comprehends its source: some one is tapping gently at the side window of the room.

Ellen hastily put on her gown once more, and advanced to the casement.

She raised the blind, and beheld the dark form of a man mounted upon a ladder, at the window. A second glance convinced her that he was the tall Italian whom she had before seen.

She approached as closely as possible, and said, in a low tone, "What do you require? what this strange proceeding?"

"I am come to save you," answered Filippo, in a voice so low, that his words were scarcely intelligible. "Do not be afraid—I am he who wrote the warning letter, which——"

Without a moment's farther hesitation, Ellen gently raised the window.

"I am he who wrote the warning letter which you received at the theatre," repeated Filippo. "Although ostensibly compelled to serve my master, yet privately I counteract all his vile schemes to the utmost of my power."

"I believe you—I trust you," said Ellen, overjoyed at the arrival of this unlooked-for succour. "What would you have me do?"

"Tie the sheets of the bed together—fasten one end to the bed-post, and throw the other outside," returned Filippo, speaking in a rapid whisper.

In less than a minute this was done; and Ellen once more assumed her bonnet and shawl.

By the directions of Filippo she then stepped upon the window-sill: he received her in his arms, and bore her in safety to the ground.

Then, taking the ladder on his shoulders, he desired her to follow him without speaking a word.

They passed behind the house, and stopped for a moment at a stable where Filippo deposited the ladder. He then led the way across a field adjoining the garden that belonged to the house.

"Lady," said the Italian, when they were at some distance from the dwelling, "if you consider that you owe me any gratitude for the service I am now rendering you, all the recompense I require is strict silence on your part with respect to the real mode of your escape."

"Rest well assured that I shall never betray you," answered Ellen. "But how is it that so bad a man as your master can possess so honest and generous a follower as you?"

"That, lady, is a mystery which it is by no means difficult to explain," replied Filippo. "Chosen by a noble-hearted lady, who by this time doubtless enjoys a sovereign rank in another clime, to counteract the villanies of Greenwood, I came to England; and fortunately I learnt that he required a foreign valet. I applied for the situation and obtained it. He believes me faithful, because I appear to enter heart and soul into all his schemes; but I generally succeed eventually in defeating or mitigating their evil effects upon others. This is the simple truth, lady; and you must consider my confidence in you as implicitly sacred. Any revelation—the slightest hint, on your part, would frustrate the generous purposes of my mistress. And think not, lady, that I am merely acting the part of a base spy:—I mean Mr. Greenwood no harm—I shall do him none: all I aim at is the prevention of harm springing from his machinations in regard to others. But we are now at the spot where a vehicle waits to convey you back to London."

Filippo opened the door of a barn, which they had just reached; and the cabman responded to his summons.

In a few minutes the vehicle was ready to depart. Ellen offered the Italian a recompense for his goodness towards her; but he drew himself up haughtily, and said, "Keep your gold, lady: I require no other reward than *silence* on your part."

He then handed Miss Monroe into the vehicle; and ordered the driver to conduct the lady whithersoever she commanded him.

Ellen desired to be taken home to Markham Place; the Italian raised his hat respectfully; and the cab drove rapidly away towards London.

Miss Monroe now began to reflect profoundly upon the nature of the excuse which she should offer to her father and Richard Markham, to account for her prolonged absence. We have before said that she had ceased to shrink from a falsehood; and she had certain cogent reasons for never associating her own name with that of Greenwood;—much less would she acquaint her father or Richard with an outrage which would only induce them to adopt means to punish its perpetrator, and thus bring them in collision with him.

At length she resolved upon stating that she had been taken ill at a concert where she had been engaged for the evening: this course would be comprehended by Markham, who would only have to substitute the word "theatre" for "concert" in his own imagination; and it would also satisfy her father.

We need merely add to this episode in our eventful history, that Ellen reached home safely at four o'clock in the morning, and that the excuse was satisfactory to both Markham and her father, who were anxiously awaiting her return.

CHAPTER XCIII.

NEWS FROM CASTELCICALA.

RETURN we once more to Diana Arlington, who still occupied the splendid mansion in Dover Street, which had been fitted up for her by the Earl of Warrington.

The routine of the life of the Enchantress continued the same as we have described it in Chapter LI.

The Earl of Warrington was unremitting in his attention, and unchanged in his liberality towards his beautiful mistress; and, on her part, Diana was the faithful friend and true companion who by her correct conduct maintained the confidence which she had inspired in the heart of her noble protector.

We must again introduce our readers to the Enchantress at the hour of breakfast, and in the little parlour where we have before seen her.

But on this occasion, instead of being occupied with the perusal of the *Morning Herald*, her entire attention was absorbed in the contents of a letter, which ran as follows:—

"*Montoni, December 3, 1839*.

"I sit down, my dearest Diana, to inform you that the ceremony of my union with his Serene Highness Angelo III. was solemnized yesterday.

"You are aware that this ceremony was to have taken place some months ago; but the intrigues of certain persons holding high and influential offices in the state, delayed it. Calumny after calumny against me was whispered in the ears of the Grand Duke; and, although his Highness believed not a word of those evil reports, I steadily refused to accept the honour he was anxious to confer upon me, until he had satisfied himself of the falsity of each successive calumny. At length I implored his Highness to address an autograph letter to the Earl of Warrington, with whom his Highness was acquainted during the residence of that good English nobleman in Castelcicala. His Highness complied with my request, and despatched his letter so privately that none of those who surround him suspected his proceeding. The Earl of Warrington, as you know, dearest Diana, hastened to reply. His answer was so satisfactory, so frank, so generous, so candid, that the Duke declared he would visit with his severest displeasure any one who dared breathe a word of calumny against me or my friends in England, in future.

"The next step adopted by his Serene Highness was to dismiss the Marquis of Gerrano from the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Baron Ruperto, the Under Secretary in that Department, retired with his superior. The Duke adopted this measure in consequence of the intrigues of those noblemen to thwart his Highness's intentions of raising to the ducal throne the woman whom he loved. You may suppose how grieved—how vexed—how distressed I have been through the conviction that I myself was the cause of these heart-burnings, jealousies, and intrigues; and although I was innocently the source of such disagreeable proceedings, my sorrow and annoyance were but little mitigated by this impression. I implored the Grand Duke to allow me to leave the country, and retire to Switzerland; but his Serene Highness remained firm, and assured me that, although he had many difficulties to overcome, he was not disheartened. Then he declared that his entire happiness was centred in me; and he thus over-ruled my scruples.

"At length the duke remodelled his cabinet (a fact to which I alluded above) by appointing the Count of Friuli (who is deeply attached to His Highness, and favourable to our union) to the Foreign Office, in place of the Marquis of Gerrano. Signor Pisani, another faithful dependant of His Highness, was appointed Under-Secretary in the place of Baron Ruperto. The Minister of War also retired, and was succeeded by General Grachia. When these changes were effected, his Serene Highness communicated to the council of ministers his intention to *unite himself to Eliza Marchioness of Ziani on the 2d of December of the present year*.

"This decision was made known on the 19th of last month. I did not write to communicate the important fact to you, because I was apprehensive of new delays; and as I had already misled you once (though unintentionally on my part) I was unwilling to deceive either you or myself a second time. I know your friendship for me, Diana,—I know that you entertain a sister's love for me, the same that I feel for you,—and I also know that you anxiously watch the progress of my fortunes, as, under similar circumstances, I should yours. I therefore resolved to acquaint you with no more of my hopes, until they should have been realised. That result has now been attained; and I need preserve a cold silence no longer.

"In the evening of the 19th of November, the Grand Chancellor of Castelcicala, the President of the Council (the Marquis of Vincenza), and the Archbishop of Montoni, visited me at the villa to acquaint me with the royal decision. I endeavoured—and I hope succeeded—to convince their lordships of the profound sense which I entertained of the high honour intended to be conferred upon me, and my conviction that no merit which I possessed could render me worthy of such distinction; at the same time I declared my readiness to accept that honour, since it was the will and pleasure of a sovereign Prince to bestow it upon me.

"I can scarcely tell you the nature of the varied emotions and feelings which filled—indeed agitated—my bosom when the memorable morning dawned. That was yesterday! I awoke at an early—a very early hour,—before six, and walked in the garden with the hope that the fresh air and the charming tranquillity of the scene would compose me. I could scarcely believe that I was on the point of entering upon such high destinies; that a diadem was so soon to encircle my brow; that the thrilling words *Highness* and *Princess* would in a few hours be addressed to me! I could not reconcile with my former obscure lot the idea that I was shortly to sit upon a sovereign throne,—command the allegiance of millions of human beings,—and share the fortunes of a potentate of Europe! Was it possible that I—I who was the daughter of a poor farmer, and who had seen so much of the vicissitudes of life,—I who had thought myself happy with the competence which I enjoyed through the Earl of Warrington's bounty at Clapton,—I who conceived myself to be one of the most fortunate of individuals when, by the goodness of that same excellent peer, I arrived in this State, and took possession of the villa which he had placed at my disposal,—I who had then no more elevated aspirations than to dwell in tranquillity and peace—no loftier hope than to deserve that kind nobleman's benefits by my conduct,—was it possible that I was in a few hours to become the Grand Duchess of Castelcicala? I could not fix my mind to such a belief; the idea seemed an oriental fiction—a romantic dream. And yet, I remembered, I had already received an earnest of this splendid promise of fortune: I had already been elevated from a lowly condition to an exalted rank; the distinction of a Marchioness was mine; for months had I been accustomed to the sounding title of *Your Ladyship* and for months had I been enrolled amongst the peeresses of Castelcicala. Yes—I thought: it was true,—true that a Prince—a powerful Prince—intended to raise me to a seat upon his own ducal throne!

"At seven precisely the three lovely daughters of General Grachia arrived at the villa to assist me in my toilette—my nuptial toilette. They informed me that, if it were my pleasure, they were to remain in attendance upon me after my marriage. I embraced them tenderly, and assured them that they should always be near me as friends. When the toilette was completed, I bade adieu to the villa. I wept—wept tears of mingled joy and sorrow as I said farewell to that abode when I had passed so many happy, happy hours! At length I entered General Grachia's carriage, which was waiting; and, accompanied by my three amiable friends, repaired to their father's private dwelling (not his official palace of the War Department) in Montoni.

"Here my letter must terminate. Enclosed is an account of the entire ceremony, translated into English by my private secretary (who is well acquainted with my native tongue) from the *Montoni Gazette*. Fain would I have erased those passages which are favourable—too favourable to myself; but I fancied that my friend—my sister Diana would be pleased to read the narrative in its integrity.

"In conclusion, let me say—and do you believe it as devoutly as I say it sincerely—that, in spite of my rank and fortunes,—in spite of the splendours that surround me, to you I am in heart, and always shall remain, the same attached and grateful being, whom you have known as

"ELIZA SYDNEY."

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of delight with which Mrs. Arlington perused the latter portion of this letter. Pass we on, therefore, to the Bridal Ceremony, as it was described in the translated narrative which accompanied the communication of the Grand Duchess:—

"THE MARRIAGE OF THE GRAND DUKE.

"Yesterday morning were celebrated the nuptials of his Serene Highness Angelo III. and Eliza Marchioness of Ziani.

"From an early hour the capital wore an appearance of unusual gaiety and bustle. The houses looking on the Piazzetta of Contarini, leading to the ancient Cathedral of Saint Theodosia, were decorated in a most splendid manner with banners, garlands, festoons of flowers, and various ornaments and devices appropriate to the occasion. The balconies were fitted up as verdant bowers and arbours, and the lovely characteristics of the country were thus introduced into the very heart of the city. The Town-Hall was hung with numerous banners; and the royal standard waved proudly over the Black Tower of the Citadel. The shops in those streets through which the procession was to pass were fitted up with seats which were let to those who were willing to pay the high prices demanded for them. In other parts of the city the shops and marts of trade were all closed, as was the Exchange. A holiday was observed at the Bank of Castelcicala; and the business of the General Post Office closed at eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Nor was the port less gay than the city. All the vessels In the harbour and docks, as well at those in the roadstead, were decked with innumerable flags. The royal standard floated from the main of the ships of war of the Castelcicalan navy. The sight was altogether most imposing and lively.

"At seven o'clock the bells of Saint Theodosia and all the other churches in Montoni rang out merry peals; and the troops of the garrison got under arms. At a quarter before eight the Mayor and Corporation of the city, arrayed in their robes of green velvet edged with gold, proceeded to the palace and presented an address of congratulation on the auspicious day, to his Serene Highness, who was pleased to return a most gracious answer. It being generally understood that the Marchioness of Ziani would in the first instance alight at the dwelling of General Grachia, the Minister of War, a crowd of highly respectable and well-dressed persons had collected in that neighbourhood. At nine o'clock the General's private carriage, which had been sent to convey the future Grand Duchess from her own abode to the General's mansion, drove rapidly up the street, attended by two outriders. We shall never forget the enthusiasm manifested by the assembled multitude upon that occasion. All political

feelings appeared to be forgotten; and a loud, hearty, and prolonged burst of welcome met the ear. The object of this ebullition of generous feeling bowed gracefully to the crowds on either side; and the cheering continued for some moments after the carriage had entered the court-yard of the General's mansion.

"At half-past ten o'clock the President of the Council, the Grand Chancellor, and the Intendant of the Ducal Civil List arrived in their carriages at General Grachia's abode, preceded by one of the royal equipages, which was sent to convey the bride and her ladies-in-waiting to the palace. In a few minutes the President of the Council handed the bride, who was attended by the lady and three lovely daughters of General Grachia, into the ducal carriage. The procession then repaired to the palace, the crowds that lined the streets and occupied the windows and balconies by which it passed, expressing their feelings by cheers and the waving of handkerchiefs. To these demonstrations the bride responded by graceful bows, bestowed in a manner so modest and yet evidently sincere, that the conduct of this exalted lady upon the occasion won all hearts.

"The procession entered the palace-square; and the Grand Duke, attended by the great officers of state and a brilliant staff, received his intended bride at the foot of the great marble staircase of the western pavilion. The illustrious company then entered the palace. Immediately afterwards the five regiments of household troops, commanded by that noble veteran the Marshal Count of Galeazzo, marched into the square, and formed into three lines along the western side of the palace. At half-past eleven the royal party appeared at the foot of the marble staircase, and entered the numerous carriages in waiting. The bride occupied the carriage which had conveyed her to the palace, and was accompanied by the ladies in attendance upon her. His Serene Highness, attended by the President of the Council and the Grand Chancellor, entered the state carriage. The procession then moved onwards to the Cathedral of Saint Theodosia.

"This was the signal for the roar of artillery from all points. The citadel, and the ships of war in the roadstead thundered forth the announcement that his Serene Highness had just left the palace. The bells rang blithely from every steeple; the troops presented arms, the military bands played the national hymn; and the procession was welcomed with joyous shouts, the waving of handkerchiefs, and the smiles of beauty. The windows and balconies of the houses overlooking the streets through which it passed, were crowded with elegantly dressed ladies, brilliant with their own beauty, gay with waving plumes, and sparkling with diamonds. The only indication of political feeling which we observed upon the occasion, was on the part of the troops; *and they were silent*.

"The bride was naturally the centre of all interest and attraction. Every one was anxious to catch a glimpse of her charming countenance. And certainly this lovely lady never could have appeared *more lovely* than on the present occasion. She was attired in a dress of the most costly point-lace over white satin. Her veil was of the first-mentioned material, and of the richest description. She was somewhat pale; but a charming serenity was depicted upon her countenance. She bowed frequently, and in the most unpretending and affable manner, as the procession moved along.

"At length the cavalcade reached the cathedral, where the Archbishop of Montoni, assisted by the Bishops of Trevisano and Collato, was in attendance to perform the solemn ceremony. The sacred edifice was thronged by the *élite* and fashion of the capital, who had been admitted by tickets. When the royal party had entered the Cathedral, the doors were closed; and the holy ceremony was solemnised. The roar of the artillery was again heard, as the royal party returned to their carriages. This time the Grand Duchess was handed by his Serene Highness into the state carriage. The return to the palace was distinguished by demonstrations of satisfaction on the part of the spectators more enthusiastic, if possible, than those which marked the progress of the cavalcade to the cathedral. A glow of animation was visible upon the countenance of her Serene Highness; and the Grand Duke himself looked remarkably well and cheerful. In a short time the Sovereign conducted his lovely bride into that palace which in future is to be her home.

"Thus ended a ceremony which, in a political point of view, may probably be attended with important results to the interests of Castelcicala. Should male issue proceed from this marriage, the contentions of rival parties in the state will be at once annihilated. The supporters of the Prince of Castelcicala, who is now an exile in England, are naturally indignant and annoyed at the marriage of his Serene Highness Angelo III. with a lady young enough to encourage hopes that the union may not remain unfruitful. It is even evident that many of the former friends of the exiled Prince pronounced in favour of this marriage, the moment it was contemplated some months previously to its solemnization. This sentiment of approval will account for the entrance of General Grachia, who was notorious for his adhesion to the popular cause espoused by the Prince, into the Ministry. Probably the best friends of their country, aware that it was neither natural nor legal to attempt to control the inclinations and affections of his Serene Highness Angelo III., looked upon this marriage as the best means of securing peace and internal tranquillity to Castelcicala, inasmuch as it gives a prospect of an heir to the ducal throne—an heir whose right and title none could dispute. This is the view we ourselves take of the case: and we therefore hail the event as one of a most auspicious nature in our annals."

Scarcely had the Enchantress terminated this narrative of the ceremony which elevated her friend to a ducal throne,—a narrative which she had perused with the liveliest feelings of satisfaction, and the most unadulterated pleasure,—when the Earl of Warrington was announced.

Diana hastened to communicate to him the tidings which she had received; and the nobleman himself read Eliza's letter, and the extract from the *Montoni Gazette*, with an interest which showed how gratified he felt in the high and exalted fortunes of the daughter of her whom he had once loved so tenderly.

"Yes, indeed," said the earl, when he had terminated the perusal of the two documents, "Eliza Sydney now ranks amongst the queens and reigning princesses of the world: from a humble cottage she has risen to a throne."

"And this exalted station she owes to your lordship's goodness," remarked Diana.

"Say to my justice," observed the earl; "for I may flatter myself that I have behaved with justice to the child of my departed uncle's daughter. And this remarkable exaltation of Eliza Sydney shows us, Diana, that we should never judge of a person's character by one fault. Eliza has always been imbued with sentiments of virtue and integrity, although she was led into one error by that villain Stephens; and she has now met with a reward of a price high almost beyond precedent. But, ah!" exclaimed the earl, who was carelessly turning the letter of the Grand Duchess over and over in his hands as he spoke, "this is very singular—very remarkable;"—and he inspected the seal and post-marks of the letter with minute attention.

"What is the matter?" inquired Diana.

"Some treachery has been perpetrated here," answered the earl, still continuing his scrutiny: "this letter had been opened before it was delivered to you."

"Opened!" cried Diana.

"Yes," said the Earl of Warrington; "here is every proof that the letter has been violated. See—there is the English post-mark of *yesterday morning*: and over it has been stamped *another mark*, of this morning's date. Then contemplate the seal. There are two kinds of wax, the one melted over the other: do you not notice a shade different in their colours?"

"Certainly," said Diana: "it is apparent. But who could have done this? Perhaps the Grand Duchess herself; for the ducal arms are imprinted upon the upper layer of wax."

"The persons who opened this letter, Diana," said the earl, in a serious—almost a solemn tone, "are those who know full well how to take the imprint of a seal. But have you not other letters from Castelcicala?"

"Several," replied Diana; and she hastily unlocked her writing-desk, where she produced all the correspondence she had received from Eliza Sydney.

The earl carefully inspected the envelopes of those letters; and his countenance grew more serious as he proceeded with his scrutiny.

"Yes," he exclaimed, after a long pause; "the fact is glaring! Every one of these letters was opened *somewhere* ere they were delivered to you. The utmost caution has been evidently used in re-sealing and re-stamping them;—nevertheless, there are proofs—undoubted proofs—that the whole of this correspondence has been violated in its transit from the writer to the receiver."

"But what object—what motive——"

"I have long entertained suspicions," said the Earl of Warrington, interrupting his fair mistress, "that there is one public institution in England which is made the scene of proceedings so vile—so detestable—so base as to cast a stain upon the entire nation. Those suspicions are now confirmed."

"What mean you?" inquired Diana: "to which institution do you allude?"

"*To the General Post-office*," replied the Earl of Warrington.

"The General Post-office!" cried Mrs. Arlington, her countenance expressing the most profound astonishment.

"The General Post-office," repeated the earl. "But this is a matter of so serious a nature that I shall not allow it to rest here. You will lend me these letters for a few hours? I am more intimately acquainted with the Home Secretary than with any other of her Majesty's Ministers; and to him will I now proceed."

The earl consigned the letters to his pocket, and, with an air of deep determination, took a temporary leave of Mrs. Arlington.

Scarcely had the earl left the house, when Mr. Greenwood's valet, Filippo, was introduced.

"I have called, madam," said the Italian, "to inform you that I last night counteracted another of my master's plots, and saved a young female from the persecution of his addresses."

"You have done well, Filippo," exclaimed Mrs. Arlington. "Does your master suspect you?"

"Not in the remotest degree, madam. I contrived matters so well, that he believed the young person alluded to had escaped by her own means, and without any assistance, save that of a pair of sheets which enabled her to descend in safety from the window of the room in which she was confined."

"I am delighted to hear that your mission to England has been so successful, in thwarting the machinations of that bad man," observed Mrs. Arlington. "Have you heard any news from Castelcicala?"

"I have this morning received a Montoni newspaper, announcing the nuptials of the Grand Duke and the Marchioness of Ziani," replied Filippo.

"And I also have heard those happy tidings," said Mrs. Arlington. "But have you any further information to give me relative to the schemes of your master? I am always pleased to learn that his evil designs experience defeat through your agency."

"I have nothing more to say at present, madam," answered Filippo; "except, indeed," he added, suddenly recollecting himself, "that I overheard, a few days ago, a warm contention between my master and a certain Sir Rupert Harborough."

"Sir Rupert Harborough!" ejaculated Diana, a blush suddenly overspreading her cheeks.

"Yes, madam. From what I could learn, there was a balance of about a thousand pounds due from Sir Rupert Harborough to Mr. Greenwood, on a bill that purported to be the acceptance of Lord Tremordyn, but which was in reality a forgery committed by Sir Rupert himself."

"A forgery!" cried Diana.

"A forgery, madam. Sir Rupert bitterly reproached Mr. Greenwood with having suggested to him that mode of raising money, whereas Mr. Greenwood appeared to deny with indignation any share in the part of the transaction imputed to him. The matter ended by Mr. Greenwood declaring that if the bill were not paid to-morrow, when it falls due (having, it appears, been renewed several times), Sir Rupert Harborough should be prosecuted for forgery."

"And what said Sir Rupert Harborough to that?" inquired Diana.

"He changed his tone, and began to implore the mercy of Mr. Greenwood: but my master was inexorable; and Sir Rupert left the house with ruin and terror depicted upon his countenance."

"This battle you must allow them to fight out between themselves," said Diana, after a moment's hesitation. "I know Sir Rupert Harborough—know him full well; but I do not think that he is so thoroughly black-hearted as your master. He was once kind to me—once," she added, musing to herself rather than addressing the Italian valet: then, suddenly recollecting herself, she said, "However, Filippo—that affair does not regard you."

"Very good, madam," replied the valet; and he then took his departure.

The moment he was gone, Mrs. Arlington threw herself into her comfortable arm-chair, and became wrapt up in deep thought.

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE HOME OFFICE.

In a well furnished room, on the first-floor of the Home Office, sate the Secretary of State for that Department.

The room was spacious and lofty. The walls were hung with the portraits of several eminent statesmen who had, at different times, presided over the internal policy of the country. A round table stood in the middle of the apartment; and at this table, which groaned beneath a mast of papers, was seated the Minister.

At the feet of this functionary was a wicker basket, into which he threw the greater portion of the letters addressed to him, and over each of which he cast a glance of such rapidity that he must either have been a wonderfully clever man to acquire a notion of the contents of those documents by means of so superficial a survey, or else a very neglectful one to pay so little attention to affairs which were associated with important individual interests or which related to matters of national concern.

The time-piece upon the mantel struck twelve, when a low knock at the door of the apartment elicited from the Minister an invitation to enter.

A tall, thin, middle-aged, sallow-faced person, dressed in black, glided noiselessly into the room, bowed obsequiously to the Minister, and took his seat at the round table.

This was the Minister's private secretary.

The secretary immediately mended a pen, arranged his blotting-paper in a business-like fashion before him, spread out his foolscap writing paper, and then glanced towards his master, at much as to say, "I am ready."

"Take that pile of correspondence, if you please," said the Minister, "and run your eye over each letter."

"Yes, my lord," said the Secretary; and he glanced cursorily over the letters alluded to, one after the other, briefly mentioning their respective objects as he proceeded. "This letter, my lord, is from the chaplain of Newgate. It sets forth that there is a man of the name of William Lees at present under sentence of death in that prison; that William Lees, in a fit of unbridled passion, which bordered upon insanity, murdered his wife; that the conduct of the deceased was sufficient to provoke the most temperate individual to a similar deed; that he had no interest in killing her; and that he committed the crime in a moment over which he had no control."

"Do you remember anything of the case?" demanded the Home Secretary. "For my part, I have no time to read trials."

"Yes, my lord," replied the Secretary. "This William Lees is a barber; and his wife was of vile and most intemperate habits. He murdered her in a fit of exasperation caused by the discovery that she had pledged every thing moveable in the house, to obtain the means of buying drink."

"Oh! a barber—eh?" said the Home Secretary, yawning.

"Yes, my lord. Your lordship will remember that young Medhurst, who assassinated a school-fellow in a fit of passion, was only condemned to three years' imprisonment."

"Ah! but that was quite a different thing," exclaimed the Minister. "Medhurst was a gentleman; but this man is only a barber."

"True, my lord—very true," said the Secretary. "I had quite forgotten that."

"Make a memorandum, that the law in the case of William Lees must take its course."

"Yes, my lord;"—and the Secretary, having endorsed the note upon the letter, referred to another document. "This, my lord, is a petition from a political prisoner confined in a county gaol, and who sets forth that he is compelled to wear the prison dress, associate with felons of the blackest character, and eat the prison allowance. He humbly submits—"

"He may submit till he is tired," interrupted the Minister. "Make a memorandum to answer the petition to the effect that her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department does not see any ground for interfering in the matter."

"Very good, my lord. This letter it from a pauper in the—— Union, stating that he has been cruelly assaulted, beaten, and ill-used by the master; that he has applied in vain to the Poor Law Commissioners for redress; and that he now ventures to submit his case to your lordship."

"Make a note to answer that the fullest inquiries shall be immediately instituted," said the Minister.

"Shall I give the necessary instructions for the inquiry, my lord?" asked the Secretary.

"Inquiry!" repeated the Minister: "are you mad? Do you really imagine that I shall be foolish enough to permit any inquiry at all? Such a step would be almost certain to end in substantiating the pauper's charge against the master; and then there would be a clamour from one end of the country to the other against the New Poor Laws. We must smother all such affairs whenever we can; but by writing to say that the fullest inquiries shall be instituted, I shall be armed with a reply to any member who might happen to bring the case before Parliament. My answer to the charge would then be *that her Majesty's Government had instituted a full inquiry into the matter, and had ascertained that the pauper was a quarrelsome, obstreperous, and disorderly person, who was not to be believed upon his oath*."

"True, my lord," said the Secretary, evidently struck by this display of ministerial wisdom. "The next letter, my lord, is from a clerk in the Tax Office, Somerset House. He complains that his income is too small, and that the Commissioners of Taxes refuse to augment it. He states in pretty plain terms, that unless he receives an augmentation, he shall not hesitate to publish the fact, that the Dividend Books of the Bank of England are removed to the Tax-Office every six months, in order that an account of every fundholder's stock in the government securities may be taken for the information of the Treasury and the Tax Commissioners: he adds that such an

announcement would convulse the whole nation with alarm at the awful state of *espionnage* under which the people exist; and he states these grounds as a reason for purchasing his silence by means of an increase of salary."

"This is serious—very serious," said the Minister: "but the letter should have been addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. You must enclose it to my colleague."

"Yes, my lord," replied the Secretary.

At this moment a gentle knock was heard at the door of the apartment.

The Secretary hastened to respond to the summons, and admitted two persons dressed in plain but decent attire. One was a short, stout, red-faced, consequential-looking man: the other was a tall, raw-boned, ungainly person, and seemed quite confounded at the presence in which he found himself.

The former of these individuals was an inspector of police: the latter was a common police-officer. Indeed, the reader has been already introduced to them, in the fourteenth chapter of this narrative.

Having ushered these individuals into the room, the private secretary hastened to breathe a few words in an under tone to the ear of his master.

"Oh! these are the men, are they?" said the Minister aloud.

"Yes, my lord," replied the Secretary; then, addressing the police-officers, he exclaimed. "Step forward, my men—step forward. There—that's right: now sit down at that side of the table, and let the one who can write best make notes of the instructions that will be immediately given to you."

Both the Minister and Secretary were cautious enough not to give those instructions in their own handwriting.

The men sate down, as they were desired; and the inspector whispered to his companion an order to assume the duties of amanuensis on the occasion.

"You are aware, my good fellows," said the Minister, "that there is to be a great political meeting to-morrow evening somewhere in Bethnal Green?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the inspector.

"It is necessary to the purposes of her Majesty's Government," continued the Minister, "that discredit should be thrown upon all political meetings when very liberal sentiments are enunciated."

"Yes, my lord," said the inspector. "Shall Crisp put that down, my lord?"

"There is no necessity to make a note of my observations, only of my instructions," answered the Minister, with a smile. "The best method of throwing discredit upon those meetings is to create a disturbance. You, Mr. Inspector, will therefore take care and have at least a dozen of your men in plain clothes at the assembly to-morrow evening."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"You will direct your men, Mr. Inspector, to applaud most vehemently all the inflammatory parts of the speeches made upon the occasion."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"You will contrive that Mr. Crisp, whom my secretary states to be a proper man for the purpose, shall himself make a speech to-morrow evening."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"This speech must be of the most violent and inflammatory kind: it must advocate the use of physical force, denounce the aristocracy, the government, and the parliament in the most blood-thirsty terms; it need not even spare her most gracious Majesty. Let the cry be *Blood*; and let your men, Mr. Inspector, applaud with deafening shouts, every period in this incendiary harangue."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"The well-disposed portion of the audience will remonstrate. Your men in plain clothes can thus readily pick a quarrel; and a quarrel may be easily made to lead to blows. Then let a posse of constables in uniform rush in, and lay about them with their bludgeons most unsparingly. The more broken heads and limbs, the better. Be sure to have some of the audience taken into custody; and on the following morning, appear against them before the police-magistrate."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"You will take especial care to denounce the individuals so captured, as the ringleaders of the riot, and the ones who made themselves most conspicuous in applauding the inflammatory speeches uttered on the occasion—especially those which advocated rebellion, bloodshed, and death to monarchy and aristocracy."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"If the magistrate asks you—as he will be certain to do," continued the Minister, "whether you are acquainted with the prisoners at the bar, you can say that they are well known to the police as most dangerous and disorderly characters."

"Yes, my lord. Put that down, Crisp."

"You see," said the Minister, turning towards his own private secretary, "it is ten to one that the individuals so arrested will be respectable tradesmen; and as they will thus obtain a taste of the treadmill (for we must send our private instructions to the magistrates at Lambeth Street, to that effect) the warning will be a most salutary one throughout the whole district—especially at a moment when the Spitalfields weavers are reduced to desperation by their dreadfully distressed condition."

"Of course, my lord," replied the Secretary. "Such a proceeding will sicken men of political meetings. Has your lordship any farther instructions for these officers?"

"None," said the Minister. "I may, however, add, that if they acquit themselves well in this respect, the inspector shall become a

superintendent, and the constable a serjeant."

"Thank your lordship," exclaimed the inspector. "You may put that down, too, Crisp—and express your gratitude to his lordship for his kindness."

Mr. Crisp acted in all respects as he was desired; and having each made an awkward bow, the two officers retired.

"Now proceed with the correspondence," said the Minister.

"Yes, my lord," replied the Secretary. "Here is a letter from the mayor of ——, stating that the experiment of making the prisoners, tried and untried, who are confined in the gaol of that town, wear black masks whenever they are compelled to mingle together, works well. The mayor moreover states, that out of two hundred prisoners subjected to the *solitary system*, since the introduction of the plan into the gaol, only nineteen have gone mad, and of those only three have died raving. He therefore recommends the solitary system. He adds that all personal identity is now destroyed in the prison, and prisoners are known by *numbers* instead of by their *names*. He concludes by inquiring whether these regulations shall continue in force?"

"Most assuredly," answered the Minister. "Make a note that a reply is to be sent to that effect. I am glad the system of solitary confinement, black cloth masks, and numbers instead of names, works well. I shall gradually apply it to every criminal prison in England. At the same time, I must endeavour to throw the odium of the introduction of that system upon the justices in quarter sessions assembled—in case I should be assailed on the subject in the House."

"Certainly, my lord. This letter is from the secret agent, sent down to Manchester to inquire into the constitution and principles of the Independent Order of Rechabites. He obtained admission into a lodge, and was regularly initiated a member of the Brotherhood. He finds that the Rechabites are about eighty thousand in number, having lodges in all the great cities and towns of England, with the head-quarters at Manchester. The Order is not political; but is formed of sections of the Teetotal Societies. The government need not entertain any fears of this combination. The agent sends up a detailed account of the secrets and signs connected with the Order, accompanied by a copy of the rules and regulations."

"These Teetotalers must not be encouraged. They are seriously injuring the Excise-revenues. Proceed."

"This letter, my lord, is from the principal agent sent down into the mining districts, to encourage a spirit of discontent amongst the pitmen. He says that he has no doubt of being enabled to produce a disturbance in the north, and thus afford your lordship the wished-for opportunity of sending more troops in that direction. When once over-awed by the presence of a formidable number of bayonets, the pitmen will be compelled to submit to the terms dictated by the coal-mine proprietors; and your lordship's aims will be thus accomplished."

"I am glad of that. The coal-mine proprietors are rich and influential men, whom it is necessary to conciliate," said the Minister. "What next?"

"Here is a letter, my lord," continued the Secretary, "from Sir Joseph Gosborne, stating that his daughter, Miss Gosborne, was taken into custody yesterday morning on an accusation of stealing a jar of anchovies from an oilman's shop. The magistrate refused to take bail, and remanded the young lady until next Monday. Sir Joseph is anxious that his daughter should be admitted to bail, because, in that case, should he fail to settle with the prosecutor, he can keep his daughter out of the way when the day of trial arrives, and pay the money for the estreated recognizances. He is moreover desirous that the case should be sent to the Sessions, because, if by any accident the matter *should* go to trial, a verdict of acquittal is certain at the hands of a Clerkenwell jury, but by no means sure with an Old Bailey one."

"Make a memorandum to write to the magistrate who will hear the case next Monday, to take bail—*moderate bail*, mind—and to refer the matter to the Sessions. We must not refuse to oblige Sir Joseph Gosborne."

While the private secretary was still writing, a servant entered and informed the Minister that Mr. Teynham was waiting, and solicited an audience.

"Ah! the new magistrate at Marlborough Street," exclaimed the Home Secretary. "Show him in."

Mr. Teynham, a middle-aged gentleman attired in black, was introduced accordingly. He bowed very low to the Minister, and, when desired to take a chair, obsequiously seated himself upon the very edge.

"I have recommended you to Her Majesty, Mr. Teynham," said the Minister, "as a fit and proper person to fill the situation of police-magistrate and justice of the peace at the Marlborough Street Court; and her Majesty has been most graciously pleased to confirm the appointment."

Mr. Teynham bowed very low, and became entangled in a labyrinth of acknowledgments, with which "deep gratitude"—"sense of duty"—"impartial distribution of justice," and such like phrases were blended.

"It is necessary," said the Minister, after a pause, "that I should give you a few instructions with respect to the functions upon which you are about to enter. You are aware, Mr. Teynham, that the young gentlemen of the aristocracy are occasionally addicted to wrenching off knockers, pulling down bells, and other innocent little pranks of a similar nature. These are delicate cases to deal with, Mr. Teynham; but I need scarcely inform you that the treadmill is *not* for the aristocracy."

"I understand, my lord. A trifling fine, with a reprimand—and a little wholesome advice—"

"Precisely, Mr. Teynham—precisely!" cried the Minister: "I see that you understand your business well. The nice discrimination which you possess will always teach you whether you have a gentleman to deal with, or not. If a low person choose to divert himself with aristocratic amusements, punish him—do not spare him—send him to the treadmill. In the same way that game is preserved for the sport of the upper classes, so must the knockers and the bells be saved from spoliation by the lower orders."

"I fully comprehend your lordship," said the newly-made magistrate. "I should like, however, to know your lordship's sentiments in one respect."

"Speak, Mr. Teynham," said the Minister, with the most condescending affability, or the most affable condescension—whichever

the reader likes best.

"Suppose, my lord, that a young nobleman or well-born gentleman wrenches off a knocker, and throws it into the street; then suppose, my lord, that a poor man, passing by, picks up the knocker and carries it off to a marine-store dealer's to sell it for old iron, in order to procure his family a meal; and then if your lordship will be kind enough to suppose that both those persons are brought up before me—the nobleman for wrenching off the knocker and throwing it away, and the poor man for picking it up and selling it,—how am I to act in such a case?"

"Very ingenious—very ingenious, indeed, Mr. Teynham," said the Minister: "you will make an excellent magistrate! Your course in the case propounded is clear; the nobleman is fined five shillings for being drunk and disorderly—because all noblemen and gentlemen who wrench off knockers are drunk and disorderly; and the poor man must be committed to the House of Correction for three months. Nothing is plainer, Mr. Teynham."

"Nothing, my lord. Has your lordship any farther instructions?"

"Oh! decidedly," returned the Minister. "When any individual connected with a noble or influential family gets into a scrape, and is brought before you, hear the case in private, and exclude the reporters. Again, never commit such a person for trial, unless you are absolutely compelled. Let him go upon bail: it will be ten to one if you are ever troubled any more with the case. There is another point to which I must direct your attention. The practice of shoplifting among ladies has increased lately to a fearful degree. But, after all, it is only a *little eccentricity*—indeed one might almost call it an *amiable weakness*. The fact is, that many ladies will go into a shop, purchase a hundred-guinea shawl, and secrete an eighteen-penny pair of gloves. Prudent husbands and fathers avert the tradesman, with whom their wives and daughters deal, beforehand; and these trifling abstractions are duly entered in the running accounts; but now and then a lady *does* get taken up. In such a case you must show her every possible distinction. Order her a chair in the dock: and before the business comes on, permit her to remain with her friends in the 'magistrates' private room.' Then, if the prosecutor hesitates in giving his evidence, fly into a passion, tell him that he is prevaricating and not worthy to be believed upon his oath, and indignantly dismiss the case. The accused lady can then step into her carriage, and drive off comfortably home."

"Your lordship's instructions shall be complied with to the very letter," said Mr. Teynham.

"In a word," continued the Minister, "you must always shield the upper classes as much as possible; and in order to veil their little peccadilloes, bring out the misdeeds of the lower orders in the boldest relief. This is the only way to support the doctrine that the poor *must* be governed by the rich. Whenever young boys or girls appear as witnesses, ask them if they know the value of an oath; and if they reply in the negative, expatiate upon the frightful immorality prevalent among the poorer classes, so that the reporters may record your observations. This does good—and enables the Bishops to make long speeches in the House of Lords on the necessity of religious instruction, and the want of more churches. If you attend to these remarks of mine, Mr. Teynham, you will make an excellent magistrate."

"Your lordship may rely upon me," was the submissive answer.

"There is one more point—I had almost forgotten it," said the Home Secretary. "You must invariably take the part of the police. Remember that the oath of one police-officer is worth the oaths of a dozen defendants. This only applies to the collision of the police with the lower orders, mind. As a general rule, remember that the police are always *in the right* when the poor are concerned, and always *in the wrong* when the rich are brought before you. And now, Mr. Teynham, I have nothing more to say."

The newly-made magistrate rose, bowed several times, and withdrew, walking obsequiously upon the points of his toes for fear his boots should creak in the awful presence of the Home Secretary.

But if "his worship" were thus meek and lowly before his patron, he afterwards avenged himself for that constraint, when seated in the magisterial chair, upon the poor devils that appeared before him!

The private secretary was about to proceed with the correspondence addressed from different quarters to the Minister, when a servant entered the room, and placed a card upon the table before this great officer of state.

"The Earl of Warrington?" said the Minister. "I will receive him."

The servant withdrew, and the private secretary retired to an inner apartment.

In a few moments the Earl of Warrington was announced.

When the usual civilities had been exchanged between the two noblemen, the Earl of Warrington said, "I have called, my lord, upon a matter which, I hope from the knowledge I have of your lordship's character, will be considered by you as one of importance to the whole nation."

"The estimate your lordship forms of any business can be no mean guide to my own opinion," answered the Minister.

"I am not quite aware whether I am acting in accordance with official etiquette, to bring the matter alluded to under the notice of your lordship, or whether it would have been more regular in me to have addressed myself direct to the Postmaster-General or the Prime Minister; but as I have the honour of being better acquainted with your lordship than with any of your colleagues in the administration, I made up my mind to come hither."

"I shall be most happy to serve your lordship in any way in my power," said the Minister.

"Then I shall at once come to the point," continued the Earl of Warrington. "A friend of mine—a lady who resides in London—has corresponded for some months past with a lady living in the state of Castelcicala; and there is every reason to believe that the letters addressed to my friend in London, have been opened during the transit."

"Indeed," said the Minister, not a muscle of whose countenance moved as he heard this communication. "May I ask what is the nature of the proofs that such is the fact?"

"I believe," returned the Earl of Warrington, "that the letters have been opened at the English Post-office."

"The English Post-office!" ejaculated the Minister, with an air of great surprise—whether real or affected, we must leave our

readers to determine.

"Yes, my lord—the English Post-office," said the Earl of Warrington, firmly. "The proofs are these;"—and, extracting the letters from his pocket, he pointed out to the Minister the same appearances which he had ere now explained to Mrs. Arlington.

"On this last letter," said the Minister, "I perceive the ducal arms of Castelcicala."

"The present Grand Duchess of that state is the correspondent of Mrs. Arlington, to whom, your lordship may perceive, these letters are addressed."

"And her Serene Highness is a relative of your lordship, I believe?" observed the Minister inquiringly.

"Which circumstance, united with my friendship for Mrs. Arlington, has determined me to inquire into this matter—nay, to sift it to the very bottom."

"Your lordship can scarcely suppose that the contents of letters are violated by the sanction of the Post-Master General?" said the Minister, darting a keen glance upon the earl.

"I will not take upon myself to accuse any individual directly," was the answer.

"Nor is it worth while to scrutinise a matter which will probably terminate in the discovery that the impertinent curiosity of some clerk has led to the evil complained of," said the Minister.

"No, my lord—this violation of private correspondence has been conducted too systematically to be the work of a clerk surrounded by prying eyes and hurried with the fear of detection every moment. Here are two distinct coats of wax on several of the letters; and yet the impressions of the original seals are retained. Those impressions were not taken by artificial process in an instant, nor without previous preparation."

"Then whom does your lordship suspect?" inquired the Minister, with a trifling uneasiness of manner.

"I come to ask your lordship to furnish me with a clue to this mystery, and not to supply one. Were I acquainted with the real truth, I should know what course to pursue."

"And what course would that be?"

"In the next session of Parliament, I would rise in my place in the House of Lords, and proclaim to the whole nation—nay, to the entire world—the disgraceful fact, that England, the land of vaunted freedom, possesses an institution where the most sacred ties of honour are basely violated and trampled under foot."

"But suppose, my lord—I only say suppose," cried the Minister, "that her Majesty's government should consider it vitally important to English interests to be acquainted with the contents of certain letters,—suppose, I say, my lord, that such were the case,—would you then think it necessary to publish your discovery,—presuming that your lordship has made such discovery,—of that necessary proceeding on the part of her Majesty's government?"

"I am afraid that your lordship has now afforded me a clue to the mystery which has perplexed me," said the Earl of Warrington coldly.

"And as a nobleman devoted to your country, your lordship must recognise the imperious necessity of adopting such a course, at times, as the one now made known to you."

"As a nobleman devoted to my country," exclaimed the Earl of Warrington proudly, "I abhor and detest all underhand means of obtaining information which serves as a guide for diplomatic intrigue, but which in nowise affects the sterling interests of the state."

"Your lordship speaks warmly," said the Minister.

"And were I in my place in Parliament, I should speak more warmly—far more warmly still. I am, however, here in your lordship's apartment, and the laws of courtesy do not permit me to express my feelings as I elsewhere *should* do—and as I elsewhere *shall* do."

"Your lordship will reflect," said the Minister, now really alarmed,—"your lordship will reflect—maturely—seriously——"

"It requires no reflection to teach me my duty."

"But, my dear earl——"

"My lord?"

"The peace of the country frequently depends upon the information which we acquire in this manner."

"Then had the peace of the country better be occasionally menaced, than that the sacred envelope of a letter should be violated?"

"Your lordship is too severe," said the Minister.

"No—my lord: I am not, under the circumstances, severe enough. Behold the gross injustice of the system. The law forbids us to transmit sealed letters through any other medium than the Post-office; and yet that very Post-office is made the scene of the violation of those sacred missives. My lord, it is impossible to defend so atrocious a proceeding. Now, my lord, I have spoken as warmly as I feel."

"Really, my dear earl, you must not permit this little business to go any further. You shall have for your friends every satisfaction they require: their correspondence shall be strictly inviolate in future. And now, my lord," continued the Minister, with a smile whose deceptive blandness Mr. Greenwood would have envied, "let me request attention to another point. The Premier has placed your lordship's name on the list of peers who are to be raised to a more elevated rank ere the opening of the next session; and your lordship may exchange your coronet of an earldom against that of a marquisate."

"Her Majesty's government," replied the earl with chilling—freezing *hauteur*, "would do well to reserve that honour in respect to me, until it may choose to reward me when I shall have performed a duty that I owe my country, and exposed a system to express my full sense of which I dare not *now* trust my tongue with epithets. Good morning, my lord."

And the Earl of Warrington walked proudly from the room.

On the following day a cabinet council was held at the Home Office.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE FORGER AND THE ADULTERESS.

It was evening; and Lady Cecilia Harborough was seated alone in the drawing-room of the house which she and her husband occupied in Tavistock Square.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate: the lamp upon the table diffused a soft and mellow lustre through the apartment.

Lady Cecilia's manner was pensive: a deep shade of melancholy overspread her countenance; and at times her lips quivered, and her bosom heaved convulsively.

She was evidently attempting to struggle with feelings of a very painful nature.

"Slighted—neglected—perhaps despised!" she at length murmured. "Oh! what an indignity! To have yielded myself up entirely to that man—and now to be cast aside in this manner! For months past have I observed that his conduct grew more and more cool towards me;—his visits became less frequent;—he made appointments with me and did not keep them;—he remonstrated with me for what he called my extravagance, when I asked him for money! Ah! how I endeavoured to close my eyes to the truth:—I forced myself to put faith in his excuses for absence—I compelled myself to be satisfied with his apologies for not keeping his engagements. Fool that I have been! Had I reproached—wept—stormed—and quarrelled, as other women would have done, he would yet be my slave: but I was too pliant—too easy—too docile,—and he has ended by contemning me! I wanted spirit—I was deficient in courage—I practised no artifice. I should have refused him my favours when he was most impassioned; I should have tantalized him—acted with caprice—set a high value upon the pleasures which he enjoyed in my arms. Oh! it is cruel—cruel! I have been the pensioned harlot of that man! He commanded the use of my person as he would that of the lowest prostitute in the street. I was too cheap—too willing—too ready to meet him half way in the dalliance of love! I caught a fine bird—and by leaving his cage open, have allowed him an opportunity to fly away! The indignity is insufferable! For weeks I had not asked him for a shilling—for weeks I had not spoken to him on the subject of money. And now—to-day—when I require a hundred guineas for urgent matters, to be refused! to be denied that paltry sum! Oh! it is monstrous! And not to come himself to explain,—but to send a cool note, expressing a regret that the numerous demands he has had upon him lately render it impossible for him to comply with my request! A worn-out excuse—a wretched apology! And for him, too, who absolutely rolls in riches! I never could have believed it. Even now it appears a dream! Ah! the ungrateful monster! It is true that he has supplied me at times in the most generous manner,—that he redeemed my jewels for me a second time, some months ago, when Rupert played me that vile trick by plundering me during my absence;—but, alas! the jewels have returned to their old place—and who is to redeem them *now*?"

Lady Cecilia paused, and compressed her lips together.

She felt herself slighted—perhaps for some rival: and whose sufferings are more acute than those of a neglected woman? who experiences mental pangs more poignant?

Lady Cecilia felt herself degraded. She now comprehended that she had been made the instrument of a heartless libertine's pleasures; and that he coolly thrust her aside when literally satiated with her charms.

This was a most debasing conviction—debasing beyond all others, for a patrician lady!

Never did she seem so little in her own estimation: she felt polluted;—she saw that she had sold herself for gold: she remembered how willingly, how easily she surrendered herself on the first occasion of her criminality; and she despised herself, because she felt that Greenwood despised her also!

She had no virtue—but she had pride.

The highest bidder might enjoy her person, so voluptuous was she by nature—so ready also was she to make any sacrifice to obtain the means of gratifying her extravagance.

Love with her was not a refinement—it was a sensuality.

Still she had her pride—her woman's pride; for even the most degraded courtezan has *that*; and it was her pride that was now so deeply wounded.

She knew not what course to pursue.

Should she endeavour to bring Greenwood back to her arms?

Or should she be revenged?

If she resolved upon the former, what wiles was she to adopt—what artifices to employ?

If she decided upon the latter, what point in her neglectful lover was vulnerable—what weapon could she use?

A woman does not like to choose the alternative of vengeance, because such a proceeding implies the absence of all hope and of all power of recalling the faithless one.

And yet what was Lady Cecilia to do? That refusal of the money which she had requested, appeared expressive of Mr. Greenwood's determination to break off the connexion.

In that case nothing remained to her but vengeance.

Such were her thoughts.

Her reverie was interrupted by the sudden entrance of her husband Sir Rupert Harborough. His face was flushed with drinking—for he had dined, with his friend Chichester, at a tavern; and his cares had forced him to apply with even more than usual liberality to

the bottle.

He threw himself into a chair opposite to his wife, and said, "Well, Cecilia, I have got very bad news to tell you."

"Indeed, Sir Rupert?" she said, in a tone which signified that *she* also had her annoyances, and would rather not be troubled with *his*.

"I have, on my honour!" cried the baronet. "In fact, Cecilia, I must find a thousand pounds to-morrow by twelve o'clock."

Lady Cecilia only laughed ironically.

"You make merry, madam, at my misfortunes," said Sir Rupert; "but I can assure you that the present is no laughing matter."

"And I unfortunately have no more diamonds and jewellery for you to rob me of," returned the lady.

"No, Cecilia—but you are my wife; and the disgrace that falls upon your husband would redound on yourself."

"Oh! if you be afraid of rusticating in the Queen's Bench prison for a season, I would advise you to make yourself easy on that head; because—"

"Because what, Cecilia?"

"Because I can assure all your friends and acquaintances that you are merely passing the winter in Paris."

"Ridiculous!" cried the baronet impatiently.

"Not so ridiculous as you imagine," returned Lady Cecilia. "You are accustomed, you know, to leave home for weeks and months together."

"Lady Cecilia, this is no time for either ill-feeling or sarcasm. If we have no love for one another, at least let us sit down and converse calmly upon the urgency of our present situation."

"*Our* situation?" ejaculated Cecilia.

"Yes—*ours*," repeated the baronet emphatically. "In one word, Cecilia, can you possibly raise a thousand pounds?"

To a person who had not the means of obtaining even the tenth part of that sum, and who had herself been disappointed that very evening in her endeavour to procure a hundred guineas, the question put by the baronet appeared in so ridiculous a light, that—in spite of her own annoyances—Lady Cecilia threw herself back in her chair, and burst into a loud and hearty laugh.

Sir Rupert rose and paced the room in an agitated manner; for he was totally at a loss what course to pursue. His only hope was in his wife; and yet he knew not how to break the fatal news to her.

"My God! Cecilia," he exclaimed, after a pause, during which he resumed his seat, "you will drive me mad!"

"You have become very sensitive of late, Sir Rupert; and yet I was not aware that you were so weak-minded as to tremble upon the verge of insanity. Certainly your conduct has never led me to suppose that you were over sane."

"My dear Cecilia, cease this raillery, in the name of every thing sacred," cried the baronet. "I tell you that ruin hangs over me—ruin of the most fearful nature—ruin in which your own name, as that of my wife, will be compromised—"

"Then tell me at once what you dread, and I will tell you whether I can assist you; for I know perfectly well that you require me to do something."

"Do not ask me what it is, Cecilia; but say—can you procure from any quarter—*from any quarter*, mind—a thousand pounds?"

"Absurd! Sir Rupert," answered the lady. "I have no means of helping myself at this moment—much less of providing so large a sum to supply your extravagance. This is a debt of honour, I presume—a debt contracted at the gambling table."

"No—it is far more serious than that, Cecilia; and you *must* exert yourself. If I do not have that amount by twelve to-morrow, the consequences will be most fatal. I know you can borrow the money for me—you have resources, no matter where or how—I ask no questions—I do not wish to pry into your secrets—"

"You are really very considerate, Sir Rupert. You do not wish to pry into my secrets: but you would not hesitate to pry into my drawers and boxes, if you thought there was any thing in them worth taking."

And as she uttered these words, a smile of superb contempt curled her vermilion lips.

Sir Rupert was maddened by this behaviour on the part of his wife; and with difficulty could he restrain his feelings of rage and hatred.

"Madam," he exclaimed, "I ask you to throw aside your raillery, and converse with me—for once—in a serious manner."

"I am willing to do so, Sir Rupert," answered Cecilia; "but you really appear to be joking me yourself. You speak in enigmas about the ruin that hangs over *you* and will involve *me*;—you refuse to entrust me with more of your secret than is necessary to serve as a preface for your demand;—and that demand is a thousand pounds! A thousand pounds are required in a few hours of a person who has no diamonds to pledge—no friends to apply to—"

"Stay, Cecilia," cried the baronet. "You cannot be without friends. For a year past you have been well supplied with funds—you have redeemed your diamonds twice—you have satisfied many of our creditors—the servants' wages and the rent have been regularly paid—"

"And all this has been done without the contribution of one shilling on the part of my husband towards the household expenses," added Lady Cecilia.

"I am glad you have mentioned that point," exclaimed Sir Rupert: "it proves that you *have* friends—that perhaps your father and mother assist you in private,—in a word, that you have some resources. Now what those resources may be, I do not ask you: all I require is assistance—now—within a few hours—before twelve to-morrow."

"Even if I could raise the sum you require," said Cecilia, "I would not think of giving it to you without knowing for what destination it was intended."

"And can you procure the sum, if I reveal to you—if I tell you——"

"I promise nothing," interrupted Lady Cecilia drily.

"But you will do your best?" persisted the baronet.

"I will do nothing without being previously made aware of the real nature of your difficulties."

"I will then keep you in the dark no longer. The cause of my embarrassment is a bill of exchange, for a thousand pounds, now lying in Greenwood's hands, and due to-morrow."

"That is but a simple debt; and, methinks, Sir Rupert, that your acquaintance with bills is not so slight as to render you an alarmist respecting the consequences."

"Were it only a simple matter of debt, I should care but little," said Sir Rupert, still compelled to support the biting raillery of his wife: "but unfortunately—in an evil hour—I know not what demon prompted me at the moment——"

"Speak, Sir Rupert—tell me the truth at once," cried Lady Cecilia, now really alarmed.

"I say that in an evil hour—in a moment of desperation—in an excess of frenzy—I committed a forgery!"

"A forgery!" repeated Lady Cecilia, turning deadly pale. "Ah! what a disgrace to the family—what shame for me——"

"I told you that my ruin would redound upon yourself, Cecilia. But there is more yet for you to hear. The acceptance that I forged ——"

"Well?"

"Was that of Lord Tremordyn——"

"My father!"

"And now you know all. Can you assist me?"

"Sir Rupert, I have no means of raising one tenth part of the sum that you need to cover this infamous transaction."

"And yet you seemed to say that if I told you the nature of my difficulties——"

"I was curious to learn your secret; and as you appeared resolved to keep it from *me*, I thought I would see if there were no means of wheedling it out of *you*."

"And you therefore have no hope to give me?" said the baronet, in a tone of despair.

"None. Where could I raise one thousand pounds? how am I to obtain such a sum? It is for you either to pacify Mr. Greenwood, or to throw yourself at my father's feet and confess all."

"Mr. Greenwood is resolute; and you know that your father would spurn me from his presence. So far from me being able to help myself, it is for you to help me. Perhaps Mr. Greenwood would listen to your representations; or else Lord Tremordyn would accord to you what he would never concede to me."

"You cannot suppose that I can have any influence upon Mr. Greenwood," began Lady Cecilia: "and as for—"

"On the contrary," said Sir Rupert, fixing his eyes in a significant manner upon his wife's countenance; "I have every reason to believe that your influence over Mr. Greenwood is very great; and I will now thank you to exercise it in my behalf."

"What do you mean, Sir Rupert?" exclaimed Cecilia, a deep blush suffusing her face, and her eyes sinking beneath her husband's expressive look.

"Do not force me to explanations, Cecilia," returned the baronet. "I know more than you imagine—I have proofs of more than you fancy I could even suspect. But of that no matter: relieve me from this embarrassment—and I will never trouble you about *your* pursuits."

"What would you have me do?" asked the guilty wife, in a trembling voice.

"Go to Greenwood and settle this business for me," said the baronet, in an authoritative tone.

"I cannot—I dare not—I have no right to demand such a favour of him—I should be certain to experience a refusal—I—"

"Lady Cecilia," interrupted the baronet, speaking in a slow and emphatic manner, "Mr. Greenwood is too gallant a man to refuse a mere trifle to a lady who has refused nothing to him."

"Sir Rupert—you cannot suppose—you—"

"I mean what I say, madam," added the baronet sternly. "Mr. Greenwood is your paramour, and you can surely use your influence with him to save your husband."

"My God! what do I hear?" ejaculated Cecilia. "What proof have you, Sir Rupert—what testimony—what ground—"

"Every proof—every testimony—every ground," interrupted the baronet impatiently. "But, again I say, I do not wish to ruin your reputation, if you will save mine."

"Impossible!" cried Lady Cecilia. "I do not deny that Mr. Greenwood has accommodated me with an occasional loan—upon interest—"

"Interest indeed!" said the baronet, whose turn to assume a tone of raillery had now arrived: "interest paid from the bank of my honour!"

"Upon legal and commercial terms has he lent me money," continued Lady Cecilia; "and this very evening has he refused to advance me another shilling!"

"Is that true, Cecilia?" demanded Sir Rupert.

"Nay—satisfy yourself," said the lady; and drawing a note from her bosom, she handed it to her husband.

The correspondence that passed between Mr. Greenwood and Lady Cecilia was always of a laconic and most guarded nature:

there was consequently nothing in the letter now communicated to Sir Rupert Harborough, to confirm his belief in his wife's criminality. Indeed, the epistle was neither more nor less than any gentleman might write upon a matter of business to any lady.

"I see that Mr. Greenwood is tired of you, Cecilia," said the baronet, throwing the note upon the table, "and that he is anxious to break off the connexion. Now I will tell you how you must be kind enough to act," he continued, in a tone of command. "You must proceed at once to Mr. Greenwood; you must tell him that I have discovered all—that I have positive proofs—that since the day when Chichester discovered him with his arm round your neck in my drawing-room—"

"Oh! that villain Chichester!" murmured Lady Cecilia.

"That ever since that day," continued the baronet, "Chichester and myself have watched your proceedings—have seen you, Cecilia, repair to the appointments agreed upon with your paramour—"

"But this is atrocious!" ejaculated the lady, now dreadfully excited.

"Nay—do not interrupt me," said Sir Rupert in an imperative manner. "You must tell Mr. Greenwood that I and my witness have followed you both to an hotel at Greenwich—that we have been in the next room and have overheard your conversation—that we have been aware of the moments of your amorous dalliance—"

"Ah! Sir Rupert—do you want to kill me" cried Cecilia, bursting into an agony of tears.

"Nonsense!" ejaculated the baronet: "I only want you to save me, and I will screen you. Go, then, to Greenwood—tell him all this—assure him that I know all—that for months have I been watching you—and that I should obtain from him damages far more important than the amount of this acceptance, but that I am willing to compromise the business by the destruction of that document."

"And why could you not have acquainted Mr. Greenwood with all this when you last saw him?" demanded Lady Cecilia, drying her tears, and endeavouring to compose herself, now that the worst was known.

"I did not intend to mention my knowledge of your criminality at all," said Sir Rupert; "and had you consented in the first instance to use your influence with Greenwood to obtain the money to settle the bill, you would not have forced me to these revelations."

"Say rather, Sir Rupert Harborough," exclaimed the lady, "that you would have me obtain for you the means to pay this forged bill; and when once you were freed from the power of Greenwood, you would have brought your action against him, and exposed your wife. But as you have failed in making *me*—the wife whom you would thus expose—the instrument of procuring that sum,—and as the danger now stares you in the face, you proclaim your knowledge of our connexion, and use it as a means to compromise the forgery."

"Cecilia, you do not think me capable——"

"I think you capable of any thing," interrupted his wife indignantly; and it was singular to see that adulterous woman—that criminal wife—that profligate female now putting her husband to the blush, by exposing his base designs.

"Well—after all," exclaimed Sir Rupert, "recriminations will do no good. Go to Greenwood—settle the affair—and the past shall be buried in oblivion."

"And what guarantee do you offer to ensure eternal secresy on your part, provided Mr. Greenwood will give up this forged bill?"

"I will sign any paper he may require," replied the baronet. "But time presses—it is now nearly ten o'clock—and to-morrow morning——"

"I will go to Mr. Greenwood," said Lady Cecilia, rising from her seat: "I will go to him—and endeavour to compromise this affair to the best of my power."

Sir Rupert rang the bell and ordered wine to be brought up, while Lady Cecilia hastened to her boudoir to attire herself for going out; and in the mean time a servant was despatched to procure a cab.

The vehicle arrived and Lady Cecilia was already upon the threshold of the front door of the house, when a servant in a handsome livery ascended the steps, presented a letter, and said "For Sir Rupert Harborough."

Lady Cecilia received the letter; and the servant who delivered it, immediately took his departure.

The lady was about to send in the letter by her own domestic to her husband, when the superscription on the envelope caught her eyes by the light of the hall-lamp. The writing was in the delicate hand of a female; and, without a moment's hesitation, Cecilia consigned the epistle to her reticule.

She then stepped into the vehicle, and ordered the driver to take her to Spring Gardens.

There were two bright lamps fixed in front of the cab; and by these means was Lady Cecilia enabled to examine the contents of the letter intended for her husband.

Without the least hesitation she opened the letter, and to her ineffable surprise discovered that it contained a Bank of England note for one thousand pounds.

This treasure was accompanied by a letter, the contents of which were as follows:—

"An individual who once received some kindness at the hands of Sir Rupert Harborough, has learnt by a strange accident that Sir Rupert Harborough has a pressing need of a sum of money to liquidate a debt due to Mr. George Montague Greenwood. The individual alluded to takes leave to place the sum required at Sir Rupert Harborough's disposal."

No name—no date—no address were appended to this mysterious note. The writing was in a delicate female hand;—and a servant in a handsome livery had delivered the letter. These circumstances, combined with the handsome manner in which the money was tendered, refuted the suspicion that some female, with whom Sir Rupert was illicitly connected, had thus befriended him.

Lady Cecilia was bewildered: the pain of conjecture and doubt was however absorbed in the pleasurable feelings excited by the possession of so large a sum of money. The cab now stopped at Mr. Greenwood's residence.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT'S LEVEE.

"You have doubtless called, my dear Cecilia," said Mr. Greenwood, as he handed the fair visitant to a seat in his elegant drawing-room,—"you have doubtless called to remonstrate with me respecting my note of this evening."

"No," answered Cecilia coldly: "I come on a more momentous affair than that: Sir Rupert knows all!"

"Ah!" cried Greenwood; "is it possible that the villain Chichester—"

"Has betrayed us," added the lady. "Moreover, Sir Rupert and his inseparable friend have been watching and dogging all our movements for months past."

"This is awkward—very awkward," observed Greenwood. "However, Sir Rupert will not dare show his teeth against me, nor venture to give publicity to the affair."

"Because you hold his bill, with a forged acceptance, for one thousand pounds," said Lady Cecilia.

"Ah! he has told you that much—has he?" exclaimed Greenwood. "Well—you perceive, my dearest Cecilia, that he is completely in my power."

"The most remarkable part of the entire business," observed the lady, "is that I am actually deputed by Sir Rupert to negotiate the amicable settlement of the affair with you."

"Indeed!" cried Greenwood. "He could not have chosen a more charming plenipotentiary."

"His proposal is this:—you are to give up the acceptance, and he will sign any paper you choose to guarantee you against legal proceedings on his part."

"I do not see, fair ambassadress," said Greenwood, who did not treat the business with so much serious attention as Lady Cecilia had anticipated—"I do not see that I should benefit myself by such an arrangement. So long as the bill remains in my possession, it is impossible for Sir Rupert Harborough to commence civil proceedings against me, because he knows full well that were he to have process issued against me, I should that moment hand him over to the officers of justice."

"Then, for my sake, Mr. Greenwood," said Lady Cecilia, cruelly hurt by this cold calculation on the part of a man the slave of whose passions she had so completely been,—"for my sake, compromise this affair amicably."

"A thousand pounds is a large sum to fling into the street, my dear Cecilia," observed Greenwood.

"And suppose that by some accident my husband should raise that amount and pay the bill—"

"It never was my intention to allow him to pay all," interrupted Greenwood. "I imagined that by threatening him, I should obtain five or six hundred on account, and I should still hold the bill for the balance. That balance I would not receive, were he to offer it, because by retaining the bill, I keep him in my power."

"Then, once again, for my sake—*for my sake*," repeated Lady Cecilia, "consent to the proposal made to you this evening—settle the affair in an amicable manner."

"To oblige you, my dear Cecilia, I will assent to Sir Rupert Harborough's proposal. Let him draw up and sign a document in which he acknowledges that he has discovered the—the—"

"Criminal conversation between his wife and Mr. George Greenwood," said Cecilia: "we will not mince words in a negotiation of this kind," she added ironically.

"Precisely," exclaimed Greenwood, coolly; "and that he has received full satisfaction for the same. In this manner the business can be disposed of to the satisfaction of all parties."

"To-morrow morning at eleven o'clock I will call with that paper," said Lady Cecilia.

"And I will give you up the forged bill," returned the Member of Parliament. "And now, my dear Cecilia, allow me to make an observation relative to the answer I sent you this evening to your little note. The truth is, that representing as I do an enlightened and independent constituency—"

"Pardon me," said Lady Cecilia, rising: "we will not talk of any other business until this most painful affair be settled."

The fair patrician lady then took her leave, and returned to her husband, who awaited Greenwood's decision in a state of the most painful suspense.

Cecilia communicated to him the particulars of the interview; and, ere he retired to rest, the baronet drew up the document which was to save himself by the compromise of his honour.

"So far, so good," said Sir Rupert, as he handed the paper to his wife. "I have now a proposal to make to you, Cecilia—and I have little doubt that you will accept it."

"Proceed," said Cecilia.

"After the explanation which has taken place between us this evening, it is impossible that we can ever entertain much respect for each other again. You know me to be a forger—I know you to be unfaithful to my bed. If it suits you, we will agree to live together beneath the same roof as hitherto—to have our separate apartments—to maintain an appearance of enjoying domestic tranquillity—and each to follow his own pursuits without leave or remonstrance on the part of the other. You will never interfere with me—I will never interfere with you. If you hear that I have a mistress, you will take no notice of it: if I know that you have a lover, I shall be equally

blind and dumb. Does this please you?"

"Perfectly," answered Lady Cecilia. "Shall we commit this compact to writing?"

"Oh! with much pleasure," returned Sir Rupert. "I will draw up two agreements, embodying the conditions of our compact, immediately. You can retain one; and I will keep the other."

The baronet set to work, and, in a most business-like manner, wrote out the compact. He then read it to Lady Cecilia, who signified her approval of its terms. A counterpart was written; and the husband and wife signed the papers that released them from all the moral obligations of their marriage-vows!

They then retired to their separate apartments, better pleased with each other, perhaps, than they had been for a long—long time.

The reader need scarcely be informed that Lady Cecilia said nothing to her husband relative to the mysterious letter containing the Bank note for a thousand pounds.

On the following morning Lady Cecilia repaired to the abode of Mr. Greenwood. When she arrived in Spring Gardens, she found the street completely blocked up with a train of charity children—boys and girls, marshalled by the parish beadle, and accompanied by the schoolmaster and schoolmistress. The girls were attired in their light blue dresses, plain straw bonnets, white collars, and pepper-and-salt coloured cloaks; and their arms, red with the cold, were only half covered with their coarse mittens. The boys wore their muffin caps, short coats, and knee-breeches; and each was embellished with a large tin plate, or species of medal, affixed like a badge of honour, to the breast. Their meagre countenances, their thin arms, and lanky legs, did not speak much in favour of the quantity of food which constituted their diurnal meals.

Lady Cecilia was conducted to the drawing-room by the Italian valet, who informed her that Mr. Greenwood would wait upon her the moment he had dismissed the charity children.

Lafleur, in the mean time threw open the door of the mansion, and admitted the procession into the spacious hall, after having kept the poor creatures shivering in the cold for nearly a quarter of an hour. The beadle took his station upon the steps, with awful dignity, and watched the boys and girls as they defiled past him in military order into the hall. It was very evident from the timid glances which the little scholars cast towards the countenance of this functionary, that they believed him to be one of the most important personages on the face of the earth; and perhaps they were even perplexed to decide, in their own minds, whether the parish beadle whom they saw before them, or Mr. Greenwood, M. P., whom they were about to see, was the greater man of the two.

At length the procession had entirely cleared the threshold of the mansion, and then only did the beadle enter. He doffed his enormous cocked hat out of respect to the owner of the dwelling in which he now found himself, and made his long staff ring upon the marble pavement of the hall with a din that electrified the children and called looks of solemn importance to the countenances of the schoolmaster and mistress.

In a few moments a side door opened, and Mr. Greenwood appeared.

The beadle struck his stick upon the hall floor once more; and the children, duly tutored to obey the signal, saluted the great man, the girls with low curtseys, and the boys by doffing their muffin caps, bobbing their heads forward, and kicking back their left legs.

"Well, Mr. Muffles," said the Member of Parliament to the beadle, with one of his usual affable smiles; "brought your little family —eh?"

"These children, sir," responded Muffles in a self-sufficient and important tone, glancing at the same time in a patronising manner upon the groups of juveniles around—"these children, sir, has come, as in dooty bounden, to hoffer up the hincense of their most gratefullest thanks to you, sir, as their kind paytron which supplied 'em with pea-soup, blankets, and religious tracts, to keep their bodies and souls both warm and comfortable, as one may say."

"I am delighted, Mr. Muffles," replied the Member of Parliament, in a most condescending manner, "to receive this little mark of gratitude on the part of those for whom I entertain a deep interest, and I am the more pleased because this visit on their part was quite spontaneous, and on mine totally unlooked for."

Mr. Greenwood did not think it necessary to state his knowledge that the whole affair had been got up by Lafleur, in obedience to his own commands.

"Representing as I do," continued Mr. Greenwood, "an enlightened, independent, and important constituency, I cannot do otherwise than feel interested in the welfare of the rising generation; and when I glance upon the happy countenances of these dear children, I thank God for having given me the means to contribute my mite towards the maintenance of the schools of the parish wherein I have the honour to reside."

Mr. Muffles' stick was here rapped upon the floor with tremendous violence; and the boys and girls immediately burst forth into shrill cries of "Hear! hear!"

When silence was once more restored, the beadle in due form presented the schoolmaster and schoolmistress to Mr. Greenwood.

"This gen'leman, sir," said the parish functionary, "is Mr. Twiggs, the parochial perceptor—as worthy a man, sir, as ever broke bread. He's bin in his present sitivation thirteen year come Janivary—"

"Febivary, Mr. Muffles," said the schoolmaster, mildly correcting the beadle.

"Oh! Febivary, be it, Mr. Twiggs?" exclaimed the parish authority. "And this, sir, is Mrs. Twiggs, a lady well known for her excellent qualities in teaching them blessed young gals, and taking care o' their linen."

"Delighted to see your scholars looking so well, Mr. Twiggs," said Greenwood, bowing to the master: "quite charmed, Mrs. Twiggs, to behold the healthy and neat appearance of your girls," he added, bowing to the mistress.

"Would you be kind enough, sir," said Mr. Twiggs, in a meek and fawning tone, "to question any of them lads on any pint of edication?"

"Perhaps I might as well, Mr. Twiggs," returned Greenwood; "in case I should ever have to allude to the subject in the House of

Commons."

The mere idea of any mention of the parochial school being made in Parliament, produced such an impression upon the beadle that he banged his staff most earnestly on the hall floor; and the children, taking it for a signal which they had been previously tutored to observe, again yelled forth "Hear! Hear!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Muffles; and the vociferations instantly ceased.

"Now, my boy," said Mr. Greenwood, addressing the one who stood nearest to him, "I will ask you a question or two. What is your name?"

"Jem Blister, sir," was the prompt reply.

"James Blister—eh? Well—who gave you that name?"

"Father and mother, please, sir."

"Blister, for shame!" ejaculated Mr. Muffles, with a terrific frown: then, by way of prompting the lad, he said, "*My Godfathers and*—"

"*My Godfathers and Godmother in my baptism*," hastily cried the boy, catching at the hint; and after a pause, he added, "*I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward*—"

"Blister, I am raly ashamed of you!" again exclaimed Mr. Twiggs. "Stand back, sir; and let the boy behind you stand for'ard."

Another urchin stepped forth from the rank, and stood, blushing up to his very hair, and fumbling about with his cap, in the presence of Mr. Greenwood.

"My good boy," said the Member of Parliament, condescendingly patting him upon the head, "what is *your* name?"

"M. or N. as the case may be, please, sir," replied the boy.

"I should observe, sir," said the schoolmaster, "that this lad only began his Catechism yesterday."

"Oh very well, Mr. Twiggs," exclaimed Greenwood: "that accounts for his answer! I will ask him something else, then. My good lad, who was Adam?"

"The fust man, sir."

"Very good, my boy. And who was Eve?"

"The fust 'ooman, sir."

"Very good indeed," repeated Mr. Greenwood. "Now tell me what is the capital of England?"

"This boy is not in geography, sir," said Mr. Twiggs. "He's jest begun cyphering."

"Oh very good. Can you say your multiplication table, my boy?"

"Twice one's two; twice two's three; twice three's eight; twice four's ten; twice five's fourteen—"

The boy was rattling on at a furious pace, when the ominous voice of Mr. Twiggs ejaculated, "Garlick, I am ashamed of you!"

And Master Garlick began to cry most piteously.

"Come, it is not so bad, though," said Mr. Greenwood, by way of soothing the discomfited schoolmaster and restoring the abashed beadle to confidence; "he evidently knows his Bible very well—and that is the essential."

The Member of Parliament then delivered himself of a long harangue in favour of a sound religious education and in praise of virtue; and thus ended the solemn farce.

The great man bowed and withdrew: the beadle rapped his staff upon the floor; Lafleur opened the door; and the procession filed slowly out of the mansion.

Mr. Greenwood, having thus gone through a ceremony an account of which was to appear in the papers on the following morning, hurried up to the drawing-room where Lady Cecilia awaited him.

"My dear Cecilia," he exclaimed, as he entered the room, "a thousand pardons for keeping you; but the fact is that the position in which an intelligent and independent constituency has placed me, entails upon me duties—"

"A truce to that absurdity with me," interrupted the baronet's wife, in a more peremptory tone than Mr. Greenwood had ever yet heard her use. "I am come according to appointment to settle a most unpleasant business. Here is my husband's acknowledgment, drawn up as you desired: please to deliver up to me the bill."

Mr. Greenwood ran his eye over the document, and appeared satisfied. He then drew forth the bill from his pocket-book, and handed it to Lady Cecilia.

There was a flush upon the lady's delicately pale countenance; and her eyes sparkled with unusual vivacity. She was dressed in a very neat, but plain and simple manner; and Mr. Greenwood fancied that she had never seemed so interesting before.

As he delivered the bill into her keeping, he took her hand and endeavoured to convey it to his lips.

She drew back with an air of offended dignity, which would have well become a lady that had never surrendered herself to the pleasures of an illicit love.

"No, Mr. Greenwood," she said, in a firm, and even haughty tone: "all *that* is ended between you and me. You are a heartless man, who cannot appreciate the warmth with which a confiding woman yields herself up to you;—you have treated me—the daughter of a peer—like a pensioned mistress. But let that now pass:—I have made you acquainted with the nature of my thoughts—and I am satisfied."

"I am at a loss to understand how I should have deserved these harsh words, Cecilia," replied Greenwood, with a somewhat supercilious smile; "but perhaps my inability to supply you with the means of gratifying your extravagances has given you offence."

"Your cool indifference of late has indeed given me a bitter lesson," said Lady Cecilia.

"And yet I manifested every disposition to serve you, madam," rejoined Greenwood haughtily, "when I consented to compromise your husband's felony."

"Yes—you generously abandoned your claim to a thousand pounds," exclaimed Cecilia, with cutting irony, "in order to hush up an intrigue with the wife of the man whom you had inveigled into your net. But think not, Mr. Greenwood, that I attempt to justify my husband's conduct: I know him to be a heartless—a bad—an unprincipled man;—and yet, Mr. Greenwood, I do not conceive that *you* would shine the more resplendently by being placed in contrast with *him*. One word more. Had you refused to deliver up that bill, I was prepared to pay it. Some unknown friend had heard of this transaction—heaven alone knows how; and that friend forwarded last evening the means wherewith to liquidate this debt. Here is the letter which contained a Bank-note for a thousand pounds: it fell into my hands, and my husband knows naught concerning it;—can you say whose writing that is?"

Greenwood glanced hastily at the letter, and exclaimed, "Yes—I know that writing well: Mrs. Arlington is your husband's generous friend!"

"Mrs. Arlington!" exclaimed Cecilia: "Oh!—now I recollect that rumour points to that woman as having once been my husband's mistress."

"The same," said Greenwood, struck by this noble act on the part of the fair one whom he himself had first seduced from the paths of virtue.

"It would now be difficult to decide," observed Cecilia, in a tone of profound contempt, "which has acted the more noble part—the late mistress of Sir Rupert Harborough, or the late lover of his wife."

Greenwood only answered with a satirical curl of the lip.

Lady Cecilia rose from her seat, bowed coldly to the capitalist, and withdrew.

Thus terminated the amours of the man of the world and the lady of fashion—ending, as such illicit loves usually do, in a quarrel.

But the reader must not suppose that the same sentiments of pride which had thus induced Lady Cecilia to break off abruptly a connexion which her paramour had been for some time dissolving by degrees, influenced her in the use to which she appropriated the handsome sum supplied for an especial purpose by Mrs. Arlington. The lady knew no compunction in this respect, and she therefore devoted the thousand pounds so generously forwarded by her husband's late mistress, to her own wants!

* * * * *

The Italian valet had overheard the entire conversation between Lady Cecilia Harborough and Mr. Greenwood, which we have just described.

In the course of the day the whole details of that interview were communicated to Mrs. Arlington, who thus learnt that Lady Cecilia had intercepted the money intended for Sir Rupert Harborough, and had settled the forged bill without being compelled to disburse it.

CHAPTER XCVII.

ANOTHER NEW YEAR'S DAY.

It was the 1st of January, 1840.

The tide of Time rolls on with the same unvarying steadiness of motion, wearing off the asperities of barbarism, as the great flood of ocean smooths the sharp edges of rugged rocks.

But as the seasons glide away, vainly may we endeavour to throw a veil upon the past;—vainly do we lament, when Winter comes, that our Spring-dreams should be faded and gone, too beautiful to endure;—vainly, vainly do we pray that the waves of a Lethean sea may overwhelm the memories of those years when Time cast flowers from his brow, and diamonds from his wing!

Time looks down upon the world from the heights of the Pyramids of Egypt; and, as he surveys the myriad cities of the universe swarming with life,—marks the mighty armies of all states, ready to exterminate and kill,—views the navies of great powers riding over every sea,—as he beholds all these. Time chuckles, for he knows that they are his own!

For the day must come when the Pyramids themselves, the all but immortal children of antiquity, shall totter and fall; and Time shall triumph over even these.

The strongest edifices crumble into dust, and the power of the mightiest nations fritters into shreds, beneath the hand of Time.

The glories of Sesostris are now a vague dream—the domination of Greece and Rome has become an uncertain vision: the heroes of the Crusades have long since mouldered in the earth;—the crescent of the Ottomans menaces Christendom no more: the armadas of Spain are extinct;—the thrones that Napoleon raised are cast down: of the millions that he led to conquest, during his meteor-like career, what numbers have left this busy scene for ever and how varied are the climes in which they have found their graves!

Oh, Time! what is there that can strive with thee—thou that art the expression of the infinite existence of God himself!

Alas! if Time were a spirit endowed with intellect to comprehend, and feelings to sympathise, how would he sorrow over the woes of that human existence, which has now occupied nearly sixty centuries!

Year after year rolls away; and yet how slowly does civilization accomplish its task of improving the condition of the sons and daughters of toil.

For in the present day, as it was in the olden time, the millions labour to support the few; and the few continue to monopolize the choicest fruits of the earth.

The rights of labour are denied; and the privileges of birth and wealth are dominant.

And ever, when the millions, bowed down by cares, and crushed with incessant hardships, raise the voice of anguish to their taskmasters, the cry is, "*Toil*! *toil*"

And when the poor labourer, with the sweat standing in large drops upon his brow, points to his half-starved wife and little ones, and demands the increase of his wages which will enable him to feed them adequately, and clothe them comfortably, the only response that meets his ears is still, "*Toil! toil!*"

And when the mechanic, pale and emaciated, droops over his loom, and in a faint tone beseeches that his miserable pittance may be turned into a fair remuneration for that hard and unceasing work which builds up the fortunes of his employer, the answer to his pathetic prayer is, "*Toil! toil!*"

And when the miner, who spends his best days in the bowels of the earth, hewing the hard mineral in dark subterranean caves at the peril of his life, and in positions which cramp his limbs, contract his chest, and early prostrate his energies beyond relief,—when *he* exalts his voice from those hideous depths, and demands the settlement of labour's rights upon a just basis, the only echo to his petition is, "*Toil! toil!*"

Yes—it is ever "*Toil! toil!*" for the millions, while the few repose on downy couches, feed upon the luxuries of the land and water, and move from place to place in sumptuous equipages!

It was the 1st of January, 1840.

Another New Year's Day—commemorated with feasting by those who had no reason to repine, but marked as the opening of another weary epoch of care and sorrow by those who had nothing for which to be grateful, either to heaven or to man!

The first day of January, 1840, was inclement and severe. The air was piercing cold, and the rain fell in torrents. The streets of the great metropolis were swept by a wintery wind that chased the poor houseless wanderers beneath the coverings of arches and doorways, and sent the shivering mendicants to implore an asylum at the workhouse.

It was evening; and the lamps diffused but an uncertain light in the great thoroughfares. The courts and alleys of the poor neighbourhoods were enveloped in almost total darkness; for every shutter was closed, and where there were no shutters, blinds were drawn down, or rags were stretched across the windows, to expel the bitter cold.

We must now request our readers to accompany us to a district of London, which is most probably altogether unknown to the aristocrat, even by name, and with which many of that class whose occupations lead them into an intimate acquaintance with the metropolis, are by no means familiar.

Situate to the east of Bethnal Green,—bounded on the north by Bonner's Fields, on the south by the Mile End Road, and on the east by the Regent's Canal,—and intersected by the line of the Eastern Counties Railway, is an assemblage of narrow streets and filthy lanes, bearing the denomination of Globe Town.

When compared with even the worst districts of the metropolis,—when placed in contrast with Saint Giles's or Saffron Hill,—Globe Town still appears a sink of human misery which civilisation, in its progress, has forgotten to visit.

The majority of the streets are unpaved, rugged, and broken. The individual who traverses them in the summer is blinded by the dust, or disgusted by heaps of putrescent offal, the rotting remains of vegetables, and filth of every description, which meet the eye at short intervals; and, in winter, he wallows, knee-deep, in black mud and stagnant water. But even in the summer itself, and in the very midst of the dog-days, there are swamps of mire in many of the streets of Globe Town, which exhale a nauseating and sickly odour, like that of decomposing dead bodies.

In the winter time Globe Town is a complete marsh. Lying low, in the vicinity of the canal, and on a naturally swampy soil, the district is unhealthy in the extreme. Nor do its inhabitants endeavour, by any efforts of their own, to mitigate the consequences of these local disadvantages. They seem, for the most part, to cling with a sort of natural tenacity, to their rags and filth. Perhaps it is the bitterness of their poverty which makes them thus neglectful of the first duties of cleanliness: perhaps their pinching indigence reduces them to a state of despair that allows them no spirit and no heart to do any thing that may conduce to their comfort. Whatever be the cause, it is nevertheless a fact that, with the exception of one or two streets, Globe Town is a district which necessity alone could compel a person of cleanly habits and domestic propriety to reside in.

And yet Globe Town contains streets delighting in aristocratic names. There is Grosvenor Place in which a carriage and pair would have some trouble to turn; there is Parade Street, where a corporal's guard could not find space to manœuvre; there is Park Street, whose most gorgeous embellishment is the sign of a mangle; there is Chester Place, formed by two rows of miserable shops; and there are Essex Street and Digby Street, where single men may obtain lodgings at the rate of threepence a night.

How strange is this affection for fine names to distinguish horrible neighbourhoods! In the lowest parts of Whitechapel we find Pleasant Row, Queen Street, Flower Street, Duke Street, and Rose Lane. In Bethnal Green, a place inhabited by the poorest of the poor is denominated Silver Street; and, in the same district, a filthy thoroughfare is christened Pleasant Street.

Globe Town and its immediate vicinity abound in cemeteries. To the north there is the Eastern London Cemetery; and to the south there are two Jews' burial grounds, and two other places of sepulture. With the exception of the first-mentioned one, which has only

been recently opened, and is a large airy space neatly planted with shrubs, those cemeteries are so crowded with the remains of mortality, that it is impossible to drive a spade into the ground without striking against human bones.

When you once merge from the Cambridge Road, pass the new church in Bethnal Green, and plunge into Globe Town, it seems as if you had left London altogether,—as if you were no longer within the limits of the metropolis, but had suddenly dropped from the clouds into a strange village strangely peopled. You encounter but few persons in the streets; and those whom you do meet are, for the most part, squalid, emaciated, pale, and drooping. The only sounds of mirth which meet your ear, emanate from the casements of the public-houses, or from the urchins that play half-naked in the mud. With these exceptions, Globe Town is silent, gloomy, and sombre.

The shop-windows are indicative of the poverty of the inhabitants. The butcher's shed displays but a few slices of liver stretched upon a board, sheep's heads of no very inviting appearance, and hearts, lungs, and lights, all hanging together, like a Dutch clock with its weights against a wall. The poor make stews of this offal. The fish-stalls present "for public competition," as George Robins would say, nothing but the most coarse and the cheapest articles—such as huge Dutch plaice, haddocks, &c. In the season the itinerant venders of fresh-herrings and sprats drive a good trade in Globe Town. In a word, every thing in that district denotes poverty—poverty—nothing but pinching poverty.

The inhabitants of Globe Town are of two kinds; being weavers, and persons who earn their livelihood by working at the docks or on the canal, on the one hand; and thieves, prostitutes, and vagrants, on the other. When a burglar or a pickpocket finds St. Giles's, Clerkenwell, the Mint, or Bethnal Green too hot to hold him, he betakes himself to Globe Town, where he buries himself in some obscure garret until the storms that menaced him be blown over. Globe Town has thus acquired amongst the fraternity of rogues of all classes, the expressive denomination of the "Happy Valley."

In one of the narrowest, dirtiest, and most lonely streets at the eastern extremity of Globe Town, there was a house of an appearance more dilapidated than the rest. It was only two storeys high, and was built in a very singular manner. From the very threshold of the front door a precipitate staircase, more nearly resembling a ladder, led to the upper apartments; so that when any one entered that house from the street, he had to thread no passage nor corridor, but immediately began to ascend those steep steps. The staircase led to a landing, from which two doors opened into small, dirty, and dark chambers. These rooms had a door of communication pierced in the wall that separated them: but there were no stairs leading down into the lower apartments of the house. The only way of obtaining access to the rooms on the ground-floor, was by means of a door up an alley leading from the street, and running along one side of the house into a court formed by other dwellings. Thus the upper and lower parts of this strange building might be said to constitute two distinct tenements. The windows of the ground-floor rooms were darkened with shutters, at the upper part of which holes in the shape of hearts had been cut to admit a few straggling rays of light.

The rooms on the upper floor were furnished in a tolerably comfortable manner; but every article was wretchedly begrimed with dirt. The front apartment served as a sitting-room for the inmates of this strangely-built house; and the back chamber was fitted up as a bed-room.

It was evening, as we before said; and thick curtains were drawn over the two windows of the front room to which we have alluded. A candle with a long flaring wick, stood upon the table. On a good fire a kettle was just beginning to boil. The table was set out with glasses, bottles, sugar, lemons, pipes, and tobacco. The inmates of that room were evidently preparing for a carouse, while the rain beat in torrents against the windows, and the wind swept down the street like a hurricane.

But who *were* the inmates of that room?

We will proceed to inform our readers.

Lolling in an arm-chair, the covering of which was torn in many places, and spotted all over with grease, was a female, who in reality had scarcely numbered five-and-twenty years, but to whom the ravages of dissipation and evil passions gave the appearance of five-and-thirty. She had once been good-looking; and her features still retained the traces of beauty: but there was a deep blue tint beneath the eyes, which joined the dark thick brows, and thus seemed to inclose the orbs themselves in a dingy circle. The faded cheeks were coloured with rouge; but the dye had been so clumsily plastered on, that the effect could not deceive the most ignorant in such matters. This woman wore a faded light silk gown, cut very low in front, and disclosing a considerable portion of a thin and shrivelled neck. In a word, she had the air of being what she really was—a faded courtesan of a low order. Her proper name was Margaret Flathers; but her acquaintance, for brevity's sake, called her Meg; and, in addition to these appellations, the name of *The Rattlesnake* had been conferred upon her, from the circumstance that she was fond of dressing in silks or satins, which she had a habit of rustling as much as possible when she walked.

On the other side of the fire-place was seated a man of cadaverous countenance, which was overshadowed by a quantity of tangled black hair, and whose expression was vile and sinister to a degree.

"Half-past eight," said the woman, glancing towards a huge silver-watch which hung by a faded blue riband to a nail over the mantel.

"Yes—they can't be long now," returned her companion, who was no other than the Resurrection Man. "But because they're late, Meg, it's no reason why we shouldn't have a drop of blue ruin. The night's precious cold; and the kettle's just on the boil. Pour out the daffy, Meg."

The woman drew two tumblers towards her, and half filled each with gin. She then added sugar and lemon; and in a few moments the Resurrection Man poured the boiling element upon the liquor.

"Good, isn't it, Tony?" said the Rattlesnake.

"Capital, Meg. You're an excellent girl to judge of the proportions in a glass of lush."

"And I think, Tony," said the woman coaxingly, "that you have had no reason to complain of me in other respects. Twelve months all but a few days that we've been together, and I have done all I could to make you comfortable."

"And so you ought," answered the Resurrection Man. "Didn't I take you out of the street and make an independent lady of you?

Ain't you the mistress of this crib of mine? and don't you live upon the fat of the land?"

"Very true, Tony," said the Rattlesnake. "But what would you have done without me? When that business took place down by the Bird-cage Walk, and you was obliged to come and hide yourself in the Happy Valley, you wanted some one you could rely upon to go out and buy your things, take care of the place, and get information whether the blue-bottles had fallen on any scent."

"All right, my girl," cried the Resurrection Man. "I *did* want such a person, and the moment after I escaped that night when I blew the old crib up, I went to you and told you just what I required. You agreed to come and live with me and I agreed to treat you well. We have both kept our bargain; and I am satisfied if you are."

"Oh! you know I am, Tony dear," exclaimed the Rattlesnake. "But sometimes you have been so cross and quarrelsome, that I didn't know what to make of it."

"And was there no excuse, Meg?" cried the Resurrection Man. "Did I not see my old mother and the Cracksman perish before my very eyes—and by my own hand too? But I do not accuse myself of having wilfully caused their death. There was no help for it. We should have all three been taken to Newgate, and never have come out of the jug again but twice—once to be tried, and the second time to be hung."

"Could they have proved any thing against you?" demanded the Rattlesnake.

"Yes, Meg," answered the Resurrection Man; "there was a stiff'un in the front room at the very moment when the police broke into the house. We had burked him on the preceding evening; and he was still hanging head downwards to the ceiling."

"It was much better, then, to blow the place up, as you did," observed the Rattlesnake.

"Of course it was, Meg. Don't you see," continued the Resurrection Man, after a pause, during which he imbibed a considerable quantity of the exhilarating fluid in his glass,—"don't you see that I was too old a bird not to be always prepared for such an event as that which happened at last? I had got together a great quantity of gunpowder in the back-room of the crib, and had stowed it away in brown paper parcels in a cupboard. This cupboard stood between the fire-place and the back wall of the house. So I had made a hole through the wall, and had introduced a long iron pipe into the cupboard. This pipe was ten or twelve feet in length, and ran all along the wall that divided my yard from the next. The pipe, so placed, was protected by a wooden cover or case; and any one who saw it, must have thought it was only a water-pipe. It was, however, filled with excellent gunpowder, and there was nothing to do but to put a match to the farthest end of the pipe to blow up the whole place."

"Capital contrivance!" exclaimed the Rattlesnake. "Had you put up that pipe long before the police broke into the house?"

"Oh! yes—some months," answered the Resurrection Man; "and very lucky it was, too, that the pipe was water-tight, so that the rain had never moistened the powder in the least. Well, when the blue-bottles broke in, I rushed into the back-room, locked the door, leapt through the window, flew to the end of the pipe, tore out the plug, applied the match, and in a moment all was over."

"And for a long time even your old pals at the Boozing-ken on Saffron Hill, fancied you had been blown up with the rest," said the Rattlesnake.

"Of course they did, because the newspapers, which you always used to go and fetch me to read, said there was no doubt that every one of the gang in the house at the time had perished."

"And they also spoke of the way in which the police had followed you and the Cracksman to the house," said the Rattlesnake.

"Yes—and that was how I came to learn that the man who had hunted me almost to death, was Richard Markham," exclaimed the Resurrection Man, his countenance suddenly wearing an expression of such concentrated—vile—malignant rage, as to render him perfectly hideous.

"Now don't begin to brood over that," cried the Rattlesnake hastily; "for I am almost afraid of you when you get into one of those humours, dear Tony."

"No—I shan't give way now," said the villain: "I have prepared the means for revenge; and then I shall be happy. Ah! Meg, you cannot conceive how I gloated over the wretch the other night when I denounced him in the theatre! That man has been the means of making me stay in this infernal prison—for it has been nothing better—for weeks and months; he was the cause of the loss of my best friend, the Cracksman, and of my old mother, who was very useful in her way: and he prevented me from getting that young fellow into my power, who went and explored the Palace. When I think of all that I have suffered through this infernal Richard Markham, I am ready to go mad;—and I should have gone mad, too, if it hadn't been that I always thought the day of vengeance would come!"

"And my little attentions helped to console you Tony," said the Rattlesnake, in a wheedling manner that seemed peculiar to her.

"Oh! as for that, Meg, a man like me can be consoled by nothing short of revenge in such a case. I have told you the history of my life over and over again; and I think you must have learnt from it, that I am not a person to put up with an injury. I have often thought of doing to Markham as I did to the justice of the peace and the baronet—setting his house on fire; but then he might not learn who was the incendiary, or he might even think that it was an accident. My object is for him to know who strikes him, that he may writhe the more."

"And do you think that the Buffer and Moll are to be depended upon?" asked Margaret Flathers.

"To the back-bone," replied the Resurrection Man. "How could the Buffer possibly betray *me*, when *he* was one of the gang, as the newspapers called it? Besides, wasn't he laid by the heels in Clerkenwell Gaol for making away with the bantling to cheat the Burying Society? and didn't he escape? How could he go and place himself in contact with the police by giving information against me? And what good would it be to him to deceive me? He knows that I have got plenty of tin, and can pay him well. Indeed, how has he lived in the Happy Valley for the last eleven months and more, since he escaped out of Clerkenwell? Haven't I been as good as a brother to him, and lent him money over and over again?"

"Very true," said the Rattlesnake. "I only spoke on your account."

"I shall be able to let the Buffer in for several good things, now that I am determined to commence an active life again,"

continued the Resurrection Man. "I have been idle quite long enough; and I am not going to remain so any more. Why, Greenwood alone ought to be as good as an annuity to me. He can always find employment for a skilful and daring fellow like me."

"And he pays like a prince, doesn't he?" demanded the Rattlesnake.

"Like a prince," repeated the Resurrection Man. "Five guineas the other night for just attending the carrying off of the young actress. That is the way to make money, Meg."

"And you have got plenty, Tony, I know?" said the woman, in a tone more than half interrogatively, and only partially expressing a conviction.

"What's that to you?" cried the Resurrection Man, brutally; at the same time eyeing his mistress in a somewhat suspicious manner.

"Oh! only because you needn't have any secrets from me, Tony," returned the Rattlesnake, affecting a tone of indifference. "You have been out every night lately—and only for a short time—"

"Now I tell you what it is, Meg," exclaimed Tidkins, striking his fist upon the table, "you have asked me about my money a great many times lately; and I tell you very candidly, I don't like it. It looks suspicious; but, by heavens! if you attempt to play me false—"

"Why should you say that, Tony? Have I not given you every proof of fidelity?"

"Yes—you have; or else I should have known what to do in a very few moments. But why do you bother yourself about the money that I have got? It is very little, I can tell you; but where it is, it's safe enough; and if I ever catch you attempting to follow me or spy upon me when I go into the rooms down stairs, I'll make you repent it."

"Now, Tony dear, don't put yourself into a passion," said the Rattlesnake, turning pale, and assuming her usual wheedling tone: "I didn't mean to annoy you. All that I wanted to know was whether there was a chance of running short or not."

"Don't frighten yourself, Meg," returned the Resurrection Man. "Whenever I run low, I know how to get more. And now, that we mayn't have to talk upon this subject again, recollect once for all that I won't have you prying into any thing that I choose to keep to myself. You know that I am not a man to be trifled with; and if any one was to betray me—I don't mean to say that you ever had such an idea—I only mean you to understand that if anybody *did*—"

"Well—what?" said the Rattlesnake in a tone of alarm.

"I would not be taken alive," added the Resurrection Man; "and those who came to take me at all, would probably travel the same road that the police, the Cracksman, and the Mummy have gone already."

"Tony," exclaimed the woman, a deadly pallor overspreading her countenance, "you don't mean to say that this house is provided with a pipe like the one—"

"I don't mean to say any thing at all about it, one way or another," interrupted the Resurrection Man coolly. "All I want you to do is to remain quiet—attend to my wishes—keep a close tongue in your head—and have no eyes for any thing that I don't tell you to look at,—and then we shall go on as pleasant as before. Otherwise—"

At this moment a knock at the street door was heard.

The Rattlesnake hastened to answer the summons, and returned accompanied by the Buffer and his wife.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

DARK PLOTS AND SCHEMES.

THE Buffer was one of the most unmitigated villains that ever disgraced the name of man. There was no species of crime with which he was not familiar; and he had a suitable helpmate in his wife, who was the sister of Dick Flairer—a character that disappeared from the stage of life in the early part of this history.

In person, the Buffer was slight, short, and rather well-made,—extremely active, and endowed with great physical power. His countenance was by no means an index to his mind; for it was inexpressive, stolid, and vacant.

His wife was a woman of about five-and-twenty, being probably ten years younger than her husband. She was not precisely ugly; but her countenance—the very reverse of that of the Buffer—was so indicative of every evil passion that can possibly disgrace womanhood, as to be almost repulsive.

The two new-comers seated themselves near the fire, for their clothes were dripping with the rain, which continued to pour in torrents. The warmth of the apartment and a couple of glasses of smoking grog soon, however, put them into good humour and made them comfortable; and the Resurrection Man then proposed that they should "proceed to business."

"In the first place, Jack," said the Resurrection Man, addressing himself to the Buffer, "what news about Markham?"

"He will attend to the appointment," was the answer.

"He will?" exclaimed the Resurrection Man, as if the news were almost too good to be true: "you are sure?"

"As sure as I am that I've got this here glass in my mawley," said the Buffer.

"To-morrow night?"

"To-morrow night he'll meet his brother at Twig Folly," answered the Buffer, with a laugh.

"Tell me all that took place," cried the Resurrection Man; "and then I shall be able to judge for myself."

"As you told me," began the Buffer, "I made myself particklerly clean and tidy, and went up to Holloway this morning at about eleven o'clock. I knocked at the door of the swell's crib; and an old butler-like looking feller, with a port-wine face, and a white napkin under his arm, come and opened it. He asked me what my business was. I said I wanted to speak to Mr. Markham in private. He asked me to walk in; and he showed me into a library kind of a place, where I see a good-looking young feller sitting reading. He was very pale, and seemed as if he'd been ill."

"Fretting about that business at the theatre, no doubt," observed the Resurrection Man.

"What business?" cried the Buffer.

"No matter—go on."

"Well—so I went into this library and see Mr. Markham. The old servant left us alone together. 'What do you want with me, my good man?' says Markham in a very pleasant tone of voice.—'I have summut exceeding partickler to say to you, sir,' says I.—'Well, what is it?' he asks—'Have you heerd from your brother lately, sir?' says I, throwing out the feeler you put me up to. If so be he had said he had, and I saw that he really knew where he was, and every thing about him, I should have invented some excuse, and walked myself off; but there was no need of that; for the moment I mentioned his brother, he was quite astonished.—'My brother!' he says in a wery excited tone: 'many years has elapsed since I heerd from him. Do you know what has becomed on him?'—'Perhaps I knows a trifle about him, sir,' says I; 'and that is wery trifling indeed. In a word,' I says, 'he wants to see you.'—'He wants to see me!' cries my gentleman: 'then why doesn't he come to me? But where is he? tell me, that I may fly to him.'—So then I says, 'The fact of the matter is this, sir; your brother has got his-self into a bit of a scrape, and don't dare show. He's living down quite in the east of London, close by the Regent's Canal; and he has sent me to say that if so be you'll meet him to-morrow night at ten o'clock in Twig Folly, he'll be there.'—Then Mr. Markham cries out, 'But why can I not go to him now? If he is in distress or difficulty, the sooner he sees me the better.'—'Softly, sir,' says I. 'All I know of the matter is this, that I'm a honest man as airns his livelihood by running on messages and doing odd jobs. A gentleman meets me on the bank of the canal, close by Twig Folly, very early this morning and says, '*Do you want to airn five shillings?*' Of course I says '*Yes*.'—'*Then,*' says the gentleman, '*go up to Markham Place without delay, and ask to see Mr. Markham. He lives at Holloway. Tell him that you come from his brother, who is in trouble, and can't go to him; but that his brother will meet him to-morrow night at ten o'clock on the banks of the canal, near Twig Folly. And,' says the gentleman, 'if he should ask you for a token that you're tellin' the truth, say that this appointment must be kept instead of the one on the top of the hill where two ash trees stand planted*.'—Well, the moment I tells Mr. Markham all this, he begins to blubber, and then to laugh, and to dance about the room, crying, 'Oh! my dear—dear brother, shall I then embrace you so soon again?' and such-like nonsense. Then he gives me half a sovereign his-self, and sends me into the kitchen, where the cook makes me eat and drink till I was well-nigh ready to bust. The old butler was rung for; and I've no doubt that his master told him the good news, for when he come back into the kitchen, he treated me with the greatest civility, but asked me a lot of questions about *Master Eugene*, as he called him. I satisfied him in all ways; and at last I rises, takes my leave of the servants, and comes off."

"Well done!" cried the Resurrection Man, whose cadaverous countenance wore an expression of superlative satisfaction. "And you do not think he entertained the least suspicion?"

"Not a atom," returned the Buffer.

"Nor the old butler?" asked the Resurrection Man.

"Not a bit. But do jest satisfy me on one point, Tony; how come you to know that anythink about this young feller's brother would produce such a powerful excitement?"

"Have I not before told you that this Richard Markham was a fellow-prisoner with me in Newgate some four years and more ago? Well, I often overheard him talking about his affairs to another man that was also there, and whose name was Armstrong. Markham and this Armstrong were very thick together; and Markham spoke quite openly to him about his family matters, his brother, and one thing or another. That's the way I came to hear of the strange appointment made between the two brothers."

"Well, there's no doubt that the fish has bit and can be hooked to-morrow night," said the Buffer.

"Yes—he is within my reach—and now I shall be revenged," exclaimed the Resurrection Man, grinding his teeth together. "I will tell you my plans in this respect presently," he added. "Let us now talk about the old man that your wife nurses."

"Or *did* nurse, rather," cried Moll, with a coarse laugh.

Both the Resurrection Man and Margaret Flathers turned a glance of inquiry and surprise upon the Buffer's wife.

"The old fellow's dead," she added, after a moment's pause.

"Dead already!" exclaimed Tidkins.

"Just as I tell you," answered Moll. "He seemed very sinking and low this morning; and so I was more attentive to him than ever."

"But the money?" said the Resurrection Man.

"All a dream on her part," cried the Buffer, sulkily, pointing towards his wife.

"Now don't you go for to throw all the blame on me, Jack," retorted the woman; "for you know as well as I do that you was as sanguine as me. And who wouldn't have taken him for an old miser? Here you and me," she continued, addressing herself to her husband, "go to hire a lodging in a home in Smart Street, about three months ago, and we find out that there's an old chap living overhead, on the first floor, who had been there three months before that time, and had always lived in the same regular, quiet way—never going out except after dusk, doing nothing to earn his bread, paying his way, and owing nobody a penny. Then he was dressed in clothes that wasn't worth sixpence, and yet he had gold to buy others if he chose, because he used to change a sovereign every week, when he paid his rent. Well, all these things put together, made me think he was a miser, and had a store somewhere or another; and when I said to you——"

"I know what you said, fast enough," interrupted the Buffer, sulkily: "what's the use of telling us all this over again?

"Just to show that if I was deceived, you was too. But it's always the way with you: when any thing turns out wrong, you throw the blame on me. Didn't you say to me, when the old fellow was took ill a month ago: '*Moll*,' says you, '*go and offer your services to nurse the old gentleman; and may be if he dies he'll leave you something; or at all events you may worm out of him the secret of where he keeps his money, and we can get hold of it all the same*.' That's what you said—and so I did go and nurse the old man; and he seemed very grateful, for at last he began to like me almost as much as he did his snuff-box—and that's saying a great deal, considering the quantity of snuff he used to take, and the good it seemed to do him when he was low and melancholy."

"Well—what's the use of you and the Buffer wrangling?" cried the Resurrection Man. "Tell us all about the old fellow's death."

"As I was saying just now," continued Moll, "the old gentleman was took wery bad this morning soon after Jack left to go up to Holloway; and the landlady, Mrs. Smith, insisted on sending for a doctor. The old gentleman shook his head, when he heard Mrs. Smith say so, and seemed wery, much annoyed at the idea of having a medical visit. But Mrs. Smith was positive, for she said that she had lost her husband and been left a lone widder through not having a doctor in time to him when he was ill. Well, a doctor *was* sent for, and he said that the old gentleman was very bad indeed. He asked me and Mrs. Smith what his name was, and whether he'd any relations, as they ought to be sent for; but Mrs. Smith said that she never knowed his name at all, and as for relations no one never come to see him and he never went to see no one his-self. The doctors orders him to have mustard poultices put to his feet; but it wasn't of no use, for the old fellow gives a last gasp and dies at twenty minutes past two this blessed afternoon."

"Well," said the Resurrection Man; "and then, I suppose, you had a rummage in his boxes?"

"Boxes, indeed!" cried Moll, with an indignant toss of her head. "Why, when he first come to the house, Mrs. Smith says that all he had was a bundle tied up in a blue cotton pocket handkercher—a couple of shirts, and a few pair of stockings, or so. She didn't like to take him in, she says; but he offered to pay a month's rent in advance; and so she was satisfied."

"Then you found nothing at all?" exclaimed the Rattlesnake.

"Not much," returned Moll. "The moment we saw he was dead, we began to search all over the room, to see what he had left behind him. For a long time we could find nothing but a dirty shirt, two pair of stockings, and a jar of snuff; and yet Mrs. Smith said she knew there must be money, for she had heard him counting his gold one day before he was took ill. Besides, during his illness, whenever money was wanted to get any thing for him, he never gave it at first, but sent me or Mrs. Smith out of the room with some excuse; and when we went back, he always had the money in his hand. Well, me and Mrs. Smith searched and searched away; and at last Mrs. Smith bethinks herself of looking behind the bed. We moved the bed away from the wall as well as we could, for the dead body lying upon it made it precious heavy; and then we saw that a hole had been made down in the comer of the room. Mrs. Smith puts in her finger, and draws out an old greasy silk purse. I heard the gold chink; but I saw that the purse was not over heavy. '*Well*,' says Mrs. Smith, '*I'm glad I've got a witness of what the poor gentleman left behind him, or else I might get into trouble some day or another, if any inquiries should be made*.' So she pours out the gold into her hand, and counts thirty-nine sovereigns."

"And that was all?" cried the Resurrection Man.

"Every farthing," replied the Buffer's wife. "Well, I asked Mrs Smith what she intended to do with it; and she says, '*I shall bury the poor old gentleman decently: that will be five pounds. Then there it a pound for the doctor, as I must get him to follow the funeral; and here is two pounds for you for your attention to the old gentleman in his illness*.' So she gives me the two pounds; and I asks her what she is going to do with the rest, because there was still thirty-one pounds left."

"And what did she say to that?" demanded the Rattlesnake.

"She began a long ditty about her being an honest woman, though a poor one, and that dead man's gold would only bring ill-luck into her house."

"The old fool!" cried the Resurrection Man.

"And then she said she should ask the parson, when she had buried the old man, what she ought to do with the thirty-one pounds."

"Why didn't you propose to split it between you, and hold your tongues?" asked the Resurrection Man.

"So I did," answered Moll; "and what do you think the old fool said? She up and told me that she always thought that me and my husband was not the most respectablest of characters, and she now felt convinced of it."

"Well, we must have those thirty-one yellow boys, old fellow," said the Resurrection Man to the Buffer.

"Yea—if we can get them," answered the latter; "and I know of no way to do it but to cut the old woman's throat."

"No—that won't do," ejaculated the Resurrection Man. "If the old woman disappeared suddenly, suspicion would be sure to fall on you; and the whole Happy Valley would be up in arms. Then the blue-bottles might find a trace to this crib here; and we should all get into trouble."

"But if you mean to put the kyebosh upon young Markham to-morrow night," said the Buffer, "won't that raise a devil of a dust in the neighbourhood?"

"Markham disappears from Holloway, which is a long way from the Happy Valley," replied the Resurrection Man.

"And the old butler, who is certain to know that the appointment was made for Twig Folly," persisted the Buffer, "won't he give information that will raise the whole Valley in arms, as you call it?"

"No such thing," said the Resurrection Man. "Markham falls into the canal accidentally, and is drowned. There's no mark of violence on his body, and his watch and money are safe about his person. Now do you understand me?"

"I understand that if you mean me to jump into the canal and help to hold him in it till he's drowned, you're deucedly out in your reckoning, for I ain't going to risk drowning myself, 'cause I can't swim better than a stone."

"You need not set foot in the water," said the Resurrection Man, somewhat impatiently. "But I suppose you could hold him by the heels fast enough upon the bank?"

"Oh! yes—I don't mind *that*," replied the Buffer: "but how shall we get the thirty-one couters from this old fool of a landlady, unless we use violence?"

The Resurrection Man leant his head upon his hand, his elbow being supported by the table, and reflected profoundly for some moments.

So high an opinion did the other villain and the two women entertain of the ingenuity, craft, and cunning of the Resurrection Man, that they observed a solemn silence while he was thus occupied in meditation,—as if they were afraid of interrupting a current of ideas which, they hoped, would lead to some scheme beneficial to them all.

Suddenly the Resurrection Man raised his head, and, turning towards the Buffer's wife, said, "Do you know whether the old woman has spoken to any one yet about the funeral?"

"She said she should let it be till to-morrow morning, because the weather was so awful bad this afternoon."

"Excellent!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man. "Now, Moll, do you put on your bonnet, take the large cotton umbrella there, and go and do what I tell you without delay."

The woman rose to put on her bonnet and cloak, which she had laid aside upon first entering the room; and the Resurrection Man wrote a hurried note. Having folded, wafered, and addressed it, he handed it to the Buffer's wife, saying, "Go down as fast as your legs will carry you to Banks, the undertaker, in Globe Lane, and ask to see him. Give him this; but mind and deliver it into his hand only. If he is not at home, wait till he comes in."

The woman took the note, and departed on the mysterious mission entrusted to her.

"What's in the wind now?" demanded the Buffer, as soon as the door had closed behind his wife.

"You shall see," replied the Resurrection Man. "Now let us fill our glasses, and blow a cloud till Moll comes back."

The Rattlesnake mixed fresh supplies of grog; and the two men lighted their pipes.

"How the rain does beat down," observed the Buffer, after a pause.

"And the wind sweeps along like a hurricane," said the Resurrection Man. "By the by, this is New Year's Day. What different weather it is from what it was last New Year's Day."

"Do you recollect what sort of weather it was last New Year's Day?" demanded the Buffer.

"Perfectly well," answered the Resurrection Man; "because it was on that evening that I and the poor Cracksman helped young Holford over the Palace wall."

"And that venture turned out no go, didn't it?" asked the Buffer.

"It failed because the young scamp either turned funky or played us false, I never could make out which. But I have an account to settle with him too; and the first time I meet him I'll teach him what it is to humbug a man like me."

There was a pause, during which the two men smoked their pipes with all the calmness of individuals engaged in virtuous and innocent meditation; and the Rattlesnake added fresh fuel to the fire, the flames of which roared cheerfully up the chimney.

"Come, sing as a song, Meg," cried the Buffer, breaking a silence which had lasted several minutes.

"I have got a cold, and can't sing," replied the woman.

"Well, then, Tony," said the Buffer, "tell us some of your adventures. They'll amuse us till Moll comes back."

"I am quite tired of telling the same things over and over again," answered the Resurrection Man. "We've never heard you practise in that line yet; so the sooner you begin the better. Come, tell us your history."

"There isn't much to tell," said the Buffer, refilling his pipe; "but such as it is, you're welcome to it."

With this preface, the Buffer commenced his autobiography, in the record of which we have taken the liberty of correcting the grammatical solecisms that invariably characterised this individual's discourse; and we have also improved the language in which the narrative was originally clothed.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE BUFFER'S HISTORY.

"You are well aware that my name is really John Wicks, although very few of my pals know me by any other title than the Buffer.

"My father and mother kept a coal and potatoe shed in Great Suffolk Street, Borough. I was their only child; and as they were very fond of me, they would not let me be bothered and annoyed with learning. For decency's sake, however, they made me go to the Sunday-school, and there I just learnt to read, and that's all.

"When I was twelve years old, I began to carry out small quantities of coals and potatoes to the customers. We used to supply a great many of the prisoners in the Bench; and whenever I went into that place, I generally managed to have a game of marbles, and sometimes rackets, with the young blackguards that lurked about the prison to pick up the racket balls, run on messages, and so on. At length I got to play for money; and as I generally lost, I had to take the money which I received from the customers to pay my little gambling debts. I was obliged to tell my father and mother all kinds of falsehoods to account for the disappearance of the money. Sometimes I said that I had lost a few halfpence; then I declared that a beggar in the street had snatched a sixpence out of my hand, and ran away; or else I swore that the customers had not paid me. This last excuse led to serious misunderstandings; for sometimes my father went himself to collect the debts owing to him; and then, when the prisoners declared they had paid me, I stuck out that it was false; and my father called them rogues and swindlers. At length, he began seriously to suspect that his son was robbing him; and one day he found it out in a manner which I could not deny. I was then fourteen, and was pretty well hardened, I can tell you. So I turned round, and told my father that he had brought it all on himself, because he had instructed me how to cheat the customers in weight and measure, and had therefore brought me up in wrong principles.

"You must understand that the usual mode of doing business in coal-sheds is this: all the weights only weigh one half of what they are represented to weigh. For instance, the one which is used as the fifty pound weight is hollow, and is, therefore, made as large in outward appearance as the real fifty pound weight; whereas, in consequence of being hollow, it actually only weighs twenty-five pounds. This is the case with all the weights; the pound weight really weighs only half a pound, and so on. You may ask why the weights are thus exactly one half less than they are represented to be,—neither more nor less than one half. I will tell you: when the leet jury comes round and points, for instance, to the weight used for fifty pounds, the answer is, 'Oh, that is the twenty-five pound weight;' and, upon being tested, the assertion is found to be correct. So there is never any danger of being hauled over the coals by the leet jury; but if the weights were each an odd number of ounces or pounds short, they could not be passed off to the jury as weights of a particular standard, and then the warehouseman would get into a scrape. It is just the same with the measures. The bushel contains a false bottom, and is really half a bushel; and when the leet jury calls, it is stated to be the half bushel measure, whereas to customers it is passed off as the bushel. This will also account to you for the way in which costermongers in the streets are able to sell fruit (cherries particularly) and peas, in the season, for just one half of the price at which they can be bought at respectable dealers. The poor dupe who gives twopence for *a pound* of cherries of a costermonger in the street, only obtains half a pound; and the housewife who thinks that she can save a hundred per cent. by buying her peas in the same way, only gets half a peck instead of a peck.

"My father had thirty barrows, which he let out to the costermongers at the rate of eighteen pence a day each; and some of those men could clear eight or ten shillings a day by their traffic. But they are so addicted to drinking that they spend all they get; and in the winter season they starve. Now and then a costermonger would disappear with the barrow, for the loan of which my father never required any security, as the poor souls had none to give; and then my father offered a reward for the apprehension of the absentee. He was generally caught, and my father always had him taken before the magistrate and punished—as a warning, he said, to the rest. I used to think he behaved very harshly in this respect, as the poor wretch whom he thus got sent to the treadmill had most probably paid for the barrow over and over again.

"But to return to my story. When my father discovered that I had robbed him, I threw in his teeth the use he made of false weights and measures. He was alarmed at this, because I threatened to inform the neighbours; and so he did not give me the thrashing which he had at first promised. He, however, resolved to send me away from home, and in the course of a few days got me a place at a friend's of his, who kept a sweet-stuff shop, in Friar Street, Blackfriars. There I was initiated into all the mysteries of that trade. I found that the white-sugar articles were all largely adulterated with plaster of Paris; and that immediately accounted to me for the pernicious—often fatal—effects produced by this kind of trash upon children. If parents, who really care for their children, were only commonly prudent, they would never allow them to eat any white-sugar sweet-stuff at all. Then I discovered that the articles passed off as burnt almonds, really contained the kernels of fruits; for the kitchen-maids in wealthy families and hotels collect and sell the stones of the peaches, apricots, and nectarines, eaten at the dinner-tables of their masters, as regularly as cooks dispose of their bones and grease. In fact, the most deleterious ingredients enter into the composition of sweet-stuff. The sugar-refiners sell all their scum to the sweet-stuff makers; and this scum is composed of the lime, alum, bullock's blood, charcoal, acetate of soda, and other things used for fining sugar. Oxide of lead is also mixed with the small proportions of sugar used in making sweet-stuff; and thus you may perceive what filthy and poisonous substances are given to children in the shape of sugar-plums. I hope that I do not weary you with this description; and if you should be surprised that I can now recollect the chemical names of the ingredients used, I must tell you that I went so often to the sugar-refiners, and to the chemists, for my master, that I soon became familiar with every thing at all relating to the business.

"I now come to more interesting matters. I had been with my master about six years, and was then going on for twenty-one, when my father died. My mother sent for me home to help her in the business; and I now had the command of money. The taste for gambling which I had imbibed in my boyhood, returned with additional force; and I sought every opportunity of gratifying my inclination in this

respect. I frequented a notorious public-house in Suffolk Street, where gaming was carried on to a great extent; and my ill-luck seemed unvaried. My mother did all she could to check the progress of this infatuation; but it was invincible; and in the course of three years I had completely ruined both my mother and myself. An execution was put into the house for rent, and my mother died of a broken heart. I shed a few tears, and then looked round me for some occupation.

"One of the persons who frequented the public-house in Suffolk Street offered to recommend me to a friend of his, who kept an auction-room in the City. I gladly accepted the proposal, and was engaged as 'a bidder,' at that establishment. I will tell you what I had to do: the auction was carried on in an open warehouse in a great thoroughfare. The articles put up for sale were all of the most worthless description—razors, made (like Peter Pindar's) to sell, and not to cut; pen-knives, that would inflict no damage upon a piece of wood; decanters, that would scarcely resist the pressure of the most delicate lady's hand; candlesticks, made of a metal that would melt if held too close to the fire; urns, that sprang a leak the moment hot water was poured into them; watches, that were never known to go beyond the first four-and-twenty hours; scissors, that would not sever a thread; snuffers, that merely crushed without diminishing the wick; teapots, made of polished pewter, and warranted as silver; in a word, every species of domestic rubbish of this kind, occupied the counters and tables in the auction-room. Myself and three others were hired as bidders. Our duty was to offer a price for every article put up, and buy it in if it appeared likely to go to a stranger at too low a price—although, indeed, few prices were too low for the articles on which they were put. Then, when a greenhorn entered the mart, we were to puff off the articles amongst ourselves in his hearing—never talking *to* him, but talking *at* him. The master was perched up behind a high desk, using his hammer with exemplary alacrity, and knocking down article after article to the flats that came in and bid. Sometimes the dupes would come back the following day, and demand the return of their money, as they had ascertained that the goods for which they had parted with it were worthless: it was then our duty to hustle such obstreperous claimants, bonnet them, or, in extreme cases, knock them down, and then give them into custody for creating a disturbance.

"In this situation I remained for three years. The master was very good to us, and gave us a present every time he effected large sales by our means. One afternoon an elderly gentleman entered the mart, and stood bidding for some cut decanters. They had been invoiced to the proprietor of the establishment for six shillings, and the lowest price at which they were to be knocked down was two pounds ten. The bidding was rather slow; and I retreated a pace or two behind the old gentleman, to avoid having the appearance of being anxious to make myself conspicuous. In that position I observed the corner of a red pocket-book peeping out of his coat tail. I glanced around: no one noticed me; and in a moment I abstracted the inviting object. This was the first theft I ever committed; and bad as I already was, the moment I had that pocket-book safe in my possession, I would have given the world for it to have been back again in its former place. The deed was however done; and I evaporated from the auction mart with the rapidity of thought.

"I was not such an idiot as to return to my lodgings; but I hastened into the vicinity of Smithfield, and entered a public-house in Chick Lane. The parlour—a little slip, with a single window looking upon the street—was fortunately empty; and I immediately examined my treasure. And true enough it was a treasure! It contained eight hundred pounds in Bank of England notes, together with bills of exchange to the amount of three thousand. There were also letters and cards of address, which showed me who the old gentleman was. He was a rich landholder in the county of Hants. I enclosed the bills of exchange and the letters in a sheet of paper, and returned them through the post to their owner. The Bank notes I kept. But I was now at a loss how to act; for I fancied that if the notes had been stopped, there would be danger in attempting to pass them. After I had put the letter in the post, I returned to the public-house in Chick Lane, and meditated upon the best course to pursue. While I was sitting in the parlour, over a glass of brandy-and-water, pondering upon this very difficult matter, a man entered, sate down, called for some liquor, and got into conversation with me. By degrees we grew confidential; and he let me know that he was a member of the swell-mob. I opened my heart to him; and he immediately offered to take me to a place where I could change my notes.

"I thankfully accepted his proposal; and he led me into Field Lane. There he entered a shop where they sold salt fish, herrings, haddocks, and oysters. He asked a dirty-looking girl if Israel Moses was at home; and, receiving an affirmative answer, led the way up a narrow, dark, and dirty staircase, to a room where an old Jew, with a face almost completely concealed by grisly white hair, was sitting at a table covered with papers. My guide immediately communicated to him the object of my visit; and the old Jew questioned me closely relative to the way in which I had obtained the Bank notes. My companion advised me to tell him the exact truth, which I did; and the Jew then offered me six hundred pounds in gold for my eight hundred pounds' worth of notes. He explained to me that he should be compelled to send them to his agents in Paris, Hamburgh, and Amsterdam, to get rid of them; and that he could therefore afford to give me no more. I accepted his proposal, received the gold, and departed, accompanied by my new friend, who was no other than Dick Flairer.

"I made him a handsome present for his counsel and assistance, and was about to part from him, when he told me that I had better take care of myself for a few days until the hue and cry concerning the pocket-book should be over. He asked me to accompany him to his lodgings in Castle Street, Saffron Hill. I agreed; and there I first met his sister Mary. In the evening Dick went out, to ascertain, as he said, 'how the wind blew.' He came back at a late hour, and brought me a copy of a hand-bill that had been printed and circulated, and which gave not only a full description of the robbery, but also a most painfully accurate account of my person. Dick assured me that I was not safe in his lodgings, as he himself was a suspicious character in the neighbourhood; and he advised me to hide myself in a certain house which he knew in Chick Lane. I followed his advice, and proceeded to the Old House, where I lay concealed in that horrid dungeon under ground for a mortal fortnight. Mary brought me my food every other day, and gave me information of what was going on outside. She told me that the newspapers had published an account of the return of the bills of exchange and letters by post; and that the same organs stated that the old gentleman who had been robbed was unwilling to proceed any farther on that very account. At length Dick came himself, and assured me that I might leave the dungeon; but that it would be better for me to remain quiet in some snug place for a few weeks. I proposed to him a trip into the country; he agreed; and Mary accompanied us.

"We went down to Canterbury, and took lodgings on the Herne Bay road, close by the barracks. Dick and I used to visit all the neighbouring towns, and see what we could pick up; but we led a jovial life, spending much more than we got, and thus making desperate inroads into my funds. My old habits of gambling returned; and the gold which I had received from the Jew was disappearing very rapidly. We had left London for upwards of eight months, when we thought of returning to our old haunts. Mary seemed quite averse to the proposal, and was most anxious to remain a short time longer where she was. To this Dick agreed; and he and I came up to town. We went to the Boozing-ken on Saffron Hill, and there took up our quarters. Dick introduced me to Bill Bolter; and as it happened that our funds were all low, we resolved upon adopting some means to replenish our purses. Happening to take up

the *Times*, I saw an advertisement, according to which a wealthy jeweller and goldsmith in the Strand required a porter. I made a remark which led Dick Flairer to observe, that if I chose to take the situation, he could get me a reference, as he knew one of the largest linen-drapers in Norton Folgate, who was in the habit of buying stolen goods of the cracksmen of Dick's gang, and would not dare refuse to perform the part required. The plan was settled: I applied for the situation, gave the reference, and in two days entered the service of the rich goldsmith. In less than a fortnight I had obtained all the information I required; and stepping out one evening, I hastened to the boozing-ken, where I met the pals, and appointed the following night for the enterprise. I then returned to my master's residence.

"On the ensuing night, precisely as the clock struck twelve, I stole softly down from my bed-room, and entered the shop by means of a skeleton key. I then cautiously opened the front door, and admitted Dick Flairer and Bill Bolter. We immediately set to work to pack up all the most valuable and most portable articles; in which occupation we were engaged when a cry of '*Fire, fire!*' was heard in the street outside; and almost at the same moment a tremendous knocking at the front door began. For an instant we were paralysed; but the noise of steps descending the stairs hurried us into action; and, opening the doors, we darted from the house with the speed of wild animals, leaving all the booty behind us. The cry of '*Fire!*' was instantly succeeded by that of '*Thieves!*' and several persons began to pursue us hotly. We gained Wellington Street, and hastened towards Waterloo Bridge, intending to get into the Borough with the least possible delay. On we went—through the great gate, without waiting to pay the toll at the entrance of the footway—the pursuers gaining upon us. Suddenly I recollected that the cornice along the outside of the parapet was very wide; and without hesitating a moment I sprang over the parapet, alighted on the cornice, and only saved myself from falling into the river by catching hold of the gas-pipe which runs along the outer side of the bridge. Scarcely had I thus accomplished a most dangerous feat, when I distinctly saw a man, a few yards a-head, mount the parapet, and precipitate himself into the river. Then arose the sounds of voices on the bridge, crying, '*He is over!*' '*He has leaped in!*' '*He will be drowned.*' '*They have all three escaped.*' '*But where the devil could the other two have got to?*' and such-like exclamations, which convinced me that my companions were safe. There I remained, a prey to a thousand painful reflections and horrid ideas, for upwards of an hour; till at length I grew so dizzy that I was every moment on the point of falling into the river. The bridge was now completely silent; and I ventured to leave my hiding-place. I passed over the bridge to the Surrey side, without molestation, and proceeded by a circuitous route to the Old House in Chick Lane, where, to my astonishment, I found Bill Bolter. I then learnt that it was Dick Flairer who had leapt into the river, and was no doubt drowned; and that Bolter had only escaped by concealing himself in the deep shade of one of the recesses of the bridge, when totally overcome by fatigue, until his pursuers had passed, when he retraced his steps, and quietly gained the Strand.

"We were greatly grieved to think that our enterprise in the jeweller's house should have failed, and that we had lost so excellent a fellow as Flairer; but in the midst of our lamentations, the door opened and Dick himself entered the room. Pale, dripping, and exhausted, he fell upon a seat, and would most probably have fainted—if not died—had we not forced some brandy down his throat. He then revived; and, having changed his clothes, was soon completely recovered from the effects of his bath, and the desperate exertions he had made to swim to a wharf communicating with the Commercial Road.

"We staid for the remainder of the night at the Old House; and on the following morning Dick Flairer went up to the boozing-ken, where he procured a newspaper. He then returned to us; and we perceived by the journal that the curtains of the bed-room which I had occupied at the jeweller's house had caught fire, and created the alarms which had interrupted us in the midst of our employment in the shop. I moreover ascertained that I was of course suspected of having admitted thieves into the premises, and that a reward was offered for my apprehension. I was accordingly compelled to remain concealed for some weeks in the Old House, while Bolter and Flairer, being unsuspected, were enabled to go abroad. I did not upon this occasion conceal myself in the dungeon of the Old House, for I could not bear the solitude of that living tomb; and as Bolter and Flairer were constantly visiting me, the time did not hang so very heavily on my hands. At length I left the Old House, and I and Dick returned to Canterbury.

"When we arrived there, after an absence of two months, we made a most unpleasant discovery—unpleasant to Dick as the brother, and to me who was enamoured of Mary. She was in a way to become a mother; her situation was too palpable to be concealed. Dick flew into a most ungovernable rage; and Mary tried to deny it. But the fact was glaring, and she was obliged to confess that she had been seduced by a serjeant of the regiment stationed at Canterbury. Her attachment to that man, and the hope that he would do her justice, were the reasons that had induced her to remain at Canterbury, when we went to London. The serjeant had recently treated her with neglect and indifference, and she longed for revenge. Dick and I swore that she should have it. She told us that the serjeant was very fond of angling, and that every morning early he indulged in his favourite sport in the river Stour, which flowed close by the barracks.

"Next morning Dick and I went down to the river, and there we saw the serjeant preparing his tackle. From the description we had received of him, we knew him to be the man we wanted; but there was a large water-mill close by, and we dared not attack him in a spot that was so overlooked. We accordingly returned home, and consulted together how we should proceed. At length we resolved that Mary should endeavour to get him to grant her an interview on the banks of the river. She sent him a note, saying that she was to leave Canterbury in a few days, and that she wished to see him once more. She concluded by begging him to meet her that evening or the next between nine and ten o'clock, close by the bridge of Kingsford's water-mill. He consented, and appointed the evening of the next day for the interview.

"The hour drew nigh, and Mary went to the place agreed upon. Dick and I followed her at a little distance. The night was dark; it was in the month of April; and the air was very cold. As we drew near the bridge as noiselessly as we could, we distinguished the forms of two persons standing upon the bridge, and leaning in earnest conversation upon the low railing that overhung the huge wheel which was revolving beneath, the torrent pouring over it through the sluices of the dam upon the top of which the bridge stood. We advanced closer; and could then perceive that the two forms were those of Mary and her seducer. We proceeded to the bridge. When we reached the middle, Dick went up to the serjeant, and said, '*This is my sister; do you mean to do her justice?*'—'*No,*' cried Mary; '*he has just told me that I need have no hope in that respect.*' '*Then there is nothing more to be said,*' exclaimed Dick Flairer; and at the same moment we precipitated ourselves upon the serjeant. Dick Flairer pressed his hand upon his mouth; the poor wretch struggled

violently; but in an instant we hurled him over the bridge-railing. He fell upon the wheel; the roar of the torrent, and the din of the ponderous machine drowned his last cry of agony, and the crushing of his bones. '*Now, Mary,*' said I, '*you are revenged*.' She pressed my hand convulsively, without uttering a word; and we returned to our lodgings.

"Next day, the body of the serjeant was found, fearfully crushed and mutilated, a mile below the mill, entangled in a bed of osiers. It was carried to the barracks: an inquest was called; and a verdict of '*Found Drowned*' was recorded. Not a suspicion was entertained that the man had been murdered, it being evident from the surgical examination that he had been crushed by the wheel of the mill, upon which it was supposed he had accidentally fallen, over the bridge-railing, which was only about three feet high.

"The moment the verdict was returned, and we saw that no suspicion attached to any body in reference to the murder, we left Canterbury, and repaired to London. In the course of a few weeks, Mary became the mother of a still-born child; and in due time I assured her that I would overlook her fault, and marry her if she would have me. She was pleased with the proposal; and Dick readily agreed to it. But before we could be spliced, I one day met the goldsmith of the Strand in the street; and he gave me into custody. I was taken before the magistrates, and fully committed for an attempt to rob my employer. While I was in Newgate, waiting for my trial, I was greatly alarmed lest the old gentleman, whom I had robbed at the auction mart, should prefer an indictment against me; but my fears in this respect were unfounded. At length the sessions commenced, and I was put upon my trial. The Sheriffs had supplied me with counsel, for I was completely without funds when I was arrested. The barrister thus retained in my behalf, advised me to plead guilty, as I should then stand a good chance of escaping transportation. I followed his recommendation, and expressed my contrition for the offence. The Recorder read me a long lecture, and condemned me to seven years' transportation, which sentence was commuted to two years' imprisonment in Newgate.

"During that time I seriously thought of mending my ways, when I should be once more at liberty. But I could not conceive what on earth I should do for a livelihood if I did not steal. I knew that I should be turned adrift without a penny in my pocket; and I had no friends but those with whom I could only pursue my old career. When the chaplain spoke to me upon the errors of my past life, and the necessity of reformation, I used to say to him, '*Show me, reverend sir, how I am to obtain an honest living when I leave these walls, and I never shall sin again*.' But he always gave an evasive reply. In fact, what could he say? If he had required a man-servant—a groom—an errand-boy—a menial scrub to black his boots and brush his clothes, would he have taken me? No. If he had known any friend who wanted a man to take care of his hounds—never enter his house—but sleep in the kennels along with the dogs, would the chaplain have recommended me? No. If the governor of Newgate had needed a man to sweep the dirt away from the front of the prison, would the reverend gentleman have spoken a kind word in favour of me? No. Of what use, then, is it for these gaol chaplains to preach penitence and reformation, when by their very actions they say, '*We do not believe that you can possibly change for the better?*' Of what benefit is it for these salaried moralists to declaim upon the advantages of a virtuous course, when they know perfectly well that the old maxim is invariably correct,—'*Give a dog a bad name and hang him!*' Virtue must be fed; but Virtue, upon leaving the walls of a criminal prison, can obtain no food. Must Virtue, then die of starvation? Human nature revolts against this self-destruction—this systematic suicide; and, sooner than submit to it, Virtue will allow itself to be changed by circumstances into Vice. Virtue in this case has no option but to become Vice.

"I often thought, when I was in prison, that if there was a workshop, established by the government to receive persons whom the criminal gaols daily vomit back upon society, many a miserable creature would in reality reform, and be saved from a re-plunge into the sea of crime. But all that the government does is to punish. I mentioned these thoughts to the chaplain. And what did he say? He endeavoured to get rid of the necessity of giving a decisive opinion, by throwing himself headlong into a mass of argument and reasoning, half religious and half political, which I could not understand. Thus do those men invariably extricate themselves from perplexing topics. In my opinion there is no mockery more abominable—no hypocrisy more contemptible—no morality more baseless than the attributes of a gaol-chaplain!

"If good and pious men attended criminal prisons of their own free will, and talked in a plain homely manner to the inmates,—a manner which those inmates could understand,—how much benefit might result! But when you think that the chaplain only troubles himself about you because he is paid,—that he doles out his doctrine in proportion to the income which he receives,—and that he says the same to you to-day which he said to another yesterday, and will say to a third to-morrow,—his office is mean, contemptible, and degrading.

"It does not do for me to hold forth in this manner; I know *that*: but I cannot help expressing the thoughts that occupied me when I was in Newgate. They are often present in my memory; and, sometimes, when I am dull and in low spirits, I console myself by the conviction that if I am bad now, it is because there is no door open for me to be good. So a truce to these ideas. They do not often come from my lips; and even now I scarcely wish to recall them.

"Well—I passed my two years in Newgate; and when I was released, I stood still by the lamp-post at the top of the Old Bailey, thinking which way I should go. I had not a penny in my pocket; and I knew that in the course of a few hours I should be hungry. As true as I am sitting here, tears rolled down my cheeks as I contemplated the necessity of returning to my old pursuits,—yes—burning tears—tears of agony—such tears as I never shed before, and shall never shed again!

"Suddenly a thought struck me. I would go to the workhouse. The idea consoled me; and, fearful lest my good intentions should grow cool, I turned back past the door of Newgate again, and directed my steps down the Old Bailey towards Blackfriars' Bridge. In the course of an hour, I knocked at the door of the —— Workhouse, with an order for admission from the overseer.

"It was about twelve o'clock in the day when I entered the Workhouse. The porter conducted me into the office, where the master took down my name, age, &c. He then sent me to the bath-room, where I was cleansed. When I came from the bath I put on the coarse linen, grey suit, and thick shoes which constitute the workhouse garb—the livery of poverty. The dress differed but little from the one I had worn in Newgate—so small is the distinction in this blessed country between a felon and a pauper! My old clothes were put up together in a bundle, labelled with my name, and conveyed to the store-room, to be returned to me when I chose to leave the place. As soon as I was dressed, I was allotted to the *able-bodied men's department* of the Workhouse. The scale of food for this class of persons

was just this:—

	Bread.	Gruel.	Meat.	Bacon.	Potatoes.	Soup.	Cheese.	Suet Pudding.
	Oz.	*Pints.*	*Oz.*	*Oz.*	*Oz.*	*Pints.*	*Oz.*	
Monday	14	1½	..	..	..	1½	2	..
Tuesday	21	1½	..	..	..	..	4	..
Wednesday	14	1½	..	..	..	1½	2	..
Thursday	14	1½	..	4	8	..	2	..
Friday	14	1½	..	..	..	..	2	14
Saturday	14	1½	..	..	..	1½	2	..
Sunday	14	1½	5	..	8	1½	..	..
Total Weekly Allowance	105	10½	5	4	16	6	14	14

"So you see that we had only five ounces of cooked meat and five ounces of bacon, in the shape of animal food, in the course of each week! And yet we had to work—to keep the grounds in order, to do various jobs in the establishment, and to pick four pounds of oakum each, every day, the Sabbath excepted. Felons are better off;[79] for in the prison one has more meat, more bread, and more gruel (which is certainly nourishing) than in the workhouse!

"We had nothing to drink with our dinners and suppers but water—and of that they could not very well stint us, because it cost nothing. The able-bodied women had much *less* than the able-bodied men. The infirm paupers had each one ounce of tea and seven ounces of sugar weekly, instead of gruel, for breakfast! Fancy one ounce of tea for seven meals!

"We were divided into messes, or tables of ten each; and each mess elected a carver. The duty of the carver was to go to the kitchen and fetch the provision allotted to the individuals at his particular table, and then to distribute it in equal proportions. What fighting and wrangling always took place at meal times! On meat days, one had too much fat, and another's morsel was too under-done:—on bacon days, one had too much lean, and another had the rind given to him. Then one declared that he had been cheated out of a potatoe; and so on. It was a scene of perpetual selfishness—of human beings quarrelling for a crumb! But who can wonder? A potatoe or a cubic inch of bread was a considerable portion of a meal; and where all were ravenous, who could afford to lose even a potatoe or a crumb?[80]

"Neither of you have ever been in a workhouse, I know; and therefore you cannot imagine the change it produces in its inmates. They grow discontented with the world, and look upon their superiors with abhorrence. An army of able-bodied men, recruited from all the Unions in the kingdom, would make the finest republican soldiers imaginable. They would proceed with a good heart to level throne, aristocracy, and every institution which they believed oppressive to the industrious classes.

"But that is no business of mine—and I care nothing for politics of any kind. Of an evening, we used to gather round the fire till bed-time, and talk of our past lives. Many—many of my companions, had, like myself, seen better days; and it actually made one's heart ache to hear them compare their former positions with their present ones. And after all, what can be more inhuman—what more cruel, than the very principles of the workhouse system? Old couples, who have lived together for years and years, are separated when they go to the workhouse. Mothers are debarred from the society of their little ones:—no ties of kindred are respected *there*!

"I remember one man—he was about sixty, and much better behaved than the rest—who had been a writer, or something of that kind, in his time. The men used to get him now and then, when he was in the humour to recite poems—some of which he had composed in better days, and others since he had been in the Union. Those of his palmy years were all about love, and friendship, and sweet spring, and moonlight scenes, and so on;—but from the moment that he set foot in the workhouse, he bade farewell to love and friendship; and he never more was destined to know the enjoyments of charming seasons and tranquil hours! One of his late poems made such an impression on me, that I learnt it by heart. It was a workhouse scene. I remember it now; and will repeat it:—

"THE SONG OF THE WORKHOUSE.

"Stooping over the ample grate,
Where burnt an ounce of fuel,
That cheered not the gloom
Of the workhouse room,
An aged and shivering female sate,
Sipping a pint of gruel:
And as she sopped a morsel of bread
In that liquid thin and poor,
With anguish she shook her aching head,
And thought of the days that were o'er.

"Through the deep mists of years gone by
Her mental glances wandered;
And the warm blood ran
To her features wan;
And fire for a moment lighted her eye,
As o'er the past she pondered.
For she had once tripped the meadow green
With a heart as blithe as May;
And she had been crowned the village-queen
In times that were far away!

"She'd been the pride of parents dear,
And plenty banished sorrow;
And her love she gave
To a yeoman brave;
And a smiling offspring rose to cheer
Hearts that feared not for the morrow.
Oh! why should they fear? In the sweat of their brow
They ate their daily bread;
And they thought, 'The earth will e'er yield as now
The fruits whereon we're fed!'

"But when their hair grew silvery white,
Sorrow their cot invaded,
And ravaged it then
As armies of men
Sack the defenceless town by night:—
Thus all Hope's blossoms faded!
From their little farm the stock was swept
By the owner of their land;
And the very bed on which they slept,
Was snatched by the bailiff's hand.

"One hope—one fond hope now was all
Each tender heart dared cherish—
That they might remain
Still linked by one chain,
And 'midst the sorrows that might befal,
Together live or perish.
But Want drove them on to the workhouse gate;
And when the door was pass'd
They found themselves doomed to separate—
To separate at last!

"And he fell sick:—she prayed in vain
To be where he was lying;
She poured forth her moan
Unto hearts of stone;
Never admittance she could gain
To the room where he was dying!
Then into her brain the sad thoughts stole
That brain with anguish reeling—
That the great ones, judging by their own soul,
Think that paupers have no feeling.

"So, thus before the cheerless grate,
Watching the flick'ring ember
She rocked to and fro,
Her heart full of woe;
For into that heart the arrow of fate
Pierced like the cold of December.
And though she sopped a morsel of bread,
She could not eat for crying:
'T was hard that she might not support the head
Of her much-lov'd husband dying!

"I stayed in the workhouse six weeks; and could stand it no longer. I had to labour, and was half-starved. So one morning I went to the Master, demanded my clothes, and was speedily retracing my steps towards my old haunts. That evening I supped with Dick Flairer at the boozing-ken on Saffron Hill; and the same night we broke into a watchmaker's shop in the City. We got seventeen pounds in money, and a dozen watches and other trinkets, which we sold to the 'fence' in Field Lane for thirty guineas. That was a good bargain for him! I then went and took up my quarters with Dick Flairer at his lodgings; and in a few weeks I married his sister Mary. Six or eight months afterwards poor Dick was killed; and—"

CHAPTER C.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE GROUND-FLOOR ROOMS.

THE Buffer was interrupted at this point by the return of his wife, who in spite of the protection of the Resurrection Man's umbrella, was dripping wet.

We must observe that we have taken the liberty of altering and improving the language, in which the Buffer delivered his autobiography, to the utmost of our power: we have moreover embodied his crude ideas and reduced his random observations into a tangible shape. We should add that the man was not deficient in intellectual sharpness, in spite of the stolid expression of his countenance; and thus the observations which he made relative to prison discipline and the neglect of government to adopt means of *preventing* crime in preference to *punishing* it when committed, need excite no astonishment in those who peruse them.

But to return to the thread of our narrative.

When the Buffer's wife had taken a warm seat by the fire, and comforted herself with a tolerably profound libation of steaming gin-and-water, she proceeded to give an account of her mission.

"I went down to Globe Lane," she said; "and a miserable walk it was, I can assure you. The rain falls in torrents, and the wind blows enough to carry the Monument into the Thames. By the time I got down to the undertaker's house I was drenched. Then Banks wasn't at home; but his wife asked me to stop till he came in; and as I thought that the business was pressing, I agreed. I waited—and waited till I was tired; one hour passed—then half an hour more; and I was just coming back when Banks walks in."

"And so you gave him the note," said the Resurrection Man, who had listened somewhat impatiently to this prelude.

"Yes—I gave him the note," continued Moll Wicks; "and he put on a pair of spectacles with round glasses as big as the bottoms of wine-glasses. When he had read it, he said he would attend to it, and should call his-self on you to-morrow morning by nine o'clock."

"Well and good," exclaimed the Resurrection Man.

"What are you going to do, Tony?" demanded the Rattlesnake.

"Never do you mind now," answered the Resurrection Man. "I will tell you all to-morrow."

"But I haven't quite done yet," cried the Buffer's wife. "Just as I came out of the undertaker's shop I met the surgeon that attended upon the old gentleman at Mrs. Smith's. He beckoned me under an archway, and asked when the old gentleman was going to be buried? I told him that I knew nothing about it. He hesitated, and was going away; and then he turned round suddenly, and said, 'Do you think your husband would mind a job that would put ten pounds into his pocket?' I don't know whether he had ever seen Jack, or not——"

"To be sure he has," interrupted the Buffer. "Didn't I go to him when I cut my hand with the hatchet, chopping wood one day?"

"Ah! I forgot that," said Moll. "Well, so I told him that my husband wasn't at all the man to refuse a ten pun' note; and even then he didn't seem to like to trust me. But after a little more hesitation, he says, says he, 'I should like to know what that old gentleman died of; I can't make out at all. I wonder whether his friends would have any objection to my opening the body; for I spoke to Mrs. Smith, and she won't hear of it.' I told him that the poor old feller had no friends; but I saw very well what the sawbones wanted; and so I says, 'Why don't you have him up again if so be you want so partickler to know what he died of?'—'That's just the very thing,' he says. 'Do you think your husband would do the job? I once knew a famous feller,' he says, 'one Anthony Tidkins'——"

"And so do I know him," interrupted the Resurrection Man. "Doesn't he live in the Cambridge Road, not far from the corner of Bethnal Green Road?"

"The same," answered the Buffer's wife.

"Well—what took place then?"

"He only told me to tell my husband to call upon him—and that was all."

"Here's more work, you see, Jack," said the Resurrection Man. "Leave this business to me. I'll take care and manage it. When we meet to-morrow night, I'll explain all my plans about the money this old fellow has left behind him; and then I'll tell you what arrangement I've made with this surgeon. You must mind and be with me at nine to-morrow night, Jack; because we won't keep young Markham waiting for us."

These last words were uttered with a low chuckle and an expression of countenance that indicated but too well the diabolical hopes and intentions of the Resurrection Man.

The Buffer and his wife then took leave of their friends, and departed to their own abode.

"Now, Meg," said the Resurrection Man, "it is nearly twelve o'clock; and you may get ready to go to bed. I am just going out for a few minutes—"

"As usual, Tony," cried the Rattlesnake, impatiently. "Why do you always go out now—every night?"

"I have told you over and over again not to pry into my secrets," returned the Resurrection Man, furiously. "You mind your own business, and only meddle in what I tell you to take a part; or else—"

"Well, well, Tony—don't be angry now," said the Rattlesnake, in her most wheedling tone. "I will never ask you any more questions. Only I thought it strange that you should have gone out every night for the last three weeks—no matter what weather—"

"And you may think it strange a little longer if you like," once more interrupted the terrible Resurrection Man, with a sinister

lowering of his countenance which checked the reply that was rising to the lips of his companion.

The Rattlesnake lighted a candle, and passed into the adjoining apartment.

The Resurrection Man poured some raw spirits into a wine glass, tossed it off, and putting on his hat, left the room.

He descended the precipitate staircase leading to the front door of the house, and in another moment reached the street.

Simply closing, without locking, the door behind him, he turned sharply round into the dark alley which ran beneath a sombre and narrow arch, along one side of the house.

But his footsteps, on this occasion, were closely followed by the Rattlesnake.

Unable to restrain her curiosity any longer—and, *perhaps*, influenced by other motives of a less superficial nature,—Margaret Flathers had determined to follow her paramour this night; and, scarcely had he closed the street door, when she was already at the bottom of the staircase.

The moment she stepped into the street, she saw the dark form of the Resurrection Man turn down the alley above mentioned; and she muttered to herself, "I thought so! and now perhaps I shall find out why he never would allow me to set foot in the rooms of the lower storey."

The Resurrection Man passed half-way up the alley, and taking a key from his pocket, proceeded to open a door that communicated with the ground-floor of his singularly-built house.

He entered, and the Rattlesnake hurried up to the door. She applied her ear to the key-hole—listened—and heard his footsteps echoing upon the boarded floor of the back-room. In a few moments the grating of a lucifer-match upon the wall met her ear; and applying her eye for a moment to the key-hole, she saw that there was now a light within.

Impelled by an invincible curiosity, or other motives of a powerful nature,—if not both,—the Rattlesnake cautiously raised the latch, and opened the door to the distance of nearly a foot.

With the utmost care, she now ventured to look into the interior of that part of the house, in respect to which a species of Blue-beard restriction had existed for her ever since she first became the companion of the Resurrection Man in that mysterious abode.

Glancing cautiously in, we say, she saw a small passage communicating with two rooms—one at each end, front and back. The door of the front room was closed: that of the back one was open. She accordingly directed all her attention to the back-room.

Against the wall facing the door was a candle, burning in a bright tin shade or reflector; and in the middle of the room, between the door and the light, stood the Resurrection Man. He had his back towards the Rattlesnake; but she could watch all his proceedings with the greatest facility.

And how strange were those proceedings!—The Resurrection Man enveloped himself in a large dark cloak, and fixed a black cloth mask over his countenance. He then advanced towards a cupboard, which he opened, and whence he took several articles, the precise nature of which the Rattlesnake could not ascertain, in consequence of the position in which her paramour was then standing. She however observed that he placed those articles in a basket at his feet; and when this task was accomplished, he lifted the basket in his hand, and turned so abruptly round to leave the room, that the Rattlesnake trembled from head to foot lest he should have caught a glimpse of her head protruded through the opening of the door.

She drew herself back and pulled the door towards her. For a moment she felt inclined to beat a precipitate retreat to her own quarters; but curiosity compelled her to remain.

What could mean that strange disguise?—Why that cloak?—Wherefore that mask?—And what were the objects which the Resurrection Man had consigned to his basket?—Lastly, whither was he going?

With the most extreme caution she again pushed the door partly open, and again did she glance into the interior of that mysterious division of the house.

But all was now dark; the light had disappeared, or was extinguished, and the place was involved in total obscurity.

Nevertheless, all was not silent. The measured tread of receding footsteps fell upon the woman's ear: those sounds seemed to come from heavy feet descending stone stairs.

Fainter and fainter became the sounds, until at length they merged into the low wind, which whistled gloomily and monotonously through the lower part of the house.

Margaret Flathers felt alarmed: she scarcely knew why.

Was it that being aware of the diabolical character of the Resurrection Man, she naturally associated his present strange proceedings with some deed of darkness whose very mystery made her shudder?

Was it that she trembled at the idea of being in the power of a miscreant whose ability to work evil seemed as unbounded as his inclination?

Suddenly her thoughts received an interruption which was by no means calculated to tranquillize her mind.

A scream, apparently coming from the very bowels of the earth, echoed through the lower part of that house—a scream expressive of an agony so intense, an anguish so acute, that it smote even her hardened and ruthless heart!

That scream was not repeated; but its echoes rang long throughout the place, and vibrated in a strange and terrible manner on the ears of the Rattlesnake.

Then followed low mutterings, in a hoarse and subdued tone; but as they gradually grew louder, she could recognise the menacing voice of the Resurrection Man.

Fear now completely triumphed over the motives which had induced the woman to seek to penetrate into the secrets of her paramour. The dark cloak—the black mask—the basket—the piercing scream—and the threatening voice, all combined to bewilder her imagination, and fill her with vague but not less terrible alarms.

Hastily closing the door, she retreated with precipitate speed from the dark alley, and ascended the steep staircase leading to the upper rooms of the house.

To throw off her clothes and betake herself to rest was the occupation of but a few minutes: nevertheless, as she laid aside her garments, she cast timid and furtive glances behind her—as if she were afraid that her eyes would encounter some horrible spectre—or some masked figure of appalling aspect.

In a quarter of an hour after she had returned from the contemplation of those mysterious proceedings that had filled her mind with such ineffable horror, the Resurrection Man entered the bed-room.

A light was burning upon the table, and when the door opened the Rattlesnake glanced with profound terror in that direction—for she feared lest he should appear in his long dark cloak and black mask. She was inured to crime;—but it was that crime which she could contemplate face to face; and thus the idea that she was in a house where deeds of unknown horror and machinations of an undefined degree of blackness were the business of the terrible man with whom her fortunes were now linked, prostrated all her courage, and filled her with alarms the more profound, because so ominously vague.

In order to avoid the risk of betraying her trepidation to the Resurrection Man, she soon affected to fall asleep; and, when at length slumber really overtook her, her dreams were filled with gaunt forms clad in long black cloaks, and wearing upon their countenances dark masks, through the holes of which their eyes glared with fearful brightness.

CHAPTER CI.

THE WIDOW.

THE cold January morning struggled into existence, amidst rain and sleet, and seemed cradled in dense masses of clouds of tempestuous blackness.

It appeared as if the sun had taken leave of the earth for ever; and it would not have been surprising had the ignorant inquired whence came the gloomy light that just seemed to guide them to their toil.

Miserable indeed was the aspect of the eastern district of the metropolis. Emaciated women, wrapt in thin and scanty shawls, crept along the streets, through the pouring rain, to purchase at the chandlers' shops the morsel that was to serve for the morning's meal,—or, perhaps, to pledge some trifling article in their way, ere they could obtain that meal! Half-starved men,—poor wretches who never made a hearty meal, and who were yet compelled to work like horses,—unhappy beings, who flew to the public houses in despair, and then were reproached by the illiberal and intolerant for their immorality,—black sheep of Fortune's flock, to whom verdant pastures were unknown,—friendless outcasts, who in sickness knew no other consolation than that of the hospital, and in destitution, no asylum save the workhouse,—luckless mortals, who cursed the day they knew the power of love, and execrated that on which they pronounced the marriage vows, because therefrom had sprung children who pined for want before their face,—such men as these were seen dragging themselves along to their labours on the railroad, the canal, or at the docks.

It was about eight o'clock on this miserable morning, when a man, dressed in a shabby suit of black, and wearing a very dirty white neckcloth, the long ends of which hung, damp and lanky, over the front of his closely-buttoned body-coat, walked slowly along Smart Street—a thoroughfare in the eastern part of Globe Town.

This individual was in reality verging upon sixty; but as he dyed his hair and whiskers in order to maintain an uniform aspect of funereal solemnity, he looked ten years younger. His manner was grave and important; and, although the rain was descending in torrents, he would not for the world depart from that measured pace which was habitual to him. He held an old umbrella above his head, to protect a battered hat, round which a piece of crape was sewn in three or four clumsy folds; but the torrent penetrated through the cotton tegument, and two streams poured from the broad brims of his hat adown his anti-laughter-looking and rigidly demure countenance.

When he arrived at about the middle of Smart Street, he halted, examined the numbers of the houses, and at length knocked at the door of one of them.

An elderly woman, dressed in a neat but very homely garb, responded to the summons.

"Does Mrs. Smith live here, ma'am?" demanded the individual in black.

"My name's Smith, sir," answered the widow.

"Very good, ma'am. I'll have a little conversation with you, if you please;"—and the stranger stepped into the passage.

Mrs. Smith conducted him into her little parlour, and inquired his business.

"Mine, ma'am," was the answer, "is a professional visit—entirely a professional visit, ma'am. Alas! ma'am," continued the stranger, casting his eyes upwards in a most dolorous manner, and taking a dirty white handkerchief from his pocket,—"alas! ma'am, I understand you have had a sad loss here?"

"A lodger of mine, sir, is dead," said Mrs. Smith, somewhat surprised at the display of sorrow which she now beheld, and very naturally expecting that her visitor would prove to be a relation of the deceased.

"Ah! ma'am, we're all mortal!" exclaimed the stranger, with a mournful shake of the head, and a truly pitiful turning up of the whites of his eyes: "we're all mortal, ma'am; and howsomever high and mighty we may be in this life, the grave at last must have our carkisses!"

"Very true, sir," said the good woman, putting the corner of her apron to her eyes; for the reflection of the stranger called to her mind the loss she had experienced in the deceased Mr. Smith.

"Alas! it's too true, ma'am," continued the stranger, applying his handkerchief to his face, to suppress, as the widow thought, a sob: "but it is to be hoped, ma'am, that your lodger has gone to a better speer, where there's no cares to wex him—and no rent to pay!"

"I hope so too, most sincerely, sir," said Mrs. Smith, wondering when the gentleman would announce the precise terms of relationship in which he stood to the deceased. "But, might I inquire—"

"Yes, ma'am, you may inquire anything you choose," said the stranger, with another solemn shake of his head—in consequence of which a great deal of wet was thrown over Mrs. Smith's furniture; "for I know you by name, Mrs. Smith—I know you well by reputation—as a respectable, kind-hearted, and pious widder; and I feel conwinced that your treatment to the poor lamented deceased —" here the stranger shook his head again, and groaned audibly—"was every thing that it ought to be in this blessed land of Christian comfort!"

Mrs. Smith now began to suspect that she was honoured with the visit of a devout minister of some particular sect to which the deceased had probably belonged. But before she had time to mention her supposition, the stranger resumed his highly edifying discourse.

"My dear madam," he said, turning up his eyes, "the presence of death in this house—this wery house—ought to make us mindful of the uncertain leasehold of our own lives; it ought to make us prayerful and church-loving. But madam—my dear madam," continued the stranger, apparently on the point of bursting out into a perfect agony of grief, "there are attentions to be paid to the body as well as cares to entertain for the soul; and the least we can do is to show a feeling of weneration for our deceased friends by consigning them in a decent manner to the grave."

"On that point, sir," said Mrs. Smith, "I think as you do; and I s'pose you're come to superintend the funeral. If so, I am sure I am very thankful, for it's a great tax on a poor lone body like me to have such a undertaking to attend to."

"I'll *undertake* the undertaking—out of respect to the poor dear deceased, ma'am," observed the stranger, in a tone of deep solemnity. "And now, ma'am," he continued, rising, "I must request you to command those feelings which is so nat'ral under such circumstances, and show me into the room where the blessed departed lays."

Mrs. Smith, thinking within herself that the visitor must have some legitimate authority for his present proceeding, and presuming that he would condescend to impart to her the nature of that authority ere he took his leave, conducted him with very little hesitation to the room where the deceased lay stretched upon the bed.

The corpse was covered with a clean white sheet; for every thing, though excessively homely, was still neat and decent in the widow's dwelling.

"I see, ma'am," said the stranger, advancing solemnly up to the bed, and drawing the sheet away from the corpse, "I see that you know how to pay proper respect to the last remnants of mortality. Ah! ma'am, it's all wanity and wexation of spirit!"

With these words the extraordinary stranger drew a rule gravely from his pocket, and proceeded to measure the corpse, saying at the same time, "Ah! my dear madam, heaven will reward you for all your goodness towards our dear deceased friend!"

"Was he a friend of yours, then, sir?" demanded the widow, somewhat astounded at the process of measurement which was now going on before her eyes.

"Are we not all friends and brethren, ma'am?" said the stranger: "are we not all Christian friends and Christian brethren? Yes, ma'am, we are—we must be."

"May I ask, sir, why——"

"Yes, ma'am, ask any thing—I implore you to ask any thing. I am so overcome by the idea of your goodness towards the blessed defunct, and by the sense of the dooty which my profession——"

"What profession, sir?" asked Mrs. Smith, point-blank.

"Ah! my dear madam," answered the stranger, with a shake of the head more solemn than any he had yet delivered himself of, "I exercise the profession of undertaker."

"Undertaker!" ejaculated the widow, a light breaking in upon her as she thought of the systematic measurement of the body.

"Undertaker and furnisher of funerals, ma'am, on the most genteel and economic principles."

"Well—I raly took you for a minister," said Mrs. Smith, somewhat disappointed.

"Excellent woman! your goodness flatters me," ejaculated the undertaker. "But here is my card, ma'am—*Edward Banks*, you perceive—*Globe Lane*. Ah! my dear madam, I knew your dear deceased husband well! Often and oft have we chanted the same hymn together in the parish church; and often have we drunk together out of the same pewter at the *Spotted Dog*."

Mournful, indeed, was the shake of the head that accompanied this latter assurance; and the undertaker once more had recourse to his dingy pocket-handkerchief.

The widow used the corner of her apron.

Mr. Banks saw the advantage he had gained, and hastened to clench the object of his visit.

"Yes, my dear madam, no man respected your dear husband more than me: in fact, I wenerated that man. Poor dear Thomas Smith——"

"Matthew, sir," said the widow mildly.

"Ah! so it was, ma'am—Matthew Smith! Good fellow—charming companion—excellent man—gone, gone—never to come back no more!"

And Mr. Banks sobbed audibly.

"Well," observed the widow, wiping her eyes, "it's wery strange that poor dear Mat never should have mentioned your name to me, considering you was so intimate."

"Our friendship, ma'am, was a solemn compact—too solemn to be made a matter of idle conversation. But since I have made myself known to you, my dear madam, do, pray, let me take this unpleasant business off your hands, and conduct the funeral of your lamented lodger."

"Well, sir," said the widow, after a moment's reflection, "since you are in the undertaking line, and as you've called so polite and all, I shall be wery much obleeged——"

"Say no more, my dear Mrs. Smith," exclaimed Mr. Banks. "I will do the thing respectable for you—and wery moderate charges. You need not bother yourself about it in any way. We will bury the dear departed in one of the Globe Lane grounds; and I will even provide the clergyman."

"Do you know a good—pious—sincere minister, that you can recommend, Mr. Banks?" asked the widow.

"I do, ma'am—a godly, dewout, prayerful man—meek and humble," answered the undertaker.

"I rayther want a little advice in one way—quite private," continued Mrs. Smith; "and I should take it as a faviour if your friend the minister would just step round—or shall I call upon him?"

"No, Mrs. Smith—certainly not. He shall pay his respects to you. Gentlemen always waits upon ladies," added Mr. Banks.

Though he uttered a compliment, he did not smile; but Mrs. Smith was flattered; and, leading the way down stairs to her little parlour, she invited Mr. Banks to take "a thimble-full of something short to keep out the damp that cold morning."

Mr. Banks accepted the civility; and the costs of the funeral were duly settled. The undertaker engaged to inter the deceased lodger for five pounds, and pay all expenses. At length he took his leave; and Mrs. Smith felt quite relieved from any anxiety respecting the obsequies of the deceased.

From Mrs. Smith's humble abode, the respectable Mr. Banks proceeded to the dwelling of the Resurrection Man, who had just returned from a visit to the surgeon that had attended upon the deceased. The success of this visit will be related hereafter; for the present, let us hasten to inform our readers that Mr. Banks acquainted his friend Mr. Tidkins with every particular respecting his call upon the widow in Smart Street.

CHAPTER CII.

THE REVEREND VISITOR.

WHEN Mr. Banks had taken his leave of the widow in Smart Street, Globe Town, the latter seated herself in her little parlour to reflect upon what had passed during the interview.

"Well," she said to herself, "that certainly is a wery singular man. To have knowed my husband so well, and for me never to have knowed *him*! P'raps, after all, my poor Mat was fond of the public-house, and didn't like to speak of the acquaintances he met there. That accounts for his never mentioning Mr. Banks's name. But for a man like Mr. Banks to come here whimpering and crying over a corpse which he never see living, shows a excellent heart. Mr. Banks must be a wery amiable man. And yet I always heerd say that butchers and undertakers was the most unfeelingest of men. They never let butchers set on juries; but I'm sure if undertakers is so milk-hearted, *they* may set on juries, or up in pulpits, or any where else, for my part. Mr. Banks is a wery respectable man—and a wery pious one too. I'm sure I thought he was going to sing a hymn—'specially after the dodger of gin he took. The minister that he said he'd send to me must be a holy man: I shall put confidence in him—and foller his advice."

A tap at the parlour door interrupted Mrs. Smith's reverie; and the Buffer's wife entered the room.

"How do you do this morning, ma'am?" said Moll Wicks. "I thought I heerd that you had company just now?"

"Only Mr. Banks, the undertaker, Mrs. Wicks."

"Oh! Mr. Banks, was it?" ejaculated the Buffer's wife, who now began to comprehend a part of the Resurrection Man's plan: "and a highly respectable individual he is too."

"Do you know any thing of him, Mrs. Wicks?"

"Certainly I do, ma'am. He buried my grandfather and grandmother, my great uncle and my lame aunt, and never took no more than expenses out of pocket," answered Moll—although be it well remembered, she had never seen nor heard of Mr. Banks before the preceding evening.

"Ah! well—I thought I couldn't be wrong," observed the widow, extremely satisfied with this information.

"And so I suppose, ma'am, you've made the arrangements with him for the funeral?"

"Just so," responded Mrs. Smith; "and in the course of the day I expect a wery pious minister of Mr. Banks's acquaintance."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when a modest double knock at the front door was heard—a summons which Mrs. Wicks volunteered to answer.

The moment she opened the door, an ejaculation of surprise was about to issue from her tongue; but the individual whom she saw upon the threshold put his finger to his lips to impose silence.

The Buffer's wife responded with a significant nod, and introduced the visitor into the widow's parlour.

Moll Wicks then withdrew to her own room.

Meantime the visitor stood in the presence of Mrs. Smith, who beheld before her a short man, with a pale face, dark piercing eyes, shaggy brows, and long straggling black hair. He was dressed in a respectable suit of mourning, and wore a clean white cravat.

"Pardon me, ma'am, if I intrude," said the visitor; "but my friend Mr. Banks—"

"Oh! sir, you are quite welcome," ejaculated the widow. "Pray sit down, sir. I presume you are the reverend minister—"

"I am a humble vessel of the Lord," answered the visitor, casting down his eyes with great meekness: "and I am come to see in what way I can be useful to a respectable widow of whom my friend, the excellent Mr. Banks, has spoken so very highly."

"The truth is, reverend sir," said the widow, sinking her voice, and drawing her chair closer up to her sanctified visitor, "I want some good advice how to act in a wery partickler matter."

"It is my business to give good advice," was the reply.

"I thought so, reverend sir; and if Mat had been alive, I should have told him that I thought so. Howsomever, this is what I want to know about. An old gentleman dies yesterday morning in my house; and he leaves a little money—thirty or forty pounds, or so—behind him. He always paid his way with me; and so I don't start no claim to a farthing of it. He has no name—no friends—no relations—no nothing: now the question is, sir, what am I to do with this here money that he's left behind him?"

"You are a very honest woman, Mrs. Smith," answered the reverend gentleman; "and you conduct yourself in a most creditable way in this respect. Many people would have put the money into their own pockets."

"And that's just what a female lodger of mine wanted me to do, reverend sir," exclaimed the landlady. "But I know myself better. Dead man's money never did no one no good unless it was properly left, as the saying is. Mrs. Wicks would have had me keep it all quiet; and I must say that I was surprised at the perposal. But, between you and me, sir, I don't think overmuch of my lodgers, although they do pay their rent pretty reg'lar. The man doesn't seem to have any work or employment; and yet they live on the best—biled beef one day, steaks the next, bacon and greens the next—and so on. I know that *I* can't do it on nothing. And then they have their ale at dinner, and their gin of an evening. For my part I can't understand it. The man keeps late hours too; and the woman swears like a trooper when she's got a drop too much. But then, as I said, they pays their way; and a lone widder like me doesn't dare ask no questions."

"Of course not," said the reverend gentleman. "I think you stated that the name of the lodgers you allude to is Wicks?"

"Yes, sir—Wicks."

"I know them—by reputation only. They have an annuity of eighty pounds a-year, and are very respectable people. Their only fault is that they are rather fond of company—and that, perhaps, makes them stay out late now and then."

"Well, sir, if a pious gentleman like you thinks well on them, it isn't for a poor ignorant creatur' like me to say black's the white of their eye.... They pays their way; and that's all I ought to bother myself about. But, as I was a-saying, the old gentleman which lodged with me dies, and leaves some money behind him. There ain't kith or kin to claim it. Now what had I better do with it?"

"The ecclesiastical law—"

"Sir?"

"The law of Doctors' Commons, I mean, is very particular on this head," said the reverend visitor. "There are only two things to do."

"And which be they, sir?" asked the widow.

"Either to go and put the money into the Chancery Court, or to bury it in the coffin along with the deceased."

"And suppose I put it into the Chancery Court, sir?"

"Then no one will ever get it out again—that's all."

"But if some relation comes for'ard?"

"Then he'll just have to pay two pounds costs for every pound he draws out."

"Lack-a-daisy me!" ejaculated the widow. "I raly think it would be best to bury the money in the poor old gentleman's coffin."

"I am sure it would be," said the reverend adviser; "and although you would be giving up a treasure in this life, you would be laying up for yourself a treasure in heaven."

"Ah! well-a-day, sir—we must all think of that. I shall foller your advice, and bury the money with the poor man in his coffin."

"Without mentioning the business to a soul except Mr. Banks," said the saintly man, in an impressive tone.

"Or else his rest might be disturbed—eh, sir?" demanded the widow, sinking her voice to a whisper. "But do you think there's such people as resurrection men now-a-days?"

"Resurrection men!" ejaculated the reverend visitor, bursting out into a laugh; "no, my dear madam—society has got rid of those abominations."

"Then where do surgeons get corpses from, sir?"

"From the hulks, the prisons, and the workhouses," was the answer.

"What! poor creatures which goes to the workus!" cried Mrs. Smith, revolting at the idea.

"Yes—ma'am; but the surgeons don't like them as subjects, because they're nothing but skin and bone."

"Well, for my part," exclaimed the widow, wiping away a tear, "I think it's wery hard if, after paying rates and taxes for a many—many year, I should be obleeged to go to the workus, and then be cut up in a surgeon's slaughter-house at last."

"Ah! my dear ma'am, these are sad times—very sad times," said the sanctified gentleman. "But a woman who does her duty to her fellow creatures as you do, need fear nothing; heaven will protect you!"

With these words the holy man rose from his seat, and prepared to depart.

"I hope Mr. Banks has engaged you to perform the service over my poor deceased lodger, sir?" said the widow, as she conducted him to the door.

"He has, ma'am," was the reply; and the reverend minister took his leave of Mrs. Smith, from whose mind a considerable load was removed by the suggestion she had received relative to the disposal of the money of her defunct lodger—a suggestion which she now determined to follow to the very letter.

In the mean time the Rattlesnake had been left alone at the mysterious dwelling which she and her terrible paramour inhabited.

Before the Resurrection Man went out, after the call of Mr. Banks, he threw aside his every-day garb, and put on a complete suit of black. He performed the ceremony of his toilet somewhat hurriedly; and the Rattlesnake perceived with the most unfeigned delight that he forgot to transfer the contents of the pockets of his old garments to those of his new ones. At length he went out; and the Rattlesnake instantly commenced a strict examination of the clothes which he had just put off.

There were a few papers and dirty letters, but of those the woman took no notice. Neither did her fingers clutch greedily the three or four sovereigns which were contained in a greasy purse. A bunch of keys—the principal object of her search—rivetted all her attention—engrossed all her interest.

Without a moment's delay, she descended the stairs, and issued from the house. She darted up the narrow alley, paused at the side door, and tried the lock with the different keys. The last of all was the one which opened the door.

The heart of the Rattlesnake beat with joy as she entered the passage, and closed the door carefully behind her.

She first peeped into the front room, and by the faint light that was admitted through the heart-shaped holes in the shutters, she beheld only the implements peculiar to the avocation of a resurrection man; namely, flexible iron rods to sound the depths of graves, and long poles with hooks at the ends to drag up bodies, together with saws, spades, pickaxes, trowels, ropes, skeleton-keys, &c. &c.

The Rattlesnake then entered the back room, which was small, damp, and in a dilapidated condition. The plaster of the walls had given way in several places; and the whole appearance of the chamber seemed to indicate that it had not been inhabited for many years.

A table, a chair, and a cupboard were all the furniture which the room contained. On the table lay the mask, and over the chair hung the cloak in which the Resurrection Man had disguised himself on the preceding night. The basket, which she had seen him use on the same occasion, and which was of the kind that housewives take to market to hold their purchases, lay upon the floor.

The contents and appearance of the room were visible by means of the light admitted through the shutters.

The door of the cupboard was locked, but one of the keys which the Rattlesnake had with her speedily unlocked it. There, however, was nothing either to excite or allay her curiosity—for it was empty.

She now proceeded to examine the chamber more carefully, expecting to find some secret communication with a subterranean excavation; for she was still impressed with the idea that she had heard the steps of the Resurrection Man descend a flight of stairs on the preceding evening; and she was also convinced that the scream she had then heard had proceeded from a greater distance or lower depth than the small back chamber in which she now found herself.

But all her attempts to penetrate this mystery were unavailing; and, fearful that the Resurrection Man might return and detect her proceedings, she hastened away from the ground floor of this strange house.

Carefully locking the doors after her, she succeeded in reaching the upper story and replacing the keys where she had found them, some time ere she heard the steps of the Resurrection Man ascending the staircase.

When he entered the bed-room to change his clothes once more, he found her busily engaged in some domestic occupation; and, as she welcomed him in her usual manner, not a suspicion of her proceedings entered his mind.

"Well," he said, as he assumed his common garb, "I have managed this business. I have played the parson to some purpose; and the old woman has consented to bury the yellow boys along with the old fellow. I shall now sit down and write a letter to a certain Mr. Chichester, which letter you must take to the post yourself. That being done, I can remain quiet until the evening; and then," he added, with a ferocious leer, "*then* for Richard Markham!"

CHAPTER CIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

We must now go back to the preceding day, and introduce our readers to Markham Place, immediately after the Buffer had called upon Richard in the manner already described.

Richard had received him in the library, and had there heard the exciting news of which the Buffer was the bearer.

Dismissing the man to the kitchen to partake of some refreshment, Richard hastened to the parlour, where Mr. Monroe and Ellen were seated.

The past sorrows and anxieties which the young man had experienced were now all forgotten: forgotten also was the dread exposure which he had so recently received at the theatre,—an exposure which had deprived him of the honourable renown earned by his own talent,—an exposure, too, which had induced Ellen to abandon that career wherein she excelled so pre-eminently.

The idea of meeting his well-beloved brother now alone occupied his mind:—the hope of seeing and even succouring the wanderer banished every other consideration.

His cheek, lately so pale, was flushed with a glow of animation, and his eyes glistened with delight, as he rushed into the room where Ellen and her father were seated.

"Eugene is returned—my brother has come back at last!" he exclaimed.

"Your brother!" repeated Ellen, deadly pallor overspreading her countenance.

"Eugene!" cried Mr. Monroe, in a tone of deep interest.

"Yes—Eugene is in London—is returned," answered Richard, not noticing the strange impression which his words had made, and still produced upon Ellen, who now sat incapable of motion in her chair, as if she were suddenly paralyzed: "Eugene is in London! A man has just been to tell me this welcome news; and I am to see my brother to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow evening!" said Mr. Monroe. "And why not now—at once?"

"Alas! my brother is in some difficulty, and dares not appear at the dwelling of his forefathers. I am not aware of the nature of that dilemma, but I am assured that he has need of my help."

"Where are you to meet him?" inquired Monroe, somewhat surprised by the singularity of this announcement.

"At the eastern extremity of London—on the banks of the canal, near some place called Twig Folly."

"And at what hour?" demanded the old man.

"To-morrow night, at ten precisely," was the reply.

"Do you know the man who brought you this message? or have you received a letter?" asked Ellen, who now began to breathe more freely.

"No, I never saw the man before; nor have I any letter. But, surely, you cannot suppose that any one is deceiving me in so cruel a manner?"

"I feel convinced of it," said Ellen, with peculiar emphasis on her words and warmth in her manner.

"No—no—impossible!" cried Markham, unwilling to allow the hope which had a moment ago appeared so bright, to be obscured by the mists of doubt: then, acting upon a sudden impulse, he rang the bell violently.

Whittingham speedily made his appearance.

"The man that I have just sent below," said Richard, hastily, "has come to inform me that my brother is in London—"

"Mister Eugene in London!" ejaculated the old butler, forgetting his gravity, and literally beginning to dance with joy.

"And he has appointed to meet me to-morrow evening in a very distant and lonely part of London," continued Markham. "This circumstance seems suspicious—strange;—at least so Miss Monroe thinks—"

"Nay—I do not *think*, Richard: I am *sure*," exclaimed Ellen, with the same emphasis which had marked her previous declaration.

"At all events, Whittingham," said Markham, "do you return to the kitchen, get into conversation with the man, and then give us your opinion."

The old butler withdrew to execute these orders.

Markham then began to pace the room in an agitated manner.

"I cannot think who could be cruel enough to practise such a vile cheat upon me," he said, "if a cheat it really be. No one would benefit himself by so doing. Besides—the man spoke of the appointment which my brother made when we parted on yonder hill; he spoke of that appointment as a token of his sincerity—as a proof of the veracity of his statement—as an evidence that he came direct from Eugene!"

"Many persons are acquainted with the fact of that appointment," said Ellen. "There is not an individual in this neighbourhood who is ignorant of the meeting that is named for the 10th of July, 1843, between the ash-trees on that hill."

"True!" exclaimed Markham. "The mere mention of that appointment is scarcely a sufficient evidence. And yet my brother might deem that it would prove sufficient: Eugene may not know how suspicious the deceits of this world are calculated to render the mind that has been their victim."

"I have no doubt that Eugene is by this time as well acquainted with the world as you can be, Richard," persisted Ellen; "and I am also convinced that if he were to send such a message to you as this stranger has brought—making an appointment at a strange place and at a very lonely hour—he would have been careful to accompany it with some undeniable token of its genuineness."

"You reason sensibly, Ellen," said Markham; "and yet I am by no means inclined to surrender up the hope that was just now so consoling to my heart—wounded as that heart is by many misfortunes!"

"I reason consistently with your interests," returned Ellen. "Nothing could persuade me that your brother would fail to write a line to you in such a case as this is represented to be."

"What say you, Mr. Monroe?" inquired Richard.

"I am hesitating between the two arguments," answered the old man: "I know not whether to encourage the hope to which you cling—or to suffer myself to be persuaded by the reasoning of Ellen."

At this moment Whittingham returned to the parlour.

"The enwoy-plentipotent-and-hairy is gone," said Whittingham; "and, although he didn't show his credentials, my firm compression is that he was raly the representation of the court he said he come from."

"You questioned him closely?" asked Markham.

"You know, Master Richard, I can put a poser or two now and then; and if this man had been a compostor, I should have circumwented him pretty soon, I can assure you."

"He answered your questions in a straightforward manner, then?" persisted Richard.

"He couldn't have been more straightfor'ard," replied Whittingham. "I'm sure he's a honest, simple-hearted, well-meaning man."

"Then it is decided!" ejaculated Richard: "I will go to this appointment. Who knows in what peril my poor brother may be? who can say from what dangers I may save him? who can explain what powerful motives he may have for the nature of the appointment he has made, and the caution he has adopted in making it? I should be wrong to allow a suspicion to interfere with a duty. Were any thing serious to happen to Eugene, through the want of a friend at this moment, how should I ever after reproach myself? I will not incur such a chance: I will go to-morrow evening to the spot named, and to the hour appointed!"

Whittingham withdrew; and Ellen once more endeavoured to deter Richard from his resolution.

"In the name of God, reflect," she exclaimed, with an earnestness which, had he not been otherwise preoccupied, would have struck him by its peculiarity, for it seemed rather the impassioned expression of a conviction based on indisputable grounds, than a doubt which might be based on truth or error;—"in the name of God, reflect, Richard, ere you endanger your life, perhaps, by going at a auspicious hour to a lonely place. Remember, you have enemies: recollect how nearly you met your death at the hands of *one villain* in the neighbourhood of Bird-Cage Walk—the narrative of which occurrence and your miraculous escape you have so often related to us;—reflect that *that* was not the only occasion on which the same miscreant has sought to injure you—"

"I know to what you allude, Ellen," said Markham, significantly; "and I thank you sincerely for your interest in my behalf. But, believe me, there is no Resurrection Man in the present matter: all is straightforward—I feel convinced of it."

Markham uttered these words in a tone which left no scope for further argument or remonstrance; and Ellen threw herself back in her chair, a prey to reflections of the most painful nature.

At length she retired to her chamber to meditate in secret upon the incident of the morning.

"What can I do," she mused aloud, "to convince Richard Markham that he is nursing a delusion? I tremble lest some enemy should meditate treachery against him. Perhaps even his life may be threatened? Oh! the plots—the perfidies—the villanies which are engendered in this London! But how warn him? how prove to him that he is deceived? Alas! that is impossible; unless, indeed—"

But she shook her head impatiently, as if to renounce as impracticable the idea which had for a moment occupied her mind.

"No," she continued, "that were madness indeed! And yet what can be done? He must not be allowed to rush headlong and blindly into danger—for that danger awaits him, I feel convinced. Perhaps that terrible man, from whose power he once escaped, and who denounced him at the theatre, may be the instigator of all this? And, if such be the fact, then who knows where the atrocity of that miscreant may stop? Murder—cold-blooded, ruthless murder may be the result of this mysterious appointment. And the murder of whom?" said Ellen, a shudder passing, like a cold chill, over her entire frame: "the murder of my benefactor—of the noble-minded, the generous hearted young man who gave us an asylum when all the world forsook us! Oh! no—no—it must not be! I dare not tell him all I know; but I can do somewhat to protect him!"

She smiled, in spite of the unpleasant nature of the emotions that agitated her bosom,—she smiled, because a wild and romantic idea had entered her imagination.

Without further hesitation,—and acting under the sudden impulse of that idea,—she sate down and wrote a short note.

When she had sealed and addressed it, she rang the bell.

In a few moments Marian answered the summons.

"My faithful friend," said Ellen, "I am about to put your goodness to another test. But before I explain what I require of you, I beseech that you will not now endeavour to penetrate my motives. You shall know all the day after to-morrow."

"Speak, Miss; I am always ready to do any thing I can for you," said Marian.

"In the evening," continued Ellen, "you must find a pretence to go out for two or three hours. In the first instance you must call at Mr. Greenwood's house—"

"Mr. Greenwood's?" ejaculated Marian.

"Yes—but your business is not this time with him. On the contrary, he must not know the real motive of your visit, which is to deliver this note into the hands of his Italian valet Filippo. You have never seen Filippo—for he entered the service of Mr. Greenwood

since you called there some months ago. You cannot, however, mistake him. He is a tall, dark man, with long black curling hair. Moreover, he speaks English with a strong foreign accent."

"The description is sufficient, Miss," said Marian; "I shall not be mistaken."

"This note is to be delivered into his hand—and his only," continued Ellen. "Should you meet Mr. Greenwood by accident, you may say, '*I come from Miss Monroe to inform you that your child is well and thriving*.' This will be an excuse; I must leave the rest to you; but I implore you to do all you can to obtain an interview with Filippo."

"I will follow your wishes, Miss, to the utmost of my power," returned Marian.

"And when you know the motives of my present proceeding," said Ellen, "you will be satisfied with the part you have taken in it."

"I do not doubt you, Miss," observed Marian. "Have you seen the dear little baby lately?"

"I saw him yesterday," answered Ellen. "I called at Mr. Wentworth's: the excellent man's wife was nursing my little Richard. I took him in my arms and fondled him; but, alas! he cried bitterly. Of course he does not know me: he will learn to look up to a stranger as his mother! Oh! Marian, that idea pierced like a dagger to my very heart!"

"Cheer up, Miss!" exclaimed Marian, in a kind tone; "better days will come."

"But never the day, Marian," added Ellen, solemnly, "when I can proclaim myself the mother of that child, nor blush to mention its father's name!"

CHAPTER CIV.

FEMALE COURAGE.

HOLYWELL Street was once noted only as a mart for second-hand clothing, and booksellers' shops dealing in indecent prints and volumes. The reputation it thus acquired was not a very creditable one.

Time has, however, included Holywell Street in the clauses of its Reform Bill. Several highly respectable booksellers and publishers have located themselves in the place that once deserved no better denomination than "Rag Fair." The unprincipled venders of demoralizing books and pictures have, with few exceptions, migrated into Wych Street or Drury Lane; and even the two or three that pertinaciously cling to their old temples of infamy in Holywell Street, seem to be aware of the incursions of respectability into that once notorious thoroughfare, and cease to outrage decency by the display of vile obscenities in their windows.

The reputation of Holywell Street has now ceased to be a by-word: it is respectable; and, as a mart for the sale of literary wares, threatens to rival Paternoster Row.

It is curious to observe that, while butchers, tailors, linen-drapers, tallow-manufacturers, and toy-venders, are gradually dislodging the booksellers of Paternoster Row, and thus changing the once exclusive nature of this famous street into one of general features, the booksellers, on the other hand, are gradually ousting the old-clothes dealers of Holywell Street.

As the progress of the American colonist towards the far-west drives before it the aboriginal inhabitants, so do the inroads of the bibliopoles menace the Israelites of Holywell Street with total extinction.

Paternoster Row and Holywell Street are both losing their primitive features: the former is becoming a mart of miscellaneous trades; the latter is rising into a bazaar of booksellers.

Already has Holywell Street progressed far towards this consummation. On the southern side of the thoroughfare scarcely a clothes shop remains; and those on the opposite side wear a dirty and miserably dilapidated appearance. The huge masks, which denote the warehouse where masquerading and fancy-attire may be procured on sale or hire, seem to "grin horribly a ghastly smile," as if they knew that their occupation was all but gone. The red-haired ladies who stand at their doors beneath a canopy of grey trousers with black seats, and blue coats with brown elbows—a distant imitation of Joseph's garment of many colours—seem dispirited and care-worn, and no longer watch, with the delighted eyes of maternal affection, their promising offspring playing in the gutters. Their glances are turned towards the east—a sure sign that they meditate an early migration to the pleasant regions which touch upon the Minories.

Holywell Street is now a thoroughfare which no one can decry on the score of reputation: it is, however, impossible to deny that, were the southern range of houses pulled down, the Strand would reap an immense advantage, and a fine road would be opened from the New Church to Saint Clement Danes.

It was about half-past seven in the evening that Ellen Monroe, dressed in the most simple manner, and enveloped in a large cloak, entered Holywell Street.

Her countenance was pale; but its expression was one of resolution and firmness.

She walked slowly along from the west end of the street towards the eastern extremity, glancing anxiously upon the countenances of those traders who stood in front of the second-hand clothes shops.

At length she beheld a female—one of the identical ladies with red hair above alluded to—standing on the threshold of one of those warehouses.

Ellen looked upwards, and perceived all kinds of articles of male attire suspended over the head of this female, and swinging backwards and forwards, like so many men hanging, upon the shop-front.

Ellen paused—glanced wistfully at the Jewess, and appeared to hesitate.

Her manner was so peculiar, that, although the clothes venders do not usually solicit the custom of females, the Jewess immediately exclaimed in a sharp under-tone, "Sell or buy, ma'am?"

Ellen turned, without another moment's hesitation, into the shop.

"I wish to purchase a complete suit of male attire—for myself," said Miss Monroe. "Serve me quickly—and we shall not dispute about the price."

These last words denoted a customer of precisely the nature that was most agreeable to the Jewess. She accordingly bustled about her, ransacked drawers and cupboards, and spread such a quantity of coats, trousers, and waistcoats, before Ellen, that the young lady was quite bewildered.

"Select me a good suit which you think will fit me," said Miss Monroe, after a moment's hesitation; "and allow me to try it on in a private room."

"Certainly, ma'am," answered the Jewess; and, having looked out a suit, she conducted Ellen up stairs into her own sleeping-apartment.

"And now I require a hat and a pair of boots," said Ellen;—"in a word, every thing suitable to form a complete male disguise. I am going to a masquerade," she added, with a smile.

The Jewess made no reply: it did not concern her, if her customer chose to metamorphose herself, so long as *she* was paid; and she accordingly hastened to supply all the remaining apparel necessary to complete the disguise.

She then left Ellen to dress herself at leisure.

And soon that charming form was clothed in the raiment of the other sex: those delicate feet and ankles were encased in heavy boots; thick blue trousers hampered the limbs lately so supple in the voluptuous dance; a coarse shirt and faded silk waistcoat imprisoned the lovely bosom; a collar and black neckcloth concealed the swan-like neck and dazzling whiteness of the throat; and a capacious frock coat concealed the admirable symmetry of the faultless figure. The hair was then gathered up in a manner which would not betray the sex of the wearer of those coarse habiliments, especially when the disguise was aided by the darkness of the light, and when that luxuriant mass was covered with the broad-brimmed and somewhat slouching hat which the Jewess had provided for the purpose.

Ellen's toilette was thus completed, and she then descended to the shop.

The Jewess—perhaps not altogether unaccustomed to such occurrences—made no comment, and took no impertinent notice of the metamorphosed lady. She contented herself with asking a handsome price for the clothes and accommodation afforded; and Ellen paid the sum without a murmur, merely observing that she should send for her own apparel next day.

Miss Monroe then left the shop, and issued from Holywell Street just as the church clocks in the neighbourhood struck eight.

The reader has, doubtless, seen enough of her character to be well aware that she had acquired a considerable amount of fortitude and self-possession from the various circumstances in which she had been placed: she was not, therefore, now likely to betray any diffidence or timidity as she threaded, in male attire, the crowded streets of the metropolis. She threw into her gait as much assurance as possible; and thus, without exciting any particular notice, she pursued her way towards the eastern districts of the great city.

The weather was cold and damp; but the rain, which had fallen in torrents the day before, had apparently expended its rage for a short interval. A sharp wind, however, swept through the streets; and Ellen pitied the poor shivering, half-naked wretches, whom she saw huddling upon steps, or crouching beneath archways, as she passed along.

Ellen walked rapidly, and having gained Bishopsgate Street, proceeded as far as the terminus of the Eastern Counties Railway.

There she halted, and glanced anxiously around her.

In a few minutes, a tall man, wrapped up in a large cloak, came up to the spot where she was standing.

"Is that you, Filippo?" said Ellen.

"Yes, Miss; I am here in obedience to your commands," returned Mr. Greenwood's Italian valet. "I promised your servant yesterday evening that I would be punctual to the hour—half-past eight—to-night; and I have kept my word."

"I owe you a debt of gratitude, which I never shall be able to repay," said Ellen. "Your generous behaviour towards me on a former occasion emboldened me to write to you when I required a friend. I told you in my note not to be surprised if you should find me disguised in male attire; I moreover requested you to arm yourself with pistols. Have you complied with this desire on my part?"

"I have, Miss," answered Filippo. "Conceiving it to be impossible that you could wish me to aid you in any dishonourable service, I have attended to your commands in every respect. I mentioned to you when we last met that my mission to England is from a lady now enjoying a sovereign rank, and that it is devoted to good and liberal purposes. Under those circumstances, I am ready to assist you in any manner consistent with my own principles and with the real objects of my mission.

"You will this night be the means of rendering an essential service to a fellow-creature," said Ellen, in an impressive tone. "A foul conspiracy against him,—whether to take his life or for other purposes of villany, I know not,—has been devised; and he has blindly fallen into the snare that has been spread for him. At ten o'clock he is to attend an appointment on the banks of the canal at a place called Twig Folly. We must proceed thither: we must watch at a little distance; and, if need be, we must interpose to save him."

"A more simple plan, Miss," said the Italian, "would be to warn this individual of his danger."

"I have done so; but he will not believe that treachery is intended," returned Ellen.

"Then another effectual manner to counteract the designs of villains in such a case is to obtain the assistance of the police."

"No, Filippo; such a proceeding would lead to inquiries and investigations whence would transpire circumstances that must not be made known."

"Miss Monroe, this proceeding on your part is so mysterious, that I hesitate whether to accompany you further," said the Italian.

While thus conversing, they had pursued their way, Ellen being the guide, along Church Street into the Bethnal Green Road.

"Come with me—do not hesitate—I implore you," exclaimed Ellen. "If you persist in penetrating my motives for acting in this strange manner, I will tell you all, rather than you should retreat at a moment when it is too late for me to obtain other succour. And be your resolve as it may," added Ellen, hastily, "nothing shall induce *me* to turn back. Desert me—abandon me if you will, Filippo; but, in the name of every thing sacred, lend me the weapons which you carry with you."

The Italian made no reply for some moments, but continued to walk rapidly along by the side of the disguised lady.

"I will believe, Miss Monroe," he said, at length, "that your motives are excellent; but are you well advised?"

"Listen," exclaimed Ellen. "The individual, whose life we may perhaps this night save, is Richard Markham—the generous young man who has been a son to my father, and a brother to myself."

"I have heard Mr. Greenwood mention his name many times," observed Filippo.

"He believes that he is to meet his brother, from whom he has been for many years separated, this night on the banks of the canal," continued Ellen. "For certain reasons I know most positively that the idea of such an appointment can only be a plot on the part of some enemies of Richard Markham. And yet I dared not communicate those reasons to him—Oh! no," added Ellen, with a shudder, "that was impossible—impossible!"

"I do not seek to penetrate further into your secrets, Miss," said Filippo, struck by the earnestness of the young lady's manner, and naturally inclined to admire the heroism of her character, as developed by the proceeding in which he was now bearing a part.

"And the necessity of keeping those *certain reasons* a profound secret," continued Ellen, "has also prevented me from procuring

the intervention of the police. In the same way, should the result of our present expedition introduce you to the notice of Mr. Markham, it would be necessary for you to retain as a profound secret who you are—how you came to accompany me—and especially your connexion with Mr. Greenwood. Not for worlds must the name of Greenwood be mentioned in the presence of Richard Markham! If it should be necessary to enter into explanations with him, leave that task to me; and contradict nothing that you may hear me state. I have my motives for all I do and all I say—motives so grave, so important, that, did you know them all, you would applaud and not doubt me. And now are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly," returned Filippo: "I will not ask another question, nor hesitate another moment."

"My everlasting gratitude is your due," said Ellen. "And now, one more favour have I to ask."

"Name it," answered the Italian.

"Give me one of your pistols."

"But, Miss Monroe—"

"Pray do not refuse me! I am not a coward; and I must inform you that I learnt to fire a pistol at the theatre."

The Italian handed the young lady one of his loaded weapons.

She concealed it beneath the breast of her coat; and her heart palpitated with pride and satisfaction.

Ellen and the Italian then quickened their pace, and proceeded rapidly towards Globe Town.

CHAPTER CV.

THE COMBAT.

In spite of the suspicions entertained by Mr. Monroe and Ellen concerning the genuineness of the appointment for which Markham was engaged, the young man was too devotedly attached to the memory of his brother not to indulge in the most wild and sanguine hopes.

Thus, as he proceeded to the place of meeting near Twig Folly, he communed with himself in the following manner:—

"If my brother be involved in pecuniary difficulties,—or if he have committed any imprudence, from the results of which money may release him,—how gladly will I dispose of the remainder of my small income—how joyfully will I devote all I possess to aid him! And then, when I have no other resources, I will open the mysterious document which Thomas Armstrong placed in my hands ere he breathed his last; and I feel convinced that I shall at least receive therefrom good advice—if not pecuniary succour—to guide me in future. O Eugene! is it possible that I am now about to meet you once more? On the 10th of July, 1831, did we part on the summit of the hill which overlooks the mansion of our ancestors. This is the 2d of January, 1840. Eight years and a half have now elapsed since the day of our separation. Ah! I know the proud—the haughty—the independent disposition of my brother! Were he prosperous—were he successful in his pursuits, (be those pursuits what they may,) he would not seek me now. He would wait until the accomplishment of the twelve years: he would not seek me until the 10th of July, 1843. *Then* should we compare notes, and ascertain who was the more prosperous! Yes—this would be my brother's mode of conduct. And therefore he is unhappy—he is unfortunate, that he seeks me ere the time be elapsed: he is perhaps poor—in want—who knows? Oh! how sincerely I hope that this is no delusion; that my unfortunate star will not pursue me even unto the point of so terrible a disappointment! No—I feel that this is no deception—that Eugene indeed awaits me. Who could wish to injure *me*? who would desire to take *my* life? who could hope to obtain a treasure by laying a plot to rob *me*? The idea is preposterous! Yes—the appointment is a genuine one: I am about to meet my brother Eugene!"

Such were the meditations of Richard Markham as he proceeded towards the place of appointment. He was considerably before his time; for hope cannot brook delay.

When he reached the banks of the canal, he was struck by the lonely and deserted nature of the spot. The sward was damp and marshy with the late heavy rains: the canal was swollen, and rolled, muddy and dark, between its banks, the pale and sickly moon vainly wooing its bosom to respond to the caresses of its beams by a reflective kiss.

The bank on which Markham now walked backwards and forwards, and which constituted the verge of the region of Globe Town, was higher than the opposite one; and the canal, swollen by the rains, had deluged many parts of that latter shore.

In the place where Markham now found himself, several ditches and sluices had been cut; and these, added to the uneven and swampy nature of the soil, rendered his ramble in that quarter not only unpleasant, but even dangerous.

Nevertheless, Markham continued to pace backwards and forwards on the bank where he expected to meet one who was so dear to him.

He had been at his post about half an hour when footsteps suddenly fell upon his ears.

He stopped, and listened.

The steps approached; and in a few moments he beheld, through the obscurity of the night, a person advancing towards him.

"True to your appointment, sir," said the individual, when he came up to the spot where Richard was standing.

"I told you that I should not fail," answered Markham, who had immediately recognised the voice of the man that had borne him the message making the present appointment. "But what of my brother? will he come? is he near? Speak!"

"He will be here in a few moments," said the man, who, as our readers well know, was none other than the Buffer.

"Are you sure?" demanded Markham. "Why has he sent you first? could he suspect treachery from his own brother?"

"Not a bit of it," replied the Buffer. "Only—but here he comes, sure enow."

Approaching footsteps were heard; and in a minute or two another form emerged from the gloom of night.

Markham's heart palpitated violently.

"Here is your brother, sir," said the Buffer.

"Eugene—dear Eugene!" cried Richard, springing forward to catch his brother in his arms.

"Brother indeed!" muttered the ominous voice of the Resurrection Man; and at the same moment Richard was pinioned from behind by the Buffer, who skilfully wove a cord around his arms, and fastened his elbows together.

"Villains!" ejaculated Richard, struggling with all his might—but vainly, for the Resurrection Man, whose voice he had immediately recognised but too well, threw him violently upon the damp sod.

"Now, my lad," cried the Resurrection Man, "your fate is decided. In a few minutes you'll be at the bottom of the canal, and then —"

He said no more—for at that moment another person appeared upon the scene; and, quick as thought, the Resurrection Man was felled by the butt end of a pistol.

But the instant the miscreant touched the ground, he caught a desperate hold of the person who had so suddenly and unexpectedly appeared upon the spot; and Filippo—for it was he—also rolled on the damp sward.

The Resurrection Man leapt upon him, and caught hold of his throat with such savage violence, that the Italian would have been suffocated in a few moments, had not the flash of a pistol close by the head of the Resurrection Man turned the fortune of the combat.

The pistol so aimed only flashed in the pan; but the sudden glare singed the Resurrection Man's hair, and caused him to abandon his victim and spring upon his feet with an alacrity that resembled a galvanic effect.

The Buffer, alarmed by the first attack on the part of Filippo, had relinquished his hold of the rope that confined Richard's arms; and Markham, encouraged by this sudden and unexpected assistance, disengaged himself from the coil with the rapidity of lightning. He then sprang upon the Buffer, hurled him to the ground, and, placing his knee upon the ruffian's chest, kept him fast in that prostrate condition on the very verge of the canal.

The Resurrection Man, with eagle glance, beheld the situation of affairs. He saw his confederate powerless, and desperate odds leagued against himself—for, in the darkness of the night, he could not observe that one of his opponents was a female in disguise.

The moment that he sprang from the ground, in consequence of the flash of the pistol close by his ear, he cast this comprehensive look over the field of action.

There was no time for hesitation.

Pushing Ellen violently aside, and dashing Filippo furiously back again upon the ground from which he was rising, the Resurrection Man darted upon Richard Markham.

In another moment there was a splash of water: a cry of horror issued from the lips of Ellen; the Resurrection Man shouted "Run! run!"—but neither the young lady nor Filippo thought of interrupting the flight of the miscreants.

"The villains!—they have drowned him!" exclaimed Filippo; and, without an instant's hesitation, he plunged into the canal.

"Brave man!" cried Ellen. "Save him—oh! save him!"

As she uttered these words, she stumbled over the coil of rope which had been used to confine Markham's hands, and which the miscreants had left behind them.

Instantly twining one end round her delicate wrist, she cast the other into the canal; and creeping so far down the bank as nearly to touch the water, she exclaimed, "Here is a rope, Filippo: Richard, try and catch the rope. Speak, Filippo—can you save him? If not, I will myself plunge into the stream—and—"

"He is lost—he is gone!" said Filippo, who was swimming about on the surface of the water as skilfully as if it were his native element.

"Oh, God! do not say that! do not—"

"I see him—I see him, Miss—yonder—down the stream—struggling desperately—"

At that moment a faint cry for help echoed over the bosom of the canal.

Ellen scrambled up the bank, and darted along the margin with the speed of the fawn, dragging the long coil of rope after her.

In a few moments she beheld a black object appear on the surface of the water—then disappear again in an instant.

But Filippo had already gained that part of the stream; and Ellen directed him with her voice to the spot where the object had sunk.

The brave Italian, though well-nigh exhausted, dived fearlessly; and to the infinite joy of Ellen, re-appeared upon the surface, exclaiming, "He is saved—he is saved!"

Supporting Markham's head above the water, Filippo swam to the bank; and, aided by Ellen and the rope, succeeded in landing his burden as well as himself.

Markham was insensible; but Filippo placed his hand upon the young man's breast, and said, "He lives!"

"Heaven be thanked!" ejaculated Ellen, solemnly.

She then chafed his temples; while the Italian rubbed the palms of his hands.

In a few minutes Richard moaned.

The attentions of those who hung over him were redoubled; and Filippo was about to propose to convey him to the nearest dwelling, when he gasped violently, and murmured, "Where am I?"

"Saved!" answered Ellen. "None but friends are near you."

A quarter of an hour had not elapsed from the moment that he was rescued from the water, when he was so far recovered as to sit up on the bank; and all fears on the part of Ellen relative to his complete resuscitation had vanished.

"Ellen—is that you? can this be you? was it your voice that I heard?" he said, in a faint tone: "or is it a vision?"

"It is no vision, Richard—it is indeed Ellen, who owes you so much, and who has been the humble instrument—aided by this brave man—of saving your life."

"And who is this brave man?" asked Markham. "Tell me his name, that I may pour forth my gratitude to him, as well as to you, kind Ellen—my sister!"

"His sister!" murmured Ellen; while an emotion, like an electric shock, agitated her to the very heart's core.

But those words—"his sister!"—were not heard by either Markham or Filippo.

"Do not fatigue yourself by speaking now," said Ellen, after a moment's pause. "Suffice it for the present to tell you that I was afraid of treachery towards you—I had my misgivings—a presentiment of evil haunted me! I owed you so much, that I was determined to watch over your safety—weak and powerless as I am. Hence this strange attire. Fortunately I met this brave man—a total stranger to me—near the spot; and, when I communicated my object to him, he generously offered to bear me company."

"Excellent girl!—generous stranger!" cried Richard; "I owe you my life. Oh! how can I ever express my gratitude?"

"We must not speak on that subject now, sir," said Filippo. "The chief point to be considered is how to get you home."

"And he lives so far from here, too," hastily exclaimed Ellen, laying her hand at the same time, but unseen by Markham, on Filippo's arm.

The Italian took the hint, which was to remind him that he must not seem to know the place of residence, or indeed any other particular concerning the affairs, of Richard Markham.

"Oh! this bitter disappointment—this vile treachery!" cried the young man, whose thoughts were now reflected back to the cause of the perils from which he had just escaped.

"Compose yourself," said Ellen, with peculiar and touching kindness of manner: "compose yourself, Richard; and do not excite yourself by unpleasant reflections. Let us rather think how we are to convey you home. There is no vehicle to be obtained in this neighbourhood."

"I feel myself able to walk," said Markham,—"at least as far as the nearest place where we can procure conveyance."

"Wrap yourself up in my cloak," cried Filippo. "It is close at hand—I took it off and concealed it under yonder tree, before the conflict began."

Filippo hastened to fetch the cloak, in which Markham enveloped himself.

Then, leaning on the arms of those to whom he was indebted for his rescue from the murderous designs of his enemies, he walked slowly away from the spot where he had hoped to meet a brother, but where he had encountered fiends in human shape.

In this manner they traversed Globe Town, and reached Bethnal Green New Church. In that neighbourhood they procured a cab, into which Markham and Ellen stepped.

"I shall now take leave of you, sir," said Filippo; "and I most sincerely hope that you will soon recover from the effects of this night's maltreatment."

"Generous man!" cried Markham, "tell me your name that I may—"

But Filippo had already disappeared.

"How strange!" said Markham. "That noble-hearted foreigner makes light of his own good deeds. He has left me no opportunity of expressing my gratitude more fully than by mere words."

"He is evidently a man of lofty feelings and generous disposition," observed Ellen calmly. "It was fortunate that I happened to encounter him in that lonely spot."

She then informed the driver whither he was to proceed; and the vehicle rolled quickly away.

CHAPTER CVI.

THE GRAVE-DIGGER.

THREE days after the events related in the preceding chapter,—and at that hour in the cold wintry morning when the dawn breaks in fitful gleams through a dense atmosphere of a dark neutral dye,—a labouring-man, with a shovel and pickaxe upon his shoulder, entered one of the cemeteries in the immediate vicinity of Globe Lane.

This cemetery was only partly enclosed by houses; on the remaining sides there was a low wall.

The soil was damp; and a nauseous odour, emanating from it, impregnated the air. When the sun lay for several days upon the place, even in the depth of winter,—and invariably throughout the summer,—the stench was so intolerable that not a dwelling in the neighbourhood was seen with a window open. Nevertheless, that sickly, fetid odour penetrated into every house, and every room, and every inhabited nook or corner, in that vicinity; and the clothes of the poor inmates smelt, and their food tasted, of the damp grave!

The cemetery was crowded with the remains of mortality. The proprietors of the ground had only one aim in view—namely, to crowd the greatest possible quantity of corpses into the smallest space. But even this economy of room did not prevent the place from being so filled with the dead, that in a given quantity of the soil it was difficult to say whether earth or decayed human remains predominated. Still the cemetery was kept open for interments; and when there was no room for a new-comer, some recently-buried tenant of a grave was exhumed to afford the required space.

In one part of the ground was a rude brick-building, denominated a Bone-House. This hovel was provided with a large fire-place; and seldom did a day pass without smoke being seen to issue from the chimney. On those occasions,—when the furnace was lighted,—the stench from the cemetery was always more powerful than at other times.

Some of the poor inhabitants of the adjoining houses had remonstrated with the parochial authorities on the subject of this nuisance being tolerated; but the only reply the applicants could obtain was, "Well, prefer an indictment at the sessions, if you don't like it!"

The idea of men in the receipt of eight or ten shillings a week preferring an indictment! Such a process is only accessible to those possessed of ample means; for the legislature has purposely rendered law,—that is, the power of obtaining justice, enforcing rights, or suppressing nuisances,—a luxury attainable only by money. The poor, indeed! who ever thought of legislating for the poor? Legislate *against* them, and it is all well and good: heap statute upon statute—pile act upon act—accumulate measure upon measure—encumber the most simple forms with the most intricate technicalities—diversify readings and expand in verbiage until the sense becomes unintelligible—convert the whole legal scheme into a cunning web, so that the poor man cannot walk three steps without entangling his foot in one of those meshes of whose very existence he was previously unaware, and whose nature he cannot comprehend even when involved therein;—do all this, and you are a wise and sound statesman; for this is legislating *against* the poor—and who, we repeat, would ever think of legislating *for* them?

But to continue.

The grave-digger entered the cemetery, and cast a glance around him.

That glance well expressed the man's thoughts; for he mentally asked himself, "Whose grave must I disturb now to make room for the new one?"

At length he advanced towards a particular spot, considered it for a moment, and then struck his spade into the soil, as much as to say, "This will do."

The place where he had now halted was only a few yards from the Bone-House. Taking a key from his pocket, he proceeded to unlock the door of that building.

Entering the Bone-House he took from amongst a quantity of implements in one corner, a long flexible iron rod similar to those which we have already described as being used by the body-snatchers.

Returning to the grave, he thrust the rod into the ground. It met with a little resistance from some substance a little harder than the soil; but the man pushed it downwards with a strong arm; and it sank at least twelve feet into the ground.

Satisfied with this essay of the nature of the spot, the grave-digger drew back the rod; and from the deep but narrow aperture thus formed, issued a stench more pestiferous than that which ever came from the lowest knacker's yard.

The man retreated rapidly to the Bone-House; that odour was too powerful even for one who had passed the greater portion of his life in that very grave-yard.

He now proceeded to light a fire in the Bone-House; and when he saw the huge logs which he heaped on the grate, blazing brightly, he covered them with coke. The current of air from the open door fanned the flames, which roared up the chimney; and the grave-digger felt invigorated and cheered by the genial warmth that issued from the ample grate.

After lingering for a few minutes in the Bone-House, the grave-digger returned to the spot which he had previously marked for excavation.

Baring his brawny arms to the very shoulders, he now set himself vigorously to work to dig the grave which was to receive a new-comer that afternoon.

Throwing the earth up on either side, he had digged to a depth of about two feet, when his spade encountered a coffin. He immediately took his pickaxe, broke the coffin to pieces, and then separated with his shovel the pieces of wood and the human bones

from the damp earth. The coffin was already so soft with decay that the iron rod had penetrated through it without much difficulty; and it therefore required but little exertion to break it up altogether.

But the odour which came from the grave was now of the most nauseating kind—fetid, sickly, pestiferous—making the atmosphere heavy, and the human breath thick and clammy, as it were—and causing even that experienced grave-digger to retch as if he were about to vomit.

Leaping from the grave, he began to busy himself in conveying the pieces of the broken coffin and the putrid remains of mortality into the Bone-House, where he heaped them pell-mell upon the fire.

The flesh had not completely decayed all away from the bones; a thick, black, fatty-looking substance still covered those human relics; and the fire was thus fed with a material which made the flames roar and play half up the chimney.

And from the summit of that chimney came a smoke—thick, dense, and dark, like the smoke of a gasometer or a manufactory, but bearing on its sable wing the odour of a pestilence.

The man returned to the grave, and was about to resume his labour, when his eyes caught sight of a black object, almost embedded in the damp clay heaped up by the side. He turned it over with his spade: it was the upper part of the skull, with the long, dark hair of a woman still remaining attached to it. The grave-digger coolly took up the relic by that long hair which perhaps had once been a valued ornament; and, carrying it in this manner into the Bone-House, threw it upon the fire. The hair hissed for a moment as it burnt, for it was damp and clogged with clay; then the voracious flames licked up the thin coat of blackened flesh which had still remained on the skull; and lastly devoured the bone itself.

The grave-digger returned to his toils; and at a depth of scarcely one foot below the coffin thus exhumed and burnt, his shovel was again impeded for a moment—and by another coffin!

Once more was the pickaxe put into requisition: a second coffin was broken up; another decomposing, but not entirely decomposed, corpse was hacked, and hewed, and rent to pieces by the merciless implement which was wielded by a merciless arm;—and in a few moments, the fire in the Bone-House burnt cheerfully once more, the mouth of the chimney vomiting forth its dense and pest-bearing breath, the volume of which was from time to time lighted with sparks and flakes of fire.

Thus was it that this grave-digger disposed of the old tenants of the cemetery in order to make room for new ones.

And then fond, surviving relations and friends speak of the *last home* and the *quiet resting-place* of the deceased: they talk with affectionate reverence of those who *sleep in the grave*, and they grow pathetic in their eulogies of the *tranquil slumber of the tomb*!

Poor deluded creatures! While they are thus engaged in innocent discourse,—a discourse that affords them solace when they ponder upon the loss which they have sustained,—the *last home* is invaded—the *quiet resting-place* is rudely awakened with sacrilegious echoes—the *sleep of the grave* is disturbed by the thunder of a pickaxe—and the corpse is snatched from the *tranquil slumber of the tomb* to be cast into the all-devouring furnace of the Bone-House.

The grave-digger proceeded in his task; and a third coffin was speedily encountered. Each successive one was more decayed than that which had preceded it; and thus the labour of breaking them up diminished in severity.

But the destination of one and all was the same—the fire of the Bone-House.

No wonder that the cemetery continued to receive so many fresh tenants, although the neighbours knew that it must be full:—no wonder that the stench was always more pestiferous when the furnace of the Bone-House was lighted!

And that man—that grave-digger performed his task—his odious task—without compunction, and without remorse: he was fulfilling the commands of his employers—his employers were his superiors—and "surely his superiors must know what was right and what was wrong!"

And so the grave-digger worked and toiled—and the fire in the Bone-House burnt cheerfully—and the dark, thick smoke was borne over the whole neighbourhood, like a plague-cloud.

Two hours had passed away since the man had commenced his work; and he now felt hungry.

Retiring to the Bone-House, he took a coffee-pot from the shelf, and proceeded to make some coffee, the material for which was in a cupboard in a corner of the building. Water he took from a large pitcher, also kept in that foul place; and bread he had brought with him in his pockets.

He drew a stool close to the fire; and, when the coffee boiled, commenced his meal.

The liquid cheered and refreshed him; but he never once recollected that it had been heated by flames fed with human flesh and bones!

While he was thus occupied, he heard footsteps approaching the Bone-House; and in a few moments Mr. Banks, the undertaker, appeared upon the threshold.

"Mornin', sir," said the grave-digger. "Come to have a look at the size of the grave, s'pose? You've no call to be afeard; I'll be bound to make it big enow."

"I hope it won't be a very deep one, Jones," returned the undertaker. "Somehow or another the friends of the blessed defunct are awerse to a deep grave."

"My orders is to dig down sixteen feet and shore up the sides as I deepens," said Jones. "Don't you see that I shall throw the earth on wery light, so that it won't take scarcely no trouble to shovel it out agin; 'cos the next seven as comes to this ground must all go into that there grave."

"Sixteen feet!" ejaculated the undertaker, in dismay. "It will never do, Jones. The friends of the dear deceased wouldn't sleep quiet in their beds if they thought he had to sleep so deep in his'n. It won't do, Jones—it won't do."

"My orders is sich from the proprietors, sir," answered the grave-digger, munching and drinking at intervals with considerable calmness.

"Now I tell you what it is, Jones," continued the undertaker, after a moment's pause, "not another grave will I ever order in this ground, and not another carkiss that I undertake shall come here, unless you choose to comply with my wishes concerning this blessed old defunct."

"Well, Mr. Banks, there isn't a gen'leman wot undertakes in all Globe Town, or from Bonner's Fields down to Mile End Gate, that I'd sooner obleege than yourself," said Jones, the grave-digger; "but if so be I transgresses my orders—"

"Who will know it?" interrupted Banks. "You have whole and sole charge of the ground; and it can't be often that the proprietors come to trouble you."

"Well, sir, there is summut in that—"

"And then, instead of five shillings for yourself, I should not hesitate to make it ten—"

"That's business, Mr. Banks. How deep must the grave be?"

"How deep is it already?"

"A matter of nine feet, sir," said Jones.

"Then not another hinch must you move," cried the undertaker, emphatically; "and here's the ten bob as an earnest."

Mr. Banks accordingly counted ten shillings into the hands of the grave-digger.

"When's the funeral a-coming, sir?" asked Jones, after a pause.

"At two precisely," replied Mr. Banks.

"Rale parson, or von of your men as usual?" continued the grave-digger, inquiringly.

"Oh, a friend of mine—a wery pious, savoury, soul-loving wessel, Jones—a man that it'll do your heart good to hear. But, I say, Jones," added the undertaker, "you're getting uncommon full here."

"Yes, full enow, sir; but I makes room."

"I see you do," said Banks, glancing towards the fire: "what a offensive smell it makes."

"And would you believe that I can scarcely support it myself sometimes, Mr. Banks?" returned Jones. "But, arter all, our ground isn't so bad as some others in London."

"I know it isn't," observed the undertaker.

"Now ain't it a odd thing, sir," continued the grave-digger, "that persons which dwells up in decent neighbourhoods like, and seems exceedin' proud of their fine houses and handsome shops, shouldn't notice the foul air that comes from places only hid by a low wail or a thin paling?"

"It is indeed odd enough," said Mr. Banks.

"Well, I knows the diggers in some o' the yards more west," continued Jones, "and I've heerd from them over and over agin that they pursues just the wery same course as we does here—has a Bone-House or some such conwenient place, and burns the coffins and bones that is turned up."

"I suppose it is necessary, Jones?" observed Mr. Banks.

"Necessary, sir? in course it be," exclaimed the grave-digger. "On'y fancy wot a lot of burials takes place every year in London; and room must be made for 'em somehow or other."

"Ah! I know something about that," said the undertaker. "Calkilations have been made which proves that the average life of us poor weak human creeturs is thirty-five years; so, if London contains a million and a half of people, a million and a half of persons dies, and is buried in the course of every thirty-five years. Isn't that a fine thing for them that's in the undertaking line? 'cause it's quite clear that there's a million and a half of funerals in every thirty-five years in this blessed city."

"And a million and a half of graves or waults rekvired," said Jones. "Well, then, who the deuce can blame us for burning up the old 'uns to make room for the new 'uns?"

"Who, indeed?" echoed Mr. Banks. "T'other day I had an undertaking, which was buried in Enon Chapel, Saint Clement's Lane, —down there by Lincoln's Inn, you know. The chapel's surrounded by houses, all okkipied by poor people, and the stench is horrid. The fact is, that the chapel's divided into two storeys: the upper one is the preaching place; and the underneath one is the burial place. There's only a common boarded floor to separate 'em. You go down by a trap-door in the floor; and pits is dug below for the coffins. Why, at one end the place is so full, that the coffins is piled up till they touch the ceiling—that is, the floor of the chapel itself, and there's only a few inches of earth over 'em. The common sewer runs through the place; so, what with that and the coffins and carkisses, it's a nice hole."

"Wuss than this?" said Jones.

"Of course it is," returned Banks; "'cause at all ewents this *is* out in the open air, while t'other's shut up and close. But I'll tell you what it is, Jones," continued the undertaker, sinking his voice as if he were afraid of being overheard by a stranger, "the people that lives in that densely-populated quarter about Saint Clement's Lane, exists in the midst of a pestilence. Why they breathe nothing but the putrid stench of the Enon burial-place, the Green Ground in Portugal Street, and the Alms-House burying ground down at the bottom of the Lane."

"All that'll breed a plague von o' these days in the werry middle of London," observed Jones.

"Not a doubt of it," said the undertaker. "But I haven't done yet all I had to say about that quarter. Wery soon after a burial takes place at Enon Chapel, a queer-looking, long, narrow, black fly crawls out of the coffin. It is a production of the putrefaction of the dead body. But what do you think? Next season this fly is succeeded by another kind of insect just like the common bug, and with wings. The children that go to Sunday-school at the Chapel calls 'em '*body bugs*.' Them insects is seen all through the summer flying or crawling about the Chapel. All the houses that overlooks the Chapel is infested with rats; and if a poor creetur only hangs a bit of meat

out of his window in the summer time, in a few hours it grows putrid."

"Well, Mr. Banks, sir," said Jones, after reflecting profoundly for some moments, "it's wery lucky that you ain't one o' them chaps which writes books and nonsense."

"Why so, Jones?"

"'Cos if you was to print all that you've been tellin' me, you'd make the fortunes of them new cemetries that's opened all round London, and the consekvence would be that the grounds *in* London would have to shut up shop."

"Very true, Jones. But what I'm saying to you now is only in confidence, and by way of chat. Why, do you know that the people round about the burying grounds in London—this one as well as any other—have seen the walls of their rooms covered at times with a sort of thick fatty fluid, which produces a smell that's quite horrid! Look at that burying place in Drury Lane. It's so full of blessed carkisses, that the ground is level with the first-floor windows of the houses round it."

"Well, it's a happy thing to know that the world don't trouble themselves with these here matters," said Jones. "Thank God! in my ground I clears and clears away, coffins and bodies both alike, as quick as I turns 'em up. Lord! what a sight of coffin nails I sells every month to the marine-store dealers; and yet people passes by them shops and sees second-hand coffin furniture put out for sale, never thinks of how it got there, and where it come from."

"Of course they don't," cried Banks. "What the devil do you think would become of a many trades if people always wondered, and wondered how they supported theirselves?"

"You speaks like a book, Mr. Banks, sir," said Jones. "Arter all, I've often thought wot a fool I am not to sell the coffin-wood for fuel, as most other grave-diggers does in grounds that's obleeged to be cleared of the old 'uns to make room for the new 'uns. But, I say, Mr. Banks, sir, I've often been going to ask you a question about summut, and I've *always* forgot it; but talkin' of these things puts me in mind of it. What's the reason, sir, that gen'lemen in the undertaking line wery often bores holes right through the coffins?"

"That's what we call '*tapping the coffin*,' Jones," answered Mr. Banks; "and we do it whenever a body's going to remain at home two or three days with the coffin-lid screwed down, before the funeral takes place. Poor people generally buries on Sunday: well, p'raps the coffin's took home on Wednesday or Thursday, and then the body's put in and the lid's screwed tight down at once to save trouble when Sunday comes. Then we tap the coffin to let out the gas; cause there *is* a gas formed by the decomposition of dead bodies."[81]

"Well, all that's a cut above me," said Jones. "And now I must get back to work—"

"Not at *that* grave, mind," interrupted the undertaker. "It musn't be another hinch deeper."

"Not a bit, sir—I ain't a goin' to touch it: but I've got another place to open; so here goes."

With these words the grave-digger rose from his seat, and walked slowly out of the Bone-House.

"At two o'clock, Jones, I shall be here with the funeral," said Mr. Banks.

"Wery good, sir," returned Jones.

The undertaker then left the burial-ground; and the grave-digger proceeded to open another pit.

CHAPTER CVII.

A DISCOVERY.

At two o'clock precisely the funeral entered the cemetery.

Four villanous-looking fellows supported a common coffin, over which was thrown a scanty pall, full of holes, and so ragged at the edges that it seemed as if it were embellished with a fringe.

Mr. Banks, with a countenance expressing only a moderate degree of grief, attended as a mourner, accompanied by the surgeon and the Buffer. The truth is that Mr. Banks had a graduated scale of funeral expressions of countenance. When he was uncommonly well paid, his physiognomy denoted a grief more poignant than that of even the nearest relatives of the deceased: when he was indifferently paid, as he considered himself to be in the present case, he could not afford tears, although he was not so economical as to dispense with a white pocket-handkerchief.

In front of the procession walked the Resurrection Man, clad in a surplice of dingy hue, and holding an enormous prayer-book in his hand. This miscreant performed one of the most holy—one of the most sacred of religious rites!

Start not, gentle reader! This is no exaggeration—no extravagance on our part. In all the poor districts in London, the undertakers have their own men to solemnise the burial rites of those who die in poverty, or who have no friends to superintend their passage to the grave.

The Resurrection Man,—a villain stained with every crime—a murderer of the blackest dye—a wretch whose chief pursuit was the violation of the tomb,—the Resurrection Man read the funeral service over *the unknown* who was now consigned to the grave.

The ceremony ended; and Jones hastened to throw the earth back again into the grave.

The surgeon exchanged a few words with the Resurrection Man, and then departed towards his home.

Mr. Banks and the Buffer accompanied the Resurrection Man to his own abode, where they found a copious repast ready to be served up to them by the Rattlesnake. The Buffer's wife was also there; and the party sat down with a determination to enjoy themselves.

To accomplish this most desirable aim there were ample means. A huge round of beef smoked upon the board, flanked with sundry pots of porter; and on a side-table stood divers bottles of "Booth's best."

"Well," said Mr. Banks, "the worst part now is over. We have got the body under ground—"

"And we must soon get it up again," added the Resurrection Man drily. "You are sure the old woman put the money in the coffin?"

"I see her do it," answered the undertaker. "She wrapped it up in a old stocking which belonged to the blessed defunct—"

"Blessed defunct indeed!" said the Rattlesnake, with a coarse laugh.

"You see, ma'am, I can't divest myself of my professional lingo," observed Mr. Banks. "It comes natural to me now. But as I was a saying, I see the old woman wrap the thirty-one quids up in the toe of a stocking, and put it on his breast—"

"On the shroud, or underneath?" demanded the Resurrection Man eagerly.

"Underneath," replied Banks: "I took good care of that. I knowed very well that you'd want to draw the body up by the head, and that the money must be so placed as to come along with it."

"Of course," said the Buffer; "or else we should have to dig out all the earth, and break open the lid of the coffin; and that takes twice as long as to do the job t' other way."

"At what time is the sawbones coming down to the grave-yard?" asked Banks.

"He isn't coming at all," returned the Resurrection Man: "but I promised that we would be at his place at half-past one o'clock to-night."

"Too early!" exclaimed the Buffer. "We can't think of beginning work 'afore twelve. The place ain't quiet till then."

"Well, and an hour will do the business," said the Resurrection Man. "Besides, the saw-bones will set up for us. Now then, Meg, clear away, and let's have the blue ruin and hot water. I must just write a short note to a gentleman with whom I have a little business of a private nature; and you can run and take it to the post presently."

The Resurrection Man seated himself at a little side-table, and penned a hasty letter, which he folded, sealed, and addressed to "Arthur Chichester, Esq., *Cambridge Heath, near Hackney*."

Margaret Flathers took it to the post-office, which was in the immediate neighbourhood.

On her return, the Resurrection Man said, "Now you and Moll try your hands at some punch,—and make it pretty stiff too—just as you like it yourselves."

This command was obeyed; and the three men betook themselves to their pipes, while the women set to work to brew a mighty jorum of gin-punch in an earthenware pitcher that held about a gallon and a half. The potent beverage was speedily served up; and the conversation grew animated. Even the moroseness of the Resurrection Man partially gave way before the exhilarating fluid; and he narrated a variety of incidents connected with the pursuits of his criminal career.

Then the women sang songs, and Mr. Banks told a number of anecdotes showing how he was enabled to undertake funerals at a cheaper rate than many of his competitors, because he had always taken care to league himself with body-snatchers, to whom he gave

information of a nature serviceable to them, and for which they were well contented to pay a handsome price. Thus, whenever he was intrusted with the interment of a corpse which he fancied would make a "good subject," he communicated with his friends the resurrectionists, and in a night or two the body was exhumed for the benefit of some enterprising surgeon.

In this manner the time slipped away;—hour after hour passed; supper was served up; "another glass, and another pipe," was the order of the evening; and although these three men sate drinking and smoking to an immoderate degree, they rose from their chairs, at half-past eleven o'clock, but little the worse for their debauch.

The Resurrection Man filled a flask with pure gin, and consigned it to his pocket.

"We must now be off," he said. "You, Banks, can go home and get the cart ready: the Buffer and me will go our way."

"At what time shall I come with the cart?" demanded the undertaker.

"At a quarter past one to a second—neither more nor less," answered Tidkins.

Banks then took his departure.

"Are you going to stay here with Meg, or what?" asked the Buffer of his wife.

"I shall go to bed," said the Rattlesnake hastily. "Tony can take the key with him."

"Then I shall be off home," observed Moll. "Besides, Mrs. Smith may think it odd if we both remain out so late."

The Buffer's wife accordingly took her leave.

"Now come, Jack," said the Resurrection Man. "We have no time to lose. There's the tools to get out."

The two men descended the stairs, and issued from the house. They hastened up the little alley: the Resurrection Man opened the door of the ground-floor rooms; and they entered that part of the house together.

"Bustle about," said Tidkins, when they found themselves in the front room; and having lighted a candle, he hastily gathered together the implements which they required.

Laden with the tools, the two men were about to leave the room, when the Buffer suddenly exclaimed, "What the devil was that? I could have sworn I heard some one moaning."

"Nonsense," said the Resurrection Man; but, as he spoke, he observed by the glare of the candle, that the countenance of his companion had suddenly become ashy pale.

"Well, I never was more deceived in my life," observed the Buffer.

"You certainly never was," answered the Resurrection Man: then, hastily extinguishing the light, he pushed the Buffer into the alley, and locked the door carefully behind himself.

The two body-snatchers then proceeded to the scene of their midnight labour.

We must take leave of them for a short space, and follow the movements of the Rattlesnake.

It was not without an object that this woman had got rid of the company of the Buffer's wife, by declaring that she was about to retire to rest.

She permitted ten minutes to elapse after the Resurrection Man and his companion had left the room; then, deeming that sufficient time had been allowed for them to provide themselves with the implements necessary for their night's work, she started from her chair, involuntarily exclaiming aloud, "Now for the great secret!"

From an obscure corner of a shelf in the bed-room she drew forth a bunch of skeleton keys, which she had procured on the preceding day.

She then provided herself with a dark-lantern, and descended to the alley.

In five minutes she lighted upon a key, after many vain attempts with the others, which turned in the lock. The door opened, and she entered the ground floor.

Having closed the door, she immediately proceeded into the back room, the appearance of which was the same as when she last visited it. The mysterious cloak and mask were there; but in the cupboard, which was before empty, were now a loaf and a bottle of water.

"Then there *is* a human being concealed somewhere hereabouts!" she said to herself: "or else why that food! And it must have been the supply of bread and water that I saw *him* put into his basket the other night."

She listened; but no sound fell upon her ear. Then she carefully examined the room, to discover any trap-door or secret means of communication with a dungeon or subterranean place. She knew, by the situation of the house in respect to those on either side of it, that there could be no inner room level with the ground-floor; she therefore felt convinced that if there were any secret chamber or cell connected with the premises, it must be underneath.

She scrutinized every inch of the floor, and could perceive no signs of a trap-door. The boards were all firm and tight. She advanced towards the chimney, which was divested of its grate; and suddenly she felt the hearth-stone move with a slight oscillation beneath her feet.

Her countenance became animated with joy; she felt convinced that her perseverance in examining that room was about to be rewarded.

She placed the lantern upon the floor, and endeavoured to raise the stone; but it seemed fixed in its setting, although it trembled as she touched it.

Still she was not disheartened. She scrutinized the boards in the immediate vicinity of the stone; but her search was unavailing. No evidence of a concealed lock—no trace of a secret spring met her eyes. Yet she was confident that she was on the right scent. As she turned herself round, while crawling upon her hands and knees the better to pursue her examination, her rustling silk dress disturbed a portion of the masonry in the chimney, where a grate had once been fixed.

A brick fell out.

The heart of the Rattlesnake now beat quickly.

She approached the lantern to the cavity left by the dislodged brick; and at the bottom of the recess she espied a small iron ring.

She pulled it without hesitation; the ring yielded to her touch, and drew out a thick wire to the distance of nearly a foot.

The Rattlesnake now tried once more to raise the stone, and succeeded. The stone was fixed at one end with stout iron hinges to one of the beams that supported the floor, and thus opened like a trap-door.

When raised, it disclosed a narrow flight of stone steps, at the bottom of which the most perfect obscurity reigned.

The Rattlesnake now paused—in alarm.

She longed to penetrate into those mysterious depths—she panted to dive into that subterranean darkness; but she was afraid.

All those terrible reminiscences which were associated with her knowledge of the Resurrection Man, rushed to her mind; and she trembled to descend into the vault at her feet, for fear she should never return.

These terrors were too much for her. She, moreover, recalled to mind that nearly an hour had now elapsed since the Resurrection Man and the Buffer had departed; and she knew not how speedily they might conclude their task. Besides, some unforeseen accident or sudden interruption might compel them to beat a retreat homewards; and she knew full well that if she were discovered *there*, death would be her portion.

She accordingly determined to postpone any further examination into the mysteries of that house until some further occasion.

Having closed the stone trap-door and replaced the brick in the wall of the chimney, she hastened back to the upper floor, where she speedily retired to bed.

We may as well observe that during the time she was in the lower room, no sound of a human tongue met her ears. But perhaps the victim slept!

CHAPTER CVIII.
THE EXHUMATION.

THE night was fine—frosty—and bright with the lustre of a lovely moon. Even the chimneys and gables of the squalid houses of Globe Town appeared to bathe their heads in that flood of silver light.

The Resurrection Man and the Buffer pursued their way towards the cemetery. For some minutes they preserved a profound silence: at length the Buffer exclaimed, "I only hope, Tony, that this business won't turn out as bad as the job with young Markham three nights ago."

"Why should it?" demanded the Resurrection Man, in a gruff tone.

"Well, I don't know why," answered the Buffer. "P'rhaps, after all, it was just as well that feller escaped as he did. We might have swung for it."

"Escape!" muttered the Resurrection Man, grinding his teeth savagely. "Yes—he did escape *then*; but I haven't done with him yet. He shall not get off so easy another time."

"I wonder who those chaps was that come up so sudden?" observed the Buffer, after a pause.

"Friends of his, no doubt," answered Tidkins. "Most likely he suspected a trap, or thought he would be on the right side. But the night was so plaguy dark, and the whole thing was so sudden, it was impossible to form an idea of who the two strangers might be."

"One on 'em was precious strong, I know," said the Buffer. "But, for my part, I think you'd better leave the young feller alone in future. It's no good standing the chance of getting scragged for mere wengeance. I can't understand that sort of thing. If you like to crack his crib for him and hive the swag, I'm your man; but I'll have no more of a business that's all danger and no profit."

"Well, well, as you like," said the Resurrection Man, impatiently. "Here we are; so look alive."

They were now under the wall of the cemetery.

The Buffer clambered to the top of the wall, which was not very high; and the Resurrection Man handed him the implements and tools, which he dropped cautiously upon the ground inside the enclosure.

He then helped his companion upon the wall; and in another moment they stood together within the cemetery.

"Are you sure you can find the way to the right grave?" demanded the Buffer in a whisper.

"Don't be afraid," was the reply: "I could go straight up to it blindfold."

They then shouldered their implements, and the Resurrection Man led the way to the spot where Mrs. Smith's anonymous lodger had been buried.

"I'm afeard the ground's precious hard," observed the Buffer, when he and his companion had satisfied themselves by a cautious glance around that no one was watching their movements.

The eyes of these men had become so habituated to the obscurity of night, in consequence of the frequency with which they pursued their avocations during the darkness which cradled others to rest, that they were possessed of the visual acuteness generally ascribed to the cat.

"We'll soon turn it up, let it be as hard as it will," said the Resurrection Man, in answer to his comrade's remark.

Then, suiting the action to the word, he began his operations in the following manner.

He measured a distance of five paces from the head of the grave. At the point thus marked he took a long iron rod and drove it in an oblique direction through the ground towards one end of the coffin. So accurate were his calculations relative to the precise spot in which the coffin was embedded in the earth, that the iron rod struck against it the very first time he thus sounded the soil.

"All right," he whispered to the Buffer.

He then took a spade and began to break up the earth just at that spot where the end of the iron rod peeped out of the ground.

"Not so hard as you thought," he observed. "The fact is, the whole burial-place is so mixed up with human remains, that the clay is too greasy to freeze very easy."

"I s'pose that's it," said the Buffer.

The Resurrection Man worked for about ten minutes with a skill and an effect that would have astonished even Jones the grave-digger himself, had he been there to see. He then resigned the spade to the Buffer, who took his turn with equal ardour and ability.

When *his* ten minutes elapsed, the resurrectionists regaled themselves each with a dram from Tidkins' flask; and this individual then applied himself once more to the work in hand. When he was wearied, the Buffer relieved him; and thus did they fairly divide the toil until the excavation of the ground was completed.

This portion of the task was finished in about forty minutes. An oblique channel, about ten feet long, and three feet square at the mouth, and decreasing only in length, as it verged towards the head of the coffin at the bottom, was now formed.

The Resurrection Man provided himself with a stout chisel, the handle of which was covered with leather, and with a mallet, the ends of which were also protected with pieces of the same material. Thus the former instrument when struck by the latter emitted but little noise.

He then descended into the channel which terminated at the very head of the coffin.

Breaking away the soil that lay upon that end of the coffin, he inserted the chisel into the joints of the wood, and in a very few moments knocked off the board that closed the coffin at that extremity.

The wood-work of the head of the shell was also removed with ease—for Banks had purposely nailed those parts of the two cases very slightly together.

The Resurrection Man next handed up the tools to his companion, who threw him down a strong cord.

The end of this rope was then fastened under the armpits of the corpse as it lay in its coffin.

This being done, the Buffer helped the Resurrection Man out of the hole.

"So far, so good," said Tidkins: "it must be close upon one o'clock. We have got a quarter of an hour left—and that's plenty of time to do all that's yet to be done."

The two men then took the rope between them, and drew the corpse gently out of its coffin—up the slope of the channel—and landed it safely on the ground at a little distance from the mouth of the excavation.

The moon fell upon the pale features of the dead—those features which were still as unchanged, save in colour, as if they had never come in contact with a shroud—nor belonged to a body that had been swathed in a winding-sheet!

The contrast formed by the white figure and the black soil on which it was stretched, would have struck terror to the heart of any one save a resurrectionist.

Indeed, the moment the corpse was thus dragged forth from its grave, the Resurrection Man thrust his hand into its breast, and felt for the gold.

It was there—wrapped up as the undertaker had described.

"The blunt is all safe, Jack," said the Resurrection Man; and he secured the coin about his person.

They then applied themselves vigorously to shovel back the earth; but, when they had filled up the excavation, a considerable quantity of the soil still remained to dispose of, it being impossible, in spite of stamping down, to condense the earth into the same space from which it was originally taken.

They therefore filled two sacks with the surplus soil, and proceeded to empty them in different parts of the ground.

Their task was so far accomplished, when they heard the low rumble of wheels in the lane outside the cemetery.

To bundle the corpse neck and heels into a sack, and gather up their implements, was the work of only a few moments. They then conveyed their burdens between them to the wall overlooking the lane, where the well-known voice of Mr. Banks greeted their ears, as he stood upright in his cart peering over the barrier into the cemetery.

"Got the blessed defunct?" said the undertaker, interrogatively.

"Right and tight," answered the Buffer; "and the tin too. Now, then, look sharp—here's the tools."

"I've got 'em," returned Banks.

"Look out for the stiff 'un, then," added the Buffer; and, aided by the Resurrection Man, he shoved the body up to the undertaker, who deposited it in the bottom of his cart.

The Resurrection Man and the Buffer then mounted the wall, and got into the vehicle, in which they laid themselves down, so that any person whom they might meet in the streets through which they were to pass would only see one individual in the cart—namely, the driver. Otherwise, the appearance of three men at that time of night, or rather at that hour in the morning, might have excited suspicion.

Banks lashed the sides of his horse; and the animal started off at a round pace.

Not a word was spoken during the short drive to the surgeon's residence in the Cambridge Road.

When they reached his house the road was quiet and deserted. A light glimmered through the fan-light over the door; and the door itself was opened the moment the cart stopped.

The Resurrection Man and the Buffer sprang up; and, seeing that the coast was clear, bundled the corpse out of the vehicle in an instant; then in less than half a minute the "blessed defunct," as the undertaker called it, was safely lodged in the passage of the surgeon's house.

Mr. Banks, as soon as the body was removed from his vehicle, drove rapidly away. His portion of the night's work was done; and he knew that his accomplices would give him his "reg'lars" when they should meet again.

The Resurrection Man and the Buffer conveyed the body into a species of out-house, which the surgeon, who was passionately attached to anatomical studies, devoted to purposes of dissection and physiological experiment.

In the middle of this room, which was about ten feet long and six broad, stood a strong deal table, forming a slightly inclined plane. The stone pavement of the out-house was perforated with holes in the immediate vicinity of the table, so that the fluid which poured from subjects for dissection might escape into a drain communicating with the common sewer. To the ceiling, immediately above the head of the table, was attached a pulley with a strong cord, by means of which a body might be supported in any position that was most convenient to the anatomist.

The Resurrection Man and his companion carried the corpse into this dissecting-room, and placed it upon the table, the surgeon holding a candle to light their movements.

"Now, Jack," said Tidkins to the Buffer, "do you take the stiff 'un out of the sack, and lay him along decently on the table ready for business, while I retire a moment to this gentleman's study and settle accounts with him."

"Well and good," returned the Buffer. "I'll stay here till you come back."

The surgeon lighted another candle, which he placed on the window-sill, and then withdrew, accompanied by the Resurrection Man.

The Buffer shut the door of the dissecting-room, because the draught caused the candle to flicker, and menaced the light with extinction. He then proceeded to obey the directions which he had received from his accomplice.

The Buffer removed the sack from the body, which he then stretched out at length upon the inclined table, taking care to place its head on the higher extremity and immediately beneath the pulley.

"There, old feller," he said, "you're comfortable, at any rate. What a blessin' it would be to your friends, if they was ever to find out that you'd been had up again, to know into what skilful hands you'd happened to fall!"

Thus musing, the Buffer turned his back listlessly towards the corpse, and leant against the table on which it was lying.

"Let me see," he said to himself, "there's thirty-one pounds that was buried along with *him*, and then there's ten pounds that the sawbones is a paying now to Tony for the *snatch*; that makes forty-one pounds, and there's three to go shares. What does that make?

Threes into four goes once—threes into eleven goes three and two over—that's thirteen pounds a-piece, and two pound to split—"

The Buffer started abruptly round, and became deadly pale. He thought he heard a slight movement of the corpse, and his whole frame trembled.

Almost at the same moment some object was hurled violently against the window; the glass was shivered to atoms; the candle was thrown down and extinguished; and total darkness reigned in the dissecting-room.

"Holloa!" cried the Buffer, turning sick at heart; "what's that?"

Scarcely had these words escaped his lips when he felt his hand suddenly grasped by the cold fingers of the corpse.

"O God!" cried the miscreant; and he fell insensible across the body on the table.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE STOCK-BROKER.

UPON a glass-door, leading into offices on a ground floor in Tokenhouse Yard, were the words "JAMES TOMLINSON, *Stock-broker*."

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning.

A clerk was busily employed in writing at a desk in the front office. The walls of this room were covered with placards, bills, and prospectuses, all announcing the most gigantic enterprises, and whose principal features were large figures expressing millions of money.

These prospectuses were of various kinds. Some merely put forth schemes by which enormous profits were to be realised, but which had not yet arrived to that state of maturity (the point at which the popular gullibility has been laid hold of,) when Directors, Secretaries, and Treasurers can be announced in a flaming list. Others denoted that the projectors had triumphed over the little difficulty of obtaining good names to form a board; and the upper part of this class of prospectuses was embellished with a perfect array of M.P.'s, Aldermen, and Esquires.

The prospectuses, one and all, set forth, with George-Robins-flourishes and poetico-hyperbolical flowers of rhetoric, the unparalleled and astounding advantages to be reaped from the enterprises respectfully submitted to public consideration and to the monied world especially. The face of the globe was a complete paradise according to those announcements. The interior of Africa was represented to be a perfect mine of gold by the projectors of a company to trade to those salubrious parts; the cannibals of the South Sea Islands became intelligent and interesting beings in the language of another association of speculators; the majestic scenery of the North Pole and the phenomena of the aurora borealis were held out by a colonising company as inducements to families to emigrate to Spitzbergen; the originators of a scheme for forming railways in Egypt expatiated upon the delights of travelling at the rate of sixty miles an hour through a land famous for its antiquarian remains, and along the banks of a river where the young alligators might be seen disporting in the sun; and numerous other prospectuses of majestic enterprises developed their original principles and prospective benefits to the astounded reader.

One would have imagined that any individual with a five-pound note in his pocket, had only just to step into Mr. Tomlinson's office, take five shares in as many enterprises, pay one pound deposit upon each, and walk out again a man of vast wealth.

Mr. Tomlinson himself was seated in a decently furnished room, which constituted the "private office." He was looking well, but somewhat careworn, and not quite so comfortable as a man who had passed through the Bankruptcy Court, got his certificate, and was in business once more, might be expected to look. In a word, he had a hard struggle to make his way respectably, and was compelled to meddle in many things that shocked his somewhat sensitive disposition.

A short, well-dressed, good-humoured man, with a small quick eye, was sitting on one side of the fire, conversing with the stock-broker.

"Well, Mr. Tomlinson," he said, "on those conditions I will lend my name to the Irish Railway Company proposed. But, remember, I require fifty shares, and I am not to pay a farthing for them."

"Oh, of course," cried Tomlinson; "that is precisely the proposal I was instructed to make to you. The fact is, between you and me, the projectors are all men of straw—one came out of Whitecross Street Prison a few weeks ago, and another has been a bankrupt twice and an insolvent seven times; and so they must raise heaven and earth to get good names."

"'Tis their only plan—their only plan," answered the gentleman; "and I flatter myself," he added, drawing himself up, "that the countenance of Mr. Sheriff Popkins is not to be sneezed at."

"On the contrary, my dear Mr. Popkins," said Tomlinson, "your name will soon bring a host of others."

"I should think so, Mr. Tomlinson—I should think so," was the self-sufficient reply.

"Well, then, Mr. Popkins, shall I make an appointment for you to meet Messrs. Bubble and Chouse to-morrow morning at my office?"

"If you please, my dear sir. And now I wish you to do a little matter for me. The fact is, I have been fool enough to take thirty shares in a certain railway company, and I have been elected a director. The company is in a most flourishing condition, and so I mean to make them purchase my shares of me. You will accordingly have the kindness to let it be known on 'Change that you have my shares to sell; but you must mind and not part with them. The thing will get to the company's ears, and they will be terribly alarmed at the prospect of the injury which may be done to the enterprise by a director offering his shares for sale. They will then send and negotiate with you privately, and you can make a good bargain with them."

"I understand," said Tomlinson. "I shall only breathe a whisper about the shares being offered for sale, in a quarter whence I know the rumour will immediately fly to the Directors of the Company."

"Good," observed Mr. Sheriff Popkins. "Here is the scrip: you can tell me what you have done when I call to-morrow morning to meet Messrs. Bubble and Chouse."

The worthy sheriff then withdrew, and Mr. Alderman Sniff was announced.

"Mr. Tomlinson," said this gentleman, "I wish you to do your best for a new Joint Stock-Company which I have just founded. This is the prospectus."

The stock-broker glanced over it, and said, in a musing manner, "Ah! very good indeed—excellent! '*British Marble Company.*'

Famous idea! '*Capital Two Hundred Thousand Pounds in Ten Thousand Shares of Twenty Pounds Each*.' Good again. '*Deposit One Pound per Share*.' That will do. Then comes the Board of Directors—all good names. I see you have made yourself Managing Director: well, that's quite fair! Then, again, '*Auditor, Mr. Alderman Sniff*; *Treasurer, Mr. Alderman Sniff*; *Secretary, Mr. Alderman Sniff*.' But who sells the quarry to the Company? Oh! I see, '*Mr. Alderman Sniff*.'"

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded the alderman.

"You ask me candidly, my dear sir?"

"Certainly," replied the alderman.

"I think the plan is excellent. The only drawback to its success, is—shall I speak openly?"

"I wish you to do so."

"Then I am of opinion that you have given yourself too many situations," continued Tomlinson. "In the first place you found the Company, and you make yourself Managing Director. Well and good. But then you also sell the quarry *to* the Company. Now, as Managing Director, you have to award *to* yourself a sum for that quarry; as Treasurer you pay yourself; as Secretary you draw up the agreements; and as Auditor you confirm your own accounts!"

"Perfectly correct, Mr. Tomlinson. Is it not a rule that Joint-Stock Companies are never to benefit any one save the founder?"

"Oh! no one denies *that*," answered the stock-broker. "What I am afraid of is, that the public will not *bite*, when they see one man occupying so many situations in the Company."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! The name of an alderman will carry every thing before it. Does not the world believe that the Aldermen of the City of London are all as rich as Crœsus?"

"Whereas, between you and me," returned Tomlinson with a sly laugh, "there is scarcely one of them who has got a penny if his affairs came to be wound up."

"And yet we live gloriously, ha! ha!" chuckled Mr. Alderman Sniff. "But to return to my business: what can you do for me?"

"I can certainly recommend the enterprise," answered Tomlinson. "But where can the marble be seen?"

"At my office," said the alderman. "I went and bought the finest piece that was ever imported from Italy; and there it is in my counting-house, labelled 'British Marble' in letters at least half a foot high."

"Where is the quarry situated?" inquired Tomlinson.

"Oh! I haven't quite made up my mind about *that* yet," was the answer given by Mr. Alderman Sniff. "The truth is, I am going down into Wales this week, and I shall buy the first field I can get cheap in some rude part of the country. That is the least difficulty in the whole enterprise."

"Your plans are admirable, my dear sir," exclaimed Tomlinson. "I will do all I can for you. Will you take a glass of wine and a biscuit?"

"No, I thank you—not now," said the Alderman. "I have promised a colleague to sit for him to-day at Guildhall police-court. Last week I was on the rota for attendance there, and I remanded a man who was brought up on a charge of obtaining three and sixpence under false pretences."

"Indeed?" ejaculated Tomlinson, whose eyes were fixed upon the "*Two Hundred Thousand Pounds*" in the alderman's prospectus.

"Yes," continued Mr. Sniff; "and I am going to sit to-day because that fellow comes up again. I mean to clear the City of all such rogues and vagabonds. I shall give him a taste of the treadmill for two months. So, good morning. By the by, call as you pass my office and have a look at the marble; and mind," he added, sinking his voice, "you don't let out that it came from Italy. It is pure Welsh marble, remember!"

Alderman Sniff chuckled at this pleasant idea, and then hastened to Guildhall, where he fully justified his character of being the most severe magistrate in the City of London.

A few minutes after Mr. Alderman Sniff had taken his departure, Mr. Greenwood was announced.

"My dear Tomlinson, I am delighted to see you," said the capitalist. "It is really an age—a week at least—since I saw you. How do matters get on?"

"I have prospects of doing an excellent business," answered Tomlinson. "The numberless bubble companies that are started every day, are the making of us stock-brokers. We dispose of shares or effect transfers, and obtain our commission, let the result be what it may to the purchasers."

"And I hope that you have conquered those ridiculous qualms of conscience which always made a coward of you, when you were in Lombard Street?" said Greenwood.

"*Needs must when the devil drives*," observed Tomlinson drily.

"For my part," continued Greenwood, "I take advantage of this mania on the part of the English for speculation in joint-stock companies and railway shares. A day of reaction will come; and the effects will be fearful. Thousands and thousands of families will be involved in irretrievable ruin. That day may not occur for one year—two years—five years—or even ten years;—but come it will; and the signal for it will be when the House of Commons is inundated with railway and joint-stock company business, and when it is compelled to postpone a portion of that business until the ensuing session. Then confidence will receive a shock: an interval for calm meditation will occur; and the result will be awful. Every one will be anxious to sell shares, and there will be no buyers. Now mark my words, Tomlinson; and, if you speculate on your own account, speculate accordingly. *I* do so."

"And you are not likely to go wrong, I know," said Tomlinson. "But stock-brokers do not risk any money of their own: they have plenty of clients, who will do that for them."

"Then you are really thriving?" asked Greenwood.

"I am earning a living, and my business is increasing. But I feel hanging like a mill-stone round my neck the thousand pounds which you lent me at twenty per cent.—"

"Yes—*only* twenty per cent."

"*Only* at twenty per cent.," continued Tomlinson with a sigh: "and I am unable to return you more than one hundred at present, although I agreed to pay you two hundred every four months."

"The hundred will do," said Greenwood; and he wrote out a receipt for that amount.

Tomlinson handed him over a number of notes, which Greenwood counted and then consigned to his pocket.

"There is a pretty business to be done in the City now," said the capitalist, after a pause. "I contrive to snatch an hour or two now and then from the time which I am compelled to devote to the enlightened and independent body that returned me to Parliament; and I seldom come into the City on those occasions without lending a few hundreds to some poor devil who has over-bought himself in shares."

"I have no doubt that you thrive, Greenwood," said the stock-broker. "Every man who takes advantage of the miseries of others must get on."

"To be sure—to be sure," cried the Member of Parliament. "I hope that you will act upon that principle."

"I have no reason to complain of the business that I am now doing: I act as honestly as I can—and that principle deprives me of many advantageous affairs. Then I experience annoyance from a constant reminiscence of that poor old man who so nobly sacrificed himself for me."

"The eternal cry!" ejaculated Greenwood. "If you are so very anxious to find him out, put an advertisement in the *Times*—"

"And if he saw it, he would believe it to be a stratagem of the police to arrest him. You know that there is a warrant out against him. The official assignee took that step."

"Well, let him take his chance; and if he should happen to be captured, we will petition the Home Secretary to diminish the period for which he will be sentenced to transportation. Not that such a step would benefit him much, because his age—"

"Let us drop this subject, Greenwood," said Tomlinson, evidently affected.

"With all my heart. I must admit that it moves one's feelings; and if I met the old man in the street, I should not hesitate to give him a guinea out of my own pocket."

"A guinea!" cried Tomlinson—and a smile of contempt curled his lips. "Perhaps you would recommend me to bestow a five-pound note upon that poor Italian nobleman whom you cheated out of his fifteen thousand pounds."

"You need not call him a poor nobleman," answered Greenwood. "He is now worth ten thousand pounds a-year."

"Indeed! A great change must have taken place, then, in his fortunes?" exclaimed Tomlinson.

"The fact, in a few words, is this. A young lady, whom I knew well," said Greenwood, "obtained letters of introduction from Count Alteroni to certain friends of his in Montoni, the capital of Castelcicala, to which state she repaired for the benefit of her health, or some such frivolous reason. She had the good fortune to captivate the Grand Duke—"

"Miss Eliza Sydney, you mean?" said Tomlinson.

"The same. Did you know her?"

"Not at all. But I read in the newspapers the account of her marriage with Angelo III. Proceed."

"The moment she married the Grand Duke, a pension of ten thousand a-year was granted to Count Alteroni, by way of indemnification, I have heard, for his estates, which were confiscated after he had fled the country in consequence of political intrigues."

"How did you learn all this?"

"My valet Filippo happens to be a native of Montoni, and he seems well acquainted with all that passes in Castelcicala. Count Alteroni and his family have returned to the villa which they formerly inhabited at Richmond."

"I am delighted to hear this good news. You have taken a considerable weight off my mind; the transaction with that nobleman was always a subject of self-reproach."

"I dare say," observed Mr. Greenwood ironically; then, drawing his chair closer to Tomlinson's seat, he added, "You are no doubt the most punctilious and conscientious of all City men. I have something to communicate to you, and must do it briefly, as I am compelled to return to Spring Gardens, to meet a deputation from the Rottenborough Agricultural Society, at one o'clock precisely—and I never keep such people waiting more than an hour!"

"That is considerate on your part," said the stock-broker.

"Don't you think it is? But I did not come here for the sole purpose of chatting. The fact is, a gentleman with whom I am acquainted wants a stock-broker for a very delicate and important business—for a business," added Greenwood, sinking his voice to a whisper, "which requires a man who will be content to put five hundred pounds into his pocket for the service that will be required of him, and perform that service blindfold, as it were."

"I will do nothing to compromise my safety," said Tomlinson.

"You will not be required to do so," answered Greenwood. "However, the gentleman I allude to will call upon you in the course of the day, I dare say; and he will then explain to you the service he has to demand at your hands."

"What is the name of your friend?" inquired Tomlinson.

"Mr. Chichester—Arthur Chichester," was the reply.

"Chichester—Chichester," said the stock-broker, musing; "surely I have heard you mention that name before? Ah! now I

remember! Did you not complain to me a few days ago that he had been making mischief between you and a certain Sir Rupert Harborough?"

"I did," answered Greenwood; "and I certainly had good cause for anger against this same Arthur Chichester. But I had become his confidant and adviser in a certain affair a few weeks before I discovered that he had acquainted Sir Rupert Harborough with circumstances which he had better have kept to himself; and I am therefore compelled to continue my assistance and counsel to him until the affair alluded to be brought to a successful termination. Besides, as Sir Rupert and I have settled our little differences, there is no use in bearing malice, especially when something is to be gained by forbearance."

"I thought you would make that admission," said Tomlinson, laughing. "Well, I shall see your friend, and if, with safety, I can earn five hundred pounds, certainly, in my position, I cannot afford to lose such an opportunity."

"That is speaking like a reasonable man," observed Greenwood. "Never stick at trifles. What should I be now, if I had hesitated at every step I took? Should I possess a hundred thousand pounds in good securities? should I be enabled to gratify every wish, caprice, or desire, whose object money can accomplish? should I be the representative of one of the most independent and intelligent constituencies in England? Ah, my dear fellow, think of me and my position when you hesitate; and always make money after the well-authorised system—*honestly*, if you can; *but, at all events, make money*."

With these words, Mr. Greenwood took his departure.

"Yes," mused Tomlinson, when he was alone once more, "that man is right! Make money, honestly, if you can; but, at all events, *make money*. That is the burden of *his* song; why should it not be the *chorus* of mine? When I look around me, I see every one making money upon the same plan. Sheriff Popkins does not hesitate to lend his name to a bubble; and Alderman Spiff concocts one! And they are men of reputation—holding important offices—appearing at Court—wielding power—exercising influence. This is indeed a wide field for contemplation. Why, Greenwood, in his bold, dashing manner, gains more in a day than I, in my miserable, droning fashion, earn in a month. To be afraid to touch the gold that is thrown in one's way in this wonderful city, is to be a coward—a very coward. Yes—I see it all! Greenwood is right. Make money—honestly, if you can; but, at all events, make money!"

Mr. Tomlinson's soliloquy had arrived at this very pleasing conclusion, just as the door of his office opened, and a clerk entered to acquaint his master that a gentleman of the name of Chichester desired to speak to him.

"Show Mr. Chichester in," said Tomlinson.

Mr. Chichester was dressed in his usually fashionable manner; and his gait had lost nothing of the care-nothing-for-anybody kind of swagger which characterised him when he was first introduced to the reader.

Having thrown himself listlessly upon a chair, he said, "I presume our mutual friend Greenwood has mentioned my name to you, Mr. Tomlinson?"

"He has. I was prepared for your visit."

"But not for its object, perhaps?" said Chichester.

"I am as yet ignorant on that head," was the reply.

"Mr. Greenwood then told you nothing—"

"Nothing, save an intimation that my services were required in a certain delicate and important matter, and that five hundred pounds would be my remuneration."

"Perfectly correct," answered Mr. Chichester. "Are you disposed to aid me on the proposed terms?"

"I must first learn the nature of the business in which my interference is needed."

"And if you should then decline?"

"You shall have my solemn assurance that what you confide to me remains buried in my own bosom."

"That is what I call a proper understanding," exclaimed Chichester. "You must know, then, that some three months ago I wooed, and won, a widow lady, not very ugly, certainly, but whose principal attraction consisted of the sum of sixteen thousand pounds in the three and a half per cents. She was five and twenty years of age, and possessed of a sweet little house in the neighbourhood of the Cambridge Heath gate. I met her one evening in July or August last at a party at my father's house—when I was doing the amiable to the old gentleman in order to sound his pockets; and my father whispered to me that I ought to make up to Mrs. Higgins. Certainly the name was not very aristocratic; but then her Christian name was Viola; and I thought that Viola Chichester would be pretty enough. I accordingly flirted with the widow on that occasion, and we seemed tolerably pleased with each other. I called next day—and every now and then, when I had time; but I, really, scarcely entertained serious thoughts of making her an offer, until one day when I was desperately hard up, and I saw my friend Harborough involved in such difficulties that we could not do any good together. So I got into an omnibus in Bishopsgate Street, went down to Cambridge Heath, called upon Mrs. Higgins, and then and there offered her my heart and hand. She accepted me. We had a pleasant little chat about money matters: she stated that her late husband, a wealthy builder, had left her sixteen thousand pounds; and, of course, I could not make myself out a pauper. Besides, she knew that father was tolerably well off. I assured her that I was possessed of a few thousands, and that the old gentleman allowed me three hundred a-year into the bargain. She stipulated that all her own money should be settled upon herself. I demurred to this proposal; but she was obstinate; and I then discovered that Mrs. Viola Higgins had a very determined will and a very positive temper of her own. I thought to myself, '*Here is a charming widow who throws herself into my arms, and who possesses a decent fortune; it would be madness to neglect so golden an opportunity of enriching myself. Besides,*' I reasoned, '*when once we are married, it will be very easy for me to wheedle the affectionate creature out of any money that I may require*.' Well, I consented to the settlement of all her property upon herself; and in due course we were married. I did not mention the matter to any of my West-End friends, because I did not like to invite them to the wedding—I was afraid their off-hand manners would alarm the bride, and give her an unfavourable opinion with regard to myself. So the business was kept very snug and quiet; and we passed the honey-moon at my wife's sister and brother-in-law's, very decent people in their way, and dwelling at Stratford-le-Bow. On our return to London, I thought it time to break the ice in respect to my own pecuniary situation. The

truth was, that I had not a penny-piece of my own, and that my father had long since withdrawn his support, in consequence of the immense drains I had made upon his purse. I was moreover encumbered with debts; and some of my tradesmen had found me out and began to call at the house at Cambridge Heath. They even used menaces. My position was truly critical. I did not marry the widow merely with a view to take her out for a walk, sit by the fire-side chatting, or read a book while she worked. I wanted money,—money to pay my debts,—money to enjoy myself with. Accordingly I broke the ice by very candidly avowing that I had not a shilling. I, however, swore that her beauty and accomplishments had alone induced me thus to deceive her. But—oh! the vixen! She flew into such a passion that I thought she would tear my eyes out. She raved and wept—and wept and raved—and then reproached and taunted,—until I wished one of us at the devil, and scarcely cared which went there. The scene ended in Viola's falling into a fit of hysterics; and she was compelled to go to bed. I was most assiduous to her; and my attentions evidently softened her. In a few hours she grew calm, and then said, '*Arthur, you have deceived me grossly; but I can forgive you. I do not regret the loss of the wealth and income which you led me to believe were yours; I am only sorry that you should have thought it necessary to practise such a measure to induce me to marry you. But let what is past be forgotten. The income derived from my property is sufficient for us; and, if you will be kind and good to me, this deception shall never more trouble our happiness.*'"

"I think Mrs. Chichester spoke like a generous, sensible, and noble-hearted woman," observed Tomlinson, who was, nevertheless, at a loss to conceive how all these details could be connected with the service which Mr. Chichester required at his hands.

"Ahem!" exclaimed that gentleman, who did not seem to relish the remark particularly well. "However, all that fine feeling was mere outward show with my wife," he continued; "for she was inexorable in her refusal to sell out or mortgage any of her funded property for my use. I told her that I had debts. '*Give a list to my solicitor,*' she said, '*and he shall compromise with your creditors*.' I assured her that I could make a better bargain with them myself. She would not believe me. I then declared point-blank that I did not mean to remain tied to her apron-strings; that she must at least settle half the property upon me; that I desired to keep a horse and cab, and introduce my friends to my wife; and that I was resolved we should live as people of property ought to live. It was then that she showed her inveterate obstinacy, and manifested the worst shades of an infamous temper. She agreed to allow me one hundred a-year for my clothes and pocket-money, but would not give me any control over her property. As for horses, cabs, and West End friends, she ridiculed the idea. I prayed, threatened, and reasoned by turns: she was as immoveable as Mount Atlas. Several days were passed in perpetual arguments upon the subject; but the more I prayed, threatened, and reasoned, the more obstinate she grew. One morning we had a desperate quarrel. I swore that I would be revenged—that I would extort from her by violence, or other means, what she refused to yield to argument. Nothing, however, could move her: she said that she would not ruin herself to gratify my extravagances. This was nearly a month ago. I bounced out of the house, and hurried up to the West End of the town, as fast as I could go, to see and consult my friend Sir Rupert Harborough. But, as I was on my way thither—for I actually had not even money in my pocket to pay a cab—I accidentally met Greenwood. He saw that I was annoyed and vexed, and inquired the reason. I told him all. He reflected for some moments, and then said, '*Do not consult Harborough in this matter. He cannot assist you. There is only one course to adopt with such a woman as this. You must put her under restraint.*' I told him that nothing would please me better; but that I should have all her friends upon me if I threw her into a lunatic asylum; and that I was, moreover, without the means to take a single step. Greenwood and I went into a tavern, and discussed the business over a bottle of wine. He then laid down a certain plan, made certain stipulations respecting remuneration for himself, and offered to back me in carrying the matter to the extreme. Of course I assented to all he proposed. The whole affair was managed in such a manner as—"

"As none but Greenwood *could* manage it," observed Tomlinson.

"Exactly," returned Chichester. "Indeed, he *is* a thorough man of business! He procured two surgeons to call, at separate times, at the house at Cambridge Heath, ostensibly to see me. I took care to be at home. They also saw my wife; and the result was that they granted the certificates I required."

"Certificates of an unsound state of mind?" inquired Tomlinson.

"Certificates of an unsound state of mind," repeated Chichester, affirmatively. "Greenwood managed it all—keeping himself, however, entirely in the back-ground. He found the surgeons—provided me with money to fee them—and then recommended to me a keeper of a lunatic asylum, who is not over particular. These proceedings occupied two or three days, during which I was on my very best behaviour with my wife; but if ever I hinted to her the propriety of acceding to my wishes in respect to the disposal of her property, she cut me short by the assurance that her decision was irrevocable. I really wished to avoid extreme measures; but with such a disobedient, self-willed, obstinate woman, leniency was an impossibility. Accordingly, I one evening allured her, during a walk, into the immediate vicinity of the lunatic asylum: the streets were lonely and deserted; and it was already dark. The keeper of the mad-house had been prepared for the execution of the project that evening; and he was at his post. As we slowly passed by his house, he sprang forward from some recess or dark nook, and fixed a plaster over my wife's mouth. Thus not a cry could escape her lips. At the same moment we seized her, and conveyed her into the asylum."

"That was three weeks ago?" inquired Tomlinson.

Chichester nodded an assent.

"And she has not come to her senses yet?"

"She has at length," was the answer. "I received a letter yesterday from the keeper of the asylum, stating that her spirit is broken, and that she is now ready to obey her husband in all things. The keeper wrote to me a few days ago to state that his *mode of cure* was producing a favourable result; and yesterday he intimated to me by another letter that the *mode* alluded to had proved completely successful."

"What course do you now intend to pursue?" demanded Tomlinson, who began to suspect the manner in which his services were to be made available.

"I immediately communicated the important contents of this second letter to Greenwood," continued Chichester, "and he recommended me to apply to you to aid me in completing the business. My wife now sees her folly, and is willing to devote one half of

her property—namely, eight thousand pounds, to the use and purposes of her lawful husband; and I am generous enough to be satisfied with that sum, instead of insisting upon having the whole."

"I understand you," said Tomlinson: "you require a stock-broker to effect the transfer of eight thousand pounds from the name of your wife into your own name."

"And to sell out the amount when so transferred," added Chichester.

"It will be necessary for me to obtain the signature of your wife to a certain paper," observed Tomlinson.

"Greenwood has told me all this. In one word, will you accompany me to the asylum where my wife is confined, and obtain her signature?"

"If she be willing to give it, I am willing to receive it—*as a matter of business*," answered Tomlinson. "But, are you sure—in a word, what guarantee have you that she will not denounce the whole proceeding to the officers of justice—rally her friends around her—appeal to the law—and punish every one concerned in the business?"

"Listen. The document which she agrees to sign is a general power on my behalf over eight thousand pounds in the Bank of England: this power will be dated two months back—a month after our marriage. We must be supposed to have called at your office on a particular day at that period, on which occasion she signed the power in your presence. It being a general power of transfer, it would not seem extraordinary that I did not use it until now—that is, two months after it was given. This night must she sign the deed: to-morrow you must transfer and sell out the money. Then to-morrow night, she shall be conveyed back to the house at Cambridge Heath. The two servants whom we keep are bribed to my interest: they are ready, in case of need, to prove the existence of those symptoms of insanity which justified the certificates of the surgeons and the restraint under which my wife has been placed. How, then, can she do us an injury? If she proclaim her '*wrongs*'—as she may call them, *you* can prove that the power of transfer could not have been extorted from her in a mad-house, as it was signed two months ago at your office! Then, if she were to speak of the *mode of treatment* adopted by the keeper of that mad-house to curb her haughty spirit, the accusation would be indignantly denied; and her statements would be set down to a disordered imagination, *and would justify further restraint*. Be you well assured, that she will never say or do any thing that may endanger her liberty again! No—the fact is simply this: we divide the property, and separate for ever. She will be glad to get rid of a husband like me: I shall not be sorry to dissolve—as far as we can dissolve it—a connexion with a woman of her mean, griping, and avaricious disposition."

"This is Greenwood's scheme throughout," said Tomlinson. "No other man living could plot such admirable combinations to effect a certain object, without danger to any one."

"Do you consent to act in this matter, on consideration of retaining for yourself five hundred pounds of the money which you will have to transfer and sell out to-morrow?"

"I do consent," replied Tomlinson, after a few moments' reflection, during which he muttered to himself, "*Make money—honestly, if you can; but, at all events, make money*."

"To-night—at ten o'clock, will you come to me at my house at Cambridge Heath?" inquired Chichester.

"I will," was the answer. "But let me ask you one question:—what excuse have you made to your wife's friends for this absence of three weeks?"

"In the first place," said Chichester, "her only relations consist of a sister and this sister's husband at Stratford-le-Bow; and they are so immersed in the cares of business, that they have not called once at Cambridge Heath ever since our marriage. Secondly, my wife always lived in a very retired manner, and has very few acquaintances or friends besides my father's family. It was therefore easy to satisfy the one or two persons who *did* call, with the excuse that Mrs. Chichester had gone on a short visit to some relatives in the country."

"And you feel convinced your precautions are so wisely taken, that she will never open her lips relative to the past?" said Tomlinson.

"*I am confident that she will not breathe a word that may lead to her return to the place where she now is*," answered Chichester, with a significant look and emphatic solemnity of tone.

"Then I will not hesitate to serve you in this business," said Tomlinson. "To-night—at ten o'clock."

"To-night—at ten o'clock," repeated Chichester; and with these words he departed.

When he was gone, Tomlinson paced his office in an agitated manner.

"The die is cast—I am now about to plunge into crime!" he said. "And yet how could I avoid—how could I long procrastinate this step? These mean tricks—these dishonourable dealings—these deceptive schemes in which we brokers are compelled to bear a part, only serve to prepare the way for more daring and more criminal pursuits. Five hundred pounds at one stroke! That is a little fortune to a man, struggling against the world, like me! Four hundred will I pay to Greenwood—the other hundred will swell my little account at the bankers'; for who can hope to do any extent of business in this city without a good name at his bankers'?"

Tomlinson ceased, and sate down calm and collected. Alas! how easy is it to reason oneself into a belief of the existence of a necessity for pursuits of dishonesty or crime!

The clerk entered the private office, and said, "Sir, there is a person, who refuses to give his name, waiting to speak to you."

"Let him come in," replied Tomlinson.

The clerk ushered in a man of cadaverous countenance, bushy brows, and large whiskers, and who was dressed in a suit of black.

"Your business, sir?" said the stock-broker, who did not much like the appearance of his visitor.

"Your name's Tomlinson?" remarked the man, coolly taking a chair.

"Yes. What would you with me?"

"James Tomlinson," continued the man, referring to a scrap of paper, which he took from his waistcoat pocket, "late banker in Lombard Street?"

"The same," said Tomlinson, impatiently.

"Then I took it down right, although he did speak in such a confused manner," observed the man, muttering rather to himself than to Mr. Tomlinson.

"What do you mean?" demanded the stock-broker.

"I mean that there's a person who wants to see you," answered the stranger. "I don't know that I'm exactly right in saying *wants*, because he is in such a state that he can neither want nor care about any thing. At the same time, I think it would be as well if *you* was to see *him*."

"Who is this person?" cried Tomlinson.

"A man that seems to know you well enough, if I can understand his ravings."

"Ravings!" repeated the stock-broker, already influenced by a slight misgiving.

"Ravings, indeed! and enough to make him rave! To be laid out as dead for four days, then put in a coffin, buried, and be had up again within ten or a dozen hours:—if that wouldn't make a man rave—what the devil would?"

"Have the goodness to explain yourself. Every word you utter is an enigma to me."

"But it wasn't an enigma to my poor friend when the stiff 'un suddenly put a cold hand upon his. However, in two words, do you know a person called Michael Martin?"

"Michael Martin!" cried the stock-broker. "Speak—what has become of him?"

"He has been ill—"

"Ill! poor old man! and I not to know it!"

"Worse than that! He died—"

"Died! Where—when?"

"Died—and was buried."

"Trifle not with me. When did he die? where is he buried?"

"He died—was buried—and came to life again!" said the stranger, with the most provoking coolness.

"Sir," exclaimed Tomlinson, advancing towards his visitor, and speaking in a firm and emphatic manner, "if you have called to tell me any thing concerning Michael Martin, speak without mystification."

"Well, sir," returned the stranger, "the plain truth is this:—An old man, without a name, took up his abode in a by-street in Globe Town some months ago. He was taken ill, and, to all appearance, died. He was buried. A surgeon fancied him as a subject, and hired me and a friend of mine to have him up again. We resurrectionized him, and took him in a cart last night to the surgeon's house. He was conveyed into the dissecting-room, and stretched on the table. The doctor and I went into the surgery to settle the expenses; and, in the mean time, my friend was left alone with the stiff 'un. It seems that a neighbour, suspecting that the surgeon now and then got a subject for his experiments, saw the cart stop at the door, and immediately understood what was going on. He went into his garden, which joins the yard where the dissecting-house stands, and seeing a light in the window of the dissecting-house, he felt sure that his suspicions were well founded, although he could not see into the place, because there was a dark blind drawn down over the window. However, the neighbour was resolved to clear up his doubts; so he took up a brick-bat, and threw it as hard as he could against the window. The glass was broken, and the light extinguished. My friend, who was left alone with the stiff 'un, was somewhat startled at this occurrence; but how much more was he alarmed when he suddenly felt the body stretch out its hand and catch hold of one of his?"

"Then Michael Martin was not dead?" ejaculated Tomlinson, in a tone which expressed alike the tenderness of deep emotion and also the bitterness of disappointment; for, perhaps, all circumstances considered, the ex-banker would rather have heard a confirmation of the death, than an account of the resuscitation of his late clerk.

"No—the old man is not dead. The doctor and myself were in the surgery, when we heard the smash of the window and the cry of the Buf—of my friend, I mean."

"Of your brother resurrectionist, I suppose," continued Tomlinson, in a tone of ineffable disgust. "Well, go on."

"We went into the dissecting-room with a lamp, and there we found the light put out, and my comrade insensible on the floor. But what was more extraordinary still, we saw the corpse gasping for breath. '*He is not dead!*' cried the surgeon; and in a moment a lancet was stuck into his arm. The blood would not flow at first, but the surgeon chafed his temples and hands by turns; and in a few moments the blood trickled out pretty freely. Meantime I had recovered my companion, and explained to him the nature of the phenomenon that had taken place. When he heard the real truth, he was no longer alarmed, because he knew very well that people are often buried in a trance. In fact, one night, about eighteen months ago, he and I went to Old Saint Pancras church-yard to get up a stiff 'un, and when we

opened the coffin, we found that the body had turned completely round on its face; it was, however, stone dead when we got it up—and never shall I forget what a countenance it had! But of that no matter."

"Have the goodness to keep to your present narrative," said Tomlinson, scarcely able to conceal his disgust at the presence of a resurrectionist—an avowed body-snatcher.

"Well," continued the man with the cadaverous countenance, "in a very few minutes we completely recovered the old gentleman. I obeyed all the directions of the surgeon, and ran backwards and forwards to the pharmacy for God only knows what salts and what ammonia. At last the subject gave a terrible groan, opened his eyes, and exclaimed, '*Where am I?*' The surgeon assured him that he was in safety—that he had been very ill—that he was now much better—and so on. Meantime, by the surgeon's orders, I had called up his housekeeper, (for he is a bachelor,) and she had got a bed prepared and warmed, and some hot water ready, and every thing comfortable. Well, we carried the old gentleman up to bed; the doctor gave him a little warm brandy and water; and in another half hour, he was able to speak a few words in a comprehensible manner. But his brain seemed confused, and all we could learn was that his name was '*Michael Martin*,' and that he raved after a gentleman, whom he called '*James Tomlinson, the banker*.'"

"Ah! he said that—did he?" cried Tomlinson, rising, and pacing the room with agitated steps.

"He did," was the reply. "And then we began to think that we had heard those names before; and, in a few minutes, I—who know every thing," added the man, fixing his serpent-like eyes upon he stock-broker with a kind of fiendish leer,—"I," he continued, "remembered that Michael Martin was the man who had been the cashier in the bank of Tomlinson and Company, Lombard Street."

"But did he say—did he—" began the stock-broker, gasping for breath,—"did he—"

"He raved—he grew delirious; and in his wanderings, he said enough to prove that *he* was not guilty of the breach of trust imputed to him."

"O God! thy vengeance overtakes me, then, at last!" cried Tomlinson, sinking, pale and trembling, upon a chair.

"He said much—very much," continued the man whose revelations had thus produced so strange an effect upon James Tomlinson. "But do not alarm yourself—I am not one to peach; and the doctor himself is not likely to say any thing that night lead to an awkward inquiry into the circumstances that brought the old gentleman into his house. Remember, the law now punishes with transportation those who resurrectionize, and those who encourage resurrectionists."

"Then you will not betray me?" ejaculated Tomlinson, a ray of hope animating his countenance.

"Betray you!" echoed the man, with a contemptuous curl of his lip and a ferocious leer of his eyes, which gleamed from beneath their bushy brows like those of a hyena from the shade of an overhanging brake: "betray you! What good should I get by that? You know that a reward of three thousand pounds was offered to any one who would deliver up this Michael Martin; and as a man of sense, you must also understand that it would not be very convenient for me to go forward and claim this reward. At the same time, I might talk—or my friend might talk; no one could prevent that; and such-like idle gossiping would lead to the detection of the old man. Now you are the best judge whether or not it is worth while to put a seal upon our lips. We don't want to be hard upon you;—but, perhaps," added the man, interrupting himself, "you had better see the old gentleman first, and then you will know that I am telling you the truth."

"When can I see him? where is he?" demanded Tomlinson, almost bewildered by the sudden revelation which had been made to him concerning Michael Martin.

"You had better put off your visit till dusk," was the reply; "because I should like to go with you, and the surgeon would not be very well pleased if I called upon him in the day-time."

"Let it be at dusk, then," said Tomlinson.

"Name your hour."

"I have an engagement between nine and ten o'clock to-night," returned the stock-broker.

"And so have I," said the visitor. "What should you say to seven o'clock? It is as dark then as it is at ten or eleven."

"Seven will suit me well," answered Tomlinson. "Where shall I meet you?"

"At Bethnal Green New Church—the church that stands in the Cambridge Road, and faces the Bethnal Green Road," explained the body-snatcher. "You can be walking up and down there a few minutes before seven—I shall not keep you waiting."

"I will be punctual," said Tomlinson. "But—once more—you will not betray me?"

"Ridiculous!" was the contemptuous reply.

"And this surgeon—will he not be tempted by the reward to—"

"Do you think he would walk straight into Newgate and say, '*I am come to be transported for encouraging and employing resurrection men*?' You need not alarm yourself. Me and my comrade will settle the matter amicably with you."

The body-snatcher then took his departure.

Tomlinson threw himself back in his chair, pressed both his hands against his heated forehead, and exclaimed in a tone of despair, "I have fervently prayed that I might meet my poor old clerk again; and heaven has granted my request—but merely to punish me for my crimes!"

CHAPTER CX.

THE EFFECTS Of A TRANCE.

It was half-past eight o'clock in the evening.

By the side of a bed in a comfortable chamber at the surgeon's house in the Cambridge Road, near Bethnal Green New Church, sate James Tomlinson.

The light of the candles that burnt upon the table, fell on the pale and ghastly countenance of old Michael Martin, who lay in that bed, his head propped up with pillows.

There was no one else in the room at the time, save these two persons.

"And thus was it, my good and faithful friend," said Tomlinson, breaking the long silence which had ensued after mutual explanations,—"thus was it that you so nobly sacrificed yourself for me! Oh! believe me that I have never ceased to think of your generous—your unparalleled behaviour in that sad business!"

"I know it—I know it," returned the old man in a weak and hollow voice. "If you had not been a kind master to me, I should never have done all that for you. But, tell me,—and tell me truly," added Michael, fixing his glassy eyes upon the stock-broker, "do you think that these persons—the surgeon, and that hideous man who—"

Martin ceased—and his entire frame was convulsed with horror as he remembered the appalling circumstances under which he had been recovered from his late death-like trance and restored to life.

"Compose yourself, my excellent friend," said Tomlinson, who fully comprehended what was passing in his mind; "fear alone will seal these people's lips—even if no other motive were powerful enough to ensure their silence. The surgeon seems an honest kind of man, and may be relied upon: besides, he would seriously compromise himself were he to breathe a word of this strange occurrence. As for the other person—he who came to tell me what had taken place, and brought me hither this evening—I have agreed to purchase his silence and that of a comrade, who, it appears, was engaged with him in the business."

"I know you cannot afford to do any such thing," said old Michael, speaking with somewhat of that bluntness, or even gruffness of manner, which had characterised him in past times; "and I won't have you get yourself into difficulties on my account."

"Believe me, I can afford it," returned Tomlinson.

"You can't. You told me just now that you were struggling against many difficulties. How much are you going to give these scoundrels?"

"A mere trifle—nothing beyond my means—"

"How much?" demanded old Michael, imperatively.

"Two hundred pounds."

"Two hundred pounds! It can't—and it shan't be done, Mr. Tomlinson. You have not got two hundred pounds: I know you have not."

"I am to receive five hundred this evening for certain professional services to be rendered," said Tomlinson; "and I can readily spare a portion to ensure a silence which is necessary not only to your safety but to mine."

"True—*your* safety," muttered old Michael, whose thoughts seemed ever fixed upon the welfare of his late employer. "Well—well, I suppose it must be done. Do it, then."

Another long pause ensued.

Suddenly Martin turned towards Tomlinson, and said, in a sharp querulous tone, "You told me that you were going to receive five hundred pounds this evening?"

"Such is my hope," answered the stock-broker, averting his glances from the old man.

"Ah! you can't look me in the face," exclaimed Michael, almost savagely. "Where are you going to get that money from?"

"From a client—for whom I am to do business—of a certain nature," faltered Tomlinson.

"Certain nature, indeed! What is it?"

"Merely professional. Michael," was the answer.

"Professional business in one evening, that will produce five hundred pounds," said the old man, dwelling emphatically upon every word: then, after a pause, he added abruptly, "I don't believe it."

"I declare most solemnly that I am telling you the truth," cried Tomlinson, somewhat hurt by Michael's manner and observations.

"So much the worse for you, then," rejoined the old man, laconically. "The business you are to perform for that sum is not honest."

Tomlinson was about to make some excuse to put an end to the topic by an evasive reply, when Michael Martin raised himself to a sitting posture in the bed, and, fixing his eyes upon his late master, exclaimed, with strange emphasis of manner, "Have you not seen enough—experienced enough—and suffered enough, to render you timorous in re-embarking upon the great ocean of chicanery, duplicity, and crime? Be you well assured that though the currents of that ocean may float you prosperously along for a season, they will sooner or later dash you against a sunken rock, and shipwreck you beyond redemption. Oh!" he continued, his ghastly countenance becoming animated with the ruddy tinge of excitement, and fire once more sparkling from his glassy eyes,—"Oh! if you

had only passed through all that I have within these last few days, you would not neglect so terrible a warning! Do you know,"—and his utterance became rapid and eloquent,—"do you know that I have passed the limits of the tomb, and have wandered in the worlds beyond? Do you know that I have learnt the grand—the sublime—the supernal secret of eternity? Yes—when the breath left this mortal clay, my soul winged its flight into the regions of infinite space! With the rapidity of a whirlwind I was hurried away from the earth; and, although I was nothing but a spirit, *and could not touch myself*, yet had I ears to hear, and eyes to see, and organs to receive sensations. I was permitted to wander amidst the regions of eternal bliss, and to penetrate into the mysteries of hell. O God! I tasted of the joys of the former, and was equally compelled to submit to the torments of the latter—each for a little space! Ah! sir, can you not divine wherefore the Almighty from time to time plunges mortals into a trance—submits them to the dominion of death for a season? It is that he may snatch away their souls, to lead them into the celestial mansions, and precipitate them into the depths of Satan's kingdom,—so that, when restored to their mortal clay, they may teach their fellow-creatures the grand truths of eternity—they may announce to them that there is a heaven to reward, and a hell to punish! And the Almighty made choice of me,—of *me*, a grovelling worm, one of the most obscure and humble of his creatures,—He made choice of *me*, I say, to become the means through which His warning voice might speak to *you* and *others*! What the pleasures of heaven are, or of what the torments of hell consist, I dare not say: suffice it for you to know that there *is* a heaven, and there *is* a hell—and the former exceeds all idea which man can conceive of bliss, while the latter surpasses every thing which he can imagine of horror! Be warned, then, by me, James Tomlinson—be warned by one who for four days was snatched away from earth, and, during that period was initiated in the mighty secrets of Eternity!"

The old man fell back in the bed, exhausted.

Tomlinson had at first listened to him with sorrow and alarm: he trembled lest the delirium of a fever had suddenly overtaken him—lest his brain was wandering. But as he proceeded—in a style of galvanic force and eloquence of which the listener, who had known him for so many years, deemed him incapable,—in a manner so inconsistent with all his former habits, so strangely at variance with his nature, his character, and his disposition,—the stock-broker became afraid, for it seemed to him as if those burning, searching, searing, scorching words were indeed an emanation from a source belonging to the mysteries of other worlds.

An awful pause ensued when Michael Martin ceased to speak.

For some moments Tomlinson sate riveted in speechless terror to his chair—stunned, bewildered, astounded, appalled by all he had just heard.

That dread silence was at length interrupted by the entrance of the surgeon.

"How gets on my patient now?" he said, approaching the couch.

"I fear—I am afraid—that is, I think—his head, wanders," faltered the stock-broker, scarcely knowing what he said.

"We must expect that such will be the case—for some days to come," returned the surgeon, with the coolness of a professional man who saw nothing extraordinary in such results following so strange a resuscitation from a death-like trance.

"You think, then," asked Tomlinson, "that it is possible for this poor old man to rave—about things of—a very extraordinary nature?"

"People, when delirious, burst forth into the most wild and fanciful ravings," answered the surgeon, as he felt Michael's pulse.

"And *he* might, then, rave of heaven—and hell—and things relating to—"

"He may rave of any nonsense," said the surgeon, abruptly; "but that is no reason why we should allow ourselves to be affected by it—as I see that you are."

"It was, indeed, very foolish on my part," observed Tomlinson, now acquiring confidence, and endeavouring to divest himself of the strange sensations of horror and dread which the eloquence of the old man had excited within him.

"You had better retire for the present," said the surgeon. "He is in a high fever—produced, perhaps, by this interview with you, under such circumstances. Do not think of seeing him again this evening: to-morrow evening he will be better and more composed."

"And you will take every possible care of him," exclaimed the stock-broker. "Remember that no expense most be spared to make him comfortable—to ensure his recovery. I will remunerate you handsomely, sir."

"Well, well," said the surgeon, impatiently. "We will talk about that another time. Good evening—you may return to-morrow at the same hour."

"Good evening," answered Tomlinson; and he slowly took his departure.

CHAPTER CXI.

A SCENE AT MR. CHICHESTER'S HOUSE.

It was about half-past nine on the same evening that the above incidents occurred, when a double-knock at the front door echoed through Mr. Chichester's dwelling, in the immediate vicinity of the Cambridge Heath Gate.

Mr. Chichester himself was seated in an elegantly-furnished parlour, sipping a glass of excellent Madeira, and pondering upon the best means of enjoying himself when he should have fingered the cash to obtain which he had perpetrated so diabolical an outrage against the confiding woman who had bestowed upon him her hand, and made him a partner in the enjoyment, if not in the actual possession, of her fortune.

The room was not large, but very comfortable; and at one end a pair of ample folding doors, now closed, afforded admission into a back parlour.

A few moments after the echo of the double-knock above mentioned, through the house, a female servant entered and announced Mr. Tomlinson.

Having requested the stock-broker to be seated, Mr. Chichester followed the servant into the hall, and said to her in a low whisper, "When the *other person* comes, show him into the back parlour, as I may require to have some conversation with this gentleman before I introduce them to each other."

This command being given, Mr. Chichester returned to the room where he had left Mr. Tomlinson.

"You are before your time," said Chichester, pushing the decanter and a glass towards the stock-broker: "that looks like business."

"I accidentally had an appointment upon some business in this neighbourhood," was the reply; "and when that matter was disposed of, I came straight hither."

"We cannot repair to the lunatic asylum until ten or half-past," said Chichester, "because, as a precaution, the keeper has promised to call upon me presently, and report whether my wife continues in the same docile mood as when he wrote to me yesterday afternoon."

"I should be delighted to hear that you could settle this unpleasant—very unpleasant affair in some amicable way," returned Tomlinson, whose mind was still painfully excited by the interview which had taken place between him and his late cashier.

"Impossible, my dear sir!" ejaculated Chichester. "There is no way save the one chalked out. I hope that you do not hesitate to fulfil the agreement into which you entered with me."

"The truth is, Mr. Chichester," said Tomlinson, "there is no man in London to whom a few hundreds of pounds would prove so welcome as to me—especially as to-morrow I have to pay two hundred to men who will not be very well pleased to experience a disappointment. It is true that I possess such a sum at my bankers'; but I dare not draw out every shilling—my credit would be ruined."

"So much the better reason for doing as I require of you," said Chichester, filling the glasses with Madeira.

"True," observed Tomlinson. "But, on the other hand, I tremble to take a false step—I fear to jeopardize myself by connivance at a direct conspiracy—"

"Pshaw!" cried Chichester. "What is the use of compunction on the part of a man who stands in so much need of money as yourself?"

Tomlinson was about to reply, when a low knock at the front door fell upon his ears.

"It is no one—of any consequence," said Chichester; then, as he re-filled the glasses, he muttered to himself, "There is no use in introducing these men to each other, unless this milk-and-water fool is quite agreeable to act."

"Did you make an observation?" inquired the stock-broker.

"I was observing that it was no one of any consequence;—only some person for the servants, most probably. But let me now ask you seriously, Mr. Tomlinson, whether you feel disposed to proceed further in this matter or not?"

"Candidly speaking, I would rather not," was the reply.

"Then you were wrong to give me a false hope of your aid, and allow so much valuable time to elapse, during which I might have found a broker less punctilious than you."

"I regret that I should have caused this inconvenience," answered Tomlinson; "but I had resolved to perform my promise until about an hour ago, and I have even brought the necessary documents for the purpose."

"Something very remarkable must have intervened to change your resolutions," said Chichester, contemptuously.

"I am not superstitions," observed Tomlinson; "but I believe that a providential warning was conveyed to me—"

"A providential fiddle-stick! Remember, Mr. Tomlinson, that by your unpardonable vacillation in this matter you will only prolong the incarceration of my wife."

"And, pray, who is responsible for that deed?"

"We will not discuss this point," returned Chichester. "I did not ask you to become my Mentor. At the same time," he added, sinking his voice, "every moment is important—for my wife is going mad in reality!"

"Then, in the name of God, release her at once!" ejaculated Tomlinson.

"Never—until she signs the deed."

"Release her," continued Tomlinson; "and then bring her with you to my office, where she can make the transfer."

"Are you mad yourself? Do you suppose she would ever put pen to paper if she were once liberated in that manner? I am surprised at your ignorance—vexed at your cowardice. You have not acted like a man of business, nor as a man of the world. It was for you to accept or decline my proposal—not to deceive me by these changes and shiftings of inclination. Come, sir—once for all—pluck up your courage: remember the two hundred pounds which you say must be paid to-morrow to two men who will not be put off, and the settlement of which debt will so materially embarrass your finances."

"My mind is made up, Mr. Chichester," answered Tomlinson firmly.

"And what is your decision?"

"I shall beg to withdraw from the transaction."

And Tomlinson rose to depart.

But at the same moment the folding-doors, communicating with the inner room, were thrown open, and a man with a cadaverous countenance stood forward.

"You shall *not* forfeit your word in this respect," exclaimed the individual, whom Tomlinson immediately recognised to be the body-snatcher engaged in the affair of Michael Martin.

"What does this man do here?" asked Tomlinson, in a faint voice, of Chichester.

"What do I do here? what do I do every where?" cried the man, with a diabolical laugh.

"Tell me the secret plot—the cunning intrigue—- the scheme of villany to which Anthony Tidkins, surnamed the Resurrection Man, is a stranger! But little did I think when I called upon you this morning,—little did I imagine when I met you again this evening, that *you* were the person enlisted by Mr. Chichester in the affair which we have now in hand."

"It would appear, then, that you are acquainted with each other," said Chichester, laughing heartily at the confusion manifested by the stock-broker in the presence of the Resurrection Man. "Why, what devilry was it that brought you two together?"

"Whether I keep Mr. Tomlinson's secret, or whether I proclaim it to you and every one else whom I know, until the whole town rings with the circumstance, is a matter for him to decide," said the Resurrection Man;—and, with admirable coolness, he helped himself to a bumper of Madeira.

"If I pay you two hundred pounds, as agreed upon," exclaimed Tomlinson, "what more would you require of me?"

"I require that you remain faithful to your promise to Mr. Chichester;—I require that you fulfil the service which you have undertaken to perform in his behalf," was the resolute reply.

"And in what way does the business regard you—you, who acknowledge yourself to be—"

"A resurrectionist! Certainly I am—and the most skilful in London, no other excepted," exclaimed Tidkins, with a satanic chuckle. "But that does not prevent me from turning mad-house keeper—or any thing else—when opportunity offers."

"What! *you* are the keeper of the asylum in which this gentleman's wife is imprisoned!" exclaimed the stock-broker, in a tone of the most profound astonishment.

"Yes, he is indeed," said Chichester; "and a better keeper could not have been found. So now you know all about that point."

"And Mr. Tomlinson will be good enough to accompany *me* to my house," observed the Resurrection Man. "You, Mr. Chichester, can follow us at a little distance. It looks suspicious for three people to walk together."

"I really must decline—" began Tomlinson, trembling from head to foot, as the warning voice of Michael Martin seemed to ring in his ears.

"One word more, Mr. Tomlinson," said the Resurrection Man. "I am a person of determined spirit and resolution. I never stick at trifles myself; and I don't choose others, with whom I am connected, to balk me in my designs, when I can prevent them. Now, either come with me, and do what is required of you; or, as sure as there is breath in your body, I will deliver up a certain person to the police, and stand the consequences myself."

"I beg of you—I implore you—"

"Pshaw!" cried Chichester: "this is child's play!"

"Child's play, indeed!" thundered the Resurrection Man in a terrible voice. "But I will put an end to it. Come, sir—hesitate another minute, and *that old man* is lost!"

"I will accompany you," answered the stock-broker;—then, in an under tone, he added, "But God knows how unwillingly!"

The Resurrection Man seized him by the arm, and conducted him out of the house.

Five minutes afterwards, Chichester followed in the same direction.

CHAPTER CXII.

VIOLA.

THE Resurrection Man and the stock-broker pursued their way in silence to the very entrance of the alley leading to the side door of the dwelling of the former.

There they halted, the Resurrection Man observing that they must wait for Mr. Chichester.

Tomlinson took advantage of the interval to implore the Resurrection Man not to communicate to Chichester the secret relating to Michael Martin.

"Do not be afraid," was the answer: "I am as close as Newgate-door when people conduct themselves as they ought to do. One individual for whom I do business never knows what I am engaged in for another—unless his own bad behaviour forces me to blab. So make yourself quite easy upon that score."

Chichester now made his appearance; and the Resurrection Man led the way up the alley.

Having opened the door of the house, he admitted his two companions into the back-room on the ground-floor, and then struck a light.

The appearance of the place was precisely the same as when we described it on the first occasion of the Rattlesnake's visit to that department of the building.

Tomlinson shuddered as he cast his eyes around the naked and gloomy walls.

"Holloa!" ejaculated Chichester, taking up the mask, which lay on the table, in his hands: "I suppose that this—"

"Hush!" said the Resurrection Man, glancing towards Tomlinson, as much as to desire Chichester not to allow the stock-broker to know more of the secrets connected with the treatment of the prisoner, than was possible; for Tidkins, who possessed a profound knowledge of human nature, was well aware that certain compunctious feelings still floated in the mind of Tomlinson, and that he was, after all, but a very coward in the ways of crime.

Chichester covered the mask with the cloak, while the stock-broker was engaged in scanning the appearance of the chamber.

When Tomlinson had completed his survey, and while he was still wondering where the means of communication with the apartment of the alleged lunatic could be, he happened to turn in the direction of the chimney-piece, when to his surprise he perceived the hearth-stone raised, and the Resurrection Man half down the subterranean staircase which that strangely contrived trap-door had disclosed to view.

Tomlinson shuddered—and hesitated whether he should proceed further in the matter; but his scruples vanished when he heard the voice of the Resurrection Man desiring—or rather commanding him—to follow him down that flight of stone steps.

Guided by Tidkins, who carried the candle, which was fixed in one of the large tin shades before described, Tomlinson descended the stairs, and found himself in a vaulted passage, about twenty feet long, and four broad. There were four strong doors, studded with thick iron nails, on each side.

"You see, this house was built for a lunatic asylum many—many years ago, when treatment wasn't quite so humane as it is now," whispered the Resurrection Man to Tomlinson; "but it hadn't been used as such for the last thirty years till the other day."

"And did you hire the establishment for the purpose of restoring it to its original uses?" demanded Tomlinson, shuddering, as he glanced around on the damp walls on which the strong light of the candle fell.

"Not I, indeed," answered Tidkins, abruptly.

Chichester had now descended into the subterranean passage.

"This is the cell," said the Resurrection Man; and, approaching one of the doors, he placed a key in the lock.

During the few seconds that intervened until the door was thrown open, Tomlinson experienced a perfect age of mental agony. He felt as if he were about to perpetrate some hideous crime—a murder of the blackest dye. The perspiration poured off his forehead: he trembled from head to foot; his brain felt oppressed; there was a weight upon the pit of his stomach; his eye-balls throbbed.

Yes—he was a very coward in guilt!

The door flew open.

The Resurrection Man entered first, and advanced into the middle of a small arched cell—a stone tomb, built to immure the living!

A decent bed, a table, a chair, a wash-hand-stand, and a lamp, which was lighted, together with a few other necessaries, composed the furniture of that dungeon.

And stretched upon the bed, with her clothes on, lay the victim of this cruel persecution.

The glare of the Resurrection Man's candle fell upon a pale, but not unpleasing countenance: the long chesnut hair spread, dishevelled, over the arm that supported the head.

The sleep of that lady was deep but uneasy—such a slumber as might be supposed to fall upon the eyes of the criminal the night before his execution.

Her bosom heaved convulsively; and from her lips escaped a stifled sob as the three men entered the cell.

Chichester was about to place his hand upon her shoulder in order to arouse her, when she opened her eyes, and started up to a

sitting posture on the bed.

"Villains!" she exclaimed: "would you murder me?"

"No such thing, my dear," said Chichester. "We have merely come to terminate this unpleasant business in the way proposed by Mr. Tidkins."

"The wretch!" cried Viola, casting a glance of doubt and uncertainty at both Tomlinson and the Resurrection Man.

"Ah! I dare say I am, ma'am, in *your* estimation," said Tidkins, coolly. "Oh! you needn't look at me in that way, ma'am. I will acknowledge that I am your keeper in this establishment; and that it's me who has been good enough to bring you food every night."

"The wretch!" again cried the unhappy lady, while a profound shudder seemed to convulse her whole frame as she surveyed the Resurrection Man from head to foot. "It is you, then," she continued, leaping from the bed, and confronting the miscreant, "it is you who have dared to practise upon my fears in a manner the most diabolical—the most cowardly;—you who have chosen the solemn hour of midnight for your visits, and who have come in a guise calculated to fill my mind with the most horrible imaginings!"

"Remember our agreement, ma'am," said Tidkins, sternly. "You pledged yourself to forget the past upon certain conditions: we are here to fulfil those conditions. Do you mean to keep your word? or must we leave you to your solitude?"

"Who is this gentleman?" demanded Viola, casting a penetrating glance upon Tomlinson.

"The stock-broker, my dear," answered Chichester: "the person who will receive your signature to a certain little paper—"

"Then, sir," interrupted the lady, addressing herself to James Tomlinson, "as you exercise an honourable profession, prove yourself an honourable man in this respect. You see before you a powerless female, who was weak enough to bestow her hand upon a villain—a villain that has immured her, by the aid of another villain of even a deeper dye than himself, in this horrible vault! Perhaps they have told you that I am mad, sir; but do I speak like one whose reason has abandoned her? or would you receive the signature of a person who knew not what she signed? Oh! no, sir—you cannot believe that I am in mental darkness! you must perceive the full extent of the villany that has been practised against me, for the purpose of plundering me of that property which I received from my former husband! Oh! if you be a man possessing one spark of honour—as I must suppose that you are—"

"Come—a truce to all this," said Mr. Chichester. "The gentleman to whom you are addressing yourself knows the whole affair, and will act *with* and *for* me."

"Is this true, sir?" asked the unhappy lady, casting a glance of mingled terror and supplication upon the stock-broker, and clasping her hands together: "can this be true? Is it possible that a person exercising an honourable profession can league with wretches of their stamp?"—and she pointed disdainfully towards the Resurrection Man and Chichester. "Oh! no, it cannot be! At least, hear me! I married that man—"

"Don't I tell you that Mr. Tomlinson knows all," cried Chichester, impatiently. "We did not come to debate upon the past, but to settle for the future."

"You have come, then, to plunder a weak, helpless, persecuted female," continued Viola. "But do you know, sir, the terrible means that have been adopted to wring from me a consent to part with half the property which was bequeathed to me by a man that loved me—a man who toiled for years and years to amass the fortune that must now be devoted to the extravagances of a spendthrift? Would you believe to what an extent the cruelty, the cowardice of that man,"—and she pointed to Tidkins,—"has been carried to terrify me into compliance with the demands of his employer? Sir, for three weeks and three days have I been a prisoner in this dungeon; and every night—without fail—has that miscreant visited me in a disguise which, in such a place, and at such an hour, would make the stoutest heart palpitate with horror,—a disguise of such a nature that this is the first time that I have seen his face; for on the fatal evening when I was seized and brought to this dungeon, every thing was involved in utter obscurity;—and then, when the door opened again, and a light gleamed in upon me,—O God! it was carried by a person dressed in a dark cloak and a white mask—like a being of another world!"

"Surely you did not go to such extremes as this?" exclaimed Tomlinson, turning sharply round upon the Resurrection Man.

"Whatever I did, or did not, is nothing to the present business," replied Tidkins, brutally. "If any thing is going to be done, let it be done at once; if not, the lady will remain here till she chooses to consent to the terms proposed to her."

Tomlinson glanced, with a look of deep sympathy, towards the lady, who stood in an attitude of supplication and despair before him. Her dishevelled hair hung loosely over her shoulders: her countenance, though not beautiful, was naturally interesting, and was now rendered more so by its extreme pallor and by the expression of profound melancholy which it wore; and her mild blue eyes were raised towards him as if to implore his aid—his compassion.

"Now, what is to be done?" demanded Chichester.

"It is for this gentleman to decide," said the lady, still gazing upon Tomlinson's countenance. "You may well suppose that I am desirous to recover the liberty which has thus been infamously violated;—but if you, sir, possess one germ of generous feeling—one spark of honour—one gleam of humanity in your soul, do not—do not lend yourself to this infamy! Command these men to restore me to freedom—they cannot refuse to obey you! Oh! sir—hear me—do not avert your head: hear me—hear me, I implore you!"

"This is quite enough of folly for one time," ejaculated the Resurrection Man: "I have been an idiot myself to listen to it so long. Mr. Tomlinson, are you prepared to receive the signature of this lady to the deed that will transfer to her husband a certain portion of her property?"—then, approaching his lips to the stock-broker's ear, he murmured in a low whisper, "Hesitate—and I denounce your late clerk within an hour!"

These words operated like magic upon the weak-minded and timid James Tomlinson. He no longer beheld the supplicating woman before him: he only saw his own danger.

Accordingly, he advanced towards the table, drew forth a document from his pocket, and said, in a cold tone, "I am ready to receive that lady's signature."

The Resurrection Man produced an ink-bottle and pens (with which he had purposely provided himself beforehand) from his pocket; and placed them upon the table.

Tomlinson seated himself in the chair, and proceeded to fill up the paper.

"In whose favour is the transfer to be made?" he demanded.

"Then, sir, you are determined to league with my oppressors?" said Viola, in a tone expressive of concentrated feelings of indignation and despair.

"Madam, I am unfortunately compelled—"

"Say no more, sir," interrupted the lady, with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "If you came hither a villain, I must be mad indeed to hope to make you an honest man by any reasoning of mine."

"Madam, you wrong me, by heavens!" ejaculated Tomlinson, throwing down the pen.

But at the same moment his wrist was seized with a grasp of iron, and a well-known voice whispered in his ear, "Hesitate another moment, and I denounce you and your cashier together!"

Tomlinson became docile as a child, resumed the pen, and said, "In whose favour is this transfer to be made?"

"In that of Mr. Arthur Chichester," answered Viola, firmly.

"What is the amount to be so transferred?"

"Eight thousand pounds, being part of a sum now standing in my name in the Three-and-a-Half per cents.," replied the injured woman, still with an outward composure, which was not, however, the reflection of her inward feelings.

Tomlinson filled up the paper according to the instructions which he received.

Then, addressing himself to Viola, but without turning his eyes towards her, he said, "You are aware, madam, that this document is ante-dated by two months?"

"I am, sir."

"Nothing now remains, then, madam, save for you to sign it."

Viola advanced slowly towards the table, took up the pen, and seemed to be about to affix her signature to the deed, when—as if suddenly recollecting herself—she turned towards the stock-broker, and exclaimed, "What guarantee have I that my freedom is to follow this concession on my part?"

"To-morrow evening, at dusk, you shall be conveyed home," exclaimed Chichester, seeing that Tomlinson gave no answer.

"And why not this evening—now—the moment that document is signed?"

"Because I should prefer laying my hand on the money first," was the reply.

"Mr. Tomlinson," cried the lady, "I have more confidence in you than in either of these men: I am willing even to believe that some circumstance, unknown to me, compels you unwillingly to become their instrument on this occasion."

"By heavens, you speak the truth, madam!" ejaculated Tomlinson, warmly.

"I believe you. Now, sir, promise me on your most solemn word of honour—by every thing you consider sacred—- that to-morrow evening at nine o'clock I shall be released from this dungeon."

"I promise—I swear that you shall be conveyed home to-morrow evening at nine o'clock," answered Tomlinson. "But, in return, madam, will you pledge yourself as solemnly that your lips shall ever remain closed with regard to this proceeding?"

"Oh! yes—I do—I do," answered the poor creature, clasping her hands together—for she could even feel grateful to the man who, while leagued with others against her, yet pledged himself to her release from that horrible cell.

"Secresy on all sides is one of the conditions of the present arrangement," said Chichester.

"And if the lady breaks that condition," added the Resurrection Man, "she would repent it; for let her be surrounded by friends—let her be protected by a regiment of soldiers—let her take refuge in the Queen's palace, I would still find means to tear her away, and bring her back to this dungeon."

Tomlinson and the lady both cast a glance of mingled horror and surprise at the formidable individual who thus spoke so confidently of his power and resolution.

There was a moment's pause.

Viola then took up the pen, and, with a firm hand, affixed her signature to the document.

"I am now at your mercy," she said, in a tone rather of supplication than of menace or mistrust.

"You need not be afraid that we shall deceive you, my dear," observed Chichester, with a smile.

A reply rose to the lips of his injured wife; but she suppressed it—though with difficulty. She was no doubt afraid to irritate the man in whose power she still found herself, by giving utterance to her thoughts.

"No—there's nothing to be afraid of," said the Resurrection Man. "The lady has fulfilled her part of the bargain, and we will perform ours. As for her keeping this little business dark, I feel confident about *that*: she would not like to stand the chance of coming here again; and, as for making a disturbance merely to get back the money, that would be useless, when once it had found its way into the pockets of her husband."

Having concluded this brutal speech, the Resurrection Man desired his companions to await his return for a moment, while he proceeded to fetch the lady her provisions for the next four-and-twenty hours.

He accordingly hastened up the steps to the little back room, whence he speedily returned with his basket in his hand.

"You see that I expected how all this would end," he observed, with a hideous smile; "and so I prepared a little treat for the lady. Here's a prime fowl; that brown paper contains ham; here's a new loaf; and this is a bottle of as excellent sherry as one need drink."

The Resurrection Man placed the articles, as he enumerated them, upon the table; and Viola was pleased as she contemplated them—because she perceived in this indulgence an earnest that the promise of her persecutors would be fulfilled with respect to her restoration to liberty.

"We must now take leave of Mrs. Chichester," said Tidkins. "To-morrow evening, ma'am, at nine precisely, you shall be free."

The three men then left the dungeon.

But ere the door closed upon the inmate once more, she moved forward, caught Tomlinson by the hand, and said in an emphatic tone, "Remember your solemn promise!"

"Do not be alarmed, madam. There can be no interest to detain you here beyond to-morrow."

Viola retreated into the dungeon; and the door was shut.

She heard the three persons who had just left her retire from the subterranean prison: the closing of the trap-door also fell upon her ears.

Clasping her hands together, she exclaimed, "God grant that they may not deceive me!"

And then a vague terror stole upon her,—a horrible, an absorbing dread lest those men intended to immure her for life in that solitary cell, or else restore her to liberty only when they should have extorted from her the remainder of her fortune.

"Oh! fool that I was, to sign that paper!" she exclaimed, in a paroxysm of despair. "Will men, who are capable of such villany—such atrocity as this that they have practised towards me,—will they remain satisfied with a portion of the gold that has allured them to violate every principle of honour and humanity? Oh! no—no! and perhaps—to conceal their crime the more effectually—they will not hesitate to imbrue their hands in my blood!"

Overpowered by this idea, the unhappy woman threw herself upon the bed, and wept bitterly.

That torrent of tears relieved her; and in a few minutes she grew somewhat composed.

Then came reflections of a less painful nature.

"Still—still there was something honest in the appearance of that stock-broker: there was something feeling in his words! He was performing a task against which his soul revolted. He commiserated my condition: oh! yes—he sympathised with me! In him is my hope—my only hope! I need not quite despair!"

She thus reasoned herself into a state of comparative calmness; and then a feeling of weakness came over her. She grew faint—her head swam round.

She rose, and walked up and down the cell to dispel the sensation that thus oppressed her; and suddenly she recollected that many hours had elapsed since she had eaten any thing. Her eyes fell upon the viands which the Resurrection Man had placed on the table; and she hastened to break her long fast. When she had partaken of a morsel of food, she poured some wine into a glass and drank it.

Scarcely, however, had she swallowed the liquor, when she felt herself overpowered by a deep drowsiness; the glass dropped from her hands; she rose from the chair, advanced a few paces, and then fell upon the bed in a state of insensibility.

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE LOVERS.

THE morning, which succeeded the night that witnessed the incidents just detailed, was clear, frosty, and fine. It was one of those winter mornings when the soil is as hard as iron, but on which the sun shines with gay light if not with genial heat. On such a morning we walk abroad with a consciousness that the exercise benefits us: we feel the blood acquiring a more rapid circulation in our veins; we soon experience a pleasant glow pervading the frame; our spirits become exhilarated; and we learn that even Winter has its peculiar charms.

Such was the feeling that animated Richard Markham, as, after alighting from a public vehicle at Richmond, he proceeded rapidly along a by-road that led through the fields at the back of Count Alteroni's mansion.

His cheeks were tinged with a glow that set off his handsome features to the greatest advantage: his dark eyes sparkled with an expression of joy and hope; a smile played upon his lip; and he walked with his head erect as if he felt proud of his existence—because that existence, in spite of its vicissitudes, was protected by some auspicious star.

O Love! art thou not a star full of hope and promise, like that which guided the sages of the East to the cradle of their Redeemer?—like the welcome planet which heralds the dauntless mariner over the midnight seas?—like the twinkling orb which points the right track to the Arab wanderer of the desert?

Richard Markham pursued his way—his soul full of hope, and love, and bliss.

At a distance of about a quarter of a mile on his right hand, the mansion of Count Alteroni soon met his eyes, surrounded by the evergreens that, in contrast with the withered trees elsewhere, gave to the spot where it stood the air of an oasis in the midst of a desert.

Markham's heart beat quickly when that well-known dwelling met his view; and for a moment a shade of melancholy passed over his countenance, for he recalled to mind the happy hours he had once spent within its walls.

But that transitory cloud vanished from his brow, when his eye caught a glimpse, in another instant, of a sylph-like form that was threading a leafless grove at a little distance.

Richard redoubled his steps, and was led, by the circuitous winding of the path that he was pursuing, somewhat nearer to the Count's mansion.

In a few minutes he reached the very spot where, in the preceding spring, he had accidentally encountered Isabella, and where she assured him of her unchanged and unchangeable love.

He is now on that spot once more:—he pauses—looks around—and Isabella again approaches.

Richard rushes forward, and clasps the beauteous Italian maiden in his arms.

"Isabella—dearest Isabella! What good angel prompted you to grant me this interview?" he exclaimed, when the first effusion of joy was over.

"Do you think me indiscreet, Richard?" asked the signora, taking his arm, and glancing timidly towards his countenance.

"Indiscreet, my sweet girl!" cried her lover: "Oh! how can you suppose that I would entertain a harsh feeling with regard to that goodness on your part which doubtless instigated you to afford me the happiness of this meeting?"

"But when we met here—seven or eight months ago, Richard," said Isabella, "I told you that never—never would I consent to a stolen interview. And now—you may imagine—"

"I imagine that you love me, Isabella—love me as I love you," exclaimed Markham; "and what other idea can occupy my thoughts when that one is present? Oh! you know not the ineffable joy—the unequalled pleasure which I experienced when your letter reached me yesterday. I recognised your handwriting immediately; and I seized the letter with avidity, when it was brought to me in my study. And then, Isabella—will you believe me when I tell you that I trembled to open it? I laid it upon the table—my hand refused to break the seal. Pardon me—forgive me, if for a moment I feared—"

"That I had forgotten my vows—my plighted affection," faltered Isabella, reproachfully.

"Again I say pardon—forgive me, dearest girl; but—oh! I have been so very unfortunate!"

"Think not of the past, Richard," said Isabella, tenderly.

"The past! Oh! how can I cease to ponder upon the past, when it has nearly bereaved me of all hope for the future?" exclaimed Markham, in an impassioned tone.

"Not *all* hope," murmured Isabella; "since hope still remains to *me*!"

"Angel that thou art!" cried Richard, pressing the maiden's hand fondly. "How weak I am, since it is from thee that moral courage ever is imparted."

"You were speaking of my letter," said Isabella, with a smile.

"True! But so many emotions—joy and hope—sorrowful reminiscences and brighter prospects, bewilder me! I will, however, try to talk calmly! When your letter came, I feared to open it for some moments: I dreaded a new calamity! But at length I called all my firmness to my aid; and a terrible weight was taken from my soul, when my eye glanced at the first lines of that letter which suddenly became as dear and welcome as a reprieve to the condemned criminal. Then, when I saw that my beloved Isabella still thought of me—still loved me—-"

"Oh, I did not tell you *that* in my letter," exclaimed Isabella, with a smile of bewitching archness.

"No—but I divined it—I gathered it from the words in which you conveyed to me your desire to see me—from the manner in which you said that at eleven o'clock this morning you should walk in the very place where we had met accidentally once before—oh! I suddenly became a new being: never was my heart so light!"

"And yet I said in my letter, Richard, that I wished to see you upon a matter of business——"

"Ah! Isabella, destroy not the charm which makes me happy! Let no cold thought of worldly things chill the heavenly fervour of our affection. Were it not for that love which reciprocally exists between us, how should I have supported the misfortunes that have multiplied upon me?"

"Again I say, Richard, allude not to the past. Alas! bitter—bitter were the tears that I wept on that fatal night when——"

"When I was publicly disgraced at the theatre—in the midst of a triumph. Yes—Isabella, you were there—there, when my shame was consummated!"

"Accident had led us to the theatre that evening," answered Isabella. "My father had heard that a new tragedy, of which grand hopes were entertained, was to be produced; and he insisted that I should accompany him and my mother. I was compelled to assent to his desire—although I prefer retirement and tranquillity to society and gaiety. You may conceive our astonishment—you may imagine *my* surprise and *my* joy, when you came forward to acknowledge the congratulations offered for a triumph so brilliantly achieved. And then—but let us leave that subject—my blood turns cold when I think of it!"

"Oh! go on—speak of it, speak of it!" exclaimed Markham, enthusiastically; "for although the reminiscence of that fearful scene be like pouring molten lead upon an open wound, still it is sweet—it is sweet, Isabella, to receive sympathy from such lips as yours."

"Alas! I have little more to say—except that the sudden intervention of that terrible man seemed to strike me as with the arrow of death; and I became insensible. Then, Richard,—*then*," continued Isabella, in a low and tremulous tone, "my mother suspected my secret—or rather received a confirmation of the suspicion which she had long entertained!"

"And she shuddered at the mere idea?" exclaimed Markham, interrogatively.

"No, Richard: my mother is kind and good—and, you know, was always well disposed towards you: I have told you that much before! She said little—and of that no matter! But my father—my father——"

"He discovered *our* secret also!" exclaimed Richard. "Oh! did he not curse me?"

"He was cool and calm, when—on the following morning—he spoke to me upon the subject. I answered him frankly: I admitted my attachment for you."

"What did he say, Isabella! Tell me every thing—suppress not a word!"

"Oh, heavens! he made me very miserable," returned Isabella, tears trickling down her countenance. "But wherefore distress both yourself and me with a recapitulation of what ensued? Suffice it to say, that I collected all the arguments in my memory—and they were not a few;—and I presented to him that paper—the confession of Talbot, which proved your innocence!"

"Dearest girl!" exclaimed Markham, rapturously.

"He did not refuse to read it," added Isabella; "and at length, when I saw that I had made a profound impression on him, I turned the conversation upon the momentary reverse of fortune which had plunged him into a debtors' prison——"

"Isabella!" cried Markham, in surprise.

"And then I boldly declared my conviction that the unknown friend who had released him—the anonymous individual who had thrown open to him the gate leading to liberty—the nameless person, that had done so generous a deed, and accomplished it in a manner as delicate as it was noble,—was none other than Richard Markham!"

The tone of the Italian maiden had become more and more impassioned as she proceeded; and when she uttered the last words of the foregoing sentence, she turned upon him on whose arm she leant, a countenance glowing with animation, and radiant with gratitude and love.

"Oh, Isabella! you told your father *that*!" cried Markham. "And yet—you knew not——"

"My suspicion amounted almost to a certainty," interrupted Isabella: "and now I doubt no longer. Oh! Richard—if ever for one moment I had wavered in my love for you,—if ever an instant of coldness, arising from worldly reflections, had intervened to make me repent my solemn vows to you,—that *one* deed of yours—that noble sacrifice of your property, made to release my revered parent from a gaol,—that—that alone would have rendered my heart unalterably thine!"

"Beloved girl—this moment is the happiest of my life!" exclaimed Markham; and tears of joy filled his eyes, as he pressed the maiden once more to his heart.

"Yes, Richard," continued Isabella, after a long pause; and now her splendid countenance was lighted up with an expression of dignity and generous pride, and the timid, bashful maiden seemed changed into a lady whose brow was encircled with a diadem; "yes, Richard, if ever I felt that no deed nor act of mine shall separate us eternally—if ever I rejoiced in the prospect of possessing wealth, and receiving lustre from my father's princely rank——"

"Isabella!" exclaimed Richard, dropping the arm on which the Italian lady was leaning, and stepping back in the most profound astonishment: "Isabella, what mean you?"

"I mean," continued the signora, casting upon him a glance of deep tenderness and noble pride; "I mean that henceforth, Richard, I can have no secret from you,—that I must now disclose what has often before trembled upon my tongue; a secret which my father would not, however, as yet, have revealed to the English public generally,—the secret of his rank; for he whom the world knows as the Count Alteroni, is Alberto, Prince of Castelcicala!"

Strange was the effect that this revelation produced upon the young man. He felt, as if, when in a burning heat, a mighty volume

of icy water had suddenly been dashed over him: his head appeared to swim round—his sight grew dim—he staggered, and would have fallen had not Isabella rushed towards him, exclaiming, "Richard—dear Richard—do you not believe how much I love you?"

Those words produced an instantaneous change within him: those sweet syllables, uttered in the silvery tones of lovely woman's tenderness—recalled him to himself.

"Ah! Isabella," he exclaimed, mournfully, "how insuperable is the barrier which divides us *now*!"

"And—if that barrier to which you allude, ever existed, was it less formidable when you were ignorant of the secret than it is at present?" asked Isabella, tenderly.

"It seems so to me," replied Richard. "Are you not placed on an eminence to which I never can hope to reach? have I not dared to lift my ambitious eyes towards a Princess—the daughter of one who will some day wear a sovereign crown? Oh! now the delusion is gone—I am awakened from a long dream! But, say—did your highness make this revelation to-day, in order to extinguish my adventurous aspirations at once and for ever?"

"Richard, you wrong me—cruelly wrong me!" exclaimed Isabella, bursting into tears.

"Forgive me—forgive me, sweetest, dearest girl!" cried Markham. "I was mad—I raved—I knew not what I said——"

"Richard, when we met here—once before—you doubted my affection, and then you asked me to forgive you! How often will you put my feelings to so cruel a test? how often will you renew those unjust suspicions?"

"O God! what have I done, that I should thus call tears to your eyes, Isabella? Forgive me, again—I say—forgive me: on my knees I implore——"

"No—no! I think no more of what you said," exclaimed Isabella. "Calm yourself for my sake!"—and she gazed so tenderly up into his countenance, that he was reassured, and all his doubts and fears vanished in a moment.

"Yes, Isabella," he said: "I am now calm; and you—you are an angel!"

"A mere terrestrial one, Richard, I am afraid," returned the Princess, with a smile. "And now let me speak to you upon the little matter of business to which I alluded in my note. After I had informed my father that you were the generous unknown who had been the means of his release from prison, he exclaimed, '*Excellent-hearted young man! How I have wronged him by my injurious suspicions concerning that night when the burglary was attempted at our home!*' You see that I tell you his very words."

"Yes—tell me every thing, dear Isabella. And, thus, your father no longer believes——"

"How can he believe that any one would attempt to rob him one day, and pay nearly two thousand pounds for him another?" exclaimed Isabella. "Oh, no—he is disabused upon that point. Would that he were unprejudiced on others!"

"I understand you," said Markham, mournfully. "The Prince cannot consent to renew his acquaintance with one who has been subjected to an infamous punishment, and who aspires to the hand of his daughter."

"Alas! you have divined but too truly," returned Isabella, wiping away a tear. "Nevertheless, may we not hope? Already is one great point gained: my father believes that you may have been unfortunate, and not guilty. Oh! that is a great obstacle removed! And in my mother, Richard, you have a warm friend—although her prejudices of rank and family——"

"I can well comprehend the sentiments of her Highness," answered Markham: "and it is all that which now makes me fear lest ——"

"Fear not—but hope every thing," said Isabella, who, however, poor girl! spoke in a more flattering manner than her secret thoughts would have warranted, had she consulted them; but she saw her lover oppressed and weighed down by the revelation of that secret which she had considered it unkind to retain any longer; and she did all she could to console him.

"Yes—I will hope, for both our sakes," said Richard.

"And now let me conclude my little narrative," continued Isabella. "My father resolved to repay you the money you had so generously advanced, the moment he was enabled; and as the Grand Duke of Castelcicala has settled upon him an income of ten thousand a-year, besides an immediate grant of forty thousand pounds,—boons which my father had only accepted because no political condition was attached to them, and because they are alleged to be an indemnification for his estates which have been confiscated,—he only awaited the arrival of his first remittances to acquit himself of that debt of honour. The day before yesterday he gave this letter," added Isabella, taking a small sealed packet from her reticule, "to one of our servants to convey to the post at Richmond. I demanded it back again privately of the servant, with the view of placing it myself in your hands, and—and taking the opportunity to reveal to you a secret which I did not think it right to keep from you any longer."

"I receive this packet, then, Isabella, with its contents," said Markham, pressing her hand as he took it, "because your father is happily in position to repay me the trifle which I was enabled to disburse for his benefit. But ten thousand times more valuable is this sum to me, since its payment prompted you to grant me this interview."

"I had so much to tell you, Richard," answered the lady, with a deep blush, "that I could not commit it all to paper. I therefore adopted this plan—which perhaps is indiscreet——"

"Use not that epithet again, dear Isabella," interrupted Markham. "You assure me that you love me: can you then regret that you have made me happy by allowing me to see you—to talk to you—to embrace you once again? And yet, in the midst of that happiness, the sad thought intrudes upon me—'*When shall I see thee again?*'"

"Accident may throw us together soon—as it has done ere now," murmured Isabella: "accident—or rather Providence—does so much for us poor mortals."

"But, with your mother's prejudices in favour of rank and birth, and with your father's high destinies, what hope can exist for so humble an individual as myself? How can I dare aspire to the hand of a Princess of a powerful independent state?"

"Did not Miss Eliza Sydney espouse the Grand Duke of Castelcicala? and she—she also——"

"Oh! I remember," exclaimed Markham, seeing that Isabella hesitated,—"I remember that *she* also was unfortunate, as I was; and she also endured a weary imprisonment of two years. Yes—I accept the omen—it is an auspicious one!"

And Richard's handsome countenance was once more animated with a glow of hope and joy.

Then, in an access of enthusiasm, he exclaimed:

"Oh! if ever this fond aspiration should be realised,—if ever the humble and obscure Englishman were united to the high-born and brilliant Italian Princess, how sweet—how sweet would it be for him to owe rank and fortune to the woman whom he loved so fondly, and whom he would ever love until the hand of Death should beckon him to the tomb! For myself, I pant not for the honours and glories of this life; for hadst thou, Isabella, been the daughter of the lowest peasants, I had loved thee all the same—and had been far, far more contented, because the obstacles which now oppose our happiness might then have ceased to exist!"

"Believe me, Richard," answered Isabella, in a tone of witching tenderness, "believe me, that the happiest day of my life will be that when I can prove to you the extent of that affection with which you have inspired me;—and, again I repeat, that if ever I rejoiced in the prospect of that fortune which, whether my father eventually succeed to the ducal throne or not, he will be enabled to leave me,—and if ever I felt proud of that high station which my family enjoys, or indulged in the hope that my parents may one day attain to sovereign rank,—that joy, that pride, that hope are all experienced on account of *you*! For, like you, I care not for the grandeur and ostentation of palaces;—but it will be a thrice happy day for me, when I can say to thee—'*Richard, my fortune is all thine, and thou shalt share my rank!*' Because, in Castelcicala, unlike the usages of your native land, he who espouses a Princess becomes a Prince; and, when you shall be thus exalted, Richard, who will dare to remind you of the misfortunes of your past life? That is why I rejoice in my present rank and future prospects,—a joy that is experienced solely on account of you!"

"Noble-hearted girl! what kindness—what attention—what devoted love on my part can ever repay thee for these generous feelings—these endearing proofs of the tenderest attachment!"

"Do you think that I should love you, Richard, as I do," returned Isabella, "if I did not know the generosity of your soul—if I did not appreciate all your virtues? I am well aware that, unfortunately, you are not rich; and yet you sacrificed—nobly sacrificed your property to release my parent from a gaol! Oh! how can I ever forget that conduct of yours? You speak of repaying *me* for my affection: how much do I not owe to *you*?"

There was a pause in the conversation, during which the lovers walked up and down along the edge of the leafless grove, each enjoying reflections of a pleasurable nature. Isabella leant with charming confidence upon the arm of that handsome and generous-hearted young man, in whose love she gloried as if *he* were the Prince and *she* were the obscure individual; and he felt his heart expand with ineffable bliss, as he contemplated the brilliant prospects which that lovely girl—the proudly-born Princess spread before the eyes of him—the obscure individual.

More than an hour and a half had already passed, and Isabella at length remembered that she must return home.

She intimated to her lover the necessity of separating; and, with fond embraces and renewed vows, they parted.

Richard watched her receding form until she entered the grove of evergreens surrounding her father's mansion: he then retraced his steps towards Richmond.

And never was his heart so light as now!

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE CONTENTS OF THE PACKET.

ALBERTO of Castelcicala, to conceal his princely rank, when he arrived in England an exile from his native shores, had adopted the style of Count Alteroni—this title being the name of an estate which he had possessed in Italy, but which, together with the remainder of his vast property, had been confiscated by order of the Grand Duke, his uncle. The government of Castelcicala was an absolute despotism; and it was because the Prince, with a view to ameliorate the condition of the people whom he might one day be called upon to govern, had placed himself at the head, and openly avowed himself as the patron, of a political party in the state, whose object was to obtain a constitution, he had been proscribed by the Grand Duke and the old aristocracy of the country.

His party advised him to have recourse to arms; and meetings in favour of the enlightened principles which he advocated were held at the time throughout the country. But the Prince was resolved never to plunge his native land into the horrors of a civil war: he preferred exile and obscurity to such an alternative. His was, indeed, a lofty and patriotic soul, that knew how to sacrifice his dearest interests to the popular tranquillity.

Accordingly, on his arrival in London he had adopted a rank comparatively humble in respect to the exalted station which he in reality occupied; and to this mode of conduct he was instigated by the same disinterested motives that had led him to fly from his country rather than raise the standard of civil strife. He knew that if he settled in London under his proper title, he could not avoid receiving those patriotic exiles who had fled from Castelcicala to avoid the consequences of their liberal opinions. He was averse to the idea of allowing his dwelling to be made the point of *réunion* for those who advocated the enforcement of the popular cause by means of arms; he would not for a moment consent to permit a nucleus of open rebellion against the reigning sovereign of Castelcicala, to be formed under his auspices. He had, therefore, intimated to his friends and adherents that he intended to retire into private life, until circumstances might place him in a position to confer upon his native land the charter of liberties which he believed to be its natural right.

The few English persons who were acquainted with his secret, religiously kept it. The Tremordyns, Armstrong, and the Earl of Warrington, whom he numbered amongst his best friends, respected the *incognito* which his Highness thought fit to preserve. Thus, Armstrong had not even communicated the fact to Richard Markham when he introduced him to the Prince's dwelling; and the reader may now understand the reasons which led the haughtiest of England's peers, the Earl of Warrington, on the occasion of his visit to the mansion near Richmond to solicit letters of introduction for Eliza Sydney, to bend his head with such profound respect in the presence of the heir presumptive to a throne.

Nor need it now be made a matter of marvel if those letters of introduction proved such immediate passports for Eliza Sydney into the first society of Castelcicala;—but little did he who gave them or he who solicited them,—little did they think that their ulterior effect would be to open the way for that lady to such an eminence as the one which she had attained.

We have before explained,—a point, indeed, which the intelligent reader could not fail to comprehend,—that the chance of Alberto to the Castelcicalan throne now depended upon the contingency of the marriage of Angelo III. producing offspring, or not. Scarcely, however, had that marriage been consummated, when the Minister of Foreign. Affairs wrote to the Castelcicalan envoy at the court of Queen Victoria, to communicate to Prince Alberto the intention of the government, sanctioned by the Grand Duke, to allow him a handsome income, and supply him with an immediate grant, by way of indemnification for the loss of his estates. No political condition of any kind being attached to this concession, the Prince did not hesitate to accept it; and it was even mentioned in a Montoni newspaper, that the influence of the Grand Duchess, aided by the friendly feeling of some of the new Ministers towards the Prince, had procured this act of justice at the hands of Angelo III.

These few observations may not be deemed superfluous, inasmuch as they tend to explain the real position of the Prince of Castelcicala—the father of our charming heroine.

We said it was with a light heart that Richard Markham retraced his steps to Richmond, after having parted with the Princess Isabella.

He was, moreover, desirous to examine the contents of the packet which she had placed in his hands,—not because he cared for the money which was thus returned to him; but because he was anxious to ascertain whether any note from her father accompanied it.

He, however, restrained his curiosity until he reached Richmond, where he entered an hotel, ordered a private room, bespoke some refreshment, and then proceeded to break the seal of the envelope.

Yes—there *was* a letter, containing a cheque.

The cheque fell unheeded on the carpet: the letter was immediately perused with avidity;—

"I cannot sufficiently express my admiration of your noble and generous conduct in having liquidated the debts for which I was detained in the Queen's Bench prison. I now repay, with unfeigned and heart-felt gratitude, that sum which you advanced, for my necessities, in a manner so honourable to your own nature and so eminently useful to me at that period. I need not say how deeply I regret the injurious suspicions which I entertained concerning you on a certain occasion: but circumstances were too powerfully combined against you to admit of any other impression. You will forgive me—for I ask your pardon: I sincerely apologise for all I may have said or done on that occasion.

"And now, my dear Mr. Markham, I am compelled to touch upon a subject which, though painful, demands a few observations. That you have been unfortunate, I know: that you were never guilty, I am now well convinced. I have read a document which proves this. But you have inspired my daughter with an affection, which I understand is reciprocal, and which never can end otherwise than in disappointment to you both. Crush, then, this sentiment in your breast; and for the peace of mind of *her* who is my only child, and who never—never can become your wife, I implore you not to see her more! Avoid her—as I shall instruct her to avoid you,—my only motive being based upon certain circumstances, unknown to you, which render your union an impossibility. I address you as a friend—as a father I write to you; your generous heart will teach you how to respect my wishes.

"One more subject must not be forgotten. I am well aware that you are not as wealthy as you once were. Thank God, my pecuniary means have ceased to be a subject of anxiety to me. You aided me when I was in need and in distress: allow me to offer you a trifling assistance towards enabling you to build up your fortunes. This is an object, which, with your great talents, you cannot fail to accomplish. Remember, I do not offer this small aid as an acquittal of my deep obligation towards you: no—my gratitude is intense—and the circumstances under which you befriended me leave me ever

your debtor. But as a friend, I offer you the use of my purse;—as a friend I place in your hands a sum of money which you can use during your pleasure, and return to me at your convenience. Should that sum be insufficient to forward your views, hesitate not to apply to me for more.

"And now, farewell—at least for the present; and believe that no one will be more delighted to hear of your success in life, than

"Your very sincere friend,
"ALTERONI."

Markham picked up the cheque: it was for five thousand pounds.

We must endeavour to explain the nature of the feelings which the contents of the Prince's letter created within him.

He saw with delight that the illustrious exile once more addressed him as a friend, and that all suspicions of his guilt had been extirpated from the mind of that nobleman. But, on the other hand, the barrier between himself and Isabella seemed to be rendered insuperable by the positive terms in which the Prince bade him eradicate his passion from his bosom. That barrier was no doubt twofold: the father of Isabella never could consent to the union of his daughter with one whom the world had stamped with ignominy, although innocent:—and, chiefly, the Italian Prince—the probable heir to a throne—might aspire to a far, far higher connexion for his child. Then Richard's thoughts were directed to the handsome sum of money which the Prince had placed at his disposal; and he could not do otherwise than admire the delicate manner in which it was proffered,—a manner that scarcely admitted of a refusal. And yet Richard was resolved to return the surplus above the amount which he had disbursed to procure the Prince's liberation from prison.

Thus was it with mingled feelings of joy and melancholy that Markham reviewed the contents of that letter.

Still he clung to Hope,—for Isabella had bade him hope; and he thought that the same good Providence which had thus far reconciled him to the father of his beloved, might in time accomplish more striking miracles in his favour.

But, alas! it must indeed be a miracle that could link his fate with the high destinies of the ducal house of Castelcicala!

Isabella, instead of being the daughter of an obscure count, was the only child of one who, if he were not to become himself the sovereign of the most powerful petty state in Europe, would at all events occupy a station next only to the sovereign whenever circumstances should allow him to return to his native land.

But, on the other hand, Isabella was faithful and true; and what might not be expected from woman's love?

In a word, Markham was rather inclined to hope than to despair; and the incidents of that morning imparted to his soul a solace which was a recompense for much, very much of past suffering.

Having partaken of some refreshment, Richard returned to London, and repaired to the bank where the cheque was made payable.

He only drew for the amount actually due to him, and desired that the surplus might be retained in behalf of Count Alteroni (under which name the Prince was known at the bankers' establishment).

On his return home, Richard addressed the following letter to the Italian nobleman:—

"A thousand thanks, my dear lord, for your most kind and courteous letter. To find that you have at length become convinced that I was unfortunate, and *never* guilty, is a source of happiness the extent of which I cannot describe.

"Your wishes in respect to the attachment which I certainly entertain for the Signora Isabella, shall be so far complied with—that I will not venture to present myself at your abode. As for extinguishing that affection which burns in my heart—mortal power cannot accomplish the task.

"It was with unfeigned delight that I understood from your lordship's letter that your position not only enabled you to return the trifle which I once ventured to use in your behalf, but also most generously to offer me the means of building up my fallen fortunes. My lord, I am unable to profit by your kindness; the stigma under which I lie—and with tears I write these words—is a bar to any legitimate speculation with a hope of success. Moreover, I have sufficient for my wants; and am therefore, in one sense, rich. Excuse me if I have not availed myself of your noble offer—an offer that scarcely admits of refusal in consequence of the delicacy and kindness with which it was made. Nevertheless, I am bound to decline it—with the most sincere gratitude; at the same time observing, that should need ever press me, I shall not hesitate to have recourse to the friendship with which you honour me.

"In the earnest hope that happiness and health may attend upon yourself and amiable family,

"I remain, my dear lord,
"Your most grateful and faithful servant,
"RICHARD MARKHAM."

It will be seen that the tone of this letter was somewhat constrained; but, although Richard endeavoured to write with apparent ease, as if ignorant of his correspondent's real rank, he could not forget that he was addressing himself to the Prince of Castelcicala.

CHAPTER CXV.

THE TREASURE.—A NEW IDEA.

ALAS! that we should be compelled to turn from such bright scenes as woman's love and lovers' hope, to deeds of infamy and crime.

But so goes the world; and no faithful historian can venture to deviate from the rule.

Sad, and dismal, and dark, are many of the phases which this narrative has yet to show; but we can also promise our reader that there will not be wanting bright and cheering scenes to afford relief to his eye.

Chequered, indeed, are the ways of life: varied and diversified are all its paths.

And, oh! let him who is wearied with the load of existence, while wending through the rough and craggy places of the world, and when rudely jostled by the world's unfeeling crowd,—let him remember that there is another sphere beyond, where the ways are smooth and pleasant, and where the voice of lamentation is never heard,—a sphere where angels alone shall be the guides of the elect, and where the sound of grateful harmony shall never cease,—a sphere, whose name is HEAVEN!

Again we say, alas! that we should be compelled to divert the attention of our reader from scenes of mundane bliss and the contemplation of the purest love, to deeds of iniquity and hatred.

But to our task.

It was about five o'clock in the evening of the day that witnessed the incidents of the two preceding chapters, and that had succeeded the night on which the unhappy Viola had signed a deed surrendering up half her property to her unprincipled husband,—that the Resurrection Man returned home to his dwelling in Globe Town.

But before he ascended to the apartments inhabited by himself and his mistress with a fearful name, he entered the lower part of the building, and, having lighted a candle, descended to the subterranean vaults.

In the first place he went into a cell opposite to that which was still tenanted by Viola, who, it will be remembered, had received a solemn promise to be restored to her own abode that evening at nine o'clock.

The Resurrection Man entered the cell to which we have alluded, and which was empty.

He raised a stone from the floor, and drew from a hole of about a foot deep, a large leathern bag, the contents of which sent forth the welcome metallic sound of gold as he took it in his hand.

The miscreant seated himself upon the cold floor of the cell, and poured forth into his hat the glittering contents of the bag. His eyes sparkled with delight as he surveyed the treasure.

He took a few of the coins up in his hand, and let them drop one by one back again into his hat—his glances greedily fixed upon the gold as he thus toyed with it.

"Two hundred good sterling sovereigns here already," he mused within himself,—"two hundred pounds earned with toil, trouble, daring, and danger. Two hundred pounds are a decent provision for any man in my line of life! And now," he continued, taking a smaller canvass bag from his pocket, "there is more to add to swell the treasury. Here is a hundred pounds—my half of the sum paid by Tomlinson this afternoon for keeping the secret about his old clerk. The Buffer has got his share; but I warrant he will hoard none of it as I do! Thank my stars, within the last year I have learnt to be economical and saving. I mean to have something for my old age; unless——"

And his countenance suddenly assumed an expression perfectly hideous, as he reflected upon the probability of his career being cut short by the hand of the law.

But, in another moment, he grew composed—that is to say, desperately hardened; and he then proceeded with his occupation and his musings.

"Well, here is my share of the two hundred pounds that the chicken-hearted, contemptible, cowardly Tomlinson paid for a secret which a little calm reflection might have told him that I dared not reveal. That's a hundred pounds to add to my sinking fund;"—and here the miscreant smiled. "Now," he continued, "comes the grand swag—three hundred pounds from Chichester,—and not too much for the trouble I have had in *his* affair! Two hundred before—Tomlinson's hundred—and Chichester's three hundred,—that makes six hundred pounds of good sterling gold, the property of Mr. Anthony Tidkins!"

And here the Resurrection Man laughed outright:—it was a horrible chuckle—the triumph of a miscreant of a most atrocious nature.

But he was happy—happy after his own fashion;—happy in counting and contemplating the produce of his turpitude.

While he was consigning his wealth to the larger bag, and gloating over the gold as he passed it through his hand, he was suddenly alarmed by a slight sound in the passage.

It seemed like a low footstep.

He listened, but it was not repeated.

For nearly a minute did he remain motionless, and almost breathless, in a state of painful attention; but not another sound met his ear.

Then, recovering from the state of uneasy suspense into which that incident had thrown him, he rose from the floor, and hurried

into the passage which divided the two rows of cells.

All was quiet.

Ashamed of himself for his childish alarm, and muttering a curse at his folly for having given way to that fear, he returned into the cell, buried his treasure and covered the place with the stone. He then carefully locked the door of the dungeon.

He crossed the passage, and proceeded gently to open the door leading into the cell occupied by Viola. When he entered this vault, he found the lamp extinguished; but by the glare of his candle, he perceived the unhappy woman stretched in a profound slumber upon the bed.

"All right," he muttered to himself,—"and just as I expected. She will sleep some hours yet, for the wine was well drugged; and thus we can convey her back again to her house in a state of insensibility. When she awakes in her own bed, her servants will assure her that all she has passed through was a mere dream; and by this plan she will be so bewildered, that she will actually fancy she has been delirious, and that her brain has wandered. This was Chichester's suggestion; and I must give him credit for it. True—she will sooner or later discover that the departure of half her property is no dream; but then the first burst of passion will have gone by, and she will consider it prudent to hold her tongue. Well—let her sleep: at nine o'clock Chichester and Tomlinson will come, and then she shall be removed."

At that instant an idea struck the Resurrection Man. Hitherto he had worked as Chichester's agent, and by Chichester's directions, in this affair: what if he were to turn the business to some good account for himself? The lady had only parted with half her property: she had eight thousand pounds left. Might not all, or a decent portion of this sum thus remaining, pass into the hands of the Resurrection Man? His *mode of treatment* had elicited the first concession: some additional horrors might extort a further grant. The idea was excellent: fool that he was for not having thought of it before!

Thus reasoned Anthony Tidkins.

The more he thought of the new plot which had just entered his head, the more he grew enamoured of it. He was well aware that neither Chichester nor Tomlinson would dare to adopt measures to resist his will; and with a grin of savage delight, he exclaimed aloud, "By God, it shall be done!"

He then removed the bottle of wine from the cell, so that when Viola awoke she might not repeat her dose—supposing that she should be ignorant of the cause of her long lethargic slumber; for the Resurrection Man was not aware of the sudden effect which it had produced upon her, but imagined that the drugged liquid was only powerful enough to operate gradually. He next replenished the lamp with oil from a bottle which stood in one corner of the cell, and, having lighted the lamp, withdrew, carefully bolting and locking the door behind him.

He ascended from the subterranean prison, replace the stone trap-door, and issued from the ground-floor of the house. He observed that the door leading into the alley was locked as he had left it when he entered; and this circumstance reassured him relative to the little incident which had temporarily disturbed him when counting his money in the cell.

Many circumstances combined to put the Resurrection Man into an excellent humour.

He had that day added four hundred pounds to his hidden treasure; he saw business of all kinds multiplying upon his hands, and promising a golden harvest; and he had hit upon a scheme which, he had no doubt, would produce him a larger sum than he had ever yet realised even in his dreams.

It was therefore with a smiling countenance that he entered the up-stairs room where the Rattlesnake was busily employed in spreading the contents of her cupboard upon the table.

"Well, Meg, you see I am home before my time," he exclaimed. "I don't want any dinner: I took some at a chop-house in town, as I had to wait on business. But leave the lush: I am in a humour for a glass of grog;—and you and I, Meg, will sit down and have a cozy chat together."

"So we will, Tony," returned the woman, with a manner even more wheedling and fawning than she had ever before used towards her terrible paramour. "You seem in excellent spirits, Tony."

"Yes, Meg—excellent: I have done a good day's work—and now I will enjoy myself till nine o'clock, when I have got to meet two gentlemen close by here on another little matter."

"Ah! you seldom tell me what you are doing, Tony," said the Rattlesnake.

"No—no: I don't like trusting women a bit farther than I can see them. Such things as getting up a body or so—well and good; but serious things, Meg—serious things, never!"

"Well, just as you like," returned Margaret Flathers, affecting a smile as if she were quite satisfied; but as she turned to replace the meat in the cupboard, her countenance involuntarily assumed an expression of mysterious triumph.

"Come, now—sit down," said the Resurrection Man: "give me a pipe, and brew me my lush. There—that's a good girl."

Tidkins lighted his pipe, and smoked for some moments in silence.

"I tell you what, Meg," he exclaimed, after a pause; "you shall sing me a song. I feel in such an uncommon good humour this evening—in such excellent spirits. No—I won't have a song: I tell you what you shall do."

"What?" said Margaret, as she mixed two glasses of gin and water.

"You shall tell me all about the coal-mines, you know—your own history. You told it me once before; but then I wasn't in a humour to hear you. I missed half, and have forgot t' other half. So now, come—let's have the Life and Adventures of Miss Margaret Flathers." The Resurrection Man laughed at this joke—as he considered and meant it to be; and the Rattlesnake, who never dared to thwart him in any thing, and who apparently had some additional motive to humour him on this occasion, hastened to comply with his request—or rather command. She accordingly related her history, the phraseology of which we have taken the liberty materially to correct and amend, in the following manner.

CHAPTER CXVI.

THE RATTLESNAKE'S HISTORY.[82]

"I was born in a coal-mine in Staffordshire. My father was a married man, with five or six children by his wife: my mother was a single woman, who worked for him in the pit. I was, therefore, illegitimate; but this circumstance was neither considered disgraceful to my mother nor to myself, morality being on so low a scale amongst the mining population generally, as almost to amount to promiscuous intercourse. My mother was only eighteen when I was born. She worked in the pit up to the very hour of my birth; and when she found the labour-pains coming on, she threw off the belt and chain with which she had been dragging a heavy corf (or wicker basket), full of coal, up a slanting road,—retired to a damp cave in a narrow passage leading to the foot of the shaft, and there gave birth to her child. That child was myself. She wrapped me up in her petticoat, which was all the clothing she had on at the time, and crawled with me, along the passage, which was about two feet and a half high, to the bottom of the shaft. There she got into the basket, and was drawn up a height of about two hundred and thirty feet—holding the rope with her right hand, and supporting me on her left arm. She often told me those particulars, and said how she thought she should faint as she was ascending in the rickety vehicle, and how difficult she found it to maintain her hold of the rope, weak and enfeebled as she was. She, however, reached the top in safety, and hastened home to her miserable hovel—for she was an orphan, and lived by herself. In a week she was up again, and back to her work in the pit; and she hired a bit of a girl, about seven or eight years old, to take care of me.

"How my infancy was passed I, of course, can only form an idea by the mode of treatment generally adopted towards babies in the mining districts, and under such circumstances as those connected with my birth. My mother would, perhaps, come up from the pit once, in the middle of the day, to give me my natural nourishment; and when I screamed during her absence, the little girl, who acted as my nurse, most probably thrust a teaspoonful of some strong opiate down my throat to make me sleep and keep me quiet. Many children are killed by this treatment; but the reason of death, in such cases, is seldom known, because the Coroner's assistance is seldom required in the mining districts.

"When I was seven years old, my mother one day told me that it was now high time for me to go down with her into the pit, and earn some money by my own labour. My father, who now and then called to see me of a Sunday, and brought me a cake or a toy, also declared that I was old enough to help my mother. So it was decided that I should go down into the pit. I remember that I was very much frightened at the idea, and cried very bitterly when the dreaded day came. It was a cold winter's morning—I recollect that well; and the snow was very thick upon the ground. I shivered with chilliness and terror as my mother led me to the pit. She gave me a good scolding because I whimpered; and then a good beating because I cried lustily. But every thing combined to make me afraid. It was as early as five in that cold wintry morning that I was proceeding to a scene of labour which I knew to be far, far under the earth. The dense darkness of the hour was not even relieved by the white snow upon the ground; but over the country were seen blazing fires on every side,—fires which appeared to me to be issuing from the very bowels of the earth, but which were in reality burning upon the surface, for the purpose of converting coal into coke: there were also blazing fields of bituminous shale; and all the tall chimneys of the great towers of the iron furnaces vomited forth flames,—the whole scene thus forming a picture well calculated to appal and startle an infant mind.

"I remember at this moment what my feelings were then—as well as if the incident I am relating had only occurred yesterday. During the day-light I had seen the lofty chimneys giving vent to columns of dense smoke, the furnaces putting forth torrents of lurid flame, and the coke-fires burning upon the ground: but that was the first time I had ever beheld those meteors blazing amidst utter darkness; and I was afraid—I was afraid.

"The shaft was perfectly round, and not more than four feet in diameter. The mode of ascent and descent was precisely that of a well, with this difference—that, instead of a bucket there was a stout iron bar about three feet long attached in the middle, and suspended horizontally, to the end of the rope. From each end of this bar hung chains with hooks, to draw up the baskets of coal. This apparatus was called the *clatch-harness*. Two people ascended or descended at a time by these means. They had to sit cross-legged, as it were, upon the transverse bar, and cling to the rope. Thus, the person who got on first sate upon the bar, and the other person sate a-straddle on the first one's thighs. An old woman presided at the wheel which wound up or lowered the rope sustaining the clatch-harness; and as she was by no means averse to a dram, the lives of the persons employed in the mine were constantly at the mercy of that old drunken harridan. Moreover, there seemed to me to be great danger in the way in which the miners got on and off the clatch-harness. One moment's giddiness—a missing of the hold of the rope—and down to the bottom of the shaft headlong! When the clatch-harness was drawn up to the top, the old woman made the handle fast by a bolt drawn out from the upright post, and then, grasping a hand of both persons on the harness at the same time, brought them by main force to land. A false step on the part of that old woman,—the failure of the bolt which stopped the rotatory motion of the roller on which the rope was wound,—or the slipping of the hands which she grasped in hers,—and a terrible accident must have ensued!

"But to return to my first descent into the pit. My mother, who was dressed in a loose jacket, open in front, and trousers (which, besides her shoes, were the only articles of clothing on her, she wearing neither shift nor stockings), leapt upon the clatch-iron as nimbly as a sailor in the rigging of his ship. She then received me from the outstretched arm of the old woman, and made me sit in the easiest and safest posture she could imagine. But when I found myself being gradually lowered down into a depth as black as night, I felt too terror-struck even to cry out; and had not my mother held me tight with one hand, I should have fallen precipitately into that hideous dark profundity.

"At length we reached the bottom, where my mother lifted me, half dead with giddiness and fright, from the clatch-iron. I felt the

soil cold, damp, and muddy, under my feet. A lamp was burning in a shade suspended in a little recess in the side of the shaft; and my mother lighted a bit of candle which she had brought with her, and which she stuck into a piece of clay to hold it by. Then I perceived a long dark passage, about two feet and a half high, branching off from the foot of the shaft. My mother went on her hands and knees, and told me to creep along with her. The passage was nearly six feet wide; and thus there was plenty of room for me to keep abreast of her. Had not this been the case, I am sure that I never should have had the courage either to precede, or follow her; for nothing could be more hideous to my infantine imagination than that low, yawning, black-mouthed cavern, running into the very bowels of the earth, and leading I knew not whither. Indeed, as I walked in a painfully stooping posture along by my mother's side, my fancy conjured up all kinds of horrors. I trembled lest some invisible hand should suddenly push forth from the side of the passage, and clutch me in its grasp: I dreaded lest every step I took might precipitate me into some tremendous abyss or deep well: I thought that the echoes which I heard afar off, and which were the sounds of the miner's pickaxe or the rolling corves on the rails, were terrific warnings that the earth was falling in, and would bury us alive: then, when the light of my mother's candle suddenly fell upon some human being groping his or her way along in darkness, I shuddered at the idea of encountering some ferocious monster or hideous spectre:—in a word, my feelings, as I toiled along that subterranean passage, were of so terrific a nature that they produced upon my memory an impression which never can be effaced, and which makes me turn cold all over as I contemplate those feelings now!

"You must remember that I had been reared in a complete state of mental darkness; and that no enlightened instruction had dispelled the clouds of superstition which naturally obscure the juvenile mind. I could not read: I had not even been taught my alphabet. I had not heard of such a name as JESUS CHRIST; and all the mention of GOD that had ever met my ears, was in the curses and execrations which fell from the lips of my father, my mother, her acquaintances, and even the little girl who had nursed me. You cannot wonder, then, if I was so appalled, when I first found myself in that strange and terrific place.

"At length we reached the end of that passage, and struck into another, which echoed with the noise of pickaxes. In a few moments I saw the *undergoers* (or miners) lying on their sides, and with their pickaxes breaking away the coal. They did not work to a greater height than two feet, for fear, as I subsequently learnt, that they should endanger the security of the roof of the passage, the seam of coal not being a thick one. I well remember my infantine alarm and horror when I perceived that these men were naked—stark naked. But my mother did not seem to be the least abashed or dismayed: on the contrary, she laughed and exchanged a joke with each one as we passed. In fact, I afterwards discovered that Bet Flathers was a great favourite with the miners.

"Well, we went on, until we suddenly came upon a scene that astonished me not a little. The passage abruptly opened into a large room,—an immense cave, hollowed out of the coal in a seam that I since learnt to be twenty feet in thickness. This cave was lighted by a great number of candles; and at a table sate about twenty individuals—men, women, and children—all at breakfast. There they were, as black as negroes—eating, laughing, chattering, and drinking. But, to my surprise and disgust, I saw that the women and young girls were all naked from the waist upwards, and many of the men completely so. And yet there was no shame—no embarrassment! But the language that soon met my ears!—I could not comprehend half of it, but what I *did* understand, made me afraid!

"My mother caught me by the hand, and led me to the table, where I found my father. He gave us some breakfast; and in a short time, the party broke up—the men, women, and children separating to their respective places of labour. My mother and myself accompanied one of the men, for my mother had ceased to work for my father, since she had borne a child to him, as his wife had insisted upon their separation in respect to labour in the mine.

"The name of the man for whom my mother worked was Phil Blossom. He was married, but had no children. His wife was a cripple, having met with some accident in the mine, and could not work. He was therefore obliged to employ some one to carry his coal from the place where he worked, to the cart that conveyed it to the foot of the shaft. Until I went down into the mine, my mother had carried the coal for him, and also *hurried* (or dragged) the cart; but she now made me fill one cart while she hurried another. Thus, at seven years old, I had to carry about fifty-six pounds of coal in a wooden *bucket*. When the passage was high enough I carried it on my back; but when it was too low, I had to drag or push it along as best I could. Some parts of the passages were only twenty-two inches in height; this was where the workings were in very narrow seams; and the difficulty of dragging such a weight, at such an age, can be better understood than explained. I can well recollect that when I commenced that terrible labour, the perspiration, commingling with my tears, poured down my face.

"Phil Blossom worked in a complete state of nudity; and my mother stripped herself to the waist to perform her task. She had to drag a cart holding seven hundred weight, a distance of at least two hundred yards—for ours was a very extensive pit, and had numerous workings and cuttings running a considerable way underground. The person who does this duty is called a *hurrier*: the process itself is termed *tramming*; and the cart is denominated a *skip*. The work was certainly harder than that of slaves in the West Indies, or convicts in Norfolk Island. My mother had a girdle round her waist; and to that girdle was fastened a chain, which passed between her legs and was attached to the skip. She then had to go down on her hands and knees, with a candle fastened to a strap on her forehead, and drag the skip through the low passages, or else to maintain a carved or stooping posture in the high ones.

"Phil Blossom was what was called a *getter*. He first made a long straight cut with a pickaxe underneath the part of the seam where he was working: this was called *holing*: and as it was commenced low down, the getter was obliged to lie flat on his back or on his side, and work for a long time in that uneasy manner.

"I did as well as I could with the labour allotted to me; but it was dreadful work. I was constantly knocking my head against the low roofs of the passages or against the rough places of the sides: at other times I fell flat on my face, with the masses of coal upon me; or else I got knocked down by a cart, or by some collier in the dark, as I toiled along the passages, my eyes blinded with my tears or with the dust of the mine.

"Many—many weeks passed away; and at length I grew quite hardened in respect to those sights and that language which had at first disgusted me. I became familiar with the constant presence of naked men and half-naked women; and the most terrible oaths and filthy expressions ceased to startle me. I walked boldly into the great cavern which I have before described, and which served as a place of meeting for those who took their meals in the mine. I associated with the boys and girls that worked in the pit, and learnt to

laugh at an obscene joke, or to practise petty thefts of candles, food, or even drink, which the colliers left in the cavern or at their places of work. The mere fact of the boys and girls in mines all meeting together, without any control,—without any one to look after them,—is calculated to corrupt all those who may be well disposed.

"I remained as a carrier of coal along the passages till I was ten years old. I was then ordered to convey my load, which by this time amounted to a hundred weight on each occasion, up a ladder to a passage over where I had hitherto worked. This load was strapped by a leather round my forehead; and, as the ladder was very rudely formed, and the steps were nearly two feet apart, it was with great difficulty that I could keep my balance. I have seen terrible accidents happen to young girls working in that way. Sometimes the strap, or tagg, round one person's forehead has broken, and the whole load has fallen on the girl climbing up behind. Then the latter has been precipitated to the bottom of the dyke, the great masses of coal falling on the top of her. On other occasions I have seen the girls lose their balance, and fall off the ladder—their burden of coals, as in the other case, showering upon them or their companions behind. The work was indeed most horrible: a slave-ship could not have been worse.

"If I did not do exactly as Phil Blossom told me, the treatment I received from him was horrible; and my mother did not dare interfere, or he would serve her in the same manner. He thrashed me with his fist or with a stick, until I was bruised all over. My flesh was often marked with deep wales for weeks together. One day he nipped me with his nails until he actually cut quite through my ear. He often pulled my hair till it literally gave way in his hand; and sometimes he would pelt me with coals. He thought nothing of giving me a kick that would send me with great violence across the passage, or dash me against the opposite side. On one occasion he was in such a rage, because I accidentally put out the candle which he had to light him at his work, that he struck a random blow at me with his pickaxe in the dark, and cut a great gash in my head. All the miners in pits *baste* and *bray*—that is, beat and flog—their helpers.

"You would be surprised if I was to tell you how many people in the pit were either killed or severely injured, by accidents, every year. But there are so many dangers to which the poor miners are exposed! Falling down the shaft,—the rope sustaining the clatch-harness breaking,—being drawn over the roller,—the fall of coals out of the corves in their ascent,—drowning in the mines from the sudden breaking in of water from old workings,—explosion of gas,—choke-damp,[83]—falling in of the roofs of passages,—the breaking of ladders or well-staircases,—being run over by the tram-waggons, or carts dragged by horses,—the explosion of gunpowder used in breaking away huge masses of coal,—and several other minor accidents, are all perpetually menacing the life or limbs of those poor creatures who supply the mineral that cheers so many thousands of fire-sides!

"Deaths from accidents of this nature were seldom, if ever, brought under the notice of the coroner: indeed, to save time, it was usual to bury the poor victims within twenty-four or thirty-six hours after their decease.

"I earned three shillings a-week when I was ten years old, and my mother eleven. You may imagine, then, that we ought to have been pretty comfortable; but our household was just as wretched as any other in the mining districts. Filth and poverty are the characteristics of the collier population. Nothing can be more wretched—nothing more miserable than their dwellings. The huts in which they live are generally from ten to twelve feet square, each consisting only of one room. I have seen a man and his wife and eight or ten children all huddling together in that one room; and yet they might have earned, by their joint labour, thirty-shillings or more a week. Perhaps a pig, a jackass, or fowls form part of the family. And then the furniture!—not a comfort—scarcely a necessary! And yet this absence of even such articles as bedsteads, is upon principle: the colliers do not like to be encumbered with household goods, because they are often obliged to *flit*—that is, to leave one place of work and seek for another. Such a thing as drainage is almost completely unknown in these districts; and all the filth is permitted to accumulate before the door. The colliers are a dirty set of people; but, poor creatures! how can they well be otherwise? They descend into the mines at a very early hour in the morning: they return home at a very late hour in the evening, and they are then too tired to attend to habits of cleanliness. Besides, it is so natural for them to say, '*Why should we wash ourselves to-night, since to-morrow we must become black and dirty again?*' or '*Why should we wash ourselves for the sake of sleeping with a clean skin?*' As for the boys and girls, they are often so worn out—so thoroughly exhausted, that they go to rest without their suppers. They cannot keep themselves awake when they get home. I know that this was often and often my case; and I have preferred—indeed, I have been compelled by sheer fatigue, to go to bed before my mother could prepare any thing to eat.

"Again, how can the collier's home possibly be comfortable? He makes his wife and children toil with him in the mine: he married a woman from the mine; and neither she nor her daughters know any thing of housekeeping? How can disorder be prevented from creeping into the collier's dwelling, when no one is there in the day-time to attend to it? Then all the money which they can save from the *Tommy-shop*, (of which I shall speak presently) goes for whiskey. Husband and wife, sons and daughters all look after the whiskey. The habits of the colliers are hereditarily depraved: they are perpetuated from father to son, from mother to daughter; none is better nor worse than his parents were before him. Rags and filth—squalor and dissipation—crushing toil and hideous want—ignorance and immorality; these are the features of the collier's home, and the characteristics of the collier's life.

"Our home was not a whit better than that of any of our fellow-labourers; nor was my mother less attached to whiskey than her neighbours.

"But the chief source of poverty and frequent want—amounting at times almost to starvation—amongst persons earning a sufficiency of wages, is the *truck system*. This atrociously oppressive method consists of paying the colliers' wages in goods, or partly in goods, through the medium of the tommy-shop. The proprietor of a tommy-shop has an understanding with the owners of the mines in his district; and the owners agree to pay the persons in their employment once a month, or once a fortnight. The consequence is that the miners require credit during the interval; and they are compelled to go to the tommy-shop, where they can obtain their bread, bacon, cheese, meat, groceries, potatoes, chandlery, and even clothes. The proprietor of the tommy-shop sends his book to the clerk of the owner of the mine the day before the wages are paid; and thus the clerk knows how much to stop from the wages of each individual, for the benefit of the shopkeeper. If the miners and their wives do not go to the tommy-shop for their domestic articles, they instantly lose their employment in the mine, in consequence of the understanding between their employer and the shopkeeper. Perhaps this would not be so bad if the tommy-shops were honest; because it is very handy for the collier to go to a store which contains every

article that he may require. But the tommy-shop charges twenty-five or thirty per cent. dearer than any other tradesman; so that if a collier and his family can earn between them thirty shillings a week, he loses seven or eight shillings out of that amount. In the course of a year about twenty pounds out of his seventy-five go to the tommy-shop for nothing but interest on the credit afforded! That interest is divided between the tommy-shop-keeper and the coal-mine proprietor.

"In the district where my mother and I lived, there was no such thing at all as payment of wages in the current money of the kingdom. The tommy-shop-keeper paid the wages for the proprietors once a month: and how do you think he settled them? In ticket-money! This coinage consisted of pewter medals, or markers, with the sum that they represented, and the name of the tommy-shop on them. Thus, there were half-crowns, shillings, sixpences, and half-pence. But this money could only be passed at the tommy-shop from which it was issued; and there it must be taken out in goods. So, you see, that what with the truck-system and the tommy-shop, the poor miners are regularly swindled out of at least one fourth part of their fair earnings.

"The wages, in my time, were subject to great changes: I have known men earn twenty-five shillings a week at one time, and twelve or fifteen at another. And out of that they were obliged to supply their own candles and grease for the wheels of the carts or *trams*. The cost of this was about three-pence a day. Then, again, the fines were frequent and vexatious: it was calculated that they amounted to a penny a day per head. These sums all went into the coffers of the coal-owners.

"Such was the state of superstitious ignorance which prevailed in the mines, that every one believed in ghosts and spirits. Even old men were often afraid to work in isolated places; and the spots where deaths from accidents arose were particularly avoided. It was stated that the spectres of the deceased haunted the scenes of their violent departures from this world.

"By the time I was twelve years old I was as wild a young she-devil as any in the mines. Like the other females, I worked with only a pair of trousers on. But I would not consent to hurry the trams and skips. I saw that my mother had got a great bald place on her head, where she pushed the tram forward up sloping passages; and as I was told that even amidst the black and filth with which I was encrusted, I was a good-looking wench, I determined not to injure my hair. I may as well observe that a stranger visiting a mine, and seeing the boys and girls all huddling together, half-naked, in the caves or obscure nooks, could not possibly tell one sex from the other. I must say that I think, with regard to bad language and licentious conduct, the girls were far—far worse than the boys. It is true that in the neighbourhood of the pits Sunday-schools were established; but very few parents availed themselves of these means of obtaining a gratuitous education for their children. When I was twelve years old, I did not know how to read or write: I was unaware that there was such a book as the Bible; and all I knew of God and Jesus Christ was through the oaths and imprecations of the miners.

"It was at that period—I mean when I was twelve years old—that I determined to abandon the horrible life to which my mother had devoted me. I had up to that point preserved my health, and had escaped those maladies and cutaneous eruptions to which miners are liable; but I knew that my turn must come, sooner or later, to undergo all those afflictions. I saw nine out of ten of my fellow-labourers pining away. Some were covered with disgusting boils, caused by the constant dripping of the water upon their naked flesh in the pits. I saw young persons of my own age literally growing old in their early youth,—stooping, asthmatic, consumptive, and enfeebled. When they were washed on Sundays, they were the pictures of ill-health and premature decay. Many actually grew deformed in stature; and all were of stunted growth. It is true that their muscles were singularly developed; but they were otherwise skin and bone.[84] The young children were for the most part of contracted features, which, added to their wasted forms, gave them a strange appearance of ghastliness, when cleansed from the filth of the mine. The holers, or excavators, were bow-legged and crooked; the burriers and trammers knock-kneed and high-shouldered. Many—very many of the miners were affected with diseases of the heart. Then, who ever saw a person, employed in the pits, live to an advanced age? A miner of fifty-five was a curiosity: the poor creatures generally drooped at five-and-thirty, and died off by forty. They invariably seemed oppressed with care and anxiety: jollity was unknown amongst them. I have seen jolly-looking butchers, blacksmiths, carpenters, ploughmen, porters, and so on; but I never beheld a jolly-looking miner. The entire population that labours in the pits appears to belong to a race that is accursed!

"I pondered seriously upon all this; and every circumstance that occurred, and every scene around me, tended to strengthen my resolution to quit an employment worse than that of a galley-slave. I saw my mother wasting all her best energies in that terrible labour, and yet remaining poor—beggared! Scarcely enough for the present—not a hope for the future! Sometimes I wept when I contemplated her, although she had but little claims on my sympathy or affection; nevertheless, when I saw her bald head—her scalp thickened, inflamed, and sometimes so swollen, that it was like a bulb filled with spongy matter, and so painful that she could not bear to touch it,—when I heard her complain of the dreadful labour of pushing the heavy corves and trams with her sore head,—when I perceived her spine actually distorted with severe work; her stomach growing so weak that she frequently vomited her food almost as soon as it was eaten; her heart so seriously affected that the intervals of violent palpitation frequently made her faint; her lungs performing their functions with difficulty; her chest torn with a sharp hacking cough, accompanied by the expectoration of a large quantity of matter of a deep black colour, called by colliers the *black-spit*;—when I saw her thus overwhelmed with a complication of maladies—dying before my eyes, at the age of thirty-three!—when I looked around, and beheld nine out of ten of all the persons employed in the pits, whether male or female, similarly affected,—I shuddered at the bare idea of devoting my youth to that horrible toil, and then passing to the grave while yet in the prime of life!

"I thought of running away, and seeking my fortune elsewhere. I knew that it was no use to acquaint my mother with my distaste for the life to which she had devoted me: she would only have answered my objections by means of blows. But while I was still wavering what course to pursue, a circumstance occurred which I must not forget to relate.

"One morning my candle had accidentally gone out, and I was creeping along the dark passage to the spot where Phil Blossom was working, to obtain a light from his candle, when I heard him and my mother conversing together in a low tone, but with great earnestness of manner. Curiosity prompted me to stop and listen. 'Are you sure that is the case?' said Phil.—'Certain,' replied my mother. 'I shall be confined in about five months.'—'Well,' observed Phil, 'I don't know what's to be done. My old woman will kick up the devil's delight when she hears of it. I wish she was out of the way: I would marry you if she was.'—Then there was a profound silence for some minutes. It was broken by the man, who said, 'Yes, if the old woman was out of the way you and I might get married,

and then we should live so comfortable together. I'm sure no man can be cursed with a wife of worse temper than mine.'—'Yes,' returned my mother, 'she is horrible for that.'—'Do you think there would be much harm in pushing her down a shaft, or shoving her head under the wheel of your tram, Bet?' asked Phil, after another pause.—'There would be no harm,' said my mother, 'if so be we wern't found out.'—'That's exactly what I mean,' observed Phil.—'But then,' continued my mother, 'if she didn't happen to *die* at once, she might peach, and get us both into a scrape.'—'So she might,' said Phil.—'I'll tell you what we might do,' exclaimed my mother, in a joyful tone: 'doesn't your wife come down at one to bring you your dinner?'—'Yes,' replied Phil Blossom: 'that's all the old cripple is good for.'—'Well, then,' pursued my mother, 'I'll tell you how we can manage this business.'—Then they began to whisper, and I could not gather another word that fell from their lips.

"I was so frightened at what I had heard that I crept quickly but cautiously back again to my place of labour, and sate down on the lower steps of the ladder, in the dark—determined to wait till some one should come, rather than go and ask Phil Blossom for a light. I had suddenly acquired a perfect horror of that man. I had understood that my mother was with child by him; and I had heard them coolly plotting the death of the woman who was an obstacle to their marriage. At my age, such an idea was calculated to inspire me with terror. I think I sate for nearly an hour in the dark, my mind filled with thoughts of a nature which may be well understood. At length a young woman, bearing a corf, came with a light; and I was no longer left in obscurity. I then plucked up my courage, took my basket, and went to Phil Blossom for a load of coal. My mother was not there; and he was working with his pickaxe as coolly as possible. He asked me what had made me so long in returning for a load; and I told him I had fallen down a few steps of the ladder and hurt myself. He said no more on the subject; and I was delighted to escape without a braying or basting. While I was loading my corf, he asked me if I should like to have him for a father-in-law. I said 'Yes' through fear, for I was always afraid of his *nieves*, as the colliers call their clenched fists. He seemed pleased; and, after a pause, said that if ever he was my father-in-law, I should always take my *bait* (or meals) with him in the cavern. I thanked him, and went on with my work; but I pretty well comprehended that the removal of Phil's wife by some means or another had been resolved on.

"Shortly before one o'clock that same day my mother came to the place where I was carrying the coals, and gave me a *butter-cake* (as we called bread and butter), telling me that she was going up out of the mine, as she must pay a visit to the tommy-shop for some candles and grease for herself, and some tobacco for Phil Blossom. I did not dare utter a word expressive of the suspicions which I entertained; but I felt convinced that this proceeding was in some way connected with the subject of the conversation which I had overheard. A strange presentiment induced me to leave my place of work, and creep along the passage to the foot of the shaft, in order to see whether Phil's wife would come down at the usual time with his bait. Several *half-marrows* and *foals* (as we called the young lads who pushed the trams) were at the end of the passage just at the foot of the shaft; and we got into conversation. It is a very curious thing to look up a shaft from the very bottom; the top seems no bigger than a sugar-basin. Well, the boys and I were chattering together about different things, when the click of the clatch-harness at the top of the shaft fell upon my ears. I peeped up and saw some one get on the clatch: then the creaking of the wheel and roller was heard. 'Here comes some one's bait, I dare say,' observed one of the half-marrows.—I wish it was mine,' said another; 'but I never get any thing to eat from breakfast-time till I go home at night.'—Scarcely were these words spoken when a piercing scream alarmed us: there was a rushing sound—the chains of the harness clanked fearfully—and down came a woman with tremendous violence to the bottom of the pit, the clatch rattling down immediately after her. A cry of horror burst from us all; the poor creature had fallen at our very feet. We rushed forward; but she never moved. The back part of her head was smashed against a piece of hard mineral at the bottom of the shaft. But her countenance had escaped injury; and as I cast a hasty glance upon it, I recognised the well-known face of Phil Blossom's crippled wife!

"One of the boys instantly hastened to acquaint him with the accident. He came to the spot when his wife lay a mangled heap, stone dead; and he began to bewail his loss in terms which would have been moving had I not been aware of their hypocrisy. The half-marrows were, however, deceived by that well-feigned grief, and did all they could to console him. I said nothing: I was confounded!

"In due time the cause of the *accident* was ascertained. It appeared that my mother had gone up the shaft, but when she got to the top she struck her foot so forcibly against the upright post of the machinery, that she lamed herself for the time, The old woman who presided over the machinery (as I have before said) very kindly offered to go to the tommy-shop for her, on condition that she would remain there to work the handle for people coming up or going down. This was agreed to. The very first person who wanted to go down was Mrs. Blossom; and my mother alleged that the handle unfortunately slipped out of her hand as she was unwinding the rope. This explanation satisfied the overseer of the mine: the intervention of the coroner was not deemed necessary;—my mother appeared much afflicted at the *accident*: Phil Blossom mourned the death of his wife with admirable hypocrisy;—the corpse was interred within forty-eight hours;—and thus was Phil's wife removed without a suspicion being excited!

"I was now more than ever determined to leave the mine. I saw that my mother was capable of any thing; and I trembled lest she should take it into her head to rid herself of me. One day she told me that she was going to be married to Phil Blossom: I made a remark upon the singularity of her being united to the very man whose wife had died by her means;—she darted at me a look of dark suspicion and terrible ferocity; and, in the next moment, struck me to the ground. From that instant I felt convinced that I was not safe. Accordingly, one Sunday, when I was washed quite clean, and had on a tolerably decent frock, I left the hovel which my mother occupied, and set out on my wanderings.

"I had not a penny in my pocket, nor a friend on the face of the earth to whom I could apply for advice, protection, or assistance. All that stood between me and starvation, that I could see, was a piece of bread and some cheese, which I had taken with me when I left home. I walked as far as I could without stopping, and must have been about six miles from the pit where I had worked, when evening came on. It was November, and the weather was very chilly. I looked round me, almost in despair, to see if I could discover an asylum for the night. Far behind me the tremendous chimneys and furnaces vomited forth flames and volumes of smoke; and the horizon shone as if a whole city was on fire: but in the spot where I then found myself, all was drear, dark, and lonely. I walked a little farther, and, to my joy, espied a light. I advanced towards it, and soon perceived that it emanated from a fire burning in a species of cave overhung by a high and rugged embankment of earth belonging to a pit that had most probably ceased to be worked. Crouching over this fire was a lad of about fifteen, clothed in rags, dirty, emaciated, and with starvation written upon his countenance. I advanced

towards him, and begged to be allowed to warm myself by his fire. He answered me in a kind and touching manner; and we soon made confidants of each other. I told him my history, only suppressing my knowledge that the death of Phil Blossom's wife arose from premeditation, instead of accident, as I did not wish to get my mother into a scrape, although I had no reason to have any regard for her. The lad then acquainted me with his sad tale. He was an orphan; and his earliest remembrance was experienced in a workhouse, of which, it appeared, he had become an inmate shortly after his birth, his parents having been killed at the same time by the explosion of a fire-damp in the pit in which they had worked. When the lad was eight years old, the parish authorities apprenticed him to a miner, who gave him the name of *Skilligalee*, in consequence of his excessive leanness. This man treated him very badly; but the poor boy endured all for a period of seven years, because he had no other asylum than that afforded him by his master. 'At length,' said the boy, 'a few weeks ago, master got hurt upon the head by the falling in of some coal where he was working; and from that moment he acted more like a madman than a human being. He used to seize me by the hair, and dash me against the side of the pit: sometimes he flogged me with a strap till my flesh was all raw. I could stand it no longer; so, about three weeks ago, I ran away. Ever since then I have been living, I can scarcely tell how. I have slept in the deserted cabins on the pits' bank, or in the old pits that have done working: I have got what I could to eat, and have even been glad to devour the bits of candles that the colliers had left in the pits. All this is as true as I am here.[85] Yesterday I found some matches in a pit; and that is how I have this good fire here now. But I am starving!'

"The poor fellow then began to cry. I divided with him my bread and cheese; and, when we had eaten our morsel, we began to converse upon our miserable condition. He had as much abhorrence of the mine as I had; he declared that he would sooner kill himself at once than return to labour in a pit; and I shared in his resolution. In less than an hour Skilligalee and myself became intimate friends. Varied and many were the plans which we proposed to earn a livelihood; but all proved hopeless when we remembered our penniless condition, and Skilligalee pointed to his rags. At length he exclaimed in despair, '*There is nothing left to do but to rob!*'—'*I am afraid that this is our only resource*,' was my reply.—'*Do you mean it?*' he demanded.—'*Yes!*' I said boldly; and we exchanged glances full of meaning.

"'*Come with me,*' said Skilligalee. I did not ask any questions, but followed him. He led the way in silence for upwards of half an hour, and at length lights suddenly shone between a grove of trees. Skilligalee leapt over a low fence, and then helped me to climb it. We were then in a meadow planted with trees—a sort of park, which we traversed, guided by the lights, towards a large house. We next came to a garden; and, having passed through this enclosure, we reached the back part of the premises. Skilligalee went straight up to a particular window, which he opened. He then crept through, and told me to wait outside. In a few minutes he returned to the window, and handed me out a large bundle, wrapped up in a table-cloth. He then crept forth, and closed the window. We beat a retreat from the scene of our plunder; and returned to the cave. The fire was still blazing, and Skilligalee fed it with more fuel, which he obtained by breaking away the wood from an old ruined cabin close by.

"We next proceeded to open the bundle, which I found to contain a quantity of food, six silver forks, and six spoons. Skilligalee then told me that the mansion which we had just robbed was the dwelling of the owner of the mine wherein he had worked for seven years, and where he had been so cruelly treated by the pit-man to whom he had been apprenticed. He said that he had sometimes been sent with messages to the proprietor, from the overseer in the mine, and that the servants on those occasions had taken him into the kitchen and given him some food. He had thus obtained a knowledge of the premises. 'Last night,' he added, 'I was reduced by hunger to desperation, and I went with the intention of breaking into the pantry. To my surprise I found the window open, the spring-bolt, being broken. My courage, however, failed me; and I returned to this cave to suffer all the pangs of hunger. To-night you came: companionship gave me resolution; and we have got wherewith to obtain the means of doing something for an honest livelihood.

"We then partook of some of the cold meat and fine white bread which the pantry had furnished; and, while we thus regaled ourselves, we debated what we should do with the silver forks and spoons. I said before that I was decently dressed; but my companion was in rags. It was accordingly agreed that I should go to the nearest town in the morning, dispose of the plate, purchase some clothes for Skilligalee, and then rejoin him at the cave. This matter being decided upon, we laid down and went to sleep.

"Next morning I washed myself at a neighbouring stream, made myself look as decent as I could, and set off. Skilligalee had told me how to proceed. In an hour I reached the town, and went to a pawnbroker's shop. I said that I was servant to a lady who was in a temporary difficulty and required a loan. The pawnbroker questioned me so closely that I began to prevaricate: he called in a constable, and gave me into custody. I was taken before the magistrate; but I refused to answer a single question, being determined not to betray my accomplice. The magistrate remanded me for a week; and I was sent to prison. There I herded with juvenile thieves and prostitutes; and I cared little for my incarceration, because I was tolerably, and, at all events, regularly fed. When I was had up again, the owner of the mansion which I had helped to rob, was there to identify his property. I, however, still persisted in my refusal to answer any questions: I was resolved not to criminate Skilligalee; and I also felt desirous of being sent back to gaol, as I was certain of there obtaining a bed and a meal. In vain did the magistrate impress upon me the necessity of giving an explanation of the manner in which the plate came into my possession, for both he and the owner of the property were inclined to believe that I was only a tool, and not the original thief;—I remained dumb, and was remanded for another week.

"At the expiration of that period, I was again placed before the magistrate; and, to my surprise, I found Skilligalee in the court. He was still clothed in his rags, and looked more wretched and famished than when I first saw him. I gave him a look, and made a sign to assure him that I would not betray him; but the moment the case was called, he stood forward and declared that he alone was guilty,—that he had robbed the house, and that I was merely an instrument of whom he had made use to dispose of the proceeds of the burglary. I was overcome by this generosity on his part; and both the magistrate and the owner of the property were struck by the avowal. The latter declared that he did not wish to prosecute: the former accordingly inflicted a summary sentence of imprisonment for a few weeks upon Skilligalee. He then questioned me about my own condition; and I told him that I had worked in a mine, but that I had been compelled to run away from home in consequence of the ill treatment I received at the hands of my mother. I expressed my determination to put an end to my life sooner than return to her; and the gentleman, whose house had been robbed, offered to provide for me at his own expense, if the magistrate would release me. This he agreed to do; and the gentleman placed me as a boarder in a school kept in the town by two elderly widows.

"This school was founded for the purpose of furnishing education to the children of pit-men who were prudent and well disposed enough to pay a small stipend for that purpose, that stipend being fixed at a very low rate, as the deficiency in the amount required to maintain the establishment was supplied by voluntary contribution. There were only a few boarders—and they were all girls: the great majority of the pupils consisted of day-scholars. At this school I stayed until I was sixteen, when the gentleman who had placed me there took me into his service as housemaid.

"During the whole of that period I had never heard of my mother, or Phil Blossom. I now felt some curiosity to discover what had become of them; so, one day, having obtained a holiday for the purpose, I went over to the pit where I had myself passed so many miserable years. The same old woman, who had presided at the handle of the roller that raised or lowered the clatch-harness, during the period of my never-to-be-forgotten apprenticeship, was there still. She did not recognise me—I was so altered for the better. Clean, neatly dressed, stout, and tall, I could not possibly be identified with the dirty, ragged, thin, and miserable-looking creature who had once toiled in that subterranean hell. I accosted the old woman, and asked her if a woman named Betsy Flathers or Blossom worked in the mine. "Bet Blossom!" ejaculated the old woman: 'why, she's been dead a year!'—'Dead!' I echoed. 'And how did she die?'—'By falling down the shaft, to be sure,' answered the old woman.—Although I entertained little affection for my mother, absence and a knowledge of her character having destroyed all feelings of that kind, I could not hear this intelligence without experiencing a severe shock.—'Yes,' continued the old woman, 'it was a sort of judgment on her, I suppose, for she herself let a poor creature fall down some four or five years ago, when she took my place at the handle here for a few minutes while I went to the tommy-shop for her. She married the husband of the woman who was killed by the fall; and every body knew well enough afterwards that there wasn't quite so much neglect in the affair as she had pretended at the time, but a something more serious still. However, there was no proof; and so the thing was soon forgot. Well, one day, about a year ago, as I said just now, Phil Blossom came up to me and asked me to run to the tommy-shop to fetch him some candles. I told him to mind the wheel, and he said he would. It seems that a few minutes after I had left on his errand, his wife came up the clatch; and, according to what a lad, who looked up the shaft at the time, says, she had just reached the top, when she fell, harness and all, the whole pit echoing with her horrible screams. She died the moment she touched the bottom. Phil Blossom was very much cut up about it; but he swore that the handle slipped out of his hand, and then went whirling round and round with such force that he couldn't catch it again. I own people *did* say that Phil and his second wife led a precious dog-and-cat kind of a life; but the overseer thought there was no reason to make a stir about it, and there the matter ended.'—'And what has become of Phil Blossom?' I inquired.—The old woman pointed down the shaft, as much as to say that he was still working in the mine.—'Did they have any children?' I asked.—'Bet had one, I believe,' said the old woman; 'but it died a few days after it was born, through having too large a dose of Godfrey's Cordial administered to make it sleep.'—I gave the old woman a shilling, and turned away from the place, by no means anxious to encounter Phil Blossom, who, I clearly perceived, had rid himself of my mother by the same means which she had adopted to dispose of his first wife.

"As I was returning to my master's house, I had to cross a narrow bridge over a little stream. I was so occupied with the news I had just heard, I did not perceive that there was another person advancing from the opposite side, until I was suddenly caught in the arms of a young man in the very middle of the bridge. I gave a dreadful scream; but he burst out into a loud laugh, and exclaimed, 'Well, you needn't be so frightened at a mere joke.' I knew that voice directly; and glancing at the young man, who was tolerably well dressed, I immediately recognised my old friend Skilligalee. It was then my turn to laugh, which I did very heartily, because he had not the least notion who I was. I, however, soon told him; and he was quite delighted to meet me. We walked together to the very identical cave where we had first met when boy and girl. Now he was a tall young man, and had improved wonderfully. He told me that he had become acquainted with some excellent fellows when he was in prison, and that he had profited so well by their advice and example, that he led a jovial life, did no work, and always had plenty of money. I asked him how he managed; and he told me, after some hesitation, that he had turned house-breaker. There was scarcely a gentleman's house, within twelve miles round, that he had not visited in that quality. He then proposed that I should meet him on the following Sunday evening, and take a walk together. I agreed, and we separated. "I did not neglect my appointment. Skilligalee was delighted to see me again; and he proposed that I should leave service, and live with him. I consented; and——"

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE RATTLESNAKE.

HERE the Rattlesnake abruptly broke off.

The Resurrection Man was asleep in his chair. It had not been without a motive that the woman so readily complied with the desire of the Resurrection Man that she should amuse him with the history of her life; and as she saw him gradually becoming more and more drowsy as her narrative progressed, an ill-concealed expression of joy animated her countenance.

At length, when the hand of the watch over the mantelpiece pointed to eight, and the Resurrection Man fell back in his chair fast asleep, she could hardly suppress an ejaculation of triumph.

She broke off abruptly in the midst of her narrative, and listened.

The nasal sounds that emanated from her companion convinced her that he slept.

Not a moment was now to be lost.

She knew full well that whenever Anthony Tidkins was overtaken by a nap in such a manner as the present, he invariably awoke a short time before the hour at which he had any business to transact; for that strange but fearful individual exercised a marvellous control over all his natural wants and propensities.

Rising cautiously from her seat, the Rattlesnake advanced towards the Resurrection Man, and steadfastly examined his countenance. There could be no doubt that he slept profoundly.

She was, however, resolved to assure herself as far as possible on that head; and she purposely agitated the fire-irons against each other.

The Resurrection Man started slightly, but did not awake.

Perfectly satisfied on this point, Margaret Flathers hastened into the adjoining room, and put on her bonnet and shawl.

Having provided herself with her skeleton keys and some lucifer matches, she descended the stairs and went out of the house.

It was not, however, without an intense apprehension of danger that she proceeded to the execution of her scheme. Were the Resurrection Man to awake suddenly, and entertain any suspicion on discovering her absence, she knew that her life would not be worth an hour's purchase.

Still the temptation that now lured her to dare this terrific chance was so great—it was irresistible!

Her hesitation, when she stood in the street, was only of a moment's existence; and, calling all her courage to her aid, she plunged into the alley.

The door in that dark passage was opened in another moment: she closed and locked it carefully, and then entered the back room on the ground floor.

Having obtained a light, she raised the mysterious trap-door, and boldly descended the steps leading into the subterranean passage.

One of her keys soon opened the door of the cell in which the Resurrection Man had buried his treasure; but her joy at this disappearance of the only difficulty which she had apprehended, was adulterated by a sentiment of invincible terror, as she still thought of the possibility of detection by him whose desperate character inspired her with this tremendous alarm.

Nevertheless, she was resolved to dare every thing in the enterprise which she had undertaken.

"Fortune seemed to favour me this afternoon when I watched him," she murmured to herself; "and surely it will not desert me at the last moment."

Then she boldly entered the cell.

To take up the stone which covered the treasure, and possess herself of the bag that contained the gold over which she had a few hours previously beheld the Resurrection Man gloating in so strange a manner,—this was the work of only a few moments.

She replaced the stone: she clutched the bag with a feeling of wild joy commingled with terrific alarm; and she was hurrying from the cell, when something at the opposite side of the passage met her view, and for a moment riveted her to the spot.

A light was streaming from beneath the door of a dungeon facing the one on the threshold of which she stood.

Circumstances, which in the excitement of her present daring proceedings she had forgotten, now rushed like an overwhelming torrent to her memory.

The mysterious visits of the Resurrection Man in a mask and dark cloak to that subterranean place,—the bread and water which she had seen in the cupboard up stairs,—and the fearful scream that on one occasion had emanated from the depths where she now found herself,—these circumstances all flashed to her mind.

There was no longer any doubt: a human being—a female, most probably, judging by the tone of that agonising shriek which now seemed to ring in her ears as if its vibration had never once ceased—was immured in that dungeon whence the light streamed!

This conviction dissipated the alarm into which the sudden glare of that light had plunged the Rattlesnake.

Urged by several motives,—curiosity, a desire to obtain the reinforcement of a companion in case of the sudden appearance of the Resurrection Man, and, to do her justice, a feeling of compassion for a victim whom she believed to be of her own sex,—urged, we say, by these motives, which all presented themselves to her mind with the rapidity of lightning, the Rattlesnake hastened to open the

door of that dungeon whence the light emanated.

She boldly entered the cell; and at the same moment Viola awoke.

Starting up from the bed, that unhappy lady glanced wildly around and exclaimed, "Where am I?"

"Hush! not a word," said the Rattlesnake, advancing towards her. "I am come to save you—follow me!"

Viola did not hesitate a single moment: the manner in which the woman addressed her, and a profound sense of the certainty that no treachery was needed to draw her into any position worse than her present one, since she was so completely in the power of the terrible master of that establishment, induced her to yield instantaneous compliance with the directions of the Rattlesnake.

"Fear nothing, lady," observed the latter; "only be silent, and lose not a moment."

She then hastened from the cell followed by Viola, who did not even wait to put on her bonnet and shawl.

They ascended the steps leading to the back-room, both hearts palpitating violently.

The Rattlesnake did not stop to close the mouth of the subterranean vaults, but hastened to apply the skeleton key to the door leading into the alley.

Her hand trembled to such an extent that she could not turn the key.

"O heavens!" she exclaimed in a tone of despair, "if *he* should come!"

"Have you the right key?" demanded Viola in a hurried tone.

"The one that has opened it before," replied Margaret;—"but it appears that—it will not turn—and, ah! my God, I hear steps approaching!"

The affrighted woman fell upon her knees, as if already to supplicate for her life.

Viola listened during half a minute of the most agonising suspense; but no sound from without met her ears.

"It was a false alarm," she exclaimed; then applying her hand to the key, she turned it with ease, for fear alone had prevented the Rattlesnake from moving it.

In another instant the door was opened.

"Thank God!" cried Margaret Flathers, starting from her suppliant posture, and clutching the bag of gold beneath her left arm.

"Come—let us not lose a moment," said Viola; and she darted into the alley, followed by the Rattlesnake.

There was no one to oppose their egress; but they could scarcely believe that they were really safe even when they found themselves in the street.

And now they ran—they ran, as if that terrible individual, whom they both feared so profoundly, were at their heels;—they ran, doubting the fact, the one that she was free, the other that she was safe;—they ran—they ran, reckless of the way which they were pursuing, but each alike impressed with the conviction that it was impossible to place too great a distance between them and the dwelling of the Resurrection Man!

Margaret Flathers carried her treasure as if it were a thing of no weight: Viola Chichester forgot that she had neither bonnet nor shawl to protect her against the bitter chill of that wintry evening.

And thus, together, did they pursue their way—the virtuous wife and the abandoned woman,—the former thinking not what might be the character of her companion—the latter having now no curiosity to know the circumstances that had plunged the lady by her side into the captivity from which she had just been released.

At length they reached the New Church facing the Bethnal Green Road; and there they halted, both completely out of breath and exhausted.

"We are now safe," said Margaret Flathers.

"We are now safe," echoed Viola Chichester.

"Still this place is lonely——"

"And if that dreadful man were on our track—"

"We might yet repent——"

"Yes—we might yet repent our proceeding."

The minds of those two women—so distinct in all other respects—were now entirely congenial in reference to one grand absorbing idea.

In spite of the alarm which yet filled their imaginations, they lingered against the palings surrounding the field at the back of the New Church, for they were too exhausted to continue their flight for a few moments.

That interval of rest enabled them to direct their attention to other matters besides the immense danger from which they had just escaped, and the sense of which was still uppermost in their minds.

"Which way are you going, madam?" asked the Rattlesnake, who saw by Viola's air—in spite of the disadvantages under which her outward appearance laboured—that she was not one of the poorer orders.

"My own house is close by," answered Mrs. Chichester. "But you—whither are *you* going? Will it not be better for you to come with me—and——"

"No, lady," replied Margaret Flathers; "you are not aware who and what I am, or you would not make me that generous offer."

"Generous!" exclaimed Viola: "have you not saved me from a fearful dungeon? It is true that my persecutors promised to release me this evening: but, alas! *their* word was not to be depended upon."

"Ah! madam," said Margaret, "if you trusted to Anthony Tidkins to give you your freedom, you would have been woefully disappointed—unless, indeed, he had no longer any interest in keeping you a prisoner."

"Well—well," observed Viola, "we will talk of all that hereafter. In the mean time, I insist upon your accompanying me to my home."

"I will see you safe to your own door, madam," returned Margaret; "and there I shall leave you."

"And why will you refuse an asylum at my abode?" demanded Viola.

"I dare not remain in London," answered the Rattlesnake. "Oh! you know not the perseverance, the craft, and the wickedness of the man from whose power you have just escaped. But there is one favour, madam, which you can grant me——"

"Name it," exclaimed Viola: "it is already conferred, if within my power."

"You can have no difficulty in fulfilling my request," said the Rattlesnake, "because it is simple, and consists only in forbearance. I mean, madam, that you will amply reward me for the service I have been able to render you, if you will promise not to take any measures to punish or molest Anthony Tidkins. He has been more or less good to me; and I should not like to know that he was injured through me. Besides, his revenge would only be the more terrible, if ever you or I again fell into his hands."

"I give you the promise which you require," said Viola; "although I must confess that it is somewhat repugnant to my feelings to allow such a wretch to be at large with impunity."

"But for my sake, lady——"

"For your sake, I give my most solemn pledge not to do aught that may injure that man on account of his past offences."

"A thousand thanks!" ejaculated the Rattlesnake. "Let us now proceed. But, heavens! you have got nothing on your head nor on your shoulders; and I did not notice that before! Take my bonnet and shawl, madam—I am more accustomed to the cold than you."

"No," said Viola; "in five minutes I shall be at my own house. Come—let us proceed."

Mrs. Chichester and the Rattlesnake hastened towards the Cambridge Heath gate.

On reaching the door of her abode, Viola again pressed her companion to accept of her hospitality: but the Rattlesnake firmly, though respectfully, refused the offer.

"In another hour, madam," she said, "I shall not be in London. *Then* only shall I consider myself safe."

"At least allow me to supply you with some money for your immediate purposes. I have none about me, and I know not whether my husband has left a single shilling in the house; but any of my tradesmen in the neighbourhood will honour my draft; and if you will walk in for a few minutes—"

"Thank you, madam—thank you for your kind consideration; but I am well supplied;" and she shook the bag that she hugged beneath her arm.

Viola heard the jingling of the gold, and ceased to press her offer.

"At all events," she observed, "should you ever require a friend, do not hesitate to apply to Mrs. Chichester."

"Mrs. Chichester!" ejaculated the Rattlesnake: "surely I have heard that name before? Oh! I recollect—I have taken to the post-office letters from Tidkins to a Mr. Chichester, who, I suppose, must be your husband."

"The same," said Viola, with a profound sigh.

"Farewell, madam," cried the Rattlesnake: "I feel that I shall not breathe with freedom until I am far beyond London. Farewell."

"Farewell," said Mrs. Chichester, extending her hand towards her deliverer.

Margaret Flathers pressed it warmly, and then hurried away.

Viola knocked at the door, and was speedily admitted once more into her own dwelling.

The servant who received her, uttered an ejaculation of surprise when she beheld the condition in which her mistress had returned.

"Make fast the door with chain and bolt, and bring me the key," said Viola, taking no heed of her domestic's exclamation. "See also that the shutters of the windows are well secured; and bring me your master's pistols."

"Mr. Chichester came this morning early, ma'am," returned the servant, "and took away every thing belonging to him."

"Heaven be thanked!" cried Viola. "Perhaps he will molest me no more? God grant that the separation may be eternal! Nevertheless, secure the door and the windows: this house is not safe! To-morrow I shall leave it, and hire lodgings in the very heart of London. *There*, perhaps," she murmured to herself, "no violence can be offered to me!"

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE TWO MAIDENS.

On a fine frosty morning—about ten days after the incidents just related,—two young ladies were walking together along the road in the immediate vicinity of the dwelling of Count Alteroni (for so we had better continue to call him, until he himself shall choose to throw aside his incognito).

Did an artist wish to personify the antipodes,—as the ancients did their rivers, mounts, and groves,—upon his canvass, he could not possibly have selected for his models two maidens between whom there existed so great a physical contrast as that which was afforded to the eye by the young ladies above noticed.

The one was a brunette, and seemed a child of the sunny south; the other was as fair as ever daughter of our cold northern clime could be:—the one had the rich red blood mantling beneath a delicate tinge of the purest and most transparent *bistre*; the other was pale and colourless as the whitest marble:—the generous mind and elevated intellect of the one shone through eyes large, black, and impassioned; the almost infantine candour and artlessness of the other were expressed by means of orbs of azure blue:—the glossy raven hair of the one was parted in two rich bands over the high and noble forehead; the flaxen tresses of the other fell in varied waves of pale auburn and gold, beneath the bonnet, over the shoulders:—the form of the one was well-rounded but sylph-like; the symmetry of the other was delicate and slight:—the appearance of the one excited the most ardent admiration tempered with respect; that of the other inspired the most lively interest:—the beauty of the one was faultless, brilliant, and dazzling; that of the other, ideal, fascinating, and bewitching:—the one, in fine, was a native of the warm Italian clime; the other, a daughter of Britain's sea-girt isle.

A shade of profound melancholy hung upon the countenance of Mary-Anne Gregory. The sprightly—gay—joyous—innocently volatile disposition had changed to sadness and gloom. Those vermilion lips, which until so lately were ever wreathed in smiles, now expressed care and sorrow. The step, though light, was no longer playfully elastic. Time had added but a few months to the sixteen years which marked the age of Mary-Anne when we first introduced her to our readers; but thought, and meditation, and grief had given to the mind the experience of maturity. She was no longer the gay, lively, flitting, bee-like being that she was when Richard Markham became her brothers' tutor: her manner was now painfully tranquil, her air profoundly pensive, her demeanour inconsistently grave when considered in relation to her years.

It seemed as if there were a canker at the heart of that fair creature; as if the hidden worm were preying upon the delicate rose-bud ere it expanded into the bloom of maturity!

And these traits and symptoms were rendered the more apparent by the contrast afforded by the rich health and youthful vigour which characterised the Signora Isabella. The hues of the rose were seen beneath the soft brunette tint of her complexion—for that complexion was clear and transparent as the stream over which the trees throw a shade beneath a summer sun.

And both those maidens loved: but the passion of the English girl was without hope; while that of the noble Italian lady was nurtured by the fondest aspirations.

But how came those charming creatures thus acquainted with each other?

Perhaps their conversation may elucidate this mystery.

"We have only known each other one short week," said Mary-Anne; "and yet I feel as if you were sent to me by heaven to become my friend and confidant—for, oh! it seems to me as if my soul nourished a secret which consumes it."

"An accident made us acquainted; and that very circumstance immediately inspired me with a deep interest in your behalf," returned the signora. "There are occasions when two persons become more intimate in a few short days, than they otherwise would in as many years."

"You echo my own feelings, signora," said Mary-Anne; "and your goodness makes me desire to deserve and gain your friendship."

"Your wish is already accomplished, my dear Miss Gregory," observed Isabella. "You have my friendship; and if you think me worthy of your confidence, I can sympathise with your sorrows, even if I cannot remove them."

"How have you divined that the confidence I would impart is associated with grief?" asked Mary-Anne, hastily.

"I will tell you," replied the beautiful Italian. "When you were riding on horseback, accompanied by your father, along this road a week ago, I observed you from my own chamber. Even at that distance, I perceived something about you that immediately inspired me with interest. I followed you with my eyes until you were out of sight: and then I still continued to think of you—wondering, with that idiosyncrasy of thought which often occurs during a leisure half-hour, who you were. At length you returned. You were a few paces in front of your father; and I observed that the horse you rode was a spirited one. Then occurred the accident: the moment you were thrown so rudely off against the very gate of our shrubbery, I precipitated myself down the stairs, and, calling for the servants as I descended, hurried to your assistance. You cannot remember—because you were insensible—that I was the first to reach the spot, where your father had already raised you from the ground. Mr. Gregory was distracted: he thought that you were lost to him for ever. I, however, ascertained in a moment that you still breathed; and I directed the servants to convey you to the house. While you were still stretched in a state of insensibility upon my own bed, I contemplated you with increasing interest. Then, when you awoke at length, and spoke,—and when I conversed with you,—it seemed as if I were irresistibly attracted towards you. I was, indeed, delighted when my father proposed to Mr. Gregory to allow you to remain a few days with us until you should be completely recovered from the effects of your fall. Your father consented, and he left you with us. It was not long before I perceived that you nourished a profound

grief;—I observed the frequent abstraction of your manner—I noticed your pensive mood. I thought within myself, '*Is it possible that one so young and interesting should already be acquainted with sorrow?*' From that hour I have felt deeply on your account—for, alas! I myself have known what are the effects of grief!"

"Signora," said Mary-Anne, with tears in her eyes, "I can never repay you for this kind interest which you manifest towards me. I feel that I should be happier were I to tell you all that grieves me; but I tremble—lest you should think me very foolish, and very indiscreet!"

"Foolish we may all be at times," said Isabella; "but indiscreet I am convinced you never were."

"Is it not indiscreet to nurse a sentiment whose hopes can never be realised? Is it not indiscreet," added Mary-Anne, hanging down her head, and speaking in a low tone, "to love one who loves another?"

"No—not indiscreet," answered Isabella, hastily: "for what mortal has power over the heart?"

"Signora, love is not then a stranger to your breast!" exclaimed Mary-Anne, glancing with tearful eyes up to the countenance of the Italian lady.

"I should be unworthy of your confidence, were I to withhold mine," said Isabella. "Yes—my troth is plighted to one than whom no living soul possesses more generous, more noble feelings: and yet," she added, with a sigh, "there are obstacles in the way of our union—obstacles which, alas! I sometimes think, can never be overcome!"

"Ah! lady, while I can now feel for you—feel most deeply," said Mary-Anne, "I am, nevertheless, rejoiced that you have thus honoured me with your confidence. It removes any hesitation—any alarm, on my part, to unburden my soul to you!"

"Speak, my dear Mary-Anne," returned Isabella: "you will at least be certain to receive sympathy and consolation from me."

"I shall then reveal my sentiments unreservedly," continued Mary-Anne. "I have before mentioned to you that I have two brothers, who are now at college. A few months ago, they were preparing for their collegiate course of study, and were residing at home in Kentish Town. My father obtained for them the assistance of a tutor—a young gentleman who had once been wealthy, but who had been reduced to comparative poverty. Oh! it was impossible to see that young man without feeling an interest in him. When I first heard that a tutor was engaged for my brothers, I immediately pictured to myself a confirmed pedagogue—shabby, dirty, dogmatic, and ugly. How greatly then was I astonished, when I was introduced to an elegant and handsome young man, of polished manners, agreeable conversation, entirely unassuming, courteous, and affable? There was a partial air of melancholy about him; but his eyes were lighted with the fire of intellect, and his noble forehead seemed to be adorned with that unartificial crown of aristocracy which nature bestows upon her elect. Alas! woe to me was the day when that young man first entered my father's dwelling. The interest I felt for him soon augmented to a degree, that I was miserable when he was away. But, when he was present, oh! then my heart seemed to bound within me like a fawn upon the hills; and my happiness was of the most ravishing description—I was gay, frolicksome, and playful: no laugh of a child was so hearty, so sincere as mine! His voice was music to my ears! He taught me drawing; but I was too happy to sit still for many minutes together—too happy to sit next to him! And yet I did not understand my own feelings: in fact, I never stopped to analyse them. I was carried along by a whirlwind that left me no leisure for self-examination. When he was absent, my only thought was upon what he had said when present, and how happy I should be when he came once more. I had no more idea of the true nature of the sentiment that animated my soul, than I have at this instant of what constitutes the happiness of heaven. I knew that I felt happy when he was there: I know that those feel happy who dwell above;—but I was as ignorant then of what formed my felicity, as I now am of the bliss experienced by those who inhabit the Almighty's kingdom. Thus a few weeks passed away; and then my father announced his intention of allowing a holiday for a short period. I remember—as well as if it were an event of yesterday—that this arrangement caused me serious displeasure; because I understood that our tutor would cease to visit us during the suspension of the studies. I expressed my annoyance in plain terms; but this ebullition on my part was most probably considered a specimen of girlish caprice, or the airs of a spoiled child. And now, signora—now——"

"Call me Isabella," said the Italian lady, affectionately.

"Now, my dear Isabella," preceded Mary-Anne, "I come to that part of my narrative which involves an indiscretion that may appear grave in your eyes—though, God knows, I was at the time entirely ignorant of the imprudence of the step which I was taking."

"I am prepared to allow every extenuation for one so young, so artless, and so inexperienced as yourself," observed Isabella.

"Ah! how kind you are," returned Mary-Anne, pressing her companion's hand. "But let me not hesitate to reveal the indiscretion into which I was hurried by feelings of a new and powerful nature, I called upon the young tutor at his own residence! And then, how nobly did he behave! how generously did he act! He explained to me—by degrees, and in the most delicate manner possible—the impropriety of the step which I had taken: he gave me an insight into those rules of feminine propriety, a breach of which can scarcely be extenuated by the plea of guilelessness;—in a word, he opened my eyes to the position in which I had placed myself! But, alas! what did I learn at the same time? He told me that he was attached to a young lady, who was very beautiful. It then struck me, with lightning rapidity, that I had no right to offer my *friendship* (for still I did not dream of *love*) to one on whom another heart had claims; and I left him with a sincere apology for my conduct."

"I admit that your indiscretion was great," said the pure-minded Isabella; "but no one possessing a generous heart could hesitate to sympathise with you, rather than blame."

"For days and days," continued Mary-Anne, "I struggled with my feelings. I still believed that all I experienced towards the object of my interest was friendship. But when he resumed his attendance, I found that it was impossible to conquer the sentiments which agitated my bosom. God knows—God knows, Isabella, how I reasoned with myself upon the state of mind in which I existed! I prayed to heaven to relieve me from the doubts, the anxieties, the uneasiness, which constantly oppressed me, by restoring me to that state of perfect happiness which was mine ere I knew that being who, in spite of himself, exercised so powerful an influence over me. At length my father sent me suddenly, and without a day's warning, to pass a week with some particular friends at Twickenham. I was at first inclined to remonstrate with him at this proceeding; and then it struck me that it would be well if I were to cease to exist under

the spell which the frequent presence of the tutor at the house seemed to throw around me."

"And all this time you were still unaware of the true nature of the feelings which animated you?" inquired Isabella.

"Oh! yes—I was indeed," answered Mary-Anne: "but a fearful occurrence was speedily destined to open my eyes! I remained a few days with my kind friends at Twickenham, and then returned home. I there learnt that the tutor had ceased to attend at the house, as my brothers were to proceed, at the commencement of January, to college. I know not whether my father had some motive for the conduct which he thus pursued, in abruptly dismissing the tutor and sending me away while he adopted that step; nor can I say whether any particular reason prompted him to do all that he could to amuse my mind on my return home. It is, nevertheless, certain that he exerted himself to provide amusements for me: he purchased two horses, and accompanied me in frequent equestrian exercises; he took me to concerts and the theatres; and supplied me with entertaining books of travel and adventure, music, and pictures. But my mind was intent only upon one absorbing idea; nor could it be weaned from that feeling which it nursed in favour of the young tutor. I, however, acceded to all my father's plans of diversion; and it was one evening at the theatre that the veil fell from my eyes! I accompanied my father to witness a new drama. The action of the piece was deeply interesting; the poetry was of a nature to touch the inmost soul. There was a passage in which the heroine described her hopeless love: I listened—I drank in every word—I hung upon each syllable of that fine speech as if my own destiny were intimately linked with the scene enacting before me. As she proceeded, I was painfully surprised by the similitude existing between the feelings that *she* described and that *I* felt. At length a light dawned in upon my soul;—then did I begin to comprehend the real nature of the sentiments that filled my own soul;—then could I read my own heart! I perceived that I loved tenderly, deeply, unalterably! I heard no more of the drama—I saw nothing more of its progress: I sate absorbed in deep reflection upon the conviction that had so suddenly reached me. When I awoke from my reverie, the tragedy——"

"A tragedy?" said Isabella, hastily.

"Yes—the tragedy was finished, and the author, holding the hand of the heroine of his piece, stood before the public. Merciful heavens! the great tragic writer who had thus suddenly burst upon the world, was no other than the young tutor!"

"The tutor!" exclaimed Isabella, a strange suspicion suddenly entering her mind.

"Yes—he whom I had just discovered that I loved," answered Mary-Anne.

"May I inquire his name?" said Isabella, in a tremulous tone, and with a palpitating heart.

"There can be no indiscretion in revealing it," returned Miss Gregory; "for it is not probable that you have ever heard of Mr. Richard Markham."

"Unhappy girl!" exclaimed Isabella, in a tone of deep sympathy—but without the least feeling of jealousy; "it is now my duty to return your confidence with a reciprocal frankness. But, alas! what I am about to say cannot tend to soothe your sorrows, since—as I fondly believe—it will only confirm you in the impression that the affections of him whom *you* love are fixed elsewhere."

"You speak mysteriously, Isabella," said Mary-Anne: "pray, explain yourself."

"I will—and without reserve," continued the signora, a blush mantling upon her beauteous countenance. "So far from Mr. Richard Markham being a stranger to me, Mary-Anne, he is——"

"He is—" repeated Miss Gregory, mechanically.

"He is the hope of my happiness—the one to whom my vow of constancy and love is pledged——"

"You the object of his attachment!" ejaculated Mary-Anne, clinging to Isabella for support: "Oh! forgive me—forgive me, that I have dared to love him also!"

"Alas! dear girl, I have nothing to forgive," said Isabella, affectionately: "I deeply—deeply compassionate your lot. And, oh! believe me," continued the generous Italian Princess,—"believe me when I say that no feeling of petty jealousy—no sentiment unworthy the honourable affection which I bear towards Richard Markham—can ever impair the friendship that has commenced, and shall continue, between you and me!"

"Oh! how noble is your disposition, Isabella!" exclaimed Mary-Anne. "But your generous assurance shall not meet with an ungrateful return. So far from feeling jealous of you,—*envious* I must be, to some extent,—I offer you the most sincere congratulations on your engagement to one who is so well worthy of your love—in spite of what the world may say against him;—for that he could be guilty of the deed of which that horrible man accused him——"

"He is not guilty," answered Isabella, firmly. "The story is a long one; but I will tell thee all."

The signora then related to her companion the narrative of the misfortunes and sufferings of Richard Markham.

Mary-Anne listened with profound attention, and, when Isabella terminated her history, exclaimed, "Oh! I knew that he was all of honourable, great, and generous, that human nature could be!"

A profound silence then ensued between the two young ladies, and lasted for some minutes.

At length it was broken by Mary-Anne.

"Oh! well might *he* have said," she exclaimed, in a sudden ebullition of feeling, as she gazed upon the countenance of the signora, —"well might he have said that his heart was devoted to a lady who was very beautiful! And he might also have observed, as good as she was lovely!"

"Nay—you must not flatter me," returned Isabella.

"You need not hesitate to hear the truth from my lips," said Mary-Anne. "God grant that I may live to see you happily united: I shall then die in peace."

"It is wrong to talk of dying at your age," observed Isabella. "Time will mitigate that passion which has made you unhappy——"

"Oh! Isabella, do *you* believe that true and sincere love can ever succumb to time?" exclaimed Mary-Anne, almost reproachfully.

"Time cannot extinguish it; but time may soften its pangs," said the Italian lady, desirous to console her unfortunate friend.

"But time will only ripen, and not eradicate, the canker which gnaws at the heart," persisted Miss Gregory; "and *mine*," she added with a mournful pathos of tone that showed how deeply she felt the truth of what she said,—"*mine* has received a wound whose effects may be comparatively slow, but which is not the less mortal. A few years, perhaps, and my earthly career must end. I shall wither like the early flowers, that peep forth prematurely to greet a deceptive gleam of sunshine which they mistake for spring:—I shall pass away at that age when my contemporaries are in the full enjoyment of life, vigour, and happiness! Yes—I feel it here—*here*;"—and she pressed her hand upon her heart.

"No, my dear friend," said Isabella, affected even to tears; "your prospect is not so gloomy as you would depict it. There is one star that burns in the same heaven which is above us all;—and that star is Hope."

"Hope!" ejaculated Mary-Anne, bitterly: "ah! where does hope exist for me? Is not hope extinguished in my heart for ever?"

"In the one sense, hope is dead," answered Isabella, mildly; "but hope beams not only in one sphere. The attentions of your friends—the kindness of your relations, will combine to cheer your path; and surely this conviction must be allied to hopes of tranquillity, peace, and even happiness! Consider, Mary-Anne—you have a father who is still in the vigour of his years: you will live for him! You have brothers who must soon enter upon their respective careers in the great world: you must live for them! You have friends who are devoted to you: you will live for them also! Oh! do not speak of death with levity: do not seem to invite its presence! We do not live for ourselves only: we live for others. To yield to those feelings which facilitate the ravages of sorrow and encourage the inroads of grief, is to perpetrate a slow suicide. God and man alike require that we should war against our misfortunes!

"Alas! I have not that great moral courage which characterises your soul, Isabella," answered Mary-Anne: "I am a weak and fragile plant, that bends to the lightest gale. How, then, can I resist the terrible tempest?"

"By exerting that fortitude with which every mind is more or less endowed, but which cannot be developed without an effort," answered Isabella.

Mary-Anne sighed, but gave no answer.

The two maidens now felt wearied with the somewhat lengthy walk which they had taken; and they accordingly retraced their steps to the mansion.

CHAPTER CXIX.

POOR ELLEN!

It was evening; and a cheerful fire burned in the grate of the drawing-room at Markham-Place.

Mr. Monroe and his daughter were seated in that apartment; the former dozing in an arm-chair, the latter reading a novel.

Richard was engaged in a literary pursuit in his library.

From time to time Miss Monroe laid aside her book, and fell into meditation. Not that she had any particular subject for her reflections; but the events of her life, when taken together, constituted a theme from which it was impossible to avert her attention for any lengthened period.

There was also a topic upon which she pondered more frequently as time passed on. She knew that in the course of nature,—especially after the rude shocks which his constitution had received from mental suffering and bodily privation,—her father could not live much longer. Then, she was well aware that she could not continue to dwell beneath the same roof with Richard Markham;—and her pride revolted against the idea of receiving a direct eleemosynary assistance from him in the shape of a pecuniary allowance. She had some few pounds treasured up in a savings bank, and which she had saved from her salary when engaged at the theatre; but this sum would not maintain her long. She therefore looked, with occasional anxiety, to the necessity of adopting some course that should obtain for her a livelihood. Of all the avocations in which she had been engaged, she preferred that of the stage; and there were times when she seriously thought of returning to the profession, even during her father's life-time.

In sooth, it was a pity that one of the brightest ornaments of female loveliness should have been lowered by circumstances from the pedestal of virtue and modesty which she would have so eminently adorned. Should her transcendent loveliness captivate the heart of any individual whose proposals were alike honourable and eligible, how could she accept the hand thus extended to her? She must either deceive him in respect to that wherein no man likes to be deceived; or she must decline the chance of settling herself advantageously for life. These were the alternatives;—for in no case could she reveal her shame!

Her fate was not, therefore, a happy one; and the reader need not marvel if she now and then found reflections of a disagreeable nature stealing into her soul.

She was now past twenty years of age: and in spite of the severe trials which she had endured, the sweet freshness of her youthful charms was totally unimpaired. Her faultless Grecian countenance,—her classically-shaped head,—her swan-like neck,—her symmetrical form,—her delicate hands and feet,—all those charms which had been perpetuated in the works of so many artists—these elements of an almost superhuman beauty still combined to render her passing lovely!

O Ellen! the soul of the philanthropist must mourn for thee,—for thou wast not wrongly inclined by nature. On a purer being than thou wast, ere misery drove thee in an evil moment to an evil course, the sun never shone:—and now thou hast to rue the shame which thine imperious destiny, and not thy faults, entailed upon thee!

But to our tale.

Old Mr. Monroe was dozing in the arm-chair; and Ellen had once more turned her eyes upon her book, when Marian entered the room.

She perceived at a glance that Mr. Monroe was asleep; and, placing her finger upon her lip to enjoin silence, she put a note into Ellen's hand, saying it the same time in a low whisper, "Mr. Wentworth's servant has just brought this, with a request that it should be immediately conveyed to you. Miss."

Marian then withdrew.

Ellen tore open the note, and read as follows:—

"I grieve to state that your little Richard has been attacked with a sudden and dangerous malady. Come to my house for an hour—if you can possibly steal away, without exciting suspicion. My servant will convey this to you through your faithful confidant.

"DAVID WENTWORTH."

Ellen flung the note frantically upon the table, and rushed out of the room.

She hurried up stairs, put on her bonnet and cloak, and, having told Marian to sit up for her, hastened from the house—one sole idea occupying her mind,—the danger of her well-beloved child!

When she arrived at Mr. Wentworth's abode, she was received by that gentleman's wife, who immediately said, "The danger is over—the crisis is past! Do not alarm yourself—my husband no longer fears for your son's life. He, however, deemed it to be his duty to send for you."

"Oh! he did well—he acted kindly and considerately," returned Ellen. "But let me assure myself that my boy is no longer in danger."

Mrs. Wentworth led the way to the chamber where little Richard was now sleeping tranquilly, the surgeon seated by the bed-side.

From his lips Ellen gathered hope that the perilous crisis had passed: she nevertheless determined to remain for some time to assure herself that any return of the spasms might not be fraught with increased danger. All other considerations were banished from her mind; she thought not of her father—she remembered not that her absence might alarm both him and Richard Markham; and when Mr. Wentworth delicately alluded to that subject, as time slipped by, she uttered some impatient remark intimating that she should not

be at a loss for an excuse to account for her protracted absence.

Thus the pure and holy maternal feeling was now uppermost in the mind of that young lady: the danger of her child was the all-absorbing subject of her thoughts.

Bent over the bed, she tenderly gazed upon the pale countenance of her child.

Oh! where can the artist find a more charming subject for his pencil, or the poet a more witching theme for his song, than the young mother watching over her sleeping infant?

Hour after hour passed; and when the babe awoke, Ellen nursed him in her arms. In spite of its illness, the little sufferer smiled; but when the pang of the malady seized upon him, it was Mrs. Wentworth—and not Ellen—who could pacify him!

Alas! galling indeed to the young mother was this conviction that her child clung to another rather than to herself.

Nevertheless Ellen watched the babe with the most heartfelt tenderness; and it was not until near midnight, when the surgeon declared that the malady had passed without the remotest fear of a relapse, that Ellen thought of returning home.

She then took her departure, with an intimation that she should call again in the morning.

She retraced her steps towards the Place, and, passing up the garden, was admitted through the back entrance by the faithful Marian.

"My child is saved," whispered Ellen to the servant. "Has my father inquired for me?"

"No, miss," was the reply. "He is still in the drawing-room; and Mr. Markham is with him."

"They are up late to-night," remarked Ellen. "But I," she continued, "am weary in mind and body, and shall at once repair to my own room."

Marian gave the young lady a candle, and wished her a good night's rest.

Ellen hastened cautiously up-stairs, and in a few minutes retired to rest.

She was fatigued, as before intimated; and yet slumber refused to visit her eyes. Nevertheless, she dozed uneasily,—in that kind of semi-sleep which weighs down the heavy lids, and yet does not completely shut out from the mind the consciousness of what is passing around.

A quarter of an hour had probably elapsed since Ellen had sought her couch, when the door slowly opened; and her father entered the room, bearing a light in his hand.

The countenance of the old man was ghastly pale; but there was a wildness in his eyes which bore testimony to the painful feelings that agitated him within.

He advanced towards the bed, and contemplated the countenance of his daughter for a few moments with an expression of profound sorrow.

Ellen opened her eyes, and started up in the bed, exclaiming, "My dear father, in the name of heaven, what is the matter?"

"O God! Ellen," cried the old man, placing the light upon a side-table, "tell me that it is not true—say but one word, to assure me that you are the pure and spotless girl I have always deemed you to be!"

"Father!" exclaimed the young lady, a horrible feeling taking possession of her, "why do you ask me that question?"

"Because a fearful suspicion racks my brain," answered the old man; "and I could not retire to rest until I knew the truth—be that truth what it may."

"My dear father—you alarm me cruelly!" said Ellen, her cheeks at one moment suffused with blushes, and then varying to ashy whiteness.

"In one word, Ellen," exclaimed the old man, "what is the meaning of that letter?"

And the almost distracted father threw the surgeon's note upon the bed.

In an instant Ellen remembered that she had left it behind her in the room where she was seated with her father when she received it.

Joining her hands in a paroxysm of the most acute mental agony, she burst into tears, crying wildly, "Forgive me! forgive me—my dear, dear father! Do not curse your wretched—wretched daughter!"

And then she bowed her head upon her bosom, and seemed to await her parent's reply in a state of mind which no pen can describe.

For some moments Mr. Monroe maintained a profound silence: but the quivering of his lip, and the working of the veins upon his forehead betrayed the terrible nature of the conflict of feelings which was taking place within his breast.

At length he also burst into tears, and covering his face with his hands, exclaimed, "My God! that I had died ere I had experienced this bitter—bitter hour!"

These words were uttered in a tone of such intense agony, that a mortal dread for her father's reason and life suddenly sprang up in Ellen's mind.

Throwing herself from the bed, she fell upon her knees, crying, "Forgive me, my dear father. Oh! if my child were here, I would hold it in my arms towards you; and, when its innocent countenance met your eyes, you would pardon *me*!"

"Ellen! Ellen! thou hast broken thy father's heart," murmured Mr. Monroe, averting his face from his suppliant daughter. "Oh! heaven be thanked that thy mother has been snatched from us! But tell me, unhappy girl, who is the villain that has dishonoured thee—for, in the moment of my intense agony, when I read the fatal letter that disclosed thy dishonour and marked the name of thy child, I vilely—ungratefully accused our generous benefactor of thy ruin."

"What! Richard?—oh! no, no!" ejaculated Ellen, in a tone of ineffable anguish; then, as the thought of *who the father of her child really was* flashed across her memory, she gave utterance to a terrible moan, and sank backwards, senseless, upon the floor.

"Ellen! Ellen!" cried the old man: "Ellen—my dearest daughter, Ellen—oh! I have killed her!"

At that moment Marian, bearing a light, entered the room.

"Water! water!" exclaimed the agonised father: "she is insensible—she is dying!"

Then hastily filling a tumbler from a decanter of water which stood upon the toilet-table, he knelt down by the side of his daughter, and bathed her temples.

In a few moments Ellen partially recovered, and gazed wildly around her.

"My sweet child," murmured the old man, pressing her hand to his lips, "live—live for me: all shall be forgiven—all forgotten. I was harsh to thee, my Ellen—to thee who have always been so fond, so tender, and so good to me."

"Leave her, sir, for the present," said Marian: "allow her to compose herself. This discovery has been almost too much for her!"

"I will," returned Mr. Monroe. "You must stay with her, good Marian; and in the morning I will come and see her."

The old man then withdrew.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

It was nine o'clock in the morning.

Ellen was lying, pale and tearful, in her bed, by the side of which sate her father.

The past night had worked a fearful change in the old man: his countenance was haggard, his look desolate and forlorn.

At one moment his lips quivered as if with concentrated rage: at another he wiped tears from his eyes.

Ellen watched him with the deepest interest.

"And you persist in refusing to acquaint me with the name of him who has dishonoured you?" said the old man, in slow and measured terms.

"Oh! my dear father, why will you persist in torturing me?" exclaimed Ellen. "Do you think that I have not suffered enough?"

"Oh! I can well believe that you have suffered, Ellen—suffered profoundly," returned Monroe; "for you were reared in the ways of virtue; and you could not have fallen into those of crime without a remorse. Suffered! but how have I not suffered during the last few hours! When I read that fearful secret, I became a madman. I had but two ideas: my daughter was a mother, and her child's name was *Richard*! What could I think? I went straight to the room where our benefactor was sitting: I closed the door; I approached him, with the rage of a demon in my breast, and I said, '*Villain! is my daughter's honour the price of the hospitality which you have shown towards us?*' He was thunderstruck; and I showed him the letter. He burst into tears, exclaiming, '*Could you believe me capable of such infernal atrocity?*' Then we reasoned together; we conversed upon the subject; and his noble frankness of manner convinced me that I had erred—grossly erred! He implored me to allow the night to pass ere I revealed to you the appalling discovery which I had made: he dreaded the effects of my excited state of mind; he thought that rest would calm me. But there was no rest for me! I retired to my room; and there—when alone—I felt that I could not endure meditation. I came to your chamber; and then—O God! the doubt to which I had yet so fondly clung was dissipated."

"My dear father, if you knew all," said Ellen, weeping, "you would pity me—oh! you would pity me! Do not think that I surrendered myself to him who is the father of my child, in a moment of passion: do not imagine that the weakness was preceded by affection on my part for him who led me astray!"

"Unhappy girl, what mean you?" ejaculated Mr. Monroe. "Would you rob yourself of the only plea of extenuation which woman in such a case can offer? Speak, Ellen!"

"I will tell you all—that is, all I know," added Ellen, with a blush. "You remember that when we returned to live in that horrible court in Golden Lane, the second time we were reduced to poverty,—you remember what fearful privations we endured! At length our misery reached a point when it became intolerable; and one morning you set out with the determination of seeking relief from the bounty of Richard Markham."

"I well remember it," said Monroe. "Proceed."

"You can then call to mind the circumstance of my absence when you returned home to our miserable abode——"

"I do—I do: hours passed—I had gold—and you were absent!" ejaculated the old man, with feverish impatience.

"And when I returned home—late—" continued Ellen, her voice scarcely rising above a whisper, and her face, neck, and bosom suffused with burning blushes, "did I not bring you gold also?"

"Merciful heavens!" cried Monroe, starting from his seat; "say no more, Ellen—say no more—or I shall go mad! Oh, God! I comprehend it all! You went and sold yourself to some libertine for gold!"

The old man threw himself into his daughter's arms, and wept bitterly.

"Father—dear father, calm yourself," said Ellen.

"I could not see you want—I had no faith in the success of your appeal to him who has since been our benefactor—I thought that there was but *one resource* left;—but," she added, her eyes kindling with the fire of pride, while her father sank back into his seat, "I call my God to witness that I acted not thus for myself. Oh, no! death sooner should have been my fate. But you, my dear father, you wanted bread; you were starving; and that was more than I could bear! I sinned but once—*but once*; and never, never have I ceased to repent of that fatal step—for my one crime bore its fruit!"

Monroe was convulsed with grief. The tears trickled through the wrinkled hands with which he covered his venerable countenance; his voice was lost in agonising sobs, and all he could utter were the words: "Ellen, my daughter, it is for me to ask pardon of you!"

"No, say not so, dear father—say not so!" ejaculated Miss Monroe, throwing her arms around him, and kissing his forehead and his hands. "No, my dear father, it was not your fault, if misery drove me to despair. But now you perceive," she added, solemnly, "that I was more to be pitied than to be blamed; and—and," she murmured, the falsehood at such a moment almost suffocating her, "you understand why I cannot tell you who was the father of my child!"

There was something so terrible in the idea that a young, virtuous, and lovely girl had prostituted herself to the first unknown libertine who had bid a price for her charms,—something so appalling to a father in the thought that his only child had been urged by excess of misery and profound affection for him, to such a dismal fate, that Monroe seemed to sink under the blow!

For some time did his daughter vainly endeavour to solace him; and it was only when she herself began to rave and beat her

bosom with anguish and in despair, that the old man was recalled to a sense of the necessity of calming his almost invincible emotions.

The father and daughter were at length restored to partial tranquillity by each other's endeavours at reciprocal consolation, and were commingling their tears together, when the door opened.

Markham, followed by Marian, entered the room.

But what was the surprise of Mr. Monroe—what was the joy of Ellen, when Marian advanced towards the bed, and presented the child to her mother!

"A parent must not be separated from her offspring," said Richard; "henceforth, Ellen, that infant must be nurtured by thee."

"Oh! good, generous friend, my more than brother!" exclaimed Ellen, with an ebullition of feeling that might almost be termed a wild paroxysm of joy; and she pressed the infant to her bosom.

"Richard," said Mr. Monroe, "you possess the noblest soul that ever yet blessed or adorned a human being."

Marian stooped over the bed, apparently to caress the sleeping infant, but in reality to whisper these words in Ellen's ears:—"Fear nothing: I was sent to fetch the child; and Mr. Wentworth will keep your secret inviolably."

Ellen cast a look of profound gratitude upon Marian; for this welcome announcement assured her that the surgeon would never admit the fact of possessing any clue, direct or indirect, to the father of the babe which she held in her arms.

In a few minutes, when she had recovered herself from the horrible alarm that had filled her mind lest Markham had himself been to see Mr. Wentworth, and had learnt that the father of the child was so far known that he had engaged to furnish the means for its support,—in a few minutes, we say, she turned to her father, and said: "Our benefactor's goodness deserves every explanation from us; tell him the extent of my misfortune—reveal to him the origin and cause of my shame—let nothing be concealed."

"Ellen," said Richard, "I know all! Forgive me, but I reached the door of your room when you were telling your sad tale to your father; and I paused—because I considered that it was improper to interrupt you at such a moment. And, if I overheard that affecting narrative, it was not a mean curiosity which made me stop to listen—it was the deep interest which I now more than ever feel in your behalf."

"And you do not despise me?" said Ellen, hanging down her head.

"Despise you!" ejaculated Richard, "I deeply sympathise with you! Oh, no! you are not criminal; you are unfortunate. Your soul is pure and spotless."

"But the world—what will the world think," said Ellen, "when I am seen with this babe in my arms?"

"The world has not treated you so well, Ellen," returned Markham, "that its smiles should be deeply valued. Let the world say what it will, it would be unnatural—inhuman—to separate a mother from her child; unless, indeed," he added, "it is your desire that that innocent should be nursed among strangers."

"Oh, no—no!" exclaimed Ellen. "But my unhappy situation shall not menace your tranquillity; nor shall the tongue of scandal gather food from the fact of the residence of an unwedded mother beneath your roof. I will retire, with my father, to some secluded spot——"

"Ellen," interrupted Markham, "were I to permit that arrangement, it would seem as if I were not sincere in the interest and commiseration, instead of the blame, which I ere now expressed concerning you. No: unless you and your father be wearied of the monotonous life which you lead with me, here will you both continue to dwell; and let the world indulge in its idle comments as it will."

"Your benevolence finds a reason for every good deed which you practise," said Ellen. "Ah! Richard, you should have been born a prince, with a princely fortune: how many thousands would then have been benefited by your boundless philanthropy."

"My own misfortunes have taught me to feel for those of others," answered Richard; "and if the world were more anxious than it is to substitute sympathy for vituperation, society would not be the compound of selfishness, slander, envy, and malignity, that it now is."

"It is settled, then, Richard," murmured Ellen, "that my babe shall henceforth experience a mother's care!"

And Ellen covered her child with kisses and with tears.

At that moment the infant awoke; and a smile played over its innocent countenance.

Ellen pressed it more closely and more fondly to her bosom.

CHAPTER CXXI.

HIS CHILD!

Mr. Greenwood was sitting in his study,—the handsomely fitted-up room which we have before described,—the same morning on which the babe was restored to its mother, through the admirable feeling of Richard Markham.

Mr. Greenwood was studying speeches for the ensuing session of Parliament. He employed two secretaries who composed his orations; one did the dry details, and the other the declamatory and rhetorical portions. Each received thirty shillings a week, and worked from nine in the morning until nine at night, with half an hour three times a day for meals—which said meals were enjoyed at their own expense. And then Mr. Greenwood hoped to reap all the honours resulting from this drudgery on the part of his clerks.

The studies of the Member of Parliament were interrupted by the introduction of Mr. Arthur Chichester.

"I am off to France to-morrow," said this gentleman, throwing himself lazily upon a sofa; "and I called to see if I could do any thing for you on that side of the water."

"No, nothing," answered Greenwood. "Do you propose to make a long stay in France?"

"I shall honour Paris with my presence for about a month," said Chichester.

"During which time," added Greenwood, with a smile, "you will contrive to get rid of all the money which Mrs. Viola Chichester so generously supplied."

"Generously indeed!" said Chichester, laughing heartily. "So far from thinking of running through the money, I hope to double it. Although the public gambling-houses have been abolished in France, there is plenty of play at the private clubs. But you must not imagine that I have a perfect fortune in my possession: the means adopted to obtain the cash cost a mint of money: then were five hundred pounds to Tomlinson for his assistance; five hundred to you for your aid, advice, and advances—(there is a splendid alliteration for you!)—and three hundred to poor Anthony Tidkins."

"Poor indeed!" ejaculated Greenwood. "According to what you told me, the miserable wretch must be in a blessed state of pecuniary nudity."

"It was perfectly true," said Chichester. "When he came to meet me and Tomlinson on the night that Viola was to be released, in the dark alley adjoining his house, he was like a furious hyena. It seems that he had awoke up ten minutes before the hour appointed for our meeting, and then discovered his loss as I before described it to you."

"I should not like to have such a man as my enemy," observed Greenwood, carelessly.

"Nor I either. Bless me, how he did swear! I never heard such imprecations come from a human being's mouth before. He vowed that he would undertake no other business, nor devote himself to any other pursuit, until he had traced the woman who had robbed him, and avenged himself upon her. Flaying alive, he said, was too good for her! Well, I gave him twenty pounds, poor devil, through good nature; and Tomlinson gave him ten through fear; for it appears that this Tidkins exercises some extraordinary influence over that cowardly stock-broker—"

"Ahem!" said Greenwood. "And so poor Tidkins," he added, "did not set out on his travels after the thief empty-handed?"

"By no means. But he is a useful fellow, and one might want him again."

"True," said Greenwood: "he is one of the necessary implements which men of the world must make use of at times, to carve out their way to fortune. Hare you heard any thing of your beloved wife?"

"Nothing more than what I have already told you," answered Chichester. "She has given up her abode at the Cambridge Heath gate, and taken apartments at a house in the very heart of the City, and where there are plenty of other lodgers. She is determined to be secure. However," continued Chichester, with a smile, "so long as she holds her tongue about that little matter—which she seems inclined to do—she need not fear any further molestation from me."

"I question whether you would have released her that evening, had she not made her escape," said Greenwood.

"Oh, indeed I should," returned Chichester; "I did not wish to push things too far; and I really believe that another week's confinement in that terrible place, which I have described to you, would have turned her mad in reality. Then again, I should have been afraid of that cowardly, snivelling fool, Tomlinson, who insisted upon accompanying me to ensure her release. That man has every inclination to be a downright rogue; but he lacks the courage."

"Have you seen your friend Harborough lately?" inquired Greenwood.

"To tell you the truth, he is going with me on my present expedition to Paris. His name, you know, sounds well: Sir Rupert Harborough, Bart., son-in-law of Lord Tremordyn,—eh?"

"His name must be somewhat worn out, I should imagine," observed Greenwood, playing with his watch-chain. "Have you seen Lady Cecilia?"

"No: she has her suite of apartments, and Sir Rupert has his—they do not interfere with each other. Sir Rupert, however, notices that Lady Cecilia has a great many visitors of the male sex; and amongst others, an officer of the grenadier guards, seven feet seven inches high, including his bear-skin cap."

"Indeed! Lady Cecilia is then becoming a confirmed demirep," observed Greenwood, without pausing to think who helped to make her so.

"There is no doubt of that," said Chichester. "But you seem up to your neck in business as usual."

"Yes: I am busily engaged in behalf of the Tory party," answered Greenwood. "The future Premier has great confidence in me. I have bought him over seven votes from the Whig side during the recess; and the moment the Tories succeed to power, I shall be rewarded with a baronetcy."

"You are making your way famously in the world," said Chichester, rising to leave.

"Pretty well—pretty well," returned Greenwood, with a complacent smile.

Chichester then shook hands with his friend, and departed.

Half an hour elapsed, during which Mr. Greenwood pursued his studies, when he was again interrupted by the entrance of a visitor.

This time it was Mr. Tomlinson, the stock-broker.

After having transacted a little pecuniary business together, Greenwood said, "What have you done with the old man?"

"I have taken a lodging for him in an obscure street of Bethnal Green, and there he is residing," answered Tomlinson.

"My plan was better," observed Greenwood, dogmatically: "you should have had him locked up in one of Tidkins's subterranean cells, and allowed three or four shillings a week for his maintenance."

"Impossible!" cried Tomlinson, indignantly. "I could never have acted so unmanly—so ungrateful—so atrocious a part."

"Well, just as you please," returned the Member of Parliament: "of course, you know best."

"We will not discuss that point," said Tomlinson.

"That is precisely what I said some time since to a deputation from the free and independent electors of Rottenborough, when they sent to remonstrate with me on a certain portion of my parliamentary conduct," observed Mr. Greenwood.

At this moment Lafleur entered and whispered something in his master's ear.

Tomlinson took his leave, and the valet proceeded to admit Marian into the presence of his master.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Greenwood: "any thing wrong, Marian?"

"That may be according to the light in which you view the news I am come to communicate, sir," replied the servant. "In a word, Miss Monroe's father and Mr. Markham have discovered all."

"All! no—not *all*!" cried Greenwood, turning deadly pale; "surely Ellen could not——"

"When I said *all*, sir," replied Marian, "I was wrong. Mr. Monroe and my master have discovered that Miss Ellen is a mother; and her child is now with her."

"What! at Markham Place?" demanded Greenwood.

"Yes, sir."

"And is it known also who—what person—the father, I mean——"

"Miss Ellen has maintained *that* a profound secret, sir," said Marian.

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated Greenwood, now breathing freely. "But Mr. Wentworth—the surgeon——"

"He has also promised to remain dumb relative to what little he knows. You are best aware, sir, whether Miss Monroe has studied your wishes, or your interests, in remaining silent herself relative to you, and in recommending Mr. Wentworth, through me, to say nothing that may prove that she is really acquainted with the father of her child."

"But how was the discovery made? Tell me all," exclaimed Greenwood impatiently.

"The explanation is short. Mr. Wentworth sent a note relative to the health of the infant, last evening, to Miss Monroe; and she inadvertently left it upon the table in the same room where her father was sitting."

"And her father—and Richard—Mr. Markham, I mean," said Greenwood, "are acquainted but with the bare fact that she is a mother?"

"That is all, sir. But, oh! if you only knew the excuse that Miss Ellen made to avoid additional explanations," continued Marian, "you yourself—yes, you, sir, would be affected."

"What was that excuse?" demanded Greenwood.

"I can scarcely believe for one moment that it was true," said Marian, musing, rather than replying to his question.

"But what was it?" cried the Member of Parliament, impatiently.

"Oh! she spoke of the misery to which her father and herself had once been reduced, and she said that, prompted by despair, she had sold her virtue to one whom she knew not—whom she had never seen before nor since."

"Ah! she said *that*," murmured Greenwood. "And were her father and your master satisfied?"

"The old man wept well-nigh to break his heart, and Mr. Markham said that henceforth the child should stay with its mother in his house. Oh! sir, there lives not a man of nobler disposition than my master: he is all that is generous, humane, liberal, and upright!"

Mr. Greenwood turned aside, and appeared to contemplate some papers with deep interest for nearly a minute; and then he passed a handkerchief rapidly over his face.

Marian thought, as she afterwards informed Ellen, that he wiped tears from his eyes!

He made no reply, however, to her observations; but rang the bell for his French valet.

When Lafleur entered the room, Mr. Greenwood said, "You will proceed immediately to the abode of Mr. Wentworth, at Holloway: you will hand him from me this bank-note for fifty pounds; and you will say to him these words: '*As the child has been removed through an unforeseen occurrence from your care, its father sends you this as a small token of his gratitude for the kindness you have manifested towards it; and he hopes that, should you be questioned upon the subject, you will not reveal the fact that you ever*

had the slightest communication from its father.' Go—and return quickly."

Lafleur received the bank-note, bowed, and left the room.

"You can inform Miss Monroe of the step which I have thus taken to ensure the surgeon's secrecy," said Greenwood, addressing himself to Marian.

"I shall not fail to do so, sir," answered the servant.

She then withdrew.

When the door closed behind her, Greenwood threw himself back in his chair, murmuring, "My child beneath Richard's roof!"

CHAPTER CXXII.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon that the Earl of Warrington alighted from his horse at the door of Mrs. Arlington's residence in Dover Street.

Giving his horse in charge to his mounted groom, the nobleman entered the dwelling.

The Enchantress received him in the drawing-room; but, to her surprise, the air of the earl was cold and formal.

He seated himself in a chair at a distance from the sofa which Diana occupied; and for some moments he uttered not a word.

A sentiment of pride prevented her from saying any thing to elicit an explanation of his ceremonial manner, because she was not aware that she was guilty of a fault meriting such treatment.

At length that silence, most embarrassing to both, was broken by the earl.

"Diana," he said, "we must separate. You have conducted yourself in a manner that has made me the laughing-stock of all who know me."

"My lord!" exclaimed Diana, perfectly astonished at this accusation; "you must have been misinformed; or you are bantering me."

"Neither the one nor the other," replied the earl. "You may probably conceive whether I am inclined to jest, when I state that your kind consideration towards Sir Rupert Harborough has reached my ears."

"Indeed, my lord!" cried Diana. "I do not attempt to deny that I forwarded, anonymously, to Sir Rupert Harborough a sum of money to extricate him from a fearful embarrassment."

"It would be unmanly in me to do more than remind you whence came that money which you could afford to fling away upon an unprincipled profligate," said the Earl of Warrington; "at the same time, you cannot suppose that it is pleasant to my feelings to learn that the world makes itself merry at my expense."

"Your lordship is aware that I am the last person in existence to do aught to occasion you the slightest uneasiness. Perhaps I was wrong——"

"You cannot, with your good sense, think otherwise. But let us not dispute upon the point: the thing is done, and cannot be recalled; but its effect is fatal to our connection."

"Your lordship does not mean——"

"I mean that we must separate, Diana," interrupted the nobleman, firmly.

"Is my fault irreparable in your eyes?" asked the Enchantress, tears trickling down her cheeks.

"No man can endure ridicule—and I am particularly sensitive in that respect."

"But where did you learn that such was the result of my foolish kindness?" said Diana, almost bewildered by the suddenness with which this blow had come upon her.

"I will give you every explanation you require, as in duty bound," replied the earl. "Captain Fitzhardinge, an officer in the Grenadier Guards, is an acquaintance of mine. He is a visitor at the house of Sir Rupert Harborough; and last evening Lady Cecilia Harborough told him what she called a *capital anecdote* of how she had cheated her husband out of a thousand pounds. Then, it appears, they laughed heartily at this *excellent joke*; and Lady Cecilia proceeded to inform him that she had discovered whence the handsome subsidy emanated. She concluded, in terms more galling than polite, by ridiculing the Earl of Warrington, who was foolish enough to supply Mrs. Arlington so munificently with money, that she was enabled to spare some for her ancient lovers. You have asked me for the plain truth, and I have told it, as Captain Fitzhardinge stated it to me."

"And thus a trivial indiscretion on my part has created all this mischief," sobbed the Enchantress.

"You have acted most unwisely, Diana: I will not go so far as to say that you must have had some particular motive in forwarding that money to one who——"

"Heaven knows the purity of my motive!" exclaimed Diana, wiping away her tears, and glancing proudly towards the nobleman.

"The world will scarcely admit that purity of motive in such a case was possible. Consider the inferences that must be drawn ——"

"And do you, my lord, believe that any unworthy reason of that kind led me to assist Sir Rupert Harborough?" demanded the Enchantress.

"If I may judge by your outward conduct towards me, I should give a decided negative in reply to your question. But we should no longer be happy in each other's society, while the least ground for unpleasant suspicions existed. We will, then, separate—but separate as good friends."

"Be it so, my lord," said Diana, the flush of injured pride dyeing her cheeks, while she conquered the emotions that rose in her bosom.

"The lease of this house, and every thing it contains, are yours," continued the earl, after a moment's pause: "in this pocket-book there is a cheque——"

"No, my lord," interrupted Diana; "your bounty has already done much for me—more than you seem to think I have deserved: I cannot accept another favour at your lordship's hands."

The Earl of Warrington was struck by this answer, which proved that his mistress was not selfish; and for a few moments he was upon the point of making overtures for a reconciliation.

But the dread of ridicule—the fear of being laughed at as a man who kept a mistress for the benefit of others—the horror of being made the laughing-stock of all the rakes and demireps in London, smothered the lenient feelings that had awoke in his breast.

"You refuse to accept this token of my friendship, Diana?" he said.

"I must beg most respectfully to decline it, my lord—with fervent gratitude, nevertheless, for your generosity."

Again the earl wavered.

He looked at that beautiful woman who had been so charming and fascinating a companion,—who had advised him as a faithful friend in various matters upon which he had consulted her,—and who, to all appearances, had conducted herself so well towards him, save in this one instance;—he gazed upon her for a few moments, and his stern resolves melted rapidly away.

"Diana," he said, "we——"

At that moment the sounds of voices in the street caused him to turn his head towards the window; and he perceived Captain Fitzhardinge and another gentleman riding by on horseback.

They were laughing heartily, and gazing towards the house.

The Earl of Warrington's sensitive mind instantly suggested to him the idea that the anecdote of the thousand pounds was being again retailed, and most probably accompanied by the intimation that *that was the house of the complaisant Earl of Warrington's mistress*!

The Enchantress, with that keen perception which characterises woman, had seen all that was passing in the earl's mind,—had observed him waver *twice*, and had felt convinced on the second occasion that he would court a reconciliation.

But when those voices and that hearty laughter from the street fell upon her ears, and when she saw the blood rush to the earl's countenance as he glanced in that direction, she knew that all was over.

The earl rose and said, "Give me your hand, Diana: we will part, as I said, good friends; and remember that I shall always be ready to serve you. Farewell!"

"Farewell, my lord," returned Mrs. Arlington, extending her hand, which the nobleman pressed with lingering tenderness.

Then, afraid of another access of weakness, the Earl of Warrington wrung her hand warmly, and precipitated himself from the room.

The Enchantress hurried to the window, concealed herself behind the curtain, and watched him as he mounted his horse to depart.

He did not glance once upwards to the window: perhaps he knew that she was there!

And yet her pride prompted her to conceal herself in that manner.

When he was out of sight she threw herself upon the sofa and wept.

"Oh! if I had but said one word when his hand pressed mine," she exclaimed, "I might still have retained him! He is gone!—my best, my only friend!"

But Diana was not a woman to give way to grief for any length of time. She possessed great mental fortitude, which, though subdued for a short space, soon rose predominant over this cruel affliction.

She then began to reflect upon her position.

She had a house beautifully furnished; and she possessed a considerable sum of *ready* money. She had therefore no disquietude for the present, and but little apprehension for the future; for she knew that her personal beauty and mental qualifications would at any moment bring another lover to her feet.

But she seriously thought of renouncing the species of life to which she had for some years been devoted: she longed to live independently and respectably.

In this frame of mind she passed the remainder of the day, pondering upon a variety of plans in accordance with her new desire.

She retired early to rest; but, not feeling an inclination to sleep, she amused herself with a book. The candle stood upon a table by the side of the bed; and Diana, luxuriously propped up by the downy pillows, culled the choicest flowers from Byron's miscellaneous poetic wreath.

An hour elapsed; and at length she grew sleepy. The book fell from her hand, and her eye-lids closed.

Then she remembered no more until she was suddenly aroused by a sensation of acute pain: she started up, and found the bed enveloped in flames.

She sprang upon the floor; but her night-dress was on fire:—she threw herself on the carpet, and rolled over and over in terrible agony, piercing screams issuing from her lips.

Those screams were echoed by loud cries of "Fire!" from the street; and then there was a rush of footsteps upon the stairs.

The door of the chamber was forced open; and Diana was caught up in the arms of a policeman, who had effected an entry into the house through the ground-floor windows.

She was carried in a state of insensibility down into the parlour, where a cloak was hastily thrown over her, and she was conveyed to a neighbouring hotel. Fortunately a medical man was passing at the moment; and he tendered his aid.

Meantime the fire spread with astonishing rapidity. The servants were extricated from the burning pile; but little property was saved.

A considerable time elapsed before the engines arrived; and when they did reach the spot, an adequate supply of water could not be procured, as the springs were ice-bound by the frost.

An immense crowd collected in the street; and all was bustle or curiosity.

The broad red flames shot upward with a roar like that of a furnace: the scene for a great distance round was as light as noon-day; and the heavens immediately above appeared to be on fire.

At one time the neighbouring houses were endangered; but suddenly the roof of the burning tenement fell in with a terrific crash; and then the conflagration seemed smothered.

But in a few minutes the flame shot upwards once more; and another hour elapsed ere it was completely subdued.

The newspapers announced next morning that Mrs. Arlington's property was not insured, and that the lady herself lay in a most precarious state at the hotel to which she had been conveyed.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

ARISTOCRATIC MORALS.

It was still dark, though past seven o'clock, on the morning which succeeded the fire, when a somewhat strange scene occurred at the house of Sir Rupert Harborough in Tavistock Square.

The baronet, in his slippers and dressing-gown, cautiously descended the stairs, guiding himself with his left hand placed upon the balustrade, and conducting a young female with his right.

They maintained a profound silence, and stole down so carefully that it was easy to perceive they were fearful of alarming the household.

But while he was still descending the stairs, leading the young female, who was fully dressed even to her bonnet and shawl, the following thoughts passed rapidly through the mind of the baronet.

"After all, it is absurd for me to take this trouble to get my new mistress secretly out of the house. Why should she not walk boldly in and out, night or day, I wonder? 'Pon my honour, I have a great mind that she should! But, no—whatever agreement exists between me and Lady Cecilia, a certain degree of decency must be observed before the servants, and for the sake of one's character with the neighbours. After all, prudence is perhaps the best system."

His thoughts were at this moment interrupted by steps upon the stairs, which evidently were not the echoes of those of himself and his paramour.

He paused and listened.

Those steps were descending with great apparent caution, and yet a little more heavily than was quite consistent with entire secrecy.

The baronet led his mistress hastily after him, crossed the hall, and then drew her along with him into an obscure corner near the front-door.

"Silence, Caroline—silence," he whispered: "it is most likely the housemaid."

The baronet and his mistress accordingly remained as quiet as mice in the corner where they were concealed.

Meantime the steps gradually drew nearer and nearer; and now and then a low and suppressed whisper on the stairs met the baronet's ears.

A vague suspicion that some adventure, which those who were interested in it were anxious to conduct with as much secrecy as possible, was in progress, now entered the mind of Sir Rupert Harborough. He accordingly became all attention.

And now the steps ceased to echo upon the stairs, but advanced towards the front door.

The hall was pitch-dark; but the baronet was satisfied that two persons—a male and female—were the actors in the proceeding which now interested him; and all doubt on this head was banished from his mind when they halted within a few feet of the corner where he and his mistress were concealed.

Then the whispering between the two persons whose conduct he was watching re-commenced.

"Farewell, dearest Cecilia," said the low and subdued voice of a man.

"Farewell, beloved Fitzhardinge," answered another voice, with whose intonation, in spite of the whisper in which it spoke, the baronet was full well acquainted.

Then there was the billing murmur of kisses, which continued for some moments.

"When shall we meet again, dearest?" demanded Fitzhardinge, still in the same low tone.

"To-night—at the usual hour I will admit you," returned Lady Cecilia. "Sir Rupert goes to France to-night with his splendid friend Chichester."

"Thank heaven for that blessing!" said the Grenadier Guardsman. "And now, adieu, sweet Cecilia, until this evening! But, tell me, before I depart—shall I always find you the same warm, loving, devoted, fond creature you now are?"

"Always—always to *you*," was the murmuring reply.

Then kisses were exchanged again.

"And am I indeed the first whom you have ever really loved? am I the only one who has ever tasted the pleasures of heaven in your arms, save your husband?" continued the officer, intoxicated with the reminiscences of the night of bliss which he had enjoyed with his paramour: "Oh! tell me so once again—only once!"

"You know that you alone could have tempted me to weakness, Fitzhardinge," answered the fair, but guilty patrician lady: "you alone could have induced me to forget my marriage vows!"

"Now I shall depart happy, my beloved Cecilia," said the officer; and again he imprinted burning kisses upon the lady's lips.

He then turned towards the front-door, and endeavoured to remove the chain: but it had become entangled with the key in some way or another; and he could not detach it.

"What is the matter?" inquired Cecilia, anxiously.

"This infernal chain is fast," answered the officer; "and all I can do will not move it."

"Let me try," said the lady; but her attempt was as vain as that of her lover.

"What is to be done?" asked Fitzhardinge.

"God knows!" returned Cecilia; "and it is growing late! In half-an-hour it will be day-light. Besides, the servants will be about presently."

"The devil!" said the officer, impatiently.

"Stay," whispered Lady Cecilia: "I will go to the kitchen and obtain a light. Do not move from this spot: I will not be a moment."

She then glided away; and the officer remained at his post as motionless and as silent as a statue, for fear of alarming the inmates of the house. His thoughts were not, however, of the most pleasureable kind; and during the two minutes that Lady Cecilia was absent, his mind rapidly pictured all the probable consequences of detection—exposure, ridicule, law-suit, damages, the Queen's Bench prison, the divorce of the lady, and the necessity under which he should labour of making her his own wife.

This gloomy perspective was suddenly enlivened by the gleam of a candle at the further end of the hall, and which was immediately followed by the appearance of Lady Cecilia, with the light.

Still the corner in which Sir Rupert and his paramour were concealed was veiled in obscurity; while the baronet obtained a full view of the tall Guardsman, dressed in plain clothes, standing within a couple of yards of his hiding-place, and also of Lady Cecilia, attired in a loose dressing-gown, as she advanced rapidly towards the place where her lover awaited her.

But when Cecilia reached the immediate vicinity of the front door, the gleam of the candle fell upon that nook which had hitherto remained buried in obscurity.

A scream escaped the lady's lips, and the candle fell from her hands.

Fortunately it was not extinguished: Sir Rupert rushed forward and caught it up in time to preserve the light.

Then, at a single glance, those four persons became aware of each other's position.

A loud laugh escaped the lips of the baronet.

"Sir," said the officer, advancing towards him, "for all our sakes avoid exposure; but if you require any satisfaction at my hands, you know who I am and where I reside."

"Satisfaction!" exclaimed Lady Cecilia, ironically; for she had recovered her presence of mind the moment she had perceived the equivocal position in which her husband himself was placed in respect to the female who stood quivering and quaking behind him: "what satisfaction can Sir Rupert Harborough require, when he admits such a creature as that into his house?"

And she pointed with a disdain and a disgust by no means affected, towards her husband's paramour.

"Creature indeed!" cried the young woman, now irritated and excited in her turn: "I think I am as honest as you, my lady, at all events."

"Wretch!" murmured Cecilia between her teeth, as if the sight of the *creature* filled her with abhorrence and loathing.

Ah! haughty lady! thou couldst thyself sin through lust: but thou couldst not brook the sight of one who sinned for bread!

The young woman, over-awed by the air of insuperable disgust which marked the proud patrician at that moment, recoiled from her presence and burst into tears.

"Come, enough of this folly," said Sir Rupert, impatiently: "we shall have the servants here in a moment. Perhaps you and this gentleman," he continued, "will step into that room for a moment, while I open the door for my little companion here."

Lady Cecilia tossed her head disdainfully, darted a look of sovereign contempt upon the abashed Caroline, and beckoned Captain Fitzhardinge to follow her into the adjacent parlour.

Sir Rupert retained the light. He opened the door, the chain of which had only become entangled round the key, and dismissed his paramour, who was delighted to escape from that house where the terrible looks of the lady had so disconcerted her.

The baronet then repaired to the parlour, and, having locked the door to prevent the intrusion of the servants, threw himself upon the sofa.

"Well, on my honour!" he exclaimed, bursting into a loud fit of laughter, "this is one of the most pleasant adventures that ever I heard or read of—'pon my honour!"

"Have you requested me to wait here in order to contribute to your hilarity, sir?" demanded Captain Fitzhardinge, indignantly.

"My dear fellow," returned the baronet, "let us laugh in concert! Oh! I can assure you that you need fear no law-suits nor pistols from me!"

"*Fear*, sir!" ejaculated the Guardsman: "I do not understand the word."

"Well—*expect*, then, if that will suit you better, my dear captain," continued Sir Rupert Harborough. "You see that my wife and myself act as we please, independently of each other."

"Sir Rupert!" exclaimed Cecilia, who was by no means anxious that her lover should be made acquainted with the terms of the agreement into which she and her husband had entered a short time previously, and the nature of which the reader will remember.

"My dear Cecilia," observed the baronet, "is it not much better that your *friend* should be made acquainted with the grounds on which you have admitted him as your sworn knight and only love?"

"Cease this bantering, sir," cried Captain Fitzhardinge. "Have I not already said that I am willing to give you any satisfaction which you may require?"

"And must I again tell you, my dear fellow," returned the baronet, with an affectation of familiarity, which only made his words the more bitter,—"must I again tell you that I require no satisfaction—that I have none to ask, and you none to give? But I cannot allow you to consider me a grovelling coward:—I must explain to you the grounds on which my forbearance is based."

"Proceed, sir," said Captain Fitzhardinge, coolly.

"You will then allow me to retire to my own room?" exclaimed Lady Cecilia, rising from the chair in which she had thrown herself.

"No, my dear," said the baronet, gently forcing her back into her seat: "you must remain to corroborate the truth of what I am about to state to this gentleman."

Lady Cecilia resumed the chair from which she had risen, and made no reply.

"In one word, Captain Fitzhardinge," continued the baronet, "there is a mutual understanding between my wife and myself, that we shall follow our own inclinations, whims, and caprices, without reference to the ties which bind us, or the vows which we pledged at church some years ago. All this may seem very strange: it is nevertheless true. Therefore, I have no more right to quarrel with Lady Cecilia on *your* account, than she has to abuse me on account of that young person whom you saw in the house just now. Now, then, my dear captain," continued the baronet, his tone again becoming bitterly ironical, "you may at your ease congratulate yourself upon being the only person that Lady Cecilia has ever loved, and the only one on whom she has ever bestowed her favours with the exception of her husband."

"Then I am to understand, sir," said the officer, perfectly astounded at the turn which the affair had taken, "that you do not consider yourself offended or aggrieved by the—the——"

"Not a whit!" ejaculated the baronet. "On the contrary—I have no doubt we shall be excellent friends in future."

The captain bowed, and rose to depart.

Sir Rupert unlocked and opened the door for him, and then ushered him, with affected politeness, out of the house.

When he returned to the parlour, he found Lady Cecilia red with indignation.

"What means this scene, Sir Rupert," she said, "after our mutual compact?"

"My dear," answered the baronet, calmly, "you treated my little friend in a most unpleasant manner, and I thought myself justified in retaliating to a certain extent. Besides, I was compelled to give an explanation to a man who would have otherwise looked upon me as a coward for failing to demand satisfaction of him."

"But did you not consider that you have rendered me contemptible in his eyes?" demanded Lady Cecilia, bursting with spite.

"Never fear," said the baronet. "Confiding in your sweet assurances that he alone has ever possessed your love, and that he alone, save your husband, has ever been blest with the proofs of that affection, he will return ere long to your arms. Besides, am I not going to France to-night with my splendid friend Chichester?"

"This is cruel, Sir Rupert. If an accident made you acquainted with the conversation which passed between us——"

"An accident indeed!" interrupted Sir Rupert Harborough, laughing affectedly. "'Pon my honour, the entire adventure was one of the drollest that ever occurred! But let us say no more upon the subject! Adhere to the compact on your side, and insult not *my* friends ——"

"But a prostitute in my house!" ejaculated Lady Cecilia, still loathing the idea.

"And my wife's paramour in my house!" cried Sir Rupert.

"Oh! there is something refined in an amour with one's equal," said Lady Cecilia: "but a wretch of that description——"

"Enough of this!" cried the baronet. "The servants are already about: let us each retire to our own rooms."

And this suggestion was immediately adopted.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

THE INTRIGUES OF A DEMIREP.

Lady Cecilia retired to her own chamber, locked the door, threw herself upon the bed, and burst into tears.

Oh! at that moment how the hated her husband;—how she hated herself!

She wept not in regret of her evil ways: she poured forth tears of spite when she thought of the opinion that her new lover must form of her, after the explanation given by Sir Rupert.

For Captain Fitzhardinge was rich and confiding; and the fair patrician had calculated upon rendering him subservient alike to her necessities and her licentiousness.

But, now—what must he think of one who bestowed upon him those favours that were alienated from her husband by a formal compact? What opinion could he entertain of a woman who sinned deliberately by virtue of an understanding with him whom she had sworn to respect and obey?

It could not be supposed that the morality of Captain Fitzhardinge was of a very elevated nature: but in the occurrence of that morning there was something calculated to shock the mind the least delicate—the least refined.

Yea—Lady Cecilia wept; for she thought of all this!

And then her rage against her husband knew no bounds.

"The wretch—the cowardly wretch!" she exclaimed aloud, as she almost gnashed her teeth with rage: "was he not born to be my ruin? From the moment that I saw him first until the present hour, has he not been an evil genius in my way? Yes—oh! yes: he is a demon sent to torture me in this world for my faults and failings! Seduced by him when I was very young, I might have been plunged into disgrace and infamy, had not my father purchased his consent to espouse me. Then the large sum that was paid to save my honour was squandered in the payment of his debts, or in ministering to his extravagances. Now, what is our position? what is *my* position? Shunned by my own father and mother, I am left dependent on him who knows not how to obtain enough for himself; or else I—I, the daughter of a peer, must sell myself to some Mr. Greenwood or Captain Fitzhardinge for the means to support my rank! Oh! it is atrocious: I begin to loathe myself! Would that I were the mistress of some wealthy man who would be constant and kind towards me, rather than the wife of this beggared baronet!"

Lady Cecilia rose from the bed, advanced towards the mirror, and smoothed her hair. Then she perceived that her eyes were red with weeping.

"Absurd!" she exclaimed, a contemptuous smile curling her lips: "why should I shed tears upon the past which no human power can recall? Rather let me avail myself of the present, and endeavour to provide for the future. Am I not young? and does not my glass tell me that I am beautiful? Even the immaculate—the taintless—the exemplary rector of Saint David's paid me a compliment on my good looks when I met him at Lady Marlborough's, a few days ago. Yes—and methought that if the most evangelical of evangelical clergymen of the Established Church could for a moment be moved by my smile,—if that admired preacher, who publicly avows that he refrains from marriage upon principle,—if that holy minister who is quoted as a pattern to his class, and an example for the whole world,—if *he* could whisper a word savouring of a compliment in my ear, and then seem ashamed of the moment of weakness into which his admiration had betrayed him;—if my charms could effect so great a miracle as this, what may they not do for me in helping me on to fortune?"

She paused and considered herself for some minutes in the glass opposite to her.

"Yes," she cried, again breaking silence, "I will no longer remain in the same house with my unprincipled and heartless husband: I will no longer breathe the tainted atmosphere which he inhabits. His very name is associated in my mind with forgery and felony! I will break the shackle which yet partially binds me to him; I will emancipate myself from the restraint and thraldom wherein I now exist. Fitzhardinge is rich and loving: perhaps he may still feel the influence of the silken chain which I threw around his heart. We will see! If he come gladly back to my feet, my aim is won: if not—well,"—and she smiled, complacently,—"there are others as rich, as handsome, and as easily enchained as he!"

Lady Cecilia proceeded to her desk and wrote the following note:—

"Come to me, dearest Fitzhardinge, at three precisely this afternoon: I have much to say respecting the specious falsehoods which Sir Rupert uttered this morning in order to conceal the natural cowardice of his disposition. He was afraid to involve himself in a quarrel with you; and he excused his unmanly forbearance by means of assertions that reflected upon me. Come, then, to me at three: I shall be alone, and at home only to you."

This note was immediately conveyed to Captain Fitzhardinge by Cecilia's lady's-maid, who was the confidant of her mistress's intrigues.

Having despatched her missive, the baronet's wife proceeded to the duties of the toilet.

This employment, breakfast, the newspaper, and a novel, wiled away the time until about one o'clock, when Lady Cecilia, having ascertained that her husband had gone out half an hour previously, descended to the drawing-room.

She was attired in a simple and unpretending manner; but then she knew that this style became her best.

She was determined to captivate that day; and certainly she had seldom appeared to greater advantage.

Her rich auburn hair,—of a hue as warm as the disposition which it characterised,—fell in long hyperion ringlets upon her sloping shoulders: her blue eyes were expressive of a feeling of languid voluptuousness; and her pure complexion was set off by the dark dress

that she wore.

The time-piece upon the mantel had scarcely struck two, when a loud double-knock at the front-door resounded through the house.

Lady Cecilia started from her seat, for she had forgotten to instruct the servants "that she was only at home to Captain Fitzhardinge." But she was too late to remedy her neglect; the summons was already answered ere she had gained the landing on which the drawing-room opened.

She accordingly returned to the sofa, and composed herself to receive the visitor, whoever it might be.

In a few moments the servant announced the Earl of Warrington.

With this nobleman Lady Cecilia was only very slightly acquainted, she having met him on two or three occasions, some years previously, at her father's house.

"I must apologise, Lady Harborough, for this intrusion," said the earl; "but I trust to your kindness to pardon me in that respect, and to afford me a little information concerning a matter which has suddenly assumed an air of importance in my eyes."

"No apology is necessary for the honour which your lordship confers upon me by visiting my humble abode," answered Lady Cecilia; "and with regard to the subject to which your lordship alludes, I shall be happy to furnish any information in my power."

"Your ladyship's courtesy encourages me to proceed," continued the earl. "Forgive me if I must direct your attention to one of those pieces of gossip—I will not say scandal—which so often become current in the sphere in which we move. I allude to an anecdote relative to a certain mysterious remittance of a thousand pounds which was forwarded to Sir Rupert Harborough, and which your ladyship undertook to disburse for his advantage."

"Your lordship places the matter in as delicate a light as possible," said Lady Cecilia, affecting to laugh heartily in order to conceal the shame which she really experienced at this reference to her unworthy action; "but it was only a pleasant trick which I played Sir Rupert. The truth is, Sir Rupert is not the most generous of men towards his wife; and when I found that some honourable person was repaying him a debt contracted a long time previously, I thought that, as the amount fell so providentially into my hands, I could not do better than appropriate it to the liquidation of the arrears of pin-money due to me."

"Very just, madam," said the earl, forcing himself to smile at the incident which Lady Cecilia represented in the light of a venial little advantage taken by a wife against her husband. "I believe that the amount was forwarded anonymously?"

"To tell you the candid truth, my lord," answered Lady Cecilia, "the whole affair was so strange and romantic, that I kept, as a great curiosity, the letter which accompanied the bank-note. If you possess any interest in the matter——"

"Your ladyship *knows* that I am not seeking this information without *some* object," said the earl, emphatically. "Would it be indiscreet," he added, in a less serious tone, "to request a glimpse at that great curiosity?"

"Oh! by no means," returned Lady Cecilia, who affected to treat the whole matter as an excellent joke; then, rising from her seat, she hastened to her work-box, and in a few moments produced the letter. "It was not so scented with musk when I received it," she added, laughing; "but it was redolent of a far more grateful flavour—that of this world's mammon."

"I believe mammon is the deity whom we all more or less adore," observed the Earl of Warrington, gallantly taking up the tone of chit-chat, rather than formality, which Lady Cecilia endeavoured to infuse into the conversation: then, as he received the letter from her hand, he said, "May I be permitted to read it?"

"Oh! certainly, my lord: and, if you have any curiosity in the matter, you are welcome to retain it," answered Lady Cecilia.

"With your leave I will do so," said the earl.

"And now that I have replied to all your lordship's queries," continued Lady Cecilia, "may I ask one in my turn?"

The earl bowed, and smiled.

"Who was the indiscreet eave's-dropper or tale-bearer that gave your lordship the hint concerning this business?" asked the baronet's wife.

"Methinks that your ladyship has been at no pains to conceal the affair," said the earl: "and what hundreds have talked about cannot well be charged against an individual tale-bearer."

"Nay, my lord, I mentioned it but to two persons," exclaimed Cecilia; "the first was to Sir Rupert Harborough—in a moment of pique; and the other was to a—a—particular friend——"

"I am not indiscreet enough to ask for names," interrupted the earl, rising; and he hastened to take his leave, ere Lady Cecilia could reiterate her question relative to the person who had communicated to him the fact of the intercepted thousand pounds.

It was now nearly three o'clock; and Lady Cecilia again composed herself to receive Captain Fitzhardinge.

Punctual to the hour, that officer was introduced into the drawing-room.

But his manner, instead of being all love and tenderness, was simply polite and friendly.

"Fitzhardinge," said the lady, "I perceive that you have allowed yourself to be prejudiced against me."

"Not prejudiced, Lady Cecilia," answered the guardsman; "but I confess that I am no longer under the influence of a blind passion. The conduct of your husband this morning was that of a man who was acting consistently with the circumstances which he explained, and not that of an individual who was playing a part in order to disguise the innate cowardice of his disposition. No, Cecilia—your husband is not a coward—whatever else he may be! And now one word relative to myself. So long as I believed that you made to me, as a proof of love, the generous sacrifice of conjugal fidelity,—so long as I believed that an affection for me alone induced you to violate your marriage-vow,—then the dream was sweet, though not the less criminal! But when I discovered that you made no sacrifice to me,—that you came not to my arms warm with a love that trembled at detection, but secure in the existence of a heartless compact with your husband,—then my eyes were opened, and I saw that Lady Cecilia Harborough had risked nothing of all that she

had pretended to risk—sacrificed nothing of all that she had affected to sacrifice—for the sake of Captain Fitzhardinge! Thus the delusion was destroyed; and although our amour might be based upon more impunity than I had ever conceived, it would be the less sweet! The charm—the spell is broken!"

"And have you come here to tell me all this—to insult me with your moralisings?" demanded Lady Cecilia, the fire of indignation and wounded pride displacing the languid voluptuousness which had at first reigned in the expression of her eyes.

"No! not to insult you, Cecilia," answered the officer; "but to explain in an open and candid manner the motive which leads me to say: '*Let us forget the past, as it regards each other!*'"

"Be it so," said Lady Cecilia, deeply humiliated, and now hating the handsome officer much more than she had ever liked him. "In that case, sir, we can have nothing more to say to each other."

Captain Fitzhardinge bowed, and withdrew.

Lady Cecilia fell back upon the sofa, murmuring, "Beaten—beaten! defeated in this hope!"

And tears came into her eyes.

But in a few moments she exclaimed, "How foolish is this grief! how useless this indignation! Sorrow and hatred are the consuming enemies of female beauty! Did I not say ere now that there were others in the world as rich, as handsome, and as confiding as Captain Fitzhardinge?"

As she uttered these words aloud, the haughty beauty wiped her eyes and composed her countenance.

She rose and advanced towards the mirror to assure herself that her appearance indicated naught of those tears which she had shed; and as she contemplated her features with a very pardonable pride, the reminiscence of the compliment which the clergyman of Saint David's had paid her flashed to her mind.

She smiled triumphantly as she pondered upon it; and that vague, shadowy, unsubstantial phrase of flattery, that now formed the topic of her thoughts, gradually assumed a more palpable shape in her imagination,—became invested with a significant meaning,—then grew into a revelation of passion,—and was at length embodied into a perfect romance of love with all its enjoyments and blisses.

The ardent soul of that frail woman converted the immaculate clergyman into an admirer betrayed in an unguarded moment into a confession of love,—then changed him into a suitor kneeling at her feet,—and by rapid degrees carried him on, through all the mystic phases of passion, until he became a happy lover reclining on her bosom.

With a presumption which only characterises minds of her warm temperament and loose ideas of morality, Cecilia triumphed in the half-hour's impassioned reverie which succeeded the departure of Captain Fitzhardinge, over the ascetic virtue and self-denying integrity which public opinion ascribed to the rector of Saint David's.

Then, when some trifling incident aroused her from this wild and romantic dream, she did not smile at its folly—she regarded it as a species of inspiration prompting her in which direction to play the artillery of her charms.

"Yes," she exclaimed, musing aloud; "he once said, '*I never saw you look so well as you appear this evening*:'—these words shall be a motto to a new chapter in my life!"

And she smiled triumphantly as if her daring aim were already accomplished!

"Thirty-six years of age," she abruptly resumed her musings,—"wealthy—handsome—unmarried, *from principle*,"—and here an erratic smile of mingled satisfaction and irony played on her rosy lips,—"and yet fond of society, the Reverend Reginald Tracy must no longer be permitted to remain proof against woman's beauty—aye, and woman's wiles. Oh! no—he shall repeat to me, but far more tenderly, the words he uttered the other evening: his passing compliment shall become a permanent expression of his sentiments! But his character—his disposition? must I not study *them*? If that be necessary, the task is ready to hand!"

She rose from the sofa, and having selected an ecclesiastical magazine from some books that stood upon a cheffonier, returned to her seat to peruse at leisure a sketch which the work contained of the character, ministry, and popularity of the rector of Saint David's.

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE RECONCILIATION.

In the meantime the Earl of Warrington drove to the hotel in Dover Street, where Diana Arlington lay; and, upon inquiry, he ascertained that a nurse and the medical attendant were with her.

He desired to be conducted to a private room, and then despatched the waiter to request the professional gentleman to step thither for a few moments.

"What name shall I say, sir?" asked the servant, who was unacquainted with the earl's person.

"It is needless to mention any name," replied the nobleman; "I shall not detain the gentleman five minutes."

The servant disappeared, and in a few moments returned, followed by the medical attendant.

The waiter introduced him into the apartment, and then withdrew.

"I believe, sir," said the earl, "that you are attending upon the lady who experienced so severe an accident last night?"

"I was by chance passing through Dover Street when the flames burst forth," was the reply: "and I gave an immediate alarm to the police. I remained upon the spot to ascertain if my professional services could be rendered available; and it was well that I did so."

"The lady then is much injured?" said the earl, in a tone expressive of emotion.

"Seriously injured," answered the surgeon; "and as I live at some distance from this neighbourhood, I considered it proper to remain with the patient all night. Indeed, I have not left her for a moment since the accident occurred."

"Your attention shall be nobly recompensed, sir," said the earl. "Here is my card, and I am your debtor."

The surgeon bowed low as his eye glanced upon the name of the individual in whose presence he stood.

"And now," continued the nobleman, "answer me one question—candidly and sincerely. Will your patient be scarred by the effects of the fire?"

"My lord, that is more than I can answer for," returned the surgeon. "Fortunately, medical assistance was rendered the moment after the accident occurred; and this circumstance should inspire great hope!"

"Then I *will* hope," said the earl. "How long an interval do you imagine must elapse ere she may be pronounced convalescent? Or rather, I should have asked, is she in any positive danger?"

"There is always danger—great danger in these cases, my lord. But, should the fever subside in a few days, I should recommend the removal of the patient to some quiet neighbourhood—afar from the bustle of the West End."

"You said that you yourself resided some distance from hence?" observed the earl, after a few moments' reflection.

"My abode is in Lower Holloway, my lord," answered the surgeon; "and my name is Wentworth."

"Holloway is quiet and retired," said the earl; "but is not the air too bleak there at this season?"

"It is pure and wholesome, my lord; and the spot is tranquil, and devoid of the bustle of crowds and the din of carriages."

"Wherever Mrs. Arlington may remain until her recovery," said the Earl, "she must receive all the attentions which can be lavished upon her; and in nothing must she be thwarted where gold can procure her the gratification of her wishes."

"I would offer to place my house at the lady's disposal, my lord—and the attention of Mrs. Wentworth would be unremitting—but ——"

"Name the obstacle," said the earl. "Perhaps you consider that the position of the lady with regard to myself,—a position the nature of which you may have divined,—is somewhat too equivocal to permit your wife——"

"No, my lord; medical men have no scruples of that kind. I hesitated because I feared that my abode would be too humble——"

"Then let that obstacle vanish this moment," interrupted the earl. "It is my wish that Mrs. Arlington should be removed to your house so soon as the step can be taken with safety to herself: you will then devote yourself to her cure; and on you I place my reliance. I have been unjust to her, Mr Wentworth," continued the nobleman, pressing the surgeon's hand, and speaking in a low but hurried tone,—"I have been unjust to her—but I will make her ample reparation—that is, provided you can preserve her beauty,—for we are all mortal—and I confess to a weakness,—but no matter! Say—you will do your best!"

"My lord, I am poor, and struggling with the world," answered the surgeon, "and, I may say without vanity—because I possess certificates from eminent medical men under whom I have studied—that I am not ignorant of my profession. My lord, I have every inducement to devote all the knowledge I possess to the aim which you desire. My attentions shall be unwearied and unremitting; and if I succeed——"

"If you succeed in restoring her to me in that perfection of beauty which invested her when I took leave of her yesterday,—without a mark, without a scar,—your fortune shall be my care, and you will have no need to entertain anxiety relative to the future, with the Earl of Warrington as your patron."

"At present, my lord, all I can say is—*I will do my best*," rejoined Mr. Wentworth.

"And at present I can ask no more," exclaimed the earl: then, after a moment's pause, he said, "May I be allowed to see your patient for a few moments?"

The surgeon hesitated.

"I know why you dislike this proposal," observed the nobleman: "you are afraid that, when I contemplate the altered countenance of that woman who was lately so beautiful, I shall despair of her complete cure."

"Such is, indeed, my impression," answered Mr. Wentworth. "Those symptoms and appearances which are most alarming to persons unacquainted with the medical art, are frequently the least causes of alarm to the professional man."

"Then let me *speak* to her, and not *see* her," said the earl.

"I understand your lordship: in a few minutes I will return."

And the surgeon withdrew.

During his absence the earl paced the room in an agitated and excited manner, which was quite inconsistent with the usual equanimity and even gravity of his temperament.

Ten minutes had elapsed when the surgeon came back.

"Will your lordship follow me?"

Mr. Wentworth led the way to the chamber in which Diana Arlington lay.

The shutters were closed, and the curtains were drawn around the bed: the room was nearly dark, a few straggling gleams of light alone forcing their way through the chinks in the shutters.

When the earl entered the apartment, the surgeon remained in the passage outside: the nurse had already been directed to retire for a short time.

The nobleman approached the bed, and seating himself in a chair by the side, said, "Diana, can you forgive me for my cruelty of yesterday?"

"I never entertained a feeling of resentment, my lord, and therefore have nothing to forgive," was the answer, delivered in a low and plaintive tone.

"I did you a serious wrong, Diana," continued the earl; "but I am not too proud to confess my error. I trembled at the idea of ridicule: hence the hastiness of my conduct. And then, there was a suspicion in my mind—a suspicion which made me uneasy, very uneasy—but which is now dispelled. I have read your letter which accompanied the bank-note addressed to Sir Rupert Harborough; and I am satisfied in respect to the integrity—nay, the generosity of your motives."

"It was kind of you, my lord, to take the steps necessary to reinstate me in your good opinion," murmured Diana from her couch, in a tone evidently subdued by deep emotion.

"There was no kindness in the performance of an act of justice," returned the earl. "When I read in this morning's newspaper the sad account of that terrible accident of last night, my heart smote me for my conduct towards you. Then I reflected upon all the happiness which I had enjoyed in your society, and I was moved—deeply, profoundly moved! I despatched a servant to this hotel to inquire if you were really so seriously injured as the journal represented; and he brought me back word that your life was no longer in positive danger, but——"

"But that I shall be a hideous object for the remainder of my days," added Diana, with somewhat of bitterness in her manner.

"God forbid!" cried the earl, energetically: "Mr. Wentworth seems to promise——"

"Alas! the medical art prompts its professors to console the mind in order to heal the body; but I am not foolish enough to yield to a hope so baseless!"

These words were uttered in a tone of the most profound melancholy.

"Diana, you *must* hope," exclaimed the Earl of Warrington: "you will recover—yes, you will recover; and even if a slight trace of this accident——"

"A slight trace!" almost screamed Diana—and the earl could hear her roll herself convulsively over on her pillow: "a slight trace, my lord! I shall be disfigured for life: nothing can save me! My countenance will be seared as with a red-hot-iron—my neck will be covered with deep scars—my arms, my entire body will be furrowed with crimson and purple marks! O God! it is hard to suffer thus!"

And then she burst into an agonising flood of tears.

The earl allowed her to weep without interruption: he knew that her mind would be relieved by that outpouring of feeling.

And he was right: in a few minutes she said, "Pardon me—I am weak, I am foolish. And now proceed to tell me how you became possessed of that note which I sent with the money to Sir Rupert Harborough."

The Earl of Warrington then related the particulars of his interview with Lady Cecilia.

"And now that I have done an act of justice, and convinced myself of the purity of the motives which induced you to act in the manner that created my displeasure," continued the earl, "let us talk of yourself. I have made arrangements with Mr. Wentworth which, I hope, will meet your approval and conduce to your benefit. When you can be removed with safety, you shall be conveyed from the bustle of an hotel in a crowded neighbourhood to the tranquil retirement of Mr. Wentworth's abode at Holloway. I am induced to place reliance upon the skill and talent of that man—I scarcely know why."

"Oh! yes—he is no doubt very clever," said the patient; "for his treatment of me speedily gave me relief from the acuteness of the agony which I at first experienced."

"Every thing shall be done to conduce to your comfort, Diana," resumed the nobleman. "My upholsterer shall send down to Mr. Wentworth's house the furniture that may be required for the rooms which you are to occupy; and my steward shall supply him with ample funds."

"How kind—how good you are," murmured Diana.

"But I shall not attempt to see you," continued the earl, "until your recovery is announced to me—your complete recovery; and then——"

He checked himself; and there was a long silence.

Suddenly the earl arose.

"Farewell, Diana—my presence is not calculated to calm you," he exclaimed. "I shall now leave you—but, remember, I watch over you from a distance. Farewell!"

"Farewell—till we meet again," said Diana. "But—oh! how shall I dread that day! And—if my worst fears should be confirmed—if I really become the horrible, scarred, hideous object which I dread,—then—then we shall never meet more,—for I will fly from the world and bury myself in some deep solitude whither none who ever knew me in my bright days shall trace me!"

"You will not be forced to adopt such an alternative, Diana—believe me you will not!" exclaimed the earl. "At all events—let us hope,—let us *both* hope!"

The earl hastily withdrew.

In the passage he encountered the surgeon, to whom he reiterated his instructions relative to the attention to be shown towards the patient.

"Mr. Wentworth," he said, in an emphatic tone, "remember all that I have told you. Gold shall be placed at your disposal with no niggard hand; spare no expense! That lady's complete restoration to her pristine beauty is your care: think of naught save that one grand aim!"

"My lord," answered the surgeon, "I can only repeat the words I used just now—*I will do my best*!"

The earl pressed his hand warmly, and hurried away—more affected by the incidents of that day than he had been for many, many years.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

THE RECTOR OF SAINT DAVID'S.

It is not necessary to explain to our readers the precise locality of the splendid Chapel of Ease known by the name of Saint David's. Suffice it to say, that it is situate not a hundred miles from Russell or Tavistock Square; and that the clergyman attached to it at the period of which we are writing was the Rev. Reginald Tracy.

It was Sunday morning.

A crowd of well-dressed persons, of both sexes, poured into the chapel of Saint David's. The street was lined with carriages; and when each in its turn drew up at the door of the sacred edifice, the *élite* of the aristocracy might have been observed to alight and hasten to form part of the immense congregation assembled to hear the most popular preacher of the day.

The interior of the chapel was vast, and of a convenient oblong form. It was lofty, and beautifully fitted up. On three sides were large and roomy galleries, amphitheatrically arranged with pews. The magnificent organ stood in the gallery over the entrance; and at the further end was the communion-table. The pulpit, with its annexed reading-desk, stood a little in front of the altar, and facing the organ. The pews both of the galleries and the body of the church were provided with soft cushions; for this was a proprietary chapel, and there was but a slender accommodation for the poor. Indeed, this class occupied plain benches in the aisles, and were compelled to enter by a small side-door so that they might not mingle with the crowd of elegantly dressed ladies and fashionable gentlemen that poured into the chapel through the grand entrance in front.

A policeman maintained order at the side-door, which admitted the humbler classes; but two beadles, wearing huge cocked hats and ample blue cloaks bedizened with broad gold-lace, and holding gilt wands in their hands, cleared the way for the wealthy, the great, and the proud, who enjoyed the privilege of entrance by means of the front gates.

"This way, my lord. Pray step this way, my lady," said the polite beadles, in their blandest tones. "The pew-opener is in attendance, my lord. My lady, here is the hymn-book, which your ladyship commanded me to procure for your ladyship. My lord, take care of the step. This door, ladies, if you please. Gentlemen, this way, if you would be so condescending. Yes, sir—certainly, sir—the pew-opener will find *you* a seat, sir—immediately, sir. Ladies, this way is less crowded. You will find the left aisle comparatively empty. My lord, straight forward, if your lordship will be so good. Ladies, the pew-opener is in attendance. This way, ladies and gentlemen!"

And at the side-door the policeman might be heard vociferating in somewhat like the following manner:—

"Now, then, you young woman, where the deuce are you pushing to? Want to get a good place, eh? What! with sich a rag of a shawl as that there?—I'm afeard I can't admit you. Now, boy, stand back, or I'll show you the reason why. I say, old woman, you ain't wanted here; we doesn't take in vimen with red cloaks. You'd better go to the dissenting chapel round the corner, you had: that's good enow for you. Holloa! what's this mean? a sweep in his Sunday toggery. Come, come; that's rayther too strong, chummy. You toddle off, now. Here, young woman, you may come in; you may—'cos you're very pretty: that way, my dear. Holloa! here comes a feller without a nose. No—no—that won't do at no price; my orders is partickler; no von comes here vithout a nose. Vy, you'd frighten all the great ladies out o' their vits. They already complains of the riff-raff that comes to this here chapel; so we must try and keep it *se*-lect—just like Gibbs's westry. Ha! ha! now then, who's that blaigaird a-talking so loud there? It's on'y me as can talk here at this door, 'cos I'm official—I am. This vay, young woman: push the door, my dear. Well, if you ain't married, I'm sure you ought to be. Now, then, who's that a guffawing like a rhinoceros? I'll clap a stopper on your mug, I will. Come, come; you go back, old chap: no workus-livery here; this is the wrong shop for the workus people; this is—I can tell yer. Vell, you're a genteel couple, I don't think—coming to a pro-pri-*ai*-tory chapel vithout no gloves, and fists as black as tinkers. Stand back there, boys, and let that young gal vith the yaller ribands come up: she's decent, she is. Yes, my dear,—you may go in, my dear. Now, then, stand back—no more comes in this mornin': the orgin's begun."

With these words the policeman thrust the poor people violently down the steps, entered the chapel, and closed the door in their faces.

The interior was crowded throughout; and it was very evident that curiosity and fashion, more than devotion, had congregated in that chapel the rank, wealth, and beauty that filled the pews below and above.

The solemn swell of the organ pealed through the sacred edifice; and then arose the morning hymn, sung by a select corps of choristers and by twelve youths belonging to the school of a celebrated professor of Music for the Millions.

A venerable clergyman, with hair as white as his own surplice, occupied the reading-desk; and in a pew close by the pulpit, was the cynosure that attracted all eyes—the Rev. Reginald Tracy.

The tall commanding form of this clergyman would have rendered him conspicuous amongst the congregation, had no other circumstance tended to endow him with popularity. His countenance was eminently handsome: his high and open forehead was set off, but not shaded, by dark brown hair which curled naturally; his hazel eyes beamed with the fire of a brilliant intellect; his Roman nose, small month, and well-turned chin formed a profile at once pleasing and commanding; and his large well-curled whiskers, meeting beneath his chin, confirmed the manly beauty of that proud and imposing countenance.

There was a profound, but totally unassuming, sense of the solemnity of the scene and of the sanctity of his profession in his manner and deportment: his voice did not join in the hymn, but his mind evidently followed the words, as he from time to time glanced at the book which he held in his hand.

Doubtless he was well aware—but nothing in his demeanour seemed to indicate this consciousness—that he was the centre of all attraction: though not servilely meek nor hypocritically austere, he was still surrounded by a halo of religious fervour which commanded the most profound respect.

And towards him were turned hundreds of bright eyes; and the glances of fair maids dwelt upon his countenance rather than on their books.

The hymn ceased, and the service proceeded.

At length the anthem succeeding the communion-service, filled the chapel with its solemn echoes, accompanied by the pealing of the magnificent organ. Then a simultaneous sensation pervaded the entire congregation, and all eyes were directed towards the Rev. Reginald Tracy, who was now ascending the steps to the pulpit.

The anthem was ended; the congregation resumed their seats; and the preacher commenced.

It is not, however, our intention to treat our readers to a sermon: suffice it to say, that the eloquence and matter of the discourse which the Rev. Reginald Tracy delivered upon this occasion, were well calculated to sustain his high reputation.

But of the attentive audience, no individual seemed to be more deeply impressed with his sermon than Lady Cecilia Harborough, who sate in a pew near the pulpit—next indeed to the one which the clergyman himself had occupied during the former part of the service.

She was alone; for on the previous day she had hired that pew for her own especial use.

Whenever the eyes of the preacher were turned in the direction where she sate, she appeared to be wiping away tears from her cheeks; for the sermon was on a solemn and pathetic subject.

More than once she fancied that *he* observed her; and her heart beat triumphantly in her bosom.

When the sermon was concluded she remained in her pew, and allowed the rest of the congregation to leave the chapel ere she moved from her seat. At length the sacred edifice was deserted, save by herself and two or three officials connected with the establishment.

In a few minutes the pew-opener—an elderly matron-like person—accosted her, and said, "If you please, ma'am, the doors will be closed almost directly."

"Could you—could you oblige me with a glass of water?" faltered Lady Cecilia: "I feel as if I were about to faint."

"Oh! certainly, ma'am," answered the pew-opener; and she hurried to the vestry.

Presently she returned, accompanied by the Rev. Reginald Tracy himself.

"Is the lady very unwell?" inquired the clergyman of the pew-opener, as they advanced together towards Lady Cecilia's seat.

"She seems very languid—quite overcome, sir," was the answer. "But this is the pew."

The clergyman stepped forward, and instantly recognised the fair indisposed.

"Lady Harborough!" he exclaimed. "Is your ladyship unwell?"

And taking the tumbler of water from the pew-opener, he handed it to the baronet's wife.

"It is nothing—the heat, I suppose," murmured Lady Cecilia; and she drank a portion of the water. "Thank you, Mr. Tracy, for your attention: I feel better—much better now."

"Will your ladyship step into the vestry and sit down for a few minutes?" inquired the clergyman, really concerned at the presumed indisposition of the lady.

"If it would not be indiscreet, I should esteem it a favour," answered Cecilia, still speaking in a tremulous and faltering tone.

Reginald Tracy instantly proffered his arm to the lady, and conducted her to the vestry, where the venerable clergyman who had read the service was calmly discussing a glass of sherry.

"I am ashamed—perfectly ashamed to give you all this trouble, Mr. Tracy," said Cecilia, as she accepted the chair which was offered her; "but the heat of the chapel—and, to tell the truth, the emotions which your beautiful discourse aroused within me—quite overcame me."

"The chapel was, indeed, very much crowded," answered Reginald Tracy, touched by the homage rendered to his talent in the second cause which Lady Cecilia alleged for her indisposition.

"Nevertheless, this little incident will not in future prevent me from becoming one of the most regular of your congregation," observed Cecilia, with a smile.

Mr. Tracy bowed, and smiled also.

Both had brilliant teeth, and it was impossible for either to fail to notice this beautiful feature in each other.

"I feel quite recovered now," said Cecilia, after a short pause, "and will return home. I offer you my best thanks for this kind attention on your part."

"Do not mention it, Lady Harborough. But I cannot permit you to return alone, after this indisposition: allow me to conduct you as far as your own door?"

"I could not think of taking you out of your way—"

"It happens that I have a call to make in Tavistock Square, and am actually going that way," interrupted Reginald Tracy.

Lady Cecilia, like a well-bred person as she was, offered no farther objection, but accepted the clergyman's escort to her own abode.

During the short walk she rendered herself as agreeable as possible; though purposely conversing upon topics suitable to the sabbath, and to the profession of her companion. She also introduced one or two delicate, and apparently unsophisticated, allusions to

the eloquence which had produced so deep an impression upon a crowded congregation, and the profound attention with which the sermon was received. Then she artfully, but with admirably assumed sincerity, questioned Mr. Tracy upon two or three passages in that discourse, and suffered him to perceive that not one word of it had been lost upon her.

Mr. Reginald Tracy was mortal like any other human being, and was not exempt from some of the weaknesses of that mortality. It was impossible for him not to experience a partial sentiment of pride and satisfaction at the impression which his eloquence had evidently made upon a young and beautiful woman; and that feeling became in the least degree more tender by the fact that this young and beautiful woman was leaning upon his arm.

Then how could he feel otherwise than flattered when, with her witching eyes upturned towards his countenance, she questioned him—so meekly and so sincerely, as he thought—upon the very passages of his sermon which he himself considered to be the best, and which he had studied to render the most effective? He *was* flattered—he smiled, and endeavoured to render himself agreeable to so charming a woman.

At length they reached the door of Lady Harborough's abode. The syren invited him to walk in, as a matter of course; but Mr. Tracy was compelled to forego that pleasure. He was really engaged elsewhere; or there is no saying but that he might have stepped in —only for a few minutes.

Lady Cecilia extended her hand to him at parting, and held his for just two or three moments, while she renewed her thanks for his attention. The action was perfectly natural; and yet the gentle contact of that delicate hand produced upon Reginald Tracy a sensation which he had never before experienced. It seemed to impart a glow of warmth and pleasure to his entire frame.

At length they separated; and as the Rector of Saint David's pursued his walk, he found his mind from time to time wandering away from more serious reflections, and reverting to the half hour which he had passed so agreeably in the society of Lady Harborough.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

BLANDISHMENTS.

Lady Cecilia took very good care not to appear at chapel that evening. She was well aware that common politeness—if no other motive—would induce the Rev. Reginald Tracy to call on the following day to inquire after her health.

Accordingly, on the Monday, she took more than usual pains with her toilet.

Sir Rupert Harborough had departed with his "splendid friend" Chichester for the Continent; and she was completely her own mistress. She had no one to interfere with her plans or pursuits, for her lady's maid was entirely devoted to her interests. However others suffered or waited in respect to pecuniary matters, Sarah—the aforesaid lady's maid, or *cameriste*—was always well and regularly paid.

It was by no means an uninteresting scene to behold the attention and zeal with which Sarah seconded her mistress's determination to make the most of her charms upon the present occasion.

Lady Cecilia was seated near her toilet-table, with a little gilt-edged oval-shaped mirror in her hands, which reposed in her lap; and Sarah was engaged in arranging the really beautiful hair of her mistress.

"What o'clock is it, Sarah?" inquired Lady Cecilia, casting a complacent glance at herself in the large looking-glass upon her toilet-table.

"It must be nearly one, my lady," was the reply.

"Then you have no time to lose, Sarah. The ringlets are quite divine; pray take equal pains with the back-hair. Do you think that I look better in ringlets or in bands?"

"In ringlets, my lady."

"And if I had my hair in bands, and asked you the same question, you would reply, '*In bands*.'"

"Your ladyship cannot think that I am so insincere," said the *cameriste*.

"Do you fancy me in this dress, Sarah?" asked the lady, heedless of her domestic's observation.

"I prefer the blue watered-silk," was the answer.

"Then why did you not recommend it in the first instance?"

"Your ladyship never required my advice."

"True. Have you finished?"

"No hairdresser from Bond Street, or the Burlington Arcade, could have performed his task better, my lady," replied Sarah.

"Yes—it is very well—very well, indeed," said Cecilia, surveying herself in the mirror. "I will now descend to the drawing-room."

When she reached that apartment, the artful woman spread on the table a few books on serious subjects; she then amused herself with a volume of a new novel.

The clock had just struck two, when a double-knock was heard at the front-door.

Lady Cecilia thrust the novel under the cushion of the sofa, and took up "Sturm's Reflections."

The Rev. Mr. Tracy was announced.

Lady Cecilia rose and received him with a charming languor of manner.

"I have called to satisfy myself that your ladyship has recovered from the indisposition of yesterday," said the rector.

"Not altogether," answered Cecilia. "Indeed, after I returned home, yesterday, I experienced a relapse."

"I observed that you were not at chapel in the evening, and I feared that such might be the case."

It was with difficulty that Lady Cecilia could suppress a smile of joy and triumph as this ingenuous and unsophisticated announcement met her ears. He had thought of her! he had noticed her absence!

"I can assure you that nothing save indisposition could have induced me to remain away from a place where one gathers so much matter for useful and serious meditation," answered the lady.

"And yet the world generally forgets the doctrines which are enunciated from the pulpit, an hour after their delivery," observed Reginald.

"Yes—when they are doled forth by ministers who have neither talent nor eloquence to make a profound impression," said Cecilia, artfully conveying a compliment without appearing to mean one at the moment. "I believe that our churches would be much better frequented, were the clergy less dogmatic, less obscure; and did they address themselves more to the hearts of their hearers than they do."

"I believe it is necessary to appeal to the heart, and not be satisfied with merely reaching the ears," said the rector, modestly.

"And wherever the pastor possesses the rare talent of moving the feeling,—of exciting the mind to salutary reflection, as well as merely expounding points of doctrine,—thither will the multitude flock, high and low, rich and poor. Oh!" exclaimed Cecilia, as if carried away by the enthusiasm of the subject, "how grand—how noble a situation does that man occupy, who, by the magic of his voice and the power of his mind, can collect the thousands around his pulpit! I can understand how an impression may be easily made upon the half-educated or totally ignorant classes of society: but to cast a spell upon the intelligent, the well-informed, and the erudite,—to congregate the aristocracy of the realm to listen to the words that flow from his mouth,—oh! great, indeed, must be the influence of such a man!"

"You consider, then, Lady Cecilia, that the upper classes need powerful inducements to attend to the truths of religion?" said Reginald, irresistibly charmed by the witching eloquence that had marked the language of the beautiful woman in whose society he found himself.

"I consider—but, if I tell you my thoughts," said Cecilia, suddenly checking herself, "I shall unavoidably pay a high compliment to you; and that neither——"

"Let me hear your ladyship's sentiments in any case," said the clergyman, fearful of losing those honied words which produced upon him an impression such as he had never experienced in his life before.

"I believe," continued Cecilia, "that the upper classes in this country are very irreligious. I do not say that they are infidels: no—they all cherish a profound conviction of the truths of the gospel. But their mode of life—their indolent and luxurious habits, militate against a due regard to religious ceremonials. How is it, then, that they are aroused from their apathy? They hear of some great preacher, and curiosity in the first instance prompts them to visit the place of his ministry. They go—almost as they would repair to see a new play. But when they listen to his words—when they drink, in spite of themselves, large draughts of the fervour which animates *him*—when he appeals to their hearts, then they begin to perceive that there is something more in religion than an observance of a cold ceremonial; and they go home '*to reflect*!'"

"You believe that to be the case?" said the rector, delighted at this description of an influence and an effect which he could not do otherwise than know to be associated with his own ministry.

"I feel convinced that such is the fact," answered Lady Cecilia; then, lowering her tone in a mysterious manner, and leaning towards him, she added, "Many of my friends have confessed that such has been the case in respect to their attendance at your chapel—and such was the case with myself!"

"With you, Lady Cecilia?" exclaimed the clergyman, vainly endeavouring to conceal the triumph which he experienced at this announcement.

"Yes, with me," continued the artful woman. "For, to be candid with you, Mr. Tracy, I need consolation of some kind—and the solace of religion is the most natural and the most effective. My domestic life," she proceeded, in a deeply pathetic tone, "is far from a happy one. Sir Rupert thinks more of his own pleasures than of his wife;—he does more than neglect me—he abandons me for weeks and weeks together."

She put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Mr. Tracy drew his chair closer to the sofa on which she was seated: it was only a mechanical movement on his part—the movement of one who draws nearer as the conversation becomes more confidential.

"But why should I intrude my sorrows upon you?" suddenly exclaimed Cecilia. "And yet if it be not to the minister of religion to whom we poor creatures must unburden our woes, where else can we seek for consolation? from what other source can we hope to receive lessons of resignation and patience?"

"True," said the rector. "And that has often appeared to me the best and redeeming feature in the Roman Catholic world, where the individual places reliance upon his priest, and looks to him for spiritual support and aid."

"Ah! would that our creed permitted us the same privilege!" said Lady Cecilia, with great apparent enthusiasm.

"I know of no rule nor law which forbids the exercise of such a privilege," said Reginald; "unless, indeed, usage and custom be predominant, and will admit of no exceptions."

"For my part, I despise such customs and usages, when they tend to the exclusion of those delightful outpourings of confidence which the individual pants to breathe into the ears of the pastor in whom implicit faith can be placed. In how many cases could the good clergyman advise his parishioners, to the maintenance of their domestic comfort? how many heart-burnings in families would not such a minister be enabled to soothe? Oh! sir, I feel that your eloquence could teach me how to bear, unrepiningly, and even cheerfully, all the sorrows of my own domestic hearth!"

"Then look upon me as a friend, my dear Lady Cecilia," said the clergyman, drawing his chair a little closer still: "look upon me as a friend; and happy indeed shall I be if my humble agency or advice can contribute to smooth the path of life for even only one individual!"

"Mr. Tracy, I accept your preferred friendship—I accept it as sincerely as it is offered," exclaimed Lady Cecilia; and she extended her hand towards him.

He took it. It was soft and warm, and it gently pressed his. He returned the pressure:—was it not the token, the pledge of friendship? He thought so—and he meant no harm.

But again did the contact of that soft and warm hand awake within his breast a flame till then unknown; and his cheeks flushed, and his eyes met those of the fair—the fascinating creature, who craved his friendship!

"Henceforth," said Cecilia, who now saw that her intrigue was progressing towards a complete triumph—even more rapidly than she had ever anticipated—"henceforth you will have no votary more constant in attendance than I; but, on your part, you must occasionally spare from your valuable time a single half hour wherein to impart to me the consolations I so much require."

"Be not afraid, Lady Cecilia," said the rector, who now felt himself attracted towards that woman by a spell of irresistible influence: "I shall not forget that you have ingenuously and frankly sought my spiritual aid; and I should be false to the holy cause in which I have embarked, were I to withhold it."

"I thank you—deeply, sincerely thank you," exclaimed Cecilia. "But judge for yourself whether I do not seek solace, in my domestic afflictions, from the proper source! This is the book which I was reading when you called."

Cecilia took up Sturm's "Reflections," and opened the book at random.

"There," she said; "it was this page which I was perusing."

She held the book in her hands as she reclined, rather than sate, upon the sofa; and the clergyman was compelled to lean over her to obtain a glimpse of the page to which she pointed.

His hair touched hers: she did not move her head. Their faces were close to each other. But not an impure thought entered his soul: still he was again excited by that thrilling sensation which came over him whenever he touched her.

She affected not to perceive that their hair commingled, but pointed to the page, and expatiated upon its contents.

In a moment of abstraction, for which he could not account, and against the influence of which he was not proof, Reginald Tracy's eyes wandered from the book to the form which reclined, beneath his glance, as it were, upon the sofa. That glance swept the well-proportioned undulations of the slight but charming figure which was voluptuously stretched upon the cushions.

Suddenly Cecilia left off speaking, and turned her eyes upward to his countenance. Their glances met; and Reginald did not immediately avert his head. There was something in the depths of those melting blue orbs which fascinated him.

Still he suspected not his extreme danger; and when he rose to depart, it was simply because he felt like a man flushed with wine, and who requires air.

He took his leave; and Cecilia reminded him that she should expect to see him soon again.

Can there be a doubt as to his answer?

When he regarded his watch, on reaching the street, he was astounded to perceive that two hours had slipped away since he entered the house.

And a deep flush suddenly overspread his countenance as he beheld the viper-like eyes of a hideous old hag, who was standing near the steps of the front-door, fixed upon him with a leer which for an instant struck a chill to his heart by its ominous and yet dim significancy.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

TEMPTATION.

"He will come again on Wednesday," said Lady Cecilia to herself, as she heard the front door close behind the Rev. Reginald Tracy.

This wily woman was well-acquainted with the human heart: she had discovered the weak side of the rector of Saint David's: she assailed him by means of his vulnerable point; she directed her way to his heart through the avenue of his *vanity*.

Yes—Reginald Tracy was vain,—as vain as a man who was admired and sought after by all classes, was likely to be rendered,—as vain as a spoiled child of the public could be.

His life had, moreover, been so pure, so chaste, so ascetic, that the fierce passions which agitate other men were unknown to him; and, as all mortals must be characterised by some failing, his was a habit of self-admiration!

Venial and insignificant was this foible, so long as no advantage was taken of it by designing or worldly-minded persons; but even our lightest defects, as well as our most "pleasant vices," may be made the means of our ruin.

Vanity is a noxious weed which, when nurtured by the dews of flattery, spreads its poisonous roots throughout the fertile soil of the heart; and each root springs up into a plant more venomous, more rank; more baleful than its predecessor.

The life of Reginald Tracy had been singularly pure. He had even passed through the ordeal of a college career without affixing the least stain on the chastity of his soul. Yet with all his austerity of virtue, he was characterised by no austerity of manner: he mixed freely in society, and hesitated not to frequent the ball-room—although he did not dance. He could be a pleasant companion: at the same time he never uttered a word upon which he had to retrospect with regret. When amongst men, no obscene jest nor ribald allusion was vented in his presence; and yet he was never voted "a bore." In a word, he was one of those men who possess the rare talent of maintaining a character for every virtue, and of being held up as a pattern and an example, without creating a single enemy—without even being compelled to encounter the irony of the libertine, and without producing a feeling of restraint or embarrassment in the society which he frequented.

Such was Reginald Tracy; and it was this man,—who at the age of thirty-six could look back with complacency upon a spotless life,—a life unsullied by a single fault,—an existence devoid of the slightest dereliction from moral propriety,—it was this good, this holy, this saint-like man whom the daring Cecilia undertook to subdue.

Reginald, Reginald! the day of thy temptation has now come: thou standest upon a pinnacle of the temple—the tempter is by thy side;—take good heed of thyself, Reginald Tracy!

"He will come again on Wednesday," had said Lady Cecilia.

The prediction was fulfilled!

The morning had been so inclement that no one would have stirred abroad unless actuated by important motives. The rain had fallen in torrents,—beating violently against the windows, and inundating the streets. It had, however, ceased at noon; but the sky remained covered with black clouds; and at three o'clock on that gloomy winter-day it was dark and sombre as if night were at hand.

But in spite of that inauspicious weather, the Rev. Reginald Tracy knocked at Lady Cecilia Harborough's door at the hour which we have just mentioned.

The designing creature received the clergyman with a smile, exclaiming at the same time, "It is indeed kind of you to visit me on such a day as this. I have been so happy—so resigned—so possessed with the most complete mental tranquillity since you manifested sympathy and interest in my behalf, that your presence appears to be that of a good angel!"

"It is our duty to sustain those who droop, and console those who suffer," answered the rector.

"Delightful task!" ejaculated Cecilia. "What a pure and holy satisfaction must you enjoy, when you reflect upon the amount of comfort which your lessons impart to the world-wearied and sinking spirit. Believe me, many an one has entered the gates of your chapel with a weight upon his soul almost too heavy for him to bear, and has issued forth carrying his burden of care lightly, if not cheerfully, along!"

"Do you really imagine that my humble agency can produce such good results in the cause of heaven?" asked Reginald, fixing a glance of mingled tenderness and satisfaction upon the charming countenance of Cecilia.

"I do—I do," she answered, with apparent enthusiasm; "I can judge by the effect which your admirable discourse of last Sunday morning produced upon myself. For—let me not deceive you," she continued, hanging down her head, and speaking in a tremulous and tender voice,—"let me not deceive you—it was not the heat of the chapel which overcame me—it was your eloquence! I dared not confess this to you at first; but now—now that I can look upon you as a friend—I need have no secret from you."

She took his hand as she uttered these words, and pressed it in a manner which he conceived to be indicative of grateful fervour; and without a thought of evil—but with an undefinable sensation of pleasure to which until lately he had been all his life a stranger—he returned that pressure.

Lady Cecilia did not withdraw her hand, but allowed it to linger in his; and he retained it under the influence of that sensation which caused his veins to flow with liquid fire.

He was sitting on the sofa by her side, and his eyes wandered from her countenance over the outlines of her form.

"Oh! how can the man who accompanied you to the altar, and there swore to love and cherish you," he exclaimed, in an ebullition

of impassioned feelings such as he had never known before,—"how can that man find it in his heart to neglect—to abandon you,—you who are evidently all gentleness, amiability, and candour!"

"He has no heart—no soul for any one save himself," answered Cecilia. "And now tell me—relieve my mind from a most painful suspense upon one point! Am I criminal in the eyes of heaven, because I have ceased to love one whom I vowed to love, but whose conduct has quenched all the affection that I once experienced for him?"

"You must not harden your heart against him," said Reginald; "but by your resignation, your uncomplaining patience, your meekness, and your constant devotion to his interests, you must seek to bring him back to the paths of duty and love."

"I might as well essay to teach the hyena gratitude," answered Cecilia.

"You speak too bitterly," rejoined the rector of Saint David's; and yet he was not altogether displeased at the aversion which Lady Cecilia's language manifested towards her husband.

"Alas! we have no power over volition," said she; "and that doctrine is a severe one which enjoins us to kiss the hand that strikes us."

"True," observed Reginald. "I know not how it is—but I feel that I am at this moment unaccountably deficient in argument to meet your objections; and yet——"

He paused, for he felt embarrassed; but he knew not why.

"Oh! you can appreciate the difficulty of enjoining a love towards one who merits hatred," exclaimed Cecilia, now skilfully availing herself of the crisis to which she had so artfully conducted the conversation. "You see that you are deficient in reasoning to enforce the alleged necessity of maintaining, cherishing, and nourishing respect and veneration for a husband who has forfeited all claims to such feelings on the part of his injured wife. At all events, do not tell me that I am criminal in ceasing to love one who oppresses me;—do not say that I offend heaven by ceasing to kiss the hand that rudely repulses all my overtures of affection;—oh! tell me not *that*—or you will make me very, very miserable indeed!"

Lady Cecilia's bosom was convulsed with sobs as she uttered these words in a rapid and impassioned manner; and as she ceased speaking her head fell upon Reginald's shoulder.

"Compose yourself—compose yourself, Lady Cecilia," exclaimed the clergyman, alarmed by this ebullition of grief, the sincerity of which he could not for one moment suspect. "Do not give way to sorrow—remember the lessons of resignation and patience which you have heard from my lips—remember——"

But the lady sobbed as if her heart would break: her head reclined upon his shoulder—her forehead touched his face—her hand was still clasped in his.

"Oh Reginald!—Reginald!" she murmured, "I cannot love my husband more—no—it is impossible! I love another!"

"You love another!" ejaculated the rector, his whole frame trembling with an ineffable feeling of mingled joy and suspense.

"Yes—and now reproach, revile me—leave me—spurn me—treat me with contempt!" continued Cecilia: "do all this if you will; but never, never can you prevent me from idolizing—adoring you!"

"Cecilia!" cried Reginald Tracy, starting from his seat; "you know not what you are saying!"

"Alas! I know but too well the feelings which my words express," returned the lady, clasping her hands together, and sobbing violently. "Hear me for a few minutes, and then leave me to the misery of my fate—a hopeless love, and a breaking heart!"

"Speak, then, and unburden your mind to me without reserve," said Reginald, resuming his seat upon the sofa, and inviting a confidence the thought of which produced in his mind emotions of bliss and burning joy, the power of which was irresistible.

"Yes, I will speak, even though I render myself contemptible in your sight," continued Cecilia, wiping her eyes and affecting to resume that calmness which she had never lost more than the impassioned actress on the stage, when enacting some melo-dramatic part. "For months and months past I have cherished for you a feeling, the true nature of which has only revealed itself to me within the last few days. In the first instance, I admired your character and your talents: I respected you; and respect and admiration soon ripened into another feeling. You do not know the heart of woman; but it is ever moved by a contemplation of the sublime characteristics of remarkable men—like you. I met you in society, and I almost worshipped the ground on which you trod. I listened to your conversation: not a word was lost to me! During long and sleepless nights your image was ever present to my mind. You became an idol that I adored. At length you yourself, one evening, innocently and unconsciously, fanned the flame that was engendered in my heart: you told me that *I looked well*. That passing compliment rendered me your devoted slave. I thought that no human happiness could be greater than that of pleasing you. I resolved to attend your chapel from that period. I obtained the pew that was nearest to the pulpit; and when you preached I was electrified. Oh! you saw how I was overcome! Your attention to me on that occasion threw additional chains around me. Then you called on me the day before yesterday, and you spoke so kindly that I was every moment on the point of falling at your feet, and exclaiming,—'*Forgive me, but I now know that I love you!*' You proffered me your friendship: how joyously I accepted the sacred gift! And that friendship—oh! let me not forfeit it now—for the love which my heart cherishes for you shall be as pure and taintless as that friendship with which you have blessed me!"

Reginald had listened to this strange confession with the most profound attention;—yes, and with the deepest interest.

A young and beautiful woman had avowed her love for him—she sate near him;—his hand still thrilled with the pressure of hers—his cheek was still warm and flushed with the contact of her white and polished forehead;—the room was involved in obscurity and silence.

She had insinuated herself, in an incredibly short space of time, into his heart, by flattering his vanity and exciting those desires which had hitherto slumbered so profoundly in his breast, but which were now ready to burst for with the violence of the long pent-up volcano.

He trembled—he hesitated. At one moment he was inclined to rush from the house, as if from the presence of the tempter; and

then he remembered that the love which she had avowed was as pure as his friendship!

Nevertheless, the struggle in his mind was terrific.

Cecilia understood it all.

"You hate me—you despise me," she suddenly exclaimed, covering her face with her hands. "Oh! do not crush me with your contempt—do not abandon me to the conviction of your abhorrence! Reginald—take pity upon me: forgive me for loving you—forgive me—on my knees I implore you!"

She threw herself before him: she took his hand and pressed it to her lips.

She covered it with kisses.

"Cecilia," murmured the rector, making a faint effort to withdraw his hand.

"No—no, you shall not leave me thus," she exclaimed, with apparent wildness: "I should die if you went away, without telling me that you forgive me! No, you must not leave me thus!"

"Rise, Cecilia—rise—in the name of heaven, rise!" exclaimed Reginald, alarmed lest they should be discovered in that equivocal position: "rise, and I will forgive you. I will do all that you desire—I will not leave you until you are composed."

"And you will return and see me again? you will not withdraw your friendship?" demanded Cecilia, in a soft and melting tone.

"No—never, never!" cried Reginald, enthusiastically, as if he suddenly abandoned himself to the torrent of passion which now swept through his soul.

"Oh! thank you—thank you for that assurance!" exclaimed Cecilia; and, as if yielding to an unconquerable burst of feeling, she threw herself into his arms: "you shall be as a brother to me; and our friendship, our love, shall be eternal!"

Her rich red mouth was pressed upon the rector's lips; her arms were wound around him; and for a moment he yielded to the intoxicating delight of that pleasure so new to him.

But ere he was entirely culpable, his guardian genius struck his soul with a sudden remorse; and, disengaging himself from the syren's arms, he imprinted one long—burning—delicious kiss upon her lips; then, murmuring, "To-morrow, to-morrow, dearest Cecilia, I will see thee again," rushed from the room.

"He is mine!" exclaimed the lady, as the door closed behind him; "irrevocably mine!"

CHAPTER CXXIX.

THE FALL.

REGINALD Tracy returned to his own abode, his breast agitated with a variety of conflicting feelings.

He pushed his old housekeeper, who announced to him that dinner was ready, rudely aside, and hurried up to his own chamber.

There he threw himself upon his knees, and endeavoured to pray to be released from temptation.

For he now comprehended all the dangers which beset him, although he suspected not the perfidy and artifice of the tempter.

But not a word of supplication could he utter from the mouth which still burned with the thrilling kisses of the beautiful Cecilia.

He rose from his knees, and paced the room wildly,—at one moment vowing never to see that syren more,—at another longing to rush back to her arms.

The animal passions of that man were strong by nature and threatened to be insatiable whenever let loose; but they had slumbered from his birth, beneath the lethargic influence of high principle and asceticism.

Moreover, they had never been tempted until the present time; and now that temptation came so suddenly, and in so sweet a guise,—came with such irresistible blandishments,—came, in a word, so accompanied with all that could flatter his vanity or minister unto his pride,—that he knew not how to resist its influence.

And at one moment that man of unblemished character and lofty principle fell upon his knees, grovelling as it were at the foot-stool of Him whom he served,—anxious, yearning to crave for courage to escape from the peril that awaited him,—and yet unable to breathe a syllable of prayer. Then he walked in a wild and excited manner up and down, murmuring the name of Cecilia,—pondering upon her charms,—plunging into voluptuous reveries and dreams of vaguely comprehended bliss,—until his desires became of that fiery, hot, and unruly nature, which triumphed over all other considerations.

It was an interesting—and yet an awful spectacle, to behold that man, who could look back over a life of spotless and unblemished purity, now engaged in a terrific warfare with the demons of passion that were raging to cast off their chains, and were struggling furiously for dominion over the proud being who had hitherto held them in silence and in bondage.

But those demons had acquired strength during their long repose; and now that the day of rebellion had arrived, they maintained an avenging and desperate conflict with him who had long been their master. They were like a people goaded to desperation by the atrocities of a blood-thirsty tyrant: they fought a battle in which there was to be no quarter, but wherein one side or the other must succumb.

Hour after hour passed; and still he sustained the conflict with the new feelings which had been excited within him, and which were rapidly crushing all the better sentiments of his soul. At length he retired to bed, a prey to a mental uneasiness which amounted to a torture.

His sleep was agitated and filled with visions by no means calculated to calm the fever of his blood. He awoke in the morning excited, unsettled, and with a desperate longing after pleasures which were as yet vague and undefined to him.

But still a sense of the awful danger which menaced him stole into his mind from time to time; and he shuddered as if he were about to commit a crime.

He left the table, where the morning's meal was untasted, and repaired to his study. But his books had no longer any charm for him: he could not settle his mind to read or write.

He went out, and rambled in all directions, reckless whither he went—but anxious to throw off the spell which had fallen upon him.

Vain was this attempt.

The air was piercing and cold; but his brow was burning. He felt that his cheeks were flushed; and his eyes seemed to shoot forth fire.

"My God! what is the matter with me?" he exclaimed, in his anguish, as he entered Hyde Park, the comparative loneliness of which at that season he thought calculated to soothe his troubled thoughts. "I have tried to pray—and last night, for the first time in my life, I sought my pillow, unable to implore the blessings of my Maker. Oh! what spell has overtaken me? what influence is upon me? Cecilia—Cecilia—is it indeed thou that hast thus changed me?"

He went on,—now musing upon all that had passed within the few preceding days—now breaking forth into wild and passionate exclamations.

He left the Park, and walked rapidly through the streets of the West End.

"No," he said within himself, "I will never see her more. I will conquer these horrible feelings—I will triumph over the mad desires, the fiery cravings which have converted the heaven of my heart into a raging hell! Oh! why is she so beautiful? why did she say that she loved me? Was it to disturb me in my peaceful career—to wean me from my God? No—no: she yielded to an impulse which she could not control;—she loves me—she loves me—she loves me!"

There was a species of insanity in his manner as he thus addressed himself,—not speaking with the lips, but with the heart,—unheard by those who passed him by, but with a voice which vibrated like thunder in his own ears.

"Yes—she loves me," he continued; "but I must fly from her—I must avoid her as if she were a venomous serpent. I dare not trust myself again in her presence: and not for worlds—not for worlds would I be with her alone once more. No,—I must forget her—I must

tear her image from my heart—I must trample it under foot!"

He paused as he spoke: he stood still—for he was exhausted.

But how was it that the demon of mischief had, with an under-current of irresistible influence, carried him on, in spite of the forceful flow of the above reflections, to the very goal of destruction!

He was in Tavistock Square.

He was at the door of Lady Cecilia Harborough's house.

And now for one minute a terrific conflict again raged within him. It seemed as if he collected all his remaining courage to struggle with the demons in his heart; but he was weak with the protracted contest—and they were more powerful than ever.

"I will see her once more," he said, yielding to the influence of his passions: "I will tell her that I stand upon an abyss—I will implore her to have mercy upon me, and permit me to retreat ere yet it be too late!"

His good genius held him faintly back; but his passions goaded him on: he obeyed the latter impulse; he rushed up the steps and knocked at the door.

"Even now I might retreat," he said to himself: "there is still time! I will—I will!"

He turned, and was already half-way down the steps, when the door was opened.

His good resolutions vanished, and he entered the house.

In a few moments more he was in the presence of Lady Cecilia,—Lady Cecilia—looking more bewitching, more captivating than ever!

She had expected him, and had resolved that this visit, on his part, should crown her triumph.

It was in a small parlour adjoining her own boudoir that she received him.

The luxurious sofa was placed near the cheerful fire: the heavy curtains were drawn over the windows in such a manner as to darken the room.

Cecilia was attired in a black silk dress, that she had purposely chosen to enhance the transparent brilliancy of her complexion, and to display the dazzling whiteness of a bust, which, though of small proportions, was of perfect contour.

She was reclining languidly upon the cushions which were piled on one end of the sofa, and her little feet peeped from beneath the skirts of her dress.

She did not rise when Reginald entered the room, but invited him to take a seat near her upon the sofa.

So bewitchingly beautiful did she appear, as the strong glare of the fire played upon her countenance, amidst the semi-obscurity of the room, that he could not resist the signal.

He accordingly sate down by her side.

"Your visit to-day," said Cecilia, "proves to me that you have forgiven the indiscreet confession into which I was yesterday led in a moment of weakness."

"I am come as a friend—as a true and sincere *friend*," returned Reginald, with considerable emphasis upon the last word. "But I know not whether my occupations, my duties, in a word—will permit me to visit you again for some time——"

"Oh! do not deprive me of the pleasure of your society from time to time," interrupted Cecilia, divining all that was passing in the rector's soul, and well aware, by the tremulous tone in which he spoke, that his good resolutions were but unequal opponents to the fury of his newly awakened passions.

"Listen, Lady Cecilia," answered Reginald; "and I will tell you frankly the real motives which most compel me to forego the pleasure of your society in future. I tremble for myself!"

"You tremble for yourself!" repeated Cecilia, with ill-concealed joy. "Do you think me, then, so very formidable?"

"Formidable—oh! no," ejaculated Reginald, darting an impassioned glance upon his ravishing companion. "But I consider that you are very beautiful—too beautiful for me thus to seek your presence with impunity."

"Then would you sever that bond of friendship which you yourself proposed so generously, so kindly?" asked Lady Cecilia, placing her hand upon that of the rector, and approaching her countenance towards his as if to read the answer in his eyes.

"It must be so—it must be so—for my peace of mind, Cecilia!" cried Reginald, thrilled by that electric touch, and receiving into his own soul no small portion of that same voluptuousness which animated the fair patrician at that moment.

"It must be so,—oh! cruel resolve!" said Cecilia, pressing his hand between both of hers. "But let me not advance my selfish feelings as a barrier to your interest. Oh! no, Reginald—I would sacrifice every thing to give you pleasure! You shall go—you shall leave me; but you will sometimes think of me—you will occasionally devote a thought to her who has dared to love you!"

"Dared to love me!" exclaimed the rector;—"and what if I—— but no—it is madness!"

"Speak—tell me what you were about to say," murmured Cecilia, in a melting tone.

"I was on the point of asking what you would think—what opinion you would form of me, if I were to confess that I also dared to love you?"

"I should reply that such happiness never could descend upon me," said Cecilia.

"And yet it is true—it is true! I cannot conceal it from myself," exclaimed Reginald, giving way to the influence of his emotions: "it is true that I love you!"

"Oh! am I indeed so blest?" faltered Cecilia. "Tell me once more that you love me!"

"Love you!" cried the rector, unable to wrestle longer with his mad desires: "I worship—I adore you—I will die for you!"

He caught her in his arms, and covered her with burning and impassioned kisses.

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Oh, Reginald! and hast thou at length fallen? Have a few short days sufficed to undo and render as naught the purity—the chastity of years?

Where was thy guardian angel in that hour?

Whither had fled that proud virtue which raised thee so high above thy fellow-men, and which gave to thine eloquence the galvanic effect of the most sublime truth?

Look back—look back, with bitterness and sorrow, upon the brilliant career through which thou hast run up to this hour, and curse the madness that prompted thee to darken so bright a destiny!

For thou hast plucked thine own crown of integrity from thy brow, and hast trampled it under foot.

Henceforth, in thine own heart, wilt thou know thyself as a hypocrite and a deceiver!

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It was past eleven o'clock when Reginald Tracy issued from the abode of Lady Cecilia Harborough.

The night was dark; but from time to time the moon shone for a short interval, as the clouds were swept away from its face.

Reginald paused for a moment upon the steps of the door, and gazed upwards.

The tempestuous aspect of the heavens alarmed him; and a superstitious dread crept, like a death-shudder, over his entire frame; for it seemed to him as if the mansion of the Almighty had put on its sable garb in mourning for a soul that was lost unto the blessings of eternity.

Deeply imbued as he was with a sense of the grand truths of the gospel, this sudden and awful idea speedily assumed so dread a shape in his mind, that he felt alarmed, as if a tremendous gulph were about to open beneath his feet.

He hurried on, hoping to outstrip his thoughts; but that idea pursued him,—haunted him,—every moment increasing in terrific solemnity, until it wore the appearance of a mighty truth instead of a phantom of the imagination.

Again he looked upwards; and the dense sombre clouds, which rolled rapidly like huge black billows over each other, imparted fresh terrors to his guilty soul.

Then his feverish and excited imagination began to invest those clouds with fantastic shapes; and he traced in the midst of the heavens a mighty black hand, the fore-finger of which pointed menacingly *downwards*.

The more he gazed—the more palpable to his mind that apparition became. Half sinking with terror—oppressed with an astounding, a crushing consciousness of his adulterous guilt—the wretched man went wildly on, reckless of the way which he pursued, and every minute casting horror-stricken glances up to the colossal black hand which seemed suspended over his head.

Suddenly a deafening peal of thunder burst above him: he looked frantically up—the hand appeared to wave in a convulsive manner—then the clouds parted, rolling pell-mell over each other,—and the terrific sign was broken into a hundred moving masses.

Never did erring mortal so acutely feel his guilt as Reginald Tracy on this fearful night.

The storm burst forth; and he ran madly on, without aim—a prey to the most appalling reflections.

It was not of this world that he now thought,—it was not on its reproaches, its blame, or its punishment, that his mental looks were fixed;—but it was of eternity that he was afraid.

He trembled when he thought of that Maker whose praise he had so lately sung with pride, and hope, and joy,—and whose name he dared not now invoke!

Oh! his punishment had already begun.

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Weak, wearied, subdued,—drenched with the rain that had accompanied the storm; and in state of mind bordering upon madness and despair, the wretched man reached his home at four o'clock in the morning.

But whither he had wandered, and which way he had taken,—whether he had continued running on, or had rested once or often during that terrific night, he never remembered.

He retired to bed, and slept during several hours. When he awoke, the sun was shining gloriously through his casement; but the horrors and the congenial reflections of darkness had left too fearful an impression upon his mind to be readily effaced; for he was not so inured to vice as to treat with levity the events of the past night,—events which to his superstitious imagination had assumed the aspect of celestial warning and divine menace.

CHAPTER CXXX.

MENTAL STRUGGLES.

THE rector of Saint David's fell upon his knees, and, turning his face towards the casement through which the sun glanced so cheerfully into the chamber, poured forth his soul to the Being of whose universal dominion that radiance seemed an emblem.

Reginald could now pray. He had sinned deeply, and he implored pardon; for he conceived that heaven had deigned to convey a special warning to his mind through the medium of the clouds and the storm of the preceding night.

"Oh! I am not yet totally lost!" he exclaimed, joining his hands fervently together: "I am not yet an outcast from divine mercy! Heaven itself manifests an interest in my welfare: dare I neglect the warning? No—no! I have sinned—but there is repentance. Upon my otherwise spotless life there is one stain; but tears of regret shall be shed unceasingly until the mark be washed away! And thou, temptress—never more must we meet as we have lately met; I must shun thee as my evil genius! Yet I do not blame thee—for I myself was fond, and being fond, was weak. If I fell, and can yet aspire to pardon and forgiveness,—I who was strong,—what extenuation may not exist for thee—a poor, weak woman! Oh! let the light of divine grace shine in upon my soul, even as these bright beams of the orb of day penetrate with cheering influence to my very heart! Let me rise up from the depths of sin, stronger than when I fell,—so that sad experience may tend to confirm my resolves to pursue the paths of chastity and virtue!"

Thus spoke aloud Reginald Tracy, as he knelt in his chamber the day after his fall: thus did he breathe vows of future self-denial and purity.

He rose resigned, and penitent,—though at intervals a species of struggle took place in his breast—a conflict between his recently-experienced sensations of amorous delight and his present resolutions of abstinence from carnal pleasures.

In a moment when his better feelings were predominant, he wrote a brief letter to Lady Cecilia, imploring her to forget all that had taken place between them, and enjoining her, if she entertained the slightest interest in his earthly and immortal welfare, never to seek to see him again.

Then Reginald gathered all his moat valued books around him, and plunged into his studies with an earnestness which augured well for the strength and permanency of his good resolutions.

This occupation was for a few minutes disturbed by a note from Lady Cecilia, imploring a last interview ere they parted for ever:—but the rector was immoveable in his present precautionary conduct; and he answered her, not angrily, but firmly, to beseech her not to "lead him into temptation."

Yes, this man of fiery passions wrestled gallantly with his inclinations: the combat was at times a fearful one; but he exerted all his strength, and all his power, and all his energy, to subdue those desires which were smouldering, and were not quenched, at the bottom of his soul.

It was in the evening of the fourth day after the rector's fall from the pedestal of his purity, that his studies were interrupted by the entrance of his housekeeper, who informed him that a gentleman desired to speak to him.

The rector ordered the visitor to be admitted; and Mr. Richard Markham was announced.

The object of our hero's call was speedily explained.

Mr. Monroe was lying in a dangerous state, and his life was despaired of. Mr. Wentworth, the surgeon, who attended upon him, had recommended him to settle all his earthly affairs, and prepare his soul to meet his Creator; and the old man, who was fully sensible of the importance of this advice, had expressed a wish to receive spiritual consolation from a minister whose sanctity had become proverbial.

"The desire of my dying friend," added Markham, "must serve as an apology for my intrusion upon you; but, I implore you, reverend sir, not to hesitate to soothe by your much-coveted presence the passage of a fellow-creature from this world to a better."

But for a moment the rector *did* hesitate:—was he fit to administer divine consolation to another,—he who was still deeply dyed with sin himself?

Such was the thought which floated rapidly through his imagination.

Richard urged his request with eloquence.

Reginald Tracy felt that he could offer no sufficient excuse, short of the revelation of his own guilt, for refusing to attend the death-bed of one who craved his presence; and he agreed to accompany the young man to Markham Place.

Richard had a vehicle at the door; and in a short time they reached our hero's abode.

Reginald was conducted to the room where Monroe lay.

Hanging over the pillow, on which the invalid reclined, was a charming female form, from whose bosom deep sobs emanated, and rendered almost inaudible the words of strangely commingled hope and despair which she addressed to her father.

She did not hear the door open; and it was only when Richard approached the bed, and whispered that the Reverend Mr. Tracy was present, that she raised her tearful countenance.

Then did the eyes of the rector glance upon one of the most lovely beings whom Nature ever invested with all her choicest gifts; and—even in that solemn moment when he stood by the bed of one who was pronounced to be dying—his soul was stirred by the presence of that transcendent beauty.

"Oh! sir," exclaimed Ellen, in that musical voice which was now rendered tremulous by deep emotions, "how grateful am I for

this prompt attention to the wish of my dear—dear father!"

"I deserve no gratitude for the performance of a Christian duty," answered the rector, as he approached the bed.

Markham took Ellen's hand and led her from the chamber, in order to allow unrestrained converse between the clergyman and the invalid.

An hour elapsed, and the bell of the sick-room rang.

Ellen hurried thither, and found her father composed and resigned to meet his fate. The rector sate by his bed-side.

"This holy man," said Monroe, "has taught me how to die like a true Christian. Weep not, dearest Ellen; we shall meet again hereafter."

"Oh, my dearest father," exclaimed the young lady, bursting into an agony of tears; "it is I—I who have murdered you! My conduct——"

"Silence, Ellen—accuse not yourself in that dreadful manner," interrupted her father.

Reginald was astonished at the words which had just fallen from the daughter's lips; and he surveyed her with increased interest and curiosity.

At that moment Mr. Wentworth entered the room. He found the invalid better, and his countenance was animated with a ray of hope.

This expression of his inward feelings was not lost upon Ellen; and she interrogated him with a rapid and imploring glance.

"Mr. Monroe must be kept very—very quiet," said the surgeon in a whisper, which was addressed to both Ellen and Reginald Tracy.

"And then—there is hope?" murmured Ellen in breathless suspense.

"Yes—there is hope," repeated the surgeon solemnly.

"May heaven be thanked for that assurance on your part," said Ellen, fervently.

The rector contemplated her with an admiration which he could not restrain; and, in spite of himself, the thought flashed across his mind, how far more lovely was Miss Ellen Monroe than Lady Cecilia Harborough!

Then, indignant with himself for having allowed the comparison to force itself upon his attention, he rose to take his departure.

The invalid had just sunk into a deep slumber; and Mr. Wentworth intimated his intention of passing the night by his side.

"I will call again to-morrow morning," said Reginald, addressing Miss Monroe; "for I perceive that this gentleman is not without hopes."

"Thank you—thank you, sir, for your kindness," answered Ellen with grateful enthusiasm. "Your presence seems to have brought a blessing into this sick-room."

She extended her hand towards him, and he pressed it for a moment in his.

His whole frame seemed electrified with a sudden glow; and he hurried somewhat abruptly from the room.

When he reached his own abode once more, he felt a profound melancholy steal into his soul; for he seemed more lonely, and more solitary than he ever yet had been.

He retired to rest, and his dreams were filled with the images of Cecilia and Ellen.

When he awoke in the morning, he was discontented with himself—with the whole world: he experienced vague longings after excitement or change of scene;—he could not settle himself, as on the four previous days, to his studies—his books were hateful to him. He wandered about his house—from room to room—as if in search of something which he could not define, and which he did not discover: he was pursued by ideas only dimly comprehensible, but which were at variance with his recently formed resolutions of purity and virtue. He was restless—discontented—uneasy.

At length he remembered his promise to return to Markham Place. The idea seemed to give him pleasure: he longed to see Ellen Monroe once more;—and yet he did not choose to make this admission to himself.

With a beating heart did he cross the threshold of the house in which that delightful vision had burst, as it were, upon his sight on the previous evening. He was immediately conducted to the sick-room, where Ellen was sitting alone by her father's bed-side.

The old man slept.

Ellen rose and tripped lightly to meet him, a smile upon her charming, though pale and somewhat careworn countenance.

Laying her hand gently upon his, she whispered, "He will recover! Mr. Wentworth assures me that he will recover!"

"Most sincerely do I congratulate you upon this happy change," said Reginald. "I can well comprehend the feelings of an affectionate daughter who is allowed to hope that her parent may be restored to her."

"Yes, sir—and so good a father as mine!" added Ellen. "But it was all my fault——"

Then, suddenly checking herself, she cast down her eyes, and blushed deeply.

"Your fault, Miss Monroe?" repeated the rector, inspired with the most lively curiosity to penetrate the mystery of that self-accusation which he had now heard for the second time: "I cannot believe that any fault of yours—you whom I found hanging over your beloved father——"

"Let us speak no more upon that subject," interrupted Ellen, vexed with herself for having so unguardedly said what she had relative to the primal cause of her father's dangerous illness. "He will recover—something tells me that he will recover; and then—oh! how I will cherish him—how I will exert myself to make the remainder of his days happy!"

Her countenance became flushed as she spoke; and Reginald's glances were fixed, by a species of invincible fascination, upon the beautiful being in whose presence he stood.

He felt at that moment that he could sacrifice every thing for her love.

The surgeon and Richard Markham now entered the apartment; and Reginald received the thanks of our young hero for the attention which he had shown to the old man whose life had ceased to be despaired of.

After a somewhat protracted visit, the rector took his leave.

But throughout that day Ellen alone occupied all his thoughts. What fault of hers could have thrown her father upon a bed of sickness, whose only termination was at one time anticipated to be in death? what could have been the conduct of so fond a daughter to have produced such terrible results? Had she strayed from the path of virtue? This was the only feasible solution of such a mystery. Then a terrible pang of jealousy shot through his breast.

And why should he be jealous? What was that young girl to him?

He was jealous, because his ardent passions instinctively attracted him towards that beautiful creature;—and she was every thing to him, because she *was* so beautiful, and because he desired her!

Yes—a new flame now burnt in his heart—a flame as violent, as relentless, as fierce, as that which had already made him the slave of Lady Cecilia Harborough. But was he this time to become a slave or a victim?

He sat down and reasoned with himself. He endeavoured to crush the feelings of licentiousness which had been re-awakened in his heart.

But as vainly might he have endeavoured to lull the Maelstroom with a breath, or to subdue the rage of Vesuvius with a drop of water!

Such was his frame of mind, when an old woman sought his presence in the evening.

He had made it a rule, throughout his career, never to be difficult of access to those who wished to see him; and now that he felt the fabric of his fair fame to be tottering upon the verge of a precipice, he was not inclined to deviate from any of those outward forms which had aided in the consecration of his renown. He accordingly ordered his house keeper to admit the old woman to his presence.

The instant a hag, with a horribly wrinkled countenance, entered his study, he started—for that repulsive face was not altogether unknown to him.

Then, in another moment, he remembered that he had once seen her standing at the door of Lady Cecilia Harborough's abode in Tavistock Square; and that the glance which she had thrown upon him, on that occasion had for an instant struck him with sinister foreboding.

The old woman seated herself, and, without any preamble, said: "A man of great learning like you, reverend sir, cannot be otherwise than a man of great taste. This conviction has emboldened me to call upon you in preference to any other, relative to a most perfect work of art which fortune has thrown in my way."

Reginald gazed upon the old woman in speechless astonishment: her mysterious—indeed, incomprehensible language, induced him to believe that she was some unfortunate creature bereaved of her right senses.

"Listen to me for a few minutes, reverend sir," continued the hag, "and I will explain my meaning to you. Your charity, as well as your taste, is about to be appealed to."

"Speak," said the clergyman, somewhat impatiently, for he longed to be left alone again with his reflections, which had just assumed a most voluptuous complexion when his privacy was thus intruded upon.

"I will not detain you long—I will not detain you long," cried the old hag. "You must know, reverend sir, that a foreign sculptor—a poor Italian—came some few months ago to lodge at my humble dwelling. He was in the deepest distress, and had not the means to procure either marble or tools. I am very poor—very poor, myself, sir; but I could not see a fellow-creature starving. I bought him marble—and I bought him tools. He went to work, toiling day and night almost unweariedly; and a week ago he put the finishing stroke to the statue of a nymph. His art has enabled him, by means of colour, to give a life-like appearance to that admirable work of art; so that as you contemplate it, it seems to you as if the eyes were animated, the lips breathed, and the bosom rose and sank with respiration."

"And your artist is, no doubt, anxious to dispose of his statue?" said the rector.

"Precisely so," answered the hag. "I do not profess to be a judge myself; but I can speak of the effect which it produced upon me.

When I saw it finished—standing upon its pedestal—I was about to address it as a living being."

"The effect must, then, be indeed striking," observed Reginald, with the voluptuous train of whose ideas this picture was well adapted to associate.

"Were you to judge for yourself, reverend sir," said the old hag, "you would find that I have not overrated the perfection of this masterpiece. The sculptor demands but a small price for his statue: it would be a charity were you to purchase it yourself, or recommend one of your friends to do so."

"When and where could I see this matchless work of art?" asked Reginald, whose curiosity was now strangely excited.

"At my own humble dwelling in Golden Lane is this statue concealed," replied the horrible old hag; "and no mortal eyes, save the sculptor's and mine own, have yet glanced upon it. If you will accompany me now, you can inspect it without delay."

Reginald referred to his watch, and found that it was past nine o'clock. The evening was pitch dark; and he did not, therefore, dread being seen in the company of that hideous old woman. Besides, even if he were—was he not often summoned at all hours to attend upon the last moments of some dying sinner?

"I will proceed with you at once to your abode," said the rector, after a few moments' hesitation.

"And you will do well," answered the hag; "for I can promise you a fine treat in what you are about to see."

While the rector stepped aside to put on his cloak and hat, a strange smile curled the lips of the wrinkled harridan; but as Reginald again turned towards her, her countenance instantly resumed its wonted composure.

They then went out together.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE STATUE.

THE old woman led the way at a rapid pace towards Golden Lane, the rector following her at a little distance.

Although there was nothing improbable in the tale which the hag had told him, and nothing improper in the step which he was taking,—nevertheless he experienced a vague and indefinable idea of doing wrong.

Something told him that he ought to retreat; and at the same time a superior influence urged him onward.

And, therefore, he followed the old woman.

The wrinkled creature pursued her way, and at length turned into the dark and dirty court with which the reader is already well acquainted.

"This is a strange place, you will say," observed the old woman, as she pushed open the door of one of the houses in that court, —"this is a strange place to contain such a treasure."

"And for that reason the treasure should not long be allowed to remain here," answered the clergyman.

The hag chuckled:—the sound was between a hollow laugh and a death-rattle; and it seemed horrible to the ears of Reginald Tracy.

The old woman then slowly ascended the narrow and dark staircase, until she reached the landing, where she drew a key from her pocket, and leisurely applied it to the lock of a door.

She fumbled about so long with the key, muttering to herself all the while, that Reginald thought she would never open the door, and he offered to assist her.

But at that moment the key turned in the lock, and the door was slowly opened.

The hag beckoned the rector to follow her; and he found himself in a tolerably large room, decently furnished, and with an excellent fire burning in the grate.

There were no candles lighted; nor did the hag offer to provide any;—but the contents of the apartment were plainly visible by means of the strong glare of the fire.

Heavy curtains of a dark colour covered the windows: the floor was carpeted; the chain and tables were of plain but solid material; and a large mirror stood over the mantel.

At the farther end of the room was a second door, which was now closed, but evidently communicated with an inner chamber.

"I gave the poor artist the best rooms in my house," observed the hag, as she placed a chair near the fire for the rector. "The statue stands in the adjoining chamber; you can inspect it at once, while I——"

She mumbled the remainder of the sentence in such a way that it was wholly unintelligible to the rector, and then left the room.

For a few minutes Reginald stood before the fire, uncertain what course to pursue. He now began to think that the entire proceeding was somewhat extraordinary; and the singular manner in which the old hag had left him, inspired him with a feeling not entirely free from alarm.

But for what purpose could he have been inveigled thither, if it were not really to behold the marvellous statue? and, perhaps, after, all, the old woman had only left him in order to fetch the candles or to summon the artist? Moreover, had she not informed him that the statue was in the next room, and that he might inspect it at once? It was therefore easy to satisfy himself whether he had been deceived or not.

Ashamed of his transient fears, he threw off his hat and cloak, and advanced towards the door communicating with the inner chamber.

Even then he hesitated for a minute as his fingers grasped the handle; but, at length, he boldly entered the room.

The moment the door was thrown open, he perceived by the light of the fire which burned in the front apartment, that the inner one was a small and comfortably fitted-up bed-chamber. It was involved in a more than semi-obscurity; but not to such an extent as to conceal from Reginald Tracy's penetrating glance the semblance of a female form standing upon a low pedestal in the most remote corner of the room.

"I am not then deceived!" he exclaimed aloud, as he advanced nearer towards the statue.

By this time his eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity of the chamber, into which the glimmer of the fire threw a faint but mellowed light. Still, in somewhat bold relief, against the dark wall, stood the object of his interest,—seeming a beautiful model of a female form, the colouring of which was that of life. It was naked to the middle; the arms were gracefully rounded; and one hand sustained the falling drapery which, being also coloured, produced upon the mind of the beholder the effect of real garments.

Lost in wonder at the success with which the sculptor had performed his work,—and experiencing feelings of a soft and voluptuous nature,—Reginald drew closer to the statue. At that moment the light of the fire played upon its countenance; and it seemed to him as if the lips moved with a faint smile. Then, how was his surprise increased, when the conviction flashed to his mind that the face he was gazing upon was well known to him!

"O Cecilia, Cecilia!" he ejaculated aloud: "hast thou sent thy statue hither to compel me to fall at its feet and worship the senseless stone, while thou—the sweet original—art elsewhere, speculating perhaps upon the emotions which this phantasmagorian

sport was calculated to conjure up within me! Ah! Cecilia, if thou wast resolved to subdue me once more—if thou couldst not rest until I became thy slave again,—oh! why not have invited me to meet thine own sweet self, instead of this speechless, motionless, passionless image,—a counterpart of thee only in external loveliness! Yes—there it is perfect:—the hair—the brow—the eyes—the mouth—— Heavens! those lips seem to smile once more; those eyes sparkle with real fire! Cecilia—Cecilia—"

And Reginald Tracy was afraid—he scarcely knew wherefore: the entire adventure of the evening appeared to be a dream.

"Yes—yes!" he suddenly exclaimed, after having steadfastly contemplated the form before him for some moments,—standing at a distance of only three or four paces,—afraid to advance nearer, unwilling to retreat altogether,—"yes!" he exclaimed, "there is something more than mere senseless marble here! The eyes shoot fire—the lips smile—the bosom heaves—— Oh! Cecilia—Cecilia, it is yourself!"

As he spoke he rushed forward: the statue burst from chill marble into warmth and life;—it was indeed the beauteous but wily Cecilia—who returned his embrace and hung around his neck;—and the rector was again subdued—again enslaved!

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"And you will pardon me for the little stratagem which I adopted to bring you back to my arms?" said Cecilia.

"How can I do otherwise than pardon you?" murmured the rector, whose licentious soul was occupied only with gross delights, and who would at that moment have dared exposure and disgrace rather than tear himself away from the syren on whose bosom his head was pillowed. "Oh! Cecilia, I have had a violent struggle with my feelings; but I shall now contend against them no more. No! from this instant I abandon all hope of empire—all wish for dominion over myself: I yield myself up to the pleasures of love and to thee! Sweet Cecilia, thou hast taught me how ineffable is the bliss which mortals may taste in this world;—and after all, the sure present is preferable to the uncertain future!"

"Reginald—beloved Reginald, didst thou imagine that I would resign thee so easily as thou wouldst have resigned me!" said Lady Cecilia. "Oh! you know not the heart of woman! There were but two alternatives for me—to bring you back, or to avenge myself on you."

"Avenge yourself!" exclaimed Reginald, starting.

"Yes," replied the wily creature, purposely adopting this discourse in order to enchain her lover in future; "a woman who fondly—madly loves, as I love, Reginald—will not so willingly part with the object of her affection! What,—could you suppose that I would surrender myself to you one day to be abandoned the next? No—never, never would I permit myself to be made the victim of a caprice! You wrote to me to implore me not to seek to see you again: I requested one last interview—you refused me my demand! Then I smarted sorely; but I said to myself, '*He loves me*'; and I added, '*I love him also*.' I accordingly resolved to attempt one grand effort to draw the anchorite from his cell. Chance threw in my way the old woman whom I sent to you, and in whose house we now are ——"

"And what chance was that?" demanded Reginald, who entertained a strong and yet unaccountable aversion for that old hag.

"I will tell you all, dearest Reginald," answered Cecilia. "The evening after I received your cruel note desiring that all might end between us, I was going out with the intention of calling upon *you*—yes, of throwing myself at your feet——"

"Imprudent Cecilia!" murmured the rector, imprinting a kiss upon her lips.

"Yes—I was on the point of leaving my own abode to seek yours," continued Cecilia, "when I heard a hoarse and ominous voice muttering behind me. I looked round, and perceived that old wretch. She smiled—or rather, leered significantly, and said, '*Happy, happy lady—to enjoy the rector of Saint David's love!*'"

"She said *that*!" cried Reginald. "How could she divine what passed between us?"

"She has since explained to me how she one evening saw you leave my house—with a certain wildness in your manner——"

"True! true!" ejaculated the rector; "and the mind of the old woman being perhaps naturally evil, she conceived evil of others on the faintest suspicion."

"Exactly," answered Cecilia. "When she accosted me in that manner, I was so wretched, so miserable at the idea of being separated from you——"

"Sweetest creature! I was, indeed, ungrateful in return for so much love!"

"I was so unhappy that I was even glad to speak of thee to such a wretch as that old creature. Then she uttered words of consolation, and we talked together—talked for an hour in the cold, damp street——"

"Poor Cecilia!" murmured Reginald.

"What would I not dare for you?" said the wily woman, pressing him warmly in her snowy arms. "And now you can guess the rest—how the old woman proposed that some stratagem should be invented to bring the recreant back to my arms——"

"And you have thus blindly confided yourself—not only *your* secret, but *mine* also—to a perfect stranger? O, Cecilia—was this prudent?" exclaimed Reginald in alarm.

"Does love know prudence?" asked the lady. "But fear not: gold will seal the lips of our confidant; and better is it for her obscure dwelling to be the scene of our loves than for our caresses to be exchanged at my abode, where the intrusion of a servant at any moment——"

"True!" interrupted Reginald. "And yet upon what a fearful abyss does my reputation now seem to tremble!"

"*Yours!*" ejaculated Lady Cecilia, almost scornfully,—for she was resolved to put an end to these repinings on the part of her lover: "Oh! can you be so selfish as to think only of yourself? Should you be detected, you are ruined only in your profession, and not as a man—for with the man there is no dishonour in illicit love;—but if I be detected, am I not lost as a wife, and as a woman? Will not all the wrath of an avenging society light upon me? For it is upon us—upon poor woman—that contumely, and shame, and disgrace

fall!"

"Forgive me, dearest Cecilia," murmured the rector, clasping the frail beauty in his arms. "I have been unjust to you—I have thought only of myself, unmindful of the immense sacrifice that is made by thee! But, forgive me, I say—and never again shall the expression of my cowardly alarms—my egotistical terrors impair our happiness! I love you—I love you, my Cecilia: Oh! heaven knows how sincerely—how madly I love you!"

"And you will love me always?" whispered Cecilia.

"Always! for ever—and ever!" answered the rector, now intoxicated—delirious with joy, and reckless of all consequences.

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The barrier was now completely broken down; and the rector gave way to the violence of the passion which hurried him along.

That man, so full of vigour, and in the prime of his physical strength, abandoned himself without restraint to the fury of those desires which burnt the more madly—the more wildly, from having been so long pent-up.

Day after day did he meet his guilty paramour; and on each occasion did he reflect less upon the necessity of caution. He passed hours and hours together with her at her abode; and at length he ventured to receive her at his own residence, when his housekeeper had retired to rest.

But he did not neglect his professional duties on the Sabbath;—and he now became an accomplished hypocrite. He ascended the pulpit as usual, and charmed thousands with his discourse as heretofore. Indeed his eloquence improved, for the simulated earnestness which displaced the tone of heart-felt conviction that he had once experienced, seemed more impassioned, and was more impressive than the natural ebullition of his feelings.

Thus as he progressed in the ways of vice, his reputation increased in sanctity.

But the moment he escaped from the duties of his profession, he flew to the arms of her who had seduced him from his career of purity; and so infatuated was he with her who had been his tutoress in the ways of amorous pleasure, that he joyfully placed his purse at the disposal of her extravagance.

Thus was Lady Cecilia triumphant in all points with regard to the once immaculate, but now sensual and voluptuous rector of Saint David's.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

LET us now return to the Rattlesnake, whom we left in the act of flying from the pursuit which she knew would be undertaken in respect to her by the Resurrection Man.

Having bade farewell to Mrs. Chichester at Cambridge Heath, Margaret Flathers, with her well-filled bag under her arm, hastened along the road leading to Hackney.

She cared not which direction the pursued, provided she placed a considerable distance between herself and London; for so terrible was the dread under which she laboured from her knowledge of the desperate character and profound cunning of the Resurrection Man, that she conceived it to be impossible for her to be safe so long as she was within even a wide circuit of the great metropolis.

Having passed through Hackney, she speedily left the main road, and struck at random across the fields, careful only to pursue a course which she felt convinced must remove her farther and further from London.

Unweariedly for two long hours did she hurry on her way, until she fell, overcome with weariness, beneath a large tree, whose gigantic leafless boughs creaked ominously in the darkness over her head.

The night was fearfully cold—the grass was damp—and the wind moaned gloomily through the trees.

The Rattlesnake was hungry and thirsty; but she had not food nor drink to satisfy the cravings of nature. In that solitude,—without a light gleaming through the obscurity as a beacon of hospitality,—she felt that her gold was then and there no better to her than the cold soil upon which she rested her weary limbs.

At length, worn out by fatigue and want, she fell asleep.

When she awoke the sun was shining.

But where was she?

Close at hand burnt a blazing fire, fed with wood and turf, and sending up a dense smoke into the fine frosty air. To an iron rod, fastened horizontally to two upright stakes, was suspended a huge caldron, the bubbling of which reached her ears, and the savour of whose contents was wafted most agreeably to her nostrils.

Grouped around the fire, and anxiously watching the culinary process, were two women, four men, and a boy.

Two of the men were not characterised by that swarthy complexion and those black elf-locks which distinguished their two male companions, the women, and the boy.

Of the two man thus especially alluded to, as not being of the gipsy race, to which their companions evidently belonged,—the first was about forty years of age and possessed a herculean form. His countenance was weather-beaten and indicated the endurance of great hardship: indeed, he had been abroad to far-off climes, and had gone through privations of an almost incredible nature. He was, however, taciturn and reserved, and ever teemed brooding upon some secret grief or absorbing sentiment of a darker nature: nevertheless, the little he had chosen to tell his present companions relative to his former history had obtained for him the name of the *Traveller*; and by no other appellation was he known amongst them.

The other man, whose complexion proclaimed him not to be of the Egyptian race, was apparently verging towards thirty; and, although slight, he was well-built and uncommonly active. His name will transpire presently.

The elder of the two male gipsies was a man of nearly eighty years of age. His hair was as white as driven snow; and his bald head was protected from the cold wind by only a thin faded green silk skull-cap. His beard, as white as his hair, hung down over his breast, and formed a strange contrast with his swarthy countenance and piercing black eyes, the fires of which were not dimmed with age. This individual was the King of the Gipsies, and rejoiced in the assumed name of Zingary.

The other male gipsy was the King's son, and was a fine tall handsome fellow of about thirty-five, dark as a Spaniard, and with fine Roman features.

The two women were also very discrepant in respect to age: one was nearly sixty, and was the Queen of the Gipsies, her assumed name being Aischa: the other was a pretty brunette, with fine laughing eyes and brilliant teeth, and was the wife of Morcar, the King's son. Her name was Eva; and she was the mother of the boy before alluded to, and who was between eight and nine years old.

We have thought it as well to state all these particulars at once in order to avoid confusion; although the Rattlesnake was not immediately aware of them.

When the Rattlesnake awoke up and surveyed this strange groups, she instinctively felt for her bag of gold; and a scream of dismay escaped her lips when she perceived that it was gone.

A loud burst of laughter emanated from the gipsies,—for by this general name we shall denominate the band, although two members of it were not of the race;—and the fair-complexioned man, whose name we have not yet stated, exclaimed, "Don't alarm yourself, my dear young woman: we have banked the rag[86] for fear that a buzman[87] should have nabbed you with it in your possession. But you shall have your reg'lars out of it, mind, whenever you want to pursue your way. Only, as you've happened to trespass upon the dominions of his high mightiness King Zingary, you must pay toll."

While this individual was speaking, the Rattlesnake, who had first been struck by the tone of his voice, considered him with great attention, and seemed to forget the loss she had sustained in the interest with which she contemplated the person addressing her.

At length, when he had ceased to speak, she started from the ground, advanced towards him, and exclaimed in an excited tone, "Have not you and I met before?"

"Not unlikely, my dear," was the reply. "Perhaps under the screw[88]—or in the Holy Land,[89] which I visit from time to time—or else in the bottom of a coal-hell[90] in the county of Stafford."

"It is! it is!" ejaculated the Rattlesnake, ready to spring towards him, and throw her arms around his neck. "Don't you remember me now?"

"Remember you?" repeated the man slowly; and he gazed upon the Rattlesnake's countenance for some moments;—then, as if a sudden light dawned in upon him, he started from the ground in his turn, crying, "May I never drink rum slim[91] again if it isn't my old flame, Meg Flathers!"

And they flew into each other's arms.

"Your Majesty," said Skilligalee,—for this was the individual whose name we for a moment suppressed,—"Your Majesty," he exclaimed, when this embrace was over, "allow me to present to you my wife, the lovely and accomplished Margaret Flathers."

"She is welcome," said Zingary gravely. "Young woman, sit down and be welcome. We ask no questions whether you are our comrade's splice[92] or not: it is enough for us that he acknowledges you as such. Aischa—welcome a daughter; Eva—greet a sister."

The old and the young gipsy women advanced towards the Rattlesnake and took each a hand.

"I welcome you, daughter," said Aischa.

"I greet you, sister," said Eva.

They then each kissed her forehead, and resumed their seats close by the fire.

"And I greet you too, my gal," exclaimed Morcar, thrusting out his large muscular hand, and giving that of the Rattlesnake a friendly squeeze.

"And now sit down," said the King, "and moisten your chaffer."[93]

"Ah! do," cried Morcar; "for you must want it after sleeping underneath that tree on the top of the hill, exposed to the cold wind and damp."

This observation led the Rattlesnake to cast a glance around her; and she found that the gipsy-camp was at the bottom of a deep valley, on the brow of which stood the tree to which the King's son pointed, and beneath which she had sunk exhausted on the preceding night.

Meantime Skilligalee had visited a covered van, which stood at a little distance, and near which an old horse was quietly munching the contents of a capacious nose-bag; and in a few moments he returned, bearing with him a large stone bottle that might have held two gallons of liquor.

From his pocket he produced a small horn-cup and, pouring forth a bumper of rum, he handed it to the queen.

"No—there first," laconically said Aischa, pointing towards the Rattlesnake, who was accordingly compelled to drain the horn before her majesty.

"Good—isn't it?" asked Skilligalee, with a sly wink.

"I felt very cold—and it has revived me," replied the Rattlesnake.

"And the contents of that pot will put you right altogether," said Skilligalee, pointing to the caldron that was simmering over the fire. "Beg pardon, majesty," he added, turning towards the queen, and pouring forth another dram.

Aischa drank the contents of the horn-cup without winking; and Skilligalee proceeded to do the honours of the bottle to the rest of the company.

Having served the king, Eva, and Morcar, he approached the Traveller, who had sat a silent spectator of all that passed.

"Now, friend, your turn is come."

"Thank you," said the man, drily; and having tossed off the liquor, he muttered, grinding his teeth savagely, "And some one else's turn must come too, sooner or later."

"Always brooding upon the same thing," exclaimed the laughing, light-hearted Skilligalee.

"And if you had been served by a villain as I was," returned the Traveller, brutally, "you would long for the time to come to settle up accounts with him. Thank my stars! we shall be in London to-morrow, and then—then——"

The remainder of the man's words were lost in mutterings, which, to judge by the terrific workings of his countenance, the violence with which he ground his teeth, and the convulsive rage indicated by the manner in which he clenched his fist, must have been a direful portent.

But a few words which he had uttered, struck sudden dismay to the heart of the Rattlesnake.

"Are you going to London?" she whispered, in a tone of alarm, to Skilligalee, who had now resumed his seat by her side.

"Ah! indeed are we, my dear," was the reply. "The royal palace in the Holy Land is prepared for our reception; and this night at nine o'clock does his majesty make his triumphant entry, disguised as a timber-merchant,[94] into that part of his dominions."

"To London!" gasped the Rattlesnake. "Then—then—I cannot accompany you—I——"

"What have you to fear?" demanded Skilligalee. "Have you not me to defend you individually, and his majesty's protection to shield you generally?"

"No—no," returned Margaret Flathers; "I cannot—will not return to London. I hate the place—I detest it—I abhor it! I am not even now as far from it as I could wish—not half."

"Far from it?" ejaculated Skilligalee, with a merry laugh. "Why, you can almost hear the sounds of the cabs and hackney-coaches

where we are now."

"What!" cried Margaret. "How far are we from London? tell me—speak!"

"When you are on the top of that place where I found you sleeping early this morning," answered Skilligalee, "you can see Hornsey Wood on the next hill—about two miles off."

"My God! then in spite of all my care last night, I must have gone a strange round," said Margaret, speaking rather to herself than to her companion.

"Ah! I see how it is, Meg," observed Skilligalee; "you are in trouble about that gold. Well—never mind, old gal—so much the more reason for me to protect you. Now I tell you what it is: not all the buzmen in London can find you out at our crib in the Holy Land; and so you shall come along with us, and you shall keep in doors the whole time: we'll take care of you. What do you think of that?"

"Skilligalee," whispered Margaret, "I am not afraid of the police: they don't trouble themselves about me. But there is a certain man that seeks my life——"

"Oh! if that's all," interrupted her companion, "make yourself perfectly easy. You don't know yet what defences and fortifications the king has got to his palace: a regiment of swaddles[95] would never storm it, or take it by surprise."

"And you really think that I shall be safe?" asked the Rattlesnake, hesitating; for these assurances of protection began to please her more than the idea of being compelled to wander alone about the country.

"Think!" cried Skilligalee, "I don't think—I'm certain. Trust to me—and all will be right. Besides, do you not pay toll to his majesty? and where can you find a more powerful protector than King Zingary? You will see what he can do, when once we arrive at the palace in the Holy Land."

"But—but—will he keep all my gold?" asked the Rattlesnake, hesitatingly.

"Not all, my dear," answered Skilligalee. "One third goes to the Box;[96] another third to be divided amongst all us here who picked you up; and the other remains at your own disposal. Are you content?"

"Quite," said the Rattlesnake, knowing full well that it was no use to remonstrate, and not unwilling, moreover, to pay handsomely for the protection promised to her.

While this conversation took place between the Rattlesnake and Skilligalee, the two women had prepared the repast. The king had in the meantime amused himself with what, in his own lingo, he termed "cocking a broseley;"[97]—the boy fetched the platters, knives, forks, spoons, and other articles necessary for the meal, from the van;—Morcar went to look after the horse;—and the Traveller was buried in a profound reverie. Thus the discourse of Margaret Flathers and her companion was as private and unrestrained as if no one had been by.

And now the immediate vicinity of the fire presented an animated and even comfortable appearance. Upon a huge earthenware dish was piled a stew, which sent forth a most inviting odour. A goose, a sucking-pig, three fowls, a couple of rabbits, and an immense quantity of vegetables, greeted the eye and pleased the olfactory nerve; and a couple of jolly brown quartern loaves flanked the feast. Every guest was furnished with a horn snicker:[98] salt, pepper, and mustard were also provided, to give a zest to the food. Then Skilligalee paid another visit to the van,—for he, it appears, was butler in ordinary to his Majesty King Zingary,—and returned laden with a second enormous bottle, filled to the bung with the very best malt liquor that ever aided to immortalise Barclay and Perkins.

"All is ready," said Eva, in a respectful manner to her father-in-law, the King.

Zingary stroked down his beard in a majestic manner, murmured a grace in a language totally incomprehensible to the Rattlesnake, and then helped himself to a portion of the mess.

This was the signal for the attack; and Margaret Flathers was by no means sorry to receive upon her platter, from the gallant and attentive Skilligalee, a good proportion of the savoury comestibles.

The Traveller did his duty in respect to the repast; but he seldom joined in the gay discourse which seasoned it, apparently brooding over the one absorbing idea of vengeance, which now seemed to constitute the only object for which that man lived.

Margaret Flathers could not help noticing the great respect which all present paid to the King and Queen of the Gipsies. Their majesties joined familiarly in the conversation; and it was evident from their remarks, especially those of Zingary, that they had travelled over every inch of Great Britain, not a crevice or corner of which was unknown to them. Margaret also gathered from their discourse that they had visited foreign countries in their youth; and Zingary boasted more than once of the intimate terms upon which he stood with the sovereigns of the Gipsies of Spain and Bohemia.

Morcar listened to his father with deep attention and marked respect; and expressed, with deference, his own opinions upon the various topics of discourse. Eva spoke little, but she was an interested listener; and from time to time she bestowed a caress upon her boy, or exchanged a glance or a smile of affection with her husband.

In a word, the members of the royal family of the gipsies appeared to exist upon the most comfortable terms with each other.

When the meal was over, Skilligalee beckoned Margaret Flathers aside, and said, "We will go and seat ourselves under the brow of yonder hill, and pass an hour in conversation. I have much to tell you, and you must have something to tell me."

"I have—I have indeed!" exclaimed Margaret, as she accompanied Skilligalee to the spot indicated, where they seated themselves on some large blocks of wood that lay there half buried in the soil.

"I have often read and heard of the King of the Gipsies," said Margaret; "but I always imagined that he was a fabulous character. Is that old man yonder really the King; or has he only assumed the distinction by way of amusement?"

"He is as much the sovereign of the gipsies, Margaret," answered Skilligalee, with unusual solemnity, "as Victoria is the Queen of England; and more so, for the whole tribe pays him a blind and implicit obedience."

"How came the king and his family with such strange names as those by which I heard them call each other?" inquired the

Rattlesnake.

"The Gipsies in England are of two distinct races, although united under one ruler," replied Skilligalee. "They are Egyptian and Bohemian, and the royal family always adopts names likely to please both parties: *Zingary* and *Aischa* are, amongst the gipsies, supposed to be Egyptian names; *Morcar* and *Eva* are held as Bohemian. The parents who have Egyptian names, give Bohemian ones to their children; so that the rulers of the tribe are alternately looked upon as Egyptian and Bohemian."

"Then Morcar and Eva will be king and queen at the death of Zingary?" said the Rattlesnake.

"Just so," replied Skilligalee.

"Now tell me, who is that moody, melancholy, scowling fellow that you call the Traveller?" continued Margaret.

"We know but little of him," was the answer. "He joined us—or rather, we picked him up in a state of starvation, a few miles from Liverpool, about six weeks or two months ago; and the king has allowed him to tramp with us, because he is without friends or money. Moreover, he was anxious to get to London; and, for some reason or other, he is afraid to be seen on the high-roads, or in the towns and villages. So our wandering life just suited his convenience; and he feels himself safe in our company. He seldom speaks about his own affairs; but he has said enough to enable us to understand that he has suffered deeply in consequence of the treachery of some person in whom he had put confidence, or who was his pal in former times; and he is going up to London with the hope of finding out his enemy. He seems a desperate fellow; and I should not like to be the person that has offended him."

"He is not a gipsy?" said Margaret, interrogatively.

"No—not a whit more than myself," answered Skilligalee; "and I dare say he will leave us in London. As he was with us when we banked your rag, he will have his reg'lars, and that will set him up."

"And you have no idea what he has been, or who he is?" inquired the Rattlesnake.

"We never ask questions, Meg; we listen to all that is told us, but we never seek to pry into secrets. The king was quite contented with seeing your well filled bag; but if you remained in his company for a hundred years from this time, he would never ask you how you came by it. All impertinent curiosity is against the laws of the Zingarees."

"Zingarees! who are they?" exclaimed the Rattlesnake.

"The Gipsies—with another name—that's all, Meg," replied Skilligalee. "But I was telling you about the man that we call the Traveller. When his heart has been the least thing warmed with sluicing his bolt[99] and cocking his broseley, he has told us strange stories of foreign countries, so that even old Zingary, who has travelled a good deal, has turned up the whites of his eyes. But there is no doubt that the sulky stranger has seen much, and gone through much also. He talks of the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn, and Australia, and heaven only knows what distant places, almost as well as you and I should about the coal-hells in Staffordshire."

"And does he mean to kill the man that has offended him?" demanded the Rattlesnake.

"I'll warrant he does," was the answer; "for all that he possessed in the world, when we picked him up nearly frozen to death in a pit where he had crept for shelter,—all that he possessed besides his rags, was a long dagger, which he calls a poniard: it is as bright as silver, and so flexible that you can bend it double without breaking it. So determined is he to bury it some half dozen inches in his enemy's heart, that he wouldn't even sell it, it appears, when famishing for a morsel of bread."

"He seems a desperate-looking fellow," observed the Rattlesnake. "I never beard of so terrible a man—except one; and hell doesn't contain a greater demon than him. But I will tell you all about that another time: you must answer me my questions first."

"Oh! of course," exclaimed Skilligalee, with a merry laugh; "because you are the lady, and I am the gentleman. What else do you want to know?"

"Why, the king is going up to London?"

"He always does at this season of the year, to meet the chiefs of the different districts, and settle a good deal of business. But you will see all about it when once we get up into the Holy Land—that is, if you've made up your mind to go with us."

"I have," answered the Rattlesnake. "And now tell me all that has happened to you since we parted in that hurried manner—you know how."

"Well—I will," cried Skilligalee: "so listen attentively, as all story-tellers say."

Then, clearing his throat with a loud hem, he commenced his narrative in the following manner.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

SKILLIGALEE'S HISTORY.

"You remember the day we parted, after having lived together for nearly six months. I gave you two guineas to find your way up to London, where I recommended you to proceed to seek your fortune; and I told you that I had as much left for myself, to help me to get away from a part of the country where the numerous burglaries I had committed had put all the constables on the alert after me. But in reality I had but two or three shillings remaining in my pocket. I knew that if I told you the real state of my finances, you would not accept so much as I had given you; but I was afraid that you might be implicated in my difficulties, and so I was determined that you should have sufficient to convey you clear away from Staffordshire.

"Well, when we parted, I walked along the road leading away from the village, as disconsolate as might be; and yet you know that I am not naturally of a very mournful disposition. It was nine o'clock in the evening, if you remember, when I put you into the waggon that was to take you to London. I went on until I reached a lonely public-house, by the way-side. It was then eleven o'clock; and I was both tired and hungry. I entered the *Three Compasses* (which was the sign of the public-house), and sat down in the parlour. There was another traveller there—a short stout man, with a very red face, and who was committing desperate havoc upon a large cheese and loaf, from which he, however, occasionally diverted his attention, in order to pay his respects to a pot of porter. I ordered some refreshment, and inquired if I could be accommodated with a bed. The old widow woman who kept the place, said that the only bed she had to spare was already engaged by the gentleman then at supper, but that I might sleep in the hay-loft if I chose. Thereupon the red-faced man gave a long stare at me, shrugged his shoulders, and went on eating. I suppose that my appearance was not respectable enough to induce him to resign half of his bed for my accommodation; and, indeed, I was dreadfully shabby—almost in rags, as you may well remember. So I accepted the offer of the hay-loft; and retired to that place as soon as I had finished my supper.

"But as I clambered up the ladder to my roosting-place, my unfortunate trousers caught a nail; and one leg was split completely down to the foot. I was now in a most wretched dilemma, not knowing how I should contrive to mend my luckless inexpressibles. But I soon fell asleep, in spite of my unpleasant reflections; and when I awoke, the dawn of the mild spring morning was just breaking. I examined my garment, and was reduced to despair at its appearance. At length I resolved to dress myself, go down stairs, borrow a needle and thread of the old woman, and be my own tailor. When I descended into the yard, I found a lad busily employed in cleaning a pair of boots, while a pair of trousers lay upon a bench, neatly folded up, having evidently gone through the process of brushing. I immediately recognised the stout drab pantaloons which the red-faced man wore on the preceding evening; and my eyes dwelt longingly upon them. In reply to my questions, the boy said that his grandmother (the old widow who kept the public-house) was not up yet, but that he could get me a needle and thread, as he knew where she kept her work-bag. I begged him to do so; and he very obligingly went into the house for that purpose.

"The moment he had disappeared I snatched up the red-faced man's drab trousers in one hand, and his excellent pair of bluchers in the other: then, without waiting to look behind me, I jumped over the fence which separated the stable-yard from the fields, and was speedily scampering across the open country as fast as my legs would carry me. When I had run about a mile, I reached a little grove, situated on the bank of a stream: and there I halted.

"The red-faced gentleman's boots were a wonderful improvement upon my old broken shoes; but his pantaloons fitted somewhat awkwardly, being a world too wide round the waist, and a foot too short in the legs. However, they were better than my old tattered unmentionables, and I could not complain that they were dear!

"I pursued my way along the banks of the stream until past mid-day, when I came to a village, where I halted at a public-house to take some refreshment. My two or three shillings were still unchanged, because I had not paid a single penny for my entertainment at the *Three Compasses*. While I sate enjoying my bread and cheese and beer, I revolved in my mind various plans to better my condition. But my attention was speedily averted from that topic to the conversation of two old men, who were sitting at another table in the tap-room.

"'So poor old Joe Dobbin's scapegrace nephew is coming home at last?' said one.—'Yea,' replied the other: 'he has been seeking his fortune, as a sailor, all over the world, for the last ten years; and now that he hasn't a penny, and is a-weary of a sea-faring life, he has written to say that he is coming home to his poor old blind uncle.'—'Ah! Tom Tittlebat has been a wild 'un in his day, I'll answer for it,' said the first old man. 'But his uncle seems quite delighted at the idea of seeing him again,' observed the other old fellow.—'He says that he shall persuade upon Tom to stay at home and take care of him; and then he'll be able to turn away cross old Margery, who robs him and ill-treats him in a shameful manner.'

"I devoured every word of this conversation; and my mind was instantly made up. I accordingly joined in the discourse, called for some ale, of which I made the two old fellows partake, and so artfully pumped them that in half an hour I knew all about old blind Dobbin and his graceless nephew Tom Tittlebat, without having appeared even to ask a single question concerning them. At length, when I had my lesson complete. I burst out into a hearty laugh, and cried out, 'What, Master Buckley, don't you remember me then? and you, good Master Dottings, am I quite a stranger to *you* too?' The old men stared; and then, with another hearty laugh I boldly announced myself to be Tom Tittlebat. You should have seen the old fellows—how glad they were! One swore that he had all along suspected who I was; and the other vowed that my features were unchanged since he last saw me, although my face was a little tanned! Then I called for more ale, and plied the old boys well, so that they might help to favour the imposture which I meditated.

"Away we went to the cottage inhabited by old Dobbin, my two aged companions really showing me the way, while I pretended to be quite familiar with it. The moment we came in sight of my alleged uncle's residence, old Buckley and Dottings (whose names I had found out from their own discourse with me) hobbled forward, exclaiming, 'Here's the prodigal returned, Brother Dobbin!'—'Kill the fatted calf, Brother Dobbin!' And in a few moments I was in my alleged uncle's arms.

"Then the fatted calf was indeed killed. Dame Margery, the old man's housekeeper, was compelled to bustle about to prepare a copious supper—a duty which she performed with a very bad grace, and with sundry suspicious leers and side-glances towards me. I took no notice of her ill-humour, but rattled away about my adventures by sea and land till the three old men were quite astounded at the marvellous things I had seen and the tremendous perils that I had escaped. Buckley and Dottings were invited to stay to supper; and a merry meal we had. When the things were cleared away, I undertook to brew the punch, assuring the old folks that the compound would be made according to a recipe which I had obtained from the king of the Inaccessible Islands.

"Well, the punch was made; and there it stood steaming in an enormous bowl upon the table. I was determined to enjoy myself; for I purposed to pack up every thing portable during the night and decamp before dawn, for fear that the rightful nephew should return before I had turned my trick to advantage. So I filled the tumblers, and plied the punch to such an extent that even old Margery's ill-humour was overcome by the gaiety of the scene; and she consented to sit down and join us.

"I was just in the middle of a most exciting account of a conflict which I had with a shark at the South Pole, when a loud knock at the door resounded through the house. Margery hastened to obey the summons; and Old Dobbin observed, 'I shouldn't be surprised if this was my cousin George, for I wrote to him the day before yesterday to say that my nephew Tom was coming home, and invited him down to pass a week or so on the happy occasion.' I heard this remark; but the punch had produced such an effect upon me, that I felt no uneasiness. I thought I should be able to get over cousin George as easily as I had done Uncle Dobbin; and so I amused myself by filling the glasses round from the second bowl, which had only just been mixed.

"Meantime Dame Margery, having answered the door, returned, exclaiming, 'It be Master George,' and followed by a person whom her tall gaunt form in some measure hid from me until they were both close to the table. Then what a dreadful scene took place! In cousin George, to my horror and dismay, I beheld the red-faced man that I'd met at the *Three Compasses*, and whose drab trousers adorned me at that very moment!

"I leapt from my seat, and was making as fast as I could to the door, when cousin George shouted out, 'Holloa! who have we here?'—and, springing forward, he collared me in a moment. 'What's the matter? what's the matter?' demanded old Dobbin.—'My stars! what's this mean?' exclaimed Dame Margery.—'Why, it means that this fellow is a robber, and has got on my breeches and boots!' vociferated cousin George, growing purple in the face with rage, and giving me a violent shake.—'Your breeches!' cried old Buckley.—'Your boots!' mumbled old Dottings.—'Yes, to be sure!' shouted the red-faced man. 'Go and fetch a constable.'—Why, you don't mean that nephew Tom has done this?' said old Dobbin.—'Nephew Tom!' exclaimed cousin George, letting go his hold upon my coat: 'no!'—'But I say *yes*, though,' said I, putting a bold face upon the matter: 'I knew you directly when I met you at the *Three Compasses* last night, and only did it by way of a lark.'

"But this turn did not serve me. While I spoke, cousin George surveyed me attentively; and, again rushing upon me, he roared out, 'He's a cheat! he's an impostor! Tom has a mole on the left cheek, and he's none: Tom has a cut over the right eye, and he hasn't. Go for a constable.'—'Well, I thought all along he was a rogue,' cried Dame Margery, hurrying off to execute this most unpleasant order.

"My case now seemed desperate; and not a moment was to be lost. Casting my eyes rapidly around in search of some weapon of defence or avenue of escape, I espied the punch-bowl, three parts full of steaming liquor, within my reach. With the rapidity of lightning I seized it, and dashed it over like a hat upon cousin George's head. He uttered a terrific yell as the hot punch streamed down him; and I precipitated myself from the room as if a blood-hound was at my heels.

"Away I scudded—a hue and cry after me: but I ran like a race-horse; and in a few minutes was beyond the sound of the '*Stop, thief*,' raised by cousin George's ominous voice.

"That was an excellent adventure; I have often and often laughed at it since, and wondered whether the real Tom Tittlebat ever did return. At all events I kept cousin George's trousers and boots; but they got me into more scrapes yet.

"I strolled along through the fields, diverting myself with reflection upon the past, and pondering upon what might be in store for the future, until I reached a large market town, where I went boldly to the tap-room of the principal tavern. I ordered an excellent supper, with plenty of ale, feeling convinced that some lucky adventure would enable me to pay for my cheer—for I had now but one

shilling left, the remainder of my money having been spent at the inn where I met the two old acquaintances of blind Dobbin.

"The tap-room was filled with people; and the conversation was pretty general. There was, however, one individual who took no part in the discourse, but sate apart in an obscure corner smoking his pipe. He did not even appear to listen to what was said around him; but maintained his eyes moodily fixed on the floor. His horrible sallow complexion, deep wrinkles, and large mustache, gave him an aspect very far from inviting. Nevertheless, I endeavoured to enter into conversation with him—simply, I suppose, because he appeared to be so reserved, and my curiosity was excited with respect to him; but he threw upon me a look of the most sovereign contempt, and made me no answer. I shrank back from the fierce glance of his dark black eyes, and felt abashed and cowed—I scarcely knew why. But soon recovering my usual good spirits, I also called for my pipe and my pot, and mingled in the conversation. Rattling away with my anecdotes, and now and then singing a snatch of a song, I speedily made myself so agreeable to the drovers and waggoners assembled in the tap-room, that they called for punch and invited me to partake of it with them.

"At twelve o'clock the waiter came in, and bawled out, '*Any more orders, gentlemen? any more orders?*' No answer being given, he said, '*I will receive each gentleman's account, if you please.*'—This announcement came like a clap of thunder upon me: I had but a shilling in my pocket, and owed nearly three. What to do I could not tell. Meantime the waiter went round, collecting the money due to him from each individual; and the nearer he drew to the table where I was sitting, the more fidgetty I became. As I glanced round me with feverish anxiety, I saw the dark black eyes of the sallow-faced stranger fixed upon me; and I thought that they glared with fiendish delight, as if they had penetrated my secret. I felt ashamed—and my eyes fell beneath the demon-like glance. In another moment the waiter stood before me. 'Now, sir—if you please, sir: steak, one shilling—taturs, penny—bread, penny—fourteen-pence; two pints of ale, eight-pence—screw of bakker, penny—pot porter, four-pence,—that's two-and-three, sir.' I sat aghast for a few minutes, and then began to fumble in my pockets, the waiter every moment growing more impatient. At that instant the sallow-faced stranger pointed to the bench on which I was sitting, and said in a surly tone, 'No wonder, young man, that you can't find your money in your pocket, when you let it roll about in all directions.' He then sank back into his corner, and seemed to take no more notice of me or my concerns. I thought he had a mind to banter me; but, turning my eyes towards the place which he had indicated, to my surprise I perceived a couple of half-crowns lying there. I am sure the waiter must have seen how my countenance brightened up with sudden joy; but he made no remark; and I paid my bill. He then passed on to the sallow-faced man, who settled his own account, and hastily left the room, without condescending to cast another glance upon me.

"I was at a loss to make out whether the sallow-faced stranger had done a most generous action, or whether some one else had dropped the money there, and he had really fancied it to be mine. I did not, however, lose much time in conjecture; but, taking the whole affair for a good omen, ordered another glass, and then went jovially to bed. I awoke early, had some breakfast, and went out to take a stroll in the town. I naturally directed my steps towards the market-place, knowing that it was market-day, and hoping to find a watch or a purse in the crowd.

"Elbowing my way through the graziers, drovers, and butchers, I got into the middle of the market, and there a most extraordinary spectacle met my eyes. A man was leading a woman along by a halter, which was tied round her neck. At first, I thought that a public execution was about to take place; but, seeing no gibbet—no police—no sheriffs—and no clergyman,—and observing, at a second glance, that the woman was giggling and laughing very much unlike a person just going to be hanged, I was at a loss to account for so strange a sight. The crowd appeared to enjoy the fun—for fun it evidently was—excessively; and, at length, I learnt that '*Bob Fosset, the dog's-meat-man, was about to sell his wife to Will Wyatt, the costermonger.*' And, sure enough, such was the fact. Bob Fossett led his wife—a comely-looking woman enough—to the centre of the market, and tied the halter to a sheep-pen. He then mounted on the top bar of the pen, and shouted out: '*I hereby put up my wife, Jenny Fossett, to public auction; and I declare that she shall go to the highest bidder.*'—'*So I will, Bob*,' cried the woman.—'*Hooray, Bob Fossett*,' bawled the crowd assembled; and then there was such laughing, and joking, and sky-larking, it seemed for all the world just like a fair. Well, Will Wyatt steps forward, and exclaims: '*I bid one shilling for that woman.*'—'*One shilling bid,*' said Bob Fossett.—'*One shilling and a pot of beer*,' cries some wag in the crowd. —'*One shilling and a pot of beer is bid*,' shouts Fossett; '*who bids any more?*'—'*One shilling and a gallon of beer!*' bawls Will Wyatt. —'*One shilling and a gallon of beer for this woman!*' cries Bob Fossett: '*who'll advance on that? Going for one shilling and a gallon of beer: going—going,—will no one bid?—gone! Will Wyatt, my lad, that woman's yours!*' So Will Wyatt steps forward, kisses the woman, takes off the halter, and tacks her under his arm as cozy as if they'd just been spliced at church. Then they all three went off to the nearest public-house, the crowds hooraying, and shouting, and squeaking, and roaring, as they made way for the party to pass along. I determined to see the remainder of the fun, and so I followed them to the public-house.

"The moment we entered the parlour, I saw a person sitting in one corner, whose face seemed more or less familiar to me. He was a fine, tall, powerfully-built man; and his countenance was very handsome, but so dark that he appeared to be an East-Indian. But it was the peculiar expression of the mouth, and the piercing glance of the eyes, that struck me. I looked—and looked again; and thought that a slight smile curled the stranger's lips as I surveyed him, although he did not seem to take any notice of me, or even to know that I was staring at him. 'Well,' I thought to myself, 'if you are not my sallow-faced friend of last-sight, I'm terribly mistaken—that's all;' for I knew too much of disguises myself to be bothered by the difference of complexions. So I went and sat down close by him; and, having ordered something to drink, at length boldly whispered to him, '*I have seen you before.*'—'*Very likely,*' answered the man, coolly; '*but take care of yourself, or you may still get into a scrape on account of cousin George's breeches.*' With these words he rose, drained his glass, and walked coolly out of the room.

"You may imagine how astonished I was at the ominous words which he had whispered in my ear; but, collecting my ideas, I began to feel alarmed for my safety; and, having no longer any interest in the party whom I had followed into the public-house, I abruptly departed—without partaking of, or paying for, the refreshment which I had ordered. Hurrying away from the place, I got out of the town as quick as possible; and, avoiding the main-road, struck into the fields.

"I wandered about for two or three days, until all my money was gone; and I was one afternoon roaming along a by-lane, wondering what was to become of me, and thinking that it would be much better to break into some house, as a last and desperate resource, when I suddenly encountered a man and woman at the turning of the road. They were dressed as poor country people; but the

darkness of their complexions immediately struck my attention; and, at a second glance, I recognised in the man the very person who had whispered those mysterious words in my ears, concerning cousin George's trousers, and whom I could almost certainly identify with the sallow-faced stranger. 'What, not got rid of cousin George's trousers yet!' he exclaimed, laughing heartily; and the woman, who seemed to understand the joke, joined in her companion's mirth.—'Who are you?' I said, 'and how do you happen to know about that little adventure of mine?'—'You see that I *do* know all about it' returned the man, with another laugh; 'and you may perhaps be surprised when I tell you that I consider the abstraction of the trousers to be even a more pleasant freak than the personation of Tom Tittlebat.—'The deuce!' I cried, now completely bewildered: 'if you are a constable, say so, and we will have a fight for it; if not, tell me who you are, and how you came to be acquainted with my affairs.'—'I am certainly no constable,' answered the man, 'or I might have apprehended you some days since on two several occasions, and when there would have been no necessity to fight for it. As to how I know any thing about you, ask no questions, because you will receive no satisfactory answers. But if you wish to earn a shilling or two, say so; and you can do it within an hour.'—I professed my willingness to serve this strange individual.—'Come with us,' he said; and, striking into a narrow path, he led the way for about half-a-mile across the fields, until we came in sight of a large farm-house. 'You see that farm,' he said: 'now listen attentively. You must go there, and under any pretence you can think of, obtain admission into the kitchen, or get into conversation with one of the servants, so as to glean all the information you can about the family. There's three daughters: find out whether they are engaged to be married, or who the young men are that principally visit at the house, and all particulars of that kind. We will wait for you in yonder copse.'

"The stranger and his companion hastened away towards the place where I was to meet them again, and I proceeded towards the farm. It was by no means difficult to gain admittance into the kitchen of that hospitable establishment: a simple request for a cup of milk led to an invitation from a buxom cook and a smart servant-maid to walk in and rest myself a little. Then bread and cheese, and a foaming tankard of home-brewed were set before me; and, while I ate and drank, I gradually drew the two women into the conversation which suited my purpose. They proclaimed the praises of 'master and missis;' and told me how the old people were very well off; and how Miss Jemima, the eldest daughter, was engaged to a young farmer in the neighbourhood; how Miss Mary, the second daughter, had been courted by an officer in the army who had been quartered in the neighbouring town, but who had since left, and had never written to her afterwards; and how Miss Frances, the youngest, had been very melancholy ever since she had visited an aunt at Stafford, where it was well known an attorney's clerk had paid her very great attention. These, and various other particulars relative to the family, were related to me in the course of conversation; and, having remained at the farm for a couple of hours, I was about to take my leave, as well informed relative to the inmates as if I had lived with them all my life. But just as I was rising to depart, I espied a purse lying in a work-box upon a shelf; and I began to reflect how I could make it my own. Accident served my purpose: the cook insisted upon drawing me some more ale, and went into the cellar for that purpose; and the maid-servant stepped to the door of the kitchen to receive a can of milk which a boy brought there at the moment. To dart toward the shelf and secure the purse was the work of an instant; and when the maid turned towards me again, I was sitting as composedly as if I had never left my chair. The cook made her appearance with the ale, of which I drank; and I then took my leave, with many thanks for the kind entertainment I had received.

"I proceeded to the copse, where I found my strange employer and his female companion waiting for me. I told them all that I had gleaned relative to the farmer and his family; and they were highly delighted with the information so procured. The man gave me five shillings, and told me that he did not require my services any farther. I was not sorry to get away from the neighbourhood; and, taking leave of the persons who had employed me in so singular a service, pursued my way. When at a convenient distance from the spot where I had left them, I examined the purse, and, to my joy, found that it contained four sovereigns and about seven shillings in silver.

"Considerably cheered at this change in my pecuniary position, I pursued my way until long after dusk, when I entered a village where I determined to put up for the night. Having supped at a public-house, I inquired about a bed, and found that I could be accommodated with one in a double-bedded room, the other being already retained by a traveller who had arrived before me, but who had stepped out, I was informed, to transact some business with certain inhabitants of his acquaintance. Being tired, I went up to the room where I was to sleep, before the return of the person who was to occupy the other bed; but before I sought my own nest I looked about for a secure spot where I could conceal my purse, as I fancied that my companion might probably be no more honest than myself. I accordingly hid my treasure between the mattress and the sacking; and, putting my clothes under my pillow, lay down to rest. I soon fell into a deep sleep, from which I did not awake until aroused by the noise of some one moving about the room. I started up, and rubbing my eyes, asked what o'clock it was. The person who occupied the other bed was shaving himself at a looking-glass, with his back turned towards me; but the moment my voice fell upon his ears, he started round; and—to my horror—I recognised but too well, beneath a thick coat of lather, the never-to-be-forgotten countenance of cousin George.

"Here was a precious scrape! The red-faced man was deaf to my prayers for mercy, and alarmed the whole house. Landlord, boots, ostler, and pot-boy rushed up stairs, while cousin George vociferated, 'Fetch a constable! this is the rogue who stole my breeches and boots. Fetch a constable, I say! Here's the villain that imposed upon poor old blind Dobbin. Fetch a constable!' A constable was accordingly fetched; and I was duly given into his charge. While I was huddling on my clothes, cousin George exclaimed, with savage malignity, 'Ah! there's the boots, the scoundrel! There's the drab trousers, the scamp!' and I really believe he would have wrested them from me had it not been necessary for me to wear them in order to accompany the constable.

"I did not choose to drag forth my purse from its place of concealment, for fear it might involve me in a worse dilemma than that in which I found myself, and which, after all, was not particularly serious. I however left it beneath the mattress, with deep regret, and was led away by the constable, every soul in the public-house turning out to witness my departure. The landlord, moreover, gave me a parting blessing after a fashion—accusing me as a thief who had run up a score of three shillings and seven-pence halfpenny at his house, without the slightest means of paying it! To this very natural conclusion he came, inasmuch as the constable, upon searching me, had found nothing in my pockets.

"The clergyman of the village was a justice of the peace; and before his worshipful reverence was I accordingly taken. He was an elderly man, very corpulent and very stern; and he frowned upon me in a ferocious manner when I was conducted into the library, where he intended to hear the case. Cousin George, who had only shaved one side of his face, and had a black bristly beard over the

other, stepped forward and stated the entire case, which comprised the theft of his garments and the imposture practised upon his relative. In the latter business, however, the magistrate refused to interfere, and confined his attention to the abstraction of the trousers and boots. I, of course, set up the usual defence,—'*Had never seen the gentleman before in my life—had bought the trousers and boots of a man that I met at a public house, and whose name I did not know; that I was an honest hard-working young fellow, out of employment; and had never been in trouble before.*' The magistrate was, however, obstinate, and would not believe a word I uttered. He accordingly ordered me to be committed for trial at the sessions; and I was moved to an out-house, there to wait in the custody of the constable, until my *mittimus* was made out, and a cart was obtained to take me to the county gaol. Cousin George, satisfied with what he had done so far, threw a glance of triumph upon me as I was moved away from the magistrate's library.

"While I was pent up in the out-house, I went up to the window and looked out upon that open country which seemed the scene of a freedom now lost to me. As I was standing there, pondering on my condition, and wondering whether the numerous burglaries which I had committed in a neighbourhood not very far distant, would be brought against me, my attention was suddenly attracted to a number of people who were advancing rapidly towards the house. As they drew near, to my surprise I recognised the swarthy stranger and his female companion, both evidently in the custody of two constables, and followed by the cook, maid-servant, and other persons belonging to the farm-house. An idea of the real truth instantly flashed through my mind; and I felt sorry—very sorry for the two poor creatures who, I had no doubt, were suffering under a suspicion of the robbery which I had perpetrated. Moreover, I could not help thinking that the swarthy man and the sallow-faced man were one and the same person, and that the two half-crowns had been purposely thrown in my way by him, at the inn in the market-town, to relieve me from that embarrassment into which his keen eyes had penetrated. These reflections suddenly filled me with deep interest in the stranger and his female companion.

"The procession passed the window (from which I drew back), and entered the magistrate's house. Half-an-hour passed away; and then the clergyman's man-servant made his appearance with a jug of ale and some bread and meat for the constable who had me in charge. But nothing was given to me, either to eat or drink! 'There's a new case on in the library,' said the servant.—'Ah! what's that?' inquired the constable.—'Two gipsies,' was the answer, 'man and woman, have been prigging a purse down at firmer Clodhopper's. The purse belonged to a young servant gal, and was missed out of her work-box just after the gipsies had left the house last night. But the constables were put on the scent, and soon found the thieves.'—'And was the purse recovered?' asked the officer who had me in custody.—'Deuce a bit of it,' said the servant, 'those gipsies know a trick worth two of that. It seems that they went down to the farm late last night, and told all the young ladies and servant girls their fortunes; so they were taken into the kitchen and fed with the best, besides all the money they'd had given to them by the young ladies and the servants. Not content with all that, they stole the purse, the vagabonds!'—'No, they didn't, though!' I exclaimed, stepping forward; for somehow or another my blood boiled and my heart ashed to think that those two poor creatures should be punished for a crime of which they were innocent. Besides, I made sure that all my past offences would be brought against me at the assizes; and I knew in that case that I should be booked for transportation; so one robbery more or less could not make much difference to me. Well, both the constable and the servant stared when I spoke in that manner. 'Yes,' I continued, 'it is perfectly true that those two gipsies are innocent of the theft; and if you will take me before his worship again, I will prove my words.' The constable accordingly conducted me back to the library.

"The moment I entered the room, the gipsy-man and his companion exhibited the greatest surprise and interest. I gave them a re-assuring glance; and then, turning towards the magistrate, I said, 'Your worship, these two poor creatures are innocent of the crime imputed to them.'—'How do you know?' demanded the justice roughly, for his lunch-time was now drawing near.—'Because I stole it myself,' was my answer. The greatest astonishment pervaded the assembly; joy animated the countenance of the two gipsies; while the cook and maid servant cried out, '*Dear me!*' and '*Who would have thought it!*' as loud as they could. The justice looked tremendous savage, and declared that he would order the room to be cleared of strangers if they interrupted the business in that indecent manner! I was then called upon to explain the assertion which I had made.—'These two persons,' I said, pointing towards the gipsies, 'are accused of stealing a purse from farmer Clodhopper's kitchen?'—'They are. Well?'—'Then they didn't steal it, because I stole it myself; and these servants can prove that I was there yesterday afternoon.'—'So he was!' exclaimed the cook and maid in the same breath.—'And now,' I continued, 'if you will send and search under the mattress of the bed which I slept in last night at the public-house where I was arrested, you will find the purse.' But this trouble was avoided; for scarcely had I uttered these words, when in came the landlord of that public-house, holding the purse in his hands. His wife, it appeared, had found it when making the beds; and suspicion instantly pointed to me as the person who had placed it in the spot where it was discovered. This circumstance brought the case safe home to me; and the gipsies were instantly discharged, with a warning to take care of themselves in future!

"Nothing could exceed the looks of deep gratitude which those two innocent persons cast upon me as they left the room:—but that of the man was significant of something more than a mere sense of obligation for the act of duty which I had done. I don't know how it was, too—but, rogue as I was, I felt an inward satisfaction at the part which I had just performed.

"I was taken back to the out-house, with another serious charge hanging over my head; and the cart was every moment expected to convey me to the county gaol. But time slipped away, and it did not arrive. At length the constable became impatient, and talked about the impropriety of trifling with the time of a public officer like him, adding that he didn't know if he shouldn't write to the prime minister about it. Presently the man-servant came in with some dinner for him—but not a bite nor a sup for me! Neither did the constable offer me any thing. 'Here's a pretty business,' says the servant; 'the man that was to drive you over to the county gaol has got drunk somehow or other, and can't go; and the horse has suddenly gone dead lame.'—'What's to be done, then?' cried the constable.—'Why, you must wait till the man's sober, and the veterinary surgeon has looked to the horse.'

"And sure enough we did wait until eight o'clock in the evening before we started; and then no thanks to the man nor the veterinary surgeon, for the former was still too tipsy to move, and the latter could do nothing for the horse. However, another man came forward, at a late hour, and offered his services. He not only cured the horse in few minutes, but also undertook to drive the cart. The constable accordingly put a pair of handcuffs on me and took me out into the yard where the vehicle was waiting. A man with a sallow face and bushy red hair, was already seated in front, holding the whip and reins; and as I mounted he gave me a look which I immediately understood. That man was no other than my friend, the swarthy gipsy, so well disguised that his own mother would have

scarcely known him.

"Away we went at a rattling pace: it was soon dark, and the constable told the driver not to go at such a rate. But he did not obey the command: on the contrary, he whipped the horse the more; and the cart bounded along the road as if it was for wager. The constable swore and prayed by turns: the driver laughed; and presently the cart upset into a dry ditch. 'Run for your liberty!' cried the driver to me, as he pulled me from the ditch; and I followed him across the fields with a speed that was increased by hearing the constable shouting '*Stop, thief!*' behind me. But in a very few minutes those cries became fainter and fainter, until they at length ceased altogether. Still my deliverer pursued his way, and at such a rate, too, that I was scarcely able to keep up with him.

"At length we stopped in a thicket, and sat down to rest. My deliverer took a file from his pocket and worked away at my manacles with such a skill and energy, that in a few minutes I was relieved from them. He then produced some food, and I made a hearty meal. When the meal was over, my companion condescended to give me an explanation of certain matters which had hitherto remained wrapped up in some degree of mystery.

"'You must be informed,' he said, 'that my name is Morcar, and that I am the son of Zingary, king of the gipsies. The female whom you saw with me yesterday and this morning, is my wife. A considerable portion of the money earned by our race consists of fees paid by the simple and credulous, for having their fortunes told. In order to obtain the necessary information relative to the inhabitants of those places or dwellings which we visit, we are compelled to assume many disguises, or to make use of the agency of others, not connected with us, to gather that information for us. Some days ago, at an early hour in the morning, I was loitering about in the neighbourhood of the *Three Compasses*, and from behind a hedge saw you make off with the boots and trousers which a boy had been brushing in the yard. Chance led me that same afternoon to the village where you played your famous trick upon old Dobbin; and, as the story spread like wild-fire through the place immediately after your detection by cousin George, I could not avoid hearing all the particulars. I got a lift in a cart from that village to the market-town where I met you the same night at the inn. I could not help admiring your boldness and ingenuity; and, while I sat quietly smoking my pipe in the tap-room, listening to the discourse of the inmates, and picking up a variety of information, to be turned to future account, I noticed your embarrassment at the appearance of the waiter to collect the money owing by each individual. I had made a good day's work in a certain way, and was disposed to be liberal: accordingly, at a moment when you were turned in another direction, I placed the two half-crowns close by where you sate on the bench. Next day I threw off what I call my '*sallow disguise*', and repaired to another public-house, near the market, to glean additional information, all of which our women have since turned to ample profit. Then I was enabled to give you a warning which was really important to you, as old Dobbin's cousin George had actually arrived that morning in the town to attend the market. A few days afterwards I was roving with my wife along the by-lanes in the neighbourhood of Clodhopper's farm, endeavouring by some means to glean what we could concerning the young women at that place—for our finest harvests are always reaped at farm-houses. Again I met you; and I made you the instrument of my design. But,' added Morcar, with a smile, 'you went farther than you were instructed: you did a thing which *we* never do—I mean, steal money. We take for our use a sucking-pig, a fowl, or a goose; and we do not consider that stealing. We also snare rabbits and game; and we look upon it as no crime. However, you saw the scrape into which that business of the purse got me and my wife this morning. You saved us, and I vowed to save you also. The moment I was discharged I went to the stable where the horse that was to convey you to gaol was kept, and bribed the ostler to drive a nail into his foot so as to touch the flesh. Then I found the man who was to drive you, and plied him so well with liquor that he was unable to perform his duty. My object was to delay your journey until the evening, because I knew that I could ensure your escape in the dark. You have seen how well my plans have succeeded, because you are now free.'

"You may suppose that I thanked my kind deliverer most sincerely for all he had done to serve me. He, however, cut me short in my expressions of gratitude, by saying, 'What are you going to do? If you will join us, you will be assured of your daily food, and will be more or less protected from danger. My father has a van, in which you can at any time hide when concealment is necessary; and we will do all we can to serve you, for I still consider myself to be indebted to you on account of your generous conduct of this morning. I could have borne punishment myself; but the idea of my wife being plunged into such misery—no, never—never!'

"I accepted the welcome offers of Morcar, and that very night was conducted to the encampment where his father and mother had taken up their quarters. Eva presented her son to me, saying, 'You have preserved for this little one a father and mother: henceforth the Zingarees will know thee as a friend!' From that moment I have lived with the gipsies until the present time; and, though some years have passed away since I first joined them, I have not yet become weary of our wandering mode of existence."

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

THE PALACE IN THE HOLY LAND.

THE wanderer amidst the crowded thoroughfares of the multitudinous metropolis cannot be unacquainted with that assemblage of densely populated streets and lanes which is situate between High Street (St. Giles's) and Great Russell Street (Bloomsbury).

The district alluded to is called the Holy Land.

There poverty hides its head through shame, and crime lurks concealed through fear;—there every thing that is squalid, hideous, debauched, and immoral, makes its dwelling;—there woman is as far removed from the angel as Satan is from the Godhead, and man is as closely allied to the brute as the idiot is to the baboon;—there days are spent in idleness, and nights in dissipation;—there no refinement of habit or of speech is known, but male and female alike wallow in obscene debauchery and filthy ideas;—there garments are patched with pieces of various dyes, and language is disfigured with words of a revolting slang;—there the natural ruffianism and brutal instincts of the human heart are unrepressed by social ties or conventional decencies;—there infamy is no disgrace, crime no reproach, vice no stain.

Such is the Holy Land.

In a dark and gloomy alley, connecting two of the longer streets in this district, stood a large house four storeys high, and with windows of such narrow dimensions that they seemed intended to admit the light of day only by small instalments.

Four steep stone steps, each only about six inches broad, led to the front door, which always stood open during the day-time.

This front-door gave admittance into a small square compartment, which was denominated "the lobby," and from which a second door opened into the house.

The inner door just alluded to was kept constantly shut, save when admittance was demanded by any one who had the right of entry into the habitation. But even that admittance was never granted without precaution. In the ceiling of the little hall or lobby described, there was a small trap-door, let into the floor of the room above; and by these means the sentinel on duty up-stairs was enabled to reconnoitre every one who knocked at the inner door.

The interior of the house resembled a small barrack. The apartments on the ground floor were used as day-rooms or refectories, and were fitted up with long tables and forms. The floors were strewed with sand; and the appearance of the place was more cleanly and comfortable than might have been expected in such a neighbourhood. The lower panes of the windows were smeared with a whitewash, which prevented passers-by from peering from the street into the apartments.

The upper storeys were all used as dormitories, some being allotted to the male and others to the female inmates of the house. These rooms were furnished with mattresses, blankets, and coverlids; but there were no bedsteads. The aspect of the dormitories was as cleanly as that of the day-rooms.

To the ceiling over the landing-place of the second floor was hung a large bell, to the wheel of which were attached numerous ropes, which branched off, through holes in the walls and floors, in all directions, so that an alarm could be rung from every room in that spacious tenement.

Behind the house there was a large yard, surrounded by the dead walls which formed the sides of other buildings; thus, in no way, was the dwelling which we have described, overlooked by the neighbours. At the bottom of the yard was a door opening into a court which communicated with another street; and thus a convenient mode of egress was secured to any one who might find it prudent to beat a precipitate retreat from the house.

We have now endeavoured to furnish the reader with an idea of King Zingary's Palace in the Holy Land.

In order to complete the description, it only remains for us to state that the various precautions to which we have alluded, in connexion with the Palace, were adopted for the protection and safety of those inmates who, either in the course of their avocations or otherwise, might happen to render themselves obnoxious to the myrmidons of the law. Not that the pursuits of the subjects of King Zingary necessarily comprised practices which rendered their headquarters liable to constant visits from the police: but persons accustomed to a vagabond kind of existence, could not be otherwise than often tempted into lawless courses; and his Majesty did not dare disown or discard a dependant who thus became involved in danger. Moreover, the protection of the gipsies was frequently accorded to persons who rendered them a service, or who could pay for such succour, as in the respective cases of Skilligalee and the Rattlesnake: or it was not unusually granted upon motives of humanity, as in reference to the man called the Traveller. This intercourse with characters of all descriptions was another reason for the adoption of precautionary measures at the Palace; but seldom—very seldom was it that the necessity of those measures was justified by events, the police being well aware that no good ever resulted from a visit to the royal mansion in the Holy Land.

It was ten o'clock at night; and the king of the gipsies was presiding at the banqueting-table in his palace.

Upwards of sixty gipsies, male and female, were assembled round the board. These consisted of the chiefs of the different districts into which the gipsy kingdom was divided, with their wives and daughters.

Skilligalee, the Rattlesnake, and the Traveller were also seated at the table, and were honoured as the king's guests.

The meal was over; and the board was covered with bottles containing various descriptions of liquor, drinking mugs, pipes, and tobacco.

With all the solemn gravity of a chairman at a public dinner, Zingary rapped his knuckles upon the table, and commanded those

present to fill their glasses.

The order was obeyed by both men and women; and the king then spoke as follows:—

"Most loyal and dutiful friends, this is the hundred and thirty-first anniversary of the institution of that custom in virtue of which the provincial rulers of the united races of Egyptians and Bohemians in England assemble together once every year at the Palace. A hundred and thirty-one years ago, this house was purchased by my grandfather King Sisman, and bequeathed to his descendants to serve as the head-quarters and central point of our administration. There is scarcely an individual of the united races who has not experienced the hospitality of this Palace. Every worthy Zingaree who visits the metropolis enjoys his bed and his board without fee and without price for seven days in our mansion, the superintendence of which is so ably conducted, while we are absent, by our brother on my right." Here the king glanced towards a venerable-looking gipsy who sate next to him. "In his hands our treasures are safe; and to-morrow he will place before you an account of the remittances he has received from the provincial districts, and the expenditures he has made in the maintenance of this establishment. You will find, I have reason to believe, a considerable balance in our favour. Let us then celebrate with a bumper the hundred and thirty-first anniversary of the opening of our royal palace!"

This toast was drunk without noise—without hur rahs—without clamour,—but not the less sincerely on that account.

"My pretty Eva," said the king, after a pause, "will now oblige us with a song?"

Zingary's daughter-in-law did not require to be pressed to exhibit her vocal powers; but in a sweet voice she sang the following air:—

THE GIPSY'S HOME.

Oh! who is so blythe, and happy, and free
As the ever-wandering Zingaree?
'Tis his at his own wild will to roam;
And in each fair scene does he find a home,—
Does he find a home!

The sunny slope, or the shady grove,
Where nightingales sing and lovers rove;
The fields where the golden harvests wave,
And the verdant bank which the streamlets lave,
Are by turns his home.

The busy town with its selfish crowd,
The city where dwell the great and proud,
The haunts of the mighty multitude,
Where the strong are raised and the weak subdued,
Are to him no home.

Oh! ever happy—and ever free,
Who is so blest as the Zingaree?—
Where nature puts on her gayest vest,
Where flowers are sweetest and fruits are best,
Oh! there is his home.

"Thank you, sweet Eva," said the king, when the gipsy woman had concluded her song, in the chorus of which the other females had joined in a low and subdued tone. "Ours is indeed a happy life," continued Zingary. "When roving over the broad country, we enjoy a freedom unknown to the rest of the world. No impost or taxes have we then to pay: we drink of the stream at pleasure, and never feel alarmed lest our water should be cut off. We can choose pleasant paths, and yet pay no paving-rate. The sun lights us by day, and the stars by night; and no one comes to remind us that we owe two quarters' gas. We pitch our tents where we will, but are not afraid of a ground-landlord. We do not look forward with fear and trembling to Lady-day or Michaelmas, for the broker cannot distress us. We move where we like, without dreading an accusation of *shooting the moon*. In fine, we are as free and independent as the inhabitants of the desert. A health, then, to the united races of Zingarees!"

This toast was drunk in silence, like the former; and the king then called upon the pretty dark-eyed daughter of one of the chiefs to favour the company with a song.

The request was complied with in the following manner:—

"COME HITHER, FAIR MAIDEN."

Come hither, fair maiden! and listen to me,
I've a store of good tidings to tell unto thee—
Bright hopes to call smiles to those sweet lips of thine,
And visions of bliss little short of divine.

Come hither, fair maiden! the poor Zingaree
Hath promise of love and of fortune for thee:
Away from the future the dark cloud shall fly,
And years yet unborn be revealed to thine eye.

Come hither, fair maiden! no more shall thou be
Alarmed lest the fates act unkindly to thee;—
The planet that governed the hour of thy birth
Shall guide thee to all the fair spots of the earth!

Come hither, fair maiden! futurity's sea
Shall roll on no longer unfathomed by thee;
With me canst thou plunge in its dark depths, and know
How rich are the pearls that Hope treasures below.

In this manner did the gipsies pass the evening, until the clock struck eleven, when they separated to their dormitories.

The Rattlesnake was astonished to observe the order and regularity which prevailed with the strange association amongst which accident had thrown her. The festival had passed without noise and without intemperance; the presence of the king and queen seemed alone sufficient to maintain tranquillity and prevent enjoyment from passing the barriers of propriety.

We need not, however, linger upon this portion of our tale. Suffice it to say that a fortnight glided away, during which the king of the gipsies was detained in the metropolis by the business which he had to transact with his chiefs. The Rattlesnake did not venture out of the house; and Skilligalee was her constant companion.

The Traveller meantime disguised himself in a manner which would have defied the penetrating eyes of even a parent, had he met his own mother; and from morning until evening did he prowl about London, in search of the *one individual* against whom he nourished the most terrible hatred. But, every evening, when he returned home to the Gipsy Palace, his countenance was more gloomy and his brow more lowering; and, if questioned relative to the causes of his rage or grief, he replied in a savage tone, "Another day is gone—and *he* still lives: but I will never rest until I trace him out."

And then he would grind his teeth like a hyena.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

THE PROPOSAL.—UNEXPECTED MEETINGS.

RETURN we once more to Markham Place.

Mr. Monroe had so far recovered from the malady into which the dread discovery of his daughter's dishonour had plunged him, as to be enabled to rise from his bed and sit by the fire in his chamber.

Ellen was constant in her attentions to the old man; and, with her child in her arms, did she keep him company.

By a strange idiosyncrasy of our nature, Mr. Monroe, instead of abhorring the sight of the infant which proclaimed his well-beloved daughter's shame, entertained the most ardent affection for the innocent cause of that disgrace; and he rapidly recovered health and spirits, as he sate contemplating that young unwedded mother nursing her sin-begotten babe.

Richard Markham pursued his studies, though rather for amusement than with any desire of gain, inasmuch as the money repaid him by Count Alteroni had once more restored him to a condition of comfort, although not of affluence.

His mind was far more easy and tranquil than it had wont to be; for he knew that he was beloved by Isabella; and, although she was a high-born princess of Europe, he felt convinced that no circumstances could alienate her affections from him.

One evening, when the year 1840 was about three weeks old, Whittingham introduced Mr. Gregory into our hero's library.

The countenance of that gentleman wore a melancholy expression;—his pace was sedate and solemn;—his voice was low and mournful. Markham was shocked when he beheld his altered appearance.

"Mr. Markham," said the visitor, as he seated himself at Richard's request, "you are, perhaps, surprised to see me here, especially after the manner in which we parted. I am come to demand a favour, and not to reproach you:—indeed, I have no right to use the word *reproach* towards you at all. You conducted yourself like an honourable man in respect to me: you taught my sons no lessons save those by which they have profited. If you erred in early life, you have no doubt repented;—and shall man dare to withhold that pardon which the Lord vouchsafes to all who implore it? I beheld your triumph at the theatre—would to God that nothing had sullied it! I beheld your fall—and I commisserated you. But before that there were reasons—cogent reasons which forbade me to continue the cultivation of your friendship; and as a man of honour and of good taste, you have not sought mine since we parted."

"Before you proceed farther," said Richard,—"for I see that you have some business of more or less importance to discuss with me,—allow me to inform you that I was not overpowered by guilt on that fatal night when I was so cruelly denounced at the theatre. The consciousness of crime did not strike me level with the dust. I fell beneath a reaction of feelings too powerful for human nature to struggle with. The proofs of my innocence——"

"Your innocence!" cried Mr. Gregory, now strangely agitated; "your innocence, say you?"

"Yes—my innocence," repeated Markham, his cheeks flushed with a noble pride; "for I can glory in that innocence, and assert it boldly and without fear of contradiction."

"In the name of God, explain your meaning!" exclaimed Mr. Gregory, so excited that he could scarcely draw his breath.

"I mean that I was the victim of the most infernal treachery ever planned," cried our hero; and he then related the whole particulars of his early misfortunes to Mr. Gregory.

"Oh! now, indeed, I can make my proposal to you with joy and honour!" cried this gentleman; "for you must know, Mr. Markham, that my daughter loves you, and has for some time loved you with the most pure, the most holy, and the most ardent affection! But you saw that she loved you—you were not blind to that passion which her ingenuous nature would not allow her to conceal: you knew that her heart was fondly devoted to you."

"And most solemnly I declare," cried Markham, "that neither by word nor deed did I ever encourage that feeling in Miss Gregory's heart."

"I believe you," said the father of that young lady; "for I noticed that you were often reserved when she was gay and friendly towards you. And it was to separate her from the object of her affection that I parted with you as the tutor of my sons; for it was not until the disclosure at the theatre that I learnt the sad accusation under which you had laboured in your early youth."

Mr. Gregory paused for a moment, and then continued thus:—

"I hoped that my daughter's happiness was not altogether compromised by her love for you;—I removed her to a change of scene; and there an accident threw her into the society of a charming family, with whom she passed about ten days. At the beginning of this week I fetched her home to my house in Kentish Town; but I found that she was more melancholy than ever. Her naturally joyous and lively disposition has changed to mourning and sorrow. I have not, however, told her that I am acquainted with her secret: I know not whether she even suspects that I have penetrated it. I have studiously avoided all mention of your name; and she never alludes to you by word. But she thinks of you always! She nourished a flame which consumes her! Now I am come, Mr. Markham, to propose to you the hand of my daughter,—to propose it to you with frankness and candour! I know that the step which I am taking is an unusual one—perhaps an improper one;—but the safety—the happiness—the life of my daughter compels me thus to depart from the usages of society. If your heart be not otherwise engaged—and I never heard you hint that such was the case,—and if you think that the charms and accomplishments of Mary-Anne are worthy of your notice,—in addition to the handsome fortune which my means enable me to settle upon her,—in that case——"

"My dear sir," interrupted Richard, pressing Mr. Gregory's hands warmly in his own,—"you have honoured me with this

proposal;—and, under other circumstances, I should have been no doubt gratified—but—it is impossible!"

"Impossible!" repeated Mr. Gregory, a cloud coming over his countenance.

"Yes—impossible! I appreciate your daughter's great merits—I admire her personal beauty—I respect her excellent qualities,—and I could have loved her dearly as a sister;—but my heart—*that* is not mine to give!"

"What? You love another!" ejaculated Mr. Gregory.

"For some time my affections have been devoted to a young lady, who has confessed a reciprocal attachment to me——"

"Enough—enough!" cried the unhappy father: "for my poor daughter there is now no hope! But you, Mr. Markham, will forget that this proposal was ever made;—you will bury the particulars of this visit of mine in oblivion?"

"With me the secret of your daughter's heart is sacred."

Mr. Gregory wrung the hand of our hero, and took his leave.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that Mary-Anne had not communicated to her father one word of the conversation which had taken place a few days previously between herself and Isabella, relative to Richard Markham, and which has duly been narrated in a recent chapter; neither was Richard aware that Mr. Gregory and his daughter had accidentally formed the acquaintance of Count Alteroni's family.

So affected was Richard by the interview which had just taken place, that he sought the fresh air in order to calm his mind, and divert his thoughts from the contemplation of the unhappy condition of a lovely young creature whose heart was so disinterestedly devoted to him.

He walked towards London: the night was fine, frosty, and moonlight; and he was induced to prolong his ramble. He recollected that he required a particular work which was published by a bookseller in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury; and thither did he proceed.

He entered the shop, made the purchase which he needed, and then repaired to the bottom of Tottenham Court Road, where it joins Oxford Street, in order to obtain a conveyance to take him home.

But as he turned the corner of Great Russell Street, an individual coming in the opposite direction knocked somewhat violently against him.

"Why the devil don't you use your eyes?" exclaimed the fellow brutally.

Richard started back and uttered a cry of mingled astonishment and horror; for the tone of the voice which had just addressed him was familiar—oh! too familiar—to his ears.

"Wretch!" he ejaculated, almost instantly recovering his presence of mind, and precipitating himself upon the other; "we have met at last where you shall not escape me!"

"Damnation! Richard Markham!" growled the Resurrection Man—for it was he; then, with a sudden jerk, rather characterised by a particular knack than by any extraordinary degree of strength, he disengaged himself from the grasp of our hero, and, turning on his heels, darted off at full speed towards Saint Giles's.

All this was only the work of a single instant; but as soon as the Resurrection Man thus escaped, Richard gave the alarm, and in a moment a policeman and several persons who had witnessed the encounter (for it was but a little past nine o'clock in the evening) joined in the pursuit.

The Resurrection Man rushed along with desperate speed,—took the first turning to the left, and plunged into the dark and narrow streets lying between Great Russell Street and High Street.

London was as well known to the miscreant as if it were a mere village, whose topography may be learnt in an hour. This knowledge stood him in good stead on the present occasion: he dived down one street—merged into another—dodged down courts, and up alleys—and at length rushed into a sort of lobby, the front door of which stood open, but the inner door of which was shut.

At that inner door he knocked violently.

A trap was opened above, and a light streamed down upon him.

"What do you want?" cried a gruff voice, speaking through the trap-door in the ceiling.

"Open—open!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man; "let me in, and I will reward you well."

The trap was closed; the lobby was again pitch-dark, as it was before the light streamed down into it; and in a few moments the house-door was opened.

The Resurrection Man rushed in: the door was closed once more; and the villain exclaimed, "I have done them, by God!"

"Who are you?" asked the man who had opened the door, and who had the appearance of a gipsy.

"Judging by the way in which your house is secured, my good friend," was the reply, "there can be no harm in telling you that I am persecuted by blue-bottles—a race which cannot be altogether unknown to you."

"That's enough," said the gipsy; "you are safe here. Follow me."

The gipsy led the Resurrection Man into one of the lower rooms, where King Zingary, Morcar, and five or six gipsy-chiefs were carousing. The Rattlesnake was up stairs with the other women; the Traveller was not yet returned from his day's hunt after his enemy; and the greater number of the gipsies had already taken their departure from London.

The Resurrection Man was well aware that the gipsies had an establishment in that district of London; but he had never been previously acquainted with its precise whereabouts. It, however, now instantly struck him that accident had led him into that very establishment.

Advancing towards Zingary, he said, "If I am not mistaken, this is the crib where the famous race of Bohemians and Egyptians are accustomed to meet in London. I claim of them hospitality for a few hours."

"As long as suits your interests, friend," answered the King. "Sit down, and do as we do."

The Resurrection Man needed no second invitation. He took the seat offered him near the royal chair, and, in pursuance of another invitation, speedily made himself comfortable with a snicker of rum-flim and a broseley.

"Booze and be merry," said the King: "we shall have nothing to interrupt our merriment to-night; the women have all gone to roost, that they may get up early, for we leave the Holy Land to-morrow morning. At five o'clock we depart. But you, my friend," he continued, addressing himself to the Resurrection Man, "are welcome to remain here a day or two, if such a plan suits your safety, as I suppose it does. We leave an intendant of our royal palace behind us."

At this moment Skilligalee entered the room, and took his seat at the board.

"All is quiet up stairs, your majesty," said this individual; "and so I suppose the women are gone to the downy. They all seem glad at the idea of leaving London to-morrow morning."

"And none more so, I think, than your Margaret," observed the King, with a laugh. "She seems dreadfully afraid of that man who, she says, is in pursuit of her."

The Resurrection Man was immediately struck by these remarks: he became all attention, but said nothing.

"If you knew all," cried Skilligalee, "you would not blame her. It appears that the fellow is a perfect demon. His regular trade is in dead bodies; and so he can't be very nice."

"It is the Rattlesnake—it *must* be!" said the Resurrection Man to himself.

But not a muscle of his countenance moved; and he sat smoking his pipe as coolly as if he had heard nothing capable of exciting him. Nevertheless, within him there were emotions of the most fiendish triumph—of the most hellish delight; for his victim was near—and the hour of vengeance approached.

Then it struck him that his purpose might be defeated, were the Rattlesnake, who had evidently made friends of the gipsies, to meet him in their presence. But he recollected that the women were stated to have already retired to rest; and he felt more easy on this head. Again, he asked himself how he was to discover the room in which she slept;—and to this question all his ingenuity could answer nothing more than that he must trust to circumstances.

And accident did serve his infernal purposes even in this respect.

The gipsies, not dreaming that their conversation could have any ulterior interest to him, continued it upon the same topic.

"Poor Meg is terribly put out because she has lost all her companions up stairs," continued Skilligalee. "She couldn't bear the idea of sleeping all alone in the great room just over this."

"Then she should get married, and have a husband to take care of her," said the Resurrection Man, with a coarse laugh;—but his remark was merely for the purpose of clearing up a doubt.

"And so she has some one to take care of her," cried Skilligalee; "and that's me. But there's one rule in this place—men sleep in their rooms, and women in theirs."

"We can't split the palace into a hundred different bed-chambers," observed Zingary.

"Certainly not," said the Resurrection Man. "But surely the lady you are talking of can't be afraid in such a fortress as this?"

"But she is, though," answered Skilligalee. "The women that occupied the same room with her went away this morning, because the court is going out of town again," he added, with a jovial laugh. "Meg wanted to move into her majesty's room; but Aischa and Eva told her that she must learn to get rid of her stupid fears."

"And very properly," said the Resurrection Man.

"But never mind these matters of talk," cried Skilligalee; "they're only domestic, after all. Come, I'll sing you a song, as it's the last night we shall be here."

Skilligalee accordingly chanted a merry lay; and the conversation afterwards turned upon a variety of topics, none of which possessed sufficient interest to be recorded in our pages.

At length a clock in the passage struck eleven; and King Zingary instantly rose from his seat.

This was a signal for the revellers to retire.

"Skilligalee," said the King, "you will tell the trap-faker[100] that the Traveller is the only one out; and you will conduct our new guest to the strangers' ward. Lieges and friends, good-night."

The king withdrew; the other gipsy-chiefs dispersed to their dormitories; and Skilligalee proceeded to conduct the Resurrection Man to the room where he was to sleep.

If any doubt had remained in the mind of Anthony Tidkins relative to the identity of the Margaret then in that house with the Margaret whom he sought, it would have been dispelled by the mention of the name of Skilligalee—a name which had occurred in the Rattlesnake's history of her life. The Resurrection Man immediately comprehended that she had fallen in with her old companion.

Skilligalee lighted a candle, and led the way up stairs. On the first floor, he looked into the porter's lodge, which was immediately over, and corresponded in size with, the lobby below.

"Trap-faker, old fellow," he said, "the Traveller is out late to-night; but I suppose he means to come back. He's the only one abroad."

"All right," returned the porter: "I'll attend to him."

Skilligalee then conducted the Resurrection Man up another flight of stairs, and into a room which Tidkins knew, from what had been already said, to be immediately over the one where Margaret Flathers slept. Skilligalee left the Resurrection Man a candle, wished him good night, and retired to the room in which he slept.

The moment the Resurrection Man was alone, his hideous countenance threw aside its constraint composure, and assumed an

expression so truly fiend-like, that, had a spectator been by, it must have inspired sentiments of terror. Like every greedy and avaricious man, he entertained the most ferocious hatred against the person who had robbed him of his treasure;—and now that the means of revenge were within his reach, together with a hope of recovering his gold, (for he resolved to converse with the Rattlesnake ere he killed her), he experienced that kind of demoniac joy which invariably characterises the triumph of the ruffian.

Beneath the rough upper coat which the Resurrection Man wore, he had a pair of loaded pistols; and in his pocket he carried a clasp-knife, with a blade as long, pointed, and sharp as a dagger.

Thus armed to the very teeth, as it were,—and moreover endowed with that reckless kind of daring which we have seen him exercise on so many different occasions,—the Resurrection Man was as desperate and formidable a villain as any Italian bravo that ever wielded the elastic steel of Milan, or any Spanish bandit whose hand was familiar with the bright blade of Albaceta.

An hour passed away; and profound silence reigned throughout the Palace in the Holy Land.

The Resurrection Man, with a candle in his left hand, and his right ready to grasp a weapon of defence, stole cautiously from his room.

He descended the stairs, and proceeded to the apartment in which the Rattlesnake slept.

The door yielded to his hand—and he entered the chamber.

It was a large room, with twelve mattresses spread upon the floor; but only one of the beds was occupied—and that was by Margaret Flathers.

The intended victim slept.

Anthony Tidkins approached the bed, placed the candle upon the floor, knelt down, and bent over the bolster.

"Margaret!" he said, in a low tone, giving her a gentle shake by the shoulder at the same time.

She opened her eyes; and at the same moment the Resurrection Man clapped his hand tightly upon her mouth. But this precaution was unnecessary; for, without it, profound terror would have sealed the lips of the affrighted woman.

"If you cause an alarm," muttered the Resurrection Man, in a low but hoarse and dogged tone, "I'll cut your throat that minute. I want to speak to you; and if you tell me the truth I will do you no harm."

The Rattlesnake clasped her hands together, and cast a glance of the most humble and earnest supplication up into the countenance of the demon whose sudden appearance—*there*—and at the still hour of night—leaning over her in so menacing a manner, and with dark resolve expressed in his foreboding face,—had struck such terror to her inmost soul.

"Now, mind," added the Resurrection Man,—"one word to disturb the house—and you die!"

He then withdrew his hand from her mouth; but she scarcely breathed more freely. Her alarm would not have been of a more appalling character, had she awoke to find herself encircled in the horrible coils of a boa-constrictor.

"You see, Margaret," continued Tidkins, "no one can escape me: sooner or later I fall in with those who thwart or injure me. But we have not much time for idle chattering. In one word; what have you done with the money you stole from me?"

"The gipsies have got it all," answered the woman, scarcely able to articulate through intense terror; "but a part of it is mine whenever I choose to claim it."

"Who has got it? Where is it kept?" demanded the Resurrection Man, speaking in a low and sullen whisper.

"The king of the gipsies."

"What—the old fool with a white beard?"

"The same."

"And where does he keep it, I say?"

"I have been told that the bag containing the gipsies' treasure is always placed under his bolster."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the Resurrection Man.

"Certain," was the reply: and now Margaret Flathers began to breathe more freely; for she thought that the object of the terrible individual present was not to kill her, but to obtain back his gold.

"Has any of it been spent?"

"No—no," answered the Rattlesnake, eagerly; although she well knew that a third had been already divided between the royal family, the Traveller, and Skilligalee—those being the persons who had found her asleep beneath the tree, and possessed themselves of her treasure in the first instance.

"Do you know where the king, as you call him, sleeps?" proceeded the Resurrection Man.

"Yes—I am acquainted with every nook and corner of this place," replied Margaret, her presence of mind gradually returning to her aid.

"But he does not sleep alone," said the Resurrection Man: "I know all about *that*. How many men occupy the same room with him?"

"Only his son Morcar."

"Are they armed?"

"No," answered the Rattlesnake; "they have nothing—or fancy they have nothing—to fear: this house is so well guarded!"

"Now listen," said the Resurrection Man, after a pause: "I have no time to waste in words. Will you conduct me to the room where this king of yours sleeps, and help me to get back my gold? or will you have your throat cut this minute?" And as he uttered these terrific words, he coolly drew his clasp-knife from his pocket.

"Oh! put away that horrid thing, and I will do all you tell me!" said the Rattlesnake, clasping her hands again together, while a

cold shudder passed over her entire frame.

"Well—I don't want to do you any harm," returned Tidkins, with difficulty suppressing a sardonic smile. "But I warn you, that if you attempt any treachery, I will shoot you upon the spot without an instant's hesitation, let the consequences be what they may."

And this time he showed her the butt-ends of his pistols in the side-pocket of his rough coat.

"You need not threaten me, Tony," said the woman, endeavouring to assume an insinuating tone; but the dark scowl with which the Resurrection Man surveyed her as she thus addressed him, instantly checked that partial overture towards reconciliation and confidence.

"None of that nonsense with me, Meg," whispered Tidkins; "it has deceived me before. But I warn you! So now jump up and lead the way to the king's room."

The Resurrection Man rose from his kneeling posture over the bed, which, as our readers have been already informed, was made up on the floor; and Margaret Flathers got up.

"Shall I dress myself?" she said.

"What for? You don't think that you're going away with me—do you? No, no; I shall leave you in the excellent company which you have chosen for yourself, and with your friend Skilligalee."

The Rattlesnake made no reply; but she marvelled how the Resurrection Man became acquainted with so many particulars concerning her companions.

"Take the light, and go first," said the Resurrection Man; and, pulling off his heavy shoes, he prepared to follow her.

Margaret Flathers took the candle in her hand, and led the way cautiously to the room in which Zingary and Morcar slept.

The door was a-jar—and she entered, followed by the Resurrection Man.

The king and Morcar were fast asleep in their beds, which were also spread on the floor.

The Resurrection Man drew a pistol from his pocket, and advanced to the head of the king's couch.

The Rattlesnake remained in the middle of the room, holding the candle.

Tidkins cautiously introduced his hand beneath the bolster; and, to his inexpressible joy, his fingers came in contact with a bag evidently containing no small quantity of coin.

By the sudden flash of delight which overspread his countenance, the Rattlesnake perceived that her words had not misled him; and she rejoiced in her turn—for she had dreaded the consequences of any disappointment experienced on his part.

A difficult task yet remained for the Resurrection Man to perform: he had to draw the bag, as gently as he could, from beneath the king's head. At one moment a horrible idea entered his imagination;—he thought of cutting the old man's throat, in order to abstract the treasure without molestation. But then, there was the other man who might happen to awake! Accordingly he abandoned this horrible scheme, and commenced his task of slowly removing the bag.

But just at the moment when this difficulty seemed entirely overcome, Morcar started up in the next bed, and uttered a loud cry.

The candle fell from the hands of the Rattlesnake, and was extinguished. Availing himself of the darkness into which the room was thus suddenly plunged, the Resurrection Man seized the bag, and darted towards the door.

But scarcely had he set foot in the adjacent passage, when the deep tones of a bell suddenly boomed throughout the house; and the notes of the tocsin were instantly responded to by the clamour of voices and the rushing of many persons from the various rooms to know the cause of the alarm.

The entire house was now in confusion: the alarm, which Morcar rang, awoke every one throughout the establishment.

Meantime, the Resurrection Man had precipitated himself down stairs, and had already begun to unbolt the front door, when lights appeared, and in another moment he was surrounded by the gipsy chiefs, and pinioned by them.

"Villain!" cried Morcar, tearing the bag of gold from his grasp: "is this the reward of our hospitality?"

"It's mine—and I can prove it," thundered the Resurrection Man. "But let me go—I don't want to hurt any of you—and you needn't hurt me."

"Ah! that voice!" ejaculated the Traveller, who had just reached the bottom of the stairs as Tidkins uttered those words: then, before a single arm could even be stretched out to restrain him, he rushed with the fury of a demon upon the Resurrection Man, and planted his long dagger in the miscreant's breast.

Tidkins fell: a cry of horror broke from the gipsies; and the Traveller was instantly secured.

"He is not dead—but he is dying," exclaimed Morcar, raising the Resurrection Man in his arms.

"Tell him, then," cried the Traveller, in a tone of mingled triumph and joy,—"tell him that the man who was transported four years ago by his infernal treachery has at length been avenged,—tell him that he dies by the hand of Crankey Jem!"

These words seemed to animate the Resurrection Man for a few moments: he made an effort to speak—but his tongue refused to articulate the curses which his imagination prompted; and, turning a glance of the most diabolical hatred upon the avenger, he sank back insensible in the arms of Morcar.

The gipsies conveyed him up stairs, and placed him on a bed, where Aischa, who, like many females of her race, possessed no inconsiderable amount of medical knowledge, immediately attended upon him.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

THE SECRET TRIBUNAL.

HALF an hour after the occurrences just related, a strange and terribly romantic scene took place at the Gipsies' Palace in Saint Giles's.

The principal room on the ground-floor was lighted up with numerous candles. At the head of the long table sate King Zingary, clad in a black robe or gown, and wearing a black cap upon his head.

The gipsies, who had all dressed themselves in the interval which had occurred since the alarm, were seated at the board,—the men on one side, the women on the other.

Aischa alone was absent.

At the lower end of the table sat Margaret Flathers,—her countenance deadly pale, and her eyes wildly glancing upon those around her, as if to inquire the meaning of this solemn conclave.

Skilligalee was also present; but his looks were downcast and sombre.

Such an assembly, in the middle of the night, and succeeding so rapidly upon the dread incidents which had already occurred, was enough to strike terror to the soul of Margaret Flathers; for she knew that this meeting, at which so much awful ceremony seemed to preside, bore some reference to *herself*.

At length Zingary spoke.

"Margaret," he said, in a solemn tone, "you are now in the presence of the secret tribunal of the united races of Zingarees. Our association, existing by conventional rules and laws of its own making, and to a certain degree independent of those which govern the country wherein we dwell, has been compelled to frame severe statutes to meet extreme cases. One of our customs is hospitality; and you have seen enough of us to know that we ask but few questions of those who seek our charity or our protection. It necessarily happens that persons who so come amongst us, learn much of our mode of life and many of our proceedings. But the basest ingratitude alone could reward our generous hospitality with a treacherous betrayal of any matters, the communication of which might militate against our interests. Although we have no sympathy and no dealings with the thieves and rogues of this great metropolis, we never refuse them the security of this establishment, when accident or previous acquaintance with its existence leads them to seek the safety of its walls. This conduct on our part has been pursued upon grounds of generosity and policy;—generosity, because we believe that half the criminals in existence are rather the victims of bad laws than of their own perverse natures;—policy, because we wish to keep on good terms with all orders and classes who live in violation of the law. It, however, behoves us to adopt as much precaution as possible against treachery, and to punish treachery where we detect it, and when the perpetrator of it is in our power. With this view the secret tribunal was instituted at the same time that this establishment was first opened, more than a century ago. Margaret, you are now in the presence of that tribunal, and you are accused of treachery and ingratitude of the very blackest dye."

This address was delivered with a solemnity which made a deep impression upon all present. No slang phrases, no low synonymes disfigured the language of King Zingary. He spoke in a manner becoming the chief of a vastly ramified association which had made laws for the protection of its own interests.

Margaret surveyed the aged individual who thus addressed her, with wild astonishment and vague alarm. But so confused were her ideas that she could not make any reply.

"What are the facts of this case?" continued King Zingary, after a pause: "you, Margaret, are discovered by us one morning, sleeping in the open air, and nearly dead with the cold. You have a treasure with you, which we might have appropriated altogether to ourselves, but a third of which has been held at your disposal—yours at any time you might choose to demand it. You come amongst us; you are treated by us with even more than usual attention and kindness; and you are allowed to associate with our wives and daughters without the least restraint. A fortnight scarcely elapses, when you conduct a robber into my room, and point to him the place where he may find the treasure belonging to the association."

"Hear me—hear me!" ejaculated Margaret, now recovering the power of speech; "hear me—and I will explain all."

"Speak," said the king.

"I am not guilty of premeditated ingratitude," continued the Rattlesnake: "I awoke in the middle of the night, and found a fiend in human shape hanging over me. That man was the one whom I had been so anxious to avoid—of whom I was so afraid. I admit that I had robbed him of the gold which you found with me; but I was not bound to tell you *that* before now. Well—I awoke, and he was hanging over me! How he came into the house, you best know; how he knew that I was an inmate of it, I cannot explain; how he discovered my room is also a mystery. Nevertheless—he did find me out; and with dreadful threats of instant death he made me lead him to your apartment to get back his gold. That is the whole truth."

A smile of incredulity played upon the lips of Zingary.

"Why did you not give the alarm, when once you were in my chamber?" he demanded. "Even if I am old and feeble, was not Morcar there? and could you not in one moment have summoned the others to your aid, by touching the bell-rope within your reach?"

"And, had I done so, that instant would have been my last. The fearful man, whom I obeyed, would have shot me dead on the spot," answered the Rattlesnake.

"And do you not know how to die rather than betray your companions?" asked the king.

"I am but a woman—a weak woman," exclaimed Margaret; "and—oh! no—no—I could not die so horrible a death!"

"Our women would die in such a cause," said Zingary; "and those who join us and live with us must learn our customs and our habits."

"Remember how sudden was the appearance of that man—how awful were his threats—in the middle of the night—and a knife, I may say, at my very throat——"

"It is a most extraordinary thing, that the very man whom you so much dreaded should have happened to seek our hospitality within a fortnight after you had joined us. Am I wrong if I entertain a suspicion in that respect? You knew that the bag, which every night was deposited beneath my head, contained not only the greater part of the gold which you brought us, but also the year's contributions from the tribes and districts: you knew all this, because we had no secrets from you. Then, perhaps, you were tired of our company; and you imagined that it would be an easy thing to make your peace with that man whom you so much feared, by putting him in possession of a larger treasure than the one you plundered from him,—a treasure, too, which you might hope to share with him."

"As I live, that was not the case!" cried the Rattlesnake, energetically. "You know that I have never stirred out of this house once since I first crossed the threshold: how, then, could I communicate with that man?"

"Where there is a will, there generally is a way, Margaret," answered the king. "Have you any thing further to urge in your defence?"

"I have told the truth," replied the woman; "what more can I say?"

"Then you may retire," said Zingary.

Two gipsy-men led her from the room; and those who remained behind proceeded to deliberate upon the case.

The whole affair was viewed in an aspect most unfavourable to the Rattlesnake; and when Skilligalee volunteered an argument in her defence, he was reminded that he only sate at that board by sufferance, because he was known to be faithfully attached to the Zingarees, but that he was not one of either race.

When the question had been duly discussed by the Secret Tribunal, the king put the point at issue to the vote—*Guilty*, or *Not Guilty*.

The decision of the majority was "Guilty."

The Rattlesnake was then ordered to be brought back to the room.

When she again stood in the presence of her judges, Zingary addressed her in the following manner:—

"This tribunal, Margaret, has duly deliberated upon the case in which you are so especially interested. The result of that deliberation is, that you are found guilty of the blackest treachery and ingratitude. The founders of this tribunal wisely ordained that it should only pronounce one penalty in all cases which terminated in convictions; and that penalty is one which does not enable the criminal to return to the world to seek at the hands of the country's tribunals redress for what such criminal might deem to be an injustice practised by this court. That penalty is death!"

"Death!" wildly screamed Margaret Flathers: "oh, no—you would not, could not murder me in cold blood!"

"Death," solemnly repeated Zingary;—"death in the usual manner, according to the laws which this Tribunal was instituted to dispense."

"Death!" again cried the unhappy woman, scarcely believing what she heard: "no—it is impossible! You will not kill me—you cannot cut me off so soon! I am not prepared to die—I have led a wicked life, and must have time to repent. Spare me! But—do not keep me in this dreadful suspense! Oh! I can understand that you wish to strike me with terror—to read me a terrible lesson. Well—you have succeeded! Expel me from your society—thrust me out of your house; but——"

"Remove her," interrupted Zingary, firmly; but at the same time a tear trickled down his countenance.

The two gipsies who had before led the Rattlesnake from the room, now dragged her forcibly away; while her piercing screams struck to the hearts of those who heard them.

"When is the sentence to be executed?" inquired Skilligalee, in a subdued and mournful tone.

"Within the hour," answered the king. "You may converse with her up to the fatal moment."

Skilligalee bowed, and left the room.

"Let the Traveller be now introduced," said Zingary.

Crankey Jem,—against whom, the reader may remember, the Resurrection Man had turned Crown evidence at the same sessions of the Central Criminal Court at which Richard Markham and Eliza Sidney were tried and condemned,—was now brought into the room.

"You have conducted yourself in a manner calculated to involve us all in a most serious difficulty," said the king, addressing this individual; "and we are compelled to rid ourselves of your presence without delay. You have been treated with hospitality by us: reward us by maintaining the most profound secresy relative to all you have seen or heard since you have been our companion and guest. Depart—and may you always be ready and willing to serve a Zingaree."

"I will—I will," answered Jem: "night and day—in any case—I will risk my life for one of you. I do not blame you for expelling me; in fact, I should have left you in the morning of my own accord. London is no place for an escaped convict; and I shall not be sorry to leave it. But, answer me one question before I go: is *that man* dead?"

"We shall give you no information on that head," answered Zingary. "Depart, my friend—and trouble us with your presence no longer. You have gold—and may you prosper."

Crankey Jem bowed to the gipsies; and, having thanked them for their hospitality and kindness towards him, took his departure

from the palace.

The gipsies retained their seats; but not a word was spoken by any one present.

At length the great bell on the staircase was struck three times. At this signal the king rose and walked slowly out of the room, followed by the other gipsies.

The procession moved with solemn pace, and in dead silence, to the back part of the house, where it descended a flight of stone steps into a place used as a scullery. There Skilligalee, Margaret Flathers, and the two gipsy-gaolers who had charge of the criminal, were waiting.

A single candle burned in the place, and its dim fitful light rather augmented than diminished the gloom.

Margaret was absorbed in the most profound grief and terror; and her mental sufferings were revealed in heart-rending sobs.

The nature of her doom had already been communicated to her!

Skilligalee's countenance was ashy pale; but, much as he felt, he knew the Zingarees too well to undertake the vain task of imploring their mercy on behalf of the culprit.

"Is every thing ready?" demanded the king.

"Every thing," answered one of the gipsy-gaolers.

With these words the man opened a massive door leading into a cellar, at the end of which there was another door, affording admittance into a second and smaller vault.

"Margaret," cried the king, in a loud tone, "your doom is prepared. Brethren, take warning against treachery and ingratitude from this last act of justice!"

The two gipsies who had been entrusted with the custody of the criminal, raised her between them, and bore her through the first cellar into the interior vault.

But she uttered not a scream—nor a sob: she had fallen into a state of apathy bordering upon insensibility, the moment the rough hands of those men had touched her.

Skilligalee's lips were compressed; and he evidently experienced immense difficulty in restraining his feelings.

Margaret was deposited on a mattress in the inner cell: a loaf of bread and pitcher of water had already been placed upon a shelf in one corner of the dungeon.

The door was then closed and carefully bolted.

The door of the outer cellar was also shut; and thus was the wretched woman entombed alive.

But as the procession of Zingarees turned to leave the vicinity of that fearful scene of punishment, a faint shriek—though not the less expressive of bitter agony in consequence of its indistinctness—fell upon the ears of those who had witnessed the sepulture of a living being.

EPILOGUE TO VOLUME I.

THUS far have we pursued our adventurous theme; and though we have already told so much, how much more does there remain yet to tell!

Said we not, at the outset, that we would introduce our readers to a city of strange contrasts? and who shall say that we have not fulfilled our promise?

But as yet we have only drawn the veil partially aside from the mighty panorama of grandeur and misery which it is our task to display:—the reader has still to be initiated more deeply into the MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

We have a grand moral to work out—a great lesson to teach every class of society;—a moral and a lesson whose themes are

WEALTH. | POVERTY.

For we have constituted ourselves the scourge of the oppressor, and the champion of the oppressed: we have taken virtue by the hand to raise it, and we have seized upon vice to expose it; we have no fear of those who sit in high places; but we dwell as emphatically upon the failings of the educated and rich, as on the immorality of the ignorant and poor.

We invite all those who have been deceived to come around us, and we will unmask the deceiver;—we seek the company of them that drag the chains of tyranny along the rough thoroughfares of the world, that we may put the tyrant to shame;—we gather around us all those who suffer from vicious institutions, that we may expose the rottenness of the social heart.

Crime, oppression, and injustice prosper for a time; but, with nations as with individuals, the day of retribution must come. Such is the lesson which we have yet to teach.

And let those who have perused what we have already written, pause ere they deduce therefrom a general moral;—for as yet they cannot anticipate our design, nor read our end.

No:—for we have yet more to write, and they have more to learn, of the MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

Strange as many of the incidents already recorded may be deemed,—wild and fanciful as much of our narrative up to this point may appear,—we have yet events more strange, and episodes more seemingly wild and fanciful, to narrate in the ensuing volume.

For the word "LONDON" constitutes a theme whose details, whether of good or of evil, are inexhaustible: nor knew we, when we took up our pen to enter upon the subject, how vast—how mighty—how comprehensive it might be!

Ye, then, who have borne with us thus far, condescend to follow us on to the end:—we can promise that the spirit which has animated us up to this point will not flag as we prosecute our undertaking;—and, at the close, we feel convinced that more than one will be enabled to retrospect over some good and useful sentiment which will have been awakened in his soul by the perusal of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

P. P. THOMS, PRINTER, 12, WARWICK SQUARE, LONDON.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

RATS' CASTLE.

Richard Markham, though perfectly unpretending in manner and somewhat reserved or even sedate in disposition, possessed the most undaunted courage. Thus was it that, almost immediately recovering himself from the sudden check which he had experienced at the hands of the Resurrection Man, he hurried in pursuit of the miscreant, followed by the policeman and the people whom the alarm which he had given had called to his aid.

The people were, however, soon tired of running gratuitously for an object which they could scarcely comprehend; but the police-officer kept close to Markham; and they were speedily reinforced by two other constables, who, seeing that something was the matter, and with characteristic officiousness, immediately joined them.

From an inquiry put to the waterman of the adjacent cab-stand, who had seen a person running furiously along a moment or two before, Markham felt convinced that the object of his pursuit had plunged into the maze of Saint Giles's; and, though well aware of the desperate character of that individual, and conscious that should he encounter him alone in some dark alley or gloomy court, a fearful struggle must ensue between them, he did not hesitate, unarmed as he was, to dash into that thicket of dangerous habitations.

Soon outstripping the officers, who vainly begged him to keep with them, as they were unacquainted with the person of whom he was in pursuit,—forgetting every measure of precaution in the ardour of the chase, Richard rushed headlong through the dark and ill-paved streets, following the echo of every retreating footstep which he heard, and stopping only to scrutinise the countenances of those who, in the obscurity of the hour and place, seemed at first sight to resemble the exterior of the Resurrection Man.

Vain was his search. At length, exhausted, he sate down on the steps of a door-way to recover his breath, after having expended an hour in his fruitless search up one street, down another, and in every nook and corner of that district which we have before described as the Holy Land.

Accident shortly led the officers, who had originally entered upon the chase with him, to the spot where he was seated.

"Here is the gentleman himself," said one, turning the glare of his bull's-eye full upon our hero.

"No luck, I suppose, sir?" observed another. "You had much better have remained with us and given us some idea of the person that you want."

"Fool that I was!" exclaimed Markham, now perceiving his imprudence in that respect: "I have left you to pursue a shadow, instead of depicting to you the substance. But surely the name of Anthony Tidkins——"

"The Resurrection Man, as they call him," hastily remarked one of the constables.

"The same," answered Markham.

"Why—he blew himself up, along with some others and a number of our men, last year, down in Bethnal Green," said the constable who had last spoken.

"No—he lives, he lives," exclaimed Richard, impatiently. "My God! I know him but too well."

"And it was after him that you gave the alarm just now in Tottenham Court Road?"

"It was. I knew him at once—I could not be mistaken: his voice, laden with a curse, still rings in my ears."

"Well, since the gentleman's so positive, I 'spose it must be so," said the constable: "we musn't sleep upon it, mates. Ten to one that Tidkins has taken to burrow in one of the low cribs about here; and he means to lie quiet for two or three days till the alarm's blown over. I know the dodges of these fellers. You two go the round of Plumptre Street; and me and this gentleman will just take a promiscuous look into the kens about here."

The two constables to whom these words were addressed, immediately departed upon the mission proposed to them, and Richard signified his readiness to accompany the officer who had thus settled the plan of proceedings.

"We'll go first to Rats' Castle, sir, if you please," said the policeman: "that is the most likely place for a run-away to take refuge in at random."

"What is Rats' Castle?" asked Markham, as he walked by the officer's side down a wretched alley, almost as dark as pitch, and over the broken pavement of which he stumbled at every step.

"The night-house where all kind of low people meet to sup and lodge," was the reply. "But here we are—and you'll see all about it in an instant."

They had stopped at the door of a house with an area protected by thick wooden palings. All the upper part of the dwelling appeared to be involved in total darkness: but lights streamed through the chinks of the rude shutters of the area-windows; and from the same direction emanated boisterous merriment, coarse laughter, and wild hurrahs.

"You knock at the door, sir, if you please," said the policeman, "while I stand aside. I'll slip in after you; for if they twig my coat, and Tidkins really happens to be there, they'd give him the office to bolt before we could get in."

"Well thought of," returned Markham. "But upon what plea am I to claim admittance?"

"As a stranger, impelled by curiosity. You carry the silver key in your pocket."

The policeman withdrew a few paces; and our hero knocked boldly at the door.

A gruff voice challenged the visitor from the area.

"Who's here?"

"No one that will do you any harm," replied Richard. "I am anxious to witness the interior of this establishment; and here is half-a-crown for you if you can gratify my curiosity."

"That's English, any how," said the voice, softening in its tone. "Stop a minute."

Markham heard a door close in the area below; and in a few moments the bolts were drawn back inside the one at which he was standing.

"Now then, my ben-cull—in with you," said a man, as he opened the front door, and held a candle high up above his head at the same time.

Markham stepped into a narrow passage, and placed his foot against the door in such a way as to keep it open. But the precaution was unnecessary, for the policeman had glided in almost simultaneously with himself.

"Now, no noise, old feller," said the constable, in a hasty whisper to the man who had opened the door: "our business isn't with any of your set."

"Wery good," returned the porter of Rats' Castle: "you know best—it isn't for me to say nothink."

"Go first, sir," whispered the officer to Markham. "You seem to know *him* better than me, for I never saw him but once—and then only for a minute or two."

"Which way?" demanded Richard.

"Straight on—and then down stairs. You keep behind us, old feller," added the policeman, turning to the porter.

Markham descended a flight of narrow and precipitate steps, and at the bottom found himself in a large room formed of two kitchens thrown into one.

Two long tables running parallel to each other the entire length of the place, were laid out for supper,—the preparations consisting of a number of greasy napkins spread upon either board, and decorated with knives and forks all chained to the tables. Iron plates to eat off, galley-pots and chipped tea-cups filled with salt, three or four pepper-boxes, and two small stone jars containing mustard, completed the preparations for the evening meal.

The room was lighted by means of a number of candles disposed in tin shades around the walls; and as no one gave himself the trouble to snuff them, the wicks were long, and infested with what housewives denominate "thieves," while the tallow streamed down in large flakes, dripping on the floor, the seats, or the backs of the guests.

Crowded together at the two tables, and anxiously watching the proceedings of an old blear-eyed woman, who was occupied at an immense fire at the farther end of the room, were about thirty or forty persons, male and female. And never did Markham's eyes glance upon a more extraordinary—a more loathsome—a more revolting spectacle than that assemblage of rags, filth, disease, deformity, and ugliness.

Mendicants, vagabonds, impostors, and rogues of all kinds were gathered in that room, the fetid heat of which was stifling. The horrible language of which they made use,—their frightful curses,—their obscene jests,—their blasphemous jokes, were calculated to shock the mind of the least fastidious:—it was indeed a scene from which Markham would have fled as from a nest of vipers, had not a stern duty to society and to himself urged him to penetrate farther into that den.

The appearance of himself and the policeman did not produce any remarkable degree of sensation amongst the persons assembled: they were accustomed to the occasional visits of well-dressed strangers, who repaired thither to gratify curiosity; and the presence of the officers of justice was a matter of frequent occurrence when any great robbery had been perpetrated in the metropolis, and while the culprits remained undiscovered.

"He is not here," whispered Markham to his companion, after casting a hasty but penetrating glance around.

"He may come: this is the most likely place in Saint Giles's for him to visit," returned the policeman. "We will wait half-an-hour."

Richard would gladly have retired; but he was ashamed to exhibit a disgust which the officer might mistake for fear. He accordingly seated himself at a small side-table, in compliance with a sign from his companion.

A waiter, wearing an apron which, by its colour, seemed also to do the duty of dish-cloth, now accosted them, and said, "Please to order anythink, gen'lemen?"

"Two glasses of brandy-and-water," replied the constable.

This command was speedily complied with; and, a few minutes afterwards, supper was served up on the two long tables before described. The old woman who presided over the culinary department of the establishment had amply catered for those present. Legs of mutton, both roasted and boiled,—rounds of beef, flanked with carrots,—huge pies,—boiled legs of pork,—immense quantities of sausages,—and sheep's heads, constituted the staple of the banquet. These viands, accompanied by piles of smoking potatoes "in their jackets" and heaps of cabbages, were all served up on iron dishes, from which no thrifty hand ever removed the rust.

Then commenced the clattering of the knives and forks, the din of which upon the iron platters was strangely blended with the rattling of the chains that held them to the tables. The boisterous merriment and coarse conversation were for a time absorbed in the interest occasioned by the presence of the repast.

"What a strange assembly," whispered Markham to the constable.

"Strange to *you*, sir—no doubt," was the answer, also delivered in a tone audible only to him to whom the words were addressed. "That sturdy feller sitting at the head of the nearest table, with the great cudgel between his legs, is one of the class that don't take the trouble to clothe themselves in rags, but trust to their insolence to extort alms from females walking alone in retired parts. That feller next to him, all in tatters, but who laughs louder than any one else, is one of them whining, shivering, snivelling wretches that crouch up in doorways on rainy days, and on fine ones sit down on the pavement with '*Starving, but dare not beg*,' chalked on the stone before them. The man over there in sailor's clothes tumbled down an area when he was drunk, and broke his leg: he was obliged to have it cut off; and so he now passes himself off as one of Nelson's own tars, though he never saw the sea in his life. That chap almost naked who's just come in, is going to put on his coat and shoes before he sits down to supper; he always goes out begging in that state on

rainy days, and is a gentleman on fine ones."

"I do not understand you," said Markham, astonished at this last observation.

"Why, sir," replied the policeman, "there's certain beggars that always turn out half-naked, on rainy days, or when the snow's on the ground; and people pity them so much on those occasions that the rogues get enough to keep them all through the fine weather. If they have wives and children to go out with them, so much the better: but that feller there isn't married; and so he goes with a woman who frequents this place, and they hire three or four children from the poor people in this neighbourhood, at the rate of two-pence a day each child, and its grub. To see them go shivering and whining through the streets, with no shoes or stockings, you'd think they were the most miserable devils on the face of the earth; and then, to make the scene complete, the man and woman always pinch the little children that they carry in their arms, to make them cry, whenever they pass a window when several ladies are looking out."

"Is this possible?" whispered Markham, his face flushing with indignation.

"Possible, sir! Don't I see it all every day of my life? Look at them men and women blowing their hides out with all that good meat; and now look at the pots of porter that's coming in. Every soul there has sworn a hundred times during the day that he hasn't tasted food for forty-eight hours, and will repeat the same story to-morrow. But they all had good suppers here last night, and good breakfasts here this morning; and you see how they are faring this evening."

"But there are real cases deserving of charity?" said Markham, interrogatively,—for he almost felt disposed to doubt the fact.

"Certainly there are, sir," was the reply; "but it's very difficult for such as you to decide between the true and the false. Look at that man who carves at the second table: he can see well enough to cut himself the tit-bits; but to-morrow he will be totally blind in one of the fashionable squares."

"Totally blind!" said Richard, more and more astonished at what he heard.

"Yes, sir—totally blind; led by a dog, and with a placard upon his chest. He keeps his eyes fast shut, and colours the lids with carmine and vermilion. But that is nothing. That feller next to him, who uses his knife and fork so well, will to-morrow have lost his right arm at the battle of Salamanca."

"But how can that imposture be effected?"

"His right arm is concealed under his clothes, and the coat-sleeve hangs down loose," replied the constable. "That tall stout man who has just jumped so nimbly over the form in his way back to his place, has walked on crutches in the streets for the last twenty years; and when you see him so, you would think he could hardly drag himself along. The feller over there is a frozen-out gardener in winter, and a poor Spitalfields' weaver in summer. The one next to him will have a black patch over his left eye to-morrow; and yet you may see that it is as good as his right. The short man opposite to him bends his left leg back, and has a wooden one to support the knee, when he is in the street. That woman there has been dressed in widows' weeds for the last fifteen years, and always has a troop of six children with her; but the children never grow any bigger, for she hires fresh ones every year or so."

"This is the most extraordinarily combined mass of contradictions and deceptions I ever gazed upon," whispered Markham.

"You may well say that, sir," said the policeman. "The ragged feller down at the bottom of the second table sits as upright as you or me: well, in the streets he crawls along the ground with two iron supporters in his hands. He is the most insolent feller in London. The man next to him goes about on a sort of van, or chaise, and the world believes that he has no legs at all; but they are all the time concealed in the body of the vehicle, and the stumps of the thighs which are seen are false. Those three hulking chaps over there, sitting with the three women that laugh so much, are begging-letter impostors. The eldest of the three men has been seventeen years at the business, and has been in prison twenty-eight times. One day he is a bricklayer who has fallen from a scaffold, and broken his leg, and has a wife and eleven young children dependent on him; another day he is a licensed clergyman of the Church of England, but unemployed for two years—wife and six children totally dependent on him. Then he changes into a stanch Tory, ruined by his attachment to the cause, and proscribed by all his friends on account of his principles: in this shape he addresses himself to the old Tory noblemen, and makes a good harvest. The very next day he becomes a determined and stanch Reformer, who lost his employment through giving his vote for the Tower Hamlets to the liberal candidate at the last election, and has since met with an uninterrupted series of misfortunes—sold up by a Tory landlord,—his wife been dead only a fortnight, and seven motherless children left dependent on him. This kind of letter always draws well. Then he becomes a paralytic with an execution in his house; or a Spitalfields' weaver, with nine children, two of which are cripples, and one blind; or else a poor Scotch schoolmaster, come to London on business, and robbed by designing knaves of the means of returning to his own country. The women are just as bad. They are either wives with husbands in hospitals and bed-ridden mothers; or daughters with helpless parents and sick brothers and sisters dependent on them;—and so on."

"But if you be aware of all these monstrous impositions, why do you not interfere to protect the public?" inquired Markham. "Lord, sir!" said the constable, "if we took up all persons that we know to be impostors, we should have half London in custody. We only interfere when specially called upon, or when we see cases so very flagrant that we can't help taking notice of them. Some of these chaps that are eating here so hearty now, will seem to be dying in the streets to-morrow."

"Merciful heavens, what a city of deceit and imposture is this!" observed Richard, painfully excited by the strange details which he had just heard. "Were the interior of this den but once exposed to general view, charity would be at an end, and the deserving poor would suffer for the unprincipled impostor."

"True enough, sir. And now look—the cloth is removed, and every one is ordering in something strong to wash down the supper. There goes a crown-bowl of punch—that's for the begging-letter impostors: and there's glasses of punch, and cold spirits and water, and shrub, and negus. That's the way they do it, you see, sir."

Markham did indeed see, and wondered more and more at what he so saw—until his feelings of surprise changed into sentiments of ineffable abhorrence and disgust; and he longed to leave that odious den.

"The person whom we seek does not appear to come," he said, after a long interval of silence. "Two hours have elapsed—and we are only wasting time here."

"He must have taken refuge in some other crib, sir," returned the constable. "Let us leave this one, and make the round of the other lodging-houses in this street." Markham was glad to hurry away from Rats' Castle, the mysteries of which had so painfully shocked his generous feelings.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

A PUBLIC FUNCTIONARY.

Urged by that sense of duty to which we have before alluded, and which prompted him to neglect no step that might lead to the discovery of a great criminal's lurking-place, Richard accompanied the police-officer to various houses where the dregs of the population herded together.

The inspection of a plague-hospital could not have been more appalling: the scrutiny of a lazar-house could not have produced deeper disgust.

In some the inmates were engaged in drunken broils, the women enacting the part of furies: in others the females sang obscene songs, the men joining in the chorus.

Here a mother waited until her daughter should return with the wages of prostitution, to purchase the evening meal: there a husband boasted that his wife was enabled, by the liberality of a paramour, to supply him with ample means for his night's debauchery.

In one house which our hero and the constable visited, three sisters of the respective ages of eleven, thirteen, and fourteen, were comparing the produce of their evening's avocations,—the avocations of the daughters of crime!

And then those three children, having portioned out the necessary amount for their suppers and their lodging that night, and their breakfast next morning, laughed joyously as they perceived how much they had left to purchase gin!

For GIN is the deity, and INTEMPERANCE is the hand-maiden, of both sexes and nearly all ages in that district of London.

What crimes, what follies have been perpetrated for Gin! A river of alcohol rolls through the land, sweeping away health, honour, and happiness with its remorseless tide. The creaking gibbet, and the prison ward—the gloomy hulk, and the far-off penal isle—the debtors' gaol, and the silent penitentiary—the tomb-like workhouse, and the loathsome hospital—the galling chain, and the spirit-breaking tread-wheel—the frightful mad-cell, and the public dissecting-room—the death-bed of despair, and the grave of the suicide, are indebted for many, many victims to thee, most potent GIN!

O GIN! the Genius of Accidents and the Bad Angel of Offences worship thee! Thou art the Juggernaut beneath whose wheels millions throw themselves in blind adoration.

The pawnbroker points to thee and says, "Whilst thy dominion lasts, I am sure to thrive."

The medical man smiles as he marks thy progress, for he knows that thou leadest a ghastly train,—apoplexy, palsy, dropsy, delirium tremens, consumption, madness.

The undertaker chuckles when he remembers thine influence, for he says within himself, "Thou art the Angel of Death."

And Satan rejoices in his kingdom, well-knowing how thickly it can be populated by thee!

Yes—great is thy power, O GIN: thou keepest pace with the progress of civilisation, and thou art made the companion of the Bible. For when the missionary takes the Word of God to the savage in some far distant clime, he bears the fire-water with him at the same time. While his right hand points to the paths of peace and salvation, his left scatters the seeds of misery, disease, death, and damnation!

Yes—great is thy power, O Gin: a terrible instrument of evil art thou. Thou sweepest over the world with the wing of the pestilence: thy breath that of a plague:—like the poisonous garment of Dejanira on the burning limbs of the Centaur, dost thou cling around thy victims.

And where the grave-yard is heaped up with mouldering bones—and where disease and death prevail in all their most hideous shapes—and where misery is most keenly felt, and poverty is most pinching—and where the wails of hapless children ascend to heaven in vain appeal against the cruelty of inhuman parents—and where crime is most diabolical,—there are thy triumphs—there are thy victories!

But to continue.

The clock of St. Giles's Church proclaimed the hour of midnight; and though our hero and the constable had visited many of the low dens and lodging-houses in the Holy Land, still their search was without success.

"Unless my mates have been more lucky than us," observed the policeman, halting at the corner of a street, "we must conclude that the bird is flown."

"And even if they should chance to enter a house where the miscreant has taken refuge, how would they be enabled to recognise him?" asked Richard.

"One of them knows him well," replied the constable.

At that moment a violent scream issued from the upper part of the house close to which Markham and the constable were standing.

The dwelling was high, narrow, and, if possible, more gloomy, when viewed by the feeble rays of a watery moon, than the neighbouring houses.

From the uppermost window streamed a strong light, which danced upon the black wall of the building opposite, making the sombre appearance of the locality the more sinister as it was the more visible.

That scream, which expressed both horror and agony, caused Markham to start with momentary consternation.

The constable did not, however, appear surprised; but merely observed with a strange coolness, "Ah! there's Smithers at his old tricks again."

"And who is Smithers?" inquired Richard.

But before the constable could reply to the question, the window, whence the light emanated, was thrown up with crashing violence, and a female voice shrieked for assistance.

"Had we not bettor ascertain what is the matter here?" exclaimed Markham, hastily.

"I dare not force an entry, unless there's a cry of '*Murder*,'" answered the officer.

Scarcely were these words uttered when the sound of a heavy blow, like that of a thong or leathern strap upon a person's back, echoed along the street; and then terrific shrieks, mingled with cries of "*Murder!*" issued from the open window.

In another instant the female was dragged away from the casement by some one in the room where this scene occurred; then the blows were resumed with frightful severity, and the screams and cries continued in a more appalling manner than at first.

Immediately afterwards, and just as the constable was preparing to force an entry, some one was heard to rush precipitately down the stairs inside the house: the door opened, and a strange-looking being darted madly into the street.

"Now, Gibbet," cried the policeman, catching the hump-backed lad—for such Markham perceived him to be—by the collar, "what's all this about?"

"Oh! you are an officer!" exclaimed the hump-back, in a tone of surprise and delight: "for God's sake come up—father's murdering Kate!"

The screams and the sounds of the blows still continuing up stairs, the constable did not hesitate to comply with the request of the deformed lad whom he had saluted by the singular name of Gibbet; and Markham hastened after him, anxious to render any assistance that might be required at his hands.

The policeman and our hero hurried up the narrow stairs, lighted by the officer's bull's-eye; and speedily reached the room whence the screams had emanated.

But we must pause for a moment to describe that apartment, and to give the reader some idea of the inmates of the house to which we have introduced him.

The room was situated at the top of the house, and bore the appearance of a loft, there being no ceiling to conceal the massive beams and spars which supported the angular roof.

From one of the horizontal beams hung a stuffed figure, resembling a human being, and as large as life. It was dressed in a complete suit of male attire; and a white mask gave it the real but ghastly appearance of a dead body. It was suspended by a thick cord, or halter, the knot of which being fastened beneath the left ear, made the head incline somewhat over the right shoulder; and it was waving gently backwards and forwards, as if it had been recently disturbed. The arms were pinioned behind; and the hands, which were made more or less life-like by means of dingy white kid gloves, were curled up as it were in a last convulsion. In a word, it presented the exact appearance of a man hanging.

Markham started back when his eyes first fell on this sinister object; but a second glance convinced him that the figure was only a puppet.

This second survey brought to his view other features, calculated to excite his wonder and curiosity, in that strange apartment.

The figure already described was suspended in such a way that its lower extremity was about a foot from the ground; but it was concealed nearly up to the knees by a small scaffold, or large black box, it having been suffered to fall that much through a trap-door made like a drop in the platform of that diminutive stage.

From this strange spectacle,—which, in all respects, was a perfect representation of an execution—Markham's eyes wandered round the loft.

The walls—the rough brick-work of which was smeared over with white-wash,—were covered with rude pictures, glaringly coloured and set in common black wooden frames. These pictures were such as are sold in low neighbourhoods for a few pence each, and representing scenes in the lives of remarkable highwaymen, murderers, and other criminals who had ended their days upon the scaffold. The progress of Jack Sheppard to the gibbet at Tyburn,—the execution of Jonathan Wild,—Turpin's ride to York,—Sawney Bean and his family feasting off human flesh in their cave,—Hunt and Thurtell throwing the body of Mr. Weare into the pond,—Corder murdering Maria Martin at the Red Barn,—James Greenacre cutting up the corpse of Hannah Brown,—such were the principal subjects of that Gallery of Human Enormity.

But as if these pictorial mementos of crime and violent death were not sufficient to gratify the strange taste of the occupants of that apartment, some hand, which was doubtless the agent of an imagination that loved to "sup full of horrors," had scrawled with a burnt stick upon the wall various designs of an equally terrific nature. Gibbets of all forms, and criminals in all the different stages of their last minutes in this life, were there represented. The ingenuity of the draughtsman had even suggested improvements in the usual modes of execution, and had delineated drops, halters, and methods of pinioning on new principles!

Every thing in that spacious loft savoured of the scaffold!

Oh! had the advocates of capital punishment but been enabled to glance upon that scene of horrors, they would have experienced a feeling of dire regret that any system which they had supported could have led to such an exhibition!

But to proceed.

On a rude board which served as a mantel over the grate, was a miniature gibbet, about eight inches high, and suspended to the horizontal beam of which was a mouse—most scientifically hung with a strong piece of pack-thread.

The large silver watch belonging to the principal inmate of the house was suspended to a horizontal piece of wood, with an oblique supporter, projecting from the wall above the fire-place.

In one corner of the room was a bed, over which flowed curtains of a coarse yellow material; and even these were suspended to a spar arranged and propped up like the arm of a gibbet.

A table, on which the supper things still remained, and half a dozen chairs, completed the contents of this strange room.

And now a few words relative to the inmates of that house.

The hump-backed lad who had rushed down the stairs in the manner already described, was about seventeen or eighteen years of age, and so hideously ugly that he scarcely seemed to belong to the human species. His hair was fiery red, and covered with coarse and matted curls a huge head that would not have been unsuitable for the most colossal form. His face was one mass of freckles; his eyes were of a pinkish hue; his eyebrows and lashes were white; and his large teeth glittered like dominoes between his thick and blueish lips. His arms were long like those of a baboon; but his legs were short; and he was not more than four feet and a half high. In spite of his hideous deformity and almost monstrous ugliness, there was an air of good-nature about him, combined with an evident consciousness of his own repulsive appearance, which could not do otherwise than inspire compassion—if not interest.

The moment the policeman, who entered the room first, made his appearance upon the threshold, a young female precipitated herself towards him, exclaiming, "For God's sake protect me—but do not, do not hurt my uncle!"

This girl was about sixteen years of age, and, though not beautiful, possessed a countenance whose plaintive expression was calculated to inspire deep interest in her behalf. She was tall, and of a graceful figure: her hair was light chesnut; her eyes dark blue, and with a deep melancholy characterising their bashful glances; her teeth were small, white, and even. Though clad in humble attire, there was something genteel in her appearance,—something superior to the place and society in which we now find her.

The man from whose cruel blows she implored protection, was of middle height, rather stoutly built, with a pale countenance, and an expression of stern hard-heartedness in his large grey eyes and compressed lips. He was dressed in a suit which evidently had never been made for him,—the blue frock coat being too long in the sleeves, the waistcoat too wide round the waist, and the trousers scarcely reaching below the knees.

"For God's sake protect me!" exclaimed the young girl, as above stated; "but do not—do not hurt my uncle," she added in a tone which proved the sincerity of the prayer.

"Come, come, Master Smithers," said the constable, "this won't do: you musn't alarm the neighbourhood in this manner."

"Why, then, does she interfere between me and Gibbet?" cried the man brutally, at the same time flourishing a thick leathern thong in his right hand.

"She does it out of good-nature, I suppose," observed the constable. "Every one knows how shameful you treat your son Gibbet; and this poor gal takes her cousin's part."

At these words the hump-back cast a timid but affectionate glance towards Katherine, who, on her part, threw a look of profound compassion upon the unfortunate lad.

"She does it out of good-nature, does she?" repeated the man: "then why won't he learn my business? He never can be fit for any other. But, no—the moment I leave him, he is off to the side of Miss there; and she makes him read in her outlandish books, so that he despises his father and the business that he must take to, sooner or later."

"But you ought not to beat Miss Katherine, Smithers," reiterated the policeman. "The next time I hear the cry of '*Murder*' in your house I'll walk you off to the station—and that's all about it."

"I suppose that I may leather my own son if I choose?" said the man, savagely.

"You ought to remember that he is deformed through your cruelty," cried the constable, "and that his mother died of fright and grief ——"

"Hold your tongue, blue-bottle!" interrupted Smithers, his lips quivering with rage. "It isn't for you to come and make mischief in a family. Get out with you!"

"But if we leave this poor girl to the rage of her uncle," said Markham to the constable, whom he drew aside and thus addressed in a whisper, "he will do her some injury."

"What is to be done with her, sir?" demanded the officer. "Smithers says she is his niece——"

"Is it not certain that she stands in such a degree of relationship towards him?" inquired our hero, whose humane heart was moved in favour of the suffering girl.

"Now, then, what are you chattering about there?" ejaculated Smithers. "I want to go to bed: Gibbet, you be off to your room—and, Kate, you go to yours. This is mine—and I should advise the blue-bottle with his spy in plain clothes to make themselves scarce."

"Remember, I shall report you to our serjeant," said the policeman; "and he will tell the Division to keep an eye on you."

"Tell him whatever you like," returned the man doggedly.

The hump-back and Katherine had already left the room in obedience to the command of Smithers.

The constable repeated a caution to the ruffian who had ill-used them, and then took his departure, followed by Richard Markham.

When they were once more in the street, our hero said to his companion, "Who is that man?"

"The PUBLIC EXECUTIONER," was the reply.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE CONFIDENCE.

So astounded was Markham by this information, that for some moments he was unable to utter a word.

"I see that you are surprised, sir," said the policeman; "but couldn't you guess where you was when you saw the room filled with gibbets, real or in pictures?"

"It never struck me who the owner of those terrific symbols might be," answered Richard. "I concluded that some man of morbid taste dwelt there; but not for one moment did I imagine that I was in the presence of the public executioner."

"Did you ever see such a horrible-looking object as his son is?" asked the policeman.

"Poor creature—he is greatly to be pitied! Surely his father cannot in reality have conferred upon him the name by which you called him?"

"I don't suppose that Gibbet is his real name, sir, but it is the only one I ever heard him called by. You see, sir, Smithers wishes to bring the lad up to the same line: he wants an assistant, and he thinks that Gibbet is old enough to help him. Besides, there's plenty of work always after Assizes in the country; and the London hangman may get the jobs if he likes. He's considered more skilful than any one else; and, after all, practice makes perfect. As it is, he is forced to refuse a good many offers, because he can't be here, there, and everywhere. Now if Gibbet would only take to the business kindly, he might help his father to earn a fortune!"

"But if the poor lad have a loathing for the horrible avocation—as well he may," observed Markham, with a shudder, "why should he be forced to embrace it?"

"Because he can never do himself good elsewhere," answered the constable. "Who will employ the son of Jack Ketch? Why, will you believe it, sir, that not a soul visits Smithers' family? Although he lives in this neighbourhood, where, God knows, people ain't over nice and particklер, not a human being would cross his threshold."

"Does that aversion arise from disgust or superstition?" demanded Markham.

"From both, sir," was the reply. "The people that live in this district are of two kinds—the poor and ignorant, and the rogues and vagabonds. The poor and ignorant are afraid of the public executioner; and the rogues and vagabonds hate him, although he's merely an instrument. Miss Kate goes to market for him; and the shop-keepers that know who she is, are scarcely civil to her. They seem as if they'd rather she'd keep away."

"And you say that she is the executioner's niece?" observed Markham.

"Smithers says so himself," was the reply; "and of course I know nothing to the contrary; but it does seem strange that so amiable, genteel, and clever, a young gal should belong to such a family!"

"Her own parents are dead, I presume?"

"Yes, sir,—she is an orphan. When Smithers is very dull and miserable with his lonely situation, he sometimes comes down to the station and has a chat with us constables; and then he's pretty communicative. He told me one day that Katherine's parents had died when she was very young, and so he was compelled to take care of her. All the while she was a child Smithers let her do pretty well as she liked; and it is a wonder that she has turned out a good gal. But she regularly frequented the School established in the parish of Saint David's by the Rev. Mr. Tracy; and in that way she picked up a tolerable smattering of knowledge. Since then she's instructed herself as much as she could, and has bought books with the little money that her needle has produced her."

"But who employs her as a sempstress, if, as you say, so terrible a stigma affixes itself to each member of the hangman's family?" inquired Richard.

"The old housekeeper at Mr. Tracy's is very friendly disposed towards the poor creature, and gives her work," answered the policeman. "Katherine does all she can to console that poor hump-back Gibbet; and she has taught him to read and write—aye, and what's more, sir, to pray."

"Policeman," said Richard, after a pause, "the manner in which you have spoken relative to that poor girl, shows me that you have a good heart. Is there any mode of ameliorating her wretched situation? I feel the deepest compassion for her miserable lot; and all you have told me of her excellent character makes me anxious to see her removed from the vile society of that ruffian under whose roof she lives."

"I believe she is anxious to go out to service, sir, or open a little school," answered the constable; "but her family connection is against her. Or else I don't think that Smithers would care about parting with her."

"What induces you to suppose that such are her wishes?" asked Markham.

"Because she told me so, sir," was the reply. "One evening I went to Smithers' house, with a certain message from the Sheriff of London—you can guess what, I dare say——"

"To acquaint him with the day fixed for some wretch's execution, no doubt?"

"Precisely, sir; but Smithers wasn't at home, and so I sate down and waited for him. It wasn't in Jack Ketch's own room up stairs where we went just now, and where he teaches his son how to hang by means of that puppet; but it was in a little parlour they have got

down stairs, and which Miss Kate keeps as clean and comfortable as if they saw no end of company. Well, I got talking to the young gal; and though she never said a single word against her uncle, but spoke of him in a grateful and kind manner, she let out that if he *could* spare her, she should like to earn her own bread by her own exertions. And then the poor creature burst out crying, and said, that no one would take her as a servant, and that she should get no scholars even if she was to open a school."

Markham made no answer; but he reflected profoundly on all that he had just heard.

"Poor gal!" continued the policeman, after a few moments' silence; "she don't deserve to suffer as she does. My beat is about this quarter: and I know pretty well all that's going on. I see more than other people about here, because I've opportunity and leisure. Besides, it's my business. Well, sir, I can assure you that there isn't a more charitable or generous-hearted gal in all London than Miss Katherine. If a poor neighbour's ill, it's ten to one but some female muffled up in her shawl knocks at the door of the sick person's house, leaves a parcel, and runs away; and then there's tea, and sugar, and gruel, for the invalid—and no one knows who brought it, or where it comes from. Or if a family's in want, the baker calls with bread that's paid for, but won't say who sent it. Or may be it's the butcher with a small joint—but always sent in the same quiet manner. Then, while the poor creatures whose hearts are made glad by this unlooked-for charity, are wondering whether it was the parson, or the parson's wife, or this benevolent gentleman, or that good lady, who sent the things, Kate buries herself in her room, and doesn't even think that she has done any thing out of the way."

"Is this possible?" cried Markham.

"I know it, sir—for I've seen her do it all," answered the policeman, "when she couldn't see me and little thought that any body noticed her."

"And she the niece of the public executioner!" exclaimed Richard: "a pearl concealed in this horrible swamp!"

The conversation between Markham and the good-hearted constable was cut short by the sudden appearance of the other two policemen, who had undertaken to visit the low houses in Plumptre Street.

"Well, what news?" asked Richard's companion.

"None," was the reply. "We have been in every flash crib down yonder, and can't hear or see any thing of the Resurrection Man."

"Then we must abandon the search for to-night, I presume," said Richard. "The clock has struck one, and I begin to be wearied of this fruitless ramble."

"We will exert ourselves to discover the miscreant that blew up our comrades in Bethnal Green," observed the constable who had been our hero's companion that night. "Should we succeed in capturing him, sir, where can I wait upon you to communicate the tidings?"

"My name is Markham," was the reply, "and I live at Holloway. If you discover the villain Anthony Tidkins, lose not a moment in making me acquainted with the circumstance."

Richard then rewarded the three constables liberally for the trouble they had taken; and ere he departed from them, he drew aside the one who had been his companion.

"My good fellow," he said, slipping an additional sovereign into his hand, "you have too kind a heart for the situation which you fill. Should you ever require a friend, hesitate not to come to me."

"And should you, sir, ever need the humble aid of Morris Benstead, you know the Division I belong to, and a note to the chief station will always command my attention."

Markham thanked the officer for his civility, and then struck into the nearest street leading from the Holy Land to Tottenham Court Road, where he hoped to find a vehicle to take him home.

But scarcely had he proceeded twenty paces, when he heard hasty footsteps behind him; and, turning round, was accosted by a man whose slouched hat almost entirely shaded his countenance.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the man; "but I heard you mention two names a few moments ago that are familiar to me."

"Indeed!" cried our hero, surprised at this strange mode of address.

"Yes:—I was lurking in a court, and I heard you say that you were Mr. Richard Markham," resumed the man: "and you mentioned a certain Anthony Tidkins."

"I did. Do you know him?" demanded Richard.

"But too well," answered the man bitterly.

"Who are you?" inquired Markham.

"No matter who I am: I know *you*—and I know *him*. I was in a certain place at the same time that you were there; though we were not in the same ward. But I heard all about you *then*; and when you mentioned your name just now, I felt sure you was the same person. Has Tidkins ever injured you?"

"Cruelly," replied Richard. "But I am not influenced by petty motives of revenge: I am anxious to deliver a monster into the grasp of justice."

"And what should you say if you heard that Tidkins was beyond your reach in this world?"

"I should rejoice that society was relieved from such a fiend."

"Then I think that I can make your mind easy on that score," said the man.

"What do you mean?" cried Richard, eagerly.

"I mean that this hand has done the law's work," responded the stranger.

"You mean—you mean that you yourself have acted the part of an avenger?" said Markham.

"Precisely what I *do* mean: in plain terms, I've killed him."

"My God! and you tell me this so coolly!" exclaimed Richard. "Whatever that man's crimes may be, you are not the less a murderer!"

"Pooh—pooh! I should have thought you'd more pluck than to talk in this way. What does it matter whether Jack Ketch or a private enemy did the job?"

"Where did this happen? when?—how long ago?" inquired Markham, not knowing whether to believe the statement thus strangely made to him, or not.

"If you really wish to know all about it," said the man, "step up this court, where we can talk in peace, and I will tell you. What! you think I am going to hurt you too? Well, be it so. Goodnight—or rather good morning."

At that moment Saint Giles's Church struck two.

"Stay," cried Richard, catching the man by the arm: "I will accompany you."

They walked together into a dark court, our hero keeping himself in readiness to resist any sudden hostility, were such a proceeding intended.

But the man appeared to have no such aim in view, for, leaning himself tranquilly against the wall, he said, "Can you keep a secret?"

"If I promise to do so," answered Richard.

"Then promise not to betray what I am going to tell you."

"I promise," said Markham, after some hesitation.

"You must know," continued the man, satisfied with this assurance, "that I have lately partaken of the hospitality of a race of persons, at whose head-quarters—not a hundred miles from where we are now standing—I met Anthony Tidkins——"

"When?" demanded Richard impatiently.

"About two hours ago."

"Ah! then it may be true——"

"True! what interest have I to tell you a lie? I have been some time in search of that villain; and accident threw us together to-night. This dagger——" here he took Markham's hand, and made him feel the point of the elastic poniard,—"this dagger drank his life's best blood!"

Richard could not suppress an ejaculation of horror.

The assassin laughed.

"Unhappy man," said our hero, "are you not aware that your life may be forfeited on account of this deed?"

"And this good blade should reach the heart of any one that attempted to take me," was the resolute and indeed significant reply.

"I promised to betray nothing that you might communicate to me, and I shall keep my word," rejoined Markham, in a firm tone, and without retreating a single step. "Did I wish to forfeit my pledge, your dagger would not intimidate me."

"You are a brave fellow," cried the stranger; "and all brave men may be trusted. Would you like to satisfy yourself, with your own eyes, that Anthony Tidkins has received his death wound?"

"I should," answered Markham; "both on my own account and on that of society."

"And you will not betray the place that I shall take you to, or the people that you may see there?"

"Most solemnly will I keep your secret."

"Come with me, then. I will leave you at the door; and your own ingenuity must obtain you admittance. But, one word more: you will not state to any one there that you have met me?"

"I will not even allow my motive for visiting the place you speak of to transpire."

"I believe all you say. Come!"

The man led the way out of the court, accompanied by our hero.

They threaded several narrow streets and alleys, and at length stopped at the door of a large house.

"Knock, and demand shelter: admittance will not, I fancy, be refused."

"Is there any danger to be encountered?" asked Markham: "not that I fear it—but I am unarmed."

"There is no danger. This is the head-quarters of the Gipsies, or Zingarees: they never use the dagger or the pistol. And, once more, remember your promise."

"I shall not forget it," said Richard. "But, before we separate, answer me one question."

"Speak—and be speedy," returned the man.

"In one word, then, why, when you overheard my conversation with the policeman, did you resolve upon making me the confidant of a deed which might send you to the scaffold?"

"Because I am proud of that deed," replied the man, grasping Richard forcibly by the wrist, and grinding his teeth in horrible triumph;—"because it is the result of four years of pent-up yearning after vengeance;—because, in avenging myself, I have avenged all who have suffered through that miscreant;—because I am anxious that those who have been injured by him should know the fate that has overtaken him at last."

With these words, Crankey Jem (whom the reader has doubtless already recognised) disappeared precipitately from the spot.

CHAPTER CXL.

INCIDENTS IN THE GIPSY PALACE.

For a few moments Richard remained rooted to the spot where the returned convict had left him. He was uncertain how to proceed.

Warned by the desperate adventure which had nearly cost him his life at Twig Folly, he feared lest the present occurrence might be another scheme of the Resurrection Man to ensnare him.

Then he reflected that the individual who had just left him, had met him accidentally, and had narrated to him circumstances which had every appearance of truth.

We have before said that Markham was not a coward—far from it; and he moreover experienced a lively curiosity to satisfy himself concerning the fate of an individual whose inveterate malignity had so frequently menaced not only his dearest interests, but his life.

This reflection decided him; and, without farther hesitation, he knocked boldly at the front door of the Gipsies' Palace.

Some minutes elapsed ere his summons appeared to have created any attention within; and he was about to repeat it, when the door slowly moved on its hinges.

But to Markham's surprise no person appeared in the obscure lobby into which the pale moon threw a fitful light; in fact, the front door was opened by means of a simple mechanism which the porter worked in his lodge overhead.

While Markham was lost in wonder at this strange circumstance, the trap was suddenly raised above, and a strong light was thrown through it into the lobby.

"Who are you?" demanded the gruff voice of the porter.

"I seek a few hours' repose and rest," answered Markham.

"Who sent you here?"

"A person who is a friend to you."

"Do you know what place this is?"

"Yes—it is the head-quarters of the Zingarees."

"So far, so good," said the porter. "Well—wait a few moments—I must see."

The trap closed—the lobby was again involved in total darkness; and for the next ten minutes the silence of death appeared to reign within the house.

At the expiration of that time the inner door was opened:; and the porter, bearing a light, appeared.

"You may enter," he said. "The Zingarees never refuse hospitality when it can be safely granted."

Markham crossed the threshold without hesitation.

The porter closed both doors with great care.

"Follow me," said the man.

He then led the way up stairs to the first floor, and conducted our hero into a room where there were several beds, all of which were unoccupied.

"You have your choice of the downies," observed the porter, with a half smile; "and I shall leave you this light. Do you require any food?"

"None, I thank you."

"So I should think," said the man drily, as he surveyed Markham's appearance in a manner which seemed to express a wonder why a person in his situation of life had come thither at all.

We have, however, before observed that curiosity formed but a faint feature of the gipsy character; and, even when it existed, it was not expressed in verbal queries. Moreover, individuals in a respectable sphere not unfrequently sought in the Holy Land a refuge against the officers of the laws which they violated; and hence the appearance of a person had nothing to do with the fact of admission into the gipsies' establishment.

Nevertheless, the porter did survey Markham in a dubious way for a moment; but whether the preceding incidents of the night, or the calm tranquillity of our hero's manner,—so inconsistent with the idea that he was anxious to conceal himself from the eyes of justice,—excited the suspicions of the porter, it is impossible to say.

But that glance of curiosity was only momentary.

Averting his eyes from our hero, the porter placed the light upon the floor, wished him a good night's rest, and retired.

But to the surprise and annoyance of Markham, the gipsy locked the door of the apartment.

As the key turned with a grating sound, a tremor crept over Richard's frame; and he almost repented having sought the interior of an abode the character and inmates of which were almost entirely unknown to him. Indeed, all that he knew of either was derived from the meagre information of the man (and that man an acknowledged assassin!) who had induced him to visit the place where he now found himself.

"How weak I am to yield to this sentiment of fear!" he exclaimed. "Rather let me determine how to act."

He proceeded to examine the room in which he appeared to be a prisoner. The numerous beds seemed to indicate that he really was in a species of barrack, or lodging-house of some kind; and this circumstance, coupled with the fact that the porter who had admitted him was evidently a member of the Egyptian or Bohemian race, reassured him—for he felt convinced that he was actually in the abode of gipsies.

So far the stranger, who had been the means of his visit to that strange tenement, had not deceived him.

But how was he to satisfy himself in regard to the Resurrection Man? He tried the door—it was indeed fastened; he examined the windows—they were not barred, but were of a dangerous height from the back-yard on which they looked.

Markham paced the room uncertain how to act.

Suddenly his reverie was interrupted by the tread of many steps upon the stairs; and then a species of subdued bustle took place throughout the house.

The whispering of voices—the removal of heavy objects overhead—the running of persons hither and thither—and the opening and shutting of doors, announced that some extraordinary movement was taking place.

Richard listened with breathless anxiety.

At length the sounds of several heavy steps, in the landing outside his door, met his ears; and this noise was at short intervals varied by deep groans.

The groans seemed to accompany the tread of the heavy steps just mentioned.

These steps and those expressions of human suffering grew fainter and fainter, as they descended the stairs, until at length they were no longer audible.

Nevertheless Markham kept his ear fixed to the key-hole of his chamber-door.

Silence now once more reigned throughout the house; but in a few minutes the noise and bustle seemed to have been transferred to the yard.

Richard hurried to the window; but the moon had gone down and the darkness without was intense.

He concealed the light in a corner of the room, and then gently raised one of the windows.

But he could distinguish nothing with his eyes; and the sounds that met his ears were those of footsteps bustling to and fro. At length these ceased; a door was closed at the end of the yard; and almost immediately afterwards Richard heard, in the same direction, the rumbling noise of a vehicle moving heavily away.

When that din had ceased, the most profound tranquillity prevailed not only in the home but also in its neighbourhood.

That silence was interrupted only for a few moments by the sonorous bell of St. Giles's Church, proclaiming the hour of three.

"Time wears on," said Markham impatiently; "and no opportunity of satisfying myself upon the one point seems to present itself. To attempt to seek repose is impossible; to pass the dull hours in suspense like this is intolerable!"

Then he seated himself on one of the beds, and considered what course he should pursue.

Slowly—slowly passed the time; and though he revolved in his mind many plans, he could fix upon none.

At length the clock struck four.

"The hour for departure will come, and I shall leave this house as full of doubt and uncertainty as when I entered it!" he ejaculated, starting up.

His eye chanced to fall upon a long nail in the wall opposite to the bed from which he had just risen.

A scheme which had already suggested itself to his mind, now assumed a feasible aspect:—he knew that the door was only locked, and not bolted; and that nail seemed to promise the means of egress.

He, however, first examined the candle which had been left him, and which still burned in the corner where he had concealed it:—to his joy he found that there was an inch remaining.

"With the assurance of light for another half hour, and good courage," he said to himself, "I may yet accomplish my purpose."

Having extracted the nail from the wall, he proceeded to pick the lock of the room-door—an operation which he successfully achieved in a few minutes.

Without a moment's hesitation, he issued from the room, bearing the candle in his hand.

As he crossed the landing towards the staircase, which he resolved to ascend, his foot came in contact with some object.

He picked it up: it was an old greasy pocket-book, tied loosely round with a coarse string, and as Markham raised it, a letter dropped out.

Richard was in the act of replacing the document in the pocket-book, which he intended to leave upon the stairs, so as to attract the notice of the inmates of the house, when the address on the outside of the letter caught his eyes.

The candle nearly fell from his hand, so great was the astonishment which immediately seized upon him.

That address consisted simply of the words "ANTHONY TIDKINS!"—but the handwriting—Oh! there was no possibility of mistaking *that*! Markham knew it so well; and though years had elapsed since he had last seen it, still it was familiar to him as his own—the more so, as it remained unchanged in style;—for it was the writing of his brother Eugene!

With a hasty but trembling hand he opened the letter, the wafer of which had already been broken;—he did not hesitate to read the contents;—judging by his own frank and generous heart, he conceived that such a licence was permitted between brothers. Moreover, he experienced a profound and painful anxiety to ascertain what link could connect his brother with the terrible individual to whom the letter was addressed.

But all that the letter contained was this:—

"Come to me to-night without fail, between eleven and twelve. Knock in the usual manner."

Richard examined the handwriting with the most minute attention; and the longer he scrutinized it, the more he became confirmed in his belief that it was Eugene's.

But Eugene a patron or colleague of the greatest miscreant that had ever disgraced human nature! Was such a thing possible?

The letter bore no date—no signature—and was addressed from no place. It had no post-mark upon it, and had, therefore, evidently been delivered by a private hand.

"Oh!" thought Richard within himself, "if my unhappy brother have really been the victim, the associate, or the employer of that incarnate demon, may God grant that the wretch is indeed no more—for the sake of Eugene!"

And then his curiosity to ascertain the truth relative to the alleged assassination of Tidkins, became more poignant.

"It must be so!" reasoned Markham within himself; "that stranger has not deceived me:—the presence of this pocket-book here is an undeniable trace of the miscreant. Oh, how much it now behoves me to convince myself that he is indeed removed from the theatre of his crimes!"

Subduing as much as possible the painful emotions which that letter had suddenly excited within him, Markham secured the pocket-book about his person; for now that accident had revealed to him to whom it belonged, he did not consider himself called upon to part with an object which, in case the statement of Tidkins' death should prove untrue, might contain some paper calculated to afford a clue to his haunts or proceedings.

Scarcely decided in what manner to pursue his investigation in that house, and trusting more to accident than to any settled plan to aid him in testing the truth of the self-accused stranger's statement relative to Tidkins,—Markham stole softly up the staircase.

Arrived on the first landing to which it led, he listened attentively at the various doors which opened from it.

All was silent as death within the rooms to which those doors belonged.

Not even the sound of human respiration met his ears. Could it be possible that the house was deserted? Perhaps the bustle which he had heard ere now was caused by the departure of its occupants?

As this idea grew upon him, he was emboldened to try the latch of one of the doors at which he had already listened. It yielded to his hand; he pushed the door open with great caution, and entered the chamber.

Not a human soul was there.

He visited the other rooms upon that landing, the doors of which were all unlocked; and they were alike untenanted.

There was another storey above; and thither he proceeded.

The first three rooms which he entered were empty, like the preceding ones; but in the fourth there were three men. They were, however, fast asleep in their beds; and Richard's visit was so noiseless that they were not in the least disturbed.

Hastily retreating, and closing the door carefully behind him, Markham descended to the landing on which his own room opened, and where he had found the pocket-book.

On that floor were four apartments, as on each of the upper flats, in addition to the porter's lodge, which, it will be remembered, was precisely over the lobby below.

To avoid elaborate detail, we may state that Markham found the doors of the other three rooms (besides his own) on the first floor unlocked, and the chambers themselves untenanted.

He was about to leave the last room, when the appearance of one of the beds attracted his attention; and on a closer examination, he perceived that it was saturated with blood. Moreover, on a chair close by, there were pieces of linen rag, on which large stains of gore were scarcely dry, together with lint and bandages—unquestionable proofs that a wound had very recently been dressed in that apartment.

"No—that self-accuser has not deceived me!" thought Markham, as he contemplated these objects. "All circumstances combine to bear evidence to the truth of his assertion! Doubtless the gipsies have departed, carrying away the corpse with them!"

He stood gazing on the blood-dyed bed at his feet musing in this manner; and then he thought how fearful was the fate of the miscreant, the evidences of whose death he believed to be beneath his eyes, cut off in the midst of his crimes without a moment's preparation or repentance!

But suddenly he asked himself—"Am I certain that he is no more? That lint to stanch the blood—those bandages to bind the wound,—do they not rather bear testimony to a blow which was not fatal, but left life behind it? And yet, for what purpose could the body be removed—save for secret interment? Oh! if that man be yet alive—and if Eugene be indeed his accomplice or his patron——"

And Markham experienced emotions of the most intense anguish! He loved his brother with the most ardent affection; and the idea that the individual so loved could be a criminal, or the friend of criminals, was harrowing to his soul.

"But, after all," thought Richard, his naturally upright and almost severe principles asserting their empire in his mind,—"after all, ought I not to rejoice, if this man be indeed still alive, that he has survived the assassin's blow—that he is allowed leisure for repentance! My Maker, who can read all hearts, knows that I am not selfish; and yet it is a principle of our frail human nature to rejoice at the fall of a deadly enemy! Oh! when I think of all the wrongs and injuries I have experienced at the hands of that man,—exposures—persecutions—attempts upon my life,—I cannot pray that he may live to be the scourge of others—and perhaps of my brother—as he has been of me!"

Unwilling to contend longer with the varied emotions which agitated his breast, Markham hurried from the room.

The lower part of the house yet remained to be explored:—perhaps the body—if the Resurrection Man were indeed dead—had been removed to a room on the ground floor?

Determined to leave no stone unturned to satisfy his doubts, Markham cautiously descended the stairs, and visited the refectory-rooms, one after the other.

They were all empty.

His candle was now waxing dim; but he saw that his search was nearly over. A flight of steps, apparently leading to offices in the basement of the building, alone remained for him to visit.

To that part of the house he descended, and found himself in a small place which had the appearance of a scullery.

On one side was a massive door, secured with huge bolts, and evidently leading into a vault or cellar. But scarcely had Markham time to cast one glance around him in the subterranean, when the candle flickered and expired.

At the same moment a hollow groan echoed through the basement.

Richard started: he was in total darkness—and a momentary tremor came over him.

The groan was repeated.

His fears vanished; and he immediately concluded that the Resurrection Man, wounded and suffering, must be somewhere near.

At that idea, all sentiments of aversion, hatred, and abhorrence,—all reminiscence of injury and wrong, fled from the mind of that generous-hearted young man: he thought only that a fellow-creature was in anguish and in pain—perhaps neglected, and left to die without a soul to administer consolation!

Reckless of the danger which he might incur by alarming the inmates of the house, he determined upon rousing the porter in order to obtain a light.

He turned from the scullery, and was rushing up the stone steps in pursuance of his humane intention, when he suddenly came in violent contact with a person who was descending the same stairs.

CHAPTER CXLI.

THE SUBTERRANEAN.

The violence of the concussion threw Richard backwards; and in a moment he felt the rough hand of a man grasp him by the throat.

"Who is it?" was the demand simultaneously put to him.

"I will answer you when we are on equal terms," replied Markham; and, hurling the man away from him, he sprang upon his feet. "Now—stand off," he cried; "for I am not to be injured with impunity."

"I don't want to injure you," said the man. "But who are you? I know by your voice that you're not one of us."

"You then are an inmate of this house?" observed Markham, fencing with the other's question.

At that instant another hollow groan echoed through the subterranean.

"She lives!" cried the man; and in another moment Markham heard him drawing back the bolts of the massive door which he had observed in the scullery.

Richard groped his way towards him, and said, "*She lives?* whom do you allude to? Surely there cannot be a female imprisoned ——"

"Be silent, in the name of heaven!" interrupted the man, in a whisper. "The life of an unhappy woman depends upon your secrecy—whoever you may be."

"Then would I rather aid than harm you and her, both," answered Markham.

Another groan was heard; and Richard could now distinguish the direction from which it came.

But still the massive door remained unopened.

"This bolt,—this bolt!" muttered the man in a tone expressive of commingled rage and despair. "Oh! for a light!"

"Can you not procure one?" demanded Richard.

"Stay," said the man—"a good thought! There should be candles somewhere here—and matches. By Jove! here is a candle—and, on this shelf—yes—here are matches also!"

The man struck a light.

By a natural impulse he and Markham immediately cast scrutinising glances at each other.

"Ah! I thought so by your voice—you are a gentleman," said the man: "then you will not betray me?"

"Betray you!" repeated Markham, surprised at this observation.

"I will tell you what I mean presently: there is no time to be lost! Hark—another groan: she is dying!"

The man, who was tall and good-looking, and evidently not a scion of the Bohemian race—gave Markham the candle, and proceeded to open the massive door, the presence of the light enabling him to remove the fastenings with ease.

He then beckoned Richard to follow him into the cellar, where he instantly set to work to draw the bolts of a second door.

This task was speedily accomplished; and as the door grated upon its hinges, another heart-wrung moan emanated from the interior of the second vault.

The man rushed in; Markham followed with the light, and beheld a woman stretched almost lifeless upon the mattress.

The groans had all along emanated from her lips:—then where was the Resurrection Man?

"Margaret—cheer up—it's me—it's Skilligalee—I'm come to save you," said the protector of the Rattlesnake as he bent over her.

"How long has she been immured here?" inquired Markham.

"Only three or four hours," answered Skilligalee; "and so it must be fright that has half killed her. Pray get some water, sir—there's plenty in the scullery."

Markham hastened to comply with this request; and Skilligalee bathed the woman's face with the refreshing element.

She opened her eyes, and a smile came over her faded countenance as she caught sight of the friendly face that greeted her fearful glance.

"How long have I been here?" asked the Rattlesnake in a faint tone, while her whole frame was convulsed with terror as recent events rushed to her mind.

"Not many hours, Meg," answered Skilligalee.

"And you will not leave me here any longer?" she said. "Oh! do not let me die in this horrible place!"

"I am come to save you," returned Skilligalee. "Are you able to get up and walk?"

"Yes—for the sake of freedom," cried the Rattlesnake, rising from the mattress. "But who is that?" she added, as her eyes now fell upon Markham for the first time.

"That's exactly what I don't know myself," said Skilligalee. "The gentleman has, however, behaved himself as such; and that's enough for us. Hark! there's the clock on the staircase striking five? We haven't much time to lose: come on."

Markham led the way with the light: Skilligalee followed, supporting the Rattlesnake, who was weak and exhausted with the effects of extreme terror.

"Which way shall we go?" she inquired, as they paused for a moment in the scullery, to listen if all were quiet.

"By the back gate," answered Skilligalee. "I have secured the key. The porter keeps the keys of the front door."

"And what has become of *him*—that dreadful man who was the cause of all this misery?" asked the Rattlesnake. "Was he killed by the blow that the Traveller dealt him with his long dagger?"

These words struck a chord which vibrated to Markham's heart.

"Was any one wounded in this house during the night?" he demanded hastily.

Skilligalee hesitated: he knew not who Markham was, nor what might be the consequences of a reply consistent with the truth.

"Answer me, I conjure you," continued Richard, perceiving this unwillingness to satisfy his curiosity. "I have every reason to believe that a person whose name is Anthony Tidkins——"

"Oh! yes—yes," murmured the Rattlesnake, with a convulsive shudder.

"Then I have not been deceived!" cried Markham. "That individual, who is better known as the Resurrection Man, was dangerously wounded—if not killed—in this house a few hours since. "You," he continued, addressing himself to Skilligalee, "are evidently acquainted with the particulars of the occurrence: as I have assisted you to liberate this woman who seems dear to you, reward me by telling me all you know of that event."

"First tell me who you are," said Skilligalee. "And be quick—I have no time for conversation."

"Suffice it for you to know that I am one whom the Resurrection Man has cruelly injured. Twice has he attempted my life: once at his den in Bethnal Green, and again on the banks of the canal at Twig Folly——"

"Then you, sir, are Mr. Markham?" interrupted be Rattlesnake. "Oh! I know how you have been treated by that fearful man; and there is no necessity to conceal the truth from you! Yes—sir, it is true that the wretch who has persecuted you was stabbed in this house; and—if I did not believe that the wound was mortal——"

Here the Rattlesnake stopped, and leant heavily upon Skilligalee for support—so profoundly was she terrified at the mere possibility of Anthony Tidkins being still in existence.

Her companion perceived her emotion, and fathoming its cause, hastened to exclaim, "But he is no more! You need dread him no longer."

"Are you sure? are you well convinced of this?" demanded Markham.

"I saw him breathe his last," was the answer.

"Where? Not in this house?" cried Richard.

"No," returned Skilligalee. "Between two and three this morning the King, his family, and all the Zingarees, except those who stay to take care of this establishment, took their departure; and I was compelled to go along with them. In consequence of some communication between the person you call the Resurrection Man and Aischa, the Queen of the Zingarees, after he was badly wounded by the Traveller——"

"How do you call the individual who attacked him?" demanded Richard.

"The Traveller," answered the Skilligalee. "But, it appears, that he had another name—Crankey Jem: at least, he said so after he had stabbed the man."

"I should know that name," said Richard, musing. "Oh! I remember! Proceed."

"Well—in consequence of something that the Resurrection Man told Aischa, when she was attending to his wound, it was determined to take him along with us; and four of our men carried him down to the van which was waiting at the back gate. He groaned very much while he was being removed."

"I heard him," said Richard, instantaneously recalling to mind the groans which had met his ears when he was listening at his chamber door to the bustle of the gipsies' departure.

"You heard him?" repeated Skilligalee.

"Yes—I was in the house at the time. Proceed."

"We conveyed him down to the van, where we laid him on a mattress, and he seemed to fall asleep. Then we all divided into twos and threes, and got safe out of London, into a field near the Pentonville Penitentiary. But when the van, with Aischa, Eva, and Morcar, —those are some of our people, sir,—came to the place of appointment, we found," added Skilligalee, his voice assuming a peculiar tone, "that the Resurrection Man was dead."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated the Rattlesnake, with a fervour which made Markham's blood run cold.

"And now that I have told you all I know, sir," said Skilligalee, "you will have no objection if me and my companion here go about our business; for it is dangerous to both our interests to remain here any longer."

Skilligalee uttered these words in his usually jocular manner; for he was anxious to reassure his female companion, who still laboured under an excess of terror that seemed ready to prostrate all her energies.

"Yes—let us leave this fearful den," said Markham: "to me it appears replete with horrors of all kinds."

Skilligalee now took the candle and led the way, still supporting Margaret Flathers on his arm.

They all three effected their egress from the palace without any obstacle.

When they were safe in the alley with which the back gate communicated, Markham said to Skilligalee, "From what I can understand, you have fled from the gipsies in order to return and liberate your companion from the dungeon where we found her."

"That is precisely what I did," answered Skilligalee. "I gave them the slip when they had set up their tents in the field near the Penitentiary."

"It is probable that you are not too well provided with pecuniary resources," said Richard: "the contents of my purse are at your service."

"Thank you kindly, sir—very kindly," returned Skilligalee. "I am not in want of such assistance."

Markham vainly pressed his offer: it was declined with many expressions of gratitude. The truth was that Skilligalee had the greater portion of his share of Margaret's gold still remaining; and there was something so generous and so noble in the manner of Richard Markham, that he could not find it in his heart to impose upon him by taking a sum of which he did not stand in immediate need.

"At all events, let me advise you to avoid such companions as those with whom you appear to have been allied," observed Richard, "and who are cruel enough to immure a female in a subterranean dungeon."

"I shall not neglect your advice, sir," returned Skilligalee; "and may God bless you for it."

"And you," continued Richard, addressing himself to Margaret Flathers, "second your companion in his good intentions. I know not what deed on your part could have led to your incarceration in that cell—neither do I seek to know;—but to you I would give similar advice—avoid those whose ways are criminal, and whose vengeance is as terrific as it is lawless. Farewell."

"May God bless you, sir, for your good counsel!" said Margaret Flathers, weeping.

She had not merely repeated, with parrot-like callousness, the words uttered by her companion: that benediction emanated with fervid sincerity from a heart deeply penetrated by anxiety to renew a long-forgotten acquaintance with rectitude.

"Farewell, sir," said Skilligalee.

He and the Rattlesnake then struck into one of the streets with which the alley at the back of the gipsies' palace communicated.

Richard took another direction on his way homewards.

CHAPTER CXLII.

GIBBET.

A fortnight had passed since the incidents just related.

It was a Monday morning.

The clock of St. Giles's had just struck six, when the faint, flickering gleam of a candle struggled through the uppermost windows of the hangman's house.

The few persons who were passing along at that hour, and on that dark winter's morning, shuddered as they caught a glimpse of the sickly glare through the obscurity and the mist—for they thought within themselves, "The executioner is up early on account of the man that's to be hanged at eight o'clock."

And such was indeed the case.

Smithers rose shortly before six; and, having lighted the solitary candle that stood upon the mantel, proceeded to the floor below to call his son.

"Gibbet, you lazy hound!" he cried, thundering with his fist at the door of the hump-back's room; "get up."

"I'm getting up, father," replied the lad, from the interior of the chamber.

"Well, make haste about it," said the executioner in a savage tone.

He then returned to the loft.

There was something horribly fantastic in the appearance of that place. The dim and sickly light of the candle did but little more than redeem from complete obscurity the various strange objects which we have already described. But as the penetrating eye of the executioner plunged into the visible darkness of the loft, and beheld the ominous figure balancing beneath the beam, while its mask of a livid white hue wore a ghastly appearance in contrast with the black body and limbs which it surmounted,—no sentiment of horror nor of alarm agitated his heart.

The avocations of the man had brutalized him, and blunted every humane feeling which he had once possessed.

He walked up and down the room impatiently for several minutes, until the door opened and his son entered.

The hideous countenance of the lad was ghastly pale, and distorted with horror. His eyes glared fearfully, as if terrific apparitions flitted before them.

"Gibbet," said his father, "you shall try your hand this morning on a living being instead of a puppet."

"This morning!" repeated the lad, his teeth chattering, and his knees knocking together.

"To be sure. Didn't I tell you so last night?" cried the executioner. "Why, you hump-backed scoundrel, you—you ought to have prayed that no reprieve might be sent for the chap that's to be tucked up this morning, instead of working yourself up to this state of cowardly nervousness. But I'll take it out of you, I will."

With these words, Smithers seized his leathern thong, and was advancing towards the hump-back, when the wretched lad threw himself on his knees, clasped his hands together, and cried, "No,—don't, father—don't! I can't bear that lash! You don't know how it hurts.—I'll do all you tell me."

"Well, that's speaking proper—that is," said the executioner, dropping the already uplifted thong.

"It's all for your good that I use it now and then, Gibbet. Don't I want to make a man of you? Look at the money you can earn if you'll only make yourself a name like me. D'ye think the sheriffs throughout England would all apply to me to do their work for them, if I wasn't celebrated for my skill? Why—even the criminals themselves must look upon it as a regular blessing to have such a knowing hand as me to tie their last cravat for them. I'd bet a pound that the man who's to be turned off presently, isn't half as miserable as people think—'cos why, he's well aware that I shan't put him to no pain."

"I know you've got a great name in your business, father——"

"We'll call it *profession* in future, Gibbet; it's more genteel. And, after all, it's as good as a barrister's; for the barrister gets the man hanged—and I hang him. That's all the difference."

"I know it's very respectable, father," resumed the lad, submissively; "but—still—I——"

"Still what?" cried Smithers, savagely, and taking up the thong again.

"Nothing—nothing, father," faltered Gibbet.

"So much the better. Now come to the model, and take and pinion the figure—'cos that's what I mean you to do presently down at Newgate. Begin by degrees, as the saying is; you shall pinion this man to day; you shall let the drop fall for the next—and you shall put the halter on the one that comes arter him, whoever he may be."

"Must I—pin—in—ion the man this morning, father?" inquired the lad, the workings of whose countenance were now absolutely terrific.

"Must you? Of course you must," answered Smithers. "Why, what the devil are you snivelling at now? I'd wager a crown to a brass farthin' that there's many a young nobleman who'd give fifty pounds to be able to do it. Look how they hire the winders opposite

Newgate! Lord bless their souls, it does me good to think that the aristocracy and gentry patronises hanging as well as the other fine arts. What would become of the executioners if they didn't? Why—the legislature would abolish capital punishment at once."

Gibbet clasped his hands together, and raised his eyes in an imploring manner, as much as to say, "Oh! how I wish they would!"

Fortunately for him, his father did not perceive this expression of emotion, for the executioner had approached the candle to the model-gallows, and was now busily occupied in arranging the figure for his son's practice.

"I'll tell you who are the patrons of my business—profession, I mean," continued the executioner; "and if you had a grain of feeling for your father, you'd go down on your knees night and morning and pray for them. The old Tories and the Clergy are my friends; and, thank God! I'm a stanch Tory, too. I hate changes. What have changes done? Why swept away the good old laws that used to hang a man for stealing anything above forty shillings. Ah! George the Third was the best king we ever had! He used to tuck 'em up—three, four, five, six—aye, seven at once! Folks may well talk of the good old times—when an executioner could make his twenty or thirty guineas of a morning! I'd sooner take two guineas for each man under such an excellent system, than have the ten pounds as I do now."

While Smithers was thus talking, he had lowered the figure until it stood upon the drop. He then took off the halter; but the puppet still retained its upright position, because it was well stiffened and had heavy plates of lead fastened to the soles of its feet.

"Now what a cry the rascally radical Sunday papers make against the people they call the *saints*," continued Smithers, as he unfastened the cord which pinioned the arms of the puppet; "and yet those very *saints* are the ones that are most in favour of punishment of death. For my part, I adore the *saints*—I do. When Fitzmorris Shelley brought forward his measure to do away with capital penalty, didn't Dinglis and Cherrytree and all those pious men make a stand against him? And don't they know what's right and proper? Of course they do! Ah! I never read so much of House of Commons' business before, as I did then:—but I was in a precious fright, it's true. I thought of calling a public meeting of all the executioners in the kingdom to petition Parliament against the measure; but I didn't do it—because the House of Commons might have thought that we was interested."

Smithers paused for a moment, and contemplated the puppet and the model-gallows with great admiration. He had fashioned the one and built the latter himself; and he was not a little proud of his handiwork.

"Now, come, Gibbet," he at length exclaimed; "it's all ready. Do you hear me, you infernal hump-back?"

"And if I am a hump-back, father," returned the lad, bursting into tears, "you know——"

"What?" cried the executioner his countenance assuming an expression truly ferocious.

"You know that it isn't my fault," added the unfortunate youth, shrinking from the glance of his savage parent.

"None of this nonsense, Gibbet," said the man, a little softened by the reminiscence that he himself had made his son the object of the very reproach levelled against his personal deformity. "Come and try your hand at this work for a few minutes before breakfast; and then we'll go down yonder together."

Gibbet approached the model-gallows; but his countenance still denoted the most profoundly-rooted disgust and abhorrence.

"Let's suppose that the culprit is as yet in his own cell, Gibbet," continued the executioner. "Well, it's time to pinion him, we'll say; there's the sheriffs standing there—and here's the chaplain. Now, you go for'ard and begin."

Gibbet took the whip-cord which his father handed to him.

"That's right. Now you won't bounce up to the poor devil just like a wild elephant: remember that he's more or less in an interesting situation—as the ladies say. You'll rather glide behind him, and insinuate the cord between his arms, whispering at the same time, '*Beg pardon*.' Mind and don't forget that; because we're under an obligation to him to some extent, as he's the means of putting money in our pocket, and we get the reversion of his clothes."

Here Gibbet cast a hasty but terrified glance towards his father's attire.

"Ah! I know what you're looking at, youngster," said Smithers, with a coarse laugh; "you want to see if I've got on my usual toggery? To be sure I have. I wear it as a compliment to the gentleman that we're to operate on this morning. This coat was the one that Pegsworth cut his last fling in: this waistcoat was Greenacre's; and these breeches was William Lees's. But go on—we mustn't waste time in this way."

Gibbet approached the puppet, and endeavoured to manipulate the string as his father instructed him; but his hand trembled so convulsively that he could not even pass it between the arms of the figure.

While he was still fumbling with the cord, and vainly endeavouring to master his emotions, the leathern thong descended with tremendous violence upon his back.

An appalling cry burst from the poor lad; but the executioner only showered down curses on his head.

At length Gibbet contrived, through fear of another blow, to pinion the figure in a manner satisfactory to his brutal parent.

"There!" exclaimed Smithers; "I shall make something of you at last. What virtue there must be in an old bit of leather: it seems to put the right spirit into *you*, at all events. Well, that's all you shall do this morning down at Newgate; and mind and do it as if the thong was hanging over your head—or it will be all the worse for you when we get home. Try and keep up the credit of your father's name, and show the Sheriffs and the Chaplain how you can truss their pigeon for them. They always take great notice—they do. Last time there was an execution, the Chaplain says to me, says he, '*Smithers, I don't think you had your hand nicely in this morning?*'—'*Don't you, sir?*' says I.—'*No*,' says he; '*I've seen you do it more genteel than that.*'—'*Well, sir*,' says I, '*I'll do my best to please you next time*.'—'*Ah! do, there's a good fellow, Smithers*,' says the Chaplain; and off he goes to breakfast with the Sheriffs and governor, a-smacking his lips at the idea of the cold fowl and ham that he meant to pitch into. But I only mention that anecdote, to show you how close the authorities take notice—that's all. So mind and do your best, boy."

"Yes, father," returned Gibbet.

"So now we've done the pinioning," continued Smithers, once more busying himself with the puppet, which he surveyed with an admiration almost amounting to a kind of love. "Well, we can suppose that our chap has marched from the cell, and has just got on the scaffold. So far, so good. We can't do better than polish him off decently now that he *is* here," proceeded Smithers, alluding to the figure, and rather musing aloud than addressing himself to his son. "Now all we've got to do is to imagine that the bell's a-ringing:—

there stands the parson, reading the funeral service. Here I am. I take the halter that's already tied nicely round the poor devil's neck—I fix the loop on this hook that hangs down from the beam of the gibbet—then I leave the scaffold—I go underneath—I pull the bolt—and down he falls so!"

"O God!" cried Gibbet, literally writhing with mental agony, as the drop fell with a crashing sound, and the jerking noise of the halter met his ear a moment afterwards.

"Now, then, coward!" exclaimed the executioner; and again the leathern thong elicited horrible screams from the hump-back.

The lad was still crying, and his father was in the midst of sundry fearful anathemas, levelled against what he called his son's cowardice, when a knock was heard at the door of the loft.

"Come in!" shouted the executioner.

The invitation was obeyed; and an elderly man, dressed in a shabby suit of black, entered the room with an affected solemnity of gait.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

MORBID FEELINGS.—KATHERINE.

"Holloa, Banks!" exclaimed the executioner. "Got scent of the morning's work—eh, old feller?"

"Alas! my dear Mr. Smithers," returned the undertaker, shaking his head in a lachrymose manner, "if men will perpetrate such enormities, they must expect to go to their last home by means of a dance upon nothing."

And, according to a custom which years had rendered a part of Mr. Banks's nature, he wiped his eyes with a dingy white pocket-handkerchief.

"There he is again, the old fool!" ejaculated Smithers, with a coarse guffaw; "always a-whimpering! Why, you don't mean to say, Banks, that you care two straws about the feller that's going to be tucked up this morning?"

"Ah! Smithers, you don't know my heart: I weeps for frail human natur', and not only for the unhappy being that's so soon to be a blessed defunct carkiss. But, Smithers—my boy——"

"Well?" cried the executioner.

"How much is it to be this time for the rope?" asked Mr. Banks, in a tremulous tone and with another solemn shake of the head.

"Five shillings—not a mag under," was the prompt reply.

"That's too much, Mr. Smithers—too much," observed the undertaker of Globe Lane. "The last one I bought I lost by: times is changed, Mr. Smithers—sadly changed."

"Ain't the *morbid feelings*, as the press calls 'em, as powerful as ever?" demanded the executioner savagely.

"The morbid feelings, thank God, is right as a trivet," answered Banks; "but it's the blunt that falls off, Smithers—the blunt! And what's the use of the morbid feelings if there's no blunt to gratify 'em?"

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Banks," cried the executioner, "that you can't get as ready a sale for the halters as you used to do?"

"I'm afraid that such is the actiwal case, my dear friend," responded Mr. Banks, turning up his eyes in a melancholy manner. "The last blessed wictim that you operated on, Mr. Smithers, you remember, I gived you five shillings for the rope; and I will say, in justice to him as spun it and them as bought it, that a nicer, stronger, or compacter bit of cord never supported carkiss to cross-beam. But wain was it that I coiled it neat up in my winder;—wain was it that I wrote on a half sheet of foolscap, '*This is the halter that hung poor William Lees*;'—the morbid feelings was strong, 'cos the crowd collected opposite my house; but the filthy lucre, Smithers, was wanting. Well—there the damned—I beg its pardon—the blessed cord stayed for a matter of three weeks; and I do believe it never would have gone at all, if some swell that was passing quite promiscuously one day didn't take a fancy to it——"

"Well, and what did he give you?" demanded the executioner impatiently.

"Only twelve shillings, as true as I'm a woful sinner that hopes to be saved!" answered the undertaker.

"Twelve shillings—eh? And how much would you have had for the rope?"

"When the blunt doesn't fall short of the morbid feelings, I calkilates upon a guinea," answered Mr. Banks.

"Why, you old rogue," shouted the executioner, "you know that you sold William Lees's rope a dozen times over. The moment the real one was disposed of, you shoved a counterfeit into your winder; and that went off so well, that you kept on till you'd sold a dozen."

"No, Smithers—never no such luck as that since Greenacre's business," said the undertaker, with a solemn shake of his head; "and then I believe I really did sell nineteen ropes in less than a week."

"I only wonder people is such fools as to be gulled so," observed Smithers.

"What can they say, when they see your certifikit that the rope's the true one?" demanded Banks. "There was one old gen'leman that dealt with me for a many—many years; and he bought the rope of every blessed defunct that had danced on nothing at Newgate for upwards of twenty year! I quite entered into his feeling, I did—I admired that man; and so I always sold him the real ropes. But time's passing, while I'm chattering here. Come, my dear Smithers—shall we say three shillings for the rope and certifikit this morning?"

"Not a mag less than five," was the dogged answer.

"Four, my dear friend Smithers?" said the undertaker, with a whining, coaxing tone and manner.

"No—five, I tell you."

"Well—five then," said Banks. "I'll be there at a few minits 'afore nine: I s'pose you'll cut the carkiss down at the usual hour?"

"Yes—yes," answered Smithers. "I'm always punctiwal with the dead as well as the living."

The undertaker muttered something about "blessed defuncts," smoothed down the limp ends of his dirty cravat, and slowly withdrew, shaking his head more solemnly than ever.

"See what it is to be a Public Executioner!" cried Smithers, turning with an air of triumph towards his son: "look at the perk-visits—look at the priweleges! And yet you go snivelling about like a young gal, 'cos I want to make you fit to succeed me in my honourable profession."

"O father!" cried the lad, unable to restrain his feelings any longer: "instead of being respected, we are abhorred—instead of being honoured, our very touch is contamination! You yourself know, dear father, that you scarcely or never go abroad; if you enter the

public-house tap-room, even in a neighbourhood so low as this, the people get up and walk away on different excuses. When I step out for an errand, the boys in the streets point at me; and those who are well-behaved, pass me with stealthy looks of horror and dread. Even that canting hypocrite who has just left us—even *he* never crosses your threshold except when his interest is concerned;—and yet he, they say, is connected with body-snatchers, and does not bear an over-excellent character in his neighbourhood. Yet such a sneaking old wretch as that approaches our door with loathing—Oh! I know that he does! You see, father—dear father, that it is a horrible employment; then pray don't make me embrace it—Oh! don't—pray don't, father—dear father: say you won't—and I'll do any thing else you tell me! I'll pick up rags and bones from the gutters—I'll sweep chimnies—I'll break stones from dawn to darkness;—but do not—do not make me an executioner!"

Smithers was so astounded at this appeal that he had allowed it to proceed without interruption. He was accustomed to be addressed on the same subject, but never to such a length, nor with such arguments; so that the manner and matter of that prayer produced a strange impression on the man who constantly sought, by means of rude sophistries, to veil from himself and his family the true estimation in which his calling was held.

Gibbet, mistaking his father's astonishment for a more favourable impression, threw himself at his feet, clasped his hands, and exclaimed, "Oh! do not turn a deaf ear to my prayer! And think not, dear father, that I confound *you* with that pursuit which I abhor;—think not that I see other in you than my parent—a parent whom——"

"Whom you shall obey!" cried the executioner, now recovering the use of his tongue: "or, by God!" he added, pointing with terrible ferocity towards the model-gallows, "I'll serve you as I did that puppet just now—and as I shall do the man down in the Old Bailey presently."

Gibbet rose—disappointed, dispirited, and with a heart agitated by the most painful emotions.

But why had not Smithers recourse to the leathern weapon as usual? why had he spared the poor hump-back on this occasion?

Gibbet himself marvelled that such forbearance should have been shown towards him, since he now comprehended but too well that his father was inexorable in his determination with regard to him.

The truth was that Smithers was so far struck by his son's appeal as to deem it of more serious import than any previously manifested aversion to his horrible calling; and he accordingly met it with a menace which he deemed to be more efficacious than the old discipline of the thong.

"Now, mind me," said the executioner, after a few moments' pause, "you needn't try any more of these snivelling antics: they won't succeed with me, I tell you before-hand. If you don't do as I order you, I'll hang you up to that beam as soon as yonder mouse in the noose on the mantel. So let one word be enough. Hark! there's seven o'clock: we've only just time to get a mouthful before we must be off."

Smithers proceeded down stairs, followed by Gibbet.

They entered a little parlour, where Katherine was preparing breakfast.

It being still dark, a candle stood on the table; and its light was reflected in the polished metal tea-pot, milk-jug, and sugar-basin. The table napkin was of dazzling whiteness: the knives and forks were bright as steel could be;—in a word, an air of exquisite neatness and cleanliness pervaded the board on which the morning's repast was spread.

Nor was this appearance confined to the table. The little room itself was a model of domestic propriety. Not a speck of dust was to be seen on the simple furniture, which was also disposed with taste: the windows were set off with a clean muslin curtain; and the mantel was covered with fancy ornaments all indicative of female industry.

Then Kate herself!—her appearance was in perfect keeping with that of the room which owed its cleanliness and air of simple comfort to her. A neat cap set off her chesnut hair, which was arranged in plain bands: her dark stuff gown was made high in the body and long in the skirt, but did not conceal the gracefulness of her slender form, nor altogether prevent a little foot in a neat shoe and a well-turned ankle in a lily-white cotton stocking from occasionally revealing themselves. Then her hands were so slightly brown, her fingers so taper, and her nails so carefully kept, that no one, to look at them, would conceive how much hard work Katherine was compelled to do.

Though so rigidly neat and clean, Kate had nothing of the coquette about her. She was as bashful and artless as a child; and, besides—whom had she, the executioner's acknowledged niece, to captivate?

Although she endeavoured to greet Smithers and the hump-back with a smile, a profound melancholy in reality oppressed her.

It was one of those mornings when her uncle was to exercise his horrible calling:—this circumstance would alone have deeply affected her spirits, which were never too light nor buoyant. But on the present occasion, another cause of sorrow weighed on her soul—and that was the knowledge that her wretched cousin was that morning to enter on his fearful noviciate!

She entertained a boundless compassion for that unfortunate being. His physical deformities, and the treatment which he experienced from his father, called forth the kindest sympathies of her naturally tender heart. Moreover, he had received instruction and was in the habit of seeking consolation from her: she was the only friend of that suffering creature who was persecuted alike by nature and by man; and she perhaps felt the more acutely on his account, because she was so utterly powerless in protecting him from the parental ferocity which drove him to her for comfort.

She knew that a good—a generous—a kind—and a deeply sensitive soul was enclosed within that revolting form; and she experienced acute anguish when a brutal hand could wantonly torture so susceptible a spirit.

And to that wounded, smarting spirit she herself was all kindness—all softness—all conciliation—all encouragement.

No wonder, then, if the miserable son of the public executioner was devoted to her: no wonder if she were a goddess of light, and hope, and consolation, and bliss to him! To do her the slightest service was a source of the purest joy which that poor being could know: to be able to convince her by a deed,—even so slight as picking up her thread when it fell, or placing her chair for her in its wonted situation,—this, this was sublime happiness to the hump-back!

He could sit for hours near her, without uttering a word—but watching her like a faithful dog. And when her musical voice, fraught with some expression of kindness, fell upon his ear, how that hideous countenance would brighten up—how those coarse lips would form a smile—how those large dull orbs would glow with ineffable bliss!

But when his father was unkind to her,—unkind to Katherine, his only friend,—unkind to the sole being that ever had looked not only without abhorrence, but with unadulterated gentleness on him,—then a new spirit seemed to animate him; and the faithful creature, who received his own stripes with spaniel-like irresistance, burst forth in indignant remonstrance when a blow was levelled at her. Then his rage grew terrible; and the resigned, docile, retiring hump-back became transformed into a perfect demon.

How offensive to the delicate admirer of a maudlin romance, in which only handsome boys and pretty girls are supposed to be capable of playing at the game of Love, must be the statement which we are now about to make. But the reader who truly knows the world,—not the world of the sentimental novel, but the world as it really is,—will not start when we inform him that this being whom nature had formed in her most uncouth mould,—this creature whose deformities seemed to render him a connecting link between man and monkey,—this living thing that appeared to be but one remove above a monster, cherished a profound love for that young girl whom he esteemed as his guardian angel.

But this passion was unsuspected by her, as its nature was unknown to himself. Of course it was not reciprocated:—how could it be? Nevertheless, every proof of friendship—every testimonial of kind feeling—every evidence of compassion on her part, only tended to augment that attachment which the hump-back experienced for Katherine.

"Well, Kate," said the executioner, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table, "I've drilled Gibbet into the art of pinioning at last."

The girl made no answer; but she cast a rapid glance at the hump-back, and two tears trickled down her cheeks.

"Come, Gibbet," added Smithers; "we've no time to lose. Don't be afraid of your bread-and-butter: you'll get nothing to eat till you come home again to dinner."

"Is John going with you this morning, uncle?" inquired Katherine timidly.

"Why, you know he is. You only ask the question to get up a discussion once more about it, as you did last night."

This was more or less true: the generous-hearted girl hoped yet to be able to avert her uncle from his intention in respect to the hump-back.

"But I won't hear any more about it," continued the executioner, as he ate his breakfast. "And, then, why do you call him John?"

"Did you not give him that name at his baptism?" said Kate.

"And if I did, I've also the right to change it," returned the executioner; "and I choose him to be called *Gibbet*. It's more professional."

"I think the grocer in High Street wants an errand boy, uncle," observed Katherine, with her eyes fixed upon her cup—she dared not raise them to Smithers' face as she spoke: "perhaps he would take John—I mean my cousin—and that would be better than making him follow a calling which he does not fancy."

"Mind your own business, Miss Imperence!" ejaculated the executioner; "and let me mind mine. Now, then—who knocks at the front door?"

Gibbet rose and hastened from the room.

In a few moments he returned, holding in his hand a paper, which he gave to his father.

"Ah! I thought so," said Smithers, as he glanced his eye over the paper: "my friend Dognatch is always in time. Here's the *last dying speech, confession, and a true account of the execution* of the man that I'm to tuck up presently—all cut and dry, you see. Well—it's very kind of Dognatch always to send me a copy: but I suppose he thinks it's a compliment due to my sitiwation."

With these words Smithers tossed off his tea, rose, and exclaimed, "Now, Gibbet, my boy, we must be off."

"Father, I don't feel equal to it," murmured the hump-back, who seemed fixed to his chair.

"Come—without another word!" cried the executioner, in so terrible a tone that Gibbet started from his seat as if suddenly moved by electricity.

"Uncle—uncle, you will not—you cannot force this poor lad—" began Katherine, venturing upon a last appeal in favour of the hump-back.

"Kate," said the executioner, turning abruptly upon her, while his countenance wore so ferocious an expression of mingled determination and rage, that the young girl uttered an ejaculation of alarm,—"Kate, do not provoke me; or——"

He said no more, but darted on her a look of such dark, diabolical menace, that she sank back, annihilated as it were, into her seat.

She covered her face with her hands, and burst into an agony of tears.

For some moments she remained absorbed in profound grief: the fate of the wretched hump-back, and the idea that she herself was doomed to exist beneath the same roof with the horrible man whom she called her uncle, were causes of bitter anguish to her tender and sensitive soul.

When she raised her head, and glanced timidly around, she found herself alone.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE UNFINISHED LETTER.

The dawn was now breaking; and Katherine extinguished the candle.

How gloomily does the young day announce itself to the dwellers in the narrow streets and obscure alleys of the poor districts of the metropolis! The struggling gleam appears to contend with difficulty against the dense atmosphere and noxious vapours which prevail in those regions even in the midst of winter; and as each fitful ray steals through the dingy panes, its light seems leaden and dull, not golden and roseate as that of the orb of day.

Kate wiped away her tears, and set to work to clear the table of the breakfast-things.

Having performed this duty, she slipped on her neat straw bonnet and warm shawl,—purchased by the produce of her own industry,—and repaired to market.

But, alas! poor girl—as she passed rapidly through the streets, she could not help noticing the people, that were lounging at their doors, nudge each other, as much as to say, "There goes the executioner's niece."

And no friendly voice welcomed her with a kind "Good morning:" no human being had a passing compliment,—not even one of those civil phrases which cost nothing to utter, mean perhaps as little, but still are pleasing to hear,—to waste upon the executioner's niece.

Some old women, more hard-hearted than the rest, exclaimed, as she hurried timidly by the spot where they were gossiping, "Ah! her uncle has got business on his hands this morning!"

And when the poor girl reached the shop whither she was going, her eyes were bathed in tears.

The shopkeeper was cool and indifferent in his manner towards her—not obsequious and ready as towards his other customers. He even examined with suspicion the coin which she tendered him in payment for her purchases—as if it were impossible that honesty could dwell in the heart of an executioner's niece!

The ill-conditioned fellow! He saw not the mild blue eyes, with a tear glittering in each like twin-drops of the diamond-dew;—he marked not the pretty lips, apart, and expressive of such profound melancholy;—he observed not the thick folds of the shawl across the gently-budding bosom rise and sink rapidly:—no,—he beheld not that interesting young creature's grief; but he treated her rudely and harshly, because she was the executioner's niece!

Kate retraced her steps homewards. She saw other girls of her own age nod familiarly to their acquaintances at the windows, as they passed;—but she had no friend to receive or return her smile of recognition!

Shrinking within herself, as it were, from the slightest contact with the world which despised her, the poor young creature felt herself an interloper upon the very pavement, and even stepped into the muddy street to make way for those who passed.

With a broken spirit she returned home, her fate weighing upon her soul like a crime!

And so it was with her always on those mornings when her uncle was called upon to exercise his fearful functions.

She was glad to bury herself once more in that dwelling the threshold of which a friendly step so seldom crossed: her little parlour, embellished with her own hands, appeared a paradise of peace after the contumely which she experienced in the bustling streets.

She had returned home in so depressed a state of mind that she had forgotten to close the front door behind her.

She opened her work-box, seated herself at the table, and commenced her toil of pleasure—for that young girl loved her needle, and abhorred idleness.

She then fell into a reverie as she worked.

"To be a hangman is something horrible indeed," she mused aloud; "but to be a member of a hangman's family is far worse. *He* knows that he merits what reproach is levelled against him, if indeed his office deserve reproach at all; but *I*, who abhor the bare idea, and never so much as witnessed an execution—why should shame and obloquy redound upon *me*? It is like suffering for a crime of which one is innocent! O God, is this human justice? What have I done that the vilest and lowest should despise me? Am I not flesh and blood like them? do my clothes carry pollution, that the ragged beggar draws her tatters close to her as she passes me? Oh! give me strength, heaven, to support my wretched fate; for there are moments when I despair!"

"You are wrong to mistrust the goodness of the Almighty," said a mild voice close behind her chair.

Kate started, and looked round.

It was the rector of St. David's who had entered he room, unperceived by the young maiden.

"Pardon me, reverend sir," answered Kate; "I know that I am often forgetful of the wholesome lessons which I have received from your lips; but——"

"Well, well, poor child," interrupted Reginald Tracy, to whose cheeks the phrase "*wholesome lessons*" brought a flush of crimson—for he remembered how he himself had deviated from the doctrines which he had long successfully and sincerely taught: "be consoled! I know how sad must be our lot; and I have called this morning to see if I cannot ameliorate it."

"What? better my condition, sir?" exclaimed Katherine. "Oh! how is that possible?"

"We will see," answered the rector, taking a chair near the young maiden. "You are not altogether so friendless as you imagine."

"I am aware, sir, that through your goodness I received an education at the school which your bounty founded; and your excellent housekeeper, Mrs. Kenrick, has furnished me with needle-work. Oh! sir, I am not ignorant how much I owe to you both!"

Kate raised her mild blue eyes towards the rector's countenance; but her glance drooped again instantaneously, for his looks were fixed upon her in a manner which she had never noticed in him before, and which excited a momentary feeling of embarrassment—almost of alarm—in her mind.

But that feeling passed away as rapidly as it had arisen; and she blushed to think that she should have experienced such a sentiment in the presence of so holy a man and so great a benefactor.

"I did not wish to remind you of any trifling services which myself or my housekeeper may have rendered you, Katherine," said Reginald. "I alluded to another friend who interests himself in you."

"Another friend!" ejaculated the young girl. "Is it possible that I have *another friend* in the whole world?"

"You have," replied Mr. Tracy. "Did not a gentleman, accompanied by a police-officer, visit this house about a fortnight ago?"

"Yes—I remember—late one night——"

And she stopped short, being unwilling to allude to that instance of her uncle's cruelty which had led to the visit mentioned by the rector.

"Well, that gentleman feels interested in you," continued Reginald. "He saw how you were treated—he knows that you are unhappy."

"And do strangers thus interest themselves in the wretched?" asked Katherine, her eyes swimming in tears.

"Not often," replied the rector. "But this gentleman is one of the few noble exceptions to the general rule."

"He must be indeed!" exclaimed Katherine, with an enthusiasm which was almost pious.

"That gentleman learnt from the policeman enough to give him a favourable impression of your character, and to render him desirous of serving you. He pondered upon the matter for some days, but could come to no determination on the subject. He heard that you were anxious to leave this house and earn your own bread."

"Oh! yes—how willingly would I do so!" exclaimed Katherine fervently. "But——"

"But what?" demanded Reginald, in whose eyes the young maiden had never been an object of peculiar interest until at present;—and *now* he observed, for the first time, that her personal appearance was far—very far from disagreeable.

The truth was, that, since his fall, he had viewed every woman with different eyes from those through which he had before surveyed the female sex. When he himself was chaste and pure, he observed only the feminine mind and manner:—now his glances studied and discriminated between external attractions. His moral survey had become a sensual one.

"But what?" he said, when Katherine hesitated. "Do you object to leave your uncle?"

"I should be a hypocrite were I to say that I object to leave him," was the immediate answer. "Nevertheless, if he demanded my services, I would remain with him, through gratitude for the bread which he gave me, and the asylum which he afforded me, when I was a child and unable to earn either. But he would not seek to retain me, I know; for he does not—he cannot love me! Still, there is one poor creature in this house——"

"My housekeeper has told me of him. You mean your uncle's son?" said Reginald.

"I do, sir. He has no friend in the world but me; and, though my intercessions do not save him from much bad treatment, still I have studied to console him."

"If he be grateful, he will feel pleased to think that you may be removed to a happier situation," said the rector.

"True!" exclaimed Kate. "And if I only earned more money than I do here, I should be able to provide him with a great many little comforts."

"Assuredly," replied the fashionable preacher, who during this colloquy had gradually drawn his chair closer to that of the young maiden. "The gentleman, to whom I have before alluded, called upon me yesterday. It appears he learnt from the policeman that you had been educated at the school in my district, and that my housekeeper was well acquainted with you. He nobly offered to contribute a sum of money towards settling you in some comfortable manner."

"The generous stranger!" exclaimed Kate. "What is his name, sir—that I may pray for him?"

"Mr. Markham——"

"Markham!" cried the young girl, strangely excited by the mention of that name.

"Yes. Have you ever heard of him before?" asked the rector, surprised at the impression thus produced.

Katherine appeared to reflect profoundly for some moments; then, opening a secret drawer of her work-box, she drew forth a small satin bag, carefully sewed all round.

She took her scissors and unpicked the thread from one end of the bag.

The rector watched her attentively, and with as much surprise as interest.

Having thus opened one extremity of the bag, she inserted her delicate fingers, and produced a sheet of letter-paper, folded, and dingy with age.

Handing it to the rector, she observed, with tears streaming down her cheeks, "These were the last words my mother ever wrote; and she had lost the use of her speech ere she penned them."

Reginald Tracy unfolded the letter, and read as follows:——

"Should my own gloomy presages prove true, and the warning of my medical attendant be well founded,—if, in a word, the hand of Death be already extended to snatch me away thus in the prime of life, while my darling child is * * * * and inform Mr. Markham, whose abode is——"

The words that originally stood in the place which we have marked with asterisks, had evidently been blotted out by the tears of the writer.

Reginald folded the letter as he had received it, and returned it to Katherine.

The young girl immediately replaced it in the little bag, which she sewed up with scrupulous care.

It was the poor creature's sole treasure; and she prized it as the last and only memento that she possessed of her mother.

"And you know not to whom that unfinished letter alluded?" said the rector, after a long pause, during which the bag, with its

precious contents, had been consigned once more to the secret drawer in the work-box.

"I have not the least idea," answered Kate, drying her tears. "I was only four years old when my mother died, and of course could take no steps to inquire after the Mr. Markham mentioned in the letter. My uncle has often assured me that he took some trouble in the matter, but without success. Markham, you know, sir, is by no means an uncommon name."

"And your father, Katherine—do you remember him?"

"Oh! no, sir—he died before my mother. When I was old enough to comprehend how dreadful it is to be an orphan, Mr. Tracy, I made that little satin bag to preserve the letter which Death would not allow my poor mother to finish."

And again the young maiden wept bitterly.

The rector was deeply affected; and for some minutes his sensual ideas concerning the damsel were absorbed in a more generous sympathy.

"But did not the medical man who attended your mother in her last moments, and who is also alluded to in the letter," asked Reginald,—"did he not afford some clue to unravel the mystery?"

"That question I have asked my uncle more than once," answered Kate; "and he has assured me that the medical man was a perfect stranger who was casually summoned to attend upon my poor mother only the very day before she breathed her last. Since then the medical man has also died."

"Your mother was your uncle's own sister, was she not?" asked the rector.

"She was, sir."

"And she married a person named Wilmot?"

"Yes—for my name is Katherine Wilmot."

"I remember that you were so entered upon the school-books," said the rector. "Your mother must have been a superior woman, for the language of that fragment of a letter is accurate, and the handwriting is good."

"The same thought has often struck me, sir," observed Katherine. "And now how strange it is that a person bearing the name of Markham should interest himself in my behalf!"

"Strange indeed!" exclaimed Reginald, whose eyes were once more fixed upon the interesting girl near him,—fixed, too, with an ardent glance, and not one of tender sympathy. "Mr. Richard Markham—the gentleman of whom I speak—called upon me, as I ere now stated, and besought me to exert myself in your behalf. He seems to think that my position and character enable me to do for you that which, coming from him, might awaken the tongue of scandal. The cause of my visit this morning is now at length explained."

"I am very grateful, sir, for Mr. Markham's good intentions and your kindness," said Katherine. "The coincidence in names, which led me to show you that letter, seems a providential suggestion to me to follow the counsel of such generous—such disinterested friends."

"I thought as I came along," resumed the clergyman, "that I would procure you a situation with some friends of mine in the country. But—" and he cast upon her a burning look brimful of licentiousness—"I have my doubts whether it would not be better for you to come to my house and assist Mrs. Kenrick in her domestic duties—especially as she is getting very old—and——"

He paused for a moment:—he hesitated, because at the back of the offer there was an unworthy motive at which his guilty soul quaked, lest it should betray itself.

But that pure-minded and artless girl only saw in that offer a noble act of kindness; and she frankly accepted it—upon the condition that her uncle approved of her conduct in doing so.

The rector rose—he had no farther excuse for protracting his visit.

The young girl thanked him for his goodness with the most heart-felt sincerity.

He then took his leave.

CHAPTER CXLV.

HYPOCRISY.

Reginald Tracy proceeded from the dwelling of the hangman to the corner of Tottenham Court Road, where his carriage was waiting for him.

He stepped into the vehicle, and ordered the coachman to drive him to Markham Place near Lower Holloway.

Richard was not at home: he had gone for a short walk with Mr. Monroe, who was yet too feeble to move far without the support of a companion's arm. They were, however, expected to return in a short time;—besides, Miss Monroe was in the drawing-room; and the rector therefore decided upon walking in and waiting for Mr. Markham.

The name of Miss Monroe produced a powerful sensation in the breast of that man whose passions until lately dormant from his birth, now raged so furiously. He had seen her in a voluptuous *negligee*, attending by the sick-bed of her father;—he had heard her utter words of strange self-accusing import, in connection with that parent's illness;—and his curiosity, as well as his desires, was kindled.

He had been fascinated by that charming girl; and our readers will remember *that he had felt himself capable of making any sacrifice to obtain her love*!

His mind, too, entertained a distant suspicion—a very distant one, but still a suspicion—that she had strayed from the path of virtue;—for of what else could a daughter, whom he had seen hanging like a ministering angel over her father's couch, accuse herself?

This suspicion—and, at all events, that mystery which hung around the accusation alluded to, served to inflame the imagination of a man who now sought to place no bridle upon his passions. The idea suggested itself to him, that if another had revelled in her charms, why should not he? In a word, his heart glowed with secret delight when he learnt from Whittingham that Miss Monroe was alone in the drawing-room.

On his entrance, Ellen rose from the sofa, and welcomed him with a cordiality which originated in a sense of gratitude for the spiritual comfort he had rendered her father during his illness.

At a glance his eyes scanned the fair form of Ellen from head to foot; and his imagination was instantly fired with the thoughts of her soft and swelling charms—those graceful undulations which were all her own, and needed no artificial aids to improve the originals of nature!

"I am pleased to learn from the servant that your father, Miss Monroe, is able to take a little exercise once more," said the rector.

"Oh! all danger is now past," exclaimed Ellen cheerfully. "But at one time, Mr. Tracy, I had made up my mind to lose him."

"I saw how much you were afflicted," observed the rector; "and I was grieved to hear you reproach yourself to some extent——"

"Reproach myself!" interrupted Ellen, blushing deeply. "You heard me reproach myself?"

"I did," answered the rector. "And now, forgive me, if—by virtue of my sacred calling—I make bold to remind you that Providence frequently tries us, through the medium of afflictions visited upon those whom we love, in order to punish us for our neglectfulness, our unkindness, or our errors, towards those so afflicted. Pardon me, Miss Monroe, for thus addressing you; but I should be unfaithful towards Him whom I serve, did I not avail myself of every opportunity to explain the lessons which his wise and just dispensations convey."

"Mr. Tracy," exclaimed Ellen, cruelly embarrassed by this language, "do you really believe that Providence punished my father for some misconduct on my part?"

"Judging by the reproach—the accusation which your lips uttered against yourself—perhaps in an unguarded moment—when you ministered with angelic tenderness at your father's sick-bed——"

"Sir—Mr. Tracy, this is too much!" cried Ellen, tears starting from her eyes, while her cheeks were suffused with blushes: "it is unmanly—it is ungenerous to take advantage of any expressions which might have been wrung from me in a moment of acute anguish."

"Pardon me, young lady," said the rector with apparent meekness: "heaven knows the purity of my intentions in thus addressing you. It is not always that my spiritual aid is thus rejected—that my motives are thus cruelly suspected."

"Forgive me, sir,—I was wrong to excite myself at words which were meant in kindness," said Ellen, completely deceived by this consummate hypocrisy.

"Miss Monroe," continued Reginald, "believe me when I assure you that I feel deep compassion—deep interest, wherever I perceive grief—especially when that sorrow is secret. And, if my eyes have not deceived me, methinks I have read in your young heart the existence of some such secret sorrow. My aim is to console you; for the consolation which I can offer is not human—it is divine! I am but the humble *instrument* of the supernal Goodness; but God imparts solace through even the least worthy of his ministers."

"I thank you sincerely for your friendly intentions towards me," said Ellen, now recovering her presence of mind; "but, since my father is restored to health, I have little to vex me."

"And yet that self-reproach, Miss Monroe," persisted the rector, determined not to abandon the point to which he had so dexterously

conducted the conversation,—"that self-accusation which escaped your lips——"

"Is a family secret, Mr. Tracy, which may not be revealed," interrupted Ellen firmly.

"I ask you not for your confidence, Miss Monroe: think not that I seek to pry into your affairs with an impertinent curiosity——"

"Once more, sir, I thank you for the kindness which prompts you thus to address me; but—pray, let us change the conversation."

These words were uttered in so decided a tone, that Reginald dared not persist in his attempt to thrust himself into the young lady's confidence.

An awkward silence ensued; and the rector was thinking how he should break it, when the door opened.

Almost at the same moment, a female voice was heard outside the room, saying, in tender playfulness, "Come to mamma! come to mamma!"

Then, immediately afterwards, Marian entered the apartment, bearing an infant in her arms.

Whittingham had neglected to tell her that there was a visitor in the drawing-room.

Poor Marian, astounded at the presence of the rector, could neither advance nor retreat for some moments.

At length she turned abruptly away.

Ellen sank back upon the sofa, overcome with shame and grief.

The rector threw upon her a glance full of meaning; but she saw it not—for her own eyes were cast down.

This depression, however, lasted only for a moment. Suddenly raising her head, she exclaimed with that boldness and firm frankness which had been taught her by the various circumstances of the last few years of her life, "You now know my secret, sir: but you are a man of honour. I need say no more."

"Who has been base enough to leave this grievous wrong unrepaired?" asked Reginald, taking her hand—that soft, warm, delicate hand.

"Nay—seek to know no more," returned Ellen, withdrawing her hand hastily from what she however conceived to be only the pressure of a friendly or fraternal interest; "you have learnt too much already. For God's sake, let not my father know that you have discovered his daughter's shame!"

"Not for worlds would I do aught to cause you pain!" cried the rector, enthusiastically.

"Thank you—thank you," murmured Ellen, completely deceived in respect to the cause of Tracy's warmth, and mistaking for friendly interest an ebullition of feeling which was in reality gross and sensual.

With these words Ellen hurried from the room.

"I have discovered her secret!" said the rector triumphantly to himself, as he rose and paced the apartment, mad passions raging in his breast; "and that discovery shall make her mine. Oh! no sacrifice were too great to obtain possession of that charming creature! I would give the ten best years of my life to clasp her in my arms, in the revels of love! Happy—thrice happy should I be to feel that lovely form become supple and yielding in my embrace! But my brain burns—my heart beats—my eyes throb—my blood seems liquid fire!"

Reginald threw himself, exhausted by the indomitable violence of his passions, upon the sofa.

Scarcely had he time to compose himself, when Markham entered the room.

The rector communicated to him the particulars of his interview with Katherine Wilmot, and concluded by saying that, as the girl was known to his housekeeper, he had determined upon taking her into his service.

"With regard to the fragment of the letter," observed Richard, "allusion must have been made to some person of the name of Markham who is totally unconnected with our family. We have no relations of that name. I feel convinced that the mention of the name could not in any way refer to my father; and my brother and myself were children at the time when that letter must have been written."

"It is a coincidence—and that is all," observed the rector. "But as you have to some extent constituted yourself the benefactor of this young person, do you approve of the arrangement which I have made for her to enter my household?"

"My dear sir, how can I object?" exclaimed Richard, who, in the natural generosity of his heart, gave the rector credit for the most worthy motives. "I consider myself your debtor for your noble conduct in this instance. Under your roof, Mr. Tracy, the breath of calumny cannot reach that poor creature; and *there* no one will dare to make her family connexions a subject of reproach."

Some farther conversation took place between Reginald Tracy and Richard Markham upon this subject, and when the former rose to depart, they both observed, for the first time during their interview, that a violent shower of rain was pouring down.

Richard pressed the rector to remain to dinner—an invitation which he, whose head was filled with Ellen, did not hesitate to accept.

The rector's carriage and horses were accordingly housed in the stables attached to Markham Place; and Whittingham was desired to make Mr. Tracy's coachman and livery-servant as comfortable as possible—instructions with which the hospitable old butler did not fail to comply.

Dinner was served up at five o'clock; and Reginald had the felicity of sitting next to Miss Monroe.

The more he saw of this young lady, the more did he become enraptured with her,—not, however, experiencing a pure and chaste affection, but one whose ingredients were completely sensual.

The evening passed rapidly away;—the rain continued to pour in torrents.

As a matter of courtesy—indeed, of hospitality, for Richard's nature was generosity itself—the rector was pressed to stay the night at the Place; and, although he had a good close carriage to convey him home (and persons who have such equipages are seldom over careful of their servants), he accepted the invitation.

There was something so pleasing—so intoxicating in the idea of passing the night under the same roof with Ellen!

CHAPTER CXLVI.

THE BATH.—THE HOUSEKEEPER.

It was scarcely light when the rector of Saint David's rose from a couch where visions of a most voluptuous nature had filled his sleep.

Having hastily dressed himself, he descended from his room with the intention of seeking the fine frosty air of the garden to cool his heated brain.

But as he proceeded along a passage leading to the landing of the first flight of stairs, he heard a light step slowly descending the upper flight; and the next moment, the voice of Ellen speaking fondly to her child, fell upon his ear.

For nurses and mothers will talk to babes of even a few months old—although the innocents comprehend them not!

Reginald stepped into the recess formed by the door of one of the bed-chambers in that spacious mansion; and scarcely had he concealed himself there when he saw Ellen, with the child in her arms, pass across the landing at the end of the passage, and enter a room on the other side.

She wore a loose dressing-gown of snowy whiteness, which was confined by a band round her delicate waist, and was fastened up to the throat: her little feet had been hastily thrust into a pair of buff morocco slippers; and her long shining hair flowed over her shoulders and down her back.

The licentious eyes of the clergyman followed her from the foot of the stairs to the room which she entered; and even plunged with eager curiosity into that chamber during the moment that the door was open as she went in.

That glance enabled him to perceive that there was a bath in the apartment to which Ellen had proceeded with her child.

Indeed, the young lady, ever since her residence at Markham Place, had availed herself of the luxury of the bathing-room which that mansion possessed: and every morning she immersed her beautiful person in the refreshing element, which she enjoyed in its natural state in summer, but which was rendered slightly tepid for her in winter.

When the rector beheld her descend in that bewitching *negligee*,—her hair unconfined, and floating at will—her small, round, polished ankles glancing between the white drapery and the little slippers,—and the child, with merely a thick shawl thrown about it, in her arms,—and when he observed the bath in that chamber which she entered, he immediately comprehended her intention.

Without a moment's hesitation he stole softly from the recess where he had concealed himself, and approached the door of the bath-room.

His greedy eyes were applied to the key-hole; and his licentious glance plunged into the depths of that sacred privacy.

The unsuspecting Ellen was warbling cheerfully to her child.

She dipped her hand into the water, which Marian had prepared for her, and found the degree of heat agreeable to her wishes.

Then she placed the towels near the fire to warm.

Reginald watched her proceedings with the most ardent curiosity: the very luxury of the unhallowed enjoyment which he experienced caused an oppression at his chest; his heart beat quickly; his brain seemed to throb with violence.

The fires of gross sensuality raged madly in his breast.

Ellen's preparations were now completed.

With her charming white hand she put back her hair from her forehead.

Then, as she still retained the child on her left arm, with her right hand she loosened the strings which closed her dressing-gown round the neck and the band which confined it at the waist.

While thus occupied, she was partly turned towards the door; and all the treasures of her bosom were revealed to the ardent gaze of the rector.

His desires were now inflamed to that pitch when they almost become ungovernable. He felt that could he possess that charming creature, he would care not for the result—even though he forced her to compliance with his wishes, and murder and suicide followed,—the murder of her, and the suicide of himself!

He was about to grasp the handle of the door, when he remembered that he had heard the key turn in the lock immediately after she had entered the room.

He gnashed his teeth with rage.

And now the drapery had fallen from her shoulders, and the whole of her voluptuous form, naked to the waist, was exposed to his view.

He could have broken down the door, had he not feared to alarm the other inmates of the house.

He literally trembled under the influence of his fierce desires.

How he envied—Oh! how he envied the innocent babe which the fond mother pressed to that bosom—swelling, warm, and glowing!

And now she prepared to step into the bath: but, while he was waiting with fervent avidity for the moment when the whole of the drapery should fall from her form, a step suddenly resounded upon the stairs.

He started like a guilty wretch away from the door: and, perceiving that the footsteps descended the upper flight, he precipitated himself down the stairs.

Rushing across the hall, he sought the garden, where he wandered up and down, a thousand wild feelings agitating his breast.

He determined that Ellen should be his; but he was not collected enough to deliberate upon the means of accomplishing his resolution,—so busy was his imagination in conjuring up the most voluptuous idealities, which were all prompted by the real scene the contemplation whereof had been interrupted.

He fancied that he beheld the lovely young mother immersed in the bath—the water agitated by her polished limbs—each ripple kissing some charm, even as she herself kissed her babe!

Then he imagined he saw her step forth like a Venus from the ocean—her cheeks flushed with animation—her long glossy hair floating in rich undulations over her ivory shoulders.

"My God!" he exclaimed, at length, "I shall grow mad under the influence of this fascination! One kiss from her lips were worth ten thousand of the meretricious embraces which Cecilia yields so willingly. Oh! Ellen would not surrender herself without many prayers—much entreaty—and, perhaps, force;—but Cecilia falls into my arms without a struggle! Enjoyment with her is not increased by previous bashfulness;—she does not fire the soul by one moment of resistance. But Ellen—so coy, so difficult to win,—so full of confidence in herself, in spite of that one fault which accident betrayed to me,—Ellen, so young and inexperienced in the ways of passion,—Oh! she were a conquest worth every sacrifice that man could make!"

The rector's reverie was suddenly interrupted by the voice of Whittingham summoning him to the breakfast-room.

Thither he proceeded; and there Ellen, now attired in a simple but captivating morning-dress, presided.

Little did she imagine that the privacy of her bath had been invaded—violated by the glance of that man who now seated himself next to her, and whose sanctity was deemed to be above all question.

Little, either, did her father and friend suppose that there was one present who had vowed that she should be his, and who, in connection with that determination, had entertained no thought of marriage.

The ramble in the garden had so far cooled the rector's brain, that nothing in his behaviour towards Ellen was calculated to excite observation; but, from time to time, when unperceived, he cast upon her a glance of fervent admiration—a long, fixed, devouring glance, which denoted profound passion.

At length the hour for departure arrived; and his carriage drove round to the front door.

The rain of the preceding evening had changed to frost during the night;—the morning was fine, fresh, and healthy, though intensely cold; there was hence no shadow of an excuse for a longer stay.

The rector expressed his thanks for the hospitality which he had experienced, with that politeness which so eminently characterised his manners; and when he shook hands with Ellen, he pressed hers gently.

She thought that he intended to convey a sort of assurance that the secret which he had detected on the previous day, was sacred with him; and she cast upon him a rapid glance, expressive of gratitude.

Reginald then stepped into the carriage, which immediately rolled rapidly away towards London.

Upon his arrival at home, he proceeded straight to his study, whither he was immediately followed by the old housekeeper.

"Leave me—leave me, Mrs. Kenrick," said the rector; "I wish to be alone."

"I thought something had happened, sir," observed the old woman, fidgetting about the room, for with senile pertinacity she was resolved to say what she had upon her mind: "I thought so," she continued, "because this is the first time you ever stayed out all night without sending me word what kept you."

"I am not aware that I owe you an account of my actions, Mrs. Kenrick," said the rector, who, like all guilty persons, was half afraid that his conduct was suspected by the old woman.

"Certainly not, sir; and I never asked it. But after all the years I have been with you, and the confidence you have always reposed in me—until within the last week or two," added the old housekeeper, "I was afraid lest I had done something to offend you."

"No such thing," said the rector, somewhat softened. "But as the cares of my ministry multiply upon me——"

"Ah! sir, they must have multiplied of late," interrupted the old woman; "for you're not the same man you were."

"How do you mean?" demanded Reginald, now once more irritated.

"You have seemed restless, unsettled, and unhappy, for some two or three weeks past, sir," answered the housekeeper, wiping away a tear from her eye. "And then you are not so regular in your habits as you were: you go out and come in oftener;—sometimes you stay out till very late; at others you come home, send me up to bed, and say that you yourself are going to rest;—nevertheless, I hear you about the house——"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Reginald, struck by the imprudence of which he had been guilty in admitting Lady Cecilia into his abode. "Do not make yourself unhappy, Mrs. Kenrick: nothing ails me, I can assure you. But—tell me," he added, half afraid to ask the question; "have you heard any one else remark—I mean, make any observation—that is, speak as you do about me——"

"Well, sir, if you wish for the truth," returned the housekeeper, "I must say that the clerk questioned me yesterday morning about you."

"The clerk!" ejaculated Reginald; "and what did he say?"

"Oh? he merely thought that you had something on your mind—some annoyance which worried you——"

"He is an impertinent fellow!" cried the rector, thrown off his guard by the alarming announcement that a change in his behaviour had been observed.

"He only speaks out of kindness, sir—as I do," observed the housekeeper, with a deep sigh.

"Well, well, Mrs. Kenrick," said the rector, vexed at his own impatience: "I was wrong to mistrust the excellence of his motives. To tell the truth, I have had some little cause of vexation—the loss of a large sum—through the perfidy of a pretended friend—and——"

The rector floundered in the midst of his falsehood; but the old housekeeper readily believed him, and was rejoiced to think that he had at length honoured her with his confidence in respect to the cause of that restlessness which she had mistaken for a secret grief.

"But no one else has made any remark, my dear Mrs. Kenrick?" said the rector, in a tone of conciliation "I mean—no one has

questioned you—or——"

"Only Lady Cecilia Harborough sent yesterday afternoon to request you to call upon her, sir."

"Ah!—well?"

"And of course I said to her servant-maid that you were not at home. She came back in the evening, and seemed much disappointed that you were still absent. Then she returned again, saying that her mistress was ill and wished to consult you upon business."

"And what did you tell her, Mrs. Kenrick?"

"That you had not returned, sir," answered the housekeeper, surprised at the question, as if there were any thing else to tell save the truth. "The servant-maid seemed more and more disappointed, and called again as early as eight o'clock this morning."

"This morning!" echoed Reginald, seriously annoyed at this repetition of visits from Lady Cecilia's confidential servant.

"Yes, sir; and when I said that you had not been home all night, she appeared quite surprised," continued the housekeeper.

"And you told her that I had not been home all night?" mused Reginald. "What must Lady Cecilia think?"

"Think, sir?" cried the housekeeper, more surprised still at her master's observations. "You can owe no account of your actions, sir, to Lady Cecilia Harborough."

"Oh! no—certainly not," stammered the rector, cruelly embarrassed: "I only thought that evil tongues——"

"The Reverend Reginald Tracy is above calumny," said the housekeeper, who was as proud of her master as she was attached to him.

"True—true, Mrs. Kenrick," exclaimed the rector. "And yet—but, after all no matter. I will go and call in Tavistock Square at once; and then I can explain——"

Up to this moment the housekeeper had spoken in the full conviction that annoyance alone was the cause of her master's recent change of behaviour and present singularity of manners; but his increasing embarrassment—the strangeness of his observations relative to Lady Cecilia—his anxiety lest she should entertain an evil idea concerning his absence from home,—added to a certain vague rumour which had reached her ears relative to the lightness of that lady's character,—all these circumstances, united with the fact of Cecilia having sent so often to request Mr. Tracy to call upon her, suddenly engendered a suspicion of the truth in the housekeeper's mind.

"Before you go out again, sir," said the housekeeper, wishing to discard that suspicion, and therefore hastening to change the conversation to another topic, "I should mention to you that yesterday afternoon—between one and two o'clock—Katherine Wilmot arrived here——"

"Indeed! What, so soon?" exclaimed the rector.

"And as she assured me that you had only a few hours before offered her a situation in your household," continued Mrs. Kenrick, "I did not hesitate to take her in. Besides, she is a good girl, and I am not sorry that she should leave her uncle's roof."

"Then you approve of my arrangement, Mrs. Kenrick?" said Reginald.

"Certainly, sir—if I have the right to approve or disapprove," answered the old lady, who, in spite of the natural excellence of her heart, was somewhat piqued at not having been previously consulted upon the subject: then, ashamed of this littleness of feeling, she hastily added, "But the poor girl has a sad story to tell, sir, about the way in which she left her uncle; and, with your permission, I will send her up to you."

"Do so," said the rector, not sorry to be relieved of the presence of his housekeeper, in whose manner his guilty conscience made him see a peculiarity which filled his mind with apprehension.

In a few minutes Katherine Wilmot entered the rector's study.

Her story was brief but painful.

"After you left, sir, I sate thinking upon your very great kindness and that of Mr. Markham, and how happy I should be to have an opportunity of convincing you both that I was anxious to deserve all you proposed to do for me. The hours slipped away; and for the first time I forgot to prepare my uncle's dinner punctually to the minute. I know that I was wrong, sir—but I had so much to think about, both past and future! Well, sir, one o'clock struck; and nothing was ready. I started up, and did my best. But in a few minutes my uncle and cousin came in. My uncle, sir, was rather cross—indeed, if I must speak the truth, very cross; because his son had absolutely refused to assist him in his morning's work. I need not say, sir," continued the girl, with a shudder, "what that work was. The first thing my uncle did was to ask if his dinner was ready? I told him the whole truth, but assured him that not many minutes would elapse before it would be ready. You do not want to know, sir, all he said to me; it is quite sufficient to say that he turned me out of doors. I cried, and begged very hard to part from him in friendship—for, after all, sir, he is my nearest relation on the face of the earth—and, then, he brought me up! But he closed the door, and would not listen to me."

Katherine ceased, and wiped her eyes.

The poor girl had said nothing of the terrific beating which the executioner inflicted upon Gibbet the moment they returned home, and then upon Katherine herself before he thrust her out of the house.

"Have you brought away your mother's letter with you, Katherine?" inquired the rector, who during the maiden's simple narrative, had never taken his eyes off her.

"My uncle sent round all my things in the evening, by my unfortunate cousin," replied Katherine; "and amongst the rest, my work-box where I keep the letter. It is safe in my possession, sir."

"Take care of it, Kate," observed the rector; "who knows but that it may some day be of service?"

"Oh! sir, and even if it should not," ejaculated the girl, "it is at all events the only memento I possess of my poor mother."

"True—you told me so," said Reginald, prolonging the conversation only because the presence of an interesting female had become his sole enjoyment. "And now, my dear," continued the rector, rising from his seat, and approaching her, "be steady—conduct yourself well—and you will find me a good master."

"I will not be ungrateful, sir," returned Katherine.

"And you must endeavour to relieve Mrs. Kenrick of all onerous duties as much as possible," said the rector. "Thus, you had better always answer my bell yourself, when the footman is not in the way."

"I will make a point of doing so, sir," was the artless reply.

The rector gave some more trivial directions, and dismissed his new domestic to her duties.

He then hastened to Tavistock Square, to appease Lady Harborough, whose jealousy, he suspected, had been aroused by his absence from home.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE RECTOR'S NEW PASSION.

To make his peace with Lady Cecilia was by no means a difficult matter; and it was accomplished rather by the aid of the rector's purse than his caresses.

He remained to dinner with the syren who had first seduced him from the paths of virtue, which he had pursued so brilliantly and triumphantly—too brilliantly and triumphantly to ensure stability!

In the evening, when they were seated together upon the sofa, Reginald implored her to be more cautious in her proceedings in future.

"Such indiscretion as that of which you have been guilty," he said, "would ruin me. Why send so often to request my presence? The most unsuspicious would be excited; and my housekeeper has spoken to me in a manner that has seriously alarmed me."

"Forgive me, Reginald," murmured Cecilia, casting her arms around him; "but I was afraid you were unfaithful to me."

"And to set at rest your own selfish jealousies, you would compromise me," said the rector. "Do you know that my housekeeper has overheard me moving about at night when I have admitted you, or descended the stairs to let you out before day-light? and, although she attributes that fact to restlessness on my part, it would require but little to excite her suspicions."

"Again I say forgive me, Reginald," whispered Cecilia, accompanying her words with voluptuous kisses, so that in a short time the rector's ill-humour was completely subdued. "Tell me," she added, "may I not visit you again? say—shall I come to you to-night?"

"No, Cecilia," answered the clergyman; "we must exercise some caution. Let a week or a fortnight pass, so that my housekeeper may cease to think upon the subject which has attracted her notice and alarmed me; and then—then, dearest Cecilia, we will set no bounds to our enjoyment."

Reginald Tracy now rose, embraced his mistress, and took his leave.

But it was not to return home immediately.

His mind was filled with Ellen's image; and, even while in the society of Lady Cecilia, he had been pondering upon the means of gratifying his new passion—of possessing that lovely creature of whose charms he had caught glimpses that had inflamed him to madness.

Amongst a thousand vague plans, one had struck him. He remembered the horrible old woman of Golden Lane, who had enticed him to her house under a pretence of seeing a beautiful statue, and had thereby led him back to the arms of Lady Cecilia Harborough.

To her he was determined to proceed; for he thought that he might be aided in his designs by that ingenuity of which he had received so signal a proof.

Accordingly, wrapping himself up in his cloak, he repaired directly from Lady Cecilia's house to the vile court in Golden Lane.

It was past seven o'clock in the evening when he reached the old hag's abode.

She was dozing over a comfortable fire; and her huge cat slept upon her lap. Even in the midst of her nap, the harridan mechanically stretched forth her bony hand from time to time, and stroked the animal down the back; and then it purred in acknowledgment of that caress which to a human being would have been hideous.

Suddenly a knock at the door awoke the hag.

"Business—business," murmured the old woman, as she rose, placed the cat upon the rug, and hastened to answer the door: "no idle visitor comes to me at this time."

The moment she opened the door the rector rushed in.

"Gently, gently," said the old hag: "there is nothing to alarm you in this neighbourhood. Ah!" she cried, as Reginald Tracy laid aside his hat and cloak; "is it you, sir? I am not surprised to see you again."

"And why not?" demanded the rector, as he threw himself into a chair.

"Because all those who wander in the mazes of love, sooner or later require my services," answered the hag; "be they men or women."

"You have divined my object in seeking you," said the rector. "I love a charming creature, and know not how to obtain possession of her."

"You could not have come to a better place for aid and assistance, sir," observed the harridan, with one of her most significant and, therefore, most wicked leers.

"But can I trust you? will you be faithful? what guarantee have I that you will not betray me to Lady Harborough, whose jealousy is so soon excited?" cried Reginald.

"If you pay me well I am not likely to lose a good patron by my misconduct," answered the old woman boldly. "In a word, my left hand knows not what my right hand does."

"Well spoken," said the rector; and, taking gold from his purse, he flung it upon the table, adding, "Be this your retaining fee; but it is as nothing compared to what I will give you if you succeed in a matter on which I have set my heart."

"You must be candid with me, and tell me every particular, sir," said the hag, as she gathered up the gold with avidity.

"I have seen the young lady to whom I allude, but on three or four occasions," continued the rector; "and yet I have discovered much concerning her. She has been weak already, and has a child of some six or seven months old. That child was not born in wedlock; nor, indeed, has its mother ever borne the name of wife."

"Then the conquest cannot be so difficult," murmured the hag.

"I am not sure of that," said Reginald Tracy. "Without knowing any thing of her history, I am inclined to believe that some deep treachery—some foul wrong must have entrapped that young lady into error. She lives in the most respectable way; and neither by her manner nor her looks could her secret be divined. Accident alone revealed it to me."

"It may serve our purpose—it may serve our purpose," cried the harridan, musing.

"She dwells with her father, at the house of a friend—a very young man——"

"Ah!" cried the hag, struck by this information. "What is her name?"

"Ellen Monroe," replied the rector.

"I thought so," exclaimed the old woman.

"You know her, then?" cried Reginald Tracy in astonishment. "Are you sure she is the same whom you imagine her to be?"

"She resides at the house of Mr. Markham in Holloway—does she not?"

"She does. But how came you to be acquainted with her? what cause of intimacy could exist between you and her?" demanded the rector.

"My left hand never knows what my right hand does," said the hag. "If I reveal to you the affairs of another, how could you put confidence in me when I declare that your own secrets shall not be communicated to Lady Harborough or any one else who might question me?"

"True!" said the rector: "I cannot blame your discretion. "But tell me—have you any hope that I may succeed?"

"The business is a difficult one," answered the hag. "And yet greater obstacles than I can here see have been overcome—aye, and by me, too. Did I not tell Lady Harborough that I would bring you back to her arms? and did I not succeed? Am I then to be foiled now. Show me the weakness of a human being, and I direct all my energies against that failing. Ellen Monroe has two vulnerable points ——"

"Which are they?" asked the rector eagerly.

"Her vanity and her love for her father," replied the harridan. "Leave her to me: when I am ready for you I will call upon you."

"And you will lose no time, good woman?" said the rector, overjoyed at the hopes held out to him.

"I will not let the grass grow under my feet," returned the hag. "But you must have patience; for the girl is stubborn—sadly stubborn. Art, and not entreaties, will prevail with her."

"In any case, manage your matters in such a way that I cannot be compromised," said the rector; "and your reward shall be most liberal."

"Trust to me," murmured the hag.

Reginald Tracy once more enveloped himself in his cloak, and took his departure.

"And so I have made a discovery this evening!" mused the hag, when she was once more alone. "Miss Ellen is a mother—she has a child of six or seven months old! She never told me that when she came to seek my aid, and I gave her the card of the Mesmerist;—she never told me that when she sought me after that, and I sent her to the Manager;—she never told me that when I met her at Greenwood's house in the country, and from which she escaped by the window. The cunning puss! She does not even think that I know where she lives;—but Lafleur told me that—Lafleur told me that! He is the prince of French valets—worth a thousand such moody, reserved Italians as Filippo! So now the rector must possess Miss Ellen? Well—and he shall, too, if I have any skill left—if I have any ingenuity to aid him!"

Then the hag concealed the five pieces of glittering gold which the rector had given her, in her Dutch clock; and having thus secured the wages of her iniquity, she proceeded to mix herself a steaming glass of gin-and-water to assist her meditations concerning the business entrusted to her.

"Yes," she said, continuing her musings aloud, "I must not fail in this instance. The rector is a patron who will not spare his gold; and Ellen may not be the only one he may covet. I warrant he will not keep me unemployed! These parsons are terrible fellows when once they give way; and I should think the rector has not been long at this game, or he could scarcely have contrived to maintain his reputation as he has. How the world would be astonished did it know all! But I am astonished at nothing—not I! No—no—I have seen too much in my time. And if I repent of any thing—but no I do not repent:—still, if I *did* sometimes think of *one* more than *another*, 'tis of that poor Harriet Wilmot! I should like to know what became of her. It must be sixteen or seventeen years since *that* occurred;—but the mention of the name of Markham just now, brought it all fresh back again to my mind. Well—it cannot be helped: it was in the way of business like any thing else!"

Let us leave the horrible old hag at her musings, and relate a little incident which occurred elsewhere, and which, however trivial the reader may deem it now, is not without importance in respect to a future portion of our narrative.

The rector had reached the door of his own house, after his interview with the old hag, and was about to knock when he perceived, by the light of the gas lamp, a strange-looking being standing on the step.

"What do you want, my good lad?" asked Reginald.

"Please, sir, I want to speak to Kate Wilmot, my cousin," answered Gibbet—for it was he.

"Indeed! I suppose, then, that you are the son of—of——" and Reginald stopped; for he did not like to wound the hump-back's feelings by saying "of the hangman," and at that moment he had forgotten the name of Katherine's uncle.

"My name is Smithers, sir," said the lad.

"Ah! Smithers—so it is," cried the rector. "Well, my good lad, I cannot think of preventing Katherine's relations from coming to see her if they choose; but, as she is now in a good place and respectably settled, it would perhaps be prudent that those visits should occur as seldom as possible—I mean, not too often."

"I'm sure, sir, I'm very sorry if I have offended you, by coming," sobbed the poor hump-back; "and I would not for all the world injure Kate in the opinion of those friends who have been so kind as to provide for her."

"Yon have done no harm—I am not angry with you," said the rector. "Only Mrs. Kenrick, my housekeeper, is very particular, and does not like the servants to have many visitors."

"Then I won't come any more, sir," murmured Gibbet, whose heart was ready to break at this cruel announcement.

"Yes—you may come and see your cousin every Sunday evening."

"Oh! thank you, sir—thank you kindly, sir!" ejaculated the hump-back, in a tone of touching sincerity.

"Every Sunday evening, then, let it be," continued the rector. "And now go round by the back way, and see her to-night, since you wish to do so."

The hump-back literally bounded with joy off the steps, and hurried to the stable-yard, whence there was a means of communication with the servants' offices attached to the rector's house.

As he drew near the back-door, he observed lights through the kitchen-windows; and he stopped for a moment to observe if Katherine were within.

In order to see into the kitchen, which, with its offices, formed a sort of out-house joining the main dwelling, the hump-back was compelled to climb upon a covered dust-hole standing in an obscure nook on the opposite side of the yard, and so shrouded in darkness that no one passing through the yard could observe a person concealed there.

The idea of ascertaining if Kate were in the kitchen at that moment, was not a mere whim on the part of the hump-back: he was afraid that, if she were not, he might not be allowed to return, and was therefore apprehensive of not seeing her that evening at all.

Accordingly, he clambered upon the dust-bin, which stood in a nook formed by the irregularity of the high wall that separated the yard of the rector's house from that of the stables; and from this point of observation, which his quick eye had thus detected, he commanded a full view of the interior of the kitchen.

Yes—Kate was there, seated at the table, and occupied with her needle.

She was alone too.

Gibbet remained in his hiding-place for some minutes, contemplating, with melancholy pleasure, the interesting countenance of the young girl.

At length it struck him that it was growing late, and that his visit must not last long.

He let himself gently down from the eminence to which he had clambered; and as he was about to turn away, to cross the yard to the kitchen door, he stopped short, as if an idea had suddenly entered his mind.

Casting a look back upon the obscure place from which he had just emerged, he muttered between his teeth, "No Kate—they shall not prevent me from seeing you of an evening when I will—and when, too, you will little suspect that I am so near."

He then walked over to the kitchen door, and knocked gently.

Kate herself rose to open it, and with unfeigned pleasure admitted the hump-back.

"Mr. Tracy says that I may come and see you every Sunday evening, Kate," were Gibbet's first words: "you won't say no—will you, Kate?"

"Certainly not, John," answered the maiden. "I shall always be glad to see you, my poor cousin," she added compassionately.

"Oh! I know you will, Kate," exclaimed the hump-back. "I have missed you so all yesterday afternoon, and all to-day; and father is more unkind to me than ever," he added, the tears trickling down his cheeks.

"We must hope that better times await you, John," said Katherine, in a soothing tone.

"Never for me," observed Gibbet, with a profound sigh. "Father does not cease to upbraid me for my conduct yesterday morning. But I could not help it. I went down to Newgate with the intention to do my best; but when I got there, and found myself face to face with the miserable wretch who was about to suffer,—when I saw his awful pale face, his wild glaring eyes, his distorted features, his quivering limbs,—and when I heard him murmur every other moment, '*O Lord! O Lord!*' in a tone scarcely audible and yet expressive of such intense anguish,—I could not lay a finger upon him! When my father gave me the twine to pinion him, it fell from my hands; and I believe I felt as much as the unfortunate man himself. Oh! heavens—his face will haunt me in my dreams as long as I live. I never shall forget it—it was so ghastly, so dreadful! I would not have had any thing to do with taking that man's life away—no, not for all the world. I did not see a criminal before me—I only saw a fellow-creature from whom *his* fellow-creatures were about to take away something which God alone gave, and which God alone should have the right to recall. I thought of all this; and I was paralysed. And it was because my nature would not let me touch so much as the hem of that man's garment to do him harm, that my father upbraids and beats me. Oh! it is too cruel, Kate—it is too cruel to bear!"

"It is, my poor cousin," answered the girl; "but let me entreat you to submit patiently—as patiently as you can. Times must change for you—as they have for me."

These last words she uttered in a half-tone of self-reproach, as if she upbraided herself with having left her unfortunate cousin to the mercy of his brutal father.

But how could she have done otherwise, poor girl?

The conversation between that interesting young creature and the hump-back continued in pretty much the same strain for about half-an-hour, when Gibbet took leave of his cousin.

"You will come and see me next Sunday, John," said Katharine, as she shook him warmly by the hand.

"Next Sunday evening, dear Kate," he replied, and then departed.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE OLD HAG'S INTRIGUE.

On the morning after she had received the visit from the Reverend Reginald Tracy, the old hag rose early, muttering to herself, "I must lose no time—I must lose no time."

She then proceeded to dress herself in her holiday attire, each article of which was purchased with the wages of her infamous trade.

Female frailty—female shame had clothed the hag: female dishonour had produced her a warm gown, a fine shawl, and a new bonnet.

When she was young she had lived by the sale of herself: now that she was old she lived by the sale of others.

And she gloried in all the intrigues which she successfully worked out for those who employed her, as much as a sharp diplomatist triumphs in outwitting an astute antagonist.

It is said that when Perseus carried the hideous head of the Gorgon Medusa through the air, the gore which dripped from it as he passed over the desert of Libya turned into frightful serpents: so does the moral filth which the corruption of great cities distils, engender grovelling and venomous wretches like that old hag.

Well—she dressed herself in her best attire, and contemplated herself with satisfaction in a little mirror cracked all across.

Then, having partaken of a hearty breakfast, she sallied forth.

By means of a public conveyance she soon reached the vicinity of Markham Place.

She had never been in that neighbourhood before; and when she beheld the spacious mansion, with its heavy but imposing architecture, she muttered to herself, "She is well lodged—she is well lodged!"

The hag then strolled leisurely round Richard's miniature domain, debating within herself whether she should knock boldly at the front door and inquire for Miss Monroe, or wait in the neighbourhood to see if that young lady might chance to walk out alone.

The day was fine, though cold; and the hag accordingly resolved to abide by the latter alternative.

Perceiving a seat upon the summit of the hill, whereon stood the two trees, she opened the gate at the foot of the path which led to the top.

Then she toiled up the hill, and seated herself between the two ash trees—now denuded of their foliage.

Presently, as her eyes wandered hither and thither, they fell upon the inscriptions engraved on the stem of one of the trees. Thus they stood:—

EUGENE.

Dec. 25, 1836.

EUGENE.

May 17th, 1838.

The old woman marvelled what that name, twice inscribed, and those dates could mean.

But she did not trouble herself much with conjecture on that point: she had other business on hand, and was growing impatient because Ellen did not appear.

At length her penetrating eyes caught a glimpse of a female form approaching from the direction of the garden at the back of the mansion.

The hag watched that form attentively, and in a few moments exclaimed joyfully, "It is she!"

Ellen was indeed advancing up the hill. She had come forth for a short ramble; and the clearness of the day had prompted her to ascend the eminence which afforded so fine a view of the mighty metropolis at a little distance.

When she was near the top, she caught sight of a female seated upon the bench between the trees, and was about to retreat—fearful that her presence might be deemed a reproach for what was in fact an intrusion upon private property.

But, to her surprise, she observed the female beckoning familiarly to her; and she continued her way to the summit.

Then, with profound astonishment and no little annoyance, she recognised the old hag.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Ellen, hastily.

"Resting myself, as you see, miss," answered the harridan. "But how charming you look this morning! That black velvet bonnet sets off your beautiful complexion; and the fresh air has given a lovely glow to your cheeks."

"You have not uttered that compliment without a motive," said Ellen, vainly endeavouring to suppress a half-smile of satisfaction. "But you must not suppose that your flattery will make me forget the part which you played when Mr. Greenwood had me conveyed to his house somewhere in the country."

"My dear child, do not be angry with me on that account," said the old hag. "Mr. Greenwood thought that you would prefer me as

your servant instead of a stranger."

"Or rather, he hired you to talk me over to his wishes—or, perhaps, because he knew that you would wink at any violence which he might use. But I outwitted you both," added Ellen, laughing.

"Ah! now I see that you have forgiven me, my child," cried the hag. "And when I behold your sweet lips, red as cherries—your lovely blue eyes, so soft and languishing—and that small round chin, with its charming dimple, I feel convinced——"

"Nay—you are determined to flatter me," interrupted Ellen; "but I shall not forgive you the more readily on that account."

"How well this pelisse becomes your beautiful figure, my child," said the hag, affecting not to notice Ellen's last observation.

"Cease this nonsense," cried Miss Monroe; "and tell me what brings you hither."

"To see you once more, my child."

"How did you discover my abode?"

"A pleasant question, forsooth!" ejaculated the hag. "Do you think that I am not well acquainted with all—yes, *all* that concerns you?" she added significantly.

"Alas! I am well aware that you know much—too much," said Ellen, with a profound sigh.

"Much!" repeated the hag. "I know *all*, I say,—even to the existence of the little one that will some day call you mother."

"Who told you that? Speak—who told you *that*?" demanded Ellen, greatly excited.

"It cannot matter—since I know it," returned the hag: "it cannot matter."

"One question," said Ellen,—"and I will ask you no more. Was Mr. Greenwood your informant?"

"He was not," answered the hag.

"And now tell me, without circumlocution, what business has brought you hither—for that you came to meet with me I have no doubt."

"Sit down by me, my child," said the hag, "and listen while I speak to you."

"Nay—I can attend to you as well here," returned Ellen, laughing, as she leant against one of the trees—an attitude which revealed her tiny feet and delicate ankles.

"You seem to have no confidence in me," observed the hag; "and yet I have ever been your friend."

"Yes—you have helped me to my ruin," said Ellen, mournfully. "And yet I scarcely blame you for all that, because you only aided me to discover what I sought at the time—and that was *bread at any sacrifice*. Well—go on, and delay not: I will listen to you, if only through motives of curiosity."

"My sweet child," said the harridan, endeavouring to twist her wrinkled face into as pleasing an expression as possible, "a strange thing has come to my knowledge. What would you think if I told you that a man of pure and stainless life, who is virgin of all sin,—a man who to a handsome exterior unites a brilliant intellect,—a man whose eloquence can excite the aristocracy as well as produce a profound impression upon the middle classes,—a man possessed of a fine fortune and a high position,—what would you think, I say, if I told you that such a man has become enamoured of you?"

"I should first wonder how such a phœnix of perfection came to select you as his intermediate," answered Ellen, with a smile, which displayed her brilliant teeth.

"A mere accident made me acquainted with his passion," said the hag. "But surely you would not scorn the advances of a man who would sacrifice every thing for you—who would consent to fall from his high place for one single hour of your love—who would lay his whole fortune at your feet as a proof of his sincerity."

"To cut short this conversation, I will answer you with sincerity," returned Ellen. "Mr. Greenwood is the only man who can boast of a favour which involves my shame: he is the father of my child. I do not love him—I have no reason to love him: nevertheless, he is—I repeat—the father of my child! That expresses every thing. Who knows but that, sooner or later, he may do me justice? And should such an idea ever enter his mind, must I not retain myself worthy of that repentant sentiment on his part?"

"You cherish a miserable delusion, my child," said the hag; "and I am surprised at your confidence in the good feelings of a man of whom you have already seen so much."

"Ah! there is a higher power that often sways the human heart," observed Ellen; and, as she spoke, her eyes were fixed upon the inscriptions on the tree, while her heart beat with emotions unintelligible to the old hag.

"You will then allow this man of whom I have spoken, and who has formed so enthusiastic an attachment towards you, to languish without a hope?" demanded the woman.

"Men do not die of love," said Ellen, with a smile.

"But he is rich—and he would enrich you," continued the old harridan: "he would place your father in so happy a position that the old man should not even experience a regret for the prosperity which he has lost."

"My father dwells with a friend, and is happy," observed Ellen.

"But he is dependant," exclaimed the old hag: "for you yourself once said to me, '*We are dependant upon one who cannot afford to maintain us in idleness.*' How happy would you be—for I know your heart—to be enabled to place your father in a state of independence!"

"Would he be happy did he know that he owed the revival of his prosperity to his daughter's infamy?"

"Did he divine whence came the bread that was purchased by your services to the statuary, the artist, the sculptor, and the photographer? You yourself assured me that you kept your avocations a profound secret."

"Were I inclined to sell myself for gold, Greenwood would become a liberal purchaser," said Ellen. "All your sophistry is vain. You cannot seduce me from that state of tranquil seclusion in which I now dwell."

"At least grant your unknown lover an interview, and let him plead his own cause," exclaimed the hag, who did not calculate upon so much firmness on the part of the young lady.

"Ah! think not that he is unknown," cried Ellen, a light breaking in upon her mind: "a man of pure and stainless life, virgin of all sin,

—a man endowed with a handsome person, and a brilliant intellect,—a man whose eloquence acts as a spell upon all classes,—a man possessed of a large fortune and enjoying a high position,—such is your description! And this man must have seen me to love me! Now think you I cannot divine the name of your phœnix?"

"You suspect then, my child——"

"Nay—I have something more than mere suspicion in my mind," interrupted Ellen. "Oh! now I comprehend the motive of that apparent earnestness with which he implored me to reveal the secret sorrow that oppressed me! In a word, old woman," added the young lady, in a tone of superb contempt, "your phœnix is the immaculate rector of St. David's!"

"And do you not triumph in your conquest, Miss?" demanded the hag, irritated by Ellen's manner.

"Oh! yes," exclaimed the young lady, with a sort of good-humoured irony; "so much so, that I will meet him when and where you will."

"Are you serious?" inquired the hag, doubtfully.

"Did I ever jest when I agreed to accept the fine offers which you made me on past occasions?" asked Ellen.

"No: and you cannot have an object in jesting now," observed the old woman. "But when and where will you meet him who is enamoured of you?"

"You say that he will make any sacrifice to please me?"

"He will—he will."

"Then he cannot refuse the appointment which I am about to propose to you. On Monday evening next there is to be a masked ball at Drury Lane Theatre. At ten o'clock precisely I will be there, dressed as a Circassian slave, with a thick veil over my face. Let him be attired as a monk, so that he may be enabled to shroud his features with his cowl. We shall not fail to recognise each other."

"Again I ask if you are in earnest?" demanded the old woman, surprised at this singular arrangement.

"I was never more so," answered Ellen.

"But why cannot the appointment take place at my abode?" said the hag.

"Oh! fie—the immaculate rector in your dirty court in Golden Lane!" ejaculated Ellen.

"That court was once good enough for you, my child," muttered the old woman.

"We will not dispute upon that point," said the young lady. "If I am worth having, I am worth humouring; and I must test the sincerity of the attachment which your phœnix experiences for me, by making him seek me at a masked ball."

"Oh! the caprices of you fair ones!" ejaculated the hag. "Well, my child, I will undertake that it shall be as you desire."

"Next Monday evening at ten o'clock," cried Ellen; and with these words she tripped lightly down the hill in the direction of the mansion.

The old hag then took her departure by the path on the opposite side; and, as she went along, she chuckled at the success of her intrigue.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE MASQUERADE.

The evening of the masquerade arrived.

It is not our intention to enter into a long description of a scene the nature of which must be so well known to our readers.

Suffice it to say that at an early hour Old Drury was, within, a blaze of light. The pit had been boarded over so as to form a floor level with the stage, at the extremity of which the orchestra was placed. The spacious arena thus opened, soon wore a busy and interesting appearance, when the masques began to arrive; and the boxes were speedily filled with ladies and gentlemen who, wearing no fancy costumes, had thronged thither for the purpose of beholding, but not commingling with, the diversions of the masquerade.

To contemplate that blaze of female loveliness which adorned the boxes, one would imagine that all the most charming women of the metropolis had assembled there by common consent that night; and the traveller, who had visited foreign climes, must have been constrained to admit that no other city in the universe could produce such a brilliant congress.

For the fastidious elegancies of fashion, sprightliness of manners, sparkling discourse, and all the refinements of a consummate civilization, which are splendid substitutes for mere animal beauty, the ladies of Paris are unequalled;—but for female loveliness in all its glowing perfection—in all its most voluptuous expansion, London is the sovereign city that knows in this respect no rival.

In sooth, the scene was ravishing and gorgeous within Old Drury on the night of which we are writing.

The spacious floor was crowded with masques in the most varied and fanciful garbs.

There were Turks who had never uttered a "Bismillah," and Shepherdesses who had seen more of mutton upon their tables than ever they had in the fields;—Highlanders who had never been twenty miles north of London, and Princesses whose fathers were excellent aldermen or most conscientious tradesmen;—Generals without armies, and Flower-Girls whose gardens consisted of a pot of mignonette on the ledge of their bed-room windows;—Admirals whose nautical knowledge had been gleaned on board Gravesend steamers, and Heathen Goddesses who were devoted Christians;—Ancient Knights who had not even seen so much as the Eglintoun Tournament, and Witches whose only charms lay in their eyes;—and numbers, of both sexes, attired in fancy-dresses which were very fanciful indeed.

Then there was all the usual fun and frolic of a masquerade;—friends availing themselves of their masks and disguises to mystify each other,—witticism and repartee, which if not sharp nor pointed, still served the purpose of eliciting laughter,—and strange mistakes in respect to personal identity, which were more diverting than all.

There was also plenty of subdued whispering between youthful couples; for Love is as busy at masquerades as elsewhere.

The brilliancy of the dresses in the boxes, and the variety of those upon the floor, combined with the blaze of light and the sounds of the music, formed a scene at once gay, exhilarating, and ravishing.

At about a quarter before ten o'clock, a masque, attired in the sombre garb of a Carmelite Friar, with his cowl drawn completely over his face, and a long rosary hanging from the rude cord which girt his waist, entered the theatre.

He cast a wistful glance, through the slight opening in his cowl, all around; and, not perceiving the person whom he sought, retired into the most obscure nook which he could find, but whence he could observe all that passed.

At five minutes to ten, a lady, habited as a Circassian slave, and wearing an ample white veil, so thick that it was impossible to obtain a glimpse of her countenance, alighted from a cab at the principal entrance of the theatre.

Lightly she tripped up the steps; but as she was about to enter the vestibule, her veil caught the buttons of a lounger's coat, and was drawn partly off her face.

She immediately re-adjusted it—but not before a gentleman, masked, and in the habit of a Greek Brigand, who was entering at the time, obtained a glimpse of her features.

"What? Ellen *here*!" murmured the Greek Brigand to himself: "I must not lose sight of her!"

Ellen did not however notice that she had been particularly observed; much less did she suspect that she was recognised.

But as she hastened up the great staircase, the Greek Brigand followed her closely.

Although her countenance was so completely concealed, her charming figure was nevertheless set off to infinite advantage by the dualma which she wore, and which, fitting close to her shape, reached down to her knees. Her ample trousers were tied just above the ankle where the graceful swell of the leg commenced; and her little feet were protected by red slippers.

The Brigand who had recognised her, and now watched her attentively, was tall, slender, well made, and of elegant deportment.

Ellen soon found herself in the midst of the busy scene, where her graceful form and becoming attire immediately attracted attention.

"Fair eastern lady," said an Ancient Knight in a buff jerkin and plumed tocque, "if thou hast lost the swain that should attend upon thee, accept of my protection until thou shalt find him."

"Thanks for thy courtesy, Sir Knight," answered Ellen, gaily: "I am come to confess to a holy father whom I see yonder."

"Wilt thou then abjure thine own creed, and embrace ours?" asked the Knight.

"Such is indeed my intention, Sir Knight," replied Ellen; and she darted away towards the Carmelite Friar whom she had espied in

his nook.

The Ancient Knight mingled with a group of Generals and Heathen Goddesses, and did not offer to pester Ellen with any more of his attentions.

"Sweet girl," said Reginald Tracy (whom the reader has of course recognised in the Carmelite Friar), when Ellen joined him, "how can I sufficiently thank you for this condescension on your part?"

"I am fully recompensed by the attention you have shown to the little caprice which prompted me to choose this scene for the interview that you desired," answered Ellen.

Both spoke in a subdued tone—but not so low as to prevent the Greek Brigand, who was standing near, from overhearing every word they uttered.

"Mr. Tracy," continued Ellen, "why did you entrust your message of love to another? why could you not impart with your own lips that which you were anxious to communicate to me?"

"Dearest Ellen," answered the rector, "I dared not open my heart to you in person—I was compelled to do so by means of another."

"If your passion be an honourable one," said Ellen, "there was no need to feel shame in revealing it."

"My passion is most sincere, Ellen. I would die for you! Oh! from the first moment that I beheld you by your father's sick-bed, I felt myself drawn towards you by an irresistible influence; and each time that I have since seen you has only tended to rivet more firmly the chain which makes me your slave. Have I not given you an unquestionable proof of my sincerity by meeting you *here*?"

"A proof of your desire to please me, no doubt," said Ellen. "But what proof have I that your passion is an honourable one? You speak of its sincerity—you avoid all allusion to the terms on which you would desire me to return it."

"What terms do you demand?" asked the rector. "Shall I lay my whole fortune at your feet? Shall I purchase a splendid house, with costly appointments, for you? In a word, what proof of my love do you require?"

"Are you speaking as a man who would make a settlement upon a wife, or as one who is endeavouring to arrange terms with a mistress?" demanded Ellen.

"My sweet girl," replied Reginald, "know you not that, throughout my career, I have from the pulpit denounced the practice of a man in holy orders marrying, and that I have more than once declared—solemnly declared—my intention of remaining single upon principle? You would not wish me to commit an inconsistency which might throw a suspicion upon my whole life?"

"Then, sir, by what right do you presume that I will compromise my fair fame for your sake, if you tremble to sacrifice your reputation for mine?" asked Ellen. "Is every compromise to be effected by poor woman, and shall man make no sacrifice for her? Are you vile, or base, or cowardly enough to ask me to desert home and friends to gratify your selfish passion, while you carefully shroud your weakness beneath the hypocritical cloak of a reputed sanctity? Was it to hear such language as this that I agreed to meet you? But know, sir, that you have greatly—oh! greatly mistaken *me*! By the most unmanly—the most disgraceful means you endeavoured to wring from me, a few days ago, a secret which certain expressions of mine, incautiously uttered over what I conceived to be my father's death-bed, had perhaps made you more than half suspect. Those words, which escaped me in a moment of bitter anguish, you treasured up, and converted them into the text for a sermon which you preached me."

"Ellen," murmured the rector; "why these reproaches?"

"Oh! why these reproaches?—I will tell you," continued the young lady, whose bosom palpitated violently beneath the dualma. "Do you think that you did well to press me to reveal the secret of my shame? Do you think that you adopted an honourable means to discover it? When you addressed me in that saintly manner—a manner which I now know to have been that of a vile hypocrisy—I actually believed you to be sincere; for the time I fancied that a man of God was offering me consolation. Nevertheless, think you that my feelings were not wounded? But an accident made you acquainted with that truth which you vainly endeavoured to extort from me! And now you perhaps believe that I cannot read your heart. Oh! I can fathom its depths but too well. You cherish the idea that because I have been frail once, I am fair game for a licentious sportsman like you. You are wrong, sir—you are wrong. I never erred but once—but once, mark you;—and then not through passion—nor through love—nor in a moment of surprise. I erred deliberately—no matter why. The result was the child whom you have seen. But never, never will I err more—no, not even though tempted, *as I have been*, by the father of my child! You sent to me a messenger—the same filthy hag who pandered to my first, my only disgrace,—you sent her as your herald of love. Ah! sir, you must have already plunged into ways at variance with the sanctity of your character—or you could not have known *her*! I told her—as I now assure you—that I do not affect a virtue which I possess not;—but if I henceforth remain pure and chaste, it is because I am a mother—because I love my child—because I will keep myself worthy of the respect of *him* who is the father of that child, should God ever move his heart towards me. Say then that I am virtuous upon calculation—I care not: still I am virtuous!"

The individual in the garb of the Greek Bandit drew a pace or two nearer as these words met his ears.

Neither the rector nor Ellen observed that he was paying any attention to them: on the contrary, he appeared to be entirely occupied in contemplating the dancers from beneath his impervious mask.

"Ellen, what means all this?" asked Reginald: "are you angry with me? You alarm me!"

"Suffer me to proceed, that you may understand me fully," said Ellen. "You mercilessly sought to cover me with humiliation, when you rudely probed that wound in my heart, the existence of which an unguarded expression of mine had revealed to you. Your conduct was base—was cowardly; and, as a woman, I eagerly embraced the opportunity to avenge myself."

"To avenge yourself!" faltered Reginald, nearly sinking with terror as these words fell upon his ears.

"Yes—to avenge myself," repeated Ellen hastily. "When your messenger—that vile agent of crime—proposed to me that I should grant you an interview, I bethought myself of this ball which I had seen announced in the newspapers. It struck me that if I could induce you—you, the man of sanctity—to clothe yourself in the mummery of a mask and meet me at a scene which you and your fellow-ecclesiastics denounce as one worthy of Satan, I should hurl back with tenfold effect that deep, deep humiliation which you visited upon me. It was for this that I made the appointment here to-night—for this that I retired early to my chamber, and thence stole forth unknown to my father and my benefactor—for this that I now form one at an assembly which has no charms for me! My intention was to seize an opportunity to tear your disguise from you, and allow all present to behold amongst them the immaculate

rector of Saint David's. But I will be more merciful to you than you were to me: I will not inflict upon you that last and most poignant humiliation!"

"My God! Miss Monroe, are you serious?" said the rector, deeply humbled; "or is this merely a portion of the pastime?"

"Does it seem sport to you?" asked Ellen: "if so, I will continue it, and wind it up with the scene which I had abandoned."

"For heaven's sake, do not expose me, Miss Monroe!" murmured Reginald, now writhing in agony at the turn which the matter had taken. "Let me depart—and forget that I ever dared to address you rudely."

"Yes—go," said Ellen: "you are punished sufficiently. You possess the secret of my frailty—I possess the secret of your hypocrisy: beware of the use you make of your knowledge of me, lest I retaliate by exposing you."

There was something very terrible in the lesson which that young woman gave the libidinous priest on this occasion; and he felt it in its full force.

Cowering within himself, he uttered not another word, but stole away, completely subdued—cruelly humiliated.

Ellen lingered for a few moments on the spot where she had so effectually chastised the insolent hypocrite; and then hastily retired.

The Greek Brigand made a movement as if he were about to follow her; but, yielding to a second thought, he stopped, murmuring, "By heavens! she is a noble creature!"

CHAPTER CL.

MRS. KENRICK.

The rector of Saint David's returned home a prey to the most unenviable feelings.

Rage—disappointment—humiliation conspired to make him mad.

The old hag had raised his hopes to the highest pitch; and at the moment when the cup of bliss seemed to approach his lips, it was rudely dashed away.

A woman had triumphed over him—mocked his passion—spurned his offers—read him a lesson of morality—taught him that proud man must not always domineer over feminine weakness.

Oh! it was too much for that haughty—that vain—that self-sufficient ecclesiastic to endure!

As he returned home in a hired cab, he threw from the window of the vehicle the Carmelite gown and cowl which he had worn; and bitterly did he reproach himself for his folly in having been seduced into the degradation of that masqued mummery.

Arrived at his own house, he rushed past the housekeeper who opened the door, and was hurrying up-stairs to the solitude of his chamber, when the voice of the old lady compelled him to pause.

"Mr. Tracy—Mr. Tracy," she exclaimed; "here is a note from Lady Harborough."

"Tell Lady Harborough to go to the devil, Mrs. Kenrick!" cried the rector, goaded almost to madness by this new proof of Cecilia's indiscretion.

The old housekeeper dropped the candle and the note, as if she were thunderstruck.

Was it possible that she had heard aright? could such an expression have emanated from the lips of her master—of that man whom the world idolized?

"What is the matter now, Mrs. Kenrick?" asked the rector, suddenly recovering his presence of mind, and perceiving the immense error into which his excited feelings had betrayed him.

"Nothing, sir—nothing," answered the housekeeper, as she re-lighted her candle by means of a lamp which was standing on the hall-table; "only I thought that something very terrible had occurred to annoy you."

"Yes—yes—I have indeed been grievously annoyed," said Reginald; "and you must forgive my hasty conduct. I was wrong—very wrong. Do not think anything more of it, Mrs. Kenrick. But did you not observe that Lady Harborough had sent a message——"

"A note, sir. Here it is."

And as the housekeeper handed her master the perfumed *billet*, she cast a scrutinizing glance upon his countenance.

He was as pale as death—his lips quivered—and his eyes had a wild expression.

"I am afraid, sir, that something very dreadful has happened to you," she observed timidly. "Shall I send for the physician?"

"No—no, Mrs. Kenrick: I shall be quite well in the morning. I have received a violent shock—the sudden communication of ill news—the death of a dear friend——"

"Ah! sir, I was convinced that all was not right," observed the housekeeper. "If you would follow my advice you would take something to compose you—to make you sleep well——"

"An excellent thought, Mrs. Kenrick! If it be not too late, I wish you would send and procure me a little laudanum: I will take a few drops to ensure a sound slumber."

"I will do so, sir," answered the housekeeper.

She then repaired to the kitchen, while Reginald hurried up to his own chamber to read Lady Cecilia's letter, the contents of which ran as follow:—

"Nearly a week has elapsed, dearest Reginald, and I have not seen you! neither have I heard from you. What is the meaning of this? Is it neglect, or extreme caution? At all events the interval which you enjoined for the cessation of my visits to you, has nearly expired; and my impatience will brook no longer delay. I must see you to-night! Precisely as the clock strikes twelve, I will be at your front-door, when you must admit me as on previous occasions—or I shall imagine that you are already wearied of your

"CECILIA."

"After all," said the rector, "the presence of Cecilia will in some degree console me for my disappointment of this evening! I cannot remain alone with my reflections—it drives me mad to think of what I am, and what I have been! And laudanum is a miserable resource for one who dreads a sleepless night: it peoples slumber with hideous phantoms. Yes—I will admit Cecilia at the appointed hour:—my housekeeper does not suspect me—my guilty conscience alone makes me think at times that she reads the secrets of my soul?"

The rector seated himself before the cheerful fire which burnt in the grate, and fell into a long train of voluptuous meditation.

He had become in so short a time a confirmed sensualist; and now that his long pent-up passions had broken loose, they never left him a moment of repose.

His reverie was interrupted by a knock at the door; and Mrs. Kenrick entered.

"Kate was fortunate enough to find a druggist's shop open, sir," she said, "and procured some laudanum. But pray be cautious how

you use it."

"Never fear," returned the rector: "I may not avail myself of it at all—for I feel more composed now."

The housekeeper wished her master a good night's rest, and withdrew.

The rector then took a decanter of wine from a cupboard, and tossed off two glasses full, one immediately after the other.

The idea that Cecilia would shortly be there and the effects of the wine inflamed his blood, and brought back the colour to his cheeks.

Midnight soon sounded: the rector threw off his shoes, took a candle in his hand, and hastened down stairs.

He opened the front-door with the utmost caution; and a female, muffled in an ample cloak, darted into the hall.

"Cecilia?" whispered the rector.

"Dearest Reginald," answered the lady, in the same under tone.

They then stole noiselessly up stairs, and reached the rector's chamber without having scarcely awakened the faintest echo in the house.

The remainder of the night was passed by them in the intoxicating joys of illicit love. Locked in Cecilia's arms, the rector forgot the humiliation he had received at the hands of Ellen, and abandoned himself to those pleasures for which he risked so much!

It was still dark—though at a later hour in the morning than Cecilia had been previously in the habit of quitting the rector's house—when the guilty pair stole softly down stairs, without a light.

"Hasten, Cecilia," murmured the rector: "it is later than you imagine."

"My God!" whispered the lady: "I hear a step ascending!"

The rector listened for a moment, and then said in a faint tone, "Yes: we are lost!"

A light flashed on the wall a few steps beneath those on which they were standing: it was too late to retreat; and in another moment Mrs. Kenrick made her appearance on the stairs.

"What! Mr. Tracy?" ejaculated the housekeeper, her eyes glancing from the rector in his dressing-gown to the lady in her cloak.

Then the good woman stood motionless and silent—her tongue tied, and her feet rooted to the spot, with astonishment.

Lady Cecilia drew her veil hastily over her countenance; but not before Mrs. Kenrick had recognised her.

A thousand ideas passed rapidly through the rector's brain during the two or three moments that succeeded this encounter.

At first he thought of inventing some excuse for his awkward situation;—next he felt inclined to spring upon his old housekeeper and strangle her;—then he conceived the desperate idea of rushing back to his room and blowing his brains out.

"Mrs. Kenrick," at length he exclaimed, "I hope you will say nothing of this."

The housekeeper made no reply to her master; but, turning a contemptuous glance upon the lady, said, "Madam, allow me to conduct you to the front door."

Cecilia followed her mechanically; and Reginald rushed up the stairs to his room, a prey to emotions more readily conceived than described.

The housekeeper preceded Lady Cecilia in silence, and opened the front door.

"My dear Mrs. Kenrick," said the frail patrician, who had now nearly recovered her presence of mind, "I hope you will take no notice of this unpleasant discovery."

"I shall remain silent, madam," answered the housekeeper; "but through no respect for you. I however value the reputation of a master whom I have served for many years, too much to be the means of ruining him."

She then closed the door unceremoniously, and, seating herself on one of the mahogany benches in the hall, burst into tears.

That good woman loved her master with a maternal affection; and she was shocked at this dread confirmation of the faint suspicions which she had already entertained, and which had so sorely afflicted her.

"It is then true!" she thought within herself. "He has fallen! He is a living, breathing falsehood. His eloquence is a mere talent, and not the spontaneous outpouring of holy conviction! The world adores an idle delusion—worships a vain phantom. Oh! what a discovery is this! How can I ever respect him more? how can I ever talk with others of his virtues again? And yet he may repent—oh! God grant that he may! Yes—he must repent: he must again become the great, the good man he once was! It behoves me, then, to shield his guilt:—at the same time all temptation should be removed from his presence. Ah! now I bethink me that he has cast wistful eyes upon that poor girl whom he has taken into the establishment. I must remove her: yes—I will remove her, upon my own authority. He will thank me hereafter for my prudence."

Thus did the good woman reason within herself.

When she had somewhat recovered from the first shock which the unpleasant discovery of her master's criminality had produced upon her, she repaired to her domestic avocations.

Kate was already in the kitchen, occupied with her usual duties.

"Katherine, my dear child," said Mrs. Kenrick, "I am going to give you my advice—or rather to propose to you a plan which I have formed—relative to you——"

"To me, ma'am?" exclaimed the young maiden, desisting from her employment, and preparing to listen with attention.

"Yes, my dear girl," continued the housekeeper; "and when I tell you that it is for your good—entirely for your good—you would thank me——"

"Oh! I do, ma'am—I thank you in advance," said Kate; "for I have already experienced too much kindness at your hands not to feel convinced that all you propose is for my good."

"Well, then, my dear—without giving you any reasons for my present conduct—I am anxious that you should leave this house——"

"Leave, ma'am?" cried Kate, astonished at this unexpected announcement.

"Yes, Katherine: you must leave this house," proceeded Mrs. Kenrick. "But think not that you will be unprovided for. I have a sister who resides a few miles from London; and to her care I shall recommend you. She will be a mother to you."

"But why would you remove me from the roof of my benefactor?" asked Kate: "why would you send me away from London, where my only relations on the face of the earth reside?" she added, bursting into tears; for she thought of her poor persecuted cousin the

hump-back.

"Do not ask me, my good child," returned Mrs. Kenrick: "my reasons are of a nature which cannot be communicated to you. And yet—if you knew them, and could rightly understand them—you would not object——"

"Alas! ma'am, I am afraid that I understand them but too well," interrupted the girl: "the executioner's niece brings discredit upon the house of her benefactor."

"Oh! no—no," exclaimed the good-natured housekeeper; "do not entertain such an idea! Not for worlds would I have you labour under such an error. You know I would not tell a falsehood; and I declare most solemnly that you have totally misunderstood me and my motives."

There was an earnestness in the way in which Mrs. Kenrick spoke that immediately removed from Katherine's mind the suspicion she had entertained.

"Why should you send the poor girl away, Mrs. Kenrick?" said the footman, now suddenly emerging from the pantry, which joined the kitchen.

"Have you overheard our conversation, then, Thomas?" exclaimed Mrs. Kenrick, angrily.

"I couldn't very well avoid it," answered the footman, "since I was in there all the time."

"It would have been more discreet on your part to have let us know that you were there, when you heard a private conversation begin," remarked the housekeeper.

"How should I know the conversation was private?" exclaimed Thomas. "I suppose you're jealous of the girl, and want to get rid of her."

"You must value your place very little by speaking to me in this way," said Mrs. Kenrick. "However, I scorn your base allusions. And you, my dear," she continued, now addressing herself to Katherine, "look upon me as your friend—your very sincere friend. What I am doing is for your good: to-day I will write to my sister—and to-morrow you shall, proceed to her abode."

The housekeeper then resumed her avocations with the complacency of one conscious of having performed a duty.

"Thomas," she said, after a pause, "go up and inquire if your master will have breakfast served in his own chamber, or in the parlour."

The footman hastened to obey this order.

"Master says he is very unwell, and desires no breakfast at all," was the information which the man gave on his return to the kitchen.

The housekeeper made no reply: she was however pleased when she reflected that the rector felt his situation—a state of mind which she hoped would lead to complete repentance and reform.

The morning passed: the afternoon arrived: and still Reginald Tracy kept his room.

The housekeeper sent the footman up to ask if he required any thing.

Thomas returned with a negative answer, adding "Master spoke to me without opening the door, and seemed by his tone of voice to be very unwell."

Again the housekeeper remained silent, more convinced than before that contrition was working its good effects with her master.

Hour after hour passed; the sun went down; and darkness once more drew its veil over the mighty city.

Mrs. Kenrick again sent up Thomas with the same inquiry as before.

The servant returned to the kitchen with a letter in his hand.

"This time master opened the door," he said; "and gave me this letter to take up to Mr. Markham at Holloway. But I shall take the omnibus there and back."

Thomas then departed to execute his commission.

Shortly after he was gone, the bell of the rector's room rang.

Mrs. Kenrick hastened to answer it.

She found Mr. Tracy sitting in a musing attitude before the fire in his bed-room.

"My dear Mrs. Kenrick," he said, "I wish to have some conversation with you—I need scarcely now explain upon what subject. I have sent Thomas out of the way with an excuse: do you get rid of Katherine for an hour; I am faint—and require refreshment; and I will take my tea with you in the kitchen."

"In the kitchen, sir!" exclaimed the housekeeper, in surprise.

"Yes—if you will permit me," answered the rector: "I can then converse with you at the same time."

Mrs. Kenrick left the room to execute her master's wishes; and, as she descended the stairs, she thought within herself, "I am right! he has repented: he will become the virtuous and upright man he once was!"

And the good woman experienced a pleasure as sincere as if any one had announced to her that she was entitled to a princely fortune.

To send Katherine out of the way for an hour was no difficult matter. The old housekeeper gave her leave to repair to Saint Giles's to visit her relatives; and the young girl, thinking that her uncle might repent of his recent harshness towards her, now that she was no longer dependant upon him, gladly availed herself of this permission.

Katherine accordingly proceeded to Saint Giles's; and the moment she had left the house Mrs. Kenrick spread the kitchen table with the tea-things.

CHAPTER CLI.

A MYSTERIOUS DEED.

Katherine tripped lightly along towards Saint Giles's; but as she drew near her uncle's door, she relaxed her speed, and her heart grew somewhat heavy.

She was afraid of experiencing an unkind reception.

It was, therefore, with a pleasure the more lively as it was unexpected, that the poor girl found herself welcomed by a smile on the part of her dreaded relative.

"Come in, Kate," said he, when he perceived his niece; "I felt myself dull and lonely, and was just thinking of you as you knocked at the door. I'm almost sorry that I ever parted with you; but as you're now in a place that may do you good I shall not interfere with you."

"I am very much obliged to you for thinking so kindly of me, uncle," said Kate, wiping away a tear, as she followed Smithers into the little parlour, which, somehow or another, did not look so neat as it had been wont to do in her time.

"I can't help thinking of you now and then, Kate," continued Smithers. "But, I say," he added abruptly, "I hope you've forgotten all about the manner in which we parted t'other day?"

"Oh! indeed I have, uncle," answered the girl, more and more astonished at this unusual urbanity of manner.

"I am not happy—I'm not comfortable in my mind, somehow," said Smithers, after a short pause. "Since the night before last I haven't been myself."

"What ails you?" asked Kate, kindly.

"I think my last hour's drawing nigh, Kate," returned the public executioner, sinking his voice to a low and mysterious whisper; but, at the same time, his countenance grew deadly pale, and he cast a shuddering look around him.

"You are low-spirited, uncle—that's all," said Kate, surveying him attentively—for his peculiarity of manner alarmed her.

"No—that's not it, Kate," continued the executioner; then, drawing his chair closer towards that on which his niece was seated, he added, "I have had my warning."

"Your warning, uncle! What mean you?"

"I mean what I say, Kate," proceeded Smithers, in a tone of deep dejection: "I have had my warning; and I s'pose it will come three times."

"Uncle—dear uncle, I cannot understand you. You must be unwell. Will you have medical advice? Say—shall I fetch a physician?"

"Don't be silly, Kate: there's nothink the matter with my body;—it's the mind. But I'll tell you what it is," continued Smithers, after a few moments of profound reflection. "It was the night before last. I had been practising—you know how——"

"Yes—yes, uncle," said Katherine, hastily.

"And it was close upon midnight, when I thought I would go to bed. Well—I undressed myself, and as there was only a little bit of candle left, I didn't blow the light out, but put the candlestick into the fire-place. I then got into bed. In a very few minutes I fell into a sort of doze—more asleep than awake though, because I dreamt of the man that I hanged yesterday week. I didn't, however, sleep very long; for I woke with a start just as Saint Giles's was a striking twelve. The light was flickering in the candlestick, for it was just dying away. You know how a candle burnt down to the socket flares at one moment, and then seems quite dead the next, but revives again immediately afterwards?"

"Yes, uncle," answered Katherine; "and I have often thought that in the silent and solemn midnight it is an awful thing to see."

"So it struck me at that moment," continued the executioner. "I felt a strange sensation creeping all over me; the candle flared and flickered; and I thought it had gone out. Then it revived once more, and threw a strong but only a momentary light around the room. At that instant my eyes were fixed in the direction of the puppet; and, as sure as you are sitting there, Kate, *another face* looked at me over its shoulder!"

"Oh! my dear uncle, it was the imagination," said the young girl, casting an involuntary glance of timidity around.

"Is a man like me one of the sort to be deluded by the imagination?" asked Smithers, somewhat contemptuously. "Haven't I been too long in a certain way to have any foolish fears of that sort?"

"But when we are unwell, uncle, the bravest of us may perceive strange visions, which are nothing more than the sport of the imagination," urged Kate.

"I tell you this had nothing to do with the imagination," persisted the executioner. "I saw *another face* as plain as I see yours now; and—more than that—its glassy eyes were fixed upon me in a manner which I shall never forget. It was a warning—I know it was."

Kate made no reply: she saw the inutility of arguing with her uncle upon the subject; and she was afraid of provoking his irritable temper by contending against his obstinacy.

"But we won't talk any more about it, Kate," said the executioner, after a pause. "I know how to take it; and it doesn't frighten me; it only makes me dull. It hasn't prevented me from sleeping in my old quarters; nor will it, if I can help it. But you want to be off—I see you are getting fidgetty."

"I only received permission to remain out one hour," answered Kate. "Is my cousin at home?"

"The young vagabond!" ejaculated the executioner, whose irritability this question had aroused in spite of the depression of spirits under which he laboured; for he could not forget the unwearied repugnance which Gibbet manifested towards the paternal avocations:—"the young vagabond! he is never at home now of an evening."

"Never at home of an evening!" exclaimed Kate, surprised at this information.

"No," continued the executioner; "and at first I thought he went to see you."

"He can only visit me on Sunday evenings," observed the young maiden.

"So he told me yesterday. Howsumever, he goes out regular at dusk, and never comes back till between nine and ten—sometimes later."

"Then I am not likely to see him this evening?" exclaimed Kate, in a tone of disappointment.

"That you are not," replied the executioner. "But I must put a stop to these rovings on his part."

"Oh! pray be kind to him, uncle," said Katherine, rising to depart.

"Kind indeed!" grumbled the man, some of his old surliness returning.

Katherine then took leave of her uncle, and hurried towards Mr. Tracy's residence.

She reached her destination as the clock struck nine, and entered the house as usual, by the back way.

She proceeded to the kitchen, where, to her surprise, she observed Mrs. Kenrick sitting in her arm-chair, but apparently fast asleep. The old housekeeper's arms reposed upon the table, and formed a support for her head which had fallen forwards.

"Strange!" thought Katherine; "this is the first time I have known her sleep thus."

The young maiden moved lightly about the kitchen, while she threw off her bonnet and cloak, for fear of awaking the housekeeper.

Then she sate down near the fire, and fell into a profound reverie concerning the strange tale which her uncle had told her.

Presently it struck her that she did not hear the housekeeper breathe; and an awful suspicion rushed like a torrent into her mind.

For some moments she sate, motionless and almost breathless, in her chair, with her eyes fixed upon the inclined form of the housekeeper.

"My God!" at length Kate exclaimed; "she does not breathe—she does not move;—and her hands—oh! how pale they are!"

Then, overcoming her terror, the young maiden bent down her head so as to obtain a glimpse of Mrs. Kenrick's countenance.

"Oh! heavens—she is dead—she is dead!" cried the horror-struck girl, as her eyes encountered a livid and ghastly face instead of the healthy and good-humoured one which was familiar to her.

And Katherine sank back in her seat, overcome with grief and terror.

Suddenly the thought struck her that, after all, the housekeeper might only be in a fit.

Blaming herself for the delay which her fears had occasioned ere she administered succour, Kate hastened to raise the old lady's head.

But she let it fall again when she had obtained another glance of that ghastly countenance;—for the eyes were fixed and glazed—the under jaw had fallen—and the swollen tongue was lolling, dark and livid, out of the mouth.

Then Kate rushed into the yard, screaming for help.

The rector's groom (who also acted as coachman) was in the stable adjoining; and he immediately hastened to the spot.

"What is the matter?" he demanded, alarmed by the wildness of Katherine's manner and the piercing agony of her cries.

"Mrs. Kenrick is dead!" replied Katherine, sobbing bitterly.

"Dead!" ejaculated the man; and he instantly rushed into the kitchen.

In a few moments afterwards the rector made his appearance, and inquired the cause of the screams which had alarmed him.

"Mrs. Kenrick is dead, sir," said the groom.

Katherine had flung herself into a chair, and was giving full vent to her grief for the loss of her benefactress.

"Dead!" cried the rector. "No—let us hope not. Run for the nearest surgeon—it may only be a fit!"

"I'm afraid it's too late, sir," said the groom, who had now raised the housekeeper from her procumbent posture, and laid her back in the chair.

"Who knows? Run—run," exclaimed the rector impatiently.

The groom instantly departed; and during his short absence the rector was most assiduous in bathing the housekeeper's forehead with vinegar and water, and chafing her hands between his own.

In a few minutes the groom returned, accompanied by a surgeon; and the rector was found in the midst of his vain attentions.

The surgeon's examination was brief; but his words were decisive, as he said, "All human aid is vain, sir; and those appearances are most suspicious."

"What do you mean?" demanded Reginald.

"That your servant is poisoned," replied the surgeon.

"Poisoned!" exclaimed the rector. "Oh! no—you must mistake. She would not take poison herself, and I do not believe she has an enemy on the face of the earth."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Tracy," said the surgeon positively, "she is poisoned."

At these words Kate's sobs became more convulsive.

"But is it too late?" cried the rector: "can nothing be done? Is she past recovery?"

"Past all human succour, I repeat."

"My poor servant—my faithful friend," exclaimed Reginald Tracy, burying his face in his hands: "Oh! what could have induced her to commit suicide?"

"Suicide!" echoed Katherine, starting from her seat, and coming forward: "Oh! no, sir—do not wrong her memory thus! She was too good—too pious—too much bent upon the mercy of her Redeemer, to commit such a crime."

"Alas! suicide it must have been, my poor girl," said the rector; "for who could have administered poison to so harmless, so charitable, so humane a creature? Some secret grief, perhaps——"

At this moment Thomas returned from his mission to Markham Place. The poor fellow was deeply affected when the dreadful spectacle in the kitchen met his eyes, and when the few particulars yet known concerning the death of the housekeeper, or rather the first discovery of her death—were communicated to him.

"I never shall forgive myself as long as I live," exclaimed Thomas, "for having spoken cross to her, poor lady, this morning."

"Spoken cross to her!" cried the rector.

"Yes, sir," answered the man; "I said something to her—but I forget exactly what—because she told Katherine that she should send her away from London."

"Send Katherine away!" said Reginald, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes, sir; and because I saw the girl didn't like it, I took her part against Mrs. Kenrick; and I'm now heartily sorry for it," rejoined Thomas, wiping away an honest tear.

"Young woman," said the surgeon, who had been attentively examining Katherine for some moments, "did you not visit my shop last evening?"

"I, sir!" exclaimed the young girl, who was too deeply absorbed in grief at the death of her benefactress to have her ideas very clearly distributed in the proper cells of her brain.

"Yes," continued the surgeon: "the more I look at you, the more I am convinced you came last night to my establishment and purchased a small phial of laudanum."

"Oh! yes—I remember, sir," said Katherine: "Mrs. Kenrick sent me for it, and told me that it was for my master."

The surgeon threw an inquiring glance towards Reginald.

"For me!" ejaculated the rector.

"So Mrs. Kenrick said, sir," returned Katherine: "and the moment I brought it in, she went up stairs with it."

"You can in one moment set at rest that point, sir," said the surgeon, with another glance of inquiry towards the rector.

"The laudanum was not for me," answered Mr. Tracy, calmly: "nor did I order my poor housekeeper to obtain any."

"O Katherine!" ejaculated Thomas; "surely—surely, you have not done this dreadful deed!"

"I——a murderess!" almost shrieked the poor girl: "Oh! no—no. God forbid!"

And she clasped her hands together.

The surgeon shook his head mysteriously.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the rector, who was evidently excited to a painful degree, "you do not suspect—you cannot suppose—you do not—cannot imagine that—this young person——"

"I regret to state that the matter is to my mind most suspicious," observed the surgeon, with true professional calmness. "This morning the housekeeper informs that young person she must leave your establishment——"

"But, according to your own admission, the laudanum was purchased last night," interrupted the rector.

"Your humanity in pleading on behalf of that young woman does honour to your heart, Mr. Tracy," said the surgeon; "but was it not likely that she knew *yesterday* of some circumstance which would induce the housekeeper to give her warning *to-day*? and——"

"Oh! my God!" cried the rector, striking his forehead forcibly with the open palm of his right hand.

"To a virtuous mind like yours I know that such a suspicion must be abhorrent," said the surgeon.

He then whispered a few words to the groom.

The groom immediately went out.

"Mr. Tracy—sir—you cannot surely entertain a suspicion against me!" cried Katherine, in a tone of the most piercing anguish. "Oh! that poor creature was my benefactress; and I would sooner have died myself than have done her wrong!"

"I believe you," exclaimed the rector,—"believe you from the bottom of my heart!"

"Thank you, Mr. Tracy," cried the poor girl, falling upon her knees before him, and grasping his hands convulsively in her own.

"You are too good—too generous," muttered the surgeon. "Be not deluded by that tragic acting. At all events I must do my duty."

"What do you mean?" cried the rector. "You cannot say that suspicion attaches itself to this young girl. I would stake my existence upon her innocence!" he added emphatically.

"You know not human nature as I know it," returned the surgeon coolly.

At this moment the groom returned, followed by a police-officer.

"A person has met with her death in a most mysterious manner," said the surgeon; "and strong suspicions point towards that young female."

Then followed one of those heart-rending scenes which defy the powers of the most graphic pen to delineate.

Amidst the wildest screams—and with cries of despair which pierced even to the stoic heart of the surgeon, who had acted in a manner which he had deemed merely consistent with his duty, the unhappy girl was led away in the custody of the officer.

"My God! who would have thought that it would have come to this?" exclaimed Reginald Tracy, as he precipitated himself from the kitchen.

"The surgeon is right," observed Thomas to the groom; "master is too good a man to believe in guilt of so black a nature."

CHAPTER CLII.

THE DEATH BED.

Early on the morning which succeeded the arrest of Katharine Wilmot, Mr. Gregory paid a visit to Markham Place.

The moment he entered the room where Richard received him, our hero observed that some deep affliction weighed upon the mind of his friend.

"Mr. Markham," said the latter, in a tone of profound anguish, "I am come to ask you a favour—and you will not refuse the last request of a dying girl."

"My dear sir—what do you mean?" exclaimed Richard. "Surely your daughter——"

"Mary-Anne will not long remain in this world of trouble," interrupted Mr. Gregory, solemnly. "Hers will soon be the common lot of mortals—perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow! She must die soon—God will change her countenance and take her unto himself. Oh! where shall I find consolation?"

"Consolation is to be found in the conviction that the earth is no abiding place," answered Markham; "and that there is a world beyond."

"Yes, truly," said the afflicted father. "We stand upon the border of an ocean *which has but one shore*, and whose heavings beyond are infinite and eternal."

There was a pause, during which Mr. Gregory was wrapped up in painful reflections.

"Come," said he, at length breaking that solemn silence, and taking Richard's hand; "you will not refuse to go with me to the death-chamber of my daughter? You will not offend against the delicacy of that devotion which you owe to *another*; for *she* herself is also there."

Richard gazed at Mr. Gregory in astonishment as he uttered these words.

"Yes, my young friend," continued the wretched father; "within the last four and twenty hours, Mary-Anne and I have had many explanations. By a strange coincidence, it was at the abode of Count Alteroni that Mary-Anne passed a few days at the commencement of last month, and to which visit I alluded the last time I saw you, but without particularising names. I did not then know that you were even acquainted with the Alteroni family—much less could I suspect that your affections were fixed upon the Lady Isabella."

"And your daughter and Isabella are acquainted?" ejaculated Markham, more and more surprised at what he heard.

"They are friends—and at this moment the Lady Isabella is by the bed-side of Mary-Anne. It seems that the young maidens made confidants of each other, during my daughter's visit to the Count's mansion; and they then discovered that they both loved the same individual."

"How strange that they should have thus met!" cried Markham.

"Then was it," continued Mr. Gregory, "that my daughter learnt how hopeless was her own passion! Oh! I need not wonder if she returned home heart-broken and dying! But your Isabella, Richard, is an angel of goodness, virtue, and beauty!"

"She is worthy of the loftiest destinies!" said Markham enthusiastically.

"She was present when my daughter poured forth her soul into my bosom," resumed Mr. Gregory; "and Mary-Anne was guilty of no breach of confidence in revealing to me the love which existed between the Signora and yourself. And Isabella, with the most becoming modesty, confirmed the truth of Mary-Anne's recital. But your secret, Mr. Markham, remains locked up in my breast. You are too honourable and the Lady Isabella is too pure-minded to act in opposition to the will of her father: but God grant that events may prove favourable to you, and that you may be happily united!"

Richard pressed the hand of his respected friend in token of gratitude for this kind wish.

"And now you cannot hesitate to take a last farewell of my daughter," said Mr. Gregory; "for all danger of contagion from her malady has passed."

Markham instantly prepared himself to accompany the unhappy parent.

Few were the words that passed between them as they proceeded to the dwelling which was the abode of sorrow.

On their arrival Markham was shown into the drawing-room for a short time; and then the nurse came to introduce him into the sick-chamber.

The room was nearly dark; the curtains of the bed were close drawn; and thus the dying girl was completely concealed from our hero.

But near the foot of the bed was standing a beauteous form, whose symmetrical shape Markham could not fail to recognise.

Isabella extended her hand towards him: he pressed it in silence to his lips.

Mary-Anne had heard his footsteps; and she also gave him her hand between the folds of the curtains.

"Sit down by the bed-side, Richard," whispered Isabella: "our poor friend is anxious to speak to you."

And Isabella wept—and Richard also wept; for those noble-minded beings could not know, without the liveliest emotion, that one so sweet, so innocent, and so youthful, was stretched upon the bed from which she was destined never to rise again.

Markham seated himself by the side of the bed; and Isabella was about to withdraw.

"Stay with us, my dear friend," said Mary-Anne, in a plaintive but silver tone of voice, which touched a chord of sympathy that vibrated to their very souls.

Alas! that dulcet voice could not move the tuneless ear of Death!

Isabella obeyed her friend's wish in silence.

"This is kind of you—very kind," continued Mary-Anne, after a brief pause, and now evidently addressing herself to Richard. "I longed to speak to you once again before I left this earthly scene for ever; and that angel who loves you, and whom you love, earnestly implored my father to procure for me that last consolation. And now that you are both here together—you and that angel, by my bed-side,—I may be allowed to tell you, Richard, how fondly—how devotedly I have loved you; and I know you to be the noble, the enduring, the patient, the high-minded, and the honourable being I always believed you to be. Oh! how rejoiced I am that you have not loved me in return; for I should not like to die and leave behind me one who had loved me as tenderly as I had loved him."

"You will not die—you will recover!" exclaimed Markham, deeply affected, while Isabella's ill-suppressed sobs fell upon his ears. "Yes—yes—you will recover, to bless your father and brothers, and to make *us*, who are your friends, happy! It is impossible that Death can covet one so young, so innocent, and so beautiful——"

"Beautiful!" cried Mary-Anne, with a bitterness of accent which surprised our hero, and which served to elicit a fresh burst of sorrow from the sympathising bosom of Isabella: "beautiful—no, not now!"

Then there was another solemn pause.

"Yes—I shall die; but you will be happy," resumed Mary-Anne, again breaking silence. "Something assures me that providence will not blight the love which exists between Isabella and yourself—as it has seen fit to blight mine! Such is my presentiment; and the presentiments of the dying are often strangely prophetic of the future truth. Oh!" continued the young maiden, in a tone of excitement, "brilliant destinies await you, Richard! All your enduring patience, your resignation under the oppression of foul wrong, will meet with a glorious reward. Yes—for I know all:—that angel Isabella has kept no secret from me. She is a Princess, Richard; and by your union with her, you yourself will become one of the greatest Princes in Europe! Her father, too, shall succeed to his just rights; and then, Richard, then—" she said, with a sort of holy enthusiasm and sybilline fervour,—"*then* how small will be the distance between yourself and the Castelcicalan throne!"

At that solemn moment, Isabella extended her hand towards Richard, who pressed hers tenderly; and the lovers thus acknowledged the impression which had been wrought and the happy augury which was conveyed by the fervent language of the dying girl.

"Oh! do not think my words are of vain import," continued Mary-Anne, in the same tone of inspiration. "I speak not of my own accord—something within me dictates all I now say! Yes—you shall be happy with each other; all obstacles shall vanish from the paths of your felicity; and when, in your sovereign palace of Montoni, you shall in future years retrospect over all you have seen and all you have passed through, forget not the dying girl who predicted for you all the happiness which you will then enjoy!"

"Forget you!" exclaimed Richard and Isabella in the same breath; "never—never!"

And the tears streamed down their cheeks.

"No—never forget me," said Mary-Anne; "for if it be allowed to the spirits of the departed to hover round the dwellings of those whom they loved and have left in this world, then will I be as a guardian angel unto you—and I shall contemplate your happiness with joy!"

"Oh! speak not thus surely of approaching death," exclaimed Richard. "Who knows that your eyes may not again behold the light!"

"My eyes!" repeated the invalid, with an evident shudder. "But for what could I live?" demanded the young maiden: "what attractions could life now offer to me?"

"You are young," returned Markham: "and hope and youth are inseparable. You can mingle with society,—you can appear in the great world—a world that will be proud of you——"

"Oh! Richard, Richard," murmured the soft tones of Isabella; "you know not what you say!"

At the same time that the Signora thus spoke in a low whisper, deep and convulsive sobs emanated from behind the curtains.

"Pardon me, Mary-Anne," said Richard, not comprehending the meaning of Isabella's words; "I have probably touched a chord——"

"Oh! I do not blame you," said Miss Gregory; "but my father ought to have told you all!"

"All!" echoed Richard. "What fresh misfortune could he have communicated?"

"Did he not tell you that I had been attacked with a grievous malady? that——"

"I remember! He spoke of a dangerous malady which had assailed you; and he remarked that all fear of contagion was now past. But I was so occupied at the time with the afflicting intelligence of your severe illness—so surprised, too, when I learnt that Isabella was here with you,—that I paid but little attention to that observation."

"Alas!" said Mary-Anne, in a faint and deeply-melancholy tone, "I have been assailed by a horrible malady—a malady which leaves its fatal marks behind, as if the countenance had been seared with red-hot iron—which disfigures the lineaments of the human face—eats into the flesh—and—and——"

"The small-pox!" cried Markham with a shudder.

"The small-pox," repeated Mary-Anne. "But you need not be alarmed: all danger of infection or contagion is now past—or I should not have sent to Isabella to come to me yesterday."

"I am not afraid," answered our hero: "I shuddered on your account. And even if there were any danger," he added, "I should not fly from it, if my presence be a consolation to you."

"You now understand," said the dying girl, "the reason why I could not hope for happiness in this world, even if I were to recover from my present illness,—and why death will be preferable to existence in a state of sorrow. How could I grope about in darkness, where I have been accustomed to feast my eyes with the beauties of nature and the wonderful fabrics raised by men? How could I consent to linger on in blindness in a world where there is so much to admire?"

"Blindness!" echoed our hero: "impossible! You cannot mean what you say!"

"Alas! it were a folly to jest upon one's death-bed," returned the young lady, with a deep sigh. "What I said ere now was the truth.

The malady made giant strides to hurry me to the tomb: never had the physicians before known its ravages to proceed with such frightful celerity. It has left its traces upon my countenance—and it has deprived me of the blessing of sight. Oh! now I am hideous—a monster,—I know, I feel that I am,—revolting, disgusting," continued Mary-Anne, bitterly; "and not for worlds would I allow you to behold that face which once possessed some attraction."

"The marks left by the scourge that has visited you will gradually become less apparent," said Richard, deeply afflicted by the tone, the manner, and the communications of the invalid; "and probably the eye-lids are but closed for a time, and can be opened again by the skill of a surgeon."

"Never—never!" cried Mary-Anne, convulsively; and, taking Richard's hand, she carried it to her countenance.

She placed his fingers upon her closed eye-lids.

He touched them; they yielded to his pressure.

The sockets of the eyes were empty.

The eye-balls were gone!

"Oh! wherefore art thou thus afflicted—thou who art so guiltless, so pure, so innocent?" exclaimed our hero, unable to contain his emotions.

"Question not the will of the deity," said Mary-Anne. "I am resigned to die; and if, at times, a regret in favour of the world I am leaving enters my mind, or is made apparent in my language, I pray the Almighty to pardon me those transient repinings. Of the past it is useless now to think;—the present is here;—and the future is an awful subject for contemplation. But upon that I must now fix my attention!"

Markham made no answer; and during the long silence which ensued, the dying girl was wrapt up in mental devotion.

At length she said, "Give me your hand, Richard—and yours, Isabella."

Her voice had now lost all its excitement; and her utterance was slow and languid.

The lovers obeyed her desire.

Mary-Anne placed their hands together, and said, "Be faithful to each other—and be happy."

Richard and Isabella both wept plentifully.

"Adieu, my kind—my dear friends," murmured Mary-Anne. "You must now leave me; and let my father come to receive the last wishes of his daughter."

"Adieu, dearest Mary-Anne: we shall meet in heaven!" said Isabella, in a tone expressive of deep emotion.

"We will never—never forget you," added Richard.

He then led the weeping Isabella from the apartment.

As they issued from the chamber of death, they met Mr. Gregory in the passage: he wrung their hands, and said, "Wait in the drawing-room until I come."

The unhappy parent then repaired to the death-bed of his daughter.

Markham and Isabella proceeded in silence to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER CLIII.

PROCEEDINGS IN CASTELCICALA.

The scene, which they had just witnessed, produced a most painful impression upon the minds of the lovely Italian lady and Richard Markham.

For some moments after they were alone in the drawing-room together, they maintained a profound silence.

At length Richard spoke.

"It is a mournful occurrence which has brought us together to-day, Isabella," he said.

"And although this meeting between us be unknown to my father," answered Isabella, "yet the nature of the circumstance which caused it must serve as my apology in your eyes."

"In my eyes!" ejaculated Markham. "Oh! how can an apology be necessary for an interview with one who loves you as I love you?"

"I am not accustomed to act the prude, Richard," returned Isabella; "and therefore I will not say that I regret having met you,—apart from the sad event which led to our meeting."

"Oh! Isabella, if I do not now renew to you all my former protestations of affection, it is because it were impious for us to think of our love, when death is busy in the same house."

"Richard, I admire your feeling in this respect. But you are all our poor dying friend proclaimed you—high-minded, honourable, and generous. O Richard! the prophetic language of Mary-Anne has produced a powerful impression upon my mind!"

"And on mine, also," answered Markham. "Not that I esteem the prospective honours displayed to my view; but because I hope—sincerely hope—that my adored Isabella may one day be mine."

The Princess tendered him her hand, which he kissed in rapture.

"Do you know," said Isabella, after a few moments' silence, "that events are taking a turn in Castelcicala, which may lead to all that poor Mary-Anne has prophesied? There was a strong party in the state opposed to the marriage of the Grand Duke; and the military department was particularly dissatisfied."

"I remember that in the accounts which I read of the celebration of that marriage, it was stated that the ducal procession experienced a chilling reception from the soldiery."

"True," answered Isabella; "and early last month—a few days after the commencement of the new year—that spirit showed itself more unequivocally still. Three regiments surrounded the ducal palace, and demanded a constitution. The Grand Duke succeeded in pacifying them with vague promises; and the regiments retired to their quarters. It then appears that his Serene Highness wished to make an example of those regiments, and drew up a decree ordaining them to be disbanded, the officers to be cashiered, and the men to be distributed amongst other corps."

"That was a severe measure," remarked Richard.

"So severe," continued Isabella, "that General Grachia, the Minister of War, refused to sign the ducal ordinance. He was accordingly compelled to resign, the Duke remaining inflexible. The whole of the Cabinet-Ministers then sent in their resignations, which the Grand Duke accepted. Signor Pisani, the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was charged with the formation of a new ministry—a fact which shows how completely the Duke has alienated from himself all the great statesmen of Castelcicala."

"So that he has been compelled to have recourse to an Under Secretary as his Prime Minister," observed Richard.

"Precisely," answered Isabella. "Signor Pisani formed an administration; and its first act was to carry into force the decree already drawn up against the three discontented regiments. The second proceeding of the new ministry was to banish General Grachia from the country."

"This was madness!" ejaculated Markham. "Does the Grand Duke wish to seal his own ruin?"

"It would appear that he is desperate," continued Isabella, "as I shall show you in a moment. General Grachia left Montoni, accompanied by his family, and followed by immense multitudes, who cheered him as the well-known friend of the Prince my father. The troops also crowded in his way, to show their respect for the veteran chief who had so often led them to conquest. The next morning a ducal ordinance appeared, which showed that the Grand Duke was resolved to throw off the mask, and proclaim a despotism. I have the *Montoni Gazette* in my reticule."

Isabella produced the newspaper, and, opening it, said, "I will translate the ordinance to you."

"Nay—rather allow me to read it for myself," returned Markham.

"How? But it is in Italian," exclaimed the Signora.

"And I will read it in that tongue," said Richard.

"I was not aware—I knew not until now——"

"No, dearest Isabella: until lately the Italian language was as Chinese to me," interrupted Richard: "but I have studied it intensely—without aid, without guidance; and if I cannot speak it fluently nor with the correct pronunciation, I can understand it with ease, and—I flatter myself—speak at least intelligibly."

The lovely Italian girl listened to this announcement with the most tender interest. She received it as a proof of boundless love for her; and sweet—ineffably sweet was the glance of deep gratitude which she threw upon her lover.

Richard took the *Montoni Gazette* from the fair hand which tendered it to him, and then read, with ease and fluency, the following translation of the ducal ordinance alluded to:—

"ANGELO III., BY THE GRACE OF GOD, GRAND DUKE OF CASTELCICALA,

"To all present and to come, Greeting:

"We have ordered and do order that which follows:—

"I. The censorship of the press is restored from this date: and no newspaper nor periodical work shall be published in our dominions, without the consent of the Minister of the Interior.

"II. Offences against this law, as well as all others connected with the press, shall henceforth be brought before the cognizance of the Captain-General of the province where such offences may occur, instead of before the ordinary tribunals.

"III. No assembly of more than seven persons will henceforth be allowed to take place, without the consent of the local authorities, save for the purposes of religious worship and ceremonial.

"IV. Our Captains-General are hereby authorised to declare martial law in their provinces, or any part of their provinces, should signs of insubordination appear.

"V. Our Minister Secretary of State for the Department of the Interior will see to the execution of this our ordinance.

"*By the Grand Duke*, ANGELO III.
"RAPALLO PISANI,
"Minister of the Interior.

"*January 10th, 1840.*"

"The Grand Duke has thus destroyed the freedom of the press, promulgated a law to suppress political meetings, and menaced the country with martial law," said Richard, when he had terminated the perusal of this ordinance.

"And it would appear, by the newspapers and by private letters which my father has received," added Isabella, "that the Grand Duke would have proceeded to extremes far more dangerous to his throne had not his amiable Duchess softened him. But even her intercessions—and I understand she is a most deserving princess—were ineffectual in a great measure."

"Know you the results of that despotic ordinance?" asked Markham.

"Several riots have taken place at Montoni," answered the Signora; "and the Captain-General of the province of Abrantani has proclaimed martial law throughout the districts which he governs."

"Matters are then becoming serious in Castelcicala," observed Richard. "What has become of General Grachia?"

"No one knows. He left Montoni within twenty-four hours after the receipt of the decree of exile; but my father has received no information of his progress or intentions. Oh! my beloved country," she exclaimed, in a tone of pious fervour, "may God grant that thou wilt not be the scene of anarchy, bloodshed, and civil strife!"

Richard surveyed his beautiful companion with the most enraptured admiration, as she uttered that holy wish,—a wish that spoke so eloquently of the absence of all selfishness from her pure soul.

The above conversation had been carried on in a subdued tone; and its topic had not excluded from the minds of the young lovers the recollection of the sad scene which they had ere now witnessed.

Indeed they only pursued their discourse upon that particular subject, because it was connected with the chain of events which seemed adapted to carry out the prophetic hopes of the dying girl.

Nearly an hour had passed since they had left the chamber of death.

At length the door opened slowly, and Mr. Gregory entered the drawing-room.

His countenance was deadly pale; and yet it wore an expression of pious resignation.

Isabella and Richard knew that all was over.

Mr. Gregory advanced towards them, and taking their hands, said, "She is gone—she died in my arms! Almost her last words were, '*Tell Isabella and Richard sometimes to think of Mary-Anne*.'"

The bereaved parent could subdue his grief no longer: he threw himself upon the sofa and burst into tears.

Nor were the cheeks of Isabella and Richard unmoistened by the holy dew of sweet sympathy.

"Richard," said Mr. Gregory, after a long pause, "you must write to my sons and tell them of this sad affliction. Desire them to return home immediately from college: I was wrong not to have sent for them before; but—my God! I knew not that my sweet child's death was so near!"

Markham instantly complied with Mr. Gregory's request, and despatched the letter to the post.

Scarcely was this duty accomplished, when Count Alteroni's carriage drove up to the door. It was, however, empty, having been merely sent to fetch Isabella home.

The Signora took leave of Mr. Gregory, and bade a tender adieu to Richard, who handed her into the vehicle.

The carriage then drove away.

Richard passed the remainder of the day with Mr. Gregory, and returned home in the evening deeply affected at the misfortune which had overtaken an amiable family.

But Markham, on his arrival at his own house, was doomed to hear tidings of a most unpleasant nature.

"Mr. Tracy's footman has been here with very disagreeable news," said Ellen, the moment Markham entered the sitting-room. "Had I known whither you were gone, I should have directed him on to you."

"Mr. Tracy's footman!" exclaimed Richard. "Why—he was here last evening, with a letter from his master inviting me and Mr. Monroe to dine with him next Monday——"

"I am aware of it," interrupted Ellen. "And you declined the invitation."

"Yes—because I do not seek society," observed Richard. "I wrote a proper answer: what, then, did his servant require to-day?"

"It appears that a young person in whom you felt some interest——"

"Katherine Wilmot?" said Richard.

"That is the name," returned Ellen.

"What about her?" asked our hero.

"She has committed a crime——"

"A crime!"

"A crime of the blackest dye: she has poisoned Mr. Tracy's housekeeper."

"Ellen you are deceived—you are mistaken: it is impossible!" exclaimed Markham, "I never saw her but once, it is true: and still the impression she made upon me was most favourable. I did not mention any thing concerning her to either you or your father, because I sought to do an act of humanity in tearing her away from a wretched home; and I am not one who speaks of such a deed as that."

"I am not deceived—I am not mistaken, Richard," answered Ellen. "The footman came and narrated to me the particulars; and he said that his master was too unwell, through horror and excitement, to write to you upon the subject."

Ellen then related the few particulars yet known in connexion with the case, but the nature of which is already before the reader.

Richard remained silent for a long time, after Ellen had ceased to speak.

"If that innocent-looking girl be a murderess," he exclaimed at length, "I shall never put faith in human appearances again. But, until she be proved guilty, I will not desert her."

"Do you know," said Ellen, "that I do not like your Mr. Tracy at all! Not that I suppose him capable of falsely accusing any one of so heinous a crime as murder; but—I do not like him."

"A female caprice, Ellen," observed Richard. "The world in general adores him."

"Ah! those who stand upon the highest pinnacles often experience the most signal falls," said Ellen.

"The breath of calumny has never tainted his fair fame," cried Richard.

"Alas! we have so many—many instances of profound ecclesiastical hypocrisy," persisted Miss Monroe.

"Ellen, you wrong an excellent man," said Markham, somewhat severely. "I will call upon him to-morrow morning, and learn from his own lips the particulars of this most mysterious deed."

CHAPTER CLIV.

REFLECTIONS.—THE NEW PRISON.

Richard Markham passed an uneasy night.

His thoughts wandered from topic to topic until the variety seemed infinite.

He pondered upon his brother, and again reflected for the thousandth time what connexion could possibly exist between him and the Resurrection Man. The fatal letter, desiring this terrible individual to call upon him, was too decidedly in Eugene's handwriting to be doubted. The other contents of the pocket-book, which Richard had found in the Gipsies' Palace, threw no light upon the subject; indeed, they only consisted of a few papers of no consequence to any one.

Then Richard's thoughts travelled to the Resurrection Man himself. Was this individual really no more? Had the truth been told relative to his death at the Gipsies' encampment near Pentonville prison?

Next our hero's imagination wandered to the death-bed of the innocent girl who had entertained so unfortunate a passion for him. What fervent love was that! what disinterested affection! And then to perish in such a manner,—with the darkness of the tomb upon her eyes, long ere death itself made its dread appearance!

But with what inspiration had she prophesied the most exalted destinies for him she loved! With her sybilline finger she had pointed to a throne!

And then how speedily were those predictions followed by the communication of events which portended grand political changes in Castelcicala,—changes which threatened the reigning sovereign with overthrow, and the inevitable result of which must be the elevation of Prince Alberto to the ducal throne!

And Isabella—how many proofs of her unvaried love for our hero had she not given? She had confessed her attachment to the deceased maiden—she had avowed it to that deceased maiden's father. Then, when Mary-Anne had prophesied the exalted rank which Isabella would be destined to confer, by the fact of marriage, upon Richard, the lovely Italian had ratified the premise by the gentle pressure of her hand!

Next our hero pondered upon the awful deed which had been ascribed to Katherine Wilmot; and here he was lost in a labyrinth of amaze, distrust, and doubt. Could it be possible that the blackest heart was concealed in so fair a shrine? or had circumstantial evidence accumulated with fearful effect to enthral an innocent girl in the meshes of the criminal law? Richard remembered how he himself had suffered through the overwhelming weight of circumstantial evidence; and this thought rendered him slow to put faith in the guilt of others.

Then, amidst other topics, Richard meditated upon the mysterious instructions which were conveyed to him in the document left behind by Armstrong, and which seemed to promise much by the solemn earnestness that characterised the directions relative to the circumstances or the time that would justify him in opening the sealed packet.

Thus, if some of our hero's thoughts were calculated to produce uneasiness, others were associated with secret hopes of successful love and dazzling visions of prosperity.

In three years and a half the appointment with his brother was to be kept. How would they meet? and would Eugene appear on the day named, and upon the hill where the two trees stood? Why had he not written in the meantime? Was he progressing so well that he wished to surprise his brother with his great prosperity? or was he so wretched that his proud heart prevented him from seeking the assistance of one of whom he had taken leave with a species of challenge to a race in the paths which lead to fortune? That Eugene was alive, Richard felt convinced, because the inscriptions on the tree—*Eugene's own tree*—and the letter to the Resurrection Man, proved this fact. The same circumstances also showed that Eugene had been several times in London (even if he did not dwell in the metropolis altogether) since he parted with Richard upon the hill.

Then Richard reflected that if he himself were eventually prosperous, his success would be owing to fair and honourable means; and he sincerely hoped that his brother might be pursuing an equally harmless career. Such an idea, however, seemed to be contradicted by the mysterious note to the Resurrection Man. But our hero remembered that bad men often enjoyed immense success; and then he thought of Mr. Greenwood—the man who had robbed him of his property, but whom, so far as he knew, he had never seen. That Greenwood was rising rapidly, Richard was well aware; the newspapers conveyed that information. So well had he played his cards, that a baronetcy, if not even a junior post in the administration, would be his the moment his party should come to power. All this Richard knew: the Tory journals were strenuous in their praise of Mr. Greenwood, and lauded to the skies his devotion to the statesmen who were aspiring to office. Then the great wealth of Mr. Greenwood had become proverbial: not a grand enterprise of the day could be started without his name. He was a director in no end of Railway Companies; a shareholder in all the principal Life Insurance Offices; a speculator in every kind of stock; chairman of several commercial associations; a ship-owner; a landowner; a subscriber to all charitable institutions which published a list of its supporters; President of a Bible Society which held periodical meetings at Exeter Hall; one of the stanchest friends to the Society for the Suppression of Vice; a great man at the parochial vestry; a patron of Sunday Schools; a part-proprietor of an influential newspaper; an advocate for the suppression of Sunday trading and Sunday travelling; a

member of half a dozen clubs; a great favourite at Tattersall's; a regular church-goer; a decided enemy to mendicity; an intimate friend of the Poor Law Commissioners; and an out-and-out foe to all Reform. All this Richard knew; for he took some interest in watching the career of a person who had risen from nothing to be so great a man as Mr. Greenwood was. Then, while he reflected upon these facts, our hero was compelled to admit that his brother Eugene might appear, upon the appointed day, the emblem of infinite prosperity, and yet a being from whom the truly honest would shrink back with dismay.

But we will not follow Richard Markham any further in his reflections during that sleepless night.

He rose at an early hour, and anxiously awaited the arrival of the morning's newspaper.

From that vehicle of information he learnt that Katherine Wilmot had been examined, on the previous day, before the magistrate at the Marylebone Police Court, and had been remanded for one week, in order that the depositions might be made out previous to her committal to Newgate to take her trial for the murder of Matilda Kenrick.

We need not now dwell upon the evidence adduced on the occasion of that preliminary investigation, inasmuch as we shall be hereafter compelled to detail it at some length.

We must, however, observe that when Richard Markham perused all the testimony adduced against the girl before the magistrate, he was staggered; for it seemed crushing, connected, and overwhelming indeed.

Nevertheless, he remembered his own unhappy case; and he determined not to desert her.

He called upon Mr. Tracy, and found that gentleman unwilling to believe that so young and seemingly innocent a girl could be capable of so enormous a crime; yet the reverend gentleman was compelled to admit not only that the evidence weighed strongly against her, but that it was difficult to conceive how the housekeeper had come by her death unless by Katherine's hands.

Richard took his leave of the rector, in whom he saw only a most compassionate man—ready to allow justice to take its course, but very unwilling to utter a word prejudicial to the accused.

From Mr. Tracy's house our hero proceeded to the New Prison, Clerkenwell, to see Katherine.

The New Prison is situate in the midst of the most densely populated part of Clerkenwell. It was originally established in the reign of James I.; but in 1816 it was considerably improved and enlarged, at the enormous cost of £40,000. It is now destined to be levelled with the ground, and a new prison is to be built upon the same site, but upon a plan adapted for the application of the atrocious *solitary system*.

The infamy of the English plan of gaol discipline is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the New Prison, Clerkenwell. Between five and six thousand prisoners pass annually through this gaol; and not the slightest attempt at classification, save in respect to sex, is made. The beds are filthy in the extreme, and often full of vermin from the last occupant: thus prisoners who arrive at the prison in a cleanly state, find themselves covered with loathsome animalculæ after one night's rest in that disgusting place. A miserable attempt at cleanliness is made by bathing the prisoners; but the generality of them dislike it, and bribe the wardsmen to allow them to escape the ordeal. And no wonder—for the gaol authorities compel every six individuals to bathe one after the other in the same water, and it frequently happens that a cleanly person is forced into a bath containing the filth and vermin washed from the person of a beggar. The reader must remember, that highly respectable persons—even gentlemen and ladies—may become prisoners in this establishment, for breaches of the peace, assaults, or menaces, until they be released by bail; and yet the gentlemen are compelled to herd with felons, beggars, and misdemeanants—and the ladies with the lowest grade of prostitutes and the filthiest vagrants!

The prisoners pilfer from each other; and the entire establishment is a scene of quarrelling, swearing, fighting, obscenity, and gambling. The male prisoners write notes of the most disgusting description, and throw them over with a coal into the female yard. Riots and disturbances are common in the sleeping wards; and ardent spirits are procured with tolerable facility.

The degradation of mingling with the obscene and filthy inmates of the female Reception Ward was, however, avoided by poor Katherine Wilmot. The Keeper took compassion upon her youth and the deep distress of mind into which she was plunged, and sent her to the Female Infirmary.

When Richard Markham called at the New Prison, he was permitted to have an interview with Katherine in the Keeper's office.

The hapless girl flew towards our hero, as if to a brother, and clasping her hands fervently together, exclaimed, "Mr. Markham, I am innocent—I am innocent!"

"So I choose to believe you—unless a jury should pronounce you to be guilty," replied Richard; "and even then," he added, in a musing tone, "it is possible—I mean that juries are not infallible."

"Oh! Mr. Markham, I am most unfortunate—and very, very unhappy!" said Katherine, the tears rolling down her cheeks. "I have never injured a human being—and yet, see where I am! see how I am treated!"

At that moment Richard recalled to mind all that the policeman had told him relative to the unpretending charity of the poor girl,—her goodness even to the very neighbours who despised her,—her amiability towards her unfortunate cousin,—the pious resignation with which she had supported the ill-treatment of her uncle,—and her constant anxiety to earn her own bread in a respectable manner.

All this Richard remembered; and he felt an invincible belief in the complete innocence of the poor creature with respect to the awful deed now laid to her charge.

"It is not death that I fear, Mr. Markham," said Katherine, after a pause; "but it is hard—very hard to be accused of a crime which I abhor! No—I do not fear death: perhaps it would be better for me to die even at my age—than dwell in a world which has no charms for me. For I have been unhappy from my birth, Mr. Markham: I was left an orphan when I was young—so very young—oh! too young to lose both parents! Since then my existence has not been blest; and at the very moment when a brighter destiny seemed opened to me, through the goodness of yourself and Mr. Tracy, I am suddenly snatched away to a prison, and overwhelmed with this terrible accusation!"

"Katherine," said Richard, deeply affected by the young girl's tone and words, "I believe you to be innocent—as God is my judge, I believe you to be innocent!"

"And may that same Almighty Power bless you for this assurance!" exclaimed Katherine, pressing our hero's hands with the most

grateful warmth.

"Although in asserting my conviction of your innocence, Katherine," continued Richard, "I leave the deed itself enveloped in the darkest mystery, still I *do* believe that you are innocent—and I will not desert you."

Richard remembered how grateful to *his* ears had once sounded those words, "I believe that you are innocent,"—when Thomas Armstrong uttered them in the prison of Newgate.

"Yes, Katherine—you *are*, you *must* be innocent," he continued; "and I will labour unceasingly to make your innocence apparent. I will provide the ablest counsel to assist in your defence; and all that human agency can effect in your behalf shall be ensured at any cost."

The poor girl could not find words to express her deep gratitude to this young man who so generously constituted himself her champion, and on whom she had not the slightest claim;—but her looks and her tears conveyed to our hero all she felt.

"Has your uncle been to see you?" he inquired.

"No, sir—nor my cousin," replied Katherine, with melancholy emphasis upon the latter words.

"Perhaps they are unaware of your situation. I will call and communicate to them the sad tidings. As your relatives, it is right that they should know the truth."

He then took leave of the young creature, who now felt less forlorn since she knew that she possessed at least one friend who would not only exert himself in her behalf, but who also believed in her innocence.

From the New Prison Richard proceeded to Saint Giles's, and knocked at the door of the Public Executioner's abode.

But his summons remained unanswered.

He repeated it again: all was silent within.

At length a neighbour,—a man who kept a coal and potato shed,—emerged from his shop, and volunteered some information concerning the hangman and his son.

"It's no use knocking and knocking there, sir," said the man: "Smithers and his lad left London early yesterday morning for some place in the north of Ireland—I don't know the name—but where there's some work in his partickler line. The postman brought Smithers a letter, asking him to start off without delay; and he did so. He took Gibbet with him to give him another chance, he said, of trying his hand. Smithers told me all this before he went away, and asked me to take in any letters that might come for him, or answer any one that called. That's how I came to know all this."

"Do you happen to be aware when he will return?" asked Richard.

"I've no more idea than that there tater," answered the man, indicating with his foot a specimen of the vegetable alluded to.

Richard thanked the man for the information which he had been enabled to give, and then pursued his way towards the chief police station in the neighbourhood.

Arrived at that establishment, he inquired for Morris Benstead.

The officer happened to be on the premises at the moment.

Markham led him to a short distance, and then addressed him as follows:—

"You have doubtless heard of the extraordinary position in which poor Katherine Wilmot is placed. I, for one, firmly believe her to be innocent."

"So do I, sir," exclaimed the officer, emphatically.

"Then you will prove the more useful to my purposes in consequence of that impression," said Richard. "When I saw you on a former occasion, you offered me your services if ever I should require them. Little did I then suppose that I should so soon need your aid. Are you willing to assist me in investigating this most mysterious affair?"

"With pleasure, sir—with the sincerest pleasure," answered Benstead. "You know the respect I entertain for Miss Kate."

"And I know your goodness of heart," said our hero. "You must then aid me in collecting proofs of her innocence. Spare no expense in your task: hesitate not to apply to me for any money that you may need. Here are ten pounds for immediate purposes. To-morrow I will let you know whom I shall decide upon employing to conduct the poor girl's defence; and you can then communicate direct with the solicitor and barrister retained. Are you willing to undertake this task?"

"Need you ask me, sir?" cried the policeman. "I would do any thing to serve Miss Kate."

"Prudence renders it necessary for me to keep myself in the back-ground in this affair," said Richard; "for fear lest scandal should attach an unworthy motive to my exertions in her behalf, and thus prejudice her cause by injuring her character. Upon you, then, I throw the weight of the investigation."

"And I accept it cheerfully," returned Benstead.

Markham then took leave of the officer, and having paid a visit to Mr. Gregory, returned home.

CHAPTER CLV.

PATRIOTISM.

It was late in the evening of the day on which Richard adopted the measures just recorded to ensure the most complete investigation into the case of Katherine Wilmot, that a foreigner called at Markham Place and requested a few moments' private conversation with our hero.

The request was immediately acceded to; and the foreigner was shown into the library.

He was a man of middle age, with a dark complexion, and was dressed with considerable taste. His air was military, and his manners were frank and open.

He addressed Richard in bad English, and tendered an apology for thus intruding upon him.

Markham, believing him, by his accent and appearance, to be an Italian, spoke to him in that language; and the foreigner immediately replied in the same tongue with a fluency which convinced our hero that he was not mistaken relative to the country to which his visitor belonged.

"The object of my visit is of a most important and solemn nature," said the Italian; "and you will excuse me if I open my business by asking you a few questions."

"This is certainly a strange mode of proceeding," observed our hero; "but you are aware that I must reserve to myself the right of replying or not to your queries, as I may think fit."

"Undoubtedly," said the Italian. "But I am a man of honour; and should our interview progress as favourably as I hope, I shall entrust you with secrets which will prove my readiness to look upon you in the same light."

"Proceed," said Richard: "you speak fairly."

"In the first place, am I right in believing that you were once most intimate with a certain Count Alteroni who resides near Richmond?"

"Quite right," answered Richard.

"Do you, or do you not, entertain good feelings towards that nobleman?"

"The best feelings—the most sincere friendship—the most devoted attachment," exclaimed our hero.

"Are you aware of any particulars in his political history?"

"He is a refugee from his native land."

"Does he now bear his true name?"

"If you wish me to place confidence in you," said Richard, "you will yourself answer me one question, before I reply to any farther interrogatory on your part."

"Speak," returned the Italian stranger.

"Do you wish to propose to me any thing whereby I can manifest my attachment to Count Alteroni, without injury to my own character or honour?" demanded Richard.

"I do," said the stranger solemnly. "You can render Count Alteroni great and signal services."

"I will then as frankly admit to you that I am acquainted with *all* which relates to *Count Alteroni*," said Richard, dwelling upon the words marked in italics.

"With *all* which relates to *Prince Alberto of Castelcicala*?" added the stranger, in a significant whisper. "Do we understand each other?"

"So far that we are equally well acquainted with the affairs of his Highness the Prince," answered Richard.

"Right. You have heard of General Grachia?" said the foreigner.

"He is also an exile from Castelcicala," returned Markham.

"He is in England," continued the foreigner. "I had the honour to be his chief aide-de-camp, when he filled the post of Minister of War; and I am Colonel Morosino."

Richard bowed an acknowledgment of this proof of confidence.

"General Grachia," proceeded Morosino, "reached England two days ago. His amiable family is at Geneva. The general visited Prince Alberto yesterday, and had a long conversation with his Highness upon the situation of affairs in Castelcicala. The Grand Duke is endeavouring to establish a complete despotism, and to enslave the country. One province has already been placed under martial law; and several executions have taken place in Montoni itself. The only crime of the victims was a demand for a Constitution. General Grachia represented to his Highness Prince Alberto the necessity of taking up arms in defence of the liberties of the Castelcicalans against the encroachments of despotism. The reply of the Prince was disheartening to his friends and partizans. '*Under no pretence*,' said he, '*would I kindle civil war in my native country.*'"

"He possesses a truly generous soul," said Richard.

"He is so afraid of being deemed selfish," observed the Colonel; "and no one can do otherwise than admire that delicacy and

forbearance which shrink from the idea of even appearing to act in accordance with his own personal interests. The Prince has every thing to gain from a successful civil war: hence he will not countenance that extremity."

"And what does General Grachia now propose?" asked Markham.

"You are aware that when Prince Alberto was exiled from Castelcicala for having openly proclaimed his opinions in favour of a Constitution and of the extension of the popular liberties, numbers of his supporters in those views were banished with him. *We know* that there cannot be less than two thousand Castelcicalan refugees in Paris and London. Do you begin to comprehend me?"

"I fear that you meditate proceedings which are opposed to the wishes of his Highness Prince Alberto," said Markham.

"The friends of Castelcicalan freedom can undertake what in them would be recognised as *pure patriotism*, but which in Prince Alberto would be deemed the result of his own *personal interests* or *ambition*."

"True," said Richard: "the distinction is striking."

"The Prince, moreover, in the audience which he accorded to General Grachia yesterday evening, used these memorable words:—'*Were I less than I am, I would consent to take up arms in defence of the liberties of Castelcicala; but, being as I am, I never will take a step which the world would unanimously attribute to selfishness.*'"

"Those were noble sentiments!" ejaculated Markham: "well worthy of him who uttered them."

"And worthy of serving as rules and suggestions for the patriots of Castelcicala!" cried Colonel Morosino. "There are certain times, Mr. Markham," he continued, "when it becomes a duty to take up arms against a sovereign who forgets *his duty* towards his subjects. Men are not born to be slaves; and they are bound to resist those who attempt to enslave them."

"Those words have often been uttered by a deceased friend of mine—Thomas Armstrong," observed Richard.

"Thomas Armstrong was a true philanthropist," said the Colonel; "and were he alive now, he would tell you that subjects who take up arms against a bad prince are as justified in so doing as the prince himself could be in punishing those who violate the laws."

"In plain terms," said Richard, "General Grachia intends to espouse the popular cause against the tyranny of the Grand Duke?"

"Such is his resolution," answered Colonel Morosino. "And now that you have heard all these particulars, you will probably listen with attention to the objects of my present visit."

"Proceed, Colonel Morosino," said Richard. "You must be well aware that, as one well attached to his Highness Prince Alberto, I cannot be otherwise than interested in these communications."

"I shall condense my remarks as much as possible," continued the officer. "General Grachia purports to enter into immediate relations with the Castelcicalans now in London and Paris. Of course the strictest secresy is required. The eventual object will be to purchase two or three small ships which may take on board, at different points, those who choose to embark in the enterprise; and these ships will have a common rendezvous. When united, they will sail for Castelcicala. A descent upon that territory would be welcomed with enthusiasm by nine-tenths of the population; and the result," added Morosino, in a whisper,—"the inevitable result must be the dethronement of the Grand Duke and the elevation of Alberto to the sovereign seat."

"That the project is practicable, I can believe," said Markham; "that it is just, I am also disposed to admit. But do you not think that a bloodless revolution might be effected?"

"We hope that we shall be enabled successfully to assert the popular cause without the loss of life," returned Morosino. "But this can only be done by means of an imposing force, and not by mere negotiation."

"You consider the Grand Duke to be so wedded to his despotic system?" said Markham interrogatively.

"What hope can we experience from so obstinate a sovereign, and so servile an administration as that of which Signor Pisani is the chief?" demanded the Colonel. "And surely you must allow that patriotism must not have too much patience. By allowing despots to run their race too long, they grow hardened and will then resist to the last, at the sacrifice of thousands of lives and millions of treasure."

"Such is, alas! the sad truth," said Richard. "At the same time a fearful responsibility attaches itself to those who kindle a civil war."

"Civil wars are excited by two distinct motives," returned the Colonel. "In one instance they are produced by the ambition of aspirants to power: in the other, they take their origin in the just wrath of a people driven to desperation by odious tyranny and wrong. The latter is a sacred cause."

"Yes—and a most just one," exclaimed Markham. "If then, I admit that your projects ought to be carried forward, in what way can my humble services be rendered available?"

"I will explain this point to you," answered Colonel Morosino. "General Grachia, myself, and several stanch advocates of constitutional freedom, met to deliberate last evening upon the course to be pursued, after the General had returned from his interview with the Prince at Richmond. We sat in deliberation until a very late hour; and we adopted the outline of the plans already explained to you. We then recognised the necessity of having the co-operation of some intelligent, honourable, and enlightened Englishman to aid us in certain departments of our preliminary arrangements. We must raise considerable sums of money upon certain securities which we possess; we must ascertain to what extent the laws of this country will permit our meetings, or be calculated to interfere with the progress of our measures; we must purchase ships ostensibly for commercial purposes; and we must adopt great precautions in procuring from outfitters the arms, clothing, and stores which we shall require. In all these proceedings we require the counsel and aid of an Englishman of honour and integrity."

"Proceed, Colonel Morosino," said Richard, seeing that the Italian officer paused.

"We then found ourselves at a loss where to look for such a confidential auxiliary and adviser; when one of our assembly spoke in this manner:—'I came to this country, as you well know, at the same time as his Highness the Prince. From that period until the present day I have frequently seen his Highness; and I became aware of the acquaintance which subsisted between his Highness and an English gentleman of the name of Richard Markham, who was introduced to his Highness by the late Thomas Armstrong. I am also aware that a misunderstanding arose between the Prince and Mr. Markham: the nature of that misunderstanding I never learnt; but I am aware that, even while it existed, Richard Markham behaved in the most noble manner in a temporary difficulty in which his Highness was involved. I also know that the motives which led to that misunderstanding have been completely cleared away, and that the Prince now speaks in the highest terms of Mr. Richard Markham. Address yourselves, then, to Mr. Markham: he is a man of honour; and with him

your secret is safe, even if he should decline to meet your views.'—Thus spoke our friend last night; and now the cause and object of my visit are explained to you."

"You have spoken with a candour and frankness which go far to conquer any scruples that I might entertain in assisting you," said Richard. "At the same time, so important a matter demands mature consideration. Should I consent to accept the office with which you seek to honour me, I should not be a mere lukewarm agent: I should enter heart and soul into your undertaking; nor should I content myself with simply succouring you in an administrative capacity. Oh! no," added Richard, enthusiastically, as he thought of Isabella, "I would accompany you on your expedition when the time came, and I would bear arms in your most righteous cause."

"Generous young man!" cried the Colonel, grasping our hero's hand with true military frankness: "God grant that your answer may be favourable to us. But pray delay not in announcing your decision."

"This time to-morrow evening I will be prepared to give you an answer," returned Markham.

The Colonel then took his leave, saying, "To-morrow evening I will call again."

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE DECISION.

Richard Markham retired to rest, but not to immediate slumber.

The proposal of Colonel Morosino was of a most perplexing nature.

Our hero longed to be enabled to show his devotion to Isabella by exerting himself in what must eventually prove her father's cause; but he was afraid of acting in a manner which might displease the Prince.

Then he reflected that the Prince had uttered those expressive words, "*Were I less than I am, I would consent to take up arms in defence of the liberties of Castelcicala*."

The more Richard pondered upon these words, the more was he inclined towards the service proposed to him; and when he remembered that he should be associated with some of the most gallant and disinterested of Italian patriots, he felt a generous ardour animate his bosom.

"Oh! if I could but achieve some deed that would render me worthy of Isabella," he thought, "how should I bless the day when I adopted the cause of those brave exiles who now seek my aid! Yes—I will join them, heart and soul; and in me they shall have no lukewarm supporter! The die is cast;—and this resolution must either make or mar me for ever!"

Richard then gradually fell into a profound slumber: but the subjects of his latest thoughts became the materials of which his dreams were woven.

Imagination carried him away from his native land, and whirled him on board a vessel which was within sight of the Castelcicalan coasts. Presently a descent upon the land was effected; and then Richard fancied himself to be involved in the thickest of a deadly fight. Next he saw himself entering Montoni at the head of a victorious army; and it seemed to him as if he were the object of attraction—as if the salutations of countless multitudes were addressed to him—and as if he returned them! Then the scene changed, by one of those rapid transitions so peculiar to dreams; and he found himself standing at the altar, the lovely Isabella by his side. A tiara of diamonds adorned her brow and on his own was a princely coronet. Then the ceremony was completed; and friends with smiling countenances gathered around to congratulate him and his lovely bride; and the swelling words "Your Highness" and "My Lord" echoed upon his ears. He turned to address his thanks to those who thus felicitated him—and awoke!

"A dream—a dream!" he exclaimed, as the gay pageantry of the vision yet dwelt vividly in his mind: "but will the most happy episode therein ever be fulfilled?"

Richard rose with depressed spirits; for a dream of that nature—by raising us to the highest eminence to which our aspirations ever soared, and then dashing us back again to the cold realities of earth—invariably leads to a powerful reaction.

The day passed without any incident of importance; and by the time the evening arrived, Richard had recovered his mental serenity.

Punctual to his appointment, Colonel Morosino made his appearance.

He came in a chaise, accompanied by another individual; but the latter did not alight from the vehicle.

"Mr. Markham," said the Colonel, when he was alone with our hero, in the library, "have you made up your mind?"

"I have," answered Richard, in a decided tone.

"And your decision——"

"Is to join you, heart and soul—to throw myself with enthusiasm into your cause—to co-operate with you as if I were a Castelcicalan subject," said Richard, his handsome countenance glowing with animation, his fine dark eyes flashing fire, and his nostrils dilating with the ardour which filled his soul.

"I am no prophet, if you ever repent this decision," said Colonel Morosino, pressing Richard's hands warmly. "Will you now permit me to introduce a gentleman who has accompanied me?"

"With much pleasure," answered Markham.

The Colonel stepped out, and at the expiration of a few moments returned, accompanied by a tall, thin, military-looking man, whose lofty bearing and eagle eye bespoke him as one who had been accustomed to command.

"Mr. Markham," said the Colonel, "may you soon become better acquainted with General Grachia."

The veteran proffered Richard his hand with true military frankness, and observed, "I rejoice to find that your decision is favourable to our views."

"You will also find that I shall be zealous and unwearied in your service," rejoined Markham.

"Our proceedings," continued General Grachia, "must be conducted with caution, so that no rumour prejudicial to our measures may reach Castelcicala."

"I believe it to be understood," said Markham, "that should the Grand Duke change his policy to such an extent that the Castelcicalans may obtain their just rights and privileges by means of his concessions, before our own projects shall be ripe for execution,—that, in this case, we at once abandon them."

"Assuredly," replied General Grachia. "God knows the purity of my motives, and that I would not plunge my country into civil war

without the pressure of a dire necessity. Neither am I adopting extreme measures from vindictive motives because the Grand Duke has banished me not only from office but also from the territory. Had I assented to his despotic decrees I might have retained my high position in the cabinet, and aggrandized my own fortunes at the same time. As a proof of my integrity, Mr. Markham, read this document."

The General produced from his pocket-book a letter which had been sealed with the ducal signet, and was addressed "*To His Excellency General Grachia, Minister Secretary of State for the Department of War*."

This document he handed to Richard, who found that it was an autograph letter from the Grand Duke to the General, written at the time when the military disturbances occurred at Montoni. It remonstrated with General Grachia for refusing to countersign the ordinance decreeing the disbandment of the three regiments, and promising him the rank of Marquis and the Premiership if he would but consent to aid his Serene Highness in carrying out the proposed rigorous measures.

"To this letter I replied by sending in my resignation," said General Grachia; "and thus I wrecked my own fortunes, and made my wife and children exiles."

"You acted nobly—like a true patriot," cried Markham, contemplating the veteran with admiration. "If for one instant I entertained a scruple in embracing your cause, it is now annihilated; for you have honoured me with the most convincing proofs of your patriotism."

"I served the Grand Duke faithfully," said the General; "and I cannot reproach myself for any measure which I ever recommended to his Serene Highness. Although deeply attached to Prince Alberto, I did not oppose the marriage of the Grand Duke; because I believed that, upon principle, sovereigns are entitled to as much freedom in affairs so nearly touching their domestic happiness, as any of their subjects. I saw in the present Grand Duchess an amiable lady; and I knew that she was a virtuous one from the strong recommendations which she received from his Highness Prince Alberto and the Earl of Warrington to myself and my family. I supported, then, that marriage upon principle—upon a conviction which I entertain. I believe that sovereigns have a right to consult their own happiness in marriage; but I never will admit that they have a right to enslave their subjects. I will maintain the privileges of princes, when I consider them encroached upon by the people: with equal readiness will I protect the people against the tyranny of princes."

Richard listened with admiration to these noble sentiments; and he could not help exclaiming, "How blind sovereigns often seem to the merits and honesty of those who would counsel them wisely!"

"Such is too frequently the case," observed Colonel Morosino.

"The plan upon which I propose to act is simply this," resumed General Grachia:—"one of the most humble, but not the least sincere, of those refugees who support us, will take a house in London in his own name; and there shall our head-quarters be fixed. There shall we hold our meetings; and thence will our correspondence be expedited to those whom we can trust, and on whose support we can rely. In order to avoid all cause of suspicion, I shall take a house for myself and suite at the West End, where I shall, however, lead a comparatively secluded life. Fortunately, the greater portion of my property consisted in money in the public funds of Castelcicala; and for that I obtained securities which may be easily realised in London. My friend Morosino stands in the same position. Between us we can muster some twenty thousand pounds; and other exiles, who are favourable to our views, can throw ten thousand more into the common stock."

"To which I shall also be permitted to contribute my *quota*," interrupted Richard.

"Not if we can manage without it," answered General Grachia; "and I have no doubt that pecuniary resources will not be wanting in this good cause."

The General then proceeded to a more detailed development of his plans; but as we shall have to deal with them fully hereafter, we will take leave of the subject for the present.

Before we conclude this chapter we must record two or three little incidents that maintain the continuous thread of our narrative.

A week after the demise of Miss Gregory, the funeral took place at a suburban cemetery. The bereaved father and afflicted brothers were the chief mourners; but Richard also followed the remains of the departed girl to the tomb. An elegant but chaste and unassuming monument marks the spot where she reposes in her narrow bed.

At the expiration of the seven days during which she had been remanded, Katherine was examined a second time before the magistrate, and was fully committed for trial.

A Coroner's Inquest had in the meantime recorded a verdict of *Wilful Murder* against her.

She was accordingly conveyed to Newgate.

But Richard Markham did not neglect her interests; and Morris Benstead was busy in adopting every possible measure to fathom the deep mystery in which the awful deed was still shrouded.

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE TRIAL OF KATHERINE WILMOT.

The March sessions of the Central Criminal Court commenced upon a Monday morning, as usual.

On the Wednesday Katherine Wilmot was placed in the dock, to take her trial for the murder of Matilda Kenrick.

The particulars of the case had produced a great sensation; and the door-keepers of the gallery of the court reaped a rich harvest by the fees for admission.

Katherine was deadly pale; but she had made up her mind to conduct herself with fortitude; and her demeanour was resigned and tranquil.

Richard Markham was in the gallery of the court; but his manner was uneasy and anxious:—he had heard nothing of Benstead, the policeman, for the preceding forty-eight hours; and not a fact had that individual communicated to the counsel for the prisoner which might tend to prove her innocence or even throw a doubt upon her guilt!

When called upon to answer to the indictment, Katherine pleaded, in a firm tone, "*Not Guilty*."

The counsel for the prosecution then stated the case, which was supported by the following testimony:—

Henry Massey deposed: "I am a surgeon, and reside in Great Coram Street. One evening, early in February, a young female came to my shop and purchased two ounces of laudanum. She brought no phial with her. I gave it to her in a phial of my own, which I labelled *Poison*. On the following evening I was summoned to the house of the Rev. Mr. Tracy. I was introduced into the kitchen, where I found the deceased lying back in her chair quite dead. A young female was there; and I recognised her to be the one who had purchased the poison at my shop. She is the prisoner at the bar. From this circumstance and others which transpired, I suspected her to have poisoned the deceased; and I had her given into custody. The Rev. Mr. Tracy was in the kitchen when I arrived. He was doing all he could to recover the deceased. He was deeply affected. On the following day I examined the deceased, and found that she had died by poison. That poison was laudanum. I discovered so large a quantity in her, by the usual tests, that she must have experienced a deep lethargy almost immediately after taking the poison, and could not have lived many minutes. I cannot say that she did not take it voluntarily, and with the object of committing suicide. There was nothing upon the table near her—no cup, glass, nor any drinking vessel. The phial produced is the one in which I sold the poison."

Thomas Parker deposed: "I am footman to the Rev. Mr. Tracy. On the morning of the day when the housekeeper was poisoned, I overheard a conversation between her and Katherine Wilmot. The deceased informed Katherine that she must leave the house, but would not assign any reason. The deceased, however, said that she would provide for Katherine at a sister's in the country. Katherine objected to leave London, because her relations live here. I thought Mrs. Kenrick was jealous of Katherine, and wished to get rid of her. I mean that deceased thought that Katherine would perhaps be entrusted to fulfil some of her duties as housekeeper. I came out of the pantry, where I was cleaning the plate, and observed that I supposed Mrs. Kenrick was jealous of Katherine. The housekeeper cut the matter short by saying that Katherine should leave. Katherine was very miserable all day afterwards. In the evening my master sent me with a letter to a gentleman at Holloway. When I came back, I found the housekeeper dead. The first witness was there, in the kitchen. So were my master, Katherine, and the groom. I alluded to the conversation which had taken place between the deceased and the prisoner in the morning. The surgeon mentioned about Katherine having bought the laudanum at his house. Katherine seemed very much confused. She was then given into custody."

James Martin deposed: "I am groom and coachman to the Rev. Mr. Tracy. On the evening in question I heard screams in the yard. I was in the stable adjoining. There is a communication between the yard of the house and the stable yard. I hastened to the yard of the house where the screams came from. I saw Katherine wringing her hands and crying. I asked her what was the matter? She said, '*Mrs. Kenrick is dead*.' I hurried into the kitchen. Almost immediately afterwards Mr. Tracy came in. He had been alarmed by the screams too, he said. I found the housekeeper lying forward on the table, with her face resting on her arms, as if she had fallen asleep. I raised her, and laid her back in her chair. She seemed quite dead. Mr. Tracy was greatly affected. Katherine did not offer to help, but withdrew to the farther end of the kitchen. She cried very much. Mr. Tracy sent me for a surgeon. When I came back with the first witness, we found Mr. Tracy bathing deceased's head with vinegar, and doing all he could to recover her. Katherine was not assisting him." This witness then confirmed the previous statement relative to the immediate circumstances which led to Katherine's arrest. He concluded his testimony thus: "When I first went into the kitchen, there were no cups, nor glasses, nor any drinking vessels on the table. All the tea-things had been washed and put into their proper place."

The Rev. Reginald Tracy deposed: "I received the prisoner into my service through charity. I had no character with her. I had known her before, because she had attended the St. David's Sunday Schools. I considered her to be a most exemplary young person. I was not aware that Mrs. Kenrick intended to send her away. Mrs. Kenrick had the power, if she chose to do so, as she managed my household for me. I cannot say that Katherine had done any thing to offend Mrs. Kenrick. She had done nothing to offend me. In the evening I was alarmed by screams. I went down into the kitchen, and found the housekeeper in the position described by the last witness. I sent him for a surgeon, and adopted all the remedies within my reach to recover the housekeeper. I think I had observed that something had

been preying upon the mind of the deceased. She had lately been melancholy and abstracted."

Cross-examined: "I am not aware that Katherine went out on the evening in question. I do not know that she visited her uncle on that evening. I cannot say that she did not. She would not have asked me for permission to do so. She would have applied to Mrs. Kenrick. I was unwell all day, and did not leave my room until I heard the screams. I was very loath to believe that Katherine could have perpetrated such a deed. I told the surgeon so."

A policeman deposed: "I was summoned to Mr. Tracy's house on the evening in question. I took the prisoner into custody. When I had conveyed her to the station-house, I returned to Mr. Tracy's house. I searched the kitchen. I found the phial, produced in court, upon a shelf. It was empty."

This testimony closed the case for the prosecution.

The general impression which prevailed amongst the auditory was unfavourable to the prisoner.

Richard Markham trembled for her: still his confidence in her innocence was unshaken.

But time wore on: the case was drawing to a close;—and not a sign of Morris Benstead!

Markham knew not what to think.

The manner in which Reginald Tracy gave his evidence was the subject of much comment in the gallery.

"What an amiable man he appears to be!" said one.

"How he endeavoured to create an impression in favour of the prisoner," observed another.

"He said that he was loath to believe her guilty," remarked a third, "and considered her to be an exemplary young person."

"Hush! hush!" said the first speaker: "the case is about to be resumed."

This was the fact. The Judges, having retired for a few minutes, had now returned to the bench.

The counsel for the defence rose.

He began by calling upon the jury to dismiss from their minds any prejudice which the statements in the newspapers in connexion with the case might have created. He then dissected the evidence for the prosecution. He insisted much upon the importance of the fact that the poison had been purchased the evening before the conversation took place between the deceased and the prisoner, relative to the removal of the latter from the house. His instructions were that the prisoner had purchased that poison by order of the deceased, and, as the prisoner understood at the time, for the use of her master who had returned home unwell. There was no proof that Katherine had done any thing wrong, and that she might have anticipated receiving warning from the housekeeper, and thus have actually contemplated murder when she procured the laudanum. It was stated that there was no cup nor glass upon the table—no drinking vessel in which poison could be traced. The inference thence drawn by the counsel for the prosecution was that the prisoner must have administered the poison—most probably in deceased's tea, and had then washed the cup. But might not the deceased have taken the poison with the intention of committing suicide, by drinking it from the phial which was found upon the shelf? Would not the prisoner have concealed or destroyed the phial, had she really administered the poison? The prisoner's account of the case was this. Mrs. Kenrick of her own accord had given her permission to visit her friends for an hour on the fatal evening. The prisoner availed herself of this kindness, and proceeded to her uncle's residence in St. Giles's. He (the counsel) hoped to have been able to prove the important fact of this visit, because it would show that the housekeeper had purposely sent Katherine Wilmot out of the way: but, unfortunately, the prisoner's uncle had not yet returned to town; and although a letter had been sent to the place whither it was supposed that he had proceeded——

At this moment a great bustle was observed in the body of the court; and a man, elbowing his way through the crowd, advanced towards the learned counsel for the defence.

Richard's heart leapt within him: at the first glance he recognised, in that man, his agent, Morris Benstead, dressed in plain clothes.

Benstead whispered to the barrister for some minutes, and then handed him a letter which the learned gentleman perused rapidly.

The most breathless suspense prevailed throughout the court.

"My lords," at length exclaimed the barrister, retaining the letter in his hand, and addressing the Judges, "this case is likely to take a most unexpected turn."

"Heaven be thanked!" murmured Richard to himself: "the poor creature's innocence will be made apparent—I feel that it will!"

Meantime Morris Benstead again forced his way through the crowd, and took his stand close by Reginald Tracy.

Poor Katherine knew not what all this meant; but her heart beat violently with mingled emotions of hope, uncertainty, and apprehension.

"My lords," continued the barrister, "I need not continue my speech in defence of the prisoner. I shall at once proceed to call my witnesses."

The anxiety of the audience grew more and more intense.

"Jacob Smithers!" cried the barrister.

The Public Executioner instantly ascended into the witness-box.

He deposed as follows: "The prisoner is my niece. She called at my house on the evening alluded to. She remained with me at least half an hour. She did not complain of Mrs. Kenrick; nor did she say that she was to leave the Rev. Mr. Tracy's house. I remember that I was very low-spirited myself that evening; and so I suppose she did not choose to annoy me by saying that she was to leave. Or else, perhaps, she thought that I should wish her to return home to me if I knew that she was to leave Mr. Tracy's service. I have been to Belfast where I was detained some days: then I accepted an engagement to go to the Isle of Man. I never received any letter informing me of what had occurred to my niece. The fact is, I do not go by my right name when I travel in that way, because I have to stop at inns, and do not like to be known. That is probably the reason why a letter addressed to me by the name of Smithers did not reach me. I did not see the account of this business in the newspapers until a few days since, when I was in the Isle of Man; and I returned home as quick as possible. I only reached London an hour ago."

"You may stand down," said the barrister: then, after a pause, he exclaimed, "Rachel Bennet!"

An elderly woman, decently attired in mourning, but evidently in a very sickly state of health, slowly ascended into the witness-box.

She deposed: "I am the sister of the deceased, and reside about three miles from Hounslow. I received a letter from my sister early in

February. The letter now shown me is the one." (This was the same letter which Benstead had given to the barrister.) "On the following day I received a letter from Mr. Tracy informing me of my sister's death, and stating that it was supposed she had been poisoned by a young person then in custody. I was bed-ridden with illness at the time, and was supposed to be dying. I could not therefore come to London, or take any steps in the matter. Some one came to me yesterday, and induced me to come to town."

The counsel for the defence then passed the letter, which had been placed in his hands by Benstead, to the clerk of the court, by whom it was read.

Its contents were as follow:—

"MY DEAR RACHEL,

"I hope this will find you much improved in health: at the same time I am somewhat anxious at not having heard from you. My present object in writing to you is to request you to receive at your house a young person in whom I am interested, and who is at present in Mr. Tracy's service. Katherine Wilmot is a pretty and interesting girl; and it would be unsafe for her to remain *here*. You know, dear Rachel, that you and I have never had any secrets between us; and I am not now going to break through that rule of mutual confidence which has been the basis of our sincere attachment. The truth is, Mr. Tracy is not what he was. He has fallen from the pinnacle of virtue which he once so proudly occupied; and it was only this morning that I had the most convincing proof of his weakness and folly! O Rachel—I met him and his mistress face to face upon the stairs! But I will not dwell upon this: I sincerely pray to heaven that he may repent, and become the good man he once was. I know that this secret will be sacred with you. But I am determined to remove from him all temptations, as far as lies in my humble power; and you may now comprehend my motives for sending Katherine Wilmot away from this house. In a word, I shall despatch her to you by to-morrow's coach; and will write at greater length by her.

"Your affectionate Sister,

"MATILDA KENRICK."

This letter produced a most extraordinary sensation in the court.

The Judges, the barrister, the prisoner, and the audience were astounded at this revelation of the weakness of that man whom the world almost worshipped as a saint.

"Ellen was right!" murmured Richard Markham to himself: "he is a hypocrite! But I never could have thought it!"

And what of Reginald himself?

The moment the clerk reached that paragraph which proclaimed the astounding fact of his unworthiness, a cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead; and he turned to leave the court.

But Morris Benstead caught him by the arm, and pointing to a seat, said, "You must remain here, if you please, sir: I am an officer."

The rector cast a look of unutterable dismay upon the policeman, and fell upon the bench in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

Meantime the case proceeded.

The counsel for the prosecution said that he should like to ask Rachel Bennet a few questions.

That witness accordingly returned to the box.

"Why did you not empower some one to produce that letter when the prisoner was examined before the magistrate?" inquired the prosecuting counsel.

"Because, sir, I did not conceive that it could be of any use. I never for a moment suspected that any other person besides the one accused could have taken away my poor sister's life. My husband proposed to send the letter to the magistrate; but as my sister had written to me in strict confidence, I would not consent to that step. And now, since you have asked me, sir, I will tell you what I really *did* think; and God forgive me if I have been unjust."

"We do not want to hear what you thought," exclaimed the prosecuting counsel. "You may stand down."

"No," cried the barrister for the defence: "as we are upon the subject, we *will* have the witness's impressions."

"I really thought, sir," continued the woman, "that the Katherine Wilmot alluded to was perhaps no better than she should be, and had become more intimate with Mr. Tracy than my poor sister suspected. That, I thought, was the reason why she had poisoned my sister in order to get her out of the way, and for herself to remain at Mr. Tracy's house. But I did not think that Mr. Tracy himself had any hand in the murder; and so I did not see the good of producing a letter which would only expose Mr. Tracy."

"Now you may stand down," said the counsel for the prisoner: then, in a loud tone, he called, "John Smithers!"

And Gibbet entered the witness-box.

His first glance was towards the dock; and that look, rapid, and imperceptible to others, conveyed a world of hope to the bosom of poor Katherine.

Richard Markham was at a loss to conceive what testimony the hump-back could bring forward in the prisoner's favour.

Every one present felt the deepest interest in the turn given to the proceedings.

The hump-back stood upon a stool that there was in the witness-box; and even then his head was alone visible. His hideous countenance, pale and ghastly through his intense feelings for Katherine's situation, was nevertheless animated with confidence and hope.

Amidst a dead silence of awe-inspiring solemnity, he deposed as follows:—

"I am the prisoner's cousin. She has ever been most kind to me; and I was always happy in her society. When she went to live at Mr. Tracy's house, I thought that I should be able to see her every evening; but on one occasion Mr. Tracy met me, and said that I might only visit her on Sundays. I had, however, discovered an obscure corner in his yard, where I could hide myself and see all that passed in the kitchen of his house. I went to that corner regularly every evening, Sunday excepted; and remained there an hour—sometimes more. I did not want to pry into what was going on in Mr. Tracy's house: all I cared about was to see Katherine."

A murmur, expressive of deep feeling—mingled surprise, sympathy, and admiration—on the part of the audience, followed this ingenuous announcement. Many an eye was moistened with a tear; and even the Judges did not look angrily when that murmur met their ears.

Gibbet continued:—

"One evening when I was concealed in the corner, I saw Mrs. Kenrick address something to Katherine, which I could not hear; but immediately afterwards Katherine put on her bonnet and went out. As I had sometimes seen her do so before, and return very shortly afterwards, I thought she had merely gone to execute some little commission; and I remained where I was. Although Katherine used to

pass through the yard, and close by me, when she went out in that manner, I never spoke to her, for fear she should reprove me for what she might think was watching her actions. Immediately after she was gone, Mrs. Kenrick laid the tea things; and in a few minutes Mr. Tracy entered the kitchen. He and the housekeeper sate down to tea. Mrs. Kenrick was pouring out the tea, when Mr. Tracy said something which made her pause. She then put down the tea-pot, fetched a coffee-biggin, and made some coffee. She filled two cups, and then turned towards the shelves to fetch a small jug, which I thought contained milk. But while her back was turned, I saw Mr. Tracy hastily put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, and then as rapidly advance his hand to Mrs. Kenrick's cup. All that was the work of only one moment; and I could not distinctly see why he did so. In fact I did not think much of it, until afterwards. Mrs. Kenrick resumed her seat; and she and Mr. Tracy drank their coffee. I observed that Mrs. Kenrick took no milk, and drank hers very quickly. In a short time I saw her head begin to nod as if she was sleepy: she got up, and walked about. Then she sate down again, and placed her arms on the table as if to support herself. In a short time her head fell forward on her arms. I felt a little alarmed; but still scarcely knew why. Mr. Tracy watched her for some minutes after she had fallen forward in that manner, and then bent down his head to look at her face. In another moment he rose, and to my surprise washed up all the things on the table and placed them upon the shelves. Then I began to fear that something was wrong; and I stole away. When I got home I found my father rather cross with me for staying out; and I was afraid to tell him what I had seen. Early the next morning we left for Ireland; and I never had courage to speak to my father upon this subject until we read the account of the murder and of Katherine's arrest. That was in the Isle of Man."

The reader may imagine the profound sensation which this narrative created.

Richard Markham was literally astounded.

Katherine Wilmot wept abundantly.

Reginald Tracy was crushed, as it were, to the very dust, by this overwhelming exposure of his guilt.

The jury whispered together for a few moments; and the foreman rose and said, "My lords, it is rather as a matter of form than as the result of any deliberation, that we pronounce a verdict of *Not Guilty*."

"The prisoner is discharged," said the senior judge. "It will be the duty of the police to take charge of Reginald Tracy."

"I have him in custody, my lord," exclaimed Morris Benstead in a loud tone.

CHAPTER CLVIII.

A HAPPY PARTY.

In a private room up stairs, at a tavern nearly opposite the Court-house of the Old Bailey, a happy party was assembled.

And yet the group was somewhat motley.

It consisted of Richard Markham, Katherine Wilmot, the Public Executioner, Gibbet, Rachel Bennet, and Morris Benstead.

The best luncheon which the house afforded was spread upon the table.

"And so you really thought I was lost, sir?" said Benstead. "I am not the man to neglect the business that is entrusted to me; neither do I excite hopes unless I know that they'll be realised."

"But you have not yet told me how you came to bring all your witnesses into court at one and the same moment," said Richard Markham.

"Well, sir, I'll soon satisfy your curiosity on that head," returned the policeman. "I made every exertion to sift the entire matter to the bottom; but the farther I went into it, the more mysterious it seemed. At last I was pretty nearly inclined to give it up in despair. One of the principal measures that I adopted was to endeavour to trace, step by step, all that either Mrs. Kenrick or Katherine did on the day when the murder took place. I have seen, in my time, so much important evidence come out of the most trivial—really the most ridiculous things, that I resolved to glean every minute particular I could relative to the motions of both the deceased and the accused on that day. My firm idea was that the housekeeper had committed suicide—saving your presence, ma'am," added Benstead, turning towards Mrs. Bennet. "Well, I found out the principal shops where Mr. Tracy dealt; and I visited them all to ascertain if Mrs. Kenrick had been there on that day; and if so, whether her words or manner had betrayed any thing strange. But I could learn nothing material. Various other schemes I thought of, and put into execution; but as they all failed, there's no use in mentioning them. At length, yesterday evening I happened to call at the post-office near Mr. Tracy's house. I got into conversation with the post-mistress, who seemed to be well acquainted with the late Mrs. Kenrick. In the course of comment and observation upon the mysterious event, the post-mistress said, 'I do really think there's some ground for supposing that the poor dear woman committed suicide; for she came here to pay a letter to her sister only a few hours before she was found dead; and then I saw that she wasn't as she usually was. Something appeared to hang upon her mind.'"

"That was no doubt the sorrow she experienced at having discovered the hypocrisy of her master," observed Richard.

"Most likely, sir," said Benstead. "Well, the moment I heard that Mrs. Kenrick had written to her sister only a few hours before her death, I felt more convinced than ever that it was a case of suicide. It was then nine o'clock; but I was determined to start off at once to investigate the business. The post-mistress knew that Mrs. Bennet lived at Hounslow; and this was fortunate. I thanked her for this information, and hurried away. I was obliged to go to St. Giles's, before I started for the country, to ask my Inspector's leave. As I passed by Mr. Smithers' house, I knocked to see if he had come home. But the green-grocer next door answered me, as on several former occasions when I had called. He told me that Mr. Smithers had not come back. I knew it was important for Miss Kate to prove that she had visited her uncle on the night of the supposed murder; and so I scribbled a note to Mr. Smithers, desiring him, in case he should return home in time to-day, to lose not a minute in coming to this very tavern and sending over into the Old Court to fetch me. This note I left with the green-grocer; and I then hastened to the station. I obtained permission to absent myself, and lost no time in hiring a post-chaise. But it was midnight before I reached Hounslow; and then I learnt that Mrs. Bennet lived three miles away from that town. So I was obliged to wait till the first thing this morning before I could see her. Then a great deal of time was wasted, because Mrs. Bennet and her husband could not rightly understand why I came, or on whose side I was engaged. I do not blame them for their caution:—I only mention the fact to account for our being so late in court. At length I succeeded in persuading Mrs. Bennet to show me her sister's letter to her; and when I read it, the whole affair wore another appearance in my mind. I saw through it in a moment. Then I resolved upon bringing Mrs. Bennet up to London with me; and to her credit, she did not hesitate an instant to accompany me, when I had communicated to her the suspicions which that letter had awakened in my mind, and impressed upon her the necessity of hastening to save an innocent person from the weight of an unjust accusation. To conclude this long and rambling story, we came up in the post-chaise; and, as luck would have it, just as we drove up to this tavern, Mr. Smithers and his son were stepping out of a cab at the door."

"Ah! Mr. Markham," said Katherine, "how can I ever sufficiently express my gratitude towards you; for it was by means of your generosity that Mr. Benstead was enabled to make those exertions which led to this happy result."

"I felt convinced of your innocence from the first," returned our hero; "and it was not probable that I should abandon you when such were my sentiments."

"A life devoted to your service, sir, could not repay the debt which I owe you," said Kate. "And you, my dear cousin," she continued, turning towards Gibbet, who was seated next to her,—"you also have been no unimportant instrument in rescuing me from infamy and death."

"Do not speak of it, Kate," said the hump-back, whimpering like a mere child. "I hope you won't scold me for watching you like a

cat every evening as I did."

"Scold you, John! Oh! how can you make use of such words to me—and after the service you have rendered me?" exclaimed Kate, tears also streaming down her own cheeks. "I ought to bless God—and I do—to think that your friendship towards me led you to adopt a step to see me, which has turned so wonderfully—so providentially to my advantage."

"And now, Kate," said the executioner, "tell me one thing: why didn't you mention to me that evening when you called, that you were going to leave the rector's service?"

"Because, my dear uncle," answered the young maiden, "you made one observation to me which showed that you were pleased at the idea of me being in Mr. Tracy's service; and as you were so dull and low-spirited, I did not like to tell you any thing that might occasion you additional vexation. You said—oh! I shall never forget your words—they made me weep as I followed you from the street door into the parlour——"

"Yes—because I so seldom spoke kindly to you, poor Kate," exclaimed the executioner, as if struck by a sudden remorse.

"Do not say that, dear uncle! I owe so much—so very much to you, that even if you have been harsh to me now and then, I never think of it—and then, perhaps I have deserved it," she added slowly; for the amiable girl was anxious to extenuate her uncle's self-accusation in the eyes of those present.

"No—you did *not* deserve it, Kate!" cried the executioner, with resolute emphasis; "you are a good girl—too good ever to have been in such a den as mine!"

Smithers threw himself back in his chair, and compressed his lips together to restrain his emotions.

But nature asserted her empire.

A tear trickled from each eye, and rolled slowly down the cheeks of that man whose heart had been so brutalized by his fearful calling.

Kate rose from her chair, and threw herself into his arms, exclaiming, "Uncle—dear uncle, if you speak kindly to me, I am indeed happy!"

Gibbet cried, and yet laughed—sobbed, and yet smiled, in so strange a manner, as he contemplated that touching scene, that the result of his emotions presented the most ludicrous aspect.

"Sit down, Kate dear," said Smithers: "I am not used to be childish;—and yet, I don't know how it is, but I don't seem ashamed of dropping a tear now. I know I'm a harsh, brutal man: but what has made me so? God, who can read all hearts, has it written down in his book that I was once possessed of the same kind feelings as other people. However—it's no use talking: what I am I must remain until the end."

"Believe me," exclaimed Richard Markham, who was ever sensibly alive to the existence of generous feelings in others,—"believe me," he cried, grasping Smithers' hand, "society lost a good man when you undertook your present avocation."

"What, sir!" ejaculated Smithers, unfeignedly surprised; "do you shake hands with the Public Executioner?"

"Yes—and unblushingly would I do so before the whole world," replied Markham, "when I discover at the bottom of his soul a spark—aye, even the faintest spark of noble and exalted feeling yet unquenched."

The Public Executioner fixed upon the animated and handsome countenance of our hero a glance of the deepest gratitude—a glance of respect, almost of veneration!

He then cast down his eyes, and appeared to plunge into profound rumination.

"You were going to tell us, Miss Katherine," said Benstead, "what observation it was that prevented you from communicating to your uncle the notice Mrs. Kenrick had given you to leave."

"Oh! I remember," exclaimed the young maiden, upon whose heart the noble conduct of Richard Markham towards her despised and degraded relative had made a deep impression: "my uncle said to me, '*I am almost sorry that I ever parted with you; but as you are now in a place that may do you good, I shall not interfere with you*.'"

"Ah! my dear young friend," exclaimed Mrs. Bennet, "how fatal might that place have been to you after all? But where are you going to live now? If you can make yourself happy with me, I will offer you a home and show you the kindness of a mother."

Katherine turned a look of deep gratitude upon the good woman who made her this generous offer; and then she glanced timidly towards her uncle and Richard Markham.

"If I may be allowed to speak my thoughts in this matter," said our hero, "I should counsel Katherine to accept a proposition so kindly, so frankly made; and it shall be my duty to see that she becomes not a burden upon the friend who will provide her with a home."

"I can give no opinion in the matter, sir," observed the executioner: "there is something about you which compels me to say, '*Deal with me and my family as you will*.' Command, sir, and we will obey."

"I never command—but I advise as a friend," said Richard, touched by the strange gentleness of manner which was now evinced by one lately so rude, so brutal, so self-willed. "Katherine, then, has your consent to accompany Mrs. Bennet to Hounslow?"

"And I sincerely thank Mrs. Bennet for her goodness towards that poor girl who has undergone so much," said the executioner.

Mrs. Bennet now suggested that her husband would be uneasy if she remained long absent from home; and Richard immediately summoned the waiter, to whom he gave orders to procure a post-chaise.

This command was speedily executed. Katherine took leave of her relatives, Markham, and Benstead, with streaming eyes.

"God bless you, my girl," said the executioner, in a tone the tremulousness of which he could not altogether subdue.

Gibbet could say nothing: his voice was choked with sobs.

Katherine, however, whispered words of kindness in his ears; and the poor hump-back smiled as he wrung her hand with all the fervour of his affection.

"To you, Mr. Markham," said Kate, "no words can convey the gratitude—the boundless gratitude and respect which I entertain for you."

"Be happy, Katherine," returned Richard, shaking her warmly by the hand; "and remember that in me you have a sincere friend, always ready to aid and advise you."

The young maiden then tendered her thanks to the good-hearted policeman for the interest he had manifested in her favour.

The farewells were all said; good wishes were given and returned; and Mrs. Bennet hurried Katherine from the room. Those who remained behind, watched their departure from the window.

The moment the post-chaise had rolled away from the door of the tavern, Smithers accosted our hero, and said, "I am no great hand at making speeches, sir; but I can't take my leave of you, without saying something to convince you that I'm not ungrateful for what you've done for my niece. Your goodness, sir, has saved her from death; and more than that, has proved her innocence. You are the best man I ever met in my life: you are more like an angel than a human being. I didn't think that such men as you could be in existence. It makes me have a better opinion of the world when I look upon you. How happy would a country be if it had such a person as yourself for its sovereign! I cannot understand my own feelings in your presence: I seem as if I could fall at your feet and worship you. Then I think that I am unworthy even to breathe the same air that you do. But your words have made me happy to some extent: for years I have not felt as I feel to-day. I can say no more, sir: I don't know how I came to say so much!"

And the executioner turned abruptly aside; for he was weeping—he was weeping!

Markham had not interrupted him while he spoke, because our hero knew that it was well for that man to give way to the good feelings which the contemplation of humanity and philanthropy in others had so recently awakened.

But Richard did not perceive that, while the executioner was giving utterance to the invincible promptings of nature, Gibbet had drawn near,—had listened to his father with indescribable interest,—had drunk in with surprise and avidity every word that fell from his lips,—and had gradually sunk upon his knees in the presence of that benefactor whom even a rude, brutalized, and savage disposition was now compelled to believe to be something more than man!

"This, sir," said Benstead, glancing his eyes around, and touching Markham's arm to direct his attention to the scene,—"this, sir, is doubtless a welcome reward for all your goodness."

Richard hastily brushed away a tear, and raising Gibbet from his adoring posture, said, "You, my good lad, possess a heart worthy of a nobleman. Look upon me as your friend!"

Then our hero caught Smithers by the hand, and drawing him into the recess of a window, whispered in a low and rapid tone, "You are not insensible to the charms of being useful to one's fellow-creatures. I implore you to renounce your fearful calling—and I will supply you with the means to enter upon some other pursuit."

Smithers did not answer for a few moments: he appeared to reflect profoundly.

"Yes—I will follow your advice, sir," he at length said: "but not quite yet! I must hang up that rector—and then, *then* I will abandon the calling for ever!"

With these words the executioner turned abruptly away, caught Gibbet by the hand, and hurried from the room.

A few minutes afterwards Richard Markham and Benstead also took their departure, each in a different direction; but the police-officer's pocket contained substantial proofs of our hero's liberality.

CHAPTER CLIX.

THE INTERVIEW.

A week passed away, during which the examination of Reginald Tracy took place before the police-magistrate, and terminated in the committal of the rector to Newgate.

The whole town rang with the extraordinary events which had led to this crisis in the career of a man whose very name had so lately inspired respect.

The clergy were horror-struck at the disgrace brought upon their cloth by this terrific explosion; for people grew inclined to look upon real ecclesiastical sanctity as nothing more nor less than a garb of rank hypocrisy.

Some ministers of the gospel, more daring and enthusiastic than the rest, boldly proclaimed from their pulpits that Reginald Tracy was a saint and a martyr, against whom a horrible conspiracy had been concocted in order to remove the imputation of murder from the young female who had been discharged, and fix it on him.

Other clergymen entered into learned disquisitions to prove that Satan must have obtained especial leave from God, as in the case of Job, to tempt the most holy and pious of men; and that, having failed to seduce him from the right path, the Evil One had accomplished a series of atrocities all so artfully arranged as to fix the stain upon the rector of St. David's.

But there were some reverend gentlemen, who, having always been jealous of Reginald Tracy's popularity, descanted in significant terms upon the shallowness of mere eloquence in the pulpit, and the folly of running after "fashionable preachers." One venerable and holy gentleman, who had been married three times, and had received from his wives an aggregate of seventeen pledges of their affection, bitterly denounced in his sermon the "whitened sepulchre," "tinkling cymbal," and "unclean vessel," who had dared to set his face against the sacred institution of matrimony.

The fashionable world was powerfully excited by the exposure of Reginald Tracy. Some wiseacres shook their heads, and observed that they had always suspected there was something wrong about the rector; others plainly asserted that they had even prophesied what would happen some day. The fair sex all agreed that it was a great pity, as he *was* such a charming preacher and such a handsome man!

The press was not idle in respect to the business. The newspapers teemed with "Latest Particulars;" and all the penny-a-liners in London were on the alert to collate additional facts. Nine out of ten of these facts, however, turned out to be pure fictions. One journal, conducted on more imaginative principles than its contemporaries, promulgated a new discovery which it had made in respect to the rector's history, and coolly fixed upon his back all the murders which had occurred in the metropolis during the previous dozen years, and the perpetrators of which had never yet been detected.

Heaven knows Reginald Tracy was bad enough; but if one believed all which was now said of him in the public journals, no monster that ever disgraced humanity was so vile as he.

Some of the cheap unstamped periodicals treated their readers with portraits of the rector; and as very few of the artists who were employed to draw them had ever seen their subject, and were now unable to obtain access to him, their inventive faculties were put to the most exciting test. And, as a convincing proof that no two persons entertain the same idea of an object which they have never seen, it may be observed that there was a most extraordinary variety in the respective characteristics of these portraits.

In a word, the rector's name engrossed universal attention:—a cheap romance was issued, entitled "The Murdered Housekeeper; or the Corrupt Clergyman;"—one of the minor theatres attracted crowded houses by the embodiment of the particulars of the case in a melodrama;—and Madame Tussaud added the effigy of Reginald Tracy to her collection of wax-works.

But what were the feelings of Lady Cecilia Harborough when the terrible announcement of the rector's arrest met her ears!

We must observe that when she first heard of the death of the housekeeper, she entertained a faint suspicion that Reginald, and not Katherine Wilmot, was the author of the deed. But while the young girl was yet in prison, before the trial, and when Cecilia and the rector met, the latter so eloquently expatiated upon the case, that Cecilia's suspicions were hushed; and she learnt to look upon the housekeeper's death following so shortly on the exposure of the rector's hypocrisy to that female, as a remarkable coincidence only. Moreover, the rector had all along declared his impression that the housekeeper had committed suicide, and that the innocence of Katherine would be made apparent before the judges.

Thus Cecilia's mind had been more or less tranquillised during the interval which occurred between the housekeeper's death and the day of trial.

But when, in the afternoon of the day on which that trial took place, the appalling news of Katherine's acquittal and Reginald's arrest reached her ears, she was thrown into a state of the most painful excitement.

It was true that she could not in the slightest degree be implicated in the enormous crime of which he was accused: but would her guilty connexion with him transpire?

Her conscience entertained the worst forebodings in this respect.

At one moment she thought of hastening to visit him in his prison: then she reflected that such a course would only encourage a suspicion calculated to proclaim that scandal which she was so anxious to avoid.

Fortunately Sir Rupert Harborough was still away from home, with his friend Chichester, and thus Lady Cecilia had no disagreeable spy to witness her distressing emotions and embarrassment.

Day after day passed; Reginald had been committed, as before stated, to Newgate; and Cecilia heard nothing from him.

At length at the expiration of a week from the day of his arrest, a dirty, shabby-looking lad called in Tavistock Square, and requested to see Lady Cecilia Harborough alone.

He was accordingly admitted to her presence.

"Please, ma'am," he said, "I've come with a message from Mr. Tracy, which is in Newgate. He is a wery nice gen'leman, and is certain sure to be hung, they say."

"Who are you?" demanded Cecilia, with ill-concealed disgust.

"Please, ma'am, I belong to an eating-house in the Old Bailey," returned the boy; "and I takes in Mr. Tracy's meals to him."

"And what do you want with me?"

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Tracy says will you go and see him to-morrow morning between ten and eleven?"

"In Newgate!" ejaculated Lady Cecilia, with an unaffected shudder.

"Oh! yes, ma'am: I goes in there three times every day o' my life; and so I'm sure you needn't be afraid to wisit it just for vonce."

"Well—I will think of it. Have you any thing else to say to me?"

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Tracy says that you've no call to give your own name at the gate; but if you pass yourself off as his sister, just come up from the country, you can see him alone in his cell. But if you don't do that you'd on'y be allowed to speak to him through the bars of his yard. He would have wrote to you, but then the letters must be read by the governor before they goes out; and so it would have been known that he sent to you. He never thought of speaking about it to me till this morning; and I promised to do his arrand faithful. That's all, ma'am."

"And enough too," said Lady Cecilia, in a tone of deep disgust, as she threw the lad a few shillings across the table in the room where she received him.

"Is there any message, ma'am, to take back to Mr. Tracy?" asked the boy; "'cos I shall see him the first thing in the morning."

"You may say that I will do as he desires," answered Cecilia: "but beware how you mention to a soul that you have been here. Forget my name as if you had never heard it."

"Yes, ma'am—to be sure," replied the boy; "and thank'ee kindly."

He then pocketed the money, and took his departure.

"Newgate, Newgate!" thought Lady Cecilia, when she was once more alone: "there is something chilling—menacing—awful in that name! And yet I must penetrate into those gloomy cells to see—whom? A murderer! Oh! who would have thought that the rich, the handsome, the renowned, the courted, the flattered rector of St. David's would become an inmate of Newgate? A murderer! Ah—my God, the mere idea is horrible! And that uncouth boy who said coolly that he was certain to be hanged! Reginald—Reginald, to what have you come? Would it not have been better to dare exposure—contumely—infamy—reproach, than to risk such an appalling alternative? But reputation was dearer to this man than aught in the world beside! And he is rich:—what will he do with his wealth? Perhaps it is for *that* he desires my presence? Who knows?"

This idea determined Lady Cecilia upon visiting Newgate on the following day.

She did not reflect that she herself was the first link in that chain which had so rapidly wound itself around the unhappy man, until it paralysed his limbs in a criminal gaol. She often asked herself how he could have been so mad as to commit the deed that menaced him with the most terrible fate; but beyond the abstract event itself she never thought of looking.

The morning dawned; Lady Cecilia rose, and dressed herself in as unpretending a manner as possible.

At half-past nine she went out, took a cab at the nearest stand, and proceeded to Newgate.

She ascertained, by inquiry, which was the prison entrance, and ascended the steps leading to the half-door, the top of which was garnished with long iron spikes.

A stout, red-faced turnkey, with a good-tempered countenance, admitted her into the obscure lobby, behind which was a passage where a gas-light burns all day long.

"Who do you want, ma'am?" said the turnkey.

"Mr. Tracy," was the reply.

"Are you any relation to him?"

"His sister. I have just arrived from the country."

"Please to write your name down in this book."

Lady Cecilia, who seldom lost her presence of mind, instantly took up the pen, and wrote down "ANNE TRACY."

"Excuse me, ma'am," said the turnkey, "but if you have any knife in your pocket you must leave it here."

"I have none," answered Cecilia.

"Take that passage, ma'am, and you will find a turnkey who will admit you to Tracy's cell."

All titular distinctions are dropped in Newgate.

Lady Cecilia proceeded along the passage as she was desired, and at length reached a large stone vestibule, from which several doors opened into the different yards in that part of the building.

She accosted a turnkey, informing him whom she came to visit; and he bade her follow him.

In a few moments he stopped at a massive door, opened it, and said, "Walk in there, ma'am."

She advanced a few steps: the door closed behind her; and she found herself in the presence of Reginald Tracy.

But how changed was he! His cheeks were ghastly pale—his eyes sunken—his hair was in disorder—his person dirty and neglected.

"This is kind of you, Cecilia," he said, without rising from his chair. "Sit down, and lose no time in conversing—we have not much time to be together."

"Oh, Reginald!" exclaimed Cecilia, as she took a seat, "what a place for us to meet in!"

"Now do not give way to ejaculations and laments which will do no good," said Reginald. "If you can maintain your tranquillity it

will be advantageous to yourself. You know that I am possessed of some property?"

"The world always believed you to be rich," observed Cecilia.

"I have lately been extravagant," continued Reginald: "still I have a handsome fortune remaining. As I am not *yet* condemned," he added bitterly, "I can leave it to whom I choose. Do you wish to be my heiress?"

"Ah! Reginald—this proof of your affection——"

"No superfluous words, Cecilia," interrupted the rector impatiently. "If you wish to possess my wealth you must render me a service—an important service, to merit it."

"Any thing in the world that I can do to benefit you shall be performed most faithfully," said Lady Cecilia.

"And you will not shrink from the service which I demand? The condition is no light one."

"Name it. Whatever it be, I will accept it—provided that it do not involve my safety," returned Cecilia.

"Selfishness!" exclaimed the rector contemptuously. "Listen attentively. To-morrow my solicitor will attend upon me here. To him I shall make over all my property—in trust for the person to whom I choose to bequeath it. He is an honourable man, and will faithfully perform my wishes. I have not a relation nor a friend in the world who has any particular claim upon me. I can constitute you my heiress: at my death," he added slowly, "all I possess may revert to you,—the world remaining in ignorance of the manner in which I have disposed of my wealth. But if I thus enrich you, I demand from your hands the means of escaping an infamy otherwise inevitable."

"I do not understand you," said Cecilia, somewhat alarmed.

The rector leant forward, fixed a penetrating glance upon his mistress, and said in a hollow and subdued tone, "I require poison—a deadly poison!"

"Poison!" echoed Cecilia, with a shudder.

"Yes: do you comprehend me now? Will you earn wealth by rendering me that service?" he asked eagerly.

"What poison do you require?" demanded Cecilia greatly excited.

"Prussic acid: it is the most certain—and the quickest," answered the rector. "If you are afraid to procure it yourself, the old hag in Golden Lane will assist you in that respect."

"And must it really come to this?" said Cecilia. "Is all hope dead?"

"My doom is certain—if I live to meet it," answered Reginald, who only maintained the composure which he now displayed by the most desperate efforts to subdue his emotions. "The evidence is too damning against me. And yet I imagined that I had adopted such precautions!" he continued, in a musing tone. "I felt so confident that the poor, old woman would appear to have died by her own hand! I sent the footman out of the way, not upon a frivolous cause, but on an errand which would bear scrutiny. I made the housekeeper herself get rid of Katherine. I did all that prudence suggested. But never—never did I anticipate that *another* would be charged with the crime! And yet, when suspicion attached itself so strongly to that poor innocent girl, what could I do? I had but two alternatives—to allow her to suffer, or to immolate myself by proclaiming her guiltlessness. Oh! Cecilia, you know not—you cannot conceive all that I have suffered since that fatal evening! Often and often was I on the point of going forward and confessing all, in order to save that innocent girl. But I had not the courage! When I gave my testimony, I rendered it as favourable towards her as possible. I laboured hard to encourage the suspicion that the deceased had been her own destroyer. But fate had ordained that all should transpire."

He paused, and buried his face in his hands.

A sob escaped his breast.

"This is childish—this is foolish in the extreme," he suddenly cried. "Time is passing—and you have not yet decided whether you will render me the service I require, upon the consideration of inheriting all my wealth."

"I will do what you ask of me," said Cecilia, in a low but decided tone.

"And do not attempt to deceive me," continued Reginald; "for if you bring me a harmless substitute for a deadly poison, you will frustrate my design, it is true—but I shall live to revoke the bequest made in your favour."

"I will not deceive you, Reginald—if you be indeed determined," said his mistress.

"I *am* determined. We now understand each other: to me the poison—to you the wealth."

"Agreed," was the answer.

"The day after to-morrow you will return—provided with what I require?" said Reginald.

"You may rely upon me."

"Then farewell, Cecilia, for the present."

The rector offered the lady his hand: Cecilia pressed it with affected fervour, though in reality she almost recoiled from the touch.

Profligate as she was, she had no sincere sympathy for a murderer.

Nor was she sorry when she once more found herself beyond the terrible walls of Newgate.

CHAPTER CLX.

THE RECTOR IN NEWGATE.

Reginald Tracy awoke early on the morning when Cecilia was to return to him.

He had been dreaming of delicious scenes and voluptuous pleasures; and he opened his eyes to the fearful realities of Newgate.

He clasped his hands together with the convulsiveness of ineffable mental agony; and the smile that had played upon his lips in his elysian dream, was suddenly changed into the contortion of an anguish that could know no earthly mitigation.

"Fool—madman that I have been!" he exclaimed aloud, in a piercing tone of despair. "From what a brilliant position have I fallen! Wealth—pleasure—fame—love—life, all about to pass away! The entire fabric destroyed by my own hands! Oh! wretch—senseless idiot—miserable fool that I have been! But is it really true?—can it be as it seems to me? Have I done the deed? Am I here—*here*, in Newgate? Or is it all a dream? Perhaps I have gone suddenly mad, and my crime and its consequences are only the inventions of my disordered imagination? Yes—it may be so; and this is a mad-house!"

Then the rector sate up in his bed, and glanced wildly around the cell.

"No—no!" he cried with a shriek of despair; "I cannot delude myself thus. I am indeed a *murderer*—and *this* is Newgate!"

He threw himself back on the rude bolster, and covered his face with his hands.

But though he closed his eyes, and pressed his fingers upon the lids until the balls throbbed beneath, he could not shut out from his mind the horrors of his position.

"Oh! this is insupportable!" he cried, and then rolled upon his bed in convulsions of rage: he gnashed his teeth—he beat his brow—he tore his hair—he clenched his fists with the fury of a demon.

His emotions were terrible.

He seemed like a wild beast caught in a net whose meshes were inextricable.

Then a rapid reaction took place in that man of powerful passion; and he grew exhausted—humble—and penitent.

"O God, have mercy upon me!" he said, joining his hands in prayer. "I have grievously offended against thee: oh! have mercy upon me. Why didst thou permit me to fall? Was I not enthusiastic in thy cause? O heaven, have mercy upon me!"

This short prayer, in which reproach and intercession were commingled, was said with profound sincerity.

But the image of Cecilia suddenly sprang up in the rector's imagination; and then his entire form once more became convulsed with rage.

"That wretch—that adulteress was my ruin!" he exclaimed, clenching his fist so violently that the nails of his fingers almost penetrated into his palms. "I was virtuous and untainted until I knew her. She led me astray: she taught me the enjoyment of those pleasures which have proved so fatal to me! The wretch—the adulteress! And to be condemned the day before yesterday to maintain a forced calmness towards her! Oh! I could tear her limb from limb: I could dig my nails into the flesh whose dazzling whiteness and whose charms were wont to plunge my soul in ecstacies. The foul—the vile creature! May she die in a dungeon, as I shall die: no, may she rot upon the straw—may she perish by degrees—of starvation,—a cruel, lingering death of agony! Had I never known her, I should yet be on the pinnacle of pride and fortune,—yet be respected and adored! Ah! these thoughts drive me mad—mad."

And again he beat his forehead and his breast: again he tore his hair, and writhed convulsively on his bed.

"Senseless idiot that I have been!" he continued. "Better—better far were it to have thrown off the mask—to have dared the world! I was rich—and I was independent. I might have lived a life of luxury and ease, pleasure and enjoyment;—but I was too weak to risk exposure. And that poor old woman whom I destroyed—was she not devoted to me! would she have proclaimed my hypocrisy? My conscience made me behold every thing in its worst light. I anticipated complete security in her death. And now I must die myself,—give up this bright and beautiful world in the prime of my existence,—abandon all earth's pleasures and enjoyments in the vigour of my days! Senseless idiot that I was to suppose that murder could be perpetrated so easily—to imagine that the finger of God would not point to me, as much as to say '*That is the man*.' Yes—though millions be assembled together in one vast crowd, the hand of the Almighty will single out the ruthless murderer!"

The rector ceased, and lay for some instants still and motionless.

But his mind was fearfully active.

"Had not all this occurred," he thought within himself, "I should now be awaking, in my comfortable chamber, to a day which would be marked with the same happiness and security that other men are now enjoying. I should be free to go out and come in at will—free to walk hither and thither as I might choose. I should not have death staring me in the face, as at present! I should be able to say with confidence, '*To-morrow I will do this*,' and '*Next day I will do that*.' I should be my own master, possessed of all that can make man happy. But, now—*now* what a wretch I am! Confined to these four walls—a mere automaton that must eat and drink when a gaoler chooses!"

These thoughts were too heart-rending for the miserable man to endure; and, starting from his bed, he threw on his clothes with a rapidity that denoted the feverish state of his mind.

The clock struck eight; and his breakfast was brought to him.

"How many times more shall I hear that sound?" he asked himself. "Once how welcome were the notes of bells to my ears! With what happiness did I obey their summons to that church to which crowds flocked to hear me! Oh! what calm, what peaceful enjoyments were mine *then*—in the days of my innocence! And those days are gone—never to return! No human power can restore me to those enjoyments and to that innocence; and God will not do it!"

Thus passed the time of this truly wretched man.

At length the clock struck nine—next ten.

"Will she come?" he said, as he paced his cell with agitated steps. "Or will she be afraid of compromising herself? And yet she must have confidence in me: I have acted in a manner to inspire it. I suffered her to believe that it was out of regard for her that I did not write to her, and that I recommended her to pass in as my sister. The vile wretch! she little knows that all this was the result of calculation on my part! If I had shown myself indifferent to her reputation—careless of her name,—she would not have so readily consented to do my bidding. Perhaps she would never have come to me at all! Now she believes that I am anxious to avert the breath of scandal from herself; and she will serve me: yes—I feel convinced that she will come!"

Nor was Reginald mistaken.

Scarcely had he arrived at that point in his musings, when the bolts of his cell were drawn back, and Lady Cecilia entered the dungeon.

"You are true to your promise," said the rector.

"Yes—I would not fail you," answered Cecilia, throwing herself into a chair: "but I tremble—oh! I tremble like a leaf."

"Have you brought—*it*?" asked Reginald in a hollow tone.

Cecilia drew from her bosom a small crystal phial, and handed it to the rector.

He greedily withdrew the cork, and placed the bottle to his nostrils.

"Yes—you have not deceived me! Now—now," he exclaimed, as he carefully concealed the phial about his person, "I am the master of my own destinies!"

And, as he spoke, his countenance was animated with an expression of diabolical triumph.

Cecilia was alarmed.

"My God, what have I done?" she cried; "perhaps I have involved myself——"

"Set aside these selfish considerations," said the rector; "you have earned wealth—for I have kept my promise—I have bequeathed all my fortune to you."

"Do not imagine that I shall ever receive enjoyment from its possession, dear Reginald," returned Cecilia, affecting a tenderness of tone and manner which she did not feel.

"Oh! I know your good heart, beloved Cecilia," exclaimed the rector; and as she cast down her eyes beneath his looks, he glared upon her for a moment with the ferocity of a tiger. "But you will be surprised—yes, agreeably surprised," he added composedly, "when you call upon my solicitor—which you must do to-morrow! Here is his address."

"To-morrow!" echoed Cecilia, turning deadly pale. "You cannot mean to——to——"

"To take this poison to day?" said Reginald. "Yes—this evening at seven o'clock you may pray for my soul!"

"Oh! this is, indeed, dreadful!" cried Cecilia. "Give me back that phial—or I will raise an alarm!"

"Foolish woman! Will you not be worth twenty thousand pounds!" ejaculated Reginald. "And fear not that you will be compromised. I shall leave upon this table a letter that will exculpate you from any suspicion of having been the bearer to me of the means of self-destruction—even if it be discovered who it was that visited me here as my alleged sister."

"This consideration on your part is truly generous, Reginald," said Cecilia, in whose breast the mention of the twenty thousand pounds had stifled all compunction.

"We must now part, Cecilia—part for ever," observed the rector. "Go—do not offer to embrace me—I could not bear it!"

"Then farewell, Reginald—farewell!" exclaimed Cecilia, who was not sorry to escape a ceremony which she had anticipated with horror—for the idea that her paramour was a murderer was ever present in her mind.

"Farewell, Cecilia," added the rector; and he turned his back to the door.

In another moment she was gone.

"Thank heaven that I was enabled to master my rage," cried Reginald, when he was once more alone. "Oh! how I longed to fall upon her—to tear her to pieces! The selfish harlot—as if I could not read her soul *now*—as if I were any longer her dupe. But I shall be avenged upon her—I shall be avenged! My death will be the signal of her exposure—my dissolution will be the beginning of her shame! Oh! deeply shall she rue every caress she has lavished upon me—every accursed wile that she practised to ensnare me! Her blandishments will turn to moans and tears—her smiles to the contortions of hell. The fascinating syren shall become the mark for every scornful finger. Fool that she is—to think I would die unavenged! If my existence be cut short suddenly—hers shall be dragged out in sorrow and despair."

Then the rector paced his cell, while from his breast escaped a hoarse sound like the low growling of a wild beast.

But we will not dwell upon the wretched man's thoughts and words throughout that long day.

Evening came.

Six o'clock struck; and Reginald feared no farther interruption from the turnkeys.

He then sate down to write two letters.

Having occupied himself in this manner for a short time, he sealed the letters, and addressed them.

When this task was accomplished, he felt more composed and calm than he had done during the day.

He walked three or four times up and down his cell.

Then he fell upon his knees, and prayed fervently.

Yes—fervently!

Seven o'clock struck.

"Now is the hour!" he exclaimed, rising from his suppliant posture near the bed.

He took the bottle from his pocket: a convulsive shudder passed over him as he handled the fatal phial whose contents were to sever the chain which bound his spirit to the earth.

Then he felt weak and nervous; and he sate down.

"My courage is failing," he said to himself: "I must not delay another moment."

But he still hesitated for a minute!

"No—no!" he exclaimed, as if in answer to an idea which had occupied him during that interval; "there is no hope! My fate would be——the scaffold!"

This thought nerved him with courage to execute his desperate purpose.

He raised the phial to his lips, and swallowed the contents—greedy of every drop.

In a few seconds he fell from his chair—a heavy, lifeless mass—upon the floor of the dungeon.

CHAPTER CLXI.

LADY CECILIA HARBOROUGH.

Cecilia passed a sleepless and agitated night.

Wild hopes and undefined fears had banished repose from her pillow.

She thought the morning would never come.

At length the first gleam of dawn struggled through the windows of her bed-room; and she instantly arose.

She was pale—yet fearfully excited; and there was a wildness in her eyes which denoted the most cruel suspense.

The minutes seemed to be hours; for she was now anxiously awaiting the arrival of the morning paper.

She descended to the breakfast parlour; but the repast remained untouched.

At length the well-known knock of the news-boy at the front door echoed through the house.

The moment the journal was placed on the table by her side, Cecilia took it up with trembling hands, and cast a hasty glance over its contents.

In another instant all suspense relative to the rector's fate ceased.

The following words settled that point beyond a doubt:—

"SUICIDE OF THE REV. REGINALD TRACY.

"Shortly after eight o'clock last evening a rumour was in circulation, to the effect that the above-mentioned individual, whose name has so recently been brought before the public in connection with the murder of Matilda Kenrick, had put a period to his existence by means of poison. It appears that the turnkey, on visiting his cell, according to custom, at eight o'clock, found him stretched upon the floor, to all appearances quite dead. Medical aid was immediately procured; but life was pronounced by the gaol-surgeon to be totally extinct. We have been unable to learn any further particulars."

"It is better so, than to die upon the scaffold," said Cecilia to herself. "Now to the lawyer's: Reginald expressly told me that I was to call upon him this morning."

The heartless woman did not drop a tear nor heave a sigh to the memory of her paramour.

She rang the bell and desired the servant to fetch a cab without delay.

By the time it arrived Cecilia was ready.

During the rapid drive to the City, she arranged a thousand plans for the employment and enjoyment of the wealth which she believed herself to be now entitled to, and the bequest of which she was resolved to conceal from her husband.

When she alighted at the solicitor's door, she assumed a melancholy and solemn air, which she thought decorous under the circumstances.

The solicitor, who was an elderly man, and whose name was Wharton, received her in his private office, and politely inquired the nature of her business.

"Did you not expect a visit from Lady Cecilia Harborough this morning?" asked the frail woman.

"Lady Cecilia Harborough!" exclaimed the lawyer, his countenance assuming a severe tone the moment that name fell upon his ears. "Are you Lady Cecilia Harborough?"

"I am Lady Cecilia Harborough," was the reply.

"So young—and yet so powerful to work evil!" observed Mr. Wharton, in a musing tone, and with a sorrowful air.

"I do not understand you, sir," exclaimed Cecilia somewhat alarmed, yet affecting a haughty and offended manner.

"Do not aggravate your wickedness by means of falsehood," said the lawyer sternly. "Think you that I am a stranger to your connexion with that unhappy man who died by his own hands last night? I have known him for many years—I knew him when he was pure, honourable, and respected: I have seen him the inmate of a dungeon. The day before yesterday I was with him for the last time. He then revealed to me every particular connected with his fall. He told me how you practised your syren arts upon him—how you led him on, until he became an adulterer! He explained to me how he repented of his first weakness, and how you practised a vile—a detestable artifice, by the aid of an old hag in Golden Lane, to bring him back to your arms."

"Spare me this recital, sir, which has been so highly coloured to my prejudice," exclaimed Lady Cecilia. "I confess that I was enamoured of that unhappy man; but——"

"You cannot palliate your wickedness, madam," interrupted Mr. Wharton, sternly. "Mr. Tracy detailed to me every blandishment you used—every art you called into force to subdue him. And as for *your* love for him, Lady Cecilia Harborough—even that excuse cannot be advanced in extenuation of your infamy."

"Sir—that is a harsh word!" cried Cecilia, red with indignation, and starting upon her chair.

"Nay, madam—sit still," continued the solicitor: "you may yet hear harsher terms from my lips. I say that you cannot even plead a profound and sincere attachment to that man as an excuse for the arts which you practised to ensnare and ruin him:—no, madam—it was his gold which you coveted!"

"Sir—I will hear no more—I——"

"Your ladyship must hear me out," interrupted the lawyer, authoritatively motioning her to retain her seat. "When alone in his

gloomy cell, your victim pondered upon all that had passed between him and you, until he came to a full and entire comprehension of the utter hollowness of your heart. He then understood how he had been duped and deluded by you! Moreover, madam, it was by your desire that he admitted you into his own house—that fatal indiscretion which, being often repeated, at length led to the terrible catastrophe. Now, then, madam," cried Mr. Wharton, raising his voice, "who was the real cause of my friend's downfall? who was the origin of his ruin? who, in a word, is the murderess of Reginald Tracy?"

"My God!" ejaculated the wretched woman, quivering like an aspen beneath these appalling denunciations; "you are very severe—too, too harsh upon me, sir!"

"No, madam," resumed the lawyer; "I am merely placing your conduct in its true light, and giving your deeds their proper name. You had no mercy upon my unfortunate friend;—you sacrificed him to your base lust after gold;—you hurried him on to his doom. Why should I spare you? You have no claims upon my forbearance as a woman—because, madam, your unmitigated wickedness debars you from the privilege of your sex. To show courtesy to you, would be to encourage crime of the most abhorrent nature."

"Was it to be thus upbraided, sir—thus reviled," demanded Lady Cecilia, endeavouring to recover her self-possession, "that I was desired to call upon you this morning?"

"Desired to call upon me, madam!" exclaimed the solicitor: "who conveyed to you such instructions?"

"Mr. Tracy himself," answered Cecilia in a faint tone—for she now trembled lest Reginald had deceived her.

"Then my poor friend must have been aware of the reception which you would meet at my hands—of the stern truths that you would hear from my lips," said Mr. Wharton; "for to no other purpose could this visit have been designed."

"But—are there no written instructions—with which you may be as yet unacquainted—no papers, the contents of which you have not read——"

"Madam, I am at a loss to comprehend you," said the lawyer. "If you allude to any papers of Mr. Tracy's now in my hands, I can assure you that they bear no reference to any affairs in which you can possibly be interested."

"And you have read *all* those papers—every one—*the last* that was placed in your hands, as well as any others?" inquired Cecilia, in a tone of breathless excitement.

"Merciful heavens, madam!" ejaculated the lawyer, on whose mind a light seemed suddenly to break: "surely—surely *you* cannot be in expectation of a legacy or a boon from that man whom you hurried to his ruin—aye, even to murder and suicide? Surely your presumption is not so boundless as all that?"

Cecilia sank back, almost fainting in her chair: her sole hope was now annihilated; and in its stead there remained to her only the bitter—bitter conviction that she had been deceived by Reginald in that last transaction which took place between them.

"No, madam—no," continued the lawyer, with a smile of the most cutting contempt: "if that unhappy man had bequeathed you any thing, it would have been his curse—his withering, dying curse!"

"Oh! do not say *that*," screamed Cecilia, now really appalled by the energetic language of that man who was so unsparing in his duty to the memory of his friend.

"Ah! I am rejoiced that your ladyship at last feels the full force of that infamy which has accomplished the ruin of a man once so good, so upright, so honourable, so happy! But you are, no doubt, curious to know how your victim has disposed of that wealth of which you would have plundered him had he not been so suddenly stopped in his mad career? I will tell you. He has bequeathed it to that young girl who so nearly suffered for *his* crime—to Katherine Wilmot, who was so unjustly accused of the enormity which *he* perpetrated!"

Lady Cecilia wept with rage, shame, and disappointment.

"Weep, madam, weep," rang the iron voice of that stern denunciator once more in her ears: "weep—for you have good cause! Not for the wealth of the universe would I harbour the feelings which ought to be—*must* be yours at this moment."

A pause ensued, which was interrupted by the entrance of a clerk who whispered something in the lawyer's ear, and then withdrew.

"I request your ladyship to have the goodness to remain here until my return," said Mr. Wharton. "I shall not keep you long."

The lawyer passed into the outer office; and Cecilia was now alone.

The reader can scarcely require to be reminded that this lady was not one who was likely to remain long depressed by a moral lesson, however severe its nature.

Scarcely had the lawyer left her, when she raised her head, and thought within herself, "I have been deceived—cruelly deceived; and if I did Reginald any wrong, he is amply avenged. One thing seems certain—he has retained the secret of the means by which he obtained the poison. He has not compromised me there; or else this harsh man would have been only too glad to throw *that* also in my teeth. Thus, my position might have been worse!"

Such was the substance of Lady Cecilia Harborough's musing during the absence of the lawyer.

This absence lasted nearly a quarter of an hour; and then he returned to the office.

He held an open letter in his hand.

"Lady Cecilia Harborough," he said, in a tone of increased sternness, "the measure of your guilt is now so full, that justice demands an explanation at your hands."

"Justice, sir!" faltered the frail woman, an icy coldness striking to her heart.

"Yes, madam," answered the lawyer; "and even from the grave will the wrongs of Reginald Tracy cry out against you."

"My God! what do you mean?" she exclaimed, her pallor now becoming actually livid.

"Before Reginald Tracy took the poison which hurried him to his last account," continued the solicitor in a low and solemn tone, "he wrote two letters. These were found upon the table in his cell. One was to Katherine Wilmot—the other was to me. The governor of Newgate has just been with me, and has delivered to me this last communication from my poor friend."

"The governor of Newgate!" repeated Cecilia, now overwhelmed with vague terrors.

"Yes, madam: and the contents are to inform me that you—*you*, madam, with an assumed name, and passing yourself off as Mr. Tracy's sister, visited him twice in his cell, and, on the latter occasion, furnished him with the means of self-destruction."

"Heaven protect me! it is but too true!" cried Cecilia; and, throwing herself upon her knees before the lawyer, she almost shrieked

the words, "You would not give me up to justice, sir—you will not betray me?"

"No, madam," answered Mr. Wharton; "I had punished you sufficiently when these tidings arrived."

"Thank you, sir—thank you," cried Cecilia, rising from her knees. "But the governor of Newgate——"

"Is gone, madam. I did not tell him that you were here. I must, however, warn you that I communicated to him, as in duty bound, the contents of this letter."

"Then he is aware that I——"

"He is aware that you conveyed the poison to Reginald Tracy; and the officers of justice will be in search of you in another hour," replied the lawyer, coldly.

"My God! what will become of me?" ejaculated Cecilia, now pushed to an extremity which she never had contemplated.

"I would not say that you were here, madam," continued the lawyer, "because Reginald Tracy had contemplated making me the means of handing you over to the grasp of justice; and I am sorry that he should so far have misunderstood me. I now comprehend why he directed you to come hither. He thought that his letter would reach me earlier—before you came, and that I should be the willing instrument of his vengeance. I will not show you the letter, because he has mistaken me—he has misunderstood me; and for this reason alone—and for no merciful feeling towards *you*—have I shielded you thus far. Now go, madam: when once you are away from this house, you must adopt the best measures you can devise to ensure your safety."

"But can you not counsel me, sir—will you not direct me how to act?" cried Cecilia: "I am bewildered—I know not what step to take!"

"I have no counsel to offer, madam," returned the lawyer, briefly.

Cecilia could not mistake the meaning conveyed by this tone.

She rose; and bowing in a constrained manner to the solicitor, left the office.

But when she found herself in the street, she was cruelly embarrassed how to act.

She dared not return home; the paternal door had long been closed against her; she had not a friend—and she had not a resource.

A few sovereigns in her purse were all her available means.

She thought of quitting the country at once, and proceeding to join her husband, whom she knew to be in Paris.

But how would he receive her? The newspapers would soon be busy with her name; and Sir Rupert was not the man to burden himself with a woman penniless in purse and ruined in reputation.

For an instant she thought of Greenwood; but this idea was discarded almost as soon as entertained. She was aware of his utter heartlessness, and felt confident that he would repulse her coldly from his dwelling.

To whom could she apply? whither was she to betake herself?

And yet concealment was necessary—oh! she must hide somewhere!

The feelings of this woman were terrible beyond description.

And now she was walking rapidly along the streets towards London Bridge; for the idea of quitting the country was uppermost in her mind.

Her veil was drawn carefully over her countenance; and yet she trembled at every policeman whom she passed.

She was hurrying down Gracechurch Street, when she heard herself called by name.

She knew the voice, and turned round, saying to herself, "Help may come from this quarter!"

It was the old hag who had spoken to her.

"My good woman," said Lady Cecilia hastily, "all is known—all is discovered!"

"What is known?" asked the old hag, in her usual imperturbable tone.

"It is known that I conveyed the poison, which *you* procured for me, to Reginald Tracy," replied Cecilia, in a hoarse whisper. "You have heard that he is dead?"

"I heard *that* last evening," said the hag. "What are you going to do?"

"To hide myself from the officers of justice," returned Cecilia. "But step into this court, or we shall be observed."

The old woman followed the unhappy lady under an archway.

"I must conceal myself—at least for the present," resumed Cecilia. "Will you grant me an asylum?"

"I! my dear lady!" ejaculated the hag, shaking her head ominously: "I am in danger myself—I am in danger myself! Did I not procure you the poison?"

"True. But I would not betray you."

"No—we must each shift for ourselves—we must each shift for ourselves, as best we can," replied the hag flatly. "Indeed, I may as well remind you, Lady Cecilia, that your day is gone—you are ruined—and, if you had any spirit, you would not survive it!"

"My God! what do you mean?" faltered Cecilia, in a faint tone.

"The river is deep, or the Monument is high," answered the hag, in a significant tone; "and you are near both!"

The wrinkled old harridan then hobbled out of the court as quickly as her rheumatic limbs would carry her.

"Even *she* deserts me!" murmured Cecilia to herself, and with difficulty suppressing an ebullition of feeling which would have attracted notice, and probably led to her detection: "even *she* deserts me! My God—is there nothing left to me but suicide? No—nothing!"

Her countenance wore, beneath her veil, an expression of blank despair, as she arrived at this appalling conviction; and for some moments she stood as if rooted to the spot.

"No—nothing left but *that*," she murmured, awaking from her temporary stupefaction: "nothing—nothing!"

And although these words were uttered in the lowest whisper, still it seemed as if she shrieked them *within herself*.

Then she hurried from the court.

"The river—or the Monument," she said, as she continued her rapid way: "the river is near—but the Monument is nearer. Drowning must be slow and painful—*the other* will be instantaneous. From the river I might be rescued; but no human power can snatch me from death during a fall from that dizzy height."

And she glanced upwards to the colossal pillar whose base she had now reached.

At that moment two men, evidently belonging to the working classes, passed her.

A portion of their conversation met her ears.

"And so she was not his sister, then?" said one.

"No such thing," replied the other. "I heard the governor of Newgate tell all about it to one of the City officers scarcely half an hour ago. The governor was coming out of a lawyer's house—Tracy's lawyer, I believe—and the City officer was waiting for him at the door. He then told him that it was a lady of fashion—with a name something like Cecilia Scarborough, I think——"

The men were now too far for the wretched woman to hear any more of their conversation.

"Merciful heavens!" she said, scarcely able to prevent herself from wringing her hands; "even at this moment I am not safe!"

Then, without farther hesitation, she passed round the base of the Monument, and crossed the threshold.

"Sixpence, if you please, ma'am," said the man who received the fees from visitors.

Lady Cecilia exercised an almost superhuman power over her distracted feelings, so as to appear composed, while she drew forth the coin from her purse.

"It's a fine day to view London, ma'am," said the man, as he took the money.

"Beautiful," answered Cecilia.

She then began the tedious ascent.

And now what awful emotions laboured in her breast as she toiled up that winding staircase.

"My God! my God!" she murmured to herself; "is it indeed come to this?"

Once she was compelled to stop and lean against the wall for support.

Then she wrung her hands in agony—indescribable agony of mind.

"And yet there is no alternative!" she thought; "none—none! But my mother—my poor mother! what will be her feelings? Oh! better to know that I am dead, than an inmate of Newgate!"

And, somewhat encouraged in her dreadful purpose by this idea, she pursued her way.

In a few moments the fresh air blew in her face.

She was near the top!

A dozen more steps—and the brilliant sun-light burst upon her eyes.

It was indeed a lovely morning; and the Thames appeared like a huge serpent of quicksilver, meandering its way amidst the myriads of buildings that stretched on either side, far as the eye could reach.

The din of the huge city reached the ears of the wretched woman who now stood upon that tremendous eminence.

All was life—bustle—business—activity below!

And above was the serene blue sky of an early spring, illuminated by the bright and cloudless sun.

"But yesterday," thought Cecilia, as she surveyed the exciting scene spread beneath her, "had any one said to me, '*Thou wilt seek death to-morrow*,' I should have ridiculed the idea. And yet it has come to this! Oh! it is hard to quit this world of pleasure—to leave that city of enjoyment! Never more to behold that gorgeous sun—never more to hear those busy sounds! But if I hesitate, my heart will turn coward; and then—Newgate—Newgate!"

These last words were uttered aloud in the shrill and piercing tones of despair.

She clasped her hands together, and prayed for a few moments.

Then, as if acting by a sudden impulse,—as if afraid to trust herself with the thoughts that were crowding into her mind,—she placed her hands upon the railing.

One leap—and she stood upon the rail.

For a single instant she seemed as if she would fall backwards upon the platform of the Monument; and her arms were agitated convulsively, like the motions of one who endeavours to gain a lost balance.

Then she sprang forwards.

Terrific screams burst from her lips as she rolled over and over in her precipitate whirl.

Down she fell!

Her head dashed against the pavement, at a distance of three yards from the base of the Monument.

Her brains were scattered upon the stones.

She never moved from the moment she touched the ground:—the once gay, sprightly, beautiful patrician lady was no more!

A crowd instantaneously collected around her; and horror was depicted on every countenance, save one, that gazed upon the sad spectacle.

And that one wretch who showed no feeling, was the old hag of Golden Lane.

"She cannot now betray me for procuring the poison," thought the vile harridan, as she calmly contemplated the mangled corpse at her feet.

CHAPTER CLXII.

THE BEQUEST.

Two days after the suicide of Lady Cecilia Harborough,—an event which created a profound sensation in the fashionable world, and plunged the Tremordyn family into mourning,—Richard Markham was a passenger in a coach that passed through Hounslow.

At this town he alighted, and inquired the way to the residence of Mr. Bennet, a small farmer in the neighbourhood.

A guide was speedily procured at the inn; and after a pleasant walk of about three miles, across a country which already bore signs of the genial influence of an early spring, Richard found himself at the gate of a comfortable-looking farm-house.

He dismissed his guide with a gratuity, and was shortly admitted by a buxom servant-girl into a neat little parlour, where he was presently joined by Katherine.

The young maiden was rejoiced to see her benefactor; and tears started into her eyes, though her lips were wreathed in smiles;—but they were tears of pleasure and gratitude.

"This is kind of you, Mr. Markham," she said, as he shook her hand with friendly warmth.

"I am come to see you upon important business, Katherine," observed Richard. "But first let me inquire after the good people with whom you reside?"

"I am sorry to say," answered Katherine, "that Mrs. Bennet experienced a relapse after her return from London; and she is not able to leave her chamber. She is, however, much better. Her husband is a kind-hearted, good man, and he behaves like a father to me. He is now occupied with the business of his farm, but will be in presently."

"And now, Katherine, listen to the tidings which I have to communicate," said Markham. "Have you received any news from London within the last day or two?"

"No—not a word," returned Katherine, already alarmed lest some new misfortune was about to be announced to her.

"Compose yourself," said Richard; "the news that I have for you are good. But first I must inform you that your late master, Mr. Reginald Tracy, is no more."

"Dead!" exclaimed Katherine.

"He put a period to his own existence," continued Markham; "but not before he made you all the amends in his power for the deep injury which his own guilt entailed upon you."

"Then he confessed his crime, and thus established my innocence beyond all doubt?" said Katherine.

"And he has bequeathed to you his whole fortune, with the exception of a small legacy to Mrs. Bennet, whom his guilt deprived of a sister," added our hero.

"Oh! then he died penitent!" exclaimed Katherine, weeping—for her goodness of heart prompted her to shed tears even for one who had involved her in such a labyrinth of misery as that from which she had only so recently been extricated.

"He died by his own hands," said Richard; "and the world will not generally admit that such an act can be consonant with sincere penitence. That he attempted to make his peace with heaven ere he rushed into the presence of the Almighty, let us hope:—that he did all he could to recompense those whom his crime had injured, is apparent. But this letter will probably tell you more on that head."

Richard handed to Katherine a letter, as he uttered these words.

It was addressed, "*Miss Katherine Wilmot*."

With a trembling hand the young girl opened it; and with tearful eyes she read the following words:—

"To you, Katherine Wilmot, a man about to appear before his Maker appeals for pardon. That man is deeply imbued with a sense of the injury—the almost irreparable injury which his enormous guilt caused you to sustain. But in confessing that this guilt was all and solely his own,—in proclaiming your complete innocence,—and in offering you the means of henceforth enjoying independence, and fulfilling the dictates of your charitable disposition,—that great criminal entertains a hope that you will accord him your forgiveness, and that you will appreciate his anxiety to do you justice in his last moments. My solicitor is already acquainted with my intentions; and he will faithfully execute my wishes. This letter will be forwarded to him, to be delivered to you, through your benefactor—that noble-hearted young man, Mr. Richard Markham. The bulk of my fortune, amounting to eighteen thousand pounds, I have made over to my solicitor in trust for yourself, and under certain conditions which I have devised exclusively for your benefit. The sum of five hundred pounds I have, in addition, bequeathed to Rachel Bennet, with the hope that she will extend *her* pardon also to the man who deprived her of an affectionate sister. This letter is written in a hurried manner, and under circumstances whose appalling nature you may well conceive. May heaven bless you! Refuse not to pray for the soul of

"REGINALD TRACY."

Katherine perused this letter, and then handed it to Richard Markham.

While he read it, the young maiden prayed inwardly but sincerely for the eternal welfare of him whose course had been dazzling like a meteor, but had terminated in a cloud of appalling blackness.

"Those conditions, to which the unhappy man alluded, I can explain to you," said Richard, after a long interval of silence, during which he allowed Katherine to compose her thoughts. "This letter was placed in the hands of Mr. Tracy's solicitor, by the governor of Newgate, the day before yesterday. The lawyer immediately wrote to me, being unacquainted with your address. I saw him yesterday afternoon; and he gave me the letter to convey to you, entrusting me at the same time with the duty of communicating to you this last act of Reginald Tracy. Mr. Wharton acquainted me with the conditions which Mr. Tracy had named. These are that you shall enjoy the interest of the money until you attain the age of twenty-one, when the capital shall be placed at your whole and sole disposal; but

should you marry previous to that period, then the capital may also be transferred to your name. And now I must touch upon a more delicate point—inasmuch as it alludes to myself. Mr. Tracy was pleased to place such confidence in me, as to have stipulated that should you contract any marriage previous to the attainment of the age of twenty-one, without my approval of the individual on whom you may settle your affections, you will then forfeit all right and title to the fortune, which is in that case to be devoted to purposes of charity specified in the instructions given by Mr. Tracy to his solicitor."

"Oh! I should never think of taking any step—however trivial, or however important—without consulting you, as my benefactor—my saviour!" exclaimed Katherine.

"You are a good and a grateful girl, Katherine," said Richard; "and never for a moment did I mistake your excellent heart—never did I lose my confidence in your discretion and virtue."

"No—for when all the world deserted me," said the maiden, "you befriended me!"

"I have yet other matters of business to consult you upon," continued Markham. "Yesterday evening your uncle called upon me. Never—never have I seen such an alteration so speedily wrought in any living being! He said that certain representations which I had made to him at the tavern in the Old Bailey, after you had departed with Mrs. Bennet, had induced him to reflect more seriously upon the course of life which he had been for years pursuing."

"Oh! these news are welcome—welcome indeed!" ejaculated Katherine, clasping her hands together in token of gratitude.

"I communicated to him your good fortune, Katherine," proceeded Markham; "and he wept like a child."

"Poor uncle! His heart was not altogether closed against me!" murmured Katherine.

"I desired him to call upon me to-morrow, and I assured him that in the meantime I would devise some project by which he should be enabled to earn a livelihood whereof he need not be ashamed."

"You are not content with being my benefactor, Mr. Markham: you intend to make my relatives adore your name!" cried Katherine, her heart glowing with gratitude towards our hero.

"I now intend that *you* shall be the means of doing good, Katherine," said Richard, with a smile.

"Oh! tell me how!" exclaimed the amiable girl, joyfully.

"You shall draw upon the first year's interest of your fortune, for a sufficient sum to enable your uncle to retire to some distant town, where, under another name, he may commence a business at whose nature he will not be forced to blush."

"Oh! that proposal is indeed a source of indescribable happiness to me," said Katherine.

"Then I will carry the plan into effect to-morrow," continued Richard. "Your uncle and cousin shall both visit you here, when they leave London."

"Poor John!" said Katherine. "Do you think that his father——"

"Will treat him better in future?" added Markham, seeing that the maiden hesitated. "Yes: I will answer for it! A complete change has taken place in your uncle: he is another man."

"He contemplated your benevolence, and he could not do otherwise than be struck by the example," said Kate.

"I asked him if he desired you to live with him in future; and he replied, '*Not for worlds!*' He then continued to say that dwell where he might, conceal his name how he would, there would be danger of his ancient calling transpiring; and he would not incur the chance of involving you in the disgrace that might ensue. This consideration on his part speaks volumes in favour of that change which has been effected within him."

"The tidings you have brought me concerning my uncle, Mr. Markham," said Katherine, "far outweigh in my estimation the news of my good fortune."

"Your uncle and your cousin will yet be happy—no doubt," observed Richard. "In reference to yourself, what course would you like to adopt? Would you wish me to seek some respectable and worthy family in London, with whom you can take up your abode in entire independence? or——"

"Oh! no—not London!" exclaimed Katherine, recoiling from the name in horror.

"My counsel is that you remain here—in this seclusion,—at least for the present," said Richard. "The tranquillity of this rural dwelling—the charms of the country—the unsophisticated manners of these good people, will restore your mind to its former composure, after all you have passed through."

"This advice I have every inclination to follow," said Katherine; "and even were I otherwise disposed—which I could not be—your counsel would at once decide me."

"Remember, Katherine," resumed Markham, "I do not wish you to pass the best portion of your youth in this retirement. With your fortune and brilliant prospect, such a proceeding were unnatural—absurd. I only feel desirous that for a short time you should remain afar from society—until recent events shall be forgotten, and until your own mind shall become calm and relieved from the excitement which past misfortunes have been so painfully calculated to produce."

"I will remain here until you tell me that it is good for me to go elsewhere," said Katherine.

At this moment an old man, dressed in a rustic garb, but with a good-natured countenance and venerable white hair, entered the room.

This was the farmer himself.

Katherine introduced Richard to him as her benefactor; and the old man shook hands with our hero in a cordial manner, saying at the same time, "By all I have heard Miss Kate tell of you, sir, you must be an honour to any house, whether rich or poor, that you condescend to visit."

Richard thanked the good-natured rustic for the well-meant compliment, and then communicated to him the fact that his wife was entitled to a legacy of five hundred pounds, which would be paid to her order in the course of a few days.

The old man was overjoyed at these tidings, although his countenance partially fell when he heard the source whence the bequest emanated; but Richard convinced him that it would be unwise and absurd to refuse it.

Mr. Bennet hastened up-stairs to communicate the news to his wife.

While he was absent, the farmer's servant-girl entered to spread the table for the afternoon's repast.

On the return of the old man to the room, the dinner was served up; and our hero sat down to table with the farmer and Katherine.

A happy meal was that; and in the pure felicity which Katherine now enjoyed, Richard beheld to a considerable extent the results of his own goodness. How amply did the spectacle of that young creature's happiness reward him for all that he had done in her behalf!

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when our hero took his leave of the old farmer and Miss Wilmot, in order to retrace his steps to Hounslow.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

THE ZINGAREES.

The old farmer had offered to convey Richard to Hounslow in his own spring-cart, or to provide him with a guide to conduct him thither; but our hero felt so confident of being enabled to find his way back to the town, that he declined both offers.

He walked on, across the fields, pondering upon various subjects,—Isabella, his brother, Katherine, Reginald Tracy's crimes, and the frightful suicide of Lady Cecilia Harborough,—and with his mind so intent upon these topics, that some time elapsed ere he perceived that he had fallen into a wrong path.

He looked around; but not an object of which he had taken notice in the morning, when proceeding to the farm, could he now discover.

Thus he had lost the only means which could assist his memory in regaining the road.

As he stood upon a little eminence, gazing around to find some clue towards the proper direction which he should follow, a light blue wreath of smoke, rising from behind a hill at a short distance, met his eyes.

"There must be a dwelling yonder," he said to himself; "I will proceed thither, and ask my way; or, if possible, obtain a guide."

Towards the light blue cloud which curled upwards, Markham directed his steps; but when he reached the brow of the hill, from the opposite side of which the smoke at first met his eye, he perceived, instead of a cottage as he expected, an encampment of gipsies.

A covered van stood near the spot where two men, two women, and a boy were partaking of a meal, the steam of which impregnated the air with a powerful odour of onions.

The caldron, whence the mess was served up in earthenware vessels, was suspended by means of stakes over a cheerful wood-fire.

We need attempt no description of the persons of those who were partaking of the repast: it will be sufficient to inform the reader that they consisted of King Zingary, Queen Aischa, Morcar, Eva, and this latter couple's son.

They were, however, totally unknown to Richard: but the moment he saw they were of the gipsy tribe, he determined to glean from them any thing which they might know and might choose to reveal concerning the Resurrection Man.

He therefore accosted them in a civil manner, and, stating that he had lost his way, inquired which was the nearest path to Hounslow.

"It would be difficult to direct you, young gentleman, by mere explanation," answered Zingary, stroking his long white beard in order to impress Richard with a sense of veneration; "but my grandson here shall show you the way with pleasure."

"That I will, sir," exclaimed the boy, starting from the ground, and preparing to set off.

"But perhaps the gentleman will rest himself, and partake of some refreshment," observed Morcar.

"If you will permit me," said Markham, whose purpose this invitation just suited, "I will warm myself for a short space by your cheerful fire; for the evening is chilly. But you must not consider me rude if I decline your kind hospitality in respect to food."

"The gentleman is cold, Morcar," said Zingary: "produce the rum, and hand a snicker."

The King's son hastened to the van to fetch the bottle of spirits; and Markham could not help observing his fine, tall, well-knit frame, to which his dark Roman countenance gave an additional air of manliness—even of heroism.

Richard partook of the spirits, in order to ingratiate himself with the gipsies; and King Zingary then called for his "broseley."

"You appear to lead a happy life," observed Richard, by way of encouraging a conversation.

"We are our own masters, young gentleman," answered Zingary; "and where there is freedom, there is happiness."

"Is it true that your race is governed by a King?" asked Markham.

"I am the King of the united races of Bohemians and Egyptians," said Zingary, in a stately manner. "This is my beloved Queen, Aischa: that is my son, Morcar; here is my daughter-in-law, Eva; and that lad is my grandson."

Richard started when these names fell upon his ears; for they had been mentioned to him by Skilligalee in the Palace of the Holy Land. He also remembered to have been informed that it was in consequence of something which the Resurrection Man told Aischa, when she was attending to his wound, that the gipsies took him with them when they removed from the Palace to the encampment near the Penitentiary at Pentonville.

"I feel highly honoured by the hospitality which your Majesty has afforded me," said Richard, with a bow—an act of courtesy which greatly pleased King Zingary. "On one occasion I was indebted to some of your subjects for a night's lodging at your establishment in St. Giles's."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the King; and now all the gipsies surveyed Richard with some interest.

"Yes," continued our hero; "and I may as well state to you frankly and candidly under what circumstances I became your guest—for *you* were all inmates of the house at the time I entered it."

"Speak, young gentleman," said Zingary: "we will listen with attention to all you may please to tell us; but we do not seek your confidence of our own accord, as curiosity is forbidden to our race."

"I must inform you," resumed Richard, "that I have sustained great and signal injuries at the hands of a miscreant, whom I one night traced to your dwelling in St. Giles's."

"Call it the Palace, young gentleman," said Zingary, smoking his pipe, and listening with great complacency.

"On that night, the man to whom I allude was desperately wounded——"

"Ah!" ejaculated the gipsies, as it were in a breath.

"And you removed him with you, away from the Palace during the night—or rather very early in the morning."

"Then you, young gentleman," said the King, "were the stranger whom the porter locked in the room to which you were shown, and who escaped from the Palace by some means or other? The matter was duly reported to us by letter."

"It is perfectly true that I liberated myself from the room in which I was imprisoned," said Markham. "But, answer me—I implore you—one question; did that vile man die of the wound which he received?"

"Before I reply to you," observed Zingary, "you will have the goodness to inform me why you left the Palace by stealth on that occasion, and whether you saw or heard any thing remarkable *after* we had taken our departure?"

"I will answer you frankly," returned Markham. "I left my room on that occasion, because I wished to discover whether Anthony Tidkins, to whom I have alluded, was in the house——"

"The Palace," said Zingary.

"I beg your Majesty's pardon—the Palace," continued Richard; "and I thank God that I was more or less instrumental in releasing from a horrible dungeon a poor woman——"

"We know whom you mean," interrupted Zingary, sternly. "Did you see a tall young man——"

"Who called himself by the strange name of Skilligalee?" added Markham, concluding the King's question for him. "I did;—I helped him to release that woman he named Margaret."

"And whom the laws of the Zingarees had condemned to the penalty from which you freed her," said the King. "Was it right, young man, thus to step between the culprit and the decree of justice?"

"I acted in accordance with the dictates of humanity," replied Richard firmly; "and under such circumstances I should act in a similar way again."

"The young gentleman speaks well," said Morcar, who admired the resolution evinced in our hero's tone and manner.

"And he showed a good heart," observed Eva, now speaking for the first time since Richard's arrival, and displaying her brilliant teeth.

"Well—well," exclaimed Zingary: "I will not upbraid the young man more, since even my pretty Eva takes his part. You see," he continued, addressing himself especially to the gipsies, "it is as we thought. Skilligalee deserted us in order to liberate Margaret Flathers. I always believed that such was the case, from the moment we received the account of her escape. But I have one more question to ask our guest. Let him satisfy us how he traced Anthony Tidkins *to* the Palace, and how he learnt that Anthony Tidkins was wounded *in* the Palace."

"On that head I must remain silent," said Richard. "I will not invent a falsehood, and I cannot reveal the truth. Be you, however, well assured that I never betrayed the secrets and mysteries of your establishment in Saint Giles's."

"Our guest is an honourable man," observed Morcar. "We ought to be satisfied with what he says."

"I am satisfied," exclaimed the King. "Aischa, answer you the questions which it is now the young man's turn to put to us."

"I wish to know whether Anthony Tidkins died of the wound which he received?" said Richard.

"It was my lot to attend to his wound," began Aischa. "When he was so far recovered as to be able to speak—which was about half an hour after the blood was stanched—he implored me to have him removed from the Palace. He told me a long and pathetic story of persecutions and sufferings which he had undergone; and he offered to enrich our treasury if we would take him beyond the reach of the person who had wounded him. His anxiety to get away was extreme; and it was in consequence of his representations and promises that I prevailed upon the King to issue orders to those who were to leave London with us, to hurry the departure as much as possible. That accounts for the abrupt manner in which we left at such an hour, and for the removal of the wounded man with us. In answer to your direct question, I must inform you that he did *not* die of the wound which he received."

"He did *not* die!" repeated Markham. "Then he is still alive—and doubtless as active as ever in purposes of evil."

"Is he such a bad man?" asked Aischa.

"He belongs to the atrocious gang called *Burkers*," answered Richard emphatically.

"Merciful heavens!" cried Eva, with a shudder. "To think that we should have harboured such a wretch!"

"And to think that I should have devoted my skill to resuscitate such a demon!" exclaimed Aischa.

"The vengeance of the Zingarees will yet overtake him," said the King calmly.

"Wherever I meet him, there will I punish him with the stoutest cudgel that I can find ready to hand," cried Morcar, with a fierce air.

"Have you then cause to complain against him?" asked Richard.

"The wretch, sir," answered Morcar, "remained nearly a month in our company, until his wound was completely healed by the skill of my mother. We treated him with as much kindness as if he had been our near and dear relative. One morning, when he was totally recovered, he disappeared, carrying away my father's gold with him."

"The ungrateful villain!" ejaculated Richard. "And he was indebted to your kindness for his life?"

"He was," returned Morcar." Fortunately there was but little in the treasury at the time—very little;—nevertheless, it was all we had—and he took our all."

"And you have no trace of him?" said Richard, eagerly.

"Not yet," replied Morcar. "But we have adopted measures to discover him. The King my father has sent a description of his person and the history of his treachery to every chief of our race in the kingdom; and thousands of sharp eyes are on the look-out for him through the length and breadth of the land."

"Heaven be thanked!" exclaimed Markham. "But when you discover him, hand him over to the grasp of justice, and instantly acquaint me with the fact."

"The Zingarees recognise no justice save their own," said the King, in a dignified manner. "But this much I promise you, that the moment we obtain a trace of his whereabouts, we will communicate it to you, and you may act as seemeth good to yourself. We have no sympathy in common with a cowardly murderer."

"None," added Morcar, emphatically.

"I thank you for this promise," said Richard, addressing himself to the King. "Here is my card; and remember that as anxious as I am to bring a miscreant to justice, so ready shall I be to reward those who are instrumental in his capture."

"You may rely upon us, young gentleman," said Zingary. "We will not shield a man who belongs to the miscreant gang of *Burkers*. To-morrow morning I will issue fresh instructions to the various district chiefs, but especially to our friends in London."

"And is it possible that, with no compulsory means to enforce obedience, you can dispose of thousands individuals at will?" exclaimed Markham.

"Listen, young man," said the King, stroking his beard. "When the great Ottoman monarch, the Sultan Selim, invaded Egypt at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and put to death the Mameluke sovereign Toumanbai,—when the chivalry of Egypt was subdued by the overwhelming multitudes of warriors who fought beneath the banner of Selim and his great Vizier Sinan-Pacha,—then did a certain Egyptian chief place himself at the head of a chosen body of Mamelukes, and proclaim death and destruction to the Ottomans. This chief was Zingarai. For some time he successfully resisted the troops of Selim; but at length he was compelled to yield to numbers; and Selim put him to death. His followers were proscribed; and those who did not fall into the hands of the Turkish conquerors escaped into Europe. They settled first in Bohemia, where their wandering mode of life, their simple manners, their happy and contented dispositions, and their handsome persons soon attracted notice. Then was it that the Bohemian maidens were proud to bestow their hands upon the fugitive followers of Zingarai; and many Bohemian men sought admittance into the fraternity. Hence the mixed Egyptian and Bohemian origin of the gipsy race. In a short time various members of this truly patriarchal society migrated to other climes; and in 1534 our ancestors first settled in England. Now the gipsy race may be met with all over the globe: in every part of Asia, in the interior of Africa, and in both the Americas, you may encounter our brethren, as in Europe. The Asiatics call us *Egyptians*, the Germans *Ziguener*, the Italians *Cingani*, the Spaniards *Gitanos*, the French *Bohemians*, the Russians *Saracens*, the Swedes and Danes *Tartars*, and the English *Gipsies*. We most usually denominate ourselves *the united races of Zingarees*. And Time, young gentleman, has left us comparatively unchanged; we preserve the primitive simplicity of our manners; our countenances denote our origin; and, though deeply calumniated—vilely maligned, we endeavour to live in peace and tranquillity to the utmost of our power. We have resisted persecution—we have outlived oppression. All Europe has promulgated laws against us; and no sovereigns aimed more strenuously to extirpate our race in their dominions than Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth of England. But as the world grows more enlightened, the prejudice against us loses its virulence; and we now enjoy our liberties and privileges without molestation, in all civilised states."

"I thank you for this most interesting account of your origin," said Richard.

"Henceforth you will know how to recognise the real truth amongst all the wild, fanciful, and ridiculous tales which you may hear or read concerning our race," proceeded Zingary. "From the two or three hundred souls who fled from Egypt and took refuge in Bohemia, as I have ere now explained to you, has sprung a large family, which has increased with each generation; and at the present moment we estimate our total number, scattered over all parts of the earth, at one million and a half."

"I was not aware that you were so numerous," said Richard, much interested by these details. "Permit me to ask whether the members in every country have one sovereign or chief, as those in England?"

"There is a King of the Zingarees in Spain; another in France; a third in Italy; and a fourth in Bohemia. In the northern provinces of European Turkey, in Hungary, and in Transylvania, there is a prince with the title of a Waiewode: the Zingarees of Northern Europe are governed by a Grand, or Great Lord."

Richard now rose to take leave of the hospitable and entertaining family in whose society he had thus passed an hour; and, as it was growing dark, Morcar himself offered to conduct our hero as far as Hounslow.

This proposal was gladly accepted; and Markham, having taken leave of the King, Aischa, and Eva, set out with Morcar.

In the course of three-quarters of an hour they reached the precincts of the town.

Richard forced a handsome remuneration upon the gipsy, and reminded him of the promise made by his father concerning the Resurrection Man.

"You may rely upon us," said Morcar: "it cannot be very long before you will hear from us, for there are many on the alert to discover the haunt of the villain."

The gipsy then turned to retrace his steps towards the encampment; and Richard proceeded to the inn, where he obtained a conveyance for London.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

THE EXECUTIONER'S HISTORY.

On the following evening Smithers presented himself, according to appointment, at Markham Place.

Richard received him in the library, and treated him altogether with a condescension and a degree of kindness which made a deep impression on the mind of the executioner.

Our hero then proceeded to acquaint him with the good fortune of Katharine, and the arrangement which had been made to supply him with the means to establish him in business.

"But do not imagine that this is all which you are to expect at Katherine's hands," said Richard. "As time progresses, and I find that you are determined not only to persevere in a respectable course of life, but also to make amends, by your altered manner, for the harshness which you have exhibited towards your son on so many occasions,—it will be my pleasing duty to recommend Katherine's trustee, who is disposed to place implicit confidence in me, to grant you such occasional pecuniary succour as may enable you to extend the business, whatever it may be, in which you intend to embark."

"I cannot find words to express my gratitude to you, sir," said Smithers; "and I hope that when you see Kate again, you will ask her forgiveness in my name for all the unkindness I have shown her at different times."

"You shall see her yourself—she wishes you and your son to call upon her," answered Richard; "and Mr. Bennet, to whom I communicated every thing, has sent you both an invitation to pass an entire day at his farm so soon as you can find leisure to avail yourself of the offer."

"Then that shall be to-morrow, sir," exclaimed Smithers; "for now that Katherine has such good prospects, I may as well communicate something to her which she probably will not regret to hear."

And for a few moments Smithers appeared to be absorbed in deep thought.

"And I don't know why I should keep any secret away from you, sir," he continued, suddenly breaking silence; "you have done so much for Kate, and you have produced so great a change in my mind, that I ought to conceal nothing from you. In one word, then, sir—Katherine Wilmot is no more my niece than she is yours."

"Not your niece!" ejaculated Richard.

"No relation whatever in the world to me," replied Smithers. "I never had either brother or sister; neither had my wife: and thus you see, sir, Kate cannot be my niece."

"But she believes herself to be so related to you," said Markham, who was not altogether displeased to learn that the young female for whom he experienced a fraternal interest, was not even a connexion of the Public Executioner.

"The story is somewhat a long one—and to me a melancholy subject," continued Smithers; "but if you will have patience to listen to it, I shall have nerve to relate it."

"Proceed," said Markham. "I feel deeply interested in the topic which now occupies us."

"You will then excuse me, sir, if I begin by telling you something about myself," resumed Smithers; "because it is more or less connected with Kate's early history."

Smithers settled himself in a comfortable position in his chair, and then related the following history:—

"My father was a grocer, in a large way of business, at Southampton. He was a widower; and I was his only son. I was considered to be a steady, exemplary young man; and I can safely say that I attended studiously to my father's business. I never frequented public-houses, but went to church regularly of a Sunday, and was fond of reading good books. Next door to us there lived a corn-dealer of the name of Wilmot;—he also was a widower, and had one child. This was a beautiful girl, about a year or two younger than myself, and whose name was Harriet. The two families had been acquainted for a long, long time; and Harriet and myself were playmates in our infancy. We were therefore very intimate together; and the friendship of childhood ripened into love as we grew up. And, oh! how I did adore that girl! From amidst all the coarse, worldly, and abominable ideas which have of late years crowded in my brain, I have ever singled out that one bright—pure—and holy sentiment as a star that points to a blissful episode in my life. And she loved me in return! Our parents were pleased when they saw our attachment; and it was understood that our marriage should take place on the day that I attained my one-and-twentieth year. It only wanted seven or eight months to that period, when an event occurred which quite changed the prospect of affairs. The local bank failed, and old Wilmot was ruined."

Smithers paused for a moment, heaved a deep sigh, and then continued thus:—

"Wilmot immediately came to my father and addressed him in these words: '*The failure of the bank will throw me into the Gazette, if I cannot raise twelve or fifteen hundred pounds within a week to sustain my credit. That difficulty being overcome, I have no doubt of retrieving myself altogether.*' My father expressed his great delight at hearing this latter announcement, but instinctively buttoned up his breeches-pockets. Wilmot proceeded to state that he could raise the sum he required if my father would guarantee its repayment. My father was a money-making, close man; and this proposal astounded him. He refused it point blank: Wilmot begged and implored him to save him from ruin;—but all in vain. In the course of ten days the name of Joseph Wilmot, corn-dealer, figured in the list of

Bankrupts."

Again Smithers paused for a few moments.

"I must tell you, sir," he continued, "that I did all I could to persuade my father to help Wilmot in this business; but my prayers and entreaties had been poured forth entirely without effect. I, however, took an opportunity of seeing Harriet, and assuring her that my affection was based upon no selfish motive, but that her father's misfortunes endeared *her* more than ever to me. My father viewed matters in quite a different light, and spoke to me openly of the impossibility of my marrying a girl without a penny. I remonstrated with him on the cruelty, injustice, and dishonour of such conduct; but he cut me very short by observing that '*his money was his own—he had made it by his industry—he could leave it to whom he chose—and that if I insisted upon marrying Harriet Wilmot I need not darken his threshold afterwards*.' I replied that I was resolved to consult my own inclinations, and also to do honour to my vows and promises towards Harriet."

"You acted in a generous manner," observed Markham; "although you opposed the wishes of your own father."

"I had no secrets from Harriet," said Smithers; "and I assured her that if she would espouse a man who had nothing but his honest name and exertions to depend upon, I was ready to make her mine. She answered me, with tears in her eyes, that she could never consent to be the cause of marring all my prospects in life, and that, much as she loved me, she would release me from my vows. I wept in concert with her;—for I was not *then* hard-hearted, sir,—nor had my countenance become impressed with that brutal severity which I know—I feel, it has long, long worn."

"As the countenance is more or less the index of the soul," said Markham, "so will yours resume all its former serenity of expression."

"Well—well, sir: let me hope so! I do not wish to die with the word 'EXECUTIONER' traced upon my features. But I will continue my story. Harriet seemed firm in her generous purpose not to be the cause of my ruin: I however implored her to reflect upon the misery into which her decision would plunge me. I then left her. The next morning I heard that Wilmot and his daughter had departed from their house, and had gone—no one knew whither. Malignant people said that the old man was afraid to face his creditors in the local Bankruptcy-court: I thought otherwise. I felt persuaded that Harriet had prevailed upon her father, by some means or another, to leave;—and I now considered her lost to me for ever. My sorrow was great; but I redoubled my attention to business in order to distract my mind from contemplating the misfortune that had befallen me. Weeks and months passed away; and the wound in my heart was closed, but it was still painful. One day, during a temporary indisposition which confined my father to his room, I was turning over some papers in his desk, seeking for an invoice which I required, when I perceived a letter addressed to my father and signed *Joseph Wilmot*. The date especially attracted my attention, because I remembered that this letter must have been written on the very day that I had the last interview with Harriet. I hesitated not a moment to read it; and its contents revealed to me the cause of that precipitate departure which has so distressed me. Indeed, the letter was in answer to one which Wilmot acknowledged to have just before received from my father. It appears that my father had written to offer old Wilmot two hundred pounds if he would quit the town, with his daughters, and that Wilmot should give a note of hand for this amount, which security my father engaged himself not to enforce so long as Wilmot remained away and left me in ignorance of his future place of residence. Wilmot consented to this arrangement: he was a ruined man without a shilling; and he gladly availed himself of the means of embarking in business elsewhere. This stratagem on the part of my father I discovered through Wilmot's letter. I said nothing about the letter to my father: I concluded that he had merely acted under the impression that he was consulting my welfare; and moreover the injury appeared to be irrevocable. Well, sir—six months passed away after the departure of Wilmot and his daughter, and my father, who was usually so cautious and prudent, was induced to embark some money in the purchase of smuggled goods. The excise officers discovered the transaction; and a fine was imposed which swept away every farthing of the sum which my father had been accumulating by the industry and toil of years. It broke his heart: he died, and left me a ruined business, instead of a decent competence. I struggled on for a year, just keeping my head above water, but dreadfully crippled for want of capital. At length I learnt, from a friend, that I had found favour in the sight of a wealthy neighbour's daughter, who was some six or seven years older than myself. I made the best of this circumstance; and, to save myself from total ruin, in a short time married the female alluded to. The fruit of this union was a son—the poor deformed creature whom you have seen. He was not, however, so afflicted at his birth: how he come to be so, I will presently tell you."

Smithers uttered these words in a tone of deep feeling.

"I had married for money, sir," he continued; "and I married unhappily. My wife was of a temper befitting a demon. Then she was addicted to drink; and in her cups she was outrageous. My home grew miserable: and I began to neglect the business; and, to avoid my wife in her drunken humours, I went to the public-house. Then also my temper was so sorely tried that it gave way under the accumulated weight of domestic wretchedness. I grew harsh and uncourteous to my customers; I retaliated against my wife in her own fashion of ill-treatment—by means of stormy words and heavy blows; and, when I was weary of all that, I rushed to the public-house, where I endeavoured to drown my cares in strong drink. In a word, three years after my marriage, I was compelled to abandon my business in Southampton; and, with about a hundred pounds in my pocket—the wrecks of all that my wife had brought me—I removed, with her and the child, to London. On our arrival, I took a small tobacconist's shop in High Street, St. Giles's, and exerted myself to the utmost to obtain an honest livelihood; and for some time my wife seemed inclined to second me. The ruin which our disputes and evil courses had entailed upon us appeared to have made a deep impression upon her mind. She carefully avoided strong drink, and declared her resolution never to take any thing stronger than beer. But one day she was prevailed upon by a female friend to accept a little spirits; and a relapse immediately followed. She came home intoxicated; we had fresh quarrels—renewed disputes; and I myself went in an evil hour to the nearest public-house. From that moment we pursued pretty well the same courses that had ruined us in Southampton; and this conduct led to similar results. I was forced to give up the snuff and cigar shop; and we moved into that identical house in St. Giles's which I now inhabit, and where you first saw me."

Smithers passed his hand over his forehead, as if to alleviate the acuteness of painful recollections.

He then pursued his narrative in the following manner:—

"Our sole hope and only resource now consisted in being able to let the greater portion of the house; and as we had managed to save our little furniture from the wreck of the business in High Street, we had still a decent prospect before us. My wife again promised

reformation; and, as I never took to drink except when driven to it by her conduct, I was by no means unwilling to second her in her resolutions of economy. We soon let our lodgings, and I did a little business by selling groceries on commission for a wholesale house to which I managed to obtain an introduction. In this way we got on pretty well for a time; and now I come to the most important part of my story."

Richard drew his chair, by a mechanical movement as it were, closer to that of the executioner, and prepared to listen with redoubled attention, if possible.

"It was twelve years ago last January," continued Smithers, "that I returned home one evening, after a hard day's application to business, when the first thing my wife told me was that our back room on the second floor, which had long been to let, was at length taken. She added that our new lodger was a female of about eight-and-twenty or thirty, and had a little girl of four years old. My wife also stated that she was afraid the poor creature was in a dreadful state of health, and was not very comfortably off, as all her own and her child's things were contained in a small bundle which she brought with her. When my wife asked for a reference she evaded the inquiry by paying a week's rent in advance; and this pittance was taken from a purse containing a very slender stock of money. I inquired if the new lodger had given any name; but my wife replied that she had not asked her for it. The next day I was taken unwell, and was compelled to stay at home; but my wife went out with our boy, who was then six years old, to pass a few hours with a friend. I was sitting in the little parlour all alone, and thinking of the past, when I heard a gentle knock at the door. I opened it, and saw a nice little girl, about four years old, standing in the passage. She asked me to let my wife step up to her mother, who was very ill. I took the child in my arms, and went up to my new lodger's room, to say that my wife was out, but that if I could render any assistance I should be most happy to do so. I knocked at the door; it opened—but the female who appeared uttered a piercing scream, and fell back senseless on the floor. She had recognised me; and I, too, had recognised her,—recognised her in spite of her altered appearance and her faded beauty. It was Harriet Wilmot!"

The executioner paused, averted his head for a moment, and wiped away a tear.

He then continued his narrative.

"I instantly did my best to recover her. I fetched vinegar, and bathed her forehead; and in a few minutes she opened her eyes. I laid her upon the bed; and she motioned me to give her the child. This I did; and she pressed it rapturously to her bosom. I stood gazing upon the affecting scene, with tears in my eyes; but I said nothing. She extended her hand towards me, and murmured in a faint tone, '*Is it then in your home that I am come to breathe my last?*'—I implored her to compose herself, and assured her that she should meet with every attention. She glanced tenderly upon her child, and large tears rolled down her faded cheeks. Oh! she was so altered that it was no wonder if my wife, who had known her years before at Southampton, had not recognized her! I asked her if I should procure medical attendance. She could not answer me: a dreadful faintness seemed to come over her. I told her that I would return immediately; and I hurried for a doctor. The medical man came with me; and we found the poor creature speechless, but still sensible. He shook his head with significant hopelessness at me: I understood him—she was dying! The surgeon hastened back home, and speedily returned with various drugs and medicines. But all was of no avail; the poor creature was on the threshold of the grave. The doctor told me what to do, and then took his leave, promising to return in a couple of hours. I seated myself by the side of the bed, and anxiously watched the patient, who had gradually sunk into a deep slumber. I also amused myself with, and pacified the little girl. In this way hour after hour passed; and at length my wife came home. But in what a state did she return? Her friend—the same, as I afterwards learnt, who had before seduced her away from the paths of temperance—had accomplished this feat a second time. My wife was in a disgusting state of intoxication. Not finding me in our sitting-room, she came up stairs to search for me. The moment I heard her, I stepped out of Harriet's chamber to meet her, and request her assistance in behalf of the dying woman—for as yet I knew not the state in which my wife had returned. But when she saw me come from that room, she rushed upon me like a tigress: her jealousy was suddenly excited to an ungovernable fit of passion. She tore my face with her nails, and dragged out my hair by handfuls. I implored her to hear me; she raved—she stormed—she declared she would have the life of the woman in whose chamber I had been. Then my own anger was fearfully roused: I caught her by the throat, and I do believe that I should have strangled her, had not John—our boy—at that instant caught hold of my legs and begun to kick and pinch me with all his might—for he always took his mother's part. I was now rendered as infuriate as a goaded bull: I hurled my wife away from me, and with one savage blow—may God forgive me!—I knocked the child backwards down the stairs."

Here Smithers covered his face with his hands, and the tears trickled through his fingers.

"The lodgers rushed up to the floor where this horrible scene took place," he continued, after a long pause; "and I, in that moment of my excited and bewildered senses, justified my conduct by declaring that the woman who lay dying in the next room was my own sister. My wife was insensible, and could not contradict me; and thus the tale was believed. The lodgers removed my wife and my child to their bed-room; and the same surgeon who had attended upon Harriet was instantly sent for. Alas! his skill was all in vain. My wife never rallied again, save to give way to dreadful hysterical fits: in a few weeks, during which she lingered in that manner, she breathed her last;—and my son became deformed, as you have seen him!"

Again the miserable man paused, and gave way to his emotions.

Several minutes elapsed ere he continued his narrative; and Markham also remained wrapped in a profound silence.

At length the executioner proceeded thus:—

"The condition into which my rage had thrown my wife and child on that memorable day, did not prevent me from watching by the death-bed of Harriet Wilmot. I even attended to her little girl as if she had been my own. I felt my heart yearn towards that poor woman whom I had once known so beautiful and had loved so tenderly. She slept on,—slept throughout that long and weary night; and there I remained, watching by her bed-side. In the morning the doctor came: Harriet awoke, and smiled when she saw me. Then she made signs that she wished to write. Her powers of speech had deserted her. The medical man addressed her in a kind tone, and said that if she had any thing to communicate she had better do so, as she was very, very ill. She thanked him with a glance for his candour, and for the delicate manner in which he bade her prepare for death. I placed writing materials before her; and she wrote a few lines, which were, however, so blotted by tears——"

"I have already been made acquainted with the contents of the only legible portion which still remains of that letter," interrupted our

hero.

"And you are, then, aware, sir, that allusion is made to a certain Mr. Markham?" said Smithers.

"Perfectly," replied Richard. "The late Mr. Reginald Tracy communicated that fact to me."

"The poor creature breathed her last ere she could terminate that letter," continued the executioner. "She suddenly dropped her pen, turned one agonising glance upon her child, fell back, and expired. I buried her as decently as my means would permit; and I determined to take care of Katherine. I repeated my original statement that the little girl was my niece; and, in order not to throw shame upon the memory of her mother, I represented her as having been a widow when she came to my house. I have before said that my wife never sufficiently recovered her senses to contradict this story; and my son John was too young at the time to be aware that it was a fiction."

"And did you never institute any inquiries into the meaning of that allusion to Mr. Markham in the letter?" inquired Richard.

"I obtained various *Directories* and *Guides*, and found that there were thirty or forty persons of that name residing in London, and whose addresses were given in those books. I called upon several; but none knew any thing of the business which took me to them. Then I abandoned the task as hopeless: for I reflected that there might be others of the same name who were *not* to be found in the *Directories*; and I was not even assured that the Mr. Markham alluded to dwelt in London."

"Thus you never obtained any farther clue to Katharine's parentage?"

"Never," answered Smithers. "The little child herself, when questioned by me soon after her mother's death, did not recollect having ever seen any one whom she called *Papa*; and from all I could learn from the orphan girl, her mother must have been living for some time in London before she came to my house. But where this residence was, I could not ascertain. One thing, however, I discovered, which seemed to proclaim the illegitimacy of Katherine's birth: she said that her mamma's name was Wilmot. That was her maiden name!"

"Poor Katherine!" said Richard.

"And now I have told you all, sir, that concerns her early history—at least all that I know. Some time after my wife's death, evil reports got abroad concerning me. It was said that my brutality had produced her death; and my son was a living reproach against me. No one would employ me—no one would lodge in my house. It was then that I accepted the office of Public Executioner,—to save myself from starving, and to give bread to my own son and the little orphan girl. By degrees my temper, already ruined by the conduct of my wife, became confirmed in its ferocity and cruel callousness. I grew brutal—savage—inhuman. I felt the degradation of my calling—I saw that I was shunned by all the world. I was looked upon as a monster who had murdered his wife and made his son deformed;—but the provocation and the circumstances were never mentioned to palliate the enormity of that double crime. At length I heard all the reproaches, and did not take the trouble to state facts in order to justify myself. But all this was enough to brutalize me,—especially when added to the duties of my new calling. In time I even began to ill-treat that poor orphan girl whom I had at first looked upon as my own child. But, bad as I have been towards her when I thought that she encouraged my son to thwart my will,—shamefully as I used her at times, I never would have abandoned her;—for when she thought that I turned her out of my house the day she went to Mr. Tracy's, it was only my brutal way of letting her go to a place which I knew would be creditable to her, and which, by what she told me, I saw she wished to take. Then I thought within myself, '*Yes, even she will now gladly leave me*;'—and, in order to conceal what I felt at that idea—and I *did* feel deeply—I took refuge in my own brutalized temper. But I sent her round all her things in the evening—not forgetting her work-box, which I knew contained the fragment that her poor mother wrote upon her death-bed. Moreover, when she came to see me, I received her with no constrained kindness; for I always liked her—even when I ill-used her;—and I was sorry to have parted with her."

"The world, my good friend, has not altogether read your heart correctly," said Richard.

"Thank you, sir,—thank you for that assurance," exclaimed Smithers; "and when you *good friend* me, sir—you, who are so noble-hearted, so generous, so truly grand in your humanity—I could burst into tears."

"If my example please you," said Markham, kindly, "you will make me happy by profiting by it. Oh! you shall yet live long to convince the world that the human heart never can be so deadened to all good feelings as to be beyond redemption!"

"I do not think I shall live to an old age, sir," observed Smithers, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper: "I have already had one warning!"

"One warning!" repeated Richard, surprised at this strange announcement.

"Yes, Mr. Markham. One night I was lying in bed;—the candle was flickering in the fire-place;—I happened to turn my eyes towards that puppet which hangs in the loft where I used to sleep until within the last few days,—and I saw *another face* looking over its shoulder at me."

"Another face!" ejaculated Markham: "what do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, *that Harriet Wilmot's countenance appeared above the shoulder of the figure*!" answered Smithers, with a shudder.

"My good friend," said Markham, "your imagination was disordered at the moment. The days of spectres and apparitions are gone by. The Almighty does not address himself to man by means of terrors which nurses use to frighten children. I will show you, by a simple process of reasoning, that it is *impossible* to *see* a ghost—even if such a thing should exist. You do not see with the eye precisely in the way in which you may imagine. Strictly speaking, the eye does not see at all. The effect is this: substantial objects are reflected in the retina of the eye as in a mirror; and the impression is conveyed from the retina into the brain, where it assumes a proper and suitable shape in the imagination or conception. But in order that objects should so strike the retina of the eye, they *must* be *substantial*: they must have length, breadth, and thickness;—they must displace so much air as to leave the void filled up by their own forms. Now, even if the spirits of the departed be allowed to revisit this earth, *no mortal eye can see them*, because they are *unsubstantial*, and they cannot be reflected in the retina of the eye. I have only entered into this explanation to convince you that an unsettled mind or a disordered imagination—arising from either moral or physical causes—can *alone* conjure up phantoms."

"Well, sir, we will not talk any more upon *this* subject, if you please," said Smithers. "I understand what you say; and I thank you for your goodness in explaining the matter to me. I now wish to ask you whether you would rather that I should communicate all I have told you to Katherine; or whether you will yourself?"

"My good friend," said Richard, "you acted so noble a part towards her mother that this duty will better become you. Katherine will thank you for your goodness towards her parent—especially as that goodness arose from no interested motives; and you will rejoice in the grateful outpourings of the heart of that orphan whom you reared, and to whom you gave a home. To-morrow you and your son can visit her: the day after to-morrow, in the evening, I wish both of you—yourself and your son—to call upon me."

Smithers promised to obey our hero's desires in all respects, and then took his leave,—wondering how any human being could possess such influence over the heart, to humanize and reclaim it, as Richard Markham.

CHAPTER CLXV.

THE TRACE.

In order to avoid unnecessary details we shall now concisely state that Smithers and his son paid the visit agreed upon to Katherine Wilmot.

Smithers communicated to her, when they were alone together for half an hour, so much of his own history as involved all the particulars with which he was acquainted concerning her parentage.

The grateful girl expressed a deeper sense of obligation than she had ever yet experienced towards the individual who had supported her for so many years, although she had no claims of relationship upon him.

After one of the most agreeable days which the *late* executioner and his son had ever passed in their lives, they took leave of Katherine and the worthy people of the farm, and returned to London.

Poor Katherine Wilmot! she had that day learnt more concerning her parentage than she had ever known before; but she would have been happier, perhaps, had her original impressions on that subject never been disturbed!

Still Markham had conceived it to be a duty which was owing to the young maiden, to permit Smithers thus to reveal to her those circumstances which seemed to fix her with the stigma of illegitimacy.

That night her pillow was moistened with abundant tears, as she lay and reflected upon her lamented mother!

On the appointed evening Smithers and his son called at Markham Place.

They were conducted by Whittingham to a parlour, where the table was spread with a handsome collation, places being arranged for three persons.

"Sit down, my friends," said Richard Markham, who received them with a warmth far more encouraging than mere courtesy: "after supper we will transact the business for which I have requested your presence here."

"What, sir!" ejaculated Smithers; "can you condescend to have *me* at your table?"

"Not as you lately were," answered Richard: "I receive you as a regenerated man."

John Smithers (for we shall suppress his nickname of *Gibbet*, as his father had already done so) cast a glance of profound gratitude upon our hero, in acknowledgment of a behaviour that could not do otherwise than confirm his father in his anxious endeavours to adopt a course of mental improvement.

Smithers' confidence increased, when he had imbibed a glass or two of generous wine; and he related to Markham the particulars of his interview with Katharine.

Then was it for the first time the hump-back learnt that Katherine was not his cousin.

He said nothing; but, as he drank in all that fell from his father's lips, two large tears rolled down his cheeks.

When the supper was over, Richard addressed Smithers in the following manner:—

"The narrative which you revealed to me the day before yesterday materially alters the position in which Katherine stands with respect to you. When I first proposed that she should advance you at once a small sum, I believed her to be your near relative. But as she is in no way akin to you, it results that you have for years supported one who had no claim upon you. Accident has made her rich; and it is but fair and just that you should be adequately rewarded for your generosity. I have communicated with Katherine's trustee upon the subject; and we have agreed to furnish you with five hundred pounds at once, to enable you to embark in a respectable and substantial line of business. This pocket-book," proceeded Markham, "contains that sum. Take it, my worthy friend—it is your due; and, should you succeed in the career that you are now about to enter upon, you can with satisfaction trace your prosperity to the humanity which you showed to a friendless orphan."

After some hesitation, Smithers received the pocket-book. He and his son then took leave of Richard Markham, with the most sincerely felt expressions of gratitude, and with a promise from the father to write to him soon to state where and how they had settled themselves.

Scarcely had those two individuals, now both made happy, taken their departure, when Whittingham informed his master that a person with a dark complexion, and who gave the name of Morcar, requested to speak to him.

Richard ordered the gipsy to be instantly admitted to his presence.

Morcar was accordingly shown into the parlour.

The moment he found himself alone with Markham, he said in a low and somewhat solemn tone, "We have traced him!"

"I expected as much, the moment your name was announced," said Richard. "Where is he?"

"He has taken refuge in a barge on the river," answered Morcar. "That is all I have been able to learn; but I am confident he is there."

"And do you know where the barge is moored?" asked Richard.

"Close by Rotherhithe. But there are several other barges off the same wharf; and I cannot single out which he is in. I, however, know that he *is* concealed in one of them."

"It is important to discover which," said Markham. "Were we to make our appearance in that vicinity with a body of police, he might

escape us altogether."

"And therefore it will be better to take him by means of stratagem," observed Morcar.

"What can have induced him to seek refuge there?" said Richard, in a musing tone. "Some new crime, perhaps?"

"Or else some fresh scheme of villany," returned Morcar. "But perhaps you are not aware, sir, that river piracy still flourishes to some extent?"

"I certainly imagined that with our system of Thames police, that species of depredation was completely ruined."

"No such thing, sir!" exclaimed Morcar. "The man who gave me the information about Tidkins, told me more than ever I knew before on that subject."

"You may as well acquaint me with those particulars, Morcar," said our hero. "They may assist me in devising some scheme to entrap the Resurrection Man, and enable justice to receive its due."

"River piracy, sir," continued Morcar, "is carried on by a set of vagabonds who for the most part have been sailors, or in some shape or another engaged amongst barges and lighters. They are all leagued with the marine-store dealers and people that keep old iron and junk shops on both sides of the river below London bridge. The river pirates usually possess a barge or lighter, which every now and then makes a trip up and down the river between Greenwich and Putney, but with no other freight than bales of sawdust, old rags, or even dung. This they do to keep up appearances and avoid suspicion. But all day long they maintain a good look out in the pool, and take notice of particular ships which they think can be easily robbed. For instance, sometimes a steamer is left with only a boy on board to take care of it; or else a lighter has only one man to look after it. Then these pirates go on board in the night, master the boy or the man, and plunder the steamer or lighter of any thing worth carrying away."

"I begin to understand how these villains may reap a profitable harvest in this manner," observed Richard.

"Oh! you don't know half their pranks, yet," said Morcar. "Sometimes two or three of the gang will go and hire themselves as bargemen or lightermen; and then they easily arrange with their pals how to plunder the vessels thus entrusted to them, while the owners never suspect that their own men are at the bottom of the robbery. When times are bad, and these fellows are driven to desperation, they think nothing of cutting away great pieces of ships' cables, or even weighing the anchors of small craft; and with these heavy materials they will get clean off in their boats to their own barge; and next morning they convey them as coolly as possible to the marine store dealers. Sometimes they cut lighters adrift, when the tide is running out, and follow them in their boat; then, under pretence of helping those on board, they cut away bales of cotton or any other goods that are easily thrown into their boats in dark nights."

"The villain Tidkins has no doubt transferred his operations from the land to the river," observed Markham; "seeing that, by means of a little address and a great deal of courage, such depredations can be effected."

"These river-pirates are of several kinds," continued Morcar. "There's the *light-horsemen*, or men who board the unprotected vessels in the night. Then there's the *heavy-horsemen*, who wear an under-dress, called a *jemmy*, which is covered by their smocks: these fellows obtain employment as *lumpers*,—that is, to load or discharge ships in the pool, during which they contrive to stow away every thing portable in the large pouches or pockets of their under-dress. Afterwards, the *heavy-horsemen*, give information to their pals, and put them on the scent which ships to rob at night. Next there's the *mud-larks*, who get on board stranded lighters at low water, and carry off what they can when the vessels are unprotected, or ask some question to lull suspicion if they find any one on board. This mode of river-piracy is very profitable, because numbers of lighters and barges are often left for hours alongside the banks, without a soul on board. *Game lightermen* are those pirates that are in league with dishonest mates and sailors belonging to vessels that come up the river to discharge: and they receive at night from their pals on board, through the port-holes or over the quarter, any thing that's easy to move away in this manner. Last of all there's the *scuffle-hunters*, who put on smocks, and obtain work as porters on the wharfs where a ship is loading: then, if they can't contrive to steal any thing by those means, they can at all events carry some useful information to their pals—so that the ship is generally robbed in one way or another."

"With so well organised a fraternity and such means of operation," said Markham, who had listened with interest and astonishment to these details, "Tidkins is capable of amassing a fortune in a very short time. But we must stop him in his criminal career. At the same time, let us do nothing without mature consideration. Are you willing to assist? Your reward shall be liberal."

"The Zingaree may not of his own accord deliver up any one to justice," answered Morcar; "but he is allowed to serve an employer who pays him. Moreover," he added, as if ashamed of that sophistical compromise with the rules of his fraternity, "I shall gladly help to punish the miscreant who treated us with such base ingratitude."

"Then you consent to serve me?" said Richard.

"I do, sir," was the reply.

"To-morrow, at mid-day, I will meet you somewhere in the eastern part of London," continued Richard. "I have already a project in my head; but I must consider it more maturely."

"Where shall we meet, sir?" asked Morcar.

Markham reflected for a moment, and then said, "On the Tower wharf."

"I will be punctual, sir," answered the gipsy; and he took his departure.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE THAMES PIRATES.

Moored at a wharf at the Rotherhithe side of the river Thames, nearly opposite Execution Dock, were several lighters and barges, all lying together.

Along the upper part of the buildings belonging to the wharf were painted, in rude but gigantic letters, the following words:—"MOSSOP'S WHARF, WHERE GOODS ARE RECEIVED, HOUSED, OR CARTED."

Mr. Mossop, the sole proprietor of this wharf, was by no means particular what goods he thus received, whence they came when he housed them, or whither they were going when he carted them. He asked no questions, so long as his commission and charges were duly paid.

For the convenience of his numerous customers, he kept his office constantly open; and either himself or his son Ben Mossop was in constant attendance.

Indeed, Mr. Mossop did more business by night than by day. He was, however, a close man: he never put impertinent questions to any one who called to patronise him; and thus his way of doing business was vastly convenient for all those who used his wharf or his store-houses.

If a lighter arrived at that wharf, ostensibly with a freight of hay, but in reality with divers bales of cotton or other goods concealed beneath the dried grass, Mr. Mossop did not seem to think that there was any thing at all strange in this; and if next day he happened to hear that a barge at a neighbouring wharf had been robbed of divers bales of cotton during the night, Mr. Mossop was too much of a gentleman to question the integrity of *his* customers. Even if every wall in Rotherhithe, Horselydown, and Bermondsey, were covered with placards announcing the loss of the bales, describing them to a nicety, and offering a reward for their recovery, Mr. Mossop never stopped to read one of them.

On two or three occasions, when a police-officer called at his wharf and politely requested him just to honour the nearest magistrate with a visit, and enter into an explanation how certain goods happened to be found in his store-rooms, the said goods having been lost by other parties in an unpleasant manner, Mr. Mossop would put an enormous pair of spectacles upon his nose and a good face on the matter at the same time; and it invariably happened that he managed to convince the bench of *his* integrity, but without in any way compromising those persons who might be in custody on account of the said goods.

His son Ben was equally prudent and reserved; and thus father and son were mighty favourites with all the river pirates who patronised them.

Moreover, Mossop's Wharf was most conveniently situate: the front looked, of course, upon the river; the back opened into Rotherhithe Wall; and Mossop's carts were noted for the celerity with which they would convey goods away from the warehouse to the receivers in Blue Anchor Road or in the neighbourhood of Halfpenny Hatch.

The father and son were also famous for the regularity and dispatch with which they executed business on pressing occasions. Thus, while Mossop senior would superintend the landing of goods upon the wharf, Mossop junior was stationed at the back gate, where it was his pleasing duty to see the bales speedily carted as they were brought *through* the warehouses by the lumpers employed.

Mossop senior was also reputed to be a humane man; for if any of his best customers got into trouble (which was sometimes the case) and were short of funds, a five pound note in a blank envelop would reach them in prison to enable them to employ counsel in their defence; and this sum invariably appeared as "*money lent*" in Mossop's next account against them when they were free once more, and enabled to land another cargo at the wharf.

But to continue our narrative.

It was the evening after the one on which Morcar had called at Markham Place; consequently the evening of that day when the gipsy was to meet our hero on the Tower wharf.

Over the particulars of that meeting we, however, pass; as the plans then arranged will presently develop themselves.

It was now about nine o'clock.

The evening was beautiful and moonlight.

Myriads of stars were rocked to and fro in the cradle of the river's restless tide; and the profiles of the banks were marked with thousands of lights, glancing through dense forests of masts belonging to the shipping that were crowded along those shores.

At intervals those subdued murmurs which denoted that the river was as busy and active as the great city itself, were absorbed in the noise of some steamer ploughing its rapid way amidst the mazes of vessels that to the inexperienced eye appear to be inextricably entangled together.

Then would arise those shouts of warning to the smaller craft,—those rapid commands to regulate the movements of the engines,—and those orders to the helmsman, which, emanating from the lips of the captain posted on the paddle-box, proclaim the progress of the steamer winding its way up the pool.

A wondrous and deeply interesting spectacle, though only dimly seen, is that portion of the Thames on a moonlight night.

Then indeed is it that even the most callous mind is compelled to contemplate with mingled astonishment and awe, one of the grandest features of the sovereign city and world's emporium of trade.

The gurgling water, and the countless masts,—the vibration of mighty engines on the stream, and the myriads of twinkling lights along the shores,—the cheering voices of the mariners, and the dense volumes of smoke which moving colossal chimneys vomit forth,—the metallic grating of windlasses, and the glittering of the spray beneath revolving wheels,—the flapping of heavy canvass, and the glare from the oval windows of steamers,—the cries of the rowers in endangered boats, and the flood of silver lustre which the moon pours upon the river's bosom,—these form a wondrous complication of elements of interest for both ear and eye.

The barge that was farthest off from Mossop's wharf, of all the lighters moored there, and that could consequently get into the stream quicker than any other near it, was one to which we must particularly direct our readers' attention.

It was called the *Fairy*, and was large, decently painted, and kept in pretty good order. It had a spacious cabin abaft, and a smaller one, termed a cuddy, forward. The mast, with its large brown sail that seemed as if it had been tanned, was so fitted as to be lowered at pleasure, to enable the vessel to pass under the bridges at high water. The rudder was of enormous size; and the tiller was as thick and long as the pole of a carriage.

The waist, or uncovered part of the lighter in the middle, was now empty; but it was very capacious, and adapted to contain an immense quantity of goods.

On the evening in question two men were sitting on the windlass, smoking their pipes, and pretty frequently applying themselves to a can of grog which stood upon the deck near them.

One was the Resurrection Man: the other was John Wicks, better known as the Buffer.

"Well, Jack," said the Resurrection Man, "this is precious slow work. For the last four days we've done nothing."

"What did I tell you, when you fust come to me and proposed to take to the river?" exclaimed the Buffer. "Didn't I say that one ought to be bred to the business to do much good in it?"

"Oh! that be hanged!" cried the Resurrection Man. "I can soon learn any business that's to make money. Besides, the land was too hot to hold me till certain little things had blown over. There's that fellow Markham who ran against me one night;—then there's Crankey Jem. The first saw that I was still hanging about London; and the other may have learnt, by some means or another, that I didn't die of the wound he gave me. Then again, there's those gipsies whose money I walked off with one fine day. All these things made the land unsafe; and so I thought it best to embark the gold that I took from old King Zingary, in this barge, which was to be had so cheap."

"I suppose we shall do better in time, Tony," said the Buffer, "when we get more acquainted with them light and heavy horsemen that we must employ, and them lumpers that gives the information."

"Of course. When you set up in a new business, you can't expect to succeed directly," returned the Resurrection Man. "The regular pirates won't have confidence in us at first; and as yet we don't know a single captain or mate that will trust us with the job of robbing their ship. How do they know but what we should peach, if we got into trouble, and tell their employers that it was all done with their connivance? But old Mossop begins to grow more friendly; and that, I'm sure, is a good sign that *he* thinks that we shall succeed."

"So it is," said the Buffer. "Besides, this barge is so good a blind, that business *must* come. What should you say to getting into the skiff presently, and taking a look out amongst the shipping for ourselves?"

"Well, I've no objection," answered Tidkins. "But we've already a connexion with several lumpers; and they have put us on to all that we *have* done up to the present time. P'rhaps we should do better to wait for the information that they can give us. They begin to see that we pay well; and so they'll only be too anxious to put things in our way."

"True enough," observed the Buffer.

At this period of the conversation, a woman's head appeared above the cabin hatchway.

"Supper's ready," she said.

"We're coming, Moll," returned the Buffer.

The two villains then descended into the cabin, where a well-spread table awaited them.

Scarcely had the trio concluded their repast, when a man, who had come from the wharf and had walked across the barges until he reached the *Fairy*, called to Tidkins, by the appellation of "Captain," from the hatchway.

"Come below," answered the Resurrection Man.

The person thus invited was the foreman in Mr. Mossop's employment. He was short, stout, and strongly built, with a tremendous rubicundity of visage, small piercing grey eyes, no whiskers, and a very apoplectic neck. His age might be about fifty; and he was dressed in a light garb befitting the nature of his calling.

"Well, Mr. Swot," said the Resurrection Man, as the little fat foreman descended the ladder; "this is really an unusual thing to have the honour of your company. Sit down; and you, Moll, put the lush and the pipes upon the table."

"That's right, Captain," returned Mr. Swot, as he seated himself. "I came on purpose to drink a social glass and have a chat with you. In fact, my present visit is not altogether without an object."

"I'm glad of that," said the Resurrection Man. "We want something to do. It was only just now that I and my mate were complaining how slack business was."

"You know that Mossop never has any thing to do with any schemes in which chaps of your business choose to embark," continued Mr. Swot: "he receives your goods, and either keeps them in warehouse or carts them for you as you like; but he never knows where they come from."

"Perfectly true," observed the Resurrection Man.

"But all that's no reason why I should be equally partickler," proceeded Swot.

"Of course not," said the Resurrection Man.

"Well, then—we are all friends here?" asked Swot, glancing around him.

"All," replied Tidkins. "This is my mate's wife; she answers to the name of Moll, and is stanch to the back-bone."

"Well and good," said Swot. "Now I've as pretty a little idea in my head as ever was born there; but it requires two or three daring—I

may say *desperate* fellers to carry it out."

"You couldn't come to a better shop for them kind of chaps," remarked the Buffer.

"And if it's necessary, I'll deuced soon dress myself up like a lighterman and help you," added Moll.

"I am very much pleased with your pluck, ma'am," said Mr. Swot; "and I drink to your excellent health—and our better acquaintance."

Mr. Swot emptied his mug at a draught, lighted a pipe, and then continued thus:—

"But now, my fine fellers, s'pose I was to start some scheme which is about as dangerous as walking slap into a house on fire to get the iron safe that's full of gold and silver?"

"Well—we're the men to do it," said Tidkins.

"That is," observed the Buffer, "if so be the inducement is equal to the risk."

"Of course," returned Mr. Swot. "Now one more question:—would you sleep in the same room with a man who had the cholera or the small-pox, for instance—supposing you got a thousand pounds each to do it?"

"I would in a minute," answered the Resurrection Man. "Nothing dare, nothing have."

"So I say," added the Buffer.

"And you wouldn't find me flinch!" cried Moll.

"Now, then, we shall soon understand each other," resumed Swot, helping himself to another supply of grog. "Please to listen to me for a few minutes. A very fine schooner, the *Lady Anne* of London, trades to the Gold and Slave Coasts of Guinea. She takes out woollens, cottons, linen, arms, and gunpowder, which she exchanges for gold dust, ivory, gums, and hides. A few days since, as she was beating up the Channel, homeward bound with a fine cargo, something occurs that makes it necessary for her to run for the Medway, instead of coming direct up to London. But the night before last it blew great guns, as you may recollect; and as she was but indifferently manned, she got out in her reckoning—for it was as dark as pitch—and ran ashore between the mouth of the Medway and Gravesend. Now, there she lies—and there she's likely to lie. She got stranded during spring-tide; and she does not float now even at high water. The gold dust would be very acceptable; the gums, ivory, hides, and such like matters, may stay where they are."

"Then the fact is the owners haven't yet moved out the cargo?" said the Resurrection Man, interrogatively.

"No—nor don't intend to, neither—for the present," answered Swot. "And what's more, there's a police-boat pulling about in that part of the river all day and all night; but I can assure you that it gives the schooner a precious wide berth."

"Well, I can't understand it yet," said the Buffer.

"The fact is," continued Swot, "the *Lady Anne* was on its way to Standgate Creek in the Medway, when it got ashore on the bank of the Thames. Do you begin to take?"

"Can't say I do," answered the Resurrection Man. "Is the crew on board still?"

"The crew consisted this morning, when I heard about it last, of three men and a boy," returned Swot; "and one of them men is a surgeon. But the *Lady Anne* has got the yellow flag flying;—and now do you comprehend me?"

"The plague!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man and the Buffer in the same breath.

"The plague!" repeated Moll Wicks, with a shudder.

"Neither more or less," said Swot, coolly emptying his second mug of grog.

There was a dead silence for some moments.

It seemed as if the spirits of those who had listened with deep attention to the foreman's narrative, were suddenly damped by the explanation that closed it.

"Well—are you afraid?" asked Swot, at length breaking silence.

"No," returned the Resurrection Man, throwing off the depression which had fallen upon him. "But there is something awful in boarding a plague-ship."

"Are you sure the gold dust is on board?" demanded the Buffer.

"Certain. My information is quite correct. Besides, you may get the newspapers and read all about it for yourselves."

"The thing is tempting," said Moll.

"Then, by God, if a woman will dare it, we mustn't show the white feather, Jack," exclaimed the Resurrection Man.

"That's speaking to the point," observed the foreman. "You see there's a guard on land, to prevent any one from going near the vessel on that side; and the police-boat rows about on the river. The plan would be, to get down to Gravesend to-morrow, then to-morrow night, to drop down with the tide close under the bank, and get alongside the vessel."

"All that can be done easy enough," said the Resurrection Man. "But we want more hands. Of course you'll go with us?"

"Yes—I'll risk it," answered Mr. Swot. "It's too good a thing to let slip between one's fingers. If you'll leave it to me I'll get two or three more hands; because we must be prepared to master all that we may meet on the deck of the schooner, the very moment we board it, so as not to give 'em time even to cry out, or they'd alarm the police-boat."

"Well and good," said the Resurrection Man. "But you don't mean to go in the lighter?"

"No—no: we must have a good boat with two sculls," answered Swot. "Leave that also to me. At day-break every thing shall be ready for you; and I shall join you in the evening at Gravesend."

"Agreed!" cried Tidkins.

Mr. Swot then took his departure; and the three persons whom he left behind in the lighter, continued their carouse.

In this way the Resurrection Man, the Buffer, and Moll Wicks amused themselves until nearly eleven o'clock, when, just as they were thinking of retiring for the night,—Tidkins to his bed in the after cabin where they were then seated, and the other two to their berth in the cuddy forward,—the lighter was suddenly shaken from one end to the other by some heavy object which bumped violently against it.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

AN ARRIVAL AT THE WHARF.

The collision was so powerful that the Buffer's wife was thrown from her seat; and every plank in the *Fairy* oscillated with a crashing sound.

The Buffer and the Resurrection Man rushed upon the deck.

A single glance enabled them to ascertain the cause of the sudden alarm.

A lighter, nearly as large as the *Fairy*, and heavily laden, had been so clumsily brought in against the barges moored off the wharf, that it came with the whole weight of its broad-side upon the *Fairy*.

"Now then, stupids!" ejaculated the Buffer, applying this complimentary epithet to the two men who were on the deck of the lighter which was putting in.

"Hope we haven't hurt you, friends," exclaimed one of the individuals thus addressed.

"More harm might have been done," answered the Buffer. "Who are you?"

"The *Blossom*," was the reply.

"Where d'ye come from?" demanded Wicks.

"Oh! up above bridge," cried the man, speaking in a surly and evasive manner. "Here—just catch hold of this rope, will you—and let us lay alongside of you."

"No—no," shouted the Buffer. "You'd better drop astern of us, and moor alongside that chalk barge."

"Well, so we will," said the man.

While the *Blossom* was executing this manœuvre, which it did in a most clumsy manner, as if the two men that worked her had never been entrusted with the care of a lighter before, the Buffer turned towards the Resurrection Man, and said in a whisper, "We must remain outside all the barges, 'cause of having room to run our boat alongside the *Fairy* and get the things on board easy, when we come back from the expedition down to the *Lady Anne*."

"To be sure," answered the Resurrection Man. "You did quite right to make those lubbers get lower down. I'm pleased with you, Jack; and now I see that I can let you be spokesman on all such occasions without any fear that you'll commit yourself."

"Why, if you want to keep in the back-ground as much as possible, Tony," replied the Buffer, "it's much better to trust these little things to me. But, I say—I think there's something queer about them chaps that have just put in here."

"So do I, Jack," said Tidkins. "They certainly know no more about managing a lighter than you and I did when we first took to it."

"Yes—but we had a regular man to help us at the beginning," observed the Buffer.

"So we had. And I precious soon sent him about his business when he had taught us our own."

"Well—p'rhaps them fellows have got a reg'lar man too," said Wicks. "But let 'em be what and who they will, my idea is, that they've taken to the same line as ourselves."

"We must find that out, Jack," observed the Resurrection Man. "If they're what you think, they will of course be respected: if they don't belong to the same class, we must ascertain what they've got on board, and then make up our minds whether any of their cargo will suit us."

"Well said," returned the Buffer.

"But in any case you must be the person to learn all this," continued the Resurrection Man. "You see, I'm so well known to a lot of different people that would show me no mercy if they got hold of me, that I'm compelled to keep myself as quiet as possible. There's Markham—there's Crankey Jem—there's the gipsies—and there's the Rattlesnake: why—if I was only to be twigged by one of them I should have to make myself scarce in a minute."

"I know all this, Tony," cried the Buffer, impatiently; "and therefore the less you're seen about, the better. In the day time always keep below, as you have been doing; but at night, when one can't distinguish particular faces, you can take the air;—or on such occasions as to-morrow will be, for instance,—when we run down the river, and get away from London——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Tidkins: "don't think that I shall throw away a chance. Those lubbers have managed to make their lighter fast to the chalk barge now: just step across and try and find out what you can about them."

The Buffer immediately proceeded to obey this order. He walked across the barges, which, as we before stated, were so closely moored together that they formed one vast floating pier; and approaching as close as possible to the *Blossom*, without setting foot upon it, he said, "Holloa, friend, there! You mustn't think that we meant any thing by telling you not to lay alongside of us: 'twas only 'cause we expect to be off to-morrow or next day."

"No offence is taken where none's intended," answered the man who had before spoken.

The Buffer now perceived that the other individual on board the *Blossom*, and who had charge of the helm, was a Black, of tall form, and dressed in the rough garb of a sailor.

"You seem well laden," said the Buffer, after a pause.

"Yes—pretty deep," answered the first speaker.

"Do you discharge here, at Mossop's?"

"Don't know yet," was the laconic reply.

"And what may be your freight?"

"Bales of cotton," returned the man.

"Then I suppose you're the master of that lighter?" continued the Buffer.

"Yes," was the brief answer.

"Well, it's a pleasant life," observed Wicks. "Have you been at it long?"

"I've only just begun it," replied the master.

"And that sable gentleman there," said the Buffer, with a laugh,—"I should think he's not a Johnny Raw on the water?"

"Not quite," returned the master. "Poor fellow! he's deaf and dumb!"

"Deaf and dumb, eh?" repeated the Buffer. "Well,—p'rhaps that's convenient in more ways than one."

"I believe you," said the master, significantly.

"Ah! I thought so," cried Wicks, who now felt convinced that the *Blossom* was not a whit better than the *Fairy*. "Ain't there no one on board but you and Blackee?"

"What the devil should we want any more hands for?" said the master, gruffly.

"Oh! I understand," observed the Buffer. "Capital! you're the master—to do as you like; Blackee's deaf and dumb, and can't blab; and you and him are alone on board. I've hit it, you see."

"You're uncommon sharp, my fine feller," said the master. "Step on board and wash your mouth out."

The Buffer did not hesitate to accept this invitation. The Black had lighted his pipe, and was lounging on the deck over the after cabin. The master disappeared down the hatchway of the small cabin, or cuddy, forward; and in a few moments he returned with a bottle and two tin pannikins.

"What's the name of your craft?" he said, as he poured out the liquor, which exhaled the strong and saccharine flavour of rum.

"The *Fairy*," replied the Buffer.

"Then here's a health to the *Fairy*."

"And here's to the *Blossom*."

The master and the Buffer each took draughts of the raw spirit.

"Now let us drink to our better acquaintance," said the master. "You seem an honest, open-hearted kind of a feller——"

"And to be trusted, too," interrupted Wicks.

"Well—I'm inclined to think you are," said the master, speaking deliberately, as if he were meditating upon some particular idea which then occupied his mind; "and it's very probable—it *may* be, I mean—that I shall want a little of your advice; for which, remember, I should be happy to pay you well."

"You couldn't apply to a better man," returned the Buffer.

"And here's to you," said the master. "What sort of a fellow is Mossop, that keeps this wharf?"

"He has no eyes, no ears, and no tongue for things that don't consarn him," answered Wicks.

"Just the kind of agent I want," returned the master. "But I shall also require two or three good fellers in a few days,—chaps that ain't over partickler, you understand, how they earn a ten-pound note, so long as it's sure."

"And you want two or three chaps of that kind?" asked the Buffer.

"Yes. I've a good thing in hand," returned the master. "But I shan't say too much now."

"Well, you may reckon on me at any moment—to-morrow excepted," said Wicks; "and my pal in the *Fairy* will also be glad to row in the same boat."

"What sort of a man is your pal?" demanded the master: "one of the right kind?"

"If he wasn't, him and I shouldn't long hold together," answered the Buffer. "But when do you think you'll want our services?"

"Very soon. You say you're both engaged for to-morrow?"

"Yes—both of us."

"The day after to-morrow, in the evening, you and your friend can come and smoke your pipes with me; and we'll talk the matter over," said the master.

"And if any thing should prevent us coming the day after to-morrow, the evening after that will do p'rhaps?" remarked the Buffer, interrogatively.

"Well—we must make that do, then," answered the master. "Good night."

"Good night," said Wicks; and he then returned to the *Fairy*.

"What can you make of them, Jack?" demanded the Resurrection Man, who was smoking his pipe on the after deck.

"They're of the right sort, Tony," was the reply. "The master seems a good kind of a feller: the only other man on board with him is a Black; and he's deaf and dumb. The master sounded me about Mossop; and that shows that he knows what's what. Besides, he hinted that he'd a good thing in view, but wanted more hands, and so he made an appointment for you and me to smoke a pipe with him in the course of two or three evenings, to talk over the matter."

"You didn't say much about me?" exclaimed the Resurrection Man, hastily.

"Not more than was proper. It's all right—I could tell *that* with half an eye."

"Well, business seems dropping in upon us," observed the Resurrection Man; "but we must be very cautious what we do. And now let's turn in, for we have to get up early, recollect."

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

THE PLAGUE SHIP.

It wanted half-an-hour to day-break, when the splash of oars alongside met their ears; and in a few moments Swot, the foreman, made his appearance.

"I've got all ready for you, my boys," said that individual; "a good boat, and two stout chaps to help."

"Have they got their barkers?" demanded the Resurrection Man, thereby meaning pistols.

"A brace each," replied the foreman. "But they must only be used in case of desperation. There's a false bottom to the boat; and there I've stowed away five cutlasses."

"All right!" cried the Buffer. "Now, Moll, you make yourself comfortable till we get back again."

"You're a fool, Jack, not to let me go along with you," observed the woman.

"Nonsense," answered her husband. "Some one must stay on board to take care of the lighter."

"Well, don't say that I'm a coward—that's all," exclaimed Moll.

"We won't accuse you of that," said the Resurrection Man. "But now let's be off. Where shall we meet you at Gravesend?"

"You know the windmill about a mile below the town," returned Swot, to whom this question was addressed. "Well, close by is the *Lobster Tavern*, and there's a little jetty where the boat can be fastened. Meet me at that tavern at ten o'clock this evening."

"Agreed," answered Tidkins.

The three men then ascended to the deck.

The dawn was at that moment breaking in the east; and every moment mast after mast on the stream, and roof after roof on the shore, appeared more palpably in the increasing light of the young day.

On board of the *Blossom*, the Black was busily employed in washing the deck, and seemed to take no notice of any thing that was passing elsewhere.

"The tide will be with us for nearly three hours," said Tidkins. "Come—we won't lose a moment."

The foreman retraced his steps across the barges to the wharf; while the Resurrection Man and the Buffer, each armed with a pair of pistols, leapt into the boat, that lay alongside the lighter.

Two stout fellows, dressed like watermen, and who were already seated in the boat, instantly plied their sculls.

The skiff shot rapidly away from the vicinity of the barges, and was soon running down the middle of the river with a strong tide.

The morning was beautiful and bright: a gentle breeze swept the bosom of the stream:—and when the sun burst forth in all its effulgent glory, a few fleecy clouds alone appeared on the mighty arch of blue above.

Here and there the mariners on board the outward-bound vessels were busy in heaving up their anchors—a task which they performed with the usual cheering and simultaneous cry,—or in loosening the canvass that immediately became swollen with the breeze.

At distant intervals some steamer, bound to a native or foreign port, walked, as it were, with gigantic strides along the water, raising with its mighty Briarean arms, a swell on either side, which made the smaller craft toss and pitch as if in a miniature whirlpool.

Alas! how many souls have found a resting-place in the depths of those waters; and the spray of the billow seems the tears which old Father Thames sheds as a tribute to their graves! Then, at dark midnight, when the wind moans over the bosom of the river, the plaintive murmurs sound as a lament for those that are gone!

Vain are thy tears, O River! But if they must be shed, let them flow for the living, whose crimes or whose miseries may, with Orphic spell, awaken the sympathy of even inanimate things.

The boat shot rapidly along, the sun gilding its broad pathway.

What evidence of commercial prosperity appears on either side! The clang of mighty hammers denote the progress of new vessels in the various building-yards; and in the numerous docks the shipwright is busy in repairing the effects of past voyages, and rendering the gallant barks fit to dare the perils of the ocean once more!

The river-pirates, whose course we are following, pursued their way: the old *Dreadnought*, stripped of the cannon that once bristled on its lofty sides, and now resembling the worn-out lion that has lost its fangs, was passed;—the domes of Greenwich greeted the eye;—and now the boat merged upon the wide expanse which seems to terminate with Blackwall.

But, no! the stream sweeps to the right; and onward floats the skiff—skirting the Kentish shore.

At length the gloomy and sombre-looking hulks off Woolwich are reached: the boat shoots in between the shipping; and there the pirates landed.

At Woolwich they repaired to a low public-house with which they were acquainted; and, as the fresh air of the river had sharpened their appetites, they called into request every article of food which was to be found in the larder. Liquors in due proportion were ordered; the Resurrection Man paid the score for all; and in this manner the four pirates contrived to while away the time until the tide turned once more in their favour in the afternoon.

At three o'clock they retraced their steps to the boat; and in a few minutes were again gliding rapidly along on the bosom of the river.

"Now," said the Resurrection Man, "as we have drunk a glass and smoked a pipe together, we are better acquainted with each other."

These words were especially addressed to the two men whom the foreman at Mossop's wharf had provided.

"Of course," continued the Resurrection Man, "I needn't ask you if you know the exact nature of the business which we have in hand. I didn't think it prudent to talk about it when we were at the crib in Woolwich just now, because walls have ears; but I took it for granted, from certain words which you two chaps said, that it's all right."

"Yes, yes, master," returned one, who was called Long Bob, in consequence of his height: "Swot put us up to the whole thing."

"We know the risk, and we know what's to be got by it," added the other, who delighted in the name of the *Lully Prig*,[1] from the circumstance of his having formerly exercised the calling with which, in flash language, the name is associated, before he became a river-pirate.

"Then we understand each other," said the Resurrection Man, "without any farther wagging of the tollibon."[2]

"We cut the same lock that you do,[3] old feller," answered the Lully Prig; "and as long as we snack the bit[4] in a reg'lar manner, we're stanch to the back-bone."

"So far, so good," said the Resurrection Man. "But you're also aware that the swag must be taken up the river and put on board the *Fairy*, where it must stay some time till Swot can find a safe customer for it, because it's sure to be chanted on the leer."[5]

"We're fly to all that," said Long Bob. "But Swot promised us ten neds[6] each, if the thing succeeds to-night; so that we shan't object to waiting for the rest of our reg'lars till the swag is dinged."[7]

"Who knows that we shan't find some gobsticks,[8] clinks,[9] or other things of the same kind?" exclaimed the Lully Prig; "and, if so, they can soon be walked off to the melting-pot fence,[10] and the glanthem will be dropped[11] in no time."

"That's understood, my boys," exclaimed the Resurrection Man. "Now, give way with a will, and don't let's delay."

On went the boat with increased rapidity, the Lully Prig and Long Bob plying the oars with strength and skill. Then, when they were wearied, the Resurrection Man and the Buffer took their turns. Occasionally Tidkins handed round his flask, which he had taken good care to have replenished with rum at Woolwich; and at intervals the Buffer or the Lully Prig cheered their labours with a song.

In this manner Erith was reached and passed:—Greenhithe and Ingress Abbey, the front of which splendid mansion is built with the stones of old London Bridge, were in due course left behind;—and soon the antique windmill and the tall tower of Gravesend greeted the eyes of the river-pirates.

At the two piers of the town were numerous steam-packets;—there were large merchant-vessels riding at anchor in the middle of the river;—and, on the opposite side, Tilbury Fort commanded the expanse of water with its cannon.

"Since we're to meet Swot at the *Lobster Tavern*," said the Resurrection Man, "we may as well run down to that place at once."

"So we will," returned the Buffer.

The boat continued its course; and in a short time it was made fast to the little jetty which affords a convenient means of landing at the point mentioned.

The *Lobster Tavern* is a small isolated place of entertainment, upon the bank of the Thames, and is chiefly frequented by those good folks who, in fine weather, indulge in a trip on Sundays from London to Gravesend.

There are sheds, with seats, built in front of the tavern; and on a calm summer's evening, the site and view are pleasant enough.

The four pirates entered the establishment, and called for refreshments.

They thus passed away the time until ten o'clock, when Mossop's foreman joined them.

In another half-hour they were all five seated in the boat; and, in the darkness of the night, they bent their way towards the plague-ship.

They kept close along the Kentish shore; and when Swot imagined that they must be within half-a-mile of the place where the *Lady Anne* was stranded, the oars were muffled.

The sky was covered with dense black clouds: no moon and not a star appeared.

The water seemed as dark as ink.

But the foreman knew every inlet and every jutting point which marked the course of the Thames; and, with the tiller in his hand, he navigated the boat with consummate skill.

Not a word was spoken; and the faint murmurs of the oars were drowned in the whistling of the breeze which now swept over the river.

At length the foreman said in a low whisper, "There is the light of the police-boat."

At a distance of about a quarter of a mile that light appeared, like a solitary star upon the waters.

Sometimes it moved—then stopped, as the quarantine officers rowed, or rested on their oars.

"We must now be within a few yards of the *Lady Anne*," whispered Swot, after another long pause: "take to your arms."

The Buffer cautiously raised a plank at the bottom of the boat, and drew forth, one after another, five cutlasses.

These the pirates silently fastened to their waists.

The boat moved slowly along; and in another minute it was by the side of the plague ship.

The Resurrection Man stretched out his arm, and his hand swept its slimy hull.

There was not a soul upon the deck of the *Lady Anne*; and, as if to serve the purposes of the river-pirates, the wind blew in strong gusts, and the waves splashed against the bank and the vessel itself, with a sound sufficient to drown the noise of their movements.

The bow of the *Lady Anne* lay high upon the bank: the stern was consequently low in the water.

As cautiously as possible the boat was made fast to a rope which hung over the schooner's quarter; and then the five pirates, one after the other, sprang on board.

"Holloa!" cried a boy, suddenly thrusting his head above the hatchway of the after cabin.

Long Bob's right hand instantly grasped the boy's collar, while his left was pressed forcibly upon his mouth; and in another moment the lad was dragged on the deck, where he was immediately gagged and bound hand and foot.

But this process had not been effected without some struggling on the part of the boy, and trampling of feet on that of the pirates.

Some one below was evidently alarmed, for a voice called the boy from the cabin.

Long Bob led the way; and the pirates rushed down into the cabin, with their drawn cutlasses in their hands.

There was a light below; and a man, pale and fearfully emaciated, started from his bed, and advanced to meet the intruders.

"Not a word—or you're a dead man," cried Long Bob, drawing forth a pistol.

"Rascal! what do you mean?" ejaculated the other; "I am the surgeon, and in command of this vessel. Who are you? what do you require? Do you know that the pestilence is here?"

"We know all about it, sir," answered Long Bob.

Then, dropping his weapons, he sprang upon the surgeon, whom he threw upon the floor, and whose mouth he instantly closed with his iron hand.

The pirates then secured the surgeon in the same way as they had the boy above.

"Let's go forward now," cried Swot. "So far, all's well. One of you must stay down here to mind this chap."

The Lully Prig volunteered this service; and the other pirates repaired to the cabin forward.

They well knew that the plague-stricken invalids must be *there*; and when they reached the hatchway, there was a sudden hesitation—a simultaneous pause.

The idea of the pestilence was horrible.

"Well," said the foreman, "are we afraid?"

"No—not I, by God!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man; and he sprang down the ladder.

The others immediately followed him.

But there was no need of cutlass, pistol, or violence there. By the light of the lamp suspended to a beam, the pirates perceived two wretched creatures, each in his hammock,—their cadaverous countenances covered with large sores, their hair matted, their eyes open but glazed and dim, and their wasted hands lying like those of the dead outside the coverlids, as if all the nervous energy were defunct.

Still they were alive; but they were too weak and wretched to experience any emotion at the appearance of armed men in their cabin.

The atmosphere which they breathed was heated and nauseous with the pestilential vapours of their breath and their perspiration.

"These poor devils can do no harm," said the Resurrection Man, with a visible shudder.

The pirates were only too glad to emerge from that narrow abode of the plague; and never did air seem more pure than that which they breathed when they had gained the deck.

"Now then to work," cried Swot. "Wait till we raise this hatch," he continued, stopping at that which covered the compartment of the ship where the freight was stowed away; "and we'll light the darkey when we get down below. You see, that as they hadn't a light hung out before, it would be dangerous to have one above: we might alarm the police-boat or the guard ashore."

The hatch was raised without much difficulty: a rope was then made fast to a spar and lowered into the waist of the schooner; and Long Bob slid down.

In a few moments he lighted his dark lantern; and the other three descended one after the other, the Lully Prig, be it remembered, having remained in the after cabin.

And now to work they went. The goods, with which the schooner was laden, were removed, unpacked, and ransacked.

There were gums, and hides, and various other articles which the western coast of Africa produces; but the object of the pirates' enterprise and avarice was the gold-dust, which was contained in two heavy cases. These were, however, at the bottom of all the other goods; and nearly an hour passed before they were reached.

"Here is the treasure—at last!" cried Swot, when every thing was cleared away from above the cases of precious metal. "Come, Tony—don't waste time with the brandy flask now."

"I've such a precious nasty taste in my mouth," answered the Resurrection Man, as he took a long sup of the spirit. "I suppose it was the horrid air in the fore-cabin."

"Most likely," said the foreman: "come—bear a hand, and let's get these cases ready to raise. Then Long Bob and me will go above and reeve a rope and a pulley to haul 'em up."

The four men bent forward to the task; and as they worked by the dim light of the lantern, in the depths of the vessel, they seemed to be four demons in the profundities of their own infernal abode.

Suddenly the Resurrection Man staggered, and, supporting himself against the side of the vessel, said in a thick tone, "My God! what a sudden headache I've got come on!"

"Oh! it's nothing, my dear feller," cried Swot.

"And now I'm all cold and shivering," said Tidkins, seating himself on a bale of goods; "and my legs seem as if they'd break under me."

The Buffer, the foreman, and Long Bob were suddenly and simultaneously inspired with the same idea; and they cast on their companion looks of mingled apprehension and horror.

"No—it can't be!" ejaculated Swot.

"And yet—how odd that he should turn so," said Bob, with a shudder.

"The plague!" returned the Buffer, in a tone of indescribable terror.

"You're a fool, Jack!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man, glaring wildly upon his comrades, and endeavouring to rise from his seat.

But he fell back, exhausted and powerless.

"Damnation!" he muttered in a low but ferocious tone; and he gnashed his teeth with rage.

"The plague!" repeated the Buffer, now unable to contain his fears.

Then he hastily clambered from the hold of the schooner.

"The coward!" cried Swot: "such a prize as this is worth any risk."

But as he yet spoke, Long Bob, influenced by panic fear, sprang after the Buffer, as if Death itself were at his heels, clad in all the

horrors of the plague.

"My God! don't leave me here," cried the Resurrection Man, his voice losing its thickness and assuming the piercing tone of despair.

"Every man for himself, it seems," returned Swot, whom the panic had now robbed of all his courage; and in another moment he also had disappeared.

"The cowards—the villains!" said Tidkins, clenching his fists with rage.

Then, by an extraordinary and almost superhuman effort, he raised himself upon his legs: but they seemed to bend under him.

He, however managed to climb upon the packages of goods; and, aided by the rope, lifted himself up to the hatchway. But the effort was too great for his failing strength: his hands could not retain a firm grasp of the cord; and he fell violently to the bottom of the hold, rolling over the bales of merchandize in his descent.

"It's all over!" he mattered to himself; and then he became rapidly insensible.

Meantime the Lully Prig, who was mounting sentry upon the surgeon in the after cabin, was suddenly alarmed by hearing the trampling of hasty steps over head. He rushed on deck, and demanded the cause of this abrupt movement.

"The plague!" cried the Buffer, as he leapt over the ship's quarter into the boat.

The Lully Prig precipitated himself after his comrade; and the other two pirates immediately followed.

"But we are only four!" said the Lully Prig, as the boat was pushed away from the vessel.

"Tidkins has got the plague," answered the Buffer, his teeth chattering with horror and affright.

Fortunately the police-boat was at a distance; and the pirates succeeded in getting safely away from that dangerous vicinity.

But the Resurrection Man remained behind in the plague-ship!

1. A thief who steals damp linen off the hedges in the country.
2. Talking—palaver. "Tollibon" is the tongue.
3. Get our living in the same way.
4. Share the money.
5. Advertised in the newspapers.
6. Sovereigns.
7. Sent to the receiver.
8. Silver spoons.
9. Silver milk jugs or sugar basins.
10. Persons who receive and melt down stolen metal.
11. Money will be obtained.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

THE PURSUIT.

We must now return to the *Blossom*—the lighter which had only arrived at Mossop's wharf the night before the incidents of the last chapter occurred.

When the boat which conveyed the pirates to Gravesend had pushed away from the *Fairy* at day-break, as already described, the Black, who was cleaning the deck of the *Blossom*, cast from beneath his brows a rapid and scrutinising glance at the countenances of the four men who were seated in that skiff.

As soon as the boat was out of sight, the Black hastened down into the after-cabin of the *Blossom*, where a person was lying fast asleep in bed.

The Black shook this person violently by the shoulder, and awoke him.

"I have found him, sir,—I have found him!" cried the Black.

"Indeed!" cried Markham, starting up, and rubbing his eyes. "Where? where?"

"He has just gone with three other men in a boat, down the river," answered Morcar; "and one of these men is him that spoke to Benstead last night."

"Then they both belong to the *Fairy*?" exclaimed Richard.

"Both," replied Morcar; "at least they both came from it just now."

"Go and rouse Benstead," said Markham; "and in the meantime I will get up."

The gipsy, who had so well disguised himself as a man of colour, hastened to the cuddy where Benstead was wrapped in the arms of Morpheus.

The police-officer was delighted, when awakened and made acquainted with Morcar's discovery, to find that the Resurrection Man had been thus recognised; and he lost no time in dressing himself.

The gipsy and Benstead afterwards proceeded to Richard's cabin, where they found our hero just completing his hasty toilet.

"Thus far our aims are accomplished," said Markham, when they were all three assembled. "It has turned out exactly as I anticipated. Morcar, by aid of his disguised appearance, was enabled to keep a sharp look out on all the vessels; while the report which you circulated that he was deaf and dumb prevented him from being questioned. Had Tidkins himself seen Morcar as closely as we are to him now, he would not have known him."

"My suspicions, too, are fully confirmed," observed Benstead. "The moment I saw that feller hanging about us last night, I suspected he was up to no good. But how I managed to pump *him*, when he doubtless thought that *I* was the soft-pated one! By my short, evasive, or mysterious answers, I allowed him to think that the *Blossom* was no better than she should be; and then I saw by his manners and language at once, that he was a pirate. But when I dropped a hint about wanting two or three hands for a good thing which I had in view, how eager the chap was to enlist himself and his pal in the business!"

"And to-morrow night they are coming to talk over the matter with you?" said Richard, half interrogatively.

"To-morrow night, or the night after," returned Benstead. "The pal that the man spoke of is sure to be Tidkins, since our friend Morcar saw the villains leave the *Fairy* together."

"But there were two other men in the boat," observed the gipsy.

"You say that they sculled the boat round to the *Fairy*, from some place higher up the river?" said Richard.

"Yes. But I could not see where they came from, as it was nearly dark when they got alongside the *Fairy*."

"Well," exclaimed Benstead, "it is very clear that those two men who came in the boat, don't belong to the *Fairy*; but that Tidkins and the person who spoke to me last night do. I should think there's no doubt about Tidkins being the pal that the man alluded to."

"Not the slightest," said Markham. "And yet, to make assurance doubly sure, we will not alter the plan which we laid down yesterday afternoon when we first came on board the lighter. You, Benstead, must remain spokesman—the master, in fact, of the *Blossom*; you, Morcar, will continue a deaf and dumb Black," continued Richard, with a smile; "and I must keep close in this cabin until the moment of action arrives. If, to-morrow night or the night after, that man should bring Tidkins with him, our object is accomplished at once: if he bring a stranger, our precautions must be strictly preserved, and we must devise a means of seizing the miscreant on board the *Fairy* or any other lighter to which we can trace him."

This advice was agreed to by Benstead and Morcar; and while Richard remained below, the others took their turns in watching upon the deck.

But all that day passed; and the pirates did not come back to the *Fairy*—they being occupied in the manner related in the last chapter.

Morcar undertook to keep watch during the night; but hour after hour stole away,—another day dawned, and still the *Fairy* was occupied only by the woman whom the pirates had left behind.

That day also passed; and it was not until midnight that Morcar's attention was attracted towards the *Fairy*. Then a boat rowed

alongside of the pirate-barge.

The night was pitch dark—so dark that Morcar could not see what was going on in the direction of the *Fairy*: but his ears were all attention.

He was enabled to discover, by means of those organs, that the boat transferred one or more of its living freight (but he could not tell how many) to the *Fairy*: then a brief conversation was carried on in low whispers, but not a distinct word of which reached the gipsy. At length the boat pushed off, and rowed away up the river.

Morcar stood upon the deck of the *Blossom* for a few minutes, attentively listening to catch a sound of any thing that might be passing on board the pirate lighter: but all continued silent in that quarter.

Then Morcar descended to the cabin, where Richard and the policeman were waiting.

To them he communicated the few particulars just narrated.

"It is clear that the pirates have returned from their expedition, whatever it might be," said our hero; "and most probably Tidkins and his friend have just been put on board their lighter. We must contrive to watch their motions; and should they keep their appointment with you, Benstead, to-morrow night, our enterprise will speedily be brought to a conclusion."

"I will keep my watch now on deck till three o'clock," said the policeman; "and Morcar may turn in."

This was done; Richard also retired to rest; and the night passed away without any further adventure.

But at day-break Morcar, who had again resumed the watch, observed some activity on board the *Fairy*. The Buffer and his wife were in fact making evident preparations for departure. They raised the mast by means of the windlass; they shook out the sail; fixed the tiller in the rudder, and performed the various preliminaries in a most business-like manner.

Morcar speedily communicated these circumstances to Benstead and Markham; and these three held a rapid consultation in the after-cabin of the *Blossom*.

"You are certain you saw no one but that man who first spoke to Benstead, and the woman?" asked Markham.

"Not a soul," answered Morcar. "But that is no reason why Tidkins should not be below."

"Certainly not. He has numerous reasons to conceal himself."

"But what is to be done?" said Morcar.

"Benstead must go and speak to the man," observed Richard, after a pause.

The policeman immediately left the cabin.

He crossed the barges and approached the *Fairy*, which was just ready to put off.

"Holloa! my friend," cried Benstead: "you seem busy this morning?"

"Yes—we're going up above bridge a short way," answered the Buffer: "the tide is just turning in our favour now, and we haven't a moment to spare."

"And the appointment with me?"

"Oh! that must stand over for a day or two. How long do you mean to remain here?"

"Till I get a couple of good hands to help me in the matter I alluded to the night before last," answered Benstead.

"Well, I don't like to disappoint a good feller—and *that* you seem to be," said the Buffer, "but I really can't say whether I shall be able to do any thing with you, or not. I've something else on hand now—and I think I shall leave the river altogether."

"You speak openly at all events," said Benstead. "It's very annoying, though; for I relied upon you. Can't your pal—the man that you spoke of, you know—have a hand in this matter with me?"

"No," answered the Buffer shortly. "But I'll tell you who'll put you up to getting the assistance you want:—and that's Mossop's foreman. He's a cautious man, and won't meet you half way in your conversation; but you can make a confidant of him, and if he can't help you, he's sure not to sell you. So now good bye, old feller; and good luck to you."

With these words the Buffer loosened the rope that held the *Fairy* alongside the barge next to it; and then by means of a boat-hook he pushed the lighter off.

"Good bye," exclaimed Benstead; and he hastened back to the *Blossom*.

"Now what must be done?" asked Morcar, when these particulars were communicated to him and Richard.

"It seems clear to me that these men have endangered themselves by something they have just been doing," observed Benstead; "and so they're sheering off as fast as they can."

"And most likely the Resurrection Man is concealed on board the *Fairy*," added Markham. "We must follow them—we must follow them, at any rate!"

"If we take our skiff and pursue them, they will immediately entertain some suspicion," said Benstead; "and if *you* go, sir, the Resurrection Man will recognise you the moment he catches a glimpse of you."

"We have no alternative, my good friends," observed Richard. "Let us all three follow them in our skiff: we will dog them—we will watch them; and if they attempt to land, we will board them."

"Be it so," said Benstead.

This plan was immediately put into operation.

The skiff was lowered: Markham, the policeman, and the gipsy leapt into it; the two latter pulled the oars; and our hero, muffled in a pilot coat, with the collar of which he concealed his countenance as much as possible, sate in the stern.

"Just keep the lighter in view—and that's all," said Richard. "So long as it does not show signs of touching at any place on shore, we had better content ourselves with following it, till we are assured that Tidkins is actually on board."

"Certainly, sir," answered Benstead. "We might only get ourselves into trouble by forcibly entering the *Fairy*, unless we knew that we should catch the game we're in search of."

The rowers had therefore little more to do than just play with their oars, as the tide bore the skiff along with even a greater rapidity than the lighter, although the latter proceeded with tolerable speed, in consequence of being empty, and having a fair breeze with it. Thus, when the boat drew too near the barge, the rowers backed their oars; and by this manœuvring they maintained a convenient distance.

On board the lighter, the Buffer and his wife were too busy with the management of their vessel—a task to which they were not altogether equal—to notice the watch and pursuit instituted by the little boat.

In the manner described, the two parties pursued their way up the narrow space left by the crowds of shipping for the passage of vessels.

The Tower was passed—that gloomy fortalice which has known sighs as full of anguish and hearts as oppressed with bitter woe as ever did the prisons of the Inquisition, or the dungeons of the Bastille.

Then the Custom House was slowly left behind; and Billingsgate, world-renowned for its slang, was passed by the pursued and the pursuer.

To avoid the arch of London Bridge the Buffer lowered his mast; and then midway between that and Southwark Bridge, his intentions became apparent.

He was about to put in at a wharf on the Surrey side, where a large board on the building announced that lighters were bought or sold.

"Pull alongside the *Fairy*," cried Markham: "we must board her before she touches the wharf, or our prey may escape."

Benstead and Morcar plied the oars with a vigour which soon brought the boat within a few yards of the *Fairy*. The Buffer's attention was now attracted to it for the first time; but he did not immediately recognise the two rowers, because they had their backs turned towards the lighter.

"I should know that man!" suddenly exclaimed Richard, as he contemplated the Buffer, who was standing at the tiller, and who had his eyes fixed with some anxiety upon the boat, which was evidently pulling towards him.

"Who?" asked Benstead.

"That man on board the lighter," was the reply.

Benstead cast a glance behind him, and said, "He's the man that spoke to me."

"I remember him—the villain!—I recollect him now!" cried Richard. "Yes—he is a companion in iniquity of Anthony Tidkins: it was he who brought me that false message concerning my brother, which nearly cost me my life at Twig Folly!"

These words Richard spoke aloud; but they were unintelligible to his two companions, who were unacquainted with the incident referred to.

They had no time to question him, nor had he leisure to explain his meaning to them; for at that moment the boat shot alongside of the lighter.

"Markham!" cried the Buffer, in alarm, as he recognised our hero who immediately sprang upon the deck.

"You know me?" said Richard: "and I have ample reason to remember you. But my present business regards *another*; and if you offer no resistance, I will not harm you."

"Who do you want?" asked the Buffer, somewhat reassured by these words.

"Your companion," replied Richard.

"What! my wife?" ejaculated the Buffer, with a hoarse laugh. "Do you know this gen'leman, Moll?"

"Cease this jesting," cried Richard sternly; "and remain where you are. Benstead, take care that he does not move from the deck: Morcar, come you with me."

The Buffer cast looks of surprise and curiosity upon Richard's companions, who, having made the boat fast to the lighter, had leapt upon the deck.

"What! you, my fine feller?" cried Wicks, addressing himself to Benstead. "I suppose, then, this is all a reg'lar plant;—and you're ——"

"I am a police officer," answered Benstead coolly. "But, as far as I know, we have no business with either you or your wife—since you say that this woman is your wife."

"Well—so much the better," remarked the Buffer. "And I also suppose your negro is about as deaf and dumb as I am?"

"About," replied Benstead, unable to suppress a smile. "Keep quiet, and no harm will happen to you."

"But who is it that you *do* want?" asked the Buffer.

"Your friend Tidkins—better known as the Resurrection Man."

"Then you won't find him here."

In the meantime, Richard and the gipsy had descended into the after-cabin; and they now re-appeared upon the deck, their search having been fruitless.

"He is not there," said Richard. "Let us look forward."

He and Morcar visited the cuddy; but the Resurrection Man was evidently not in the lighter.

They returned to the after deck; and questioned the Buffer.

"I don't know where Tidkins is," was the reply of that individual, who did not dare reveal the truth relative to the expedition to the plague ship, and its result; "and even if I did, it is not likely that I should blab any thing that would get us both into a scrape, since I see that the whole thing with you is a trap, and that man there," he added, pointing to Benstead, "is a policeman."

"Now, listen," exclaimed Richard. "It is in my power to have you arrested this moment for being concerned in a plot against my life—you know how and when; but I pledge you my honour that if you will satisfy me relative to Anthony Tidkins, we will depart, and leave you unmolested. I scorn treachery, even among men of your description; and I will not offer you a bribe. But I require to know how he came to separate from you—for I am convinced that he was with you a day or two ago."

"Well, sir," said the Buffer, who had found time, while Richard thus spoke, to collect his ideas and invent a tale, "Tidkins, me, and some other pals went on a little excursion the night afore last—you don't want me to get myself into a scrape by saying what the business was; but we fell in with a Thames police boat some way down the river; and Tidkins had a swim for it."

"Did he escape?" demanded Richard.

"Yes," answered the Buffer, boldly. "I saw him get safe on land; and then of course he took to his heels."

"This looks like the truth, sir," said Benstead aside to our hero. "These fellows have been baulked in some scheme—the river-police

have got scent of 'em—and that's the reason why this man gets off so quick with his lighter."

"And as I do not wish to punish this man for the injury he has done me," said Richard, glancing towards the Buffer,—"as I can afford to forgive *him*,—our expedition seems to have arrived at its close."

"Without success, too, sir," added Morcar.

"We shall now leave you," continued Richard, turning towards the Buffer; "but rest well assured that, though *we* forbear from molesting you, justice will some day overtake you in your evil and wayward courses."

"That's my look out," cried the Buffer, brutally.

Markham turned away in disgust, and descended to the boat, followed by Morcar and Benstead.

"We will now proceed to the wharf where I hired the *Blossom*," said Richard, when they had pushed off from the *Fairy*; "and, my good friends, there I shall dispense with your further services. The owner of the lighter can send his men to Rotherhithe to bring it up, and thus save us a task which is somewhat beyond our skill."

"It is a great pity we have failed to capture the miscreant," observed Morcar.

"But your reward has not been the less fairly and honestly earned," replied Richard; "as I will prove to you when we land."

CHAPTER CLXX.

THE BLACK VEIL.

Return we now to one whom we have long left, but whom the reader cannot have forgotten.

In a sumptuously furnished room at the house of Mr. Wentworth, the surgeon of Lower Holloway, Diana Arlington was reclining upon a sofa.

She was dressed in an elegant manner; but a large black lace veil, doubled so as to render it more impervious to the eye of a beholder, was thrown over her head. The folds were also so arranged that the elaborately worked border completely concealed her countenance.

She was alone.

An open piano, a harp, and piles of music, together with a choice selection of volumes on the shelves of a book-case, denoted the nature of her amusements during her residence of several weeks at the surgeon's abode.

It was mid-day.

The damask curtains at the windows were drawn in such a manner as to reduce the light of the effulgent sun to a mellow and soft lustre within that apartment.

Beautiful nosegays of flowers imparted a delicious fragrance to the atmosphere.

The bounty of the Earl of Warrington had furnished the room in a style of luxury which could scarcely be surpassed.

But was Diana happy?

Were those sighs which agitated her heaving bosom,—was that restlessness which she now manifested,—was that frequent listening as the sounds of wheels passed along the road,—were all these signs of sorrow or of suspense?

Patience, gentle reader.

The time-piece on the mantel had chimed mid-day.

"He is not punctual," murmured Diana.

Ten minutes elapsed.

"He does not come!" she said aloud.

And her restlessness redoubled.

At length a carriage drove rapidly up to the door; and a long double knock reverberated through the house.

'"Tis he!" cried Diana.

In a few moments the Earl of Warrington entered the room.

"Diana—dearest Diana!" exclaimed the nobleman, starting back when he beheld her countenance covered with that ominous dark veil: "is it indeed thus——"

"Thus that we meet after so long an absence?" added the Enchantress. "Yes, my lord: Mr. Wentworth must have told you as much."

"No, Diana," answered the Earl, seating himself upon the sofa by her side, and taking her hand: "you know not by what a strange idiosyncrasy my conduct has been influenced. I entrusted you to Mr. Wentworth's care: I enjoined him to spare no money that might procure the best advice—the most efficient means of cure. Then I resigned myself to a suspense from which I might at any moment have relieved my mind by an inquiry;—but at the bottom of that suspense was a fond, a burning hope which made the feeling tolerable—nay, even vested the excitement with a peculiar charm of its own. I took it for granted that you would be cured—that your countenance would be restored to that beauty which had originally attracted me towards you;—and now, may I not say—without detriment to my own firm character as a man, and without indelicacy towards your feelings,—may I not say that I am disappointed?"

"And is this my fault?" asked Diana, in a soft plaintive tone. "Does your lordship suppose that I have not also suffered—that I do not at present suffer?"

"Oh! yes—you have—you do," answered the nobleman, pressing her hand with warm affection. "When we were happy in each other's society, Diana," he continued, "I never spoke to you of love: indeed, I experienced for you nothing more than a fervent friendship and profound admiration. But since I have ceased to see you—during the interval of our separation—I found that you were necessary to me,—that I could not be altogether happy without you,—that your conversation had charms which delighted me,—and that your attachment was something on which I could ponder with infinite pleasure. My feelings have warmed towards you; and I—I, the Earl of Warrington—experience for you a feeling which, if not so romantic and enthusiastic as my *first affection*, is not the less honourable and sincere."

"Ah! my lord," said Diana, in a tremulous tone, "why raise the cup of happiness to my lips, when a stern fatality must dash it so cruelly away?"

"No, Diana—it shall not be thus dashed away," answered the Earl, emphatically. "I am rich—I am my own master: not a living soul has a right to control or question my conduct. The joy which I anticipated at this meeting shall not be altogether destroyed. Here, Diana—here I offer you my hand; and on your brow—scarred, blemished by an accident though it be—that hand shall place a coronet!"

"My lord, this honour—this goodness is too much," said Diana, in a tone of deep emotion. "Remember that I am no longer possessed of those charms which once attracted you; and now that they are gone—gone for ever—I may speak of what they were without vanity! Remember, I say, that you will ever have before you a countenance seared as with a red-hot iron,—a countenance on which you will scarcely be able to look without loathing in spite of all the love which your generous heart may entertain for me! Remember that when I deck myself in the garments befitting the rank to which you seek to elevate me, that splendour would be a hideous mockery—like the fairest flowers twining round the revolting countenance of a corpse on which the hand of decay has already placed its mark! Remember, in a word, that you will be ashamed of her whom, in a moment of generous enthusiasm, you offer to reward for so much suffering—suffering which originated in no fault of yours:—remember all this, my lord—and pause—reflect—I implore you to consider well the step you are taking!"

"Diana, I am not a child that I do not know my own mind," answered the Earl: "moreover, I have the character of firmness: and I shall *never* repent the proposal I now make you—provided you yourself do not give me cause by your conduct."

"And on that head——"

"I have every confidence—the deepest conviction, Diana," interrupted the Earl, warmly.

"Your wishes, then, are my commands—and I obey," returned Diana, her voice thrilling with tones expressive of ineffable joy. "But shall we not ratify our engagement with *one* kiss?"

And as she spoke she slowly drew the black veil from her countenance.

The nobleman's heart palpitated, as she did so, with emotions of the most painful suspense—even of alarm: he felt like a man who in another instant must know the worst.

The veil dropped.

"Heavens! Diana," exclaimed the Earl, starting with surprise and indescribable delight.

For instead of a countenance seared and marked, he beheld a pure and spotless face glowing with a beauty which, even in her loveliest moments, had never seemed to invest her before.

Not a scar—not a trace of the accident was visible.

Her pouting lips were like the rose moistened with dew: her high, pale forehead was pure as marble; and her cheeks were suffused in blushes which seemed to be born beneath the clustering ringlets of her dark brown hair.

"Ah! Diana," exclaimed the Earl, as he drew her to his breast, "how can I punish thee for this cheat!"

"You will pardon me," she murmured, as she clasped her warm white arms around his neck, and imprinted a delicious kiss upon his lips, while her eyes were filled with a voluptuous languor,—"you will pardon me when you know my motives. But can you not divine them?"

"You wished to put my affection to the test, Diana," said the Earl. "Yes—I must forgive you—for you are beautiful—you are adorable—and I love you!"

"And if the sincerest and most devoted attachment on my part can reward you for all your past goodness, and for the honours which you now propose to shower upon me, then shall I not fail to testify my gratitude," exclaimed Diana.

These vows were sealed with innumerable kisses.

At length the Earl rose to depart.

"Three days hence," he said, "my carriage will be sent to fetch you to the church where our hands shall be united."

"And our hearts—for ever," returned Diana.

The nobleman embraced her once more, and took his leave.

But he did not immediately quit the house: he had business with Mr. Wentworth to transact.

We know not the precise sum that this generous peer presented to the surgeon: this, however, we can assure our readers, that he kept his word to the very letter—for Mr. Wentworth became rich in one day.

"*If you succeed in restoring her to me*," had the Earl said, when he first entrusted Diana to the surgeon's care, "*in that perfection of beauty which invested her when I took leave of her yesterday—without a mark, without a scar,—your fortune shall be my care, and you will have no need to entertain anxiety relative to the future, with the Earl of Warrington as your patron*."

Such were the nobleman's words upon that occasion; and, on the present, he amply fulfilled his promise.

Three days after, Diana became the Countess of Warrington.

The happy news were thus communicated by the bride to her sincerest and best friend:—

"*Grosvenor Square,*
"*March 22nd, 1840.*

To Her Serene Highness the Grand Duchess of Castelcicala.

"I steal a few minutes from a busy day, my dearest Eliza,—for by that dear and familiar name you permit me to call you,—to inform you that I have this morning united my destinies with those of the Earl of Warrington. In a former letter I acquainted you with the dreadful accident which menaced me with horrible scars and marks for life:—you will be pleased to know that the skill and unwearied attention of my medical attendant have succeeded in completely restoring me to my former appearance—so that not a trace of the injury remains upon my person. The Earl of Warrington has elevated me to the proud position of his wife: the remainder of my existence shall be devoted to the study of his happiness.

"I regret to perceive by your letters, dearest Eliza, that *you* are not altogether happy. You say that the Grand Duke loves you; but his temper is arbitrary—his disposition despotic. And yet he is amiable and gentle in his bearing towards you. Study to solace yourself with this conviction. He has elevated you to a rank amongst the reigning princesses of Europe; and as you have embraced the honours, so must you endure some few of the political alarms and annoyances which are invariably attached to so proud a position. You tremble lest the conduct of the Grand Duke, in alienating from him those who are considered his best friends, should endanger his crown. Are you convinced that those persons are indeed his friends! Of course I know not—I cannot determine: I would only counsel you, my dearest friend, not to form hasty conclusions relative to the policy of his Serene Highness.

"I perceive by the English newspapers, that there are numerous Castelcicalan refugees in this country. Amongst them are General Grachia and Colonel Morosino, both of whom, I believe, occupied high offices in their native land. They, however, appear, so far as I can learn, to be dwelling tranquilly in London—no doubt awaiting the happy moment when it shall please your illustrious husband to recall them from exile.

"His Highness Alberto of Castelcicala—(for you are aware that the Earl of Warrington communicated to me some time ago the real rank and name of *Count Alteroni*)—continues to reside at his villa near Richmond. This much I glean from the public journals; but doubtless you are well acquainted with all these facts, inasmuch as your government has a representative at the English court.

"Adieu for the present, dearest Eliza:—I knew not, when I sate down, that I should have been enabled to write so long a letter. But I must now change my dress; for the carriage will be here shortly to convey me to Warrington Park, where we are to pass the honeymoon.

"Ever your sincere friend,
"DIANA."

Such are the strange phases which this world presents to our view! That same Fortune, who, in a moment of caprice, had raised an obscure English lady to a ducal throne, placed, when in a similar mood, a coronet upon the brow of another who had long filled a most equivocal position in society.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

MR. GREENWOOD'S DINNER-PARTY.

Some few days after the events just related, Mr. G. M. Greenwood, M.P., entertained several gentlemen at dinner at his residence in Spring Gardens.

The banquet was served up at seven precisely:—Mr. Greenwood had gradually made his dinner hour later as he had risen in the world; and he was determined that if ever he became a baronet, he would never have that repast put on table till half-past eight o'clock.

On the present occasion, as we ere now observed, the guests were conducted to the dining-room at seven.

The thick curtains were drawn over the windows: the apartment was a blaze of light.

The table groaned beneath the massive plate: the banquet was choice and luxurious in the highest degree.

On Mr. Greenwood's right sate the Marquis of Holmesford—a nobleman of sixty-three years of age, of immense wealth, and notorious for the unbounded licentiousness of his mode of life. His conversation, when his heart was somewhat warmed with wine, bore ample testimony to the profligacy of his morals: seductions were his boast; and he frequently indulged in obscene anecdotes or expressions which even called a blush to the cheeks of his least fastidious male acquaintances.

On Mr. Greenwood's left was Sir T. M. B. Muzzlehem, Bart., M.P., and Whipper-in to the Tory party.

Next to the two guests already described, sate Sir Cherry Bounce, Bart., and the Honourable Major Smilax Dapper—the latter of whom had recently acquired a grade in the service *by purchase*.

Mr. James Tomlinson, Mr. Sheriff Popkins, Mr. Alderman Sniff, Mr. Bubble, Mr. Chouse, and Mr. Twitchem (a solicitor) completed the party.

Now this company, the reader will perceive, was somewhat a mixed one: the aristocracy of the West End, the civic authority, and the members of the financial and legal spheres, were assembled on the present occasion.

The fact is, gentle reader, that this was a "business dinner;" and that you may be no longer kept in suspense, we will at once inform you that when the cloth was drawn, Mr. Greenwood, in a brief speech, proposed "Success to the Algiers, Oran, and Morocco Railway."

The toast was drunk with great applause.

"With your permission, my lord and gentlemen," said Mr. Twitchem, the solicitor, "I will read the Prospectus."

"Yeth, wead the pwothpeckthuth, by all meanth," exclaimed Sir Cherry Bounce.

"Strike me—but I'm anxious to hear *that*," cried the Honourable Major Dapper.

The solicitor then drew a bundle of papers from his pocket, and in a business-like manner read the contents of one which he extracted from the parcel:—

"ALGIERS, ORAN, AND MOROCCO GREAT DESERT RAILWAY.

"(Provisionally Registered Pursuant to Act.)
"Capital £1,600,000, in 80,000 shares, of £20 each.
"Deposit £3 2*s.* per Share.

"COMMITTEE OF DIRECTION.

"The Most Honourable the Marquis of Holmesford, G. C. B., Chairman.

"George M. Greenwood, Esq., M.P., Deputy Chairman.

"Sir T. M. B. Muzzlehem, Bart., M.P.
"James Tomlinson, Esq.
"Sylvester Popkins, Esq., Sheriff of London.
"Percival Peter Sniff, Esq., Alderman.
"Sir Cherry Bounce, Bart.
"The Honourable Major Smilax Dapper.
"Charles Cecil Bubble, Esq.
"Robert James Baring Chouse, Esq.

"This Railway is intended to connect the great cities of Algiers and Morocco, passing close to the populous and flourishing town of Oran. It will thus be the means of transit for passengers and traffic over a most important section of the Great Desert, which, though placed in maps in a more southernly latitude, nevertheless extends to the District through which this Line is to pass.

"The French government has willingly accorded its countenance to the proposed scheme; and the Governor-General of Algeria has expressed his sincere wish that it may be carried into effect.

"The Morocco government (one of the most enlightened in Africa) has also assented to the enterprise; and the Emperor, the better to manifest the favour with which he views the project, ordered his Prime Minister to be soundly bastinadoed for daring to question its practicability. This proof of the imperial wisdom has filled the Committee and friends of the enterprise with the most sanguine hopes.

"The support of the principal tribes, and other influential parties in Algeria and Morocco, has been secured.

"The Emperor of Morocco, on one side, and his Excellency the Governor-General of Algeria, on the other, have signified their readiness to grant a strong armed force to protect the engineers and operatives, when laying down the rails, from being devoured by wild beasts, or molested by predatory tribes.

"The ex-Emir of Mascara, Abd-el-Kadir, has entered into a bond not to interfere with the works while in progress, nor to molest those who may travel by the Line when it shall be opened; and, in order to secure this important concession on the part of the ex-Emir, the Committee have agreed to make that Prince an annual present of clothes, linen, tobacco, and ardent spirit.

"It is with the greatest satisfaction that the Committee of Direction is enabled to announce these brilliant prospects; and the Committee beg to state that application for the allotment of Shares must be made without delay to James Tomlinson, Esq., Stockbroker, Tokenhouse Yard.

"By order of the Board,
"SHARPLY TWITCHEM, Secretary."

"On my thoul, there never wath any thing better—conthith, bwief, ekthplithit, and attwactive!" cried Sir Cherry.

"Sure to take—as certain as I'm in Her Majesty's service—strike me!" exclaimed Major Dapper.

"I think you ought to have thrown in something about African beauties," observed the Marquis: "they are particularly stout, you know, being all fed on a preparation of rice called *couscousou*. I really think I must pay a visit to those parts next spring."

"I will undertake to get one of the members of the government to introduce a favourable mention of the project into his speech to-morrow night, in the House," said Sir T. M. B. Muzzlehem: "but you must send him a hundred shares the first thing in the morning."

"That shall be done," answered Mr. Twitchem.

"Well, my lord and gentlemen," observed Mr. Greenwood, "I think that this little business looks uncommonly well. The project is no doubt feasible—I mean, the shares are certain to go off well. Mr. Bubble and Mr. Chouse will undertake to raise them in public estimation, by the reports they will circulate in Capel Court. Of course, my lord and gentlemen, when they are at a good premium, we shall all sell; and if we do not realise twenty or thirty thousand pounds each—*each*, mark me—then shall you be at liberty to say that the free and independent electors of Rottenborough have chosen as their representative a dolt and an idiot in the person of your humble servant."

"Whatever Mr. Greenwood undertakes is certain to turn to gold," observed Mr. Bubble.

"Can't be otherwise," said Mr. Chouse.

"Mr. Greenwood's name stands so well in the City," added Mr. Sheriff Popkins.

"And his lordship's countenance to the enterprise is a tower of strength," exclaimed Mr. Alderman Sniff.

"I have already had many inquiries concerning the project," said Mr. Tomlinson.

"Yes—Chouse and I took care to circulate reports in the City that such a scheme was in contemplation," observed Bubble.

"Gentlemen, I think that all difficulties have been provided against in this Prospectus," cried Mr. Twitchem:—"the predatory tribes, Abd-el-Kadir, and the wild beasts."

"Nothing could be better," answered Mr. Greenwood. "Take care that the Prospectus be sent as an advertisement to every London journal, and the leading provincial ones. You know that I am a shareholder in one of the London newspapers; and I can promise you that it will not fail to cry up our enterprise. In fact, my lord and gentlemen," added Mr. Greenwood, "I have at this moment in my pocket a copy of a leading article—that will appear in that paper, the day after to-morrow."

"My gwathioth!—do read it, Greenwood," cried Sir Cherry Bounce.

"Yes: I'd give the world to hear it—smite me!" ejaculated Major Dapper.

Mr. Greenwood glanced complacently around, and then drew forth a printed slip, the contents of which were as follow:—

"In our opposition to those multifarious railway projects which are starting up on all sides, as if some Cadmus had been sowing bubbles in our financial soil, we have only been swayed by our fears lest such a number of schemes, which never can obtain the sanction of Parliament, should injure the credit, and impair the monetary prosperity of the country. It must not, however, be supposed that we are inimical to those undertakings which are based upon fair, intelligible, and reasonable grounds. There are many talented, honourable, and wealthy individuals engaged in speculations of this nature; and, their motives being beyond suspicion, no one of common sense can for a moment suppose that we include *their* projects amongst the airy nothings against which we are compelled to put the public on their guard. The extension of railways is internally connected with the progress of civilisation; and when we behold the principle applied to distant and semi-barbarian countries—as in the case, for instance, of that truly grand and promising enterprise, the Algiers, Oran, and Morocco Great Desert Railway—we feel proud that England should have the honour of taking the initiative in thus propagating beyond its own limits the elements of civilisation, and the germs of humanising influences. At the same time we shall continue our strenuous opposition to all railway schemes which we consider to be mere bubbles blown from the pipes of intriguants and adventurers; and we shall never pause until in those pipes we put an effectual stopper."

"Thuper-ekthellent—glowiouth—majethtic—athtounding!" ejaculated Sir Cherry, quite in raptures.

"You perceive how beautifully—how delicately the puff is insinuated," said Mr. Greenwood. "That article will have an astonishing effect."

"No doubt of it," observed the Marquis. "You might have contrived to introduce something relative to the Emperor of Morocco's ladies. Why not state that the Moorish terminus will command a view of the gardens of the imperial harem, where those divine creatures—each of seventeen stone weight—are wont to ramble in a voluptuous undress?"

"No—no, my lord; that would never do!" cried Greenwood, with a smile. "And now, my lord and gentlemen, we perfectly understand each other. Each takes as many shares as he pleases. When they reach a high premium, each may sell as he thinks fit. Then, when we have realized our profits, we will inform the shareholders that insuperable difficulties prevent the carrying out of the project,—that Abd-el-Kadir, for instance, has violated his agreement and declared against the scheme,—that the Committee of Direction will therefore retain a sum sufficient to defray the expenses already incurred, and that the remaining capital paid up shall be returned to the shareholders."

"That is exactly what, I believe, we all understand," observed Mr. Twitchem.

"For my part," said Lord Holmesford, "I only embark in the enterprise to oblige my friend Greenwood; and therefore I am agreeable to any thing that he proposes."

Matters being thus amicably arranged, the company passed the remainder of the evening in the conviviality of the table.

At eleven o'clock the guests all retired, with the exception of the Marquis of Holmesford.

"Now, friend Greenwood," said this nobleman, "you will keep your engagement with me?"

"Yes, my lord: I am prepared to accompany you."

"Let us depart at once, then," added the Marquis, rising from his chair: "my carriage has been waiting some time; and I long to introduce you to the voluptuous mysteries of Holmesford House."

CHAPTER CLXXII.

THE MYSTERIES OF HOLMESFORD HOUSE.

The Marquis and Mr. Greenwood alighted at the door of Holmesford House—one of the most splendid palaces of the aristocracy at the West End.

The Marquis conducted his visitor into a large ante-room at the right hand of the spacious hall.

The table in the middle of the apartment was covered with the most luxurious fruits, nosegays of flowers, preserves, sweetmeats, and delicious wines.

From this room three doors afforded communication elsewhere. One opened into the hall, and had afforded them ingress: the other, on the opposite side, belonged to a corridor, with which were connected the baths; and the third, at the bottom, communicated with a vast saloon, of which we shall have more to say very shortly.

The Marquis said to the servant who conducted him and Mr. Greenwood to the ante-room, "You may retire; and let *them* ring the bell when all is ready."

The domestic withdrew.

The Marquis motioned Greenwood to seat himself at the table; and, filling two coloured glasses with real Johannisberg, he said, "We must endeavour to while away half an hour; and then I can promise you a pleasing entertainment."

The nobleman and the member of Parliament quaffed the delicious wine, and indulged in discourse upon the most voluptuous subjects.

"For my part," said the Marquis, "I study how to enjoy life. I possess an immense fortune, and do not scruple to spend it upon all the pleasures I can fancy, or which suggest themselves to me. I am not such an idiot as to imagine that I possess the vigour or natural warmth which characterised my youth; and therefore I have become an Epicurean in my recreations. I invent and devise the means of inflaming my passions; and then—*then* I am young once more. You will presently behold something truly oriental in the refinements on voluptuousness which I have conceived to produce an artificial effect on the temperament when nature is languid and weak.

"Your lordship is right to fan the flame that burns dimly," observed Greenwood, who, unprincipled as he was, could not, however, avoid a feeling of disgust when he heard that old voluptuary, with one foot in the grave, thus shamelessly express himself.

"Wine and women, my dear Greenwood," continued the Marquis, "are the only earthly enjoyments worth living for. I hope to die, with my head pillowed on the naked—heaving bosom of beauty, and with a glass of sparkling champagne in my hand."

"Your lordship would then even defy the pangs of the grim monster who spares no one," said Greenwood.

"I have lived a joyous life, my dear friend; and when death comes, I can say that no mortal man—not even Solomon, with his thousand wives and concubines—nor any eastern Sultan, who had congregated the fairest flowers of Georgia, Circassia, and Armenia in his harem,—had more deeply drunk than I of the pleasures of love."

Just as the aged voluptuary uttered these words, a silver bell that hung in the apartment was agitated gently by a wire which communicated with the adjoining saloon.

"Now all is in readiness!" exclaimed the Marquis: "follow me."

The nobleman opened the door leading into the saloon, which he entered, accompanied by Greenwood.

He then closed the door behind him.

The saloon was involved in total obscurity; the blackest darkness reigned there, unbroken by a ray.

"Give me your hand," said the Marquis.

Greenwood complied; and the nobleman led him to a sofa at a short distance from the door by which they had entered.

They both seated themselves on the voluptuous cushions.

For some moments a solemn silence prevailed.

At length that almost painful stillness was broken by the soft notes of a delicious melody, which, coming from the farther end of the apartment, stole, with a species of enchanting influence, upon the ear.

Gentle and low was that sweet music when it began; but by degrees it grew louder—though still soft and ravishing in the extreme.

Then a chorus of charming female voices suddenly burst forth; and the union of that vocal and instrumental perfection produced an effect thrilling—intoxicating—joyous, beyond description.

The melody created in the mind of Greenwood an anxious desire to behold those unseen choristers whose voices were so harmonious, so delightful.

The dulcet, metallic sounds agitated the senses with feelings of pleasure, and made the heart beat with vague hopes and expectations.

For nearly twenty minutes did that delicious concert last. Love was the subject of the song,—Love, not considered as an infant boy, nor as a merciless tyrant,—but Love depicted as the personification of every thing voluptuous, blissful, and enchanting,—Love, the

representative of all the joys which earth in reality possesses, or which the warmest imagination could possibly conceive,—Love apart from the refinements of sentiment, and contemplated only as the paradise of sensualities.

And never did sweeter voices warble the fervid language of passion through the medium of a more enchanting poesy!

Twenty minutes, we said, passed with wonderful rapidity while that inspiring concert lasted.

But even then the melody did not cease suddenly. It gradually grew fainter and fainter—dying away, as it were, in expiring sounds of silver harmony, as if yielding to the voluptuous enhancement of its own magic influence.

And now, just as the last murmur floated to the ears of the raptured listeners, a bell tinkled at a distance; and in an instant—as if by magic—the spacious saloon was lighted up with a brilliancy which produced a sensation like an electric shock.

At the same time, the music struck up in thrilling sounds once more; and a bevy of lovely creatures, whom the glare suddenly revealed upon a stage at the farther end of the apartment, became all life and activity in a voluptuous dance.

Three chandeliers of transparent crystal had suddenly vomited forth jets of flame; and round the walls the illumination had sprung into existence, with simultaneous suddenness, from innumerable silver sconces.

A glance around showed Greenwood that he was in a vast and lofty apartment, furnished with luxurious ottomans in the oriental style; and with tables groaning beneath immense vases filled with the choicest flowers.

The walls were covered with magnificent pictures, representing the most voluptuous scenes of the heathen mythology and of ancient history.

The figures in those paintings were as large as life; and no prudery had restrained the artist's pencil in the delineation of the luxuriant subjects which he had chosen.

There was Lucretia, struggling—vainly struggling with the ardent Tarquin,—her drapery torn by his rude hands away from her lovely form, which the brutal violence of his mad passion had rendered weak, supple, and yielding.

There was Helen, reclining in more than semi-nudity on the couch to which her languishing and wanton looks invited the enamoured Phrygian youth, who was hastily laying aside his armour after a combat with the Greeks.

There was Messalina—that imperial harlot, whose passions were so insatiable and whose crimes were so enormous,—issuing from a bath to join her lover, who impatiently awaited her beneath a canopy in a recess, and which was surmounted by the Roman diadem.

Then there were pictures representing the various amours of Jupiter,—Leda, Latona, Semele, and Europa—the mistresses of the god—all drawn in the most exciting attitudes, and endowed with the most luscious beauties.

But if those creations of art were sufficient to inflame the passions of even that age when the blood seems frozen in the veins, how powerful must have been the effect produced by those living, breathing, moving houris who were now engaged in a rapid and exciting dance to the most ravishing music.

They wore six in number, and all dressed alike, in a drapery so light and gauzy that it was all but transparent, and so scanty that it afforded no scope for the sweet romancing of fancy, and left but little need for guesses.

But if their attire were thus uniform, their style of beauty was altogether different.

We must, however, permit the Marquis to describe them to Greenwood—which he did in whispers.

"That fair girl on the right," he said, "with the brilliant complexion, auburn hair, and red cherry lips, is from the north—a charming specimen of Scotch beauty. Mark how taper is her waist, and yet how ample her bust! She is only nineteen, and has been in my house for the last three years. Her voice is charming; and she sings some of her native airs with exquisite taste. The one next to her, with the brown hair, and who is somewhat stout in form, though, as you perceive, not the less active on that account, is an English girl—a beauty of Lancashire. She is twenty-two, and appeared four years ago on the stage. From thence she passed into the keeping of a bishop, who took lodgings for her in great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. The Right Reverend Prelate one evening invited me to sup there; and three days afterwards she removed to my house."

"Not with the consent of the bishop, I should imagine?" observed Greenwood, laughing.

"Oh! no—no," returned the Marquis, chuckling and coughing at the same time. "The one who is next to her—the third from the left, I mean—is an Irish girl. Look how beautifully she is made. What vigorous, strong, and yet elegantly formed limbs! And what elasticity—what airy lightness in the dance! Did you observe that pirouette? How the drapery spread out from her waist like a circular fan! Is she not a charming creature?"

"She is, indeed!" exclaimed Greenwood. "Tall, elegant, and graceful."

"And her tongue is just tipped with enough of the Irish accent—I cannot call it *brogue* in so sweet a being—to render her conversation peculiarly interesting. And now mark her smile! Oh! the coquette—what a roguish look! Has she not wickedness in those sparkling black eyes?"

"She seems an especial favourite, methinks," whispered Greenwood.

"Yes—I have a sneaking preference for her, I must admit," answered the Marquis. "But I also like my little French girl, who is dancing next to Kathleen. Mademoiselle Anna is an exquisite creature—and such a wanton! What passion is denoted by her burning glances! How graceful are her movements: survey her now—she beats them all in that soft abandonment of limb which she just displayed. Her mother was a widow, and sold the lovely Anna to a French Field-Marshal, when she was only fifteen. The Field-Marshal, who was also a duke and enormously rich, placed her in a magnificent mansion in the Chausseé d'Antin, and settled a handsome sum upon her. But, at his death, she ran through it all, became involved in debt, and was glad to accept my offers two years ago."

"She is very captivating," said Greenwood. "How gracefully she rounds her dazzling white arms!"

"And how well she throws herself into the most voluptuous attitudes—and all, too, as if unstudied!" returned the Marquis. "The beauty next to her is a Spaniard. The white drapery, in my opinion, sets off her clear, transparent, olive skin, to the utmost advantage. The blood seems to boil in her veins: she is all fire—all passion. How brilliant are her large black eyes! Behold the glossy magnificence of her raven hair! Tall—straight as an arrow—how commanding, and yet how graceful is her form! And when she smiles—now—you can perceive the dazzling whiteness of her teeth. Last of all I must direct your attention to my Georgian—"

"A real Georgian?" exclaimed Greenwood.

"A real Georgian," answered the Marquis; "and, as Byron describes his Katinka, 'white and red.' Her large melting blue eyes are full of voluptuous, lazy, indolent, but not the less impassioned love. Her dark brown hair is braided in a manner to display its luxuriance, and yet leave the entire face clear for you to admire its beauty. Look at that fine oval countenance: how pure is the red—how delicate the white! Nature has no artificial auxiliaries there! And now when she casts down her eyes, mark how the long, silken black lashes, slightly curling, repose upon the white skin beneath the eyes. Is not that a charming creature? The symmetry of her form is perfect. Her limbs are stout and plump; but how slender are her ankles, and how exquisitely turned her wrists! Then look at her hand. What beautiful, long taper fingers! How sweet are her movements—light, yet languishing at the same time!"

"What is the name of that beauty?" asked Greenwood.

"Malkhatoun," replied the Marquis; "which means *The Full Moon*. That was the name of the wife of Osman, the founder of the Ottoman empire."

"And how did you procure such a lovely creature?" inquired Greenwood, enraptured with the beauty of the oriental girl.

"Six months ago I visited Constantinople," answered the Marquis of Holmesford; "and in the Slave-Market I beheld that divinity. Christians are not allowed to purchase slaves; but a convenient native merchant was found, who bought her for me. I brought her to England; and she is well contented to be here. Her own apartment is fitted up in an oriental style; she has her Koran, and worships Alla at her leisure; and when I make love to her, she swears by the Prophet Mahommed that she is happy here. The romance of the thing is quite charming."

"Of course she cannot speak English?" said Greenwood interrogatively.

"I beg your pardon," answered the Marquis. "She has an English master, who is well acquainted with Persian, which she speaks admirably; and I can assure you that she is a most willing pupil. But of that you shall judge for yourself presently."

During this conversion, the dance proceeded.

Nothing could be more voluptuous than that spectacle of six charming creatures, representing the loveliness of as many different countries, engaged in a *pas de six* in which each studied how to set off the graces of her form to the utmost advantage.

The genial warmth of the apartment—the delicious perfume of the flowers—the brilliancy of the light—the exciting nature of the pictures—and the enchantment of that dance in which six beings of the rarest beauty were engaged,—filled the mind of Greenwood with an ecstatic delirium.

Not the rich and luscious loveliness of Diana Arlington, whom circumstances had made his own,—not the matured and exuberant charms of Eliza Sydney, who had escaped his snares,—not the bewitching beauty of Ellen Monroe, from whose brow he had plucked the diadem of purity,—nor the licentious fascinations of Lady Cecilia Harborough, who sold herself to him for his gold,—not all these had so stirred his heart, so inflamed his ardent imagination, as the spectacle which he now beheld.

At length the dance terminated.

The Marquis then advanced towards the stage, accompanied by Greenwood, and said, "Many thanks, young ladies, for this entertainment. Allow me to present an intimate friend of mine—a gentleman whom I am anxious to initiate in the mysteries of Holmesford House."

Greenwood bowed; the six beauties returned his salutation; and the Marquis then proposed to adjourn to the ante-room, where supper was served up.

The ladies descended from the platform by a flight of steps on one side.

"I shall give my arm to Kathleen," said the Marquis. "Do you escort whomever you fancy. There are no jealousies here."

Without hesitation Greenwood advanced towards the charming Malkhatoun, who took the arm which he presented to her, with a sweet smile—as if of gratitude for the preference.

As Greenwood thus stepped forward to meet her, he now for the first time observed the orchestra, which was situated in a large recess on the right of the stage, and had consequently been unseen by him from the place which he had originally occupied at the other end of the saloon.

The party now proceeded to the ante-room before mentioned.

There a magnificent repast was served up.

They all seated themselves at table, Kathleen next to the Marquis, and Malkhatoun by the side of Greenwood.

At first the conversation languished somewhat, the ladies being abashed and reserved in the presence of a stranger; but as they grew warmed by degrees with the generous wine, their tongues were unlocked; and in half an hour they rattled and chatted away as if they had never known restraint.

They laughed and displayed their beautiful teeth: their eyes flashed fire, or became voluptuously melting: and their cheeks were animated with the hues of the rose.

Even the fair Mohammedan did not refuse the sparkling champagne which effervesced so deliciously over the brim of the crystal glass.

The Scotch and Irish girls warbled the sweetest snatches of song which Greenwood had ever heard; and then the French damsel rose and gave admirable imitations of Taglioni's, Ellsler's, and Duvernay's respective styles of dancing—throwing, however, into her movements and attitudes a wantonness which even the most exciting efforts of those *artistes* never displayed.

It was now nearly two in the morning; and Greenwood intimated to the Marquis his wish to retire.

"Just as you please," replied the old voluptuary, who had drawn Kathleen upon his knee, and was toying with her as if they were unobserved: "but if you like to accept of a bed here, there is one at your service—and," he added, in a whisper, "you need not be separated from Malkhatoun."

"Is your lordship in earnest?" asked Greenwood, also in a low tone, while joy flashed from his eyes.

"Certainly I am," replied the Marquis. "Do you think that I brought you hither merely to tantalize you?"

Greenwood smiled, and then redoubled his attentions towards the charming Georgian, who returned his smiles, and seemed to consider herself honoured by his caresses.

On a signal from the Marquis, the Scotch, English, French, and Spanish girls withdrew.

"One glass of wine in honour of those houris who have just left us!" cried the nobleman, who was already heated with frequent potations, and inflamed by the contiguity of his Hibernian mistress.

"With pleasure," responded Greenwood.

The toast was drunk; and then the Marquis whispered something to Greenwood, pointing at the same time to the door which opened into the bathing rooms.

The member of Parliament nodded an enraptured assent.

"There is a constant supply of hot water, kept ready for use," observed the nobleman. "Each room is provided with a marble bath; and vases of eau-de-cologne afford the means of cooling the water and imparting to it a delicious perfume at the same time. You will also find wines, fruits, and all species of delicate refreshments there; and adjoining each bath-room is a bed-chamber. With Malkhatoun as your companion, you may imagine yourself a Sultan in the privacy of his harem; and, remember, that no soul will intrude upon you in that joyous retreat."

Greenwood presented his hand to Malkhatoun, and led her away in obedience to the nobleman's suggestion.

The door by which they left the ante-room admitted them into a passage dimly lighted with a single lamp, and where several doors opened into the bathing apartments.

Into one of those rooms Greenwood and the beautiful Georgian passed.

Shortly afterwards the Marquis and Kathleen entered another.

Here we must pause: we dare not penetrate farther into the mysteries of Holmesford House.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

THE ADIEUX.

Our narrative must now take a leap of several months.

It was the middle of October.

Once more in the vicinity of Count Alteroni's mansion near Richmond, a handsome young man and a beautiful dark-eyed maiden were walking together.

Need we say that they were Richard and the charming Isabella?

The countenances of both wore an expression of melancholy; but that indication of feeling was commingled with the traces of other emotions.

Richard's eyes beamed with ardour, and his lips denoted stern resolution: Isabella's bewitching features showed that her generous soul entertained warm and profound hope, even though the cloud sate upon her brow.

"Yes, my adored one," said Richard, gazing tenderly upon her, "it is decided! To-morrow I embark on this expedition. But I could not quit England without seeing you once more, dearest Isabella; and for two or three days have I vainly wandered in this neighbourhood with the hope of meeting you—alone."

"Oh! Richard, had I for one moment divined that you were so near, I should have come to you," answered the Princess; "and this you know well! If I have hitherto discouraged clandestine meetings and secret correspondence—save on one or two occasions—it was simply because you should not have reason to think lightly of me;—but you are well aware, Richard, that my heart is thine—unchangeably thine,—and that my happiest moments are those I pass with thee!"

"I cannot chide you, dearest, for that fine feeling which has made you discourage clandestine meetings and secret correspondence," said Richard, gazing with mingled admiration and rapture upon the angelic countenance of Isabella; "but now that circumstances are about to change,—now that I shall be far away from thee, beloved girl,—that restriction must in some degree be removed, and you will permit me to write to you from time to time."

"It would be an absurd affectation and a ridiculous prudery, were I to refuse you," replied Isabella. "Yes, dear Richard—write to me;—and write often," she added, tears starting into her eyes.

"A thousand thanks, Isabella, for this kind permission—this proof of your love. And, oh! to whatever perils I am about to oppose myself face to face,—in whatever dangers I may be involved,—whatever miseries or privations I may be destined to endure,—the thought of you, my own adored Isabella, will make all seem light! But I do not anticipate much difficulty in the attainment of our grand object. General Grachia, Colonel Morosino, and the other chiefs of this enterprise, have so well, so prudently, so cautiously digested all the measures necessary to ensure success, that failure is scarcely possible. The tyranny of the Grand Duke and of his shameless Ministry has reduced the Castelcicalans to despair. We have three fine vessels; and twelve hundred devoted patriots will form the expedition. The moment we land, we shall be welcomed with enthusiasm. And if an opportunity should serve for me to show myself worthy of the confidence that General Grachia and his colleagues have placed in me,—if," continued Richard, his handsome countenance now lighted up with a glow of heroic enthusiasm,—"if the aid of my feeble efforts can in any way demonstrate my zeal in favour of the constitutional cause, be well assured, dearest Isabella, that it is not an idle boaster, nor a braggart coward who now assures thee that he will not dishonour the service in which he has embarked."

"Of that I feel convinced, Richard," exclaimed the Italian lady, whose soul caught the enthusiasm which animated her lover. "But you know not the wild hopes—the exalted visions which have at times filled my imagination, since I heard a few weeks ago that you were one of the chiefs of this enterprise, the preparations for which were communicated to my father. For you are doubtless aware that General Grachia *has* made my father acquainted with his intentions and projects——"

"Which the Prince discountenances," added Richard, with a sigh. "Nevertheless, he is perhaps right: but if we succeed, Isabella—oh! if we succeed, your father becomes the sovereign of a great and enlightened people! Then—what hope will remain for me?"

"Providence will not desert us, Richard," answered Isabella. "Said I not ere now that the wildest hopes—the most exalted visions have dazzled my imagination? I will not describe them to you, Richard; but need I confess that they are connected with yourself? The dying words of our poor friend Mary Anne have made an impression upon me which I can never forget."

"I can well divine all the hopes and aspirations which *her* prophetic language was calculated to excite," returned Markham; "for there have been moments when I was weak enough to yield to the same influence myself. But the future is with the Almighty; and He must ordain our happiness or our misery! I must now leave you, my beloved Isabella:—when I am away thou wilt think of me often?"

"Oh! Richard, will you really depart? will you venture on this expedition, so fraught with danger?" cried Isabella, now giving way to her grief as the moment of separation drew nigh. "I told you to hope—I wished to console you; but it is I who require consolation when about to say farewell to you! Oh! Richard, if you knew what anguish now fills my heart, you would be enabled to estimate all my love for you!"

"I do—I do, adored Isabella!" ejaculated Markham, pressing her to his breast. "How devotedly—how faithfully you have loved me, I

never can forget! When spurned from your father's house—overwhelmed with the most cruel suspicions, your love remained unchanged; and in many a bitter, bitter hour, have I derived sweet solace from the conviction that thy heart was mine! Oh! Isabella, God in his mercy grant that I may return from this enterprise with some honour to myself! It is not that I am influenced by motives of selfish ambition;—it is that I may remove at least one of the hundred obstacles which oppose our union. And now adieu, my angel—my dearly-beloved Isabella: adieu—adieu!"

"Farewell, Richard—farewell, dearest one—my first and only love," murmured Isabella, as she wept bitterly upon his breast.

Then they embraced each other with that passionate ardour—with that lingering unwillingness to separate—with that profound dread to tear themselves asunder, which lovers in the moment of parting alone can know.

"Let us be firm, Isabella," said Richard: "who can tell what happiness my share in this enterprise may create for us?"

"Yes—something tells me that it will be so," answered Isabella; "and that hope sustains me!"

Another embrace—and they parted.

Yes—they parted,—that handsome young man and that charming Italian maiden!

And soon they waved their handkerchiefs for the last time;—then, in a few moments, they were lost to each other's view.

Richard returned home to his house at Lower Holloway.

He had visited the farm near Hounslow a few days previously, and had taken leave of Katherine. The young maiden had wept when her benefactor communicated to her his intended absence from England for some time; but, as he did not acquaint her with the nature of the business which took him way from his native country, she was not aware of the perils he was about to encounter.

He had now to say farewell to the inmates of his own dwelling. But towards Mr. Monroe, Ellen, and the faithful Whittingham he was less reserved than he had been to Katherine.

Vainly had the old butler implored "Master Richard not to indemnify himself with other people's business;"—vainly had Mr. Monroe endeavoured to persuade him to refrain from risking his life in the political dissensions of a foreign country; vainly had the beautiful and generous-hearted Ellen, with a sisterly warmth, argued on the same side. Richard was determined:—they deemed him obstinate—foolish—almost mad; but they knew not of his love for Isabella!

"I must now make you acquainted with a certain portion of my affairs," said our hero, addressing Mr. Monroe, "in order that you may manage them for me until my return. I have embarked as much of my capital as I could well spare in the enterprise on which I am about to set out: you will find in my strong-box, of which I leave you the key, a sufficient sum of money to answer the expenses of the establishment until January. Should I not return by that time, you will find papers in the same place, which will instruct you relative to the moneys that will then be due to me from the two respectable individuals who are my tenants. Moreover," added Richard,—and here his voice faltered,—"my will is in the strong-box; and should I perish in this undertaking, you will find, my dear friend,—and you too, my faithful Whittingham,—that I have not left you without resources."

"Richard, this is too generous!" exclaimed Mr. Monroe, tears of gratitude trickling down his cheeks.

Whittingham also wept; and Ellen's sobs were convulsive—for she regarded Richard in the light of a dear brother.

"Render not our parting moments more painful than they naturally are, my dear friends," said Markham. "You cannot understand—but, if I live, you shall some day know—the motives which influence me in joining this expedition. Mr. Monroe—Ellen—Whittingham, I have one last request to make. You are all aware that on the 10th of July, 1843, a solemn appointment exists between my brother and myself. If I should perish in a far-off clime,—or if a prison, or any accident prevent my return,—let one of you represent me on that occasion. Should it be so, tell my brother how much I have loved him—how anxiously I have ever looked forward to that day,—how sincerely I have prayed for his welfare and his success! Tell him," continued Richard, while the tears rolled down his cheeks, large and fast,—"tell him that I have cherished his memory as no brother ever before was known to do; and if he be poor—or unhappy—or suffering—or unfortunate, receive him into this house, which will then be your own—console, comfort him! If he be criminal, do not spurn him:—remember, he is my brother!"

Ellen sobbed as if her heart would break as Richard uttered these words.

There was something fearfully poignant and convulsive in that young lady's grief.

But suddenly rousing herself, she rushed from the room; and, returning in a few moments with her child, she presented it to Markham, saying "Embrace him, Richard, before you depart;—embrace him—for he bears your Christian name!"

Our hero received the innocent infant in his arms, and kissed it tenderly.

No pen can depict the expression of pleasure—of radiant joy,—joy shining out from amidst her tears,—with which Ellen contemplated that proof of affection towards her babe.

"Thank you, Richard—thank you, my brother," she exclaimed, as she received back her child.

The old butler and Mr. Monroe were not callous to the touching nature of that scene.

"I have now no more to say," observed Richard. "I am about to retire to the library for a short time. At five o'clock the post-chaise will be here. Whittingham, my faithful friend, you will see that all my necessaries be carefully packed."

Markham then withdrew to his study.

There he wrote a few letters upon matters of business.

At length Whittingham made his appearance.

"Morcar is arrived, Master Richard," said the old man, "and it is close upon five."

"I shall soon be ready, Whittingham," answered Richard.

The old butler withdrew.

Then Richard took from his strong-box the mysterious packet which had been left to him by Thomas Armstrong; and that sacred trust he secured about his person.

"Now," he said, "I am about to quit the home of my forefathers."

And tears trickled down his cheeks.

"This is foolish!" he exclaimed, after a pause: "I must not yield to my emotions, when on the eve of such a grand and glorious undertaking."

He then returned to the drawing-room.

At that moment the post-chaise arrived at the front door of the mansion.

We will not detail the affecting nature of the farewell scene: suffice it to say that Richard departed with the fervent prayers and the sincerest wishes of those whom he left behind.

Morcar, the gipsy, accompanied him.

"Which road, sir?" asked the postillion.

"Canterbury—Deal," replied Richard.

And the post-chaise whirled him away from the home of his forefathers!

By a special messenger, on the same day when the above-mentioned incidents took place, the following letter was despatched from London:—

"To Her Serene Highness the Grand Duchess of Castelcicala.

"I have the honour to inform your Serene Highness that the measures which I adopted (and which your Highness condemned in the last letter your Highness deigned to address to me) have enabled me to ascertain the intentions of the conspirators. The three vessels purchased by them are now completely equipped and manned. One has already arrived in the Downs, where the Chiefs of the rebels are to join her. A second sailed from Hull four days ago: and the third left Waterford about the same time. They will all three meet at Cadiz, where they are to take in stores and water. Twelve hundred exiled Castelcicalans are on board these three ships, which are ostensibly fitted out as emigrant vessels for North America. So well have General Grachia, Colonel Morosino, and Mr. Markham planned their schemes, that I question whether even the English government is acquainted with the real destination of those ships, and the object of their crews.

"Beware, then, noble lady! The last meeting of the Chiefs of the expedition was held last evening; and I was present in my presumed capacity of a stanch adherent to the cause of the conspirators. The reasons which I adduced for not proceeding with them on the enterprise, and for remaining in London, were completely satisfactory; and no one for a moment suspected my integrity. Indeed, the confidence which Mr. Markham has placed in me from the beginning, in consequence of the share which I had in saving his life (an incident to which I have alluded in preceding letters to your Highness) on a certain occasion, annihilated all suspicion as to the sincerity of my motives.

"At the meeting of which I have just spoken, it was resolved that the descent upon Castelcicala shall be made in the neighbourhood of Ossore, which, I need scarcely inform your Serene Highness, is a small sea-port about thirty-five miles to the south of Montoni.

"And now I have discharged what I consider to be a faithful duty. If I have fallen in your Highness's good opinion by betraying those with whom I affected to act, I fondly hope that the importance of the information which I have thereby been enabled to give you, will restore me to your Highness's favour.

"But remember, my lady—remember the prayer which I offered up to your Highness when first I wrote concerning this conspiracy,—remember the earnest supplication which I then made and now renew,—that *not a hair of Richard Markham's head must be injured*!

"I have the honour to subscribe myself your Serene Highness's most faithful and devoted servant,

"FILIPPO DORSENNI.
Oct. 16th, 1840."

Thus was it that Mr. Greenwood's Italian valet provided, to the utmost of his power, for the safety of Richard Markham, in case those whom he improperly denominated "conspirators" should fall into the hands of the Castelcicalan authorities.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

CASTELCICALA.

The Grand-Duchy of Castelcicala is bounded on the north by the Roman States, on the south by the kingdom of Naples, on the east by the Apennine Mountains, and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea.

It is the most beautiful, the best cultivated, and the finest portion of the Italian Peninsula. The inhabitants are brave, enlightened, and industrious.

Castelcicala is divided into seven districts, or provinces, the capitals of which are Montoni (which is also the metropolis of the Grand Duchy), Abrantani, Veronezzi, Pinalla, Estella, Terano, and Montecuculi. Each province is governed by a Captain-General (the chief military authority), and a Political Prefect, (the chief civil authority).

The principal city, Montoni, stands at the mouth of the Ferretti, and contains a hundred thousand inhabitants. It is built on both sides of the river, has a fine harbour, spacious dockyards, and extensive arsenals, and is one of the principal trading-ports of Italy. It is strongly fortified on the system of Vauban.

The entire population of the Grand-Duchy of Castelcicala is two millions. Its revenues are three millions sterling; and the annual income of the sovereign is two hundred thousand pounds.

From these details the reader will perceive that Castelcicala is by no means an unimportant country in the map of Europe.

We shall now continue our narrative.

It was the middle of November, 1840, and at an early hour in the morning, before sunrise, when three vessels (two large brigs and a schooner) ran in as close as the depth of water would permit them with safety, on the Castelcicalan coast a few miles below Ossore.

The boats of these vessels were immediately lowered; and by the time the sun dawned on the scene, nearly twelve hundred armed men were landed without molestation.

This force was divided into two columns: one of seven hundred strong was commanded by General Grachia; the other of five hundred was led by Colonel Morosino. Richard Markham, as Secretary-General of the Constitutional Chiefs, and attended by Morcar, accompanied General Grachia. The chiefs and their staff were all provided with horses.

The army presented a somewhat motley aspect, the officers alone appearing in uniforms. The entire force was, however, well provided with weapons; and every heart beat high with hope and patriotism.

The banners were unfurled; an excellent brass band struck up an enlivening national air; and the two columns marched in the direction of Ossore.

It was deemed most important to possess this sea-port without delay; as its harbour would afford a safe refuge for the three ships to which the Constitutionalists (as the invaders termed themselves) could alone look for the means of retreat, in case of the failure of their enterprise.

But of such a result they entertained not the slightest apprehension.

And now the peasants in the farm-houses and hamlets near which they passed, were suddenly alarmed by the sounds of martial music: but the rumour of the real object of the invaders spread like wild-fire; and they had not marched three or four miles, before they were already joined by nearly a hundred volunteer-recruits.

The hearts of the Constitutionalists were enlivened by this success; for while the male inhabitants of the district through which they passed hastened to join them, the women put up audible prayers to heaven to prosper their glorious enterprise.

Ossore was in the province of Abrantani, which had for nearly a year groaned under the tyranny of the Captain-General, who governed his district by martial law, the jurisdiction of the civil tribunals having been superseded by the odious despotism of military courts. The Constitutionalists, therefore, entertained the strongest hopes that Ossore would pronounce in their favour the moment they appeared beneath its walls.

The Constitutionalists were now only three miles from Ossore, which was hidden from their view by a high hill, up the acclivity of which the two columns were marching, when the quick ear of General Grachia suddenly caught the sound of horses' feet on the opposite side of the eminence.

Turning to one of his *aides-de-camp*, he said, "Hasten to Colonel Morosino—tell him to take that road to the left and possess himself of yonder grove. Our landing is known—a body of cavalry is approaching."

These words were delivered in a rapid but firm tone. The *aide-de-camp* galloped away to execute the order; and General Grachia proceeded to address a few brief but impressive words to the patriots of his division, telling them that the moment to strike a blow was now at hand.

"Markham," said the General, when he had concluded his harangue, "we shall have hot work in a few minutes."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when a large body of cavalry made its appearance on the summit of the hill. A general officer,

surrounded by a brilliant staff, was at their head.

"That is Count Santa-Croce, the Captain-General of Abrantani!" exclaimed Grachia, drawing his sword. "Parley with him were vain—he is devoted to the Grand Duke. My friends, before us lies death or victory!"

The Constitutionalists gave a deafening cheer in answer to the words of their commander.

Then, like an avalanche bursting from its rest on the Alpine height, and rolling with dread and deafening din in its precipitate path, the ducal cavalry thundered down the hill.

But they were well received; and a terrific contest ensued.

The ear was deafened with the report of musketry and the clang of weapons. Bullets whistled through the air; and as the serried ranks on either side poured forth volumes of smoke,—the Constitutionalists with their muskets, and the cavalry with their carbines,—the shouts of the combatants and the groans of the dying announced the desperate nature of the conflict.

But, alas! the Constitutionalists were doomed to experience a sad blow!

General Grachia,—a patriot whose memory demands our admiration and respect,—was slain at the commencement of the battle. He died, fighting gallantly at the head of his troops; and not before the enemy had felt the weight of his valiant arm.

Almost at the same moment the ensign who bore the Constitutional banner was struck to the earth; and an officer of the ducal cavalry seized the standard.

But scarcely had he grasped it, when Richard Markham, who had vainly endeavoured to protect his chief and friend from the weapons of the enemy, spurred his steed with irresistible fury against the officer, hurled him from his seat, and snatched the banner from his grasp.

Then, waving the flag above his head with his left hand, and wielding his sword in the right, Richard plunged into the thickest of the fight, exclaiming, "Vengeance for the death of our general!"

The moment that Grachia fell, a sudden panic seized upon the Constitutionalists of his division; and they were already retreating, when that gallant exploit on the part of Markham rallied them with galvanic effect.

"Vengeance for the death of our general!" was the cry; and our hero was instantly backed by his faithful Morcar and a whole host of Constitutionalists.

The conflict was desperate—both sides fighting as if all idea of quarter were out of the question, and victory or death were the only alternatives.

Fired by the loss of General Grachia,—conscious of the desperate position in which defeat would place the invaders,—and inspired by the image of Isabella, Richard fought with the fury of the Destroying Angel.

He who had only been looked upon as possessing an able head in administrative matters, now suddenly appeared in a new light,—a gallant warrior, who by his bravery had succeeded in rallying a panic-struck army.

Already were the ducal cavalry retreating;—already had the Captain-General, who surveyed the conflict from the summit of the hill, disappeared with his staff-officers on the opposite side;—already were the Constitutionalists of Richard's division shouting "Victory,"—when Colonel Morosino's corps, which had been engaged by another body of cavalry, was observed to be in full retreat—dispersing in disorder—flying before its triumphant foes.

The rumour that Colonel Morosino himself was slain, and that a strong body of infantry, provided with cannon, was already advancing from the opposite side of the hill, now spread like wild-fire through the ranks of Richard's division.

Vainly did Markham endeavour by his example to inspire the troops with courage. A panic seized upon them: they exclaimed that some villain had betrayed them; and the disorder became general.

The ducal cavalry which were so lately in full retreat, rallied again: their charge was irresistible; they literally swept the slope of the hill down which they rushed.

Backed by a small but gallant band that scorned to retreat, and well seconded by Morcar, Richard fought with a desperation which was truly marvellous in one who had never wielded a hostile brand until that day. But a pistol-bullet disabled his right arm; and he was taken prisoner, together with Morcar and several others.

The Constitutionalists were completely defeated; five hundred fell upon the field of battle; the remainder were dispersed or captured. But scarcely three hundred succeeded in saving themselves by flight.

And almost at the same moment when this unfortunate expedition was thus overwhelmed with ruin, a Castelcicalan frigate, which had put out from Ossore harbour, shortly after the landing of the Constitutionalists, captured the three vessels which were the last hope of those patriots who had escaped from captivity or carnage.

From the summit of the hill, whither he was conducted into the presence of the Captain-General of Abrantani, Richard beheld the three vessels strike their colours to the Castelcicalan man-of-war.

"Treachery has been at work here," he said within himself; "or else how arose these preparations to receive us?"

He was not, however, permitted much time for reflection—either in respect to his own desperate condition, or that of the unfortunate fugitives whose last hope was thus cut off by the seizure of the ships; for the Captain-General—an old man, with white hair, but a stern and forbidding countenance,—addressed him in a haughty and savage tone.

"Know you the penalty that awaits your crime, young man?" he exclaimed; "for in you I doubtless behold one of the chiefs of this monstrous invasion."

"I know how to die," answered Richard, fearlessly.

"Ah!" ejaculated the Captain-General. "What traitor have we here? Some foreign mercenary perhaps. He is not a Castelcicalan, by the accent with which he speaks our native tongue."

"I am an Englishman, my lord," said Markham, returning the proud glance of defiance and scorn which Count Santa-Croce threw upon him.

"An Englishman!" thundered the Captain-General. "Then is a military death too good for you! What brings a wretched foreigner like

you amongst us with a hostile sword? You have not even the miserable subterfuge of patriotism as a palliation for your crime. Away with him! Hang him to yonder tree!"

"I have one favour to implore of your lordship," said Markham, his voice faltering not, although his cheek grew somewhat pale: "I am prepared for death—but let me not perish like a dog. Plant your soldiers at a distance of a dozen paces—let them level their muskets at me—and I promise you I shall not die a coward."

"No—you are a foreigner!" returned the Captain-General ferociously. "Away with him!"

Markham was instantly surrounded by soldiers, and dragged to the foot of a tree at a little distance.

An *aide-de-camp* of the Count was ordered to superintend the sad ceremony.

"Have you any thing which you desire to be communicated to your friends in your native country?" asked the officer, who was a generous-minded young man, and who, having beheld Richard's bravery in the conflict, could not help respecting him.

"I thank you sincerely for the kindness which prompts this question," replied our hero; "and all I have now to hope is that those who know me—in my native land—may not think that cowardice or dishonour closed the career of Richard Markham."

"Richard Markham!" ejaculated the officer. "Tell me—is that your name?"

"It is," answered our hero.

"Then there is hope for you *yet*, brave Englishman!" cried the officer; and without uttering another word, he hastened back to the spot where the Captain-General of Abrantani was standing.

Were we to say that Richard was now otherwise than a prey to the most profound suspense, we should be exaggerating the moral strength of human nature.

We have no wish to make of our hero a demigod: we allow him to be nothing more than mortal after all!

It *was*, therefore, with no little anxiety that Markham saw the officer approach the Captain-General of Abrantani, and discourse with him for some moments in a low tone. The *aide-de-camp* appeared to urge some point which he was anxious to carry: Count Santa-Croce shook his head ominously.

"Beloved Isabella," murmured Richard to himself: "shall I never see thee more?"

His eyes were still fixed upon those two men who appeared to be arguing his life or death.

At length the Captain-General took a paper from the breast of his profusely-laced blue uniform coat, and cast his eyes over it.

Richard watched him with breathless anxiety.

This state of suspense did not last long. Count Santa-Croce folded the paper, replaced it where he had taken it from, and then gave a brief command to the officer.

The latter hurried back to the spot where Markham was hovering as it were between life and death.

"You are saved, sir!" cried the Castelcicalan his countenance expressing the most unfeigned joy.

"Generous friend!" exclaimed Richard: "by what strange influence have you worked this miracle?"

"That must remain a secret," answered the *aide-de-camp*. "At the same time I can take but little merit to myself in the transaction—beyond a mere effort of memory. You have powerful friends, sir, in Castelcicala: otherwise his lordship the Captain-General," he added in a whisper, "was not the man to spare you."

"To you I proffer my most heart-felt thanks, generous Italian!" cried Richard; "for to you I am clearly indebted for my life. Let me know the name of my saviour?"

"Mario Bazzano—junior *aide-de-camp* to Count Santa-Croce, the Captain-General of Abrantani," was the answer. "But we have no time to parley," he continued rapidly: "the good news which I have already imparted to you in respect to your life, must be somewhat counterbalanced by the commands which I have received regarding your liberty."

"Speak, Signor Bazzano," said Markham. "You saw that I did not flinch from death: it is scarcely probable that I shall tremble at any less severe sentence which may have been passed upon me."

"My orders are to conduct you to Montoni, where you will be placed at the disposal of a higher authority than even the Captain-General of Abrantani," returned the *aide-de-camp*. "But, in the first place, my lord's surgeon shall look to your wound."

Then once more did the generous-hearted Castelcicalan hasten away; and in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the Count's own medical attendant.

Richard's arm was examined; and it was discovered that a bullet had passed through the fleshy part between the elbow and the shoulder. The wound was painful, though by no means dangerous; and the surgeon bandaged it with care and skill.

"Now, Signor Markham," said Bazzano, "it is my duty to conduct you to Montoni. I do not wish to drag you thither like a felon—because you are a brave man: at the same time I am answerable to the Count and *to another* who is higher than the Count, for your person. Gallant warriors are usually honourable men: pledge me your honour that you will not attempt to escape; and we will proceed to Montoni alone together."

"I pledge you my honour," answered Richard, "that so long as I am in your custody, I will not attempt to escape. But the moment you are released from your charge of my person, my vow ceases."

"Agreed, signor," said Bazzano.

The *aide-de-camp* then ordered his own and another horse (for Richard's steed had been sorely wounded in the conflict) to be brought to the spot where this conversation took place.

"Signor Bazzano," said Richard, "you have behaved to me in so noble and generous a manner that I am emboldened to ask another favour of you. A young man accompanied me as my attendant in this unfortunate enterprise: he has a wife and child in his native land; his parents are also living. Should aught happen to him, four others would thereby be plunged into the depths of misery."

"Where is this person to whom you allude?" inquired Bazzano.

"He is a prisoner yonder. There—he is seated on the ground, with his face buried in his hands!"

And Richard pointed in the direction where the poor gipsy was plunged into a painful and profound reverie at a little distance.

For the third time the *aide-de-camp*,—who was a tall, active, handsome, dark-eyed young man,—hurried away. Count Santa-Croce had mounted his horse and repaired, with his staff, to view more closely the spot where the conflict had taken place, and to issue orders

relative to the interment of the killed and the disposal of the prisoners. Mario Bazzano did not therefore dread the eagle glance of his superior, as he hastened to perform another generous deed and confer another favour on Richard Markham.

"Young man," he said, addressing himself to Morcar, "rise and follow me. You are to accompany your master. My good friend," he added, speaking to the sentinel who stood near, "I will be answerable for my conduct in this instance to his lordship the Captain-General."

The sentinel was satisfied; and Morcar followed the officer to the spot where Richard and the Castelcicalan soldiers who had charge of him, were standing.

A third horse was procured; and in a few minutes the *aide-de-camp*, our hero, and Morcar rode rapidly away from the scene of carnage, towards Ossore.

It were a vain task to attempt to describe the joy which succeeded Morcar's grief and apprehension, when he discovered that his own and his master's lives were beyond danger, and that Mario Bazzano was evidently so well inclined to befriend them.

"As I do not wish to keep you in an unpleasant state of suspense, signor," said the *aide-de-camp* to Richard, "I must inform you that you have little to dread at Montoni. You have powerful friends there. A short imprisonment—or some punishment of a slight nature, will be all the penalty you will both have to pay for your mad freak—or else I am much mistaken. But more I dare not—cannot say."

"Whatever be our fate," exclaimed Richard, "my heart will cherish until death the remembrance—the grateful remembrance of your noble conduct. But tell me, my generous friend—what will become of those unfortunate prisoners?"

"The chiefs of the enterprise have fallen in the conflict," answered Mario; "else the fate of traitors would have been in store for them. As for the mistaken men whom they have led to these shores, imprisonment—a long imprisonment in the citadels of Abrantani, Pinalla, and Estella, will doubtless be the penalty of their treason."

The severe terms in which the young *aide-de-camp*, who was evidently devoted to the Grand Duke's cause, spoke of the Constitutionalists, pierced like a dagger to the heart of our hero; but delicacy and gratitude towards one from whom he had received such signal obligations, prevented him from making any comment.

In a short time the little party reached Ossore, at which town they proceeded to an hotel, where they obtained refreshments. There, also, plain clothes were procured for Markham, in order that his uniform (which was different from that of the Castelcicalan officer) might not create unpleasant notice on his arrival at Montoni. Morcar had no uniform to change.

When the repast was terminated, Lieutenant Bazzano ordered a post-chaise and four; and in a short time the little party was whirling rapidly along the high road to the capital.

During the journey Richard and the *aide-de-camp* rose higher in each other's esteem, the more they conversed together; and by the time they reached their destination, a sort of friendship, which circumstances had tended to invest with unusual interest, already existed between them.

Bazzano assured our hero that the contemplated invasion of the Constitutionalists had been communicated some time previously to the Captain-General of Abrantani; but whence that information had emanated the young officer was unable to state. Preparations had, however, been in existence for at least a fortnight to receive the invaders when they set foot on the Castelcicalan territory. These assurances confirmed Richard in the opinion which he had already formed, that treachery had existed somewhere on the side of the patriots.

CHAPTER CLXXV.

MONTONI.

It was nine o'clock at night when the post-chaise entered the capital of Castelcicala.

In spite of his unfortunate position,—a prisoner, defeated in his grand aims, and with all his hopes apparently blasted,—Richard could not help feeling a glow of pleasure when he thus found himself in the sovereign city which was the birth place of his well-beloved Isabella.

But, oh! in what a state did he now enter its walls!

Instead of accompanying a victorious army to proclaim Alberto Grand Duke of Castelcicala,—instead of the society of the patriotic Grachia and the heroic Morosino,—instead of hearing the welcome voices of a liberated people echoing around,—the young man was in the custody of a subaltern, and, for aught he knew, on his way to a dungeon!

Then—Grachia, Morosino, and the other chiefs of the enterprise—where were they?

Numbered with the dead—or captives in the hands of a savage conqueror!

Oh! how were Markham's fondest hopes blasted! how were his elysian dreams dissipated by the mocking reality of disaster and defeat!

Now, too, how much farther than ever was he removed from the sole object of his toils,—the only hope of his existence,—the hand of Isabella!

Her father, who had all along discountenanced the projects of the Constitutionalists, but who would naturally have pardoned them had they succeeded, could not for a moment be expected to forgive the survivors of that terrible defeat!

All these gloomy ideas annihilated in a moment the temporary glow of pleasure which our hero had experienced on entering Montoni.

The chaise traversed the southern part of the metropolis, crossed the Ferretti by a noble bridge, and entered the most fashionable and imposing quarter of that portion of the city which stands on the northern side of the river.

At length it stopped at an hotel.

"We shall alight here," said Mario Bazzano.

"But this is not a prison!" exclaimed Richard.

"I never told you that you were on your way to such a place," returned the *aide-de-camp*, laughing.

"Did you not hint at imprisonment, signor?" said our hero, surprised at the kind forbearance shown towards him—captured, as he had been, with arms in his hand against the reigning Prince.

"That may, or may not happen," replied Bazzano. "At all events, here we will alight: and, remember, while in my charge, you are on your parole. It is not necessary to let the gossips of this tavern know who you are, or why you are here with me."

"My honour is pledged, and the vow will be punctually fulfilled," said Markham.

They then descended from the vehicle, and were conducted to a private apartment in the hotel.

Bazzano ordered refreshments: then, as soon as he himself had drunk a glass of wine and eaten a mouthful of food, he left the room, simply observing, "I may be absent nearly an hour; but I will thank you not to retire to rest until my return."

Markham bowed an acquiescence with this request; and, as soon as the door had closed behind the *aide-de-camp*, he exclaimed, "If Signor Bazzano be a fair specimen of the Castelcicalans generally, they are a glorious race!"

"Some kind power seems to protect you in this country, Mr. Markham," observed Morcar.

"I candidly confess that I am at a loss to interpret these occurrences," returned our hero. "At the moment when the cord is round my neck, the mention of my name saves my life, and converts an enemy into a stanch friend. Even the ferocious Captain-General of Abrantani relaxes all his natural severity in my behalf. Then, instead of being chained, I am scarcely guarded: instead of being placed between two soldiers with loaded muskets, I am allowed to remain upon parole. He who has charge of me, leaves me for an hour, with a simple request not to retire to rest until his return! Yes—some secret power protects me. It is true that a few years ago I once met her who now occupies a seat on the Grand-ducal throne," he continued, rather musing to himself, than addressing his words to Morcar; "but she can scarcely remember—or, even if she do—could not be supposed to interest herself in one so obscure, so humble as I!"

Then he paced the room—lost in conjecture, and giving way to the immense variety of reflections which his position was calculated to engender.

In an hour the young *aide-de-camp* returned.

"Signor Markham," he said, "you will have the kindness to accompany me whither I shall conduct you. You," he added, addressing himself to Morcar, "must await our return here."

Richard signified his readiness to follow Bazzano; and they left the hotel together.

It was now past eleven o'clock; and, though the shops were all closed, the streets of Montoni were resplendent with the lustre which streamed from the windows of the *cafés*, *restaurants*, and club-houses.

Markham could not help observing to his companion that there appeared to be numerous patrols of military moving about in the capital, and that the sentinels were posted along the streets at very short intervals.

"The news of this morning's invasion reached Montoni several hours ago," answered the *aide-de-camp*; "and I do not disguise from you the fact that until this strong military demonstration was made, the city was in an extraordinary ferment. This I heard just now, previous to my return to the hotel."

"The reigning Grand Duke seems very unpopular," observed Markham.

Bazzano made no reply: it was evident that he could not contradict the assertion; and, being in his sovereign's service, he could not with propriety corroborate it.

A quarter of an hour's rapid walking brought our hero and the young officer to an immense square; and the magnificent buildings on two sides thereof shed a brilliant light from their ample casements.

"This is the ducal palace," said Mario.

Crossing the square, the officer led the way towards a small door in one of the angles of the immense edifice.

Mario knocked gently; and the door was immediately opened by a tall servant in a gorgeous livery.

Markham followed his companion into a small vestibule, brilliantly lighted, and at the end of which was a narrow staircase carpetted all over.

Not a word was spoken: the domestic bowed as the two young men passed him; and Bazzano led the way up the staircase, which was lighted by lamps held in the hands of marble statues placed in recesses.

On the landing which the visitors speedily reached, an usher, dressed in black, and wearing a massive gold chain, advanced to receive them; and, opening a door, conducted them into an ante-room, where he requested them to be seated.

He then opened another door on the opposite side from which they had entered the room, and disappeared for a few minutes.

On his return, he desired Markham to follow him.

Our hero obeyed, and was led through several magnificent apartments, all brilliantly lighted, but unoccupied at the moment.

At length the usher paused in a room smaller, but more elegantly furnished, than any of the preceding ones; and, having requested our hero to take a seat, he retired by the same door by which they had entered that room.

For a few minutes Richard remained alone with his reflections.

He was now in the Castelcicalan palace. But wherefore had he been brought thither? Was it to undergo an examination before the Grand Duke, relative to the invasion of the morning? was it to be overwhelmed with reproaches by that sovereign against whom, and without provocation, he had borne arms? Could treachery be meditated? No—that idea was absurd. He was so completely in the power of the Grand Duke, that there had been no need to exercise treachery towards him, if punishment were intended.

Then our hero thought of the Grand Duchess. Had she learnt that he was engaged in the expedition? had she remembered his name? was it through her he had received that treatment from Mario Bazzano which had so astonished him? could it be possible that she would interest herself in him?

He was in the midst of his reverie, when a door opposite to where he was sitting, suddenly opened; and a lady, elegantly attired, with a tiara of diamonds upon her brow, entered the apartment.

One glance was sufficient for Richard Markham!

He immediately recognised the beautiful woman whom he had seen five years previously, disguised in male attire, at Mrs. Arlington's lodgings, and whose singular history had subsequently reached his ears when he was imprisoned at the same time as herself, though of course not in the same department, in Newgate.

Yes—he recognised *her* who was once Eliza Sidney; and he now bent his head to the grand Duchess of Castelcicala.

Although somewhat pale, and showing a slightly deeper shade of that melancholy expression which her countenance had acquired during her captivity of two years, Eliza was still eminently lovely.

Her form had expanded into those proportions which indicated the maturity of her charms, but which gave to her beauty a voluptuousness that was only attempered by the chaste glances of her melting hazel eyes, and the halo of purity which dwelt on her lofty and spotless brow.

And well fitted was that pure and open forehead to be crowned with the glittering tiara which denoted her sovereign rank, and which set off to such exquisite advantage the large bands of her light, luxuriant, shining, chesnut hair!

Her walk was a dignified and yet harmonious motion;—her gesture expressed no particle of hauteur, but still denoted a consciousness of the respect which she felt to be due to her position as a Princess, and to her character as a woman.

"Resume your seat, Mr. Markham," she said in a sweet tone, and with a manner full of grace: then, placing herself on a sofa at a short distance, she added, "I have had the pleasure of seeing you before; but little did I *then* suppose that the next time we met, it would be under such circumstances as these."

"I comprehend your Serene Highness," answered Markham, firmly, but respectfully. "We meet—your Highness as a sovereign Princess, and I as a prisoner at the disposal of those who have power to command in this State."

"Such is indeed the fact, Mr. Markham," returned the Grand Duchess, with a half smile. "But I did not send for you hither to reproach you. Doubtless you considered yourself justified in the proceedings which you have adopted, and in joining the cause of those mistaken men who this morning set hostile feet upon these shores;—for I have received from an agent of mine in England assurances of your honourable nature and estimable character; and I did not fail some time since to issue those secret instructions to the various authorities, which saved your life this morning, and ensured you good treatment at the hands of those into whose power you were doomed to fall. Moreover, I learn that you behaved most gallantly in the conflict between your party and the ducal troops; and I can respect bravery, Mr. Markham, even in an enemy."

"Your Serene Highness will give me credit for the sincerity with which I express my gratitude for the kindness that I have received at your hands," said Markham; "especially under circumstances, which—whatever opinion I may entertain of them—could not have served me as a very favourable passport to the notice of your Highness."

"Mr. Markham," returned the Grand Duchess, "you are an Englishman—and that is one reason to induce me to exercise some

leniency in your case; for however profoundly my interests may be identified with this country, it is impossible that I can forget my own. Secondly, I am better acquainted with your history than you imagine. Do you remember an anonymous letter which your late father received—some years ago,—yes—it was in 1831, I believe,—warning him of a burglarious attempt which was contemplated in respect to his abode?"

"I remember well the letter to which your Highness alludes," answered Markham, surprised at this mention of an incident which had occurred only a short time previously to the separation of himself and his brother on the hill-top.

"That letter was written by myself," said the Grand Duchess, with a smile.

"Written by your Highness!" ejaculated Markham, more and more amazed at what he heard.

"Yes, Mr. Markham," continued Eliza: "it was I who sent that warning. Circumstances enabled me to overhear the discourse of two miscreants in whose den I accidentally took refuge during a storm, and whence I narrowly escaped with my life. But enough of that: I merely mentioned the circumstance to show you that your name has long been familiar to me. Then, about four years after that event, I met you at the abode of a lady from whom I have since received signal kindnesses, and who is now the Countess of Warrington."

"I remember that evening well, your Highness," observed Richard.

"Afterwards," resumed the Grand Duchess, sinking her voice, "you and I were the inmates of a tenement whose severity you deserved perhaps much less than I—though heaven knows the artifice that was used to involve me in that desperate venture!"

"Your Serene Highness has heard, then, that I too was innocent of the crime laid to my charge?" said Markham.

"I imagined so when I first learnt the particulars of your case at the time of its occurrence," answered the Grand Duchess; "and my agent in England has lately confirmed me in that belief. Then, again," she added, with an arch smile, "I am not ignorant of the motives which induced you to embark, like a gallant cavalier, in the enterprise whose results have led to this interview."

"Your Serene Highness will not wrong, by injurious suspicions, an exiled family!" said Markham, well knowing to what Eliza alluded.

"No!" exclaimed the Grand Duchess, solemnly: "I am aware that Prince Alberto did not countenance the expedition; and I can scarcely believe that his charming daughter," she continued, archly smiling again, "could have been very ready to permit you to embark on so mad an enterprise. You see, Mr. Markham, that I am acquainted with more than you would have supposed me to know. And now, perhaps, you will be surprised, when I assure you that I entertain the most profound respect and esteem for Prince Alberto and his family—although I have never seen them. But, oh!" exclaimed Eliza, wiping away a tear, "how great was my grief when I learnt, this afternoon, that my friend General Grachia had fallen in the conflict of the morning!"

"General Grachia invariably spoke to me in the most pleasing terms of your Serene Highness," observed Richard.

"Do not think, Mr. Markham," said the Grand Duchess, after a pause, during which she seemed a prey to deep thought,—"do not think that I have been a party to all the instances of severity and sentences of exile which have lately characterised the political history of Castelcicala. No, Mr. Markham—I would not have you think unworthily of your fellow-countrywoman. But, enough of that! You can well imagine that I am not all-powerful here:—otherwise," she added, with a sigh, "it would be different! Time is, however, pressing; and I have not yet spoken to you on the matter which ought to form the principal topic of our conversation;—I mean your own position. You have heard enough from my lips to show you that you are not unknown to me, and that there are consequently reasons which have induced me to interest myself in your behalf. But, as I ere now observed, my power is not unlimited; and although my secret wishes are commands in the eyes of Count Santa-Croce and his officers, still my influence is not sufficient to protect you from the vengeance of the Grand Duke, did he know that *one* of the invaders was at large and unpunished in his dominions. It is true that I can soften his rigour—as I shall do in respect to those unhappy prisoners——"

"God be thanked that their condition excites the compassion of your Serene Highness!" exclaimed Markham fervently. "A weight is removed from my mind by this assurance!"

"Rest satisfied on that head," said Eliza. "I can promise you that imprisonment is the worst punishment which shall overtake any of them."

When Eliza had first entered the room, Richard had bowed his head low to the Grand Duchess; but now he sank on his bended knee in presence of the humane and tender-hearted woman.

Eliza felt the full force of this expression of feeling:—it rewarded her for her goodness!

She extended her hand towards him; and he respectfully touched it with his lips.

Then he rose, and resumed his seat.

Oh! at that moment, how sweet—how sweet to the amiable and noble-minded woman,—noble in nature, as well as in name,—was the possession of power;—and how amply recompensed was she for its humane use, by that spontaneous tribute of respect which she had just received from her fellow-countryman!

"Mr. Markham," she said, after a pause, "you must escape from Castelcicala: but that is not so easy a matter as you may haply imagine. The Castelcicalan steam-frigates will rigorously guard the coast by sea, and the custom-house officers by land; and not a ship will leave one of our ports without being searched. Orders to that effect have already been issued by the Minister of Marine; and I dare not interfere to prevent their full operation. Are you bold enough to strike far into the country, traverse its length, and obtain refuge in the Neapolitan kingdom?"

"And wherefore not in the Roman States, my lady?" asked Richard. "Their frontier is but a day's distance from Montoni."

"Because the Grand Duke has concluded a league, offensive and defensive, with the Pope; and you would assuredly be detected in the dominions of his Holiness, and sent ignominiously back to Montoni—in which case, Mr. Markham, I could not save you."

"And what chance of safety do I possess by following the plan suggested by your Serene Highness?"

"Every chance," was the decided reply. "In the first place, Signor Mario Bazzano will procure for you a passport: his uncle is Under-Secretary for the Interior. This passport, made out for you in a fictitious name, will be dated from Montoni; and the various authorities will never suspect that one of the invaders could possibly have obtained such a document from the capital itself. Secondly, you can purchase a portfolio with drawing materials, and pass yourself off for an English artist, sent to Castelcicala to design some of the most striking features of Italian scenery. By these means there will be an ostensible reason for avoiding the great cities and towns; and no

suspicion will be excited by your keeping as much as possible to the open country. Does my plan please you?"

"How can I ever sufficiently express my gratitude to your Serene Highness for all this kind consideration—this unlooked-for generosity?" cried Markham.

"By abstaining from plans of invasion or insurrection in future," answered Eliza.

"Ah! how can I pledge myself to such a condition?" exclaimed Richard. "Should circumstances induce or compel Prince Alberto to strike a blow——"

"I fully comprehend you," interrupted the Grand Duchess. "In that case, I impose no conditions whatsoever upon you. Go, Mr. Markham—adopt the plan which I have suggested—and you will soon be beyond the reach of danger. And excuse me," she added, after a moment's pause, "if I act as your banker, as well as your adviser. Use this purse; and, on your arrival in England, you can liquidate the debt by affording succour to any needy Castelcicalan whom chance may throw in your way."

"Before I receive this new proof of your goodness—before I take my leave,—your Serene Highness must permit me, on my bended knee,"—and our hero sank to that posture as he spoke,—"to declare that, while I shall henceforth consider myself indebted to your Highness in an obligation which I can never repay,—while I shall ever hold myself ready to serve your Highness by day and night, and to dare every earthly danger in so doing—in order to evince my gratitude for all that your Highness has this day done for me,—still I would rather be delivered up to the hands of justice,—I would rather die on the scaffold to-morrow, or take my stand in front of a platoon,—than renounce—Englishman—foreigner though I be—the cause of Castelcicalan liberty!"

"Rise, headstrong—foolish young man," exclaimed the Grand Duchess, smiling. "I seek to impose no conditions upon you. Go; and when once you are beyond the Castelcicalan territory, use your own free will—let no shackle of any kind curb the ardour of your soul. At the same time, beware! On another occasion, I may seek to protect you in vain!"

"Never—never again, your Highness, will I wantonly aid in provoking civil strife in Castelcicala!" ejaculated Richard. "Two motives shall alone henceforth be powerful enough to induce me to unsheath the hostile weapon in this clime."

"And which are they?" asked Eliza, still half smiling as she spoke.

"In obedience to the command of Prince Alberto—and then only if *his* cause be just; or in order to relieve Castelcicala from some foreign invader."

"And may God grant that neither of those alternatives shall ever occur!" said the Grand Duchess. "But our interview has already lasted a long time; and delay is dangerous to you."

Eliza once more extended her hand towards our hero, who pressed it respectfully, but with fervour, to his lips.

He then withdrew.

In the adjoining apartment he found the usher waiting for him.

They retraced their steps to the ante-room, where Signor Mario Bazzano was seated, expecting their return.

In a few minutes our hero and the young *aide-de-camp* were on their way back to the hotel.

During the walk, Bazzano said, "I presume you have assented to the plan which her Highness has devised for your safe retreat into the Neapolitan territory?"

Markham replied in the affirmative.

"In that case I will procure passports for yourself and attendant, to-morrow morning," observed the young officer. "But, for the present, we all three stand in need of rest."

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

THE CLUB-HOUSE.

We must now transport our readers back to London.

At about the same time when the events of the two preceding chapters occurred in Castelcicala, others of a scarcely less interesting nature took place in the great metropolis of England.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of one of those dark, misty, dispiriting November days, when the sun is scarcely visible, and sinks early to rest, that half-a-dozen fashionable gentlemen were lounging in the bay-window of a Club-House in St. James's Street.

They were all dressed in the first style: gold chains festooned over waistcoats of the most recent Parisian fashion; and brilliantly polished boots, without a speck of mud upon them, showed that their owners had not arrived at the Club on foot.

"What news in the political world, Greenwood?" asked the Marquis of Holmesford.

"Nothing particular," answered the gentleman appealed to. "Our party is sure to drive the Whigs out next year; and then I shall show the independent and enlightened freemen of Rottenborough that they will acquire some honour through the medium of their representative."

"I suppose you will do a little good for yourself—eh, Greenwood?" asked the Honourable Augustus Smicksmack—a lieutenant in the Grenadier Guards, and just turned nineteen: "a baronetcy—eh, Greenwood? for that's the rumour, I believe?"

"Well, I *do* hope that Fame for once is not far wrong, my dear fellow," answered Mr. Greenwood.

"And I must beg of you to support my friend the Honourable Gively Starkeley's new Game Bill, which he intends to introduce next session," observed Lord Dunstable—a major in a crack regiment, and whose age was probably one-and-thirty.

"A new Game Bill!" ejaculated Mr. Greenwood, horror depicted on his countenance. "Surely your friend Starkeley cannot mean to relax the penalties which now exist in respect to poaching?"

"Quite the reverse," answered Lord Dunstable. "He thinks—as I think—that the present statute is not stringent enough; and he has drawn up a bill—at least, Rumrigg the barrister did for him—making it transportation for life to shoot game without a license, and transportation for fifteen years for looking at a bird or a hare with an unlawful purpose."

"*That Bill* will receive my most unqualified support, Dunstable," said Mr. Greenwood. "In fact, the laws cannot be too stringent against poachers."

"Certainly not," observed Colonel Cholmondeley, a gentleman of about three-and-thirty who was one of the group in the Club-House window. "For my part, I consider a murderer or a highwayman to be an estimable character in comparison with a poacher."

"Decidedly so," exclaimed Lord Dunstable. "A murderer kills his victim—a highwayman robs a person; and the thing is done. The individuals murdered or plundered alone suffer. But a poacher deprives hundreds of noblemen and gentlemen of their legitimate sport: he preys upon the aristocracy, as it were;—and, by God! I'll defend the privileges of the aristocracy with my life!"

"Oh! certainly—certainly," muttered the Marquis of Holmesford, who, in consequence of swollen gums, had been compelled to lay aside his false teeth for a few days, and was therefore somewhat incomprehensible in his speech. "Always defend the aristocracy! *The millions*, as they call themselves, are ever ready to assail us: they're jealous of us, you see—because we have carriages and horses, and they have not."

"And for many other reasons," observed Mr. Greenwood. "But I always know how to serve the scurvy riff-raff. Why, it was but the other day that some thirty or forty of the independent and intelligent electors of Rottenborough assembled together at the *Blue Lion* in their town, to address a remonstrance to me on my parliamentary conduct, and call upon me to resign."

"And what did you do?" asked Lord Dunstable.

"Oh! I knew my men well enough: it was not the first time they had taken this step," continued Greenwood. "My agent down there wrote me up an account of their intentions; and I sent him instructions how to act. The malcontents met; there was a great deal of speechifying; and the tide flowed strong against my interests. The chairman was about to put to the vote a Resolution condemnatory of my conduct, when the landlord entered, and addressed the meeting in this manner:—'Gentlemen, Mr. Greenwood, having heard that it was your intention to assemble here this evening, has conveyed to me his commands to serve up a little supper—poultry, turtle, venison, and other trifles of the same kind, together with as much port and sherry as you can drink. The supper is now ready, gentlemen: you had better partake of it first, and continue your deliberations afterwards.'"

"Capital—excellent!" exclaimed Lord Dunstable.

"Glowiouth—thuperfine—bwilliant!" cried Sir Cherry Bounce, who was one of the group.

"Strike me—but it was uncommon good!" observed Major Dapper, who was also present.

"Well—what followed?" demanded Colonel Cholmondeley.

"Yes, do tell us," said Mr. Smicksmack.

"Oh! the result was simple enough," continued Greenwood. "The free and independent electors of Rottenborough adjourned to the

supper-room, gorged and drank till their senses were completely obfuscated, and then passed a vote of confidence in their Member, one gentleman alone not holding up his hand in its favour."

"What was the reason of that?" inquired the Marquis of Holmesford.

"Simply because he was dead drunk under the table," answered Greenwood. "And then this fellow had the impudence to write a letter next day to all the newspapers to say *that he alone had remained dissentient upon principle*!"

"Pwepothterouth!" loudly exclaimed Sir Cherry Bounce.

"Hold your tongue, Cherry," said Major Smilax Dapper. "You're a——"

"A what, Thmilackth?" asked the youthful baronet.

"A bore—strike me!" replied the major.

There was a general laugh at the expense of Sir Cherry Bounce, who coloured up to the very roots of his hair.

"What's become of Harborough, does any one know?" said Lord Dunstable, when the cachinnation was concluded.

"Gone into the country with his friend Chichester, I believe," replied Greenwood. "Harborough and I have not spoken for a long time; but I heard of him a little while ago."

"A dreadful thing that was about his wife," observed the Honourable Augustus Smicksmack.

"I don't think Harborough cared much about it," returned Greenwood. "They had long led a cat-and-dog kind of a life. The moment Lady Cecilia's suicide reached the ears of Sir Rupert, who was in France at the time, he came over to England, and sold the few things which had belonged to his wife—her trinkets, I mean; for the house in Tavistock Square was a ready-furnished one."

"And *that* he gave up, I believe?" said Dunstable.

"Or rather the landlord took it away from him," answered Greenwood. "That intimacy with Reginald Tracy was a bad business for Lady Cecilia," he continued. "But I had my suspicions of *him* before the exposure took place. The fact is, I saw him at a masquerade ball one night, at Drury Lane theatre."

"At a masquerade?" ejaculated Lord Dunstable.

"Yes. I was dressed as a Greek brigand, and he was attired as a monk."

"The sanctified scoundrel!" said Colonel Cholmondeley, in a tone of deep indignation. "What dishonour he brought upon the cloth! You know my brother the Archdeacon? Well, he's as jovial a fellow as you could wish to meet. Keeps his three mistresses, his horses and hounds, and goes to bed mellow every night of his life. But *he* does things discreetly."

"In a proper manner, to be sure," muttered the Marquis of Holmesford. "But, by the by, Greenwood, you once admired my beautiful Georgian."

"And I often think of her now, my lord," returned the Member of Parliament.

"I'll make you a proposal, if you like," continued the Marquis, grinning like an antiquated goat. "I have taken quite a fancy to your bay mare *Cleopatra*."

"Yes—'tis a beautiful bit of horse-flesh," remarked Greenwood.

"Well—my Georgian for your bay mare?" said the Marquis. "Is it a bargain?"

"A decided bargain," replied Greenwood.

"But how do you know that the lady will submit to the exchange?" asked Smicksmack, with a smile.

"I feel convinced that she will offer no objection," answered Greenwood. "It is true that every slave becomes free when once the foot touches the soil of this country, as I once observed to the independent electors of Rottenborough;—but I am sure that she will wear the gold chain that I shall be delighted to throw around her."

"Well spoken, Greenwood!" cried the Marquis. "Send the bay to my stables in the morning; and fetch away the Georgian when you choose."

"Greenwood's the man for business," observed Lord Dunstable. "By the by, how did the African Railroad scheme turn out?"

"Oh! admirably," replied the capitalist. "I cleared my ten thousand by it: so did the Marquis."

"But I loth thwee thouthand, though—and a pwethiouth wage I wath in," said Sir Cherry.

"Because you kept your shares too long, my dear fellow," remarked Greenwood coolly. "No, my good woman—I have nothing for you!"

These last words were uttered, in a loud tone, and accompanied by a stern shake of the head, to a poor, ragged, shivering creature, who had paused on the pavement outside to solicit alms from the aristocrats assembled at the window.

The miserable woman cast one glance of ineffable anguish on Mr. Greenwood, and then hurried away, overwhelmed by the savage determination of his refusal.

"That poor wretch has been good-looking in her time," said Mr. Smicksmack. "Although it is nearly dark, I caught sight of her countenance by the light of the lamp."

"And so did I," whispered Lord Dunstable to Colonel Cholmondeley, whom he drew aside. "Do you know who that was?" he asked in a low and somewhat hoarse tone.

"No: how the devil should I?" said the Captain, also sinking his voice—but simply because Dunstable did so.

"If that poor mendicant were not Lydia Hutchinson," returned the young nobleman, "I never was more mistaken in my life. But, my God! how altered!"

And for a few moments his countenance became inexpressibly sad.

"What nonsense to give way to feelings of that kind!" whispered Cholmondeley.

"But she was once so beautiful!" said Dunstable. "Do you remember the first time we ever met her—in Hyde Park——"

"I was thinking a deuced deal too much about Adeline Enfield, at that time, to bother myself about Lydia What-'s-her-name," interrupted the colonel, impatiently. "Come—it's of no use yielding to maudlin feelings of that kind, Dunstable. We are all going to dine together presently: and if you wear that kill-joy countenance, I shall wish you at the devil."

Then the Captain drew the young nobleman back to the group in the window; and in a few minutes the sprightly nature of the conversation banished from Dunstable's mind the unpleasant reminiscences which had been temporarily excited by the sudden appearance of one whom he knew so well!

In the meantime that miserable female pursued her way down St. James's Street.

The weather was cold—dreadfully cold: the streets were damp—and she had neither shoes nor stockings!

An old cotton gown, a wretched rag of a shawl, and a broken straw bonnet, constituted her sole attire.

Not an article of clothing had she more than those enumerated.

She had parted with her under garments to obtain the means of subsistence; not even a petticoat had she beneath that thin cotton gown!

When she stopped for a moment to implore alms at the Club-window, it was the first time she had ever begged. She had not recognised *him* who had recognised her: but the stern countenance of Greenwood, as he refused her a single penny from his immense wealth, had struck her with despair.

If the rich would not assist her, how could she hope for succour from the poor?

She hurried down the street, weak and weary as she was;—but she hurried, with a sort of shuffling pace, because she was cold, and her feet were so benumbed that she could not feel that she had any!

She passed many a brilliantly lighted shop,—many a superb Club,—many a magnificent hotel, from the underground windows of which emanated the savoury steam of delicious viands:—she beheld cheerful fires, roaring up the chimneys of the kitchens whence those odours came;—but she was starving, shivering, dying, all the same!

A carriage, with arms emblazoned on the panels, and with horses whose beauty and appointments attracted the gaze of the passengers, was standing opposite to a splendid shawl-warehouse.

Just as the poor mendicant was passing, a tall footman, carrying a gold-headed cane in his hand, pushed her rudely back, exclaiming, "Don't you see that you're in the way?"

The shivering woman cast a timid look around, and beheld an elderly gentleman handing a lady, much younger than himself, to the carriage above mentioned.

The blaze of light from the shop window illuminated that portion of the street; and as the elegantly-dressed lady turned her countenance towards her companion, to answer some observation which he made to her, the mendicant caught a full view of her beautiful features.

A scream escaped from the beggar's lips: then, in the next moment, she rushed towards the door of the carriage, which the gentleman and lady were just entering.

"Miss Enfield—Adeline!" she exclaimed.

"What do you want, my good woman?" cried the voice of the nobleman—for such indeed he was.

"Miss Enfield—I—I am starving!" answered the beggar, clinging to the door.

"Do you know her, my dear?" asked the nobleman.

"I—I think she was once a teacher at the school, where——" faltered the beautiful lady, evidently by no means pleased at the recognition.

"Oh! a teacher!" cried the nobleman. "Ah! it is easy to see what she has come to:"—and he drew up the carriage window violently.

That was a signal for the coachman to whip his horses: the fiery animals sprang forward—the carriage moved off with a species of jerk—the poor starving, shivering creature was thrown upon the kerb-stone—and there she lay insensible.

In a moment she was surrounded by a crowd, that formed a circle about her, and stood gazing on the prostrate, motionless form as if the spectacle were very interesting, but by no means calculated to awaken compassionate sympathy.

Then a huge policeman elbowed his way through the crowd, crying "Move on here!" in a very savage tone, and crushing divers bonnets, besides upsetting sundry small boys in his endeavours to force a passage.

But at the same moment that he reached the spot where the poor creature was lying, a lady, about six-and-twenty years of age, and well though by no means showily dressed, pressed through the crowd, and immediately bestowed her attention on the mendicant female.

The lady raised the unfortunate being's head; and then, by the light of the lamp, it was discovered that she had received a wound on the temple, from which the blood was flowing freely.

"She must be conveyed to the hospital, if she's got any broken bones," said the policeman; "and to the workus if she hasn't."

"She shall go to neither," observed the lady firmly: "I will take care of her until she is recovered."

"What—do you know her, mum?" demanded the policeman.

"No—I never saw her before in my life, to my knowledge," answered the lady. "But I cannot help feeling for a fellow-creature—especially one of my own sex—in such a position."

A murmur of approbation arose amongst the crowd.

"Will you help me to convey the poor creature to the neighbouring surgeon's?" continued the lady, addressing herself to the officer. "See—she opens her eyes—she moves—but, my God! how wan, how thin, how cold she is!"

The wretched woman was removed to the adjacent establishment of a medical practitioner; and in a short time the benevolent lady had the satisfaction of ascertaining that the wound on the poor creature's forehead was the only injury which she had sustained by the fall.

"She is more in need of sustenance, madam, than medicine," said the surgeon, when he had bandaged the wound. "I will give her a glass of wine and a morsel of light food."

This humane proposal was immediately carried into effect;—the starving creature would have eaten ravenously; but the surgeon prudently checked her;—and in a short time she was considerably revived.

She appeared to be about seven or eight and twenty years of age; and possessed the remains of great personal attractions. But her dark eyes were sunken, and their lustre was dimmed with privation: her cheeks were hollow; and her form was little more than mere

skin and bone.

The lady did not ask her if she had any friends, or any home. Such a question would have been a superfluous mockery of one whose appearance was sufficient to convey the sad tale of utter destitution and hopelessness.

"You shall come with me, my poor creature," whispered the lady, in a kind tone. "I know not who nor what you are; but I am touched to the very heart by your sorrowful condition."

"Ah! madam, if you knew all—" began the woman, bursting into tears; "if you knew——"

"I wish to know nothing now," interrupted the lady. "It is sufficient for me that you are in distress."

The surgeon's boy was despatched for a hackney-coach, into which the invalid was conveyed. The lady then entered it, and directed the driver to take them to her residence, which was in Cannon Street, City.

"I have known sorrow myself," said the lady, as they proceeded thither; "and, although, thank God! I have never experienced the stings of poverty, I have nevertheless been forced to endure afflictions almost as poignant."

"Ah! madam," returned the poor woman, "such a heart as yours never ought to be tutored in the ways of unhappiness. But, as you observe, there are other afflictions which may compare with the stings of want!"

And the unhappy creature wept bitterly.

The lady endeavoured to console her to the best of her ability; and even in the short conversation which passed between them during the ride from the West End to the City, the invalid gave proofs of a superior understanding and cultivated mind.

At length they reached Cannon Street, and stopped at a house, the lower portion of which was a stationer's shop. The lady occupied apartments on the first floor.

"Oh! Mrs. Chichester, how long you have been absent!" exclaimed the mistress of the house, who opened the door. "I really began to be alarmed—"

"Thanks for your kind consideration," interrupted Viola, with a smile—for the benevolent lady was none other than the neglected and persecuted wife of Mr. Chichester. "I have brought home a poor creature, whom I found insensible—dying—in the streets; and I request you to provide a room for her."

"Ah! my dear lady, what an excellent disposition you possess!" exclaimed the mistress of the house.

Then she bustled about to help the invalid up stairs; and the poor creature speedily experienced a feeling akin to happiness, when cheered by a comfortable fire and a good meal.

Mrs. Chichester also supplied her with warm clothes; and a night's rest made her an altered being.

On the following day she was enabled to narrate her history, which she did in the ensuing manner.

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

THE HISTORY OF AN UNFORTUNATE WOMAN.

"My name is Lydia Hutchinson. My father was the curate of a small village near Guildford; and fortune had frowned upon him with such continuous rancour from the moment he left the University where he graduated, that it was somewhat late in life ere he ventured to think of matrimony. After filling several different curacies, from which he was invariably removed at the deaths of the old incumbents and the arrival of the new ones, he seemed at length to settle down in the little village to which I have alluded. There he fell in love with the daughter of a half-pay officer as poor as himself; and, with only eighty pounds a year to depend upon, he embarked in the voyage of matrimony. A year after this union, a son was born, and christened by the name of Edgar: an interval of eighteen months elapsed, and I was ushered into the world. But my mother died in giving birth to me.

"To say that my brother and myself were the only consolation which my poor father now possessed, were merely to tell the common tale of parental love in the widowed breast. We were indeed his only consolation! Often and often has he told us this, when we were old enough to comprehend his meaning, and appreciate the full value of his kindness. He was an excellent man. In order to let his children be respectably dressed and maintain a decent appearance—especially at church on Sundays—he stinted himself of almost the common necessaries of life. He undertook my brother's education himself; and from his lips I also learnt the rudiments of the knowledge which I possess. There was resident in the village, a widow lady of great accomplishments, but reduced circumstances; and out of his pittance my father even contrived to spare something to procure her services in giving me lessons in music, drawing, embroidery, and French. Under her tuition I progressed rapidly in those branches; and, when I was sixteen, I was considered to be better educated than if I had been brought up at a boarding-school.

"Since I have mentioned that age, I will not weary you with any farther details concerning the earlier portion of my life. My brother Edgar had already obtained a situation as an usher in a school at Guildford, and my father, though loth to part with us both, was well aware of the necessity of placing us in positions which would, he hoped, enable us to earn our own bread. For of course his small income would cease at his death; and it had been impossible for him to save a single penny. He, however, anticipated that, when we were both provided for, he should be able to lay aside a few pounds during the remaining years of his life, so as not to leave his dearly-beloved children completely dependant on themselves at his decease. Under such circumstances he gladly availed himself of an opportunity of placing me as junior teacher in an extensive ladies' boarding-school at Kensington.

"My father brought me up to London, and left me at Mrs. Lambkin's establishment, which was called Belvidere House. He wept when he took leave of me; but as Mrs. Lambkin (who was a widow, about forty years of age) spoke very kindly, and promised to take great care of me, the sorrow of parting was somewhat mitigated on both sides. I was to receive no salary the first year; but if I suited, my remuneration was fixed at six pounds for the second year, to be increased subsequently.

"When my father took his leave, Mrs. Lambkin said, 'My dear sir, do not be grieved at parting from your daughter. She will find a mother in me. I will be all to her that her own maternal parent would be, were she alive. God bless her! she's a pretty, amiable looking girl; and I already love her!'—Then Mrs. Lambkin put her handkerchief to her eyes; and my poor father was deeply affected. Mrs. Lambkin proceeded to inform him that she had scarcely ever known a moment's happiness since poor dear Mr. Lambkin's death, which took place, she said, five years previously, and in a most distressing manner. 'In fact, Mr. Hutchinson,' she continued, 'Mr. Lambkin lost his valuable life when gallantly attempting to rescue an ill-used and most virtuous young woman from a brutal assault on the part of half-a-dozen intoxicated policemen.'—My father expressed great sorrow at this information. Mrs. Lambkin had wine and cake brought in; and at length my father took his leave, greatly comforted to think that I should have obtained a situation in the establishment of so kind-hearted and excellent a lady.

"Scarcely had my father left the door, when Mrs. Lambkin turned round towards me, and in a tone which I considered somewhat inconsistent with her former manner and language, exclaimed, 'Now, miss, dry those tears, and go up to your room to make yourself decent for afternoon school. The young ladies at Belvidere House all belong to the first families of distinction, and are accustomed to see the teachers well dressed.' Then, ringing the bell, she said to a smart servant who answered the summons, 'Jessica, show Miss Hutchinson to her room.' Jessica took a good long stare at me, then turning sharply round, told me to follow her. We proceeded up two handsome flights of stairs, beautifully, carpetted. On the second floor, the doors of several bed-rooms stood open; and I could not help admiring the comfort—nay, even the luxury, which their interior revealed to the hasty glance that I threw into them. 'These are the young ladies' rooms,' said Jessica abruptly: 'yours is higher up.' On the third floor I also observed the doors of several chambers standing open, and permitting glimpses of great neatness inside. 'These are *our* rooms,' said Jessica—alluding, as I afterwards discovered, to the servants' apartments. Up another flight we went; and now we reached the attics. 'These are the junior teachers' rooms,' cried Jessica, 'and this is yours,' she added, flinging open the door of a garret, wherein I perceived nothing save a mean-looking bed, one chair, a table with a wash-hand basin on it, a brown stone pitcher in a corner, and a glass as large as the palm of my hand hanging to a pin stuck in the wood-work of the window.

"I was about to offer some observation, thinking that Jessica had made a mistake in showing me to this garret; but I checked myself

—being unwilling to commence my noviciate at Belvidere House with any thing in the shape of a complaint. 'Will you have the kindness to bring me up my trunk and bonnet-box?' said I, in as polite and meek a manner as possible.—Miss Jessica burst out laughing in my face. 'Well! that is a pretty thing, I don't think!' she exclaimed, tossing her head haughtily: 'an under teacher to ask an upper servant to bring up her trunk! Well—I never!'—'I am very sorry if I have offended you,' I said.—'If you really don't know better,' answered Jessica, looking at me attentively, 'I don't mind forgiving you this time. And I'll do more, too, for I'll tell the scullery girl to help you up with your things; but of course even *she* wouldn't do it alone.'—My heart rose into my mouth; and it was only by means of a desperate effort that I restrained my tears.—'Do the other teachers sleep on this floor?' I asked, more for the sake of concealing my emotions, than gratifying my curiosity.—'Miss Muddle, the head teacher,' replied Jessica, 'sleeps in the room of the first class young ladies: Miss Spinks, the second teacher, sleeps with the second class; Miss Pantile, the third teacher, with the third class; Miss Rhodes, Miss Jessop, and you occupy this part of the house. But I'll go and tell Betsy to help you up with your things.'

"Jessica walked away in the most stately manner, preceding me down stairs, and evidently considering me her inferior. Betsy was summoned; and with no small amount of grumbling, that dirty slattern condescended to hold one end of my trunk, while I carried the other. Scarcely had I dressed myself in my second best gown (I had but three)—when Jessica came up to say that Mrs. Lambkin was excessively angry at the length of time I took to make myself decent. Jessica herself was in a very bad humour at being obliged to mount four flights to convey this message, and told me in an insolent manner not to dawdle so again.

"Trembling, miserable, and unhappy, I went down to the school-room, where Mrs. Lambkin scolded me, before the other teachers and the young ladies, in no measured terms. Then, because I cried, she scolded me the more. At length she set me to teach four little girls, of ages varying from eight to ten. Miss Muddle, Miss Spinks, and Miss Pantile, all surveyed me with the most sovereign contempt: Miss Rhodes and Miss Jessop, who were not much older than myself (whereas the three senior teachers were all past thirty) looked at me in a more friendly manner. The ages of the boarders varied from eight to sixteen. They were all beautifully dressed; and some of the elder ones were very pretty. There were about forty young ladies altogether in the establishment.

"The four little girls whom I had to teach, were as stupid as they well could be, and so pert that I scarcely knew how to manage them. They laughed and giggled at every attempt which I made to instruct them. Sometimes Mrs. Lambkin would exclaim, 'Hutchinson, there's too much noise with your class;'—and when I spoke very low to my pupils, it was, 'Hutchinson, you're literally doing nothing there!' The three senior teachers were alone addressed by Mrs. Lambkin as *Miss*: with the three juniors it was plain *Rhodes*, *Jessop*, and *Hutchinson*.

"At tea-time, the three senior teachers sate near the mistress of the establishment, and had tea and thin bread-and-butter: the three junior teachers sate amongst the little girls, and had milk-and-water, and thick bread-and-butter. The same arrangement existed at breakfast. At dinner, the three junior teachers were expected to eat the cold meat; though none of the little girls were made to partake of it, and, as I once heard Jessica observe, 'such a thing as cold meat was never touched in the kitchen.' I only mention these trifling details to give you an idea of Mrs. Lambkin's fashionable academy. I may add that the junior teachers had to make their own beds, and fetch up their own water in the great stone pitchers.

"I soon found that Mrs. Lambkin was very far from being so amiable as she had appeared in the presence of my father—except of an evening, after about six or seven o'clock; and then she grew more cheerful—nay, jovial, and was very familiar with us all. But she was constantly leaving the room where we all sate, and remaining away for only a few minutes each time; but the oftener she went out in this strange manner, I noticed that the more good-humoured she grew.

"Thus some weeks passed away. One evening I had solicited permission to go out for a few minutes to take a letter to the post for my father (for the servants would do nothing to oblige the junior teachers), when one of the eldest boarders in the establishment (the Honourable Miss Adeline Enfield) accosted me in the passage, and, in a hasty whisper, said, 'Dear Miss Hutchinson, will you put this letter in the post for me?'—'Certainly,' I replied.—'You need not say a word about it, you know,' added Miss Enfield; and she glided away.—I did not think very seriously of the matter, knowing that it was against the rules of the establishment for the young ladies to write to their friends or parents without allowing Mrs. Lambkin to inspect their letters; and as I considered this to be a harsh regulation, I did not hesitate to oblige Miss Enfield—especially as she had addressed me in so kind a tone. I accordingly posted her letter, and thought no more of the subject. But the next time I was going out, Miss Enfield repeated her request, and again ran away ere I could reply. I noticed that this letter was addressed to the same person as the former one—namely, '*Captain Cholmondeley, Barracks, Knightsbridge*;'—but supposing that he might be a relative, I did not hesitate to post the epistle.

"That same night, after I had retired to my garret, the door was opened softly, and the Honourable Miss Enfield entered. She was in her night clothes; and, placing her finger on her lip to enjoin caution, she said, 'My dear Miss Hutchinson, you can do me such a favour, if you will?' '—Certainly I will, if I can,' was my answer.—'Oh! you can very easily,' continued the young lady, who, by-the-by, was a sweet pretty girl, and very interesting: 'a letter will come addressed to you, by the first post to-morrow morning.'—'Indeed!' I said; 'and how do you know that?'—'Because, though the envelope will be addressed to you, the letter inside will be for me,' she answered, laughing.—'And what would Mrs. Lambkin say if she knew it?' I asked.—'She cannot know it unless you tell her; and I am sure you will not do that, dear Miss Hutchinson,' returned the Honourable Miss Enfield.—'I will oblige you this time,' I said, after some consideration; 'but pray do not let this take place again.'—Then she kissed me so affectionately, I was really pleased to have made a friend of her; for I was so forlorn and unhappy in my situation—though I never let my father know how completely we had been deceived in Mrs. Lambkin's disposition.

"On the following morning the letter came: and when I could find an opportunity, I gave the contents (which was a small note carefully sealed) to Miss Enfield. She thanked me with a sweet smile. Three or four days afterwards, another letter came addressed to me, with another enclosure for Miss Enfield. I was determined not to give it to her during the day, because I could find no opportunity to speak to her unobserved. Accordingly, as I anticipated, she came up to my room in the evening, after we had all retired to rest. I then gave her the note, but with a firm and decided assurance that I would not be the intermediate of any further correspondence carried on in so secret a manner. She cried very bitterly at my resolve, and by means of some tale which it is not worth while to repeat, but which seemed to me satisfactory at the time, induced me to convey a letter to the post for her next day, and receive the answer in the usual manner. I foolishly allowed myself to be over-persuaded, and fulfilled her wishes in both respects. I must observe that her letter was

addressed to the same person as the two preceding ones.

"She was very grateful to me for my kindness, and treated me with marked attention. Being the daughter of a noble house, her conduct towards me produced a pleasant effect in respect to the three senior teachers, who, seeing that Miss Enfield courted my society, began to treat me more as their equal than they had hitherto done. Mrs. Lambkin also grew less harsh towards me; and my position acquired some degree of comfort.

"One evening, after I had retired to my garret, Miss Enfield paid me another visit. She had another favour to ask me. 'The day after to-morrow,' she said, 'I shall have leave to go out for a little shopping. Will you accompany me?'—I replied that I should do so with much pleasure.—'Very well,' she said; 'leave me to manage it. I will ask Mrs. Lambkin to-morrow night, when she has been out of the room three or four times——.'—'I do not understand why you should choose that moment,' I said.—'Oh!' was the answer, 'when she has had her third or fourth glass, she can refuse me nothing; and she is sure to ask whom I will have of the teachers to accompany me.'—'Her third or fourth glass!' I exclaimed.—'Yes, to be sure,' returned Miss Enfield. 'What! I thought every one knew that she drinks like a fish; although she does do it on the sly. Her husband was a dreadful drunkard.'—'Indeed! I am sorry to hear this,' I observed. 'Moreover, I thought that her husband was a most respectable person.'—'Oh! I dare say Mrs. Lambkin has been telling you that nonsense about her husband's death,' said Miss Enfield, laughing. 'The truth is, he was coming home one night most terribly the worse for liquor, when he became involved in a dispute with a bad woman; and when the police interfered, he made a desperate assault upon them, and was killed by an unlucky blow with one of their bludgeons.'—'She told quite a different tale to my father,' I observed. —'Yes, because your father is a clergyman, and may recommend some boarders to her house,' returned Miss Enfield. 'Did she not also seem mighty civil and polite before him?'—I confessed that she did.—'And the moment his back was turned, did she not turn also?'—This I likewise admitted.—'She cannot keep her temper long, you see. But I must go now, for fear Miss Muddle should awake, and happen to find out that I have left my bed. Good night, dear Miss Hutchinson. The day after to-morrow we will go out shopping together.'

"Then the Honourable Miss Enfield withdrew, leaving me greatly astonished at what I had heard. I lay awake the greater part of the night, reflecting on all that she had told me; and when I thought of this young lady's rank, youth, beauty, and brilliant prospects, I felt sad at the idea that the purity of her soul had been in the least degree interfered with by tales of drunken men, bad women, and police-riots, as well as by the example of an intemperate school-mistress. Miss Enfield's communication had shed a new light upon my mind. The term '*bad woman*' set me thinking what it could mean; and at last I comprehended its signification. Oh! how I shuddered when that first consciousness of the real extent to which female frailty can reach, grew more and more defined in my imagination, until I understood its deep shade of guilt. The first step towards teaching the youthful mind to become infidel, is to suffer it to know that there live men, in Christian countries, who deny the truth of revealed religion:—the first step towards inducing a young girl to harbour impure thoughts, is to show her that female depravity has, in its worst sense, an indubitable existence!

"The Honourable Miss Enfield was as good as her word. She obtained permission to go out shopping, and also for me to accompany her. It was three o'clock, on a beautiful spring afternoon, when Miss Enfield and myself sallied forth together. 'The best shops lie in this direction,' I observed, pointing towards the left.—'Oh! no, my dear Miss Hutchinson,' she said, with a merry laugh: 'the spot that will suit me is in *this* direction;'—and she took the road to London. I made no objection; my duty was to accompany her for the sake of appearances—not precisely to take care of her, because, although eight months younger than I, she was as tall and as matured in form as myself. Indeed she was very precocious, but, as I have before said, very pretty.

"We passed by several linen-drapers' shops; but the Honourable Miss Enfield entered none of them. At length we reached Hyde Park. 'Do let us take a walk here, my dear Miss Hutchinson,' she exclaimed: 'see how beautiful the trees already seem; and what a freshness there is in the air!'—I assented; and we entered the Park. Presently Miss Enfield burst out into a joyous laugh. I inquired the reason; but she only looked archly at me, and renewed her merriment. Scarcely had I time to question her a second time concerning her joyousness, when she pressed my arm significantly; and I beheld two tall, fine-looking military men approaching. I cast my eyes downwards, for I perceived that they were looking attentively at us; but in a few moments I heard one of the officers exclaim, 'It *is* my dearest Adeline! I felt convinced that she would not disappoint me.'—'Not for worlds, Cholmondeley,' she replied;—and, in another moment, she had left me and was hanging on the officer's arm.—'Now, Dunstable, you do the amiable with Miss Hutchinson,' said Captain Cholmondeley to his companion; and before I could recover from the stupefaction into which these proceedings threw me, I found myself arm-in-arm with a handsome young officer, whom I soon afterwards ascertained to be Lord Dunstable.

"For some time I walked on in profound silence, conscious that I was doing wrong, but unable to muster up the courage sufficient to withdraw from the false position in which Miss Enfield's intrigue had placed me. At length the gentle tones of a kind but manly voice penetrated through the chaos of ideas which agitated in my brain. 'Wherefore so silent, Miss Hutchinson?' said the young officer: 'does my boldness in constituting myself your companion offend you? If so, I will instantly release you from the unpleasant contact of my society.'—I made no answer, but burst into tears.—'By heaven! you are a sweet girl,' he continued; 'and I feel that I can love you sincerely. But dry those lovely eyes: there are persons about who may observe us.'—He was right: I wiped away the tears; and, after hazarding a few brief replies to his remarks, I insensibly fell into conversation with him. By degrees I lost the restraint and embarrassment which had at first possessed me; and ere I had been half an hour in his society, I laughed heartily at his lively sallies and sprightly observations. In the mean time Adeline was walking at a considerable distance in front, with the Honourable Captain Cholmondeley.

"Nearly two hours passed away in this manner; and then I insisted upon returning to Belvidere House. We accordingly overtook Miss Enfield and the Captain; and I signified my desire, observing that Mrs Lambkin would be angry did we remain absent much longer. 'We will not part with you, ladies,' said the Captain, 'unless you promise to lighten our darkness again with your presence ere we are all a week older.'—'This day week we could manage it again,' immediately observed Miss Enfield.—I murmured an objection. —'If you do not come, my dearest Miss Hutchinson,' whispered Lord Dunstable to me, 'I shall either hang or drown myself.'—I smiled; and Adeline, who was watching my countenance, cried, 'Oh! Lydia is such a dear good-natured creature, and we are such friends, I am sure she will not refuse.'—Again I smiled; and this was taken for an assent on my part. Then the two gentlemen looked round, and, perceiving no strangers near at the present, they bade us farewell in a most tender manner:—I mean that Captain Cholmondeley

pressed Adeline in his arms, while Lord Dunstable literally glued his lips to mine. And I——Oh! my resistance was but feeble!

"Miss Enfield and myself then retraced our steps towards Belvidere House; but to save appearances, she purchased some articles at the first linen-draper's shop that we came to. 'Ah! Miss Adeline,' I said, as we proceeded homewards, 'what have we both been doing?'—'Enjoying ourselves very much, dear Lydia,' answered the young lady, laughing heartily. 'I am sure you ought not to complain, for you have made the conquest of a lord, handsome, and wealthy.'—'But what will he think of me?' I exclaimed.—'That you are a very pretty, amiable, delightful girl,' rejoined the Honourable Miss Enfield.—'And all this was planned on your part, Miss Adeline?' I said.—'Call me *Adeline* in future,' answered Miss Enfield; 'for now you and I are sworn friends. Yes; the whole matter was pre-arranged so far as my meeting with Cholmondeley was concerned; and as I told him in my last note that *you* would accompany me, he was too gallant not to engage a friend to take charge of you while he and I were conversing together.'—'Are you going to be, married to Captain Cholmondeley?' I inquired.—'He has promised to demand my hand of my parents the moment I leave school,' replied Adeline: then after a pause, she added, 'And if you play your cards well, you may become Lady Dunstable.'—This assurance electrified me: it filled me with new hopes, new visions, new aspirations. In a few moments I saw myself (in imagination) the wife of a Lord, my father a Bishop, through my husband's influence, and my brother a rich gentleman to whose addresses no heiress would turn a deaf ear!

"I could not sleep all that night! I considered my fortune already assured; and I declare most solemnly that I felt more delight, in the visions of prosperity and bliss which I conjured up, on account of my father and brother, than for the sake of myself. The week passed away: I did not oppose Miss Enfield's intimation to me that we should keep our appointment with the two officers; and, permission having been obtained as before, we sallied forth. Hyde Park was soon gained; and we were not kept waiting a moment by our *beaux*—for they were already at the place of meeting. They received us with evident delight; and as Lord Dunstable pressed my hand tenderly, my eyes met his—a deep blush suffused my countenance—and I felt that I already loved him.

"Adeline walked apart with the Captain: and I remained with Lord Dunstable. He spoke to me more freely, but not less respectfully, than on the former occasion. He assured me that he had thought of nothing, since we last met, save the prospect of seeing me again; and he forced from me an avowal that I too had not altogether forgotten him! We had been thus together for half an hour, when it began to rain. The Honourable Captain Cholmondeley and Adeline then turned and joined us. 'This rain is a great nuisance,' said the Captain: 'it is impossible to keep the ladies out in it; and it is equally impossible to part with them so soon.'—'What is to be done?' asked Lord Dunstable.—'My private residence is close by,' said the Captain; 'and if the ladies would take shelter there, until the rain is over, they shall be treated with as much respect as if they were at home.'—'Well, on that condition,' exclaimed Miss Enfield, 'we will assent.'—I was about to offer some remonstrance, when Lord Dunstable whispered a few tender words in my ear; and the objection died upon my lips.

"The Honourable Captain Cholmondeley's private dwelling was in the immediate vicinity of Sloane Street; and thither we repaired. A servant in livery opened the door: we were conducted into an elegantly furnished dining-room, and a cold collation was speedily served up. Champagne was poured out; and, not aware of its strength, I drank two glasses without much hesitation. The Captain told the servant to leave the room; and I remember that we laughed, and chatted, and ate, and drank as happily as if Adeline and myself were in no way tied to time. But presently my senses became obscured; my head swam round; and I was ready to fall from my seat. I have a faint idea of beholding Adeline sitting on the Captain's knee; and then I recollected no more, until I awoke in the morning!

"But, my God! to what did I awake? Oh! even now I shudder as I recall to mind my sentiments on that occasion! I was in bed—in a strange bed; and by my side was Lord Dunstable. Then I comprehended that my dishonour had been effected! I uttered a scream—a wild, terrific, appalling scream! Lord Dunstable caught me in his arms, and said all he could to soothe me. He pleaded the extent of his love, called heaven to witness that he looked upon me as his wife, and swore by all he held sacred to make me so in the eyes of the law as soon as he could complete certain arrangements necessary to such a change in his condition. He spoke with so much apparent sincerity, used so many arguments to convince me of his love, and expatiated so eloquently upon the happiness which we should enjoy when united, that my grief was absorbed in a wild delirium of bliss!

"Then came the sudden thought, '*What was to become of me in the meantime?*'—'You can return to Belvidere House,' answered Lord Dunstable: 'Miss Enfield will make it all right for you.'—'Return to Belvidere House!' I exclaimed: 'impossible!'—'Nay, it is very possible,' rejoined my lover: 'Adeline, who is an uncommonly sharp girl, arranged it all last evening before she left. She said that she should let herself into Belvidere House by the back way, and that she should proceed straight into the parlour, where she should assure Mrs. Lambkin that you, Lydia, had come home with such a dreadful headach, you were obliged to go straight up to bed.'—'That excuse will do for last night,' I said, wringing my hands in despair: 'but this morning?'—'All is arranged equally well,' answered my noble lover. 'It is only now six o'clock: you are to be in the neighbourhood of the school by half-past seven; Adeline will steal out and join you: then you can both walk boldly up to the door, enter, and say that you have been out together for a little stroll, in accordance with a permission to that effect which Adeline declared she would obtain from Mrs. Lambkin last night, when that respectable lady was in her cups.'—These stratagems produced a great relief to my mind, because I saw that they were entirely practicable. But, even in that moment of my agitated soul, I could not help reflecting upon the deep artifice which lurked in the bosom of so young a creature as the Honourable Miss Enfield.

"I rose and hastily dressed myself. Then I took leave of Lord Dunstable. He renewed all his protestations of sincerity, unalterable love, and honourable intentions; and we arranged a plan of correspondence and future meetings. I stole from the house, unperceived by any of the inmates, and proceeded at a rapid pace towards the school. But how changed was my soul—how altered were all my thoughts! I fancied that every one whom I met, read the history of my shame in my countenance! Then I consoled myself with Lord Dunstable's assurance that I was his wife in the sight of heaven, and soon should receive that hallowed name in the eyes of man.

"At a short distance from the school, I met Miss Enfield. I cast down my eyes, and blushed deeply. She laughed merrily. 'Oh! Adeline,' I exclaimed, 'to what has all this intriguing brought me?'—'My dear Lydia,' she returned, 'our positions in that respect are equal; and, as our lovers will keep their words and marry us, where is the harm?'—I stared at the young lady with the most profound astonishment. How were our positions equal in reference to our lovers? She speedily cleared up my doubts. 'If you continue to blush and turn pale alternately, twenty times in a minute, as you are now doing,' she said, 'we shall both be suspected. We must exercise the

greatest caution; for if it were discovered that we surrendered ourselves to our lovers——.'—'*We!*' I repeated, contemplating her with increasing astonishment.—'My dear Lydia,' she continued, 'do you suppose that I was more virtuous than you, or the captain less tender than the nobleman? I certainly would not have accepted the invitation to visit Cholmondeley's private abode, if I had foreseen the consequences. But what is done cannot be undone; and we must make the best of it.'—I offered no reply: I saw that we were both completely at the mercy of those who had taken advantage of us,—that our positions were indeed equal in this one respect; and I fervently hoped that we might not live to rue the adventures of the last twelve hours!

"The Honourable Miss Enfield had so well arranged matters, that we entered the house without having excited the least suspicion of my absence throughout the night. And now commenced a new species of existence for me. My whole life suddenly appeared to be wrapped up in the promise which Lord Dunstable had given me to make me his wife. We corresponded often; and his letters to me invariably contained a note from the Honourable Captain Cholmondeley to Miss Enfield. A fortnight after the meeting which was so fatal to my honour, Adeline obtained permission for us to go out again; and we proceeded to Hyde Park, where our lovers joined us. An invitation to the Captain's private residence was again given; the weather was, however, fine—we could walk in the Park—and I positively refused. But Adeline and Cholmondeley disappeared for more than an hour! Dunstable was as kind and tender to me as I could wish: still he did not volunteer a single observation concerning our marriage; and, when I gently alluded to it, he declared that he was hastening his arrangements. Then he changed the conversation. At length the Captain and Adeline returned; and we parted with our lovers, promising to meet them again in a fortnight.

"The two weeks passed away: we met again; and on this occasion the invitation to Cholmondeley's house was renewed—insisted upon—and, alas! accepted. I will not dwell upon this portion of my narrative. Suffice it to say that Cholmondeley's residence was converted into the scene of unlawful pleasure and voluptuousness,—that Adeline with her lover in one room, and myself with Dunstable in another, entered upon a career of wantonness, which grew more insatiable as it progressed!

"Seven months had passed since the first meeting in Hyde Park; and Lord Dunstable never spoke of marriage—never started the subject of his own accord. I often questioned him on the point; and he invariably replied that his arrangements were not yet complete. At length the dream of hope and pleasure in which Adeline and myself had existed for half-a-year, was suddenly dissolved. Hastily-written letters were one morning received by us from our lovers, stating that they were about to proceed on a continental tour; that they had not leisure to meet us for the sake of taking leave; but that, on their return at the expiration of a few months, they should be delighted to renew the intimacy. Not a word of marriage in either letter!

"That night, at eleven o'clock, Adeline came to my garret. I was reduced to despair; and could offer her no consolation, although she needed it even more—oh! far more than I. The moment she found herself alone with me, she gave way to a paroxysm of grief—a convulsion of anguish, which alarmed me. I implored her to restrain her emotions, or we should be overheard. She sank upon my bed; and I soon perceived that she was enduring great bodily pain in addition to deep mental affliction. An idea of the terrible truth flashed through my brain: she was in the agony of premature labour!

"I had not even suspected her condition until that moment. I was bewildered—I knew not what to do. At length I thought it advisable, at all hazards, to alarm the house, and procure medical attendance. But as I was rushing towards the door for that purpose, Adeline caught me by the hand; and, turning towards me her countenance—her ghastly pale countenance, with an expression of indescribable anguish and alarm, she said, 'For God's sake, remain with me! If another be made acquainted with my shame, I will not survive this disgrace.' I locked the door cautiously, and returned to the bed-side. And there—in a miserable garret, and in the depth of a cold winter's night,—with a nipping frost upon the window, and the bright moon high in the heavens,—there, attended only by myself, did the delicately-nurtured Adeline Enfield give birth to a male child. But the little infant's eyes never opened even for a moment upon this world: it was born dead!

"An hour afterwards Adeline dragged herself back to the room in which she slept. That was a fearful night for us both: it was for *me*—it must have been for *her*! I never closed my eyes: this terrible event weighed upon my soul like a crime. I felt as if I had been the accomplice in some awful deed of darkness. The cold and placid moon seemed to reproach me—as if its bright orb were heaven's own all-seeing eye!

"I could not endure that calm—unvarying—steadfast light, which appeared to be a glance immoveably fixed upon *me*. It drove me mad—it pierced my brain. That cloudless moon seemed to shine on none of earth's denizens, save myself. Methought that from its empyrean height it surveyed every nook, every crevice of my lonely garret; and at length so icy became its gaze, that I shuddered from head to foot—my teeth chattered—my limbs grew rigid. There was a deep conviction in my soul that the eye of God was upon me!

"I knelt down at last, and tried to pray. I called upon heaven—I called upon my father—I called upon my brother, to pardon me! Then once more I turned my eyes towards the moon; and its reproachful, chilling glance seemed to penetrate to the depths of my secret soul,—singling me, *me* out for its maddening scrutiny,—marking *me* alone, of all the human race, for its calm, but bitter contemplation.

"At length the orb of night was no longer visible from my window, although its silver flood still inundated the dwellings and the country of which my garret commanded a view. Then I grew more tranquil:—but I could not sleep!

"Never was morning more welcome to the guilty imagination haunted by the fearful apparitions of the night, than it was to me. I composed myself as well as I could; but when I surveyed my countenance in the glass, I was dismayed by its awful pallor—its haggardness—its care-worn look. I did not dare plead illness, as an excuse for keeping my chamber; because I was too anxious to ascertain what course Miss Enfield would pursue to escape those inquiries that her appearance, I felt convinced, must elicit. Besides, there was *something* in my box which—but of that no matter at present.

"I accordingly descended to the breakfast-room. The moment I entered, I cast a hurried glance around, and beheld Adeline seated in her usual place, chatting gaily with Miss Muddle, the senior teacher. We exchanged rapid and significant looks; and I moved in silence to my own chair. But I fully comprehended the indescribable efforts which Adeline was forced to make in order to prevent herself from sinking with exhaustion. Others noticed her extreme pallor, and spoke of the slight indisposition which she declared she experienced: but *I* saw how ill—how very ill, weak, and languid she really was. And I was pale and suffering too; and no one inquired what ailed me. This result of indifference on the part of all save Adeline,—and of prudence on *her* side,—was actually a great source of comfort

to me; for had I been questioned, I know not how I should have replied. My confusion was extreme as it was; and yet I had much less to tremble for than Adeline.

"The breakfast was over; and we all repaired to the school-room. As we were proceeding thither, Miss Enfield drew me aside for a moment, and said in a hurried whisper, 'For heaven's sake, keep my secret, dearest Lydia: the honour of a noble family depends upon your prudence!'—I pressed her hand in acquiescence.—'I will ever be your friend, dearest Lydia,' she repeated.—Then we separated to take our respective places in the school.

"The usual routine was progressing in its monotonous and wearisome manner, when Jessica, the upper servant-maid, suddenly burst into the room, and, addressing Mrs. Lambkin, said, 'Ma'am, there's three silver tea-spoons missing; and as we've been quarrelling about it down stairs, I beg that all our boxes may be searched. Of course I don't mean the young ladies; or yet the *senior* teachers, ma'am.'—The loss of three silver spoons was sufficient to rouse Mrs. Lambkin's ire; and she vowed that Jessica's suggestion should be immediately acted upon. The boxes must be searched. I felt as if struck by a thunderbolt.

"Mrs. Lambkin summoned Miss Rhodes, Miss Jessop, and myself to accompany her. Then Adeline rose, and exclaimed, 'Surely, Mrs. Lambkin, you will not subject these three young ladies to the indignity of examining their trunks?'—'Yes, but I will though,' cried Mrs. Lambkin, her anger getting the better of her respect for the scion of aristocracy.—Adeline sank back in her seat: and never—never shall I forget the imploring, despairing, heart-rending glance which she darted upon me, as I followed the school-mistress from the room.

"The servants' boxes were all searched, one after the other; and no spoons were discovered. Then Miss Rhodes was subjected to the same degradation. When the scrutiny in respect to her trunk was concluded,—and, of course, without any success in respect to the lost articles,—she said, 'Madam, I beg to give you one month's warning that I intend to leave your establishment.'—'Oh! very well: just as you like,' returned Mrs. Lambkin.—Miss Jessop's room then passed through the ordeal. No spoons. 'Madam,' said Miss Jessop, 'I beg to give you one month's notice, according to the terms of our agreement. I know that my parents will not blame me, after this insult.'—'Very well, miss,' cried Mrs. Lambkin; 'you'll repent of leaving a good situation before you're six months older.' Then, turning towards me, she said, 'This won't prevent me from searching your boxes, miss; and I shall not die of grief if you give me notice also.'—'Such is not my intention, madam,' I replied, hoping that my submissiveness would plead in my favour, and prevent her from visiting my room.—'No; I should think not,' she retorted; and she walked straight away to the garret which I occupied.

"Miss Rhodes and Miss Jessop had gone down stairs; Jessica, Mrs. Lambkin, and myself were alone together. During the few minutes that intervened between the search in my small boxes and the visit to my large trunk, I revolved in my mind the only alternatives which a certain discovery that I now saw to be inevitable, would leave me: namely, to shield Miss Enfield by accusing myself; or to save myself by exposing her. Then I thought whether I really should save my own honour by this latter course; for, although my frailty had led to none such consequences as those which were connected with Adeline, nevertheless she might proclaim me to have been the paramour of Lord Dunstable. Moreover, I remembered her appealing, despairing look;—I called to mind all the promises of friendship and assistance which she had made me; I knew that she belonged to a noble, wealthy, and influential family; and I had such confidence in the generosity and grateful nature of her disposition, that I felt fully persuaded she would never abandon me.

"But, oh! I did not thus reason so calmly nor so deliberately as I am now speaking. My brain was a whirlwind—my soul was a chaos; and it was only with considerable mental effort, that I could separate and classify my ideas in the slightest degree. And now the school-mistress approached my trunk: she raised the lid—I leant against the wall for support. My clothes were tumbled out on the floor: at the bottom of the box was a small bundle, wrapped round with linen articles. The school-mistress drew it forth—a terrific scream escaped my lips—the corpse of the infant rolled upon the floor!

"Jessica gave vent to an exclamation of horror and alarm, and was rushing towards the door, when Mrs. Lambkin, recovering from the sudden shock which this spectacle had occasioned, held her back, saying, 'In the name of God be cautious; or my establishment will be ruined!' Then turning towards me, her lips quivering and white with rage, she said, in a low hollow tone, 'No wonder you are so pale and ill this morning! But must I look upon you as the murderess——.'—'Oh! no, no, madam,' I exclaimed, falling on my knees, and joining my hands together; 'that child was born dead. Listen to me, and I will tell you all; I will confess every thing!'—'There appears to be but little now to confess,' returned Mrs. Lambkin; 'and I have no time for idle conversation. The honour of my institution is seriously compromised: I will pay you the amount due to you, and you can leave my service this minute. It will be your fault if the real cause ever transpires.'—'Ah! madam,' I exclaimed, 'shall I not then be looked upon as the thief who stole your spoons?'—'No,' answered the school-mistress. 'I will declare in the presence of the entire establishment that my search has proved ineffectual in all quarters; and I will even allow you the merit of having left of your own accord, for the same reason which prompted Miss Rhodes and Miss Jessop to give me notice.' Mrs. Lambkin then turned towards Jessica, to whom she enjoined the strictest secrecy concerning the discovery of the dead child.

"At one moment, when on my knees before Mrs. Lambkin, I was about to confess the whole truth: but, now perceiving the turn which matters had taken, and that she herself was most solicitous to hush up the affair for the credit of her establishment, I saw that no exposure awaited me, and that I might save Adeline from disgrace and ruin without farther compromising myself. I accordingly intimated my readiness to leave on condition that the real motive should never transpire. Then I thrust my things back again into the trunk: but the corpse of the child, wrapped in linen, I left lying on the floor. 'Put every thing into the trunk—*that*, and all!' said Mrs. Lambkin.—'Not for worlds, madam,' I exclaimed, 'would I remove my effects elsewhere, with *that* amongst them!'—"Wretch!' she cried, 'would you have me dispose of your bastard's corpse for you?'—This insulting question brought the blood into my cheeks. Oh! it was too much to be thus reviled for a disgrace which did not really belong to me. Mrs. Lambkin saw how I was agitated, and, dreading a scene, she said in a low tone, 'You can remain here till to-morrow, Miss Hutchinson. If you choose to walk out this evening, *when it is dark*, you have my permission. But, in the meantime, you will have the kindness to keep your box carefully locked.'—I understood the hint, and bowed acquiescence.

"We descended to the school-room once more. The moment I entered I darted a glance towards Adeline which convinced her that *she* was saved. The one she gave in return was replete with gratitude. Oh! how much had I sacrificed, and how deeply had I suffered for her!

"The day passed slowly away. Fortunately the missing spoons were found in the evening: they had merely been mislaid by the cook or scullery-girl. I retired to my chamber at an earlier hour than usual: the presence of the school-mistress was irksome to me in the room below. In a short time Adeline came to me. She had stolen away to have an opportunity of conversing with me. Then I narrated to her all that had occurred in the morning. She threw herself upon my neck, and thanked me with tears in her eyes for having saved her from the depths of disgrace. She called me her 'sister'—her 'friend'—her 'dearest, dearest friend;' and vowed she would never forget the immense service which I had rendered her. Then I felt glad that I had acted as I had done. She even offered to go out, when the other inmates of the house had retired to rest, and dispose of the corpse of the child—her own child; but I knew that it would be death to one in her condition to venture abroad in the night-air. I accordingly undertook to perform that task also. We next conversed on my own prospects. I was averse to return home: I dreaded the numerous questions which my father and brother were certain to put to me. Adeline, who was an uncommonly worldly-minded girl for her age, instantly suggested that I should take a respectable lodging in London, and she would undertake to procure for me a situation as a nursery-governess. The Christmas holidays were at hand: she would be returning in the course of ten days to her parents' house in Belgrave Square; and she assured me that she should then have an opportunity of exercising her influence in my favour. To these proposals I assented; and she withdrew.

"When the house was quiet, I put on my bonnet and cloak, concealing beneath the latter the corpse of Miss Enfield's child. I then slipped out by the back way, and striking into the bye-lanes leading towards Brompton, at length reached a pond, into which a muddy ditch emptied itself. The moon was bright, and thus enabled me to discover a spot fitted for my purpose. I placed two or three large stones in the bundle containing the body of the child: then I threw the whole into the pond. The dark water splashed and gurgled; and in a few moments all was still once more.

"I now breathed more easily; but it was not without some difficulty that I found my way back to Belvidere House.

"On the following morning I took my leave of the inmates of that establishment. I received the money that was due to me; and I requested Mrs. Lambkin to allow me to leave my boxes until I should send for them in the evening. To this she assented; and I repaired by the omnibus to London. Miss Enfield had given me the necessary advice to guide me in searching for a lodging; and I engaged a room in the house of a respectable widow in Bury Street, St. James's. Her husband had been an upper servant in the family of Lord and Lady Rossville (Miss Enfield's parents); and, by using Adeline's name, I was immediately received with civility by the widow.

"I sent a porter for my boxes; and then my first care was to write a letter to my father. This I found to be no easy task. I recoiled from the idea of sending a tissue of falsehoods to that dear, confiding parent. Nevertheless, the duty was imperative. I accordingly concocted a letter, in which I informed him 'that having been grievously insulted by Mrs. Lambkin, I had left her service; but that I had met with a sincere friend in the Honourable Miss Adeline Enfield, one of the young ladies of the establishment, who had taken a great interest in me, and had not only promised to procure me a situation as a nursery-governess in a wealthy family, but had also recommended me, in the interval, to the care of a most respectable widow.' By return of post I received my father's answer. He regretted my precipitation in leaving Mrs. Lambkin until I had written to consult him; but admitted that the provocation in searching my boxes was grave. He expressed his entire confidence in my discretion, and declared his delight at the friendship I had formed with Miss Enfield. But he charged me to return home the moment I experienced the least difficulty in obtaining another situation. He concluded by stating that either he or Edgar would have repaired to London to see me; but that the expense was an almost insuperable barrier to such a step, their limited means being considered.

"Ten days elapsed; and then I knew that Miss Enfield must have returned home for the Christmas holidays. I accordingly expected an early visit from her. Nor was I mistaken. A magnificent equipage one afternoon drove up to the door; and Adeline stepped out. In a few moments she was seated in my little room. 'You see that I have not forgotten you, dear Lydia,' she exclaimed. 'I have told my mother, Lady Rossville, such a fine story about you,—how good and kind you always were to me, and how Mrs. Lambkin persecuted you without any reason,—that she has permitted me to visit you; and, more than *that*, she has recommended you to Lady Penfeather as a nursery-governess. There is Lady Penfeather's address; and you may call on her to-morrow afternoon. I have already said so much to her ladyship concerning you, and assured her of the respectability of yourself and family with such effect, that you will be received immediately.'—I cordially thanked Adeline for this goodness on her part; and she insisted so earnestly upon pressing on me a sum of money to enable me to improve my wardrobe, that I could not refuse her offer. She then embraced me, and took her leave.

"I will not dwell tediously on this portion of my narrative. On the following day I called upon Lady Penfeather, and was received very graciously. After some conversation, she engaged me at a salary of twenty guineas a-year; and I was to remove to her house immediately. She was an easy, affable, good-natured person—about thirty-six years of age, and not very handsome. Her husband, Sir Wentworth Penfeather, was three or four years older than herself, and was a fine, tall, good-looking man. They had three children, whose ages were between six and ten: the two eldest were girls, and the youngest a boy. These were to be my pupils. I hastened back to my lodging, and wrote a letter to my father informing him of my good luck. Then I settled with my kind landlady, and removed to Sir Wentworth Penfeather's residence in Cavendish Square.

"I was very well treated in this family. The servants were all civil and attentive to me; and the children were as ready to learn as children of such an age could possibly be. Sir Wentworth was very frequently in the apartment where I sate with them; and he was particularly kind in his manners toward me. He even laughed and joked, and conversed with me in a very friendly way. But in the presence of his wife, he was reserved, and never addressed a word to me. At length his attentions, when unperceived by Lady Penfeather, grew daily more significant; and he paid me many compliments on my beauty. I discouraged his familiarity as much as possible; but he soon grew more bold, and one day declared in plain terms that he adored me. I rose and left the room.

"Three months had now passed; and I had never seen Adeline since she called upon me at my lodging. I knew that she was not to return to Mrs. Lambkin's establishment, her education being completed (completed indeed!); and I felt hurt that she had not found a leisure moment either to call or write to me. I accordingly wrote a note requesting to see her. I was anxious to obtain another situation, and thus escape from Sir Wentworth Penfeather's importunities. On the following day Adeline called, and desired to see me alone. I

was struck by her cold and distant manner. 'Miss Hutchinson,' she said, 'you must not be astonished at my conduct in not visiting you. You did me a great service: I have returned the obligation by procuring you a good situation. There are now no debts on either side. Our ways lie so totally different in the world, that were I to maintain an intimacy with you, my behaviour would be subject to the most annoying comments. We have both of us a deep interest in keeping each other's secrets. Were you, in a moment of anger against me, to state that it was my child that was discovered in *your* trunk, who would believe you? whereas, if you proclaim our respective amours with Captain Cholmondeley and Lord Dunstable, you publish your own shame at the time you denounce me. I am sorry to be compelled to speak thus to you; but I should have thought that your own good sense would have taught you the immeasurable distance which lies between you and me. Henceforth we are mere acquaintances, and nothing more.'

"With these words the honourable Adeline Enfield sailed out of the room, leaving me lost in astonishment—absolutely bewildered—at her behaviour. Then I felt for the first time the bitter ingratitude of the world, and I wept. Oh! I wept abundantly. My head had fallen forward on the table near which I was sitting; and I was giving way to my sorrow, when I heard Lady Penfeather's voice in the passage. She was saying, 'This way, my lord: I am sure you will be delighted to see the dear children. They are all so fond of your lordship! Really it is quite an age since we have seen you!'—'I have been on the continent with my friend Cholmondeley,' was the answer: but the voice in which it was delivered touched the tenderest chord in my heart. In another moment the door opened, and Lady Penfeather entered, followed by Lord Dunstable. 'This is the little school-room, you see, my lord,' she said; 'and this is my governess, Miss Hutchinson. But where are the children?'—'Miss Hutchinson!' exclaimed Lord Dunstable; 'Oh! we are old acquaintances: I have had the honour of meeting Miss Hutchinson before. I used to visit at her father's house, at—at—;' and he hesitated.—'At the Parsonage, near Guilford, my lord,' I instantly added, my courage reviving when I felt my hand tenderly pressed in his.—'Ah! to be sure,' he exclaimed; 'and how is my respectable friend, your father?' he continued, casting a significant look upon me.—I answered the query; and Lady Penfeather was quite satisfied with the manner in which Lord Dunstable's knowledge of me was accounted for. His lordship went on talking to me about Guilford, (which, I really believe, he had never seen in his life); and Lady Penfeather went herself into the next room to fetch the children.

"The moment her back was turned, Lord Dunstable said to me in a hurried whisper, 'Dearest Lydia, you look more beautiful than ever! I have never ceased to think of you since we last met. I have much to say to you: will you meet me to-morrow afternoon, somewhere? Say in the Pantheon, (it is not very far from hence) at three o'clock precisely?'—I murmured an affirmative; and at that moment Lady Penfeather returned, accompanied by the children. Lord Dunstable affected to admire them very highly; and the mother was quite charmed with his amiability. I could not help noticing how much his continental tour had improved him; indeed, I had never seen him looking so handsome before: my heart was once more filled with the fondest hopes;—for I really loved that man.

"When his lordship retired, he shook hands with me again, and we exchanged significant glances. The pleasure I experienced at this unexpected meeting, and the interest he manifested in my behalf, banished from my mind the disagreeable impression created by Adeline's unfeeling conduct towards me. Oh! how slowly passed the hours until the time of our appointment drew nigh! I was so completely my own mistress in Lady Penfeather's family, that I could go out when I chose; and thus I had no difficulty in repairing to the *rendez-vous*. Lord Dunstable was there; and he advanced to meet me with pleasure depicted on his countenance. I took his arm, and we retired to the picture-gallery, where there happened to be but few loungers at the moment.

"He began by saying 'What must you have thought of my conduct in leaving England so abruptly?'—'It gave me very great pain,' I answered; 'and, after all your promises to me, I considered that I had reason to be both dissatisfied and unhappy.'—'Let me speak candidly to you,' he continued. 'I am so circumstanced, in consequence of being entirely dependent on my father, that marriage is for the present impossible. But I love you very sincerely, and absence has augmented my attachment. Are you happy where you are?'—I then candidly acquainted him with Sir Wentworth Penfeather's conduct towards me, and stated my determination to leave my present situation as soon as I could obtain another.—'Sir Wentworth,' continued Lord Dunstable, 'is the greatest scoundrel in respect to women, in London. If you do not yield to his wishes, he will slander you to his wife in private: and you will be turned away some fine morning without knowing why, and without a character.'—'Can he be so base?' I exclaimed, alarmed at this information.—'He is indeed,' replied Dunstable.

"Then, in a language so plausible—so earnest—so seductive, that I am unable to give you an idea of its speciousness, he proposed that I should at once place myself under his protection. At first I scorned the offer: he implored me to listen to him; he declared that he loved me to distraction, and that the moment his father was dead he would marry me. I wavered—he redoubled his entreaties, prayers; and at length he wrung from me a consent to his proposition! It was agreed that I should invent some excuse to quit Lady Penfeather in the course of the week; and Dunstable promised in the meantime to provide suitable apartments for me. Then we separated.

"But do not imagine that I did all this without a pang, when I thought of my poor father and my brother! Oh! no—I wept bitter, burning tears at my weakness, after I quitted my lover; and I resolved to recall my promise to accept his protection. In this better frame of mind I returned to Cavendish Square. The moment I entered, the servant who opened the door informed me that Lady Penfeather desired to speak to me. I proceeded to the drawing-room, where her ladyship was sitting. Sir Wentworth was also there. I immediately suspected that there was something wrong. Lady Penfeather said, in a cold and freezing tone, 'Miss Hutchinson, I have no farther need of your services. Here is the amount due to you, together with a quarter's salary in addition, as I have not given you a quarter's notice.'—'This is somewhat peremptory, madam,' I observed, when I could recover from this sudden and unexpected announcement.—'I should be even justified in turning you out of the house, without the quarter's salary, Miss,' retorted the lady: 'but I do not wish to behave too harshly to you; I would not, however, advise you to apply to me for a character.'—'My God!' I exclaimed; 'what have I done?'—'The levity of your conduct has been noticed by Sir Wentworth,' returned Lady Penfeather.—'Sir Wentworth!' I repeated, unable to believe my own ears; and then, in a moment, Lord Dunstable's words flashed to my memory.—'Yes, Miss Hutchinson,' continued Lady Penfeather; 'and as I recalled to mind the significant glances which you exchanged with Lord Dunstable yesterday, I deemed it my duty to have you watched this afternoon. Do you desire to know any more?'—'It is perfectly true that I have been with Lord Dunstable ere now,' I exclaimed, my blood boiling with indignation: 'but it is because I would not listen to the infamous proposals of your husband, madam, that I have been maligned, and am treated thus.'—Sir Wentworth started from his seat, livid with rage; and her ladyship ordered me to quit the room. I perceived that all attempts at explanation in respect to her husband's conduct were vain; and

I accordingly obeyed this mandate.

"I now resolved to return straight home to my father. I accordingly repaired, with my baggage, in a hackney-coach to the *White Horse Cellar*, for the purpose of taking the first conveyance to Guilford. But my evil star interfered to prevent this prudential arrangement; for it happened that as I alighted at the coach-office in Piccadilly, Lord Dunstable was passing at the moment. I shrank back to avoid him; but he saw me, and was immediately by my side. I then told him all that had occurred at the Penfeathers', and acquainted him with my firm resolution to return home. Need I say how he implored me to abandon this determination? need I describe the earnestness with which he besought me not to make him miserable for life? His language was eloquent—he was handsome—I loved him—I was weak—and I consented to pass a few days with him ere I returned to my father.

"Alas! those few days were prolonged into a few weeks. I did not dare to write home: I fondly hoped that my father imagined me still to be in Lady Penfeather's establishment; and I felt convinced there was no chance of his coming to London so long as he entertained this impression. Lord Dunstable continued very kind to me. He had hired magnificent apartments for me in Jermyn Street, and allowed me a carriage, besides a handsome weekly allowance. He passed with me all the time he could spare from his regimental duties; but he never went abroad with me—except to a private box at the theatre on two or three occasions; and then he was so afraid of being seen by his relations, that I was quite miserable.

"Several times I made up mind to leave him and return home; for the remembrance of my beloved father and brother cut me to the quick. But how could I seek their presence,—I who was now polluted not merely through the treachery of my lover, but also through my own weakness! Nevertheless, day after day I resolved to abandon my present mode of life—retrace my steps to the home of my childhood—throw myself at my father's feet—confess all my errors—implore his blessing—and devote the remainder of my existence to penitence and virtue. Then my lover would make his appearance; and all my prudent designs would flit away as if they had never been.

"But one morning I was aroused from this dream of irresolution—vacillation—weakness—and crime. I was seated alone at breakfast, whiling away an hour with the newspaper. Suddenly my eyes fell upon an advertisement at the head of the second column of the first page. Oh! never shall I forget the agony of my feelings—the deep, deep anguish of my soul, as I read these words:—'*L. H., your father is at the point of death. Your afflicted brother implores you to return home. For God's sake, delay not; or it will be too late! All shall be forgiven and forgotten.*'—And in the corner was the name of my father's village!

"For an instant I felt as if I should go raving mad. My brain seemed actually to whirl. Oh! what a wretch did I conceive myself to be! Another moment, and I became all activity—hurrying the small preparations which were necessary for my departure. The terrible words, '*Delay not, or it will be too late!*' seemed fraught with an electric impulse. A post-chaise and four were immediately ordered: I took with me but a small parcel containing necessaries;—all the trinkets, all the jewels, all the valuables which Dunstable had given to me, I sealed up and left behind me. I moreover penned a hasty note to bid him farewell for ever!

"I lavished gold upon the postillions to induce them to spare not their horses. The chaise rushed along like the wind. God knows what were my feelings during the few hours which that terrible journey lasted. I cannot attempt to describe them. Oh! if indiscretion and crime have their enjoyments, they are also doomed to experience bitter—bitter penalties. And my punishment was now at hand. It was not so long since I had journeyed along that road with my father—when he first conducted me up to London. Then we had travelled by the coach, and not so rapidly as I was now retracing the same path. Then, too, I had marked many of the most prominent features on the road and in the adjacent country,—here a church—there a picturesque farm—a cottage—a mill—or a hamlet! As I was hurried along in the post-chaise, I looked ever and anon from the window; oh! there were the same objects I had before observed;—there they were, apparently unchanged;—but I—my God—was I the same?

"But it was as I drew nearer and nearer to the little village where I was born, that my eyes encountered a thousand objects which aroused feelings of the most acute anguish within me. There was a beautiful hill to the summit of which I had often climbed in my youthful days, accompanied by my brother. There was the stream which turned the huge wheel of the water-mill in the valley, and the path along whose banks was a favourite walk of my father's. The wheel was turning still: my eye could trace the path on the river's margin;—but the days of innocence, in which I had rambled there—a fond, loving, and confiding girl, hanging on my father's arm, or skipping playfully away from him to pluck the wild-flowers in the fields—those days of innocence, where were they? The chaise rolled on; and now the spire of the village church, peeping above the mighty yew-trees which surrounded the sacred temple, met my view. But, ah! what was that sound? The bell was speaking with its iron tongue: its well-known clang boomed over hill and valley. Merciful heavens! it was a knell! 'Oh! no—no,' I exclaimed aloud, clasping my hands together in bitter agony; 'it cannot be! God grant that it is not so!'

"And now the chaise rolled through the village: the humble inhabitants rushed to their doors—Ah! how many faces that I knew, were thrust forth to gaze at the equipage. I can picture to myself that when the condemned malefactor, on the morning of his death, is advancing towards the scaffold, he closes his eyes just at the moment when he feels that he has reached that point whence his glances might embrace all its hideous reality. Urged by a similar impulse, I covered my face with my hands the instant the chaise swept from the main-road towards the home of my childhood. I dared not glance in that direction!

"But in a few moments the vehicle stopped. The knell from the church-tower was still ringing in my ears: by an almost superhuman effort I withdrew my hands from my countenance, and cast a shuddering look towards the house. My terrible apprehensions were confirmed: the shutters were all closed; and I saw in a moment *that there was death in that abode*!

"From that instant all consciousness abandoned me for several hours. Indeed, it was not until the next morning that I awoke as it were from a hideous dream,—and yet awoke to find it all a fearful reality. I was in bed: my poor brother—pale and care-worn—was leaning over me. In a short time I learnt all. My father was indeed no more. He had breathed his last while I was yet on my way to implore his dying blessing. And he *had* left me his blessing—he did not curse me, although I had been the cause of his death! Nor did my brother reproach me: on the contrary, he whispered to me words of consolation, and even of hope! Poor father—beloved brother!

"But I cannot dwell upon this portion of my narrative: it rends my heart—lost, guilty, wretched as I am,—it rends my heart to recall those terrible events to mind! Suffice it to say that Lady Penfeather had written to my father, to state that she had been compelled to discharge me at a moment's notice '*in consequence of the levity of my behaviour;*' and she had added that, '*in spite of the excellent*

admonitions and example of herself and Sir Wentworth,' she was afraid I had formed evil acquaintances. This letter was enough to induce a parent even less loving than my poor father, to hasten immediately to London, where he commenced a vigilant search after me. He traced me to the *White Horse Cellar*; and there, by dint of inquiry, he discovered that I had met a gentleman with whom I had gone away. He proceeded to Mrs. Lambkin, with the feeble hope that she might know something about me; and that lady told him sufficient (without, however, mentioning a word about the discovery of the dead infant in my box) to confirm his worst fears that I was indeed a lost and ruined creature! After passing several weeks in London in a vain and ineffectual search after his still dearly-beloved daughter, the poor old man had returned home, heart-broken—to die!

"And I gazed upon his cold clay—and I followed him to the grave which was hollowed for him near the walls of that church wherein for twenty years he had preached the ways of virtue—those ways which he himself had so steadily pursued. Oh! when the minister came to those solemn words '*Earth to earth, and ashes to ashes*,'—and when the cold clay rattled down upon the coffin-lid,—what feelings were mine! You may probably divine them; but the world has no language that can express them!

"Scarcely was my father consigned to his last home, when my brother demanded of me a full account of my late proceedings. He could not believe that one who had been reared with such care, and in whose soul such sublime moral lessons had been inculcated, could have erred willingly. He expressed his conviction that some infernal treachery had been practised towards me. I threw myself upon his breast: I wept—and I told him all,—all, as I have now related these particulars to you. On the following morning he had left home when I descended to the breakfast-table. His absence alarmed me sorely; I was full of vague and undefined apprehensions. Alas! how speedily were they confirmed! Four days afterwards I received a letter from a surgeon in London, breaking to me the fearful news '*that my brother had died of a wound received in a duel with a certain Lord Dunstable*.'—A certain Lord Dunstable;—as if I did not know him too well!

"Was I, then, the murderess of my poor father and my noble-hearted brother? If my hand had not struck a dagger into their hearts, my conduct had nevertheless hurried them to the grave. I hated—I abhorred myself. But the bitterness of my reflections was in some degree mitigated by the hasty preparations which I was compelled to make for an immediate return to London. I had not money enough to enable me to take a post-chaise; and I was therefore obliged to wait for the Portsmouth coach, which passed through the village on its way to the metropolis. I had already made up my mind what course to adopt. Now that my father and brother were no more, I could not bear the idea of remaining in the place where we had all been once so happy together: I moreover knew that the parsonage-house would soon be required by the new curate who had been appointed as my late father's successor. I accordingly sent for the village lawyer, and gave him instructions to realize in ready money all the little property which had become my sad inheritance. I told him that in a few days I would let him know my address in London; and that he was to forward me the proceeds of the sale. But I retained a few relics to remind me of my departed relatives; and as I wept bitterly over them, I took a solemn vow that my future conduct should prove the sincerity of my repentance for the past!

"The coach made its appearance soon after mid-day: there was not a single person inside; and thus I was enabled to pour forth, without restraint, that grief—that acute anguish which I experienced at being compelled, by my own misconduct, to quit for ever the place of my birth. Oh! then I felt how hard, how bitter it was to arrive at the conviction that I had no longer *a home*! I was now wretched in the extreme: I had lost those who were nearest and dearest to me! Not to me was it given to close the eyes of the author of my being: not to me was it allowed to receive the parting sigh of that brother who had met his death in the cause of his sister's outraged honour! Wretch that I was;—I had no longer a friend—and no longer a home!

"The coach, on its arrival in London, stopped at the *White Horse Cellar*. I took a cab, and immediately proceeded to the house of the surgeon who had written to me. There it was that my brother had breathed his last! The duel had taken place in the neighbourhood of Bayswater: my brother received his adversary's ball in the breast; and although he lived for some hours afterwards, he never spoke again. Lord Dunstable conjured the surgeon to show the unfortunate young man every attention, and then took his immediate departure for the continent. But, from motives of delicacy, neither poor Edgar nor his lordship had communicated to the medical man the cause of the duel. It was only by means of papers found about my brother's person that the surgeon discovered that he had a sister, and ascertained where that sister lived. In the hurry, alarm, and confusion which followed the duel, the surgeon had forgotten to demand, and Lord Dunstable was too bewildered to communicate, any particulars relative to the family or friends of the young man who had fallen in the hostile encounter. Thus, had it not been for certain memoranda which were discovered in my poor brother's pocket-book, the surgeon would not have known to whom to write, and I might have remained for months—or even years—in ignorance of that dear relative's untimely fate. Full well did I comprehend the delicacy of his own conduct: he had not left a written trace which might expose my shame by revealing the motives that had led to the duel!

"There was a coroner's inquest; but, as it was stated that I was not in London at the time when the hostile encounter took place, I was not examined. Thus were my feelings spared a most painful ordeal! The funeral took place;—and the earth closed over the remains of him who was cut off in the flower of his youth—a victim to my misdeeds! The kindness of the surgeon's family had hitherto made me their guest; but on the day after the mournful obsequies, I perceived the necessity of adopting some decided course, so as to intrude no longer on that generous hospitality. But the worthy surgeon questioned me closely; and finding that I had only recently been left an orphan, and was totally friendless, he insisted that I should pass a few weeks longer with his family, until he could obtain for me a situation as governess. I wrote to the lawyer of my native village; and by return of post he forwarded me an order on a London banker for thirty-seven pounds—the poor proceeds of the sale of the furniture in the parsonage house.

"Six months passed away: during that period I was treated with the utmost kindness by the surgeon and his family. But misfortune suddenly overtook that excellent man. The villany of a false friend plunged him from affluence into comparative poverty. This abrupt change preyed so deeply on his mind, that he put a period to his existence. His brother—a man of morose disposition and selfish character—undertook to provide for the widow and her children; and I was then compelled once more to shift for myself. I took an affectionate farewell of those who had behaved so well towards me, and removed to a humble lodging, where I soon experienced all the wretchedness of my lonely and unfriended position. I inserted advertisements in the newspapers, for the purpose of obtaining a situation as teacher in a school or governess in a respectable family; and although I received many replies, I failed to give a satisfactory account of myself. I could not refer to Mrs. Lambkin, nor to Lady Penfeather; and I found that my orphan condition excited but little sympathy in my favour. Thus a year—an entire year—passed; and at the end, I found myself without hope, and without resources. I knew not what would become of me. At length I mustered up all my courage, and proceeded to Rossville House. I inquired for Miss Adeline Enfield. The servant demanded my name, and left me standing in the hall for nearly ten minutes until his return. I was then shown into a small but magnificently furnished parlour; and almost immediately afterwards Adeline made her appearance. She advanced towards me with the most chilling hauteur of manner, and desired to know '*my business*.'—'Oh! Miss Adeline,' I exclaimed, 'have I no claims upon your friendship?'—'You must remember what took place between us the last time we met,' she answered. 'If you require pecuniary assistance, I will succour you *for the last time*; but circumstances compel me to decline seeing you, or even *knowing* you in future.'—'And is this the way you treat me after all I suffered on your account?' I said, bursting into tears. 'Do you not reflect that your reputation is in my hands?'—'If you menace me, Miss Hutchinson,' she said, 'I shall know how to treat you. In a word, who would believe your story were you to proclaim it? You would only draw down upon yourself the vengeance of my family by endeavouring to shift your own disgrace on to my shoulders. The whole world would denounce you as a common impostress.'—An instant's reflection showed me that these assurances were strictly true. But my pride was hurt, and my feelings were poignantly wrung by the blackness of Adeline's ingratitude. Pushing aside her hand which tendered me a purse of gold, I exclaimed, 'From this moment, Miss Enfield, I consider myself absolved from all motives of secrecy on your account;'—and, before she could utter a word of reply, I left the room.

"I hurried back to the house where I lodged. The landlady met me upon the threshold of the door. 'Come, young woman,' she said, 'can you pay the fortnight's rent you owe me?'—'I have been disappointed,' was my reply: 'but in a few days——.'—'People are always being disappointed when they owe money,' she exclaimed. 'I shall keep your things till you settle your rent; and I shall let the room to those who can and will pay.' And she banged the door in my face. This cruel calamity reduced me to despair. I turned away from that inhospitable abode,—not with tears, for there is a grief too profound to find a vent by the eyes—but with an utter hopelessness that was distraction!

"I had eaten nothing since the morning: I was hungry, and I had not a farthing in my pocket. It was moreover cold; and I knew not where to sleep that night. Oh! then how bitterly did I regret the ebullition of pride and feeling which had prevented me from accepting the purse which Adeline had proffered me! It was now too late to conciliate her: I had used menaces; and I felt convinced that it would be impossible to make my peace with that proud and determined spirit. I wandered about the streets in a state of mind which every moment suggested suicide. Then did all the happiness of home and of the days of innocence recur to my memory with a force that nearly crushed me! I thought of my dear departed father and my noble-hearted brother—both hurried to the grave by my wickedness! Evening came—and I was still a wanderer in the streets, without a hope—without a feasible project! Hour after hour passed: midnight was proclaimed by the iron tongues of the thousand towers of this mighty city;—and I sank exhausted on the step of a door in Gerrard Street, Soho. I then became insensible.

"When I awoke, I was in a comfortable bed; and the day-light streamed through the windows of a nicely-furnished room. I started up, and glanced around me. On a small table by the side of the bed stood a decanter with some port wine, and a bowl half-filled with broth. I immediately judged by those appearances, and by my own sensations, that the kind hand of charity had administered sustenance to me, as well as providing me with an asylum. From those objects on the table my eyes wandered round the room; and I was surprised and shocked to observe that the pictures on the walls were of a somewhat indecent description. The unpleasant reflections which this circumstance occasioned were interrupted by the entrance of an elderly woman,—very stout, with small grey eyes, and a red nose. She seemed to have literally flung on the cotton-gown which she wore; and a dirty night-cap was perched on the top of her head. She advanced with a good-natured smile towards the bed, and, surveying me with great apparent satisfaction, exclaimed, 'How do you feel, my poor child? I am delighted to see you looking so much better! Dear me, what a state you were in when I found you, in the middle of the night, on the step of my door.'—'Ah! madam,' I said, extending my hand towards her, 'how can I ever repay you for this goodness?'—She pressed my hand warmly, and declared that she was charmed at being able to serve so sweet a young creature. Then she asked me a great many questions; and I gave her to understand that I was the orphan daughter of a clergyman; that I had failed to obtain the renewal of my engagements as a nursery-governess: that I had been turned into the streets by my landlady, who had detained my boxes; and that I should have perished had it not been for the kindness and benevolence of my present benefactress. When I had concluded this statement of as much of my past life as I chose to reveal, the elderly lady exclaimed, 'And so you are a clergyman's orphan, my dear? How very singular! Poor curates' daughters are always falling into difficulties. But cheer up, my dear: I will be a friend to you. And first tell me the address of your hard-hearted landlady: I will send at once and redeem your things for you.'—I gave her the information which she asked, and once more expressed my profound gratitude for her goodness

towards me. She patted my cheek, and then left the room, observing that she would send me up breakfast. In a few minutes a good-looking and smartly-dressed servant entered the chamber, bearing a tray containing coffee, hot rolls, eggs, and the usual concomitants of a good meal. 'What is the name of your excellent mistress?' I inquired.—'Mrs. Harpy,' was the reply, given with a smile the nature of which struck me as being somewhat strange.—'What is she?' I asked.—'She keeps a very respectable boarding-house,' answered the servant.—I did not like to put any farther questions; and the girl withdrew.

"I ate a very hearty breakfast, and then lay down again; for I was not quite recovered from the fatigues of the preceding day. I fell into a doze; and when I awoke, Mrs. Harpy was once more standing by the side of the bed. 'Here are your things, my dear,' she said: 'I paid your landlady fifteen shillings. That was for two weeks' rent owing, and a week she claimed because you had left without giving notice. She gives an excellent character of you, and proves all you have told me to be quite true. I am really as fond of you as if you were my own daughter. You are looking much better; and a nice little boiled fowl, with a glass of Port, will set you to rights. What time do you like to dine, dear?'—'My good lady,' I replied, 'you are heaping favours upon me, and I have not the means of paying you for any one of them.'—'Don't talk of that, my dear girl,' ejaculated Mrs. Harpy. 'I'm sure it is quite a pleasure to do any thing for you. But, by-the-by,' she added, 'you may just as well give me a memorandum for what I am paying for you; and as I shall be able to procure some nice, easy, genteel avocation for you, you can reimburse me at your convenience.'—Of course I was delighted at this opportunity of testifying my honest intentions and good-will; and I instantly affixed my signature to a slip of paper which she produced from her pocket. Mrs. Harpy kissed me very affectionately; and then, casually observing that she kept a very genteel boarding-house, concluded by saying that she would ask some of the young ladies to come up after dinner and keep me company for an hour or two.

"At four o'clock the pretty servant made her appearance with the boiled fowl and a small decanter of wine; and when the things were cleared away, the young ladies were duly ushered in. There were five of them. Their ages varied from seventeen to twenty-three; and they were all remarkably good-looking. It however struck me as somewhat singular that they were every one dressed in extremely low-bodied gowns, so as to exhibit a great deal more of the bust than was consistent with my notions of decorum. But as they were very affable and kind in their manners, and '*dear'd*' me with much apparent sincerity, I ceased to think of that peculiarity. Presently Mrs. Harpy sent up a bottle of wine and some fruit, with her kindest compliments; and then the young ladies laughed and enjoyed themselves in the happiest manner possible. They drank the wine with great freedom and relish; and by degrees their conversation turned upon the topic of love. With this subject they were quite familiar; and the more they drank, the more license they allowed their tongues. They spoke of the kindness of Mrs. Harpy, of the gaiety of the life which they led in her establishment, and of the high acquaintance which they enjoyed. They seemed to know every young lord and wealthy gentleman about town, and compared the various qualifications of those personages. Their discourse became more and more animated in proportion as their imaginations were warmed with the wine; and at length they allowed such observations to escape them which made me blush. I was surprised at their levity, and had already begun to entertain strange suspicions of their virtue, when a bell suddenly rang on the landing. They all started up, and rushed out of the room—leaving me a prey to the reflections which their remarkable conduct had very naturally excited.

"I kept my bed, by Mrs. Harpy's advice, all that day; but I did not feel sleepy in the evening, after the young ladies had left me;—and even if the contrary were the case, I should not have been able to indulge a wish for repose, for after eleven o'clock the whole establishment seemed to be in a constant bustle. People ran up and down stairs; doors were banged; shouts of laughter awoke every echo in the place; glasses rattled on trays that were carried to the different rooms; and the boisterous mirth of men rose at intervals above the other sounds and noises. This confusion, as it appeared to me, continued until about two o'clock; and then the house became quiet. My suspicions were seriously excited relative to the respectability of Mrs. Harpy's establishment; but I endeavoured to quiet them by all the arguments I could conceive in that lady's favour, and which were prompted by my gratitude towards her. At length I fell asleep.

"In the morning the servant brought me up my breakfast. I asked her the meaning of the bustle I had heard during the night. She answered carelessly, 'Oh! Mrs. Harpy is very gay, Miss, and is fond of company.'—After breakfast I got up, and had just dressed myself, when a door was opened violently on the opposite side of the landing, and a male voice exclaimed, 'Well, if the old woman won't give me credit for a miserable bottle of champagne, after all the money I've spent in the place, I'll never set foot in it again. So good bye, 'Tilda. Here's a sovereign for you, my girl. It's the last time I shall ever sleep in this house.'—Thereupon the individual, who had so expressed himself, descended the stairs with a tremendous stamping of his feet, as if he were very indignant at the treatment he had complained of; and Miss Matilda—one of the *young ladies* who had visited in my room on the preceding evening—returned into her apartment, banging the door violently behind her. This incident opened my eyes to the dread truth:—I was in a brothel!

"I threw myself on a chair and burst into a flood of tears. Merciful heavens! for what fate was I reserved? Had I indeed fallen so low that my only home was a loathsome den of iniquity like that? For some minutes after the occurrence of the incident just related, I felt as if my senses were leaving me. Suddenly the door opened, and Mrs. Harpy made her appearance. She seemed astonished at the condition in which she found me, and was about to make some remark, when I threw myself at her feet, exclaiming, 'I conjure you, madam—if you have any pity for a poor friendless orphan—let me leave your house this moment!'—'And where will you go, my dear child?' she said.—'To the workhouse, ma'am: anywhere, rather than remain here!' I answered.—'This is a pretty recompense for my kindness towards you,' she observed. 'If it had not been for me, you would have died in the streets.'—'Far better for me were it, had I so perished!' I exclaimed.—'Now, Miss,' cried Mrs. Harpy, growing angry, 'what is the meaning of all this nonsense?'—'Can you ask me?' I demanded. 'Oh! that the feelings which prompted you to assist me, should have been any other save the disinterested benevolence for which I so sincerely thanked you!'—'Then you know where you are, Miss, I suppose?' she said, with a leer; and, before I had time to give any reply, she added, 'I meant you to find it out in a day or two; and it's as well now as a few hours later. Here you are, and here you will stay. You shall be treated just in proportion as you behave; and this evening, I shall introduce some fine nobleman or gentleman to you.'—'Never!' I cried: then moving towards the door, I said, 'Detain me at your peril!'—'So I shall,' answered Mrs. Harpy, coolly. 'I've got your I. O. U. for twenty pounds; and if you go any where, it will be to Whitecross Street prison, before you're many hours older. Remember, it's for *necessaries*; and so no plea of minority or any other gammon of that kind, will avail you.'—I

remembered the slip of paper which I had signed; and my heart sank within me, as I saw how completely I was in the power of that vile woman.—'So now you understand how you are situated,' she continued, softening in her tone and manner. 'This is what all young girls like you must come to, sooner or later; and you'll be very happy here, I can assure you. This evening a nobleman who patronizes my house, will call upon you; and if you have any of your nonsense with him, I'll send you straight to Whitecross Street to-morrow morning.'—With these words she left the room, locking the door behind her.

"I cannot attempt to explain the nature of my feelings during the remainder of that day. A good dinner was sent up to me; but I could not eat a mouthful. The servant asked if I should like to see any of the 'young ladies;' and I answered in a manner which convinced her how I recoiled from the detestable proposal. She smiled—as I thought, significantly,—as much as to say, 'You will talk differently in a very short time.'—At about nine o'clock Mrs. Harpy sent up word that I was to dress myself in my best attire—a command with which I positively refused to comply for I was determined that, happen what might, I would not assist in the sacrifice of myself!

"At ten o'clock the servant brought up waxlights, and a tray containing a bottle of champagne, glasses, and several plates of fruits and cakes. I watched these preparations in a state of dumb despair, bordering on stupefaction. Another half hour passed; and steps once more ascended the stairs. My heart palpitated violently! The door was thrown open;—a man elegantly dressed entered the room;—I cast one glance towards him, and, uttering a faint cry, sank insensible on the carpet. It was Lord Dunstable!

"When I awoke, I found that nobleman hanging over me, bathing my temples. He compelled me to drink a glass of wine; and I soon recovered full consciousness of the miseries of my condition. Starting from the half-embrace in which Lord Dunstable had clasped me, I surveyed him with horror. 'Do I frighten you, Lydia?' he exclaimed. 'I must confess that our meeting is a strange one. The old woman sent to tell me that she had a prize; but I little expected to find you here.'—'My presence in this house of infamy, my lord,' I answered, 'is one of the links in that chain of degradation of which you forged the first link. To you I owe all the disgrace and all the sorrow that I have endured. Not contented with my ruin, you deprived me of my brother.'—'Come, Lydia, this is absurd,' he cried. 'In the first place, a young female who meets a gentleman and walks with him in Parks or elsewhere, must not expect to escape the usual consequences. Secondly, your brother challenged me, like a rash and headstrong young fellow as he was: I sent him due warning by my second that I was certain to shoot him; but he would not take good advice, and I *did* shoot him.'—'And had you no regard for me at that moment?' I asked.—'Egad!' he replied, 'I only thought of myself. I fancied that if I did not shoot him, he might perform that good office for me; and so I was resolved not to give him a second chance.'—'Surely you cannot be in your senses, my lord,' I exclaimed, 'to talk of so serious a matter in such a flippant style?'—'Come, let us understand each other, Lydia,' he said. 'I did not come to such a house as this to receive a lesson in morals. Do you wish me to remain here with you until to-morrow?'—'No: a thousand times *no*,' I replied. 'Your hand is red with the blood of my poor brother.'—'Very well, Lydia,' he answered coolly; 'then I will take myself off as quietly as I came. But for old acquaintance' sake I must do the thing handsomely.'—I heard his observation, the flippant tone of which made me avert my head from him in disgust; and I did not therefore see why he lingered for a few moments. At length he left the room, saying, 'Bye, bye, Liddy;' and when the door closed behind him, he began to hum an opera-tune, as he descended the stairs.

"Scarcely could he have had time to gain the street door, when Mrs. Harpy bounded into my room, exclaiming, 'Well, my dear, you have behaved very well, for his lordship went away in an excellent humour. What did he give you?'—'Give me!' I repeated, surveying that horrible woman with mingled indignation and terror.—'By Jove, he's a lord in name and nature both!' ejaculated Mrs. Harpy, as her eyes caught sight of a bank-note which lay upon the table. 'Twenty pounds, as I'm a living woman!' and she clutched the object of her delighted avarice.—'Hold, madam!' I exclaimed. 'Not one farthing of that money will I retain! The man who gave it killed my brother!'—'I don't care who he's killed, or who he means to kill,' answered the old woman, 'But here's his money; and that I intend to keep.'—'*You* keep it!' I cried.—'Yes; who else? What an ungrateful hussy you must be, after I took you out of the street! This room and your board will cost you a guinea a-day. Then your clothes, washing, and other things are all extra. So I'll keep nineteen pound fifteen shillings on account; and you shall have a crown for pocket money. If that is not generous, I don't know what is; but I like to do the thing what's right.'—With these words she threw five shillings on the table, and walked off with the twenty pound note.

"This unexpected interview with Lord Dunstable and its result stamped my degradation, and made me reckless. He had seen me in a brothel; and in the excitement of our meeting, I had not explained to him how I became an inmate of that house. Then he left behind him a sum of money; and, as I was unable to restore it to him with an indignant refusal of any succour at his hands, he would naturally conceive that I availed myself of his bounty. My pride was wounded to such an irreparable degree, that I felt, if you can understand me, a total unwillingness to endeavour to maintain it any longer. I was spirit-crushed. I fancied that it was no use to contend any more against my fate. I considered myself to be now so lost and degraded in the estimation of that one man whom I had loved, that I had nothing else in the world to induce me to study character, reputation, or pride. I accordingly abandoned myself to what I firmly believed to be my destiny; and, seating myself at the table, I poured out a glass of champagne. For a moment I sighed as I remembered that it was champagne that had led to my ruin in the first instance:—then I laughed at what I called 'my folly,' and emptied the glass. The wine cheered me, but, at the same time, confirmed me in that recklessness which had succeeded the first feeling of utter and irredeemable degradation. I drank another glass: the last spark of virtuous aspiration was then extinguished in my bosom. The other *young ladies* suddenly made their appearance: I received them with open arms;—we sate down to drink and chat;—I was put to bed in a disgusting state of intoxication; and on the following morning I awoke—reconciled to a life of infamy!

"Pardon me, if I dwell for a few minutes upon the characteristics of those houses of abomination, in one of which I was now located. Mrs. Harpy was an admirable type of her profession. She was mean and griping in the extreme when wringing an extra shilling, or even an extra penny, from her *boarders*, as we were called; and yet she was profuse and liberal in supplying us with costly wine. If we complained of having to eat cold meat two days running, she would storm, and declare that we lived too well as it was;—but she would think nothing of giving us a bottle of champagne, which could not have cost her less than eight or ten shillings, after dinner. She took from us every farthing that we received, and invariably made us out her debtors, although she never showed us any accounts. To give you an idea of her way of managing, I will relate a little anecdote. One Saturday afternoon, Matilda (whom I have before mentioned) asked her for a sovereign; adding, 'You know I have given you altogether thirteen guineas this week.'—'Thirteen guineas!' screamed the old woman: 'I'll take my Bible oath it was only twelve.'—'Well, call it even twelve, if you like,' said the young female: 'you can well spare me a sovereign.'—'Lord bless the girl!' cried Mrs. Harpy. 'Why, there's seven guineas for your board and lodging; two

guineas for your washing; that's ten; a guinea for pocket money; and a guinea for letters and needles and thread; that makes up the twelve, or else I never went to school to learn compound addition.'—'And multiplication too,' said Matilda. 'Why, I had but one letter all the week, and that was paid.'—'Well, my dear,' answered Mrs. Harpy, 'we will ask the postman. Come! I'll stand another bottle of champagne now, and you shall have an extra sovereign for yourself next Saturday, if you're lucky in the meantime.'

"We were complete slaves to this Mrs. Harpy. She had got a note-of-hand for twenty pounds from each of us; and if any one even so much as hinted at leaving her, she immediately threatened to wreak her vengeance by means of the sheriffs' officer. She seldom allowed us to go out to take any exercise, for fear we should decamp altogether; but every now and then we would all go together to Gravesend or Richmond by the steam-boats, or else to Copenhagen House, in the summer time, and to some minor theatre in the winter. Oh! the misery of that existence! We were slaves to an old wretch who was enriching herself at our expense, whilst we had not an opportunity of hoarding a single guinea against any sudden necessity or misfortune. Then, what atrocious proceedings were frequently enacted in that house! Hard by lived three or four idle fellows, who dressed flashily, spent a great deal of money, and yet had no visible employment or resources. Those ruffians were the *blinks*, or *bullies*, belonging to Mrs. Harpy's establishment. Their tricks were manifold. For instance, they would pick up, at a tavern, coach-office, the theatre, or other public place, some country gentleman, or even a clergyman, whom they would ply with liquor, and then induce to accompany them to '*their aunt's*,' where they would meet '*some delightful girls*.' Of course this was Mrs. Harpy's establishment. The respectable country gentleman, or clergyman, was plied with more liquor; and, if he would not drink fast enough, his wine was drugged for him. When he awoke in the morning, he would find himself in bed with one of the '*delightful girls*.' Presently, one of the bullies would rush into the room, declare that the gentleman had debauched '*his cousin*,' and threaten an exposure. Then the poor victim was glad to compromise the business by paying a considerable sum, in order to hush up the matter at once.

"Sometimes, the bullies would attempt a similar scheme of extortion in reference to individuals who came voluntarily to the house; and if the latter resisted the exorbitant demands made upon them, they were not unfrequently maltreated in a most shameful manner. It often happened that a gentleman would become a regular visitor to the house, if he took a fancy to one particular boarder: in such a case he probably adopted a false name, and took every precaution to avoid discovery as to who he was. The girl whom he visited, was then directed to pump him; and if she failed to elicit the desired particulars, one of the bullies was instructed to watch and dog him when he left the house. By these means, his real name, residence, position, and circumstances, were speedily ascertained. If he were moving in a very respectable sphere, was married, or had any particular motives to induce him to keep his intrigue secret, he was the very kind of person who suited Mrs. Harpy and her bullies. The next time he visited the house, he would be surrounded by those ruffians, menaced with exposure, and forced to pay a considerable sum of money to purchase silence. But the evil did not terminate there. From that time forth, the unfortunate gentleman would be periodically beset by his persecutors; and fresh extortions would be effected to renew the pledge of secrecy on their part. Married men, moving in respectable spheres, have been *driven to suicide* by this atrocious system! Many a time have I read, in the newspapers, instances of self-destruction on the part of gentlemen whose pecuniary, social, or domestic circumstances afforded not the least appearance of any possible motive for such a deed;—and then I have thought within myself that those poor victims had been *hunted to death* by extortioners of the class which I have described! The man who has a *character* to lose, or who has the *peace* of his family to consider, knows not how fearfully both are compromised, both endangered, when he so far forgets himself as to set foot in a house of infamy. He may imagine that his secret never can transpire—that neither his family nor friends can, by any possible means, ever discover that he has thus erred;—but, if he be an individual, who, by his wealth and social position, appears worth the trouble of looking after, he will most assuredly find himself a prey to the vilest of extortioners. His happiness will be undermined and destroyed; he will live in constant dread of exposure: and deeply—deeply will he rue the day that he ever set foot in a brothel!

"The most bare-faced robberies are practised in even what are called '*the respectable dress-houses*.' A gentleman, wearing a handsome watch and chain, is pretty certain to have it stolen from him; and when he remonstrates, he is perhaps met with a counter-accusation of having given a bad sovereign in payment for champagne, on the preceding evening. On one occasion, a young gentleman who was so plundered, and so accused, carried the business to the Marlborough Street Police-Office. Mrs. Harpy attended, denied the robbery in the most indignant manner, and persisted in the accusation relative to the base sovereign. The proceedings took such a turn that the young gentleman was searched; and in his pockets were found *other counterfeit sovereigns*, exactly resembling the *one* produced by Mrs. Harpy. Then Mrs. Harpy sent for her wine-merchant, her butcher, and her baker, who were all her near neighbours: and those tradesmen declared that Mrs. Harpy kept a most respectable boarding-house, and that she was a lady of good connexions and undoubted integrity. The magistrate then appealed to the policeman within whose beat Gerrard Street was included; and as he received five guineas a year from Mrs. Harpy for shutting his eyes, it was not likely that he would open them on that occasion. He fully corroborated the evidence of the wine-merchant, butcher, and baker; and the young gentleman was committed for trial for passing base money. Mrs. Harpy's story was that he had presented himself on the preceding evening at her house, and arranged to become a boarder in her establishment; that he obtained from her the change for the bad sovereign; and that, when accused of the act, he had turned round with a counter-charge relative to his watch. The magistrate declared that there was no doubt of Mrs. Harpy's perfect respectability, and commented severely on the '*infamous behaviour of the prisoner, in trumping up so vile an accusation, as a means of releasing himself from the odium of the charge laid against him*.' This young man belonged to a highly respectable family; and he had given a fictitious name in answer to the magistrate's question, *for he had only been married six months*, and was naturally anxious to conceal his visit to a brothel from the knowledge of his friends. But when he was committed for trial, he was forced to send for them, confess his indiscretion, and implore them to save him from the ignominy of exposure in a court of justice. A compromise with Mrs. Harpy was accordingly effected: she *paid* fifty pounds in forfeit of her recognizances to prosecute: and she *received* two hundred to abstain from farther proceedings! I need scarcely say that the young gentleman really had been plundered of his watch, and that the entire business of the counterfeit money had been arranged to ruin him. Again I declare that no one knows the woeful risks he incurs when he sets foot in a house of ill-fame. That one false step may embitter the remainder of his days!

"Some weeks elapsed ere I was completely aware of the infamies which were perpetrated in Mrs. Harpy's den; and then I resolved to leave the place, whatever might subsequently become of me. At length an opportunity served; and one evening, with only a small

parcel of necessaries under my arm, and a few shillings in my purse, I slipped out of that scene of iniquities. I cannot enter into further details; suffice it to say, from that moment commenced an existence of fearful vicissitudes,—starvation one day, luxury the next,—the most abrupt descents into the lowest abyss of destitution, and the most sudden elevations to comfort, though still a career of infamy,—wanderings for many, many nights together, without knowing where to lay my head, and then a lodging and a good bed! Oh! it was horrible, that precariousness of life to which I was doomed!

"How often did I reflect upon the times of my innocence! Now and then I saw well-known names mentioned in the newspapers. The consecutive and rapid promotions of Lord Dunstable and Cholmondeley were not unnoticed by me. The presentation of the Honourable Adeline Enfield to court was an incident which affected me deeply; for it naturally led me to compare her elevated position with my degraded and wretched state. But one event, which was recorded in the newspapers, gave me, I must confess, some satisfaction: this was the bankruptcy of Mrs. Lambkin and her committal to Newgate for having fraudulently disposed of her property. I afterwards learnt that she died miserably in that gaol.

"But my own vicissitudes continued! Oh! let those who are prone to turn away from *the unfortunate woman* with disgust and abhorrence, rather exercise a feeling of sympathy in her behalf. She does not drag her weary frame nightly along the pavement, through *choice*, but from *necessity*. In all weathers must she ply her miserable trade—or starve. Then to what indignities is she subjected! Every drunken ruffian considers himself justified in ill-using her: every brutal fellow jostles against her, and addresses her in terms of insult. Do they think that, because she is compelled to ply her hideous trade, she has no feelings? But it is chiefly from the young men who rove about the streets at night, smoking cigars, wearing pea-coats, and carrying sticks, that the unfortunate woman is doomed to receive the deepest indignity:—yes, from those who ought to have more chivalry in their dispositions! There is one base extortion to which the unfortunate woman is subjected, and which I must mention. I allude to the necessity of feeing the policeman belonging to that beat where the unhappy creature walks. The miserable wretch who deviated from this practice, either through inability or unwillingness, would never have a moment's peace. The moment she was accosted in the street by a gentleman, the officer would come up and order her brutally to move on; and perhaps he would add violence to harsh words. Then, on the slightest pretence—and often without any at all—the miserable woman is dragged off to the station-house, charged with creating a disturbance, and taken next morning before the magistrate. In vain may she protest her innocence of the offence charged against her: in vain may she denounce the vindictive motives of the officer. The word of one policeman is deemed worth the oaths of ten thousand degraded females; and the accused is sentenced to Bridewell accordingly. No one can conceive the amount of the wrongs inflicted by the police upon the most miserable class of women!

"I could enter into details respecting the lives of unfortunate females, which would inspire you with horror—and yet with deep compassion. But I have already dwelt too long on a subject which should never be mentioned without caution to the pure-minded woman. In reference to myself, I need only add that having passed through all the terrible phases of a career of infamy,—each day beholding me more degraded, and sinking lower and lower amongst the low,—I was reduced to a condition when beggary appeared the only resource left From this appalling condition your goodness has relieved me; and God alone must reward you—I never can!"

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

THE TAVERN AT FRIULI.

Through the broad meadows, the waving woods, and the delicious valleys which lie on the northern side of the Ferretti, in the State of Castelcicala, two foot-travellers pursued their way.

Lovely flowed the river amidst the meads that were clothed in the country's everlasting green.

Busy hamlets, neat farm-houses, and the chateaux of nobles or wealthy gentlemen, varied the appearance of the magnificent landscape.

Although it was the middle of November, the climate was as mild and genial as that of September in the British Islands: the vines had not been entirely stripped of their luscious fruit; and the citrons, so plentiful that they were but little prized by the inhabitants, grew wild by the road-side.

Here groups of mighty chesnut-trees afforded a delicious shade to the way-worn traveller: there the tapering spire of a village church, or the white walls and slated roof of some lordly country-seat, appeared above the verdant mulberry-groves.

Nevertheless, the woodlands of Castelcicala were not characterised by that gloominess of foliage which invests the English and German forests with such awful solemnity; for the leaves were of a brighter green, and the density of their shade was relieved by the luxuriousness of the botany that spread its rich and varied colours over the surface of the land.

The banks of the Ferretti yielded an immense profusion of aromatic herbs, which imparted a delicious perfume and, at the same time, a freshness to the air.

Much as those two travellers had been accustomed to admire the loveliness of their own native England, they could not avoid exclamations of joy and surprise as they pursued their way amidst the fertile plains of Castelcicala.

We need scarcely inform our readers that those travellers were Richard Markham and his faithful Morcar.

Our hero, dressed in a neat but modest garb, and carrying a portfolio of drawing materials under his arm, journeyed along a little in advance of his attendant, who bore a small valise of necessaries.

In his pocket-book Richard had secured the two passports, for himself and follower, which the interest of Mario Bazzano had obtained, and which were made out in fictitious names.

Fastened to a riband round his neck, and carefully concealed beneath his raiment, was a small morocco leather case, containing the sealed letter left him, with such mysterious instructions, by Thomas Armstrong.

The well-filled purse which the generosity of the Grand Duchess had supplied, and a map of the Duchy, completed the stock of materials with which the travellers had deemed it fit to furnish themselves.

Their way now lay, according to the advice which Richard had received from the Grand Duchess, towards Friuli: thence it was his intention to strike off abruptly in a longitudinal direction, and, passing between Dandolo and Lipari, proceed straight toward the Neapolitan frontier.

On the fourth evening the two travellers arrived at Friuli, having walked upon an average thirty miles each day, and slept at night in some cottage or farm-house.

They did not, however, penetrate into the fine and spacious town which they had now reached; but stopped at a small tavern in the suburbs. There they ordered supper, which was served up to them in the public room, as Richard did not think it prudent to excite notice by having a private apartment.

Several other persons were sitting in the public room, busily engaged in imbibing the various liquors suited to their respective palates, and discussing, with great solemnity, the political aspect of the State.

By their conversation Markham judged that they must be the small tradesmen of the suburbs of the town, as they all seemed well acquainted with each other, and spoke as if they were in the habit of meeting at that tavern every evening after the bustle and cares of the day's business.

"Are you certain, neighbour," said one worthy burgher, addressing himself to another, "that the proclamation will be made to-morrow morning?"

"I believe, gentlemen," answered the individual thus appealed to, "you are all aware that my wife's father is Adjunct to the Mayor of Friuli; and the title of Adjunct is pretty nearly synonymous with that of Deputy. Well, then, gentlemen, my father-in-law being, you perceive, as good as Deputy-Mayor," continued the speaker, thinking that his prosiness would add to his importance, "he cannot fail to be in the mayor's secrets. That once granted, gentlemen, you can easily estimate the value of my authority for the tidings I reported to you just now. You may therefore rely on it, that the proclamation placing the entire province of Montecuculi under martial law, will be read in Friuli, as well as in all the other towns, villages, and hamlets of the aforesaid province, to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock."

"Then I suppose the whole Duchy will be placed under martial law?" observed another member of the party.

"No doubt of it," said the second speaker. "The worshipful mayor hinted as much to the not less worshipful adjunct, or deputy, this afternoon."

"The province of Abrantani has been for some time in an exceptional state, you know," said the individual who had first spoken; "and by all accounts, we had much better be under the yoke of the Austrians at once—just like the northern provinces of Italy. I tell you what," added the individual who was now addressing his companions,—"I tell you what," he repeated, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, "there is not a man in Castelcicala who will not be ready to draw his sword against this most odious tyranny."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed the relative of the civic authority, as he glanced towards Richard Markham and Morcar; "we do not know who may overhear us, as the adjunct often observes to me."

"The gentleman is an artist, and looks like a foreigner, too," said the individual whose freedom of speech had provoked this remonstrance: "he is not likely to meddle with our political business."

"Gentlemen," said Richard, "it is true that I understand your language, although I speak it imperfectly; but if you apprehend that I should make any improper use of the remarks which fall from you, I will at once retire to a private room."

"Well spoken!" ejaculated one of the company. "No, sir—you shall not leave the room on our account. If I mistake not, you must be an Englishman or a Frenchman; and I like both those nations—for they know what true freedom is, while we are slaves,—abject slaves."

"Yes,—and I admire the English, too," cried the person who had before spoken with so little reserve. "Have they not given an asylum to that excellent Prince who is only exiled because he was the people's friend—because he wished to obtain for us a Constitution that would give us Houses of Parliament or Chambers, to be the bulwark of our liberties? Is not our Grand Duchess an Englishwoman? and has she not exerted herself to the utmost to mitigate the severity of Angelo III? *That* is no secret. And, when I think of it, I remember hearing at Ossore (where I was, you know, a few days ago,) that it was a young Englishman who rallied the Constitutionalists when they were flying, after the fall of General Grachia."

"What became of him?" asked one of the company.

"It is known that he was taken prisoner," was the reply; "but as he disappeared almost immediately afterwards, it is supposed that he was hurried off without delay to one of the fortresses in the interior—Pinalla or Estella, for instance. Poor young fellow—I wish he had had better luck! But, as I was saying, you see we have good reason to admire the English—God bless them!"

"Amen!" exclaimed several voices.

The emotions of our hero, while this discourse was progressing, may be more readily imagined than explained: but prudence on his own account, and obedience to the advice of the Grand Duchess, sealed his lips.

Morcar continued to eat and drink without excitement, because the conversation passing around was totally unintelligible to him.

The relative of the mayor's adjunct was dilating pompously on the duties of a sovereign, when a post-chaise drove furiously up to the door of the tavern.

All was immediately bustle and confusion.

"Horses! four horses wanted!" shouted a voice in the passage.

Then commenced the rattling of harness,—the running hither and thither of ostlers,—and the usual calling and bawling which characterise such occasions.

All the inmates of the coffee-room, with the exception of Markham and the gipsy, rushed out to stare at the equipage.

Scarcely was the room thus left comparatively empty, when a tall man, wrapped in an ample travelling cloak, entered hastily, followed by the landlord.

"Here—we have not a moment to lose—give me change for this bank-note," cried the traveller.

"Yes, sir," said the host, and hurried from the room.

"Signor Bazzano," whispered our hero, who had started from his seat at the sound of the traveller's voice.

"What! Signor Markham!" said the young *aide-de-camp*, shaking him kindly by the hand. "This is indeed most fortunate! But I have not a moment to spare. Listen! terrible events have taken place at Montoni: *you* are in danger. You must separate from your attendant, and each gain the Neapolitan frontier by a separate route. Follow my advice, my dear Markham,—*as you value your life*!"

At that moment the host re-appeared with the gold and silver in change for the note; and Bazzano, having hastily consigned the money to his pocket, hurried from the room,—but not before he had darted a significant glance upon our hero.

In a few moments the post-chaise drove rapidly away.

Richard returned to his seat in a cruel state of uncertainty, doubt, and suspense.

What could that precipitate journey mean? was Bazzano the sole occupant of the carriage? what terrible events could have occurred at Montoni? and what was that fearful peril which would oblige him to adopt so painful a precaution as to separate from his companion?

Richard was at a total loss how to solve these queries which naturally suggested themselves to his mind.

While he was yet pondering on the singularity of the incidents which had occurred, all within the space of three or four minutes, the company poured back again to the coffee-room.

"Something mysterious there," said one.

"Yes—a post-chaise with the blinds drawn down," observed another.

"Four horses—and travelling like wild-fire," exclaimed a third. "The tall man in the cloak, who rode outside, came into this room. What did he want, sir?" demanded the speaker, turning abruptly towards Markham; "for I believe you did not leave the room."

"He obtained change from the landlord for a bank-note, sir," answered our hero laconically.

"Oh! that was all—eh? Well—the thing still looks odd—particularly in such troubled times as these. Did anybody hear the orders given to the postilions?"

"The tall man in the cloak said in a loud voice, '*The road towards Dandolo, my boys!*'" observed another of the company.

Richard smiled imperceptibly; for he thought within himself, "Then it is precisely because Bazzano said in a loud tone, '*Towards Dandolo*,' that the travellers are going in another direction."

The company continued to debate, as all gossips will, upon the incident which had just occurred; and Richard determined to lose no more time ere he explained to Morcar, who had of course recognised the young *aide-de-camp*, the nature of the warning he had

received from this individual.

He according bade the assembled guests "Good night," and left the room, followed by Morcar.

At his request, the landlord conducted them to a double-bedded room; and the moment the host had retired, Richard communicated to the gipsy all that Bazzano had said to him.

"There is but one course to pursue, sir," exclaimed Morcar.

"Which is that?" asked Richard.

"To follow the Castelcicalan officer's advice," returned Morcar. "He saved your life—he restored me to your service—and he is incapable of deceiving us. He is your friend, sir—and you must obey him."

"But, my poor Morcar," said Richard, "I cannot part with you. I have lured you away from your family and native land, to lead you into these difficulties; and I would sooner die than abandon you in a strange country, with even the language of which you are unacquainted."

"My dear, good master," exclaimed the gipsy, his eyes dimmed with tears, "it will go to my heart to leave you; but if your life is in danger, I shall not hesitate a moment. Besides, the same peril that would overtake one, would crush both, were we together when it came; and it is folly for either of us to run idle risks in such a strait. No—let us follow the advice of your friend."

"Again, I say, Morcar, that I cannot part with you. Were any thing fatal to happen to you, I should never forgive myself. No," continued Richard, "you shall remain with me. If danger come, it is only I who will suffer—for it seems that it is only my life which *is* in danger. And this is probable enough."

"Ah! sir—I am not afraid of myself," exclaimed Morcar: "I would lay down my life to serve you! But I am convinced that you will only attract unpleasant attention to yourself, if you travel with a follower: one person can slip unperceived through so many perilous places, where two together would be suspected. Besides, sir, I shall not be quite so badly off in this strange country, as you suppose."

"How so, Morcar?" demanded Richard, surveying him with astonishment.

"There are Zingarees in this land as well as elsewhere," replied Morcar; "and amongst them I shall be safe."

"On that consideration alone," exclaimed Richard, struck by the truth of the observation, and well-pleased at the idea that his faithful dependant would indeed derive no small benefit, under circumstances, from the aid of that extensive and mysterious freemasonry to which he belonged,—"on that consideration alone I will consent to this separation. At day-break we will rise, and each take a different route. I will give you the map of Castelcicala, as its geography has been so well studied by me that I am fully acquainted with the direction of all the principal towns and cities. But let us fix a place where we can meet again. Our grand object must be to gain the city of Naples. On your arrival there, proceed to the abode of the English Consul, and leave with him the name of the inn where you put up: if I have reached Naples before you, that functionary will be enabled to tell you where I am to be found."

"I will strictly follow your instructions, sir," said Morcar.

"And now, my good friend," continued our hero, "I must speak to you as if I were making my last will and testament; for heaven alone knows whether I shall ever quit this country alive. You remember the secret of my affection for a noble lady, which I communicated to you the night before we landed on the Castelcicalan coast?"

"Not a syllable of what you told me, sir, has been effaced from my memory," replied Morcar. "You enjoined me that, if any thing fatal should occur to yourself, and Providence should enable me to return to England, I was to seek the Princess Isabella, and break to her the tidings and manner of your death, with the assurance that your last thoughts were given to her!"

"Such was my request, Morcar," said Richard. "I need now observe little more than repeat it. Let the one who reaches Naples first wait for the other fifteen days; and, if he come not by the expiration of that period, then let him——"

"Surmise the worst," added Morcar, seeing that our hero hesitated. "Your message to the Princess shall be delivered—if God ordain that so sad a result ensues. And, on your part, sir—if I come not to the place of appointment, and you succeed in reaching it——"

"Say no more, my dear friend," interrupted Markham, pressing the gipsy's hand; "we understand each other!"

And they each dashed away the tears from their eyes.

Richard then divided the contents of his purse into two equal portions, and presented one to Morcar. The gipsy positively refused to accept any thing beyond a few pieces of gold; but Markham was more positive still, and compelled him to assent to the equitable partition of the large sum which Eliza's bounty had supplied.

They then retired to rest.

At day-break Markham started up; but he looked in vain for Morcar.

On the table stood a pile of gold: it was the one which our hero had forced upon the gipsy;—and only two of the pieces had been taken from the heap.

"Generous man;" cried Markham: "God grant that I may one day be enabled to reward him for his fidelity and devotion to me!"

Having hastily dressed himself, our hero concealed about his person the few necessaries that were indispensable, and left the remainder in his valise.

He then descended to the coffee-room, hurried over a slight refreshment, and, having settled the account, took his departure, telling the landlord to keep the valise for him until his return.

But now how lonely, forlorn, and friendless did he feel, as he hurried away from the inn where he had parted with his faithful dependant!

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

THE JOURNEY.

Richard Markham struck into the fields, and pursued his way in a southerly direction.

He avoided even the small hamlets, and kept as much as possible in the open country.

Being unaware of the precise nature of the danger which menaced his life,—although of course connecting it with the part which he had recently played in the invasion,—he feared lest printed descriptions of his person, with rewards for his apprehension, might be circulated; and this source of terror induced him to choose the most secluded paths.

It was long after sunset when he stopped at a small country public-house, where he determined to rest for the night.

To his great joy the coffee-room was unoccupied by other travellers; and the landlord appeared a simple, honest kind of half-farmer, half-publican, who never troubled himself about any one's business save his own.

A good supper and a bottle of very excellent wine tended to raise our hero's spirits: and when the meal was concluded, he fell into a train of meditation on the events of the preceding evening.

A thousand times did he ask himself who could be the occupant of that chaise which was journeying in such haste? for that there *was* some person inside the vehicle, who had urgent reasons for the utmost circumspection, the fact of the drawn blinds would not permit him to doubt. Moreover, the young *aide-de-camp* was evidently riding *outside* for the purpose of answering any questions that might be put, paying the bills, directing the postillions, and in all respects acting with a view to save the person or persons inside from the necessity of giving their own orders.

The words—"*Terrible events have occurred at Montoni*"—were also fraught with a most menacing and mysterious importance. What could they mean? whom had these events endangered? Was it possible that the kindness of the Grand Duchess towards himself had been detected? And if so, what results could such a discovery have produced?

While he was thus lost in the most painful conjectures, a horseman suddenly galloped up to the door of the inn; and in a few moments the traveller himself entered the coffee-room.

He was a slightly-built, middle-aged man, with a good-humoured expression of countenance. He was attired in a kind of undress cavalry uniform, consisting of a foraging-cap with a broad gold band, a laced jacket, trousers with a red stripe down each leg, and a very small black leathern knapsack at his back.

"Now, landlord," he exclaimed, as he entered the room, followed by the individual whom he thus addressed, "some supper at once—not a moment's unnecessary delay—and see that a fresh horse is ready in twenty minutes. That is all the rest I can allow myself here."

The landlord bustled about to serve up the best his house could afford in such haste; and in the meantime the new-comer addressed himself to our hero.

"Rather chilly this evening, sir," he said.

"And yet you can scarcely feel the cold, considering the pace at which you appear to ride," returned Richard with a smile.

"Egad! I do not ride so for pleasure, I can assure you," observed the man. "But I presume that you are travelling in this country for your amusement," he added: "for I perceive by your accent that you are not a Castelcicalan, and I can judge your avocation by that portfolio lying near you."

"You have guessed correctly," answered Richard. "Have you travelled far to-day?"

"A considerable distance. I am, as perhaps you may know by my dress, a government courier: and I am the bearer of dispatches from Montoni to the Captain-General of Montecuculi."

"Any thing new in the capital?" asked Richard, scarcely able to conceal the anxiety with which he waited for a reply.

"Great news," was the answer. "The Grand Duchess has fled."

"Fled!" ejaculated Markham.

"Yes—left the capital—gone no one knows where, and no one knows why," continued the courier. "Montoni is in a dreadful ferment. Martial law was proclaimed there the day before yesterday; and a tremendous crowd collected in the Palace-square in the evening. The military were called out, but refused to fire upon the people. Numerous conflicting reports are in circulation: some say that the Grand Duke has sent to demand the aid of an Austrian force. The people attacked the mansion of the Prime Minister; and the firmness of the Political Prefect alone prevented serious mischief. In fact, sir," added the courier, sinking his voice to a whisper, "we are on the eve of great events; and for my part—although I am in the government employment—I don't think it's treason to say that I would as soon serve Alberto as Angelo."

At that moment the landlord entered with a tray containing the courier's supper; and the conversation ceased. Nor had our hero an opportunity of reviving it; for the courier was too busily engaged with his knife and fork to utter a word during his meal; and the moment it was terminated, he wished Markham good night and took his departure.

Still our hero had gleaned enough to afford him some clue to the mystery of the post-chaise. The Grand Duchess had fled: the reason of her flight was not publicly known. Was it not probable that she was an occupant of the post-chaise which journeyed so swiftly? did

not this idea receive confirmation from the fact that Mario Bazzano accompanied the vehicle?

Then again occurred the question, had the Grand Duchess involved herself in difficulty by her generosity towards him? The bare supposition of such an occurrence was the source of the most poignant anguish in the breast of Richard Markham.

He retired to rest; but his sleep was uneasy; and he awoke at an early hour, little refreshed. He was however compelled to pursue his melancholy journey, which he resumed with a heavy heart and with a mind oppressed by a thousand vague apprehensions.

There was one circumstance which especially afflicted him. He had not dared to write a letter to Isabella; and he knew that the tidings of the failure of the invasion would shortly reach her. Then what must be her feelings! She would believe that he had either fallen in the conflict, or was a prisoner in some Castelcicalan fortress; and he entertained so profound a conviction of her love for him, —a love as sincere as that which he experienced for her,—that he dreaded the effects which would be produced upon her by the most painful uncertainty or the worst apprehensions concerning his fate.

Still, how could he write to her with any hope that the letter would reach her? In the existing condition of Castelcicala, he felt persuaded that all correspondence addressed to Prince Alberto or any member of his family, would be intercepted. This conviction had hitherto prevented him from addressing a word to that charming girl whose image was ever present to his mind.

But as he journeyed wearily along, it suddenly struck him that he might write to Whittingham, and enclose a note for Isabella. Besides, he was also anxious to acquaint that faithful servant, as well as Mr. Monroe and Ellen, with the hopes that he entertained of being shortly enabled to return to his native land. He accordingly resolved to put this project into execution.

For that purpose he was compelled to pass the next night at a town where there was a post-office. He wrote his letters in the most guarded manner, and omitted the signature. When they were safely consigned to the letter-box, he felt as if a considerable load had been taken off his mind.

At this town he gleaned a great deal of information concerning the agitated condition of the country. Martial law had been proclaimed in every province; and the worst fears existed as to the Grand Duke's ulterior views. The idea of Austrian intervention appeared to be general; and deep, though not loud, were the curses which were levelled against the policy of that sovereign who could venture to call in a foreign soldiery to rivet the shackles of slavery which he had imposed upon his subjects.

One circumstance peculiarly struck our hero: the Grand Duke seemed to possess no supporters—no apologists. The hatred excited by his tyranny was universal. Castelcicala only required a champion to stand forward—a leader to proclaim the cause of liberty—and Richard felt convinced that the whole nation would rise as one man against the despot.

That the Grand Duchess had fled precipitately from Montoni, was a fact now well known; but the motives and details of her departure were still veiled in the most profound mystery.

There was another circumstance which forced itself on Markham's observation: this was that the deepest sympathy existed in behalf of the prisoners who had been taken in the conflict near Ossore, and who, it seemed, had all been despatched to the fortress of Estella. Richard's prowess in rallying the troops also appeared to be well known; and on more occasions than one, during his wanderings in Castelcicala, did he find himself the object of the most flattering discourse, while those who eulogised him little suspected that the hero of their panegyric was so near.

But it is not our intention to follow him through those wanderings. Suffice it to say that he found his journey more wearisome than he had anticipated; and that he was frequently compelled to avail himself of a carrier's van along the by-roads, or to hire a horse, in order to diminish the fatigues of his wayfaring.

It was on the twelfth evening after he left Friuli, where he had parted with Morcar, that he crossed the river Usiglio at a ferry about four miles to the east of Pinalla.

He was now only forty miles from the Neapolitan frontier; and in twenty-four hours more he fondly hoped to be beyond the reach of danger.

He had partaken of but little refreshment during that day, for the nearer he approached the point where peril would cease and safety begin, the more anxious did he become.

Having crossed the ferry, he inquired of the boatman the way to the nearest inn. A dreary by-lane was pointed out to him, with an intimation that it would lead to a small public-house, at the distance of about a mile.

Richard pursued his way, and had proceeded about three hundred yards down the lane, which was shaded on either side by large chesnut-trees, when several individuals rushed upon him so suddenly that he had no time to offer any effectual resistance.

He, however, struggled desperately, as two of the banditti (for such his assailants were) attempted to bind his arms with cords.

But his endeavours to free himself from their grasp were vain and fruitless, and only provoked a rougher treatment at their hands; for one of the banditti drew a pistol from his belt, and with the butt-end of the weapon aimed a desperate blow at our hero's head.

Richard fell, bleeding and insensible, upon the ground.

When he opened his eyes again, he found himself lying in a comfortable bed.

Putting aside the damask-silk curtains, he glanced anxiously around the room, which was sumptuously furnished.

He fell back on his pillow, and strove to collect his scattered ideas. His head pained him: he raised his hand to his forehead, and found that it was bandaged.

Then the attack of the banditti in the dark lane flashed across his mind; and he mechanically thrust his hand into his bosom.

Alas! Armstrong's letter was gone!

CHAPTER CLXXX.

THE "BOOZING-KEN" ONCE MORE.

We must now direct our readers' attention for a short space to the parlour of the Boozing-Ken on Saffron Hill.

It was nine o'clock in the evening; and, as usual, a motley company was assembled in that place.

A dozen persons, men and women, were drinking the vile compounds which the landlord dispensed as "Fine Cordial Gin," "Treble X Ale," "Real Jamaica Rum," "Best Cognac Brandy," and "Noted Stout."

At one of the tables sate the Buffer, smoking a long clay pipe, and from time to time paying his respects to a pot of porter which stood before him. He occasionally glanced towards the clock as if he were expecting some one; and then an impatient but subdued curse rose to his lips, proving that the individual for whom he waited was behind his time.

"Well, as I was saying," exclaimed an old shabbily-dressed and dissipated looking man, who sate near the fire, "it's a burning shame to make people pay so dear for such liquor as this;"—and he made a quart-pot, which he held in his hand, describe sundry diminutive circles, in order to shake up the liquor whereat he gazed with disgust.

"Why do you drink it, then, friend Swiggs?" demanded the Buffer, in a surly tone. "You was once a licensed witler yourself: and I'll be bound no one ever doctored his lush more than you did."

"Of course I did!" ejaculated the old man. "The publican can't live without it. Look how he's taxed—look how the police preys upon him—look at the restrictions as to hours that he's subject to. I tell you the publican *must* adulterate his liquor—aye, even the most honest. But I don't like to drink it so, none the more for all that. Besides, this beer is so preciously done up, that one does not know whether there's most cocculus indicus or most tobacco-juice in it."

"What's cocculus indicus?" asked the Buffer.

"An Indian berry of so poisonous a nature," was the reply, "that the natives throw it into the ponds to render the fish insensible and make them float on the surface, when of course they are easily caught. That will show you the strength of it—ha! ha!"

And the old man chuckled with a sort of malignant triumph, as he recalled to mind his own practices when he was in business, and ere dissipation ruined him.

"Oh! I have the *Vintners' Guides* all by heart, I can assure you," continued Swiggs; "and now that I'm out of the business, and never likely to be in it again, I don't mind telling you a secret or two. Let us begin with the beer. In the first place the brewer adulterates it, to save his malt and hops; and then the publican adulterates it, to increase its quantity. *His* business is to make one butt of beer into two—aye, and sometimes three. Ha! ha! Now, how do you think he does it? He first deluges it with water: then, of course, it's so weak and flat that no one could possibly drink it. It wants alcohol, or spirit in it; it wants the bitter flavour; it wants pungency; it wants age; and it wants froth. All these are supplied by means of adulteration. Cocculus indicus, henbane, opium, and Bohemian rosemary are used instead of alcohol: these are all poisons; and the Bohemian rosemary is of so deadly a nature, that a small sprig produces a raving intoxication. Ha! ha! that's good so far! Then aloes, quassia, wormwood, and gentian supply the place of hops, and give bitterness to the hell-broth. Ginger, cassia-buds, and capsicum, produce pungency. Treacle, tobacco-juice, and burnt sugar give it colour. Oil of vitriol not only makes it transparent, but also imparts to it the taste of age; so that a butt so doctored immediately seems to be two years old. I needn't tell you what sort of a poison oil of vitriol is: I don't want to suggest the means of suicide—ha! ha! But when the brew has gone so far, it wants the heading—that froth, you know, which you all fancy to be a proof of good beer. Alum, copperas, and salt of tartar will raise you as nice a heading as ever you'd wish to dip your lips in."

"You don't mean to say all that's true, Swiggs?" exclaimed the Buffer; "for though I ain't partickler, I don't think I shall ever like porter again."

"True!" ejaculated the old man, contemptuously: "it's as true as you're sitting there! But there's a dozen other ingredients that go into the stuff you lap up so pleasantly, and pay for as *beer*. What do you think of extract of poppies, coriander, nux vomica, black extract, Leghorn juice, and bitter beans? But all these names are Greek to you. They ain't to the publicans, though—ha! ha! Why half the poor people that go to lunatic asylums, are sent there by the poison called beer."

"What have you got to say agin blue ruin, old feller?" demanded a Knacker, who was regaling himself with a glass of gin-and-water.

"Blue ruin—gin!" cried the old man. "Ah! I can tell you something about that too. Oil of vitriol is the chief ingredient: it has the pungency and smell of gin. When you take the cork out of a bottle of *pure gin*, it will never make your eyes water: but the oil of vitriol *will*. Ha! ha! there's a test for you. Try it! Oil of turpentine, sulphuric æther, and oil of almonds are used to conceal the vitriol in the made-up gin. What is called *Fine Cordial Gin* is the most adulterated of all: it is concocted expressly for dram-drinkers—ha! ha!"

"Rum, I should think, is the best of all the spirits," said the Buffer.

"Because you like it best, perhaps?" exclaimed the old man. "Ha! ha! you don't know that the *Fine Jamaica Rum* is nothing else but the vile low-priced Leeward Island rum, which is in itself a stomach-burning fire-water of the deadliest quality, and which is mixed by the publican with cherry-laurel water and *devil*."

"What's *devil*?" asked the Knacker.

"Aye, what is it, indeed? It's nothing but chili pods infused in oil of vitriol—that's all! But now for *Best Cognac Brandy*," continued the old man. "Do you think the brandy sold under that name ever saw France—ever crossed the sea? Not it! Aqua ammonia, saffron, mace, extract of almond cake, cherry-laurel water, *devil*, terra japonica, and spirits of nitre, make up the brandy when the British spirit has been well deluged with water. That's your brandy! Ha! ha!"

"What a precious old sinner you must be, Swiggs," said one of the company, "if you used to make up such poisons as you're now talking about."

"Dare say I was—dare say I was," observed the old man, composedly. "Nearly every publican does the same, I tell you. Those who don't, go into the *Gazette*—that's all. Ha! ha! But if the poor are cheated and poisoned in that way, how do you think the middle classes and rich ones are served! Shall I tell you any thing about wine—eh?"

"Yes—do," cried several voices. "Let's hear how the swell cove is served out."

"Well, I'll tell you that too," continued the old man. "There's hundreds of *Wine-Guides* that contain instructions for the merchants, and vintners, and publicans. Take a bottle of cheap Port wine, and get a chemist to analyse it: he'll tell you it contains three ounces of spirits of wine, fourteen ounces of cyder, one ounce and a half of sugar, two scruples of alum, one scruple of tartaric acid, and four ounces of strong decoction of logwood. That's the way I used to make *my* Port wine. Not a drop—not a single drop of the juice of the grape. Ha! ha! Families bought it wholesale—three-and-sixpence the bottle—rank poison! Ha! ha! Nearly all fictitious wines possess too high a colour—particularly sherry: the way to make such wine pale is to put a quart of warm sheep's blood in the butt, and, when it's quite fine, to draw it off. I always did that—but I didn't tell the families so, though! Which do you think is the greatest cheat of all the cheap wines?—the Cape. The publicans sell it at eighteen-pence and two shillings. Why—it's nothing more than the drippings from the casks, the filterings of the lees, and all the spoiled white wines that happen to be in the cellar, mixed together with rum-cowe and cyder, and fined with sheep's blood."

"I'm glad to hear the rich is humbugged as well as the poor," observed the Knacker: "that's a consolation, at any rate."

"So it is," said a cat's-meat man, nodding his head approvingly.

"Humbugged!" ejaculated Swiggs, triumphantly: "I b'lieve you! I'll tell you how two-thirds of all the Port wine drunk in the United Kingdom is made:—Take four gallons of cyder, two quarts of the juice of red beet-root, two quarts of brandy, four ounces of logwood, half a pound of bruised rhatany root, and one ounce of alum: first infuse the logwood and rhatany root in the brandy and a gallon of the cyder for ten days; then strain off the liquor and mix all the other ingredients with it; put it into a cask, keep it for a month, and it will be fit to bottle. Not a drop of grape-juice there. Ha! ha! If the colour isn't quite right, an infusion of raspings of red sandars wood in spirits of wine will soon give it a beautiful red complexion. But then the bees'-wing. Ha! the bees'-wing—eh! A saturated solution of cream of tartar, coloured with Brazil-wood or cochineal, will give the best crust and bees'-wing you can imagine. There's for you! Port made in a month or six weeks can be passed off for wine ten or a dozen years old. The corks can easily be stained to indicate age—and who's to discover the cheat? Nobody but the chemist—ha! ha!"

"Well, I've learnt someot to-night," said the Knacker.

"Learnt something! You know nothing about it yet," cried the old man, who was on his favourite topic. "You don't know what poison—rank poison—there is in all these cheap wines;—aye, and in the dear ones too, for that matter. Sugar of lead is a chief ingredient! I needn't tell you that sugar of lead is a deadly poison: any fool knows that. Sal enixum and slaked lime are used to clear muddy wine; and litharge gives a sweet taste to wines that are too acid. Bitter almonds imparts to port a nutty flavour; cherry-laurel water gives it a bouquet; and tincture of raisin seeds endows it with a grapy taste—which it hasn't got and can't have otherwise. But I've told you enough for to-night. And now I dare say you wonder why I drink beer or spirits at all? Because I am old and miserable; because I am poor and wretched; because I must kill care somehow or another; and therefore I take daily doses of those slow poisons."

With these words the old man rose, and shuffled out of the room.

His denunciation of the abominable system of doctoring wines, spirits, and malt liquors produced a gloomy effect upon the company whom he left behind. The Buffer glanced often and often towards the clock: the time was passing rapidly; and yet the person for whom he was waiting came not.

"Who'll tip us a song?" said the Knacker, glancing around.

"There's Jovial Jenkins up in the corner there," exclaimed the cat's-meat man. "He's the chap for a song."

"Well, I don't mind, pals," cried a diminutive specimen of the male sex, dressed in a suit of clothes every way too large for him. "What shall I sing yer? Oh! I s'pose it must be the favourite—eh? Come—here goes, then."

And in another minute the parlour of the boozing-ken reverberated with the intonations of the following strange song:—

THE MAN OF MANY PURSUITS.[12]

Come, lip us a chant, pals! Why thus mum your dubber!
My gropus clinks coppers, and I'll fake the rubber:
Here's a noggin of lightning to slacken your glib;—
Then pass round the lush, and cease napping the bib.

T'other night we'd a precious rum squeeze at the Spell,
And, togg'd as a yokel, I used my forks well;
From a Rum-Tom-Pat's kickseys I knapp'd a green twitch,
And nearly got off the gold glims from his snitch.

But a swell with hock-dockeys and silken gam-cases,
Put the parish prig up to the rig of such places;—
So, finding the nib-cove was chanting the play,
I shov'd my trunk nimbly and got clean away.

As a jolly gay-tyke-boy I sometimes appear,
And chirp for the curs that are spelt in the leer;
Or as a leg-glazier, with fadger and squibs,
I work my way into the nibsomest cribs.

But when on these dodges the blue-bottles blow,
As a flue-flaker togg'd then at day-break I show:

And though from the slavey I get but a flag,
I can fly the blue-pigeon and thus bank the rag.

Sometimes as a mabber I dose the swell fred;—
Or else as a vamper I mill for a ned;
And as soon as my man is tripp'd by the gams,
A pal knaps his ticker, or frisks off his flamms.

But the life that I love is in Swell-street to shine,
With a Mounseer-fak'd calp, and my strummel all fine,
Heater-cases well polish'd, and lully so white,
And an upper ben fitting me jaunty and tight.

Then with nice silk rain-napper, or gold-headed dick,
I plunge neck and heels into sweet river-tick;
And if in a box of the stone-jug I get,
Though hobbled for macing, 'twill prove but a debt.

Then lip us a chant, pals! Why thus mum your dubber?
My gropus clinks coppers, and I'll fake the rubber:
A noggin of lightning will slacken our glib;
So pass round the lush, and let none nap the bib.

"Brayvo, Jovial Jen!" shouted the inmates of the boozing-ken parlour.

"You're the prince of good fellers at a spree," said the Knacker: "and I'll stand a quartern of blue ruin and two outs, in spite o' what old Swiggs said of the lush."

The promised treat was called, paid for, and disposed of.

Scarcely had the applause, which greeted this song, terminated, when the door opened, and Lafleur, Mr. Greenwood's French valet, entered the room.

He was disguised in a large rough coat and slouched hat; but the Buffer immediately recognised his countenance, and hurried to meet him.

"You're late," said the Buffer, in a low tone.

"Yes—I could not come before," answered the valet. "But I knew that you would wait for me, as I told you yesterday that the business was important."

"Well, we can't talk here," observed the Buffer. "There's a snug room up-stairs devoted to them that's got private business: and I'll show you the way."

The Buffer left the parlour, followed by Lafleur, whom he conducted to a private apartment on the first floor. A bottle of wine was ordered; and when the waiter had withdrawn, the Buffer made a sign for his companion to explain the object of the interview.

"You know very well that I am in the service of Mr. Greenwood, the Member of Parliament?" began Lafleur.

"Yes—me and two pals once did a little job for him on the Richmond road," answered the Buffer.

"You mean the affair of the robbery of Count Alteroni?" said Lafleur.

"Well—I do, since you know it. Does your master tell you all his secrets?" demanded the Buffer.

"No—no," was the reply; and the Frenchman gave a sly laugh. "But he can't very well prevent me listening at the door of his room, when he's engaged with people on particular business. I know enough to ruin him for ever."

"So much the better for you. There's nothing like being deep in one's master's secrets: it gives you a hold on him."

"Let us talk of the present business," said Lafleur. "Are you the man to do a small robbery on the Dover road, as skilfully as you helped to do it on the Richmond road?"

"I'm the man to do any thing for fair reglars," answered the Buffer. "Go on."

"I will explain myself in a few words," continued Lafleur. "By dint of listening at doors and looking over my master's papers when he was out, I have made a grand discovery. To-morrow evening Greenwood leaves town in a post-chaise and four for Dover. It seems that he has embarked in some splendid speculation with a house in Paris, and the success of it depends on influencing the rates of exchange between English and French money. He will take with him twenty thousand pounds in gold and Bank of England notes to effect this purpose."

"Never mind the rigmarole of the reasons," said the Buffer; "for I don't understand them no more than the Queen does the papers she signs, they say, by dozens and dozens at a sitting."

"It is sufficient, then, for *you* to know that Mr. Greenwood will leave London to-morrow evening with twenty thousand pounds, in a post-chaise," proceeded Lafleur. "His Italian valet and myself are to accompany him; and we are all to be well armed."

"What sort of a feller is your Italian wally?" demanded the Buffer.

"Not one of our sort," replied Lafleur; "he will do his duty to his master, although I don't think he has any very great love for him."

"Greenwood believes you to be stanch also, s'pose?"

"Of course he does. I shall have to see that his master's pistols are in proper order, and place them in the chaise; but the Italian will take care of his own. There will, consequently, only be *one pair* loaded with ball."

"I understand you," said the Buffer. "Still that one pair of pistols may send two good chaps to Davy Jones."

"Risk nothing, get nothing," observed Lafleur. "The chances are that Filippo and I shall ride together on the dickey: if so, the moment the horses are stopped, I shall have nothing more or less to do than turn suddenly on Filippo and prevent him from doing any mischief."

"So far, so good," said the Buffer. "But I ought to have at least three pals with me. Remember, there's two postillions; Greenwood himself won't part with his tin without a struggle; and Filippo, as you call him, might master you."

"Can you get three men as resolute as yourself to accompany you?" asked Lafleur.

"The notice is so deuced short," returned the Buffer; "but I think I can reckon on two. Long Bob and the Lully Prig," he added, in a musing tone, "are certain to jine in."

"Three of you will scarcely be sufficient," said Lafleur. "Only think of the sum that's at stake: we mustn't risk the loss of it by any

want of precaution on our parts."

"Well—I must see," cried the Buffer. "It isn't that I don't know a many chaps in my line; but the thing is to get one that we're sure on—that won't peach either afore or arterwards. Ah! I lost my best pal in Tony Tidkins—poor feller!"

"The Resurrection Man, you mean?" said Lafleur.

"The same. Greenwood was a good patron of his'n," observed the Buffer; "but that wouldn't have perwented him from jining in along with me."

"I remember that Greenwood wanted Tidkins for some business or another nearly a year ago," said the French valet; "and he sent me with a note to him at this very place. He did not, however, come; but I called here a few days afterwards, and heard that he had received the letter."

"That was just about the time poor Tidkins was desperately wounded by Crankey Jem," said the Buffer, rather speaking to himself than to his companion; "and circumstances forced him to keep deuced close arterwards. But that's neither here nor there: let's talk on our own business. Leave me to get a proper number of pals; and now answer me a question or two. At what time does Greenwood intend to start?"

"At seven o'clock. He means to get to Dover so as to have a few hours' sleep before the packet leaves for Calais."

"Then the business mustn't be done this side of Chatham," said the Buffer: "it would be too early. There's a nice lonely part of the road, I remember, between Newington and Sittingbourne, with a chalk pit near, where we can divide the swag, and each toddle off in different directions arterwards. The chaise will reach that place about ten. Now, one more question:—where will the blunt be stowed away?"

"Under the seat inside, no doubt," answered Lafleur. "Then I may consider the business agreed upon between us?"

"As good as done, almost," said the Buffer.

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door.

The waiter entered, and whispered something to the Buffer.

"By God, how fortunate!" ejaculated this individual, his countenance suddenly assuming an expression of the most unfeigned joy. "Show him up—this minute!"

The waiter disappeared.

"Who is it?" demanded Lafleur.

"The very person we are in want of! He has turned up again:—that feller has as many lives as a cat."

"But who is it?" repeated Lafleur impatiently.

Before the Buffer could answer the question, the door was thrown open, and the Resurrection Man entered the room.

12. In order to avoid breaking the sense of this song by a constant repetition of those typographical signs which point a reference to foot-notes, we have deemed it best to give a complete glossary:—
Lip us a chant. Sing us a song.
Mum your dubber. Keep your mouth shut.
My gropus clinks coppers. My pocket has got money in it.
Fake the rubber. Stand treat this time.
Noggin of lightning. Quartern of gin.
Slacken your glib. Loosen your tongue.
Cease napping the bib. Leave off whining.
Precious-rum squeeze at the Spell. Good evening's work at the theatre.
Yokel. Countryman.
Forks. Fingers.
Rum-Tom-Pat. Clergyman.
Kickseys. Breeches.
Twitch. Silk net purse.
Glims. Spectacles.
Snitch. Nose.
Hock-dockeys. Shoes.
Gam-cases. Stockings.
Parish prig. Parson.
Nib-cove. Gentleman.
Chanting the play. Explaining the tricks and manœuvres of thieves.
Shov'd my trunk. Moved off.
Gay-tyke-boy. Dog-fancier.
Chirp. Give information.
Spelt in the leer. Advertised in the newspaper.
Leg-glazier. A thief who carries the apparatus of a glazier, and calls at houses when he knows the master and mistress are out, telling the servant that he has been sent to clean and mend the windows. By these means he obtains admission, and plunders the house of any thing which he can conveniently carry off.
Fadger. Glazier's frame.
Squibs. Paint brushes.
Nibsomest cribs. Best houses.
Blue-bottles. Police.
Flue flaker. Chimney-sweeper.
Slavey. Female servant.
Flag. Fourpenny-piece.
Fly the blue-pigeon. Cut the lead off the roof.
Bank the rag. Make some money.
Mabber. Cab-driver.
Dose the swell fred. Inveigle the fare into a public-house and hocus him.
Vamper. A fellow who frequents public-houses, where he picks a quarrel with any person who has got a ring or a watch about him, his object being to lead the person into a pugilistic encounter, so as to afford the vamper's confederate, or pal, the opportunity of robbing him.
Mill for a ned. Fight for a sovereign.
Gams. Legs.
Ticker. Watch.
Flamms. Rings.
Swell-street. The West End.
Mounseer-fak'd calp. A hat of French manufacture.
Strummel. Hair.
Heater-cases. Wellington boots.
Lully. Shirt.
Upper ben. Coat.
Rain-napper. Umbrella.
Gold-headed dick. Riding-whip.

River-tick. Tradesmen's books.
Box of the stone-jug. Cell in Newgate.
Hobbled. Committed for trial.
Macing. Swindling.
'Twill prove but a debt. Swindlers of this class usually arrange their business in such a manner as to escape a conviction on the plea that the business is a mere matter of debt. In order to induce the jury to come to this decision, recourse is had to the assistance of pals, who depose to conversations which they pretended to overhear between the prosecuting tradesman and the swindling prisoner, but which in reality never took place.

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

THE RESURRECTION MAN AGAIN.

Anthony Tidkins was dressed in a most miserable manner; and his whole appearance denoted poverty and privation. He was thin and emaciated; his eyes were sunken; his cheeks hollow; and his entire countenance more cadaverous and ghastly than ever.

"My dear fellow," cried the Buffer, springing forward to meet him; "how glad I am to see you again. I really thought as how you was completely done for."

"And no thanks to you that I wasn't," returned the Resurrection Man gruffly. "Didn't you leave me to die like a dog in the plague-ship?"

"I've been as sorry about that there business, Tony, ever since it happened, as one can well be," said the Buffer: "but if you remember the hurry and bustle of the sudden panic that came over us, I'm sure you won't harbour no ill-feeling."

"Well, well—the least said, the soonest's mended," growled the Resurrection Man, taking his friend's hand. "Holloa, Lafleur! What are you doing here?"

"Business—business, Mr. Tidkins," answered the valet; "and you're the very man we are in want of."

"The very man," echoed the Buffer. "I give up the command of the expedition to him: he's my old captain."

"In the first place, order me up some grub and a pint of brandy," said the Resurrection Man; "for I've been precious short of every thing at all decent in the eating or drinking way of late;—and while I refresh myself with some supper, you can tell me what new scheme there is in the wind. Of course I'm your man, if there's any good to be done."

The waiter was summoned: Lafleur ordered him to bring up the entire contents of the larder, together with a bottle of brandy; and when these commands were obeyed, the Resurrection Man fell to work with extraordinary voracity, while the French valet briefly explained to him the nature of the business already propounded to the Buffer.

The hopes of obtaining a considerable sum of money animated the eyes of Tidkins with fire and his cadaverous countenance with a glow of fiendish satisfaction. He highly approved of the idea of engaging the Lully Prig and Long Bob in the enterprise; for he entertained a good opinion of their courage, in spite of the affair of the plague-ship. Indeed, he could well understand the invincible nature of the panic-terror which had seized upon them on that occasion; and, as he foresaw that their co-operation would be valuable in other matters, he was disposed to forget the past.

In fine, all the preliminary arrangements were made with Lafleur, who presented the two villains each with a ten pound-note as an earnest of his sincerity, and then took his departure.

When the Resurrection Man and the Buffer were alone together, they brewed themselves strong glasses of brandy and water, lighted their pipes, and naturally began to discourse on what had passed since they last saw each other.

The Buffer related all that had occurred to him after his return to Mossop's wharf,—how he had been pursued by the three men belonging to the *Blossom*,—how one turned out to be Richard Markham, another a policeman in disguise, and the third Morcar,—how they had vainly searched the *Fairy* to discover Anthony Tidkins,—and how he himself eventually sold the lighter.

"Since then," added the Buffer, "I have not been doing much, and was deuced glad when Greenwood's valet came to me last evening and made an appointment with me for to-night to talk upon some business of importance. You know what that business is; and I hope it will turn up a trump—that's all."

"Then the whole affair of the *Blossom* was a damnation plant?" cried the Resurrection Man, gnashing his teeth with rage. "And that hated Markham was at the bottom of it all? By the thunders of heaven, I'll have the most deadly vengeance! But how came you to learn that Morcar was one of the three?"

"Because I heard Markham call him by that name when they all boarded the *Fairy*; and I instantly remembered the gipsy that you had often spoken about. But what do you think? He was the Black—the counterfeit Brummagem scoundrel that could neither speak nor hear. The captain was the blue-bottle; and Markham, I s'pose, had kept down below during the time the *Blossom* was at Mossop's. It was a deuced good scheme of theirs; and if you hadn't been left in the plague-ship, it might have gone precious hard with you."

"Well said, Jack," observed the Resurrection Man. "Out of evil sometimes comes good, as the parsons say. But that shan't prevent me from doing Master Richard Markham a turn yet."

"You must go to Italy, then," said the Buffer laconically.

"What gammon's that?" demanded Tidkins.

"Why, I happened yesterday morning to look at a newspaper in the parlour down stairs, and there I read of a battle which took place in some country with a cursed hard name in Italy, about three weeks ago; and what should I see but a long rigmarole about the bravery of '*our gallant fellow-countryman, Mr. Richard Markham*,' and '*the great delight it would be to all the true friends of freedom to learn that he was not retained amongst the prisoners'*."

"But perhaps he was killed in the battle, the scoundrel?" said the Resurrection Man.

"No, he wasn't," answered the Buffer; "for the moment I saw that all this nonsense was about him, I read the whole article through;

and I found that he *had* been taken prisoner, but had either been let go or had made his escape. No one, however, seems to know what's become of him;—so p'r'aps he's on his way back to this country."

"I'd much sooner he'd get hanged or shot in Italy," said the Resurrection Man. "But if he ever does come home again, I'll be square with him—and no mistake."

"Now you know all that has happened to me Tony," exclaimed the Buffer, "have the kindness to tell us how you got out of that cursed scrape in the *Lady Anne*."

"I will," said the Resurrection Man, refilling his glass. "After you all ran away in that cowardly fashion, I tried to climb after you; but I fell back insensible. When I awoke, the broad day-light was shining overhead; and a boy was looking down at me from the deck. He asked me what I was doing there. I rose with great difficulty; but I was much refreshed with the long sleep I had enjoyed. The boy disappeared; and in a few minutes the surgeon came and hailed me down the hatchway. I begged him to help me up out of the hold, and I would tell him every thing. He ordered me to throw aside my pistols and cutlass, and he would assist me to gain the deck. I did as he commanded me. He and the boy then lowered a rope, with a noose; I put my foot in the noose, grasped the rope tight, and was hauled up. The surgeon instantly presented a pistol, and said, '*If you attempt any violence, I'll shoot you through the head*.' I declared that nothing was farther from my intention, and begged him to give me some refreshment. This request was complied with; and I then felt so much better, that I was able to walk with comparative ease. It, however, seemed as if I had just recovered from a long illness: for I was weak, and my head was giddy. I told the surgeon that I was an honest hard-working man; that I had come down to Gravesend the day before to see a friend; and had fallen in with some persons who offered me a job for which I should be well paid; that I assented, and accompanied them to their boat; that when I understood the nature of their business, I declared I would have nothing more to do with it; that they swore they would blow my brains out if I made any noise; that I was compelled to board the ship with them; that when some sudden sound alarmed them as they were examining the goods in the hold, they knocked me down with the butt-end of a pistol; and that I remembered nothing more until the boy awoke me by calling out to me from the deck. The surgeon believed my story, and said, '*A serious offence has been perpetrated, and you must declare all you know of the matter before a magistrate*.' I of course signified my willingness to do so, because I saw that the only chance of obtaining my liberty was by gaining the good opinion of the surgeon; for he had a loaded pistol in his hand—I was unarmed—and the police-boat was within hail. '*But, according to the quarantine laws*,' continued the surgeon, '*you cannot be permitted to leave the vessel for the present; and what guarantee have I for your good behaviour while you are on board*?'"

"That was a poser," observed the Buffer.

"No such thing," said the Resurrection Man. "I spoke with so much apparent sincerity, and with such humility, that I quite gained the surgeon's good opinion. I said, '*You can lock me in your cabin during the day, sir; or you can bind my hands with cords; and, at night, I can sleep in the hold from which you released me, with the hatches battened down*.'—'*I really do believe you to be an honest man*,' exclaimed the surgeon; '*but I must adopt some precaution. You shall be at large during the day; and I think it right to give you due notice that I carry loaded pistols constantly with me. At night you shall sleep in the hold, with the hatches battened down, as you say.*' I affected to thank him very sincerely for his kindness in leaving me at liberty during the day; and he then repaired to the fore-cabin to attend to his patients."

"Hadn't he got the plague himself?" inquired the Buffer.

"No: but the fœtid atmosphere of the fore-cabin, to which he was compelled so frequently to expose himself, had made him as emaciated and as pale as if he had only just recovered from the malady. I got into conversation with the boy, and found that he had contrived, shortly after you and the others decamped, to free his arms from the cords with which we had bound him; and that his first care was to release the surgeon. They neither of them entertained the remotest suspicion that any of the pirates were left in the ship, until the boy discovered me in the hold shortly after day-break."

"Well—and how did you escape after all?"

"I remained three or four days on board, before I put any scheme into force, although I planned a great many. At night I could do nothing, because I was a prisoner in the hold; and during the day the police-boat was constantly about, besides the sentinels on land. The surgeon always made me go down into the hold while it was still day-light; and never let me out again until after sunrise; so that I was always in confinement during the very time that I might contrive something to effect my escape from that infernal pest-ship. But the surgeon seemed afraid to trust me when it was dark. I never passed such a miserable time in my life. The slight touch that I had experienced of the plague—for it could have been nothing else—kept me in a constant fear lest it should return with increased force. How often did I mutter the most bitter curses against you and the other pals for abandoning me;—but now, in consequence of what you told me of the plant that Markham had set a-going against me, I am not sorry to think that I was left behind in the plague-ship. One evening—I think it was the fifth after my first entrance into the vessel—I observed that it was growing darker and darker; and yet the surgeon did not appear on deck with his loaded pistol to send me below. The boy was walking about eyeing me suspiciously; and at length he went down into the after-cabin. It struck me that the surgeon was probably indulging in a nap, and that the lad would awake him. It was not quite dark; but still I fancied that it was dusk enough to leap from the bow of the ship, which part of the vessel was high and dry, without alarming the sentinels on shore. At all events the chance was worth the trial. Seizing a handspike, I hurried forward, and sprang from the ship. Then, without losing a moment, I ran along the bank towards Gravesend, as rapidly as I could. In a short time I knew that I was safe. I hurled the handspike into the Thames, and walked on to the *Lobster Tavern*. There I obtained a bed—for I had plenty of ready money in my pocket. My only regret was that I had not been able to bring away any of the gold-dust with me."

"Why didn't you knock the surgeon and the boy on the head, and help yourself?" demanded the Buffer.

"So I should if I had seen a chance," replied the Resurrection Man; "but I was so weak and feeble all the time I was on board, that I was no match even for the young lad; and the surgeon always kept at such a distance, with a loaded pistol ready cocked in his hand, when I was ordered into the hold of an evening, or called up of a morning, that there wasn't a shadow of a chance. Well, I slept at the *Lobster Tavern*, and departed very early in the morning—long before it was day-light. I thought that London would be too hot for me, after every thing that had lately occurred; and I resolved to pay a visit to Walmer—my own native place. I was still too weak to walk many miles without resting; and so I took nearly four days to reach Walmer. Besides, I kept to the fields, and avoided the high road as

much as possible. I took up my quarters at a small inn on the top of Walmer hill, and then made inquiries concerning all the people I had once known in or about the village. I have often related the former incidents of my life to you; and you will therefore recollect the baronet who was exchequered for smuggling, and was welcomed with open arms by his friends, when he paid the fine. You also remember all that occurred between him and me. I found that he had married his cook-maid, who ruled him with a rod of iron; and that the '*very select society*' of Walmer and Deal had all cut him on account of that connexion, which was much worse in their eyes than all the smuggling in which he had been engaged. In fact, he was a hero when prosecuted for smuggling; but now *no decent persons could associate with him*, since he had married his scullion. In a word, I learnt that he was as miserable as I could have wished him to be."

"And didn't you inquire after your friend the parson?" demanded the Buffer.

"You may be sure I did," returned the Resurrection Man. "He had made himself very conspicuous for refusing the sacrament to a young woman who was seduced by her lover, and had an illegitimate child; and the '*select society*' of Walmer greatly applauded him for his conduct. At length, about a year ago, it appears, this most particular of all clergymen was discovered by a neighbouring farmer in too close a conversation with the said farmer's wife; and his reverence was compelled to decamp, no one knows where. He, however, left his wife and children to the public charity. That charity was so great, that the poor woman and family are now inmates of the very workhouse where his reverence's slightest wish was once a law. I stayed at Walmer for nearly a week; and then departed suddenly for Ramsgate, with the contents of the landlord's till in my pocket. At Ramsgate I put up at a small public-house where I was taken dreadfully ill. For four months I was confined to my bed; and both landlord and landlady were very kind to me. At length I slowly began to recover; and, when I was well enough to walk abroad, I used to go upon the beach to inhale the sea-air. It was then summertime; and bathing was all the rage. I never was more amused in my life than to see the ladies, old as well as young, sitting on the beach, to all appearance deeply buried in the novels which they held in their hands, but in reality watching, with greedy eyes, the men bathing scarcely fifty yards off."

"You don't mean to say that?" cried the Buffer.

"I do indeed, though," returned Tidkins. "It was the commonest thing in the world for elderly dames and young misses to go out walking along the beach, or to sit down on it, close by the very spot where the men bathed, although there were plenty of other places to choose either for rambling or reading. Well, I stayed two more months at Ramsgate; and as the landlord and landlady of the public-house had behaved so kind to me, I took nothing from them when I went away. I merely left my little account unsettled. I walked over to Margate, with the intention of taking the steamer to London Bridge; but just as I was stepping on the jetty, some one tapped me on the shoulder, and, turning round, I beheld my landlord of the little inn on the top of Walmer hill. All my excuses, promises, and entreaties were of no avail: the man collared me—a crowd collected—a constable was sent for, and I was taken before a magistrate. Of course I was committed for trial, and sent across in a cart to Canterbury gaol. There I lay till the day before yesterday, when the sessions came on. By some extraordinary circumstance or another, no prosecutor appeared before the Grand Jury; and I was discharged. I resolved to come back to London;—for, after all, London is the place for business in our way. With all its police, it's the best scene for our labours. So here I am; and the moment I set foot in this ken, I find employment waiting for me."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear you've been lumbered, old feller," cried the respectable Mr. John Wicks; "but it's a blessin' the prosecutor never come for'ard. Let's, however, think of the present; and botheration to the past. I'm heartily glad you've turned up again. I was precious nigh going into mourning for you, Tony. Joking apart, though—this business of the Frenchman's looks well; and we must be about early to look after the Lully Prig and Long Bob. I know their haunts down by Execution Dock, just opposite to Mossop's."

"Where are you hanging out now, Jack?" inquired the Resurrection Man.

"Me and Moll has got a room in Greenhill's Rents—at the bottom of Saint John's Street, you know," was the answer.

"Well, I shall sleep here to-night," said the Resurrection Man; "and by six o'clock to-morrow morning I shall expect you."

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

MR. GREENWOOD'S JOURNEY.

It was six o'clock on the evening following the incidents related in the two preceding chapters.

Mr. Greenwood had just concluded an early dinner (early for him) after having devoted the greater part of the day to business in the City, and a small portion of it to his fair Georgian, for whom he had taken elegantly furnished apartments in Suffolk Street, Pall Mall.

Having disposed of his last glass of champagne, the honourable member for Rottenborough rang the bell.

Lafleur made his appearance.

"Is the chaise ordered for seven precisely?" inquired Mr. Greenwood.

"Yes, sir—seven precisely, sir," answered the valet.

"Did you write to my agent at Rottenborough to tell him that I should pass through that town at half-past eight, and that although I wished to preserve a strict incognito, yet I should not mind being recognised while the horses are changing at the inn?"

"I mentioned all that, sir," replied Lafleur; "and I suggested that he had better get together a hundred or so of persons in the tap-room, to be ready to rush out and cheer you."

"That was well thought of, Lafleur. I have already sent a paragraph to the morning newspaper in which I am a shareholder, stating that I was enthusiastically cheered as I passed through Rottenborough. It will appear to-morrow morning. Have you renewed my positive orders to the policeman on this beat to take all beggars into custody who are found loitering near my door?"

"I have, sir. One woman, with three whimpering children, was dragged off to the station-house half an hour ago, for looking too earnestly down the area windows," said Lafleur. "Her husband has just been to beg you to intercede with the Inspector for her release. He said he was a hard-working man, and that it must be a mistake, as his wife was no beggar."

"And what did you say, Lafleur?" demanded Mr. Greenwood, sternly.

"I said nothing, sir: I merely banged the door in his face."

"That was right and proper. I am determined to put down vagrancy. Nothing is more offensive to the eye than those crawling wretches who are perpetually dinning in one's ears a long tale about their being half-starved."

"Yes, sir—it is very disagreeable, sir," observed Lafleur.

"The free and independent electors of Rottenborough have not sent me to Parliament for nothing, I can assure you," continued Mr. Greenwood.

"No, sir," responded Lafleur.

"And I, from my place in the House, will denounce this odious system of mendicancy," added Mr. Greenwood.

"Yes, sir," observed Lafleur.

"By-the-by, did you send the letter I gave you just now to the post?"

The valet answered in the affirmative.

"I am glad of that. It was to the Reverend Dr. Beganuph—the rector of some place in some county—I am sure I forget where. However—the reverend gentleman is having the parish church enlarged—or made smaller—I really forget which,—but I know it's something of the kind;—and as he has sent a circular to all persons whose names are in the *Court Guide*, soliciting subscriptions, I cannot, of course, refuse to contribute my mite of five pounds to the pious work—especially as the list of subscribers is to be advertised in the principal London and provincial papers. We must support the Church, Lafleur."

"Yes, sir—decidedly, sir," observed the valet.

"What would become of us without the Church?" continued Mr. Greenwood. "It is the source from which flow all the blessings of Christian love, hope, benevolence, and charity. Hark! Lafleur, I do really believe there is a woman singing a ballad in the street! Run out and give her into custody this minute."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the valet: "it's only the muffin-boy."

"Oh! that's different," observed Mr. Greenwood, rising from his seat. "The chaise will be here at seven, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"You and Filippo will accompany me. Tell Filippo to see that his fire-arms are in good order; and do you attend to mine as well as your own. Not that I apprehend any danger on such a road as that on which we are about to travel; still it is better to be prepared."

"Decidedly, sir," answered Lafleur, not a muscle of his countenance betraying any extraordinary emotion.

"Take a lamp to my study," said Greenwood; "and then go and see about the fire-arms. Let my case of pistols be put inside the chaise."

"Yes, sir;"—and Lafleur was about to leave the room, when he suddenly recollected himself, and said, "If you please, sir, your boot-maker sent your new slippers this morning, wrapped up in a piece of the *Weekly Dispatch*. I thought I had better mention it, sir."

"By God, you have done well to acquaint me with this infamy, Lafleur!" cried Mr. Greenwood, desperately excited. "The scoundrel! he reads the *Dispatch*, does he?—the journal that possesses more influence over the masses than even pulpits, governments, sovereigns, or religious tracts! The villain! I always thought that man was a democrat at heart; because one day when I told him if he didn't vote for the Tory Churchwarden he would lose my custom, he smiled—yes, smiled! And so he reads the *Dispatch*—the people's journal—the vehicle of all argument against our blessed constitution—the champion to which all who fancy themselves oppressed, fly as naturally as bees to flowers! Lafleur," added Mr. Greenwood, solemnly, "you will send to that boot-maker, and tell him to show his face no more at the house of the Member for Rottenborough."

"Yes, sir."

And Lafleur left the room.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Greenwood repaired to his study, where the lamp had already been placed upon the table.

He then opened his iron safe, and drew forth a large canvass bag full of sovereigns. This he consigned to a tin box, resembling those in which lawyers keep their clients' papers. Three more bags, of the same size as the first, were taken from the safe and stowed away in this japanned case.

"Four thousand pounds!" murmured Greenwood to himself. "How many a family would be made happy with only the hundredth part of that sum! But those who want the glittering metal should toil for it as I have done."

Mr. Greenwood, having thus complimented himself upon those "toils" whereby he had gained his wealth, proceeded to take a large portfolio from the iron safe.

Partially opening its various compartments, so as to obtain a glance at the contents, he smiled still more complacently than when his eyes lingered on the canvass bags.

"Sixteen thousand pounds in Bank of England notes," he exclaimed aloud, as he consigned the portfolio to the tin case. "And these twenty thousand pounds, judiciously applied in Paris, will produce me twenty-five thousand clear gain—twenty-five thousand at the least!"

His really handsome countenance wore an expression of triumph, as he carefully locked the tin case, and placed the key in his pocket.

"My combinations are admirable! Thirty thousand pounds, already embarked in these Parisian speculations, have prepared the way for enormous gains: and now," continued Greenwood,—"now this sum,"—and he glanced towards the tin box—"will strike the decisive blow! It is a glorious science—that of the financier! And who is more subtle than I? True—I have experienced some losses during the past week—a few thousands: but they are nothing! I was wrong to job as I did in the English funds. The fluctuations in the French securities are the means by which brilliant fortunes can be made! The timid talk of the great risks—Pshaw! Let them combine their projects as I have done!"

He ceased, and surveyed himself complacently in the mirror above the mantel.

He then rang the bell.

Lafleur appeared in about a minute; but so calm, composed, and unruffled was his countenance, that no living soul would have suspected that he had been attentively listening at the door of the study all the while his master was transferring the treasure from the iron safe to the tin box.

"Bring me my upper coat and travelling cap, Lafleur," said Mr. Greenwood, not choosing to lose sight of his tin box.

Lafleur once more disappeared, and speedily returned with his master's travelling attire.

He announced at the same time that the chaise was at the door.

In a few minutes, Mr. Greenwood was ensconced in the vehicle. The tin box was stowed away under the seat: and his case of pistols lay by his side, within convenient reach.

Filippo and Lafleur mounted the dickey: the postillions cracked their whips; and the equipage rolled rapidly away from Spring Gardens.

At half-past eight o'clock precisely the vehicle drove up to the door of the principal inn of which the town of Rottenborough could boast.

The ostlers seemed to bungle in a very unusual manner, as they changed the horses; and full five minutes elapsed ere they could loosen the traces. In a word, they punctually obeyed the directions of Mr. Greenwood's agent in that famous town.

Suddenly the door of the tap-room burst open and vomited forth about eighty of such queer and suspicious-looking fellows, that no prudent man would have walked down a dark lane where he knew any one of them to be lurking.

Out they came—in most admirable disorder—pell-mell—jostling, hustling, pushing, larking with each other.

"Hooray, Greenwood! brayvo, Greenwood!" they shouted, at the tops of voices somewhat disguised in liquor. "Greenwood for ever! Down with the Tories!"

"No—no!" shouted a little man, dressed in deep black, and who suddenly appeared at the head of the mob: "down with the Liberals, you mean!"

"Oh—ah! so it is!" cried the mob; and then they shouted louder than ever, "Hooray for Greenwood! Down with the Liberals! The Tories for ever!"

Then the little man in black, who was none other than the honourable member's agent, rushed up to the carriage window, exclaiming, "Ah! Mr. Greenwood!—you are discovered, you see! Very pretty, indeed, to think of passing through Rottenborough *incog.*,—you who are the hope and the glory of the town! Luckily a party of gentlemen—all independent electors," added the lawyer, glancing round at the ragged and half-drunken mob, "were partaking of some little wholesome refreshment together—quite accidentally—in the tavern; and thus they are blessed with an opportunity of paying their respects to their representative in our glorious Parliament!"

"Brayvo, Greenwood!" ejaculated the crowd of "gentlemen," when the little lawyer had concluded his speech.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Greenwood, thrusting his head out of the chaise-window, "you cannot conceive the delight which I experience at this most unexpected—most unlooked-for, and entirely spontaneous expression of your good feeling towards me. Gentlemen, when I behold an enlightened—an independent—a respectable—and an intelligent assembly thus coming forward to

signify an approval of my parliamentary career, I meet with an ample recompense for all my exertions and toils to maintain the interests of the great constituency of Rottenborough. Gentlemen, the eyes of the world are upon you at this moment——"

"Then the world can see in the dark without spectacles," cried one of the free and independent inhabitants of Rottenborough.

"Yes, gentlemen," continued Greenwood, unabashed by this interruption, which raised a general titter; "the eyes of the world are upon you; for when Rottenborough thus emphatically expresses itself in favour of its member, it is avowing its stanch adherence to the true principles of Conservatism. This is a great fact, gentlemen; and so long as Rottenborough remains faithful to those principles, the democratic disturbers of the public peace must look on and tremble!"

With this splendid finale, Mr. Greenwood sank back in the chaise, which immediately drove rapidly away, amidst the uproarious shouts of the ragamuffins and tatterdemalions whom the lawyer had convoked, according to Lafleur's written instructions, for the occasion.

The ragamuffins and tatterdemalions were, however, well recompensed for their trouble; for they were copiously regaled with beer and tobacco before the arrival of the honourable member; and as soon as the member had departed, a supper of boiled tripe and onion-sauce was served up to them. The entertainment concluded with a quarrel and battle amongst the convivialists, several of whom took home with them broken heads and black eyes as trophies of their prowess.

Meantime the travelling-chaise rolled along the road.

The night was beautiful, clear, and frosty; and the moon rode high in the heavens.

Newington was passed; and Mr. Greenwood was just falling into a delicious sleep, when four men, wearing masks, and enveloped in thick pilot-coats, rushed from a hedge.

The horses were stopped suddenly; and two of the ruffians presented pistols at the heads of the postillions, menacing them with instant death if they offered any resistance.

Greenwood lowered the windows of the chaise, and holding a pistol in each hand, exclaimed, "I'll shoot the first who dares approach me!"

Filippo leapt to the ground on one side, and Lafleur followed him so closely, that he fell over the Italian, one of whose pistols went off by the shock, but without doing any mischief. Before he could make an effort to rise, Lafleur struck him on the head with the butt-end of one of his weapons, and laid him senseless on his back.

Meantime, while the Lully Prig and Long Bob took charge of the postillions, as above stated, the Resurrection Man and the Buffer rushed up to the door of the chaise.

Greenwood fired point-blank at Tidkins's head but without the slightest effect.

The door was opened; and the Resurrection Man sprang into the vehicle.

Greenwood fired his second pistol; but it merely singed his assailant's hair.

Then the Member of Parliament was dragged into the road, and bound hand and foot almost in the twinkling of an eye.

This being done, the Resurrection Man hastened to search the chaise, and speedily secured the tin box.

He gave a long shrill whistle: this was a signal to announce his success; for it had been previously agreed amongst the ruffians that they should not utter a word more than might be absolutely necessary, so that their voices might not be afterwards recognised, in case suspicion fell upon them. Moreover, the Resurrection Man's voice was well known to Greenwood; and thus this precaution was not an useless one.

The four robbers and Lafleur now beat a rapid retreat towards an adjacent chalk-pit, the Buffer leading the way, and the Resurrection Man carrying the box.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

KIND FRIENDS.

We left Richard Markham at the moment when, awaking in a strange bed, he perceived that Thomas Armstrong's letter was gone!

It would be impossible to describe his grief at this discovery.

The mysterious document, which he had treasured with so much care, and concerning which such particular instructions had been left by his departed friend,—a document which seemed so intimately to regard his future welfare,—had been wrested from him!

For a few moments he remained a prey to the deepest dejection; and tears stole into his eyes.

But he was not allowed to remain long in that unpleasant reverie.

The door opened slowly; and a light step approached his couch.

He drew aside the curtain, and beheld a middle-aged lady, elegantly dressed, and with a countenance on which the Almighty had written the word "Benevolence" in characters so legible, that a savage might have read and learnt to revere them.

Advancing close up to the bed, the lady said, in a soft tone, and in the Italian language:—"Be not alarmed, Signor Markham; you are with those who will treat you as your dauntless valour and noble mind deserve."

"Where am I, madam?" asked our hero, reassured by the lady's words and manner.

"In the house of my brother, Signor Viviani, the most eminent banker in Pinalla," answered the lady.

"And how did you discover my name, Signora?" inquired Richard.

"By means of a letter which was secured in a morocco-case about your person, and is now safe in my brother's possession," returned Signora Viviani.

"A thousand thanks, lady, for that assurance—a thousand sincere and grateful thanks!" exclaimed Markham, new life as it were animating his soul.

"Hush!" cried the banker's sister, placing her finger upon her lip: "you must not give way to excitement of feelings. You have been ill—very ill."

"How long, Signora, has this illness lasted?"

"Ten days," was the reply. "You have been delirious."

"Ten days!" ejaculated Richard. "Alas! poor Morcar—what will he think? where can he be?"

"Morcar is safe and knows that you are here, Signor," said the lady. "But do not excite yourself. Providence has allowed you to suffer, for its own wise and inscrutable purposes; but it never deserts the good and great."

"Ah! lady, how can I ever thank you sufficiently for the goodness of yourself and your brother towards one who is a perfect stranger to you?" said Markham, pressing the lady's hand respectfully to his lips.

"You are not altogether so much a stranger to us as you imagine," observed the banker's sister, with a mysterious but good-natured smile. "But I will not tantalize, nor excite you by keeping you in suspense. Your deceased countryman Thomas Armstrong was my brother's intimate friend."

"Is this possible?" cried Markham, overjoyed at such welcome intelligence. "Then Providence has not indeed deserted me!"

"I will now hasten and fetch my brother to see you," said the lady. "He is burning with impatience for the moment when he can converse with you."

Signora Viviani left the room, and shortly returned, accompanied by a gentleman of about sixty, and whose countenance was as expressive of excellent qualities as her own.

"Here is our patient, brother," said the lady, with a smile: "a patient, however, only in one sense, for he has been very impatient in his queries; and now you must satisfy his curiosity in all respects."

"I am delighted to find that you are able to devote a thought to such matters, my dear young friend," exclaimed the banker, pressing both Markham's hands cordially in his own; "for as a friend do I indeed regard you," added the excellent man.

"How can I possibly have deserved such kind sympathy at your hands?" asked Richard, overpowered by so much goodness.

"Your deceased and much lamented friend Thomas Armstrong was as a brother to me, during his residence at different times in Castelcicala," answered the banker; "and he constantly corresponded with me when he was in his native country. In the letters which he wrote during the last two years of his life, he mentioned you in terms which, did I know nothing else meritorious on your part, would have induced me to welcome you as a friend—as a son. But your noble conduct in the late attempt to release Castelcicala from the sway of a tyrant, and place that excellent Prince Alberto on the ducal throne, has confirmed my good opinion of you—if any such confirmation were necessary. I learnt from Armstrong that you were generous, intelligent, and virtuous: recent events have shown that you are brave and liberal-minded."

"How rejoiced I am that my conduct in that unhappy affair merits your approval," said Richard. "I have often trembled, since the fatal day when so many brave spirits came to these coasts to meet death or imprisonment, lest the more sensible portion of the Castelcicalan community should look upon the expedition as one concocted only by selfish or insane adventurers."

"Selfish or insane!" ejaculated Viviani. "Was Grachia selfish or insane? was Morosino a mere adventurer? Oh! no—Castelcicala weeps over the bloody graves of her patriots; and thousands of tongues are familiar with the name of Richard Markham."

The countenance of our hero became animated with a glow of generous enthusiasm as these words met his ears.

"How handsome he is!" exclaimed the banker's sister. "An old woman like me may say so without impropriety," she added smiling; "and even the Princess Isabella would not be offended, did she overhear me."

"The Princess!" ejaculated Richard, surprised at this allusion to that beautiful lady.

"You must not be angry with your faithful Morcar," said the banker's sister, smiling, "if he betrayed your secret. But it was with a good motive. When he found that you were with those who were anxious to be considered in the light of your friends, he communicated to us your secret respecting the Princess, in order that we might write to her and relieve her mind of all anxiety by assuring her that you were safe and well. So I took upon myself the duty of addressing a letter to her Highness the Princess Isabella, and I thought that a little falsehood relative to your real condition would be pardonable. I assured her that you were in security and in good health, save a sprain of the right hand which had compelled you to employ a secretary; and in order that the letter might be sure to reach her, my brother enclosed it in one to his agent in London, with special directions that it might be delivered as speedily as possible. Morcar also wrote a note to his father and his wife, and addressed it to the care of some person in a part of the English capital called Saint Giles's. In a word, you need be under no anxiety relative to your friends in England."

"Excellent lady!" cried Markham; "you accumulate kindnesses so rapidly upon me, that I know not how to testify my gratitude. And, Morcar, too—how thoughtful of him! Oh! I have indeed found good friends."

"You are doubtless anxious to learn how you came into this house," said the banker. "I will tell you—for you will not allow your mind to compose itself until you know every thing. I had been to pass the day with a friend whose country seat is at a few miles' distance from Pinalla; and I was returning home in an open chaise, attended by my groom, when, in the middle of a lane which I had taken as a short cut, I was accosted by a man who seemed frantic with grief, and implored me to render assistance to his master. He spoke in English; and fortunately I understand that language tolerably well. In a word, the person who accosted me, was your dependant Morcar. He has since explained to me how you had separated at Friuli, in order to gain the Neapolitan frontier by different routes; and it seems that he was journeying along that lane, when he stumbled over a body in the path. The light of the moon speedily enabled him to recognise his master. At that moment my chaise fortunately came up to the spot. Not knowing who you were, but actuated by that feeling which would prompt me to assist any human being under such circumstances, I immediately proposed to convey you to my own house. Your dependant was overjoyed at the offer; and I desired him to accompany you. He would not tell me your real name, but when I questioned him on that point, gave a fictitious one. The poor fellow did not then know how I might be disposed towards the Constitutionalists who had survived the slaughter near Ossore. You may therefore conceive my astonishment when on my arrival at my house, I discovered a letter in a case fastened to a riband beneath your garments, as I helped to undress you. These words, '*To my dear friend, Richard Markham*,' in a handwriting well known to me, immediately excited a suspicion in my mind; and when I had procured the attendance of my physician and ascertained that there was a hope of your eventual recovery—although your wound was a serious one—I questioned Morcar more closely than before. But he would not confess that you were Richard Markham. I then showed him the letter which I had found about your person. Still he obstinately denied the fact. At length, in order to convince him that I was really sincere in my good feeling towards you, I showed him several letters from the deceased Mr. Armstrong to me, and in which you were favourably mentioned. Then he became all confidence; and I can assure you that he is a most faithful and devoted creature towards you."

While the banker was yet speaking, he drew from his pocket the morocco case containing Armstrong's letter, and laid it upon the bed.

Richard warmly pressed his hand with grateful fervour.

He then in a few words narrated the particulars of the attack made upon him by the banditti in the narrow lane, and concluded by saying, "I consider the fact of the ruffians overlooking that document when they rifled me, as another proof of heaven's especial goodness towards me; for I value this relic of my departed friend as dearly as my life."

"And you are still ignorant of its contents?" said the banker, with a smile.

Richard was about to explain the nature of the mysterious instructions which Armstrong had written on the envelope, when Viviani stopped him, saying, "I know all. Some months before his death Armstrong wrote to me his intentions concerning you; and therefore, I presume that '*when you are destitute of all resources—when adversity or a too generous heart shall have deprived you of all means of subsistence—and when your own exertions fail to supply your wants, you will open the enclosed letter. But should no circumstances of any kind deprive you of the little property which you now possess—and should you not be plunged into a state of need from which your own talents and exertions cannot relieve you,—then will you open that letter on the morning of the 10th of July, 1843, on which day you are to meet your brother.*'"

So astonished was Markham, while the banker recapitulated the *very words* of Armstrong's mysterious instructions, that he could not utter a syllable until the excellent man had finished speaking; and then he cried, in a tone of the most unfeigned surprise, "My dear sir, you know all, then?"

Signora Viviani laughed so heartily at Markham's astonishment, that her good-natured countenance became quite purple.

"Indeed, I do know all," exclaimed the banker, laughing also; "and that is not surprising, either, seeing that every farthing Armstrong has left you is in my hands. But I must not say any more on that head: indeed, I am afraid I have violated my departed friend's instructions to *me* by saying so much already. However, my dear Richard—for so you must allow me to call you, as I am a sort of guardian or trustee towards you—you will not want to open that letter until the 10th of July, 1843; for if you require money, you have only to draw a cheque upon me, and I will honour it—aye, even for ten or fifteen thousand pounds."

"Is it possible that I am awake? am I not dreaming? is this fairy-land, or Castelcicala?" said Richard. "I am overwhelmed with happy tidings and kindnesses."

Again did the good banker and his merry sister—who, though bachelor and spinster, possessed hearts overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and who felt towards Richard almost as a father and mother would feel towards their own child,—again did they

laugh heartily; until the lady remembered that their patient might be too much excited.

"And now I dare say you are anxious about your faithful Morcar," said the banker. "In truth, he is a mystery whom I cannot fathom. All I know of him is that he is most devotedly attached to you. He comes to the house every evening, and sits by your bed-side a couple of hours, or perhaps more; and then he takes his departure again. In vain have I pressed him to remain here—to live here so long as you are my guest: no—he declares that he has business on his hands; and he keeps that business a profound secret. He is always absent save during those two or three hours which he spends near you."

"And when he is here," added the banker's sister, laughing, "he will not allow a soul save himself to do any thing for you. No—he must smooth your pillow—he must raise your head, and give you your cooling drink—he must hold your hands when the delirium is on you (but, thank heaven! *that* has passed now);—in a word, no one is permitted to be your nurse save himself."

"The good, faithful creature!" cried Markham, tears standing on his long, dark, and slightly curled lashes. "Heaven grant that he be not involving himself in any difficulty."

"He seems prudent and steady," said the banker; "and those are grand qualities. Moreover, these men of Egyptian origin have strange fancies and whims. In any case, he will be more communicative to you than he is to us."

"You have now gratified my curiosity in many—many ways," said Richard; "but there is one more point——"

"You are interminable with your questions," exclaimed Signora Viviani, laughing. "Now, remember—this is the last we will answer on the present occasion, or we shall really fatigue you."

"Oh! no," returned our hero. "When the mind labours under no suspense, how soon the physical energies revive."

"Speak, then," said the banker.

"What is the present condition of Castelcicala? has it been ameliorated, or rendered more deplorable?"

The banker's countenance fell.

"My dear Richard," he replied, "strange and striking events have occurred during the last few days,—events which it pains me to recount, as it will grieve you to hear them. The Grand Duchess fled from the capital—no one knows wherefore. It is certain that she reached Montecuculi in safety; and her farther progress is a complete mystery. All traces of her cease there. But that is not all. An army of thirty thousand Austrians, Richard,—an army of foreigners has been called into the State by Angelo III. Ten days ago it crossed the Roman frontiers, and encamped beneath the walls of Montoni."

"Merciful heaven!" ejaculated Richard: "an army of occupation in the country!"

"Alas! that I should tell the truth when I say so," continued the banker, in a melancholy tone. "The Grand Duke intends to enforce his despotism by means of foreign bayonets. Four thousand Austrians moved on as far as Abrantani, where they are placed under the command of Captain-General Santa Croce, that province being considered the most unsettled, and the one exhibiting the greatest inclination to raise the standard of liberty. But Montoni, Richard,—Montoni, our capital, has set a glorious example. The same day that the Austrians appeared beneath its walls, its inhabitants rose against the Grand Duke and his infamous Ministers. The Municipal Council, with the Mayor at its head, declared its sittings permanent, and proclaimed itself a Committee of Government. The garrison, consisting of ten thousand brave men, pronounced in favour of the Committee. The Grand Duke and his Ministers fled to the Austrian camp, and took refuge with Marshal Herbertstein, the generalissimo of the foreign army of occupation. And now, Richard—now the Grand Duke and his Austrian allies are besieging the capital of Castelcicala!"

"Alas! these are terrible tidings," said Richard, astounded at all he had just heard, and at the rapidity with which so many important events had occurred.

"Terrible tidings they must be to one who, like you, has fought for Castelcicalan liberty," continued the banker. "Oh! that I should have lived to see my country thus oppressed—thus subject to a foreign yoke! But I have not yet told you all. The Lord High Admiral of Castelcicala has declared in favour of the Grand Duke, and has instituted a blockade, with all his fleet, at the mouth of the Ferretti, so that no provisions may be conveyed into the besieged capital. The garrison of Montoni is, however, behaving nobly; and as yet the Austrians have made no impression upon the city. But a famine must ensue in Montoni;—and then, all hope will be lost!"

"And the other great cities of Castelcicala?" asked Richard: "do they make no demonstration in this terrible crisis?"

"Alas—no! Martial law everywhere prevails; and had we not a humane and merciful Captain-General at the head of the province of Pinalla, our condition here would be desperate indeed. You are doubtless aware that all the Constitutionalists who were taken prisoners at the battle of Ossore, are now prisoners in Estella——"

Signor Viviani was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who came to announce that Morcar requested admittance to the sick-room.

The kind-hearted banker and his no less excellent sister withdrew, in order to allow the gipsy an opportunity of free and unrestrained intercourse with his master.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

ESTELLA.

Nothing could exceed the joy which the faithful Morcar experienced on finding his master restored to consciousness, and evidently in a fair way towards convalescence.

The reader may imagine with what enthusiasm the gipsy dwelt upon the kindness of Signor Viviani and his sister; and when the grateful fellow had exhausted all his powers of speech in depicting the excellent qualities of these good people, he begged Markham to acquaint him with his adventures since they separated at Friuli.

Richard related those particulars which are already known to the reader; and he did not forget to reproach Morcar for having refused to accept his share of the purse at the tavern in the suburbs of the above-mentioned town.

"I knew that I should not require the gold, sir," answered Morcar; "for an individual of my race finds friends and brethren all over the world. Nor was I an exception to that rule. At a short distance from Friuli I fell in with an encampment of *Cingani*—for so the gipsies are called in Italy; and I was immediately welcomed in a way becoming my position as the heir to the sovereign of the Zingarees of Great Britain."

"But how did you render yourself intelligible to your Italian brethren?" asked Richard, with a good-natured smile at the solemn manner in which his follower had uttered the concluding portion of his observations.

"We have a language peculiar to ourselves, sir," replied Morcar; "and although it is not very rich in words, it nevertheless contains sufficient to enable us to converse freely with each other. I travelled with the Cingani belonging to the encampment; and when we arrived in the neighbourhood of Pinalla, I took leave of them with the intention of hastening over the frontier to Naples. God ordained that I should strike into the same path which you were pursuing; and I could not have been many yards behind you, when you were attacked by the banditti in the manner you have just explained to me. You may conceive my grief when I found you lying senseless in that gloomy lane, and when the moonlight, falling on your countenance, showed me who you were. Had it not been for the accidental arrival of Signor Viviani on the spot, and at that particular moment, I cannot say what would have become of us. You know the rest."

"Not entirely, my dear Morcar," said Richard. "I do not wish to penetrate into your secrets; but I am anxious to learn wherefore you refused the hospitality of Signor Viviani's mansion?"

"When I found that you were amongst friends, sir," answered Morcar, "and that there was no longer any necessity for me to proceed to Naples, I returned to my brethren, the Cingani. I have dwelt with them ever since; but have occasionally called to inquire after you."

"Nay, my faithful friend," exclaimed Richard, taking the gipsy's hand, "do not depreciate your own goodness of heart. I have learnt how regularly you came to pass the evening by my side, and how kindly you ministered to me. Heaven grant that the day may arrive when I shall be enabled to reward you adequately."

"You must not talk any more at present, sir," said the gipsy. "If you will only remain quiet for a few days, you will be quite well; and then—"

"And then, what?" asked Richard, seeing that the gipsy checked himself.

"And then we can deliberate on the best course to adopt," replied Morcar.

Our hero saw that his dependant had some plan in his head; but he did not choose to press him on the subject.

A fortnight had elapsed since Richard Markham awoke to consciousness in the house of the generous Castelcicalan banker.

This interval had produced a marvellous change in his physical condition.

A powerful constitution, aided by excellent medical advice, and the unremitting attention of his kind friends, enabled him to triumph over the severity of the treatment which he had experienced at the hands of the banditti.

He was now completely restored to health—with the exception of a partial weakness and pallor which naturally followed a long confinement to his couch.

But by means of gentle exercise in the garden belonging to the banker's house, he was rapidly recovering his strength, and the hues of youth again began to bloom upon his cheeks.

It was on the 26th of December, 1840, that he had a long conversation with the banker and Morcar. A certain project was the topic of this debate,—a project for which Morcar had arranged all the preliminaries during Richard's illness, and which our hero now burned to carry into execution. Signor Viviani raised but one objection; and that was only for the purpose of delaying, not renouncing, the scheme in view. He feared lest Markham's health might not be sufficiently restored to enable him to embark so soon in the enterprise. But this doubt was completely over-ruled by his young friend, whose enthusiastic soul could not brook delay in a matter that was so near and dear to his heart.

The deliberations of the three individuals who formed this solemn council lasted for four hours, and concluded at sunset. Richard then wrote several letters, which he sealed and placed in the hands of Signor Viviani, saying, "You will forward these only in case of my death."

The banker wrung our hero's hand cordially, exclaiming, "No, my generous—my gallant-hearted young friend; something within me seems to say that there will be no need to dispatch those letters to your friends in England; for proud success shall be yours!"

Signora Viviani entered the room at this moment, and in a tone of deep anxiety, inquired the result of the deliberation.

"The expedition is to take place," replied the banker, solemnly.

"Ah! Signor Markham," exclaimed the lady; "have you well weighed the contingencies? Do not imagine that I would attempt to dissuade you from so generous,—so noble an undertaking!—Oh! no,—I should be the last to do so. And yet—"

"My dear madam," interrupted Richard, with a smile, "I appreciate all your kind anxiety in my behalf; but I must fulfil my duty towards those unfortunate creatures who embarked in an enterprise of which I was one of the chiefs."

"It would be improper in me to urge a single argument against so noble a purpose," said the banker's sister. "May God prosper you, Richard."

The old lady wiped the tears from her eyes as she spoke.

It was now quite dusk; and our hero signified his intention of taking his departure. He confided the morocco case containing Armstrong's letter, to his excellent friend, the banker, and at the same time expressed his deep gratitude for all the kindness he had experienced at the hands of that gentleman and his sister.

"Do not talk thus, my noble boy," ejaculated the old man; "it makes me melancholy—as if I were never to see you more; whereas, I feel convinced that there are many, many happy days in store for us all! Here, Richard—take this pocket-book: it contains bank-notes to some amount. But if you require more, hesitate not to draw upon me for any sum that you need. And now, farewell—and may all good angels watch over you!"

Signora Viviani, on her side, felt as acutely in parting with our hero as if she were separating from a near relative—so much had his amiable qualities, generous disposition, and noble character endeared him alike to the banker and his kind-hearted sister.

And now the door of that hospitable mansion closed behind Richard Markham, who was accompanied by his faithful Morcar.

They pursued their way, the gipsy acting as the guide, through the streets of Pinalla, and passing out of the town by the north-eastern gate, followed the course of the river Usiglio for upwards of two miles and a-half.

The night was clear with the pure lustre of the chaste moon; and the air was mild, though fresh enough to be invigorating.

At length they reached the confines of a forest, into which Morcar plunged, closely followed by his master.

They now continued their way amidst an almost total darkness, so thick was the foliage of the evergreens through the mazes of which they pursued their course.

Presently lights glimmered among the trees; and in a few minutes more, Morcar conducted our hero into a wide open area, where a spacious gipsy-encampment was established.

Markham caught his companion by the arm, and held him back for a few moments while he contemplated that scene so strange—so wild—and yet so picturesque.

A space, probably an acre in extent, had been cleared in the midst of the forest; and the tall trees all around constituted a natural barrier, defining the limits of the arena formed for the encampment.

A hundred tents, of the rude gipsy fashion, swarmed with life. Dark countenances bent over the cheerful fires, above which mighty caldrons were simmering; and the lurid light was reflected from dark eyes. The tall athletic forms of men and the graceful figures of women, were thrown out into strong relief by the lambent flames; and the sounds of many voices fell in confused murmurs upon the ears.

"There are four hundred brave men, who will welcome you as their leader, sir!" exclaimed Morcar, stretching forth his arm towards the encampment.

"Oh! my dear friend," cried Markham, all the enthusiasm of his soul aroused by the hopes which those words conveyed: "by what magic were you enabled to collect this band in so short a time?"

"My influence as the son of Zingary was sufficient to induce them to make our cause their own, sir," replied Morcar; "and the extensive organization of the fraternity was already well calculated to gather them thus together. I have moreover informed you that they are all well armed; for their funds have been devoted to the purchase of the weapons and ammunition necessary for the undertaking."

"Which outlay it will be my care immediately to reimburse," said Richard. "But you speak of me as the chief of this band, Morcar? No—that honour is reserved for you, whose energies and influence alone could have brought those four hundred men together."

"That may not be, sir," returned Morcar, seriously. "These men have assembled with the hope that *you* will be their chief: it is *your* name which is enthusiastically spoken of in Castelcicala; and it is *your* presence which will animate this gipsy-band with courage. Come—let me introduce you to the chiefs of the tribe."

"Is the King amongst them?" asked Richard.

"No, sir: the King of the Cingani, or Italian gipsies, is at present in Tuscany; but the chiefs, to whom I will now conduct you, are his relations."

Morcar led our hero through the mazes of the encampment to a tent more conveniently contrived and spacious than the rest; and as they passed along, the groups of Cingani surveyed Richard with curiosity and respect.

They evidently divined who he was.

In the tent to which Morcar conducted his master, three elderly men were seated upon mats, smoking their pipes, and discoursing gravely upon political affairs.

They welcomed Richard with respectful warmth, and instantly assigned to him the place of honour at the upper end of the tent.

A council was then held; but as the results will explain the decision to which the members came, it is not necessary to detail the deliberations on this occasion.

We must, however, observe that Markham accepted the responsible and difficult post of commandant of the entire force; and he immediately handed over to the gipsies an amount in bank-notes equivalent to a thousand pounds, for the purpose of reimbursing the outlay already effected by the Cingani chiefs, and of supplying an advance of pay to all the members of the band.

At about eleven o'clock the fires were all extinguished throughout the encampment; and, sentinels having been posted at short intervals round the open space, those who were not on duty laid down to rest.

At day-break the scene was once more all bustle and life: the morning meal was hastily disposed of; and Richard then issued the necessary orders for breaking up the encampment.

It was arranged that the men who bore arms should proceed by forced marches towards Estella; while the women and children might follow at their own pace.

The farewells between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, fathers and children, sons and mothers, took place in silence, but in profound sincerity; and the corps, consisting of four hundred men, all well armed with muskets and cutlasses, and some few with axes also, was soon in motion amidst the dense mazes of the forest.

Markham, with a sword by his side and a pair of pistols in the breast of his coat, advanced in front of the column, attended by the three chiefs and Morcar.

It was at day-break on the 29th of December, that the sentinels posted on the southern bastion of the citadel of Estella, observed a small but compact body of men suddenly emerge from the forest which stretches along the Usiglio, from the neighbourhood of Pinalla almost up to the very walls of Estella.

An alarm was given throughout the citadel; for the beams of the rising sun glistened on the weapons of the small force that was approaching; and although no uniform attire characterised the corps, it was easy to perceive that it advanced with a hostile intention.

But ere the garrison could be got under arms, Richard's followers had already cut an opening in the palisades which protected the glacis, and were advancing up the inclined plane towards the rampart. On they went, their youthful leader at their head: the glacis was passed—the covered way was gained—and then the sentinels on the bastion discharged their muskets at the besiegers.

Two of the Cingani fell dead, and one was very slightly wounded.

"Follow me!" cried our hero; and rushing along the covered way, he reached the wooden bridge which communicated with the interior of the citadel.

And now commenced an interval of fearful peril, but for which Markham was not unprepared.

The soldiers of the garrison had by this time flocked to the rampart of the bastion, and commenced a terrific fire upon the besiegers. The latter, however, replied to it with rapidity and effect, while half a dozen of the foremost cut down with their axes a huge beam from the wooden bridge, and, under the superintendence of Markham, used it as a battering-ram at the postern-gate.

The Cingani, however, lost eight or nine of their men while this task was in progress; and their position, exposed as they were to a murderous fire, would soon have become untenable, had not the postern-gate shortly yielded to the engine employed against it.

Then, with his drawn sword in his hand, Markham precipitated himself into the citadel, closely followed, and well supported by the brave and faithful Cingani.

The tunnel beneath the rampart, into which the postern opened, was disputed for some minutes with desperate valour on both sides; but our hero was so ably backed by Morcar, the three chiefs, and the foremost of his corps, that he eventually drove the soldiers before him.

"Constitutional freedom and Prince Alberto!" shouted Richard, as he rushed onward, and entered the court of the citadel.

The cry was taken up by the Cingani; and although the conflict continued in the court for nearly half an hour longer, it was evident that the note of liberty had touched a chord in the hearts of the Castelcicalan soldiers, for they resisted but feebly and, though superior in numbers to the besiegers, rapidly gave way.

On the farther side of the court stood a large but low and straggling building, the windows of which were defended with iron bars.

"Friends," exclaimed Markham, pointing with his blood-stained sword towards that structure, "there is the prison of the patriots!"

These words operated like an electric shock upon our hero's followers; and they rushed onward, driving the soldiers like chaff before them.

The gate of the prison was reached, and speedily forced: Richard entered the gloomy stronghold, and the work of liberation commenced.

Five hundred Castelcicalan patriots were restored to freedom in a short half-hour; and when they recognised in their deliverer him who had been one of the chiefs of the first expedition, and whose valour was so signalised in the battle near Ossore, their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

The name of "MARKHAM" was shouted to the sky: the patriots flocked around him, with heart-felt thanks and the most fervent outpourings of their gratitude; and they hailed him as a deliverer and a chief.

There was not, however, much time for congratulation or explanation. Though the garrison of the citadel was weak, that of the town itself was strong; for the Captain-General had concentrated the greater part of his force in the heart of Estella in order to over-awe the inhabitants. This fact had been previously gleaned by the spies whom Morcar had sent out while Richard was yet an inmate of the banker's house; and hence the attack upon the most exposed part of the citadel in preference to an attempt upon the town.

Richard was now master of the citadel. A portion of the garrison had fled into Estella; but by far the larger part, about three hundred in number, declared its readiness to join the cause of liberty. This offer was joyfully accepted. The armoury was then visited, and arms were distributed to the patriots who had been delivered from their dungeons.

Thus Richard Markham found himself at the head of an effective force of nearly twelve hundred men—a triumphant position, which had fortunately cost no more than about twenty lives on the side of the Cingani.

It was now mid-day; and while his forces were obtaining refreshment, and putting the citadel in a proper state of defence, in case of an attack on the part of the Captain-General of Estella, Richard called a council of the three Cingani chiefs, Morcar, the leading patriots whom he had released, and the officers of the garrison-troops that had declared in favour of "Constitutional liberty and Prince Alberto."

At this council it was resolved that Richard should issue a proclamation to the inhabitants of Estella, declaring the real objects for

which the standard of civil liberty had been raised—namely, to release the imprisoned patriots, to expel the Austrians from the land, and to place Prince Alberto upon the ducal throne.

This resolution was carried into effect; and the document was forwarded to the Mayor of Estella. The corporation was immediately assembled; and while the Captain-General prepared to attack the citadel, the municipal body remained in close deliberation.

Three hours elapsed; when a rumour prevailed throughout the town that the troops had refused to leave their barracks at the command of the Captain-General. This proof of sympathy with the successful Constitutionalists decided the opinions of the members of the corporation; and the Mayor, attended by several of the municipal authorities, waited upon Richard Markham and presented him with the keys of the city.

No sooner were these tidings bruited throughout Estella, than the Captain-General, the Political Prefect, and one regiment which remained faithful to the Grand Duke's cause, left the town with extraordinary precipitation: the remainder of the garrison sent a deputation to Markham's head quarters in the citadel to announce their readiness to join his cause; and at seven o'clock in the evening of that eventful day the roar of the artillery on the walls of Estella saluted the tri-coloured flag of liberty which was hoisted on the Town-Hall.

By this grand and decisive blow, Richard possessed himself of one of the principal towns of Castelcicala, and found himself backed by a force of three thousand men.

His first care, when order and tranquillity were restored that evening, was to forward a courier with a letter to Signor Viviani at Pinalla. That letter not only detailed the events of the day, but contained a request that the banker would lose no time in writing an account of the proceedings direct to Prince Alberto (under the name of Count Alteroni) in England. Richard also enclosed a letter to be forwarded to Mr. Monroe, and one from Morcar to Eva.

The corporation had assembled in the Town Hall, immediately after the tri-coloured flag was hoisted, and remained in deliberation until past ten o'clock. The Mayor then published a proclamation in which there were three clauses. The first declared the sittings of the municipal body permanent, under the title of "Committee of Administration for the Province of Estella." The second nominated Richard Markham General-in-chief of the army of that province. The third called upon all good and faithful Castelcicalan patriots to take up arms in the cause of Constitutional liberty and Prince Alberto, and against the Austrian army of occupation.

A copy of this proclamation was forwarded to Richard Markham, who highly approved of the first and last clauses, and accepted the rank conferred upon him by the second.

Early on the following morning uniforms, taken from the store-rooms in the arsenal, were distributed amongst the Cingani and the patriots who had been liberated; and Richard then made his entry into Estella, in compliance with the request of the corporation.

Wearing the uniform of a General-officer, and mounted upon a handsome charger, our hero never appeared to greater advantage.

The garrison of the town lined the streets, and presented arms to the youthful commander whose extraordinary skill and prowess had so materially contributed to the victory of the preceding day, and who was hailed as a champion raised up by Providence to deliver Castelcicala from the tyranny under which it groaned.

He was attended by two officers whom he had appointed his *aides-de-camp*, and by the faithful Morcar, whom nothing could induce to accept any definite rank, but who, in the uniform of a private, was proud to follow his valiant master.

The windows were crowded with faces, anxious to obtain a glimpse of the youthful hero; and while bright eyes shone upon his way, fair hands waved handkerchiefs or threw nosegays of exotics and artificial flowers from the casements.

The bells rang merrily; the artillery saluted the entrance of the General into the town; the crowds in the streets welcomed him with enthusiastic shouts; and the civic authorities, in their official robes, received him as he alighted at the Town-Hall.

There he was complimented on his gallant deeds, and invited to partake of a sumptuous banquet in the evening.

But Richard's answer was firm though respectful.

"Gentlemen," he said, "pardon me if I decline your great kindness. There remains so much to be done, to restore happiness to Castelcicala, that I should deem myself unworthy of your confidence, did I waste valuable time in festivity. A detachment of the Austrian army occupies and overawes the province of Abrantani: in two hours, with your permission, I propose to set out in that direction with all the forces that you will spare me. Should Providence prosper my arms in this new expedition, my course is simple. I shall proceed to Montoni, and either deliver the capital from the besieging force, or perish beneath its walls."

This short but pithy speech was received with enthusiastic cheers by the municipal body.

"Go, sir," said the Mayor, when silence was obtained once more, "and fulfil your grand mission. Take with you the force that you deem necessary for your purposes; and it shall be *our* duty to supply you with a treasury-chest that will not be indifferently furnished. Go, sir: God has sent you to us in the time of our bitter need; and you are destined to deliver Castelcicala from its tyrant."

Markham bowed, and withdrew.

His return to the citadel was a signal for the renewal of that enthusiasm which had greeted his entrance into the town.

But he was not proud! No—he had no room in his heart for pride: hope—delicious, burning, joyous hope,—the hope of accomplishing his mighty aims and earning the hand of Isabella as his reward,—this was the only sentiment which filled his soul!

On his arrival at the citadel once more, he issued immediate orders to prepare for a march. He proposed to leave a garrison of one thousand men in Estella, and take two thousand with him; for he calculated that this number would be considerably increased, by volunteers, on his way to Abrantani.

The evident rapidity with which he intended his movements to be characterised, created a most favourable impression not only amongst the inhabitants of Estella, but also with the troops under his command; and though they all deemed him eminently worthy of the post to which he had been raised, yet few foresaw the future greatness of that hero who was destined to take his place amongst the most brilliant warriors of the age.

It was at two o'clock in the afternoon that the Constitutional army, consisting of two thousand men, defiled through the western gate of the citadel, towards the bridge over the Usiglio. A squadron of four hundred cavalry led the way: next came the corps of Cingani; then the horse-artillery, with twelve field-pieces; next the liberated patriots; and the rear-guard consisted of the regular infantry of the garrison.

As soon as the river was crossed, Richard formed his little army into three columns, and then commenced a rapid march towards Villabella, which he knew to be well affected in favour of the Constitutional cause.

But while he was leading a gallant band over the fertile plains of Castelcicala, incidents deserving notice occurred in his native land far away.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

ANOTHER NEW YEAR'S DAY.

It was the 1st of January, 1841.

If there be any hour in the life of man when he ought to commune with his own heart, that proper interval of serious reflection is to be found on New Year's Day.

Then, to the rightly constituted mind, the regrets for the past will serve as finger-posts and guides to the hopes of the future.

The heathen mythology depicted Janus with two faces, looking different ways:—so let the human heart, when on the first day of January, it stands between two years, retrospect carefully over the one that has gone, and combine all its solemn warnings for use and example in the new one which has just commenced.

This also is the day that recalls, with additional impressiveness, the memory of those dear relatives and friends whose mortal forms have been swept away by the viewless and voiceless stream of Time.

Nor less do fond parents think, amidst tears and prayers, of their sons who are absent in the far-off places of the earth,—fighting the battles of their country on the burning plains of India, or steering their way across the pathless solitudes of the ocean.

But, alas! little reck the wealthy and great for those whose arms defend them, or whose enterprise procures them all the bounties of the earth.

An oligarchy has cramped the privileges and monopolised the rights of a mighty nation.

Behold the effects of its infamous Poor-Laws;—contemplate the results of the more atrocious Game-Laws;—mark the consequences of the Corn-Laws.

The Poor-Laws! Not even did the ingenuity of the Spanish or Italian Inquisitions conceive a more effectual method of deliberate torture and slow death, than the fearful system of mental-abasement and gradient starvation invented by England's legislators. When the labourer can toil for the rich no longer, away with him to the workhouse! When the old man, who has contributed for half a century to the revenue of the country, is overtaken by sudden adversity at an age which paralyses his energies, away with him to the workhouse! When the poor widow, whose sons have fallen in the ranks of battle or in defence of the wooden walls of England, is deprived of her natural supporters, away with her to the workhouse! The workhouse is a social dung-heap on which the wealthy and great fling those members of the community whose services they can no longer render available to their selfish purposes.

The Game-Laws! Never was a more atrocious monopoly than that which reserves the use of certain birds of the air or animals of the earth to a small and exclusive class. The Almighty gave man "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth;" and those who dare to monopolise any of these, to the prejudice of their fellow-creatures, fly in the face of the Lord of all! The Game-Laws have fabricated an offence which fills our prisons—as if there were not already crimes enough to separate men from their families and plunge them into loathsome dungeons. That offence is one of human construction, and exists only in certain countries: it is not a crime against God—nor is it deemed such in many enlightened states. The selfish pleasures of a miserably small minority demand the protection of a statute which is a fertilising source of oppression, wretchedness, ruin, and demoralization. The Game-Laws are a rack whereon the aristocracy loves to behold its victims writhing in tortures, and where the sufferers are compelled to acknowledge as a heinous crime a deed which has in reality no moral turpitude associated with it.

The Corn-Laws! Were the Russian to boast of his freedom, Common Sense would point to Siberia and to the knout, and laugh in his face. When the Englishman vaunts the glory of his country's institutions, that same Common Sense comes forward and throws the Corn-Laws in his teeth. What! liberty in connexion with the vilest monopoly that ever mortal policy conceived? Impossible! England manufactures articles which all the civilised world requires; and other states yield corn in an abundance that defies the possibility of home consumption. And yet an inhuman selfishness has declared that England shall not exchange her manufactures for that superfluous produce. No—the manufactures may decay in the warehouses here, and the grain abroad may be thrown to the swine, sooner than a miserable oligarchy will consent to abandon one single principle of its shameless monopoly. The Corn-Laws are a broom which sweeps all the grain on the threshing-floor into one corner for the use of the rich, but which leaves the chaff scattered every where about for the millions of poor to use as best they may.

The aristocracy of England regards the patience of the masses as a bow whose powers of tension are unlimited: but the day must come, sooner or later, when those who thus dare to trifle with this generous elasticity will be struck down by the violence of the recoil.

Although our legislators—trembling at what they affect to sneer at under the denomination of "the march of intellect"—obstinately refuse to imitate enlightened France by instituting a system of national education,—nevertheless, the millions of this country are now instructing themselves!

Honour to the English mechanic—honour to the English operative: each alike seeks to taste of the tree of learning, "whose root is bitter, but whose fruits are sweet!"

Thank God, no despotism—no tyranny can arrest the progress of that mighty intellectual movement which is now perceptible

amongst the industrious millions of these realms.

And how excellent are the principles of that self-instruction which now tends to elevate the moral condition of the country. It is not confined within the narrow limits which churchmen would impose: it embraces the sciences—the arts—all subjects of practical utility,—its aim being to model the mind on the solid basis of Common Sense.

To the millions thus enlightened, Religion will appear in all its purity, and the objects of Government in all their simplicity. The holy Christian worship will cease to be regarded as an apology for endowing a Church with enormous revenues; and political administration must no longer be considered as a means of rendering a small portion of the community happy and prosperous to the utter prejudice of the vast remainder.

There breathes not a finer specimen of the human race than a really enlightened and liberal-minded Englishman. But if *he* be deserving of admiration and applause, who has received his knowledge from the lips of a paid preceptor—how much more worthy of praise and respect is *the self-instructed mechanic*!

But to resume our narrative.

It was the 1st of January, 1841.

The time-piece on the mantel in Mr. Greenwood's study had just struck two in the afternoon.

That gentleman himself was pacing the apartment in an agitated manner.

His handsome dressing-gown of oriental pattern was not arranged, with the usual contrived air of negligence, to display the beautiful shirt-front, over which hung the gold chain of his Breguet-watch:—on the contrary, it had evidently been hurried on without the least regard to effect.

The writing-table was heaped with a confused pile of letters and accounts—not thrown together for show, but lying in the actual disorder in which they had been tossed aside after a minute investigation.

Though not absolutely slovenly in his present appearance, Mr. Greenwood had certainly neglected his toilet on that day; and the state of his room moreover proved that he was too much absorbed in serious affairs to devote time to the minor considerations of neatness and the strict propriety of order.

There was a cloud upon his brow; and his manner was restless and unsettled.

"Curses—eternal curses upon that Lafleur!" he exclaimed aloud, as he walked up and down with uneven steps. "To think that I should have lost so much at one blow! Oh! it nearly drives me mad—mad! If it had only been the twenty thousand pounds of which the black-hearted French villain and his confederates plundered me, I might have snapped my fingers at Fortune who thus vented her temporary spite upon me! But the enormous amount I lost in addition, by failing to pour that sum of English notes and gold into circulation in the French capital,—the almost immediate fall in the rates of exchange, and the fluctuation of the French funds,—Oh! *there* it was that I was so seriously injured. Fifty thousand pounds snatched from me as it were in a moment,—fifty thousand pounds of hard money—my own money! And the thirty thousand pounds that I had first sent over to Paris were so judiciously laid out! My combinations were admirable: I should have been a clear gainer of five-and-twenty thousand, had not that accursed robbery taken place! May the villain Lafleur die in a charnel-house—may he perish the most miserable of deaths!"

Mr. Greenwood ground his teeth with rage as he uttered these horrible maledictions.

He did not, however, recall to mind that Lafleur was an honest man when he entered his service;—he did not pause to reflect upon all the intrigues, machinations, plots, duplicities, and villanies, in which he had employed his late valet,—thus gradually initiating him in those paths which could scarcely have led to any other result than the point in which they had actually terminated—the robbery of the master by the servant whom he had thus tutored.

"The villain!" continued Greenwood. "And I was so kind to him—constantly increasing his wages and making him presents! Such confidence as I put in him, too! Filippo, whom I did not trust to half the same extent—save in my intrigues with women—is stanch and faithful to me!"

He paused and glanced towards the time-piece.

"Half-past two; and Tomlinson does not come! What *can* detain him? Surely that affair cannot have gone wrong also? If so——"

And Greenwood's countenance became as dark and lowering as the sky ere the explosion of the storm.

In a few moments a double-knock at the door echoed through the house.

"Here's Tomlinson!" ejaculated Greenwood; and with sovereign command over himself, he composed his features and assumed his wonted ease of manner.

The stock-broker now entered the room.

"You are an hour behind your time, Tomlinson," said Greenwood, shaking him by the hand.

"I could not come before," was the answer: "I was detained on your business."

"What news?" asked Greenwood, scarcely able to conceal his profound anxiety.

"Bad," replied Tomlinson. "You have sent sixteen thousand pounds to look after the fifty you have already lost. Fortunately you are a rich man, and can stand reverses of this kind. Besides, one who speculates so enormously as you have done of late, must meet with occasional losses. For my part, I should advise you to leave Spanish alone. It seems that you are doomed to fail in your ventures in the foreign securities:—first, your French scheme was totally ruined by the villany of your servant; and now your Spanish one, so far from enabling you to retrieve your losses, has increased them."

This long speech enabled Greenwood to recover from the shock which the announcement of a new reverse had produced.

"My dear Tomlinson," he said, "I am resolved to follow up my speculations in Spanish. The private information I received from an intimate friend of the Spanish Ambassador is correct—I am convinced it is; and I am sure that Queen Christina, by the advice of Espartero, will appropriate a sum to pay the interest on the passives. The announcement must be made in a few days. Of this I am certain. But all my resources are locked up for the present:—in fact, I do not hesitate to tell *you*, Tomlinson, that I have over-speculated of late. Still—remember—I *have* plenty of means remaining; but they are not instantly available."

"What, then, do you propose to do?" inquired the stock-broker.

"You have raised yourself during the past year to a confidential position in the City, Tomlinson," continued Greenwood: "and people

no longer remember your bankruptcy."

"But I do," observed the stock-broker bitterly.

"Oh! that is nothing," exclaimed Greenwood. "I was about to say that you could probably borrow me fifteen or twenty thousand on my bond—say for three months."

"I doubt it," returned Tomlinson. "You have no mercantile establishment—you are known as a great speculator——"

"And as a great capitalist, I flatter myself," added Greenwood, playing with his watch-chain in the easy complacent manner which had so characterised him until lately.

"That you *were* a capitalist, there can be no doubt," said Tomlinson, in his usual quiet way; "but ill news fly fast—and your losses ——"

"Are already known in the City, you mean?" exclaimed Greenwood, with difficulty concealing his vexation. "I care not a fig for that, Tomlinson. I have ample resources left; but, as I ere now observed, they are not immediately available."

"I understand you. It is well known that you accommodate the members of the aristocracy and heirs-expectant with loans; I presume that you have a mass of their bills, bonds, and acknowledgments? Now if you were to deposit them as collateral security, I know where I could obtain you an equivalent loan in twelve hours."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Greenwood: then, after a moment's pause, he said, "And you think there can be no difficulty in managing the business in that way?"

"None," answered the stock-broker.

Again Greenwood appeared to reflect.

"And yet," he observed, "all these pecuniary accommodations of which you spoke, are strictly confidential; and I dare not violate ——"

"You know best, Greenwood," said Tomlinson, coolly. "At the same time, I can assure you that my friend will not betray you. The whole thing lies in a nut-shell: you deposit, say twenty thousand pounds' worth of securities, for a loan of that amount, to be repaid in three months; you redeem the documents by the day appointed, and none of your aristocratic debtors will be one whit the wiser. The transaction could only become known to them if you failed to refund the money, in which case the holder of the documents would send them into the market."

"I comprehend," said Greenwood. "Well—I have no objection to the arrangement. When will you ascertain whether your friend will advance the money?"

"This afternoon," returned Tomlinson; "and should the reply be in the affirmative—of which I have no doubt—I will make an appointment for four to-morrow."

"Be it so," cried Greenwood. "You will, perhaps, send me word between five and six this evening."

"I will not fail," said the stock-broker.

"Any thing new in the City?"

"Nothing particular."

"And your late cashier—what has become of him?" inquired Greenwood.

"He is still living in an obscure street in Bethnal-Green," was the answer. "The poor old man never stirs abroad; and his health is failing fast."

"Ah! it will be a good thing when he is gone altogether," said Greenwood. "If he had had to do with me, I should have shipped him to New Zealand or Van Diemen's Land long ago."

Tomlinson turned away in disgust, and took his leave.

Greenwood never moved from his seat until he heard the front door close behind the stock-broker.

Then he started from his chair, and all his apparent composure vanished.

"Sixteen thousand pounds more gone!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse, hollow tone, while he clenched his fists with rage. "Loss upon loss! All this is enough to ruin any man! And I—who have been even far more unfortunate of late than I chose to admit to Tomlinson! Nothing short of one bold and successful hit can now retrieve my tottering fortunes. Securities for twenty thousand pounds, indeed! Ha! ha! I have not bills nor bonds in my possession to the amount of three thousand!"—and he laughed wildly. "But I *will* have them, though—aye, and such ones as shall fully serve my purposes."

Then he paced the room in a singularly agitated manner.

"Yes—one more bold stroke, and I shall retrieve myself," he continued. "My good star cannot have altogether deserted me. No—no! These vicissitudes are only temporary. Accursed Lafleur! To think that he should have served me thus! Instead of proceeding to Paris—with the means of following up those schemes which I had combined so well, and in which I had already risked so much—but with such absolute certainties of immense gain,—instead of pursuing my career of success,—to be plundered—robbed at the last moment—and compelled to return to London to raise fresh funds! Then, when in four days I was prepared with the necessary sum once more—with another twenty thousand pounds—to receive letters which convinced me that the delay was fatal, and that all was lost! Yes—Fortune did indeed persecute me then! But I will be even with her yet. My information concerning the Spanish debt is accurate; and on that ground I can build a fortune far more colossal than the one I have lost. Shall I hesitate, then, in obtaining this money through Tomlinson's agency? No—no!"

Having thus buoyed himself up with those hopes which invariably urge on the gambler—whether at the actual gaming-table or in the public funds (for there is little difference in a moral light between the two modes of speculation),—to put down fresh stakes on the chance aimed at, Greenwood recovered his wonted calmness.

He busied himself in arranging his papers, and restoring neatness to his writing-table.

Thus passed the time until six o'clock, when Filippo entered the room with a letter.

It was from Tomlinson.

Greenwood tore it open: the contents were favourable. The stock-broker's friend had agreed to advance any sum up to twenty-five thousand pounds on the terms proposed, and had promised to observe the strictest secrecy in the transaction. "The rest now depends upon myself!" ejaculated Greenwood. "Fortune has not altogether deserted me."

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

THE NEW CUT.

At nine o'clock on the same evening, Mr. Greenwood, muffled in a cloak, alighted from a hackney-cab in the Waterloo Road at the corner of the New Cut.

That wide thoroughfare which connects the Waterloo and Blackfriars' Roads, is one of the most busy and bustling, after its own fashion, in all London.

Nowhere are the shops of a more miscellaneous nature: nowhere are the pathways so thronged with the stalls and baskets of itinerant venders.

The ingenuity of those petty provision-dealers adapts the spoilt articles of the regular fishmongers and butchers to serviceable purposes in the free market of the New Cut. The fish is cut in slices and fried in an oil or butter whose rancid taste obviates the putrid flavour and smell of the comestible; and the refuse scraps from the butchers shops are chopped up to form a species of sausage-balls called "faggots." Then the grease, in which the racy slices of fish and savoury compounds of lights and liver have been alike cooked, serves to fry large rounds of bread, which, when thus prepared, are denominated "sop in the pan." Of course these culinary refinements are prepared by the venders in their own cellars or garrets hard by; but when conveyed to the miscellaneous market in the New Cut, the luxuries impart a greasy and sickening odour to the air.

It is perfectly wonderful to behold the various methods in which the poor creatures in that thoroughfare endeavour to obtain an honest livelihood; and although their proceedings elicit a smile—still, God pity them! they had better ply their strange trades thus than rob or beg!

There may be seen, for instance, a ragged urchin holding a bundle of onions in his hand, and shouting at the top of his shrill voice, "Here's a ha'porth!"—and, no matter how finely dressed the passer-by, he is sure to thrust the onions under his or her very nose, still vociferating, "Here's a ha'porth!" Poor boy! he thinks every one *must* want onions!

The immediate vicinity of the Victoria Theatre is infested with women who offer play-bills for sale, and who seem to fancy it impossible that the passers-by can be going elsewhere than to the play.

Here an orange-girl accosts a gentleman with two or three of the fruit in her hand, but with a significant look which gives the assurance that her real trade is of a less innocent nature:—there a poor woman with an array of children before her, offers lucifer matches, but silently appeals for alms.

A little farther on is a long barrow covered with toys; and a tall man without a nose, shouts at intervals, "Only a penny each! only a penny each!" Some of these gimcracks excite astonishment by their extreme cheapness; but they are chiefly made by the convicts in Holland, and are exported in large quantities to England.

In the middle of the road a man with stentorian voice offers "A hundred songs for a penny;" and, enumerating the list, he is sure to announce the "Return of the *H*admiral" amongst the rest.

Nearly opposite the Victoria Theatre there is an extensive cook's-shop; and around the window stands a hungry crowd feasting their eyes on the massive joints which are intended to feast the stomach.

In front of the butchers' shops the serving-men keep up a perpetual vociferation of "Buy! buy!"—a sort of running fire that denotes the earnestness with which competition is carried on amongst rivals in that delectable trade.

Perhaps a new baker's shop is opened in the New Cut; and then a large placard at the window announces that "a glass of gin will be given to every purchaser of a quartern loaf." The buyers do not pause to reflect that the price of the cordial is deducted from the weight of the bread.

The pawnbrokers' shops seem to drive a most bustling trade in the New Cut; and the fronts of their establishments present a more extensive and miscellaneous assortment of second-hand garments, blankets, handkerchiefs, and sheets, than is to be seen elsewhere.

The influx and efflux of people at the public-houses and gin-shops constitute not the least remarkable feature of that neighbourhood, where every thing is dirty and squalid, yet where every one appears able to purchase intoxicating liquor!

On the southern side of the New Cut there are a great many second-hand furniture shops, the sheds wherein the articles are principally exposed being built against the houses in a fashion which gives the whole, when viewed by the glaring of the gas-lights, the appearance of a bazaar or fair.

The New Cut is always crowded; but the multitude is not entirely in motion. Knots of men congregate here, and groups of women there—the posts at the corners of the alleys and courts, or the doors of the gin-shops, being the most favourite points of such assembly.

The edges of the pathways are not completely devoted to provision dealers. Penny peep-shows, emblazoned with a coloured drawing representing the last horrible murder,—itinerant quacks with "certain remedies for the toothache,"—stalls covered with odd numbers of cheap periodical publications,—old women seated on stools, behind little trays containing combs, papers of needles, reels of cotton, pack-thread, stay-laces, bobbin, and such-like articles,—men with cutlery to sell, and who flourish in their hands small knives with innumerable blades sticking out like the quills on a porcupine,—these are also prominent features in that strange market.

In some conspicuous place most likely stands a caravan, surmounted by a picture representing a colossal giant and a giantess to match, with an assurance in large letters that the originals may be seen inside:—then, as the eye wanders from the enormous canvass to the caravan itself, and compares their sizes, the mind is left in a pleasing state of surprise how even *one* of the Brobdingnag marvels—let alone *two*—could possibly stow itself away in that diminutive box.

Branching off from the New Cut, on either side, are numerous narrow streets,—or rather lanes, of a very equivocal reputation; their chief characteristics being houses of ill-fame, gin-shops, beer-shops, marine-store dealers, pawnbrokers, and barbers' establishments.

There are two facts connected with low neighbourhoods which cannot fail to attract the attention of even the most superficial observers in their wanderings amidst the mazes of the modern Babylon. The first is that the corner shops of nearly all the narrow and dirty streets are occupied by general dealers or people in the chandlery-line; and the second is that all the barbers' establishments are ornamented with a blind or placard conveying an assurance that each is "*the original shaving shop*." Here, again, the mind enjoys the excitement of uncertainty, as in the matter of the caravan and the giants; for it is impossible to arrive at any satisfactory decision whether the aforesaid placard means you to infer that the shop to which it belongs was the *first* ever opened in the world for tonsorial purposes, or only the *first* that shed the light of its civilisation upon that especial neighbourhood. We may also observe that some of the proprietors of those establishments are not altogether unacquainted with the mysteries of puffing; inasmuch as we frequently read upon their shop-fronts the truly exhilarating and inspiring words, "*Hair-dresser to the Queen.*"

Such are the New Cut and its tributary lanes.

And it was now along the New Cut that Mr. Greenwood, enveloped in his cloak, was pursuing his way.

He scarcely noticed the turmoil, bustle, and business of that strange thoroughfare; for he was too much absorbed in his own meditations.

The truth was, that his affairs—once so gloriously prosperous—were now rendered desperate by various reverses; and he was about to seek a desperate means of retrieving them.

The reader cannot have failed to observe that the characters of George Montague Greenwood and Richard Markham stand out from our picture of London Life in strong contrast with each other; and it is not the less remarkable that while the former was rising rapidly to wealth, rank, and eminence, the latter was undergoing persecutions and sinking into comparative poverty. Now—at the epoch which we are describing—the tables seem to have turned; for while George Montague Greenwood is about to seek a desperate remedy for his desperate affairs, Richard Markham is leading a gallant army over the fertile plains of Castelcicala.

The former, then, may be deemed the personification of vice, the latter the representative of virtue.

They had chosen separate paths:—the sequel will fully demonstrate which of the two characters had selected the right one.

In the meantime we will continue our narrative.

Mr. Greenwood pursued his way, and, having crossed over to the southern side of the New Cut, repaired to a small row of private houses of which this famous thoroughfare can boast at the extremity joining the Blackfriars' Road.

There he stopped for a moment beneath a lamp to consult a memorandum in his pocket-book; and, having thereby refreshed his memory in respect to the address of which he was in search, he proceeded to knock at the door of a house close by.

A dirty servant-girl opened it just as far as a chain inside would permit; and protruding her smutty face, said, with strange abruptness, "Well, what is it?"

"Does Mr. Pennywhiffe live here?" demanded Greenwood.

"No—he don't; and, if he did, you wouldn't come in—'cos I know it's all your gammon," returned that most uninteresting specimen of the female-domestic race.

"Why not?" exclaimed Greenwood, indignantly. "Whom do you take me for?"

"For what you are," replied the girl.

"And what am I, then?"

"Why—a execution, to be sure."

And, with these words, the girl banged the door in Mr. Greenwood's face.

"I must have taken down the wrong number in my memorandum," thought the Member of Parliament, as he turned away from the house, which was evidently in a state of siege. "This is very provoking!"

He then knocked at the door of the next house.

A woman with a child in her arms answered the summons; and, without waiting for any question, said abruptly, "You had better walk in."

Greenwood entered accordingly, supposing that the woman had overheard his inquiry next door, and that he had now found the abode of the person whom he sought.

The woman led the way into a back room, almost completely denuded of furniture, smelling awfully of tobacco-smoke, and very feebly lighted with a single candle that wanted snuffing.

In the midst of a dense cloud of that vapour, a man without a coat was sitting on a trunk; but the moment Greenwood entered, this individual threw down his clay-pipe, and advancing towards the visitor, exclaimed in a ferocious voice, "So you're going your rounds at this hour, are you? Well—I'm as far off from having the tin as I have been all along; and as I am going away to-morrow, I don't mind if I give you a good drubbing to teach you how to pester a gentleman with shabby bits of paper in future."

Thus speaking, the ferocious individual advanced towards Greenwood, squaring away like clock-work.

"Really, sir—you must labour under some mistake," exclaimed the Member of Parliament. "I have never called here before in my life."

"Then who the devil are you?" demanded the pugilistic phenomenon.

"That is quite another question," said Greenwood. "I——"

"Do you mean to tell me, then," exclaimed the man, "that you ain't the Water Rates?"

"No—I am not," answered Greenwood, unable to suppress a smile. "I thought that a Mr. Pennywhiffe lived here."

"Then he don't—that's all," was the rejoinder. "Blowed if I don't believe it's a plant, after all. Come—ain't you a bum? no lies, now!"

Greenwood turned indignantly away from the room, and left the house, muttering to himself, "This is most extraordinary! Every one appears to be in difficulties in this street."

He was not, however, disheartened: it was highly necessary for him to see the person of whom he was in search; and he accordingly knocked at another door.

"Tell him I'll send round the money to-morrow," shouted a masculine voice inside. "I know it's the collector, because he's rapping at every house."

Greenwood did not wait for the door to be opened; he knew very well that Mr. Pennywhiffe could not live there.

The fourth house at which he knocked was the right one.

A decent-looking servant girl replied in the affirmative to his inquiry; and he was forthwith conducted to a well-furnished room on the first floor, where he found Mr. Pennywhiffe seated at a table covered with papers.

This individual was about fifty years of age. In person he was short, thin, and by no means prepossessing in countenance. His eyes were deeply set, grey, and restless; and his forehead was contracted into a thousand wrinkles. He was dressed in a suit of black, and wore a white neckcloth—no doubt to enhance the respectability of his appearance. This was, however, a difficult task; for had he figured in the dock of a criminal tribunal, the jury would have had no trouble in coming to a verdict, a more hang-dog countenance being seldom seen, even in a city where the face is so often the mirror of the mind.

"Ah! Mr. Greenwood," exclaimed Mr. Pennywhiffe, rising to welcome his visitor; "this is an unexpected honour. What can I do for you? Pray be seated; and speak plainly. There's no listeners here."

"I require your aid in a most important business," answered Greenwood, taking a chair, and throwing back his cloak. "To-morrow I must raise twenty or twenty-five thousand pounds, for three or four months—upon bills—*good bills*, Mr. Pennywhiffe."

"To be deposited?" asked that individual.

"To be deposited," replied Greenwood.

"Shall you withdraw them in time?"

"Decidedly. I will convert the money I shall thereby raise into a hundred thousand," exclaimed Greenwood.

"My commission will be heavy for such a business," observed Pennywhiffe; "and *that*, you know is ready money."

"I am aware of it, and am come provided. Name the amount you require."

"Will two hundred hurt you?" said Pennywhiffe. "Remember—the affair is a serious one."

"You shall have two hundred pounds," exclaimed the Member of Parliament, laying his pocket-book upon the table.

"That is what I call coming to the point."

Mr. Pennywhiffe rose from his seat, and opening an iron safe, took thence a memorandum-book and a small tin box.

Returning to his seat, he handed the memorandum-book to Greenwood, saying, "There is my list of noblemen, wealthy gentlemen, and great mercantile firms, *whose names are familiar to me*. Choose which you will have; and make notes of the various sums the bills are to be drawn for. Let them be for the most part uneven ones, with fractions: it looks so much better."

While Greenwood was employed in examining the memorandum-book, which contained upwards of five hundred names of peers, and great landowners, in addition to those of the chief commercial firms of London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Glasgow, and other places,—besides several belonging to Paris, Lyons, Bordeaux, Havre, and Lille; Brussels, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Hamburgh; New York, the West Indian Islands, and Montreal; Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras;—while Mr. Greenwood, we say, was examining this strange register, and copying several of the best names of noblemen, gentlemen, and merchants, upon a slip of paper, Mr Pennywhiffe opened his tin-case.

The contents thereof were numerous paid checks, and bills of exchange, respectively bearing the signatures of the persons or firms whose names were entered in the memorandum-book.

How Mr. Pennywhiffe became possessed of such important documents,—which, seeing that they had all been duly honoured at maturity, ought to have remained in the hands of those who took them up,—was a mystery which he kept to himself. Whether he had collected them by degrees, or had obtained them in a heap by robbery, or any other means, he never condescended to acquaint his clients.

"I have chosen eleven names," said Greenwood; "and have appended to them the various sums for which I require the bills to be drawn. The aggregate is twenty-three thousand two hundred and seventeen pounds, nine shillings, and sevenpence halfpenny."

"A good total, *that*," observed Mr. Pennywhiffe,—"an excellent total—sounds uncommon well. Nothing could be better. Am I to provide the stamps?"

"If you please. I will pay you extra for them."

Mr. Pennywhiffe once more had recourse to his iron safe, and returned to his seat with a small paste-board box, long and narrow, and containing a vast number of bill-stamps adapted to sums of all amounts. As the usual formula of such documents was printed (though in various ways, they having been procured at different stationers' shops) the process of filling them up was by no means a tedious one.

But now the ingenuity of Mr. Pennywhiffe mainly exhibited itself. Each bill was filled up with a different ink and a different pen; and so skilful a caligrapher was he, that the most astute judge of writing could not possibly have perceived that they were all written by the same hand. Then, by the aid of red ink, a few flourishes, and little circles containing initial letters or figures as if each document corresponded with some particular entry in some particular leger or bill-book, the papers speedily assumed a very business-like appearance.

And now the most difficult and delicate part of the entire process was to commence—the signatures. But Mr. Pennywhiffe went to work with the air of one who fully understood what he was about; and with the originals before him as a copy, he perfected acceptance after acceptance in so masterly a manner, that Greenwood, when he compared the fictitious signatures with the genuine, was astounded at the caligraphic proficiency of that man whose dangerous agency he was now rendering available to his purposes.

"So far, all goes well," said Mr. Pennywhiffe.

"The bills are excellent in every point save one," observed Greenwood.

"Which is that?" demanded the caligrapher.

"They look *too new*—the paper is too clean."

"I know it," returned Mr. Pennywhiffe; "but the process is not entirely complete."

He rose and threw a quantity of small coal upon the fire, so as to smother the flame, and create a dense smoke. He then passed each bill several times through the smoke, until the documents acquired a slightly dingy hue. Lastly, he placed them between the leaves of a portfolio scented with musk, so as to take off the odour of the smoke; and the entire process was terminated.

Mr. Greenwood now counted upon the table bank-notes to the aggregate amount of the two hundred pounds promised, and the price of the stamps; and in exchange he received the bills for twenty-three thousand two hundred and seventeen pounds, nine shillings, and sevenpence halfpenny.

"This seems to be a most extraordinary neighbourhood, Mr. Pennywhiffe," said Greenwood, as he placed the bills in his pocket-book. "I knocked by mistake at three houses before I came to yours, and the inmates of each seemed to be in difficulties."

"No doubt of it, my dear sir. This part of London swarms with members of the Swell Mob, broken-down tradesmen, fraudulent bankrupts, insolvents playing at hide-and-seek with the sheriff's-officers, railway projectors, and swindlers of all kinds. I have got a very queer kind of a lodger in my attic: he has no visible means of living, but is out nearly all day long; and he dresses uncommonly well—gold chain—polished boots—figured silk waistcoat—and so forth. He only pays me—or ought to pay me—five shillings a week for his furnished bed-room; and he is six months in arrears. But what is more remarkable still, I don't even know his name; and he never receives any letters, nor has any friends to call. He is about thirty-six or thirty-eight years old, a good-looking fellow enough, and an Irishman."

"Perhaps he also is some railway projector," said Mr. Greenwood, rising to take his departure.

At this moment a double knock at the front-door was heard.

"That must be my lodger," exclaimed Mr. Pennywhiffe.

Urged by curiosity to catch a glimpse of the mysterious gentleman alluded to, Greenwood hurried on his cloak, took leave of the caligrapher, and left the room.

On the stairs he met the lodger, who was ascending to his attic, with a brass candlestick, containing an inch of the commonest candle, in his hand.

The moment he and Greenwood thus encountered each other, an ejaculation of surprise issued from the lips of each.

"Hush! not a word!" said the gentleman, placing his fore-finger upon his lip. "And, of course, Greenwood," he continued, in a whisper, "you will never mention *this* to a soul."

"Never—on my honour!" answered Greenwood.

They then shook hands, and parted—the gentleman continuing his way to the attic, and Greenwood hastening to leave the house.

"Wonders will never cease!" thought the latter, as he proceeded towards the cab-stand near Rowland Hill's chapel in the Blackfriars Road: "who would have thought of one of the Irish Members of Parliament living in an attic in the New Cut?"

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

THE FORGED BILLS.

At half-past four o'clock on the following afternoon, Ellen Monroe was in the immediate vicinity of the Bank of England.

She had been to receive a small sum of money which an old debtor of her father's, residing in Birchin Lane, had written to state that he was in a condition to pay; and she was now on her return to Markham Place.

The evenings of January are obscure, if not quite dark, at that hour; and the lamps were lighted.

As she was proceeding along Lothbury, Greenwood suddenly passed her. He was walking rapidly, in a pre-occupied manner, and did not perceive her.

But she beheld *him*; and she turned to speak to him; for in spite of all the injuries which her parent, her benefactor Richard, and herself had sustained at his hands, he was still the father of her child!

Scarcely had she thus turned, when he drew his handkerchief from his pocket—still hurrying on towards Tokenhouse Yard.

Ellen quickened her pace; but in a few moments her foot encountered an object on the pavement.

She stooped, and picked it up.

It was a pocket-book.

Conceiving that Greenwood might have dropped it, as she had found it on the very spot where she had seen him take his handkerchief from his pocket, she ran in the direction which she supposed him to have pursued; but as, in the mean time, he had turned into the narrow alley called Tokenhouse Yard, and as she continued her way along Lothbury towards Throgmorton Street, she did not of course overtake him.

Finding that her search after him was unavailing, she determined to examine the contents of the pocket-book, and ascertain if it really did belong to him; in which case, she resolved to proceed straight to Spring Gardens, and restore it to him.

Retracing her steps along Lothbury, she entered Cateaton Street; and turning into the Old Jewry, which was almost deserted, she stopped beneath the light of a lamp to open the pocket-book.

It contained several letters, addressed to "G. M. GREENWOOD, ESQ., M.P.;" and thus her doubts were cleared up at once. But as she was thus investigating the interior of the pocket-book, her eye fell upon a number of bills of exchange, all drawn and endorsed by Mr. Greenwood, and accepted for large sums by noblemen, well-known landowners, and eminent merchants. A rapid glance over these documents convinced Ellen that the aggregate amount which they represented could not fall far short of twenty-five thousand pounds; for, in addition to the fictitious bills obtained from Pennywhiffe, Greenwood had placed in his pocket-book several genuine ones which he legitimately possessed.

Miss Monroe's scrutiny did not altogether occupy a minute; and, carefully securing the pocket-book about her person, she hurried towards Cheapside, where she entered a cab, directing the driver to take her to Spring Gardens.

She did not forget Greenwood's former conduct in having her carried away to his house in the country; but she did not apprehend any ill-usage at his hands in a part of London where succour would be so readily obtained as in Spring Gardens. It was therefore without hesitation that she resolved to proceed direct to his own dwelling in that quarter.

In due time the vehicle stopped at Greenwood's house in Spring Gardens.

With a beating heart Ellen knocked at the door, which was almost immediately opened by Filippo.

"Ah! Miss Monroe!" he exclaimed, as the light of the hall-lamp fell upon her beautiful countenance.

"Yes—it is I at Mr. Greenwood's house," she answered, with a smile: "is he at home?"

"No, Miss—he has gone into the City; but he will be back at six o'clock at the latest."

"Then I will wait for him," said Ellen.

Filippo conducted her up stairs.

In the window of the staircase still stood the beautiful model of the Diana, holding a lamp in its hand,—that model which was the image of her own faultless form.

On the landing-place, communicating with the drawing-room, was also the marble statue, the bust of which was sculptured in precise imitation of her own.

And, when she entered the drawing-room, the first object which met her eyes was the picture of Venus rising from the ocean, surrounded by nereids and nymphs,—that Venus which was a faithful likeness of herself!

Oh! how many phases of her existence did these permanent representations of her matchless beauty bring back to her memory!

When Filippo left her, and she found herself alone, she fell upon a sofa, and gave way to a violent flood of tears.

Then she felt relieved; and she began to ask herself wherefore she had come thither? Was it because she was glad to have found an excuse for calling upon him who was the father of her child? was it because she was anxious to receive his thanks—from his own lips—for restoring to him his pocket-book? She scarcely knew.

Half an hour passed in reflections of this nature—reflections which branched off in so many different ways, and converged to no

satisfactory point—when a cab suddenly drove up to the house.

In another minute hasty steps ascended the stairs—they approached the drawing-room—and Greenwood rushed in, banging the door furiously behind him.

"My God! what have I done?" he exclaimed, frantically—for he did not immediately perceive Ellen, whom a screen concealed from his view. "The pocket-book is lost—gone! I am ruined—should those forged bills——"

He said no more, but threw himself upon a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Ellen instantly comprehended it all:—the bills which she had seen in the pocket-book were forgeries!

Rapid as lightning a train of new reflections passed through her brain:—a project suggested itself;—she hesitated for a moment—but only for a moment:—she thought of her child—and she was resolved.

Assuming all her calmness, and calculating in an instant all the chances of her scheme, she rose from the sofa, and slowly approached the chair on which Greenwood was seated.

He heard a step in the room, and raised his eyes.

"Ellen!" he exclaimed, starting back in surprise.

She murmured a *Christian name*—but it was not *George*.

"Call me not *that*, Ellen!" cried Greenwood, fiercely: "the time is not come! But tell me," he added, speaking thickly, and at the same instant casting upon her a glance which seemed to pierce her inmost soul,—"tell me—were you here—in this room—when I came in?"

"I was," answered Ellen, gazing, in her turn, fixedly upon him.

"And you heard——"

"I heard every word you uttered," continued Miss Monroe, keeping her eyes still bent upon him.

"Ah! then you know——"

"*That you have committed forgery*," added Ellen, in an emphatic tone; "*and that you are ruined*!"

"Damnation!" ejaculated Greenwood. "What did you come for? why are you here? To gloat over my falling fortunes—to make yourself merry at my ruin—to taunt me with the past—to laugh at me in my adversity—to——"

"Then it *is* true," thought Ellen, within herself: "these bills *are* forgeries—and he is in my power.—No," she exclaimed aloud; "such was not my object."

"Then, go—leave me—depart!" cried Greenwood, frantically. "I am in no humour to listen to you now! But, Ellen," he added, suddenly becoming cool—desperately cool:—"tell me—speak—you will not betray me?"

"No—that is, on *one* condition," answered Ellen.

"One condition!" repeated Greenwood: "name it!"

"That you make me your wife," was the steady reply.

"My wife!" exclaimed Greenwood, laughing hysterically. "Do you know whose wife you would become?—the wife of a forger! Have you not learnt that dread secret? But, perhaps, it is to mock me that you offer to become my wife! Oh! I understand you full well, Ellen! When I was rich and beyond the reach of the law, I would not marry you;—and now you mean me to comprehend that since I am ruined, and every moment in danger of being dragged to a station-house, *you* would scorn the alliance! The jest is good:—no—the revenge is just! But it is not the less bitter to me, Ellen!"

"By heavens, you wrong me!" cried Ellen. "Listen with calmness—with composure—if you can!"

"I cannot, Ellen—I cannot! I am mad! A few months—nay, even a few weeks ago, I was happy—wealthy—prosperous:—now I am ruined—miserable—lost! Oh! the grand prospects that were so lately open before me!"

"Again I say, listen. All is not so bad as you imagine," said the young lady, in a hasty tone.

"What do you mean, Ellen? what *can* you mean?" he exclaimed, bewildered. "Do you not understand the nature of a forgery—the consequences which it entails? True—I did not perpetrate the forgery with my own hands;—but the bills are all drawn—all endorsed by me! Oh! it is dreadful—it is terrible!"

"I will not keep you any longer in suspense," said Ellen. "Your pocket-book is found——"

"Found!" repeated Greenwood, electrified by that word, and not knowing whether it imported good or evil to him: "found! Did you say——"

"Yes—found," answered Miss Monroe;—"and by me!"

"By you, Ellen?" cried Greenwood. "No—it is impossible!"

"How, then, should I know that you had lost a pocket-book?" asked the young lady.

"True! And you have found it? Oh! then I am saved—I am saved! Give it to me, Ellen—give it to me!"

And he advanced towards her, with out-stretched hands.

"No—not yet," exclaimed the young lady, in a firm tone. "In this room—yes, in this very room—I went down upon my knees, and implored you to save me from disgrace—to give a father's name to the child who was then as yet unborn. And you refused my supplication—you turned a deaf ear to my agonising entreaties. Oh! I remember that scene but too well. You would not do me justice—and I told you that you might live to repent your cruelty towards me!"

"What! you will now avenge your alleged wrongs!" cried Greenwood, his countenance becoming livid with mingled fear and rage: "you will deliver me up to justice? No—I will tear the pocket-book from you—I will destroy the proofs of my folly—my crime; and then——but why should I waste time in idle words like these; I must act! Give me the book!"

And he rushed towards her, as a tiger springs upon its victim.

But Ellen, light as the fawn, glided away from him, and took such a position that a table was between them, and a bell-pull within her reach.

"Dare to attempt violence towards me," she exclaimed, "and I summon your servants. Then—in their presence—I will proclaim their master a forger! Provoke me not—my spirit is roused—and your fate hangs upon a thread!"

"Damnation!" cried Greenwood, grinding his teeth with rage. "Can nothing move you, Ellen?"

"Yes—the *one condition* that I ere now named," she answered, drawing herself up to her full height, and assuming all the influence

of her really queenly beauty.

"Agreed!" ejaculated Greenwood. "Give me the pocket-book—I take God to witness that I will make you my wife within a week from this day."

"You regard an oath no more than a mere promise," replied Ellen, calmly, and with a slightly satirical curl of the lip.

"I will give you the promise in writing, Ellen," persisted Greenwood, urged to desperation.

"Neither will *that* satisfy me," said the young lady. "When our hands are joined at the altar, I will restore you the proofs of your crime; and God grant," she added solemnly, "that this peril which you have incurred may serve as a warning to you against future risks of the same fearful kind."

"You have no faith in my word—you have no confidence in my written promise, Ellen," cried Greenwood: "how, then, can you be anxious to have me as a husband?"

"That my child may not grow up with the stain of illegitimacy upon him—that he may not learn to despise his mother," answered Ellen, emphatically; "for *he* need never know the precise date of our union."

"But you know, Ellen," again remonstrated Greenwood, "that there are circumstances which act as an insuperable barrier to this marriage. Could you tell your father that you have espoused the man who ruined him—ruined Richard,—and also admit, at the same time, that this man was the father of your child! Consider, Ellen—reflect——"

"There is no need of consideration—no need of reflection," interrupted Miss Monroe. "I care not about revealing the fact of my marriage for the present. In a few years—when our child can comprehend his true position,—*then* it would be necessary to declare myself a wife."

"But there is another difficulty, Ellen," persisted Greenwood: "my name——"

"Let us be wedded privately—in some suburban church, where you stand no chance of being recognised as George Montague Greenwood, and where your *right name* may be fearlessly inscribed upon the register."

"A woman who is determined to gain her point, annihilates all difficulties," muttered Greenwood to himself.

"How do *you* decide?" asked Ellen. "Remember that *I* am firm. I have these alternatives before me—either to obtain a father's name for my child, or to avenge the wrongs of my own parent and myself. Consent to make me your wife, and the proofs of your crime shall be returned to you at the altar: refuse, and to-morrow morning I will prepare the way for vengeance."

"Ellen, I consent to your proposal," said Greenwood, in a tone of deep humiliation; "but upon condition that our marriage shall never be proclaimed until that day, when——"

"I understand you; and I cheerfully agree to the proposal," interrupted Miss Monroe. "You can believe *my* word:—besides, you *must* know that I also should have reasons to conceal our union, until you chose to declare your real name."

"Then be it as you propose, Ellen. To-morrow morning, early, I will procure a special license, and we will be united at Hackney. You can meet me at the church precisely at ten o'clock in the morning: I will have every thing in readiness. But whom will you ask to accompany you?"

"Marian—the faithful servant who has been so devoted to my interests," answered Miss Monroe.

"I think that I should prefer the wife of that surgeon—Mrs. Wentworth, I mean—as the witness to our union," said Greenwood. "I dislike the idea of domestics being entrusted with important secrets. Besides, Mrs. Wentworth has never seen me—knows not that I am passing by the name of Greenwood—and, in a word, is a lady."

"Be it as you will in this instance," returned Ellen. "Mrs. Wentworth shall accompany me—I can rely upon her."

She then rang the bell.

"What do you require, Ellen?" asked Greenwood, alarmed by this movement on her part.

"Merely to ensure the presence of one of your servants, as I pass from this spot to the door of the room," replied Ellen. "You can give him some order to avert suspicion."

Filippo made his appearance; and Ellen then took leave of Mr. Greenwood, as if nothing peculiar had occurred between them.

Oh! with what joy—with what fervid, intoxicating joy—did she return to Markham Place! She had subdued *him* whose cold, calculating, selfish heart was hitherto unacquainted with honourable concessions;—she had conquered him—reduced him to submit to her terms—imposed her own conditions!

Never—never before had she embraced her child with such pride—such undiluted happiness as on that evening. And never had she herself appeared more beautiful—more enchantingly lovely! Her lips were wreathed in smiles—her eyes beamed with the transports of hope, triumph, and maternal affection—a glow of ineffable bliss animated her countenance—her swelling bosom heaved with rapture.

"You are very late, my dear child," said Mr. Monroe, when she took her seat at the tea-table: "I began to grow uneasy."

"I was detained a long time at the office of your debtor," answered Ellen. "To-morrow morning I intend to pay a visit to Mrs. Wentworth, and shall invite myself to breakfast with her. So you need not be surprised, dear father," she added, with a sweet smile, "if I do not make my appearance at your table."

"You please me in pleasing yourself, dear Ellen. Moreover, I am delighted that you should cultivate Mrs. Wentworth's acquaintance. Most sincerely do I hope," continued Mr. Monroe, "that we shall have letters from Richard to-morrow. The communications which we have already received are not satisfactory to my mind. God grant that he may be by this time safe in Naples—if not on his way to England."

"Alas! the enterprise has been a most unfortunate one for him!" returned Ellen, a cloud passing over her countenance. "I understand his noble disposition so well, that I am convinced he deeply feels the defeat of Ossore."

We must observe that the news of our hero's success at Estella had not yet reached England.

"It will be a happy day for us all," said Mr. Monroe, after a pause, "when Richard once more sets foot in his own home—for I love him as if he were my son."

"And I as if he were my brother," added Ellen;—"yes—*my brother*," she repeated, with strange emphasis upon these words.

On the following morning, a few minutes before ten o'clock, a post-chaise stopped at the gate of the parish church of Hackney; and Mr. Greenwood alighted.

He was pale; and the quivering of his lip denoted the agitation of his mind.

The clock was striking ten, when a hackney-coach reached the same point.

Greenwood hastened to the door, and assisted Mrs. Wentworth and Ellen Monroe to descend the steps.

As he handed out the latter, he said, in a hurried whisper, "You have the pocket-book with you?"

"I have," answered Ellen.

The party then proceeded to the church, the drivers of the vehicles being directed to await their return at a little distance, so as not to attract the notice of the inhabitants.

The clergyman and the clerk awaited the arrival of the nuptial party.

The ceremony commenced—proceeded—and terminated.

Ellen was now a wife!

Her husband imprinted a kiss upon her pale forehead; and at the same moment she handed him the pocket-book.

In a few minutes the marriage-certificate was in her possession.

Drawing her husband aside, she said, "Let me now implore you—for your own sake—for the sake of your child—if not for *mine*—to abstain from those courses——"

"Ellen," interrupted Greenwood, "do not alarm yourself on that head. My friend the Marquis of Holmesford lent me ten thousand pounds last evening; and with that sum I will retrieve my falling fortunes. Yes—you shall yet bear a great name. Ellen," he added, his countenance lighting up with animation; "*a name that shall go down to posterity!* But, tell me—has your father received any tidings from Richard?"

"None since those of which I wrote to you. We are not yet aware whether he be in safety, or not."

"You will write to me the moment you receive any fresh communication?"

"Rest assured that I shall not forget that duty."

"And now, Ellen, we must pass the day together. We will spend our honeymoon of twenty-four hours at Richmond. Mrs. Wentworth can return home, and send word to your father that she means to keep you with her until to-morrow morning."

"If you command me, it is my duty to obey," replied Ellen.

"I do—I do," answered Greenwood, earnestly. "You are now mine—the circumstances which led to our union shall be forgotten—and I shall think of you only as my beautiful wife."

"Oh! if this be really true!" murmured Ellen, pressing his hand fervently, and regarding him with affection—for he was the father of her child!

"It *is* true," answered Greenwood;—but his bride perceived not how much of sensual passion prompted him on the present occasion. "I know that you have been faithful to me—that the hope of one day becoming my wife has swayed your conduct. Of *that* I have had proofs."

"Proofs!" repeated Ellen, with mingled surprise and joy.

"Yes—proofs. Do you not remember the Greek Brigand at the masquerade, where you met and so justly upbraided that canting hypocrite, Reginald Tracy?"

"I do. But that Greek Brigand——"

"Was myself!" replied Greenwood.

"You!" exclaimed Ellen, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Yes: and I overheard every sentence you uttered. But we may not tarry here longer: speak to Mrs. Wentworth, that she send a proper excuse to your father; and let us depart."

Ellen hastened to the vestry where the surgeon's wife was seated near a cheerful fire; and the arrangement desired by Greenwood was soon made.

The party then proceeded to the vehicles.

Mrs. Wentworth bade the newly-married couple adieu, having faithfully promised to retain their secret inviolate; and Greenwood handed her into the hackney-coach.

He and Ellen entered the post-chaise; and while the surgeon's wife retraced her way to her own abode, the bride and bridegroom hastened to Richmond.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

THE BATTLES OF PIACERE AND ABRANTANI.

We must now request our readers to accompany us once more to Castelcicala.

In an incredibly short time, and by dint of a forced march which put the mettle of his troops to a severe test,—at which, however, they did not repine, for they were animated by the dauntless courage and perseverance of their commander.—Richard Markham arrived beneath the walls of Villabella.

During his progress towards the town, he had been joined by upwards of four hundred volunteers, all belonging to the national militia, and armed and equipped ready for active service.

The daring exploit which had made him master of Estella, had created an enthusiasm in his favour which he himself and all his followers considered to be an augury of the final success of the Constitutional Cause; and in every village—in every hamlet through which his army had passed, was he welcomed with the most lively demonstration of joy.

When, early on the morning of the 1st of January, his advanced guard emerged from the woods which skirted the southern suburb of Villabella, the arrival of the Constitutional Army was saluted by the roar of artillery from the ramparts; and almost at the same moment the tri-coloured flag was hoisted on every pinnacle and every tower of the great manufacturing town.

"We have none but friends there!" exclaimed Richard, as he pointed towards Villabella. "God grant that we may have no blood to shed elsewhere."

The army halted beneath the walls of Villabella, for Richard did not deem it proper to enter those precincts until formally invited to do so by the corporation.

He, however, immediately despatched a messenger to the mayor, with certain credentials which had been supplied him by the Committee of Administration at Estella; and in the course of an hour the municipal authorities of Villabella came forth in procession to welcome him.

The mayor was a venerable man of eighty years of age, but with unimpaired intellects, and a mind still young and vigorous.

Alighting from his horse, Richard hastened forward to meet him.

"Let me embrace you, noble young man!" exclaimed the mayor. "Your fame has preceded you—and within those walls," he added, turning and pointing towards Villabella, "there breathes not a soul opposed to the sacred cause which heaven has sent you to direct."

Then the mayor embraced Richard in presence of the corporation—in presence of the Constitutional Army; and the welkin rang with shouts of enthusiastic joy.

The formal invitation to enter Villabella was now given; and Markham issued the necessary orders.

The corporation led the way: next came the General, attended by his staff; and after him proceeded the long lines of troops, their martial weapons gleaming in the morning sun.

The moment our hero passed the inner drawbridge, the roar of cannon was renewed upon the ramparts; and the bells in all the towers commenced a merry peal.

As at Estella, the windows were thronged with faces—the streets were crowded with spectators—and every testimonial of an enthusiastic welcome awaited the champion of Constitutional Liberty.

Then resounded, too, myriads of voices, exclaiming, "Long live Alberto"—"Long live the General!"—"Down with the Tyrant!"—"Death to the Austrians!"

In this manner the corporation, Markham, and his staff, proceeded to the Town-Hall, while the troops defiled off to the barracks, where the garrison—a thousand in number—welcomed them as brethren-in-arms.

All the officers of the troops in Villabella, moreover—with the exception of the colonel-commandant,—declared in favour of the Constitutionalists; and even that superior functionary manifested no particular hostility to the movement, but simply declared that "although he could never again bear arms in favour of the Grand Duke, he would not fight against him."

When he had transacted business at the Town-Hall, and countersigned a proclamation which the municipality drew up, recognising the Committee of Administration of Estella, and constituting itself a permanent body invested with similar functions,—Markham repaired to the barracks.

Thence he immediately despatched couriers to the excellent banker at Pinalla, to the mayor of Estella, and to the Committee of Government at Montoni.

He then issued an address to his army, complimenting it upon the spirit and resolution with which the forced march to Villabella had been accomplished; reminding it that every thing depended upon the celerity of its movements, so as to prevent a concentration of any great number of adverse troops, before the Constitutional force could be augmented sufficiently to cope with them; and finally ordering it to prepare to resume the march that afternoon at three o'clock.

By means of new volunteers and a portion of the garrison of Villabella, Richard found his army increased to nearly four thousand men.

At the head of this imposing force he set out once more, at the time indicated, and commenced another rapid march in the direction of Piacere.

On the ensuing evening—the 2d of January—the towers of that important city broke upon the view of the van-guard of the Constitutionalists.

The commandant of the garrison of Piacere was an old and famous officer—General Giustiniani,—devoted to the cause of the Grand Duke, and holding in abhorrence every thing savouring of liberal opinions.

Markham was aware of this fact; and he felt convinced that Piacere would not fall into his hands without bloodshed. At the same time, he determined not to pass it by, because it would serve as a point of centralisation for the troops of Veronezzi and Terano (both being seats of the military administration of Captains-General), and moreover afford the enemy a means of cutting off all communication between himself on the one hand, and Villabella and Estella on the other.

Certain of being attacked, Markham lost no time in making the necessary arrangements. He ordered the van-guard to halt, until the troops in the rear could come up, and take their proper places; and he planted his artillery upon a hill which commanded almost the entire interval between his army and the city.

Nor were his precautions vainly taken; for in a short time a large force was seen moving towards him from Piacere, the rays of the setting sun irradiating their glittering bayonets and the steel helmets of a corps of cuirassiers.

In another quarter of an hour the enemy was so near as to induce Richard to order his artillery to open a fire upon them: but General Giustiniani, who commanded in person, led his forces on with such rapidity, that the engagement speedily commenced.

Giustiniani had about three thousand five hundred men under his orders; but although this force was numerically inferior to the Constitutionalists, it was superior in other respects—for it comprised a large body of cuirassiers, a regiment of grenadiers, a corps of rifles, and twenty field-pieces: it was, moreover fresh and unwearied, whereas the Constitutionalists were fatigued with a long march.

For a few minutes a murderous fire was kept up on both sides; but Richard led his troops to close quarters, and charged the cuirassiers at the head of his cavalry.

At the same time the Cingani, in obedience to an order which he had sent their chiefs, turned the right flank of the rifles by a rapid and skilful manœuvre, and so isolated them from their main body as to expose them to the artillery upon the hill.

Excited, as it were to desperation, by the conduct of our hero, the Constitutional cavalry performed prodigies of valour; and after an hour's hard fighting in the grey twilight, succeeded in breaking the hitherto compact body of cuirassiers.

Leaving his cavalry to accomplish the rout of the enemy's horse-guards, Richard flew to the aid of his right wing, which was sorely pressed by the grenadiers, and was breaking into disorder.

"Constitutionalists!" he cried: "your brethren are victorious elsewhere: abandon not the field! Follow me—to conquest or to death!"

These words operated with electrical effect; and the Constitutional infantry immediately rallied under the guidance of their youthful leader.

Then the battle was renewed: darkness fell upon the scene; but still the murderous conflict was prolonged. At length Richard engaged hand to hand with the colonel of the grenadiers, who was well mounted on a steed of enormous size. But this combat was short; the officer's sword was dashed from his hand; and he became our hero's prisoner.

These tidings spread like wild-fire; and the enemy fell into confusion. Their retreat became general: Richard followed up his advantage; and Giustiniani's army was completely routed.

The Constitutionalists pressed close upon them; and Richard, once more putting himself at the head of his cavalry, pursued the fugitives up to the very walls of Piacere—not with the murderous intention of exterminating them, but with a view to secure as many prisoners as possible, and prevent the enemy from taking refuge in the city.

At the very gates of Piacere he overtook General Giustiniani, and, after a short conflict, made him captive.

He then retraced his steps to the scene of his victory, and took the necessary steps for concentrating his forces once more.

That night, the Constitutionalists bivouacked in the plains about a mile from Piacere.

Early in the morning of the 3d of January, the results of the brilliant triumph of the preceding evening were known. Eight hundred of the enemy lay dead upon the field; and fifteen hundred had been taken prisoners. The Constitutionalists had lost three hundred men, and had nearly as many wounded.

Scarcely had the sun risen on the scene of carnage, when messengers arrived from Piacere, stating that the corporation had declared in favour of the Constitutionalists, and bearing letters from the municipal authorities to Markham. Those documents assured our hero that the sympathies of the great majority of the inhabitants were in favour of his cause; and that deep regret was experienced at the waste of life which had been occasioned by the obstinacy and self-will of General Giustiniani. Those letters also contained an invitation for him to enter the city, where the tri-coloured flag was already hoisted.

These welcome tidings were soon made known to the whole army, and were received with shouts of joy and triumph.

Richard returned a suitable answer to the delegates, and then sought General Giustiniani. To this commander he offered immediate liberty, on condition that he would not again bear arms against the Constitutionalists. The offer was spurned with contempt. Markham accordingly despatched him, under a strong escort, to Villabella.

At nine o'clock Markham entered Piacere, amidst the ringing of bells, the thunder of cannon, and the welcome of the inhabitants. The corporation presented him with the keys, which he immediately returned to the mayor, saying, "I am the servant, sir, and not the master of the Castelcicalans."

This reply was speedily circulated through Piacere, and increased the enthusiasm of the inhabitants in his favour.

Richard determined to remain until the following morning in this city. Having seen his troops comfortably lodged in the barracks, he adopted his usual course of despatching couriers, with accounts of his proceedings, to Villabella, Estella, Pinalla, and Montoni. Need we say that every letter which he addressed to the worthy banker contained brief notes—necessarily brief—to be sent by way of Naples, to Mr. Monroe and Isabella?

Having performed these duties, Richard repaired to the Town-Hall, where he countersigned a decree appointing the municipal body a Committee of Administration; and a proclamation to that effect was speedily published.

He next, with the most unwearied diligence, adopted measures to increase his army, for he resolved to march with as little delay as possible towards Abrantani; where a strong Austrian and Castelcicalan force was lying, under the command of the Captain-General of that province. At that point Richard well knew an important struggle must take place—a struggle in comparison with which all that he had hitherto done was as nothing.

But his endeavours in obtaining recruits were attended with great success. Volunteers flocked to the barracks; and the city-arsenal was well provided with all the uniforms, arms, ammunition, and stores that were required.

On the west of Piacere was a vast plain, on which Richard determined to review his troops at day-break, and thence march direct upon Abrantani.

The order was accordingly issued; and half an hour before the sun rose, the army defiled through the western gates. Nearly all the inhabitants repaired to the plain, to witness the martial spectacle; and many were the bright eyes that glanced with admiration—and even a softer feeling—at the handsome countenance of that young man whose name now belonged to history.

Colonel Cossario, the second in command, directed the evolutions. The army was drawn up in divisions four deep, and mustered five thousand strong.

And now, on the 4th of January, a morning golden with sun-beams, the review began. Each regiment had its brass band and its gay colours; and the joyous beams of the orb of day sported on the points of bayonets, flashed on naked swords, and played on the steel helmets of four hundred cuirassiers whom Richard had organised on the preceding evening.

Stationed on an eminence, attended by his staff, and by his faithful Morcar, who had comported himself gallantly in the battle of the 2d, Markham surveyed, with feelings of indescribable enthusiasm, that armament which owned him as its chief.

Cossario gave the word—it was passed on from division to division; and now all these sections are wheeling into line.

The line is formed—the bands are stationed in front of their respective corps: and all is as still as death.

Again the Colonel gives the word of command—"General salute! Present arms!"—and a long din of hands clapping against the muskets echoes around.

The bands strike up the glorious French air of the *Parisienne*; and Markham gracefully raises his plumed hat from his brow, in acknowledgment of the salute of his army.

The music ceases—the word, "Shoulder arms!" is passed from division to division, along that line of half a mile from flank to flank.

Then Markham gallops towards the troops, followed by his staff; the ranks take open order; he passes along, inspecting the different corps,—addressing them—encouraging them.

Again he returns to the eminence: the line is once more broken into divisions; close columns are formed; and the whole army is put in motion, to march past its General, the bands playing a lively air.

From the plain the troops defiled towards the road leading to Abrantani.

But scarcely had Markham taken leave of the mayor and the municipal authorities, in order to rejoin his army, when a courier, covered with dust, galloped up to him. He was the bearer of letters from Signor Viviani. Those documents afforded our hero the welcome intelligence that Pinalla had hoisted the tri-colour, declared in favour of the cause of liberty, recognised Markham as the General-in-Chief of the Constitutional Armies of Castelcicala, and had despatched a reinforcement of two thousand men to fight under his banner.

Richard hastily communicated these tidings to the corporation of Piacere, and then joined his army, throughout the ranks of which the news of the adhesion of so important a city as Pinalla to the great cause diffused the utmost joy.

"Every thing favours me!" thought Richard, his heart leaping within him. "Oh! for success at Abrantani; and such will be its moral effect upon my troops that I shall fear nothing for the result of the grand and final struggle that must take place beneath the walls of Montoni! And, then, Isabella, even your father will acknowledge that I have some claim to your hand as a reward for placing him upon the ducal throne!"

The road that the army now pursued was most favourable for the rapid march which Richard urged. It was wide and even, and afforded an easy passage to the artillery.

Shortly after mid-day the van-guard entered the beautiful province of Abrantani; and there the troops were received by the inhabitants with an enthusiasm of the most grateful description. For it was in this district that the tyranny of the Grand Duke's *régime*, under the auspices of Count Santa-Croce, had been most severely felt.

No wonder, then, that the Constitutional Army was greeted with rapture and delight;—no wonder that blessings were invoked upon the head of its General! The old men went down upon their knees by the road-sides, to implore heaven to accord success to his mission;—mothers held up their children to catch a glimpse of the youthful hero;—and young maidens threw garlands of flowers in his path.

Volunteers poured in from all sides; and the army increased in its progress, like the snowball rolling along the ground.

At sunset the entire force halted in the precincts of a large town, the inhabitants of which hastened to supply the soldiers with provisions and wine.

During that pause, couriers arrived from Veronezzi, with the joyful tidings that it had declared in favour of the Constitutional cause, and was sending reinforcements. Thus the whole of the south of Castelcicala was now devoted to the movement of which Markham was the head and chief.

For two hours was the army permitted to rest: it then continued its march until midnight, when it bivouacked in a wide plain, a wood protecting its right wing, and a hill, whereon the artillery was planted, defending its left.

Richard adopted every precaution to avoid a surprise; for he was well aware that the Count of Santa-Croce was not a man to slumber at such a crisis. But it afterwards appeared that the Captain-General did not dare to quit the neighbourhood of the city of Abrantani, for fear that it should pronounce in favour of the Constitutionalists.

It was, therefore, under the walls of Abrantani itself that the contest was to take place.

There was a flat eminence to the east of the city; and on this had Santa-Croce taken up his position at the head of seven thousand men—three thousand Castelcicalans, and four thousand Austrians.

Against this force was Richard to contend, at the head of six thousand soldiers, the volunteers who had joined him since he left Piacere amounting to a thousand.

But to return to our narrative in the consecutive order of events.

At five o'clock in the morning of the 5th, the Constitutionalists quitted their position where they had bivouacked, and pursued their way towards the city of Abrantani.

The day passed—night came once more—and the troops bivouacked in the immediate vicinity of a large hamlet.

The morning of the 6th saw them again in motion; but Richard allowed them to proceed with diminished celerity, as he had already enough chances against him to warn him not to increase them by over-fatiguing his army.

It was not, therefore, until the evening that he came in sight of the tall spire on the Cathedral of Abrantani.

"By this time to-morrow," exclaimed Richard, pointing in the direction of the city, "the tower on which yon spire stands shall echo with the sounds of its bells to celebrate our triumph!"

"Amen!" ejaculated Morcar, who was close behind him.

The Constitutionalists took up a strong position, with a village on their right and a range of extensive farm-buildings on their left. They were all animated by an enthusiasm worthy of the great cause in which they were embarked; and their ardour was manifested by singing martial songs as they crowded round the fires of the bivouac.

Richard never closed his eyes during the night. Confident that his want of experience in military tactics must be compensated for by unceasing exercise of that intelligence and keenness of perception which had enabled him to direct the movements of his troops so as to achieve the victory of Piacere, he reconnoitred all the positions adjacent to his own—marked those where troops would be advantageously placed, and observed others where they would be endangered—visited the outposts—studied the maps of that part of the country—and held consultations with his most skilful officers. These subordinates were astonished at the soundness of his views, the excellence of his arrangements, and the admirable nature of his combinations.

Markham was resolved to effect two objects, which, he felt convinced, would lessen the chances that were now against him. The first was to throw up a small redoubt, where he might place a portion of his artillery, so as to command the flat eminence on which the Austro-Castelcicalan army was stationed. The second was to send off a small detachment before day-break, to gain a wood about two miles distant, whence it might debouch at the proper time, and fall upon the left flank of the enemy.

The redoubt was commenced, and proceeded rapidly; and an hour before sunrise the corps of Cingani departed on the important service which the General-in-Chief confided to it, with strict orders not to move from the wood until the enemy should have left the eminence and descended to the plain.

Thus, by the time the sun rose on the morning of the 7th, the Cingani were safely concealed in the wood; a redoubt, bristling with artillery, commanded the enemy's position; and the Constitutionalists were formed in order of battle.

Richard commanded the right wing; and Colonel Cossario the left.

The engagement began on the part of the Constitutionalists, with a cannonade from the redoubt; and so well did this battery perform its part, that—as Richard had foreseen—the Captain-General was compelled to descend into the plain, and endeavour to surround the right wing of the Constitutionalists, in order to terminate the carnage occasioned by that dreadful cannonade.

Meantime, Cossario, with his division, advanced to meet three battalions which the Captain-General had detached to attack the range of farm-buildings; and for an hour the combat raged in that point with inconceivable fury. The Austrians precipitated themselves with a desperate ardour upon Cossario's troops, who were at length compelled to retreat and occupy the farm.

On the right, Markham sustained a fearful contest with the force opposed to him. The fire of the musketry was at point-blank distance; and the firmness with which the action was maintained on both sides, rendered the result highly dubious.

But now the Cingani debouched from the wood, and fell upon the left wing of the enemy. The impetuosity of their attack was irresistible: the wing was turned by them; and the Austro-Castelcicalans were thrown into disorder. Then Richard, at the head of his cuirassiers, charged upon the centre of the enemy, and decided the fortune of the day.

In the meantime Cossario had completely rallied his division and had succeeded in repulsing the battalions that were opposed to him.

The Captain-General endeavoured to effect a retreat in an orderly manner towards the eminence which he had originally occupied; but Richard, perceiving his intention, was enabled to out-flank him, and to gain possession of the height. For an hour this important position was disputed with all the vigour and ardour of military combat; but, though the Austro-Castelcicalans manifested a vehemence bordering on rage, and a perseverance approaching to desperation, all their attempts to recover their lost ground were ineffectual.

And equally vain were the endeavours of Santa-Croce to secure an orderly retreat; his columns were shattered—his battalions broken; the flight of his troops became general; but they were closely pursued by their conquerors.

The Cathedral of Abrantani proclaimed the hour of three in the afternoon, when Richard, on the eminence commanding the city, sate down to pen hasty dispatches, announcing this great victory to the Committees of Montoni, Piacere, Villabella, Veronezzi, Pinalla, and Estella. Nor did he forget to enclose, in his letters to Signor Viviani, brief notes addressed to his friend Monroe and the Princess Isabella.

The results of the battle of Abrantani were most glorious to the Constitutional arms. While Richard's loss was small, that of the enemy had been enormous. Two thousand men—chiefly Austrians—lay dead upon the plain; and nearly as many were taken prisoners. Two of the Castelcicalan regiments rallied at a short distance from the scene of the conflict, and placing themselves at the disposal of Colonel Cossario, who had pursued them, joined the Constitutional cause.

The Captain-General, Count Santa-Croce, succeeded in effecting his escape, with several of his superior officers; and, hastening to join the Grand Duke, who was still besieging Montoni, the vanquished chief was the first to communicate to that Prince the fatal result of the battle.

That same evening Richard Markham entered the city of Abrantani, which joyfully opened its gates to receive him; and, as in the

other towns which he had occupied, the thunders of artillery, the ringing of bells, and the plaudits of admiring crowds testified the enthusiasm which was inspired by the presence of the youthful General.

Richard determined to remain some days in the city of Abrantani. Montoni was besieged by a force nearly twenty-five thousand strong; and our hero felt the necessity of waiting for the reinforcements promised him, and of raising as many volunteers as possible, ere he could venture to cope with so formidable a force. But in every despatch which he had sent to the Committee of Government at Montoni, he had given the most solemn assurances of his resolution to march to the relief of the capital with as little delay as possible; and it was now, at Abrantani, that he anxiously expected official tidings from the besieged city.

Nor was he kept long in suspense. On the morning of the 10th a courier arrived with despatches from the Committee of Government. These documents are so important, that we do not hesitate to lay them before our readers.

The first was conceived thus:—

"*Montoni, January 9th, 1841.*

"The Committee of Government of the State of Castelcicala have received the various despatches which the General-in-Chief of the Constitutional Army has addressed to them respectively from Villabella, Piacere, and Abrantani. The Committee must reserve for a future occasion the pleasing duty of expressing how deeply they rejoice at the General-in-Chief's various successes, and how anxiously they watch the progress of that cause of which he has become the guide and champion.

"The Committee cannot, however, omit one duty which they now perform by virtue of the full powers of administration and government that have been vested in them by the inhabitants of the capital, and which powers are recognised by all faithful Castelcicalans who have declared in favour of the Constitutional cause.

"This duty is rendered imperious on the Committee by the eminent and unequalled services of the General-in-Chief.

"The Committee of Government have therefore ordained, and do ordain, that the style and title of *Marquis of Estella* be conferred upon the General-in-Chief, the most Excellent Signor Richard Markham.

"And a copy of this decree shall be forwarded to every city or town which has pronounced in favour of the Constitutional cause.

"By order of the Committee of Government—

"GAETANO, *President*.
TERLIZZI, *Vice-President*."

The second despatch ran thus:—

"To the Marquis of Estella, General-in-Chief of the Constitutional Armies of Castelcicala.

"My Lord,

"We, the members of the Committee of Government of Castelcicala, have the honour to lay before your lordship a few particulars relative to the condition of the capital city of that State. Closely besieged by the foreign force whom the traitor Angelo has invited into the country, and blockaded at sea by the fleet of the Lord High Admiral, Montoni already enters upon the dread phase of *famine*. The garrison performs its duty nobly in defending the capital from the attacks daily directed against it by the insolent Austrian invaders; but it is impossible that we can hold out for any length of time. We are, however, happy to be enabled to assure your lordship that the inhabitants endure their lamentable condition with exemplary fortitude and patience, the brilliant achievements of your lordship and the Constitutional Army having inspired them with the most lively hopes of a speedy deliverance. So sorely are we pressed, that it has been only with the greatest difficulty that your lordship's couriers have been able to pass the lines of the besiegers, and gain entrance into the city.

"We feel convinced that these brief statements will be sufficient to induce your lordship to lose no time in marching to the deliverance of the capital.

"We have the honour to remain, My Lord,
"Your lordship's obedient servants,

"For the Members of } GAETANO, *President*.
the Committee } TERLIZZI, *Vice-President*.

"Montoni, January 9th, 1841 (Six o'clock in the morning.)"

Most welcome, in one sense, to our hero were these documents. Although he deeply deplored the condition to which Montoni was reduced, he could not do otherwise than experience the most thrilling and rapturous delight at the impression which his conduct had produced upon the Provisional Government of the State, and of the inhabitants of the capital.

Nor shall we depreciate the merits of Richard Markham, if we admit that he received, with the most heart-felt joy, that title of nobility which, he felt convinced, must lead him nearer to the grand aim of all his exertions—the hand of Isabella!

And as he looked back upon the events of the last fortnight,—when he reflected that at the commencement of that short interval he had issued from Pinalla on a desperate undertaking, and that these fourteen days had shed glory on his name, and placed the coronet of a Marquis upon his brow,—he was lost in admiration of the inscrutable ways of that Providence to whom he had never ceased to pray, morning and evening—as well when crowned with success as in the hour of danger!

But as we do not wish to dwell too much upon this grand and remarkable episode in our hero's history, we shall continue our narrative of these events in their proper order.

The Marquis of Estella each day saw his army increasing. The promised reinforcements arrived from Pinalla and Veronezzi: Lipari and Ossore declared for his cause, and furnished their contingents to the Constitutional forces; and each hour brought to Richard's head-quarters at Abrantani tidings of fresh movements in his favour. Troops poured in; and he was compelled to muster his forces in an encampment on the northern side of the town.

Indeed, the battles of Piacere and Abrantani had electrified Castelcicala; and the tri-coloured banner already floated on the walls of the principal cities and towns of the state. Addresses of confidence and congratulation were sent to our hero from all parts; and large sums of money were raised and forwarded to him, to enable him to reward his troops and equip his volunteers.

It was on the 20th of January that Markham put his army in motion. He was now at the head of sixteen thousand men, with a formidable train of artillery. Although the numerical odds were fearfully against him, he reposed the most perfect confidence in the valour of his troops—elated as they were by previous successes, and glorying in a cause which they deemed holy and sacred. Moreover, he knew that the moral strength of his army was incomparably superior to that of the mere drilled Austrian troops, who were trained under a soul-crushing system of discipline, and who regarded their chiefs rather as tyrants and oppressors than as generous superiors exercising a species of paternal influence over them.

On the morning of the 22d, the Constitutional Army reached Ossore, all the inhabitants of which town came out to behold the glorious procession, and testify their admiration of the young General.

It was during a brief halt near this place, that a courier, travel-soiled and sinking with fatigue, arrived from Montoni, with a letter addressed to the Marquis of Estella and containing only this laconic but urgent prayer:—

"Hasten, my lord—delay not! In forty-eight hours it will be too late!

"GAETANO."

Richard instantly despatched a messenger, on whose prudence and daring he could rely, with an answer equally brief and impressive:—

"Fear not, signor! By to-morrow night Montoni shall be delivered, or the army which I am leading to your rescue will be annihilated.

"ESTELLA."

The city was indeed sore pressed. The inhabitants were reduced to the utmost extremities in respect to provision; and the Austrians, headed by the Grand Duke in person and Marshal Herbertstein, were pushing the siege with a vigour that was almost irresistible.

But on the 22d of January those commanders were compelled to concentrate nearly all their troops on the southern side of Montoni: for they were well aware that the Constitutional Army was now approaching.

In the afternoon of the same day, the light cavalry of Richard's force entered upon the broad plain through which the Ferretti rolls its silver way; and at a distance of three miles the tower of Saint Theodosia reared its summit far above the white buildings of Montoni.

By nine o'clock on that night the entire Constitutional Army had taken up a strong position, its left being protected by high sand-banks which overlooked the sea, and its right defended by a large village.

Oh! it was a great cause which was so soon to be justified—and that was a glorious army which was now preparing for the final struggle!

A discharge of cannon from the walls of Montoni announced that the capital awaited its deliverance; and the Committee of Government issued orders that the bells of every church should ring for mass at day-break, in order that the inhabitants might offer up prayers for the success of the Constitutional Army.

As on the eve of the glorious fight of Abrantani, the Marquis of Estella was actively employed during the whole night in making the various dispositions for the great battle which, on the following day, must decide the fate of Castelcicala.

And most solemnly and sublimely interesting was that night! So close were the two armies to each other—only half a cannon shot distant—that every sound on either side could be mutually heard. The very outposts and sentinels were almost within speaking range; and the lights of the two positions were plainly visible. Watchfulness and keen observation characterised both sides.

An hour before sunrise—and by the lurid gleam of the bivouac fire in the grove of Legino—Richard addressed a letter, full of tenderness and hope, to the Princess Isabella; and this he despatched in another epistle to his excellent friend, the banker at Pinalla.

Then, when the first gleam of twilight heralded the advent of the sun, and while the bells were ringing in every tower of Montoni, the hero mounted his horse and prepared for the conflict that was now at hand.

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

THE BATTLE OF MONTONI.

The morning of the memorable 23d of January dawned, and the bells were ringing in every tower, when three cannon gave the signal for the fight, and the battle of Montoni began.

The light troops of the Constitutionalists opened a smart fire upon the Austrians, and dislodged a strong corps from a position which it occupied on the bank of a small stream. In consequence of this first success, Richard was enabled to stretch out his right wing without restraint; and, remembering the operation effected by the Cingani at Abrantani, he instantly despatched that faithful corps, with a battalion of rifles, to make the circuit of the village, and endeavour to turn the Austrians' left flank.

The left wing of the Constitutionalists soon came to close quarters with the right wing of the enemy; and a desperate struggle ensued to decide the occupancy of the sand-banks, which were quite hard and a desirable position for artillery-pieces. Colonel Cossario, who commanded in that point, succeeded, after a desperate conflict, in repulsing the Austrians; and twenty field-pieces were dragged on the sand-banks. These speedily vomited forth the messengers of destruction; and the dread ordnance scattered death with appalling rapidity.

The Grand Duke, seeing that his cause was hopeless if that dreadful cannonade was not stopped, ordered four battalions of grenadiers to attack the position. Markham, who was riding about the field,—now issuing orders—now taking a part in the conflict,—observed the manœuvre, and instantly placed himself at the head of two regiments of cuirassiers with a view to render it abortive.

Then commenced one of the most deadly spectacles ever performed on the theatre of the world. The Grand Duke sent a strong detachment of Austrian Life-Guards to support the grenadiers; and the two squadrons of cavalry came into fearful collision. The Constitutionalists were giving way, when Markham precipitated himself into the thickest of the fight, cleared every thing before him, and seized the Austrian colours. Morcar was immediately by his side: the sword of a Life-Guard already gleamed above our hero's head—another moment, and he would have been no more. But the faithful gipsy warded off the blow, and with another stroke of his heavy brand nearly severed the sword-arm of the Life-Guard. Richard thanked him with a rapid but profoundly expressive glance, and, retaining his hold on the Austrian banner, struck the ensign-bearer to the ground.

This splendid achievement re-animated the Constitutional cuirassiers; and the Austrian Life-Guards were shattered beyond redemption.

Almost at the same time, the Cingani and rifles effected their movement on the left wing of the enemy, and threw it into confusion. This disorder was however retrieved for about the space of two hours; when the Marquis of Estella, with his cuirassiers, was enabled to take a part in the conflict in that direction. This attack bore down the Austrians. They formed themselves into a square; but vain were their attempts to oppose the impetuosity with which the cuirassiers charged them. By three o'clock in the afternoon, the left wing of the enemy was overwhelmed so completely that all the endeavours of Marshal Herbertstein to rally his troops were fruitless.

Then, resolved to perish rather than surrender, the Austrian commander met an honourable death in the ranks of battle.

In the center the conflict raged with a fury which seemed to leave room for doubt relative to the fortune of the day, notwithstanding the important successes already obtained by the Constitutionalists.

The Grand Duke had flown with a choice body of cavalry to support the compact masses that were now fighting for the victory: he himself rode along the ranks—encouraging them—urging them on—promising rewards.

For nearly four hours more did the battle last in this point; but at length our hero came up with his cuirassiers, all flushed with conquest elsewhere; and his presence gave a decided turn to the struggle.

Rushing precipitately on—bearing down all before them—thundering along with an irresistible impetuosity, the cuirassiers scattered confusion and dismay in the ranks of their enemies. And ever foremost in that last struggle, as in the first, the waving heron's plume which marked his rank, and the death-dealing brand which he wielded with such fatal effect, denoted the presence of Richard Markham.

He saw that the day was his own;—the Austrians were flying in all directions;—confusion, disorder, and dismay prevailed throughout their broken corps and shattered bands;—Marshal Herbertstein was numbered with the slain;—the Grand Duke fled;—and at eight o'clock in the evening Montoni was delivered.

Darkness had now fallen on the scene of carnage; but still the Constitutionalists pursued the Austrian fugitives; and numbers were taken ere they could reach the river. A comparatively small portion of the vanquished succeeded in throwing themselves into the boats that were moored on the southern bank, or in gaining the adjacent bridges; and those only escaped.

Montoni saluted its deliverance with salvoes of artillery and the ringing of bells; and the joyous sounds fell upon the ears of the Grand Duke, as, heart-broken and distracted, he pursued his way, attended only by a few faithful followers, towards the frontiers of that State from which his rashness and despotism had driven him for ever.

Meantime, Richard Markham issued the necessary orders for the safeguard of the prisoners and the care of the wounded; and, having attended to those duties, he repaired to the village before mentioned, where he established his temporary head-quarters at the *château*

of a nobleman devoted to the Constitutional cause.

Then, in the solitude of the chamber to which he had retired, and with a soul full of tenderness and hope, as in the morning in the grove of Legino,—he addressed a letter to the Princess—the only joy of his heart, the charming and well-beloved Isabella:—

Head Quarters, near Montoni, Jan. 23.

Eleven at night.

"Long ere this will reach thee, dearest one, thou wilt have heard, by means of telegraphic dispatch through France, of the great victory which has made me master of Castelcicala. If there be any merit due unto myself, in consummating this great aim, and conducting this glorious cause to its final triumph, it was thine image, beloved Isabella, which nerved my arm and which gave me intelligence to make the combinations that have led to so decided an end. In the thickest of the fight—in the midst of danger,—when balls whistled by me like hail, and the messengers of death were circulating in every direction,—thine eyes seemed to be guiding stars of hope, and promise, and love. And now the first moment that I can snatch from the time which so many circumstances compel me to devote to your native land, is given to thee!

"To-morrow I shall write at great length to your honoured father, whom in the morning it will be my pleasing duty to proclaim ALBERTO I. GRAND DUKE OF CASTELCICALA.

"Although men now call me *Marquis of Estella*, to thee, dearest, I am simply

"RICHARD."

Our hero despatched this letter in one to Signor Viviani at Pinalla, by especial courier. He next wrote hasty accounts of the great victory which he had gained, to the chief authorities of the various cities and towns which had first declared in his favour, as before mentioned; and these also were instantly sent off by messengers.

Then soon did rumour tell the glorious tale how Montoni was delivered; and how the mighty flood of Austrian power, which had dashed its billows against the walls of the ducal capital, was rolled back over the confines of Castelcicala into the Roman States, never to return!

We shall not dwell upon the particulars of that night which succeeded the battle. Our readers can imagine the duties that devolve upon a commander after so brilliant and yet so sanguinary a day. Suffice it to observe, that Richard visited the houses in the village to which the wounded had been conveyed; while Colonel Cossario took possession of the Austrian camp.

That night Montoni was brilliantly illuminated; and the most exuberant joy prevailed throughout the capital.

The Committee of Government assembled in close deliberation, immediately after the receipt of the welcome tidings of the victory; and, although they consulted in secret, still the inhabitants could well divine the subject of their debate—the best means of testifying their own and the nation's gratitude towards that champion who had thus diffused joy into so many hearts.

Early in the morning, the entire Committee, dressed in their robes, and attended by the chief officers of the garrison, repaired on horseback to the village where Richard had established his head-quarters.

Our hero came forth to meet them, at the door of the mansion where he was lodged, and received those high functionaries with his plumed hat in hand.

"My lord," exclaimed Signor Gaëtano, the President of the Committee, "it is for us to bare our heads to you. You have saved us from an odious tyranny—from oppression—from siege—from famine! God alone can adequately reward you: Castelcicala cannot. We have, however, further favours to solicit at your lordship's hand. Until that Prince, who is now our rightful sovereign, can come amongst us, and occupy that throne which your hands have prepared for him, you must be our chief—our Regent. My lord, a hundred councillors, forming the Provisional Committee of Government, debated this point last evening; and not a single voice was raised in objection to that request which I, as their organ, have now proffered to your lordship."

"No," answered Richard: "that cannot be. The world would say that I am ambitious—that I am swayed by interested motives of aggrandizement. Continue, gentlemen, to exercise supreme sway, until the arrival of your sovereign."

"My lord," returned the President, "Castelcicala demands this favour at your hands."

"Then, if Castelcicala command, I accept the trust with which you honour me," exclaimed Markham; "but so soon as I shall have succeeded in restoring peace and order, you will permit me, gentlemen, to repair to England, to present the ducal diadem to your rightful liege. And one word more," continued Markham; "your troops have conducted themselves, throughout this short but brilliant campaign, in a manner which exceeds all praise. To you I commend them—you must reward them."

"Your lordship is now the Regent of Castelcicala," answered the President; "and your decrees become our laws. Order—and we obey."

"I shall not abuse the power which you place in my hands," rejoined Markham.

The President then communicated to the Regent the pleasing fact that the Lord High Admiral had that morning hoisted the tri-coloured flag and sent an officer to signify his adhesion to the victorious cause. In answer to a question from Signor Gaëtano, Richard signified his intention of entering Montoni at three o'clock in the afternoon.

The principal authorities then returned to the capital.

Long before the appointed hour, the sovereign city wore an aspect of rejoicing and happiness. Triumphal arches were erected in the streets through which the conqueror would have to pass: the troops of the garrison were mustered in the great square of the palace; and a guard of honour was despatched to the southern gate. The windows were filled with smiling faces: banners waved from the tops of the houses. The ships in the harbour and roadstead were decked in their gayest colours; and boats were constantly arriving from the fleet with provisions of all kinds for the use of the inhabitants.

The great bell in the tower of Saint Theodosia at length proclaims the hour of three.

And, now—hark! the artillery roars—Montoni salutes her Regent: the guard of honour presents arms; the martial music plays a national air; and the conqueror enters the capital. The men-of-war in the roadstead thunder forth echoes to the cannon on the ramparts; and the yards are manned in token of respect for the representative of the sovereign power.

What were Richard's feelings now? But little more than two months had elapsed since he had first entered that city, a prisoner—vanquished—with shattered hopes—and uncertain as to the fate that might be in store for him. How changed were his circumstances! As a conqueror—a noble—and a ruler did he now make his appearance in a capital where his name was upon every tongue, and where his great deeds excited the enthusiasm, the admiration, and the respect of every heart.

Then his ideas were reflected still farther back; and he thought of the time when he was a prisoner, though innocent, in an English

gaol. Far more rapidly than we can record his meditations, did memory whirl him through all past adversities—reproduce before his mental eyes his recent wanderings in Castelcicala—and hurry him on to this glorious consummation, when he finds himself entering the capital as the highest peer in the State.

On his right hand was Colonel Cossario; and close behind him—amidst his brilliant staff—was Morcar,—the faithful gipsy whose devotedness to his master had not a little contributed to this grand result.

On went the procession amidst the enthusiastic applause of the myriads collected to welcome the conquerors,—on through streets crowded to the roof-tops with happy faces,—on to the ducal palace, in whose great square ten thousand troops were assembled to receive the Regent.

Richard alighted from his horse at the gate of the princely abode, on the threshold of which the municipal authorities were gathered to receive him.

Oh! at that moment how deeply—how sincerely did he regret the loss of General Grachia, Colonel Morosino, and the other patriots who had fallen in the fatal conflict of Ossore!

Nor less did memory recall the prophetic words of that departed girl who had loved him so devotedly, but so unhappily;—those words which Mary-Anne, with sybilline inspiration, had uttered upon her death-bed:—"*Brilliant destinies await you, Richard! All your enduring patience, your resignation under the oppression of foul wrong, will meet with a glorious reward. Yes—for I know all:—that angel Isabella has kept no secret from me. She is a Princess, Richard; and by your union with her, you yourself will become one of the greatest Princes in Europe! Her father, too, shall succeed to his just rights; and then, Richard, then—how small will be the distance between yourself and the Castelcicalan throne!*"

CHAPTER CXC.

TWO OF OUR OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

We must again transport our readers to the great metropolis of England.

It was late in the evening of the 24th of January, 1841,—with Byron, we "like to be particular in dates,"—that a man, of herculean form, weather-beaten countenance, and whose age was apparently somewhat past forty, was passing down Drury Lane.

He was dressed like a labourer, with a smock frock and a very broad-brimmed straw hat, which was slouched as much as possible over his face.

Passing into Blackmoor Street, he continued his way towards Clare Market; whence he turned abruptly into Clements' Lane, and entered a public-house on the right hand side of this wretched scene of squalor and poverty.

No one possessing the least feeling of compassion for the suffering portion of the industrious millions—(and how large is that portion!)—can pass along the miserable thoroughfare called Clements' Lane without being shocked at the internal misery which the exterior appearance of many of the dwellings bespeaks. There is ever a vile effluvium in that narrow alley—a miasma as of a crowded churchyard!

Entering the parlour of the public-house, the man with the weather-beaten countenance and slouched hat was immediately recognised by a lad seated apart from the other inmates of the room.

This youth was about eighteen or nineteen years of age, very short in stature, but well made. On a former occasion we have stated that his countenance was effeminate and by no means bad-looking; his eyes were dark and intelligent; his teeth good; and his voice soft and agreeable. His manners were superior to his condition; and his language was singularly correct for one who was almost entirely self-taught, and who had filled menial employments since his boyhood.

He was dressed in a blue jacket and waistcoat, and dark brown trousers; and that attire, together with a boy's cap, contributed towards the extreme youthfulness of his appearance.

A pint of porter stood, untouched, upon a table at which he was sitting.

The man with the weather-beaten countenance proceeded to take his seat next to this lad: he then rang the bell, and having ordered some liquor and a pipe, entered into conversation with his young companion.

"Have you heard any thing more of that villain Tidkins, Harry?" asked the man.

"Nothing more since I saw you yesterday morning, Jem," replied Holford. "I have lost all trace of him."

"But are you sure that it was him you saw the day before yesterday?" demanded Crankey Jem—for *he* was the individual with the weather-beaten countenance and slouched hat.

"Don't you think I know him well enough, after all I have told you concerning him?" said Henry Holford, smiling. "When you and I accidentally met for the first time, the day before yesterday, in this parlour, and when in the course of the conversation that sprang up between us, I happened to mention the name of Tidkins, I saw how you fired—how you coloured—how agitated you became. What injury has he done you, that you are so bitter against him?"

"I will tell you another time, Harry," answered Crankey Jem. "My history is a strange one—and you shall know it all. But I *must* find out the lurking-hole of this miscreant Tidkins. You say he was well dressed?"

"As well as a private person can be," answered Holford. "But did the Resurrection Man put on the robes of the greatest monarch in the world, he could not mitigate the atrocious expression of his cadaverous—hang-dog countenance. I confess that I am afraid of that man:—yes—I am afraid of him!"

"He was well-dressed, and was stepping into a cab at the stand under the Charterhouse wall, you said?" observed Crankey Jem.

"Yes—and he said, '*To the Mint—Borough*,'" replied Holford: "those were his very words—and away the cab went."

"And you have since been to see if you could recognise the cab, and pump the cab-man?" continued Jem.

"By your request I have done so," answered Holford; "and my researches have been altogether unsuccessful. I could not find the particular cab which he took."

"Why didn't you question the waterman and the drivers?" asked Jem.

"So I did; but I could glean nothing. Now if you really want to find the Resurrection Man, I should advise you to go over to the Mint, and hunt him out amongst the low public-houses in that district. Depend upon it," added Holford, "he has business there; for he is not a man to run about in cabs for nothing."

"The fact is, Harry," returned Jem, "that it doesn't suit my schemes to look after Tidkins myself. He would only get out of my way; and—as I have missed my aim *once*—I must take care to *thrust home* the next time I fall in with him."

"You mean to say that you have poniarded him once, and that he escaped death?" whispered Holford.

"Yes: but I will tell you all about it presently, Harry," said Crankey Jem; "and then, perhaps, you will be induced to assist me in hunting out the Resurrection Man."

"I certainly have an old score to settle with him," returned Holford; "for—as I told you—he once laid a plot against my life. To-night

you shall tell me how you came to be so bitter against him: to-morrow night I will visit the Mint, and make the inquiries you wish concerning him; and the night afterwards I must devote to particular business of my own."

"And what particular business can such a younker as you have in hand?" asked Crankey Jem, with as much of a smile as his grim countenance could possibly relax itself into.

"I now and then visit a place where I can contemplate, at my ease, a beautiful lady—without even my presence being suspected," answered Holford, in a mysterious tone.

"A beautiful lady! Are you in love with her, then?" demanded Crankey Jem.

"The mere idea is so utterly absurd—so extravagant—so preposterous," replied Holford, "that my lips dare not speak an affirmative. To acknowledge that I love this lady of whom I speak, would be almost a crime—an atrocity—a diabolical insult,—so highly is she placed above me! And yet," he added mournfully, "the human heart *has* strange susceptibilities—*will* indulge in the idlest phantasies! My chief happiness is to gaze upon this lady—and my blood boils when I behold him on whom all her affection is bestowed."

"She is married, then?" said Crankey Jem, interrogatively.

"Yes—married to one who is handsome and young, and who perhaps loves her all the more because he owes so much—so very much to her! But I actually shudder—I feel alarmed—I tremble, while I thus permit my tongue to touch upon such topics,—topics as sacred as a religion—as holy as a worship."

"You have either indulged in some very foolish and most hopeless attachment, Harry," said his companion; "or else your wits are going a-wool-gathering."

"May be both your remarks apply to me," muttered Holford, a cloud passing over his countenance. "But—no—no: I am in the perfect possession of my senses—my intellects are altogether unimpaired. It is a fancy—a whim of my mine to introduce myself into the place I before alluded to, and, from my concealment, contemplate the lady of whom I have spoken. It gives me pleasure to look upon her—I know not why. Then—when I am alone—I brood upon her image, recall to mind all I have heard her say or seen her do, and ponder on her features—her figure—her dress—her whole appearance, until I become astonished at myself—alarmed at my own presumption—terrified at my own thoughts. For weeks and weeks—nay, for months—I remain away from the place where she often dwells;—but at length some imperceptible and unknown impulse urges me thither; I rove about the neighbourhood, gazing longingly upon the building;—I endeavour to tear myself away—I cannot;—then I ascend the wall—I traverse the garden—I enter the dwelling—I conceal myself—I behold *her* again—*him* also,—and my pleasures and my tortures are experienced all over again!"

"You're a singular lad," said Crankey Jem, eyeing the youth with no small degree of astonishment, and some suspicion that he was not altogether right in his upper storey. "But who is this lady that you speak of? and why are you so frightened even to think of her? A cat may look at a king—aye, and *think* of him too, for that matter. Human nature is human nature; and one isn't always answerable for one's feelings."

"There I agree with you, Jem," said Holford. "I have often struggled hard against that impulse which urges me towards the place where the lady dwells—but all in vain!"

"Who is she, once more?" demanded Jem.

"That is a secret—never to be revealed," answered Harry.

Crankey Jem had commenced an observation in reply, when one of the persons who were sitting drinking at another table, suddenly struck up a chant in so loud and boisterous a tone that it completely drowned the voice of Holford's companion:—

FLARE UP.

Flare up, I say, my jolly friends,
And pass the bingo gaily;—
Who cares a rap if all this ends
Some morn at the Old Bailey?
"A short life and a merry one"
Should be our constant maxim;
And he's a fool that gives up fun
Because remorse attacks him.

Here Ned has forks so precious fly,
And Bill can smash the flimsies;[13]
No trap to Tom could e'er come nigh,
For he so fleet of limbs is.
Bob is the best to crack a crib,
And Dick to knap a fogle;[14]
And I can wag my tongue so glib
A beak would wipe his ogle.

Who are so happy then as we—
Each with such useful knowledge?
For Oxford University
Can't beat the Floating College.[15]
To parish prigs one gives degrees,
To lumber-lags[16] the latter:
But I would sooner cross the seas,
Than in a humbox[17] patter.[18]

Each state in life has its mishaps:—
Kings fear a revolution;
The knowing covey dreads the traps—
And *both* an execution.
Death will not long pass any by—
Each chance is duly raffled;
What matters whether we must die
In bed or on the scaffold?

Flare up, I say, then, jolly friends,
And pass the bingo gaily;
Who cares a rap if all this ends
Some morn at the Old Bailey?

"A short life and a merry one"
Should be our constant maxim;
And he's a fool that gives up fun
Because remorse attacks him.

"Now let us be moving, young sprig," said Crankey Jem, when the song was brought to a conclusion. "You shall come with me to my lodging, where we'll have a bit of supper together; and then I'll tell you my story. It is a strange one, I can assure you."

Holford rose, and followed Crankey Jem from the public-house.

The latter led the way to a court in Drury Lane; and introduced the lad into a small back chamber, which was tolerably neat and comfortable.

On a table near the window, were small models of ships, executed with considerable taste; various tools; blocks of wood, not yet shaped; paint-pots, brushes, twine, little brass cannon and anchors,—in a word, all the articles necessary for the miniature vessels which are seen in the superior toy-shops.

"That is the way I get my living, Harry," said Jem, pointing towards the work-table. "I have been a sad fellow in my time: but if any one who has gone through all I have suffered, doesn't change, I don't know who the devil would. Sit down, Harry—the fire will soon blaze up."

Jem stirred the fire, and then busied himself to spread a small round table standing in the middle of the room, with some cold meat, a substantial piece of cheese, and a quartern loaf. He also produced from his cupboard a bottle of spirits, and when there was a good blaze in the grate, he placed the kettle to boil.

"You have got every thing comfortable enough here, Jem," said Holford, when these preparations were concluded.

"Yes; I can earn a good bit of money when I choose," was the answer. "But I waste a great deal of time in making inquiries after Tidkins—yes, and in brooding on my vengeance, as you, Harry, do upon your love."

"Love!" ejaculated Holford. "My God! if you only knew of whom you were speaking!"

"Well—well," cried Jem, laughing; "I see it is a sore point—I won't touch on it any more. So now fall to, and eat, Harry. You're sincerely welcome. Besides, you can and will serve me, I know, in ferretting out this villain Tidkins. If you behave well, I'll teach you how to make those pretty ships; and you can earn six times as much at that work, as ever you will obtain as pot-boy at a public."

"Oh! if you would really instruct me, Jem, in your business," exclaimed Holford, "how much I should be obliged to you! The very name of a pot-boy is odious to my ears. Yes—I will serve you faithfully and truly, Jem," continued the lad: "I will go over to the Mint to-morrow evening; and if Tidkins is *there*, you shall know *where*."

"That's what I call business, Harry," said Jem. "Serve me in this—and you can't guess all I'll do for you."

They ate their supper with a good appetite. Jem—who was somewhat methodical after a fashion—cleared away the things, and placed two clean tumblers and a bowl full of sugar upon the table.

When the grog was duly mixed, and "every thing was comfortable," as the man termed it, he commenced his truly remarkable history, which we have corrected and improved as to language, in the following manner.

13. Pass fictitious Bank-Notes.
14. Handkerchief.
15. The Hulks.
16. Transports.
17. Pulpit.
18. Preach.

CHAPTER CXCI.

CRANKEY JEM'S HISTORY.

My father's name was Robert Cuffin. At the death of *his* father he succeeded to a good business as grocer and tea-dealer; but he was very extravagant, and soon became bankrupt. He obtained his certificate, and then embarked as a wine merchant. At the expiration of three years he failed again, and once more appeared in the *Gazette*. This time he was refused his certificate. He, however, set up in business a third time, and became a coal merchant. His extravagances continued: so did his misfortunes. He failed, was thrown into prison, and took the benefit of the Insolvents' Act—but not without a long remand. On his release from gaol, he turned dry-salter. This new trade lasted a short time, and ended as all the others had done. Another residence in prison—another application to the Insolvents' Court—and another remand, ensued.

"My father was now about forty years of age, and completely ruined. He had no credit—no resources—no means of commencing business again. He was, however, provided with a wife and seven children—all requiring maintenance, and he having nothing to maintain them on. I was not as yet born. It appears that my father sate down one evening in a very doleful humour, and in a very miserable garret, to meditate upon his circumstances. He revolved a thousand schemes in his head; but all required some little credit or capital wherewith to make a commencement; and he had neither. At length he started up, slapped his hand briskly upon the table, and exclaimed, 'By heavens, I've got it!'—'Got what?' demanded his wife.—'A call!' replied my father.—'A call!' ejaculated his better half, in astonishment.—'Yes; a call,' repeated my father; 'a call from above to preach the blessed Gospel and cleanse the unsavoury vessels of earth from their sinfulness.'—His wife began to cry, for she thought that distress had turned his brain; but he soon convinced her that he was never more in earnest in his life. He desired her to make the room look as neat as possible, and get a neighbour to take care of the children for an hour or two in the evening, when he should return with a few friends. He then went out, and his wife obeyed his instructions. Sure enough, in the evening, back came my father with a huge Bible under one arm and a Prayer-Book under the other, and followed by half-a-dozen demure-looking ladies and gentlemen, who had a curious knack of keeping their eyes incessantly fixed upwards—or heaven-ward, as my father used to express it.

"Well, the visitors sate down; and my father, whose countenance had assumed a most wonderful gravity of expression since the morning, opened the prayer-meeting with a psalm. He then read passages from the two sacred books he had brought with him; and he wound up the service by an extemporaneous discourse, which drew tears from the eyes of his audience.

"The prayer-meeting being over, an elderly lady felt herself so overcome with my father's convincing eloquence, that a considerate old gentleman sent for a bottle of gin; and thus my father's 'call' was duly celebrated.

"To be brief—so well did my father play his cards, that he soon gathered about him a numerous congregation; a chapel was hired somewhere in Goodman's Fields; and he was now a popular minister. His flock placed unbounded confidence in him—nay almost worshipped him; so that, thanks to their liberality, he was soon provided with a nicely-furnished house in the immediate vicinity of the chapel. Next door to him there dwelt a poor widow, named Ashford, and who had a very pretty daughter called Ruth. These females were amongst the most devoted of my father's flock; and in their eyes the reverend preacher was the pattern of virtue and holiness. The widow was compelled to take a little gin at times 'for the stomach's sake;' but one day she imbibed too much, fell down in a fit, and died. My father preached a funeral sermon, in which he eulogised her as a saint; and he afforded an asylum to the orphan girl. Ruth accordingly became an inmate of my father's house.

"And now commences the most extraordinary portion of the history of my father's life. You will admit that the suddenness of his 'call' was remarkable enough; but this was nothing to the marvellous nature of a vision which one night appeared to him. Its import was duly communicated to Miss Ashford next day; and the young lady piously resigned herself to that fate which my father assured her was the will of heaven. In a few months the consequences of the vision developed themselves; for Miss Ashford was discovered to be in the family way. My father's lawful wife raised a storm which for some time seemed beyond the possibility of mitigation; the deacons of the chapel called, and the elders of the congregation came to investigate the matter. My father received them with a countenance expressive of more than ordinary demureness and solemnity. A conclave was held—explanations were demanded of my father. Then was it that the author of my being rose, and, in a most impressive manner, acquainted the assembly with the nature of his vision. 'The angel of the Lord,' he said, 'appeared to me one night, and ordered me to raise up seed of righteousness, so that when the Lord calls me unto himself, fitting heirs to carry on the good work which I have commenced, may not fail. I appealed to the angel in behalf of my own lawfully begotten offspring; but the angel's command brooked not remonstrances, and willed that I should raise up seed of Ruth Ashford: for she is blessed, in that her name is Ruth.'—This explanation was deemed perfectly satisfactory: and, when the deacons and elders had departed, my father succeeded some how or another not only in pacifying his wife, but also in reconciling her to the amour which he still carried on with Miss Ashford.[19]

"Thus my father preserved both his mistress and his sanctity—at least for some considerable time longer. The fruit of that amour was

myself; and my name is consequently Ashford—James Ashford—although my father insisted upon calling me Cuffin. Time wore on; but by degrees the jealousies which my father had at first succeeded in appeasing, developed themselves in an alarming manner between the wife and the mistress. Scenes of violence occurred at the house of his Reverence; and the neighbours began to think that their minister's amour was not quite so holy in its nature as he had represented it. The congregation fell off; and my father's reputation for sanctity was rapidly wearing out. Still he would not part with my mother and me; and the result was that his lawful wife left the house with all her own children. My father refused to support them; the parish officers interfered; and the scandal was grievously aggravated. Death arrived at this juncture to carry away the principal bone of contention. My mother became dangerously ill, and after languishing in a hopeless condition for a few weeks, breathed her last.

"Having thus stated the particulars of my birth, it will not be necessary to dwell on this portion of my narrative. I will only just observe that, at the death of Miss Ashford, a reconciliation was effected between my father and his wife; and that the former contrived to maintain his post as minister of the chapel—though with a diminished flock, and consequently with a decreased revenue. Nevertheless, I obtained a smattering of education at the school belonging to the chapel, and was treated with kindness by my father, although with great harshness by his wife. Thus continued matters until I was fifteen, when my father died; and I was immediately thrust out of doors to shift for myself.

"I was totally friendless. Vainly did I call upon the deacons and elders of the congregation; even those who had adhered to my father to the very last, had their eyes opened now that he was no longer present to reason with them. They spurned me from their doors; and I was left to beg or steal. I chose the former; but one night I was taken up by a watchman (there were no police in those times) because I was found wandering about without being able to give a satisfactory account of myself. You may look astonished; but I can assure you that when a poor devil says, '*I am starving—houseless—friendless—pennyless*,' it is supposed to mean that he can't give a satisfactory account of himself! In the morning I was taken before the magistrate, and committed to the House of Correction as a rogue and vagabond.

"In prison I became acquainted with a number of young thieves and pickpockets; and, so desperate was my condition, that when the day of emancipation arrived, I was easily persuaded to join them. Then commenced a career which I would gladly recall—but cannot! Amongst my new companions I obtained the nickname of '*Crankey*,' because I was subject to fits of deep despondency and remorse, so that they fancied I was not right in my head. In time I became the most expert housebreaker in London—Tom the Cracksman alone excepted. My exploits grew more and more daring; and on three occasions I got into trouble. The first and second times I was sent to the hulks. I remember that on my second trial a pal of mine was acquitted through a flaw in the indictment. He was charged with having broken into and burglariously entered a jeweller's shop. It was, however, proved by one of the prosecutor's own witnesses that the shop door had been accidentally left unlocked and unbolted, and that consequently he had entered without any violence at all. Thanks to the laws, he escaped on that ground, although judge and jury were both convinced of his guilt. Time wore on; and I formed new acquaintances in the line to which I was devoted. These were Tom the Cracksman, Bill Bolter, Dick Flairer, the Buffer, and the Resurrection Man. With them I accomplished many successful burglaries; but at length I got into trouble a third time, and a stop was put to my career in London. It was in the year 1835 that the Resurrection Man and I broke into a jeweller's shop in Princes Street, Soho. We got off with a good booty. The Resurrection Man went over to the Mint: I let Dick Flairer into the secret, gave him a part of my share in the plunder, and then took to a hiding-place which there is in Chick Lane, Smithfield. Now I knew that Dick was stanch to the back-bone; and so he proved himself—for he brought me my food as regularly as possible; and at the end of a week, the storm had blown over enough to enable me to leave my hiding-place. I hastened to join the Resurrection Man in the Mint, where I stayed two or three days. Then the miscreant sold me, in order to save himself; and we were both committed to Newgate. Tidkins turned King's Evidence; and I was sentenced to transportation for life. The Resurrection Man was discharged at the termination of the business of the sessions.

"Myself and several other convicts, who were sentenced at the same session, were removed from Newgate to the Penitentiary at Millbank. Amongst the number were two persons whose names you may have heard before, because their case made a great noise at the time. These were Robert Stephens and Hugh Mac Chizzle, who were the principal parties concerned in a conspiracy to pass a certain Eliza Sydney off as a young man, and defraud the Earl of Warrington out of a considerable property. We remained about a fortnight in the Penitentiary, and were then transferred to the convict-ship at Woolwich. But before we left Millbank, we were clothed in new suits of grey, or pepper-and-salt, as we called the colour; and we were also ironed. The convict-ship was well arranged for its miserable purpose. On each side of the between-decks were two rows of sleeping-berths, one above the other: each berth was about six feet square, and was calculated to hold four convicts, eighteen inches' space to sleep in being considered ample room enough for each individual. The hospital was in the fore-part of the vessel, and was separated from the prison by means of a bulk-head, in which partition there were two strong doors, forming a means of communication between the two compartments. The fore and main hatchways, between decks, were fitted up with strong wooden stanchions round them; and in each of those stanchions there was a door with three padlocks, to let the convicts in and out, and secure them effectually at night. In each hatchway a ladder was placed, for us to go up and down by; and these ladders were always pulled on deck after dusk. Scuttle-holes, or small ports to open and shut for the admission of air, were cut along the vessel's sides; and in the partition between the prison and the hospital was fixed a large stove, with a funnel, which warmed and ventilated both compartments at the same time. When we were placed on board the convict-ship, we had each a pair of shoes, two pairs of trousers, four shirts, and other warm clothing, besides a bed, bolster, and blanket. Of Bibles, Testaments, and Prayer-Books, there was also plenty.

"The moment the surgeon came on board, he arranged the mess-berths and mess-tables. All the clothing, linen, bedding, and other articles were marked with consecutive numerals in black paint, from No. 1. up to the highest number of convicts embarked. Thus, we messed and slept along the prison-deck in regular numerical progression. In food we were not stinted: each man had three-quarters of a pound of biscuit daily; and every day, too, we sate down to beef, pork, or pease-soup. Gruel and cocoa were served out for breakfast and supper. Every week we received a certain quantity of vinegar, lime-juice, and sugar, which were taken as preventatives for scurvy. Each mess selected a head, or chairman, who saw the provisions weighed out, and that justice was done in this particular to each individual at his table.

"The surgeon selected six of the most fitting amongst the convicts to act the part of petty officers, whose duty it was to see his orders punctually executed, and to report instances of misconduct. Four of these remained in the prison; and the other two were stationed on deck, to watch those convicts who came up in their turns for airing. The *Captains of the Deck*, as the officers were called, had some little extra allowance for their trouble, and were moreover allowed a certain quantity of tobacco.

"It was in January, 1836, that we sailed for Sydney. Although I had no wife,—no children,—and, I may almost say, no friend that I cared about,—still my heart sank within me, when, from the deck of the convict-ship, I caught a last glimpse of the white cliffs of Old England. Tears came into my eyes; and I, who had not wept since childhood, wept then. But there were several of my companions who had left wives and children, or parents, behind them; and I could read on their countenances the anguish which filled their inmost souls!

"The surgeon was a kind and humane man. The moment we were out of sight of land, he ordered our chains to be taken off; and he allowed us to enjoy as much air upon deck as we could possibly require. The guard, under the command of a commissioned officer, consisted of thirty-one men, and did duty on the quarter-deck in three alternate watches. A sentry, with a drawn cutlass, stood at each hatchway; and the soldiers on watch always had their fire-arms loaded.

"When we had been to sea a little time, most of the convicts relapsed into their old habits of swearing, lying, and obscene conversation. They also gambled at pitch and toss, the stakes being their rations. Thieving prevailed to a very great extent; for the convict who lost his dinner by gambling, was sure to get one by stealing. They would often make wagers amongst themselves as to who was the most expert thief; and when the point was put to a practical test, dreadful quarrels would arise, the loser of the wager, perhaps, discovering that he himself was the victim of the trial of skill, and that his hoard of lime-juice, sugar, tobacco, or biscuit had disappeared. Stephens, who was at the same mess with myself, did all he could to discourage these practices; but the others pronounced him '*a false magician*,' and even his friend, Mac Chizzle, turned against him. So at last he gave up the idea of introducing a reformation amongst his brethren in bondage. The fact is, that any convict who attempts to humbug the others by pretensions to honesty, or who expresses some superior delicacy of sentiment, which, of course, in many instances is actually experienced, had better hang himself at once. The equality of the convict-ship is a frightful equality,—the equality of crime,—the levelling influence of villany,—the abolition of all social distinctions by the hideous freemasonry of turpitude and its consequent penalties! And yet there is an aristocracy, even in the prison of the convict-ship,—an aristocracy consisting of the oldest thieves, in contra-distinction to the youngest; and of *townies*,[20] in opposition to *yokels*.[21] The deference paid by the younger thieves to the elder ones is astonishing; and that man who, in relating his own history, can enumerate the greatest number of atrocities, is a king amongst convicts. Some of the best informed of the convicts wrote slang journals during the passage, and read them once a-week to the rest. They generally referred to the sprees of the night, and contained some such entries as this:—'*A peter cracked and frisked, while the cobbles dorsed; Sawbones came and found the glim doused; fadded the dobbins in a yokel's crib, while he blew the conkey-horn; Sawbones lipped a snitch; togs leered in yokel's downy; yokel screwed with the darbies*.' The exact meaning of this is:—'A chest broken open and robbed while the convicts slept: surgeon came in and found the lamp put out; the thief thrust the clothes which he had stolen into a countryman's berth, while he was snoring fast asleep; the surgeon ordered a general search; the clothes were found in the countryman's bed; and the countryman was put into irons.'

"I must observe, that while the ship was still in the Thames, none of the convicts would admit that they deserved their fate. They all proclaimed themselves much-injured individuals, and declared that the Home Secretary was certain to order a commutation of their sentence. The usual declarations were these:—'I am sure never to see New South Wales. The prejudice of the judge against me at the trial were evident to all present in the court. The jury were totally misled by his summing-up. My friends are doing every thing they can for me; and I am sure to get off.'—Out of a hundred and ten convicts, at least a hundred spoke in this manner. But the ship sailed,—England was far behind,—and *not one single convict* had his hopes of a commuted sentence gratified. Then, when those hopes had disappeared, they all opened their budget of gossip most freely, and related their exploits in so frank a manner, that it was very easy to perceive the justice of the verdicts which had condemned them.

"The voyage out was, on the whole, a tolerably fine one. It lasted four months and a half; and it was, consequently, in the middle of May that we arrived in sight of Sydney. But, when thus at the point of destination, the sea became so rough, and the wind blew such 'great guns,' that the captain declared there was mischief at hand. The convicts were all ordered into the prison, the ports of which were closed; and the heat was stifling. The tempest came with appalling violence. Crash went every loose thing on board,—the timbers creaked as if they would start from their settings,—the ropes rattled,—and the wind whistled horribly through the rigging. The ship was lifted to an immense height, and then by the fall of the mountain wave, was plunged into the depths of the trough of the sea;—at one moment dipping the studding-sail boom into the water,—and the next lying nearly on its beam-ends on the opposite side. I afterwards learnt from a sailor, that the waves were forty feet high, twenty below the ordinary level of the sea, and twenty above it. Thus, when we were in the trough, they were forty feet above our heads! Towards evening the storm subsided; and early next morning Sydney broke more clearly upon our view.

"Sydney is beautifully situated. It possesses a fine ascent from a noble harbour; and its bays, its coves, its gardens, its gentlemen's seats, form a pleasing spectacle. Then its forests of masts—the Government-house, with its beautiful domain—the numerous wharfs—the thousands of boats upon the glassy water—and Wooloomooloo, with its charming villas and its windmills,—all these combine to enhance the interest of the scene. The town itself is far more handsome than I had expected to find it. The shops are very fine—particularly the silversmiths', the haberdashers', and confectioners', which would not disgrace the West End of London. They are mostly lighted with gas, and in the evening have a brilliant appearance. There is an astonishing number of grog-shops—nearly two hundred and fifty, for a population of 30,000 souls. George Street and Pitt Street are the principal thoroughfares: and the rents are so high that they average from three to five hundred pounds a-year. There are no common sewers in Sydney; and, although the greater portion of the town stands upon a height, yet many of the principal streets are perfectly level, and the want of a vent for the foul water and other impurities is sadly felt. I may add, that the first appearance of Sydney and its inhabitants does not impress a stranger with the idea of being in a country so far away from Europe; the language, the manners, and the dress of the people being so closely similar to those of England. But wait a little while, and a closer observation produces a different effect. Presently you will see the government

gangs of convicts, marching backwards and forwards from their work in single military file,—solitary ones straggling here and there, with their white woollen Paramatta frocks and trousers, or grey or yellow jackets with duck overalls, all daubed over with broad arrows and initial letters to denote the establishment to which they belong,—and then the gaol-gang, moving sulkily along with their jingling leg-chains,—all these sad spectacles telling a tale of crime and its effects, and proclaiming trumpet-tongued the narrative of human degradation!

"The ship entered the harbour; our irons had already been put on again some days previously; and we were all landed under the care of the guard. We were marched to the gaol-yard; and there our clothes were all daubed over with broad arrows and the initials P. S.—meaning '*Prisoners' Barracks*,' to which establishment we were conducted as soon as the ceremony of painting our garments was completed. This barrack had several large day-rooms and numerous sleeping wards, the bedsteads being arranged in two tiers, or large platforms, but without separation. In every room there was a man in charge who was answerable for the conduct of the rest; but no one ever thought of complaining of the misbehaviour of his companions. A tread-mill was attached to the building: there were moreover several solitary cells—a species of punishment the horrors of which no tongue can describe.

"In the course of a few days we were all divided into sections, according to the degrees of punishment which we were to undergo. Stephens and Mac Chizzle were kept at Sydney: I was sent with some thirty others to Port Macquarie—a place about two hundred and sixty miles, as the crow flies, to the north of Sydney.

"The scenery is magnificent in the neighbourhood of Macquarie Harbour: but the life of the convict—oh! that is fearful in the extreme! I know that I was a great criminal—I know that my deeds demanded a severe punishment; but death had been preferable to a doom like that! Compelled to endure every kind of privation,—shut out from the rest of the world,—restricted to a very limited quantity of food, which *never* included fresh meat,—kept in chains and under a military guard with fixed bayonets and loaded fire-arms,—with no indulgence for good conduct, but severe penalties, even flogging or solitary confinement, for the smallest offences,—constantly toiling in the wet, at felling timber and rolling it to the water,—forced to support without murmuring the most terrible hardships,—how did I curse the day when I rendered myself liable to the discipline of this hell upon earth! I will give you an idea of the horrors of that place:—during the six months that I remained there, nineteen deaths occurred amongst two hundred and twenty convicts; and of those *nineteen*, only five were from natural causes. Two were drowned, four were killed by the falling of trees, three were shot by the military, and five were murdered by their comrades! And why were those murders perpetrated? Because the assassins were tired of life, but had not the courage to commit suicide; and therefore they accomplished crimes which were sure to be visited by death upon the scaffold!

"The chain-gang to which I belonged was stationed at Philip's Creek; and our business was to supply timber for the ship-builders on Sarah's Island. We were lodged in huts of the most miserable description; and though our toils were so long and arduous, our rations were scarcely sufficient to keep body and soul together. The timber we cut was principally Huon pine; no beasts of burden were allowed; and we had to roll the trunks of trees to an immense distance. What with the humid climate, the want of fresh meat, and the severity of the labour, no man who fell ill ever entertained a hope of recovery. Talk of the civilised notions of the English—talk of the humane principles of her penal laws,—why, the Inquisition itself could not have been more horrible than the doom of the convict at Macquarie Harbour! Again I say, it was true that we were great criminals; but surely some adequate mode of punishment—some mode involving the means of *reformation*—might have been devised, without the application of so much real physical torture! I have heard or read that when the Inquisition put its victims to the rack, it afterwards remanded them to their dungeons, and allowed them leisure to recover and be cured;—but in the penal settlement of Port Macquarie those tortures were renewed daily—and they killed the miserable sufferers by inches!

"Our rations consisted daily of one pound and a half of flour, from which twelve per cent. of bran had been subtracted, one pound and a half of salt meat, and half an ounce of soap. No tea—no vegetables. The flour was made into cakes called *damper*, cooked in a frying-pan; and this wasteful mode of preparing it greatly diminished its quantity. Besides, divide those rations into three parts, and you will find that the three meals are little enough for men toiling hard from sunrise to sunset. The convict who did not keep a good look-out on his provisions was certain to be robbed by his comrades; and some men have been plundered to such an extent as actually to have been on the very verge of starvation.

"I had not been at Macquarie Harbour more than five months, when Stephens and Mac Chizzle arrived, and were added to our chain-gang. This punishment they had incurred for having endeavoured to escape from Sydney, where they had been treated with some indulgence, in consequence of their station in life previous to their sentence in England. So miserable was I, with hard work and scanty food, that I resolved to leave the place, or perish in the attempt. I communicated my design to Stephens and Mac Chizzle; and they agreed to accompany me. Escape from Macquarie was known to be a most difficult undertaking; and few convicts who essayed it were ever able to reach the settlements in other parts of the Colony. They were either murdered by their comrades for a supply of food, or perished in the bush. Formidable forests had to be traversed; and the chance of catching kangaroos was the only prospect of obtaining the means of existence. Nevertheless, I resolved to dare all those horrors and fearful risks, rather than remain at Philip's Creek. Five or six others, in addition to Stephens and Mac Chizzle, agreed to adopt this desperate venture with me; and one night we stole away—to the number of ten—from the huts.

"Yes—we thus set out on this tremendous undertaking, each individual possessing no more food than was sufficient for a single meal. And ere the sun rose all our store was consumed; and we found ourselves in the middle of a vast forest—without a guide—without victuals—almost without a hope! Convicts are not the men to cheer each other: misfortunes have made them selfish, brutal, and sulky. We toiled on in comparative silence. One of my companions, who had been ten years at Macquarie Harbour, was well acquainted with the mode in which the natives search for traces of the opossum; and, when hunger began to press upon us, he examined every tree with a hollow limb, and also the adjacent trees for marks of the opossum's claws. For, I must tell you, that this animal is so sagacious, that it usually runs up a neighbouring tree and thence jumps to the one wherein its retreat is, in order to avoid being traced. The convict to whom I have alluded, and whose name was Blackley, at length discovered the trail of an opossum, and clambered up the tree in which its hole was found, by means of successive notches in the bark, to place the great toe in. Having reached the hole, he probed it with a long stick, and found that there actually was an opossum within. Thrusting in his hand, he seized

the animal by the tail, pulled it out, and killed it by a swinging dash against the trunk of a tree. But this was little enough among so many. We, however, made a fire, cooked it, and thus contrived just to mitigate the terrible cravings of hunger. The flesh of the opossum is like that of a rabbit, and is therefore too delicate to enable a hearty appetite to make a good meal on a tenth portion of so small an animal.

"On the following day Blackley managed to kill a kangaroo, weighing about sixty pounds; and thus we were supplied with food for three or four days, acting economically. The flesh of the kangaroo is much like venison, and is very fine eating. We continued our way amidst the forest, which appeared endless; and in due time the kangaroo's flesh was consumed. Blackley was unwearied in his exertions to provide more food; and, so much time was wasted in these endeavours, that we made but little progress in our journey. And now, to our terror, Blackley could find no more opossums—could kill no more kangaroos. We grew desperate: starvation was before us. Moody—sulky—glaring on each other with a horribly significant ferocity, we dragged ourselves along. Four days elapsed—and not a mouthful of food had we touched. On the fifth night we made a fire, and sate round it at considerable distances from each other. We all endeavoured to remain awake: we trembled at the approach of drowsiness—*for we knew the consequences of sleep in our desperate condition*. There we sate—none uttering a word,—with cracked and bloody lips—parched throats—eyes glowing with cannibal fires,—our minds a prey to the most appalling thoughts. At length Mac Chizzle, the lawyer, fell back in a sound slumber, having no doubt found it impossible to bear up against the weariness which was creeping over him. Then Blackley rose, and went farther into the wood. It required no ghost to tell us that he had gone to cut a club for a horrible purpose. The most breathless silence prevailed. At length there was a strange rustling amongst the trees at a little distance; and then cries of indescribable agony fell upon our ears. These tokens of distress were in the voice of Blackley, who called us by name, one after another. A vague idea of the real truth rivetted us to the spot; and in a short time the cries ceased altogether. Oh! what a night of horror was that! An hour had elapsed since Blackley's disappearance; and we had ceased to trouble ourselves concerning his fate:—our own intolerable cravings for food were the sole objects of our thoughts. Nor was Mac Chizzle doomed to escape death. A convict named Felton determined to execute the purpose which Blackley had entertained—though in a different manner. Afraid to venture away from the party to cut a bludgeon, he drew a large clasp-knife from his pocket, and plunged the long sharp blade into the breast of the sleeper. A cry of horror burst from Stephens and myself; and we rushed forward—now that it was unfortunately too late—to save the victim. We were well aware of the man's intentions when he approached his victim; but it was not until the blow was struck that we had the courage to interfere. It was, however, as I have said—too late! Mac Chizzle expired without a groan.

"I cannot dwell upon this scene: depraved—wicked—criminal as I was in many respects, my soul revolted from the idea of cannibalism, now that the opportunity of appeasing my hunger by such horrible means was within my reach. Stephens and I retired a little from the rest, and turned our backs upon the frightful work that was in progress. Again I say—oh! the horrors of that night! I was starving—and food was near. But what food? The flesh of a fellow-creature! In imagination I followed the entire process that was in operation so close behind me; and presently the hissing of the flesh upon the embers, and the odour of the awful cookery, convinced me that the meal would soon be served up. Then how did I wrestle with my own inclinations! And Stephens, I could well perceive, was also engaged in a terrific warfare with the promptings of hunger. But we resisted the temptation: yes—we resisted it;—and our companions did not trouble themselves to invite us to their repast.

"At length the morning dawned upon that awful and never-to-be-forgotten night. The fire was now extinguished; but near the ashes lay the entrails and the head of the murdered man. The cannibals had completely anatomised the corpse, and had wrapped up in their shirts (which they took off for the purpose) all that they chose to carry away with them. Not a word was spoken amongst us. The last frail links of sympathy—if any really had existed—seemed to have been broken by the incidents of the preceding night. Six men had partaken of the horrible repast; and they evidently looked on each other with loathing, and on Stephens and myself with suspicion. We all with one accord cut thick sticks, and advanced in the direction whence Blackley's cries had proceeded a few hours previously. His fate was that which we had suspected: an enormous snake was coiled around the wretch's corpse—licking it with its long tongue, to cover it with saliva for the purpose of deglutition. We attacked the monstrous reptile, and killed it. Its huge coils had actually squeezed our unfortunate comrade to death! Then—for the first time for many, many years—did a religious sentiment steal into my soul; and I murmured to myself: '*Surely this was the judgment of God upon a man who had meditated murder*.'

"That same day Stephens and myself gave our companions the slip, and struck into another direction together. We were fortunate enough to kill a kangaroo; and we made a hearty meal upon a portion of its flesh. Then how did we rejoice that we had withstood the temptation of the cannibal banquet! Stephens fell upon his knees and prayed aloud: I imitated his example—I joined in his thanksgiving. We husbanded our resources as much as possible; and God was merciful to us. We succeeded in killing another kangaroo, even before the first was entirely consumed; and this new supply enabled us to reach a settlement without further experiencing the pangs of hunger. Prudence now compelled us to separate; for though we had rid ourselves of our chains, we were still in our convict garb; and it was evident that two persons so clad were more likely to attract unpleasant notice, than one individual skulking about by himself. We accordingly parted; and from that moment I have never heard of Stephens. Whether he succeeded in escaping from the colony altogether, or whether he took to the bush again and perished, I know not:—that he was not retaken I am sure, because, were he captured, he would have been sent to Norfolk Island; and that he did *not* visit that most horrible of all the penal settlements—at least during a period of eighteen months after our escape from Macquarie—I am well aware, for reasons which I shall soon explain.

"In fact, I was not long at large after I separated with Stephens. My convict-dress betrayed me to a party of soldiers: I was arrested, taken to Sydney, tried, and sentenced to transportation to Norfolk Island. Before I left England in 1836, and since my return towards the end of 1839, I have heard a great many persons talk about Norfolk Island; but no one seemed to know much about it. I will therefore tell you something concerning it now.

"A thousand miles to the eastward of Sydney there are three islands close together. As you advance towards them in a ship from Sydney, Philip Island, which is very high land, and has a bold peak to the south, comes in view: close beyond it the lower hills of Norfolk Island, crowned with lofty pines, appear in sight; and between those two islands is a small and sterile speck called Nepean Island. Norfolk Island is six miles and a half long, and four broad—a miserable dot in the ocean compared to the vast tract of Australia.

The soil is chiefly basaltic, and rises into hills covered with grass and forest. Mount Pitt—the loftiest eminence in the island—is twelve hundred feet above the level of the sea. The Norfolk Island pine shoots to a height of a hundred feet,—sometimes growing in clumps, elsewhere singly, on the grassy parts of the island, even to the very verge of the shore, where its roots are washed by the sea at high water. The apple-fruited guava, the lemon, grapes, figs, coffee, olives, pomegranates, strawberries, and melons have been introduced, and are cultivated successfully. The island is every where inaccessible, save at an opening in a low reef fronting the little bay; and that is the point where the settlement is situated. The Prisoners' Barracks are pretty much upon the same plan as those at Sydney, and which I described to you just now. There is a room, called the Court-House, where the Protestant prisoners meet on Sunday to hear prayers; and there is another, called the Lumber-Yard room, for the Roman Catholics. The prayers in both places are read by prisoners. The principal buildings in the settlement are the Commandant's Residence, the Military Barracks, the Penitentiary, the Gaol, and the Hospital. The convicts are principally employed in quarrying stone; and as no gunpowder is used in blasting the rocks, and the stone is raised by means of levers, the labour is even more crushing than that of wood-felling at Port Macquarie. The prisoners, moreover, have to work in irons; and the food is not only insufficient, but bad—consisting only of dry maize bread and hard salt meat. Were it not for the supply of wild fruits in the island, the scurvy would rage like a pestilence. Between Macquarie Harbour and Norfolk Island I can only draw this distinction—that the former is *Purgatory*, and the latter *Hell*!

"There is no attempt to reform the prisoners in Norfolk Island, beyond prayer-reading—and this is of scarcely any benefit. The convicts are too depraved to be amended by mere moral lessons: they want *education*; they require to be *treated like human beings*, instead of brute beasts, criminal though they are; they need *a sufficiency of wholesome food*, to enable them to toil with something approaching a good will; they ought to be *protected against the tyranny of overseers*, who send them to gaol for the most trivial offences, or on the slightest suspicions; they should not be *forced to labour in chains which gall their ankles almost to the bone*, when a guard with loaded muskets is ever near, and seeing that shackles on the legs would not prevent violence with the hands were they inclined to have recourse to it; nor should they be *constantly treated as if they were merely wild beasts whom it is impossible to tame save by means of privation, heart-breaking toil, and the constant sense of utter degradation*. How can men be redeemed—reclaimed—reformed by such treatment as this? Let punishment be terrible—not horrible. It is monstrous to endeavour to render the criminal more obstinate—to make the dangerous one more ferocious—to crush in the soul every inducement to amend—to convert vice into hardened recklessness. The tortures of semi-starvation and overwhelming toil, and the system of retaining men's minds in a state of moral abasement and degradation in their own eyes, will never lead to reform. When at Macquarie Harbour, or at Norfolk Island, I have often thought how comparatively easy it would be to reclaim even the very worst among the convicts. Teach them *practically* that while there is life there is hope,—that it is *never too late to repent*,—that man can show mercy to the greatest sinner, even as God does,—that the most degraded mind may rise from the depths of its abasement,—that society seeks reformation and prevention in respect to crime, and not vengeance,—that the Christian religion, in a word, exists in the heart as well as in a book. But what sentiments do the convicts entertain? They are taught, by oppressive treatment, to lose sight of their own turpitude, and therefore to consider that all mankind is bent on inflicting a demoniac vengeance upon them;—they look upon the authorities as their persecutors;—they begin to fancy that they are worms which are justified in turning on those who tread them under foot;—they swear, and blaspheme, and talk obscenely, *merely because there is no earthly solace left them save in hardening their own hearts against all kindly sympathies and emotions*;—they receive the Word of God with suspicion, because man does not practically help them to a belief in the divine assurance relative to the efficacy of repentance;—they are compelled by terrific and unceasing hardships to look upon the tears of a contrite heart as the proofs of moral weakness:—and, in a word, they study how to avoid reflections which can lead, so far as they can see, to no beneficial end. They therefore welcome hardness of heart, obstinacy, and recklessness of disposition as an actual means of escape from thoughts which would, under favourable circumstances, lead to moral amendment and reformation.

"You may be surprised to hear such ideas from my lips; but I have pondered much and often upon this subject. And if ever these words which I am now uttering to you, Henry Holford, should find their way into print,—if ever my narrative, with its various reflections, should go forth to the world,—be you well assured that these ideas will set people thinking on the grand point—*whether society punishes to prevent crime and to reclaim the offender, or merely to avenge itself upon him*?

"My own prospects were gloomy enough. My life was to be passed in exile, misery, and torture. I loathed my associates. They took all possible pains to tease and annoy each other. They converted a beautiful spot—one of the loveliest islands in the world—into a perfect hell upon earth;—and seemed determined to supply any deficiency which the authorities had left in the sum of our unhappiness. They concocted various schemes of mischief, and then the most hardened would betray their comrades merely for the pleasure of seeing them flogged! I never shall forget a convict saying to me one day, 'I doubt the existence of a God; but I wish, if there is one, that he would take away my life, for I am so very miserable. I have only six years more to serve; and I am determined either to escape, or to murder some one and get hanged for it.'—This man's name was Anson; and from that moment he and I had frequent conversations together relative to an escape from the island. But how few were our hopes? Surrounded by the ocean—pent up in so narrow a space, as it were—so distant from all other lands—fearful to confide in our companions—and unable to carry our scheme into effect without assistance, we were frequently induced to give it up in despair.

"Not very far from the Commandant's house was a singular little cave, hollowed in the rugged limestone that forms two low hills,—the flat and the reef on the south of the island. This cave was near a lime-kiln, and was concealed by a stone drawn over its mouth. I had been nearly eighteen months on the island, (during which time, as I before said, Stephens was not sent to join the gangs; and therefore I concluded that he either perished in Australia, or effected his escape to Europe,)—eighteen months, I say, had elapsed, when Anson and I were one day at work in the lime-kiln, with a small gang. When the mid-day meal-time came, he and I strolled apart from the rest; and none of the sentries took any notice of us, because escape from that point in the broad day-light was impossible. As we were walking along and conversing, we discovered the cave. This circumstance gave a new impulse to our ideas, and to our hopes of an escape; and a few days afterwards, we put our plan into execution. We enlisted two other convicts in the scheme,—two men in whom we imagined that more confidence was to be placed than in any of the rest. By their aid we contrived to purloin at dusk a sack of biscuits; and this we conveyed to the cave. On the next night one of our new accomplices contrived to rob a small house of entertainment for seamen, of three suits of sailors' clothes; and these were conveyed to the cave. Our plans were now all matured. A

small decked yacht, cutter-rigged, and belonging to the Commandant, lay close by the shore; and we knew that there were only a man and a boy on board at that time. Our project was a desperate one; but the risk was worth running, seeing the result to be gained—namely, our freedom. When our arrangements were completed, we all four one evening absconded as we were returning home from the day's toils, and took refuge in the cave. No time was to be lost. About midnight, Anson and I swam off to the yacht, contrived to get on board, seized each a windlass-bar, and, descending to the cabin, mastered the man and the boy. We bound them in such a way that they could not leave their hammocks; and then we fastened down the hatchway to drown their cries in case they should shout for assistance. We next lowered the little skiff, and returned to land. Our companions joined us, with the bag of biscuit and the clothes, at a point previously agreed upon; and we all succeeded in reaching the cutter in safety. Then we set sail; and, favoured by the darkness of the night, got clear away without having excited on shore a suspicion that the yacht had moved from its moorings.

"As we had conjectured, there was very little provision on board; for the Commandant never used the yacht for more than a few hours' trip at a time. We had therefore done wisely to provide the biscuit; but there was not two days' supply of meat on board. We accordingly steered for the back of Philip Island, which we knew to abound in pigs and goats, and to be uninhabited by man. Anson and another of our companions went on shore with fire-arms, which we had found in the cutter; and within two hours after day-light they shot four pigs and thirteen goats. Myself and the other convict, who remained on board to take care of the vessel and guard the seaman and the boy, caught several king-fish and rock-cod. We were thus well provisioned; and another trip to the shore filled our water-casks. We next proposed to the seaman and boy either to join us, or to take the skiff and return to Norfolk Island as best they might. They preferred the latter offer; and we accordingly suffered them to depart, after compelling the sailor to exchange his clothes for one of our convict suits; so that we had now a proper garb each. In their presence we had talked of running for New Caledonia—an Island to the north of Norfolk Island; but the moment they were gone, we set sail for New Zealand, which is precisely in a contrary direction—being to the south of Norfolk Island. Our craft was but little better than a cockle-boat: it was, however, decked; fine weather prevailed; and moreover, it was better to die by drowning than perish by the gradual tortures of a penal settlement.

"We were in sight of New Zealand, when a fearful storm came on suddenly at an early hour on the thirteenth morning after we had quitted Norfolk Island. A tremendous sea broke over our little craft, and washed poor Anson over-board. The other two convicts and myself did all we could to save the vessel, and run her into a bay which we now descried in the distance; but our inexperience in nautical matters was put to a severe test. When our condition was apparently hopeless, and we expected that the sea would swallow us up, a large bark hove in sight. We made signals of distress; and the vessel steered towards us. But a mountainous wave struck the stern of the cutter, and stove in her timbers. She immediately began to fill. We cut away the boom, and clung to it as to a last hope. The vessel went down; and, small as it was, it formed a vortex which for a few moments sucked us under, spar and all. But we rose again to the surface, clinging desperately to the boom. Suddenly one of my comrades uttered a fearful cry—a cry of such wild agony that it rings in my ears every time I think of that horrible incident. I glanced towards him: the water was for an instant tinged with blood—a shark had bitten off one of the wretched man's legs! Oh! what an agony of fear I experienced then. The poor creature continued to shriek in an appalling manner for a few seconds: then he loosened his hold upon the spar, and disappeared in the raging element. My only surviving companion and myself exchanged looks of unutterable horror.

"We were drifting rapidly in the direction of the bark, which on its side was advancing towards us. When within hail, it lowered a boat. But I was destined to be the only survivor of the four convicts who had escaped from Norfolk Island. When only a few yards from the boat, my companion suddenly relaxed his hold upon the spar, and sank with a loud cry—to rise no more. The water was not tinged with blood—and therefore I do not suppose that he was attacked by a shark: most probably a sudden cramp seized him;—but, whatever the cause, he perished! I was dragged in an exhausted state into the boat, and was speedily safe on board the bark.

"The vessel was a trading one, and bound for Hobart Town, whence it was to sail for England. I gave so plausible an account of the shipwrecked cutter, that the real truth was not suspected, especially as I was attired in a sailor's dress; and as the bark was not to remain many days at Hobart Town, where, moreover, I was not known, I entertained the most sanguine hopes of being able to ensure my safe return to England. In three weeks,—after encountering much bad weather—we entered the Derwent; and, taking in a pilot, were carried safe up to Sullivan's Cove.

"Hobart Town is the capital of Van Diemen's Land, and is beautifully placed on the banks of an estuary called the Derwent. The streets are spacious: the houses are built of brick; and the roofs, covered with shingles, have the appearance of being slated. Mount Wellington rises behind the town to the height of 4000 feet, and is almost entirely clothed with forests. There is in Hobart Town a spacious House of Correction for females: it is called the Factory, and contained at that time about two hundred and fifty prisoners. They were employed in picking and spinning wool, and in washing for the Hospital, Orphan-School, and other institutions. The women were dressed in a prison garb, and had their hair cut close, which they naturally considered a grievous infliction of tyranny. When they misbehaved themselves, they were put into solitary confinement; and I heard that many of them had gone raving mad while enduring that horrible mental torture. I saw a chain-gang of a hundred and ten convicts, employed in raising a causeway across a muddy flat in the Derwent: they looked miserably unhealthy, pale, and emaciated, being half-starved, over-worked, and compelled to drink very bad water. The Government-House is a fine building, on the banks of the Derwent, and about a mile from the town. The Penitentiary at Hobart Town contains about six hundred prisoners, and is the principal receptacle for newly-arrived convicts. They are sent out in gangs, under overseers and guards, to work on the roads, or as carpenters, builders, sawyers, or masons, in the various departments.

"After remaining almost a fortnight at Hobart Town, the bark sailed for England, by way of Cape Horn; and I was now relieved from all fears of detection—at least for the present. As I have spoken of the condition of the female convicts in Hobart Town, I may as well give you some account of how transportation affects women; for you may be sure that I heard enough of that subject both at Sydney and at Macquarie Harbour. A female-convict ship is fitted up on precisely the same plan as that of the men, with the addition of shelves whereon to stow away the tea-crockery. The women's rations are the same as the men's, with the extra comforts of tea and sugar. This they have for breakfast, and oatmeal for supper. No guard of soldiers is required on board: nor is there a bulk-head across the upper deck in mid-ships. Instead of *captains of the vessel*, there are matrons appointed by the surgeon to take care of the *morals* of the rest; and these matrons are usually old brothel-keepers or procuresses, who know how to feign a sanctity which produces a favourable impression in their behalf. Women convicts are dreadfully quarrelsome; and their language is said to be more disgusting and filthy than that of the men. However vigilant the surgeon may be, it is impossible altogether to prevent intercourse between the females and the sailors; and it often happens that some of the *fair ones*, on their arrival in the colony, are in a way to increase the Australian population. Perhaps the surgeon himself may take a fancy to one or two of the best-looking; and these are sure to obtain great indulgences—such as being appointed nurses to the sick, or being permitted to remain on the sick-list throughout the voyage, which is an excuse for allowing them wine and other little comforts. The women always speak *to* and *of* each other as *ladies*; and the old procuresses, when chosen as matrons, are treated with the respectful *Mrs*. Thus it is always, '*Ladies*, come for'ard for your pork;' or '*Ladies*, come up for your biscuit;' or '*Ladies*, the puddings are cooked.' Of an evening they dance or sing,—and as often quarrel and fight. This cannot be wondered at, when it is remembered that there is no attempt at classification; and women who may have been chaste in person, though criminal in other respects, are compelled to herd with prostitutes of all degrees, from the lowest trull that skulks in the courts leading out of Fleet Street to the fashionable nymph who displays her charms at the theatre. The very chastity of a woman who has been sentenced perhaps for robbing furnished lodgings, or plundering her master in her capacity of servant, or for committing a forgery, is made a reproach to her by the prostitutes and old procuresses; and her life is miserable. Moreover, it is next to impossible that she can escape a contamination which prepares her for a life of profligacy when she reaches the colony.

"Before the female convict-ship leaves the Thames, numbers of old procuresses and brothel-keepers go on board to take leave of the girls with whom they are acquainted. These hags, dressed out in their gayest garb, and pretending to be overwhelmed with grief (while they really are with gin), represent themselves to be the mothers or aunts of the '*poor dear creatures*' who have got into trouble, and assure the surgeon that their so-called daughters or nieces were most excellent girls and bore exemplary characters previous to their present '*misfortune*.' The surgeon—if a novice, or a humane man—believes the tale, and is sure to treat with kindness the '*poor creatures*' thus recommended to him. About twenty years ago a Religious Society in London sent out, in an emigrant ship, twelve '*reclaimed unfortunate girls*,' with the hope that they might form good matrimonial connexions among the free settlers in the colony; there always having been—especially at first—a great dearth of European females in Australia. These girls were called the *Twelve Apostles*; and all England rang with the good work which had been accomplished by the Religious Society. But on the arrival of the Twelve Apostles at Sydney, seven of them were found to be in the family way by the sailors; and the others immediately entered on a course of unbounded licentiousness.[22]

"A few days before the female convict-vessel arrives at Sydney, the women—old and young—busy themselves in getting ready their finery for landing. The debarkation of female convicts always takes place with great effect. The prostitutes appear in their most flaunting attire; and many of them have gold ornaments about them. They are then sent to the Paramatta Factory. This establishment cannot be looked on as a place of punishment—nor as a place of reformation. The inmates are well fed, and are put to no labour. There is an extensive garden, in which they can walk at pleasure. Some of them are allotted to free settlers requiring servants; but the grand hope of the female convict is to marry. This prospect is materially aided by the fact that both free settlers and ticket-of-leave convicts are allowed to seek for help-mates in the Factory. When they call for that purpose, the fair penitents are drawn up in a row; and the wife-seeking individual inspects them as a general does his army, or a butcher the sheep in Smithfield Market. If he fancies one of the candidates, he beckons her from the rank, and they retire to a distance to converse. Should a matrimonial arrangement be made, the business is soon finished by the aid of a clergyman; but if no amicable understanding is come to, the nymph returns to the rank, and the swain chooses another—and so on, until the object of his visit is accomplished. So anxious are the unmarried free settlers or the ticket-of-leave convicts to change their single state of blessedness, and so ready are the fair sex to meet their wishes, that few women whose husbands die remain widows a couple of days; some not more than four-and-twenty hours. A few years before I was in the colony, an old settler saw a convict-girl performing penance on a market-day, with her gown-tail drawn over her head, for drunkenness and disorderly conduct in the Factory. He walked straight up to her—regardless of the hootings of the crowd—and proposed marriage. She was candid enough to confess to him that she was five months gone in the family way by a master to whom she had been allotted ere she returned to the Factory; but the amorous swain, who was nearly sixty, was so much struck by her black eyes and plump shape, that he expressed his readiness to take her 'for better or worse;' and she had not left the place of punishment an hour, ere she was married to one of the richest settlers in the colony.[23]

"I will tell you one more anecdote relative to Australian marriages. A very handsome woman was transported for shop-lifting—her third offence of the kind. She left a husband behind her in England. On her arrival at Sydney she was allotted to an elderly gentleman, a free settler, and who, being a bachelor, sought to make her his mistress. She, however, resisted his overtures, hoping that he would make her his wife, as he was not aware that she had a husband in her native country. Time wore on, he urgent—she obstinate,—he declining matrimonial bonds. At length she received a black-edged letter from her mother in England; and upon being questioned by her master, she stated '*that its contents made a great alteration in her circumstances*.' More she would not tell him. He was afraid of losing his handsome servant; and agreed to marry her. They were united accordingly. When the nuptial knot was indissolubly tied, he begged his beloved wife to explain the nature of the black-edged letter. '*There is now no need for any further mystery*,' she said, '*The truth is, I could not marry you before, because I had a husband living in England. That black-edged letter conveyed to me the welcome news that he was hanged five months ago at the Old Bailey; and thus nothing now stands in the way of our happiness*.'—And that

woman made the rich settler a most exemplary wife.

"I have now given you an insight into the morals of the female, as well as those of the male convicts; and you may also perceive that while transportation is actually a means of pleasing variety of scene and habits to the woman, it is an earthly hell to the man. I know that transportation is spoken of as something very light—a mere change of climate—amongst those thieves in England who have never yet crossed the water; but they are woefully mistaken! Transportation was *once* a trivial punishment, when all convicts were allotted to settlers, and money would purchase tickets-of-leave; or when a convict's wife, if he had one, might go out in the next ship with all the swag which his crimes had produced, and on her arrival in the colony apply for her husband to be allotted to her as her servant, by which step he became a free man, opened a public-house or some kind of shop, and made a fortune. Those were glorious times for convicts; but all that system has been changed. Now you have Road-Gangs, and Hulk-Gangs, and Quarrying-Gangs,—men who work in chains, and who cannot obtain a sufficiency of food! There is also Norfolk Island—a Garden of Eden in natural loveliness, rendered an earthly hell by human occupation. Oh! let not the opinion prevail that transportation is no punishment; let not those who are young in the ways of iniquity, pursue their career under the impression that exile to Australia is nothing more than a pleasant change of scene! They will too soon discover how miserably they are mistaken; and when they feel the galling chain upon their ankles,—when they find themselves toiling amidst the incessant damps of Macquarie, or on the hard roads of Van Diemen's Land, or in the quarries of Norfolk Island,—when they are labouring in forests where every step may arouse a venomous snake whose bite is death, or where a falling tree may crush them beneath its weight,—when they are exposed to the brutality of overseers, or the still more intolerable cruelty of their companions,—when they sleep in constant dread of being murdered by their fellow-convicts, and awake only to the dull monotony of a life of intense and heart-breaking labour,—then will they loathe their very existence, and dare all the perils of starvation, or the horrors of cannibalism, in order to escape from those scenes of ineffable misery!

"But I need say no more upon this subject. The bark, in which I worked my passage to Europe, reached England in safety; and I was once more at large in my native country. Yes—I was free to go whithersoever I would—and to avenge myself on him who had betrayed me to justice! The hope of some day consummating that vengeance had never deserted me from the moment I was sentenced in the Central Criminal Court. It had animated me throughout all the miseries, the toils, and the hardships which I have related to you. It inspired me with courage to dare the dangers of an escape from Macquarie: its effect was the same when I resolved upon quitting Norfolk Island. I have once had my mortal foe within my reach; but my hand dealt not the blow with sufficient force. It will not fail next time. I know that vengeance is a crime; but I cannot subdue those feelings which prompt me to punish the man whose perfidy sent me into exile. In all other respects I am reformed—completely reformed. Not that the authorities in Australia or Norfolk Island have in any way contributed to this moral change which has come over me: no—my own meditations and reflections have induced me to toil in order to earn an honest livelihood. I will never steal again: I will die sooner. I would also rather die by my own hand than return to the horrors of Macquarie or Norfolk Island. But my vengeance—Oh! I must gratify my vengeance;—and I care not what may become of me afterwards!"

Crankey Jem then related so much of his adventures with the gipsies as did not involve a betrayal of any of their secrets, and concluded his recital by a concise account of his sudden meeting with, and attack upon, the Resurrection Man *at a certain house in St. Giles's*.

19. This episode is founded on fact. The newspapers of 1840, or 1841, will in this instance furnish the type of Mr. Robert Cuffin in the person of a certain Reverend who obtained much notoriety at Rickmansworth.
20. Londoners.
21. Countrymen.
22. Fact.
23. Fact.

CHAPTER CXCII.

THE MINT.—THE FORTY THIEVES.

Reader, if you stroll down that portion of the Southwark Bridge Road which lies between Union Street and Great Suffolk Street, you will perceive, midway, and on your left hand, a large mound of earth heaped on an open space doubtless, intended for building-ground.

At the southern extremity of this mound (on which all the offal from the adjacent houses is thrown, and where vagabond boys are constantly collected) is the entrance into an assemblage of miserable streets, alleys, and courts, forming one of the vilest, most dangerous, and most demoralised districts of this huge metropolis.

The houses are old, gloomy, and sombre. Some of them have the upper part, beginning with the first floor, projecting at least three feet over the thoroughfares—for we cannot say over the pavement. Most of the doors stand open, and reveal low, dark, and filthy passages, the mere aspect of which compels the passer-by to get into the middle of the way, for fear of being suddenly dragged into those sinister dens, which seem fitted for crimes of the blackest dye.

This is no exaggeration.

Even in the day-time one shudders at the cut-throat appearance of the places into the full depths of whose gloom the eye cannot entirely penetrate. But, by night, the Mint,—for it is of this district that we are now writing,—is far more calculated to inspire the boldest heart with alarm, than the thickest forest or the wildest heath ever infested by banditti.

The houses in the Mint give one an idea of those dens in which murder may be committed without the least chance of detection. And yet that district swarms with population. But of what kind are its inhabitants? The refuse and the most criminal of the metropolis.

There people follow trades as a blind to avert suspicions relative to their real calling: for they are actually housebreakers or thieves themselves, or else the companions and abettors of such villains.

In passing through the mazes of the Mint—especially in Mint Street itself—you will observe more ill-looking fellows and revolting women in five minutes than you will see either on Saffron Hill or in Bethnal Green in an hour. Take the entire district that is bounded on the north by Peter Street, on the south by Great Suffolk Street, on the east by Blackman Street and High Street, and on the west by the Southwark Bridge Road,—take this small section of the metropolis, and believe us when we state that within those limits there is concentrated more depravity in all its myriad phases, than many persons could suppose to exist in the entire kingdom.

The Mint was once a sanctuary, like Whitefriars; and, although the law has deprived it of its ancient privileges, its inhabitants still maintain them, by a tacit understanding with each other, to the extent of their power. Thus, if a villain, of whom the officers of justice are in search, takes refuge at a lodging in the Mint, the landlord will keep his secret in spite of every inducement. The only danger which he might incur would be at the hands of the lowest description of buzgloaks, dummy-hunters, area-sneaks, and vampers who dwell in that district.

There is no part of Paris that can compare with the Mint in squalor, filth, or moral depravity;—no—not even the street in the Island of the City, where Eugene Sue has placed his celebrated *tapis-franc*.

Let those who happen to visit the Mint, after reading this description thereof, mark well the countenances of the inhabitants whom they will meet in that gloomy labyrinth. Hardened ruffianism characterises the men;—insolent, leering, and shameless looks express the depravity of the women;—the boys have the sneaking, shuffling manner of juvenile thieves;—the girls, even of a tender age, possess the brazen air of incipient profligacy.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when the Resurrection Man, wrapped in a thick and capacious pea-coat, the collar of which concealed all the lower part of his countenance, turned hastily from the Southwark Bridge Road into Mint Street.

The weather was piercingly cold, and the sleet was peppering down with painful violence: the Resurrection Man accordingly buried his face as much as possible in the collar of his coat, and neither looked to the right nor left as he proceeded on his way.

To this circumstance may be attributed the fact that one so cautious and wary as he, should now fail to observe that his motions were watched and his steps dogged by a lad whose countenance was also well concealed by a high collar which was drawn up to his ears.

In order to avoid unnecessary mystification, we may as well observe that this youth was Henry Holford.

The Resurrection Man pursued his way along Mint Street, and suddenly turned into a small court on the left-hand side. There he knocked at a door in a peculiar manner, whistling a single sharp shrill note at the same time; and in another moment Holford saw him enter the house.

"Well, Mr. Tidkins," said a boy of about fourteen, who had opened the door to admit the formidable individual with whom he was evidently well acquainted: "a preshus cold night, arn't it?"

"Very, my lad," answered the Resurrection Man, turning down his collar, so that the light of the candle which the boy held, gleamed upon his cadaverous countenance. "Is the Bully Grand at home?"

A reply in the affirmative was given; and the boy led the way, up a narrow and dilapidated staircase, to a large room where a great number of youths, whose ages varied from twelve to eighteen, were seated at a table, drinking and smoking.

The organisation of this society of juvenile reprobates requires a detailed notice.

The association consisted of thirty-nine co-equals and one chief who was denominated the Bully Grand. The fraternity was called *The Forty Thieves*;—whether in consequence of the founders having accidentally amounted to precisely that number, or whether with the idea of emulating the celebrated heroes of the Arabian tale, we cannot determine.

The society had, however, been established for upwards of thirty years at the time of which we are writing,—*and is in existence at this present moment*.

The rules of the association may thus be briefly summed up:—The society consists of Forty Members, including the Bully Grand. Candidates for admission are eligible at twelve years of age. When a member reaches the age of eighteen, he must retire from the association. This rule does not, however, apply to the Bully Grand, who is not eligible for that situation until he has actually reached the age of eighteen, and has been a member for at least four years. Each candidate for membership must be guaranteed as to eligibility and *honour* (that *honour* which is necessary amongst thieves) by three members of good standing in the society; and should any member misconduct himself, or withhold a portion of any booty which he may acquire, his guarantees are responsible for him. The Bully Grand must find twelve guarantees amongst the oldest members. His power is in most respects absolute; and the greatest deference is paid to him.

The modes of proceeding are as follow:—The metropolis is divided into twelve districts distinguished thus:—1. The Regent's Park; 2. Pentonville; 3. Hoxton; 4. Finsbury; 5. City; 6. Tower Hamlets; 7. Westminster; 8. Pimlico; 9. Hyde Park; 10. Grosvenor Square; 11. Lambeth; 12. The Borough. Three members are allotted to each district, and are changed in due rotation every day. Thus the three who take the Regent's Park district on a Monday, pass to the Pentonville district on Tuesday, the Hoxton district on Wednesday, and so on. Thus thirty-six members are every day employed in the district-service. The Bully Grand and the three others in the meantime attend to the disposal of the stolen property, and to the various business of the fraternity. In every district there is a public-house, or boozing-ken, in the interest of the association; and to the landlords of these flash cribs is the produce of each day's work consigned in the evening. The house in the Mint is merely a place of meeting once a fortnight, a residence for the Bully Grand, and the central depôt to which articles are conveyed from the care of the district boozing-kens.

The minor regulations and bye-laws may be thus summed up:—Of the three members allotted to each district, the oldest member acts as the chief, and guides the plan of proceedings according to his discretion. Should any member be proved to have secreted booty, his guarantees must pay the value of it; and with them rests the punishment of the defaulter. General meetings take place at the head-quarters in the Mint on the first and third Wednesday in every month; but if the Bully Grand wishes to call an extraordinary assembly, or to summon any particular member or members to his presence, he must leave notices to that effect with the landlords of the district houses-of-call. The members are to effect no robberies by violence, nor to break into houses: their proceedings must be effected by sleight of hand, cunning, and artifice. All disputes must be referred to the Bully Grand for settlement. The booty must be converted into money, and the cash divided fairly between all the members every fortnight, a certain percentage being allotted by way of salary to the Bully Grand.

Such are the principles upon which the association of the Forty Thieves is based. Every precaution is adopted, by means of the guarantees, to prevent the admission of unsuitable members, and to ensure the fidelity and *honour* of those who belong to the fraternity. When a member "gets into trouble," persons of apparent respectability come forward to give the lad a character; so that magistrates or judges are quite bewildered by the assurances that "it must be a mistake;" "that the prisoner is an honest hard-working boy, belonging to poor but respectable parents *in the country*;" or "that so convinced is the witness of the lad's innocence, that he will instantly take him into his service if the magistrate will discharge him." While a member remains in prison previous to trial, the funds of the association provide him with the best food allowed to enter the gaol; and, if he be condemned to a term of incarceration in the House of Correction, he looks forward to the banquet that will be given in the Mint to celebrate the day of his release. Moreover, a member does not lose his right to a share of the funds realised during his imprisonment. Thus every inducement is adopted to prevent members who "get into trouble" from peaching against their comrades, or making any revelations calculated to compromise the safety of the society.

It was a fortnightly meeting of the society when the Resurrection Man visited the house in the Mint, on the occasion of which we were ere now speaking.

The Forty Thieves were all gathered round a board formed of several rude deal tables placed together, and literally groaning beneath the weight of pewter-pots, bottles, jugs, &c.

The tallow-candles burnt like stars seen through a mist, so dense was the tobacco-smoke in the apartment.

At the upper end of the table sate the Bully Grand—a tall, well-dressed, good-looking young man, with a profusion of hair, but no whiskers, and little of that blueish appearance on the chin which denotes a beard. His aspect was therefore even more juvenile than was consistent with his age, which was about twenty-five. He possessed a splendid set of teeth, of which he seemed very proud; and his delicate white hand, which had never been applied to any harder work than picking pockets, was waved gently backward and forward when he spoke.

Around the table there were fine materials for the study of a phrenologist. Such a concatenation of varied physiognomies was not often to be met with; because none of the charities nor amenities of life were there delineated;—those countenances were indices only of vice in all its grades and phases.

The Resurrection Man was welcomed with a hum of applause on the part of the members, and with out-stretched hands by the Bully Grand near whom he was invited to take a seat.

"The business of the evening is over, Mr. Tidkins," said Mr. Tunks,—for so the Bully Grand was named; "and we are now deep in the pleasures of the meeting, as you see. Help yourself! There are spirits of all kinds, and pipes or cigars—whichever you prefer."

"Have you any information to give me?" inquired Tidkins in a low tone.

"Plenty—but not at this moment, Mr. Tidkins. Take a glass of something to dispel the cold; and by-and-bye we will talk on matters of business. There is plenty of time; and many of my young friends here would no doubt be proud to give you a specimen of their vocal powers. Let me see—who's turn is it?"

"Leary Lipkins's, sir," whispered a boy who sate near the Bully Grand.

"Oh! Leary Lipkins—is it?" said Tunks aloud. "Now, brother Lipkins, the company are waiting for an opportunity to drink to your health and song."

Mr. Lipkins—a sharp-looking, hatchet-faced, restless-eyed youth of about sixteen—did not require much pressing ere he favoured his audience with the following sample of vocal melody:—

THE SIGN OF THE FIDDLE.

There's not in all London a tavern so gay,
As that where the knowing ones meet of a day:
So long as a farthing remains to my share,
I'll drink at that tavern, and never elsewhere.

Yet it is not that comforts there only combine,
Nor because it dispenses good brandy and wine;
'Tis not the sweet odour of pipe nor cigar—
Oh! no—'tis a something more cozie by far!

'Tis that friends of the light-fingered craft are all nigh,
Who'd drink till the cellar itself should be dry,
And teach you to feel how existence may please,
When pass'd in the presence of cronies like these.

Sweet Sign of the Fiddle! how long could I dwell
In thy tap full of smoke, with the friends I love well;
When bailiffs no longer the alleys infest,
And duns, like their bills, have relapsed into rest.

"Bravo!" "Brayvo!" "Bra-ah-vo!" echoed on all sides, when this elegant effusion was brought to a close.

The Bully Grand then rose, and spoke in the following manner:—

"Gentlemen, in proposing the health of our excellent brother Leary Lipkins, I might spare eulogy, his merits being so well known to us all. But I feel that there are times when it is necessary to expatiate somewhat on the excellent qualities of the leading members of our honourable Society—in order to encourage an emulative feeling in the breasts of our younger brethren. Such an occasion is the present one, when we are all thus sociably assembled. Gentlemen, you all know Leary Lipkins! (Cheers, and cries of "We do! we do!") You all know that he is indeed leary in every sense of the word. (Hear! hear!) He can see through the best bit of broad cloth that ever covered a swell's pocket. There seems to be a sort of magnetic attraction between his fingers and a gold watch in the fob of a Bond Street lounger. (Cheers.) Talk of mesmerism! why—Leary Lipkins can send a gentleman into a complete state of *coma* as he walks along the streets, so that he never can possibly feel Leary's hands in his pockets. Gentlemen, I hold Leary Lipkins up to you as an excellent example; and beg to propose his very good health."

The toast was drunk with "three times three."

Mr. Lipkins returned thanks in what a newspaper-reporter would term "a neat speech;" and he then exercised the usual privilege of calling upon a particular individual for a song.

A certain Master Tripes Todkinson accordingly indulged his companions in the following manner:—

THE COMPASSIONATE LADY AND THE CHIMNEY-SWEEP.

"Pray, who's the little boy that is dancing so nimbly?
 Come, Mary, bring a halfpenny down.—"
"Please, ma'am, I'm the feller as swept your chimbley,
 And I'm very much obleeged for the brown.—"

"Alas! how his schooling has been neglected!
 But perhaps his kind father's dead?—"
"No, ma'am; he's a tinker as is wery much respected
 And this mornin' he's drunk in bed.—"

"Perchance 'tis a motherless child that they've fixed on
 To dance. Does your mamma live still?—"
"Yes, ma'am; at this moment she's stayin' at Brixton,
 Vith a gen'leman as keeps a mill.—"[24]

"Poor child, he is miserably clad! How shocking!
 Not to give him some clothes were a sin!—"
"Thank'ee, ma'am; but I doesn't want no shoe nor stocking,
 I'd rayther have a quartern o' gin!"

The Bully Grand proposed the health Of Master Tripes Todkinson, in a speech which was mightily applauded; and Master Tripes Todkinson, having duly returned thanks, called on Master Bandy-legged Diggs to continue the vocal harmony.

This invitation was responded to with as much readiness as Master Diggs would have displayed in easing an elderly gentleman in a crowd of his purse; and the air with which he favoured his audience ran thus:—

THE LAST OATH.

Upon the drop he turned
 To swear a parting oath;
He cursed the parson and Jack Ketch,
 And he coolly damned them both.

He listened to the hum
 Of the crowds that gathered nigh;
And he carelessly remarked,
 "What a famous man am I!"

Beside the scaffold's foot
 His mistress piped her eye:
She waved to him her dirty rag,
 And whimpering said, "Good bye!"

She mourned the good old times
That ne'er could come again,
When he brought her home a well-lined purse;—
But all her tears were vain!

Poor Jack was soon turned off,
And gallantly was hung:
There was a sigh in every breast,
A groan on every tongue.

Go—gaze upon his corse,
And remember then you see
The bravest robber that has been,
Or ever more shall be!

We need scarcely observe that this chant was received with as much favour as the preceding ones. The Resurrection Man was, however, growing impatient; for the reader doubtless comprehends enough of his character to be well aware that Tidkins was not one who loved pleasure better than business. He looked at his watch, and cast a significant glance towards the Bully Grand.

"What o'clock is it, Mr. Tidkins?" inquired that great functionary.

"Half-past ten," was the answer.

"Well, I will devote my attention to you in a few minutes," said Tunks. "You may rest perfectly easy—I have obtained information on every point in which you are interested. But—hark! Shuffling Simon is going to speak!"

A lad of about seventeen, who had a weakness in the joints of his knees, and walked in a fashion which had led to the nickname mentioned by the Bully Grand, rose from his seat, and proposed the health of Mr. Tunks, the chief of the society of the Forty Thieves.

Then followed a tremendous clattering of bottles and glasses as the company filled up bumpers in order to pay due honour to the toast; and every one, save the Grand himself, rose. The health was drunk with rounds of applause: a pause of a few moments ensued; and then Shuffling Simon commenced the following complimentary song, in the repetition of which all the other adherents of the Chief vociferously joined:—

PROSPER THE GRAND.

Prosper our Bully Grand,
Great Tunks, our noble Grand;
Prosper the Grand
Send him good swag enough,
Heart made of sterling stuff,
Long to be up to snuff;—
Prosper the Grand.

Save him from all mishaps,
Scatter blue-bottle traps
Throughout the land
Confound the busy beak,
Flourish the area-sneak;
In Tunks a chief we seek;—
Prosper the Grand!

The best lush on the board
To Tunks's health be poured
By all the band!
May he continue free,
Nor ever tread-mill see;
And all shall shout with glee,
Prosper the Grand!'

It was really extremely refreshing for the Resurrection Man to contemplate the deep manifestation of loyalty with which the thirty-nine thieves sang the preceding air.

Nor less was it an imposing spectacle when the object of that adoration rose from his seat, waved his right hand, and poured forth his gratitude in a most gracious speech.

This ceremony being accomplished, the Grand (what a pity it was that so elegant and elevated a personage had retained his unworthy patronymic of *Tunks*!) took a candle from the table, and conducted the Resurrection Man down stairs into a back room, which the Chief denominated his "private parlour."

"Now for your information," said the Resurrection Man, somewhat impatiently. "In the first place, have you discovered any thing concerning Crankey Jem Cuffin?"

"My emissaries have been successful in every instance," answered Tunks, with a complacent smile. "A man exactly corresponding with your description of Crankey Jem dwells in an obscure court in Drury Lane. Here is the address."

"Any tidings of Margaret Flathers?" inquired Tidkins.

"She has married a young man who answers to your description of Skilligalee; and they keep a small chandlery-shop in Pitfield Street, Hoxton Old Town. The name of Mitchell is over the door."

"Your lads are devilish sharp fellows, Bully Grand," said the Resurrection Man, approvingly.

"With thirty-six emissaries all over London every day, it is not so very difficult to obtain such information as you required," returned Tunks. "Moreover, you paid liberally in advance; and the boys will always be glad to serve you."

"Now for the next question," said Tidkins. "Any news of the old man that Tomlinson goes to see sometimes?"

"Yes—he lives in a small lodging in Thomas Street, Bethnal Green," was the answer. "There is his address also. His name is Nelson:—you best know whether it is his right one or not. That is no business of mine. Mr. Tomlinson regularly calls on him every Sunday afternoon, and passes some hours with him. The old man never stirs out, and is very unwell."

"Once more I must compliment your boys," exclaimed Tidkins, overjoyed with this intelligence. "Have you been able to learn any thing concerning Katherine Wilmot?"

"There I have also succeeded," replied Mr. Tunks. "My boys discovered that, after the trial of Katherine, she lunched with some

friends at an inn in the Old Bailey, and shortly afterwards left in a post-chaise. She was accompanied by an old lady; and the chaise took them to Hounslow."

"And there, I suppose, all traces of them disappear?" said the Resurrection Man, inquiringly.

"Not at all. I sent Leary Lipkins down to Hounslow yesterday; and he discovered that Miss Wilmot is staying at a farm-house belonging to a Mr. and Mrs. Bennet."

"Precisely!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man. "That Mrs. Bennet was a witness on the trial. I remember reading all about it. She was the sister of the woman whom Reginald Tracy murdered."

"The farm is only a short distance from Hounslow," observed the Bully Grand: "any one in the town can direct you to it. Most probably it was with this Mrs. Bennet that Miss Wilmot travelled in the post-chaise."

"Evidently so," said the Resurrection Man. "But of that no matter. All I required was Katherine Wilmot's address; and you have discovered it. Now for my last question. Have you ascertained whether it will be possible to bribe the clerk of the church where Lord Ravensworth and the Honourable Miss Adeline Enfield were married, to tear out the leaf of the register which contains the entry of that union?"

"I have learnt that the clerk is open to bribery: but he is a cautious man, and will not allow himself to be sounded too deeply in the matter," was the answer.

"Then that business must regard me," observed the Resurrection Man. "You have served me well in all these matters. Twenty pounds I gave you the other day: here are twenty pounds more. Are you satisfied?"

"I have every reason to be pleased with your liberality," returned the Bully Grand, folding up the bank-notes with his delicate fingers. "Have you any further commands at present?"

"Yes," replied the Resurrection Man, after a few moments' consideration: "let one of your lads take a couple of notes for me."

While the Bully Grand proceeded to summon Leary Lipkins, the Resurrection Man seated himself at a desk which there was in the room, and wrote the following note:—

"The news I have just received are rather good than bad. The clerk is open to bribery, but is cautious. I will myself call upon him the day after to-morrow; and I will meet you afterwards, at our usual place of appointment, in the evening between six and seven. But you must find money somehow or another: I am incurring expenses in this matter, and cannot work for nothing. Surely Greenwood will assist you?"

This letter was sealed and addressed to "GILBERT VERNON, ESQ., *No.—Stamford Street*."

The Resurrection Man then penned another note which ran thus:—

"I have discovered Katherine's address, and shall call upon you the day after to-morrow at nine o'clock in the evening. Remain at home; as you know the importance of the business."

By the time he had concluded his correspondence, the Bully Grand had returned with Leary Lipkins.

"My good lad," said the Resurrection Man, addressing the latter, "here are two notes, which you must deliver this night—*this night, mind*. The first is addressed; and the person for whom it is intended never retires to bed until very late. He will be up, when you call at the house where he lodges in Stamford Street. Give the letter into his own hand. You must then proceed to Golden Lane; and in the third court on the right-hand side of the way, and in the fourth house on the left-hand in that court, an old woman lives. You must knock till she answers you; and give her this second letter. I actually do not know her name, although I have dealings with her at present."

Leary Lipkins promised to fulfil these directions, and immediately departed to execute them.

Shortly afterwards the Resurrection Man took his leave of the Bully Grand, and left the head-quarters of the Forty Thieves.

Henry Holford, who had never lost sight of the door of that house since he had seen the Resurrection Man enter it, and who had remained concealed in the shade of an overhanging frontage opposite for more than two hours, resumed his task of dogging that formidable individual.

The Resurrection Man passed down Mint Street, into the Borough, and called a cab from the nearest stand, saying to the driver, "New Church, Bethnal Green."

The moment Tidkins was ensconced within, and the driver was seated on his box, Henry Holford crept softly behind the cab. In that manner he rode unmolested until within a short distance of the place of destination, when he descended, and followed the vehicle on foot.

The cab stopped near the railings that surround the church; and the Resurrection Man, having settled the fare, hurried onwards into Globe Town, Holford still dogging him—but with the utmost caution.

Presently Tidkins struck into a bye-street at the eastern extremity of the Happy Valley (as, our readers will remember, Globe Town is denominated in the gazetteer of metropolitan thieves), and stopped at the door of a house of dilapidated appearance. In a word, this was the very den where we have before seen him conducting his infamous plots, and in the subterranean vaults of which Viola Chichester was imprisoned for a period of three weeks.

Holford saw the Resurrection Man enter this house by the front door communicating with the street. He watched the windows for a few moments, and then perceived a light suddenly appear in the room on the upper floor.

"I have succeeded!" exclaimed Holford, aloud, "the villain lives there! I have traced him to his lurking-hole; and Jem may yet be avenged!"

Then, in order to be enabled to give an accurate description of the house to the returned convict, Holford studied its situation and appearance with careful attention. He observed that it was two storeys high, and that by the side was a dark alley.

At length he was convinced that he should be enabled to find that particular dwelling again, or to direct Crankey Jem to it without the possibility of error; and, rejoicing at being thus enabled to oblige his new friend, the young man commenced his long and weary walk back to Drury Lane.

24. The tread-mill.

CHAPTER CXCIII.

ANOTHER VISIT TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

It was the evening following the one the incidents of which occupied the preceding chapter.

Beneath a sofa in the Ball Room of Buckingham Palace, Henry Holford lay concealed.

It would be a mere repetition of statements made in former portions of this work, were we to describe the means by which the young man obtained access to the most private parts of the royal dwelling. We may, however, observe that he had paid frequent visits to the palace since the occasion when we first saw him enter those sacred precincts at the commencement of January, 1839; and that he was as familiar with the interior of the sovereign's abode, even to its most retired chambers, as any of its numerous inmates.

He had run many risks of discovery; but a species of good fortune seemed to attend upon him in these strange and romantic ventures; and those frequent alarms had never as yet terminated in his detection. Thus he became emboldened in his intrusions; and he now lay beneath the sofa in the Ball Room, with no more apprehension than he would have entertained if some authority in the palace had actually connived at his presence there.

It was nine o'clock in the evening; and the Ball Room was brilliantly illuminated.

But as yet the low-born pot-boy was its sole occupant.

Not long, however, was he doomed to that solitude. By a strange coincidence, the two noble ladies whose conversation had so much interested him on the occasion of his first visit to the palace, entered the room shortly after nine o'clock. He recognised their voices immediately; and he was delighted at their arrival, for their former dialogues had awakened the most lively sentiments of curiosity in his mind. But since his intrusion in January, 1839, he had never seen nor heard them in his subsequent visits to the royal dwelling, until the present occasion; and now, as they advanced through the room together, he held his breath to catch the words that fell from them.

"The dinner-party was tiresome to-day, my dear countess," observed the duchess: "her Majesty did not appear to be in good spirits."

"Alas!" exclaimed the lady thus addressed, "our gracious sovereign's melancholy fits occur at less distant intervals as she grows older."

"And yet her Majesty has every earthly reason to be happy," said the duchess. "The Prince appears to be devotedly attached to her; and the Princess Royal is a sweet babe."

"Worldly prosperity will not always ensure felicity," returned the countess; "and this your grace must have perceived amongst the circle of your acquaintance. Her Majesty is a prey to frequent fits of despondency, which are distressing to the faithful subjects who have the honour to be near the royal person. She will sit for an hour at a time, in moody contemplation of that sweet babe; and her countenance then wears an expression of such profound—such plaintive—such touching melancholy, that I have frequently wept to behold her thus."

"What can be the cause of this intermittent despondency?" inquired the duchess.

"It is constitutional," answered the countess. "The fit comes upon her Majesty at moments when she is surrounded by all the elements of pleasure, happiness, and joy. It is a dark spirit against which no mind, however powerful, can wrestle. The only method of mitigating the violence of its attacks is the bustle of travelling:—then novelty, change of scene, exercise, and the demonstrations of popular devotion seem to relieve our beloved sovereign from the influence of that morbid, moody melancholy."

"I believe that when we conversed upon this topic on a former occasion,—it must be at least two years ago,—your ladyship hinted at the existence of hereditary idiosyncrasies in the Royal Family?" observed the duchess, inquiringly. "Indeed," added her grace, hastily, "I well remember that you alluded to the unfortunate attachment of George the Third for a certain Quakeress——"

"Yes—Hannah Lightfoot, to whom the monarch, when a prince, was privately united," answered the countess. "His baffled love—the necessity which compelled him to renounce one to whom he was devotedly attached—and the constant dread which he entertained lest the secret of this marriage should transpire, acted upon his mind in a manner that subsequently produced those dread results which are matters of history."

"You allude to his madness," said the duchess, with a shudder.

"Yes, your grace—that madness which is, alas! hereditary," replied the countess solemnly. "But George the Third had many—many domestic afflictions. Oh! if you knew all, you would not be surprised that he had lost his reason! The profligacy of some of his children—most of them—was alone sufficient to turn his brain. Many of those instances of profligacy have transpired; and although the public have not been able to arrive at any positive proofs respecting the matters, I can nevertheless assure your grace that such proofs *are* in existence—and in my possession!"

"Your ladyship once before hinted as much to me; and I must confess that without having any morbid inclination for vulgar scandal, I feel some curiosity in respect to those matters."

"Some day I will place in your hand papers of a fearful import, in connexion with the Royal Family," returned the countess. "Your grace will then perceive that profligacy the most abandoned—crimes the most heinous—vices the most depraved, characterised nearly all the children of George the Third. There is one remarkable fact relative to that prince's marriage with Hannah Lightfoot. The Royal

Marriage Act was not passed until *thirteen years after this union*, and could not therefore set it aside; and yet *Hannah Lightfoot was still living when the prince espoused Charlotte Sophia Princess of Mecklenburgh Strelitz in 1761*."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed the duchess, profoundly surprised.

"It is possible—it is true!" said the countess emphatically. "In 1772 the Royal Marriage Act[25] was passed, and provided that no member of the Royal Family should contract a marriage without the sovereign's consent. This measure was enacted for several reasons; but principally because the King's two brothers had formed private matrimonial connexions,—the Duke of Cumberland with Mrs. Horton, a widow—and the Duke of Gloucester with the widow of the Earl of Waldegrave."

"The act certainly appears to me most cruel and oppressive," said the duchess; "inasmuch as it interferes with the tenderest affections and most charming of human sympathies—feelings which royalty has in common with all the rest of mankind."

"I cordially agree with your grace," observed the countess. "The law is barbarous—monstrous—revolting; and its evil effects were evidenced by almost every member of the family of George the Third. In the first place, the Prince of Wales (afterwards George the Fourth) was privately united to Mrs. Fitzherbert, at the house of that lady's uncle, Lord Sefton. Fox, Sheridan, and Burke were present at the ceremony, in addition to my mother and several relations of the bride. Mr. Fox handed her into the carriage; and the happy pair proceeded to Richmond, where they passed a week or ten days. Queen Charlotte was made acquainted with the marriage: she sent for her son, and demanded an explanation. The prince avowed the truth. Your grace has, of course, read the discussion which took place in connexion with this subject, in the House of Commons, in 1787. Mr. Rolle, the member for Devonshire, mysteriously alluded to the union: Mr. Fox rose up, and denied it; but from that day forth Mrs. Fitzherbert never spoke to Fox again. Sheridan let the truth escape him:—he said, '*A lady who has been alluded to, is without reproach, and is entitled to the truest and most general respect*.' How would Mrs. Fitzherbert have been without reproach, or entitled to respect, if she were *not* married to the prince? But I have proofs—convincing proofs—that such an union did actually take place, although it was certainly null and void in consequence of the Marriage Act."

"It nevertheless subsisted according to the feelings and inclinations of the parties interested," said the duchess; "and it was based on *honour*, if on no legal principle."

"Alas!" whispered the countess, casting a rapid glance around; "the word *honour* must not be mentioned in connexion with the name of George the Fourth. It pains me to speak ill of the ancestors of our lovely queen: but—if we converse on the subject at all—truth must influence our observations. The entire life of George the Fourth was one of profligacy and crime. Often have I marvelled how one possessing a soul so refined as Georgiana, the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, could have resigned herself to such a degraded voluptuary—such a low debauchee. Yet she was his Queen of Love, surrounded by her graces, who, however, bore the modern names of Craven, Windham, and Jersey."

"Carlton House has, indeed, beheld strange and varied scenes," said the duchess; "low orgies and voluptuous revels—music floating here—dice rattling there—the refinements of existence in one room, and the most degraded dissipation in another."

"Such was the case," observed the countess. "But let us return to the consequences of the Royal Marriage Act. Rumour has told much in connexion with the coupled names of the Duke of York and Mrs. Clarke—the late King William and Mrs. Jordan; and so well known are these facts that I need not dwell upon them. The matrimonial connexions of the Duke of Sussex—first with Lady Augusta Murray, and afterwards with Lady Cecilia Underwood,[26] are all matters resting upon something more solid than mere conjecture."

"And the Duke of Cumberland—the present King of Hanover?" said the duchess inquiringly.

"It is dangerous to speak of *him*," whispered the countess; "because it is impossible to utter a word in his favour."

"You surely cannot believe all the tales that have been circulated against him?" exclaimed the duchess, earnestly watching the countenance of her companion, as if to anticipate her reply.

"Does your grace particularly allude to the death of Sellis?" asked the countess, turning her head so as to meet the glance of her friend. "Because," continued she, without waiting for a reply, "I should be sorry—nay, nothing should induce me—to state in plain terms my impression relative to that event. I may, however, allude to a few material points. Sir Everard Home, the medical attendant of the Duke of Cumberland, frequently observed, '*that too much pains were taken to involve that affair in mystery*;' and another eminent physician, since dead, declared that '*the head of Sellis was nearly severed from his body, and that no man could inflict upon himself a wound of such a depth*.' The Duke of Cumberland stated that his valet, Sellis, entered his bed-chamber and attacked him with a sword; and that having failed in his murderous purposes, he retired to his own room and committed suicide. Sir Everard Home distinctly proved, on the inquest, that the corpse was found lying on its *side* on the bed; and yet '*he had cut his own throat so effectually that he could not have changed his position after inflicting the wound*.' I will not, however, make any observations upon *that* fact and *this* statement which seem so conflicting: the subject is almost too awful to deal with. There is still one remarkable point to which the attention of those who discuss the dark affair should be directed:—the hand-basin in Sellis's room was half full of blood-stained water, and it is very clear that the miserable wretch himself could not have risen to wash his hands *after* the wound was inflicted in his throat. But let us not dwell on this horrible event: the mere mention of it makes me shudder."

"The King of Hanover has been, at least, unfortunate in many circumstances of his life, if not guilty," observed the duchess; "because his enemies have insisted strongly upon the suspicious nature of the incident of which we have been speaking."

"The more so, because it was known that the Duke of Cumberland had intrigued with the wife of Sellis," returned the countess. "As your grace declares, that exalted personage has been indeed unfortunate—if nothing more. In 1830 Lord Graves committed suicide; and the improper connexion existing between the Duke of Cumberland and Lady Graves was notorious."

"I well remember," said the duchess, "that the conduct of the Duke and Lady Graves was far from prudent, to say the least of it, after that melancholy event. Scarcely were the remains of the self-slain nobleman cold in the tomb, ere his widow and her illustrious lover were seen driving about together in the neighbourhood of Hampton Court, where Lady Graves had apartments."

"True," exclaimed the duchess. "But we have travelled a long way from our first topic—the Royal Marriage Act. We were speaking of its pernicious effects in respect to the family of George the Third. And that was a fine family, too! My deceased mother often

expatiated—and her secret papers dwell at length—upon the charms of the princesses. Alas! how sorrowfully were they situated! In the bloom of youth—in the glow of health—with warm temperaments and ardent imaginations, which received encouragement from the voluptuous indolence of their lives—they were denied the privileges of the meanest peasant girl in the realm:—they were unable to form matrimonial connexions where their inclinations prompted them. The consequences were those which might have been anticipated: the honour of the princesses became sacrificed to illicit passion—passion which was still natural, although illicit! Those amours were productive of issue; but the offspring of none has created any sensation in the world, save in the instance of Captain Garth, the son of the Princess Sophia. Relative to the mysterious birth of that individual, the secret papers left by my mother—and the existence of which is even unknown to my husband—contain some strange, some startling facts. Conceive the embarrassment—the perilous nature of the situation in which the princess was suddenly involved—when, during a journey from London to some fashionable watering-place, she found herself overtaken with the pangs of premature maternity—she, who up to that moment had managed to conceal her condition even from the attendants upon her person! Then imagine this princess—a daughter of the sovereign of the realm—compelled to put up at a miserable road-side inn—forced to make a confidant of her lady in attendance, and obliged also to entrust her secret to the surgeon of the village where her child was born! But you shall read the narrative, with all its details, in my private papers."

"What opinion has your ladyship formed relative to the circumstances which led to the Bill of Pains and Penalties instituted against Queen Caroline, the spouse of George the Fourth?" inquired the duchess.

"I firmly believe that most unfortunate and most persecuted princess to have been *completely innocent*," answered the countess, with solemn emphasis. "From the first she was hateful to her husband. When the Earl of Malmsbury, who was sent to Germany to escort the Princess to England, arrived with her in London, the Prince of Wales repaired instantly to pay his respects to his intended bride. But scarcely had he set eyes on her when he conceived a feeling of ineffable dislike; and, turning towards the Earl, he said, 'Harris,[27] a glass of brandy—I am ill!' Your grace has heard of love at first sight: here was hatred at first sight. Every thing attending that marriage was inauspicious: for if the Princess had the misfortune to make an unfavourable impression on the Prince, his Royal Highness wantonly wounded her feelings by grossly manifesting his dislike towards her on all occasions. On the bridal night he drank so deeply that he fell on a sofa in the nuptial chamber, and there slept with his clothes on. But to pass over many years, let us come to the circumstances which led to the memorable trial of Queen Caroline. During her continental travels, Baron Bergami was presented to her. He was a man of honourable character, good family, but ruined fortunes. His condition excited the compassion of the generous-hearted Caroline; and she gave him a situation in her household. His conversation was fascinating; and he was frequently her companion inside the travelling chariot. Perhaps an English lady would have acted with more prudence; but your grace will remember that there is a wide distinction between our manners and customs and those of the Continent. *We* see improprieties in actions which foreigners view as harmless courtesies or innocent proofs of friendly interest. *We* also seem ready to meet suspicions of evil half-way: foreigners, with more generous frankness and candour, say, '*Evil be to him who evil thinks*.' But the marriage was hateful to King George the Fourth; and he was determined to dissolve it. He was resolved to sacrifice his wife to his aversions. She was to be made a victim. Then commenced that atrocious subornation of perjured witnesses which gave a colour to the proceedings against the unfortunate Queen. Her slightest levities were tortured into proofs of guilt: her generosity towards Bergami was branded as an illicit passion. The witnesses made statements which proved how well they had been tutored: they over-acted their parts; and, in their zeal to serve a master who paid them for their perjury, they deposed to more than they could possibly have known, even if the main accusation had been true. The nation was indignant—for *the people*, your grace, are possessed of much chivalry and noble generosity of character. Then, too, rose the portentous voices of Denman and Brougham, calling upon the hidden accuser to come forth and confront his victim. Oh! it was a vile proceeding; and I, as a woman—as a wife, feel my blood boiling in my veins when I think of all the foul wrongs which were heaped upon the most injured of my sex!"

"That trial," said the duchess, who was naturally of a more cautious disposition than her companion,—"that trial was certainly a dark blot on the page which records the annals of George the Fourth's reign."

"Say rather, your grace," exclaimed the countess, "the blackest of the innumerable black deeds which characterised his existence. Before the accusation in respect to Bergami was ever thought of, a charge was concocted against that injured lady, and commissioners were appointed to investigate it. Thus, your grace perceives, her bad husband was determined to ruin her. That charge accused her of having been delivered of a male child at her abode at Blackheath; and the affair certainly appeared suspicious at first. But how triumphantly was it met? how readily was it refuted? how easily was it explained! The injured lady had taken a fancy to the infant of poor but respectable people named Archer, living in that neighbourhood; and she had undertaken to adopt and provide for the boy. The unfortunate Princess felt the necessity of loving something—since her own child was taken from her. Thus was her goodness towards William Archer converted into a weapon wherewithal to assail her in the most tender point. Her husband's agents circulated the most odious calumnies concerning her, and even improperly coupled her name with that of Sir Sydney Smith, the hero of Acre. But the Archer story fell to the ground; and the Bergami scandal was subsequently propagated with a zeal which evinced the determination of George the Fourth to ruin Caroline of Brunswick."[28]

There was a pause in the conversation.

The duchess, who was possessed of a strong inclination for the mysterious or scandalous narratives connected with the family of George the Third, was so impressed by the vehemence and confident emphasis with which her companion had denounced the profligacy of George the Fourth, that a species of awe—an undefined alarm came over her:—it suddenly appeared as if it were a sacrilege thus to canvass the character of that deceased monarch within the very palace where he himself had dwelt;—and she hesitated to make any remark or ask any question that might lead to a continuation of the same topic.

On her side, the countess—who was much older than the duchess, and more deeply initiated in the mysteries of Courts—had become plunged into a deep reverie; for she possessed a generous mind, and never could ponder upon the wrongs of the murdered Queen Caroline without experiencing the most profound indignation and sorrow.[29]

The reader may probably deem it somewhat extraordinary that ladies attached to the Court should thus freely discuss the most private affairs, and canvass the characters of deceased members of the Royal Family. But we can positively assert that nowhere are

scandal and tittle-tattle more extensively indulged in, than amongst the members of that circle of courtiers and female sycophants who crowd about the sovereign.[30]

The conversation of the duchess and countess was not renewed on the present occasion; for while they were yet plunged each in the depths of her own particular meditations, the regal train entered the Ball Room.

And all this while Henry Holford remained concealed beneath the sofa!

Victoria leant upon the arm of her consort; and the illustrious party was preceded by the Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Steward. The Queen and the Prince proceeded to the reserved seats which were slightly elevated in a recess, and were covered with white satin embroidered in silver.

Then the magnificent Ball-Room presented a truly fairy spectacle. Plumes were waving, diamonds were sparkling, bright eyes were glancing, and music floated on the air. The spacious apartment was crowded with nobles and gentlemen in gorgeous uniforms or court-dresses; and with ladies in the most elegant attire that French fashions could suggest or French milliners achieve. All those striking or attractive figures, and all the splendours of their appearance, were multiplied by the brilliant mirrors to an illimitable extent.

The orchestra extended across one end of the Ball-Room; and the musicians had entered by a side-door almost at the same moment that the royal procession made its appearance.

In the rooms adjoining, the Corps of Gentlemen-at-arms and the Yeomen of the Guard were on duty; and in the hall the band of the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards was in attendance.

The Queen and the Prince danced in the first quadrille; and afterwards they indulged in their favourite waltz—the *Frohsinn mein Ziel*. At the termination of each dance the royal party passed into the Picture Gallery, where they promenaded amidst a wilderness of flowers and aromatic shrubs. Then indeed the odour-breathing exotics—the whispering leaves—the light of the pendent lamps, mellowed so as to give full effect to the portraits of those who were once famous or once beautiful—the ribboned or gartered nobles—the blaze of female loveliness—the streams of melody—the presence of all possible elements of splendour, harmony, and pleasure, combined to render the whole scene one of enchantment, and seemed to realize the most glowing and brilliant visions which oriental writers ever shadowed forth!

The dancing was renewed in the Ball-Room: and as the beauteous ladies of the court swam and turned in graceful mazes, it appeared as if the art had become elevated into the harmony of motion. Dancing there was something more than mechanical: it was a true, a worthy, and a legitimate sister of poetry and music.

At twelve o'clock the doors of the supper-room were thrown open; and in that gorgeous banqueting-hall the crimson draperies, the service of gold, and the massive table ornaments were lighted up by Chinese lanterns and silver candelabra of exquisite workmanship. A splendid row of gold cups was laid on each side of the table. On the right of each plate stood a decanter of water, a finger-glass half filled with tepid water, a champagne glass, a tumbler, and three wine-glasses. Numerous servants in magnificent liveries were in attendance. No one asked for any thing: the servants offered the various dishes, of which the guests partook or which they rejected according to their taste. No healths were drunk during the Queen's presence; nor was the ceremony of taking wine with each other observed—not even on the part of the gentleman with the lady whom he had handed into the room. The domestics whose especial duty it was to serve the wine, never filled a glass until it was quite empty; nor did any guest ask for wine, but, when the servant approached him, merely stated the kind of wine he chose.

After sitting for about an hour, the Queen rose, and was conducted to the Yellow Drawing-Room by Prince Albert, the guests all rising as the royal couple retired.

Then the servants filled the glasses, and the Lord Steward said, "The Queen!" The health was drunk standing, in silence, and with a gentle inclination of the head. In a few minutes afterwards the gentlemen conducted the ladies into the Yellow Drawing-Room, where coffee and liqueurs were served.

The harp, piano, and songs by some of the ladies, occupied another hour; at the expiration of which the guests took their departure.

Holford had now been concealed nearly five hours beneath the sofa in the ball-room; and he was cramped, stiff, and wearied. During that interval he had experienced a variety of emotions:—wonder at the strange revelations which he had heard from the lips of the countess,—ineffable delight in contemplating the person of his sovereign,—envy at the exalted prosperity of Prince Albert,—thrilling excitement at the fairy-like aspect of the enchanting dance,—sensations of unknown rapture occasioned by the soft strains of the music,—and boundless disgust for his own humble, obscure, and almost serf-like condition.

During those intervals when the royal party and the guests were promenading in the Picture-Gallery or were engaged in the supper-apartment and the drawing-room, Holford longed to escape from his hiding-place and retreat to the lumber-closet where he was in the habit of concealing himself on the occasion of his visits to the palace; but there were too many persons about to render such a step safe.

It was not, therefore, until a very late hour,—or rather an early one in the morning,—that he was able to enter the supper-room and help himself to some of the dainties left upon the board; having done which, he retreated to his nook in the most retired part of the palace.

25. This Act was denounced at the time as "one calculated only to encourage fornication and adultery in the descendants of George the Second."

26. Now Duchess of Inverness.

27. The family name of the Earl of Malmsbury.

28. We had the honour of enjoying the friendship of Sir Sydney Smith in Paris during the years 1834-7; and the misfortunes of Queen Caroline frequently became the topic of discourse between us. Sir Sydney Smith assured us on several occasions and in the most solemn manner, that the reports which had been circulated relative to himself and that injured lady, during her residence at Blackheath, were vile calumnies. "Queen Caroline had certainly much levity of manner, and was very thoughtless and inexperienced," he would observe; "but her virtue was never for a moment suspected by me." The following passage occurs in a letter which Queen Caroline wrote to the Countess de C——, shortly before the commencement of the Trial, and which autograph letter (*together with numerous important papers concerning George the Third and his family*) is in our possession:—"This letter will be delivered to you by an individual who is persecuted because he has served me faithfully. I recommend him to your kindness. The Baron Bergami is of high birth. He has been unfortunate: I perceived the excellence of the qualities he possesses—I have ameliorated his condition in a pecuniary point of view—and thus have I secured him as my friend. The fury of my adversaries pursues him—I tremble for his very existence—my royal husband is *capable of any crime* to ensure the gratification of his revenge. I therefore crave your protection for Bergami, and hope that by your influence you will so arrange matters that he shall not be molested in Paris. I do not ask you to admit him into your society, unless agreeable to yourself; at the same time, my dear Countess, you must be aware that pride is folly. We must judge mankind by the scale of merit, and not by the grandeur of titles. This is the course I have adopted through life, and am well pleased with my line of conduct. Recollect this precept: you will perceive its wisdom when you grow old."

29. The last and fatal illness of Queen Caroline was caused by a stoppage in the bowels. Doctors Maton and Warren (the king's physicians) attended upon the illustrious lady; and various remedies were prescribed by them—but in vain. One morning, a bottle of *croton oil* was sent to an individual of Her Majesty's household, accompanied by the following letter:—

"Sir,—I am aware that nothing but the great—the very great—danger Her Majesty is in, would excuse this unauthorised intrusion. Having, however, learnt from the papers the nature of Her

Majesty's complaint, I have taken the liberty to forward to you, with a view of having it handed to Dr. Maton or Dr. Warren, a medicine of strong aperient properties, called *croton oil*—one drop of which is a dose. It is most probably known to some of Her Majesty's advisers; but it has only been recently brought into this country. It may be proper to observe that Doctor Pemberton has *himself* taken it; and I have administered it to more than one person. Its operation is quick and certain. Two drops, when made into pills with bread, usually produce saving effects in half or three quarters of an hour. It has struck me that this medicine might be successfully administered to Her Majesty. At all events I can have done no harm in taking the liberty to suggest it; but, unwilling to appear anxious to make myself obtrusive, or to seem influenced by any other than the most disinterested motives, I have declined giving my name.

"Yours respectfully,
A CHEMIST."

This letter, and the medicine, were forwarded to Dr. Pemberton, of Great George Street, Hanover Square, who had at one time been Her Majesty's principal medical attendant. Dr. Pemberton's answer was this:—"I have myself taken *two* drops of the *croton oil*, on several occasions; and the Queen may safely take *one*." The royal physicians obtained an interview with George the Fourth, and the result was a declaration on their part, "*that they did not consider themselves justified in administering the medicine to Her Majesty*." Comment is unnecessary.

30.

But, ah! while of Victoria's court I'm singing,
What solemn music echoes from the lyre!
And wherefore does a passing bell seem ringing,
And melancholy thoughts my soul inspire?
See where the raven now his flight is winging—
Hark to the anthem of the funeral choir—
List to the curfew's note of death-like gloom—
And drop a tear o'er Flora Hastings' tomb!

—*Sequel to Don Juan.*

CHAPTER CXCIV.

THE ROYAL BREAKFAST.

Holford did not immediately close his eyes in slumber.

Although his education had been miserably neglected, he possessed good natural abilities; and his reflections at times were of a far more philosophical nature than could have been anticipated.

The gorgeous scenes which he had just witnessed now led him to meditate upon the horrible contrasts which existed elsewhere, not only in the great metropolis, but throughout the United Kingdom,—and many, very many of which he himself had seen with his own eyes, and felt with his own experience.

At that moment when festivity was highest, and pleasure was most exciting in the regal halls, there were mothers in naked attics, dark cellars, or even houseless in the open streets,—mothers who pressed their famished little ones to their bosoms, and wondered whether a mouthful of food would ever pass their lips again.

While the royal table groaned beneath the weight of golden vessels and the choicest luxuries which earth's fruitfulness, heaven's bounty, or man's ingenuity could supply,—while the raciest produce of fertile vineyards sparkled in the crystal cups,—at that same period, how many thousands of that exalted lady's subjects moistened their sorry crust with tears wrung from them by the consciousness of ill-requited toil and the pinching gripe of bitter poverty!

Delicious music here, and the cries of starving children there;—silver candelabra pouring forth a flood of lustre in a gorgeous saloon, and a flickering rushlight making visible the naked and damp-stained walls of a wretched garret;—silks and satins, rags and nudity;—luxurious and pampered indolence; crushing and ill-paid labour;—homage and reverence, ill-treatment and oppression;—the gratification of every whim, the absence of every necessary;—not a care for to-morrow here, not a hope for to-morrow there;—a certainty of a renewal of this day's plenty, a total ignorance whence the next day's bread can come;—mirth and laughter, moans and sorrowing;—a palace for life on one hand, and an anxiety lest even the wretched hovel may not be changed for a workhouse to-morrow;—these are the appalling contrasts which our social sphere presents to view!

Of all this Holford thought as he lay concealed in the lumber-room of the royal dwelling.

But at length sleep overtook him.

It was still dark when he awoke. At first he thought that he must have slumbered for many hours—that a day had passed, and that another night had come;—but he felt too little refreshed to remain many instants in that opinion. Moreover, as he watched the window, he observed a faint, faint gleam of light—or rather a mitigation of the intenseness of the gloom without—slowly appearing; and he knew that the dawn was at hand.

He was nearly frozen in that cheerless room where he had slept: his teeth chattered—his limbs were benumbed. He longed for some new excitement to elevate his drooping spirits, and thus impart physical warmth to his frame.

Suddenly a thought struck him: he would penetrate into the royal breakfast-room! He knew that the Queen and Prince Albert frequently partook of the morning meal together; and he longed to listen to their conversation when thus *tête-a-tête*.

Scarcely had he conceived this project when he resolved to execute it. The interior of the palace—even to its most private apartments and chambers—was as we have before stated, perfectly familiar to him. Stealing from the place where he had slept, he proceeded with marvellous caution to the point of his present destination; and in about ten minutes he reached the breakfast-room in safety.

The twilight of morning had now penetrated through the windows of this apartment; for the heavy curtains were drawn aside, a cheerful fire burnt in the grate, and the table was already spread.

A friendly sofa became Holford's hiding-place.

Shortly after eight o'clock a domestic entered with the morning Ministerial paper, which he laid upon the table, and then withdrew.

Five minutes elapsed, when the door was thrown open, and the Queen entered, attended by two ladies. These were almost immediately dismissed; and Victoria seated herself near the fire, to read the journal. But scarcely had she opened it, ere Prince Albert made his appearance, followed by a gentleman in waiting, who humbly saluted her Majesty and retired.

Servants immediately afterwards entered, and placed upon the table the materials for a sumptuous breakfast, having performed which duty they immediately left the room.

The Queen and her consort were now alone—or at least, supposed themselves to be so; and their conversation soon flowed without restraint.

But such an empire—such a despotism does the habitual etiquette of Courts establish over the natural freedom of the human mind, that even the best and most tender feelings of the heart are to a certain extent subdued and oppressed by that chilling influence. The royal pair were affectionate to each other: still their tenderness was not of that lively, unembarrassed, free, and cordial nature which subsists at the domestic hearth elsewhere. There seemed to be a barrier between the frank and open interchange of their thoughts; and even though that barrier were no thicker than gauze, still it existed. Their words were to some degree measured—scarcely perceptibly

so, it is true—nevertheless, the fact *was* apparent in the least, least degree; and the effect was also in the least, least degree unpleasant.

The Queen was authoritative in the enunciation of her opinion upon any subject; and if the Prince differed from her, he expressed himself with restraint. In fact, he did not feel himself his wife's equal. Could a listener, who did not see them as they spoke, have deadened his ear to those intonations of their voices which marked their respective sex, and have judged only by their words, he would have thought that the Queen was the *husband*, and the Prince the *wife*.

The Prince appeared to be very amiable, very intelligent; but totally inexperienced in the ways of the world. The Queen exhibited much natural ability and an elegant taste: nevertheless, she also seemed lamentably ignorant of the every-day incidents of life. We mean that the royal pair manifested a reluctance to believe in those melancholy occurrences which characterize the condition of the industrious millions. This was not the result of indifference, but of sheer ignorance. Indeed, it would necessarily seem difficult for those who were so surrounded by every luxury, to conceive that such a fearful contrast as literal starvation could possibly exist.

But let us hear that illustrious pair converse: their language will to some extent serve as an index to their minds.

"Melbourne informed me last evening," said the Queen, "that he trembles for the safety of his Cabinet during the approaching session. The Carlton Club is particularly active; and the Conservative party has acquired great strength during the recess."

"What would be the consequence of a Ministerial defeat?" inquired Prince Albert.

"A dissolution, of course," answered the Queen. "I must candidly confess that I should regret to see the Conservative party succeed to power. All the principal lords and ladies of our household would be immediately changed. The Whigs, however, have certainly grown unpopular; and there appears to be some distress in the country. The very first article on which my eyes rested when I took up this newspaper ere now, is headed '*Dreadful Suicide through Extreme Destitution*.' Beneath, in the same column, is an article entitled '*Infanticide, and Suicide of the Murderess, through Literal Starvation*.' The next column contains a long narrative which I have not had time to read, but which is headed '*Suicide through Dread of the Workhouse*.' On this page," continued the Queen, turning the paper upon the table, "there is an article entitled '*Death from Starvation;*' another headed '*Dreadful Condition of the Spitalfields' Weavers;*' a third called '*Starving State of the Paisley Mechanics;*' a fourth entitled '*Awful Distress in the Manufacturing Districts;*' and I perceive numerous short paragraphs all announcing similar calamities."

"The English papers are always full of such accounts," observed the Prince.

"And yet I would have you know that England is the richest, most prosperous, and happiest country on the face of the earth," returned the Queen, somewhat impatiently. "You must not take these accounts literally as you read them. My Ministers assure me that they are greatly exaggerated. It appears—as the matter has been explained to me—that the persons who furnish these narratives are remunerated according to quantity; and they therefore amplify the details as much as possible."

"Still those accounts must be, to a certain extent, based on truth?" said Prince Albert, half inquiringly.

"Not nearly so much as you imagine. My Ministers have satisfied me on that head; and they must know better than you. Take, for instance, the article headed '*Dreadful Condition of the Spitalfields' Weavers*.' You may there read that the weavers are in an actual state of starvation. This is only newspaper metaphor: the writer means his readers to understand that the weavers are not so well off as they would wish to be. Perhaps they have not meat every day—perhaps only three or four times a week: but they assuredly have plenty of bread and potatoes—because bread and potatoes are so cheap!"

"I thought that you intended to discountenance the importation of foreign silks, by ordering all the ladies of the Court to wear dresses of English material?" observed Prince Albert, after a pause.

"Such was my intention," answered the Queen; "but the ladies about me dropped so many hints on the subject, that I was compelled to rescind the command. I must confess that I was not sorry to find an excuse for so doing; for I greatly prefer French silks and French dressmakers. But let me make an observation upon this article which is headed '*Suicide through Dread of the Workhouse*.' I spoke to the Secretary of State a few days ago upon the subject of workhouses; and he assured me that they are very comfortable places. He declared that the people do not know when they are well off, and that they require to be managed like refractory children. He quite convinced me that all he said was perfectly correct; and I really begin to think that the people are very obstinate, dissatisfied, and insolent."

"They are most enthusiastic in their demonstrations towards their sovereign," remarked the Prince.

"And naturally so," exclaimed Victoria. "Am I not their Queen? are they not my subjects? do I not rule over them? All the happiness, prosperity, and enjoyments which they possess emanate from the throne. They would be very ungrateful if they did not reverence—nay, adore their sovereign."

"Oh, of course!" said Prince Albert. "In Germany, any individual who exhibits the least coldness towards his sovereign is immediately marked as a traitor."

"And in this country the Home Secretary keeps a list of disaffected persons," observed the Queen; "but, thank God! their number is very limited—at least, so I am assured. My Ministers are constantly informing me of the proofs of loyalty and devotion which the people manifest towards me. If this were a Roman Catholic nation, they would no doubt place my image next to the Virgin in their chapels; and if it were an idolatrous country, my effigy would assuredly stand amongst the gods and goddesses. It is very pleasant, Albert, to be so much loved by my subjects—to be positively worshipped by them."

The Prince replied with a compliment which it is not worth while to record.

The Queen smiled, and continued:—

"You remember the paragraph which the Secretary of State pointed out a few days ago: it was in the *Morning Post*, if you recollect. That journal—which, by the bye, circulates entirely amongst the upper servants of the aristocracy, and nowhere else—declared '*that so great is the devotion of my loyal, subjects that, were such a sacrifice necessary, they would joyfully throw themselves beneath the wheels of my state-carriage, even as the Indians cast themselves under the car of Juggernaut*.'[31] I never in my life saw but that one number of the *Post*: its circulation, I am told, is confined entirely to the servants of the aristocracy; still it seems in that instance to express the sentiments of the entire nation. You smile, Albert?"

"I was only thinking whether the paragraph to which you have alluded, was another specimen of newspaper metaphor," answered the Prince, with some degree of hesitation.

"Not at all," returned the Queen, quickly; "the Editor wrote precisely as he thought. He must know the real sentiments of the people, since he is a man of the people himself. I have been assured that he was once the head-butler in a nobleman's family: hence his success in conducting a daily newspaper exclusively devoted to the interests and capacities of upper-servants."

"I thought that English Editors were generally a better class of men?" observed the Prince.

"So they are for the most part," replied the Queen: "graduates at the Universities—barristers—and highly accomplished gentlemen. But in the case of the *Morning Post* there seems to be an exception. We were, however, conversing upon the distress in the country—for there certainly is some little distress here and there; although the idea of people actually dying of starvation in a Christian land is of course absurd. I am really bewildered, at times, with the reasons of, and the remedies proposed for, that distress. If I ask the Home Secretary, he declares that the people are too obstinate to understand what comfortable places the workhouses are;—if I ask the Colonial Secretary, he assures me that the people are most wilfully blind to the blessings of emigration: if I ask the Foreign Secretary, he labours to convince me that the distracted state of the East reacts upon this country; and if I ask the Bishop of London he expresses his conviction that the people require more churches."

"For my part, I do not like to interfere in these matters," said the Prince; "and therefore I never ask any questions concerning them."

"And you act rightly, Albert, for you certainly know nothing of English politics. I observe by the newspapers that the country praises your forbearance in this respect. You are a Field-Marshal, and Chief Judge of the Stannaries Court—and——"

"And a Knight of the Garter," added the Prince.

"Yes—and a Learned Doctor of Laws," continued the Queen: "any thing else?"

"Several things—but I really forget them all now," returned the Prince.

"Never mind," exclaimed the Queen. "I intend to obtain for you higher distinctions yet. I do not like the mere title of *Prince*, and the style of *Royal Highness*: you shall be *King-Consort* and *Your Majesty*. Then, when a vacancy occurs, you must be appointed Commander-in-Chief."

"I feel deeply grateful for your kind intentions," returned the Prince, with a smile; "but you are well aware that I am totally ignorant of every thing connected with the army."

"That is of no consequence in England," replied the Queen. "You will have subordinates to do your duty. I must speak to Melbourne about all this. And now, as I intend to take these steps in your behalf, pray be a little more cautious relative to your private amusements; and let me hear of no more burying of dogs with funeral honours. That little affair of the interment of *Eos* at Windsor has attracted the notice of the press, I understand. It was indiscreet."

"If I adapt my conduct entirely according to the English notions," returned the Prince, "I should be compelled to give up those *battues* to which I am so devotedly attached."

"We must consult Melbourne on that head," observed the Queen.

The royal pair then conversed upon a variety of topics which would afford little interest to the reader; and shortly after nine her Majesty withdrew.

Prince Albert remained in the room to read the newspaper.

Henry Holford had listened with almost breathless attention to the conversation which we have recorded.

The Prince had drawn his chair more closely to the fire, after the Queen left the room; and he was now sitting within a couple of yards of the sofa beneath which Holford lay concealed.

The pot-boy gently drew aside the drapery which hung from the framework of the sofa to the floor, and gazed long and intently on the Prince. His look was one in which envy, animosity, and admiration were strangely blended. He thought within himself, "Why are you so exalted, and I so abased? And yet your graceful person—your intelligent countenance—your handsome features, seem to fit you for such an elevated position. Nevertheless, if I had had your advantages of education——"

The meditations of the presumptuous youth were suddenly and most disagreeably checked:—the Prince abruptly threw aside the paper, and his eyes fell on the human countenance that was gazing up at him from beneath the sofa.

His Royal Highness uttered an exclamation of surprise—not altogether unmingled with alarm; and his first impulse was to stretch out his hand towards the bell-rope. But, yielding to a second thought, he advanced to the sofa, exclaiming, "Come forth—whoever you may be."

Then the miserable pot-boy dragged himself from his hiding-place, and in another moment stood, pale and trembling, in the presence of the Prince.

"Who are you?" demanded his Royal Highness in a stern tone: "what means this intrusion? how came you hither?"

Henry Holford fell at the feet of the Prince, and confessed that, urged by an invincible curiosity, he had entered the palace on the preceding evening; but he said nothing of his previous visits.

For a few moments Prince Albert seemed uncertain how to act: he was doubtless hesitating between the alternatives of handing the intruder over to the officers of justice, or of allowing him to depart unmolested.

After a pause, he questioned Holford more closely, and seemed satisfied by the youth's assurance that he had really entered the palace through motives of curiosity, and not for any dishonest purpose.

The Prince accordingly determined to be merciful.

"I am willing," he said, "to forgive the present offence; you shall be suffered to depart. But I warn you that a repetition of the act will lead to a severe punishment. Follow me."

The Prince led the way to an ante-room where a domestic was in waiting.

"Conduct this lad as privately as you can from the palace," said his Royal Highness. "Ask him no questions—and mention not the incident elsewhere."

The Prince withdrew; and the lacquey led Henry Holford through various turnings in the palace to the servants' door opening into Pimlico.

Thus was the pot-boy ignominiously expelled from the palace; and never—never in his life had he felt more thoroughly degraded—more profoundly abased—more contemptible in his own eyes, than on the present occasion!

31. Such a disgustingly fulsome, and really atrocious paragraph did actually appear in the Morning Post three or four years ago.

CHAPTER CXCV.

THE ARISTOCRATIC VILLAIN AND THE LOW MISCREANT.

On the northern side of the Thames there is no continuously direct way along the bank for any great distance: to walk, for instance, from London Bridge to Vauxhall Bridge, one would be compelled to take many turnings, and deviate materially from the course shaped by the sinuosity of the stream. But on the southern side of the Thames, one may walk from the foot of London Bridge to that of Vauxhall, without scarcely losing sight of the river.

In this latter instance, the way would lie along Clink Street, Bankside, and Holland Street, to reach Blackfriars Bridge; the Commercial Road to Waterloo Bridge; the Belvidere Road, and Pedlar's Acre, to Westminster Bridge; and Stangate, the Bishop's Walk, and Fore Street, to reach Vauxhall Bridge.

This journey would not occupy nearly so much time as might be supposed ere a second thought was devoted to the subject; and yet how large a section of the diameter of London would have been traversed!

A portion of the path just detailed is denominated Pedlar's Acre; and it lies between Westminster and Hungerford Bridges. Adjoining the thoroughfare itself is an acre of ground, which is the property of the parish, and is let as a timber-yard. Tradition declares that it was given by a pedlar to the parish, on condition that the picture of himself and his dog be preserved, in stained glass, in one of the windows of Lambeth church; and in support of this legend, such a representation may indeed be seen in the south-east window of the middle aisle of the church just mentioned. Nevertheless, one of those antiquaries whose sesquipedalian researches are undertaken with a view to elucidate matters of this kind,—a valueless labour,—has declared that the land was bequeathed to the parish, in the year 1504, by some person totally unknown. Be the origin of the grant and the name of the donor as they may, there *is* such a place as Pedlar's Acre; and it is to a public-house in this thoroughfare that we must now request our readers to accompany us.

Seated in a private room on the first floor was a gentlemanly-looking man, of about six-and-thirty years of age. His face was decidedly handsome; but it had a downcast and sinister expression little calculated to prepossess a stranger in this person's favour. There was also a peculiar curl—more wicked than haughty—about his lip, that seemed to speak of strongly concentrated passions: the deep tones of his voice, the peculiar glance of his large grey eyes, and the occasional contraction of his brow denoted a mind resolute in carrying out any purpose it might have formed.

He was dressed with some degree of slovenliness; as if he had not leisure to waste upon the frivolity of self-adornment, or as if his means were not sufficient to permit that elegance of wardrobe which could alone stimulate his pride in the embellishment of his person.

A glass of steaming punch stood untouched near him.

It was six o'clock in the evening; and he was evidently waiting for some one.

His patience was not, however, put to a very severe test; for scarcely had five minutes elapsed after his arrival, when the door opened, and the Resurrection Man entered the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Vernon," he said, as he carefully closed the door behind him: then, taking a seat, he observed, "I hope I have not kept you waiting."

"Oh! never mind that," exclaimed Vernon, impatiently. "Have you any good news to communicate?"

"I am sorry to say that I have not. I called this morning upon the clerk of the parish church where your brother was married, and tried him in all ways."

"And he refused?" said Vernon, with an angry tone.

"He refused," answered Tidkins. "He is timid and old; and, after having first entertained the subject, at length backed out of it altogether."

"Because you did not offer him enough," cried Vernon, savagely: "because you did not show him gold! You are only lukewarm in this affair: you are afraid to risk a few miserable pounds in the business. This is not the way to conduct a grand project of such a nature. It is true that I am fearfully embarrassed for funds at this moment; but if you had acted with liberality—if we eventually succeeded—you *must* be well aware that my generosity would know no bounds."

"Mr. Vernon," said the Resurrection Man, coolly, "if you have nothing better than reproaches to offer as the reward of my exertions in your behalf, we should do well to separate at once. I was *not* niggard in my offers to the clerk: I spread fifty golden sovereigns before him—told him to take them, and promised as much more when he had done the job. But he hesitated—reflected—and at length positively refused altogether."

"And you really believe there is no hope in that quarter?" said Vernon, anxiously.

"None. If the old clerk would ever agree to serve us, he would have consented this morning. I know the man now: he is too timid to

suit our purposes. But let us look calmly at the whole business, and devise another mode of proceeding," added the Resurrection Man. "You are still determined, by some means or other, to get possession of the estates of your elder brother?"

"My resolution is even increased by every fresh obstacle," replied Vernon. "I have two powerful objects to accomplish—revenge and ambition. Lord Ravensworth has treated me with a cruelty and a contempt that would goad the most meek and patient to study the means of vengeance. Our late father always intended the ready money, of which he *could* dispose, to come to me, because the estates were entailed upon my brother. But my father died suddenly, and intestate; and my brother, although he well knew our parent's intentions, grasped all—gave me nothing! No—I am wrong," added Vernon, with exceeding bitterness of tone and manner; "he agreed to allow me five hundred pounds a-year, as a recompense for the loss of as many thousands!"

"And you accepted the offer?" said the Resurrection Man.

"I accepted it as a beggar receives alms sooner than starve," continued Vernon: "I accepted it because I had nothing: I had not the means of existence. But I accepted it also as an instalment of my just due—and not as a concession on the part of his bounty. My habits are naturally extravagant: my expenses are great—I cannot check myself in that respect. Thus am I perpetually obtaining advances from my brother's agent; and now I have not another shilling to receive until next January."

"Nearly a year!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man. "But if you was to call on the agent——"

"Absurd!" ejaculated Vernon. "Have I not told you that my brother believes me still to be in the East—still travelling in Turkey? So long as he supposes me far away, I can carry on my projects in London with far greater security. In a word, it is much safer that my presence in this country should remain a profound secret. He will die shortly—he *must* die—he is daily, steadily parting with vitality. He is passing out of existence by a sure, a speedy, and yet an inexplicable progression of decay. Of *his* death, then, I am sure; and when it shall occur, how can suspicion attach itself to me—since I am supposed to be abroad—far away?"

"You are certain that your brother is hastening towards the grave?" said the Resurrection Man. "The great obstacle—the greatest, I mean—will be thereby removed. Suppose that Lady Ravensworth should be delivered of a boy, would it not be equally easy——"

"Yes—it would be easy to put it out of the way by *violence*," was the rapid reply; "but, then, I should risk my neck at the same time that I gained a fortune. No—that will not do! I could not incur a danger of so awful a nature. The infant heir to vast estates would be jealously protected—attentively watched—surrounded by all wise precautions:—no—it were madness to think of practising aught against its life."

"Could not the same means by which—even though at a distance—you are undermining the life of your brother——"

"No—no," replied Vernon, impatiently. "It is not necessary that I should explain to you the precise nature of the means by which I succeed in effecting Lord Ravensworth's physical decay; suffice it to state that those means could not be applied to a child."

"Nevertheless," continued the Resurrection Man, "you must have an agent at Ravensworth Park; for if—as I suppose—your brother is dying by means of slow poison, there is some confidential creature of your own about his person to administer the drugs."

"I have no agent at Ravensworth;—I have no confidential creature about my brother's person;—and I have so combined my measures that Lord Ravensworth *is actually committing suicide—dying by his own hand*! Another time I will expound all this to you; for to *you* alone have I communicated my projects."

"Have you not explained yourself to Greenwood?" demanded the Resurrection Man. "I thought you told me, the last time we met, that he knew you well—and knew also that you are in England?"

"I was acquainted with him some four or five years ago, when he was not so prosperous as he is—or as he appears to be—at present," replied Vernon; "but having been abroad since that time until my return last week, I had lost sight of him—and had even forgotten him. It was not a little provoking to run against him the very first day of my arrival in London; and, though I endeavoured to avoid him, he persisted in speaking to me."

"You are not afraid that he will gossip about your presence in London?" said the Resurrection Man.

"He promised me most faithfully to keep the fact a profound secret," returned Vernon.

"And will he not advance you a small sum for your present purposes?" demanded Tidkins.

"I called on him last evening, in consequence of the suggestion contained in your note;—I requested a loan for a particular purpose;—but he refused to oblige me," added Vernon, his brow contracting. "I wish that I had not so far humbled myself by asking him."

"No matter for that," said Tidkins: "we are wandering from our subject. Here is the substance of the whole affair:—Lord Ravensworth will soon be gathered to his fathers, as they say: but in the meantime Lady Ravensworth may have a child. If it is a daughter, you are all safe; if it is a son you are all wrong. I don't know how it is—I'm not superstitious—but in these matters, where a good fellow like yourself is within reach of a fortune, and whether you are to get it or not depends on the sex of an expected infant,—in such cases, I say, the card generally does turn up wrong. Now if the child should be a boy, what will you do?"

"I cannot consent to abandon the plan of bribing the clerk to destroy the leaf in the register," answered Vernon.

"Pshaw! the project is bad—I told you so all along. See how the matter would stand," continued Tidkins:—"Lord Ravensworth dies and leaves, we will suppose, an infant heir—a son. Then you suddenly make your appearance, and demand proofs of your brother's marriage. The register is searched—a leaf is missing—it is the one which contains the record of the union celebrated between Lord Ravensworth and Miss Adeline Enfield! Would not this seem very extraordinary? would it not create suspicions that Lord Ravensworth may not have died fairly? No—your project, Mr. Vernon, will never do: It is baseless—shallow—childish. It is unworthy of you. If you persist in it, I shall wash my hands of the business:—if you will follow my advice, you shall be Lord Ravensworth before you are a year older."

Vernon could not conceal a sentiment of admiration for that man who thus dexterously reasoned on his plans, and thus boldly promised that consummation to which he so fondly aspired.

"Speak, Mr. Tidkins," he said; "we have met to consult on the necessary course to be adopted."

"Let us come, then, boldly to the point," continued the Resurrection Man, sinking his voice to a whisper: "rest patiently for the confinement of Lady Ravensworth, which, you have learnt, is expected to take place in six weeks;—if the issue is a girl, you need trouble yourself no more in the business, but calmly wait till death does its work with Lord Ravensworth."

"And if the issue be a boy?" said Vernon, gazing fixedly on his companion's countenance.

"It must be put out of the way," answered the Resurrection Man, in a low, but stern tone; "and you may trust to me that the business shall be done in such a manner as to endanger no one's neck."

"You think—you imagine that it can be done——" said Vernon, hesitatingly—but still with that kind of hesitation which is prepared to yield and to consent.

"I do not speak upon thoughts and imaginings," replied Tidkins: "I argue on conviction. Leave the whole affair to me. I have my plan already settled—and, when the time comes, we will talk more about it. For the present," continued the Resurrection Man, drawing a bill-stamp from his pocket, and handing it to his companion, "have the goodness to write the name of *Ravensworth* at the bottom of this blank. I shall not use it until you are really Lord Ravensworth, when the signature will be your proper one."

Vernon cast a hasty glance over the bill, and observed, "It is a five-and-twenty shilling stamp."

"Yes—to cover three thousand pounds," returned the Resurrection Man. "That will not be too much for making you a peer and a rich man. Besides, I intend to advance you a matter of fifty pounds at once, for your immediate necessities."

"And if I should happen to fail in obtaining the title and estates of Ravensworth," said Vernon, "this document would enable you to immure me in a debtor's prison."

"Ridiculous!" ejaculated Tidkins, impatiently. "In that case your name would not be *Ravensworth*; and it is the name of *Ravensworth* which I require to this bill. As for throwing your person into a prison, what good could that do me? A dead carcass is of more value than a living one," he added, in a muttering tone.

Vernon did not overhear this remark—or, if he did, he comprehended not the allusion; but he signed the bill without farther hesitation.

The Resurrection Man consigned it to his pocket-book, and then drew forth a purse filled with gold, which he handed to his companion.

Vernon received it with a stiff and haughty inclination of the head:—his necessities compelled him to accept the succour; but his naturally proud feelings made him shrink from its source.

Having so far arranged the matters which they had met to discuss, the aristocratic villain and the low miscreant separated.

Vernon returned to his lodging in Stamford Street; and the Resurrection Man proceeded into the Westminster Road, where he took a cab, saying to the driver, "Golden Lane, Saint Luke's."

CHAPTER CXCVI.

THE OLD HAG AND THE RESURRECTION MAN.

The Old Hag, who has so frequently figured in former portions of our narrative, had latterly become more prosperous, if not more respectable, than when we first introduced her to our readers.

From having been the occupant of only one room in the house in the court leading from Golden Lane, she had become the lessee of the entire dwelling. The commencement of this success was owing to her connexion with Lady Cecilia Harborough in the intrigue of the "living statue;" and from that moment affairs seemed to have taken a new turn with her. At all events her "business" increased; and the sphere of her infamy became enlarged.

She would have taken another and better house, in some fashionable quarter, and re-commenced the avocation of a first-rate brothel-keeper—the pursuit of the middle period of her life;—but she reasoned that she was known to a select few where she was—that the obscurity of her dwelling was favourable to many of the nefarious projects in which her aid was required—and that she was too old to dream of forming a new connexion elsewhere.

It would be impossible to conceive a soul more diabolically hardened, more inveterately depraved, than that of this old hag.

In order to increase her resources, and occupy, as she said, "her leisure time," she had hired or bought some half-dozen young girls, about ten or twelve years old;—hired or bought them, whichever the reader pleases, of their parents, a "consideration" having been given for each, and the said parents comforting themselves with the idea that their children were well provided for!

These children of tender age were duly initiated by the old hag in all the arts and pursuits of prostitution. They were sent in pairs to parade Aldersgate Street, Fleet Street, and Cheapside; and their special instructions were to practise their allurements upon elderly men, whose tastes might be deemed more vitiated and eccentric than those of the younger loungers of the great thoroughfares where prostitution most thrives.

A favourite scheme of the old woman's was this:—One of her juvenile emissaries succeeded, we will suppose, in alluring to the den in Golden Lane an elderly man whose outward respectability denoted a well-filled purse, and ought to have been associated with better morals. When the wickedness was consummated, and the elderly gentleman was about to depart, the old hag would meet him and the young girl on the stairs, and, affecting to treat the latter as a stranger who had merely used her house as a common place of such resort, would seem stupefied at the idea "*of so youthful a creature having been brought to her abode for such a purpose*." She would then question the girl concerning her age; and the reply would be "*under twelve*" of course. Thus the elderly voluptuary would suddenly find himself liable to punishment for a misdemeanour, for intriguing with a girl beneath the age of twelve; and the virtuous indignation of the old hag would be vented in assertions that though she kept a house of accommodation for grown-up persons, she abhorred the encouragement of juvenile profligacy. The result would be that the hoary old sinner found himself compelled to pay a considerable sum as hush-money.

We might occupy many pages with the details of the tricks and artifices which the old hag taught these young girls. And of a surety, they were subjects sufficiently plastic to enable her to model them to all her infamous purposes. Born of parents who never took the trouble to inculcate a single moral lesson, even if they knew any, those poor creatures had actually remained ignorant of the meaning of right and wrong until they were old enough to take an interest in the events that were passing around them. Then, when they missed some lad of their acquaintance, and, on inquiry, learnt that he had been sent to prison for taking something which did not belong to him, they began to understand that it was *dangerous* to do such an act—but it did not strike them that it was *wrong*. Again, if by accident they heard that another boy whom they knew, had got a good place, was very industrious, and in a fair way to prosper, they would perceive some *utility* in such conduct, but would still remain unable to appreciate its *rectitude*.

Most of the girls whom the old hag had enlisted in her service, had been born and reared in that dirty warren which constitutes Golden Lane, Upper Whitecross Street, Playhouse Yard, Swan Street, and all their innumerable courts, alleys, and obscure nooks, swarming with a ragged and degraded population. Sometimes in their infancy they creeped out from their loathsome burrows, and even ventured into Old Street, Barbican, or Beech Street. But those excursions were not frequent. During their childhood they rolled half-naked in the gutters,—eating the turnip-parings and cabbage-stalks which were tossed out into the street with other offal,—poking about in the kennels to find lost halfpence,—or even plundering the cat's-meat-man and the tripe-shop for the means of satisfying their hunger! This mode of life was but little varied;—unless, indeed, it were by the more agreeable recreations of particular days in the year. Thus, for instance, November was welcomed as the time for making a Guy-Fawkes, and carrying it round in procession amidst the pestilential mazes of the warren; August gave them "oyster day," to be signalised by the building of shell-grottoes, which were an excuse for importuning passengers for alms; and the December season had its "boxing-day," on which occasion the poor ragged creatures would be seen thronging the doors of the oil-shops to beg for Christmas-candles!

These had been the only holidays which characterised the childhood of those unfortunate, lost, degraded girls whose lot we are describing. Sunday was not marked by cleanlier apparel, nor better food: if it were singled out at all from the other days of the week, the distinguishing sign was merely the extra drunkenness of the fathers of the families. Good Friday brought the little victims no hot-

cross buns, nor Christmas Day its festivities, nor Shrove Tuesday its pancakes:—they had no knowledge of holy periods nor sacred ceremonies;—no seasonable luxury reminded them of the anniversaries of the birth, the death, or the resurrection of a Redeemer.

No—in physical privations and moral blindness had they passed their infancy:—and thus, having gone through a complete initiation into the miseries and sufferings of life, they were prepared at the age of ten to commence an apprenticeship of crime. And the old hag was an excellent mistress: were there an University devoted to graduates in Wickedness, this horrible wretch would have taken first-class Degrees in its schools.

Thus, be it understood, up to the age of ten or eleven, when those poor girls were transferred by their unfeeling parents (who were glad to get rid of them) to the care of the old woman, they had scarcely ever been out of the warren where they were born. Now a new world, as it were, dawned upon them. They laid aside their fetid rags, and put on garments which appeared queenly robes in their eyes. They were sent into streets lined with splendid shops, and beheld gay carriages and equipages of all kinds. Hitherto the principal gin-shop in their rookery had appeared the most gorgeous palace in the world in their eyes, with its revolving burners, its fine windows, and its meretriciously-dressed bar-girls:—now they could feast their gaze with the splendours of the linen-drapers' and jewellers' establishments on Ludgate Hill. Their existence seemed to be suddenly invested with charms that they had never before dreamt of; and they adored the old hag as the authoress of their good fortune. Thus she established a sovereign dominion over her poor ignorant victims through the medium of their mistaken gratitude; and when she told them to sin, they sinned—sinned, too, before they even knew the meaning of virtue!

Such was the history—not of one only—but of all the young girls whom this atrocious old hag had bought from their parents!

To many—to most of our readers, the details of this description may seem improbable,—nay, impossible.

The picture is, alas! too true.

Poor fallen children! the world scorns you—society contemns you—the unthinking blame you. But, just heaven! are ye more culpable than that community which took no precaution to prevent your degradation, and which now adopts no measures to reclaim you?

As for ourselves, we declare most solemnly that we believe no age to have been more disgraced than the present one, and no country more culpable than our own. In this age of Bibles and country of glorious civilisation,—in this epoch of missions and land of refinement,—in this period of grand political reform, and nation of ten thousand philanthropic institutions,—in the middle of the nineteenth century, and with all the advantages of profound peace,—and, what is worst of all, in that great city which vaunts itself the metropolis of the civilised world, there are thousands of young children whose neglected, hopeless, and miserable condition can only be looked upon as an apprenticeship calculated to fill our streets with prostitutes of finished depravity—to people our gaols, hulks, and penal colonies with villains familiar with every phase of crime—and to supply our scaffolds with victims for the diversion of a rude and ruthless mob!

It was nine o'clock in the evening; and the old hag was seated in the same room where we have before frequently seen her.

She was, however, surrounded by several additional comforts. She no longer burnt turf in her grate, but good Wall's End coals. She no longer placed her feet on an old mat, but on a thick carpet. She no longer bought her gin by the quartern or half pint, but by the bottle. She sweetened her tea with lump sugar, instead of moist; and in the place of a stew of tripe or cow-heel, she had a joint cooked at the bake-house, or a chicken boiled on her own fire.

Her select patrons had contributed much towards this improvement in her circumstances; but the luxuries in which she could now indulge, were provided for her by the prostitution of her young victims.

She was now dozing in her arm-chair, with her great cat upon her lap; but even in the midst of her semi-slumber, her ears were awake to the least motion of the knocker of the house-door—that sound which was the indication of business!

Thus, when, true to the time appointed in his note, the Resurrection Man arrived at the house, not many moments elapsed ere he was admitted into the hag's parlour.

"So you have discovered the address of Katherine Wilmot," said the hag. "Where does she reside?"

"No matter where," returned the Resurrection Man; "it is sufficient that I can communicate with her, or bring her up to London, when it suits me. I have come now to have a full understanding with you on the subject; and if we play our cards well, we may obtain a round sum of money from this girl—that is, supposing she is really the child of the Harriet Wilmot whom you knew."

"There can be no doubt of it—there can be no doubt of it," exclaimed the old hag, rocking herself to and fro. "She is the daughter of that Harriet Wilmot whom I knew, and whose image sometimes haunts me in my dreams."

"But what proofs have you of the fact?" demanded the Resurrection Man. "It will not suit me to take any more trouble in the matter, unless I know for certain that I am not running a wild-goose chase."

"I shall not tell you how I came to know Harriet Wilmot seventeen years ago, nor any thing more about her than I can help," said the old hag resolutely. "I was, however, well acquainted with her—I knew all about her. With her own lips she told me her history. She was for some time engaged to be married to a young man—young at that period—at Southampton. His name was Smithers. Circumstances separated them before the realisation of their hopes and wishes; and she came to London with her father, who soon afterwards died of a broken heart through misfortunes in business."

"Broken heart!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man contemptuously: "who ever died of a broken heart? But never mind—go on."

"Harriet was alone in the world—an orphan—unprotected—and without friends or resources," continued the hag. "She was accordingly compelled to go out to service. A wealthy gentleman saw her, and fell in love with her—but I shall not tell you all about *that*! No—I shall not tell you about *that*! Harriet's was a strange fate—a sad fate; and I do not like to think of the part I acted in some respects towards her," added the old woman, shaking her head, as if it were in regret of the past.

"Go on," said the Resurrection Man. "If you have got any thing unpleasant in your memory, all the shakings of heads in the world won't drive it out."

"Alack! you speak the truth—you speak the truth," muttered the old woman. "It was the blackest deed I ever committed—I wish it had never occurred: it troubles me very often; and when I cannot sleep at night, I am constantly thinking of Harriet Wilmot."

"What is all this to lead to?" demanded Tidkins, impatiently.

"I shall not trouble you with many more of my reflections," said the hag. "Harriet became a mother: she had a daughter, on whom she bestowed the name of Katherine. Three or four years afterwards I lost sight of her, and never beheld her more. From that time all traces of herself and her child were gone until last year, when the murder of Reginald Tracy's housekeeper placed the name of Katherine Wilmot before the public. That name immediately struck me: the newspapers said she was sixteen years old—precisely the age that Harriet's daughter must have been. Then the name of Smithers was mixed up in the proceedings which ensued: I saw it all—Harriet must be dead, and Smithers had adopted her child as his niece! But, to convince myself still further, I went to the Old Bailey—I saw Katherine in the dock: you might have knocked me down with a feather, so strong was the resemblance between the young girl and her deceased mother! I came home—I was very ill: methought I had seen the ghost of one whom I had deeply, deeply injured!"

"And now you have so far forgotten your remorse that you are desirous to turn your knowledge of Katherine's parentage to a good account?" said the Resurrection Man, with a sneering laugh. "But how do you know that she is not well informed on that head already?"

"She cannot be—she cannot be," answered the old hag; "she would not bear the name of *Wilmot* if she was. Besides, I have since ascertained that her mother died when she was only four years old; and therefore Katherine was too young to receive any revelation from her parent's lips. No—no: I have good reason to believe that Katherine knows nothing of her paternal origin."

"I am now perfectly satisfied, from all you have told me, that Katherine Wilmot is the daughter of the Harriet whom you knew," said the Resurrection Man; "and as you seem so positive that she is unaware of many important particulars concerning her birth, I will proceed in the business you have proposed to me."

"Where is she living?" inquired the old woman.

"If I tell you that," said Tidkins, "what guarantee have I got that you will not post off alone to her, extort the purchase-money for your secrets, and chouse me out of my reglars? Look you—I have been at the trouble and expense of finding her out—which you never could have done—and I must go halves with you in the produce of the affair."

"So you shall—so you may," returned the old woman. "But I will not speak to her in your hearing. I don't know how it is that I have a strange superstitious awe in connexion with all that concerns Harriet Wilmot's memory and the existence of her child. I cannot help the feeling—I cannot help it."

"By Satan," exclaimed the Resurrection Man, darting a furious glance upon the hag, "you are either a drivelling fool, or you are deceiving me. You entertain compunction about these Wilmots—and yet you purpose to obtain money from the girl. Now is this consistent? Take care how you play with me; for—if I catch you out in any of your tricks—I will hang you up to your own bedpost as readily as I would wring the neck of that damned old cat."

"You shall see whether I will deceive you—you shall see," cried the old hag, with some degree of alarm. "Arrange the business as you will, so long as I may have speech of Katherine without being overheard; but you shall be present when she pays me for the secret which I have to communicate."

"Let that be the understanding, and I am agreeable," observed the Resurrection Man. "Will it suit you to go a few miles out of town with me to-morrow."

"Is it to see Katherine?" inquired the hag.

"What the devil else do you think I want your company for?" cried Tidkins: "to take you to dine at Greenwich or Blackwall—eh? Not quite such a fool as that! However, to-morrow morning you may expect me at seven o'clock——"

"It is not light at that hour," observed the hag.

"I prefer the dusk of either morning or evening," answered the Resurrection Man. "It suits me better—because I have a few enemies in London. But, as I was saying, I shall call for you at seven to-morrow morning; a friend of mine—one Banks of Globe Town—has a covered spring-cart and a capital bit of horse-flesh. He will drive us to where we have to go, in no time. So don't keep us waiting—as the vehicle will be at the bottom of the lane by a quarter to seven."

The old hag promised to be punctual; and the Resurrection Man took his departure from her den.

CHAPTER CXCVII.

ELLEN AND KATHERINE.

Turn we now to the farm-house of the Bennets near Hounslow—the residence of Katherine Wilmot.

The morning was dry and beautiful—one of those mornings which sometimes cheer us towards the end of January, and give us a short foretaste of the approaching spring.

It was nine o'clock, when the door of the farm-house opened, and two young females came forth to enjoy the fresh air of a charming day.

These were Ellen Monroe—(for by her maiden name must we continue to call her, as she herself maintained it for the present)—and Katherine Wilmot.

Never had Ellen appeared more beautiful; nor Katherine more sweetly interesting.

They had evidently been conversing on a subject which gave them pleasure; and they were both intent on continuing the same delightful topic during their walk.

The subject of that discourse had inspired Ellen with emotions of pride, as well as of joy. She walked with a dignity and yet an elegance of motion which denoted the vigour of that vital system which was so highly developed in her voluptuous style of beauty. The generous and noble feelings of the heart shone in the light of her deep blue eyes, and in the animation of that countenance where the fair and red were so exquisitely blended. They were indicated, too, by the expression of that short and somewhat haughty upper lip which belonged to the classic regularity of her features, and in the dilation of the rose-tinted nostrils.

Ellen was a finer and far lovelier creature than Katherine;—but the latter was characterised by more of that tender sensibility and touching interest which physiologists deem the development of the intellectual system. The eyes were intensely expressive; and over her features a soft, pale, and modest light seemed to be shed. Her figure was delicate and slight, and contrasted strongly with that luxuriant expansion which constituted the fine and not less symmetrical proportions of Ellen.

"I shall really experience deep regret to leave your dwelling-place, dear Katherine," observed Ellen, as they entered a hard and dry pathway leading through the fields; "for even at this season, it possesses many attractions superior to the vicinity of a great city."

"In the warmer months it is a beautiful spot," returned Katherine. "But you will not leave me to-day? Consider—you have only been here a few hours——"

"Since yesterday morning," exclaimed Ellen, with a smile; "and in that time we have formed a friendship which may never, I hope, be interrupted."

"Oh! never," said Katherine warmly. "It was so kind of you to come and find me out in my seclusion—so considerate to make me acquainted with all those wonderful events which have occurred to my benefactor——"

"Nay—neither kind nor considerate," again interrupted Ellen. "Richard's letter, dated from the city of Abrantani on the 10th, and received by my father the day before yesterday, enjoined him to send me to see you—to make your acquaintance—to assure myself that you are well and happy—and to communicate to you tidings which Richard feels will be welcome to all his friends."

"Oh! welcome indeed!" exclaimed Katherine, with grateful enthusiasm. "How much do I owe to him—and how worthy is he of that rank which has rewarded his grand deeds! Such a man could not long remain a humble individual: his great talents—his noble heart—his fine qualities were certain to elevate him above the sphere in which he was born."

"And now will the name of Markham go down to posterity," said Ellen, proudly: "and the glory which Richard has thrown around it, will be to some degree shared by all who bear it. Oh! this was prophesied to me but a little while ago;—and yet, *then* how far was I from suspecting that the realisation of the prediction was so near at hand, especially too, as that prediction was not uttered with any reference to Richard—but to another,—*that other alluding to himself*!"

Katherine cast a glance of surprise towards her companion, whose last words were unintelligible to her; and Ellen, apparently recollecting herself, hastened to add, "But I was speaking of matters which are yet unknown—yet strange to you. Think no more of my observations on that topic. There are times when the soul is lost and bewildered in the contemplation of the world's strange events and marvellous vicissitudes; and such has often been the case with me during the last few days. It was on the 16th of January that we received the letter which imparted us the tidings of Richard's first exploit—the capture of Estella. Oh! how sincerely I prayed for his success—and yet I trembled for him! My father, too, had some misgivings; but we endeavoured to reassure each other, mutually concealing our fears. Two or three days afterwards we received the news of his triumphant entry into Villabella;—another interval of a few days, and we had a letter from him, giving us a brief account of the Battle of Piacere. Our fears were almost entirely dissipated by the tidings of this glorious achievement; and if any doubts yet lingered, they were completely dispelled by the news of the great victory of Abrantani. Oh! how well has he earned that coronet which now adorns his brow!—how well does that proud title of Marquis become the great, the generous, and the good!"

"Would that his struggles were over, and that the civil war was put an end to in Castelcicala!" exclaimed Miss Wilmot—for the news of the great victory beneath the walls of Montoni were yet unknown in England.

"I have no fears for the result," said Ellen: "a conqueror has he hitherto been—and a conqueror will he remain! Heaven itself prospers him in this undertaking: the wise dispensations of Providence are apparent throughout his career in the Grand Duchy. Had the first expedition, which landed at Ossore, succeeded, there were great chiefs—Grachia and Morosino—who would have taken the lead in the State. But the enterprise failed—and those patriots were numbered with the slain. The idea of releasing from their captivity his companions in that fatal affair, led Richard to the attack of Estella. He succeeded—and he stood alone at the head of the movement. There was not a chief amongst the patriots to dispute his title to that elevated situation."

"Yes—the finger of heaven was assuredly visible in all those circumstances which led to my benefactor's greatness," remarked Katherine. "Methinks that when I see him again, I shall be strangely embarrassed in his presence:—instead of addressing him by the familiar name of *Mr. Markham*, my lips must tutor themselves to breathe the formal words '*My Lord*,' and '*Your Lordship*;' and——"

"Oh! you wrong our noble-hearted friend—our mutual benefactor," interrupted Ellen. "Rank and distinction—wealth and glory cannot change *his* heart: he will only esteem them as the elements of an influence and of a power to do much good."

The young ladies paused in their conversation, because two persons were approaching along the pathway.

A man muffled in a large cloak, and with a countenance of cadaverous repulsiveness scowling above the collar, advanced first; and behind him walked a female whose bowed form denoted the decrepitude of old age. There was an interval of perhaps a dozen yards between them; for the woman was unable to keep pace with the more impatient progress of the man.

"Is this the way, young ladies, to Farmer Bennet's?" demanded the foremost individual, when he was within a few feet of Ellen and Katherine.

"It is," replied Kate. "You may see the roof appearing from the other side of yonder eminence. Mr. Bennet is not, however, within at this moment: he has gone to a neighbouring village on business, and will not return till two o'clock."

"Then you know Farmer Bennet?" exclaimed the Resurrection Man—for he was the individual who had addressed the young ladies.

But before Katherine could give any reply, an exclamation of astonishment broke from the lips of Ellen, whose eyes had just recognised the countenance of the old hag.

"Well, Miss—do I have the pleasure of meeting you once more?" said the detestable woman, with a leer comprehensively significant in allusion to the past: then, as her eyes wandered from Ellen's countenance to that of Katherine, she suddenly became strangely excited, and exclaimed, "Ah! Miss Wilmot!"

"Is *this* Miss Wilmot?" demanded the Resurrection Man, with an impatient glance towards Katherine, while he really addressed himself to the old hag.

"My name is Wilmot," said Kate, in her soft and somewhat timid tone. "Was it for me that your visit to the farm was intended?"

"Neither more nor less, Miss," answered the Resurrection Man. "This person," he continued, indicating his horrible companion, "has something important to say to you."

"Yes—and we must speak alone, too," said the hag.

"No!" ejaculated Ellen, hastily and firmly; "that may not be. I am Miss Wilmot's friend—the friend, too, of one in whom she places great confidence; and whatever you may have to communicate to her cannot be a secret in respect to me."

And, as she uttered these words, she glanced significantly at her young companion.

"Yes," said Kate, who understood the hint conveyed in that look, although she was of course entirely ignorant of the motives of Ellen's precaution: "yes—whatever you may wish to communicate to me must be told in the presence of my friend."

"But the business is a most delicate one," cried the Resurrection Man.

"Oh! I have no doubt of that," exclaimed Ellen, with a contemptuous smile which the hag fully comprehended.

"Do you know this young lady?" asked the Resurrection Man, in an under tone, of the old woman, while he rapidly indicated Ellen.

"I know that young lady well," said the hag aloud, and with a meaning glance: "I know you well,—do I not, Miss Monroe?"

"I am not disposed to deny the fact," replied Ellen, coolly; "and I can assure you that my disposition is as resolute and determined as you have always found it to be. Therefore, if you have aught to communicate to Miss Wilmot, say it quickly—or come with us to the farm, where you will be more at your ease: but, remember, I do not quit this young lady while you are with her."

"You will repent of this obstinacy, Miss—you will repent of this obstinacy," muttered the hag.

"It may be so," said Ellen: "nevertheless, menaces will not deter me from my purpose."

"If you thwart me, I can proclaim matters that you would wish unrevealed," retorted the hag, but in a whisper apart to Ellen.

"Act as you please," exclaimed this young lady aloud, and with a superb glance of contemptuous defiance. "Your impertinence only convinces me the more profoundly of the prudence of my resolution to remain with Miss Wilmot."

The hag made no reply: she knew not how to act.

Tidkins was not, however, equally embarrassed. He saw that Ellen was acquainted with the old woman's character, and that she entertained suspicions of a nature which threatened to mar the object of his visit to that neighbourhood.

"Miss Monroe," he said,—"for such, I learn, is your name,—I beg of you to allow my companion a few moments' conversation with your young friend. They need not retire a dozen yards from this spot; and your eye can remain upon them."

"No," returned Ellen, positively: "your companion shall have no private conference with Miss Wilmot. Miss Wilmot's affairs are no secret to me;—she has voluntarily made me acquainted with her past history and her present condition—and she cannot now wish me to remain a stranger to the object of your visit, however delicate be the nature of that business."

"I am desirous that Miss Monroe should hear your communications," added Kate.

"I will not speak to Miss Wilmot in the presence of witnesses," said the old hag.

"Then we have nothing farther to prevent us from returning to the farm immediately," exclaimed Ellen; and, taking Katherine's arm, she turned away with a haughty inclination of her head.

"Neither need we remain here any longer, Mr. Tidkins," said the hag.

"Tidkins!" repeated Ellen, with a convulsive shudder—for the name reached her ear as she was leading her young friend homeward:—"Tidkins!" she murmured, the blood running cold in her veins; "my God! what new plot can now be contemplated?"

And she hurried Katherine along the path, as if a wild beast were behind them.

"Do you know those people?" asked Miss Wilmot, alarmed by her companion's tone and manner.

"Unfortunately," replied Ellen, in a low voice and with rapid utterance,—"unfortunately I can attest that the woman whom we have just met, is the vilest of the vile; and the mention of that man's name has revealed to me the presence of a wretch capable of every atrocity—a villain whose crimes are of the blackest dye—an assassin whose enmity to our benefactor Richard is as furious as it is unwearied. Come, Katharine—come: hasten your steps;—we shall not be in safety until we reach the farm."

And the two young ladies hurried rapidly along the path towards the dwelling, every now and then casting timid glances behind them.

But the Resurrection Man and the old hag had not thought it expedient to follow.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

A GLOOMY VISITOR.

As soon as the two young ladies had reached the farm-house, Ellen addressed Katherine with alarming seriousness of manner.

"My dear friend," she said, "some plot is in existence against your peace. That fearful-looking man and that horrible old woman are perfect fiends in mortal shape."

"But what cause of enmity can they entertain against me?" asked Katharine, drawing her chair close to Ellen's seat with that sweet confidence which a younger sister would have been expected to show towards an elder one. "I never saw them before in my life, to my knowledge; and I certainly never can have injured them."

"You are rich—and that is a sufficient motive to inspire the man with designs against you: you are pretty—and that is a sufficient reason for inducing the woman to spread her nets in your path. The man," continued Ellen, "has more than once attempted the life of our generous benefactor Richard; and that old hag, Katherine, is a wretch who lives upon the ruin of young females."

At this moment Mrs. Bennet entered the room; and, observing the disturbed countenances of Ellen and Katherine, she felt alarmed.

Ellen immediately communicated to her the particulars of the adventure just related, and concluded with these observations:—"The person of the man was previously unknown to me; but Mr. Markham had made me familiar with his name. Thus, when I heard that name breathed by his infamous companion, I recognised in him the monster of whose crimes my benefactor has related so dread a history. As for the woman," added Ellen, after a moment's hesitation, "she has been pointed out to me as one of those vile wretches who render cities and great towns dangerous to young females. Indeed, she once practised her arts upon me:—hence I am well aware of her true character."

Mrs. Bennet was dreadfully frightened at the incident which had occurred; but, like Katherine, she was somewhat at a loss to conceive what possible object the two bad characters whom Ellen so bitterly denounced, could have in view with respect to her young charge.

The trio were still conversing upon the mysterious occurrence, when Farmer Bennet entered the room.

Of course the narrative had to be repeated to him; and he was much troubled by what he heard.

The dinner was served up; but none of those who sate down to it ate with any appetite. A vague and uncertain consciousness of impending danger or of serious annoyance oppressed them all.

The table was cleared; and Mrs. Bennet had just produced a bottle of excellent home-made wine, "to cheer their spirits," as she said, when the servant entered to announce that a person desired to speak to Mr. Bennet. The farmer ordered the individual in question to be admitted; and the servant, having disappeared for a few moments, returned, ushering in an elderly man dressed in shabby black, and wearing a dingy white cravat with very limp ends.

"Your servant, ma'am—your most obedient, young ladies," said he: then, starting with well-affected surprise, he ejaculated, "Ah! if my eyes doesn't deceive me in my old age, that's Miss Kate Wilmot, werily and truly!"

"Mr. Banks!" said Katherine, in a tone expressive of both surprise and aversion; for she remembered that the undertaker used to call upon Smithers to purchase the rope by means of which criminals had been executed.

"Yes, my dear—my name is, as you say, Banks—Edward Banks, of Globe Lane, London—Furnisher of Funerals on New and Economic Principles—Good Deal Coffin, Eight Shillings and Sixpence—Stout Oak, Thirty-five Shillings—Patent Funeral Carriage, One Pound Eleven—First Rate Carriage-Funeral, Mutes and Feathers, Four Pound Four—Catholic Fittings——"

"Really, sir," exclaimed Mr. Bennet, impatiently, "this is not a very pleasant subject for conversation; and if you have come upon no other business than to recite your Prospectus——"

"A thousand apologies, sir—a thousand apologies," interrupted Mr. Banks, calmly sinking into a seat. "But whenever I see a few or a many mortal wessels gathered together, I always think that the day must come when they'll be nothink more than blessed carkisses and then, Mr. Bennet," added the undertaker, shaking his head solemnly, and applying a dirty white handkerchief to his eyes, "how pleasant to the wirtuous feelings must it be to know where to get the funeral done on the newest and most economic principles."

"Katherine, do you know this person?" inquired the farmer, irritated by the intruder's pertinacity in his gloomy topic.

"I have seen him three or four times at Mr. Smithers' house in London," was the answer; "but Mr. Banks well knows that I never exchanged ten words with him in my life."

"Then you do not come to see Miss Wilmot?" demanded Mr. Bennet, turning towards the undertaker.

"No, sir—no," answered Banks, heaving a deep sigh. "Did you not perceive, sir, that I was quite took at a non-plush when I set my wenerable eyes on the blessed countenance of that charming gal? But pardon me, sir—pardon me, if I am someot long in coming to the pint:—it is, however, my natur' to ramble when I reflects on the pomps and wanities of this wicked world; and natur' is natur,' sir, after all—is it *not*, ma'am?"

Here he turned with a most dolorous expression of countenance towards Mrs. Bennet.

"I really do not understand you, sir," was her laconic reply:—nor more she did, good woman! for it was not even probable that Mr.

Banks quite understood himself.

"Now, sir, will you have the goodness to explain the nature of your business with me—since it is with *me*, no doubt, that you have business to transact?" said the farmer, in a tone which showed how disagreeable the undertaker's whining nonsense was to him.

"Something tells me that this man's visit bears reference to our adventure of the morning," whispered Ellen to Katherine. "Do not offer to leave the room: let us hear all he has to say."

Katherine replied by a meaning look, and then glanced with suspicious timidity towards Banks, who was again speaking.

"My business isn't to be explained in a moment, sir," said the undertaker; "and I must beg your patience for a little while."

"Go on," exclaimed the farmer, throwing himself back in his seat, and folding his arms with the desperate air of a man who knew that he could only get rid of a troublesome visitor by allowing him to tell his story in his own way.

"You're in mourning, ma'am, I see," observed Mr. Banks, turning towards Mrs. Bennet. "Ah! I remember—that wexatious affair of the Rector of Saint David's. Pray, ma'am, who *undertook* the funeral of your blessed defunct sister?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Bennet, tears starting into her eyes.

"No offence, ma'am—no offence. Only I should like it to be known in these here parts that Edward Banks—of Globe Lane, London, undertakes on new and economic principles, and doesn't mind distances. S'pose, sir," continued this most disagreeable visitor, again addressing the farmer, "s'pose you come to me some fine morning and says, '*Banks*,' says you, '*my dear wife has just become a blessed defunct*——'"

"This is too much!" ejaculated Mr. Bennet, starting from his seat. "Have you, or have you not, any business to engage my attention?"

"I'm coming to the pint—I'm coming to the pint this moment," said Banks. "Pray sit down for a few minutes—I shan't ingross much more of your wallyable time; for time really *is* wallyable in this sublunary speer;"—and the undertaker shook his head so mournfully that worthy Mrs. Bennet could not help thinking he was a very good and humane, though somewhat a prosy individual. "When we look around us, and behold how many benighted creeturs lives in total recklessness for the futur'—without putting by in an old stocking or any where else a single penny towards buying 'em a decent coffin—it's enough to make one's hair stand on end. But I see you are growing impatient, sir:—well—perhaps my feelings does carry me away. Still I don't mean no harm. Howsomever—business is business, as coffins is coffins, or carkisses is carkisses; and so here's to business in a jiffy."

With these words Mr. Banks drew from his capacious coat-pocket a brown-paper parcel, about a foot long, three inches wide, and as many deep.

Then he began, with most provoking deliberation of manner, to unroll the numerous folds of paper in which the precious object of so much care was wrapped; and, while he thus aroused the curiosity of his spectators to the utmost, he continued talking in a more lachrymose style than ever.

"There is dooties which we owe to heaven—and there is dooties which we owe to our fellow-creeturs. To heaven, ma'am, we owes a obligation of wirtue: to our fellow-creeturs we owes respect and decency when they're no more. Wirtues, ma'am, is like the white nails on a black-cloth covered coffin: the more there is of 'em, the stronger is the coffin, and the better it looks. Wices, ma'am, is like the knots in a common deal coffin: the more there is of 'em, the veaker is the coffin, and the wuss it looks. I'm now a-going to show you, ma'am—and you, too, sir—and you also, young ladies—a object of the deepest interest to us poor mortal wessels. I've wrapped it up in this wise, 'cause I've paytented it, and this is the only model I've got. When once it's generally known, the whole world will thank me for the inwention; and posterity will remember with gratitude the name of Banks of Globe Lane—Furnisher of Funerals on New and Economic Principles. You see, the parcel is gettin' smaller and smaller—'cause the blessed object was as well wrapped up as a young babby. However—here's the last fold:—off with the paper—and there's the concentrating focus of all interest!"

As Mr. Banks wound up with this beautiful peroration, he disengaged from the last fold of paper a miniature model of a coffin, about eight inches long, and wide and deep in proportion. It was covered with black silk, and was studded with innumerable white nails.

But as he placed it, with a glance of almost paternal affection, upon the table, the farmer started up, exclaiming, "I have already put up with your insolence too long. What does this unwarrantable intrusion upon my privacy mean? Speak, sir: have you any thing to say to me?"

"I am now coming to the pint at length," answered the undertaker, but little abashed by this rebuff. "In one word," he continued, producing a small memorandum-book and preparing to write with a pencil,—"in one word, I want you and your family to let me put down each of your names——"

"For what?" demanded Bennet, impatiently.

"For a Paytent Silk-covered Silver-nailed Indestructible Wood-seasoned Coffin," was the calm reply. "It's warranted to keep as good as new till you want it."

Mr. Bennet fell back into his seat, completely stupefied by this extraordinary announcement;—Mrs. Bennet cast horrified glances at the undertaker, as if she thought he was mad;—Ellen cast a look of deep indignation on the individual who had produced this excitement;—and Katherine started on her seat, exclaiming, "What have you done, Mr. Banks? Mrs. Bennet is fainting!"

This was really the case—such an effect did the sudden display of the coffin and the cool demand of patronage made by the undertaker, produce upon one whose mind had not yet quite recovered from the severe shock occasioned by the murder of her sister.

"Water, Katherine!—quick!" exclaimed the farmer, hastening towards his wife.

Kate instantly hurried from the room to fetch water; while Ellen, on her part, proffered the necessary attentions to the fainting woman.

Mr. Banks was thus for a moment forgotten; and this was exactly the condition of things that suited his purpose. Hastily thrusting the model coffin into his pocket, he seized his hat and hurried from the parlour, closing the door behind him.

In the passage he met Kate, who was hastening back to the room, with a jug of water in her hand.

"One moment—only one moment—*as you value the memory of your deceased mother*,"—whispered Banks, speaking more rapidly and with less whining affectation than he had done for many years. "Take this note—read it in private—its contents deeply concern

you and your *blessed defunct parent*. If you breathe a word concerning it to a soul *you will for ever lose the opportunity of knowing who was your father*."

Banks thrust a note into the girl's hand, and hastily left the house.

The words which he had uttered, produced—as might naturally be supposed—so strange an effect upon Katherine,—that sudden allusion to her mother took her so much by surprise,—and then that mysterious mention of her father increased her bewilderment to such an extent, that she mechanically grasped the note with a mixture of awe and gratitude, and, prompted by the same impulses, thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

All this was the work of scarcely a quarter of a minute; and the moment she had thus received and concealed the note, she re-entered the parlour, where the aid of the fresh water soon brought Mrs. Bennet to herself.

"Where is that scoundrel?" cried the farmer, now finding leisure to think of the cause of his wife's sudden indisposition.

"He is gone," returned Katherine.

Then, seating herself near the window, the young girl fell into a profound reverie.

"Gone!" ejaculated Bennet. "But it is better that he should have gone—or I might be tempted to do him a mischief."

"That man came hither with some sinister design," said Ellen. "From the first moment of his appearance, my suspicions associated his visit with the adventure of the morning."

"But what object could he have?" cried the farmer. "He seemed only anxious to intrude himself as long as possible."

"Perhaps he was waiting for an opportunity to speak to Katherine alone," observed Ellen. "He certainly appeared to be talking against time."

"Yes, dear friends," exclaimed Katherine, rising from her seat, and advancing towards those whom she thus addressed; "that man *did* desire to speak to me alone—and he succeeded in his object. Pardon me if for a few moments I hesitated whether to obey his solemn injunction of silence, or to communicate the incident to you who wish me well. But the words which he spoke, and the earnestness of his manner, bewildered me. It however only required a short interval of sober reflection to teach me my duty."

Katherine then repeated the words that Banks had whispered in her ears, and produced the note which he had thrust into her hand.

"You have acted prudently in revealing these particulars, dear Kate," said Ellen. "A man who is compelled to effect his purposes by such low devices as those employed by him who has just left us, cannot mean well."

"Let us hear the contents of the letter," cried Farmer Bennet: "we may then, perhaps, see more clearly into the mystery."

"Read it, Ellen," said Kate. "I must confess to a profound curiosity to become acquainted with its contents."

Ellen accordingly opened the note, and read as follows:—

> "Silence and secrecy,—if you respect the memory of your deceased mother! Be not deluded by the advice of Miss Monroe, who has her own reasons for prejudicing you against me. I am well acquainted with all the particulars of your birth:—I can impart facts that it behoves you to learn. You will bitterly repent any distrust in this matter. Have you no inclination to hear more concerning your mother's history than you can possibly now know? would you not go far, and sacrifice much, to glean something with regard to *your father*? This evening—at seven precisely—I shall be at the foot of the hill where I met you just now. If you come alone, you will learn much that nearly and deeply concerns you: if you appear accompanied by a soul, my lips will remain sealed.
>
> "THE FEMALE YOU SAW JUST NOW."

"I have so far my own reasons for counselling you against that wicked woman," said Ellen, indignantly, "inasmuch as I would save you from danger. But if you really believe that there can be any thing serious in this promise of important communications, I should advise you to meet that female—for precautions can be adopted to protect you from a distance."

Katherine glanced inquiringly towards the farmer.

"I see that you are anxious to meet this woman, Kate," said he, after a pause; "and it is natural. She promises communications on subjects that cannot be otherwise than dear to you. Miss Monroe and I can keep watch at a distance; and on the slightest elevation of voice on your part, we will hasten to your assistance."

This project was approved of even by the timid Mrs. Bennet; and Katherine Wilmot anxiously awaited the coming of the appointed hour.

CHAPTER CXCIX.

THE ORPHAN'S FILIAL LOVE.

The evening was calm, fresh, and dry: the heavens were covered with stars; and objects were visible at a considerable distance.

A few minutes before the wished-for hour, Katherine, Ellen, and the farmer reached the hill at the foot of which was the place of appointment.

Then Kate left them and proceeded alone, while her two friends hastened by a circuitous route to gain a clump of trees which would enable them to remain concealed within a distance of fifty yards of the spot where Kate was to meet the old woman.

The young girl pursued her way—her heart palpitating with varied emotions,—vague alarm, exalted hope, and all the re-awakened convictions of her orphan state.

She reached the foot of the hill, and in a few minutes beheld a human form emerging, as it were, from the obscurity at a distance—the dim outline gradually defining itself into a positive shape, and at length showing the figure of the old woman whom she had seen in the morning.

"You have done well to obey my summons, Miss," said the hag, as she approached the timid and trembling girl. "But let me look well on your countenance—let me be satisfied that it is indeed Katherine Wilmot."

Then Kate turned towards the moon, and parted the light chesnut hair: which clustered around her countenance; so that a pure flood of silvery lustre streamed on all the features of that sweetly interesting face—a sight too hallowed for the foul-souled harridan to gaze upon!

It was as if the veil of the Holy of Holies, in the Jewish temple, were lifted before some being fresh from the grossest pollutions of the world.

"Yes—I am satisfied!" murmured the hag. "You are Katherine Wilmot—the Katherine whom I saw and recognised this morning. I feared lest your artful friend, Ellen Monroe, less timid than yourself, might have come to play your part."

"Wherefore should you speak ill of Miss Monroe?" inquired Katherine, mildly. "Malicious allusions to my friends will not serve as a passport to my confidence."

"Well, well," said the hag, "we will speak no more on that subject. It was for other purposes that I sought this interview. Tell me, Miss—do you remember your mother?"

"I remember her, with that faint and dim knowledge which consists only of many vague and dubious impressions," replied Kate, in a deeply plaintive tone. "I was but four years of age when God snatched her from me; and it was not until I was old enough to feel her loss, that my memory began to exert itself to the utmost to recall every incident which I could associate with her kindness towards me. For kind she must have been—because every reminiscence which my mind has ever been able to shadow forth concerning her, fills my heart with grateful tenderness and love. Oh! I have sate for hours—in the solitude of my own chamber—endeavouring to fix the volatile ideas which at times flash through my memory in reference to the past,—until I have seemed to connect them in a regular chain;—and then I have fancied that at the end of the vista of years through which my mental glances retrospected, I could define a beautiful but melancholy countenance—the mild blue eyes weeping, and the lips smiling sweetly, over me—the gentle hand smoothing down my hair, and caressing my cheeks,—and all this in a manner so touching, so plaintive, so softly sorrowful, that the picture fills my soul with sad fears lest my mother was not happy! And there have been times, too," continued Kate, tears trickling down her cheeks, "when it appeared to me, that I could remember the fervent tenderness with which my mother clasped me in her arms—fondled me—played with me—did all she could to make me laugh—and then wept bitterly, because my infantine joy was so exuberant! Yes—these and many other things of the same kind have I pondered on and treasured up as holy memories of the past;—and then the dread thought has suddenly flashed to my brain, that I have been merely worshipping the images of my own fond creation. At such times, I have gone down upon my knees—I have prayed that these ideas might really be reflections of the long-gone truth,—bright reflections which had been cast in the mirror of my mind during the days of my infancy! Oh! it would grieve me sadly—it would wring my soul with anguish—it would fill my heart with desolation, were I to be led to the fearful conviction that all those pleasing-painful glimpses of my mother's presence and my mother's love are not the reminiscences of reality, but the creations of a fond and credulous imagination."

"Your memory has not deceived you, Miss," said the old woman. "Your mother fondled and caressed you—smiled and wept over you, in the manner you have described."

"Oh! thank you—thank you for that assurance!" exclaimed Katherine, forgetting, in the enthusiasm of her filial, but orphan, love, all her late repugnance to that old woman: "again, I say, thank you! You know not the consolation you have imparted to me! Oh! were it possible to recall from the tomb that dear mother who fondled and caressed me—smiled and wept over me, I would give all the remainder of my life for one day of her presence here—one day of her love! When I think that she is really gone for ever—that no tears and no prayers can bring her back—ah! it seems as if there were an anguish in my heart which no human sympathy can ever soothe. But you knew my mother, then?" added Kate, suddenly; "you knew her—did you not? Oh! tell me of her: I could never weary of

hearing you speak of her."

"Yes—I knew your mother well," was the answer: "I knew her before you were born."

"And was she happy?" demanded Katherine, trembling at the question she thus put, for fear the reply should not be as she would wish it.

"She knew happiness—and she was also acquainted with sorrow," said the hag: "but that is the lot of us all—that is the lot of us all!"

"Poor mother!" murmured the young girl, with a profound sob: "it is then true that, in my infancy, I saw her weep as well as smile! Wherefore was she unhappy? Was she betrayed and neglected? But, oh! I tremble to ask those questions, which—"

"To explain the cause of her sorrows would be to tell you all her history," answered the old woman; "and, ere I can do that, I have some questions to ask you, and—and some conditions to—to propose."

The hag hesitated:—yes, even *she*, with her soul so hardened in the tan-pits of vice, as to be on all other occasions proof against the dews of sympathy,—even *she* hesitated, as if softened by the ingenuous and holy outpourings of that young orphan's filial love.

"Speak—say quickly what you require of me," exclaimed Katherine; "and hasten to tell me of my parents—for in your letter you spoke of both my father and my mother."

As Katherine entertained not the slightest recollection of her father, all her thoughts had ever been fixed on the memory of her mother;—but when she coupled the two names together—when she found her lips pronouncing the sacred denominations of *father* and *mother* in the same breath, there arose in her soul such varied and overpowering emotions that she dissolved into a violent agony of weeping.

But that efflux of tears relieved the surcharged heart of the orphan; and, composing herself as quickly as she could, she exclaimed, "Speak, good woman—name your conditions: I am rich—and they shall be complied with,—so that you hasten to tell me of my parents!"

"Did your mother leave no papers behind her—no letters—no private documents of any kind?" inquired the old hag.

"Nothing,—nothing save the fragment of a note which she commenced when in a dying state, and which death did not permit her to finish," answered Katherine.

"And that fragment—did it suggest no trace—"

"Stay—I will repeat its contents to you," exclaimed Katherine: "the words are indelibly fixed upon my memory——Oh! how were it possible that I could ever forget them? Those words ran thus:—'*Should my own gloomy presages prove true, and the warning of my medical attendant be well founded,—if, in a word, the hand of death be already extended to snatch me away thus in the prime of life, while my darling child is*——:' there," continued Katherine, "is a blank, occasioned—alas! by the tears of my poor mother! Two or three lines are thus obliterated; and then appears a short—disjointed—but a most mysterious portion of a sentence, written thus:—'*and inform Mr. Markham, whose abode is*——.' There's not another word on the paper!" added the orphan.

"Markham—Markham!" repeated the hag, as if sorely troubled by some reminiscence; "she mentioned the name of Markham in the letter she wrote on her death-bed? Young lady, did you ever hear more of that Mr. Markham?"

"Inquiries were instituted at my mother's death," replied Kate; "but the Mr. Markham alluded to in the note could not be discovered. The name—the very name, however, seems to be of good omen to me; for one of that name,—who is now a noble of exalted rank, and the commander of a mighty army in a foreign land,—has been my best friend—my benefactor—my saviour. Yes—it is to Richard Markham——"

"Ah! now I comprehend the cause of your intimacy with Miss Monroe," said the hag, hastily: "she resides with her father at the house of Mr. Richard Markham. And so," she continued in a musing tone,—"and so that same Mr. Richard Markham is your friend—your benefactor?"

"Oh! what should I have been without him?" ejaculated Katherine. "When I was involved in that fearful situation, of which you have no doubt heard, *he* was the only one who came to me and said, '*I believe you to be innocent*!' May heaven ever prosper him for that boundless philanthropy—that noble generosity which induced him to espouse the orphan's cause! Yes—to him I owed the development of my innocence—the unravelling of that terrible web of circumstantial evidence in which I was entangled. He employed an active agent to collect evidence in my favour; and the measures which he adopted led to the results which must be known to you."

"It is, then, as I thought," said the old woman, scarcely able to subdue a chuckle of delight. "You know but little concerning your mother—and nothing relative to your father."

"And it is to receive precious communications on those points that I have met you now," exclaimed Katherine. "Let us lose no more time—my friends will grow uneasy at my prolonged absence! Speak—in the name of heaven, speak on a subject so near and dear to my heart."

"Listen attentively, young miss, to what I am about to say—listen attentively," returned the hag. "Now do not be alarmed at my words: you will see that I am disposed to act well towards you. The man who was with me this morning—," and here the old woman cast a rapid glance around, and lowered her voice to a whisper,—"that man is a bad one, and he knows I am acquainted with all that concerns your parentage. He is avaricious, and desires to turn my knowledge to a good account."

"I understand you," said Katherine: "he requires money. But are you influenced by him?"

"I cannot explain all that, Miss: attend to what I choose to tell you—or *may* tell you—and you will act wisely," returned the old woman. "He is a desperate man—and I dare not offend him. He wants money; and money he must have—money he must have!"

"How much will satisfy him?" asked Katherine. "And if I procure the sum that he needs, will you then tell me all you know in connexion with my parents?"

"Wait a moment—wait a moment, Miss," said the hag. "I am but a poor—miserable—wretched—oppressed—starving creature myself——"

"Again I understand you," interrupted Katherine, unable to subdue a tone expressive of contempt. "You declare yourself to be the possessor of a secret which nearly and dearly concerns me; and you intend to barter it for gold? But if I meet your demands in all respects,—if I satisfy that man who exercises such influence over you, and if I reward yourself,—what security can you give me that you are really acquainted with those particulars which you offer to communicate? what guarantee can you show that this first

concession on my part will not be followed by increased demands on yours?"

"I will convince you of my good faith," was the old woman's ready reply. "Give me wherewithal to satisfy that man; and the reward you intend for me need not be bestowed until I have told you all I know."

"How much will that man require?" asked Katherine, wearied by this mercenary trading in matters which to her appeared so sacred.

"Give him a hundred pounds:—you are rich and can well afford it—for report says that you inherited the fortune of Reginald Tracy," exclaimed the hag.

"And for yourself?" said Kate, impatiently.

"Alack! I am a poor, starving old creature," was the answer; "I am miserable—very miserable! Give me wherewith to make my few remaining days happy—as I shall be able to show you great sources of comfort in the news I have to impart."

"Listen, now, to me," said Kate, after a moment's hesitation. "I will give you that sum of one hundred pounds to enable you to satisfy the man of whom you speak; and, afterwards—if your communications should really and truly prove a source of comfort to me—I will reward you with a liberality surpassing your most sanguine expectations. But, alas! some delay must take place ere I can procure the funds from the solicitor who has my affairs in his charge; and, oh! I shall know no peace until your lips reveal those secrets which are to prove such sources of comfort to me."

There was a temporary pause:—the old woman seemed to be reflecting upon the orphan's words; and the young girl herself was rapidly conjecturing of what nature the promised revelations could be. But how vain were all her attempts to assign a satisfactory solution to that enigma which the hag, like some horrible sphynx, had set before her!

During this prolonged interview the early loveliness of the evening had yielded to one of those sudden variations peculiar to our island-climate at that season of the year:—the sky had become overcast—the moon no longer poured forth a flood of sweet silver lustre to light up the innocent countenance of the maiden, or to mock with its chaste halo the wrinkled expression of the foul hag.

"But perhaps your solicitor may refuse you the advances which you need?" said the old woman at length.

"No: he will not cast an obstacle in the way of aught which is to contribute to my happiness," answered Katherine. "I have seen him but twice, and, inexperienced as I am in the ways of life, I feel confident that he possesses a kind and generous heart. Oh! if Richard—I mean, the Marquis of Estella—were in England now, I should not be compelled to wait many hours in suspense for the want of this money which you require."

"The Marquis of Estella!" exclaimed the hag, in astonishment: "who is he? and what connexion can he have with you?"

"Have you not heard or read the news which have doubtless appeared in all the London journals?" inquired Katherine;—"those glorious news——"

"Alack! dear Miss—I never read a newspaper," said the hag.

"Then you are ignorant that the Richard Markham of whom we have been speaking, is a great noble—a peer of a foreign realm,—that the coronet of a Marquis has been conferred upon him for his gallant deeds——"

"Well-a-day! this world sees strange ups and downs!" interrupted the hag. "Ah! Miss—lose no time in satisfying that man who was with me this morning, and I will tell you a secret that will be well worth all the gold you will have to give for its purchase. But what was that noise? did you not hear something?"

"It seemed to me that there was a rustling along the path," replied Katherine, in a hasty and timid whisper. "Oh! you would not do me any harm—you have not been deceiving me? My God! how cruel would it be to lead the orphan into danger, by the allurements of fond hopes respecting the memory of her parents!"

"Silence, Miss—listen!" said the hag, in a subdued but earnest tone: "I mean you no harm."

Then they both held their breath;—but all was still—not a sound met their ears, save the low murmur of the breeze which had sprung up within the last few minutes.

"It is nothing," observed the old woman. "But why should you mistrust me?"

"Pardon me if I wrong you," returned Kate:—"you are a stranger to me—and, although you may mean to serve me, your proceedings are conducted with so much mystery—so much secrecy—that I must be forgiven if vague suspicions——"

"I know it—I know it," interrupted the old woman; and after a short pause, she added, "Yes—I will ensure your confidence, Miss; and then you will understand my sincerity. That man who was with me this morning discovered your place of abode at my desire. He demanded to be present at our interview but I refused—for reasons of my own. I assured him I would speak to you alone, or not at all. I was therefore compelled, this morning, in his presence, to insist on having none by to overhear the business that made me seek you; and the same reason forced me to stipulate that you should meet me this evening unaccompanied by any of your friends. For if I had permitted one to be present at our interview, then there was no reason to exclude another; and that man might have insisted on being a witness as well as any companion of yours."

"If that be the only reason for this mystery," observed Katherine, considerably relieved by the old woman's explanation, "you cannot object to Miss Monroe accompanying me on the next occasion of our meeting."

"No," answered the old woman; "that may not be, for the man who is to be satisfied with money will watch me at a distance when we meet again. But, afterwards—at any future interview that may be necessary—Miss Monroe may accompany you."

"I understand you," said Kate. "To-morrow evening I will meet you again—here—and at the same hour. I shall then doubtless be prepared to give you the amount necessary to satisfy that man's avarice; and his interference will be disposed of. It will afterwards remain for *you* to satisfy *me*—and for *me* to reward *you*."

"Agreed, young lady—agreed!" answered the old woman. "We have now no more to say—except," she added, as a sudden thought struck her,—"except that, should the man insist on speaking to you to-morrow evening, you need not tell him that you have any intention of bestowing a separate recompense on me."

"I hope that he will not dare to approach me," said Katherine, indignantly; "and, were he to force his disagreeable presence upon me, I should scarcely permit myself to be catechised by him."

"'Tis well, Miss," returned the hag, apparently well pleased with the resolute manner of the young orphan.

They then separated.

The old woman went one way; and Katherine proceeded direct to the clump of trees where Ellen and the farmer were concealed;—for it was now so dark that there was no fear of the direction she took being observed.

It may be naturally supposed that Ellen and Mr. Bennet were deeply anxious to be made acquainted with the particulars of an interview concerning which they had some few misgivings.

On the return of the trio to the farm-house, they found Mrs. Bennet very uneasy on Kate's account. The appearance of the young maiden reassured the good-hearted woman; and Katherine then gave a detailed account of all that had passed between herself and the hag.

The impression produced was, that there was really a legitimate foundation for the old woman's proceedings, and that she was actually possessed of secrets touching Kate's parentage. The agreement that the recompense was only to be awarded to her after she had made the promised communications, was considered a proof of good faith; and Kate's promise to supply the sum demanded in the first instance to satisfy the avarice of the Resurrection Man, met with the approval of her friends.

"To-morrow, then," said Kate, "I must repair to London, and procure the necessary funds from Mr. Wharton. You will accompany me, Ellen?"

"That journey is not requisite," observed the farmer. "Mr. Wharton would demand an explanation of the business for which the money is intended; and he would only view it with the calm and severe eye of a lawyer. He might even go so far as to insist upon having those persons arrested as extortioners. He might not fully appreciate your filial anxiety, Kate, to risk every chance to know more of the authors of your being. I can well comprehend your feelings; and, after all, the venture is but a hundred pounds—for the old woman is to make her revelations before she receives a recompense. No—you shall say nothing to Mr. Wharton on the subject. I am going to London to-morrow; and on my return I will supply you with the sum required."

It is needless to say that Katherine expressed her gratitude to Mr. Bennet for his goodness; and Ellen readily promised to stay at the farm for a day or two longer, until the pending mysteries should be cleared up. Mr. Bennet moreover undertook to call at Markham Place, with a note from Ellen to relieve Mr. Monroe of any anxiety which he might feel on her account, as her absence from home would be protracted beyond the time originally contemplated.

CHAPTER CC.

A MAIDEN'S LOVE.

The two young ladies had now retired to the bed-chamber which Kate occupied at the farm, and which Ellen shared with her during her visit.

The respective characters of those two charming creatures were then incidentally contrasted and powerfully set forth, each in its peculiar phase, by means of occurrences apparently trivial to a degree, but which were nevertheless significant in the eyes of those who closely observed the nature of the human mind.

While Ellen was disrobing herself, she stood, in all the pride of her glorious beauty, before the mirror; in the reflection of which she also arranged her long, luxuriant hair previously to retiring to rest.

But Katherine, in the semi-obscurity of the remotest corner, laid aside her vestment; nor did she once think of approaching the glass.

Whence arose this discrepancy,—this pride on the one hand, and this bashfulness on the other?

It was that Ellen had been placed in those circumstances which had taught her the value and led her to appreciate the extent of her almost matchless charms:—her lovely countenance had served as a copy, and her exquisitely modelled form as a pattern for artists and sculptors;—during her brief dramatic career, she had been the object of unceasing adulation;—and when she forced Greenwood to espouse her, the splendour of her beauty had disarmed him of the resentment which he would otherwise have experienced in being compelled to sacrifice for her all his hopes of a brilliant matrimonial alliance. Hers was the pride of a loveliness which had produced her bread in the hour of her bitter need,—which was perpetuated in great works of art,—which had elicited the heart-felt admiration of many suitors of rank and name,—and which was still in all the freshness of health and youth. Still that pride was never obtrusive—not even conspicuous; for it was attempered by a natural generosity, an innate loftiness of soul which rendered her as adorable for her disposition as she was desirable for her beauty.

Katherine had long languished in a condition which compelled her to retire from observation. While she dwelt with the late executioner, she was glad to be able to shroud herself from public view. She was always neat and cleanly from principle, but not from pride. The germinations of self-complacency had been checked in their nascent state, though not completely obliterated; and now, if they were slightly expanding in the genial atmosphere of the improved circumstances which surrounded her, it was with a legitimate growth, such as no female mind should remain unacquainted with. For a certain degree of proper pride is necessary to woman,—to preserve her self-esteem, and to maintain her soul so happily poised that it may not fall into over-weening confidence on the one side, nor into an awkward and repulsive reserve on the other.

That chamber-scene would have made a fine and deeply interesting subject for the pencil of the artist, who would have delighted to shadow forth the variety of the female character,—here the glorious loveliness of the wife who dared not avow that sacred name,—there the retiring beauty of the young virgin.

But Katherine had not altogether escaped the influence of that blind deity who exercises so important a control over the destinies of us mortals.

How this happened we must leave her to describe in her own artless manner.

"I have been thinking, dear Kate," said Ellen, as she stood combing her long and silky hair, on which a lamp's reflection in the mirror shed a bright glory,—"I have been thinking that this is a dull and lonely place for you. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are very kind and amiable people; but it will not be suitable for one whose worldly prospects are so good as yours, to remain in this solitude. You are literally buried here! I am almost inclined to take you with me to Markham Place for a short time, when the business with that old woman is decided. I am sure Richard would be pleased with such an arrangement."

"I should like to be with you, Ellen," was the reply: "but—for the present—I must remain here," added Katherine, with some little hesitation.

"Oh! no—you must come with me to Markham Place," exclaimed Ellen; "and the change of scene will please you. Besides—I have a secret to tell you, Kate."

"A secret!" repeated the maiden.

"Yes—a secret that will surprise you," continued Ellen. "I shall reveal it to you now; but you must not mention it to any one here—for particular reasons which I cannot explain to you at present. What should you think if I were to tell you that I am married?"

"You!—married!" exclaimed Katherine. "Then why are you still called Miss Monroe?"

"There are certain circumstances which compel me to keep my marriage a secret. When you come to Markham Place—as you must—you will see my father; but never in his presence, nor in that of Richard when he returns home, may you speak of me as a wife. And now do you know why I have told you this? Because, as I am determined that you shall come and pass at least a few days with me you will see my child——"

"Oh! Ellen, are you indeed a mother?" cried Katherine. "Are you not devotedly attached to your child? do you not fondle—play with it?"

"I am never wearied of its little company," answered Ellen. "It is a boy, and named after our mutual benefactor Richard. And now you know my secret. But tell me, Kate, wherefore you wish to remain pent up in this secluded dwelling? Has some happy youth in the neighbourhood touched your heart? You do not answer me. I cannot see you where you are; but I'll wager that you are blushing. Oh! if there be any truth in my suspicion, let it be revelation for revelation. We are friends—and you may confide in me."

"I know not how to answer you, Ellen;—and yet——"

"And yet you *have* a secret," returned the young wife, laughing; "oh! yes—you *have* a secret—and you must make me your confidant."

"I am willing to tell you all that relates to this foolish affair," said Katherine; "but that *all* is very little."

And she hesitated,—suffused with blushes even in the nook whither Ellen's eyes were not directed!

"Nay, continue," exclaimed Ellen. "I perceive that you are about to interest me with the commencement of a charming little love-tale. Seriously speaking, Kate—you will lose nothing by entrusting your secret to one who may be enabled to give you some useful counsel in a matter which is of far greater moment than young persons of our sex are induced to believe?"

"I will conceal nothing from you, Ellen," returned Katherine, in a low and timid tone. "It was only at the commencement of last week that I was rambling in the neighbourhood—on as fine a day as this one has been—when I met a young gentleman, who was crossing the same field as myself, but in an opposite direction. The path was very narrow; and he stood on one side to allow me to pass. I bowed in acknowledgment of his politeness, and he raised his hat. The glance that I threw upon him was of course only momentary; and I passed on. I thought no more of the incident——"

"He is doubtless very handsome," said Ellen, laughing. "All heroes of such romantic adventures are."

"Nay—hear me to the end," continued Katherine; "for since I have begun this silly tale, I may as well terminate it. The following day was fine; and I walked out again—as indeed I always do, when the weather will permit. I was proceeding through the same field ——"

"The same field," observed Ellen slily.

"Oh! I can assure you, my dear friend, that you do me an injustice by the suspicion which your words imply," exclaimed Katherine. "I had totally forgotten the trifling incident of the preceding day; but I chose that path,—it was the same which we took this morning,—because it was dry and hard. To my surprise I again met that gentleman; and when he made way as before, to let me pass, he looked at me with an attention not rude, but still earnest. Our eyes met—and I passed hastily on. I felt myself blushing—I knew not why—to the very verge of my forehead. And yet I had done no wrong. I had glanced towards him as I acknowledged his politeness in stepping aside to allow me to pass; and it was by accident—at least on my part—that our eyes thus met. When I became more composed, I was angry at having been annoyed with myself. I then found myself involuntarily reflecting upon the handsome countenance,—for he *is* handsome, Ellen,—of which I had only so hasty a glimpse. I must admit that I thought of him more than once during the remainder of that day."

"Love at second sight, we must denominate it," observed Ellen, with a smile. "I will hazard a guess that the next day was fine,—for the weather is usually favourable in such circumstances,—and that you unwittingly found yourself rambling in the same path."

"Ah! Ellen, I am afraid that I was wrong—but all happened as you have described," said Kate, in a soft and melancholy tone; "and I obeyed some impulse for which I could not account. I candidly confess that I wondered, as I walked along, whether *he* would be there again; and when I did not perceive him, I experienced a sentiment of vexation. At length he appeared at the extremity of the field—he drew near—nearer and nearer. I felt ashamed of myself: it suddenly struck me that he must suppose I came thither on purpose to see him again. I never thought so little of myself—no, not even when I was pointed at as the presumed relative of an executioner. I turned abruptly round, and began to retrace my way towards the farm. I reached the low stile on the brow of the hill: at that moment I heard steps behind me. I cannot describe the sensations which I then experienced—a few short seconds of pleasing, painful suspense. Ere a minute had elapsed, the stranger stood by my side; and with a low bow he extended his hand to assist me in crossing the barrier. My head seemed to swim round; and I mechanically gave him my hand. He held it but for an instant as I passed into the next field;—and yet he pressed it gently—very gently;—still he pressed it! I know not whether I bowed or hurried abruptly on—I was so confused!"

"And during the remainder of that day you pondered on the incident," observed Ellen.

"Oh! how well you seem to divine all my thoughts—all my emotions!" exclaimed Katherine.

"Love has the same emblems—the same symbols, throughout the world," answered Ellen; "and it also has the same unvarying worship. Of the true nature of the great God there are many conflicting opinions; and different nations offer up their adoration in different manners. But to that blind deity whom we call Love, there is only one incense—and that is common to all humanity!"

"Then it was not wrong on my part to experience those emotions which I have explained to you?" said Katherine, with the most amiable *naïveté*.

"Wrong, dearest girl! oh, no!" exclaimed Ellen. "That heart must be a cold—a callous—a worldly-minded one, which never feels those most beautiful and holy of all sympathies! But go on with your narrative, Kate; for I feel convinced that you have seen your handsome lover since the day mentioned."

"I will tell you how we met again," said Katherine. "On the following day I did not stir abroad: I wished to take my usual ramble—but I feared that I should be doing wrong to incur the chance of meeting *him* again. As I was sitting at the parlour window, he passed. I was so taken by surprise—he appeared so unexpectedly,—ah! no—I am deceiving myself—I am deceiving you;—he came not altogether unexpectedly—for I had found myself wondering more than once whether he would again revisit this neighbourhood. He passed the window, then—as I have said; and I did not turn away until it was too late. He saw me—he seemed pleased: he bowed—and I slightly responded to his salutation. Then I retreated from the window, and did not approach it again during the rest of that day. The next day was wet and gloomy; and I felt persuaded that I should not see him. Will you blame me if I say that I was vexed at this circumstance? would you believe me if I declared that I treated it with indifference? But, ah! my annoyance was soon dissipated:—he passed the house at the same hour as on the preceding day! He was wrapped in a long military cloak; and when he saw me, he bowed with the same courtesy as heretofore;—but methought he smiled, as if with satisfaction at seeing me. And now you will say that I am a vain and foolish girl;—but, dearest Ellen, I an faithfully detailing to you all that occurred, and all the emotions I have experienced."

"Proceed, Katherine," said Ellen. "I become deeply interested in your narrative."

"The next day was fine once more; and I felt indisposed for want of exercise," continued the maiden. "I accordingly walked out—but in another direction. How I trembled at the slightest sound which resembled a footstep! How my heart beat when a bird flew past me! But my alarms—if I can honestly so call them—were without foundation: I beheld not the stranger that day. On the ensuing one I walked out again in the same direction; and, lost in thought, I rambled to a considerable distance. But at length I turned homewards once more; and when in sight of the farm, I suddenly beheld the stranger advancing towards me across a field. He was pursuing no direct path:—my heart beat violently—for something told me that he was coming that way only on my account! In a few moments we met: he bowed—I returned his salutation;—he suddenly took my hand, and pressed it—I hastily withdrew it—and passed rapidly on."

"This mute declaration of love is truly romantic," said Ellen, laughing, as she threw herself, half undressed, into an easy chair, and began to unlace the boots which enclosed her pretty feet.

Katherine had emerged from her nook, and was sitting on the side of the bed which was farthest removed from Ellen; and there, veiling her blushes behind the curtain, the young maiden continued her artless narrative.

"I know not how it was," she said: "but that gentle pressure seemed to remain upon my hand. I can even feel it now, when I think of it. Is not this very foolish, Ellen? But you wish me to tell you every thing; and therefore you must expect to be wearied with my frivolous details. The incident which I have just related made a profound impression upon me. The image of the stranger was constantly present to my memory throughout that day. I fancied that there was something sincere—and yet extremely respectful,—something fervent—and yet quite inoffensive,—in his manner towards me when he seized and pressed my hand. But I have forgotten to give you some idea of his appearance. He is young—tall—slight—and of a dark complexion. He seems to be of a foreign nation. His eyes are black and animated, and on his lip he wears a small moustache. His gait is elegant; and his manners are evidently those of a polished gentleman."

"And his name?" said Ellen. "He has doubtless communicated that?"

"He has never spoken a word to me," answered Katherine, with the most ingenuous seriousness. "We have not exchanged a syllable. I think, indeed, that I have already been sufficiently imprudent in allowing him to touch my hand. Still I could not have prevented him—he took it so suddenly!"

"And you have not exchanged a syllable!" exclaimed Ellen. "But it is as well that matters have remained where they appear to be. I will, however, give you my advice presently. In the meantime, continue your narrative."

"I have little more to say," answered Katherine, with a sigh. "On the following morning I met him once more—that was three days ago; and he accosted me evidently with the intention of speaking. But I hurried on; and he stopped. When I was at some distance, I cast a rapid glance round: he was still standing where I had left him. He saw that I threw that hasty look behind me; for——but, no——I cannot tell you the indiscretion of which he was guilty. It pains me to think of it; and perhaps he himself is conscious of his impropriety, for I have not seen him since."

"What, in heaven's name, did he do?" asked Ellen, surprised by the thoughtful seriousness of her young friend's manner.

"Do you wish me to tell you?" exclaimed Katherine. "Well—I must confess all! He kissed his hand to me."

"Were I not afraid of wounding your feelings, I should laugh immoderately, Kate," said Ellen. "Here was I on the tenter-hooks of expectation—awaiting some truly mortifying disclosure; and I find that the only fault which your swain has committed, is a delicate and mute declaration of his attachment. But to speak seriously once more. If you really entertain any sentiment of interest in behalf of this handsome stranger, you must allow time and circumstances to serve you. These romantic meetings, dear Katherine, are calculated to fill your young heart with hopes which may be cruelly disappointed. If he really experience a tender feeling towards you, he will find means to make it known in a more satisfactory, if not more intelligible manner. Then will be the proper time for your friends to ascertain who he is. For the present I cannot,—as I wish you well,—counsel you to incur the chance of meeting him in that wild way again. I am glad you have imparted this secret to me. It shall be sacred. But, oh! I am too intimately acquainted with the world to treat lightly or neglectfully a matter that may so nearly touch,—that does, perhaps, already to some extent concern,—your happiness; more than ever do I now desire that you should pass a few days with me at Markham Place. If your stranger really wishes to know more of you,—if his views be honourable, and his pretensions feasible, he will soon institute inquiries at the farm regarding you. Mr. Bennet will then know how to act. In the meantime there is no necessity to mention the affair to either him or his wife."

The tender interest of the subject had so completely absorbed all other ideas in the mind of Katherine, that—no longer under the restraint of the extreme bashfulness which had driven her into the obscure part of the chamber in order to lay aside her vesture—she had emerged from the concealment of the curtain, and gradually approached nearer and nearer towards Ellen, while the latter was affectionately offering her counsel.

The scene was now a most touching one.

In the large arm-chair reclined the young wife, her luxuriant hair, not yet arranged for repose, flowing in shining waves over her ivory shoulders, and forming a dark curtain behind her arching neck, the dazzling whiteness and graceful contour of which were thus enhanced with an effect truly enchanting;—while a stray curl of the glossy hair, detached from the mass behind, and more fortunate than its companions, fell on the glowing bosom which was without shame revealed in the sanctity of that chamber.

And, standing meekly before the young wife,—with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks,—was the young virgin,—her white arms supporting the loosened garments over her bosom in that sweet attitude of modesty which so many great masters have loved to delineate in their marble representations of female beauty.

It seemed as if Venus, the Queen of Love, were enthroned in the voluptuous negligence of the boudoir, and had suddenly assumed a demeanour befitting her sovereign sway, while she tutored one of her attendant Graces in some lesson whose importance demanded that unusual seriousness.

"And now, dearest Katherine," added Ellen, after a moment's pause, "I have given you the best advice which my humble capacity allows me to offer; and I think so well of you that I feel convinced of your readiness to follow it."

"I should be unworthy of your good opinion—I should despise myself, were I to hesitate a moment what course to pursue," returned Kate; and, yielding to the generous emotions of friendship, she threw herself on the bosom of her whom she had made the confidant of her young love.

"And you will consent to pass a short time with me at Markham Place?" said Ellen, embracing her affectionately.

"I will follow your counsel in all things, dear Ellen," replied the maiden, weeping from emotions of gratitude and love.

Human nature has no essence more pure,—the world knows nothing more chaste,—heaven has endowed the mortal heart with no feeling more holy, than the nascent affection of a young virgin's soul. The warmest language of the sunny south is too cold to shadow forth even a faint outline of that enthusiastic sentiment. And God has made the richest language poor in the same respect, because the depths of hearts that thrill with love's emotions are too sacred for the common contemplation. The musical voice of Love stirs the source of the sweetest thoughts within the human breast, and steals into the most profound recesses of the soul, touching chords which never vibrated before, and calling into gentle companionship delicious hopes till then unknown!

Yes—the light of a young maiden's first love breaks dimly but beautifully upon her as the silver lustre of a star glimmers through a thickly-woven bower; and the first blush that mantles her cheek, as she feels the primal influence, is faint and pure as that which a rose-leaf might cast upon marble. But how rapidly does that light grow stronger, and that flush deeper,—until the powerful effulgence of the one irradiates every corner of her heart, and the crimson glow of the other suffuses every feature of her countenance.

CHAPTER CCI.

THE HANDSOME STRANGER.—DISAPPOINTMENT.

On the ensuing morning Farmer Bennet departed early for London.

After breakfast, Ellen said, with a significant smile: "The weather is fine, Kate: let us take advantage of it. Your country air does me so much good."

Katherine blushed, and then smiled also; but she offered no objection to the proposed walk.

The toilette of the young ladies was soon complete; and they sallied forth on their little excursion.

"Mr. Bennet has promised to call at Markham Place," observed Ellen. "I have written a note to my father, stating that I shall return to-morrow, or next day at latest; and I have intimated my intention of bringing you with me. I most sincerely hope that some fresh tidings have been received from Richard."

"And in that wish I earnestly partake," said Katherine. "But wherefore do you choose this path?" she added in a tremulous tone, and with downcast eyes.

"Because it is the most pleasant," answered Ellen, laughing. "It seems, moreover, that your handsome stranger was determined to seek you in one direction, as well as in another; and if he be in the neighbourhood this morning, rest assured that he will see you—whichever way you may pursue. Love has as many eyes in this respect as Argus. I am with you, dear Kate—you have a companion; and there is no indiscretion in even taking this very path where you have on most occasions met your unknown. Besides, should he be here to-day, I am anxious to catch a glimpse of him. To-morrow or next day you will leave this vicinity of pleasant memories—at least for a time; and——"

"Ellen, Ellen!" murmured Kate, suddenly; and she caught her companion by the arm.

"Ah! I understand!—compose yourself, Katherine—compose yourself," was the rapid reply. "It would be improper to betray any emotion. See—he is approaching slowly;—in the name of heaven compose yourself!"

And, in effect, a handsome young man,—with a dark complexion, fine and expressive eyes, and a graceful figure,—was advancing in the opposite direction. But he came slowly, as if anxious to keep some favourite object as long in view as possible!

How the pulse of the maiden's young heart quickened, as she beheld her unknown lover approaching.

And now the handsome stranger came near:—and Katherine drew close to her companion, as the timid fawn relies for protection on the stately deer.

The look of the stranger was cast for a moment upon Ellen; but not the bright glance of her eye—nor the rich colouring of her cheeks, framed as they were in masses of glossy hair—nor that symmetry of swelling bust, delicate waist, and matchless proportions of a finely-moulded form,—not this assemblage of charms induced the stranger to dwell for more than an instant on Katherine's companion. No:—it was to Katherine herself that his eyes reverted with adoring glance; and though he gazed fixedly upon the retiring maiden, yet there was something so respectful in his manner, that it was impossible to take offence at it.

He made way for the two ladies, and raised his hat as they passed.

Katherine returned the salutation without turning her eyes towards him.

"Your stranger is not only handsome," observed Ellen, when they were at such a distance as to incur no danger of being overheard; "but he is also of an appearance so respectable—so superior,——I had almost said noble,——that I cannot for a moment suppose his intentions to be dishonourable. At the same time, why does he not address you? He might, without impropriety, have taken advantage of my presence to speak to you; and, to tell you the truth, it was to afford him such an opportunity that I brought you in this direction."

We need not record the conversation that ensued: the reader does not require to be informed that its principal topic was the love of the young maiden—a theme on which she was naturally pleased to speak, and in the discussion of which Ellen indulged her;—not, however, with the view of fanning the flame of incipient passion; but with the affectionate motive of warning her against the encouragement of hopes which might never be fulfilled.

The walk was prolonged until two o'clock, when the young ladies retraced their steps to the farm. Mr. Bennet had not yet returned from London: dinner was however served up. The fresh air had given Ellen an appetite; but Katherine ate little, and was somewhat pensive.

Indeed, the maiden had sufficient to engage the meditation of her young mind. The evident impression which the handsome stranger had made upon her, and the hope that evening would bring her the much-desired information relative to her parents, divided her thoughts.

But of what nature would the old woman's secrets prove? in what manner were they to be a source of comfort to her? It will be remembered that Smithers had made her acquainted with certain particulars relative to her mother; and the sad inference had been that Katherine was of illegitimate birth. Would the tendency of the old woman's communications be to clear up this mystery in a manner satisfactory to the young maiden? As yet all was doubt and uncertainty; and conjecture was vain!

It was about four o'clock when the farmer made his appearance.

He entered the parlour, where Ellen, Katharine, and Mrs. Bennet were sitting, with a countenance expressive of supreme satisfaction.

"I have glorious news for you, young ladies," he exclaimed; "and, indeed, all who know Mr. Markham——I beg his pardon, the Marquis——must be rejoiced."

"Oh! what of him?" ejaculated Ellen and Kate, as it were in one breath.

"Patience for a moment," said the farmer. "Here is a letter from Mr. Monroe to you, Miss,"—addressing Ellen; "and that will explain every thing yet known of the affair."

Ellen hastily tore open her father's note, and began to read its contents aloud:—

"*January 29th, 1841.*

"You will be supremely delighted, dearest Ellen, to hear the joyful tidings which I am about to communicate. This morning's newspapers publish a *Telegraphic Despatch* from Toulon, stating that a grand and decisive battle took place beneath the walls of Montoni on the 23d. Richard was completely victorious. The Austrian army was routed with tremendous loss; the Grand Duke fled; and the capital was delivered. Our dear benefactor is safe. The steamer which conveyed these tidings to Toulon left Montoni in the afternoon of the 24th, at the moment when Richard was entering the city—as the Regent of Castelcicala!

"Nothing more is known at present; but this is enough not only to reassure us all—but to fill our hearts with joy. My blood glows in my veins, old as I am, when I think of Richard's grand achievements. To what a proud height has he raised himself—second only to a sovereign! As I looked forth from the casement ere now, and beheld the two trees on the hill-top, I could not avoid a sorrowful reflection concerning Eugene. What can have become of him? I——"

"Heavens! dearest Ellen, are you ill?" exclaimed Katherine, seeing that her friend suddenly turned ashy pale.

"No, Kate: it is nothing! The abruptness with which we have received these tidings——"

"Yes—you *are* unwell," persisted Katherine; and she hastened to procure water.

Ellen drank some; and the colour slowly returned to her cheeks.

"I am better now, Kate," she said. "Do you terminate the perusal of my father's letter."

Katherine, perceiving that her friend really seemed to have revived, read the remainder of the note in the following manner:—

"I fear that he will not be enabled to tell so glorious a tale as his younger brother,—even if the appointment be really kept on his part! But enough of that. You speak of bringing Miss Wilmot, to pass a few days at the Place. I entirely approve of the project, if the excellent people with whom she is living, and of whom Richard has spoken to us so highly, be willing to part with her.

"I must not forget to mention that poor Whittingham is nearly crazed with joy at Richard's success. You remember his extravagant but unfeigned manifestation of delight when we received the tidings of the battle of Abrantani and its results. Then the worthy fellow danced and capered madly, exclaiming, '*Master Richard a Markis!*' all day long. But when I read him the Telegraphic Despatch this morning, he took his hat and kicked it all round the room,—a new hat too,—until it was battered into a state beyond redemption,—shouting all the time, '*Here's a glorious cataplasm!*'—(meaning 'catastrophe,' no doubt):—'*Master Richard a Markis, and a Regency! I'll get drunk to-night, sir: I haven't been intoxicated for many a year; but I'll get drunk to-night, in spite of all the Teetotalers in London! Thank God for this glorious cataplasm!*' And he rushed out of the room to communicate the news in his own way to Marian. But conceive my surprise when I presently heard the report of fire-arms: I listened—a second report followed—a third—a fourth. I became alarmed, and hastened into the garden. There was Whittingham firing a salute with his old blunderbuss; and Marian's new plaid shawl was floating, by way of a banner, from the summit of a clothes' prop fixed in the ground. Poor Marian did not seem to relish the use to which her Sunday shawl was thus unceremoniously converted; but all the satisfaction she could obtain from Whittingham was, '*It's a glorious cataplasm! Master Richard's a Regency!*' And away the old blunderbuss blazed again, until the salute was complete. I do really believe the excellent-hearted old man intends to illuminate the Place this evening; and I shall not interfere with the ebullition of his honest joy.

"I write this long letter while Mr. Bennet partakes of some refreshment.

"Trusting to see you and your young friend to-morrow or next day at latest, I am, dearest Ellen," &c. &c.

It is unnecessary to state that the news from Montoni diffused the most lively joy amongst the party assembled in the parlour of the farm-house.

Ellen speedily recovered her usual flow of excellent spirits, and expressed her sincere satisfaction at that remarkable elevation on the part of Richard which had excited the enthusiasm of her father.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet offered no objection to the proposal that Kate should pay a visit to Markham Place: on the contrary, though grieved to part with her, they considered that change of scene could not do otherwise than benefit her.

And now the appointed hour for the meeting with the old woman drew near; and Mr. Bennet provided Kate with the necessary funds for her purpose.

Shortly before seven, the farmer (provided with a brace of loaded pistols) and Ellen repaired to the same hiding-place which they had occupied on the preceding evening; and, with a beating heart, Katherine hastened to the spot where she expected to encounter one who had promised to reveal secrets so nearly concerning her.

The old woman did not, however, make her appearance.

The minutes passed slowly away—and still she came not.

Katherine's anxiety was intense.

Half an hour had elapsed: still there was no sign of the hag.

The young maiden waited until past eight o'clock; and at length she suddenly perceived two persons advancing towards her at a little distance.

For a moment she felt afraid; but the farmer's voice speedily reassured her.

Ellen and he were alarmed at Katherine's prolonged absence, and had come to seek her.

Finding that the old woman had not made her appearance, they began to view the entire affair with some suspicion; and Kate was compelled to return with them to the farm—a prey to the most cruel disappointment.

"If the old woman was prevented, by any unforeseen circumstance, from meeting you," said the farmer, "she will communicate with you early to-morrow. Perhaps we may be favoured with another visit from her emissary, Mr. Banks; but should he come, I shall take good care that he treats us to a sight of no more model-coffins."

During the remainder of the evening Kate was pensive and melancholy; nor could all Ellen's affectionate endeavours wean her from her sorrowful thoughtfulness.

They retired to rest early; and Katherine rose next morning with the hope of receiving tidings from the old woman.

But hour after hour passed without gratifying her wish.

Ellen purposely delayed their departure for London, to afford a fair opportunity for the arrival of any intelligence which the old woman might forward; but three o'clock came, and still all was blank disappointment and mystery in respect to the affair.

Then Kate herself saw the inutility of tarrying longer; and, having taken an affectionate farewell of Mrs. Bennet, the young ladies were accompanied by the farmer to Hounslow. There they obtained a conveyance for the capital, and Mr. Bennet saw them depart in safety.

CHAPTER CCII.

THE PRINCESS ISABELLA.

We must now succinctly record a few incidents which occurred at the mansion of Prince Alberto in the vicinity of Richmond, from the period when Richard bade adieu to Isabella ere his departure for Castelcicala in the month of October, 1840, until the end of January, 1841—that is, up to the date at which we have brought our narrative in the preceding chapter.

The Princess Isabella declared, at her farewell meeting with Richard, that wild hopes and exalted visions filled her imagination when she contemplated the enterprise on which her lover was about to embark. So well did she read the true character of our hero, and so elevated was her opinion of his high qualifications, that she felt persuaded he only required an opportunity to open for himself a grand and brilliant career.

Her boundless affection for Richard Markham aided her not only in fostering these convictions, but also in shadowing forth and defining the elements of a glorious success and rapid rise on the part of one to whom her first and undivided love was given.

But when she tore herself away from his last embrace,—when she breathed the mournful word "Farewell," and then separated from the generous, the high-minded, and handsome young man who possessed her heart,—oh! how acute was the anguish that filled her soul!

For some minutes—when he was no longer in sight—all her golden dreams and glorious visions fled from her imagination;—she strove to recall them, as a drowning person in the dark hour of night struggles to gain the surface of the waters once more to catch another glimpse of the bright stars above;—but hope seemed to have yielded to blank despair.

The Princess, however, possessed a firm mind; and when the primal burst of anguish was over, she wrestled with her gloomy imaginings, until she gradually triumphed over their mournful influence.

Having purposely prolonged her walk homewards, in order to compose herself, Isabella did not re-enter the mansion until she had collected her scattered thoughts and had wiped away the traces of her tears.

Her father had all along discountenanced the expedition to Castelcicala, so far as he was concerned; although he could not do otherwise than wish it success. Indeed, as he himself had intimated to General Grachia, he would no doubt have joined in it, had he been differently situated. It was therefore with feelings of admiration that the Prince had from the first heard of Markham's enthusiasm in the Constitutional cause: and at that period he frequently found himself dwelling attentively upon all the good points in Richard's character which had once made our hero so welcome a guest at the mansion.

As for Isabella's mother, this Princess was more than ever favourable towards Markham; for she saw in his present conduct nothing save a profound devotion to the cause of her illustrious husband, and a laudable ambition to render himself worthy of her daughter's love—that love which was no secret to the parents of the amiable girl!

When Isabella returned to the drawing-room after her interview with Richard, her still melancholy demeanour attracted the notice of her affectionate parents.

"Where have you been, Isabel?" inquired the Prince, eyeing her attentively.

"My dear father," was the instantaneous reply, "I went for my usual walk in the adjacent fields, and I met Mr. Markham."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Prince, a little impatiently.

"I do not pretend that it was accidentally on *his* part," continued Isabella, in a tone expressive of the pride of truth; "because he is the last person in the world to sanction duplicity of any kind. It was, however, accidental in reference to myself—for I knew not of his intention to seek an interview with me this day."

"But you have met?" said the Prince, in a softening voice, and with a manner which denoted how justly proud he was of the upright mind of his daughter.

"We have met, dear father," answered Isabel, wiping away a tear; "and—we have separated—perhaps," she added in a faltering tone, "never to meet again. Oh! be not angry with *him*—nor with *me*, my dearest parents,—especially not with *him*!"

"No—we are not angry, my child," said the Princess of Castelcicala, hastily. "Indeed, for my part, I wish that Mr. Markham had come to wish us all farewell. But perhaps he will write——"

"I did not refuse his request on that subject," murmured Isabella, casting down her eyes and blushing: "Oh! no—I could not! And now, my dear parents, you know all. If I have done wrong, I am deeply grieved;—but my conscience tells me that I have not outraged the devotion and love that I owe to you."

The Prince made no reply: but the expression of his countenance was not severe; and the Princess of Castelcicala embraced her daughter affectionately.

From that time the mansion contained three anxious hearts; for the exiled family was deeply interested in the results of the expedition to Castelcicala.

Who, then, can depict the disappointment with which the tidings of the fatal affair of Ossore were received, at the end of November, in that dwelling?

The Prince and Princess perceived in the failure of the enterprise a deep blow to their own cause in the Duchy, inasmuch as it was calculated to afford the supporters of the Grand Duke an excuse for heaping opprobrium on the name of Alberto, whom they would point out as the instigator of the invasion;—and Isabella was overwhelmed with grief by the mystery which at that period enveloped the fate of Richard.

Several days of heart-breaking suspense elapsed: the colour forsook the maiden's cheek; and her countenance became expressive of a deep melancholy.

Nor was this terrible uncertainty concerning Richard's fate the only cause of affliction which she was now doomed to experience. Her father was so profoundly affected by the failure of the expedition, and the evils which he believed would result to his own interests in many respects, that he became ill, and was soon unable to leave his bed.

Then how assiduous was the poor girl to her parent, while her own heart was often well-nigh breaking! The Prince grew irritable and impatient, and even reproached his daughter for fretting on account of one who, as he declared, "had helped to hurry the Constitutional cause,—a cause that might have triumphed in time,—to a most ruinous catastrophe." But Isabella bore all this without a murmur; and as her father grew more harsh, her attentions towards him were redoubled. In her mother's kindness and sympathy the afflicted maiden found a consolation; but she could with difficulty bear up against the agony of suspense and alarm which she experienced on account of her lover.

At length,—about a week after the receipt of the fatal tidings connected with the battle of Ossore,—Whittingham called at the mansion, and placed in Isabella's hand a letter from Richard.

"He lives! he lives!" were the maiden's first words of reviving hope; "heaven be thanked—he lives!"

But Isabella's joy was speedily overclouded once more; for she saw, by the guarded manner in which he wrote and by the omission of his signature, that her lover was in danger.

Nevertheless—"where there is life, there is hope," as the proverb says; and, somewhat consoled by his conviction, she was less miserable than before!

And now came another tedious interval of suspense, the wretchedness of which was enhanced by the increasing indisposition of the Prince.

At length—at the expiration of about three weeks—the Princess Isabella received a letter from Signora Viviani, the nature of which, as already known to our readers, was not extremely well calculated to reassure the affectionate girl relative to her lover. It was true that she was informed of Richard's safe arrival at Pinalla, where he was in the society of kind friends; but vague and torturing fears were aroused by the fact that he himself had been unable to write to her.

Again was there a weary interval of silence; but this was suddenly broken in a manner calculated to re-awaken all the bright hopes which Isabella had once entertained relative to the future greatness of Richard Markham. On the 16th of January, the news of the glorious exploit at Estella reached the mansion of the exiled family in England; and inspired the young Princess with the most enthusiastic feelings of admiration towards him whom she loved so fondly, and of whom she had always thought so well.

"Oh! why am I bound to this bed of sickness?" exclaimed the Prince, when Signor Viviani's letter narrating that event was read to him. "Why am I not permitted to hasten to my native country, and take part with that gallant youth! No consideration of policy or delicacy should now restrain me; for the Austrian is in the land, and every true Castelcicalan should draw the sword and fling away the scabbard!"

"Compose yourself, dearest father," said Isabella, enraptured at the manner in which he had spoken of her lover: "excitement will only delay your recovery;—and something tells me that Castelcicala will soon demand your presence!"

But the Prince could *not* tranquillize his mind: the thraldom of a sick bed had become more intolerable to him than ever; and, although he now ceased to reproach his daughter, his irritability of temper painfully increased.

Three days afterwards letters were received at the mansion announcing Richard's entry into Villabella. Then the colour came back again to the cheeks of the charming Italian maiden; and her eyes shone with all their wonted brilliancy. Forgotten were her recent sorrows—gone was her agonising suspense—banished was the memory of her cruel doubts;—her lover was already a hero—and hope was once more enthroned in her heart.

The Prince now began to perceive the absolute necessity of avoiding the excitement of useless repinings at that illness which still chained him to his bed. Richard's letters told him how the inhabitants of Villabella had shouted the thrilling words "Long live Alberto!"—and the Prince was inspired with hopes the extent of which he did not seek to conceal.

Four days elapsed; and when the postman was again descried by the watchful Isabella advancing through the shrubbery towards the mansion, how quickly beat the hearts of the illustrious exiles!

Yes—there were letters from Castelcicala:—never were sealed documents more quickly torn open! And, oh! what joyous news did they contain—the victory of Piacere!

Isabella's feelings found vent in tears:—she was so happy—that she wept!

"These are indeed glorious tidings!" said the Prince, raising himself upon his pillow; then, after a moment's pause, he exclaimed warmly, "Richard Markham is a hero!"

Ah! how touchingly grateful was the glance which Isabella cast upon her father through her tears, to thank him for that generous sentiment relative to one in whom she felt so deep an interest!

Another short interval now occurred; and then fresh letters came, bringing farther tidings of success. The battle of Abrantani was a worthy sequence to that of Piacere!

"Oh! my beloved Isabella," now exclaimed the Prince, pressing her to his heart, "can you forgive me for the reproaches I have so unjustly—so wantonly uttered relative to Richard Markham?"

"Think not of the past, dearest father," answered the maiden: "the present is so full of joy, and hope, and glory, that we should not feel wearied of contemplating it."

"And, whatever may be the result of this contest," observed the Princess of Castelcicala to her husband, "you will always acknowledge that Richard is a hero?"

"He is a young man whom the greatest sovereign in the world might be proud to claim as a son!" ejaculated the Prince, enthusiastically.

Isabella pressed her mother's hand tenderly for having obtained this most welcome avowal.

The health of Prince Alberto now rapidly improved; and in a few days he was enabled to leave the couch to which he had been confined for many weary weeks.

And Isabella—Oh! all the charming carnation tinge had come back to her cheeks; and her eyes were brilliant with the purest rays of happiness and hope. Her fondest dreams—her brightest visions were all but realised: her lover was accomplishing those grand destinies of which her mental vision had caught glimpses ere his departure from England; and the world was already busy with his name. And now, too, was that name ever upon the tongue of her father, who pronounced it with admiration and respect.

A few days after the arrival of the intelligence of the decisive victory of Abrantani, the newspapers acquainted the illustrious Italian family with the fact that the Committee of Government at Montoni had bestowed the title of Marquis of Estella upon the youthful Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of Castelcicala.

Oh! with what joyous feelings—with what ineffable emotions of enthusiasm, did the charming Isabella read aloud to her parents that account of her lover's elevation,—an elevation which, as he himself had felt convinced, must remove one grand obstacle that had hitherto existed in the way of their happiness.

And how did her young heart beat and her bosom heave, when her father exclaimed, in an emphatic tone, "Yes—Richard is now a Marquis, and may take his rank amongst the proudest peers in the universe;—but there is a higher grade which he yet may reach—and it will be a happy day for us all when I shall say to him, '*Receive my daughter as the reward of your achievements, and become a Prince!*'"

Isabella threw herself at her father's feet, and pressed to her lips the hand which she also moistened with her tears. She endeavoured to murmur words of gratitude for that most welcome assurance; but her heart was too full—she could only weep!

It was a most touching scene; and, perhaps, never had that exiled family experienced more perfect happiness than on this occasion.

But the sentiment was soon destined to give way to new fears and fresh anxieties. It was well-known that Montoni was besieged by an immense Austrian force; and the English newspapers, in commenting upon the position of the Constitutionalists, declared that though the moral effects of so decisive a victory as that of Abrantani must be very great, there was nevertheless much room to doubt whether the Marquis of Estella would be able to assemble an army sufficiently strong to march to the relief of the capital.

Prince Alberto trembled as he read these observations; because he not only comprehended their justice, but was also well aware that the fate of Castelcicala could be alone decided by a pitched battle between the Austrians and the Constitutionalists.

He endeavoured to conceal his misgivings from his wife and daughter: but they saw what was passing in his mind;—and thus all was still anxiety and hope—uncertainty and fervent aspiration, at the mansion of the Prince.

Thus did a few days pass; and Alberto suffered a slight relapse, in consequence of the nervous state of doubt in which he was plunged.

All his hopes—all his interests—all his prospects were at stake. If the Constitutionalists were successful, a crown awaited him: if the Austrians triumphed, the Grand Duke Angelo had pledged himself to adopt a scion of the imperial family of Vienna as the heir to the throne. Thus Prince Alberto hovered between a glorious elevation or a fatal fall.

The Princess, his wife, entertained sanguine hopes that a campaign so successfully begun, would terminate in triumph; and Isabella called every argument to her aid to convince her father and mother that all must end well! Nevertheless, poor girl! she also had her intervals of doubt and alarm; and many were the tears which she shed in secret as she prayed for the safety of her lover.

And now how eagerly was the arrival of the postman looked for every day; how anxiously was the presence of the newspaper awaited!

At length, on the morning of the 29th of January, all doubts were cleared up—all uncertainties terminated.

The illustrious family was seated at the breakfast table—a mere ceremonious mockery, for they were unable to eat a morsel.

Presently a servant entered, and presented the morning paper to the Prince.

Alberto opened it with a trembling hand: his wife and daughter watched him attentively.

Suddenly he started—his eyes were lighted up with their wonted fires—a flush appeared on his pale cheek—and he exclaimed in a fervent tone, "O God! I thank thee!"

He could say no more: his emotions nearly overpowered him, weakened as he was by a long illness.

Isabella caught the paper as it was falling from his hands. One glance was sufficient: it told her all! For there—conspicuously displayed at the head of a column—was the following glorious announcement:—

"CASTELCICALA.

"TOTAL DEFEAT OF THE AUSTRIANS—DELIVERANCE OF MONTONI.

"The French Government have received the following Telegraphic Despatch from Toulon:—

"'*The Castelcicalan steamer* Torione *has just arrived. The Austrians were completely routed on the 23rd. Montoni is delivered. The Grand Duke has fled.* The Marquis of Estella *entered the capital at three o'clock on the 24th. He has been appointed Regent until the arrival of* Alberto I. *The* Torione *left while the cannon were saluting the presence of the* Marquis.'"

"Let me be the first to congratulate your Serene Highness on this glorious result!" exclaimed Isabella, falling at the feet of her father, and pressing his hand to her lips.

"No—not on your knees, dearest Isabel!" cried Alberto, now Grand Duke of Castelcicala: "but come to my arms, sweet girl—and you also, beloved companion of my banishment," he added, turning towards his wife, who was nearly overcome by these sudden tidings of joy:—"come to my arms—for we are no longer exiles—we shall once more behold our native land!"

How sweet—how sweet were the caresses which those three illustrious personages now exchanged:—how unalloyed was that happiness which they now experienced!

And when they were enabled to compose their feelings so far as to discourse upon the triumphant result of the Constitutional cause, the name of Richard Markham was not forgotten!

CHAPTER CCIII.

RAVENSWORTH HALL.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Kilburn on the gentle acclivity rising towards Wilsden Green, stood a noble mansion in the midst of a spacious park.

Every thing about that vast structure, within and without, denoted aristocratic grandeur combined with exquisite taste.

The adjunction of no modern buildings had spoiled the antique and time-honoured appearance of Ravensworth Hall: the hand of the mason, when repairing the ravages of years, had successfully studied to preserve the effect of the beautiful Elizabethan architecture.

Thus the splendid mansion,—with its numerous gables, its tall chimneys, its picturesque belfry, its immense windows with small diamond-shaped panes, and its ample portals approached by a flight of twenty steps,—seemed well adapted for the residence of a peer who could trace his family back to the epoch of the Conquest, and who preserved as much feudal state and grandeur as modern systems and habits would permit.

It was the 1st of February; and as early as six o'clock on that morning—before it was light—Ravensworth Hall was a scene of bustle and excitement.

Some grand event was evidently about to take place.

The chimneys belonging to the kitchen and servants' offices in the rear of the building, sent forth dense columns of smoke, which seemed to imply that extensive culinary preparations were in progress.

The butler,—a venerable old man with hair as white as snow, but with a stately portliness of form that was scarcely bent by age,—was busy in selecting the choicest wine from the immense stock of which he was the guardian. The female domestics were early employed in preparing the grand apartments of the mansion for the reception of a brilliant company:—windows were cleaned, coverings removed from the velvet cushions of chairs and sofas, heavy hangings and curtains arranged in the nicest folds so as to display the richness of their texture to the best advantage, and China ornaments carefully dusted.

Lord Ravensworth rose earlier than he had done for some weeks; for before the clock struck eight he descended from his dressing-room to a chamber which he denominated his "cabinet."

He was a man of about fifty years of age, and had evidently been very handsome. But his countenance was now colourless, haggard, and painfully indicative of some deeply seated disease which was preying upon his vitals. His eyes were sunken and lustreless: his cheeks were hollow,—and yet seldom had an individual of his age possessed so splendid a set of teeth, the whole of which were perfect. So thin and wasted was his form, that, although he was naturally of a powerful and portly structure, the dressing-gown which he had on hung as loosely about him as if on a skeleton.

And how rapidly had these ravages of an unknown and unaccountable malady worked their terrific influence on a man who had lately appeared to possess that constitutional vigour and robustness of health which predicate a long life!

Three months previously to the time of which we are writing had Lord Ravensworth first experienced a change in his physical energies which began to alarm him. He was then staying, with his young and beautiful wife, to whom he had only then been married half-a-year, at his town-mansion; and when the primal symptoms of his malady appeared,—evidencing themselves in want of appetite, intervals of deep lethargic languor, and an apathetic listlessness in respect to every thing passing around him,—his physicians advised him to essay the bracing air and change of scene of Ravensworth Park. His lordship was, however, unwilling to remove his young wife—the lovely Adeline—from the gaieties of London, at that season when all the fashionable world was returning to the metropolis after the autumnal visits to their country seats or favourite watering-places; and he had accordingly persisted in passing the Christmas holidays at his town-residence.

But he rapidly grew worse:—his appetite totally failed him; and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could force himself to take the sustenance necessary to sustain life. He had always been a great smoker; and his only solace now appeared to be his meerschaum. Alone in his own private apartment, he would sit for hours with no other companion than the eternal pipe. He was fond of oriental tobacco, because the Turkish and Persian weeds possessed a peculiar aroma which rendered their use a habit comparatively inoffensive to others. And here we may observe that the only reciprocal attentions which had taken place for years between Lord Ravensworth and his younger brother, the Honourable Gilbert Vernon, consisted in the annual interchange of presents:—thus, as Gilbert had resided in oriental climes, he was in the habit of sending Lord Ravensworth every year a small chest containing the most rare and excellent samples of tobacco grown in Asia Minor and Persia; and in return he received from his elder brother a box filled with all the newest English publications, and a variety of choice articles for the toilette, such as Gilbert could not have procured in the East.

Thus was it that, when the nobleman found a strange and insidious malady growing upon him, he naturally sought relief, both mental and physical, in his favourite recreation; and never had the present of his brother seemed more valuable to him than when he forgot his ailments in the soothing enjoyments of the aromatic Turkish or mildly-flavoured Persian tobacco.

For two months had he been subject to a mysterious and deeply-rooted disease,—which one physician treated as atrophy, and which another honestly confessed he could not comprehend,—when about the beginning of the year, he had yielded to the entreaties of his

wife and removed to Ravensworth Hall.

There he appeared to rally for a few days,—taking powerful exercise on horseback and on foot, and indulging but little in the luxury of the meerschaum. One day, however, the weather was so intemperate that he could not stir abroad; and he passed several hours in his "cabinet," with his favourite meerschaum. From that period the apathy which he had to some extent shaken off, returned with increased power: his manner seemed more lethargic and indifferent than it had yet been; and the companionship of his pipe grew more welcome to him than ever. He now spent the greater portion of each day in his cabinet, with positive orders that he was not to be disturbed; and there he enjoyed that baleful comfort which is experienced by the *Teryaki*, or oriental opium-eaters. Reclining in a capacious arm-chair, with the tube of his meerschaum between his lips, Lord Ravensworth forgot the world without,—remembered not his wife,—thought not of the infant that she bore in her bosom,—and even seemed insensible to the fearful wasting away which his physical strength was rapidly undergoing. He refused to allow his physician to prescribe for him; and though the work of enfeeblement and decay progressed with alarming velocity, he seldom appeared to reflect that he must shortly be numbered with the dead.

It is due to Adeline to state that,—attached to pleasure and gaiety, and fond of society as she was,—she endeavoured to arouse her husband as much as she could from that mortal apathy which, even in her presence, shrouded all his sensibilities as it were in a premature grave. His case presented the remarkable and mysterious anomaly of a man in the noon of lusty-hood, and without any apparent ailment of a specific kind, passing out of existence by a geometrical progression of decay.

Such was the condition of Lord Ravensworth at the period when we introduce our readers to the Hall.

A few words will explain the motive which had induced him to rise at so unusually early an hour on the 1st of February, and which also led him to a temporary, and, alas! very feeble exertion to shake off the torpor of listlessness and the opiate influence of his mortal apathy.

Lady Ravensworth's cousin, the Honourable Miss Maria Augusta Victoria Amelia Hyacintha Villiers, was, in fashionable language, "to be that morning led to the hymeneal altar." This young lady was rich only in her names: she was a portionless orphan; and the cold calculation of her guardian, Lord Rossville (Adeline's father), had induced him to consent to the sacrifice of the poor girl to a suitor whose wealth and title of Baronet were his only recommendations.

Miss Maria Augusta Victoria Amelia Hyacintha Villiers had been residing with her cousin Adeline, ever since the marriage of the latter with Lord Ravensworth; and it was to consummate the sacrifice ere now alluded to that all the grand preparations before mentioned were in progress. Lord and Lady Rossville and Lady Ravensworth all conceived that Lord Ravensworth would be benefited by the excitement attending the assemblage of a marriage party at the Hall; and their expectations appeared to be in some measure justified. His lordship descended at an unusually early hour to his cabinet, and, instead of having recourse to his meerschaum, he summoned the butler, to whom he gave instructions relative to the service of particular wines.

For nearly a month past his lordship had not meddled in any of the affairs of the household; and the venerable servant was overjoyed to think that his noble master was giving unequivocal signs of recovery. This idea seemed to acquire confirmation from the circumstance that the nobleman afterwards returned to his dressing-room without smoking a single pipe, and, aided by his valet, attired himself with unusual precision and care.

"Your lordship is better this morning," observed the valet, deferentially.

"Yes—I am a little better, Quentin," returned the nobleman; "and yet I hardly know that I have ever felt actually ill. Want of appetite is the principal ailment which affects me. It makes me grow thin, you perceive:—but am I so *very* thin, Quentin?"

"Oh! no, my lord," answered the valet, who belonged to a class that never tell disagreeable truths so long as their wages are regularly paid. "Your lordship is certainly not so stout as your lordship was; but——"

"But what, Quentin?"

"I think—if your lordship would not be offended—that I am acquainted with the cause of that want of appetite, which prevents your lordship from taking proper sustenance."

"Go on, Quentin: I shall not be offended. I know you are a faithful fellow," exclaimed the nobleman. "What do you think is the cause?"

"With your lordship's permission, I should say that smoking too much—" began the valet, timidly.

"Pooh! pooh!—nonsense!" interrupted Lord Ravensworth, impatiently. "I have always been a great smoker: you know I have. I began to smoke when I was only fourteen; and as I was so long a bachelor—during the best years of my life, indeed—I had no reason to curb myself in my favourite recreation. It would be different, perhaps, if I used the filthy tobacco which you buy in England—or if I smoked strong Havannah cigars. But that mild and aromatic plant, which is reared in the East, cannot injure a soul:—a child might smoke it."

"Your lordship knows best," observed the valet, feeling that he was treading on delicate ground. "But I think your lordship has smoked more lately than——"

"I dare say I have," again interrupted the nobleman, with some little petulance. "But the last chest of tobacco which my brother sent me is so much better than all the former ones; and there is such a delightful soothing influence in the samples of Turkish and Persian, that I cannot lay aside my pipe when once I take it up. Let me see! It was only last October—yes, and at the end of October, too—that I received the chest; and I have already made a deep inroad into it."

"Is the Honourable Mr. Vernon still in Turkey, my lord?" inquired the valet.

"Yes: at least, when I heard from him last—that was when he sent me the chest of tobacco in October—he stated in his letter that he should yet remain abroad for two or three years. He seems devoted to the East. But you know, Quentin, that he and I are not upon the very best of terms, although we occasionally correspond and interchange little civilities every now and then. However, I can scarcely blame myself for any coldness that may subsist between us. I have behaved to him as an elder brother ought to a younger one;—and because I would not consent to minister to his extravagant propensities he took umbrage. When I espoused her ladyship last May, I wrote to Mr. Vernon, who was then at Beyrout, acquainting him with that event; and his reply, which accompanied the chest of tobacco

in October, was more kind and conciliatory than I could have expected, considering his gloomy and morose character."

"I am glad that he exhibited a proper feeling towards your lordship," said Quentin, by way of making some observation, because his master had paused.

"And so am I," continued the nobleman. "Then I wrote to him again in November, to inform him that Lady Ravensworth was in a way that gave promise of a continuation of our name,—the name of Ravensworth is a very ancient one, Quentin——"

"Yes, my lord. I believe your lordship can trace it back to the invasion of Britain by the Romans?"

"No—not quite that," returned the nobleman; "but to the conquest by William the Norman. However, I wrote to my brother, as I have informed you; and I received no answer. I therefore conclude that he has renewed his travels through Asia-Minor."

The toilet of Lord Ravensworth was now complete; and he hesitated for a moment whether he should repair to his cabinet and take "just one little pipe," or whether he should hasten to the drawing-room at once.

The valet understood what was passing in the nobleman's mind; but as he was really attached to his master, and moreover entertained a belief that the too liberal use of tobacco had reduced him to his present wretched physical condition, he hastened to exclaim, "The company are already assembled, my lord, in the drawing-room; and her ladyship will be quite delighted to see your lordship looking so very well to-day."

Once more Lord Ravensworth, who for a moment was about to relapse into a state of listless apathy, brightened up, and wrestled with the fatal influence that was creeping over him; and in this improved state of mind and body he proceeded to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER CCIV

THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.

A brilliant assembly was collected in the principal saloon of Ravensworth Hall.

Lord Rossville,—a tall, thin, stern-looking man,—and Lady Rossville,—a very short, stout, and affected dame,—were amongst the most conspicuous by rank and station.

Lady Ravensworth seemed as beautiful as Lydia Hutchinson had described her; and, as she was rather pale and delicate in consequence of being in an "interesting situation," she was really a being who might be termed, without any poetical exaggeration, sweetly fascinating. But no one who there beheld the elegant and proud peeress, doing the honours of her splendid mansion to a circle of noble guests, would have imagined that, when plain Miss Adeline Enfield, she had played the wanton at so tender an age, and given birth to a child in a miserable garret!

The Honourable Miss Maria Augusta Victoria Amelia Hyacintha Villiers was a beautiful, but timid and retiring, girl of seventeen;—and as she now appeared in the virginal white which custom had compelled her to assume for the consummation of a sacrifice which she felt—Oh! how keenly felt,—it was easy for a benevolent eye to perceive that she was a victim to cold calculation, and not a happy bride about to accompany to the altar one whom she loved.

But there were no benevolent eyes there:—there seldom are in fashionable life and in such cases. The expression of blank despair which marked the countenance of the young bride was regarded only as the token of maidenly reserve and bashfulness.

Not that she loved another: no—her heart was entirely her own;—but she was about to be given to a man whom she abhorred.

"Why did she not remonstrate with her guardian?" asks the innocent reader. Remonstrate with a stanch Tory and High-Church-supporting peer like Lord Rossville? Ridiculous! He who believed that the people are mere machines formed to toil for the aristocracy, was not likely to listen with even common patience to the remonstrances of a young maiden for whom he believed he had arranged a splendid destiny.

"But, then, poor Maria might have opened her heart to Lady Rossville?" says that self-same innocent reader. Equally ridiculous! A mother who had intrigued so well as to foist her own daughter upon an elderly noble like Lord Ravensworth, and who imagined that matrimony was nothing more nor less in respect to young ladies than "catching at the first rich man who offered himself," was very far from being the proper person at whose hands the orphan and portionless Maria could obtain a reprieve of the death-sentence which had been pronounced upon her heart.

In high life how many matrimonial connexions are based on the calculations of sordid interest, instead of the sympathies of the soul! And then the hoary peer or the decrepid nabob is surprised that his young wife proves unfaithful to his bed, and declaims against the profligacy of her conduct in yielding to the temptations of a deeply-seated love for another—a love which was perhaps engendered before the ignominious sacrifice of her person to the sexagenarian husband was ever thought of!

But to return to the drawing-room at Ravensworth Hall.

Amongst the select party assembled, we must especially mention the Honourable Miss Wigmore and the Honourable Miss Helena Sophia Alexandrina Wigmore—the bridesmaids, who looked as if they had much rather have been principal instead of secondary actresses in the matrimonial ceremony. There also was the newly-appointed Bishop of the Carribbee Islands—solemn in lawn sleeves, and pompous in the display of his episcopal importance. Lounging near the chair of a very pretty girl, with whom he was conversing, stood Count Swindeliski—a refugee who sported enormous whiskers, who had found his way into fashionable society no one exactly knew how, and who had the extraordinary but not altogether uncommon knack of living at the rate of five thousand a-year—upon nothing! Then there were several Members of Parliament who had collected together near a window, and were disputing with all their talent whether there ought to be a duty of one halfpenny or three-farthings per hundred on foreign brick-bats. Near an open piano was gathered a group of very young ladies, engaged in an edifying discussion on the character of some other very young lady who was not present. Conversing with Lord Rossville was the owner of half a county, who could return six Members to Parliament with the greatest ease, but could not for the life of him return a sensible answer to even the plainest question. Standing apart from all the rest, was a young country clergyman, who kept turning up the whites of his eyes as if in a constant agony of some kind or another—but really because he was in the presence of a Bishop, although the said Bishop never once cast his reverend eyes that way. Then there was the Dowager Countess of Brazenphace, who had "got off" seven out of nine red-haired daughters, and had brought the two remaining single ones with her just to see if they could not make an impression somewhere or another. There also was the celebrated German philosopher Baron Torkemdef, who had written a work in fourteen quarto volumes to prove that there is no such thing as matter—that we do not really exist—but that we ourselves and every thing else are mere ideas. This learned man was, as might be supposed, a very valuable acquisition to a bridal party. Seated next to Lady Rossville was the Honourable Mrs. Berrymenny, who had seen five husbands consigned to the tomb, and was looking out for a sixth. It was, however, probable that she was doomed to look long enough, inasmuch as she had no fortune, and had already reached the comfortable age of fifty-three. Lastly, there was the elegant and accomplished Miss Blewstocken, who was known to have written a volume of poems which had an excellent circulation (amongst the

butter-shops), and who was suspected of having perpetrated a novel.

These are all the stars whom it is worth while to signalise amidst a galaxy of some fifty personages.

The bridegroom had not yet arrived: he was expected to make his appearance at about half-past eight.

When Lord Ravensworth entered the room, every one who had not lately seen him was shocked at the dreadful change which had taken place in him; but of course the guests, one and all, assured him that they had never seen him look so well before.

Adeline sighed deeply—for she could not help thinking that it was a miserable mockery for a gaunt and almost fleshless skeleton thus to deck itself out in an apparel befitting a bridal:—moreover, the idea that if her yet unborn offspring should prove a girl, the broad lands and noble Hall of Ravensworth would pass away to another, was ever uppermost in her mind.

To conceal her emotions, she hastened to the side of poor Maria Villiers, to whom she said, "It is very strange that the lady's-maid whom you have hired did not come last evening, as promised."

"It is, indeed, very annoying," observed Maria, whose sorrows were, however, too deep to permit her mind to be even ruffled by that trifling source of vexation.

"But never mind," continued Lady Ravensworth, in a whisper; "you shall take my maid Flora with you, and I will either find another at my leisure, or keep the one whom you have engaged, should she make her appearance after you have left."

"This is very kind of you, Adeline," said Maria, mechanically.

"I am afraid you did not manage well in your first essay in choosing dependants, dear Maria," observed Lady Ravensworth. "You were attracted by the advertisement in the *Morning Herald*; whereas I never should think of taking a lady's-maid who advertises. Then, as you yourself told me, you went to some out-of-the-way place in the City for the young woman's character."

"Oh! I was perfectly satisfied, Adeline," interrupted Maria, to whom this conversation appeared trivial in the extreme on an occasion so fraught with solemnity to herself.

Lady Ravensworth was about to make some reply, when Lord Rossville, who had been standing at the window for the last few moments, exclaimed, "Here's the bridegroom!"

A cold shudder passed over Maria's frame; and it seemed as if her heart had been suddenly swathed in ice.

She alone retained her place: all the other persons present hurried to the window.

And, sure enough, the bridegroom was in view; and a very funny view it was. Perched upon the back of an enormous bright bay horse, the "happy man" never appeared more miserable in his life. He was tugging at the reins with all his might; but the huge animal galloped furiously along in spite of the efforts made to restrain its speed. The bridegroom's feet were thrust as far as they could go into the stirrups: his hat was rammed tight down over his eyes, to prevent it from blowing away;—his form was bent, or rather crouched up, like that of a monkey;—with his right hand he held fast by the horse's mane;—and with his left he continued tugging at the bit and bradoon. The poor animal itself seemed to wonder, like John Gilpin's steed, what sort of a thing it had got upon its back; for its eyes glared, and its nostrils dilated with affright: while its whole body was covered with a greasy perspiration, and white flakes of foam kept falling from its mouth.

In this manner did the bridegroom rush madly, but with involuntary speed, through the spacious Park towards the Hall. At a short distance behind him rode another cavalier, who managed his horse well, and amused himself by maintaining a succession of shouts and hurrahs after the bridegroom, whereby that unfortunate individual's steed was only affrighted all the more. A third person on horseback appeared at a greater distance still; but this was the bridegroom's servant.

"A most un-christianlike and decidedly unhallowed manner for a bridegroom to comport himself," said the Bishop of the Carribbee Islands, as he contemplated this ludicrous display of horsemanship.

"It certainly is strange," observed Lord Rossville. "But perhaps our young friend is anxious to display his skill——"

"No such a ting, milor—no such a ting!" ejaculated Count Swindeliski, caressing his whiskers. "Dat young gentelman's von great homebogue; and if me was dere, me hit him some kick for his pain."

"Ah! he doesn't ride so well as my poor dear *fourth*," said Mrs. Berrymenny, with a profound sigh, as she thus alluded to one of her husbands.

"It's all vanity and vexation of spirit," observed the young clergyman, glancing deferentially towards the Bishop.

"No, sir—it is not, sir," said the Bishop sternly: "it is sheer bad riding, sir—and nothing else."

The Right Reverend Father in God had been a fox-hunter in his time.

"For my part," cried a Member of Parliament, "I move that we repair to the young gentleman's assistance."

"And I beg to second the motion," said another Member.

"Ah! by heaven, that's serious!" ejaculated Lord Rossville, turning abruptly away from the window.

And so it seemed; for the horse suddenly stopped near the entrance of the mansion, and pitched the bridegroom clean over its head into a clump of evergreens. All the ladies who beheld this catastrophe screamed aloud. But at the very next moment he rose from his ignominious position, and with difficulty removing his battered hat from over his eyes, saluted the company assembled at the windows of the drawing-room. "It's noting at all," said Baron Torkemdef: "he only tink himself hurted—you only tink dat a horse what did seem to run way wid him:—it all de idea—all de fancy."

Then, while Lord Rossville and others hastened to meet the bridegroom and assure themselves that he was not hurt, Baron Torkemdef caught hold of the great county landowner by the button-hole, and began to expatiate upon the folly of yielding to sensations of pain and other afflictions, as not only those sensations but also we ourselves were only so many unsubstantial ideas. Meantime, poor Maria Villiers had remained in a sort of listless reverie in her seat; and it was only when Lady Ravensworth assured her that the bridegroom had sustained no injury, that she learnt he had been in any peril at all. In ten minutes the door opened, and Lord Rossville returned to the room, ushering in the bridegroom, who had been cleansed in the meantime from the effects of his fall, and who endeavoured to put a smiling face upon the matter, although still terribly disconcerted. Then Lady Adeline advanced to meet him, and said in a most gracious tone, "We have been painfully excited on your account, Sir Cherry Bounce."

CHAPTER CCV.

THE BREAKFAST.

Yes—it was to this individual that Maria Villiers was to be sacrificed:—it was to him that the cold and selfish policy of Lord Rossville was about to consign a beautiful, an artless, and an amiable girl.

Sir Cherry's mother had paid the debt of nature about a year previously; and the young baronet found himself the possessor of an immense fortune.

Lord Rossville only looked upon his orphan niece Maria as an encumbrance while she remained single, or as a means of increasing the *wealth* (and in his idea, the *strength*) of the family when she married. Sir Cherry had met her in the brilliant sphere of the West-End society: he had courted her; and, the moment Lord and Lady Rossville observed his attentions, they *commanded* her to receive them with favour. She—poor timid, friendless girl!—was half persuaded into the idea that the match was really to her advantage, and half bullied (for we can actually use no other term) into an acquiescence in the views of her guardian.

Thus she had not dared to utter a negative when the effeminate and insipid baronet had solicited her hand; and, her silence being taken for a ready consent, the preliminaries were hurried on, without any further reference to the inclinations or wishes of the victim!

"We have been painfully excited on your account, Sir Cherry Bounce," said Lady Ravensworth, advancing to receive the bridegroom.

"The twuth wath that my fwiend Thmilackth inthithted on my widing the new horth I bought yethterday," exclaimed the baronet; "and ath he don't theem to be veway well bwoken in, the wethult wath that I nearly got a bwoken head."

"I never saw such a Guy on a horse before—strike me!" ejaculated Major Smilax Dapper, who had followed his friend into the room. "He would keep in advance of me the whole way; and although I called after him to rein in—strike him!—he would not listen to me."

"It wath that thouting and hoowaying that fwightened my horth," observed Sir Cherry, casting a sulky look towards Smilax.

"At all events you are not hurt—and that is the essential," said Lord Rossville.

"Hurted! no—of course de good gentleman's not hurted," exclaimed Baron Torkemdef: "it noting at all but de idea—de fancy. You know vare well, sare, dat you not really exist—dat you only tink you do exist——"

Sir Cherry Bounce, to whom these words were addressed, cast so ludicrous a look of surprise mingled with dismay upon the philosopher, that Major Smilax Dapper burst into an immoderate fit of laughter; so that Baron Torkemdef was for a moment disconcerted.

Lord Rossville seized this opportunity to lead Sir Cherry Bounce towards Miss Villiers, who received her intended husband with a manner which to the superficial observer might appear excessive bashfulness, but which to the penetrating eye was the expression of blank—dumb—soul-crushing despair.

"I was just as timid with my *first* as Maria is," whispered Mrs. Berrymenny to the Countess of Brazenphace: "with my *second* I was a leetle more gay;—with my *third*——"

"Dear Mrs. Berrymenny," interrupted the Countess, impatiently; "pray do not talk of your *seconds* and *thirds*, when here are my two youngest daughters who haven't even yet got their *firsts*."

Two footmen, in gorgeous liveries, now entered the room and threw open a pair of folding-doors, thus revealing an inner apartment where the nuptial ceremony was to take place by special license.

Then Sir Cherry Bounce took Maria's hand, and led her slowly into the next room, the Honourable Misses Wigmore attending her in the capacity of bridemaids.

The remainder of the company followed in procession.

And now the Bishop takes his place near the table, and opens the book.

The ceremony begins.

Pale as marble, and almost insensible to what is passing around her, Maria Villiers hears a sort of droning mumbling, but cannot distinguish the words.

And yet the Bishop read the prayers in a clear, distinct, and impressive manner.

One of the bridemaids whispered in Maria's ear; and the young victim mechanically repeated the answer thus prompted.

But she was scarcely aware of the tenour of what she had said: every moment the scene became less comprehensible to her mind—and she was on the point of uttering a wild cry, so alarming was the confusion of her thoughts, when there was a sudden movement amongst the assembly—warm lips touched her forehead for a moment and were instantly withdrawn—and then her ears rang with the congratulations of her *friends*!

The chaos of her ideas was immediately dispelled; and the appalling truth broke suddenly on her.

The ceremony was over—and she was a wife:—upon her marble brow the kiss of a husband had been imprinted.

By one of those strange efforts of which the soul is sometimes capable, when "the worst" has arrived and "the bitterness of death"

has passed, Maria recovered her presence of mind, and even smiled faintly in acknowledgment of the congratulations which she received.

"Dat young lady seem vare happy now," whispered the German philosopher to Mrs. Berrymenny; "but it all noting more dan de idea. We all idea—dat reverend Bischop—dis room—dat book what he was read in—every ting!"

"Do you mean to persuade me, sir," asked Mrs. Berrymenny, with an indignant glance at Baron Torkemdef, "that it is all mere fancy on my part that I have had five husbands? If so, sir, all I can say is that I should like to have a sixth opportunity of putting your theory to the test."

And with these words the widow of five experiments of the marriage-state joined the procession which was now on its way to the breakfast-room.

The table in this apartment was spread with all the delicacies which were calculated to tempt the appetite even of satiety.

Sir Cherry thought it necessary to whisper some soft nonsense in the ears of his bride, as he conducted her to a seat; and Maria turned upon him a vacant glance of surprise;—then, suddenly recollecting the relation in which she stood towards him, her head drooped upon her bosom, and she made no reply.

"Cherry," whispered Major Dapper, "you are not half lively enough—blow you! You look like a fool—but I suppose you can't help it."

"Hold your tongue, Thmilackth," returned Sir Cherry, colouring to such an extent that the deep red was visible beneath his light hair. "You than't tweat me like a child any more."

And now began the bustle of the breakfast-table, and the excitement of the scene appeared to produce the most beneficial effects upon Lord Ravensworth, who did the honours of the table, conjointly with Adeline, in a manner indicative of more gaiety and spirit than he had exhibited for some time.

"Lord Ravensworth is certainly improving," said the Countess of Brazenphace apart to Mrs. Berrymenny.

"My *second* used to deceive me in the same manner," was the reply, also delivered in an under tone. "He was always dying—and always getting better, for at least three years before he went off altogether. My *fourth*——"

"Oh! you have told me all about him before," hastily interrupted the Countess, who was alarmed lest the widow should inflict upon her a narrative of oft-experienced tediousness.

"Dat vare excellent bird—how you call him? Peasant—ah!" observed Baron Torkemdef to the young clergyman, who, like a child, saw, heard, but said nothing. "But after all it no use for to praise one ting or to blame anoder—'cause dem each de idea—de fancy. Dere really no table—no peasant—no wine—no peoples: it all de imagination."

And while the philosopher went on expatiating in this manner, the viands disappeared from his plate and the wine from the decanter near him with a marvellous rapidity; so that the young clergyman could not help muttering to himself, "I wonder whether the Baron's appetite is an idea also."

"Seraphina," whispered the Countess of Brazenphace to one of her daughters, "if you look so much at Count Swindeliski, I shall be very angry. He has got no money, and is not a match for you. There is the Member for Buyemup-cum-Rhino sitting on your right, and he is a wealthy bachelor."

"But, dear mamma," returned Miss Seraphina, also in a whisper, "he is at least sixty."

"So much the better," was the prompt reply: "he is the easier to catch. Now mind your p's and q's, Miss."

This maternal advice was duly attended to; and, by the time he had tossed off his third glass of champagne, the Member for Buyemup-cum-Rhino had grown very tenderly maudlin towards the red-haired young husband-hunter.

"Miss Blewstocken, dear," cried the elder Miss Wigmore, "have you composed nothing appropriate for the present occasion?—no sweet little poem in your own fascinating style?"

"Oh! dear Miss Wigmore, how unkind!" said the literary young lady, in an affected and languishing manner. "I could not have believed it of you—to appeal to me before so many! If I have told you in confidence, or if it be indeed generally known that '*The Poetic Nosegay*' was written by me—and if it had a very large circulation—I do not think it is fair to expect——"

"Ah! Miss Blewstocken," exclaimed Miss Wigmore, "we are all aware that your pen is seldom idle."

"It is really quite provoking to find oneself known to Fame," said the literary lady, with increasing affectation of manner, and in a drawling, insipid tone. "I wish I had never written at all:—not that I have ever been induced to acknowledge the authorship of that novel which was so successful last year—'*The Royal Fiddlestick*,' I mean. No:—but the time *may* come——"

And here the literary lady shook her head in so mysterious a way that if she intended to be incomprehensible, she certainly was most successful in the endeavour.

"Who is that lady?" inquired the Bishop of Lord Rossville.

"Miss Blewstocken, the celebrated authoress," was the reply.

"Oh!" said the Bishop, in a dry laconic way, which proved that, however celebrated Miss Blewstocken might be, the trumpet of her renown had never sounded in his ears before.

"Talk of de poetry and de novel," exclaimed the German Baron, "what are all dem to de researches of de philosoph? Was your lordship ever read my von grand vork on de '*Ideality of de Universe*?'"

"I cannot say that I have ever read it, sir," answered the Bishop, with a frown. "I have heard of it, sir—and I consider its doctrines to be opposed to the Bible, sir. I believe it is in fourteen large volumes, sir? Well, sir—then all I have to observe upon it is that so many quartos are themselves too substantial to be a mere idea."

"But dey are von idea!" exclaimed the Baron, angrily. "Dey do not really exist, milor—in spite of what your lordship shall say. Every ting is de idea—we be ourselves all de walking, moving idea: dere no such ting as joy—no such ting as pain—dey mere sensation—"

At this moment the learned philosopher started from his seat with a yell of agony, and began stamping on the floor in a furious manner.

The fact was that while he was gesticulating in order to bestow additional emphasis on the enunciation of his principles, his hand, raised in the air, came in contact with a cup of coffee which a domestic was about to place before the young clergyman; and the

scalding fluid was poured forth on the bald head and down the back of the philosopher.

"Pray do not mind it, sir," said the Bishop, drily: "it is merely an idea."

"Yes—it de idea, no doubt!" ejaculated Baron Torkemdef, as he wiped his head with his pocket-handkerchief, while the domestic murmured an apology and slunk away: "but de idea was come in de unpleasant shape—dat noting against my doctrine—tousand devils, how him do burn!"

And, particularly disconcerted, the learned man sank back into his seat, where he consoled himself with a renewed application to the decanter near him.

Meantime Count Swindeliski was rendering himself very amiable to the Honourable Miss Helena Sophia Alexandrina Wigmore, next to whom he sate.

"Poland, then, must be a very beautiful country?" said the young lady, duly impressed by a most graphic description which the Count had just terminated.

"It vare fine—vare fine," returned the fascinating foreigner. "De ancestral castle of the Swindeliskis vare grand—touch de clouds—so long dat when you do stand at de von end you shall not see de oder—so wide dat horses shall always be kept saddled for to cross de court. My father was keep tree tousand dependants: me not choose for to spend de revenue in dat vay—me only may keep von tousand."

"And can you prefer England to your own beautiful country?" inquired Miss Helena Wigmore.

"Me shall not prefare England," answered the Count: "me shall choose wife of de English ladies—dey vare beautiful—vare fine—vare clevare. Den me take my wife to Poland, where she shall be von vare great lady indeed."

And, as he spoke, he threw a tender glance at his fair companion.

But Miss Helena Sophia Alexandrina Wigmore knew full well that every word the Count uttered concerning his fortune and castle was false. She was, however, too polite not to seem to believe him; and she was, moreover, pleased at engrossing the attentions of the handsomest man in the room. She therefore permitted herself to flirt a little with him; especially as her mother was not present to control her actions; but, like all young ladies in fashionable circles, she was too astute and wary to entertain the least idea of a more serious connexion.

The breakfast was now over; a carriage and four drove up to the front of the mansion; and the hour of departure had arrived for the "happy couple."

Maria withdrew for a few moments in company with Lady Ravensworth and the two bridemaids and when she returned she was dressed for travelling.

"Happy fellow!" whispered Major Dapper to his friend; "blow you!"

"Fooleth Thmilackth!" returned Sir Cherry Bounce. "But I am weally veway happy—ekthepth that curthed wide on the fatht twotting horth. Good bye: I thall wite to you in a few dayth."

The farewells were all said; and Maria resigned her hand to him who was about to bear her away from the Hall.

She wept not—she sighed not: but despair was written on her marble visage—though none present could read that sombre and melancholy language.

"I have directed Flora to accompany you," whispered Lady Ravensworth; "and you can keep her altogether, if you choose. Should the young woman whom you have hired, make her appearance, I will retain her, and give her a trial. But what is her name? I had forgotten to ask you."

Maria gave an answer; but there was such a bustle in the room at the moment and such a confused din of many voices, that the name escaped Adeline's ears.

Sir Cherry at the same instant led Maria towards the stairs; and in a few minutes the carriage, containing the newly-married pair, was rolling away from Ravensworth Hall on its journey to Cherry Park in Essex.

"I wish I was bound on a similar trip with a *sixth*," thought Mrs. Berrymenny, as she watched from the window the departure of the carriage.

"I wish I could get off my *eighth* and *ninth* as easily as the Rossvilles have done with Maria," thought the Countess of Brazenphace. "But I am afraid that the member for Buyemup-cum-Rhino will not bite."

"I wish I had not eulogised the single state in my poems," thought Miss Blewstocken, with a profound sigh.

"Me wish me shall soon find de agreeable lady dat will make me de von happiest of men," said Count Swindeliski to Miss Helena Sophia Alexandrina Wigmore.

"After all," said Baron Torkemdef, who had recovered his equanimity, by dint of frequent libations, "de marriage only de idea—de fancy, like any oder ting. Dat handsome chariot do not actually exist—it only de idea; and dat loving pair what shall sit in it are only idea as well. All is idea—me an idea—and dat Lord Bischop wid de lawn-sleeves only an idea."

"Where is Lord Ravensworth?" inquired Adeline of a domestic.

"His lordship felt suddenly unwell a few moments ago, my lady, and has retired to his cabinet."

"Ah! a reaction—a recurrence to the meerschaum!" murmured Lady Ravensworth, a cloud passing over her brow.

"Please your ladyship," said the servant, "a young woman has just arrived from London. She says that she was hired by Miss Villiers—I beg pardon Lady Bounce—and that an accident to the vehicle in which she came to the Hall has delayed her."

"Oh! she is to remain with me," returned Adeline. "Tell her that I will take her into my service on the same terms that were arranged between her and Lady Bounce. She is to replace Flora."

"Very good, my lady;"—and the servant was about to retire.

"One moment, William," said Adeline, beckoning him back. "Did this young woman mention her name—for as yet I am really ignorant of it?"

"Yes, my lady," answered the domestic: "her name is Lydia Hutchinson."

And the servant withdrew.

"Lydia Hutchinson!" murmured Lady Ravensworth, turning deadly pale, and tottering to a seat.

"Are you unwell, Adeline?" inquired Lady Rossville, approaching her daughter.

"No—a sudden indisposition—it is nothing!" replied Adeline; and she hastened from the room.

CHAPTER CCVI.

THE PATRICIAN LADY AND THE UNFORTUNATE WOMAN.

Lady Ravensworth retired to her boudoir; and, throwing herself upon a voluptuous ottoman, she burst into a flood of tears.

The wife of one of England's wealthiest nobles,—mistress of a splendid mansion and numerous household,—young, beautiful, and admired,—with a coronet upon her brow, and all the luxuries and pleasures of the world at her command,—this haughty and high-born lady now trembled at the idea—now shrunk from the thought—of meeting an obscure young woman who was forced to accept a menial place in order to earn her daily bread!

It was a strange coincidence that thus brought Lydia Hutchinson beneath the roof of Lady Ravensworth, whom the young woman was very far from suspecting to be that same Adeline Enfield who had been her companion—nay, her tutoress—in the initiative of wantonness and dishonour.

Mrs. Chichester had manifested a sisterly kindness towards the unfortunate Lydia; and, instead of shrinking in disgust, as so many others would have done, from the young woman who had been urged by stern necessity to ply a loathsome trade, she had endeavoured, by the most delicate attentions, to reclaim the mind of society's outcast from the dark ocean of despair in which it was so profoundly plunged.

The reader has doubtless seen that Lydia Hutchinson had never courted vice for vice's sake. She was not naturally of a depraved nor lascivious disposition. Circumstances—amongst which must be reckoned the treachery exercised by Lord Dunstable to accomplish her seduction, and the accident which threw the poor creature upon the tender mercies of Mrs. Harpy,—had conspired,—fearfully conspired, to brand her with infamy, and to drag her through the filth and mire of the various phases which characterise the downward path of a career of prostitution. Necessity had made her what she was!

Mrs. Chichester comprehended all this; and she was not one of those who believe that there is no sincere penitence—no reformation for the lost one. She longed to afford Lydia an opportunity of entering on a course of virtue and propriety. She would have willingly afforded the poor creature a permanent asylum, as a matter of charity, and even to insure a companion to cheer her own species of semi-widowed loneliness; but she was well aware that eleemosynary aid of such a kind, by retaining its object in a condition of idleness and of dependence, was of a most demoralising nature. She wished to give Lydia an opportunity of retrieving her character in her own estimation, and of regaining a proper confidence in herself; and she resolved that no excess of indulgence, nor extreme of charity, on her part, should permit the young woman to live in an indolence that might unfit her for any occupation in case of ultimate necessity, and that would thus fling her back upon the last and only resource—a recurrence to the walks of ignominy and crime. To reclaim and reinstate, as it were the unfortunate Lydia Hutchinson, was Viola Chichester's aim; and the object of this humane solicitude was deeply anxious to second, by her own conduct, the intentions of her generous benefactress.

As time wore on, Lydia improved greatly in mental condition and personal appearance: her thoughts became settled and composed, and her form resumed much of the freshness which had characterised her youth. She speedily began to express a desire to exert herself in some honest employment to gain her livelihood;—she also felt that indolence and dependence, even in the presence of the best moral examples, produce a vitiated frame of mind;—and she revolted from the mere idea of a relapse into the horrible path from which a friendly hand had redeemed her, as the most appalling catastrophe that her imagination could conceive.

Mrs. Chichester felt so persuaded of Lydia's firmness of purpose in pursuing a career of rectitude, that she resolved to take a step which only the extreme urgency of the case and a settled conviction of the young woman's inclination to do well, could justify. This was to obtain her a situation in some family. Lydia was overjoyed at the proposal. An advertisement was accordingly inserted in a newspaper; and a few days brought many written answers. Miss Villiers—now Lady Bounce—called personally, and was so pleased with Lydia's manner that she put no special questions to Mrs. Chichester.

Viola, however, addressed Miss Villiers thus:—"The young woman who now stands before you has been unfortunate—very unfortunate; and hers has been the fate of the unfortunate. She is most anxious to eat the bread of industry and honesty. I am persuaded that a kind hand stretched out to aid her in this desire, will raise her to happiness, and ensure her lasting gratitude."

Miss Villiers was a young lady of an excellent heart: she did not completely understand all that Mrs. Chichester meant; but she comprehended enough to render her willing to assist a fellow-creature who sought to earn her livelihood honourably, and who seemed to possess the necessary qualifications for the employment desired. Thus the bargain was hastily concluded; and when Miss Villiers desired Lydia to join her on a certain day at Ravensworth Hall, the young woman entertained not the least idea that her school friend Adeline Enfield was Lady Ravensworth, the mistress of that lordly habitation.

We will now return to Adeline, whom we left weeping in her boudoir.

The presence of Lydia in that house was indeed enough to alarm and embarrass her. Not that she precisely feared exposure at Lydia's hands in respect to the past—especially as it would be so easy to deny any derogatory statement of the kind. But Adeline felt that she

should now possess a dependant before whom her dignity and self-confidence would ever be overwhelmed by the weight of that dread secret of which Lydia's bosom was the depository. Such a prospect was most galling—most humiliating—most degrading to the mind of the haughty peeress.

"But of what avail are tears?" said Adeline, suddenly. "The danger is here—the evil is before me. We must meet:—it were better that I should see her at once! Doubtless she is unaware in whose abode she is now a menial!"

Adeline wiped her eyes, rang the bell, and reseating herself, assumed as composed a manner as possible under the circumstances.

In a few moments she heard footsteps approaching.

"This is my lady's apartment," said the housekeeper in the passage.

"Thank you," replied another voice.

Oh! how Adeline's heart beat,—the well-remembered tones of Lydia Hutchinson had just met her ears.

Then she heard the retreating sounds of the housekeeper's footsteps; and there was a gentle knock at the door of their boudoir.

"Come in," said Adeline, in a half-stifling voice.

The door opened, and Lydia Hutchinson entered the room.

Lady Ravensworth's countenance was averted towards the fire; and it was not until she heard the door close that she turned towards Lydia, who was in a state of trembling anxiety, mingled with curiosity, as to what might be the disposition of her mistress.

But no pen can describe the astonishment of the young woman, when by that pale but beautiful countenance, which was now suddenly turned towards her, she recognised her whom she had so much reason never to forget.

Staggering towards the mantel for support, and with her eyes fixed almost wildly upon her mistress, she exclaimed, "Miss Enfield! Is it indeed you?"

"I am Lady Ravensworth," was the somewhat haughty answer.

"Oh! now I understand it all!" cried Lydia, an expression of sincere gratitude animating her countenance, while she clasped her hands fervently together: "you have taken compassion on me at length,—you discovered where I was residing,—you sent some friend to engage me as if for herself,—and you were determined to surprise me by this proof of your goodness—this token of your kind remembrance of me!"

"No," returned Adeline: "accident alone has brought you into my service: and you must well understand that I am not over well pleased with the coincidence. In a word, name the sum that will satisfy you for the loss of a good place—and take your departure. You can leave to me the invention of some proper excuse——"

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Lydia; "this cold—heartless—ungrateful reception——"

"Do you recollect to whom you are speaking?" demanded Adeline, the colour mounting to her cheeks.

"Oh! yes,—I know that full well—too well," said Lydia, again clasping her hands, and casting her eyes upwards, as if in appeal to heaven against the ingratitude of the world. "I stand in the presence of one to save whose good fame I sacrificed my own—to shield whom from the finger of scorn and reproach, I allowed myself to be made a victim! Yes, proud lady of Ravensworth—so many years have not elapsed since, in my cold and cheerless garret, in the depth of a winter night, you gave birth——"

"Silence, Lydia!" ejaculated Adeline, her lips quivering, and the colour coming and going on her cheeks with rapid alternations. "Let us not refer to the past. The present——"

"No," interrupted Lydia, in a solemn tone: "you *can* not—you *shall* not deter me from talking of the past. For you, lady, are so highly exalted above myself, that it is almost impossible for you to shape the least—the faintest—the most remote idea of the depth of misery into which I have been plunged. And yet I pant—I long—I feel a burning desire to make you comprehend all I have suffered;—because to my acquaintance with you—to my fatal connexion with you at the seminary—may be traced all the sorrows—the profound, ineffable woes—the degradations—the terrible afflictions that have since marked my career!"

"I will not hear more;—I cannot permit you thus to insult—to upbraid me," faltered Lady Ravensworth, her bosom agitated with the most cruel emotions.

"Oh! I have longed for this opportunity to meet you face to face, and tell you all I have suffered, and all I now feel!" exclaimed Lydia; "and it is not likely that I will abandon so favourable an occasion. No—you have triumphed over me long enough: you have used me as a tool when it suited your convenience—and you spurned me when I had ceased to be useful. Though maintaining your own outward respectability, honour, and good name upon the wreck of mine, you dare to treat me with the blackest ingratitude! Lady Ravensworth, I said that all I have endured was traceable to you! When I first met you at the Kensington seminary, I was pure, artless, innocent:—you were already initiated in the secrets of intrigue—you were even then, at that tender age, a wanton in your heart."

"Lydia—Miss Hutchinson! Oh! my God!" exclaimed Adeline, covering her face with her hands.

"Yes—you were already trembling on the verge of dishonour—you were courting seduction and all its consequences!" continued the unfortunate woman, upbraiding that proud peeress with a remorselessness, a bitterness, and a feeling of delighted vengeance that made her language the more terrible and its effect more overwhelming. "I even remember still—oh! how well I remember—that you were the first who opened my eyes to the existence of female frailty. Yes—I, who went to that school as a teacher, was taught by a pupil! And merciful heavens! what did you teach me? You led me on step by step in the path of duplicity and dishonour: you made me the companion of your own amours; and we became victims to our seducers on the same day!"

"Oh! spare me—spare me!" moaned Adeline. "My God! if we were overheard! I should be lost—ruined—undone!"

"Rest tranquil on that head:—it does not suit my present purposes to betray you—and I will explain my reason shortly. In the meantime," continued Lydia Hutchinson, "I must recall to your recollection all those circumstances which led me to sacrifice myself to save you."

"No—no: I remember everything. Say no more, Lydia," cried Lady Ravensworth. "Tell me what you require—what I can do for you! Will you have money? or——"

"Peace!—silence!" said Lydia, eyeing the patrician lady with a glance of ineffable scorn. "Oh!" she added, almost wildly, "I *have*

sold myself for gold;—but never—never may that occur again; either bodily or morally! Your ladyship declares you remember all that has ever passed between us? Then does your ingratitude become infinitely the more vile and contemptible. For when you lay writhing in the agonies of maternity, I was there,—there in that cold and cheerless garret,—to minister unto you! And when the lifeless form of your babe was discovered concealed amongst my clothes—in my room—and in my box,—I did not turn to the school-mistress and say, '*It is not mine: it is Miss Adeline Enfield's!*'—When, too, I saw that you were so weak, so feeble, and so suffering that the cold night air would kill you, I took your child, and, like a thief, I stole away from the house to sink the corpse in a distant pool. For you had said to me, '*Keep my secret, dearest Lydia: the honour of a noble family depends upon your prudence!*'—My prudence! Oh! no:—the honour of your family depended on the sacrifice of *mine*! And I *did* sacrifice my family to save you;—for to all that I did for you may be traced the broken heart of my poor father and the assassination of my brother by the hand of the duellist!"

"Oh! spare me—spare me!" again exclaimed Lady Ravensworth. "I have been very ungrateful—very unkind; but now, Lydia, I will endeavour to compensate you for all that has passed."

"One being alone can so compensate me, lady," said Miss Hutchinson in a solemn tone; "and that being is God! No human power can give me back my poor father or my much-loved brother: no human agency can obliterate from my mind those infamies and degradations to which I have been subject. What amount of gold can reward me for days of starvation and nights of painful wanderings amidst the creatures of crime, without a place to repose my aching, shivering limbs? And sometimes, amidst the overwhelming crowd of sorrows that so often drove me to the river's bank, or made me pause on the threshold of the chemist's-shop where poison was to be procured,—I saw, from time to time, your name mentioned in the newspapers. Oh! what memories did those occasions recall! On the very day that you were presented at Court, I had not a crust to eat! And twice on that day did I seek the river's brink, whence I turned away again—afraid of changing even the horrible certainties of this life's sufferings for the more appalling uncertainties of another world."

"Lydia—Lydia, you are killing me!" exclaimed Lady Ravensworth. "Pity me—if not for myself, for the sake of the innocent child which I bear in my bosom. Tell me what I can do for you—what you require——"

"My views are soon explained," interrupted Lydia. "I demand permission to remain in the service of your ladyship."

"Oh! no—no: impossible!" said Adeline, in an imploring tone.

"It must be as I say," observed Lydia, coolly.

"Insolent menial!" ejaculated Lady Ravensworth, losing all command over herself. "Leave me—quit this house—go——"

"Do you dare me?" said Miss Hutchinson. "I assured your ladyship ere now that it did not suit my present plans to expose you; because I seek to remain in your service. But, if you essay again to triumph over me—to spurn me from your presence—I will, remorselessly and fearlessly, proclaim the past."

"And who will believe you?" cried Adeline, trembling with mingled alarm and rage: "who will believe you? The whole world will denounce you as an impostress. Nay—more: I will punish you—yes, I will punish you for your insolence! I will declare that you have attempted to extort money from me by means of the most diabolical threats——"

"Think not that I am to be intimidated by your ladyship's miserable subterfuges," interrupted Lydia, who grew if possible more cold and contemptuous in her manner in proportion as the proud patrician became excited and indignant. "Are there no witnesses to speak to collateral faces? Could Cholmondeley and Dunstable prove nothing against you?"

"They would not raise their voices against a noble lady's fame," said Adeline, impatiently.

"They would speak the truth when placed on their oaths in a court of justice," exclaimed Lydia, confidently; "for it is to a court of justice that your ladyship threatens to drag me. And now, proud peeress, I dare you to the public investigation! Throw open the door—summon your domestics—send me to a gaol!—but the day of fair and searching scrutiny must come—and I should await in confidence the reply that a British judge and a British jury would give to the vile calumny of even a lady so highly exalted as yourself!"

"Enough!" cried Adeline, now almost purple with rage, and every vein on her forehead swollen almost to bursting. "I accept your challenge—for I well know that I can rely upon the honour of Lord Dunstable and Colonel Cholmondeley. Yes—yes: they would sooner perjure themselves than attaint the honour of a peeress!"

"There is one other consideration, then," said Lydia, still completely unruffled: "and perhaps the ingenuity of your ladyship will devise a means of frustrating that test also."

"To what do you allude?" demanded Adeline.

"I mean that when you summon your domestics to drag me to a gaol on a charge of extortion," replied Lydia, contemptuously, "that moment do I proclaim the history of the past! Then will medical experience speedily prove whether Lady Ravensworth now bears *her first child* in her bosom!"

Adeline uttered a faint shriek, and fell back upon the sofa, overwhelmed by this dread menace.

That shriek was accompanied by a low moan that seemed to come from the passage outside.

Lydia hastened towards the door; but ere she had half crossed the room, it was thrown violently open, and Lord Ravensworth entered the boudoir.

"My husband!" screamed Adeline, in a frantic tone: then, flinging herself on her knees before him, she cried, "Mercy! mercy!"

CHAPTER CCVII.

THE HUSBAND, THE WIFE, AND THE UNFORTUNATE WOMAN.

"Mercy! mercy!" were the words that burst from the lips of the affrighted lady, ere she paused to reflect whether the preceding conversation had been overheard or not.

"Rise," said Lord Ravensworth, his quivering lip, flashing eye, hectic cheek, heaving chest, and clenched hand denoting a more powerful excitement than he had experienced for a long, long time. "Rise, madam: this is a subject which cannot be disposed of in passionate ejaculations;—it requires a calmer deliberation—for the honour of two noble families is now at stake!"

"Then you know all!" cried Adeline, in an agonising tone, as she embraced her husband's knees.

"Yes—I overheard enough to enable me to comprehend the whole truth," returned the nobleman, who for the time being seemed to have altogether thrown off the apathetic lethargy which had characterised him lately with such few intermissions.

Then, as he was yet speaking, he forcibly raised his wife from her suppliant position, and placed her upon the ottoman.

Taking a chair near her, he pointed to another, and, glancing towards Lydia, said in a tone rather mournful than angry, "Young woman, be seated."

Lydia obeyed mechanically; for she herself was alarmed at the serious turn which the affair had taken.

"Adeline," said the nobleman, after a short pause, during which he evidently endeavoured to compose his feelings as much as possible, "before we enter upon this sad topic, I must in justice to myself observe that I did not seek your chamber to play the eaves-dropper. I felt unwell in the drawing-room ere now, and I retired to my own cabinet to solace myself in the usual manner with the meerschaum. But it struck me that I *had* been better during all the early part of the morning than for some weeks past; and, after a long struggle with myself, I resolved to renounce the pipe. On my return to the drawing-room, I heard that you were suddenly indisposed; and I came hither to inquire after you. But at the moment I reached your door, I overheard words which struck me as with a thunderbolt. Then I listened—and overheard much—too much!"

"And now you hate—you despise me!" cried Adeline, wildly: "you will thrust me forth from your dwelling—you will cover me with shame! No—no," she added hysterically, "death—death before such a fate!"

"Calm yourself, Adeline," said Lord Ravensworth, who evidently suppressed his own feelings with great difficulty: "I before observed that there is the honour of *two* families to preserve—that of Rossville and of Ravensworth. Give me your Bible."

"My Bible!" exclaimed Adeline, in astonishment mingled with alarm.

"Yes—your Bible. Where is it?"

"There—there!" said Adeline in a faint tone—for she was at a loss to divine the meaning or intention of her husband; and that mysterious uncertainty filled her with vague fears.

Lydia rose, and taking the Bible from a small book-case to which Lady Ravensworth pointed, handed it to the nobleman.

"Will you swear, Adeline," he said, in a solemn and impressive tone,—"will you swear upon this volume which contains the Word of God, that the child you now bear in your bosom is mine, and that since your marriage you have never forgotten the fidelity due to a husband? Will you swear this, Adeline?"

"I will—I will!" she exclaimed, in almost a joyful tone, as if she were satisfied that her conjugal faith should be put to such a test.

"Swear, then," said Lord Ravensworth; "and invoke God to cast you dead—dead this minute at my feet—if you swear falsely."

"I do—I do!" cried Lady Ravensworth: then, taking the holy volume in her hand, she said in a calmer and more measured tone, "I swear, as I hope for future salvation, that I have never been unfaithful, even in thought, to my marriage vow, and that the child I bear in my bosom is my husband's. This I swear by every thing sacred and holy; and if I have sworn falsely, may the great God cast me dead at your feet."

She then kissed the book.

There was a solemn pause:—Lady Ravensworth was now perhaps the most composed of the three, for she saw that her husband was satisfied in all that concerned his own honour since the day he had led her to the altar.

As for Lydia—she was overawed and even alarmed at that imposing ceremony of a husband administering an oath to his wife; and Lord Ravensworth remained for some moments absorbed in deep thought.

"Yes," he suddenly exclaimed, as if continuing aloud the thread of his silent thoughts,—"the honour of two families must be preserved! And, after all,—perhaps I am rightly served! A man of my years should have sought a partner of a fitting age; but it is the fault—the error—the curse of elderly men to believe that their rank and wealth warrant them in seeking some young girl who may thus become as it were a victim. Then mothers take advantage of that longing to obtain a wife of comparatively tender years; and those worldly-minded parents——"

"My lord—my lord, spare my feelings!" ejaculated Adeline, now painfully excited. "My mother knew not of her daughter's frailty

——"

"Well—enough on that head!" said Lord Ravensworth, somewhat impatiently. "The past cannot be recalled: let us secure the honour of the future. You have erred in your girlhood, Adeline! and there," he added, indicating Lydia, "is one who knows that sad secret. You have been ungrateful to her—by *her* accusations and *your* acknowledgment; and she holds you in her power. Not *you* alone:—but she holds *your* family and *mine*—for an exposure would create a scandal that must redound upon us all!"

"I have no wish to avail myself of the possession of that secret for such an object," said Lydia. "I have two motives for desiring to remain at least a year in her ladyship's service."

"Never!" cried Adeline, emphatically. "It is you who have made all this mischief!"

"Silence, Adeline," said Lord Ravensworth, sternly; then, turning towards Lydia, he added, "Young woman, proceed—and speak frankly."

"I stated that I had two objects to serve in being anxious to remain in her ladyship's service for one year," continued Lydia. "In the first place, I have been so unfortunate—so very, very miserable, that I wish to earn my livelihood by servitude; and it is my hope to remain here until her ladyship can conscientiously give me such a character as will ensure me a good situation elsewhere."

"That is naturally understood," observed Lord Ravensworth. "What is your second motive?"

"My second motive!" repeated Lydia, with the least accent of bitterness: "oh! that I will explain to her ladyship in private—and she will be satisfied!"

"Now listen to me," said the nobleman. "Lady Ravensworth dislikes the idea that you should remain here. I will give you the means of settling yourself comfortably for life, if you will leave forthwith, and promise solemnly to preserve that fatal secret which you possess."

"My lord," answered Lydia, respectfully but firmly, "I return you my most sincere thanks for that bounteous offer which I am compelled to decline. Were I to accept your lordship's conditions, my aims would not be answered. In respect to my first object, I have determined to earn a character that may to some extent retrieve the past;—for, as your lordship must have gathered from the conversation which you overheard, I have been unfortunate—very unfortunate!"

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Adeline; "how can I retain you in my service? You have belonged to a class—oh! no—it is impossible—impossible!"

"I do not wish to insult your feelings, young woman," said Lord Ravensworth; "especially since you manifest so praiseworthy a desire to retrieve your character. But you must perceive the impossibility, as her ladyship observes, of retaining you in our service. You might be known—recognised——"

"I understand your lordship," interrupted Lydia, bitterly; "I might be recognised as an unhappy creature who had once earned a livelihood by parading the public streets. That is scarcely probable:—I am much changed since then. The kindness of an excellent lady has enabled me to recruit my strength and to recover a healthy appearance. Yes—I must be altered; for your lordship does not perceive in me the poor miserable starving wretch who some few months since accosted her ladyship in Saint James's Street."

"Ah! I recollect," exclaimed the nobleman, as the incident flashed to his mind. "I only observed you for a moment on that occasion; but still—so miserable was your appearance—it made an impression on my mind. Yes—you are indeed changed! Nevertheless, those who saw you in an unhappy career, before you became so reduced as you were on the occasion which you have mentioned, might recognise you. And—pardon my frankness, young woman; but the subject admits not of the measurement of words—what would be thought of me—of my wife—of all the other members of my household——"

"If I were seen in your establishment, your lordship would add," exclaimed Lydia. "I admit the truth of all your lordship states: still my wish to remain a member of that establishment is unchanged. For—as your lordship may have ere now gathered from our conversation—it was her ladyship who first placed me in those paths which led to my ruin; and it must be her ladyship who shall aid me in earning an honourable character once more."

"But this punishment is too severe!" exclaimed Adeline, almost wringing her hands; for she perceived how completely the honour of two families was in Lydia's power.

"Consider, I implore you, the position of my wife," said the nobleman: "in a few weeks she will become a mother!"

"My lord, her ladyship never had any consideration for me, from the first moment that I ceased to be useful to her," returned Lydia, with inexorable firmness; "and I cannot consent to sacrifice what I consider to be my own interests to her ladyship's wishes now."

Then Lydia Hutchinson rose, as if to intimate that her determination was unchangeable; and that obscure girl was enabled to dictate her own terms to the noble peer and the proud peeress.

"It must be so, then—it must be so," said Lord Ravensworth, with a vexation of manner which he could not conceal. "You shall have an apartment in my establishment and handsome wages:—all I exact is that you do not force your attentions on her ladyship save when she demands them."

"If I remain here, it must be in the capacity of her ladyship's principal attendant," returned Lydia: "otherwise I could not fairly earn a good character in the eyes of the other dependants of your lordship."

"Perdition! young woman," exclaimed the nobleman; "you demand too much!"

"More than I will ever concede," added Lady Ravensworth, unable to restrain a glance of malignity and desperate hate towards Lydia Hutchinson.

"Then your lordship will permit me to take my departure," said she, calmly; and she moved towards the door.

"My God! she will reveal every thing!" almost shrieked Lady Ravensworth.

"Yes—every thing," said Lydia, returning the look which Adeline had cast on her a few moments before.

"Stay, young woman—this may not be!" ejaculated Lord Ravensworth. "You exercise your power with a fearful despotism."

"The world has been a fearful despot towards me, my lord," was the firm but calm reply.

"And with your tyranny in this respect you will kill my wife—kill my yet unborn child!" exclaimed the nobleman, rising from his seat and pacing the room in a state of desperate excitement. "But the honour of the Rossvilles and the Ravensworths must be preserved—at any sacrifice—at any risk!—Yes—though you bring misery into this house, here must you remain—since such is your inflexible

will. Were an exposure to take place, the consequences—my God! would be awful—crushing! The finger of ridicule and scorn would point at me—the elderly man who espoused the young and beautiful girl, and who was so proud that he had won her for a wife! And then—should the child of which she is so soon to become a mother, prove a son—although the law would recognise him as the heir to my name and fortune, yet the scandalous world would throw doubts, perhaps, on his legitimacy. Ah! the thought is maddening! And my brother—my brother too——"

Lord Ravensworth checked himself in the midst of those musings, into the audible expression of which the agitation of his mind had hurried him:—he checked himself, for the convulsive sobs which came from his wife's lips suddenly reminded him that every word he was uttering pierced like a dagger into her soul.

"Oh! God have mercy upon me!" she exclaimed, in a voice scarcely audible through the convulsions of her grief: "how dearly—dearly am I now paying for the errors of my youth!"

"Does that sight not move you, woman?" muttered the nobleman between his grinding teeth, as he accosted Lydia, and pointed to the lamentable condition of his wife.

"My lord, I lost all by serving the interests of her who is now Lady Ravensworth; and it is time that I should think only of my own."

This reply was given with a frigid—stern—and inexorable calmness, that struck despair to the heart of the unhappy nobleman and his still more wretched wife.

"Then be it all as you say—be it all as you wish, despotic woman!" cried Lord Ravensworth. "Remain here—command us all—drive us to despair—for our honour is unhappily in your remorseless hands."

With these words, the nobleman rushed from the room in a state bordering on distraction.

A few minutes of profound silence elapsed.

Lydia remained standing near the mantel, gazing with joyful triumph on Adeline, whose head was buried in her hands, and whose bosom gave vent to convulsive sobs.

Suddenly Lady Ravensworth looked up, and gazed wildly around her.

"He is gone—and you are still there!" she said, in a low and hoarse voice. "Now we are alone together—and doubtless I am to look upon you as one determined to drive me to despair. What other motive had you for insisting upon remaining here?"

"Lady, I will now explain myself," returned Lydia, speaking slowly and solemnly. "It pierced me to the heart to cause so much grief to that good nobleman, of whom you are so utterly unworthy; but for you I have no kind consideration—no mercy. Adeline, I hate you—I loathe you—I detest you!"

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Lady Ravensworth: "and you are to be constantly about my person!"

"Yes: and my second motive for remaining here to enjoy that privilege," continued Lydia, bitterly, "is *vengeance*!"

"Vengeance!" repeated Adeline, recoiling as it were from the terrible word, and clasping her hands franticly together.

"Vengeance—vengeance!" continued Lydia Hutchinson. "Before the rest of the world I shall appear the humble and respectful dependant—yes, even in the presence of your husband. But when alone with you, I shall prove a very demon, whose weapons are galling reproaches, ignominies, insults, and indignities."

"Oh! this is terrible!" cried Adeline, as if her senses were leaving her. "You cannot be such a fiend."

"I can—I will!" returned Lydia. "Have I not undergone enough to make me so? And all was occasioned by *you*! When I was your wretched tool, you promised me the affection of a sister; and how did you fulfil your pledge? You came to me at a house where I was a governess, and whence I was anxious to remove from the importunities of the master; and there you threw off the mask. I then saw the hollowness of your soul. My father died of a broken heart, and my brother perished in a duel, in consequence of my iniquity. But who had made me criminal? *You!* I called upon you at Rossville House at a time when a little sympathy on your part might have still saved me; for I should have felt that I had *one friend* still left. But you scorned me—you even menaced me; and I then warned you that I was absolved from all motives of secrecy on your account. Your black ingratitude drove me to despair; and I immediately afterwards fell to the lowest grade in the social sphere—that of a prostitute! Yes—for I need use no nice language with you. All the miseries I endured in my wretched career I charge upon your head. And ere now you menaced me again: you threatened to accuse me falsely of a crime that would render me amenable to the criminal tribunals of the country. It only required *that* to fill the cup of your base ingratitude to the very brim. And think you that your malignant—your spiteful glances,—your looks of bitter, burning hate,—were lost upon me? No—you would doubtless assassinate me, if you dared! Oh! I have long detested you—long loathed your very name! But, never—never, until we met in this room ere now, did I believe that my hatred against you was so virulent as it is. And never—never until this hour did I appreciate the sweets of vengeance. At present I can revel in those feelings:—I can wreak upon you—and I *will*—that revenge which my own miseries and the death of those whom I held dear have excited in my heart! Your ladyship now knows the terms of our connexion, for one year; and at the expiration of that period you will be glad—Oh! too glad to rid yourself of me by giving me a character that will never fail to procure for me a place in future."

With these words Lydia Hutchinson left the room.

Lady Ravensworth sank back in convulsions of anguish upon the ottoman.

And Lord Ravensworth,—who throughout the morning had experienced so much lightness of heart and mental calmness that he resolved to wrestle in future with that apathy and gloom which drove him to his pipe,—had shut himself up in his private cabinet, to seek solace once more in the fatal attractions of the oriental tobacco.

Thus had the presence of Lydia Hutchinson,—once despised, scorned, and trampled on,—brought desolation and misery into that lordly dwelling.

O Adeline, Adeline! thou wast now taught a bitter lesson illustrative of the terrible consequences of ingratitude!

The aristocracy conceives that it may insult the democracy with impunity. The high-born and the wealthy never stop to consider, when they put an affront upon the lowly and the poor, whether a day of retribution may not sooner or later come. The peer cannot see the necessity of conciliating the peasant: the daughter of the nobility knows not the use of making a friend of the daughter of the people.

But the meanest thing that crawls upon the earth may some day be in a position to avenge the injuries it has received from a

powerful oppressor; and the mightiest lord or the noblest lady may be placed in that situation when even the friendship of the humblest son or the most obscure daughter of industry would be welcome as the drop of water to the lost wanderer of the desert.

Yes! Most solemnly do I proclaim to you, O suffering millions of these islands, that ye shall not always languish beneath the yoke of your oppressors! Individually ye shall each see the day when your tyrant shall crouch at your feet; and as a mass ye shall triumph over that proud oligarchy which now grinds you to the dust!

That day—that great day cannot be far distant; and then shall ye rise—not to wreak a savage vengeance on those who have so long coerced you, but to prove to them that ye know how to exercise a mercy which they never manifested towards you;—ye shall rise, not to convulse the State with a disastrous civil war, nor to hurry the nation on to the deplorable catastrophe of social anarchy, confusion, and bloodshed;—but ye shall rise to vindicate usurped rights, and to recover delegated and misused power, that ye may triumphantly assert the aristocracy of mind, and the aristocracy of virtue!

CHAPTER CCVIII.

THE RESURRECTION MAN'S HOUSE IN GLOBE TOWN.

Return we to the house of the Resurrection Man in Globe Town,—that house where we have already seen such diabolical mischief concocted, and much of which was actually perpetrated,—that house where the gloomy subterraneans had echoed to the moans of Viola Chichester!

It was about seven o'clock in the evening, when the Resurrection Man suddenly emerged from that very same cell in which Viola had once been confined.

He held a lantern in his hand; and the feeble rays glanced upon a countenance convulsed and distorted with deep, malignant rage.

On the threshold of the dungeon he paused for a moment; and turning towards the interior of that living tomb, he growled in a savage tone, "By all the powers of hell! I'll find means to cure you of this obstinacy."

A hoarse and stifled moan was the only answer.

"Then try another night of it!" exclaimed the Resurrection Man.

And he closed the door violently.

The heavy bolt grated upon the ears of another victim to the remorseless cruelty of this fiend-like miscreant!

Muttering maledictions to himself, the Resurrection Man slowly left the subterranean, and extinguishing his lantern, secured the doors of the lower part of his dwelling.

As he was about to ascend the steep staircase leading to the upper floor, a person in the street called after him in a low and tremulous tone, "Mr. Tidkins! Mr. Tidkins! is that you?"

"Rather so," replied the Resurrection Man, who had immediately recognised the voice; "walk up, Mr. Tomlinson."

"I—I—if you have no objection," stammered the stock-broker, who evidently had some cause of alarm, "I would much prefer—that is, I should like to speak to you down here; because my time is precious—and——"

"And you are afraid to trust yourself with me," added the Resurrection Man, gruffly. "Why, what an infernal fool you must be! I don't suppose that you've come with your pockets full of gold: and, if you haven't, you certainly ain't worth robbing and murdering. So, walk up, I say—and no more of this gammon. Shut the door, and bolt it after you."

The stock-broker did not like to offer any farther objection, so deep was his dread of irritating a man of whom he entertained a vague and horrible apprehension.

He accordingly closed the door, and followed Tidkins up the precipitate steps to the back room on the first floor: for the Resurrection Man had converted this one into his parlour, to avoid the necessity of having a light in the front chamber, the windows of which looked upon the street—the miscreant being compelled to adopt as many precautions as possible to prevent his numerous enemies from discovering a trace of his whereabouts.

"Sit down, and don't be afraid, Mr. Tomlinson," said Tidkins. "There, sir—draw near the fire; and here's brandy, rum, or gin, if you like to take any thing."

"Nothing, I thank you," faltered the stock-broker, casting a hurried glance of alarm around him as he sank upon a chair. "You wrote to desire me to call this evening—at seven o'clock—or I might repent——"

"Yes—and so you would repent the consequences," added the Resurrection Man. "But, as you have come, it is all right. I dare say you thought I had forgotten you: you were deceived, you see; for I never lose sight of old friends. When I want to use them, I am sure to find them out again."

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Tidkins?" asked the stock-broker, in a tremulous tone; for he felt a desperate alarm lest the Resurrection Man should have discovered *the one secret* which he had taken so much pains to conceal—the secret of the abode of old Michael Martin.

"I have but two wants in the world at any time," answered the Resurrection Man, lighting his pipe: "money most often—vengeance now and then. But it is money that I want of you."

"Money—money!" murmured Tomlinson: "do you think I am made of money? I have had hard struggles—losses—expenses——"

"I dare say you have," observed the Resurrection Man, drily. "I do not mean to be hard upon you; but something I must have. You see, I have got a little amount put by—how obtained is neither here nor there; and I want to scrape together as much as I can, so that in a few months, when I have settled the different matters I have on hand, I may leave England for America, or some such place; and then you will never hear of me any more."

"That will be a great blessing," thought Tomlinson; but he did not say so.

"And under all circumstances, you must help me to make up the sum I want," added the Resurrection Man.

"You are too hard upon me, Mr. Tidkins," said Tomlinson. "If I had employed you on any business, it would be different: but——"

"But if you have a secret that I have found out, and that's worth keeping?" exclaimed Tidkins, significantly.

"Oh! then it is as I feared!" murmured Tomlinson, pressing his feverish hand to his forehead, through which a sudden pain seemed to shoot, producing a sensation as of tightness on the brain. "Surely this man must be Satan himself, who comes at intervals to goad the wicked to desperation for their sins!"

"What's that you say about Satan?" asked Tidkins.

"Nothing—nothing," replied the stock-broker, hastily: "I was only thinking to myself that Satan took a delight in persecuting me."

"I know nothing about that," observed the Resurrection Man. "All I care for is the cash that you will have the goodness to bring me down to-morrow evening at this same hour."

A sudden idea struck Tomlinson. Was the Resurrection Man really acquainted with Martin's present place of abode? or was he endeavouring to extort money merely upon the strength of his knowledge, some time previously obtained (as our readers will remember), that the old clerk, though generally believed to have absconded, had actually remained concealed in London?

"But wherefore should you press me in this way?" said the stock-broker. "Did I not satisfy your demands on a former occasion?"

"And have I not kept my pledge?" cried Tidkins. "Has a word ever escaped my lips to do you an injury? Why, there is still a reward of three thousand pounds to be got——"

"No—no," interrupted Tomlinson; "you are wrong. My affairs are all wound up in respect to the bank—and a dividend has been paid."

"A precious small one, I'll be bound," observed Tidkins. "However,—reward or no reward,—it wouldn't place you in a very comfortable situation if I was to take a policeman with me, and just call at a particular house in Thomas Street, where an old gentleman named Nelson——"

"Enough!" cried Tomlinson: "I see you know all. My God! when shall I be released from this peril? when shall I know a moment's comfort?"

"When you've brought me down a couple of hundred pounds to-morrow night," answered the Resurrection Man, knocking out the ashes from his pipe. "And, then—if you like to make it worth my while—I tell you what I'll do for you."

"What?" asked the stock-broker, gasping for breath.

"I'll entice the old fellow down here, and either lock him up in one of my cells, or else settle his hash in such a way that he shall only be fit to sell to the surgeons," returned the Resurrection Man, fixing his snake-like eyes on the stock-broker's countenance, as if to ascertain the precise impression which this proposal made.

"Monster!" ejaculated Tomlinson, shrinking from the bare idea of such an atrocity—for he was more or less attached to Michael Martin, in consequence of the immense sacrifice which the old man had made on his account: "no—never will I imbrue my hands with blood, nor suborn another to play the assassin's part for me! To-morrow evening you shall receive the amount you demand; and heaven grant that all connexion between us may cease."

"Be it so," observed the Resurrection Man, coolly, as he brewed himself a glass of grog.

"You have nothing more to say to me?" asked Tomlinson, rising to depart.

The reply was a negative; and the stock-broker hurried away from a dwelling where crime seemed to proclaim its presence trumpet-tongued,—where every look that eyes shot forth, and every word that lips uttered, and every thought that brains conceived—all, all appeared to feel the noxious atmosphere of blackest turpitude.

In a house where a person has lately died, every thing seems to exhale a sickly odour as of a corpse; and if you touch the wall with your finger, you feel a clammy and fetid moisture which makes your blood run cold within you. So was it with the dwelling of the Resurrection Man: the taint of crime impregnated the very atmosphere; and Tomlinson shook himself when he gained the open air, as if he could thus throw off some pestilential influence which had seized hold of him.

Tomlinson had not left the house many minutes, when a low, but peculiar knock at the door brought the Resurrection Man down to answer the summons.

"Who is it?" he demanded, ere he opened.

"Me," growled a voice which Tidkins immediately recognised to be that of the Lully Prig.

This individual was forthwith admitted; and when the two villains were seated by the fire in the back room, the Resurrection Man asked "What news?"

"Just as you wished," was the reply. "I called at the chandlery shop in Pitfield Street, Hoxton, and axed for a nounce of bakker. The woman served me; and I soon see that she was alone. Then says I, '*If so be no one's within 'earing, I want a word with you*.'—She looked frightened, but said nothing wotsomever.—'*All I have to tell you is just this*,' says I: '*Tony Tidkins knows where you be and all about you. But he says, says he, that if you take no notice of him in case you sees him, and says nothing to nobody in case you 'ears of him, he'll leave you alone.*'—Lor! how she did turn pale and tremble when I mentioned your name; and she seemed so glad when I told her that you wouldn't do her no harm, if so be she didn't try to do you none.—'*If he won't come near me, I'll never even breathe his name*,' she says.—'*And you'll never utter a word about the crib in Globe Town*,' says I.—'*Never, never*,' says she.—'*Well, then*,' says I, '*all will go on well; and you can sleep as sound in your bed as if there wasn't such a man as Tony Tidkins in the world. But if so be you peaches, or says a word*,' says I, '*that may get Tony into trouble, he's got plenty of friends as will awenge him, and the fust is me*.'—So she swore eyes and limbs, she'd keep all close; and in that way I left her."

"So far, so good," observed the Resurrection Man. "She's frightened, and will keep a close tongue. That's all I want. When I have finished the different things I have in hand, and don't care about staying in London any longer, I will punish her for what she did to me. But my revenge will keep for the present. Now, what about Crankey Jem?"

"He still lives in the court in Drury Lane, and stays at home all day," answered the Lully Prig. "But at night he goes out for some hours, and I can't find out where. For three evenin's follering I watched him; and every time I missed him at last somehow or another."

"Which way did he go?" demanded the Resurrection Man.

"Different ways—but always up one street and down another—now here, then there, as if he hadn't no partickler motive, but merely went out a walkin' for the fun of it."

"I tell you what it is, Lully," said the Resurrection Man, gloomily, "you're not so wide awake as I am. That fellow has some object in wandering about zigzag and crosswise in that manner. He has got a scent of me; and he's following it up. But at the same time he's afraid that I may have a scent of him; and so he dodges about. It's as clear as day-light—'cause it's just what I should do."

"And you're a downy cove enough, Tony," observed the Lully Prig; "although I do think arter all you've let that damned parley-woo French feller do us about them Bank notes."

"It's very strange the Buffer doesn't return," said the Resurrection Man. "I'd take my davy that he wouldn't chouse us out of our reglars. But time will show. Now look here, Lully,—as you've made that same remark a dozen times since the thing took place,—and just see how the matter stood. We got four thousand pounds clear——"

"Yes—a thousand a-piece," said the Lully Prig, assentingly: "and a precious jolly catch it was."

"Well," continued the Resurrection Man, "the Bank notes were of no more use to us than so much waste paper, because Greenwood was sure to stop them the moment he got back to London: at least I should think so. Now when that French fellow Lafleur offered to let you, me, the Buffer, and Long Bob share the gold, and he would go to France to smash the notes at the money-changer's that he told us about in Paris, and then take his thousand beyond his fifth share of the produce of the notes, it was the best thing we could do to accept his proposal—particularly as he said that any one of us might go with him."

"But if he sticks to the whole sixteen thousand pounds, what a deuced good pull he has over us," observed the Lully Prig.

"So he has," said the Resurrection Man; "and again I tell you that if he hadn't offered to go to France and change the notes, we must have destroyed them in the very chalk-pit where we divided the swag. They were no use to us—but a great danger. It was better to trust to the chance of Lafleur doing the thing that's right; and if he don't, the Buffer will drop down on him, in spite of all the guilloteens[32] and Johnny-darmies[33] in France."

"Well, we won't quarrel about it, Tony," said the Lully Prig. "You and the Buffer let me in for a good thing; and I ought not to grumble. You see, I've follered your advice, and kept the blunt in a safe place, without wasting it as Long Bob is doing. He's never been sober since the thing took place."

"Where is he now?" asked the Resurrection Man.

"Oh! he's knocking about at all the flash cribs, spending his tin as fast as he can," answered the Lully Prig.

"Don't let him know of this place of mine for the world," said Tidkins. "A drunken chap like that isn't to be trusted in any shape. I only hope he won't wag his tongue too free about the business that put all the money into his pocket."

"Not he!" cried the Lully Prig: "he's as close as the door of Newgate about them kind of things, even when he's as drunk as a pig. But I don't want to have nothing more to do with him; I'll stick to you and the Buffer; and when you've settled all the things you say you have in hand, we'll be off to Americky."

"So we will, Lully. But this fellow Crankey Jem annoys me. You must go on watching him. Or p'rhaps it would be better to get the Bully Grand to set some of his Forty Thieves after him?" added the Resurrection Man.

"No—no," cried the Lully Prig, whose pride was somewhat hurt at this suggestion, which seemed to cast a doubt upon his own skill and ability in performing the service required: "leave him in my hands, and I'll find out what dodge he's upon sooner or later."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when a knock at the front door fell on the ears of the two villains.

The Resurrection Man descended; and, to the usual inquiry ere the door was opened, the well-known voice of the Buffer answered, "It is me."

"Well—what luck?" demanded the Resurrection Man, hastily—his avarice prompting the question even before his accomplice in iniquity had scarcely time to utter a reply to the first query.

"Sold—regularly sold—done brown!" returned the Buffer, closing and bolting the door behind him.

"Damnation!" cried the Resurrection Man, who, now that the faint hope of obtaining a further share of the plunder of Greenwood's tin-case was annihilated, manifested a fiercer rage than would have been expected after his cool reasoning with the Lully Prig upon the special point.

"You may well swear, Tony," said the Buffer, sulkily, as he ascended the stairs; "for we never was so completely done in all our lives. That snivelling Mounseer was one too many for us."

"Ah! I see how it is," observed the Lully Prig, when the two men entered the room where he had remained; "and I can't say it's more than I expected. But how did he do it?"

"Why, he gave me the slip at last," answered the Buffer, pouring himself out half a tumbler of raw spirit, which he drank without winking, just as if it were so much water. "You see, he kept me humbugging about in Paris week after week, always saying that it wasn't prudent to begin smashing the notes yet awhile; and I stuck to him like a leech. I shan't make a long story on it now—I'm too vexed: all I'll tell you at present is that four days ago he gave me the slip; and so I twigged that it was all gammon. He'd done us brown—that was wery clear;—and so I come back."

We shall leave the three villains to discuss this disappointment, together with divers other matters interesting to themselves, and continue the thread of our narrative in another quarter.

It is, however, as well to observe that all these comings and goings at the house of the Resurrection Man were watched by an individual, who for several nights had been lurking about that neighbourhood for the purpose, but who had exercised so much caution that he was never perceived by any one of the gang.

This person was Crankey Jem.

32. Guillotines.
33. Gendarmes.

CHAPTER CCIX.

ALDERMAN SNIFF.—TOMLINSON AND GREENWOOD.

It was eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the day following the incidents just related.

The scene is Mr. Tomlinson's office in Tokenhouse Yard.

The stock-broker was seated at his desk. His manner was nervous, and his countenance expressive of anxiety: he had, indeed, passed a sleepless night—for he saw in the conduct of the Resurrection Man the renewal of a system of extortion which was not likely to cease so long as there was a secret to be hushed up.

The careful aspect of the stock-broker was not, however, noticed by Mr. Alderman Sniff, who was lounging against the mantel, with his back to the fire, and expatiating on his own success in life—a favourite subject with this civic functionary, who considered "success" to be nothing more nor less than the accumulation of money from a variety of schemes and representations so nearly allied to downright swindling, that it was impossible to say what a jury would have thought of them had they come under the notice of a criminal tribunal.

"But how have you managed to do it all?" asked Tomlinson, by way of saying something—although his thoughts were far removed from the topic of Mr. Alderman Sniff's discourse.

"You see I began life with plenty of money," returned the Alderman: "I mean I had a decent fortune at the death of my father, which took place when I was about two-and-twenty. But that soon went; and I was glad to accept an offer to go out to India. On my arrival at Madras I was inducted into a situation as clerk in a mercantile establishment; and there I was making some little money, when I was foolish enough to issue a prospectus for the '*General Boa-Constrictor Killing and Wild Beast Extirpation Joint-Stock Company*,'—a project which was not so well relished as I could have wished. My employers discharged me; and, deeply disgusted with the ignorance of the English settlers and the natives, who could not understand the magnitude of my designs, I came back to England. My trip to India was, however, very useful to me; for, on my return to this country, I lived splendidly on the Deccan Prize Money for four years."

"Lived on the Deccan Prize Money!" exclaimed Tomlinson: "why—what claim had you to any of it?"

"None," replied Mr. Sniff; "I never was in the Deccan in my life. But I declared that I had claims to I can't remember how many lacs of rupees; and it was very easy to obtain loans from friends and get bills cashed on the strength of the assertion. Of course this had an end: the settlement of the Deccan Prize Money affairs was interminable; but the facility for procuring cash on the strength of it was not equally lasting. However,—as I just now observed,—I lived comfortably on my alleged claims for four years; and then I started the '*Universal Poor Man's Corn-Plaster and Blister Gratuitous Distribution Society*.' I got several philanthropic and worthy men to join me in this laudable undertaking: we took splendid offices in King Street, Cheapside; and the enterprise progressed wonderfully. How well I remember our first annual meeting at Exeter Hall! The great room was crowded to excess. I was the Secretary, and it was my duty to read the *Report* of the Committee. That document had been drawn up in most pathetic language by some poor devil of an author whom I employed for the purpose; and it produced a wonderful effect. It was really quite touching to see how the ladies—poor dear creatures!—wept tears of the most refreshing philanthropy, when I enumerated the blessings which this Society had conferred upon vast numbers of individuals. Nine thousand six hundred and sixty-seven Corn-Plasters and eleven thousand two hundred and fourteen Blisters had been distributed gratuitously, during the year, to as many poor suffering creatures, who had all been thereby cured of corns previously deemed inveterate, and of chest-complaints that until then had received no medical attention. The *Report* dwelt upon the gratitude of thousands of poor families for the relief thus dispensed, and congratulated the members of the Society on the claims they possessed to the applause of the whole Christian world. Subscriptions rained in upon me in perfect torrents; and there was not a tearless eye throughout that vast hall."

"How was it that so excellent an institution became extinct?" asked Tomlinson, awaking from his reverie when the Alderman paused.

"I really can scarce tell you," was the reply. "Whether it was that the public thought there could not possibly be any more corns to cure or pulmonary complaints to heal,—or whether it was in consequence of a proposition which I made, in an unlucky hour, to extend the benefits of the Society to the poor savages in the islands of the Pacific,—I can't say: it is, however, certain that the subscribers were very 'backward in coming forward' at the third annual meeting; and so the institution dwindled into nothing. I had, nevertheless, saved some little money; and I was not long idle. My next spec. was '*The Metropolitan Poor Family's Sunday-Dinner Gratuitous Baking Association*.' You perceive that I am fond of dealing in humane and philanthropic enterprises. My idea was to establish numerous baking-houses all over London, and to cook the poor man's Sunday joint and potatoes for him, the Society reserving to itself the dripping, which being sold, and the profits added to the voluntary subscriptions received from the charitable, would support these most useful institutions. At the end of a year, however, I was compelled to dissolve the Association, after having gone to the expense of building no less than sixty enormous ovens in as many different parts of London."

"How came that project to fail," asked Tomlinson, "when it was calculated to benefit so many poor families?"

"Simply because so few of those poor families ever had any Sunday dinners to cook at all," replied Alderman Sniff. "Nevertheless, the subscriptions which were received paid all the outlay, and remunerated me for my trouble. I therefore met with some little encouragement in all I did for the benefit of my fellow-creatures; and, more than *that*," added the philanthropist, slapping his left breast," I enjoyed the approval, Mr. Tomlinson, of my conscience."

The stock-broker sighed:—not that he envied any inward feelings which Mr. Alderman Sniff could have experienced as the results of the speculations referred to; but the thoughts occasioned by the mere mention of the word "Conscience" aroused painful emotions in the breast of James Tomlinson.

"While I was thus engaged in the behoof of the poorer classes of the community," continued Alderman Sniff, "I was gaining influence with my fellow citizens. I became the Treasurer of no end of charitable institutions, was elected Churchwarden of my parish, and soon became Deputy of the Ward. Fortunately my parish, as you well know, is governed by a Select Vestry—properly consisting of three individuals; but as two of the last-elected trio have died, and as I have ever stedfastly and successfully opposed the nomination of other parishioners to replace the deceased, we have now a Select Vestry of *One*. This gentleman is my most intimate friend; and it would do your heart good to see the parochial solemnity and official dignity with which he annually proposes me to himself as a candidate for the place of Churchwarden, and then proceeds to second the nomination, put the question, lift up his hand, and declare me duly elected *without a dissentient voice*. In due time I was chosen Alderman of the Ward; and every thing has gone well with me. I have been eminently successful. My '*British Marble Company*' was a glorious hit, as you well know."

"Yes—a glorious hit for you," said Tomlinson, with a faint smile. "You yourself were Managing Director, and you sold your quarry—or rather your supposed quarry—*to* yourself;—you were Auditor and Secretary, and consequently examined and passed your own accounts;—you were also the Treasurer, and paid yourself. You had the best of it in every way."

"Come, Mr. Tomlinson," exclaimed Sniff, chuckling audibly, "I allowed you to reap a decent profit on the shares which you sold; so you need not complain."

"Oh! I do not complain," observed the stock-broker. "But how do you get on with the accounts of your parish?"

"Mr. Tomlinson," said the Alderman, almost sternly, "I never will give any accounts at all to those refractory parishioners of mine. The Select Vestry of One has met regularly every year, and resolved himself into a Committee to investigate my accounts—and that is sufficient. And, after all," added the civic functionary, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, "even if the accounts *were* produced,—although they run over such a long period of years, you might put them all into your waistcoat-pocket without finding it stick out more than it now does with your small French watch."[34]

With these words, Mr. Alderman Sniff, who had merely looked in to have a chat and talk of himself to one with whom there was no necessity to maintain any secrecy in respect to his antecedents,—Mr. Alderman Sniff retired.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Greenwood was introduced.

"My dear Tomlinson," he said, "I am quite delighted to find you within. I have made a hit, and shall retrieve myself with ease. The ten thousand pounds which Holmesford lent me are now twenty thousand."

"You are a lucky fellow," observed Tomlinson, with a sigh. "Adversity has no effect upon you; whereas with me——"

"Why—what is the matter now?" interrupted Greenwood. "Always complaining?"

"I have good cause for annoyance," returned the stock-broker. "That precious acquaintance of yours——"

"Who?" demanded Greenwood, sharply.

"The lunatic-asylum keeper, as your friend Chichester supposed him to be—but the resurrectionist, thief, extortioner, villain, and perhaps murderer, as I take him to be," said Tomlinson,—"that scoundrel Tidkins, in a word, has discovered poor old Michael's address, and menaces me."

"Ah!" said Greenwood, coolly; "it is your own fault: you should have got Martin out of the way—even if you had painted him black, shipped him to the United States, and sold him as a slave."

"Ridiculous!" cried Tomlinson, sternly. "I never will cease to be a friend—a grateful friend—to that poor old man."

"Well," observed Greenwood, after a pause, "I can do you a service in this respect. I was at Rottenborough yesterday—amongst my intelligent and independent constituents; and I learnt that the situation of porter to the workhouse in that truly enlightened town is vacant. Now, if——"

"Enough of this, Greenwood!" exclaimed Tomlinson. "I was wrong to mention the old man's name to *you*.—What can I do for you this morning? Have you made up your mind to take the loan which my friend consented to advance to you about a month ago, and which you——"

"Which I declined then, and decline now," said Greenwood, hastily—as if the allusion awoke unpleasant reminiscences in his mind.

"I never could understand your conduct on that evening," observed Tomlinson, in his quiet manner: "you came at the appointed hour to terminate the business: the money was ready—the deed was prepared—my friend was here,—and when you put your hand into your pocket for the securities, you turned on your heel and bolted off like a shot."

"Yes—yes," said Greenwood, with increased impatience; "I had lost my pocket-book. But——"

"And have you found it since?" asked the stock-broker.

"I have. But I do not require the loan," returned Greenwood, shortly. "So far from that, I wish you to lay out these seven thousand pounds for me in a particular speculation which I will explain to you. I have prepared the way for certain success, but cannot appear in it myself."

Greenwood then counted the Bank notes upon the table for the sum named, and gave Tomlinson the necessary instructions for the disposal of the amount.

"Any news to-day?" he asked, when this business was concluded.

"Here is a second edition of *The Times* with another Telegraphic Despatch from Castelcicala," said Tomlinson. "I know you are interested in the affairs of that country, by the way you have lately spoken to me on the subject."

"Yes:—I am—I am indeed," exclaimed Greenwood, earnestly, as he seized the paper, in which the following article appeared in a

bold type:—

"CASTELCICALA.

"PROCLAMATION OF ALBERTO I.—FORMATION OF THE NEW MINISTRY.

"The French Government have received the following Telegraphic Despatch from Toulon:—

"'*The* Alessandro *steamer has just arrived from Montoni*. THE MARQUIS OF ESTELLA *proclaimed the* GRAND DUKE ALBERTO I. *in the evening of the 24th, instead of in the morning of that day, which was his original intention. This was merely occasioned by the delay of the Marquis in entering the capital. The Marquis has formed the following Ministry*:—

"*Prime Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs*, SIGNOR GAËTANO.
Minister of the Interior, SIGNOR TERLIZZI.
Minister of War, COLONEL COSSARIO.
Minister of Marine, ADMIRAL CONTARINO.
Minister of Finance, SIGNOR VIVIANI.
Minister of Justice, BARON MANZONI.
Minister of Commerce, CHEVALIER GRACHIA.'"

The Times newspaper, commenting upon this Administration, reminded its readers that Signors Gaëtano and Terlizzi were the Chiefs of the Provisional Committee of Government during the Revolution in Castelcicala; that Colonel Cossario was the second in command of the glorious army that had achieved Castelcicalan freedom; that Signor Viviani was the well-known banker of Pinalla; and that the Chevalier Grachia was the nephew of the deceased general of that name.

"Thus is it that Richard can now make a Ministry in a powerful State!" murmured Greenwood to himself. "Oh! what a sudden elevation—what a signal rise! And I——"

"What are you muttering about to yourself, Greenwood?" asked Tomlinson.

"Ah!" cried the Member of Parliament, suddenly, and without heeding the stock-broker's question,—for his eyes, wandering mechanically over the surface of the paper which he held in his hand, had settled upon a paragraph that excited the liveliest emotions of surprise:—who could have believed it? Oh! now I recall to mind a thousand circumstances which should have made me suspect the truth!"

"The truth of what?" demanded Tomlinson.

"That Count Alteroni and Prince Alberto were one and the same person," exclaimed Greenwood; "and he is now the Grand Duke of Castelcicala!"

"Then you have had the pleasure of including a sovereign-prince amongst the number of your victims," observed the stock-broker, coolly.

Greenwood made no reply, but remained plunged in a deep reverie, the subject of which was the brilliant destiny that appeared to await Richard Markham.

As soon as he had taken his leave, Tomlinson also began musing; but it was upon a far different topic!

"Oh! what a hollow-hearted wretch is that Greenwood!" he said within himself: "and how would he have treated Michael Martin, had the poor old man been dependent upon him! Greenwood would indeed be capable of sending him to the United States as a slave, were such a course practicable. Ah!—the United States!" cried Tomlinson, aloud, as a sudden idea was created in his mind by the mention of the name of that glorious Republic:—"and why should *not* Michael Martin visit the States—and with me too? Yes! I am wearied of London,—wearied of this city where all hearts seem to be eaten up with selfishness,—wearied of supporting the weight of that secret which the merest accident may reveal, and which places me at the mercy of that ferocious extortioner! Oh! if that secret were discovered—if it were ascertained that Michael Martin was really in London,—he would be dragged before the tribunals—and I must either appear against him as a witness, or proclaim his innocence and thereby sacrifice myself! No—no—I could not do either:—never—never! I know that I am weak—vacillating—timid! But God also knows how unwillingly I have departed from the ways of rectitude—how many bitter tears have marked the paths of my duplicity! And now I will be firm—yes, firm to commit one last crime! Oh! I will prove myself a worthy pupil of my great master Greenwood! He shall be amply repaid," continued the stock-broker, bitterly, "for all the kind lessons he has given me in the school of dishonour—yes, and repaid, too, in his own coin. Seven thousand pounds—added to my own little stock,—this will be a sufficient fund wherewith to begin an honourable avocation in another clime. Yes—America is the country for me! There I can begin the world again as a new man—and perhaps I may retrieve myself even in my own estimation!"

Tomlinson's resolution was now irrevocably fixed.

He would emigrate to the United States, accompanied by his faithful old clerk!

Greenwood's money should constitute the principal resource to which he must trust as the basis whereon to establish a fortune in the place of the one he had lost.

Nor did he hesitate a moment—weak, timid, and vacillating as he was in ordinary circumstances—to self-appropriate those funds thus entrusted to him.

He had no sympathy for Greenwood;—and, moreover, he had many an act of insolence on the part of that individual—many an instance of oppression, to avenge. Ere the failure of the bank, Greenwood had taken advantage of his necessities to wring from him enormous interest for loans advanced, and had, moreover, made him his instrument in defrauding the Italian prince. Since the establishment of the office in Tokenhouse Yard, Greenwood had continued to use Tomlinson as a tool so long as his own fortunes had remained prosperous;—and even latterly—since the condition of Greenwood's finances had levelled some of those barriers which the necessities of the one and the wealth of the other had originally raised between them,—even latterly, the manner of the Member of Parliament towards the fallen banker had been that of patronage and superiority. Then the frequent and heartless allusions which Greenwood made to the poor old clerk, rankled deeply in the mind of Tomlinson; and all these circumstances armed that naturally weak and timid man with a giant strength of mind when he contemplated the possibility of at length punishing Greenwood for a thousand insults.

Tomlinson was not naturally a vindictive man:—persons of his quiet and timid disposition seldom are. But there are certain affronts which, when oft repeated and dwelt upon in their aggregate, form a motive power that will arouse the most enduring and the weakest mind to action—especially, too, when accident throws a special opportunity of vengeance in the way.

James Tomlinson was a strange compound of good and bad qualities—the latter arising from his constitutional want of nerve, and his deficiency in moral energy. Had he been mentally resolute, he would have proved a good and great man. The conflicting elements of his character were signally demonstrated on this occasion, when he had determined to fly from the country.

Having given his clerks positive orders that he was not to be interrupted for some hours, he sealed up in different parcels the small sums of money which his various clients had placed in his hands to purchase scrip or other securities, and addressed the packets to those to whom the sums respectively belonged,—omitting, however, Greenwood in this category. He next computed the salaries due to his clerks, and set apart the amount required to liquidate those obligations also. These duties being accomplished, he locked all the parcels up in one of the drawers of his writing-table, and placed the key in his pocket. Greenwood's deposit he secured about his person.

When it grew dusk in the evening, he repaired to the lodging which Michael Martin occupied in Bethnal Green.

As soon as Tomlinson had made known his scheme to the old man—(but, of course, without betraying the fact of his intention to self-appropriate Greenwood's money)—Michael took a huge pinch of snuff, and reflected profoundly for some minutes.

"And what's the meaning of this all of a sudden?" demanded the ex-cashier at length.

Tomlinson explained, with great frankness, that the Resurrection Man had by some means discovered the secret of Michael's abode, and was again playing the part of an extortioner. He, moreover, expressed his invincible dislike for a city where he had experienced such painful reverses; and declared his resolution of no longer living in such a state of suspense and anxiety as he was kept in by the constant dread of an exposure in respect to his faithful old clerk.

"You need not leave London on that account," said Martin, gruffly: "I have long made up my mind how to act in case of detection."

"How?" asked Tomlinson, with a foreboding shudder.

"I should put an end to my life," returned the old man, filling his nose with snuff. "I am well aware that you would not have the courage to appear against me in a court of justice and boldly accuse me of having embezzled your funds——"

"The courage!" exclaimed Tomlinson, wiping away a tear: "no—nor the heart! My good—faithful old friend——"

"Well—well: don't be childish, now," said Michael, who was obliged to take several pinches of snuff to conceal his own emotions: "if you are really desirous to leave England and go to America, I will accompany you. Of course I will—you know I will," he added, more hastily than he was accustomed to speak.

"There is no time for delay," said Tomlinson, rejoiced at this assent which he had wrung from his faithful servitor. "We will repair to Dover this very night, and thence proceed to France. The distance from Calais to Havre is not very great: and from the latter port ships are constantly sailing for America."

"Let me proceed alone to Havre," said old Martin; "and you can follow me openly and at your leisure."

"No," replied Tomlinson; "that would only be to compromise *your* safety, perhaps. We will part no more."

The advice of the stock-broker was acted upon; and the fugitives succeeded in leaving the kingdom in safety.

But that night the Resurrection Man vainly awaited the arrival of James Tomlinson.

And on the following day, Mr. Greenwood discovered, to his cost, that the effects of those lessons of duplicity and dishonour which he had inculcated in respect to the stock-broker, practically redounded upon himself!

34. The readers must not for a moment suppose that we intend Mr. Sniff to be a type of *all* the city aldermen. Far from it. There are some excellent, honourable, and talented men amongst the civic body. Mr. Sniff is as different from what Sir Peter Laurie *is*, or Mr. Harmer *was*, as light differs from darkness. There are, however, some individuals wearing civic gowns, who are a disgrace to the great city of which they have the unaccountable effrontery to remain magistrates.

CHAPTER CCX.

HOLFORD'S STUDIES.

It was midnight.

In a garret, belonging to a house in the same court where Crankey Jem resided, sate Henry Holford.

He was alone. His elbow rested on the table, and his hand supported his feverish head—for dark thoughts filled the brain of that young man.

The flickering light of a single candle fell upon the pages of an old volume, which he was reading with intense interest.

His cheeks were pale,—his lips were dry,—his throat was parched,—and his eye-balls glared with unnatural lustre.

He did not feel athirst—else there was water handy to assuage the craving:—nor did he hear his heart beating violently, nor experience the feverish and rapid throbbing of his temples.

No:—his whole thoughts—his entire feelings—his every sensation,—all were absorbed in the subject of his study.

And that the reader may fully comprehend the nature of those impulses which were now urging this strange young man on to the perpetration of a deed that was destined to give a terrible celebrity to his name, we must quote the passage on which his mind was so intently fixed:—

"THE ASSASSINATION OF GUSTAVUS III., OF SWEDEN.[35]

"The nobles were discontented with the general conduct of the King; and a conspiracy was planned against him under his own roof. His wars had compelled him to negotiate large loans, and to impose upon his subjects heavy taxes. The nobles took advantage of that circumstance to prejudice the minds of many of the people against the sovereign who had laboured so long for their real good. On the 16th of March, 1792, he received an anonymous letter, warning him of his immediate danger from a plot that was laid to take away his life, requesting him to remain at home, and avoid balls for a year; and assuring him, that if he should go to the masquerade for which he was preparing, he would be assassinated that very night. The King read the note with contempt, and at a late hour entered the ball-room. After some time he sat down in a box with the Count of Essen, and observed he was not deceived in his contempt for the letter, since, had there been any design against his life, no time could be more favourable than that moment. He then mingled, without apprehension, among the crowd; and just as he was preparing to retire with the Prussian ambassador, he was surrounded by several persons in masks, one of whom fired a pistol at the back of the King, and lodged the contents in his body. A scene of dreadful confusion ensued. The conspirators, amidst the general tumult and alarm, had time to retire to other parts of the room; but one of them had previously dropped his pistols and a dagger close by the wounded King. A general order was given to all the company to unmask, and the doors were immediately closed; but no person appeared with any particular distinguishing marks of guilt. The King was immediately conveyed to his apartment; and the surgeon, after extracting a ball and some slugs, gave favourable hopes of his Majesty's recovery.

"Suspicions immediately fell upon such of the nobles as had been notorious for their opposition to the measures of the court. The anonymous letter was traced up to Colonel Liljehorn, Major in the King's Guards, and he was immediately apprehended. But the most successful clue that seemed to offer was in consequence of the weapons which had fallen from the assassin. An order was issued, directing all the armourers, gunsmiths, and cutlers, in Stockholm, to give every information in their power to the officers of justice, concerning the weapons. A gunsmith who had repaired the pistols readily recognised them to be the same which he had repaired some time since for a nobleman of the name of Ankarstrom, a captain in the army; and the cutler who had made the dagger, referred at once to the same person.

"The King languished from the 17th to the 29th of March. At first, the reports of his medical attendants were favourable; but on the 28th a mortification was found to have taken place, which terminated his existence in a few hours. On opening his body, a square piece of lead and two rusty nails were found unextracted within the ribs.

"During his illness, and particularly after he was made acquainted with the certainty of his approaching dissolution, Gustavus continued to display that unshaken courage which he had manifested on every occasion during his life. A few hours before his decease, he made some alterations in the arrangement of public affairs. He had before, by his will, appointed a council of regency, but convinced, by recent experience, how little he could depend on the attachment of his nobles, and being also aware of the necessity of a strong government in difficult times, he appointed his brother, the Duke of Sudermania, sole regent, till his son, who was then about fourteen, should have attained the age of eighteen years. His last words were a declaration of pardon to the conspirators against his life. The actual murderer alone was excepted; and he was excepted only at the strong instance of the regent, and those who surrounded his Majesty in his dying moments. Immediately on the death of the King, the young prince was proclaimed by the title of Gustavus IV.

"Ankarstrom was no sooner apprehended, than he confessed with an air of triumph, that he was the person 'who had endeavoured to liberate his country from a monster and a tyrant.' Suspicions at the same time fell on the Counts Horn and Ribbing, Baron Pechlin, Baron Ehrensvard, Baron Hartsmandorf, Von Engerstrom the Royal Secretary, and others; and these suspicions were confirmed by the confession of Ankarstrom. After a very fair and ample trial, this man was condemned to be publicly and severely whipped on three successive days, his right hand and his head to be cut off, and his body impaled: which sentence he suffered on the 17th of May. His property was given to his children, who, however, were compelled to change their name."

"Ankarstrom was a martyr—a hero!" exclaimed Holford, aloud; his imagination excited by the preceding narrative, and all the morbid feelings of his wrongly-biassed mind aroused at the idea of the terrible renown that attached itself to the name of a regicide.

Then,—although the garret in which he sate was so cold that ice floated on the water in the pitcher, and the nipping chill of a February night came through the cracked panes and ill-closed lattice, while the snow lay thick upon the slanting tiles immediately above his head,—that young man's entire frame glowed with a feverish heat, which shone with sinister lustre in his eyes, and appeared in the two deep-red hectic spots which marked his cheeks.

"Yes—Ankarstrom was a hero!" he exclaimed. "Oh! how he must have despised the efforts of the torturers to wring from him a groan:—how he must have scorned the array of penalties which were sought to be made so terrible! And Ravaillac—the regicide beneath whose hand fell Henry IV. of France—oh! how well is every word of his history treasured up in my mind. But Francis Damien—ah! his fate was terrible indeed! And yet I am not afraid to contemplate it—even though such a one should be in store for me."

Then hastily turning to the "History of France," in the volume which he was reading, he slowly and in measured terms repeated aloud the following passage:—

"ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF LOUIS XV., OF FRANCE.

"In the year 1757, one Francis Damien, an unhappy wretch, whose sullen mind, naturally unsettled, was inflamed by the disputes between the King and his Parliament concerning religion, formed the desperate resolution of attempting the life of his Sovereign. In the dusk of the evening, as the King prepared to enter his coach, he was suddenly, though slightly, wounded, with a pen-knife, between the fourth and fifth ribs, in the presence of his son, and in the midst of his guards. The daring assassin had mingled with the crowd of courtiers, but was instantly betrayed by his distracted countenance. He declared it was never his intention to kill the King: but that he only meant to wound him, that God might touch his heart, and incline him to restore the tranquillity of his dominions by re-establishing the Parliament, and banishing the Archbishop of Paris, whom he regarded as the source of the present commotions. In these frantic and incoherent declarations he persisted, amidst the most exquisite tortures; and after human ingenuity had been exhausted in devising new modes of torment, his judges, tired out with his

obstinacy, consigned him to a death, the inhumanity of which might fill the hearts of savages with horror: he was conducted to the common place of execution, amidst a vast concourse of the populace; stripped naked, and fastened to the scaffold by iron manacles. One of his hands was then burnt in liquid flaming sulphur; his thighs, legs, and arms, were torn with red hot pincers: boiling oil, melted lead, resin, and sulphur, were poured into the wounds; and, to complete the terrific catastrophe, he was torn to pieces by horses!"

"And they call him an unhappy wretch!" exclaimed Holford, pushing the book from him: "no—no! He must have had a great and a powerful mind to have dared to attempt to kill a King! And his name is remembered in history! Ah! that thought must have consoled him in the midst of those infernal torments. What is more delightful than the conviction of emerging from vile obscurity, and creating a reputation—although one so tarnished and disfigured that the world shrinks from it with loathing? Yes:—better to be a Turpin or a Barrington—a Claude du Val or a Jack Sheppard, than live unknown, and die without exciting a sensation. But it would be glorious—oh! how glorious to be ranked with Ankarstrom, Ravaillac, Damien, Felton, Guy Fawkes, Fieschi, and that gallant few who have either slain, or attempted the lives of, monarchs or great men! I am miserable,—poor,—obscure,—and without a hope of rising by legitimate means. I have seen the inside of a palace—and am doomed to drag on my wretched existence in this garret. I have partaken of the dainties that came from the table of a sovereign—and, were I hungry now, a sorry crust is all that my cupboard would afford. I have listened to the musical voice of that high-born lady whose name I scarcely dare to breathe even to myself—and now the cold blast of February comes with its hoarse sound to grate upon my ears in this miserable—miserable garret! Oh! why was my destiny cast in so lowly a sphere? What has been my almost constant occupation—with some few brighter intervals—since I was twelve years old? A pot-boy—a low, degraded pot-boy: the servant of servants—the slave of slaves—forced to come and go at the beck and call of the veriest street-sweeper that frequented the tap-room! Ah! my God—when I think of all this humiliation, I feel that my blood boils even up to my very brain—my eyes and cheeks appear to be upon fire—I seem as if my senses were leaving me!"

And, as he spoke, he clenched his fists and ground his teeth together with a ferocious bitterness, which indicated the fearfully morbid condition of his mind.

For he was enraged against fortune who had made him poor and humble—against the world for keeping him so—and against royalty and aristocracy for being so much happier and so incomparably more blessed than the section of society to which he belonged.

And in his vanity—for his soaring disposition made him vain—he conceived that he possessed elements of greatness, which the world, with a wilful blindness, would not see; or which adverse circumstances would not suffer to develop themselves.

He deemed himself more persecuted than others moving in the same sphere: his restless, diseased, and excited mind, had conjured up a thousand evils to which he thought himself the marked—the special prey.

He had seen, in his visits to the palace, so much of the highest eminence of luxury, pleasure, happiness, and indolent enjoyment, that he looked around with horror and affright when he found himself hurled back again into the lowest depths of obscurity, privation, and cheerlessness of life.

He had at intervals feasted his eyes so greedily with all the fascination, the glitter, the gorgeousness, the splendour, the ease, and the voluptuousness, of the Court, that he could not endure the contemplation of the fearful contrast which was afforded by the every-day and familiar scenes of starvation, penury, misery, and ineffectual toil that marked the existence of the people.

The moral condition of Henry Holford was a striking proof of the daring flights of which the human mind is capable. On the very first occasion of his visit to the palace, he had allowed himself to be carried away by all the wildest emotions and the strangest impressions that were produced by the novelty of what he then saw and heard. Royalty had been ever associated, in his vulgar conception, with something grand and handsome in man, and something wonderfully beautiful in woman. Thus, when he first saw the Queen, he was prepared to admire her:—he admired her accordingly; and that feeling increased to a degree the insolence of which at times overawed and terrified even himself.

By another wayward inclination of his unhealthy but enthusiastic mind, he had from the first been prepared to dislike the Prince; and this feeling increased in violence with those circumstances which each successive visit to the royal abode developed. At length—as if his evil destiny must infallibly hurry him on to some appalling catastrophe—he was discovered by the Prince in the detestable condition of an eaves-dropper, and was ignominiously driven forth from that dwelling where his mind had gradually collected the elements of a most unnatural excitement.

He knew that any attempt to repeat his visits would be frustrated by the precautions which were certain to have been adopted to prevent future intrusions of a like nature; and he now felt precisely as one who is compelled suddenly to abandon a habit to which he had become wedded. Strange as it may appear, the morbid excitement attendant upon those visits to the palace was as necessary to Holford's mental happiness as tobacco, opium, snuff, or strong liquors are to so many millions of individuals.

With a person in such a state of mind, the first impulse was bitter hatred against the one who had deprived him of a source of pleasurable excitement; and in that vengeful feeling were absorbed all those rational reflections which would have convinced him that his own insolent intrusion—his own unpardonable conduct—had provoked the treatment he had received. He never paused to ask himself by what right he had entered the palace and played the ignoble part of a listener to private conversation and a spy upon the hallowed sanctity of domestic life:—the dominant idea in his mind was his ignominious expulsion.

"Fate has now filled my cup of bitterness to the brim," he would say to himself; "and all that remains for me to do is to avenge myself on him whom my destiny has made the instrument of this crowning degradation."

By degrees the mind of that young man found its gloomy broodings upon vengeance associating themselves with other sentiments. He gradually blended this idea of revenge with the ardent desire of breaking those trammels which kept his name imprisoned in the silent cavern of obscurity. The two sentiments at length united in his imagination; and his pulse beat quickly—and his eyes flashed fire, when he surveyed the possibility of gratifying his thirst for vengeance and suddenly rendering his name notorious at the same moment, and by one desperate—fearful deed!

The reader cannot now be at a loss to comprehend how this wretchedly mistaken young man was brought to study the history of those regicides who have gained an infamous renown in the annals of nations.

And as he dwelt with an insane enthusiasm upon those narratives, the feeling of admiration—nay, adoration—which he had once experienced towards the Queen, was merged in the terrible longing for a diabolical notoriety that now became his predominating—his all-absorbing passion!

"Yes!" he exclaimed, as he pushed the book away from him, that night on which we have introduced the reader to his garret: "I will

be talked about—my name shall be upon every tongue! Obscurity shall no longer enshroud me: its darkness is painful to my soul. I will do a deed that shall make the Kingdom ring from one end to the other with the astounding tidings:—the newspapers shall struggle with all the eagerness of competition to glean the most trivial facts concerning me;—and when the day arrives for me to appear before my judges, the great nobles and the high-born ladies of England shall crowd in the tribunal to witness the trial of the pot-boy Henry Holford!"

The act on which the young man was now resolved, appeared not to him in its real light as an atrocious crime—a damnable deed that would arouse a yell of execration from one end of the land to the other:—it seemed, on the contrary, a glorious achievement of which he would have reason to be proud.

Alas! how strangely constituted is the human mind, which, in any state of being, could cherish such monstrous delusions—such fatal aspirations!

But is there no blame to be attached to society for this development of ideas so morbid even on the part of one single individual? is there nothing in the constitution of that society which gives encouragement, as it were, to those detestable sentiments?

Let us see.

Enough has been said in the more serious and reasoning parts of this work to prove that society is in a vitiated—a false—and an artificial condition. The poor are too poor, and the rich too rich: the obscure are too low, and the exalted too high. The upper classes alone have opportunities of signalising themselves: the industrious millions have no chance of rising in the State. Interest procures rank in the Navy—money buys promotion in the Army—and interest and money united obtain seats in the Legislative Assembly. Interest and money, then, remain to the exclusive few: the millions have neither—nor are they even stimulated by a national system of Education. An aristocrat of common abilities may rise to eminence in some department of the State, with but little trouble: but a son of toil, however vast his natural talents, has not a single chance of starting from obscurity through the medium of their proper development.

This is true: and we defy the most subtle reasoner on behalf of the oligarchy to refute those positions.

Now, such being the case,—with a dominant aristocracy on one hand, and the oppressed millions on the other,—is it not evident that every now and then some member of the latter class will brood upon the vast, the astounding contrast until feelings of a deplorably morbid nature become excited in his mind? How could it be otherwise? Ireland, with its agrarian outrages and its frequent instances of assassination, proves the fact. England, with its incendiary fires in periods of deep distress, affords additional corroboration.

We deplore that such should be the case; and not for a moment do we advocate such means of vindicating just rights against the usurpers thereof.

But if these instances of outbreaking revenge—if these ebullitions of indomitable resentment *do* now and then occur, no small portion of the blame must be charged against that aristocracy which maintains itself on an eminence so immeasurably above the depths in which the masses are compelled to languish. And when the poor creature who is goaded to desperation, *does* strike—can we wonder if, in the madness of his rage, he deals his blows indiscriminately, or against an innocent person? He may even aim at royalty itself—although, in every really constitutional country, the sovereign is little more than a mere puppet, the Prime Minister of the day being the virtual ruler of the nation.

From what we have said, it is easy to perceive how the contemplation of the splendid luxury of the palace first unhinged and unsettled the mind of Henry Holford.

We must now go a step farther.

Society manifests a most inordinate and pernicious curiosity in respect to criminals who perpetrate an unusual offence. This curiosity passes all legitimate bounds. The newspapers, with a natural attention to pecuniary interests, obey the cravings of that feeling by serving up the most highly-seasoned food to suit the peculiar appetite. Portraits of the guilty one are exhibited in every picture-shop. Apposite allusions are introduced into dramatic representations; and even the presiding genius of a "Punch and Judy show" mingles the subject with his humorous outpourings. If the criminal make an attack upon royalty, he goes through the important but mysterious ordeal of an examination at the Home Office, whence the reporters for the press are excluded. On his appearance at Bow Street, the magisterial tribunal is "crowded with gentlemen and ladies, who were accommodated with seats upon the bench," as the journals say; and when the finale comes at the Central Criminal Court, the fees for admission to the gallery rise to two or three guineas for each individual.

Thus the criminal is made into a hero!

Now is not all this sufficient to turn the head of one whose mind is already partially unhinged?

Society, then, is to blame in many ways for the development of those morbid feelings which, in the present instance, actuated Henry Holford in his desperate purpose.

35. From Evans' and Forbes' "Geographical Grammar." Edition of 1814.

CHAPTER CCXI.

THE DEED.

Crankey Jem was at dinner, in the afternoon of the day which followed the night of Holford's sad historical studies, when the young man entered his room.

"Oh! so you've turned up at last," said Jem, pointing to a seat, and pushing a plate across the table in the same direction. "What have you been doing with yourself for the last two days? But sit down first, and get something to eat; for you look as pale and haggard as if you'd just been turned out of a workhouse."

"I am not well, Jem," replied Holford, evasively; "and I cannot eat—thank you all the same. But I will take a glass of beer: it may refresh me."

"Do. You really seem very ill, my poor lad," observed Crankey Jem, attentively surveying Holford's countenance, which was sadly changed. "If you have got no money left, my little store is at your service, as far as it goes; and you need not think of working in any way till you are better. I can easily make another boat or two more during the week; and so you shall not want for either medicine or good food."

"You are very kind to me, Jem," said Holford, wiping away a tear. "If it hadn't been for you I don't know what I should have done. You have supplied me with the means of getting a lodging and——"

"And you served me well by tracing the villain Tidkins to his nest in Globe Lane," interrupted the returned transport. "I have watched about that neighbourhood every night since you followed him there, and have seen something that has made me hesitate a little before I pay him the debt of vengeance I owe him. Now that he is in my power, I don't care about waiting a while. Besides, if I can find him out in something that would send him to the gibbet, I would sooner let him die that way—as a dog, with a halter round his neck—than kill him outright with my dagger."

"And you suspect——" began Holford.

"Yes—yes: but no matter now," cried Jem, hastily. "You are not in the right mood to-day to listen to me: but, either I am very much mistaken, or *murder* has been committed within the last few days at that house in Globe Town. At all events, I saw a person taken by force into the place one night; and that person has never come out again since."

"How do you know?" said Holford. "You only watch about the neighbourhood by night."

"And is it likely that a person who was conveyed into that house by force during the night, would be allowed to walk quietly out in the day-time?" demanded Crankey Jem. "No such thing! Tidkins is not the chap to play such a game. The person I speak of was blindfolded—I could see it all as plain as possible, for the moon was bright, though I kept in the shade. Now, being blindfolded," continued Jem, "it was to prevent her——"

"What? was the person a woman?" cried Holford, his interest in Jem's conversation somewhat increasing, in spite of the absorbing nature of his own reflections.

"Yes. And, as I was saying, the blindfolding was of course to prevent her knowing whereabouts she was: so it isn't likely that Tidkins would let her go away again in the broad day-light."

"Neither does it seem probable that he took her there to make away with her," said Holford; "for, as the dead tell no tales, there was not any use in binding her eyes."

"*That* also struck me," observed Crankey Jem; "and it's all those doubts and uncertainties that make me watch him so close to find out what it all means. And, mark me, Harry—I *will* find it all out too! I'm pretty near as cunning as he is! Why—what a fool he must take me for, if he thinks I can't see that he has got a great hulking chap to dog me about. But I always give him the slip somehow or another; and every evening when I go out I take a different direction. So I'll be bound that I've set Tidkins and his man at fault. The night afore last I saw the spy, as I call him—I mean the chap that is set to dog me—go to Tidkins's house; and about an hour afterwards a man I once knew well—one Jack Wicks, who is called the Buffer—went there also. Ah! there's a precious nest of them!"

"I say, Jem," exclaimed Henry Holford, abruptly, "I wish you would lend me your pistols for a few hours."

"And what do you want with pistols, young feller?" demanded the returned convict, laying down his knife, and looking Holford full in the face.

"A friend of mine has made a wager with another man about hitting a halfpenny at thirty paces," said Henry, returning the glance in a manner so confident and unabashed, that Jem's suspicions were hushed in a moment.

"Yes—you shall have the pistols till this evening," said he: "but mind you bring 'em back before dusk."

With these words, he rose, went to a cupboard, and produced the weapons.

"I'll be sure to bring them back by the time you go out," said Holford. "Are they loaded?"

"No," answered Jem. "But here's powder and ball, which you can take along with you."

"I wish you would load them all ready," observed Holford. "I—I don't think my friend knows how."

"Not know how to load a pistol—and yet be able to handle one skilfully!" ejaculated Jem, his vague suspicions returning.

"Many persons learn to fire at a mark at Copenhagen House, or a dozen other places about London," said the young man, still completely unabashed; "and yet they can't load a pistol for the life of them."

"Well—that's true enough," muttered Jem.

Still he was not quite reassured; and yet he was unwilling to tax Holford with requiring the pistols for any improper purpose. The young lad's reasons might be true—they were at least feasible; and Jem was loth to hurt his feelings by hinting at any suspicion which the demand for the weapons had occasioned. Moreover, it would be churlish to refuse the loan of them—and almost equally so to decline loading them;—and the returned convict possessed an obliging disposition, although he had been so much knocked about in the world. He was also attached to Henry Holford, and would go far to serve him.

Nevertheless, he still hesitated.

"Well—won't you do what I ask you, Jem?" said Holford, observing that he wavered.

"Is it really for your friends?" demanded the man, turning short round upon the lad.

"Don't you believe me?" cried Holford, now blushing deeply. "Why, you cannot think that I'm going to commit a highway robbery or a burglary in the day-time—even if I ever did at all?"

"No—no," said Jem; "but you seemed so strange—so excited—when you first came in——"

"Ha! ha!" cried Holford, laughing: "you thought I was going to make away with myself! No, Jem—the river would be better than the pistol, if I meant *that*."

"Well—you must have your will, then," said Crankey Jem; and, turning to the cupboard, he proceeded to load the pistols.

But still he was not altogether satisfied!

Holford rose from his seat with an assumed air of indifference, and approached the table where the little models of the ships were standing.

A few minutes thus elapsed in profound silence.

"They're all ready now," said Jem, at length; "and as your friends don't know how to load them, it's no use your taking the powder and ball. I suppose they'll fire a shot each, and have done with it?"

"I suppose so," returned Holford, as he concealed the pistols about his person. "I shall see you again presently. Good bye till then."

"Good bye," said Jem.

But scarcely had Holford left the room a minute, when the returned convict followed him.

The fact was that there shot forth a gleam of such inexpressible satisfaction from Holford's eyes, at the moment when he grasped the pistols, that the vague suspicions which had already been floating in the mind of Crankey Jem seemed suddenly to receive confirmation—or at least to be materially strengthened; and he feared lest his young friend meditated self-destruction.

"The pistols are of no use to him," muttered Jem, as he hastened down the stairs, slouching his large hat over his eyes; "but if he is bent on suicide, the river is not far off. I don't like his manner at all!"

When he gained the street, he looked hastily up and down, and caught a glimpse of Holford, who was just turning into Russell Street, leading from Drury Lane towards Covent Garden.

"I will watch him at all events," thought Crankey Jem. "If he means no harm, he will never find out that I did it; and if he does, I may save him."

Meantime, Holford, little suspecting that his friend was at no great distance behind him, pursued his way towards St. James's Park.

Now that his mind was bent upon a particular object, and that all considerations had resolved themselves into that fixed determination, his countenance, though very pale, was singularly calm and tranquil; and neither by his face nor his manner did he attract any particular notice as he wandered slowly along.

He gained the Park, and proceeded up the Mall towards Constitution Hill.

Crankey Jem followed him at a distance.

"Perhaps, after all, it is true that he has got some friends to meet," he muttered to himself; "and it may be somewhere hereabouts that he is to join them."

Holford stopped midway in the wide road intersecting Constitution Hill, and lounged in an apparently indifferent manner against the fence skirting the Green Park.

There were but few persons about, in that particular direction, at the time,—although the afternoon was very fine, and the sun was shining brightly through the fresh, frosty air.

It was now three o'clock; and some little bustle was visible amongst those few loungers who were at the commencement of the road, and who were enabled to command a view of the front of the palace.

They ranged themselves on one side:—there was a trampling of horses; and in a few moments a low open phaeton, drawn by four bays, turned rapidly from the park into the road leading over Constitution Hill.

"They are coming!" murmured Holford to himself, as he observed the equipage from the short distance where he was standing.

Every hat was raised by the little group at the end of the road, as the vehicle dashed by—for in it were seated the Queen and her illustrious husband.

By a strange coincidence Her Majesty was sitting on the left hand of Prince Albert, and not on the right as usual: she was consequently nearest to the wall of the palace-gardens, while the Prince was nearest to the railings of the Green Park.

And now the moment so anxiously desired by Holford, was at hand:—the phaeton drew nigh.

He hesitated:—yes—he hesitated;—but it was only for a single second.

"Now to avenge my expulsion from the palace!—now to make my name a subject for history!" were the thoughts that, rapid as lightning, flashed across his mind.

Not another moment did he waver; but, advancing from the railings against which he had been lounging, he drew a pistol from his breast and fired it point-blank at the royal couple as the phaeton dashed past.

The Queen screamed and rose from her seat; and the postillions stopped their horses.

"Drive on!" cried the Prince, in a loud tone, as he pulled Her Majesty back upon the seat; and his countenance was ashy pale.

Holford threw the first pistol hastily away from him, and drew forth the second.

But at that moment a powerful grasp seized him from behind,—his arm was knocked upwards,—the pistol went off into the air,—and a well-known voice cried in his ears, "My God! Harry, what madness is this?"

Several other persons had by this time collected on the spot; and the most cordial shouts of "God save the Queen!" "God save the Prince!" burst from their lips.

Her Majesty bowed in a most graceful and grateful manner: the Prince raised his hat in acknowledgment of the sympathy and attachment manifested towards his royal spouse and himself;—and the phaeton rolled rapidly away towards Hyde Park, in obedience to the wishes of the Queen and the orders of the Prince.

"What madness is this, I say, Harry?" repeated Crankey Jem, without relaxing his hold upon the would-be regicide.

But Holford hung down his head, and maintained a moody silence.

"Do you know him?" "Who is he?" were the questions that were now addressed to Crankey Jem from all sides.

But before he could answer his interrogators, two policemen broke through the crowd, and took Holford into custody.

"We must take him to the Home Office," said one of the officers, who was a serjeant, to his companion.

"Yes, Mr. Crisp," was the reply.

"And you, my good feller," continued the serjeant, addressing himself to Crankey Jem, "had better come along with us—since you was the first to seize on this here young miscreant."

"I'd rather not," said Jem, now terribly alarmed on his own account: "I——"

"Oh! nonsense," cried Mr. Crisp. "The Home Secretary is a wery nice genelman, and will tell you how much obleeged he is to you for having seized——But, I say," added Mr. Crisp, changing his tone and assuming a severe look as he gazed on the countenance of the returned convict, "what the deuce have we here?"

"What, Mr. Crisp?" said the policeman, who had charge of Holford.

"Why! if my eyes doesn't deceive me," cried the serjeant, "this here feller is one James Cuffin, generally known as Crankey Jem—and he's a 'scaped felon."

With these words Mr. Crisp collared the poor fellow, who offered no resistance.

But large tears rolled down his cheeks!

Policemen and prisoners then proceeded across the park to the Home Office, followed by a crowd that rapidly increased in numbers as it rolled onwards.

CHAPTER CCXII.

THE EXAMINATION AT THE HOME OFFICE.

On the arrival of the two prisoners and the two policemen at the Home Office, they were shown into a small room joining the one in which the Secretary of State for that Department was accustomed to receive individuals or deputations, and where we have already seen him in an earlier portion of this work.

But on the present occasion the Home Secretary had to be fetched from the Foreign Office, where he was sitting with his colleagues in a Cabinet Council.

The police officers and the prisoners were therefore left alone together for nearly half an hour in the room to which some subordinate official had ordered them to be conducted, upon the motives of their presence there being made known to him.

The crime of which Holford was accused seemed too grave and serious for even the tamperings of policemen: still as these gentry are not merely content with having a finger in almost every pie, but must thrust a whole hand in when once they find the opportunity, it was impossible that either Mr. Crisp or his colleague could leave Crankey Jem as well as the would-be regicide unassailed with questions.

The common policeman placed a chair against the outer door of the room, and seated himself in it with the air of a man who meant to say as plainly as he could, "Escape now if you can."

Holford sank upon a seat and fell into a profound reverie; but it was impossible to gather the nature of his thoughts from the now passionless and almost apathetic expression of his countenance.

Crankey Jem also took a chair; but his nervous manner, the pallor of his face, the quivering of his lip, and the unsettled glances of his eyes, betrayed the fearful condition of his mind. The poor wretch already imagined himself transported back amongst the horrors of Norfolk Island!

As for Mr. Crisp, he walked once or twice up and down the room, surveying himself complacently in a mirror, and then advancing towards Crankey Jem, said with a sort of official importance, "Well, my fine feller, you've done it pretty brown again—you have."

Jem Cuffin cast upon him a look of deep disgust.

"Remember," continued Mr. Crisp, in no way abashed at this unequivocal expression of feeling, "whatever you says to me now will probably trans-peer in another place, as we officials express it; but if you choose to tell me anything by way of unbuzziming yourself and easing your conscience, why, I don't think there'd be no harm in it, and it might do you good with the 'thorities. At the same time it's no part of my dooty to pump you."

"I have nothing to say to *you*," observed Crankey Jem.

"Well—p'rhaps that's prudent,—'cos I'm official after all," said Mr. Crisp. "But if so be you was to tell me how you got away from transportation, how long you've been in England, and what you've been doing with yourself since your return, I don't see that you could prejjudidge yourself."

"As you've had the trouble of taking me, policeman, you'd better go to the extra trouble of finding out what you want to know about me," said Jem.

"You needn't be uppish with me, because I did my dooty," returned Mr. Crisp. "Remember, I don't ask—but I s'pose you've been living in London—eh?"

"Well—and if I have——"

"There! I knowed you had," cried Crisp.

"I didn't say so," observed Jem Cuffin, angrily.

"No—but you can't deny it, though. Well, then—as you *have* been living in London, *according to your own admission*," continued Mr. Crisp, "in course you must have hung out in some partickler quarter. Remember, I don't ask you—but I des say it was in the Holy Land."

"I dare say it wasn't," returned Jem, drily.

"Then it was in the Mint, I'll be bound," cried Crisp. "I don't ask, you know—but wasn't it in the Mint?"

"No—it wasn't," said Crankey Jem, with a movement of impatience.

"Not the Mint—eh? Well, if you says so, it must be true—'cos you should know best. But I s'pose you won't deny that it was somewhere in Clerkenwell?"

"You're out again," returned Crankey Jem.

"The devil I am!" exclaimed Crisp, rubbing his nose. "And yet I'm a pretty good hand at a guess too. Now it isn't my wish or my dooty to pump a prisoner—but I should like to be resolved as to whether you haven't been living in the Happy Valley?"

"No," cried Jem; "and now leave me alone."

"Not the Happy Valley—eh?" proceeded the indefatigable Mr. Crisp: then, perceiving that his endeavours to find out the prisoner's place of abode were useless, he went upon another tack. "Well—it isn't my business to pump you; but I am really at a loss to think how

you could have been such a fool as to go back to your old tricks and break into that house there—down yonder, I mean—you know where? Come now?"

And Mr. Crisp fixed a searching eye upon Crankey Jem's countenance.

"I tell you what it is," exclaimed the prisoner, seriously irritated at length; "you want to entrap me, if you can—but you can't. And for a very good reason too—because I haven't broken into any house at all, or done a thing I'm ashamed of since I came back to England."

With these words, Crankey Jem turned his back upon the baffled Mr. Crisp, and looked out of the window.

Almost at the same moment an inner door was thrown open, and one of the Under Secretaries for the Home Department beckoned Mr. Crisp into the adjacent room, where the principal Secretary was already seated, he having arrived by the private entrance.

Crisp remained with the Minister for about ten minutes, and then returned to the ante-room, but it was merely to conduct Henry Holford and Crankey Jem into the presence of the Home Secretary and the Chief Magistrate of Bow Street.

"You may withdraw, Mr.——ahem?" said the Home Secretary, addressing the police-officer.

"Crisp, my lord—Crisp is my name."

"Oh! very good, Mr. Frisk. You may withdraw, Mr. Frisk," repeated the Minister.

And the police-officer retired accordingly, marvelling how the examination could possibly be conducted in a proper manner without his important presence.

The magistrate commenced by informing Henry Holford of the accusation laid against him by Crisp, and then cautioned him in the usual manner to beware of what he said, as anything he uttered might be used in evidence against him.

"I have no desire to conceal or deny a single particle of the whole truth," returned Holford. "I acknowledge that I fired at the Queen and Prince Albert—and with pistols loaded with ball, too."

"No—there you are wrong," exclaimed Jem; "for I loaded the pistols myself, and I took good care only to put powder into them."

Holford cast a glance of unfeigned surprise on his friend.

"Yes," continued the latter, "what I say is the truth. Your manner was so strange when you came to me to borrow the pistols, that I feared you meant to make away with yourself. I did not like to refuse to lend you the weapons—particularly as I knew that if you was really bent on suicide, you could do it in other ways. But I was resolved that my pistols should not help you in the matter; and I only charged them with powder. Then I followed you all the way down to the Park; and as you did not stop anywhere, I know that you couldn't have either bought balls or altered the charge of the pistols."

"This is important," said the magistrate to the Home Secretary.

"Very important," answered the latter functionary, who, from the first moment that Holford entered the room, had never ceased to gaze at him in the same way that one would contemplate an animal with two heads, or four tails, in the Zoological Gardens.

"It is very evident that the man was no accomplice in the proceeding," remarked the magistrate, in an under tone.

The words did not, however, escape Holford's ears.

"He an accomplice, sir!" cried the youth, as if indignant at the bare idea. "Oh! no—he has been a good friend to me, and would have advised me quite otherwise, had I mentioned my purpose to him. He was the first to rush upon me, and—I remember now—knocked up my arm when I was about to fire the second pistol."

Crisp and the other policeman were called in separately, and examined upon this point. Their evidence went entirely to prove that James Cuffin could not have been an accomplice in the deed.

When the policemen had withdrawn, the Home Secretary and the magistrate conversed together in a low tone.

"This man Cuffin's evidence will be absolutely necessary, my lord," said the magistrate; "and yet, as a condemned felon, and with another charge—namely, that of returning from transportation—hanging over him, he cannot be admitted as a witness."

"You must remand him for farther examination," returned the Home Secretary; "and in the mean time I will advise Her Majesty to grant him a free pardon."

"And Henry Holford will stand committed to Newgate, my lord?" said the magistrate, inquiringly.

The Minister nodded an assent.

The policemen were re-admitted, the depositions were signed, and the necessary instructions were given for the removal of the prisoners.

Two cabs were procured: Holford was conducted to one, and conveyed to Newgate,—but not before he had shaken hands with Crankey Jem, who shed tears when he took so sad a farewell of the lad, whom he really liked.

He himself was shortly afterwards removed in the other cab to the New Prison, Clerkenwell.

CHAPTER CCXIII.

THE TORTURES OF LADY RAVENSWORTH.

A week had now elapsed since Lydia Hutchinson entered the service of Lady Ravensworth.

The service! Oh! what a service was that where the menial had become the mistress, and the mistress had descended to the menial.

From the moment that Lydia had expressed her unalterable resolution to remain at the Hall, Lord Ravensworth scarcely ever quitted his private cabinet. He had a bed made up in an adjoining room, and secluded himself completely from his wife. Vainly did Adeline seek him—go upon her knees before him—and beseech him, with the bitterest tears and the most fervent prayers, to return to an active life:—he contemplated her with an apathetic listlessness—as if he were verging, when but little past the prime of life, into second childhood. Or if he did manifest a scintillation of his former spirit, it was merely to command his wife to leave him to his own meditations.

And again did he have recourse to the pipe: in fact he was never easy now save when he lulled his thoughts into complete stupefaction by means of the oriental tobacco. Even when, in the midst of her earnest prayers, his wife implored him to come forth again into the world—to *live*, in fine, for the sake of his as yet unborn babe, the fire that kindled in his eyes was so evanescent that an acute observer could alone perceive the momentary—and only momentary—effect which the appeal produced.

The guests had all taken their departure the day after the bridal; and the splendid mansion immediately became the scene of silence and of woe.

To all the entreaties of his wife—to all the representations of his favourite page Quentin, that he would engage eminent medical assistance, Lord Ravensworth turned a deaf ear, or else so far roused himself as to utter a stern refusal, accompanied with a command that he might be left alone.

Thus was he rapidly accomplishing his own destruction,—committing involuntary suicide by slow, certain, and yet unsuspected means,—even as his brother, the Honourable Gilbert Vernon, had declared to the Resurrection Man.

Adeline had no inclination to seek the bustle and excitement of society. Her love of display and ostentation was subdued—if not altogether crushed. She was so overwhelmed with sorrow—so goaded by the tyranny of Lydia Hutchinson—so desperate by the mere fact of having to submit to that oppression, and by the consciousness that she dared not unbosom her cares to a single sympathising heart,—that she at times felt as if she were on the point of becoming raving mad, and at others as if she could lay herself down and die!

We will afford the reader an idea of the mode of life which the once proud and haughty Lady Ravensworth was now compelled to lead beneath the crushing despotism of Lydia Hutchinson.

It was on the seventh morning after the arrival of the latter at Ravensworth Hall.

The clock had struck nine, when Lydia repaired to the apartment of her mistress——her mistress!

Until she reached the door, her manner was meek and subdued, because she incurred a chance of meeting other domestics in the passages and corridors.

But the moment she entered Adeline's apartment—the moment the door of that chamber closed behind her—her manner suddenly changed. No longer meek—no longer subdued—no longer wearing the stamp of servitude Lydia assumed a stern expression of countenance—so terrible in a vengeful woman—and in an instant clothed herself, as it were, with an appearance of truly fiend-like malignity.

Adeline slept.

Approaching the bed, Lydia shook her rudely.

Lady Ravensworth awoke with a start, and then glanced hastily—almost franticly—around.

"Ah! *you* here again!" she murmured, shrinking from the look of bitter hatred which Lydia cast upon her.

"Yes—I am here again," said the vindictive woman. "It is time for you to rise."

"Oh! spare me, Lydia," exclaimed Adeline; "allow me to repose a little longer. I have passed a wretched—a sleepless night: see—my pillow is still moist with the tears of anguish which I have shed; and it was but an hour ago that I fell into an uneasy slumber! I cannot live thus—I would rather that you should take a dagger and plunge it into my heart at once. Oh! leave me—leave me to rest for only another hour!"

"No:—it is time to rise, I say," cried Lydia. "It has been my destiny to pass many long weary nights in the streets—in the depth of winter—and with the icy wind penetrating through my scanty clothing till it seemed to freeze the very marrow in my bones. I have been so wearied—so cold—so broken down for want of sleep, that I would have given ten years of my life for two hours' repose in a warm and comfortable bed:—but still have I often, in those times, passed a whole week without so resting my sinking frame. Think you, then, that I can now permit *you* the luxury of sleep when your body requires it—of repose when your mind needs it? No, Adeline—no! I cannot turn you forth into the streets to become a houseless wanderer, as I have been:—but I can at least arouse you from the indolent enjoyment of that bed of down."

With these words Lydia seized Lady Ravensworth rudely by the wrist, and compelled her to leave the couch.

Then the revengeful woman seated herself in a chair, and said in a harsh tone, "Light the fire, Adeline—I am cold."

"No—no: I will not be *your* servant!" exclaimed Lady Ravensworth. "You are *mine*—and it is for you to do those menial offices."

"Provoke me not, Adeline," said Lydia Hutchinson, coolly; "or I will repair straight to the servants' hall, and there proclaim the astounding fact that Lord Ravensworth's relapse has been produced by the discovery of his wife's frailty ere their marriage."

"Oh! my God—what will become of me?" murmured Adeline, wringing her hands. "Are you a woman? or are you a fiend?"

"I am a woman—and one who, having suffered much, knows how to revenge deeply," returned Lydia. "You shall obey me—or I will cover you with shame!"

Adeline made no reply; but, with scalding tears trickling down her cheeks, she proceeded—yes, she—the high-born peeress!—to arrange the wood in the grate—to heap up the coals—and to light the fire.

And while she was kneeling in the performance of that menial task,—while her delicate white hands were coming in contact with the black grate,—and while she was shivering in her night gear, and her long dishevelled hair streamed over her naked neck and bosom,—there, within a few feet of her, sate the menial—the servant, comfortably placed in an arm-chair, and calmly surveying the degrading occupation of her mistress.

"I have often—oh! how often—longed for a stick of wood and a morsel of coal to make myself a fire, if no larger than sufficient to warm the palms of my almost frost-bitten hands," said Lydia, after a short pause; "and when I have dragged my weary limbs past the houses of the rich, and have caught sight of the cheerful flames blazing through the area-windows of their kitchens, I have thought to myself, '*Oh! for one hour to sit within the influence of that genial warmth!*' And yet you—*you*, the proud daughter of the aristocracy—recoil in disgust from a task which so many thousands of poor creatures would only be too glad to have an opportunity of performing!"

Adeline sobbed bitterly, but made no reply.

The fire was now blazing in the grate: still the high-born peeress was shivering with the cold—for ere she could put on a single article of clothing, she was forced to wash the black dirt from her delicate fingers.

Then that lady, who—until within a week—had never even done so much as take, with her own hands, a change of linen from the cupboard or select a gown from the wardrobe, was compelled to perform those duties for herself;—and all the while her servant,—her hired servant, to whom she had to pay high wages and afford food and lodging,—that servant was seated in the arm-chair, warming herself by the now cheerful fire!

"Do not be ashamed of your occupation, madam," said Lydia. "It is fortunate for you that there is a well-stocked cupboard to select from, and a well-provided wardrobe to have recourse to. Your linen is of the most delicate texture, and of the most refined work: your feet have never worn any thing coarser than silk. For your gowns, you may choose amongst fifty dresses. One would even think that your ladyship would be bewildered by the variety of the assortment. And yet you are indignant at being compelled to take the trouble to make your selections! For how many long weeks and months together have I been forced, at times, to wear the same thin, tattered gown—the same threadbare shawl—the same well-darned stockings! And how many thousands are there, Adeline, who dwell in rags from the moment of their birth to that of their death! Ah! if we could only take the daughters of the working classes, and give them good clothing,—enable them to smooth their hair with fragrant oil, and to wash their flesh with perfumed soaps,—and provide them with all those accessories which enhance so much the natural loveliness of woman, think you not that they would be as attractive—as worthy of homage—as yourself? And let me tell you, Adeline, that such black ingratitude as I have encountered at your hands, is unknown in the humble cottage:—the poor are not so selfish—so hollow-hearted as the rich!"

While Lydia Hutchinson was thus venting her bitter sarcasm and her cutting reproach upon Lady Ravensworth, the latter was hurriedly accomplishing the routine of the toilet.

She no longer took pride in her appearance:—she scarcely glanced in the mirror as she combed out those tresses which it was Lydia's duty to have arranged;—her sole thought was to escape as speedily as possible from that room where insults and indignities were so profusely accumulated upon her.

But her ordeal of torture was not yet at its end.

So soon as Lady Ravensworth was dressed, Lydia Hutchinson said in a cool but authoritative tone, "Adeline, you will comb out my hair for me now."

"Provoke me not, vile woman—provoke me not beyond the powers of endurance!" almost shrieked the unhappy lady; "or I shall be tempted—oh! I shall be tempted to lay violent hands upon you. My God—my God! what will become of me?"

"I am prepared to stand the risk of any ebullition of fury on your part," said Lydia, in the same imperturbable manner in which she had before spoken. "Lay but a finger upon me to do me an injury, and I will attack you—I will assault you—I will disfigure your countenance with my nails—I will tear out your hair by handfuls—I will beat your teeth from your mouth;—for I am stronger than you—and you would gain nothing by an attempt to hurt me."

"But I will not be your servant!" cried Adeline, fire flashing from her eyes.

"I tended your ladyship when you lay upon the humble couch in my garret, in the agonies of maternity," replied Lydia; "and your ladyship shall now wait upon me."

"No—no! You would make me a slave—a low slave—the lowest of slaves!" ejaculated Adeline, wildly. "You degrade me in my own estimation—you render me contemptible in my own eyes——"

"And you have spurned and scorned me," interrupted Lydia; "you have made me, too, the lowest of slaves, by using me as an instrument to save you from shame;—and now it is time that I should teach you—the proud peeress—that I—the humble and friendless woman—have *my* feelings, which may be wounded as well as *your own*."

"Lydia—I beg you—I implore you—on my knees I beseech you to have mercy upon me!" cried Adeline, clasping her hands together in a paroxysm of ineffable anguish, and falling at the feet of the stern and relentless woman whom she had wronged.

"I can know no mercy for *you*!" said Lydia Hutchinson, now speaking in a deep and almost hoarse tone, which denoted the powerful concentration of her vengeful passions. "When I think of all that I have suffered—when I trace my miseries to their source—and remember how happy I might have been in the society of a fond father and a loving brother,—when I reflect that it was you—*you* who led me astray, and having blighted all my prospects—demanding even the sacrifice of my good name to your interests,—thrust me

away from you with scorn,—when I ponder upon all this, it is enough to drive me mad;—and yet you ask for mercy! No—never, never! I cannot pity you—for I hate, I abhor you!"

"Do not talk so fearfully, Lydia—good Lydia!" cried Adeline, in a voice of despair, while she endeavoured to take the hands of her servant, at whose feet she still knelt.

"Think not to move me with a show of kindness," said Lydia, drawing back her hands in a contemptuous manner: "*your overtures of good treatment come too late!*"

"But I will make amends for the past—I will henceforth consider you as my sister," exclaimed Adeline, raising her eyes in an imploring manner towards the vengeful woman. "I will do all I can to repair my former ingratitude—only be forbearing with me—if not for *my* sake, at least for the sake of my unborn babe!"

"Your maternal feelings have improved in quality of late," said Lydia, with a scornful curl of the lip; "for—as you must well remember—your *first babe* was consigned to me to be concealed in a pond, or thrust into some hole—you cared not how nor where, so long as it was hidden from every eye."

"Of all the agonies which you make me endure, detestable woman," ejaculated Adeline, rising from her knees in a perfect fury of rage and despair, "that perpetual recurrence to the past is the most intolerable of all! Tell me—do you want to kill me by a slow and lingering death? or do you wish to drive me mad—*mad*?" she repeated, her eyes rolling wildly, and her delicate hands clenching as she screamed forth the word.

The scene was really an awful one—a scene to which no powers of description can possibly do justice.

The stern, inflexible tyranny of Lydia Hutchinson forced Lady Ravensworth to pass through all the terrible ordeal of the most tearing and heart-breaking emotions.

Did the miserable peeress endeavour to screen herself within the stronghold of a sullen silence, the words of Lydia Hutchinson would gradually fall upon her, one after the other, with an irritating power that at length goaded her to desperation. Did she meet accusation by retort, and encounter reproach with upbraiding, the inveteracy of Lydia's torturing language wound her feelings up to such a pitch that it was no wonder she should ask, with an agonising scream, whether the avenging woman sought to drive her mad? Or, again, did she endeavour to move the heart of her hired servant by self-humiliation and passionate appeal, the coldness, or the malignant triumph with which those manifestations were received awoke within her that proud and haughty spirit which was now so nearly subdued altogether.

"Do you wish to drive me mad?" Lady Ravensworth had said:—then, when the accompanying paroxysm of feeling was past, she threw herself on a chair, and burst into an agony of tears.

But Lydia was not softened!

She suffered Adeline to weep for a few minutes; and when the unhappy lady was exhausted—subdued—spirit-broken—the unrelenting torturess repeated her command—"You can now arrange my hair."

Oh! bad as Adeline was at heart—selfish as she was by nature and by education,—it would have moved a savage to have seen the imploring, beseeching look which, through her tears, she cast upon Lydia's countenance.

"My hair!" said Lydia, imperatively.

Then Lady Ravensworth rose, and meekly and timidly began to perform that menial office for her own menial.

"I never thought," observed Lydia, "while I was a wanderer and an outcast in the streets,—as, for instance, on the occasion when I accosted you, in the bitterness of my starving condition, in Saint James's Street, and when your lacqueys thrust me back, your husband declaring that *it was easy to see what I was*, and your carriage dashing me upon the kerb-stone,—little did I think *then* that the time would ever be when a peeress of England should dress my hair—and least of all that this peeress should be *you*! But when, in your pride, you spurned the worm—you knew not that the day could ever possibly come for that worm to raise its head and sting you! Think you that I value any peculiar arrangement which you can bestow upon my hair? Think you that I cannot even, were I still vain, adapt it more to my taste with my own hands? Yes—certainly I could! But I compel you to attend upon me thus—I constitute myself the mistress, and make you the menial, when we are alone together—because it is the principal element of my vengeance. It degrades you—it renders you little in your own eyes,—you who were once so great—so haughty—and so proud!"

In this strain did Lydia Hutchinson continue to speak, while Lady Ravensworth arranged her hair.

And each word that the vindictive woman uttered, fell like a drop of molten lead upon the already lacerated heart of the unfortunate Adeline.

At length the ordeal—that same ordeal which had characterised each morning since Lydia Hutchinson had become an inmate of Ravensworth Hall—was over; and Adeline was released from that horrible tyranny—but only for a short time.

CHAPTER CCXIV.

THE DUELLISTS.

When Lady Ravensworth descended to the breakfast parlour, she summoned her husband's principal valet, Quentin, to her presence, and desired him to hasten and inform his lordship that the morning meal was served up.

Quentin bowed and retired.

But both Lady Ravensworth and the valet were well aware that this was a mere idle ceremonial which would only lead to the same ineffectual result as on the six preceding mornings—indeed, ever since the arrival of Lydia Hutchinson at the Hall. At the same time, the servant was very far from suspecting how large a share the new lady's-maid enjoyed in the relapse of his master and the increasing sorrows of his mistress.

In a few minutes Quentin returned.

"His lordship requests you, my lady, to excuse his absence," was the message which he delivered—a message as formal as the one that had evoked it.

"How is your lord this morning?" asked Adeline, with a profound sigh.

"His lordship does not appear to be improving, my lady," was the answer.

Adeline sighed once more, and remained silent.

The valet withdrew; and the unhappy lady endeavoured to eat a morsel of food: but she had no appetite—her stomach seemed to loathe all solid nourishment; and she pushed her plate from her.

She then endeavoured to while away an hour or two with the most recently published novel and the morning's newspapers; but she found her imagination ever wandering to other and sadly painful topics.

It was about mid-day, when, as she was standing listlessly at the window, which commanded a view of the park, she suddenly caught sight of a carriage that was advancing rapidly towards the mansion.

The livery of the servants belonging to it was unknown to her; and she hastily summoned a domestic to instruct him that "she was not at home to any visitors."

The vehicle drove up to the principal entrance of Ravensworth Hall; and although the domestic delivered the answer commanded by his mistress, it did not seem sufficient to cause the departure of the carriage.

There was some conversation between the servant who gave that answer and the occupants of the vehicle;—but Lady Ravensworth could not overhear a word that was said.

In a few minutes, however, the domestic returned to Adeline's presence.

"Please your ladyship," he said, "there is a gentleman below who has just been dangerously wounded in a duel; and his companions earnestly request——"

"I understand you," interrupted Lady Ravensworth. "This is quite another consideration. You must admit them by all means."

The domestic once more hurried away; and Adeline shortly beheld, from the window, two gentlemen alight from the carriage, and then carefully remove a third, who appeared to be in a helpless condition. She did not, however, catch a glimpse of either of their faces.

Lady Ravensworth now felt herself to be in a most unpleasant situation. Her husband, she knew, would not come forth from his private cabinet to do the honours of his mansion; and delicacy prevented her from hastening to receive persons who might be total strangers to her, and who arrived under such extraordinary circumstances.

She did not, however, long hesitate how to act. Ringing the bell, and summoning Quentin to her presence, she said to him, "You must make a fitting excuse for the non-appearance of Lord Ravensworth, and see that the wounded gentleman be conveyed to a chamber. Then assure his friends that they may command every thing they require in this house; and state that I shall be happy to receive them in the drawing-room in half an hour."

Quentin retired to execute this commission. He had the wounded man borne to a bed-room, and offered to send a messenger on horseback to procure medical assistance, from the nearest village; but one of the other two gentlemen proved to be a surgeon, whose services had been engaged in the usual manner by the duellists.

In the meantime, Lady Ravensworth repaired to her boudoir, to change her dress.

She was immediately followed thither by Lydia Hutchinson.

"I do not require your attendance," said Adeline, with a visible shudder, as the lady's-maid closed the door behind her.

"I care not for your wishes or aversions," returned Lydia. "Appearances compel me to wait upon you—or to have the semblance of waiting upon you;—and, moreover, I have something important to communicate. Oh! I feel such pleasure in being the bearer of good news to *you*!"

"What new torture have you in store for me, horrible woman?" cried Lady Ravensworth, affrighted by the malignant bitterness with which these last words were uttered.

"Know you to whom your princely mansion has just afforded its hospitality?" demanded Lydia.

"To a wounded duellist and his friends," replied Adeline. "Is *this* circumstance to be in any way rendered available to your fearful purposes of torture in respect to me?"

"And that wounded duellist and one of his companions are well known to you," said Lydia, impressively.

"Known to me!" ejaculated Adeline, who felt convinced that some fresh cause of anguish to herself lurked in the mysterious language of her torturess.

"Oh! yes—known too well to yourself and to me also!" said Lydia, as if shuddering with concentrated rage.

"Ah! my God—it would require but *that* to drive me to desperation!" exclaimed Adeline, a terrible suspicion darting across her mind.

"Then despair must be your lot," said Lydia, fixing her eyes with malignant joy upon her mistress: "for—as sure as you are called Lady Ravensworth—Lord Dunstable and Colonel Cholmondeley are inmates of this mansion!"

"May God have mercy upon me!" murmured Adeline, in a low but solemn tone.

And she sank almost insensible upon the sofa.

"Yes," continued the unrelenting Lydia, "*he* to whom you gave your honour, as one child might give a toy of little value to another—and *he* who stole my honour as a vile thief plunders the defenceless traveller upon the highway,—those two men are beneath this roof! The villain who ruined me and slew my brother, is now lying upon a bed from which he may never more be removed save to the coffin. His second was the gay seducer who rioted awhile upon your charms, and then threw you aside,—yes, *you*—the daughter of one of England's proudest peers—as he would a flower that had garnished his button-hole for an hour, and then failed to please any longer. These two men are beneath your roof!"

"Oh! if my errors have been great, surely—surely my punishment is more than commensurate!" murmured Adeline, in the bitterness of her heart.

"Your punishment seems only to have just begun," retorted Lydia, ever ready to plunge a fresh dagger into the soul of the unhappy lady.

"My God! you speak but too truly!" ejaculated Adeline, clasping her hands together. "Oh! that I could pass the latter half of my life over again—oh! that I could recall the years that have fled!"

"The years that have fled have prepared a terrible doom for those that are to come," said Lydia. "But hasten, my lady,—*this time* I will aid you to change your dress," she added sneeringly; "for I long to see your meeting with Colonel Cholmondeley."

"*See* our meeting!—*you!*" cried Lady Ravensworth, springing from the sofa in alarm.

"Yes—I shall contrive that pleasure for myself," observed Lydia, calmly.

Adeline made no reply: she felt convinced that all remonstrance would be useless.

She accordingly addressed herself to the toilet, Lydia assisting her in that ceremony for the first time.

"I have chosen the attire that best becomes you—and I have arranged your hair in the most attractive manner," said Lydia; "for I should be vexed were you not to appear to advantage in the presence of him who made you his mistress during pleasure."

"Wretch!" cried Adeline, turning sharply round upon Lydia, whose bitter taunt touched the most sensitive fibre of her heart.

"If I be a wretch, it is you who made me so," said Lydia, with imperturbable coolness.

Adeline bit her lips almost till the blood came, to suppress the rage that rose as it were into her throat.

She then hastily left the boudoir, followed at a short distance by Lydia Hutchinson.

Lady Ravensworth knew that her torturess was behind her,—knew also that it was vain to reason with her in respect to any particular line of conduct that she might choose to adopt.

As the unhappy lady proceeded towards the drawing-room, she endeavoured to compose both her countenance and her mind as much as possible: but she felt herself blushing at one moment and turning pale the next,—now with a face that seemed to be on fire—then with an icy coldness at the heart.

Since she was at school at Belvidere House she had never met Colonel Cholmondeley. He had been much abroad; and, when he was in London, accident had so willed it that he did not once encounter the partner of his temporary amour.

But that same chance was not for ever to be favourable to Adeline in this respect; and now she was at length about to meet that man of all the species in whose presence she had most cause to blush.

Such an encounter was however necessary, for the sake of appearances. What would her servants think if she remained in the solitude of her own chamber while visitors were at the mansion? what would the surgeon, who attended the wounded duellist, conjecture if she refused the common courtesy which became the mistress of the mansion? The total retirement of Lord Ravensworth was already a sufficient reason to provoke strange surmises on the part of the newly-arrived guests, although the existence of his extraordinary and unaccountable malady was well known in the fashionable world: but if to that fact were superadded the circumstance of a similar seclusion on the part of Lady Ravensworth, the most unpleasant rumours might arise. Thus was Adeline imperatively forced to do the honours of her house on this occasion.

And now she has reached the door of the drawing-room.

She pauses for a moment: how violently beats her heart!

"This is foolish!" she murmurs to herself: "the ordeal must be passed;—better to enter upon it at once!"

And she entered the drawing-room.

One only of the guests was there; and he had his back towards the door at the moment.

But full well did she recognise that tall, graceful, and well-knit frame.

The sound of light footsteps upon the thick carpet caused him to turn hastily round;—and then Adeline and her seducer were face to face.

"Lady Ravensworth," said the Colonel, rather averting his glance as he spoke—for he experienced the full embarrassment of this encounter,—"necessity, and not my wish, has compelled me to intrude upon your hospitality. My friend Lord Dunstable and another

officer in the same regiment had an altercation last evening, which would permit of none other than a hostile settlement. The choice of time and place, fell by the laws of honour, to Lord Dunstable's opponent; and the vicinity of your abode was unfortunately fixed upon as the spot for meeting. My friend was grievously wounded with the first shot; and I had no alternative but to convey him to the nearest habitation where hospitality might be hoped for. Your ladyship can now understand the nature of that combination of circumstances which has brought me hither."

"I deeply regret that Lord Ravensworth should be too much indisposed to do the honours of his house in person," said Adeline, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, and a deep blush upon her cheeks. "Is your friend's wound dangerous?"

"Mr. Graham, a surgeon of known skill, is now with him," answered the Colonel; "and entertains great hopes of being enabled to extract the ball, which has lodged in the right side. It is true that I incur some risk by remaining in the neighbourhood of the metropolis; but I cannot consent to abandon my friend until I am convinced that he is beyond danger."

"*It is the fashion in the aristocratic world to adhere to a friend, but to abandon the seduced girl when she no longer pleases*," said Lydia Hutchinson, who had entered the room unperceived by either Colonel Cholmondeley or Lady Ravensworth, and who now advanced slowly towards them.

The Colonel stared at Lydia for a few moments: but evidently not recognising her, he turned a rapid glance of inquiry upon Adeline, who only hung down her head, and remained silent.

"I see that you do not know me, sir," continued Lydia, approaching close to Colonel Cholmondeley: then, fixing her eyes intently upon him, she said, "Do you remember me now?"

"My good young woman," replied the Colonel, with a mixture of hauteur and bantering jocularity, "I really do not think that you have served in any family which I have had the honour to visit: and, even if you had, I must candidly confess that my memory is not capacious enough to retain the image of every lady's-maid whom I may happen to see."

"And yet it is not every lady's-maid," said Lydia, with a scornful glance towards Adeline, who, pale and trembling, had sunk upon a seat,—"it is not every lady's-maid that can venture to talk thus openly—thus familiarly in the presence of her mistress."

While she was yet speaking, a light broke upon the Colonel's mind. Who but one acquainted with Lady Ravensworth's secret could be capable of such extraordinary conduct? This idea led him to survey Lydia Hutchinson's countenance more attentively than before;—and, although it was much altered,—although it no longer bore the blooming freshness which had characterised it when he first knew her,—still the expression and the features enabled him to recognise the young woman who had become the victim of his friend Lord Dunstable.

"Ah! you know me now," continued Lydia, perceiving by a sudden gesture on the part of the Colonel that he *had* at length remembered her. "Think you that I have no reproaches to hurl at you, sir? Was it not at your house that my ruin was consummated? and were you no party to the infamous treachery which gave me to the arms of your friend? But you have no shame:—you are a fashionable gentleman—a *roué*—one who considers seduction an aristocratic amusement, as well as wrenching off knockers or breaking policemen's heads. What to such as you are the tears of deceived and lost girls? what to you are the broken hearts of fond parents? Nothing—nothing: I know it well! And therefore it were vain for me to say another word—unless it be that I shall now leave you to make your peace as best you may with your cast-off mistress *there*!"

And pointing disdainfully at Adeline, who uttered a low scream and covered her face with her hands as those terrible words fell upon her ears, Lydia slowly quitted the room.

Frightfully painful was now the situation of Lady Ravensworth and Colonel Cholmondeley.

The former was crushed by the terrible indignity cast upon her: the latter was so astounded and at the same time so hurt by all that had just occurred, that he knew not how to act.

He felt that any attempt to console Lady Ravensworth would be an insult; and yet he experienced an equal inability to permit the scene to pass without some comment.

Fortunately for them both, Mr. Graham, the surgeon, entered the room at this juncture.

Adeline composed herself by one of those extraordinary efforts which she had lately been so often compelled to exert; and Cholmondeley, with the case of a man of fashion (who must necessarily be a thorough hypocrite), instantly assumed a manner that would even have disarmed suspicion, had any been excited.

Having uttered a few ceremonial phrases upon his introduction to Lady Ravensworth, Mr. Graham said, "I am happy to state that Lord Dunstable is in as favourable a state as under the circumstances could be expected. I have succeeded in extracting the ball—and he now sleeps."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Cholmondeley,—not with any real piety, but merely using that common phrase as expressive of his joy to think that the matter was not more serious than it now appeared to be.

"I am, however, afraid," continued the surgeon, turning towards Adeline, "that my patient will be compelled to trespass for some few days upon the kind hospitality of your ladyship."

"In which case Lord Dunstable shall receive every attention that can be here afforded him," observed Adeline. "It would be but an idle compliment to you, sir, under the circumstances, to say that Ravensworth Hall will be honoured by your presence so long as you may see fit to make it your abode."

The surgeon bowed in acknowledgment of this courteous intimation.

"For my part," Colonel Cholmondeley hastened to say, "I shall not trespass upon her ladyship's hospitality; for—since I am assured that my friend is no longer in danger—I must attend to certain pressing business which calls me elsewhere."

Adeline threw a glance of gratitude upon the Colonel for this expression of his intention to relieve her from the embarrassment of his presence; and accordingly, after partaking of some luncheon, Cholmondeley took his departure.

But ere he left, Lydia Hutchinson had secretly placed a letter, containing a key, upon the seat of the carriage which bore him away.

CHAPTER CCXV.

THE VOICES IN THE RUINS.

It would be impossible to conceive the existence of a more wretched woman than Adeline Ravensworth.

Though wealth and title were hers,—though every luxury and every pleasure were within her reach,—though with jewels of inestimable value she might deck herself at will, and thus enhance her natural charms,—still, still was she the prey to a constant agony of mind which rendered life intolerable.

For it is not all the wealth of India,—nor all the luxuries and pleasures of oriental palaces,—nor all the diamonds that ever sparkled over the brow of beauty,—it is not these that can impart tranquillity to the soul, nor give peace to the conscience.

Such was the bitter truth that Adeline was now compelled to acknowledge!

Shortly after the departure of Colonel Cholmondeley, which occurred at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Lady Ravensworth felt so deeply the want of undisturbed solitude for her meditations and of fresh air to relieve the stifling sensation which oppressed her, that she determined to take a long walk through the quiet fields.

Hastily slipping on a plain straw bonnet and a thick warm shawl, she left the house unperceived by her torturess—Lydia Hutchinson.

Passing through the spacious gardens at the back of the mansion, she gained the open fields, where the cold fresh breeze somewhat revived her drooping spirits.

"Heaven grant that the babe which now agitates in my bosom may prove a son!" she thought, as she cast a hasty but proud glance around: "or else the broad lands which I now behold, and the soil on which my feet now tread, will stand but a poor chance of remaining long beneath my control. Yes—they would pass away to one whom I have never seen—whom I have never known save by name—and who could not possibly be supposed to entertain any sympathy for me! But if my babe should prove a boy—if he should live, too—then adieu to all thy hopes and chances, Gilbert Vernon."

These reflections led to a variety of others—all connected with Adeline's interests or her sorrows.

So profoundly was she plunged in her painful reverie, and at the same time so invigorated did she feel by the freshness of the air, that she insensibly prolonged her walk until the shades of evening gathered around her.

She had now reached the ruined remains of a gamekeeper's lodge which marked the boundary of the Ravensworth estate in that direction.

Feeling a sudden sensation of weariness come over her, she seated herself on a bench which still existed near the dilapidated remnant of the cottage-portico.

Scarcely had she taken that place, when a voice from the other side of the ruined wall caused her to start with sudden affright: but the words that met her ears conquered this first feeling of alarm, and inspired one of curiosity.

She accordingly lingered where she was; and as the darkness was every moment growing more intense, she knew there was but little danger of being perceived.

"I tell you that I am a man capable of doing any thing for money," said the voice, in an impatient tone. "If you think there is any squeamishness about me, you are deucedly mistaken. What I have promised you, I will perform, when the time comes, and if there should be a necessity for such a step. I value a human life no more than I do that of a dog. If any one came to me and said, '*There is my enemy, and here is your price—now go and kill him*,' I should just count the money first to see that it was all right, and the remainder of the job would soon be done, I can assure you."

"Well—well, I believe you," said another voice, whose deep tones rolled solemnly upon the silence of the dark evening. "To all that you have proposed I must assent—I have gone too far to retreat. But we must now separate."

"And when shall I see you again?" demanded the first speaker: "because now that you have made me acquainted with the whereabouts, I shall constantly be ascertaining how things go on, and I ought therefore to be able to communicate very often with you. That is—I ought to see you frequently; for I hate doing business by letter."

"Can you not give me your own private address?" asked the individual with the deep-toned voice; "and then I might call upon you every other evening."

"Well said," exclaimed the first speaker: then, after a pause, during which Adeline distinctly heard the rustling sound of paper, he said, "Have you got a pencil in your pocket? for I can *feel* to write a few words in the dark."

"Yes—here is a pencil," returned the deep-toned voice.

There was another short pause.

"All right!" cried the first speaker, at length. "That bit of paper contains the name and address of the most daring fellow that London ever produced," he added with a low chuckle. "Talk of your bravos of Spain or Italy—why, they are nothing to me! And isn't it odd, too, that whenever a rich or great person wants any thing queer done for him, it is sure to be me that he gets hold of somehow or another?"

"I have no doubt that you enjoy a most extensive patronage," said the deep-toned voice, rather impatiently—and even haughtily.

"But we must now separate. The day after to-morrow—in the evening—I shall call upon you."

"Good: I shall expect you," returned the other.

The two individuals then separated—each taking a different way; but one came round the angle of the ruined wall, and passed so close to Adeline that she shrank back in a dreadful state of alarm lest her presence there should be discovered;—for, mysterious as was the conversation which she had just overheard, there was one fact which it too intelligibly revealed—and this was the desperate nature of those two men's characters.

But the individual who passed so closely, did not observe her—for the evening was very dark, and she moreover was sitting in the still deeper obscurity of the ruined portico.

Neither was she enabled to obtain a glimpse of his countenance: the outline of a tall and somewhat stout figure, as he hurried by her, was the extent of the view which she caught of him.

In a few moments all was again silent: the sounds of the retreating footsteps no longer met her ears.

She did not immediately leave the ruins: she paused to reflect upon the strange conversation which she had overheard. But all its details were dark and mysterious—save that one man was a wretch who gloried in his readiness to perform any crime for a commensurate reward, and that the other was either his accomplice or his employer in some fearful plot that was in progress.

There was one expression that had fallen from the lips of the former miscreant, and on which Lady Ravensworth principally dwelt:—"*Now that you have made me acquainted with the whereabouts, I shall be constantly ascertaining how things go on*."

Could the *whereabouts*, or locality, alluded to, have any connexion with that neighbourhood? And, if so, did the observation refer to the Ravensworth estate? Or were the two men merely discussing, in those ruins, matters which regarded some other and totally distinct spot?

"The latter supposition must be the right one," said Adeline to herself, after a long meditation upon the subject. "The only person in the world who could have any interest in learning '*how things were going on*' in this neighbourhood, is Gilbert Vernon; and he is in Turkey. Moreover—even were he in England—he would have no need to spy about in the dark: he is on friendly terms with his brother, and might present himself boldly at the Hall."

Thus reasoning against the vague and temporary fears which had arisen in her mind, Adeline rose from the bench and was about to retrace her steps homewards, when the moon suddenly appeared from behind a cloud, and its rays fell upon a small white object that lay at the lady's feet.

She mechanically picked it up:—it was a piece of paper on which she could perceive, by the moonlight, that a few words were written; but she could not decypher them.

Nevertheless, the mode in which the short lines were arranged struck her with the idea that this paper contained an address; and a natural association of facts immediately encouraged the belief that she held in her hand the one which the self-vaunted bravo had given ere now to his companion, and which the latter might probably have dropped by accident.

Hastily concealing it in her bosom, Adeline retraced her steps to Ravensworth Hall.

On her arrival she hurried to her boudoir, lighted the wax tapers, and examined the paper ere she even laid aside her bonnet and shawl.

Yes—it contained an address; and the words were scrawled as they would be if written in the dark.

There could, then, be no doubt that this was the address which one of the men had given to his companion in the ruins of the gamekeeper's lodge.

"It is useful to know that such a villain as this can be hired for money!" muttered Adeline to herself, as she concealed the paper in one of her jewel-caskets. "What did he say? That if any one went to him and whispered, '*There is my enemy, and here is your price—now go and kill him*,' he would take the bribe and do the deed. And did he not boast that he was employed by the rich and the powerful? In what manner could such persons require his aid? Assuredly in no good cause! Ah! Lydia—Lydia," continued Adeline, her brows contracting and a dark cloud passing over her countenance as she spoke, "be not too confident! You are now in *my* power!"

But scarcely was the fearful thought thus implied, when Adeline seemed to recoil from it with horror: for, covering her face with her hands, she almost shrieked out, "No—no! I could not do it!"

"What can you not do, dearest?" said a low voice close by her ear; and almost at the same instant she was clasped in the arms of Colonel Cholmondeley.

"Release me—release me!" exclaimed Adeline, struggling to free herself from his embrace.

"Not till I have imprinted another kiss upon, those sweet lips," returned the Colonel: "not till I have made my peace with you, dearest Adeline, in respect to the past:—else wherefore should I have come hither?"

And as he uttered these words, he glued his lips to hers, although she still continued to resist his insolence to the utmost of her power.

"Oh! my God!" she murmured in a faint tone "am I to submit to this new indignity?"

Cholmondeley supported her to the sofa; then, throwing himself at her feet, he took her hands in his, and said in a fervent tone, "Adeline—dearest Adeline, wherefore do you receive me thus coldly? Is it possible that you can have altogether forgotten those feelings which animated our hearts with a reciprocal affection some years ago? But perhaps my conduct—my ungrateful, my ungenerous conduct—has completely effaced all those emotions, and excited hatred and disgust instead? Oh! I admit—I acknowledge that my conduct *was* ungrateful—*was* ungenerous! I abandoned you at a moment when you most required my counsel—my assistance! But was my fault so grave that it is beyond the possibility of pardon? When I found myself this morning brought by an imperious necessity—or rather by a strange chance—to this mansion, I thought within my breast, '*I shall now see Adeline once again: but we must be strangers unto each other. Cold ceremony must separate hearts that once beat in the reciprocities of love.*'—And you know, Adeline, with what formal respect I sought to treat you. But when I beheld you so beautiful, and yet so unhappy,—when I saw that the lovely girl had grown into the charming woman,—oh! I was every moment about to dash aside that chilling ceremony and snatch you to my breast. And now, Adeline, will you forgive me?—will you say that you do not quite detest me—even if you cannot call me your lover—your friend?"

With her head drooping upon her bosom,—with tears trembling upon her long dark lashes,—and with her hands still retained in those of Colonel Cholmondeley, did Adeline listen to this specious appeal.

The words "*your friend*" touched a chord which vibrated to her heart's core.

"Oh! yes—I do require a friend—a friend to advise and console me," she exclaimed; "for I am very—very miserable!"

Cholmondeley was man of the world enough to perceive that his appeal was successful—that his victory was complete; and, seating himself by Adeline's side, he drew her towards him, saying, "I will be your friend, dearest—I will advise you—I will console you. You shall pour forth all your sorrows to me, as if I were your brother: and I swear most solemnly, beloved Adeline, that if it be your wish, I will never seek henceforth to be more to you than a brother!"

"Oh! if that were true—if I could rely upon your word!" cried Adeline, joyfully.

"By every sacred obligation with which man can bind himself, do I vow the sincerity of that promise," returned Cholmondeley.

Then withdrawing his arm from her waist, as a tacit proof of his honourable intentions, but still retaining one of her hands in his own, he looked anxiously in her countenance to read the impression which his words and manner had created.

"Again I say that if I could believe you, I should think myself happy—nay, blest in your friendship," returned Adeline; "for I am so miserable—so very, very wretched—that I feel the burden of such an existence too heavy to bear. All that has passed between us constitutes a reason to induce me to accept you as my friend, rather than any other;—for I have lately seen so much of the fiend-like disposition of *one* woman, that I am inclined to abhor the whole sex—yes, even though it be my own! And to you, moreover, I can speak frankly of those causes which have rendered me so very wretched."

"Speak, dear Adeline—unburden your mind to me," said Cholmondeley, in a low, but tender tone. "I must, however, inform you that I am already acquainted with many of the incidents regarding the connexion between Lydia Hutchinson and yourself, from the moment when Lord Dunstable and I so dishonourably wrote to you both to state that we were going abroad. Yes—Adeline, I have learnt how you were extricated from the embarrassments of that situation in which I shamefully left you,—how, in a word, the offspring of our love was born dead and disposed of, and how your reputation was saved through the means of Lydia."

"You know all those fearful particulars?" exclaimed Lady Ravensworth, profoundly surprised at what she heard.

"Yes, dearest: for Lydia, some time after she left the school, became the mistress of my friend Dunstable; and she told him all. He related those incidents to me: it was natural that he should do—seeing that we were mutually acquainted with each-other's loves. And, oh! my dearest Adeline," continued the Colonel, "I can well understand how completely that odious woman is enabled to tyrannise over you."

"And you can also comprehend how much I stand in need of a friend?" said Lady Ravensworth; "for it is hard to be compelled to nurse one's griefs—to conceal one's sorrows—without being able to unburden to a single living soul a heart surcharged with woe."

"I will be that friend, Adeline," replied Cholmondeley.

"But, oh! what dangers do I incur by seeing you—by receiving you here!" exclaimed Adeline. "And this thought reminds me that I am even yet ignorant of the means by which you gained access to my chamber."

"Nay, Adeline," said Cholmondeley, in a tender tone, "do not attempt to disavow the encouragement which you so kindly gave me—and to which you now force me to allude."

"Encouragement!" repeated Lady Ravensworth, with a tone and manner expressive of unfeigned surprise.

"Yes, dearest. That key which I found in the post-chaise—and the few words written upon the paper which enveloped it——"

"My God! there is some fearful mistake in all this!" cried Adeline, seriously alarmed. "But explain yourself—quickly—I conjure you!"

Cholmondeley was now astonished in his turn; and hastily taking a paper from his pocket, he handed it to Lady Ravensworth, saying, "The key was enclosed in this."

Adeline cast her eyes upon the paper, and read these words:—

> "The key contained herein belongs to a door on the southern side of Ravensworth Hall: and that door communicates with a private staircase leading to the passage from which my own apartments open. I wish to converse with you in secret—if only for a moment; and though I have taken this imprudent—this unpardonable step, you will surely spare my feelings, should you avail yourself of the possession of the key, by forbearing in my presence from any allusion to the means by which it fell into your hands."

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated Adeline, when she had hurriedly glanced over the paper: "I am ruined—I am undone! It must be that fiend Lydia, who has thus paved the way for my utter destruction!"

There was the wildness of despair in the manner of Lady Ravensworth, as she uttered these words; and Cholmondeley could not for another moment imagine that her distress was feigned.

"What do you mean, Adeline?" he said: "did you not send me the key?—did you not pen those lines? Surely—surely the handwriting is yours?"

"As God is my judge, Cholmondeley," she answered, emphatically, "I never sent you the key—I never penned those lines! No—it is Lydia who has done it: she knows my writing well—she has imitated it but too faithfully! Go—fly—depart, Cholmondeley: ruin awaits me—perhaps both!"

The Colonel dared not delay another moment: the almost desperate wildness of Adeline's manner convinced him that she spoke the truth—that she had *not* invited him thither.

"At least let me hope to see you soon again—or to hear from you," he said, imprinting a hasty kiss upon her forehead.

"Yes—yes—any thing you will, so that you now leave me," she cried, in a tone of agonising alarm.

Cholmondeley rushed to the door:—Adeline followed him into the passage, bearing a candle in her hand.

The reader may conceive the relief which she experienced, when, upon casting a rapid glance up and down, she found that her torturess was not there either to expose her completely, or to triumph over her alarms.

"Farewell," whispered Cholmondeley; and he disappeared down the staircase.

Adeline remained at the top, until she heard the private door at the bottom carefully open and as gently close.

Then she breathed more freely, and re-entered her own chamber.

"What could Lydia mean by this perfidious plot?" she murmured to herself, as she sank upon the sofa, exhausted both mentally and bodily. "She was not there to enjoy my confusion; she did not come with the servants to behold what might have been considered the evidence of infidelity towards my husband:—what, then, could she mean?" Scarcely had these words passed Adeline's lips, when the door opened, and her torturess entered the room.

CHAPTER CCXVI.

THE PROGRESS OF LYDIA HUTCHINSON'S VENGEANCE.

"What means this new device, terrible woman?" cried Adeline, advancing towards Lydia Hutchinson, and giving vent to the question which was uppermost in her mind.

"Ah! you have already detected my handiwork in the new source of torment which is now open against you?" said Lydia, with a smile of triumphant contempt.

"I know that you have forged a letter in imitation of my writing——" began Adeline.

"And that letter has already produced the desired effect," interrupted Lydia, coolly; "for five minutes have scarcely elapsed since Colonel Cholmondeley stole from the private door opening upon the garden."

"Then you were watching the results of your detestable scheme," cried Lady Ravensworth, in a tone bitter with rage.

"Not only I—but half a dozen of the other dependants of the household," returned Lydia.

"Merciful God! you have done this, vile woman?" screamed Lady Ravensworth. "No—no: you surely could not have been so wicked?"

"I have done it," replied Lydia, in her calm, impassive manner.

"Then it is now for *me* to think of vengeance!" said Adeline, conquering the turbulent emotions of passion which agitated within her, and flinging herself once more upon the sofa, while her thoughts wandered to the address concealed in the casket of jewels.

"*You* think of vengeance!" repeated Lydia, scornfully. "Oh! I should rejoice if you were to meet me with my own weapons—for such conduct on *your* part would afford *me* scope and excuse for augmenting the means of punishment which I employ. And now listen to the details of that scheme by which I have this evening so successfully degraded you."

"Wretch!" muttered Adeline, hoarsely between her teeth.

"Hard names break no bones, my lady," said Lydia. "But again I enjoin you to listen to what I have to tell you. I knew your handwriting well—and it was no difficult thing to imitate it. I penned that letter which the Colonel ere now showed you—and I enclosed the key. In the note I desired that no allusion might be made by him to that letter, because I wished the interview to be a long one, and I suspected that the suddenness and boldness of his unexpected intrusion would cause a protracted conversation ere any question on your part would elicit from him the means by which he had obtained access to your privacy. Nor was I mistaken."

"Then you listened—you overheard all that passed between us?" cried Adeline.

"Nearly every word," answered Lydia: "I only quitted the door of this chamber when he was about to leave it."

"And therefore you are well aware that he received no criminal encouragement on my part?"

"Oh! is there nothing criminal in the fact of a lady accepting her seducer—her former lover—the father of her first child, as her friend? And such a friend as Cholmondeley would prove!" continued Lydia, in a tone of the most mordent sarcasm: "such a friend! Good heavens! does your ladyship suppose that that man who is so selfish in his pleasure—so unprincipled in his adoption of means to procure the gratification of his wishes—would content himself with the cold title and small privileges of a friend? No—no! Were you to encourage his visits to this boudoir, ere the third were passed, you would become criminal again!"

"And was it to render me criminal again that you inveigled him hither by an atrocious forgery?" exclaimed Adeline.

"Such was not my object," replied Lydia; "although I have no interest in protecting your virtue! *Your virtue*—the virtue of Adeline Enfield—the virtue of Lady Ravensworth! Where was ever virtue so immaculate?"

"Beware lest you destroy every particle of virtue—that is, of forbearance—remaining within me," cried Adeline, her thoughts again reverting to the address which she had concealed in her jewel-casket.

"Could you kill me, I believe you capable of laying violent hands upon me," returned Lydia; "for I know how you must hate *me*—even as sincerely as I loathe *you*! But I have before told you that I am stronger than you!"

Adeline made no answer: her mind now dwelt with less horror than before upon the possible use which she might be driven to make of the address in the casket.

"Oh! brood—brood over plans of vengeance," exclaimed Lydia; "and remember that I defy you! All the dark malignity which is now expressed in your lowering countenance, does not terrify me. But listen to the conclusion of the narrative which I ere now began. My object in effecting the prolongation of the interview between Cholmondeley and yourself, was to afford me leisure to warn those of your servants to whom I had already hinted my suspicions of your infidelity."

Adeline started convulsively, but checked the reply which rose to her lips.

"I stationed myself in the garden, accompanied by the housekeeper," continued Lydia; "for I suspected that your Colonel would not allow one evening to elapse ere he availed himself of the invitation which he supposed to have come from you. Nor was I mistaken. We saw him creep stealthily along towards the private door: we saw him enter. Then, while I flew hither to listen in the passage to what might pass between you, the housekeeper hastened to fetch Quentin——"

"Quentin!" cried Adeline, with a shudder.

"Yes—your husband's principal valet and four of the other servants, that they might watch your supposed lover's departure," continued Lydia. "But fear not that the tidings will reach your husband. No: my vengeance does not seek to wound him:—I pity him too much for that! My sole object was to degrade *you* in the eyes of your domestics, as *I* have been degraded in the eyes of the world; for I must reduce *your* situation as nearly as I can to the level of what *mine* so lately was—that you may understand how much I have suffered, and how strong is my justification in avenging myself on the one whose bad example and ungrateful heart threw me into the ways of vice and sorrow."

"And how can *you*, detestable woman, prevent my servants from circulating this terrible scandal?" cried Lady Ravensworth, trembling as she beheld ruin and disgrace yawning like a black precipice at her feet, ready to engulph her: "how can *you* seal the lips of Quentin, so that this same scandal shall not reach the ears of my husband?"

"I have enjoined them all to secrecy on many grounds," answered Lydia: "I have pointed out to them the necessity of waiting for ampler proofs of your guilt—I have represented to them the propriety of sparing you in your present position, so near the time of becoming a mother as you are—and I have also conjured them to exercise forbearance on account of their lord, for whom they all feel deeply."

"Oh! how kind—how considerate were you in my behalf!" exclaimed Adeline, bitterly: "and yet—were I already a mother—you would not hesitate, doubtless, to wreak your fiend-like vengeance upon my poor innocent babe."

"God forbid!" cried Lydia, emphatically: "no—it is enough that I punish *you*."

"And yet every taunt you throw in my teeth—every indignity you compel me to undergo—every torture you inflict upon me, redound in their terrible effects upon the child which I bear in my bosom," said Lady Ravensworth, pressing her clasped hands convulsively to her heart.

"I know it—and I regret it," returned Lydia coldly: "but I cannot consent to forego one tittle of all the tortures which my mind suggests as a punishment for such a bad and heartless creature as yourself. I shall now leave you; for I have more work in hand. I have undertaken to sit up during the first half of the night, in the chamber of the wounded Lord Dunstable. The housekeeper will relieve me for the second half."

"Heavens! have you found another object whereon to wreak your vengeance?" exclaimed Adeline. "Then may God have mercy upon the unhappy man!"

"Yes—pray for him, Adeline: he will have need of all your sympathy!"

With these words Lydia Hutchinson left the boudoir.

It was now nine o'clock in the evening: Mr. Graham had been left to dine alone; and Adeline felt the necessity of proceeding to the drawing-room, to join her guest in partaking of coffee.

A plea of indisposition was offered for her absence from the dinner-table; and to her questions concerning his patient, Mr. Graham replied favourably.

The evening dragged its slow length wearily along; for Adeline was too much depressed in spirits to prove a very agreeable companion. She moreover fancied she beheld an impudent leer upon the countenances of the domestics who served the coffee; and this circumstance, although in reality imaginary, only tended to complete her confusion and paralyse her powers of conversation.

Were it not that *she* now dreamt of vengeance in her turn,—were it not that she beheld a chance of speedily ridding herself for ever of the torturess whom circumstances had inflicted upon her,—she could not possibly have endured the weight of the last indignity forced upon her.

To be made the object, as she deemed herself to be, of her very servants' scandalous talk and insulting looks, was a position so utterly debasing, that she would have fled from it by means of suicide, had she not consoled herself by the idea that a terrible vengeance on the authoress of her degradation was within her reach.

Crime is like an object of terror seen dimly through the obscurity of night. When afar off from it, the appearance of that object is so vaguely horrible—so shapelessly appalling, that it makes the hair stand on end; but the more the eye contemplates it—the more familiar the beholder grows with its aspect—and the nearer he advances towards it, the less terrible does it become; until at length, when he goes close up to it, and touches it, he wonders that he was ever so weak as to be alarmed by it.

We have seen Lady Ravensworth recoiling with horror from the bare idea of perpetrating the crime which the possession of the self-vaunted bravo's address suggested to her imagination:—the next time it entered her thoughts, she was less terrified;—a few hours passed—and she was now pondering calmly and coldly upon the subject.

O God! what is the cause of this? Is there implanted in the heart of man a natural tendency towards even the blackest crimes—a tendency which only requires the influence of particular circumstances to develop it to its dark and terrible extreme?

We may here explain the motives which had induced Colonel Cholmondeley to endeavour to renew his connexion with Adeline.

Of love remaining for her he had none—even if he had ever experienced any at all. But his interests might have been probably served by the restoration of his former influence over her.

He was a man of ruined fortunes—having dissipated a large property; and although he still contrived to maintain appearances, the struggle was a severe one, and only kept up with the desperate view of "hooking an heiress."

Thus, when he found the letter and the key in the carriage—naturally presuming that Adeline had herself thereby intimated her readiness to renew their former *liaison*,—he began to reflect that Lord Ravensworth was dying—that Lady Ravensworth might, should she have a son, be speedily left a wealthy widow—or that at all events she must acquire some fortune at her husband's decease,—and that he should be acting prudently to adopt all possible means to regain his ancient influence over her.

This explanation will account for his readiness to act in accordance with the hint which he had fancied to have been conveyed by Adeline through the medium of the letter and the key: it will also show wherefore he humoured her, during their interview, in respect to accepting the colder denomination of *friend*, instead of the warmer one of *lover*.

The reader may imagine his confusion, when an explanation took place relative to the letter and the key; nor need we describe the

bitter feelings with which he beat his ignominious retreat.

It was eleven o'clock at night.

Mr. Graham had just left his patient in a profound sleep, and had retired to the bed-room allotted to him, Lydia Hutchinson having already come to keep the promised vigil by the couch of the wounded nobleman.

The curtains were drawn around the bed: waxlights burnt upon the mantel.

A deep silence reigned throughout the mansion.

Lydia Hutchinson threw herself back in the arm-chair, and gave way to her reflections.

"Thus far has my vengeance progressed: but it is not yet near its termination. It must fall alike upon the woman who first taught me the ways of duplicity and vice, and on him who used the blackest treachery to rob me of my innocence. Oh! who would have ever thought that I—once so humane in disposition—once possessed of so kind a heart that I sacrificed myself to save a friend,—who would have thought that I could have become such a fiend in dealing forth retribution? But my heart is not yet completely hardened: it is only towards those at whose hands I have suffered, that my sympathies flow no longer. And even in respect to the hateful Adeline, how often—oh! how often am I forced to recall to mind all my wrongs—to ponder, to brood upon them—in order to nerve myself to execute my schemes of vengeance! When she spoke this evening of her unborn child, she touched my heart:—I could have wept—I could have wept,—but I dared not! I was compelled to take refuge in that freezing manner which I have so well studied to assume when I contemplate her sufferings. My God! thou knowest how great are my wrongs! A father's grey hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave impel me to revenge:—the voice of a brother's blood appeals to me also for revenge! Revenge—revenge—upon Adeline and on the perfidious nobleman sleeping here!"

She had reached this point in her musings, when Lord Dunstable moved, and coughed gently.

He was awake.

"Graham," he murmured, in a faint tone: "for God's sake give me some drink—my throat is parched!"

"Mr. Graham is not present," answered Lydia: "chance has brought *me* hither to attend upon you."

Thus speaking, she drew aside the curtains.

Lord Dunstable cast one glance up to that countenance which looked malignantly on him.

"Lydia!" he said: "is that you? or is my imagination playing me false?"

"It *is* Lydia Hutchinson, whom you betrayed—whose brother fell by your hand—and who is now here to taunt you with all the infamy of your conduct towards her," was the calm and measured reply.

"Am alone with you?—is there none else present?" asked Dunstable, in a tone of alarm.

Lydia drew the curtains completely aside; and the nobleman cast a hasty look round the room.

"You see that we are alone together," she said; "and you are in my power!"

"What would you do to me, Lydia?" he exclaimed: "you cannot be so wicked as to contemplate——"

"I am wicked enough to contemplate any thing horrible in respect to *you*!" interrupted the avenging woman. "But fear not for your life. No:—although your hands be imbrued with the blood of my brother, I would not become a murderess because you are a murderer."

"Did a man apply that name to me," said Dunstable, darting a savage glance towards Lydia's countenance, "he should repent his insolence sooner or later."

"And are you not a murderer as well as a ravisher?" cried Lydia, in a taunting tone. "By means the most vile—the most cowardly—the most detestable—the most degrading to a man, you possessed yourself of my virtue. Afterwards, when my brother stood forth as the avenger of his sister's lost honour, you dared to point the murderous weapon at him whom you had already so grossly wronged in wronging me. Ravisher, you are a cowardly villain!—duellist, you are a cold-blooded murderer!"

"Lydia—Lydia, what are *you*?" cried Lord Dunstable; "a fiend—thus to treat a wounded man who is so completely at your mercy!"

"And how did you treat me when I was at your mercy at the house of your equally abandoned friend Cholmondeley?" continued Lydia. "Was not the wine which I drank, drugged for an especial purpose? Or, even if it were not—and supposing that I was intemperate,—granting, I say, that the stupefaction into which I fell was the result of my own imprudence in drinking deeply of a liquor till then unknown to me,—did you act honourably in availing yourself of my powerlessness to rob me of the only jewel I possessed? I was poor, my lord—but I was still virtuous:—you plundered me of that chastity which gave me confidence in myself and was the element of my good name! No prowling—skulking—masked thief ever performed a more infernal part than did you on that foul night!"

"And now that years have passed, you regret the loss of a bauble—call it a jewel, indeed!—which I certainly seized an opportunity to steal, but which you would have given me of your own accord a few days later, had I chosen to wait?" said Dunstable, speaking contemptuously, and yet with great difficulty.

"It is false—it is false—it is false!" replied Lydia, in a hoarse voice that indicated the rage which these words excited in her bosom. "I never should have yielded to you: never—never! But when once I was lost, I became like all women in the same state—reckless, indifferent! Villain that you are, you make light of your crimes. Oh! I am well aware that seduction—rape, even, under such circumstances as those in which you ravished me—are not deemed enormities in the fashionable world: they are achievements at which profligates like yourself laugh over their wine, and which render them favourites with the ladies! Yon call seductions and rapes by the noble name of '*conquests*!' O glorious conqueror that *you* were, when you lay down by the side of a mere girl who was insensible, and rifled her of the only jewel that adorned her! How was your victory celebrated? By my tears! What have been its consequences? My ruin and utter degradation! Detestable man, of what have you to boast? Of plunging a poor, defenceless woman into the depths of misery—of hurrying her father to the grave with a broken heart—of murdering her brother! Those are your conquests, monster that you are!"

Weak as was the young nobleman's frame,—attenuated as was his mind by suffering and by prostration of the physical energies, it is not to be wondered at if those terrible reproaches produced a strange effect upon him,—uttered as they were, too, in a tone of savage malignity, and by a woman with whom he found himself alone at an hour when all the other inmates of the mansion were probably rocked in slumber.

That evanescent gleam of a naturally spirited disposition which had enabled him to meet her first taunts with a contemptuous reply, had disappeared; and he now found himself prostrated in mind and body—rapidly yielding to nervous feelings and vague alarms—and almost inclined to believe himself to be the black-hearted criminal which Lydia represented him.

"And when such profligates as you appear in the fashionable world, after some new conquest," proceeded Lydia, "how triumphant—how proud are ye, if the iniquity have obtained notoriety! Ye are the objects of all conversation—of all interest! And what is your punishment at the hands of an outraged society? Ladies tap you with their fans, and say slyly, '*Oh! the naughty man!*' And the naughty man smiles—displays his white teeth—and becomes the hero of the party! But all the while, how many bitter tears are shed elsewhere on his account! what hearts are breaking through his villany! Such has doubtless been your career, Lord Dunstable: and I do not envy you the feelings which must now possess you. For should that wound prove fatal—should mortification ensue—should this, in a word, be your death-bed, how ill-prepared are you to meet that all-seeing and avenging Judge who will punish you the more severely on account of the high station which you have held in the world!"

"Water, Lydia—water!" murmured Lord Dunstable: "my throat is parched. Water—I implore you!"

"How could I give you so poor a drink as water, when you gave me wine?"

"Oh! spare those taunts! I am dying with thirst."

"And I am happy in the thirst which now possesses me—but it is a thirst for vengeance!"

"Water—water! I am fainting."

"Great crimes demand great penance. Do you know in whose mansion you are? This is Ravensworth Hall," added Lydia; "and Lady Ravensworth is Adeline—Cholmondely's late paramour."

"I know all that," said Lord Dunstable, faintly: "but how came you here?"

"It were too long to tell you now."

"Water, Lydia,—Oh! give me water!"

"Tell me that you are a vile seducer—and you repent."

"Oh! give me water—and I will do all you tell me!"

"Then repeat the words which I have dictated," said Lydia, imperiously.

"I am a seducer——"

"No: a *vile* seducer!"

"A vile seducer—and I repent. Now give me water!"

"Not yet. Confess that you are a ruthless murderer, and that you repent!"

"No—never!" said Dunstable, writhing with the pangs of an intolerable thirst. "Water—give me water!"

"You implore in vain, unless you obey me. Confess——"

"I do—I do!" exclaimed the miserable nobleman. "I confess that I am—I cannot say it!"

"Then die of thirst!" returned Lydia, ferociously.

"No: do not leave me thus! Give me water—only one drop! I confess that I murdered your brother in a duel—and I deeply repent that deed! Now give me to drink!"

"First swear that you will not complain to a living soul of my treatment towards you this night," said Lydia, holding a glass of lemonade at a short distance from his lips.

"I swear to obey you," murmured Dunstable, almost driven to madness by the excruciating anguish of his burning thirst.

"You swear by that God before whom you may so soon have to appear?" continued Lydia, advancing the glass still nearer to his parched mouth.

"I swear—I swear! Give me the glass."

Then Lydia allowed him to drink as much as he chose of the refreshing beverage.

At that moment the time-piece struck one, and a low knock was heard at the door.

"I now leave you," said Lydia, in a whisper, as she leant over him. "Another will watch by your side during the remainder of the night. To-morrow evening I shall visit you again. Remember your oath not to utter a complaint that may induce the surgeon to prevent me from attending on you. If you perjure yourself in this respect, I shall find other means to punish you:—and then my vengeance would be terrible indeed!"

Lord Dunstable groaned in anguish, and closed his eyes—as if against some horrific spectre.

Lydia smiled triumphantly, and hastened to admit the housekeeper.

"His mind wanders a little," she whispered to the person who thus came to relieve her in the vigil; "and he appeared to think that I wished to do him a mischief."

"That is a common thing in delirium," answered the housekeeper, also in a low tone, inaudible to the invalid. "Good night."

"Good night," returned Lydia.

She then withdrew—satisfied at having adopted a precautionary measure in case the nobleman should utter a complaint against her.

And she retired to her own chamber gloating ever the vengeance which she had already taken upon the man who had ruined her, and happy in the hope of being enabled to renew those torments on the ensuing night.

We must conclude this chapter with an incident which has an important bearing upon events that are to follow.

Adeline arose early on the morning following that dread night of vengeance, and dressed herself before Lydia made her appearance in the boudoir.

Hastening down stairs, Lady Ravensworth ordered breakfast to be immediately served, and the carriage to be got ready.

When she returned to the boudoir to assume her travelling attire, Lydia was there.

"You have risen betimes this morning, madam," she said; "but if you think to escape the usual punishment, you are mistaken."

"I am going to London, Lydia, upon important business for Lord Ravensworth," answered Adeline; "and as you have frequently declared that you do not level your vengeance against *him*, I——"

"Enough, madam: I will do nothing that may directly injure the interests of that nobleman, whom I sincerely pity. When shall you return?" she demanded in an authoritative manner.

"This evening—or at latest to-morrow afternoon," was the reply, which Adeline gave meekly—for she had her own reasons not to waste time by irritating her torturess on this occasion.

'"Tis well, Adeline," said Lydia: "I shall not accompany you. *You* are always in my power—but Dunstable may soon be far beyond my reach; and I would not miss the opportunity of passing the half of another night by his bed-side."

Adeline was now ready to depart; and Lydia attended her, for appearance' sake, to the carriage.

Ere the door of the vehicle was closed, Lady Ravensworth said to Lydia, "You will prepare my room as usual for me this evening—and see that the fire be laid by eleven o'clock—as it is probable that I may return to-night."

Lydia darted upon her mistress a glance which was intended to say—"You shall soon repent the authoritative voice in which you uttered that command;"—but she answered aloud, in an assumed tone of respect, "Yes, my lady."

The footman closed the door—and the carriage drove rapidly away for the town-mansion at the West End.

And as it rolled along, Adeline mused thus:—

"Now, Lydia, for vengeance upon *you*! You have driven me to desperation—and one of us must die! Oh! I have overreached you at last! You think that I am bound upon business for my husband:—no, it is for *you*! And well did I divine that your schemes of vengeance against the poor wounded nobleman would retain you at the Hall: well was I convinced that you would not offer to accompany me! At length, Lydia, you are in my power!"

Then, as she smiled with demoniac triumph, Adeline took from her bosom and devoured with her eyes the address that she had picked up in the ruins of the gamekeeper's cottage.

There was only an old housekeeper maintained at the town-mansion, to take care of the dwelling; and thus Adeline was under no apprehension of having her motions watched.

Immediately after her arrival, which was shortly before eleven in the forenoon, she repaired to a chamber, having given instructions that as she had many letters to write, she desired to remain uninterrupted.

But scarcely had the housekeeper withdrawn, when Adeline enveloped herself in a large cloak, put on a common straw bonnet with a thick black veil, and left the house by a private door of which she possessed the key.

CHAPTER CCXVII.

THE PRISONER IN THE SUBTERRANEAN.

It was on the same morning when Adeline came to London in the manner just described, that Anthony Tidkins emerged from his dwelling, hastened up the dark alley, and entered the ground-floor of the building.

He was not, however, alone:—Mr. Banks, who had been breakfasting with him, followed close behind.

"Light the darkey, old fellow," said the Resurrection Man, when they were both in the back room; "while I raise the trap. We must bring matters to an end somehow or another this morning."

"I hope so," returned Banks. "It isn't wery probable that the poor old weasel will have pluck enow to hold out much longer. Why—it must be near upon ten days that she's been here."

"I dare say it is," observed the Resurrection Man, coolly: "but she'll never stir out till she gives us the information we want. It would be worth a pretty penny to us. The young girl was evidently dying to know about her parents, that night she met the old woman; and she can get money from her friends—she said so."

"Well," returned Banks, "let us hope that the old woman has thought better on it by this time and will make a clean buzzim of it. It would be a great pity and a wery useless crime if we was obleeged to knock the sinful old weasel on the head arter all: her corpse would fetch nothing at the surgeon's."

"Don't be afraid," said Tidkins: "it won't come to that. She was half inclined to tell every thing last night when I visited her as usual. But come along, and let's see how she is disposed this morning."

The Resurrection Man descended the stone staircase, followed by Banks, who carried the light.

In a few moments they entered the vault where their prisoner was confined.

And that prisoner was the vile hag of Golden Lane!

A lamp burned feebly upon the table in the subterranean; and the old woman was already up and dressed when the two men made their appearance.

She was sitting in a chair, dolefully rocking herself to and fro, and uttering low moans as she pondered upon her condition and the terms on which she might obtain her release.

When the Resurrection Man and Banks entered the subterranean, she turned a hasty glance towards them, and then continued to rock and moan as before.

The two men seated themselves on the side of the bed.

"Well," said the Resurrection Man, "have you made up your mind, old woman? Because me and my friend Banks are pretty tired of this delay; and if the solitary system won't do—why, we must try what good can be effected by starvation."

"Alack! I have always thought myself bad enough," said the old hag; "but you are a very devil."

"Ah! and you shall find this place *hell* too, if you go on humbugging me much longer," returned the Resurrection Man, savagely. "You have only got yourself to thank for all this trouble that you're in. If you had behaved in a straightforward manner, all would have gone on right enough. My friend Banks here can tell you the same. But you tried to get the upper hand of me throughout the business."

"No—no," murmured the hag, still rocking herself.

"But I say yes—yes," answered the Resurrection Man. "In the first place you would tell me nothing about Catherine Wilmot's parentage: you kept it all close to yourself. I suspected you—I even told you so. I declared that '*if I caught you out in any of your tricks, I would hang you up to your own bedpost, as readily as I would wring the neck of your old cat*.' And I will keep my word yet, if you refuse to give me the information I require."

"What will become of me? what will become of me!" moaned the old hag. "Alack! alack!"

"You'll very soon find out," answered Tidkins. "But I just want to prove to you that I am right in all I am doing with regard to you. In the first place you would speak to Katherine alone: that didn't look well. You said I might be a witness at a distance—or when the money was paid; but I knew that to be all humbug. However, I let you have your way at the beginning—if it was only to see how the young girl would receive you. Well, friend Banks drives us to Hounslow: we set off to the farm—we meet Katherine and another young lady—and this Miss Monroe throws cold water on the whole business. Still you won't speak before witnesses. We go back to the inn at Hounslow: we concoct the note to Kate; and friend Banks undertakes to deliver it, as it seemed he knew something of her. He managed to give it to her; and you, old woman, go off to meet her at seven. Now did you think I was so precious green as not to take advantage of the opportunity? Not I! I went after you—I crept round behind the fences near where you and Katherine met each other—and I heard every word that passed between you."

"Alack! alack!" moaned the old woman.

"Yes—I heard every thing," continued the Resurrection Man;—"enough to prove to me that the young girl would give half her fortune to learn the truth concerning her father and mother. I also understood pretty well that there is the name of *Markham* in the case; and I was struck by the manner in which you urged her to purchase your secret, when she informed you that Richard Markham—the

Markham whom I know and hate—had been made a great lord. All you said in respect to the conditions on which your secret was to be sold didn't astonish me at all. It only confirmed me in the conviction that you had intended throughout to gammon me. You meant to make use of me as a tool to find out Katherine's address, and then to reserve for your own particular plucking the pigeon whose hiding-place I had detected. '*The man who was with me this morning, is a bad one*,' said you: '*he is avaricious, and desires to turn my knowledge of this secret to a good account*.'—And so I did, you old harridan; and so I mean to do now.—'*He is a desperate man, and I dare not offend him*,' you went on to say.—Egad! you've found out that you spoke pretty truly.—'*He wants money; and money he must have*.'—True again: and money I will have too. The girl tells you she is rich and anxious to purchase the secret; and when she asks you how much will satisfy me, you coolly tell her, '*A hundred pounds!*'—A hundred devils! And then, in your gammoning, snivelling way, you demand of her the '*wherewith to make your few remaining days happy*!'"

"Alas! I am a poor old soul—a poor old soul!" murmured the horrible crone, shaking her head. "Do with me what you will—kill me at once!"

"And what the devil good would your carcass be to us?" exclaimed the Resurrection Man.

"A workus coffin would be thrown away on it," added Mr. Banks.

"So it would, Ned," returned Tidkins. "But I'll just finish what I have to say to the old woman; and we'll then go to the point. I was so disgusted, and in such an infernal rage, when I heard you going on in such a rascally manner,—selling me, and taking care of yourself,—that I determined at one time to come down from behind the palings, and force you to tell Katherine Wilmot on the spot all you knew about her parents, and then trust to her generosity. And as the night had turned dark, I had moved away from the spot, and was coming towards you along the path, when you heard the rustling of my cloak. At that instant another idea struck me: I resolved to bring you *here*, and get the secret out of you. I therefore crept softly back behind the fence. Then you went on with a deal more nonsense—all of which I heard as well as the rest. I was now determined to punish you: so I got back to the inn before you—arranged it all with Banks—and we had you up to London, and safely lodged here in this pleasant little place, that very night. Now, tell me the truth, old woman—don't you deserve it all?"

"Lack-a-day!" crooned the harridan.

"She does indeed deserve it, Tony," said Banks, shaking his head with that solemnity which he had affected so long as at length to use it mechanically: "she's as gammoning an old wessel as ever stood a chance of making a ugly carkiss to be burnt in the bone-house by my friend Jones the grave-digger."

"Now, by Satan!" suddenly ejaculated the Resurrection Man, starting up, and laying his iron hand on the hag's shoulder so as to prevent her from rocking to and fro any longer; "if you don't give up this infernal croaking and moaning, I'll invent some damnable torture to make you tractable. Speak, old wretch!" he shouted in her ears, as he shook her violently: "will you tell us the secret about Katherine Wilmot—or will you not?"

"Not now—not now!" cried the hag: "another time!"

"I will not wait another hour!" ejaculated the Resurrection Man; "but, by God! I'll put you to some torture. What shall we do to her, Banks?"

"Screw her cussed carkiss down in one of my coffins for an hour or so," answered the undertaker.

"No—that won't do," said the Resurrection Man.

"I always punishes my children in that way," observed Banks; "and I find it a wery sallitary example."

"I know what we'll do," exclaimed Tidkins: "they say that Dick Turpin used to put old women on the fire to make them tell where their money was. Suppose we serve this wretched hag out in the same way?"

"I'm quite agreeable," returned Banks, with as much complacency as if a party of pleasure had been proposed to him. "I b'lieve you've got a brazier."

"Yes—up in the front room, ground-floor, where all the resurrection-tools are kept," answered Tidkins. "You go and fetch it—bring plenty of coal and wood, and the bellows—and we'll precious soon make the old woman speak out."

The undertaker departed to execute this commission; and Tidkins again reasoned with the hag.

But all he could get out of her was a moaning exclamation; and as soon as he withdrew his hand from her shoulder, she began rocking backwards and forwards as before.

It suddenly struck the Resurrection Man that she was actually losing her senses through the rigours of confinement; and he became alarmed—not on her account, but for the secret which he wished to extort from her.

As this idea flashed to his mind, he cast a rapid glance towards the old woman; and surprised her as she herself was scrutinising his countenance with the most intense interest, while she was all the time pretending to be listlessly rocking her self.

"Another gag—by hell!" ejaculated Tidkins "What *do* you take me for? You think that I am such a miserable fool as to be deluded by your tricks? Not I, indeed! Ah! you would affect madness—idiotcy—would you? Why, if you really went mad through captivity in this place, I would knock you on the head at once—for fear that if you were let loose you might preach in your ravings about my designs concerning Kate Wilmot. But if you tell me, in your sober senses, all I want to know, I'll give you your freedom in twelve hours; because I am very well aware that you would not, when in possession of your reason, attract attention to your own ways of life by betraying mine."

"And if I tell you all I know," said the hag, seeing that her new design was detected and that it was useless to persist in it,—"if I tell you all I know, why will you not allow me to go home at once?"

"Because you came here in the night—and you shall go away in the night: because you arrived blindfolded—and you shall depart blindfolded," replied the Resurrection Man, sternly. "Do you think that I would let an old treacherous hag like you discover the whereabouts of this house? Why—you have no more idea at present whether you're in Saint Giles's or the Mint—Clerkenwell or Shoreditch—Bond Street or Rosemary Lane;—and I don't intend you ever to be any wiser. But here comes Banks, with the brazier."

The undertaker made his appearance, laden with the articles for which he had been sent.

The Resurrection Man laid the wood and coals in the brazier, and applied a match. In a few moments there was a bright blaze, which he fanned by means of the bellows.

"It'll be a good fire in a minute or two," said Tidkins, coolly.

"Almost as good as Jones makes in the bone-house where he burns the blessed carkisses of wenerable defuncts," returned Mr. Banks.

"Don't blow any more, Mr. Tidkins—save yourself the trouble," said the hag, now really alarmed. "I will make terms with you."

"Terms, indeed!" growled the Resurrection Man. "Well—what have you to say?"

"If I tell you every thing, you can get what money you choose out of Katherine," continued the old woman; "and I shall not receive a penny."

"Serve you right for having tried to gammon me."

"That will be very hard—very hard indeed," added the hag. "And after all, when you go to Katherine Wilmot and reveal to her the secrets I communicate to you, she will ask you for proofs—*proofs*," repeated the old woman, with a cunning leer; "and you will have no proofs to give her."

"Then you shall write out the whole history, and sign it," said Tidkins; "and my friend Banks will witness it."

"Yes," observed the undertaker, smoothing his limp cravat-ends: "Edward Banks, of Globe Lane, Globe Town—Furnisher of Funerals on New and Economic Principles—Good Deal Coffin, Eight Shillings and——"

"Hold your nonsense, Ned," cried Tidkins: then addressing himself again to the old woman, he said, "Well—don't you think that scheme would answer the purpose?"

"Very likely—very likely," exclaimed the hag. "But proofs—*written proofs*—would not be bad companions to the statement that you wish me to draw up."

"And have you such written proofs?" demanded Tidkins, eagerly.

"I have—I have," was the reply.

"Where are they?"

"Where you cannot discover them—concealed at my own abode. No one could find them, even if they pulled the house down, except myself."

And again the hag leered cunningly.

"This only makes the matter more important," mused the Resurrection Man, now hesitating between his avarice and his desire to possess such important testimony. "Well," he continued, after a pause,—"to use your own words, we *will* make terms. I tell you what I'll do:—write out your history of the whole business in full—in full, mind; and I will give you ten guineas down. At night me and Banks will take you home—to your own place; where you shall give me up the written proofs you talk of—and I will give you another ten guineas. Now is that a bargain?"

"Alack! it must be—it must be!" said the hag. "But why not let me go home to write out the history?"

"I am not quite such a fool," returned Tidkins. "And mind you do not attempt to deceive me with any inventions for I shall deuced soon be able to tell whether your history tallies with all I overheard you and Katherine say together on the subject. Besides, the written proofs must be forthcoming—and they, too, must fully corroborate all you state. Fail in any one of these conditions—and, by Satan! I'll cut your throat from ear to ear. Do you agree?"

"I do," answered the hag. "Give me paper and pens."

Tidkins departed to fetch writing materials, food, some strong liquor, and oil for the old woman's lamp.

In five minutes he returned; and, placing those articles upon the table, said, "When will your task be completed?"

"It will take me some hours," returned the hag: "for I have much to think of—much to write!"

And she heaved a deep sigh.

"This evening I will visit you again," said the Resurrection Man.

He and Banks then fastened the huge door upon the old woman, and left the subterranean.

When they reached the street, the undertaker departed in the direction of his own house; and the Resurrection Man ascended to his apartment on the first floor.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

THE VEILED VISITOR.

Mr. Tidkins sate down and smoked his pipe as calmly as if he were not at all afraid to be left alone to the company of the thoughts which the occupation was likely to stir up within him.

For when a man takes up his pipe, all the most important ideas in his brain are certain to present themselves to his contemplation; and think on them he must, willing or unwilling.

But Tidkins shrank not from any of those reflections: he was not one of your villains who are either afraid in the dark, or who loathe solitude;—what he did he perpetrated systematically, and reviewed coolly.

He did not have recourse to the pipe on account of its soothing qualities—for as long as he made money, he had no cares; and when he indulged in a glass, it was by no means to drown remorse—because he had no compunctions to stifle.

"A few months more in this country, and I shall be all right," he mused to himself: "then off to America—plunge into the far-west—change my name—buy land—and live comfortable for the rest of my days. This business of Katherine Wilmot must produce me something handsome:—Gilbert Vernon's affair is sure to do so, in one way or the other;—and if any other business worth taking, and speedily done, comes in the meantime, all the better. That rascal Tomlinson regularly bilked me: and yet the fellow did it cleverly! Bolted with the old man—got clean away. For my part, I wonder he didn't do it long ago. Well—perhaps I shall meet them both some day in America; for I dare say they are gone there. All run-a-ways go to America—because there's no fear of questions being asked in the back-woods, and no need of letters of introduction when a chap has got plenty of money in his pocket. With what I've got already, and what I hope to get from the things now in hand, I shall stand a chance of taking a few thousands with me. But before I do go I must pay one or two people out:—there's that hated Markham—when he comes back; then there's the Rattlesnake; and there's Crankey Jem, who, they say in the papers, will have a free pardon before the trial of that young fool Holford comes on. Well—I have got something to do, in one way or another, before I leave England; but I'm not the man to neglect business—either in the pursuit of money or to punish an enemy. Ha! that was a knock at the door! who can come to me at this hour?"

The Resurrection Man looked at his watch:—the time had passed rapidly away while he was smoking and thinking;—and it was now nearly an hour past mid-day.

The knock—which was low and timid—was repeated.

"It *is* a knock," said Tidkins; and he hastened down to the street door.

He opened it and beheld a lady, enveloped in a large cloak, and wearing a black veil which was so elaborately worked and so well arranged in thick folds that it was impossible to catch even the faintest glimpse of the countenance that it concealed.

Tidkins, however, perceived at the first glance that it was no mean person who had sought his abode; for the delicate kid gloves were drawn on the small hands with a scrupulous nicety; the foot which rested upon the door-step was diminutive to a fault; and the appearance of the lady, even disguised as she was, had something of superiority and command which could not be mistaken.

"Does Mr. Tidkins reside here?" she said, in a tremulous and half-affrighted tone.

"My name's Tidkins, ma'am—at your service," answered the Resurrection Man, in as polite a manner as he could possibly assume.

It seemed as if the lady looked at him through her veil for a few moments, ere she made a reply; and she even appeared to shudder as she made that survey.

And no wonder;—for a countenance with a more sinister expression never met her eyes; and she had moreover recognised the man's voice, which she had heard before.

"Will you step in, ma'am?" said Tidkins; seeing that she hesitated. "I am all alone;—and if you come to speak on any particular business—as of course you do—there'll be no one to overhear us."

For another instant did Adeline—(there is no necessity to affect mystery here)—hesitate ere she accepted this invitation:—then she thought of her torturess Lydia—and she boldly crossed the threshold.

But when Tidkins closed and bolted the door behind her, and she found herself ascending the steep staircase,—when she remembered that she was now alone in that house with a man concerning whom her notions were of the most appalling nature,—she felt her legs tremble beneath her.

Then again was she compelled to encourage herself by rapidly passing in mental review the horrors of those tortures and the extent of those indignities which she endured at the hands of Lydia Hutchinson!—and her strength immediately revived.

She ascended the stairs, and entered the back room, to which the Resurrection Man directed her in language as polite as he could command.

Then, having placed a chair for his mysterious visitor near the fire, he took another at a respectful distance from her—for he knew that it would be impolitic to alarm one who was evidently a well-bred lady, by appearing to be too familiar.

"I dare say you are surprised to see a—a female—alone and unprotected—visit your abode in this—in this unceremonious manner?" said Adeline, after a long pause, but still fearfully embarrassed.

"I am not surprised at any thing, ma'am, in this world," replied Tidkins: "I've seen too much ever to wonder. Besides, it is not the first time that I have had dealings with gentlemen and ladies even of the highest class. But I ask no impertinent questions, and make no impertinent remarks. One thing, however, I should like to learn, ma'am—if it would not be rude: and that is, how you came to address yourself to me for whatever business you may have in hand?"

"That I cannot explain," returned Adeline: then, after a moment's thought, she said, "Will it not be sufficient for you to know that I obtained your address from one of those high-born persons to whom you ere now alluded?"

"Quite sufficient, ma'am," answered Tidkins. "In what way can I aid you?"

"I scarcely know how to explain myself," said Lady Ravensworth. "I require a great service—a terrible one; but I am prepared to pay in proportion."

"Do not hesitate with me, ma'am," observed Tidkins, his countenance brightening up considerably at the prospect of reaping a good harvest by means of his new customer. "Of course you require something which a lawyer can't do, or else you'd go to one: therefore what you want is illegal, ma'am; and my business, in a word, is to do every thing which can be done in opposition to the law."

"But are you prepared to accomplish a deed which, if detected——Oh! I cannot explain myself! No:—let me depart—I never should have come hither!"

And Adeline was seized by a sudden paroxysm of remorse and alarm.

"Calm yourself, ma'am," said Tidkins. "If you wish to go, I cannot prevent you; but if you really need my aid—*in any way*—no matter what—speak at your leisure. I am not particular, ma'am, as to what I undertake; and don't think I mean to offend you in what I'm going to say—it's only to give you confidence towards me, and to afford you an idea of what I now and then do for great folks and others, both male and female. Suppose a lady has pawned or sold her diamonds to pay a gaming debt, she wants a sham burglary got up in the house to cover the loss of them: well, ma'am, I'm the man to break in and carry off a few trifles, besides forcing open the door of the closet or bureau *where the casket of jewels ought to be*. Or perhaps a tradesman who is about to become bankrupt, wants the stock removed to a place of safety where he can have it again after a time: there again, ma'am, I'm the individual to accomplish the whole affair in the night, and give the house the appearance of having been robbed. Or else a gentleman insures his house and furniture, and wants the money: he goes off into the country—his place is burnt to a cinder during his absence—and no one can possibly suspect him of having had any thing to do with it. Besides, the whole thing seems an accident—so cleverly do I manage it. And, to go a little farther, ma'am—if a lady should happen to want to get rid of a severe husband—an illegitimate child—an extortionate lover—or a successful rival——"

"Or a bitter enemy?" added Lady Ravensworth, hastily—for she had been enabled to collect her thoughts and compose herself while Tidkins was thus expatiating upon his exploits.

"Yes, ma'am—or a bitter enemy," he repeated;—"it's all the same to me; for,"—and he lowered his voice as he spoke—"I have either the means of imprisoning them till they're driven raving mad and can be safely removed to an asylum—or I make shorter work of it still!" he added, significantly.

"Ah! you have the means of imprisoning persons—of keeping them for ever out of the way—and yet not go to the last extreme?" said Adeline, catching at this alternative.

"I have, ma'am," was the calm reply.

"But wherefore do you speak thus freely to me? why do you tell me so much?" demanded Adeline, a vague suspicion entering her mind that this fearful man knew her. "I am a complete stranger to you——"

"Yes, ma'am: and you may remain so, if it suits your purpose," answered Tidkins, who divined the motive of her observations. "Tell me what you wish done—pay me my price—and I shall ask you no questions. And if you think that I am incautious in telling you so much concerning myself, let me assure you that I am not afraid of your being a police-spy. The police cannot get hold of such persons as yourself to entrap men like me. I *know* that you have business to propose to me: your words and manner prove it. Now, ma'am, answer me as frankly as I have spoken to you. You have a bitter enemy?"

"I have indeed," answered Adeline, reassured that she was not known to the Resurrection Man: "and that enemy is a woman."

"Saving your presence, ma'am, a woman is a worse enemy than a man," said Tidkins. "And of course you wish to get *your enemy* out of the way by some means?"

"I do," replied Adeline, in a low and hoarse tone—as if she only uttered those monosyllables with a great exertion.

"There are two ways, ma'am," said the Resurrection Man, significantly: "confinement in a dungeon, or——"

"I understand you," interrupted Lady Ravensworth, hastily. "Oh! I am at a loss which course to adopt—which plan to decide upon! Heaven knows I shrink from the extreme one——and yet——"

"The dead tell no tales," observed Tidkins, in a low and measured tone.

Adeline shuddered, and made no reply.

She fell back in the chair, and rapidly reviewed in her mind all the perils and circumstances of her position.

She wished to rid herself of Lydia Hutchinson—for ever! She was moreover anxious that this object should be effected in a manner so mysterious and secret that she might not afterwards find herself at the mercy of the agent whom she employed in her criminal purpose. She had, indeed, already settled a plan to that effect, ere she called upon Tidkins. During the whole of the preceding night had she pondered upon that terrible scheme; and so well digested was it that Lydia might be made away with—murdered, in fine—and yet Tidkins would never know whom he had thus cut off, where the deed was accomplished, nor by whom he had been employed. Thus, according to that project, all traces of the crime would disappear, without the possibility of ever fixing it upon herself.

Now this idea was disturbed by the hint thrown out relative to imprisonment in a dungeon. Were such a scheme carried into effect, Tidkins must know who his prisoner was, and by whom he was employed. A hundred chances might lead to an exposure, or enable Lydia to effect her escape. Moreover, by adopting this project, Adeline saw that she should be placing herself at the mercy of a ferocious man, who might become an extortioner, and perpetually menace her by virtue of the secret that would be in his keeping. She felt that she should live in constant alarm lest Lydia might effect her release by bribery or accident. But chiefly did she reason that she had suffered so much at the hand of one who was acquainted with a dread secret concerning her, that she shrank from the idea of so

placing herself at the mercy of another.

All these arguments were reviewed by the desperate woman in far less time than we have occupied in their narration.

But while she was thus wrapped up in her awful reverie, Tidkins, who guessed to a certain extent what was passing in her mind, sate silently and patiently awaiting her decision between the two alternatives proposed—a dungeon or death!

Had he been able to penetrate with a glance through the folds of that dark veil, he would have beholden a countenance livid white, and distorted with the fell thoughts which occupied the mind of his visitor:—but never once during this interview did he obtain a glimpse of her features.

"Mr. Tidkins," at length said Adeline, in a low tone and with a visible shudder, "my case is so desperate that nothing but a desperate remedy can meet it. Were you acquainted with all the particulars, you would see the affair in the same light. Either my enemy must die—or I must commit suicide! Those are the alternatives."

"Then let your enemy die," returned the Resurrection Man.

"Yes—yes: it must be so!" exclaimed Adeline, stifling all feelings of compunction: then taking from beneath her cloak a heavy bag, she threw it upon the table, the chink of gold sounding most welcome to the ears of the Resurrection Man. "That bag contains a hundred sovereigns," she continued: "it is only an earnest of what I will give if you consent to serve me precisely in the manner which I shall point out."

"That is a good beginning, at all events," said Tidkins, his eyes sparkling with joy beneath their shaggy brows. "Go on, ma'am—I am ready to obey you."

"My plan is this," continued Adeline, forcing herself to speak with calmness:—"you will meet me to-night at the hour and place which I shall presently mention; you will accompany me in a vehicle some few miles; but you must consent to be blindfolded as long as it suits my purpose to keep you so: when the deed is accomplished, you shall receive two hundred sovereigns in addition to the sum now lying before you; and you will return blindfolded with me to the place where I shall think fit to leave you. Do you agree to this?"

"I cannot have the least objection, ma'am," answered Tidkins, overjoyed at the prospect of obtaining such an important addition to the ill-gotten gains already hoarded. "Where and when shall I meet you?"

"This evening, at nine o'clock—at the corner of the Edgeware Road and Oxford Street," replied Adeline.

"I will be punctual to the minute," said the Resurrection Man.

Lady Ravensworth then took her departure.

As soon as it was dusk, Tidkins filled a basket with provisions, and repaired to the subterranean dungeon where the old hag was confined.

"How do you get on?" he demanded, as he placed the basket upon the table.

"Alack! I have not half completed my task," returned the old woman: "my thoughts oppress me—my hand trembles—and my sight is bad."

"Then you will have to wait in this place a few hours longer than I expected," said Tidkins. "But that basket contains the wherewith to cheer you, and you need not expect to see me again until to-morrow morning, or perhaps to-morrow night. So make yourself comfortable—and get on with your work. I shall keep my word about the reward—do you keep yours concerning the true history and the written proofs of Katherine's parentage."

"I shall not deceive you—I shall not deceive you," answered the hag. "Alack! I am too anxious to escape from this horrible den."

"You may leave it to-morrow night for certain," returned Tidkins: "at least, it all depends on yourself."

He then closed the door, bolted it carefully, and quitted the subterranean.

While he was engaged in making some little changes in his toilet ere he sallied forth to his appointment with the veiled lady, he thus mused upon a project which he had conceived:—

"I have more than half a mind to get the Buffer to dog that lady and me, and find out where she takes me to. And yet if we go far in a vehicle, the Buffer never could follow on foot; and if he took a cab, it would perhaps be observed and excite her suspicions. Then she might abandon the thing altogether; and I should lose my two hundred quids extra. No:—I must trust to circumstances to obtain a clue to all I want to know—who she is, and where she is going to take me."

Having thus reasoned against the project which he had for a moment considered feasible, the Resurrection Man armed himself with a dagger and pistols, enveloped himself in his cloak, slouched his hat over his forbidding countenance, and then took his departure.

CHAPTER CCXIX.

THE MURDER.

It wanted five minutes to nine o'clock when Anthony Tidkins reached the corner of Oxford Street and the Edgeware Road.

A cab was standing a few yards up the latter thoroughfare; and as the driver was sitting quietly on his box, without endeavouring to catch a fare, it instantly struck the Resurrection Man that his unknown patroness might be the occupant of the vehicle, and was waiting for him.

He accordingly approached the window, and by the reflection of a shop gas-light, perceived the veiled lady inside.

"Is it you?" she said, unable to distinguish his countenance beneath his slouched hat.

"Yes, ma'am. All right," he cried to the driver; and, opening the door, entered the cab.

It then moved rapidly away—the driver having evidently received his instructions before-hand.

"Draw up the window," said the lady.

Tidkins obeyed.

"You remember your promise to be blindfolded?" continued Adeline.

"I have forgotten nothing that passed between us, ma'am."

He had taken off his hat upon entering the vehicle; and Adeline now drew over his head a large flesh-coloured silk cap, or bag, fitted with a string that enabled her to gather it in and fasten it round his neck—but not so tightly as to impede the free current of air.

"I am sorry to be compelled to subject you to any inconvenience," she said, loathing herself at the same time for being compelled to address this conciliatory language to such a man—a murderer by profession!

"Don't mention it, ma'am: it's all in the way of business."

A profound silence then ensued between them.

On his part the Resurrection Man, who was intimately acquainted with London and all its multitudinous mazes, endeavoured to follow in his mind the course which the vehicle was taking; and for some time he was enabled to calculate it accurately enough. But it presently turned off to the left, and shortly afterwards took several windings, which completely baffled his reckoning. He accordingly abandoned the labour, and trusted to accident to furnish him with the clue which he desired.

On her side, Adeline was a prey to the most horrible emotions. Now that she had carried the dread proceedings up to the point which they had reached, she recoiled from urging them to the awful catastrophe. Vainly did she endeavour to tranquillise herself with the specious reasoning that she would not become a murderess, since *her* hands were not to do the deed,—or that even if that name must attach itself to her, she was justified in adopting any means, however extreme, to rid herself of a remorseless enemy:—vainly did she thus argue:—the crime she was about to commit, or to have committed for her, seemed appalling! Often during this long ride was she on the point of declaring to her terrible companion that she would stop short and abandon the murderous project at once: and then would come soul-harrowing remembrances of Lydia's tyranny, accompanied by violent longings after vengeance.

Thus did nearly three quarters of an hour pass, when the cab suddenly halted.

"Put on your hat—draw up your cloak-collar—and hold down your head as you alight," said Adeline in a rapid whisper.

The Resurrection Man understood her; and the darkness of the night favoured the precautions which Lady Ravensworth had suggested to prevent the driver, who opened the door, from observing that Tidkins's face was covered with the flesh-coloured silk.

"Wait until our return," said Adeline: "we may not be back for two, or even three hours;—but in any case wait."

And she placed a piece of gold in the man's hand.

She then took the arm of Tidkins and hurried him across the fields—for such he could feel the soil upon which he was walking to be.

In this manner did they proceed for upwards of half an hour, when they reached the fence surrounding the gardens of Ravensworth Hall. Adeline opened the wicket by means of a key which she had with her, and hurried her companion through the grounds to the private door at the southern extremity of the mansion. This she also opened and locked again when they had entered. She then conducted the Resurrection Man up the staircase, and finally into her boudoir.

Guiding him to a chair, she released him from the silk cap; but when it was removed, he could perceive nothing—for the room was quite dark.

"My enemy is certain to come hither shortly," whispered Adeline: "it may be directly—or it may be in an hour;—still she is sure to come. I shall conceal you behind a curtain—in case *the wrong person* might happen to enter the room by accident. But when any one comes in, and you hear me close the door and say 'WRETCH!' rush upon her—seize her by the throat—and strangle her. Are you strong enough to do this?—*for no blood must be shed*."

"Trust to me, ma'am," returned Tidkins. "The woman—whoever she may be—will never speak again after my fingers once grasp her neck."

Adeline then guided him behind the curtain of her bed; and she herself took her post near the door.

And now succeeded a most appalling interval of nearly twenty minutes,—appalling only to Adeline; for her hardened accomplice was thinking far more of the additional sum he was about to earn, than of the deed he was hired to perpetrate.

But, Adeline—oh, her thoughts were terrible in the extreme! Not that she dreaded the failure of the deadly plot, and a consequent exposure of the whole machination:—no—her plans were too well laid to admit that contingency. But she felt her mind harrowing up, as it were, at the blackness of the tragedy which was in preparation.

Twenty minutes, we said, elapsed:—twenty years of mental agony—twenty thousand of acute suffering, did that interval appear to be.

At length a step echoed in the corridor;—nearer and nearer it came.

Good God! what pangs lacerated the heart of Lady Ravensworth;—and even then—far as she had gone—she was on the point of rushing forward, and crying, "No! no!—spare—spare her!"

But some demon whispered in her ear, "Now is the time for vengeance!"—and she retained her post—she stifled the better feelings that had agitated within her—she nerved herself to be merciless and unrelenting.

She knew that the step approaching was that of Lydia; for Lydia allowed none of the other servants to enter her mistress's own private chamber. The reason of this must be obvious to the reader:—Lydia only repaired thither for the sake of appearances—and not to do the work which it was her duty to perform. No—that had been left for Adeline herself to execute!

And now the handle of the lock was agitated—the door opened—and Lydia, bearing a light, entered the room.

Instantly Adeline closed the door violently—exclaiming, "WRETCH, your time is come!"

Lydia started—and dropped the light.

But in another second the Resurrection Man, springing like a tiger from his lair, rushed upon her from behind the curtain—seized her throat with his iron grasp—and threw her on the floor as easily as if she were a child.

The light had gone out—and the fearful deed was consummated in the dark.

A low gurgling—a suffocating sound—and the convulsions of a body in the agony of death were the terrible indications to Adeline that the work was indeed in awful progress!

Faint and sick at heart—with whirling brain—and bright sparks flashing from her eyes—Lady Ravensworth leant against the door for support.

Two minutes thus elapsed—the gurgling sound every instant growing fainter and fainter.

Adeline felt as if her own senses were leaving her—as if she were going mad.

Suddenly a low, hoarse voice near her whispered, "It's all over!"

Then Lady Ravensworth was suddenly recalled to the consciousness of her perilous position,—awakened to the necessity of carrying out all her pre-arranged measures of precaution to the end.

"We must now dispose of the body," she said, in a low and hurried tone. "You must take it on your back, and carry it for a short distance, whither I will lead you. But, first—here is a bag: it contains two hundred and fifty sovereigns—fifty more than I promised you."

The Resurrection Man clutched the gold eagerly:—the weight was sufficient to convince him that his patroness was not deceiving him.

While he was hugging his ill-earned gains, Adeline hastily felt her way to the bureau, opened it, and took forth her casket of jewels. She left the door of the bureau open, and the key in the lock.

The Resurrection Man now suffered her to replace the silk cap over his head:—what would he not have done for one who paid so liberally!

Then, taking the body upon his back, he was led by Adeline from the boudoir.

They descended the stairs, and passed out of the mansion by the private door, which Adeline closed but left the key in the lock.

She conducted him through the grounds once more, leaving the wicket open—and proceeded across a field, in one corner of which was a large deep pond.

A pile of stones was near the brink.

"Throw the body upon the ground," said Adeline.

The Resurrection Man obeyed, and seated himself quietly by it.

Adeline averted her eyes from the pale countenance, on which a faint stream of straggling moonlight stole through the darkness of the night;—and rapidly did she busy herself to secure her casket of rich jewels and several huge stones about the corpse. This she did by means of a strong cord, with which she had provided herself; for—fearful woman!—she had not omitted one single detail of her horrible plan—nor did she hesitate to sacrifice her precious casket to aid in the assurance of her own safety.

When this labour was finished,—and it did not occupy many minutes,—Adeline rolled the body down the precipitous bank into the pond.

There was a splash—a gurgling sound; and all was still.

"By God!" murmured the Resurrection Man; "this is the cleverest woman I ever met in my life. I really quite admire her!"

The words did not, however, reach the ears of Lady Ravensworth,—or she would have recoiled with abhorrence from that fearful admiration which she had excited in the mind of such a miscreant—a resurrectionist—a murderer!

"Every thing is now finished," said Adeline, breathing more freely. "Let as depart."

She led her companion across the fields:—her delicate feet were wet with the dew;—and though she felt wearied—oh! so wearied that she was ready to sink,—yet that woman—within a few weeks of becoming a mother—was armed with an almost superhuman energy, now that it was too late to retreat and her enemy was no more.

When they reached the cab, the driver was sleeping on his box; and before he was well awake, the Resurrection Man had entered the vehicle.

"Back to the place where you took up my companion," said Adeline, as she followed Tidkins into the cab.

And now she was journeying side by side with one who had just perpetrated a cold-blooded murder,—she the promptress—he the instrument!

In three quarters of an hour they again stopped at the corner of the Edgeware Road, Adeline having removed the cap from the Resurrection Man's head a few minutes previously.

The cab was dismissed:—Tidkins had vainly looked to discover its number. Adeline, by bribing the driver, had provided against *that* contingency also!

"Any other time, ma'am," said Tidkins, "that you require my services—or can recommend me to your friends——"

"Yes—certainly," interrupted Adeline. "Good night."

And she hastened rapidly away.

"It's no use for me to attempt to follow her," murmured the Resurrection Man to himself: "she is too wary for that."

He then pursued his way homewards, well contented with his night's work.

And Adeline regained admittance to her town-mansion, having so well contrived matters that the housekeeper never suspected she had once quitted it during the day or night.

Between three and four o'clock in the morning the rain began to pour down in torrents, and continued until past eight,—so that Lady Ravensworth was enabled to assure herself with the conviction that even the very footsteps of herself and Anthony Tidkins were effaced from the grounds belonging to the Hall, and from the fields in one of which was the pond to whose depths the corpse of the murdered victim had been consigned.

CHAPTER CCXX.

THE EFFECT OF THE ORIENTAL TOBACCO.—THE OLD HAG'S PAPERS.

Scarcely had Lady Ravensworth risen from the table, whereon stood the untasted morning meal, when the housekeeper of the town-mansion entered the room, and informed her mistress that Quentin had just arrived on horseback from the Hall, and requested an immediate audience of her ladyship.

Adeline was not unprepared for some such circumstance as this; she however affected to believe that the sudden appearance of Quentin in town bore reference to the illness of her husband; and when the valet entered the apartment, she hastened to meet him, exclaiming, with well-assumed anxiety, "Is any thing the matter with your lord? Speak, Quentin—speak!"

"His lordship is certainly worse this morning, my lady: but——"

"But not dangerously so, Quentin?" cried Adeline, as if tortured by acute suspense and apprehension.

"My lord is far—very far from well," returned Quentin: "but that is not precisely the object of my coming to town so early. The truth is, my lady, that Lydia Hutchinson has decamped."

"Lydia gone!" exclaimed Lady Ravensworth.

"Yes—my lady. But permit me to ask whether your ladyship brought your jewel-casket to town with you yesterday morning."

"Certainly not, Quentin: I merely came for a few hours—or at least until this morning——"

"Then our worst fears are confirmed!" ejaculated the valet. "Lydia has decamped with your ladyship's jewel-case."

"The ungrateful wretch!" cried Adeline, feigning deep indignation. "Was she not well treated at the Hall? was I a severe mistress to her?"

"She was not a favorite with the other dependants of your ladyship's household," observed Quentin.

"And when did this happen? how did you discover her flight?" demanded Lady Ravensworth.

"She was not missed until this morning, my lady; although there is every reason to believe that she must have taken her departure last evening. She had agreed with the housekeeper to take the first half of the night in watching by the side of Lord Dunstable's bed; but as she did not make her appearance at the proper time, it was concluded she had gone to rest, and another female domestic took her place. This morning, the gardener found the wicket of the southern fence open, and the key in the lock: this circumstance excited his suspicions; and, on farther investigation, he also found the key in the lock of the private door at the same end of the building. He gave an alarm: a search was instituted; and, after a time, your ladyship's chamber was visited, when the bureau was discovered to be open and the casket of jewels was missed. The servants were mustered; but Lydia had disappeared; and it was subsequently ascertained that her bed had not been slept in all night. Moreover, the candlestick which Lydia was in the habit of using when she waited upon your ladyship, was found lying in the middle of your ladyship's boudoir, as if it had been hastily flung down—probably in a moment of alarm."

"And has nothing been missed save my jewels?" demanded Adeline, whose plan had succeeded in all its details precisely as she had foreseen.

"Nothing—at least so far as we had been enabled to ascertain before I left for town, my lady," answered Quentin. "And what is more remarkable still, is that Lydia took none of her own things with her. It seems as if she had gone to your ladyship's boudoir, discovered the key of the bureau, and finding the jewel-casket there, was suddenly impelled by the idea of the theft; so that she decamped that very moment—for it does not appear that she even took a shawl, or a cloak, or a bonnet with her; although, of course, as she had been so short a time in your ladyship's service, the other female servants scarcely knew what clothes she possessed."

"But the keys of the private door and the wicket?" exclaimed Adeline: "how came she with them?"

"They might have been in your ladyship's room—by some accident," answered Quentin, with a little embarrassment of manner.

"Yes—I believe they were," said Adeline, blushing deeply—for she guessed the cause of the valet's hesitation: he was evidently impressed with the idea that his mistress had possessed herself of those keys to favor her supposed amour with Colonel Cholmondeley.

But she willingly incurred even this suspicion, because, by apparently accounting for the keys being in her room, it made the evidence stronger against Lydia Hutchinson.

"Does his lordship yet know of this event?" inquired Adeline, after a short pause.

"I communicated the fact to his lordship," answered Quentin; "but he treated it with so much indifference, that I did not enter into any details. I shall now, with your ladyship's permission, repair to Bow Street, and lodge information of the robbery."

Lady Ravensworth suffered the valet to reach the door ere she called him back; for nothing was more opposed to her plan than the idea of giving any notoriety to the transaction, inasmuch as such a course might afford Anthony Tidkins a clue to the entire mystery of the transaction in which he had played so important a part.

Accordingly, as if impelled by a second thought, she said, "Stay, Quentin: this step must not be taken."

"What, my lady?" cried the valet, in astonishment.

"I must show leniency in this respect," was the answer.

"Leniency, my lady, towards one who has robbed your ladyship of jewels worth, as I understand, at least two thousand pounds!" ejaculated Quentin, his surprise increasing.

"Yes—such is my desire, upon second thoughts," she continued. "My dear cousin Lady Bounce is deeply interested—I scarcely know exactly why—in this young woman; and I feel convinced that she would rather induce her husband Sir Cherry to repay me for the loss of my jewels, than see Lydia Hutchinson, bad though she must be, involved in so serious a dilemma. I shall therefore feel obliged to you, Quentin, to keep the affair as secret as possible—at least until I have communicated with Lady Bounce."

"Your ladyship's commands shall be obeyed," said the obsequious valet, with a bow. "In this case, I may return immediately to the Park."

"Let the carriage be got ready, and I will myself hasten thither," answered Adeline; "as you say that his lordship is somewhat worse."

Quentin retired, well persuaded in his own mind that the leniency of his mistress was caused by her fears lest the presumed fact of the keys of the private door and the wicket having been kept in her room might lead to inquiries calculated to bring to light her supposed amour with Colonel Cholmondeley.

Thus was it that one of the engines of Lydia's vengeance,—namely, the trick by which she had induced the Colonel to enter her mistress's boudoir, and the fact of making the other servants privy to that visit,—now materially served the purposes of Adeline.

In a quarter of an hour the carriage was ready; and Lady Ravensworth was soon on her way back to the Hall.

On her arrival, she found that the circumstance of Lydia Hutchinson's disappearance had yielded in interest to one of a more grave and absorbing character.

Lord Ravensworth was dying!

She hastened to his apartment, and found him lying in bed—in a state of complete insensibility—and attended by Mr. Graham, who had sent off an express to town (by a shorter way than the main road by which Adeline had returned) for eminent medical assistance.

It appeared that about an hour previously the nobleman's bell had rung violently; and when the servants hurried to the room, they found their master in a fit. He had probably felt himself suddenly attacked with an alarming symptom, and staggered from his chair to the bell-rope, and had then fallen upon the floor. Mr. Graham had been immediately summoned; and by his orders Lord Ravensworth was conveyed to bed.

But he had continued insensible—with his eyes closed; and the only sign of life was given by his faint, low breathing.

It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Graham exerted all his skill on behalf of the dying man.

Adeline affected the deepest sorrow at the condition in which she found her husband;—but the only grief which she really experienced was caused by the prospect of being shortly compelled to resign all control over the broad lands of Ravensworth, in case her as yet unborn child should prove a daughter.

In the course of the day two eminent physicians arrived from London; but the condition of Lord Ravensworth was hopeless: nothing could arouse him from the torpor in which he was plunged; and in the evening he breathed his last.

Thus was it that this nobleman had at length accomplished—involuntarily accomplished—his self-destruction by the use of the oriental tobacco sent to him by his brother Gilbert Vernon!

On the first day of February there had been a marriage at Ravensworth Hall: on the sixteenth there was a funeral.

How closely does mourning follow upon the heels of rejoicing, in this world!

On the same night when Lord Ravensworth breathed his last, the following scene occurred in London.

It was about eleven o'clock when the Resurrection Man and Mr. Banks entered the cell in which the old woman was confined.

"Is your labour done?" demanded Tidkins, in a surly tone, as if he expected a farther delay in the business.

"God be thanked!" returned the foul hag; "it is complete."

And she pointed to several sheets of paper, written upon in a hand which showed that the harridan had been no contemptible pen-woman in her younger days.

The Resurrection Man greedily seized the manuscript, and began to scrutinise each consecutive page. As he read, his countenance displayed grim signs of satisfaction; and when, at the expiration of a quarter of an hour, he consigned the papers to his pocket, he said, "Well, by what I have seen this really looks like business."

"The old wessel has done her dooty at last," observed Mr. Banks, shaking his head solemnly; "and what a blessed consolation it must be for her to know that she has made a friend of you that's able to protect her from her enemies while she lives, and of me that'll bury her on the newest and most economic principles when she's nothing more than a defunct old carkiss."

"Consolation, indeed!" cried Tidkins: then, counting down ten sovereigns upon the table, he said, "Here's what I promised you, old woman, for the fulfilment of the first condition. Now me and Banks will take you home again; and when you give me up the written proofs you spoke of, you shall have t'other ten quids."

"Alack! I've earned these shining pieces well," muttered the hag, as she wrapped the sovereigns in a morsel of paper, and concealed them under her clothes.

The Resurrection Man now proceeded to blindfold her carefully; and the operation reminded him of the process to which he had submitted on the preceding night, at the hands of his veiled patroness. He next helped the old woman to put on her cloak, the hood of which he threw over her bonnet so that a portion of it concealed her face; and Banks then led her away from the subterranean, while Tidkins remained behind them for a few moments to secure the doors.

The party now proceeded, by the most unfrequented streets, through Globe Town into Bethnal Green; but it was not until they reached Shoreditch, that the Resurrection Man removed the bandage from the old hag's eyes.

Then she gazed rapidly around her, to ascertain where she was.

"Ah! you'll never guess where you've been locked up for the last ten or twelve days," said the Resurrection Man, with a low chuckle.

"Never—as sure as she's a sinful old creetur'!" remarked Banks.

The worthy trio then pursued their way to Golden Lane.

On their arrival at the court, the hag uttered an exclamation of delight when she beheld the filthy place of her abode once more: but her joy was suddenly changed into sadness as a thought struck her; and she exclaimed, "I wonder what has become of the poor dear children that are dependant on me?"

She alluded to the juvenile prostitutes whom she had tutored in the ways of vice.

Heaving a deep sigh at the reflection, she took a key from her pocket, and opened the door of her house.

A little delay occurred in obtaining a light; but at length she found a candle and matches in a cupboard at the end of the passage.

Mr. Banks now officiously opened the door of the old woman's parlour; but this act was followed by a sweeping, rustling noise—and the undertaker started back, uttering a yell of agony.

The hag screamed too, and nearly dropped the light; for her large black cat had flown at Banks as he entered the room.

The fact was that the poor animal had been left in that apartment, when the old woman first set out with the Resurrection Man and the undertaker for Hounslow; and it had gone mad through starvation.

Tidkins rushed forward the moment his friend gave vent to that scream of anguish, and caught the cat by the neck and hind legs with his powerful fingers, as it clung, furious with rage, to the breast of the undertaker, whose dingy shirt frill and front its claws tore to rags.

"Don't strangle it—don't strangle it!" cried the hag, with unfeigned anxiety—for the only thing she loved in the world was her huge black cat.

"Stand back, old witch!" exclaimed Tidkins: "this beast is capable of tearing you to pieces."

And in spite of the violent pressure he maintained with his fingers upon its throat, the animal struggled fearfully.

"They say the cussed wessel has nine lives," observed Mr. Banks, dolefully, as he beheld the tattered state of his linen and smarted with the pain of the cat's scratches upon his chest.

"Don't kill it, I say!" again screamed the hag: "it will be good with me—it will be good with me."

"Too late to intercede," said the Resurrection Man, coolly, as he literally wrung the cat's neck: then he tossed the carcass from him upon the stairs.

"Poor thing!" murmured the old woman: "poor thing! I will bury it decently in the yard to-morrow morning."

And she actually wiped away a tear,—she who felt no pity, no compunction, no sympathy in favour of a human soul!

"She'll bury it, will she?" muttered Banks, endeavouring to smooth his linen: "on economic principles, I suppose."

The trio then entered the parlour: but before she could compose herself to attend to business, the old hag was compelled to have recourse to her gin; and fortunately there was some in her bottle. Her two companions refreshed themselves in a similar manner; and Tidkins then said, "Now for the proofs of all you've said in your history."

"Not all—not all: I never said all," cried the hag; "only of a part. And so, if you will lay the other ten sovereigns on the table, you shall have the papers."

The old woman spoke more confidently now; for she felt herself to be less in the power of her two companions than she so lately was.

The Resurrection Man understood her, and smiled grimly, as he counted the money before her.

She then took a pair of scissors, cut a small hole in the mattress of her bed, and drew forth a pocket-book, which she handed to Tidkins.

It was tied round with a piece of riband—once pink, now faded to a dingy white; and its contents were several letters.

The Resurrection Man glanced over their superscriptions, muttering to himself, "Well, you have not deceived me: I have brought you to reason—I thought I should. Ha! what have we here? '*To Mr. Markham, Markham Place, Lower Holloway.*'—And here is another to him—and another.—But this next is different. '*To the Marquis of Holmesford, Holmesford House.*'—Slap-up fellow, that—a regular old rake: keeps a harem, they say.—And here is another to him.—Then we have one—two—three, all directed alike—to '*Mrs. Wilmot,*' and no address: conveyed by hand, I suppose. And that's all."

With a complacent smile—as complacent as a smile on such a countenance could be—the Resurrection Man secured the pocket-book with its contents about his person.

He and Banks then took their leave of the old woman.

CHAPTER CCXXI.

THE RETURN TO ENGLAND.

It was on a beautiful morning, in the first week of March, that a large war-steamer passed Gravesend, and pursued its rapid way towards Woolwich.

She was a splendid vessel, rigged as a frigate, and carrying twelve carronades. Her hull was entirely black, save in respect to the gilding of her figurehead and of her stern-windows; but her interior was fitted up in a style of costly magnificence. Large mirrors, chaste carving, rich carpets, and soft ottomans gave to the chief cabin the air of a princely drawing-room.

On the deck every thing denoted the nicest order and discipline. The sailors performed their duties with that alacrity and skill which ever characterise men-of-war's men who are commanded by experienced officers; and two marines, with shouldered firelocks, paced the quarter-deck with measured steps.

The white sails were all neatly furled; for the gallant vessel was now progressing by the aid of that grand power which has achieved such marvellous changes on the face of the earth. The tall chimney sent forth a volume of black smoke; and the bosom of the mighty river was agitated into high and foam-crested billows by the play of the vast paddle-wheels.

From the summit of the main-mast floated the royal standard of Castelcicala.

And on the deck, in the uniform of a general officer, and with a star upon his breast, stood the Marquis of Estella, conversing with his *aides-de-camp*.

At a short distance was Morcar—in plain, private clothes.

Richard was now returning to his native shore—occupying in the world a far more exalted position than, in his wildest imaginings, he could ever have hoped to attain. He had left England as an obscure individual—a subordinate in a chivalrous expedition—under the authority of others:—he came back with a star upon his breast—having achieved for himself a renown which placed him amongst the greatest warriors of the age! Unmarked by title, unknown to fame, was he when he had bade adieu to the white cliffs of Albion a few months previously:—as the Regent of a country liberated by himself—as a Marquis who had acquired nobility by his own great deeds, did he now welcome his native clime once more.

Tears of joy stood in his eyes—emotions of ineffable bliss arose in his bosom, as he thought of what he had been, and what he now was.

But vanity was not the feeling thus gratified: at the same time, to assert that our hero was not proud of the glorious elevation which he had reached by his own merits, would be to deny him the possession of that laudable ambition which is an honour to those who entertain it. There is, however, a vast distinction between vanity and a proper pride: the former is a weakness—the latter the element of moral strength.

Yes: Richard *was* proud—but not unduly so—of the honours which were now associated with his name;—proud, because he had dashed aside every barrier that had once seemed insuperable between the Princess and himself.

And, oh! he was happy, too—supremely happy; for he knew that when he landed at Woolwich he should behold her whom we have before declared to be the only joy of his heart—the charming and well-beloved Isabella!

The gallant steamer pursued its way: Erith is passed;—and soon Woolwich is in sight.

And now the cannon roars from the English arsenal: the volumes of white smoke sweep over the bosom of the Thames;—the artillery salutes the royal standard of Castelcicala.

The troops are drawn up in front of the barracks to do honour to their heroic fellow-countryman, who retains his almost sovereign rank until the moment when he shall resign it into the hands of that Prince on whose brow he has come to place a diadem.

It is low water; and the Castelcicalan steamer drops her anchor at some little distance from the wharf. Then, under a salute from the cannon of the gallant vessel, the Marquis of Estella descends into a barge which has been sent from the arsenal to waft him ashore.

But while he is still at a distance from the wharf his quick eye discerns well-known forms standing near the spot where he is to land. There are the Grand-Duke Alberto and the Grand-Duchess, attended by the commandant of Woolwich and his staff; and leaning on her father's arm, is also the Princess Isabella.

The Grand-Duke is in plain clothes: he has come as it were incognito, and as a friend, to receive him to whom he is indebted for that throne which awaits him; and he is moreover anxious that all the honours proffered on this occasion shall be acknowledged by him who still bears the rank of Regent of Castelcicala.

The barge touches the steps: Richard leaps ashore. He hurries up the stairs—he stands upon the wharf; and, while the guard of honour of British soldiers presents arms, he is affectionately embraced by the Grand-Duke.

"Welcome—welcome, noble youth!" exclaimed Alberto, straining him to his breast, as if he were a dearly beloved son.

"I thank heaven, that you, most gracious sovereign, are pleased with my humble exertions in favour of Castelcicalan freedom," replied Markham, whose heart was so full that he could with difficulty give utterance to those words.

"Humble exertions do you call them!" cried the Grand-Duke. "At all events they have deserved the highest reward which it is in my

power to offer."

And, as he thus spoke, Alberto placed the hand of our hero in that of the beauteous Isabella, while the Grand-Duchess said in a voice tremulous with joyful emotion, "Yes, dear Richard—you are now our son!"

Markham thanked the parents of his beloved with a rapid but expressive glance of the deepest gratitude; and he and Isabella exchanged looks of ineffable tenderness, as they pressed each other's hand in deep silence—for their hearts were too full to allow their lips to utter a syllable.

But those looks—how eloquent were they! They spoke of hopes long entertained—often dim and overclouded—but never completely abandoned—and now realized at last!

To appreciate duly the sweets of life, we should have frequently tasted its bitters; for it is by the influence of contrast, that the extent of either can be fully understood. Those who have been prosperous in their loves,—who have met with no objections at the hands of parents, and who have not been compelled to wrestle against adverse circumstances,—are incapable of understanding the amount of that bliss which was now experienced by Richard and Isabella. It was indeed a reward—an adequate recompense for all the fears they had entertained, the sighs they had heaved, and the tears they had shed on account of each other!

And we ourselves, reader, pen these lines with heart-felt pleasure; for there are times—and the present occasion is one—when we have almost fancied that our hero and heroine were real, living characters, whom we had seen often and known well;—and we are vain enough to hope that this feeling has not been confined to our own breast. Yes—we can picture to ourselves, with all its enthusiasm, that delightful scene when the handsome young man,—handsomer than ever in the uniform which denoted his high rank,—exchanged those glances of ineffable tenderness and devoted love with the charming Italian maiden,—more charming than ever with the light of bliss that shone in her eyes, made her sweet bosom heave, and brought to her cheeks a carnation glow beneath the faint tint of *bistre* which denoted her southern origin without marring the transparency of her pure complexion.

And now, the first delights of this meeting over, Richard presented his *aides-de-camp* to the illustrious family; then, beckoning Morcar towards him, he took the gipsy by the hand, saying, "It is to this faithful friend that Castelcicala is indebted for the first step in that glorious career which was finally crowned with triumph beneath the walls of Montoni."

"And I, as the sovereign of Castelcicala," returned the Grand-Duke, shaking Morcar warmly by the hand, "shall find means to testify my gratitude."

"Your Serene Highness will pardon me," said Morcar, in a firm but deferential manner, "if I decline any reward for the humble share I enjoyed in those successes of which his lordship ere now spoke. No:—the poor Zingaree has only done his duty towards a master whom he loved—and loves," continued Morcar, looking at Richard and dashing away a tear at the same time; "and it only remains for him to return to his family—and to his roving life. The sole favour I have to ask at the hands of these whom I have now the honour to address, is that when they hear—as they often may—the name of *Gipsy* vilified and abused, they will declare their belief that there are a few favourable exceptions."

"But is it possible that I can do nothing to serve you?" exclaimed the Duke, struck by the extreme modesty and propriety of the Zingaree's words and manner. "Consider how I may ameliorate your condition."

"I require nothing, your Highness," answered Morcar, in the same respectful but firm tone as before,—"nothing save the favour which I have demanded at your hands. No recompense could outweigh with me the advantage which I have received from the contemplation of a character as good as he is great—as noble by nature as he now is by name," continued the gipsy, once more looking affectionately towards Markham;—"and, from the moral influence of his society and example, I shall return to my people a new man—a better man!"

Having thus spoken, Morcar wrung the hand of our hero with a fraternal warmth, and was about to hurry away,—leaving all his hearers deeply affected at the words which he had uttered,—when Isabella stepped forward, caught him gently by the arm, and said in her sweet musical voice, now so tremulously clear,—"But you have a wife, Morcar; and you must tell her that the Princess Isabella is her friend! Nor will you refuse to present her with this small token of that regard which I proffer her."

Thus speaking, the Princess unfastened a gold chain from her neck, and forced it upon Morcar.

"Yes, lady," said the gipsy, "Eva shall accept that gift from you; and she shall pray morning and night for your happiness. Nay, more," he added, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, "she shall hold up to her son the example of him who is destined, lady, to make you the happiest woman upon earth."

With these words, Morcar hurried away—hastened down the steps, leapt into a wherry, and directed the rowers to push the boat instantly from the wharf.

When it was some yards distant, Morcar turned his head towards the group upon the quay, and waved his hand in token of adieu;—and every member of that group returned his salutation with gestures that expressed the kindest feelings towards him.

The party now proceeded to the residence of the commandant, where a splendid *déjeuner* was served up. Richard sate next to his Isabella, and was supremely happy.

"Oh! how rejoiced shall I feel," he whispered to her, "when we can escape from all the ceremony which accompanies rank and power, and indulge uninterruptedly in that discourse which is so dear to hearts that love like ours! For I have so much to tell you, beloved one; and now that all the perils of war and strife are past, I can look with calmness upon that series of events of which I was only enabled to send you such slight and rapid accounts. But, believe me, Isabella—I would much rather have come back to my native shores unattended by all that ostentation and formal observance which have accompanied my return: nevertheless, the high office with which I was invested, and the respect due to your father by the one who came to announce with befitting ceremony that a throne awaited him, demanded the presence of that state and required that public demonstration. You must not, however, imagine, dearest one, that a sudden elevation has made me vain."

"I have too high an opinion of your character, Richard," answered Isabella, "to entertain such an idea for a single moment. I know that you are not unduly proud; but I, Richard, am proud—proud of you!"

"And yet, dear girl," whispered our hero, "all I have done has been but through the prompting of your image; and so did I write to you in the evening after that dreadful battle which decided the fate of Castelcicala."

"Ah! Richard, you know not the deep suspense which we experienced, and the moments of indescribable alarm which *I* felt, during the intervals between the letters announcing your several successes," said the Princess. "But all fear has now vanished—and happiness has taken its place. When we glance at the past, it will only be to rejoice at those events which have prepared so much joy for the future. Do you not remember how often I bade you hope, when you were desponding? Oh! heaven has indeed rewarded you, by placing you in so proud a position, for all the misfortunes which you have endured."

"Rank and honours were nothing in my estimation," answered Richard, "had they not removed the obstacles which separated me from you!"

A domestic now entered and stated that the carriages were in readiness; and the illustrious party, having taken leave of the commandant and officers of the garrison, proceeded to the mansion at Richmond.

Alberto and Richard Markham were then closeted for some time together. Our hero presented his Highness with the official despatches from the Ministers announcing his proclamation as Grand-Duke, and inviting him to return to Castelcicala to take possession of the throne.

"Your Serene Highness will not deem me presumptuous," said Richard, when these documents had been perused, "in accepting the executive sway immediately after the battle of Montoni. My object was to ensure the tranquillity of the country, and to lay the foundation of that liberal system of government which I knew to be congenial to the sentiments of your Highness. I appointed a Ministry formed of men who had shown their devotion to the Constitutional cause, and who were worthy of the confidence thus reposed in them. With respect to the late sovereign, Angelo III., I learnt a few hours ere my departure, that he had taken refuge in Austria; but in reference to the Grand-Duchess Eliza I have obtained no tidings."

"I cordially approve of every step you have taken, my dear Richard," replied the Grand-Duke: "your conduct has been beyond all praise. I expressed that opinion in the letter which I wrote to you, and wherein I informed you that I should wait in England until you came in person to announce to me the desire of the Castelcicalans that I should become their sovereign. I have, as I told you in my communication, only just recovered from a severe illness; but my duty to my country requires that I should return thither as soon as possible. In four days I shall embark on board the ship that brought you to England."

"So soon, my lord?" cried Markham, somewhat uneasily.

"I should leave England to-morrow, had I not one solemn but joyful task to accomplish," answered the Duke with a smile. "Fear not, dear Richard, that I shall delay your happiness any longer; for if you yourself do not consider the haste indelicate, I purpose to bestow Isabella upon you the day after to-morrow."

"Oh! my lord—what happiness!—and what deep gratitude do I owe you!" exclaimed Richard, falling upon his knees, and pressing the sovereign's hand to his lips.

"Rise, Richard—rise," said the Grand-Duke: "you owe me no gratitude—for you forget how deeply I am your debtor! You have delivered my native land from an odious tyranny—although it be of my own relative of whom I am compelled to speak thus severely; and you have given me a throne. In return I bestow upon you the dearest of all my earthly treasures—my daughter!"

"And the study of my life shall be her happiness," replied our hero. "But I have one great and signal favour to implore of your Highness; and I tremble to ask it—lest you should receive my prayer coldly."

"What is there that you should hesitate to ask or that I could refuse to grant?" exclaimed the Grand-Duke. "Speak, Richard:—the favour—if favour it be—is already accorded."

"Your Highness must be informed," continued Richard, thus encouraged, "that I have various duties to accomplish, which demand my presence for some time in England. I have an old friend and his daughter dependant upon me: I must settle them in a comfortable manner, to ensure their happiness. There is also a young female named Katherine Wilmot,—whose history I will relate to your Highness at a more convenient period,—but to whom I have been in some measure left guardian. By letters which I received a few days before my departure, I learnt that she is residing at my house, with my old friend and his daughter. It will be my duty to arrange plans for the welfare of Katherine. This I should wish to do in concert with Isabella. Lastly, my lord, I have the hope of meeting my brother—should he be still alive," added Richard, with a sigh. "Your Highness is aware of our singular appointment for the 10th of July, 1843."

The Grand-Duke reflected profoundly for some minutes; and Richard awaited his answer with intense anxiety.

"You shall have your will, noble-hearted young man!" at length cried Alberto: "I was wrong to hesitate even for a moment; but you will pardon me when you remember that in granting your request, I consent to a long—long separation from my daughter."

"But when the time for the appointment with my brother shall have passed," said Richard "Isabella and myself will hasten to Montoni; and then, God grant that you may be parted from your daughter no more in this life."

"Would it be impossible for you to effect a species of compromise with me in this way?" returned Alberto, with a smile. "Provide for those who are dependant on you; and when that duty is accomplished, pass at Montoni the interval until the period of the appointment with your brother shall demand your return to London."

"I would submit to your Highness this fact," answered Richard,—"that I live in constant hope of the reappearance of my brother ere the stated time; and should he seek me in the interval—should he be poor or unhappy—should he require my aid or consolation—if I were far away——"

"I understand you," interrupted the Grand-Duke. "Be it as you say. Provided Isabella will consent," he added, smiling, "you shall remain in England until the autumn of 1843."

"Much as the Princess will grieve to separate from her parents——"

"You think she will be content to stay in this country with you," again interrupted the Duke, laughing. "I see that you have already planned every thing in your own way; and both the Grand-Duchess and myself are too much pleased with you—too willing to testify our regard for you—and too anxious to make reparation for the past," added his Serene Highness significantly, "to oppose your projects in the slightest degree. It shall be all as you desire."

"Your Highnesses will then render me completely happy," exclaimed Richard, again pressing the Duke's hand to his lips.

Alberto then rang the bell, and commanded the domestic who answered the summons to request the presence of the Grand-Duchess

and the Princess.

Those illustrious ladies soon made their appearance—Isabella's heart fluttering with a kind of joyful suspense, for she full well divined at least *one topic* that had been discussed during the private interview of her father and her lover.

The two latter rose as the ladies entered the room.

Then the Grand-Duke took his daughter's hand, and said, "Isabella, our duty towards our native land requires that your mother and myself should return thither with the least possible delay. But before we depart, we must ensure the happiness of you, beloved child, and of him who is in every way worthy of your affections. Thus an imperious necessity demands that the ceremony of your union should be speedily accomplished. I have fixed the day after to-morrow for your bridal:—but you, dearest Isabel, will remain in England with your noble husband. He himself will explain to you—even if he has not already done so—the motives of this arrangement. May God bless you, my beloved children! And, oh!" continued the Grand-Duke, drawing himself up to his full height, while a glow of honourable pride animated his countenance, "if there be one cause rather than another which makes me rejoice in my sovereign rank, it is that I am enabled to place this excellent young man in a position so exalted—on an eminence so lofty—that none acquainted with his former history shall ever think of associating his name with the misfortunes that are past! And that he may give even a title to his bride and accompany her to the altar with that proper independence which should belong to the character of the husband, it is my will to create him PRINCE OF MONTONI; and here is the decree which I have already prepared to that effect, and to which I have affixed my royal seal."

With these words the Grand-Duke took from the table a paper which he presented to our hero, who received it on his bended knee.

He then rose: Alberto placed the hand of Isabella in his; and the young lovers flew into each other's arms.

The parents exchanged glances of unfeigned satisfaction as they witnessed the happiness of their charming daughter and of him whom she loved so faithfully and so well.

Dinner was shortly announced; and around the table were smiling faces gathered that evening.

At nine o'clock Richard took his departure alone in the Grand-Duke's carriage; for he had transferred his own *aides-de-camp* to the service of their sovereign.

But when he bade farewell to Isabella on this occasion, it was with the certainty of seeing each other again in a short time; and they inwardly thanked heaven that their meeting was no longer clandestine, and that their attachment was at length sanctioned by the parents of the charming maiden.

CHAPTER CCXXII.

THE ARRIVAL AT HOME.

On the same evening Mr. Monroe, Ellen, and Katharine were assembled in the drawing-room at Markham Place.

The lamp burnt bright, and there were books open upon the table; but none of the little party had any inclination to read:—some event of importance was evidently expected.

"He will assuredly return this evening," observed Mr. Monroe, after a long pause in the conversation. "The last letter he wrote to us was positive in naming the day when he calculated upon arriving in England."

"But as he said that he should be compelled to come back to his native land in one of the government steamers of Castelcicala," said Ellen, "it is impossible to conjecture what delay adverse weather may have caused."

"True," exclaimed Mr. Monroe; and he walked to the window, whence he looked forth into the bright clear night.

It is a strange fact that whenever people are expecting the arrival of some one near or dear to them, they invariably go to the windows, where they watch with a sort of nervous agitation—as if by so doing they could hasten the coming which they anticipate.

The two young ladies drew close to each other on the sofa, and exchanged a few words in whispers.

"You seem low-spirited, dearest Kate," said Ellen; "and yet our benefactor is about to return to us. I feel convinced that you are more annoyed than you choose to confess, on account of the, non-appearance of the handsome stranger."

"I should be telling you an untruth, Ellen," answered Kate, blushing deeply, "were I to declare that I do not sometimes think of him whom you alluded to. But have I not another cause of vexation? do you imagine that the recent interview which I had with that odious Mr. Banks——"

"Yes, dear Kate: all that he told you was well calculated to render you anxious and unsettled in mind," interrupted Ellen. "But it was necessary to await the return of him who can best counsel you; and the time now approaches when you may communicate to Richard all that has passed."

Katherine was about to reply, when Mr. Monroe, who was still watching at the window, suddenly exclaimed, "A carriage—at last!"

The two young ladies hurried to the casement, and beheld the lamps of the vehicle rapidly approaching, while the sound of its wheels also reached their ears.

Then they both hastened from the room, followed by Mr. Monroe, to receive Markham the moment he should alight.

Whittingham and Marian joined them; and the whole party was stationed on the steps of the front door when the carriage drove up.

In another moment Richard was amongst them; and there were such congratulations—such shaking of hands—and such proofs of joy as were seldom known or seen even on occasions of similar happiness.

As for the old butler, he was literally mad with the excitement of his feelings. He hugged his young master with a warmth that could not possibly have been exceeded had they stood in the relation of father and son, and the fervour of which considerably deranged the position of our hero's epaulettes and aiguillettes—for he was in his uniform, as the reader will remember. Then, when Whittingham had thus far testified his joy at his master's return, he seized upon Marian and compelled her to perform three or four rapid pirouettes with him in the hall—to the infinite peril of that good woman's equilibrium. She disengaged herself from him with considerable difficulty; and the old man, quite overcome by his feelings and performances, sate down in one of the hall-chairs, and began to whimper like a child—exclaiming as well as he could, "Don't mind me—don't mind me! I can't help it! It's the unawoidable commotions here!" and he slapped his breast. "Master Richard's come back to the home of his successors; and he's a great man too—in spite of all that them willains Marlborough and Axminster once did to him!"

"Compose yourself, my excellent old friend," said the young Prince, pressing Whittingham's hand: "I am indeed come back—and to remain, too, for a long—long time."

The footman who attended upon the Grand-Duke's carriage now approached our hero, and with head uncovered, said in a tone of extreme deference, "Is it the pleasure of your Highness that the chariot should remain, or return to Richmond?"

"I wish you to stay here until the morning," answered Richard; "as I shall visit his Serene Highness to-morrow."

The footman bowed, and retreating to the hall-steps, cried aloud to the coachman, "The Prince commands us to remain."

"Hey! what's that?" ejaculated Whittingham, who, together with the others present, had caught those swelling titles. "I heerd, Master Richard, that you was a Markiss; but——"

"It has pleased the gracious sovereign to whose service I have the honour to belong, to invest me with the rank which has surprised you," answered Richard, laughing at his old dependant's bewilderment: "at the same time I can assure you that you will please me best by addressing me ever as you have been accustomed to do from my childhood."

The butler seemed to reflect profoundly for a few moments, with his eyes fixed on the marble floor then, suddenly raising his head, he exclaimed, "No, Master Richard—it can't be done! It would be to treat you as if you was still a boy. There's such a thing in the world as epaulette—etiquette, I mean; and I know myself better than to lose sight on it. Besides, Master Richard—it isn't every one as is butler to a Prince; and I'm proud of the office. So now I've called you *Master Richard* for the last time. Marian, bustle about the

supper—and see that the servants with the carriage is well taken care of. You can show 'em round to the stables; while I light his Highness to the drawing-room."

Having issued these commands in a tone of pompous importance which the old man had not adopted for some years past, he seized a candle and led the way in a solemn and dignified manner up stairs.

"Poor Whittingham scarcely knows whether he stands on his head or his feet," whispered Richard, laughing, to Ellen and Katharine, as he placed himself between them, and gave them each an arm. "Let us, however, humour the good old man, and ascend with due ceremony to the drawing-room."

The reader will not require us to detail all the conversation which ensued. Markham had so much to tell, and his hearers so much to learn, that the time slipped away with lightning speed. Our hero not only related at length all that had occurred to him in Italy, but also entered upon explanations which he had never broached before relative to his attachment to Isabella. He made Whittingham sit down and listen to all he had to say; and he concluded by acquainting those present with his intended marriage.

"But," he hastened to add, "this event will make no difference in regard to the dear friends by whom I am surrounded. You, Mr. Monroe and Ellen, must continue to dwell with me; and you, Katherine, must look upon this house as your home. It is large enough for us all—even for those servants whom it will now be necessary to add to our establishment, and who will increase the department over which you, my faithful friend,"—addressing himself to Whittingham,—"preside so ably."

"I shall know how to distrain 'em all in order, my lord," said the butler, with an air of considerable importance.

Ellen's countenance had suddenly become thoughtful, when she heard that Richard was so shortly to be married.

Leaning towards him, as she sate by his side, she murmured in a hasty whisper, "Tell Whittingham to leave the room: I wish to speak to you and my father immediately."

Markham requested the old man to see that the servants of the Grand-Duke were well cared for; and Whittingham accordingly withdrew.

Richard then glanced inquiringly towards Ellen, who rose and whispered to Katherine, "Leave us, my sweet friend, for a few moments: I wish to speak to Richard and my father on a subject which nearly concerns myself."

Kate cheerfully complied with this request, and retired.

"What does this mean, Ellen?" inquired Richard with some degree of anxiety. "God grant that no cause of unhappiness may interrupt the joy of my return!"

"No—reassure yourself on that head," said Ellen. "My dear benefactor—and you, beloved father—listen to me for a few moments. You, Richard, are about to bring home a bride whom you love—whom you respect—and who must be respected,—a lady endowed with every quality that can render her worthy of you,—pure, chaste, and stainless as snow. Richard, she must not be placed in the companionship of one who occupies an equivocal situation in society—like myself!"

"Ellen, my Isabella is of too generous—too charitable a mind——" began Richard, deeply affected by these words, which recalled so many unpleasant reminiscences with respect to Monroe's daughter.

"Nay—hear me out," continued Ellen, with a sweet smile of gratitude for the sentiment which Markham had half expressed: "I shall not keep you in suspense for many moments. You wish me to be the companion of your Isabella, Richard?—I will be so—and not altogether unworthily either in respect to her or to myself. And now I am about to communicate to you both a secret which I should have treasured up until the proper time to elucidate it had arrived—were it not for the approaching event which has compelled me to break silence. But in imparting this secret, I must confide in your goodness—your forbearance—not to ask me more than I dare reveal. Richard—father—I am married!"

"Married!" repeated our hero, joyfully.

"Come to my arms, Ellen!" cried Mr. Monroe: "let me embrace you fondly—for now indeed are you my own daughter for whom I need not blush!"

And he pressed her to his heart with the warmest enthusiasm of paternal affection.

"Yes," continued Ellen, after a short pause, "I am married—married, too, to the father of my child;—and that is all that I dare reveal to you at present! I implore you—I beseech you both to ask me no questions; for I could not respond truly to them, and be consistent with a solemn promise of temporary secrecy which I have pledged to my husband! The motives of that mystery are not dishonourable, and do not rest with me. In two or three years there will be no necessity to keep silent. And now tell me, dear father—tell me, Richard—have you sufficient confidence in me, to believe what I have unfolded you, without knowing more?"

"Believe you, Ellen!" exclaimed Markham: "oh why should I doubt you? Your motive in revealing the happy fact of your marriage—a motive instigated by delicacy towards her who is so soon to accompany me to the altar—is so generous, so pure, so noble, that it speaks volumes in your favour, Ellen; and I love you as a sister—a very dear sister."

"Yes—it is with a brother's love that you must regard me," exclaimed Ellen, emphatically and joyfully; "and you know not what happiness your assurance imparts to me! Let me not, however, be misunderstood in any thing that I have already stated. I would not have you infer that I have been married long—nor that I was a wife when I became a mother," continued Ellen, casting down her eyes, and blushing deeply. "No—it was only on the 3d of January, in the present year, that I was united to him who will one day give a father's name to his child."

"I care not to know more, Ellen!" exclaimed Mr. Monroe. "You are a wife—and your son, as he grows up, need never be made acquainted with the true date of his parents' union. That innocent deception will be necessary."

"Your father is satisfied—and I am satisfied, dear Ellen," said Richard: "we should be wrong to seek to penetrate into a secret which your good sense would not induce you to retain inviolable without sufficient motives. I cannot express to you my joy at the revelation which you have made; and, believe me, you will now have no cause to blush in the presence of my Isabella."

"Father—Richard," murmured Ellen, pressing their hands affectionately in her own, "you have made me happy—because you have placed confidence in my word!"

And as tears of joy stood in her large melting blue eyes, and her face and neck were suffused in blushes, how beautiful did she appear—sweet Ellen!

"You have banished your young friend from the room," said Markham, after a short pause.

"But I will speedily summon her hither again," answered Ellen; "for she also has something important to reveal to you."

"A continuation, doubtless, of the narrative of the mysterious proceedings of the vilest of men and his female accomplice, and concerning which you wrote me full details some weeks ago?" observed Richard.

"Yes—there is another chapter in that strange history for you to hear," replied Ellen.

She then hurried from the room, and in a short time returned with Katherine.

"Tell Richard the remainder of your story in your own way, dear Kate," said Ellen, as the young ladies seated themselves side by side upon the sofa.

"It was nearly a week ago," began Katherine "that I rambled forth a little way alone. Ellen was somewhat indisposed and unable to accompany me; and Mr. Monroe had gone into town upon some business. I ascended the hill, and, having enjoyed the prospect for a short time, passed down on the opposite side, and walked through the fields. I was thinking of various matters,—but chiefly of the cruel disappointment which I had experienced in my recently awakened hopes of obtaining information relative to my parentage,—when I suddenly observed a person approaching; and I was somewhat alarmed when I perceived that it was that odious Mr. Banks, the undertaker, whom Ellen mentioned to you in the letter which related all that had taken place at the farm. I was about to retrace my steps, when Mr. Banks called after me, assuring me that I had no reason to be afraid of him, and declaring that he had important news to communicate. My hopes were revived—I felt convinced that his business was to renew those negotiations between myself and the old woman which had been so suddenly interrupted; and I no longer experienced any alarm. He accosted me, and, in his peculiar phraseology—an imitation of which I shall not inflict upon you—declared that a friend of his possessed certain papers which would entirely clear up the mystery wherein my parentage was involved. You may conceive the emotions which this communication excited within me: I trembled to put implicit faith in what I heard—in case of disappointment—in case of deception; and yet I clung—oh! I clung to the hope of at length being enlightened in matters so dear to my heart. Mr. Banks spoke candidly and intelligibly—though with wearisome circumlocution and a mass of hypocritical cant. He said that his friend had purchased the papers of the old woman for a large sum; and that he would only part with them for a larger sum still. In a word, he demanded five hundred pounds; and he assured me that I should not regret the bargain—for there were letters in my poor mother's own handwriting."

Kate wiped away the tears that had started into her eyes as she thus alluded to her maternal parent.

"I represented to Mr. Banks," she continued, after a pause, "that I was unpossessed of the immediate command of the sum demanded, and that I must either apply to the solicitor who had the management of my affairs, or wait until your return, Richard, from Italy. I moreover explained to him the extreme improbability that either Mr. Wharton or yourself would permit me to pay so large an amount for the papers, unless they were previously ascertained to be of the value represented. He seemed prepared for this objection; for he immediately declared that if I would name a day and an hour when I would call upon him, accompanied by any one friend, male or female, whom I might choose to select, he would have the papers in readiness, and that I might glance over them in order to satisfy myself of their value and authenticity."

"That was certainly a fair proposal for such a gang of villains to make," observed Richard; "and it invests the entire affair with the utmost importance. Did you give the man any definite answer?"

"I assured him that I could do nothing without consulting my friends; but that I would write to him in the course of a day or two. He advised me to lose no time; as his friend was not a person to be trifled with."

"And that friend," said Markham, "is the villain Anthony Tidkins—beyond all doubt. He does not dare appear actively himself in this business, for fear of affording me a clue to his haunts; and therefore he employs this Banks as his agent. The whole scheme is as transparent as possible."

"Before I parted from the undertaker," observed Katherine, "I objected to visit his house, and proposed to him that, in the event of my friends permitting me to purchase the papers, he should allow the cursory inspection of them either at Mr. Wharton's office or at Markham Place. But to this arrangement he expressed his entire hostility, stating emphatically that the documents must be examined and the purchase-money paid at his own house—and that, too, with four-and twenty-hours' notice of the time which I should appoint for the purpose."

"I see through it all!" exclaimed Richard. "Tidkins is afraid to trust his own agent with the papers or with the money paid for their purchase; and he will be concealed somewhere in Banks's house when the appointment takes place. Hence the notice required. It is as clear as the noon-day sun."

"On my return to the Place," continued Katherine, "I acquainted Mr. Monroe and Ellen with the particulars of the interview between the undertaker and myself; and as your letter, announcing the day when you hoped to set foot on the English soil again, had arrived that very morning, it was arranged that no decisive step should be taken until you were present to advise and to sanction the course to be adopted. I accordingly wrote a note to Mr. Banks, stating that I would communicate with him in a positive manner in the course of a week or ten days."

"You acted wisely, dear Kate," said Richard; "and I now question whether the Resurrection Man has not allowed his suspicious avarice to get the better of his prudence. But of that we will speak on a future occasion. You shall purchase the documents, Katherine—and without troubling Mr. Wharton upon the subject. Thanks to the liberality of the Castelcicalan government, my fortune is now far more ample than that which I lost; and pecuniary vexations can never again militate against my happiness. Yes, Katherine, we will yield to the extortion of these villains who are trading in the dearest ties and holiest sympathies of the human heart; but I must tax your patience somewhat—for you can well understand that for a few days I shall be unable to devote myself to even an affair so important as this. To-morrow you can write to Mr. Banks, and fix an appointment at his own house—one week hence—the hour to be eight o'clock in the evening, for it is then dark."

Katherine expressed her gratitude to our hero for this additional proof of his kindness towards her.

The happy party remained in conversation until a late hour—unconscious of the rapid lapse of time, so deeply were they interested in the various topics of their discourse.

It was, indeed, nearly two o'clock in the morning when the last light was extinguished in Markham Place.

Nevertheless, the inmates of that happy dwelling rose at an early hour—for there was much to be done that day, and little time for the purpose.

Ellen and Mr. Monroe repaired to town the moment breakfast was over, to make a variety of purchases in order to render the mansion as complete in all its arrangements as possible for the reception of the bride. Money is endowed with a wondrously electric power to make tradesmen bustling and active; and in spite of the little leisure left for choice and selection, the business-habits of Mr. Monroe and the good taste of his daughter enabled them to accomplish their task in a manner satisfactory to all concerned. Thus, in the afternoon, waggons piled with new and costly furniture, carts laden with chinaware and glass, and others containing carpets, curtains, and handsome hangings for the windows, were on their way to Markham Place.

And at the mansion, in the meantime, all was bustle and activity. Richard had departed early in the Grand-Duke's carriage for Richmond; but Katherine superintended all the domestic arrangements; Marian obtained the assistance of two or three char-women in her special department; and Whittingham forthwith added to the establishment, upon his own responsibility, two footmen and a page, all of whom were well known to him and happened to have been out of place at the moment.

Thus, by the time the young Prince returned home to dinner at five o'clock, the old mansion exhibited an appearance so changed, but withal so gay and tastefully handsome, that he was unsparing in his praises of those who had exhibited so much zeal in rendering it fit to receive his bride on the following day.

CHAPTER CCXXIII.

THE MARRIAGE.

The happy morning dawned.

The weather was mild and beautiful; the sky was of a cloudless azure; and all nature seemed to smile with the gladness of an early spring.

Markham rose at seven o'clock, and dressed himself in plain clothes; but upon his breast he wore the star which denoted his princely rank.

And never had he appeared so handsome;—no—not even when, with the flash of his first triumph upon his cheeks, he had entered the town of Estella and received the congratulations of the inhabitants.

When he descended to the breakfast-room, he found Mr. Monroe, Ellen, and Katherine already assembled: they too were attired in a manner which showed that they were not to be omitted from the bridal party.

At eight o'clock the Grand-Duke's carriage drove up to the door; and in a few minutes our hero and his friends were on their way to Richmond.

"Strange!" thought Ellen to herself; "that I should have passed my honeymoon of twenty-four hours with *him* in the same neighbourhood whither Richard is now repairing to fetch his bride."

The carriage rolled rapidly along; and as the clock struck nine it dashed up the avenue to the door of the now royal dwelling.

Richard and his companions were ushered into the drawing-room, where the Grand-Duke and the Duchess, with the *aides-de-camp*, and a few select guests, were awaiting their arrival. The reception which Mr. Monroe, Ellen, and Katherine experienced at the hands of the royal pair was of a most cordial kind, and proved how favourably our hero had spoken of them.

In a short time Isabella made her appearance, attended by her bridemaids—the two daughters of an English peer.

Richard hastened to present his friends to the Princess; and the cordiality of the parents underwent no contrast on the part of the daughter;—but if she were more courteous—nay, kind—in her manner to either, that preference was shown towards Ellen.

And it struck the young lady that such slight preference was evinced towards her; for she turned a quick but rapid glance of profound gratitude upon Richard, as much as to say, "'Tis you whom I must thank for this!"

How lovely did Isabella seem—robed in virgin white, and her cheeks suffused with blushes! There was a charm of ineffable sweetness—a halo of innocence about her, which fascinated the beholder even more than the splendour of her beauty. As she cast down her eyes, and the long slightly-curling black fringes reposed upon her cheeks, there was an air of purest chastity in her appearance which showed how nearly allied her heart was to the guilelessness of angels. And then her loveliness of person—Oh! that was of a nature so ravishing, so enchanting, as to inspire something more than mere admiration—something nearer resembling a worship. Poets have compared eyes to stars—teeth to ivory—lips to coral—bosoms to snow;—they have likened symmetry of form to that of sylphs, and lightness of step to that of fairies;—but poor, poor indeed are all similitudes which we might call to our aid to convey an idea of the beauty of this charming Italian maiden, now arrayed in her bridal vestment!

The ceremony was twofold, Richard being a Protestant and Isabella a Roman Catholic. A clergyman of the Church of England therefore united them, in the first instance, by special licence, at the Grand-Duke's mansion. The bridal party immediately afterwards entered the carriages, which were in readiness, and repaired to the Roman Catholic chapel at Hammersmith, where the hands of the young couple were joined anew according to the ritual of that creed.

And now the most exalted of Richard's earthly hopes were attained;—the only means by which his happiness could be ensured, and a veil drawn over the sorrows of the past, were accomplished. When he looked back to the period of his first acquaintance with Isabella,—remembered how ridiculously insignificant was once the chance that his love for her would ever terminate in aught save disappointment,—and then followed up all the incidents which had gradually smoothed down the difficulties that arose in his path until the happy moment when he knelt by her side at the altar of God,—he was lost in astonishment at the inscrutable ways of that Providence which had thus brought to a successful issue an aspiration that at first wore the appearance of a wild and delusive dream!

On the return of the bridal party to the mansion near Richmond, a splendid banquet was served up; and if there were a sentiment of melancholy which stole upon the happiness of any present, it was on the part of Isabella and her parents at the idea of separation.

At length the *déjeuner* is over; and Isabella retires with her mother and bridemaids to prepare for her departure. The Grand-Duke takes that opportunity to thrust a sealed packet into our hero's hand. A few minutes elapse—Isabella returns—the farewells take place—and the bridegroom conducts his charming bride to the carriage. Mr. Monroe, Ellen, and Katherine follow in a second chariot.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when Richard assisted his lovely young wife to alight at the door of his own mansion; and now Markham Place becomes the residence of the Prince and Princess of Montoni.

Vain were it to attempt to describe the delight of the old butler when he beheld his master bring home that beauteous, blushing bride; and—as he said in the course of the day to Mr. Monroe, "It was only, sir, a doo sense of that comportance which belongs to a man in my situation of authority over the servants that perwented me from collapsing into some of them antics that I indulged in when we

heerd of Master—I mean of his Highness's successes in Castle Chichory, and when he came home the day before yesterday. But I won't do it, sir—I won't do it; although I don't promise, Mr. Monroe," he added, in a mysterious whisper, "that I shan't go to bed rayther jolly to-night with champagne."

It was eleven o'clock that night when Ellen cautiously issued from the back door of the mansion.

She passed rapidly through the garden, passed out of the gate, and hastily ascended the hill on whose summit were the two trees.

A man was seated on the bench.

Ellen approached him, threw her arms round his neck, and embraced him with a tenderness that even appeared to surprise him by its warmth.

She placed herself by his side; he drew her towards him—and kissed her almost affectionately.

"You are not happy?" said Ellen, in a plaintive and anxious tone. "I knew *that* by the contents of the note which Marian gave me just now; and your manner confirms me in the opinion."

"I know not how it is," replied Greenwood, without answering her question in a direct way, "but you never seemed dear to me, Ellen, until this evening."

"And am I dear to you now?" she asked, in a tone tremulous with joy.

"You are—you are," exclaimed Greenwood, speaking nevertheless in a manner which seemed to indicate that he was giving way to a feeling of weakness which he could not conquer, but of which he was ashamed; "you are dear to me—for my heart appears as if it required something to love, and some one to love me."

"And do I not love you?" cried Ellen, pressing her lips to his. "Oh! there was a time when I never thought I could love you—when I only sought you as a husband because you were the father of my child:—but since we have been united in holy bonds, I have learnt to love you—and I *do* love you—I *do* love you—in spite of all that has passed!"

"You are a good girl, Ellen," said Greenwood, upon whose lash a tear stood: but he hastily dashed it away, exclaiming, "This is unlike me! What can be the cause of these emotions—hitherto unknown? Is it that I am envious of *his* happiness? Is it that I pine for that sweet domesticity which he will now enjoy? Or is it that I am wearied of a world false and hollow-hearted?"

"Alas!" cried Ellen, the tears streaming from her eyes: "is the world really false and hollow-hearted? or have you sought only that sphere which wears the appearance that you deplore? Look yonder," she continued, pointing towards the mansion; "no falsehood—no hollow-heartedness are there! And why? Because he who rules in that abode has encouraged every sweet sympathy that renders life agreeable—every amenity which inspires confidence and mutual reliance between a number of persons dwelling together. The sphere that he has chosen is purified by his own virtues: the light of his excellence is reflected from the hearts of all around him. All are good, or strive to be good in his circle—because he himself is good. Where you have moved—ever agitating amidst the selfish crowd, as in troubled waters—none are good, because no one sets a good example. Every thing in *your* world is SELF: in Richard's world *he* sacrifices SELF unto others. Hence *his* prosperity—*his* happiness——"

"And hence my adversity—my dissatisfied spirit!" exclaimed Greenwood, impatiently. "But talk not thus, Ellen, any more: you will drive me mad!"

"Oh! my dear husband, what makes you thus?" cried Ellen, in alarm: "I never saw you so before. You who were ever so cool—nay, pardon me, if I say so chilling,—so calculating—so inaccessible to the tenderest emotions,—you are now an altered being! But God grant that your heart is touched at last, and that you will abandon those paths of selfishness which, as you have by this time learnt, are not those of permanent prosperity! Do not be offended with me:—heaven knows I would not wound your heart; for I love you ten thousand times better to-night than ever I did before—and solely because you *are* changed, or appear to be. Oh! let me implore you to cast aside your assumed name—to throw off all disguise—to return to that home where the arms of sincerest affection will be extended to welcome you——"

"No—no, Ellen!" cried Greenwood, almost furiously: "my pride will not permit me to do that! Speak no more in this way—or I will quit you immediately. I will fulfil my destiny—whatever it may be. Not a day—not an hour before the appointed time must *he* and I meet! No—broken though my fortunes be, they are not irreparable. Had it not been for the flight of that villain Tomlinson, I should have retrieved them ere now. I must not, however, despair: my credit is still good in certain quarters; and I possess talents for finance and speculation of no mean order."

"But you will not again embark in any such desperate venture as—as——"

"As the forged bills, you would say, Ellen," added Greenwood, hastily. "No:—be not alarmed on this head. I will not sully that name which *he* has rendered great."

"Oh! do you not remember," cried Ellen, as a sudden reminiscence shot through her brain, "that on the morning when our hands were united, you promised *that the name which you then gave me should go down to posterity*?"

"It will—it will: the prediction is already fulfilled, Ellen," said Greenwood, hastily;—"but not by me!" he added mournfully. "I know not why I feel so low spirited to-night; and yet your presence consoles me! Richard now clasps his lovely bride in his arms—and we are forced to snatch this stolen interview, as if we had no right to each other's society!"

"And whose fault is that?" asked Ellen, somewhat reproachfully. "Is it not in your power to put an end to all this mystery?"

"I cannot—I will not," returned Greenwood, with renewed impetuosity. "No—let us not touch upon the topic again. My resolves are immoveable on that point. If you love me, urge me not to inflict so deep a wound upon my pride. This lowness of spirits will soon pass away: I am afraid that envy—or jealousy, rather—has in some degree depressed me. And yet envy is not the term—nor does jealousy express the true nature, of my sentiments. For, in spite of all my faults, I have loved *him*, Ellen—as you well know. But it is that I feel disappointed—almost disgusted:—I have as yet toiled for naught! I contrast my position with *his*—and that makes me mournful. Still I am proud of him, Ellen:—I cannot be otherwise."

"That is a generous feeling," said Ellen, again embracing her husband: "it does me good to hear you express such a sentiment."

"I scarcely know what I have been saying," continued Greenwood: "my mind is chaotic—my ideas are confused. Let us now

separate; we will meet again shortly—and I will tell you of my progress towards the fortune which I am resolved to acquire."

"Yes—let us meet again soon," said Ellen; "but not here," she added, glancing towards the trees. "It makes you melancholy."

"Well—well: I will find another spot for our interviews. Farewell, Ellen—dearest Ellen."

"Farewell, my dearest husband."

They embraced, and separated—Ellen retracing her steps towards the mansion, and Greenwood remaining on the hill.

On the following morning, after breakfast, Richard conducted his lovely bride over the grounds belonging to the Place; and when they had inspected the gardens, he said, "I will now lead you to the hill-top, beloved Isabella, where you will behold those memorials of affection between my brother and myself, which mark the spot where I hope again to meet him."

They ascended the eminence: they stood between the two trees.

But scarcely had Richard cast a glance towards the one planted by the hand of Eugene, when he started, and dropped Isabella's arm.

She threw a look of intense alarm on his countenance; but her fears were immediately succeeded by delight when she beheld the unfeigned joy that was depicted on his features.

"Eugene is alive! He has been hither again—he has revisited this spot!" exclaimed Richard. "See, Isabella—he has left that indication of his presence."

The Princess now observed the inscriptions upon the tree.

They stood thus:—

EUGENE.
Dec. 25, 1836.

EUGENE.
May 17th, 1838.

EUGENE.
March 6, 1841.

"Eugene was here yesterday," said Richard. "Oh! he still thinks of me—he remembers that he has a brother. Doubtless he has heard of my happiness—my prosperity: perhaps he even learnt that yesterday blest me with your hand, dearest Isabel; and that inscription is a congratulation—a token of his kind wish alike to you and to me."

Isabella partook of her husband's joy; and after lingering for some time upon the spot, they retraced their steps to the mansion.

The carriage was already at the door: they entered it; and Richard commanded the coachman to drive to Woolwich.

On their arrival at the wharf where Richard had landed only two days previously, they found a barge waiting to convey them on board the Castelcicalan steamer.

The Grand-Duke and Grand-Duchess, with their suite, received them upon the deck of the vessel.

The hour of separation had come: Alberto and his illustrious spouse were about to return to their native land to ascend a throne.

The Grand-Duke drew Richard aside, and said, "My dear son, you remember your promise to repair to Montoni so soon as the time of appointment with your brother shall have passed."

"I shall only be too happy to return, with my beloved Isabella, to your society," answered Markham. "My brother will keep his appointment; for yesterday he revisited the spot where that meeting is to take place, and inscribed his name upon the tree that he planted."

"That is another source of happiness for you, Richard," said the Grand-Duke; "and well do you deserve all the felicity which this world can give."

"Your Serene Highness has done all that is in mortal power to ensure that felicity," exclaimed Markham. "You have elevated me to a rank only one degree inferior to your own;—you have bestowed upon me an inestimable treasure in the person of your daughter;—and you yesterday placed in my hands a decree appointing me an annual income of twenty thousand pounds from the ducal treasury. Your Serene Highness has been too liberal:—a fourth part will be more than sufficient for all our wants. Moreover, from certain hints which Signor Viviani dropped when I was an inmate of his house at Pinalla—and subsequently, after his arrival at Montoni to take the post of Minister of Finance which I conferred upon him, and which appointment has met the approval of your Serene Highness—I am justified in believing that in July, 1843, I shall inherit a considerable fortune from our lamented friend Thomas Armstrong."

"The larger your resources, Richard, the wider will be the sphere of your benevolence," said the Grand-Duke; then, by way of cutting short our hero's remonstrances in respect to the annual revenue, his Serene Highness exclaimed, "But time presses: we must now say farewell."

We shall not dwell upon the parting scene. Suffice it to say that the grief of the daughter in separating from her parents was attempered by the conviction that she remained behind with an affectionate and well-beloved husband; and the parents sorrowed the less at losing their daughter, because they knew full well that she was united to one possessed of every qualification to ensure her felicity.

And now the anchor was weighed; the steam hissed through the waste-valves as if impatient of delay; and the young couple descended the ship's side into the barge.

The boat was pushed off—and the huge wheels of the steamer began to revolve on their axis, ploughing up the deep water.

The cannon of the arsenal thundered forth a parting salute in honour of the sovereign and his illustrious spouse who were returning to their native land from a long exile.

The ship returned the compliment with its artillery, as it now sped rapidly along.

And the last waving of the Grand-Duchess's handkerchief, and the last farewell gesture on the part of the Grand-Duke met the eyes of Isabella and Richard during an interval when the wind had swept away the smoke of the cannon. The Prince and Princess of Montoni landed at the wharf, re-entered their carriage, and were soon on their way back to Markham Place.

CHAPTER CCXXIV.

MR. BANKS'S HOUSE IN GLOBE LANE.

The evening appointed by Katherine, in her note to Mr. Banks, for the purchase of the papers relating to her birth, had now arrived.

It was nearly eight o'clock.

The undertaker was at work in his shop, the door of which stood open; and several idle vagabonds were standing near the entrance, watching the progress that was made in bringing a new coffin to completion. Somehow or another, people always do stop at the doors of undertakers' workshops—doubtless actuated by feelings of the same morbid nature as those which call crowds of faces to the windows in a street along which a funeral is passing.

Mr. Banks had laid aside his coat, and appeared in his dingy shirt sleeves: he wore a paper cap upon his head; and a long apron was tied very high up above his waist—reaching, indeed, almost to the waistcoat pockets. As the gas was not laid on in his establishment, he was working by the light of a couple of tallow candles, that flickered in a most tantalising manner with the draught from the open door—leaving Mr. Banks every other minute in a state of exciting suspense as to whether they were about to be extinguished or to revive again. Still he did not choose to adopt the very natural precaution of closing the shop-door, because he considered it business-like to have a group of idlers collected at the entrance.

And there *was* an air of business about Mr. Banks's establishment. There were shining white coffin-plates hanging along one row of panes in the window; and black japanned ones suspended along another row. At a central pane hung a miniature coffin-lid, covered with black cloth, and studded with nails in the usual manner. The shop itself was crowded with coffins, in different stages towards completion: the floor was ankle deep in shavings and sawdust; and carpenters' tools of all kinds lay scattered about. But, pre-eminently conspicuous amongst all those objects, was a glass-case standing upon a little shelf, and enclosing that very miniature model of the patent coffin which he had displayed at the farm-house near Hounslow.

Mr. Banks was busily employed in fitting a lid to a coffin which stood upon trestles in the middle of the shop; and his two eldest boys, one fifteen and the other thirteen, were occupied, the first in planing a board, and the second in sawing a plank.

"Well," mused Mr. Banks to himself, as he proceeded with his work, "I hope Miss Kate won't fail to keep her appintment—partickler as Tidkins seems so sure of the job. That other feller which came yesterday to look at my first floor front as is to let, never returned. And yet he appeared to like the blessed place well enow. Goodness knows he asked questions by the dozen, and looked in every cranny about the house. What did he want to bother his-self like that as to whether there was a good yard for his missus to hang her clothes in on washing days? He should have sent her to see all about that. Then he would see where the yard-wall looked—and whether there was a yard or a street t' other side—and all about it. I raly thought he would have taken the rooms. But p'rhaps he didn't like the coffins: p'rhaps his missus don't fancy that there constant hammering. Ah! it's a sinful world!"

And, as if deeply impressed by this conviction, the undertaker shook his head solemnly.

He then continued his employment for some time without musing upon any one topic in particular.

At length he broke silence altogether.

"Now, Ned," said he to his eldest-born (he had five or six smaller specimens of the Banks' breed indoors), as he raised his head from his work, and looked severely round towards the lad; "that's quite planing enow: the board'll be veared as thin as a egg-case before it's used. Make it on economic principles, boy—economic principles, I say, mind!" added Mr. Banks, sternly.

"It ain't economic principles to turn out coffins as rough as if they didn't know what planing is," returned the youth; "'cause the friends of the defuncks'll only send them back again."

"The friends of the defuncts will do no such a thing to a 'spectable furnisher of funerals like me, as has lived, man and boy, in the same house for fifty year, and paid his way reglar," responded Mr. Banks. "If we adopts economic principles, we can't waste wood or time either."

"And do you mean to say, father," cried the boy, "that this here plank is planed enow? Pass your hand along it, and it'll get kivered with splinters—stuck all over like a porkipine."

"It will do exceeding well for the blessed carkiss that'll rejice in such a lid as that board will help to make him," said Banks, sweeping his horny palm over the plank. "That's good enow—that's economic principles."

"Then economic principles is a fool and a humbug," returned the lad, sulkily: "that's all I can say about the matter."

"Oh! that's it—is it?" cried Banks, assuming a threatening attitude.

"Yes—with a wengeance," added his son.

"No—that's the wengeance," said Mr. Banks, coolly, as he dealt his heir a tremendous box on the ear, which forced the young man nearly over the plank that had caused the dispute; but as the lad was not quite floored, his father bestowed on him a kick which, speedily succeeding the slap, levelled the youthful coffin-maker altogether.

"Brayvo!" shouted the idlers at the door.

The discomfited son of Mr. Banks got up, retreated to the farther end of the shop, and was about to discharge a volley of insolence at

his father when a gentleman and lady suddenly appeared on the threshold of the shop.

"Ah! Miss Wilmot," exclaimed Mr. Banks: "punctual to the time! Your most obedient, sir," he added, turning towards Kate's companion, whom he did not know personally, but who was really Richard Markham. "Walk in, Miss—walk in, sir."

Then, without farther ceremony, the undertaker banged the door violently in the faces of the loungers at the shop-entrance.

"Please to come this way," he said, again turning to his visitors. "Take care of that lid, Miss; it'll soon cover a blessed defunct as a widder and seven small childern is now a-weeping for. I'm doing it cheap for 'em, poor things—eighteen-pence under the reg'lar charge, 'cause they had to sell their bed to pay for it—in adwance. This way, sir: mind them trestles. Ah! a many coffins has stood on 'em—all made on the newest and most economic principles; for my maxim is that a cheap and good undertaker is a real blessin' to society—a perfect god-send in this world of wanity and wexation. What would the poor sinful wessels in this neighbourhood do without me?—what indeed?"

Thus talking, and shaking his head in a most solemn manner, Mr. Banks led the way to a parlour behind the shop: and when his two visitors had entered it, he closed the door to prevent the intrusion of his sons.

"Pray, sit down, Miss—sit down, sir," said the undertaker, doing the honours of his abode with all the politeness of which he was master. "I am truly glad to behold your blessed countenance again, Miss;—for it's a sinful world, and blessed countenances is scarce—wery scarce. And this gentleman is Mr.—Mr.—ahem!—I haven't the pleasure of knowing him."

"It's no matter who I am," said Richard. "The agreement between Miss Wilmot and yourself was that she should visit you, accompanied by a friend:—I am that friend. Let us now proceed to business."

And as he spoke, our hero coolly produced a brace of pistols, which he laid upon the table.

"Sir—Miss Kate—I—I hope——" stammered the undertaker, turning pale, and recoiling in alarm.

"Fear nothing," said Markham: "it is merely a necessary precaution. This young lady and myself are in a strange neighbourhood:—I have about me a considerable sum of money, for the purpose of buying certain papers which you profess to have; and you will pardon me if I have thought fit to adopt every precaution—yes, *every precaution*," he added emphatically, "to guard against treachery."

"But surely that dear creetur, Miss Katherine, with her angelic countenance," said Banks, "must have told you, sir, that I'm a 'spectable man as was well known to Mr. Smithers, and that I should scorn to act dishonourable to any blessed living wessel."

"We will not dispute upon the point, sir," returned our hero, in an authoritative tone. "I have my reasons for acting with caution. If you intend us no harm—none can befall you. Where are these papers?"

"The papers, sir? Oh! the papers is safe enow," said Banks, still hesitating; "but them pistols——"

"Will remain there until the bargain is concluded," added Markham. "Again I say that I mean fairly if you do."

Thus speaking, he drew forth a pocket-book, and, opening it, displayed to the undertaker's eager eyes a number of Bank notes.

"Business—it looks like business," murmured Banks; "in spite of them bles——cussed pistols. You see, dear pretty Miss—and you, good sir,—that a man moving in such a important speer as myself sees so much of the pomps and wanities——"

"A truce to these unnecessary observations, Mr. Banks," said Markham, somewhat sternly; "or you will compel me to think that you are only talking to gain time—which could not be for any proper motive. In one word, then—have you the papers which relate to this young lady's parentage?"

"I have, sir—I have indeed," returned the undertaker.

With these words, he slowly unlocked an old walnut-wood desk, which stood in a recess; and thence he took a brown-paper parcel, tied round with coarse string and sealed in several places.

"This is just as I received the blessed dokiments from my friend," he said, leisurely advancing towards the table: then, taking a seat, he handed the parcel to Markham, observing, "You may break it open, and satisfy yourself that its contents is geniwine. Two minutes will be enow for that—and two minutes is all my friend told me to give for the purpose. I haven't read a line of them myself; and I know nothink of what they say;—but my friend is as sharp a feller as here and there one; and he assures me they're going dirt cheap—like workus coffins."

While Banks was thus indulging his garrulity, Markham had opened the parcel by the aid of a pair of scissors which lay upon the table; and the first thing which struck him was a letter addressed to "*Mr. Markham, Markham Place*."

Katherine, who watched him attentively, without, however, looking at the papers herself, observed him start as if with sudden surprise: then he tore open the letter with almost a wild precipitation, and glanced rapidly over the contents. As he read, his countenance became flushed, and his features expressed mingled joy and astonishment—joy the most fervent, astonishment the most profound.

"My God!" he exclaimed, throwing down the letter, ere he had fully perused it: "how wondrous are thy ways! Katherine, dearest girl—come to my arms—for you are my sister—my own sister!"

"Your sister, Richard!" murmured the young maiden, as she sank almost fainting upon her brother's breast.

"Yes—my sister, Kate—my own sister!"—and he embraced her tenderly. "Compose yourself, dear girl—compose yourself: this is no place for explanations! But you are not the less my sister—and I thank God for it! I have now a natural right to be your protector—and a protector as well as an affectionate brother will you ever find me!"

"Oh! Richard—this sudden—this unexpected happiness is too much!" exclaimed Katherine, weeping through varied but ineffable emotions. "Is it possible that he whom I have known as a benefactor is indeed a brother!"

"I cannot doubt it—I do not wish to doubt it," returned Markham. "No—I am happy that I have found a sister in her whom I already loved as one!"

And again he embraced her tenderly.

"And I to find a brother in the noblest and best of men!" murmured Katherine: "it appears to be a dream—a delicious dream!"

"It is a reality," said Richard; "and we shall now all be happier than ever. Oh! what a surprise for those at home!"

"Then you perceive, my lord, that the dokiments is of some wally," observed Mr. Banks, wiping his eyes with the limp ends of his

cravat, as if deeply affected by the scene. "I knowed they was; and I now begin to think that I have found out your name. I'm sure it's a unspeakable honour that a great lord and prince like you has done my poor house by setting foot in it—and all amongst the coffins too!"

"Let us now conclude this business, sir," exclaimed Richard, with whom the undertaker's remarks passed unheeded, so absorbed were his thoughts in the signal discovery which he had just made. "These papers are mine; and this pocket-book is yours. You may examine its contents."

"Oh! I've no doubt they're all right, my lord," said Banks, grasping the treasure now handed to him; "but I'll just look over 'em—merely for form's sake. It's more business-like. And nice new flimsies they are, too," continued the undertaker, as he scrutinised the notes one by one. "Ah! what miserable wessels we should be without money, my lord—in this wicked world;—and what would become of us if our friends had no cash to buy us nice coffins when we are blessed defunct carkisses? It's awful to think of! Four fifties—two hundreds—and ten tens: that's five hundred—sure enow."

And Mr. Banks proceeded to lock up the pocket-book, with its valuable contents, in his desk.

Richard and Katherine rose, as if to depart.

"May be, your lordship and this pretty young lady will just wash your mouths out," said Mr. Banks, attempting a pleasant smile. "A leetle drop of wine—one glass; and I'll step myself to the public-house to fetch it."

"Do so," returned Markham, throwing a sovereign upon the table.

Katherine looked at her brother in astonishment; but he affected not to perceive the impression which his strange conduct had thus created.

Banks seemed overjoyed at the affability of the nobleman; and gathering up the piece of gold, the change out of which he already considered as his own perquisite, he hastened to execute the commission;—but not without trying the lid of the desk ere he left the room, to convince himself that it was securely locked.

He passed through the shop, which was empty; and, muttering to himself something about "his unnat'ral boys who had gone off to the public without finishing the economic coffins," opened the street door and went out.

The moment he was gone, Richard seized his pistols, and saying in a hurried tone to Katharine, "Remain here, dear sister, for a few moments," hastened from the room by a door leading to the inner part of the dwelling.

He rushed down a passage, and entered the yard—as if well acquainted with the undertaker's premises.

The moment he set foot in the yard, he whistled in a peculiar manner.

"Damnation!—treachery!" cried a man, darting forward from the corner near the window.

"Stand—or I fire!" exclaimed Markham, advancing towards him, and presenting a pistol.

"Fool!" said the man; and he threw himself with desperate fury upon our hero.

But Richard, maintaining his footing gallantly, closed with his assailant, and threw him to the ground, his pistol going off with the shock—without, however, inflicting any injury.

And at the same moment three police-officers leapt over the wall, in time to put an end to the struggle between Markham and his opponent, the latter of whom they made their prisoner and immediately bound with strong cords.

"Is your Highness hurt?" asked one of the officers.

"No, Benstead," was the reply: "a little bruised, perhaps—but it is nothing. Bring the prisoner this way."

The whole transaction,—from the moment when Richard left the undertaker's parlour to that when he re-entered it, followed by the policemen with the captive,—had not occupied two minutes.

He found Katherine reclining back in her chair—half fainting and paralysed by terror, so deeply had the report of the pistol and the concomitant scuffle in the yard alarmed her.

But the moment she heard her brother's voice, she started up, gazed wildly around, and threw herself into his arms.

"You are not hurt, Richard? Oh! tell me—that pistol!" she exclaimed, terror still depicted on her countenance.

"No, dear sister—I am not hurt," exclaimed Richard. "Calm yourself. Every thing has resulted according to my expectations. Look, Kate—that terrible man is at length in the hands of the officers of justice."

Katherine turned a rapid glance towards the group on the other side of the room, and beheld the sinister and ferocious countenance of the individual whom she had seen in the company of the old hag near Bennet's farm.

At this moment the door communicating with the shop opened, and Mr. Banks made his appearance, carrying a bottle in his hand.

He started back in astonishment and alarm when his eyes encountered the police-officers, with his friend Anthony Tidkins securely bound in the midst of them.

But as his glances wandered from one to another, he suddenly appeared to recollect something; and, fixing his eyes on Benstead, he exclaimed, "Ah! now I twig it all. What a cussed fool I was not to know a trap even in plain clothes! But I was blind, 'cause I thought I'd got a 'spectable man coming as a fust floor lodger. No wonder you poked your nose in every hole and corner—'specially the yard. I was a idiot—a ass—a addle-pated old wessel! But p'rhaps the gen'lemen will take a glass of wine, since they're here?" added Mr. Banks, with a smirking countenance.

This semi-pleasantry on his part was only assumed; for his own life had not been so immaculate as to preclude the existence of certain fears when he found himself in the dangerous vicinity of the police.

He was, however, speedily reassured on this head.

"Keep your wine, sir," exclaimed Markham, "for those who can enjoy it in your company; and consider yourself fortunate that, in becoming the agent of that man,"—pointing with deep disgust towards Tidkins,—"you have not committed yourself in any way which at present endangers your safety. I see that you glance uneasily at your desk:—you need not fear that I shall attempt to deprive you of the sum which you have extorted as the purchase-money for the papers now in my possession. No:—although I do not envy you the feelings which could prompt you thus to lend yourself to make a market of secrets so sacred as those which the documents contain, I cannot question your right thus to act, seeing that the papers were in your possession. And were I compelled to pay a thousand times the sum given to obtain them, I should consider they were cheaply bought, inasmuch——But *you* cannot understand such feelings!" he

added, addressing these words to the undertaker, but glancing affectionately towards Katherine.

"I hope there's no offence, my lord," said Banks, shaking in every limb with vague fears and suspicions. "I'm a poor man, which tries to live honestly by *undertaking* on the most economic principles; and there isn't a carkiss as goes through my hands that wouldn't sign a certifikit in my favour if it could."

Richard turned his back contemptuously upon Mr. Banks, and, addressing himself to Benstead, asked where he intended to lodge the prisoner for the night.

"There isn't a station-house in London that would be safe to put such a desperate feller in," was the reply. "He'd get out as sure as my name is Morris Benstead. I shall take him direct to Coldbath Fields, where the keeper will be sure to give him accommodation. To-morrow your Highness will be so kind as to appear against him at Lambeth Street."

Markham promised compliance with this request. A cab was sent for; and the Resurrection Man, who had maintained a moody silence, although he never ceased from looking vindictively upon our hero, from the moment he was arrested, was now removed in safe custody.

The Prince then conducted Katherine to the carriage that was waiting for them in another street; and shortly after ten o'clock they reached Markham Place.

We shall pass over all elaborate details of the surprise and joy with which Isabella, Ellen, and Mr. Monroe received the intelligence that Katherine was our hero's sister,—his sister without what the world calls the *stigma* of illegitimacy! Suffice it to say, that the discovery produced the most unfeigned pleasure in the breasts of all, and that Kate became the object of the sincerest congratulations.

Richard then related as succinctly as possible,—for he longed to peruse the precious documents in his possession,—the capture of the Resurrection Man and the scheme by which he had placed that villain in the hands of the officers of justice.

"I felt persuaded," he said, "that Tidkins did not put implicit confidence in Banks, and that he intended to watch the negotiation. His avarice engendered suspicions and got the better of his prudence. I communicated my views yesterday morning to a faithful officer whom I know; and Morris Benstead—the person to whom I allude—visited the undertaker's house on a pretence of hiring apartments which were to let. By those means he was enabled to *reconnoitre* the premises, and adopt measures accordingly. The result has answered my anticipations; and that consummate villain, who twice attempted my life, and whose atrocities are numerous as the hairs on his head, is at length in custody."

"Ah! dearest Richard," said Isabella, "wherefore should you have thus perilled your precious life?"

"Do not chide me, Isabel," exclaimed the Prince, kissing her tenderly. "I only performed a duty that I owed alike to society and to myself. Let us now examine these documents which have already made so strange, and yet so welcome a revelation."

The members of that happy party drew round the table; and Richard began by reading the various letters that accompanied the old woman's narrative. But as those epistles merely corroborated the main points of her tale, we shall not quote them.

The narrative itself will explain all; and that important document may be found in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER CCXXV.

THE OLD HAG'S HISTORY.

"I must carry my recollection back between seventeen and eighteen years. Not that it requires any effort to call to mind the leading facts in this sad history; no—no—they are too well impressed upon my memory;—but there are certain details connected with my own position at the time which will need the fullest explanation, in order to show how one like me could have become the friend of Harriet Wilmot.

"At that epoch I kept a boarding-house—a fashionable boarding-house, in a fashionable street at the West End. I was not then ugly and withered as I am now: I had the remains of great beauty—for I *was* very beautiful when young! I was also of pleasant and agreeable manners, and knew well how to do the honours of a table. You will not therefore be surprised when I tell you that I was a great favourite with the persons who lodged at my establishment, and with the still more numerous visitors. It is true that this establishment was a boarding-house; and it was conducted to all outward appearances, in a most respectable manner. But it had its interior mysteries as well as many other dwellings in this metropolis. The fact is, that I was well known to a large circle of nobles and gentlemen who employed all their leisure time in intrigues and amours. Having been gay myself from fifteen to forty, I was deeply versed in the various modes of entrapping respectable young persons, and even ladies, in the meshes artfully spread to ensure a constant supply of new victims to the lust of those men of pleasure. Having changed my name and thrown a veil as it were over the past, I opened the boarding-house by means of the funds supplied by my patrons, and soon experienced great success. By paying all my tradesmen with the utmost punctuality, I acquired a good character in the neighbourhood; for your tradesmen can always make or mar you, their shops being the scandal-marts where all reports, favourable or unfavourable, are put into circulation; and as they consider that those who pay well *must* necessarily be respectable, regularity on that point is certain to ensure their advantageous opinion. Having thus founded the *respectability* of my establishment, the rest was easy enough. The calculations made by myself and patrons were these:—Boarding-houses are usually inhabited by ladies possessing incomes which, though derived from sources that are sure, are too small to enable them to set up in housekeeping for themselves. Elderly widows with their daughters,—young widows who, coming from the country or from abroad, are strangers in London, but who wish to marry again, and therefore seek that society which is most easily entered,—friendless orphans who possess small annuities,—aunts and their nieces,—grandmothers with their grand-daughters,—these are the class of ladies who principally support boarding-houses. Thus there is always a large proportion of *young ladies* in those establishments; and out of a dozen there are sure to be three or four very good-looking. There can now be no difficulty in understanding the motives which induced my patrons to place me at the head of a boarding-house.

"I must now record the plan of operations. In all boarding-houses the number of ladies preponderates greatly over that of gentlemen. My average was usually about twenty ladies and four or five gentlemen. Three times every week we had music and dancing in the evening; and as there was a lack of *beaux*, I of course supplied the deficiency by inviting '*some highly respectable gentlemen with whom I had the honour to be acquainted*.' These were of course my patrons; and when they were at the house they always took care to treat me with a proper politeness, as if all they knew of me was highly to my credit and honour. They thus became constant visitors, and were enabled to improve their acquaintance with any of the young ladies whom they fancied. As they were very attentive also to the elderly ladies, and as good wine and negus were never spared upon those occasions, the mammas, aunts, and grandmammas were very fond of our evenings' entertainments, and considered the gentlemen whom I invited to be '*the most delightful creatures in the world*.' Sometimes rubbers of whist would vary the amusements; and as my patrons were not only all rich, but had their own private purposes to serve in frequenting my house, they allowed the old ladies to cheat them without manifesting the least ill will; or else they actually played badly to enable the said old ladies to win. It was therefore impossible that they could have failed to become especial favourites; and of these advantages they availed themselves in their designs upon the young ladies.

"The lodgers in boarding-houses are always mean and avaricious. The smallness of their incomes does not permit them to indulge largely in their natural taste for dress; and yet nowhere do females maintain such desperate struggles to appear fine in their apparel. Thus the ladies in boarding-houses can easily be persuaded to accept of presents; and of these my patrons were by no means sparing. A gold chain was a certain passport to a young lady's favour; and a velvet or silk dress would secure the good opinion of the aunt or grandmamma, and even of the mamma. Moreover, when one of my patrons appeared particularly attentive to any young lady, she concluded of course that his intentions were honourable; and in a very short time she became his victim. In a word, my boarding-house, though ostensibly so respectable, was nothing more nor less than a brothel conducted with regard to outward decencies, and carefully hushing up scandals that occurred within.

"I must now proceed to the principal topic of my history. It was, as I said, between seventeen and eighteen years ago, that the Marquis of Holmesford, who was one of my best patrons, called upon me and said that he had seen a beautiful young woman enter a humble lodging-house in a street not far from my own; and he directed me to institute inquiries concerning her. I did so; and in due course ascertained that her name was Harriet Wilmot—that she lived with her father in poor lodgings—and that they were by no means well off. I managed to get acquainted with Harriet, and called upon her. Her father was very ill—dying, indeed, of a broken heart,

through losses in business. It moreover appeared that he had arrived in London only a short time before, and with a small sum of ready money, which he embarked in a little speculation that totally failed. They were sorely pressed by penury when I thus sought them out; and as I then knew well how to offer assistance in a delicate manner that could give no offence, I was looked upon by the poor young woman as an angel sent to minister to the wants of her dying father. The Marquis supplied me liberally with the means of thus aiding them; and I called regularly every day.

"My plan was to instil into Harriet's mind elevated notions of the position which she ought to reach through the medium of her personal attractions. I told her of great lords who had fallen in love with females in obscure stations, and who had married them; and as I also supplied Harriet with clothes, I took good care that they should be of such a nature as was calculated to engender ideas of finery. But all my arts failed to corrupt the pure mind of Miss Wilmot: she listened to me with respect—never with interest;—she wore the garments that I gave her, because she had none others. I saw that it was no use to think of introducing the Marquis to her immediately; and such was the passion he had conceived for her, that he did not become lukewarm with delay.

"In three weeks after I first became acquainted with the Wilmots, the old man died. The purse of the Marquis supplied, through my agency, the means of respectable interment; and when the first week of mourning was over, I touched gently upon Harriet's situation. She threw herself into my arms, called me her benefactress and only friend, and thanked me for my kindness towards her deceased father and herself, in such sincere—such ardent—and yet such artless terms, that for the first time in my life I experienced a remorse at the treacherous part I was playing. Harriet declared that she could not possibly think of being a burden to me, and implored me to follow up my goodness towards her by procuring her a menial situation—as she was determined to go out to service. I told her I would consider what I could do for her; and I went away more than half resolved to gratify her wish and place her beyond the reach of the Marquis by obtaining for her a situation through the means of my tradesmen. But when I reached my own house, I found the Marquis waiting for me; and he was so liberal with his gold, and so useful to me as my best patron, that I did not dare offend him. I accordingly hushed my scruples, and communicated to him all that had just occurred. He directed me to get Harriet into my house on any terms, and leave the rest to him. I was over-persuaded; and the next day I went to Harriet, and said to her 'My dear child, I have been thinking of your wish to earn your own living; and I have a proposal to make to you. I require a young person to act as my housekeeper: will you take the place? You shall have your own room to yourself; and I will make you as comfortable as I can.' The tears of gratitude and the tokens of affection towards me, with which that friendless young woman met my offer, actually wrung my heart. I wept myself—yes, I wept myself! And I weep now, too, as all those memories return to me with overwhelming force.

"Harriet Wilmot thus entered my service. But the very same day that she came into my house, I was attacked with a sudden and malignant fever, which threw me upon a sick bed. For ten days I was insensible to all that was passing around me; and when I awoke from that mental darkness, I found Harriet by my bed-side. For ten days and ten nights had she watched near me, scarcely snatching a few moments' repose in the arm-chair. She was pale and wan with long vigils; but how her beautiful countenance lighted up with the animation of joy, when the physician declared that I should recover. And this same physician assured me that I owed my life more to the care of the faithful Harriet than to his skill. I was overwhelmed by this demonstration of so much gratitude on her part; and I determined to place her beyond the reach of danger the moment I was convalescent.

"But when I recovered, and was once more involved in the bustle and intrigues of my business, my good resolutions rapidly vanished—for the gold and the patronage of the Marquis of Holmesford were so necessary to me! The Marquis now became a more constant visitor than ever at the house; and he found opportunities to pay his attentions to Harriet. But she did not comprehend his hints; and he soon spoke more boldly. Then she grew alarmed: still, as she afterwards told me, she did not choose to annoy me by complaints; and she contented herself by shunning the Marquis as much as possible. At length, one evening, when inflamed with wine, he forced his way into her chamber, and declared his views in such unequivocal terms, that the poor creature could no longer support his importunities. She indignantly commanded him to leave her: he grew bolder, and attempted violence. She escaped from him, and quitted the house. From a lodging which she immediately took, she wrote me a letter, detailing the insults she had endured, reiterating all her former expressions of gratitude towards me, acquitting me of all blame in the transaction, but declaring that, as she supposed I could not prevent the Marquis from visiting at the house, she must respectfully but firmly decline remaining in my service. I hastened to her, and was not very urgent in my desire that she should return; for I remembered her goodness to me when I was ill, and my heart was softened in her favour. By means of one of my tradesmen she almost immediately obtained a situation as nursery-maid in a family residing at Lower Holloway. I kept this circumstance concealed from the Marquis of Holmesford, to whom I declared that I knew not whither she was gone; and it was impossible that he could now blame me, as he himself had driven her by his rashness from my house.

"I must observe that all these incidents,—from the first moment of my acquaintance with Harriet until she thus quitted my house,—occurred within a period of three months.

"Harriet was not happy in her new place. She found that her mistress was an ill-tempered vixen, and her master a despotic upstart. But an event occurred which entirely changed her gloomy prospects, and enabled her to leave her situation without the necessity of seeking for another. During her walks with the children whom she had to attend upon, she met with a gentleman of middle age, but handsome person and agreeable manners; and some accident, which I have forgotten, made them acquainted. From that time they met every day: the gentleman became deeply enamoured of her, but never once did he make a dishonourable proposal. She told him that she was a poor friendless orphan and he pitied her:—in a short time he learnt to appreciate the purity of her mind—and he loved her. He offered her his hand;—but his pride imposed a condition. He was wealthy—he was a widower—he had two children; and he probably disliked the idea of introducing to the world as his wife one who had been a servant. She was unhappy in her place—without friends—without protectors; and she yielded to his solicitations for a private union. They were married—married at Norwood, where the register will doubtless attest the fact!

"This gentleman was Mr. Markham, of Markham Place. I never was in the neighbourhood of that mansion until about a year ago; then I saw it for the first time, and I sighed as I thought of Harriet Wilmot! For she ought to have become the mistress of the spacious dwelling;—and so she doubtless would have become, had not my treachery blighted all her hopes—all her prospects! But I must go back to resume the thread of my history in due course.

"Mr. Markham took a comfortable lodging for his young bride in a street somewhere near Brunswick Square. Precisely ten months

after their union Katherine was born; and Mr. Markham now seriously thought of acknowledging his wife and child. She had hitherto passed by the name of Mrs. Wilmot since the marriage; and the husband regretted that he had not at once boldly proclaimed his second matrimonial connexion to the world. All these facts I subsequently learnt from Harriet's own lips.

"It was about three months after the birth of Katherine that I met Harriet one day in the street; and she seemed to me more beautiful than ever. She had written to announce to me that she was married, but without saying to whom, nor indicating where she lived. When I thus encountered her, holding her babe in her arms, she invited me to her lodgings, for she said, 'My husband will not be offended with me for communicating all the particulars of my happiness to you; since you were the only friend I found in the time of my poverty and, when my poor father was on his death-bed. Besides,' she added, with a smile of infinite satisfaction, 'my husband is about to acknowledge me as his wife and take me to his own home.' While we were yet speaking, the Marquis of Holmesford rode by on horseback; and, as he turned to nod to me, he instantly recognised Harriet. She also knew him, and hurrying along with some alarm, entered her lodging, which was close by. I followed her: the incident which had disturbed her was soon forgotten; and she then told me all the particulars of her first meeting and her subsequent marriage with Mr. Markham. And how she doted upon her child! Never did I behold a mother so enthusiastic in her tenderness towards the offspring which she loved—and in which she felt pride!

"I took leave of her, and promised to call soon again. On my return home I was by no means disappointed to find the Marquis waiting for me. He said, 'You are acquainted with Harriet's abode. How happens it that you have kept it secret from me?'—I assured him that I had only just discovered it—'Well, it may be as you assert,' he continued; 'but do not deceive me in what I now require at your hands. Harriet looks more lovely than ever; and all my passion for her is revived. She must be mine; and to you I look for aid in obtaining for me the gratification of my wishes.'—I told him that Harriet was married, and that the child he had seen in her arms was her own; but I did not mention the name of her husband.—'I care nothing for her marriage or her maternity,' said the Marquis: 'she is charming, and that is all I choose to think of. When money and cunning can produce any thing in this city, it is not probable that I should entertain ridiculous scruples. The money I possess; and if cunning were wealth, you would be the richest woman in England.'—I remember this conversation as well as if it only occurred yesterday. Vainly did I represent to his lordship the difficulty of accomplishing the design he had in view. I assured him that Harriet's virtue was beyond the possibility of corruption: he replied that artifice could not fail to succeed, and that if I appeared cold in the cause, he would employ another and less scrupulous agent. I trembled lest I should lose his patronage and that of his friends; and I promised to do my best. The Marquis left me, saying, 'Within a week I shall expect that you will have matured some scheme that may make her mine; and your reward shall be liberal.'

"I was now sorely perplexed: I no longer hesitated to obey the Marquis, because my own interests were concerned; but I knew not what project to devise. At length, after having racked my brain for some short time, I hit upon a device which seemed to be the most feasible my ingenuity could suggest; but I resolved to cultivate the intimacy of Harriet for nearly a week ere I put it into execution. I accordingly contrived to be almost constantly with her for the next five days, saving when she expected her husband. Of his coming she was usually made aware by letters from him: some of those epistles she read to me, in the ingenuous confidence of her pure soul; and well might she rejoice in them—well might she treasure them,—for they were replete with tenderness and love. I know not exactly now what it was that prompted me to possess myself of some of those letters, in which Mr. Markham spoke of Harriet as his wife and the infant Katherine as his own child;—but I most probably thought that my knowledge of that secret union and its fruit might be turned to advantage, especially as I saw that a wealthy and well-born man was struggling with his pride whether to proclaim to the world his marriage with an obscure servant or whether he should continue to keep the affair secret. At all events I cannot conceal the fact that I abstracted, during a temporary absence of Harriet from the room on one occasion when I called, three of the letters from her desk,—three epistles in which Mr. Markham alluded in the most unequivocal terms to his private marriage with Harriet and the existence of the fruit of that union. These letters were addressed simply '*Mrs. Wilmot*,' and without the mention of her abode on the envelope; because, as I learnt from Harriet, Mr. Markham always sent them by a messenger from a tavern in Lower Holloway—never from his own house, nor by any one of his servants; and by omitting the address, no clue could be afforded to impertinent curiosity should a letter thus sent happen to be lost.

"But to return to the scheme which I had formed for the ruin of Harriet. During the five days that we were so constantly together, as I have stated above, I professed the most sincere friendship for Harriet; and she declared that the feeling was not only reciprocal, but that on her part '*it was founded on the most sincere gratitude for my former kindness*.' And grateful she really was. It was her nature to be grateful and good towards any one who was good—or seemed good—to her. But she could not even have hated her bitterest enemies, had she known any persons who were openly and avowedly her foes. She was all gentleness and amiability—all ingenuousness and candour. But why do I thus dwell upon her excellent qualities—since the more blameless was she, the less pardonable was I!

"When I took leave of her on the fifth evening she said to me, 'Mr. Markham will not be able to visit me at all to-morrow: you would afford me pleasure by dining with me and passing a long evening.'—The invitation exactly suited my purposes; and I readily accepted it. But on the following day, instead of repairing to Harriet's lodging at four o'clock, as promised, I went straight to Holmesford House. The Marquis was at home: he awaited my coming—for I had communicated my design to him by note on the preceding evening.

"Holmesford House has long been notorious for the debaucheries of its lordly owner. Separated from his wife, and enjoying an immense fortune, the Marquis has for many years led a life which, were he a private individual, would exclude him from society, but which does not in the least degree injure him in the elevated sphere wherein he moves. His dwelling is fitted up in the most luxurious—the most voluptuous manner, and is provided with all possible means to facilitate his designs upon those virtuous females who may be entrapped into his mansion, but who will not yield to him save when overcome by violence. And to that extreme measure has the Marquis never hesitated to resort;—for who would think, however great her wrongs, of appealing to the law against a nobleman so powerful, so wealthy, and so unprincipled as the Marquis of Holmesford?

"There was one room in Holmesford House which I must particularly describe. It was a bed-chamber—small, but furnished in the most sumptuous manner. It had no side windows; but there was a sky-light on the roof; and double sets of panes were fixed in the ample wood-work, with an interval of perhaps four inches between each pair. Thus no screams—no shrieks could penetrate beyond that strangely-contrived window: the double panes deadened every sound which transpired in that room. Similar precautions were adopted in respect to the other parts of the chamber. The doors were double, and covered with thick baize, so that they fixed tightly in

their setting. The walls were also double, with a considerable interval between them: there was even a false floor half a foot above the proper one; and carpets were spread so thickly that not even a footstep echoed in that chamber.

"I shall now continue the narrative of my project against Harriet. Immediately upon my arrival at Holmesford House, I wrote a note to the intended victim: it was thus worded:—'*Come to me, dearest Harriet, without an instant's delay after the receipt of this. I am in sad tribulation—at the house of a friend; but I cannot spare a moment to give you an idea of the sudden misfortune which has overtaken me. If you ever loved me—and if I have the slightest claim upon your kindness—come! The bearer of this note will conduct you to the friend's house where I am!*'—Poor Harriet! she naturally conceived that it must be some serious event which could prevent me from keeping my engagement with her; and she hesitated not to accompany the female servant who delivered the note to her. She took her child in her arms: the servant of the Marquis suggested that she should leave the babe in the care of Harriet's own domestic; but Harriet would never separate herself from her beloved infant! The servant could not offer further remonstrance on this point; and Harriet entered the hackney-coach which was waiting to convey her to destruction!

"It was in the very depth of winter and consequently quite dark when Harriet reached Holmesford House. The lamps over the entrance had been purposely left unlighted; and thus the poor young woman did not observe the vast exterior of the mansion to which she had come. But when the front door had closed behind her, and she found herself in the hall, she exhibited some alarm; for, dimly as it was seen by the lustre of one faint lamp, she observed enough to convince her that she was in no common dwelling. The servant (who had of course received her cue) noticed the impression thus made upon her, and hastened to say something of a re-assuring nature. Thus, in a few minutes, Harriet was inveigled into the chamber which I have before described. 'Permit me to hold the baby, madam,' said the servant; 'your friend is ill in that bed.'—Harriet, doubtless bewildered at the strangeness of the whole proceeding, mechanically passed the child to the servant, and advanced towards the bed, the curtains of which were drawn around. She heard the doors close: she looked round—the servant had disappeared with the babe;—and Harriet was now alone with the Marquis of Holmesford!

"Two hours elapsed! I was awaiting, in a distant part of the mansion, the issue of that foul plot. Wine and generous cordials were on the table; and I drank deeply of them to drown the sad thoughts which oppressed me. Never had I before experienced—never have I since known such terrible emotions! All the particulars of my connexion with Harriet rushed to my mind. I remembered how I first beheld her, affectionately tending the dying bed of her father,—how she sate day and night by my side, ministering unto me in my malady as if she was my daughter,—how I had seen her a happy wife, content with retirement and privacy—content even with being, as it were, an unacknowledged wife, so long as she enjoyed her husband's love,—and how she had conducted herself as a tender mother, fondling and nursing her innocent little one! I thought of all this; and at the same time I was almost distracted with the idea of the infernal treachery which had now ensnared her! Years have passed since that foul night; and its memory haunts me still. I have made many—many lovely girls victims to the lust of my employers;—but none—no, not one—do I regret, save Harriet Markham!

"Two hours elapsed, I say; and at length the Marquis of Holmesford made his appearance. He was dreadfully frightened: his manner was wild and excited. I could not gather, from the expression of his countenance, whether he had triumphed or lost the victory to which he aspired over a virtuous and defenceless woman. I interrogated him with a gesture of impatience. '*Damnable woman!*' he exclaimed; '*if there were not such creatures as you, there would be less scope for the vices of men like me. Begone! I would not endure another such scene—no, not were I offered a sovereign crown!*'—I made some observation; but he interrupted me fiercely, and commanded me to depart. I dared not disobey—his manner was actually terrific. He appeared as if he had just witnessed some horrible spectre, or had perpetrated a dreadful crime. I returned home; and never did I pass such a miserable night.

"All next day I waited in expectation of hearing from the Marquis; but no communication arrived. In the evening I went to Harriet's lodging, and saw the landlady. In answer to my inquiries, she said, 'Mrs. Wilmot remained out until a very late hour last night, or rather this morning. It was nearly one when she came home with her child. She was in almost a frantic state, and talked so wildly and incoherently that I could not comprehend her. I persuaded her to retire to her chamber, and offered to sit up with her. She allowed me to conduct her to her room, but insisted on remaining alone. Poor thing! I heard her walking up and down the chamber until past five; and then all became quiet. I supposed she had retired to bed. When I rose at eight, I learnt from the servant that she had gone out with her child half an hour previously. She has not been back since; and I feel alarmed at her absence.'—'Some sudden calamity has perhaps overtaken her,' I said, terribly frightened at these tidings. 'Have the kindness to send your servant to let me know when she returns; but you need not tell her that you do so. I have my reasons.' The landlady, believing me to be an intimate friend of Harriet, readily promised compliance with my request. I was about to depart, when she suddenly recollected something, and said, 'I had nearly forgotten to tell you that about an hour ago, the messenger that usually comes from the gentleman who visits Mrs. Wilmot, and who she says is her husband—'—'Yes, yes,' cried I impatiently.—'The messenger has left a small packet for her,' continued the landlady. —'Let me see it,' I said, thinking that its contents might afford some clue to the mystery of Harriet's disappearance: 'I am acquainted with all Mrs. Wilmot's affairs, for you know how intimate we are.'—The landlady showed me the packet without the least hesitation, and I instantly recognised in the address the handwriting of Mr. Markham. I longed to open the parcel, but dared not. So I took my departure, having reiterated my desire to be informed of Harriet's return, the moment it might happen.

"The next evening came, and I had neither heard from the landlady, nor seen the Marquis. I sent a note to the latter; but he had left town on the previous day. A thought struck me: could he have persuaded Harriet to accompany him? Had he so far overcome the virtue of that pure-minded creature? I thought of the packet from Mr. Markham, and longed to ascertain its contents. A strong suspicion lurked in my mind that it was connected with the affair in some way or another. I however waited a week; and, hearing no tidings of any kind concerning Harriet, went boldly to her lodgings. 'Mrs. Wilmot's disappearance is so strange,' I said to the landlady, 'that, having consulted my legal adviser, and acting on the plea of being her intimate friend, I am determined to open that packet which was sent for her, and which I think must afford some clue to her absence.'—The landlady gave me the packet, saying, 'If you take the responsibility on yourself, well and good; but I will have nothing to do with the business.'—This was better than I had even expected; and I departed with the parcel.

"I was not long in returning to my house, and the moment I had reached my own chamber, I tore open the parcel. It contained four letters: but the contents of one will explain the presence of the other three. That one was from Mr. Markham, and ran as nearly as I can

recollect thus: 'After the terrible discovery which I made last night, I can never see you more. You have wantonly betrayed the confidence and affection of a man who descended from his eminence to court your love in your social obscurity. But the moral bond that united us is riven asunder; and the legal one shall be equally broken should you dare to represent yourself as my wife. The most horrible suspicion now haunts me that even *your* child may not be *mine*. Keep that infant, then; and be good to it, if your depraved heart will allow you. And that you may not sink into the lowest grades of crime from the embraces of the noble libertine to whom you have abandoned yourself, I have instructed my banker to pay to you, as *Mrs. Wilmot*, a monthly stipend of ten pounds. I have destroyed all your letters, save the *three* which I enclose; and I return them to you in the hope that a re-perusal of them will place before you in all its glaring flagrancy the contrast between your protestations and your deeds.

"This terrible document bore no signature: but it was impossible, either by its nature or the handwriting, that it could have emanated from any one save Mr. Markham. The three letters accompanying it contained expressions of sincere gratitude and fervent affection towards Mr. Markham, and denoted three particular phases in Harriet's connexion with him: namely, her assent to their union, the fact that she was in a way to become a mother, and the announcement of approaching maternity. I wept as I read them:—I wept as I thought of all I had done in accomplishing the ruin of poor Harriet!

"The Marquis came no more to my house;—I saw by the newspapers that he had returned to London, a few weeks after the sad incidents just described;—again I sought an interview with him, but he would neither see nor correspond with me. My other patrons deserted me: they had been introduced by the Marquis; and, finding that he had some private reason to shun me, they fell off rapidly. I was compelled to break up my establishment: it ruined me in pocket, as it had ruined many, many young females in virtue. But for none of my victims did I reck—no, not one, save Harriet Markham.

"I fell gradually lower and lower in the scale of my avocations; but still I contrived to gain a living in various ways which have no connexion with the object of this narrative. It was about a year after the sad events above recorded, that I one day met Harriet Wilmot face to face in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury. She was poorly clad and sickly in appearance; and her countenance was expressive of profound mental dejection. She held a letter in her hand; but she had not her child with her; and she was hurrying rapidly along—most probably to the post-office. 'Harriet!' I exclaimed, catching her by the hand.—She started at being thus accosted; but the moment her eyes fell on my countenance, she shuddered visibly, and cried out, '*You!*'—then she darted away as if in affright, dropping the letter upon the pavement. For some moments I was so stupefied by her abrupt flight, that I stood as it were paralyzed. But seeing the letter upon the pavement, I recovered the use of my limbs, and hastened to pick it up. It was addressed '*To the Marquis of Holmesford, Holmesford House*.' I hurried away with it, saying to myself, 'Now I shall discover how far the connexion between Harriet and the Marquis went.'—But I was disappointed: the letter merely contained, as far as I can remember, these words:—'I ought not to address your lordship, under the peculiar—the distressing circumstances which made us acquainted; but necessity compels me to appeal to your lordship's bounty. It is not for myself, however, that I implore your aid; but for the sake of my child, who is starving! Oh! my lord, if you only knew what the feelings of a mother are when she beholds her infant shrieking for food, and turning its eyes towards her countenance in so piteous a manner that they speak the language of famine far more eloquently than its tongue could possibly do, were it able to express its wants in words,—if you could understand these feelings, you would not think ill of me because I thus appeal to your bounty!'—An address was given in an obscure street in Bloomsbury; and the letter was signed '*Harriet Wilmot*.'

"Again I felt for that poor creature, who was now reduced, with her poor infant of fifteen months old, to such a state of penury; and I do not say it to render myself less despicable than I must appear in the eyes of those who may peruse this narrative,—but I merely state it as a fact, that I hastened home, gathered together the few shillings which I possessed, and hurried off to the address mentioned in Harriet's letter. But when I reached the house indicated, I learnt from the landlady that Mrs. Wilmot had suddenly departed half an hour before. 'She was very poor,' observed the woman; 'but she was honest. She strove hard to maintain herself with her needle, and starved herself to feed her infant. She thought herself quite happy when she earned five shillings in a week. Night after night did the poor creature sit up till she was nearly blind, toiling constantly at her work. And when she went away so suddenly just now, she offered me her shawl in payment of the little arrears of rent due. My God! I would sooner have given her all I had than have taken a rag from her! Ah!' added the woman, wiping her eyes, 'there's something very wrong somewhere in the country when such good mothers are allowed to die by inches through sheer famine!'

"I went away, very miserable. I felt convinced that Harriet, when she perceived she had lost her letter, suspected that it might fall into my hands, and that I should thereby learn her place of abode. And it was clear that she had departed so abruptly to avoid me! I have kept that letter—as well as all the others to which I refer in my history.

"As nearly as I can recollect, two years and three quarters passed away; and I again saw Harriet. It was in the month of January, about noon on a bitter cold day; and I was walking through Long Acre, when I suddenly perceived her enter a house, which was evidently let in lodgings to poor families. She did not observe me; but I felt a violent longing to make my peace, if possible, with that unfortunate victim of my treachery. The door stood open for the accommodation of the various inmates; and I hurried up the staircase. I heard footsteps before me—and I followed them to the very top of the house: then I caught a glimpse of Harriet entering a back garret. I advanced to the door, and knocked gently. Harriet immediately opened it; but when she beheld me, she recoiled with such an expression of horror and alarm upon her death-like countenance, that I was dreadfully embarrassed. 'My dear friend,' I said, at length: 'pray—in the name of heaven! hear me!'—'*You!*' she cried, in that shrieking kind of tone which had marked her utterance of the word when we met before, and which showed her utter abhorrence of me—a sentiment I well deserved: 'hear *you*! Oh! no—no!'—and she closed the door violently. I knew not how to act. I felt convinced that she had never communicated with Mr. Markham since the period when he made that mysterious but '*terrible discovery*' to which he alluded in his letter that fell into my hands. I thought I would acquaint her with the existence of that letter and the nature of its contents; because it promised an income which would have placed her above want. So I sate down upon the stairs to reflect how I should proceed to induce her to hear me. In a few minutes the door opened quickly, and Harriet, with her child (who was then four years old) in her arms and a small bundle in her hand, appeared on the landing. She shrank back when she saw me—she evidently thought I was gone. Then, recovering herself, she exclaimed, '*Wretch! why do you*

haunt me? Have you not injured me enough already? Will you not even let me die in peace?'—I started up, saying, 'Do hear me! You know not how important——.'—But ere I could utter another word, she rushed wildly past me, and ran down the stairs with a precipitation which manifested her profound horror at my presence.

"Thus had I involuntarily driven her a second time from her humble home! I was sorely afflicted, for many reasons—but chiefly because my motives were not on either occasion wrong. I was about to take my departure, when I thought I would cast a look at the interior of the chamber which she had inhabited. By its appearance I hoped to judge of her circumstances, which I sincerely wished might be improved. I entered the room: it was evidently a ready-furnished garret. I am able to recognise such facts at a glance. Though not absolutely wretched, it was mean—very mean—too mean to permit the idea that she, poor creature! was comfortable in her resources. Several papers were burning in the grate: she had evidently set fire to them the moment ere she left the room in the precipitate manner described. I hastened to extinguish the smouldering flames, but redeemed the fragment of only one important paper. It contained the commencement of a letter evidently written that morning, as I discovered by the date. Strange to say, it was another epistle addressed '*To the Marquis of Holmesford, Holmesford House*.' Its contents were to this effect:—'Your lordship will pardon me for again intruding myself upon your notice; but a deep sense of the duty I owe to my child, and the dread of leaving the poor innocent girl to the mercy of strangers—for the hand of Death seems to be already upon me—must serve as my excuse for thus troubling you. And when your lordship reflects that it is to you that I owe all the hideous misery which has been my lot for nearly four years,—through you that I lost the love and confidence of my husband,—your lordship's heart will not allow this appeal to be made in vain. Hitherto your lordship has remained unacquainted with the name of that husband of whom I speak; but now it is my duty to reveal it to you, that your lordship may see him and ex——'

"The remainder had been so scorched that it was illegible. Conjecture relative to the termination of the sentence was vain. Was the unfinished word *explain*? Or was it *express*? Often—often have I sate and wondered what the end of the passage originally was, ere the flames singed that sad letter. *She felt the hand of Death already upon her*; and I had driven her from the place where she wished *to die in peace*! Wretch—wretch that I was!

"From that time forth I never saw her more!

"All that I know of Harriet Markham is now told. The only link that is missing in the chain of my narrative is the detailed account of the mode in which Mr. Markham discovered that his wife had become the victim of the Marquis of Holmesford. That mystery the Marquis himself may be enabled to explain.

"My task is terminated: nor would I for worlds be compelled to accomplish it over again. It has given additional poignancy to thoughts that frequently oppress me, and has aroused others equally painful, but which had slumbered for years and years until now. And where I write—I dare not name the place, nor even those at whose command I write—there is a fearful gloom that is congenial, too congenial with those appalling reminiscences. Perhaps I should have felt and expressed less remorse for the past, had I written under more pleasant circumstances; perhaps, in that case, many of those dread images which *here* haunt my mind and are reflected in the bewailings and self-reproaches which appear in these pages, would not have visited me: still, had I performed this task in a cheerful chamber and in the gladdening sun-light,—even then I must have felt *some* remorse—for of all the bad deeds of my life, the treachery which I perpetrated towards Harriet is the blackest!

"May her sweet daughter Katharine be more happy—more fortunate!"

CHAPTER CCXXVI.

THE MARQUIS OF HOLMESFORD.

It was eleven o'clock on the following day, when the Marquis of Holmesford rose from the arms of one of the houris who formed his harem.

He thrust his feet into a pair of red morocco slippers, put on an elegant dressing-gown of gay-coloured silk, and passed from the room of his charmer to his own chamber.

There he entered a bath of warm milk; and, while luxuriating in the tepid fluid which imparted temporary vigour to a frame enfeebled by age and dissipation, he partook of a bowl of the richest French soup, called *consommée*, which his valet presented on a massive silver salver.

Having finished a broth that was well calculated to replenish the juices of his wasting frame, the hoary voluptuary left the bath, which was immediately wheeled into an adjacent chamber.

Every morning was a certain quantity, consisting of many gallons, of new milk supplied for the use of the Marquis of Holmesford; and when it had served him for one bath, it became the perquisite of his valet.

And what did this domestic do with it? Had he possessed hogs, he would not have given to those unclean beasts the fluid which had washed off all the impurities of his master's person:—no—he would not have allowed the very pigs to partake of the milk with which the disgusting exudations of the old voluptuary's body had commingled!

But he contracted with a milk-man whose "walk" was in a very poor neighbourhood; and that milk-man paid the valet a certain sum daily for the perquisite.

It was then retailed to the poor as the best "country grass-fed milk!"

Let us, however, return to the Marquis.

Upon quitting his bath, he commenced the mysteries of the toilet,—that ceremony which involves so many repulsive details when connected with old men or old women who have recourse to cosmetics or succedaneous means to render less apparent the ravages of time and debauchery.

Taking out his complete set of false teeth, he placed them in a glass filled with pure lavender water. His dressing-case supplied a silver instrument to scrape the white fur from a tongue that denoted the fever produced by the previous evening's deep potations; a pair of silver tweezers removed the hairs from his nostrils; and, in the meantime, his wig, stretched upon a block, was skilfully dressed by the valet.

It was past mid-day when Lord Holmesford quitted his chamber, looking as well as all the artificial means which he adopted towards the improvement of his person, and all the accessories of faultless clothes, whitest linen, and richest jewellery, could render an old worn-out beau of sixty-four.

As he was descending the stairs, a servant met him, and said in a profoundly respectful tone, "Mr. Greenwood, my lord, is in the drawing-room."

The Marquis nodded his head, as much as to say that he heard the announcement, and proceeded to the apartment where the Member for Rottenborough was waiting.

"Well, Greenwood, my boy," cried the Marquis, affecting the sparkling hilarity of youth, and endeavouring to walk with a jaunty and easy air, just as if his old bones did not move heavily in their sockets like a door on rusty hinges; "how goes the world with you? As for me, by God! I really think I am growing young again, instead——"

"Your lordship *does* look uncommonly well," said Greenwood, who had his own purposes to serve by flattering the nobleman; "and for a man of fifty-two——"

"Come, Greenwood—that won't do!" cried the Marquis. "Fifty-one, if you please, last birth-day."

"Yes—I meant in your fifty-second year, my lord," said Greenwood, with admirable composure of countenance, although he well knew that the hoary old sinner would never see sixty-four again:—"but, as I was observing, you are really an astonishing man; and if I were married—egad! I should deem it but prudent to request your lordship not to call at the house except when I was at home!"

"Ah! you rogue, Greenwood!" exclaimed the Marquis, highly delighted at the compliment thus conveyed—for with debauchees in fashionable life such a degrading assertion *is* a compliment, and a most welcome one, too:—"no—no—not so bad as that, either, Greenwood. Friendship before every thing!"

"No, my lord—*love* before every thing with your lordship!" cried Greenwood, gravely sustaining the familiar poke in the chest which his former compliment had elicited from the old nobleman. "You are really terrible amongst the women; and, some how or another, they cannot resist you. By the bye, how gets on the action which Dollabel has against you?"

"What! Dollabel, the actor at the Haymarket!" ejaculated the Marquis. "Oh! settled—settled long ago. My lawyer ferreted out an overdue bill of his, for ninety-odd pounds, bought it up for seven guineas, sued him on it, and threw him into some hole of a place in the City, that they call Redcross——"

"No—Bluecross, I think," suggested Greenwood, doubtingly—although he knew perfectly well to what place the Marquis was alluding.

"No—no—that isn't it either," cried the nobleman: "Whitecross Street—that's it."

"Ah! Whitecross Street—so it is!" exclaimed Greenwood. "What a memory your lordship has!"

"Yes—improves daily—better than when I was a boy," said the Marquis. "But as I was observing, my solicitor threw Dollabel into Whitecross Street gaol, and starved him into a compromise. I consented to give him his discharge from the debt and a ten-pound note to see his way with when he came out. But his wife was really a nice woman!"

"She was—a very nice woman," observed Greenwood. "You got out of that little *crim. con.* very nicely. Then there was Maxton's affair——"

"What! the tea-dealer in Bond Street!" exclaimed the Marquis, chuckling with delight as his exploits in the wars of love were thus recalled to his mind. "Oh! that was not so easily settled, my dear fellow. It went up to within a week of trial; and then Maxton agreed to stop all further proceedings and take his wife back if she came with a cool two thousand in her pocket. Well, my lawyer—knowing fellow, that!—drew him into a correspondence, and got him to receive his wife. Home she went:—Maxton met her with open arms—declared before witnesses that he was at length convinced of her innocence—(this he said to patch up her reputation)—and all was well till next morning, when he asked her to give him the two thousand pounds, that he might take them to the Bank. Then she laughed in his face—and he saw that he was done. *Condonation*, the civilians call it—and so he could not go on with the suit. Capital—wasn't it?"

"Capital, indeed!" ejaculated Greenwood, nearly dying with laughter.

The Marquis never for a moment suspected it to be all forced, but rubbed his hands together so briskly and chuckled so heartily, that a violent fit of coughing supervened, and he was compelled to turn aside to hold in his false teeth.

"Your lordship has caught a little cold," said the Member for Rottenborough. "But it is nothing—a mere nothing: I often have a cough like that. I've known many young men—much younger than your lordship—have worse coughs."

"Oh! I know that it's nothing," cried the Marquis, still stammering with a diabolical irritation in the throat.

"By the bye," said Greenwood, imagining that he had now so effectually worked himself into the old nobleman's good graces that he might safely explain the business that had brought him thither; "you are not in any hurry for the ten thousand I borrowed of you at the beginning of the year?"

"Not in the least, my dear fellow," returned the Marquis. "But, while I think of it, what has become of the fair Georgian—the blue-eyed Malkhatoun?"

"I handed her over to Dapper some time ago," answered Greenwood. "We were, however, speaking of those ten thousand pounds ——"

"A trifle—a mere trifle. Say no more about it," cried the nobleman.

"I expected as much from your lordship's generous friendship," said Greenwood, obsequiously. "In fact, I came to tax you for a further loan—just for a few days——"

"Impossible at present, my dear fellow!" interrupted the Marquis, rather peremptorily; for he had entertained doubts of his friend's prosperity for some time past; and this application only tended to confirm his suspicions. "I am really so pressed at this moment——"

The dialogue was interrupted by the sudden entrance of a servant, who said, "My lord, the Prince of Montoni requests an interview with your lordship."

"The Prince—Richard—*here*!" exclaimed Greenwood, thrown off his guard.

"Show his Highness up immediately," said the Marquis, in the tone of a man who was surprised but not alarmed at this visit.

"My lord," interrupted Greenwood, speaking in a hurried and thick tone, "I have the most urgent reasons for not meeting the Prince of Montoni—for not even being seen by him. I implore you not to say that I am here—not even to allude to me."

And having uttered this hasty injunction, Greenwood passed into a back drawing-room, which was separated from the front one by folding-doors.

But it was easy to overhear in the former apartment all that was said in the latter.

Scarcely had the Member for Rottenborough thus retreated, when the Prince was ushered into the presence of the Marquis of Holmesford.

Those two personages had never met before; and the moment they thus found themselves face to face, they surveyed each other with rapid but scrutinising glances.

On one side Richard Markham was naturally curious to behold the man,—the monster in human form,—who could have practised so much villany against so much virtue—who, in a word, had destroyed the happiness of the deceased and lamented mother of Katharine.

On the other hand, the Marquis was struck by the handsome and noble appearance of that fine young man, who had raised himself from a sphere comparatively humble to an exalted position—who had led armies to a crowning triumph through the deadly strife of battle—and who was himself the personification of that generous spirit of political freedom which now influences the civilised world from the banks of the Thames to the waters of the Volga.

And, oh! what a contrast was formed in that splendid drawing-room where a great Prince and a wealthy peer now met for the first time:—the one possessing a heart beating with all the generous emotions that can redeem frail humanity from some of the dire consequences of the Primal Fall; the other accustomed to sacrifice all and every thing to his own selfish lusts and degrading debaucheries:—the one endowed with that manly beauty which associates so well with the dignity of high rank and the aristocracy of virtue; the other sinking beneath the infirmities of age and the ravages of dissipation:—the one noble alike by nature and by name; the other noble only by name:—the one carrying his head erect, and well able to meet the glance of every eye that would seek to penetrate into the recesses of his soul; the other conscious of having outraged so many hearts, that he quailed beneath the look of every visitor whose business was not immediately announced:—the one, in a word, the type of all that is great, good, chivalrous, and estimable; the other a representative of a vicious hereditary aristocracy!

The Marquis requested our hero to be seated, and, having himself taken a chair, waited for an explanation of the motives of this visit.

"I have called upon you, my lord," said Richard, "for the purpose of requesting one half-hour's serious conversation on a subject which deeply interests me and an amiable girl whom I only yesterday discovered to be my sister. My name is not unknown to your lordship——"

"I have heard much of your Highness," interrupted the nobleman; "and am well acquainted with those great achievements which have covered you with glory."

"When I said that my name was not unknown to your lordship," continued Richard, bowing coldly in acknowledgment of the compliment thus paid him, "I did not allude to that title by which the forms of ceremony compelled me to announce myself: I intended you to understand that the name of *Markham* must occupy no agreeable place in your lordship's memory."

"Your Highness oversteps the bounds of courtesy in undertaking to answer for the state of my feelings," exclaimed the Marquis, with evident signs of astonishment: "your Highness insinuates that I have reason for self-reproach; and this between strangers——"

"Pardon me for interrupting your lordship," said our hero, calmly but firmly: "if we were personally strangers to each other until now, the name of my deceased father was not unknown to you; nor am I unacquainted with your conduct towards one who was dear to *him*. And now, my lord, let us understand each other. I came not hither on an inimical errand—scarcely even to reproach you. You are an old man—and it would be unseemly in me, who am a young man, to assume a tone of intimidation or of menace. But I come to request an explanation of a certain affair which is to some degree enveloped in doubt and mystery—although, alas! I dread the very worst:—I come as one gentleman seeks another, to demand the only atonement that can be made for wrongs inflicted years ago on him who was the author of my being;—and that atonement is a full avowal of the past, so that no uncertainty even as to the worst may dwell in the minds of those who are now interested in the subject to which I allude."

"Your Highness is labouring under some extraordinary error," said the Marquis of Holmesford, warmly. "I declare most solemnly that the name of your father was totally unknown to me: indeed, I never heard of your family until the newspapers first became busy with your own exploits in Italy."

"Is this possible?" cried Richard: then, as a sudden reminiscence struck him, he said in a musing tone, "Yes—it may be so. In her last letter addressed to the Marquis of Holmesford poor Harriet intimated that the name of her husband was unknown to him—and that letter was never sent!"

Although the Prince uttered those words rather in a musing tone to himself than in direct address to the Marquis, the latter caught the name of *Harriet*, and instantly became deeply agitated.

"Harriet, my lord?—did your Highness mention the name of Harriet?" murmured the nobleman.

"Yes, my lord," continued Richard: "I see that I have hitherto been speaking in enigmas. But I will now explain myself better. It is of one whom you knew as Harriet Wilmot that I require explanations at your hands."

"Harriet Wilmot!—yes—I knew her," said the Marquis, faintly: "I did her grievous wrong! and yet——"

"Your lordship will understand wherefore I feel interested in all that relates to Harriet Wilmot," interrupted Markham,—"when I declare to you that she was secretly married to my own father—and it is her child whom I yesterday embraced as a sister!"

"As there is a God in heaven, my lord," exclaimed the Marquis of Holmesford, emphatically, "I never until this moment knew the name of Harriet's husband; and with equal solemnity would I assert on my death-bed that she was innocent, my lord—she was innocent!"

"Oh! if I could believe—if I were assured——"

Richard could say no more: he pressed his hand to his brow, as if to steady his brain and collect his thoughts; and tears trembled on his long black lashes.

"Prince of Montoni," cried the Marquis, rising from his seat, and speaking with more sincerity and more seriousness than had characterised his tone for many, many years; "I am a man of pleasure, I admit—a man of gallantry, I allow; but I have no inclination to gratify, no interest to serve, by uttering a falsehood now. Again I declare to you—as God is my judge—that Harriet was innocent in respect to myself,—and I believe—nay, I would venture to assert—innocent also with regard to others—and faithful to her husband!"

"My lord," said Richard, in a voice tremulous with mingled emotions of joy and doubt; and as he spoke, he also rose from his seat, and took the nobleman's hand, which he pressed with nervous force,—"my lord, prove to me what you have just stated—explain all that took place between yourself and Harriet on that night which appears to have been so fatal to her happiness,—show me, in a word, that she *was* innocent,—and I will banish from my mind all angry feelings which may have been excited by the knowledge of your intrigues to undermine her virtue!"

"I cannot for a moment, hesitate to satisfy you in this respect," said the Marquis. "Resume your seat, my lord—and I will narrate, as calmly and distinctly as I can, all that transpired on the night when she was inveigled to my house;—for I perceive that you are well acquainted with many details concerning her."

"It is but right to inform you," observed Richard, "that the old woman who aided your designs with regard to her whom I must consider to have been my step-mother, has committed to paper a narrative of all which she knew relative to that unfortunate young woman. But there is one gap which your lordship must fill up—one mystery which is as yet unrevealed. I allude to the incidents of that fatal night, when, even if Harriet escaped innocent from this house, she, by some strange combination of untoward circumstances, lost the confidence of my father—her husband—and appeared guilty in his eyes."

"And yet she *was* innocent!" exclaimed the Marquis, emphatically. "Listen, Prince, to what I am about to say. The old woman to whom you have alluded, inveigled Harriet to my house—and, I confess, by my instructions. I knew that she was married; but the old woman told me not to whom—even if she knew."

"She *did* know," remarked our hero; "but the marriage was kept secret——"

"And I never asked the vile procuress any particulars concerning it," interrupted the Marquis. "All I coveted was Harriet's person: I cared nothing for her connexions or circumstances. The young mother came hither, with her child in her arms. One of my female servants took the babe from her, and locked her in a room where she expected to find the woman whom she believed to be her friend. But she was alone with me! She knew me—and the conviction that she was betrayed flashed to her mind the moment her eyes met mine. Then she fell upon her knees, and implored me to save her—to spare her. I was inflamed with wine—maddened with desire; and

I heeded not her prayers. I attempted to reason with her;—but not all the tempting offers I made her—not all the promises I uttered—not all the inducements I held out, could persuade her to submit to my wishes. I was already a widower, and I even swore to make her my wife, so soon as a divorce could be obtained between herself and her husband, if she would become my mistress. No:—she wept and shrieked—she prayed and menaced—she grew violent and imploring, by turns. At length—for I must tell you all—I had recourse to violence: I was no longer able to master my passions. But she resisted me with a strength and energy that surprised me. I was completely baffled—and Harriet remained innocent!"

"Thank God—thank God!" exclaimed Markham, fervently clasping his hands together.

"Yes, my lord—she remained innocent," continued the Marquis; "and, when I myself grew more cool, I felt ashamed—humiliated—cast down, in the presence of that young woman who had preserved her virtue from my violence,—the first who ever entered that room and conquered *me*! I suddenly experienced an admiration for her—such as I had never known till then on behalf of any female! I approached her—in my turn I became a suppliant;—but it was for pardon! I deplored the outrage I had committed—I went upon my knees to ask her forgiveness.—'*My child!*' she suddenly exclaimed, as if awaking from a profound reverie.—I rang the bell, and received her child at the door: in my own arms I carried the babe to her. She covered it with kisses; and my manner touched her—for she declared that she would pardon me, if I never molested her more. I called heaven to witness the sincerity of the oath that I then pledged to observe this condition. Two hours had thus elapsed; and when she was composed, I rang the bell and ordered a hackney-coach to be fetched. When the vehicle arrived, I escorted her to it. But as I handed her down the steps of the front door, a gentleman, who was passing at the moment, caught sight of her countenance.—'*Harriet!*' he exclaimed, in a voice of mingled astonishment, rage, and despair.—'*My husband!*' she cried, with a wild shriek; and she would have fallen on the pavement, had I not caught her in my arms.—'*Sir*,' I said to the stranger, '*this lady is innocent, although appearances may be against her.*'—'*Innocent!*' he repeated, in a tone of bitterness and grief: '*innocent when she comes calmly from the house of the Marquis of Holmesford, and sinks into the Marquis of Holmesford's arms! No: I am not to be deceived! Harriet, vile woman, I cast you off for ever!*'—And, with these words, the stranger hurried away."

"Alas! that was my poor father!" said Markham, the tears trickling down his cheeks.

"I had no opportunity to explain the circumstances that had occurred," continued the nobleman, after a pause. "Your father disappeared with the rapidity of lightning; and the moment he was gone, Harriet burst from my arms, evidently in pursuit of him. I was so bewildered with the suddenness of these events, that I remained transfixed as it were to the spot. At length I hurried down the street after Harriet;—but I could not overtake her. Distressed beyond measure, I returned home, vented my wrath upon the old woman, whom I loathed as the authoress of this misfortune, and drove her from my house. The wretch wrote to me afterwards, and even endeavoured to obtain an interview with me; but I would never see her more."

"And did your lordship lose sight of poor Harriet altogether?" asked Richard.

"I once received a letter from her," was the reply: "I think it must have been about a year after the occurrences which I have just related. She wrote in a mild and respectful tone—declaring that the sufferings of her half-famished child could alone have induced her to apply for assistance to me. I enclosed her a hundred pounds, and desired her in my letter of reply never to hesitate to avail herself of my purse—as I should not attempt to take any advantage of the assistance which I might render her. But to my astonishment she sent back eighty pounds—retaining only twenty, and declaring in a brief note that she felt ashamed of being even compelled to accept that sum. I never heard from her again; but I gather from your Highness's observations that she is no longer living!"

"She died unhappily,—miserably upwards of thirteen years ago," said Richard. "A strange combination of circumstances threw me in the way of her daughter,—the orphan whom she left—about fifteen months ago; and it was only last night that I discovered a sister in her whom I had known as Katherine Wilmot."

"Katherine Wilmot!" exclaimed the Marquis: "surely that name is known to me?"

"My sister was accused of a crime which the Rev. Reginald Tracy had in reality perpetrated; and——"

"I remember the occurrence full well," interrupted the Marquis. "When that exposure of the rector of Saint David's took place, I was struck by the name of Wilmot; but I suspected not for a moment that the Katherine Wilmot, who was concerned in that affair, and whose innocence transpired so clearly, was the daughter of poor Harriet."

"Katharine Markham—for such is now her name," said Richard, "was for a period the victim of circumstantial evidence—even as a combination of unfortunate circumstances had persecuted her mother before her. Yes—it was evidence of that kind which ruined Harriet in the eyes of my father! But I shall intrude no longer upon your lordship—unless it be to say that your candid explanation this day has gone far to retrieve the past in my estimation. For, oh! my lord—you can perhaps understand how welcome to me is the conviction that the mother of my newly-discovered sister was virtuous:—and to her, poor girl! the assurance of her parent's innocence will be joyful indeed! Every thing is now cleared up—and the narrative of Katherine's parentage is complete. Its truth is proved by the fact that certain letters now in my possession are in the handwriting of my father; and some which Harriet also wrote, correspond with a fragment of a note that the poor creature commenced on her death-bed, and which has remained in her daughter's possession. One link was alone wanting to make the history perfect—the occurrence of that night which was so fatal to my step-mother's happiness. That link your lordship has supplied;—and I thank you."

The Prince then took his leave of the Marquis.

Scarcely had Richard left the room, when Greenwood re-entered it from the back apartment.

His countenance was pale—his manner was agitated.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded the Marquis, astonished at his friend's altered mien.

"Your lordship cannot divine how nearly all that I have overheard concerns *me*," was the answer.

And Greenwood left the house abruptly.

We must leave the reader to imagine the joy that prevailed at Markham Place, when the Prince returned thither, the bearer of those happy tidings which proved the legitimacy of Katherine and the innocence of her departed but not unlamented mother.

CHAPTER CCXXVII.

COLDBATH FIELD'S PRISON.

Return we now to the Resurrection Man,—that incarnate fiend whose crimes were so numerous, and all of so black a dye.

Firmly bound, and guarded by three officers, who kept their bludgeons in their hands, the miscreant saw that all resistance was vain: he accordingly threw himself back in the cab that was bearing him to prison, and gave way to his saturnine reflections.

"If I had only thought that Richard Markham would have accompanied that young girl Katharine,"—it was thus he mused,—"a very different song would have been sung. But I knew that he was married only a week ago, and never dreamt that *he* would leave his pretty wife to poke his nose into Banks's crib. What an infernal oversight on my part! And now—here I am, regularly lumbered; and all the swag arising from Kate Wilmot's business is in the hands of that canting sneak Banks! Damnation to Richard Markham! I shall swing for this if I don't take precious good care. He'll swear to two different attempts on his life—one at the old house near Bird-cage Walk, and t'other at Twig Folly. What a cursed—ten times cursed fool I was to let myself tumble into a snare in this way! Some one else will find the gold that I have saved up; and when I shall be cold and stiff under the pavement of Newgate, others will riot on my treasure! But, no—it can't happen in that way: it's impossible that my time is come yet—impossible! I shall escape somehow or another;—I *must* escape—I *will* escape! But how? That question is the devil of the difficulty. Never mind—escape I will;—so I mustn't be down-hearted!"

These and numberless other reflections, in which despondency and hope alternately asserted a predominant influence, occupied the mind of Anthony Tidkins as the cab proceeded rapidly through Bethnal-Green and Shoreditch,—then along Old Street—up the Goswell Road—through Northampton Square—and lastly along Exmouth Street, in its way to Coldbath Fields' Prison.

At length the cab turned into the short road which forms the approach, within the wooden railings in front of the governor's dwelling, to the great gates of the gaol,—those gates over which may be read in large letters, "MIDDLESEX HOUSE OF CORRECTION."

A shudder crept over even the iron frame of Anthony Tidkins, as those huge portals, towering high above the cab which now drew up close to them, seemed to frown upon him like a colossal genius of evil amidst the obscurity of night.

Benstead leapt from the cab, and knocked loudly at the gate.

The iron din was responded to by gloomy echoes from the courts inside.

In a few minutes heavy chains fell, and the wicket was opened by a man bearing a lantern.

Benstead whispered to him for a few moments; and Tidkins was conducted into a little lobby on the left hand.

The turnkey, who had opened the gate, then proceeded to the governor's house, which was close by within the walls; and, after an absence of ten minutes, he returned with an affirmative answer to Benstead's request that the prisoner might be retained in custody in that gaol until a magistrate should otherwise dispose of him.

The turnkey accordingly led the way through the wicket of a strong iron grating, across a yard where a watchman armed with a loaded blunderbuss was stationed, and thence into a building, up the narrow stone staircase of which the party proceeded, until they reached a cell, where the Resurrection Man, who was now released from his bonds, was left.

Tidkins threw himself upon the bed and soon fell asleep. He was not an individual to whom danger or even the prospect of death could bring remorse: darkness and solitude had no alarms for him;—and, thus, in spite of the profound vexation he experienced at his present predicament, he yielded to the influence of fatigue and slept soundly.

On the following morning a bowl of gruel and a piece of bread were supplied for his breakfast; and he washed at the common sink belonging to that department of the gaol.

At ten o'clock Benstead and two other officers arrived, placed manacles upon him, and conveyed him to a cab, in which they seated themselves with him.

In about half an hour the Resurrection Man was placed in the dock at the Lambeth Street Police Office.

The Prince of Montoni, attended by his solicitor, Mr. Dyson, had entered the court a few moments before; and the magistrate, upon being made acquainted with his name and rank, immediately threw down the newspaper, saying, "It is by no means necessary that your Highness should enter the witness-box: your Highness will do me the honour to accept a seat on the bench; and the clerk will take down your Highness's evidence at your Highness's leisure. Make room there, for his Highness: usher, clear the way for his Highness."

Scarcely able to conceal his disgust at this fulsome behaviour of the magistrate, the Prince coldly said, "I thank you, sir, for your politeness: but I cannot consent to receive a favour which would not be shown to a poor and obscure individual."

The magistrate turned very red, and bowed meekly, but without repeating his offer.

The case was then entered upon.

The Prince detailed the particulars of that adventure at the Resurrection Man's house in the neighbourhood of the Bird-cage Walk, with which the reader is already acquainted: and he also related the subsequent circumstances connected with the blowing up of the den—a deed which had cost several persons their lives, and which (added Markham) was no doubt perpetrated by Tidkins himself.

When these depositions were taken down, the Prince was about to enter upon his second charge—namely, the attack made upon him

at Twig Folly: but the magistrate thought the first case had better be previously completed, and resolved upon remanding the prisoner for three days, in order to allow time to procure the evidence of those surviving policemen who had witnessed the fate of their brother-officers on the occasion of the blowing up of the house.

Tidkins was accordingly remanded to Coldbath Fields' Prison; and the Prince of Montoni immediately repaired in his carriage to Holmesford House—the particulars of which visit have been detailed in the preceding chapter.

On his return to the gaol, Tidkins was allowed to walk for an hour in the tread-wheel yard nearest to the entrance of the prison. There are several tread-mill yards in Coldbath Fields' gaol, alike for males and females; but we specify the particular yard in which the Resurrection Man was permitted to take exercise, because it has relation to a certain event which is to follow. It is also of the wheel in this yard that the fan, or balance, is seen above the wall near the south-western angle of the prison, by persons passing through Coldbath Square.

The tread-wheel is an enormous drum, or cylinder, with ranges of steps all round it, at a distance of about a foot and a half from each other. Between forty and fifty persons can work on the wheel at one time. It moves slowly round towards the prisoners placed upon it; and thus the step on which the foot stands descends, while the next step presents itself. A platform is built to half the height of the wheel; and from this platform the prisoners step upon the wheel itself. They support themselves by a railing, and their weight keeps the wheel in motion. Thus they *must* sink *with all their weight*, as they work on that rotatory engine of diabolical torture. The action is that of going up stairs, without, however, actually rising higher; for every step so reached sinks beneath the feet, and the prisoner is compelled to get upon the next one in its descent. Those prisoners who wait their turns to go on, sit upon the platform; and the task-master in the yard directs the intervals of labour and those of rest.

And upon this engine of torture, as we ere now denominated the tread-mill, not only boys of twelve years of age are placed, but even women!

Yes:—in this civilised country,—in this land where novelists and poets celebrate the chivalrous devotion which should be paid to the softer sex,—in this great city, where the pseudo-saints blurt forth their nauseating hypocrisy at Exeter Hall, and swindle the charitable of alms for the purpose of improving the condition of savages thousands of miles off, while there is such an awful want of instruction and moralising elements at home,—in the very centre of the English capital are women subjected to the ferocious torture of the tread-mill!

The food is scanty;—and yet the labour thus forced upon the poor sickly, half-starved wretches, is horribly severe.

Three-quarters of the crimes which send prisoners to Coldbath Fields, are larcenies and robberies caused by dire penury and pinching want: the miserable beings are half-famished already when they enter that gaol; but they are nevertheless retained in something closely bordering on that state of constant hunger, while the hardest possible labour is required from them!

Remember, reader, that we do not wish idleness to prevail in a prison. It is just the place where habits of industry should be inculcated. We therefore approve of the system of workshops established in Coldbath Fields: we admire the oakum-room—the room, too, where shoe-making is taught—and that department of the prison in which rugs are manufactured for a wholesale warehouse that contracts for the purchase of the same.

But we abhor torture—we detest cruelty; and the tread-wheel is alike a torture and a cruelty!

It makes the heart bleed in the breast of the visitor to the female-division of Coldbath Fields, to behold women nursing their babes at one moment, and then compelled to deliver their sucklings to the care of their fellow-prisoners, while they themselves repair to take their turn upon the tread-mill!

Talk of the despotism of Turkey, Russia, Austria, or Prussia,—talk of the tyranny of those countries where the will of one man is a law, be it for good or evil,—we solemnly and emphatically cry, "*Look at home*!"

Flogging in the Army and Navy, private whipping in prisons, semi-starvation in workhouses and gaols, and the tread-wheel,—these are the tortures which exist in this land of boasted civilisation—these are the instances in which our rulers seek to emulate the barbarism of past ages and the wanton inhumanity of foreign autocrats!

We must in justice observe that Coldbath Fields' Prison is kept in a most cleanly state. Perhaps the ventilation is not as perfect as it might be; and certainly the stone cells must be awfully cold in winter, for there are no means of imparting to them any artificial warmth. But as far as wholesome cleanliness is concerned, there is not the slightest ground whereon to raise a cavil against the establishment.

The discipline maintained in that gaol is on the Silent System. There it no separation—no classification—during the day; but the plan of silence prevents the corruption of the only moderately bad by the inveterately wicked. At night each individual sleeps apart in a cell.

Anthony Tidkins walked about the yard, affecting a moody and sullen air of indifference, but in reality catching with rapid glance every point of the buildings around him—every object within the range of his vision; so that he committed to memory a complete map of that division of the prison where he was now taking exercise.

Having walked an hour, he was re-conducted to his room where a bowl of pease-soup with a slice of bread was given to him for his dinner. In the evening he was supplied with a basin of gruel and another piece of bread, and was then locked in for the night.

CHAPTER CCXXVIII.

A DESPERATE ACHIEVEMENT.

It was, as the readers must remember, in the middle of the month of March when these events occurred. At that season of the year the sun sets at about six o'clock; and it is consequently dark at seven.

The Resurrection Man was no sooner left undisturbed for the night, when he commenced the arduous and almost desperate attempt of an escape from the prison.

Taking off his coat, he tore open the lining of the collar, and drew forth two files scarcely larger than watch-springs, and made of steel of an equally fine temper.

"Thanks to my precaution in never moving away from home without such tools as these about me!" he exclaimed, as he bent the files almost double to try their elasticity, and then drew them over one of his nails to test the keenness of their teeth.

It is not an uncommon circumstance for the police-magistrates at the offices not within the City of London to remand prisoners accused of heinous crimes to Coldbath Fields' gaol; and as such persons cannot, according to the law, be deemed guilty until they be declared so by a jury, they are not lodged in the common dark cells allotted to misdemeanants or criminals sentenced to imprisonment within those walls. There is a room specially appropriated to the use of untried individuals who are sent to Coldbath Fields. That chamber is capable of holding four or five beds, and has two windows looking upon the prison-grounds.

Those windows are, however, secured by strong iron bars outside the casements, which are made to open for the purpose of airing the room in the day-time.

Tidkins had already carefully examined these bars, and had calculated to a nicety the exact time which it would occupy him to remove two of them by means of his files.

It was seven o'clock when he commenced his labour; and as the clock of the church on Clerkenwell Green struck eleven, that portion of his task was accomplished.

"True to a minute!" muttered the Resurrection Man to himself, with a low chuckle of triumph: "I reckoned on four hours to do it in!"

But his fingers were cut and lacerated with the process: he, however, assuaged the pain by greasing the flesh with the remainder of the gruel left in his bowl.

The next proceeding was to tear his bedding into slips, wherewith to form a rope; and this was accomplished in about half an hour.

The window was not very high from the ground; and he did not dread the descent:—but the moon was shining brightly—and he knew that watchmen, carrying fire-arms, kept guard in the prison-grounds.

He looked up at the lovely planet of the night, whose chaste splendour was at that moment blessed by so many travellers alike upon the land and on the ocean; and he uttered a fearful imprecation against its pure silvery lustre.

But he did not hesitate many minutes: his case was desperate—so was his character.

"Better receive an ounce of lead in the heart than dance on nothing in six weeks or so," he said to himself, as he fastened the rope to the bar which stood next to the place of the two that he had removed.

Then he passed his legs through the window; and clinging by his hands and feet, slid slowly and safely down the rope.

He was now in the grounds belonging to the prison; but the high wall, that bounded the enclosure, separated him from the street.

Cautiously and noiselessly did he creep along, beneath the shade of the building—directing his steps towards the tread-wheel yard in which he had been permitted to take exercise, as above stated.

Suddenly the noise of footsteps and of voices fell upon his ears; and those ominous sounds were approaching.

"Perdition!" thought the Resurrection Man, as he crouched up close beneath the building: "I could have managed one—I could have sprung upon him—strangled him in a moment. But two—*two*——"

And he ground his teeth with rage.

"And so you was at the Old Bailey to-day?" said one of the watchmen to his companion, as they advanced round that part of the prison.

"Yes: it was my half-holiday," was the reply; "and so I thought I might as well go and hear the trial of that young Holford, you know, who shot at the Queen. The jury had a good deal of trouble at coming to a verdict; but at last they acquitted him on the ground of insanity."

"Ah!" said the first speaker: "then he's let out again?"

"Deuce a bit of that!" exclaimed his companion. "The judge ordered him to be detained till the royal pleasure should be known; and so he'll get sent to Bedlam for the rest of his life."

"And d'ye think he's mad? did he look mad?"

"Not he! He's no more mad than me. He seemed a little gloomy and sulky—but not mad. The only time he showed any interest in the proceedings, was when a witness called Jem Cuffin was examined; and this chap said all he could in favour of the youngster, although he wasn't able to deny that he saw him fire at the Queen and Prince Albert. But the best of it was, this Jem Cuffin proved that

the pistols wasn't loaded at all. Holford did not, however, know *that* when he fired them. So the young feller has managed to get board and lodging for life; and Jem Cuffin, who is a returned transport, it seems, and had been in custody for some time, was discharged on a full pardon granted by the Home Secretary."

"It must have been an interesting trial," observed the first speaker.

"Yes," said his companion; "but I'll tell you what will be more interesting still—and that is the trial of Tony Tidkins, whenever it comes on. Lord! what things that feller *has* done in his time! Talk of Jack Sheppard, or Dick Turpin, or any of the old criminals—why, they're nothing at all compared with this Tidkins. Ah! some rum things will come out when he goes up afore the nobs at the Old Bailey!"

The two men had stopped within half a dozen yards of the place where the Resurrection Man was crouched up in the deep shade of the building; and every word of the above conversation met his ears. In spite of the peril of discovery which now seemed inevitable, the miscreant experienced a momentary feeling of pride and triumph as he listened to the observations which were made concerning himself.

"Well, I must go round t'other way," said one of the watchmen, after a short pause: "we should get blowed up if we was found together—'specially talking in a prison on the *silent system*."

This was meant as a joke; and so the two men chuckled at it.

Tidkins also chuckled within himself; because he had just learnt that the watchmen intended to separate, and that consequently only one would pass him. He was still menaced with a fearful peril; but he considered it to be only one half so great as it had seemed a few moments previously.

Midnight was now proclaimed by the iron tongue of Clerkenwell Church; and the two watchmen parted—one retracing his steps round the building; and the other slowly advancing towards Tidkins.

"I must spring upon him and throttle him in a moment," thought the Resurrection Man, clenching his fingers as if they already held the intended victim's neck in their iron grasp.

But Providence saved the miscreant from that additional crime:—the watchman struck abruptly away from the neighbourhood of the building, and walked towards the boundary wall.

His back was now turned upon Tidkins, who lost no time in availing himself of this unexpected relief from the danger which had threatened him. In fact, the very circumstance of the two watchmen having advanced so close to him in each other's company,—which circumstance had menaced him with a detection that seemed unavoidable,—now proved most advantageous to his scheme; for as he hurried rapidly on towards the first tread-wheel yard, he passed between the two watchmen, each of whom was retreating farther from him, the one by retracing his steps round the building, and the other by lounging towards the wall.

Thus, while their backs were turned upon him, he gained in safety the tread-wheel yard where he had taken exercise, and every point of which he had accurately committed to memory.

His movements were now executed with the rapidity of one who had well weighed and pre-considered them.

Taking from a corner a gardener's basket, which he had previously noticed there, and which was used to convey the potatoes that were dug up in the prison-grounds, he turned it bottom upwards against a low building, or out-house, which abutted with a shelving slate roof against the high wall. By means of the basket, he raised himself upon this roof—crept up on it—and with one nimble spring upwards was enabled to catch at the *chevaux-de-frise*, or revolving iron spikes, which were fixed near the top of the wall, and which thus hung over the out-house.

Careless of the wounds which he received from the *chevaux-de-frise*, he scrambled over them, and gained the top of the wall.

The wall was much too high to permit him to drop into the street with any chance of escaping a broken limb. This he had previously reflected upon; and he now commenced the desperate feat of walking along the summit of that lofty wall—with a bright moon shining above, and the almost positive certainty of being observed by the watchmen inside the prison.

To increase the personal danger incurred by this extraordinary undertaking, the wall is irregular on the top, breaking into sudden and abrupt falls towards the south-western angle, and then rising with elevations equally abrupt from that point to the north-western angle.

This peculiarity of structure is caused by the unevenness of the ground on which the entire establishment with all its enclosures stands.

The journey along the top of the walls was not even a short one. The object of the Resurrection Man was to reach the houses in Guildford Place, which join the prison-wall on the eastern side. The point where he ascended was nearly at the middle of the southern wall; but between him and the south-eastern angle stood the gates and the governor's house, which he could not pass. He therefore had to make a circuit comprising nearly half the southern wall—all the western wall—all the northern wall—and then a part of the eastern wall;—and this in the largest prison in England!

It was a desperate venture: but—as we have before said—Tidkins was a desperate man—and his case was also desperate!

Fortune often aids the unworthy; and she did so upon this occasion.

Scarcely had the Resurrection Man proceeded twenty yards along the wall, when the moon—hitherto so lovely—became suddenly obscured; and a huge black cloud swept over its face.

Tidkins cast one rapid glance upwards; and his heart leapt within him, as he said to himself, "It will be dark like this long enough for my purpose."

On he went—walking upright, and rapidly—with scarcely an unusual effort to balance himself upon that giddy height,—and stooping only when he reached any of those abrupt descents or ascents in the structure of the wall which we have ere now noticed.

And now he has gained—safely gained—the north-western angle: he is pursuing his way along the wall which looks upon Calthorpe Street.

At the slightest signal of alarm he is prepared to risk his life by leaping from the wall.

But no one observes him: it is now quite dark;—he is far away from that part of the prison where the watchmen walk;—and the street beneath is empty.

Here and there are lights in the upper windows of the adjacent houses: he can almost see into those rooms, above the level of which

he is placed.

Looking to his right, he perceives the dark outlines of the prison-buildings, between which and the northern wall, whereon he is now walking, there is a considerable interval, the intermediate space being occupied by the gaol-gardens.

His heart beats joyfully—triumphantly: he has gained the north-eastern angle!

A glance to the left shows him the lights of Bagnigge Wells: before him are those of Wilmington Square; and to his right is Guildford Place.

He felt that he was beyond the reach of danger; and so exhilarating was his joy, that a momentary dizziness seized upon him—and he nearly fell over within the precincts of the gaol.

But recovering his balance by an extraordinary exertion, he planted his feet more firmly than ever on the wall, and continued his walk along the dizzy height.

He was now again in danger of discovery; for he had reached that part of the eastern wall against which the buildings and tread-wheel yards of the females' department stood, and in the immediate vicinity of which a watchman was stationed.

Nevertheless, the houses in Guildford Place were near; and their back premises abutted against the outer side of the wall along which he was now proceeding.

"One minute more of that dark cloud upon the moon—and I am safe!" he said to himself, as he cast a rapid glance upwards.

But, no—the cloud passes!

It has passed;—and the bright moon suddenly bursts forth with a flood of silver light.

Almost at the same instant, a loud voice raises an alarm within the precincts of the gaol: the sharp crack of a blunderbuss is heard—and a bullet whistles past the Resurrection Man, whose dark form, as seen by the watchman near the females' department, stands out in strong relief against the moon-lit sky.

The cry of the watchman is echoed by other voices on the prison side of the wall; and Tidkins mutters a terrible curse as he hurries forward.

But his courage does not fail him:—no—he is determined to sell his life as dearly as possible!

In less than a minute after the watchman within the enclosure had raised the alarm, the Resurrection Man reached the backs of the houses in Guildford Place;—and now the clear moonlight was of the utmost service to him, in enabling him to execute his movements with security and caution.

He lowered himself from the prison-wall to the roof of an out-house, and thence alighted in a yard attached to a dwelling.

The back-door of the house was locked and bolted inside: but this was a small obstacle in the way of one who had just escaped from the Middlesex House of Correction.

Unable to waste time by proceeding with caution, and compelled to risk the chance of alarming the inhabitants of the dwelling, the desperate man threw himself with all his strength against the door, which broke inwards with a loud crash.

The noise was followed by ejaculations of alarm in the house; footsteps were heard overhead; windows were thrown open—and the cry of "Thieves!" echoed along the street.

Tidkins paused not to reflect:—he dashed through the house—along the passage to the front door, the bolts of which he drew back in a moment. The key was in the lock:—every thing now appeared to favour the escape of the Resurrection Man!

The front-door was opened in a few moments, just as the inmates of the dwelling were rushing down the stairs.

But when they reached the passage, the door closed violently behind the intruder who had caused their alarm.

The Resurrection Man was safe in the open street; and he knew that he had a good start of the prison watchmen, who would have to make a considerable circuit from the vicinity of the females' department to the gates, and from the gates round the south-eastern angle, ere they could reach the point from which he was now departing.

Swift as an arrow he scud up Guildford Place—turned to the right—and slackened his pace only when he had passed through Wilmington Square. He gained the City Road, along which he walked somewhat leisurely towards Finsbury—well aware that his pursuers would not think of looking for him in a wide and open thoroughfare, but would rather prosecute their searches in the narrow lanes and low districts in the immediate neighbourhood of the gaol.

His object was to gain his den in Globe Town; for not a word had transpired during his examination before the magistrate at Lambeth Street, to show that the police had any clue to his place of abode; and he felt certain that Banks would not have betrayed him. The undertaker, he knew, was too deeply concerned in many of his plots and schemes to risk a general smash of the whole gang, by making any unpleasant revelations.

The Resurrection Man struck from the City Road into Old Street, and speedily reached Shoreditch.

As he passed down one of the horrible lanes which lie behind Shoreditch Church, he observed the door of a public-house to be open. He was well aware of the flash character of the place, but did not happen to be known by the people who kept it.

He entered this low boozing-ken, ordered a glass of something at the bar, and inquired for the evening paper. It was immediately handed to him; for all flash houses of that description take an evening as well as a morning journal, that their customers may receive the earliest intelligence of each day's Police or Old Bailey proceedings—matters in which the generality of them are very frequently interested.

Tidkins turned to the most recent Police Intelligence, and found his own case duly reported. Nothing, however, was said in that or any other department of the paper, which tended to excite an alarm lest his house in Globe Town had been discovered or any of his accomplices in his various crimes had been traced.

Thus reassured, he drank off the contents of his glass, and then recollected that he had no money in his pocket to pay for it. All he had about him when he was arrested, had been taken from him, according to custom, on his removal to Coldbath Fields.

Scarcely had this new embarrassment presented itself to his mind, when the door of the tap-room opened, and a man came forth. To Tidkins's infinite relief it proved to be the Buffer, who started when he saw his old friend at liberty.

The Resurrection Man placed his finger upon his lip; and the Buffer instantly checked the ejaculation of astonishment which had risen to his tongue.

The trifling debt incurred for the liquor was immediately settled by the Resurrection Man's friend; and the precious pair left the boozing-ken together.

As they walked along towards Globe Town, Anthony Tidkins related the particulars of his escape, at which the Buffer was monstrously delighted. Then, in reply to the Resurrection Man's questions, the other stated that he had seen Banks on the previous afternoon, and that no inquiries of a suspicious nature had been made at that individual's abode.

When they reached the door of the Resurrection Man's house in Globe Town, the Buffer took leave of his friend, with a promise to call in the course of the day and bring the morning's newspapers.

Tidkins was overjoyed when he again set foot in his back room on the first floor: and finding some gin in the cupboard, he celebrated his escape and return with a copious dram.

He did not immediately retire to bed, although he was sadly fatigued and bruised by the achievements of the night; but, taking down a bundle of keys from a shelf, he paid a visit to the subterranean department of his establishment.

The moment he placed the key in the lock of the private door up the narrow alley, he uttered a curse, adding, "This lock has been tried—tampered with! I know it—I could swear to it: I can tell by the way that the key turns!"

And the perspiration ran down his countenance:—for he trembled for the safety of his treasure!

With feverish impatience he opened the door, and entered that part of his strangely-built house.

Having obtained a light, a new circumstance of alarm struck him: the door of the back room was standing wide open!

"And I can swear that I closed it the last time I ever came here!" he cried aloud. "Some one has been to this place;—and that some one must be Banks! The sneaking scoundrel! But he shall suffer for it."

With a perception as keen as that of the North American Indian following the trail of a fugitive foe, did the Resurrection Man examine the floor of the room; and his suspicions that some one had been thither were confirmed by the appearance of several particles of damp dirt, which had evidently been left by the feet of an intruder within the last few hours.

"Worse and worse!" thought the Resurrection Man. "And, by Satan! the trap has been raised!"

This was evident; for the brick which covered the iron ring in the masonry of the chimney, had not been restored to its place.

"I could not have left it so!" cried Tidkins, aloud: "no—it is impossible! Some one *has* been here!"

With almost frantic impatience he raised the trap, and descended into the subterranean.

Entering one of the cells,—not the same whence the Rattlesnake had stolen his treasure,—he raised a stone, and then almost shrank from glancing into the hollow thus laid open.

But mastering his fears,—those fears which owned the influence of avarice far more than that of danger or of crime,—he held the lantern over the hole, and plunged his eyes into its depth.

"Safe!—all safe—by God!" he exclaimed, as four or five canvass bags met his view.

Then, in order to convince himself of the reality of the presence of his treasure, he opened the bags one after the other, and feasted his sight upon their glittering contents.

"It can hardly be Banks who has been here," he mused to himself, as he restored the bags to their place of concealment, and then rolled the stone back into its setting: "nothing could escape the keenness of his scent! He would have pulled up all the pavement sooner than have missed what he came to look for. And then, too, he is not the man to leave the brick out of its place, so as to show the secret of the stone-trap to any other curious intruder that might find his way here. No—no: Master Banks would pay a second and a third visit to this place, if he felt sure of finding any thing concealed here; and he would leave every thing close and snug after each search. But some one *has* been here! Unless—and I might have done such a thing as to forget to replace the brick,—I *might* have done so;—and yet it is barely possible!" continued Tidkins, in deep perplexity, and almost as much alarmed as Robinson Crusoe was upon discovering the print of the human foot upon the sand of his island. "Then there is that damp mud, too—and the door that was open—and the lock that has been tampered with! But suppose the mud came from my own shoes the last time I was here? the place is very damp—and it mayn't have got dry. It might also have been myself that left the door open;—and as for the lock—it is an old one, and may begin to work badly. Besides—I remember—the last time I was here, I was in a deuce of a hurry: it was just before I went down to Banks's to see him settle that job with Kate Wilmot. So, after all—my fears may be all idle and vain! However, I shall send for Banks presently, when the Buffer comes again; and I'll precious soon tell by his sneaking old face whether he has been here, or not, during my absence!"

Thus reasoning against the feasibility of his fears,—as men often do in cases of doubt and uncertainty, and when they are anxious to persuade themselves of the groundlessness of their alarms,—Tidkins left the subterranean, and returned to his chamber, where he immediately went to bed.

But his fears *were* well founded: some one *had* visited the subterranean during the hours while he himself was occupied in escaping from Coldbath Fields' Prison.

That intruder was not, however, Banks—nor any one of the Resurrection Man's accomplices in crime.

CHAPTER CCXXIX.

THE WIDOW.

We must now return to that beautiful little villa, in the environs of Upper Clapton, to which we introduced our readers in the early portion of this history, and where we first found Eliza Sydney disguised in the garb of a man.

Nothing was altered in the appearance of that charming suburban retreat, either externally or internally,—unless it were that there were no dogs in the kennels nor horses in the stables, and that the elegant boudoir no longer displayed articles of male attire.

But the trees around were green with the verdure of Spring; the fields, stretching behind far as the eye could reach, were smiling and cultivated; and umbrageous was the circular grove that bounded the garden.

In the parlour on the ground-floor still hung the miniatures of Eliza and her dead brother—that brother whom she had personated with such fatal consequences to herself!

And now on the sofa in that parlour sate Eliza Sydney herself,—dressed in deep mourning.

She was pale—but beautiful as ever!

The snow-white widow's cap concealed her bright chesnut hair, save where the shining masses were parted, glossy and smooth, over her lofty and polished forehead.

The high black dress and plain collar covered the snowy whiteness of her neck, but still displayed the admirable *contours* of her bust.

Her countenance bore a somewhat melancholy but resigned expression; and the amiability of her soul shone in her large, soft, melting hazel eyes.

It was noon—about a week after the date of the incidents related in the preceding chapter.

Scarcely had the time-piece upon the mantel proclaimed the mid-day hour, when a carriage drove up to the front door of the villa.

A few moments elapsed; and three visitors were ushered into the parlour where Eliza awaited them.

These were the Prince and Princess of Montoni and Katherine Markham.

Eliza extended her hand with ingenuous courtesy towards Richard, saying, "Prince, no selfish feelings can prevent me from congratulating you on that proud position which your prowess and your virtues have achieved for yourself." Then, offering her hand to Isabella, she added, "Nor need I wait for a formal introduction to one whom I now see for the first time, but of whom I have heard so much that I am well prepared to become her friend—if her Highness will permit me."

There was something so sweet and touching—something so frank and sincere—in the manner of the exiled Grand-Duchess of Castelcicala, that Isabella's heart was instantaneously warmed towards her. Moreover, the young Princess felt all the noble generosity of that conduct on the part of one who had lost a throne by the events which had led to the happiness of herself and her husband, and which had achieved the exaltation of her parents.

Thus were those two beauteous creatures attracted to each other the instant they met; and Isabella, instead of receiving the out-stretched hand that was offered as the pledge of friendship, threw herself into Eliza's arms.

It was a touching picture,—the embrace of that charming bride and that scarcely less charming widow!

In due course Markham presented his sister to the exiled Grand-Duchess, who received her in the most affable and cordial manner.

When the first excitement of this meeting was over, and they were all seated, Eliza broke a temporary silence which ensued.

"The last time we met, Prince," she said, addressing herself to our hero, "no human foresight could have divined the great events that were so shortly to ensue—the brilliant destinies that were in waiting for yourself."

"And if there be one regret which I have experienced," observed Richard, "arising from those events, it is that they deprived an amiable lady of that throne which her virtues embellished. But the cause of Castelcicalan freedom outweighed all other considerations; and the duty imposed upon me by those adherents who made me their Chief, was stern, solemn, and imperative."

"You need not reproach yourself," exclaimed Eliza: "you need not entertain a moment's regret on my account! All that occurred was inevitable—and it was for the best. Castelcicala panted for freedom—and she had a right to claim it. This I may assert without injustice—without insult to the memory of my husband. And had no such reclamation been made by the people of Castelcicala—had no revolution occurred—had Angelo been more prudent, and less severe—Alberto would still at this moment be the sovereign of that country. For my husband had long been afflicted with a disease of the heart that was incurable, and that must inevitably have terminated in a sudden death. As I informed you in my letter of yesterday, he had scarcely reached the city of Vienna, where he was received as became his rank, and lodged in one of the imperial palaces, when he was taken ill, and in a few hours breathed his last. His misfortunes could not have accelerated an event which his physicians had previously seen to be near at hand—although this prescience was all along religiously concealed from me. You have therefore, Prince, naught wherewith to reproach yourself on that head."

"Your kind assurances are conveyed in a spirit worthy of your generous heart," said Richard;—and Isabella, who was greatly affected by the noble behaviour of Eliza, enthusiastically echoed her husband's sentiments.

"It was but a week ago," continued Eliza, "that I received the tidings of the late Grand-Duke's death. He had misunderstood me—he

had suspected me—and we had parted in anger: nay—I had fled to save myself from his fury!"

"May I hope—and yet I dare not—that the generous behaviour of your Serene Highness towards me," observed Richard, "proved not the cause of that lamentable misunderstanding?"

"Oh! I should be grieved—deeply grieved, were such indeed the case!" exclaimed Isabella; "for Richard has made me acquainted with all the details of your Serene Highness's noble conduct towards him after he was taken prisoner at Ossore."

"I will explain all," said Eliza. "But, in the first place," she added, with a sweet smile, "let me entreat a favour of you all. You style me by that title which became mine when I was honoured with the hand of the late Grand-Duke Angelo, and which still is mine, did I choose to adopt it;—for the new Government has passed no decree to deprive me of it."

"Nor ever will!" exclaimed Richard, warmly.

"And yet I now value it not," continued the royal widow. "Thanks for that assurance, Prince;—but it is unnecessary. I was ever happier as Eliza Sydney, than as the Marchioness of Ziani, or as the Grand-Duchess of Castelcicala. As Eliza Sydney I left England: as Eliza Sydney I returned to England;—and by that name do I wish to be known. Nay—I implore you not to interrupt me: if you would please me—if you would do aught to contribute to my happiness—if you value my poor friendship,—that friendship, which, poor as it is, I so cordially offer to you all,—let me henceforth be Eliza Sydney, as I once was. When I came back three months ago to my native land, I re-entered this house—which is my own—with feelings of a far more peaceful happiness than those which I experienced when I first set foot as its mistress in the palace of Montoni. Here do I hope to pass the remainder of my days; and if you will sometimes come to cheer my solitude, I shall require no other source of felicity—no other society."

"We will visit you often, dearest Eliza—for so you will permit me to call you," said Isabella; "and you must come to our dwelling frequently—very frequently! It shall be the care of my husband, his dear sister Katherine, and myself, and also of the friends who dwell with us, to contribute to your happiness to the utmost of our power!"

Eliza pressed Isabella's hand, and smiled sweetly upon her and Katherine through the tears that stood upon her lashes.

"But I promised you an explanation of those events which led to my precipitate departure from Castelcicala," continued Eliza, after a short pause. "You must know that the loss which the ducal troops experienced at Ossore—chiefly through your prowess, Prince—overwhelmed my late husband with a fury which rendered him terrible to all around. He threatened the most deadly vengeance against the Constitutional prisoners, and was only persuaded by my entreaties and prayers to relinquish the extreme measures which he at first conceived against them. It was, I think, on the fourth day after you, Prince, left Montoni, disguised as an artist, and with a passport made out in a fictitious name, that the usher who had admitted you into the palace, and who, it appeared, had listened at the door of the room where our interview took place, betrayed the whole circumstances to the Grand-Duke. The Grand-Duke came immediately to my apartment, overwhelmed me with reproaches, and levelled the most unjust accusations against me. But I will not insult you nor your amiable bride by repeating all that the Duke said on that occasion. Never were suspicions more cruel: never was woman's conduct so thoroughly misunderstood—so unjustly interpreted! His Serene Highness commanded me to keep my own chamber—to consider myself a prisoner! An hour afterwards, Signor Bazzano contrived to obtain access to me, unperceived by the spies set to watch me. His uncle was, as I think I informed you when we met at Montoni, Prince, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department; and from that relative Bazzano had learnt the fearful tidings which he came to impart to me. It appeared that the Grand-Duke intended to appoint a Commission of Judges and Councillors of State to try me—*me*, his wife! All his former affection for me had suddenly changed, beneath the weight of his injurious suspicions, into the most unbounded hatred. I knew that he would form the Commission of men rather inclined to do the royal bidding than to investigate the entire matter with justice and impartiality. He was a prince who knew no other law than his own sovereign will! Alas! that was his failing; and it triumphed over all the better feelings of a mind naturally generous! Signor Bazzano also informed me that spies had been sent out all over the country to track you, Prince; and that your death, should you be captured, was determined upon. Fortunately, however, you escaped the pursuit of your foes!"

"And yet what danger must you have incurred!" exclaimed Isabella, gazing with tearful affection at her husband.

"Providence shielded you, dearest brother," murmured Katherine.

"Yes—Providence shielded him for its own wise and good purposes," added Eliza Sydney. "To continue the thread of my narrative, I must observe that the information brought me by the faithful Bazzano filled me with alarm. I already saw myself disgraced by an unjust verdict:—my life was even in danger. I was not compelled to implore Signor Bazzano to assist me to escape: he proposed the step as the only means of safety alike to myself and to him—for he was already endangered by the revelations of the usher, although the influence of his uncle had served to shield him from the immediate vengeance of the Grand-Duke. A post-chaise was procured by Bazzano that same afternoon; and I managed to escape from the palace, accompanied by Louisa—a faithful Englishwoman who has been in my service for some years. At Friuli Signor Bazzano met you, Prince, and gave you a timely warning, the nature of which you can now understand. For it was known that you had quitted Montoni, attended by a servant of dark complexion; and the spies sent after you were therefore led to inquire for *two persons* answering a certain description, and journeying together. Thence the recommendation to separate company, which Bazzano so wisely gave you; and perhaps to that circumstance of thus parting from your servant you each owed your safety. In reference to my own flight it only remains for me to say that we proceeded to Montecuculi, having left behind us at Friuli an impression that we were going in quite another direction. Arrived in safety at Montecuculi, we sent back the chaise to Montoni, and secured places in a public vehicle for the nearest town in the Roman States. Our perils were soon over:—we travelled day and night until we reached Leghorn, in Tuscany, whence we embarked on board a vessel bound for England. Shortly after my arrival here, the news of the Castelcicalan insurrection reached this country; and then I heard, Prince, that you were at the head of the Constitutionalists."

"But I did not violate my promise to you," observed Richard. "I pledged myself, on the occasion of our interview at Montoni, never to draw the hostile weapon in Castelcicala, save at the command of Alberto and in a just cause, or to relieve the Grand-Duchy from a foreign invader."

"Yes, Prince," returned Eliza; "you kept your word—for the Austrians were in the land when you became the champion of the Constitutionalists. I have now but a few words more to say in reference to myself. When the news of the battle of Montoni reached England, accompanied with the statement that the Grand-Duke Angelo had fled into the Roman States, I felt persuaded that he would

repair to Vienna, the Austrian Emperor being his near relative. I accordingly wrote to my husband, addressing my letters to him in that city. I explained all that had occurred between yourself, Prince, and me at our interview immediately after the defeat of the Constitutionalists at Ossore: I told him how deeply he had wronged me with the most injurious suspicions; and I implored him to allow me to join him, and comfort him in his exile—in his misfortunes! The answer I received was satisfactory—was in itself all I could wish;—but it was accompanied by the tidings of his death! On the bed from which he never rose again, he recognised my innocence—he acknowledged his injustice—he besought me to forgive him!"

"Heaven be thanked that, through your goodness towards me, you were not doomed to undergo the additional torment of his dying enmity!" ejaculated the Prince, fervently.

"Rest tranquil on that head," returned Eliza. "I have now told you all that concerns myself. I may, however, observe that I should have sought an interview with you sooner, only I was unwilling to disturb the first few days of your happiness with your charming bride."

"Would that you had written to me the moment I arrived in England!" cried Richard. "The parents of Isabella would have been rejoiced to obtain your friendship! But you have not yet told us what has become of the faithful Mario Bazzano. I owe him a debt of deep gratitude; and if he be in this country still——"

"He *is* in England," interrupted Eliza; "and as I felt persuaded that you would comply with the request contained in my letter of yesterday, and come hither to-day, I wrote to Signor Bazzano to request his presence in the afternoon. We may, therefore, expect him shortly. He has grown very melancholy of late—I know not why: some secret care appears to oppress him! On our arrival in England, he hired apartments at the West-End; but shortly afterwards he encountered an English officer with whom he had formed an acquaintance some years ago in Montoni. It appears that this officer was travelling at that time in Italy: and during his temporary stay in the Castelcicalan capital, he and Signor Bazzano grew intimate. When they met at the West-End two or three months ago, this officer pressed Signor Bazzano to stay with him at some town near London, where his regiment is stationed. Signor Bazzano accepted the invitation; and for some weeks I saw nothing of him. Since his return to London he has not appeared to be the same being. It is true that I see him but seldom: still that change has not escaped my notice. He is fond of solitude and long lonely walks, in which he employs the greater portion of his time—save those hours which he devotes to the study of English by the aid of a master; and I can assure you that his progress in acquiring our language has been truly remarkable."

"Perhaps his melancholy is produced by absence from his native land," said Richard. "There can be no possible reason for him to remain in exile against his inclination; and should he wish to return to Italy, I will provide him with strong recommendations to the Grand-Duke."

"No—he does not desire to leave England," answered Eliza; "for I myself have questioned him upon that subject. I am rather inclined to believe that some motive of a more tender nature—some hopeless attachment, perhaps—has produced in him the alteration which I have seen and deplored. But he will be here shortly; and——"

Eliza was interrupted by a loud knock at the front door.

Katherine sighed: for the words of the royal widow had aroused within her gentle breast painful remembrances of her own romantic and apparently hopeless attachment!

The door opened; and Signor Bazzano was introduced.

Richard immediately hastened forward to greet him.

But—how strange!—a cry of wild delight burst from the lips of the handsome Castelcicalan, as his eyes encountered *one* particular countenance in that room;—and at the same moment Katherine clung convulsively to Isabella's arm, as if to save herself from falling from the sofa.

For Mario Bazzano was the hero of the young maiden's romantic adventures at Hounslow!

Katherine, with the ingenuous confidence of a sister, had revealed to her brother, and also to Isabella, the particulars of those strange meetings with the "handsome unknown," and had not attempted to disguise the impression made upon her heart by that individual,—an impression against which she had vainly endeavoured to struggle.

Thus, when those tokens of recognition were manifested alike by Mario Bazzano and Katherine Markham, both Richard and Isabella instantly divined the cause.

"Pardon me, your Highness," exclaimed the Castelcicalan officer, endeavouring to throw off the trammels of embarrassment, and speaking in excellent English; "but—that young lady—I think I have seen her——before——I——"

"Perhaps," interrupted the Prince, laughing. "At all events I will introduce her to you now—for she is my sister."

"Your sister, my lord!" cried Mario, in a tone which expressed some degree of vexation at this announcement—as if he dared not aspire to so near a relative of a personage of our hero's rank.

"Throw aside all ceremony with me, Bazzano," said Richard, shaking him warmly by the hand. "I am your debtor—deeply your debtor. You saved my life after the defeat of Ossore: your conduct was too generous—too noble ever to be lightly valued. But, say—was it near Hounslow that you have met my sister?"

And as he spoke, he glanced slily towards the blushing Katherine, who was half hiding her countenance behind Isabella.

"It was—it was!" exclaimed Mario. "And will your Highness be offended if I confess that your charming sister made a profound impression upon my mind? Although believing her to be only the daughter of the tenants of that farm-house near which I encountered her in her walks, I felt myself irresistibly attracted towards her! And,—but your Highness will laugh at my romantic dreams,—I determined to acquire the English language for her sake—that I might speak to her—that I might render myself intelligible to her!"

"We will give you an opportunity of convincing her of your proficiency in our native tongue, Mario," said the Prince, again smiling—but with kindness, and in a manner well calculated to reassure the young Italian officer, whom he led towards Katherine.

And, oh! how the bashful maiden's heart beat, and how crimson became her sweet countenance, as she felt her hand pressed in that of him who had now for some months occupied so large a portion of her thoughts!

"You guessed rightly as to the cause of Signor Bazzano's melancholy and altered appearance," whispered Isabella to Eliza, as they walked towards the window from which Richard was now gazing upon the prospect spread before the villa.

Then Mario and Katherine began to converse,—timidly and with frequent intervals of silence at first: but by degrees those intervals became shorter and shorter;—and at length the young officer found himself describing how he had felt deeply grieved at being unable to utter a word to her in her own tongue when they had met in the fields near the farm,—how he had torn himself away from the spot and returned to London to study English,—how he had gone back to Hounslow a few days afterwards, and vainly wandered about in those fields with the hope of seeing her,—how he conceived at length that she must purposely remain within the house to avoid him, the idea that she had left the neighbourhood never entering his mind,—how he had returned again to London and pursued his English studies under the romantic impression that they would some day serve him in respect to the attachment he had formed for her,—and how he paid frequent visits to the vicinity of the farm, and was at length almost compelled to abandon the hope of ever seeing her again.

All this he suddenly found himself telling her; and she as suddenly found herself listening to him with attention,—neither quite recollecting how the subject had first been touched upon.

Their pleasant *tête-a-tête* was at length interrupted by Eliza Sydney, who tapped them each on the shoulder, with the laughing assurance that the servant had already announced luncheon three times; and then Kate's countenance was again suffused with blushes, as she took the proffered arm of her lover to repair to the apartment where an elegant collation was served up.

The afternoon passed speedily away; and all were so happy that they were in no haste to break up such a pleasant party. Eliza accordingly insisted that her guests should remain to dinner—an invitation which was accepted.

Indeed, it was eleven that night ere the Prince's carriage and Mario's horse were ordered round to the door.

And when the young officer separated from Katharine, it was not without an assurance from her brother that he would always be a welcome guest at Markham Place.

Great was the surprise, but not less the joy, of Ellen Monroe, when Katherine, on her return home and ere the two young ladies sought their couch, made her friend acquainted with the elucidation of the mystery of "the handsome stranger."

CHAPTER CCXXX.

BETHLEM HOSPITAL.

What contrasts does mortal existence present to view!

While some are joyous and happy in one place, others are overwhelmed with sorrow and affliction elsewhere! At the same moment that the surgeon ushers a new being into life, the hand of the executioner cuts short the days of another. *Here* the goblet sparkles with the ruby wine—*there* the lip touches the poisoned glass of suicide:—in *this* abode a luxurious banquet is spread upon the table—in *that* the wretched inmate has not a crust to stay the cravings of famine!

Thus was it that while the hostess and the guests were blithe and happy in the villa near Clapton, a painful scene was in process of enactment elsewhere.

It was about five o'clock on that same evening when a cab stopped at the prisoners' gate of Newgate; and from the vehicle stepped a tall, powerfully-built, and rather good-looking man dressed in plain clothes. He was accompanied by a Superintendent and Serjeant of Police.

They were immediately admitted into the lobby of the gaol; and the turnkey, after bestowing upon them a nod of recognition, said, "You needn't tell me to guess what you're come about. So the youngster is to go over, then—after all?"

"Yes," replied the tall man in plain clothes. "The Secretary of State's warrant was sent down here about an hour ago. I suppose Cope is in?"

"Step into the office, Mr. Busby, and see," answered the turnkey.

The tall man, who responded to the name of Busby, accordingly passed from the lobby into the governor's office.

"Any thing new?" asked the turnkey, rubbing his nose with the end of the massive emblem of his office, and accosting the two police authorities, who had seated themselves on the bench facing the gate.

"Not that I know on," returned the Serjeant; "leastways nothink partickler—unless it is that my Superintendent here is doing someot in the littererry line, and writing a book about Great Criminals, and Police, and Prisons, and all that there kind of thing."

"You don't say so?" ejaculated the turnkey.

"Yes, sir—Mr. Crisp is quite right," said the Superintendent, pompously: "I *ham* getting up a work on them subjects; but my official po-sition will compel me to publish it enonnymusly, as they say. And while we're here, Crisp, we may as well take down a few notes—for I must inform you," continued the Superintendent, addressing himself once more to the turnkey, "that my friend and subordingate Mr. Crisp is helping me in this here labour of love."

"Well, sir," returned the gaol functionary, "any information that I can give you, I shall be most happy to furnish you with, I'm sure."

"Thank'ee kindly," said the Superintendent. "Now, Crisp, out with your note-book, and fall to. Busby will be half an hour or so in the office. Pray, sir, what may be the anniwal average of prisoners, male and female, in Newgate?"

"About three thousand males and eight hundred females," answered the turnkey.

"Put that down, Crisp. I suppose in the males you includes boys, and in the females you comprises gals?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Put that down, Crisp. Now what's the state of discipline here?" asked the Superintendent. "I've heerd a good deal about it, in course; but I'd rayther have it direct from a 'ficial source."

"Why, there isn't much to say on that point," returned the functionary thus appealed to. "We let the prisoners have pretty much their own way: they gamble, play at ball, fight, swear, sing, and lark in the wards just as they like."

"Put that down, Crisp. It's a blessing to think of the state of freedom one enjoys even in the gaols of this enlightened and liberal nation."

"To be sure it is," said the turnkey. "The young thieves consider Newgate to be a capital school for improvement in their profession: when they're at chapel, they're always practising pick-pocketing on each-other."

"What's bred in the bone will never go out of the flesh," observed the Superintendent. "But the poor creeturs must have some diwersion. Put that down, Crisp."

"Ah! Newgate has seen some rum things in its time," moralised the turnkey. "It has been a felon's gaol for well-nigh seven hundred years."

"Has it, though?" cried the Superintendent. "Now, then, Crisp—put that down."

"And ever since I first come here," continued the turnkey, "there have been constant *Reports* drawn up about the state of discipline; but I never see that any change follows."

"Put that down, Crisp. When *my* book is published, my good fellow, you'll jist see what the world will say about a change! There's no need of change—and that I'll undertake to prove. Newgate is the very palace of prisons. Lord bless us! it would do half the Aldermen themselves good to pass a few days in such a pleasant place."

"Sometimes we have a few discontented fellows here that don't like to associate with the rest," proceeded the turnkey; "and then they

ask to be thrown into solitary cells."

"Put that down, Crisp. I suppose they're always gratified in their wishes?" asked the Superintendent.

"Oh! always," replied the turnkey. "But the worst of all is that the chaplain here is nothing more or less than a regular spy upon the governor and the officials, and constantly reports to the Home Office every thing that occurs."

"Put that down, Crisp. Such conduct is shameful; and I wonder the Gaol Committee of Aldermen don't take the matter up."

"So they will," rejoined the turnkey. "But here comes Busby."

And, as he spoke, the tall man in plain clothes re-entered the lobby.

"All right?" asked the Superintendent.

"Yes. We'll take him over at once," was the reply.

The turnkey stepped into a passage leading to the interior of the gaol, and gave some instructions to a colleague who was stationed there.

A few minutes afterwards Henry Holford, dressed in his own clothes, and not in the prison-garb, was led into the lobby by the official to whom the turnkey had spoken.

The youth was well in health, and by no means cast down in spirits. His face, at no period remarkable for freshness of colour, was less pallid than it ever before had been. There were, however, a certain apathy and indifference in his manner which might have induced a superficial observer to conclude that his reason was in reality affected; but a careful examination of the expression of his countenance and a few minutes' study of his intelligent dark eyes, would have served to convince even the most sceptical that, however morbid his mind might for an interval have become, that excitement or disease had passed away, and he was now as far removed from insanity as the most rational of God's creatures.

"Come, young man," said Mr. Busby, with great kindness of manner, as if he were endeavouring to conciliate an individual whom he actually deemed to be of disturbed intellects; "you are going along with me—and I'll take you to a nice house with a pleasant garden, and where you'll be well treated."

"I am at no loss to imagine the place to which you allude," said Holford, an expression of slyness curling his lip. "Better Bedlam than Newgate."

"He's no more mad than me, Crisp," whispered the Superintendent to the Serjeant.

"Not a bit, sir," was the reply.

"You may put that down, Crisp," continued the Superintendent, still speaking aside to his subordinate. "It will all do to go into our report to the Home Secretary. How capital that turnkey allowed himself to be pumped by me, to be sure! Don't you think I did it very well?"

"Very well, sir, indeed," returned Crisp. "But I introduced the subject for you, by saying that you was okkipied in writing a book."

"Good hidear, that, Crisp," rejoined the Superintendent. "The turnkey little thought we was spies, while he blowed up about the chaplain."

"In course you'll make out Newgate a horrid place, sir?" said Crisp.

"In course I shall," answered the Superintendent, emphatically; "'cos it'll please the Home Secretary. But there's Busby a-calling after us."

This was indeed the case; for while the two police-officers were thus engaged in the interchange of their own little private sentiments, Mr. Busby had conducted Holford to the cab, and had ensconced himself therein by the side of the prisoner.

The Superintendent followed them into the vehicle; and, at the suggestion of Busby, who declared in a whisper to that functionary that three men were not needed to take care of one boy, the farther services of Crisp were dispensed with.

And now the cab rolled rapidly along the Old Bailey, turned down Ludgate Hill, thence into Bridge Street, and over Blackfriars Bridge, in its way to Bethlem.

How strange to Holford appeared the busy, bustling streets, and that river—"the silent highway"—on whose breast all was life and animation,—after the seclusion of several weeks in Newgate!

But—ah! did he not now behold those scenes for the last time? would not he thenceforth become dead to the world? was he not about to be immured in a living tomb?

Never—never more would the echoes of the myriad voices of the great city meet his ears! He was on his way to the sepulchre of all earthly hopes—all mundane enjoyments—all human interests!

Henceforth must that bright sun, which now steeped pinnacle, dome, tower, and river in a flood of golden lustre, visit him with its rays only through the grated window of a mad-house!

For the last time was he crossing that bridge—for the last time did he behold that crowded thoroughfare leading to the obelisk:—on the gay shops, the rapid vehicles, and the moving multitudes, was he also now gazing for the last time!

The last time! Oh! those three monosyllables formed a terrible prelude—an awful introduction to an existence of monotony, gloom, and eternal confinement! Ah! could he recall the events of the last few weeks!—But, no—it was impossible:—the die was cast—the deed was done—and justice had settled his destiny!

The last time! And he was so young—so very young to be compelled to murmur those words to himself. The sky was so bright—the air of the river was so refreshing—the scene viewed from the bridge was so attractive, that he could scarcely believe he was really doomed never to enjoy them more! And there was a band of music playing in the road—at the door of a public-house! What was the air? "*Britons never shall be slaves!*" Merciful God!—he was now a slave of the most abject description! The convict in the hulks knew that the day of release must come—the transported felon might enjoy the open air, and the glorious sun, and the cheering breeze:—but for *him*—for Henry Holford—eternal confinement within four walls!

The last time! Oh! for the pleasures of life that were now to be abandoned for ever! For the last time did his eyes behold those play-bills in the shop windows—and he was so fond of the theatre! For the last time did he see that omnibus on its way to the Zoological Gardens—and he was so fond of those Gardens! Ah! it was a crushing—a stifling—a suffocating sensation to know that in a few minutes more huge doors, and grated windows, and formidable bolts and bars must separate him from that world which had so many

attractions for one of his age!

Yes:—he now beheld those houses—those shops—those streets—those crowds—those vehicles—*for the last time*!

And now the cab has reached the iron gate in front of Bethlem Hospital.

There was a temporary delay while the porter opened that gate.

Holford looked hastily from the windows; and his lips were compressed as if to subdue his feelings.

Again the vehicle rolled onward, and in a few moments stopped at the entrance of the huge mad-house.

The Superintendent alighted: Holford was directed to follow; and Busby came close after him.

The great folding doors leading into the handsome hall of the establishment stood open:—Holford paused on the threshold for an instant—cast one rapid but longing look behind him—*a last look*—and then walked with firm steps to a waiting-room commanding a view of the grounds at the back of the building.

On the table lay a book in which visitors to the institution are compelled to enter their names and places of abode. Holford turned over the leaves—carelessly at first; but when he caught sight of several great names, he experienced a momentary glow of pride and triumph, as he murmured to himself, "*How many will come hither on purpose to feast their eyes on me!*"

Busby, who was one of the principal officers connected with the establishment, of which Sir Peter Laurie is the intelligent and justly-honoured President, left the room for a short time, Holford remaining in the charge of the Superintendent. When the first-mentioned functionary returned, it was to conduct the youth to his future place of abode.

Busby led the way through a long and well ventilated passage, in which about a dozen miserable-looking men were lounging about.

Holford cast a glance of ill-concealed terror upon their countenances, and read *madness* in their wild eyes. But, to his astonishment, he beheld no horrifying and revolting sights,—no wretches writhing in chains—no maniacs crowning themselves with straws—no unhappy beings raging in the fury of insanity. He had hitherto imagined that madhouses were shocking places—and Bethlem worse than all: but distressing though the spectacle of human reason dethroned and cast down must ever be, it was still a great relief to the young man to find, upon inquiry of the officer, that there were no scenes throughout the vast establishment one tittle worse than that which he now beheld.

On one side of that long passage were the cells, or rather little rooms, in which the inmates of that department of the asylum slept, each being allowed a separate chamber. The beds were comfortable and scrupulously cleanly in appearance; and the officer informed Holford that the linen was changed very frequently.

From the other side of the passage, or wide corridor, opened the rooms in which the meals were served up; and here we may observe that the food allowed the inmates of Bethlem Hospital is both excellent in quality and abundant in quantity.

There was a very tall officer,—indeed, all the male keepers throughout the institution are tall, strong, and well-built men,—walking slowly up and down the passage of which we are speaking; and when any of the unhappy lunatics addressed him, he replied to them in a kind and conciliatory manner, or else good-naturedly humoured them by listening with apparent interest and attention to the lamentable outpourings of their erratic intellects.

It is delightful to turn from those descriptions of ill-disciplined prisons and of vicious or tyrannical institutions, which it has been our duty to record in this work,—it is delightful to turn from such pictures to an establishment which, though awakening many melancholy thoughts, nevertheless excites our admiration and demands our unbounded praise, as a just tribute to the benevolence, the wisdom, and the humanity which constitute the principles of its administration.

Oh! could the great—the philanthropic Pinel rise from the cold tomb and visit this institution of which we are speaking,—he would see ample proof to convince him that, while on earth, he had not lived nor toiled in vain.

Connected with the male department of Bethlem, there are a library and a billiard-room, for the use of those who are sufficiently sane to enjoy the mental pleasures of the one or the innocent recreation of the other. The books in the library are well selected: they consist chiefly of the works of travellers and voyagers, naval and military histories and biographies, and the leading cheap periodicals—such as *The London Journal*, Chambers's *Information for the People*, Knight's *Penny Magazine*, &c.

Communicating with the female department of the asylum, is a music-room,—small, but elegantly fitted up, and affording a delightful means of amusement and solace to many of the inmates of that division of the building.

When these attentions to the comforts and even happiness,—for Bethlem Hospital exhibits many examples where "ignorance is bliss,"—of those who are doomed to dwell within its walls, are contrasted with the awful and soul-harrowing spectacle which its interior presented not very many years ago, it is impossible to feel otherwise than astonished and enraptured at the vast improvements which civilisation has introduced into the modern management of the insane!

But let us return to Henry Holford.

We left him threading the long passage which formed a portion of his way towards the criminal department of the hospital,—that department which was thenceforth to be his abode!

It may be readily imagined that he gazed anxiously and intently on all he saw,—that not a single object of such new, strange, and yet mournful interest to him escaped his observation.

Suddenly he beheld a man leaning against the wall, and staring at him as he passed in a wild and almost ferocious manner. There seemed to be something peculiar in that poor creature's garb:—Holford looked again—and that second glance made him shudder fearfully!

The man had on a strait-waistcoat,—a strong garment made of bed-ticking, and resembling a smock that was too small for him. The sleeves were *beneath*, instead of *outside*, and were sewn to the waistcoat—a contrivance by which the arms of the unhappy wretch were held in a necessary restraint, but without the infliction of pain.

"Merciful God!" thought Holford, within himself; "if a residence within these walls should drive me really mad! Oh! if I should ever come to such an abject state as *that*!"

His miserable reflections were strangely interrupted.

One of the lunatics abruptly drew near and addressed him in a wild and incoherent tone.

"The nation is falling," he said; "and the worst of it is that it does not know that it is falling! It is going down as rapidly as it can; and

I only can save it! Yes—the nation is falling—falling——"

Holford felt a cold and shuddering sensation creep over him; for these manifestations of a ruined intellect struck him forcibly—fearfully,—as if they were an omen—a warning—a presage of the condition to which he himself must speedily come!

He was relieved from the farther importunities of the poor lunatic, by the sudden opening of a door, by which Busby admitted him into a narrow passage with two gratings, having a small space between them. The inner grating was at the bottom of a stone staircase, down which another keeper speedily came in obedience to a summons from Busby's lips.

This second keeper now took charge of Henry Holford, whom he conducted up the stairs to a gallery entered by a wicket in an iron grating, and divided by a similar defence into two compartments.

One of these compartments was much larger than the other, and contained many inmates and many rooms: the smaller division had but six chambers opening from it.

The entire gallery was, however, devoted to those persons who, having committed dread deeds, had been acquitted on the ground of insanity.

It was to the lesser compartment that Holford was assigned.

And now he was an inmate of the criminal division of Bethlem Hospital,—he who was as sane as his keeper, and who could, therefore, the more keenly feel, the more bitterly appreciate the dread circumstances of his present condition!

And who were his companions? Men that had perpetrated appalling deeds—horrible murders—in the aberration of their intellects!

Was this the triumph that he had achieved by his regicide attempt? had he earned that living tomb as the sacrifice to be paid for the infamous notoriety which he had acquired?

Oh! to return to his pot-boy existence—to wait on the vulgar and the low—to become once more a menial unto menials,—rather than stay in that terrible place!

Or else to be confined for life in a gaol where no presence of madness might tend to drive him mad also!—Yes—that were preferable—oh! far preferable to the soul-harrowing scene where man appeared more degraded and yet more formidable than the brutes!

Yes—yes: transportation—chains—the horrors of Norfolk Island,—any thing—any thing rather than immurement in the criminal wards of Bethlem!

Vain and useless regrets for the past!—futile and ineffective aspirations for the future!

CHAPTER CCXXXI.

MR. GREENWOOD AND MR. VERNON.

It was in the middle of April, and about two o'clock in the afternoon, when the Honourable Gilbert Vernon knocked at the door of Mr. Greenwood's mansion in Spring Gardens.

He was immediately admitted by a footman in livery; and Filippo, the Italian valet, who was lounging in the hall at the moment, conducted him to the elegant drawing-room where the Member for Rottenborough was seated.

As soon as Filippo had retired, Mr. Vernon said in a somewhat impatient tone, as he fixed his large grey eyes in a scrutinising manner upon Greenwood's countenance, "May I request to know, with as little delay as possible, the reason that has induced you to demand this interview?"

"Sit down, Mr. Vernon," was the reply; "and listen to me calmly. In January last I met you accidentally in London; and you implored me not to breathe to a soul the fact that you were in this country."

"And if I had private—urgent motives for so acting, Mr. Greenwood," exclaimed Vernon, "I cannot suppose that it cost you any effort to maintain my secret."

"I set out by requesting you to listen to me attentively," returned the Member of Parliament, with the coolness of a man who knows he is dictating to one completely in his power.

"Proceed," said Vernon, biting his lip. "I will not again interrupt you: that is—unless——"

"I need scarcely state that I *did* keep your secret," continued Greenwood, without appearing to notice the hesitation with which his visitor gave the promise of attention. "You shortly afterwards called upon me to request a loan, which it was not convenient for me to advance at the moment. On that occasion you reiterated your request of secrecy relative to your presence in London. I renewed my pledge of silence—and I kept it; but I felt convinced that there were some cogent reasons which prompted that anxiety for concealment. Knowing much of your circumstances, I instituted inquiries in a certain quarter; and I learnt that Lord Ravensworth was dying—dying gradually—in a most mysterious manner—and of a disease that baffled all the skill of his physicians. I also ascertained that he was a slave to the use of a particular tobacco which you—his brother—had *kindly* sent him from the East!"

"Mr. Greenwood!" ejaculated Vernon, his face assuming so dark—so foreboding—so ferocious an expression that the Member of Parliament saw his dart had been levelled with the most accurate aim.

"Pray, listen, Mr. Vernon!" said Greenwood, playing with his watch-chain in a calm and quiet manner, as if he were discoursing upon the most indifferent topics. "Having made those discoveries,—which, indeed, were so generally known in the fashionable world, that the most simple inquiry induced any West-End gossip or newsmonger of the Clubs to descant upon them,—I began to view them in a particular light——"

"Mr. Greenwood," cried Vernon, starting from his seat, his countenance red with indignation, "do you pretend for one moment to insinuate that I—I, the brother of the late Lord Ravensworth——"

"I insinuate nothing," interrupted the Member, with the most provoking calmness: "but I will presently explain to you in broad terms, if you choose, the *facts* of which I am *convinced*. I promise you that you will do well to hear me patiently."

"But is my character to suffer by the scandal of superannuated dowagers and the tattle of Club *quid nuncs*?" demanded Vernon, rage imparting a terrible emphasis to his deep-toned voice.

"Your character has in no way suffered with those parties," answered Greenwood. "All that they relate is mere idle gossip, without an object or an aim. *They* have no suspicion: circumstances have aroused none in *their* minds. But when I heard all that they state as mere matter of conversation, *I* viewed it in a different light, because my suspicions *were* aroused by the knowledge of your presence in England, and your anxiety to conceal that fact. And, if any thing were wanting to confirm those suspicions, the company in which I saw you the evening before last——"

"Ah! you saw me—with some one?" cried Vernon, hastily, and for the moment thrown off his guard.

"Yes: I saw you in conversation with a man of the most desperate character—a man who only last month escaped from the Middlesex House of Correction——"

"Then, in a word, Mr. Greenwood," interrupted Vernon, subduing his vexation and rage with a desperate mental effort, and resuming his seat, "how came you to discover my address in Stamford Street? and wherefore did you yesterday write to me to call on you to-day?"

"I overheard you say to Anthony Tidkins, *'The day after to-morrow I shall proceed to Ravensworth Hall, as if I had only just returned to England in consequence of letters sent to Beyrout to announce to me my brother's death; and you will join me in the capacity agreed upon*.' This I overheard you say, Mr. Vernon," continued Greenwood, fixing upon his visitor a glance of triumphant assurance; "and I then felt convinced that all my previous suspicions were well founded! I accordingly followed you when you separated from that individual who bears the odious name of *the Resurrection Man*; and I traced you to your lodgings in Stamford Street."

"But for what purpose? with what view?" demanded Vernon, who saw that he was completely in Greenwood's power.

"I will come to that presently," was the calm reply. "You do not even give me credit for the delicacy with which I acted in bringing about this interview?"

"Delicacy!" repeated Vernon, his lip curling haughtily.

"Yes—delicacy," added Greenwood. "I knew not whether you passed at your lodging by your proper name; and therefore I would not call in person to inquire for you—fearful of betraying you."

"But I *do* pass there in my proper name," said Vernon; "for the old widow who keeps the house nursed me in my infancy, and I can rely upon her."

"Thank you for this admission, Mr. Vernon," rejoined Greenwood, complacently: "wherever reliance is to be placed, it is clear that there is something which might be betrayed. You have confirmed the strength of my previous convictions."

"Do not think that I made that admission unguardedly," said Vernon, nettled by Greenwood's manner. "No: I see that I am in your power—I admit it; and therefore I no longer attempted to mislead you."

"And you acted wisely," returned Greenwood. "It were far better for you to have me as a friend, than as an enemy. But, as I was ere now observing, it was to avoid the chance of betraying you that I sent my faithful valet, Filippo, to loiter about Stamford Street last evening, and slip my note into your hands. I described your person to him—and he executed my commission well."

"Then you have no inimical motive in seeking me out—in telling me all that you suspect?" said Vernon, looking suspiciously at Greenwood from beneath his dark brows.

"Not the slightest! How can I have such a motive?" exclaimed Greenwood. "A secret falls in my way—and I endeavour to profit by it. That is all."

"I scarcely comprehend you," observed the guilty man, his countenance again becoming overcast.

"In one word, Mr. Vernon," continued Greenwood, emphatically, "you come to England privately—upon some secret and mysterious errand. Still you pass by your own name at your lodging. That circumstance to superficial observers might seem to involve a strange want of precaution. To me it appears a portion of your plan, and the result of a judicious calculation. You return privately to England, I say—but you retain your own name at a place where you know it will not be betrayed unless circumstances should peremptorily demand its revelation; and then, should certain suspicions attach themselves to you, you would say boldly and feasibly also—'*It is true that I came to England to live quietly; but I attempted no disguise—I assumed no fictitious name*.' Ah! I can penetrate further into the human heart than most people: my experience of the world is of no common order."

"It would seem not," said Vernon: "especially as *you* also appear to know Anthony Tidkins, since you recognised him in my society the other night."

"There are few men at all notorious for their good or evil deeds, in this great city, who are unknown to me," observed Greenwood, calmly. "But permit me to continue. You are here—in this country, while really deemed to be abroad—under circumstances of no ordinary mystery; your brother smokes the tobacco you so kindly sent him—*and dies*; your associate the Resurrection Man and you are now about to proceed to Ravensworth Hall—doubtless convinced that you have allowed a sufficient interval to elapse since your brother's death in the middle of February, to maintain the belief—where such belief suits your purposes—that you have only just had time to receive that intelligence in the East, and thence return to England. Can you deny one tittle of my most reasonable conjectures?"

"Greenwood, you are an extraordinary man," cried Vernon, affecting an ease which he did not feel and a sudden familiarity which he did not like. "Did I not before say that I would no longer attempt to mislead you? And I am willing to secure you as my friend."

"You now speak to the point. I candidly confess that I have told you all I suspect or know concerning yourself and your affairs," proceeded Greenwood; "and I am perfectly indifferent as to whether you choose to enlighten me farther, or not. Doubtless you have some defined course to pursue; or else the aid of the Resurrection Man would be unnecessary. But whether you hope to inherit largely under your deceased brother's will; or whether you can establish claims that may benefit you, in spite of the existence of the infant heir of Ravensworth, who was born a month ago——"

"Ah! the birth of that heir has well-nigh destroyed all my hopes!" interrupted Vernon, again rising from his seat. "But, tell me—what do you require at my hands? how am I to secure you as my friend? how am I to purchase your continued silence concerning all you have divined or now know?"

"With money," replied Greenwood: "with that article which buys every thing in this world!"

"Money!—I have none!" exclaimed Vernon. "But ere long——"

"Stay!" cried Greenwood: "tell me nothing of your schemes—nothing of your projects! I would rather remain in ignorance of the designs you may have in view; for, look you, Mr. Vernon,—though, between ourselves, I am not over nice in some matters, as you may probably suppose from the fact that Anthony Tidkins is known to me, as well as from my readiness to receive a bribe to ensure my secrecy in respect to your proceedings,—yet I do not care if I tell you that I shudder when I think of the lengths to which you have already gone—to which, perhaps, you are still prepared to go!"

"Was it to read me a moral lecture that you sought this interview?" demanded the Honourable Gilbert Vernon, with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

"No—far from that!" responded Greenwood. "And therefore enough of this style of discourse on my part. Still the observations were not unnecessary; for they serve to explain the relative positions in which we stand. *You* have already committed *one* fearful crime—and I know it: perhaps you meditate *another*—and I suspect it. But it is not for me to betray you—nor to reason with you:—I am not inclined to do either—provided you are grateful."

"Mr. Greenwood," said Vernon, speaking thickly between his set teeth, "you shall have a noble reward, if you religiously keep my secret."

"Such is the understanding at which I was desirous to arrive," observed Greenwood. Gilbert Vernon then took his leave, in no very enviable state of mind under the conviction that his crimes had placed him so entirely in the power of such an extortioner as the Member for Rottenborough. We must observe, ere we conclude the chapter, that Filippo, the Italian valet, had listened at the door of the drawing-room where this interview took place; and that not a syllable of the whole conversation was lost upon him. In the evening Filippo obtained leave of absence for a few hours; and he availed himself of this license to repair to the villa in which Eliza Sydney dwelt.

CHAPTER CCXXXII.

SCENES AT RAVENSWORTH HALL.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon of the same day on which the interview between George Montague Greenwood and the Honourable Gilbert Vernon took place, that a post-chaise advanced rapidly through Ravensworth Park, towards the Hall.

In a few minutes it stopped at the principal entrance of the mansion; and the Honourable Mr. Vernon alighted.

Quentin, who received him, made some inquiry in a respectful tone concerning his baggage.

"My valet will be here in the evening with my trunks," replied Vernon, abruptly.

Thus, without committing himself by a positive assertion, he led Quentin and the other domestics who were present to infer that he had only just arrived in England, and had left his servant in London to clear his baggage at the Custom-House.

Quentin bowed as he received that answer, and hastened to conduct Mr. Vernon to the drawing-room where Lady Ravensworth was seated.

The widow and her brother-in-law now met for the first time.

Vernon saw before him a young and beautiful woman, very pale, and with a countenance whose expression denoted much suffering—mental rather than physical. It was true that she had only lately become a mother,—that little more than a month had elapsed since she had given birth to an heir to the proud title and broad lands of Ravensworth;—and though the pallor of her face was the natural consequence of so recent an event, yet the physical languor which usually follows also, had given place to a nervousness of manner—a restlessness of body—a rapid wandering of the eyes—and an occasional firm compression of the lips, which indicated an uneasy mind.

Alas! upon that woman's soul lay a crime, heavy and oppressive as a weight of lead! The voice of the murdered Lydia was ever ringing in her ears;—the countenance of the murdered Lydia was ever staring her in the face—ghastly, distorted, and livid in appearance;—the form of the murdered Lydia was ever standing before her! At night the spectre placed itself between the opening of the curtains, and seemed more palpable—more horrible—more substantial in the hours of darkness.

No wonder, then, that her mind was restless—that her manner was nervous—and that her looks were wandering and unsettled!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative, taking it up at the moment when the Honourable Gilbert Vernon entered the apartment where Lady Ravensworth rose to receive him.

Extending her hand towards him, she said, "Welcome to this mansion: it is kind of you to answer so speedily in person the letters which it was my painful duty to address to you at Beyrout."

These words reassured Vernon on one important point: they proved that letters *had been* sent, conveying the intelligence of his brother's death.

"Accept my gratitude for the cordiality with which you receive me, sister—for such you will permit me to call you," answered Vernon; "and believe me——. But, good God! what ails you? what is the matter, Lady Ravensworth? You are ill—you——"

"That voice—that voice!" shrieked Adeline, staggering towards a chair, on which she sank helplessly. "Oh! Mr. Vernon——"

Gilbert was astounded at the affrighted manner and strange ejaculations of his sister-in-law;—but, seeing that she was on the point of fainting, he snatched from the table a small bottle of powerful scent, and handed it to her.

She inhaled the perfume, which acted as a slight restorative; but it was chiefly to the natural vigour of her mind, and to the imperious necessity in which dread circumstances had placed her of constantly maintaining as much command over herself as possible, that she was indebted for her almost immediate recovery from the state into which sudden surprise and profound alarm had thrown her.

"Perhaps your ladyship is desirous that I should withdraw?" said Vernon. "There may be something in my countenance—my manner—or my voice that recalls to your mind painful reminiscences of my lately-departed brother:—it is natural that you should experience these feelings;—and I will leave you for the present."

"No, Mr. Vernon—stay!" exclaimed Adeline, in a tone which denoted the most painful excitement and agitation.

"Compose yourself, then: attempt not to pursue the conversation immediately," said Gilbert; "for as—with your permission—it is my intention to become your guest for a few weeks——"

"My guest!" repeated Adeline, with a shudder.

"Really, my dear sister," exclaimed Vernon, somewhat impatiently; "I am at a loss to understand the meaning of this excitement on your part. It is *not* caused by those reminiscences to which I ere now alluded: it begins to assume the aspect of aversion towards myself. Pardon me if I speak thus plainly; but if I be indeed hateful to you—if slanderous tongues have wronged me in your estimation—if even my own brother were cruel enough to malign me to his wife——"

"Mr. Vernon," interrupted Adeline, with a kind of feverish haste, "your conjectures will never lead you to discover the true cause of that agitation which I could not conquer, and which has offended you. The moment you addressed me, I was seized with a strange surprise—a wild alarm; and those feelings still influence me to some extent,—for methinks that I have heard your voice before!"

And she fixed her eyes in a penetrating manner upon his countenance.

"It may be," answered Vernon, quailing not beneath that look—for he had so desperate a part to play at Ravensworth Hall, that he

knew how much depended upon a self-command and a collectedness of ideas that might avert suspicion,—"it may be, sister, that some years ago—ere I left England—we met in those circles in which we both move by right of birth and social position; and, although I do not remember that I ever had the pleasure of seeing you until now, still such a meeting may have occurred, and your mind may have retained certain impressions——"

"No, Mr. Vernon," again interrupted Adeline; "that surmise—even if correct—will not account for the cause of my agitation. To speak candidly, my impression was—and still *is*,—and yet," she added, suddenly recollecting herself, "if that impression should be indeed erroneous, I should insult you—insult you grossly by explaining it——"

"Proceed, dear sister," said Vernon, gaining additional assurance, in proportion as Lady Ravensworth hesitated. "State to me candidly the impression which you received; and I will as candidly answer you."

"Yes—I *will* tell you the reason of that excitement which nearly overcame me," cried Adeline, whose suspicions were robbed of much of their strength by the calm and apparently open manner of her brother-in-law.

"And believe me when I declare that I shall readily pardon you, however injurious to myself may be the impression my voice has unfortunately made upon you. I can make ample allowances for one who has lately lost a beloved husband, and whose anxieties have been increased by the duties of maternity," added Gilbert.

"In one word, then, Mr. Vernon," continued Adeline, "it struck me that on a certain evening—in the month of February—I heard your voice,—yes, your voice in conversation with another person, in a ruined cottage which stands on the verge of the Ravensworth estate."

And, as she spoke, she again studied his countenance with the most earnest attention.

Desperate was the effort which the guilty man exerted over the painful excitement of feeling which this declaration produced within him:—in a moment he recalled to mind all the particulars of his meeting with the Resurrection Man at the ruined lodge; and he also remembered that he had lost on the same occasion the scrap of paper on which was written the address of his terrible agent in crime. But he *did* succeed in maintaining a calm exterior:—steadily he met the searching glance fixed upon him;—and though his heart beat with fearful emotions, not a muscle of his countenance betrayed the agitation that raged within his breast.

"My dear sister," said Vernon, in a cool and collected tone, "you are labouring under a most extraordinary delusion. Think you that there is not another voice in the world like mine? Believe me, had I been in this country at the time to which you allude, I should have only felt too much rejoiced to have paid my respects to you at an earlier period than the present."

Adeline listened to the deep tones of that voice which now rolled upon her ear like a perpetuation of the echoes of the one which she had heard in the ruins;—and she was still staggered at the resemblance! She also remembered that, in spite of the darkness of the night, she had on that occasion caught a glimpse of the tall and somewhat stout form which had passed near her, and which she knew not to have been that of the Resurrection Man, whom she had since seen:—and she was bewildered more and more.

But the calmness with which Vernon denied the circumstance of being in England at that time,—the steady, honest manner with which he declared that she was labouring under a delusion in identifying his voice with the one she had heard in the ruined lodge,—and the absence of any motive which she could conjecture for his maintaining his presence in this country (even were he really here at the period alluded to) so profoundly secret,—these arguments staggered her still more than even her contrary suspicions.

On his side, Vernon was congratulating himself on the evident embarrassment of his sister-in-law; and he felt convinced that the sound of his voice alone—and nothing that had passed between him and Tidkins in the ruined cottage—had produced an impression upon her.

"You will then forgive me for a momentary suspicion that was injurious to you?" said Adeline, after a short pause, and now adopting the only course open to her in the matter.

"I have come to England to form your acquaintance—your friendship,—to see if I can be of service to you in the position in which my brother's death and the birth of a son have placed you,—to aid you in the settlement of any affairs which may require the interference of a relative," answered Vernon; "for these purposes have I come—and not to vex you by taking umbrage at impressions which, however painful to me, are pardonable on the side of one in your situation."

"Then let us banish from our conversation the disagreeable topic which has hitherto engrossed it," exclaimed Adeline. "It is my duty to give you some information in respect to certain matters; and the family solicitor will, when you may choose to call upon him, enter into more elaborate details. You are aware that your poor brother died ere his child was born. But so far back as last November his lordship made a will the provisions of which were so prudentially arranged as to apply to the welfare of either male or female progeny, whichever might be accorded by Providence. Two distinguished noblemen are now my son's guardians, under that will, and consequently the trustees of the entailed estate."

Vernon bit his lip with vexation.

"In reference to his personal property," continued Adeline, "my lamented husband has left me sole executrix."

A dark cloud passed over the countenance of the brother-in-law.

"But, by a special clause in his will," added Lady Ravensworth, who did not observe those manifestations of feeling on the part of Gilbert Vernon, "your deceased brother has ensured in your behalf double the amount of that pension which has hitherto been paid to you."

"Thus my brother deemed me unworthy to be the guardian of his child;—he also considered it prudent to exclude me from any share in the duty of carrying his wishes into effect;—and he has provided me with a pittance of one thousand pounds a-year."

In spite of the necessity of maintaining the most complete self-command over himself, in order to carry out his plans successfully, Gilbert Vernon could not avoid those bitter observations which showed how deeply he was galled at the total want of confidence displayed in respect to him by his deceased brother.

Adeline felt that the point was a delicate one, and made no reply.

Fortunately for them both, each being much embarrassed by the present topic of discourse, a servant now entered to announce that

dinner was served up.

Gilbert Vernon and Lady Ravensworth accordingly repaired to the dining-room.

We may here observe that Lord Dunstable and Mr. Graham had left the mansion some weeks previously, the young nobleman having recovered from the wound which he had received in the duel.

When dinner was over, Vernon and his sister-in-law returned to the drawing-room, where coffee was served up. Adeline directed that the infant heir—then scarcely more than a month old—should be brought in, Gilbert having hypocritically expressed a desire to see his newly-born nephew. The request was granted:—the nurse made her appearance with the babe; and Vernon passed upon it the usual flattering encomiums which are so welcome to a mother's ears.

But there was no falsehood in those praises,—however insincere might be the manner in which they were uttered:—for the infant was a remarkably fine one, and appeared sweetly interesting as it slept in the nurse's arms.

Vernon flattered the mother's vanity so adroitly, by distant but by no means unintelligible allusions to her own good looks, as he spoke of the child, that she began to consider him a far more agreeable man than she had at first supposed he could possibly prove to be.

Shortly after the nurse had retired with the child, Quentin entered the drawing-room, and, addressing himself to Vernon, said, "Your valet has just arrived, sir, with your baggage."

"If her ladyship will permit me," returned Gilbert, "I will withdraw for a few moments to give my servant some instructions."

"I am about to retire to my own chamber, Mr. Vernon," observed Adeline, "and shall leave you in undisturbed possession of this apartment. Your valet can therefore wait upon you here."

Quentin withdrew for the purpose of sending Mr. Vernon's domestic to the drawing-room; and Lady Ravensworth, having remained for a few moments to finish her coffee, also retired.

On the landing she heard hasty steps approaching and almost immediately afterwards Quentin appeared, followed by the Honourable Gilbert Vernon's valet.

They passed Lady Ravensworth as she was about to ascend the stairs leading from the brilliantly lighted landing to the floor above.

But—O horror!—was it possible?—did her eyes deceive her?—was she the sport of a terrible illusion?

No:—a second glance at the countenance of the false valet was sufficient to confirm the appalling suspicion which the first look in that direction had suddenly excited within her.

For *his* was a countenance which, once seen—if only for a moment—could never be forgotten;—and in spite of the new suit of complete black which he wore,—in spite of the care that had been bestowed upon his person,—in spite of the pains which a Globe Town barber had devoted to his usually matted hair—it was impossible not to recognise in this individual so disguised, the instrument of Adeline's own crime—the terrible Resurrection Man!

CHAPTER CCXXXIII.

A WELCOME FRIEND.

As if struck by a flash of lightning, Adeline fell insensible upon the stairs.

When she awoke, she found herself in bed,—not in the chamber where the murder of Lydia Hutchinson had been perpetrated: no—never since that fatal night had Lady Ravensworth dared to sleep in her boudoir;—but she had adopted as her own apartment, one quite at the opposite end of the building.

Yet, vain—oh! passing vain were the endeavours of the murderess to escape from the phantom of her victim:—had she fled to the uttermost parts of the earth—had she buried herself amidst the pathless forests of America, or made her abode on the eternal ice of the northern pole,—even thither would the spectre have pursued her!

It was midnight when Lady Ravensworth awoke in her chamber, after having fainted upon the stairs.

An ejaculation of terror escaped her lips—for she instantly recollected all that had passed.

The curtains were immediately drawn aside; and a charming female countenance, but totally unknown to Adeline, beamed upon her.

"Tranquillise yourself, lady," said the stranger: "it is a friend who watches by your side."

"A friend!" repeated Adeline, with a profound sigh: "have I indeed a friend? Oh! no—no: I am surrounded by enemies!"

And covering her face with her hands, she burst into an agony of tears.

"Pray compose yourself, Lady Ravensworth," said the stranger, in so sweet and musical a tone that it carried to the heart conviction of friendly intentions.

"And who are you that thus feel an interest in one so woe-begone as I?" asked Adeline, relieved by her tears.

Then she turned her still streaming eyes towards the stranger who spoke in so kind, so soothing, so convincing a manner; and she beheld, by the mellowed light of the lamps that burnt in the chamber, a female of lovely person, but clad in deep black, and wearing the peculiar cap which bespeaks the widow.

The respectability of this garb combined with the softness of the lady's tone and manner, and the sweet amiability of her fine countenance, to produce the most favourable impression upon the wretched Adeline,—wretched alike through her own misdeeds and those of others!

"You ask me who I am," answered the stranger:—"rather seek to know wherefore I am here! Compose yourself, and I will explain the latter mystery in a few words. This evening I received tidings—from an authority which I cannot doubt, but which I dare not name—of a fearful conspiracy that is in progress against you,—not only against *you*, but I fear also against your child."

"Oh! heavens—I begin to understand it all!" shrieked Lady Ravensworth, the presence of Gilbert Vernon and Anthony Tidkins in that mansion, and evidently leagued together, recurring to her mind. "But how did you hear this! how did you learn the terrible tidings which other circumstances proclaim so fatally to be, alas! too true?"

"Lady, ask me not for my authority," was the reply. "Were I to reveal it, I should incur the chance of ruining a source of intelligence which may enable me to frustrate other diabolical schemes that might be conceived, even as I hope to baffle the one that is now in progress against yourself. You are no doubt watched by enemies of a desperate character—one of whom has every thing to gain by the death of your child."

"Oh! you allude to Gilbert Vernon—my brother-in-law!" exclaimed Adeline. "He is already in this house—accompanied by his valet, who——"

She checked herself ere she uttered another word that might have led her new friend to marvel how she could possibly have obtained any previous insight into the character of that attendant upon her brother-in-law.

"And that valet, by all I have heard," said the strange lady, "is a man of the most fiend-like soul—the most remorseless disposition,—a man capable of every atrocity—every crime,—and who is so ready to accomplish any enormity for gain, that were there another Saviour to betray, he would become another Judas."

"Oh! what a picture you are drawing!" cried Lady Ravensworth, with a cold shudder—for she knew how much of that appalling description was true!

"It is not to intimidate you, that I am thus candid," was the reply; "but simply to convince you in what danger you are placed, and how deeply you need the assistance of a sincere friend."

"And that friend—" said Adeline.

"Is myself," answered the stranger. "It is true, I am but a woman—a poor, weak woman, as the lords of the creation style our sex;—but I possess the heart to aid you—the spirit to defend you—and the courage to dare every peril in your behalf!"

"Excellent woman!—heaven must have sent you to me!" cried Adeline, reassured by these words; and, as she spoke, she caught her new friend's hand and pressed it enthusiastically to her lips. "But, your name!—tell me your name!—that I may address you in terms of affection, and hereafter speak of you in those of gratitude."

"Call me by any name you will," was the reply; "but ask me no more concerning myself. In aiding you, I must impose the conditions

upon which I offer to befriend you! I have no selfish motive:—my own social position places me above all interested views. No:—through the purest feelings of humanity have I sought you. Listen to me a few moments in patience. This evening I heard the principal details of the plot contrived against your peace: I learnt enough to prove that you have enemies capable of the very worst deeds to secure their own ends. I resolved upon hastening to your aid—of offering myself as your companion, your friend, until the peril be averted. I arrived at Ravensworth Hall at about nine o'clock this evening, and requested an interview with you. I was told that you had just been seized with a fit, and conveyed to your chamber. I replied that I was well known to you—that I had even come in pursuance of an invitation received from you—and that my presence was most opportune since you were so suddenly taken ill. Your lady's-maid was summoned, and, in consequence of my representations, I was admitted to your chamber. You had partially recovered, and had sunk into a sound sleep. I assured the maid that she need not remain with you, as I would watch by your side. This is the tale I have told—an innocent falsehood to ensure a good aim. If you wish me to remain with you, it will be for you to repeat to your servants the same story of our previous acquaintance. This will be necessary to account to Vernon for my presence in the mansion, and for the terms of inseparable friendship on which we must appear to be together. For from this night I shall not lose sight of yourself or your child, until the danger that threatens that innocent infant be averted. As for my name—I dare not allow it to be known here; for Vernon is acquainted with a certain individual to whom that name is not strange, and who, were he to learn that I am here, would perhaps suspect that I had some ulterior motive. Indeed, it was a conversation between your brother-in-law and that individual to whom I allude, which was overheard by a person devoted to my interests, and which discourse betrayed enough to show that one terrible deed had already been committed by Vernon, and that he was meditating another."

"One terrible deed has already been committed!" exclaimed Adeline, in affright: "to what can you allude!"

"Alas!" replied Eliza Sydney,—for she was the generous-hearted unknown,—"did the lamentable death of Lord Ravensworth excite no suspicions in your mind?"

"Oh! now I see it all!" cried Adeline, clasping her hands together, and speaking with hysterical vehemence: "Gilbert Vernon *was* in England—it *was* his voice that I heard in the ruins;—and it was he who sent the fatal and poisoned weed which carried my husband to the tomb! Monster—monster that you are, Gilbert Vernon!"

And she sank back exhausted upon the pillow, from which she had raised herself as she screamed forth that last accusation.

Several minutes elapsed ere she grew calm enough to explain to Eliza the meaning of her exclamation relative to the voice in the ruins.

"You see how well arranged have been all Vernon's plans," observed Eliza; "for, in the conversation with the individual to whom I have already alluded, he admitted that he had been some time in England. Oh! there can be no doubt that he was awaiting the effect of the poisoned weed;—for I read in the newspapers the account of your husband's strange and mysterious death after a few months of atrophy, and which fatal event was alleged to have been hastened by his passionate attachment to a peculiar oriental tobacco. It is now for you to remain retired and tranquil—to keep your child constantly with you—and to allow me to act as I shall think fit. In a short time I hope to be enabled to collect a chain of evidence that may establish Vernon's guilt. At present there is strong suspicion—but no proof—that he caused the death of his brother."

"But I will not stay here—in this lonely house," cried Adeline: "I will seek safety with my father!"

"And think you that change of dwelling will screen your child from the intrigues—the infernal intrigues and plots of a man who found means, while at a distance, to murder his brother with a fatal poison?" demanded Eliza. "No—he would accomplish his purpose, wherever you might conceal the heir of Ravensworth! But if we can obtain proofs of his past crime or of his present intention—if we can so contrive that we may place him within the reach of justice,—then—and only then will there be safety for your child. If you seek refuge with your relatives, he will see that he is suspected; and his schemes will only be prosecuted with the more caution."

"I am in your hands—I will follow your advice in all things," said Adeline: "but, in the name of heaven! devise means to bring these dangers and perplexities to a speedy issue."

"Trust to me, Lady Ravensworth," returned Eliza. "In the first place, is there still left in the house any of that oriental weed whose effects were so fatal upon your husband?"

"There is," answered Adeline; "and I think I divine your motive for asking the question. You would have the tobacco analysed and tested by a skilful chemist? That step was taken shortly after my lamented husband's death, by the desire of Mr. Graham—a medical gentleman who attended him in his last moments. Not that any suspicion against Gilbert Vernon had then arisen: no—it was curiosity and a love of science which prompted Mr. Graham thus to act."

"And the result?" said Eliza, interrogatively.

"No trace of a deleterious substance could be discovered," was the answer.

"Providence will open another road to the discovery of that man's guilt," observed Eliza. "But you must now compose yourself to sleep: the night is far advanced—and you need rest."

"Rest!—oh! not for me!" said Adeline, with a dreadful shudder, as she thought of the murdered Lydia Hutchinson.

But Eliza Sydney did not comprehend that Lady Ravensworth had any source of affliction save the machinations of her enemies.

In the morning, Eliza wrote the following letter to Filippo Dorsenni, Greenwood's valet:—

"*Ravensworth Hall, April 16th, 1841.*

"You will see by the superscription that I am on the spot where danger menaces an innocent babe of a month old. Vernon and Anthony Tidkins are both here; but Lady Ravensworth has placed herself entirely under my guidance.

"I wish you to undertake the three following commissions as speedily as possible.

"The first is to form an acquaintance with the landlady of the house in Stamford Street where Gilbert Vernon lodged, and endeavour to glean from her not only how long he lived in her dwelling, but any other particulars concerning him she may be willing to communicate. This task you must execute with great precaution, so that in case Vernon should call upon her she may not inform him that you have actually sought information at her hands. Should she be skilfully drawn into gossiping discourse upon the subject, she would not mention to Vernon that she had breathed a word in connexion with him or his affairs.

"In the second place, you must endeavour to discover the abode of the beautiful Georgian, Malkhatoun, whom, as you informed me some months ago—shortly after my arrival in England—Mr. Greenwood made over to his friend the Honourable Major Dapper.

"In the third place you must find some trusty person who will immediately set off for Beyrout. Fortunately, an extra Overland Mail departs to-morrow evening. The instructions of the individual whom you may thus employ are contained in the enclosed letter. Doubtless, amongst the few Castelcicalans who are now resident in London, you are acquainted with one who will undertake this mission, for the expenses of which I forward you a cheque upon my bankers.

"You can write to me to report the progress of these three commissions."

CHAPTER CCXXXIV.

A MIDNIGHT SCENE OF MYSTERY.

"Well," said Quentin to his fellow-domestics, as they were sitting at breakfast in the servants' hall, "the Honourable Mr. Vernon is by no means the most agreeable gentleman that ever set foot in this house; but his valet beats any thing I ever saw in the same shape."

"Did you ever see such a countenance?" exclaimed one of the maids. "I am sure it was not for his good looks that Mr. Vernon could have chosen him."

"He is just the kind of person that I should not like to meet in a lane in a dark night," observed another member of the female branch of dependants.

"He certainly cannot help his looks," said Quentin: "but heaven knows they tell amazingly against him."

"And what I think somewhat extraordinary," remarked the butler, "is that just now I found him in my pantry, balancing the silver spoons at the end of his finger, as if to tell the weight of them. So I quietly informed him that my pantry was sacred; and he took himself off with a very ill grace."

"Did you notice him last night, after supper," said the first maid who had spoken, "when we got talking about the disappearance of Lydia Hutchinson with my lady's casket of jewels, how eagerly he joined in the conversation, and how many questions he asked?"

"Yes, to be sure I did," returned another female servant: "he was as curious about the matter as if Lydia was his own sister, or daughter, or sweetheart. He wanted to learn how long ago it happened—how we knew that she had run away with the casket—and all about it; and then, when we told him what we thought of the matter, he cross-questioned us as if he was a counsel and we were witnesses at a trial. But I wonder who this widow is that came last night, and seems so intimate with my lady."

"She's a very genteel person," said Quentin; "and seems to know how to treat servants, as if she had a great many of her own. You can always tell the true breed of people by the way they behave to servants."

"I'm decidedly of your opinion, Mr. Quentin," observed a footman. "A true gentleman or true lady always says '*Thank you*,' when you hand them any thing at table, and so on. But it seems that my lady is very unwell this morning; for she and her new friend had their breakfast in my lady's own chamber."

"And the nurse and child are to remain altogether in my lady's private suite of apartments," added one of the females. "Does any one know the name of my lady's friend?"

"Mrs. Beaufort, I think the lady's-maid said," replied Quentin. "But here comes James White."

And James White did accordingly enter the servants' hall at that moment in the person of the Resurrection Man; for by the former name was he now pleased to pass at Ravensworth Hall.

"Been taking a walk, Mr. White?" said Quentin, as Tidkins seated himself at the breakfast-table.

"Yes—just looking about the grounds a little," was the answer. "Handsome building this—fine park—beautiful gardens."

"It *is* a handsome building, Mr. White," said Quentin; "and as commodious as it is handsome."

"Very commodious," returned the Resurrection Man. "Nice snug little private door, too, at the southern end," he added with a strange leer.

"Why, that was the very door that Lydia Hutchinson decamped by, when she ran off with my lady's jewels," exclaimed one of the maids.

"Ah—indeed!" said the Resurrection Man, carelessly. "And wasn't her ladyship cut up at the loss of the jewels?"

"Somewhat so," was the female servant's answer. "But my lady is too rich to care very much about that."

"And was there no blue-bot—police-case, I mean, made of it?" asked Tidkins.

"None," replied the maid. "My lady possesses too good a heart to wish to punish even those who most wrong her."

"A very excellent trait in her character," observed the Resurrection Man, as he deliberately made terrific inroads upon the bread and butter and cold meat. "Was her ladyship at the Hall when that young woman bolted?"

"No: she had gone to London early in the morning of the very same day. But there's my lady's bell."

And the female servant who had been thus conversing with the Resurrection Man, hastened to answer the summons.

In a few minutes she returned, saying, "Mr. Quentin, you are wanted in the little parlour opposite my lady's room."

The valet repaired to the apartment named, where Eliza Sydney was waiting for him.

Motioning him to close the door, she said in a low but earnest tone, "Lady Ravensworth informs me that you were devoted to your late master: doubtless you are equally well disposed towards his unprotected and almost friendless wife?"

"If there is any way, madam, in which my fidelity can be put to the test, I shall be well pleased," was the reply.

"In a word, then," continued Eliza, "your mistress and the infant heir are in danger; and it behoves you to aid me in defeating the machinations of their enemies. After what I have now said, are your suspicions in no way excited?"

"I confess, madam," answered Quentin, "that the presence of a certain person in this house——"

"You allude to the Honourable Mr. Vernon," exclaimed Eliza; "and you are right! He has domiciled himself here without invitation—

without apparent motive; and he is attended by an individual capable of any atrocity."

"Mr. Vernon's valet?" said Quentin, interrogatively.

"The same," was the reply. "But I dare not explain myself more fully at present. What I now require of you is to watch all the proceedings of Mr. Vernon and his attendant, and report to me whatever you may think worthy of observation."

"I will not fail to do so, madam," returned Quentin.

"And now I have to request you to give me a small portion of the tobacco which the late Lord Ravensworth was accustomed to use," continued Eliza; "and the remainder you must carefully conceal in some secure place, as it may some day be required for inspection elsewhere."

"Your directions shall all be implicitly attended to," said Quentin. "But might I be permitted to ask whether you are aware, madam, that the tobacco was sent to Lord Ravensworth by Mr. Vernon?"

"It is my knowledge of that fact which induced me to give those instructions concerning the weed—*the fatal weed*," replied Eliza, significantly.

"Ah! madam—I also have had my suspicions on that head!" exclaimed Quentin, who perfectly understood the lady's meaning. "I hinted those suspicions to the medical gentleman who attended my lord in his last moments; and he had the tobacco analysed by a skilful chemist;—but the result did not turn out as I had expected."

"Lady Ravensworth has already mentioned this fact to me," said Eliza: "I have, however, conceived a means of submitting the weed to a better test. But of this and other subjects I will speak to you more fully hereafter."

Quentin withdrew to fetch a small sample of the tobacco, with which he shortly re-appeared. Eliza renewed her injunctions to watch the movements of Vernon and his valet; and then hastened to rejoin Lady Ravensworth.

The day passed without the occurrence of any thing worth relating; but in the evening one or two little circumstances in the conduct of Mr. Vernon's valet struck the now watchful Quentin as being somewhat peculiar.

In the first place, Tidkins sought an excuse to lounge into the kitchen at a moment when the servants belonging to that department of the household were temporarily absent; and Quentin, who followed him unperceived, was not a little astonished when he saw the Resurrection Man hastily conceal three large meat-hooks about his person.

There were some silver forks and spoons lying on the table; but these Tidkins did not touch. It was consequently apparent to Quentin that Mr. Vernon's valet did not self-appropriate the meat-hooks for the sake of their paltry value: it was clear that he required them for some particular purpose.

"What, in the name of common sense! can he possibly want with meat-hooks?" was the question which the astonished Quentin put to himself.

Conjecture was vain; but the incident determined him to continue to watch Mr. Vernon's valet very closely.

When the hour for retiring to rest arrived, a female servant offered Tidkins a chamber candlestick; but he requested to be provided with a lantern, saying with a carelessness which Quentin perceived to be affected, "The truth is, I'm fond of reading in bed; and as a candle is dangerous, I prefer a lantern."

Quentin alone suspected the truth of this statement. He, however, said nothing. The lantern was given to Tidkins; and the servants separated for the night.

It so happened that the bed-room allotted to the Resurrection Man was in the same passage as that tenanted by Quentin. Suspecting that Tidkins required the lantern for some purpose to be executed that night, Quentin crept along the passage, and peeped through the key-hole of the other's chamber.

He was enabled to command a good view of the interior of that room, the key not being in the lock; and he beheld Tidkins busily engaged in fastening the meat-hooks to a stout stick about a foot and a half long. The Resurrection Man next took the cord which had secured his trunk, and tied one end round the middle of the stick. He then wound the cord round the stick, apparently to render this singular apparatus more conveniently portable.

This being done, Tidkins put off his suit of bran new black, and dressed himself in a more common garb, which he took from his trunk.

When he had thus changed his clothes, he secured the stick, with the cord and meat-hooks, about his person.

"This is most extraordinary!" thought Quentin to himself. "He is evidently going out. But what is he about to do? what can all this mean?"

The valet's bewilderment was increased when he beheld the Resurrection Man take a pair of pistols from his trunk, deliberately charge them with powder and ball, and then consign them to his pocket.

"What *can* he mean?" was the question which Quentin repeated to himself a dozen times in a minute.

The bell on the roof of the mansion now proclaimed the hour of midnight; and Tidkins, having suddenly extinguished the candle in the lantern, made a motion as if he were about to leave the room.

Quentin accordingly retreated a few yards up the passage, which was quite dark.

Almost immediately afterwards, he heard the door of Tidkins' room open cautiously: then it was closed again, and the sharp click of a key turning in a lock followed.

Tidkins was now stealing noiselessly down the passage, little suspecting that any one was occupied in dogging him. He descended the stairs, gained the servants' offices, and passed out of the mansion by a back door.

But Quentin was on his track.

The night was almost as dark as pitch; and the valet had the greatest difficulty in following the steps of the Resurrection Man without approaching him so closely as to risk the chance of being overheard. From time to time Tidkins stopped—evidently to listen; and then Quentin stood perfectly still also. So cautious indeed was the latter in his task of dogging the Resurrection Man, that this individual, keen as were his ears, and piercing his eyes, neither heard nor saw any thing to excite a suspicion that he was watched.

By degrees, black as was the night, Quentin's eyes became accustomed to that almost profound obscurity; and by the time the Resurrection Man had traversed the gardens, and clambered over the railings which separated those grounds from the open fields, the

valet could distinguish—only just distinguish—a dark form moving forward before him.

"If I can thus obtain a glimpse of him," thought Quentin, "he can in the same manner catch sight of me the first time he turns round."

And the valet was accordingly compelled to slacken his pace until he could no longer distinguish the form of him whom he was pursuing.

But as the Resurrection Man, deeming himself quite secure, did not take the trouble to walk lightly along the hard path which ran through the fields, Quentin was now enabled to follow without difficulty the sounds of his footsteps.

All of a sudden these sounds ceased; and Quentin stopped short. In another minute, however, he heard the low rustling tread of feet walking rapidly over the grass; and thus he recovered the trail which was so abruptly interrupted.

The Resurrection Man had turned out of the beaten path, and was pursuing his way diagonally across the field.

Quentin followed him with the utmost caution: and in a few moments there was a bright flash in the corner of the field, the cause of which the valet was at no loss to comprehend.

Tidkins had lighted a lucifer-match—doubtless to assure himself that he was in the particular spot which he sought.

Quentin, to whom every square yard of the estate was well known, immediately remembered that there was a pond in the corner of the field where Tidkins had thus stopped; and close by was a thick hedge. The valet accordingly made a short and rapid circuit in order to gain the stile leading into the adjacent field: then, creeping carefully along the bushes, he arrived in a few moments behind that precise portion of the hedge which overlooked the pond.

The night was so dark that he could not follow with his eyes the exact movements of the Resurrection Man. He was, however, enabled to distinguish his form on the opposite bank of the pond; and not many moments after he had taken his post behind the hedge, there was a sudden splash in the water, as of some object thrown into it. Then the Resurrection Man moved slowly along the bank; and it instantly struck Quentin that he was dragging the pond.

This idea explained the purpose of the apparatus formed by the hooks, the stout stick, and the cord:—but for what could he be dragging?

The valet shuddered as this question occurred to him;—for the nature of the apparatus, the secresy of the whole proceeding, and the bad opinion which Eliza Sydney's hints had induced him to form of him whom he, however, only knew as James White,—these circumstances combined to fill Quentin's mind with a terrible suspicion that Tidkins was dragging for a dead body.

The Resurrection Man drew up his drag with a terrible oath, uttered aloud, and expressive of disappointment.

"And yet this must be the spot!" he added, as he disentangled the hooks from the cord. "I went over the whole grounds this morning—and I could swear it was here that——"

The conclusion of the sentence was muttered to himself, and therefore remained unheard by the valet.

The drag was thrown into the water a second time; and, at the expiration of a few moments, Tidkins gave utterance to an exclamation expressive of satisfaction.

Then he retreated slowly from the edge of the pond, as if dragging a heavy object out of the water.

From behind the hedge Quentin strained his eyes, with mingled feelings of curiosity and terror, to scrutinise as narrowly as possible the real meaning of this strange and mysterious proceeding. At length there was a strong gurgling of the water; and in another moment a large dark object was moving slowly and heavily up the steep bank.

A cold shudder crept over the valet's frame; for that object bore the appearance of a corpse!

He would have taken to flight—he would have escaped from the contemplation of such a strange and appalling scene—he would have hastened back to the mansion to raise an alarm;—but vague fears—ineffable horror bound him as it were to the spot—paralysed his limbs—and compelled him to remain a spectator of the dark proceeding.

The object was safely landed upon the bank: there was a sharp crack as of a match—a small blue flame suddenly appeared—and then Tidkins lighted the candle in his lantern.

This being done, he approached the object upon the bank;—and in another moment all Quentin's doubts were cleared up—for the light of the lantern now fell upon the body of a female!

He closed his eyes instinctively—and his brain was seized with a sudden dizziness. But, mastering his feelings, he again looked towards the mysterious and fearful drama which was being enacted on the opposite bank of the pond.

The light was again extinguished; and Tidkins was stooping over the corpse.

Suddenly an exclamation of joy escaped his lips; but Quentin was unable to divine the cause.

Another minute elapsed; and the Resurrection Man rolled the body back again into the water. There was a second splash a moment afterwards: it was evidently the drag which Tidkins had thrown away, its services being no longer required by him.

Then he retreated with rapid step from the bank of the pond; and Quentin, scarcely able to subdue the terror which had taken possession of him, retraced his way along the hedge,—determined, in spite of his feelings, to watch the Resurrection Man to the end——if more there were of this strange midnight drama yet to come.

Having hastily performed the short circuit that was necessary to bring him back into the field through which Tidkins was now proceeding, Quentin shortly came within sight of that individual's dark form, moving rapidly along the beaten path.

Near the railings which bounded the gardens, there were several groups of large trees; and at the foot of one of them Tidkins halted. Stooping down, he appeared to be busily employed for some minutes in digging up the earth. Quentin approached as nearly as he could without incurring the risk of discovery; and the motions of the Resurrection Man convinced him that he was indeed engaged in burying something at the foot of the tree.

This task being accomplished, Tidkins clambered over the palings, and pursued his way through the gardens towards the back gate of the Hall.

Quentin remained behind—his first impulse being to examine the spot where the Resurrection Man had been digging. But a second thought made him hesitate; and, after a few moments' reflection, he determined to wait until he had reported the whole of this night's mysterious proceedings to the lady whom he only knew as Mrs. Beaufort, and at whose instance he had been induced to watch the proceedings of Mr. Vernon's valet.

He accordingly pursued his way back to the mansion. But as the Resurrection Man had bolted the back door inside, Quentin was compelled to gain an entry through one of the windows of the servants' offices. This he effected with safety, and noiselessly returned to his own chamber.

But he closed not his eyes in slumber throughout the remainder of that night; for all he had seen haunted his imagination like a spectre.

CHAPTER CCXXXV.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

In the morning Eliza Sydney received the following letter from Filippo Dorsenni:—

"Your orders have been punctually obeyed.

"I have already visited the landlady in Stamford Street, under pretence of being acquainted with a gentleman who wishes to take lodgings in that street; and I have ascertained that her *last lodger*—who can be none other than Mr. Vernon—resided with her three or four months. Consequently he *has* been in England during that period.

"In the second place, I have discovered the address of the beautiful Georgian; and can communicate with her so soon as I receive your instructions to that effect.

"Thirdly, I have despatched a faithful person to Beyrout; and he will return to England the moment he shall have gleaned the information specified in your instructions."

To this letter Eliza despatched an immediate answer, praising her faithful adherent for the skill and despatch with which he had executed her orders, and giving him certain instructions in respect to Malkhatoun.

She then repaired to the parlour opposite Lady Ravensworth's own apartment; for Quentin had already sent a private message by one of the female servants, intimating that he was anxious to speak to her without delay.

When they met in the parlour, Eliza heard with profound astonishment the extraordinary narrative which the valet had to relate to her.

"Some deed of mystery and crime has been doubtless perpetrated," observed Eliza; "but it cannot possibly bear any reference to the atrocious plot which Gilbert Vernon is meditating against the happiness of his sister-in-law and the life of her child. I will now tell you that the villain who passes in this house as James White is in reality a certain Anthony Tidkins, known amongst his associates in crime as the Resurrection Man."

"I have heard of him, madam," said Quentin, with a shudder. "And, by the by—was it not this same wretch who lately escaped in so extraordinary a manner from the Middlesex House of Correction? The affair was in all the newspapers."

"He is the same person," answered Eliza.

"Oh! madam," cried Quentin, somewhat reproachfully; "it is not for me to dictate to you—but since you have discovered who this man is, how could you permit him to remain for one single day at large?—why should he be allowed to take his place at the same table with honest people?"

"I admit that such society must be abhorrent in the extreme," answered Eliza, mildly but firmly: "I also acknowledge that for a short space I am depriving justice of its due. Listen, however, to my reasons. Gilbert Vernon is a man of so desperate a character that he will hesitate at no crime which will make him master of the lands and title of Ravensworth. I have every reason to believe that he caused the death of his brother: I have equally good grounds for suspecting him of an intention to murder his nephew. As speedily as circumstances will permit am I adopting measures to collect evidence that will place his guilt beyond all doubt. But until that evidence be obtained, we must excite in his mind no suspicion that there are counter-schemes in progress. Were we to do so, it is impossible to imagine what desperate deed he might immediately risk in furtherance of his aims."

"But suspicions are already so strong against him, madam," observed Quentin, "that a magistrate would grant a warrant for his apprehension."

"And if the evidence against him were found to be incomplete and vague, as it indeed now is," answered Eliza, "he would soon be at large again to pursue his detestable machinations. No, Quentin: your good sense must show you that it is better to take no decisive step until our evidence shall be so complete that it will serve two objects—namely, to punish him for the crime he has already committed, and thereby release your lady and her son from any future danger at his hands."

"I submit to your superior judgment, madam," said Quentin. "But in respect to this Anthony Tidkins—this James White—this villain who is now quartered upon us——"

"Until you ere now communicated to me those strange and horrifying incidents of last night," interrupted Eliza, "my intention was to leave that miscreant also unmolested, for fear that by handing him over to justice Gilbert Vernon might be led to perceive that he also was suspected. But the narrative of last night's adventure involves so serious a matter that I am for a moment at a loss what course to pursue. In any case it will be better to ascertain the nature of the object which the villain buried at the foot of the tree; and probably we shall thereby discover some clue to the elucidation of this mystery. In the meantime, I conjure you to keep your lips sealed in respect to all these topics of fearful interest. Lady Ravensworth is in so nervous and agitated a state, that I shall not acquaint her with the incidents to which you were last night a spectator, until she be better able to support the terrors of so frightful a narrative. But to-night, Quentin, you must visit the spot where the villain buried some object in the earth: you will ascertain what that object is;—and we will then decide upon the proper course which we ought to pursue."

Quentin could not help admiring the strength of mind, the sagacity, and the calmness which Eliza Sydney displayed in her self-imposed task of countermining the dark plots of the Honourable Gilbert Vernon. Though but a servant, he was himself shrewd, intelligent, and well-informed; and he was not one of those obstinate men who refuse to acknowledge to themselves the superiority of a female mind, where such superiority really exists. He accordingly expressed his readiness to follow Eliza's counsel in all things connected with their present business; and he also promised that he would not by his conduct towards Tidkins excite in that individual's mind any idea that he was known or suspected.

He and Eliza Sydney then separated.

We must pause for a moment to explain the system of argument upon which this lady's present proceedings were based.

"If," she said to herself, "Tidkins be delivered up to justice, it is possible that he will not turn upon his employer Vernon, who might readily account for having such a villain in his service by declaring that he was entirely ignorant of his true character when he engaged him as a valet. Again, were Vernon immediately accused of the murder of his brother, the evidence would be slight unless it were proved not only that the tobacco was really poisoned, but also that it was the same which Vernon had sent to Lord Ravensworth. For the only positive ground of suspicion which can as yet be adduced against him, is that he has been some time in England while he represented himself to have been still dwelling in the East. But this circumstance might be disposed of by some feasible excuse on his part, and would also be inefficient unless coupled with more conclusive evidence. In a month I shall probably be able to collect all the testimony I require; and it is not likely that Vernon will immediately attempt the life of the infant heir, as such a deed following so closely upon the death of the late lord would of itself afford matter of serious inquiry and arouse suspicions against him. It is therefore necessary to remain tranquil for the present, until the day arrives when the machinations of Gilbert Vernon may be crushed for ever by the same blow that shall punish him for his past crimes."

Ravensworth Hall was now the scene of plot and counter-plot,—of fears, suspicions, and a variety of conflicting passions.

While Quentin and Eliza Sydney were engaged in the conversation above related, the following discourse took place between the Resurrection Man and Gilbert Vernon in the bed-chamber of the latter.

"I don't think I shall relish this monotonous kind of life long," said Tidkins. "Bustle and activity are what I like. Besides, I can't say that I'm altogether without fears; for that description of my person which was published after my escape from Coldbath Fields, was so infernally correct that even this white neckcloth, and bran new suit of black, and the cropping of my hair, and so on, haven't changed me enough to make all safe."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Vernon, impatiently. "Who would think of looking for you at Ravensworth Hall? who would suspect that the valet of one in my station is what he really is?"

"But where is the use of putting the thing off for a month or six weeks?" asked Tidkins.

"Because it would appear strange—too strange that such an event should occur only a few days after my arrival at the Hall," answered Vernon. "You must be guided by me in this respect. The scheme to get rid of the brat is your own—and a good one it is too. Nothing could be better. But you really must allow me to have my own way as to the time when it is to be put into execution."

"Well, well," growled Tidkins: "be it so. For my part, however, I don't see how it is to be put into execution at all, if Lady Ravensworth remains cooped up with the brat in her own room, as she did all yesterday, and seems disposed to do again to-day, by what the servants said at breakfast just now."

"That certainly embarrasses me," observed Vernon. "It was my intention, as I before informed you, to remain here for a few weeks and ingratiate myself as much as possible with my sister-in-law, and get into the habit of fondling the child. Faugh! it almost makes me sick to think that I must take the snivelling brat from its nurse, and dandle it about for half-an-hour at a time, so as to save appearances at least. But, as you say, Lady Ravensworth seems determined that I shall have no chance of playing the amiable at all; for she keeps her room with that widow friend of hers who came so cursed inopportunely. It cannot be that Adeline suspects me? And yet the strange way in which she received me—the impression my voice made upon her——"

"Which proves that she really was concealed in those ruins, for some purpose or another, when we met there," interrupted the Resurrection Man.

"But I am convinced that nothing which then passed between us, gave her any hint concerning our projects," said Vernon; "for when I denied that it was my voice which she had heard, she afterwards became convinced that the mere coincidence of a resemblance of tones had deceived her. Had any other circumstance tended to corroborate her first impression, she would not have hesitated to mention it. But to return to what we were ere now talking of. If my sister-in-law should persist in keeping her own chamber, I shall request an interview with her; and the result will teach me how to act."

"And suppose she really is afraid of you,—suppose she suddenly leaves the Hall, and proceeds to town,—or suppose she sends for her friends and relations to keep her company here," exclaimed Tidkins; "how will you act then?"

"She will not quit the Hall," replied Vernon. "Decency compels her to live in retirement at the country-seat during the first few months of her widowhood; and Lord and Lady Rossville, her parents, are kept in London by the parliamentary duties of his lordship."

"I think I know a way to make her leave her room," said Tidkins, with some little hesitation, and after a few moments' pause.

"You!" cried Vernon, turning shortly round, and surveying his ill-favoured accomplice with astonishment.

"Yes—me," answered the Resurrection Man, coolly. "If I could only speak to her alone for a few minutes, I'm very much mistaken if I can't do what I say."

"Impossible—ridiculous!" ejaculated Vernon.

"I say that it's neither impossible or ridiculous," rejoined Tidkins, angrily.

"But how will you manage it? what will you say to her?" demanded Vernon, more and more surprised; for he knew that the Resurrection Man was not accustomed to boast without the power of performing.

"All that is my own secret," answered Tidkins. "If you question me from now till the end of next month, I won't satisfy you. That's my rule—and I always act on it. Now, all I have to say is that if you will procure me a private meeting with your sister-in-law, I'll engage that she shall leave her room—unless she really is very ill—and take her seat at the dinner-table to-day."

"But this is so extraordinary," cried Vernon, "that unless you know something wherewith to over-awe her—and let me tell you that she is not a woman to be frightened by empty menace——"

"Leave all that to me, Mr. Vernon," said the Resurrection Man, coolly. "Accept my proposal, or refuse it, as you like;—but don't question me."

"You are really a wonderful man, Tidkins," observed Gilbert, slowly; "and you are not in the habit of talking for talking's sake. If you feel convinced that you will succeed—if you do not incur the risk of spoiling all——"

"I am not such a fool as that," interrupted the other, gruffly.

"Then I will endeavour to bring about the interview which you desire," said Vernon.

And, without farther hesitation—though not entirely without misgiving—he sate down to pen a brief note to his sister-in-law, requesting an interview at her leisure.

An hour afterwards Lady Ravensworth proceeded alone to one of the drawing-rooms.

Eliza Sydney had offered no objection to this interview which Mr. Vernon had demanded with his sister-in-law: on the contrary, she was afraid that his suspicions would be excited were it refused.

On her part, Adeline was far from feeling annoyed at the request contained in Vernon's letter; for she had been a prey to the most acute suspense ever since she had recognised the Resurrection Man in her brother-in-law's valet.

Her guilty conscience led her at one moment to believe that Tidkins was certain to discover that Ravensworth Hall was the scene of the mysterious murder in which he was *her* instrument; and at another time she persuaded herself that her plans had been too prudently adopted to admit of such an elucidation.

"Oh! if that dreadful man should obtain a clue to the real truth," she thought, as she repaired to the drawing-room, "how completely should I be in his power! Nay, more—he might communicate his discovery to Vernon; and then——but I cannot dwell upon so terrible an idea! My God! in what torture do I exist! O Lydia Hutchinson, thy vengeance pursues me even from the other world! And now I am about to meet my brother-in-law again! Well—it is better that this interview should take place at once. It must relieve me from much terrible uncertainty—much agonising suspense. If Tidkins have already discovered the dread secret, I shall know the worst *now;*—and if he have not already discovered it, there is but little chance that he ever will. Let me then summon all my courage to my aid: a few minutes more, and my fate must be decided! Either I shall find myself in the power of Vernon and *that horrible man*; or my secret is safe! And if it be still safe—safe it shall remain;—for *he* could only recognise me by my voice—and I will take care never to speak in *his* presence! No—no: sooner than incur the risk of thus betraying my secret, I will shut myself up for ever in my own apartment—or I will fly far away from this house which has so many fearful recollections for me!"

Thus musing, Lady Ravensworth entered the drawing-room.

Her countenance was almost as white as marble; and this pallor was enhanced by the widow's weeds which she wore.

We must here observe that there was, as is usual in the well-furnished rooms of the mansions of the rich, a screen in one corner of the apartment; and on the same side were large folding-doors opening into an ante-chamber, which communicated with the passage and also with the suite of saloons intended for grand occasions.

The moment Adeline entered the apartment, Gilbert Vernon, who was already there, rose from a sofa and hastened to meet her.

"My dear sister," he said, taking her hand with an air of great friendship, "I was truly sorry to hear that you were so indisposed yesterday as to be compelled to keep your chamber. May I hope that you are better to-day?"

"I am very far from well, Mr. Vernon," answered Adeline coldly, as she withdrew her hand somewhat hastily; for, deeply steeped in guilt as she herself was, she shrank from the touch of one whom she looked upon as the murderer of her husband and the deadly foe of her infant child.

"You seem to avoid me purposely, Adeline," said Gilbert, fixing his large grey eyes upon her in a searching manner, though she averted her looks from him: "have I offended you? or is my presence in this house irksome to you?"

"I must candidly confess," replied Lady Ravensworth, "that I remained at the Hall, after the sad loss which I lately sustained, with a view to avoid society—to dwell in retirement;—and neither decency nor my own inclination allow me to receive company with any degree of pleasure."

"Your ladyship, then, looks upon the brother of your late husband as a stranger—a mere guest?" said Vernon, biting his lip. "And yet you have no relative who is more anxious to serve you—more ready to become your true friend——"

"My lamented husband left his affairs in such a position as to preclude the necessity of any intervention save on the part of the trustees," observed Adeline, gathering courage when she perceived that her brother-in-law was rather inclined to conciliate than to menace.

"Then, if such be your sentiments, Adeline," said Gilbert, "I need intrude upon your presence no longer."

Thus speaking, he hastily retreated from the room through the same door by which Lady Ravensworth had entered it.

"My secret is safe!" murmured Adeline, clasping her hands joyfully together, the moment Vernon had disappeared;—and she also was about to quit the apartment, when the screen was suddenly thrown back.

She cast a glance of apprehension towards the spot whence the noise had emanated; and an ejaculation of horror escaped her lips.

The Resurrection Man stood before her!

"Don't be frightened, my lady," said Tidkins, advancing towards her with a smirking smile on his cadaverous countenance: "I shan't eat you!"

"Wretch! what means this intrusion?" cried Adeline, in a feigned voice, and endeavouring to subdue her terror so as ward off, if possible, the danger which now menaced her.

"Lord, ma'am, don't be angry with me for just presenting my obscure self to your notice," said Tidkins, with a horrible chuckle. "You can't pretend not to know me, after all that's taken place between us?"

"Know you!—I know only that you are Mr. Vernon's valet, and that he shall chastise you for this insolence," cried Adeline, astonished at her own effrontery: but her case was so truly desperate!

"I always thought you was the cleverest woman I ever came near," said the Resurrection Man; "but I also pride myself on being as sharp a fellow as here and there one. If I was on the rack I could swear to your voice although it is feigned, and though when you came to my crib you kept your face out of sight. But your voice—your height—your manner,—every thing convinces me that I and Lady

Ravensworth are old friends."

"You are mistaken, sir—grossly mistaken," cried Adeline, almost wildly. "I do not know you—I never saw you before you set foot in this house the other night."

"And then you recognised me so well that you fainted on the stairs," returned Tidkins, maliciously. "But if you think to put me off with denials like this, I can soon show you the contrary; for, though I was blindfolded when you brought me to the Hall on a certain night in the middle of February last, I am not quite such a fool as to have forgot the gardens we passed through—the little door leading to the private staircase at the south end of the building—and the very position of the room where the mischief was done. Why, bless you, ma'am, I began to suspect all about it the very first hour I was in this house, when the servants got talking of a certain Lydia Hutchinson who disappeared just about that time."

"You are speaking of matters wholly incomprehensible to me," said Lady Ravensworth, whose tone and countenance, however, strangely belied the words which she uttered. "It is true that a servant of mine, named Lydia Hutchinson, decamped in the month of February last; and if you know any thing concerning her——"

"By Satan!" cried the Resurrection Man, stamping his foot with impatience; "this is too much! Do you pretend that it was not Lydia Hutchinson whom you hired me to throttle in your own chamber?"

"Monster!" screamed Adeline, starting from her seat, and speaking in her proper tone, being now completely thrown off her guard: "of what would you accuse me?"

And her countenance, which expressed all the worst and most furious passions of her soul, contrasted strangely with her garb of widowhood.

"Of nothing more than I accuse myself," answered the Resurrection Man, brutally. "But if you want any other proof of what I say, come along with me, and I'll show you the very pond in which the body of Lydia Hutchinson is rotting. Ah! I found out that too, during my rambles yesterday!"

Adeline's cheeks were flushed with rage when he began to answer her last question; but as he went on, all the colour forsook them; and, pale—pale as a corpse, she fell back again upon the sofa.

"There! I knew I should bring it home to you," said the Resurrection Man, coolly surveying the condition to which he had reduced the guilty woman. "But don't be frightened—I'm not going to blab, for my own sake. I haven't even told your brother-in-law about this business. Tony Tidkins never betrays his employers."

Lady Ravensworth cast a rapid glance at his countenance as he uttered these words; and catching at the assurance which they conveyed, she said in a low and hollow tone, "You have not really acquainted Mr. Vernon with all this?"

"Not a syllable of it!" cried Tidkins. "Why should I? he wouldn't pay me the more for betraying you!"

"Then how came you here during my interview with him?" demanded Adeline, almost suffocated by painful emotions. "Was he not privy to your presence?"

"He was, my lady," answered Tidkins, in a less familiar tone than before: "but, for all that, he doesn't know what business I had with your ladyship."

"This is false—you are deceiving me!" exclaimed Adeline, with hysterical impatience.

"Not a whit of it, ma'am: I'm too independent to deceive any body," rejoined the Resurrection Man. "In plain terms, your brother-in-law has taken a fancy to this place, and means to stay here for a few weeks."

"He is very kind!" said Adeline, bitterly.

"But he doesn't like sitting down to breakfast and dinner by himself, and to lounge about in the drawing-room without a soul to speak to," continued the Resurrection Man; "for a petticoat is the natural ornament of a drawing-room. So what he wants is a little more of your society; and as he didn't exactly know how to obtain his wishes in this respect, I offered to use my interest with your ladyship."

"*Your* interest!" repeated Lady Ravensworth, disdainfully.

"Yes, ma'am—and that can't be small either," returned Tidkins, with a leer. "Now all you have to do is to show yourself more in the drawing and dining-rooms—and on my part I engage not to breathe a word of the Lydia Hutchinson affair to Mr. Vernon."

"And can you for a moment think that I shall submit to be dictated to in this manner?" cried Adeline, again becoming flushed with indignation.

"I do indeed think it, ma'am," answered Tidkins, coolly; "and what is more, I mean it, too—or, as sure as you're there, I'll drag up the body of Lydia Hutchinson, as I did last night!"

"O heavens!" shrieked Adeline: "what do you mean?"

"I mean, my lady, that when I heard the servants talking about the loss of your jewel-casket, I began to suspect that you had sacrificed it to create an idea that Lydia Hutchinson had bolted with it," answered Tidkins; "and I thought it just probable that I should find it in the pond. So last night I fished up the dead body——"

"Enough! enough!" cried Adeline, wildly: "Oh! this is too much!—you will drive me mad!"

"Not a bit of it, ma'am," returned Tidkins. "A clever and strong-minded lady like you shouldn't give way in this manner. All I wanted was the casket; and——"

"And what?" said Adeline, speaking in a tone as if she were suffocating.

"And I got it," was the answer. "But I rolled the body back again into the pond; and there it'll stay—unless you force me to drag it up once more, and bring it to the Hall."

"No: never—never!" screamed Lady Ravensworth. "Were you to perpetrate such a horrible deed, I would die that moment—I would stab myself to the heart—or I would leap from this window on the stones beneath! Beware, dreadful man—or you will drive me mad! But if you require gold—if you need money, speak: let me purchase your immediate departure from this house."

"That does not suit my book, ma'am," answered Tidkins. "Here I must remain while it suits the pleasure of my master," he added, with a low chuckling laugh.

"And what business keeps your master here? what wickedness does he meditate? why does he force his presence upon me?" cried

Adeline, rapidly.

"I don't know any thing about that," answered the Resurrection Man. "All I have to say can be summed up in a word: leave your own chamber and act as becomes the mistress of the house. Preside at your own table—this very day too;—or, by Satan! ma'am, I'll take a stroll by the pond in the evening, and then run back to the Hall with a cry that I have seen a human hand appear above the surface!"

Having thus expressed his appalling menaces, the Resurrection Man hurried from the apartment.

Lady Ravensworth pressed her hands to her brow, murmuring, "O heavens! I shall go mad—I shall go mad!"

CHAPTER CCXXXVI.

WOMAN AS SHE OUGHT TO BE.

A quarter of an hour after the interview between Lady Ravensworth and the Resurrection Man, Eliza Sydney repaired to the little parlour before mentioned, in compliance with a message which had been conveyed to her from Quentin.

The moment she entered that room she was struck by the ghastly and alarming appearance of the valet.

He was pacing the apartment with agitated steps; his face was as pale as death—his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets—and his entire aspect was that of a man who had just seen some terrible spectacle, or heard some appalling revelation.

"In heaven's name, what is the cause of this excitement?" asked Eliza, advancing towards the valet, after she had carefully closed the door.

"Oh! madam—oh! Mrs. Beaufort," exclaimed Quentin, clasping his hands together through the intenseness of his mental anguish; "by playing the part of your spy I have learnt a most dreadful secret! Merciful God! this house has become the head-quarters of diabolical crime: its very atmosphere is tainted with the foul breath of murderers;—destruction lurks within its walls. Oh! accursed house, of which not one stone should be left upon another!"

"Quentin, you alarm me!" cried Eliza. "Speak—explain yourself! What mean these strange expressions?"

"Madam," said the valet, drawing close to her, and speaking in a low and hollow tone, "have you heard of a certain Lydia Hutchinson, who disappeared from this dwelling about two months ago?"

"Yes: the nurse was this morning telling me something about that event," answered Eliza; "but Lady Ravensworth hastened to change the conversation."

"And no wonder, madam—no wonder!" observed Quentin. "Oh! that I should still remain in the service of one who has perpetrated such a deed!"

"Will you explain yourself, Quentin?" cried Eliza, somewhat impatiently. "I see that you have learnt a dreadful secret: but wherefore keep me thus in suspense?"

"Pardon me, madam—forgive me," said Quentin, "I ought not to trifle with you! But, ah! madam, what will you think—how will you act, when you learn that she for whom you are so generously striving to combat the wicked plots of Gilbert Vernon,—that Lady Ravensworth, in a word, is—is——"

"Is what?" said Eliza, hastily.

"A murderess!" returned Quentin, shuddering from head to foot as he uttered the appalling word.

"Just heaven! what do I hear?" exclaimed Eliza, the colour forsaking her cheeks. "Oh! no—no: it cannot be! Recall that assertion, Quentin; for you are labouring under some strange delusion!"

"Would that I were, madam," said the valet, in a mournful tone; "but, alas! I heard too much—and that much too plainly—to entertain a doubt! Yes, Mrs. Beaufort—that lady to whom you have devoted yourself, is the murderess of poor Lydia Hutchinson!"

"Oh! this is indeed a house of crime, Quentin!" exclaimed Eliza Sydney, now greatly excited. "But tell me how you made this fearful discovery!"

"I will endeavour to collect my thoughts sufficiently to explain it all, madam," said the valet. "You must know, that about two hours ago, the miscreant Tidkins brought me a note, written by his master, and to be sent up to my lady. To this note a verbal message was returned that my lady would see Mr. Vernon in an hour in the drawing-room."

"Yes—that interview took place with my entire concurrence," observed Eliza.

"Obedient to your instructions, madam," continued Quentin, "I kept a constant watch upon Tidkins; and when the hour for the meeting between my lady and Mr. Vernon approached, I saw Tidkins accompany his master to the drawing-room. This circumstance struck me to be so singular, that I concealed myself in an ante-room, separated only by folding doors from the saloon itself. It appears that Tidkins had placed himself behind the screen; for, after a few words of little consequence had passed between my lady and her brother-in-law, the latter left the apartment—and Tidkins burst forth from his hiding-place! Oh! madam, never shall I forget the scene which followed! By means of the key-hole I could perceive, as well as hear, all that occurred in the drawing-room. With the most insolent familiarity did Tidkins address my lady; and, though for a time she steadily denied all participation in the murder of Lydia Hutchinson, at length she acknowledged it—she admitted it!"

"Miserable woman that she is!" exclaimed Eliza. "Oh! this accounts for her sleepless nights—her constant nervousness—her strange looks!"

"And it is the corpse of Lydia Hutchinson, madam," added Quentin, "which was last night dragged from the pond by that fiend who was hired by my lady to murder her!"

The valet then detailed at length all the conversation which had taken place between the Resurrection Man and Lady Ravensworth, and which explained wherefore Tidkins had fished up the body of the murdered woman.

"It is therefore clear," said Eliza, horror-struck at all she heard, "that it is the lost casket which Tidkins buried at the foot of the tree."

"Doubtless, madam. But it now remains for *you* to decide what course you will pursue," continued Quentin: "as for *me*, my mind is made up—I shall depart within an hour from this abode of crime!"

"Such will not be my conduct," said Eliza, firmly. "Dreadful as is the guilt of Lady Ravensworth, I cannot find it in my heart to abandon her to her enemies. She must have received some fearful provocation to have been driven thus to rid herself of a servant whom, under ordinary circumstances, she might have abruptly discharged."

"I think that I can penetrate into the mystery of this crime, madam," observed Quentin. "Her ladyship admitted a certain Colonel Cholmondeley to her chamber; and this intrigue was known to Lydia Hutchinson."

"Oh! crime upon crime!" ejaculated Eliza Sydney, with a shudder. "Yet will I not abandon this very guilty and very miserable woman! No:—for the sake of her babe will I still aid her in defeating her enemies! And this duty becomes the more imperious, inasmuch as if Gilbert Vernon should be made acquainted with her enormities—if the miscreant Tidkins should betray her to his master—he would obtain a hold upon her that must further all his vile schemes."

"And will you remain, madam, in the midst of these murderers?" asked Quentin, profoundly surprised at the resolution of Eliza Sydney:—"will you remain in the same house with Vernon, the murderer of his brother,—with Tidkins, who lives by murder,—and with Lady Ravensworth the murderess of Lydia Hutchinson? Can you continue to dwell in such horrible society?"

"As a matter of duty—yes," answered Eliza. "Were the infant heir of Ravensworth abandoned to the designs of those dreadful men, his life would not be worth a month's purchase; and his mother would not dare to publish the foul deed, even were he murdered before her face!"

"The protection of that child is indeed a duty," said Quentin, in a musing manner; "and my lord was always a good and kind master to me! I have eaten his bread for many years—I have amassed in his service enough to keep me in my old age! Madam," added the valet, turning abruptly round towards Eliza, "your noble example shall not be lost upon me! I will remain here—I will obey your instructions—for you are a lady of whose confidence a humble individual like myself should feel proud!"

How powerful is the moral influence of a virtuous woman, performing painful but solemn, though self-imposed duties! And, oh! had that man, who now felt and acknowledged this influence,—had he known that he stood in the presence of one whose brow had been adorned with a diadem, and who still possessed a ducal title, although she used it not,—had he known all this, he would have fallen at her feet, in homage to one so great and good!

"Your resolution, Quentin, to remain here as the protector of your lamented master's heir, does you honour," exclaimed Eliza. "And, as you are indeed deserving of my confidence, I will acquaint you with the course which I shall adopt towards Lady Ravensworth. For the sake of her family—for the sake of the memory of her deceased husband—for the sake of her child, I will spare her that exposure, and those fearful consequences of such exposure, which justice seems to demand in expiation of a crime so foul as hers. Never—never could I consent to be the means of sending one of my own sex to a scaffold! No: I will gently break to her my knowledge of her guilt; I will enjoin her to pray often—long—and fervently to that Almighty Power which can show mercy to those who truly repent, be they never so deeply stained with crime; and I will endeavour to conduct her mind to that state which shall atone for the great sin which lies so heavy on her soul!"

"Ah! madam," exclaimed Quentin, in unfeigned admiration of this excellent lady; "were there more like you in this world, there would be far less need for prisons, criminal judges, and public executioners!"

"Reformation is better than punishment, Quentin," said Eliza, impressively. "But let us now separate. I need not enjoin you to the strictest silence in respect to the awful discovery of this morning."

"Oh! madam, tell me how to act, and I would not for worlds deviate from your instructions," cried the valet.

"Thank you for this assurance," said Eliza. "Before we separate, let me ask if you will assist in the performance of a painful but solemn duty which circumstances impose upon us?"

"Speak, madam," returned Quentin: "I almost think that I can anticipate your explanation."

"The corpse of the murdered woman must not be allowed to remain in that pond," said Eliza, in a low, but emphatic tone.

"I had divined your thoughts, madam," observed the valet. "To-night I will bury it—painful, horrible though that duty be."

"And I will assist you in the sad task," returned Eliza. "Nay—offer no objection: I am determined. To-night, at eleven o'clock, I will meet you in the garden near the wicket leading into the fields. You must be provided with the necessary implements for the purpose. In respect to the casket of jewels, leave it where it is—leave it to that dreadful man who will not long remain at large to dishonour human nature with his atrocities; for he and his present master will fall together—and the same knell shall ring for them both!"

"I understand you, madam," said Quentin. "That casket could never return to the possession of Lady Ravensworth, with safety to herself."

The valet then retired; and Eliza hurried back to Adeline's apartments.

There a most painful—a most distressing scene took place.

The nurse was dismissed with the child into a remote chamber of the same suite; and when Eliza was alone with Adeline, she broke to the miserable lady her knowledge of the fearful crime which had put an end to the existence of Lydia Hutchinson.

And, oh! how gently—how delicately—and in what a purely Christian spirit of charity, did Eliza perform this most difficult—this most melancholy duty!

It was not as an avenger, menacing the thunders of the law, that Eliza spoke: it was not as one prepared to deliver up the criminal to justice, that she addressed herself to Lady Ravensworth. No:—it was as a true disciple of Him with whom is vengeance as well as mercy, that she communed with Adeline: and this wretched woman found, to her astonishment, that she possessed a friend who would pray with her, solace her, and conceal her guilt, instead of a being prepared to expose, to disgrace, and to abandon her upon the plea of performing a duty which every one owes to society!

Then, when Lady Ravensworth was sufficiently composed—when the first terrific shock was over,—she related, truly and minutely, her entire history: she revealed to Eliza all those particulars of her connexion with Lydia Hutchinson, which are known to the reader; she concealed nothing—for the unparalleled generosity of Eliza's mind and conduct aroused in Adeline's heart all the better feelings of her sex and nature.

Though the crime of murder is so horrible that there exists for it scarcely the shadow of extenuation,—still when the case of Lady Ravensworth was calmly considered,—when it was remembered how she had been goaded to madness and desperation by the conduct of Lydia Hutchinson,—when all the circumstances that united at the time to cause her reason to totter upon its seat, were dispassionately viewed,—even the well-ordered mind of Eliza Sydney was induced to admit that, if ever such shadow of extenuation did exist, it was in this most lamentable episode in the history of the human race.

And, oh! with what feelings of profound—ineffable gratitude did Adeline throw herself at the feet of that angel who seemed to have been sent from above to teach her that there was hope for even the greatest criminal, and that "*there is more joy in heaven over the repentance of one sinner than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance!*"

"You ask me not to leave you—not to abandon you," said Eliza: "such an idea never entered my mind. Where the plague rages, there should the physician be; and if the physician fly away through fear of infection, he is unworthy to exercise an honourable calling. For it is not the healthy who require his services. And if the rich man offer alms to those who are as wealthy as himself, his charity becomes a mere mockery, because it is only offered where he knows it will be refused. No—it is the abodes of misery which he should visit; and it is amongst those who need his assistance that he should dispense his bounty. I fear not, Adeline, that I shall be endangered by the infection which has so unhappily seized upon you: on the contrary, I hope to eradicate from your heart the seeds of the pestilence of sin! And it is also you who require the alms of sympathy and solace; for you must be very—very wretched! Do not think, then, that I will desert you: oh! no—the more guilty, the more miserable you are, the stronger shall be the bond that unites me to your interests!"

This was the holy and touching language with which Eliza Sydney sought to move the heart of Lady Ravensworth to penitence.

Could such wholesome means fail of success?

No:—and Adeline felt rejoiced that her secret had become known to one who availed herself of that knowledge for such excellent purposes!

The comprehensive mind of Eliza Sydney enabled her to embrace at a glance all the new difficulties which the crime of Adeline had conjured up. Eliza's aim, as before stated, was to take such effectual steps to stop the guilty career of Vernon, that the heir of Ravensworth should be entirely freed from any farther peril at the hands of his unnatural uncle. But the very same moment that ruined Vernon and his atrocious assistant, might bring destruction upon Adeline; for when the strong grasp of the law once fixed itself on Tidkins, there was no guarantee that he would not, in his rage, reveal the terrible mystery respecting the fate of Lydia Hutchinson.

This chance was duly weighed by Eliza Sydney; but she conceived a plan to save Adeline from the overwhelming consequences of such an exposure.

What this project was will be explained hereafter:—suffice it for the present to say that it obviated the necessity of any change in the policy already adopted to defeat and punish Gilbert Vernon and Tidkins; and that Adeline gratefully assented to the conditions which it involved.

A far more embarrassing subject for immediate consideration presented itself to the mind of Eliza Sydney. This was how to advise Lady Ravensworth to act in respect to the requisition made by Gilbert Vernon, and so energetically backed by Anthony Tidkins, relative to her presence in the drawing and dining rooms. But at length Eliza decided upon recommending Adeline to yield in this instance.

"You will suffer too much in exposing yourself, by refusal, to the menaces and constant persecutions of Anthony Tidkins," said Eliza; "and moreover, we must remain faithful to our plan of not allowing Vernon to suspect that his plots are being met by counter-schemes. I shall always be with you when you are compelled to endure his presence; and therefore it will be better thus to humour him."

"I shall be guided by you in all things," returned Adeline.

She accordingly presided at the dinner-table that very evening:—and thus was the promise, made by the Resurrection Man to his employer, fulfilled to the letter.

During the repast, Vernon endeavoured to ingratiate himself as much as possible with the two ladies: but Adeline was too unhappy even to affect any feeling beyond cold politeness; and Eliza Sydney was only distantly courteous.

Coffee was served in the drawing-room; and afterwards the ladies withdrew to their own apartments.

"One grand point is at least gained," said Vernon to himself, when he was alone: "my amiable sister-in-law has been forced to leave her nest! In a day or two I must ask to see the child. But with what spell Tidkins effected this change in Adeline's conduct, I am at a loss to imagine!"

That night, at eleven o'clock, Eliza Sydney stole from the mansion, Adeline and Quentin being alone cognisant of her proceeding.

In the garden she met the faithful valet, who was provided with a drag, a mattock, a spade, and a sack.

They repaired together to the field in which was the pond where the remains of Lydia Hutchinson were concealed.

Quentin, who had purposely reconnoitred the vicinity in the afternoon, proceeded to dig a grave in a spot where there was no grass, and at a distance of about twenty yards from the water.

This labour occupied an hour: and, when it was concluded, he proceeded with Eliza to the pond.

The drag was used successfully; and the corpse was drawn to land. It was then wrapped in a large sheet which Eliza had brought for the purpose, and carried to the grave hollowed to receive it.

Eliza breathed a prayer for the soul of her whose remains were denied Christian sepulture, while Quentin threw back the soil. The superfluous earth was conveyed in the sack to the pond; and thus all traces of this hurried burial disappeared.

Eliza and Quentin then returned to the mansion.

On the following morning, after breakfast, Eliza Sydney walked out alone, and repaired to a grove at a short distance from the mansion.

A cab, containing two persons, drove up to the same spot a few moments afterwards; and Filippo, having leapt out, assisted Malkhatoun to alight.

Eliza immediately joined them; and they all three entered the grove together.

When they had proceeded so far as to be beyond the range of the cab-driver's hearing, Eliza stopped, and, addressing herself to Malkhatoun, said, "I hope that you understand enough of the English tongue to be able to converse with me for a few minutes upon a most important subject?"

"I am well acquainted with your language, lady," was the reply, spoken with singular accuracy for an oriental foreigner.

"Now listen to me attentively," continued Eliza: "I have read in some book of eastern travel that the inhabitants of Asia Minor, Georgia, and Circassia, possess the art of steeping the tobacco-leaf in a poison of such a nature that it undermines the constitution of him who uses the plant so treated."

"It is perfectly correct, lady," answered Malkhatoun; "and the operation of steeping the plant in the opiatic poison is chiefly performed by the female slaves."

"Have you ever seen the process?" inquired Eliza.

"Frequently," was the reply. "My father was a Georgian chief,"—and as she spoke, tears started into her eyes:—"he had many slaves, and they prepared the tobacco which he purposely left in his tents, when the Persian invaders drove him from them. To poison your enemies thus, is not deemed a dishonourable mode of warfare in Georgia."

"Should you recognise tobacco so prepared, were you to see it?" asked Eliza.

"Instantaneously, lady, on the application of fire," replied Malkhatoun; "for the poison used is of so peculiar a nature that its qualities are only put into action by means of fire. The most skilful chemist cannot discover its presence in tobacco, unless he light the weed and inhale the perfume of the vapour."

"The idea of such a circumstance struck me also," observed Eliza.

As she spoke, she produced from her reticule a small galley-pot containing some of the late Lord Ravensworth's tobacco: then she drew forth a box of lucifer-matches.

Malkhatoun held the galley-pot, while Eliza procured a light; and the flame was then applied to the tobacco.

The beautiful Georgian immediately inhaled the vapour, and said, "Lady, this tobacco is so strongly impregnated with the poison, that were the strongest man to indulge freely in its use for a few months, he would sink into the tomb."

"It is as I suspected," murmured Eliza.

"Tobacco thus poisoned," continued Malkhatoun, "possesses properties of so fascinating a nature, that he who smokes it becomes irresistibly attached to it; and I have heard it said in Georgia, that men labouring under incurable maladies, or those whose life is burthensome to them, have voluntarily whiled away their existence by the use of the poisoned weed."

"I thank you sincerely for this explanation," said Eliza. "And now, pardon me if I speak a few words concerning yourself—for it is with a good motive. When you mentioned the name of your father, tears started into your eyes."

"My poor father was slain in the battle which made me and several other Georgian females the prisoners of the Persian conquerors, against whom my sire rose in rebellion," answered Malkhatoun. "I was sent to Teflis, and sold as a slave to a Turkish merchant, who carried me to Constantinople, where I was purchased for an English nobleman. I wept ere now, lady, because I have a mother, and brothers, and sisters living in my native land; and my heart yearns towards them."

"And would you be pleased, my poor girl, to return to Georgia?" asked Eliza, the tears trickling down her cheeks—for Malkhatoun's voice was soft and plaintive as she told her artless tale.

"I would give half the years that remain to me to embrace my dear mother and brothers and sisters once more," replied Malkhatoun.

"You shall return to them—oh! you shall return to them with as little delay as possible," exclaimed Eliza. "In the course of this day I will transmit by post to you, Filippo, a draft upon my banker to supply the means for this poor girl to go back to her native land."

"And it shall be my duty, madam, to see her safely on board the first ship that sails for the Levant," said Filippo.

Malkhatoun could scarcely believe her ears; but when she saw that Eliza was really in earnest, she threw herself at the feet of her benefactress, whose hand she covered with her kisses and her tears.

Eliza hastened to raise her from that posture; and when the now happy Georgian became composed, they all three retraced their steps to the cab.

Malkhatoun and Filippo returned to London; and Eliza retraced her way to Ravensworth Hall.

Nor did she forget her promise to Malkhatoun; and two days afterwards the fair Georgian embarked at Gravesend on board a ship bound for the Levant.

CHAPTER CCXXXVII.

THE JUGGLERS.

Nearly five weeks had elapsed since the day when the noble-minded Eliza Sydney first took up her quarters at Ravensworth Hall.

Time was, therefore, now verging towards the close of May, 1841.

It was at about nine o'clock in the morning of a charming day, at this period, that the Resurrection Man sauntered leisurely from the servants' offices, at Ravensworth Hall, with the air of a person about to indulge in a stroll after eating a good breakfast.

But when he was out of sight of the Hall, he quickened his pace, and proceeded somewhat rapidly towards the ruined lodge where he had once before met the Honourable Gilbert Vernon.

And it was to meet that very same individual that he now sought the place again.

But as Vernon had not yet arrived, Tidkins, after walking round the dilapidated cottage to convince himself that no stranger was near, took a seat upon a pile of bricks, and, producing a cigar-case, was speedily wrapped in the enjoyment of a mild havannah and his own delectable meditations.

With the nature of those thoughts we shall not trouble the reader: suffice it to say that they were all connected with the scheme which he and his master were carrying on at Ravensworth Hall, and the last dread act of which was now in immediate contemplation.

Tidkins had just lighted a second cigar, when he descried Vernon at a distance.

He, however, continued to smoke—for he was not the man to stand upon any ceremony with his employer, even were that employer a prince.

"Come at last?" said Tidkins, as Vernon entered the ruins. "Been doing the amiable to the ladies, I suppose?"

"I have succeeded in that task tolerably well lately," answered Vernon, with difficulty concealing an expression of disgust at the odious familiarity of his agent; but he had already learnt that crime places the menial upon a footing with the master, and compels the haughty aristocrat to brook the insolence of the vulgar desperado.

"Well, now we are drawing to the end of the play at last," continued Tidkins. "So much the better: for I was getting infernally sick of this moping kind of life. But what if this plan of ours should happen to fail?"

"Then I will try another—and even another, if necessary, until we succeed," answered Vernon, emphatically. "Yes: I am now so bent upon the deed—so resolved to become the lord and owner of these broad lands and yon proud mansion—that I will even risk my neck to attain that end."

"You speak in a plucky manner that I admire," said Tidkins. "Besides, when once you are Lord Ravensworth, who will dare to utter a suspicion—even if there should seem any ground for it?"

"No one—certainly," replied Vernon. "But have you looked about the ruins? Remember the last time we met here—there was an eaves-dropper then——"

"Don't alarm yourself," interrupted Tidkins: "I walked carefully round the place; and I'll swear no one is near. Unless, indeed," he added, with a jocular chuckle, "some very curious person has got into that great cistern up there; and I must confess I didn't climb up to look into it."

"Cease this humour," said Vernon, somewhat sternly. "If you have been round the ruins, that is sufficient. Our business is too important to allow us to waste time in idle bantering. Do the jugglers understand that they are to come up this evening?"

"Fully so," answered Tidkins, coolly inhaling the fragrant vapour of his cigar. "They are all at the *Three Kings*—that public-house which you see by the road-side yonder,—and most likely making merry with the couple of guineas that I gave them last night. It is not necessary that I should see them again before they come to the Hall."

"You mentioned to them that there was a sick lady at the mansion who would be amused with their sports?" said Vernon.

"I have already told you what representations I made," replied Tidkins, impatiently. "Where's the use of asking the question over again?"

"For the same reason that one reads a letter twice," rejoined Vernon,—"to see that nothing has been omitted which ought to be said or done. But are you sure that the fellows will understand how to use the detonating balls?"

"Nothing is easier," answered Tidkins. "And as it was merely to try one that we agreed to meet here now, suppose I just make the trial directly?"

"Yes—I am anxious to be assured of the effect," said Vernon. "We are far enough away from the Hall to do so in safety."

"Certainly we are," remarked Tidkins. "In the first place we're down in this deep valley;—in the second place there's the thick grove on the top of the hill;—and in the third place, even if there wasn't the hill at all between us and the Hall, the back windows of the mansion don't look this way. So the smoke can't be seen."

"True!" exclaimed Vernon. "And now for the test."

The Resurrection Man drew from his pocket a ball covered with coarse blue paper, and nearly as large as a cricket-ball.

Then, rising from his seat, he dashed it with some degree of violence upon the hard ground.

It exploded in the twinkling of an eye, with a din as loud as that of a blunderbuss; and both Vernon and the Resurrection Man were immediately enveloped in a dense cloud of black and sulphurous-smelling smoke.

When the dark volume had blown away, Vernon beheld the cadaverous countenance of the Resurrection Man looking towards him with a grin of ferocious satisfaction.

"Well—will that do?" cried Tidkins, triumphantly.

"Admirably," answered Gilbert, averting his face—for there was something fiend-like and horrible in the leer of his companion.

There was a short pause; and then those two villains resumed their conversation. But as the remainder of their discourse was connected with the last act of their tragic drama, which we shall be compelled to relate in detail, it is unnecessary to record in this place any more of what passed between them upon the present occasion.

After having been nearly an hour together, Gilbert Vernon and the Resurrection Man separated, in order to return by different routes to the Hall.

Five minutes after they had left the building, the head of a man looked cautiously over the brink of the empty cistern to which Tidkins had jocularly alluded, and which stood on the top of the least dilapidated portion of the lodge.

Seeing that the coast was now perfectly clear, the person who was concealed in the cistern emerged from his hiding-place and let himself drop lightly upon the ground.

This individual was the gipsy, Morcar.

Being on his way to London,—alone, and upon some business connected with his tribe,—he had stopped to rest himself in those ruins: but he had not been there many minutes, when he heard the sound of footsteps; and, almost immediately afterwards, he beheld, through a cranny in the wall behind which he was seated, the well-known form and features of the Resurrection Man.

His first impulse was to dart upon the miscreant and endeavour to make him his prisoner; but, seeing that Tidkins looked suspiciously about, Morcar instantly imagined that he had some object in seeking that place. At the same time it struck him, from his knowledge of the Resurrection Man's character, that this object could be no good one; and he resolved to watch the villain's proceedings.

Thus, while Tidkins was making the circuit of the ruins, Morcar clambered noiselessly and rapidly up to the cistern, in which he concealed himself.

The consequence was, that the gipsy overheard the entire discourse which shortly afterwards ensued between Tidkins and Vernon; and a scheme of such diabolical villany was thus revealed to him, that his hair almost stood on end as the details of the fearful plot were gradually developed by means of that conversation.

When the Resurrection Man and Gilbert Vernon had taken their departure, and Morcar had emerged from his hiding-place, his first impulse was to proceed to Ravensworth Hall and communicate every thing he had overheard to the lady of that mansion.

But, ere he took that step, he sate down, with the usual caution which characterises his race, to ponder upon the subject.

We have before stated that it is repugnant to the principles of the Zingarees to be instrumental in delivering a criminal over to any justice save their own; and Morcar knew that if he did adopt such a course, he must necessarily appear as a witness against the two villains whose dark designs he had so strangely discovered. This appearance in a court of justice would sorely damage him with his tribe, over whom he was to rule at his father's death.

It is, however, probable that the excellent effects of Richard Markham's example upon the generous-hearted Morcar would have hushed those scruples and induced him to do what his good sense told him was his duty towards society, had not the sudden reminiscence of a certain portion of the conversation he had overheard confirmed him in the opinion that he should be acting more prudently to counteract the project of the two villains at the moment it was to be put into execution, rather than deliver them up to justice ere it was attempted.

"*I am now so bent upon the deed*," had one of the miscreants said, "*so resolved to become the owner of these broad lands and yon proud mansion—that I will even risk my neck to attain that end!*"

The reasoning which these words now engendered in Morcar's mind, was coincidentally similar to that upon which Eliza Sydney's conduct had been based.

"This man," thought Morcar, "who dared to utter such sentiments, is the member of a noble family—the next heir after an infant child, to the title and lands of Ravensworth. Would the word of a wandering gipsy be for a moment credited against his indignant denial of the accusation which I should make against him, were he now delivered up to justice? And, were he to escape from that accusation, would he not commence anew his dark plots against the life of that child who seems to stand in his way? Far better will it be for me to counteract his scheme, and then proclaim his guilt when *my* evidence can be corroborated by the fact that *he* did attempt the deed of which he will stand accused! Yes—it must be so. Then will the law for ever remove him from a scene where his detestable machinations would sooner or later prove fatal to their innocent object!"

Having devised a mode of proceeding, Morcar quitted the ruins, and bent his way towards the *Three Kings* public-house, which was about a mile distant.

On his arrival at the little rustic inn, the gipsy sauntered into the tap-room, where he sate down, and ordered some refreshment.

At one of the tables five men were busily engaged in devouring bread and cheese and washing down the same with long draughts of Barclay and Perkins's Treble X. They were thin, but well-made and athletic-looking fellows; and were dressed in garments of which fustian and corduroy were the principal materials. On the bench near them were several bundles tied up in handkerchiefs, through the openings and holes of which the quick eye of the gipsy caught sight of certain nankin breeches and flesh-coloured stockings, such as are worn by itinerant mountebanks. In a corner of the room stood a large drum, and near it a wicker basket with a lid.

Morcar was convinced that these persons were the same to whom Vernon and Tidkins had alluded.

His object was now to get into conversation with them; and this was easily effected by one of those casual remarks upon the weather which invariably commence a discourse between strangers in this country.

"Fine day," said the gipsy, after quenching his thirst with half the contents of a pint of porter.

"Very, indeed," replied one of the men. "Have you walked far this morning?"

"Pretty well," returned Morcar. "I'm going to London presently," he added with apparent carelessness, "to try and astonish the people a little."

"Ah!" exclaimed another of the jugglers: "and how so? For it must be a clever feller to do that with the Londoners. But may be your people have got hold of some new way of telling fortunes—for the old one is veared out by this time, I should think."

"You suppose that because I am of the gipsy race I must be connected with women who tell fortunes," said Morcar, laughing good-naturedly. "Well, so I have been; but now I'm going to begin in a new line. In fact I don't mind telling you what it is—it's no secret; and I'm half inclined to believe that it's more or less in your way also," he added, glancing significantly towards the drum and the bundles.

"If you could only do some new trick in our line," cried one of the men, eagerly, "you'd make your fortune: but it must be a good one, mind."

"I can do a trick that, I flatter myself, no other man in England can perform," said Morcar, still speaking in a careless, indifferent kind of way. "But as you tell me that you *are* in the juggling line——"

"Yes—we are; and we ain't ashamed on't," exclaimed two or three of the men together.

"Well—then I'll explain to you what I can do," continued Morcar. "I've made a net that winds round an immense long roller, which must be raised upon two upright stakes. When the net is drawn out at dusk, or in a darkened room, it shows a thousand different figures—men, animals, fish, birds, snakes, and monsters of all kinds."

"Capital!—capital!" exclaimed the jugglers.

"But that isn't all," continued Morcar. "These figures all move about—skip—leap—dance—fly—crawl—or seem to swim, according to their nature."

"Come, come—that won't do!" said one of the men, who began to think the gipsy was bantering them.

"It's as true as you're there," answered Morcar, seriously; "and it's very easy to do, too:—only a little phosphorus and other chemical things, skilfully used in a particular way. I reckon upon setting all the young children wild with delight when they see it."

"And if you can really do what you say," observed the man who had last spoken, "you're safe to make your ten bob a-day. But, then," he added, with a sly glance towards his companions, "the trick won't take so well alone: it ought to come after the usual exhibition of chaps like us."

"That's just what I have been thinking myself," cried Morcar. "Only, as I didn't know any people in your way——"

"Well, now you know some, at all events," interrupted the spokesman of the party of jugglers; "and though I say it what shouldn't perhaps, you won't find a jollier or better set of fellers than us in all England. What should you say to making a bargain with us?"

"I have no objection," replied Morcar: "we can but give the thing a trial. But I would rather begin in the country, if possible, than in London."

"The very ticket!" cried the man: "you shall begin to-night. We're hired to perform at that great house which you see from the window; and as we are to be there about half an hour before sunset, it will just be dark enough at the end of our performances for you to show yours. What do you say?"

"Let us settle the terms," answered Morcar; "and I've no objection."

The five jugglers, who were evidently much delighted at the prospect of securing so valuable an addition to their troop, consulted together in whispers for a short period, while Morcar hummed a tune as if perfectly indifferent whether a bargain were concluded or not. The men did not fail to remark his free and off-hand manner, and took it as an unquestionable proof of his confidence in the value of his invention and the success which must attend upon its exhibition. They therefore resolved to enlist him on almost any terms.

"Well," said the spokesman of the party, at length turning towards Morcar once more, "me and my partners here have no objection to give you one-third of the earnings."

"That will suit my purpose uncommonly," replied Morcar: "so let us shake hands upon it."

"And wet it," added one of the jugglers, who, as the gipsy subsequently discovered, was the musician of the party—his instrumental harmony being composed of the huge drum and a set of Pandean pipes, vulgarly called a mouth-organ.

The process of shaking hands all round and of imbibing more strong beer was then gone through; after which the jugglers became very anxious to see the marvellous net that was to make their fortunes. They were, therefore, somewhat disappointed when Morcar informed them that one of the tribe had conveyed it to London in his cart the day before; but their elongating countenances expanded once more into smiles of satisfaction when he assured them that he would instantly set off after it, and be with them again at least an hour previously to the time when they intended to visit the mansion in the neighbourhood.

Matters being thus arranged, Morcar took his departure—rejoiced at the success of his project, though somewhat annoyed at having been compelled to utter so many falsehoods to the credulous jugglers. But this vexation was speedily dissipated by the remembrance of the important duty which he had undertaken; and he moreover intended to make the poor fellows a handsome recompense for the disappointment they were destined to experience relative to the wonderful net.

It is not necessary to follow the gipsy's footsteps to the metropolis, and back to the *Three Kings* again: suffice it to say that he made his appearance at the little public-house shortly after six o'clock in the evening—much to the joy of the five jugglers, who began to imagine that he had been hoaxing them.

But all their suspicions vanished when they beheld the gipsy return, with an iron rod, as long as a hop-pole, and round which the magic net was rolled, over his shoulder.

This rod was not much thicker than the thumb, but the bulk of the burden was considerably increased by the folds of the net.

And at that net did the jugglers stare with such eager eyes, that Morcar could hardly contain his laughter: for the net was nothing more than a common one of the very largest size, such as poachers use to drag canals and small rivers. It was, however, very strong, and when stretched out would cover a room eighteen feet long, by twelve in width.

The iron rod was about thirteen feet long, and the net was rolled round it breadthways.

"You will let us have a sight of the thing before we go?" said one of the jugglers.

"I had rather rest myself for half an hour, or so if you please," returned Morcar. "My walk to-day has been none of the shortest; and I am sadly fatigued. Your curiosity will keep till by and by; for as I have fulfilled my word in coming back, you surely can trust me when I tell you that this net, simple as it may appear, will do all I have promised. Besides, we should only have the trouble of darkening the room, which must be done with blankets, as there are no shutters."

"Let our new friend have his own way, Mike," said the musician of the troop.

"And now," continued Morcar, "I must propose a certain condition, without giving any explanation, but it belongs to my part of the performance. What I require is this:—one of you must remain entirely with me from the moment I pitch the stakes to which this net is to be fastened; and the one who so remains with me, must do just as I direct him in the arrangement of the net; because I must seize a particular time of the evening, in regard to the twilight, to unroll it."

"Well—that can be managed without difficulty," said the man who had been addressed as Mike. "It is always my business to collect the coppers after the exhibition; and I take no share in the performances. So I can remain with you—and whatever you tell me to do, shall be done."

"So far, so good," exclaimed Morcar. "And now, as it is pretty nearly time to set off, we had better begin to dress."

"Are *you* going to dress too?" demanded Mike, with mingled satisfaction and astonishment.

"Only just to disguise myself a bit," answered Morcar, taking a huge red wig from one pocket and a hideous mask from another; "because there's often a prejudice amongst people—especially young ones—against gipsies."

"So there is," observed Mike. "Besides, it's much better to go in character, as they say."

The jugglers were now in high spirits; and they speedily addressed themselves to the process of changing their common apparel for the professional costume.

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

THE PERFORMANCE.

The evening was serene and beautiful.

A few thin vapours floated lazily through the blue arch, the hue of which was deliciously mellowed by the golden light of the sun.

It was about seven o'clock; and the principal inmates of Ravensworth Hall were collected in the drawing-room.

Adeline, pale, emaciated, and care-worn, was reclining upon the sofa; and near her sate Eliza Sydney.

The nurse was walking up and down the apartment, with the infant heir in her arms.

Gilbert Vernon was standing outside the window, on a spacious balcony, around which were placed green wooden boxes and garden-pots containing shrubs and early flowers.

"The evening is very beautiful," said Eliza, in a low tone, to Adeline: "will you not walk with me through the Park? The nurse shall accompany us and the child can be well wrapped up. But, indeed, there are no dangers to fear—for the earth is parched with the heat of the day."

"I feel incapable of any energy," answered Adeline, mournfully—very mournfully. "Never have my spirits been so depressed as they are this evening. Methinks that a presentiment of evil near at hand, weighs upon my soul. Oh! when will this dread state of suspense terminate? For five long weeks has it now lasted——"

"Hush! lady—speak lower!" interrupted Eliza. "Mr. Vernon might suddenly enter from the balcony."

"Ah! my dear friend," returned Adeline; "do I not suffer a fearful penalty for my crimes? But human nature cannot endure this doubt—this appalling uncertainty any longer! What does he mean? what can be his plans?"

"Would that we were indeed able to read them!" said Eliza, earnestly. "But the term of this strange drama must speedily arrive," she continued, sinking her voice to a scarcely audible whisper, as she leant over the unhappy lady whom she thus addressed. "Vernon does not remain here from motives of pleasure: he has not abandoned his projects."

"Yet wherefore should he appear so affectionate towards the child?" asked Adeline. "When he first took my sweet Ferdinand in his arms, oh! how I trembled lest he should strangle him in his embrace; and had not a look from you reassured me, I should have shrieked with terror! But now I scarcely entertain a fear when I see my brother-in-law fondle my child. Tell me, dear friend—how must I account for this altered state of feelings?"

"Habit has taught you to subdue your alarms in this respect," replied Eliza Sydney. "Your brother-in-law has gradually devoted more and more of his attention to your dear Ferdinand; and as he never seeks to take him—nor even to approach him—save with your consent, you are to some extent thrown off your guard. Then, as a mother, you are naturally inclined to think better of that man since he has thus seemed to manifest an affection for his nephew. But, be not deceived, lady—his soul is deep and designing! Think you that he cares for a babe not yet ten weeks old? Oh! no—it is not probable! And when he talks in a hypocritical tone of his lamented brother's child—and expresses those apparently earnest hopes that the heir of Ravensworth may eventually prove an honour to the noble house to which he belongs, and to the ancient name which he bears,—ah! be not deceived by him, lady—I implore you: he means nothing that is good—he is playing a part, the true object of which I cannot fathom!"

"Oh! think not that I am deceived by him, dear friend," answered Lady Ravensworth: "think not that my suspicions relative to him are hushed. No—no: else wherefore should I complain of this cruel suspense? There are times, indeed, when I could throw myself at his feet—implore him to quit these walls—and beg upon my knees for mercy towards my child! Does this show that I have forgotten all those circumstances which have led us to look upon him with an abhorrence that we have alike had so much difficulty to conceal?"

"I am aware of all you must suffer," answered Eliza, with a profound sigh; for she pitied—deeply pitied the wretched but criminal woman: "still it is for your child's sake that I have tutored you to play this game of hypocrisy,—that I have induced *you* and compelled *myself* to endure the society of one who is loathsome to us both,—and that we have even condescended to veil beneath smiles our consciousness of his character and atrocious designs. This has been the sum of our hypocrisy;—and how venial it is! And now that all my plans are so nearly matured—with the exception of the return of my messenger from Beyrout——"

"And on his return?" said Adeline, anxiously.

"Have I not assured you that the moment which places in my hands the conclusive proofs of Vernon's guilt—the only link wanting to complete the chain——"

Eliza Sydney was suddenly interrupted by an exclamation which came from the lips of Gilbert Vernon.

She rose, and hastened to the window.

"Here is a troop of poor fellows who doubtless endeavour to earn an honest penny by their agility and skill," said Vernon; "and in a country where mendicity is a crime, even such a livelihood as theirs is honourably gained."

Had not Eliza Sydney's curiosity been at the moment attracted by the strange appearance of the corps of mountebanks to whom Vernon alluded, and who were advancing towards the Hall, she would have been struck with surprise at the emanation of such generous sentiments from so cold-hearted, austere, and aristocratic a person as he.

But her attention was for the time directed towards six persons, five of whom were clad in the light grotesque manner in which mountebanks appear at country-fairs, and even not unfrequently in the streets of London. They wore flesh-coloured stockings, nankin breeches, and jackets of variegated colours, as if, in respect to this latter article of their apparel, they attempted to vie with the peculiar costume of world-renowned Harlequin. The sixth was dressed in a common garb, and wore a hideous mask.

One of the jugglers carried an enormous drum slung behind his back, and had a set of Pandean pipes tucked in his neckcloth beneath his chin; and another was laden with a wicker-basket. The man who was dressed in the common garb and wore the mask, bore a long rod with a net twisted round it, upon his shoulder. A fourth carried two stout stakes; and the remaining two were empty-handed, although it was evident by their dress that they took no small share in the performances which itinerant mountebanks and conjurors of this kind are in the habit of exhibiting.

We must observe, in respect to the man who wore the mask, and who, as the reader already knows, was the gipsy Morcar, that beneath his ample straw hat, and over the edges of the mask, projected huge bushes of reddish-yellow hair, which seemed as if they had once belonged to a door-mat. He walked, a little apart from the others, in company with the man who carried the stakes.

"These conjurors evidently contemplate an exhibition upon the lawn before the windows," said Eliza Sydney, as the men drew nearer to the house. "I will send them out some money and request them to retire, as such performances are not suitable to a spot where mourning is still worn for the deceased lord."

"That were a pity, Mrs. Beaufort," returned Vernon. "These poor creatures have their little feelings as well as performers on the boards of our national theatres; and I am sure you possess too good a heart to wound them. No—let them remain; and if you can induce her ladyship to witness their sports from the balcony, she might be cheered for the moment."

"I should be sorry to wound the feelings of any living being who did not injure me," answered Eliza: "but——"

"Nay, my dear Mrs. Beaufort," interrupted Vernon, "do not refuse me this request. You cannot think that I am boy enough to care for the tricks of these jugglers; but I am well aware—setting aside any consideration on their behalf—that the most trivial and frivolous amusement will often produce a favourable impression upon the spirits. Let Lady Ravensworth come to the window."

Eliza scarcely knew how to offer any farther objection: she was, however, about to make some remark in answer to Mr. Vernon, when the point at issue was settled by that gentleman beckoning the foremost mountebank to advance under the window.

"Now, my good fellow," he exclaimed, looking over the parapet of the balcony, and tossing the man a sovereign, "let us see how well you can amuse us."

"Thank'ee, sir," cried the man, receiving the money in his straw-hat. "We'll do our best, you may depend upon it, sir."

He then returned to his companions, who had stationed themselves at a short distance on the lawn.

The mountebanks forthwith commenced their preparations.

The wicker-basket was placed upon the ground; and its contents were speedily disposed in a manner to suit the performances. A long rope was tied to two trees of about twenty yards' distance from each other: some common blue plates and a wash-hand basin were laid upon the grass; and then a number of small yellow balls were ranged in a line, and at short intervals apart, across the lawn.

While some of the men were making these arrangements, Morcar and his companion advanced to within a short distance of the balcony, and drove the two stakes firmly into the ground. To the tops of these stakes they fastened the ends of the iron rod, without however unrolling the net, but in such a manner that the rod itself would revolve with ease, and the entire net might be drawn out in a moment. They then took their posts each by one of the stakes, and there remained motionless.

In the meantime the man with the drum and the mouth-organ had commenced his instrumental harmony, such as it was; and, at the sound, the servants of the Hall flocked from their offices to the steps of the entrance, well pleased to observe that the monotony of their existence in a dwelling where no company was now received, was about to be broken by even the performances of a few wandering mountebanks.

In the drawing-room, Vernon was still stationed at the balcony; and the nurse, holding the sleeping child in her arms, had approached the open window outside of which Vernon was thus standing.

Eliza Sydney had returned to the side of Lady Ravensworth, to whom she mentioned the presence of the mountebanks and the encouragement which they had received from Mr. Vernon.

"Does he suppose that my spirits can possibly be elevated by a buffoonery of this nature?" said Adeline, her lip curling with contemptuous hauteur. "Besides, such a proceeding is most indecent—most indelicate—on the very spot where a funeral so lately passed!"

"And yet it suits not our present purpose to anger him," returned Eliza.

Lady Ravensworth was about to reply, when Quentin entered the room and placed a letter in Eliza's hands.

The valet then withdrew.

Eliza immediately recognised the writing of the faithful Filippo, and opened it in haste.

Her countenance evinced signs of satisfaction as she perused its contents; but ere she reached the end, she sighed deeply.

"You have evil tidings there," whispered Lady Ravensworth, who had attentively watched her friend's countenance. "And yet, methought you smiled at first."

"I smiled," answered Eliza, also in a low tone, "because I was rejoiced to find that the only link wanting to complete the chain of evidence against that villain"—glancing towards the window as she thus spoke—"is now complete;—and to-morrow——"

"Ah! your messenger is returned from Beyrout?" said Adeline, joyfully. "Then wherefore seem sorrowful?"

"Because the tidings which I now receive confirms the terrible suspicion that your husband was indeed murdered,—coldly—systematically—methodically murdered,—by his own brother!" answered Eliza. "Alas! for the honour of human nature that such things should be!"

Adeline became red as scarlet, and a profound sigh escaped her bosom;—for was she not also a disgrace to human nature?

Eliza forgot at the moment that her words were calculated to wound the already deeply lacerated heart of Lady Ravensworth;—else not for a moment—criminal as Adeline was—would those words have escaped her tongue.

Neither did she perceive the acute emotions which she had awakened; for she was intent upon the reflections excited by the arrival

of Filippo's letter.

In the meantime the sports upon the lawn had commenced.

One of the mountebanks ascended to the tightrope, and performed many curious evolutions, much to the amusement not only of the servants assembled upon the steps at the entrance, but even of the nurse at the window.

When the dancing was over, a second juggler balanced first a blue plate, and then the basin, on the point of a long stick—making them spin rapidly round, to the especial delight of the female servants. The nurse, too, was so very much amused that she crossed the threshold of the window, and advanced a little upon the balcony, the better to view the performance.

Vernon seemed intent upon the sports, and did not appear to notice that the ladies were not spectators also. But perhaps he might have thought that they were at another window.

And all this while Morcar, with his mask and bushy yellow hair, and his assistant Mike, were stationed each by one of the stakes to which the net was fixed.

From time to time Vernon had looked over the balcony at these two men, whose presence there seemed somewhat to annoy him: and when the exhibition of the plates and basin was over, he leant forward, exclaiming, "Well, my good fellows, when does your turn come? and what are you going to do with that iron pole and net?"

"You shall see presently, sir," replied Morcar. "It will be the best trick of the whole—as I know you'll admit."

"It is all right," thought Vernon to himself. "These fellows know not the motive for which they were hired; and therefore the fact of their placing the net there can only be a coincidence. However, it is far enough away from the flag-stones to suit my purpose."

Such were the rapid reflections which passed through Vernon's brain.

And had searching eyes been fixed upon his countenance now, they would have observed that although he seemed to watch the sports with a zest passing strange in a man of his years, there were far more important matters agitating in his brain;—for his face was pale—his lips quivered from time to time—and, even while his head remained stationary as if he were looking straight towards the lawn, his eyes were wild and wandering.

Amidst the servants on the steps of the entrance stood the Resurrection Man, apparently one of the most enthusiastic admirers of the sport. But *he*—as well as his employer in the balcony—was somewhat annoyed when he beheld the iron rod and the net which was rolled round it, placed upon the stakes on the verge of the lawn almost beneath the open window of the drawing-room. Another circumstance likewise engaged his attention. This was that he had only seen five jugglers when he had first hired them for the performances; whereas there were now six present. He, however, consoled himself with the idea that the man in the mask and his companion had taken their station so near the balcony, simply because their exhibition, whatever it was, should be better viewed by the inmates of the drawing-room; and relative to the presence of the sixth juggler, he said to himself upon second thoughts, "Well, after all, the troop might have been joined by another comrade since I saw them last night."

But to continue the thread of our narrative.

The last beams of the setting sun were flickering faintly in the western horizon, when the jugglers commenced what may be termed the third act of their performances—namely, the athletic exercises. They had wrestling matches, took extraordinary leaps, and performed various other feats of strength and skill. These being over, one of the band threw himself back, supporting himself with his hands on the ground, and in this position ran on all fours along the line of yellow balls, picking them up with his mouth, one after the other, with astonishing rapidity.

This feat elicited a burst of applause from the servants on the steps; and the nurse, still holding the child in her arms, advanced close up to the parapet of the balcony.

The sun had already set when that last feat began: the twilight was, however, sufficiently strong to permit the spectators to obtain a good view of the performance. But the jugglers now paused for a few minutes to rest themselves; and during that interval the duskiness sensibly increased.

"I wonder what these men are going to do with their iron pole and net," observed Vernon. "Surely their turn must have come now?"

The nurse looked over the parapet to see whether the man in the mask and his companion were still stationed near their apparatus, the use of which puzzled her amazingly.

At that moment two of the jugglers who had advanced from the lawn towards the flag-stones that skirted the wall of the mansion, threw each a detonating-ball upon the pavement.

The explosion was loud—abrupt—startling; and a volume of dense smoke instantly burst as it were from the ground, enveloping the balcony, and pouring even into the drawing-room through the open window.

And, almost at the same instant that the explosion took place, a terrible scream pierced the air; and this was followed by agonising shrieks, mingled with frantic cries of "The child! the child!"

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated Eliza Sydney, rushing from her seat near Lady Adeline to the window.

But she was met by the nurse, who darted in from the balcony, clasping her hands together, and still screaming wildly—"The child! the child!"

"Holy God!" cried Vernon, also rushing into the room: "the infant has fallen over! Oh! my nephew—my dear nephew!"

And he sank upon a chair, as if overcome by his grief.

"Murderer!—vile—detestable assassin!" exclaimed Eliza Sydney: "this was no accident!"

"Madam," cried Vernon, starting from his seat, "recall those words—or I will not answer for my passion!"

"No—I dare you—monster, murderer that you are!" ejaculated Eliza, as she forced the nurse, who was raving violently, to a sofa.

At that moment shouts of delight were heard from below; and loud cries of "Saved! saved!" reached all the inmates of the drawing-room—save Lady Ravensworth, who had fainted the instant the first wild scream of the nurse had struck her ears like a death-omen.

"Saved! saved!" repeated the nurse, catching at the joyous sound, and now becoming hysterical with the effects of the revulsion of emotions thereby produced.

"Oh! if it be indeed true!" cried Eliza Sydney, darting towards the balcony; but it was now too dark to distinguish any thing that was passing below.

Her suspense did not, however, endure many moments longer; for the door of the drawing-room was suddenly thrown open, and the man in the mask rushed in, crying "Saved! saved!"

Eliza Sydney hastened to meet him, and received the child in her arms.

The little innocent was indeed unhurt, to all appearance, but was crying bitterly.

"Thank God! thank God!" exclaimed Eliza, fervently, as she pressed the child to her bosom.

Quentin now made his appearance with lights: and several of the servants had followed him as far as the door of the room.

"Call the lady's-maid, Quentin, for your mistress," said Eliza, hastily: "she has fainted! Bring water—vinegar—perfume;—I dare not part with the child!"

The lady's-maid was close by; and, hastening into the room, she devoted the necessary attentions to Adeline, who, soon recovering, opened her eyes, gazed wildly around, and then exclaimed in a frantic tone, "My child! my child!"

"He is safe—he is unharmed, dear lady," said Eliza Sydney, advancing towards the sofa with the babe in her arms.

"Give him to me—to me only,—for I am his mother—and I will protect him!" cried Adeline in a shrieking tone: then, receiving the infant from her friend, she clasped it with frantic fondness to her bosom.

In the meantime—although this scene occupied but a few minutes—Gilbert Vernon had sunk upon a chair, like one intoxicated. A film came over his eyes—his brain reeled—and he could not accurately distinguish what was passing around him. Amidst the sudden chaos into which his ideas were plunged, one thought was alone clear—defined—and unobscured; and this was that the child was saved!

The moment Eliza Sidney had consigned the heir of Ravensworth to the arms of his mother, she said in a hasty whisper to Quentin, "Secure Anthony Tidkins without delay, and order the carriage immediately."

The valet quitted the room; and Eliza then advanced towards Gilbert Vernon, exclaiming in a loud tone, "Arrest this villain—hold him—keep him safely, till the officers of justice can be sent for. He murdered his brother; and ere now he has sought to murder that innocent babe!"

As these words, uttered with terrible emphasis, fell upon the ears of the servants, a cry of horror and execration burst from their lips; and Vernon, starting up, exclaimed, "Who accuses me? Wretches—you dare not say that I did such deeds!"

But the next moment he was pinioned by a pair of powerful arms; for Morcar, who had hastily thrown off his mask and wig, was prepared to secure the guilty man.

"Release me, villain!" cried Vernon, struggling furiously—but without avail; for some of the male domestics of the household now assisted the gipsy to retain him. "You shall suffer for this outrage—you shall pay dearly for your conduct! Who dares accuse me of an attempt on that child's life?"

"I!" answered Eliza Sydney, boldly.

"And I also!" echoed Morcar.

"Yes—and I too, murderous wretch!" exclaimed the nurse, stepping forward.

"This is absurd—ridiculous!" cried Vernon, ceasing to struggle, and sinking back into the chair. "You all know how I loved my nephew—how I fondled the dear infant; and you cannot—no—you cannot suppose——"

"I recollect it all now!" ejaculated the nurse, vehemently. "The sudden explosion of those fireworks frightened me dreadfully, and I loosened my hold upon the child: but—if I was standing before my God, I could declare with truth that the babe was at that very same moment pushed from my arms!—Oh! yes—I remember it all now!"

A second burst of indignation on the part of the servants struck terror to the heart of the guilty wretch, who writhed upon his chair; while the workings of his ashy pale countenance—the convulsive movements of his lips—and the wild rolling of his eyes, were terrible—terrible!

Nevertheless he mustered up courage sufficient to exclaim, "That woman speaks falsely! She dropped the child—and she would throw the blame on me!"

"She speaks truly,—vile—black-hearted man!" cried Eliza. "And now, learn that the sole object of my presence in this mansion has been to frustrate your diabolical plots, which for weeks have been known to me!"

"You!" said Vernon, quailing beneath the indignant glance of abhorrence which the royal widow fixed upon him.

"Yes," she continued: "not only have I remained here to frustrate your plots—which, alas! would have succeeded in destroying the child, had not some strange accident, as yet unaccounted for, at least to me, saved the innocent babe from being dashed to pieces against the stones beneath the balcony;—but I have also adopted those measures which will bring all your guilt most terribly home to you! Treacherous—infamous man, I denounce you as the murderer of your brother!"

"'Tis false—false as hell!" cried Vernon.

"It is, alas! too true," returned Eliza. "I have damning proofs against you!"

"Again I declare it is false!" said Gilbert, violently.

"Let us see," resumed Eliza. "You profess to have arrived from the East a few weeks ago; and you have been in England since December or January last! Lady Ravensworth heard your voice in the ruined lodge——"

"Ridiculous!—a mere coincidence—a false impression!" exclaimed Vernon.

"And your landlady in Stamford Street can prove that you lodged with her for several months," added Eliza.

"Monster!" ejaculated one of the servants who had hold upon him.

"All this proves nothing," cried Vernon, furiously.

"But the tobacco which you sent your brother was poisoned," said Eliza, with bitter emphasis.

"'Tis false! It has been submitted to tests: the surgeon who attended my brother had it analysed. All the inmates of the household can speak to this fact."

"And I also have had it analysed," returned Eliza; "and by a native of the East! Fire alone can develope its poisonous qualities; and the ablest chemists in England shall shortly test it by means of that process!"

"Even were it the rankest poison known, you cannot show that I sent it to my brother. I deny the charge—I scorn the imputation!"

cried Gilbert Vernon.

"You will speak in a tone of diminished confidence," said Eliza, calmly, "when you hear that I despatched a messenger to Beyrout—that the very place where you purchased the tobacco in that town has been discovered—that the merchant who shipped it for you has made an affidavit before the British Consul at Beyrout to this effect—and that the precise time when you embarked from Beyrout for England has also been ascertained. Nay, more—the letters sent to your address in that town, announcing the death of your brother, reached their destination long after you had left, and were never opened—nor even seen by you! Yet you affected to return to England in consequence of the receipt of those letters."

"And who are you, madam, that have taken such pains to collect these particulars, which you are pleased to call evidence against me?" demanded Vernon. "Is the scion of a noble race to be maligned—outraged—accused of atrocious crimes by an unknown but meddling woman?"

"Again you speak at random," answered Eliza; "for did I choose to proclaim my title and my rank, you would admit that not even the owners of the proud name of Ravensworth possess a dignity so exalted as mine. Let me, however, return to the sad subject of my discourse: let me convince you that the evidence of your crime is so overwhelming that penitence and prayer would become you far more than obstinacy, and haughty but vain denial! For if there be farther proofs of your guilt required, seek them for yourself in those circumstances which induced you to take into your service Anthony Tidkins, the Resurrection Man!"

Vernon shuddered fearfully as these words fell upon his ears; for it seemed as if a sledge-hammer had been suddenly struck upon his brain.

"And if farther proofs are really wanting, lady," said Morcar, "it is for me to supply them. This morning I was concealed in the ruins of a cottage at no great distance from the Hall; and there my ears were astounded with the damnable plot which this man and his accomplice had conceived against the life of the infant heir of Ravensworth. Why I did not immediately betray them—why I resolved on counteracting that plot, I will explain on a more fitting occasion. But let me inform you that it was by my device the child was saved; for the instant that the arms of the jugglers were raised to throw the detonating balls upon the ground, the net was unrolled—rapid as lightning—by my companion and myself; and the babe was caught in it as he fell!"

"Excellent man!" exclaimed Eliza Sydney, while a murmur of applause passed amongst the assembled servants: "who are you? what is your name?"

"I am one of that wandering tribe called *Gipsies*, madam," was the answer: "and my name is Morcar."

"Morcar!" echoed Eliza. "Oh! I have heard of you before—often—very often! The Prince of Montoni speaks of you as a friend; and your services to him in the Castelcicalan war have become a matter of history."

"Ah! is it possible?" cried Morcar, who for some moments had been studying Eliza's features with attention—for he had seen many portraits of her during his sojourn in Italy, and a light now broke in upon his memory: "is it possible that I am in the presence of her to whom that great Prince owes his life? Oh! madam, I also have to thank your Serene Highness—humble as I am—for the safety and freedom which I experienced after the defeat at Ossore."

And, as he spoke, Morcar abandoned his hold upon Gilbert Vernon, and fell upon his knees before the royal widow.

"Rise, Morcar," she hastily exclaimed: "I have renounced for ever the proud title of Grand-Duchess, and would henceforth be known as Eliza Sydney. Moreover, this is no time for homage—even were I disposed to receive it."

"The knee of Morcar bows not to princes because they are princes," returned the gipsy, proudly and yet respectfully; "but to men or women who by their virtues deserve such homage."

At that moment a cry of alarm burst from the servants who had still retained their hold upon Vernon; and at the same instant this guilty man sprang furiously from their grasp—hurled them violently aside—and, ere a single hand could stop his mad career, rushed to the window.

Morcar bounded after him: but it was too late.

Gilbert Vernon had precipitated himself from the balcony!

The sound of his fall upon the pavement beneath,—and the sound of a human being thus falling has none other like it in the world,—struck upon every ear in that drawing-room.

Some of the servants hastened down stairs, and ran to the spot where Vernon lay.

They raised him—they bore him into the hall; but the moment the light of the lamps fell upon him, they perceived that all human aid was unavailing.

His skull was literally beaten in, and his hair was covered with his blood and brains!

Thus did he meet the fate which he had all along intended for his infant nephew.

Terrible suicide—but just retribution!

Half an hour after this dread event a travelling carriage rolled rapidly away from Ravensworth Hall.

In it were seated Adeline, with her child upon her lap, her lady's-maid, and the nurse.

The faithful Quentin, who had been induced by the persuasion of Eliza Sydney to remain in the service of Lady Ravensworth, occupied the dickey behind the vehicle.

Adeline was now on her way to Dover, whence she purposed to pass to the continent; her intention being, in pursuance of the advice of Eliza, to seek some retired spot in the south of France, where she might at least find tranquillity and repose, if not happiness, after the rude storms to which she had lately been so fearfully exposed.

Not that this self-expatriation was compulsory on account of Lady Ravensworth's *one dread crime*: it was nevertheless the project to which we have before alluded, and by which means Eliza had planned that Adeline should escape from the consequences of any revelation that might be made by the Resurrection Man in respect to the murdered Lydia Hutchinson.

But no such revelation was made, inasmuch as Tidkins had disappeared from the mansion ere Quentin received the order to secure him. For the instant the cry of "Saved! saved!" fell upon the ears of the Resurrection Man and conveyed to him the stunning fact that

the scheme had failed—that the child had escaped, in some marvellous manner, the fate intended for it,—then did he know full well that Ravensworth Hall was no longer the place for him. Reckless of what might become of Vernon, and unnoticed by the servants amidst the confusion which prevailed immediately after the fall of the child from the balcony, Tidkins slipped out of the mansion by the back way, and was speedily beyond the reach of danger.

Thus terminated that terrible series of incidents which constitute so strange an episode in the annals of the family of Ravensworth.

But ere Adeline took her departure from the mansion of that noble race whose name she bore, she had learnt, with surprise and joy, that the excellent friend whom heaven had sent her, and by whose touching language and admirable example her own heart had been brought to a state of sincere and profound penitence,—she had learnt, we say, that this noble-hearted woman was one whose brow a diadem had lately graced!

We may also observe that Morcar refused the liberal recompense which both Adeline and Eliza proffered him for the most important service which he had rendered in defeating Vernon's plan at a moment when, in spite of all the precautions and the various measures adopted by Eliza, it seemed to touch upon the verge of a success fatal to the existence of the infant heir.

Satisfied with the approval of his own conscience, and attended by the blessings of a mother whose child he had saved, Morcar returned with the jugglers to the *Three Kings*, where he completely satisfied them for the disappointment they had experienced in respect to the wondrous properties of his net; and on the ensuing morning he parted from them, to pursue his own way.

Eliza Sydney passed the night at Ravensworth Hall; and, after the Coroner's Inquest had sate next day upon the body of the suicide Vernon, she returned to her peaceful villa at Clapton.

CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

THE RESURRECTION MAN'S RETURN HOME.

As the Resurrection Man hurried through the fields, amidst the darkness of the night, he vented in horrible imprecations the rage he experienced at the failure of a scheme to which he had devoted so much time and trouble.

He knew that the blank acceptance which he had extorted from Vernon, and which he had looked upon as the safe guarantee of the speedy acquisition of three thousand pounds, was now but a valueless slip of paper; and he cursed himself for having been foolish enough to advance some two or three hundred guineas of his own money to furnish his late employer with the supplies necessary for his purposes.

But as a set-off against these disappointments he had one consolation—a consolation which to a less avaricious mind would have been more than commensurate with the losses that Tidkins deplored. He was possessed of Lady Ravensworth's valuable casket of jewels, which he had removed, a few days after he had obtained it in the manner already described, to his house in Globe Town.

And it was to this den that he was now repairing. He was as yet unacquainted with the fate of Gilbert Vernon; but, supposing it probable that justice might already have that individual in his grasp, he at once determined to provide for his own safety. Abandoning, therefore, all his long-nourished schemes of vengeance against the Prince of Montoni, the Rattlesnake, and Crankey Jem, Tidkins was now intent only on securing his treasure, and taking his departure for America with the least possible delay.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when the Resurrection Man, sinking with the fatigues of his long and circuitous journey round all the northern outskirts of London, arrived at his own house.

Wearied as he was, he wasted no time in snatching a temporary repose: a glass of spirits recruited his strength and invigorated his energies; and, with his bunch of keys in his hand, he repaired from his own chamber to the rooms on the ground-floor.

It will be remembered that on a former occasion,—on his return home, in the middle of the month of March, after his escape from the Middlesex House of Correction,—the Resurrection Man had perceived certain indications which led him to imagine that the step of an intruder had visited the ground-floor and the subterranean part of his house. His suspicions had fallen upon Banks; but an interview with this individual convinced him that those suspicions were unfounded; for although he did not question him point-blank upon the subject, yet his penetration was such, that he could judge of the real truth by the undertaker's manner.

Since that period Tidkins had visited his house in Globe Town on several occasions—indeed, as often as he could possibly get away from Ravensworth Hall for the greater portion of a day; and, perceiving no farther indications of the intrusion of a stranger, he became confirmed in the belief which had succeeded his first suspicions, and which was that he had been influenced by groundless alarms.

But now, the moment he put the key into the lock of the door in the alley, he uttered a terrible imprecation—for the key would not turn, and there was evidently something in the lock!

Hastily picking the lock with one of those wire-instruments which are used for the purpose by burglars, he extracted from it a piece of a key which had broken in the wards.

Fearful was now the rage of the Resurrection Man; and when he had succeeded in opening the door, he precipitated himself madly into that department of his abode.

But what pen can describe his savage fury, when, upon lighting a lantern, he saw the trap raised, and the brick removed from the place in the chimney where it covered the secret means of raising the hearth-stone?

Plunging desperately down into the subterranean, at the risk of breaking his neck, Tidkins felt like one on whose eyes a hideous spectre suddenly bursts, when he beheld the door of a cell—the very cell in which his treasure was concealed—standing wide open!

Staggering now, as a drunken man—and no longer rushing wildly along,—but dragging himself painfully,—Tidkins reached that cell.

His worst fears were confirmed: the stone in the centre was removed from its place;—and his treasure was gone!

Yes:—money-bags and jewel-casket—the produce of heaven only knows how much atrocity and blackest crime—had disappeared.

This was the second time that his hoarded wealth was snatched from him.

Then did that man—so energetic in the ways of turpitude, so strong in the stormy paths of guilt,—then did he sink down, with a hollow groan, upon the cold floor of the cell.

For a few minutes he lay like one deprived of sense and feeling, the only indications of life being the violent clenching of his fists, and the demoniac workings of his cadaverous countenance.

Cadaverous!—never did the face of a wretched being in the agonies of strangulation by hanging, present so appalling—so hideous an appearance!

But in a short time the Resurrection Man started up with a savage howl and a terrible imprecation: his energies—prostrated for a period—revived; and his first idea, when arousing from that torpor, was vengeance—a fearful vengeance upon the plunderer.

But who was that plunderer? whose hand had suddenly beggared him?

His suspicions instantly fixed themselves upon two persons—the only two of his accomplices who were acquainted with the

mysteries of the subterranean.

These were Banks and the Buffer.

He was about to turn from the cell, and repair forthwith—even at that hour—to the dwelling of the undertaker, when his eyes suddenly fell upon some letters scrawled in chalk upon the pavement, and which the position of the lantern had hitherto prevented him from observing.

He stooped down, and read the words—"JAMES CUFFIN."

The mystery was solved: his mortal enemy, Crankey Jem, had robbed him of his treasure!

Dark—terribly ominous and foreboding—was now the cloud which overspread the countenance of the Resurrection Man.

"Had I ten times the wealth I have lost," he muttered to himself, with a hyena-like growl, "I would not quit this country till I had wreaked my vengeance upon that man! But this is now no place for me: he has tracked me here—he may set the traps upon me. Let us see if the Bully Grand cannot discover his lurking hole."

With these words,—and now displaying that outward calmness which often covers the most intensely concentrated rage,—the Resurrection Man quitted the subterranean, carefully securing the doors behind him.

He purposely broke a key in the lock of the door leading into the dark alley, so as to prevent the intrusion of any of the neighbours, should their curiosity tempt them to visit the place; for he made up his mind not to return thither again so long as Jem Cuffin was alive and able to betray him.

Having provided himself with a few necessaries, he closed the up-stairs rooms, and then took his departure.

He bent his steps towards the house of the undertaker in Globe Lane; and, knocking him up, obtained admittance and a bed.

When he awoke from a sound sleep, into which sheer fatigue plunged him in spite of the unpleasant nature of his thoughts, it was broad-day-light.

He immediately rose and despatched one of Banks's boys for the morning newspaper; and from its columns he learnt the fate of the Honourable Gilbert Vernon.

"Better so than that he should have remained alive perhaps to repent, as these sentimental humbugs in high life usually do, and then blab against me," murmured Tidkins to himself. "The whole business at the Hall is evidently wrapped in considerable mystery; and there I hope it will remain. But now let me devote myself heart and soul to my search after that scoundrel Crankey Jem."

CHAPTER CCXL.

A NEW EPOCH.

Twenty months had elapsed since the events just related.

It was now the end of January, 1843.

Haply the reader may begin to imagine that our subject is well-nigh exhausted—that the mysteries of London are nearly all unveiled?

He errs; for London is a city containing such a variety of strange institutions, private as well as public, and presenting so many remarkable phases to the contemplation of the acute observer, that the writer who is resolved to avail himself fully of the heterogeneous materials thus supplied him, cannot readily lack food for comment and narrative.

The dwellers in the country, and even the inhabitants of the great provincial cities and manufacturing towns, can form no just estimate of the wondrous features of the sovereign metropolis by the local scenes with which they are familiar.

Who can judge of the splendour of the West End of London by even the most fashionable quarters of Edinburgh or Dublin?

Who can conceive the amount of revolting squalor and hideous penury existing in the poor districts of London, by a knowledge of the worst portions of Liverpool or Manchester?

Who can form a conjecture of the dreadful immorality and shocking vice of the low neighbourhoods of London, judging by the scenes presented to view in the great mining or manufacturing counties?

No:—for all that is most gorgeous and beautiful, as well as all that is most filthy and revolting,—all that is best of talent, or most degraded of ignorance,—all that is most admirable for virtue, or most detestable for crime,—all that is most refined in elegance, or most strange in barbarism,—all, all these wondrous phases are to be found, greatest in glory, or lowest in infamy, in the imperial city of the British Isles!

And shall we be charged with vanity, if we declare that never until now has the veil been so rudely torn aside, nor the corruptions of London been so boldly laid bare?

But, in undertaking this work, we were determined at the outset to be daunted by no fear of offending the high and the powerful: we were resolved to misrepresent nothing for the purpose of securing to ourselves the favour of those whom so many sycophants delight to bespatter with their sickly praises.

In the same independent spirit do we now pursue our narrative.

On the left-hand side of Brydges Street, as you proceed from the Strand towards Russell Street, Covent Garden, you may perceive a lamp projecting over the door of an establishment which, viewed externally, appears to be a modest eating-house; but which in reality is one of the most remarkable places of nocturnal entertainment in London.

Upon the lamp alluded to are painted these words——"THE PARADISE."

It was past midnight, towards the end of January, 1843, when two gentlemen, wearing fashionable Taglioni coats over their elegant attire, and impregnating the fine frosty air with the vapour of their cigars, strolled into this establishment.

Proceeding down a passage, they pushed open a door with a painted ground-glass window, and entered a spacious supper-room.

This apartment was lofty, handsomely fitted up, well furnished, and provided with boxes containing little tables, like the coffee-room of an hotel.

A cheerful fire burnt in the grate, and the numerous lights suspended around the apartment were reflected in a handsome mirror over the mantel-piece.

Above the door leading into the room was a species of gallery, forming a grotto-like opening into a suite of upper apartments, which were reached by a flight of stairs leading from the passage just now mentioned.

All was gaiety and bustle both in the coffee-room below and the chambers above. Numerous suppers were in progress, the partakers thereof consisting of gentlemen of various descriptions and gay ladies of only one particular class. Oysters, lobsters, cold fowls, ham, and kidneys, constituted the principal edibles; while liquor flowed copiously and in all gradations of luxury, from humble porter in pewter pots to sparkling champagne in green bottles.

The male portion of the guests was composed of those various specimens of "gentlemen" who either turn night into day, or who make up for the toils of the day by the dissipated enjoyments of the night.

There was an attorney's clerk, who, having picked up a stray guinea in a manner for which he would not perhaps have liked to account, was doing the liberal, in the shape of oysters, stout, and hot brandy-and-water, to some fair Cyprian whom he had never seen before, and whom he would perhaps never see again, but with whom he was on the very best possible terms for the time being; the only trifling damper to *his* enjoyment being *her* constant anxiety lest "her friend" should happen to come in and catch her at supper with the said attorney's clerk.

There was a notorious black-leg, who was regaling a couple of frail ones with champagne and looking out for flats as well; while his accomplice was doing precisely the same in the next box,—both these respectable gentlemen affecting to be total strangers to each

other.

There also was a handsome young man, who, having just come of age, and stepped into the possession of a good property, was commencing his career of waste and extravagance at the Paradise. Proud of the nauseating flattery of the three or four abandoned women who had him in tow, he was literally throwing about his money in all directions, and staring around him with the vacant air of semi-intoxication, as much as to say, "Don't you think me a very fine dashing fellow indeed?"

In another box was an old man, who had reached the wrong side of sixty, but who was endeavouring to make a young girl of seventeen believe that he was but forty-four last birth-day,—a tale which she had too much tact to appear to doubt for a moment, as the antiquated beau supplied her with copious draughts of champagne to enable her to swallow the lie the more easily.

A little farther on was a dandified, stiff-necked, coxcomical individual of about six-and-twenty, sipping sherry with a fair friend, and endeavouring to render himself as polite and agreeable as possible. But, at every word he spoke, he drew out the edge of the table-cloth to precisely the extent of a yard between his fore-fingers and thumbs;—whereby it was easy to perceive that, although he assured his companion he was a captain in the Guards, he in reality exercised the less conspicuous but more active employment of a linen-draper's assistant.

Crowding near the fire were several Cyprians, who had not as yet obtained cavaliers, and were therefore hovering between the alternatives of "supper" or "no supper," the odds being, to all appearances, in favour of the latter. They did not, however, seem very unhappy while their fate, as to oysters and stout, was pending in the balance of suspense; but laughed, chattered, and larked amongst themselves; and then, by way of avoiding any thing like monotony or sameness in their recreation, two of them got up a pleasant little quarrel which terminated in a brisk exchange of blows and scratches.

Leaning over the side of the grotto-like gallery before referred to, were two individuals, whose appearance was something between that of dissipated actors and broken down tradesmen; and who were so disguised in liquor that their own mothers could scarcely have recognised them. Being most probably wearied of their own conversation, they diverted themselves by addressing their remarks to the people in the coffee-room below, whom they invited in the most condescending manner possible to "flare up," "mind their eyes," "form a union," and enact various other little social civilities of the same ambiguous nature.

Within the upper rooms were several gay ladies and jovially disposed gentlemen, all mainly intent upon the pleasures of eating or drinking, which occupations were however relieved by boisterous shouts of laughter and practical jokes of all kinds.

In justice to the proprietor of this establishment it must be observed that he conducted it upon as orderly a system as could be possibly maintained when the characters of his patrons and patronesses are taken into consideration; and the moment a disturbance occurred, either himself or his waiters adopted the most efficient means of putting an end to it, by bundling the offenders neck-and-crop into the street.

The two gentlemen who lounged, as before stated, into this celebrated night-house on the occasion alluded to, took possession of a vacant box, and throwing down their cigars, summoned the waiter.

"Yes, sir—coming, sir—*di*-rectly, sir," cried the chief functionary thus adjured, and who was busy at the moment in disputing the items of the score with the linen-draper's assistant:—but, when that little matter was duly settled to the satisfaction of the waiter and the discomfiture of the assistant aforesaid, he hurried up to the table occupied by the new comers.

"Well, what shall we have, Harborough?" asked one of the gentlemen, appealing to his companion.

"'Pon my honour, I don't care a rap," was the reply. "Order what you like, old fellow."

Thus encouraged, Mr. Chichester (for it was he) desired the waiter to bring "no end of oysters," and to follow with a cold fowl.

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir," said the domestic, hastily transferring a pepper-box from one side of the table to the other, and smoothing down the cloth: "please to order any thing to drink, gentlemen?"

"A bottle of champagne," returned Mr. Chichester; "and make haste about it."

"Yes, sir—this minute, sir:"—and the waiter glided away with that kind of shuffling, shambling motion which no living beings save waiters can ever accomplish.

When the provender was duly supplied, and the first glass of champagne was quaffed, Chichester leant across the table, and said to the baronet in a low tone of chuckling triumph, "Well, old chap, I don't think we can complain of Fortune during the last three or four months?"

"No—far from it," returned Sir Rupert Harborough. "But we musn't be idle because we happen to have a few five pound notes in our pocket. However, things will turn up, I dare say."

"Yes—if we look out for them," said Chichester; "but not unless. By the bye, who do you think I met this afternoon, as I was strolling along the Strand?"

"Can't say at all," replied the baronet. "Who?"

"Greenwood," added Chichester.

"The deuce you did! And how was he looking?"

"Not so slap-up as he used to be:—no jewellery—toggery not quite new—hat showing marks of the late rain—boots patched at the sides—and cotton gloves."

"The scoundrel! Do you remember how he served me about that bill which I accepted in Lord Tremordyn's name? Ah! shouldn't I like to pay him out for it!" said the baronet. "But how he has fallen within the last two years! Turned out of his seat for Rottenborough at the last election—obliged to give up his splendid house in Spring Gardens——"

"Well, well—we know all about that," interrupted Chichester, impatiently. "Don't speak so loud; but look into the next box—the one behind me, I mean—and tell me if you think that young fellow who is treating those girls to champagne would prove a flat or not."

The baronet glanced in the direction indicated; and immediately afterwards gave an affirmative nod of the head to his companion: then, leaning across the table he whispered, "To be sure he would; and I know who he is. It's young Egerton—the son of the great outfitter, who died a few years ago, leaving a large fortune in trust for this lad. I'll be bound to say he has just come of age, and is launching out."

"Does he know you?" inquired Chichester, also speaking in a subdued tone.

"I am almost certain he does not," replied the baronet. "But sit up—we will soon see what he is made of. I will touch him on the *cross* that we have got up together."

The two friends resumed the discussion of their supper, and in a few minutes began to converse with each other in a tone loud enough to be heard—and intended also to be so heard—in the next box.

"And so you really think the Haggerstone Pet will beat the Birmingham Bruiser, Mr. Chichester?" observed the baronet, in a tone of mere friendly courtesy.

"I am convinced of it, Sir Rupert, in spite of the odds," was the answer, delivered in the same punctilious manner. "Will you take my four ponies upon the Haggerstone Pet to five?"

"Done, Mr. Chichester!" cried the baronet: then drawing out a betting-book from the breast-pocket of his coat, he proceeded to enter the wager, saying aloud and in a measured tone as he did so, "Back Birmingham Bruiser against Haggerstone Pet—five ponies to four—Honourable—Arthur—Chichester. There it is!"

This ceremony was followed on the part of Mr. Chichester, who, having produced *his* book, wrote down the wager, saying, "Back Haggerstone Pet against Birmingham Bruiser—four ponies to five—Sir—Rupert—Harborough—baronet."

"And now," exclaimed the baronet, "before we put up our books, I'll give you another chance. Will you take three hundred to one that the favourites for the fight and the *Derby* don't both win?"

"Stop, Sir Rupert!" cried Chichester. "Let me first see how I stand for the *Derby*:"—then, as if speaking to himself, he continued, "Taken even five hundred, four horses against the field, from Lord Dunstable;—seven hundred to one against *Eagle-wing*, from the Honourable Colonel Cholmondeley;—betted even five hundred, *Skyscraper* to *Moonraker*, with the Honourable Augustus Smicksmack. Well, Sir Rupert," he exclaimed, raising his head from the contemplation of the leaf on which these sham bets were entered, "I don't mind if I take you."

"It's a bargain," said the baronet; and the wager was accordingly inscribed in the little books.

The two gentlemen then refreshed themselves each with another draught of champagne; and Sir Rupert Harborough, as he drank, glanced over the edge of the glass into the next box, to ascertain the effect produced upon Mr. Egerton by the previous little display of sporting spirit.

That effect was precisely the one which had been anticipated. Mr. Egerton was not so tipsy but that he was struck with the aristocratic names of the two gentlemen in the next box; and he raised his head from the bosom of a Cyprian to take a view of Sir Rupert Harborough, Bart., and the Honourable Arthur Chichester.

So satisfactory was the result of the survey—at least to himself—that he determined not only to show off a little of his own "dashing spirit," but also, if possible, form the acquaintance of the two gentlemen; for, like many young fellows similarly circumstanced, he was foolish enough to believe that the possession of money *must* prove a passport to the best society, if he could only obtain an opening.

Therefore, having greedily devoured every word of the dialogue just detailed, and taking it for granted that nothing in this world was ever more sincere than the betting of Sir Rupert Harborough, Bart., and the Honourable Arthur Chichester, Mr. Egerton exclaimed, "Beg pardon, gentlemen, for intruding upon you; but I think I heard you staking some heavy sums on the coming fight?"

"Really, sir," said the baronet, gravely, "I was not aware that any thing which took place between me and this gentleman could be overheard;—and yet, after all," he added with a gracious smile, "I do not know that there is the least harm in a little quiet bet."

"Harm, no—and be damned to it!" ejaculated Mr. Egerton. "All I can say is, that I admire sporting men—I honour them: they're an ornament to the country. What would Old England—hic—be without her Turf—her hunting—her prize-fighting? For my part, I have a great idea of this fight—a very great—hic—idea. But I back the Birmingham Bruiser—I do."

"So do I, sir," answered the baronet "My friend here, however—the Honourable Mr. Chichester—fancies the Haggerstone Pet."

"I heard him say so," returned the young man. "But, if he hasn't made up his book, I don't mind betting him five hundred pounds—hic—to his four—that's the odds, I believe——"

"Yes—those are the odds," observed Mr. Chichester, carelessly: then, taking out his book, he said, "But I am already so deep in this fight, that I really am afraid——however, if you wish it, I don't mind——"

"Is it a bet, then, sir?" asked the young gentleman, looking round the room with an air of importance, as if he were quite accustomed to the thing, although it was in reality the first wager he had ever laid in his life.

"It shall be so, if you choose, sir," returned Chichester: then, glancing in an inquiring manner towards his new acquaintance, he said with a bland smile, "I really beg your pardon—but I have not the pleasure——"

"Oh! truly—you don't know me from Adam!" interrupted the other. "But you shall know me, sir—and I hope we shall know each other better too—hic."

He then produced his card; and Mr. Chichester, of course, affected not to have been previously aware of the young gentleman's name.

The bet between them was duly recorded—by Mr. Chichester in his little book, and by Mr. Albert Egerton on the back of a love-letter.

The latter gentleman then called for his bill, and having glanced at the amount, paid it without a murmur, adding a munificent donation for the waiter. Having effected this arrangement, by means of which he got rid of the women who had fastened themselves on him, he coolly passed round to the table at which his new acquaintances were seated, and called for another bottle of champagne.

When it was brought, he was about to pay for it; but Sir Rupert interrupted him, saying, "No—that would be too bad. If you sit at our table, you are our guest;—and here's to a better acquaintance."

The bottle went round rapidly; and Mr. Egerton became quite enchanted with the agreeable manners of Sir Rupert Harborough, Bart., and the off-hand pleasant conversation of the Honourable Arthur Chichester.

It was now past one o'clock; and the baronet proposed to depart.

"Which way do you—hic—go?" inquired Egerton.

"Oh! westward, of course," returned Harborough, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, as much as to say that there could have been no doubt upon the subject. "Will you walk with us?"

"Certainly," was the answer: "and we will smoke a—hic—cigar as we go along."

The baronet called for the bill, paid it, and led the way from the room, followed by Egerton and Chichester, the former of whom insisted upon stopping at the bar to take some soda water, as he declared himself to be "half-seas—hic—over."

While the three gentlemen were engaged in partaking each of a bottle of the refreshing beverage, Sir Rupert felt his coat-sleeve gently pulled from behind; and, turning round, he perceived a man whom he had noticed in the coffee-room. Indeed, this was one of the black-legs already alluded to as having been engaged in treating Cyprians to supper and champagne.

The baronet instantly comprehended the nature of the business which this individual had to address him upon; and making him a significant sign, he said to Chichester, "Do you and Mr. Egerton go very slowly along the Strand; and I will follow you in a few minutes. I have a word to say to this gentleman."

Gentleman, indeed!—one of the most astounding knaves in London! But vice and roguery compel the haughty aristocrat to address the lowest ruffian as an equal.

Chichester took Egerton's arm, and sauntered out of the house, attended to the door by the obsequious master of the establishment—an honour shown only to those who drink champagne or claret.

"Well, sir, what is it?" asked the baronet, taking the black-leg aside, and speaking to him in a whisper.

"Only this, Sir Rupert," returned the man: "you've got that youngster in tow, and he'll turn out profitable, no doubt. Me and my pal, which is inside the room there, meant to have had him somehow or another; and we planted our vimen on him to-night:—but we thought he wasn't drunk enough; and then you come in and take him from us. Your friend has nailed him for a bet of five hundred, which he's safe to pay; so you must stand someot for my disappointment."

"I understand you, sir," said the baronet. "Here are twenty pounds: and if the bet be paid, you shall have thirty more. Will that do?"

"Thank'ee for the twenty, which is ready," answered the black-leg, consigning the notes to his pocket. "Now never mind the other thirty; but make the best you can out of that young chap; and all I ask in return is just a word or two about the mill that's coming off."

"I don't understand you," said the baronet, colouring.

"Come, come—that won't do," continued the man. "But don't be afeard—it's all in the way of business that I'm speaking. I see you and Mr. Chichester at a public about three weeks ago along with the Birmingham Bruiser; and therefore I knowed you was the friends which deposited the money for him, but which kept in the back-ground. So all I want is the office—just a single word: is the Bruiser to win or to make a cross of it?"

"Really, my good fellow——" stammered the baronet.

"Only just one word, so that I may know how to lay my money," persisted the black-leg, "and your secret is safe with me. For my own interest it will be so, if you tell me which way it is to be."

"Can I rely on you?" said Sir Rupert. "But of course I may, if you really mean to bet. Now keep the thing dark—and you may win plenty of money. The Bruiser is to *lose*: the odds are five to four on him now—and they will be seven to four in his favour before the fight comes off. No one suspects that it is to be a cross; and the reports of the Bruiser's training are glorious."

"Enough—and as mum as a dead man, Sir Rupert," whispered the black-leg.

He then returned to the supper-room; and the baronet hastened after his friends.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

CROCKFORD'S.

Sir Rupert Harborough, Mr. Albert Egerton, and Mr. Arthur Chichester were walking arm-in-arm, and smoking cigars, along the West Strand, about ten minutes after the little incident which closed the preceding chapter, when they were met by two tall and fashionable-looking gentlemen, who immediately recognised the baronet and Chichester.

Both parties stopped; and the two gentlemen were in due course introduced to Mr. Egerton as Lord Dunstable and the Honourable Colonel Cholmondeley.

By the significant tone and manner of the baronet,—a sort of freemasonry known only to the initiated,—both Dunstable and the Colonel were given to understand that a flat had been caught in the person of Mr. Albert Egerton; and they immediately received their cue as completely as if they had been prompted by half an hour's explanation.

"What have you been doing with yourselves, gentlemen, this evening?" inquired Dunstable, as they all now proceeded together through Trafalgar Square.

"My friends and myself have been supping at the Paradise," answered the baronet, carelessly.

Mr. Egerton drew himself up an inch higher immediately, although somewhat top-heavy with the champagne and cigars;—but he felt quite proud—quite another man, indeed—at being numbered amongst Sir Rupert Harborough's *friends*, and at walking familiarly in the company of a real lord.

"Cholmondeley and I were thinking of looking in at Crockford's before we encountered you," observed Dunstable, forgetting at the moment that himself and friend were proceeding in quite a contrary direction when the meeting alluded to took place. "What say you? shall we all go to Crockford's?"

Egerton noticed not the little oversight. The word "Crockford's" perfectly electrified him. He had often passed by the great pandemonium in St. James's Street, and looked with wistful eyes at its portals—marvelling whether they would ever unfold to give admission to him; and now that there seemed a scintillation of a chance of that golden wish, which he had so often shadowed forth, being substantially gratified, he could scarcely believe that he was in truth Albert Egerton, the son of an outfitter, and having a very respectable widowed aunt engaged in the haberdashery line on Finsbury Pavement;—but it appeared as if he had suddenly received a transfusion of that aristocracy in whose company he found himself.

Already did he make up his mind to cut the good old aunt and the half-dozen of fair cousins—her daughters—for ever:—already did he vow never to be seen east of Temple Bar again. But then he thought how pleasant it would be to drop in at Finsbury Pavement on some Sunday—just at the hour of dinner, which he could make his lunch—and then astound his relatives with the mention of his aristocratic acquaintances,—no, his *friends*,—Lord Dunstable, Sir Rupert Harborough, the Honourable Colonel Cholmondeley, and the Honourable Arthur Chichester!

And what glorious names, too:—nothing plebeian about them—nothing lower than an Honourable!

Had he known how cheaply Mr. Chichester held his titular decoration, Albert Egerton would have perhaps assumed one himself: but he did not entertain the least suspicion concerning the matter, and therefore envied the pawnbroker's son almost as much as either of the others.

But to return.

Lord Dunstable had said, "Shall we all go to Crockford's?"

Deep was the suspense of Mr. Egerton until Sir Rupert Harborough replied, "With much pleasure. It would be the very thing to teach our young friend Egerton here a little of life."

"But I am not a member" he murmured, in a disconsolate tone.

"*We* are all members, however," said Lord Dunstable; "and can pass you in with ease. Let me and Harborough take charge of you."

This arrangement was rendered necessary by the fact that Mr. Chichester was *not* a member of Crockford's, and would, therefore, require to be introduced by Colonel Cholmondeley. Dunstable, Harborough, and Egerton accordingly walked on together; while the Colonel and Chichester followed at some little distance, as it was not thought worth while to allow the young flat to perceive that the Honourable Arthur Chichester must be smuggled in, as it were, as well as himself.

In this manner the two parties repaired to the celebrated—or rather notorious—Saint James's Club; and Egerton's wildest dream was realized—the acmé of his ambition was reached—the portals of Crockford's were darkened by his plebeian shadow!

Although excited by wine and by the novelty of his situation, he nevertheless maintained his self-possession so far as to avoid any display of vulgar wonderment at the brilliant scene upon which he now entered. Leaning on the arms of Lord Dunstable and Sir Rupert Harborough, he passed through the marble hall, and was conducted to the coffee-room on the right-hand side.

There they waited for a few minutes until Cholmondeley and Chichester joined them; and Egerton had leisure to admire the superb pier-glasses, the magnificent chandeliers, the handsome side-boards, the costly plate, and the other features of that gorgeous apartment.

When the Colonel and Chichester made their appearance, the party proceeded to the supper-room. There Egerton's eyes were

completely dazzled by the brilliant looking-glasses, all set in splendid frames with curious designs—the crystal chandeliers—the elegant sconces—the superb mouldings—the massive plate—and the immense quantities of cut glasses and decanters. The curtains were of the richest damask silk; the walls were hung with choice pictures; and the whole magic scene was brilliantly lighted up with innumerable wax candles, the lustre of which was reflected in the immense mirrors. In a word, the voluptuousness and luxury of that apartment surpassed any thing of the kind that young Egerton had ever before witnessed.

Seated near one of the fire-places in conversation with an elderly gentleman, was an old man, somewhat inclined to stoutness, and very slovenly in his costume. His clothes were good; but they appeared to have been tossed upon him with a pitch-fork. His coat hung in large loose wrinkles over his rounded shoulders: his trousers appeared to hitch up about the thighs, as if through some defect in their cut; two or three of his waistcoat buttons had escaped from their holes, or else had not been fastened in them at all; his cravat was limp; and his shirt-frill was tumbled. His countenance was pale and sickly, and totally inexpressive of that natural astuteness and sharpness which had raised him from the most obscure position to be the companion of the noblest peers in the realm. His eyes were of that lack-lustre species which usually predicate mental dullness and moral feebleness, but which was at variance with the general rule in this instance. In a word, his entire appearance bespoke an individual whose health was wasted by long vigils and the want of needful repose and rest.

When Lord Dunstable's party entered the room, there were already three or four groups occupying supper-tables, on which the French dishes, prepared in Ude's best style steamed, with delicious odour.

"Will you take supper, Mr. Egerton?" inquired Lord Dunstable.

"No, I thank you, my lord," was the reply. "I believe Sir Rupert Harborough informed you that we had already been feeding together."

It was not true that Egerton had supped with the baronet and Chichester, as the reader knows; but Sir Rupert had already said so of his own accord, and Mr. Egerton was not the young man to contradict a statement which seemed to place him upon a certain degree of intimacy with the aforesaid baronet.

"Vot, no supper, my lord?" cried the stout gentleman, rising from his seat near the fire, and accosting Dunstable. "Yes—your lordship and your lordship's friends vill do that honour to Mosseer Ude's good things."

"No, I thank you," said Dunstable, coolly: "we shall not take any supper. We mean to step into the next room and amuse ourselves for an hour or so—eh, Mr. Egerton?"

And a significant glance, rapid as lightning, from Lord Dunstable's eyes, conveyed his meaning to the stout elderly gentleman with the sickly face.

"Wery good, my lord. I'll send some nice cool claret in; and the groom-porters is there. Valk that vay, my lord: valk that vay, gentlemen;—valk that vay, sir."

These last words were addressed to Egerton, and were accompanied by a very low bow.

Dunstable took the young man's arm, and led him into the next apartment, where there was a French hazard table.

"Who is the good-natured old gentleman that spoke so very politely, my lord?" inquired Egerton, in a whisper, when they had passed from the supper-room.

"That good-natured old gentleman!" cried Dunstable, aloud, and bursting out into a fit of laughter so hearty that the tears ran down his cheeks: "why—that's Crockford!"

"Crockford!" repeated Egerton, in astonishment; for, although he had denominated the presiding genius of the place "a good-natured old gentleman," he had not failed to observe the execrable English which he spoke, and was overwhelmed with surprise to learn that the friend of nobles was at such open hostilities with grammar.

"Yes—that is no other than the great Crockford," continued Lord Dunstable, in an under tone. "He once kept a small fishmonger's shop near Temple Bar; and he is now rich enough to buy up all the fishmongers' shops in London, Billingsgate to boot. But let us see what is going on here."

There were only three or four persons lounging about in the Hazard-Room, previously to the entrance of Dunstable, Egerton, Harborough, Cholmondeley, and Chichester; and no play was going on. The moment, however, those gentlemen made their appearance, the loungers to whom we have just alluded, and who were decoy-ducks connected with the establishment, repaired to the table and called for dice, while his croupiers took their seats, and the groom-porter instantly mounted upon his stool.

"What does he get up there for?" asked Egerton, in a whisper.

"To announce the *main* and *chance*," replied Lord Dunstable. "But don't you play hazard?"

"No, no—that is, not often—not very often," said the foolish young man, afraid of being deemed unfashionable in the eyes of his new acquaintances if he admitted that he never yet handled a dice-box in his life.

"Oh! no—not often—of course not!" exclaimed Dunstable, who saw through the artifice: "neither do I. But here comes Crockey with the bank."

And, as he spoke, Mr. Crockford made his appearance, holding in his hands an elegant rosewood case, which he placed upon the table, and behind which he immediately seated himself.

The dice-box was now taken by Lord Dunstable, who set ten sovereigns, called "five" as a main, and threw seven.

"Seven to five!" exclaimed the groom-porter.

"Three to two are the odds," said Sir Rupert Harborough to Egerton: "I'll take them of you in fifties?"

"Done," cried Egerton; and in another moment he had the pleasure of handing over his money to the baronet.

After Lord Dunstable had thrown out, Mr. Chichester took the box, and Cholmondeley in his turn ensnared Egerton into a private bet, which the young man of course lost. But he parted from his bank-notes with a very good grace; for, although considerably sobered by the soda-water which he had drunk at the Paradise, yet what with the wine and the idea of being at that moment beneath Crockford's roof, he was sufficiently intoxicated to be totally reckless of his financial affairs.

Thus, after having lost a bet to each of his friends, he was easily persuaded to take the box, and dispense a little more of his cash for the especial benefit of Mr. Crockford.

"I'll set a hundred pounds," cried Egerton, "and call five the main."

He then threw ten.

"Ten to five!" cried the groom-porter.

"Put down three fifties," said Dunstable; "and you have four fifties to three. That's right. Now go on."

Egerton threw.

"Five—trois, deuce—out!" cried the groom-porter.

And the young man's money was swept towards the bank in a moment.

"Try a *back*, Egerton," exclaimed Chichester.

"Well—I don't mind," was the reply—for the waiter had just handed round goblets of the most delicious claret, and the lights began to dance somewhat confusedly before the young victim's eyes. "I'll set myself again in two hundred; and five's the main."

"Five's the main," cried the groom-porter: "deuce, ace—out."

And away went the bank-notes to the rosewood case at the head of the table.

Colonel Cholmondeley now took the box.

"Will you set me a pony, Egerton?" he said.

"I should not mind," was the reply, given with a stammer and a blush; "but—to tell you the truth—I have no more money about me. If my cheque will do——"

Dunstable nodded significantly to Crockford.

"Oh! my dear sir," said the old hell-keeper, rising from his seat and shuffling towards Egerton, whom he drew partially aside; "I means no offence, but if you vants monies, I shall be werry 'appy to lend you a thousand or two, I'm sure."

"Take a thousand, Egerton," whispered Lord Dunstable. "You'll have better luck, perhaps, with old Crockey's money—there's a spell about it."

"I—I," hesitated the young man for a moment, as the thought of his previous losses flashed to his mind, even amidst the dazzling influence of Crockford's club and his aristocratic acquaintances: "I——"

"Glass of claret, sir?" said the waiter, approaching him with a massive silver salver on which stood the crystal goblets of ruby wine.

"Thank you;"—and Egerton quaffed the aromatic juice to drown the unpleasant ideas which had just intruded themselves upon him: then, as he replaced the glass upon the salver, he said, "Well, give me a thousand—and I'll have another throw."

Sir Rupert Harborough took the box, set himself in ten pounds, and cried, "Nine's the main."

He then threw.

"Six to nine!" exclaimed the groom-porter.

"Five to four in favour of the caster," observed Colonel Cholmondeley.

"I'll bet the odds," cried Egerton.

"'Gainst the rules, sir," said the pompous groom-porter: "you're not a setter this time."

"Pooh, pooh!" cried Crockford, affecting a jocular chuckle. "The gentleman has lost—let the gentleman have a chance of recovering his-self. Take the hodds of the gentleman."

"Then I bet five hundred to four in favour of the caster," said Egerton, now growing interested in the play as he began to understand it better.

Sir Rupert threw a few times, and at last turned up six and three.

"Nine—six, trois—out!" cried the groom-porter.

Egerton now insisted upon taking the box again; and in a few minutes he had not a fraction left of the thousand pounds which he had borrowed.

He turned away from the table and sighed deeply.

"Glass of claret, sir?" said the waiter, as composedly as if he were offering the wine through civility and not for the systematic purpose of washing away a remorse.

Egerton greedily swallowed the contents of a goblet; and when he looked again towards the table, he was astounded to find another bundle of Bank notes thrust into his hand by the obliging Mr. Crockford, who said in his blandest tones, "I think you vas vaiting, sir, for more monies."

"Take it—take it, old chap," whispered Dunstable: "you can turn that second thousand into ten."

"Or into nothing—like the first," murmured Egerton, with a sickly smile: but still he took the money.

He then played rapidly—wildly—desperately,—drinking wine after each new loss, and inwardly cursing his unlucky stars.

The second thousand pounds were soon gone; and Dunstable whispered to Crockford, "That's enough for to-night. We must make him a member in a day or two—and then you'll give me back the little I. O. U. you hold of mine."

"Certainly—certainly," answered the hell-keeper. "But mind you doesn't fail to bring him again."

"Never fear," returned Dunstable;—then turning towards his party, he said aloud, "Well, I think it is pretty nearly time to be off."

"So do I, my lord——hic," stammered Egerton, catching joyfully at the chance of an immediate escape from the place where fortunes were so speedily engulphed;—for tipsy as he now was again, the idea of his losses was uppermost in his mind.

"Well, my lord—well gentlemen," said Crockford, bowing deferentially; "I wishes you all a wery good night—or rather morning. But perhaps your friend, my lord, would just give me his little I. O. U.——"

"Oh! certainly, he will" interrupted Dunstable. "Here, Egerton, my boy—give your I. O. U. for the two thousand——"

"I'd ra-a-ther—hic—give my draft," returned the young man.

But, as his hand trembled and his visual faculties were duplicated for the time, he was ten minutes ere he could fill up a printed cheque in a proper manner.

The business was, however, accomplished at last, and the party withdrew, amidst the bows of decoy-ducks, croupiers, waiters,

groom-porters, door-porters, and all the menials of the establishment.

William Crockford was the founder of the Club which so long bore his name, and which was only broken up a short time ago.

He began life as a fishmonger; and when he closed his shop of an evening, was accustomed to repair to some of the West End hells, where he staked the earnings of the day. Naturally of a shrewd and far-seeing disposition, he was well qualified to make those calculations which taught him the precise chances of the hazard-table; and a lucky bet upon the St. Leger suddenly helped him to a considerable sum of ready money, with which he was enabled to extend his ventures at the gaming-house.

In due time he gave up the fish-shop, and joined some hellites in partnership at the West End. Fortune continued to favour him; and he was at length in a condition to open No. 50, St. James's Street, as a Club.

The moment the establishment was ready for the reception of members, announcements of the design were made in the proper quarters; and it was advertised that all persons belonging to other Clubs were eligible to have their names enrolled *without ballot* as members of the St. James's. The scheme succeeded beyond even the most sanguine hopes of Crockford himself; and hundreds of peers, nobles, and gentlemen, who were fond of play, but who dared not frequent the common gaming-houses, gladly became supporters and patrons of the new Club.

In the course of a short time No. 51 was added to the establishment; and No. 52 was subsequently annexed. The rules and regulations were made more stringent, because several notorious black-legs had obtained admission; but, until the very last, any member was permitted to introduce a stranger for one evening only, with the understanding that such visitor should be balloted for in due course. The entrance-fee was fixed at twenty guineas a year; and an annual payment of ten guineas was required from every member.

The three houses, thrown into one, were soon found to be too small for the accommodation of the members: they were accordingly pulled down, and the present magnificent building was erected on their site. It is impossible to say how much money was expended upon this princely structure; but we can assert upon undoubted authority that the internal decorations alone cost ninety-four thousand pounds!

The real nature of this most scandalous and abominable establishment soon transpired. Hundreds of young men, who entered upon life with fortune and every brilliant prospect to cheer them, were immolated upon the infernal altar of that aristocratic pandemonium. Many of them committed suicide:—others perpetrated forgeries, to obtain the means of endeavouring to regain what they had lost, and ended their days upon the scaffold;—and not a few became decoy-ducks and bonnets in the service of the Arch-demon himself. Even noblemen of high rank did not hesitate to fill these ignominious offices; and for every flat whom they took to the house, they received a recompense proportionate to the spoil that was obtained. To keep up appearances with their fellow members, these ruined lacqueys of the great hellite actually paid their subscriptions with the funds which he furnished them for the purpose.

So infamous became the reputation of Crockford's, that it was deemed necessary to devise means to place the establishment apparently upon the same footing with other Clubs. A committee of noblemen and gentlemen (what precious *noblemen* and *gentlemen*, good reader!) was formed to administer the affairs of the institution; but this proceeding was a mere blind. The Committee's jurisdiction extended only to the laws affecting the introduction of new members, the expulsion of unruly ones, and the choice of the wines laid in for the use of the Club. The French Hazard Bank and all matters relating to the gambling-rooms were under the sole control of Crockford, who reaped enormous advantages from that position.

Thus was it that a vulgar and illiterate man—a professed gambler—a wretch who lived upon the ruin of the inexperienced and unwary, as well as on the vices of the hoary sinner,—thus was he enabled to make noble lords and high-born gentlemen his vile tools, and thrust them forward as the ostensible managers of a damnable institution, the infamous profit of which went into his own purse![36]

36. So far back as 1824, *The Times* newspaper thus directed attention to the atrocious nature of Crockford's Club:—

"'Fishmongers' Hall,' or the *Crock*-odile Mart for gudgeons, flat-fish, and pigeons (which additional title that 'Hell' has acquired from the nature of its 'dealings') has recently closed for the season. The opening and closing of this wholesale place of plunder and robbery, are events which have assumed a degree of importance, not on account of the two or three unprincipled knaves to whom it belongs, and who are collecting by it vast fortunes incalculably fast, but for the rank, character, and fortunes of the many who are weak enough to be inveigled and fleeced there. The profits for the last season, over and above expenses, which cannot be less than £100 a day, are stated to be full £150,000. It is wholly impossible, however, to come at the exact sum, unless we could get a peep at the Black Ledger of accounts of each day's gain at this Pandemonium, which, though, of course omits to name of whom, as that might prove awkward, if at any time the book fell into other hands. A few statements from the sufferers themselves would be worth a thousand speculative opinions on the subject, however they might be near the fact, and they would be rendering themselves, and others, a vital benefit were they to make them. Yet some idea can be formed of what has been sacked, by the simple fact that *one thousand pounds* was given at the close of the season to be divided among the waiters alone, besides the Guy Fawkes of the place, a head servant, having half that sum presented to him last January for a New Year's gift. A visitor informed me, that one night there was such immense play, he was convinced a million of money was, to use a tradesman's phrase, turned on that occasion. This sum, thrown over six hours' play of sixty events per hour, 360 events for the night, will give an average stake of £2777 odd to each event. This will not appear very large when it is considered that £10,000 or more were occasionally down upon single events, belonging to many persons of great fortunes.

"Allowing only one such stake to fall upon the points of the game in favour of the bank per hour, full £16,662. were thus sacrificed; half of which, at least, was hard cash from the pockets of the players, exclusively of what they lost besides.

"Now that there is a little cessation to the satanic work, the frequenters to this den of robbers would do well to make a few common reflections;—that it is their money alone which pays the rent and superb embellishments of the house—the good feeding and the fashionable clothing in which are disguised the knaves about it—the refreshments and wine with which they are regaled, and which are served with no sparing hand, in order to bewilder the senses to prevent from being seen what may be going forward, but which will not be at their service, they may rest well assured, longer than they have money to be plucked of; and above all, it is for the most part their money, of which are composed the enormous fortunes the two or three keepers have amassed, and which will increase them prodigiously while they are still blind enough to go. To endeavour to gain back any part of the lost money, fortunes will be further wasted in the futile attempt, as the same nefarious and diabolical practices by which the first sums were raised, are still pursued to multiply them. One of these 'Hellites' commenced his career by pandering to the fatal and uncontrollable appetites for gambling of far humbler game than he is now hunting down, whose losses and ruin have enabled him to bedeck this place with every intoxicating fascination and incitement, and to throw out a bait of a large sum of money, well hooked, to catch the largest fortunes, which are as sure to be netted as the smaller ones were. Sum up the amount of your losses, my lords and gentlemen, when, if you are still sceptical, you must be convinced of these things. Those noblemen and gentlemen, just springing into life and large property, should be ever watchful of themselves, as there are two or three persons of some rank, who themselves have been ruined by similar means, and now condescend to become 'Procurers' to this foul establishment, kept by a '*ci-devant*' fishmonger's man, and who are rewarded for their services in the ratio of the losses sustained by the victims whom they allure to it.

"They wish to give the place the character of a subscription club, pretending that none are admitted but those whose names are first submitted for approval to a committee, and then are balloted for. All this is false. In the first place, the members of different clubs at once are considered 'eligible;' and in the next, all persons are readily admitted who are 'well' introduced, have money to lose, and whose forbearance under losses can be safely relied upon. Let the visitors pay a subscription—let them call themselves a club, or whatever they choose—still the house having a bank put down from day to day by the same persons to be played against, and which has points of the games in its favour, is nothing but a common gaming-house, and indictable as such by the statutes; and in the eye of the law, the visitors are 'rogues and vagabonds.' Were it otherwise—why don't the members of this club! be seen at the large plate-glass windows of the bow front, as well as at the windows of reputable club-houses? No one is ever there but the creatures of the 'hell,' dressed out and bedizened with gold ornaments (most probably formerly belonging to unhappy and ruined players), to show off at them, and who look like so many jackdaws in borrowed plumes; the players, ashamed of being seen by the passers by, sneak in and out like cats who have burnt their tails. Some of the members of the different clubs will soon begin to display the real character of this infernal place—those who will ultimately be found to forsake their respectable club-houses, and merge into impoverished and undone frequenters to this 'hell.'"

CHAPTER CCXLII.

THE AUNT.

Albert Egerton now became the constant companion of the fashionable acquaintances whom he had accidentally picked up—or rather, who had cunningly picked up *him*.

He dined with them at Long's;—he formed with them parties to eat fish at Greenwich and Blackwall;—he became a member of Crockford's;—and every day he lost considerable sums to them in one shape of gambling or another.

They had ascertained that he was possessed, on coming of age a few weeks previously, of the handsome fortune of sixty thousand pounds; and they determined to appropriate the best portion of it to their own uses.

The Honourable Colonel Cholmondeley most obligingly acted as his Mentor in the choice of magnificent furnished apartments in Stratton Street;—Lord Dunstable was kind enough to purchase two thorough-breds for him, the price being *only* eight hundred guineas—a little transaction by which his lordship quietly pocketed three hundred as his own commission;—Mr. Chichester thought it no trouble to select a rare assortment of wines at one of the most fashionable merchants of the West End, and actually carried his good-nature so far as to see them carefully stowed away in the young dupe's cellar;—and Sir Rupert Harborough generously surrendered to him his cast-off mistress.

The four friends also conceived so violent an attachment towards Mr. Egerton, that they never lost sight of him. They managed matters so well that he had no time for compunctious reflections; for they invariably made him drunk ere they took him home to his bed; and when he awoke in the morning, the obliging Mr. Chichester was sure to be already there to give him sherry and soda-water.

Then Harborough would drop in to breakfast; and while Egerton was performing the duties of the toilette, Dunstable and Cholmondeley were sure to make their appearance.

Perhaps Egerton would complain of headach.

"Don't talk of headach, my dear fellow," Lord Dunstable exclaimed: "you were quite sober last night in comparison with me. My losses were terrific! A thousand to Cholmondeley—fifteen hundred to Chichester—and double as much to Harborough."

"It is very strange that I seldom win any thing," observed Egerton on one of these occasions: "and yet we can't all lose. Some one must be the gainer."

"Every one has his turn, my dear boy," cried Harborough. "But what shall we do to-day? Any thing going on at Tattersall's, Colonel?"

"Nothing particular," was the reply, lazily delivered. "Suppose we have some claret and cigars for an hour or two, and then play a rub of billiards till dinner-time. Of course we all dine together this evening."

"Oh! of course," chimed in Lord Dunstable. "What do you think the Duke of Highgate said of us all yesterday, Egerton?"

"I know not what he could have said of you," was the answer; "but I am sure he could have said nothing of me—for he cannot be aware that there is such a person in existence."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Dunstable: "you are as well known now in the fashionable world as any one of us. Every body is speaking of you; and it will be your own fault if you do not marry an heiress. We must introduce you at Almack's in due course. But I was speaking about my friend the Duke. His Grace met me yesterday as I was on my way to join you all at the Clarendon: and when I told him where I was going, he said with a laugh, 'Ah! I call you five the *Inseparables*!'—and away he went."

Egerton was profoundly gratified with the absurd flattery thus constantly poured in his ear; and as he really possessed a handsome person, he saw no difficulty in carrying out the idea of marrying an heiress.

And this same belief has proved fatal to thousands and thousands of young men placed in the same situation as Albert Egerton. They pursue a career of reckless extravagance and dissipation, buoying themselves up with the hope that when their present resources shall have passed away, it will be the easiest thing possible to rebuild their fortunes by means of marriage.

A month slipped away, and Egerton found himself on intimate terms with many "men about town"—one of the most popular members at Crockford's—a great favourite in certain titled but not over-particular families, where there were portionless daughters to "get off," and at whose house Lord Dunstable enjoyed the *entrée*—and the pride and delight (as he believed) of his four dear friends who had done so much for him!

And sure enough they had done a great deal in his behalf; for he had already sold out twenty thousand pounds, or one third of his entire fortune; but he was purposely kept in such an incessant whirl of excitement, pleasure, dissipation, and bustle, that he had no time for reflection.

One morning—it was about eleven o'clock—the young man awoke with aching head and feverish pulse, after the usual night's debauch; and it happened that none of his dear friends had yet arrived.

Egerton rang the bell for some white wine and soda-water to assuage the burning thirst which oppressed him; and when his livery-boy, or "tiger," appeared with the refreshing beverage, the young rake learnt that a lady was waiting to see him in the drawing-room.

"A lady!" exclaimed Egerton: "who the deuce can she be?"

"She is a stout, elderly lady, sir," said the tiger.

"And did she give no name?" inquired Egerton, beginning to suspect who his visitor was.

"No, sir," was the answer. "I assured her that you were not up yet, and that you never received any one at so early an hour; but she declared that you would see *her*; and I was obliged to show her into the drawing-room."

"Ah! it must be my aunt, then!" muttered Egerton to himself. "Bring me up some hot-water this minute, you young rascal:"—fashionable upstarts always vent their annoyances upon their servants;—"and then go and tell the lady that I will be with her in five minutes."

The tiger disappeared—returned with the hot-water—and then departed once more, to execute the latter portion of his master's orders.

Egerton felt truly wretched and ashamed of himself when he surveyed his pale cheeks and haggard eyes in the glass, and thought of the course which he had lately been pursuing. But then he remembered the flattery of his fashionable friends, and soothed his remorseful feelings by the idea that he was on intimate terms with all the "best men about town," was a member of Crockford's, and had the *entrée* of several families of distinction.

Moreover, when he was shaved and washed,—oiled and perfumed,—and attired in a clean shirt, black trousers, red morocco slippers, and an elegant dressing-gown, his appearance was so much more satisfactory to himself that he felt quite equal to the task of encountering his relative.

He accordingly proceeded, with a smile upon his lips and an easy unconstrained manner, to the drawing-room, where a respectable, motherly-looking, stout old lady was anxiously awaiting him.

"My dear Albert," she exclaimed, as he entered the apartment, "what have you been doing with yourself this last month, that you never come near us—no, not even on Sundays, as you used to do?"

And, while she spoke, the good-natured woman made a motion as if she were anxious to embrace her nephew; but he—well aware that it is improper to give way to one's feelings in the fashionable world—retreated a step or two, and graciously allowed his aunt to shake the tip of his fore-finger.

"Lor, Albert, how strange you are!" exclaimed the baffled relative. "But do tell me," she continued, quietly resuming her seat, "what you *have* been doing with yourself. Why did you leave your nice little lodging in Budge Row? why do you never come near us? why have you moved up into this part of the town? and why didn't you even write to tell us where you was living? If it hadn't been for Storks, your stock-broker, I shouldn't have known how to find you out; but he gave me your address."

"Storks!" murmured Egerton, turning very pale. "Did he tell you—any thing——"

"Oh! yes," continued the aunt, speaking with great volubility; "he told me that you had sold out a power of money;—but when he saw that I was annoyed, he assured me that it could only be for some good purpose. And it is so, Albert dear—isn't it?"

"Certainly—to be sure, aunt—Oh! certainly," stammered the young man, as he glanced uneasily towards the door.

"Well, now—I am glad of that, Albert," said the old lady, apparently relieved of a serious misgiving. "I said to your eldest cousin Susannah Rachel, says I, '*Albert is a good young man—quiet—steady—and firm in his resolve to follow in the footsteps of his dear lamented father*':—here the aunt wiped her eyes;—'*and*,' says I, '*if he has sold out fifteen or twenty thousand pounds, depend, upon it he has bought a nice snug little estate; and he means to surprise us all by asking us to dine with him some Sunday at his country-house*.' Am I right, Albert dear?"

"Oh! quite right, aunt," exclaimed the young man, overjoyed to find that his dissipated courses were unknown to his relatives. "And that was the reason why I did not go near you—nor yet write to you. But have a little patience—and, in a few weeks, I promise you and my cousins a pleasant day——"

"Well, well—I don't want to penetrate into your little secrets, you know," interrupted the aunt. "But how late you get up. Why, it is near twelve, I declare; and I rose this morning before day-light."

"I was detained last evening——"

"Ah! by your man of business, no doubt," cried the voluble old lady. "Many papers to read over and sign—contracts to make—leases to consider—deeds to study—Oh! I understand it all; and I am delighted, Albert, to find you so prudent."

"It is quite necessary, my dear aunt," said Egerton, in a hurried and nervous tone, for a thundering double-knock at that moment reverberated through the house. "But I am afraid—that is, I think—some one is coming, who——"

"Oh! never mind me, dear Al," observed the old lady. "I shall just rest myself for half an hour or so, before I take the omnibus back to the Pavement."

"Certainly, my dear aunt—but——"

The door opened; and Lord Dunstable entered the room.

"Ah! my dear Egerton!" he exclaimed, rushing forward, with out-stretched hand, to greet his young friend: but, perceiving the lady, who had risen from the sofa, he stopped short, and bowed to her with distant politeness—for it struck him at the moment that she might be a washerwoman, or the mother of Egerton's servant, or a shirt-maker, or some such kind of person.

"How d'ye do, sir?" said the aunt, in acknowledgment of the bow; and, resuming her seat, she observed, "I find it very warm for the time of year. But then I was scrooged up in an omnibus for near an hour—all packed as close as herrings in a barrel; and that's not pleasant—is it, sir?"

"By no means, madam," answered Dunstable, in a cold tone; while Egerton bit his lips—at a loss what to do.

"Well—it is *not* pleasant," continued the garrulous lady. "And now, when I think of it, I have a call to make in Aldgate to-day; and so, when I leave here, I shall take a Whitechapel 'bus. Nasty place that Aldgate, sir?"

"Really, madam, I never heard of it until now," said Lord Dunstable, with marvellous stiffness of manner.

"Never heard of Aldgate, sir?" literally shouted the lady. "Why, you must be very green in London, then."

"I know no place east of Temple Bar, madam," was the cold reply. "I am aware that there *are* human habitations on the other side; and I could perhaps find my way to the Bank—but nothing more, madam, I can assure you."

And he turned towards Egerton, who was pretending to look out of the window.

"Well—I never!" exclaimed the lady, now eyeing the nobleman with sovereign contempt.

"My dear aunt," said Egerton, desperately resolved to put an end if possible to this awkward scene; "allow me to introduce my friend Lord Dunstable: Lord Dunstable—Mrs. Bustard."

"Oh! delighted at the honour!" cried the nobleman, instantly conquering his surprise at this announcement of the relationship existing between his young friend and the vulgar lady who complained of having been "scrooged up in an omnibus:"—"proud, madam, to form your acquaintance!"

And his features instantly beamed with smiles—a relaxation from his former chilling manner, which appeared like a sudden transition from the north pole to the tropics.

On her side, the aunt had started up from the sofa, quite electrified by the mention of the magic words—"LORD DUNSTABLE;" and there she stood, cruelly embarrassed, and bobbing up and down in a rapid series of curtseys at every word which the nobleman addressed to her. For this was the first time in her life that she had ever exchanged a syllable with a Lord, unless it were with a Lord Mayor on one or two occasions—but that was only "cakes and gingerbread" in comparison with the excitement of forming the acquaintance of a real Lord whose title was not the temporary splendour of a single year.

"I really must apologise, my dear madam," said the nobleman, now speaking in the most amiable manner possible, "for having affected ere now not to know anything of the City. I cannot fancy how I could have been so foolish. As for the Mansion House, it is the finest building in the world; and Lombard Street is the very focus of attraction. With Aldgate I am well acquainted; and a pleasant spot it is, too. The butchers' shops in the neighbourhood must be quite healthy for consumptive people. Then you have Whitechapel, madam;—fine—wide—and open: the Commercial Road—delightful proof of the industry of this great city;—and, best of all, there is the Albion in Aldersgate Street,—where, by the by, Egerton," he added, turning towards his friend, "we will all dine to-day, if you like."

"Oh! yes—certainly," said Egerton, smiling faintly.

But Dunstable was too good a judge to show that he even perceived the honest vulgarity of his friend's aunt: he accordingly seated himself near her upon the sofa, and rattled away, in the most amiable manner possible, upon the delights of the City. He then listened with great apparent interest to the long story which the old lady told him,—how she kept a haberdashery warehouse on the Pavement, and did a very tidy business,—how she had five daughters all "well-edicated gals as could be, and which was Albert's own first cousins,"—how her late husband had once been nearly an alderman and quite a sheriff,—how she and her deceased partner dined with the Lord Mayor "seven years ago come next November,"—how she had been lately plundered of three hundred pounds' worth of goods by a French Marchioness, who turned out to be an English swindler,—and how she strongly suspected that young Tedworth Jones, the only son of the great tripe-man in Bishopsgate Street Without, was making up to her third daughter, Clarissa Jemima.

To all this, we say, Lord Dunstable listened with the deepest interest; and, at the conclusion, he expressed a hope that if the anticipated match did come off between Mr. Tedworth Jones and Miss Clarissa Jemima Bustard, he should have the honour of receiving an invitation on the happy occasion.

Even Egerton himself was rendered more comfortable by the distinguished politeness with which his aunt was treated; but he was not the less delighted when she rose and took her departure.

As soon as the door was shut behind her, Dunstable hastened to observe, "There goes an estimable woman—I can vouch for it! What would England's commerce be without such industrious, plodding, intelligent persons as your aunt? Egerton, my boy, you ought to be proud of her—as I am of her acquaintance. But there is Chichester's knock, I'll swear!"

In a few moments the gentleman alluded to made his appearance; and the scene with the aunt was soon forgotten.

The day was passed in the usual profitless manner; and the greater portion of the night following was spent in gaming and debauchery.

CHAPTER CCXLIII.

THE FIGHT.—THE RUINED GAMESTER.

The day on which the fight was to take place between the Birmingham Bruiser and the Haggerstone Pet, now drew near.

Great was the excitement of the sporting world on the occasion; and all those, who were not in the secret of the "cross," felt confident that the Bruiser must win.

Indeed the odds had risen in his favour from five to four, to eleven to five. There were numerous betters, and the takers were willing.

The following paragraph appeared in *Bell's Life*, on the Sunday preceding the contest:—

> "The Approaching Fight.—The mill between the Birmingham Bruiser and the Haggerstone Pet is to come off on Thursday next, at Wigginton Bottom, near Snodsnook Park, in Essex. We are assured by persons who have seen the Bruiser in training at Bexley Heath, and the Pet at Cheshunt, that the men are in first-rate condition, and full of confidence. The Bruiser has vowed that if he is beaten in this fight, he will retire altogether from the Ring; but his friends do not for a moment apprehend that the result will be such as to occasion such a step. The admirers of this truly British sport have begun to flock to the neighbourhood of the scene of action; and every bed at Wigginton is already let. In fact we know of two guineas having been offered and refused for a mere 'shake-down' in the tap of the *Green Lion*, at that beautiful little village. The odds in favour of the Bruiser have risen within these few days to eleven to five. The Bruiser's backers are not known: they are most likely some swell nobs, who prefer keeping out of sight. Some thousands of pounds will change hands next Thursday."

On the appointed day Lord Dunstable drove his friends Egerton, Chichester, Harborough, and Cholmondeley, down to Wigginton in his four-in-hand—an equipage that he had only very recently set up, and which had been purchased and was still maintained by the coin extracted from the pocket of the credulous son of the deceased outfitter.

The scene of the contest was thronged with as miscellaneous a collection of persons as could possibly be gathered together. There were specimens of all classes, from the peer down to the beggar. The fashionable exquisite was jostled by the greasy butcher;—the sporting tradesman was crushed between two sweeps;—the flat was knocked down by one black-leg and picked up by another;—the country-squire was elbowed by the horse-chaunter;—the newspaper reporter was practically overwhelmed by the influence of the "press;"—and, in short, there was such a squeezing that many who had paid a guinea to be conveyed thither, would have gladly given ten to be removed away again.

Presently a tremendous shout of applause welcomed the arrival of Lord Snodsnook's carriage, from which leapt the Haggerstone Pet, who was immediately surrounded by his friends; and shortly afterwards a "slap-up turn-out," "tooled" by a sporting publican of the West End, to whom it belonged, brought the Birmingham Bruiser upon the scene of action, amidst renewed vociferations and another rush of supporters.

The preliminaries being all settled, the combatants stripped, entered the ring, attended by their seconds, and then shook hands. The newspapers subsequently declared that no two pugilists ever "peeled" better, nor seemed more confident.

It is not our purpose, however, to dwell upon the disgusting exhibition:—those brutal displays are loathsome to us, and, to our mind, are a disgrace to the English character.

Suffice it to say, that the Birmingham Bruiser was quite able to beat the Haggerstone Pet, if he had so chosen: but he had made his appearance there on purpose to lose. For upwards of twenty rounds, however, he secured to himself the advantage; and the general impression amongst the uninitiated was that he must win. Those who were in the secret accordingly bet heavily upon the Haggerstone Pet; and we need hardly say that, as Egerton backed the Bruiser, he found several of his dear friends perfectly willing to accept the odds at his hands.

By the twenty-fifth round, the Bruiser began to grow "groggy," and to hit at random. Of course this was mere pretence on his part: but it gave the Pet renewed courage; and in proportion as the latter acquired confidence, the former seemed to lose ground rapidly.

Many of the backers of the Bruiser now exhibited elongating countenances; and, when that champion was thrown heavily at the thirty-first round, his former supporters manifested a desperate inclination to "hedge." Egerton, however, remained confident in favour of the Bruiser; but then he knew nothing about prize-fighting—it was the first combat of the kind he had ever seen in his life—and, even if he had been inclined to hedge his bets, he would have found no persons willing at this stage of the proceeding to afford him the chance.

The Bruiser played his game so well, that even the most experienced in the pugilistic science were unable to detect the fraud that was being practised upon them; and thousands were deceived into a belief that he was really doing his best to win.

At the fortieth round he fell, apparently through sheer weakness; and it was highly ludicrous to behold the discomfited looks of those who had bet most heavily upon him.

He stood up for three rounds more; but time was called in vain for the forty-fourth—and the Haggerstone Pet was declared to be the conqueror.

The Bruiser seemed to be in a horrible plight: for some time he remained motionless upon the ground, obstinately resisting all the efforts that were made to recover him, until one of his friends thrust a huge pinch of snuff up his nose—and then he was compelled to sneeze.

He was now borne to the *Green Lion* at Wigginton, and put to bed. A surgeon in Sir Rupert Harborough's pay volunteered his services to attend upon him; and, although the Bruiser had nothing more serious the matter with him than a few bruises and a couple of black eyes, the medical gentlemen assured the multitudes who flocked to the inn, that "the poor fellow could not possibly be worse." A

great deal of medicine was also purchased at the village apothecary's shop; but it was all quietly thrown away by the surgeon, and the Bruiser was regaled, in the privacy of his chamber, with a good cut off a sirloin of beef and a bottle of Port-wine.

Lord Dunstable, Mr. Chichester, Colonel Cholmondeley, and Sir Rupert Harborough divided equally amongst themselves the money won by this "cross;"—they sacked a thousand pounds each, Egerton alone having lost fifteen hundred upon the fight.

The five friends returned to town in his lordship's four-in-hand, and dined that evening at Limmer's, where Egerton speedily drowned the recollection of his heavy losses in bumpers of champagne and claret.

The party afterwards repaired to Crockford's; but just as they were ascending the steps, they beheld one of the waiters in altercation with a person of emaciated form, haggard countenance, and shabby attire, but who had evidently seen better—far better days; for his language was correct, and even beneath his rags there was an air of gentility which no tatters could conceal—no penury altogether subdue.

"Come, Major, none of this nonsense—it won't do here," said the waiter, in an insolent tone. "Be off with you—there's gentlemen coming in."

"I care not who hears me!" cried the person thus addressed: "Mr. Crockford is within—I know he is; and I must see him."

"No—he's not here—and he never comes now," returned the waiter. "If you don't make yourself scarce, I'll call a policeman. Pray walk in, my lord—walk in, gentlemen."

These last words were addressed to Lord Dunstable and his party; but, instead of entering the Club, they remained on the steps to hear the issue of the dispute.

"Call a policeman—oh! do," ejaculated the Major. "I wish you would—for I should at least have a roof over my head to-night; whereas I now stand the chance of wandering about the streets. But you dare not give me in charge—no, you dare not! You know that I should expose all the infamy of this den before the magistrate to-morrow morning. However—in one word, will you deliver my message to Mr. Crockford?"

"I tell you that he is not here," repeated the waiter, insolently.

"Did you give him my note?" asked the Major, in an imploring tone.

"Yes—and he said there was no answer," replied the menial, placing his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

"My God! no answer for *me*!" cried the miserable man, in a voice of bitter despair. "No answer for *me*—and I lost so much in his house! Surely—surely he could spare a guinea from the thousands which he has received of me? I only asked him for a guinea—and he does not condescend to answer me!"

"Well, I tell you what it is," said the waiter, perceiving that not only Lord Dunstable's party lingered upon the steps, but that there was also another listener—a gentleman in a military cloak—standing at a short distance:—"if you will go away now, I'll give you half-a-crown out of my own pocket, and I will undertake that Mr. Crockford shall send you up a sovereign to-morrow."

"God knows with what reluctance I accept that miserable trifle from *you*!" exclaimed the unhappy man, tears rolling down his cheeks, as he extended his hand for the pittance offered.

At the same instant Egerton, who was much moved by all he had just overheard, drew forth his purse with the intention of presenting five sovereigns to the poor Major: but the waiter, perceiving his intention, hastened to drop the half-crown into the miserable wretch's palm with a view to get rid of him at once;—for the domestic wisely argued to himself that every guinea which Egerton might give away would be so much lost to his master's bank up-stairs.

The half-crown piece had just touched the Major's hand, when the individual in the cloak sprang forward—seized it—threw it indignantly in the servant's face—and, dragging the Major away from the door, exclaimed, "No—never shall it be said that a soldier and an officer received alms from an insolent lacquey! Mine be the duty of relieving your wants."

And, leading the Major a few paces up the street, the stranger bade him enter a carriage that was waiting, and into which he immediately followed him.

The servant closed the door, received some whispered instructions from his master, and got up behind the vehicle, which immediately rolled away at a rapid pace.

But to return to Lord Dunstable and his party.

The moment that the individual in the cloak sprang forward in the manner described, and the light of the hall lamps streamed full upon his countenance, both Harborough and Chichester uttered ejaculations of surprise, and hastened precipitately into the Club, followed by Dunstable, Egerton, and Cholmondeley.

"What's the matter?" demanded Dunstable, when the baronet and Chichester were overtaken on the stairs: "and who's that person?"

"The Prince of Montoni," replied Harborough, whose countenance was very pale.

"Yes," said Chichester, hastily; "we know him well—and, as he is very particular in his notions, we did not wish him to see us coming here. But, enough of that—let us adjourn to the Hazard Room."

The conversation between the Major and the waiter, displaying as it did a fearful instance of the results of gaming, had made a deep impression upon Albert Egerton; and for some time he was thoughtful and serious.

But Dunstable attacked him so adroitly with the artillery of flattery—the waiter offered him claret so frequently—the excitement of the play appeared so agreeable—and the fear of losing ground in the good opinion of his aristocratic acquaintances was so strong in his mind, that he seized the dice-box, staked his money, lost as usual, and was conducted home in a state of intoxication at about half-past three in the morning.

In the meantime the unfortunate Major Anderson—for such was his name—had received substantial proofs of that goodness of heart which prompted the Prince of Montoni to espouse his cause against the brutal insolence of Crockford's waiter.

Immediately after the carriage rolled away from the corner of St. James's Street, Richard drew forth his pocket-book, and placed a bank-note, accompanied by his card, in the Major's hand.

"By means of this temporary relief, sir," he said, "you can place yourself in a somewhat more comfortable position than that in

which I deeply regret to find you; and, when you feel inclined to see me again, be good enough to write me a note to that effect, so that I may call upon you. For, if it would not be impertinently prying into your affairs, I should wish to learn the sad narrative of those reverses which have so reduced a gentleman of your rank and station."

"Oh! sir—whoever you are," exclaimed the Major—for it was too dark to permit him to read his benefactor's card,—"how can I ever sufficiently thank you for this noble—this generous conduct? But think not that your bounty will have been bestowed in vain—think not that I would risk one sixpence of this sum—whatever be its amount—at the gaming-table! Oh! my God—who would ever play again, that had been in such misery as I? No, sir—no: I would rather throw myself headlong from one of the bridges into the silent waters of the Thames, than enter the gamblers' den!"

"Then let me tell you frankly," said Markham, much moved by the touching sincerity of the ruined officer's tone and manner,—"let me tell you frankly that my object, in wishing to see you again, was to satisfy myself that you had in reality abjured the detestable vice which has beggared you, and that you are deserving of all I am prepared to do for your benefit."

"To-morrow afternoon, sir," answered the Major, "I will take the liberty of writing to you; for by that time I shall once more be the possessor of some humble lodging. And now, with your permission, I will alight here."

Richard pulled the check-string; and the carriage stopped in Oxford Street.

The Major alighted—pressed our hero's hand fervently—and hurried away.

When the carriage had disappeared, and the poor man's feelings were somewhat composed, he stopped beneath a lamp to learn the name of his benefactor.

"The Prince of Montoni!" he exclaimed joyfully: "oh! then I am saved—I am saved; he will never let me want again! All London rings with the fame of his goodness: his whole time seems to be passed in benefiting his fellow-creatures! Wherever poverty is known to exist, thither does he send in secret his unostentatious charity! But such good deeds cannot remain concealed; and I—I for one will proclaim to all who have spurned me in my bitter need, that a stranger has saved me—and that stranger a great Prince whose shoes they are not worthy to touch!"

Such were the words which the grateful man uttered aloud in the open street; but when he glanced at the bank-note, and found himself suddenly possessed of fifty pounds, he burst into a flood of tears—tears of the most heart-felt joy!

And Richard returned home with the satisfaction of having done another charitable action:—we say *another*, because charitable deeds with him were far more common than even promises on the part of many richer men.

But Markham delighted in doing good. Often of an evening, would he repair into London, and, leaving his carriage at the corner of some street, wander about the immediate neighbourhood to succour the poor houseless wretches whom he might meet, and to discover new cases in which his bounty might be usefully bestowed. Without hesitation—without disgust, did he penetrate into the wretched abodes of want—go down even into the cellars, or climb up into the attics, where poverty was to be relieved and joy to be shed into the despairing heart.

And when he returned home, after such expeditions as these, to his beloved wife and darling child,—for he was now a father—the happy father of a lovely boy, whom he had named Alberto,—he found his reward in the approving smiles of the Princess, even if he had not previously reaped an adequate recompense in the mere fact of doing so much good.

Indeed, there was not a happier house in the world than Markham Place;—for not only was the felicity of Richard complete—save in respect to his anxiety concerning his long-lost brother Eugene,—but that of his sister was also ensured. United to Mario Bazzano, Katherine and her husband resided at the mansion—beneath the same roof where Mr. Monroe and Ellen also continued to enjoy a home!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

True to his promise, Major Anderson wrote on the following day to acquaint our hero with his place of abode, and to renew the expression of his most fervent gratitude for the generous conduct he had experienced at the hands of the Prince of Montoni.

In the evening Richard proceeded to the humble but comfortable lodging which the Major now occupied in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road; and from the lips of the individual whom his bounty had restored to comparative happiness, did our hero learn the following terrible narrative of a Gambler's Life.

CHAPTER CCXLIV.

THE HISTORY OF A GAMESTER.

"I was born in 1790, and am consequently in my fifty-third year. My father was a merchant, who married late in life, upon his retirement from business; and I was an only child. Your Highness may therefore well imagine that I was spoilt by my affectionate parents, whose mistaken tenderness would never permit me to be thwarted in any inclination which it was possible for them to gratify. Instead of being sent to school at a proper age, I was kept at home, and a master attended daily to give me instruction in the rudiments of education; but as I preferred play to learning, and found that if I pleaded headach my mother invariably suggested the propriety of giving me a holiday, I practised that subterfuge so constantly, that my master's place was a sinecure, and I could scarcely read two words correctly when I was ten years old.

"At that period my mother died; and my father, yielding to the representations of his friends, agreed to send me to a boarding-school. The resolution was speedily carried into effect; and during the next six years of my existence, I made up for the previously neglected state of my education. At the school alluded to, and which was in a town about fifteen miles from London, there were youths of all ages between eight and eighteen; and the younger ones thought that nothing could be more manly than to imitate the elder in all shapes and ways. Thus I was scarcely twelve when I began to play pitch and toss, odd man, shuffle-halfpenny, and other games of the kind; and as my father gave me a more liberal weekly allowance of pocket-money than any other lad of my own age possessed, I was enabled to compete with the elder youths in the spirit of petty gambling. The passion grew upon me; and that which I had at first commenced through a merely imitative motive, gradually became a pleasure and delight.

"I had just completed my sixteenth year, and was one afternoon passing the half-holiday at pitch and toss with several other boys in a remote corner of the spacious play-ground, when an usher came to inform me that my father had just arrived, and was waiting in the parlour. Thither I accordingly repaired; and in a few minutes after I had been closeted with my parent, I learnt that he had just purchased an ensign's commission for me in the —th regiment of Light Infantry, and that I was to return home with him that very day to prepare my outfit previously to joining the corps. Thus was I suddenly transformed from a raw school-boy into an officer in His Majesty's service.

"Two months afterwards I joined my regiment, which was quartered at Portsmouth. My father had intimated his intention of allowing me three hundred a-year in addition to my pay: I was therefore enabled to keep a couple of horses, and to cut a better figure in all respects than any other subaltern in the regiment. The lieutenant-colonel, who was in command of the regiment, and whose name was Beaumont, was a young man of scarcely eight-and-twenty; but his father was the member for a county, a stanch supporter of the Tories, and therefore possessed of influence sufficient to push his son on with astonishing rapidity. It was a ridiculous—nay, a cruel thing to see lieutenants of five or six-and-thirty, captains of eight-and-forty, and the major of nearly sixty, under the command of this colonel, who was a mere boy in comparison with them. But so it was—and so it is still with many, many regiments in the service; and the fact is most disgraceful to our military system.

"Colonel Beaumont was mightily annoyed when he heard that a merchant's son had obtained a commission in his regiment; for, aristocratic as military officers are even now-a-days in their opinions, they were far more illiberal and proud at the time when I entered the army. It was then the year 1807—during the war, and when the deaths of Pitt and Fox, which both occurred in the previous year, had left the country in a very distracted condition. When, however, the colonel learnt that my father was a rich man, that I had a handsome allowance, and was possessed of a couple of fine horses, his humour underwent an immediate change, and he received me with marked politeness.

"I had not been many weeks in the regiment when I discovered that several of the officers were accustomed to meet in each other's rooms for the purpose of private play; and I speedily became one of the party. The colonel himself joined these assemblies, which took place under the guise of '*wine-parties*;' and though the play was not high, the losses were frequently large enough to cause serious embarrassment to those officers whose means were not extensive. Thus they were very often compelled to absent themselves from the wine-parties for several weeks until they received fresh supplies from their agents or friends; whereas those who had capital sufficient to continue playing, were sometimes enabled to retrieve in the long run what they had previously lost. This was the case with the colonel, myself, and two or three others; and we soon obtained the credit of being the only winners. Such a reputation was by no means an enviable one; for though not a suspicion existed against the fairness of our play, we were looked upon with aversion by those officers who never joined the parties, and with something like hatred by those who lost to us. We stood in the light of individuals who made use of the advantages of superior income to prey upon those of far more slender means; and although there was no open hostility towards us, yet we certainly made many private enemies. For the very atmosphere in which gamblers live is tainted by the foulness of their detestable vice!

"One evening—when I had been about a year in the regiment—it was my turn to give the wine-party in my room; but at the usual

hour of meeting no one made his appearance save the colonel. 'Well,' he said, laughing, 'I suppose we cleaned the others out so effectually last night, that they have not a feather left to fly with. But that need not prevent us from having a game together.'—I readily assented, for cards and dice already possessed extraordinary fascinations in my eyes; and we sat down to *écarté*. At first we played for small stakes, and drank our wine very leisurely; but as I won nearly every game, the colonel became excited, and made more frequent applications to the bottle. Still he lost—and the more he lost, the more wine he took; until, getting into a passion, he threw down the cards, exclaiming, 'Curse my ill-luck to-night! I have already paid over to you a hundred and seventeen guineas at this miserable peddling work; and I will have no more of it. Damn it, Anderson, if you've any pluck you'll let me set you fifty guineas at hazard?'—'Done!' cried I; and the cards being thrown aside, we took to the dice. My luck still continued: I won three hundred pounds—all the ready money the colonel had about him; and he then played on credit, scoring his losses on a sheet of paper. His excitement increased to a fearful pitch, and he drank furiously. Still we played on, and the grey dawn of morning found us at our shameful work. At length Beaumont started up, dashed the dice-box upon the floor, crushed it beneath his heel, and uttered a terrible imprecation upon his ill-luck. He drank soda-water to cool himself; and we then examined the account that had been kept. The colonel owed me four thousand four hundred pounds, in addition to the ready money he had already lost. Pale as death, and with quivering lip, he gave me his note of hand for the amount; and having enjoined me in a low hoarse voice not to mention the affair to a single soul, rushed out of the room. I retired to bed, as happy as if I had performed some great and honourable achievement.

"The colonel did not make his appearance all day—nor for several days afterwards; and the answer to all inquiries was that he was indisposed. On the evening of the sixth day after the night of his losses, I received a message requesting me to visit him at his rooms. Thither I immediately repaired, taking his note of hand with me under the pleasing supposition that I was about to be paid the amount. When I entered his sitting-apartment, I was shocked to find him ghastly pale—the cadaverous expression of his countenance being enhanced by the six days' beard which no razor had touched. He was sitting near the fire—for it was still early in Spring—wrapped in a dressing-gown. Pointing to a chair, he said in a mournful voice, 'Anderson, you must think it strange that I have not yet settled the little memorandum which you hold; but the fact is I am totally dependant upon my father, and I wrote to him confessing my loss, and soliciting the means to defray it. There is his answer:'—and he tossed me a letter which, by the date, he had received that morning. I perused it, and found that his father gave a stern refusal to the colonel's request. Mr. Beaumont stated that he had already paid his son's debts so often, and had so many drains made upon him by his other children, that he was resolved not to encourage the colonel's extravagances any farther. The letter was so positively worded that an appeal against its decision was evidently hopeless. 'You see in what a position I am placed,' continued the colonel, when I had returned the letter to him; 'and the only alternative remaining for me is to sell my commission. This I will do as speedily as possible; and until that object can be accomplished, I must request your forbearance.' Not for one moment did I hesitate how to act. 'No,' I exclaimed; 'never shall it be said that I was the cause of your ruin;' and I threw the note of hand into the fire.—He watched the paper until it was completely burnt, with the surprise of a man who could scarcely believe his own eyes; and at length, starting up, he embraced me as fervently as if I had just saved his life. He called me his saviour—his benefactor, and swore eternal friendship. We parted; and next day he appeared on parade, a little pale, but in better spirits than ever. I could not, however, avoid noticing that he encountered me with some degree of coolness and reserve, and that his manner at the mess-table in the evening was distant and constrained towards me only. But the circumstance made little impression on me at the time.

"A few days after this event the colonel obtained three months' leave of absence; and during that period the major remained in command. He was a severe, but honourable and upright man; and he intimated his desire that the wine-parties should be discontinued. Myself and the other officers who were accustomed to play, took the hint, and no longer assembled for gaming purposes in our rooms; but we had supper-parties at one of the principal taverns in the town, and the cards and dice were in as much request amongst us as ever.

"At the expiration of the three months the colonel returned; and he took the first opportunity of signifying his approval of the major's conduct in suppressing the wine-parties. This was, however, mere hypocrisy on his part, and because he did not dare encourage what an officer so near his own rank had disapproved of. His manner towards myself was more cold and distant than it was previously to his departure,—yet not so pointed in its frigidity as to authorise me to request an explanation. Besides, he was my commanding officer, and could treat me as he chose, short of proffering a direct insult."

Time passed very rapidly away, and my father purchased me a lieutenancy in the same regiment, a vacancy occurring. I would gladly have exchanged into another corps, the coldness of the colonel towards me being a source of much mortification and annoyance—the more especially as it was so little deserved on my part. I however rejoiced at my promotion, and submitted so resignedly to Beaumont's behaviour that he never had an opportunity of addressing me in the language of reprimand.

"I was now nineteen, and had been in the army three years. During that period I had gambled incessantly, but with such success that I more than doubled my income by means of cards and dice. I was completely infatuated with play, and looked upon it alike as a source of profit and recreation. About this time I formed the acquaintance of a young lady, whose name was Julia Vandeleur. She resided with her mother, who was a widow, in a neat little dwelling about two miles from Portsmouth, on the verge of South-sea common. Her deceased husband had belonged to a family of French extraction, and after passing the greater portion of his life in a government office, had died suddenly, leaving his widow, however, in comfortable though by no means affluent circumstances. Julia, at the time when I was first introduced to her at a small party given by the principal banker of Portsmouth, was a charming girl of sixteen. Not absolutely beautiful, she was endowed with an amiability and cheerfulness of disposition which, combined with the most perfect artlessness and with a rare purity of soul, rendered her a being whom it was impossible to see without admiring. Well educated, accomplished, and intelligent, she was the pride of an excellent mother, whose own good conduct through life was recompensed by the irreproachable behaviour and tender affection of her interesting daughter. Need I say that I was almost immediately struck by the appearance and manners of the charming Julia Vandeleur?

"I paid her a great deal of attention that evening, and called next day at her abode. To be brief, I soon became a constant visitor; and Mrs. Vandeleur did not discountenance my presence. Nor did her daughter manifest any repugnance towards me. The influence of that dear creature was then most salutary:—would that it had always continued so! For one year I never touched a card nor die, all my

leisure time being passed at the cottage. To add to my happiness my father came down to Portsmouth to see me: he took apartments for a few weeks at the George Hotel; and I introduced him to Mrs. and Miss Vandeleur. Although Julia was no heiress, my father was too much attached to me to throw any obstacle in the way of my suit; and I was accepted as Miss Vandeleur's intended husband. Oh! what joyous days were those—days of the most pure and unadulterated happiness!

"It was settled that my father should purchase me a captaincy, and that the marriage should then take place. He accordingly returned to town to make the necessary exertions and arrangements for my promotion; and it was during his absence that my contemplated union reached the ears of Colonel Beaumont. I had kept my attachment and my engagement an entire secret from my brother officers, because I did not wish to introduce a set of profligate and dissipated men to the innocent girl who loved me, nor to her parent whom I respected. But that secret *did* transpire somehow or another; and Beaumont then found an opportunity of venting his spite upon me. He called upon Mrs. Vandeleur, sought a private interview with her, and declared that his conscience would not permit him to allow her to bestow her daughter, without due warning, upon a confirmed gamester. He then took his leave, having produced a most painful impression upon the mind of Mrs. Vandeleur. She did not, however, immediately speak to her daughter upon the subject; but when I called as usual in the evening, she took an opportunity to confer with me alone. She then calmly and sorrowfully stated the particulars of the colonel's visit. I was confounded; and my manner confirmed the truth of his accusation. Mrs. Vandeleur implored me to urge my suit with her daughter no farther—to break off the engagement where it stood—and urged me, as a gentleman, to release Julia from her promise. I threw myself at her feet—confessed that I had been addicted to play—but swore in the most solemn manner that for a year past I had renounced the abominable vice, into which my affection for her daughter would never permit me to relapse. She was moved by my sincerity—and at length she yielded to my earnest prayers. Oh! never shall I forget that excellent lady's words on this occasion. 'William,' she said, 'I will give you my daughter. But remember that the poor widow is thereby bestowing upon you the only treasure which she possesses—her only solace—her only consolation; and if you deceive her by rendering that dear child unhappy, you will break the heart of her who now addresses you!'—'Oh! my dear madam,' I exclaimed, 'the example of your virtues and the consciousness of possessing Julia's love will make me all that you can desire. And by yon pale moon I swear that never—never more will I deserve the name of a gambler. No: may this right hand wither—may the lightning of heaven strike it—if it ever touch cards or dice again!'—Mrs. Vandeleur rebuked me for the words I used; but the sincerity of my manner completely reassured her. Julia remained in ignorance of the object of the Colonel's visit and of this explanation between her mother and myself.

"Colonel Beaumont speedily found that his malignant officiousness had failed to produce the desired aim; and he called again, with some plausible pretext, upon the widow. By hypocritically affecting a merely conscientious motive in having acted as he had done, he gleaned from her the pledges I had made and the satisfaction with which she had received them. That same afternoon, at the mess-table, his manner became as kind and courteous towards me as it was wont to be when I first joined the regiment; I could not however respond with any congeniality. Still he did not seem abashed, but appeared not to notice my disinclination to accept his advances. When I was about to leave the table, for the purpose of repairing to the abode of my beloved, the Colonel said, 'Anderson, I wish to speak to you in my room.'—I bowed and accompanied him thither.—'Let us forget the past,' he said, extending his hand towards me, 'and be friendly as we were wont.'—'I am not aware, sir,' was my reply, 'that I ever offended you.'—'No; but you humiliated me,' he answered, with a singular expression of countenance; 'and *that*, to a military man and a superior officer, was most galling. Circumstances have lately changed with me. A distant relative has died and left me a considerable property; and my first duty is to pay you the four thousand pounds I owe you.'—'That debt, sir,' said I, 'has been cancelled long ago.'—'You generously destroyed the proof,' he hastily rejoined; 'but the obligation never could be annihilated, save in this manner:' and he handed me the sum which he had formerly owed.—I of course received the amount, and my opinion of him grew far more favourable, in spite of his attempt to ruin me with Mrs. Vandeleur.

"When this transaction was completed, the Colonel said, 'Anderson, we are now quits, but not exactly on equal terms. You have won a large sum from me; and though a settlement has been delayed, still that sum is now paid. As a gentleman you will give me my revenge.'—I started and turned pale.—'Of course you cannot refuse to allow me the chance of recovering myself,' he continued, calmly producing a dice-box.—'I dare not play, sir,' I exclaimed, my breath coming thickly.—'Oh! *as a gentleman*,' he repeated, 'you are bound to do so.'—'I have sworn a solemn oath never to touch cards nor dice again.'—'And if you had also sworn never to fight a duel, would that plea justify you in receiving an insult unresented, in the eyes of honourable men?' he demanded.—'Colonel Beaumont,' I said, 'in the name of heaven do not urge me to break that solemn vow!'—'Will you compel me to declare that oaths are sometimes mere matters of convenience?' cried the colonel: 'will you force me to express my conviction that Lieutenant Anderson will enrich himself by play, and will not afford the loser that opportunity of revenge which all honourable men concede?'—'Take back your money, sir,' I cried, dreadfully agitated; 'and permit me to retire.'—'Would you insult me by restoring money that I owed?' demanded the Colonel.—'Not for worlds would I insult you, sir,' was my answer: 'but do not force me to violate my promise to Mrs. Vandeleur.'—'Oh! a promise made to a lady, eh?' he exclaimed. 'I thought you more of a man than to refuse honourable satisfaction in consequence of a vow pledged under the influence of love. Come, Anderson, act fairly; and do not compel me to explain the transaction to your brother-officers.'

"Oh! what will your Highness think of me when I declare that I was alarmed by this threat, and that I yielded to the colonel's urgent solicitation! He produced wine; and I drank deeply to drown my remorse. At first I trembled as I touched the dice-box—for I remembered the solemn oath pledged only a few days previously. But in a short time the influence of the liquor and the excitement of play stifled all compunction; and I once more devoted myself to the game with all the intense interest which is experienced by the confirmed gamester. Beaumont was cool and collected: I was nervous and irritable. Fortune seemed to be bent upon giving *him* the revenge which he had solicited. I lost—we doubled our stakes: I continued to lose—and I steeped my vexation in frequent draughts of wine. In three hours I lost back again the whole amount he had paid me. The colonel then threw down the box, and said, 'I am satisfied.'—'But I am not,' I exclaimed furiously: 'let us go on.'—'As you please,' he observed calmly; and, maddened with drink—hurried on, too, by the terrible excitement which gamblers alone can know, I played—and played until I owed the colonel two thousand three hundred pounds. Then a revulsion of feeling took place; and I cursed my folly. I loathed myself: intoxicated as I was, I felt as a perjurer should feel. The colonel claimed my note of hand; and I gave it. This done, I rushed wildly from his room, and hastened to my

own.

"When I awoke in the morning, I could scarcely believe that the scene of the previous night had really occurred. It seemed to me as if I were standing on the brink of a dreadful yawning gulf, which a mist hid from my sight, but which I nevertheless knew to be *there*. Then that mist gradually rolled away; and the blackness of the abyss was revealed to me with all its horrors. Terrible were my feelings. But I was compelled to reflect upon what was to be done. My mind was soon made up. The debt must be paid; and, that obligation once satisfied, I would never touch the dice again! Having written a hurried letter to Julia, stating that business of importance suddenly called me to London, and having obtained leave of absence from the colonel, I repaired in all possible haste to the metropolis. But my father, to whom it was of course my intention to apply for succour, had left town that very morning for Portsmouth; and we had therefore crossed each other on the way. An idea struck me:—could I not borrow the money I required without being compelled to reveal the truth to my father? The thought pleased me—and I even felt rejoiced that we had so missed each other. Early next morning I obtained the two thousand three hundred pounds of one Mr. Goldshig, a Jew, who received my note of hand for three thousand in return, with the understanding that he would continue to hold it so long as I paid a hundred pounds every quarter for the accommodation—such payments, however, not to be deducted from the principal, but to be regarded simply in the light of interest.

"Much relieved by this speedy and easily-effected negotiation, I returned to Portsmouth, where I arrived at about nine o'clock in the evening. I repaired straight to the George Hotel, at which, as I expected, my father had put up. But he was not within; and I accordingly hastened to the barracks to pay the money to Beaumont. The Colonel was at home, and received me with a chilling coldness for which, after all that had recently passed between us, I was little prepared. I did not however appear to notice the circumstance; but tendered him the amount due. 'Oh! Mr. Anderson,' he replied, 'the debt is paid.'—'Paid!' I exclaimed, greatly surprised at this announcement. —'Yes,' he said: 'it was settled this evening, about two hours since. Your father called on me, and redeemed the note of hand.'—'My father!' cried I, a cold chill striking to my heart: 'how came he to know that you held such a document?'—'Really, Mr. Anderson, I have no time to converse with you now,' answered the Colonel; and he bowed me out with freezing politeness.

"Strange misgivings now oppressed me; and I began to read something malignant and systematically vindictive in the conduct of the Colonel; for it was evident that he must have mentioned the fact of possessing my note of hand. Dreadfully agitated, I returned to the George. My father had just come in; and his countenance was mournfully severe, when I entered his presence. 'William,' said he, 'I am deceived in you; and you have acted in a manner which you will have cause to rue as long as you live; that is, if your attachment for Miss Vandeleur be truly sincere.'—'My God!' I exclaimed: 'what has occurred? Does Mrs. Vandeleur know of *this*?'—'She knows all; and she not only sees in you a confirmed gambler, but a wicked perjurer,' answered my father. 'Her door is closed against you for ever.'—'Oh! wretch that I am!' I cried, beating my breast in despair. 'But who can have done all this mischief?'—'Colonel Beaumont called this morning on Mrs. Vandeleur, and insultingly exhibited your note of hand, which I have ere now redeemed.'—'The villain!' I exclaimed, rushing towards the door: 'but he shall pay dearly for this!'—'Stop, sir, I command you,' cried my father. 'He is your superior officer; he evidently hates you; and, were you to challenge him, he would ruin you. No: that is not the course to pursue. I have purchased you a Captain's commission in the—the regiment, which is stationed at Chatham; and you have also three months' leave of absence. Return with me to London; and endeavour by your future conduct to atone for the misdeeds of the past.'

"In reply to my hurried and anxious questions, I learnt that any attempt to see Julia would be vain, and could have no other result than to irritate Mrs. Vandeleur the more against me. My father offered me some consolation by the assurance that if I conducted myself well for a year, there would be a hope of reconciliation with the incensed lady; and I trusted to Julia's love to ensure her fidelity. Thus, partially—though very partially—relieved from the intenseness of that pain which now pierced to my very soul, I hastened to the barracks to superintend the packing up of my things, and to take leave of my brother-officers. This being done, I was passing out of the barrack-yard, when I encountered the Colonel. The light of the lamp fell upon his countenance, which expressed fiend-like satisfaction and triumph. Catching me by the arm, as I was about to pass him in silence, he muttered between his teeth, 'Anderson, I am avenged. You humiliated me once; and I hate you for it! Know me as your implacable enemy; and renounce all hope of your Julia—for she shall be mine!'

"He then hurried away. I was so stupefied by this sudden revelation of the ferocious and most unjust enmity of this bad man, that I remained rooted as it were to the spot. Never was there such ingratitude! But his threat relative to Julia,—oh! I could have afforded to laugh at his hatred: that menace, however, rang in my ears like a deafening bell. Mournfully I turned away, and hastened back to the inn. I passed a sleepless—wretched night; and during the journey to town, scarcely spoke a word to my father the whole way.

"The money that I had borrowed of the Jew was still in my possession; and I resolved to lose no time in returning it. Accordingly, the very next day after my arrival in London, I set out on my way to his abode in the City; but meeting with some officers of my acquaintance, I agreed to dine with them at an hotel in Bridge Street, Blackfriars. In fact, I was so very unhappy that I was glad to meet with such society; and I thought that I could easily postpone my visit to the Jew until the morrow. The dinner was first-rate—the wines excellent; and I drank copiously to drown my cares. Presently some one proposed cards: I could not offer any objection; but I simply stated that I should not play. Cards, however, were brought; and *écarté* was the game. I sate looking on. In the course of half an hour I saw a most favourable opportunity for making a good bet; and, with the most wretched sophistry, I reasoned to myself that betting and playing were two very different things. I accordingly offered the wager, and won it. Encouraged by this success, I bet again; and again I won. In less than another half hour I had pocketed two hundred guineas—for the play was high and the wagers in proportion. The ice was, alas! again broken; and it did not require much persuasion to induce me to take a hand. I thought of Julia—sighed and hesitated: I looked again at the cards—sighed once more—and seized them with that desperate feeling which we experience when we know we are doing wrong. To be brief, we kept up the play until three o'clock in the morning; and I not only lost every farthing I had about me—amounting, with the Jew's money and my own, to nearly three thousand pounds—but six hundred more by note of hand. It was understood that we should meet again on the following evening at another hotel, to settle accounts; and I returned home in that state of mind which suggests suicide!

"Fortunately my father did not know at what hour I entered; and he therefore suspected nothing. After breakfast I paid a visit to the Jew—but not to repay him his money. My object was to borrow more, which he willingly lent me, as I was enabled to show him the previous evening's *Gazette* in which my promotion by purchase was recorded. I borrowed the six hundred pounds which I required,

and for which I gave a bill to the amount of a thousand. At the appointed hour I repaired to the hotel where I was to meet my friends; but with the firm resolution of not yielding to any inducement to play. How vain was that determination! cards were already on the table when I entered, for I came somewhat late, having dined with my father before-hand. I strove hard to keep my vow—I wrestled powerfully against my inclinations; but a glass of champagne unsettled me—and I fell once more! Another late sitting at the card-table—another severe loss—another visit to the Jew next day!

"For the three months during which my leave of absence lasted, I pursued the desperate career of a gamester, contriving, however, so well, that my father had not a single suspicion of the fatal truth. I was now in a fearful plight,—owing nearly six thousand pounds to the Jew, and compelled to devote nearly every pound I received from my father on leaving to join my regiment, to the payment of the interest. I remained for about ten months at Chatham, and still continued to play nightly. I was, however, unsuccessful, and quite unable to keep up the settlement of the quarterly amounts of interest with the rapacious Jew. What aggravated the mental anguish which I endured, was that my father corresponded with Mrs. Vandeleur from time to time, and gave her the most favourable accounts of me. Of this he informed me in his letters, and when I occasionally repaired to town to pass a few days with him.

"At length—just when the Jew was becoming most pressing for money, and my difficulties were closing in around me with fearful rapidity—I one day received a summons to return home. On my arrival I found my father in high glee; and, after tantalising me a little, he produced a letter which he had received from Mrs. Vandeleur. That excellent lady, moved by my father's representations—touched by the drooping condition of her daughter—and also, perhaps, anxious to relieve Julia from the persecutions '*of a certain Colonel*,' as she said in her letter, '*who annoyed her with his addresses*,' had consented to our union. I was overwhelmed with joy: all my cares were forgotten—my difficulties seemed to disappear. My father had not been inactive since the receipt of that letter. He had obtained six months' leave of absence for me, and had hired and furnished a house in Russell Square for the reception of myself and Julia. Even the time and place for the celebration of the marriage had been arranged between him and Mrs. Vandeleur. The ceremony was to take place at Portsmouth on the ensuing Monday; and I was to accompany my father thither two days previously.

"Much as I longed to embrace my dear Julia, I was not sorry to be allowed a few hours' delay in London; for I felt how necessary it was to pacify the Jew. I accordingly called upon him, acquainted him with my approaching marriage, and stated that as it was my father's intention to transfer to my name a considerable sum in the public funds, the monies owing should be paid with all arrears the moment that transfer took place. Goldshig seemed quite satisfied; and I took leave of him with a light heart. But as I was issuing from his dwelling, I ran against Colonel Beaumont—my mortal enemy—who was about to enter the house. He started and was evidently much surprised: I was both surprised and annoyed. Convinced, however, that this meeting was a mere coincidence, and that his presence there had no connexion with my affairs, I was about to pass on with silent contempt, when he laid his hand on my arm—as he had done at the barrack-gate at Portsmouth thirteen months previously—and said, 'You think you will yet possess Julia: you are mistaken! She has repulsed me—but *you* know that I can avenge an insult!'—I thrust him rudely away from me, smiled contemptuously, and passed on.

"This circumstance was speedily forgotten by me amidst the bustle and excitement of the preparations for my marriage; and never did I feel more truly happy than when journeying by my father's side, in our travelling-carriage, towards the place where my beloved Julia dwelt. We alighted at the George Hotel at about five o'clock on the Saturday evening; and, as my father felt fatigued,—for he was now nearly sixty-five years of age,—I repaired alone to the cottage near South-sea Common. I shall pass over the joys—the rapturous joys of that meeting. Julia evidently loved me more than ever; and Mrs. Vandeleur received me in a manner which promised an oblivion of the past. And, oh! when I contemplated that charming girl who was so shortly to be my wife,—and when I listened to the kind language of her excellent mother,—I renewed within myself, but in terms of far more awful solemnity, the oath which I had once before taken in that very room!

"I learnt that Colonel Beaumont had, as Mrs. Vandeleur stated in her letter, persecuted my Julia with his addresses, and implored her to marry him. But her heart remained faithful to me, although circumstances had compelled her mother to explain to her the cause of our separation; and the Colonel was summarily refused.

"The happy morning dawned; and, in spite of the Colonel's threats, Julia and I were united at St. Peter's Church, Portsmouth. The ceremony was as private as possible; and as we had a long journey before us, the breakfast usually given on such occasions was dispensed with. Accordingly, on leaving the church, the bridal party repaired to the George, where the travelling-carriage and four were ready for starting. My father intended to remain in Portsmouth for a few days, for the benefit of the sea-air; and Mrs. Vandeleur was to visit us in London at the expiration of about a month, and then take up her abode with us in Russell Square altogether.

"While Julia was taking leave of her affectionate parent in a private room, a waiter entered the apartment where I and my father were conversing together, and informed me that a person desired to speak to me below. I followed the waiter to a parlour on the ground-floor; and there—to my ineffable horror—I found Mr. Goldshig. Two suspicious-looking men were standing apart in a corner. I instantly comprehended the truth. I was arrested for the debt owing to the Jew. In vain did I attempt to expostulate with him on the harshness of this proceeding. 'You know very well,' said he, 'that you and your wife are going off to the continent, and I might have whistled for my money if I had not done this. In fact, the person who gave me the information, strongly urged me to arrest you on Saturday evening immediately after your arrival; but there was some delay in getting the writ. However, you are safe in the officer's hands now; and you must go to quod if your father don't give his security.'—I was overwhelmed by this sudden disaster; and I vowed vengeance upon Beaumont, whose malignity I too well recognised as the origin of my present predicament. There was no alternative but to send for my father. His sorrow was immense; and he assured me that in settling the debt, he was moved only by consideration for the feelings of my bride and her mother, whom he would not plunge into affliction by allowing his son's conduct to reach their ears. He accordingly gave his security to the Jew; and I was once more free.

"Let me pass over the incidents of the year succeeding my marriage, and the close of which saw me blessed with a little girl. During those twelve months my behaviour was as correct as it ought to have been: the idea of gambling was loathsome to me. My father, who had not as yet transferred a single shilling to my name in the Bank, but who had allowed me a handsome monthly income, now experienced confidence in my steadiness; and to encourage me, as well as to mark his approval of my conduct since my marriage, he presented me with twenty thousand pounds the day after the birth of my daughter. Poor old man! he did not live long after that! A cold

which he caught led to a general breaking up of his constitution; and he died after a short illness. But on his death-bed he implored me not to relapse into those evil courses which had originally caused so much misery; and I vowed in the most solemn manner—by all I deemed sacred, and as I valued the dying blessing of my kind parent—to follow his counsel.

"I now found myself the possessor of a fortune amounting in ready money to thirty-six thousand pounds. Mrs. Vandeleur resided with us; and, when the mournful impression created by my father's death became softened down, there was not a happier family in the universe than ours. My Julia was all that I had anticipated—amiable, affectionate, and as faultless as a wife as she was excellent as a daughter.

"Four years rolled away from the date of my father's death; and not once during that period did I touch a card nor even behold a dice-box. I had purchased a Majority, and remained unattached. I was also now the father of three children—one girl and two boys; and every thing seemed to contribute to my felicity. We had a select circle of friends—real friends, and not useless acquaintances; and our domestic economy was such as to enable us to live considerably within our income.

"Such was my position when a friend one day proposed that I should become a member of a Club to which he already belonged. Mrs. Vandeleur and Julia, seeing that I was very much at home, thought that this step would ensure me a little recreation and change of scene, and therefore advocated the propriety of accepting the offer. I was balloted for and elected. My friend was a well-meaning, sincere, and excellent man, who had not the slightest idea of placing me in the way of temptation when he made the proposal just mentioned. Neither had my mother-in-law or wife the least suspicion that play ever took place at a Club. I was equally ignorant of the fact until I became initiated; and then I perceived the precipice on which I had suddenly placed myself. But I dared not make any observation to my friend on the subject; for he was totally unaware that gaming had ever been amongst the number of my failings. To be brief, I had not been a member of the Club six weeks, when I was one evening induced to sit down to a rubber of whist with three staid old gentlemen, who only played for amusement. 'There cannot be any harm in doing this,' said I to myself; 'because no money is staked. Moreover, even if there were, I have now acquired such control over myself that I could not possibly forget my solemn vows in this respect.'—Thus endeavouring to soothe my conscience—for I knew that I *was* doing wrong, but would not admit it even to myself—I sate down. We played for an hour, at the expiration of which one gentleman left and another took his place. The new-comer proposed shilling points, '*just to render the game interesting*.' The other two gentlemen agreed: I could not possibly—at least, I thought I could not—seem so churlish or so mean as to refuse to play on those terms.

"Trifling as the amount either to be won or lost could be, the mere fact of playing for *money* aroused within me that unnatural excitement which, as I have before informed your Highness, is alone experienced by those who have a confirmed predilection for gambling. And I now discovered—when it was too late—that this predilection on my part had only been lying dormant, and was not crushed. No: for I played that evening with a zest—with an interest—with a real love, which superseded all other considerations; and I did not return home until a late hour. Next day I was ashamed of myself—I was vexed at my weakness—I trembled lest I should again fall. For a fortnight I did not go near the Club: but at the expiration of that period, a dinner took place to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the foundation of the establishment, and I found it difficult to excuse myself. I accordingly went; and in the evening I sate down to a rubber of whist. Afterwards I lounged about a table where *écarté* was being played:—I staked some money—won—and fell once more!

"I shall not linger upon details. The current of my fatal predilection—dammed up for five years and a half—had now broken through its flood-gates, and rushed on with a fury rendered more violent by the lengthened accumulation of volume and power. *Écarté* was my favourite game; and I found several members of the Club willing to play with me on all occasions. For some time I neither gained nor lost to any important amount; but one evening the play ran high, and—hurried along by that singular infatuation which prompts the gamester to exert himself to recover his losses—I staked large sums. Fortune was opposed to me; and I retired a loser of nearly two thousand pounds. The ice being once more completely broken, I plunged headlong into the fatal vortex; and my peace of mind was gone!

"My habits became entirely changed: instead of passing the greater portion of my time with my family, I was now frequently absent for the entire afternoon and the best part of the night. Julia's cheek grew gradually pale; her manner changed from artless gaiety to pensive melancholy; and, though she did not reproach me in words, yet her glances seemed to ask wherefore I remained away from her! Mrs. Vandeleur noticed the depressed spirits of her daughter, but did not altogether comprehend the reason; because, although she observed that I was out a great deal more than I used to be, my angel of a wife never told her that it was sometimes two, three, or even four in the morning ere I returned home. The real truth could not, however, remain very long concealed from Mrs. Vandeleur. She began to be uneasy when I dined at the Club on an average of twice a week: when this number was doubled and I devoted four days to the Club and only three to my family, Mrs. Vandeleur asked me in the kindest way possible if my home were not comfortable, or if Julia ceased to please me? I satisfied her as well as I could; and in a short time I began to devote another day to the Club, and only two to Russell Square. Paler and more pale grew Julia's cheek; the spirits of the children seemed to droop sympathetically; and Mrs. Vandeleur could no longer conceal her uneasiness. She accordingly seized an opportunity to speak to me in private; and she said, 'William, for God's sake what does this mean? You are killing your poor uncomplaining wife by inches. Either you love another—or you gamble! If it be the latter, may God Almighty have pity upon my daughter!'—And the excellent lady burst into tears. I endeavoured to console her: I swore that her suspicions were totally unfounded:—but, alas! no change in my behaviour tended to corroborate my asseverations.

"I persisted in my fearful course; and, as if I were not already surrounded by elements of ruin sufficiently powerful, I became a member of Crockford's. In saying that, I mention sufficient to convince your Highness that I rushed wilfully and blindly on to the goal of utter destruction. My fortune disappeared rapidly; and when it was gone, I sold my commission, and then applied to Goldshig, who lent me money upon the most exorbitant terms. But let me pass over the incidents of three years. At the expiration of that time how was I situated? What was the condition of my family? Painful as these reminiscences are, I will not conceal the facts from your Highness. In a chamber at the house in Russell Square Mrs. Vandeleur lay upon her death-bed. Julia—pale, with haggard eyes, sunken cheeks, and appearance so care-worn that it would have moved even the heart of an overseer or master of a workhouse,—Julia hung, weeping bitterly, over the pillow. In the nursery, a servant was endeavouring to pacify the children, who were crying because they

knew that their '*dear grandmamma*,' was very, very ill. In the kitchen an ill-looking fellow was dozing by the fire:—he was a bailiff's man in possession—for there was an execution levied on my property. And I—where was I? Gone to solicit Goldshig the Jew for a few days' grace, the sale having been advertised to take place next morning! Thus was this once happy home now invaded by misery and distress:—thus was an amiable wife plunged into sorrows so keen, woes so bitter, afflictions so appalling, that it was no wonder if her charming form had wasted away, and the frightful aspect of the demon of despair had chased the roses from her cheeks;—and thus, too, was an excellent lady dying prematurely with that worst of the Destroyer's plagues—a broken heart!

"It was about five o'clock in the evening when I returned, after vainly waiting six hours to see Goldshig, who was not at home. Wearied and anxious, I left a note for him at his office, and retraced my miserable way to Russell Square. On my entrance Julia hastened to meet me, for she had heard my knock. 'What tidings?' she inquired in a rapid tone.—I informed her of what I had done. Her countenance became even more wretched than it was before.—'Oh! that they will not molest my dear, dear mother on her death-bed!' she shrieked, clasping her hands franticly together. I turned aside, and shed bitter—burning tears. The children now came rushing into the room. Alas! poor innocents, they knew not of the ruin that was hanging over their heads; and when they took my hands—kissed them—and said, 'Oh! we are so glad that dear papa has come home!'—I thought my heart would break. My God! my God! had all the misery which weighed upon our house been caused by me?

"I approached my wife—I took her in my arms—I murmured, as I kissed her pale cheek, 'Can you—can you forgive me?'—'Oh! have I ever reproached you, William?' she asked, endeavouring to smile in gratitude for my caresses.—'No: never, never, poor dear afflicted creature!' I exclaimed wildly; 'and it is your resignation, your goodness which makes my conduct so black, so very black!'—She wound her arms about my neck, and said in her soft gentle tone, 'Will you not come and see my mother?'—I started back in horror. She comprehended me, and observed, 'Do not fear reproaches: but come with me, I conjure you!'—I took the hand which she extended to me: holy God! how thin that hand had become—how skeleton-like had grown the taper fingers. Though it was my own wife's hand I shuddered at the touch. She seemed to read my thoughts; for she pressed *my* hand affectionately, and then wiped away her tears. A deep sob escaped her bosom—and she hurried me towards the sick-room. The children followed us without opposition on their mother's part; and in a few moments the mournful group approached the bed of death. I had not seen Mrs. Vandeleur for nearly a week; and I was shocked—oh! painfully shocked at the alteration which had taken place in her. From a fine, stout, handsome, healthy woman, she had wasted away to a mere shadow:—Julia was a shadow herself—but her mother seemed to be the shade of a shadow! Merciful heavens! and all this had been wrought by me!

"Kneeling by the side of the bed, I took the transparent hand that the dying woman tendered me, and pressed it to my lips. My brain seemed to whirl; and all became confusion and bewilderment around me. I remember a low and plaintive voice assuring me that heaven would yet forgive me the broken heart of the mother, if I would only be kind to the daughter:—I have a faint recollection of that dying voice imploring me to quit my evil ways, for the sake of her whom I had sworn to love and protect—for the sake of the children who were sobbing bitterly close by;—and methinks that I reiterated those solemn vows of repentance which I had before so often uttered—but to break! Then I was suddenly aroused from a sort of stupor into which I fell—kneeling as I still was,—aroused, too, by a piercing scream. Starting up, I caught the fainting form of Julia in my arms;—and a glance towards the bed showed me that her mother was no more! Her prophetic words were fulfilled: the widow, who gave me her only treasure, had died of a broken heart!

"Heaven only knows how I passed the wretched night that followed. I remember that the dawn of a cold March morning, accompanied by a cheerless drizzling rain, found me pacing the parlour in a despairing manner. I do believe I was half mad. And such horrible ideas haunted me! I thought of killing my wife and children, and then blowing out my own brains. Then I resolved to fly—and never see them more. In another minute I wept bitterly when I asked myself, 'But what would become of them?' I writhed in mental agony, as I found no response to this question; and when I pictured to myself all the amiable qualities of my wife—her gentleness—her goodness—her endearments—her unimpaired love,—and then thought of the little innocents with their winning ways, their little tricks, their pretty sayings, and their cherub countenances,——Oh! God, no words can explain how acute my sufferings were!

"From that painful reverie I was aroused by a loud commanding knock at the front door. There was an ominous insolence in that knock; and the worst fears entered my mind. Alas! they were full soon confirmed. The broker made his appearance, accompanied by his men; and the house was at the same time invaded by a posse of Jews—the usual buyers at sales effected under instructions from the Sheriff. Hastening the burst of anguish that rose to my lips, I drew the broker aside, acquainted him with the fact of my mother-in-law's death on the previous evening, and implored his forbearance for a week. He quietly took a pinch of snuff, and then observed that he was not the master—that he had no power to interfere—that the advertisements, announcing the sale, had appeared in the papers—and that the business must proceed without delay! Remonstrances—threats—prayers were all useless: the sale commenced;—and I was forced to repair to my wife's room to break the fatal news to her. She uttered no reproach—she even conquered her anguish as much as she could;—and the children were then ordered to be dressed directly. Presently Julia inquired in a meek and timid tone, if I had money enough to buy in the furniture of *the* room—she meant where her mother lay. I answered in the affirmative; but it was only to console her—for I had not a guinea—nor a friend! In a state of distraction I returned to the parlour where the sale was in progress. Merciful heavens! foremost of the buyers was Beaumont—my mortal enemy—bidding for the most costly articles that were put up. In a moment I felt as if I could fall on him, and tear him to pieces. He saw me; and, although taking no apparent notice of me, I beheld a sardonic smile of triumph upon his lips. I could bear no more: reckless of all—of every thing—I rushed from the house.

"For hours and hours did I wander about like a maniac—walking hastily along, without any defined object—and not even observing the crowds that passed me. Every thing was confused: bells seemed to be ringing in my very brain. It was dark when I thought of returning home; and then I felt shocked at the idea of having deserted my poor wife and helpless children at such a time. My ideas were now more collected; and I hastened to Russel Square. All was quiet in the house: but *they* were evidently still there—for a faint light gleamed through one of the shutters. I knocked with trembling hand. Tho door was immediately opened—by Julia. 'Oh! thank God that you have come back!' she exclaimed, sinking half-fainting into my arms: 'you know not what horrible fears have oppressed me!'—I embraced her tenderly: never—never did she seem more dear to me! The children also flocked around me; and the tender word '*Papa!*' wrung from me a flood of tears, which relieved me. I then made certain inquiries, and learnt the most heart-rending particulars. Every thing was sold and removed—even to the children's little beds;—but the worst of all was that the corse of Julia's mother lay upon the floor of the chamber where she had breathed her last!

"But let me hurry over these dreadful details. A few trinkets belonging to Julia yet remained; and the sale of those ornaments—presents made to her by me in happier days—enabled us to bury her mother decently, and to remove to a small ready-furnished lodging. Julia supported these sad afflictions and reverses with angelic resignation; and never did a single reproach emanate from her lips. Neither did she neglect the children: on the contrary, her attention to them redoubled, now that she had no longer a servant to aid her. But, alas! her strength was failing visibly: her constitution was undermined by misery and woe! And still it seemed, much though we had already suffered, as if our sorrows had only just begun. For, a few weeks after the sale of my property, and just as I had obtained a clerk's situation in a mercantile house, I was arrested for the balance of the debt due to Goldshig, the auction not having produced enough to liquidate his claims. This blow was terrible indeed, as it paralysed all my energies. I was taken to Whitecross Street prison, the only prospect of obtaining my release being the Insolvents' Court. I was accordingly compelled to apply to a philanthropic association to advance me six pounds for that purpose. The request was complied with; my wife went herself to receive the money; and she brought it to me in the prison. I compelled her to retain a sovereign for the support of herself and children; and I managed to borrow three pounds more from the only one of all my late friends who would even read a letter that came from me—so utterly was I despised by them all!

"And now—will it be believed that, such was my infatuation in respect to play, I actually gambled with my fellow-prisoners—staking the money that had been obtained with so much difficulty to pay a lawyer to conduct my business in the Insolvents' Court! Yes—while my poor wife was sitting up nearly all night to earn a trifle with her needle or in painting maps,—while my children were dependent for their daily bread upon the exertions of their poor dying mother,—I—wretch that I was—lost the very means that were to restore me to them! When the money had all disappeared, I became like a madman, and attempted to lay violent hands upon myself. I was taken to the infirmary of the prison, where I lay delirious with fever for six weeks. At the expiration of that time I recovered; and the humanity of the governor of the gaol secured the services of a lawyer to file my petition and schedule in the Insolvents' Court. The day of hearing came; and I was discharged. But, alas! I returned to the humble lodging occupied by my family without a hope—without resources. Nevertheless, the angel Julia received me with smiles; and the children also smiled with their sickly, wan, and famished countenances. Then, in the course of a conversation which Julia endeavoured to render as little mournful as possible, I learnt that Colonel Beaumont had been persecuting her with his dishonourable offers,—that he had dogged her in her way to the prison when she went thither to see me,—that he had even intruded himself upon her in her poor dwelling of one back room! Indeed, it was only in consequence of this visit that my wife mentioned the circumstance to me at all; but so pure was her soul, that she could not keep secret from me an occurrence on which, did I hear it from stranger lips, a disagreeable construction might be placed. Ill—weak—dying as she was, she was still sweetly interesting;—and I could well understand how an unprincipled libertine might seek to possess her.

"Without allowing Julia to comprehend the full extent of the impression made upon me by this information, I vowed within myself a desperate vengeance against that man who seemed to take a delight in persecuting me and mine. But for the present the condition of my family occupied nearly all my thoughts. Poor Julia was killing herself with hard—hard toil at the needle; and the children were only the ghosts of what they were in the days of our prosperity. I was, however, fortunate enough to obtain another situation, with a salary of twenty-eight shillings a week; and for some months we lived in comparative tranquillity—if not in happiness. But Julia always had smiles for me,—smiles, too, when the worm of an insidious disease was gnawing at her heart's core. And for my part, my lord, whenever I hear the discontented husband or the insolent libertine depreciating the character of Woman, the memory of my own devoted wife instantly renders me Woman's champion;—and lost—low—wretched as I have been, I have never failed—even in the vilest pot-house in which my miseries have compelled me to seek shelter—to vindicate the sex against the aspersions of the malevolent!

"Six months after my release from prison the small-pox invaded the house in which we lodged; and so virulent was the malady, that within three weeks it carried off two of my children—the girl, who was the eldest, and the younger boy. I need not attempt to describe my own grief nor the anguish of my wife. The blow was too much for *her*; and she was thrown upon a sick bed. At the same time my employer failed in business; and I accordingly lost my situation. I was returning home, one evening,—very miserable after several hours' vain search for another place,—when I met a gentleman who had once been a brother-officer in the regiment in which I first served. I made known to him my deplorable situation, assuring him that both my wife and my only remaining child were at that moment lying dangerously ill, and that I was on my way home without a shilling to purchase even the necessaries of life. He said that he had no objection to serve me; and, giving me a guinea for immediate wants, desired me to call on him next day at a particular address in Jermyn Street. I hastened joyfully home, and communicated my good fortune to poor Julia. On the following morning I repaired to Jermyn Street. My friend received me cordially, and then explained his views. To my profound surprise I learnt that he was the proprietor of a common gaming-house; and his proposal was that I should receive three guineas a week for merely lounging about the play-rooms of an evening, and acting as a decoy to visitors. My situation was so desperate that I consented; and ten guineas were given me on the spot to fit myself out in a becoming manner. I returned home; and informed Julia that I had obtained the place of a night-clerk in a coach-office. She believed me: a smile played on her sickly countenance;—and she was soon afterwards able to leave

her bed.

"I entered on my new employment; and all that fatal thirst for gaming which had plunged me into such depths of misery, was immediately revived. The proprietor of the hell would not of course permit his 'decoys' to play legitimately on their own account; but we were allowed to make bets with strangers in the rooms. This I did; and as the passion gained upon me, I visited other gambling-houses when my services were not required at the one where I was engaged. Thus I again plunged into that dreadful course; and my poor wife soon suspected the fatal truth. Our little girl died—thank God!—at this period. Start not when I express my gratitude to heaven that it was so; for what could have become of her during the period of utter destitution which soon after supervened? Yes, my lord: scarcely a year had passed, when I was hurled into the very depths of want and misery. I was accused of cheating my employer at the gaming-house: the imputation was as false as ever villanous lie could be;—and from that moment forth the door of every hell was closed against me. I was also unable to obtain an honest situation; and after Julia and myself had parted with all our wearing apparel, save the few things upon our backs, we were one night thrust forth into the streets—houseless beggars!

"It was in the middle of winter: the snow lay upon the ground; and the cold was intense. My poor wife—in the last stage of consumption, and with only a thin gown and a miserable rag of a shawl to cover her—clung to my arm, and even then attempted to console me. Oh! God—what an angel was that woman! We roved through the streets—for we dared not sit down on a door-step, through fear of being frozen to death! What my feelings were, it is impossible to explain. Morning—the cold wintry morning—found us dragging our weary forms along the Dover Road. We had no object in proceeding that way; but with tacit consent we seemed bent upon leaving a city where we had endured so much. At length Julia murmured in a faint tone, 'William, dearest, I cannot move a step farther!' And she sank, half fainting, upon a bank covered with snow.

"I was nearly distracted; but still she smiled—smiled, and pressed my hand tenderly, even while the ice-cold finger of Death touched her heart. I raised her in my arms:—my God! she was as light as a child—so emaciated in person and so thinly clad was she! I bore her to a neighbouring cottage, which was fortunately tenanted by kind and hospitable people, who immediately received the dying woman into their abode. The good mistress of the house gave up her bed to Julia, while her husband hastened to Blackheath for a doctor. And I, kneeling by the side of my poor wife, implored her forgiveness for all the miseries she had endured through me. 'Do not speak in that manner, my dearest William,' she said, in a faint tone, as she drew me towards her; 'for I have always loved you, and I am sure you have loved me in return. Alas! my adored husband, what is to become of you? I am going to a better world, where I shall meet our departed children: but, ah! to what sorrows, do I leave you? Oh! this is the pang which I feel upon my death-bed; and it is more than I can bear. For I love you, William, as never woman yet loved; and when I am no more, do not remember any little sufferings which you may imagine that you have caused me; for if there be any thing to forgive, God knows how sincerely I do forgive you! Think of me sometimes, William—and remember that as I have ever loved you, so would I continue to love you were I spared. But——'

"Her voice had gradually been growing fainter, and her articulation more difficult, as she uttered those loving words which Death rudely cut short. The medical man came: it was too late—all was over! Then did I throw myself upon that senseless form, and accuse myself of having broken the heart of the best of women. Oh! I thought, if I could only recall the past: if the last few years of my life could be spent over again—if my beloved wife, my little ones, and my fortune were still left to me—how different would my conduct be! But repentance was too late: the work was done—and the consummation of the task of ruin, sorrow, and death was accomplished! Wretch—wretch that I was!

"The poor people at whose cottage my wife thus breathed her last, were very kind to me. They endeavoured to solace my affliction, and insisted that I should remain with them at least until after the funeral. And if my poor Julia's remains received decent interment,—if she were spared the last ignominy of a parish funeral, which would have crowned all the sad memories that remained to me in respect to her,—it was through the benevolence of those poor people and the surgeon who had been called in.

"When I had followed the corpse of my poor wife to the grave, I returned to London; and, assuming another name, procured a humble employment in the City. Would you believe, my lord, that one who had held the rank of a Field Officer became the follower of a bailiff—a catchpole—a sort of vampire feeding itself upon the vitals of the poor and unfortunate? Yet such was my case: and even in that detestable capacity I experienced one day of unfeigned pleasure—one day of ineffable satisfaction; and that was upon being employed to arrest and convey to Whitecross Street prison my mortal enemy—Colonel Beaumont. Yes: he also was ruined by play, and overwhelmed with difficulties. And at whose suit was he captured? At that of Goldshig, the Jew! The Colonel was playing at hide-and-seek; but I tracked him out. Night and day did I pursue my inquiries until I learnt that he occupied a miserable lodging in the Old Bailey: and there was he taken. He languished for six months in prison—deserted by his friends—and compelled to receive the City allowance. Every Sunday during that period did I visit the gaol to gloat upon his miseries. At length he died in the infirmary, and was buried as a pauper!

"Shortly after that event, I lost my place through having shown some kindness to a poor family in whose house I was placed in possession under an execution; and from that time, until yesterday, my life has been a series of such miseries—such privations—such maddening afflictions, that it is most marvellous how I ever could have surmounted them. Indeed, I am astonished that suicide has not long ago terminated my wretched career. Your Highness saw how I was spurned from the door of that temple of infamy, which had absorbed a considerable part of my once ample means;—but that was not the first—no, nor the fiftieth time that, when driven to desperation, I have vainly implored succour of those who had formerly profited by my follies—my vices. In conclusion, permit me to assure your Highness that if the most heart-felt gratitude on the part of a wretch like me, be in any way a recompense for that bounty which has relieved me from the most woeful state of destitution and want,—then that reward is yours—for I *am* grateful—oh! God only knows how deeply grateful!"

"Say no more upon that subject," exclaimed Richard, who was profoundly affected by the history which he had just heard. "From this day forth you shall never experience want again—provided you adhere to your resolves to abandon those temples of ruin in which fortune, reputation, and happiness—yes, and the happiness of others—are all engulphed. But for the present we have both a duty to perform. Last night, at the door of Crockford's Club, I observed a young man in the society of two villains, whom I have, alas! ample cause to remember. This young man of whom I speak, drew forth his purse to assist you at the moment when I interfered."

"Yes—I saw him, and I know who he is, my lord," replied the Major. "His name is Egerton—he lives in Stratton Street—and his

fortune is rapidly passing into the pockets of swindlers and black-legs. It was my intention to call upon him and warn him of the frightful precipice upon which he stands; but, alas! too well do I know that such is the infatuation which possesses the gamester——"

"Enough!" interrupted Richard. "That idea must not deter *me* from performing what I conceive to be a duty. And you must aid me in the task."

"If your Highness will show me how I can be instrumental in rescuing that young man from the jaws of destruction," exclaimed Major Anderson, "gladly—most gladly will I lend my humble aid."

"You speak as one who is anxious to atone for the misdeeds of the past," said the Prince; "and so long as such be your feelings, you will find a sincere friend in me. In respect to this foolish young man, who is rushing headlong to ruin, caution must be used; or else those arch-profligates, Chichester and Harborough, will frustrate my designs. It is for you to seek an interview with Mr. Egerton, and inform him that the Prince of Montoni is desirous to see him upon business of a most serious and of altogether a private nature."

"The wishes of your Highness shall be attended to," replied Major Anderson. "It is useless to attempt to find Egerton *alone* at this time of the day; but to-morrow morning I will call on him at an early hour."

The Prince was satisfied with this arrangement, and took his departure from the lodging of the ruined gamester.

Reader! there is no vice which is so fertile in the various elements of misery as Gambling!

CHAPTER CCXLV.

THE EXCURSION.

While Major Anderson was engaged in relating his terribly impressive history to the Prince of Montoni, Lord Dunstable and Egerton were in earnest conversation together at the lodgings of the latter gentleman in Stratton Street.

The fact was, that Albert Egerton was placed in a most cruel dilemma, as the following note, which he had received in the morning, will show:——

"*Pavement, March 28th, 1843.*

"A month has passed, dear Albert, since I saw you; and you promised to come and see us as soon as you had finished your little business about buying the estate. But you have not come; and me and the girls are quite non-plushed about it. So I tell you what we've made up our minds to do. Next Monday is a holiday; and we intend to hire a shay and go and see your new estate. But as we don't know where it is, we shall of course want you to go with us; and so you may expect us next Monday, as I say, at eleven o'clock precise. Now mind and don't disappoint us; because we've all made up our minds to go, and we won't take any refusal. If you can't go, why then we'll go by ourselves; so in that case send us the proper address, and a note to the servants. You see that me and the girls are quite determined; so no excuse.

"Your loving aunt,

"BETSY BUSTARD."

"What the deuce is to be done?" asked Egerton for the tenth time since the arrival of his friend.

"Egad! I really am at a loss to advise, my dear boy," replied Dunstable. "The affair is so confoundedly ticklish. Can't you write and put them off?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Egerton: "you see how determined they are. Even if I were to apologise for not accompanying them, how could I refuse to give them the address of a country-seat which they so firmly believe me to possess?"

"Then write and say that, finding the house did not suit you after all, you have sold it again," suggested Dunstable.

"My aunt would see through the thing in a moment," returned Egerton. "Besides, she is intimate with Storks, my stock-broker, and would learn, from him that I had not bought in any money lately; but, on the contrary, had been selling out. I really must do something—even if I hire a country house for the purpose."

"Ah! that might be done!" cried Dunstable. "Or, stay!" he continued, a sudden idea striking him: "I have it—I have it, my dear boy!"

And his lordship seemed as overjoyed as if he himself were the individual who was unexpectedly released from a serious difficulty.

"Do not keep me in suspense," said Egerton, imploringly: "what is it that you have thought of?"

"I'll tell you in as few words as possible my boy," returned the nobleman. "It was about two years ago that I passed a short time at a place not far from London, called Ravensworth Hall. It is a splendid mansion, and has been shut up almost ever since that period. Lady Ravensworth is living somewhere on the continent, in great seclusion; and I happen to know that there is only an old gardener, with his wife, residing at the Hall."

"But I cannot understand how any thing you are now telling me bears reference to my difficulty," observed Egerton, impatiently.

"Why—don't you see!" ejaculated Lord Dunstable, slapping his friend upon the shoulder. "The gardener and his wife will not decline a five-pound note; and I dare say they are not so mighty punctilious as to refuse to allow you to call yourself the master of Ravensworth Hall for one day. What do you think of that idea?"

"I think it is most admirable," returned Egerton, his countenance brightening up—"if it can only be carried into execution."

"Will you leave it all to me?" asked Dunstable.

"I cannot possibly do better," replied Egerton. "But remember—there is no time to lose. This cursed letter must be answered to-day, or to-morrow morning at latest."

"I will ride out to Ravensworth as quickly as a thorough-bred can take me thither," said Dunstable, rising to depart. "At seven o'clock this evening I'll meet you to dine at Long's; and by that time all shall be satisfactory arranged, I can promise you."

Egerton wrung his friend's hand; and the nobleman had already reached the door of the room, when he turned back as if a sudden recollection had struck him, and said, "By the way, my dear boy, have you any cash in the house? I must make a certain payment in the neighbourhood before I go; and my agent in the country has been infernally slow lately in sending up the rents of my estate."

Lord Dunstable's estate was one of those pleasing fictions which exhibit the imaginative faculties of so many members of the aristocracy and gentry residing at the West End of London.

"Oh! certainly," was Egerton's prompt answer to the question put to him. "I have some four or five hundred pounds in my pocket-book. How much do you require?"

"Four hundred pounds will just make up the amount I have to pay," said Dunstable; and having received that sum in Bank-notes, he took his departure, humming an opera air.

It is not necessary to detail the particulars of the young nobleman's visit to Ravensworth Hall: suffice it to say that he was completely successful in his proposed arrangements with the gardener, and that he communicated this result to his friend Egerton at Long's Hotel in the evening. Chichester, Cholmondeley, and Harborough were let into the secret; and they insisted upon joining the

party.

Accordingly, on the following day Egerton sent a favourable reply to his aunt's letter; but his conscience reproached him—deeply reproached him, for the cheat which he was about to practise upon his confiding and affectionate relative.

For, in spite of the dissipated courses which he was pursuing,—in spite of the gratification which his pride received from the companionship of his aristocratic acquaintances,—in spite of the lavish extravagance that marked his expenditure, this young man's good feelings were not altogether perverted; and it required but the timely interposition of some friendly hand to reclaim him from the ways that were hurrying him on to ruin!

The Monday fixed upon for the excursion arrived; and at eleven o'clock in the forenoon a huge yellow barouche, commonly called "a glass-coach," rattled up to the door of Mr. Egerton's lodgings in Stratton Street. The driver of this vehicle had put on his best clothes, which were, however, of a seedy nature, and gave him the air of an insolvent coachman; and the pair of horses which it was his duty to drive seemed as if they had been purchased at least six months previously by a knacker who had, nevertheless, mercifully granted them a respite during pleasure.

Egerton's countenance became as red as scarlet when this crazy equipage stopped at his door: but his four friends, who were all posted at the windows of his drawing-room, affected to consider the whole affair as "a very decent turn-out;" and thus the young man's mind was somewhat calmed.

By the side of the seedy coachman upon the box sate a tall, thin, red-haired young man, dressed in deep black, and with his shirt-collar turned down, over a neckerchief loosely tied, after the fashion of Lord Byron. The moment the glass-coach stopped in Stratton Street, down leapt the aforesaid seedy coachman on one side, and the thin young man on the other; and while the seedy coachman played a nondescript kind of tune upon the knocker of the house, the young gentleman proceeded to hand out first Mrs. Bustard, and then her five daughters one after the other.

This being done, and Egerton's tiger having thrown open the front door, the thin young man offered one arm to Mrs. Bustard and the other to Miss Clarissa Jemima Bustard, and escorted them into the house, the four remaining young ladies following in a very interesting procession indeed.

Egerton hastened to welcome his relatives; but from the first moment that he had set his eyes upon the red-haired young man, he had entertained the most awful misgivings;—and those fears were fully confirmed when Mrs. Bustard introduced that same young man by the name of "Mr. Tedworth Jones, the intended husband of Clarissa Jemima."

The son and heir of the wealthy tripe-man tendered a hand which felt as flabby as tripe itself; and Miss Clarissa Jemima was under the necessity of blushing deeply at her mamma's allusion to her contemplated change of situation.

Egerton gave Mr. Tedworth Jones the tip of his fore-finger, and then conducted the party up stairs to the drawing-room, where the ceremony of introducing his City relatives to his West End friends took place.

Lord Dunstable was most gallant in claiming Mrs. Bustard as "an old acquaintance;" and he even overcame his aristocratic prejudices so far as to shake hands with Mr. Tedworth Jones. Then the young ladies were introduced in due order; and, though they giggled with each other a great deal, and were dressed in very flaunting colours, they were all very good-looking; and this circumstance rendered Lord Dunstable, Sir Rupert Harborough, Colonel Cholmondeley, and Mr. Chichester particularly agreeable towards them.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Bustard, throwing herself into an arm-chair, and wiping the perspiration from her fat face, "we really was scrooged up in that shay——"

"Glass-coach, mamma," said Miss Susannah Rachel, reprovingly.

"Never mind the name, my dear," returned Mrs. Bustard. "Your poor father always called it a shay; and he couldn't have been wrong. But, as I was a-saying, how we was squeeged up, to be sure! Six of us inside, and obleeged to sit on each other's knees."

"That will be just the very thing, madam, to render the trip more agreeable," said Mr. Chichester, with an affable smile.

"Provided the old lady doesn't sit on my knees," whispered Sir Rupert Harborough to Colonel Cholmondeley.

But Mr. Chichester's observation had made all the young ladies giggle, with the exception of Miss Clarissa Jemima, who blushed, and whispered to Mr. Jones something about such a remark being very unpleasant for a person "in her situation." Mr. Jones cast a sentimental glance upon his intended, and sighed very poetically as he assured Miss Clarissa that she was "a hangel."

"How are we going, Al dear?" asked Mrs. Bustard, after a pause; "and how far off is it? because I don't think the cattle in our shay are any very great shakes."

"On the contrary, aunt, I am afraid they *are* very great shakes indeed," replied Egerton, with miserable attempt at a joke. "But I think you will approve of the arrangements made."

"Oh! yes—I am sure of *that*," hastily interposed Lord Dunstable, who perceived that his young friend was very far from happy. "Your nephew's establishment is not prepared for his reception yet; but we have done all we could to make you and your amiable daughters comfortable. Materials for an elegant collation were sent out yesterday; and my four-in-hand and the Colonel's phaeton, in addition to your glass-coach, will convey us all in a very short time to your nephew's country seat."

Scarcely were these words uttered when the four-in-hand and the phaeton alluded to, dashed up the street; and the tiger entered to announce their arrival.

Egerton immediately offered his arm to his aunt, well knowing that if he did not take care of her no one else would: Mr. Tedworth Jones escorted his intended; Lord Dunstable took one of the young ladies under his protection; and the three others of course fell respectively to the lot of Colonel Cholmondeley, Sir Rupert Harborough, and Mr. Chichester.

A fair and equitable distribution of the party took place between the three vehicles; and the cavalcade moved rapidly away in a northern direction, Mrs. Bustard assuring her nephew "that it was quite a blessing to get rid of so much scrooging and squeeging as she had previously endured."

The gentlemen were very agreeable, and the young ladles very amiable—although they every now and then simpered and giggled without much apparent cause; but then it must be recollected that they suddenly found themselves for the first time in their lives in the company of a Lord, a Baronet, and two Honourables, one of whom moreover was a Colonel.

The day was very fine: the air was as mild as if it were the month of May instead of March; and the whole party were in excellent spirits—for even Egerton recovered his natural gaiety when he saw that the affair was likely to pass off without any of those annoyances which he had feared would arise from the collision of Finsbury denizens and West End fashionables.

At length the open country was gained; and in due time the stately pile of Ravensworth Hall appeared in the distance. Nothing could equal the gratification which Mrs. Bustard and the five Misses Bustard experienced when the edifice was pointed out to them as Egerton's country-seat; and, without pausing to reflect how incompatible were his means with such a grand mansion, they felt no small degree of pride at the idea of claiming the proprietor of Ravensworth Hall as their own near relation.

"What a beautiful place!" whispered Miss Clarissa to Mr. Jones, who would insist on keeping her hand locked in his during the whole ride.

"Charming, dearest—charming!" replied the enamoured swain; "and so are you."

Miss Clarissa blushed for the thirtieth time that morning; and, as if the squeeze of the hand which Mr. Jones gave her as a proof of his undivided affection were not sufficient, he planted his boot upon her foot at the same time.

This is, however, so common a token of love in all civilised and enlightened countries, that Miss Clarissa Jemima received it as such, although the tender pressure somewhat impaired the snow-white propriety of her stocking.

"Oh! what an immense building!" exclaimed Miss Susannah Rachel Bustard, as the three carriages now swept through Ravensworth Park.

"Gigantic!" said another Miss Bustard.

"Very stupendous, indeed, ladies," observed Colonel Cholmondeley, who was seated in the same vehicle with two of Mrs. Bustard's fair daughters.

"And so this great large edifisk is yours, my dear Al?" said the good lady herself, as she thrust her head from the window of the glass-coach, and surveyed the building with ineffable satisfaction. "But what a sight of chimbleys it has, to be sure!"

"Because it has a great number of rooms, aunt," replied Egerton.

"What sweet balconies!" cried the enraptured lady.

"Yes," said Egerton: "and they will look very handsome when all the shutters are opened and the windows are filled with flowers and evergreens."

"Oh! to be sure," exclaimed Mrs. Bustard, joyfully. "Well, really, it is a most charming place; and I never did see such lovely chimbley-pots in all my life. Quite picturesque, I declare!"

The three carriages now stopped before the entrance of the Hall; and Lord Dunstable's lacquey gave a furious ring at the bell.

In a short time one of the folding-doors was slowly opened to a distance of about a foot, and an old man, wearing a strange brown wig surmounted by a paper cap, thrust his head forth. Then, having surveyed the party with a suspicious air for some moments, he opened the door a little wider and revealed the remainder of his form.

"Come, my good fellow," ejaculated Dunstable, as he rushed up the steps; "don't you know your new master, who is just handing that lady out of the glass-coach?"

This was intended as a hint to make the gardener aware of the particular individual who was to be passed off as the owner of Ravensworth Hall.

"Oh! ah!" said the man, in a drawling tone, as he took off the paper cap, and made a bow to the company; "I sees him, and a wery nice gentleman he is, I've no doubt. But I hope he'll ex-kooze me for not opening the gate at fust, because——"

"Because, I suppose," hastily interposed Dunstable, "you did not know who we all were."

"No that I didn't," continued the old man; "and I'm desperate afeard of thieves."

"Thieves!" cried Lord Dunstable: "what—in the broad day-light, and riding in carriages?"

"Lor, sir," said the gardener, turning a quid of tobacco from one side of his mouth to another, so that a swelling which at first appeared in his left cheek was suddenly transferred to the right; "me and my old 'ooman is wery lonesome in this great place; and we've heerd such strange stories about the tricks of thieves, that we never know what shape they may come in."

Dunstable cut short the old man's garrulity by inquiring if the baskets, that were sent on the previous day, had arrived; and, on receiving a round-about reply in the misty verbosity of which he perceived an affirmative, the nobleman desired Egerton to do the honours of his new mansion.

"My good man," said Mrs. Bustard, advancing in a stately fashion towards the gardener, who had replaced the paper cap on his head, and had tucked up his dirty apron, so that it looked like a reefed sail hanging to his waist,—"my good man, what is your name? I don't ask through imperent curiosity; but only because I am the aunt of your new master, and all them young ladies is my daughters, your new master's fust cousins in consequence; and it's more than likely that we shall pay a many visits to the Hall. So it is but right and proper that we should know by what name we're to call you."

The gardener was a little, shrivelled, stolid-looking old man; and there was something so ludicrous in the way in which he stared at Mrs. Bustard as she thus addressed him, that Cholmondeley and Chichester were compelled to turn aside to prevent themselves from bursting into a roar of laughter.

"My good fellow," said Dunstable, hastening forward to the rescue—for Egerton was trembling like a leaf through the fear of exposure,—"this lady puts a very proper question to you; but of course her nephew, your new master, is able to answer it."

"Well, now!" cried Mrs. Bustard, struck by this observation; "and I never thought of asking Albert! Why, it's nat'ral that one should know the names of one's own servants."

"To be sure," said Lord Dunstable, hastily; "and this worthy man's name is—is—ahem?"

"Oh! yes," observed Egerton, in a faint tone, "his name is——"

"Squiggs is my name, ma'am," said the gardener: "leastways, that's the name I've bore these nine-and-sixty blessed years past, come next Aperil—Abraham Squiggs at your service. And now that I've told you my name, ma'am, p'rhaps you'll be so obleeging as to tell me your'n?"

But Dunstable hastened to cut short this somewhat disagreeable scene,—which, by the way, never would have occurred, had he

adopted the precaution of previously ascertaining the name of the gardener,—by desiring Mr. Abraham Squiggs to lead the way into the drawing-room prepared to receive the company.

This request was complied with; and the old man slowly proceeded up the marble staircase, followed by the whole party.

Mrs. Bustard and her daughters were highly delighted at the splendid appearance of the mansion; and their joy was expressed by repeated exclamations of "Beautiful!"—"Charming!"—"Quite a palace!"—"Well, I never!"—"Oh! the sweet place!"—and other sentences of equally significant meaning.

"Ah! this here mansion has seen a many strange things," said the old gardener, as he admitted the company into a handsome apartment, the shutters of which were open: "this wery room is the one where Mr. Gilbert Vernon throwed his-self out of winder about two years ago."

"Threw himself out of the window!" cried Mrs. Bustard; "and what did he do that for?"

"To kill his-self, ma'am," answered the old man. "I wasn't here at the time: I'd gone down into the country to see a garden that a friend o' mine manured with some stuff that he bought in a jar at the chemist's—about a pint of it to a acre. Ah! it's a wonderful thing, to be sure, to be able to carry manure enow for a whole garden in your veskit-pocket, as one may say."

"But you was speaking about a gentleman who threw himself out of the window?" said Mrs. Bustard, impatiently.

"Ah! so I were," continued the gardener. "It was told in the newspapers at the time; but no partickler cause was given. Oh! there was a great deal of mystery about all that business; and I don't like to say much on it, 'cos Mr. Vernon is knowed to walk."

"Known to walk!" exclaimed several of the ladies and gentlemen, all as it were speaking in one breath.

"Yes," returned the gardener, with a solemn shake of the head: "Gilbert Vernon sleeps in a troubled grave; and his sperret wanders about the mansion of a night. If it wasn't that me and my wife is old and friendless, and must go to the workus if we hadn't this place, we'd not sleep another night in Ravensworth Hall."

"Why, my dear Al!" ejaculated Mrs. Bustard, casting a terrified glance around, although the sun was shining gloriously and pouring a flood of golden lustre through the windows,—"you have gone and bought a haunted house, I do declare!"

"How charmingly poetical!" whispered the tripeman's son to Miss Clarissa Jemima: "only think, dearest—a haunted house!"

"Yes, Tedworth—I do indeed think——"

"What? beloved one!" asked the sentimental swain.

"That I hope we shall leave it before it grows dusk," returned the young lady, who evidently saw nothing poetical in the matter at all.

"My dear aunt," said Egerton, in reply to the observation which his relative had addressed to him, "I am not so silly as to be frightened by tales of ghosts and spirits; and I would as soon sleep in this room as in any other throughout the mansion."

"No, you wouldn't, young man—no, indeed, you wouldn't!" exclaimed the gardener, in so earnest and impressive a manner that the young ladies huddled together like terrified lambs, and even the gentlemen now began to listen to the old man with more attention than they had hitherto shown: "I say, sir, that you would *not* like to sleep in this room—for, as sure as there is a God above us, have me and my wife seen the sperret of Gilbert Vernon standing at dusk in that very balcony which he throwed his-self from."

"Dear! dear!" whispered all the young ladies together.

"And what was he like?" asked Mrs. Bustard.

"Why, ma'am," returned the gardener, "he was dressed all in deep black; but his face were as pale as a corpse's; and when the moonbeams fell on it, me and my wife could see that it was the face of a dead man as well as I can see e'er a one of you at this present speaking."

"Egad! you have bought a nice property, Egerton," said Lord Dunstable, turning towards his young friend. "I shall propose that we return to London again before it grows dusk."

"Decidedly—since you are so disposed," returned Egerton, who was rejoiced to think that the old gardener had started a topic so well calculated to frighten his aunt and cousins away from the Hall some hours earlier than they might have otherwise been induced to leave it.

"'Pon my honour, all this is vastly entertaining!" exclaimed Sir Rupert Harborough. "But how long ago was it that you saw the ghost, my good friend?"

"How long ago?" repeated the old man, slowly: "why, I have seen it a matter of fifty—or, may be a hundred times. The fust time, me and my wife was together: we had been across the fields to a farm-house to get some milk, butter, and what not; and we was a-coming home through the Park, when we see a dark object in the balcony there. My wife looks—and I looks—and sure enow there it were. —'*What do you think it is?*' says she.—'*I think it's a thief*,' says I.—'*No it ain't*,' say she: '*it don't move; and a thief wouldn't stand there to amuse his-self*.'—'*No more he would*,' says I: '*let's go near, for no one won't harm two poor old creaturs like us*.' And we went close under the balcony, and looked up; but never shall I forget, or my old 'ooman either, the awful pale face that stared down upon us! Then we recollected that that wery balcony was the one which Mr. Vernon had throwed his-self from; and that was enow for us. We knowed we had seen his sperret!"

"Oh! dear, if it should come now!" murmured Miss Clarissa, who was so alarmed—or at least seemed to be—that she was forced to throw herself into the arms of Mr. Tedworth Jones.

"Well—this is what I call a leetle dilemmy that you're got into, Albert," said Mrs. Bustard; "for you'll never be able to live in this place."

"And no one else—unless it is such poor old helpless creaturs as me and my wife," said the gardener. "Since the fust time we see the sperret—and that's near a year and a half ago—we've seen him a many, many times; but he don't hurt us—we've got used to him, as one may say."

"If this be the room that your ghost frequents," exclaimed Colonel Cholmondeley, "why did you select it for our reception to-day, since there are so many other apartments in the mansion?"

The gardener looked confused, and made a movement as if he were about to leave the room.

"Oh! do make him tell us why he chose this apartment of all others!" whispered Mrs. Bustard to her nephew.

"My good fellow," said Egerton, thus urged on in a manner to which he could not reasonably object in his presumed capacity of

owner of the mansion,—"my good fellow, did you not hear the question addressed to you by Colonel Cholmondeley?"

"Yes," replied the gardener, abruptly.

"Then, why—why do you not answer it?" said Egerton, not daring to speak in a firm or commanding tone.

"Why—if you're koorious to know, I han't no objection to tell you," responded the old gardener, after a few moments' consideration. "You see, when the establishment was broke up just after Lady Ravensworth left the Hall on a sudden, and when her lawyer come down here to discharge the servants, except me and my wife, who was put in charge o' the place, he goes through the whole building, has all the shutters shut, and locks up all the rooms——"

"Yes, yes—of course," interposed Dunstable, hastily: "because the mansion was to be sold just as it stood, with all the furniture in it."

"But he give us the keys, in course," continued the gardener; "on'y he told us to keep the rooms locked, and the shutters shut, when we wasn't dusting or cleaning. Well, the wery next day arter we see the sperret in the balcony, me and my wife come up to this room together, and sure enow the shutters was open!"

"And they had been closed before?" asked one of the young ladies, in a tremulous tone.

"As sure as you're there, Miss," replied the old man, "what I now tell you is as true as true can be. But the door was locked—and that made it more koorious still."

"It is clear that the shutters in this one particular room had been left open when all the others were closed," said Colonel Cholmondeley, with a contemptuous smile; for he began to grow weary of the old man's garrulity.

"Well—and if they was," cried Abraham Squiggs, in an angry tone,—for the Colonel's remark seemed to convey an imputation against his veracity,—"me and my wife shut 'em up again, and locked the door when we went out."

"And what followed?" inquired two or three of the Misses Bustard, speaking in low voices which indicated breathless curiosity.

"Why, that next night the shutters was opened again," answered the old man, fixing a reproachful glance upon the sceptical Colonel.

The young ladies shuddered visibly, and crowded together;—Mrs. Bustard again cast a timorous glance around;—and the gentlemen knew not what to make of the gardener's story.

"Yes," continued the old man, now triumphing in the impression which he had evidently made upon his audience; "and from that moment till now I've never set foot in this here drawing-room. But the sperret is often here; for sometimes the shutters stays open for two or three days—sometimes they're closed for weeks together."

"But what has all that to do with your bringing us to this very room on the present occasion?" asked Egerton, his aunt again prompting the question.

"Now don't be angry, sir, and I'll tell you," replied the gardener, remembering that he was to treat Mr. Egerton as the owner of the place. "The shutters has been shut for a matter of three weeks up to last night; and so when I see 'em open agen, I says to my wife, says I, '*Now's the time to see what the sperret raly wants, and why he troubles that room. There's a power of fine folks a-coming to-morrow*,' says I; '*and we'll just put 'em in the haunted-room. If so be the sperret shows his-self, they're sure to speak to him; and may be he'll tell them why he walks*.'—'*Do so*,' says my old o'oman: and by rights I shouldn't have said a word about the sperret at all;—but it come out some how or another; and now you know all."

"And we are very much obleeged, indeed, for being put into a haunted room," exclaimed Mrs. Bustard, bridling up.

"Oh! the joke is a capital one!" cried Cholmondeley; "and we will stay here by all means. If the ladies should be frightened, the gentlemen must take them upon their knees."

"Oh! *this* before one in my situation!" whispered Clarissa Jemima to her lover.

"It is too bad, my charmer," returned the poetical tripe-man.

But the Colonel's observation, however grievously it shocked the tender couple, had only produced a vast amount of giggling and blushing on the part of the four Misses Bustards who were *not* engaged to be married; and the result was that no serious opposition manifested itself to Cholmondeley's proposal to occupy that particular room.

"Pray be seated, ladies and gentlemen," said Egerton, now taking upon himself the duties of a host: "and excuse me for a few minutes while I ascertain that every thing necessary for your entertainment has been provided."

Egerton accordingly left the room, beckoning Abraham Squiggs to follow him.

The gardener conducted his temporary master to the kitchen, where Mrs. Squiggs was busily engaged in unpacking the hampers of wine and cold provisions sent on the preceding day. She was as like her husband as if she had been his sister instead of his wife; and therefore the reader is prepared to hear that she was a little, shrivelled, dirty old woman, possessing a face and hands apparently at open war with soap and water.

She was, however, very good-natured, and seemed quite at home in the occupation to which her attention was at present directed.

Being unaware of the approach of her husband and a stranger, she continued aloud the soliloquy in which she was engaged previous to their entrance.

"Fine turkey, stuffed with black things—truffles I've heerd 'em called by the cooks that used to be here," said the old lady, in a voice that seemed as if it sounded through a cracked speaking-trumpet; "glorious ham—four cold chicken—and tongues, reg'lar picturs! Two could pies—weal and ham most likely—leastways, unless one's beef. Six lobsters—flask of ile—and bottle of winegar. But what's this heavy feller? Cold round of biled beef;—and here's a blessed quarter of lamb. They'll want mint-sarse for that. What next? Four great German sassages—excellent eating, I'll bet a penny! No end of bread—half a Cheshire cheese—whole Stilton—and that's all in this basket."

Mrs. Squiggs had just finished the pleasing task of ranging all these succulent edibles upon the dresser, when she turned round and beheld her husband, accompanied by a stranger, who was forthwith introduced as Mr. Egerton, the temporary master of the Hall.

The old lady bobbed down and up again—thereby meaning a curtsey; for the natural good nature of her disposition was materially enhanced by the pleasing prospect of coming in for the remainder of the splendid collation which she had just been admiring.

Egerton and the gardener hastened to unpack the wine; and when this task was accomplished, the young man addressed the old one in these terms:—

"My friend Lord Dunstable gave you five pounds the other day as a slight recompense for your civility in allowing me the use of the Hall on this occasion. Here is another five-pound note for you; but pray be upon your guard should either of the ladies take it into their heads to question you concerning my right to this property. I, however, perceive that you are well disposed to aid me in this little innocent cheat upon my relations; and I really give you great credit for the ghost-story which you told to get rid of them all as soon as possible."

"Thank'ee kindly for the money, sir," exclaimed the gardener; "but as I'm a living sinner which hopes to be saved, every word I said up stairs about the sperret is as true as the Gospel."

"Ridiculous!" cried Egerton: "you cannot seriously believe in such a thing? Who ever heard of ghosts in these times?"

"Well, sir," said the man, in a solemn tone, "don't let's talk any more about it—'cos it might bring bad luck to disbelieve in ghosts where a ghost walks."

Egerton was about to reply; but he checked himself—remembering that it was useless to argue against a deeply-rooted superstition. He accordingly gave some instructions relative to the collation, which he ordered to be served up in the course of an hour; and, having renewed his injunctions as to caution in respect to his supposed ownership of the estate, he returned to the drawing-room where he had left the company.

CHAPTER CCXLVI.

THE PARTY AT RAVENSWORTH HALL.

During Albert Egerton's absence, the conversation in the drawing-room had at first turned upon the subject of the old gardener's statements respecting the ghost.

Lord Dunstable, Mr. Chichester, and Sir Rupert Harborough expressed their firm belief in the truth of the story—simply because they were anxious to serve their friend Egerton, and get the aunt and cousins back again to London as speedily as possible. For they feared that if an exposure were to take place, and if the deception relative to the ownership of the Hall were by any accident to transpire, the remonstrances, reproaches, and accompanying advice which Egerton's relations were certain to lavish upon him, might have the effect of reclaiming him entirely—a prospect by no means pleasant to the minds of those adventurers, who were resolved to pluck him to his very last feather.

Colonel Cholmondeley, although completely agreeing with his friends in all matters of this nature, nevertheless proclaimed his total disbelief of the ghost story. This he did simply because it would have appeared too pointed had all Egerton's friends combined unanimously in recommending that the party should return to London immediately after the collation.

"For my part," said Mr. Tedworth Jones, "I believe every word that the old man uttered. Love, poetry, and ghosts seem to me to go together. For what is love, unless the lover who loses her whom he loves, can soothe the agony of his mind by the conviction that she—the dear lost one—is ever near him in the shape of a disembodied spirit?"

And, having delivered himself of this splendid proof of his poetic mind, Mr. Tedworth Jones glanced triumphantly around him.

"How sweet you do talk, to be sure, my dear Tedworth!" murmured the enraptured Clarissa Jemima. "It was your conversation," she added, in a loving whisper, "that first made an impression upon my heart."

"And did my poetry have no influence, dearest?" asked Mr. Jones, in a tone of increasing mawkishness, and so far above a whisper that the words were overheard by Mr. Chichester.

"Ah! now I have found you out, Mr. Jones!" cried this gentleman, who most probably had certain reasons of his own for playing the amiable towards the wealthy tripeman's heir: "you're a poet—eh? Well—I thought so from the very first. In fact you have the air of a poet—you wear your collar like a poet—you look altogether like a poet."

Now, although Mr. Tedworth Jones looked at that precise moment, and at most other moments also, more like an ass than a poet, he nevertheless felt the compliment in its most flattering sense; and after a considerable degree of whispering on his part with Clarissa, and giggling and whispering also on hers, it transpired that Mr. Tedworth Jones had addressed to his beloved a great variety of poetical compositions.

"And I can assure you that they are very pretty too," cried Mrs. Bustard, who was by no means an indifferent spectatress of this scene.

"But you should print them, my dear sir—you should print them," exclaimed Mr. Chichester. "Let the world welcome you at once as a great poet."

"Well," said Mr. Tedworth Jones, his whole countenance becoming as red as his hair, so that it seemed as if he were about to go off in a state of spontaneous combustion; "I did venture to print little piece a few weeks ago."

"Indeed!" said Chichester, apparently much delighted at this announcement: "in some periodical, I presume?"

"No—it was to have been struck off on a few sheets of gilt-edged paper—just to circulate privately amongst my friends, you know," replied Mr. Jones: "but really the compositors made such an awful mull of the first proof that I never had the courage to let them go on!"

"That was a very great pity," observed Chichester.

"I can show you the original copy and the first proof, if you like," continued Mr. Jones; "and you may then judge for yourself how far I was justified in being angry with the printers."

Mr. Chichester of course expressed the utmost curiosity to see the poem and the proof; and the favour was conceded by Mr. Jones, after some slight opposition on the part of Clarissa, who thought that such a display was improper in respect to a lady "in her situation."

The papers were, however, handed over to Mr. Chichester, who began by reading aloud the following manuscript copy of verses:—

TO CLARISSA JEMIMA.

Oh! sweet Clarissa—ever dearest love!
What palpitations does my fond heart prove
When thy coy hand I press!
Who can depict th' ineffable delight
With which thy glances break upon the night
Of my sad loneliness?

True as the Boreal Lights unto the Pole,

Those looks shed lustre on my sadden'd soul,
And bid sweet visions rise
To cheer me in my wandering path, and give
A plea to nurse the thought that I may live
To bask in thy bless'd eyes!

Yes—dark as seemeth this wide world to me,
Perverse as human hearts appear to be,
Thou art all truth and joy!
For thee the incense of my altar burns;
To thee my grateful memory ever turns
With bliss that ne'er can cloy!

These verses were received with great applause by all present; but during the reading of them Clarissa had thought it quite becoming for a young lady "in her situation" to burst into tears, and throw herself in a sort of hysterical frenzy into her mamma's arms.

This little bit of tragedy was, however, soon got over; and, the manuscript copy of the verses having been disposed of, Mr. Chichester proceeded to read aloud the first proof of the stanzas in print:—

TO ALRISSA GEMINI.

Oh! sweet Alrissa—ever cleanest bore!
What fluctuations does my proud heart pour
When thy toy's hand I guess!
Who can defect th' inexorable delight
With which thy flounces break upon the sight
Of my bad loveliness?

Trim as the Rascal Sights unto the Pole,
Those locks shed bistre on my padded soul,
And bid smart onions rise
To churn me in my mantling path and give
A flea to nerve the thought that I may live
To bask in thy blear'd eyes!

You bark as smelleth this vile work to me,
Peruse as human beasts appear to be,
Then act all trash and gag!
For thee the nonsense of my utter brims;
To thee my platefull simmering ever trims
With flies that now can't bag!

"I think you will grant that the printers made a slight mull of my writing?" said Mr. Jones, when Chichester had brought this specimen of typography to a conclusion.

"Yes—a slight mull, as you observe," returned this gentleman, who, together with his own friends, was scarcely able to repress a boisterous outbreak of mirth. "But it is impossible to feel any annoyance at that strange assemblage of misconceptions on the part of the printer, since the original itself is so perfectly beautiful."

"Oh! yes—so very charming!" whispered Clarissa Jemima to her lover.

Mr. Jones looked a complete encyclopædia of tender emotions; and the happy couple, forgetting that other persons were present, continued their discourse in whispers.

"Well, I declare," said Miss Susannah Rachel, after a pause, "I don't think I shall ever again be able to sleep without a light in the room, after all that has been told us about the ghost."

"And I shall always cover my head over with the clothes," lisped another female specimen of the Bustard race.

"I've been told," remarked the fourth daughter, "that a horse-shoe nailed to the door of a room will prevent evil spirits from passing the threshold."

"Or sleep with a Bible under your pillow," said the fifth Miss Bustard.

"That's all very well, gals," observed the parent of this most interesting family; "but ghostesses won't be kept away by such means as them. Where there's evil spirits, there evil spirits will be."

"Nothing can possibly be clearer, madam," exclaimed Lord Dunstable.

"And if they must walk, they will walk," continued Mrs. Bustard.

"Your arguments are really admirable, madam."

"And so it's of no use bothering oneself about it—beyond getting away as soon as possible from the place where ghostesses are," added the lady.

"Were you of the other sex, madam, I should say you had graduated at Oxford," remarked the nobleman; "for you reason with all the logic of Euclid."

"Is Mr. Euclid such a very clever man, my lord?" asked Mrs. Bustard.

Dunstable was suddenly seized with a violent fit of coughing:—at least so it appeared to the good-natured old lady; inasmuch as he was forced to keep his handkerchief to his mouth for a considerable time.

Egerton now re-appeared, and suggested a ramble about the grounds, while the collation was being spread. Mrs. Bustard was anxious to go over the mansion; but Egerton negatived that proposal by stating that as he had not yet compared the contents of the various rooms with the inventory, it would not be fair to institute any such examination unless attended by the persons in charge of the place; and they were too busy with the preparations for the luncheon to spare time for that purpose.

The ramble was accordingly agreed to; and the party descended to the gardens.

"Well, my dear Albert," said Mrs. Bustard, as they roved through the grounds, "I admire the edifisk and I admire the gardens very much; but I don't like the evil spirit. You'll never be happy in this lonely place until you marry, and have a companion."

"Marry!" exclaimed Egerton, into whose head the idea had only entered as one suggesting a means to repair his fortunes, when they should be completely shattered.

"Yes—marry, to be sure!" continued his good-natured but garrulous relative. "Let me see—I think I could make up an excellent

match for you. What should you say to Miss Posselwaithe, the great paviour's daughter?"

"Oh! my dear madam," exclaimed Lord Dunstable, "your nephew may look somewhat higher than a paviour's daughter. *I* intend that he shall marry a lady of title as well as of fortune. Only think how well it will sound in the *Morning Herald—'Mr. and Lady Egerton, of Ravensworth Park*.'"

"So it would—so it would!" cried the aunt, delighted with the prospect thus held out.

And in this way they chatted until the bell on the roof of the Hall rang to summon them to the collation.

The table was spread in "the haunted room;" and the company took their places with a determination to do ample justice to the excellent cheer.

We have already given the reader to understand that there was a most liberal supply of eatables provided for this occasion: we should also state that the wine was equally plentiful and good; and the champagne soon circulated with great freedom. Mrs. Bustard permitted Lord Dunstable to fill her glass as often as he chose; and that was very often indeed. As for her daughters, they one and all declared to the gentlemen who respectively sate next to them, that they really could not possibly think of taking more than a quarter of a glass; but it happened that, after a great deal of simpering, giggling, and blushing, they managed to toss off each a bumper; and somehow or another their eyes were averted when their glasses were being refilled; and on the third occasion of such replenishment, they took it as a matter of course.

Things went on so comfortably, that Egerton's spirits rose to as high a state of exuberance as if he were really the owner of the splendid mansion in which he was entertaining his relations and friends:—Mrs. Bustard declared that she never had seen any thing so pleasant since the day when her poor deceased husband and herself dined with the Lord Mayor;—Mr. Tedworth Jones insisted upon singing a song which he had himself composed to his intended, and the two first lines of which delicately eulogised the fair "Clarissa," and plainly stated how grieved the poet would be to "miss her;"—and even the young lady herself was so happy and contented that she forgot to reproach her lover for thus publicly complimenting one "in her situation."

Dunstable flattered the old lady: Cholmondeley, Harborough, and Chichester made themselves agreeable to the young ones; and every thing was progressing as "merry as a marriage bell," when the old gardener rushed franticly into the room, carrying his paper cap in one hand, his wig in the other, and bawling at the top of his cracked voice, "A corpse! a corpse!"

Every one started from his seat around the table, and surveyed the gardener with looks of astonishment.

For a moment Egerton and his four fashionable friends imagined that this was some scheme of the gardener to break up the party, and was therefore to some extent a stratagem in favour of Egerton himself: but a second glance at the horror-struck countenance of the old man convinced them that his present conduct was far different from a mere feint.

"A corpse! a corpse!" he repeated, casting haggard looks around.

"What in the name of heaven do you mean?" demanded Egerton, now advancing towards him.

The gardener sank, trembling all over, upon a seat; and Egerton made him swallow a glass of wine.

In a few minutes he grew more composed, put on his wig,—which, it seemed, bad fallen off as he was rushing up the stairs,—and then related in his characteristic round-about manner the causes of his ejaculations and his alarms.

But it will perhaps suit the convenience of the reader much better if we explain the whole affair in our own language, and as succinctly as possible.

It appeared, then, that while the company in the drawing-room were discussing their wine, and the gardener, his wife, and the servants in attendance upon the vehicles, were dining off the remains of the banquet in the kitchen, a stout, hearty, decently dressed man, of about eight-and-forty years of age, was passing through a field near Ravensworth Hall. He was accompanied by a beautiful terrier, with which he amused himself by throwing a small stick to as great a distance as he could, and making the dog fetch it back to him. The little animal was very sagacious, and performed its duty well: until at last the man threw the stick into a certain part of the field where the dog persisted in remaining, instead of hastening back to its master. Vainly did the man whistle and call from a distance: the dog would not obey him, but kept scratching in a particular spot from which it would not stir. Thither did the man accordingly proceed; and, on reaching the spot, he found the dog working away with its little paws in a hollow which had doubtless been caused by the recent rains. At the same time a nauseous effluvium assailed the man's nostrils; and, on examining the spot more attentively, he discovered—to his indescribable horror—a human hand protruding from the soil!

It was almost a skeleton-hand; but the black and rotting flesh still clung to it, and the fibres were not so far decomposed as to cease to hold the joints of the fingers together.

Seizing the dog in his arms, the man tore the little animal away from the spot where so appalling a spectacle appeared; and, without farther hesitation, he hurried to the Hall. Having found his way to the servants' offices, he communicated his discovery to the old gardener and to the servants who had accompanied Egerton's party to the mansion. The first impulse of Abraham Squiggs was to hurry up stairs and alarm the guests with the strange news thus brought; but Lord Dunstable's lacquey suggested the impropriety of disturbing the company, and proposed that the spot should be first examined by means of mattocks and spades.

This plan was immediately assented to: and, the gardener having procured the implements required, the owner of the dog hastened to lead the way to the place where the human hand appeared above the ground. Mrs. Squiggs protested against being left behind: she was accordingly allowed to form one of the party.

On reaching the spot, the news which the stranger had imparted were found to be correct; and the exposed member was viewed with looks of horror and alarm.

"Some foul deed has been committed," said the stranger; "but I have always heard and read that God will sooner or later bring murder to light."

"Ah! and that's true enow, I'll warrant!" exclaimed the old gardener. "The body which that hand belongs to, was no doubt buried deep; but the rains overflowed yonder pond, and the water made itself a way along here, you see—so that it has hollered the earth out several foot."

"Well—it's of no use talking," said the stranger: "but make haste and dig down here, old gentleman—so that we may see whether the hand has an arm, and the arm a body."

The gardener took the spade, and set to work; but he trembled so violently that he was unable to proceed for many minutes. The stranger accordingly snatched the spade from his hands, and addressed himself resolutely to the task.

While he was thus employed, the others stood by in profound silence; but the dog ran in a timid manner round the spot, sometimes barking—then whining mournfully.

His master worked speedily, but carefully; and as each shovel-full of earth was thrown up, and as the proofs that an entire human body lay beneath became every instant more apparent, the spectators exchanged glances of augmenting horror.

But when at length the entire form of a human being was laid bare scarcely two feet below the bottom of the hollow,—when their eyes fell upon the blackened flesh of the decomposing head, the features of which were no longer traceable,—and when the rotting remnants of attire showed that the being who had there found a grave was of the female sex, a cry burst simultaneously from every lip.

"Here's work for the Coroner, at all events," observed the stranger, after a long pause. "We must move the body to the big house there——"

"Move the body to the Hall!" cried the old gardener and his wife, in the same breath, and both looking aghast at this announcement.

"Yes—most certainly," answered the stranger. "Would you leave a Christian—as I hope that poor woman was—to be devoured by rats and other vermin? I might have done so once: but, thank God! I have become a better man since then. Howsomever, get us a plank or two, old gentleman; and we'll do our duty in a proper manner."

The gardener retraced his way, in a sulky mood, and with much mumbling to himself, to the Hall, and presently returned with a couple of planks and two stout pieces of wood to serve as cross-beams to form the bier. The corpse was then carefully placed upon the planks, but not without great risk of its falling to pieces while being thus moved; and, the bier having been hoisted on the shoulders of the stranger, Dunstable's lacquey, the seedy coachman, and Colonel Cholmondeley's groom, the procession moved towards the Hall, the gardener and his wife at the head.

But when the party arrived, with its appalling burden, near the mansion, the old man and woman began to exchange hasty whispers together.

"What is the matter now?" asked the stranger.

"Why, sir," replied the gardener, in a hesitating manner, "me and my wife has been a-thinking together that it would be as well to put the remains of that poor creetur as far from our own rooms as possible: 'cos what with a sperret here and a dead body there——"

"Well, well—old man," interrupted the stranger, impatiently; "this load is heavy, and I for one shall be glad to put it down somewhere. So leave off chattering uselessly—and tell us in a word what you do mean."

"To be sure," returned the gardener: "this way—this way."

And, as he spoke, he opened a small door at the southern end of the building, by means of a key which he selected from a bunch hanging beneath his apron.

"We never can get up that staircase, old gentleman," said the stranger, plunging his glances through the door-way.

"It's easier than you think—the stairs isn't so steep as they seem," returned the gardener; "and what's more," he added, doggedly, "you may either bring your burden this way, or leave it in the open air altogether."

"To be sure," chimed in the old woman: "if you don't choose to put the body in the very farthermost room from our end of the building, you may take it back again; and them stairs leads to the room that *is* farthermost off."

The stranger, who was a willing, good-natured man, and who seemed to study only how he should best perform a Christian duty, offered no farther remonstrance; but, respecting the prejudices of the old people, succeeded, by the aid of his co-operators, in conveying the bier up the staircase. On reaching the landing, the gardener opened the door of a room the shutters of which were closed; but through the chinks there streamed sufficient light to show that the apartment was a bed-chamber.

"Put it down there—on the carpet," said the gardener, who was anxious to terminate a proceeding by no means agreeable to him.

The bier was conveyed into the room, and placed upon the floor.

At that moment—while the gardener and his wife remained standing in the passage—the old man suddenly caught hold of the woman's arm with a convulsive grasp, and whispered in a hasty and hollow tone, "Hark! there's a footstep!"

"Yes—I hear it too!" returned his wife, in a scarcely audible tone: and, through very fright, she repeated, "There—there—there!" as often as the footstep fell—or seemed to fall—upon her ears.

"At the end of the passage——" murmured the gardener.

"Do you see any thing?" asked his wife, clinging to him.

"No—but it's certain to be the sperret," returned the man.

And they leant on each other for support.

At the next moment the four men came from the interior of the room where they had deposited the corpse; and the two old people began to breathe more freely.

The gardener hurried his wife and companions down the narrow staircase, and pushed them all hastily from the threshold of the little door, which he carefully locked behind him.

Then, having given the stranger a surly kind of invitation to step in and refresh himself, he led the way to the offices at the opposite extremity of the building.

But scarcely had the party gained the servants' hall, when the old gardener, whose mind was powerfully excited by all that had just occurred, hastened abruptly away; and, rushing up the great staircase, he burst into the drawing-room, exclaiming, "A corpse! a corpse!"

CHAPTER CCXLVII.

THE STRANGER WHO DISCOVERED THE CORPSE.

Perhaps there is no other cry in the world, save that of "Fire!" more calculated to spread terror and dismay, when falling suddenly and unexpectedly upon the ears of a party of revellers, than that of "A corpse! a corpse!"

Before a single question can be put, or a word of explanation be given, each one who hears that ominous announcement revolves a thousand dread conjectures in his mind: for although that cry might in reality herald nothing more appalling than a case of sudden death from natural causes, yet the imagination instinctively associates it with the foulest deed of treachery and murder.

Such was the case in the present instance.

The entire party started from their seats; and the smiles that were a moment before upon their countenances gave place to looks of profound horror and intense curiosity.

The feelings thus denoted did not experience any mitigation from the inquiring glances that were cast towards the gardener; for the entire appearance of the old man was far more calculated to augment than diminish the alarm which his strange cry had originated. His eyes rolled wildly in their sockets—his quivering lips were livid—his frame seemed to be influenced by one continuous shudder, and his breath came with difficulty.

In fact, the mysterious sounds of footsteps in the passage had worked up his feelings, already greatly moved by the discovery and exhumation of the rotting carcass of a female, to a degree of excitement doubly painful to behold in one so bowed with the weight of years as he; and he sank into a seat, as we have before said, in a state of almost complete exhaustion.

The wine that Egerton compelled him to swallow partially restored him; and in the course of a few minutes he was enabled to relate the particulars which we have succinctly placed before the reader.

The ladies were cruelly shocked by the narrative that thus met their ears; and they one and all declared that nothing should ever again induce them to visit a place into possession of which their relative seemed to have entered under the most inauspicious circumstances. They also requested to be taken back to London with the least possible delay; and Sir Rupert Harborough, with his friend Chichester, hastened to give the servants orders to get the vehicles ready.

Mrs. Bustard and her daughters retired into an ante-room to put on their bonnets and shawls: Egerton, Dunstable, Cholmondeley, and Tedworth Jones remained standing round the chair on which the old gardener was still seated.

"This is a most extraordinary thing," said Dunstable, after a pause, during which he had reflected profoundly: then, addressing himself to his friend the Colonel, he asked in a serious tone, "Does not the strange discovery just made remind you of something that I mentioned to you nearly two years ago?"

"I recollect!" cried the Colonel: "you allude to the mysterious disappearance of Lydia Hutchinson."

"I do," answered the nobleman. "That event occurred while I was lying wounded in this house."

"Ah! I heerd of it, to be sure!" said the gardener. "But I was down in the country when all them things took place—I was there for some months. Do you think——"

"No—it could not be!" interrupted Dunstable: "for it was well known at the time that Lydia decamped with Lady Ravensworth's jewel-box."

Colonel Cholmondeley turned away, and said nothing: he remembered the evidences of desperate enmity between Adeline and Lydia, which had come within his own cognisance; and a vague—a very vague, distant, and undefined suspicion that the corpse just discovered might indeed be that of Lydia Hutchinson, entered his mind. But he speedily banished it: for the idea that Lady Ravensworth could have had any thing to do with the murder of Lydia did not seem tenable for a moment.

"As your lordship says," observed the old gardener, after a long pause, and now addressing himself to Dunstable, "it can't have any thing to do with that young o'oman who was here a few weeks as my lady's maid—'cos it's well knowed that she bolted off with the jewel-casket, as your lordship says."

Here Cholmondeley advanced towards Dunstable, took him by the arm, and, leading him aside, said in a hasty whisper, "Let us leave this matter where it is. Should the body just discovered be really that of Lydia Hutchinson, who disappeared so strangely, it would be very annoying for us to have to explain to a Coroner's jury all we know about her and Lady Ravensworth."

"Truly so," answered Dunstable. "And, after all, it is no affair of ours."

This understanding being arrived at, the nobleman and his friend returned to the table, where they helped themselves to some champagne to allay, as they said, the disagreeable sensations produced by the sudden interruption which their mirth had experienced.

The day seemed to be marked out by destiny as one on which various adventures were to occur in respect to the excursion party to Ravensworth Hall.

It will be remembered that Sir Rupert Harborough and Chichester had left the drawing-room for the purpose of seeing the vehicles got ready with the least possible delay.

The two friends—whom the associated roguery of many years had rendered as intimate as even brothers could be—proceeded down

stairs, and, after some little trouble, found their way to the servants' offices. Guided by a sound of voices, they threaded a passage, and at length found themselves on the threshold of the room where the gardener's wife, the stranger who had first discovered the body, the seedy coachman, the lacquey, and the groom, were still discussing the incident that had so recently occurred.

But the moment that the two gentlemen appeared at the door, the stranger started from his seat, exclaiming in a loud tone, "Well met, I declare! You're the very identical men I've long been wanting to see!"

And, putting his arms akimbo, he advanced towards them in a manner which appeared extremely free and independent in the eyes of the lacqueys.

"Ah! my good friend Talbot!" cried the baronet, for a moment thrown off his guard, but speedily recovering himself: "upon my honour I am delighted to see you!"

"So am I—quite charmed to find you looking so well!" exclaimed Chichester.

"No thanks to either of you, howsomever," said the individual thus addressed, and without appearing to notice the hands that were extended to him. "But you know as well as I do that my name isn't Talbot at all; it's Bill Pocock—and, I may add, too, without telling a lie, that it's now *honest Bill Pocock*."

"Well, my dear Pocock," exclaimed Chichester, with a glance that implored his forbearance, "I am really quite happy to see you. But we will step out into the garden, and just talk over a few little matters——"

"Oh! gentlemen," said the gardener's wife, coming forward, "you're quite welcome to step into our little parlour t'other side of the passage—if so be you have any thing private to talk about."

"Thank you—that will exactly suit us," returned Chichester, hastily: and, taking Pocock's arm, he drew him into the room thus offered for their privacy.

The baronet remained behind for a few moments, to give the necessary instructions to the servants relative to preparing the vehicles; and, this being done, he rejoined Chichester and Pocock.

When the trio were thus assembled in the gardener's little parlour, Pocock said, "So I find you two chaps still pursuing the old game. Got in with a young cit named Egerton—and all his relations—eh? Pretty goings on, I've no doubt."

"Only just in a friendly way, my dear fellow," exclaimed Chichester. "But you stated that you had been looking for me and Harborough for a long time?"

"Yes—I was anxious enough to see you both," returned Pocock: "and I'll tell you the reason why. You remember that night—some few years ago—when you two got such a precious walloping at the *Dark House* in Brick Lane, Spitalfields?"

"Well—well," said the baronet: "go on."

"Oh! I see you haven't forgot it! You also know that on that same night the very young man whom we all ruined, was present—I mean Richard Markham."

"Yes—to be sure. But what of that?" demanded Chichester.

"Why—I gave him a paper, drawed up and signed by myself,—plain William Pocock, and none of your aristocratic Talbots."

"And that paper?" said the baronet, anxiously.

"Contained a complete confession of the whole business that brought him into trouble," continued Pocock. "But he pledged himself not to use it to my prejudice; and that's the reason why you never heard of it in a legal way. On that same occasion he put a fifty-pound note into my hand, saying, '*Accept this as a token of my gratitude and a proof of my forgiveness; and endeavour to enter an honest path. Should you ever require a friend, do not hesitate to apply to me.*'—Those was his words; and they made a deep impression on me. Yes—gentlemen, and I *did* enter an honest path," continued Pocock, proudly: "and that money prospered me. I returned to my old business as an engraver—I left off going to public-houses—I worked hard, and redeemed my character with my old employers. Since that night at the *Dark House* all has gone well with me. I have never applied to my benefactor—because I have never required a friend. But I have prayed for him morning and evening—yes, gentlemen, prayed! I know that this may sound strange in your ears: it is nevertheless true—and I am not ashamed to own it. And while that faultless young man was pursuing his glorious career in a foreign land, there was an obscure but grateful individual in London who wept over his first reverses, but who laughed, and sang, and danced for joy when the newspapers brought the tidings of his great battles. And that individual was myself: for he was my saviour—my guardian angel—my benefactor! Instead of heaping curses upon me, he had spoken kind words of forgiveness and encouragement: instead of spurning me from his presence, he had given me money, and told me to look upon him as my friend! My God! such a man as that can save more souls and redeem more sinners than all the Bishops that ever wore lawn sleeves! I adore his very name—I worship him—I am as proud of his greatness as if he was my own son; and all Prince though he now is, did it depend upon me, he should wear a crown."

And as he spoke, the grateful man's voice became tremulous with emotions; and the big tears rolled down his cheeks.

There was at that moment something so commanding—something so superior about even this vulgar individual, that Chichester and Harborough found themselves unable to reply to him in that strain of levity with which they would have gladly sought to sneer away his eulogies of one whom they hated and feared.

"Yes," continued Pocock: "all I possess in the world I owe to the Prince of Montoni. I am now at my ease—I live in my own house, bought with my own hard-earned money:—I can even afford to take a little pleasure, or an occasional ramble, as I was doing just now when accident brought me here. And, what is more, I always have a five-pound note to assist a friend. You cannot wonder, then, if I worship the very name of that man who from a comparatively humble rank has raised himself to such a proud height by his valour and his virtues."

"But what has all this to do with your anxiety to see the baronet and me?" inquired Chichester, in a tone displaying little of its wonted assurance.

"A great deal," answered Pocock. "I only want an opportunity to show the Prince how grateful I am to him; and for that reason have I looked out for you. Great, powerful, and rich as he now is, the memory of the past cannot oppress him; but still it would be satisfactory to his noble mind to receive from both of you the same confession of his innocence that he has had from me."

"What?" cried the baronet and Chichester together, as they exchanged troubled glances.

"Yes—you know what I mean," said Pocock; "and you dare not refuse me. Although it is my duty, perhaps, to step up stairs and quietly explain to the people there what kind of acquaintances they have got in you, yet the honour of the Prince is uppermost with me; and I will not expose you, if you at once write out and sign a paper saying that *he* was innocent and *you* was the guilty cause of his misfortunes."

"Impossible!" cried Harborough.

"He would transport us!" ejaculated Chichester, turning deadly pale.

"And no great harm if he did," said the engraver, drily. "But consideration for *me* will prevent his punishing *you*. So if you value the friendship of your chums up stairs——"

"It would never do to be shown up before *them*!" whispered the baronet with desperate emphasis to Chichester, whom he drew partially aside for a moment.

"You will pledge yourself not to show to any one, save the Prince, the paper you require of us?" asked Chichester of the engraver.

"When once you've given me that paper, I want to know nothing more of you or your pursuits," replied Pocock.

The two gentlemen exchanged a few hurried whispers, and then signified their assent to the arrangement proposed; for they found Egerton's purse too useful a means to have recourse to at pleasure, to allow them to risk the loss of their influence over him.

There were writing-materials in the room where the above conversation took place; and the document was speedily drawn up. Chichester wrote it, under the supervision of Pocock, who would not allow him to abate one single tittle of all the infamy which characterised the proceedings that had engendered the misfortunes of Richard Markham.

The paper was then duly signed, and delivered into the hands of the engraver.

"Now that this little business is settled," said he, "perhaps you two gentlemen will just allow me to observe that I have found an honest way of life much happier than a dishonest one, and quite as easy to pursue, if you only have the will; but whether you'll profit by this advice or not, is more than I can say—and certainly much more than I should like to answer for."

With these words Pocock took his departure, the dog following close at his heels.

Chichester and Harborough exchanged looks expressive of mingled vexation and contempt, and then returned to the drawing-room.

The vehicles were almost immediately afterwards driven round to the principal entrance; and the company were on the point of leaving the apartment where the festivities had been so unpleasantly interrupted, when an ejaculation which escaped the lips of Colonel Cholmondeley, who was gazing from the window, caused them all to hasten to the casements.

A travelling barouche was rapidly approaching the mansion!

CHAPTER CCXLVIII.

AN UNPLEASANT EXPOSURE.

Egerton's countenance grew pale as death when he beheld that carriage hastening through the Park towards the entrance of the Hall.

Dunstable perceived and understood his fear; and he himself experienced no little dread lest the approaching vehicle should contain Lady Ravensworth. But, in the next moment, this suspicion vanished; for it did not seem probable that her ladyship would return to a mansion totally unprepared to receive her.

The old gardener was, however, now shaking with a new alarm; and the departure was hurried as much as possible: but the travelling barouche had stopped near the entrance of the Hall ere Egerton's party had reached the bottom of the great staircase.

There was no male domestic in attendance upon the carriage: the postillion accordingly alighted from his horse, opened the door, and assisted two females, both clad in deep mourning, to descend.

Of those females, one was evidently a lady, and the other her maid.

The former raised her black veil, immediately upon alighting, and gazed in astonishment upon the three vehicles which had prevented her own from drawing-up immediately against the steps of the principal entrance.

By this time Egerton's party, followed by the old gardener, who was doing his best to hurry the intruders away, had reached the portico; and it was at this precise moment that the lady raised her veil on descending from the barouche.

Cholmondeley and Dunstable started; and the former exclaimed, "Lady Ravensworth!"

Then, recovering his wonted self-command, he advanced towards Adeline, raised his hat, and said, "Your ladyship is doubtless astonished to see so large a party at Ravensworth Hall; but if you will permit me to speak to you five words in private—"

"I have no secrets to discuss with Colonel Cholmondeley," interrupted Adeline, in a tone of freezing hauteur and yet of deep dejection: then, turning towards Mrs. Bustard, who had thrust herself forward to learn why the arrival of a barouche containing a lady and her female attendant had produced such a singular excitement amongst the gentlemen of the party, she said, "May I be permitted to inquire, madam, the meaning of this assembly on the day of my return?"

"If you'll tell me fust, ma'am, who you are," replied Mrs. Bustard, "may be I'll satisfy you."

"I am Lady Ravensworth," was the dignified answer.

"Well then, my lady, all I can say is—and which I do on the part of my nephew Albert—that you're quite welcome to occupy a room or two in this edifisk until such times as you can provide yourself with another place——"

"My dear aunt, allow me to explain myself to Lady Ravensworth," exclaimed Egerton, now stepping forward.

"Eh—do, my boy," cried Mrs. Bustard, whose voice was somewhat husky with champagne, and whose sight, from the same cause, was a little dizzy—so that she did not perceive the glance of mingled anger and astonishment which Adeline threw upon her while she was so politely offering her ladyship the use of apartments in Ravensworth Hall.

"Lady Ravensworth, permit me—one word, I implore you!" said Lord Dunstable, in an under tone, as he advanced before Egerton.

"Is this mystery to be explained to me at all?" cried Adeline. "Lord Dunstable, I have no better reason to grant a private interview to you than to your friend Colonel Cholmondeley: I therefore hope that, without farther delay, you will inform me to what circumstance I am to attribute the honour which my poor mansion has experienced by receiving so large a party during my absence."

"*Her* mansion, indeed!" said Mrs. Bustard, with an indignant toss of the head, as she turned towards her daughters and Mr. Tedworth Jones, all of whom remained mute spectators of a scene which was to them totally inexplicable.

"Upon me must the weight of your ladyship's anger fall," said Egerton, again advancing, and mustering up all his courage to afford the requisite explanation.

"No such a thing!" cried Mrs. Bustard. "What right has the lady to be angry? Because her house was put up for sale, and you bought it——"

"Abraham, will *you* explain this enigma?" exclaimed Adeline, turning impatiently towards the gardener, whom she suddenly discovered peering from behind Sir Rupert Harborough.

"Why, my lady," said the old man, twisting his paper cap over and over in his hands as he dragged himself irresolutely forward, "your ladyship sees these wery respectable folk—leastways, respectable as far as I know anythink to the contrairey,—for my maxim is, my lady—as I often says to my old 'ooman—says I—at such times when she says, says she——"

Adeline actually stamped her foot with impatience.

"I'm a-coming to the pint, my lady," continued the gardener, now completely crushing the paper cap in his hand; "and in doing that, my lady, I must ax your ladyship's pardon—'cos I'm a poor simple old man which can't boast of much edication—leastways, as I says to my old 'ooman——"

"This is insupportable!" cried Adeline. "In one word, did you not receive my letter stating that it was my intention to return to the

Hall this week?"

"No, my lady—no such a letter ever come," answered the gardener.

"But you can perhaps inform me in two words how these ladies and gentlemen happened to honour my house with their presence?" said Adeline, speaking in a severe tone.

"Your house, ma'am!" shouted Mrs. Bustard, her countenance becoming purple with indignation: "no such a thing! It's my nephew's—he bought it—and he is here to tell you so!"

Thus speaking, she thrust Egerton forward.

"My dear aunt," said the young man, tears starting into his eyes, "I have deceived you! I am sorry for the cheat which I have practised upon you: but the truth is——"

"Don't tell me no more!" cried Mrs. Bustard. "I see it all. It's a hoax—a shameful hoax! And I shouldn't wonder if your Lord and your Baronet and your Honourables are all as Brummagem as your title to this edifisk. Come, Tedworth—come, gals: let's get back to the Pavement. This is no place for us."

And having thus expressed herself, Mrs. Bustard bounced down the steps and clambered like an irritated elephant into the glass-coach, followed by her five daughters. Mr. Jones then mounted to the dickey; the seedy coachman whipped the horses; and the crazy old vehicle rattled away.

Lady Ravensworth, attended by her maid, passed into the mansion without bestowing any farther notice on the gentlemen who still lingered upon the steps; and when she had thus disappeared, they hastened to take their departure for London, Egerton in a state of mind enviable only by a man about to be hanged.

For nearly two years had Adeline been a voluntary exile from her native land; and, in the seclusion of a charming villa in the south of France, she had devoted herself to the care of her child, whom the gipsy Morcar had so miraculously saved from death. She also endeavoured, by the exercise of charity and a constant attention to her devotions, to atone for the crimes which she had committed; but, though deeply penitent, her soul could not stifle the pangs of an intense remorse. And thus had many—many sleepless nights—often rendered terrible by the shade of the murdered Lydia—dimmed the fires of Adeline's eyes, and given to her cheeks the pallor of marble!

Her only solace was her child, on whom she doated with all the affection which can be bestowed by a heart that has nothing else to love—nothing else to render existence even tolerable. The more she alienated her mind from the frivolities and levities which had occupied her when she was a brilliant star in the galaxy of London fashion,—and the more successfully she wrestled with those burning passions which had rendered her the willing victim of the seducer, even in her girlhood,—so much the more profound became her affection for the infant Ferdinand. But that consolation was not to endure. Five months before her return to England the boy was snatched away from her,—suddenly snatched away by the rude hand of Fever, as the rose-bud is cropped by the bleak north wind.

Then how desolate became the heart of Adeline! She felt that her punishment had not yet ceased on earth.

No longer were there charms for her in a foreign land; and she panted to return to her native clime. For some weeks she wrestled against this inclination; but having imparted her desire to Eliza Sydney, with whom she regularly corresponded, a letter from that excellent lady set her mind at ease as to the expediency of revisiting England. Eliza offered no argument against the project; and Lady Ravensworth accordingly hastened her preparations for a departure from the south of France.

The faithful Quentin was still in her service; but the English lady's-maid, who had followed Adeline to the Continent, had married and settled in France. A French woman, therefore, supplied her place; and it was this foreign servant who accompanied Lady Ravensworth on her return to the Hall.

Adeline's desire was to retrace her way in privacy to the mansion which, according to the conditions of her late husband's will, had become her own—for there was now no male heir to the proud title and broad lands of Ravensworth: and her intention was to dwell in the strictest retirement at the mansion. She had written to the gardener to command him to prepare for her return; but, by some accident, the letter had miscarried—and hence the old man's ignorance of the approach of his mistress.

On her arrival, by the Calais steam-packet, at London Bridge, Adeline had left Quentin to clear the baggage at the Custom-House, and had proceeded direct to the Hall. The incidents which immediately followed her arrival are already known to the reader.

It may, however, appear strange that Adeline should come back to a dwelling where she had suffered so much, and which could not fail to recall to her with renewed force the black crime which lay so heavily upon her conscience. But her mind was in that morbid state which is so well calculated to engender idiosyncratic ideas; and she believed that the very fact of her return to the scene of her enormity would prove a penance most salutary to her soul. Such purely Roman Catholic sentiments are frequently found exercising a deep influence over minds which contrition for great crimes has disposed to superstitious tendencies.

There were also considerations of a more worldly nature which to some extent urged Lady Ravensworth to return to the Hall. She loathed the idea of dwelling amidst the noise, the din, and the crowds of the metropolis: she craved for the retirement of the country. Whither, then, could she repair save to the mansion which was her own? what excuse could she offer to those who knew her, for settling in any other part of the suburbs of London?—for *near*, though not *in*, the capital had she resolved to dwell, in order to be enabled to see her parents occasionally, and Eliza Sydney frequently.

In addition to all the influences, moral and worldly, now enumerated, there was another which had confirmed Adeline in the idea of returning to the Hall. But this was a secret influence for which she could not account,—an influence that ever interposed amidst her waverings, to settle them in favour of the project,—one of those influences to which even the strongest minds are frequently subject, and for the existence of which they can give no satisfactory reason. Such an influence as this the Turk would denominate the irresistible current of Destiny; but the pious Christian believes it to be the secret and all-powerful will of heaven.

Let us, however, proceed with our narrative.

The intruders had departed; and Lady Ravensworth was as it were alone in that vast mansion which had so many sad and gloomy memorials for her!

She entered the drawing-room where Egerton's party had banqueted; and, seeing the table covered with the bottles and glasses, turned away in disgust. Passing into the adjacent suite of apartments, she opened the shutters, and gazed around the large and lonely

rooms in which the silence of death seemed to reign.

She looked at the pictures which hung upon the walls; and then it struck her that some change had taken place in those rooms, each feature of which she remembered well. The more earnestly she gazed about her, the firmer became her conviction that every thing was not as she had left it. At length she perceived that three or four of the most valuable pictures had disappeared: a costly time-piece, too, was missing from the mantel of one apartment: several ornaments were wanting in another.

Thinking that these objects might have been shifted from their usual places, she entered another suite of rooms; and there, instead of finding the things which were lost from the first, she perceived more vacancies amongst the pictures and the ornaments.

The conduct of the old gardener in allowing a party of persons to use the mansion, the care of which had been entrusted to him, recurred more forcibly than at first to her mind: and what had hitherto appeared a comparatively venial fault, now assumed a complexion, when coupled with the disappearance of the pictures and ornaments above-mentioned, which naturally created in her mind alarming suspicions of his honesty.

She rang the bell: her French servant responded to the summons; and Adeline desired that the gardener might be immediately sent into her presence.

The maid withdrew, and conveyed by signs the order which she had received; for she was unable to speak a single word of English.

The old man, who was deliberating with his wife upon the best means of breaking to Lady Ravensworth the unpleasant fact of there being a putrid corpse in the mansion at that very moment, received the command with a ludicrous expression of fear and vexation on his countenance; and he repaired to the presence of his mistress in a state of mind about as agreeable as if he were on his road to an auto-da-fé.

"Abraham," said Lady Adeline, "there are certain circumstances which render my return to this house far from pleasant. Almost heart-broken by the loss of that dear, dear child who constituted my only earthly joy, I come back to my native land with the hope of at least finding tranquillity and peace in the retirement of Ravensworth Hall. But scarcely do I alight from my carriage, when I encounter upon the very threshold of my home a party of revellers whom your imprudence permitted to celebrate their orgies within these walls. This fault I was inclined to pardon: but when, upon the first superficial glance around the principal apartments, I perceive that many valuable articles have disappeared——"

"Disappeared, my lady!" cried the old man, starting in a manner rather indicative of surprise than of guilt.

"Yes, Abraham," returned Lady Ravensworth, severely: "pictures—ornaments—time-pieces—China bowls—and several objects of less value are missing from these apartments. Have you removed them elsewhere?"

"Oh! my lady," cried the gardener, "you can't think that I would rob you! As God is my judge, neither me nor my wife has touched a single thing in the place—leastways, unless it was to dust and clean 'em. The doors has been kept locked——"

"But if you have been in the habit of allowing strangers the use of these apartments——"

"No, my lady—this was the fust and the last time that me and my old 'ooman did such a thing," exclaimed the, gardener, emphatically: "and we didn't know we was a-doing anythink so wery wrong—seeing your ladyship wasn't here."

"And you have not even observed that certain pictures and ornaments had disappeared?" inquired Adeline, who knew not what to conjecture—for the manner and words of the old man were stamped with honesty.

"Never, my lady—we never noticed it," was the answer. "For my part, I seldom come into these rooms at all: but my old 'ooman dusted 'em out reglar once a month or so; and if she'd missed anythink I should have knowed of it in a moment. But——"

"But what, Abraham?" said Lady Ravensworth, in a kinder tone.

"There's one circumstance that has troubled me and my wife more than once—or twice—or a dozen times, my lady: and yet——"

"Speak candidly. Why do you hesitate?"

The old man cast a hurried glance around,—for it was now growing dusk,—and, sinking his voice to a whisper, he said, "The Hall is troubled, my lady."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Adeline, starting from her seat, as if those words had electrified her. "Explain yourself, old man—speak!"

"Ah! my lady—there's no doubt on it!" returned Abraham, again looking suspiciously around. "Mr. Vernon can't rest in his grave—his sperret walks——"

"A truce to this idle folly!" cried Lady Ravensworth, her tone once more becoming severe.

Had the old man assured her that he had seen the spirit of Lydia Hutchinson, she would have been suddenly overwhelmed by a feeling of tremendous awe; and she would have sunk beneath the appalling weight of an announcement the truth of which she would not have dared to question. This influence, however, could only have been exercised over her by the superstition associated with her own dread crime; and when, contrary to her expectation, but greatly to her relief—the phantom she so much dreaded was not the one of which the old man spoke, she immediately rejected his tale as unworthy of credit.

"A truce to this idle folly!" she cried; "and prepare yourself to give the explanations which my solicitor may require at your hands to-morrow. Leave me."

"I hope your ladyship——"

"Leave me, I say; and send my maid up with lights."

"Yes, my lady—certainly I will," returned the old man, without moving from the place where he stood: "but before I go—I must acquaint your ladyship—leastways, I must in dooty state that—though it ain't a wery pleasant thing—still it wasn't my fault—as my old 'ooman can prove to your ladyship——"

"Leave me!" cried Adeline, in a tone which showed that she was determined to be obeyed. "If you have any apology to offer for your conduct—which, I regret to say, is now placed beyond all doubt by the confusion of your manner—you must satisfy my legal adviser upon that head. Fear not, however, that I will seek to punish an old man who cannot have many years to remain in this world: no—I am not vindictive—my own sufferings," she added, with a profound sigh, "have taught me to be merciful to others. But I do not desire to prolong this conversation now. Leave me, I repeat—leave me!"

The gardener endeavoured to obtain a farther hearing—for he was most anxious to communicate the fact of the dead body being in

the house; but Adeline waved her hand in a manner so authoritative, that the poor old man had no alternative than to obey.

He accordingly left the room, quite bewildered by the injurious suspicions which had arisen in the mind of his mistress against his honesty; for he had spoken naught save the plain truth when he declared that the disappearance of the pictures and ornaments had never been observed by either himself or his wife.

The French maid carried lights up to the drawing-room, and received from Lady Ravensworth instructions to prepare the bed-chamber situate in the northern extremity of the building: this, in fact, was the same apartment that Adeline had occupied after she had ceased to inhabit her boudoir, and during the interval between the murder of Lydia Hutchinson and the suicide of Gilbert Vernon.

The lady's-maid retired to fulfil her mistress's directions; and Adeline was left once more alone.

The solemn silence that prevailed throughout the mansion added to the depression of her spirits; and she could not combat against a vague presentiment of approaching evil, which gradually acquired a greater influence over her.

It is well known that many animals have an instinctive knowledge of impending danger, even while its source remains as yet unseen. The noble steed that bears the traveller through the forest, snuffs the air, paws the ground, and swerves uneasily from his path, when in the vicinity of the lair where the lion lies concealed: the little bird flutters wildly above the thicket which hides the lurking snake;—and the buffalo trembles through every limb as he approaches the tree from the dense foliage of which, high over head, the terrible anaconda is prepared to spring.

Is such a feeling as this never known to human beings?

We believe that it is.

And certain was it that Adeline became the prey of a similar influence—vague, sinister, and undefined,—as she sate in the loneliness of the large apartment around which her glances wandered with an uneasiness that did not diminish.

She rose from her seat and walked to the window: it was now quite dark—the sky was overclouded—and neither moon nor stars appeared.

"I could wish that the evening were less gloomy," she said to herself. "And how long Quentin seems to be!"

Then she remembered that he had many purchases to make; for it was not expected that the gardener would have provided the requisite stock of provisions and necessaries, even if he had received the letter announcing Lady Ravensworth's intended return.

"Still I wish he would come!" said Adeline. "He is a faithful servant—and I should feel more secure were he near me. What *can* be this dreadful depression of spirits which I experience? Alas! happiness and I have long been strangers to each other: but never—never have I felt as I do to-night!"

She started: it struck her that the handle of the folding doors communicating with the next room was agitated.

Yes: it was no delusion—some one was about to enter.

Yielding to fears which were the more intense because they were altogether inexplicable, she leant against the wall for support—her eyes fixed, under the influence of a species of fascination, upon the doors at the farther extremity of the room.

Slowly did one of those folding-doors open; and for an instant, in the wild turmoil of her feelings, the unhappy woman half expected to behold the spectre of Lydia Hutchinson appear before her.

But—no: it was a man who entered.

The lights flared with the draught created by the opening of that door; and for a few moments Adeline could only perceive the dark form, without being able to distinguish his features.

Not long, however, did this painful uncertainty last; for as the intruder advanced towards the almost fainting lady, the light suddenly shone full upon his countenance;—and, with feelings of indescribable horror, she once more found herself in the presence of the Resurrection Man.

CHAPTER CCXLIX.

THE RESURRECTION MAN'S LAST FEAT AT RAVENSWORTH HALL.

"Holy God protect me!" shrieked Adeline, staggering to a sofa, on which she fell.

But her senses did not leave her: a profound conviction of the terrible position in which she was again placed, suddenly nerved her with a courage and a strength that astonished even herself; and, starting from the sofa, she confronted the Resurrection Man, saying, "What do you here?"

"That's my business," answered Tidkins, gruffly. "You see that I am here:—here I have been for a long time—and here I shall remain as much longer as it suits my purpose. That is," he added, with a significant leer, "unless you make it worth my while to take myself off."

"Detestable extortioner!" ejaculated Adeline: "am I never to know peace again?"

"Well—now that's *your* business, my lady," replied the Resurrection Man. "The fact is, I find this place so much to my liking, and it answers my views as well as my safety so well, that I am in no hurry to quit it. You may look as black as you please: but you ought to know by this time that Tony Tidkins is not the man to be frightened by a lady's frown."

"The law will protect me," said Adeline, now labouring under the most painful excitement.

"Yes—and punish you too," added the Resurrection Man, coolly.

"Now listen to me," continued Lady Ravensworth, speaking with hysterical volubility: "human forbearance has limits—human patience has bounds. My forbearance is exhausted—my patience is worn out. Sooner than submit to your persecutions—sooner than be at the mercy of your extortions,—I will seek redress at the hands of justice—aye, even though I draw down its vengeance upon my own head at the same time!"

And she flew towards the bell-pull.

But the Resurrection Man caught her ere her hand could reach the rope; and dragging her back, he pushed her brutally upon the sofa. Then, drawing a pistol from his pocket, he said in a terribly ominous tone, "If you attempt that dodge again, I'll shoot you through the head as sure as you're now a living woman."

Adeline contemplated him with eyes expressive of the wildest alarm.

"You see that it's no use to play tricks with me, young lady," continued the Resurrection Man, as he replaced the pistol in his pocket.

"What is it that you require?" asked Adeline, in a faint and supplicating tone: "what can I do to induce you to depart and never molest me more? Oh! have mercy upon me, I implore you—have mercy upon me! I have no friends to protect me: I am widowed and childless. My poor boy has been snatched from me—my sole earthly solace is gone! But why do you persecute me thus? Have I ever injured you? If you hate me—if you look upon me as an enemy, kill me outright:—do not—do not take my life by inches. Your presence is slow torture!"

"Will you listen to reason?" demanded Tidkins: "can you speak calmly for a few minutes?"

"I will—I can," returned Adeline, shuddering dreadfully as the Resurrection Man drew nearer to her.

"Well, then—if you keep your word, our business will soon be brought to an end," he said, planting himself coolly in a chair opposite to her. "You must know that I've been living in this house almost ever since you left it."

"Living here!" cried Adeline, indignation mastering a considerable portion of her terror.

"Yes—living here as snug as a bug in a rug," returned Tidkins, chuckling as if he considered the fact to be an excellent joke. "The truth is I had certain reasons of my own for being either in or near London: and I looked about for a safe place. Happening to pass this way a few weeks after that business about Vernon, you know——"

"Proceed—proceed!" said Adeline, impatiently.

"I'm in no hurry," replied Tidkins.

"But my servant may come—Quentin will be here shortly—I expect him every minute——"

"He won't hurt me, my lady," said Tidkins, calmly. "If he attempted to lay a hand on me, I'd shoot him on the spot. However, I will go on quicker—since you wish it. Well, as I was saying, I passed by this way and saw the house all shut up. Inquiries at the village down yonder let me know that you was gone, and that there was no one but an old man and his wife about the premises. Nothing could suit me better: I resolved to take up my quarters here directly;—and I pitched upon the very room where Vernon threw himself out of the window. One day I heard the two old people talking in the next apartment, which they were dusting out; and I found, by their discourse, that they believed in ghosts. That was a glorious discovery for me: I soon saw that certain little devices which I practised made them think that Vernon's spirit haunted the place—and so I boldly opened the shutters and made myself comfortable, when I took it into my head. They weren't at the house, it seems, when I was staying here two years ago; and so they didn't know who I really was. Thus, when they saw me standing in the balcony—which I often did just to amuse myself by frightening them a little—they firmly

believed it was Gilbert Vernon's spirit that haunted the place. Lord! how I have laughed sometimes at the poor old souls!"

"It is you, then," cried Adeline, a sudden idea striking her, "who have been plundering the Hall during my absence?"

"Well—you may call it by that name, if you like," said Tidkins, with the most provoking calmness. "I don't hesitate to admit that I have now and then walked off with a small picture—or a time-piece—or a mantel ornament—or what not—just to raise supplies for the time being. But you ought to be very much obliged to me that I've left any thing at all in the whole place. Such forbearance isn't quite in keeping with my usual disposition."

"Villain! this to me—and said so coolly!" cried Lady Ravensworth, again starting from her seat.

"Pray keep where you are, ma'am," observed Tidkins, pushing her back again upon the sofa; "you promised to listen to reason."

"Reason!" exclaimed Adeline: "and do you call it reason when I am compelled to hear the narrative of your villanies—the history of your depredations on my property?"

"You knew what I was when you sought my acquaintance," said the Resurrection Man; "and after all, I've only just been taking the little liberties which one friend may use with another."

"Friend!" repeated Adeline, in a tone expressive of deep disgust, as she retreated as far back upon the sofa as possible.

"Come—we're only wasting time by all this disputing," said the Resurrection Man. "The whole thing lies in a nut-shell. You've come home again—and you want to enjoy undisputed possession of your own house. Well—that is reasonable enough. But, by so doing, you turn me out of doors; and I don't exactly know where I shall find a crib so safe and convenient as this. I must have an indemnity, then: and that is also reasonable on my part."

"Until you told me that you had robbed the house," exclaimed Adeline, in a tone of almost ungovernable indignation,—such as she had not experienced for a long, long time,—"I was prepared to purchase your departure with a sum of money: but now,—now that I have the most convincing proofs of your utter profligacy—even if such proofs were wanting,—now that I see the folly of reposing the slightest trust in one who studies nothing save his own wants and interests,—I will think of a compromise no longer."

"You will repent your obstinacy," said Tidkins. "Remember how you have dared me on a former occasion, and how I reduced you to submission."

"True!" ejaculated Adeline, in a calmer and more collected tone than she had yet assumed during this painful interview: "but at that time I was crushed by the weight of difficulties—overwhelmed with embarrassments and perils of the most formidable nature. I would then have committed any new crime to screen the former ones: I would have effected any compromise in order to avert danger. But now—what is there to bind me to existence? Nothing—unless it be the enjoyment of seclusion and tranquillity. These are menaced by your persecutions: and I will put an end to this intolerable tyranny—or perish in the attempt. That is my decision. Let us be at open war, if you will: and 'tis thus I commence hostilities!"

Rapid as thought, she darted towards the bell-rope: but Tidkins, who had divined her intention, intercepted her as before.

Placing his iron hand on the nape of her neck, he thrust her violently back upon the sofa: then, ere he withdrew his hold, he said in a low, hoarse, and ferocious tone, "This is the last time I will be trifled with. By Satan! young woman, I'll strangle you, if this game continues—just as I strangled your Lydia Hutchinson!"

And pushing her with contemptuous rudeness from him, he released her from his grasp.

For a few moments Adeline's breath came with so much difficulty, and her bosom heaved so convulsively, that the Resurrection Man feared he had gone too far, and had done her some grievous injury: but when he saw her recover from the semi-strangulation and the dreadful alarm which she had experienced in consequence of his treatment, his eyes glistened with ferocious satisfaction.

"Let us make a long business short," he said, in a coarse and imperious tone. "If I told you just now that I had helped myself to a few of the things in this house, it was only to convince you that I am not likely to stick at trifles in respect to you or yours. You have money—and I want some. Give me my price—and you shall never see me again."

"No—you may murder me if you will," cried Adeline, hysterically: "but I will not submit to your tyranny any more. Oh! you are a terrible man—and I would sooner die than live in the constant terror of your persecution!"

"Foolish woman, give up this screeching—or, by hell! I'll settle you, and then help myself to all I want," cried Tidkins, ferociously.

And at the same moment Adeline, whose face was buried in her hands, felt his iron grasp again upon the nape of her neck.

She started up with a half-stifled scream, and endeavoured to reach the bell-rope a third time. But once more was she anticipated in her design; and the Resurrection Man now held her firmly round the waist by his left arm.

Then drawing forth the pistol with his right hand, he placed the muzzle against Adeline's marble forehead.

"I must put an end to this nonsense at once," he said, in a ferocious tone. "There is something now in the house, proud and obstinate woman as you are—that will make you fall on your knees and beseech me to remove it from your sight. But we will try that test: and remember, this pistol that touches your forehead is loaded. Attempt to raise an alarm—and I blow your brains out."

"Release me—let me go—I implore you!" murmured Adeline, who experienced greater loathing at that contiguity with the Resurrection Man, than fear at the weapon which menaced her with instantaneous death.

"No—you shall come," returned Tidkins, brutally: "I am sick of this reasoning, and must bring you to the point at once."

"Let me go—and I swear to follow whither you may choose to lead," said Adeline.

"Well—now I release you on that condition," was the reply: and the horrible man withdrew his arm and the pistol simultaneously.

But still keeping the weapon levelled at the wretched lady, and taking a candle in his left hand, he made a sign for her to accompany him.

She was now reduced to that state of physical nervousness and mental bewilderment, that she obeyed mechanically, without attempting to remonstrate—without even remembering to ask whither they were going.

They left the room, and proceeded along the passage towards the southern extremity of the building,—Adeline walking on one side of the corridor, and Tidkins on the other—the latter still keeping the pistol levelled to over-awe the miserable woman.

But she saw it not: she went on, because she mechanically obeyed one in whose power she felt herself to be, and whose loathsome contiguity she trembled to dare again.

At length they stopped at a door: and then Adeline's memory seemed to recover all its powers—her ideas instantly appeared to

concentrate themselves in one focus.

"Oh! no—not here! not here!" she said, with a cold shudder, as she suddenly awoke as it were from a confused dream, and recognised the door of her boudoir—*the* boudoir!

"Then give me a thousand pounds—and I will leave the house this minute," returned Tidkins.

"No—you shall kill me first!" ejaculated Adeline, again recovering courage and strength, as if by instinct she knew herself to be standing upon some fearful precipice. "I will resist you to the death: you have driven me to desperation!"

And, springing towards the Resurrection Man, she made a snatch at the pistol which he held in his hand.

But, eluding her attack, he thrust the weapon into his pocket: then, clasping her with iron vigour in his right arm, and still retaining the light in his left hand, he burst open the door of the boudoir with his foot.

Adeline uttered a faint scream, as he dragged her into the room, the door of which he closed violently behind him.

Then, holding the light in such a manner that its beams fell upon the floor, and withdrawing his arm from Adeline's waist, he exclaimed in a tone of ferocious triumph, "Behold the remains of the murdered Lydia Hutchinson!"

Lady Ravensworth threw one horrified glance upon the putrid corpse; and uttering a terrific scream expressive of the most intense agony, she fell flat upon the floor—her face touching the feet of the dead body.

Tidkins raised her: but the blood gushed out of her mouth.

"Perdition! I have gone too far," cried the Resurrection Man. "She is dead—and I have done as good as cut my own throat!"

It was indeed true: Adeline had burst a blood-vessel, and died upon the spot.

Tidkins let her fall heavily upon the floor, and throwing down the candle, fled from the mansion, reckless whether the light were extinguished or not.

Half an hour afterwards Quentin was on his return to the Hall, in a hackney-coach containing, besides the baggage which he had cleared at the Custom-House, several hampers filled with the purchases he had been making in the City.

As he was thus proceeding through the park, he suddenly observed a strong and flickering light appearing through the windows at the southern extremity of the building; and in a few moments the whole of that part of the Hall was enveloped in flames.

Leaping from the coach, which, being heavily laden, dragged slowly along, the valet rushed to the mansion, where the presence of the fire had already alarmed the gardener and his wife, and the French servant.

But of what avail were their poor exertions against the fury of the devouring element?

A search was immediately instituted for Lady Ravensworth: but she was not to be found in either of the drawing-rooms. Nor was she in any of the chambers in the northern part of the building; and it was impossible to enter the southern wing, which seemed to be one vast body of flame.

The domestics, finding their search to be useless, were compelled to form the dreadful conclusion that their mistress had perished in the conflagration.

For six hours did the fire rage with appalling fury; and though the inhabitants of the adjacent village and the immediate neighbourhood flocked to the scene of desolation and rendered all the assistance in their power, the splendid mansion was reduced to a heap of ruins.

CHAPTER CCL.

EGERTON'S LAST DINNER PARTY.

We have already stated that Egerton was deeply affected by the result of the imposture which he had practised upon his relations. During the drive back to London, his four friends—Dunstable, Cholmondeley, Harborough, and Chichester—vainly endeavoured to rally him: he was silent and thoughtful, and replied only in monosyllables.

On their arrival at Stratton Street, Egerton took leave of his friends at the door without inviting them to enter; but they were not so easily disposed of. They urged him to accompany them to some place of amusement: he remained inaccessible to their solicitations, and firmly declared his intention of passing the remainder of the evening alone.

They were at length compelled to leave him—consoling themselves with the hope that he would "sleep off his melancholy humour," and rise in the morning as pliant and ductile in their hands as ever.

The four gentlemen had not long departed, when Major Anderson called at the house; and having represented to the servant that his object was an affair of some importance, he was admitted into the drawing-room where Egerton was lying upon the sofa.

"At length I find you alone, Mr. Egerton," said the Major. "I have called every evening for the last few days, and have never until now been fortunate enough to learn that you were at home."

"To what am I to attribute the honour of this visit?" asked the young man, whom it struck that he had seen the Major before—but when or where he could not remember.

"Pardon me if, ere I reply to that question, I pause to observe that you survey me with some attention," said Anderson; "and I can divine what is passing in your mind. You think that my features are not altogether unknown to you? I believe this to be the case—for you have seen me before. Indeed I should have begun by thanking you—most gratefully thanking you for that generous intention on your part which was interrupted at the door of the St. James's Club-House——"

"Ah! I recollect!" cried Egerton, starting up from his reclining position. "But——"

"Again I can read what is passing in your mind," observed the Major, with a smile; "and I can appreciate the delicacy which made you thus stop short. You notice the change that has taken place in my appearance? Yes—my circumstances are indeed altered; and from a wandering mendicant, I have become a gentleman once more. But that change has been effected by the very individual whose interposition on that night to which I have just now alluded, prevented you from exercising your intended benevolence towards me."

"And that individual was the Prince of Montoni," said Egerton.

"Oh! then you know him by sight——"

"I knew him not, otherwise than by name, until that evening," interrupted Egerton; "and it was from Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester that I learnt who the stranger was."

"Ah! his Highness has good cause to remember them also!" cried Anderson, to whom the Prince had related his entire history a day or two previously.

"Indeed," exclaimed Egerton, "I now recollect that they seemed alarmed at his presence, and mentioned his name with trepidation."

"Well might they do so!" said the Major, indignantly. "But the Prince himself will explain to you those particulars to which I allude."

"The Prince—explain to me!" cried Egerton.

"Yes: my object in calling upon you is to request that you will either visit the Prince as soon as convenient, or appoint a day and an hour when his Highness may visit you."

"Oh! I should be indeed joyful to form the acquaintance of that illustrious hero of whom every Englishman must feel proud!" exclaimed Egerton, with the enthusiasm that was natural to him. "Valour, integrity, and the most unbounded humanity are associated with the name of Richard Markham. But upon what business can the Prince be desirous to honour me with his acquaintance?"

"*That* his Highness will himself explain," was the reply. "What hour will you appoint for to-morrow to wait upon the Prince at his own residence?"

"I will be there punctually at mid-day," answered Egerton.

"And in the meantime," said Major Anderson, after a moment's hesitation, "it will be as well if you do not mention to those persons with whom you are intimate, the appointment which you have made."

"I understand you, sir," rejoined Egerton: "it shall be as you suggest."

The Major then took his leave; and Egerton—who entertained a faint suspicion of the object which the Prince had in view—received consolation from the idea that his illustrious fellow countryman experienced some degree of interest in his behalf.

That suspicion was engendered by the known philanthropy and anxiety to do good which characterised Markham; by the allusion made by Anderson to certain explanations which the Prince intended to give relative to Harborough and Chichester; and also by the injunction of secrecy in respect to the appointment that had been made.

Well knowing that his four friends would not fail to visit him early next day,—and determined that they should not interfere with his visit to one whose acquaintance he so ardently desired to form,—Egerton repaired to an hotel, where he passed the night.

On the following morning he was greatly surprised, and to some extent shocked, to read in the newspaper the tidings of the fearful conflagration which had not only destroyed Ravensworth Hall, but in which the lady who owned the mansion had herself perished.

"And there likewise is entombed the mystery of the dead body!" said Egerton, as he laid aside the paper.

His toilette was performed with great care; and, punctual to the moment, the young man knocked at the door of Markham Place.

He was conducted into an elegantly furnished apartment, where the Prince advanced to receive him in a most kind and affable manner.

"You will perhaps imagine that I have taken a very great liberty with you, Mr. Egerton," said Richard, "in requesting you to call upon me in this manner; but when you are made acquainted with my motives in seeking the present interview, you will give me credit for the most sincere disinterestedness. In a word, I consider it to be my duty to warn you against at least two of those persons who call themselves your friends."

"My lord, I was not unprepared for such an announcement," said Egerton, in a deferential manner.

"Then is my task the more easy," exclaimed Richard. "I allude to Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester, the latter of whom assumes the distinction of *Honourable*."

"And is he not of noble birth, my lord?" inquired Egerton.

"He is the son of a tradesman," answered Markham. "But that is no disgrace in my estimation: far from it! The industrious classes are the pillars of England's greatness; and I for one would rather walk arm-in-arm along the most fashionable thoroughfare with the honest mechanic or upright shopkeeper, than boast of intimacy even with a King who is unworthy of esteem and respect."

Egerton surveyed with unfeigned admiration the individual from whose lips these noble sentiments emanated—sentiments the more noble, inasmuch as they were expressed by one whose rank was so exalted, and who stood so high above his fellow-men.

"Yes," continued Markham, "your friend Mr. Chichester is one of those impostors who assume title and distinction as well to aid their nefarious courses as to gratify their own grovelling pride. I do not speak with malignity of that man—although I once suffered so much through him: for were he to seek my forgiveness, heaven knows how readily it would be accorded. Neither is it to gratify any mean sentiment of revenge that I now warn you against these two individuals. My present conduct is dictated by a sense of duty, and by an ardent desire to save a young and confiding young man, as I believe you to be, from the snares of unprincipled adventurers."

"Oh! now a light breaks in upon me," exclaimed Egerton; "and I recognise in the actions of those whom I lately deemed my friends, all the designing intrigues to which your Highness alludes! Fool that I was to be thus deceived!"

"Rather thank heaven that the means of redemption have arrived ere it be too late," said the Prince, impressively; "for I can scarcely believe, from all I have heard concerning you, that your affairs are in a state of ruin which admits of no hope."

"Your Highness argues truly," exclaimed Egerton: "I have yet sufficient resources remaining to furnish me with the means of an honourable livelihood."

"Then you need scarcely regret the amount you have paid for the purchase of experience," said the Prince. "But allow me to place in your hands proofs of the iniquity of Sir Rupert Harborough and his friend. Behold these two documents! They contain the narrative of as foul a scheme of turpitude as ever called the misdirected vengeance of the law upon an innocent victim. The first of these papers is the confession of an engraver whom Harborough and Chichester made the instrument of that project which at one time covered my name with so dark a cloud. You seem astonished at what I say? Oh! then you are ignorant of that episode in my chequered life."

"Never have I heard rumour busy with your lordship's name, save to its honour and glory," observed Egerton, in a tone of convincing sincerity.

"Peruse these papers—they will not occupy you many minutes," returned our hero, after a temporary pause. "The second document, which I now hand you, only came into my possession this morning: it was signed yesterday afternoon, by Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester——"

"Yesterday afternoon, my lord!" cried Egerton. "Those gentlemen were in my company—at a short distance from London——"

"At Ravensworth Park," said Richard, with a smile. "You see that I know all. It was indeed at that very mansion—which, as you are doubtless aware, was reduced to ashes during the night—that this confession was drawn up and signed by your two friends. The engraver, whose name is appended to the first of those papers, was led by accident to Ravensworth Hall; and there he encountered the two adventurers who had once made him their instrument—their vile tool! He compelled them to draw up and sign that second paper, which you hold in your hands, and which, through gratitude for some trifling act of kindness that I was once enabled to show him, he obtained by working on their fears. Scarcely an hour has elapsed since I experienced the satisfaction of receiving that document from him; and my delight was enhanced by the conviction that he is now an honest—a worthy—and a prosperous member of society."

Egerton perused the two confessions, and thereby obtained a complete insight into the real characters of Sir Rupert Harborough and Mr. Chichester. If any doubt had remained in his mind, this elucidation was even more than sufficient to convince him that he had only been courted by his fashionable friends on account of his purse; and heart-felt indeed was the gratitude which he expressed towards the Prince for having thus intervened to save him from utter ruin.

But how was that gratitude increased, and how profound became the young man's horror of the course which he had lately been pursuing, when Richard drew a forcible and deeply touching picture of the usual career of the gambler,—importing into his narrative the leading incidents of Major Anderson's own biography, without however specifying that gentleman's name,—and concluding with an earnest appeal to Egerton henceforth to avoid the gaming-table, if he hoped to enjoy prosperity and peace.

"Would you rush madly into a thicket where venomous reptiles abound?" demanded the Prince: "would you plunge of your own accord into a forest where the most terrible wild beasts are prowling? would you, without a sufficient motive, leave the wholesome country and take up your abode in a plague-stricken city? No: and it would be an insult to your understanding—to that intelligence with which God has endowed you—to put such questions to you, were it not for the purpose of conveying a more impressive moral. For the gaming-house is the thicket where reptiles abound—it is the forest where wild beasts prowl, ravenous after their prey—it is the city of pestilence into which one hurries from the salubrious air. Pause, then—reflect, my young friend,—and say whether the folly of

the gambler be not even as great as his wickedness?"

Egerton fell at our hero's feet: he seized the Prince's hand, and pressed it to his lips—covering it also with his tears.

"You have converted me, my lord—you have saved me!" cried the young man, retrospecting with unfeigned horror upon the desperate career which he had lately been pursuing: "Oh! how can I express my gratitude? But you may read it in those tears which I now shed—tears of contrition for the past, and bright hopes for the future!"

Richard raised the penitent from his kneeling posture, saying, "Enough! I see that you are sincere. And now listen to the plan which I have conceived to shame the men who have been preying upon you; for such punishment is their due—and it may even be salutary."

The Prince then unfolded his designs in this respect to Egerton; but it is not necessary to explain them at present. Suffice it to say that the young man willingly assented to the arrangement proposed by one on whom he naturally looked at his saviour; and when the scheme was fully digested, our hero conducted his new friend into an adjoining apartment, where luncheon was served up.

Egerton was then enabled to judge of the domestic happiness which prevailed in that mansion where virtue, love, and friendship were the presiding divinities of the place.

The faultless beauty of the Princess Isabella,—the splendid charms of Ellen,—and the retiring loveliness of Katherine, fascinated him for a time; but as the conversation developed the amiability of their minds and evinced the goodness of their hearts, he learnt that woman possesses attractions far—far more witching, more permanent, and more endearing than all the boons which nature ever bestowed upon their countenances or their forms!

Old Monroe was present; and while he looked upon our hero with all the affection which a fond father might bestow upon a son, the Prince on his part treated him with the respect which a good son manifests towards an honoured father. Between Markham, too, and Mario Bazzano the most sincere friendship existed: in a word, the bond which united that happy family was one that time could never impair.

Three days after the event just recorded, Albert Egerton gave a dinner-party at his lodgings in Stratton Street.

The guests were Lord Dunstable, Colonel Cholmondeley, Sir Rupert Harborough, and Mr. Chichester.

The dinner-hour was seven; and, contrary to the usual arrangements, the table was spread in the drawing-room, instead of the dining-room, which was behind the former, folding doors communicating between the two apartments.

Let us suppose the cloth to have been drawn, and the dessert placed upon the table.

The wine circulated rapidly; and never had Egerton appeared in better spirits, nor more affably courteous towards his friends.

"Well, I really began to suppose that you had determined to cut us altogether," said Dunstable, as he sipped his wine complacently. "For three whole days we saw nothing of you——"

"Have I not already assured you that I was compelled to pass that time with my relatives, in order to appease them after the exposure at Ravensworth?" exclaimed Egerton.

"And we have accepted the apology as a valid one," observed Chichester.

"Upon my honour," said the baronet, "if I had known you were doing the amiable on Finsbury Pavement, I should have called just to help you in your endeavours to regain the favour of those excellent ladies."

"I am afraid your reception would have been none of the best, Harborough," exclaimed Colonel Cholmondeley.

"I must confess that the old lady was terribly enraged," said Egerton; "not only against me, but also against you all, as she looked upon you as my accomplices in the cheat."

"Well, we must take some opportunity of making our peace in that quarter," observed Lord Dunstable. "I will send her a dozen of champagne and a Strasburg pie to-morrow, with my compliments. But what shall we do to pass away an hour or two?"

"What shall we do?" repeated Chichester. "Why, amuse ourselves—as gentlemen of rank and fashion are accustomed—eh, Egerton?"

"Oh! decidedly. I am willing to fall in with your views. You have been my tutor," he added, with a peculiar smile; "and the pupil will not prove rebellious."

"Well said, my boy!" cried Dunstable. "Have you your dice-box handy?"

"My rascal of a tiger has lost it," answered Egerton. "But I know that the baronet seldom goes abroad without the usual implements."

"Ah! you dog!" chuckled Sir Rupert, as if mightily amused by this sally. "You are, however, quite right; and I do not think that any fashionable man about town should forget to provide himself with the means of the most aristocratic of all innocent recreations. Upon my honour, that is my opinion."

"Just what my friend the Duke of Highgate said the other day—even to the very words," exclaimed Dunstable.

"How singular!" observed the baronet, as he produced a box and a pair of dice.

"By the by, Dunstable," said Egerton, "you promised to introduce me to his Grace."

"So I did, my dear boy—and so I will. Let me see—I shall see the Duke on Monday, and I will make an appointment for him to join us at dinner somewhere."

"The very thing," said Egerton: "I shall be quite delighted—particularly if his Grace be one of your own sort."

"Oh! he is—to the utmost," returned Dunstable, who did not perceive a lurking irony beneath the tranquillity of Egerton's manner.

"I am glad of that," continued the young man. "If I only knew three or four more such gay, dashing, good-hearted fellows as you all are, I should be as contented as possible. By the way, Chichester, I will tell you a very odd thing."

"Indeed! what is it?" inquired that gentleman.

"Oh! nothing more than a strange coincidence. Just this:—I told you that I had been staying a day or two with my respected aunt on the Pavement. Well, yesterday I wandered through the Tower Hamlets—merely for a ramble—and without any fixed purpose: but, as I was strolling down Brick Lane—a horrid, low, vulgar neighbourhood——"

"Dreadful!" cried Chichester, sitting somewhat uneasily on his chair.

"Oh! terrible—filthy, degrading," continued Egerton, emphatically. "You may therefore conceive my surprise when I perceived the

aristocratic name of *Chichester* painted in huge yellow letters, shaded with brown, over a shop-front in that same Brick Lane."

"How very odd!" ejaculated Chichester, filling himself a bumper of champagne.

"Yes—but those coincidences of course *do* occur," said the baronet, who, after eyeing his host suspiciously, saw nothing beneath his calm exterior to indicate a pointed object in raising the present topic.

"And what made the thing more ludicrous," continued the young man, "was that over the aristocratic name of *Chichester* hung three dingy yellow balls."

"Capital! excellent!" exclaimed the gentleman whom this announcement so particularly touched, and who scarcely knew how to cover his confusion.

"Yes: I had a good laugh at the coincidence," said Egerton. "At the same time I knew very well that there could be nothing in common between Mr. Chichester, the pawnbroker of Brick Lane, and the Honourable Arthur Chichester of the fashionable world."

"I should hope not, indeed!" exclaimed Chichester, reassured by this observation.

"Come—take the box, Egerton," said Sir Rupert Harborough.

"Oh! willingly," replied the young man. "But we must play on credit, because I have no money in the house; and he who loses shall pay by cheque or note of hand."

"With pleasure," said the baronet.

The two gentlemen began to play; and Egerton lost considerably. He, however, appeared to submit with extraordinary patience and equanimity to his ill-luck, and continued to chatter in a gay and unusually jocular manner.

"Seven's the main. Come, Dunstable, fill your glass: the wine stands with you. By the by, has your rascally steward sent you up your remittances yet? You know you were complaining to me about him the other day."

"No—he is still a defaulter," returned the young nobleman, laughing.

"And likely to continue so, I'm afraid," added Egerton. "But where is that estate of yours, old fellow?"

"Oh! down in the country——"

"Yes—I dare say it is. But where?"

"Why—in Somersetshire, to be sure. I thought you knew *that*," cried Dunstable, not altogether relishing either the queries themselves or the manner in which they were put.

"That makes seven hundred I owe you, Harborough," said Egerton. "Do pass the wine, Chichester. Five's the main. Let me see—what were we talking about? Oh! I recollect—Dunstable's estate. And so it's in Somersetshire? Beautiful county! What is the name of the estate, my dear fellow?"

"My own name—Dunstable Manor," was the reply; but the nobleman began to cast suspicious glances towards his friend.

"Dunstable Manor—eh? What a sweet pretty name!" ejaculated Egerton. "And yet it is very strange—I know Somersetshire as well as any one can know a county; but I do not recollect Dunstable Manor. How foolish I must be to forget such a thing as that."

With these words, he rose from the table and took down a large volume from the book-case.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Dunstable, now feeling particularly uneasy.

"Only refreshing my memory by a reference to this *Gazetteer*," answered Egerton, as he deliberately turned over the pages of the book.

"Oh! come—none of this nonsense!" exclaimed Dunstable, snatching the volume from Egerton's hands. "Who ever thinks of reading before company?"

"It would be rude, I admit," said Egerton, recovering the volume from the other's grasp, "were we not such very particular and intimate friends—so intimate indeed, that we have one purse in common between us all five, and that purse happens to be the one which I have the honour to carry in my pocket."

"Egerton, what *is* the matter with you?" demanded Lord Dunstable, who was now convinced that something was wrong.

"Matter! nothing at all, my dear boy," answered the young man, as he continued to turn the leaves of the volume. "Here it is—Somersetshire—a very detailed account—not even the smallest farm omitted. But how is this? Why—Dunstable Manor is not here!"

"Not there!" cried the nobleman, blushing up to his very hair.

"No—indeed it is not!" rejoined Egerton. "Now really this is a great piece of negligence on the part of the compiler of the work; and if I were you, Dunstable, I would bring an action against him for damages. Because, only conceive how awkward this would make you appear before persons of suspicious dispositions. Well—*upon my honour*, as the baronet says—this coincidence is almost as extraordinary as that of the pawnbroker in Brick Lane."

While Egerton was thus speaking, his four friends exchanged significant glances which seemed to ask each other what all this could possibly mean.

"Yes—suspicious people would be inclined to imagine that the Dunstable estate was in the clouds rather than in Somersetshire," proceeded Egerton, who did not appear to notice the confusion of his guests. "But the world is so very ill-natured! Would you believe that there are persons so lamentably scandalous as to declare that our friend Chichester is no more an *Honourable* than I am, and that he really is the son of the pawnbroker in Brick Lane?"

"The villains!" cried Chichester, starting from his seat: "who are those persons that dare——"

"Wait one moment!" exclaimed Egerton: "it is my duty as a sincere friend to tell you each and all what I have heard. Those same scandalous and ill-natured people exceed all bounds of propriety; for they actually assert that Sir Rupert Harborough has for years been known as a profligate adventurer——"

"By God, Mr. Egerton!" cried the baronet: "I——"

"And they affirm in quite as positive a manner," continued the young man, heedless of this interruption, "that you, Dunstable, and you too, Cholmondeley, are nothing more nor less than ruined gamesters."

"Egerton," exclaimed the Colonel, foaming with indignation, "this is carrying a joke too far."

"A great deal too far," added Dunstable.

"It really is no joke at all, my lord and gentlemen," said the young man, now speaking in a tone expressive of the deepest disgust:

"for every word I have uttered is firmly believed by myself!"

"By you!" cried the four adventurers, speaking as it were in one breath.

"Yes—and by all the world," exclaimed Egerton, rising from his seat, and casting indignant glances upon his guests.

"This is too much!" said Cholmondeley; and, unable to restrain his passion, he rushed upon the young man, seized him by the collar, and would have inflicted a severe chastisement on him had not assistance been at hand.

But the door communicating with the dining-room was suddenly thrown open, and the individual who now made his appearance, threw himself upon Cholmondeley, tore him away from his hold upon Albert Egerton, and actually hurled him to the opposite side of the apartment.

"The Prince of Montoni!" ejaculated Harborough, as he rushed towards the door, with Chichester close at his heels.

But the Prince hastened to intercept them; and, leaning his back against the door, he exclaimed, "No one passes hence, at present. Mr. Egerton, secure those dice."

Dunstable darted towards that part of the table where the dice lay; but Egerton had already obtained possession of them.

Richard in the meantime locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"Be he a king," cried Cholmondeley, who had caught the words uttered by the baronet, "he shall suffer for his conduct to me;"—and the Colonel advanced in a menacing manner towards the Prince.

"Beware, sir, how you place a finger on me!" cried Richard. "Approach another step nearer, and I will lay you at my feet!"

The Colonel muttered something to himself, and retreated towards the folding-doors communicating with the dining-room; but there his way was interrupted by the presence of two stout men in plain clothes and two of Richard's servants in handsome liveries.

"Let no one pass, Whittingham," said the Prince, "until our present business be accomplished."

"No, my lord," answered the old butler, who was one of the stout men in plain clothes: then, having given the same instructions to the two servants in livery, Whittingham exclaimed in a loud tone, "And mind, my men, that you on no account let them sneaking willains Scarborough and Axminster defect their escape!"

"My lord, what means this conduct on your part?" demanded Dunstable of the Prince. "By what authority do you detain us here as prisoners?"

"Yes—by what authority?" echoed Cholmondeley, again stepping forward.

"By that authority which gives every honest man a right to expose unprincipled adventurers who are leagued to plunder and rob an inexperienced youth," answered Richard, in a stern tone. "Mr. Egerton, give me those dice."

This request was immediately complied with; and the *other stout man in plain clothes* now stepped forward from the dining-room.

To the infinite dismay of Harborough and Chichester, they immediately recognised Pocock, who did not, however, take any notice of them: but producing a very fine saw from his pocket, he set to work to cut in halves one of the dice which Richard handed to him.

The four adventurers now turned pale as death, and exchanged glances of alarm and dismay.

"Behold, Mr. Egerton," said the Prince, after examining the die that had been sawed in halves, "how your false friends have been enabled to plunder you. Heaven be thanked that I am entirely ignorant of the disgraceful details of gamesters' frauds; but a child might understand for what purpose this die has been thus prepared."

"*Loaded*, your Highness, is the technical term, observed Pocock. "That scoundrel there," pointing to Chichester, "once told me all about them things, at the time I was leagued with him and his baronet friend."

"I hope your Highness will not make this affair public," said Lord Dunstable, his manner having changed to the most cringing meekness. "Egerton—you cannot wish to ruin me altogether?"

"Would you not have ruined me?" inquired the young man, bitterly.

"Oh! what a blessed day it is for me to be a high-witness of the disposure of them scoundrels Marlborough and Winchester!" ejaculated the old butler, rubbing his hands joyfully together. "Send 'em to Newgate, my lord—send 'em to Newgate—and then let 'em be disported to the spinal settlements, my lord!"

"Pray have mercy upon *me*—for the sake of my father and mother!" said Dunstable, whose entire manner expressed the most profound alarm. "Your Highness is known to possess a good heart——"

"It is not to me that you must address yourself," interrupted Markham, in a severe tone. "Appeal to this young man whom you have basely defrauded of large sums—upon whom you have been preying for weeks past—and whom you have tutored in the ways that lead to destruction:—appeal to him, I say—and not to me."

"I am entirely in the hands of your Highness," observed Egerton, with a grateful glance towards the Prince.

"Then we will spare these men, bad and unprincipled though they be," exclaimed Richard: "we will spare them—not for their own sakes, Egerton—but for yours. Were it known, through the medium of the details of a public prosecution, that you have been so intimately connected with a gang of cheats and depredators, your character would be irretrievably lost; for the world is not generous enough to pause and reflect that you were only a victim. Therefore, as you are determined to retrieve the past, it will be prudent to forego any criminal proceedings against those who have made you their dupe."

"Your Highness has spoken harshly—very harshly," said Lord Dunstable; "and yet I feel I have deserved all that vituperation. But this leniency with which your lordship has treated me—and *your* forbearance, Egerton—will not have been ineffectual. I now see the fearful brink upon which I stood—and I shudder; for had you resolved to drag me before a tribunal of justice, I would have avoided that last disgrace by means of suicide."

The young nobleman spoke with a feeling and an evident sincerity that touched both our hero and Egerton; but Cholmondeley turned away in disgust from his penitent friend, and Harborough exchanged a contemptuous look with Chichester.

"Lord Dunstable," said Markham, in an impressive tone, "your conduct has been bad—very bad; but much of its blackness is already wiped away by this manifestation of regret and contrition. Do not allow that spark of good feeling to be extinguished—or destruction must await you. And above all, I conjure you to avoid the companionship of such men as those who have even now by their manner scoffed at your expressions of repentance."

"Farewell, my lord," returned the young nobleman, tears trickling down his cheeks: "the events of this evening will never be

forgotten by me. Egerton, take this pocket-book: it contains the greater portion of the last sum of money that I borrowed of you; and I shall never know peace of mind, until I have restored all of which I have been instrumental in plundering you."

With these words, Dunstable bowed profoundly to the Prince, and hurried from the room, without casting a single glance upon his late confederates in iniquity.

"My lord, isn't Newgate to become more familiarly acquainted with them scrape-graces Aldborough and Winchester?" asked the old butler, as soon as Dunstable had disappeared from the room.

"Were it not that I had promised this honest and grateful man," said the Prince, turning towards the engraver, "that no criminal proceedings should be instituted on the document that he obtained from you, Sir Rupert Harborough, and from you also, Mr. Chichester, I should consider myself bound, in justice to myself and as a duty owing to society, to expose in a public tribunal the black artifices by which you once inveigled me into your toils. But for his sake—for the sake alike of his personal security and of the good character which he now enjoys—I must leave your punishment to your own consciences. And, though scoffing smiles may now mark the little weight which my prediction carries with it in respect to you, yet rest assured that the time *will* come when your misdeeds shall be visited with those penalties which it may seem wise to a just heaven to inflict."

Having uttered these words, the Prince turned away, with undisguised aversion, from the two villains whom he had so impressively and solemnly addressed.

They slunk out of the apartment, with chap-fallen countenances, while Whittingham followed them to the door of the dining-room, through which they passed, and conveyed to them the satisfactory intelligence that "if it had impended on him, they should have been confided with strong letters of commendation to the governor of Newgate."

As soon as they had departed, Colonel Cholmondeley inquired in an insolent tone whether the Prince had any thing to say to *him*; but finding that Markham turned his back contemptuously upon him, he swaggered out of the room, muttering something about "satisfaction in another manner."

Early the next morning, Mrs. Bustard received the following letter:—

"*King Square, Goswell Road.*

"Faithful to the promise which I made to you the day before yesterday, my dear aunt, I have quitted the West End, and am once more located in a quiet neighbourhood. Thanks to the kind interference of that most amiable and excellent nobleman the Prince of Montoni, and to the encouragement given me by your forgiveness of the deception which I so shamefully practised upon you, I have been completely awakened to the errors of my late mode of life. I shall pledge myself to nothing now: my future conduct will prove to you how effectually wise counsels and past experience have changed my habits, my inclinations, and my ideas. One thing, however, I may state on the present occasion: namely, that I am convinced there is no character so truly dangerous and so thoroughly unprincipled as the one who delights in the name of '*the man about town*.'

"I must also declare that I yesterday handled the dice-box for the last time. Much as I loathed the idea, after the dread warnings which I received from the lips of the Prince, I nevertheless consented to play a last game—and it *shall* remain the last! But, start not, dear aunt—I did so by the desire of the Prince, and that I might induce one of my false friends to produce the dice which he always carried about with him. The result was as the Prince had anticipated: those dice were so prepared that it was no wonder if their owner was constantly a winner. And had not the Prince known my repentance to be sincere, he would not for a moment have permitted me to touch those dice again—even though it were to accomplish an aim that might the more effectually expose the men by whom I was surrounded!

"To the Prince my unbounded gratitude is due. He has saved me from utter ruin, and has advised me how to employ the remainder of my fortune so as to recover by my industry what I have lost by my folly. It appears that his august father-in-law, the sovereign of Castelcicala,—and who has set so good an example to the Italian States by giving a Constitution and a national representation to his own country,—has established a line of steam-packets between London and Montoni; and it is my intention to trade between the two capitals. But the details of this project I will explain to you to-morrow, when I shall have the pleasure of calling upon you.

"Your affectionate Nephew,
ALBERT EGERTON."

CHAPTER CCLI.

THE OBSTINATE PATIENT.

It was about a week after the exposure which had taken place in Stratton Street, that the following events occurred at the splendid mansion of the Marquis of Holmesford.

Although the time-piece upon the mantel of this nobleman's bed-room had only just proclaimed the hour of three in the afternoon, yet the curtains were drawn close over the windows, and the chamber was rendered as dark as possible.

In that apartment, too, there was a profound silence—broken only by the low but irregular breathing of some one who slept in the bed.

By the side of the couch sate two elderly men, dressed in black, and who maintained a strict taciturnity—doubtless for fear of awakening the sleeper.

On a small table between them were various bottles containing medicines.

The bed stood upon a sort of dais, or raised portion of the floor, this platform being attained by two steps. High over the couch was a canopy of velvet and gold, surmounted by the coronet of a Marquis, and from whence the rich satin curtains, of dark purple, flowed over that voluptuous bed.

The room itself was furnished in the most luxurious manner. The rosewood tables were inlaid with mother of pearl: the chairs were of antique form, with high backs carved in the most exquisite manner;—the mirrors were large, the pictures numerous, and all set in magnificent frames;—and the toilette-table was of the most elegant and costly description.

And yet he, for whom all this gorgeousness and splendour had been devised,—he, whose wealth had converted the entire mansion into a palace that would have even delighted the proudest Sultan that ever sate on an oriental throne,—this man, for whom earth had such delights—the world so many enjoyments,—this man—the Marquis of Holmesford—was about to succumb to the power of the Angel of Death.

Oh! what a mockery was it to behold,—when the window-curtains were drawn back, upon the Marquis awaking from his uneasy slumber,—what a mockery was it to behold that truly imperial magnificence surrounding the couch whereon lay a thin, weak, haggard, and attenuated old man, in whose eyes was already seen that stony glare which marks the last looks of dissolving nature!

The nobleman awoke, and turned round towards his physicians, who watched at the bed-side.

One of them rose and drew back the window-curtains as noiselessly as possible; and then the pure light of a lovely day streamed into the apartment.

The other medical attendant took the nobleman's hand, felt his pulse, and inquired in a low whisper "how his lordship felt now?"

"Just the same—or may be a little worse," answered the Marquis, in a hollow but feeble tone. "And yet it is impossible that I should be in any real danger! Oh! no—I was only taken ill last night; and men do not—do not—*die*," he added, pronouncing the fatal word with a most painful effort, "upon so slight a warning."

"Your lordship is far from well—very far from well," said the physician, emphatically; "and it is my duty to assure you of that fact."

"But you—you do not think, doctor," stammered the Marquis, "that I am in any—any real—real danger?"

And as he spoke, his glassy eyes were for a few moments lighted up with the evanescent fire of intense excitement—the agitation of a suspense ineffably painful.

"My lord," answered the physician, in a solemn tone, "if you have any affairs of a worldly nature to settle——"

"No—no: it can't be! You are deceiving me!" almost shrieked the old nobleman, starting up wildly to a sitting posture: "do you mean to offend—to insult me when I am a little indisposed? For I am convinced that this is only a trifling indisposition—a passing illness."

"My dear Marquis," said the second physician, advancing towards the bed, "my colleague performs but his duty—painful though it be—when he assures you——"

"Oh! yes—I understand you," again interrupted the nobleman, catching at a straw: "you do right to prepare me for the worst! But mine is not an extreme case—is it? Oh! no—I am certain it cannot be! You are both clever men—well versed in all the mysteries of your profession—and you can soon restore me to health. There! I will give you each a cheque for five thousand pounds the day that you tell me that I may get up again!"

And once more did he contemplate them with eager—anxious glances, expressive alike of feverish hope and tremendous terror.

"Speak—speak!" he cried: "answer me! Five thousand pounds for each of you, the day that I leave this bed!"

"Were your lordship to offer us all your fortune," answered the elder physician—he who had first spoken,—"we could not do more for you than we are now doing. And if you excite yourself thus——"

"Excite myself, indeed!" ejaculated the Marquis, attempting a laugh—which, however, rather resembled a death-rattle that seemed to shake his crazy old frame even to the very vital foundations: "is it not enough to make me excited, when you are so foolish as to joke with me about my being in danger—although you know that I must recover soon? Don't you know *that*, doctor?—tell me dear doctor—shall I not be well in a few days—or at all events a few weeks? Come—reassure me: say that you only spoke in jest! Danger, indeed!

Why, doctor, I possess a constitution of iron!"

And, thus speaking, the Marquis fell back upon his pillow, in a state of extreme exhaustion.

The younger physician forced him to swallow some medicine; and for a few minutes he lay panting and moaning as if the chords of existence were snapping rapidly one after the other.

At length he turned again towards his medical attendants.

"Well, I do believe that I am rather worse than I just now fancied myself to be," he said, in a very faint and feeble tone: "but still I am sure of getting better soon. That medicine has already done me good. Three or four bottles of it—and I shall be quite well. Ah! my dear friends, you are profoundly skilled in all the secrets of the human frame; and with two such physicians as you, it would be impossible to—to—die so soon!"

"Pray, my lord, do not excite yourself," observed the elder medical attendant. "Repose and rest often prove more efficacious than drugs and potions."

"Well—well—I will be quiet—I will tranquillise myself," said the Marquis. "But you must not frighten me any more—you must not talk to me about settling my worldly affairs—just as if I were indeed about to die," he added, with a ghastly attempt to smile away that expression of profound terror which he *felt* to be imprinted on his countenance. "No—no: it is too ridiculous to put such ideas into one's head! Why—how old do you take me to be, doctor?"

"My lord, you afflict me greatly by this style of discourse," said the elder physician, who was thus appealed to. "Most solemnly do I adjure your lordship to compose your mind to that state in which every Christian should be prepared for the worst."

"Doctor—doctor, you cannot be serious!" again half shrieked the affrighted nobleman. "What! am I indeed so very ill? No—no: consider the strength of my constitution—remember how able I am to procure by my wealth every means that may conduce to my recovery—think of what you yourself can do for me——"

"My lord," said the physician, solemnly, "we will exert all human efforts to save you: but the result is with God!"

The Marquis uttered a hollow groan, and, closing his eyes, appeared to be suddenly wrapt in profound meditation.

The scene which we have just described, was a most painful one—even to those two physicians whose experience in such matters was so extensive. There was something peculiarly horrible in that old man of shattered health and exhausted vigour, boasting of the strength of a constitution ruined by a long career of debauchery,—boasting, too, even against his own internal convictions!

But, like all men who fear to die, the Marquis would not admit in words what his soul had acknowledged to itself. He seemed to feel as if there were a possibility of staving off the approach of death, merely by reiterating a disbelief that the destroyer was advancing at all. Thus, though his mind was filled with the most appalling apprehensions, he nevertheless clung—he knew not how nor wherefore—to a hope that his physicians *might* be deceived—that they had exaggerated his danger—that their skill was potent enough to wrestle with the dissolution of nature—in a word, that it was quite possible for him to recover.

And, if he feared to die, it was not precisely because he dreaded the idea of being suddenly plunged into eternity; for he had been a sceptic all his life, and was by no means convinced that there was any future state at all. But his mind shrank from the thought of death as from a revolting spectacle; and moreover the world had so many charms—such boundless attractions for him—that he could not endure the prospect of being called away from those delicious scenes for ever!

He remained for nearly a quarter of an hour buried in the most profound meditation.

"My worthy friends," he at length said, opening his glassy eyes once more, and turning towards his physicians, "I am now prepared to hear without excitement any thing you may deem it advisable or proper to communicate. In one word, is my state really one of great peril?"

"Your lordship now speaks as becomes a man of strong mind," answered the elder physician; "and in this altered mood you will receive with due tranquillity the sad announcement which I am bound to make."

"And that announcement?" said the Marquis, hastily.

"Is that your lordship's recovery is in the hands of heaven," replied the physician, solemnly: "for no human agency can enable you to quit that bed in health again."

"And this is your serious conviction?" said the Marquis, grasping the bed-clothes tightly with both his hands, as if to restrain an explosion of his agonising feelings.

"My duty towards your lordship compels me to answer in the affirmative," returned the physician.

A pause of some minutes ensued: the Marquis could not trust himself to speak. Silence was for a time the only safeguard against a relapse into those wildly-expressed doubts, adjurations, and frantic wanderings which had ere now denoted the real condition of his mind.

"It is then decided—and I must prepare for death!" he at length said, in a low and measured tone. "With a candour equal to that which you have already shown, doctor, tell me how long I may hope yet to live?"

"Do not press me, my lord, on that head——"

"Nay: now you are yourself adopting the very means to excite me," interrupted the Marquis, angrily. "I am nerved to hear the worst: but I wish that *the worst* may be communicated to me. Speak, doctor—speak fearlessly—and say how long I may expect yet to live?"

The two physicians consulted each other with a rapid interchange of glances; and both thereby intimating an affirmative, the elder one said, "Your lordship might probably survive four-and-twenty hours."

"Four-and-twenty hours!" repeated the Marquis, the bed actually shaking with the cold shudder that passed through his frame at this appalling announcement: "four-and-twenty hours!" he said a second time: "that is a very short reprieve, indeed! Has your skill no means, doctor, of prolonging my existence for a few days—for a few hours, even, longer than the amount which you have named?"

"There is no hope of accomplishing such a result, my lord," was the reply.

"No hope!" murmured the Marquis: then after another short pause, he said in a tone which it cost him a dreadful effort to render firm, "Have the kindness to direct that my solicitor may be sent for without delay."

This desire was immediately complied with; and as the lawyer lived in the neighbourhood, scarcely half an hour elapsed ere he was ushered into the presence of the Marquis.

The physicians were desired to remain in the room; and the solicitor, seating himself by the nobleman's directions at the table near the bed, prepared his writing materials.

The Marquis of Holmesford then gave instructions relative to the disposal of his property; and the lawyer drew up the will in due form.

Having detailed various bequests and legacies, and disposed of the great bulk of his fortune, the Marquis, who spoke in a firm and distinct tone of voice, addressed the lawyer in the following manner:—

"And now, sir, have the kindness to insert the words which I am about to dictate to you:—'*Also I will and bequeathe to Katherine Bazzano, half-sister of his Highness Richard, Prince of Montoni, the sum of fifty thousand pounds, as a proof of the sincere contrition and deep regret which I experience on account of certain proceedings on my part, whereby the mother of the said Katherine Bazzano endured grievous wrong and great affliction, although perfectly innocent of any evil thought or deed in respect to her husband, the deceased father of the above-mentioned Richard Prince of Montoni.*'—Have you written to my dictation?"

"I have followed your lordship as accurately as the introduction of a few necessary legal technicalities into that last clause would permit," was the solicitor's reply.

"Then naught now remains for me but to sign the will," said the Marquis; and he sate up in the bed, apparently with but little exertion.

He affixed his name with a firm hand to the document, and requested the physicians to witness it.

The ceremony was then completed; and the solicitor took his departure.

So soon as he had left the room, the Marquis addressed himself to the physicians in these terms:—

"My good friends, the ordeal which I most dreaded has been accomplished; and I feel as if a considerable weight were taken off my mind. What I now require is that you give me some powerful medicament or a strong cordial, that will endow me with sufficient energy to rise from this bed and proceed—alone and unattended—to another room in the house,—a room which I *must* visit—or I should not die in peace! And as a reward for this last service, I desire you to divide equally between you the amount which you will find in yonder writing-desk. That sum consists of a few thousands, and will, I hope, amply repay the kindness which I now expect at your hands."

"While I thank your lordship for this instance of your bounty towards me and my colleague," said the elder physician, "I am convinced that I express his feelings as well as my own, in stating that we cannot possibly allow you to quit your couch. The excitement might prove almost immediately fatal."

"I have no time to waste in hearing or answering objections," said the Marquis, his glazing eyes lighting up with the fever of impatience, and a hectic flush appearing on his sallow, sunken, withered cheeks. "Do what I request—or leave me this moment: give me such a cordial as you may think suitable to the purpose—or my valet will supply me with a bumper of champagne."

"My dear Marquis——"

"My lord—my lord——"

"In one word, do as I desire—or leave me," exclaimed the nobleman, cutting short the ejaculations of the two physicians by an imperious wave of his skeleton-like hand: "there shall be no other master save myself in this house, until the breath be out of my body."

The physicians essayed farther remonstrances—but in vain. The Marquis grew fearfully irritated with their opposition, and then fell back so exhausted upon his pillow, that the medical attendants were compelled to administer as a restorative the cordial which he had demanded as an artificial stimulant a few minutes previously.

The effect of the cordial was really surprising: that old man, whom its influence had just snatched—but snatched only for a time—from the out-stretched arms of death, sate up in his bed, smiled, and seemed to bid defiance to the destroying angel.

"You must humour me now, my friends," he said, in a jocose manner, which contrasted awfully with the inevitable peril of his condition: "go to the writing-desk in yonder corner, and let me be assured you have possessed yourselves of that token of my good feeling which I bequeathe to you."

The physicians, rather to please their obstinate patient than to gratify any avaricious longing on their part, did as they were desired: but, scarcely had they opened the desk, where they observed a bundle of Bank-notes, when a low chuckle met their ears.

They turned and beheld the Marquis, clad in a long dressing-gown and with slippers on his feet, hurrying out of the room by a small door near the foot of his bed.

To hasten after him was their first and most natural impulse; but the key was turned on the other side ere they even reached the door.

Without losing a moment, they hastened from the room by a door at the opposite extremity; but in the adjoining passage they were met by the nobleman's principal valet.

"Gentlemen," said the domestic, "his lordship desires me to inform you that he has no farther need of your services."

"But, my good fellow," exclaimed the younger physician, "your master is dying—he cannot live another day; and this excitement—this rash proceeding——"

"Is sheer madness!" added the senior medical attendant. "Whither has your master gone?"

The valet whispered a few words to the physicians: they understood him full well, and exchanged looks of mingled disgust and horror.

"The unnatural excitement of this proceeding," at length observed the elder physician, "will kill the Marquis within an hour!"

CHAPTER CCLII.

DEATH OF THE MARQUIS OF HOLMESFORD.

We have described at great length, in a former portion of our narrative, the voluptuous attractions of that department of Holmesford House which may very properly be denominated "the harem."

The reader doubtless remembers the vast and lofty room which we depicted as being furnished in the most luxurious oriental style, and which was embellished with pictures representing licentious scenes from the mythology of the ancients.

To that apartment we must now once more direct attention.

Grouped together upon two ottomans drawn close to each other, five beautiful women were conversing in a tone so low that it almost sank to a whisper; while their charming countenances wore an expression of mingled suspense and sorrow.

They were all in *deshabillée*, though it was now past four o'clock in the afternoon.

This negligence, however, extended only to their attire; for each of those lovely creatures had bathed her beauteous form in a perfumed bath, and had arranged her hair in the manner best calculated to set off its luxuriance to advantage and at the same time to enhance the charms of that countenance which it enclosed.

But farther than this the toilette of those five fascinating girls had not progressed; and the loose morning-wrappers which they wore, left revealed all the glowing beauties of each voluptuous bust.

There was the Scotch charmer, with her brilliant complexion, her auburn hair, and her red cherry lips:—there was the English girl—the pride of Lancashire—with her brown hair, and her robust but exquisitely modelled proportions:—and next to her, on the same ottoman, sate the Irish beauty, whose sparkling black eyes denoted all the fervour of sensuality.

On the sofa facing these three women, sate the French wanton, her taper fingers playing with the gold chain which, in the true spirit of coquetry, she had thrown negligently round her neck, and the massive links of which made not the least indentation upon the plump fullness of her bosom. By her side was the Spanish houri, her long black ringlets flowing on the white drapery which set off her transparent olive skin to such exquisite advantage.

This group formed an assemblage of charms which would have raised palpitations and excited mysterious fires in the heart of the most heaven-devoted anchorite that ever vowed a life of virgin-purity.

And the picture was the more fascinating—the more dangerous, inasmuch as its voluptuousness was altogether unstudied at this moment, and those beauteous creatures noticed not, in their sisterly confidence towards each other, that their glowing and half-naked forms were thus displayed almost as it might have seemed in a spirit of competition and rivalry.

But what is the topic of their discourse? and wherefore has a shade of melancholy displaced those joyous smiles that were wont to play upon lips of coral opening above teeth of pearls?

Let us hear them converse.

"This illness is the more unfortunate for us," said the Scotch girl, "because it arrived so suddenly."

"And before the Marquis had made his will," added the French-woman.

"Yes," observed the English beauty,—"it was only yesterday afternoon that he assured us he should not fail to take good care of us all whenever he did make his will."

"And now he will die intestate, as the lawyers say," murmured the Scotch girl; "and we shall be sent forth into the world without resources."

"Oh! how shocking to think of!" cried the Spaniard. "I am sure I should die if I were forced to quit this charming place."

"Nay—now you talk too absurdly, my dear friend," interposed the French charmer; "for, beautiful as we all are, we need not be apprehensive of the future."

"After all, the Marquis may make his will," said the English girl.

"Or recover," added the Irish beauty. "And for my part, I would sooner that he should do *that* than be snatched away from us so suddenly; for, old as he is, the Marquis is very agreeable—very amiable."

"From what our maids told us just now," remarked the Scotch girl, "there does not appear to be any chance of his lordship's recovery. Besides, he is much older than he ever chose to admit to us; and his life has been a long career of pleasure and enjoyment."

"Alas! poor old nobleman," said the Irish beauty, Kathleen; "his often-expressed wish does not appear destined to be fulfilled! How frequently has he declared that he should die contented if surrounded by ourselves, and with a goblet of champagne at his lips!"

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door of the apartment opened abruptly; and the Marquis made his appearance.

The five women started from their seats, uttering exclamations of joy.

The Marquis bolted the door with great caution, and then advanced towards his ladies with a smile upon his haggard, pale, and death-like countenance.

Indeed, it was with the greatest difficulty that the young women could restrain a murmur of surprise—almost of disgust—when, as he drew nearer towards them, they beheld the fearful ravages which a few hours' illness had made upon his face. The extent of those inroads was moreover enhanced by the absence of his false teeth, which he had not time to fix in his mouth ere he escaped from the thraldom of his physicians: so that the thinness of his cheeks was rendered almost skeleton-like by the sinking in of his mouth.

The superb dressing-gown seemed a mockery of the shrivelled and wasted form which it loosely wrapped; and as the old nobleman staggered towards his mistresses, whose first ebullition of joy at his appearance was so suddenly shocked by the ghastly hideousness of his aspect, they had not strength nor presence of mind to hasten to meet him.

Kathleen was the first to conquer her aversion and dismay; and she caught the Marquis in her arms just at the instant when, overcome by the exertions of the last few minutes, he was about to sink beneath the weight of sheer exhaustion.

Then the other women crowded forward to lend their aid; and the old nobleman was placed upon one of the luxurious ottomans.

He closed his eyes, and seemed to breathe with great difficulty.

"Oh! my God—he is dying!" exclaimed Kathleen: "ring for aid—for the physicians——"

"No—no!" murmured the Marquis, in a faint tone; and, opening his eyes once more, he gazed around him—vacantly at first, then more steadily,—until he seemed to recover visual strength sufficient to distinguish the charming countenances that were fixed upon him with mournful interest; "no, my dear girls," he continued, his voice becoming a trifle more powerful; "the doors of this room must not be opened again so long as the breath remains in my body—for I am come," he added with a smile the ghastliness of which all his efforts could not subdue,—"I am come to die amongst you!"

"To die—here—amongst us!" ejaculated all the women (save Kathleen), shrinking back in terror and dismay.

"Yes, my dear girls," returned the Marquis: "and thus will my hope and my prophecy be fulfilled. But let us not trifle away the little time that remains to me. Kathleen, my charmer—I am faint—my spirit seems to be sinking:—give me wine!"

"Wine, my lord?" she repeated, in a tone of kind remonstrance.

"Yes—wine—delicious, sparkling wine!" cried the nobleman, raising himself partially up on the cushions of the sofa. "Delay not—give me champagne!"

The French and Spanish girls hastened to a splendid buffet near the stage at the end of the room, and speedily returned to the vicinity of the ottoman, bearing between them a massive silver salver laden with bottles and glasses.

The wine was poured forth: the Marquis desired Kathleen to steady his hand as he conveyed the nectar to his lips; and he drained the glass of its contents.

A hectic tinge appeared upon his cheeks; his eyes were animated with a partial fire; and he even seemed happy, as he commanded his ladies to drink bumpers of champagne all round.

"Consider that I am going on a long journey, my dear girls," he exclaimed, with a smile; "and do not let our parting be sorrowful. Kathleen, my sweet one, come nearer: there—place yourself so that I may recline my head on your bosom—and now throw that warm, plump, naked arm over my shoulder. Oh! this is paradise!"

And for a few minutes the hoary voluptuary, whose licentious passions were dominant even in death, closed his eyes and seemed to enjoy with intense gratification all the luxury of his position.

It was a painful and disgusting sight to behold the shrivelled, haggard, and attenuated countenance of the dying sensualist, pressing upon that full and alabaster globe so warm with health, life, and glowing passions;—painful and disgusting, too, to see that thin, emaciated, and worn-out frame reclining in the arms of a lovely girl in the vigour and strength of youth:—hideous—hideous to view that contiguity of a sapless, withered trunk and a robust and verdant tree!

"Girls," said the Marquis, at length opening his eyes, but without changing his position, "it is useless to attempt to conceal the truth from you: you know that I am dying! Well—no matter: sooner or later Death must come to all! My life has been a joyous—a happy one; and to you who solace me in my dissolution, I am not ungrateful. Anna, dearest—thrust your hand into the pocket of my dressing-gown."

The French-woman obeyed this command, and drew forth a sealed packet, addressed to the five ladies by their christian and surnames.

"Open it," said the Marquis. "Two months ago I made this provision for you, my dear girls—because, entertaining foolish apprehensions relative to making my will, I felt the necessity of at least taking care of you."

While the nobleman was yet speaking, Anna had opened the packet, whence she drew forth a number of Bank-notes.

There were ten—each for a thousand pounds; and a few words written within the envelope specified that the amount was to be equally divided amongst the five ladies.

"Oh! my dear Marquis, how liberal!" exclaimed the French girl, her countenance becoming radiant with joy.

"How generous!" cried the English beauty.

"How noble!" ejaculated the Scotch charmer.

"It is more than generous and noble—it is princely!" said the Spanish houri.

Kathleen simply observed, "My dear lord, I thank you most unfeignedly for this kind consideration on your part."

The Marquis made no reply; but taking the delicate white hand of the Irish girl, as he lay pillowed upon her palpitating breast, he gently slipped upon one of her taper fingers a ring of immense value.

He then squeezed her hand to enjoin silence; and this act was not perceived by the other ladies, who were too busily employed in feasting their eyes upon the Bank-notes to pay attention to aught beside.

"Come—fill the glasses!" suddenly exclaimed the Marquis, after a short pause: "I feel that my strength is failing me fast—the sand of my life's hour-glass is running rapidly away!"

The French girl—to whose mind there was something peculiarly heroical and romantic in the conduct of the Marquis—hastened to obey the order which had been specially addressed to her; and the sparkling juice of Epernay again moistened the parched throat of the dying man, and also enhanced the carnation tints upon the cheeks of the five youthful beauties.

"And now, my charmers," said the nobleman, addressing himself to the French and Spanish women, "gratify me by dancing some

pleasing and voluptuous measure,—while you, my loves," he added, turning his glazing eyes upon the Scotch and English girls, "play a delicious strain,—so that my spirit may ebb away amidst the soothing ecstacies of the blissful scene!"

The Marquis spoke in a faint and tremulous voice, for he felt himself growing every moment weaker and weaker; and his head now lay, heavy and motionless, upon the bosom of the Irish girl, whose warm and polished arm was thrown around him.

The Scotch and English girls hastened to place themselves, the former before a splendid harp, and the latter at a pianoforte, the magnificent tones of which had never failed to excite the admiration of all who ever heard them.

Then the French and Spanish women commenced a slow, languishing, and voluptuous dance, the evolutions of which were well adapted to display the fine proportions of their half-naked forms.

A smile relaxed the features of the dying man; and his glances followed the movements of those foreign girls who vied with each other in assuming the most lascivious attitudes.

By degrees, that exciting spectacle grew indistinct to the eyes of the Marquis; and the music no longer fell upon his ears in varied and defined tones, but with a droning monotonous sound.

"Kathleen—Kathleen," he murmured, speaking with the utmost difficulty, "reach me the glass—place the goblet to my lips—it will revive me for a few minutes——"

The Irish girl shuddered in spite of herself—shuddered involuntarily as she felt the cheek of the Marquis grow cold and clammy against her bosom.

"Kathleen—dear Kathleen," he murmured in a whisper that was scarcely audible; "give me the goblet!"

Conquering her repugnance, the Irish girl, who possessed a kind and generous heart, reached a glass on the table near the sofa; and, raising the nobleman's head, she placed the wine to his lips.

With a last—last expiring effort, he took the glass in his own hand, and swallowed a few drops of its contents:—his eyes were lighted up again for a moment, and his cheek flushed; but his head fell back heavily upon the white bosom.

Kathleen endeavoured to cry for aid—and could not: a sensation of fainting came over her—she closed her eyes—and a suffocating feeling in the throat almost choked her.

But still the music continued and the dance went on, for several minutes more.

All at once a shriek emanated from the lips of Kathleen: the music ceased—the dance was abandoned—and the Irish girl's companions rushed towards the sofa.

Their anticipations were realised: the Marquis was no more!

The hope which he had so often expressed in his life-time, was fulfilled almost to the very letter;—for the old voluptuary had "*died with his head pillowed on the naked—heaving bosom of beauty, and with a glass of sparkling champagne in his hand*!"

CHAPTER CCLIII.

THE EX-MEMBER FOR ROTTENBOROUGH.

It was now the middle of April, 1843.

The morning was fine, and the streets were marked with the bustle of men of business, clerks, and others repairing to their respective offices, when Mr. George Montague Greenwood turned from Saint Paul's Churchyard into Cheapside.

He was attired in a plain, and even somewhat shabby manner: there was not a particle of jewellery about him; and a keen eye might have discovered, in the *tout ensemble* of his appearance, that his toilette had been arranged with every endeavour to produce as good an effect as possible.

Thus his neckcloth was tied with a precision seldom bestowed upon a faded piece of black silk: his shirt-cuffs were drawn down so as to place an interval of snowy white between the somewhat threadbare sleeve of the blue coat and the common grey glove of Berlin wool:—a black riband hung round his neck and was gathered at the ends in the right pocket of the soiled satin waistcoat, so as to leave the beholder in a state of uncertainty whether it were connected with a watch or only an eye-glass—or, indeed, with any thing at all;—and the Oxford-mixture trousers, *rather* white at the knees, were strapped tightly over a pair of well-blacked bluchers, a casual observer would certainly have taken for Wellingtons.

In his hand he carried a neat black cane; and his gait was characterised by much of the self-sufficiency which had marked it in better days. It was, however, far removed from a swagger: Greenwood was too much of a gentleman in his habits to fall into the slightest manifestation of vulgarity.

His beautiful black hair, curling and glossy, put to shame the brownish hue of the beaver hat which had evidently seen some service, and had lately been exposed to all the varieties of weather peculiar to this capricious climate. His face—eminently handsome, as we have before observed—was pale and rather thin; but there was a haughty assurance in the proud curl of the upper lip, and a fire in his large dark eyes, which showed that hope was not altogether a stranger to the breast of Mr. George Montague Greenwood.

It was about a quarter past nine in the morning when this gentleman entered the great thoroughfare of Cheapside.

Perhaps there is no street in all London which presents so many moral phases to the eyes of the acute beholder as this one, and at that hour; inasmuch as those eyes may single out, and almost read the pursuit of, every individual forming an item in the dense crowd that is then rolling onward to the vicinity of the Bank of England.

For of every ten persons, nine are proceeding in that direction.

Reader, let us pause for a moment and examine the details of the scene to which we allude: for Greenwood has slackened his pace—his eye has caught sight of Bow clock—and he perceives that he is yet too early to commence the visits which he intends to make in certain quarters.

And first, gentle reader, behold that young man with the loose taglioni and no undercoat: he has a devil-me-care kind of look about him, mingled with an air of seediness, as if he had been up the best part of the night at a free-and-easy. He is smoking a cigar—at that hour of the morning! It is impossible to gaze at him for two seconds, without being convinced that he is an articled clerk to an attorney, and that he doesn't care so long as he reaches the office just five minutes before the "governor" arrives.

But that old man, with a threadbare suit of black, and the red cotton handkerchief sticking so suspiciously out of his pocket, as if he had something wrapped up in it,—who is he? Mark how he shuffles along, dragging his heavy high-lows over the pavement at a pace too speedy for his attenuated frame: and see with what anxiety he looks up at the clock projecting out far overhead, to assure himself that he shall yet be at his office within two minutes of half-past nine—or else risk his place and the eighteen shillings a week which it brings him in, and on which he has to support a wife and large family. He is a copying clerk in a lawyer's office—there can be no doubt of it; and the poor man has his dinner wrapped up in his pocket-handkerchief!

Do you observe that proud, pompous-looking stout man, with the large yellow cane in his hand, and the massive chain and seals hanging from his fob? He is a stockbroker who, having got up a bubble Railway Company, has enriched himself in a single day, after having struggled against difficulties for twenty years. But, see—a fashionably-dressed gentleman, with a *little* too much jewellery about his person, and a *rather* too severe swagger in his gait, overtakes our stout friend, and passes his arm familiarly in his as he wishes him "good morning." There is no mistake about this individual: he is the Managing-Director of the stockbroker's Company, and was taken from a three-pair back in the New Cut to preside at the Board. *Arcades ambo*—a precious pair!

Glance a moment at that great, stout, shabbily-dressed man, whose trousers are so tight that they certainly never could have been made for him, and whose watery boiled-kind of eyes, vacant look, and pale but bloated face, denote the habitual gin-drinker. He rolls along with a staggering gait, as if the effects of the previous night's debauch had not been slept off, or as if he had already taken his first dram. He is on his way to the neighbourhood of the Bank, where he either loiters about on the steps of the Auction Mart, or at the door of Capel Court, or else proceeds to some public-house parlour "which he frequents." His business is to hawk bills about for discount; and, to hear him speak, one would believe that he could raise a million of money in no time—whereas he has most likely the pawn-ticket of his Sunday's coat in his pocket.

And now mark that elderly, sedate, quiet-looking man, whose good black suit is well-brushed and his boots nicely polished. He compares his heavy gold watch with the clock of Bow church, and is quite delighted to see that *his* time is correct to a second. And now he continues his way, without looking to the right or the left: he knows every feature—every shop—every lamp-post of Cheapside and the Poultry too well to have any farther curiosity about those thoroughfares—for he has passed along that way every morning, Sundays excepted, during the last twenty years. Are you not prepared to make an affidavit that he is a superior clerk in the Bank of England?

But we must abandon any farther scrutiny of the several members of the crowd in Cheapside—at least for the present; because it is now half-past nine o'clock, and Mr. Greenwood has reached Cornhill.

Here he paused—and sighed,—sighed deeply.

That sigh told a long and painful history,—of how he had lately been rich and prosperous—how he had lost all by grasping at more—how he was now reduced almost to the very verge of penury—and how he wondered whether he should ever be wealthy and great again!

"Yes—yes: I *will* be!" he said to himself—speaking not with his lips, but with that silent though emphatic tongue which belongs to the soul. "My good star cannot have deserted me for ever! But this day must show!"

Then, calling all his assurance to his aid, he turned into the office of a well-known merchant and capitalist on Cornhill.

The clerks did not immediately recognise him; for the last time he had called there, it was at four in the afternoon and he had alighted from an elegant cab: whereas now it was half-past nine in the morning, and he had evidently come on foot. But when he demanded, in his usual authoritative tone, whether their master had arrived yet, they recollected him, and replied in the affirmative.

Greenwood accordingly walked into the merchant's private office.

"Ah! my dear sir," he said, extending his hand towards the merchant, "how do you find yourself? It is almost an age since we met."

The merchant affected not to perceive the out-stretched hand; nor did he return the bland smile with which Mr. Greenwood accosted him. But, just raising his eyes from the morning paper which lay before him, he said in a cold tone, "Oh! Mr. Greenwood, I believe? Pray, sir, what is your business?"

The ex-member for Rottenborough took a chair uninvited, and proceeded to observe in a confidential kind of whisper,—"The fact is, my dear sir, I have conceived a magnificent project for making a few thousands into as many millions, I may say; and as on former occasions you and I have done *some* little business together—and I have put a *few* good things in your way—I thought I would give you the refusal of my new design."

"I am really infinitely obliged to you, Mr. Greenwood——"

"Oh! I knew you would be, my dear sir!" interrupted the ex-member. "The risk is nothing—the gains certain and enormous. You and I can keep it all to ourselves; and——"

"You require me to advance the funds, I presume?" asked the merchant, eyeing his visitor askance.

"Just so—a few thousands only—to be repaid out of the first proceeds, of course," returned Greenwood.

"Then, sir, I beg to decline the speculation," said the merchant, drily.

"Speculation! it is *not* a speculation," cried Greenwood: "it is a certainty."

"Nevertheless, sir, I must decline it; and as my time is very much occupied——"

"Oh! I shall not intrude upon you any longer," interrupted Greenwood, indignantly; and he strode out of the office.

"The impertinent scoundrel!" he muttered to himself, when he had gained the street. "After all the good things I have placed in his way, to treat me in this manner. But, never mind—let me once grow rich again and I will humble him at my feet!"

In spite of this attempt at self-consolation, Greenwood was deeply mortified with the reception which he had experienced at the merchant's office: his anger had, however, cooled and his spirits revived by the time he reached Birchin Lane, where dwelt another of his City acquaintances.

This individual was a capitalist who had once been saved from serious embarrassment, if not from total ruin, by a timely advance of funds made to him by Greenwood; and though the capitalist had paid enormous interest for the accommodation, he had nevertheless always exhibited the most profound gratitude towards the ex-member for Rottenborough.

It was, therefore, with great confidence that Greenwood entered the private office of the capitalist.

"Ah! my dear fellow," cried the latter, apparently overjoyed to see his visitor, "how *have* you been lately? Why—it is really an age since I have seen you! Pray sit down—and now say what I can do for you."

Greenwood addressed him in terms similar to those which he had used with the merchant a few minutes previously.

"And so you actually have a scheme that will make millions, my dear Greenwood?" said the capitalist, his entire countenance beaming with smiles.

"Just as I tell you," answered the ex-member.

"And you have considered it in all its bearings?"

"In every shape and way. Success is certain."

"Oh! what a lucky dog you are," cried the capitalist, playfully thrusting his fingers into Greenwood's ribs.

"Well—I can't say that I am lucky," observed the latter, in a measured tone. "I have had losses lately—serious losses: but you know that I am not the man to be long in remedying them."

"Far from it, my boy!" exclaimed the capitalist. "You will make an enormous fortune before you die—I am sure you will. And this new scheme of yours,—although you have only hinted darkly at it,—*must* succeed—I am convinced it must."

"Then you are prepared to join me in the project?" said Greenwood.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, my dear friend," ejaculated the capitalist: "but it is impossible."

"Impossible! How can that be, since you think so well of any thing which I may devise?" asked Greenwood.

"God bless your soul!" cried the other; "money is money now-a-days. For my part I can't think where the devil it all gets to! One hears of it—reads of it—but never sees it! In fact," he added, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, "I do believe that there is no such thing now as money in the whole City."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Greenwood. "Complaints from *you* are absurd—because every one knows that you have made an enormous fortune since that time when I was so happy to save you from bankruptcy."

"Yes—yes," said the capitalist: "I remember that incident—I have never forgot it—I always told you I never should."

"Then, in plain terms," continued Greenwood, "do me the service of advancing two or three thousand pounds to set my new project in motion."

"Impossible, Greenwood—impossible!" cried the capitalist, buttoning up his breeches-pockets. "Things are in such a state that I would not venture a penny upon the most feasible speculation in the world."

"Perhaps you will lend me a sum——"

"Lend! Ah! ha! Now, really, Greenwood, this is too good! Lend, indeed! What—when we are all in the borrowing line in the City!"—and the capitalist chuckled, as if he had uttered a splendid joke.

"In one word, then," said Greenwood, relishing this mirth as little as a person in his situation was likely to do; "will you assist my temporary wants—even if you do not choose to enter into my speculation? You know that I am proud, and that it must pain me thus to speak to you: but I declare most solemnly that fifty pounds at this moment would be of the greatest service to me."

"Nothing gives me more pain than to refuse a friend like you," answered the capitalist: "but, positively, I could not part with a shilling to-day to save my own brother from a gaol."

Greenwood rose, put on his hat, and left the office without uttering another word.

He felt that he was righteously punished—for *he* had, in his time, often treated men in the same manner,—professing ardent friendship, and yet refusing the smallest pecuniary favour!

Having walked about for nearly half an hour, to calm the feelings which the conduct of the capitalist had so painfully excited, Greenwood repaired to the office of a great bill-discounter and speculator in Broad Street. This individual had been a constant visitor at Greenwood's house in Spring Gardens—had joined him in many of his most profitable speculations—and had gained considerable sums thereby. He was, moreover, of a very enterprising character, and always ready to risk money with the hope of large returns.

Greenwood entered the clerks' office; and, glancing towards the private one at the lower extremity, he caught sight of the speculator's countenance peering over the blinds of the glass-door which opened between the two rooms.

The face was instantly withdrawn; and Greenwood, who of course affected not to have observed its appearance at the window, inquired whether the speculator was within.

"Really I can't say, sir," drawled a clerk, who was mending a pen: then, without desisting from his operation, he said, "I'll see, sir, in a moment."

"Be so kind as to see *this* moment," exclaimed Greenwood, angrily. "I suppose you know who I am?"

"Oh! yes—sir—certainly, sir," returned the clerk; and, having duly nibbed the pen, he dismounted very leisurely from his stool—paused to arrange a piece of blotting-paper on the desk in a very precise manner indeed—brushed the splinters of the quill from his trousers—and then dragged himself in a lazy fashion towards the private office.

Greenwood bit his quivering lip with rage.

"Two years ago," he thought to himself, "I should not have been treated thus!"

Meantime the clerk entered the inner office, and carefully closed the door behind him.

Greenwood could hear the murmuring sounds of two voices within.

At length the clerk re-appeared, and said in a careless tone, "The governor isn't in, Mr. Greenwood: I thought he was—but he isn't—and, what's more, I don't know when he will be. You'd better look in again, if it's particular; but I know the governor's uncommon busy to-day."

"I shall not trouble you nor your *governor* any more," returned Greenwood, his heart ready to break at the cool, deliberate insult thus put upon him. "You think me a fallen man—and you dare to treat me thus. But——"

"Why, as for *that*," interrupted the clerk, with impertinent emphasis, "every one knows you're broke and done up—and my governor doesn't want shabby insolvents hanging about his premises."

Greenwood's countenance became scarlet as these bitter taunts met his ears; and for a moment he felt inclined to rush upon the insolent clerk and punish him severely with his cane.

But, being naturally of a cool and cautious disposition, he perceived with a second thought that he might only become involved in a dilemma from which he had no means to extricate himself: so, conquering his passion, he rushed out of the office.

He could now no longer remain blind to the cruel conviction that the extremities of his position were well known in the City, and that the hopes with which he had sallied forth three hours previously were mere delusive visions.

Still he was resolved to leave no stone unturned in the endeavour to retrieve his ruined fortunes; but feeling sick at heart and the prey to a deep depression of spirits, he plunged hastily into a public-house to take some refreshment.

And now behold the once splendid and fastidious Greenwood,—the man who had purchased the votes of a constituency, and had even created a sensation within the walls of Parliament,—the individual who had discounted bills of large amount for some of the greatest peers of England, and whose luxurious mode of living had once been the envy and wonder of the fashionable world,—behold the ex-member for Rottenborough partaking of a pint of porter and a crust of bread and cheese in the dingy parlour of a public-house!

There was a painful knitting of the brows, and there was a nervous quivering of the lip, which denoted the acute emotions to which he was a prey, as he partook of his humble fare; and once—once, two large tears trickled down his cheeks, and moistened the bread that he was conveying to his mouth.

For he thought of the times when money was as dirt in his estimation,—when he rode in splendid vehicles, sate down to sumptuous repasts, was ministered unto by a host of servants in gorgeous liveries, and revelled in the arms of the loveliest women of the metropolis.

Oh! he thought of all this: he recalled to mind the well-filled wardrobes he had once possessed, and glanced at his present faded attire;—he shook up the remains of the muddy beer at the bottom of the pewter-pot, and remembered the gold he had lavished on champagne: his eyes lingered upon the crumbs of the bread and the rind of the cheese left on the plate, and his imagination became

busy with the reminiscences of the turtle and venison that had once smoked upon his board.

But worse—oh! far worse than this was the dread conviction that all his lavish expenditure—all his ostentatious display—all his princely feasts, had failed to secure him a single friend!

No wonder, then, that the bitter—bitter tears started from his eyes; and, though he immediately checked that first ebullition of heart-felt anguish yet the effort only caused the storm of emotions to rage the more painfully within his breast.

For, in imagination, he cast his eyes towards a mansion a few miles distant; and there he beheld *one* whose condition formed a striking contrast with his own—*one* who had suddenly burst from obscurity and created for himself as proud a name as might be found in Christendom,—a young man whose indomitable energies and honourable aspirations had enabled him to lead armies to conquest, and who had taken his place amongst the greatest Princes in the universe!

The comparison which Greenwood drew—despite of himself—between the elevated position of Richard Markham and his own fallen, ruined lot, produced feelings of so painful—so exquisitely agonising a nature, that he could endure them no longer. He felt that they were goading him to madness—the more so because he was alone in that dingy parlour at the time, and was therefore the least likely to struggle against them successfully.

Hastily quitting the public-house, he rushed into the street, where the fresh air seemed to do him good.

And then he asked himself whether he should risk farther insult by calling upon other wealthy men with whom he had once been on intimate terms? For a few moments he was inclined to abandon the idea: but a little calm reflection told him not to despair.

Moreover, he had a reason—a powerful motive for exerting all his energies to repair the past, so far as his worldly fortunes were concerned; and though the idea was almost insane, he hoped—*if he had but a chance*—to make such good use of the coming few weeks as would reinstate him in the possession of enormous wealth.

But, alas! it seemed as if no one would listen to the scheme which he felt convinced was calculated to return millions for the risk of a few thousands!

"Oh! I *must* retrieve myself—I *must* make a fortune!" he thought, as he hurried towards Moorgate Street. "One lucky stroke—and four-and-twenty hours shall see me rich again!"

This idea brought a smile to his lips; and, relaxing his pace, he composed his countenance as well as he could ere he entered the office of a wealthy stockbroker in Moorgate Street.

The stockbroker was lounging over the clerks' desk, conversing with a merchant whom Greenwood also knew; and the moment the ex-member for Rottenborough entered, the two City gentlemen treated him to a long, impertinent, and contemptuous stare.

"Ah!" said Greenwood, affecting a pleasant smile, which, God knows! did not come from the heart; "you do not appear to recollect me? Am I so very much changed as all *that*?"

"Well—it *is* Greenwood, pos-i-tive-ly!" drawled the stockbroker, turning towards his friend the merchant in a manner that was equivalent to saying, "I wonder at his impudence in coming here."

"Yes—it *is* Greenwood," observed the merchant, putting his glasses up to his eyes: "or rather the shadow of Greenwood, I should take it to be."

"Ah! ha! ha!" chuckled the stockbroker.

"You are disposed to be facetious, gentlemen," said the object of this intended witticism but really galling insult: "I presume that my long absence from the usual City haunts——"

"I can assure you, Greenwood," interrupted the stockbroker, "that the City has got on uncommonly well without you. The Bank hasn't stopped payment—bills are easy of discount—money is plentiful——"

"And yet," said Greenwood, determined to receive all this sarcasm as quietly as a poor devil ought to do when about to make a proposal requiring an advance of funds,—"and yet a certain capitalist—a very intimate friend of mine, in Birchin Lane—assured me just now that money was very scarce."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the stockbroker.

"He! he! he!" chuckled the merchant.

"Why, the fact is, Greenwood," continued the broker, "your *very intimate friend* the capitalist was here only a quarter of an hour ago; and he delighted us hugely by telling us how you called upon him this morning with a scheme that would make millions, and ended by wanting to borrow fifty pounds of him."

"He! he! he!" again chuckled the merchant.

"Ha! ha! ha!" once more laughed the stockbroker; and, taking his friend's arm, he led him into his private office, the two continuing to laugh and chuckle until the door closed behind them.

Greenwood now became aware of the gratifying fact that every clerk in the counting-house was laughing also; and he rushed out into the street, a prey to feelings of the most agonising nature.

But the ignominy of that day was not yet complete in respect to him.

As he darted away from the door of the insolent stockbroker's office, he came in collision with two gentlemen who were walking arm-in-arm towards the Bank.

"'Pon my honour, my good fellow——" began one, rubbing his arm which had been hurt by the encounter.

"Greenwood!" cried the second, stepping back in surprise.

The ex-member for Rottenborough raised his eyes at the sounds of those well-known voices, and beheld Mr. Chichester, with his inseparable friend the baronet, both eyeing him in the most insulting manner.

"Ah! Greenwood, my dear fellow," exclaimed Sir Rupert; "I am really quite delighted to see you. How get on the free and independent electors of Rottenborough? Egad, though—you are not quite the pink of fashion that you used to be—when you did me the honour of making my wife your mistress."

"Greenwood and Berlin-wool gloves—impossible!" cried Chichester. "Such a companionship is quite unnatural!"

"And an old coat brushed up to look like a new one," added the baronet, laughing heartily. "And bluchers——" Greenwood stayed to hear no more: he broke from the hold which the two friends had laid upon him, and darted down an alley into Coleman Street.

CHAPTER CCLIV.

FURTHER MISFORTUNES.

Greenwood had been insulted by those wealthy citizens who once considered themselves honoured by his notice; and *this* he might have borne, because he was man of the world enough to know that poverty is a crime in the eyes of plodding, money-making persons.

But to be made the jest of a couple of despicable adventurers—to be jeered at by two knaves for whom he entertained the most sovereign contempt, because their rascalities had been conducted on a scale of mean swindling rather than in the colourable guise of financial enterprise,—to be laughed at and mocked by such men as those, because they happened to have good clothes upon their backs,—Oh! this was a crushing—an intolerable insult!

The unhappy Greenwood felt it most keenly: he writhed beneath the sharp lash of that bitter sarcasm which had been hurled against his shabby appearance;—he groaned under the scourge of those contemptuous scoffs!

Sanguine as his disposition naturally was,—confident as he ever felt in his own talents for intrigue and scheming,—he was now suddenly cast down; and hope fled from his soul.

Not for worlds would he have risked the chance of receiving farther insult that day, by calling at the counting-house of another capitalist!

And now he fled from the City with a species of loathing,—as much depressed by disappointment as he had been elated by hope when he entered it a few hours previously.

He crossed Blackfriars' Bridge, turned into Holland Street, and thence entered John Street, where he knocked timidly at the door of a house of very mean appearance.

A stout, vulgar-looking woman, with carrotty hair, tangled as a mat, overshadowing a red and bloated face, thrust her head out of the window on the first floor.

"Well?" she cried, in an impertinent tone.

"Will you have the kindness to let me in, Mrs. Brown?" said Greenwood, calling to his aid all that blandness of manner which had once served him us a powerful auxiliary in his days of extensive intrigue.

"That depends," was the abrupt reply. "Have you brought any money with you?"

"Mrs. Brown, I cannot explain myself in the street," said the unhappy man, who saw that a storm was impending. "Please to let me in—and——"

"Come—none of that gammon!" shouted the landlady of the house, for the behoof of all her neighbours who were lounging at their doors. "Have you brought me one pound seventeen and sixpence—yes or no? 'Cos, if you haven't, I shall just put up a bill to let my lodgings—and you may go about your business."

"But, Mrs. Brown——"

"Don't Mrs. Brown *me*!" interrupted the woman, hanging half way out of the window, and gesticulating violently. "It's my opinion as you wants to do me brown—and that's all about it."

"What is it, dear Mrs. Brown?" inquired a woman, with a child in her arms, stepping from the door of the adjoining dwelling to the kerb-stone, and looking up at the window.

"What is it?" vociferated Greenwood's landlady, who only required such a question as the one just put to her in order to work herself into a towering passion: "what is it? Why, would you believe it, Mrs. Sugden, that this here swindling feller as tries to look so much like the gentleman, but isn't nothink more than a Swell-Mob's-man—and *that* was my rale opinion of him all along—comes here, as you know, Mrs. Sugden, and hires my one-pair back for seven and sixpence a-week——"

"Shameful!" cried Mrs. Sugden, darting a look of fierce indignation upon the miserable Greenwood.

"So it were, ma'am," continued Mrs. Brown, now literally foaming at the mouth: "and though he had his clean pair of calico sheets every fortnight and a linen piller-case which my husband took out o' pawn on purpose to make him comfortable——".

"*Dis*-graceful!" ejaculated Mrs. Sugden, casting up her eyes to heaven, as if she could not have thought the world capable of such an atrocity.

"And then arter all, that feller there runs up one pound seventeen and six in no time—going tick even for the blacking of his boots and his lucifers——"

Greenwood stayed to hear no more: he perceived that all hope of obtaining admission to his lodging was useless; and he accordingly stole off, followed by the abuse of Mrs. Brown, the opprobrious epithets of Mrs. Sugden, and the scoffs of half-a-dozen of the neighbours.

It was now four o'clock in the afternoon; and Greenwood found himself retracing his way over Blackfriars' Bridge, without knowing whither he was going—or without even having any place to go to.

He was literally houseless—homeless!

His few shirts and other necessaries were left behind at the lodging which had just been closed against him; and a few halfpence in

his pocket, besides the garments upon his back, were all his worldly possessions.

"And has it come to this?" he thought within himself, as he hurried over the bridge, not noticing the curiosity excited on the part of the crowd by his strange looks and wildness of manner: "has it come to this at length? Homeless—and a beggar!—a wretched wanderer in this great city where I once rode in my carriage! Oh! my God—I deserve it all!"

And he hurried franticly along—hell raging in his bosom.

At length it suddenly struck him that he was gesticulating violently in the open street and in the broad day-light; and he was overwhelmed with a sense of deep shame and profound humiliation.

He rushed across Bridge Street, with the intention of plunging into one of those lanes leading towards Whitefriars; when a cry of alarm resounded in his ears—and in another moment he was knocked down by a cabriolet that was driving furiously along.

The wheel passed over his right leg; and a groan of agony escaped him.

The vehicle instantly stopped: the livery servant behind sprang to the ground; and, with the aid of a policeman who came up to the spot the instant the accident occurred, the domestic raised Greenwood from the pavement.

But an agonising cry, wrung from him by the excruciating pain which he felt in his right leg, showed that he was seriously injured; and the policeman said, "We must take him to the hospital."

There were two gentlemen in the cabriolet; and one of them, leaning out, said, "What's the matter with the fellow—smite him!"

"Yeth—what ith it all about, poleethman?" demanded the other gentleman, also thrusting forward his head.

Greenwood recognised their voices, and turned his face towards them in an imploring manner: but he suffered too acutely to speak.

"My gwathiouth! Thmilackth," cried Sir Cherry Bounce, who was one of the inmates of the cab: "may I die if it ithn't Gweenwood!"

"So it is, Cherry—strike me!" ejaculated the Honourable Major Dapper. "Here, policeman! see that he's taken proper care of—in the hospital——"

"Yeth—in the hothpital," echoed Sir Cherry.

"Hold your tongue, Cherry—you're a fool," cried the Major. "And, policeman, if you want to communicate with me upon the subject—I mean, if any thing should happen to the poor devil, you know—you can call or write. Here's my card—and here's a guinea for yourself."

"Thanke'e, sir," returned the officer: "but won't you be so kind as to give him a lift in your cab as far as Saint Bartholomew's?"

"Quite out of the quethtion!" exclaimed Sir Cherry.

"Oh! quite," said the Honourable Major Smilax Dapper. "We are engaged to dine at the house of some friends with whom Lady Bounce—that's this gentleman's wife—is staying; and we are late as it is. You must get a stretcher, policeman—strike me! Now then, John!"

"All right, sir!" cried the servant, springing up behind the vehicle.

And away went the cabriolet with the rapidity of lightning.

In the meantime a crowd had collected; and amongst the spectators thus assembled were two individuals who seemed to take a more than common interest in the painful scene.

One was Filippo, who happened to be passing at the moment: but he kept behind the crowd, so that Greenwood might not perceive him.

The other was the hump-back Gibbet, whom accident likewise made a witness of the event, and who, observing the cruel indifference with which the gentlemen in the cab had treated a misfortune caused by themselves, felt suddenly interested in behalf of the victim of their carelessness.

The policeman procured a stretcher; and, with the aid of two or three of the idlers whom the accident had collected to the spot, he conveyed Greenwood to Saint Bartholomew's Hospital.

Filippo hurried rapidly away the moment he saw his late master removed in the manner described; but Gibbet, who, we should observe, was clad in deep mourning, walked by the side of the procession.

Greenwood fainted, through excessive pain, while he was being conveyed to the hospital; and when he came to himself again, he was lying in a narrow bed, upon a hard mattress stretched on an iron framework, while the house-surgeon was setting his leg, which had been broken.

The room was long and crowded with beds, in each of which there was a patient; for this was the Casualty Ward of Saint Bartholomew's Hospital.

"And how did this occur, then?" said the house-surgeon to the police-officer, who was standing by.

"Two gentlemen in a cab, coming along Bridge Street, capsized the poor feller," was the answer. "They told me who they was—one a *Sir*, so I suppose a Barrow-Knight—and t'other, whose card I've got, is a Honourable and a Major. If they hadn't had handles to their names I shouldn't have let 'em go off so quiet as I did, after knocking down a feller-creatur' through sheer carelessness."

"Well, well," said the surgeon, impatiently: "I suppose you know your duty. The leg is set—it's a simple fracture—and there's no danger. Mrs. Jubkins."

"Yes, sir," said a nurse, stepping forward.

"The new patient must be kept very quiet, Mrs. Jubkins," continued the house-surgeon, behind whom stood two assistants, termed dressers, and smelling awfully of rum and tobacco: "and if any casualty that's likely to be noisy should come in to-night, don't put it into this ward, Mrs. Jubkins. I shall visit this Leg the first thing in the morning, before I see the Collar-Bone that came in just now. By the by, Mrs. Jubkins, how's the Eye this evening?"

"The Eye, sir, has been calling out for somethink to eat this last three hours, sir," replied the head nurse of the Casualty Ward.

"And the Ribs, Mrs. Jubkins, that came in this morning—how do you get on there?"

"The Ribs, sir," answered the nurse, somewhat indignantly, "has done nothing but curse and swear ever since you left at noon. It's quite horrible, sir."

"A bad habit, Mrs. Jubkins—a very bad habit," said the surgeon: "swearing neither mends nor helps matters. But damn the fellow—he can't be so very bad, either."

"In course not, sir," observed the nurse. "But what am I to do with the Nose, sir?"

"Let the Nose put his feet into hot water as usual."

The surgeon then felt Greenwood's pulse, gave Mrs. Jubkins a few necessary directions, and was about to proceed to the next ward to visit a Brain, which also had a compound fracture of the arm, when he suddenly espied Gibbet near the head of the new patient's bed.

"Well, my good fellow," said the surgeon; "and what do *you* want?"

"Please, sir," answered Gibbet, "I merely came in—I scarce know why—but I saw the accident—and I thought that if this poor gentleman would like to send a message to any friend——"

"Oh! yes, I should indeed!" murmured Greenwood, in a faint and yet earnest tone.

"Well—you can settle that matter between you," said the surgeon: "only, my good fellow," he added, speaking to Gibbet, "you must not hold the patient too long in conversation."

"No, sir—I will not," was the answer.

The surgeon, the nurse, and the dressers moved away: the policeman had already taken his departure; and Greenwood was therefore enabled to speak without reserve to the kind-hearted hump-back who had manifested so generous an interest in his behalf.

And now behold Gibbet—the late hangman's son—leaning over the pallet of the once fashionable, courted, and influential George Montague Greenwood.

"I am so weak—so ill in mind and body," said the latter, in a very faint and low tone, "that I cannot devote words to tell you how much I feel your kindness."

"Don't mention *that*, sir," interrupted Gibbet. "Inform me as briefly as possible how I can serve you."

"I will," continued Greenwood. "If you would proceed to a mansion near Lower Holloway, called Markham Place——"

"Markham Place!" said Gibbet, with a start.

"Yes—do you know it?"

"It was my intention to call there this very evening. The Prince of Montoni has been my greatest benefactor——"

"Oh! how fortunate!" murmured Greenwood. "Then you know that there is a young lady named Miss Monroe——"

"Yes, sir: she lives at the Place, with her father."

"And it is to her that I wish a message conveyed," said Greenwood. "Seek an opportunity to deliver that message to her alone;—and on no account, I implore you, let the Prince—nor any inmate of that house save Miss Monroe—learn what has occurred to me."

"Your wishes shall be faithfully complied with. But the message——"

"Oh! it is brief," interrupted Greenwood, with a sad smile, which was not, however, altogether devoid of bitterness: "tell her—whisper in her ear—that an accident has brought me hither, and that I am desirous to see her to-morrow. And—assure her, my good friend," he added, after a short pause, "that I am in no danger—for she might be uneasy."

"Your instructions shall be fulfilled to the letter," replied Gibbet.

Greenwood expressed his thanks; and the hump-back took his departure.

CHAPTER CCLV.

GIBBET AT MARKHAM PLACE.

It was at about eight o'clock in the evening when Gibbet alighted from a cab at the entrance of Markham Place.

He knocked timidly at the door; but the servant who answered the summons received him with respect—for not the veriest mendicant that crawled upon the face of the earth ever met with an insulting glance nor a harsh word from any inmate of that dwelling.

To Gibbet's question whether "His Highness was at home?" the domestic replied by a courteous invitation to enter; and being shown into a parlour—the very same where more than two years previously he and his father had one evening supped with our hero—he was shortly joined by the Prince.

The hump-back, well as he had been enabled to judge of the excellent qualities of Richard, was nevertheless surprised at the kind and affable manner in which that exalted personage hastened forward to welcome him; and tears of gratitude rolled down the poor creature's face as he felt his hands clasped in those of one whom he so profoundly respected and so enthusiastically admired.

Markham made him sit down, and rang the bell for wine and refreshments: then, noticing that the hump-back was in deep mourning, he hastened to question him as to the cause—which he nevertheless could well divine.

"Alas! my lord," answered Gibbet, "my poor father is no more! And latterly—ever since he knew your Highness—he was so affectionate, so kind towards me, that I feel his loss very painfully indeed!"

"Compose yourself, my good friend," said Richard; "and be solaced with the thought that your father has gone to a better world."

"It was but last week, my lord," continued Gibbet, drying his tears, "that he was apparently in the full enjoyment of health. Your Highness is aware—by means of the letters which you were so condescending as to permit me occasionally to address to you—that the business in which my father embarked in the country prospered well, and that, under an assumed name, we were leading a happy and a comfortable life. But my father was superstitious; and I think he frightened himself to death."

"Explain yourself, my friend," said Markham: "you interest me considerably."

"I should inform your Highness," proceeded John Smithers, "of an incident which occurred about two years ago. You recollect the letter that your Highness wrote to acquaint us that you had unravelled the mystery which had so long involved the birth of ——of ——"

"Katherine—call her Katherine," said Richard, kindly. "You shall see her presently—and she would be offended with you were you to call her by any other name than that by which you knew her for so many years."

"Oh! my lord—now you afford me real joy!" ejaculated Gibbet, wiping his eyes once more. "But as I was about to say, it was in the middle of the very night before the letter reached us, that my father came to my room in a dreadful fright. He held a rushlight in his hand—and he was as pale as death. Horror was depicted on his countenance. I implored him to tell me what had disturbed him; and, when he had somewhat recovered his presence of mind, he said in a solemn and sepulchral tone—oh! I never shall forget it!—'*John, I have just received a second warning. I was in the middle of a deep sleep, when something awoke me with a start; and by the dim light of the candle, I beheld the countenance of Harriet Wilmot gazing with a sweet and beneficent expression upon me through the opening of the curtains. It lingered for a few moments, and then faded away!*'—Vainly did I reason with my father upon the subject: vainly did I represent to him that he was the sport of a vision—a fanciful dream. He shook his head solemnly, bade me mention the topic no more, and then returned to his room. For a few days afterwards he was pensive and thoughtful; but in a short time the impression thus strangely made upon him wore away, and he became cheerful and contented as usual."

"Ah! now I begin to comprehend the meaning of your observation that your poor father frightened himself to death!" exclaimed Richard. "But give me all the details."

"I will, my lord. Two years passed since that time, and the subject was never mentioned by either of us. Katherine, as your lordship knows, used to write to us frequently; and my father was always rejoiced to hear from her and of her great prosperity. We had a feast, my lord, on the day when she was united to that good Italian gentleman whom you wrote to tell us she was to marry; and I never saw my father in better spirits. Well, my lord, thus time slipped away; and all went on smoothly until last Monday week, when we retired to rest somewhat later than usual, having had a few friends to pass the evening. It was about two o'clock in the morning, and I was in a profound sleep, when some one burst into my room. I started up: my poor father fell fainting upon the bed. Assistance was immediately summoned—a surgeon was sent for—and the proper remedies were applied. But all in vain! He remained in a kind of torpor two days; and early in the morning of the third he seemed to recover a little. He opened his eyes and recognised me. A languid smile animated his features: he drew me towards him, and embraced me affectionately. Then, before he released me from his arms, he whispered in a faint tone, '*John, I am dying—I know I am! The last warning has been given—I have seen her face a third time! But how beautiful she looked—so mild, so angelic!*'—With these words his eyes closed—a sudden change came over him—and in a few minutes he was no more."

"And now, my poor friend," said Markham, wiping away a tear, while Gibbet's eyes were streaming, "you are without a companion—without a parent; and the many acts of kindness you showed to my sister when she was dependant on your father's bounty, have

created for you deep sympathies in the hearts of those who will now endeavour to solace you in your present affliction."

"Oh! my lord, you are goodness itself!" ejaculated Gibbet: "but to-morrow I shall return into the country to realize the property which I now possess through my father's death—and then—and then, my lord——"

"You will come back to London—to this house," said Markham, emphatically.

"No, my lord—I shall repair to Liverpool, and thence depart for America," answered Gibbet, conquering his emotions and speaking more firmly than he had yet done. "Oh! do not seek to turn me from my purpose, my lord—for my happiness depends upon that step."

Richard surveyed the hump-back with unfeigned astonishment;—and this sentiment was strangely increased, when the poor creature, suddenly yielding to the impulse of his emotions, fell at our hero's feet, and catching hold of both his hands, exclaimed, "Oh! my lord, pardon me for what I have done! From our childhood I have loved Katherine—loved her devotedly,—first as a brother should love a sister—and then, my lord—oh! pardon me—but I knew not that she was by birth so high above me—I could not foresee that she would be some day acknowledged as the sister of a great Prince! And thus, my lord—if I have offended you by daring at one time to love Katherine more tenderly than I ought—you will forgive me—you will forgive me! And believe me, my lord, when I solemnly declare that never did I understand my own feelings in respect to her—never did I comprehend why her image was so unceasingly present to my imagination—until that letter came in which you announced to my father her approaching marriage. Then, my lord, then ——but—oh! forgive me—pardon me for this boundless insolence—this impious presumption!"

Gibbet had spoken with such strange rapidity and such wild—startling—almost frenzied energy,—and the revelation his words conveyed had so astonished our hero, that the sudden seriousness which his countenance assumed was mistaken by the poor hump-back for severity.

But this error was speedily dissipated, when Markham, recovering from his bewilderment, raised him from the floor, conducted him to a seat, and, leaning over him, said in the kindest possible manner, "My dear friend, you have no forgiveness to ask—I no pardon to accord. In my estimation distinctions of birth are as nothing; and if you have loved my sister, it was a generous—an honest—a worthy attachment which you nourished. But, alas! my poor friend—that attachment is most unfortunate!"

"I know it, my lord—I know it!" cried Gibbet, tears streaming from his eyes: "and had I not been compelled to avow my secret, as an explanation of the motive which will induce me to seek another clime where I may commune with my own heart in the solitude of some forest on the verge of civilization—that secret would never have been revealed! And now, my lord," he added, hastily wiping his eyes and assuming a calm demeanour, "seek not to deter me from my purpose—and let us close our lips upon this too painful subject!"

"Be it as you will, my good friend," said the Prince. "But for this night, at all events, you will make my house your home."

Gibbet gave a reluctant consent; and, when his feelings were entirely calmed, Richard introduced him into the drawing-room where Isabella, Katherine and her husband, Ellen and Mr. Monroe were seated.

And here the reader may exclaim, "What! present the hump-back orphan of the late hangman to that elegant, refined, and accomplished Princess whose father sits upon a throne!"

Yes, reader: and it was precisely because this poor creature was deformed—an orphan—with what many might term a stigma on his parentage—and so lonely and desolate in the world, that Richard Markham took him by the hand, and introduced him into the bosom of his domesticity. But the Prince also knew that the unfortunate hump-back possessed a heart that might have done honour to a monarch; and our hero looked not to personal appearance—nor to birth—nor to fortune—nor to name,—but to the qualities of the mind!

And Isabella, who had heard all the previous history of those with whom Katherine had passed so many years of her life, welcomed that poor deformed creature even as her husband had welcomed him,—welcomed him, too, the more kindly because he was so deformed!

But we shall not dwell upon this scene:—we shall leave our readers to picture to themselves the delight of Katherine at beholding him whom she had long believed to be her cousin, and who was ever ready to catch the stripes that were destined for her,—her sorrow when she heard of the death of the hump-back's father,—and the happiness experienced by Gibbet himself at passing an evening in the society of the inmates of Markham Place.

Accident enabled him to obtain a few moments' conversation aside with Ellen; and to her he broke in as few words but in as delicate a manner as possible, the sad news which he had to communicate relative to Greenwood.

The young lady suppressed her grief as well as she could; but she shortly afterwards pleaded indisposition and retired early to her room—there to ponder and weep, without fear of interruption, over the fallen fortunes of her husband!

On the following morning, Gibbet—true to his resolve, which our hero no longer attempted to shake—took his departure from Markham Place, laden with the presents which had been forced upon him, and followed by the kindest wishes of those good friends whom he left behind.

CHAPTER CCLVI.

ELIZA SYDNEY AND ELLEN.—THE HOSPITAL.

Eliza Sydney had just sate down to breakfast, when a cab drove hastily up to the door of the villa, and Ellen alighted from the vehicle.

The moment she entered the parlour, Eliza advanced to meet her, saying, "My dearest friend, I can divine the cause of this early visit;—and, indeed, had you not come to me, it was my intention to have called upon you without delay."

Ellen heard these remarks with unfeigned surprise.

"Sit down, and compose yourself," continued Eliza, "while I explain to you certain matters which it is now proper that you should know."

"Heaven grant that you have no evil tidings to communicate!" exclaimed Ellen, taking a chair near her friend, upon whose countenance she turned a look of mingled curiosity and suspense.

"Be not alarmed, dear Ellen," answered Eliza: "my object is to serve and befriend you—for I know that at this moment you require a friend!"

"Oh! indeed I do," cried Ellen, bursting into tears. "But is it possible that you are acquainted with——"

"With all your history, my dear friend," interrupted Eliza.

"*All* my history!" ejaculated Ellen.

"Yes—all. But let me not keep you in suspense. In a few words let me assure you that there is no important event of your life unknown to me."

"Then, my dearest friend," cried Ellen, throwing herself into Eliza's arms, "you are aware that my husband is lying in a common hospital—and that it breaks my heart to think of the depth into which he has fallen from a position once elevated and proud!"

"Yes," answered Eliza, returning the embrace of friendship; "I learnt that sad event last evening—a few hours after it occurred; and hence my intention to visit you this morning. But I am better pleased that you should have come hither—because we can converse at our ease. You must know, my dear friend, that a few years ago I received some wrong at the hands of him who has now every claim upon the sympathy of the charitable heart."

"You speak of my husband, Eliza?" cried Ellen. "Were *you* also wronged by him? Oh! how many, alas! can tell the same tale!"

"He attempted to wrong me, Ellen—but did not succeed," answered Eliza, emphatically: "twice he sought to ruin me—and twice Providence interposed to save me. Pardon me, if I mention these facts; but they are necessary to justify my subsequent conduct in respect to him."

"Oh! ask me not to pardon aught that you may do or may have done!" ejaculated Ellen: "for your goodness of heart is an unquestionable guarantee for the propriety of your actions."

"You flatter me, my dear friend," said Eliza; "and yet God knows how pure have been my intentions through life! Let us not, however, waste time by unnecessary comment: listen rather while I state a few facts which need be concealed from you no longer. Aware, then, that he who has so long passed by the name of George Montague Greenwood——"

"Ah!" cried Ellen, with a start: "you know *that* also?"

"Have patience—and you shall soon learn the extent of my information upon this subject," said Eliza. "I was about to inform you that a knowledge of the character of him whom we must still call George Greenwood, gave me the idea of adopting some means to check, if not altogether to counteract, those schemes by which he sought alike to enrich himself dishonourably and to gratify his thirst after illicit pleasure. During the first year of my residence in Castelcicala I sent over a faithful agent to enter, if possible, the service of Mr. Greenwood. He succeeded, and——"

"Filippo Dorsenni!" exclaimed Ellen, a light breaking in upon her mind: "Oh now I comprehend it all!"

"And are you angry with me for having thus placed a spy upon the actions of your husband?" inquired Eliza, in a sweet tone of conciliation.

"Oh! no—no," cried Ellen: "on the contrary, I rejoice! For doubtless you have saved him from the commission of many misdeeds!"

"I have indeed, Ellen," was the reply; "and amongst them may be reckoned your escape from his snares, when he had you carried away to his house in the country."

"Yes—that escape was effected by the aid of Filippo," said Ellen; "and the same generous man also assisted me to save the life of Richard on that terrible night when his enemies sought to murder him near Globe Town."

"Well, then, my dear friend," observed Eliza, "you see that the presence of Filippo in England effected much good. I may also mention to you the fact that when Richard accompanied General Grachia's expeditionary force to Castelcicala, I was forewarned of the intended invasion by means of a letter from Filippo: and that letter enjoined me to save the life of him who has since obtained so distinguished a renown. Filippo had heard you speak in such glowing colours of Richard's generous nature and noble disposition, that he was induced to implore me to adopt measures so that not a hair of his head might be injured. And, oh! when I consider all that has

occurred, I cannot for one moment regret that intervention on my part which saved our friend in order to fulfil such glorious destinies!"

"But how was it, my dearest Eliza," asked Ellen, "that you discovered those secrets which so especially regard *me*?"

"In one word," replied the royal widow, "Filippo overheard that scene which occurred between yourself and Greenwood when you restored him the pocket-book that you had found; and on that occasion you called him by a name which was not *George*!"

"Ah! I remember—yes, I remember!" cried Ellen, recalling to mind the details of that memorable meeting to which Eliza Sydney alluded.

"Thus Filippo learnt a great secret," continued the royal widow; "and in due time it was communicated to me, by whom it has been retained inviolate until now. Nor should I have ever touched upon the topic with you, had not this accident which has occurred to your husband rendered it necessary for me to show you that while I am prepared to assist you in aught that may concern his welfare, I am only aiding the virtuous intentions of a wife towards him whom she has sworn at the altar to love and reverence."

Ellen again threw herself into the arms of the generous-hearted widow, upon whose bosom she poured forth tears of the most profound gratitude.

"And now," said Eliza, "can you tell me in which manner I can serve you—or rather your husband?"

"My first and most anxious wish," returned Ellen, "is that he should be removed, as soon as possible, to some place where tranquillity and ease may await him. Sincerely—sincerely do I hope that his heart may have been touched by recent misfortunes——"

"Yes—and by the contemplation, even from a distance, of that excellent example which the character of Richard affords," added Eliza, emphatically.

"And yet," continued Ellen, mournfully, "I know his proud disposition so well, that he will not permit his secret to be revealed one minute before the appointed time: he will not allow himself to be conveyed to that place where he would be received with so much heart-felt joy!"

"This is your conviction?" said Eliza, interrogatively.

"My firm conviction," answered Ellen.

"Then listen to my proposal," exclaimed the widow, after a brief pause. "Filippo shall be instructed to hire some neatly furnished house in the neighbourhood of Islington; and thither may your husband be removed so soon as the medical attendants at the hospital will permit. It is not necessary for him to know that any living soul save yourself, Ellen, has interfered to procure him those comforts which he shall enjoy, and to furnish which my purse shall supply you with ample means."

"Dearest friend," exclaimed Ellen, "it was your kind counsel that I came to solicit—and you have afforded me the advice most suitable to my own wishes. But, thanks to the generosity of Richard towards my father and myself, I possess sufficient resources to ensure every comfort to my husband. And, oh! if he will but consent to this project, I can see him often—yes, daily—and under my care he will speedily recover!"

"Then delay not in repairing to the hospital to visit and console him," said Eliza, "and Filippo, whom I expect to call presently, shall this very day seek a comfortable abode to receive your husband when his removal may be effected with safety."

Ellen expressed the deepest gratitude to her friend for the kind interest thus manifested in behalf of herself and her husband; and, having taken an affectionate leave of the royal widow, she repaired to Saint Bartholomew's Hospital.

The clock of the establishment was striking eleven when Ellen alighted from the cab at the entrance in Duke Street; and, having inquired her way to the Casualty Ward, she crossed the courtyard towards the department of the building where her husband lay.

Ascending a wide staircase, she reached a landing, where she accosted a nurse who was passing from one room to another at the moment.

Ellen intimated her request to see the gentleman who was brought in with a broken leg on the preceding afternoon.

"Well, ma'am," answered the nurse, "you couldn't possibly have applied to a better person; for I'm at the head of that ward, and I shall be most happy to obleege you. But surely a charming young lady like you will be afeard to go into a place where there's a many male inwalids all in bed?"

"The gentleman to whom the accident has happened, is very dear to me," said Ellen, in a low tone, and with tears trickling down her cheeks.

"Ah! poor dear thing—his sister, may be?" observed Mrs. Jubkins.

"Yes—I am his sister," replied Ellen, eagerly catching at the hint with which the curiosity of the woman furnished her.

"Then I'm sure, my pretty dear," said the nurse, "there's no harm in seeing your brother. But stay—just step into this room for a moment—there's only one old woman in it,—while I go into the male Casualty and see that every thing's proper and decent to receive such a sweet creatur' as you are."

Thus speaking, Mrs. Jubkins threw open the door of a small room, into which she showed Ellen, who availed herself of that opportunity to slip a guinea into her hand.

Mrs. Jubkins expressed her thanks by a nod, and hurried away with the assurance that she should not be many minutes absent.

When the door had closed behind the nurse, Ellen surveyed, with a rapid glance, the room in which she now found herself.

It was small, but exquisitely clean and well ventilated. There were four beds in the place, only one of which was occupied.

Obeying a mechanical impulse, rather than any sentiment of curiosity, Ellen glanced towards that couch which was tenanted by an invalid; but she started with mingled surprise and horror as her own bright eyes encountered the glassy ones that stared at her from the pillow.

For a moment she averted her head as if from some loathsome spectacle; but again she looked towards the bed, to satisfy herself whether the suspicion which had struck her were correct or not.

Yes—that idea was indeed well-founded; for there—in a dying state, with her hideous countenance rendered ghastly by disease—lay the old hag of Golden Lane!

A faint attempt at a smile relaxed the rigid expression of the harridan's death-like face, as she recognised Ellen; and her toothless jaws moved for a moment as if she were endeavouring to speak:—but she evidently had not strength to utter a word.

All on a sudden the boundless aversion which the young lady entertained towards the wretch, became changed into a sentiment of

deep commiseration; and Ellen exclaimed involuntarily, "Oh! it is terrible to die thus—in a hospital—and without a friend!"

The bed shook as if with a convulsive shudder on the part of the hag, whose countenance, upturned towards Ellen, wore an expression which—intelligible amidst all the ghastly ugliness of that face—seemed to say, "Is it possible that *you* can feel pity for *me*?"

Ellen understood what was passing in the old woman's mind at the moment; and, advancing nearer to the couch, she said in a tone tremulous with emotions, "If you seek forgiveness at my hands for any injury which your pernicious counsels and your fatal aid ever did me, I accord it—Oh! God knows how willingly I accord it! For, though after my fall I long remained callous to a sense of virtue, and acknowledged only the fear of shame as the motive for avoiding farther frailty, yet since I became a wife—for I *am* a wife," she added proudly,—"holier and better thoughts have taken up their abode in my soul; and good examples have restored my mind to its former purity! Thus, then, I can forgive thee with sincerity—for the injuries and wrongs I have endured through thy counsels, are past and gone!"

At that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Jubkins returned to the room.

Ellen cast another glance of forgiveness upon the hag and hurried into the passage.

"What ails that old woman?" she asked, in a low tone, when the door had closed behind herself and the nurse.

"It seems, by all I can hear, Miss," replied the hospital nurse, "that the old woman had saved up a little money; and as she lived in a low neighbourhood, I 'spose it got wind amongst the thieves and housebreakers. At all events a burglar broke into her place one night, about a week ago; and because she resisted, he beat her in such a cruel way that all her ribs was broke and one of her thighs fractured—so I 'spose he must have thrown her down and jumped on her. The rascal got clean off with all the money she had; and a policeman going his rounds, saw that the house where she lived had been broken open. He went in, and found the old creatur' nearly dead. She was brought here; and when she had recovered a little, she mumbled a few words, telling just what I've now told you. Oh! yes," added the nurse, recollecting herself, "and she also said who the thief was; for when questioned about that point, she was just able to whisper a dreadful name—so dreadful that it haunts me in my dreams."

"What was that name which sounded so terrible?" asked Ellen, with some degree of curiosity.

"*The Resurrection Man*," replied the nurse, shuddering visibly. "And no sooner had the old woman said those shocking words, than she lost her voice altogether, and has never had the use of it since. We put her into that room to keep her quiet; but she can't live out the week—and her sufferings at times are quite horrible."

As she uttered these words Mrs. Jubkins opened a door at the end of the passage, and conducted Ellen into the room where her husband was lying.

For a moment the young lady recoiled from the appearance of that large apartment, filled with beds in which there lay pillowed so many ghastly faces; but this emotion was as evanescent as the most rapid flash of lightning.

And now, firm in her purpose to console and solace him whom she had taught herself to love, she followed the nurse towards the bed where the patient lay,—looking neither to the right nor to the left as she proceeded thither.

Greenwood's countenance was very pale; but the instant the lovely features of his wife burst upon his view, his eyes were lighted up with an expression of joy such as she had never seen them wear before, and the glow of which appeared to penetrate with a sensation of ineffable bliss into the very profundities of her soul.

"Ellen, this is very kind of you," said Greenwood, tears starting on his long silken lashes, as he pressed her hand warmly in his own.

"Do not use the word *kind*, my dearest husband," whispered Ellen: "in coming hither I not only perform a duty—but should also fulfil it cheerfully, were it not for the sad occurrence which caused the visit."

"Be not alarmed, Ellen," murmured Greenwood: "there is no danger—a temporary inconvenience only! And yet," he added, after a brief pause, "to me it is particularly galling just at the very time when I was struggling so hard—so very hard—to build up my fallen fortunes, and prepare——"

"Oh! do not grieve on that head!" whispered Ellen: "abandon, I implore you, those ambitious dreams—those lofty aspirations which have only led you astray! Do you suppose that, were you to acquire an amount of wealth far greater than that which blesses *him*, he would welcome you with one single smile the more joyous—with one single emotion the more blissful? Oh! no—far from it! And believe me when I assert my conviction that it would be his pride to place you with his own hand, and by means of his own resources, in a position to enable you to retrieve the past——"

"Ellen, speak not thus!" said Greenwood, impatiently.

"Well, my dearest husband, I will not urge the topic," answered the beautiful young woman, smiling with a plaintive and melancholy sweetness as she leant over his couch. "But you will permit me to implore that when you are enabled to leave this place, you will suffer yourself to be conveyed to a dwelling which I—your own wife—will provide for you, and where I shall be enabled to visit you every day—as often, indeed, as will give you pleasure? And then—oh! then we shall be happy together—and you can prepare your mind to encounter that day which, I fear, you now look upon to be one of trial, but which I must tutor you to anticipate as one of joy and pleasure as yet unknown."

Greenwood made no answer; but he meditated profoundly upon those loving words and touching assurances that his beauteous wife breathed in his ear.

"Yes," continued Ellen, "you will not refuse my prayer! This very day will I seek a comfortable abode—in the northern part of Islington, if possible—so that I may soon be with you every day. For I am possessed of ample resources to accomplish all that I propose; and you know, dearest husband, that every thing which I can call my own is lawfully yours. You smile—oh! now I thank you, because you listen to me with attention; and I thank God also, because he has at length directed your heart towards me, who am your wife, and who will ever, ever love you—dearly love you!"

"Ellen," murmured Greenwood, pressing her hand to his lips, "I should be a monster were I to refuse you any thing which you now demand of me; and, oh! believe me—I am not so bad as *that*!"

Sweet Ellen, thou hast conquered the obduracy of that heart which was so long the abode of selfishness and pride;—thou hast subdued the stubborn soul of that haughty and ambitious man:—thine amiability has triumphed over his worldliness;—and thou hast thy crowning reward in the tears which now moisten his pillow, and in the affectionate glances which are upturned towards thee!

And Ellen departed from the hospital where her angelic influence had wrought so marvellous a change,—departed with a bosom cherishing fond hopes and delicious reveries of happiness to come.

In the course of that very day Filippo engaged a house in the northern part of Islington; and Ellen superintended, with a joyful heart, the preparations that were made during the ensuing week to render the dwelling as comfortable as possible.

At length she had the pleasure,—nay, more than pleasure—the ineffable satisfaction of welcoming her husband to that abode which, if not so splendid nor so spacious as the mansion he had once occupied in Spring Gardens, was at least a most grateful change after the cold and cheerless aspect of a hospital.

CHAPTER CCLVII.

THE REVENGE.

It was about eleven o'clock in the night of the first Saturday of June, that the Resurrection Man—the terrible Anthony Tidkins—issued from the dwelling of Mr. Banks, the undertaker in Globe Lane, Globe Town.

Mr. Banks followed him to the threshold, and, ere he bade him good night, said, as he retained him by the sleeve, "And so you are determined to go back to the old crib?"

"Yes—to be sure I am," returned Tidkins. "I've been looking after that scoundrel Crankey Jem for the last two years, without even being able so much as to hear of him. The Bully Grand has set all his Forty Thieves to work for me; and still not a trace—not a sign of the infernal villain!"

"Well," observed Banks, "it does look as if the cussed wessel had made his-self scarce to some foreign part, where it's to be hoped he's dead, buried, and resurrectionised by this time."

"Or else he's living like a fighting-cock on all the tin he robbed me of," exclaimed Tidkins, with a savage growl. "But I'm sure he's not in London; and so I don't see any reason to prevent me from going back to my old crib. I shall feel happy again there. It's now two years and better since I left it—and I'm sick of doing nothing but hunt after a chap that's perhaps thousands of miles off."

"And all that time, you see," said Banks, "you've been doing no good for yourself or your friends; and if it wasn't for them blessed coffins on economic principles, which turn me in a decent penny, I'm sure I don't know what would have become of me and my family."

"You forget the swag we got from the old woman in Golden Lane," whispered Tidkins, impatiently. "Didn't I give you a fair half, although you never entered the place, but only kept watch outside?"

"Yes—yes," said Mr. Banks; "I know you treated me very well, Tony—as you've always done. But I'm sorry you used the wicked old creetur as you did."

"Why did she resist, then, damn her!" growled the Resurrection Man.

"Ah! well-a-day," moaned the hypocritical undertaker: "she's a blessed defunct now—a wenerable old carkiss—and all packed up nice and cozy in a hospital coffin too! But they can't get up them coffins as well as me: I can beat 'em all at that work—'cause its the economic principles as does it."

"Hold your stupid tongue, you infernal old fool!" muttered Tidkins; "and get yourself to bed at once, so that you may be up early in the morning and come to me by eight o'clock."

"You don't mean to do what you was telling me just now?" said Banks, earnestly. "Depend upon it, he'll prove too much for you."

"Not he!" exclaimed Tidkins. "I've a long—long score to settle up with him; and if he has neither seen nor heard of me for the last two years, it was only because I wanted to punish Crankey Jem first."

"And now that you can't find that cussed indiwidual," said Banks, "you mean to have a go in earnest against the Prince?"

"I do," answered Tidkins, with an abruptness which was in itself expressive of demoniac ferocity. 'You come to me to-morrow morning; and see if I won't invent some scheme that shall put Richard Markham in my power. I tell you what it is, Banks," added the Resurrection Man, in a hoarse—hollow whisper, "I hate that fellow to a degree I cannot explain; and depend upon it, he shall gnash his teeth in one of the dark cells yonder before he's a week older."

"And what good will that do you?" asked the undertaker.

"What good!" repeated Tidkins, scornfully: then, after a short pause, he turned towards Banks, and said in a low voice, "We'll make him pay an immense sum for his ransom—a sum that shall enrich us both, Ned: and then——"

"And then?" murmured Banks, interrogatively.

"And then—when I've got all I can from him," replied Tidkins, "*I'll murder him!*"

With these words—uttered in a tone of terrible ferocity—the Resurrection Man hastened away from the door of the undertaker's dwelling.

The sky was overcast with dark clouds of stormy menace: the night was dark; and big drops of rain began to patter down, as Tidkins hurried along the streets leading towards his own abode—that abode which he was now on the point of revisiting after an absence of two years!

At length he reached the house; and though he stopped for a few minutes to examine its outward appearance from the middle of the street, the night was so dark that he could not distinguish whether its aspect had undergone any change.

Taking from his pocket the door-key, which he had carefully retained ever since he abandoned the place after the discovery of the loss of his treasure, he soon effected an entrance into the house.

Having closed the door, he immediately lighted a lantern which he had brought with him; and then, holding it high above his head, he hastily scrutinized the walls, the stairs, and as much of the landing above the precipitate steps, as his range of vision could embrace.

There was not the least indication of the presence of intruders: the dust had accumulated upon the stairs, undisturbed by the print of

footsteps; and the damp had covered the walls with a white mildew.

Tidkins was satisfied with this scrutiny, and ascended to the first-floor rooms, the doors of which were closed—as if they had never been opened during his absence of two years.

The interior appearance of the two chambers was just the same as when he was last there—save in respect to the ravages of the damp, the accumulation of the dust, and the effects of the rain which had forced its way through the roof.

"Well, nothing has been disturbed up here—that's certain enough," said Tidkins to himself. "Now for a survey of the vaults."

Taking from a shelf the bunch of skeleton-keys, which had suffered grievously from the damp, the Resurrection Man descended the stairs, issued forth into the street, and turned up the alley running along the side of the house.

His first attempt to open the door in that alley was unsuccessful, there being evidently some impediment in the lock: but a moment's reflection reminded him that he himself had broken a key in the lock, ere he had quitted the premises at the end of May, 1841.

Nearly ten minutes were occupied in picking the lock, which was sadly rusted; but at length this task was accomplished—and the Resurrection Man entered the ground-floor of his abode.

The condition in which he had found the lock of the door in the alley would have been a sufficient proof, in the estimation of any less crafty individual, that no intrusive footstep had disturbed that department of the dwelling: but Tidkins was resolved to assure himself on all points relative to the propriety of again entrusting his safety to that abode.

"I think it's all right," he muttered, holding up his lantern, and glancing around with keen looks. "Still the lock might have been picked since I was here last, and another key purposely broken in it to stave off suspicion. At any rate, it is better to examine every nook and corner of the whole place—and so I will!"

He entered the front room on the ground-floor: the resurrection tools and house-breaking implements, which were piled up in that chamber, had not been disturbed. Huge black cob-webs, dense as filthy rags, were suspended from mattock to spade, and from crow-bar to long flexible iron rod.

Tidkins turned with an air of satisfaction into the back room, where the dust lay thick upon the floor, and the walls were green with damp.

"Yes—it *is* all right!" he exclaimed, joyfully: "no one has been here during my absence. I suppose that villain Jem Cuffin was content with all the gold and jewels he got, and took no farther steps to molest me. But, by Satan! if ever I clap my eyes on him again!"—and the Resurrection Man ground his teeth furiously together. "Well," he continued, speaking aloud to himself in a musing strain, "it's a blessing to be able to come back and settle in the old crib! There's no place in London like it: the house in Chick Lane is nothing to it. And now that I *have* returned," he added, his hideous countenance becoming ominously dark and appallingly threatening, as the glare of the lantern fell upon it,—"one of these deep, cold, cheerless dungeons shall soon become the abode of Richard Markham!"

As he uttered these last words in a loud, measured, and savage voice, the Resurrection Man raised the stone-trap, and descended into the subterranean.

The detestable monster gloated in anticipation upon the horrible revenge which he meditated; and as he now trod the damp pavement of the vaulted passage, he glanced first at the four doors on the right, then at the four doors on the left, as if he were undecided in which dungeon to immure his intended victim.

At length he stopped before one of the doors, exclaiming, "Ah! this must be the cell! It's the one, as I have been told, where so many maniacs dashed their brains out against the wall, when this place was used as an asylum—long before my time."

Thus musing, Tidkins entered the cell, holding the lantern high up so as to embrace at a glance all the gloomy horrors of its aspect.

"Yes—yes!" he muttered to himself: "this is the one for Richard Markham! All that he has ever done to me shall soon be fearfully visited on his own head! Ah, ah! we shall see whether his high rank—his boasted virtues—his immense influence—and his glorious name can mitigate one pang of all the sufferings that he must here endure! Yes," repeated Tidkins, a fiendish smile relaxing his stern countenance,—"*this* is the dungeon for Richard Markham!"

"No—it is *thine*!" thundered a voice; and at the same moment the door of the cell closed violently upon the Resurrection Man.

Tidkins dropped the lantern, and flung himself with all his strength against the massive door;—but the huge bolt on the outside was shot into its iron socket too rapidly to permit that desperate effort to prove of the least avail.

Then a cry of mingled rage and despair burst from the breast of the Resurrection Man,—a cry resembling that of the wolf when struck by the bullet of the hunter's carbine!

"The hour of vengeance is come at last!" exclaimed Crankey Jem, as he lighted the candle in a small lantern which he took from his pocket. "There shall you remain, Tidkins—to perish by starvation—to die by inches—to feel the approach of Death by means of such slow tortures that you will curse the day which saw your birth!"

"Jem, do not say all that!" cried the Resurrection Man, from the interior of the dungeon. "You would not be so cruel? Let me out—and we will be friends."

"Never!" ejaculated Cuffin. "What! have I hunted after you—dogged you—watched you—then lost sight of you for two years—now found you out again—at length got you into my power—and all this for nothing?"

"Well, Jem—I know that I used you badly," said the Resurrection Man, in an imploring tone: "but forgive me—pray forgive me! Surely you were sufficiently avenged by plundering me of my treasure—my hoarded gold—my casket of jewels?"

"Miserable wretch!" cried Crankey Jem, in a tone of deep disgust: "do not imagine that I took your gold and your jewels to enrich myself. No: had I been starving, I would not have purchased a morsel of bread by means of their aid! Two hours after I had become possessed of your treasure, I consigned it all—yes, all—gold and jewels—to the bed of the Thames!"

"Then are you not sufficiently avenged?" demanded Tidkins, in a voice denoting how fiercely rage was struggling with despair in his breast.

"Your death, amidst lingering tortures, will alone satisfy me!" returned Crankey Jem. "Monster that you are, you shall meet the fate

which you had reserved for an excellent nobleman whose virtues are as numerous as your crimes!"

"What good will my death do you, Jem?" cried Tidkins, his tone now characterised only by an expression of deep—intense—harrowing despair.

"What good would the death of Richard Markham have done *you*?" demanded James Cuffin. "Ah! you cannot answer that question! Of what advantage is your cunning now? But listen to me, while I tell you how I have succeeded in over-reaching you at last. One night—more than two years ago—I was watching for you in the street. I had found out your den—and I was waiting your return, to plunge my dagger into your breast. But when you did come home that night, you was not alone. Another man was with you; and a woman, blindfolded, was being dragged between you up the alley. I watched—you and the man soon afterwards re-appeared; but the woman was not with you. Then I knew that she was a prisoner, or had been murdered; and I thought that if I could place you in the hands of justice, with the certainty of sending you to the scaffold, my revenge would be more complete. But my plan was spoilt by the silly affair of young Holford; for I was locked up in prison on account of that business. But I got my liberty at last; and that very same night I returned to this house. I knew that you had been arrested and was in Coldbath Fields; and so I resolved to examine the entire premises. By means of skeleton keys I obtained an easy entrance into the lower part of the house; and, after a little careful search, I discovered the secret of the trap-door. I visited the cells; but the woman was not in any of them. And now you know how I came to discover the mysteries of your den, Tidkins; and you can guess how at another visit I found the hiding-place of your treasure."

"Jem, one word!" cried the Resurrection Man, in a hoarse—almost hollow tone. "You have got me in your power—do you mean to put your dreadful threat into execution?"

"No persuasion on earth can change my mind!" returned the avenger, in a terrible voice. "Hark! this is a proof of my determination!"

A dead silence prevailed in the subterranean for two or three minutes; and then that solemn stillness was broken by the sounds of a hammer, falling with heavy and measured cadence upon the head of a large nail.

"Devil!" roared the Resurrection Man, from the interior of the cell.

Crankey Jem was nailing up the door!

It must be supposed that this appalling conviction worked the mind of the immured victim up to a pitch of madness; for he now threw himself against the door with a fury that made it crack upon its hinges—massive and studded with iron nails though it were!

But Crankey Jem pursued his awful task; and as nail after nail was driven in, the more demoniac became the feelings of his triumph.

Tidkins continued to rush against the door, marking the intervals of these powerful but desperate attempts to burst from his living tomb, with wild cries and savage howls such as Cuffin had never before heard come from the breast of a human being.

At length the last nail was driven in; and then the struggles against the door ceased.

"Now you can understand that I am determined!" cried the avenger. "And here shall I remain until all is over with you, Tidkins. No! I shall now and then steal out for short intervals at a time, to procure food—food to sustain *me*, while *you* are starving in your coffin!"

"Infernal wretch!" shouted Tidkins: "you are mistaken! I will not die by starvation, if die I must. I have matches with me—and in a moment I can blow the entire house—aye, and half the street along with it—into the air!"

"You will not frighten me, Tidkins," said Crankey Jem, in a cool and taunting tone.

"Damnation!" thundered the Resurrection Man, chafing against the door like a maddened hyena in its cage: "will neither prayers nor threats move you? Then must I do my worst!"

Crankey Jem heard him stride across the dungeon; but still the avenger remained at his post,—leaning against the door, and greedily drinking in each groan—each curse—each execration—and each howl, that marked the intense anguish endured by the Resurrection Man.

Presently James Cuffin heard the sharp sound of a match as it was drawn rapidly along the wall.

He shuddered—but moved not.

Solemn was the silence which now prevailed for a few moments: at length an explosion—low and subdued, as of a small quantity of gunpowder—took place in the cell.

But it was immediately followed with a terrific cry of agony; and the Resurrection Man fell heavily against the door.

"My eyes! my eyes!" he exclaimed, in a tone indicative of acute pain: "O God! I am blinded!"

"Sight would be of no use in that dark dungeon," said Crankey Jem, with inhuman obduracy of heart towards his victim.

"Are you not satisfied now, demon—devil—fiend!" almost shrieked the Resurrection Man. "The powder has blinded me, I say!"

"It was damp, and only exploded partially," said the avenger. "Try again!"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Tidkins; and James Cuffin heard him dash himself upon the paved floor of the cell, groaning horribly.

Ten days afterwards, Crankey Jem set to work to open the door of the dungeon.

This was no easy task; inasmuch as the nails which he had driven in were strong, and had caught a firm hold of the wood.

But at length—after two hours' toil—the avenger succeeded in forcing an entrance into the cell.

He knew that he incurred no danger by this step: for, during that interval of ten days, he had scarcely ever quitted his post outside the door of the dungeon;—and there had he remained, regaling his ears with the delicious music formed by the groans—the prayers—the screams—the shrieks—the ravings—and the curses of his victim.

At length those appalling indications of a lingering—slow—agonising death,—the death of famine,—grew fainter and fainter; and in the middle of the ninth night they ceased altogether.

Therefore was it that on the morning of the tenth day, the avenger hesitated not to open the door of the dungeon.

And what a spectacle met his view when he entered that cell!

The yellow glare of his lantern fell upon the pale, emaciated, hideous countenance of the Resurrection Man, who lay on his back upon the cold, damp pavement—a stark and rigid corse!

Crankey Jem stooped over the body, and examined the face with a satisfaction which he did not attempt to subdue.

The eyes had been literally burnt in their sockets; and it was true that the Resurrection Man was blinded, in the first hour of his

terrible imprisonment, by the explosion of the gunpowder in an iron pipe running along the wall of the dungeon!

The damp had, however, rendered that explosion only partial: had the train properly ignited, the entire dwelling would have been blown into the air.

A few hours afterwards, the following letter was delivered at Markham Place by the postman:—

"Your mortal enemy, my lord, is no more. My vengeance has overtaken him at last. Anthony Tidkins has died a horrible death:—had he lived, you would have become his victim.

"JAMES CUFFIN."

CHAPTER CCLVIII.

THE APPOINTMENT KEPT.

It was the 10th of July, 1843.

The bell upon the roof of Markham Place had just proclaimed the hour of nine, and the morning was as bright and beautiful as the cheerful sun, the cloudless sky, and the gentle breeze could render a summer-day,—when a party of eight persons ascended the hill on which stood the two trees.

Those emblems of the fraternal affection of early years were green, verdant, and flourishing; and on the one which had been planted by the hands of the long-lost brother, were the following inscriptions:—

EUGENE.
Dec. 25, 1836.

EUGENE.
May 17th, 1838.

EUGENE.
March 6, 1841.

EUGENE.
July 1st, 1843.

This last inscription, as the reader will perceive, had only been very recently added; and Richard regarded it as a promise—a pledge—a solemn sign that the appointment would be kept.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when the parting between the brothers took place in the year 1831; and, although it was impossible to determine at what hour of the day on which the twelve years expired, Eugene would return, nevertheless Richard, judging by his own anxiety to clasp a brother in his arms, felt certain that this brother would not delay the moment that was to re-unite them.

Accordingly, at nine o'clock on the morning of the 10th of July, 1843, the Prince, repaired to the eminence on which he hoped—oh! how fondly hoped—full soon to welcome the long-lost Eugene.

His seven companions were the Princess Isabella, Ellen, Mr. Monroe, Katherine, Mario Bazzano, Eliza Sydney, and the faithful Whittingham.

Richard could not conceal a certain nervous suspense under which he laboured; for although he felt assured of Eugene's appearance, yet so long a period had elapsed since they had parted, and so many vicissitudes might have occurred during the interval, that he trembled lest the meeting should be characterised by circumstances which would give his brother pain.

The Princess Isabella, naturally anxious to become acquainted with her brother-in-law, also looked forward to the return of the long-lost one with emotions which enabled her to comprehend those that animated her husband; and pressing his hand tenderly as they seated themselves on the bench between the trees, she whispered, "Be of good cheer, Richard: your brother will keep the appointment—and oh! what joy for us all!"

On her side, Katherine was the prey to various conflicting feelings,—anxiety to know a brother whom she had as yet never seen—fear lest he should not come—and curiosity to be convinced whether he were as amiable, as generous-hearted, and as deserving of her sisterly love as Richard.

And Ellen—poor Ellen!—how difficult for her was the task of concealing all the emotions which agitated her bosom now! But she nevertheless derived much encouragement and hope from the frequent looks of profound meaning which were directed towards her by Eliza Sydney.

Bazzano endeavoured to soothe the anxiety of his beloved Katherine; while Mr. Monroe and Whittingham shared to a considerable degree the suspense which now animated them all.

It was about a quarter past nine o'clock, when Mr. Greenwood halted by the road-side, at a spot which commanded a view of the hill-top whereon stood the two trees.

He was on foot; and though he had so far recovered from his recent accident as to exhibit only a very trifling lameness in his gait, still the short walk which he had taken from Islington to the immediate vicinity of Markham Place, compelled him to pause and rest by the way-side.

He looked towards the hill, and could plainly distinguish the number of persons who were stationed on that eminence.

A deadly pallor overspread his countenance; and tears started from his eyes.

But in a few moments he exercised a violent effort over his emotions, and exclaimed aloud, with a kind of desperate emphasis, "I have promised *her* to go through the ordeal—and I must nerve myself to do so! Ah! Ellen," he added, his voice suddenly changing to a plaintive tone, "you have forced me to love you—you have taught me to bless the affectionate care and solicitude of woman!"

This apostrophe to his wife seemed to arouse all the better feelings of his soul; and without farther hesitation, he pursued his way towards the hill.

In a few minutes he reached a point where the road took a sudden turn to the right, thus running round all one side of the base of the eminence, and passing by the mansion itself.

There he paused again;—for although the party assembled on the hill were plainly perceived by him, he was yet unseen by them—a hedge concealing him from their view.

"Oh! is the dread ordeal so near at hand?" he exclaimed, with a temporary revival of bitterness of spirit. "Scarcely separated from *him* by a distance of two hundred yards—a distance so soon cleared—and yet—and yet——"

At that instant he caught sight of the figure of his wife, who, having advanced a few paces in front of her companions, stood more conspicuously than they upon the brow of the hill.

"She anxiously awaits my coming!" he murmured to himself. "Oh! why do I hesitate?"

And, as he spoke, he was about to emerge from the shade of the high hedge which concealed him,—about to turn the angle of the road, whereby he would immediately be perceived by those who stood on the hill,—when his attention was suddenly called elsewhere.

For, no sooner had the words—"Oh! why do I hesitate?" issued from his lips, than a post-chaise, which was dashing along the road towards London at a rapid rate, upset only a few paces from the spot where he had paused to glance towards the hill.

One of the fore-wheels of the vehicle had come off; and the chaise rolled over with a heavy crash.

The postillion instantly stopped his horses; while a man—the only traveller whom the vehicle contained—emerged from the door that was uppermost, and which he had contrived to open.

All this occurred so rapidly that the traveller stood in the road a few instants after the upsetting of the chaise.

Greenwood drew near to inquire if he were hurt: but, scarcely had his eyes caught a glimpse of that man's features, when he uttered a cry of mingled rage and delight, and sprang towards him.

For that traveller was Lafleur!

"Villain!" cried Greenwood, seizing hold of the Frenchman by the collar: "to you I owe all my misfortunes! Restore me the wealth of which you vilely plundered me!"

"Unhand me," exclaimed the ex-valet; "or, by heaven——"

"Wretch!" interrupted Greenwood: "it is for me to threaten!"

Lafleur gnashed his teeth with rage, and endeavoured to shake off his assailant with a sudden and desperate effort to hurl him to the ground.

But Greenwood, weakened though he was by illness, maintained his hold upon the Frenchman, and called for assistance.

The postillion knew not whose part to take, and therefore remained neutral.

Lafleur's situation was most critical; but he was not the man to yield without a desperate attempt to free himself.

Suddenly taking a pistol from his pocket, he aimed a furious blow, with the butt-end of the weapon, at the head of Greenwood, whose hat had fallen off in the struggle.

The blow descended with tremendous force: and in the next moment Greenwood lay senseless on the road, while Lafleur darted away from the spot with the speed of lightning.

For an instant the postillion hesitated whether to pursue the fugitive or attend to the wounded man; but he almost immediately decided in favour of the more humane course.

Upon examination he found that Greenwood's forehead had received a terrible wound, from which the blood was streaming down his temples.

He was moreover quite senseless; and the postillion, after binding the wound with a handkerchief, vainly endeavoured to recover him.

"Well, it won't do to let the poor gentleman die in this way," said the man to himself; and, after an instant's reflection, he remembered that Markham Place was close at hand.

Depositing Greenwood as comfortably as he could on the cushions which he took from the chaise, he hastened to the mansion, and related to the servants all that had occurred.

Without a moment's hesitation,—well knowing that their conduct would be approved of by their excellent master,—three stout footmen hastened, with the means of forming a litter, to the spot where the postillion had left Greenwood.

On their arrival they found that he had to some extent recovered his senses; and a cordial, which one of the footmen poured down his throat, completely revived him.

But, alas! he was aroused only to the fearful conviction that he had received his death-blow; for that mysterious influence which sometimes warns the soul of its approaching flight, was upon him!

"My good friends," he said, in a faint and languid tone, "I have one request to make—the request of a dying man!"

"Name it, sir," returned the senior footman; "and command us as you will."

"I conjure you, then," exclaimed Greenwood, speaking with more strength and animation than at first,—"I conjure you to remove me on that litter which your kindness has prepared, to the spot where your master, his family, and friends are now assembled. You hesitate! Oh! grant me this request, I implore you—and the Prince will not blame you!"

The servants were well aware of the motive which had induced their master and his companions to repair to the hill-top thus early on this particular day; and the urgent request of Greenwood now excited a sudden suspicion in their minds.

But they did not express their thoughts: there was no time to waste in question or comment—for the wounded gentleman, who had proffered so earnest a prayer, was evidently in a dying state.

Exchanging significant glances, the servants placed Greenwood upon the litter; and, aided by the postillion, set out with their burden

towards the hill.

The angle of the road was passed; and the party bearing the wounded man, suddenly appeared to the view of those who were stationed on the hill.

"Merciful heaven!" exclaimed Richard, with a shudder: "what can this mean?"

"Be not alarmed," said Ellen: "it can have no reference to Eugene. Doubtless some poor creature has met with an accident——"

"But my own servants are the bearers of that litter which is approaching!" cried the Prince, now becoming painfully excited. "A man is stretched upon it—his head is bandaged—he lies motionless—Oh! what terrible fears oppress me!"

And as he uttered these words, Richard sank back almost fainting upon the seat.

The gallant warrior, whose heart had never failed in the thickest of the battle—whose courage was so dauntless when bullets were flying round him like hail—and whose valour had given him a name amongst the mightiest generals of the universe,—this man of a chivalrous soul was subdued by the agonising alarm that had suddenly menaced all his fond fraternal hopes with annihilation!

For so ominous—so sinister appeared to be the approach of a litter at the very moment when he was anxiously awaiting the presence of a long-lost brother, that his feelings experienced a revulsion as painful as it was sudden.

And now for a few moments the strange spectacle of the litter was forgotten by those who crowded round our hero in alarm at the change which had come over him.

Even Ellen turned away from the contemplation of that mournful procession which was toiling up the hill;—for she had seen Greenwood on the preceding evening—she had left him in good health—she had raised his spirits by her kind attentions and her loving language—and she did not for one moment apprehend that *he* could be the almost lifeless occupant of that litter!

"Pardon me, sweet Isabella—pardon me, dear Kate—and you also, my devoted friends," said Richard, at the expiration of a few minutes: "I am grieved to think that this weakness on my part should have distressed you—and yet I cannot be altogether ashamed of it!"

"Ashamed!" repeated Isabella, tenderly: "Oh! no, Richard—that word can never be associated with act or feeling on your part! For twelve years you have been separated from your brother—that last inscription on his own tree promises his return—and your generous heart is the prey of a suspense easily aggravated by the slightest circumstance of apparent ill omen."

"You describe my feelings exactly, dearest Isabel," said Markham, pressing with the tenderest warmth the hand of his lovely young wife.

"Because I know your heart so well," answered the Princess, with a sweet smile.

"Let us not believe in omens of an evil nature," said Katherine. "Some poor creature has met with an accident——"

"But wherefore should the servants bring him hither?" asked Richard.

This question produced a startling effect upon all who heard it: and no wonder that it did so—for the consideration which it involved had escaped all attention during the excitement of the last few minutes.

"Oh! heavens—now I am myself alarmed!" whispered Ellen to Eliza Sydney. "And yet it is foolish——"

At that moment the litter had approached so near the brow of the hill, that as Ellen glanced towards it while she spoke, her eyes obtained a full view of the countenance of him who lay stretched upon that mournful couch.

A piercing shriek burst from her lips; and she fell back, as if suddenly shot through the heart, into the arms of Eliza Sydney.

Richard sprang forward: a few steps brought him close by the litter, which the bearers now placed upon the ground *beneath the foliage of the very tree whereon the inscriptions were engraved*!

One look—one look was sufficient!

"Eugene—my brother Eugene!" exclaimed our hero, in a tone of the most intense anguish, as he cast himself on his knees by the side of the litter, and threw his arms around the dying man. "Oh! my God—is it thus that we meet? You are wounded, my dearest brother: but we will save you—we will save you! Hasten for a surgeon—delay not a moment—it is the life of my brother which is at stake!"

"Your brother, Richard!" cried Isabella, scarcely knowing what she said in that moment of intense excitement and profound astonishment: "your brother, my beloved husband? Oh! no—there is some dreadful mistake—for he whom you thus embraced is Mr. George Montague Greenwood!"

"Montague—Greenwood!" ejaculated Richard, starting as if an ice-bolt had suddenly entered his heart. "No—no—impossible, Isabella! Tell me—Eugene—tell me—you cannot be he of whom I have heard so much?"

"Yes, Richard—I am that villain!" answered Eugene, turning his dying countenance in an imploring manner towards his brother. "But do not desert me—do not spurn me—do not even upbraid me *now*!"

"Never—never!" cried the Prince, again embracing Eugene with passionate—almost frantic warmth. "Upbraid you, my dearest brother! Oh! no—no! Forget the past, Eugene—let it be buried in oblivion. And look up, my dear—dear brother: they are all kind faces which surround you! Here is Katherine—our sister, Eugene—yes, our sister——"

"I am acquainted with all that concerns her, Richard," said Eugene. "Come to my arms, Katherine—embrace me, my sweet sister;—and say—can *you* also forgive a brother who has done so much ill in the world, and whose name is covered with infamy?"

"Speak not thus, my dearest Eugene!" cried Kate, also falling on her knees by the side of her brother, and embracing him tenderly.

"And you, too, Isabella—for *you* also are my sister now," continued Eugene, extending his hand towards her: "do you pardon him who once inflicted so much injury upon your father?"

"You are my husband's brother—and you are therefore mine, Eugene," answered the Princess, tears trickling down her countenance. "None but affectionate relatives and kind friends now surround you; and your restoration to health shall be our earnest care!"

"Alas! there is no hope of recovery!" murmured Eugene.

"Yes—there *is* hope, my dearest husband!" exclaimed Ellen, who, having regained her consciousness through the kind attentions of Eliza Sydney, now flew to the litter.

"Your husband, Ellen!" cried Mr. Monroe and Richard as it were in the same breath.

"Yes—Eugene is my husband—my own, much-loved husband!" ejaculated Ellen: "and now you can divine the cause which led to

the maintenance of that secret until this day!"

"And you, Mr. Monroe," said Eugene, a transient fire animating his eyes, as he clasped Ellen in his arms, "may be proud of your daughter—you also, Richard, may glory in her as a sister—for she has taught me to repent of my past errors—she has led me to admire and worship the noble character of Woman! But our child, Ellen—where is my boy—my darling Richard?"

"We will remove you into the house, Eugene," said his wife, bending over the litter with the tenderest solicitude; "and there you shall embrace your boy!"

"No—no—leave me here!" exclaimed her husband: "it is so sweet to lie beneath the foliage of this tree which bears my own name, and reminds me of my youthful days,—surrounded, too, by so many dear relatives and kind friends!"

"Amongst the latter of whom you must now reckon me," said Eliza Sydney, approaching the couch, and extending her hand to Eugene, who wrung it cordially. "Hush!" added Eliza, perceiving that he was about to address her: "no reference to the past! All that is unpleasant is forgotten:—a happy future is before us!"

"Admirable woman!" cried Eugene, overpowered by so many manifestations of forgiveness, affection, and sympathy as he had received within the last few minutes.

Mario Bazzano was then presented to his brother-in-law.

"May God bless your union with my sister!" said Eugene, in a solemn tone. "For a long time I have known that I possessed a sister—and much have I desired to see her. Richard, be not angry with me when I inform you that I was in a room adjacent to that apartment wherein the explanations relative to Katherine's birth took place between yourself and the Marquis of Holmesford;—be not angry with me, I say, that I did not discover myself, and rush into your arms,—but I was then the victim of an insatiable ambition! Do not interrupt me—I have much to say. Let some one hasten to fetch my child; and do you all gather round me, to hear my last words!"

"Your last words!" shrieked Ellen: "Oh! no—you must recover!"

"Yes—with care and attention, dearest Eugene," said Richard, his eyes dimmed with tears, "you shall be restored to us."

Katherine and Isabella also wept abundantly.

A servant had already departed to fetch a surgeon: a second was now despatched to the house for the little Richard and the young Prince Alberto.

It was at length Whittingham's turn to go forward; and, whimpering like a child, he pressed Eugene's hand warmly in his own. The old man was unable to speak—his voice was choked with emotion; but Eugene recognised him, and acknowledged his faithful attachment with a few kind words which only increased the butler's grief.

"Listen to me for a few minutes, my dearest relatives—my kindest friends," said Eugene, after a brief pause. "I feel that I am dying—I have met my fate at the hands of the villanous Lafleur, who plundered me more than two years and a half ago, and whom I encountered ere now in my way hither. Alas! I have pursued a strange career—a career of selfishness and crime, sacrificing every consideration and every individual to my own purposes—raising at one time a colossal fortune upon the ruin of thousands! I was long buoyed up by the hope of making myself a great name in the world, alike famous for wealth and rank,—that I might convince you, my brother, how a man of talent could carve out his way without friends, and without capital at the beginning! But, alas! I have for some months been convinced—thanks to the affectionate reasoning of that angel Ellen, and to the contemplation of your example, Richard, even from a distance—that talent will not maintain prosperity for ever, unless it be allied to virtue! And let me observe, Richard—as God is my witness!—that with all my selfishness I never sought to injure you! When you were ruined by the speculations of Allen, I knew not that it was *your* wealth of which I was plundering *him*: I had not the least suspicion that Mr. Monroe was even acquainted with that man! The truth was revealed to me one day at the dwelling of Isabella's parents: and heaven knows how deeply I felt the villany of my conduct, which had robbed *you*! Do not interrupt me—I conjure you to allow me to proceed! Many and many a time did I yearn to hasten to your assistance when misfortune first overtook you, Richard:—but, no—the appointment had been made for a certain day—and I even felt a secret pleasure to think that you might probably be reduced to the lowest state of penury, from which in one moment, when that day should come, I might elevate you to an enjoyment of the half of my fortune! But that I have ever loved you, Richard, those inscriptions on the tree will prove; and, moreover, I once penetrated into the home of our forefathers—the study-window was not fastened—I effected an entrance—I sought your chamber—I saw you sleeping in your bed——"

"Oh! then it was not a dream!" exclaimed Richard. "Dearest Eugene, say no more—we require no explanations—no apology for the past! Here is your child, Eugene—and mine also: your son and your little nephew are by your side!"

Eugene raised himself, by Ellen's aid, upon the litter, and embraced the two children with the most unfeigned tenderness.

For a few moments he gazed earnestly upon their innocent countenances: then, yielding to a sudden impulse, as the incidents of his own career swept through his memory, he exclaimed, "God grant that they prove more worthy of the name of *Markham* than I!"

Richard and Ellen implored him not to give way to bitter reflections for the past.

"Alas! such counsel is offered as vainly as it is kindly meant!" murmured Eugene. "My life has been tainted with many misdeeds—and not the least was my black infamy towards that excellent man, who afterwards became your friend, Richard—I mean Thomas Armstrong!"

"He forgave you—he forgave you, Eugene!" exclaimed the Prince.

"Ellen has informed me that you have in your possession a paper which he gave you on his death-bed——"

"And which is to be opened this day," added Richard.

Then, drawing forth the document, he broke the seal.

A letter fell upon the ground.

"Read it," said Eugene: "all that concerns you is deeply interesting to me."

The Prince complied with his brother's request, and read the letter aloud. Its contents were as follow:—

"I have studied human nature to little purpose, and contemplated the phases of the human character with small avail, if I err in the prediction which I am now about to record.

"*Richard, you will become a great man—as you are now a good one.*

"Should necessity compel you to open this document at any time previously to the 10th of July, 1843, receive the fortune to which it refers as an encouragement to persevere in honourable pursuits. But should you not read these words until the day named, my hope and belief are that you will be placed, by your own exertions, far beyond the want of that sum which, in either case, is bequeathed to you as a testimonial of my sincerest regard and esteem.

"Signor Viviani, banker at Pinalla, in the State of Castelcicala, or his agents, Messrs. Glyn and Co., bankers, London, will pay over to you, on presentation of this letter, the sum of seventy-

five thousand pounds, with all interest, simple and compound, accruing thereto since the month of July, 1839, at which period I placed that amount in the hands of Signor Viviani.

"One word more, my dear young friend. Should you ever encounter an individual who speaks ill of the memory of Thomas Armstrong, say to him, '*He forgave his enemies!*' And should you ever meet one who has injured me, say to him, '*In the name of Thomas Armstrong I forgive you*.'

"Be happy, my dear young friend—be happy!

"THOMAS ARMSTRONG."

It would be impossible to describe the emotions awakened in the breast of all those who heard the contents of this letter.

"Now, my dearest brother," exclaimed Richard, after a brief pause, "*in the name of Thomas Armstrong, you are forgiven the injury which you did to him*!"

"Thank you, dear brother, for that assurance: it relieves my mind of a heavy load! And, Richard," continued Eugene, in a voice tremulous with emotions and faint with the ebb of life's spirit, "the prediction is verified—you are a great man! The world is filled with the glory of your name—and you are as good as you are great! The appointment has been kept:—but how? We meet beneath the foliage of the two trees—you as the heir apparent to a throne—I as a ruined profligate!"

"No—no!" exclaimed the Prince; "you shall live to be rich and prosperous——"

Eugene smiled faintly.

"Merciful heavens! he is dying!" ejaculated Ellen.

And it was so!

Terrible was the anguish of those by whom he was surrounded.

Mr. Wentworth, the surgeon, appeared at this crisis; but his attentions were ministered in vain.

Eugene's eyes grew dim—still he continued sensible; and he knew that his last moments were approaching.

Richard—Ellen—Katherine—Eliza Sydney—the two children—Mario Bazzano—Isabella—Mr. Monroe—and the faithful Whittingham—all wept bitterly, as the surgeon shook his head in despair!

"My husband—my dearest husband!" screamed Ellen, wildly: "look upon me—look upon your child—oh! my God—this day that was to have been so happy!"

Eugene essayed to speak—but could not: and that was his last mortal effort.

In another moment his spirit had fled for ever!

CHAPTER CCLIX.

CONCLUSION.

Lafleur was captured, tried, and condemned to transportation for life, for the manslaughter of Eugene Markham.

Immediately after the trial the Prince and Princess of Montoni, with the infant Prince Alberto, and accompanied by Signor and Signora Bazzano, embarked for Castelcicala in the *Torione* steam-frigate which was sent to convey them thither. We need scarcely say that the faithful Whittingham was in our hero's suite.

Eliza Sydney continues to reside at her beautiful villa near Upper Clapton; and her charitable disposition, her amiable manners, and her exemplary mode of life render her the admiration and pride of the entire neighbourhood.

The Earl of Warrington and Diana dwell in comparative seclusion, but in perfect happiness, and have never once regretted the day when they accompanied each other to the altar.

King Zingary departed this life about six months ago; and Morcar is now the sovereign of the Gipsy tribe in these realms. He has already begun strenuously to exert himself in the improvement of the moral character of his people; and though he finds the materials on which he labours to make an impression somewhat stubborn, he has declared his intention of persevering in his good work. His wife Eva constantly wears round her neck the gold chain which Isabella sent her; and night and morning the son of these good people is taught to kneel down and pray for the continued prosperity and happiness of the Prince and Princess of Montoni.

Pocock has remained an honest, industrious, and worthy man. He has now a good establishment in one of the most business-streets of the City, employs many hands, and has purchased some nice little freehold property in the neighbourhood of Holloway—in order, as he says, that he may have an occasional excuse for taking a walk round the mansion which bears the name of him whom he extols as his saviour—his benefactor!

And that mansion—to whom does it now belong? It is the property of Mr. Monroe, and will become Ellen's at his death: but the old man is still strong and hearty; and every fine afternoon he may be seen walking through the grounds, leaning upon the arm of his daughter or of Eliza Sydney, who is a frequent visitor at the Place.

Ellen is beautiful as ever, and might doubtless marry well, did she choose to seek society: but she has vowed to remain single for the sake of her child, who is now a blooming boy, and whom she rears with the fond hope that he will prove worthy of the name that he bears—the name of his uncle, Richard Markham.

Skilligalee and the Rattlesnake, long since united in matrimonial bonds, are leading a comfortable and steady life in Hoxton, the business of their little shop producing them not only a sufficiency for the present, but also the wherewith to create a provision for their old age.

Crankey Jem called upon them on the evening following the death of the Resurrection Man, and acquainted them with the event. From that moment nothing positive has ever been heard of James Cuffin; but it is supposed that he embarked as a common sailor in some ship bound for a long voyage.

Henry Holford remains a prisoner in Bethlem Hospital. He is in the full and unimpaired possession of his intellects, but has often and bitterly cursed the day when he listened to the whispering voice of his morbid ambition.

Albert Egerton has already become a wealthy merchant, possessing an establishment at Montoni and one in London; and, when sojourning at the former, he receives frequent invitations to dine at the Palace.

Lord Dunstable has retrieved the errors of his earlier years by an unwearied course of honourable and upright conduct, steadfastly pursued from the moment when he declared himself to have been touched by the words of the Prince of Montoni on the occasion of the exposure in Stratton Street.

Colonel Cholmondeley, Sir Rupert Harborough, and Mr. Chichester are undergoing a sentence of ten years' condemnation to the galleys at Brest, for having attempted to pass forged Bank of England notes at a money-changer's shop in Paris.

Major Anderson continues to live honourably and comfortably upon a pension allowed him by the Prince.

Mrs. Chichester removed about two years ago to a pleasant cottage in Wales, where she dwells in the tranquil seclusion suitable to her taste.

Filippo Dorsenni has opened an extensive hotel for foreigners at the West End of the town, and is happy in the prosperity of his business.

Lady Bounce was compelled to sue for a separate maintenance about eighteen months ago, on the ground of cruelty and ill-treatment; and in this suit she succeeded.

Sir Cherry and Major Dapper continue as intimate as ever, and pursue pretty well the same unprofitable career as we have hitherto seen them following.

Mr. Banks, the undertaker of Globe Lane, carried his economic principles to such an extent that he fell into the habit of purchasing cloth to cover his coffins at a rate which certainly defied competition; but a quantity of that material having been missed from a warehouse in the City and traced to his establishment, he was compelled, although much against his inclination, to accompany an

officer to Worship Street, where the porter belonging to the aforesaid warehouse was already in the dock on a charge of stealing the lost property. Vain was it that Mr. Banks endeavoured to impress upon the magistrate's mind the fact that he was as "pious and savoury a old wessel as ever made a coffin on economic principles:" the case was referred to the learned Recorder at the Old Bailey for farther investigation; and one fine morning Mr. Banks found himself sentenced to two years' imprisonment in the Compter for receiving goods knowing them to have been stolen.

Concerning Tomlinson and old Michael Martin, we have been unable to glean any tidings: but in respect to Robert Stephens, we have reason to believe that he manages to obtain a livelihood, under a feigned name, in a counting-house at New York.

John Smithers, better known to our readers as Gibbet, is the wealthiest inhabitant of a new town that has risen within these last three years in the valley of the Ohio; and in a recent letter to the Prince of Montoni he declares that he is happier than he ever thought he could become.

EPILOGUE.

'Tis done: VIRTUE is rewarded—VICE has received its punishment.

Said we not, in the very opening of this work, that from London branched off two roads, leading to two points totally distinct the one from the other?

Have we not shown how the one winds its tortuous way through all the noisome dens of crime, chicanery, dissipation, and voluptuousness; and how the other meanders amidst rugged rocks and wearisome acclivities, but having on its way-side the resting-places of rectitude and virtue?

The youths who set out along those roads,—the elder pursuing the former path, the younger the latter,—have fulfilled the destinies to which their separate ways conducted them.

The one sleeps in an early grave: the other is the heir-apparent to a throne.

Yes: and the prophetic words of the hapless Mary-Anne are fulfilled to the letter; for now in their palace at Montoni, do the hero and heroine of our tale, while retrospecting over all they have seen and all they have passed through, devote many a kind regret to the memory of the departed girl who predicted for them all the happiness which they enjoy!

And that happiness—the world has seen no felicity more perfect.

Adored by a tender wife,—honoured by her parents, on whose brows his valour placed the diadems which they wear,—and almost worshipped by a grateful nation whom his prowess redeemed from slavery,—Richard Markham knows not a single care.

On her side,—wedded to him to whom her young heart gave its virgin love,—proud of a husband whose virtues in peace and whose glory in war have shed undying lustre on the name which he bears,—blessed, too, with a lovely boy, whose mind already develops the reflections of his father's splendid qualities, and with a charming girl, who promises to be the heiress of the mother's beauty,—can Isabella be otherwise than happy?

Kind Reader, who have borne with me so long—one word to thee.

If amongst the circle of thy friends, there be any who express an aversion to peruse this work,—fearful from its title or from fugitive report that the mind will be shocked more than it can be improved, or the blush of shame excited on the cheek oftener than the tear of sympathy will be drawn from the eye;—if, in a word, a false fastidiousness should prejudge, from its own supposition or from misrepresentations made to it by others, a book by means of which we have sought to convey many an useful moral and lash many a flagrant abuse,—do you, kind reader, oppose that prejudice, and exclaim—"Peruse, ere you condemn!"

For if, on the one side, we have raked amidst the filth and loathsomeness of society,—have we not, on the other, devoted adequate attention to its bright and glorious phases?

In exposing the hideous deformity of vice, have we not studied to develope the witching beauty of virtue?

Have we not taught, in fine, how the example and the philanthropy of one good man can "*save more souls and redeem more sinners than all the Bishops that ever wore lawn-sleeves*?"

If, then, the preceding pages be calculated to engender one useful thought—awaken one beneficial sentiment,—the work is not without its value.

If there be any merit in honesty of purpose and integrity of aim,—then is that merit ours.

And if, in addition to considerations of this nature, we may presume that so long as we are enabled to afford entertainment, our labours will be rewarded by the approval of the immense audience to whom we address ourselves,—we may with confidence invite attention to a SECOND SERIES of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS.

THE END OF THE FIRST SERIES.

London:—J. J. WILKINSON, Printer, "Bonner House," Seacoal Lane.

CHAPTER I.
THE TRAVELLING-CARRIAGE.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the 2nd of November, 1826, that a travelling-carriage stopped, on its way to London, to change horses at the principal hotel in the little town of Staines.

The inmates of the vehicle were two ladies:—an elderly domestic in livery and a female attendant occupied the box.

The night was clear, fine, and frosty: the moon shone brightly; and the carriage lamps threw a strong glare to a considerable distance in front of the vehicle.

The active ostlers speedily unharnessed the four wearied steeds, and substituted as many fresh ones in their place: the two postboys leapt into their saddles; the landlord cried "All right!"—and the carriage rolled rapidly away from the inn, the horses' shoes striking fire against the stones.

"If there be any thing particularly calculated to raise the spirits," said one lady to the other, a few minutes after the chariot had left the peaceful town behind, "it is travelling upon such a beauteous night as this."

"I am delighted to observe that you *are* in good spirits this evening, my dear Lady Hatfield," was the reply. "After passing four long months at Sir Ralph Walsingham's country seat, London will present fresh attractions for your ladyship."

"My dear Miss Mordaunt," returned Lady Hatfield, in a serious tone, "you are aware that I am indifferent to those formal parties and ceremonial assemblies which are reckoned amongst the pleasures of the fashionable world; and I can assure you that had not my uncle purported to return to London in a few days, my own inclinations would have urged me to prolong my stay at Walsingham Manor."

"For my part," said Miss Mordaunt, "I am quite delighted with the idea of hastening back to the great metropolis. A summer in the country is only tolerable because each day brings one nearer to the enjoyments of a winter in town. But really, my dear Lady Hatfield, you are not reasonable. Rich, young, and beautiful as you are—your own mistress—and with the handsomest man in England dying to lay his coronet at your feet——"

"I shall never marry, Julia," hastily interrupted Lady Hatfield. "Pray let us change the conversation. A few minutes ago I was in excellent spirits; and now——"

She paused—and a deep sigh escaped her bosom.

"Did I not say that you were quite unreasonable?" exclaimed her companion. "Here am I—five years older than yourself,—for I do not mind telling you, my dear friend, that I shall never see thirty again;—and yet I have not renounced the idea of changing my condition. I know that I am neither so good-looking nor so wealthy as you;—still I have my little ambition. Sir Christopher Blunt would deem himself honoured were I to smile graciously upon him; but my brother, the lieutenant—who, by the by, expects his captaincy in a few days, thanks to the interest of your kind uncle Sir Ralph—declares that if ever I marry a mere knight, he will never speak to me again."

Lady Hatfield had fallen into a profound reverie, and paid not the slightest regard to the confidential outpourings of her garrulous companion.

Miss Mordaunt, who laboured under the pleasing impression that Lady Hatfield's silence was occasioned by the deep interest which she took in the present topic, continued to rattle away with her tongue as fast as the carriage did with its wheels.

"I am sure it was a very great act of kindness in you to ask me to spend the winter with you in London; for as papa is compelled to reside in Ireland, in consequence of the unsettled state of his tenantry, I should have been under the necessity of returning to the Emerald Isle, after my four months' visit with you to Walsingham Manor, had you not taken that compassion on me. But let us speak of yourself, dear Lady Hatfield. Without a soul in the world to control your actions—with the means of procuring every enjoyment—and with Lord Ellingham going mad on your account——"

"Julia," said Lady Hatfield, with a start,—"again I beseech you to drop this subject. And, as you will be my companion for some months to come, let me now, once for all, enjoin you to abstain from such topics. As you cannot read the secrets of my heart, pray bear in mind the fact that many a light word uttered thoughtlessly and with no malicious intent, may touch a chord that will thrill," she added calmly, but bitterly, "to the inmost recesses of my soul."

"Oh! my dear Lady Hatfield," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, who, in spite of her loquacity, was a very good-natured person, "I am rejoiced that you have given me this warning. And how foolish of me not to have observed—what indeed I now remember—that the topic of Love never was agreeable to you. To be sure! it was during the sermon upon the felicity of the wedded state, that you fainted and were taken into the vestry!"

Lady Hatfield writhed in mental agony; and bitterly at that moment did she repent the invitation which she had given her thoughtless

companion to pass the winter with her in London.

The carriage had now reached the little town of Bedfont, which it traversed without stopping; and continued its rapid way towards Hounslow.

But all of a sudden the course of the chariot was checked—as if by an unexpected impediment in the way; and the horses began to plunge frightfully.

At the same time the lady's-maid on the box uttered a dreadful scream.

Lady Hatfield drew down the window nearest to her: the chaise that moment came to a full stop; and a stern, but evidently disguised voice exclaimed, "Keep your horses quiet, you damned fools—and don't mind me! If you stir till I give you leave, I'll blow out the brains of both of you."

"Robbers!" shrieked Miss Mordaunt in a despairing tone: "Oh! what will become of us?"

Lady Hatfield looked from the window; and at the same instant a man, mounted on horseback, with a black mask over his countenance, and a pistol in each hand, was by the side of the vehicle.

"Villain!" cried the livery-servant on the box. "But you shall swing for this!"

"Perhaps I may," said the highwayman, coolly, though still speaking in a feigned tone, as is the custom with individuals of his profession upon such occasions as the one we are describing: "and if you attempt to move, old fellow, from where you are, an ounce of lead shall tumble you down from your perch. Beg pardon, ma'am," continued the robber, turning towards Lady Hatfield, who had shrunk back into the corner of the carriage the moment the desperado appeared at the window; "sorry to inconvenience you; but—your purse!"

Lady Hatfield handed the highwayman her reticule.

"Good!" said he, perceiving by its weight and a certain jingling sound which it sent forth, that it contained gold. "But you have a companion, ma'am—*her* purse!"

Miss Mordaunt complied with this demand, and implored the "good gentleman" not to murder her.

The highwayman gave no reply; but vouchsafed a most satisfactory proof of his intended forbearance in that respect, by putting spurs to his steed, and darting off like an arrow in the direction of Hounslow.

"Cowardly villains that you are!" ejaculated the livery-servant, hurling this reproach against the postboys.

"And what are you, old fool?" cried the postillion who rode the wheel-horse. "But he'll be nabbed yet."

"Drive on—drive on!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield from the window. "We are all frightened—and not hurt."

"Indeed, my dear," said Miss Mordaunt, as the carriage started off rapidly once more, "I am seriously hurt—grievously wounded!"

"You, Julia!" cried her ladyship, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes—in pocket," was the answer, implying deep vexation. "All the remainder of my quarter's allowance——"

"Oh! compose yourself on that head," interrupted Lady Hatfield. "You shall not be compelled to acquaint Mr. Mordaunt with your loss."

This assurance, conveying a promise of pecuniary assistance, materially tended to tranquillise the mind of Miss Mordaunt; but the event which had just occurred—apart from the mere robbery of her reticule—awoke the most painful reflections in the mind of Lady Hatfield.

"By the by," said Miss Mordaunt, after a short pause—for she never remained long silent,—"this audacious outrage reminds me of something your uncle Sir Ralph Walsingham was telling me one day, when you interrupted him in the middle. I think he informed me that about six or seven years ago—when you were only eighteen or nineteen—you were staying at your dear lamented father's country-house, where you were quite alone—for of course one does not call the servants anybody; when the mansion was broken into by robbers during the night——"

"Julia!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield, her whole frame fearfully convulsed by the powerful though useless efforts which she made to subdue her agitation: "never, I implore you, again allude to that dreadful event!"

"Well—I never will," said Miss Mordaunt. "And yet, if one must not speak of Love—nor yet of marriage—nor yet of midnight burglaries——"

"Nay—I was wrong to cut you short thus abruptly," remarked Lady Hatfield, now endeavouring to rob her prayer of the importance with which her solemn earnestness of manner had invested it: "only, do choose some more enlivening topic after the fright which we have just experienced."

"The first thing to-morrow morning," said Miss Mordaunt, who had not noticed the full extent of the impression which her allusion to the burglary of some years back had made upon her companion—for Julia was too flippant, superficial, and volatile to pay much attention to the emotions of others,—"the first thing to-morrow morning we must give information to the Bow Street runners concerning this highway robbery: secondly, we must write to the landlord at Staines to tell him what a couple of cowardly fellows he has got in the shape of these postillions;—and thirdly, you must discharge old Mason, who is evidently incapable of protecting his mistress, much less her friends."

"Discharge old Mason!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield: "impossible! How could he have protected us! He is unarmed—whereas the highwayman flourished two large pistols, doubtless loaded. But here we are safe at Hounslow!"

The carriage drew up at the door of the hotel in this town; and the postillions immediately narrated the particulars of the robbery to the landlord and his attendant tribe of hangers-on.

"Well, this is fortunate!" cried the landlord, when the tale was told: "quite a God-send, as one may say."

"As how, please, sir?" exclaimed the elder postboy, astonished at the remark.

"Why—it happens that Dykes, the famous Bow Street officer, is in the hotel at this very instant," said the landlord. "John," he added, turning to a waiter who stood near, "beg Mr. Dykes to step this way."

"And what's Dykes doing down here?" asked the postboy, when the waiter had disappeared to execute the commission he had received.

"He's been investigating a 'cendiary fire," replied an ostler; for the landlord, disdaining to hold any farther converse with a postillion, had stepped up to the window to inquire whether the ladies chose to alight.

Having received a negative answer, accompanied with an intimation that the sooner the carriage was allowed to proceed the more agreeable it would be to Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt, the landlord returned towards the spot where the postillions, the hangers-on of the hotel, and other loungers were grouped together.

Mr. Dykes almost immediately afterwards made his appearance in the form of a tall, stout, heavy, but powerfully built man, shabby-genteel in his attire, and carrying a strong ash-stick in his hand.

The particulars of the highway robbery were described to him in a very few moments.

"How was the fellow dressed?" asked the officer.

"A black coat," said the first postboy.

"No—it wasn't," cried the second.

"Then what was it?" demanded Mr. Dykes.

"I don't know—but I'm sure it wasn't a black 'un," was the highly satisfactory answer.

"Describe his horse," said Dykes impatiently.

"Brown—switch tail—standing about fourteen hands——"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated the second postillion, interrupting his companion who had volunteered the explanation. "It was a light bay—the moon fell full upon it—so did the carriage-lights."

"Come, I see we are only losing time," cried the officer. "Which way did he go?"

"He galloped off in this direction," was the reply, which remained uncontradicted.

"Then he'll be in London to-night, whichever road he took," said Mr. Dykes. "If your ladies will give me a cast as far as town, I'll be after the villain. Perhaps he turned off to the left towards Hatton, and so over by Hanwell and then Shepherd's Bush; or else he made straight for Richmond, and so over into Surrey. But, one way or another, he's sure to be in London by midnight; and ten to one if I don't pounce on him. My business is done down here; and I may just as well toddle back to-night as to-morrow morning."

The substance of these remarks was communicated to Lady Hatfield, who could not well do otherwise than accord a seat on the box to Mr. Dykes, Charlotte, the lady's-maid, removing to the interior of the carriage.

These arrangements having been effected, the vehicle pursued its way; and shortly after eleven o'clock it drew up at the door of a mansion on Piccadilly Hill.

Mr. Dykes, having asked the ladies a few questions, promised to communicate the result of his efforts to capture the highwayman; and then took his departure.

Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt shortly retired to their respective bed-chambers: the latter to dream of the delights of London—the former to moisten her pillow with tears; for the recent adventure had awakened in her mind feelings of the most agonising description.

CHAPTER II.
TOM RAIN AND OLD DEATH.

It was about half-past eight on the following morning, when two individuals entered a public-house in White Hart Street, Drury Lane.

One was a man of about thirty years of age, with florid complexion, light hair, and red whiskers,—yet possessing a countenance which, viewed as a whole, was very far from disagreeable. His eyes were of a deep blue, and indicated not only good-humour but a certain generosity of disposition which was not impaired by an association with many less amiable qualities—such as a wild recklessness of character, an undaunted bravery, a love of perilous adventure, and a sad deficiency of principle on particular points, the nature of which will hereafter transpire. He was evidently proud of a very fine set of teeth, the brilliancy of which compensated for the somewhat coarse thickness of his lips; and the delicate whiteness of his hands showed that he did not earn his livelihood by any arduous labour. In person he was about the middle-height—by no means inclined to corpulency—and yet possessing a well-knit frame, with a muscular power indicative of great physical strength. His dress partook of the half-sporting, half-rakish character—consisting of a high chimney-pot kind of hat, with very narrow brims, a checked blue silk neckerchief, fine linen, a buff waistcoat, cut-away Newmarket-style of green coat, drab-breeches, and top-boots. The proper name of this flash gentleman was Thomas Rainford; but his friends had taken the liberty of docking each word of a syllable; and he was invariably known as Tom Rain.

The other individual was an old man, of at least sixty, with white hair, but eyes of fire glaring from beneath a pair of thick, shaggy grey brows. He was upwards of six feet in height, and but little bowed by the weight of years which he bore. Having lost all his teeth, his mouth had fallen in so as to form a complete angle, the depth of which was rendered the more remarkable by the extreme prominence of his hooked nose and his projecting chin. He was as thin as it was possible to be without having the bones actually protruding through the skin, which hung upon them like a tanned leather casing. He was dressed in a long grey surtout coat, reaching below his knees; a pair of shabby black trousers, very short; and black cloth gaiters fitting loosely over that description of shoes generally denominated high-lows. On his head he wore a greasy cap, with a large front: his linen was by no means of the cleanest; and his appearance altogether was excessively unprepossessing—if not absolutely revolting. What his real name was, very few of even his most intimate acquaintances were aware; for his dreadful emaciation of form had procured for him the frightful pseudonym of *Old Death*.

Tom Rain and his hideous companion entered the public-house in White Hart Street, nodded familiarly to the landlord as they passed by the bar, and ascended the stairs to a private room on the first floor.

Having seated themselves at the table, Tom Rain began the conversation.

"Well, have you considered my proposal?" he asked.

"I have," replied the old man in a deep sepulchral tone; "but I am cautious—very cautious, my good friend."

"So you told me when I saw you three days ago for the first time," observed Rain impatiently. "But Tullock, the landlord of this place, is a pal of yours; and he knows me well too. Hasn't he satisfied you about me?"

"Well—well, I can't say that he hasn't," answered Old Death. "Still a cautious man like me never says *yes* in a hurry. Tullock knew you eight or nine years ago down in the country; and there's no doubt that you was then a right sort of blade."

"And so I am now!" cried Tom Rain, striking the table angrily with his clenched fist.

"Softly-softly, my good friend," said Old Death. "We shall agree better afterwards if we have a good understanding at first. I was going to observe that for some years Tullock loses sight of you; he comes up to town, takes this public, and doesn't even remember that there's such a fellow in existence as yourself until you make your appearance here a few days back."

"When he received me with open arms, and introduced me to you," added Tom Rain. "But go on: what next?"

"Ah! what next?" replied Old Death, with a horrible chuckle that issued from his throat as if it come from the depths of a tomb. "Why—you frankly and candidly told me your intentions and views, I admit;—but you can't do without me—you can't do without me, my dear boy—and you know it!"

Again the hideous old man chuckled in his cavern-like tones.

"I never denied what you say," answered Tom Rain. "On the contrary, I am well aware that no one in my line can think of doing business about London, and making London his head-quarters, without your assistance."

"To be sure not!" said the old man, evidently pleased by this compliment. "I've had the monopoly of it all for this thirty years, and never once got into trouble. But then I do my business with caution—such caution! I've dealings with all that are worth having dealings with; and not one of them knows even where I live!"

"Only let me find a sure and ready-money market for *my* goods," exclaimed Tom Rain, "and I'll do more business with you than all the chaps you speak of put together."

"Well, I suppose we must come to terms," said Old Death after a short pause. "Tullock assures me that you were straight-forward when he knew you in the country, and though time changes men's minds as well as their faces, I'll take it for granted that you're all right. You remember the conditions?"

"Not a word you uttered three days ago has escaped my memory," answered Rain.

"Good. When shall you commence business?"

"I opened my shop last night," replied Tom with a hearty laugh.

"Nonsense!" cried the old man, fixing a glance of delight upon his new friend. "You don't mean to say that——In a word, is *this* yours?"

As he spoke, Old Death drew from his pocket the morning's newspaper, pointed to a particular advertisement, and held the journal towards his companion.

Tom Rain's countenance was overclouded for a moment; but almost immediately afterwards it expanded into an expression of mingled surprise and satisfaction; and snapping his fingers joyfully, he exclaimed, "Is it possible? could it have been *her*? Oh! this business is speedily settled!"

And rising from his seat, he rang the bell violently.

A pot-boy answered the summons.

"Pen, ink, and paper, and a messenger to carry a letter," said Tom Rain, with extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

The boy disappeared; and Old Death, recovering partially from the astonishment into which his companion's ejaculations and manner on reading the advertisement had thrown him, exclaimed, "What the devil are you after now?"

"You shall see in a moment," was the reply; "but I don't promise you any explanation of what you *will* see," he added with another hearty laugh.

The boy returned, bringing writing materials, and intimating that he was willing to be the bearer of the letter.

Tom Rain told him to wait; then, having hastily written a few lines upon a sheet of paper, he tossed the note over to Old Death, who read as follows:—

> "Remember the night of the 27th of October, 1819;—and stop the inquiries instituted in respect to the little business referred to by the advertisement in this morning's *Times*."

"This is past all comprehension," exclaimed the old man, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the paper. "The note has not even a signature."

"It does not require one," coolly observed Tom Rain, as he snatched the letter from his companion, and proceeded to fold it up.

"And do you hope to crush the business by means of that scrap of writing?" asked Old Death, evidently perplexed what to think.

"I don't merely hope—I am certain of accomplishing my object," was the reply.

"Now mind you ain't deceiving yourself, Tom," said Old Death. "The man who has taken up the affair is persevering as a beaver and crafty as a fox. You may see that he is in earnest by the expedition he must have made to get the advertisement into this morning's paper. I should have hardly thought it possible to be done. However, done it is—and, though it gives no description of the person, yet it offers a good reward for his apprehension. No one knows what trivial circumstance may afford a trace; and——"

"Enough of this, old friend," cried Tom; and handing the letter, now duly folded, wafered, and directed, to the boy, he said, "Take this to the address written upon it: see if there's any answer; and I shall wait here till you come back. Look alive—and you'll earn a crown by the job."

The boy hastened away to execute the commission which he had received.

"And so that was your business, Master Tom?" observed Old Death, as soon as the messenger had disappeared. "Well—you have made a good beginning: it promises bright things."

"What! do you fancy that I haven't had plenty of experience down in the country?" cried Rainford. "Ah! I could tell you a tale or two—but no matter now."

"And the little business, Tom," inquired the old man,—"did it turn out worth the trouble? The advertisement says——"

"Hark'ee, Master Death," exclaimed Rainford, firmly; "that business does not regard you. Our compact dates from this morning——"

"Oh! very good—very good!" interrupted Old Death in a surly tone. "Be it as you say: but remember—if you *do* get into any trouble on account of this, you mustn't expect me to help you out of it."

"Neither do I," answered Tom. "However, I am a generous chap in my way, and I don't mind yielding to you in this instance; for you must suppose that I can see your drift plain enough. The advertisement says '*A purse containing a Bank-note for fifty pounds and eleven sovereigns, and a reticule containing a purse in which there were three ten-pound notes and sixteen sovereigns.*' This is accurate enough. The reticule I flung away: the two purses I kept—and here they are."

Thus speaking, Tom Rainford threw upon the table the objects last mentioned.

Old Death's eyes glared with a kind of savage joy as they caught a glimpse of the yellow metal and the flimsy paper through the net-work of the purses.

"Pretty things—pretty things!" he muttered between his toothless gums. "I think you'll do well, Tom."

"And I am sure I shall. But turn the money out on the table: you care more about the handling of it than I do."

Old Death "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," and lost no time in obeying the hint conveyed.

"Twenty-seven golden boys, and eighty pounds in Bank-notes," said the hideous man. "The gold is yours—that's part of our conditions: half the value of the Bank-notes is mine, for the risk and trouble in cashing them—that's also part and parcel of our conditions. So if I give you forty sovereigns—forty golden sovereigns, Tom—we shall be square."

"Just so," carelessly observed Rain.

Old Death produced a greasy leather bag from a pocket in the breast of his grey-coat, and counted thence the forty sovereigns on which he had laid such emphasis.

Tom Rain thrust the coin into his breeches' pocket without reckoning it; while his companion first secured the Bank-notes in the greasy bag, and then threw the two purses into the fire.

"You're a good fellow, Tom—a generous-hearted fellow—and I'm much pleased with you," said the old man. "I shall leave you now, as I have some little trifling matters to attend to in another part of the town. When you want me, you know where to leave a message."

"All right," ejaculated Tom Rainford, who did not appear over anxious to detain his new friend.

They accordingly separated—Old Death taking his departure, and the other remaining behind to await the return of his messenger.

It is necessary to state that when Old Death quitted the public-house, he was joined a few paces up the street by a sharp-looking, ill-clad youth of about fifteen, whose pale countenance, bright eyes, and restless glances denoted mental activity struggling against bad health.

Approaching the old man, the youth walked by his side without uttering a syllable.

"Jacob," said Death, after a brief pause, and sinking his voice to a whisper, "you saw that swell-looking chap who went into Tullock's with me just now. Well—I told you to be here this morning at a particular hour, on purpose that you *might* see him. He will be useful to me—very useful. But I must know more of him—and he is not the man to be pumped. Do you wait here, and watch him. Dog him about—find out where he goes—where he lives—whether he has a mistress or a wife, or neither——"

"Or both," added Jacob, with a low chuckle.

"Yes—any thing that concerns him, in fine," continued Old Death. "I am going to Toby Bunce's in the Dials, where I shall be for the next three or four hours if I'm wanted."

"Very good—I understand," said Jacob; and retracing his steps, he hid himself in a court which commanded a view of Tullock's public-house.

Let us now return to Tom Rain, who was waiting for the reappearance of his messenger.

It was shortly before ten when the pot-boy once more stood in his presence.

"Well?" said Rainford, interrogatively.

"I seed the lady herself," was the reply; "and I gived her the note. I thought it was somethink partickler—and so I told the flunkey I'd on'y deliver it into her hands."

"And how did she receive it?" asked Tom.

"I was showed into a parlour and told to wait. In a few minutes the door opened and in come a lady—such a splendid creatur! I never seed such a fine 'ooman in my life before. Our bar-gal's nothink to her! So I gived her the note: she looked at the writing on the outside, but didn't seem to know it. Then she opened the letter—and, my eye! didn't she give a start? I thought she'd have fell slap on her face. For a minute or so she couldn't recover herself: at last she says, '*Tell the writer of this note that it shall be attended to;*'—and she put half-a-crown into my hand. That's all."

"I knew it would be so!" cried Tom Rain in a triumphant tone. "Here's the five shillings I promised you, my boy; and I don't think you've made a bad morning's work of it."

The lad grinned a smile of satisfaction, and withdrew.

Rainford soon after descended to the bar, conversed for a few minutes with his friend Tullock, the landlord, and then took his departure—duly watched by Jacob.

He had reached the corner of Drury Lane, when he felt himself somewhat rudely tapped on the shoulder.

Turning hastily round, he was confronted by a tall stout man, who, without any ceremonial preface, exclaimed, "You're wanted, my good fellow."

"I know I am," replied Tom coolly, as he measured the stranger from head to foot with a calm but searching glance: "and I'm now on my way to the place where my presence is required."

"Just so," said the stout man: "because you are going to favour me with your company, that I may introduce you to a party who wishes to become better acquainted with you."

"Who's the friend you speak of?" asked Tom in an easy, off-hand kind of manner.

"Sir Walter Ferguson," was the reply. "So come along."

With these words, the stout man took Rainford's arm and led him away to the Police Court in Bow Street.

Jacob, who was an unsuspected witness of the whole proceeding, immediately took the shortest way to Seven Dials.

CHAPTER III.
BOW STREET.

The moment Mr. Dykes had lodged his prisoner in one of the cells attached to the court, he hurried off to Piccadilly Hill, and knocked loudly at the door of Lady Hatfield's residence.

Upon explaining the nature of his business to the domestic who answered the summons, he was admitted into an apartment where Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt almost immediately joined him.

Lady Hatfield was the orphan daughter of the Earl and Countess of Mauleverer. She was an only child: the proud title of Mauleverer had become extinct with the demise of her father; but the family property had devolved to her. She was in her twenty-fifth year, and surpassingly beautiful:—the style of her loveliness was fascinating and intellectual—rendered the more interesting, too, by the tinge of melancholy which characterised her countenance. Her eyes were large and of a deep blue: the soul sate enthroned on her pale and lofty forehead;—her smile, though always plaintively mournful, denoted amiability and kindness. In stature she was of the middle height; and, though in the least degree inclining to *embonpoint*, yet the fulness of her form marred not its lightness nor its grace. The bust was rounded in voluptuous luxuriance—and the hips were expanded;—but the waist was naturally small—the limbs tapered gradually downwards—and her step was so elastic, while her gait was easy though dignified, that even the most critical judge of female attractions could not have found it in his heart to cavil at her symmetry.

Miss Mordaunt was a lady who had seen thirty-five summers, although she would have gone into hysterics had any one suggested that such was really the fact. She was short, thin, and not particularly good-looking; for her hair was of so decided a red that it would have been a mockery instead of a compliment to term it auburn: her eyes were grey, and her nose suspiciously inclining to the species called "pug:"—but her complexion was good, her teeth well preserved and white, and her hand very beautifully formed. Thus, when she looked in her glass—which was as often as she passed near it—she mentally summed up the good and the bad points of her personal appearance, invariably striking a balance in favour of the first, and thence arriving at the very logical conclusion that she should yet succeed in escaping from a condition of single blessedness.

It was a little after eleven o'clock when Lady Hatfield and Miss Mordaunt were informed that Mr. Dykes requested an immediate interview with them. Some event of that morning's occurrence had already produced a strange—an almost alarming effect upon Georgiana—such was Lady Hatfield's Christian name: and in order to regain her spirits—to recover indeed from a sudden shock which she had received—her ladyship had proposed an early airing in the carriage. To this Julia, who had some "shopping to do," readily assented. They had accordingly just completed their toilette for the purpose, and were now waiting in the drawing-room for the arrival of the chariot, when the announcement of Mr. Dykes's name called such an ejaculation of anguish from Lady Hatfield's lips, that Miss Mordaunt was seriously alarmed.

But Georgiana,—the expression of whose countenance indicated for an instant the agony of a heart wounded to its very core,—subdued her emotions by a violent effort; and then, in answer to her friend's solicitous inquiries, attributed the temporary agitation she had experienced to a sudden pain passing through her head.

It was nevertheless with feelings of mingled terror and repugnance that Georgiana accompanied Julia to the room where the Bow Street officer awaited them.

Her very eye-lids quivered with suspense, when she found herself in the presence of the celebrated thief-taker.

"Well, ladies," exclaimed Mr. Dykes, rising from a chair, and making an awkward bow as they entered, "I've good news for you: the highwayman is——"

"Is——" repeated Georgiana, with nervous impatience.

"Is in custody, my lady; and all I now want——"

"Who is in custody?" demanded Georgiana, hope for a moment wildly animating her.

"The man that robbed you last night, my lady," answered the officer; "or else I'm dam——beg pardon—very much mistaken."

"But how do you know he is the same?" exclaimed Lady Hatfield. "Perhaps you may have erred—your suspicions may have misled you——"

"Ah! my lady," interrupted Dykes, totally mistaking the cause of Georgiana's warmth; "you surely ain't going to plead in favour of a chap that stopped you on the King's highway, and did then and there steal from your person and from the person of your friend——"

"Describe the individual whom you have arrested," said Lady Hatfield abruptly.

"To a nicety I will," answered the officer, who was now completely in his element. "About thirty years of age—good complexion—

light curly hair—red whiskers—dark blue eyes—splendid teeth—thick lips——But here's your carriage come round to the door, my lady; and nothing could possibly be more convenient. Please not to waste time—as I think we can get him committed to-day."

The moment Dykes had begun his description, Lady Georgiana's eyes expressed the agonising nature of the suspense which she endured; but as he continued, and his portraiture became the more definite, an ashy paleness overspread her countenance.

This agitation on her part was not however perceived by either the Bow Street officer or Miss Mordaunt; for the former had a habit of fixing his eyes on the knob of his ash stick when he was engrossed in a professional topic; and the latter was drinking in with greedy ears the description of the supposed highwayman, whom she was quite astonished to hear represented as so very discrepant from her idea of what a midnight desperado must be.

The arrival of the carriage was, under the circumstances, quite a relief to Georgiana; and, without uttering another objection, she allowed Mr. Dykes to have his own way in the matter.

That experienced officer rang the bell as coolly as if the house was his own, and desired that the man-servant and lady's-maid, who were in attendance on their mistress the preceding night, would prepare to accompany him to Bow Street.

Mason and Charlotte speedily obeyed this request, and the chariot, instead of taking the ladies up Bond Street, conveyed them, the two servants, and Mr. Dykes, to the police-office.

On their arrival, Mr. Dykes conducted his witnesses into a private room, and, after an absence of about five minutes, returned with the intelligence that the night charges were just disposed of, and that the prisoner was about to be placed in the dock.

A shudder passed through Georgiana's frame; but, with a desperate effort to compose herself, she followed Mr. Dykes into the court, Miss Mordaunt and the two servants remaining in the private room until they should be summoned individually to give their testimony.

As Georgiana was a lady of rank and fortune she was not treated as a humble witness would have been, but was accommodated with a chair, Mr. Dykes assuring her, in a confidential whisper, that she need not stand up to give her evidence.

The body of the court was crowded with a motley assembly of spectators, the news that a highwayman was about to be examined having spread like wildfire throughout the neighbourhood.

Scarcely was Georgiana seated, when a sensation on the part of the crowd enabled her to judge that the accused was being brought in; and as Tom Rain leapt nimbly into the dock, she cast a rapid glance towards him—a glance in which terror was combined with indescribable disgust and aversion.

The accused affected not to notice her, but lounged in a very easy and familiar fashion over the front of the dock; surveying, first Sir Walter Ferguson, and then the clerk, with a complacency which would have almost induced an uninitiated stranger to imagine that *they* were the prisoners and *he* was the magistrate.

Mr. Dykes, being called upon by Sir Walter to explain the nature of the charge against the prisoner, declared that, "in consequence of information which he had received," (the invariable phraseology of old police-officers,) "he had arrested the accused on suspicion of having stopped Lady Hatfield's carriage on the preceding evening, and robbed her ladyship and her ladyship's friend of certain monies specified in an advertisement which he had caused to be inserted in that morning's paper." Mr. Dykes further stated that, having searched the prisoner, he had found upon him a considerable sum in gold; but none of the Bank-notes stolen.

Lady Hatfield was then sworn, and she corroborated the officer's statement relative to the robbery.

"Has your ladyship any reason to suppose that the prisoner in the dock is the person by whom your carriage was stopped?" inquired the magistrate.

"I feel well convinced, sir," was the reply, delivered, however, in a tremulous tone, "that the prisoner at the bar is *not* the man by whom I was robbed."

A smile of triumph curled the lips of Tom Rain; but Mr. Dykes surveyed Georgiana with stupid astonishment.

"Not the man, my lady!" he ejaculated, at length: "why, last night, your ladyship could give no description of what the robber was or what he was not!"

"Dykes, hold your tongue!" cried the magistrate: "her ladyship is upon her oath."

"Your worship," said Georgiana, in a firmer voice than before, "I was so bewildered last evening—so overcome with terror——"

"Naturally so, Lady Hatfield," observed the magistrate, with a very courteous smile, which seemed to say that he would rather believe the bare word of a member of the aristocracy—especially a lady—than the oaths of all his officers and runners out together. "In fact," continued Sir Walter blandly, "you were too much flurried, to use a common expression, to reply calmly and deliberately to any questions which Dykes may have put to you last evening."

"Such was indeed the case, your worship," answered Georgiana. "This morning, however, I have been enabled to collect my ideas, and to recall to mind the smallest details of the robbery. The highwayman had a black mask upon his face; but, by a sudden movement of his horse, as he stood by the carriage window, the mask slipped aside, and I caught a glimpse of his countenance by the moonlight."

"And that countenance?" said the magistrate.

"Was quite different from the prisoner's," replied Lady Hatfield firmly.

"Your ladyship did not make that statement when I gave you the description of the prisoner just now," said Dykes, evidently bewildered by the nature of Georgiana's testimony.

"Because you hurried me away, together with my friend and two of my servants, in a manner so precipitate that I had no time to utter a word," returned Lady Hatfield. "Moreover, as you had taken the prisoner into custody, I believed it to be necessary that his case should be brought beneath the cognizance of his worship."

Georgiana spoke in a tone apparently so decided and calm, that the officer knew not how to reply; although in his heart he suspected her sincerity.

The magistrate consulted the clerk; and, after the interchange of a few whispers, Sir Walter said, "I see no reason for detaining the prisoner: there is evidently some mistake on your part, Dykes."

"Your worship," exclaimed the officer, "I know not what to think. Can the prisoner give a good account of himself? He rides into London from Richmond at six o'clock this morning; puts his horse up at an inn in the Borough; goes to a coffee-house in another street to have his breakfast, and leaves a pair of pistols for the waiter to take care of for him; then walks over to a suspicious public not a hundred miles from this court; meets there a man that me and my partners have long had our eyes on; and, when he is searched, has a large sum in gold about his person."

"Do you hear what the officer says, prisoner?" inquired the magistrate.

"I do, your worship," answered Tom Rain, coolly; "and I can explain it all. I come up to London on business, which requires the sum of money found upon me. I put up my horse where I think fit; and I go elsewhere to get my breakfast, because I can have it cheaper than at the inn. I was armed with pistols because I had to travel a lonely road in the dark; and I left them at the coffee-house because I did not choose to drag them about with me all day long."

Mr. Dykes was about to reply, when two decently-dressed men, who had entered the court a few minutes previously, stepped forward.

"Please, your worship," said the first, "I have known Mr. Rainford the last four years; and a more respectable man does not exist. He came up to London to buy a couple of horses of me; and he was to pay ready money. My name's Watkins, your worship; and I've kept livery and bait stables in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, for the last seventeen years."

"And I, your worship," said the other person, in his turn, "can answer for Mr. Rainford. If you doubt my respectability, your worship, send one of your officers round to Compton Street, and see if the name of Bertinshaw isn't painted up in precious large letters over the best jeweller's shop——"

"*And* pawnbroker's," interrupted Mr. Dykes significantly.

"Well—and pawnbroker's, too," added Bertinshaw: "I'm not ashamed of the calling."

"Then you are both prepared to guarantee the prisoner's appearance at any future time?" said the magistrate.

"Certainly, your worship," was the joint reply.

"To answer any charge that may be brought against him?" continued Sir Walter.

The response was again in the affirmative on the part of Watkins and Bertinshaw.

The magistrate stated the amount of the recognizances which were to be entered into, and Tom Rain was desired to stand down from the dock.

This intimation he obeyed with the same air of calm indifference which had characterized him throughout the proceedings, and which had only been for a moment disturbed by the profound astonishment he had experienced when two men, whom he had never before seen nor even heard of in his life, stepped forward to give him so excellent a character and become his bail. But a moment's reflection convinced him that Old Death was the unseen friend who worked the machinery of this manœuvre.

While the clerk was filling up the bail-bond, Lady Georgiana retired from the office, her bosom a prey to feelings of a strangely conflicting nature,—joy at having passed through an ordeal which she had dreaded—grief at having stained her soul with the fell crime of deliberate perjury—and agony at the sad reminiscences which the presence of Rainford had recalled so forcibly to her mind.

Miss Mordaunt and the two servants were astonished to hear the unexpected turn which the proceedings had taken; but their attention was almost immediately absorbed in the condition of Lady Hatfield, who scarcely had time to communicate to them the result of her examination in the court, when a sudden faintness came over her. She had exhausted all her energies in the endeavour to maintain an air of calmness, and to reply in a tone of sincerity when in the presence of the magistrate; and now a reaction took place—her courage gave way—the weight of fearful reminiscences overpowered her—the glow of excitement which had mantled her cheeks changed to a death-like pallor—and she fainted in the arms of her friend.

Fortunately, Miss Mordaunt had a bottle of volatile salts with her; and by these means Georgiana was speedily recovered. She was then led to her carriage; but she did not appear to breathe freely until the vehicle was some distance from the police-court.

CHAPTER IV.
ESTHER DE MEDINA.

Let us now return to the interior of the police-office.

The clerk was drawing up the bail-bond; the two securities were conversing in whispers with Tom Rain, whom they had affected to greet, when he descended from the dock, as an old acquaintance; and Mr. Dykes was leaning gloomily against the partition which separated the magistrate's desk from the body of the court,—when the entrance of two persons produced a new sensation amongst the crowd.

One was an officer of the court: the other was a lady, closely veiled, and enveloped in a cloak of rich material.

Her form was tall; and, even though her entire frame was now convulsed with intense anguish as she passed amidst the gaping throng to the chair which Lady Hatfield had occupied two or three minutes previously, yet that excess of grief and terror did not bow her down, nor impair the graceful dignity of her gait.

The officer motioned her to seat herself, an intimation which she evidently accepted with gratitude.

"What is it, Bingham?" inquired the magistrate of the officer.

"Please, your worship," was the reply, "it's a serious charge; and the prosecutor will be here in a moment."

"Very well," said the magistrate: "I will take it directly."

"Who is she?" whispered Dykes, accosting his brother officer.

"Her name is Esther de Medina, she tells me," returned Bingham.

The question and answer were overheard by Tom Rainford, who was standing close by the officers; and the announcement of the lady's name produced a strange and almost electrical effect upon him.

The devil-me-care recklessness of his manner suddenly disappeared; and a sentiment of profound commiseration and deep interest, in respect to Esther de Medina, seemed to occupy his mind.

He was about to question Mr. Bingham relative to the charge which he had against her, when the clerk called upon him and his securities to sign the bond. This ceremony was speedily performed; and Rain's money was returned to him by Mr. Dykes, who, however, looked at him in a manner which seemed to say—"I know I am not mistaken in you, although you have contrived to get off: but I'll have you another time."

Tom cared nothing for the sinister looks of the Bow Street officer; neither did he pay much attention to the gold which he now poured back into his pocket; for all his thoughts appeared to be absorbed in the presence of the veiled lady.

"Come along with us," whispered Bertinshaw, "and we'll celebrate your escape over a bottle of wine at my place."

"No—not now," replied Tom, hastily: "I mean to stay and hear this case: it interests me."

"Will you join us presently?" asked his new friend, who had just now pretended to be a very old one.

"Yes, yes," answered Tom: "in an hour or so."

Bertinshaw and Watkins then took their departure.

"Now, Bingham," cried the clerk; "what is it?"

At that moment a gentleman of handsome appearance and middle age entered the court.

"Here's the prosecutor who will explain the matter," said the officer.

The prisoner, suddenly remembering the respect due to the bench, raised her veil; and, at the same time, she glanced in an eager, inquiring manner towards the individual who now appeared against her.

But we must pause to describe her.

She was not more than eighteen years of age, and surpassingly lovely. Her complexion was a clear transparent olive, beneath which the delicate tinge of carnation was not entirely chased away from her cheeks by the terror and grief that now oppressed her. Her face was of the aquiline cast—her forehead broad, high, and intelligent; her nose curved, but not too prominent in shape; her mouth small, with thin vermilion lips, revealing teeth of pearly whiteness; her chin sweetly rounded; and her eyes large, black, and brilliant. And never did more splendid orbs of light mirror the whole power of the soul, or flash brighter glances from beneath richly-fringed lids. Then her brows were so delicately pencilled, and so finely arched, that they gave an air of dignity to that lovely—that fascinating countenance.

Her hair, too, was of the deepest black—a black so intense, that the raven's wing might not have compared with it. Silken and glossy, the luxuriant mass was parted above the forehead, and, flowing in two shining bands—one on each side of the face, for which they appeared to form an ebony frame,—was gathered behind the ears.

In stature she was tall, sylph-like, and graceful. Her shoulders had that fine slope which the Italian masters so much admired, and with which they were delighted to endow the heroines of their pictures. Her waist was admirably proportioned, and not rendered too thin by the unnatural art of tight-lacing. Her hand was of exceeding beauty; her feet and ankles were in perfect keeping with the exquisite symmetry of her form; and her gestures were full of dignity and grace.

She was a Jewess; and, if the most glorious beauty were honoured with a diadem, then should Esther de Medina have become Queen of the Scattered Race.

The moment she raised her veil, all who could catch a glimpse of her countenance were struck with astonishment at the dazzling loveliness thus revealed; and even the magistrate felt anxious to learn what misadventure could have placed so peerless a being within the grasp of justice. Her crime could scarcely be robbery; for she was well-dressed, and had the appearance of belonging to even a wealthy family. Besides, her face—her eyes seemed to denote a conscious purity of soul, in spite of the painful emotions which her present situation had excited within her bosom.

But the person who was most interested—most astonished by the sudden revelation of that exquisite countenance, was Tom Rain. It was not with lustful desire that he surveyed her; it was not with any unholy passion: on the contrary, it was with a sentiment of deep devotion and profound sympathy. He also manifested extreme curiosity to learn upon what possible charge Esther de Medina could have been brought thither.

On her part, she was evidently altogether unacquainted with the person of Tom Rain; for as she cast a rapid and timid glance around, her eyes lingered not upon him.

The middle-aged, handsome-looking man who had just entered the office, was now desired to state the grounds upon which Esther de Medina was in custody.

This witness deposed that his name was Edward Gordon, and that he was a diamond-merchant, residing in Arundel Street, Strand. On the 31st of October, at about five o'clock in the evening, a female called upon him and requested him to purchase of her a diamond ring, which she produced. He examined it by the light of the lamp burning in the apartment where he received her; and, finding that it was really a jewel of some value, he offered her a price which he considered fair. That sum was thirty guineas. She endeavoured to obtain more; but he did not consider himself justified in acceding to her wish. Finally, she accepted his proposal, received the amount, left the ring, and departed. He went out immediately after, carefully locking the door of the room. Having an engagement to dine with a friend, he returned home late, and did not enter that particular room until the following morning; when he discovered that a set of diamonds, which he remembered to have been lying in an open case upon the table at the time the female called on the preceding evening, was missing. He searched vainly in all parts of the room; and at length came to the fixed conclusion that the female in question had stolen the diamonds. He gave immediate information to Bingham, the officer, together with an accurate description of the suspected person; for she was upwards of twenty minutes with him on the evening of the 31st, and he had therefore seen enough of her to know her again.

"Moreover," added the prosecutor "two clear days only have elapsed since the interview which took place between us; and I appeal to your worship whether the countenance of the prisoner, when once seen, can be readily forgotten; for painful as it is to accuse so young and interesting a person of such a crime, my duty to society compels me to take this step; and I have no hesitation in declaring that the prisoner is the female who sold me the ring."

A profound sigh escaped from the bosom of Esther; but she uttered not a word.

Bingham, the officer, then proved that he called about half an hour previously upon Mr. Gordon to inform him that he had vainly endeavoured to discover a clue to the supposed thief. Mr. Gordon was on the point of going out upon particular business, and the officer, in order not to detain him, walked a part of the way in his company, so that they might converse upon the subject of the robbery as they went along. They were passing through Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, when they met the prisoner at the bar. Mr. Gordon instantly recognised her, and the officer took her into custody. She manifested much indignation, and said that there must be some mistake; but when the nature of the charge was stated to her, she turned deadly pale, and burst into tears.

Rainford had listened to these statements with the deepest—the most intense interest; and his countenance underwent various changes, especially while Mr. Gordon was giving his evidence. At one moment Tom exhibited surprise—then indignation,—and, lastly, the most unfeigned sorrow.

But suddenly an idea seemed to strike him: for a minute did he reflect profoundly; and then joy animated his features.

Hastily quitting the court, he hurried to the coffee-house opposite, called for writing materials, and penned the following letter:—

"*Nov. 3, 1826.*

"My Lord,—Esther de Medina is at Bow Street, accused of a crime which is alleged to have been committed at about five o'clock in the evening of the 31st of October. It is for you to prove her innocence. Delay not, then, an instant.

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND TO ESTHER."

Throwing a shilling upon the table, Tom Rain hurried away, took a hackney-coach at the nearest station, and desired to be driven to the

mansion of Lord Ellingham, Pall-mall, West.

A half-guinea which he slipped into the coachman's hand as he entered the vehicle, produced the desired effect; for the horses were urged into a pace the rapidity of which seemed to astonish themselves as a proof of what they could do if they chose; and, in a very short time, Rainford leapt out at the door of his lordship's abode.

The nobleman was fortunately at home; and Tom Rain delivered the letter to the servant who answered his summons.

Then, having desired the coachman to wait, as he might have "a fare" back to Bow Street, Rainford hurried away at his utmost speed, retracing his steps to the police-office.

In the meantime, the clerk had taken down the depositions of Mr. Edward Gordon and Bingham; while the most extraordinary sensation prevailed in the court. The youth—the loveliness—the modest, yet dignified appearance of Esther de Medina enlisted all sympathies in her favour; and many a rude heart then present felt a pang at the idea of believing her to be guilty.

She had stood up when the prosecutor was called against her; but when he reached that point in his evidence which mentioned the loss of his diamonds, she clasped her hand convulsively together, and, trembling with agitation, sank into the chair from which she had risen.

When the depositions were taken down, the magistrate said, "Prisoner, you have heard the very serious charge made against you: have you any thing to say in your defence?"

Then she spoke for the first time since she had entered the court; and though her words were delivered with impassioned emphasis, the melodious tones of her voice sounded like a silver bell upon the ears of all present.

"Sir, I am innocent—I am innocent!" she exclaimed. "Oh! God knows that I am innocent!"

The glance she darted from beneath her darkly fringed lids spoke even more eloquently than her words; and every feature of her fine countenance seemed to bear testimony to the truth of her declaration.

"Would you not do well to send for your friends?" asked the magistrate, in a kind tone.

These words seemed to touch her most acutely: they summed up as it were all the painful features of her most distressing position.

"Oh! my father—my dear, dear father!" she exclaimed, her countenance expressing so much bitter—bitter anguish, that there was scarcely an unmoistened eye in the court.

"Your worship, I do not wish to prosecute this case—I am sorry I have gone so far," said the diamond-merchant, wiping away the tears from his cheeks—for he was really a good-natured man.

"It is not in my power to stay the proceedings," replied Sir Walter Ferguson. "The evidence is unfortunately strong against the prisoner. She would do well to send for her friends. Let the case stand over for half an hour."

Esther was accordingly conducted into the magistrate's private room, where she was visited by the female-searcher, who endeavoured to persuade her, with as much gentleness as she could command, to mention the residence of her parents.

"Alas! my mother has long been dead," was the mournful reply; "and my poor father—oh! it would break his heart were he to know ——"

She checked herself, and fell into a profound reverie—despair expressed in her countenance. During the remainder of the half hour which intervened ere she was led back to the office, she replied only in vague and unsatisfactory, but not self-inculpating, monosyllables to the questions addressed to her.

At length the female-searcher gave her an indirect intimation, that her punishment on trial would be more lenient if she admitted her guilt and expressed her contrition.

"What!" she exclaimed, with a recovering sob; "do you really deem me culpable of this most heinous charge? My God! have the Christians no mercy—no compassion? Oh! I should not speak thus to you! But I know that our race is looked upon with suspicion: we are prejudged, because we are Jews! And yet," she added, in a different and prouder tone, "there are as noble sentiments—as generous feelings—as estimable qualities amongst the members of the scattered tribe, as in the hearts of those Christians who have persecuted our nation for centuries and centuries!"

The woman, to whom these words were addressed, was astonished at the enthusiastic manner in which the beautiful Jewess spoke; for there was something at that moment sublimely interesting—eloquently commanding about Esther de Medina, as the rich colour glowed more deeply upon her cheeks, the blue veins dilated on her proud forehead, and the whole power of her soul seemed thrown into her magnificent eyes.

It was at this moment that the usher of the court entered to conduct the Jewess back into the office.

Once more she stood in the presence of the magistrate,—now no longer subdued and crushed with terror; but nerved, as it were by conscious innocence, to meet the accusation brought against her.

Tom Rain had returned to the court; and, by mingling with the crowd of spectators, anxiously watched the countenance of Esther de Medina.

"Prisoner," said the magistrate, "have you anything now to offer in your defence? Or have you sent to communicate with your friends relative to the position in which you are placed?"

"Sir," answered Esther, her soft and musical tones falling like a delicious harmony upon the ears, "I have but one word to utter in my defence; and if I did not speak it when I first stood before you, it was simply because this terrible accusation, bursting so abruptly upon the head of an innocent person, stupefied me—deprived me of the power of collecting my ideas. Neither was it until within a moment of my return into the court that the fact which I am about to state flashed to my memory. Sir—I was not in London from two o'clock in the afternoon until half-past ten o'clock at night, on the 31st of October."

A gentle—a very gentle smile played upon her vermilion lips as she uttered these words.

"And it was during the interval which you name that the prosecutor was visited by the female whom he believes to have robbed him of his diamonds?" observed the magistrate.

"I deny having visited the prosecutor at all," answered Esther, in a firm but respectful tone. "I never sold him a ring—I never sold an article of jewellery to a living being. Placed by the honest industry of my father above want," she continued proudly, "I labour not under the necessity of parting with my jewellery to obtain money."

At this moment, a fine, tall, handsome young man, of about six and twenty years of age, entered the court. He was dressed in an elegant but unassuming manner: his bearing was lofty, without being proud; and his fine blue eyes indicated a frank and generous disposition.

Slightly inclining in acknowledgment of the respect with which the crowd made way for him to pass, he advanced towards the magistrate, who instantly recognised him as an acquaintance.

At the same moment, Esther started with surprise, and murmured the name of Lord Ellingham.

To the astonishment of all present—Tom Rain, perhaps, excepted,—the nobleman shook Esther kindly by the hand, saying, "In the name of heaven, Miss de Medina, what unfortunate—or rather ridiculous mistake has brought you hither?"

Sir Walter Ferguson immediately directed the clerk to read over the depositions.

"What!" ejaculated Lord Ellingham, who had scarcely been able to restrain his indignation during the recital of the previous proceedings: "the daughter of a respectable and wealthy gentleman to be placed in such a position as this! But in a moment I will make her innocence apparent. At the very time when this robbery was alleged to have taken place—at the hour when the female, for whom this young lady has evidently been mistaken, called upon the prosecutor—Miss de Medina was not within six miles of Arundel Street."

These words produced in the court a sensation which was the more lively because they seemed to corroborate the prisoner's own defence—a defence which Lord Ellingham had not heard.

Mr. Gordon, the prosecutor, looked astounded—and yet not altogether grieved at the prospect of the prisoner's discharge.

"Mr. de Medina," continued Lord Ellingham, "has only recently arrived in London, having retired from an extensive commercial business which he long carried on at Liverpool. He has become my tenant for a house and small estate situated at a distance of about seven miles from the metropolis; and on the 31st of October I accompanied him and his daughter—the lady now present—on a visit to the property thus leased. We left London in my own carriage at about two o'clock on the day named; and it was between ten and eleven at night when we returned. During that interval of several hours Miss de Medina never quitted her father and myself."

A murmur of satisfaction arose on the part of the spectators; but it was almost immediately interrupted by the entrance of an elderly and venerable-looking man, whose countenance—of that cast which ever characterises the sons of the scattered tribe—had once been strikingly handsome. Though not deficient in an expression of generosity, it nevertheless exhibited great firmness of disposition; and his keen black eyes denoted a resolute, unbending, and determined soul. He was upwards of fifty-five years of age, and was plainly, though neatly, dressed.

Advancing into the body of the court, he cast a rapid glance around.

"My father!" exclaimed Esther; and springing forward, she threw herself into her parent's arms.

He held her tenderly for a few moments: then, gently disengaging himself from her embrace, he murmured in her ear, "Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all! You have brought this upon yourself!"

But these words were heard only by Lord Ellingham, who had advanced to shake hands with the Jew.

That reproach appeared for the moment to be singular and altogether misplaced, as it was impossible that Esther could have perpetrated the crime imputed to her: but the nobleman had not leisure to reflect upon it, for Mr. de Medina now perceived him and accepted the outstretched hand.

"I was accidentally passing by the court," said the Jew; "and hearing my own name mentioned by some loungers outside, paused to listen. Their conversation induced me to make inquiries; and I learnt all the particulars of this charge."

"And some unknown friend of Miss de Medina sent me a hasty note conveying the unpleasant intelligence," answered Lord Ellingham. "But I believe that I have fully convinced his worship of your daughter's innocence."

These last words were uttered in a louder tone than the former part of the observation, and were evidently addressed to the magistrate.

"For my part," said Mr. Gordon, "I am perfectly satisfied that there is a grievous misunderstanding in this matter. Miss de Medina is evidently unconnected with it; and yet," he added, as his eyes dwelt upon her countenance, "never was resemblance so striking! However—I am well pleased to think that Miss de Medina is *not* the person by whom I was plundered; and I most sincerely implore her pardon for the inconvenience—nay, the ignominy to which she has been subjected."

Esther turned an appealing glance towards her father, as if to remind him of some duty which he ought to perform, or to convey some silent prayer which he could well understand: but he affected not to notice that rapid but profoundly significant glance.

The magistrate then declared that the young lady was discharged, without the slightest stain upon her character.

Hastily drawing down her thick black veil, Esther de Medina bowed deferentially to the bench; and passed out of the office, leaning on her father's arm, and accompanied by the Earl of Ellingham.

Tom Rain followed her with his eyes until the door closed behind her.

For a few moments he remained wrapped up in a deep reverie: then, heaving a profound sigh, he also took his departure.

CHAPTER V.
THE APPEAL OF LOVE.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the day on which so many strange incidents occurred at Bow Street, that Lady Hatfield was reclining in a melancholy mood upon the sofa in the drawing-room of her splendid mansion.

She was dressed in black satin, which set off the beauty of her complexion to the greatest advantage.

One of her fair hands drooped over the back of the sofa: the other listlessly held a book, to the perusal of which she had vainly endeavoured to settle herself.

There was a mysterious air of mournfulness about her that contrasted strangely with the elegance of the apartment, the cheerful blaze of the fire, the brilliant lustre of the lamps, and the general appearance of wealth and luxury by which she was surrounded.

That sorrowful expression, too, was the more unaccountable, inasmuch as the social position of Georgiana Hatfield seemed to be enviable in the extreme. Beautiful in person, possessing rank and wealth, and free to follow her own inclinations, she might have shone the star of fashion—the centre of that human galaxy whose sphere is the West End of London.

Oh! bright—gloriously bright are the planets which move in that heaven of their own:—and yet how useless is their brilliancy! The planets of God's own sky are made to bestow their light upon the orbs which without them would revolve in darkness; but the planets of the sphere of aristocracy and fashion throw not a single ray upon the millions of inferior stars which are compelled to circle around them!

To Lady Hatfield the pleasures and dissipation of the West End were unwelcome; and she seldom entered into society, save when a refusal would prove an offence. Up to the age of seventeen or eighteen she had been remarkable for a happy, joyous, and gay disposition: but a sudden change came over her at that period of her life; and since then her habits had grown retired—her disposition mournful.

But let us return to her, as she lay reclining on the sofa in the drawing-room.

The robbery of the preceding night and the events of the morning had evidently produced a powerful impression upon her mind. At times an expression of acute anguish distorted her fair countenance for a moment; and once or twice she compressed her lips forcibly, as if to restrain a burst of mental agony.

The time-piece upon the mantel had just proclaimed the hour of eight, when a domestic entered the room and announced the Earl of Ellingham.

Georgiana started up—assumed a placid expression of countenance—and advanced to receive the young nobleman, who, as he took her hand, respectfully pressed it to his lips.

"Your ladyship will, I hope, pardon me for intruding at this hour," he said, as he conducted her back to the sofa, and then took a chair at a short distance; "but I was not aware of your return to town until an hour ago, when I perused in the evening paper an account of the outrage of last night and the investigation at Bow Street this morning. How annoying it must have been to you, my dear Lady Hatfield, to have gone through the ordeal of a visit to a police-court!"

"There is something gloomy and dispiriting in the aspect of these tribunals which the crimes of the human race have rendered necessary," observed Georgiana. "The countenances of those persons whom I beheld at the police-office this morning, had all a certain sinister expression which I cannot define, but which seemed to proclaim that they never contemplated aught save the dark side of society."

"The same idea struck me this day," said Lord Ellingham: "for I also paid a visit to Bow Street—and scarcely an hour, I should conceive, after you must have left the office. But enough of this subject: the words *Bow Street—Police*—and *Tribunal* grate painfully upon the ear even of the innocent,—that is, if they possess hearts capable of sorrowing for the woes and crimes of their fellow-creatures. Lady Hatfield," continued the Earl, drawing his chair a little closer, "it was to converse upon another topic—yes, another and a more tender topic—that I have hastened to your presence this evening."

Georgiana was about to reply;—but the words died upon her quivering lips—and an oppressive feeling kept her silent.

"Yes, my dear Lady Hatfield," continued the Earl, drawing his chair still more nigh,—"I can no longer exist in this state of suspense. During the whole of last winter I was often in your society: you were kind enough to permit my visits—and it was impossible to be much with you, and not learn to love you. You departed suddenly for the country last July: but I dared not follow—for you had not even informed me of your intended retirement from London at so early a period. Pardon me if I say I felt hurt,—yes, *hurt*, Lady Hatfield,—because I loved you! And yet never—during that interval of four months—has your image been absent from my mind: and

now I am again attracted towards you by a spell stronger than my powers of resistance. Oh! you must long ago have read my heart, Georgiana:—say, then—*can* you, *do* you love me in return?"

There was something so sincere—so earnest—and yet so manly in the fluent language of the Earl of Ellingham,—his fine countenance was lighted up with so animated an expression of hope and love,—and his eyes bore such complete testimony to the candour of his speech,—that Georgiana must have been ungenerous indeed had she heard that appeal with coldness.

Nor was it so; and the Earl read in the depths of her melting blue orbs a sentiment reciprocal with his own.

"My lord—Arthur," she murmured, "you ask me if I *can* love—if I *do* love you:—and, oh! you know not the pang which that question excites in my heart! Yes," she added hastily, seeing that the Earl was astonished at her words, "I *do* love you, Arthur—for you are all that is good, generous, and handsome! But—my God!—how can I force my lips to utter the sad avowal——"

"Speak, Georgiana—speak, I conjure you!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham: "you alarm me! Oh! keep me not in suspense! You say that you love me——"

"I never loved until I knew you—I shall never love another," answered Georgiana, fixing her deep, silently expressive, and intellectual eyes upon the countenance of the Earl.

"A thousand thanks for that declaration, my heart's sole joy!" he cried in an impassioned tone; and, falling on his knees by the side of the sofa, he threw his arms around her—he clasped her to his breast—his lips pressed hers for the first time.

But that joy lasted only for a moment.

With rebounding heart—and with almost a scream of anguish—Georgiana drew herself back, and abruptly repulsed her ardent lover: then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into a flood of tears.

"My God! what signifies this strange conduct?" ejaculated the Earl, as, with wounded pride, he retreated a few paces from the weeping lady.

"Forgive me—forgive me, Arthur!" she wildly cried, turning her streaming eyes towards him in a beseeching manner. "I am unhappy—very unhappy—and you should pity me!"

"Pity *you*!" exclaimed the Earl, again approaching the sofa, and taking her hand, which she did not attempt to withdraw: "how can *you* be an object of pity? Beautiful—beloved by one whose life shall be devoted to ensure the felicity of yours——"

"Oh! your generous affection, Arthur, gives me more pain than all the rest!" cried Georgiana, in a rapid—half-hysterical tone. "As a weak woman, I have dared to love you—as an imprudent one, I have confessed that love;—but now," she added, in a slower and firmer tone, while her vermilion lips quivered with a bitter smile,—"now, as a strong woman—as a woman restored to a sense of duty—do I make the avowal—and my heart is ready to break as I thus speak——"

"Good heavens! relieve me from this cruel—this agonizing suspense!" passionately exclaimed the Earl.

"I will—I will," returned Lady Hatfield. "Arthur—dearly, fondly, devotedly as I love you,—proud as I should be to call you my husband,—happy, happy as I should feel to link my fate with yours,—alas! it cannot be:—never—never!" she added with a frantic vehemence that caused every chord to thrill in the heart of her admirer.

"Georgiana, is this possible?" he asked, in a faint tone, while a deadly pallor overspread his countenance.

"Would that it were *not*!" she murmured, clasping her hands together in visible anguish of soul.

"And yet it is incomprehensible!" cried the Earl, starting back, and even manifesting somewhat of impatience. "You are not a foolish girl who takes delight in trifling with the sincere attachment of an honest man who adores her:—you are not a heartless coquette, looking upon her admirer as a slave whom she is justified to torture. No—no: you yourself possess a generous soul—you have no sympathy with the frivolous portion of your sex—you are as strong-minded, as sincere as you are beautiful. Tell me, then, Georgiana—what signifies this strange contradiction? You love me—you would be happy and proud to become mine;—and yet—my God!—and yet you the next moment annihilate every hope in my breast!"

"Alas! how unpardonable must my conduct seem—how inexplicable my behaviour!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield, in a tone of despair. "I am not indeed a heartless coquette—nor a weak frivolous girl:—in the sincerity of my heart do I speak, Arthur;—and if you be generous you will forgive me—but I never can be thine!"

"Then you love another!" cried the Earl, impatiently.

"Have I not solemnly assured you that I never loved till I knew you—and shall never, never love again!" she added, with a convulsive sob, as if her heart were breaking.

"But perhaps you were betrothed to another in your youth:—peradventure that *other* has some sacred pledge—some irrevocable bond ——"

"No—no: I am my own mistress—none can control me!" interrupted Georgiana, her nervous state of excitement growing each moment more painful.

"And your uncle—your friends—your advisers?" said the Earl,—"it is possible that *they* have become acquainted with my attachment towards you—that *they* have some motive to counsel you against my suit?"

"On the contrary——But, my God! do not question me thus!" almost shrieked the unhappy lady. "I shall go mad—I shall go mad!"

"Oh! there is some dreadful mystery in all this!" cried the Earl; "and I too shall go mad if it be not explained! Merciful heavens! a terrible suspicion flashes across my mind. And yet—no—no, it cannot be,—for you declare that you never loved another! Still—still, what motive, save *that*, can render you thus resolute not to become mine? Georgiana," he said, sinking his voice to a low tone, and speaking with a solemn seriousness which had something even awful in its effect,—"Georgiana, I conjure you to answer me,—*me*, who am your devoted lover and your sincerest friend,—as you would reply to your God! Say—if in your giddy and inexperienced girlhood—ignorant through extreme innocence of the snare spread for you—and in a moment of weakness—you——"

"Just heavens! that you should suppose me criminal—guilty!" shrieked Georgiana, covering her face with her hands.

"Pardon—pardon!" cried the Earl, again falling on his knees at the feet of her whom he adored; and, forcibly possessing himself of one of her hands, he conveyed it to his lips. "Pardon me for the outrageous idea that I dared to express—forgive the insulting suspicion which for a moment occupied my mind! Alas! alas! that I should have provoked the look of indignation which you ere now cast upon me, when I withdrew your hand from before your eyes! But, ah—now you smile—and I am forgiven!"

Georgiana *did* smile—but in a manner so plaintively melancholy, that, although it implied forgiveness for the injurious suspicion, it still conveyed no hope!

There was a long and mournful pause.

The Earl of Ellingham burned to penetrate the deep mystery in which the conduct of Lady Hatfield was shrouded; and yet he knew not what other hypothesis to suggest.

He had no rival in her affections—her friends offered no objection to his suit—she was under no pledge to bestow her hand upon any particular individual—and the evanescent suspicion that she might have once been frail and was too honourable to bring a polluted person to the marriage-bed, had been banished beyond the possibility of return:—what, then, could influence her conduct?

He knew not how to elicit the truth; and yet his happiness was too deeply interested to permit him to depart in uncertainty and suspense.

"Georgiana," he said, at length, and speaking in a tone which showed how profoundly his feelings were excited,—"I appeal to your sense of justice whether you have acted candidly and generously in respect to me? Throughout the whole of last winter you permitted my visits—I will not say encouraged them, because you have too much delicacy to have done that. But you were never denied to me; and you gave me not to understand that my calls were unwelcome, when they began to exceed the usual limits of mere friendly visits. At length my attentions became marked towards you,—and you must have read my feelings in my manner—my language—and my attentions. Alas! why did you permit me to encourage the blossoming of hopes which are now so cruelly blighted by the unaccountable decision that you have uttered to-day?"

"Oh! do not reproach me, Arthur!" exclaimed Georgiana: "and yet I know that I have acted imprudently. But it was so sweet to be beloved by you, that I had not courage to destroy the charming vision! At length I took a decided step—or at least what seemed to me to be so: I departed suddenly to my uncle's country-seat, without previously intimating my resolution to you. And remember—no avowal of affection on your part had then met my ears; and it was impossible that I could have acquainted you with my proposed departure, even if I had wished so to do—because I did not *see* you on the day when I determined to quit London: and had I *written* to you then, would you not have thought that my note conveyed a hint for you to follow me?"

"Fool—idiot that I was not to have declared my passion months and months ago!" ejaculated the Earl. "But say, Georgiana—had I solicited your hand last summer, ere you left London, would those reasons which influence you now——"

"Yes—they were in existence then," was the hasty reply.

"And am I to remain in ignorance of the motives which compel you to refuse my suit?" asked Lord Ellingham bitterly. "Is there no chance of their influence ceasing? Oh! give me but a glimpse of hope, and so powerful is my attachment—so devoted my love——"

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Georgiana wildly,—"am I then to lose such a man as this?"

And again she clasped her hands convulsively together.

"Oh! you love me—you *do* love me, my angel," cried the Earl; "and yet you refuse me! What stern fate—what terrible destiny can possibly separate us! This mystery is appalling!"

"And a mystery it must remain," said Georgiana, suddenly assuming that quiet and passive manner which indicated despair.

"Then farewell, Lady Hatfield," exclaimed the Earl; "and be not surprised if I must attribute the disappointment—the anguish—the deep humiliation which I now experience, to some inexplicable caprice of the female mind. But, madam," he added, drawing himself up haughtily, and speaking in a tone of offended pride, "the Earl of Ellingham, whose wealth and rank may enable him to vie with the mightiest peers of England, will not be made the sport of the whims and wavering fancies of even the beautiful Lady Hatfield."

Thus speaking, the nobleman bowed coldly, and advanced towards the door.

"Oh! this is cruel—this is cruel!" cried Georgiana, throwing herself hysterically back upon the sofa.

"No, madam—it is you who are cruel to reject the honourable suit of one like me without deigning to vouchsafe an explanation," said the Earl, persisting in his severity of tone and manner against the promptings of his generous nature, but with the hope of eliciting a satisfactory reply.

"Then go, my lord—depart—leave me!" cried Georgiana; "for I never can be yours!" The Earl lingered for a moment: convulsive sobs broke from the lips of the unhappy Lady Hatfield—but not a word to invite him to remain! His pride would not permit him to offer farther entreaty;—and, suffering cruelly at heart, he rushed from the room. In less than a minute Georgiana heard the street-door close; and then, burying her face in the cushion of the sofa, she gave way unrestrainedly to all the violence of her grief.

CHAPTER VI.
DR. LASCELLES.

The interview between Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham was as long as it was painful: and ten o'clock struck by the thousand churches of London, as the nobleman quitted the mansion.

There was such a fierce struggle in his breast between wounded pride and fervent affection, that his sorrow for the blighted hope of the latter was rendered less acute by being united with the indignation inspired by the former.

In spite of his generous nature, he could not help thinking that he had been trifled with to some extent; for it naturally seemed preposterous that Georgiana should refuse him without a candid explanation of the motives, and when every earthly circumstance appeared favourable to their union.

Then, again, he pondered upon the wildness of her grief—the delirious anguish which she had shown at several stages of their interview—her solemn avowal of love for him alone—and her voluntary assurance that she should be happy and proud to call him her husband. He moreover reflected upon the steadiness of her character—her aversion to the frivolities of the fashionable world—her apparent candour of disposition—and her total want of any thing approaching to coquetry;—and he endeavoured to persuade himself that he had acted harshly by leaving her in anger.

"Yet what alternative had I?" he asked himself; "and would not any other man have in the same way cut short an interview of so mysterious and unsatisfactory—so perplexing and humiliating a nature?"

Alas! the Earl of Ellingham found himself the very next minute dwelling with an aching and compassionate heart upon the agonised state in which he had left the being whom he so tenderly loved:—he thought of her fascinating beauty—her bewitching manners—her well-cultivated mind—her amiable disposition;—and then he said within himself, "Oh! if I have indeed lost *her*, I have lost an angel!"

He had reached the immediate vicinity of Hatchett's Hotel, when he turned back with the resolution of seeking another interview with Georgiana.

But scarcely had he retraced ten steps of the way, ere he stopped short, and asked himself what advantage could be gained by such a proceeding?

"The decision is given," he reasoned: "she can never—*never* be mine! Wherefore should I renew *her* grief and *my* humiliation—evoke fresh tears from *her* eyes, and add sharpness to the sting of *my* disappointment? No: it may not be! Some terrible mystery shrouds her conduct from my penetration;—but shall I, who am defeated in love, give way to a base sentiment of curiosity? It would be unmanly—ignoble—cowardly to attempt to extort her secret from *her*,—for a profound secret she doubtless cherishes—a secret which has this evening influenced her conduct! And perhaps," he thought, following the natural channel of his meditations, "that secret is of a nature which a modest woman could not reveal to one of the opposite sex?"

This idea, suddenly flashing across his brain, suggested a proceeding which, after a few minutes of profound reflection, he determined to adopt.

Passing rapidly up Dover Street, Lord Ellingham entered Grafton Street, where he knocked at a door on which was a brass-plate engraved with the name of DR. LASCELLES.

The physician was at home; and the nobleman was immediately ushered into a parlour, where he was shortly joined by the individual whom he sought.

Dr. Lascelles was a short, thin, sallow-faced man of about fifty. He had small, restless, sparkling eyes, a prim mouth, and an intelligent though by no means prepossessing countenance. He was devoted to the art which he practised, and was reputed the most scientific man of the whole faculty. His anatomical researches had been prosecuted with an energy and a perseverance which afforded occupation to half the resurrection-men in London, and more than once to the doctor's own personal danger in respect to the law. It was whispered in well-informed circles that he never hesitated to encounter any peril in order to possess himself of the corpse of a person who died of an unusual malady. His devotion to anatomy had materially blunted his feelings and deadened the kinder sympathies of his nature; but his immense talents, added to a reputation acquired by several wonderful cures, rendered him the most fashionable physician of the day.

Such was the medical gentleman whom Lord Ellingham called to consult.

"Excuse this late visit, doctor," said the Earl; "but I knew that I might take the liberty of intruding upon you."

"The words *early* and *late* are not in my vocabulary, so far as they regard myself," was the reply. "My hours are at the disposal of my patrons, amongst whom I have the honour to include your lordship."

"Then, without farther apology, I shall proceed to state the object of my visit," said the nobleman.

"Give me your hand—you look dejected—you are very pale—your pulse——"

"It is not concerning myself altogether that I have to speak," interrupted the Earl, withdrawing the hand which the doctor had seized: "I wish to consult you upon a subject intimately affecting my happiness."

The physician looked surprised, and drew his chair closer to that in which the Earl was seated.

"To tell you the truth," continued Arthur, "I am deeply enamoured of a lady whose social position, beauty, fortune, and intellect render her in every way worthy to become my wife."

"Well—why don't you propose to her?" demanded the physician drily.

"I have—and am rejected," was the answer, accompanied by a profound sigh.

"The devil!" said the physician. "But what can I do for you in the matter? Surely your lordship does not believe in philtres and love-draughts?"

"Ridiculous!" cried the Earl impatiently. "If you will grant me a few moments, I will explain myself."

Dr. Lascelles folded his arms, threw himself back in the chair, and prepared to listen to his young friend's narrative.

"The lady to whom I am attached," continued the Earl, "is, as I ere now informed you, in every way worthy of an alliance with me; and she is moreover deeply attached to me. She has never loved another, and declares that she never can. No apparent circumstances interfere with our union; and she has done me the honour to assure me that she should be alike proud and happy to own me as her husband. She is entirely her own mistress; and, even if she were not, her friends would present no barrier to our marriage. Yet she refuses me—and for some mysterious cause which she will not explain. I have just left her,—left her in a state of anguish such as I never before witnessed—such as I hope never to behold again!"

"Perhaps she has been guilty of some weakness which she is afraid you would discover?" suggested Dr. Lascelles.

"Oh! no—no," exclaimed Arthur, enthusiastically: "in an unguarded moment—carried away by a hasty suspicion of the kind—I hinted at that possibility,—and I soon repented of my rashness! The lady's countenance flushed with a glow of honest indignation; and, instantly veiling her blushes with her hand, she burst into tears. I could pledge my existence, doctor, that she is purity itself."

"But wherefore do you consult me in the matter?" asked Lascelles.

"You must admit, doctor," answered Ellingham, "that my position is a singular one in reference to the lady of whom I speak. What am I to conjecture? Suspense is terrible; and yet, not for worlds would I again attempt to extort her secret from her."

"The motive may be a physical one," said the doctor.

"That was the idea which ere now struck me, and which has brought me hither to consult you!" exclaimed the Earl.

"She may be the prey to some insidious disease which impairs not her exterior aspect at present," continued Doctor Lascelles; "say, for instance, a cancer in the breast. Or again, her motive may be a moral one; inasmuch as she may be aware, from some secret warnings, that she is in danger of suffering an aberration of reason."

"And if the lady were a patient of your own, doctor," asked the Earl, "should you be enabled to judge whether she were menaced by that dreadful mental malady to which you have alluded?"

"Decidedly so," replied the physician.

The Earl rose from his seat, and walked two or three times up and down the apartment.

Dr. Lascelles followed him with his eyes; and as he surveyed the strong, well-knit, but slender and graceful form of the young nobleman, the votary of science could not help thinking what a splendid skeleton he would make.

At length the Earl stopped abruptly opposite the doctor, and said in an impressive tone, "You will never reveal the particulars of this interview?"

"It is scarcely probable," returned Lascelles, with a smile.

"But you promise me—you pledge your word never to breathe a syllable which may betray the motive of my present visit or the topic of our conversation?" persisted the Earl.

"Never," exclaimed the physician.

"Then listen," said the Earl, sinking his voice almost to a whisper;—"the lady of whom I have spoken, is——"

"Lady Hatfield," observed Lascelles.

"What! you have guessed——"

"Simply because every one said last winter that you were dying for her," interrupted the doctor coolly; "and therefore I presume you have availed yourself of her ladyship's return to town to place your coronet at her feet."

"Yes—I do allude to Georgiana, whose professional attendant you are," cried the Earl. "And believe me when I solemnly declare that no sentiment of impertinent curiosity——"

"Never mind the motives," said the doctor: "let us keep to the facts. I have known Lady Hatfield for upwards of five years; and I can

positively assure your lordship that there is not the slightest cause, physical or moral, with which I am acquainted, that can influence her conduct towards you."

"Then, what can this mystery be?" exclaimed Arthur, more perplexed than ever. "My God! must I again fall back upon the hypothesis of a woman's idle caprice—the theory of her unaccountable whims? Is she the victim of an idiosyncracy which she cannot control? and must I be made its sport?"

"Throughout the sphere of my extensive practice," observed Dr. Lascelles, "I know not a woman less likely to be swayed by idle caprice or unaccountable whims than Lady Hatfield. Her mind is strong—her intellect bright and uncharacterised by the slightest eccentricity. I have, however, frequently observed that her ladyship is the prey to a secret melancholy—that she has her dark moments, as one may denominate them; but at those times the vigour of her soul is not subdued to a degree that would produce so strange a result as a decision affecting her own happiness. You say she loves you——"

"I have not a doubt of the sincerity of her attachment!" cried the Earl emphatically.

"And yet she will not marry you?" said the doctor. "I cannot comprehend it."

"Nor I," observed Arthur, with exceeding bitterness of tone. "My happiness is at stake. What can I do? Had she explained the motive of her refusal, and were that motive a strong one,—did it reveal some cause which would render our union infelicitous,—I might have borne up against this cruel—cruel disappointment. My love for her would then have been converted, by admiration of her generous candour, into a permanent friendship; and we might henceforth have met as brother and sister. But how can I ever visit her again? how can I meet her? Beautiful and amiable as she is, I adore her;—and yet I dare not in future trust myself in her presence! No:—I must crush this love in my heart—stifle it—subdue it altogether! Oh! fool that I am to talk thus;—as if it were practicable to forget her—as if it were possible to cease to worship her! Ere now, as I walked through the streets, I endeavoured to blunt the keenness of my affection by placing it in contact with the amount of wrong which I deemed myself to have experienced at her hands. But, unjustly perhaps as she has treated me—humiliated as I felt and still feel myself to be—chagrined—disappointed—rejected without explanation,—oh! all these injuries are absorbed in the immensity of the love which I bear her!"

And in a state of extraordinary excitement, Arthur paced the room with agitated steps.

The doctor sate musing upon his chair. He had ever been too much devoted to scientific pursuits to afford leisure for the delights of love; and though he was married, he had entered the connubial state only through motives of self-interest. Well aware that ladies prefer a medical attendant whose propriety of conduct is—or at least appears to be—guaranteed by marriage, he had one day cast his mental eyes around the circle of his acquaintance; and his glances were at length fixed upon a wealthy widow who was one of his patients. Jumping into his cab, he called upon her, and, in order not to waste time, proposed while he felt her pulse: she simpered an assent—and, as she could not name the day, he did it for her while he wrote out a prescription. Then he pocketed her guinea all the same—not through meanness, but from the regularity of professional habit; and had she offered him a fee as an acknowledgment for his loss of time on the morning when they issued from the church, he would also have taken it. This union was sterile; but the doctor found that he had obtained an excellent wife, who kept his house in good order—did the honours of his table to admiration—and never interrupted him when he was engaged in his study.

We have only introduced this little episode in the life of Dr. Lascelles, just to convince our readers that he was not at all the man to comprehend the vehemence of Lord Ellingham's love. Thus, while the nobleman was pacing the apartment in the manner described above, and declaiming in reference to his passion, the physician was meditating profoundly upon the conduct of Lady Hatfield in refusing so excellent a match. His mind, habituated to connect every thing as much as possible with the special sphere of science wherein he moved, soon lost itself in a field of conjecture as to whether there might not be some physical cause, carefully concealed even from himself, which would elucidate the mystery. The result of his meditations was not at all satisfactory to himself; but he resolved that he would not allow the matter to remain just where it was.

This determination he did not, however, communicate to Lord Ellingham, who took his leave more bewildered than ever as to the motive which could have possibly induced Lady Hatfield to assure him of her love and yet refuse him her hand.

CHAPTER VII.
THE BEAUTIFUL PATIENT.

Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed since Lord Ellingham took his departure from the doctor's abode, and the learned gentleman himself was still pondering on the strange communication which had been made to him, when a loud and hasty knock at the front-door echoed through the house.

A servant answered the summons, and in a few moments ushered Tom Rain into the presence of Dr. Lascelles.

"Sir," said the visitor, who was painfully excited, "a female—a young woman in whom I am deeply interested—has taken poison. Come with me this instant, I implore you."

Dr. Lascelles snatched up his hat, and followed Rainford without pausing to ask a single question. A hackney-coach was waiting at the door: the two individuals leapt in; and the vehicle drove rapidly away.

The doctor now thought it expedient to make a few inquiries relative to the case which was about to engage his attention.

"What poison has the young woman taken?" he asked.

"Arsenic," was the reply: "for I found the paper which had contained it."

"And how long ago?"

"Ten minutes before I knocked at your door."

"Has there been any vomiting?"

"I did not delay a single moment in hastening to fetch you, after the unhappy creature took the poison; and therefore I am unable to answer that question."

The physician remained silent; and in a few minutes the coach stopped at a house in South Moulton Street.

The door was opened by a servant-girl; and Rainford led the physician to a bed-room on the second floor, whither the servant-girl followed them.

By the light of a candle placed upon a chest of drawers, Dr. Lascelles beheld a young female of great beauty, and with no other garment on than her night-dress, writhing in excruciating agonies upon the bed. From the reply given by the servant-girl to a question put by the doctor, it appeared that the young lady had been seized with violent vomiting the moment after Tom Rain had left to procure medical aid; and Lascelles accordingly proceeded to adopt the usual treatment which is pursued in such cases.[1]

In the course of half an hour the patient was pronounced to be out of danger; and Tom Rain, who had in the meantime manifested the utmost anxiety and uneasiness, now exhibited a proportionate liveliness of joy.

"Shall I recover, sir! Oh! tell me—shall I recover?" asked the young woman in a strange, thrilling, piteous tone, as she fixed her large dark eyes upon the countenance of the physician.

"You are in a fair way to survive this mad—this wicked attempt upon your life," answered Lascelles, in a compassionately reproachful rather than a severe tone. "But you must be kept quiet—and all sources of mental irritation must be removed or forgotten as much as possible," he added, glancing towards Rainford.

"Oh! sir—do not imagine for a moment that *he* will upbraid or ill-treat me!" exclaimed the young woman, darting a fond look towards Tom Rain: then, drawing a long and heavy respiration, she said in a different and more subdued tone, "In justice to *him*, doctor, I must assure you that no harshness on *his* part urged me to this shocking deed: but——"

"Yes, my dearest girl," interrupted Rain, rushing to the bed, and taking one of her hands which he pressed fondly to his lips, "I *did* upbraid you—I *did* speak severely to you——"

"No—no—not more than I deserved!" cried the young woman: "for I was very wrong—oh! I was very wrong! But say, Tom, can you forgive me?"

"He does forgive you—he has forgiven you," exclaimed the physician. "And now abandon that subject, which is naturally a painful one. To-morrow morning I shall call and see you early."

Dr. Lascelles took up his hat to depart, and Rainford followed him into the passage, where he said in a low but earnest tone, "One word, sir, in private! Please to step into this room."

And he conducted the physician into a front apartment, the door of which he carefully closed.

"In the first place, sir," began Rainford when they were thus alone together, "allow me to thank you for your prompt and effectual aid in this most painful affair;"—and he slipped five guineas into the doctor's hand. "Secondly, let me implore of you to grant the favour which I am about to ask."

"Speak, sir," said Lascelles; "and if your request be not inconsistent with my honour as a physician and as a gentleman——"

"Far from it!" exclaimed Rainford. "It is this:—Promise me, on your solemn word of honour, *as a physician and as a gentleman*, that, when once your professional visits here have ceased, you will forget that you ever beheld that young woman who is lying in the next room. Promise me, I say, in the most binding manner, that should you ever henceforth meet her, alone or in company, you will not even appear to recognise her, much less attempt to speak to her, unless you be formally introduced to her, when you will consider your acquaintance with her to begin only from the moment of such introduction. Promise me all this, sir, I implore you—for you know not what vitally important interests may be compromised by your conduct in this matter."

"I have not the slightest objection to tranquillise your mind by giving the pledge which you demand," returned Dr. Lascelles, without a moment's hesitation.

"A thousand thanks, sir!" cried Rainford joyfully. "You fully understand the precise nature of the reserve and silence which I require?"

"Never to allude in any way to the incident of this night, nor to appear to recognise elsewhere nor henceforth the young lady whom I have just seen," said the doctor. "You may rely upon me: the secret shall never transpire from my lips."

"Again I express my gratitude," cried Rainford, with undisguised satisfaction.

Dr. Lascelles then took his leave; and, as he retraced his way to Grafton Street, he never once ceased to think of the strange promise which he had been required to give in respect to the beautiful creature who had made so resolute an attempt upon her own existence.

On the following morning, shortly after eight o'clock, the physician's cab stopped at the door of the house in South Moulton Street; but, to his surprise, he learnt from the landlady that Mr. and Mrs. Jameson (by which names Rainford and the young woman had been known at their lodgings) had taken their departure at seven o'clock, before it was even light.

"Had they resided long with you?" inquired the doctor.

"Only a week, sir," was the answer. "The lady kept herself very quiet, and seldom went out. When she did, she always had a thick black veil over her face; and, you may think it strange, sir—but it's true for all that—which is, sir, that I never once caught a glimpse of her countenance all the time she was in this house. But the servant-gal says she was very beautiful—very beautiful indeed! *You* must, however, be able to judge whether that report is true or not, sir?"

"I know little, and think less of those matters, my good woman," said the doctor hastily; and, returning to his cab, he drove off to visit another patient.

1. The first great object which we must keep in view, is to promote the speedy evacuation of the stomach: if the poison itself has not produced vomiting, from ten to twenty grains of sulphate of zinc must be given if it can be readily procured; this generally acts as a powerful emetic. If this, however, cannot be obtained, a mustard emetic should be administered, and the vomiting promoted by drinking large quantities of barley water, linseed tea, milk or tepid water: the two first being of a mucilaginous nature are to be preferred; tickling the back of the throat with a feather will often cause the stomach to reject its contents. It frequently happens that this treatment alone is sufficient for relief in accidents of this nature. After the stomach has been cleansed by the emetic, &c., as described above, lime-water, or chalk diffused in water, if it can be procured, may be given in large quantities. Hahnemann has recommended soap to be dissolved in water, in the proportion of a pound to four pints, and a tea-cupful to be given every five or six minutes; this undoubtedly is the best treatment if lime-water is not at hand. Powdered charcoal may also be administered with advantage if the other remedies are not immediately attainable. The above remedies may be used with some degree of confidence, although their good effects are not sufficiently certain to establish them as "antidotes."—*Ready Remedies in Cases of Poisoning, &c. By James Johnson, M.R.C.S.*

CHAPTER VIII.
SEVEN DIALS.

There is not in all London a more extraordinary locality than that which bears the denomination of Seven Dials.

Situate in the midst of one of the lowest and worst neighbourhoods throughout the metropolis, and forming a focus where seven streets, converging towards that point, meet like as many streams flowing into a common reservoir, the open spot of ground called Seven Dials is a lounge for all the idle vagabonds and ill-looking persons, men and women, who occupy the cellars and garrets in the vicinity.

From the centre of the open space alluded to, the eyes may plunge their glances down into the circumjacent thoroughfares—narrow, dark, filthy, and formed by dwellings of an appearance so miserable or so repulsive that they equally pain the heart and shock the sight.

If the wanderer amidst the mazes of this vast city were desired to point out the chosen abode of poverty and crime, taking as his guide the physical aspect of all the worst neighbourhoods, he would probably indicate Seven Dials and its branching streets.

The shops are all of the lowest and dirtiest description; nauseous odours impregnate the atmosphere. In winter the streets are knee-deep in mud, save when hardened by the frost; and in summer they are strewed with the putrefying remnants of vegetables, offal, and filth of every description.

Half-naked children paddle about in the mire or wallow on the heaps of decomposing substances just alluded to,—greedily devouring the parings of turnips and carrots, sucking the marrow out of the rotting bones, and rejoicing when they happen to find a mouldy crust, a morsel of putrid meat, or the maggot-eaten head of a fish. Neglected beings, too, are they—knowing nothing save blows, curses, and hunger at home, and learning naught save every corrupt habit and ruinous vice abroad.

How can we be surprised if such an infancy becomes imbued with those evil principles which gaols and treadmills only tend afterwards to confirm, and which give ample promise of occupation for turnkeys, penal-settlements, and the hangman?

The Established Church is maintained at an annual expense of several millions sterling; the clergy belonging to that Church claim the right of educating and instructing the people;—and yet in no country in the civilised world is there such an appalling amount of juvenile depravity as in England!

For ourselves, we declare—we repeat that our Government, our Legislature, our Clergy, and our Great Landowners are all guilty of the blackest turpitude in permitting hundreds of thousands—aye, millions of children to be neglected in so horrible a manner. If a child be seized with a malignant, infectious, and dangerous disease, what would be said of the father who looked on indifferently—who omitted to call in medical advice—and who beheld, with equal calmness, the furious malady spreading amongst the rest of his offspring! Should we not denounce—should we not execrate such a man as a monster deserving of any penalty which our statutes could inflict?

Yes—a thousand times *yes*!

By a parity of reasoning, then, do we hold up to abhorrence those men who seize upon the reins of power merely to gratify their own selfish ambition; also those men who accept seats in the legislative assemblies, and fritter away the time of a great nation in their own party-squabbles,—those men, too, who put on black gowns, preach sermons as a duty rendered in return for the enjoyment of enormous revenues, and then declaim against the wickedness of those millions whom they do not attempt to reform,—and, lastly, those men who wring the sweat from the poor man's brow to distil pearls for themselves, but who care not for the welfare of that poor man's offspring!

Hundreds of thousands of pounds are annually subscribed to further the objects of foreign missions, the scene of whose labours is in far-off lands scarcely known to us by name, and amongst a race with whom our sympathies cannot exist;—but beneath our very eyes—crossing our paths—constantly displaying their loathsome rags to our view, are small children innumerable, whose only training is for the prison, the hulks, and the gallows!

Talk not to us of christianizing Barbarians in the remote islands of the South Seas, when the children of so many of our own fellow-countrymen and country-women are but barbarous Christians at home!

Let the reader who imagines that we exaggerate the amount of the evil we denounce,—let him take his stand, any evening, in the midst of Seven Dials, and well consider the scenes around him.

It is said that there are Seven Cardinal Sins: at the point where we would wish our sceptical reader to post himself, he may command a view of seven streets, each one presenting to his contemplation some new phase in the common sphere of hideous poverty and terrible demoralisation.

Mark the population of that neighbourhood, consisting of seven principal streets, with all their connecting lanes and alleys—with their

dark, filthy courts, and their murderous-looking nooks and passages!

Of what does this population consist?

Men brutalised by drink, or rendered desperate by poverty, and in either state ready to commit a crime,—women of squalid, wasted, and miserable appearance, who, being beaten by their husbands and fathers, revenge themselves upon their children or their little brothers and sisters,—poor shopkeepers who endeavour to make up for the penury of their petty dealings by cheating their famished customers,—wretched boys and girls whose growth is stunted by suffering, whose forms are attenuated through want, and whose minds are poisoned by the scenes of vice, dissipation, and immorality which open upon them at their very birth!

What hope—what promise for the future do such beings as these hold out?

In consternation and sorrow, mingled with the most awful misgivings, do we survey the picture which we are now compelled to draw;—and our feelings are thus painful because we know this picture to be correct!

And yet we call our country "MERRY ENGLAND!"

Merciful Heavens! what a mockery is this name! Can England be merry while the most hideous poverty is the lot of half her population; while her workhouses are crowded with miserable beings who must for ever resign all hope or idea of again enjoying the comforts of "home;" while the streets are filled with loathsome wretches, clad in filthy rags, which barely cover them,—shivering with the cold, or fainting beneath the intolerable heat—and spurned from the doors not only of the rich, but also of the very officers appointed to relieve distress; while the poor mother, maddened with the idea of her own destitution and houseless condition, presses her famishing child to her breast which yields no milk, and then rushes in desperation to consign the innocent being to the waters of the nearest stream; while the wretched father stifles his children that he may hush for ever in their throats the cry of "Bread! bread!"—that vain and useless cry to which he cannot respond; while innocent babes and prattling infants bear upon their countenances and exhibit in their attenuated frames all the traces of the dread and agonising pangs of a constant gnawing—craving—never satisfied hunger; and while hundreds annually *die* around us of starvation and absolute want?

Merry England, indeed! What? is England joyous when the shop of the pawnbroker thrives royally upon the immense interest wrung from the very vitals of the poor; when the gaols, the hospitals, and the workhouses are more numerous than the churches; when the hulks are swarming with convicts pent up in frightful floating dungeons, amidst a fœtid atmosphere; when the streets throng with unfortunate girls who ask to be redeemed from an appalling traffic, but who see no avenue of escape from their loathsome calling; when the voice of starvation, the voice of crime, the voice of discontent, and the voice of barbarian ignorance echo up to Heaven, and form such a chorus as could scarcely be expected to meet the ears beyond the precincts of hell; and when seven-tenths of the entire population are wretched—oppressed—enslaved—trampled on—miserable—degraded—demoralised!

Merry England!!!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

Two of the thoroughfares which converge to Seven Dials, bear each the name of Earl Street.

Passing from High Street, St. Giles's, towards St. Martin's Lane, we must request the reader to turn with us to the right into that Earl Street which lies between the Dials and one extremity of Monmouth Street.

Half way up Earl Street stood a house of even a darker and more gloomy appearance than its companions. Its door-way was lower than the level of the street, and was reached by descending three steps. The windows were small; and, as many of the panes were broken, the holes were mended with pieces of dirty paper, or stopped up with old rags. Altogether, there was something so poverty-stricken, and yet so sinister, about the appearance of that tottering, dingy, repulsive-looking dwelling, that no one possessing an article of jewellery about his person, or having gold in his pocket, would have chosen to venture amongst its inmates.

And who were those inmates? The neighbours scarcely knew. Certain it was, however, that over the rickety door of the house were painted the words—TOBIAS BUNCE, TAILOR; but few were the jobs which Mr. Bunce ever obtained from the inhabitants in the vicinity; for his manners were too reserved—too repulsive to gain favour with the class of persons who might have patronised him. And yet there appeared to be no signs of absolute poverty in that dwelling. Mrs. Bunce was one of the adjacent butcher's best customers: a public-house in the Dials was known to be regularly visited by her for the beer at dinner and supper times; and pints of gin were occasionally purchased by the same mysterious customer at the same establishment. She was as averse to gossiping as her husband; and her neighbours declared that they could not make her out at all. She always paid ready money for every thing she had; and therefore the tradespeople were the stanch defenders of the Bunces whenever a word of suspicion was uttered against them.

Who, then, were these Bunces?

Let us step inside their dwelling, and see if we can ascertain.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening, a few days after the incidents related in the preceding chapters, that Toby Bunce, his wife, Old Death, and the lad Jacob sate down to tea in the ground-floor back room of the house which we have been describing.

Toby Bunce was a short, thin, pale-faced, sneaking-looking man of about forty. He was dressed in a suit of very shabby black; and his linen was not remarkable for cleanliness. His coarse brown hair was suffered to grow to a considerable length; and, as he seldom treated it to an acquaintance with the comb, it hung in matted curls over his shoulders. His nails were equally neglected, and resembled claws terminating with blackened points.

His better-half—as Mrs. Bunce indeed was, not only figuratively, but also literally—was a tall, thin, scraggy, lantern-faced woman, with a sharp green eye, a vixenish pug-nose, and a querulous voice; for although she was excessively reserved when she went out "to

do her marketing," she made up for that silence abroad by an extra amount of garrulity at home. Her age exceeded by a year or two that of her husband, and, as she was totally devoid of that sentiment which is so generally ascribed to the sex—we mean vanity—she did not scruple to acknowledge the above fact. Indeed, she often advanced it as an argument to prove that she must know better than he, and as a reason for her assertion and maintenance of petticoat government. But if vanity were not her failing, avarice was her ruling vice; and to gratify her love for gold she never hesitated at a crime.

In this latter respect Mr. Bunce was no better than his spouse—save that his anxiety to obtain money was not always equalled by his readiness to face the danger occasionally involved in procuring it. Any act of turpitude that might be accomplished safely and quietly would find no moral opponent in the person of Toby Bunce; but when some little daring or display of firmness was required, he was forced to supply himself with an artificial energy through the medium of the gin-bottle.

The room to which we have introduced our readers was furnished with bare necessaries, and nothing more. A rickety, greasy deal-table; four or five of the commonest description of rush-bottomed chairs; a long form to accommodate extra company; an old portable cupboard, fitting into one of the angles of the apartment; and a shelf to serve as a larder,—these were the principal articles of the domestic economy. The table was spread with a varied assortment of crockery, none of the cups matching with the saucers, and no two cups or no two saucers alike.

Toby Bunce, having succeeded in inducing the kettle to boil by means of sundry bits of wood sparingly applied, his wife Betsy made the tea, while Jacob cut the bread-and-butter.

"I wonder whether Tom will keep his appointment?" said Old Death, as he sipped his tea. "It's a full hour past the time that I told him to be here."

"And we've been a waiting for him till the fire got so low that it took a power of wood to make it burn up again," observed Toby Bunce.

"S'pose it did?" cried his wife. "You know very well that we don't care about any expense when our best friend Mr. Bones is with us," she added, glancing towards Old Death; for the Bunces were amongst the very few of that individual's acquaintances who knew his real name.

"And yet I should think he would not fail," continued Old Death in a musing strain. "His conduct seemed straight-forward and right enough the very first day we agreed to terms; and he even gave me my regulars in a matter that I'd nothing to do with. But it was well for him that he did so; or else he'd have been laid up in lavender for want of bail."

"Bertinshaw and Watkins did it pretty tidy," said Jacob, who was making prodigious inroads upon the bread-and-butter.

"Keep your observations to yourself," growled Old Death in a surly tone. "Remember, I haven't forgot your negligence in losing sight of Tom Rain the other day, when he left the police-office."

"It wasn't my fault," returned the lad, his dark eyes flashing angrily. "I kept lurking about the court after I had been up here to tell you that Dykes had nabbed Mr. Rainford: I saw him go over to the coffee-house soon after he was discharged—I followed him when he went in a coach to Pall Mall—I dogged him back again to Bow Street—and then——"

"And then when the Jewess's case was over, you saw him come out, and you lost sight of him," interrupted Old Death angrily. "But never mind," he added, softening a little: "I will set you to watch him another day when you've nothing better to do, and we will find out all *I* want to know about him."

"When did you see him last?" inquired Toby Bunce.

"This morning, at Tullock's; and——"

Old Death was interrupted by a knock at the street door, to which summons Jacob hastened to respond.

In a few moments he returned, accompanied by Tom Rain, who sauntered into the room, with a complaisant air and the chimney-pot hat stuck on the right side of his head.

"So you are come at last, Tom," said Bones, *alias* Old Death, his toothless jaws grinning a ghastly satisfaction. "Well, better late than never. But let me introduce you to my very particular friends Mr. and Mrs. Bunce; and as they are good friends of mine, they will be good friends to you. This crib of theirs is convenient in more ways than one," added the old man significantly; "and you will find it so if you ever want to lay up for a time until the storm which must menace one sometimes, blows over."

"The hint may not prove useless at a pinch," said Tom carelessly, as he seated himself on the form. "But there's some one present whose name you've not yet mentioned, old chap?"

And he glanced towards the sickly lad, who was still occupied with the edible portion of the repast.

"Oh! that's my Mercury—my messenger—my confidant—or any thing else you like to call him," said Bones. "His name Is Jacob Smith, for want of a better—and he's a perfect treasure in his way. He can scent an officer two streets off, and would prove the best scout that ever a general commanding an army could possibly employ. Now you know his qualifications; and if you ever want to make use of them, he is at your service."

"Well, my lad," exclaimed Tom Rain, "your master gives a good character of you; and mind you continue to deserve it," he added with an ironical smile. "But what is to be done now, old fellow?"

This question was addressed to Bones, who accordingly prepared himself to answer it.

"There's something to be done to-morrow night, my dear boy," began the old villain, his dark eyes gleaming from beneath their shaggy,

overhanging brows; "and there's money—much money—to be got. But the thing is a difficult one, and requires great tact as well as courage."

"You must suppose beforehand that I am the person to manage it properly," said Rain; "or I should think you would not have applied to me."

"Very true, Tom," returned Old Death, with a sepulchral chuckle: "very true! The fact is, you're a dashing, genteel-looking, and well-spoken fellow when you choose; and you can insinuate yourself into the good graces of the best-born gentlemen in the land. I am sure you can do this—don't you think you can, Tom?"

"I should rather fancy I can," replied Rainford, by no means displeased with the compliment just paid him. "But go on—explain yourself—and we shall then see what can be done."

"Listen attentively," said Old Death. "Between Streatham and Norwood there stands a pretty but lonely house, occupied by a gentleman named Torrens. He is a widower, and has two daughters. The eldest of these girls is to be married the day after to-morrow to a certain Mr. Frank Curtis, the nephew of the wealthy Sir Christopher Blunt. It appears that Mr. Torrens has fallen into some difficulty through over-speculation in building houses at Norwood; and Sir Christopher has consented to advance him five thousand pounds, on condition that this match takes place. For the girl, it seems, is totally opposed to it: she has another lover whom *she* loves—and she hates Mr. Frank Curtis. But the father insists on sacrificing his daughter, to whom Curtis is greatly attached; and Curtis possesses influence enough over his uncle Sir Christopher to persuade him to advance the money."

"All this is clear enough," said Rain; "and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to baulk Sir Christopher, Frank Curtis, and the selfish old father. But I do not see how the business can in any way benefit us."

"I will tell you, my dear boy," replied Old Death, with another chuckle expressive of deep satisfaction. "To-morrow evening Sir Christopher, the nephew, and Sir Christopher's lawyer will set out for Torrens Cottage, as the place is called. They will settle all the preliminary business with the father to-morrow night, so that the marriage may take place the first thing on the ensuing morning."

"Well?" said Tom inquiringly, seeing that Old Death paused.

"And two thousand pounds out of the five will be conveyed from London to Torrens Cottage to-morrow night," continued Bones: "*unless*," he added significantly, "something happens to stop the money on its way."

"But who will have the money about him—Sir Christopher, the nephew, or the lawyer?" demanded Tom.

"Ah! that's the point to ascertain," cried Old Death. "You must exercise your tact in solving this doubt; and your courage will afterwards effect the rest. Did I not say that the business required alike tact and courage?"

"You did indeed," answered Rain; "and I can scarcely see how the deuce the thing is to be managed. Still two thousand pounds would prove very welcome. But how came you to learn all this?"

"The knight's servant, my dear boy, is in my pay," returned Old Death, with a triumphant grin. "Ah! I have many gentlemen's and noblemen's domestics devoted to my interests in the same manner; and by their means I learn a great deal. But to return to our present business. Two thousand pounds are to be paid down as an earnest of the bargain to-morrow night; and those two thousand pounds will be much better appropriated to our uses."

"I perfectly agree with you, old fellow," said Rain. "Could not the knight's servant inform you who is likely to take charge of the money?"

"Impossible!" cried Bones. "He will most probably accompany the party; and——"

"How will they go?" demanded Rain, a thought striking him.

"On horseback," answered Old Death. "Sir Christopher and his nephew have a great opinion of themselves as riders; and the lawyer, Mr. Howard, is a sporting character. It is, therefore, sure that they will all go on horseback."

"Then leave the rest to me," cried Tom Rain, snapping his fingers. "What time do they set out?"

"At six o'clock," was the answer.

"Good again," observed Tom. "It's as dark then as at midnight this time of the year. Say no more upon the subject: the thing is just the same as if it was done—provided your information is correct, and no change takes place in the plan as at present laid down by these gentlemen. One word, however;—describe Sir Christopher's servant to me."

"A short—thin—dapper-made fellow—dark curly hair—face marked with the small-pox," replied Old Death. "Drab livery, turned up with red. His name is John Jeffreys."

"Enough," said Tom. "I shall call at Tullock's to-morrow between two and three in the afternoon; and if you have any thing fresh to communicate, you can either leave a note or meet me there. If I neither see nor hear from you at that time and place, I shall consider that all remains as you have now represented. You have nothing more to say at present?"

"Nothing," returned Bones, after a moment's reflection.

"Won't you take a drop of brandy-and-water, Mr. Rainford—just a *leetle* drop?" inquired Toby Bunce, with a deferential glance towards his better half..

"A leetle drop, stupid!—a good big drop, you mean!" cried the shrew. "Isn't Mr. Rainford a friend of Mr. Bones?—and ain't all Mr. Bones's friends *our* friends? I'm sure if Mr. Rainford would drink a—a quar—a *pint* of brandy," she added, emphatically defining the quantity she felt disposed to place at the service of the new acquaintance, "he is quite welcome." "No, thank'ee," said Rainford. "I must be off. The business of to-morrow night requires consideration; and——" He was interrupted by a knock at the street-door; and Toby Bunce hastened to answer the summons.

CHAPTER IX.
A DEATH-SCENE.—LOCK'S FIELDS.

The room-door was left open; and the inmates could therefore hear every thing that took place in the passage.

Toby Bunce opened the street-door cautiously, and said, "Who's there?"

"In the name of heaven, grant me a night's lodging," exclaimed the appealing voice of a female: "if not for myself—at least for this poor dear child!"

"Toby, shut the door!" screamed the querulous tones of Mrs. Bunce from the back-room. "We don't want beggars and poor children here."

"Stay!" cried Tom Rain: "never be hard-hearted!"

And, hastening to the street-door, he saw, by the light of a shop-window opposite, the form of a miserable-looking female crouching upon the steps, and with one arm round the neck of a little boy who was crying bitterly.

"Come in, my good woman," said Rainford. "I will pay any expenses that your presence may entail on the people of the house:—come in, I say."

But the poor creature fell back insensible.

"Toby, take care of the child," cried Tom Rain in an authoritative tone; "while I lift the woman off the steps."

And, suiting the action to the word, he raised the senseless being in his arms, and conveyed her into the passage, Toby following with the little boy, who seemed to be about five or six years old.

"Surely you're mad, Tom," exclaimed Old Death, advancing from the back-room, "to bring strangers into this house."

"I should be a brute to see a dying woman turned away from the door of this or any other house," said Rainford firmly. "Stand back, and let me have my way. My purse shall satisfy the Bunces for any trouble this business may give them."

"Well, well—be it as you will," growled Old Death: then, in a hasty whisper to Betsy Bunce, he added, "You had better let him do as he likes. He is a queer fellow, but very useful—and must not be offended."

Thus advised, and cheered moreover by Rain's liberal promise of payment, Mrs. Bunce suddenly exhibited a vast amount of sympathy on behalf of the poor creature; and, having fetched a candle from the back-room, she lighted Rainford, who carried the still senseless woman in his arms, up stairs to a chamber where there was a sordid kind of bed.

Rainford placed his burden on the miserable pallet, and Betsy Bunce applied such restoratives as the circumscribed economy of her household furnished.

In the meantime Toby had brought the little boy into the chamber; and the child, hastening towards the bed, exclaimed, "Mamma—dear mamma—speak to me—why don't you speak to me?"

The woman opened her eyes languidly; but the moment they encountered the face of the child, they were lighted up with joy; and snatching the boy to her breast, she murmured in a faint tone, "I thought I had lost you, Charles—I dreamt that we were separated! Oh! my head—it seems to split!"

And she pressed her open palm to her forehead with all the appearance of intense suffering.

We must pause a moment to observe that this woman seemed to be about five-and-thirty years of age; that she was dressed in widow's weeds of the coarsest materials; and that her entire aspect denoted dreadful privations and great sufferings, mental as well as physical. The boy was also attired in mourning garments; and though his little cheeks were wan, and his form emaciated, still was he a very interesting child.

"My good woman," said Tom Rain, approaching the bed, "banish all misgivings relative to the present; for you shall be taken care of."

Then, turning towards Mrs. Bunce, he directed her to procure food and to send Jacob for a surgeon.

"No—no, it's useless," cried the poor woman, alluding to the latter order. "I feel that I am dying—my last hour is come!"

The child threw his little arms about her neck, and wept piteously.

"Oh! my God!" cried the wretched stranger, "who will now take care of you, my poor dear—dear little Charles! I who have been to you as a mother——"

"Yes—you are my mamma—my own mamma," exclaimed the child, his heart ready to burst, although he scarcely understood the real

nature of the misgivings which oppressed him.

"Sir," said the woman, after a few moments of profound silence, during which the sobbings of the boy and the uneasy palpitations of her own breast were alone heard in the chamber,—"sir," she said, addressing herself abruptly to Rainford, "you spoke to me kindly—you look kindly upon me,—and, if I may judge by your countenance, you possess a kind heart——"

"Speak, poor woman!" cried Rain, softened almost to tears. "If there is any thing I can do for you, confide in me—and I swear——"

"The gratitude of a dying being is all that I can offer you in return for what I am about to ask," interrupted the woman in a faint, yet hurried tone—for she seemed to feel that she had not long to live. "Draw near, sir—there—and now listen attentively. Dreadful privation—exposure to the cold—sleeping in the fields—and painful wanderings have reduced me to this state. But I shall die contented—nay, even happy, if I thought——"

"I understand you," cried Rain. "You are anxious for the welfare of this boy? Compose your mind—banish those painful reflections—I swear to protect him!"

There was something so earnest and sincere in the manner, the voice, and the countenance of Rainford, who was a creature of the most generous impulses, that the dying woman believed him; and her heart bounded with fervent gratitude.

Then, making a sign for Rainford to draw nearer to her still, she collected all her remaining force to utter a few last words; but physical exhaustion almost completely choked her utterance.

"This boy," she murmured in a faint and dying voice, "is not mine. Do not weep, Charles, love—I am not your mamma——although I love you——as if you was my own child. But the moment you were born——in secret——and mystery——the nurse brought you to me——all having been so arranged——and——from that moment I——but, my God! I am dying!——oh! give me strength to declare that——your mother——is——"

"Speak, speak!" cried Tom Rain: "breathe but the name of his mother—I shall catch it—and I declare most solemnly——O God! she is dead!"

And it was so! Vain were her last, last efforts to give utterance to the name which trembled upon her tongue: the death-rattle stifled the words in her throat—her eyes glazed—her countenance settled in inanimation—and she was no more!

The little Charles would not believe that she was really dead; to him she only appeared to sleep;-and this infantine delusion Tom Rain gradually dissipated, making him aware of his sad bereavement in so delicate a manner, that a stranger would have believed him to be a father himself as well as an individual of the most upright and noble principles.

But if Rainford's morality was in some points of the most indifferent nature, he nevertheless possessed kind feelings and a generous heart; and the tears trickled down his cheeks, as he exerted himself to console the little stranger.

Children seem to be endowed with an intuitive power of discrimination between those who would treat them well, and those whose dispositions are severe and harsh; and Charles speedily acquired confidence in the good intentions of Rainford.

At length, when Tom fancied that he had obtained some degree of influence over the boy's mind, he led him away from the chamber where the poor woman had breathed her last.

Old Death had remained in the room below; and Jacob had been sent to fetch a surgeon, who now arrived, but departed again immediately upon learning that his services could no longer be rendered available. Toby and Mrs. Bunce had quitted the chamber of death the moment Rain ejaculated, "O God! she is dead;"—and thus the child had no leisure to take particular notice of any one save the individual who manifested so much kindness towards him.

Fearing that the repulsive appearance of Old Death might alarm the boy, and even fill his mind with misgivings relative to the person who now took charge of him, Rainford stopped in the dark passage down stairs; and calling Mrs. Bunce from the back-room, he placed five guineas in her hand, saying, "The burial of that poor creature who has just breathed her last, must be your care. See that it is performed decently; and if there are any papers about her person—any proofs of who she is—keep them for me. Be faithful in this respect—and what I have now given you may be considered as an earnest of additional recompense."

Rainford then left the house, leading the boy by the hand.

Proceeding to the nearest hackney-coach stand, Tom hired one of the vehicles, and desired to be driven to the Elephant and Castle.

Previously, however, to entering the vehicle, the thoughtful Tom Rain purchased some of the very best cakes which a shop in such a neighbourhood could produce; and, though the little boy kept sobbing as he repeated to himself, "Mamma is dead,"—for he was too young to understand that she had denied this maternity with her dying breath,—yet he ate greedily of the food—for he was famished.

Rainford said but little to him, beyond a few occasional cheering and consolatory words, as they rode along, because the heavy rumbling of the vehicle rendered it difficult to hear what was uttered within.

In about three-quarters of an hour the coach stopped at the Elephant and Castle; and Rainford, conducting the boy tenderly by the hand, plunged into the maze of streets which form a neighbourhood requiring a detailed description.

Any one who is acquainted with that part of London, or who, with the map of the great metropolis before him, takes the trouble to follow us in this portion of our narrative, will understand us when we state that, almost immediately behind the Elephant and Castle tavern, there is a considerable district totally *unexplored* by thousands and thousands of persons dwelling in other parts of the English capital. This district is now bounded on the north by the New Kent Road, on the east by the Kent or Greenwich Road, on the south by

Walworth, and on the west by the Walworth Road. Built upon a low, damp, and unhealthy soil, the dwellings of the poor there throng in frightful abundance,—forming narrow streets half choked up with dirt, miserable alleys where the very air is stagnant, and dark courts, to enter which seems like going into the fœtid vault of a church. Many of the streets, that appear to have been huddled together without any architectural plan, but merely upon a studied system of crowding together as many hovels as possible, have their back windows looking upon ditches, the black mire and standing water of which exhale vapours sufficiently noxious to breed a pestilence. When the sun shines upon these noisome ditches, their surface displays a thousand prismatic hues, thrown out by the decomposing offal and putrid vegetables which have been emptied into those open sewers. But sewers they cannot be called—for instead of carrying off the filth of the neighbourhood, those ditches preserve it stagnant.

A considerable portion of the district we are describing is known by the name of Lock's Fields; and the horrible condition of this locality can only be properly understood by a visit. The pen cannot convey an adequate idea of the loathsome squalor of that poverty—the heart-rending proofs of that wretchedness—and the revolting examples of that utter demoralization, which characterise this section of the metropolis. The houses for the most part contain each four rooms; every room serving as the domicile of a separate family. Perhaps one of the members of such a family may be afflicted with some infectious malady: there he must lie upon his flock mattress, or his bundle of rags, or his heap of straw, until he become, through neglect, so offensive as to render one minute with him intolerable; and yet his relatives—four, five, or even six in number—are compelled to sleep in the same apartment with him, inhaling the stench from that mass of putrefaction, hearing his groans, breathing the steam from his corrupted lungs, and swarming with the myriads of loathsome animalcule engendered by the filth of the place. In another room, perhaps, we shall find some old man, living by himself—starving upon the miserable pittance obtained by picking up bones or rags, doing an odd job now and then for a neighbour, and filling up the intervals of such pursuits by begging,—his entire furniture consisting of a cup, a kettle, and a knife—no chair, no table—but with a heap of rubbish in one corner for a bed, on which he sleeps with his clothes on. In a third room there is most likely a family consisting of a man and his wife, who at night occupy one mattress, and their grown-up sons and daughters who all pig together upon another. Shame and decency exist not amongst them—because they could never have known either. They have all been accustomed from their infancy to each other's nakedness; and, as their feelings are brutalised by such a mode of existence, they suffer no scruples to oppose that fearful intercourse which their sensuality suggests. Thus—for we *must* speak plainly, as we speak *the truth*—the very wretchedness of the poor, which compels this family commingling in one room and as it were in one bed, leads to incest—horrible, revolting incest! The fourth room in the house which we take for our example of the dwellings in Lock's Fields, is occupied by the landlord or landlady, or both; and there is perhaps no more morality nor cleanliness in their chamber than in either of the others.

The shops in Lock's Fields are naturally in keeping with the means and habits of their customers. Beer-shops and public-houses abound: the lower and the poorer the locality, the greater the number of such establishments. But who can wonder? Crime requires its stimulants—and poverty its consolation. Men drink to nerve themselves to perpetrate misdeeds which are attended with peril: women drink to supply that artificial flow of spirits necessary to the maintenance of a career of prostitution;—and the honest poor drink to save themselves from the access of maddening despair. Children drink also, because they see their parents drink, and because they have acquired the taste from their earliest infancy;—and thus beer-shops and public-houses thrive most gloriously in the most wretched neighbourhoods.

Lock's Fields abound with small "general shops," where every thing is sold in the minutest detail—a pennyworth of sugar, a penny-farthing-worth of tea, a farthing candle, or a quarter of a pound of bacon for a penny. There are also many eating-houses where leg-of-beef soup can be procured for five farthings the bowl. The knackers do a good business with the owners of those establishments. Tripe-shops are likewise far from rare; and upon their boards in the open windows, may be seen gory slices of black-looking liver, tongues and brains in a dish, sheep's heads, huge cow-heels, chitterlings, piles of horses' flesh and rolls of boiled offal upon sticks—the two last-mentioned species of article being intended for cat's-meat,—but the whole heaped pell-mell together, loathsome to behold, and emitting odours of the most fœtid and nauseating description. Coal-sheds, where potatoes and greens may likewise be purchased, abound in Lock's Fields; as do also pie-shops and that kind of eating-houses where pudding fried in grease, stocking-pudding, and sop-in-the-pan are displayed in the windows, to tempt with their succulent appearance the appetites of hungry men passing to their work, or of half-famished children wearied of playing in the gutter.

It is wretched—heart-rending to linger on a description of this kind: but we must endeavour to make it as complete as possible. The generality of the inhabitants of Lock's Fields are in a state of barbarian ignorance. Nine-tenths of the children, even of ten or twelve years old, are unable to read, and know not who Jesus Christ is, nor that the Saviour of Mankind suffered upon the cross to save *them*, as well as the proudest peers or the most brilliant peeresses that shine in the realms of fashion. Look more closely at the aspect of the population in Lock's Fields. What care is depicted upon the pale cheek of that emaciated woman who is hanging the *one* change of linen upon the elder-bushes skirting the black ditch behind her dwelling! And yet she is better off than many of her neighbours—because her family does possess the *one* change of linen! Behold that man sitting on the threshold of his door, smoking his pipe:—his elbows rest upon his knees—he stares vacantly before him—not even the opiatic influence of tobacco soothes him. He is thinking of what will become of his wife and children when he shall be out of work—because the job on which he has lately been engaged will be finished on the coming Saturday. His wife comes out to speak to him—and he answers her harshly: his children approach him, and endeavour to climb up his knees—but he knocks them away. Yet that man is not brutal by nature: he loves his wife and children—and was even debating within himself whether he should not soon turn thief in order to support them, when they thus accosted him and were repulsed. Let another person insult his wife—let a stranger lay a finger upon that man's children, and the demon will be raised within his breast. But he speaks harshly and treats them all brutally, because he is miserable—because he is dissatisfied with every thing and every body—because he is reduced to despair. The unfeeling aspect of the cold world around him—that world which frowns so sternly upon poverty, and smiles so sweetly upon wealth—has rendered *him* unfeeling. His hard fate drives him to the public-house:—talk of the infamy of which that man is guilty in spending a few pence—the pence which would buy his children more bread—upon beer or gin,—it is ridiculous! That man *must* drink—he *must* drown his care: thought drives him mad—and from thought he must

therefore fly. But whither can he fly? The rich and the well-to-do have their theatres and places of amusement: if a penny tea-garden or a penny theatre be opened in Lock's Fields, or in any other poor neighbourhood, the magistrates must put it down;—it is a source of demoralisation—it is a focus of thieves and prostitutes! But the swell-mob and flash women frequent the Haymarket Theatre—and the Lyceum—and the Surrey—and the Victoria—aye, and Covent-Garden and Drury Lane Theatres also. "Oh!" cries the magistrate; "*that* is very different!" Yes—every thing in this country is different when the wealthy or the well-dressed are concerned on one side, and the poor and the ragged on the other. Then, whither can this pauperised despairing man in Lock's Fields go to escape the bitterness of his reflections? To the public-house—or to throw himself into the canal:—those are the only alternatives!

Is it not dreadful to think that we have a sovereign and a royal family on whom the country lavishes money by hundreds of thousands,—whose merest whims cost sums that would feed and clothe from year to year *all* the inhabitants of such a place as Lock's Fields;—that we have also an hereditary aristocracy and innumerable sleek and comfortable dignitaries of the Church, who devour the fruits of the earth and throw the parings and the peelings contemptuously to the poor;—in a word, that we have an oligarchy feasting upon the fatted calf, and flinging the offal to the patient, enduring, toiling, oppressed millions,—is it not dreadful, we ask, to think how much those millions do for Royalty, Aristocracy, Church, and Landed Interest, and how little—how miserably little, Royalty, Aristocracy, Church, and Landed Interest do for *them* in return?

But let us go back to Thomas Rainford and the little boy, whom we left on their way to Lock's Fields—for it was to this district that the excellent-hearted man was leading his young charge.

And, as they went along, many were the kind words that Tom Rain uttered to cheer his artless companion.

"Come, don't cry, my dear little fellow," he would say: "here is another cake—and when we get home you shall have something nice for supper. Are you cold, Charley? Well, you shall soon warm yourself by the side of a good blazing fire. And to-night you shall sleep in a soft bed; and to-morrow morning you shall have some new clothes. I am going to take you where you will find a pretty lady, who will be as kind to you as the mamma you have just lost. Are you tired, Charley? Well, I'll take you up and carry you."

And Tom Rain lifted the poor child in his arms and kissed away the tears which ran down his cheeks. The boy threw his little arms around the neck of his kind protector, and said, "Oh! you are as good to me as my dear papa was."

"And how long has your papa been dead, Charley?" asked Rainford, supposing that the child meant by his father the husband of the woman who had died that evening in Toby Bunce's house.

"Not very long—but I don't know how long," was the reply. "Oh! stay—I think I heard mamma say this morning that he died six months ago."

"And where did you live then, Charley?"

"At a cottage near a great town—Oh! I remember—Winchester."

"Winchester!" cried Rainford. "I know all that part of the country well—or at least I ought to do so," he murmured to himself, with a profound sigh. "But what made you leave your cottage?"

"When papa was buried, mamma had no money," replied the child; "and some naughty people came at last and took away all the things in the cottage, and turned mamma and me out of doors. And then mamma cried so much—oh! so much; and we were very often hungry after that—and we sometimes had no bed to sleep in."

"Poor little fellow!" cried Rainford, hugging the child closer still to his breast. "What was your papa's name?"

"Watts—and my name is Charley Watts," said the boy.

At this moment Rainford stopped at one of the few decent-looking houses in Lock's Fields, and knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by a young and beautiful woman, who appeared overjoyed at his return.

"I have brought you a present in the shape of this poor little boy," said Rainford as he entered the house. "If you wish to please me, you will behave to him as kindly as I shall."

The young woman took Charley in her arms, and kissed him as a proof that Tom's request should be attended to; and Rainford, well pleased at that demonstration, closed the street-door behind him.

CHAPTER X.
A SCENE AT THE HOUSE OF SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT.

On the following afternoon, shortly after four o'clock, three gentlemen sate, sipping their wine after an early dinner, in a magnificently furnished room in Jermyn Street.

The one who occupied the head of the table was a red-faced, stout, elderly gentleman, with hair of that blueish-black which denotes the use of an artificial dye, and with large bushy whiskers of a similar tint. He was dressed in a blue coat with brass buttons, white waistcoat, and black kerseymere trousers fitting very tight. A massive gold chain depended from his neck; and on his fingers he wore several rings of great value. In manner he was authoritative, even to rudeness: for, being immensely rich, he firmly believed that money constituted an aristocracy which had a perfect right to command. His pride was the more excessive too, as he had risen from nothing: that is, he had begun life as an errand boy in a linen-draper's shop, and had finished his mercantile career as a warehouseman in Wood Street, where he amassed a considerable fortune. He had filled the office of Sheriff, but had vainly endeavoured to procure an aldermanic gown; and, having failed to persuade the livery-men of Portsoken Ward that he was the very best person they could possibly choose to represent them in the superior City Court, he had ever since affected to rejoice at his rejection, and to look upon all City men and City matters with contempt. In reality, too, he was dreadfully mortified at the fact of his low origin; but, with that clumsy duplicity which vulgar minds often employ in such cases, he pretended to make a boast of his humble beginning, and used the subject as a means of constantly reminding his friends and acquaintances of what he had done for himself. While he held the Shrievalty, it fell to his lot to present an address to the Prince Regent; and on that occasion he received the honour of knighthood. Such was Sir Christopher Blunt.

The gentleman who sate at the bottom of the table was Mr. Frank Curtis, Sir Christopher's nephew. He was a tall, spare, thin, sickly-looking young man, of three-and-twenty; with long, straight, black hair, large staring dark eyes, very bad teeth, and a disagreeable, impudent, pert expression of countenance. He was an orphan, and totally dependent upon his uncle, who had brought him up to no business, inasmuch as he had looked upon the young man as his heir. Sir Christopher, however, having reached his fiftieth year without ever thinking of matrimony, was suddenly smitten with Miss Julia Mordaunt, Lady Hatfield's friend; and as Miss Mordaunt belonged to a very ancient though a greatly impoverished family, Sir Christopher thought that he should gain his darling wish—namely, obtain standing and consideration in the fashionable world—by conducting that lady to the hymeneal altar. This ardent desire he nevertheless kept to himself as much as possible; his first object being to get rid of his nephew in some way or another. For Mr. Frank Curtis had acquired considerable influence over his uncle; and the latter was too much of a moral coward to be able to tell his nephew boldly and frankly that he proposed "to change his condition." The passion which Frank had conceived for Miss Adelais Torrens seemed to furnish the knight with an opportunity to settle the young man, and thus throw off an influence which impeded his own matrimonial designs: hence the readiness of Sir Christopher to lend Mr. Torrens five thousand pounds as an inducement for that gentleman to compel his portionless daughter to accept Mr. Frank Curtis for a husband. We must add, that Frank had passed six months on the continent; and this brief sojourn in France had supplied the staple commodity of his entire conversational powers. Nor must we forget to observe that he was as arrogant a boaster as he was in reality a coward; and that he was so afflicted with the vice of mendaciousness, he could scarcely speak the truth by accident.

The third gentleman present in Sir Christopher's splendid dining-room, was Mr. Howard, the knight's solicitor. We need not say more relative to this individual than that he was about five-and-forty years old, enjoyed an excellent practice, was considered a fine-looking man by the ladies, and was noted for his devotion to the Turf.

The table was spread with a choice dessert and an assortment of the most exquisite wines, to which the three gentlemen appeared to be doing ample justice. Sir Christopher drank copiously, because he felt particularly well pleased at the prospect of getting rid of his nephew, for whom and the intended bride he had taken and furnished a beautiful house at Clapham: Frank had frequent recurrence to the bottle, because he felt nervous and anxious;—and the lawyer stuck fast to the Burgundy, because he liked it.

"Take care, Frank, how you fill your glass too often," said Mr. Howard; "or the young ladies will not find you very agreeable presently."

"Don't mind me, old fellow," exclaimed Curtis: "I can drink you under the table any day. Why, when I was in Paris I used to think nothing of a bottle of brandy with my breakfast. I recollect once betting thirty napoleons with an old Major of grenadiers at Boulogne ——"

"A drum-major, I suppose, Frank," said the lawyer with a smile.

"Frank could not so far forget himself as to associate with a *drum*-major," observed Sir Christopher, in a voice like that of a man who goes about with a Punch and Judy show. "Thanks to my honest exertions, I have placed myself—and, in placing myself, have placed

him—in a position which you will permit me to call brilliant. You know I make no secret of what I *was*. I rose from nothing—and I'm proud of it. And if his gracious Majesty, in acknowledgment of my humble merits, condescended to bestow upon me the honour of knighthood——"

"Oh! blow that old story, uncle!" cried the dutiful nephew. "I was telling you how I laid fifty napoleons with a Colonel of French engineers that I would drink two bottles of champagne to every one of his share——"

"What time will the horses be round at the door?" demanded Howard of the knight; for the lawyer was anxious to escape the menaced tale.

"At six o'clock precise," answered Sir Christopher. "I am always punctual. I learnt punctuality when I was a lad; and I firmly believe it helped to make me what I am. When I look around and see how I am now situated, and think of what I was——"

"Do let me tell you this story," interrupted Frank, re-filling his glass: "it is a capital one, I can assure you. Well, so the French Major-General and me, we sate down at table, and spread out the hundred and fifty napoleons that we had bet. Then we rang the bell, and ordered three bottles of Burgundy to begin with—two for me, and one for him."

"Burgundy was it?" said the lawyer, sipping his wine.

"No—claret, and I told you so," exclaimed Curtis. "But how provoking you are! Well, so the Lieutenant-General and me, we began to drink the champagne just as if it was so much water—both of us eyeing the two hundred napoleons——"

"Half-past four," said Mr. Howard, looking at his watch, and with difficulty suppressing a yawn.

"For I felt sure of winning—and so did he," continued Frank Curtis. "Well, I soon disposed of my *two* bottles of Port, and the General drank his *one* like a Trojan. To work we went again—two more for me, and another for him. Then I proposed cigars, because I knew that I could stand smoking better than him. He agreed; and we puffed away like two factory-chimnies. At last he showed signs of distress——"

"Ah! got quite groggy, like a prize-fighter at the fortieth round," observed Mr. Howard.

"Exactly," said Frank: "and so by the time I had finished my sixth bottle of Sherry, and the Field-Marshal had only got half-way through his third, he was completely sewn up. I pocketed the five hundred napoleons, as a matter of course—rang the bell to desire the waiter to take the Admiral off to bed—and then went and did the amiable at an evening party, where no one could tell that I had ever been drinking at all."

"And so you think that a very pleasant adventure, Master Frank?" said Sir Christopher. "Now, for my part, I leave guzzling and hard-drinking to those vulgar citizens the other side of Temple Bar. Do you know, Howard, that I really believe it was the most fortunate day of my life when I lost the election for Portsoken? If I had become an Alderman——"

"You would have *looked* the Alderman to perfection, Sir Christopher," observed the lawyer.

"Well—well—I might have been dignified on the bench—or I might not," said the knight complacently: "that is a mere matter of opinion—although I *have* been told by a friend who is not accustomed to flatter, that I have more sense—sound sense, I mean—in my little finger, than all the Aldermen and Common Councilmen put together. But it was fortunate for me—very fortunate—that I escaped from the vulgar contact of those citizens."

At this moment a servant entered the room, to announce that a gentleman desired to speak to Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Show him up—show him up," cried the knight. "I have no secrets that my nephew and solicitor may not hear."

The domestic retired; and in a few minutes he re-appeared, ushering in Rainford by the name of Captain Sparks.

Tom was dressed in his usual sporting garb, over which he wore a white top-coat—an article of attire much in vogue in those days amongst gentlemen who were accustomed to ride much on horseback. As he walked, his silver spurs clinked on the heels of his well-polished boots; and in his right hand he carried a whip.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen, for this intrusion," said Tom, as he entered the room; "but having heard from my very particular friend Mr. Torrens of the little affair that is to take place to-morrow morning——"

"Pray sit down, Captain Sparks," interrupted Sir Christopher. "Any friend of Mr. Torrens is welcome in this house. I do not, however, remember that he has mentioned your name in my hearing."

"Very likely not," said Rainford, drawing a chair close to the table. "The fact is I have been travelling in the north, for my amusement, during the last two years; and I only returned to town this morning. The first thing I did was to run down and see my dear friend Torrens: and you may fancy how surprised and pleased I was to learn what an excellent match his eldest daughter was about to make."

"There is the bridegroom, Captain Sparks," said the knight, pompously waving his hand towards his nephew.

"Very happy to form your acquaintance, Mr. Curtis," exclaimed Tom, with a polite bow.

"Equally delighted to know you, Captain," replied the nephew. "Here's a clean glass—and there's the bottle. Help yourself."

"With much pleasure," said Tom, suiting the action to the word. "But I was about to tell you that Mr. Torrens did me the honour to invite me to the wedding; and as I was obliged to come back to town to have my portmanteau sent down to the Cottage, I have made bold to intrude myself upon you, gentlemen, with the view of joining your party—that is, if you will permit me."

"We shall be quite charmed, Captain Sparks," answered Sir Christopher Blunt. "I need not inquire if you proceed to the Cottage on

horseback!"

"Oh! yes—none of your coaches or carriages for me," returned Tom. "I have put up my horse at the stables close by in York Street; for my groom was taken ill a couple of hours ago——"

"Our horses are also there," interrupted Sir Christopher; "and one of *my* grooms," he added ostentatiously, "shall bring round yours when he fetches ours. But I beg pardon for my rudeness, Captain Sparks:—this gentleman is Mr. Howard—*my* solicitor."

Rainford and the lawyer bowed to each other; the wine went round; and Tom chuckled inwardly at the success of his stratagem to obtain access to the knight.

"You see, Captain Sparks," said Sir Christopher in a dictatorial tone, "this projected alliance has met with some little opposition on the part of the young lady herself."

"So Torrens told me this afternoon," observed Tom coolly. "But the qualifications of your nephew, Sir Christopher, are doubtless such ——"

"I flatter myself," exclaimed Curtis, pleased with this compliment, "that I have the knack of making myself agreeable to the women when I choose. Why, the day that I left Paris, a French Marchioness took poison, and a Countess went melancholy mad—both without any apparent cause: but *I* knew deuced well what was the reason, though."

"You're a sad fellow, Frank," said the lawyer.

"Now why should you assert that?" cried the young man, affecting to be annoyed by the remark. "Did I tell you that any thing particular occurred between me and those ladies? Suppose the Duchess *did* have a little partiality for me—and suppose the Baroness *was* the least thing jealous—eh? What then?"

"Ah! what then, indeed?" said Tom Rain. "Mr. Curtis is too much a man of honour to betray those fair ones who were weak enough to be beguiled by his soft nonsense."

"Egad! you're right," exclaimed Frank, in whose good opinion the self-styled Captain was rapidly rising. "I would not give a fig for a fellow that boasts of his conquests. But if any one *might* boast on that subject, I think it is your humble servant. What do you say, Howard? Haven't I told you some queer tales at times?"

"You have indeed," answered the lawyer drily.

"Talking of boasting, Captain Sparks," said the knight, who now found means to thrust in a word, "it is *my* opinion that the only legitimate boast is that which a man can make of having risen from nothing. Now I never attempt to conceal my origin: on the contrary, I glory in it. Why, sir, I began life without a sixpence, and without a friend: and now look at me!"

Tom Rain did look at Sir Christopher, as he was requested to do; and it struck our friend that there was nothing very particular to admire in the worthy knight after all.

"You see me, Captain Sparks?" continued Sir Christopher, in an authoritative tone. "Well, sir—such as I am now, I made myself."

"And the more to your credit," said Tom, who could not help thinking that if the knight's words were to be taken literally, it was a great pity that he had not made himself a trifle handsomer while he was about it.

"Come, Howard, pass the bottle, old fellow," cried Frank Curtis, who always got disgustingly familiar when he was in his cups—which was so often that he was seldom out of them: and, as is the case with all persons who boast of the quantity they can drink, it did not require much to upset him. "Remember," he added, "we have rather a lonely road to travel part of the way——"

"Why—you surely cannot be afraid of robbers, Mr. Curtis?" exclaimed Tom, bursting out into a merry laugh.

"I afraid!" ejaculated the young man; "not I! I should think not, indeed! Why, when I was travelling from Abbeville to Paris in the mail, we were stopped by three highwaymen in the middle of the night. The government-courier and myself tackled them in a moment: we were the only persons in the mail, and the postboy was so frightened that he got off his seat and hid himself under one of the horses. Well, the poor courier was soon disabled; but I was not easily done up. Egad! in less than three minutes I forced the whole five scoundrels to sheer off."

"Oh! I have no doubt of it," said Tom very quietly. "A powerful and courageous young gentleman like you must be a match for any five highwaymen in the world."

"Come, come now," exclaimed Frank: "I don't say *that* exactly. But I will assert this much—that I have no more fears of a robber than I should have of a child's stopping me on the highway."

"In that case," observed Mr. Howard, throwing a pocket-book across the table towards Curtis, "you had better take charge of the money that's to be paid over to Mr. Torrens presently."

"Oh! as for *that*——But, never mind," cried Frank, not appearing particularly to relish the office of treasurer thus forced upon him, yet unable to decline the trust after his magniloquent vaunting: "I'll keep the two thousand safe enough, depend upon it."

Sir Christopher looked at his watch; and, finding that the hour for departure was approaching, he rang the bell to order the horses.

Precisely as the clock struck six, the party, attended by John Jeffreys, with whom Rain had found an opportunity to exchange a word or two, quitted Jermyn Street, and rode towards Westminster Bridge.

CHAPTER XI.
THE TWO THOUSAND POUNDS.—TORRENS COTTAGE.

The evening was bright, clear, and frosty; and the stars shone resplendently on the wide arch of heaven.

Well wrapped up in their great coats, the party of horsemen pursued their way; and at about seven o'clock they turned from the main-road near Streatham Common, into a bye-lane leading towards Torrens Cottage, thus leaving Streatham itself on their right hand.

Sir Christopher and the lawyer rode about a hundred yards in advance, Tom Rain and Frank Curtis having stopped at a public-house to procure cigars. Jeffreys, the groom, was about fifty yards in the rear.

"You must come and see us, Captain Sparks, after the honeymoon," said Curtis. "We shall be delighted to make you welcome."

"I shall avail myself of your kind offer," returned Tom.

"And you and me will try who can stand his bottle best," continued the young man. "But what atrocious cigars these are! I remember when I was in Paris, I was very intimate with a certain foreign Prince who was staying there—and I don't mind hinting to you that I was a great favourite with the Princess too. She was a charming woman—a very charming woman. I never saw such eyes in my life! Well, the Prince was a great smoker; and he one day gave me a box of his prime cigars—such cigars! I never smoked such beauties before or since. Poor fellow! he was killed in a duel shortly afterwards."

"Killed in a duel!" exclaimed Tom: "what—by you?"

"Oh! no—I was his second," replied Curtis, who, as usual, invented the story as he went on. "It seems that an officer of French horse-guards had been boasting of the favours which he pretended to have received from the Marchioness; and the Marquis heard of it. He instantly sent for me, and desired me to carry the grenadier-officer a message. I did so; and the hostile encounter took place in Boulogne-wood. The hussar-officer pinked the Count slap through in no time; for it appeared that he was the best swordsman in all France. Well, of course I was desperately savage to see my poor friend the Duke knocked off the hooks in that unceremonious way; and I determined to avenge him. So I challenged the light-infantry officer on the spot; and we fought for six hours without either of us getting a scratch or yielding a foot of ground. Our swords were worn as thin as skewers——"

"I have no doubt of it," said Tom coolly. "It must have been a splendid sight."

"It was indeed," returned Frank. "But at last I obtained a trifling advantage. The artillery-officer had a cold; and I watched him anxiously to catch him off his guard when he sneezed. Egad! that was a glorious idea of mine; and it succeeded too;—for after nine hours' hard fighting, I ran him through just as a cook spits a joint. You cannot imagine what a reputation that affair gave me in Paris. Every one was desirous to see the young Englishman who had killed the best swordsman in France. And, after all, without boasting, it was a feat to be proud of."

"Decidedly so," observed Tom. "But you are too brave a man, Mr. Curtis, to indulge in idle boasts."

"Of course," cried Frank. "Fellows like you and me, Captain, who know what swords and pistols mean, are the last to brag of their exploits."

"Do you carry pistols with you, Mr. Curtis?" asked Tom.

"Generally—generally," was the reply. "But I did not think it necessary to take them with me this evening."

"Well, I did," said Rainford. "And here is one," he added, producing the weapon from the pocket of his white great-coat.

"Pray don't hold it near me, Captain!" cried Frank, reining in his horse with a trepidation most remarkable on the part of a gentleman who had performed such gallant deeds in resisting highwaymen and as a duellist.

"Yes—but I shall not only hold it near you," said Tom: "I shall also fire it—unless you instantly, and without noise, hand me over that pocket-book which you have about you."

"Captain Sparks!" ejaculated the trembling young man: "this passes a joke. Come, now——"

"I never was more serious in my life," interrupted Rainford sharply. "Give me the pocket-book; or——"

And the sharp click of the pistol, as Tom cocked it, sounded like a death-warrant upon the cowardly boaster's ears. In fact, he sate paralysed—motionless—speechless upon his horse, at a loss how to act.

"Come, be quick!" cried Rain, seizing him by the collar of his coat: "I have no time for any of your nonsense."

"You—you—can't—mean——" stammered the young man, "that—you——"

"Yes—I mean that I am a highwayman, if you like to call me so," interrupted Tom impatiently: "and so give me the pocket-book."

Curtis obeyed with trembling hand and sinking heart.

"And now," said Tom, as the sounds of the trampling of a horse announced that the groom was approaching, "one word of caution! You are going to drag a young lady into a match most unwelcome to her. Beware how you accomplish her unhappiness by forcing her to accept as a husband such a contemptible boaster and arrant liar as you are: beware, I say—or you will see more than you like of Captain Sparks."

Having thus spoken, Rainford turned his horse round, and galloped away with lightning-speed.

John Jeffreys, whom he passed in the lane, did not of course attempt to molest him.

But when the groom overtook Frank Curtis, he said, "Any thing the matter, sir? I saw the Captain gallop back again like an arrow."

"Captain!" ejaculated the young man: "he is a robber—a thief—a gallows-bird!"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Jeffreys, affecting profound astonishment.

"He has plundered me of two thousand pounds, John," cried Frank, in so lamentable a tone that the groom could hardly suppress a violent indication to laugh.

"Robbed you, sir!" exclaimed Jeffreys. "You're joking, sir: no two men in England could rob you."

"We had a desperate tussle for it, John," replied Curtis; "but the villain knocked me off my horse with the butt-end of his pistol. It was a cowardly blow—and I was not prepared for it."

"Most likely not, sir," said the groom drily. "But I thought he must have used some underhand means, because I know what sort of a customer you must be."

"You're right enough there, my man," returned Curtis. "I had got the better of him at one time; and although he has gone off with the two thousand pounds, he has carried away with him such a drubbing that he won't forget in a hurry. But let us ride after my uncle and Mr. Howard—because he might come back," added Frank, casting a terrified glance behind him.

The young gentleman and the servant put spurs to their horses, and in a quarter of an hour overtook the knight and the lawyer, to whom Frank related in his own style the adventure which had just occurred.

"And you mean to say that you surrendered the pocket-book—that you gave up two thousand pounds?" exclaimed Sir Christopher, in a passion.

"What could I do?" said Frank. "The scoundrel took the money from me by main force."

"He was stronger than the five highwaymen in France," observed the lawyer quietly.

"Stronger! I believe you," cried Curtis. "And then he was armed to the very teeth. Why, when he threw open his green cut-away coat, I could see by the starlight a belt stuck round with pistols, daggers, and sharp knives. Or else do you think for a moment that he could have mastered *me*?"

"Well, the mischief is done," said the knight in a doleful tone; "and a pretty figure we shall cut at the Torrens's. I dare swear that the rascal is no more an acquaintance of the family than he is of the King of England."

"It is to be hoped he is not," observed Mr. Howard, who was mightily pleased to think that he had handed over the money into Frank's keeping previously to setting out:—"it is to be hoped not—otherwise your nephew, Sir Christopher, would be marrying into a nice family."

"Really, Mr. Howard, this is no time for jesting," exclaimed the knight. "But why didn't you try and stop the Villain, John?"

"I, sir!" said the groom. "How should I know that he had committed a robbery when he galloped past me? Besides, if he is such a terrible chap as Mr. Frank represents him, it would have been useless for me to try my hand with him."

"Certainly! John is quite right," observed Mr. Curtis. "If I could do nothing with him, I'm sure no one else could. He is as strong as a lion; and, egad! how he did swear! It was quite horrible to hear him. But what shall we do?"

"Do, indeed!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "We shall look like so many fools when we arrive at the Cottage."

"But Mr. Torrens will take your cheque, Sir Christopher," remarked the lawyer.

"True. We can manage it in that way," said the knight. "Still the cash would have appeared more business-like on such an occasion. But it is growing late: let us push on."

"Yes—let us push on," echoed Frank, casting troubled glances around, and trembling lest the highwayman should take it into his head to return and rob the remainder of the party.

In twenty minutes they reached Torrens Cottage, the inmates of which we must pause to describe.

Mr. Torrens was a widower, and had numbered about five-and-fifty years. He was a tall, thin, dry-looking man, with a very sallow complexion, a cold grey eye, and a stern expression of countenance. After having long held a situation in a Government office, he retired with a pension; and just at the same period a relation died, leaving him a few thousand pounds. With this sum he bought a beautiful little villa, which he denominated Torrens Cottage, and the leasehold of some land at Norwood, where he set busily to work to build a row of houses to be called Torrens Terrace. He had long made architecture an amateur-study during his leisure hours; and the moment he was enabled to retire from his situation in the Ordnance Office, and became possessed of capital, he resolved to put his numerous architectural theories into practice. But, as it frequently happens in such matters, he grew embarrassed; and the works were

menaced with stoppage for want of funds, when Mr. Curtis became enamoured of his eldest daughter, whom he met at the house of some of Mr. Torrens's relations in London. The bargain, already described, was soon after struck between Sir Christopher Blunt and Mr. Torrens, who did not hesitate to sacrifice his daughter's happiness to his own pecuniary interests. Unfortunately, too, for the young lady, he did not regard the contemplated union in the light of a sacrifice at all; inasmuch as he naturally looked upon Frank Curtis as Sir Christopher's heir, not dreaming that the worthy knight entertained the remotest idea of perpetrating matrimony. Mr. Torrens therefore considered that his daughter Adelais was about to form a most eligible connexion; and, although he was aware that her affections were engaged in another quarter, he acted upon the belief that parents must know best how to ensure their children's happiness.

His two daughters, Adelais and Rosamond, were both charming girls, of the respective ages of eighteen and sixteen. Their dark clustering locks, their deep hazel eyes lustrous with liquid light, and their symmetrical figures filled all beholders with admiration. Adelais was now pale, melancholy, and drooping; for she loathed the alliance that was in contemplation for her—loathed it, not only because her heart was another's, but also because the manners, conversation, and personal appearance of Frank Curtis were revolting in her estimation. Rosamond possessed a rich complexion, in which glowed all the innate feelings of her soul, animating and imparting to every feature of her beautiful face an additional charm. She was naturally the confidant of her sister, whose hard fate she deeply deplored; and many were the plans which the amiable girls had devised and discussed, with a view to overcome their father's cruel pertinacity in insisting on the sacrifice of Adelais to Frank Curtis. But each and all of those projects had either failed, or involved proceedings repugnant to their pure and artless minds. For instance, they had thought of abandoning the paternal roof, and endeavouring to seek their livelihood by needlework in some safe retirement: then Adelais would not permit Rosamond to dare the misfortunes of the world by flying from a home which she—the younger sister—had at least no personal motive to desert; and Rosamond on her side would not allow Adelais to set out alone. Again, a clandestine marriage between Adelais and her lover was often debated: the young man urged it himself;—but the daughters dreaded the father's eternal anger; and thus this project had been abandoned also. To be brief, the dreaded moment was now at hand; and the seal of misery was about to be set on the roll of the elder maiden's destinies.

And who was the lover of Adelais? A handsome, generous-hearted, honourable young man, occupying a situation in the very Government office where Mr. Torrens had himself served for many years. But, although Clarence Villiers was so far provided for, and had every prospect of rising rapidly on account of his steady habits and assiduous attention to his employment, yet he was at present only a poor clerk with ninety pounds a-year; and he had no capital. Mr. Torrens, as we have seen, required capital; and thus Frank Curtis was preferred to Clarence Villiers.

We cannot quit this description without alluding to the ardent affection which existed between the sisters. Having lost their mother in their childhood, and their father being almost constantly from home throughout the day, they were naturally thrown entirely upon each other for companionship. An illimitable confidence sprang up between them—a confidence more intimate far than even that which usually subsists between sisters; because this confidence on the part of Adelais and Rosamond extended to a mutual outpouring of their most trivial as well as of their most important thoughts, hopes, or aspirations. Thus, the reader will cease to be astonished that, when Adelais, in the anguish of her heart, had contemplated flight from the paternal roof as the only alternative save a hateful marriage, Rosamond insisted upon accompanying her. Much as they loved and revered their father, they were both prepared to sacrifice even filial affection and filial duty for each other's sake. This feeling may be looked upon as one involving a grievous fault on their side: it was not, however, the less firmly rooted in their minds,—for they were all and all to each other!

CHAPTER XII.
ADELAIS AND ROSAMOND.

Sir Christopher Blunt, Mr. Howard, and Frank Curtis were soon seated in Mr. Torrens' comfortable parlour, the walls of which were adorned with an infinite variety of architectural plans set in carved oaken frames.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; wine was placed upon the table; and the travellers were speedily as much at their ease as they could wish, or as their host could render them.

The young ladies were in another apartment, Mr. Torrens having desired them to remain in the drawing-room while the commercial part of the projected matrimonial arrangement was being settled in the parlour.

When the usual complimentary phrases had been exchanged, and Sir Christopher had observed that the weather was remarkably fine but very cold—a proposition to which Mr. Torrens entirely assented—for somehow or another people never *do* contradict each other when commenting on that subject;—when, also, a glass or two of wine had been imbibed by each, the knight inquired whether Mr. Torrens happened to be acquainted with a Captain Sparks?

The answer was a negative.

Sir Christopher then began to relate the adventure of the evening; and, although he was constantly interrupted by his nephew, who was anxious to interpolate in the narrative certain saving clauses respecting his own valour towards the highwayman, the worthy knight nevertheless succeeded at length in bringing the tale to an end.

"It is clear," said Mr. Torrens, "that you were first duped and then robbed by an infamous scoundrel. But have you any notion how he could have learnt enough of the pending arrangements to be enabled to talk so familiarly with regard to them, when he first introduced himself to you?"

"That puzzles me, my dear sir," returned Sir Christopher.

"And it is likely to continue to puzzle you, uncle," observed Frank; "for the whole business defies conjecture. I remember, when I was in France——"

"The villain evidently knew that you would leave town with a considerable sum of money in your possession," said Torrens; "and his aim was to get it. He did get it too."

"But not without a deuced good thrashing into the bargain," cried Frank; "and that's some consolation."

"I dare say Captain Sparks, as he calls himself, would gladly be thrashed every hour in the day on the same terms," observed the lawyer. "But I think that when our little business is concluded, I should do well to return to London and give information at Bow Street as speedily as possible."

"By no means," exclaimed Sir Christopher. "We must keep the tale to ourselves. If it got into the newspapers, with all the particulars, it would only make us look ridiculous. We might punish the man; but we should never get back the money. No—no: let the matter drop—for all our sakes. Thank heaven," continued the knight, assuming a slower and more pompous tone, "the loss is paltry—very paltry in my estimation. I shall not miss the amount, I can assure you."

"But you have no objection to my giving the scoundrel another good drubbing, uncle, the first time I meet him again?" inquired Frank Curtis, with great apparent earnestness.

"Oh! there can be no objection to that—if the Captain will allow you so to operate on him," said the lawyer drily.

"Allow me, indeed! I should like to know how he could prevent it," exclaimed Frank, affecting deep indignation at the remark. "You should have seen the struggle we had!"

"Very likely: but I noticed your great-coat when we came in just now—and it was not soiled," said Howard.

"Of course not: I had him down all the time."

"Then it was a great pity you did not keep him there."

"Come—come—enough of this fencing," cried Sir Christopher. "Produce the deeds, Mr. Howard: my friend Torrens will take my cheque for the two thousand."

"Oh! certainly," replied the venal father.

"And to-morrow, let us hope that I shall have to give you another for three thousand more," added Sir Christopher. "Thank heaven! my cheque is as good as a Bank-note. But it wasn't twenty years ago, though. Times have altered since then. And yet, as my friend Howard

knows, I am proud of my humble origin."

"Yes—yes, uncle," exclaimed Frank: "we all know that perfectly. But let's to business, and then join the young ladies. I shall make them laugh with the story of the highwayman. It's the first time in my life I was ever conquered—ever overcome: and now it hasn't been by fair means. I remember once, when I was at Montreuil, three French peasants had some of their nonsense with me; but I just ——"

"Here are the documents, gentlemen," said Mr. Howard. "Frank shall conclude his story presently."

The agreements for the loan of the five thousand pounds were then read over; Mr. Torrens signed them; Sir Christopher Blunt wrote him a cheque for two thousand on account—the remaining three to be advanced only on condition that the proposed marriage took place;—and thus terminated the commercial part of the business.

The four gentlemen then proceeded to the drawing-room, where the two young ladies were seated.

Adelais was excessively pale; and when the odious Mr. Frank Curtis tripped smirkingly up to her, and, taking her fair hand, pressed it to his lips,—his breath, heated with wine and rendered offensive by the fumes of the cigar, steaming upon that delicate skin,—the maiden recoiled as if from something loathsome.

Her father, who observed her narrowly, cast upon her a rapid but ireful glance; and Adelais exerted herself strenuously to recover her composure.

Like a victim about to be sacrificed at the altar of some avenging god, she suffered her admirer to lead her to a seat in a remote part of the room; and placing himself by her side, Frank Curtis darted a triumphant look at Howard and Sir Christopher, as much as to say, "Just see how successfully I am going to play the amiable in this quarter."

Then, turning towards the lovely Adelais, whose large blue eyes were bent timidly down, and whose bosom palpitated with a variety of painful emotions, he observed, in what he considered to be a most endearing whisper, "Come, my sweet gal, cheer up: there's nothing to be frightened at in marriage. I know that I'm not quite a lady's man; but we shall get on better together by and bye. You see, my dear, I've always been used to manly sports or to seeking adventures where some glory was to be gained—such as knocking down watchmen, or fighting with highwaymen, or killing my man in a duel—and things of that kind. But I've no doubt it will be pleasant enough to be tied to your apron-string—if the string itself isn't too tight."

Adelais raised her fine blue eyes, turned them for a moment upon her admirer, and then again fixed them on the carpet, a profound sigh escaping her bosom at the same time:—but that glance, so involuntarily thrown towards her companion, was one of sudden curiosity—as if she were anxious to discover by the expression of his face whether he were indeed serious in the insufferable rhodomontade with which he sought to captivate her.

"There—that's right, my dear gal," said Curtis, mistaking the motive of that rapid look which was directed towards him; "don't stand on any ceremony with me. In a few hours more we shall be husband and wife——"

Adelais shuddered visibly.

"Ah! I like this little modesty—it's all very proper on your part," continued the disgusting young man; "but it will soon wear off—naturally so."

The young lady now started indignantly—her countenance became crimson—and then large tears burst from her eyes. Curtis caught hold of her hand—but she withdraw it,—she literally snatched it away, as if from the jaws of a hideous reptile.

"You needn't think I'm going to eat you, Miss," said Frank in a surly tone. "But I forgot to tell you what an adventure I had just now with a couple of highwaymen," he continued in a milder voice. "You see, as me and my uncle and Howard were coming down the lane, I fell back a little—just to think of you, my dear, at leisure; when all of a sudden three chaps jumped over a bank, and pointed their blunderbusses at me. I didn't care a rap for that; but taking the riding-whip by the thin end, I knocked down three of them—one after the other—with the handle-part, you know, and had just made up my mind to tackle the fourth, when my horse reared and threw me. For a moment I was insensible; and during that time the fifth scoundrel picked my pocket of the two thousand pounds which I may call the purchase-money of your own dear pretty little self."

"Sir!" exclaimed Adelais, aloud: "is it your intention to insult me?"

And, without waiting for a reply, but yielding to the tide of anguish and indignation which now impelled her, she rushed from the room.

Rosamond, who, while engaged in conversation with her father, Sir Christopher, and Mr. Howard at the other end of the room, had never ceased to watch her sister with the most lively interest, now immediately followed the almost heart-broken girl.

The moment the sisters had reached their bed-chamber, Adelais threw herself into Rosamond's arms, exclaiming, "I will never marry him—I will die sooner!"

"Has he offended you?" inquired Rosamond, affectionately embracing her disconsolate sister. "But I need not ask! Your changing countenance—your anxious looks—your convulsive movements—and then your tears, while he sate by you——"

"Oh! my very soul revolts against him!" cried Adelais, emphatically, the conflicts of agonising emotions painfully expressed on her countenance. "At first—when he approached me—it required all the exertions of which my fortitude was capable to subdue the feelings of aversion and disgust—of bitter woe and heart-felt misery—with which I was agitated;—but when his coarse language met my ears——Oh! Rosamond!" exclaimed the distracted maiden, "I must fly—I must avoid this dreadful fate—or my heart will break!"

At this moment Mr. Torrens slowly opened the door, and entered the room.

His countenance wore an expression which gave evidence that anger and compunction were maintaining a fierce struggle in his breast; but the former feeling was rapidly obtaining the ascendancy.

"Rash—disobedient girl," he exclaimed, fixing his stern cold eyes upon Adelais, who still clung to her younger sister, "what signifies this folly?"

"Spare me—spare me, my dearest father!" cried Adelais, suddenly tearing herself from Rosamond's embrace, and falling on her knees before her sire: "I cannot marry that horrible man!"

Mr. Torrens bit his lip almost till the blood came.

"Listen to me, my dear father," continued the despairing girl, joining her hands together, while her cheeks were of marble whiteness, unanimated by a tinge of vital colouring,—"I am your daughter, and must obey you; but if you persist in saying, '*Receive that man as your husband*,' it is the same as if you were to utter the word, '*Die!*' Oh! no—you cannot—you will not sacrifice me in this cruel, cruel manner! What have I done to offend you, that my unhappiness has become your aim? Dearest father—relent—I implore you: on my knees, I beseech you to save me ere it be too late!"

"Adelais," exclaimed Mr. Torrens, arming himself with that fatal sophistry which led him to believe that *he* was the only judge of what was fitting for his daughter's welfare and happiness,—"Adelais, rise—I command you!"

The miserable girl obeyed, but staggered with vacillating and irregular steps towards a chair, in which she sank, the agony of her soul now expelling all power of reflection from its seat.

"I have gone too far to retreat—even if I were so disposed," continued Mr. Torrens. "Your happiness will be ensured by this union."

"Her happiness, father!" said Rosamond, reproachfully. "Oh! no—never, never!"

"Undutiful girl!" cried the venal parent: "do you league with your sister against me? I tell you that Adelais is about to become the wife of a young man who can give her an enviable position in society, and who at his uncle's death, will inherit an immense fortune. It is true that Mr. Curtis is somewhat rough in manner and incautious with his tongue; but perfection exists not in this world. To be brief, this marriage shall take place—it *must*—I dare not retract."

"Father, one word more," exclaimed Adelais, suddenly recovering her power of thought and speech—those powers which anguish had for a few minutes completely subdued: "you are about to *sell* your daughter to that man—he boasted to me that a few thousand pounds were the purchase-money—and hence my abrupt departure from the room."

"The phrase was wrong—ill-chosen—coarse," ejaculated Mr. Torrens, evidently smarting under this announcement: "but we must not judge of words themselves—we must only look to the motives of him who utters them. Mr. Curtis is incapable of insulting you——"

"Oh! you know not how abhorrent is the coarseness of his language!" cried Adelais, bursting into a torrent of tears.

"You provoke me beyond the limits of human patience!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, stamping his foot with rage. "But no more of this. You know my will—prepare to obey it. I ask you not to return to the drawing-room to-night;—to-morrow morning let me hope that you will show yourself a dutiful daughter towards a father who is anxious only to ensure your prosperity."

Mr. Torrens then imprinted a cold kiss upon the fair foreheads of Adelais and Rosamond, and hastily quitted the apartment.

For some minutes after the door had closed behind them, the sisters sat gazing upon each other in the silence of painful and awful reflection.

Yet beautiful were they in their sorrow; for the unstudied attitudes and abandonment of limb which such a state of mind produces, gave additional grace to the just proportions of their forms, and imparted an expression of the most tender interest to the perfect composition of their features.

"Sister," at length said Rosamond, in a soft and mournful tone, as she approached Adelais, "what will you do?"

This question suddenly aroused the unhappy young lady to a sense of the urgent necessity of adopting some decisive measure.

Winding her arms around Rosamond's neck, she said, "I must fly from my father's house—I must abandon the paternal dwelling. O heaven! wherefore am I reduced to so fearful an alternative?"

"Speak not only of yourself, beloved Adelais," murmured Rosamond chidingly; "for you know that my fate, as well as my heart, is inseparably linked with thine."

"Oh! I doubt not the sincerity of your love for me, dearest sister," exclaimed Miss Torrens; "but I tremble at the idea of making you the companion of my flight. Have we not read in books, dear girl, that London is a dreadful place—abounding in perils of all kinds, and concealing pit-falls beneath its most pleasant places? Oh! Rosamond, you are so young—so very young to quit your father's home and venture in that great city of danger and crime!"

"But with you as my companion, Adelais, I shall have courage to meet all those perils of which you speak," responded Rosamond, the tones of her voice becoming so gentle, so melting, and so persuasive, that never did she seem so dear—so very dear unto her sister as at this moment.

And now all hesitation was banished on the part of Adelais:—it was settled—it was determined—Rosamond should become the companion of her flight!

CHAPTER XIII.
THE ELOPEMENT.

Let us now return to Rainford, whom we left on his way back to London, after having so triumphantly eased the vain-glorious Mr. Frank Curtis of the two thousand pounds.

The highwayman,—for such indeed was the gay, generous-hearted, and brave Tom Rain,—scarcely condescended to bestow even a chuckle of satisfaction upon a victory so easily won—an exploit so readily accomplished.

He would have valued the prize far more, had it been obtained by means of hard blows and as the result of a desperate encounter; for the love of adventure was inherent in his disposition—and he had often courted danger in his life, for the exciting pleasure of freeing himself from its intricacy.

Having galloped his good steed to the beginning of the lane, he checked its celerity, and then proceeded at a moderate pace along the main road to the public-house where Curtis and himself had stopped to purchase their cigars about half an hour previously.

Riding up to the door of the little establishment, the highwayman leapt from his horse, and threw the reins to a dependant of the place who was conversing with the postillion of a chaise and pair that had stopped at the door.

When Rainford sauntered leisurely up to the bar, with his chimney-pot hat set rakishly on one side, his white coat comfortably buttoned up, and his riding-whip in his hand, the landlord instantly recollected him again, and observed, as he drew the liquor which the highwayman ordered, "Back to London, sir, to-night?"

"Yes," replied Tom carelessly: "I just escorted my friend as far as Torrens Cottage, and shall now get home again."

These words produced a visible emotion on the part of a tall, handsome, dark-haired young man, who was also standing at the bar. He was well protected by a great coat against the cold; and Tom therefore very naturally concluded that he was the traveller journeying in the post-chaise outside.

"Torrens Cottage!" cried the landlord. "Why, I do declare that's the very ticket. This gentleman here was just making inquiries whether I had any one that could take a note there in a confidential way."

The landlord blurted forth this announcement without heeding the significant coughs and "hems" of the tall young gentleman, who seemed greatly annoyed that the object of his call at the public-house should thus be published to the very first stranger who entered the place after him.

"You should keep a closer tongue in your head," said Tom Rain. "How do you know what harm might be done by your stupidity in letting out the gentleman's business in this kind of way? Fortunately, I am not the kind of fellow to do mischief; and in this case, it may be, that I can effect some good."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the tall young gentleman, his countenance suddenly exchanging the expression of annoyance which the landlord's garrulity had excited, for one indicative of hope and joy.

"Yes—I think so," said Tom. "But we must have a few words in private."

"Walk into the parlour, gentlemen," cried the landlord. "There's no one in that room at present."

Rainford and the tall stranger followed this suggestion; and when the door was closed behind them, the highwayman said, "If I am not very much mistaken, you must be the gentleman whom that lying braggart Frank Curtis is endeavouring to cut out?"

"My name is Clarence Villiers, sir," was the guarded reply.

"And you are the lover of Mr. Torrens's eldest daughter," continued Rainford. "Now do not waste valuable time by reflecting whether you shall make me your confidant, or not. I am disposed to serve you: tell me how I can do it."

"You will excuse me," said Villiers in a polite but somewhat reserved tone, "if I first request to be informed to whom I have the honour of speaking."

"Captain Sparks," was the immediate reply. "I happen to know old Sir Christopher and his precious nephew; and I rode down with them nearly as far as the cottage. But I did not accept their invitation to go in—for particular reasons of my own. You may, however, suppose that I am well acquainted with all the particulars of this infamous case. Miss Adelais Torrens loves Mr. Clarence Villiers and hates Mr. Frank Curtis; but Mr. Frank Curtis is the successful suitor with the mercenary father, because a certain five thousand pounds ——"

"Enough, Captain Sparks!" ejaculated Villiers. "I see that you do indeed know all. And will you serve me in this strait?"

"I will—honour bright!" cried Tom. "There's my hand upon it. Now say what is to be done. It is already past eight o'clock," he added, after a hasty reference to a handsome gold watch which he drew from his fob.

"My object was to obtain an interview with Adelais in some way or another, and urge her to—to——"

"Speak plainly, my friend," cried Rain. "To elope with you. Well?—do you mean every thing that is honourable?"

"As God is my judge," said the young man solemnly. "I have frequently urged the dear girl to consent to a clandestine marriage with me; but the purity of her soul has ever revolted against a course which she considers to be marked with duplicity."

"Where would you convey her during the interval that must necessarily elapse before you can marry her?" asked Rainford. "Because, as she is a minor, I suppose you could not obtain a special licence without her father's consent."

"I have an aunt in London devoted to my interests," answered Clarence; "and she would receive her with even maternal affection until I should acquire a legal right to protect her."

"So far, so good," observed Tom. "And yet a young lady eloping at night with a young man——remember, I am only speaking for the good of both of you."

"I had foreseen that difficulty also," said Villiers hastily. "The fact is, Adelais and her sister Rosamond are so linked together by the tenderest bonds of affection, that the one would not move a step unaccompanied by the other."

"The devil!" cried Rainford: "two ladies to carry off! That increases the embarrassment of the business. Now it is very clear that it is perfectly useless for us to send a messenger down with a note: it would be intercepted by the father. But if you will sit down and write what you choose, I will undertake to have it delivered to the young lady herself."

"You?" exclaimed Clarence joyfully.

"Yes: what I promise, I will perform," said Rainford. "Follow my directions—and all shall go well."

Clarence rang the bell, ordered writing materials, and in a few minutes completed a note to his beloved Adelais, which he read to his companion.

"Seal it," said Tom; "because it may pass through the hands of another person, after it leaves mine, and before it reaches Miss Torrens."

This suggestion was instantaneously complied with; and Rainford secured the letter about his person.

"Now," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "do you proceed with the chaise down the lane, and stop as near the cottage as is consistent with prudence. I shall retrace my way there at once. Fear nothing—but wait patiently at the place where you pull up, until I make my appearance."

Villiers promised to fulfil these instructions; and Rainford, having taken a temporary leave of him, remounted his horse and galloped towards Torrens Cottage.

The highwayman had his plan of proceeding ready digested by the time the white walls of the building, rendered particularly conspicuous in the starlight, met his view.

Alighting from his horse at a distance of about a hundred yards, he tied the animal to a tree, and then repaired towards the dwelling.

Having reconnoitred the premises, he speedily discovered the stable; and, to his infinite joy, a light streamed from one of the windows of that building.

Leaping over the palings which separated the kitchen-garden from the adjacent fields, Tom Rain proceeded to the stable; and there, as he had anticipated, he found John Jeffreys, the groom, busily employed with his master's horses.

John was alone; and his surprise was great, when, upon being tapped on the shoulder, he turned round and beheld the highwayman.

"Silence!" said Tom in a whisper; "we have no time to lose in idle chatter. Here's five guineas for you; and you must get this note conveyed secretly to Miss Torrens—Adelais, the eldest—you know."

"It shall be done, sir," replied Jeffreys. "I am already far in the good graces of the housemaid; the cook is old and deaf; and so there's no fear of my not being able to succeed."

"Good. And you will bring me the answer up the lane, where I shall wait for you."

"And how can you read it, when you get it?" demanded Jeffreys. "The night is not quite clear enough for that."

"The answer will be a verbal one—*yes* or *no*," replied Tom.

Jeffreys promised that no delay should occur on his part; and Rainford retraced his steps to the spot where he had left his horse.

Many novelists would here pause for the honest but somewhat tedious purpose of detailing all the reflections which passed through the mind of Rainford during the mortal half-hour that elapsed ere the sounds of footsteps upon the hard soil announced the approach of some person. But as we do not wish either to spin out our narrative with dry material, or to keep the reader in any unnecessary suspense, we will at once declare that at the expiration of the aforesaid thirty minutes John Jeffreys made his appearance at the appointed spot.

"What news?" demanded Tom impatiently.

"All right——"

"And the answer?"

"Is *yes*."

"That's well!" exclaimed Rainford. "You may now go back, John. All that I require of you is done."

"But I have something to say to *you*, sir," observed the servant. "Just now, Sir Christopher sent for me up into the parlour to give me some orders; and I heard Mr. Frank, who is uncommon far gone with brandy-and-water, making a boast to the lawyer-fellow that he'd walk all round the grounds to see that every thing is safe. It seems that the lawyer has been twitting him about his little business with you just now up the lane, you know; and so Mr. Frank is as bumptious as possible. I only thought I'd better tell you of this—in case you've any business in hand that's likely to keep you about the place."

"I am very much obliged to you, John," said Rainford. "Here's another five guineas for you—and I shall not forget to speak to Old Death in your favour. But you had better get back as soon as you can, for fear you should be missed."

Jeffreys thanked the highwayman for the additional remuneration, and returned to the cottage.

It was now past nine o'clock, and Rainford murmured to himself, "I wonder how much longer they will be?"

His horse, which was a high-spirited animal, began to grow impatient of this long stoppage; and he himself shivered, in spite of the good great coat, with the nipping chill.

Another quarter of an hour elapsed; and, to the infinite joy of Tom Rain, he suddenly beheld two female figures, well muffled in shawls and furs, emerge from the obscurity at a short distance.

"All right, ladies," he said, in as loud a voice as he dared use consistently with prudence.

Adelais and Rosamond hurried towards him, as affrighted lambs to their shepherd; and yet, when they were close to him, they seemed unable to utter a word.

"Fear not, ladies," exclaimed the highwayman. "I am the friend to whom Mr. Villiers alluded in his note."

"Save us, then, sir—save us," said Adelais, in an urgent and imploring tone; "for Mr. Curtis saw us leave the house: he was in the garden——"

At that moment the sounds of voices were heard in the direction of the cottage; and they were evidently approaching.

"Hasten up the lane, young ladies—hasten, for God's sake!" said Tom Rain. "Mr. Villiers is there with the post-chaise—and I will remain here to bar the way."

Adelais and Rosamond could not even give utterance to the thanks which their hearts longed to express: terror froze the words that started to their lips; and, not daring to glance behind them, they hurried up the lane.

Tom Rainford now mounted his horse, and took his station in the middle of the way; for several persons were rapidly approaching from the house.

In a few moments they were near enough to enable Rainford to catch what they said.

"The disobedient—self-willed girls!" exclaimed one, whom Tom was right in supposing to be Mr. Torrens.

"But wasn't it fortunate that I twigged them?" said Curtis. "Egad!——"

"It will be much more fortunate if we overtake them," observed the lawyer.

"Bless me!—I'm out of breath," cried Sir Christopher. "I wish John would come on with the horses. Did you tell him, Frank?"

"To be sure I did. We cannot fail to overtake them. But, poor things! suppose that highwayman should fall in with them—and me not there to defend them!"

"I think it would be all the same——"

Howard was interrupted by a sudden ejaculation on the part of Mr. Torrens, who was a few paces in advance of the others, but who now abruptly came to a full stop.

"What is it?" demanded Curtis, shaking from head to foot, in spite of all the liquor he had imbibed during the day.

"Some ruffian on horseback—there—don't you see?" exclaimed Mr. Torrens. "But I am not afraid of him: his presence here is in some way connected with my daughters."

And the incensed father rushed furiously towards the highwayman.

"Stand back!" cried Tom in his clear, stentorian voice; and this command was followed by the sharp clicking of the two pistols which he cocked.

"The robber!" exclaimed Frank Curtis, clinging to the coat-tails of Mr. Torrens, who had retreated a few paces at the ominous sound of the pistols. "At him, my dear sir—at him! I'm here to help you."

"Villain—give up the two thousand pounds, and we will let you go—on *my* honour as a knight!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, keeping as far remote as he deemed prudent from the sinister form which, wrapped in the white great coat, and seated composedly on the tall horse, seemed, amidst the obscurity of the night, to be a ghost disdaining to touch the earth.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness, Sir Christopher," said Tom: "but I am not at all in fear of the necessity of purchasing

my liberty at any price whatsoever. I however give you every one due warning, that the first who tries to pass this way——"

"Scoundrel! my daughters—where are they?" vociferated Mr. Torrens.

"That's it—give it him!" cried Frank Curtis. "I'll be at him when you've done."

"Go on at once," cried Howard.

"And why are you standing idle there?"

"Because it is not my business to interfere."

"Well done, lawyer!" exclaimed Tom. "No fees can recompense you for an ounce of lead in the thigh: for if I do fire, I shall only try to lame—not kill."

"Mr. Curtis—Sir Christopher—will you not help me to arrest this villain who beards us to our very faces?" exclaimed Torrens, in a towering passion.

And again he rushed forward, while Frank Curtis beat a precipitate retreat behind his uncle.

"Stand back! or, by God, I'll fire!" thundered Rainford, suddenly spurring his horse in such a manner that the length of the animal was made to block up nearly the entire width of the bye-lane.

"You dare not murder me!" cried Torrens. "My daughters will escape!"—and he attempted to pass in front of the horse.

But by a skilful manœuvre, Rainford baffled him—arrested his progress—and kept him at bay, using all the time the most desperate menaces, which he did not, however, entertain the remotest idea of putting into execution.

"Mr. Curtis, sir—will you help me?" cried the infuriate father. "My daughters are escaping before your very eyes—you are losing your bride——"

"And you the rest of the money that was to have purchased her," said Rainford coolly. "Mercenary old man, you are rightly punished."

With these words, the highwayman suddenly wheeled his horse round, and disappeared in a moment.

He had succeeded in barring the way for upwards of ten minutes against the pursuers of the two fugitive ladies; and he calculated that in less than half that time they must have reached the post-chaise which Clarence Villiers had in readiness to receive them.

Jeffreys had purposely delayed getting the horses out; and even when he did appear with them, several minutes had elapsed since the highwayman had left the path free to those who thought fit to avail themselves of the services of the animals.

These were only two—Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys himself: the latter volunteering his aid for the purpose of misleading and embarrassing the father, rather than of assisting him.

Frank Curtis affected to be suddenly taken very unwell: Sir Christopher was really so; and the lawyer, although by no means a coward, did not see any utility in hazarding his life against such a desperate character as Captain Sparks (for by that denomination only did he know Tom Rain) appeared to be.

Thus, while the knight, his nephew, and the attorney retraced their steps to the cottage, leading back the horses which had been brought out for their use, Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys galloped away towards London.

CHAPTER XIV.
LADY HATFIELD AND DR. LASCELLES.—ESTHER DE MEDINA.

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Dr. Lascelles received a message, at about noon, requesting him to repair immediately to the dwelling of Lady Hatfield, who was seriously indisposed.

He obeyed this summons with more than usual alacrity; for ever since Lord Ellingham had made him his confidant, the curiosity of the worthy doctor had been strangely piqued by the unaccountable fact that Lady Hatfield should reject the suit of a man whom she not only professed to love, but who was in every way worthy of her.

On his arrival at Lady Hatfield's residence, he was surprised to learn from Miss Mordaunt that his patient was too unwell to quit her couch; and when he was introduced into Georgiana's bed-chamber, he found her labouring under a strong nervous excitement.

In accordance with the sacred privilege of the physician, he was of course left alone with her ladyship; and, seating himself by the side of the bed, he questioned her in the usual manner.

Georgiana explained her sensations; but, although she alluded to nothing beyond those physical details which directly came within the province of the medical man, still Dr. Lascelles had no difficulty in perceiving that the *mind*, rather than the *body*, was affected.

"My dear Lady Hatfield," he said, in as gentle and mild a tone as he could possibly assume, "it is in the power of the physician to administer certain drugs which may produce temporary composure; and an opiate will encourage a good night's rest. But you will forgive me for observing that the condition in which I now find you, is scarcely one to which medical science will apply successfully—*unless* seconded by aid of a more refined and delicate nature."

"I do not comprehend you, doctor," exclaimed Georgiana, casting upon him a glance of mingled surprise and uneasiness.

"I mean, Lady Hatfield," resumed Lascelles, "that you are the prey to some secret grief—some source of vexation and annoyance, which medical skill cannot remove. The aid of a refined and delicate nature to which I refer, is such as can be afforded only by a sincere and confidential friend. Without for an instant seeking to draw you into any explanations, it is my duty to assure you that unless your mind be tranquillised, medicine will not successfully encounter this nervous irritability—this intense anxiety—this oppressive feeling of coming evil, without apparent cause—and this sleeplessness at night,—of all which you complain."

"I thank you most sincerely for this candour and frankness on your part, doctor," said Lady Hatfield, after a long pause, during which she appeared to reflect profoundly. "To deny that I *have* suffered much in mind during the last few days, were to practise a useless deception upon you. But I require no confidant—I need not the solace of friendship. To your medical skill I trust for, at all events, a partial restoration to health; and travelling—change of scene—the excitement of visiting Paris—or some such means of diversion, will effect the rest."

These last words were, however, accompanied with a deep sigh—as if upon the lady's soul were forced the sad conviction that happiness and herself must evermore remain strangers to each other.

"I should scarcely recommend travelling in the winter time, Lady Hatfield," observed Doctor Lascelles. "Surely our own city can afford that constant variety of recreation and those ever-changing scenes of amusement, which may produce a beneficial effect upon your spirits."

"I abhor the pleasures of the fashionable world, doctor," said Georgiana emphatically. "There is something so cold in the ostentation of that sphere—so chilling in its magnificence—so formal in its pursuits—so ceremonial, so thoroughly artificial in all its features and proceedings, that when in the crowded ball-room or the brilliant *soirée*, I even feel more *alone* than when in the solitude of my own chamber."

"And yet, Lady Hatfield, throughout the extensive circle of your acquaintance," said the physician, "there must be at least a few endowed with intellectual qualifications adapted to render them agreeable. The most pleasant parties, composed of these select, might be given: your rank—your wealth—your own well-stored mind—and, pardon me, your beauty,—would ensure to you——"

"Oh! doctor," exclaimed Georgiana, "I can anticipate the arguments you are about to use; but, alas! my mind appears to be in that morbid state which discolours all objects with its own jaundiced thoughts. I speak thus candidly to you, doctor—because I am aware of your friendship for me—I know also that the admission I have now made will be regarded by you as a solemn secret—and perhaps your advice," she added, slowly and hesitatingly, "might prove beneficial to me. But, no—no," she exclaimed, her utterance suddenly assuming great rapidity, "it is useless to say more: advice cannot serve *me*!"

"There is scarcely a possible case of human vexation, grief, or annoyance, which cannot be relieved by the solace, or ameliorated by

the counsel, of a friend," observed Doctor Lascelles, dwelling emphatically upon his words.

Georgiana played abstractedly with the long, luxuriant hair which streamed over her shoulders, and spread its shining masses on the white pillow; but at the same time the snowy night-dress rose and sank rapidly with the heavings of her bosom.

"Believe me, Lady Hatfield," continued Doctor Lascelles, after a short pause, during which he vainly awaited a reply to his former observation, "I am deeply grieved to find that one who so little deserves the sting of grief or the presence of misfortune, should suffer from either the sharpness of the first, or the menaces of the latter. But is it not possible, my dear lady,—and now, forgive me if I avail myself of the privilege of a physician to ask this question,—is it not possible, I say, that you have conjured up phantoms which have no substantial existence? Remember that there are certain conditions of the mind, when the imagination becomes a prey to the wildest delusions——"

"Doctor, I am no monomaniac," said Lady Hatfield abruptly. "But justly, indeed—oh! most justly and truly did you ere now assert that I little deserve the sting of grief! If through any crime—any weakness—any frailty on my part, I had merited the sore displeasure of heaven—at that time——"

She checked herself abruptly, and burst into a flood of tears; and for a few moments her countenance appeared to be the sad index of a breaking heart.

"Doctor," she observed at length, "pardon this manifestation of weakness on my part; but my spirits are so depressed—my mind feels so truly wretched, that I cannot control these tears. Think no more of what we have been saying: I wish that we had not said so much! Leave me a prescription, and visit me again in the course of the day."

Lascelles wrote out a prescription, and then took his departure, wondering more than ever what secret cause of grief was nourished in the bosom of Lady Hatfield.

That this secret grief was the motive which had induced or compelled her to refuse the hand of Lord Ellingham, he could not doubt:—that it arose from no *crime—weakness*—nor *frailty* on her part, he felt assured; inasmuch as her own words, uttered in a paroxysm of mental anguish and not in a calm moment when deception might be her aim, proved that fact;—and that it was associated with any physical ailment, he could hardly believe. Because, if she were the prey to an insidious disease, no feeling of shame—no false delicacy could possibly force a woman of her good sense and naturally powerful mind to keep such a fact from her physician. What, then, could be that secret and profoundly-rooted cause of grief? Was it monomania of some novel or very rare kind? The curiosity of the man of science was keenly whetted: he already began to suspect that he was destined to discover some new phase in the constitution of the human mind; and he resolved to adopt all the means within his reach to solve the mystery.

This curiosity on his part was by no means of a common, vulgar, or base nature. Considering the profession and researchful disposition of the man, it was a legitimate and entirely venial sentiment. It was not that curiosity which loves to feed itself upon the materials of scandal. It was purely in connexion with the thirst of knowledge and the passion for discovery which ever animated him in that sphere of science to which he was so enthusiastically devoted.

The doctor was proceeding homewards, when he encountered Lord Ellingham. The Earl was walking by the side of an elderly gentleman, on whose arm hung a tall and graceful young lady; but the physician did not immediately catch a glimpse of her countenance, as it was turned towards Lord Ellingham, who was speaking at the moment.

The nobleman shook Lascelles warmly by the hand, and immediately introduced his companions by the names of Mr. and Miss de Medina.

The doctor bowed, and then cast a glance at the countenance of the young lady: but he started as if with a sudden pang,—for in the beautiful Jewess who now stood before him, he beheld—apparently past all possibility of error—the same female who a few days previously had attempted self-destruction in South-Moulton Street.

But, almost simultaneously with this unexpected conviction, the solemn promise which he had made to Tom Rainford (whom he only knew on that occasion by the denomination of Jameson) flashed to the mind of Doctor Lascelles; and, instantly composing himself, he uttered some observation of a general nature.

"I am glad we have thus met, doctor," said Lord Ellingham, who had not noticed his sudden, but evanescent excitement; "for my friend Mr. de Medina is a comparative stranger in London, and it is as well," added the nobleman, with a smile, "that he should become acquainted with the leading physician of the day."

"I believe that no one enjoys health so good as to be enabled to dispense altogether with our assistance," said the physician, bowing in acknowledgment of the compliment thus paid him. "The most perfect piece of mechanism must necessarily need repair sometimes."

"Decidedly so," said Lord Ellingham. "But we will not assert that physicians are necessary evils, doctor—in the same sense as the lawyers are."

"I appeal to Miss de Medina whether his lordship be not, by implication, too hard upon my profession," exclaimed Lascelles, laughing.

"His lordship," replied Esther, "was yesterday riding a very high-spirited horse; and had he been thrown in such a manner as to have incurred injury, I question whether he would have believed that his medical attendant was an evil, however necessary."

"I owe you my profound gratitude for this powerful defence of my profession, Miss de Medina," said the doctor, who had thus succeeded in compelling the young lady to speak.

He then raised his hat and passed on; but he had not proceeded many paces, when he was overtaken by Lord Ellingham, who had parted from his companions to have a few minutes' conversation with the doctor.

"That is a lovely girl to whom your lordship has just introduced me," said Lascelles.

"And as good in heart as she is beautiful in person," exclaimed the nobleman.

"Ah!" cried the physician, with a sly glance: "is Lady Hatfield already forgotten?"

"Far from it!" said Arthur, his tone instantly becoming mournful and his countenance overclouded. "You cannot think me so fickle—so vacillating, doctor. No: the image of Georgiana is never absent from my memory. I had only encountered Mr. de Medina and his daughter a few minutes before we met you; and, not only am I bound to show them every attention in my power, as they are tenants of mine and were strongly recommended to me by mutual friends at Liverpool—but also I am glad to court intellectual society, wherever it can be found in this city, to distract my mind from the *one* topic which so constantly and so painfully engrosses it."

"Are Mr. de Medina and his daughter such very agreeable companions?" inquired Lascelles, apparently in quite a casual manner.

"Mr. de Medina is a well-informed, intelligent, and even erudite man," answered the Earl. "His daughter is highly accomplished, sensible, and amiable. I feel an additional interest in them, because they belong to a race whom it is the fashion to revile and often to despise. It is true that my acquaintance with Mr. de Medina and his daughter scarcely dates from a month back; but I have already seen —and if not, I have *heard* enough of them, to know that he is the pattern of integrity and the young lady the personification of every virtue."

The doctor made no reply. Certain was he that he "could a tale unfold" which would totally undeceive his noble friend relative to the character of Esther. But his lips were sealed by a solemn vow; and, even if they were not, there was no necessity to detail how he had been summoned to attend on the young lady and rescue her from the fate and crime of suicide,—how he had good cause to know that she was either a wife or a mistress, but he suspected the latter,—how he had seen that splendid form stretched half-naked upon the bed, the bosom heaving convulsively with physical and mental agony, and the exquisitely modelled arms flung wildly about with excruciating pain,—how the large black eyes had been fixed imploringly upon him, and the vermillion lips had parted to give utterance to words demanding from himself the fiat of her life or death:—there was no necessity, we say, to narrate all this, even if no vow had bound him to silence, because Lord Ellingham sought not that lovely Jewess as a wife.

That Esther de Medina and the lady of South Moulton Street were one and the same person, the doctor felt convinced. The tones of Esther's voice, flowing upon the ear with such silver melody,—the two rows of brilliant, beautiful teeth,—the face—the hair—the eyes, —the configuration of the form, with its fine but justly proportioned bust and slender waist,—all were identical! But what chiefly amazed—nay, bewildered the physician, was the calm indifference with which Esther had met his rapid, searching glance,—the admirable composure with which she had encountered him—the firmness, amounting almost to an insolent assurance, with which she had spoken to him,—never once quailing, nor blushing, nor manifesting the slightest embarrassment, but actually treating him as a person whom she saw for the first time, and as if he were totally unacquainted with any thing that militated against her character;—all this was naturally a subject of ineffable astonishment and wonder.

Lord Ellingham accompanied the doctor to Grafton Street; and when they had entered the house, Dr. Lascelles made him acquainted with Lady Hatfield's indisposition.

"She is ill!" ejaculated Arthur, profoundly touched by these tidings: "and I dare not call even to inquire concerning her!"

"And wherefore should you not manifest that courtesy?" asked the doctor.

"I must forget her—I cannot demonstrate any farther interest in her behalf!" exclaimed the nobleman. "If there really exist reasons which render it impossible or imprudent for her to change her condition by marriage, it is useless for us to meet again:—and if she be swayed by caprice, I cannot suffer myself to be made the sport of her whims."

"There are the wanton, wilful whims of a coquette," said the doctor, impressively; "and there are the delusions of the monomaniac—but the latter are not the less conscientiously believed, although they be nothing save delusions."

"Is it possible?" cried Arthur, a sudden ray of hope breaking in upon him. "Can Georgiana be subject to phantasies of that nature? Oh! then she can be cured, doctor—and your skill may yet make us happy!"

"Rest assured, my dear Earl," was the reply, "that all the knowledge which I possess shall be devoted to that purpose."

"My eternal gratitude will be due to you, doctor," said the nobleman. "With your permission I shall return in the evening to learn from you how your charming patient progresses."

The physician signified his assent; and Lord Ellingham took his departure, new hopes animating his soul.

CHAPTER XV.
THE OPIATE.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Dr. Lascelles returned to Lady Hatfield's house on Piccadilly Hill.

Miss Mordaunt, whom he encountered in the drawing-room, informed him that Georgiana had become more composed and tranquil since she had taken the medicine which he had prescribed for her, and that she had requested to be left alone, as she experienced an inclination to sleep.

"It is nevertheless necessary that I should see her," said the physician.

Julia accordingly hastened to her friend's apartment, and speedily returned with the information that Lady Hatfield was not yet asleep, and that the doctor might walk up.

Lascelles immediately availed himself of this permission; but he found—as indeed he had fully anticipated—that his patient was rapidly yielding to the invincible drowsiness produced by the opiatic medicine which he had prescribed for her.

He seated himself by the bed-side, asked her a few ordinary questions, and then suffered her to fall undisturbed into slumber.

At length she slept profoundly.

A smile of satisfaction played for a moment upon the lips of the physician; but it yielded to a sombre cloud which almost immediately succeeded it—for a powerful struggle now suddenly arose in the breast of Dr. Lascelles.

In his ardent devotion to the science which he professed, he longed to satisfy himself on certain points at present admitting of doubt and involved in uncertainty: and, on the other hand, he hesitated at the accomplishment of a deed which he could not help regarding as a gross abuse of his privileges as a medical man. By virtue of the most sacred confidence he was admitted to the bed-chamber of his female patient; and he shrank from exercising that right in an illegitimate way.

Then, again, he reasoned to himself that if he were enabled to ascertain beyond all doubt that no physical cause induced Lady Hatfield to shrink from marriage, he must fall back upon the theory that she had become subject to certain monomaniac notions which influenced her mind to her own unhappiness; and he at length persuaded himself that he should be acting for her best interests, were he to put into execution the project which he had already formed.

Such an opinion, operating upon a man who possessed but few of the delicate and refined feelings of our nature, and who was ever ready to sacrifice all considerations to the cause of the medical science, speedily banished hesitation.

Having convinced himself that Georgiana slept so profoundly that there was no chance of awaking her, he locked the door, and again approached the bed.

And now his sacrilegious hands drew aside the snow-white dress which covered the sleeping lady's bosom; and the treasures of that gently-heaving breast were exposed to his view. But not a sensual thought was thereby excited in his mind: cold and passionless, he surveyed the beauteous spectacle only as a sculptor might measure the proportions of a marble Venus or Diana the huntress.

And not a trace of cancer was there: no unseemly mark, nor mole, nor scar, nor wound disfigured the glowing orbs that, rising from a broad and ample chest, swelled laterally over the upper part of the arms.

Yet wherefore did Dr. Lascelles abruptly start? and why did his countenance suddenly assume an expression of surprise—or rather of mingled doubt and astonishment—as his glances wandered over the fair bust thus exposed to his view?

Carefully and cautiously refastening the strings of the night-dress, he now assumed the air of a man who had discovered some clue to a mystery hitherto profoundly veiled; and unhesitatingly did he resolve to clear up all his doubts and all his newly-awakened suspicions.

Five minutes afterwards Dr. Lascelles left the room, Lady Hatfield still remaining buried in a deep slumber.

His countenance expressed surprise mingled with sorrow; and, cold—phlegmatic though his disposition was, he could not help murmuring to himself, "Is it possible?"

Having just looked into the drawing-room, to take leave of Miss Mordaunt, and state that his patient was progressing as favourably as could be expected, Dr. Lascelles returned home.

Lord Ellingham was waiting for him; and this interview the physician now dreaded.

"Are your tidings favourable, doctor?" was the nobleman's hasty and anxious inquiry.

"I regret, my dear Earl," answered Lascelles, "that I should have encouraged hopes——"

"Which are doomed to experience disappointment," added Arthur bitterly. "Oh! I might have anticipated this—unfortunate being that I am! But how have you ascertained that your ideas of this morning are unfounded? How have you convinced yourself that Georgiana is *not* a prey to those mental eccentricities which your skill might reach? Has she revealed to you her motive for refusing—for rejecting me,—*me* whom she professes to love?"

"She has revealed nothing, my lord," replied the doctor solemnly. "But I have satisfied myself that monomania and Lady Hatfield are total strangers to each other."

"Then must I abandon all hope!" exclaimed the Earl; "for it is evident that I am the victim of a ridiculous caprice. And yet," he added, a sudden thought striking him, "I will see her once again. She is ill—she is suffering—perhaps she will be pleased to behold me—and who knows——"

"Not this evening, my lord—not this evening!" cried the doctor, stopping the nobleman who had seized his hat and was darting towards the door. "Lady Hatfield sleeps—and she must not be disturbed."

But Lord Ellingham was too full of his new idea to pay any attention to the physician; and he rushed from the house.

CHAPTER XVI.
THE LOVER AND THE UNCLE.

A few minutes brought Arthur to the residence of Lady Hatfield; and his hand was already upon the knocker, when a sudden idea struck him—and he asked himself, "How can I demand admission to the bed-chamber of Georgiana?"

The madness of his project now being evident to him, he mournfully turned away, when the door suddenly opened, and a tall, stout, fine-looking man, dressed as a country squire, issued from the house.

Lord Ellingham immediately recognised Sir Ralph Walsingham, Georgiana's uncle, with whom he was well acquainted. The baronet also perceived the Earl; and they shook each other cordially by the hand.

"Were you about to call?" inquired Sir Ralph.

"I was," answered Lord Ellingham. "Hearing of Lady Hatfield's illness——"

"She is better—much better," interrupted the baronet. "I have just left her; and she has not long awoke from a profound and refreshing slumber."

"I am delighted to hear these tidings," said the nobleman.

The servant, seeing that Sir Ralph had stopped to converse with the Earl, still kept the door open; and, as Arthur had admitted that he was about to call, there was now no alternative save for him to leave his card.

The baronet then took his arm; and they walked away together.

"Georgiana is a singular being," observed Sir Ralph; "and although she is my niece, yet there are times when I hardly know what to make of her. She is too intellectual—too steady—to be capricious; and still——"

"My dear Sir Ralph," interrupted the Earl, "you have touched upon the very topic concerning which I longed to speak the moment I met you. Will you accompany me to my abode, and favour me for a short period with your attention to what I am so anxious to confide to you?"

"With pleasure," was the reply. "But I have already learnt from Georgiana's lips the principal fact to which your lordship doubtless alludes; and it was indeed for the purpose of introducing the subject that I ere now made the remark relative to the occasional incomprehensibility of her character. Let us not, however, continue the discourse in the public street."

The nobleman and the baronet speedily reached the mansion of the former in Pall-Mall West; and when they were seated in an elegantly furnished apartment, with a bottle of claret before them, they renewed the conversation.

"Georgiana," said the baronet, "has informed me that your lordship has honoured her by the offer of your hand; and I need hardly assure you how rejoiced I should feel to welcome as a relative one whom I already esteem as a friend. But—to my inexpressible surprise—I find that—that——"

"That she has refused me," exclaimed the Earl;—"refused me without assigning any reason."

"I cannot think how it is to be accounted for," continued the baronet; "but Georgiana has invariably manifested a repugnance to the topic of marriage whenever I have urged it upon her. Of course, as her uncle—and double her age, my lord—I can give her advice just as if I were her father; and for some years past I have recommended her to consider well the propriety of obtaining a legal protector, her natural ones being no more. But all my reasoning has proved unavailing; and if your lordship cannot persuade my obstinate niece," he added, with a sly laugh, "then no one must hope to do so."

"I will frankly admit to you," said the Earl, "that my happiness depends on your niece's decision. I am no hero of romance—but I entertain so sincere, so ardent an affection for Lady Hatfield, that my life will be embittered by a perseverance in her refusal to allow me to call her mine."

"She will not persist in this folly—she cannot," exclaimed Sir Ralph emphatically. "It is a mere whim—a caprice; and indeed I have often thought that her disposition has somewhat altered ever since a dreadful fright which she sustained six or seven years ago——"

"Ah!" said the Earl. "What was the nature of the incident to which you allude?"

"I must tell your lordship," returned the baronet,—"unless, indeed, you are already acquainted with the fact,—that Hampshire was for three or four years—between 1818 and 1821 or 22—the scene of the exploits of a celebrated highwayman——"

"You allude to the Black Mask, no doubt?" interrupted Lord Ellingham interrogatively.

"Precisely so," answered the baronet. "The Black Mask—as the villain was called—was one of the most desperate robbers that ever

infested the highways. He would stop the stage-coach as readily as he would a single traveller on horseback; and such was his valour as well as his extraordinary skill, that he defied all attempts to capture him."

"I remember reading his exploits at the time," said the Earl. "The most conflicting accounts were reported concerning him. Some declared he was an old man—others that he was quite young; but I believe that all agreed in ascribing to him a more forbearing disposition than usually characterises persons of his class."

"I will even go so far as to assert that there was something chivalrous in his character," exclaimed the baronet. "He invariably assured travellers whom he stopped, that he should be grieved to harm them; but that if they provoked him by resistance, he would not hesitate to punish them severely. If he fell in with a carriage containing ladies, he never attempted to rifle them of their jewellery and trinkets, but contented himself with simply demanding their purses. Those being surrendered, he would gallop away. I never heard of any unnecessary violence—nor of any act of cruelty which he perpetrated. Neither did I ever meet a soul who could give anything like a credible description of his countenance. The invariable black mask which concealed his features, and from the use of which he derived his name, seemed a portion of himself; and although gossips did now and then tell strange tales about his appearance, they were all too contradictory to allow a scintillation of the real truth to transpire."

"But in what manner was the Black Mask connected with the fright which Lady Hatfield experienced some years ago?" asked the Earl impatiently.

"You are perhaps aware that the late Earl and Countess of Mauleverer possessed a country-seat between Winchester and New Alresford—not very far distant from Walsingham Manor, my own rural abode," said Sir Ralph. "It must have been seven years ago that Georgiana, who always preferred Mauleverer Lodge to the town-mansion—even during the London season,—was staying alone there—I mean so far alone, that at the time there were no other persons at the Lodge save the servants. Well, one night the Black Mask broke into the place—the only time he was ever known to commit a burglary—and such was the fright which Georgiana experienced, that for weeks and months afterwards her family frequently trembled lest her reason had received a shock."

"It must indeed have been an alarming situation for a young lady—alone, as it were, in a spacious and secluded country dwelling——"

"And Georgiana was but eighteen, I think, at the time," interrupted Sir Ralph Walsingham. "She certainly experienced a dreadful fright; and although, thank God! her reason is as unimpaired as ever it was, still we cannot say that the sudden shock might not have produced some strange effect which may probably account for the otherwise inexplicable whimsicality—for I can denominate it nothing else ——"

"Oh! I thank you, my dear Sir Ralph, for this explanation," cried Lord Ellingham, in the joy of reviving hope. "Yes—I see it all: your niece experienced a shock which has produced a species of idiosyncratic effect upon her; but the constant kindness—the unwearied attention of one who loves her, and whom she loves in return, will restore her mind to its vigorous and healthy condition. To-morrow will I visit her again:—Oh! how unkind—how ungenerous of me to remain away so long!"

There was a pause, during which Arthur gave way to all the bright allurements of the pleasing vision which he now conjured up to his imagination.

At length Sir Ralph Walsingham felt the silence to be irksome and awkward; and he ventured to break it.

"We were talking just now, my lord," he said, "of the famous highwayman known as the Black Mask. He disappeared from Hampshire very suddenly; and the old women declared that his time being out, he was carried off by the Devil, who had protected him against all the devices and snares imagined by the authorities to capture him."

"And perhaps the highwayman who robbed Lady Hatfield the other day," observed Lord Ellingham, "may be the very one who rendered himself so notorious in Hampshire a few years ago?"

"Your lordship judges by the fact that the scoundrel who stopped my niece near Hounslow wore a black mask," said the baronet; "but the generality of robbers on the high roads adopt that mode of disguise. Thank heaven! public depredators of the kind are becoming very scarce in this country!"

In such conversation did the nobleman and the baronet while away the time until eleven o'clock, when the latter took his leave, and Arthur retired to his chamber to dream of the charming but incomprehensible lady who had obtained such empire over his soul.

CHAPTER XVII.
THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.—JACOB.

On the same evening that the interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Sir Ralph Walsingham took place, as narrated in the preceding chapter, the following scene occurred at the house of Toby Bunce in Earl Street, Seven Dials.

Mrs. Bunce was alone in the dirty, dingy back room, which could not be said to be lighted, but merely redeemed from total darkness, by the solitary candle that stood on the table; and she was busily employed in lighting the fire.

Having succeeded in this object, she placed the kettle on the grate to boil; and then took from a cupboard a bottle half full of gin, two common blue mugs, a broken basin containing a little lump sugar, and a couple of pewter spoons, all of which articles she ranged around the brass candle-stick with a view to make as good a show as possible.

Then she seated herself by the fire, and consulted an old silver-watch which she drew from her pocket, and which was in reality the property of her husband, whom she would not however trust with it under any consideration.

"Eight o'clock," she said aloud in a musing tone. "He can't be very long now; and Toby won't be in till ten. If he is, I'll send him out again—with a flea in his ear," she added, chuckling at the idea of her supremacy in her own domestic sphere. "I wonder who'd be ruled by a feller like Toby? Not me, indeed! I should think not. But I wish old Bones would come," she continued, with a glance of satisfaction at the table. "Every thing does look so comfortable; and I've put 'em in such a manner that the light falls on 'em all at once. Toby never would have thought of that. It's only us women that know what tidiness is."

Tidiness indeed! The windows were dingy with dirt—the walls were begrimed with smoke and dust—the floor was as black as the deck of a collier—and the cob-webs hung like filthy rags in the corners of the room.

Scarcely had Mrs. Bunce completed her survey of the place and its arrangements, when a low knock summoned her to the street-door; and in a few moments she returned, accompanied by Old Death.

The hideous man was very cold; and, seating himself as near the fire as possible without actually burning his knees, he said, "Now, Betsy my dear, brew me a mug of something cheering as soon as possible."

"That I will, Ben," returned Mrs. Bunce, in as pleasant a tone of voice as she could assume; then she bustled about with great alacrity until the steaming liquid was duly compounded, and Old Death had expressed his satisfaction by means of a short grunt after the first sip.

"Is it nice, Ben?" asked Mrs. Bunce endearingly.

"Very. Now make yourself some, Betsy; and sit down quietly, for we must have a talk about you know what. Business has prevented me from attending to it before; but now that I have got an evening to spare—and Toby is out of the way——"

"Oh! you know very well, Ben," interrupted Mrs. Bunce, "that I can always manage *him* as I like. He's such a fool, and so completely under my thumb, that I shouldn't even mind telling him I'd been your mistress for years before I was his wife."

"Keep your tongue quiet, Betsy—keep your tongue quiet," exclaimed Old Death, with a hyena-like growl. "Never provoke irritation unnecessarily. But let's to business. Jacob is out on the watch after Tom Rain; and I told the lad to come up here before ten. And now about this letter," he continued drawing one from his pocket-book: "it proves, you see, that the child is well-born—and if the address had only been written on the outside, we might make a good thing of the matter."

"Just so," observed Mrs. Bunce. "When Mr. Rainford called this afternoon he was so particular in asking me whether I had found any papers about the woman's clothes; but I declared I had not—and he was quite satisfied. He paid me, too, very handsome for the funeral expenses and all my trouble. If he was to know about that letter, Ben?"

"How can he know?" exclaimed Old Death impatiently. "Now what I think," he continued in a milder tone, "is just this:—the woman Watts was reduced to such a desperate state of poverty, that she wrote this letter to the mother of the boy Charles——"

"Why, of course," interrupted Mrs. Bunce. "She says as much *in* the letter."

"Will you listen to me?" growled Old Death angrily: "you don't know what I was going to observe."

"Don't be cross, Ben: I won't stop you again," said the woman in a coaxing tone.

"Mind you don't, then," ejaculated Bones, allowing himself to be pacified. "Well, this Sarah Watts wrote that letter, as I was saying, with the intention of sending it, no doubt, either by post or by an acquaintance to the lady in London. I think that is plain enough. Then, when she had finished writing it, something evidently made her change her mind, and resolve on coming up to London herself. This is also plain; because, if it wasn't so, why did the letter never go—and why did she come to London?"

"How well you do talk, Ben," said Mrs. Bunce.

"I talk to the point, I hope," observed Old Death. "Now how stands the matter? Here is a very important letter, wanting two main things to render it completely valuable to us. The first thing it wants is the name of the place from which it would have been dated, had it ever been sent: and the second thing it wants is the name of the lady to whom it was intended to be sent. In a word, it wants the address of the writer and the address of the lady to whom it was written, and who is the mother of that boy Charles."

"What good would it do you to have the address of the writer, since she is dead and buried?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Because I could then visit the place where the woman was when she wrote this letter," replied Old Death. "I could make inquiries concerning the late Sarah Watts; and I know too well how to put two and two together not to arrive at some certainty in the long run."

"To be sure!" ejaculated Mrs. Bunce. "How clever you are, dear Ben."

"I don't know about being clever, Betsy my dear," returned the hideous old man; "but *this* I do think—that I'm rather wide awake."

And then he chuckled so heartily, while his toothless jaws wagged up and down so horribly, that he appeared to be a corpse under a process of galvanism; for if a dead body could be made to utter sounds, they would not be more sepulchral than those which now emanated from the throat of Old Death.

Mrs. Bunce considered it to be her duty to chuckle also; and her querulous tones seemed a humble accompaniment to the guttural sounds which we have attempted to describe.

At length the chuckling ceased on both sides; and Mrs. Bunce replenished the mugs with hot gin-and-water.

"But even as it is," suddenly observed Old Death, after a hasty glance at the letter, which he now slowly folded up and returned to his greasy pocket-book,—"but even as it is, we may still make something of the business. If we could only find a clue to the mother of that boy, it would be a fortune in itself. I tell you what we must do!" he exclaimed emphatically.

"What?" asked his ancient mistress.

"Get that boy into our own keeping," replied Bones, with a sly smile; "and then we can pump him of all he may happen to know concerning the deceased Sarah Watts."

"Excellent!" cried Mrs. Bunce, clapping her hands, "But how will you find out where Mr. Rainford lives?"

"Jacob is after him. For several reasons I want to know as much as I can about that strange fellow. The very day that I made the bargain with him about smashing all the flimsies he might bring me, he wrote an extraordinary note to the very lady whom he had robbed the night before; and he made her go into the witness-box at Bow Street and deliberately perjure herself to serve him. Then he starts off to Pall Mall, when the Jewess prisoner was brought up, and delivers a note at the house of Lord Ellingham; and Lord Ellingham comes straight down to the Police-Court and swears black and blue that the Jewess is innocent."

"And was she?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"That's more than I can say," answered Old Death; "seeing that I know nothing at all about the affair. Well, these two strange things, showing an extraordinary influence on the part of Rainford over Lady Hatfield on the one side, and Lord Ellingham on the other, have quite puzzled me. He is an enigma that I must solve."

"Does not Tullock know all about him?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"Tullock knows only that Tom took to the road some years ago, down in the country; for Tullock then did at Winchester just what I do now in London: only," added Bones, with a knowing glance and a compressed smile of the lips which puckered up his hideous face into one unvaried mass of wrinkles,—"only, my dear Betsy, Tullock never had the connexion which I have. He had no correspondent at Hamburg to whom he could send over the notes that are stolen, and stopped at the Bank: he had no well-contrived places to receive goods—places," continued Old Death, emphatically, "which have baffled the police for thirty years, and will baffle them as long again ——if I live."

"And why should you not, dear?" said Mrs. Bunce coaxingly.

"Because I cannot expect it," replied Old Death abruptly. "However—you know what I have done for myself, and in what way I manage my business. You only, Betsy dear, are acquainted with my secrets."

"And you are as safe with me as if I was deaf and dumb and unable to write," rejoined the woman.

"I know that—I know that," said Bones, hastily: then in a slower tone he added significantly, "Because if there was a smash, we should all go together, Betsy."

"Lor! Ben—don't talk in that way—don't!" cried Mrs. Bunce. "Let's see—what were we saying? Oh! you was telling me about Mr. Rainford."

"I was only observing that Tullock lost sight of him for some years, and knows nothing that happened to him till he turned up in London the other day."

"I don't suppose Rainford is his proper name?" observed the woman inquiringly.

"Tullock never told me," answered Bones; "and as he and Tom are thick together, I can't ask him too many questions. The fact is, Rainford will prove the most useful man I ever had in my service, as I may call it; and I must not risk offending him. See how neatly he did that job the other night—how beautifully he came off with the two thousand!"

"And it never got into the papers either," observed Mrs. Bunce.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Old Death, with another chuckle. "Tom calculated all that beforehand—or he never would have been fool enough to go so quietly and introduce himself as Captain Sparks to the very people he meant to rob. Ha! ha! clear-headed fellow, that Tom! He first ascertained the precise character of all the parties concerned; and he knew that he might plunder them with impunity. Sir Christopher and Mr. Torrens were sure not to talk about it, for fear of the whole disgraceful story about the purchase of the daughter coming out. Frank Curtis is a cowardly boaster, who would not like it to be known that a single highwayman had mastered him;—the lawyer was sure to speak or hold his tongue, just as his rich client Sir Christopher ordered him;—and Jeffreys was safe. Tom weighed all this, and boldly introduced himself to them without the least attempt at disguising his person. Oh! It was capitally managed—and Tom is a valuable fellow!"

Mr. Bones seldom spoke so long at a time; but he was carried away by his enthusiastic admiration of Tom Rainford; and he accordingly talked himself so effectually out of breath, that a fit of coughing supervened, and he was nearly choked.

Betsy, however, slapped him on the back; and the old man gradually recovered himself—but not before his fierce-looking eyes were dimmed with the scalding rheum which overflowed them.

"You are afraid to offend Mr. Rainford," said Mrs. Bunce, after a pause, "and yet you think of taking away that boy from him."

"Pshaw!" cried Old Death, whom the coughing-fit had put into a bad humour; "do you think I should steal the child and then tell him of it?"

"Of course not," said Mrs. Bunce. "I am a fool."

"You are indeed, Betsy," rejoined Old Death. "And yet you are the *least* foolish woman I ever knew; or else I never should have made you my confidant as I have done. And now I tell you, Betsy, that I have many great schemes in my head; and I shall require your assistance. In the first place we must get hold of that boy Charley somehow or another—provided we can find out Rainford's abode, which I think is scarcely doubtful. Then we must act upon all the information we can glean from the child, and find out who his mother really is. In the next place I must ascertain all I can concerning this Jewess—this Esther de Medina. If she *did* steal the diamonds, she is the cleverest female thief in all England—for she has managed to get clean off with her prize; and such a woman would be invaluable to me. Besides, if she pursues the same game—supposing that she has really begun it—she will want my assistance to dispose of the property; and she will gladly listen to my overtures. Such a beautiful creature as I understand she is, could insinuate herself anywhere, and rob the best houses in London. Ah! Betsy, I must not sleep over these matters. But, hark! That's Jacob's knock!"

"Poor Jacob!" cried Mrs. Bunce, with a subdued sigh: "If he only knew——"

"Silence, woman!" cried Bones in a furious manner. "Go to the door."

Mrs. Bunce was frightened by the vehemence of Old Death's manner, and hastened to obey his command.

In a few moments she returned, followed by Jacob, who seemed sinking with fatigue.

"Well," said Old Death impatiently, "what news?"

"Give me something to eat first—for I am famished," cried Jacob, throwing himself upon a chair.

"Not a morsel, till you tell me what you have done!" exclaimed Bones angrily, as he rose from his seat.

"I will *not* speak a word on that subject before I have had food," said Jacob, his bright eyes flashing fire, and a hectic glow appearing on his pale cheeks. "You make me wander about all day on your business, without a penny in my pocket to buy a piece of bread——"

"Because he who has to earn his supper works all the better for it," ejaculated Bones, his lips quivering with rage. "Now speak, Jacob—or, by God——"

"You sha'n't bully me in this way," cried the lad, bursting into tears, and yet with all the evidences of intense passion working upon his countenance. "By what right do you treat me like a dog? You fling me a bone when you choose—and you think I will lick your hand like a spaniel. I tell you once for all, I won't put up with it any longer."

"You won't, Jacob—you won't, eh?" said Old Death, in a very low tone; but at the same time he dealt the lad such a sudden and severe box on the ears, that the poor youth was hurled heavily from his chair on the hard floor.

But, springing up in a moment, he flew like a tiger at Old Death, whose small amount of strength was exhausted by the effort which it had required on the part of so aged a man to deal such a blow; and Jacob would have mastered him in another instant, had not Mrs. Bunce interfered.

With a loud scream, she precipitated herself on the lad; and, seizing him in her bony arms, forced him back into his seat, saying—"There, Jacob—for God's sake be quiet; and I'll give you something nice directly."

The lad made no reply, but darted a look of vindictive hate towards Old Death, who had sunk back exhausted on the chair which he had ere now quitted.

Then Mrs. Bunce hastened to the cupboard and produced a loaf and the remains of a cold joint, which she placed before Jacob, who, enraged as he was at the treatment he had just received, could not help wondering within himself how Toby's wife had become so liberal as to place the viands without reserve at his disposal.

The woman seemed to penetrate his thoughts; for she said, "Eat as much as you like, Jacob: don't be afraid. I sha'n't mind if you eat it—*nearly* all."

The lad smothered his resentment so far as not to permit it to interfere with his appetite; and he devoured his supper without once glancing towards Old Death, who on his side appeared unable to recover from the surprise into which Jacob's unusually rebellious conduct had thrown him.

A profound silence reigned in that room for several minutes.

At length Jacob made an end of his meal; and then Old Death spoke.

"And so this is the reward," he said, "which I receive for all my kindness towards you. Without me, what would have become of you? Deserted by your parents—a foundling—a miserable infant, abandoned to the tender mercies of the workhouse authorities——"

"Would that I had died *then*!" interrupted Jacob emphatically. "You make a boast of having taken care of me—of having reared me—such a rearing as it has been!—and yet I wish you had left me to perish on the workhouse steps where, you say, you found me. I have tried to be obedient to you—I have done all I could to please you; but do you ever utter a kind word to me? Even when I succeed in doing your bidding, what reward is mine? Blows—reproaches—sorry meals, few and far between——"

"Well, well, Jacob—I think I have not *quite* done my duty towards you," said Old Death, who in reality could have murdered the boy at that moment, but who was compelled to adopt a conciliatory tone and manner in order to retain so useful an auxiliary in his service: "but let us say no more about it—and things shall be better in future. Instead of having no regular place of abode and sleeping in lodging-houses, you shall have half-a-crown a week, Jacob, to hire a little room for yourself."

"There—Jacob; only think of that!" cried Mrs. Bunce, in a tone expressive of high approval of this munificence on the part of Old Death.

"And you shall have threepence every day for your dinner, Jacob," continued Bones, "in addition to your breakfast and tea which you always get here."

"But will you keep to that arrangement?" asked the lad, considerably softened by this prospect, which was far brighter than any he had as yet beheld.

"I will—I will," replied Old Death. "And if you have brought me any good news to-night, I'll give you ten shillings—ten whole shillings, Jacob—to buy some nice clothes and shoes in Monmouth Street."

"Put down the money!" cried Jacob, now completely won back to the interests of the crafty old villain who knew so well how to curb the evanescent spirit of his miserable slave.

"I will," said Bones; and he laid four half-crowns upon the table.

"That's right!" exclaimed Jacob, his eyes glistening with delight at the prospect of fingering such a treasure: then he glanced rapidly at his ragged apparel, with a smile on his lip that expressed his conviction of shortly being able to procure a more comfortable attire.

"Go on," said Old Death. "What have you done?"

"When Mr. Rainford went away from here this afternoon," returned Jacob, "I followed him at a good distance—but not so far off that I stood a chance of losing sight of him. Well, first he went to Tullock's; and there he stayed some little time. Then he walked into an eating-house in the Strand; and at that place he stopped about a couple of hours—while I walked up and down on the other side of the way. At length he came out, with another gentleman——"

"What was he like?" demanded Old Death.

"A fine—tall—handsome man—with dark hair and eyes," responded Jacob.

"I don't know him," said Bones. "Never mind;—go on with your story, and let it be as short as possible."

"Well," continued the lad, "this gentleman and Mr. Rainford walked together as far as Bridge Street, Blackfriars: and there they parted. The gentleman went into a house in Bridge Street—and Mr. Rainford crossed the bridge. It was now getting dusk; and I was obliged to keep closer to him. But he seldom turned round—and when he did, I took good care he should not see me. So, on he went till he came to the Elephant and Castle; and close by there he suddenly met a lady with a dark veil over her face, and holding a little boy by the hand. They stood and talked for a moment just opposite a shop-window which was lighted up; and I saw well enough that the little boy was the very same that was brought here the other night by the woman who was buried so quietly this morning."

"Then we know that the boy is still in *his* care!" ejaculated Old Death, exchanging significant glances with Mrs. Bunce. "Go on, Jacob. I can see that the ten shillings will be yours."

"Yes—that they will!" cried the lad, apparently having forgotten the blow which he had recently received. "Well, so I knew the boy at once, though he is much changed—nicely dressed, and already quite plump and rosy. Mr. Rainford patted him on the face, and the boy laughed and seemed so happy! Then Mr. Rainford gave the lady his arm; and they walked a little way down the road till they came to a jeweller's shop, where they stopped to look in at the window. Mr. Rainford pointed out some article to the lady; and they went into the shop, the lady still holding the little boy carefully by the hand. The moment they were safe inside, I watched them through the window; and I saw Mr. Rainford looking at a pair of ear-rings. In a few moments he handed them to the lady. She lifted up her veil to examine them; and I knew her again in a moment. But who do you think she was?"

Old Death shook his head.

"No—I don't think you ever could guess," cried Jacob.

"Then who is she?" demanded Bones impatiently.

"The Jewess who was accused of stealing the diamonds at Bow Street the other day," answered Jacob.

"Esther de Medina!" cried Old Death. "The very person we were speaking about just now!" he added, exchanging another glance with Mrs. Bunce. "But go on, Jacob—go on."

"I was rather surprised at that discovery," continued Jacob; "because I thought it so odd that both Mr. Rainford and the Jewess should have been had up on the very same day at Bow Street, on different charges, and that both should have got off."

"It is strange—very strange!" murmured Old Death. "But did you find out Tom Rain's address? That is the chief thing *I* want to know."

"Don't be in a hurry," said Jacob: "let me tell my story in my own way. Well, so the Jewess seemed to like the ear-rings; and she gave Mr. Rainford such a sweet smile—Oh! what a sweet smile—as he pulled out his purse and paid for them. I don't know how it was—but it really went to my heart to think that such a beautiful lady should——"

"Never mind what you felt, Jacob," interrupted Old Death abruptly. "Make an end of your story."

"Well, the ear-rings were put into a nice little box, with some wool to keep them from rubbing; and the lady drew down her veil again, before she left the shop."

"Now, Jacob—tell me the truth," said Old Death: "did either Tom Rain or the Jewess take any little thing—at a moment, you know, when the jeweller's back was turned——"

"No—not a thing!" cried the lad emphatically. "I can swear they did not."

"You are quite sure?" observed Old Death.

"As sure as that I'm here; for I never took my eyes off them from the moment they entered the shop till they came out," responded Jacob. "And when they did come out, I was very near being seen by Mr. Rainford—for I was then in front of them; and I had only just time to slip into the shade of the wall between the windows of the jeweller's shop and the next one. Then I heard Mr. Rainford say to the Jewess, '*Now this little present is in part a recompense for the diamonds which I made you give up*.'—The lady said something in a low tone; but I could not catch it—and they went on, the little boy with them."

"Then she did steal the diamonds!" exclaimed Old Death. "But how could such a man as Lord Ellingham feel any interest in her? and how could he have been induced to perjure himself to save her?"

"Isn't it strange?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"I'm all in the dark at present," returned Bones. "But go on, Jacob."

"They walked on till they came to a street on the left-hand side; and into that street they turned. I never lost sight of them once; but two or three times I thought Mr. Rainford would have twigged me. He did not, though; and I at last traced them to a house in Lock's Fields ——"

"Lock's Fields—eh?" cried Old Death. "Can they possibly be living there?"

"They are," returned Jacob; "and I can take you over to the very street and the very house any time you like."

"Well done!" ejaculated Bones, indulging in another long and hearty chuckle, which was echoed by Mrs. Bunce; and then they both rubbed their hands gleefully to think that they had made such important discoveries through the medium of Jacob.

Fresh supplies of grog were brewed; and the lad was not only permitted to consign the four half-crowns to his pocket, but was also regaled with an occasional sip of gin-and-water from Mrs. Bunce's own mug.

The return of Toby at ten o'clock prevented any further conversation on the interesting topics which had previously been discussed; for Mrs. Bunce's husband was not admitted to the entire confidence of his spouse and of Mr. Benjamin Bones, alias Old Death.

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE LOVERS.

It was noon; and Lady Hatfield sate alone in her drawing-room.

She felt herself so much better, and Dr. Lascelles had that morning so earnestly recommended her to quit the bed-chamber and seek the change of scene which even a removal from one apartment to another ever affords—especially to an invalid, that she had not hesitated to follow her own inclination and his advice, both of which were fully of accord.

Her uncle, Sir Ralph Walsingham, was announced shortly after Lady Hatfield had descended to the drawing-room.

"My dear Georgiana," exclaimed the honest and kind-hearted man, as he entered the apartment, "I am delighted to find you here. But why are you alone? Where is Miss Mordaunt?"

"In the parlour below," replied Lady Hatfield. "Julia has a visitor," she added with an arch smile, in spite of the melancholy which still oppressed her mind.

"A visitor!" ejaculated the baronet. "Sir Christopher Blunt, I'll be bound!"

"You have guessed rightly, my dear uncle. But how——"

"How should I know anything about it?" interrupted Sir Ralph. "Surely, Georgiana, you must be too well acquainted with your friend's disposition to suppose that she could have possibly held her tongue relative to the presumed attachment of the worthy knight? Why, all the time she was at the Manor, did she not absolutely hurl Sir Christopher's name at every soul whom she could engage in conversation? Was it not 'Sir Christopher had told her *this* last season,' and 'Sir Christopher had assured her *that*?' and did she not go much farther than merely to hint that Sir Christopher was dying for her? For my part, I was sick of Sir Christopher's name. But now I suppose he has come to lay his title and fortune at her feet, as the newspapers say: or else what could possibly signify a visit at so unseemly an hour as mid-day?"

"It will be an excellent match for Julia," remarked Georgiana, by way of saying something. "She is not one of those who believe that marriage should be only a convention of hearts, and not of worldly interests."

And as Lady Hatfield made this observation, a profound sigh escaped her bosom.

"What means that sigh, niece?" demanded the baronet. "Are you envious of Miss Mordaunt's worldly-mindedness? I am convinced you are not. By the way, I met Lord Ellingham last evening——"

"His lordship left his card," said Lady Hatfield, casting down her eyes, while her bosom again rose and fell with a long and painfully-drawn sigh.

"Georgiana," exclaimed Sir Ralph, seating himself by the side of his niece, and taking her hand in a kind manner, "your conduct towards that young Earl is not just—is not generous—is not rational."

"Oh! my dear uncle," cried Lady Hatfield, starting wildly, "for heaven's sake renew not the discussion of last evening!"

"Pardon me, my dear niece," said Sir Ralph, affectionately but firmly, "if I give you pain by referring to the topic of that discussion. I am your nearest relation—I am a widower, and childless: you know that my property is extensive—and my fond hope has ever been, since the death of your aunt Lady Walsingham, that you would marry, and that your children should inherit those estates and that fortune which I can bequeath to whomsoever I will. But you refuse to accept the hand of a man who is every way worthy of you—you reject an alliance which, in every human probability, would be blessed by a progeny to whom my wealth and yours may alike descend. Nay—interrupt me not, dear Georgiana: I am old enough to be your father—I love you as if you were my daughter—and I have your welfare deeply at heart. To speak frankly, I had a long conversation last evening with Lord Ellingham——"

Georgiana's attention was for an instant broken by a wild start of despair.

"My God! what signifies this grief, Georgiana?" asked her uncle. "I thought to give you pleasure by the assurance I was about to disclose,—an assurance which conveys to you the unalterable fidelity of the Earl's affection—his readiness to bury in oblivion any little whim or caprice which induced you to subject him to the humiliation of a refusal the other day—his determination to study your happiness so entirely that any cloud of melancholy, or unknown and unfounded presentiment—any morbid feeling, in a word—which hangs upon your mind, shall speedily be dissipated. Such are his generous intentions—such are his tender aspirations, Georgiana:—can you reject his suit again?"

This appeal, made to the unhappy lady by an individual who, though only related to her by the fact of having married her mother's

sister, had still ever manifested towards her the sincerest affection and friendship,—this appeal, we say, came with such overwhelming force upon the mind of Georgiana, that she knew not how to answer it.

"You consent, Georgiana—you consent!" exclaimed Sir Ralph, entirely mistaking the cause of her profound silence; and, starting up, he rushed from the room before her lips could give utterance to a syllable that might have the effect of stopping him.

"Merciful God! what does he mean to do?" cried Georgiana, clasping her hands together, while a species of spasmodic shuddering came over her entire frame.

Hasty footsteps approached the door.

Wildly did the unhappy lady glance around her—with the terrified and imploring air of one whom the officers of justice were about to fetch to the scaffold.

The door flew open: Georgiana averted her eyes;—but at the next moment her hands were grasped in those of another, and warm lips were pressed upon each fair hand of hers—and for a single instant there streamed through her whole being the electric warmth of ineffable delight, hope, and love!

She sank back upon the sofa whence she had risen: her eyes, which for a moment had seemed to lose the faculty of sight, were involuntarily turned toward the Earl of Ellingham, who was kneeling at her feet;—and simultaneously her uncle's voice, sounding like the knell of destiny upon her ears, exclaimed, "I told you she had consented, Ellingham: be happy—for Georgiana is yours!"

The door of the apartment was then closed hastily; and Lady Hatfield now knew that she was alone with her lover.

"Oh! my dearest Georgiana," murmured Arthur, still pressing the lady's hands in his own, "how happy have you at length made me—and how can I ever express the joy which animates me at this moment! My heart dances wildly with joy and gratitude; and all the anguish which I have lately experienced, is forgotten—as if it never had been. Indeed, my beloved one, it is for me to implore your pardon—for I should not have remained absent from you so long. But now that we are re-united, and your indisposition has passed, ——now that your mind has recovered its naturally healthy tone,—there is nothing, my Georgiana, to interrupt the free course of our felicity."

Lady Hatfield was seized with a certain involuntary horror, which completely stupefied her, as these impassioned exclamations fell upon her ears: and vainly—vainly did she endeavour to reply.

Arthur rose, and seating himself by her side on the sofa, passed his arm around her slender waist, and drawing her gently towards him, said in a subdued tone, "From this day forth, beloved Georgiana, you must have no secrets unknown to me. Confide in me as your best and sincerest friend—and the tenderest sympathy shall flow from my heart to solace you in those moments of melancholy which no mortal, however prosperously placed, can hope altogether to avoid. In the society of a husband who will never cease to love you—whose constant care shall be to ensure your felicity—and whose unwearied attention shall be devoted to the promotion of your happiness, your life will be spent in an atmosphere into which a cloud shall seldom intrude. Oh! what pictures of perfect bliss present themselves to my imagination!"

The enamoured nobleman pressed the fair one closer to his breast, as he thus poured forth his soul with all the ardour of his sincere and devoted love; and she—in spite of herself,—bewildered, stupefied, intoxicated as she was by the suddenness with which this scene had been brought about,—she gazed with mingled rapture and surprise upon that handsome countenance which the glow of inward passion and ineffable joy now rendered still more expressive.

She felt as if the hysterical shriek, which for some moments past had threatened to burst from her lips, were subdued—stifled by some unknown power, whose influence was strangely sweet and consoling:—her soul almost sickened in the bliss of that love by which she was surrounded, and to which her woman's heart could not do otherwise than respond.

Then, again, she felt as if she must start from his arms—reject his love—dash down that chalice of honied happiness from which they both were drinking deep draughts—and proclaim to him that it was all a hideous mistake—that she had never consented to receive him as her husband—that her uncle had committed a fearful error—and that they must separate, never, never again to meet!

But at the very moment when she was about to do all this, Arthur drew her nearer to him;—his breath, sweet as that of flowers, fell on her burning cheek—his hand pressed hers—she found herself linked to him in heart by a spell which no mortal courage could at such a moment have broken—then she caught herself looking into his fine eyes, and reading the thrilling language of love that was written there—and in another moment their lips met in one long and delicious kiss.

"Sweet Georgiana, I adore you!" murmured Arthur, his glances speaking more eloquently than his words. "And now there breathes not a happier man on the earth's wide surface than I. Say, Georgiana—say, does not that happiness which I myself experience impart pleasure to you? Could you now do aught to torture my soul again with the agony of suspense—with the despair of baffled hope? Believe me, my dearest angel, that if destiny, in its malignant spite, were now to separate us—if to-morrow I came and found you gone, or here but cold and altered,—in a word, if any impediment were to arise to the accomplishment of our union, I should not survive the blow! As a distracted maniac should I be borne to a mad-cell—or, if my reason were left me, my grave would be stained with a suicide's blood!"

Georgiana was appalled by this terrible announcement; and in the agony of feeling which it excited within her, she cast a glance of profound tenderness upon the Earl, unwittingly pressing his hand at the same time.

"Oh! now I know that you entertain the same sentiments as myself," he cried, mistaking those convulsive movements on her part for the tender evidences of love: "now I know that your heart beats in unison with mine. Oh! thrice happy day—the happiest that I ever yet have known. And happier does it seem, too, because it has dissipated so much previous anxiety—healed so much acutely-felt pain. Yes

—dearest Georgiana—I am almost glad that you rejected my suit the other day; for the wretched feelings of the interval have, by contrast, made the present moment indescribably sweet. And shall I tell you, my beloved one, that I am now acquainted with the nature of that secret——"

"That secret!" cried Georgiana, with a cold shudder—which Ellingham did not perceive, for at the moment he pressed her fondly towards him.

"Yes, dearest," he continued: "I know all the power which that secret influence must occasionally have over you: and, believe me when I declare that—instead of being any longer annoyed at the fact of that circumstance having induced you to refuse my hand the other day—I deeply sympathise with you! And if I now allude to that event—that incident which years ago, at your late father's country-residence in Hampshire——"

A short convulsive sob burst from Georgiana's breast.

"Oh! pardon me—pardon me, beloved one!" cried the Earl, again imprinting a kiss upon her lips: "I know that I was wrong to allude to an event which you can never entirely forget. But if I mentioned it ere now—it was for the first and the last time—and merely to convince you that he, whom you will soon receive as your husband, is aware of that secret influence which holds a sway over your mind; and that he implores you to forget it—to abandon yourself only to the thoughts of that happiness which our love and our brilliant social position must ensure us. And now, my dearest Georgiana, no more on that head: never again let the topic enter into our discourse—never let us allude to it, even by a single syllable!"

"Oh! generous—excellent-hearted—noble-minded man," exclaimed Georgiana; "and is your love for me indeed so strong as this?"

"Can you doubt it, dearest?" said the Earl. "If so—tell me how I can prove its sincerity?"

"Have you not given me a proof the most convincing that man can give to woman?" asked Lady Hatfield, concealing her blushing countenance on Arthur's breast. "Are you not content to receive as your wife one who——"

"No more—no more!" exclaimed the Earl, tenderly hushing her words with kisses. "Have we not agreed never again to allude to that topic?"

"But one word, Arthur," said Georgiana: "only one word! Who could have acquainted you——"

"Your uncle, dearest," answered Lord Ellingham;—"that excellent man who has been mainly instrumental in procuring me the happiness which I now enjoy!"

"My uncle!" murmured Lady Hatfield, her soul subdued with astonishment of the most overwhelming nature.

But the Earl's ears caught not the repetition of his answer; neither did he notice the effect which it produced upon Georgiana;—for her head was pillowed upon his breast—his hand clasped hers—her fine form leant against him—and he had no thought save of the pure but intoxicating happiness which he now enjoyed.

Oh, Love! thou art the sweetest charm of life—the dearest solace in this sphere of trial and vicissitude—the sentiment that, shining on us as a star, adds the most refulgent brightness to our lot. Ambition never imparted consolation to the breaking spirit, and places no curb on the wild passions and insatiable vices which too often dominate the human heart. Wealth makes its possessor envied, but also encourages the daring of the robber, or sharpens the knife of the murderer who seeks to grasp it. Honours engender hatred in the breasts of those who once were friends. Pleasure is bought by gold, and must be paid for over and over again by the health. Genius is a consuming fire: like the spur to the gallant steed, it urges its votary on, but draws the life-blood in the act. Glory is the eruption of the volcano—bright, majestic, and resplendent to gaze upon—yet bearing death in its halo. But thou, O Love! art the star which beams brighter as the gloom of this cold and selfish world becomes darker:—thou art the sunshine of the soul—teaching man to emulate the gentleness, the resignation, and the holy devotion of woman—and raising woman but one remove from the nature of angels!

CHAPTER XIX.
MR. FRANK CURTIS'S PLEASANT ADVENTURE.

About half an hour previous to the visit of Lord Ellingham, Mr. Frank Curtis was lounging along Piccadilly with a swell-mob kind of ease and a Bagnigge Wells' independence, when a young female, of good figure and pretty face, attracted his notice.

As he was proceeding in one way, and she in another, they passed each other; and, Mr. Curtis having nothing to do, it struck him that he would endeavour to scrape an acquaintance with the young person alluded to.

He accordingly turned round—hesitated for a moment how to devise an excuse for addressing himself to her—and then, drawing forth his own white cambric pocket-handkerchief, hurried after the object of his interest.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he said, tapping her gently upon the shoulder; "but I think you dropped this handkerchief."

The young female immediately replied in the negative; but a smile played upon her lips, and her blue eyes assumed an arch expression, implying that she fully saw through the young man's trick, which was indeed transparent enough.

"I really thought it was yours, Miss," exclaimed Curtis, by no means abashed. "But if it isn't—why, I must keep it till I find the owner—that's all."

"I rather think it is with the owner now, sir," answered the young woman.

"Well, my dear," said Frank, "I see you suspect my stratagem. But you are such a sweet pretty creature, that I was resolved to introduce myself to you. Now don't be angry, my love: I mean all I assert—and if you will only tell me where and when I can see you again, I'm sure you won't be sorry to make my acquaintance."

"Upon my word!" cried the young woman, in that dubious manner which might have meant disgust, or which might be taken as encouragement.

Mr. Curtis, strong in his self-conceit, adopted the latter view, and became more pressing in his attentions.

"Now do let me see you again, there's a dear," he exclaimed, continuing to walk by her side. "If you'll only agree to meet me this evening, I'll take you to the play—and I'll buy you a gold chain. Money is no object to me, my love: a man with ten thousand a-year—*and* a peerage in the perspective—may indulge his little fancies, I hope."

These falsehoods, conveyed by implication, were uttered in such a tone of assurance, that the young woman was evidently dazzled by their splendour; and she threw a rapid, but encouraging glance towards the mendacious Frank.

"Come, now—will you meet me again?" he demanded. "I *was* going over to stay a few days with the Prime Minister of France early next month; and I *had* promised to pass my Christmas with his Holiness the Pope at Rome:—but if you was only kind, now—why, there's no saying that I might not send excuses to both of them, and stay in London for the pleasure of seeing you."

"But you men are such gay deceivers," said the young female.

"Well—we may be—sometimes!" ejaculated Frank, rather looking upon the imputation as a compliment than a reproach. "But you're too pretty for a man to find it in his heart to deceive you, my dear. In one word, where shall you be at seven o'clock this evening?"

"I *did* think of calling upon a friend which is lady's-maid in a family living in Conduit Street," replied the young woman.

"And if your friend is a lady's-maid, my dear," said Frank, "what may you be?"

"The same, sir," was the answer.

"The very thing!" cried Curtis. "If there's one class of young ladies that I like more than another, it is the ladies'-maids. Why, my dear, when I left Paris—where I stayed some time with the Archbishop of that city,—for his Grace and I are as thick as two thieves—the ladies'-maids held a meeting, and appointed a committee to draw up an address expressive of regret and all that sort of thing at my going away. They did, upon my honour! But let us come to the point, my dear. Shall you be in Conduit Street this evening at about seven?"

"I think it's very likely, sir," was the answer. "But you must not go with me any farther now—for I live at the house with the bay-windows there."

"But whose service are you in, my dear?" asked Frank.

"In Lady Georgiana Hatfield's," replied the young woman.

"Indeed!" cried Curtis. "I've heard an uncle of mine speak of her ladyship, I think. But this is a great nuisance, though."

"What is?" asked Charlotte, whom our readers may remember to have been mentioned at the opening of this tale.

"Why—that you and me must separate just at the moment that we are getting so friendly together—and without a single kiss, either."

Charlotte giggled—but said nothing.

"You will really be in Conduit Street this evening, my dear?" urged Frank Curtis, after a brief pause.

"I think I shall be able to get out," responded Charlotte. "But her ladyship is an invalid; and Miss Mordaunt—her friend, or companion, or whatever she is—may want me to dress her for some ball or party; and so I cannot promise for sure."

"But you will try?"

"Yes," murmured the young woman; and she hurried on to the front-door of Lady Hatfield's house.

Curtis stopped at a short distance and watched her as she tripped along, her pretty feet and ankles peering from beneath the folds of her dress.

Now it happened that at the very moment when Charlotte was about to ring the bell, the front-door opened, and a livery-servant issued forth, doubtless upon some errand. After exchanging a word or two with Charlotte, he passed on, and the young woman entered the house. But ere she closed the door she turned a sly glance upon Frank Curtis, who, the instant he saw the livery-servant make his appearance, sauntered very leisurely along in the most innocent-looking manner in the world.

The livery-servant was now out of sight—and the pretty face of the lady's-maid lingered at the door which she kept ajar.

Curtis looked hastily around; and, the coast being tolerably clear at the moment, he darted up to the entrance.

Charlotte had merely remained on the threshold to give him a parting glance of intelligence for the purpose of assuring him of the sincerity of her promise that she would endeavour to meet him in the evening,—for the young lady was of an intriguing disposition, and flattered herself that she had captivated some very great, or at all events some very wealthy person:—but, when she saw him thus precipitately rush towards the entrance, she drew back and endeavoured to shut the door.

Frank was, however, too quick for her: and he fairly thrust himself into the hall, closing the street-door behind him.

"For God's sake, go away, sir," said Charlotte imploringly.

"Not till I have had one kiss—just one," cried Frank; and he threw his arms round the lady's-maid's neck.

"Oh! do let me go, sir—the servants will come—and I shall be ruined," she murmured, vainly struggling with the young man, who not only considered the adventure a capital joke, but was also excited by his present contact with a pretty girl.

He glued his lips to hers, and pressed her closely to him, when a loud double-knock suddenly echoed through the hall.

"Good heavens! what shall I do?" exclaimed Charlotte, in a tone of despair: then, in another moment, she recovered her presence of mind, and throwing open a side-door, said in a rapid and earnest tone, "Go in there, sir—and, if any one comes, pray invent some excuse for your being here—but don't compromise me."

Curtis darted into the parlour with which the side-door communicated: the lady's-maid hurried away: and old Mason speedily made his appearance to answer the summons conveyed by the double-knock.

"Is Miss Mordaunt at home?" inquired a voice which Curtis, who was listening anxiously on the inner side of the parlour door, immediately recognised to be that of his worthy uncle.

"Yes, Sir Christopher—Miss Mordaunt is at home," replied Mason. "Please to walk in, sir. This way, sir—Miss Mordaunt is with Lady Hatfield in the drawing-room."

"I wish to see Miss Mordaunt alone, if you please," said Sir Christopher. "Give my compliments, and if Miss Mordaunt will accord me a few minutes—upon some little matter of a private nature——"

"Certainly, Sir Christopher," responded the domestic. "Have the goodness to step into this room, sir."

And Frank Curtis—now as miserable as he was insolent and exulting a few moments previously, when embracing Charlotte in the hall—heard the footsteps of Mason and his uncle approaching the very door at which he was listening.

Not a moment was to be lost. He was too much confused—too much bewildered to think of meeting the embarrassment of his position with a good face and a bold excuse: and concealment instantly suggested itself to his coward-mind.

A cheerful fire was burning in the grate; and near it was drawn a sofa, the cushion of which had rich fringes that hung all round, and drooped nearly to the carpet. To thrust himself beneath this friendly sofa was the work of an instant with Frank Curtis; and so rapidly was the manœuvre executed, that the fringes had even ceased to rustle, when Sir Christopher Blunt stalked pompously into the apartment.

Mason withdrew to deliver the knight's message to Miss Mordaunt; and in the meantime the knight himself paced the room in somewhat an agitated manner.

At length he walked straight up to a handsome mirror, and looking fully at his image as it was reflected in the glass, began to apostrophise himself.

"Sir Christopher Blunt—Sir Christopher Blunt," he exclaimed aloud, in a solemn tone, "what is it that you are about to do? Are you taking a wise, or an imprudent step? Are you, in a word, about to ensure your own happiness, or—or—to make a damned old fool of

yourself?"

Frank Curtis was astounded at this language which came from the lips of his uncle. Despite of his fears and the unpleasant predicament in which he found himself, he was on the point of yielding to his natural propensity for mischief and blurting forth an affirmative response to the latter portion of the knight's self-interrogation, when the door opened and a lady entered the room.

Curtis accordingly held his peace, and his breath too as much as he could; for his curiosity was now so intense as to master even his fears.

"Miss Mordaunt," said the knight, suddenly turning away from the glass and advancing as jauntily as his massive frame would permit, to meet the lady, "I have to apologise for this early visit——"

"Oh! no apology, Sir Christopher," exclaimed Julia, in a most affable manner. "Pray be seated."

"Allow me," said the knight; and taking her hand, he led her to the very sofa beneath which his nephew lay concealed. Then, seating himself at a respectful distance from her—but also on the sofa, he continued thus:—"I hope, Miss Mordaunt, that I shall not offend you with what I am going—that is, with what I am about—I mean, with what I am on the point of——"

"Very intelligible, all this!" thought Frank Curtis to himself.

"Sir Christopher Blunt is incapable of offending a lady—especially a young one," observed Miss Julia, blushing in the most approved style on such interesting occasions—for she could anticipate what was coming.

"Sir Christopher Blunt thanks you for that compliment, Miss Mordaunt," said the knight pompously, and encouraged also by the lady's tone and manner. "Yes—I am indeed incapable of giving offence wilfully; although there *are* certain vulgar people east of Temple Bar who pretend that I treat them cavalierly. And, thank heaven! Miss Mordaunt, I was *not* elected Alderman of Portsoken; for I never could have put up with all the filthy guzzling and swilling—excuse the expressions, ma'am—that seem inseparable from City affairs. You know, perhaps, Miss Mordaunt, that my origin was humble—I may say that it was nothing at all. But I glory in that fact: it is my boast—my pride."

"True merit is sure to force its way in the world, Sir Christopher," observed Julia, with a smile which, displaying her white teeth, quite enchanted the amorous knight.

"Again I thank you for the good opinion of me implied by that remark," he said, edging himself a little closer to the lady. "My large fortune—for large it notoriously is, Miss Mordaunt—has all been acquired by my own honest industry; and the title which I have the honour to bear, was bestowed upon me by a gracious Prince in approbation of my conduct as a public officer."

"You occupy an enviable position in society, Sir Christopher," said Julia.

"Do you really think so, Miss?" asked the knight, endeavouring to assume a soft and plaintive tone, but with as little success as if he were a boatswain labouring under a severe cold: "do you really think so?"—and again he edged himself nearer to his companion. "Ah! my dear Miss Mordaunt, how happy should I be to lay my fortune—my title—my all, at the feet of some charming lady, who, like yourself, would not despise the man that has risen by his own honest exertions to I may say affluence and honour."

Miss Mordaunt cast down her eyes and worked herself up into a most interesting state of blushing excitement; while Sir Christopher boldly took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

The knight's foot was thrust some little way under the sofa; and as he wore blucher boots, it was not difficult to stick a pin into the calf of his leg, if any one had felt so disposed. Such an idea certainly struck his dutiful nephew at that instant; for Mr. Frank Curtis now fully comprehended the object of his uncle's visit to Miss Julia Mordaunt; and the matrimonial designs of the said uncle foreboded any thing but essential benefit to himself. Then—although he was not the brightest young man in existence—the selfish motive of Sir Christopher, in agreeing to *purchase* Mr. Torrens's elder daughter as his (Frank's) wife, flashed upon his mind; and in an instant he comprehended the entire policy of Sir Christopher as well as the reader already understands it, with regard to the recent matrimonial speculation, which Tom Rainford had so materially aided to render abortive.

We digressed just at the point where Sir Christopher was venturesome enough to press the hand of Miss Mordaunt to his lips.

"Oh! Sir Christopher," murmured the lady, apparently quite abashed, and forgetting, most probably in the agitation of the moment, to withdraw her fair fingers.

"Julia, my love—for so you must now permit me to call you," exclaimed the enamoured knight, "will my suit be rejected? can you receive it favourably? At this moment you see before you a man whom it is in your power to render happy or miserable for life. And, ah! dear me—what a dreadful dream I had last night! It was that dream which made me come to you so early to-day, to know your decision. For whether it was your image, my beloved Julia—or the cold roast pig that I eat for supper, I'm sure I can't say; but true it is that——Oh!" screamed the knight, in a fit of agony.

"My dear Sir Christopher, what—what *is* the matter?" asked Miss Mordaunt, alarmed by the sudden ejaculation, which was accompanied by an equally sudden start.

"Oh! nothing—nothing," said the knight, endeavouring to compose himself: "a sudden twitch in the leg—just like the pricking of a pin—but it is nothing—a mere sensation! I was going to tell you, my dear Julia, about that horrid dream——"

"Pray, Sir Christopher, don't tell me any thing about horrid dreams," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt: "you will frighten me out of my wits."

"Well, dearest, I will not. But you have not told me yet whether I may consider that this fair hand which I now press to my lips——Oh!"

And again the knight started violently.

"What *is* the matter, Sir Christopher?" asked Julia earnestly.

"Really—I can't make it out—I don't know—but this is the second time that the same sensation has seized me in the left leg," stammered the knight: "just for all the world like the pricking of a pin. And yet of course it cannot be that. But pray, pardon these unpleasant interruptions, Julia; and relieve me from suspense at once. Say—tell me, dearest one—will you, will you consent to be mine?"

"Oh! Sir Christopher, what do you ask?" murmured Miss Mordaunt, as if there were any thing extraordinary or unexpected in the question.

"What do I ask?" repeated the enamoured knight: "I ask you to bestow upon me this fair hand."

"How can I refuse you, Sir Christopher?" sighed the lady. "You are so killing!"

"Am I, dearest!" ejaculated the knight; and, encouraged more than ever by this assurance, he boldly kissed his companion. But almost immediately a cry of agony burst from his lips; and, starting up from the sofa, he exclaimed, "My leg! my leg! the—the devil's in it—and that's the fact!"

The fact was however somewhat different; for Mr. Frank Curtis, having very quietly and deliberately taken his breast-pin from the frill of his shirt, was amusing himself with the very pleasant pastime of thrusting the point into his uncle's leg.

On the third occasion of the application of the aforesaid breast-pin, Sir Christopher started up and danced about the room, while Miss Mordaunt, who was most anxious to bring the delicate topic of discourse to such a point that she might satisfy herself as to the very day on which she was to change her condition, endeavoured to her utmost to console him.

Convinced that the pain he experienced could be nothing more than some sudden but very galling spasmodic attack, neither Sir Christopher nor Julia entertained the least thought of looking beneath the sofa: they therefore re-seated themselves upon it, and continued their tender discourse.

"And when shall it be?" asked Sir Christopher, taking it for granted that it *was* to be.

"Whenever—that is—so soon—I mean—when you choose," murmured Miss Mordaunt. "But you will communicate your intentions to my brother, who obtained his captaincy a few days ago, and whom I *must* consult."

"And why consult him?" asked Sir Christopher, a misgiving entering his mind.

"Oh! he might—I do not say that he will—but he *might* object," answered Miss Mordaunt.

"Then perhaps you wish me to state my views to my nephew also," said the knight somewhat testily: "as *he* might also object."

"But a nephew, Sir Christopher," urged the lady,—"a nephew is not a brother."

"Very true," replied Blunt, as if some grand truth had just been made apparent to him. "And yet it appears, Julia," he added, in a coaxing tone, "that we have each a relation to whom we would rather not mention the matter—until after it was over."

"Oh! you killing man—what would you have me understand by that remark?" cried Miss Mordaunt.

"Simply that we should——"

"Should what, dear Sir Christopher?"

"Should be married privately—or run away to Gretna Green," answered the knight. "And now the truth is out."

"Oh! naughty—naughty man!" exclaimed Julia, casting on her swain one of her most bewitching smiles: but at the same time she imagined to herself all the excitement attending a run-a-way match to Gretna—the rapidity of travelling—the bustle that would be excited at the way-side inns—the sensation that must arise in the fashionable world—the paragraphs in the newspapers—the *éclat* attached to such a proceeding—and the importance with which her reappearance in town, after the union, would be attended:—of all this she thought—and the knight's proposal was therefore most welcome to her; for, while she contemplated the agreeable side of the picture, she never once reflected on the ridicule and absurdity that must attach themselves to such a step on the part of two persons of the respective ages of Sir Christopher Blunt and herself.

"Well, dearest, what are you thinking of?" asked the knight.

"Of what you were saying, dear Sir Christopher," murmured the lady in a languishing tone.

"Then, how shall it be! a private marriage—or Gretna?"

"The arrangements for a private marriage might be suspected," sighed Julia, casting down her eyes and managing a blush, which was respectable enough, seeing that it scarcely came voluntarily to her aid.

"Just my opinion!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "I would not have that prying nephew of mine, Frank Curtis—the young scapegrace—getting a hint of it beforehand, for any money."

"Nor would I wish my brother to know of it until it is all over, dear Sir Christopher," returned Julia.

"Then be it Gretna!" exclaimed the knight. "And now when shall it take place?"

"I could not say to-day, Sir Christopher—but to-morrow—to-morrow——" murmured the lady in a faint tone, as if quite overpowered by the importance of the step she was about to take, but which she would willingly have taken long before, had the proposal been made

to her:—"to-morrow," she added, "I shall be prepared—to——"

"I understand you, my angel," interrupted the knight; and this time he caught the lady fairly in his arms and subjected her to a process of hearty kissing.

Mr. Frank Curtis had in the meantime restored his breast-pin to the frill of his shirt; for, since the conversation had turned upon a regular elopement, the matter had become far too serious for him to trifle with. He suddenly found himself menaced with something bordering on total disinheritance in respect to his uncle's property; for, even if this projected union should yield no issue, still the lady might obtain so much influence over the knight as to induce him to will all his fortune to herself. Frank was therefore in rather an unpleasant state of mind, as well as being in an uneasy predicament under the sofa. He nevertheless saw that cunning must be met with cunning; and he now lay as quiet as a mouse, in order to avoid detection. But he vowed seriously that the moment he should escape from the kind of prison in which he found himself, he would not let the grass grow under his feet ere he adopted measures to defeat the matrimonial scheme of Sir Christopher Blunt and Miss Julia Mordaunt.

At length, to his unspeakable relief, the knight took his leave of Miss Mordaunt, after having settled the hour and place where they were to meet on the following evening.

Sir Christopher being gone, Julia also left the room; and poor Charlotte, who had been on the tenter-hooks of suspense and alarm ever since Frank Curtis had first entered the house, now hurried to the parlour, wondering how he could possibly have managed to avoid an exposure.

But when she entered the room, and perceived no one, she was more astonished still.

Her surprise was not, however, of long duration; for Curtis, having peeped through the fringe and ascertained who the new-comer was, suddenly emerged from his hiding-place.

"Oh! dear me, sir," exclaimed the young woman, "what a fright I have been in, to be sure!"

"And what a pickle I have been in!" cried Frank sulkily.

"You cannot say that it was my fault, sir," observed Charlotte reproachfully.

"Nor more I do, my dear," answered Curtis, warming himself into a better humour by means of a kiss or two on the lady's-maid's red lips. "But, I say, my dear," he continued, after a few moments' dalliance of that sort, "you *must* come to meet me this evening; because, independent of my desire to chat with you and all that sort of thing, you can be of service to me."

"Lor'! sir," cried Charlotte, astonished at this intimation.

"Indeed you can: but I must not stay to explain myself now," returned Curtis. "Here, my dear—take these five guineas as an earnest of what I will do for you; and mind and be punctual in Conduit Street at seven o'clock this evening."

"I shall not fail, sir," replied Charlotte.

"And in the meantime," added Frank, "watch Miss Mordaunt well. Don't ask me any questions now—I will tell you all about it this evening. But mind you watch her; and if possible, get into conversation with her. Should she ask you to do her any service—no matter of what kind—promise her that you will; and leave the rest to me. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir—and I will do as you tell me," was the answer.

"Well, then—that's right," said Curtis. "And now let me see if I can't slip out without running plump up against one of your liveried flunkeys here."

"Wait an instant," cried Charlotte; and she disappeared from the room, closing the door carefully behind her.

In a few moments she returned, with the welcome tidings that the coast was clear; and Frank Curtis succeeded in quitting Lady Hatfield's house without being perceived by any one save the faithful Charlotte.

CHAPTER XX.
HAPPINESS.—THE DIAMOND-MERCHANT.

When Lord Ellingham took his leave of Lady Hatfield, the latter hurried to her bed-chamber; and, locking the door behind her, sate down in an arm-chair near the fire to ponder unconstrainedly upon the conversation of the previous hour.

And that hour—what changes had it worked in respect to the mind and prospects of this patrician lady!

"Oh! how generous and noble-hearted is my Arthur!" she mused inwardly: "how boundless is his love for me! But is it possible that I am really to become his wife? or am I the sport of a wild and delusive dream? No—it is all true: I am awake—I see the various objects around me—there is no confusion in my brain. Yes—it *is* all true; and he will marry me—he will make me his wife—in spite of—— But let me avoid thinking of the past! The future is now bright and glorious before me. My own Arthur—whom I love so fondly, and who alone has ever possessed and will possess my heart,—my own noble, generous Arthur has surmounted all prejudice—flung aside all disgust—and has promised to make me happy! Oh! not in the wildest of my dreams could I have imagined so much bliss. The clouds which have so long hung heavily around the star of my destiny, have been suddenly dispersed by one who views my heart aright—who understands me—who knows my sad history, but recognises my innocence—who, in a word, rises superior to all the prejudices which shackle the world. Oh! dearest—dearest Arthur! how can I ever reward you adequately for this generosity on your part? All the love which I bear you—all the adoration I feel for you—all the devotion I shall manifest towards you, will not repay the immense debt that I owe you! It is true that I possess great wealth—that the services of my father to the State induced his Majesty to create me a Peeress in my own right—and that I have some pretensions to beauty:—all this is true—but it is not sufficient to induce my noble-hearted Arthur to make me the partner of his bed. No: for he himself is rich far beyond his desires—he also owns a proud and ancient name—and England has daughters far lovelier than I. But he loves me for myself—apart from all selfish considerations: and, Oh! what bliss to be thus loved!"

Lady Hatfield sank her head upon her fair hand, and gave way to the new and ineffable bliss which had so suddenly enveloped her in its halo.

At length another idea struck her.

"But my uncle—how could *he* have known my secret?" she exclaimed aloud. "And how did he discover it? Oh! he must have been aware of it from the very first! The good—the kind-hearted man—never to have even appeared to——"

Georgiana's reverie was interrupted by a hasty knock at her door.

She rose, unlocked it, and gave admission to her friend Julia.

"My dear Lady Hatfield," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, her entire countenance illuminated with joy, "congratulate me. It is all settled!"

"That you are to become Lady Blunt?" asked Georgiana, smiling.

"Yes, my dearest friend—Lady Blunt! How well it sounds! only think of '*Lady Blunt*' upon a card—printed, for instance, in the old English letter—or German text—or whatever it is. And then—'*Lady Blunt's carriage!*'—and all that sort of thing! Really I am so happy—I don't know whether to dance or sing—or both!"

"I am delighted to see you so happy, my dear Julia," said Lady Hatfield; "and most sincerely do I congratulate you. But have you acted prudently to accept Sir Christopher without communicating his proposal to your relations?"

"I think that I am quite old enough to manage my own affairs in this respect at least," answered Julia, laughing: "and yet—after all—I am not so very old—only just thirty. Still it is high time to settle one-self in life. But for the present, my dear Lady Hatfield, I must implore you to keep my engagement a profound secret—for reasons which I will explain in a few days——"

"I shall keep your secret, Julia, without seeking to learn your motives until you may choose to communicate them," replied Georgiana. "And now I am about to surprise you in respect to myself. Lord Ellingham has been here this morning."

"So I heard from old Mason just now," said Miss Mordaunt. "But you knew he would call, my dear friend, after leaving his card last night. And—if you speak candidly—you will confess that you *hoped* he would."

"I *did* hope he would call, Julia," answered Georgiana; "but I could *not* imagine that our interview would have terminated—— However," she added, checking herself, and smiling joyously, "you must now congratulate me; for in a few weeks I shall become the Countess of Ellingham."

"I do indeed congratulate you, my dearest Lady Hatfield," replied Miss Mordaunt. "But upon my word, wonders will never cease. Here were you only a few days ago rejecting the Earl in opposition to every thing like common sense—and certainly against the wishes of your very best friends——"

"Let us not talk of the past, Julia," interrupted Georgiana. "The future opens so brightly before me, that I am almost dazzled by its brilliancy. And I am happy—supremely happy—Oh! almost too happy!"

As she uttered these words, Georgiana threw herself into the arm-chair which she had quitted for the purpose of giving admission to Miss Mordaunt; and never did the beauty of her soul-speaking countenance shine to greater advantage than at that moment.

And no wonder that even her friend, whose volatile disposition seldom permitted her mind to settle its attention on subjects concerning another, was struck by the loveliness of Lady Hatfield on this occasion:—no wonder, we say, that Julia gazed with admiration for a long time on that beauteous woman: for happiness seemed to have invested her with new charms.

Her cheeks—lately so pale with mental anxiety and partial indisposition—were now tinged with a warm carnation hue:—joy flashed from her large liquid eyes, usually of so mild though lustrous a languor;—and smiles played upon those rosy lips which were wont to remain apart with serious expression.

The Earl of Ellingham, upon taking leave of Georgiana that morning,—but, be it well understood, with the promise of returning to pass an hour or two in the evening,—experienced that kind of heart-felt happiness which requires a vent by means of imparting the fact of its existence to a friend.

To the abode of Dr. Lascelles was the Earl accordingly hastening, when he was suddenly accosted by a gentleman; who addressed him by name, and whom in another moment he remembered to be Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant.

"I beg your lordship's pardon for thus stopping you," said that individual: "but I thought you might be gratified to learn that the jewels which I lost so mysteriously, have been restored to me."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Arthur. "I am rejoiced to hear these tidings. And now, I presume, you are fully convinced that Miss Esther de Medina was entirely innocent of the theft so ridiculously imputed to her."

"On the contrary, my lord," answered the diamond-merchant: "I am more than ever certain that Miss de Medina was the person who took them."

"Mr. Gordon," exclaimed the Earl indignantly, "I should have thought that, after the investigation which took place at the office in Bow Street, you would not have clung to an opinion so dishonourable—so unjust towards an innocent young lady. Moreover, sir, I should have conceived that my testimony to that young lady's character would have dispelled any doubts which had still hung on your mind."

"That your lordship gave such testimony conscientiously, I cannot for an instant question," was the firm but respectful answer. "At the same time that your lordship was and is still deceived in that young lady, I am confident."

"Perhaps, sir," observed the Earl coldly, "you will have no objection to communicate the reasons which have thus induced you to change your opinion; for, if I remember rightly, you yourself declared, in the public office, that you were satisfied there was some grievous mistake, and that Miss de Medina was innocent of the deed imputed to her at first."

"I admit, my lord," replied the diamond-merchant, "that I was staggered by the singularity of the turn given to the proceedings when your lordship appeared to speak in Miss de Medina's defence. But listen, my lord, to the subsequent events which revived all my suspicions. Upon leaving the Police-Court I returned home, but was scarcely able to attend to my business, so bewildered was I by the occurrences of the morning, and so annoyed was I also at the loss which I had so mysteriously experienced. It was probably four o'clock in the afternoon, when a lady was announced; and the moment she raised her veil, I recognised Miss de Medina. You may conceive, my lord, how surprised I was by this visit: but much greater was my astonishment, when she said to me, without a single word of preface, '*Sir, what is the value of the diamonds which you have lost?*'—'*Six hundred pounds*,' was my answer.—Miss de Medina immediately drew forth a small packet from her dress, and counted six Bank-notes, each of a hundred pounds, and which she placed before me on the table,—'*Here is the amount, sir*,' she said; and I offered her a receipt, which she however declined. For a few moments she lingered—as if anxious to say something more: then, suddenly turning away, she abruptly quitted the house."

"Extraordinary!" cried the Earl of Ellingham. "And yet——"

"One instant, my lord," interrupted Mr. Gordon: "the most mysterious part of the whole transaction is yet to be revealed to you. Not ten minutes had elapsed from the moment of Miss de Medina's departure, when a person, whom I remembered to have seen in the court, was announced. I do not know whether your lordship observed at the office a man of florid complexion—light curly hair—red whiskers—and dressed in a sporting suit——"

"I not only observed him," replied the Earl; "but from the description subsequently given by one of my servants, whom I questioned after my return home from the police-office, I have every reason to believe that the individual whom you describe was the bearer of a letter which had induced me to hasten to Bow Street to give my testimony in proof of Miss de Medina's innocence."

"And does your lordship know that man?" inquired the diamond-merchant.

"I never saw him, to my knowledge, until that day, when the attention he appeared to devote to the proceedings attracted my notice—although he was in the midst of the crowd congregated near the door. But please to continue your own narrative."

"This individual, my lord, of whom we have been speaking," returned Mr. Gordon, "was the person introduced to my office a few minutes after the departure of Miss de Medina. He seated himself in a free and easy, off-hand manner, and said, '*I think I can give you some little information concerning the diamonds which you have lost*.'—'*Indeed!*' I exclaimed: and, anxious to hear what he was about to state, I said nothing relative to the visit of Miss de Medina and the payment of the amount at which the lost jewels were valued.

—'*Yes*,' he continued: and, with the utmost coolness, he produced a pistol from one pocket and a small parcel, wrapped up in brown paper, from the other.—'*What is the meaning of this strange conduct?*' I demanded, glancing towards the weapon which the man held in his hand.—'*Oh! it is soon explained*,' he said. '*This pistol is merely to defend myself in case you should take it into your head to give me into the charge of a constable on suspicion of being connected with the person who stole your property: and as for the parcel, open it, and see what it contains.*'—Thus speaking, he tossed the packet across the table to me, crossed his legs, and began to hum a tune. I opened the parcel; and to my surprise perceived the diamonds which I had lost.—'*Is the set complete?*' asked the man.—'*Quite perfect*,' I replied in the most unfeigned astonishment at the singularity of the whole proceedings. '*But how does it happen*,' I continued,'*that you have come to restore them to me, when a quarter of an hour has scarcely elapsed since Miss de Medina herself called and paid me six hundred pounds at which they are valued?*'—It now appeared to be the man's turn to be surprised: but, in another moment, he exclaimed,'*Oh! I understand it all.*'—'*What do you understand?*' said I: '*for I must candidly confess that I understand nothing of the whole transaction, which is one involved in the deepest mystery*.'—'*So let it remain*, he cried abruptly: '*and now mark me*,' he added in a slower and more impressive tone; '*beware how you ever utter a word derogatory to the honour of Esther de Medina*.' And he quitted the apartment, leaving me in possession of my jewels and of the six hundred pounds also."

"This narrative is so singular, Mr. Gordon," said the Earl of Ellingham, "that were you not a respectable merchant, and that you can have no possible interest in amusing me with a fiction, I should not believe the portion which relates to Miss de Medina."

"I declare before my Maker," ejaculated the diamond-merchant solemnly, "that I have not exaggerated one tittle of my history. I have even more to state. The restoration of my property convinced me that I had no right to retain the money which Miss de Medina had paid to me as a recompense for its loss. I therefore determined to give it back to her. But I was unacquainted with her residence. Then I recollected that your lordship had stated that Mr. de Medina had become your tenant for a house and small estate about seven miles from London. I immediately repaired to your lordship's residence in Pall Mall to inquire the address of Mr. de Medina; but you were not at home. Your valet, however, furnished me with the information I required; and on the following morning I proceeded to Finchley. I called at the house to which I had been directed, and learnt that Mr. de Medina and his daughter did not intend to settle there until the Spring; but from the servant in charge of the premises I ascertained where Mr. de Medina resided in town. I accordingly returned to London, and forthwith repaired to Great Ormond Street, where I obtained an interview with Miss de Medina. Her father was out—a circumstance which, on the occasion, appeared to give her pleasure; because she asked the servant who announced me, whether Mr. de Medina were in his study; and on receiving a reply to the effect that he had gone out a few minutes previous to my arrival, she was evidently relieved of some anxiety. I communicated the nature of my business; but when I mentioned the particulars of the visit I had received from the light-haired gentleman, her countenance suddenly assumed so singular an expression that I can scarcely define its meaning. It was not alarm alone—nor surprise—nor shame—nor sorrow, which her looks denoted; but a feeling composed of all those sentiments blended together. Then, when I explained to her that this man had restored my lost diamonds, her countenance suddenly assumed an expression of joy. I handed her the six hundred pounds, which she received; and then—as on the occasion of her visit to me the preceding evening—she seemed anxious to make some remark, to which she could not, however, give utterance. The silence became awkward—and I took my leave. Your lordship now knows all."

"And can you for one moment imagine that Esther de Medina was the person who stole your diamonds?" exclaimed Lord Ellingham: "or that she was in any way connected with that man who restored them to you?"

"My belief is that she parted with them in some way to that man," answered Mr. Gordon; "and that her father most probably gave her the money to recompense me for my loss; but that when she paid it, she was unaware that the man had the intention of restoring the jewels."

Lord Ellingham made no answer: for there suddenly flashed upon his mind a reminiscence which staggered him.

The reader will recollect that when Mr. de Medina encountered his daughter at the police-court, he said to her, "*Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all. You have brought this upon yourself!*" These words were overheard at the time by Lord Ellingham: but they had since escaped his memory—or else failed to make any very deep impression upon him,—his own mind, since that day, having been a prey to much acute anxiety, suspense, and conflicting feelings, on account of Lady Hatfield.

But now, when he recalled those words, and considered them in all their significance,—when he pondered upon the tale which he had just heard from the lips of the diamond-merchant,—when he remembered that the man who had restored those jewels was doubtless the same who had conveyed to Pall Mall the letter which so mysteriously urged him to hasten to the police-court and give his testimony in Esther's defence,—he began to share Mr. Gordon's belief that there must be some connexion between that florid, light-haired man and Miss de Medina.

At the same time, Lord Ellingham was convinced that Esther had *not* stolen the diamonds; or that, if she had, Mr. Gordon had mistaken the hour of the day, if not the day itself, on which such theft was committed. Because Arthur remembered, beyond all possibility of error, that from two o'clock on the afternoon until near eleven o'clock at night, on the day specified by the diamond-merchant, Esther was engaged in visiting the house which her father had hired from him (Lord Ellingham), and which was situate about a mile beyond Finchley. Arthur himself accompanied Mr. de Medina and Esther on that occasion; and Esther was never absent from his sight, save perhaps for a few minutes at a time, during the interval above named.

There was a profound mystery somewhere: and though the Earl was not characterised by any feeling of impertinent curiosity, yet he longed to clear up the doubts and misgivings which had at length arisen in his mind. He entertained the greatest respect for Mr. de Medina, and—until now—the same sentiment towards Esther, whom he had hitherto looked upon as a model of purity, amiability, and innocence. He therefore felt grieved—vexed—disappointed—annoyed, for the honour of the human race, and especially for the credit of the female sex, to think it possible that he had been so grossly deceived in that beautiful Jewess.

He walked slowly along, the diamond-merchant by his side.

"Well, my lord," said the latter, at length breaking the protracted silence, "what is your opinion now?"

"I confess that I am bewildered," was the reply. "But I shall not judge hastily. In the meantime, I pray you so far to suspend your opinion upon the subject as to avoid the utterance of aught prejudicial to Miss de Medina's character; and if I succeed in fathoming this mystery, the fact of that young lady's guilt or innocence shall be duly communicated to you."

The diamond-merchant bowed respectfully, and departed in another direction; while Lord Ellingham continued his way towards Grafton Street.

CHAPTER XXI.
THE OATH.

Dr. Lascelles was at home, and immediately granted an audience to the Earl of Ellingham.

Popular physicians are potentates in their way, and access to them, save on matters of professional business, is frequently difficult.

But the doctor had taken a greater fancy to the young nobleman than he was ever known to entertain for any of his acquaintances; and he therefore received him as one who did not encroach on his very valuable time.

"Well," said the physician, as the Earl made his appearance in the professional reception-room, "something new about Lady Hatfield, I'll be bound?"

"You are right, my dear doctor," answered the lover: "and I am the happiest of men."

"I am charmed to hear it," said Lascelles, casting a glance of curiosity, not unmingled with surprise, towards the Earl.

"Yes, doctor," cried the latter, his handsome countenance irradiated with the lustre of complete felicity, "the beautiful Georgiana has consented to become my wife."

"Your wife!" ejaculated the physician.

"And wherefore not?" asked the Earl, astonished at the tone and manner of his friend. "Do you think that I will allow what must be considered a misfortune to stand in the way of my happiness?"

"Certainly—if you can rise superior to a prejudice which influences the generality of the world," said the physician, thrown off his guard by Lord Ellingham's last observation. "I do not see——"

"Ah! then you also know all?" ejaculated the Earl. "But let us not dwell on this topic. Suffice it that I have heard from Sir Ralph Walsingham enough to convince me that his niece is to be commiserated in a certain respect; and I have had a full explanation with her on the subject. In a few weeks she will be Lady Ellingham; and it shall be my duty—as it will also prove my delight—to make her so completely happy that she shall forget the incident which has had so powerful an effect upon her mind."

"I sincerely wish you all possible felicity, my dear Earl," said the doctor, shaking the young nobleman warmly by the hand.

"A thousand thanks, doctor," exclaimed Arthur, cordially returning the pressure. "But how became you acquainted with that incident in Georgiana's life which has exercised such influence over her? I thought you told me yesterday that she had not entered into any explanations with you?"

"Neither had she—nor has she, my dear lord," observed the physician, who seemed slightly surprised, if not puzzled, by the observations of his young friend. "But—as you yourself ere now said—let us not dwell on that topic;—it is of too delicate a nature."

"It *is* delicate, my dear doctor," responded the Earl. "But as I am my own master, and labour not under the necessity of consulting my relatives as to those proceedings which are connected with my interest or happiness——"

"Oh! certainly," said the doctor. "You love Lady Hatfield—and she loves you in return. It is quite natural. I have known many such cases—more, perhaps, than you could imagine."

"I do not doubt you," replied the Earl. "But I will not longer intrude on your valuable time," he added, smiling; "for I know that you are not in the habit of receiving visits of a merely friendly nature at this period of the day."

"To you only am I accessible on such terms," replied the physician.

The Earl then took his leave, and was about to return home, when he bethought himself of the strange communication he had received from Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant; and, as the weather was fine and frosty, he determined to walk as far as the residence of Mr. de Medina in Great Ormond Street.

On his arrival at that gentleman's house, he found the servant standing at the front-door in the act of receiving some articles from a tradesman's boy; and this trivial fact is only recorded, inasmuch as it explains the reason how Lord Ellingham ascended to the drawing-room without being duly announced. He considered himself to be on terms of sufficient intimacy with Mr. de Medina to take such a liberty; and when the domestic made a movement to conduct him up stairs, Arthur desired him in a condescending manner not to take the trouble, as he knew the way.

Accordingly, the Earl proceeded to the drawing-room, where he did not, however, find Mr. de Medina and his daughter, although, from the statement of the servant, he had expected to meet them there.

The floor was spread with a thick, rich Turkey carpet, on which his footsteps fell noiselessly. He was about to seat himself, when

voices in the adjoining apartment, which was only separated from the drawing-room by folding-doors, met his ears.

"Esther," said Mr. de Medina, speaking in an earnest and solemn tone, "this is the third anniversary of that dreadful day which——"

"Oh! do not refer more than is necessary to that sad event, dear father!" exclaimed the Jewess, in an imploring voice.

"Heaven knows, my child," responded her sire, "that—if you feel as I do——"

"I do—I do, dearest father!" cried Esther.

"Yes:—but not all the degradation—the infamy—the shame——"

"All—all, father,—even as acutely as yourself!" she said, in a voice denoting the most intense anguish.

"And yet, undutiful girl that you are," exclaimed Mr. de Medina, "you persist in seeing that lost—abandoned——"

The sudden rattling of a carriage in the street drowned the remainder of this sentence.

"Oh! my dearest father, forgive me!" cried Esther in a tone of the most earnest appeal. "You cannot imagine the extent of my love—my boundless love—for that unfortunate——"

"Unfortunate!" repeated Mr. de Medina angrily: "no—no! Say that most wretched—guilty—criminal——"

"My God! use not such harsh terms!" almost shrieked the beautiful Jewess; and the Earl of Ellingham could judge by the sound that she fell upon her knees as she spoke.

"Yes—Esther—on your knees implore my forgiveness for your oft-repeated disobedience!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina. "Consider, undutiful—ungrateful girl—of the position—the scandalous, disgraceful position in which you were placed a few days ago. That ring which was sold to the diamond-merchant——"

"Pardon me, dearest father—oh! pardon me!" cried the young lady, her voice becoming wildly hysterical.

Again a vehicle rolled along the street; and of the Jew's reply all that the Earl could distinguish were the words——"those diamonds, Esther—the theft of those diamonds! Oh! my God—I shall yet go mad with the dreadful thought!"

"Oh! this is cruel—most cruel, after all I have suffered!" cried Esther. "Wherefore revive those terrible reproaches now? Say—speak, father—what do you require of me? wherefore this conversation?"

"Again I must remind you," answered Mr. de Medina solemnly, "that this is the third anniversary of that day——"

"I know it—I know it? Oh! how can I ever forget it?" said Esther in a tone of the most painful emotion.

"And now," continued Mr. de Medina, apparently but little moved by his daughter's grief,—"now must you swear, Esther—upon that book which contains the principles of our creed—that you will never, under any circumstances——"

Mr. de Medina here sank his voice to so low a tone, that the Earl could only catch a few disjointed phrases, such as these—"renew your connexion with——acknowledge that——such infamy and disgrace——honoured name——family——seduced my daughter——robbed her of her purity——although the world may not suspect——degradation on yourself——discard you for ever——Thomas Rainford——"

"I swear!" said Esther, in a tone which led the Earl to imagine that she took the proscribed oath with a dreadful shudder.

"And now rise," exclaimed Mr. de Medina. "It is over."

These words suddenly awoke the Earl to a consciousness of his position: and his face became scarlet as the thought flashed upon his mind that he had been playing the part of an eaves-dropper. He despised himself for having listened to the dialogue between Mr. de Medina and his daughter: but his attention had been so completely rivetted to this strange—mysterious—and exciting conversation, that he had unwittingly remained a hearer. An invisible spell had nailed him as it were to the spot—had forced him to linger and drink in that discourse which, alas! appeared to speak so eloquently to the discredit of her whose character he had so warmly defended two hours before!

And now, suddenly awaking—as we said—to a sense of his position, he perceived that a subterfuge could alone save him from the imputation of being an eaves-dropper: and to that subterfuge was this really noble-minded peer compelled to stoop.

Hastily stepping to the drawing-room door, he opened it and closed it again with unusual violence, so that the sound might fall upon the ears of Mr. de Medina and Esther, and induce them to believe that he had only just entered the room.

The stratagem succeeded; for Mr. de Medina immediately made his appearance from the inner apartment, and welcomed the Earl with his wonted calmness of manner.

In reply to Arthur's polite inquiries relative to Miss de Medina, the father replied that his daughter was somewhat indisposed, and hoped the Earl would excuse her absence.

A quarter of an hour passed in conversation of no particular interest to the reader; and Lord Ellingham then took his leave.

When he found himself once more in the open street, he could scarcely believe that he was not the sport of some wild and delusive dream. Had he heard aright? or had his ears beguiled him? Was it true that all those reproaches had been levelled by an angry father at the head of a daughter who did not attempt to deny her guilt, but who was compelled to implore that outraged parent's forgiveness? Had he not prescribed to her an oath which seemed to imply, in plain terms,—although the Earl had caught but detached portions,—that Esther had been seduced—robbed of her purity,—and that the villain was one Thomas Rainford? Had not that oath been

administered for the purpose of binding her to break off her connexion with this Thomas Rainford? And did not Mr. de Medina assure her that, though the world might not suspect it, yet she had not the less brought degradation on herself? In fine—did not the angry father threaten to discard her for ever, unless she swore to obey his injunctions?

In what other way could the blanks in the terms of the oath—as Ellingham had gathered them by means of the few but significant disjointed passages thereof,—in what other way could those blanks be filled up than in the manner above detailed?

"It is too apparent!" thought the Earl within himself: "and Esther is an abandoned—lost—degraded girl! And yet how deceptive is her appearance—how delusive her demeanour! Purity seems to be expressed in every glance:—innocence characterises every word she utters! Merciful heavens! what must I think of the female sex after such a discovery as this? And yet, let me not judge harshly of the whole, because *one* is frail. My own Georgiana is quite different from that artful hypocrite, Esther de Medina. Georgiana conceals not a tainted soul beneath a chaste exterior: she is purity in mind as well as in appearance. And, after all, Esther *did* steal the diamonds: her father upbraided her with the theft! He even alluded to the ring which she sold to Mr. Gordon. Yes—it is indeed too apparent: she is utterly depraved! But that name of *Thomas Rainford*—surely I have heard it before?"

The Earl strove to recollect himself.

"Oh! I remember now!" he thought at the expiration of a few moments: "it was Thomas Rainford who was accused of robbing my Georgiana on the highway! How strange is this coincidence! And yet it was *not* that man who plundered her—for she proved his innocence of at least this imputation. But it was doubtless Rainford who sent me the letter desiring me to appear in the defence of Esther; and it must also have been he who restored the diamonds to the merchant! That Esther stole those diamonds is clear—for her father accused her of it. At least such is the inference that must be drawn from his words. But that Gordon was wrong as to the day, or the hour of the day on which the theft was committed, is also clear; inasmuch as Esther was at Finchley at the time stated! Still Gordon was so positive—and, when he appeared to prosecute the Jewess at the police-office, so short a time had elapsed—only a few hours, indeed—since the act was perpetrated, that it is difficult to believe how he could have mistaken the date! There is a mystery yet attending on this affair;—but that its elucidation would establish Esther's innocence, cannot for a moment be believed!"

Such was the train of thought into which the Earl of Ellingham was naturally led by the dialogue he had overheard between the Jew and his daughter.

He was sincerely grieved to be forced to come to the conviction that Esther de Medina was a lost and ruined girl, instead of the pure and artless being he had previously believed her to be. Although his affections were undividedly Georgiana's, yet he had entertained a sentiment of friendship for the Jewess; and he was pained and shocked to think that he had ever experienced any interest—even the slightest—in a female so utterly unworthy his notice. For the father he still felt respect, which was also now blended with profound commiseration; for he beheld in him an honest and honourable man, who was cursed with a daughter characterised by bad passions and evil propensities.

The Earl was well aware that Mr. de Medina was a very rich man: he could not therefore suppose that necessity had induced Esther either to dispose of the ring or to steal the jewels. What, then, could he conclude? That she required funds to support a worthless, abandoned, and lost man—her paramour! Hence the sale of the ring—hence the theft of the diamonds.

Arthur now remembered his promise to Mr. Gordon to make him acquainted with any particulars which he might discover relative to that business. But how could he fulfil his pledge? He shrank from the contemplation of the circumstance which had made him acquainted with Esther's guilt: he felt annoyed and vexed with himself for having allowed his curiosity so far to dominate his honourable principles as to render him an eaves-dropper. He would not therefore aggravate his offence by imparting its results to another; and, with an endeavour to banish the subject from his memory and turn his attention to more pleasurable topics, he hastily pursued his way homeward.

CHAPTER XXII.
THE ALARM.—THE LETTER.

In the meantime Esther de Medina had retired to her own apartment, immediately after the strange, painful, and exciting scene which had taken place with her father.

Seating herself upon a sofa, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

The delicate tinge of carnation which usually appeared beneath the clear, transparent olive hue of her complexion, was now chased away; and she was pale—very pale.

Her grief was evidently intense: anguish overwhelmed her spirit.

Oh, Esther! if thou art indeed a guilty—frail—fallen being, the eye cannot refuse a tear of pity to thy lost condition!

No:—for never has even the enamoured poet in his dreams conceived a form and face more perfect than nature had bestowed upon her. There appeared, too, such a virgin freshness about that charming creature who was just bursting into womanhood,—such a halo of innocence seemed to surround her,—so much modesty, so much propriety characterised her slightest attitudes and her most unimportant words, that to contemplate her for a few minutes and yet retain the stubborn conviction that she was a wanton, amounted almost to an impossibility.

And now—to behold her plunged in grief—alone with her own wretched thoughts, and weeping,—who could believe that the lips, on which purity appeared to dwell, had ever been pressed by those of the seducer,—that the sylph-like form, whose sweeping, undulating outlines were so gracefully set forth by the mournfulness of her attitude, had ever unveiled its beauties on the bed of illicit love,—that the rude hand of licentiousness had ever disturbed the treasures of the bosom so carefully concealed:—who could believe all this?

Nevertheless, says the reader, appearances are so completely against her—the evidences of her guilt seem so damning—that, alas! there is not a hope of her innocence!

But let us continue the thread of our narrative.

For half an hour did Esther remain absorbed in the most profound affliction—a prey to thoughts and reminiscences of a very painful nature.

At length she rose abruptly, and evidently strove to conquer her grief.

She wiped away the tears from her fine black eyes, and advanced towards the window, from behind the curtains of which she gazed into the street with the view of directing her thoughts into some new channel.

Suddenly an idea struck her; and she hastened to her writing-desk, at which she sate down and began to pen a letter.

While she was thus engaged, the crystal drops ever and anon started from her eyes, and trembled on the jetty fringes, the glossy darkness of which no oriental dye could have enhanced.

In the midst of her occupation—the progress of which was marked by many an ill-subdued sob—a female servant entered the room to acquaint Miss de Medina that her father had just received a letter on some business that required his immediate attention, and that she was not to expect him home to dinner.

The domestic then withdrew; and Esther finished her letter, which she folded and concealed in her bosom.

It was now five o'clock; and she descended to the dining-room;—but she had no appetite—and the ceremony of the repast, to which she was compelled to sit down alone, was by no means calculated to enliven her spirits.

Quitting the table as soon as possible, she returned to her chamber, put on her bonnet and shawl, and hurried into the fresh air, which she hoped would have an exhilarating influence upon her.

Esther drew her veil closely over her face, and proceeded to Southampton Row, where she entered a shop at which the local post-office was stationed.

The woman who stood behind the counter appeared to recognise her, and immediately handed her a letter which was addressed simply to "*A. B. C., Post-Office, Southampton Row. To be left till called for.*"

Miss de Medina purchased a few articles of fancy stationery—evidently with the view to recompense the shopkeeper for the trouble of receiving her letters, and not because she required the things; and while the woman was occupied in making up the parcel, Esther proceeded to read the communication just placed in her hands.

For this purpose she raised her veil, and approached the light which burnt near the window.

The letter was short: but its contents drew tears from the eyes of the beautiful Jewess.

Scarcely had she terminated the perusal, when she was startled by hearing a voice at the door distinctly exclaim, "There she is, by heaven!"

Instinctively glancing in that direction, she beheld a very pale-faced lad of apparently fifteen or sixteen gazing intently upon her from the immediate vicinity of the threshold of the shop; and close behind him—with his eyes also fixed upon her—stood a very tall, thin, old man of most repulsive aspect.

The instant Esther looked towards them, the old man laid his hand on the lad's shoulder and hurried him away; and Esther—somewhat alarmed by the incident—took up the little parcel of stationery, wished the woman a courteous "good evening," and quitted the shop.

When she again found herself in the street, she drew down her veil, and hastened towards the nearest hackney-coach stand.

A vehicle speedily drew alongside of the kerb-stone for her accommodation; and as she was stepping into it, she distinctly beheld, through the folds of her veil, the tall old man and the pale lad entering another vehicle at a little distance.

She could not be mistaken—for the shops sent forth a flood of light which rendered the forms of those two persons plainly visible.

The coachman had to repeat his inquiry whither he was to drive, ere Esther could recover her presence of mind sufficiently to reply.

"To the nearest post-office in Holborn," she at length said.

"Why, Lord bless you, ma'am—there's one close by here—not ten yards off," answered the Jarvey, who was an honest fellow in his way.

"Never mind," said Esther. "I wish to be taken to another."

The man urged no farther objection, but mounted his box and drove away—quietly settling in his own mind that his "fare" was either mad or tipsy, he neither knew nor cared which.

Miss de Medina could not shake off an oppressive suspicion which had forced itself upon her. She fancied that she was watched;—and, for the simple reason that she knew nothing of the old man and the lad, her uneasiness increased into actual alarm.

This feeling was enhanced, too, when her quick ears caught the rumbling sound of another vehicle behind: and she began to blame herself for having ventured abroad at such an hour.

Then she reasoned with herself that no harm could possibly happen to her in the midst of a densely populated city, and while people were walking about in all directions:—but still, in spite of this attempt at self-assurance, the pale countenance of the lad and the sinister looks of the old man haunted her like spirits of evil.

But in a few minutes the hackney-coach entered Holborn; and the blaze of light—the bustle—the throng of vehicles—the crowd of foot-passengers—and the animated appearance of the whole scene, dispelled nearly all her alarms.

The vehicle draw up nearly at the corner of Fetter Lane; and Esther alighted.

Another hackney-coach stopped simultaneously at a short distance; and her eyes were immediately directed towards it.

"Here's the post-office, ma'am," said the driver of the vehicle which she had hired.

Miss de Medina started—recollected herself—and hastened to thrust into the letter-box the epistle which she had written ere she left home.

The address on that epistle was—"*T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields.*"

This superscription was caught by the sharp eyes of the pale-faced boy, who had stolen—quick as thought—up to the shop-window, and now stood by Esther's side as she dropped the letter into the box.

When Esther turned hastily to regain the vehicle, she beheld the lad retreating with strange speed from the spot.

"What can this mean?" she thought within herself. "Who is it that is thus watching my movements?"

And, seriously alarmed, she hurried back to the coach, giving orders to be driven direct to Great Ormond Street.

Away went the vehicle again; and the noise of crowded Holborn prevented the Jewess from judging by sounds whether the other hackney-coach was following——for that she was watched, she had no longer any doubt.

Suddenly a suspicion struck her like an icy chill. Could her father have employed spies to dog her—to mark her movements? Circumstances, on the one hand, suggested the probability of such an occurrence; while, on the other, the character of her parent was of a nature repugnant to such a proceeding. He was stern and severe, but strictly honourable; and Esther knew that he was not a man likely to adopt underhand measures.

Then wherefore was she watched? and why had the lad crept close up to her as she put the letter into the box?

The coach had turned up Gray's Inn Lane, which thoroughfare was more quiet than Holborn; and Esther could hear no sounds of a second vehicle.

Our readers are probably aware that the generality of hackney-coaches have, or rather *had* (for they are nearly extinct at the present day) a little window behind, covered with a sort of flap made of the same material as the lining.

Esther turned round and raised the flap to assure herself that there was really no vehicle following the one in which she was. But at the

same instant a face disappeared as if it had suddenly sunk into the earth; but not before the Jewess had recognised the pale features and dark eyes of the lad.

A faint cry escaped her lips; and she fell back on the seat, a prey to vague but serious alarm.

In a few moments she recovered her self-possession, and again endeavoured to dispel her fears by arguing that no harm could possibly befall her—that, if any outrage were intended, her screams would speedily bring hundreds to her rescue—and that after all no real cause for apprehension might exist.

She arrived without accident in Great Ormond Street; and when she alighted at her own door, the lad who had terrified her was no longer to be seen.

Her father had not yet returned; and she was therefore again left to the companionship of her own thoughts. But when she was seated by the cheerful fire in the drawing-room, and with the bright lamp burning on the table, she smiled at those alarms which had ere now oppressed her.

The entire adventure now wore quite another aspect in her imagination. The old man and the boy were probably thieves who prowled about to pursue their avocation where they could: she had most likely been mistaken in the idea that they had entered a hackney-coach in Southampton Row simultaneously with herself; but they had followed her vehicle on foot; and when she stepped out to post her letter, the lad had taken that opportunity of creeping close up to her to pick her pocket. Having failed by the suddenness with which she had turned round, he had afterwards got up behind the coach to dog her to the end of her journey, with the hope of still succeeding in his predatory design; but when she had looked through the back-window, he had disappeared.

Such was the explanation which she now arranged in her mind for her own satisfaction. But, then, what could mean the words uttered at the door of the shop in Southampton Row—"There she is, by heaven!"

Fancy again came to her aid to set this point at rest:—she had most probably been watched by the old man and the lad before she was aware of the fact; and they had lost sight of her; but when they passed the shop her presence there had elicited the ejaculation from the youth.

Such was the manner in which Esther tranquillised herself relative to the little occurrence that had so much alarmed her:—whether her conjectures were well-founded, or not, the reader may judge by what we are about to relate.

No sooner had she posted her letter in Holborn, than Jacob, who had managed to get sight of its superscription, darted back to the second hackney-coach which had stopped near the top of Fetter Lane, and leaping in, said to Old Death, who was inside, "The letter is addressed to '*T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields*.'"

"And that is Tom Rain's place," ejaculated Bones. "Well—do you follow her—get up behind the coach—and meet me at Bunce's presently."

Away started Jacob; and when he was gone, Old Death alighted from the vehicle which he had hired in Southampton Row to follow Esther, dismissed it, and walked boldly into the shop where that young lady had posted her letter.

A lad was in attendance behind the counter.

"My boy," said Old Death, in as pleasant a tone as he could assume, "I just this minute dropped a letter into the box; and I remember that I have made a mistake in a particular circumstance mentioned in its contents."

"You can't have it back again," replied the boy. "It's against the rules."

"Well, I know it is," said Old Death coaxingly. "But it's of the greatest consequence to me to alter a particular part of it; and, if you'll oblige me, here's half-a-crown for your trouble."

Thus speaking, he displayed the proffered coin.

Now half-a-crown was a great temptation to a lad who only earned eighteen-pence a week in addition to his food: moreover, the master of the shop was absent at the moment, and not very likely to return in a hurry—for the boy knew he was with a party of friends at a neighbouring public-house:—and thus Old Death's silver argument was effectual.

"Well—I s'pose I must," said the youth. "But don't tell any body about it, though. What's the address?"

"*T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields.*"

The boy unlocked the letter-box, selected the particular epistle, and handed it to Old Death, who threw the half-crown on the counter, and marched off with the letter.

He could not restrain his curiosity until he reached Seven Dials or any other place which he was in the habit of frequenting, and accordingly turned into a public-house in the neighbourhood. There he ordered some refreshment, seated himself in a corner of the parlour, and carefully opened the letter in such a way that it might be re-sealed without exciting a suspicion of having ever been tampered with.

He then read the contents, which ran as follow:—

> "I sit down in anguish of heart to pen a few lines to you—to you whom I love so sincerely, but whom I must never see more. My father has just made me take a terrible oath to that effect; and so determined was his manner—so resolute was he—so stern—so severe—(alas! that I should be compelled to say so!)—that I dared not refuse to obey his command. And yet you know that I am as devotedly attached to you as ever:—all I have suffered—all I have undergone on your account, must convince you

of my unchanged, unchangeable affection. Do not, then, think ill of me on account of the oath which my father wrested—tore from me! My God! how my heart palpitates, as I write these lines! Oh! If you knew the state of my mind you would pity me! I am wretched:—heaven send that you are more happy than I! Alas! cannot you take compassion upon me—upon *me*, your own tender Esther—and quit the path which you are pursuing? It is not too late to do so—it is never too late. All might yet be well: my father would forget the past—and we should be re-united. Think of this—ponder well upon it—and remember how much happiness will be wrecked for ever, if you persist in a course which I tremble to reflect upon. To be connected with a highwayman is dreadful! Pardon me—forgive me for speaking thus plainly;—but you know how sincerely I love you—and if I write that terrible word '*highwayman*,' it is merely to fix your thoughts the more seriously on that point. What must be the end of this course of life? Public infamy—or perhaps a scaffold! Again I say, forgive me for writing thus:—I scarcely know what I commit to paper—there are moments when my brain reels as I contemplate the subject of my letter.

"I can write no more. Perhaps I shall find a note from you at the post office in Southampton Row: I hope so—and I also hope that I may discover in it some cause of satisfaction to myself. Adieu—dearest, adieu.

"ESTHER."

The contents of this letter sadly puzzled Old Death. They were quite different from what he had expected to find them; but without waiting to reflect upon their nature, he obtained a piece of sealing-wax from the waiter, and so cleverly closed the letter again that even a clerk in the General Post-Office could not have told it had been opened.

He then retraced his way to the shop in Holborn where it was originally posted, and threw it back into the box.

This being done, he bent his way towards Toby Bunce's house in Earl Street, Seven Dials.

CHAPTER XXIII.
OLD DEATH.

When Bones reached the place whither he had bent his steps, he learnt to his satisfaction that Toby Bunce had been sent out by his wife on some errand which would keep him at least an hour away. He accordingly followed Mrs. Bunce into the back room, and explained to her all that had occurred.

Having stated how he and Jacob had followed Esther in the hackney-coach from Southampton Row to Holborn, he said—"When Jacob first pointed her out to me as she was reading a letter in a shop, I felt sure he must be mistaken; for I could not conceive why she should be up at that part of the town, since from what Jacob discovered last night, I thought she was certainly living with Tom Rain in Lock's Fields. However, I determined to follow her; and when she got down at a shop in Holborn, I told Jacob to jump out and get another good look at her, if possible. But, instead of going into the shop, she merely stopped there to post a letter; and Jacob was quick enough to catch sight of the address. Well, when he came back to me, and told me what that address was, I desired him to follow her directly; for I thought that if she was writing to Tom Rain, it was clear she didn't live with him, and therefore it was as well to find out where she does live."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Bunce approvingly.

"Then it struck me," continued Old Death, "that if I could only get sight of the contents of that letter which she had posted to Tom Rain, it might open some farther clue to the nature of their connexion. And I did get the letter——"

"Oh! you clever fellow!" interrupted Betsy, shaking her head with mock gravity. "But what did the letter say?"

"Why, it was a regular sermon," answered Old Death. "It talked about how much she loved him—all she had done and suffered on his account—and a lot of gammon of that kind. She told him how her father had made her take an oath not to see him any more, and how unhappy she was. Then she begged of him to repent and leave a course of life that is sure to end at Tuck-up Fair."

"Did she use them words?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"No, you fool!" cried Old Death. "She writes quite like a lady, and in a beautiful hand too! But, after having said all I have told you, she let him know that she shuddered at the idea of being connected with a highwayman: and she begged his pardon for calling him so."

"A pleasant letter for Tom to receive!" observed Mrs. Bunce.

"Very. And she drops a hint," continued Old Death, "that if he will give up his business, there is a chance of her father forgiving Tom for what is past, and of their being *re-united*—that's the very word."

"Do you think they are married, then?" asked the woman.

"I should say not," replied Bones; "because she talks of being *connected* with a highwayman—and that's not a word a wife uses to her husband. Besides, the whole letter didn't look like one written by a wife—but rather a mistress. And then it ends by saying that she hopes to find a letter from him at the post-office in Southampton Row."

"Find a letter—when?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Why, to-day—this evening, I suppose," said Old Death. "She had evidently written *her* letter *before* she went to the post-office in Southampton Row, where she *did* find one from him—because she was reading a note when Jacob first twigged her. And it was singular enough that we were just talking of her at that very identical moment."

"Then the letter you read wasn't an answer to the one she received in Southampton Row?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"Of course not, stupid!" cried Old Death. "We followed her straight down to Holborn, and she never stopped or went in any where to write an answer. The letter I read was already written—written too in the afternoon, most likely just before she came out to go to Southampton Row. And another reason that made me anxious to get hold of her letter to Tom Rain, was that she didn't post it at the office where she received *his*, but took the trouble to go down to Holborn to put it into another box."

"I wonder why she did that?" said Mrs. Bunce.

"Oh! most likely to avoid exciting any suspicion or curiosity at the office in Southampton Row. Then there's another thing that puzzles me:—she was with Tom Rain last night—Jacob saw them together, and followed them home to Lock's Fields; and she is away from him to-day—writes to him this afternoon—and hopes to find a letter from him when she goes to Southampton Row this evening. One would think, by this, that they have been in the habit of corresponding together, and that the place in Southampton Row is where he directs his letters to her. So it's pretty clear that they don't live together for good and all. But what perplexes me most is the sermon that

she wrote him. It's plain she stole the diamonds, from what Jacob overheard Tom say to her when he gave her the ear-rings last night; and yet she doesn't reproach herself a bit in the letter to him. She only tries to convert Rainford; and, to read that letter, one would think she was as innocent of a theft or such-like thing as a child unborn."

"Oh! I dare say she wrote the letter for some object or another which we can't see," observed Mrs. Bunce.

"I scarcely think so," returned Bones: "there was so much seriousness about it."

"But she's a precious deep one, depend on it," said Betsy. "Look how she got off about the diamonds. And, after all, perhaps her father had been talking her over; and so, if she wrote to Tom Rain in a serious way, the humour won't last very long."

"Well—we shall see," exclaimed Old Death. "I should like to secure her in my interests."

"What did you do with the letter she wrote to Tom Rain?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"Put it back into the post," was the reply. "Fancy if Esther and Tom *did* get together again, and, on comparing notes, he found that the letter from her had miscarried, he might suspect a trick somewhere, and fix foul play on me. No—no: it was more prudent to let the note go, since I had gathered its contents."

"Well—perhaps it was," said Mrs. Bunce. "One thing is very clear, Ben——"

"What's that, Betsy?"

"Why—that since Esther isn't any longer with Mr. Rainford in the Fields, it will be much easier to get the little boy away."

"I thought of that just now," said Old Death: then, after a pause, he added, "And I'll tell you what's to be done. The boy most be got into our power to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!" repeated Mrs. Bunce.

"Yes—to-morrow night," returned Bones emphatically. "I'll trump up something to get Tom out of the way; and me, Toby, and Jacob, will go over and kidnap the child. If we don't do it quick, the Jewess will be getting spooney on Tom again and going back to live with him in spite of her oath to her father; and then we may not find such another chance for some time to come."

Mrs. Bunce smiled an approval of this scheme, and was about to offer a comment, when a knock summoned her to the front-door.

She shortly returned to the back-room, followed by Jacob.

"What news?" demanded Old Death.

"I found out where the Jewess lives," was the lad's answer; and he named the address in Great Ormond Street.

"Good!" exclaimed Bones. "That shows why she has her letters sent to Southampton Row;—it is close by; and as she's known in the neighbourhood, she posts her answers at another place. But give Jacob his supper—and brew me some grog, Betsy."

While Mrs. Bunce was busily employed in executing these orders, another knock at the front-door was heard. Jacob hastened to answer it, and returned with a letter directed to "MR. TOBY BUNCE;" but which, having a peculiar mark placed somewhere amidst the writing, was instantly discovered by Old Death to be intended for himself.

He accordingly opened it, and read as follows:—

> "Tim put on the tats yesterday and went out a durry-nakin on the shallows, gadding the hoof. He buzzed a bloak and a shakester of a yack and a skin. His jomen Mutton-Face Sal, with her moll-sack queering a raclan, stalled. A cross-cove, who had his regulars, tipped the office '*Cop Busy!*' and Tim twigged that a pig was marking. So he speeled to the crib, while his jomen shoved her trunk too. To-day Tim sent the yack to church and christen; but the churchman came to it through poll, as Tim's shaler had slummed on him a sprat and an alderman last week. So Tim didn't fight cocum enough, and was grabbed. The skin had three finnips and a foont, which I've got at the padding-ken, T's 23, where I'll cop them to you for edging the gaff. A fly kidden-gonnoff will leave this flim.
>
> "TWENTY-FIVE."

Old Death having read this singular composition to himself, threw it into the fire.

He then sate pondering for a few moments upon the course which he should pursue under the circumstances just made known to him.

And while he is thus engaged in meditation, we will lay before our readers a translation of the slang document:—

> "Tim dressed himself in rags yesterday, and went out disguised as a beggar half-naked and without shoes or stockings. He robbed a gentleman and a lady of a watch and a purse. His mistress Mutton-Face Sal, with her reticule, and looking like a respectable female, was on the look-out close at hand. A confederate-thief, who went shares with Tim, suddenly gave the alarm, so that Tim might hand him over the plunder; and Tim saw that a person was watching him. So he hurried off home, while his woman got off safely also. To-day Tim sent the watch to have the works taken out and put in another case and to get the maker's name altered; but the watch-maker informed against him through spite, because Tim's mistress had passed off on him (the watch-maker) a bad sixpence and half-crown last week. So Tim wasn't wary enough, and was taken into custody. The purse had three five-pound notes and a sovereign in it, which I have got at Thompson's lodging-house, No. 23, where I will hand them over to you if you will try and get Tim off. A sharp boy-thief will leave this letter."

The signature "TWENTY-FIVE" indicated the number attached to the writer's name in Old Death's private list of those thieves who were

accustomed to do business with him.

"Any thing new?" inquired Mrs. Bunce, handing him a glass of hot gin-and-water.

"Nothing particular," was the reply. "Only Tim the Snammer[2] got himself into a scrape. But I shall go and see about it directly."

"Tim isn't on your list—is he?" demanded Mrs. Bunce.

"No: but Josh Pedler—that's Number Twenty-five—has got Tim's money, and will hand it over to me. So——"

A loud knock at the door interrupted Old Death's observation.

Jacob was sent to answer the summons; and in a few moments Tom Rain walked jauntily into the room.

"Well, my prince of fences," he exclaimed, addressing Old Death, as he cast himself unceremoniously into a chair, and stretched out his legs in a free and independent manner, "any thing new in the wind?"

"Yes—a trifling job—for to-morrow night, Tom," answered Bones. "But you'll be making your fortune at this rate?" he added, with one of his hideous chuckles.

"The sooner, the better," cried the highwayman.

"And then you'd be able to retire from business—marry—and settle yourself comfortably," said Old Death, with apparent indifference of manner, but in reality watching Rainford's countenance attentively as he uttered the word "*marry*."

"Oh! as for settling," exclaimed Tom, laughing, "I am not the chap to bury myself in a cottage in Wales or Devonshire. I don't like that sort of thing. Business and bustle suit me best."

"But what do you say to marriage, Tom? A good-looking fellow like you might do something in that line to great advantage," observed Old Death.

"That's my own affair," returned the highwayman hastily.

"By-the-bye, what have you done with the boy that was thrown on your hands t'other night?" asked Old Death.

"I am taking care of him, to be sure," was the answer. "If I abandon him, he must go to the workhouse. But what is the little job you were talking about?"

"A worthy citizen and his wife will pass over Shooter's Hill to-morrow night, at about eleven o'clock, in a yellow post-chaise," replied Bones, inventing the tale as he went on. "The cit will have enough in his pocket-book to make it worth while to ease him of it; and the postboy will stop when he's ordered to do so. They were to have gone to-night; but something has happened to put off their journey till to-morrow."

"Good," said Tom. "The business shall be done. Any thing else to communicate to-night?"

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Won't you stay and take a drop of something warm, Mr. Rainford?" asked Betsy Bunce, in her most winning way.

"No, thank 'ee," returned Tom. "I must be off. Good night."

And the highwayman took his departure.

When the front-door was closed behind him, Old Death said, with a chuckle, "Well, he'll be out of the way to-morrow night; and we shall get hold of the boy. But I shall now just step up to Castle Street, and see what's going on at twenty-three."

"Shall you come back here to-night?" asked Mrs. Bunce.

"I can't say. It's now nine o'clock; and if I do, it will be by ten. Jacob, my boy, you needn't wait unless you like."

Old Death then left the house.

2. Snammer—a thief.

CHAPTER XXIV.
CASTLE STREET, LONG ACRE.

To the north of Long Acre runs Castle Street—for many years notorious as a nest of thieves, prostitutes, and juvenile vagabonds of the most degraded description.

At the period of which we are writing, a person, of the name of Thompson, owned—and probably still possesses—the lodging-houses numbered 23, 24, and 25 in Castle Street. This individual resided in Mint Street, Borough, where he had similar houses, in addition to others in Buckeridge Street, St. Giles's.

The houses in Buckeridge Street would make up one hundred beds; and those in Castle Street sixty.

At lodging-houses of this description the rooms are filled with low truckle-beds, each having a straw mattress, two coarse sheets, a blanket, and a rug. The price of half a bed is threepence; and it need scarcely be observed that men, women, and children sleep together in these filthy receptacles without the slightest regard to decency or modesty. Sometimes, when the lodging-houses are particularly crowded, three persons will share one bed;—or motives of economy frequently compel a poor family thus to herd together. It is by no means an uncommon occurrence for a grown-up girl to sleep with her father and mother, or with her brothers:—a poor married couple will even share their bed with a male friend;—and no shame is known!

Who can define where the shades of doubtful honesty and confirmed roguery meet and blend in these low lodging-houses? The labouring man is in nightly company with the habitual thief—his wife and his as yet uncorrupted daughter are forced to associate with the lowest prostitutes. How long will that wife remain faithful—that daughter taint-less? The very children who breathe that infected atmosphere soon become lost, and triumph in their degradation!

The principal frequenters and patrons of these low lodging-houses are regular customers, and consist of thieves, prostitutes, beggars, coiners, burglars, and hawkers. The casual lodgers are labouring men and their families whom poverty compels to sleep in such horrible places.

The hawkers make a great deal of money. They can buy steel-pens for 9*d*. a gross, pocket-books for 3*d*. each, snuff-boxes for 6*d*. each, and penknives for 4½*d*. each. On every article they can gain one hundred per cent. Many of these hawkers consider nine or ten shillings to be only a reasonable, and by no means a good, day's work.

Some of the women who frequent the lodging-houses in Castle Street and elsewhere, and who have no children of their own, hire infants for 4*d*. or 6*d*. a day, and obtain in the shape of alms at least four or five shillings a day each. Females of this class care not whether their husbands or lovers work or remain idle; for they boast that they can keep them—and keep them well, too. Some of these women knit caps in the streets; and they make more money than those who merely trust to the children accompanying them as the motive of charitable persons' compassion.[3]

In the low lodging-houses of Castle Street, and wherever else they may be found, the most frightful dissipation as well as the most appalling immorality prevails. Drunkenness is the presiding genius of these dens.

And how much has Strong Drink to answer for?

It is strong drink that helps to fill the gaols—the hulks—the asylums for the wretched, the diseased, and the insane. It is strong drink that calls forth so many sighs and such bitter tears—shortens existence—perpetuates family disease—and fosters maladies of all species and of all kinds. Strong drink often places the criminal in the condemned cell, and reduces the beautiful girl to barter her charms for bread. Strong drink strews the land with old rags and bleaching bones.

Let Temperance and Moderation be the guides of all:—for what are the results of Intemperance and habitual Drunkenness? Behold them in all the poor and low neighbourhoods of London! And if you ask, reader, by what signs you are to recognise them, we will tell you:—by the leaden eyes—the tottering steps—the shaking limbs—the haggard countenances—the feverish brows—the parched lips—the dry and furred tongue—the hot and pestilential breath—and the tremulous voices, of the confirmed votaries of strong drink. Apoplexy—palsy—delirium tremens—enlarged liver—ossified heart—impaired digestion—yellow jaundice—cancerous stomach—and dropsy,—all these attend upon strong drink. And the hideous catalogue of evils includes, also, broken limbs—fearful accidents and gushing wounds,—as well as many of those hereditary maladies which are handed down from father unto son!

In an earlier chapter we ridiculed the phrase of "Merry England." Oh! is it merry to see so much misery—so much crime—so much oppression—so much sorrow—so much absence of sympathy? If all this be joyous, then, of a surety, is England the merriest country, and London the merriest city, on the face of the earth. If a man can find music in the cries that issue from our crowded prisons and the wails that flow from our barbarous workhouses, then may he dance long and heartily to that melody—for it never ceases. If poverty can excite felicitous sensations within him, heaven knows he need never be sad. If crime can bring smiles to his lips, his countenance need never wear a melancholy aspect. And if he can slake his thirst in the heart-wrung tears of human agony, he need never step out of

his way to look for a fountain or a spring!

In this light, England is indeed merry; for the observer of human nature, as he walks through the crowded streets of London, is jostled and hemmed in by all the gaunt and hideous forms that bear the denominations and wear the characteristics of Crime—Poverty—Disease—Sorrow—and Despair!

Old Death knocked at the door of No. 23, Castle Street, and was instantly admitted by a tall, pale, and rather handsome girl, who exclaimed, "Ah! my fine fellow—I thought you would come."

"Is it you, Mutton-Face?" said Bones, with a grim smile.

"Me—and no one else," answered the girl. "But walk in."

Old Death accepted the invitation, and followed Mutton-Face Sal into a room where about two dozen persons, male and female, were crowded round a large fire.

One was a young man, of the name of Quin, and who obtained a handsome income by means of imposture. He was accustomed to appear in the streets as a wretched-looking, deplorable old man, bent double with age and infirmity, supporting himself on a stick, and crawling along in a painful manner at the slowest possible rate. He used to swallow a dose of some strong acid every morning to make himself look ghastly pale; and he succeeded so well in counterfeiting an aspect of the most lamentable nature, that he seldom returned to Castle Street at night with less than ten shillings in his pocket. He had now thrown off his disguise, and was whiling away the time, after a good supper, with a quart of egg-hot.

Next to him sate a young woman, stout, florid, and rather good-looking. She was in her stays and petticoat, having very quietly taken off her gown to mend a rent; and she experienced not the slightest shame at thus exposing all the upper part of her person to the mixed society present. Neither did they appear to think there was any thing at all remarkable in her conduct. How, indeed, could it be otherwise?—since she would presently undress herself entirely in that very room—and before all her companions, who would do the same—male and female—when the hour arrived to repair to the beds ranged along the wall. This girl was known as Jane Cummins, and was the mistress of the impostor Quin.

Farther on was a fellow who was sitting upright enough in his chair then, but who appeared daily in the streets as a bent cripple. He was accustomed to go about imitating a cuckoo, by which avocation he made a good living. He invariably got drunk every night.

Next to this impostor was a little deformity who was tied round the body to his chair. He had no legs, and was dragged about the streets of a day in a kind of cart drawn by two beautiful dogs, and having a banner unfurled behind him. The woman in charge of No. 23 paid him the greatest attention—put him to bed at night—helped him to rise in the morning—carried him out to his vehicle—strapped him in—and saw him safe off on his excursion about the metropolis. He usually returned at four to his dinner, and did not go out afterwards. His "earnings" were on the average ten shillings a-day.

A woman of about thirty, dressed in widow's weeds, and far advanced in the family way, sate next to the little deformity. She had never been married, but was possessed of five children, who were now playing in one corner of the room. She was accustomed to take her stand in some public thoroughfare, with her children drawn up in a row; and this game she had carried on, at the time of which we are writing, for four years—rather a long period of widowhood. She disliked fine weather, because the hearts of the charitable are more easily touched by the spectacle of a "destitute family" standing in the midst of a pouring rain or on the snow; and she reckoned that in bad weather she could earn eight or nine shillings a-day. Every Saturday night she took her station in some poor neighbourhood—such as Church Street (Bethnal Green), Leather Lane, Lambeth Marsh, High Street (St. Giles's), or Clare Market; and on those occasions she often obtained as much as fifteen shillings. But then, as she very justly observed, Sunday was a day of rest; and so it was indeed to her—for she was in the habit of getting so awfully drunk every Saturday night, after her return home to Castle Street, that she was compelled to lie in bed all the next day until three or four o'clock, when she rose to a good dinner. She always kept herself and children remarkably neat and clean—not from any principle, but as a matter of calculation. Charitable people thought she was a good mother, and a deserving though distressed woman; and alms poured in upon her. When questioned by any individual who relieved her, she would reply that "her husband was a bricklayer who had fallen off a ladder and killed himself six weeks ago;" or that "he was an honest, hard-working man whose career was suddenly cut short by his being run over by a gentleman's carriage:" or some such tale.

Next to her sate a young woman who was wont to take her stand in the evening, after dusk, close by the entrance to Somerset House. In the summer she would hold a few flowers in her hand: in the winter, laces and bobbins; and her invariable cry was "Oh! pray, dear sir"——or "dear lady," as the case might be——"pray do assist me: I have only this moment come out of the hospital, and have nowhere to sleep." By these means she realized her five shillings in three or four hours, and hastened back to Castle Street to spend them with a worthless fellow—her paramour.

Another individual whom we must mention, was an elderly man, who in his youth had been apprenticed to a chemist. He obtained his living by displaying a fearfully ulcerated arm, having himself originally produced the sores by means of corrosive acids and by the juices of various plants—such as the ranunculus acris and sceleratus, the sponge-laurel, euphorbium, arum maculatum, &c. He regularly revived and aggravated the ulcers every time they began to heal, and his arm was really shocking to contemplate. He would take his stand before a window, and, raising his shirt-sleeve, display the ulcers, so that the ladies or gentlemen at the casement sent him out a sixpence or a shilling as much for the purpose of getting rid of so loathsome a spectacle as through motives of charity. It was this man's boast that three hours in a fashionable street or square would produce him seven or eight shillings.

Another impostor present on this occasion was a man of about forty, who was a perfect adept in disguising his person, and who feigned a different malady for every change in his attire and outward appearance. At one time he was suffering from ophthalmia, produced by the application of irritants—such as snuff, pepper, tobacco, blue vitriol, salt, alum, &c. At another he would actually produce blindness

for a time by the application of belladonna, henbane, or sponge-laurel; and then he was led about by a little boy. Again, he would appear as a miserable creature afflicted with a horrible jaundice—the yellow colour being produced by a dye. He was also perfect in the counterfeit of spasmodic complaints, paralysis, and convulsions. His earnings were usually considerable: but on one occasion, "when things were very bad," he obtained admission into a hospital as an epileptic patient; and so well did he assume the dreadful attacks at particular intervals, that he remained in the institution for several weeks.

Lying on one of the beds, in a filthy state of intoxication, was a miserable object who was accustomed to go about the streets on his hands and knees, holding iron grapnels. His spine was bent upwards—rounded like that of a cat in a passion; and his legs were moreover deformed. His supine position was no counterfeit: he could not walk on his feet like other human beings. Thus far he certainly was an object of compassion: but in his character he was a worthless fellow—abusive, insolent, drunken, and addicted to thieving.

Sitting on another bed, and so far gone in liquor that he could scarcely hold the pipe he was smoking, sate a man about forty years of age, named Barlow. He had been a clergyman and was now a begging-letter impostor. He possessed an excellent address, and was most plausible in his speech as he was fluent with his pen; but the moment he obtained any money, he was never sober until it was spent. He had travelled all over England—knew every nobleman's or gentleman's country seat—and had carried on an excellent business by means of his begging-letters.[4]

A labouring man, his wife, and daughter were amongst this precious company. The girl was about fifteen, and tolerably good-looking. The family had been three days in that lodging-house; and she already laughed at the obscene jest and applauded the licentious song.

Two or three hawkers—a couple of juvenile thieves—and some young girls, confirmed prostitutes, made up the amount of the precious company into whose presence Mutton-Face Sal had conducted Old Death.

Those who were acquainted with him saluted him respectfully; for he was a great man—a very great man—amongst persons of a particular class.

"Who is that horrible old wretch?" asked the labourer's daughter, in a whisper to Jane Cummins.

"The richest fence in London," returned the other in the same low tone of voice.

"And what's a *fence*, Miss?"

"A fence, you fool, is a buyer of stolen goods, as the beaks call it. That old covey is rolling in riches—shabby and mean as you see him. He has been at it, they tell me, upwards of thirty years, and has never got his-self lumbered yet. But the best of it is, no one knows where his stores are: no one even knows where he lives. He has certain houses of call; but the cunningest Bow Street Officer can't find out his abode."

"What do you mean by *lumbered*?" asked the girl, whose name was Matilda.

"Put into quod, to be sure. But how green you are. We must teach you what's what, I see that. Here—help me to put on my gown—it's mended now. Thank'ee. Now come with me to the window, and I'll tell you what a happy kind of life I lead—and how you may do the same if you like."

But even as she uttered these words, Jane Cummins heaved a sigh—although she strove hard to subdue it.

The girl walked aside with her; and they continued their conversation in whispers at the window.

"I'm afraid our Tilda'll get no good here," said the labourer, in a low tone, to his wife, as he glanced uneasily towards his daughter.

"Nonsense, you fool!" returned the woman. "You can't get no work—and we must starve if we don't do something. Our gal can keep us, if she will—and she must too. Sooner or later it will come to *that* with her—and as well now as ever."

The poor labourer sighed: he would have remained honest, and kept his wife and daughter so, if he could; but want and houseless wanderings in the cold street stared him in the face—and he resigned himself to the bitter destiny that was thus forced upon him and his family!

In the mean time Old Death had taken a seat near the fire, and was deep in a whispered conversation with Mutton-Face Sal.

"Where's Josh Pedler?" he asked.

"He'll be in shortly," was the answer. "He's only gone out to fetch something for his supper."

"And so Tim the Snammer is lumbered?" said Old Death.

"Yes: he's in Clerkenwell. But you'll get him off when he goes up again 'afore the beak on Saturday—won't you, old chap?—now, won't you?"

"I don't know—I don't know. He isn't one of my men: he never would give me a turn. His name doesn't appear against a number on my list."

"But he will give you all his business in future, if you'll get him off this time—just this time," said the girl coaxingly.

"We shall see what Josh has to tell me—I never promise in a hurry," returned Old Death. "Besides, it's not the rule to assist a man that goes to others to do his business. Tim gets his notes changed at old Isaacs[5]—or at Milberry's[6]—or at Mrs. Davis's[7]—or at Rayner's[8]—or——"

And as Old Death enumerated his competitors, telling them off on his fingers slowly, one after the other, his jealousy arose to such a

pitch that the workings of his countenance became absolutely frightful.

"Now, what's the use of going on like this?" said Sal. "I tell you that Tim shan't have no more to do with them people, if you'll only get him off this time. None of them can do it as sure as you; and if you only tell me it shall be done, why—it's as good as done."

At this moment the door opened, and a tall, rather good-looking, but rakish and shabbily-dressed man, of about five-and-twenty, made his appearance.

"Here's Josh!" cried the girl.

The thief and Old Death exchanged greetings; and the latter proposed to adjourn to a public-house in the neighbourhood to talk over the business. Thither the two men, accompanied by Mutton-Face Sal, accordingly repaired; and Bones suffered himself to be persuaded to receive the three five-pound notes and the sovereign, mentioned in the flash letter, as the price of his endeavours to procure the discharge of Tim the Snammer.

The old man then took his departure, and Josh Pedler returned with Sal to the lodging-house.

3. A police-serjeant, from whom we have obtained much valuable information relative to the poverty, mendicity, immorality, and crime in London, one day informed us that he knew of two sisters, both single women, who were confined at about the same time, and who took it by turns to go out with the children. They passed the babies off as twins, and made upon an average seven shillings a day by this imposture. The money was spent in riotous living and debauchery, in the evening, along with their flash men, who existed in complete idleness, living, however, far better than many a poor tradesman. One evening, the police-serjeant above alluded to had occasion to visit the room which the sisters occupied at one of Thompson's houses in Castle Street (a robbery having been committed in the dwelling), and he found the two young women and their paramours at supper. On the table were a baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes, two quarts of porter, and a bottle of gin. One of the sisters is at the present moment a prostitute in Fleet Street.

4. All the characters just depicted are real ones. Some of them are still about town.

5. A notorious fence living in Liquorpond Street.

6. A flash public-house at the corner of Laurence Lane, St. Giles's.

7. A fence living in Belson Street.

8. A stick-maker, and a noted fence, living in Coach and Horses Yard, Drury Lane.

CHAPTER XXV.
MATILDA, THE COUNTRY-GIRL.

In the meantime Jane Cummins had been using all her eloquence for the purpose of inducing Matilda Briggs, the poor labourer's daughter, to become as bad as herself.

"You don't know what a pleasant life we lead," she repeated, when she had drawn the girl aside to the window. "Quin—my man—earns lots of money—and we know how to spend it. To-night we'd a roast loin of pork and apple-sauce for supper at a slap-up eating-house: then we'd some rum-and-water: and then we came home here. Look how Quin's enjoying himself with that egg-hot. Isn't he a capital fellow to be able to get so much money—and all so easy too? and don't you think I'm happy to have nothing to do but to help him spend it?"

Again the young woman struggled fruitlessly to keep down a sigh; for—in reality—she loathed, she abhorred the life which she was leading.

"And what do you suppose will become of you and your father and mother?" she continued. "Why—if it wasn't for that good-natured fellow Josh Pedler you'd have all been turned out last night into the streets. And when the woman came in just now to collect the three-pences, didn't he take and pay for you and the old people? And didn't he give you all the grub you had to-day?"

"Why do you speak so much about *him*?" asked the country-girl.

"Oh! I don't know—only because he seems to have taken a fancy to you," returned Jane Cummins. "And I tell you what it is—you may become his jomen if you like."

"His what?" said Matilda, blushing—for she half understood the meaning of the word.

"Why—his wife, over the left, if you choose," was the answer. "But what a fool you are! You're not so innocent as you pretend to be. Come—tell me—have you ever had a lover?"

"Never," replied the girl.

"Then it's high time you should. The truth is, Josh told me to sound you," she added in a mysterious manner; "and if you only say the word, we'll have a wedding here to-night. Josh has got plenty of money at this moment. He found a purse the day before yesterday ——"

"Where?" inquired the country-girl.

"In a gentleman's pocket, at the theatre," returned Jane coolly; "and he talks of setting up a mint——"

"A mint! what with?" asked Matilda.

"With Queen's metal, to be sure," responded the other; "and I think he's a very thriving young fellow. You'd be as happy as a princess along with him;—and wouldn't he come out strong to-night with the lush, if you was to say *yes*."

"But my father—my mother——" murmured the girl hesitatingly.

"Oh! leave them to me!" said Jane Cummins. "Go and sit down again—I'll manage the old woman—and she can manage the old man herself."

Matilda returned to her seat; and Quin, who could pretty well guess what his mistress had been about, handed the country-girl the quart-pot of egg-flip. She declined to partake of it; but he pressed her hard—and she drank a few drops.

"Oh! that's nothink—a mere taste!" cried Quin. "Take another sip. Come."

And she did as she was desired.

"Lord bless the girl—she's quite afraid of it!" said Quin. "But you must and shall have a good draught."

Resistance was vain: Quin held the pewter-pot to her lips, and forced her to imbibe a considerable quantity.

He then passed the measure to her mother, who did not require any entreaty to drink; and the labourer himself was not one likely to refuse good liquor when it was offered to him.

Quin thus got upon very pleasant terms with the poor family; and, making Briggs sit next to him, he began to chatter away in a familiar style, not forgetting to hand round the quart-pot at short intervals.

Meantime Jane Cummins had drawn Mrs. Briggs aside, and made certain representations to her—the result of which was that Matilda should that very night become the mistress of Josh Pedler. The arrangement was, however, to be kept quiet until Josh should return, for

fear that he might have altered his mind since he spoke to Jane on the subject in the morning.

At length Pedler came back, accompanied by Mutton-Face Sal; and, as he entered the room, he exclaimed, "Well, pals, it's all right! Old Death has took it in hand—and so Tim is as good as out. I've ordered round a gallon of gin-punch to make merry in consequence."

This announcement was received with loud cheers.

"Come you here, Josh," cried Jane Cummins: "I want to say a word to you."

"Well—what is it?" demanded the thief.

"Oh! nothing bad," she replied, with a significant look at her paramour Quin, who laughed heartily—as if an excellent piece of fun were in preparation.

Jane then whispered a few words in Josh Pedler's ears: the man did not, however, wait to hear all she had to say; but, bursting away from her, caught Matilda Briggs in his arms, and, giving her three or four hearty smacks with his lips, shouted, "A wedding, pals! a wedding!"

"A wedding!" repeated those who were only now let into the meaning of all the mysterious whispering that had been going on—first between Jane and Matilda—then between Jane and Mrs. Briggs—afterwards between Mrs. Briggs and her husband—and lastly between Jane and Josh Pedler:—"a wedding!" they cried: "hooray!"

"Yes—a wedding, in right good earnest!" exclaimed Josh. "But where's that drunken old file Barlow?"

"He's fallen asleep on his bed," observed Mutton-Face Sal.

"Then rouse him—and be damned to him!" cried Pedler.

Sal approached the bed, and speedily awoke the parson, who was at first mighty wroth at what he considered to be a very great liberty: but when he was informed that his services were required to perform a matrimonial ceremony—that he was to have five shillings for the job—and that a gallon of gin-punch was expected immediately, he uttered a tremendous oath by way of expressing his joy, and leapt up with as much alacrity as the fumes of liquor, which still influenced his brain, would permit him to display.

A circle was then formed, in the midst of which Josh Pedler, Matilda Briggs, and the begging-letter-impostor parson took their station. One of the hawkers produced a common brass ring, which he handed to Barlow, over whose person Quin threw a sheet by way of surplice, while another individual gave him an obscene book.

The greatest excitement now prevailed amongst the rogues and loose women present: and even Matilda herself entered into the spirit of the proceeding—for she was excited with the liquor which Quin had forced upon her. Her poor father alone experienced a qualm of conscience:—but he dared not utter a word calculated to betray his scruples or manifest his regrets—for his wife, of whom he stood in dread, cordially approved of the arrangement.

The drunken parson now commenced the ceremony; and assuming, as well as he could, the seriousness of former days, he recited the following slang chant:—[9]

"I, parish prig and bouncing ben,
Do here, within this padding-ken,
Josh Pedler—if thou wilt agree—
Cop that young shaler unto thee.
To her a fancy bloak be thou:—
Tip mauleys—she's thy jomen now."

Barlow made the bride and bridegroom join hands, and then continued thus:—

"When thou art out upon the cross,
May she be faithful to thy doss.
If things go rough, and traps are nigh,
May she upon the nose be fly."

The company then repeated in chorus the last line; after which display of their vocal powers, the ceremony was continued by the parson in the following words:—

"If you should pinch a lob—or plan
A sneezer, or a randlesman—
Or work the bulls and couters rum—
Or go the jump and speel the drum—
Or turn shop-bouncer at a pinch,—
Should you do this and get the clinch,
May she, while thou art lumbered, be
Still true and faithful, Josh, to thee."

The parson paused for few moments, and concluded with this distich:—

"Be witness, all, to what is said:—
And with this fawney ye are wed!"

Barlow handed Josh the ring, which the thief placed on the girl's finger, and then gave her a hearty kiss.

The spectators immediately set up a shout of acclamation; and at that instant the gin-punch made its appearance.

A scene of debauchery—noise—quarrelling—and ribaldry now followed. The parson was voted into the chair, which was constituted by the foot of one of the beds; and the punch went rapidly round in pewter-pots.

The bowl was soon emptied; whereupon Josh Pedler sent to the public-house and ordered another. The little deformity, without legs, sang a filthy song: even the man with the curved spine, and who went about on grapnels, forgot his wonted ill-humour and insolence, and joined in the mirth.

The woman, who had charge of the house, was summoned; and, for a consideration of seven shillings and sixpence, she agreed to provide a separate room for the accommodation of the "happy couple." This amount was duly paid; and the woman was made drunk into the bargain for her trouble.

At length some one proposed a dance; to which the parson objected, and moved "another bowl of punch" as an amendment. Jane Cummins, however, put an end to the argument by undressing herself, and performing sundry saltatory evolutions in a complete state of nudity—an example which was very speedily followed by Mutton-Face Sal, whose grief for the loss of her paramour, Tim the Snammer, was temporarily drowned in punch. Even the woman in widow's weeds was about to adopt the same course; but she was too tipsy to accomplish her purpose, and, on rising from her chair, fell on one of the beds and into a profound sleep at the same time.

The noise, confusion, and disgusting licentiousness of the scene increased to an extraordinary degree; but Josh Pedler led Matilda away —or rather carried her; for the unfortunate girl was now in a complete state of intoxication.

Revolting as the contemplation of such a scene as that just described must be to the rightly-constituted mind, it was nevertheless requisite to introduce it into such a work as the present.

Its details prove how necessary it is to establish in the great metropolis cheap and well-conducted lodging-houses for the use of poor but honest families.

This cannot be done by private speculators, because an efficient management could only be secured by legislative enactment.

The Government, then, should direct its attention to this very important subject.

A poor man is compelled to quit his native town or village in the provinces, and comes to London to seek for work. He is accompanied by his wife and daughter. Penury compels him to fix upon the cheapest lodging he can find; and a cheap lodging-house cannot be a respectable one. Its landlord and landlady have neither the time nor the means—even if they possess the inclination—to discriminate between the various applicants for admission:—on the contrary, they are well aware that the worst characters are most likely to prove their best customers. Their only consideration is to make their establishment answer; and so long as their lodgers pay for the accommodation they seek, no questions can be asked.

To such a den, therefore, is the poor man forced to take his wife and his daughter. The obscene language which falls upon this young girl's ears—the fact of being compelled to lay aside her garments in the presence of several males, who unconcernedly undress themselves before her—the debauchery of the day—the licentiousness of the night,—to all these elements of ruin is she immediately exposed. A veil drops suddenly, as it were, from before her eyes; and she finds herself hemmed in by moral corruption—surrounded by temptation—excited by new desires—and encouraged to go astray by her companions. How can she leave that sink of impurity, otherwise than impure? how can she quit that abode of infamy, otherwise than infamous? Many a high-born lady has succumbed to the seducer under circumstances less venial,—under influences admitting a far less amount of extenuation!

Were the Government, with the consent of the Legislature, to establish lodging-houses for poor but honest persons, an immense benefit would be conferred upon that class, and the fearful progress of immorality would receive a check at least in one point. The respectability of such institutions might be ensured by placing trustworthy married couples at their head, and applying a system of rules which would enforce regular hours, exclude ardent spirits, and only permit a moderate quantity of beer to be brought in for the use of each individual, and likewise empower magistrates to punish those who might be brought before them charged with breaking the regulations, or otherwise subverting the wholesome discipline enjoined.

Thieves, prostitutes, and bad characters would not attempt to obtain admission to establishments if this description:—no more than a person enjoying a competency would endeavour to become the inmate of a workhouse. Scenes of debauchery and unbounded license alone suit abandoned males and females;—and thus every guarantee would exist for the respectable management of those institutions which would save the honest poor from the low lodging-houses of London.[10]

9. The following is a glossary which will enable the reader to comprehend the flash terms used in the thieves' marriage-service:—

Parish prig, clergyman.
Bouncing ben, learned man.
Padding-ken, lodging-house.
Cop, make over.
Shaler, girl—young lady.

Fancy bloak, paramour—fancy man.
Tip mauleys, shake hands.
Jomen, paramour—fancy girl.
On the cross, out thieving.
Doss, bed.
Traps, constables.
Upon the nose, on the watch.
Fly, alert.
Pinch a lob, rob a till.
Plan, steal.
Sneezer, snuff-box.
Randlesman, a silk pocket handkerchief.
Work the bulls, pass bad 5.it *s.* pieces (a favourite specie with coiners in those days).
Couters, sovereigns.
Rum, bad—spurious.
Go the jump, steal into a room through a window.
Speel the drum, run away with stolen property.
Shop-bouncer, shop-lifter.
Get the clinch, be locked up in gaol.
Lumbered, imprisoned.
Fawney, ring.

10. When Mr. Mills was instructed to draw up his "Report on Prison Discipline," he obtained the necessary information and evidence from a variety of sources. One of the witnesses whom he examined was Inspector Titterton of the Metropolitan Police Force. This intelligent officer deposed as follows:—"St Giles's abounds with low lodging-houses. The most notorious are kept by Grout. He is a rich man, and has elegant private houses at Hampstead, and the lowest sort of lodging-houses in every part of London. He generally visits these dens daily;—keeps his horse and gig. Price of these houses, as all others, threepence or fourpence a night in a room with a score or two of other people. Men and women sleep together anyhow. A man and woman may have a place screened off, which they call a room, for eightpence a night; but they are seldom so delicate. These houses are brothels. Grout is the monopolist of low lodging-houses. The St. Giles's prostitutes commit many robberies upon drunken countrymen whom they entice to those places, and either bully or *hocus* them. The last is to stupify them with opium or laudanum in their drink. Girls club, and keep a man between them. Inspector has known instances of girls robbing men even of their clothes. In one case the victim had been deprived absolutely of his shirt, because it was a good one: this man the inspector carried home in a policeman's great coat. At the census Grout returned that 140 persons slept in one of his houses in Laurence Lane. His ground landlord is Nugee, the great tailor. The lodging-houses in St. Giles's are like rabbit-burrows: not an inch of ground is lost; and there are stairs and passages, innumerable. While Grout is thus the landlord of hundreds and hundreds of thieves, vagrants, and prostitutes, he lets his beautiful Hampstead villas to genteel and fashionable families."

 We have already shown that Thompson was (and perhaps is still) a lodging-house proprietor in a considerable way of business. A person named Southgate is also eminent in the same line. He possesses houses which make up altogether 309 beds. These houses are as follow:—Nos. 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9, Charles Street, Long Acre; seven houses on Saffron Hill; five in Mitre Court, St. John Street, Clerkenwell; No. 11, New Court, Cow Cross, Smithfield; and two in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell. These last are exclusively occupied by Italian boys and their masters. A man named Elliott has also lodging-houses in Charles Street: namely, Nos. 23, 24, and 45. In Shorts' Gardens, a person called "Lucky Dick" has Nos. 8 and 9.

 An officer whom Mr. Mills examined, deposed thus:—"To return to lodging-houses, there are cheap ones in all towns; most of them have two sorts of kitchens. The labourers and hawkers live in a better room, and pay fourpence a night for their bed, halfpenny for coals, halfpenny for the use of plates and hot water, and a halfpenny for the cooking apparatus. Regular beggars, the low sort of cadger fellows, live in the other kitchen, and pay a halfpenny for coals, and have nothing found them. The beggars go on very bad at night in the lodging-houses. They can make 5*s.* a day in the country by begging, let alone what they make by thieving. They never think of work, unless they can contrive to carry something in hopes of an opportunity to slip off with it."

 And it is in such dens as these that honest poverty must seek shelter and a bed!

CHAPTER XXVI.
THE LADY'S-MAID.

In the meantime Mr. Frank Curtis had met the buxom Charlotte, according to appointment, in Conduit Street.

The youthful lady's-maid, who had not numbered quite nineteen years, but who concealed a warm temperament and a disposition ripe for wanton mischief, beneath a staid and serious demeanour, when in the presence of her mistress or of those in whose eyes it was prudent to be looked upon as "a very prudent and steady young woman,"—the youthful lady's-maid, we say, walked quietly along the street, and pretended not to notice Mr. Curtis, who was leaning against a lamp-post, smoking a cigar.

But the light of the lamp fell upon her pretty countenance; and he, having immediately recognised her, stretched out his hand and caught her by the shawl, saying, "Well, Miss—do you mean to pretend you didn't see me?"

"Lor'! you there now!" exclaimed Charlotte, affecting to be quite surprised at this encounter.

"Just as if you thought I shouldn't come!" cried Frank, laughing. "But take my arm, my dear; and though this very arm has often supported duchesses—and marchionesses—and even on one occasion the young and beautiful queen of the Red-Skin Indians,—yet I don't know that it was ever more agreeably pressed than by your pretty little fingers."

"How fine you do talk!" said Charlotte, by no means displeased with the compliment. "But where are you going?"

"Oh! I'll show you, my dear," returned Frank, as he led her along. "And now tell me—has anything happened in respect to you know what?"

"Yes—a great deal," answered Charlotte. "But here I am walking with a gentleman whose very name I don't even know! Isn't it odd?"

"Very, my dear. I will, however, soon satisfy you on that head. My name is *Mr. Curtis* to the world—but *Frank* to you; and some day or another I hope to be Baron Dumplington. But what was it that you had to tell me?"

"Something about Miss Mordaunt," replied the girl, who firmly believed the Dumplington story and entertained a proportionate amount of respect towards the young gentleman who was heir to so honourable and distinguished a title.

"Come—out with it, my dear," exclaimed Frank. "Business first, and love afterwards—as my dear lamented friend the Prince of Cochin-China used to say when we were intimate together in Paris, before he hung himself for love in his garters."

"Did he, though?" cried the lady's-maid. "How shocking!"

"Shocking enough, my dear. But pray tell me what you have to say about Miss Mordaunt."

"Why, sir," resumed Charlotte, "this evening when I was dressing her for dinner, she began to sound me about how I liked my place in Lady Hatfield's service, and whether I should be glad to better myself. So, keeping in mind what you had told me to do, I seemed to fall in to all she asked me, and gave her to understand that I shouldn't object to better myself. Then she began to simper and smile, and at last let out plump that she was going to run away with a gentleman—but she didn't say who—to-morrow night."

"That gentleman, my dear, is an uncle of mine," said Curtis.

"I'll be bound, then, it's the same Sir Christopher Blunt——"

"The very same, my dear. But go on: you speak almost as well as I did when I was in Parliament—or as my uncle the Earl of Dumplington."

"Do I, though? Well," continued Charlotte, "and so Miss Mordaunt told me how she couldn't think of travelling alone with the gentleman, and that she must have a lady's-maid——"

"And you agreed to go with her?" cried Frank.

"I did," answered Charlotte; "and we settled and arranged every thing quite comfortable."

"Did she tell you where she is to meet my uncle to-morrow night?" inquired Frank.

"No: but she told me to mind and be ready to leave in the evening at about seven o'clock," returned Charlotte.

"Well—fortunately I *do* know where they are to meet—and that's close by the turnpike at Islington Green," said Frank. "She's to go up in a hackney-coach, and be there punctual at eight o'clock; and the old chap is to have the post-chaise and four in readiness. Doesn't he already fancy himself tearing along the great north road, as if the devil was after him! And so nice too did he arrange his plans with his Julia, that there's to be a supper prepared for them at St. Alban's—and off again! Egad! he's settled it pleasant enough: but I'll be even with him!"

"What do you intend to do?" asked Charlotte.

Curtis did not immediately reply; but, after a few moments' consideration, he abruptly exclaimed, "Can you trust any female friend of yours in this business?"

"Well—I don't know—unless it is my own sister Alice, which is a very nice girl, and will do any thing I tell her," was the reply.

"The very thing!" ejaculated Frank. "Is she out at service?"

"No—she's at home with mother," answered Charlotte.

"And will she just consent to take a short ride in a post-chaise and four along with you, if I give her a five-pound note?" demanded Frank.

"To be sure she will," returned Charlotte, who, with the quickness of female perception, began to comprehend Mr. Curtis's design.

"Then I'll tell you how we must contrive it," said Frank. "It's of the greatest consequence to me, my dear, to prevent this marriage: and if I can only expose my stupid old uncle, I shall fairly laugh him out of it. Now, don't you think you could manage to pass yourself off as his Julia, and get your sister to play the part of yourself, as far as St. Alban's? and I would be there with three or four friends of mine—all jolly dogs—ready to receive Sir Christopher and you girls. You might cover your face well with a thick veil; and as he will be sure to hurry you into the post-chaise the moment you get down from the hackney-coach just beyond the turnpike on the Green, you needn't speak a word. Then you can pretend to be so overcome with fear and anxiety——"

"Oh! leave all that to me!" exclaimed Charlotte, who relished the joke amazingly. "But what shall I do about my place at Lady Hatfield's?" "Deuce take your place, my dear!" cried Frank. "I'll secure beautiful lodgings for you in some nice, quiet, retired street at the West End, and you shall be as happy as the day's long. We'll have such fun together—and I'll take you to plays and all kinds of amusements. Lord bless you! I think no more of a cool thousand or two than I should of blowing out a chap's brains if he was to insult you."

"Oh! dear me, don't talk so horrid!" exclaimed Charlotte, laughing. "And you really will do all you say—if I help you in this business?"

"Yes—and much more," returned Frank. "And now the only thing to manage, is to prevent Miss Mordaunt keeping the appointment by herself. Oh! I have it!" he exclaimed, after a minute's reflection. "I can imitate my uncle's handwriting to a *t*. He writes just as if he had a skewer instead of a pen—and so do I, for that matter. So I'll just tip Miss Julia a note to-morrow afternoon about four, as if it came from Sir Christopher; and I'll tell her in it that the elopement must be postponed until the next night. Egad! this is a stroke of policy that beats hollow any thing my cousin the Duke of Dumplington ever did."

"I thought he was your uncle, sir?" remarked Charlotte.

"I meant my uncle, love," replied Frank: "but it's all the same. The Marquis of Dumplington is my relation—and that's enough. And now, my sweet creature, that we have settled all this business—suppose we adjourn to a nice quiet place that I know——"

"But I must see my sister to-night and tell her all that there is to be done," interrupted Charlotte.

The fact is that the pretty lady's-maid had kept the appointment given her by Frank Curtis, with the full intention of abandoning her person to him; for she was alike wanton in her passions and mercenary in her disposition; and the five guineas which he had given her in the morning had stimulated her with the desire of making farther inroads upon his purse. Nay—she had even hoped that he would fulfil the sort of promise he had given her at their previous interview, and, in plain terms, establish her as his mistress in a comfortable manner. But the intrigue just concocted for the purpose of defeating the matrimonial design of Miss Mordaunt and Sir Christopher Blunt, had engendered new ideas in the breast of the lady's-maid; and she resolved that her intimacy with Mr. Curtis should progress no farther for the present.

The young man, who at this moment cared much more for the success of his scheme against his uncle than for the attractions of Miss Charlotte Styles, willingly allowed her to repair at once to the abode of her mother for the purpose of tutoring Alice how to play the part which that younger sister was to enact in the great drama planned by Mr. Curtis.

Charlotte accordingly separated from Frank, with a promise to write to him if any thing should go wrong; but with an understanding, on the other hand, that her silence was to be construed by him into a proof that all was progressing favourably to his views.

CHAPTER XXVII.
LONDON ON A RAINY EVENING.—A SCENE IN A POST-CHAISE.

London has a strange appearance on those evenings—so peculiar to our climate—when a cold, drizzling, mist-like rain is falling. The lustre of the gaslights in the shops is seen dimly, as if through a gauze; and the lamps in the streets have an air as though they struggled to preserve themselves from total extinction. Clogs and pattens create a confused rattling on the pavement; and to a bird's-eye view, such crowded thoroughfares as Cheapside, Fleet Street, the Strand, and Holborn, must appear to have their *trottoirs* arched with umbrellas.

Then aristocracy seems to urge the horses of its carriage more quickly on, as it whisks to the club, the Parliament, or the dinner-party:—the member of the middle class buttons his taglioni or his great-coat over his chest;—the individual of a humbler sphere tries to make his scanty tweed cover as much of his person as it will;—and poverty wraps its rags around its shaking limbs, apparently forgetful that in drawing them over one place they leave another bare.

In the entrances of courts and covered alleys and in deep doorways the "daughters of pleasure" (oh! the frightful misnomer!) collect and huddle together in their flaunting attire, the pattering of the rain rendering their poor thin shoes as pulpy as brown paper, and splashing over their stockings—and thus aiding ardent spirits and nights of dissipation to plant the seeds of consumption more deeply in their constitutions.

The drivers of cabs and omnibuses thrust their heads as far into their hats—or else push their hats as far down on their heads—as possible; and, shrugging up their shoulders, sit with rounded backs and faces bent downward, on their vehicles;—while the conductors or omnibus-cads, in their oil-skin coats, seem to find consolation for the unpleasantness of the weather in the fact that they can speedily fill their vehicles without the usual exercise of the lungs or gymnastic movements of the arm.

And, on a rainy evening such as we are attempting to describe, what business—what bustle prevail in front of the Angel Inn at Islington! Omnibus after omnibus comes up, from every direction, discharging and receiving their animated freight with wonderful rapidity. The red-nosed man at the booking-office seems to have something better to do than merely lounge at the threshold, with his right shoulder leaning against the door-post off which it has worn the paint in one particular spot: for inquiries now multiply thickly upon him. Indeed, we are afraid that that last share of "a quartern and two outs" which he took with the Elephant and Castle six o'clock cad, has somewhat obfuscated his ideas: for he thrusts an elderly lady with a bandbox into a Chelsea, although she particularly requested to be placed in a Bank omnibus; and he has sent that tall lady with her three children and a baby over to Kennington, in spite of her thrice repeated anxiety to repair to Sloane Square.

What a paddling and stamping of feet, and pattering of clogs, and collision of umbrellas there are in every direction,—up the New Road, and down the City Road,—along St. John Street and Goswell Street Road,—and also up towards the Green! The most addle-pated writer may find some food for his pen, if he only take his stand at the Angel door—with a cigar in his mouth, too, if he like—on a rainy evening.

Does he wish to see how a party of pleasure may be spoiled by a change in the weather? Let him study that little procession of a family who have passed the day at Copenhagen House, and are now returning home, wet—cold—uncomfortable—and sulky: the husband dragging the chaise, in which two children are squalling—a lubberly boy of eight or nine pushing behind—and the wife, with a baby on one arm, and holding up her gown with the left hand, paddling miserably through the rain, and venting her ill-humour on her husband by declaring that "it was all his fault—she knew how it would be—she had begged and prayed of him to come home an hour before—but he *would* stay to have that other glass of gin-and-water!"

If our moralist, whom we station at the door of the Angel, be an admirer of pretty feet and ankles, he may now gratify his taste in that respect; for, of a surety, those who have good ones raise their dresses above the swell of the leg. Ah! ladies—it is really too bad of you:—we almost suspect that you care little for the rain, since it enables you to display those attractions!

The policeman, with his oil-skin cape, emerges from the public-house close by, drawing the back of his hand across his lips, just for all the world as if he had been taking "something short" to keep the cold out:—and very likely he has, too—for we are sure that the most rigid disciplinarian of an inspector or serjeant would not quarrel with him for so doing on such an unpleasant evening. The apple-stall woman puts up an umbrella, and maintains her seat on the low basket turned bottom upwards; for she dares not absent herself from her post, for fear of the hungry urchins that are prowling about.

Within the door-way of the Angel a knot of young gentlemen, in pea-coats, and with sticks in their hands, are smoking cigars. They are not waiting for the omnibuses, but are merely collected there because the bustle of the scene amuses them, and they like to "look at the gals." Listen a moment to their conversation:—they are talking about some favourite actress at an adjacent theatre—and, to hear their

astute observations, one would think that they must at least be the dramatic-critics of the newspapers assembled there. Or else, perhaps, their discourse turns on politics; and, then, one would be apt to imagine that they were Under-Secretaries of State in disguise, so profound are their remarks! They call the Minister of the day by his surname without any titular adjunct; and one of them, no doubt wiser than the rest, shakes his head solemnly, and very kindly prophesies the said Minister's approaching downfall. Then the conversation flies off at a tangent to some less important subject; and they most probably proceed to comment upon the "excellent lark" they had the other night at such-and-such a place. Presently one of them proposes a "go of whiskey" each; and they accordingly adjourn to the public room of the Angel, where, what with the goes of whiskey and the going of their tongues, they create so much noise that the old gentleman at the next table flings down the last Sunday's paper in despair, before he has read through the third murder.

Well, reader, it was on such a rainy evening as this that two grand events in our history were to take place:—we mean the affair of Sir Christopher Blunt on the one hand, and the project of Old Death to kidnap Charley Watts on the other.

It is our intention, however, to proceed with the former little business in this chapter.

At a quarter to eight o'clock a post-chaise and four passed through the turnpike at Islington, and drew up in the lower road, alongside the enclosure of the Green.

The right-hand window was then lowered; and a head, enveloped in a fur travelling-cap, with lappets over the ears and tying under the chin, was protruded forth.

This head—which belonged to Sir Christopher Blunt—looked anxiously up and down the thoroughfare, and was then withdrawn again.

But the worthy knight's patience was not tested to any great extent; for in a few minutes after his arrival at the appointed spot, and before the clock had struck eight, a hackney-coach rattled up to the place where the chaise was waiting.

Sir Christopher threw open the door of the chaise, kicked down the steps, and leaped out with the agility of a small elephant; and in a few moments he very gallantly handed two females, well muffled up in cloaks, boas, and veils, from the hackney-coach.

"Dearest Julia!" he murmured to the taller of the two, as he assisted her to ascend into the post-chaise.

An expressive squeeze of the hand was the reply to this affectionate apostrophe on the part of the knight.

The shorter female, whom Sir Christopher concluded to be his fair one's attendant,—inasmuch as Miss Mordaunt had informed him by note in the morning that she had secured a faithful maid to accompany her,—was also handed into the post-chaise: the knight followed—and the vehicle hurried away like wildfire.

Sir Christopher and the female whom he believed to be Miss Mordaunt, sate on the back seat, and the other young lady occupied the seat facing them.

For some time there was a dead silence inside the chaise; but at the expiration of about ten minutes, Sir Christopher began to fidget like a gentleman at a public dinner, who, though "unaccustomed to public speaking," nevertheless experiences a nervous anxiety to address the audience.

"My dear Julia—ahem!" began the knight: "I hope you—you don't feel cold, dear?"

The female thus addressed threw her arms round Sir Christopher's neck, and clasped him so fondly that, what with the tightness of the embrace and the contact of the fur in which she was enveloped, he might have been pardoned had he fancied for a moment that he was being hugged by a bear.

"Oh! dearest Julia—how happy I am!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, nearly suffocated by this display of fondness. "And you, Julia—are you happy, my love?"

"Quite—too happy!" murmured his companion.

"And yet—methinks your voice sounds strange, Julia," said the knight. "What—what *is* the matter with you?"

"Only this, Sir Christopher—that I am not Miss Mordaunt——"

"Not Miss Mordaunt!" ejaculated the knight, preparing to throw down the window and order the postillions to stop.

"No—not Miss Mordaunt," was the answer: "but one who loves you as well—or better—and is, I flatter myself, six times as good-looking."

"Then who are you, in the name of heaven?" cried the knight, so completely bewildered that he knew not how to act.

Charlotte—for it was she—threw back her veil, and, by the light of the shops which they were just passing in the outskirts, Sir Christopher recognised Lady Hatfield's dependant, whom he had seen on two or three occasions when he had called on Miss Mordaunt in Piccadilly.

"And who is your companion?" he demanded hastily.

"My sister Alice—at your service," replied Charlotte. "But listen to me for one moment, Sir Christopher!"

"Well—for one moment, then," said the knight, so strangely perplexed and annoyed that he could take no decisive step.

"Miss Mordaunt never loved you, Sir Christopher," continued the wily Charlotte.

"Never loved me! Then why did she tell me so?"

"Only to laugh at you. It was all planned between her and your nephew Mr. Frank Curtis——"

"The devil!" ejaculated the knight. "Go on."

"They determined to make themselves merry at your expense, and yourself ridiculous at the same time."

"By heaven! I will be revenged!" cried the hero of this pleasant adventure, slapping his thigh emphatically with his open palm.

"They accordingly hired me and my sister to personate Miss Mordaunt and a lady's-maid," proceeded Charlotte; "and we were to carry on the deceit till we got to St. Alban's, where Mr. Frank Curtis and a party of his friends are already waiting to receive you."

"The villain!" shouted Sir Christopher, completely deceived by this plausible tale.

"But I always admired you, sir," continued Charlotte; "and I was resolved not to be made a party to carry out the trick to the end. I should have written to you—or called to explain it: but I feared you might not believe me;—and so I thought it best to let matters go as far as they have gone now, just to convince you that what I say is perfectly true."

"Oh! I believe it all:—It is too clear—too apparent!" exclaimed the knight. "That scoundrel Frank—I'll discard him—I'll stop his allowance—I'll never speak to him again! To get a party of friends to meet us at St. Alban's—eh? Just where I'd sent word to have a good supper in readiness!"

"Miss Mordaunt told him all that, sir," observed Charlotte, who had kept one of her arms round the knight's neck, and had gradually approached her countenance so closely to his that her breath now fanned his cheek.

"Yes—I understand it all!" cried Sir Christopher. "I have been grossly deceived—vilely treated—basely served! But I am not the man to put up with it. At the same time, Miss," he added, in a softening tone, "you are a very good girl to have saved me from cutting so ridiculous a figure at St. Alban's!"

"I have only done my duty, sir," murmured Charlotte, with a profound sigh; and—of course by accident—her cheek touched that of the knight.

"A good girl—a very good girl!" repeated Sir Christopher: "as good as you are pretty—for you *are* pretty—and I've often remarked it."

The arm thrown around Sir Christopher's neck pressed him gently.

"And I really do not know how to reward you sufficiently, my dear girl," he added, new ideas entering his mind.

Again the arm pressed him tenderly.

Sir Christopher could resist the exciting contiguity no longer; and he fairly kissed the cheek that was so close to his lips.

Charlotte sighed again, but did not withdraw her face.

"Really this is very ridiculous!" exclaimed the knight. "Here we are, galloping along like lightning—and without any particular object that I know of. Upon my word, I have a great mind—a very great mind to revenge myself on both Miss Mordaunt and Master Frank at one and the same time!"

"In what way, Sir Christopher!" asked Charlotte, in a languidly murmuring tone.

"By marrying *you*, my dear," was the emphatic response.

"Oh! Sir Christopher—is it possible—such happiness!" sighed Charlotte, again embracing him in the most tender manner.

"It is so possible, my dear," answered the knight, "that if you consent to have me, the horses' heads need not be turned back again towards London."

"How can I refuse you, dear Sir Christopher?" exclaimed Charlotte;—"I, who always thought what a fine-looking—handsome—kind—genteel—fashionable man you was from the first time I ever saw you!"

"I'm sure I always heard sister speak in the highest terms of you, sir," said Alice, now taking up her cue.

"Well, then, my dear—what is to hinder us from being happy?" cried Sir Christopher.

With these words, he pulled down the window, ordered the postillions to stop, and gave them directions to change their route in such a manner as to avoid St. Alban's.

The vehicle then whisked along with renewed speed; and while Sir Christopher felt wonderfully elated at the idea of punishing his nephew and avenging himself on Miss Mordaunt by showing her that she was not the only female in the world to whom he was compelled to address himself,—Charlotte, on the other hand, rejoiced at the success of a scheme which had been suggested by the part she was originally engaged to play in this pleasant drama, and which, as the reader will now perceive, was the motive that prevented her from extending her intimacy with Mr. Frank Curtis on the previous evening.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
TOM RAIN'S LODGINGS IN LOCK'S FIELDS.

Nearly opposite to the house where Tom Rain lived, in Brandon Street, Lock's Fields, there was a boozing-ken, well known to Old Death; and shortly after nine o'clock on the same evening which marked the events related in the preceding chapter, that cunning fence, accompanied by Toby Bunce and the lad Jacob, were introduced by the landlord into a front room on the first-floor of the said flash establishment.

Jacob was ordered to station himself at the window and watch for Tom Rain to take his departure on the expedition devised for him by Old Death; while Bones himself and his acolyte Toby seated themselves opposite a cheerful fire, to discuss hot gin-and-water until the hour should arrive for putting into execution the scheme that had brought them thither.

Although the rain was falling with a mist-like density, and no gas-company had been enterprising enough to lay down pipes in such a neighbourhood as Lock's Fields,—so that there were neither stars nor lamps to light the street,—still the eagle-eyes of Jacob could distinguish sufficient of the scene without, to quiet any fear lest the movements of Tom Rain should escape him. Old Death moreover stimulated his energies by means of a sip of hot grog; and the lad remained as motionless at the window and as earnestly intent on his object as a cat watching near the hole into which a mouse has escaped.

"Well," said Old Death, as he sipped his liquor complacently, "I suppose we shall have no difficulty in managing this little job by-and-by? Jacob watched all day long in Great Ormond Street, until we joined him to come over here; and the Jewess never stirred out once—did she, Jacob?"

"No—not once," was the answer.

"But you knew that she was at home?"

"Yes: because I saw her at the window for a moment, every now and then," replied the lad, speaking without averting his eyes from the street.

"Good!" exclaimed Old Death. "It is not at all likely that she has come over to Tom's lodgings this evening, or that she will come—'specially after the long sermon she wrote——"

Bones checked himself; for he was not in the habit of being communicative with Toby Bunce; and Toby, on his side, never sought to pry into the motives or designs of the old fence by whom he was made so complete a tool.

"Who is there in the house besides Mr. Rainford and the boy?" asked Toby, after a pause.

"Only the old widow woman that keeps it," responded Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"There!" cried Jacob, suddenly: "the door opens—and Mr. Rainford comes out! He's gone."

"All right!" said Old Death. "I suppose he's going for his horse, wherever he keeps it."

"I could see by the light in the passage, when the door was opened, that he had his white coat on and his great riding-whip in his hand," remarked Jacob. "It was a woman that held the candle—because I could just catch a glimpse of her shadow, and that's all."

"You don't think it was the Jewess?" asked Bones.

"I couldn't say, because the shadow wasn't plain enough," returned Jacob. "But it's hardly probable that she could have got over here before us, even if she was coming to Mr. Rainford's lodgings to-night."

"Well said, Jacob," observed Old Death. "You're getting a knowing lad—you are; and now you shall have a glass of grog to yourself."

"What! a *whole* glass?" ejaculated Toby Bunce, in astonishment at this unwonted liberality on the part of Old Death.

"Yes—a whole glass—a sixpenny glass," responded Bones; and, having summoned the landlord, he gave the requisite order.

The liquor was brought for Jacob's express behoof; and Old Death drew forth the money to pay for it. But, as he did so, a paper with writing upon it fell upon the floor, unperceived by any one save Jacob.

The lad instantly drew a chair near the fire, and as he seated himself, placed his foot upon the paper, which, being somewhat dingy in hue, he took to be a bank-note.

The landlord withdrew; and the conversation was resumed between Old Death and Toby Bunce.

"I hope Betsy will have something nice for supper when we get back again," remarked the latter.

"She's sure to do that," replied Old Death. "You ought to be very fond of your wife, Toby—for she's very fond of you."

"D'ye think she is, Mr. Bones?" exclaimed Bunce.

"I'm sure of it. Doesn't she take great care of you?"

"Rather too much," was the reply, which came from the bottom of Toby's heart: then, perceiving that he had uttered something which seemed to imply that he had dared to form an opinion for himself, he hastened to add, "Not but what it's very kind of her to keep the money—and my watch too—and every thing else in her own care, because I know I'm an old fool——"

"No—you're not a fool, Toby," interrupted Bones; "but you want looking after. Ah! it was a blessed day for you when I recommended you to marry that virtuous—well-conducted—pattern-woman, as one may say, who is now your wife. I had no interest but your good—and hers——"

"I'm well aware of that, Mr. Bones," cried Toby: "and you've been an excellent friend to us. I'm sure Betsy respects you as if you was her——" Toby was about to say "father," but he remembered that Old Death did not like to be reminded of his age, and so he substituted "brother."

"Well—well," said Bones: "I've no doubt of what you tell me; and so long as you're happy together, that's every thing."

Toby smothered a sigh with a deep draught of gin-and-water;—Old Death poked the fire; and Jacob availed himself of the opportunity to stoop down and pick up the paper, which he dexterously conveyed to his pocket, unperceived by either of his companions. But a sudden disappointment seized upon him—for he could feel that it was too stiff for a bank-note, and was moreover folded like a letter.

The time passed away; and at length Old Death, after consulting his watch, declared it to be close upon eleven o'clock.

There were no lights visible in the house opposite; and it was therefore determined to commence operations without farther delay.

"Before we leave here," said Old Death, "remember what you are to do. Jacob and you, Toby, will put on your masks, rush in, shut the door, and make the old widow secure. Then you, Jacob, will come out and fetch me. It won't do for the woman to see me at all, because I'm so tall that if she described me to Tom Rain when he comes back, he would know who it was directly; but as there's nothing particular about either of you, he can't make you out from description."

"We'll take care, Mr. Bunce, how the thing is managed," said Toby.

The trio then quitted the public-house; and, while Toby and Jacob crossed to the other side of the street, Old Death walked a little way on.

The coast was quite clear, and a profound silence reigned throughout the neighbourhood.

Toby Bunce and the lad stopped at the door of the widow's house, slipped on their black masks, and knocked. In a few moments the door was opened by the widow herself. Quick as lightning, the candle was knocked from her hand, and the scream that half-burst from her lips was arrested by a large plaster which Toby instantaneously clapped upon her mouth. The poor woman fainted through excess of terror, and was borne into the nearest room, where Jacob hastened to strike a light.

Having succeeded thus far, Toby remained in charge of the landlady, while Jacob hastened to fetch Old Death.

In a few moments the lad returned with that individual; and the front-door was again carefully closed.

The widow continued in a swoon; and Toby did not give himself any trouble to recover her.

"Do you remain here," said Old Death, addressing himself to his myrmidon Bunce; "and if the woman revives and attempts to struggle or any nonsense of that kind, give her a knock on the head just to quiet her—but no more."

"All right," returned Toby, rejoiced to find that he had only a female to deal with.

Old Death then took the light, and, followed by Jacob, cautiously ascended the stairs.

They entered the front-room on the first-floor. It was a parlour, very neatly furnished: but no one was there.

"The boy must be in the back chamber," murmured Old Death; and thither they proceeded.

Having opened the door as noiselessly as possible, they advanced slowly into the room; but scarcely had the candle shed its light upon the bed, when they beheld the boy—the object of their enterprise—cradled on the bare and beautifully modelled arm of a female also wrapped in slumber, and whose coal-black hair spread itself over the white pillow, and partially concealed her glowing bust.

"The Jewess!" whispered Jacob, in a rapid, concentrated tone.

Old Death instantly shaded the light with his hand, and retreated from the room, followed by the lad.

But at that moment a loud knock at the front-door was heard; and simultaneously a piercing shriek burst from the apartment below, where Toby Bunce had been left in charge of the landlady.

Old Death muttered a terrible curse, extinguished the light, and hastened down stairs as noiselessly as possible—Jacob following with equal caution.

"The back way," murmured Old Death: "but first go and help Toby, who is in some trouble or another with the landlady."

Jacob darted into the front-room; and as it was quite dark, he stumbled over a chair.

The struggle between Toby and the landlady, who had succeeded in getting off the plaster, was now renewed; and, releasing her throat from the suffocating grasp which her assailant had upon it, she screamed for help a second time.

The knocking at the front-door was redoubled; and in a few moments a light gleamed from the head of the stairs.

"Perdition!" murmured old Death: "it is the Jewess!"

Then, rushing into the front room, he exclaimed, "Come off this moment!" and he was about to beat a retreat by the back way, when the house-door was forced in with a vigorous push.

"What the devil is doing here?" cried the well-known voice of Tom Rain, as he banged the door behind him and drew the bolt. "Who was screaming? What——"

"Oh! Tom—is that you?" exclaimed a melodious, though excited voice on the stairs; "there are thieves—murderers in the house!"

And the half-naked lady, with her coal-black hair floating around her shoulders and over her bosom, suddenly appeared at the turning of the narrow staircase, holding a candle.

The light illumed the small passage below, and showed Tom Rain, standing with his back against the front-door, and with a pistol in each hand.

A third scream burst from the parlour.

Rainford rushed in; and, encountering Toby and Jacob, dragged them—or rather hurled them, as if they were two children in his grasp, into the passage.

There the light revealed to him their countenances—for their masks had been torn away in the struggle with the landlady; and Rainford was for a few moments so astounded at the recognition of Old Death's agents or confederates, that he was unable to utter a word.

"The villains!—the murderers!—the assassins!" cried the landlady, rushing forward, with her hair all in disorder, her garments torn to rags, and the blood streaming from her nose. "Shall I go and fetch a constable, Mr. Rainford?"

"No, I thank'ee," returned Tom: "leave me to manage these scoundrels. Here, my love," he continued, addressing himself to the Jewess, who had remained half-way up the stairs, "give me that light, and do you retire to your room. I must speak to these rascals in private. My good woman," he added, turning once more to the landlady, "have the kindness to go up stairs and keep my wife company; and fear nothing—now that I am here."

The two women hastened to obey these injunctions; and Rainford, provided with the candle, made an imperative sign for Toby Bunce and Jacob to precede him into the room from which he had dragged them a few minutes previously.

"Answer me directly," said Tom, in a stern—resolute manner, as he closed the door behind him, and deliberately drew forth the pistols which he had thrust into the pockets of his white great-coat when he first entered the parlour to rescue the landlady,—"answer me directly—either one of you, I care not which:—what brought you here?"

"Jacob knows best, Mr. Rainford," replied Bunce, eyeing the pistols askance.

"No—I don't," said the lad, in a sulky tone.

"You are game to your employer, I have no doubt, Jacob," ejaculated Rainford. "And now, Toby Bunce, answer for yourself—or, by God! I'll shoot you through the head! In short, what brought you here?"

At this moment there was a low knock at the room-door, against which Tom Rain was leaning.

"Who's there?" demanded the highwayman.

"Me," replied the sepulchral, hollow voice of Old Death.

"Ah! the plot thickens," said Tom; and, opening the door, he gave admittance to Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"It's all a mistake, Tom—it's the wrong house!" exclaimed Old Death. "You don't know how annoyed I am—you don't indeed!"

"Well—I confess I do not," said the highwayman coolly; "and it will take you a long time to persuade me that you are speaking the truth. If it was the wrong house, why didn't these people of yours tell me so when I first questioned them?"

"Because I saw you would not believe me," cried Jacob hastily.

"And I was so flurried by them barkers," added Toby, pointing to the pistols.

"I'm not such a fool as you take me to be," observed Tom Rain. "Without being able to fathom your intentions, I can smell treachery as easy as I could gunpowder. How did you find out that I lived here? You must have had me dogged and watched, Old Death. And perhaps the very job you sent me after to-night, was a mere subterfuge to get me out of the way? Fortunately I did not wait for the yellow chaise, because I picked up something better the moment I reached Blackheath; and I thought I had done quite enough for one evening's work—so I returned without delay. Lucky it was that I did so. But am I to have an explanation of this affair?—or do you mean us to break with each other for good and all?"

"What can I say—what can I do to prove to you that this is all a mistake?" cried Old Death, sadly perplexed between the fear of complete detection and the dread of losing the valuable services of the highwayman.

"I will tell you," answered Tom, after a few moments' consideration. "Let these two followers of yours go their ways—and you and me will have a little discourse in private."

A sudden misgiving—a horrible suspicion flashed to the mind of Old Death. Could Rainford mean to murder him?

"Why do you hesitate?" demanded the highwayman, penetrating his thoughts. "Do you suppose for an instant that I intend you any

harm? Why, you miserable old wretch," he added, with a proud contempt which rendered him strikingly handsome for the moment, "I would sooner blow out my own brains than defile my hands by laying them violently on such a piece of withered carrion as you are—unless you give me ample cause."

Old Death's lips quivered with rage; but, subduing his emotions as well as he was able, he made a sign for Toby Bunce and Jacob to depart.

This hint was obeyed; and in a few moments Bones was alone in the room with the highwayman.

"What is it you require of me?" asked the old man, in a tremulous voice—for there was something in Rainford's tone and gesture which alarmed him.

"I will explain myself to you," said Tom. "When we first knew each other, you boasted that all your transactions were conducted with so much caution, that none with whom you had dealings even knew where you lived. Was it not so?"

"Very likely—very likely," returned Old Death. "But what of that?"

"Simply that as it suited you to keep your place of abode secret from me, so did I wish that my residence should remain unknown to you," answered Rainford, "Now, mark me, Mr. Bones—or whatever the devil your name may be:—you shall have no advantage over me. Hitherto our compact has been fairly kept; but at length I find you practising falsely towards me. You need not interrupt me with vows and protestations—because I shall not believe you. But I tell you what you will do—and this night, too."

"What?" groaned Old Death.

"You will place us on even ground—you will give me the same advantage that you have gained over me: in a word, you will take me straight to the place where you live, and you will show me your stores where you keep all the property you receive or purchase from those who are in league with you."

"I—I have no stores," said Old Death; "and, as for my lodging—I—I have no settled place. I sleep sometimes in one crib—sometimes in another——"

"All lies!" ejaculated Tom, in a determined tone. "You have enormous dealings with all the housebreakers and thieves in London; you have said as much to me—and you have boasted that they are ignorant of your residence. Now then, you *have* a residence—and I swear that before I am six hours older, I will know so much about *you*, that you shall never dare to practise any treachery towards *me*."

"What treachery could I practise against you, Tom?" asked Old Death in a conciliatory tone.

"I will tell you," replied Rainford. "You boast that for thirty years you have monopolised the business of fence to all the people worth dealing with in London; and, during that time, you have never got into a scrape. But how could you have enjoyed so wonderful a safety—so uninterrupted a security, unless you now and then sacrificed—yes, *sacrificed*—an accomplice or two?"

"I!" ejaculated Old Death, starting in spite of himself.

"Yes—*you*," rejoined Rainford, fixing his eyes sternly and searchingly on the ancient villain's hideous countenance. "Do you think that I am unacquainted with your real character? do you suppose that I was at a loss to understand you, even the very first moment we ever met? That flippancy of manner—that off-handedness—that reckless indifference, which characterise me, are a species of mask from behind which I can penetrate into the deepest recesses of the hearts of others. I know you as well as you know yourself—or nearly so. At all events, I know enough to render me cautious and wary; and, by the living God! you shall never have an opportunity of selling me to save yourself!"

"Tom—my dear Tom!" exclaimed Old Death, now actually frightened by the other's manner, and astonished at his words; "you cannot think of such a thing seriously!"

"So seriously do I think of it," replied Rainford, "that I will drag you into the pit, if I am destined to fall. So now, without another word, prepare to reveal to me all the mysteries in which you have for thirty years enveloped yourself."

"And if I refuse?" said Old Death, doggedly.

Rainford deliberately cocked his pistol.

"You have inveigled me into a snare—you have sent away those who might protect me—and now you seek an excuse to murder me!" exclaimed Old Death, his voice sounding like ringing metal.

"Did I not say ere now that I would not harm you, unless you gave me just cause?" demanded Rainford. "And think you that your refusal to comply with my present wish does not constitute such just cause? You have discovered my lodging, which it does not suit me to leave on that account:—you may also have found out that I am not *alone* here——"

"I know that a certain Jewess is your mistress," said Old Death, with a savage leer—for all the vindictive passions of his nature were aroused by the conduct of the individual who dared to coerce him—*him*, who had never been coerced before!

"A certain Jewess!" repeated Rainford, surveying Old Death with a singular expression of countenance.

"Yes—Esther de Medina," added Bones.

"Esther de Medina is as pure and innocent as the babe that is unborn!" cried the highwayman, with impassioned emphasis.

"Then she must be your wife," said Old Death.

"Liar!" thundered Tom Rain, rushing forward and seizing the ancient villain by the throat: then, as if ashamed of the sudden transport

of rage into which he had suffered himself to be betrayed, he withdrew his hand, and said in a more quiet but still determined manner, "Mention not the name of Esther de Medina with disrespect—or I warn you that my vengeance—yes, *my* vengeance—will be terrible! And now prepare to lead me to your place of abode—for I am wearied of this long parley."

He again drew forth one of his pistols, which he had consigned to his pocket when he rushed on the old man in the way just described.

"You'll repent this, Mr. Rainford," said Old Death, endeavouring to impress the highwayman with vague and undefined alarms.

"You see how evil your nature is, since you can threaten me thus," cried Tom. "But I care little for your menaces. I have but two alternatives to choose between:—one is to blow your brains out at once—the other is to get you as much into my power as you have got me into yours. Either way will answer my purpose. So now make up your mind which it shall be. The people in Lock's Fields wouldn't take much notice if they heard a pistol fired; and there's a pretty deep ditch at the bottom of the yard behind the house."

Old Death shuddered; for there was something awfully determined in the highwayman's manner.

"Well—and if I take you to a certain place," he said, "how do I know that you will not split upon me?"

"Trust to me as I shall *then* trust to you," ejaculated Rainford. "Shall we not continue to be necessary to each other? And on my part, I shall at least experience more confidence, since I shall know that you cannot ruin me without bringing destruction on yourself!"

"Be it as you say," growled Old Death; and, fixing his greasy cap upon his head, he prepared to depart.

"One moment—while I say a word up stairs," said Rainford; and, hastily quitting the room, he locked the door behind him.

Scarcely a minute elapsed ere he returned—to the great relief of the old man, who had begun to entertain serious misgivings at being made a prisoner.

"There are marks of dirty boots upon the carpet in the bed-room above," said Tom, confronting Bones, and fixing upon him a searching look. "What were you doing there?"

"I was not there——" began Old Death, quailing beneath that glance.

"Damnable liar!" cried Rainford. "I have half a mind——But, no," he added, checking himself: "time will show what your purpose was in invading this house; and I shall know how to punish any treachery on your part. And now mark me! You will lead the way—and I shall follow you. Avoid great thoroughfares——"

"Had we not better take a coach?" asked Old Death.

"No—we will walk, be it to the other end of London," replied the highwayman resolutely. "I shall follow close behind you:—beware how you attempt to address yourself to a soul whom you may meet—beware also how you trifle with me. But stay—I will have a guarantee for your good faith. Give me your pocket-book!"

"My pocket-book!" ejaculated Old Death, with something approaching a shudder.

"Yes—your pocket-book," replied Rain. "I know that it contains Bank-notes, and memoranda of value or utility to you; and I will retain it in this house, until we return from the expedition on which we are about to set forth. Come—quick! I have no time for idle delays!"

"My pocket-book!" repeated Old Death, with increasing dismay.

"Do I not speak plain enough?" demanded the highwayman. "If I cannot make myself intelligible by words, I may by deeds: so permit me to help myself to the article I require. It will not be the first time I shall have rifled a pocket," he added, with a merry laugh.

"Do you know that you are treating me in a manner that I never experienced before?" said Old Death, his hideous countenance convulsed with rage.

"I can very well believe what you state," returned Tom Rain coolly. "Hitherto you have had to deal with men whom you got completely into your power—whose lives hung on a thread which you could snap without endangering yourself—who were mere puppets in your hands, and did not dare say their names were their own. Oh! I am well aware how you have played the tyrant—the griping, avaricious, grinding miser—the cruel, relentless despot! But now,—*now*, Mr. Bones, you have another sort of person to deal with,—a man who will be even with you anywhere and everywhere,—and who will never let you gain an advantage over him without acquiring one in return."

"Who are you," demanded Old Death, in strange bewilderment, "that talk to me thus?"

"Why—Thomas Rainford, to be sure!" cried the highwayman, laughing—yet with a certain chuckling irony that sounded ominously on the old fence's ears. "And I need not tell you," he continued after a few moments' pause, "that I am rather a desperate character, who would as soon shoot you in the open street—aye, or in the midst of a crowd, too—if you attempted any treachery towards me, as I would ease a gentleman of his purse upon the lonely road. But we are wasting time: give me your pocket-book."

Old Death's courage had gradually oozed away during this strange colloquy; and he now mechanically obeyed the command so imperiously addressed to him.

But suddenly recollecting himself, as he was about to hand the pocket-book to the highwayman, he said, "There is one letter here—just one letter—which I should like to keep about my own person."

"Well—take that one letter," returned Tom; "and beware how you endeavour to secrete any thing else."

Old Death's hand trembled as he unfastened the clasp of the greasy old pocket-book; and, when he had opened it, he sighed deeply, as his eyes alighted first on a roll of Bank-notes. Then he turned the papers over—one after another; and clouds gathered thickly and more thickly upon his countenance.

"This is strange—very strange!" he muttered, as he fumbled about with the letters and memoranda.

"What is strange?" demanded Rainford.

"That I cannot find the letter I want," returned Old Death, with increasing agitation. "Surely I cannot have lost it? And yet—I remember now—I was referring to it this afternoon—and——Oh! yes—I recollect—I put it into my pocket——"

But the search in his pockets was vain: the letter was nowhere to be found.

"Come—there's enough of delay and such-like nonsense," exclaimed the highwayman, snatching the pocket-book from his hand.

Again Rainford quitted the room, locking the door behind him; and in a couple of minutes he returned, saying, "Your pocket-book is safe where no one will meddle with it till we come back. It is now past eleven: let us set off. Come—you go first!"

Old Death led the way, and Tom Rain followed, the latter conveying some pleasant intimation, as he closed the front-door behind him, about an ounce of lead in the other's back if he showed the slightest sign of treachery.

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE MYSTERIES OF OLD DEATH'S ESTABLISHMENT.

From the back of the Sessions House on Clerkenwell Green, towards Smithfield Market, runs a thoroughfare the upper portion of which is known by the name of Turnmill Street, and the lower part as Cow-Cross Street.

Numerous rag-shops and marine-stores here meet the eye,—establishments where the thief in a small way may obtain a ready sale for the proceeds of his roguery. It is really curious to stand for a few moments and observe the miscellaneous assortment of articles crammed together in the dingy windows of these places,—as if they were receptacles for all the rags that misery could spare, and all the rubbish which domestic neatness throws into the street.

Some of the old clothes-shops in the thoroughfare which we are describing, are strikingly characteristic of the neighbourhood; for you cannot gaze a minute upon the silk handkerchiefs, the bonnets, the shirts, the gowns, the coats, the trousers, and the waistcoats, and other articles hanging outside the windows, or suspended to nails stuck into the walls, without being able to form a pretty accurate computation of the proportion which has been stolen, and that which has been obtained by legitimate purchase.

The women lounging at the doors in Turnmill and Cow-Cross Streets are of dissipated, dirty, and loathsome appearance: nor have the men any advantage over them in these respects.

Take a duchess from the saloons of fashion,—a duchess in her satin or velvet, with her feathers and her diamonds, her refined manners, her elegant demeanour, her polished discourse, and her civilising influence,—and place her by the side of one of those degraded women in Turnmill Street,—a woman with hoarse voice, revolting manners, incrusted with dirt, clothed in the meanest apparel, if not in absolute rags, and interlarding her conversation with oaths and obscenities,—place those two specimens of the female sex together,—and how astounding is the contrast!

But the duchess has no more claim to praise for the polish—the fascinations—the exquisite refinement which characterise her, than the poor woman of Turnmill Street deserves to be blamed for the degradation and repulsiveness in which she is steeped to the very crown of her head.

Had the two been changed at their birth, she who is now the duchess would have become the dissipated, loathsome, ragged wretch of Turnmill Street; and the babe who has grown to be this ragged wretch, would have sprung up into the splendid lady with the ducal coronet on her brow.

The rich and the high-born do not reflect upon this fact:—they fancy that their very aristocracy is innate as it is hereditary, and that the poor are naturally degraded, vicious, and immoral. Oh! the terrible error—the fearful mistake! For, after all, many a proud peer is in reality the son of his reputed father's groom or footman; and many a dazzling beauty owes her being to her mother's illicit amours with a butler or a page!

The young Prince of Wales, if he live, will doubtless become one of the most polished gentlemen in the universe:—but had he been stolen at his birth, and brought up by poor people, he would even now be running bare-footed in the streets—groping in the gutters for halfpence—gnawing cabbage-stalks and turnip-parings—thieving pudding from cooks'-shops and bacon from cheesemongers' windows—easing old gentlemen of their handkerchiefs—and familiar with all the horrible vocabulary of the slang language!

No credit, then, to the aristocracy—no blame to the poor! Neither can help being what they are. The influences of the sphere of refinement must have a tendency to refine: the miseries of the poor must produce degradation, immorality, and recklessness.

Ah! my Lord Duke—how ineffable is your contempt for yon poor trembling wretch who now stands in the dock at the Old Bailey, before his judge! Your Grace never did a dishonourable action—your Grace has never committed even a crime so genteel as forgery! But has your Grace ever known what starvation is? has your Grace wandered for hours, like a madman, through the streets of a city teeming with all the luxuries of the earth, while a wife and children were weeping for bread in a cheerless garret up some filthy court? No—your Grace has never been placed in such a position; or, believe me, you would probably have purloined a loaf of bread or filched a handkerchief or a purse—even as did that poor trembling wretch in the dock, whose guilt has filled your Grace with so much disgust!

And you, too, my Lady Duchess—how closely your Grace wraps that elegant, warm shawl around your form, lest its mere hem should happen to touch the garments of that poor unfortunate girl who is passing just at the moment when your Grace is stepping from the Opera-door into the splendid equipage which is to whirl your Grace to your palace-home! Oh! I well understand the loathing—the disgust which the menaced contact with that wretched creature excites in the bosom of your Grace. But—ah! does she deserve no pity—no sympathy, as well as such sovereign contempt—such boundless aversion? The entire sex is not outraged by her fall;—and consider, my lady Duchess—had you been a poor man's daughter and so hemmed in by miseries of all kinds from your very birth until the age of womanhood, that emancipation from such incessant privations were a very paradise, even though purchased by a crime,—thinkest thou, my lady, that thy virtue would have been stronger than that of the poor wretch who seems to insult you by even breathing

the same air that surrounds your aristocracy?

Merciful heavens! how unjust the upper classes are to the lower! The great lord and the haughty lady blame where they should pity—turn away with loathing where they should commiserate—proclaim as innate wickedness that social aspect which is the inevitable result of poverty and oppression—denounce as inveterately depraved those unhappy beings who never were taught nor had a chance to be good!

The infamy of the upper class towards the lower in this country, is immense. A landowner gives his labourer eight shillings a-week, and says, "Go and live comfortably—be neat and clean—attend divine worship on the Sabbath—educate your children—let them read good books—keep them tidy in their appearance—and avoid debt!" Then when this landowner finds the family naked and starving—the man frequenting the public-house in despair, instead of the church in holy gratitude—the wife a slattern and a gin-drinker—the children incipient prostitutes and thieves,—when he sees all this, he raises his hands, exclaiming, "Oh! the inveterate, innate wickedness of the working classes!"

The aristocracy and the landowners of this country are, as a whole, the most cruel and heartless set of legalised robbers that ever preyed upon the vitals of suffering millions:—they are now what the French aristocrats and landlords were previously to the Revolution of 1796;—and solemnly—solemnly do we declare our belief that the despotic—tyrannical—remorseless oligarchy which usurps the right of domination, is hurrying the United Kingdom to a similar catastrophe!

But to continue our narrative.

The mist-like rain was still falling, and midnight had struck some time, when Old Death, closely followed by Tom Rain, merged from Cow-Cross Street, and stopped at the entrance to a narrow court in Turnmill Street.

Casting a glance around, to assure himself that Rainford was at his heels, Old Death plunged into the court; and Tom, fancying that the ancient fence meant to elude him, sprang after him and caught him by the skirt of his grey coat.

"No noise," whispered Bones. "Here we are."

Thus speaking, he opened a side-door in the court with a key which he took from his pocket, and, hurrying Tom Rain with him, closed the door carefully again behind them.

The place into which the highwayman was introduced, was as dark as pitch; and, not choosing to be led into an ambuscade, Rainford said, "One moment, my worthy friend! If you have no means of obtaining a light, I will very soon get those means from some public-house——"

While he was yet speaking Old Death procured a light from a tinder-box; and a candle, which stood ready on a low shelf near the door, soon diffused sufficient lustre around to enable the highwayman to observe what kind of place he had been introduced into. It was a small, dingy-looking room, without a vestige of furniture in it, and having the entrance to a narrow staircase on one side, and a second door, facing that by which he and Old Death had entered, on the other.

When a thief arrived at this place with any stolen property, he pulled a wire the handle of which hung against the wall in the court: a bell rang within—the outer door opened by unseen means, and the thief closed it behind him on entering the little room. He then tapped at the inner or second door which we have noticed, and which had a hatch in it that immediately drew up: no one appeared—but the thief threw in his bundle or parcel. The hatch then closed. In a few moments—or according to the time required for the inspection of the goods—the hatch was raised again, but merely high enough to admit the passage of a small piece of paper, whereon was marked the highest price that would be given for the articles offered for sale. If the paper were immediately returned by the thief, the money was thrust forth; the door in the court opened again by invisible means, the thief departed, and the door was closed behind him: if, however, he did not return the paper, it was considered that he would not accept the amount proffered, and the bundle was restored to him through the hatch.

"Thus, you perceive," said Old Death, whom Rainford compelled to reveal the mysterious use of the hatch in the inner door, "no one is seen by those who come here to dispose of their property."

"And who manages this business for you?" demanded the highwayman; "for it is clear that you cannot be here—there—and every where at one and the same time."

"I have a faithful and trustworthy man who has been in my service for many—many years," answered Old Death.

"But the people who have dealings at this place must know that it is your establishment?" said Rainford.

"Quite the contrary!" exclaimed Bones, with a grim smile. "This fencing-crib is called *Tidmarsh's*—and none of the flash men in London know that I have the least connexion with it. It takes its name from my managing man. When I have business to do that I must transact in person, I meet my friends at public-houses and patter-cribs—and my very intimate ones, such as you, at Bunce's. But come up stairs."

Old Death led the way to an indifferently furnished room, where a man as well stricken in years and as repulsively ugly as himself, though apparently not near so tall, was in bed.

"It's only me, Tidmarsh," said Old Death.

"Only you!" growled the man, sitting up in bed, and staring suspiciously at Rainford.

"Me and a friend—a very particular friend, Tiddy," added Bones. "Indeed, it's Mr. Rainford."

"Oh! that's different!" said Tidmarsh, in a more conciliatory tone. "Your fame, sir, has reached me even in this crib. Take some rum,

sir."

And he pointed to a bottle and glasses standing on a table.

"Well—I don't mind if I do—just to keep out the damp, and drink your health, Mr. Tidmarsh," cried Rainford, in his usual merry, off-hand strain; and, suiting the action to his words, he took a small dram.

Old Death followed his example; and Mr. Tidmarsh suffered himself to be prevailed upon to imbibe a like quantum.

"Now, go to sleep, Tiddy," said Bones, in a patronising manner. "We shan't disturb you any more."

Mr. Tidmarsh gave a species of grunt by way of assent to the recommendation offered, and threw himself back upon his pillow.

Old Death conducted Rainford into the adjoining rooms on the same storey, and then to the upper chambers; but they were all quite empty! Their walls were black with dirt—the ceilings seemed as if they had originally been painted of a sombre hue—the window-panes were so grimed that it was evident they could admit but a feeble light even in the broad day—the floors sent up clouds of dust as the feet trod upon them—and dense masses of cob-webs actually rounded off all the corners. There was, moreover, an earthy, infected smell in those rooms, which would have made a weak stomach heave with nausea.

Tom Rain was quite surprised to find all the chambers empty. He had expected to be introduced into warehouses teeming with the produce of three-parts of all the roguery committed in the great metropolis: but not even so much as an old rag met his eyes. Indeed, the rooms appeared as if they had not been tenanted, or even scarcely entered, for many—many years.

"This may be your reception-house," he said, in a jocular manner; "but it certainly does not contain your stores."

"All the goods are sent away as soon as they are received," replied Old Death.

"And where are they sent to?" demanded Rain.

"To the small dealers—and some to the continent," answered Bones, eyeing him askance.

"Well and good," observed the highwayman coolly. "But you have not a hundred errand-boys to distribute the bundles and parcels about: neither are there vessels sailing for Holland and France every hour in the day."

"What—what do you mean, Tom?" asked Old Death.

"I mean that you are trying to deceive me," exclaimed the highwayman, sternly. "But, look you! we are alone in this house—for I consider your old man down stairs as nobody; and, by God! if you attempt any of your nonsense with me, I'll fell you with the butt-end of this pistol."

"What would you have me do?" said Old Death, trembling at the determined manner in which his companion spoke.

"I would have you show me where you keep your stores," was the resolute answer. "And now—delay not—or it will be the worse for you."

Old Death still hesitated for a moment; but, seeing that Rainford stamped his foot impatiently and raised his pistol in a menacing manner, he disposed himself to do with a good grace what he could not avoid.

Raising the candle high up so as to light the way thoroughly, he retraced his steps down the narrow, precipitous, and broken staircase, Tom Rain following close behind.

Having reached the little room on the ground-floor, and which we have already described as the place where stolen property was purchased, Old Death opened the door containing the hatch, and led Rainford into a small back chamber, having the air of an office. Its furniture consisted of a desk, a high stool, and one of those large, old-fashioned eight-day clocks, which used to be seen in the kitchens of genteel houses, and the wall-nut cases of which were as big as coffins. On the desk were writing materials, and a huge ledger, especially dirty, as if it had been well thumbed by hands not too intimately acquainted with soap.

"This is Tidmarsh's crib, I suppose?" said Rainford inquiringly.

Old Death nodded an affirmative.

The highwayman opened the book, in which the entries of each day's transactions were regularly made. We shall quote a specimen of these accounts, prefacing the extract with the necessary explanation that the numbers prefixed to some of the memoranda were those which tallied with the names of the thieves, burglars, or prostitutes entered in Old Death's books, as was stated on a previous occasion:—

No. 31. Two belchers, a cream-fancy, a randlesman, and a blue billy; three wedge-feeders, a yack, and a dee. £1 15*s.*

A Stranger—looked like a shallow cove. Roll of snow, six snooze cases, three narps, and a blood-red fancy. 8*s.*

A Stranger—looked like a spunk fencer. Green king's-man, water's-man, yellow-fancy, and yellow-man; pair of kicksters, a fan, and a dummie. 13*s.* 6*d.*

No. 4. A cat, six pair of shakester's crabs, and a cule. 12*s.*

No. 53. Yack and onions. £1 12*s.* 6*d.*

A Stranger—looked like a snow-dropper. Twelve mill-togs. 6*s.*

A Stranger—looked like a peterman. Busy-sack, redge-yack, six wedge-feeders, and togs in busy-sack. £2 15*s.*

A Stranger—looked like a mushroom-faker. Lily benjamin. 3*s.* 6*d.*

A Stranger—looked like a crocus. To smash three double finnips. £12 10*s.* 6*d.*

A stranger—looked like a high-fly. Redge-fawney. 8*s.* 6*d.*

Lunan. To smash a single finnip. £2 2*s.* 6*d.*[11]

"Quite a secret police-book, this," observed Tom Rain, after he had gained an insight into its contents.

Old Death smiled grimly.

"But do you mean to say," continued Rainford, "that these persons who are noted by means of numbers—for I can understand the meaning of all that—do not know that this is your crib?"

"Not they!" replied Bones. "I tell you that they call it *Tidmarsh's*: and I may add that not one out of one hundred who come here, even know old Tidmarsh by sight."

"And how does he recognise these fellows who are denoted by the numbers?" asked Tom Rain.

Old Death pointed to a small hole, not larger than a pea, in the wood-work which separated the two rooms; and this hole was covered with a little moveable piece of wood on the inner side—that is, in the office where Tidmarsh was accustomed to sit.

"Things begin to grow a little plainer," said Rainford. "And now, my worthy old fence, to the store-rooms and to your own special residence."

This command was significantly backed by the motion of Rainford's right hand towards the pocket where he had deposited the pistol with which he had ere now menaced his companion.

Mr. Benjamin Bones swallowed a profound sigh—for it went to his heart to think that he was compelled to yield to the coercion of one whom he had marked out for a slave, but who had become a master.

But as he took up the candle from the desk whereon he had placed it to enable the highwayman to examine his memorandum-book, a gleam of horrible satisfaction shot athwart his countenance—as if some idea of a consolatory nature had suddenly struck him.

Tom Rain whistled a tune with an air of the most perfect indifference: but that abrupt change in Old Death's features—that scintillation of delight, momentary as its expression was, had not escaped the notice of the highwayman.

The ancient fence now approached the clock, which was ticking in a gloomy, monotonous manner; and, as he laid his hand upon the key which opened the door of the case, he turned sharply towards Rainford, saying, "You persist in going farther to-night?"

"Yes—such is my determination," answered Tom.

Old Death opened the clock, and touched some secret spring inside. This was immediately followed by the noise of wheels, accompanied by a peculiar sound as of a windlass turning rapidly; and in a few moments Rainford perceived that the entire clock itself was moving slowly along the wall, revealing by degrees an aperture in the floor.

In about a minute the working of the machinery ceased—the clock-case was once more stationary—and in the place where it first stood was an opening cut in the boards, large enough to admit the passage of even a moderately stout man.

"Shall I go first?" asked Old Death, with a sardonic smile, which seemed to indicate his opinion that Rainford would not venture to follow him.

But if such were really his idea, he was disappointed; for the highwayman said in the coolest manner possible, "By all means, old chap. And make haste about it—for the night is passing away, and as yet I have seen scarcely anything."

Old Death made no answer, but began to descend an iron ladder, to which the aperture led; and as he gradually went down the steps, he held up the candle in one hand, and with the other supported himself by means of a rope hung for the purpose.

Tom Rain unhesitatingly followed him; and when he reached the bottom of the ladder, he found himself in a long, narrow, vaulted passage, apparently stretching far underground, but to the end of which it was impossible for the eye to penetrate, so feeble and flickering was the light afforded by the candle.

"Wait an instant while I close the entrance," said Old Death: "it is a precaution I never neglect."

"Quite right," observed Tom coolly; and while he affected to be leisurely whistling a tune, he was in reality keeping a most careful watch upon his companion's movements.

Old Death pulled a thick wire which hung down from the top of the vault, and the mechanism of the clock was again set in motion, until the clock-case itself had resumed its usual station over the entrance to the vaulted subterranean.

11. The ensuing glossary will explain these otherwise enigmatical entries:—

Belcher—close striped handkerchief.
Cream fancy—any pattern of handkerchief on a white ground.
Randlesman—green handkerchief, with white spots.
Blue billy—blue ground handkerchief, with white spots.
Wedge-feeders—silver spoons.

Yack—watch.
Dee—pocket-book of small size.
Shallow cove—a fellow dressed in a Guernsey jacket, and looking like a sailor.
Roll of snow—piece of Irish linen.
Snooze-cases—pillow-cases.
Narps—calico shirts.
Blood-red fancy—handkerchief all red.
Spunk fencer—match-seller.
Green King's-man—handkerchief of any pattern on a green ground.
Watersman—sky-coloured handkerchief.
Yellow fancy—yellow handkerchief, with white spots.
Yellow-man—handkerchief all yellow.
Kicksters—trousers.
Fan—waistcoat.
Dummie—pocket-book of large size.
Cat—muff.
Shakesters' crabs—ladies' shoes.
Cule—reticule.
Yack and onions—watch and seals.
Snow-dropper—one who steals linen from hedges or drying grounds.
Mill togs—linen shirts.
Peterman—a robber who cuts trunks from the back of carriages.
Busy-sack—carpet bag.
Redge yack—gold watch.
Togs—clothes.
Mushroom faker—a man who goes about ostensibly to buy old umbrellas, but really to thieve.
Lily benjamin—white upper coat.
Crocus—an itinerant quack doctor.
Smash—change.
Double finnips—ten-pound notes.
Highfly—genteel begging-letter impostor.
Redge fawney—gold ring.
Lunan—common woman.
Single finnip—five-pound note.

CHAPTER XXX.
THE STORE-ROOMS.

The reader has already seen and heard enough to be fully aware that Thomas Rainford was a man of undaunted courage: nor did he now tremble when he found himself immured, as it were, in that subterranean, along with a character so full of cunning and malignity as Old Death.

Although completely ignorant of the dark and gloomy locality to which he had been brought, and well aware that his companion was quite capable of the foulest treachery, the highwayman followed the old fence with so firm a step, and whistled away in a manner indicative of such utter recklessness of danger, that his guide was himself astonished at so much daring.

But Rainford was keenly observant of all the movements of his companion; and, resolutely as he walked, he was nevertheless careful in following as precisely as possible in the steps of Old Death, so that he might not be entrapped by any pitfall in that gloomy place.

On his part, Old Death proceeded at a somewhat rapid pace, shading the light with his hand so as to protect it from the strong current of air which rushed through the passage.

This passage, or long subterranean vault, was about ten feet wide and six high. It was walled and arched with rough stone, and paved with huge flags. The masonry at the sides and overhead was green with the damp; and, even by the fitful light of the candle, Rainford could perceive that this strange place must have been in existence for many—many years.

Here and there he observed little niches in the wall; and in one there was the remnant of an image of the Saviour on the cross. It instantly flashed to the mind of the highwayman that this sinister-looking subterranean had once been connected with some monastic establishment; and his imagination suggested that he was probably treading on the very place where the victims of ancient Popish tyranny had been confined and left to perish through famine.

Old Death and Tom Rain had proceeded about sixty yards, as well as the latter could guess, along the vaulted passage, when the former suddenly stopped, and the highwayman perceived that their farther progress was barred by a huge door, studded with iron knobs.

"You are now about to enter my sanctuary—as I may call it," said Old Death, turning abruptly round on Rainford; "and again I ask you what guarantee I have that you will not betray me?"

"The same security which I have that you will not prove treacherous to me," answered Tom.

Old Death hesitated for a few moments, as if he were about to make another observation: but, yielding to a second thought, which most probably showed him the inutility of farther remonstrance, he proceeded to unbar the massive door.

It opened inwards, and led to a spiral flight of stone steps, up which the two men mounted, Rainford having previously secured the door, which had huge bolts on each side.

Having ascended some forty steps, Old Death, who went first, placed the candle in a niche, and pushed up a trap-door, which immediately admitted a strong current of air: but the precaution observed in respect to the light, prevented it from being extinguished.

"I ought to have brought a lantern with me, by rights," murmured Old Death. "But come along."

"You go on first," said Rainford; "and I'll take care of the candle."

"No—give it to me," replied Bones hastily; and he extended his hand to grasp it.

But Rainford hit him a hard blow on the wrist with the butt-end of his pistol, and then seized the candle.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Old Death savagely.

"Because I suspect you of treachery," returned the highwayman, in a severe tone. "But, remember—I am well armed—and, at the least appearance of evil intent on your part, I fire!"

"You are wrong, Tom—my dear fellow," said Old Death, coaxingly, as he still lingered at the top of the steps.

"Well—I may be; and I shall be glad to find that I am," exclaimed Tom: "and now lead on."

Old Death ascended the few remaining steps; and Rainford followed with his pistol in one hand and the candle in the other.

They were now in a small room furnished as a bed-chamber; and when Old Death had let down the trap-door again, he unrolled and spread a small carpet over it.

"This is your residence?" said Rainford inquiringly.

The old man nodded a grim assent.

"And your store-rooms are in this house?—for I can perfectly well understand that *we have come into another house*—and, by the direction of the subterranean, I should say it must be in Red Lion Street."

"You know London well," said Old Death.

"I do," replied Rainford.

"Although you lived so long in the country," added Bones.

"Right again, old fellow!" exclaimed Tom, "And now for a farther insight into the mysteries of your abode."

With these words the highwayman approached a door on one side of the room; but Old Death, hastily advancing towards another door, said, "This way, Tom—this way: there is nothing in that quarter—worth seeing."

But the ancient fence seemed agitated; and this was not lost upon his companion.

"Well, as you choose," observed the latter, resuming his careless, off-hand manner. "Lead on."

Bones had already opened the door; and he now conducted the highwayman into a spacious apartment, surrounded by shelves, whereon were ranged an assortment of articles of the most miscellaneous description.

Clothes and china-ware—candlesticks, plated and silver, all carefully wrapped up in paper—piles of silk pocket-handkerchiefs, and heaps of linen garments—carpet-bags and portmanteaus—every species of haberdashery—silk dresses and cotton gowns—velvet pelisses and shawls of all gradations of value—muffs, tippets, and boas—ladies' shoes and gentlemen's boots—looking-glasses and candelabra—lamps and pictures—tea-urns and costly vases—meerschaum-pipes and dressing-cases—immense quantities of cutlery—piles of printing paper—saddles and bridles,—in short, an infinite variety of articles, to detail which would occupy whole pages.

"Your magazine is crowded, old fellow," said Rainford, who, even while surveying the curious place in which he found himself, did not the less keep a strict watch upon his companion.

"Are you satisfied now?" demanded Old Death.

"Not quite," answered Rainford. "You must have another room where you keep your jewellery and all those kinds of things?"

"What kind of things?" asked Bones sharply.

"Oh! things that require to be packed away with caution, to be sure," replied Tom Rain.

For an instant the old man cast upon him a glance of searching inquiry, as if to penetrate into the most secret profundities of his soul; but the highwayman affected to be very intent in his contemplation of a picture, and the countenance of the fence grew more composed.

"Well," said Rainford, after a few moments' pause, "there's no use in delaying the matter. I *must* and *will* make myself acquainted with every nook of this place."

Old Death moved towards a door facing the one by which they entered the apartment; and Rainford was conducted into a smaller room, but fitted up with shelves like the first.

On those shelves were several boxes, of various dimensions, and numerous jewel-cases wrapped up in paper.

"Watches and plate, I suppose?" said Rainford, pointing to the boxes.

"Something in that way, Tom," replied Old Death. "Would you like to see any of them?"

"No, thank'ee," was the answer. "I am not particularly curious in that respect."

Then, as he appeared to glance casually round the room, his eyes dwelt for an instant upon an iron safe let into the wall.

"Well—have you seen enough?" asked Old Death. "It's getting very late."

"It must be early, you mean," replied the highwayman, with a smile. "But still there is time for the business that I have in hand," he added, his manner suddenly changing to seriousness.

Old Death glanced towards him uneasily. Indeed, for some time the fence had been suspecting that Rainford had an ulterior object in view, independent of the mere wish to become acquainted with his abode; and vague alarms now filled his mind. What could the highwayman mean? Was he other than he seemed? Did he intend to betray him?

All these ideas rushed rapidly through the imagination of the horrible old man; and, though *he* had formed a plan whereby to avenge himself on *the only individual who had ever yet dared to coerce him*, he trembled lest he should be unable to put it into execution. He knew that Rainford was a man of dauntless bravery, and believed him to be a desperate one; and now he found himself completely in this formidable person's power. Not that Old Death lacked courage himself: and he certainly was not deficient in treachery. But he wanted the strength—the physical strength to maintain a deadly struggle with the highwayman, if it should come to *that*!

Thus was it that for the first time, perhaps, the hardened miscreant trembled for his life.

To throw open the window and call for assistance, in case of danger, was to invite the entrance of persons who would discover all the mysteries of his abode; and death were an alternative scarcely more frightful!

"Yes—there is time enough for the business that I have on hand!" repeated Rainford, his countenance assuming so stern—so determined an expression, that Old Death trembled with a colder shudder than before.

"What do you mean?—what is that—that——" stammered Old Death.

"Sit down—there—on that seat!" thundered the highwayman, pointing imperiously to a chair. "Sit down, I say—or, by heaven! this pistol——"

"Well—I will—I will, Tom," said Bones, perceiving the deadly weapon levelled point-blank at his heart: and he sank into the chair accordingly. "But do tell me—if I have offended you—if——"

"Hold your tongue!" ejaculated Rainford, in so authoritative a manner that the ancient villain's powers of utterance were suddenly paralysed. "And now mark me," continued the highwayman: "I have a certain task to perform, which nothing save a superior physical strength on your part can prevent. But, in the first place it is necessary that I should bind you—that I should render you incapable of molesting me."

Old Death was unable to reply: but he stared with vacant terror on the individual whose proceedings were alike so mysterious and so alarming.

Rainford took a coil of rope from a bale of goods that stood upon the table, and with extraordinary rapidity proceeded to fasten Old Death's arms and legs to the chair, uttering terrible menaces the whole time that this operation lasted; while the appalling state of the aged fence's mind was indicated only by low moans and convulsive movements of uneasiness.

Having made fast the end of the rope to the iron bars of the fire-place, in such a manner that Old Death could not shift the chair beyond the length of the tether thus formed, Rainford leant himself against the table and proceeded to address his prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXI.
ANOTHER DEED OF INFAMY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

The scene was now a striking one.

In that small chamber—the shutters of which were securely closed,—by the light of a dimly-burning candle, two men of criminal avocations but of entirely discrepant characters, were seated opposite to each other,—one fastened, pinioned to a large arm-chair—the other placed in a determined attitude against the heavy oaken table.

Fear and vague alarms rendered the always repulsive countenance of Old Death now truly hideous; while excitement and a certain air of bold triumph invested the features of the highwayman with an expression which made him appear perfectly, though sternly handsome.

The gleaming eyes of Old Death flickered in sparkles beneath his shaggy, overhanging brows—for fierce, ferocious malignity mingled with the terrors that oppressed him;—while Rainford surveyed him with combined abhorrence and contempt.

"Thirty years and ten months have elapsed," said the highwayman sternly, "since one Benjamin Bones sold his half-sister Octavia to a nobleman who purchased the prize of her virtue for gold!"

For a few moments a dead silence ensued, after these words had fallen from the lips of Rainford: but, when that interval was past, a wild—a savage—a, hyena-like howl, expressive of mingled rage and astonishment, burst from the lips of Old Death.

"Silence, miscreant!" exclaimed the highwayman, in a tone and with a manner of terrible earnestness. "Ah! I have doubtless surprised you by this announcement—this denunciation of a secret that you little deemed to be known to me!"

"My God! who are you?—how came you to learn that secret?" demanded the old fence, writhing in the agony of suspense and wild excitement.

"I will tell you who I am presently," was the answer: "and you will also see wherefore I have compelled you to conduct me hither this night."

"Then you *had* another motive, besides the mere wish to become acquainted with my abode?" said Old Death, perceiving that he had been over-reached in this respect—as indeed he had for the last half-hour suspected.

"Fool!" ejaculated Rainford, contemptuously: "of what use was it to me to know where you lived, or to visit your secret repositories of plunder, unless I had some essentially important motive? The fact of your having discovered my abode gave me in truth but little uneasiness—for I could have moved elsewhere in a few hours. That fact, however, furnished me with an apparent excuse to force you to conduct me to *your* den; for I knew that were I to acquaint you with my real object in coming here, you would have risked every thing to prevent it!"

"Again I say, who *are* you?" demanded Old Death, a kind of superstitious awe now taking possession of him.

"Listen to me," said Rainford. "Nearly thirty-one years have elapsed since you sold your half-sister Octavia Manners for the gold which laid the foundation of the immense fortune you have amassed. Yes—this atrocious deed was perpetrated; and one of England's proudest peers was the purchaser of that young creature's virtue—for she was but sixteen, old man, when her ruin was effected through your vile agency! She was sold to the embrace of a man old enough to be her father—aye, even her grandfather;—and the affection which she entertained for a deserving youth in her own sphere of life, was blighted—crushed! She died of a broken heart—leaving behind her a male child whom *you* swore to protect!"

Old Death seemed to recoil from this averment as from a hideous spectre suddenly starting up before him; for, in spite of his confirmed wickedness, the present topic had awakened painful reminiscences and compunctious feelings within him.

"Yes," continued Rainford, fixing his eyes reproachfully upon the old fence; "she forgave you on her death-bed—forgave you the wrong that you did her,—forgave you, because you promised to make amends for your conduct towards her by your behaviour to the babe whom she left to your charge."

"And who can say that I did not fulfil my promise?" demanded Old Death, trembling in suspense at what might be the nature of the reply which Rainford would give.

"Who can say that you did not fulfil your promise?" repeated the highwayman, in a slow—deliberate—bitter tone, while his eyes appeared to send daggers to the heart of the old man bound helplessly in the chair. "There is damning evidence against you in that respect!"

"Where?—how?" ejaculated Old Death.

"You shall soon learn," replied Rainford. "The nobleman who had *purchased* your half-sister, provided liberally for the support of her child—*their* child—and gave a large sum to be used for the offspring of that sad connexion. But you——"

"I—I did my duty—towards the child," stammered Old Death, "till—it died——"

"Liar!" thundered Rainford, advancing in an appallingly menacing manner towards the helpless, captive wretch. "You sold the child to a tribe of gipsies——"

"Mercy! mercy!" groaned Old Death. "Do not kill me, Tom—do not hurt me! I am in your power—spare me!"

Rainford had raised his pistol as if to dash the butt-end against the forehead of the old man: but, mastering his passion, he consigned the weapon to his pocket—for he was afraid to trust his hand with it while his excitement was so terrible.

"Mercy, indeed!" exclaimed Rainford in a tone of bitter hatred, not unmingled with contempt: "what mercy did you show towards that hapless child? When Octavia Manners was on her death-bed, that nobleman to whom you sold her virtue, visited her—implored her forgiveness—and placed in your hands a thousand guineas to ensure a provision for the boy."

"My God!" ejaculated Old Death, a terrible suspicion now flashing like lightning to his mind: "how can you know all this?—even if ——you, yourself——"

"Yes—*I* am the son of that nobleman and your half-sister Octavia!" cried Rainford, placing himself in front of Old Death, on whom he gazed with eyes flashing fire from beneath sternly contracted brows.

"Spare me—spare me!" murmured the wretched man, hanging down his head—for the glances of his injured nephew seemed to scorch and sear his very heart's core.

"Look up—look up!" thundered the highwayman; "and meet the gaze of him whom, when a child, you sold to gipsies—sold, that you might grasp all the gold which was supplied to you for my benefit! Yes—you sold me to strangers—even making a profit of me by the very way in which you rid yourself of my presence in your dwelling! Had it not been for your treachery—your vile avarice in this respect, I might have grown up to be an honest man. But, no—no," added Rainford bitterly—and a tear trembled on his eye-lash, —"had you kept me with you, I should have been worse—aye, a myriad, myriad times worse than I even now am!"

At the imperious command of the highwayman, Old Death had raised his head; and Rainford then beheld a countenance so fearfully distorted with varied emotions, that he felt he was already partially avenged in having been able to produce such a powerful effect on that aged—that inveterate sinner.

"What do you mean to do to me, Tom?" asked the hideous old fence, now more than ever trembling for his life.

"Not to harm your person," replied the highwayman scornfully: "especially," he added, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "as you and I can boast of kinship. But I am wearied of the life I am leading—and my aim is to settle in some foreign clime, where the evil reputation of my deeds in this may not follow me. There are times when I abhor myself—happy, reckless, and indifferent as I usually seem;—for my career has been marked with many a deed at which I blush—all robber, plunderer that I am! And this discourse, which has turned upon the foul crime perpetrated against the honour and happiness of my mother—Oh! it has reminded me of *one* act in *my* life that presses sorely—God knows how heavily upon my conscience!"

Rainford walked thrice up and down the room, apparently oblivious of the presence of Old Death, who had never before seen him exhibit so much painful emotion.

"But regrets are useless—save as they prepare our minds for a better course of life," exclaimed Rainford, abruptly starting from his reverie: then, again confronting Old Death, he said, "And now comes the moment of punishment for all your misdeeds towards me!"

The fence groaned audibly.

"Fear not for your life," continued the highwayman: "I am no murderer:—my hands were never stained with blood—neither shall they be now! But, in regaining that which is my own—and with interest—aye, compound interest, too—I shall teach a heartless, grasping wretch a lesson that may render him more cautious in future how he sacrifices every human tie at the shrine of avarice! For even amongst such as you—such as I—such as the veriest wretches whose villany has helped to fill these stores,—the claims of kinship—the bonds of relationship have a recognition and a name. Many and many a man who is noted for his misdeeds—or who has even shed the blood of a fellow-creature—would respect the vow which he pledged to rear his dead sister's child. But you—*you* ruthlessly thrust away the helpless infant,—you cast off the offspring of that connexion which your own fearful thirst for gold had brought about! Now, then, shall I punish you through the medium of that passion which prompted you to sell my mother to the nobleman, and myself to the gipsy!"

With these words Rainford advanced close up to his prisoner, and said in a short, commanding manner, "The key of that safe—where is it?"

"The key?" repeated Old Death, his countenance becoming ghastly white.

"Yes—the key!" cried the highwayman; and he thrust his hands into the pockets of his captive's grey coat.

"No—no: you shall not have my gold!" howled the fence, agitating convulsively on his chair.

"Keep quiet!" thundered Rain; "or I shall do you a mischief yet! Keep quiet, I say.—Ah! here is the key! And now roll about, and rave, and foam as you will—I care not!"

"Villain! what are you doing?" exclaimed Old Death, his eyes glaring with ferocious hate—with infernal spite—with blood-thirsty malignity,—glaring, indeed, like those of a famished tiger caught in the snare of the hunter, and beholding a stately deer at a little distance: "what are you doing? You are going to rob me—to plunder me—after all I have done for you—all the good things I have put in your way! But I will be revenged yet—I will send you to the scaffold—I will wreak a terrific vengeance on your head. Keep off, I say—touch not that safe! Damnation light upon you!—perdition seize you! Oh! Tom—dear Tom—don't rob me—don't! You'll drive me to despair—I shall die of grief—and you will be my murderer Tom—do listen to me! Ah! he opens the safe—the wretch—the villain!"

Thus did Old Death menace and pray—coax and moan by turns; but at last his voice swelled into a howl of fiend-like rage, which rose like the wailing of a damned soul upon the silence of that early morning-hour.

But Rainford seemed indifferent alike to his earnest beseechings and his paroxysms of fury.

That last, ferocious outburst of rage had completely exhausted the old man; and gasping as if under the influence of strangulation, he fell back in the seat to which he was fastened by the strong cords. But his convulsive motions—his hollow, flashing eyes—his parched lips—and the quivering of his hands, denoted how acutely—how keenly he felt the work of depredation that was in progress.

For Rainford had opened the safe, and was now busily engaged in examining the various drawers, and also sundry pocket-books which he found therein. The former contained hoards of gold coins, and the latter were filled with Bank-notes, making an aggregate of immense value.

The highwayman secured about his person a sum of five thousand pounds, murmuring to himself, "This is sufficient to enable me to become an honest man: I will not leave the old villain penniless."

He then searched the safe for any private papers that might be deposited there; and in a drawer which he had well-nigh overlooked, he found a small leather case containing a roll of letters, tied round with a piece of riband so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been. A single glance at these documents awakened such emotions of mingled pleasure and pain within his breast, that he determined to possess himself of them; and replacing them in the leather case, he secured them about his person with even more care than he had bestowed on the Bank-notes.

Having thus rifled the safe of as much as he chose to take away, he closed the iron door, locked it, and placing the key on the table, said to Old Death, "I am now about to take my departure from this house. Is there any one living here besides yourself?"

The fence only stared at him in a fierce and sombre manner; for the brain of the old man had become a chaos of wild and terrible thoughts at the contemplation of the daring robbery which was thus practised on *him*—the patron of robbers!

Indeed, the incidents of this eventful night were sufficient to level the powers of a mind stronger even than that of Old Death,—for those incidents had followed each other in such rapid, whirlwind-like succession, and were all so hostile to his interests, that he felt as if he were the victim of a hideous nightmare composed of all the most frightful images that the terrors of a guilty conscience can possibly conjure up during the long dark nights of winter.

The failure of his expedition to Lock's Fields—the exposure of his treachery to Tom Rain—the discomfiture he had undergone in the presence of Toby Bunce and the lad Jacob—the coercion exercised to force him to discover the secrets of his receiving-house and the mysteries of his store-rooms and dwelling-house—the discovery of his deeply injured nephew in the highwayman, and the revival of the history of his villany in reference to one long since dead,—and, lastly, the robbery of his money and papers,—all these events, occurring with such consecutive rapidity that they appeared to form but one single dreadful blow, were sufficient to paralyse the energies of the old villain.

"Is there any one living in *this* house besides yourself?" repeated Rainford. "It is for your own good that I ask; for I shall leave you bound in this chair—but, if you are really alone here, I will hasten to drop your friend Tidmarsh a hint, that he may come presently and release you, by which arrangement I shall get as long a start of you as I require."

"There is no one here but myself," at length replied Old Death, aroused from his torpor by the words thus addressed to him.

"Then good bye," said Tom; and, taking up the candle, he quitted the room, heedless of the prisoner's intercession to be released from his captivity.

On gaining the bed-chamber situate above the spiral staircase leading to the subterranean passage, the highwayman remembered two circumstances which made him pause ere he raised the trap-door.

In the first place he recalled to mind the anxiety of Old Death to prevent him from securing the candle at the moment when they were about to emerge from the secret avenue; and it struck Rainford that the old man had intended to have extinguished the light as if by accident—but whether for motives of treachery, or merely to avoid the discovery of something that the fence wished to be concealed, Tom was at a loss to conjecture.

Secondly, Rainford remembered that Old Death had manifested considerable uneasiness when he had approached the first of the two doors opening from that bed-chamber; and he now thought it probable that the fence had been desirous of extinguishing the light in order to prevent Rainford from observing that there were two doors in that room.

"At all events," said Tom to himself, "let us see where this other door leads to."

It was unlocked—as he had expected to find it; because, had it been otherwise, Old Death would not have manifested so much anxiety when he had approached it on their entrance into the bed-chamber.

Proceeding with caution—so as not to incur the risk of having his light extinguished, and equally to avoid any sudden surprise in case

the house might really have other occupants besides Old Death—Rainford entered a spacious room which seemed to be fitted up as a chemical laboratory. On a large oaken table were galvanic batteries, and an infinite variety of electrical apparatus as well as the articles on which experiments are usually made with the subtle fluid,—such as pieces of glass, amber, sulphur, wax, silk, cotton, loaf sugar, phials containing a variety of oils, metallic oxides, several common stones, metallic ores, the metals and semi-metals, &c. Leyden jars, batteries, electrophori, electrometers, discharging rods, &c., were also crowded together on the table. In a large earthen pan under the table were the flayed carcasses of several rabbits, frogs, and such vermin as rats and mice, all of which appeared to have been only very recently stripped of their skins—for they emitted no putrid smell, and the blood was still oozing from them.

On a shelf were plaster of Paris casts of upwards of fifty heads of men and monkeys. On the base of some of the heads there were inscriptions in black letters, stating the originals from which the casts were made; and, with a rapid glance, the highwayman read the principal ones, which were these:—

ARTHUR THISTLEWOOD.
Executed for High Treason, 1820.

DAVID HOGGART.
Executed for Murder, 1821.

GEORGE BARRINGTON.
The Notorious Pickpocket—died 1811.

HENRY FAUNTLEROY.
Executed for Forgery, Nov., 1824.

JOHN THURTELL.
Executed for Murder, 1824.

WILLIAM PROBERT.
Executed for Horse-stealing, 1825.

There were casts from the heads of several other celebrated criminals; but we need enumerate no more.

Intrepid—dauntless—bold as Tom Rain was, he nevertheless experienced a cold shuddering as he surveyed the objects ranged upon that long shelf; for this thought forced itself upon him—"*I wonder whether a cast of* MY *head will ever be there!*"

In order to chase these gloomy reflections from his mind, Rainford turned away from the contemplation of the shelf and its sinister contents. A cupboard-door stood partially open in one corner of the room; and he hastened to inspect the recess.

But what pen can depict his horror—what language can describe his astonishment, when upon a shelf within that cupboard he beheld four human heads staring out at him with eyes wide open but perfectly motionless, and on the pupils of which the rays of the candle flashed with extraordinary brilliancy!

For an instant the highwayman felt afraid:—in what description of place was he? what meant that ghastly spectacle?

But, conquering his terrors, of which indeed in another moment he was ashamed, he approached nearer: and the idea struck him that he beheld admirable models in wax. Still the flesh was so closely resembling that of the dead—the appearance of the countenances and of the crown of the heads, which were all closely shaven, was so natural, that he extended his hand and touched the cheek of one of those appalling objects.

Great God! it was indeed human flesh,—icy cold, and producing a sensation which the touch of naught beside *can* produce!

In spite of himself, Rainford cast a shuddering glance around him: then, once more ashamed of his weakness, he resumed his inspection of the heads.

They were evidently prepared for preservation; for an odour of strong spices emanated from them, and the eyes, fitted into the sockets, were of glass. Hence the strange brilliancy produced by the reflection of the candle.

The highwayman was still absorbed in the contemplation of these frightful objects, when a door at the farther end of the room slowly opened; and a man, enveloped in a loose dressing-gown, and holding a lamp in his hand, appeared on the threshold.

But the instant he beheld Rainford, he uttered an ejaculation of surprise and alarm—hastily retreated—and barred and bolted the door behind him.

He had, however, been long enough in the room for Rainford to obtain a full view of his countenance; and it was with profound astonishment that the highwayman had recognised Dr. Lascelles!

"What!" he thought: "that respectable physician in league with Old Death?"

And he stood for some moments gazing vacantly at the door by which the doctor had entered and also so abruptly disappeared again.

Then it suddenly struck him that the physician might discover the state of bondage in which Benjamin Bones had been left; and not only would the immediate release of the old fence follow, but an active pursuit be probably instituted by both individuals after himself.

He accordingly determined to beat a retreat as speedily as possible. Not that he was afraid of encountering Old Death and the doctor;

but he knew not what principles of danger the establishment possessed, and which might be turned against himself. He had seen quite enough of the house in Turnmill Street and of that where he now was (in Red Lion Street) to be well aware that they were no ordinary places of abode; and he was also sufficiently well acquainted with the character of Old Death to feel conscious that no mercy was to be expected at his hands, should he fall completely into his power.

It is, therefore, no disparagement to the heroism of the highwayman to state that he was now anxious to effect his exit from the strange place wherein he found himself; and it naturally struck him that there must be a more speedy and convenient avenue of egress than the subterranean. He readily comprehended that the underground passage was used as a medium of transferring goods from the house in Turnmill Street to the store-rooms of the establishment in Red Lion Street; and that it might also serve, at a pinch of need, as an avenue of escape for Old Death from his own bed-room.

But that the subterranean was the only means of ingress and egress in respect to the house in Red Lion Street, Tom could not for an instant suppose; as a dwelling without a door, or with a door that was never opened, would soon become an object of suspicion in the neighbourhood.

Judging by the direction of the subterranean passage, the highwayman was enabled to conclude that the room in which he now found himself was at the back of the house, and that the one where he had left Old Death was in the front, as was also that into which Dr. Lascelles had retreated; and he was moreover convinced that these apartments were all on a first or upper storey, but decidedly not on the ground-floor.

Now as the laboratory, Old Death's bed-chamber and the larger store-room formed the suite at the back of the house, and there was no flight of stairs connecting them with the ground-floor, it was clear to Rainford that the means of communication with that ground-floor must be from the front part of the house; and into the rooms looking on the street he did not choose to penetrate, because he might there encounter the doctor and Old Death. He therefore came to the conclusion that he must escape by the back part of the house, or else dare the subterranean.

All these calculations, which have occupied us some time to record, were made and summed up in a few moments by Tom Rain.

Nor did he now hesitate what course to adopt.

Placing the candle upon the table, he hastened to throw up a window; but, to his annoyance, he found it securely barred:—and his hand assured him that the bars could not be removed by mere physical strength.

He had not time nor implements to attempt to force a way through this difficulty; and the only alternative appeared to be the subterranean.

Resuming possession of the candle, he returned into Old Death's bed-room—drew away the carpet—raised the trap-door—and commenced the descent of the spiral staircase, closing the trap after him and bolting it inside.

But scarcely had he proceeded ten steps downwards, when his foot suddenly slipped; and, in the attempt which he made to recover himself, the light went out.

At the same instant he heard heavy steps treading upon the trap-door overhead, and then the hum of voices—but whose he could not distinguish—in the room which he had just left.

"Now, Tom Rain, look alive, old fellow!" he murmured in self-encouraging apostrophe; and, with a resolute step, he hastened rapidly down the spiral staircase, amidst a darkness so intense that it was all but *felt*!

CHAPTER XXXII.
RAINFORD IN THE SUBTERRANEAN.

Tom Rain reached the bottom of the stairs in perfect safety; and, as he had carefully noted the geography of the subterranean when he traversed it an hour previously with Old Death, he experienced but little difficulty in threading his path along it, even amidst the black darkness through which he literally seemed to be pushing his way.

In a few minutes his progress was stopped by a wall, which his extended arms encountered; and he now knew that he had reached the extremity communicating with the house in Turnmill Street.

Having succeeded in grasping the wire which, passing through the top of the vault, was connected with the mechanism of the clock overhead, he pulled it vigorously.

But the machinery moved not!

Then, for the first time during this eventful night, the highwayman became appalled at the dangers on which he had entered.

Again he tugged at the wire; it snapped short close by the roof, and the long piece thus broken off, fell at his feet.

"Damnation!" cried Rainford; and he stamped impatiently on the cold, damp stones.

Suddenly it struck him that there might be one wire to move the clock over the opening at the head of the iron ladder, and another wire to move it away from that opening.

He accordingly began to feel with his hands for this second wire the existence of which was suggested by his imagination; but at the end of a minute he was compelled to admit to himself that it did indeed exist only in imagination.

No such second wire was to be found!

He then hastily ascended the ladder, and endeavoured to hurl the clock from off the opening which it covered: but the huge machine was as solidly fixed there as if it had formed a portion of the vaulted roof itself.

Escape seemed to grow every moment more hopeless; and now came the appalling thought that Old Death and the Doctor would soon have had sufficient time to repair from the house in Red Lion Street to that in Turnmill Street, and thus secure against him the avenue covered by the clock—even if it were not sufficiently secure already!

What was he to do?

Again and again he tried to force away the heavy clock: but there it stood, immoveable—and when he paused to reflect, its steady, monotonous ticking fell ominously upon his ears.

At length it struck him that he would retrace his way to the other extremity—force up the trap-door leading to Old Death's bed-chamber—and, with a pistol in each hand, dare every thing.

But what if that trap-door were secured on the other side?

No:—he remembered to have observed that there was not a bolt nor a bar to break the level of its upper surface as it fitted in flush with the floor.

Encouraged by the scintillation of hope that thus gleamed in upon him, Rainford hurried back to the other end of the subterranean—ascended the spiral staircase—grasped his pistols—and listened attentively.

All was still in the room above:—not the murmur of a voice—nor the creaking of a footstep!

He then slowly and carefully drew back the bolt of the trap-door, and tried to raise it.

But it moved not!

He applied additional force, under the impression that some heavy piece of furniture might have been dragged over the trap: but still it was as motionless as the thick, solid, substantial flooring in which it was set.

Rainford returned the pistols to his pockets, so that nothing might impede the application of all his strength to the task on which his liberty depended: but no—the door moved not!

The highwayman bit his under lip almost till the blood started forth—for he felt that his calmness was abandoning him.

Then how bitterly did he repent the course which he had adopted after his interruption in the laboratory by the appearance of Doctor Lascelles. Instead of trusting himself to that hideous subterranean, he should have essayed an escape by means of the front rooms of the house.

Regrets were, however, useless:—he must act—and not waste time in self-reproach!

Yes: he must act—if he would not die in that dreadful place, where the vindictiveness of Old Death would be sure to leave him!

To act!—oh! how easy to think of acting!—But how *was* he to put his thought into execution?

A stone pavement beneath—stone walls on either side—a stone ceiling overhead—at one end an avenue closed by a huge clock—at the other a trap-door evidently secured on the outside,—these were the obstacles—these were the barriers against which he had to contend.

And what were the implements within his power?

His two hands—a clasp-knife—and a pair of pistols!

Quick as lightning the idea flashed across him that the iron ladder at the other extremity of the subterranean was moveable, and that it would serve him as a battering-ram.

Rejoiced at this thought, he once more retraced his way along the vaulted passage, and eagerly grasped the ladder.

His conjecture was right: it merely hooked on to two iron rings fixed into the masonry just below the aperture covered by the clock; and, heavy though it was, yet Rainford now bore it as easily as if it were of wood—for renewed hope had rendered him strong and bold as a lion.

It was, however, somewhat difficult to drag the iron ladder up the spiral staircase; but in a few minutes this portion of the task was accomplished; and Rainford now prepared to assault the secret entrance to Old Death's dwelling.

Placing himself in such a position that he might deal a vigorous blow upwards with his ponderous engine, and then be able to seize his pistols the instant they might be required, he went to work with a stout arm and a still stouter heart.

Once—twice—thrice—and up swung the ladder:—that single blow was sufficient—and the trap-door burst from its setting.

Quick as thought, Rainford seized his pistols, and thrusting up the trap, ascended the last few steps of the spiral staircase.

Throwing back the carpet which had been replaced over the trap-door, he found, to his infinite surprise, that there was no resistance to his egress from that subterranean where, at one time, it seemed probable that he was destined to find a tomb; and, gazing rapidly around the room, he neither perceived Old Death nor the Doctor—nor indeed a single living soul.

Recovering all his wonted calmness, he proceeded to examine the trap-door, for the purpose of ascertaining how it had been secured against him: and, on a close inspection, he observed a spring-bolt let into the side of the trap-door in such a way that, when the trap was closed, it neither appeared above nor below it. This bolt was either held back within the wood, or made to fly into a hole made to receive it in the beam against which the trap-door closed, by means of two screws that could easily be pressed inwards. But the force of Rainford's battering-ram had unsettled this artfully-contrived piece of mechanism.

It was clear that some one had secured the trap-door; because even if the spring-bolt had flown into its socket by accident, still the carpet could not have spread out of its own accord. Moreover, when Rainford had retreated to the subterranean, he had heard footsteps and voices in Old Death's room. It therefore struck him that those who had so secured the trap-door, had departed to protect the avenue of escape in Turnmill Street, in the confidence that the said trap-door was too strong to be forced.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to guard against the possibility of an ambuscade; and Tom held his pistols in a manner calculated to render them instantaneously available.

He determined to proceed by way of the laboratory; but, on trying the door, he found it locked.

Without an instant's hesitation he forced it open with one vigorously applied blow of his foot: but here again he encountered no resistance.

Passing through the laboratory, he tried the door by which he had seen Dr. Lascelles appear and disappear again so abruptly; and this time he was spared the necessity of violent exertion,—for the door was not locked.

He now entered a passage leading to a flight of stairs; down which he hastened, and reached a kind of hall, from whence the street-door opened.

But he did not immediately issue forth. He experienced an invincible curiosity to ascertain if Old Death had in reality been released from the state of bondage in which he had left him; and, forgetting the terrible dangers whence he had escaped with so much difficulty, he re-ascended the staircase.

The appearance of this part of the house was dirty and neglected. Indeed, it afforded no evidence that the tenement was inhabited at all; but conveyed quite the contrary impression. The fan-light above the front-door was boarded over; and thus the hall itself was nearly dark, the only light it enjoyed being admitted through the ill-closed joints of the boarding just mentioned. The paper was falling away from the walls of the staircase; and dust and dirt had accumulated wherever the hand touched or the eye could penetrate.

On regaining the landing on the first-floor, Tom Rain tried a door opposite to that by which he had issued from the laboratory; but it was locked. He forced it open, and found himself, as he suspected he should, in the very room where he had left Old Death; for that apartment had two doors.

And, to his ineffable surprise, Old Death was still there,—still sitting in the chair to which he had been fastened with a strong cord;—and that cord had not been removed.

The head of the fence was bent forward, and hung—or rather drooped, upon his breast.

The highwayman was alarmed, and hastened towards him.

But the moment he caught a glimpse of his features, he started back horror-stricken,—and stupefied as it were by the hideous spectacle that presented itself to his view.

For the old man's countenance was fearfully distorted, and nearly black—the eyes protruded from their sockets, and seemed staring on vacancy—and the under jaw had fallen.

"Holy God! he is dead!" ejaculated Rainford at length: "and I—I have killed him!"

At that instant the door leading from the inner apartment was slowly and cautiously opened; and the highwayman, yielding to a natural impulse, turned and fled abruptly by the one communicating with the passage, and which he had forced open a few moments previously.

This movement on his part was so sudden and so quickly executed, that he did not perceive the person who was entering the room; but whether that person observed him, or not, he was unaware.

Descending the stairs three or four at a time, the highwayman quitted the house by the front door, and did not breathe freely until he had closed it behind him and found himself at length in the open street.

Dauntless—daring as he was, the idea that he had caused, though unintentionally, the death of the old fence, prostrated for a time the powers of a naturally vigorous mind; and horror threw all his thoughts into chaotic confusion.

He did not even pause a moment to examine, as well as the darkness of the hour would have permitted him, the outward appearance of the house which he had just left; but hurried away as quickly as he could go from the vicinity of a place where he had seen and undergone so much in such an incredibly short space of time.

For it was about one o'clock when he and Old Death had entered the house in Turnmill Street; and Saint Paul's proclaimed the hour of three as Rainford crossed Smithfield Market.

CHAPTER XXXIII.
MRS. MARTHA SLINGSBY.

The reader who is acquainted with the West End of the great metropolis of the British Empire, cannot have failed to notice the air of gloomy grandeur which characterises the aristocratic mansions of Old Burlington Street.

The dingy brick-fronts—the massive doors, all of a sombre colour—the windows, darkened by heavy hangings—and the dead silence which seems to prevail within, produce upon the passer-by a strange and almost melancholy effect.

There is nothing bustling—nothing cheerful in that street: on the brightest day of summer its aspect is cold—mournful—prison-like.

It seems to be the last refuge of the aristocracy of the old school,—that aristocracy which still clings to all its ancient prejudices, its haughty notions, its exclusive pride,—an aristocracy which finds its influence each day narrowing into a smaller compass, in proportion as that of the masses expands around it.

And God grant that every thing in the shape of hereditary aristocracy may shortly expire altogether—crushed by the weight of new interests and modern civilisation!

In one of those gloomy-looking houses of Old Burlington Street dwelt Mrs. Slingsby—a lady of about forty-two, but who, enhancing by art a natural conservation of beauty truly miraculous in a female of her age, seemed at least five or six years younger.

Her hair was very dark; and as she wore the sweetest French caps that Parisian fashion could suggest, she was invested with that air which bewilders the common observer between its admirable coquettishness and its matronly sedateness.

Her complexion was clear and delicate; and a careful but regular use of cosmetics concealed those incipient wrinkles which appeared at the corners of the eye-lids. Her teeth were perfect, white, and even; and her figure, though upon a large scale, was maintained in fine symmetry by the skill of her dress-maker. She had naturally a splendid bust; and as she usually wore very high dresses, she was the better enabled to maintain its appearance of youthful firmness in spite of the prominent expansion it had experienced as the lady herself increased in years.

Mrs. Martha Slingsby was the aunt of Mr. Clarence Villiers, the lover of Adelais Torrens. When very young, she was sacrificed by her parents to a gentleman double her age, and who had acquired a fortune while he lost his health in India. Shortly after this union, circumstances compelled Mr. Slingsby to return to Calcutta; and his youthful wife accompanied him. There they remained about eight years, at the expiration of which period Mr. Slingsby died of a broken heart, his immense wealth having been suddenly and entirely swept away by the failure of a great mercantile and banking establishment in the Anglo-Indian capital. Mrs. Slingsby, however, found a friend in the person of Sir Henry Courtenay—a baronet who had long held a high office in the Council of India, and who was about to return to England, having relinquished the cares of employment in the public service. He was upwards of fifty at that period—a widower—but having a family of young children. The moment that the misfortunes of Mrs. Slingsby were reported to him by a mutual friend, Sir Henry proposed to her that she should enter his family to supply, as far as possible, the attentions of the mother whom the children had lost. This offer was gratefully accepted; and Mrs. Slingsby, who had no offspring of her own, returned to England with the baronet.

For some years after her arrival in London, she remained in the family of Sir Henry Courtenay,—where she appeared to be treated as a near relation, and not as a dependant. But when the boys and girls were old enough to be placed at school, she removed to the house in Old Burlington Street, in which we now find her. Rumour declared that she was enabled to take so handsome an establishment, in consequence of the sudden and unexpected recovery of a portion of that fortune which was supposed to have been irretrievably swallowed up in the failure of the bank at Calcutta, and the loss of which had broken her husband's heart. At all events, she paid her way regularly—and was famed for her numerous charities. Calumny had never assailed her; for she was so regular in her religious duties—so retired in her mode of life—so ready to assist the deserving poor—so constant in her donations to all humane and philanthropic institutions—and so zealous a patroness of Missionary and Bible Societies, that her neighbours looked upon her as a very pattern of Christian virtue.

Between herself and the Courtenay family the most sincere attachment appeared to exist. Whenever the young gentlemen and the young ladies returned home for the holidays, they invariably passed a week with her whom they almost looked upon as a mother; and Sir Henry himself, in speaking of her to his friends, seemed to take a delight in eulogising the manner in which she had performed her duty towards his children. The consequence was that his relations and acquaintances echoed these praises elsewhere; and Mrs. Martha Slingsby was quoted at the West End as the perfect model of a good and excellent woman.

Thus, at the age of forty-two, Mrs. Slingsby had escaped that ordeal through which so many beautiful widows are doomed to pass: we mean, the whisperings of calumny. Not a breath had ever sullied her fame;—not a hint had ever been dropped to her disparagement. Scandal seemed to avoid her threshold as an evil spirit is supposed to recoil from the vicinity of the temple of worship.

We must observe that Sir Henry Courtenay was now close upon sixty-three—thirteen years having elapsed since Mrs. Slingsby had entered his family in India. He was nevertheless a fine man, on whose brow time seemed to sit lightly, considering how great a portion of his mortal career was already run. It is true that he wore false teeth and false hair; but art had rendered those substitutes so natural in appearance, that few suspected they were really false. Elegant in his manners—endowed with a mind which had treasured up the richest stores of intellectual wealth—fascinating in his conversation—and evincing in his attire the taste of a polished gentleman, Sir Henry Courtenay was one of the brightest stars of the fashionable world—a favourite at Court—and welcome in every gay circle.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of that day which followed the events related in the few preceding chapters, that Mrs. Martha Slingsby was seated in her elegantly furnished drawing-room, revising the list of her usual Christmas donations to the humane, philanthropic, and religious Societies.

Adelais and Rosamond Torrens were seated one on each side of her, and aiding their kind friend in her pious task.

Rosamond held in her hand a memorandum-book from which she read the names of the various associations alluded to;—Mrs. Slingsby had a cash-box open before her;—and Adelais made entries, according to this lady's dictation, in another memorandum-book.

The two beautiful girls appeared to be the daughters of the elegant and handsome woman who sate between them; and there was so much sweetness in the countenances of all three—so much animation, and so much modesty—that a painter would have been rejoiced to depict the group as Charity dictating to Benevolence and Mercy.

"Proceed, dear Rosamond," said Mrs. Slingsby, when Adelais had finished a note in her memorandum-book.

"*The Orphan Children's Free-School Association*, madam," read the young maiden thus addressed; "and last year you gave ten guineas."

"This Christmas I shall subscribe fifteen, my loves," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a mild and silvery tone of voice. "There is no duty so sweet—so holy as to contribute to the religious instruction of those poor creatures who are deprived of their natural protectors. Besides, the committee have manifested the most praiseworthy readiness to attend to any suggestions which I may deem it right to offer. For instance, it was the custom until lately to have three multiplication-table lessons to only one Bible-reading; and this, you must admit, my loves, was very indiscreet—I will not use a harsher term. But, in consequence of my recommendation, the dear children have now *three* Bible-readings to *one* multiplication-table lesson. Have you written down *fifteen guineas*, my dear?" she inquired, turning towards Adelais.

A reply was given in the affirmative; and Mrs. Slingsby wrapped the amount up in an elegant sheet of rose-coloured paper, and, having noted in pencil the contents of the little packet, added it to several others which were ranged before her on the table.

Rosamond then read the next item.

"*The Poor Authors' Assistance Fund*; and last year you gave five guineas, madam."

"And this year I shall only send two, my loves," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Authors and journalists are ruining the country, both politically and morally, as fast as they can. They are writing *for* the people, and *against* the aristocracy; and this, my loves, is a crying abomination. Heaven forgive me for speaking in such harsh terms—so inconsistent with pious meekness and Christian forbearance; but it would disturb the patience of a saint to behold the attacks made by these men upon our blessed Constitution—our holy Church, and its most necessary union with the State—the prerogatives of our monarch—the rights of the upper classes—the privileges of wealth—and all those institutions which were perfected by the wisdom of our ancestors. Do you understand me, my loves?"

"Oh! quite, madam," answered Adelais, who already began to look upon liberal-minded authors and journalists as a set of incarnate fiends banded against every thing worth preserving in society.

"Besides, my dear girls," added Mrs. Slingsby, "the *Poor Authors' Assistance Fund* does not publish a Report of its proceedings nor a list of those who subscribe to it; and, under all circumstances, I think that I should be acting more consistently with my duties as a Christian and as an Englishwoman devoted to the blessed institutions of her happy country, to decline any donation whatever to a Society encouraging infidels and republicans. So you may draw a pen through the name, Rosamond, love. There!—now my conscience is at rest. Which is the next item?"

"*The Distressed Milliners' Friends Society*, madam," was the answer.

"That is another Association from which I must withdraw my patronage," observed Mrs. Slingsby, her countenance losing its serene placidity in an air of severity. "You are too young and too pure-minded to understand my motives, dear girls; but when I tell you that most of these distressed milliners are very naughty women, you will perceive the justice of my conduct. And then they endeavour to make their penury an excuse for their turpitude! Oh! how wicked—how sinful is human nature, my loves! Erase that name also, dear Rosamond. And now what is the next?"

"*The South-Sea Island Bible-Circulating Society*, madam; and last year you gave twenty guineas."

"That is indeed a blessed institution!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, turning her eyes piously upward; "and it is to this Society's rooms that we are going in the evening to hear that estimable man, Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks, give an account of the mission from which he has just returned. I shall increase my donation by five guineas in this instance."

Adelais accordingly wrote down thirty-five guineas, which sum was duly wrapped up in rose-coloured paper and added to the other packets.

Rosamond then read the next item in her memorandum-book.

"*The Naked Savages General Clothing Association*; and last year——"

"Pardon me, dearest girl," said Mrs. Slingsby, "I cannot support that Society any longer. There is in its title a word most offensive to the ears of decency; and I do not know how I could have ever been prevailed upon to lend it the countenance of my name and the aid of my purse. Besides, I do not think the object of the institution is useful; for in India one sees the natives of the lower orders in the country districts, going about in a state bordering on nudity, and one gets so accustomed to it that it produces no disagreeable effect whatever. The name of the Association is decidedly indelicate; but there is nothing repulsive in the fact of savages going about in a state of nudity. You may strike out the item, Rosamond love."

"I have done so, madam. The next is, *The*——"

Rosamond was interrupted by a loud knock at the front-door, which resounded through the house.

In a few moments Sir Henry Courtenay was announced.

CHAPTER XXXIV.
THE PIOUS LADY.

The baronet entered the room with a smiling countenance and a graceful salutation.

"Pray be seated, ladies," he exclaimed, addressing himself to Adelais and Rosamond, who had risen from their chairs. "My dear Mrs. Slingsby, I need not inquire concerning your health—for you look quite charming this morning."

"You know, Sir Henry, that I am not pleased by flattery," said the lady in a reproachful tone.

"A thousand pardons, my dear madam," returned the baronet. "But you must remember that we have now been acquainted for some years—that our friendship is not only of yesterday's date—and that if I venture on a little freedom with you, it is as a brother might address himself to a sister for whom he has the highest esteem. Yes, ladies," he added, turning towards Adelais and Rosamond, "this excellent woman—this almost angel, as I may denominate her—was a mother to my children; and *that* is a circumstance which I can never forget."

"You attach more importance than is necessary, Sir Henry, to the mere performance of a duty," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a calm and modest manner.

Adelais and Rosamond exchanged glances, which seemed to say, "Admirable woman! we already love her as much as if she were our maternal parent!"

"But I am afraid that I am interrupting an occupation of more value than my idle chit-chat can possibly prove to be?" exclaimed Sir Henry, who surveyed Rosamond with an ill-concealed admiration. "Some useful or pious labour was engaging you, young ladies, no doubt;—for, in the society of Mrs. Slingsby, not a moment is likely to be passed without producing a benefit to at least some section of the great human family."

"The anniversary of that holy day on which the Saviour of Mankind suffered on the cross, is approaching, Sir Henry," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone and manner suiting the solemnity of her remark; "and you know that I am in the habit of forwarding my mite at this season of the year to those humane, religious, or philanthropic institutions which deserve support."

"I never forget any of those pious duties which you have taken upon yourself, my dear madam," said the baronet. "And, indeed, the object of my present visit is——But the act of charity of which I am desirous to make you the instrument," he added, glancing towards the young ladies, "involves details of so painful a nature, that——"

"I understand you, Sir Henry," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby; "and this consideration for the feelings of those who are not accustomed to look upon the dark side of the world's picture, is worthy of your generous disposition. Adelais, my love—Rosamond, dearest—pray retire for a short period."

This request was conveyed in a manner so affectionate and with such witching softness, that the maidens to whom it was addressed, could not help embracing their kind friend ere they left the room.

The moment the door had closed behind them, Sir Henry drew his chair close to that of Mrs. Slingsby, and, placing his arm round her waist, imprinted a kiss of burning desire upon her lips.

"Martha, you are really surprisingly beautiful to-day," he whispered in her ear.

"Do you think so, Henry?" she murmured, her eyes lighting up with the excitement of that contiguity. "And yet I have fancied that your behaviour has been somewhat cold towards me of late."

"Do not entertain such a suspicion, my dearest creature!" exclaimed the baronet, plunging his hand into the bosom of this pious lady's dress. "Had either of us a right to complain, I think it would be myself; for——"

"Oh! do not reproach me, Henry!" she murmured, abandoning herself to his lustful toyings. "But ever since the difficulty I experienced in producing that last miscarriage, I have been so frightened lest——"

"Nonsense, Martha! do not alarm yourself without a cause," interrupted the baronet. "Even if it did come to *that*, the matter could be easily arranged. A few weeks' retirement into the country, on some charitable mission—ha! ha!"

"True!" said the frail fair one. "But the chances of detection—oh! I shudder when I think of it! Consider how admirably we have hitherto managed——"

"And how completely the world is deceived in regard to us," added the baronet, laughing. "There is nothing like a religious demeanour to throw dust in people's eyes. Were a syllable of scandal breathed against you, you have the patrons of all those humbugging Societies

to defend you. But what are you going to do with yourself this evening? Can you not devote a few hours to me?"

"I wish I could, Henry," returned the lady; "but it is impossible! A dreadful bore named Sheepshanks is going to entertain the devout with his nonsense; and it would seem so odd—so very odd if I were not present."

"It is now upwards of three weeks since we slept together," said the baronet, in a tone of reproach.

"Yes—but you know that I cannot pretend too often to pass the entire night by the sick-bed of some poor woman," returned Mrs. Slingsby. "And now, dearest Henry, I have a favour to ask of you."

"Name it," said the baronet, in a low murmur—for his passions were furiously excited by his voluptuous toyings with his mistress.

"You must write me a check for a thousand pounds," replied the lady, winding her arms round his neck, and then literally glueing her lips to his.

"Oh! you are becoming very extravagant, Martha," said the baronet. "But I suppose I must yield——"

"You are a dear, generous fellow," murmured the lady, as she suffered herself to be led to the sofa.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Mrs. Slingsby rang the bell; and a sleek, comfortable-looking footman answered the summons.

The lady was then sitting, in her usual quiet, placid manner, in a chair near the table; and the baronet was placed at a respectful distance from her.

"Bring up luncheon, James," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Sir Henry, you will take a glass of champagne? I know you are somewhat partial to it. But a decanter of water for me, James."

"Yes, madam;"—and the domestic withdrew.

In a short time he returned, bearing a tray, which he placed on the table, and then retired again.

Having paid their respects to the cold viands placed before them, the lady and gentleman did honour to the champagne, both drinking out of the same glass, the servant having only brought up one of the description suited to that particular wine.

When the collation was ended, Mrs. Slingsby drank a tumbler of water to take away the smell of the champagne from her mouth; but she did not appear to relish the limpid beverage quite so well as the rich juice of Epernay.

The baronet then wrote the lady a cheque on his banker for a thousand pounds; and, having made a certain little appointment with her for a particular evening in the ensuing week, and at a place of *rendezvous* as convenient as it was safe, he took his departure.

Immediately after Sir Henry had left the abode of Mrs. Slingsby, that lady's housekeeper sought the presence of her mistress, and was forthwith admitted to the private interview which she desired.

"What is it, Magdalen?" inquired Mrs. Slingsby, when the housekeeper stood in her presence.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, to have any thing unpleasant for such ears as yours," was the answer; "but I am convinced that scullion-girl is in the family-way."

"Magdalen!" ejaculated the pious lady, horrified at the mere idea. "Oh! do not utter any thing so uncharitable!"

"I am sure of it, ma'am, I repeat," persisted the housekeeper. "In fact I've had my suspicions about it for a long—long time; and now I'm certain."

"Magdalen," said Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of profound solemnity, "this is a dreadful occurrence to take place in a house which, I may safely assert, has never yet been tainted with the breath of scandal—at least so long as I have occupied it. Are you sure that your conjecture is right?"

"I would take my salvation oath that it is, ma'am," responded the housekeeper.

"That expression on your part is incorrect, Magdalen," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of mild reproach. "But I of course believe all you tell me relative to that miserable—degraded girl. Let her be sent from the house this minute, Magdalen—this very minute! Pay her any wages that may be due to her, and inform her that her box shall be sent after her to her parents, with a note acquainting them of the reason for her abrupt discharge."

"She has no parents, ma'am—she is an orphan."

"But she has friends, no doubt?" said Mrs. Slingsby, inquiringly.

"No, ma'am: I took her from the workhouse, on the recommendation of lady—a friend of yours, ma'am—who visits them kind of places on a Sunday, distributing hymn-books."

"Disagreeable as the duty is, it must nevertheless be performed, Magdalen. And that duty, so incumbent upon us, is to turn the lost girl into the street. Pay her the wages——"

"She has nothing to receive, ma'am. I advanced her money to buy herself decent clothes——"

"Then let her go away without any money—since she has none to receive," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby. "To give her a single shilling, were to encourage her in that shameless career of profligacy whereon she has already so far entered."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, ma'am," replied Magdalen; and she withdrew to execute them—for she had a spite against the poor

scullery-girl, who had been intriguing with one of this over-particular housekeeper's own lovers.

Shortly after this little occurrence which we have just related, Mr. Clarence Villiers made his appearance in Old Burlington Street.

He found his aunt alone in the drawing-room; and, the moment he had paid his respects to her, he inquired for his much-beloved Adelais and her sister.

"They are safe and well, Clarence," answered Mrs. Slingsby. "But before I summon them, it will be necessary that we should have a little conversation relative to the proper and prudent course now to be adopted. Sit down, Clarence, and grant me your attention."

The young man obeyed, and prepared to listen with all the patience he could call to his aid; for much as he respected and really loved his aunt—whom he looked upon as a pattern of moral excellence and virtue—he nevertheless experienced the anxiety of a lover to find himself in the presence of Adelais.

"I shall not detain you long, Clarence," resumed Mrs. Slingsby: "and it is for your good that I am about to speak. In the first place, I feel it due to myself to explain to you that, in receiving those young ladies into my house the other evening—and at so late an hour—I was influenced solely by that affection which I entertain towards you, and by my conviction of your thorough integrity of purpose."

"The mere fact of my bringing those almost friendless girls to seek an asylum with you, dear aunt," said Clarence, "must prove to you how careful I was of their reputation."

"And it was to assist your upright views that I received them without a moment's hesitation," added Mrs. Slingsby. "You know that if I had the means, you should long ago have been put in possession of a sufficient fortune to have enabled you to compete with Mr. Francis Curtis in bidding with the mercenary Mr. Torrens for his daughter. But—although my income is sufficient for my wants, and, thank heaven! for a few little purposes of charity——"

"My dear aunt!" interrupted Villiers; "wherefore renew an explanation so unnecessary?"

"Because I would not have you suppose, Clarence, that I would for an instant sanction any underhand proceedings in respect to your union with Miss Torrens, had it been possible to have ensured that aim by means of her father's consent. But," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "I conceive that there are so many extenuating features in the case, that I cannot regret having granted an asylum to that dear girl and her sister, and in thus securing them alike from the perils of London, and from the pursuit of their father."

"Your kindness towards them will render their hearts as grateful as mine is," exclaimed the young man warmly.

"During the few days that my house has become their home," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "they have endeared themselves to me by their affectionate dispositions—their tranquil habits—their readiness to please—and a thousand amiable qualities; and therefore—for their own sakes, as well as yours—I am ready to do all in my power to serve them. But should Mr. Torrens happen to discover their abode, conceive the scandal that would be created—the observations that would be excited!"

"My dear aunt, I would not for worlds compromise you in any way!" ejaculated Clarence. "But still——"

"Do not fear that I am anxious to rid myself of their charming company," added Mrs. Slingsby. "I am only desirous that you yourself should adopt due caution, so as to avoid being followed hither by any one who might be employed by Mr. Torrens to watch you."

"No imprudence on my part shall mar the success of my plans," returned Clarence. "The banns have been published at St. George's once already—and next Sunday will be the second time! It is scarcely probable that Mr. Torrens will become aware of this circumstance; and he certainly would not, without any previous hint, conjecture that the preliminaries for our union had been adopted in so fashionable a church as that in Hanover Square," added Clarence, with a smile. "Let two more Sundays pass without the abode of my Adelais being discovered, and she will then become indissolubly mine!"

"Have you seen any more of your kind friend, who so generously took your part the other evening?" inquired Mrs. Slingsby, after a pause.

"Captain Sparks!" exclaimed Clarence. "Not since I met him, as I before informed you, at a tavern in the Strand——"

"Avoid taverns, my dear nephew!" interrupted Mrs. Slingsby, a cloud overspreading her countenance; "for—by all I have ever heard or read concerning them—they are fearful sinks of iniquity."

"Oh! not the respectable taverns, aunt," replied Villiers. "I had purchased a very handsome pair of pistols to present to the Captain as a token of my esteem; and then I recollected that I was totally unacquainted with his address. I flew to the great army-agents at Charing Cross; but there was no such name as Captain Sparks in the List. Well—I thought he might be in the Navy, and off I went to the Admiralty; but no Captain Sparks! I therefore considered it fortunate when I accidentally met him in a tavern which I entered to procure some refreshment. He positively refused to accept the pistols—declaring that he had done nothing more than I should have done for him under similar circumstances. But I thought there was something singular in the merry laugh which burst from his lips, when I proffered the case containing the pistols. However, he is an excellent-hearted fellow—and I shall always hold myself his debtor. We walked together, on that occasion, as far as my own lodgings in Bridge Street, and he entertained me with a perfect fund of anecdote all the time. Indeed, I am as much pleased with him, as I feel myself under an obligation to him."

"Gratitude is a rare virtue in this world," remarked Mrs. Slingsby, who seldom lost an opportunity of letting drop a moral maxim. "And now," she continued, with a smile, "having taxed your patience to such an extent, I must give you the well-merited reward. My kind and generous friend, Sir Henry Courtenay, has advanced me a certain sum of money, one half of which I require for charitable purposes of my own; but the other I place at your disposal, to enable you to hire and furnish a suitable dwelling to receive your bride. Take this cheque, and to-morrow you can bring me my moiety."

"Oh! my dear aunt, have you borrowed of your friends to assist me?" exclaimed Clarence, overwhelmed by so much apparent generosity.

"Not entirely to assist you, my dear nephew," was the calm reply; "but partly, as you perceive, for myself. However,—say no more about the trifle which I present to you; and reward me by making a good use of it."

Clarence embraced his relative: Adelais and Rosamond were then summoned; and the lovers were soon happy in each other's society.

We must now afford the reader some explanation relative to Mrs. Slingsby's behaviour towards her nephew: and, in so doing, we shall throw additional light upon the character of this lady.

She was of a crafty—calculating disposition, and seldom performed any act, however trivial, without a selfish motive. The fact was that she had a very difficult part to play. Devoured with raging desires, she was compelled to adopt a calm, modest, and reserved exterior, and to conceal her debauchery beneath the cloak of religion. Sir Henry Courtenay was necessary to her in more ways than one: necessary as a lover—and necessary as a treasurer, for she was totally dependent upon him in a pecuniary sense. The report relative to the recovery of a portion of her late husband's fortune, was a mere fabrication to account for her comfortable mode of life. Still she considered her position to be so dangerous, that she was compelled to fortify it by all possible means. She really loved her nephew—for it often occurs that women of her description are capable of a strong attachment of this nature:—but even had she entertained no regard for him at all, she would have pretended to do so—because he was necessary to her. He was a means by which she could constantly trumpet forth her "charitable deeds," while she herself appeared unconscious that they ever transpired. Taking good care that he should know all she did in the cause of religion or humanity, she led him to believe in a great many things which she did not do; and the consequence was that Clarence was never wearied of repeating, wherever he went, those praises which he conscientiously considered to be his aunt's due.

Now, when a near *relation* corroborates the statements made by *friends*, those statements receive a weight which places them beyond the pale of disbelief. Thus the world read Mrs. Slingsby's character as Clarence himself read it and reported it; and with such an amount of testimony in her favour, she could defy scandal. Even the most maliciously-inclined dared not venture a shake of the head, nor a shrug of the shoulder; for "surely her own nephew must know whether she were as good as she was represented? Relations seldom praise each other behind their backs; and when a dashing young fellow, like Clarence, was so enthusiastic in praise of his aunt, it was that he was thoroughly convinced of the sterling merit of her character?" Such would have been the arguments opposed to any detractive observations that scandal might dare to let drop concerning Mrs. Slingsby.

The lady, finding her nephew so necessary to her interests, naturally sought not only to maintain the most complete deception relative to herself in his mind, but also to attach him towards her by substantial acts of kindness. Thus she had readily consented to receive Adelais and Rosamond into her house, to oblige Clarence; and she now, with the same interested motive, made him a handsome pecuniary present. She let him know that she had been compelled to borrow the money (in advance of her imaginary income), to enhance the value of the gift, and also that the natural impression should arise in his mind—"Excellent aunt! she embarrasses herself to benefit me!"

The reader now fully understands how complete a mistress of duplicity—hypocrisy—and deceit was the widow of Old Burlington Street. Beneath that calm and placid demeanour—under that veil of sanctity—raged the most ardent lusts, and agitated the most selfish feelings. She was a living—walking—breathing lie. Her existence was one immense falsehood; and yet so well did she maintain the semblance of even the sternest virtue, that her real character was known only to two persons—Sir Henry Courtenay, and another whom it is not at present necessary to name.

CHAPTER XXXV.
MR. SHEEPSHANKS.

In a large room, on a first-floor in St. Martin's Lane, some three or four hundred persons, male and female, were assembled.

At one end of the apartment was a raised platform, in the middle of which stood a capacious arm-chair behind a desk; and on the said platform several sleek, oily, comfortable-looking gentlemen, all dressed in black, and wearing white cravats with no shirt-collars, were grouped together in conversation.

The body of the room was occupied by chairs for the accommodation of those who had "front-seat tickets," and forms for those who possessed "back-seat tickets."

It is a remarkable fact that the votaries of the Established Church invariably create social distinctions in the very places instituted to propagate or maintain their creed. Thus every church belonging to the "Establishment" has its pews for the rich and its pauper-seats; and in the assembly-rooms of the religious associations the same distinction is drawn between aristocracy and democracy. And these lines of demarcation are traced by men practising—or rather pretending to practise—a religion which proclaims that all are equal in the eyes of God!

Oh! the vile hypocrisy of these canting psalm-singers!

The room to which we have introduced our readers, was well lighted with wax-candles, and had two cheerful fires blazing away in the grates.

The atmosphere was warm—there were no unpleasant draughts—and the floor was covered with a thick drugget;—for your religious people are mightily fond of comfort; and comfort was certainly studied at the offices of the *South Sea Islands Bible-Circulating Society*.

In the second row of the "front-seat ticket" department, sate Mrs. Slingsby and the Misses Torrens. The two latter had their veils carefully drawn over their faces; for Mrs. Slingsby had insisted upon their accompanying her to this "pious and soul-refreshing entertainment," as they had not previously stirred out of doors from the moment they had taken up their abode with her.

At a quarter-past six o'clock, two ushers, bearing white wands, passed up the room, preceding a short, stout, brandy-faced gentleman, who tried to look as demure and humble as he could, but who could not, however, subdue that consciousness of importance which seems to say, "Ah! now I am causing a sensation!"

And a sensation, too, he produced, sure enough; for the gentlemen began clapping their hands and stamping on the floor, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs as if he were some victorious general who had just defeated a French army of a hundred thousand men.

Upon reaching the platform, the brandy-faced gentleman shook hands with the sleek and oily individuals before alluded to; and the "sensation" became more exciting on the part of the spectators, as if it were a very clever thing indeed to shake hands in public.

Then the brandy-faced man stepped a few paces back, and pretended to enter into very earnest conversation with some leading member of the Committee, while another member moved, in a drawling sing-song tone, "that their respected President, Mr. Jonathan Pugwash, do take the chair."

This proposal was received with renewed applause; and the brandy-faced gentleman (for he it was who delighted in the euphonious name of Pugwash) started as if quite astonished that such an honour should have been destined for him. He then proceeded to establish himself in the large arm-chair before mentioned; and in a voice which sounded as if he were talking inside a barrel, called upon "their respected friend, the Reverend Malachi Sawkins, to open the meeting with prayer."

Mr. Sawkins—a very demure-looking man indeed—proceeded to drawl out a long extempore prayer, in the course of which he led his audience to infer that heaven favoured that particular Society more than all others; and when he had concluded, the chairman rose to explain the object of the extraordinary assembly that evening, although the said object was already well known to every individual present—aye, and to every soul who, passing up or down St. Martin's Lane, might choose to stop and peruse the enormous bills placarded at the entrance.

Mr. Jonathan Pugwash commenced by expressing his thanks for the high honour done him by selecting him to preside over that meeting—an honour the more distinguished, inasmuch as it had been perfectly unexpected on his part. [*This was completely false, it having been settled in Committee three days previously that he was to preside on this occasion; but your zealots do not mind a white lie at times.*] He was well aware of his own unworthiness (*Cries of "No! no!"*): yes—he *was* an unworthy vessel—but he hoped the Lord would sustain him in the onerous duty thrust upon him. (*"Amen!" in a hollow, sepulchral tone from the Rev. Malachi Sawkins.*) He thanked the ladies and gentlemen—or he should rather say his Christian sisters and brethren present, for the kind—the handsome—the

feeling manner in which they had contradicted his expressed belief of his own unworthiness. (*Cheers, and "Go it, Pugwash!" from a drunken gentleman in a remote corner of the room.*) He need scarcely inform the highly respectable and influential meeting then and there assembled, that the object of such assembly on that occasion was to hear certain accounts of the progress of the good cause, from the lips of a revered brother (*cheers*) who had just returned (*renewed cheers*) from a long (*more cheering*)—arduous (*prolonged cheering*)—and most perilous (*vociferous cheering*)—mission to the islands of the South Seas (*tremendous cheering, mingled with "Bravo!" from the drunken gentleman in the remote corner.*) He need scarcely say that he alluded to their dear—venerated—respected—highly-prized—gifted—talented—persevering friend, Mr. Sheepshanks! (*Cheers.*) With these few observations, he would introduce Mr. Sheepshanks to the meeting. (*Prolonged cheering.*)

The chairman sate down in an awful state of perspiration; but, in another moment he rose again; for a little door at the back of the platform had just been opened by one of the ushers—and behold! Joshua Sheepshanks appeared before the enraptured spectators.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm which now prevailed in the room. The cheering was tremendous—the waving of the ladies' handkerchiefs created a perfect gale of chill air—and the drunken gentleman in the corner shouted so vociferously that one old lady who sate near him would certainly have fainted (as she subsequently observed) if another old lady next to her had not happened, "by the merest accident in the whole world," to have a small flask of cognac in her muff, and most charitably to place the said flask at her disposal.

Mr. Sheepshanks was a tall, thin, sallow-faced man, with black hair combed sleekly over his forehead, and sharp, piercing grey eyes, which seldom settled anywhere—but when they did, it happened (singularly enough!) that they were sure to fix themselves on the prettiest faces in the room.

Order being restored, Mr. Sheepshanks rose to address the audience. Having expressed his gratitude for the truly Christian reception he had received, he entered upon the subject so dear to all who had the good cause at heart. He stated that in the year 1823 the Committee of the Society had determined to send a missionary to some of the South Sea Islands to pave the way for the effectual carrying out of the objects of the Association. A sum of five hundred pounds was voted for the purpose; and he (Mr. Sheepshanks) had offered himself as a willing sacrifice to the good cause, although, as he perfectly well knew, at the risk of being roasted and eaten by the savages amongst whom he was to venture. Understanding that a French ship was to sail for the South Seas, from Cherbourg, on an exploring expedition, he had repaired to that port, and had taken a passage in the vessel alluded to. In due time, and after experiencing tremendous weather, the ship touched at the Cape of Good Hope, and thence proceeded towards the southern islands. "It was on the 14th of March, 1824," continued Mr. Sheepshanks, "that we anchored off the beautiful island of Squizzle-o-Koo; and I fell on my knees on the deck, to return thanks to that Providence which had at length brought me within sight of the scene of my labours. A refreshing influence came over me; and my heart leapt, like a porpoise on the wide waters, at the cheering thought that I was about to render myself useful amongst the benighted savages so near at hand. A boat was lowered; and the captain, the third mate, the purser, and myself were rowed ashore. I was provided with my Bible; the captain and the mate took with them quantities of looking-glasses, buttons, and toys; and the ungodly purser armed himself with a bottle of rum."

An awful groan burst from the Rev. Mr. Sawkins, whereat Mr. Pugwash, who had fallen asleep, woke up.

"Yes—dear Christian friends," exclaimed Mr. Sheepshanks; "a bottle of rum!"

"And no fool he!" cried the drunken gentleman in the corner.

"Order! order!" vociferated Mr. Pugwash, rubbing his eyes.

At this crisis, a gentleman of foreign appearance, well-dressed, and adorned with a pair of very fierce moustachios, advanced from the body of the room towards the platform; but at every three steps he took, he paused for a few moments to examine Mr. Sheepshanks with strict scrutiny by the aid of an eye-glass. At first he seemed uncertain relative to some idea which had entered his head; but the nearer he approached the platform, and the more closely he examined Mr. Sheepshanks, the fainter became his doubts and the stronger his suspicions.

At last—just as the missionary was about to resume the history of his adventures in respect to the island of Squizzle-o-Koo—the foreign stranger leaped upon the platform, confronted the pious gentleman, and said in an ironical tone, "How you do, Monsieur Shipshang? me vare much delight to see you dis vonce again."

Mr. Sheepshanks seemed confounded at the sudden apparition of the foreign gentleman: but, speedily recovering his self-possession, he said, "Really, sir, you have the advantage of me. But if you will step into the private office—behind there—for a short time, I——"

"Oh! yes—you really have de advantage on me, Monsieur Shipshang," interrupted the foreigner; "but you no get it again, do you see? How do Madame Shipshang, and de little Shipshang as was born at my house?"

"This gentleman, sir," said the Reverend Mr. Sawkins, addressing the foreigner in a tone of awful solemnity, and pointing towards Mr. Sheepshanks, "is not married and has no children. His life is devoted to celibacy and good works."

"Good works!" ejaculated the Frenchman: "den vot for he come and swindle me——"

"Oh!" groaned the Reverend Mr. Sawkins, holding up his hands in horror at the supposed baseness of the imputation against the most savoury vessel of the whole Society.

"Oh!" reverberated in a long echoing groan throughout the room; for, as the reader may suppose, this strange scene had excited a powerful sensation amongst all present.

"Ah! it all vare well," exclaimed the Frenchman, indignant at the awful groaning with which his words were received; "but let dis fellow Shipshang look me in de face, and——"

"Call in a constable!" roared Mr. Pugwash, the chairman.

"Give the Frenchman fair play!" cried several voices.

"Dat is all me do ask of de British public," said the Frenchman.

But while he turned to address those words to the audience, Mr. Sheepshanks disappeared with remarkable abruptness by the private door at the back of the platform.

"Where's our reverend brother?" demanded Mr. Pugwash, looking anxiously around.

"I am afraid he must be taken ill," returned Mr. Sawkins. "I will go and see."

And this reverend gentleman followed the pious missionary.

The Frenchman then proceeded to acquaint the audience that he kept an hotel at Cherbourg, where Mr. Sheepshanks arrived at the beginning of the year 1823; that the reverend gentleman continued to reside with him for upwards of ten months, spending money as profusely as if he possessed the purse of Fortunatus; that at the expiration of that period Mr. Sheepshanks departed, but returned at the end of a month, accompanied by a lady whom he represented to be his wife, and who presented him with a pledge of her affection some eleven months afterwards; that Mr. Sheepshanks and the lady, with the child, continued to honour the hotel with their presence until the middle of the year 1826, when they suddenly evaporated, leaving behind them a heavy bill unpaid and a portmanteau full of stones and straw; that business had brought the Frenchman to London, and curiosity had induced him to enter that assembly upon reading the placard, wherein the euphonious name of Sheepshanks prominently figured, at the door.

This narrative produced, as may be supposed, an extraordinary sensation amongst the saints gathered together on this occasion.

And no wonder! Was it, then, all a fabrication relative to Mr. Sheepshanks' visit to the South Sea Islands? Had he never proceeded farther than Cherbourg? were the funds of the Society lavished in riotous living and on a mistress? was it the better to carry out the deception that he had pretended to sail in a French ship, instead of an English one? was he, in a word, an unmitigated impostor? and were all the members of the Society his dupes?

These opinions seemed to be confirmed, when the Reverend Mr. Sawkins came back with the astounding intelligence that Mr. Sheepshanks was nowhere to be found in any part of the Society's offices.

Mrs. Slingsby was overwhelmed with grief, and her two fair companions with astonishment; and as they rode home in a hackney-coach, the pious widow never ceased from dilating on the tremendous injury which the "good cause" would receive from the exposure of the flagrant turpitude of Mr. Sheepshanks.

CHAPTER XXXVI.
THE BARONET AND HIS MISTRESS.

On the following day—at about twelve o'clock, and somewhat to the surprise of Mrs. Slingsby, who did not expect to see him so soon again—Sir Henry Courtenay paid the lady a visit.

She happened to be alone when he was announced; and there was a constraint—amounting almost to an embarrassment—in his manner which she immediately perceived, and which alarmed her.

"Has any thing happened, Henry?" she inquired anxiously, as he took a seat at some distance from her.

"Nothing, Martha—nothing," answered the baronet. "But I wish to have some very particular conversation with you."

"I am all attention," she said, her suspense increasing.

"Now do not be frightened," exclaimed Sir Henry. "Nothing has happened to annoy either you or me; but what I am about to propose to you, is rather of an embarrassing nature—and——"

"Then pray be quick and let me know what brings you hither this morning," said the lady, somewhat impatiently.

"Have patience!" cried the baronet. "The fact is I have taken a fancy in a certain quarter—and, though I have striven hard to wrestle against it, it is every hour growing more powerful than my opposition."

"What *do* you mean? what *can* you mean?" asked the widow, completely bewildered.

"Why do you receive into your house two young ladies of a beauty so ravishing——"

"Henry! is it possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, a light suddenly breaking in upon her mind.

"It is very possible that I should feel an unconquerable—an invincible passion for Rosamond Torrens," added the baronet, growing bolder now that the ice was fairly broken.

"And you tell me this to my face!" murmured the widow, in a hollow tone, while her countenance became purple with a rage which she dared not suffer to explode.

"It is expressly to you that I am compelled to make the avowal," was the deliberate reply; "since it is at your hands that I expect assistance."

"At my hands!" almost shrieked the widow.

"Beware how you alarm the house!" said the baronet. "You will do much better to listen to me attentively."

"Proceed," gasped Mrs. Slingsby.

"You are well aware that there are certain natures which cannot master their inclinations, however strenuously they may endeavour to do so," resumed Sir Henry Courtenay, drawing his chair closer to that on which his mistress was seated. "You yourself are of such a disposition—and I am not less so. It would have been impossible for you to remain chaste: your passions are of that ardour which must be gratified—or they would consume you."

"Wherefore this strange expatiation upon my failings?" inquired the widow bitterly.

"Simply to prove an extenuation for myself," was the response. "I have seen Rosamond but three times, and have not spoken a dozen words to her; and yet I am maddened with desire—devoured with cravings which the possession of her can alone assuage. I again assure you that I have essayed to conquer these feelings, for my sake—for hers—but principally for *yours*,—and all in vain! I do not love you the less—I shall not neglect you on her account. And, as a woman of the world," he added, fixing his eyes in a penetrating manner upon her countenance, as if to read the impression his words made on her mind,—"as a woman of the world, I repeat, you cannot imagine that it is possible for me always to remain faithful to you!"

"At least you are candid with me," observed the widow, her tone expressing bitter irony.

"That is the great merit of my present avowal," said the baronet calmly. "But how foolish you are to manifest so much annoyance. You are well aware that I cannot subdue my feelings, nor control my passions more than yourself; and it will be better for you to assist me ——"

"Assist you in debauching that young girl—the sister of her whom my nephew is to marry!" ejaculated Mrs. Slingsby.

"Listen, Martha," exclaimed Sir Henry. "I have formed this sudden caprice—or whim—or whatever you may choose to term it; and I will spare no money and no trouble to accomplish my purpose. A man with twenty thousand a-year can afford a trifle to gratify his

wishes in this or any other respect."

"But the idea is perfectly insane!" cried the widow. "Even if I were to consent to aid you in your purpose, the result must inevitably involve a fearful exposure."

"Not at all," replied the baronet. "The means are easy, and can be rendered perfectly secure. I gave you a thousand pounds yesterday—the largest sum you have ever yet had from me at one time; and I will present you with a cheque for *two* thousand more the day that Rosamond becomes mine."

"You would not marry her?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, in a tone of unconcealed alarm.

"Yes—rather than not possess her," replied the baronet.

"Oh! this is truly absurd!" said the widow. "What! so powerful an attachment towards a young girl whom you have only seen three times!"

"Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless a fact!" cried Sir Henry. "But there is a wide difference between the feelings I entertain towards you and her. You are necessary to me, to a certain extent—because you are an agreeable companion as well as a desirable woman. She is a mere child—but a very beautiful one; and, moreover, the sudden fancy I have taken for her is so strong that I cannot resist it. You see that my resolution is fixed. With or without your aid, I prosecute my purpose."

"If you are really so determined——"

"I am," said the baronet.

"Then I must assist you in this dangerous—difficult proceeding," added Mrs. Slingsby, somewhat consoled by the idea of the two thousand pounds that were to find their way into her purse as the price of her services. "But when I reflect on the matter, I behold a thousand perils from which I recoil. Were an exposure to take place, the entire fabric of—of——"

"Hypocrisy," suggested the baronet. "You and I need not mince words together."

"Well—hypocrisy," continued the lady, "would be thrown down—and I should stand revealed to the world in the most dreadful colours. Then, the real nature of *our* connexion would be instantly perceived——"

"But all these terrible evils are to be avoided by prudence," interrupted the baronet. "I am not more anxious for exposure than yourself; nor should I wish to compromise you. Our amour has existed for years—and the world suspects it not, even in the most distant manner:—we will contrive to retain the veil over it until the end."

"Then how do you wish me to proceed?" inquired the widow, with a cold shudder, as she thought of the perils attending the undertaking.

"By operating on the mind—by modelling the imagination of that young girl to suit my purpose," answered Sir Henry. "With a woman of the world like you, this is an easy task. Insinuate certain notions into her bosom—inflame her—excite her——"

"This is more difficult than you imagine," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby: "because she and her sister are constantly together."

"Devise a means to employ Adelais in one room for two or three hours at a time, while you have Rosamond with you in another," said Sir Henry. "If you enter on the task with a good will, you will find it easy enough."

"But in ten days Adelais will become the wife of Clarence; and the sisters, accompanied by him, will repair to Torrens Cottage to throw themselves at the feet of the incensed father. Rosamond will then quit my house altogether."

"Ten days are sufficient to imbue her now innocent mind with such new sensations—such voluptuous thoughts—such eager desires, that her surrender will be easy and certain," persisted the atrocious villain, who thus calmly reasoned on the means of undermining so much virtue.

"I do not think so," observed Mrs. Slingsby. "If I proceed too rapidly, I shall alarm her, instead of inflaming her imagination. Besides, you judge the world by what you yourself are, and by what you know of me. But, frail and guilty as I am, Henry," she added in an impressive tone, "believe me when I declare my conviction that more virtue is to be found in woman than you would be inclined to suspect."

Sir Henry laughed heartily at this observation; then, rising from his seat, he took up his hat, saying, "At all events, dearest Martha, act so that I may present you with the cheque as soon as possible."

He kissed her, and departed from the house, chuckling at the success of his endeavour to make his mistress the instrument of his diabolical design against the pure—the beautiful—the unsuspecting Rosamond.

CHAPTER XXXVII.
TOM RAIN AND JACOB.

It was Saturday evening; and Rainford was proceeding up Gray's Inn Lane, wrapped in his white great coat, and with a woollen "comforter" reaching up almost to his nose, when he suddenly felt some one pull him by the sleeve.

He turned round, and, by the light of a lamp, beheld the lad Jacob.

"Well, you young rascal!" exclaimed Tom—but with an anger more affected than real, for he was not a man to cherish vindictive feelings towards an enemy so utterly unworthy his resentment as that pale, weak, and sickly boy: "I wonder you have the face to accost me, after joining in that abominable scheme to intrude upon the privacy of my dwelling three or four nights ago."

"I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Rainford," said the lad: "for you *must* know," added he emphatically, "it wasn't altogether my fault. I was bound to obey the man who gave me food. But do you know, sir, what has become of *him*? Oh! Mr. Rainford—I am well aware that he *did* deserve punishment at your hands; but—pray forgive me—I hope——"

"You hope that I did not kill him?" said the highwayman in a deep, hollow-toned voice. "Why—do you suppose that I am a likely person to commit murder—intentionally?"

"Oh! no—no," replied the boy. "And yet——"

"And yet what?" asked Rainford.

"And yet it is so strange that he should never have been seen at any of his usual haunts," added Jacob.

"Come along with me," said Rainford abruptly. "We cannot stand talking in the street—and I want to have some conversation with you. But do you know any place close at hand—any public-house, I mean—where we could have a private room for an hour or so?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jacob, after a moment's reflection. "This way."

He turned abruptly down into a narrow, dark, dirty thoroughfare, called Baldwin's Gardens, and conducted the highwayman into a low public-house, where, upon inquiry, they were immediately accommodated, with a private room on the second floor.

Rainford ordered the fire to be lighted and a bottle of wine to be brought up; and when these instructions were complied with, he renewed the conversation with Jacob.

"And so nothing has been heard of Old Death?" he said, in as tranquil a manner as he could assume.

"Nothing," replied Jacob. "A man named Josh Pedler called at Bunce's this morning early, and wanted to see Mr. Bones, on account of a thief, known as Tim the Snammer, who was to go up before the magistrate to-day; and it appears that Mr. Bones had promised to get him off. Pedler was in a dreadful way when he heard that we hadn't seen any thing of the old man for two or three days; and he swore that it was all a hoax, and that Bones wanted to stick to the money that had been paid him, and shirk the job. Then comes a girl about an hour afterwards; and she said she was Tim the Snammer's wife—Mutton-faced Sal they call her;—and a deuce of a rumpus she made also."

"Do you know a person called Tidmarsh?" demanded Rainford, after a few moments' reflection—for he was anxious to learn if the boy were acquainted with the establishments in Turnmill and Red Lion Streets.

"I know him by name very well—and that's all," replied Jacob. "He is a fence, and lives somewhere in Clerkenwell. But pray tell me, Mr. Rainford, if you know what has become of the old man."

"I can tell you nothing about him, my boy," said the highwayman. "Surely he was not so very kind to you——"

"He kind! Oh! no—far from that!" cried Jacob, in a tone of evident sincerity. "But I was so dependant on him, that—unless I turn thief again—as I once was——"

He stopped short, and burst into tears.

"My poor lad," said Tom Rain, affected by this ebullition of grief on the part of the wretched boy, "if you are afraid of wanting bread, you may banish those alarms—at least for the present."

And he threw a handful of sovereigns upon the table.

"Are these for me?" cried Jacob, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Yes—every one of them," answered the highwayman. "But on this condition—that you tell me how Old Death discovered my *late* abode in Lock's Fields, and what was his object in entering it along with you and that sneaking fellow, Toby Bunce."

"I will tell you all—everything I know, Mr. Rainford," exclaimed Jacob. "But," he added slowly, "you will find that I do not deserve this kindness at your hands."

"I can scarcely blame you for obeying the person on whom you were dependant," said the highwayman. "Come—gather up the money, and make haste with your information."

As Jacob secured the gold about his person, his dark eyes were lighted up, and his cheeks were flushed with a glow of animation.

"I can tell you much more than you suppose, Mr. Rainford," he resumed in a few moments; "and if I begin at the proper place, what I have to say will go farther back than the affair the other night in Lock's Fields."

"Then begin with the beginning, Jacob," said Tom, lighting a cigar. "There—drink another glass of wine; and now fire away. But mind and tell me nothing save the truth; for I shall soon see if you are deceiving me."

"I won't deceive you, Mr. Rainford," cried the boy; "and will soon convince you that I am in earnest. Besides, it is my interest to make a friend of you—even if it wasn't my inclination. And now to begin. You remember the morning you was had up at Bow Street? Well—Old Death had told me to watch you when you came out of Tullock's—to dog you about—to find out where you lived and any thing else I could glean concerning you."

"What was that for?" demanded Tom.

"He did not tell me *then*," answered Jacob; "but I have ascertained since—and you will be able to guess by and bye. Well, I *did* follow you that morning—I saw you nabbed by Dykes, the runner—and I went up to Bunce's to tell Old Death what had happened. Then he cut off to Watkins and Bertinshaw, who came and bailed you. I was ordered to watch about the police-court, and see where you went to; and I followed you to Pall Mall—then I dogged you back again—and when the Jewess's case was over, I lost sight of you somehow or another."

"And you duly made your report to Old Death?" said Tom inquiringly.

"Of course," replied Jacob. "Two or three days afterwards I was set to watch you again, when you left Bunce's one afternoon; and I followed you down to an eating-house in the Strand. You stayed there about two hours; and at length you came out with a tall, handsome young gentleman——"

"Ah! I recollect!" cried the highwayman: "it was Clarence Villiers. But go on, my boy."

"I only mention all these little things to convince you that I am telling the exact truth," said Jacob. "Well—from the Strand I followed you and the gentleman as far as Bridge Street, Blackfriars, where you parted. I dogged you, Mr. Rainford, over to the Elephant and Castle Tavern, where you met a lady and the little boy——"

"Yes—Charley Watts!" ejaculated the highwayman, gradually becoming more interested in Jacob Smith's narrative, because each successive step thereof afforded fresh evidence of its truth.

"You joined the lady and the little boy," continued Jacob; "and when you all stopped for a short time at the window of a jeweller's shop, the lady lifted up her veil—and I knew her again."

"Ah!" cried Tom, with a sudden start.

"Yes, sir,—I recognised Miss Esther de Medina——But are you angry, sir? have I said anything to offend you?"

"No—no, Jacob," returned the highwayman, the cloud which had gathered upon his countenance suddenly disappearing. "Go on, my boy."

"Then I saw you take the lady and the little boy into the shop, and you bought a pair of ear-rings, which you gave to the lady; and as you came out again, I heard you say to her, '*This present is a kind of recompense for the diamonds which I made you give up*,'—or something to the same meaning."

"Yes—I remember that I did make use of those or similar words!" cried Rainford. "But how the deuce did it happen that I never once caught a glimpse of you?"

"Oh! sir—I acted with so much caution," replied the lad; "and then you did not suspect that you was watched."

"True!" said Tom thoughtfully. "And of course you reported all this to Old Death?"

"I followed you on to Lock's Fields, and then returned to Seven Dials, where I told Mr. Bones and Mrs. Bunce all I had seen and heard."

"And what did they say? Tell me every thing, Jacob," exclaimed the highwayman.

"They seemed very much surprised to think that you and Miss Esther were intimate together——"

Jacob suddenly paused—for again did a dark cloud overspread Tom Rain's countenance.

"Go on, Jacob," he said, observing that the lad was alarmed. "I am subject to a sudden pain——but it is nothing at all. Go on, I say. You were telling me that Old Death and that disgusting woman, Mrs. Bunce, were very much astonished at a certain circumstance. Well—and what did they say?"

"They asked me whether either you, sir, or the lady took any little thing—when the jeweller's back was turned," replied Jacob, timidly; "but I assured them that you did not."

A scornful smile curled the highwayman's lips and then he puffed away violently at his cigar—apparently wrapped in deep reflection.

"Shall I tell you any more, sir?" asked Jacob, when a few minutes of profound silence had elapsed.

"Yes, my boy: go on!" cried Tom, turning towards him again.

"The very next night," resumed Jacob, "Mr. Bones and me were walking down Southampton Row, Russell Square, you know—when I observed Miss Esther de Medina in a shop——"

"Where there was a post-office?" ejaculated the highwayman, hastily.

"Just so, sir. And she was reading a letter," continued Jacob. "Then me and Old Death followed her down to another post-office—it was in Holborn—where she posted a letter which she had with her. I crept close up to her and saw the address on it just before she dropped it into the box."

"And what was that address?" demanded Rainford.

"*T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields*," was the answer.

"And you of course told *that* to Old Death?"

"Yes—and he desired me to follow the lady to see where she lived; which I did, and traced her to Great Ormond Street. Then I went back to Bunce's, and acquainted Mr. Bones with this fact also. He was very much pleased; and soon afterwards you came in. He then told you about going to Shooter's Hill to stop a tradesman and his wife; but I afterwards found out that it was only a gag to get you out of the way next night."

"Ah! I thought as much!" cried Rainford. "And now, I suppose, we come to the visit which Mr. Bones, Toby Bunce, and yourself paid to my lodgings?"

"Exactly so," said Jacob. "Early the next morning I was ordered by Old Death to post myself all day long in Great Ormond Street, and see that Miss Esther didn't go out. I kept watch, and saw her several times at the window just for a moment: so I knew she was at home. In the evening Old Death and Mr. Bunce came and fetched me, and we went over to a public-house opposite your lodgings in Brandon Street. On the way I learnt what they meant to do; for it was to carry off the boy——"

"Poor little Charley Watts!" ejaculated Rainford, totally unprepared for this announcement. "But what harm had he done to them? or what could they want with him?"

"I don't exactly know, sir," replied Jacob. "Indeed, I don't think Toby Bunce knew himself. But I can't help thinking that it was somehow or another connected with a certain letter which Old Death let fall, and which I picked up and kept. It bears the signature of *Sarah Watts*——"

"The poor woman who died at Bunce's house!" cried the highwayman. "Where is that letter?"

"Here, sir," answered Jacob; and with these words he produced the document from his pocket, and handed it to Tom Rain.

The highwayman hastened to peruse it with the greatest interest and attention; but he was evidently disappointed when he perceived that it afforded no clue to the person to whom it was originally intended to be sent.

"I shall keep this letter, Jacob," he said, after some minutes of profound reflection.

"Do so, Mr. Rainford," returned the lad. "And now you see that I am acting sincerely with you."

"Quite," remarked the highwayman, in an absent manner; for he suddenly remembered the circumstance of Old Death declaring that he had lost a particular letter on the memorable night which was marked with so many strange occurrences. "Yes, Jacob," he continued, after a long pause, "you are right. It must have been in connexion with this letter that the old man wanted to carry off the boy. Perhaps he had discovered some clue to unravel the mystery of Charley's birth, and meant to turn the secret to his own advantage? But, if so, he must have had some better trace than this letter, which certainly says a great deal, and yet leaves the one grand point—*who Charley's mother really is*—in complete darkness! However," added Tom, who had been musing aloud, rather than addressing his remarks to Jacob, "time will perhaps clear up all."

"You see, sir," continued Jacob, "I was set to watch in Great Ormond Street to find out whether Miss Esther went over to you——"

"To *me*!" ejaculated Rainford, as if taken by surprise. "But—go on, my boy—go on!"

And as I knew that she was at home when Old Death and Toby Bunce came to join me there," pursued the lad, "we of course thought it was all right. You may, therefore, judge how Old Death and me were surprised, when we went up into the bed-room at your lodgings ——"

"Enough of that, Jacob!" cried Rainford, starting uneasily. "And now tell me why Old Death seemed so anxious all along to find out every thing he could about me?"

"Lord! sir, can't you guess?" exclaimed the boy. "He knew that you could be useful to him, and he wanted to get you completely into his power. By knowing all that concerned you, he——"

"I understand, Jacob," again interrupted the highwayman; "and it is just as I suspected. You are a good lad for telling me all this—and I will not leave you to want—in case," he added hastily, "your old master should not happen to turn up again. But I do not think I shall stay many days in London, Jacob. However, I will see you again shortly—and we will have a talk together about what is best to be done for you. One word, by the bye—do you know how this letter which you gave me, happened to fall into Old Death's hands?"

"Not all, sir—unless Mrs. Bunce found it about the poor woman who died the other night at her house."

"That is what I suspect," observed Rainford. "Indeed, it must have been so. The deceitful woman!—after my paying her so handsomely, to keep back the document! But it has found its way to my pocket at last, in spite of her and Old Death. And now, Jacob, tell me about yourself. How long have you been in the service of Mr. Benjamin Bones?"

"I wish you had time sir," said the boy, "to listen to my story: it would be a relief to me to tell it—for I already feel towards you as I never felt to any one before. Indeed, I was sorry to be employed against you in any way: but I couldn't help myself. I remember the evening that I watched you over to Lock's Fields:—I was so moved—I hardly can describe how—at seeing that little boy Charley with you; for I thought how good you were towards him, and what an excellent heart you must have,—and when I got back to Bunce's, I couldn't pluck up courage to tell Old Death any thing about you, for fear he might mean you some injury. However," added Jacob, wiping his eyes, "he *did* get it all out of me at last——"

"Never mind, my lad," interrupted Rainford, moved by Jacob's contrition: "all you have told me this evening has fully atoned for the mischief you previously did me. Besides, as I before said, you were forced to obey your master. And now," he added, after referring to his handsome gold repeater, "I don't mind if I sit another hour with you here; and while I smoke my cigar, you shall tell me the history of your life."

"I will, sir," exclaimed the boy, eagerly. "But I warn you beforehand it is a long one—that is, if I tell it as I should like to do."

"Tell it in your own way, my boy," cried Rainford; "and never mind the length."

The highwayman settled himself in a comfortable manner in his chair; and Jacob proceeded to relate the history of his life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.
THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"My earliest recollections are associated with the occupation of playing all day long in the streets, in company with other infants. This was in Upper Whitecross Street, St. Luke's; where I and those other children lived with a woman, who pretended to keep a boarding-school at which she received children to live with her altogether for one shilling and eightpence a-week each: but she used to turn us all out early in the morning with a piece of hard mouldy bread to nibble for our breakfast, and fetch us home again when it grew dusk in the evening. She would then give us each another piece of bread for supper, and we went to bed. But what a bed! A few old sacks thrown over a heap of straw in a little room about six feet long by four and a half in width, served upwards of a dozen children as a sleeping-room. There we used to cry ourselves to rest, famished with insufficiency of food—and awake again in the morning to undergo fresh privations.

"I said there were about twelve of us under the care of this Mother Maggs—as she was called. They chiefly belonged to very poor parents, who were engaged all day long at work, and were therefore glad to get rid of their children, who would otherwise only be an encumbrance to them. Some few were, however, the illegitimate offspring of poor servant-girls in place; but nearly all had parents who came to see them from time to time and perhaps gave them a few pence. I was not, however, so fortunate as the rest; for no one ever came to see me—at least that I was aware of—until I was about nine years old; and I heard that the twenty-pence a-week allowed for my board and lodging, was left regularly for Mother Maggs at the neighbouring chandler's shop every Saturday morning. Mother Maggs seemed to think that I had really no friends—for, though she bullied us all pretty well, she bullied *me* ten thousand times more than the rest.

"The habit of turning a dozen little children, some of whom were only just able to walk, into the street in the way I have described, was not likely to be always unattended with disagreeable consequences. Sometimes a child was run over, and either severely wounded or killed. In the latter case, no Coroner's Inquest ever sate on the body: the exposure of Mother Maggs's neglect towards us, would have drawn the attention of the parochial authorities towards her. But when a death happened in that way, the old woman used to put the body into a sack and carry it some distance into the country, where she would sink it in a pond or ditch. Often, however, the corpse of a dead child has been allowed to remain in our room till it was quite putrid, Mother Maggs not having time or inclination to remove it before. And, on those occasions, we *who were alive in that room* were so frightened to be with the dead body in the dark, that we shrieked and screamed till the noise reached the old woman's ears in the public-house next door; and so savage was she at being disturbed in her gin and her gossip, that she has half murdered us by way of making us hold our tongues!

"Sometimes a child was lost; and if the parents, on being informed of it, expressed regret or anger, Mother Maggs would take some trouble to find it again: if not, she did not put herself out of the way respecting the matter. In addition to her boarding-house for children, she let out lodgings to persons of either sex; and, as she was not particular so long as she got paid, her house was nothing more or less than a common brothel. She was always saying she had no time to do any thing which ought to be done: and if being all day in the public-house was a necessary duty, she certainly had no time for other purposes. Though not often tipsy, she was never actually sober—but in a constant state of muzziness. Liquor did not improve her temper: on the contrary it made her irritable—sometimes ferocious; and I have seen her fight with other women until her face was covered with long seams made by the finger-nails, and pouring with blood.

"You cannot suppose that *all* these things which I have just told you or that I am going to tell you directly, in connexion with Mother Maggs's establishment, were noticed or understood by me when I was quite a child there: but you must remember that I stayed at that den until I was nine, and in the course of those years all I saw made a deep impression on my mind; and what was then dark and unintelligible to me, has since been made clear and plain by experience and by reflection on those scenes and circumstances.

"You will wonder how my wretched companions and myself managed to live, since we only had a piece of bread each, night and morning. We kept body and soul together in a variety of ways, chiefly feeding, like swine, upon all the offal and remnants of vegetables, cooked or raw, that we found in the street. There was a dust-bin in the court where Mother Maggs's house was in Whitecross Street; and every day, just upon one o'clock, we used to crowd round it, waiting till the neighbours came to empty their potato-peelings or the refuse of their meals into that general receptacle. Then we would greedily appropriate to our use the scraps which not even the very poorest of the poor chose to eat. The potato-peelings (most poor families skin their potatoes after they are boiled) were quite a dainty to us: the heads and bones of fish and such-like refuse were also welcome to our empty stomachs. Then we were accustomed to go prowling about the street to snatch a slice of raw bacon or a bit of cheese from the board in front of a butter-shop; or steal a turnip or a carrot from an old woman's stall; or else lay unlawful hands upon the horses' flesh in the cats'-meat shops. This last article of food was much fancied by us. It was comparatively easy to steal; and when we did get such a prize as a large lump of carrion, with a stick thrust through it, we felt as happy for the time being as if we had found a treasure. Then we used to conceal ourselves in some dark court, and take a bite round—each in his turn—until it was all gone. I am afraid I disgust you with these details; but you desired me to tell my story in my own way—and I want you to understand the dreadful mode of life which thousands of poor

children lead in the wealthiest city in the world. I am sure, when I have thought of it all since, and when I see little boys and girls paddling in that neglected manner about the streets, my blood runs cold at the idea that while some human beings are riding in their carriages and living in palaces, others are prowling in the low neighbourhoods, happy if they can steal a lump of putrid carrion!

"You may next ask what we did for clothes—it being very clear that Mother Maggs could not supply us with wearing apparel out of twenty-pence a-week. Well—the fact is we scarcely had any clothes on at all. As for a cap or shoes and stockings, I declare solemnly I never wore any one of those articles from the earliest period of my recollection until I was nine years old. A little ragged frock, and that was all: yes, that was all—summer or winter! But where did even the ragged frock come from? I really hardly know: I am at a loss to say exactly how we did get even that one garment each. Sometimes a child would be taken away by its parents, who might, perhaps, bring it some decent clothing: then the cast-off rags in this case would fall to the lot of the most ragged of those who were left behind. Now and then a slop-seller in the neighbourhood would give one of us some old frock which was useless to himself: and occasionally we would steal one, when we could. You may ask me why we did not steal shoes also? So we did, if an opportunity served: but then we could do without shoes, and the eldest of the lot of us was on those occasions commissioned to sell the plunder at a rag-shop, to afford means to buy a little better food than usually fell in our way. These occurrences were, however, rare—so rare, that they constituted perfect holidays in the hideous monotony of our famished lives;—for the shopkeepers in poor neighbourhoods are constantly on the alert to watch the movements of the juvenile prowlers.

"The ages of the children under the care of Mother Maggs averaged from three to ten; and the eldest of course bullied the youngest, while Mrs. Maggs bullied us all. Misery did not make us little ones friendly together. On the contrary, we fought, quarrelled, and ill-treated each other as much as we could. I must relate to you one anecdote—although I now shudder when I think of it, and have often since shed tears of repentance. There was one boy, named Tib Tucker, about eight years old, who used to behave in a more merciless manner towards me than the rest did. He would take away my bread from me whenever he caught me eating it apart and alone; and he laid to me many thefts on Mother Maggs's cupboard which he himself committed. These false reports got me many and many a good beating from the enraged hag; and, in a word, this boy's tyranny became so insufferable, that I was resolved to adopt some desperate measure to put an end to it. I was then but little more than six years old: a fiendish instinct of revenge, however, urged me to act. I secreted a pin about my rags; and one day when Tib Tucker was trying to take away the morsel of mouldy bread which Mother Maggs had just given me, I suddenly thrust the pin into his right eye. He screamed in dreadful agony, and brought down Mother Maggs into the court. I had not run away—terror, or rather horror at what I had done, nailed me to the spot. The bully's tale was soon told. I expected to be half murdered by the dreadful woman: but, to my surprise, she suddenly took my part—declared that I had shown a proper spirit—and consoled Tib Tucker with the assurance that if he would only permit me to operate on the other eye in the same manner, he would prove a perfect fortune to his parents. 'There's nothing like a blind child to draw alms,' she said: 'but one eye's no good—you should be blind of both.'—I remember her words as well as if they had only been uttered yesterday; and, the more so, as they seemed to be prophetic—as I shall explain presently.

"The terrible vengeance which I had taken upon my persecutor, who lost his eye in consequence, not only awed him in future, but made me feared by all the rest; and my existence grew somewhat less wretched—at least in reference to the treatment I experienced from my companions. Mother Maggs also seemed to change towards me—whether through fear, or admiration at what she termed '*my spirit*,' I cannot say. I was less bullied by her—but not a whit better fed.

"About six weeks after the incident which I have related, the parents of Tib Tucker returned to London from the country where they had been harvesting. They passed the evening with Mother Maggs, and great quantities of gin were sent for from the public-house. This I afterwards learnt from my companions; for, as to myself, I kept out of the way through fear of being punished by the boy's parents for the vengeance which I had wreaked upon him. When it was quite dark, I returned to the house, and stole up to the miserable garret where my companions were already huddled together on the straw and old sacks. Tib Tucker was amongst them; for I heard him talking about a promise his parents had made to take him with them into the country, where they were going again in a few days. One of the eldest girls—for, I forgot to say, Mother Maggs's juvenile boarders were of both sexes—asked him what his parents had said about the accident. He replied that they had laughed at it, and had declared that they would turn it to some good account. Scarcely had he thus spoken, when the door opened, and Mother Maggs appeared, with a candle in her hand. Ordering Tib Tucker to get up and follow her, she added that his father and mother had a little treat in store for him, and had meant him all along to sit up to supper. Tib was overjoyed at these news, and made haste to accompany Mother Maggs to a lower room where she had left his parents; and we, in our miserable dark garret, envied the boy who had a good supper in view.

"I remember—Oh! well do I remember, how I cried that night, to think that no friends ever came to see me, and that indeed I was ignorant whether my parents were alive or not. I had often asked Mother Maggs whether she knew my father and mother; but I invariably received a cuff by way of reply—and therefore at length grew tired of putting the question. There were, however, times when my wretched—forlorn—abandoned condition almost broke my heart; for, young as I was, I knew that there were boys and girls in the world much better off than myself!

"While Tib Tucker was absent, the other children began to discourse amongst themselves, saying how lucky he was to come in for a good supper: and then they set to work to guess what the meal was likely to consist of. But all on a sudden a dreadful shriek echoed through the house, and startled us in our miserable garret. There we lay—crouching and huddling nearer to each other, holding our breath, not daring to utter a word, and filled with vague alarms, as if some dreadful danger hung over us. At length sleep came to my relief. When I awoke in the morning and ran down into the court, the first object that met my view was the wretched boy Tib Tucker, being led away by his parents—*for he was now blind of both eyes!*

"I was so frightened, that I ran into the street, where I wandered about all day—forgetting even the pangs of hunger. I had suddenly conceived such a dreadful terror of Mother Maggs, that I had not dared to present myself at her room-door to obtain my usual morsel of bread, along with the rest. It was a very rainy day, and yet I remember that I roved and roved about the whole neighbourhood, at one

time crying bitterly—at another stupified, though still moving about like a sleep-walker. When the evening came on, I was so tired and hungry that I was forced to retrace my way to the horrible den, which I only discovered again with the greatest difficulty. Mother Maggs did not take any notice of my absence from the morning distribution of bread, but gave me my evening ration along with the rest; and once more did I return to the straw and filth of the close garret.

"Months and years passed—and I reached the age of nine. The last few months opened my eyes to more wickedness than I had as yet known or dreamt of. I just now told you that Mrs. Maggs's juvenile boarders consisted of boys and girls; and I believe you understood that we all huddled together in the same garret. It was a regular pig-sty, in which we wallowed like swine: and like that of brutes also was the conduct of the eldest boys and girls. If the other rooms in the house were used as a brothel by grown-up persons, no stew could be more atrocious than our garret. The girls were more precocious than the boys, and the latter were corrupted by the former. Mere children of nine and ten practised the vices of their elders. But, my God! let me draw a veil over this dreadful scene. Oh! sir—I have seen much—gone through much; but the mere thought of the horrible licentiousness—the beastliness—the monstrous depravity that took place there, even now makes my blood run cold in my veins!

"And can you wonder that such should be the case? Not one of all us children had ever been taught what virtue was; and all that we knew of crime was that it was something which a constable took you up for. We had not the least notion of the Saviour—none of us had ever heard that the Son of God died for the sins of the world. I had once seen a Bible, because I stole one from a book-stall; and the eldest girl, who went to sell it, gathered from what was said by the person who bought it, that it *was* a Bible. But even if I had previously known that the book was called a Bible, I should not the less have stolen it; because I could not read, and no one had ever told me at that time what the Bible really was. We had all heard of the name of God, and used it pretty often too—for oaths were familiar to us even when we could only lisp them: but we knew not who God was, and had no one to tell us—even if we had wished to learn. You may think it strange that there should be children of even ten years old in London who are completely ignorant of every thing concerning religion; but I can assure you that I have met with youths and girls of fifteen or sixteen who were equally in the dark in that respect.

"I was nine years old when Mother Maggs one day fetched me out of the street where I was playing in the gutter with my companions, and took me into her own room, where I saw Mr. Bones for the first time—I mean the first time as far as my recollection is concerned. He looked at me a long time; and then turning to the old woman, said, 'I don't think you have taken the very best care of him.'—'Yes, I have,' she answered, 'He has had his bellyfull every day of his life: bread-and-butter for breakfast and supper; potatoes for dinner on week days, with may-be a bit of pudding or so now and then; and always a good dinner on a Sunday. Haven't you, Jacob, dear?'—and, as she asked me this question, she gave a terrific frown, unseen by Old Death, and the meaning of which I well understood. So I muttered a 'yes;' and she seemed satisfied.—'But I am going to take him away all the same, Mrs. Maggs,' said Mr. Bones; 'because he is of an age now to be useful to me.'—'I hope you will recommend me where you can,' cried Mother Maggs. 'I do all I can to make the poor little dears happy; and if Jacob is so shabby just the very day you drop down upon us, like, it's only because his new frock is in the suds; and as for shoes and stockings, it makes boys hardy to go without them.'—I do not remember that Old Death made any answer to these observations; because the portion of the dialogue which I have just detailed, produced so deep an impression on my mind—young as I was—that had it been continued, I should most probably have recollected the rest. But *this* I cannot forget—that when Old Death told me to follow him, and Mother Maggs took me in her arms to embrace me at parting, I screamed with affright—for the spectacle of the blind boy instantly recurred to my memory!

"Old Death took me to a shop in Whitecross Street, and bought me a complete suit of clothes—shabby and mean, it is true; but royal robes compared to the rags I now threw off. And how great was my astonishment—how wild was my delight, when I was actually supplied with a pair of stockings and shoes! Never before—never since, have I known such perfect joy as I felt at that minute. Sight restored to the blind could not be more welcome than were those articles. Not that I required them—for my feet were inured to nakedness, and to walk even on the pointed flints:—but I experienced an indescribable sensation of mingled pride and satisfaction which made me supremely happy. My joy was, however, somewhat rudely interrupted by a hard blow on the head which Old Death bestowed upon me, because I dared to laugh in the fulness of my poor heart; and then I burst into tears. He cursed me for a 'snivelling fool,' and ordered me to put on the cap which he had also bought me, and make haste to accompany him. The cap was another article of clothing till then quite strange to me; and once more my tears were succeeded by smiles!

"At length the purchases were complete; and I followed Old Death from the shop. But I walked as if I was tipsy. The cap seemed to be quite a weight on my head; and the shoes threatened every moment to trip me up. I have never worn skates,—but I can fancy how a person must feel when he puts them on for the first time; and I imagine that my awkwardness in stockings and shoes was something of the same kind. Near the point where Upper Whitecross Street joins Old Street Road, I beheld my late companions huddled together at the mouth of a passage belonging to a pawnbroker's shop. They did not know me, till I called some of them by name; and then they could not believe their eyes. I must have seemed a kind of prince to them. They instantly overwhelmed me with questions—but Old Death looked back and called me in a cross tone, and I hurried away. I declare solemnly that the tears started from my eyes as I thus separated from the companions of all my infant misery; and though I knew not whether my own fate was about to be improved, still my heart was smitten with the idea that I was leaving them behind to their wretchedness—their rags—their starvation—and their fœtid den at Mother Maggs's house. Never until that instant had I experienced the least sympathy in their behalf: but then—at that moment—I felt as if I could have remained with them, and loved them!

"Mr. Bones conducted me to some public-house—I can't recollect where it was, but I think it must have been in Brick Lane, St. Luke's,—and there he ordered bread and cheese and ale. What a glorious dinner did I make that day! Never had I tasted any thing so delicious before! The cheese was so nice—the bread so white and new,—and the ale—it was good beyond all description. At least, so the food and drink then appeared to me: and what was better still, was that I was allowed to eat as much as I chose! When we had ended our meal, Old Death began to talk very seriously to me—for we were alone in the room together. He gave me to understand that he had

found me, when quite a baby, lying on the steps of a workhouse—that he had taken me to some good, kind woman whom he knew, and who had treated me well—that afterwards he had been obliged to place me, when I was three years old, with Mother Maggs—*and that I therefore owed every thing to him*. I naturally believed at the time that I was under the deepest obligations to him; and then he proceeded to inform me that I might be useful to him in certain ways, and that if I did all he told me and was a good boy, he would never desert me. I of course listened with as much respect as it was in my power or nature to show; and, though I did not quite understand all he said to me, I was nevertheless impressed with the conviction that he had a right to do what he chose with me, and that I was bound to obey him.

"We remained some time at the public-house—indeed, if I remember right, until it was dusk; because Old Death had a great deal to say to me, and as I was so very young and so miserably ignorant, it was not an easy matter for him to make me understand his meaning. But there can be no doubt that he laboured to convince me of the right which certain privileged persons had to prey upon others who were not so privileged;—or, in plainer terms, that whenever I could obtain a handkerchief, a purse, or any thing else worth taking, and in such a manner that there was no chance of my being detected, I was perfectly justified in availing myself of the opportunity. My morals had not been so carefully attended to, as to excite any repulsive feelings at this species of reasoning: on the contrary, having from my infancy practised the art of pilfering pudding from cooks'-shops, bits of bacon from cheesemongers' windows, carrots and turnips from old women's stalls, and lumps of tripe or carrion from the boards of cats'-meat establishments, I was well prepared to go a step farther. There can be no doubt that Old Death was all along aware of the real nature of Mother Maggs's house and of the manner in which she reared the children entrusted to her. A man of his experience could not help knowing all this; and it was not probable that he was deceived by the lying statements she made to him relative to the manner in which I had been treated—although he took, as far as I recollect, no notice of her words. In fact, he had intentionally placed me in a position to learn everything that was bad—to fulfil an apprenticeship of petty vice, that I might enter on a career of crime, whereof the profits were to be his own!

"Taking me now in a somewhat kind manner by the hand, he led me down to St. Paul's Churchyard. Although having hitherto lived within a mile of that place, I had never been there before. It is true that from the garret windows of Mother Maggs's dwelling, I had sometimes seen the huge dark dome surmounted by the cross which shone like gold on a bright, sunny day; but I had never thought of asking what it was—nor had I any notion that it was so near. Often, too, in the silence of the night, when cold and hunger kept me awake in that hideous den, had the deep but glorious sound of the mighty bell, booming through the air, and proclaiming the hour, fallen on my ears: but still I had never thought of inquiring which clock it was that struck so loud and was so tediously long in striking. Thus, when I entered Saint Paul's Churchyard for the first time, in company with Old Death, I was struck with amazement to find myself at the foot, as it were, of that tremendous giant of architecture. Just at that moment, too, the mighty bell began to strike six; and I started—for, young as I was, that well-known sound, though never heard so near before, re-awakened a thousand conflicting thoughts within me. All the misery and wretchedness I had endured at Mother Maggs's house rushed to my mind; and again I shed tears as I reflected on the poor children whom I had left behind me *there*!

"Oh! Mr. Rainford—if any kind and benevolent person had taken me then under his protection and care, and taught me to do good and practise virtue, as Old Death was teaching me to do evil and practise vice, I feel—yes, I feel that I should not have been unworthy such humane attention!

"But let me not interrupt the thread of my narrative more than I can help. Mr. Bones kept me by the hand, and walked slowly—very slowly through the churchyard, pointing out to me the beautiful shops, and telling me that if I was a good boy and only did what he told me, I should soon be rich enough to be able to walk into those shops and treat myself to jewellery, or fine clothes, or anything else I might fancy. This assurance gave me the most heart-felt joy; and I already began to determine in my mind what I should buy when the happy period of such affluence might arrive. All on a sudden my gay reverie was interrupted by Old Death, who, dragging me hastily to the entrance of a passage leading into Paternoster Row, pointed to an elderly gentleman standing at a shop-window at the corner where this passage joined St. Paul's Churchyard. 'Do you see his handkerchief peeping out of his coat-pocket?' demanded Old Death hastily.—'Yes,' I replied.—'Then go and get it, and I will give you sixpence, if you bring it to me, without the old fellow perceiving that you have taken it.'—Sixpence! It was an inexhaustible treasure, such as I had often heard of, seldom seen, and never touched. Without a moment's hesitation I proceeded to execute the task. It was winter-time; and though the evening was dark, yet the shop-windows were brilliantly lighted. This was against me—but on the other hand, the place was crowded with people passing both ways, and this circumstance was in my favour. Old Death stood watching me at the entrance of the passage—no doubt ready to glide away in case of me being detected. But my skill in cribbing victuals and other little articles in Upper Whitecross Street had been so well practised, that it only required to apply the same art to another and rather more difficult branch of thieving, to be completely successful. And this success far exceeded Old Death's expectations; for when I returned to him in the passage, I was enabled to place in his hands not only the old gentleman's pocket-handkerchief, but also his gold snuff-box.

"You may suppose that Mr. Bones was well-pleased with me; and he testified his approval of my conduct by placing a shilling in my hand. I could scarcely believe that I was indeed the possessor of such a sum; and I immediately made up my mind to ease as many old gentlemen as possible of their handkerchiefs and snuff-boxes, as long as a deed so simple was so generously rewarded.

"Old Death now conducted me to Drury Lane, and showing me a public-house, said, 'Jacob, though a young boy, you are a very good and clever boy, and I think I can trust you. If you assure me that you will do just as I tell you, I will give you a treat.'—I gave him the assurance he required.—'Well, then, walk boldly into that public-house; run up stairs, just as if you had been there a hundred times before; and go straight into the large concert-room that you will come to. You will have to pay a penny for going in. Then sit down at a table, call for bread and cheese and a glass of ale—of the nice ale that you like so much, you know; and enjoy yourself. You will find several other young lads there, who will no doubt speak to you; and you may talk to them as much as you like. I shall come into the room presently; but don't come near me; and don't tell any one there that you know me. I have my reasons; and if you do all I tell you, you shall often have a treat to a concert and such like places. When you see me going away, you can follow me at a little distance. Now

do you understand?'—I assured him that I did; and I then walked into the public-house as bold as if I had been a grown-up person and a constant customer. I had money in my pocket, and for the first time in my life felt that confidence which the possession of coin produces.

"The concert-room was speedily reached: my shilling was changed to pay the entrance fee; and I entered the place of amusement. It was—or had I not better say, it *is* a very large room; for it was at the *Mogul*, in Drury Lane, to which I had now introduced myself. The place was crowded; and the music and singing were going on. I was quite delighted, and, seating myself at a table near some other boys, all older than I was then, I told the waiter to bring me bread and cheese and a glass of ale. 'Better say a pint, old feller,' observed one of the boys to me: 'and I'll help you to drink it.'—I threw down the eleven-pence, saying, 'Bring bread and cheese and ale for all this.'—I remember that the waiter looked at me for a moment in a strange way, before he gathered up the money; but he said nothing, and hurried off. In a few minutes he returned with a pot of ale, bread and cheese, and several glasses. I was already on friendly terms with the boys at the same table; and we now got quite intimate over the ale. They soon let me know that they were all *prigs*; and I answered 'Yes' to every question they put to me about my own pursuits. Presently I saw Old Death walk slowly up the room: but I pretended to be looking quite another way.

"The conversation which I had on this occasion with the boys at the penny-concert, completed what was no doubt Old Death's design in sending me there: namely, to render me as familiar as possible with that class of lads at whose hands I was to receive my initiation into the career of roguery to which I was destined. The ale excited me to such a degree that I was even then ready to obey any one who would suggest a deed by which money could be obtained; for I saw that money was the key to all kinds of enjoyment. Presently Old Death walked slowly out of the room; and two or three minutes afterwards I followed him, having told my new companions that I should be sure to meet them again there next night. In the street I joined Old Death, who asked me how I liked all I had seen? You can guess what my answer was. 'Well,' said he, 'it is for you to get a handkerchief and a snuff-box, or any thing of that kind, every day; and then you shall have money to go to concerts, and to buy nice ale, and to enjoy yourself along with those pleasant boys that you met there.'—I was delighted with this prospect; and I thought Old Death the kindest gentleman in the world, in spite of the box on the ears he had given me at the slopseller's shop in the morning. But all this time, remember, I did not know either his real or his nick-name; nor did I trouble myself about such matters.

"He now conducted me to Castle Street, Long Acre, and putting sixpence into my hand, pointed to a particular house. 'Go and knock at that door,' he said, 'and ask for a bed. You will have to pay two-pence for it. The fourpence left is to buy your breakfast in the morning, which the woman of the house will give you for that money. If the people you meet there ask you any questions, say as little as possible, and don't speak a word about me. If you do, I shall be sure to know it, and I will never see you again. Be a good boy; and at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, meet me at the corner of this street.'—I promised to mind all he told me; and he hurried away, while I gained admittance into one of those filthy lodging-houses that swarm in Castle Street.[12]

"At this place, where I procured the half of a bed, my companion being a young girl of thirteen, who had already been a prostitute eighteen months, I received further lessons in the school of vice. In the morning I obtained a cup of coffee and a couple of rounds of thick bread-and-butter for my fourpence: having disposed of which, I hastened to my appointment with Old Death. He was waiting for me at the corner of the street, and asked me a great many questions about the people I had seen at the lodging-house. I satisfied him as far as I could; but, through some lingering feeling of shame, I did not tell him that a prostitute had been my bed-fellow. He desired me to follow him at a considerable distance, but to mind and not lose sight of him. He then led me for a long walk all about the West-end of London,—proceeding slowly, so that I might have an opportunity of looking at the shops and obtaining some knowledge of the position of the different streets: in a word, that I might be able to find my way about by myself another time. At about one o'clock we went into a public-house, where we had something to eat and drink, and rested for two or three hours. Then we set out on our wanderings again, and at about seven o'clock in the evening, we came to a halt in St. Giles's, where Old Death gave me money to enter a penny-theatre. I had not practised my hand at stealing any thing all day long; because he had not instructed me to do so. Neither, from that moment, did he ever put my abilities in that way to the test in his presence: so I suppose that the little affair in St. Paul's Churchyard was merely an experiment made to enable him to judge whether I had any *talent* in the art of *conveyancing*, or not. In fact, he had tried me to ascertain whether I could be made useful; and, finding that I could, his object was now to introduce me to scenes and places where my morals might become confirmed in iniquity, or where there was a sphere for the exercise of my abilities.

"I need not therefore dwell on this part of my story; for in a few days the use which Old Death calculated to make of me was fully explained. I was to thieve where I could and when I could, and every evening I was to meet my employer at some place that he would appoint, and hand him over the articles so stolen; when he was to give me enough money for the following day's expenses. I was, moreover, charged to enlist in the same service as many boys as I could; and now for the first time I learnt that my hitherto unknown protector was named Mr. Benjamin Bones, and my companions soon informed me that he was a famous *fence*, usually bearing the denomination of 'Old Death.' I must not forget to state that my employer counselled me never to allude to him in any manner, unless it was in the way of enlistment, as just now mentioned. He said, 'It will perhaps happen, Jacob, that a constable or a Bow Street runner may catch hold of you sometimes; but do not breathe a word about me, and I will always get you out of the scrape. If, on the other hand, you confess that you are employed by me, or that you are in my service, it will do you no good, and I should cast you off for ever. Indeed, I should leave you to rot in prison; whereas, hold your tongue, whatever may happen, and you will find me your best friend.'

"I promised to obey him; and now, behold me at the tender age of nine, the companion of the worst juvenile pickpockets, and a pickpocket myself! No link had we to bind us to society: the world was our harvest-field, in which we considered that we had a right to glean; and whenever a member of our fraternity got 'into trouble,' we clubbed together to maintain him well in prison. If he was condemned to punishment, he and ourselves looked upon it as a piece of *bad luck*—and that was all. I found that my companions were

as reckless and improvident as could be,—ever fulfilling the old adage, '*Light come, light go*.' They used to play at 'pitch and toss,' or skittles, the stakes varying, according to their means at the moment, from a halfpenny to a sovereign. I was not often enabled to join in these sports; because Old Death kept me rather short, and he had obtained such an astonishing influence over me that I dared not attempt to deceive him. Sometimes I thought of appropriating a portion of a '*day's work*' to my own private use; but his image haunted me like a ghost—and I could not do it. He constantly told me that he had the means of ascertaining every robbery that was committed, and who perpetrated it, and that if I attempted to play him any tricks, I should be sure to be found out. I believed him—for he occasionally gave me proofs of the most extraordinary knowledge of all that was passing. He would say, for instance, 'Your friend Such-a-one filched a snuff-box and a pocket-book yesterday in Regent Street: he gave *his* employer the book, and pawned the box on his own account. Now, mark me,' Old Death would add, 'that boy will get into trouble soon, and no one will help him out of it again.'—And this prophecy would come true. I was therefore alarmed at the mere idea of deceiving Old Death—or rather, attempting to deceive him; and, though my companions often jeered me and urged me to '*set up on my own account*,' I lacked the moral courage to break with Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"I was very expert in the art of pickpocketing, and seldom had to disappoint Old Death when I met him in the evening. If I did, he gave me my money all the same: I suppose I was too useful to him to be lost; and perhaps he knew that I always did my best. He allowed me three shillings and sixpence for each day's expenses; and this money was usually laid out in the way I will now explain:—

Breakfast.—Pint of coffee, 2*d.*; loaf of bread, 2*d.*; butter, 1*d.*	0*s.*	5*d.*
Dinner.—Beef, 3*d.*; potatoes, 1*d.*; bread, 1*d.*; beer, 2*d.*	0	7
Tea.—Half-pint tea, 1½*d.*; toast, 3*d.*	0	4½
Supper.—Leg of beef, 3*d.*; bread, 1*d.*; potatoes, 1*d.*; beer, 2*d.*	0	7
Gin and water, 1*s.*; bed, 4*d.*	1	4
	3	3½

—leaving me 2½*d.* a day for any casual expense. This allowance of 3*s.* 6*d.* may perhaps seem rather liberal; but it was seldom that my *earnings* during the day were not of sufficient value to produce Old Death at least fifteen or twenty shillings—and often a great deal more.

"There are various grades, or classes, of juvenile thieves.[13] The most aristocratic amongst them are those who have been admitted into the fraternity of swell-moabites, or who have taken a hand in housebreaking. The next class, on the descending scale, is the pickpocket who dives only for purses, watches, pocket-books, or snuff-boxes, but who would scorn to touch a handkerchief. The third section consists of those who dive for any thing they can get, and whose chief game *does* consist of handkerchiefs. The fourth division comprises shop-sneaks and area-sneaks: the former enter a shop slily, or crawl in on their hands and knees, to rob the tills; the latter get down area-steps and enter kitchens, whence they walk off with any thing they can lay their hands on. This same section also includes the shop-bouncer, who boldly enters a shop, and, while affecting to bargain for goods, purloins some article easily abstracted. The fifth division is made up of thieves who prowl about shop-doors; or who break the glass in shop-windows, to abstract the goods; or who rob mercers by introducing a bent wire through the holes of the shutter-bolts, and draw out lace, silk, or ribands. The sixth, and last division or grade, consists of the very lowest description of thieves—such as pudding-snammers, who loiter about cooks'-shops, and when customers are issuing forth with plates of meat and pudding, or pudding alone (as is often the case), pounce on the eatables and run away with them before the persons robbed have even time to recover from their astonishment. These miserable thieves sell all they cannot eat, to other boys, and thus manage to get a few halfpence to pay for a lodging. I mention all these circumstances to you, sir, because I do not believe that you can have ever found yourself in a position to have seen what I am now relating.[14]

"On one occasion a certain robbery in which I was concerned, made some noise; and the Bow Street runners got a pretty accurate description of me. This I learnt from Old Death, who advised me to go up into the Holy Land—which I need scarcely tell you is St. Giles's—and remain quiet there for a few days until the thing was pretty well blown over. I followed this advice, which was very welcome to me; because Mr. Bones gave me plenty of money to make myself comfortable, and I was not expected to do any '*work*' for at least a week. I happened to take up my quarters at a lodging-house in Lawrence Lane, and found it chiefly used by the very lowest Irish. Never did I see such a set as they were! Filth, misery, and drunkenness were familiar enough to me, heaven knows!—but there I saw such filth, so much misery, and yet such constant and such horrible drunkenness, that I was perfectly shocked—and it required something strong to shock *me*, Mr. Rainford! The house was a brothel; and the daughters of the man who kept it were their own father's

best customers. The most dreadful debauchery prevailed there. Old women used to bring young boys, and old men young girls—mere children,—to that beastly stew. I have seen a dozen men and women all dancing together stark naked in the largest room in that house; and some of them brothers and sisters![15] On another occasion I saw an Irish wake in the same place: the corpse, which was that of a prostitute, was laid upon the floor, with candles placed round it: and the friends and relatives of the deceased woman all got so awfully drunk that they commenced a dreadful battle, tumbling about in all directions over the dead body!

"I stayed at this lodging-house in St. Giles's about a week, and never went out except of an evening for about an hour, when I looked in at Milberry's—the flash public-house in Lawrence Lane. Were you ever there, sir? No. Well—it is worth your while just to give a look in any time you are passing. The public room is fitted up with fine tables and high-back partitions. Fronting the door is a large black board, whereon the following inscription may be read:—

My pipe I can't afford to give,
If by my trade I wish to live;
My liquor's proof, my measure's just:
Excuse me, sir, I *cannot* trust.

'To prevent MISTAKES all liquors to be paid for on delivery!'

"As soon as the little affair, which had driven me up into St. Giles's, was blown over, I returned to my old haunts, and fell in again with my old companions. I was now ten years old, and was considered so cunning and clever that Old Death began to employ me in other ways besides thieving. If he required to know any thing concerning a particular party, he would set me to dog and watch him, or to make inquiries about him. Sometimes I was sent to the flash public-houses frequented by gentlemen's servants who were accustomed to arrange with the cracksmen for burglaries in their master's houses—or '*put up cracks*,' as they are called. These public-houses are principally at the West End:—the most famous are in Duke Street (Manchester Square), and Portland Street. There I got into conversation with the servants, or merely acted the part of a listener; and all the information I could glean was of course conveyed to Mr. Bones, who no doubt knew how to turn it to his greatest advantage.

"I was also a visitor to every flash-house in London, at different times, and on various errands for Old Death. The more his business increased, the more necessary did I become to him; and at that period he was not so near and stingy as he since became. Whenever I succeeded in any difficult undertaking, he would reward me with something like liberality; and I don't know whether I actually liked him—but it is certain that he exercised an immense power over my mind. I was, in my turn, much looked up to by my companions: they considered me Old Death's lieutenant; and moreover I was so skilful as a pickpocket, that no one could excel, and few equal me. I had all the qualifications necessary for the art—a light tread, a delicate sense of touch, and firm nerves. For I was then strong and healthy: now I am sickly—wasted—and have within me the seeds of an incurable malady! I used at that time to wear shoes of a very light make—as indeed do nearly all professional pickpockets. It is very easy for one who is any thing of an acute observer, to recognise juvenile pickpockets in the street. Their countenances wear an affected determination of purpose, and they always seem to be walking forward, as if bent on some urgent object of business. They never stop in the street, save to '*work*.' If they wish to confer with their pals, or if they meet a friend, they dive into some low public-house, or court, or alley. A knowing pickpocket never loiters about in the street; because that is the very first thing that draws suspicions glances towards lads. I have read—(and how I came to be able to read, I shall presently tell you)—in the newspapers that many people have a notion that pickpockets use instruments in easing gentlemen or ladies of their purses or other articles of value: but the only instrument I ever knew a pickpocket to use, or used myself, is a good pair of small scissors, which will either rip a pocket up or cut it off in a twinkling.

"I do believe that London thieves[16] are the very worst in the whole world. Their profligacy commences so early; and there is every thing to harden them. Imprisonment raises them into heroes amongst their companions. Only fancy a boy of twelve or thirteen, perhaps,—or even younger,—placed behind huge massive bars which ten elephants could not pull down! He of course thinks that he must be a very clever fellow, or at least a very important one, that the law is compelled to adopt such wonderful precautions to restrain him. He believes that society must entertain a marvellous dread of his abilities. That boy, too, is the superior in the eyes of the whole fraternity of thieves, whose punishment is the heaviest. A lad who has been tried at the Old Bailey, thinks much more of himself than one who has only passed through the ordeal of the sessions. The very pomp of justice,—the idea that all those judges and barristers in their gowns and wigs should be assembled for the sake of a boy,—that the Old Bailey street should be crowded with policemen,—that newspaper reporters should be anxious to take notes,—that spectators should pay shillings to obtain sittings in the court,—in a word, the whole ceremony and circumstance of the criminal tribunals actually tend to imbue juvenile thieves with a feeling of self-importance. Now, might not this very feeling be acted upon to a good and beneficial purpose,—to the advancement of industry and honest emulation? I think so; but society never seems to adopt really useful measures to *reform*—it contents itself with *punishing*. You may be surprised to hear such reflections come from my lips: but who is better able to judge than one who has passed through the entire ordeal?"

Here Jacob paused, and then inquired if he were wearying Tom Rain with his narrative.

"So far from your doing so, my good fellow," replied the highwayman, "that although I have several things to attend to, I mean to stop and hear you to the end. Come, drink a glass of wine. There! now you will be the better able to proceed. I will light another cigar—for I fancy that I can attend more earnestly while smoking."

Rainford once more settled himself in a comfortable posture; and the lad pursued his narrative in the following manner.

12. Although our aim is to render the "History of Jacob Smith" a regular and connected narrative of the initiation of a neglected child in the ways of vice and the career of crime, there are necessarily many phases in the history of juvenile iniquity which cannot be introduced into the text, as it would be impossible that the boy who is telling his story could have gone through all the scenes alluded to. We must, therefore, farther illustrate our aim by means of a few notes, derived from authentic sources: and this course we are the more inclined to pursue, inasmuch as we hope that the episode formed by the "History of Jacob Smith" may have the effect of directing public attention more seriously than ever to the awful nature and extent of juvenile depravity in this metropolis. Mr. Miles, in his "Report to the House of Lords on Poverty, Mendicity, and Crime," places on record the following observations:—

 "The women and the girls in these districts live with their men as long as they can agree together, or until one or the other be imprisoned or transported. The very children are prostitutes, living with their "fancy lads;" and it is difficult to say which are the most degraded, the men or the women, the girls or the boys. It is thus that I suppose crime is more engendered in low neighbourhoods, where the poorest and the most idle congregate: and I now beg to continue my remarks upon the second head, namely, the neglect of parents. The various pursuits of these parents call them from home during the greater portion of the day, and their children are left to play and idle in the streets, associating with other lads of more experience than themselves, until, seeing and hearing how easy it is to steal, they commence their career of crime, unchecked on the one hand and applauded on the other. There are some parents who turn their children out every morning to provide for themselves, not caring by what means they procure a subsistence, so that the expense of feeding them does not abstract from their means of procuring gin or beer. Other parents require their children to bring home a specified sum every night, to obtain which they must beg or thieve. Others hire out their children to beggars, for 3*d.* a day (a cripple is considered worth 6*d.*); and many women hire children in arms about the same age, to pass them off in the public thoroughfares as twins. Groups of these young neglected vagabonds herd together, and theft becomes their study; even if a child was well disposed, it is not probable that he could escape the contagion of such bad example. There is a *community of children*, who live and are separated from persons more advanced in years. Moreover, there is so rapid and so certain a communication among them all over the metropolis, that if they discover any of their slang or flash words to be known out of their circle, they will substitute another, which in the course of a day or two will be adopted by the fraternity. There are lodging-houses exclusively for their accommodation, public-houses which are chiefly supported by their custom, and the landlords of both sorts of establishments are ever ready to purchase any plunder they may bring. With this neglect of parents on the one hand, and the faculties to crime on the other hand, can it be expected that these children can resist temptation? The wonder would be if a boy was honest. My conclusion, therefore, is, that the neglect of parents in these low neighbourhoods renders them *nurseries* of crime. The number of boys in London who live by plunder is very—very considerable: and thus society is maintaining them at a great expense, either in the shape of prison expenses, or by the value of the property they steal, especially when it is considered that the receivers never give one quarter the value: and there is not a boy thief who, on the average, does not expend 5*s.* per diem."

13. In the First Series of the "MYSTERIES OF LONDON," Vol. II. ch. CXCII., there is a detailed account of an association denominated "The Forty Thieves." Soon after the Weekly Number containing that chapter appeared, we were inundated with letters, chiefly expressing unqualified disbelief of the astonishing particulars recorded in respect to the Forty Thieves. We answered all those which contained the real names and addresses of the writers, assuring them that the details related were strictly true, and that we actually possessed a printed copy of the regulations by which the Forty Thieves were governed. Still, most of our correspondents were sceptical. It was therefore with a feeling almost bordering on satisfaction that we saw in the *Morning Chronicle*, a few weeks ago, a report of a police-case in which the prisoner who figured before the magistrate was described as "belonging to an association denominated the 'Forty Thieves,' and whose head-quarters were in the Mint, Southwark." We take this opportunity of assuring our readers that of what they find recorded in the "MYSTERIES OF LONDON," far—far more is based on fact than they might at first suspect.

14. Mr. Miles, in his Report (from which we have previously quoted) says, "In considering the subject of juvenile delinquency, it is requisite to take into account the various causes which compel them to be vicious; and though we must condemn, still we must regret that no efficient means have been adopted to prevent this lamentable evil. Young thieves have often confessed to me, that their first attempts at stealing commenced at apple stalls, and that having acquired confidence by a few successful adventures, they have gradually progressed in crime, allured by others, and in their turn alluring. They find companions to cheer them and instruct them, girls to share their booty and applaud them, and every facility to sell their daily booty. There is, moreover, a kind of lottery adventure in each day's life; and as these excitements are attainable at so easy a rate, is it strange that these children are fascinated with and abandon themselves to crime? Imprisonment to a young urchin who steals and has no other means of subsistence is no punishment; for it is indifferent to him where he exists, so long as he has food and raiment. It is in prison that boys form acquaintances, more mischievous than themselves. Many lads have owned to me that they had learned more in a gaol than out of one. I once asked a lad if there was any school where boys were taught to pick pockets? Upon which he significantly observed, 'No occasion for one, sir: the best school for that sort of thing is HERE!' alluding to the prison in which I saw him."

15. We cannot allow the readers to attribute to *our* imagination a fact so disgusting as this. We received the information from a police-officer who was an eye-witness of such a scene, and from whom (as stated in a previous note in this Series) we have gleaned many remarkable facts relative to the lowest orders.

16. Mr. Miles's Report says, "London thieves have no sense of moral degradation; they are corrupt to the core; they are strangers to virtue and character, even by name; for many of them are the children of thieves or of exceedingly dissolute people,

consequently they can have no contrition; they are in a state of predatory existence, without any knowledge of social duty; they may lament detection, because it is an inconvenience, but they will not repent their crime; in gaol they will ponder on the past, curse their 'evil stars,' and look forward with anxiety to the moment of their release; but their minds and habits are not constituted for repentance. Mr. Chesterton, of the House of Correction, informed me that he considers reformation among juvenile offenders to be utterly hopeless; he observed, that 'boys brought up in a low neighbourhood have no chance of being honest, because on leaving a gaol they return to their old haunts, and follow the example of their parents or associates.' Lieutenant Tracy, of the Westminster Bridewell, has pointed out to me lads who live constantly in gaols.

"Captain Kincaid, of the City Bridewell, informed me that one-half of the number under his lock on the day that I inspected the prison (June the 9th) had been more than once committed, many of them several times, especially the boys. Mr. Teague, of the Giltspur-street Compter, is of opinion that young thieves are mostly incorrigible—that nothing will reform them; an opinion which, he says, he has formed from the experience of many years. Mr. Capper, of the Home Office, stated, in his evidence, that out of 300 juvenile convicts, on board the hulk *Euryalus*, the eldest of whom was not 17, 133 had been committed more than once; and an experienced burglar told me that young thieves cannot and will not reform. 'The only thing, sir,' he remarked, 'that may save them is transportation, as it removes them from evil companions.'

"The young thief is a nucleus of mischief. A young pickpocket, named Stuart, aged 13, informed me that his parents daily sent him into the streets to 'look about,' that is, to plunder whatever he could lay his hands upon; that his principal associates were three young thieves with whom he 'worked,' or robbed; that when he was 10 years old he stood at a horse's head while his companion stole a great coat from the gig; that he got sixpence for his share of the plunder; that he had committed many robberies because he was made to do it; and that he lived entirely by plunder. Mr. Chesterton states, in his evidence before the select committee of the House of Commons in answer to query 474, 'Some of the parents lead their children into evil courses. It is no uncommon thing, when we are listening to the conversation between the prisoners and their parents, to hear a conversation that shows at once the boy's situation; but the old thieves are in the habit of bringing in with them young inexperienced lads. Whenever the elder thieves are recommitted, they are frequently recommitted with another.' He also observes (522) that 'the elder thieves are continually corrupting young lads, and bringing them into prison.'

"I am informed that Captain Brenton considers the total number of juvenile offenders within the bills of mortality to be 12,000. Dr. Lushington, I believe, computed the number still higher; and from the evidence above quoted it is evident that each elder offender is daily spreading the mischief far and wide.

"There is a youthful population in the metropolis devoted to crime, trained to it from infancy, adhering to it from education and circumstances, whose connections prevent the possibility of reformation, and whom no punishment can deter; a race '*sui generis*,' different from the rest of society, not only in thoughts, habits, and manners, but even in appearance; possessing, moreover, a language exclusively their own. There are lodging-houses kept by old thieves where juvenile offenders herd together, and their constant intercourse tends to complete corruption. It is in these hotbeds of vice that they revel in the fruits of their plunder; and though extremely young, they live with girls, indulging in every kind of debauchery."

CHAPTER XXXIX.
CONTINUATION OF THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"I now come to an important event in my life—in fact, that portion of it which will account for this sickly condition of health in which you see me. Old Death one evening took me with him to supper at a place where he had never introduced me before. This was Bunce's in Earl Street, Seven Dials. Mrs. Bunce immediately seemed to take a great fancy to me—made me sit next to her—and, in spite of her meanness, helped me to the best of every thing on table. It was a very good supper; for Old Death, who provided it, had declared that he meant to launch out for once. But I suppose it was only to put me into such a good humour that I was the more likely to fall into the scheme which he had in view. This was not, however, the reason of Mrs. Bunce's kindness; because since then she has often treated me in a manner that has made me forget many a sorrow. It is true that these likings only take her by fits and starts—and she has not unfrequently used me cruelly enough. I can scarcely make that woman out, as far as I am concerned; and there are moments when I think a great deal of any kind words she has ever uttered to me, or any kind treatment she has ever shown me.

"But I am wandering from the subject which I had entered upon. You remember that I was telling you about the supper at Bunce's house. Well, after the things were cleared away, and the grog was going round pretty fast,—I used to drink then as much as a man, although little more than ten years old;—Old Death began to talk a great deal about the money that might be made by a clever lad like me being able to get admittance into the houses of rich people. He went on to say that I should begin to think of doing business that would leave me more time to amuse myself, and be also less dangerous than going about the streets picking pockets. I assured him that I was heartily sick and tired of the life I was leading, and that I wished I was old enough to be a housebreaker. 'For,' said I, 'a cracksman does have some time which he can call his own. If he does only one job a week, he is satisfied: but I am obliged to gad about all day to get the means of living on the next. Besides,' said I, 'I am of course running a thousand times more risks by doing so many jobs each day, than I should if I only did one or two a week.'[17]—'Everybody must have his apprenticeship,' returned Old Death, 'and you have now served yours. I agree with you that it is high time for you to be doing something better; and I have a plan ready chalked out for you.'—Mrs. Bunce mixed me another glass of grog: I produced my short pipe, and blew a cloud while Old Death explained his scheme. At first I did not much relish it: but he backed it with so many arguments, that I agreed to try it.

"And, sure enough, at six o'clock one morning—a few days afterwards—a boy, black as a devil, with soot-bag over his shoulder, and brush and scraper in his hand, was making the round of Bloomsbury Square, bawling, '*Sweep!*' as lustily as he could. That boy was myself. Presently a garret-window opened, and a female voice called me to stop. I obeyed. In a few minutes down came the cook to the front door, and I was desired to walk in and operate on the kitchen-chimney. The cook was a fat, middle-aged, good-natured body, and asked me a great many questions about myself,—how long I had been a sweep—how it happened that I became one—whether I had any father or mother—and a host of such queries; to all of which I replied in the most sorrowful manner possible. I assured her that I had been a sweep from infancy—that I had swept a chimney when I was only five years old—that I had no parents—that my master beat me cruelly—and that I had had nothing to eat since the morning before. The good creature shed tears at my narrative; and, when I had swept the chimney—which I did in a manner that scarcely bore out the assertion of my long experience—she gave me a quantity of broken victuals in addition to the money earned. I then took my departure, having very quietly deposited half-a-dozen silver forks and spoons in my soot-bag, while her back was turned.

"This business I carried on successfully enough for some months; till at last Old Death told me that he had seen several paragraphs in the papers, warning people against thefts committed by sweeps. I therefore gave up the employment, and once more took refuge in St. Giles's. But my health was seriously injured by the occupation I had just renounced; and from that time I have always been ailing and sickly. Although I had seldom turned sweep more than twice a week, and an hour after each robbery that I thus committed was as clean again as if I had never been near a chimney in my life,—yet the seeds of disease were planted in me, and I feel the effects here—here—in my chest!

"The life that I led when I gave up the chimney-sweep business, did not certainly tend to improve my health. I hired a room in St. Giles's, and took a girl into keeping—I being then eleven, and she thirteen. Of all profligate creatures, Peggy Wilkins was the worst. The moment she awoke in the morning, she must have her half-quartern of gin; and then she would go on drinking at short intervals all day long. If I attempted to stop the supplies, she would fly into the most dreadful passions, break every thing she could lay her hands on, or else throw the domestic articles at my head. When tipsy, she would loll half naked out of the window, and chaff the people passing in the street. In the evening she went to the penny concerts or penny theatres,[18] and generally came home so gloriously drunk that the entire house, much less our little room, would scarcely hold her. You may wonder why I continued to live with her: but the fact is, I liked her in spite of her outrageous conduct, and as I was sometimes very dull and low, her noisy, rackety disposition positively helped to put me into good spirits. She knew nothing of my connexion with Old Death; but she was aware that I was laying hid in St. Giles's in consequence of having robbed houses disguised as a sweep; and she used to laugh heartily when I told her several amusing

anecdotes relative to that portion of my career.

"One night—after having lived about a month in idleness in the Holy Land—I was compelled by the falling short of supplies, to call at Bunce's in Seven Dials, for the purpose of seeing Old Death. After waiting there a short time, he came in; and I immediately noticed that his face was more serious than usual,—a certain sign that he had something new on hand. I did not, however, venture to ask any questions; for I still stood in the greatest awe of him, and knew that his disposition was irritable and easy to be provoked. At length he said to Mrs. Bunce, 'Give that lad a good strong glass of grog: he's shivering with cold.'—I was not, but I took the grog, because I never refused spirits at that time. When Old Death thought I was primed enough to embrace any new plan with eagerness, he said, 'Jacob, I have something for you to do that I am convinced will yield a good harvest.'—I instantly became all attention.—'There's a widow lady,' he continued, 'living at the West End, in a swell street; and, by all I can learn, she is very well off. She is also very charitable, and belongs to a number of what's called Religious Societies; and I am sure you could get into her house as easy as possible. The chimney-sweep business has well-nigh blown over, if not quite; and it's high time to begin a new dodge.'—He then explained his plan; and I agreed to adopt it.

"When I got back to my lodging in St Giles's, I found Peggy sitting in company with a young fellow of about fifteen, drinking raw spirits. She had not expected me home so early, and was for a moment quite taken aback. But soon recovering herself, she put a good face on the matter, and introduced the young chap as her brother; saying that she had not seen him for many years before that evening, when she had met him by accident. I pretended to believe her; but the moment he was gone, I gave her a good beating and overwhelmed her with reproaches. She showed less spirit than I had expected, and did not attempt to return the blows; neither did she treat me with sulkiness or ill-humour.

"On the following evening, at about nine o'clock, I very quietly laid myself down on the door-steps of a house in Old Burlington Street. I was in such rags and tatters as to be almost naked; and having pricked my feet, with a pointed bit of wood, in several places, they were almost covered with blood, as if chapped with the cold and cut by the sharp stones. This was in the depth of winter; and my appearance was most miserable. Presently a carriage drove up to the house, and a fine, tall, elderly gentleman got out. I was crouched up close by the threshold of the door, and I purposely let him tread on one of my naked feet. Then I began to sob as if with pain; and he now observed me for the first time. He muttered an oath; but at that instant the front-door opened, and his manner changed directly. He spoke kindly to me, and put half-a-crown into my hand. A lady was crossing the hall while the door stood open and this gentleman was still speaking to me; and she immediately turned to ascertain what was the matter. 'Here's a poor, wretched creature,' said the gentleman, 'who was so huddled up against the door, that I did not observe him; and I am afraid I trod on his leg somewhat heavily.'—The lady instantly spoke in the most compassionate terms, and desired that I might be brought into the house. The man-servant raised me, for I affected to be unable to walk; and the lady said, 'Poor boy, he is paralysed with the cold!'—When I was moved into the hall, and placed in a chair, the state of my feet was observed; and this increased the compassion I had already excited. She ordered the servant to take me into the kitchen, and give me a good supper, while I warmed myself by the fire.

"All these commands were immediately executed; shoes and stockings were also supplied me; and in the course of an hour the lady herself came down to speak to me. She asked me who I was. I told her a long and piteous tale, already prepared for the occasion,—how I had been apprenticed to a tradesman at Liverpool, and had undergone the most dreadful treatment because I refused to work on the Lord's Day and insisted on my right to go to church; how the cruelty of my master had increased to such an extent, that I was obliged to run away; how I had wandered about the country for the last two months, subsisting on charity, but often half-starved; how I had that morning found my way to London, and had been obliged to sell my shoes for a penny to buy a roll, which was all I had eaten during thirty-six hours: but that I had an aunt who was housekeeper to a certain Bishop, and that I knew she would do all she could for me. The lady seemed to eye me suspiciously until I spoke of the aunt and the Bishop; and then her countenance instantly changed in my favour. 'Well, my poor lad,' she said, 'you shall remain here to-night; and the first thing to-morrow morning, one of my servants shall take a message from you to your aunt.'—I of course expressed my gratitude for this kindness; but the lady assured me that she required no thanks, as heaven rewarded her for what she did towards her suffering fellow-creatures. I really thought that there was something very much like what I and my usual associates were accustomed to call '*gammon*' in all this; and then I actually reproached myself for the idea, and began to repent of imposing on so much virtue and goodness.

"When I was well warmed with the cheerful fire and plentiful supper, the housekeeper of this lady conducted me to a little room on the top storey, and having wished me a 'good night,' retired, locking the door behind her. But this did not give me much uneasiness; for beneath my rags I had concealed the necessary means to counteract such a precaution. Accordingly, about an hour after I had heard the servants withdraw to their bed-rooms, which were on the same floor as the one where I was placed,—and when I thought the house was all quiet,—I took off the lock of the door by means of a little turn-screw, and crept carefully down stairs. Just at that minute the clock struck eleven. My intention was to visit the drawing-room first; but when I reached the door, I perceived there were lights within. I listened, and heard the gentleman and lady talking together. 'Oh! ho,' thought I, 'I shall have time to inspect the lady's bed-room first, and perhaps secure her jewels.'—So, naturally conceiving that this chamber must be the one immediately over the drawing-room, I retraced my way up stairs, and entered the front apartment on the second floor. A rush-light was burning in the room; but no one was there. I lost no time in commencing my search in all the cupboards; but I found nothing except clothes. There was, however, a mahogany press which was fast locked. I drew forth a small skeleton key, and was about to use it, when I was alarmed by footsteps in the passage. In another moment I was safely concealed under the bed.

"Some one almost immediately afterwards entered the room, and only closed the door without shutting it. I dared not move even to peep from beneath the drapery that hung round the bed to the floor: but I could tell by the rustling of silk and the unlacing of stays, that the person in the room was undressing herself—and I felt satisfied it was the lady of the house. I was now seriously alarmed. She was evidently going to bed; and my only chance of escaping from the chamber was when she should be asleep. But might I not disturb her? My situation was very unpleasant—and a prison seemed to open before my eyes.

"In about a quarter of an hour the lady stepped into bed. How I longed to catch the first sound that should convince me she was asleep! But she was not dreaming of closing her eyes yet awhile; for scarcely had she laid herself down, when the door was gently opened—then carefully closed again—and *another person*, evidently without shoes or boots on, came into the room. They said a few words to each other; and to my astonishment I found that the gentleman who had arrived in his carriage (which of course had been sent away) was going to pass an hour in company with the charitable lady. 'Well,' thought I, 'this is the way in which heaven rewards her for all she does towards her suffering fellow-creatures!'

"The gentleman undressed himself, and got into bed. Nearly two hours, instead of an hour, passed away—very pleasantly, it seemed, for the lady and gentleman, and very much to my amusement. I was now no longer under any alarm on account of myself—for I had learnt a secret which placed the lady in my power. Well, the gentleman got up at last and dressed himself; and the lady went down stairs with him to bolt the street-door after him. Their movements were so cautious, that I could plainly perceive the servants must have fancied that the gentleman had gone away long before, and that this care was taken to avoid disturbing them with any noise likely to excite suspicion.

"The moment the lady had left the room with her lover, I thought of beating a retreat. But should I go empty-handed? No: and yet I had not time to force open the mahogany press, which I believed must contain her jewels, before she would come back, as she had gone down in her night-clothes. I therefore resolved to stay where I was, and accomplish my purpose when she was asleep; because if matters did come to the worst and she should awake, she dared not expose me. So I laid quiet; and she came back in a few minutes, shivering with the cold—for I could hear her teeth actually chatter. Half an hour afterwards she was fast asleep—as I could tell by her deep and regular breathing. The rush-light still burnt in the room; and I crept carefully from beneath the bed. Yes—she was sleeping; and, though not a young woman, she appeared very beautiful. But I had not a minute to lose: my skeleton key was again at work—the bolt of the lock flew back—and the door of the press moved on its hinges. Move! yes—and creak, too, most awfully; so that the lady started up in bed, and uttered a faint scream. I instantly rushed up to her, saying in a low but determined tone, 'Madam, not a word—or I betray you and your lover!'—By the feeble light of the candle, I saw that she became as red as crimson.—'Yes, madam,' I continued, 'your tricks are known to me; and I have been all the while concealed under this bed.'—'You!' she exclaimed: 'why, surely you are the poor boy that I received into the house this evening?'—'To be sure I am, ma'am,' was my answer; 'and, being troubled with a habit of sleep-walking, I found my way to this room.'—'But what were you doing at the bureau?'—'Merely examining it in my sleep, ma'am.'—'This is ridiculous,' she said impatiently. 'I understand what you are; but I will treat you well on condition that you do not mention to a soul what you have been a witness of this night.'—'I have no interest in gossiping, ma'am.'—'And were you to do so, I can deny all you may state,' added the lady, who was dreadfully excited and nervous, as you may suppose. 'But if you follow my directions, I will reward you well.'—I readily gave a promise to that effect. She then took a reticule from a chair by the side of the bed, and drawing out her purse, emptied its contents into my hands. At a rapid glance I saw there could not be less than fifteen or sixteen sovereigns, besides a little silver. She then took from her bag a Bank-note for twenty pounds, which she also gave me.

"I secured the money about my person, and she asked me whether I was satisfied? I said, 'Perfectly.'——'Then stand aside for a few moments, and I will show you how to act.'——I stepped behind the curtain, while she rose and put on a dressing-gown; having done which, she took the rush-light in her hand and desired me to follow her as noiseless as possible. We went down into the kitchen, where she told me to take all the cold victuals there were in the larder; and she gave me a napkin to wrap them up in. There happened to be a silver spoon in one of the dishes—left there most probably by accident. This she also desired me to take; and you may be sure I did not refuse. These arrangements being made, she led me to the front door, and having reminded me of my promise not to talk about a certain affair, let me out of the house. I have no doubt that there was a great deal said next morning in Old Burlington Street, about the ungrateful lad who was taken in as an object of charity, and who decamped in the middle of the night with the contents of the larder and a silver spoon into the bargain."

"But you have not mentioned the name of this lady, Jacob?" interrupted Tom Rain.

"I did not think it was worth while, sir—as she used me very well——"

"Still I have a very particular reason for wishing to be informed on that head," said the highwayman.

"Oh! if that's the case, I shall not hesitate," replied Jacob. "The name of that lady was Mrs. Slingsby."

"I thought so from the very first moment you began to speak of her!" cried Tom. "And the name of the gentleman—did you learn *that*?"

"Yes, sir," answered the lad: "I heard the servants talking about him, when I was in the kitchen. His name was—let me see?—Oh! yes—I remember—Sir Henry Courtenay."

"Thank you, Jacob," exclaimed Tom: then, in a low, musing tone, he said, "Poor Clarence! you are woefully deceived in your saint of an aunt!"

"Shall I continue my story, Mr. Rainford?" asked Jacob. "It will not last much longer now."

"By all means go on, my boy. I would sit here till day-light, sooner than miss the end."

Thus encouraged, Jacob continued in the following manner.

17. Every juvenile delinquent is as anxious to rise in his "profession" as the military or naval officer, or the member of any other hierarchy. But with the votaries of crime the apex of promotion is—the gibbet! Mr. Miles says, "I have questioned many boys of shrewd understanding concerning their opinions, and the opinions of their associates, as to their ultimate fate (for all thieves are

fatalists). They look upon their inevitable doom to be either sooner or later transportation or the drop! It is difficult to imagine a state of more gloomy wretchedness and more despairingly horrible than the self-conviction of condign punishment, without one gleam of hope to clear the melancholy perspective. Punishments and whippings are therefore useless, for the mind is prepared to endure more, and every imprisonment is only looked upon as another step in the ladder of their sad destiny. The lad is hopeless, consequently reckless in his conduct,—hardened to the present, and irreclaimable as to the future. It is not by prison discipline that reformation can be effected: the temptations, the facilities, and the love of idleness are too alluring. Crowds of young thieves will wait round a prison-gate, to hail a companion on the morning of his liberation, and to carry him off to treat him and regale him for the day. I have asked boys under sentence of transportation if they thought they *could* reform, if returned again upon society, and the general reply has been, 'No.' Their reasons for that conclusion I give in their own words:—'If we were to be free to-morrow, we must go to our old haunts and our old companions, for where else *can* we go? If we try to be honest we cannot, for our 'pals' (associates) would torment us to return; in short, we should only have to come back here at last, but we are now going to another country, where we hope to be honest men.'

"I have, moreover, questioned many lads as to what method they would adopt to prevent other boys from falling into crime, and their remarks have been, 'Stop playing in the streets, for a pocket is soon picked, and there are many who show others how to do it;—and the next thing is to stop those cursed receivers; for if a receiver knows a boy to have dealt with him, (that is, to have sold him property,) he will make him go out to thieve; he will never let him rest; and even should we get into employment, he will teaze us till he makes us rob the master, or will tell of us to the police.' These remarks prove the boys to be good judges of their own cases; so, like a skilful physician, they know where to apply the remedy; and as I feel convinced that many of these urchins possess every requisite to be good and useful members of society, so am I certain that their reformation, in a majority of cases, is as practicable, under proper means, as their ultimate ruin is now certain, under the present system."

18. Mr. Brandon, in his Preface to Mr. Miles's Report, makes the following observations, which are too important to need any apology for their quotation:—

"If a religious fanatic brings a Bill into the House for the 'better observance of the Sabbath,' whose comforts are to be abridged? Why, the poor man's and those of the middling classes; for it is the stage-coaches and omnibuses that are to be prohibited from making their appearance, while the streets may be thronged with carriages; and though the labourer is not permitted to purchase his necessary food on that sacred day, unable to have accomplished it before from not having received his wages till too late the preceding night, yet the fishmonger may keep the turbot cool that is to grace his lordship's Sunday table, and send it home on the very day, just in time to be prepared for dinner.

"Penny theatres, too, are decried and suppressed, while the larger ones are permitted—the reason assigned being that the company who frequent the former render the step necessary, but the delinquency does not arise from cheap exhibitions—it is from the inefficiency of the law to restrain the audience; for in the plays themselves there is no improper language used. Holland, a notorious thief, in his examination, said he had heard bad language at those places before the curtain drew up, *but never any thing indecent on the stage*. This is a damning proof where the fault lies; if the laws were such as to restrain vice, and those properly administered, it would effectually prevent the improper conduct of the loose individuals, and preclude the necessity of reducing the pleasures of the poor; pockets are picked every night at the royal theatres, and scenes of the worst description carried on in the lobbies; yet it never entered into the cranium of the wiseacres that if the theatres were shut up, these abominations would be effectually eradicated. It is highly gratifying to witness the order and pleasure with which cheap diversions are conducted on the continent, even so close to us as Boulogne and Calais, where may be seen the lowest classes enjoying themselves in dancing and visiting the various public gardens, the entrance to which is a fee equivalent to our penny. Another proof of the difference with which our laws are administered according to the parties affected, is manifest in the proceedings against the various houses for play in the metropolis, the clubs of the aristocracy and the 'little goes,' little hells, &c. of the poor."

CHAPTER XL.
CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF JACOB SMITH.

"On my return to Earl Street, Seven Dials, which was at about three o'clock in the morning, I found Old Death and Mrs. Bunce sitting up for me, Toby having gone to bed. I related the adventures which I had met with, but said not a word about the intrigue of the lady and the baronet; for I could not help thinking that the kind treatment I had in the first instance received from Mrs. Slingsby, deserved the reward of secresy on that head. Old Death *very kindly* permitted me to retain five pounds out of the money which I myself had obtained; and I hurried back to my lodging in St. Giles's. Peggy was in bed and fast asleep; and I lay down by her side without awaking her.

"When I again opened my eyes, the sun was shining in the brightness of a frosty air even through the dingy panes of my window; and I started up. Peggy had already risen; and I supposed she had gone out to get things for breakfast. But something like a suspicion arose in my mind—and I felt uneasy. I searched the pockets of the ragged pair of trousers I had purposely worn on the previous night, and the five sovereigns were gone. Now I was really alarmed: Peggy had certainly decamped. A farther search showed me that she had even carried off the few little articles of decent wearing apparel that I had, leaving me only the miserable rags in which I had appeared at Mrs. Slingsby's house. Yes—Peggy had run away with all I possessed that was worth the taking; and now the question naturally rose in my mind—'*Will she betray me?*' I thought her conduct was so suspicious, that I determined not to give her a chance if I could help it; particularly as I remembered the manner in which she took the beating I gave her, and which now made me think that she had resolved on being revenged. So I dressed myself in my tatters as quick as I could, and got away from the house. But at the end of the street I met a certain Mr. Dykes—the Bow Street runner, whom you happen to know, Mr. Rainford—and though I endeavoured to dive into a narrow court, he pounced upon me in a twinkling.

"In less than an hour I stood in the felons' dock at the police-court, Bow Street, charged with a robbery committed by me in Bloomsbury Square, in the disguise of a sweep. I was remanded for a week, and sent in the meantime to Clerkenwell Prison. There I was placed in No. 12, Reception Yard, where Mrs. Bunce, who pretended to be my aunt in order to get admittance to me, visited me in the afternoon. She told me that Mr. Bones could not possibly come to see me, but that he would do all he could for me if I remained staunch and did not mention his name in any way—not even to my fellow-prisoners. 'We are afraid that you will be committed for trial,' said Mrs. Bunce; 'but all shall be done that can be done to buy off the witnesses. If that won't succeed, such evidence of former good character shall be given, that your sentence will be a light one; and in the meantime you shall have as much money as you want to live gloriously in prison. Mr. Bones has sent you up a sovereign for the present, and I will bring you a good suit of clothes to-morrow, so that you may go up swell before the beak next time. Be staunch, Jacob; and Mr. Bones will never desert you. But if you only mention his name to a soul in an improper way, he'll leave you to your fate, and you'll be transported.'—Mrs. Bunce impressed all this on my mind; but I assured her it was unnecessary, as I knew that I should not better my own plight in any very considerable degree by nosing against Bones, whereas he might be useful to me if I behaved well in the matter. She went away satisfied; and I spent the rest of the day in jollification with my fellow-prisoners, amongst whom my money raised me to the rank of a hero.[19]

"That night I slept in the Receiving Ward; and next morning I was taken to the bathing-room, a new suit of clothes having been already sent in to me by Mrs. Bunce. But I found that I was to bathe in the same water which had already served to wash the filthy bodies of several trampers who had also been sent to prison the day before on a charge of robbery; and I knew that when they entered they were covered with vermin. I therefore gave the turnkey half-a-crown to allow me to dispense with the bath, put on my new clothes, and was turned into the Felons' Yard. There I found persons, who had committed all degrees of crime, huddled together as if there was no difference in the charges against them. A boy who had stolen a pound of potatoes, value *one penny*—myself, who had stolen plate in a dwelling-house—a *gentleman*, who had wounded another in a duel and could not get bail, but who was a very superior person—a burglar—a coiner—and a man charged with *murder*, were all in one room together! It did not strike me then—but it has often struck me since—how wrong it was to put that boy who had stolen potatoes, along with a burglar, a coiner, and a practised thief as I was,—how unjust it was to put the gentleman with any of us,—and how shocking it was to put a murderer along with prisoners whose hands were not at least stained with blood. And what were the consequences? The boy, who had merely stolen the potatoes because his mother was ill and starving, and who had never done any thing wrong before, was entirely corrupted by the coiner, and made up his mind to turn prig the moment he got out;—the gentleman was worked up to such a pitch of excitement, by being in such society, that he was removed to the infirmary, and died of brain fever, as I afterwards heard;—the burglar helped the murderer to escape, and got safely away with him!

"Our amusements in gaol were chiefly gambling and drinking. Money procured as much liquor as we could consume; and with such I was well supplied. Cards and dice were not allowed, it is true; but we used to play with bits of wood cut and marked like dominoes, or by chalking the table into a draught-board, or by tossing halfpence. Then there was such fighting, quarrelling, and bad language, that nothing could equal the place! In the upper, or sleeping ward, things were much worse: the prisoners robbed each other. The very first

night the duellist-gentleman was there, he lost his purse containing several sovereigns; and when he threatened to complain, he was quietly informed by the burglar and the murderer that if he did, he would be hung up to the bars of the window with his own handkerchief the very next night, and his end would be attributed to suicide.[20]

"At the end of the week I was had up to Bow Street once more; and the evidence was so conclusive against me, that I was committed to Newgate for trial. This I had expected, and cared but little for, as Mrs. Bunce at each visit which she paid me at Clerkenwell Prison, assured me that Mr. Bones would do all he could for me. And he kept his word—but more, I suppose, for his own sake than mine. What a dreadful place I found Newgate to be! Hardened as I was—acquainted with all degrees of debauchery—and familiar with vice, I declare solemnly that I shrank from the scenes I there witnessed. Fighting, quarrelling, gambling, thieving, drinking, obscene talking, bullying, and corrupting each other,—all those took place to a great degree in the Clerkenwell Prison; but in Newgate they were carried out to an extent dreadful to think of, and associated with other crimes impossible to mention.[21]

"I now seemed to awake, for the first time, from a long dream of wickedness, and to become aware of the frightful precipice on which I stood. My eyes were suddenly opened—and I shuddered. A man was hanged at the debtors' door, while I was in Newgate: and I saw him pass from the condemned cell to the kitchen, which is just within the debtors' door. I experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling, and took a solemn oath within my own breast that I would never thieve again. But as I knew nothing of religion, and could not read or write, I was not likely to reform very rapidly nor very completely. I still laughed and joked with my fellow-prisoners, and appeared to enter into most of their fun, though I really began to loathe them. But when the chaplain visited us, and the other boys jeered and mocked him, I stood by and dwelt on every word of gentle remonstrance that fell from his lips. Next Sunday I paid great attention to his sermon, while pretending to be asleep: for if I had been caught actually lending a patient ear to his discourse, my fellow-prisoners would have led me no peace afterwards. I understood but little—very little of that sermon: still I gleaned some notion of the existence of a Saviour a belief in whom was the stepping-stone to virtue. I also heard the happiness of heaven explained for the first time: but I must confess that I was greatly puzzled when the chaplain declared that the man who was hanged for a dreadful murder on the preceding Monday, had gone to that place of joy, because he had repented in his last moments—for I thought to myself, 'Well, then, a human being is quite safe in leading as terrible a life as he chooses, as long as he repents at the end.' And, again, I was bewildered when I heard the clergyman say these words, which made so great an impression on me that I have never forgotten them, and never shall:—'*As I stood with that penitent man on the drop, last Monday morning,* I ENVIED HIM HIS FATE, *because I knew that his soul was about to ascend to heaven*!'[22]

"The day of my trial came; and I was placed in the dock before the Common Serjeant of London. The clerk of the Court asked me, '*How will you be tried—by God and your country?*'—I knew not what reply to make, and was actually on the point of saying 'that I would rather not be tried at all this time, since it seemed to be left to my own choice; and that I would faithfully promise never to thieve again,'—when the turnkey who had charge of me, whispered in my ear, 'You damned young fool, why don't you speak? Say '*By God and my country*,' damn you.'—I did as I was directed; and the trial commenced. The charge against me was fully proved; and a verdict of *Guilty* was recorded. The Common-Serjeant asked if I had ever been convicted before. The keeper of Newgate, who was present, said I had not. The counsel who had been retained for me by Old Death, then requested to be allowed to call witnesses to character. This was permitted; and three or four tradesmen, who I well knew were Old Death's friends, got up one after the other, and swore that I had been in their service (each one of course giving different periods of time), and that I was an honest, hard-working, and industrious lad, until I fell into bad company and got into trouble. Dykes, the runner, was then questioned about me; and he said that I was not known as a thief—although he knew the contrary perfectly well. But Old Death had kept his word, and had not spared his gold. My offence was, however, a grave one—robbing in a dwelling-house; and there were two or three other indictments of the same kind against me, though the prosecutors did not come forward. Old Death had made it right with *them* too. I was accordingly condemned to seven years' transportation, with a hint that this sentence would be commuted to two years' imprisonment at the hulks.

"I was but little more than eleven when my career of crime was thus interrupted; and I was glad that it *was* so interrupted—for I resolved that it should not be renewed when I regained my liberty. This was scarcely a resolution produced by moral considerations, but by fear; and it therefore required strengthening. Whether it was, or not, I shall soon inform you.

"A few days after the sessions terminated, I was removed with several other boys to the *Euryalus* Convict-Hulk at Woolwich. This vessel has three decks: the upper is appropriated to lads convicted the first time, the second to the next grade of juvenile criminals, and the third, or lowest, to the worst kind of offenders. I was assigned to the upper deck, where there were about sixty of us. On being received on board we were first sent to the wash-house, where we were bathed and well cleansed; and we then received the suit of dark grey that denotes the felon. Our employment was to make clothes for the entire establishment: that is, shirts, jackets, waistcoats, and trousers. The person who taught us was a convict-boy, who had been a tailor: the cutters-out belonged to the second deck, and visited our department as often as their services were required.

"We were divided into sections, each having at its head a boy selected as the chief on account of his good conduct when in prison. I will describe the routine of the day—taking the period when the summer regulations are in force. At five o'clock in the morning all hands were called, the ports were opened, the hammocks were lowered and lashed up, and we washed ourselves for chapel. At half-past five the signal was given for prayers; and we went to the chapel in sections, or divisions, taking our seats in profound silence. The morning hymn was sung: the schoolmaster read the prayers; and we returned to our wards on the upper deck. There we stood in ranks till six o'clock, when breakfast was served. The steward of the ship superintended the giving out of the provisions, and saw that each boy had his fair allowance of bread and gruel. This being done, the steward ordered each rank, one after the other, to approach the tables, hold up the bread, say grace, and then sit down and eat. At half-past six, we were marshalled on the quarter-deck, in divisions; and the officers of the hulk were then prepared to hear any complaints or receive any reports that might have to be submitted to them. Such complaints were noted down for after investigation. Some of the boys were kept above to wash the quarter-deck, and the remainder were sent down to cleanse their own deck. At eight o'clock we were all set to work at tailoring, a strict silence being

preserved. At nine o'clock the report upon the complaints was received from the commander of the hulk, and the punishments awarded were made known:—such as a good thrashing with a cane, stopping the dinner, or solitary confinement on bread and water. At twelve o'clock the dinners were served out, the steward superintending. The quartermasters and guards were also present, to see that one boy's allowance was not taken from him by another. From half-past twelve to half-past one we were allowed to take air and exercise on the quarter-deck, but without making any noise. At half-past one we were marched down again to our work. At two, a section of one-third of us was sent into the chapel, where we were taught reading and writing by the schoolmaster. At five we left off work or schooling, cleaned the wards, and then washed ourselves. This being done, supper was served out; and we went on the quarter-deck again for air and exercise till seven, when we were once more marched to the chapel for evening prayers and the catechism. At eight o'clock we returned to our own deck, where the signal was given for getting out the hammocks and slinging them up. At nine profound silence was ordered; and the whole ship was then as quiet as if there was not a soul on board,—this deep tranquillity being only broken by the striking of the bell and the cry of '*All's well!*' every half-hour.

"Such was the life led on board the *Euryalus* convict-hulk. But I was happier—much happier there than I had ever been before. The schoolmaster was an excellent man, and took a delight in teaching those who were anxious to learn. I was of this number, and my improvement was rapid. I quite won his regard, and he devoted unusual pains to instruct me; so that at the end of a year he obtained leave for me to give up the making of clothes and assist him as an usher. This was an employment that pleased me greatly, and allowed me plenty of time to read the books lent me by the worthy schoolmaster. So fond was I of reading, that I used to take a book with me on the quarter-deck at those times devoted to air and exercise; and sitting apart from the others, I would remain buried in study until it was time to go below again. I examined how books were written and how I was accustomed to speak: that is—I compared the language of those books with my own; and I was shocked to find how wretchedly ignorant I had hitherto been in respect to grammar. This ignorance I strove hard—oh! very hard to surmount; and the good schoolmaster assisted me to the utmost of his power. I read and studied the Bible with avidity; and the more I became acquainted with it, the more fixed grow my determination to avoid a relapse into the ways of crime when I should be released.

"During the two years that I passed at the hulk, Mrs. Bunce came very often to see me, passing herself off as my aunt; but relations were not allowed to speak to us except in the presence of a guard, and so the name of Old Death was never mentioned by either of us. But Mrs. Bunce used to tell me that 'my *uncle* would give me a home when my time was up;' and I supposed by this, that she meant her husband Toby. I knew that Old Death was the person who had directed these assurances to be given me; and often and often did I lay awake of a night, deliberating within myself what I should do when I was set free, to earn an honest livelihood and avoid the hateful necessity of returning to the service of Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"At length the day of liberation came—and I had no plan of proceedings settled. My clothes were given to me, and a shilling was put into my hand by the steward. The old schoolmaster was absent at the time; and I was sorry that I had not an opportunity of thanking him for all his kindness and imploring his advice how to proceed. It struck me that I would appeal to the commander of the hulk. I did so, and solicited him to counsel me how to get an honest livelihood. He burst out laughing in my face, exclaiming, 'I suppose you think I am to be deceived by your humbug, and that I shall put my hand into my pocket and give you half-a-guinea to see your way with. No such thing, my lad! I used to do so when I was first here; but those I assisted in that way were always the first to come back again.'—And he turned on his heel, leaving me quite astounded at the reception my sincerity of behaviour had experienced. But a few moments' reflection showed me that I could scarcely blame him for his conduct; and I quitted the ship in tears.

"The moment I stepped from the boat that landed me in Woolwich, I met Mrs. Bunce. She threw her arms round my neck, and called me her '*dear Jacob*,' in such a loving manner that one would really have believed her to be my aunt, or even my mother if she had chosen to represent herself so. Then, pointing to a public-house at a little distance, she said, 'Your good and kind friend Mr. Bones is there; and he will be so delighted to see you. He has ordered a nice steak and some good ale, and we mean to let you enjoy yourself.'—The idea of having such a glorious repast after being kept on short commons on board the *Euryalus*, made my mouth water; but then I remembered all the influence Old Death had been accustomed to exercise over me—and I knew that if I once again entered within its range, I should never have the moral courage to withdraw from it. So my mind was made up; and suddenly darting down a bye-street, I was beyond Mrs. Bunce's view in a twinkling. I heard her shrill, screaming voice call after me; but I heeded it not—and hurried onward, as if escaping from a wild beast.

"Presently I relaxed my speed, and at length entered a public-house, where I called for a pint of beer. Two or three soldiers and as many young women were sitting at another table, drinking, and indulging at the same time in the most filthy discourse. Suddenly one of the females started up, advanced towards me, and, after considering me for a few moments, exclaimed with a terrible oath, 'Well, I thought it must be my old fancy cove Jacob:'—and she offered to embrace me. I however repulsed her with loathing; for in the miserable, tattered, sickly wretch before me, I had already recognised Peggy Wilkins. She seemed ashamed of herself for a minute; then, recovering her impudence, she said, 'Damn and blast you for a sulky, snivelling hound! Who the devil are you that you can't treat me civilly? Do you think I don't know all that's happened to you? Why, you've only this moment left the hulks—and you can't deny it.'—The soldiers, hearing this, demanded if it was true; and, without waiting for my answer, thrust me out of the place. I had reached the end of the street, when I recollected that I had not received the change for my shilling, which I had tendered in payment of the beer. I therefore went back to ask for it; but the pot-boy who had served me, swore that I never gave him a shilling at all; and the landlord evidently believed that I was a vagabond endeavouring to swindle his servant. So I was kicked out—penniless!

"I was for some time before I could muster up courage to adopt any plan for my support. Indeed, I sate down in a retired nook and cried bitterly. I even regretted having left the hulk, so miserable did I feel. At last hunger compelled me to act; and I entered a shop to inquire if a boy was wanted. The man behind the counter said he did not require the assistance of a lad, but that a neighbour of his would probably hire me. I went to the place pointed out to me, and, having explained my business, was asked for testimonials of good character. I candidly confessed that I had just been discharged from the *Euryalus*, but that I thought the schoolmaster on board would

recommend me. The man flew into a dreadful passion, and rushing round from behind the counter, would have kicked me out of the shop, if I had not run away of my own accord.

"I am sure that I tried twenty different shops that day in Woolwich. At some I explained my position—at others I carefully concealed the fact of my late ignominious punishment. But character—character—character! where was it? Even for a starving lad who only asked a fair trial—who promised to work from sunrise to sunset, and to be content with a morsel of bread to eat and a cellar to sleep in, as a recompense for his toils,—even to one who offered so much and required so little in return, *character* was necessary! Night came—I was famishing and in despair. At length a charitable baker gave me a roll; and my hunger was appeased. It struck me that the tradesmen at Woolwich were perhaps more cautious than people elsewhere how they engaged the services of young lads, in consequence of that place being a station for the convict-hulks; and I therefore resolved to try my luck in another quarter. I set out for Greenwich, which I reached at midnight, and slept till morning in a shed near some houses that were being built. Cold, famished, and dispirited did I awake; and with a sinking heart I commenced my rounds. Before noon I had called at a hundred shops, public-houses, or taverns, without success. Few required the service of boys; and those people who did, demanded references. I begged a piece of bread of a baker, and then set off for London.

"So slow did I walk, and so often was I compelled to rest, that it was evening before I reached the Blackfriars Road. There, again, did I endeavour to procure honest employment—but in vain! I remember that when one shopkeeper—an old man—listened to me with more attention than the rest, I burst into tears and implored—besought—prayed him to receive me into his service, if it was only *to save me from becoming a thief*! I did not tell him I had already been one. But he shook his head, saying sorrowfully, 'If you have already thought of turning thief, your morals must be more than half corrupted.'—He gave me a few halfpence, and I went away.

"I balanced for some minutes between the cravings of my stomach and the fatigue of my limbs—that is, whether I should spend those halfpence in food or on a bed. I decided in favour of the food, and having satisfied my hunger, crept into a timber-yard on the bank of the Thames, and slept there till morning. I awoke at sunrise, and crossed Blackfriars Bridge. My limbs shivered with ague, and my clothes were damp with the dews of night. I knew not what to do—which way to turn. Hope had deserted me. There was I, a poor—wretched—houseless—friendless—starving being, anxious to remain honest, yet impelled by circumstances towards a relapse into the career of vice. I prayed as I went along the streets,—yes, I prayed to God to save me from that dreadful—that last resource. But no succour came. All day long did I rove about: night arrived again—and for twenty-four hours I had eaten nothing. I dragged myself back to the timber yard; but there was a great dog prowling about—and I dared not enter. I sought shelter elsewhere, for the rain began to descend in torrents; but I was wet through before I could even find the entrance of a court to screen me. I never slept a wink that night: I was afraid to lie down on the cold stones—they were so chill. Morning came again—and I was now so weak that I could hardly put one foot before another. I was moreover starving—yes, *starving*! I passed a baker's shop and saw the nice hot bread smoking in the windows, and I went in to implore a stale crust. But I was ordered out; and then the idea struck me that in a few minutes I might obtain money to buy a good breakfast—not only bread, but meat and tea! That was by picking a pocket! The idea, however, assumed a horrible aspect a moment afterwards—and I recoiled from it. No: I would sooner plunge into the river and end my woes there—than steal again!

"To the river's brink I hurried—dragging myself slowly no more—but running, yes—absolutely running fast to terminate my wretchedness by suicide. It was near Westminster Bridge that I was on the point of throwing myself into the Thames, when my collar was suddenly grasped from behind, and I was drawn back. I turned—and saw Old Death!

"Then I uttered a scream, and struggled dreadfully to get away, that I might still accomplish my purpose; but he held me tight, saying, 'Silly boy! why do you fly from life, since it may yet have many pleasures for you?'—'No!' I cried: 'I will never become a thief again!'—'And I will never ask you to do so,' he replied. 'But come with me, and let us talk over your prospects.'—'Prospects!' I repeated in a hysterical manner; and then I followed him mechanically to an early breakfast-house close by. He ordered a plentiful meal; and I ate ravenously. The food and hot coffee cheered me; and I began to feel grateful to Bones for having supplied the means to appease the hunger that was devouring me. Moreover, one looks with quite a different eye upon suicide after a good meal; and I could not do otherwise than regard him as the saviour of my life. I was therefore already prepared to listen to him with attention; and when he proposed that we should repair to Bunce's, where we could converse without fear of being overheard, I willingly agreed to accompany him. But during our walk to Seven Dials, I constantly repeated within my own breast the most solemn vows not to yield to any threats or representations—menaces or coaxings—to induce me to become a thief again!

"When we reached the house in Earl Street, Mrs. Bunce received me with more kindness than I had expected to meet at her hands, after the trick I had played her a few days before at Woolwich. But she did not treat me thus without a motive; for when once she and Old Death got me between them, they endeavoured to the utmost of their power to persuade me to resume my old avocations. I was faithful to my vow, and assured them that they might kill me sooner than I would again do any thing to risk imprisonment in that horrible Newgate. It was not the hulk I so much dreaded—nor yet transportation, because I knew nothing of it; but I shrunk from the mere idea of going through the ordeal of Newgate a second time. Old Death saw that I was not to be moved—at least then; and he gave up the point. 'But,' said he, 'you must do something to get a living: you can't starve; and *we* won't maintain you in idleness. If you like, I'll take you into my service to run on errands, look after people that I want to learn any thing about and make yourself useful in that way; and I'll give you a shilling a-day.'—I agreed—for I could not starve.

"Now, of course it is as plain to you as it was even then to me, that Old Death was playing a deep game with me. I was the cleverest thief that ever served him; and he had received ample—ample proofs that he could trust me. He knew that he was safe with me. I was therefore too useful a person to lose; and he thought that by throwing me again amongst my old companions, and keeping me on very short allowance, the disagreeable impressions of gaol would soon wear away, and I should relapse into my old habits. He was quite mistaken. I don't pretend that any particular idea of virtue made a great change in me; but I had been in Newgate—*and there I had seen a man going out to be hanged*; and I thought that if I got into that dreadful gaol *a second time*, I should become hardened, *and that I*

also should go out some day to be hanged! So I resisted all temptation—and lived as well as I could on the shilling a day, without increasing my means by theft or villany.

"This mode of life on my part did not suit Old Death. A few weeks passed, and when he found that I was resolved not to return to my former ways, he stopped my allowance altogether. I was now steeped to the very lips in wretchedness and misery: but somehow or another I managed to get a crust here and there just to keep body and soul together—although I oftener slept in the open air than in a bed. Mrs. Bunce showed me a little kindness now and then, but quite unknown to Old Death; and, to my surprise, she did not urge the necessity of my returning to the career of theft. For several weeks I saw nothing of Mr. Bones; but at last he fished me out in some low place, and told me I might return into his service if I liked, and that he should pay me according to the use I proved myself to be to him. To glean information for him—run on errands—dog and watch persons—or even loiter about in police-courts to hear what cases came up before the magistrates,—these were my chief duties; and badly enough they were paid. But I was now permitted to get my breakfast and tea regularly at the Bunces'; and that was something. As for my lodging, if I got together a few pence to enable me to hire a bed, or a part of a bed, in one of those low houses that I have already described to you, I was contented,—for I always had this consolation, that I could walk about the streets without being afraid of meeting a Bow-Street runner."

Jacob paused—for his tale was told.

"Well, my boy," said Tom Rain, "you have gone through much, and seen enough to form a good stock of experience. I commend your resolution never to put yourself within reach of the law again; for that's just my determination also. You have got money in your pocket now; and I will do something more for you before I leave England."

"Ah! Mr. Rainford," exclaimed Jacob, much affected, "how I wish that I had met with such a friend as you earlier in life! And how I wish, too, that I could go with you—wherever you are going—and be your servant—your slave!"

"Well—well, Jacob, we will talk of that another time," said Tom. "Rest assured I will not desert you. Call at Tullock's on Monday evening, and you will either see me there or find a note from me."

Jacob was overjoyed at the species of promise thus held out to him; and, as it was now midnight, Rainford intimated his intention of taking his departure from the public-house where he had passed the evening with the poor lad.

When they had issued from the door, the highwayman bade Jacob "Good night;" and they separated—pursuing different roads.

In fact, Jacob went towards Leather Lane, while Tom Rainford repaired in the direction of the lodgings which he at present occupied in Gray's Inn Lane—he having removed to that locality from his former abode in Lock's Fields.

19. The discipline of criminal prisons was particularly lax at the time of which Jacob Smith is supposed to be speaking.

20. This dreadful state of things continued in the New Prison, Clerkenwell, up to the year 1838.

21. The Report of the Prison Inspectors of the Home District contains these observations upon the state of Newgate:—"The association of prisoners of all ages, and every shade of guilt, in one indiscriminate mass, is a frightful feature in the system which prevails here; the first in magnitude, and the most pernicious in effect. In this prison we find that the young and the old—the inexperienced and the practical offender—the criminal who is smitten with a conviction of his guilt, and the hardened villain whom scarcely any penal discipline can subdue, are congregated together, with an utter disregard to all moral distinctions, the interest of the prisoners, or the welfare of the community. In such a state of things, can it be a matter of wonder that the effects should be such as have been described? Every other evil is aggravated by this; and it would be worse than idle to attempt a remedy for the rest, while this demoralising intermixture of criminals of all ages and degrees of guilt is suffered to frustrate the very ends of Prison discipline, and to give tenfold violence to all their mischievous inclinations, and passions, upon which it is incessantly operating, and which is the design of justice to discourage and repress. Apart from higher considerations, sound policy demands that such a system should be instantly rectified, for so long as it continues, society is nursing a moral pestilence in its bosom, and maintaining an institution in which are forged those weapons that are destined to be wielded with fatal dexterity against the community itself. Every device by which the fences of property may be overcome is here framed, and divulged to ready agents. Every fraudulent artifice, every successful trick, every ingenious mode of over-reaching the cautious, or of plundering the unguarded, is perfected here, and communicated to those who had not hitherto been initiated in the mysteries of crime.

 "But the most distressing circumstance connected with this system, is the cruel indifference with which it regards the condition and necessities of those on whom the extreme penalty of the law is doomed to fall. Prisoners actually awaiting the execution of the awful sentence of death are placed, by the evil influence of companionship, in the most unfavourable circumstances for self-reflection. Religion and humanity combine to point out the imperative necessity of providing men, brought by the sentence of the law to the verge of eternity, with the means of spiritual improvement and consolation; but the system of Prison Discipline in Newgate practically defeats every such merciful design. No human authority has a right thus to trifle with the eternal interests of a dying criminal. Against this serious evil the chaplain has repeatedly and loudly protested; and it is in evidence that the unhappy victims themselves have earnestly implored the officers to deliver them from a situation in which it was impossible for them to devote the few remaining hours that the law allowed them to reflection and prayer. The companions in guilt of these wretched men become further hardened by the influence of this association. The indulgence of thoughtless apathy, unfeeling mirth, or revolting ribaldry, are productive of incalculable mischief to the minds of those who are subjected to their influence. The prisoner who witnesses with levity or indifference the last moments of a culprit in Newgate, comes forth a greater villain than

when he went in. In him the evil principle has done its work, and the very exhibition of terror which justice designed for the reclaiming of the survivors, by a perversion of moral influence, irremediably hardens the heart which it was intended to soften and amend. If human ingenuity were tasked to devise means by which the most profligate of men might be rendered abandoned to the last degree of moral infamy, nothing more effectual could be invented than the system now actually in operation within the walls of the first metropolitan prison in England!"

22. Fact.

CHAPTER XLI.
FRESH ALARMS.

Rainford was within twenty yards of the house in which he dwelt, when a woman jostled him somewhat violently as she endeavoured to pass him while pursuing the same direction.

There was no excuse for this rudeness on her part, inasmuch as the pavement was wide in that particular spot, and no other person was on the footway.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the female; "I'm sure——But, bless me!" she cried, in a shrill, unmistakeable voice,—"if it isn't Mr. Rainford!"

"Ah! Mrs. Bunce," returned the highwayman; "what are you doing in this neighbourhood so late?"

"I'm going to pass the night with a relation of mine that's ill, and which lives at the top of the Lane," answered Mrs. Bunce. "But, Oh! Mr. Rainford, what a shocking thing this is about poor dear Mr. Bones!"

"What?" ejaculated Tom, with a kind of guilty start.

"Why, sir—he's dead, poor man!" sobbed Mrs. Bunce: "dead and buried, sir!"

"Dead—and buried!" repeated the highwayman mechanically. "And how came you to know this?"

"His friend Mr. Tidmarsh came and told me and Toby about it this blessed morning; and in the afternoon we all followed the poor old gentleman to the grave in Clerkenwell churchyard."

"His death was sudden, then?" said Tom, anxious to glean how far the woman might be informed relative to the particulars of the event which she was deploring.

"Mr. Tidmarsh isn't given to gossiping, sir," replied Mrs. Bunce; "and he said very little about it. It was quite enough for us to know that the poor dear old gentleman is gone—and without having made any Will either: so me and Toby are thrown as you may say on the wide world, without a friend to help us."

"But Mr. Bones was rich—very rich—was he not?" demanded Tom, who felt particularly uncomfortable at this confirmation of his worst fears—for he to some extent looked upon himself as the cause of the old fence's sudden death.

"Rich, God bless ye! Ah! as rich as a King!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunce. "But no one knows where he kept his money—unless it is that Tidmarsh."

"And where did he die?" asked Rainford.

"At Tidmarsh's own place in Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell," was the answer. "Poor old man! But you must have seen him only a short time before he went off, Mr. Rainford," she added, as if recollecting the fact: "for it was on that very night when he took Toby and Jacob over with him to a house in Lock's Fields, and which turned out to be where you lived. You know he stayed with you while Jacob and Toby went away. Poor old man! he's a great loss—a very great loss!"

"Were you so dependent on him, then?" asked Rainford.

"Yes, almost entirely, as I may say," was the reply. "And then there's poor Jacob, too: what in the world he'll do, I'm sure I can't say—for me and Toby can't afford to keep him now that our best friend's gone. But good night, Mr. Rainford: I must go on to my cousin's—for it's very late, and *she*, may be, will pop off the hooks before I get to her."

"Good night," returned Tom, slackening his pace so as to allow the woman to proceed as far a-head of him as possible ere he entered his own dwelling, which was now close at hand.

In a few moments the form of Mrs. Bunce was lost in the darkness of the night.

Rainford was now convinced that Old Death was indeed no more—that no prompt assistance had resuscitated him, even if the vital spark were not extinct at the moment when he saw him for the last time, bound to the chair, at the house in Red Lion Street. Yes—it was clear enough—too clear: Benjamin Bones was dead—and Tidmarsh had pounced upon all his property.

"Well—let him enjoy it," thought Rainford within himself. "I have enough for my purposes, and do not wish to dispute the inheritance with him—even if I had the right or the power. And yet—and yet," he mused, with a feeling like a contraction of the heart, "I would give ten years of my own life so that I had not been the instrument of abridging his! But it's too late to repent or regret. Repent, did I say? I have nothing to repent of. I did not do this deed wilfully: it was not murder. And as for any share that I had in the matter at all, *that* does not seem to be suspected. Oh! I can understand Master Tidmarsh's proceedings! It was no doubt he who entered the room just

at the moment when I discovered that Old Death was dead. Of course he would say nothing about finding him tied in a chair, or of me having been with him that night: a word on these heads would have excited suspicions—led to inquiries—Coroner's inquest—and all that sort of thing. Then some relation might have turned up, claimed the property, and cut Tidmarsh out. Yes—yes; it is plain enough—and Tidmarsh is a prudent as well as a lucky fellow! But what *could* the laboratory in that house mean? what were those pickled human heads kept in the cupboard for? and why was Dr. Lascelles familiar with that den?"

Even in the midst of his musings, Rainford did not hazard a conjecture to account for the mysteries just enumerated. They indeed appeared unaccountable.

The highwayman walked some distance past the door of his lodgings, to convince himself that he was not watched by Mrs. Bunce; and having assured himself on that head,—at least so far as he could judge in the darkness of the night,—he turned back and entered his dwelling.

The next day was the Sabbath; and Rainford was sitting, after breakfast, reading a Sunday paper in the neat parlour of his lodgings.

On the other side of the fire sate a young—beautiful—and dark-eyed woman—in all the rich flush of Jewish beauty,—the softly sweeping outline and symmetrical undulations of her form being developed, rather than concealed, by the loose morning wrapper which she wore; while the ray of the frosty morning's sun glanced on the glossy surface of her raven hair.

Little Charley Watts, nicely dressed, and with his rosy countenance wearing the smiles of happy innocence, was seated on a footstool near Tom Rain, looking at a picture-book, but every now and then glancing affectionately towards those whom he had already learnt to love as if they were his parents.

"Do the advertisements tell you when the next ship will sail from Liverpool for New York, Tom?" inquired the lady.

"Next Friday, my love," answered Rainford. "We will therefore leave London on Thursday."

"Four more days," remarked his female companion. "Oh! how glad I shall be when we are out of sight of England! And yet," she added, with a profound sigh, "I can scarcely bear the thought of parting—perhaps for ever——"

"You must not give way to those mournful reflections," interrupted Tom, in a kind tone. "Remember that we are going to a country where my personal safety will not be endangered,—where we shall not be obliged to shift our lodgings half-a-dozen times in a fortnight,—and where, too, we need not start at every knock that comes to the door. We shall be as happy as the day is long; and, with the money which I now have at my disposal, I may embark in some honest pursuit and earn myself a good name."

"The money will be at the New York banker's before we reach America, I suppose?" said the lady, inquiringly.

"To be sure," replied Tom; "since I paid it all into the hands of the London agent two days ago. Have you taken care of the receipt, or acknowledgment?"

"I locked it up in the little iron box, together with all your other papers," was the answer.

"And those documents that I brought home with me the other night—or rather morning——"

"All safe, dear Tom. But really when you allude to that dreadful night, you make me shudder. Oh! how long—how long did those weary hours seem, until you returned! When you came up into the bed-room and told me that you were going away with that dreadful man Bones—that the time had at length come—that opportunity had at last served your purposes——"

"Well, my dear girl—I recollect all that took place," interrupted Tom, laughing. "You begged me not to go with him—you said you had your misgivings: but I was resolved—for such an occasion might not have occurred again. Did I not tell you beforehand, when we were down in the country, that if I came up to London and purposely threw myself in the way of Old Death, accident would be sure sooner or later to enable me to wrench from his grasp that gold of which he had plundered me? And have not my words come true? You must not reproach me now, dear girl, at all events—for the danger is over."

"Yes—and the dreadful man is dead!" exclaimed the Jewess, in a tone which expressed a thanksgiving so unequivocally that a cloud for a moment gathered on Rainford's brow.

"He is dead—and can molest us no more," he observed, in a serious tone. "But I could have wished——However," he added, abruptly, "let us avoid that subject: it is not altogether an agreeable one. And now, to return to our intended departure for America, I am somewhat at a loss how to act in respect to that letter, which I obtained last night from Jacob Smith, and which so deeply regards——"

He paused, and glanced significantly towards Charley.

"What can you do in the matter, Tom?" said his beautiful companion. "The letter is too ambiguous——"

"Scarcely ambiguous—but deficient in certain points of information," interrupted Rainford.

"Which is equally mortifying," added the Jewess. "You cannot risk your safety by remaining in England to investigate the affair—even if we had not gone so far in our arrangements for departure——"

"Certainly not," replied Tom: "but I was thinking that I would entrust the letter to my friend Clarence Villiers; and who knows but that some accident may sooner or later throw him into the way of sifting the mystery to the very bottom?"

"Your project is an excellent one," answered the Jewess. "But are you sure that he does not suspect——"

"Suspect what I really am!" ejaculated the highwayman, with that blithe, merry laugh of his which showed his fine white teeth to such advantage. "Not he! He does not know Sir Christopher Blunt—nor the lawyer Howard; and his acquaintance with that consummate fool Frank Curtis was always slight, and not likely to be improved by all that has occurred: for Frank *must* suspect that Clarence had

something to do with the elopement of Old Torrens's daughters. So, all things considered, Clarence cannot have heard of the little affair by which Sir Christopher lost his two thousand pounds."

"Then you will entrust Mr. Villiers with the letter?" said the lady, inquiringly.

"Yes: I will call upon him this evening," responded Tom; "for I have a little hint to give him relative to a certain aunt of his——"

At this moment there was a knock at the front-door of the house; and the servant presently made her appearance to inform Rainford that a young man named Jacob Smith wished to speak to him.

Tom's brow darkened—as the thought flashed across him that the lad had dogged him on the preceding night. But instantly recovering his self-possession, he desired the Jewess and Charley to retire to another room, while he received the visitor.

When Jacob entered the parlour, Rainford looked sternly at him, but said nothing.

"I know what *is*—what *must be* passing in your mind, sir," said Jacob hastily; "but you wrong me—that is, if you think I found out your address by any underhand means of my own."

"Sit down, my boy," cried Tom frankly: "I am sorry if I suspected you even for an instant. But what has brought you here this morning? and how——"

"I will explain all in a few moments, Mr. Rainford," said Jacob. "Two hours ago—at about eight o'clock—I went up to Bunce's, just to see if they had heard any thing of Old Death; and, to my surprise, I learnt that he was buried yesterday."

"So I have already heard. But go on."

"You know I told you last night that yesterday morning two or three people called in Earl Street to inquire about Old Death, as he had promised to get a thief off at the police-court? Well—at that time, it seems, neither Mrs. Bunce or Toby knew what had become of Mr. Bones: but just afterwards, as I'm told, and when I had gone away from the house, up goes old Tidmarsh, the fence, with the news that Mr. Bones was dead, and that the funeral was going to take place in a couple of hours. Quick work, wasn't it, sir? So Toby Bunce and his wife went to the funeral; and now it's certain what has really become of Old Death. Tidmarsh told them he died suddenly three or four days ago at *his* house—of apoplexy. I'm sure he didn't look much like an apoplectic man."

"The best part of all this I learnt last night, soon after I left you," said Rainford.

"And I only heard it when I went up to Bunce's this morning," remarked Jacob. "Well, sir—when Mrs. Bunce had told me this, she said, '*Jacob, I want you to do a particular favour for me, and I will give you a sovereign*.'—I asked her what it was. '*I'm pretty sure*,' she says, '*that Mr. Rainford lives somewhere in Gray's Inn Lane, between Liquorpond Street and Calthorpe Street, on the same side of the way as those streets; and you must find out where it is, became I want particularly to know*.'—So I promised her I would; and I of course took good care not to say that I had seen you last night. But I was determined to give you notice of Mrs. Bunce's desire to have you watched; and I have been knocking at every door in the neighbourhood, asking if such a gentleman as yourself lived there. In describing you, however, I did not mention any name."

"That was right, Jacob," said Tom; "because I am not known as Rainford here. But what the devil can that old wretch want with me? Has she inherited Old Death's scheming disposition? or does his vengeance pursue me, even from the tomb?"

These last words were totally unintelligible to Jacob, who knew not that the highwayman had had any share in the death of Mr. Benjamin Bones.

"Of course, sir," remarked the lad, after a pause, "I shall go to Mrs. Bunce this evening and assure her that no such person as yourself lives in this neighbourhood. I hope you are not offended with me for hunting after you?"

"Far from it, Jacob," returned Tom: "for I am sure I can trust *you*. At the same time, you must be cautious how you act, so as not to let Mrs. Bunce imagine that you are playing *her* false. Try and find out what she wants with me, and meet me at Tullock's to-morrow evening, between seven and eight. No—not at Tullock's either—because that woman knows I am in the habit of going there: but come to me at the public-house in Baldwin's Buildings where we were last night. Remember—to-morrow evening, at about half-past seven."

"I shall not fail, sir," responded Jacob: and he then took his departure.

The moment he was gone, Rainford hastened up stairs to the bed-room, whither the Jewess and little Charley had retired; and closing the door, he said, "My dear girl, we must be off directly. That horrid woman Mrs. Bunce, of whom I have spoken to you, is after me—and I am afraid for no good."

"Off!" exclaimed the lady: "what—to Liverpool at once?"

"No: but to another lodging—or to a tavern rather—for it will be difficult to obtain apartments on a Sunday. I must stay in town for a day or two longer—or at least till I have seen Villiers. Come—pack up your things, my love—and let us be gone."

"Are you afraid of that lad who has just been?" demanded the Jewess.

"Not a whit! He is staunch to the backbone—I will swear to it! But *he* might be followed—or he might commit himself somehow or another, and betray me involuntarily. By-the-bye," ejaculated Tom, after an instant's pause, "I tell you what we will do! We will return to Lock's Fields. It is clear that Mrs. Bunce has found out that we are *not* living there now—otherwise she would not have set this Jacob to watch me, which she has done; and she would never suspect that we have gone back to our old quarters. So look alive, my love; and pack up the things, while I settle with our landlady here and send for a coach." Tom Rain's directions were speedily obeyed; and by mid-day the Jewess, Charley, and himself were once more located in Lock's Fields.

CHAPTER XLII.
THE PARAGRAPH IN THE NEWSPAPER.

Having partaken of a good dinner and imbibed a glass or two of wine, Tom Rain returned to the perusal of the Sunday newspaper, which he had brought with him to his old lodgings; for the highwayman loved a newspaper dearly—especially the police reports and Old Bailey trials.

But as his eye glanced down a column principally devoted to "Fashionable Intelligence," he was struck with mingled horror and astonishment by the ensuing announcement:—

> "It is rumoured that the young and wealthy Earl of Ellingham will shortly lead to the hymeneal altar, the beautiful and accomplished Lady Hatfield. Her ladyship is a peeress in her own right, that distinction having been conferred upon her in consequence of the eminent services of her ladyship's deceased father."

Tom Rain was absolutely stupefied by this paragraph:—so stupefied, indeed, that he sate gazing upon it in a species of vacant wonderment,—not starting, nor uttering any ejaculation—so that neither the Jewess nor Charley Watts, who were both in the room, noticed his emotion.

At length he recovered himself, and read and reread the paragraph until he could have repeated it by heart.

The shades of evening were gathering fast over this hemisphere; and he had therefore now a good excuse for going out—for that announcement in the Sunday paper had produced such an effect upon him that he felt he could not rest until he had performed a duty—an imperious but most painful duty!

Having hastily arranged his toilette in the bed-room up stairs, and put on a dark upper coat and a large woollen "comforter," he sallied forth—but not without having previously kissed both the Jewess and little Charley.

At the nearest coach-stand he entered a hack-vehicle, and ordered the driver to take him to the residence of Lady Hatfield, in Piccadilly.

But ere the coach arrived quite opposite the front door of the fair patrician's abode, Rainford alighted, and dismissed the vehicle.

Then he advanced to the house:—but it was with the step of a man who would rather—oh! a thousand times rather—have fled in any other direction.

His hand was on the knocker, and he hesitated,—yes, he hesitated; and that hand trembled.

It must have been some powerful cause that could have made the gallant—dauntless—almost hair-brained Tom Rain manifest so much emotion.

But at length the summons was given; and a livery-servant opened the door.

To Rainford's inquiry whether Lady Hatfield were at home, an affirmative answer was given.

"Say to your mistress," returned the highwayman, "that a person wishes to speak to her upon very particular business—and do me the favour to show me to a room where I can see her ladyship alone."

The servant hesitated a moment—for the excited tone in which the request was made somewhat surprised him. But remembering that it was not his business to question his lady's visitors, he conducted Rainford into a parlour where a fire was burning in the grate; and, having lighted the candles, the domestic retired to deliver to Lady Hatfield the message which he had received.

The few minutes which elapsed ere the door of that room again opened, seemed like an age to Tom Rain. He first sate down: then he rose again and stood before the fire in a state of extraordinary nervousness. In fact, he appeared perfectly unmanned.

We can conceive the feelings of appalling doubt—hope mingled with terrific fear—and agonising suspense, that must be experienced by an individual accused of a capital crime, and awaiting in the dock the return of the jury in whose hands are his life and death.

Such was the state of Tom Rain during the five mortal minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened.

At length it *did* open—and, though he had his back turned towards it, yet the rustling of silk and a light, airy tread convinced him that the lady of the house was now in that room.

He turned: the light streamed full upon his countenance—for he had laid aside his hat and woollen comforter; and Lady Hatfield—for it was she—uttered a faint scream as her eyes met his.

"Pardon this intrusion—fear me not *now*, my lady!" exclaimed Rainford hastily: "but grant me five minutes' attention, I implore you—

not for *my* sake—for *yours*!"

Georgiana had started back, and had become pale as death when she recognised the highwayman: but even while he was yet speaking, she recovered herself sufficiently to approach the spot where he was standing.

Then, without sitting down—but leaning her arm upon the mantelpiece, as if for support—she said in a hoarse and hollow tone, "My God! what would you with me?"

"Lady Hatfield," returned Rainford, in a mournful and even solemn tone, "forget the *past*—if you can—for a few minutes——"

"Forget the past!" repealed Georgiana hysterically, her whole frame convulsed with horror. "Oh! terrible man, wherefore have you come hither? have you not injured me enough? what do you now seek?—*my life?*"

And, as she uttered these last words, the syllables seemed to hiss between her set teeth—and her bosom heaved and fell rapidly with spasmodic palpitation.

"Listen to me, madam—I implore you!" exclaimed Rainford, cruelly perplexed and deeply touched by the agonising emotions which his presence occasioned. "I know that the sight of me must be abhorrent—loathsome to you; but it will be your fault if our interview is protracted beyond the few minutes which I ask you to grant me."

"Speak, sir—speak quickly!" cried Georgiana hysterically. "But mark me, sir," she added in a firmer and more resolute tone, while her usually placid glances seemed to glare with deadly hatred against the highwayman,—"mark me," she repeated—"if your intention be to coerce me again to commit a crime for your sake, you will not succeed. But a few days have elapsed since the stain of perjury—rank, abhorrent perjury—was fastened on my soul—and to save *you*! Oh! that I could have been so weak as to yield to your insolent command to swear to that which was false—atrociously, vilely false, at the bar of justice! And now proceed, sir, with the business which has brought you hither!"

"Lady Hatfield—I cannot, I dare not explain myself, while you labour under this dreadful excitement!" said Rainford, himself painfully excited. "Calm yourself, I implore you—for what I have to say most nearly concerns your interests."

"*My* interests!" repeated Georgiana in a sorrowful voice. "But proceed—go on, sir:—I *will* be calm."

"I observed in a newspaper of this day's date," continued Rainford, "that your ladyship is about to become the wife of the Earl of Ellingham."

Lady Hatfield gazed upon the highwayman in that vacant manner which left it doubtful whether she were the prey to feelings of surprise—terror—or despair.

"And if that rumour be true, my lady," added Rainford, after a moment's pause, "I would have you reflect on the propriety of this matrimonial connexion."

"My God! he assumes a right to dictate to me!" almost shrieked Georgiana, as she sank back upon a sofa, clasping her hands together in the excess of her mental anguish.

"No—my lady—not to dictate!" said Rainford. "I have not a shadow of a right to do that: it were the height of madness—the height of presumption—an insolence beyond all parallel on my part—in fact a deed so monstrously inconsistent with even common sense——"

"That you are surprised I should have entertained the idea?" added Georgiana, with an irony and bitterness which seemed lent her by despair.

"My God! I foresaw all the terrors of this interview!" exclaimed Rainford with feverish impatience.

"Then wherefore did you come?" demanded Georgiana. "Is it to expose me—to persecute *me* who have never offended *you*, but who have suffered so deeply—deeply——"

"Madam, I came to perform a painful duty," interrupted the highwayman; "and the sooner I accomplish it the better. Oh! you know not—you will not give me credit for the ineffable pity—the profound commiseration which I feel for you,—as well as the loathing—the abhorrence—the shame—the disgust in which I hold myself:—but I cannot recall the past. Would to God that I could!"

"Then you mean me no harm?" exclaimed Georgiana eagerly.

"Mean you harm, madam!" repeated Rainford enthusiastically: "merciful heavens! if to mitigate one single pang of the many—many with which your breast must throb, poor innocent sufferer that you are—a sufferer through my detestable crime,—if to relieve you of any portion of the load that weighs upon your mind—were that portion no heavier than a hair,—if to do this my life would suffice, I would lay it down, madam, at your feet! Think you that I glory in what I have done? No—no: bad as I am—criminal as I am—robber, plunderer as I am, and as you know me to be,—yet I have feelings—aye, and a conscience too! And, often—often, my lady, when the smile is upon my lip, that conscience is gnawing my heart's core—for I think of *you*! And all this is true as God's own justice is true,—true as that you are an innocent and a noble lady, and that I am a despicable villain!"

And Tom Rain—the gallant, dashing, almost hair-brained Tom Rain—burst into tears.

Georgiana gazed upon him in astonishment—in profound astonishment; and she was softened towards that bold and desperate man who wept on her account!

"But wherefore have you sought me this evening?" she said, in a milder and more gentle tone than she had yet used during this remarkable—this solemnly interesting meeting.

"It is not to demand your pardon, madam," returned Rainford, dashing away the tears from his manly countenance; "because *that* you

can never give! It is not to assert any presumed right to dictate to you in respect to your marriage, because *that* were adding the most flagrant cruelty to the most atrocious wrong. But it is to inform your ladyship that if you contract this marriage with the Earl of Ellingham, you wed one who is——"

"Who is what?" gasped Georgiana, almost suffocating.

Rainford paused for a few moments: it required these few moments to enable him to conquer emotions of so terrible a nature that they almost choked his powers of utterance:—then, bending down until his very lips touched Georgiana's ear, and his hair mingled with hers, he whispered a few words in a faint and scarcely audible tone.

But she heard them plainly—oh! far too plainly: and when he withdrew his face from its proximity to her head, and glanced upon her countenance, he saw, with feelings awfully shocked, that she sate mute—motionless—the image of despair.

Alas! she spoke not—she looked neither to the right nor to the left: her eyes seemed to be fixed upon the face of the highwayman;—and yet she saw him not—she was gazing on vacancy.

This dreadful state of stupefaction—the paralysis of despair—lasted for upwards of three minutes,—a perfect age alike to her who endured, and to him who beheld it.

Then suddenly burst from Lady Hatfield's lips a long—loud—piercing scream,—a scream so appalling that the very house appeared to shake with the vibration of the air which was cut by that shriek as by a keen-edged sword.

"Merciful God! the whole place will be alarmed!" ejaculated the highwayman. "Compose yourself, madam——"

But vainly did he thus address himself to the unhappy Georgiana: she had fallen back insensible upon the sofa.

The door opened abruptly; but Tom Rain was rooted to the spot where he stood gazing on the motionless form of that wretched lady,—stood gazing too in horrified amazement at the effect which his whispered words had produced.

The scream to which Lady Hatfield had given vent in the paroxysm of her ineffable anguish, had reached the ears not only of the domestics in the kitchen but also of the company in the drawing-room—for there were guests that evening at Georgiana's residence.

Thus, when the door burst open, a crowd of persons poured in,—Lord Ellingham, Dr. Lascelles, Sir Ralph Walsingham, three or four ladies, and all the servants.

Miss Mordaunt, we should observe, was no longer an inmate of Lady Hatfield's abode—for reasons that will be explained hereafter.

Lord Ellingham was the foremost of the crowd; and the first object that met his eyes, as he rushed into the room, was his Georgiana stretched senseless on the sofa. He saw a man standing near, but did not pause to cast a second glance upon him: the state in which he found his beloved engrossed all his thoughts.

He raised her in his arms—the ladies produced their smelling-bottles—the female servants hastened to fetch water, vinegar, and anything else that struck them as useful under the circumstances—and Dr. Lascelles, who *had* recognised Tom Rain, though without appearing to do so, professionally superintended all the means resorted to for the purpose of restoring suspended animation,—while the highwayman still looked on with a kind of mechanical attention.

At length Georgiana opened her eyes slowly; but the moment they caught a glimpse of Lord Ellingham's countenance, a faint cry escaped her lips—and she covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some terrible object from her view.

"Georgiana, dearest—'tis I," murmured Arthur in her ear.

But a dreadful shudder seemed to convulse her entire frame.

"Some one has terrified her—alarmed her!" exclaimed the Earl, colouring with anger; and as he glanced rapidly around, his eyes met those of the highwayman.

At that moment Dr. Lascelles desired that Lady Hatfield should be supported to her own chamber; and this suggestion was immediately followed by the female friends and servants, the physician accompanying them.

CHAPTER XLIII.
LORD ELLINGHAM AND TOM RAINFORD.

Lord Ellingham and Sir Ralph Walsingham remained behind in the apartment, where Rainford also still was.

"Sir," said the nobleman, advancing towards the highwayman, "you will perhaps be kind enough to explain the cause of her ladyship's emotion?—for the scream which reached our ears, and the condition in which we found her, denote something more serious than sudden indisposition. This gentleman, sir," added the Earl, indicating Sir Ralph Walsingham with a glance, "is Lady Hatfield's uncle: you therefore need not hesitate to address yourself to *him*—even should you decline to vouchsafe an explanation to me, who am a total stranger to you."

"Yes, my lord—for I know you well by sight—we *are* total strangers to each other," replied Rainford in a singularly mournful tone. "And yet——"

But he stopped short, seized his hat, and was about to hasten from the room, when the Earl caught him somewhat rudely by the arm, saying,—"Mr. Rainford—for such I believe to be your name—we cannot part with you thus! A lady—dear, very dear to me, and who indeed will shortly be my wife,—dear also to Sir Ralph Walsingham, who is now present,—that lady has been alarmed—terrified in some manner, by you; and we must insist upon an explanation."

"My lord," returned Tom Rain in a tone of deep emotion, as he gazed with peculiar—almost scrutinising attention upon the Earl's countenance,—"no other man on earth would thus have dared to stop me with impunity. As for explanations," he continued, his voice suddenly assuming a little of its usual reckless indifference, "I have none to give."

And again he moved towards the door.

But Lord Ellingham hastened to place his back against it in a determined manner: while Rainford, as if discouraged and daunted, fell back a few paces.

"Mr. Rainford," exclaimed the Earl, "this matter cannot pass off thus. I insist upon an explanation; or I shall consider it to be my duty to detain you until Lady Hatfield be sufficiently recovered to declare the nature of the treatment she has experienced at your hands. Moreover, sir," added the nobleman, observing that Rainford's lip blanched and quivered nervously, "you are to a certain degree an object of suspicion in my eyes. A variety of circumstances have combined to prove to me that you were implicated, to some degree, in the theft of diamonds which lately caused so much embarrassment at the police-court."

"My lord, that business does not regard you," replied the highwayman. "The diamonds were restored to their lawful owner; and—more than *that*—I even ascertained from Mr. Gordon's own lips that they were paid for, before their restoration, by one who——But let me depart, my lord, I say!" ejaculated Tom, his manner suddenly changing from nervous trepidation to the excitement of impatience.

"You must remain here, sir," said Arthur coldly, "until we ascertain whether it be Lady Hatfield's pleasure that your detention should assume a more serious aspect."

"Allow me to pass, my dear Earl," exclaimed Sir Ralph; "and I will hasten to ascertain how my niece is now, and what her intentions are with respect to this person."

Rainford paced the room in an agitated manner, while Lord Ellingham afforded egress to the baronet, and then resumed his position of sentinel with his back placed against the door.

"My lord," at length said the highwayman, advancing close up to the Earl, and speaking in a low, oppressed tone, "you will find that her ladyship has no complaint to make against me. Permit me to take my departure; and again I tell you that of no other living soul would I solicit as a favour what I would command by force."

"I cannot allow you to leave this room—at least until the return of Sir Ralph Walsingham," answered the Earl. "Lady Hatfield must have been insulted or menaced by you in some way——"

"I take God to witness that I neither insulted nor menaced her!" interrupted Rainford, warmly.

"If your liberty be endangered," said the nobleman, "it is well worth a falsehood to attempt to avert the peril."

"My God! this from *him*!" muttered Rainford bitterly to himself, as he once more turned round to pace the room: then, at the expiration of a minute, he said in a calmer tone, "Well, my lord—I am content to wait until the decision of her ladyship is made known in respect to me. And since it appears that we shall have a few moments more of each other's society, permit me to ask,—your lordship having just now alluded to a certain transaction at a police-court,—permit me to ask, I say, whether you really believe that Miss Esther de Medina was innocent or guilty of the charge imputed to her?"

"This is rather a singular question—coming from *you*, Mr. Rainford!" exclaimed the Earl; "and before I answer it, allow me to ask

whether it was not you who left a certain letter at my house, desiring me to repair to the police-office on that occasion?"

"I will not deny the fact, my lord," replied Rainford. "Indeed, I did not particularly study concealment respecting it—else would I not have afforded your lordship's servants an opportunity of describing to you the personal appearance of the individual who left that letter. But if your lordship entertains even the shadow of a suspicion injurious to the character of Miss de Medina, you are wrong—you are in error!—yes—as grievously in error as ever mistaken man could be. Besides, my lord," added Rainford hastily, "you are well aware that the *alibi* which your lordship proved was correct."

"And how knew you that Miss de Medina was with her father and myself at Finchley on the very day, and at the very hour, when the diamonds were alleged to have been taken?" demanded the Earl.

"It would be useless to pretend that accident gave me the information," answered Tom Rain. "But think not that *she* employed *me* as an agent or as a messenger to obtain the intervention of your lordship——"

"Mr. Rainford," said the Earl haughtily, "I dislike the present conversation. I have the highest opinion of Mr. de Medina, and should be sorry to think ill of any one connected with him. But I must candidly confess that there is so much mystery respecting the character of his daughter—a mystery, too, existing on account of yourself, for which reason alone do I condescend to discuss with *you* any affair relating to Mr. de Medina or his family——"

"Lord Ellingham," interrupted Rainford in a hasty and impetuous tone, "Esther de Medina is the very personification of innocence and virtue! As God is my judge, she was ignorant of my interference in her behalf on that day when she was accused of a deed from which her pure soul would recoil with horror:—she knew not even that I was in the court——"

"And yet you were there, Mr. Rainford," exclaimed the Earl: "for I noticed you—although at the time I knew not who you were."

"But Miss de Medina was *not* aware of my presence," rejoined Rainford emphatically; "*for she does not know me by sight*!"

A smile of incredulity curled the nobleman's lip—for the oath which Mr. de Medina had administered to his daughter, and in which her connexion with Rainford was so emphatically mentioned, was uppermost in his mind. But he dared not allude to that circumstance; although he would have been truly rejoiced to receive the conviction that Esther was indeed far different from what he was at present compelled to believe her to be.

"Your lordship said ere now," resumed Tom Rain, "that you noticed me in the court, although at the time you knew not who I was. Those were your words. Does your lordship now know who I am?"

"I cannot boast of a very intimate acquaintance with you or your affairs, Mr. Rainford," returned the nobleman with a hauteur bordering on contempt; "and what I do know of you is so little in your favour that you see I am detaining you here on the suspicion that your visit to Lady Hatfield was for no good purpose. In fact, the first I ever heard of you was in reference to the charge on account of which you yourself figured at Bow Street some short time since,—a charge of which, I am bound to say, you were honourably acquitted, Lady Hatfield having satisfactorily proved that you were not the person who robbed her on the highway."

"Thus far, my lord," said Rainford, "you have no just ground to speak disparagingly of my character."

"Certainly not. But then comes the affair of the diamonds; and I do not hesitate to inform you that Mr. Gordon related to me all the particulars of your interview with him, when you called to restore the jewels, and when he made you aware of the fact that Miss de Medina had already been to pay him the full value thereof."

"Ah! Mr. Gordon was thus communicative?" observed Rainford.

"Yes—and not sparing of his aspersions against the character of Miss de Medina," returned the Earl. "But I defended her, Mr. Rainford—I defended her *then*——"

"And wherefore should you not defend her now, my lord?" demanded the highwayman. "Oh! were I to reveal to you by what wondrous combination of circumstances——But, no! I dare not. And yet, my lord," he added in an earnest, solemn tone, "you are an upright—a generous-hearted man; and I appeal to your good feelings—I implore you not to trust to outward appearances. As there is a God above, Esther de Medina is innocent of every thing—any thing that scandal or misconception may have imputed to her. Again you smile incredulously—and yet mournfully, my lord! Ah! I can assure you, that Esther is innocent—oh! believe her to be innocent!"

At this moment footsteps were heard approaching the door, which Lord Ellingham accordingly opened; and Sir Ralph Walsingham re-appeared.

"How is Georgiana now?" inquired the nobleman hastily.

"My niece is ill—very ill," returned the baronet.

"Ill!" ejaculated Arthur. "Ah! villain—this is your work!" he cried, rushing towards the highwayman.

"Keep off!" thundered Rainford: "you know not whom you would strike!"

"No—touch him not!" cried Sir Ralph, catching the Earl by the arm, and holding him back. "I have seen my niece—Dr. Lascelles is now alone with her: she is more composed—though very far from well;—and she begs that this person may be allowed to depart without the slightest molestation."

"Her ladyship shall be obeyed, Sir Ralph," returned the nobleman. "Mr. Rainford, you have heard the message that has been sent relative to yourself."

Having thus spoken, Arthur turned aside;—for a strange misgiving—a vague suspicion—no, not a suspicion either,—but a feeling of

dissatisfaction had stolen into his mind. If Rainford had alarmed or insulted Lady Hatfield, wherefore should she allow him to go unpunished? Was it not more probable that he had brought her some evil tidings? But how could there exist any connexion, however remote or slight, between that man of equivocal character and Georgiana Hatfield? What business could possibly bring them together, and produce so strange—so powerful an impression upon *her*?

All these ideas rushed to the Earl's mind in rapid and bewildering succession; and the reader need not be astonished if we repeat that a sentiment of dissatisfaction—almost amounting to a vague suspicion, but of what he knew not—had suddenly taken a firm hold of his imagination.

Who was this Rainford, after all? Was he other than he seemed? Could he be in any way connected with that narrative of the Black Mask which the Earl supposed to have partially affected his Georgiana's mind, and which he looked upon as the cause of that apparent fickleness or caprice which had first led her to refuse his proffered hand? The more he involved himself in conjecture, the deeper did he plunge into a labyrinth which grew darker and more bewildering at every step.

When he turned round again towards the place where he had left Rainford standing, that individual was gone; and the noblemen was alone with Sir Ralph Walsingham.

"You have seen Georgiana?" said Arthur, advancing towards the baronet and grasping his hand with the convulsive violence of deep emotion.

"I have, my dear Earl; and she appears as if she had received some severe shock," was the reply.

"What, in the name of God! does all this mean?" exclaimed the nobleman, with wildness in his tone.

"I know not—I cannot comprehend it," answered the uncle, as much bewildered as the lover.

"But did you not question your niece? did she offer no explanation? did she not state the cause of her emotion—that piercing scream—that fainting—that movement of horror when she recovered?" demanded the Earl, impatiently.

"I questioned her; but, perceiving that it only augmented her agitation, I did not press a painful interrogatory," replied Sir Ralph. "When I informed her that you had detained that man, whom I heard you address by the name of Rainford, and whom I therefore supposed to have been the person suspected of robbing my niece,—when I informed her that you had detained him, I say, she was greatly excited, and desired me to hasten and request you to allow him to depart immediately, as she had no cause of complaint against him."

"Strange!—most strange!" murmured the Earl.

"Have patience, my dear Arthur," said Sir Ralph. "To-morrow Georgiana will be better; and then she will doubtless explain——"

"To-morrow—to-morrow!" repeated the nobleman impatiently. "Oh! what suspense—what terrible suspense! Ah! Sir Ralph, you know not how wretchedly will pass the weary hours of this night! If I could but see her—only for a moment! Would it be indiscreet? Dear Sir Ralph, have pity upon me, and ask Lascelles to come and speak to me."

The baronet, who was a kind-hearted man, instantly departed to execute this commission; and in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the physician.

To the latter the Earl repeated the same question which he had already addressed to Sir Ralph Walsingham:—"What, in the name of God! does all this mean?"

And the Doctor gave almost a similar reply:—"I know not—I cannot understand it."

But there was less sincerity in this answer as given by Lascelles than there was in the same response as uttered from the heart by the frank and honest baronet:—for the physician *had* his suspicions relative to the mysterious connexion which now appeared to subsist between Lady Hatfield and the individual whose visit had caused so much painful excitement.

"That villain Rainford! I am sorry even now that I suffered him to escape!" ejaculated the Earl, scarcely knowing how to act or speak.

"Rainford!" cried the physician. "Why, that is the name of the man who was taken up on suspicion of having robbed her ladyship near Hounslow!"

"And that was Thomas Rainford who was here ere now!" returned Arthur, with bitter emphasis, as if he hated the name.

"Rainford!" repeated the physician, in astonishment. "I thought that man's name was Jameson?"

The reader will remember that such was the denomination under which the highwayman passed when residing in South Moulton Street.

"What! do you know him?" demanded the Earl, gazing upon the doctor with unfeigned surprise.

"I once attended a patient at his abode," was the laconic reply: for Lascelles remembered the solemn promise which he had made to Tom Rain on that occasion.

"And where did he live?" inquired Arthur, eagerly. "I may wish to see that man again."

"Where he lived then, he does not live now," returned the physician; "for he moved away the very next day after I was called in; and whither he went to, the people of the house knew not."

"I believe him to be a man of bad character," observed Arthur hastily. "But enough of him—at least for the present. Doctor, can I be permitted to see Lady Hatfield for a few minutes?"

"Impossible for to-night, my dear Earl," replied the physician. "Her ladyship is in a state of nervous agitation—feverish excitement, indeed,—and must not be disturbed. Her maids are now with her, and she is about to retire to rest. To-morrow, my dear Ellingham, you shall see her—that is, provided she is more composed."

"Then must I submit to this weary night of suspense!" exclaimed the young nobleman. "But to-morrow, Doctor, I may see her. You have promised that I shall see her to-morrow! My visit will be somewhat early. Will it be indiscreet if I call at eleven?"

"Call at eleven, then," returned the physician, smiling at his friend's impatience. "But I think I ought to administer a composing draught to you."

The Earl and Sir Ralph Walsingham shook hands with Dr. Lascelles, and took their departure. The other guests had already gone; but the physician remained behind to see his fair patient once more ere he returned home.

When Lascelles found himself alone in the apartment which the young nobleman and the baronet had just left, he fell into a train of reflection which, like the Earl's state of mind, was strangely characterised by perplexity. Were the Doctor's thoughts put into words, they would assume as nearly as possible the ensuing shape:—

"Well, this is an evening of unpleasant adventure! That Jameson, or Rainford, or whatever his name is, has brought confusion and dismay into the house. Perplexities increase rapidly. I remember all that Ellingham said to me the day that he called to inform me that he was the happiest of men, and that her ladyship had accepted him. He declared then that he knew all—that he would never allow what must be considered a misfortune to stand in the way of his happiness—and so on. I also remember complimenting him on his moral courage in rising superior to a common prejudice; and then we dropped the conversation because we agreed that it was a delicate subject. And so it was, too: a devilish delicate subject! And I had found out the grand secret by stealth! Ah! the effects of that opiate were powerful, and she has never suspected that I *did* find out the secret. But Ellingham scarcely seems to have his wits about him; or else he *must* suspect the object of this Rainford's visit. It's as clear as day-light! Rainford is the man—and now he wants to extort money from her ladyship. But Ellingham cannot put two and two together as I can:"—and the physician rubbed his hands complacently, little suspecting that his sapient conjecture relative to the object of the highwayman's visit was totally wrong, as the reader is aware.—"This Rainford is an extraordinary character; and I do believe that he really robbed her ladyship, but that she did not dare say so in the police-court. He has the cut of a dashing fellow who would as soon rifle a pocket as drink a bumper of wine. Curse him, for having intruded on the mysteries of my laboratory! Oh! if Ellingham only knew what I know about the beautiful Esther de Medina—the charming Jewess! What deceivers some women are! To look on Esther, one would think she was purity itself? And yet ——"

The physician's reverie was interrupted by the entrance of a female servant, who came to inform him that Lady Hatfield had retired to her bed, and that the Doctor might now visit her again. He accordingly repaired to her chamber, and having prescribed some composing medicine, took his departure, without once alluding to the incidents of the evening; for he was anxious that Georgiana's mind should remain as free from causes of excitement and agitation as possible.

CHAPTER XLIV.
MR. FRANK CURTIS AGAIN.

In the meantime, Thomas Rainford had quitted the abode of Lady Hatfield with a heavy heart: for the duty which he had felt himself called upon to perform, in making a particular statement to Georgiana, had pained—acutely pained his generous soul.

He had not proceeded many yards from that lady's dwelling, when he suddenly encountered Mr. Frank Curtis; and as at that precise moment the glare of a lamp streamed full upon Rainford's countenance, he was immediately recognised by that impertinent young gentleman.

"Ah! Captain Sparks!" ejaculated Frank: "so we meet again, do we? Well, it's very fortunate that I did *not* accept my friend the Duke's invitation to his select dinner-party; or else I should have missed this pleasure. Now what is to prevent me from collaring you, my fine fellow, and raising a hue and cry?"

"*Fear*, Mr. Curtis—*fear* will prevent you," returned Tom Rain, recovering all his wonted presence of mind: and, taking the young man's arm, he said, "Walk a little way with me. I want to have a few minutes' chat with you. Here—put your hand on my great coat pocket: that's right! Now you can feel a pistol inside—eh? Well its companion is in the other pocket; and you must know enough of me already, to be fully aware that any treachery on your part would meet with its reward; for I would shoot you in the open street, if you attempted to place my liberty in danger."

"I'm sure I—I don't want to injure you, Captain Sparks," stammered Frank, trembling from head to foot as he walked along, arm-in-arm with the highwayman. "I always took you for a capital fellow—and I should very much like to drink a bottle of wine with you. What do you say? Shall we go into the *Gloucester*, or *Hatchett's*——"

"Neither one nor the other, Mr. Curtis," interrupted Rainford. "I thank you for your civility all the same."

"Oh! it's nothing, Captain. I learnt politeness in France, where, to be sure, I had excellent—I may say peculiar advantages. The King was very much attached to me—and as for the ladies of the Court—Oh! don't ask me to speak about them, Captain Sparks!"

"Indeed I will not," returned Tom drily. "I want you to let me know how your uncle gets on. Does he still remember that pleasant little adventure—ha! ha!"—and the highwayman's merry laugh denoted that his spirits were reviving once more.

"Sir Christopher! Oh! the old fool—don't talk to me about him!" ejaculated Frank Curtis. "I have done with my uncle—I shall cut him—I can never speak to him again, Captain Sparks. He has disgraced himself—disgraced his family, which was a very ancient one——"

"I always thought Sir Christopher made a boast of having risen from nothing?" said Tom ironically.

"Ah! so he did. But that was only a part of his system of gammoning people," continued Frank. "His family was originally the celebrated Blondevilles of France: about three thousand years ago they settled in Scotland, and their name was corrupted to *Blundevil*; —then a branch came to England about fifteen hundred years ago, and in process of time they spelt their name with a *t—Bluntevil*. At last the *e* was left out, and it became *Bluntvil*; and God only knows why, but three hundred and seventy-seven years ago, come next Michaelmas, the *vil* was dropped, and the name settled down into simple *Blunt*. So you see, Captain, that Sir Christopher is of a good family after all."

"Why don't you try and get a situation in the Herald's College?" demanded Rainford. "You would be able to find pedigrees for all the Browns, Jones's, Thompsons, and Smiths in the country."

"Come—come, Captain Sparks," exclaimed Frank: "this observation isn't fair on your part. I may have my faults—I know I have; but I don't shoot with the long bow. I hate that kind of thing!"

"But let us return to the subject of your uncle Sir Christopher," said Tom. "What has he been doing?"

"Run away with a lady's-maid—gone to Gretna with Lady Hatfield's female servant Charlotte!" cried Frank, with great bitterness of tone. "The damned old fool!—but I'll cut him—cut him dead—and that's some consolation."

"Gone to Gretna with Lady Hatfield's maid!" exclaimed Rainford.

"Maid, indeed! I hope he'll find her so!" said Curtis. "The hussey! But I'll be even with her yet!"

"And when did this happen?" inquired Tom.

"Oh! only a few days ago. They are not come back yet. I dare say Sir Christopher already repents his bargain. But I'll cut him!"

"I'm afraid if you cut his acquaintance, he'll cut off your supplies," observed Rainford jocosely.

"And what does that matter?" ejaculated Frank. "Do you think there are no rich women in London that would be glad to have a decent-

looking fellow like myself. Egad! I've already got introduced to a widow as wealthy as if her late husband had been a Nabob. It's true that she's blest with five pledges of the said late husband's affection; but then she's got five thousand a-year—and one five is a good set-off against the other, Captain Sparks. Rather so—eh? old fellow?"

"Well, I think it is," returned the highwayman. "But how did all this happen about Sir Christopher and the lady's-maid?"

"I'll tell you," answered Curtis. "You see, Sir Christopher was going to run away with Miss Mordaunt, Lady Hatfield's friend, and I found it out in one of my clever ways. So I resolved to baulk Sir Christopher; and I bribed this lady's-maid Charlotte—in fact, I gave her five hundred pounds and a gold watch, the hussey!—to go to the appointment, get into the carriage, personate Miss Julia Mordaunt, and keep up the farce until they got to St. Alban's, where me and a parcel of my friends were to be at the inn to receive them. That was to be the joke."

"And how did the joke turn so completely against yourself?" asked Tom.

"Why, me and my friends waited—and waited—and waited at the infernal hotel at St. Alban's; and no Sir Christopher—no Charlotte came. We had a glorious supper, and made a regular night of it. All next day we waited—and waited again; but no Sir Christopher—no Charlotte. '*What the devil can this mean?*' thought I to myself. So I came up to London, leaving my friends at the inn at St. Alban's in pawn for the bill—for somehow or another none of us had money enough about us to settle it. Well, when I came back to town, I went home: that is, you know, to my uncle's house in Jermyn Street; and there I found a letter that had just come for me by the post. It was written from some town a good way north, and was from Sir Christopher. I began to think something was wrong; and sure enough there was! For, when I opened the letter, I found that my silly old uncle had written to thank me for throwing in his way a delightful and most amiable woman, who had consented to take his name and share his fortune. The letter went on to say that they were then pretty far on their road to Gretna, and that as they should stop at St. Alban's *as they came back*, I might be there, if I chose, to have the pleasure of handing my *aunt* out of the carriage. That was all said to irritate me, you know, Captain Sparks; and most likely that vixen Charlotte made Sir Christopher write the letter just to annoy me. But I'll cut them both dead; and we shall see what my precious *aunt*—for such she is by this time, I suppose—will say *then*!"

"This is really a very pleasant little adventure," cried Tom Rain. "But I think you carried your joke too far, Mr. Curtis; and so it has recoiled on yourself. Have you seen Mr. Torrens lately?"

"Not I!" exclaimed Curtis. "But don't you confess, Captain, that you carried matters a trifle too far that night? Never mind the two thousand pounds: I'm glad my old hunks of an uncle has lost *that*! But I allude to the affair of helping the gals to run away. I suppose you were in league with Villiers all the time?"

"What makes you think that Villiers had any thing to do with the matter?" inquired Rainford.

"Simply because I don't imagine you carried off the gals for your own sake. However," continued Frank, "I care but little about the matter now. I certainly liked Adelais very much at the time; but there are plenty of others in the world quite as handsome. Besides, I now see through all Sir Christopher's trickery in wanting me to marry Miss Torrens in such a deuce of a hurry, and in giving me a separate establishment. The old bird wanted to commit matrimony himself; and I should have been poked off with a few paltry hundreds a-year."

"And so you will now," said Tom. "Or matters may be even worse, after the trick you endeavoured to play upon your uncle."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Frank. "Had old Blunt's scheme succeeded, I should have been married to a portionless gal, and forced to live on whatever he chose to give me. Now that his project has failed, I am free and unshackled, and can secure myself a position by marriage. I might even look as high as my friend the Duke's niece; but she is horribly ill-tempered, and so I think of making an offer of my heart and hand—I *can* do the thing well if I like, you know, Captain—to Mrs. Goldberry, the widow I spoke of just now."

"The name sounds well, I confess," observed Tom. "But did your uncle never—I mean, did he not instruct his lawyer to adopt any proceedings about that little affair of the two thousand pounds?"

"Not he, Captain!" exclaimed Frank Curtis. "As far as my uncle is concerned, you may rest quite satisfied that he will never take any notice of the business: and Howard wouldn't act without his instructions."

They had now reached Charing Cross; and Tom Rain, having had quite enough of Mr. Curtis's company, signified his desire that they should separate.

"You won't pass an hour with me over a bottle of wine?" said the young man. "I really should like to have a chat with such a gallant, dashing fellow as you are, Captain; for you're quite after my own heart—barring the——"

"The highway business—eh?" cried Tom, laughing. "Why, you cannot for a minute suppose that it is my regular profession, Mr. Curtis? No such a thing! I merely eased you of the two thousand pounds for the joke of it—just as you played off your tricks on Sir Christopher."

"You talk about easing me, Captain," returned Frank; "but I can assure you that you're the first man that ever got the better of me. Don't fancy for a moment that I—I'm a coward, Captain Sparks——"

"Far from it, my dear sir," exclaimed Tom. "I know you to be as brave as you are straight-forward in your conversation. So good night—and pray take care not to follow me; for I've an awkward habit of turning round and knocking on the head any one that I imagine to be watching me."

With these words the highwayman hurried off up the Strand: and Frank Curtis entered a cigar shop, muttering to himself, "Damn the fellow! I almost think he meant that for insolence. Egad! if he *did*, the next time I meet him——"

But the valiant young gentleman did not precisely make up his mind what he should do, in the case supposed: and any resentment which he experienced, speedily evaporated with the soothing influence of a cheroot.

Meantime Tom Rain pursued his way along the Strand and Fleet Street, and repaired to the lodgings of Mr. Clarence Villiers in Bridge Street.

That gentleman was at home, and received his visitor in a very friendly manner.

"You are most welcome, Captain Sparks," he said; "and the more so if you intend to pass an hour or two with me; for my aunt is so very particular that she *would* take the girls to church with her this evening; but of course I did not offer to accompany them, as I could not wear a veil over my face, you know," he added, laughing; "and were I recognised by Mr. Torrens or any of his friends, attention would be immediately directed to any ladies who might happen to be in my company. So I shall not visit Old Burlington Street this evening; and if you will bear me company over a bottle of wine——"

"I cannot possibly remain many minutes," interrupted Rainford. "In fact I am going to leave England very shortly——"

"Leave England!" ejaculated Clarence. "I am truly sorry to hear that announcement—just as we begin to get friendly together."

"Circumstances compel me to take this step," answered Rainford; "and my time for preparation is short. I have called to-night upon business—for, in a word, you can do me a service, perhaps, if you will."

"As if there were any doubt relative to my inclination, provided I have the power," exclaimed Clarence, who was busily employed in decanting a bottle of port-wine: then, having placed upon the table two glasses, which he filled, he said, "You know, Captain Sparks, that I am under the greatest obligation to you. Through your kind—your generous intervention, Adelais will be mine. The banns were published at St. George's, Hanover Square, a second time to-day; and to-morrow week we shall be united. The bridal breakfast will take place at my aunt's: shall we not have the pleasure of your company? Pray, do not refuse me."

"It is impossible—much as I should rejoice at being the witness of that union which no severe or mercenary father will be able to subvert," said Rainford in a feeling tone. "My affairs compel me to leave this country—at least for a time; and for that reason I am anxious to place in your hands a certain document, the mystery of which some accident might probably lead you to clear up."

Rainford then produced the letter which had been found about the person of the deceased Sarah Watts, and which he now requested Villiers to peruse.

"You observe that there is no address to indicate the name of the lady to whom that letter was written," continued the highwayman, when Clarence had read it with attention. "The child to whom it refers is now in my care: accident threw him in my way—and his adopted mother, who was the writer of that letter, is no more."

"Will the child accompany you?" asked Villiers.

"He will. But I will write to you the moment I reach America—to which country I am going—and let you know my address, or at all events through what channel a letter will come direct to me. Then, should you have made any discovery—which is however scarcely to be expected—still, as a wise precaution, I have adopted this step——"

"You are right, Captain," said Villiers; "and I shall not forget the trust you have now confided to me. Should anything transpire respecting this matter, I will not fail to communicate with you. But will you not pass one evening with me in the society of my aunt and the two young ladies, who will all be delighted to receive you? Mrs. Slingsby is a most amiable and excellent woman——"

"A little of a saint—is she not?" exclaimed the highwayman drily.

"She is certainly of a religious turn of mind—indeed, I may say, enthusiastically so," answered Villiers. "But she is extremely charitable—and her benevolence embraces a very wide circle."

"I believe she is a handsome woman, too!" observed Tom Rain.

"She is possessed of personal as well as mental attractions, Captain Sparks," responded Villiers seriously. "But, when in her society, you would think of her only as the pious—benevolent—and compassionate woman, whose heart is ever ready to sympathise with the woes of her fellow creatures."

"To speak candidly, Mr. Villiers," said Rainford, "I am no friend to the *saints*. It may be a prejudice on my part—but I can't help it. Excuse me for my frankness—I beg of you to take it in good part: still I always think that the stillest water runs deepest; and I would not——"

"Remember, Captain Sparks," interrupted Villiers, somewhat warmly, "that you are speaking of my aunt, who is a most worthy and estimable woman. Deeply as I am indebted to you—much as I am inclined to esteem you—yet——"

"I understand you, my dear Mr. Villiers," cried Tom: "you cannot permit me to breathe even a suspicion against Mrs. Slingsby in your presence. Well—I know that it is most ungracious on my part: still, as I was more or less instrumental in inducing those too artless, confiding young ladies to quit their father's home—to abandon the paternal dwelling——"

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" ejaculated Clarence, now seriously alarmed. "I see that there is something at the bottom of all this! Captain Sparks, I implore you to explain yourself. You are evidently well-intentioned—you have shown the greatest friendship for me—I reciprocate the feeling most cordially: fear not, then, to speak."

"My dear Villiers," answered the highwayman, "how can I enter upon particulars the narration of which would be most painful for you

to hear? And yet I should not be acting consistently with my duty towards those young ladies—no, nor towards yourself who are about to make one of them your wife——"

"Hesitate not: speak freely!" exclaimed Clarence, seeing that his companion paused. "Should the breath of scandal have wafted to your ear anything prejudicial to the character of my aunt, I cannot blame your motive in confiding the fact to me. And I the more earnestly solicit you to be frank and candid—that is, to act consistently with your nature, which is all frankness and candour,—and reveal to me the cause of this distrust—this want of confidence relative to Mrs. Slingsby,—because I have no doubt of being able to convince you that you have been misled."

"And should I succeed in convincing *you* to the contrary?" asked Rainford.

"Then I should say that you had indeed performed the part of a friend," replied Villiers emphatically. "Although I know beforehand that such a result is impossible—yet, for your complete satisfaction, do I declare that should you prove my aunt to be in any way an unsuitable guardian for that dear girl Adelais, and her sister, I shall conceive it to be my duty immediately to seek for them another home—yes, another home—even for the few days that remain to be passed ere I shall acquire a right to protect Adelais as her husband and Rosamond as her brother."

"You have spoken well and wisely, Villiers," said Rainford; "but I do not recommend any extreme measure, which might only irritate your aunt, and perhaps lead to the forced restoration of the young ladies to their father before you can have obtained the right you speak of. I merely wish you to be on your guard——"

"But the grounds of your suspicion, Captain?" cried Clarence impatiently. "Pardon my interruption—and pity my suspense."

"I do both," returned the highwayman. "And now remember that I am no mischief-maker between relations or friends; and were it not for the peculiar circumstances of this case, in which two innocent young ladies are concerned, I should never have thought it worth while to utter a word of any thing I know injurious to Mrs. Slingsby's character—no, not even to unmask the most disgusting hypocrisy," added Rainford warmly.

"Do you still allude to my aunt?" demanded Clarence, colouring with indignation.

"I do. But start not—I am not seeking a quarrel with you, Villiers—and you promised to listen patiently."

"To no other living being should I have listened so patiently as I have already done to you," said Clarence. "But pray let us hasten to dispose of so disagreeable a topic in one way or the other."

"I am most anxious to do so," continued the highwayman. "Do you know Sir Henry Courtenay?"

"Certainly: he is my aunt's best friend."

"And her lover," added Rainford coolly.

Villiers started from his seat, exclaiming, "Captain Sparks! you presume upon the obligation which I owe you, to calumniate——"

"Then good evening, Mr. Villiers," interrupted the highwayman. "If this is the fair and impartial hearing which you promised to give me,—if this is the manner in which you treat one who has not—cannot have an improper motive in offering you wise counsel——"

"Stay, my dear friend—stay!" exclaimed Clarence, actually thrusting Rainford back into his seat; "and pray forgive my impetuosity. But this accusation—so sudden—so unexpected—so very strange——"

"And yet it is substantially true," added Rainford emphatically: "and it is proper that you should know it. For my part, I am not the man to name Mrs. Slingsby for having a lover—nor yet the lover for having her as his mistress: it's human nature both ways. But when I know that she has been entrusted by you with the guardianship of two young ladies of tender age and spotless innocence, and one of whom is so very, very dear to you, I consider it necessary for you to be enlightened as to her true character. I've no doubt that you must feel deeply this communication: but it is better for you to learn that your aunt is something that she ought not to be, than to find out when it is too late that your wife or her sister have been corrupted by bad example."

Clarence paced the room in an agitated manner: then, at the expiration of a few minutes, he turned suddenly, exclaiming, "Not for a moment, Captain Sparks, do I suspect you of any sinister object: but you will pardon me for soliciting the proof of this charge which, if substantiated, must so completely and so painfully change my opinion of a relative whom I have until now vaunted as the pattern of virtue and propriety."

"The mode of proving the charge may be left to yourself," replied the highwayman. "Did you ever hear the circumstance of your aunt's house being robbed by a boy to whom she gave a night's lodging, some four or five years ago?"

"Certainly," exclaimed Villiers. "I recollect the incident well. Mrs. Slingsby herself communicated it to me. The ungrateful young villain——"

"I know that boy," interrupted Tom Rain drily; "and I am convinced that he told me the truth when he declared that, during the night—or rather the portion of the night, which he passed in Mrs. Slingsby's house, accident made him a witness to a scene which leaves no doubt as to the fact that Sir Henry Courtenay and Mrs. Slingsby are as intimate as man and wife together."

"And would you receive the testimony of a thief——"

"When well corroborated," added the highwayman.

"But how happened it that you should have any connexion with this lad, Captain Sparks!" demanded Clarence, in a cold and suspicions tone.

"Suppose that the boy has repented of his errors—that he has merited my interest by a service which accident enabled him to render me—that he related to me his entire history, in which this incident is comprised—and that, on questioning him closely, I learnt that the occurrence took place at the residence of your aunt?"

"I am bewildered—amazed—grieved—profoundly grieved!" ejaculated Villiers. "To suppose for an instant that this kind and affectionate relative—who has always been so good to me, and through whose bounty I am enabled to prepare and fit up a suitable dwelling for the reception of my beloved Adelais,—to think that this much-respected and long-revered woman should conceal the greatest profligacy beneath the mask of charity and religion—oh! it is a cruel blow!"

"Again I say that the mode of proving the charge may be left to yourself," observed Rainford. "Seek an opportunity to be alone with Mrs. Slingsby—make some pointed allusion to the incident—and mark how she receives it."

"I will call at my aunt's residence to-morrow morning early—the very first thing," exclaimed Villiers. "The whole affair is most serious; and, now that I can at length contemplate it with something bordering on calmness, I am bound to confess——But let us quit the topic," he added, in a tone of deep vexation, in spite of his asserted self-possession.

"And you bear me no ill-will for the course I have pursued?" said Rainford.

"Far from it. You have acted in a most friendly manner—whatever the result may be!" cried Villiers, grasping the highwayman's hand most cordially.

"I have performed a very painful duty," rejoined Tom: "and now I must take my leave of you—perhaps for a long, long time—if not for ever."

"Farewell," said Clarence; "and may prosperity attend you in another clime."

"Farewell," replied Rainford; "and may you be happy with your Adelais."

The highwayman then hurried from the room, considerably affected by this parting from one for whom he already experienced a most sincere regard.

Nor was Villiers unmoved by this farewell scene; for, on his side, he was particularly attached to the individual who had not only rendered him so essential a service on that memorable night which first made them acquainted with each other, but whose apparent frankness of disposition and manliness of character were well calculated to engage the good opinion of the confiding, warm-hearted, and unsuspecting Clarence.

CHAPTER XLV.
MR. DYKES AND HIS MYRMIDONS.

It was midnight; and profound silence reigned throughout the region of Lock's Fields.

But suddenly that silence was broken by the tread of several persons, who emerged from a bye-alley in the immediate vicinity of Brandon Street.

At the corner of this street they paused to hold a hasty conference.

They were six in number—five men and a woman.

"This is the street," said the woman.

"Oh! this is it, Mrs. Bunce—eh?" returned Mr. Dykes, the Bow Street officer, rubbing his nose with the knob of his stout ash-stick, while his countenance, on which the bright moon-beams played, showed an expression of calm determination.

"Yes: and that's the house—there: the ninth on t'other side of the way," added Mrs. Bunce.

"Well—now we don't want you no more, ma'am," said Dykes; "'cos women is all very well in their place; and darling creatur's they are too. But when a grab is to be made, they're best at home, a-bed and asleep. So good night to you, ma'am."

"Good night, gentlemen all," responded Mrs. Bunce; and she hurried away.

"Now, Bingham and you fellers," said Mr. Dykes, "we must mind what we're up to; for we shan't catch a weasel asleep. You, Bingham, take one of the runners and get round to the back of the house. Me and t'other chaps will make the entry in front. But we shan't stir a peg for one quarter of an hour; and by that time you'll be at your post."

"All right," returned Mr. Bingham; and this individual accordingly moved off, followed by one of the subordinate runners.

In the meantime, Tom Rainford was sleeping, not dreaming of danger, in the arms of the beautiful Jewess.

Charley Watts was cradled in a little bed made up for him in the warmest corner of the room.

A light burnt in the apartment, where naught was heard save the slow, regular breathing of the sleepers.

The clear, transparent olive complexion of the beautiful Jewess contrasted strongly with the florid countenance of the highwayman; and the commingling of the raven hair of the one with the light, almost yellow locks of the other, produced a strange effect, as the marked discrepancy of hues was set off by the snowy whiteness of the pillow. By the feeble light of the candle, it appeared as if ebony and gold were blending on a white ground.

But, hark! what is that sound which breaks on the silence of the chamber?—and wherefore does the highwayman start from his sleep?

He awakes—and listens.

The Jewess also awakes—and also listens,—one of her beautifully modelled arms thrown around the neck of him whom she loved so fondly.

"Some one is trying the back-door," whispered Rainford at length; and he leapt from the bed.

In less than a minute he had thrown on his clothes; and grasping his pistols, he hastened to the window.

But at the same instant the back-door was forced in;—more violently, no doubt, than Bingham and his co-operator had intended; and the sound was too unequivocal to permit Tom Rain to doubt the meaning of the disturbance.

Returning to the bed, he said in a hurried but solemn and deeply impressive tone, "Dearest, I am betrayed. If I escape, you shall soon hear from me: if I am captured, I charge you—by all the love I bear for you—by all the love you bear for me—not to attempt to visit me in prison! Farewell—dearest, dearest girl!"

He embraced her fondly—affectionately,—oh! most lovingly; while she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Then in a moment he tore himself away:—footsteps—many footsteps were already ascending—nay, rushing up—the stairs.

He darted from the room, sprang up a ladder which stood on the landing—pushed up a trap-door—and in another moment was on the roof of the house.

The officers were close upon him. Dykes and his two men had effected an entry by the front-door of the house almost at the same moment that Bingham and his follower had broken in at the back; and the entire *posse* reached the landing just at the moment that the trap-door fell down heavily into its place.

"He has escaped by the roof!" cried Dykes. "Bingham, my boy, take a couple of chaps, and watch the backs of the houses: he can't get away by the front—it's too high for him to leap into the street. Me and t'other chap will after him to the tilings."

Thus saying, Dykes ascended the ladder as quickly as his unwieldly form would permit. The trap-door was easily raised, as it only fastened inside; and the portly body of the Bow Street officer, who possessed more courage than alacrity, was forced through the small aperture. The operation was slow and difficult; but at last Mr. Dykes stood on a narrow ledge which ran along the whole row of houses, and from which the roof rose obliquely behind. This ledge was only protected by a parapet about two feet high; and the officer felt his position to be any thing but a safe one.

But he was not the man to shrink from danger.

"Come along, you feller," he cried out to his follower, who speedily emerged from the opening. "You cut along that way, and I'll go this."

And they proceeded in different directions on the roof of the house.

The moon shone brightly, but Thomas Rainford was not to be seen.

Suddenly an exclamation of triumph burst from the yard at the back of one of the adjacent houses.

"Holloa?" vociferated Dykes, from the eminence on which he stood.

"We've got him, fast enough," returned Bingham.

A piercing shriek from a window that had been thrown open, denoted the anguish of the Jewess, whose ears had caught these words.

Mr. Dykes and his attendant subordinate now retraced their way to the trap-door, through the aperture of which they once more forced themselves; and when they had regained the landing Dykes said, "Now you go and join my partner Bingham, 'cos this Rainford is a desperate feller, and the more there is to guard him the better."

The man accordingly took his departure, and Mr. Dykes knocked gently at the door of the bed-room.

"Who is there?" asked a voice within,—a voice soft and melodious, but now expressive of the most intense anguish.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Dykes; "but I must do my duty; and if so be you'll have the kindness to dress yourself, I should like to examine the boxes and cupboards, and such like—just for form's sake, and that's all."

"Must you thus add to the grief which is already——"

The plaintive voice was interrupted by a violent fit of sobbing, with the mournful sounds of which the crying of the little boy now commingled.

"I don't want to annoy you, ma'am," returned Dykes.

"I should hope not, indeed!" exclaimed the landlady, who, having been alarmed by the disturbance, had got up and dressed herself, and was now ascending the stairs. "But what is it all about? and why do you break into a respectable house in this way? I don't suppose you're thieves—or else——"

"I am an officer, ma'am," exclaimed Dykes, drawing himself up with offended dignity, as the candle which the landlady carried in her hand lighted the landing-place:—"I am an officer, ma'am—and my partners have just taken one Thomas Rainford, a highwayman ——"

"A highwayman!" ejaculated the widow, who had never suspected the character of her lodger, and who was a prudent woman that never troubled herself about other people's business so long as her rent was regularly paid.

"Yes—a highwayman," added Dykes. "But I've no time to stand palavering. I b'lieve there's a lady in this room here; and as I must overhaul the place—as the case is a serious one—you'll do well to step in and let me do the job quietly. I don't want to annoy her: the law isn't at loggerheads with her—and so she's nothing to fear. As for me, I'm as gentle as a lamb when a lady's concerned."

The widow urged the afflicted girl within the room to open the door; and as the latter had by this time dressed herself, the request was complied with.

But the Jewess wore a deep black veil over her head, when the officer and the landlady entered the bed-chamber; and, taking Charley in her arms, she seated herself in a chair near the bed, whispering a few words of consolation to the little boy even amidst the terrible violence of her own grief.

As for Charles, he knew that something wrong was occurring; but he was too young to comprehend the real nature of the appearances which terrified him.

Dykes just opened a cupboard, plunged his hands into a trunk, and turned out the contents of a carpet-bag: but he did not prosecute his search any farther; for he was too much experienced in the ways of robbers and rogues to suppose for a moment that he should find on the premises any portion of the money stolen from Sir Christopher Blunt,—this being the charge on which Rainford was arrested.

The search, such as it was, was merely for form's sake; because the magistrate was sure to inquire whether the prisoner's lodgings had been carefully examined; and this superficial glance at the contents of the boxes would enable Mr. Dykes to give an affirmative answer without any very great deviation from the actual truth.

He accordingly quitted the room within a minute after entering it; but he turned on the landing just to beg "the dear young lady not to take on too much," and also to assure the mistress of the house that she should be recompensed for the injury done to her abode by the

violent entry effected by himself and his companions.[23]

We must leave the landlady to console—or endeavour to console the unhappy Jewess,—and accompany Mr. Dykes, who passed out of the house by the back way, and stepped over two or three low fences which separated the yards of the respective dwellings, until he reached that one where Tom Rain was in the custody of Bingham and the subordinate runners.

It appeared that the gallant highwayman, finding how hotly he was pursued when he was escaping by means of the trap-door, and dreading lest the whole neighbourhood should be alarmed ere he could possibly get away, had resolved on the dangerous expedient of sliding down from the roof to the back of the buildings, by means of the perpendicular leaden water-pipe. But when he was half-way down in his perilous descent, he missed his hold, and fell upon the stone pavement of the yard beneath. He endeavoured to get up and escape—but could not: his right ankle was sprained, almost to dislocation; and in a few minutes he was discovered and captured by the detachment under the orders of Bingham.

He heard the piercing scream which followed the announcement of his arrest by this officer; and that scream—oh! it went to thy generous heart, Tom Rain!

But he uttered not a word: he offered no resistance, although he had his pistols about him. He not only shrank from the idea of shedding human blood: but he was also well aware that his case was now too desperate to be benefited by even desperate means. For, even if he slew all the officers, he could not drag himself away ere the neighbours would collect and capture him.

And by this time, the whole line of houses was awake with bustle and excitement. Light after light appeared at the different casements: windows were thrown up; and the rumour spread like wildfire, that a famous highwayman had just been arrested.

The reader may well conceive the nature of the sensation which now prevailed all along the back of Brandon Street;—but in one room there was a beauteous woman convulsed with torturing—maddening anguish,—for deep was her love for thee, Tom Rain!

"Now, then," cried Dykes, as he made his appearance in the yard, where the highwayman was sitting on an inverted wash-tub, surrounded by the runners, to whom he had surrendered his pistols;—"now, then lads—let's off with him to quod. How d'ye do, Mr. Rainford! Don't want to crow over a gentleman in trouble—but thought I should have you some day or another." Then, stooping down, he whispered in Tom's ear, "I was obleeged to give a look in at the crib up there just now; but I only stayed a moment, and shan't trouble the poor lady any more. She had a veil over her face—and so I don't know who she is: that is, you see, I *shan't* know, if I'm asked any questions by the beak:—but of course I'm aware it's the handsome Jewess that did the diamond business."

"You are mistaken—you are mistaken," said Rainford, emphatically. "But, if you showed her any civility, I sincerely thank you——"

"Lord bless you! Mr. Rainford—I wouldn't do any thing to annoy you for the world. I can't help admiring a brave man—and you're one. The poor dear lady will be troubled no more by us; and it's nothing to me who she is, or who she is not. The law don't want *her*, at all events."

"One word more," said Tom. "Who has done this business for me?"

"A lawyer named Howard," was the answer. "But I can't say no more——"

"Then what is the charge against me?" asked Tom, a considerable load already removed from his mind.

"Sir Christopher Blunt's little business—that's all," replied Dykes. "But come along: we must be off to Horsemonger."

Mr. Dykes and Mr. Bingham politely offered Rainford their arms; and the procession passed through the house, in the yard belonging to which the capture had been made. The occupants of that dwelling—men, women, and children, all in their night-dresses—crowded on the stairs to catch a glimpse of the "terrible highwayman," whose good looking appearance excited the sympathy of the female portion of the spectators.

Half an hour afterwards Tom Rain was lodged in a cell in the criminal department of Horsemonger Lane Gaol;—but his heart was lighter than the reader might possibly suppose—for he was relieved of the first and most natural fear that had assailed him: namely, that it was on account of Benjamin Bones's death that he was pursued!

"If I must be hanged," he thought within himself, "I would rather it should be for highway robbery than aught else!—But, O Tamar! Tamar! what is to become of *thee*?"

And, as he sate on the humble pallet in the darkness of his solitary cell, he buried his face in his manacled hands.

In another moment a moonbeam penetrated through the barred window; and in that silver ray glistened the tears which trickled between his fingers.

And yet it was not for himself he wept:—thou wast no coward—but thou hadst a generous heart, Tom Rain!

23. We should observe that at the time of which we are writing, it was by no means unusual for Bow Street officers to be employed in the pursuit or capture of desperate characters in Surrey, although this county was not strictly within their district.

CHAPTER XLVI.
EXPLANATIONS.

At eleven o'clock on the following day, Lord Ellingham, who had passed a sleepless and wretched night, called at the house of Lady Hatfield, and was immediately conducted to the drawing-room, where Georgiana was alone in readiness to receive him.

She was dressed in a morning garb, and, though very—very pale, looked surpassingly lovely.

"My dear friend," she said, extending her hand, which, as he offered to press it with rapture to his lips, she gently but still resolutely withdrew,—"my dear friend—for such henceforth must I call you——"

"Georgiana!" he exclaimed, starting back: "what means this coolness?"

"Be seated, Arthur—and listen to me attentively," she said in a plaintive and sweetly touching tone. "I am not very well—my nerves are not strong to-day—and you must not manifest any impatience towards me. Indeed, I ought to have postponed this interview: but I considered it to be my duty—a paramount duty owing alike to yourself and to me—to enter into as early an explanation as possible."

"This preface forebodes nothing favourable to my happiness," murmured the Earl, as he sank into a seat to which Georgiana pointed—but which was not by her side!

"Arthur," she continued, with difficulty maintaining sufficient control over her emotions to enable her to speak calmly and collectedly, "you know not how much I love you—how dearly I am devoted to you. For your sake, and to bear the name of your wife, I could consent to become a mendicant—a wanderer on the face of the earth,—renounce fortune—rank—society—all, in fine, that we women are generally deemed to hold so dear,—yes, all this could I do for your sake, so that you were my companion! Then, conceive how hard it is for me—oh! how very hard, my well-beloved Arthur, to be compelled to say that henceforth we must know each other only as friends!"

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated the Earl, uncertain whether the imagined capriciousness of his Georgiana was about to assert its tantalizing influence again, or whether any thing of a more serious nature, and connected with the incidents of the preceding evening, was about to present an insuperable bar to his happiness.

"Yes—Arthur," continued Georgiana, in an impressive tone, "henceforth we must be but as brother and sister to each other. And as a dear, fond, affectionate sister will I ever be to you; for your generosity would have made me your wife in spite of——But you cannot wish me to refer to *that*! And yet it *is* that one sad episode in my life which now asserts an inexorable influence over the conduct which we must *both* pursue. It is that event, which you—in the noble candour, in the warm liberality of your admirable disposition——"

"You praise me too highly, Georgiana," exclaimed the Earl. "I loved you—I love you dearly; and in spite of all that you now say, hope is not quenched within me. But, my God! when will this painful suspense pass? When shall I behold you no longer a prey to an influence——"

"Alas! that influence must endure for ever!" murmured Lady Hatfield, tears now trembling upon her eye-lashes.

"No—no!" cried the Earl with impassioned energy. "When, but a few days ago, we entered into explanations with each other—when I informed you that I was aware of the nature of that secret influence which tyrannised over you,—did I not assure you that, as a loving husband, I would so completely study your happiness——"

"Oh! yes," interrupted Georgiana; "and did I not declare that you had given me a proof of affection such as man seldom gave unto woman? Believe me—believe me," she added earnestly, "I felt all that there was great—generous—and noble in your conduct: for, knowing that secret—that sad, that fatal secret—you banished all prejudice—discarded even those scruples which the most high-minded of men so often entertain under such circumstances——"

"Dearest Georgiana!" exclaimed the Earl; "you attach far too much importance to the secret of which you speak. What man that truly loves a virtuous—beautiful—accomplished—and amiable woman, would allow himself to be swayed——"

"Ah! every heart is not so generous as yours!" interrupted Georgiana. "You recognise the complete innocence of my soul——"

"I cannot believe that you would be guilty of the wanton cruelty of inflicting these tortures upon me, Georgiana," said the Earl, "were it not for that strange—that almost morbid state of mind which is at times produced by the recollection of a serious fright which you experienced some years ago, and from the effects of which you have not completely recovered. But, after all, wherefore do you praise me so highly—wherefore do you thank me so much for the simple fact of not allowing the knowledge of this occasional access of morbid feeling to weigh with me——"

"Arthur!" almost shrieked Georgiana, losing all control over herself; "then, you know not the secret—the dreadful secret——"

"Yes: have I not proved to you that I know it?" exclaimed the Earl, surprised and grieved at the strange manner of Lady Hatfield. "Your

uncle put me in possession of the facts: and what is there in them, after all? It is a mere adventure which one would now tell only as a Christmas tale—or to amuse children,—had it not produced so serious an influence upon your nerves, and——"

"Arthur! Arthur! is this a cruel pleasantry?" demanded Georgiana hysterically; "or have we misunderstood each other all along?"

"You know that I am incapable of turning to ridicule or making a jest of any thing that regards you, Georgiana," returned the Earl. "And as for any misunderstanding between us, there is none. Our explanation the other day was full—complete—satisfactory——"

"No—no," cried Lady Hatfield, painfully excited. "I see that I am mistaken—that you have learnt a bare fact——"

"Yes: and since we are now conversing on the topic," said the Earl, "let us enter fully into it and then abandon it for ever. I see that you attach much importance to this subject—and that, when we are united, there may be no necessity ever to recur——"

"If ever we are united!" repeated Georgiana, clasping her hands in anguish of heart.

"Yes, my well-beloved," continued the Earl. "And now listen to me. About seven years ago you were staying alone at Mauleverer Lodge in Hampshire——"

"Oh! the fatal time—the fatal place!" cried Georgiana hysterically; and though she would have given worlds to cut short the conversation, she had not the power—for her mind was agitated like the ocean in a storm.

"You were staying alone at Mauleverer Lodge," proceeded Arthur, not observing the extent of her emotion; "you were alone, save in respect to the servants: but you had no relation—no friend there at the moment. And one night—a man broke in——"

"A man—with a black mask——" murmured Georgiana, almost wringing her hands.

"And bearing the denomination, too, of the *Black Mask*," continued Lord Ellingham;—"this man broke into the house—and——"

"And—merciful heavens! Spare me the recital of the rest!" shrieked Lady Hatfield, covering her face with her hands.

"Good God! do not thus give way to a reminiscence which, though painful, should no longer exercise any influence over a strong mind!" said the Earl, in a kind and soothing tone, as he approached and seated himself next to Georgiana. "Consider, my dearly beloved—my angel—my intended wife!—reflect, I implore you, upon the childishness of this behavior!"

"Childishness!" repeated Georgiana, with a convulsive shudder.

"Pardon the expression," said the Earl; "but I would reason with you—I would endeavour to persuade you that an occurrence which is past and gone, and which happens frequently in other houses, should not thus paralyse all the naturally fine energies of your soul. What, in the name of heaven! can it matter now, if a robber broke into a dwelling some six or seven years ago? Your uncle told me that for some months fears were entertained for your reason: but——Oh! my Georgiana, I do implore you now—now that we are once again touching on this painful—most painful theme—to exercise more command over yourself. You praise me—you thank me, because I am willing to espouse one whose reason was shocked long years ago;—for that is your secret, after all, Georgiana—dearest Georgiana;—and you perceive that I know it!"

"My God! how have we misunderstood each other!" murmured the unhappy lady:—"my secret—he knows it *not*!"

But the Earl could not catch the sense of the words which she thus whispered to herself; and, with the fond hope of consoling her—for the events of the preceding evening were for the time banished from his memory—he took her hand, pressed it to his lips, and began to utter syllables of tenderness and love.

Then, how terrible was his surprise—how acute the anguish which filled his soul, when Georgiana, suddenly starting from the half-embrace in which he was already enfolding her, exclaimed in a tone indicative of the most exquisite mental agony, "No—Arthur—no: you are not acquainted with my secret—and *now*, never, never will you learn it! We have misunderstood each other—and I consented the other day to become your wife, while labouring under a dreadful—oh! a dreadful error! But heaven has interposed to prevent the consummation of *your* misery—and *mine*! And now," she added, with the calmness of despair, "let us separate, Arthur—and henceforth be unto each other but brother and sister;—for your wife I cannot become!"

"Georgiana, this is cruelty the most refined—the most wanton!" exclaimed the Earl. "Am I again to pass through all the phases of suspense—uncertainty—mystery—and doubt?—and will you in a few days repent of all you have said, and recall this stern decision? But—much as I love you—deeply as I am attached to you—I cannot—cannot endure a treatment——"

"Pardon me—forgive me!" cried Georgiana; "but you do not comprehend me! My reason is not unhinged,—I am subject to no whims—no caprice, Arthur! A fatal mistake on my part alone induced me the other day to consent to become your wife. That error has now been cleared up—our conversation of this morning has convinced me of the tremendous misunderstanding that had nearly wrecked all *your* happiness! But, even had it not, there was *another* reason which would imperatively command us to think no more of each other in the same light as we so lately did!"

"Ah! you allude, perchance, to the incident of last evening!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham. "Permit me, then, to ask the object of that Rainford's visit? Did he insult you? did he attempt to extort money from you? If so——"

"No—no!" cried Georgiana, in whose bosom the mere mention of the highwayman's name appeared to excite the most agonising feelings. "I sent down a message to that effect last night. He did not insult me—he did not come to injure me——"

"But his presence excited you most painfully, Georgiana!" interrupted the Earl; "and it has also revived in your imagination——Oh! I understand it all!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself: "this Rainford is the Black Mask—the noted highwayman of Hampshire!"

Lady Hatfield cast upon the young nobleman a look expressive of so much mental suffering, that he was deeply touched—profoundly

affected: and yet he knew not how to administer consolation.

"Georgiana," he at length said, in as calm and collected a tone as he could assume, though his heart was in reality rent by the most painful emotions, "there is some terrible mystery in all this! I begin to believe—as you yourself ere now endeavoured to persuade me—that your reason is in no way affected—that you are not subject to mere whims and caprices. No—the cause of your grief—your anguish—your horror at the reminiscence of that event in Hampshire,—an anguish and a horror cruelly revived last night by the presence of that Rainford, who is doubtless identical with the Black Mask,—an anguish and a horror perpetuated, too, until now," continued Arthur, more emphatically,—"the cause of all this is far—far more serious than I had at first imagined. You say that you cannot become my wife—and that you have laboured under a misapprehension: you wish us to look upon each other as brother and sister. And yet you do love me well enough to become my wife—did not some terrible and fearfully mysterious obstacle stand in the way. Oh! if you really love me—then pity me, and tell me this dreadful secret which weighs upon your mind! Unless, indeed——"

And he paused abruptly, as an awful suspicion rushed into his brain.

Georgiana only turned her head aside, and sobbed convulsively.

"Unless, indeed," continued the Earl, after a few moments' silence, "it would bring a blush to your cheek to enlighten me; and I cannot—cannot ask you to humiliate yourself in my presence!"

"Arthur, I *dare* not become your wife!" exclaimed Georgiana, suddenly falling upon her knees before him; "and if you demand the reason—as, after all that has passed between us, you have a right—I will confess——"

"Georgiana, no more!" cried the Earl, hastening to raise her. "Not for worlds would I bring a blush to your cheek." Then, in a different—more serious—and very mournful tone, he added, "Henceforth we will be to each other as sister and brother."

With these words he touched her hand lightly with his lips, and was about to hurry from the room; when, animated by a sudden thought, Georgiana held him back, saying in a hollow, thick tone of voice, "Whatever suspicion you now entertain—you do not believe that I—*was guilty*?" she added, as if the very words were choking her.

"No, much injured woman!" cried the young nobleman warmly. "A light has broken in upon my mind—and I understand it all."

"Yes—for a pure soul dwells in a tainted body," murmured Lady Hatfield; "and if I have said this much—and you can well believe how painful to my feelings the mere necessity of making such an assertion must be,—but in making it, I am influenced only by the hope—the earnest hope of removing from your mind—the mind of one whom I so much respect—so highly esteem——"

"Say no more, my dearest *sister*!" interrupted the Earl emphatically; "for as a sister do I now look upon you—and as a *brother*," he added sternly, "will I avenge you. For *that* was I ere now hurrying away so abruptly!"

"Avenge me!" repeated Georgiana, looking wildly on the young nobleman's countenance, which wore a calm but determined expression.

"Yes, Georgiana," replied the Earl: "wrongs so deep as yours demand a deadly vengeance. And who so fit to become the instrument of that vengeance, than he whom those wrongs which *you* have sustained so cruelly redound upon? But for that incarnate fiend Rainford, would you not already—yes, already have been my loved and loving wife? Am I not, then, also wronged by him? Have I not something to avenge?" he demanded bitterly. "And to consummate this vengeance, Georgiana, I—your *brother* henceforth—will forget my proud title—cast aside the remembrance of my elevated rank;—and, dressed in mean attire, I will visit the noisome dens—the foul courts—the low neighbourhoods of London, until I discover that miscreant Rainford. Then will I—still forgetting the proud title and the elevated rank—dare him to meet me in a duel, from which at least but one shall depart alive, and wherein both may haply fall! I will not yield him up to the hangman, Georgiana," continued the Earl, fearfully excited; "because in his last moments he might confess his crimes, and include amongst them the foul wrong he has inflicted on thee, my sister! But I will descend to make myself his equal—I will place myself on a level with that black-hearted ruffian——"

"Hold! hold!" screamed Georgiana, suddenly recovering the powers of utterance which had been paralyzed by this tremendous explosion of generous indignation on the part of that proudly-born noble who proclaimed himself her champion. "Hold! hold! Arthur—you know not whom you calumniate—whom you would provoke to the duel of death!"

"Yes—too well I know the miscreant!" cried the Earl furiously.

"No—no—you know him not!" screamed Georgiana wildly.

"This is childish—silly!" said the Earl impatiently. "Was it not Rainford who——"

"Yes—yes: but this Rainford——"

"Is a fiend, with a heart so black——"

"Hold! hold! again I say," ejaculated Lady Hatfield, clasping her hands in despair. "That Thomas Rainford whom you would make the victim of your vengeance, is——"

"Is what?" demanded the Earl hastily.

"Is—is——"

"Who? in the name of heaven!"

"YOUR BROTHER!" was the hysterical reply.

CHAPTER XLVII.
FARTHER EXPLANATIONS.

"My brother!" repeated the Earl of Ellingham, with a wild glance and a sudden start, indicative of the most painful surprise. "My brother! Georgiana!—oh! no—impossible! 'Tis true that my father——but no——that child died——"

"I can give you no particulars—offer you no evidence in this most strange and mysterious matter," said Lady Hatfield, endeavouring to subdue the excitement produced in her much-agitated mind by the preceding scene. "All that I know is—all that *he* told me was that secret which I have now revealed to you! Thus, Arthur, you perceive that—independent of the *other* reason which would prevent *me* from becoming yours, and *you* from receiving me as your wife——"

"But wherefore did you not mention this at first—at the commencement of our conversation this morning?" demanded the nobleman, utterly bewildered by the revelation that had been made to him, and scarcely knowing whether to regard it as a substantial fact or a miserable fiction.

"Because Rainford himself appeared to tell it to me as a profound secret," observed Georgiana. "Not that he desired me to consider it as such: but his manner—and then the nature of the revelation itself, which could not be gratifying to your feelings—oh! I scarcely know what I am saying, Arthur—but I would have spared your feelings, had you not compelled me to make that revelation, to prevent the mad—the insane designs of vengeance which you had formed——"

"I understand you, Georgiana," interrupted the Earl: "and deeply—oh! deeply do I feel your generous consideration on that point. But there is one question that I wish to ask you—a question——"

"Speak, Arthur! This is the day of mutual outpourings of confidence," said Lady Hatfield: "and, remember—we are henceforth to stand in the light of brother and sister to each other!"

"The question I would ask is relative to the robbery that was perpetrated on you and Miss Mordaunt a short time back near Hounslow," continued the Earl. "Was that highwayman——"

"He was—he was!" exclaimed Georgiana, once more painfully excited. "But do not look coldly on me, Arthur—do not despise me for that dreadful crime of perjury which I committed to save him. He wrote me an imperious note, commanding me to stop all proceedings instituted in reference to that matter. What did such a note imply? It was a menace—a dreadful menace,—a threat to expose me, if I did not obey his mandate! Consider, Arthur—oh! consider how I was placed—my reputation at stake—my fame in the hands of one who ——But can you wonder that I preferred the dread alternative of perjury to the danger of disgrace and infamy which seemed to impend over my head?"

"Alas! I cannot blame you, poor, suffering woman?" ejaculated the Earl in a tone of deep commiseration. "We never know how we should act until we find ourselves placed in circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment; and then—then even the most rigid integrity often yields! But let us sit down quietly, Georgiana, for a short half-hour—compose ourselves, if we can—collect our scattered thoughts—and converse together as sister and brother. For I will now communicate to you the little I know concerning the birth of Thomas Rainford—if he indeed be the offspring of that amour——"

Arthur ceased, and passed his hand over his brow as if to calm the warfare of thoughts and conjectures which agitated his brain.

Georgiana seated herself on the sofa, and the Earl at length took a chair near her.

He then continued in the following manner:—

"My father, the late Earl, was married twice: his first matrimonial connexion was formed when he was thirty; and this union was unproductive of issue. Lady Ellingham, as I have heard, was a woman devotedly attached to the dissipation of a fashionable life. She seemed to exist only to shine in the gay assemblies of the West End; and, as she had no children, and her husband was immersed in politics, she possessed no ties to bind her to her own fireside. She played deeply—for play was very fashionable then amongst ladies, and is even now to a considerable extent. Her extravagances were great, and she made rapid inroads upon my father's fortune. By the time he was forty he found himself involved in debts; and moreover, rumour began to be so busy with the name of his wife, imputing to her the most shameless infidelity, that he determined to separate from her. I should not allude to this circumstance—I would not for a moment revive statements prejudicial to the memory of a woman who has long ago gone to render an account of her deeds to her Maker—were it not that respect for the name of my lamented father renders me anxious to discover any extenuation which offers itself for his subsequent conduct. Well, a separation was resolved upon: a certain income was settled upon Lady Ellingham; the estate was put 'to nurse,' as the law-phrase has it; and my father, who was a proud man, retired to a small property which he possessed in Ireland, ostensibly for the purpose of giving up the cares of public life, but in reality to conceal the necessity of retrenching his expenditure.

Ten years passed away: and when my father was upwards of fifty, he returned to London, his estates having in the meantime been relieved of all their incumbrances. Lady Ellingham was still living: but the smallness of her income and the impaired condition of her health, forced her to dwell in the strictest retirement. She had moreover become a devotee, and manifested no desire to return into the dazzling scenes of fashionable life.

"I am now speaking of about thirty-one years ago; when I was not born. It was at that period that my father encountered a young and very beautiful girl, named Octavia Manners. She was the half-sister of a marine-store dealer, who bore the disagreeable appellation of Benjamin Bones. By all I have heard, Octavia must have been a charming creature; and her manners, acquirements, and conversation were far superior to her humble condition in life. I cannot give you any details respecting the way in which my father became acquainted with her: suffice it to say that he grew deeply attached to her, and his visits were encouraged by her brother. But, alas! from all that I have heard, I have grounds—oh! too strong grounds to believe that those visits were most unwelcome to Octavia; for she was beloved by a young man in her own sphere of life, and whom she loved in return. And it is now that I would palliate—as far as possible—the conduct of my sire, while I am bound to admit that his proceedings in respect to that unhappy girl were most unworthy the noble and the man. My heart aches, too, as I utter these words: but I am telling you a history, the truth of which must not be disguised nor in any way misrepresented. But some allowance—some little excuse may be found for a man who was separated from a wife whom he had not seen for many years, and to whom there were positively no moral ties, although the legal ones still existed, to bind his fidelity. He was devotedly attached to a young and beautiful girl who unfortunately could not return his love, and who did not even seem flattered by his visits, as so many maidens in her sphere would have been. No—she shrank from his addresses, and implored him not to persecute her!

"But he persisted in his visits; and the first sad result was that the young man to whom Octavia's faith was plighted, would not believe that she discouraged the attentions of the nobleman who condescended to appear at that humble dwelling. I cannot of course inform you, although we may both imagine, how the young man reproached Octavia, and how she defended herself: but it is certain that he suddenly quitted the neighbourhood, leaving behind him a note declaring that he should never see the unhappy girl again. Alas! that I should now be compelled to recite the tale of my father's guilt—my father's crime! His love for Octavia knew no bounds—he was determined to risk all—every thing——"

"Spare your feelings, Arthur—dear Arthur!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield; "for I can fully appreciate the grief which this revival of such a subject must cause you!"

"Octavia, then, was purchased—purchased with gold—my father's gold, Georgiana;—and the deed of—dare I call it aught save *infamy*?—was consummated!" said the Earl, in a low and subdued tone, as if he were overcome by the enormity of his sire's guilt—that guilt which, with a venial filial affection, he had vainly endeavoured to palliate. "Yes—'twas done," he continued sadly; "and the vile half-brother sold the honour of that young and already too deeply afflicted girl. Too deeply afflicted, I say, because she had lost him on whom the affections of her youthful heart were set. The very day after her disgrace—her ruin, she fled from her brother's house; and for several months no trace was discovered of her. It was feared she had committed suicide; and my father was almost distracted. At that precise period his wife died, having ended as a devotee that life of which so much of the early portion was passed in dissipation and illicit amours. She had not been laid many weeks in the family vault, when my father, by some means unknown to me—perhaps, by accident—discovered that Octavia was living, and that she was in the way to become a mother. He hastened to the miserable garret which she occupied, and found her in the most abject state of poverty—endeavouring to earn a subsistence with her needle. A girl of the gipsy tribe, and whose name was Miranda, was the friend and companion of poor Octavia. How they grew acquainted—how they came to live together, I am not aware: but Miranda was much attached to poor Octavia, and was nearly her own age. Indeed Octavia was not seventeen even at that time; and this Miranda of whom I speak, was about fifteen. Much mystery envelopes this portion of the sad tale: it is, however, certain that my father visited Octavia for several days—that he passed hours with her—that she even appeared to be reconciled to his presence—and that they went out together, and remained absent for hours, on two or three occasions. Again she disappeared—suddenly—abruptly—without having intimated her intention to my father, and without even having confided her design to her friend Miranda. For Miranda remained behind at the lodging, and when my father called and found Octavia not, he was seized with a paroxysm of the deepest grief.

"Another year passed away; and behold, poverty and distress drove the unfortunate Octavia to seek an asylum at the house of her half-brother. She would not, doubtless, have gone near that fatal dwelling where her ruin was accomplished, had it not been for the child which she held in her arms. That child—a boy—was the fruit of her connexion with my father,—or rather of the dreadful deed which gave her, when under the influence of an opiate, into his arms. But she was dying—yes, she was dying, when she knocked at her brother's door; and on her death-bed she implored that my father might be sent for. He flew to her: he knelt by her side—he took the child in his arms, and embraced both the dying mother and the innocent babe. By a strange—a wondrous coincidence, Miranda entered the house at that moment: she had come to make inquiries concerning Octavia—and found her dying. The poor mother forgave those who had wronged her,—forgave her half-brother—blessed my father—yes, blessed him—and recommended her infant to his care—that infant being also his own! Then my father requested to be left alone with her; but scarcely had the villain Bones and the faithful Miranda quitted the room, when they were recalled by a dreadful cry which burst from my father's lips;—and they hurried back to find that Octavia was no more."

Arthur paused to wipe away the tears which were trickling down his cheeks; nor were Georgiana's eyes unmoistened by the sweet dews of sympathy.

"When my father had sufficiently recovered himself to attend to more worldly matters," continued the young Earl, "he gave directions for the funeral of his victim; and to Miranda did he entrust the child. Then he placed in the hands of Benjamin Bones, in the presence of Miranda, a thousand guineas to be placed out at interest, in order to provide the means of supporting the infant and his nurse. I should also inform you that a small roll of papers, carefully wrapped up in a piece of thick brown paper, was found upon the person of

Octavia, shortly after her death; and these were taken possession of by Benjamin Bones, my father having previously quitted the house. Of the nature of those documents I know nothing; but I have been informed that when the half-brother read them, he was greatly excited, and secured them under lock and key.

"A year elapsed, during which my father called several times to see the little boy, who throve well in Miranda's care. But at the expiration of that period his visits ceased altogether;—for he was about to marry again. Twenty-nine years ago the Honourable Miss Stamford became his second wife; and twenty-six years ago I was born. But before the date of *my* birth—and within six months after the marriage of my father appeared in the newspapers—Bones discharged Miranda on some pretence; and she returned to her tribe. Some few months afterwards she fell in with another tribe; and to her profound surprise, she discovered the child Thomas in the possession of a woman named Egyptia. Of the child's identity Miranda had no doubt, because it had a peculiar mark near the shoulder of the right arm. She and her sister-gipsy then compared notes, and Egyptia told her that she had received the child from a man named Benjamin Bones—a marine-store dealer in Greville Street, Hatton Garden; that Bones had given her twenty guineas to take the child; that the money was all gone; and that she already repented of the bargain. Miranda, who was attached to the child, offered to take it; and her proposal was accepted. For seven years did the faithful Miranda rear that boy as if he were her own; but at last she fell dangerously ill—was long delirious—and when she awoke to consciousness again, she learnt from her companions that the boy had died of the same epidemic malady beneath which she herself had nearly succumbed."

Again the Earl paused for a few moments; and when he again broke silence, it was to conclude his narrative.

"My father, as you are aware, Georgiana, died when I was only a year old; and I was brought up by my mother. At the age of nineteen I went to Oxford; and it was in the neighbourhood of that city I one day fell in with a party of gipsies. They offered to tell my fortune; and I consented for the amusement of the farce. The young female who undertook the task commenced by giving me my real name; for I had doubtless been pointed out to her in the city, as the gipsies had been there and in the vicinity for several days.[24] But the moment my name was mentioned, another gipsy-woman, who had probably seen forty summers, uttered an ejaculation of surprise—looked hard at me—and then inquired abruptly whether I was the son of the late Earl of Ellingham. I answered in the affirmative; and she let drop some observations which excited my curiosity. I took her aside, thrust a guinea into her hand, and demanded of her the meaning of her words. She returned me the money, and, after much persuasion, narrated to me the whole history of Octavia Manners—that is to say, as much of it as I have now told to you. You now understand, Georgiana, how it is possible that this Thomas Rainford may be my half-brother: but, if he be, the account of his death, received by Miranda from her companions, must have been false;—for I need hardly tell you that the elderly gipsy who unfolded to me the details of my father's fatal conduct towards poor Octavia, was none other than Miranda herself. Shortly afterwards my mother died; but I never revealed to her the story of her late husband's guilt and Octavia's wrongs."

Scarcely was this strange narrative concluded, when the door of the apartment opened, and Sir Ralph Walsingham entered the room.

"Well," he exclaimed, "Mr. Rainford, who honoured this house with a visit last night, and frightened you, Georgiana, so sadly, has got himself into a pleasant scrape at last——"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham hastily; "what——"

"He is arrested on a charge of highway robbery—a robbery, in fact, committed on no less a person than our acquaintance Sir Christopher Blunt," returned the baronet.

"Arrested!" ejaculated the Earl, exchanging a rapid glance with Georgiana, as much as to enjoin her not to allow the subject of their previous conversation to transpire in the presence of Sir Ralph Walsingham.

"Yes—arrested last night—lodged in Horsemonger Lane Gaol, as a character too desperate to put into the usual lock-up—and examined before the Magistrates at the office in the Borough this morning," continued Sir Ralph. "I happened to be in the neighbourhood an hour ago, and heard all about it. But he is remanded for a week, at the solicitation of Mr. Howard, the attorney for the prosecution, Sir Christopher not being in London. Well, poor fellow! I am really sorry for him—for he seems to be a dashing, daring, gallant blade, by all accounts. Pardon me, however, my dear Georgiana," he added, seeing that his niece was deadly pale; "I ought not to have spoken a word in favour of a man who terrified you so: but——"

Lord Ellingham interrupted Sir Ralph by taking his leave of him and Georgiana; and as the nobleman took the latter by the hand, he said in a hasty whisper, "I will go and see him at once!"

He then left the house, entered a hackney-coach at the nearest stand, and ordered the driver to take him to Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

24. For the mode adopted by Gipsies to glean information relative to persons in the various neighbourhoods they visit, see "The History of Skilligalee" in the First Series of "The Mysteries of London."

CHAPTER XLVIII.
LORD ELLINGHAM AND TOM RAIN.

The interview between Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham had lasted a considerable time; and it was close upon three o'clock in the afternoon when his lordship reached Horsemonger Lane Gaol.

He communicated to the governor his desire to see Thomas Rainford; and although visitors were usually compelled to speak to prisoners through an iron grating, yet the rank of the nobleman and the fact of his being in the commission of the peace for another county (Middlesex), procured him immediate access to the highwayman's cell.

Rainford was sitting in a pensive attitude at a table on which his dinner remained untouched. We have before said—and we now repeat—that he cared but little for the peril of his own predicament: there were, however, ties which bound him to the existence that was now in jeopardy, and to the freedom that was lost.

He started from his seat with unfeigned surprise, when the Earl of Ellingham entered the cell.

"You are astonished to see *me* here, Mr. Rainford?" said the nobleman, in a mild and mournful tone.

"It is a visit, my lord," was the answer, "that I certainly did not expect."

"And yet—if the statement you made to Lady Hatfield be true—I am but performing a duty——"

"Ah! then she has told you *that*!" exclaimed the prisoner.

"She has told me that you claim a near—a very near relationship to me," rejoined the nobleman, his voice trembling with emotion—for the reader has seen enough of him to be aware that he possessed a generous heart.

"Yes—my lord," replied Rainford: "the same father was the author of our being—although our mothers were different."

"Is this true?—is it really true?" demanded the Earl hastily.

"As true as there is an Almighty God who now beholds the great peer and the prisoned highwayman face to face!" replied Rainford solemnly; and divesting himself of his coat, he bared his right arm and exhibited a particular mark.

"I cannot doubt it—I cannot disbelieve you!" exclaimed the nobleman, tears starting from his eyes.

And then the great peer and the prisoned highwayman were folded in each other's arms.

"But, my God!" exclaimed Arthur, when the excitement of this fraternal recognition had somewhat passed away; "in what a condition do I find you, my poor brother!"

"Grieve not for me, Arthur," said Rainford: "my fate will soon be decided now; and whatever it may be, I shall be prepared to meet it as becomes a brave man."

"Talk not thus, Thomas!" cried the nobleman, pressing his hand warmly. "I have money to buy off your prosecutors—interest to use in your behalf——"

"If I say to you, '*Yes, use both*,' Arthur," replied the highwayman, "it is only because there is *one* who loves me well, and for whose sake I could wish to live."

"I understand you—you allude to Miss Esther de Medina," said the Earl. "But there is *another* for whose sake you must hope to live and enjoy freedom again: and that is the brother who now stands before you, and who, for our father's sake, will never—never desert you!"

"My dear Arthur, your kindness unmans me," said Rainford; "and yet—if you knew all—you would perhaps think that I am not altogether unworthy of your sympathy! But, sit down, and let me show you that, though of lost and ruined reputation, I am not without some feeling!"

The Earl took one of the two chairs that there were in the cell; and Rainford seated himself near his half-brother on the other.

"That you are acquainted with a considerable portion of my history, I know," resumed the highwayman; "for some seven or eight years ago you encountered a gipsy-woman near Oxford, who revealed to you——"

"The faithful Miranda indeed told me all she knew!" interrupted the Earl. "But at that period she believed you to have been long dead."

"Yes—and it was only a short time ago that I met her in Hampshire," answered Rainford; "and accident led us to converse together. A word or two which I dropped without anticipating the result, induced her to make certain inquiries: then she requested me, in a hurried and excited manner, to bare my right arm—and it was only on the occasion of which I am speaking, and which occurred a few months

since, that I learnt the real narrative of my birth. It appears that when Miranda had fallen so dangerously ill, and had become delirious, the gipsies considered me to be a burthen to them, as I was not born of their race; and one of them took me to Winchester, in the neighbourhood of which city the tents were pitched at the time; and there he purposely abandoned me. What subsequently became of me I have not time now to relate; my history has been most eventful, and could not be compressed into a short narrative. But should the laws of my country demand that my misdeeds be expiated on the scaffold, I will leave that history, written out in all its remarkable details, for your contemplation."

"Talk not thus, Thomas—oh! talk not thus!" cried Arthur. "I will save you yet—even if I throw myself at the feet of my sovereign, and proclaim that you are my brother!"

"God grant that you may prove successful, for the sake of *one* who loves me well!" said Rainford, solemnly. "But let me pursue the thread of that much of my story which I have now to relate to you. It appears that when Miranda *did* recover from her serious illness, the gipsies did not like to tell her the truth relative to myself; and they therefore invented the tale of my death to account for my disappearance. Thus was it that, until a few months ago, she remained in ignorance of the deceit that had been practised upon her; and the same day which revealed to her the fact that I was still alive, made me acquainted with the history of my birth. Miranda also told me that Benjamin Bones was still in existence and was reputed to be a rich man. She had recently been in London; and curiosity had prompted her to make inquiries concerning him. All that she had gleaned, she communicated to me. It then struck me that I would come to London—that I would throw myself in the way of that man who had plundered me of my inheritance—and that I would watch for some favourable opportunity to wring from him the amount with interest and compound interest, that was fairly mine. I learnt from Miranda that certain papers had been found about the person of my poor mother, after she was dead, and that the perusal of them had excited the interest of this Bones. It therefore struck me that I might recover those documents, as well as the money of which I had been plundered. If the documents should prove in any way interesting or valuable, I thought, so much the better: if not, no harm would be done in obtaining possession of them. I came to London; and accident enabled me, through the intervention of a mutual acquaintance named Tullock, to meet with Benjamin Bones. I offered him my services in a particular way—and he accepted them. To be candid, he was to plan deeds of villany—and I was to execute them. His terms were so ridiculously exorbitant that I should have laughed at them, had I not a particular object to serve in connecting myself with him. And the opportunity which I sought presented itself sooner than I had anticipated. In a word, I had succeeded in all I had undertaken: I was enabled to help myself to as much as I chose of his hoarded treasures—and I discovered the papers that I have alluded to."

"And were they of any interest?" asked the Earl.

"Of such interest and of such value, Arthur," returned Tom Rain, "that perhaps there is no other man in England who would have failed to avail himself of the brilliant prospects that they opened to my view. But I was not to be dazzled by them—not to be led away by the temptation. No: I knew that my character was gone—that my reputation was tarnished—that my misdeeds were numerous and great;—and I felt also for *you*, Arthur—as well as for the haughty name of Ellingham!"

"What do you mean, my dear brother?" cried the noble, struck by the impressive tone in which Rainford uttered these words.

"I mean," answered the debased highwayman to the great peer, "that within the last few days there has been within my reach a jewel which I might have had, and might still have, for the mere trouble of extending my hand to reach it: a jewel such as men toil all their lives to gain! This jewel is a proud title and a princely fortune——"

"Thomas!—my brother!" ejaculated the Earl, a strange and exciting suspicion flashing through his brain.

"Yes—a proud title and a princely fortune, Arthur," repeated Rainford: "but I desire neither! Yet—solemnly and seriously do I declare that, amongst those papers which I discovered in the den of Benjamin Bones, there was one which would make me rich at the expense of another—ennoble me to the prejudice of one whom the proud title better becomes,—and that individual who would thus suffer is *yourself*! For Octavia Manners was the Countess of Ellingham—and I—the debased highwayman, am thine elder brother, legitimately born!"

"Oh! what do I hear?" exclaimed Arthur: "and how much generosity does your conduct display! But think not, dearest brother, that I grieve at the announcement which you have just made! No—far from that! To know that my father did justice to your poor mother—to be able to entertain the conviction that the author of our being was less guilty than I imagined—is a source of satisfaction so pure—so sincere—so heart-felt, that I would gladly purchase it even with the loss of title and of fortune!"

"It is you who are generous, Arthur," said Rainford—for so we shall continue to call him, at all events for the present. "But that coronet which sits so gracefully on your noble brow, and that fortune which enables you to do so much good, shall never be lost to you. No—never, Arthur! Titles I care not for—great wealth I do not crave;—and even if I yearned for the one or aspired to the other, of what avail would be that idle—ineffectual ambition? Here am I in a vile dungeon—accused of a serious offence—my life endangered! And, even if your interest should save me, must I not for ever become an exile from the land of my birth? Yes: for whether you deter the prosecutors from farther proceedings in my case,—or, should they push the matter to the extreme verge, and my life be saved only at your intercession,—can I remain in England? If released from custody, how can I hope to gain an honest name in this clime?—if condemned to death, and then reprieved, will not this leniency on the part of the Crown be conceded on the condition of banishment for the remainder of my days? Thus, Arthur, even did I desire to possess the proud name of Ellingham—did I aspire to that coronet which adorns thy brow—I could not be mad enough to yield to the temptation. But, I repeat—I care not for rank—I need not much wealth; and thus neither my position nor my inclination will for an instant permit me to disturb you in the enjoyment of the family honours and the hereditary estates."

"Alas! how much—how deeply do I regret that we had not met before to embrace as brothers!" exclaimed the Earl. "Though crimes are imputed to you, Thomas,—yet do you possess a heart endowed with the loftiest—the most generous feelings! Ah! well do I now

understand wherefore you were agitated last night at Lady Hatfield's house—and why you told me that from no other man in England would you ask as a favour that right of egress from the mansion which you could command by force! And I, who was once on the point of striking you! But wherefore did you not then reveal to me what you have told me now?"

"The secret of my birth you should never have learnt from *my* lips," answered Rainford. "No—I would not have allowed you to know that you possessed a relative for whom you would have to blush. But I was compelled to make that revelation to Lady Hatfield—because——"

"Ah! let us not talk of her, brother!" said Lord Ellingham mournfully. "I would not for worlds reproach you—and yet you know not how profoundly I have loved that woman—how tenderly I love her still! But my hopes there——Let us change the topic, I say!" he added, hastily interrupting himself. "And now tell me if there be any thing I can do in order to soften the grief which must be experienced by that *one* to whom you alluded ere now—any message that I can take to her——"

"Yes: you must see *her*," said Rainford, after a moment's reflection; "and you must tell her that she is to give up to you all those papers which relate to the marriage of our father and my mother and to my birth. She is acquainted with every thing that concerns me and my affairs. It was my original intention to keep those papers—not to serve any purpose—never to use them,—but to gratify one of those unaccountable whims which sometimes influence the most strong-minded amongst us. I thought that, perhaps, when in a foreign land,—for it was my intention to have quitted this country in a few days,—I might sometimes feel a pleasure in contemplating documents so closely connected with my parentage and my birth. Perhaps, too, I might have been swayed by some little sentiment of pride in being able to say to myself, '*A title and a princely fortune are within my grasp; and I will not take them, because I feel myself so utterly unworthy of the first, and because I require not the other*.'—But now, let my fate be whatever it may, it is prudent that those papers should be destroyed. She, who has them in her keeping, loves me—adores me: but she has one foible—one weakness which has already produced serious embarrassment. She is fond of gay apparel—of costly jewels—of those trinkets and that outward show which dazzle the minds of so many women; and this passion on her part is stronger than herself. In a word, then, I would rather that the papers should not remain in her hands—I would sooner that they should be burnt at once than become the source of a temptation which circumstances might perhaps some day render irresistible to *her*. If you really wish to ease my mind of any portion of that weight of anxiety which now hangs upon it, you will at once visit her; and when you tell her all that has passed between you and me ere now, she will give you up those documents, which I enjoin you to commit to the flames, when you have perused them."

"I will do your bidding, Thomas, in all respects save one," returned Lord Ellingham: "and that is with regard to the destruction of the papers. No—if you are generous to a degree, I must at least be just; and I will keep those documents for you—safely, religiously keep them—to be at your disposal at any time, however remote, should altered circumstances induce you to claim them."

"Then you imagine," said Rainford, with something of bitterness in his tone, "that should the future smile upon me, I might be tempted to pluck the coronet from your brow to place it on mine own? You wrong me—yes, you wrong me, Arthur!"

"Heaven knows that I would not willingly—wantonly do so!" cried the nobleman enthusiastically. "But, justice——"

"Well—be it as you say," interrupted Rainford, with a view to terminate the discussion on this topic. "Obtain the papers—they will be safer with you than with her, much as she is devoted to me. And now must I reveal to you another secret—a secret of a strange and romantic nature, connected with *her* whom you are about to visit——"

"With Esther?" said the Earl hastily.

"Ah! ever harping upon that name!" exclaimed Rainford. "Did I not assure you last night that Esther is as pure and innocent as woman can be, and that she does not even know me by sight? See, then, if I have deceived you:—but I will not keep you in suspense——"

At this moment, the turnkey entered with an intimation that it was impossible to allow the interview to be protracted any longer on the present occasion, as the hour for locking up had already passed some time.

"To-morrow, then, you will come again," said Rainford, in a low whisper to his brother. "And now go to No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields-—it is not very far from here—and inquire for Mrs. Rainford."

The Earl pressed his hand in assurance of obeying the directions thus given; and, as the turnkey appeared impatient, the young nobleman hurried away from his brother's cell.

But the mystery relative to Esther de Medina—whatever it might be—was not so soon to be cleared up as the Earl of Ellingham expected.

Upon leaving the prison, he observed an ill-looking fellow lounging about at the gate, and on whose forbidding countenance the light of the lamp streamed fully when the wicket was opened to afford the nobleman egress:—for our readers will remember that all the incidents yet related in this narrative occurred in the winter time, when it is dark at four o'clock.

But it was now nearly six o'clock; and the atmosphere was heavy with mist.

The Earl walked rapidly away from the prison-gate; but when he had proceeded about thirty yards, he inquired of a passer-by the way to Lock's Fields.

The man was a stranger in the neighbourhood, and could not tell him.

"Please, sir, I'll show you the way," exclaimed another individual, stepping officiously forward.

Lord Ellingham immediately recognised, by the light that glimmered from a window in Horsemonger Lane, the ill-looking fellow whom he had noticed at the door of the prison; and for an instant he hesitated to accept his services. But at the next moment he felt ashamed of this vague alarm, and directed the man to lead on.

The fellow turned abruptly round, saying, "You are going out of your way, sir. We must get down to the Fields by the back of the prison."

And he led the way, the Earl following him, down Horsemonger Lane towards Harper Street. But as they passed along the prison-wall, Arthur observed two or three men loitering about at short intervals from each other; and it struck him that his guide coughed in a peculiar fashion as he passed them.

A misgiving, which he vainly endeavoured to resist, was now excited in the Earl's mind; but still he would not turn back nor question his guide.

Suddenly he was seized from behind, and pulled violently backward, while a strong hand fastened itself as it were over his mouth. He struggled desperately: but his guide turned on him, and he was now in the grasp of four powerful men, whose united strength it was impossible to resist.

Still he endeavoured to release himself: and once he managed to get the hand away from his mouth, an advantage of which he instantly availed himself to cry out for help.

But in another instant he was stunned by the blow of a pistol on the head.

When he awoke, he was in total darkness, and lying on a hard bed.

He instinctively stretched out his arms: his right hand encountered a rough and damp stone wall.

He rose and groped cautiously about him;—but it required not many moments to convince him of the terrible though mysterious truth —that he was the inmate of a narrow dungeon!

But where was he thus imprisoned?

Who were the authors of this outrage?

And for what purpose was he made a captive?

These three queries defied all conjecture; and the young nobleman was left to the darkness of his dungeon and the gloom of his meditations.

CHAPTER XLIX.
A PAINFUL INTERVIEW.

We must now go back a few hours—only to the morning of this eventful day—in order to describe the interview which Mr. Clarence Villiers had with his respectable aunt Mrs. Slingsby, at her residence in Old Burlington Street.

He called at her abode as early as nine o'clock,—for he had passed a sleepless night, in consequence of the communication made to him by the individual whom he as yet knew only as Captain Sparks, and of whose arrest on the preceding night he was as yet ignorant.

Mrs. Slingsby, Adelais, and Rosamond were seated at breakfast in a comfortable little parlour, when Clarence was announced.

At first his appearance at so unusual an hour and when he was supposed to be on his way to his office in Somerset House, excited some alarm, lest he had bad news to communicate; and the sisters already trembled for fear their father had discovered their abode. But he speedily reassured them by declaring that he intended to give himself a holiday that morning, and had therefore come to join them at the breakfast-table.

"You are welcome, Clarence," said Mrs. Slingsby, while Adelais appeared so pleased at this unexpected visit that the enhanced carnation tinge of her cheeks and the joy that flashed in her fine eyes rendered her transcendently beautiful.

But Rosamond seemed pensive and even melancholy—although she endeavoured to smile and appear gay.

"I had a visit from Captain Sparks last evening," observed Clarence. "He is going to America, and he called to take leave of me, as well as to entrust me with some little commission, which I of course undertook."

"And we heard a most wholesome and beneficial discourse from the Reverend Mr. Sawkins," observed Mrs. Slingsby.

"Was Mr. Sheepshanks present?" inquired Villiers, without looking at his aunt, and apparently intent only on carving the ham.

"My dear Clarence," said Mrs. Slingsby in a serious, reproachful tone, "your question is light and inconsiderate. You doubtless intended it as a jest, but the object to which it refers is one painfully calculated to wound those who have the good cause at heart. Mr. Sheepshanks has conducted himself in a manner that has produced the most lively grief as well as the greatest astonishment in what may be strictly termed the religious world. Sir Henry Courtenay was shocked when I narrated the incident to him."

"Oh! Sir Henry was shocked, was he?" exclaimed Clarence. "Well, for my part, I should have conceived that a man of fashion would have cared very little for all the Sheepshanks' and Sawkins' in the universe."

"Clarence!" said Mrs. Slingsby, "what *is* the matter with you this morning? There seems to be an unusual flippancy in your observations——"

"Not at all, my dear aunt. Only, I conceive that a man who is fond of gaiety—who goes to parties—mixes with the *élite* of the West End, and so on, can have but little time to devote to the interests of Cannibal-Clothing Associations."

"My dear nephew, you astonish me!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby. "Is it to affix a vulgar nick-name to an admirable institution, that you call it a Cannibal-Clothing Association? I once thought you had some degree of respect for the philanthropic and religious establishments which are the boast and ornament of your native land. But——"

"My dear aunt, pardon me if I have offended you," said Clarence—but in a cool and indifferent tone. "I really forgot at the moment the name of the institution to which that arrant hypocrite and scoundrel Sheepshanks belonged."

"Use not such harsh words, Clarence," enjoined Mrs. Slingsby, who knew not what to think of her nephew's unusual manner and discourse. "Mr. Sheepshanks has lost himself in the estimation of all persons of rightly constituted minds; but the Christian spirit of forgiveness commands us to be lenient in our comments on the actions even of the wicked."

"That may be," said Clarence. "But as I read the account in the newspapers, it certainly looked so black against this Sheepshanks, that had he been sent to Newgate, he would have had no more than his due. Now, my opinion is this:—robbery is always a heinous crime; but he who robs his fellow-creatures under the cloak of religion, is an atrocious sinner indeed. Hypocrisy, my dear aunt, is a detestable vice; and you, as a woman of sound sense and discerning judgment, must admit the truth of my observation. But we were talking of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"You must not utter a word against him," said Adelais, in the most artless manner possible; "for Rosamond has conceived so high an opinion of him——"

"Because dear Mrs. Slingsby has represented his virtues—his mental qualifications—his admirable character to me in terms which make me as enthusiastic as herself in extolling so good and amiable a man," exclaimed Rosamond, speaking with an ardour which was the more striking, because the natural purity of her soul prevented her from seeing the necessity of checking it.

Mrs. Slingsby coloured and glanced uneasily towards her nephew, who did not, however, appear to notice that the conversation had taken a turn which was disagreeable to her.

In fact, the suspicions originally excited in his mind by the communications of the preceding evening, were now materially strengthened; and the more he contemplated the character of his aunt, the more transparent became the film that had so long blinded him as to its real nature.

"And so you are a great admirer of Sir Henry Courtenay, Rosamond?" he said, endeavouring to maintain as calm and placid an exterior as possible.

"Rosamond is fully aware that virtue deserves respect, wherever it exists," returned Mrs. Slingsby hastily.

"And Sir Henry Courtenay is the pattern of all virtue, dear madam—is he not?" exclaimed Rosamond.

"He is a very good man, my dear, as I have frequently assured you," said the pious widow. "But let us change a conversation which does not appear agreeable to Clarence?"

"I would not for the world manifest so much selfishness," observed Villiers, coolly, "as to quit a topic which gives so much gratification to Rosamond. At the same time—as the future husband of Adelais, and therefore soon to be your brother-in-law, dear Rosamond—I must warn you against conceiving extravagant notions of the integrity and immaculate virtue of any man who belongs to what is called the Fashionable World."

"But dear Mrs. Slingsby has assured me, Clarence," ejaculated Rosamond, warmly, "that Sir Henry Courtenay is an exception to the general rule—that he is the very pattern of every thing generous and good—and that no one could err in following his advice, whatever it might be. Oh! I can assure you——"

Rosamond stopped short; for Mrs. Slingsby, seeing that her nephew's countenance was becoming purple with indignation as the artless girl thus gave vent to the enthusiasm excited in her soul by the most insidious representations,—Mrs. Slingsby, we say, had touched her with her foot beneath the table—a movement naturally construed by Rosamond into a hint to cut short her observations.

"You can retire, dear girls," said Mrs. Slingsby. "I wish to have a little conversation with Clarence."

"Do not keep us away long, dear madam," exclaimed Adelais, in a playful manner, as she rose to quit the room with her sister.

Clarence and Mrs. Slingsby were now alone together; and the position of each was a most painful one.

The aunt saw that something was wrong; and her guilty conscience excited a thousand vague fears within her bosom; while the nephew felt convinced that the relative, whom he had hitherto loved and respected, was worthy only of his abhorrence and contempt.

There was a long pause in the conversation after the sisters had left the room; but at length the silence, so irksome to both nephew and aunt, was broken by the latter.

"Clarence—something appears to have vexed—to have annoyed you this morning," she observed, in a tremulous tone.

"Do you know," he said, turning abruptly round towards her, and fixing a searching glance upon her countenance, "that you act most unwisely—most indiscreetly—nay, most incorrectly, to expatiate so much upon the virtues of Sir Henry Courtenay? When I first entered the room this morning, I found Rosamond pensive and thoughtful; and she said not a word until that man's name was mentioned, when she became as it were enthusiastic in his defence, although no actual attack was made by me upon his character. What is the meaning of this strange conduct?"

"Clarence—if, in my respect for Sir Henry Courtenay—I have been too warm in my praises of his character,—if——"

"Aunt, there is no supposition in the case," interrupted Villiers, almost sternly. "You *have* been too warm—and heaven only knows with what object! God forbid that I should impute the worst motives to your conduct in this respect: but a dreadful suspicion has been excited in my mind——"

"A suspicion!" murmured Mrs. Slingsby faintly, while the glance which she threw upon her nephew was full of uneasiness.

"Yes—a suspicion!" he repeated; "and most painful—oh! most painful is it to me to be compelled to address you in this manner. But the case is too serious to allow me to remain silent. In one word, have you not made an impression on the mind of that artless girl which may endanger her peace?—have you not been encouraging in her breast an admiration for a man old enough to be her grandfather—an admiration which is not natural, and which is calculated to inspire her with feelings towards a sexagenarian dandy ——"

"Clarence!" exclaimed the pious lady, in a hysterical manner; "how dare you address me in this dictatorial tone? Would you seek to invest my conduct in bestowing well-merited praise on a good man, with an aspect so black——"

"Your indignation is well feigned!" cried Villiers, his lips quivering with rage. "But the day of deception has passed—hypocrisy shall no longer impose upon me. If I accuse you unjustly, I will grovel as an abject wretch at your feet to manifest my contrition. Before I thus debase myself, however, you must prove to me that you are indeed the noble-minded—the open-hearted—the immaculate woman I have so long loved and revered! Tell me, then, the real—the true history of that night when a boy was received into this house through charity—a few years ago——"

Mrs. Slingsby became as pale as death, and sate gazing with haggard eyes upon her nephew—unable to avert *her* glance, and yet shrinking from *his*.

"Then you are guilty, madam," he said, after a few moments' pause; "and the excellent—the virtuous—the upright Sir Henry Courtenay

is your lover! My God! did the world ever know hypocrisy so abominable—so black as this?"

These words were uttered with extreme bitterness—and Mrs. Slingsby burst into a flood of tears, while she covered her face with her hands.

Clarence possessed a generous heart; and this sight moved him.

"My dear aunt," he said, "I do not wish to mortify you—much less to humiliate you in my presence. In your own estimation you must necessarily be humiliated enough. Neither will I dwell at any length upon the pain—the intense grief which I experience in finding you so different from what I have ever believed you to be—until *now*!" he added, in a mournful tone. "Were you my sister, or did you stand with reference to me in a degree of relationship that would permit me to remonstrate and advise, I should perhaps both reproach and counsel you. But it would ill become a nephew to address his aunt in such a manner."

"Clarence, will you expose me? will you ruin me?" demanded Mrs. Slingsby, in a hysterical tone.

"Not for worlds would I injure you!" ejaculated the young man. "But I must receive no more favours at your hands! Here—take back the money which you gave me a few days ago. Thank God! I have not yet expended any of it—and the arrangements I had made to furnish a house for the reception of my Adelais, can be countermanded. *She* will not object to share a lodging with me—until, by my own honest exertions," he added proudly, "I may be able to give her a suitable home."

And, as he spoke, he cast a roll of Bank-notes upon the table.

"Oh! Clarence—if I have been weak—frail—culpable," cried the widow, "you are at least severe and cruel; for I have ever done all I could to serve your interests."

"Were I to express my real opinion on that head," answered Villiers, "I might grieve you still more than I have already done. A bandage has fallen from my eyes—and I can now understand how necessary an instrument of publicity I have been for your assumed virtues. But, in the name of God! let us argue the point no further; for sincerely—sincerely do I assert my unwillingness to give you additional pain. Pardon me, however, if I declare how impossible it is—how inconsistent it would be—to leave those innocent girls in a dwelling which is visited by such a man as that Sir Henry Courtenay."

"How could you remove them elsewhere, without exposing me, Clarence?" demanded his aunt in an imploring tone. "What explanation can you or I give them, to account in a reasonable manner for the suddenness of such a step?"

Villiers paced the room in an agitated manner.

He knew not how to act.

To leave Adelais and Rosamond in the society of his aunt was repugnant to his high sense of honour and his correct notions of propriety; and whither to remove them he knew not.

He had seen and heard enough at the breakfast-table, to convince him that Mrs. Slingsby had some sinister motive in creating in the mind of Rosamond,—that innocent, artless mind, which was so susceptible of any impressions which a designing woman might choose to make upon it,—a feeling of admiration in favour of the baronet; and although he had to a considerable extent curbed the resentment and the indignation which his aunt's conduct in this respect had aroused within him, still to leave that young maiden any longer within an atmosphere of infection, was impossible! No: he would sooner restore the sisters to their father, and leave to circumstances the realization of his hopes in regard to Adelais!

While he was still deliberating within himself what course to pursue, and while Mrs. Slingsby was anxiously watching him as he paced the room with agitated steps, the servant entered with the morning's newspaper.

Clarence took it from the table in a mechanical manner and glanced his eye over the first page: but his thoughts were too painfully pre-occupied to permit him to entertain, even for an instant, any idea of reading the journal.

No:—it was one of those unwitting actions which we often perform when sorely embarrassed or bewildered,—an action without positive motive and without aim.

But how often do the most trivial deeds exercise a paramount influence over our destinies!

And this simple action of glancing at the newspaper proved to be an instance of the kind.

For at the moment when Clarence was about to throw the journal back again upon the table and resume his agitated walk, his eyes encountered an advertisement which instantaneously arrested his attention.

Then, with beating heart and with an expression of joy rapidly spreading itself over his countenance, he read the following lines:—

> "To A. AND R.—Your distressed and almost heart-broken father implores you to return to him. The past shall be forgotten on his side; and no obstacle shall be opposed to the happiness of A. Your father is lying on a sick bed, and again implores that this prayer may not be made in vain."

"God be thanked!" cried Villiers, no longer able to restrain his joy; and handing the newspaper to his aunt, he directed her attention to the advertisement.

"Here is an apology at once for the removal of the young ladies from this house, Clarence," observed Mrs. Slingsby. "And now that you are saved from the embarrassment in which you were plunged but a few minutes back, will you promise never—never to reveal—and, if possible, to forget——"

"You allude to your conduct towards Rosamond?" said Villiers. "Tell me its motive—and I swear solemnly——"

"In one word, then," interrupted his aunt, "let Rosamond beware of Sir Henry Courtenay! And now answer me a single question—for I see you are impatient to be gone:—How came you to discover——what meant your allusion—to—to the boy who was received into this house——"

"I cannot stay to explain all *that*," cried Villiers. "But rest assured that your character stands no chance of being made the subject of scandalous talk—unless, indeed, your future actions——"

"Enough, Clarence!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby. "I know that you must despise me: but spare me any farther humiliation!"

She then rang the bell, and desired the servant to summon Adelais and Rosamond.

We need not pause to describe the joy which those fair beings experienced when Clarence showed them the advertisement inviting them to return home; although tears immediately afterwards started into their eyes, when they read that their father was upon a bed of sickness.

They once more retired to their bed-chamber to prepare their toilette for departure; and, when a hackney-coach drove round to the door, they took leave of Mrs. Slingsby with demonstrations of gratitude which struck to her heart like a remorse.

Clarence accompanied them back to the cottage; and his heart palpitated violently—he scarcely knew wherefore—when he assisted them to alight.

The front door was opened by the female servant, who uttered a cry of joy on beholding the young ladies once more; and with trembling steps Adelais and Rosamond entered the parlour, followed by Clarence.

To their surprise—and, at first, to their great delight—the sisters found themselves, on crossing the threshold of the room, in the presence of their father, who was looking pale, it was true—but with concentrated anger, and not with illness.

Adelais and Rosamond fell on their knees before him, exclaiming, "Forgive us, dear father—forgive us!"

"How am I to receive you, Adelais?" he asked in a cold voice: "as Miss Torrens—or as——"

"As Miss Torrens at present, sir," answered Clarence stepping forward, and speaking in a firm though respectful tone. "But, in accordance with the promise held out in that advertisement which appears in to-day's journal, I hope that your elder daughter will soon be mine—and with your permission and blessing also."

"Where have my daughters been residing during their absence, sir?" inquired Mr. Torrens, without appearing to notice the latter portion of Villiers' observations.

"Under the protection of a female relative of mine, sir," answered Clarence, with increasing misgivings at the cold demeanour of the father of his beloved.

"Thank you for the information, sir," said Mr. Torrens, with a smile of triumph. "At least you have so far disarmed my resentment, that you have brought me back my daughter pure and innocent as when you enticed her away, with the aid of a villanous robber."

"A robber!" ejaculated Clarence indignantly.

"Yes, sir," continued Mr. Torrens, in a sneering tone; "your worthy colleague, Captain Sparks, is a common highwayman—a thief—properly named Thomas Rainford; and at this moment he is a prisoner in Horsemonger Lane Gaol. Scarcely ten minutes have elapsed since I received a note from Mr. Howard, a solicitor, informing me of the fact."

Clarence was so astounded by this announcement, that for a few moments he could make no reply; and the young ladies, who had in the meantime slowly risen from their suppliant posture and were now standing timidly by their father's side, exchanged glances of painful surprise.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Torrens in a stern and severe tone, "that man, who aided you to effect the abduction of these disobedient girls, is a common highwayman—and you could not be ignorant of that fact!"

"As I live, sir," ejaculated Clarence, at length recovering the power of speech. "I *was* ignorant of the fact; and even now——But," he added, correcting himself, "I cannot doubt your word! At the same time, permit me to assure you that I had never seen him until that night——"

"I require no farther explanation, sir," interrupted Mr. Torrens. "My daughters are now once more under the paternal roof—inveigled back again, it is true, by a stratagem on my part——"

"A stratagem!" repeated Clarence, while Adelais uttered a faint shriek, and sank weeping into her sister's arms.

"Yes—a stratagem, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens. "And now learn my decision, Mr. Villiers! Sooner than she shall become your wife," he continued, pointing towards the unhappy girl, "I would give her to the meanest hind who toils for his daily bread. Depart, sir:—this house is at least a place where my authority can alone prevail!"

"Mr. Torrens—I beseech—I implore you——" began the wretched young man, whose hopes were thus suddenly menaced so cruelly.

"Depart, sir!" thundered the angry father; "or I shall use violence—and we will then see whether you will strike in return the parent of her whom you affect to love!"

And he advanced towards Villiers in a menacing manner.

"I will not stay to irritate you, sir," said Clarence, feeling as if his heart were ready to burst. "Adelais—remember one who will never

cease to remember you! Rosamond, farewell!"

Mr. Torrens became more and more impatient; and Villiers quitted the house with feelings as different from those which had animated him when he entered it, as the deepest despair is different from the most joyous hope.

But the anguish of his heart was not greater than that which now filled the bosom of her from whom he was so unexpectedly and cruelly separated.

CHAPTER L.
THE LAWYER'S OFFICE.

A few days after the events just related, the following scene took place at Mr. Howard's office in Golden Square.

It was about four in the afternoon, and the lawyer was seated in his private room, at a table covered with papers, when a clerk entered and announced that Sir Christopher Blunt and his lady had just arrived.

"His lady with him—eh!" exclaimed the solicitor. "Well—show them in at once."

And, accordingly, in a few minutes the worthy knight, with Charlotte—or, we beg her pardon, Lady Blunt—hanging upon his arm, entered the office.

The old gentleman was all smiles—but the quick eye of Mr. Howard immediately perceived that they were to some extent forced and feigned; and that beneath his jaunty aspect there was not altogether the inward contentment, much less the lightsome glee, of a happy bridegroom.

As for Lady Blunt—she was attired in the richest manner, and in all the colours of the rainbow,—looking far too gaudy to be either genteel or fashionable.

"My dear Sir Christopher, I am quite charmed to see you" exclaimed Mr. Howard, rising to welcome his client and the bride. "Your ladyship——"

"Yes—this is my loving and beloved Lady Blunt, Howard," said the knight pompously: "a delightful creature, I can assure you—and who has vowed to devote herself to my happiness."

"Come now, you great stupid!" said the lady; "finish your business here, and let us see about the new carriage. Of all places in the world, I hate a lawyer's office—ever since I was once summoned to a Court of Conscience for seventeen shillings and ninepence-halfpenny, and had to call on the thief of an attorney to get him to take it by instalments of sixpence a-week. So, you see, I can't a-bear the lawyers. No offence, sir," she added, turning towards Mr. Howard; "but I always speak my mind; and I think it's best."

"My dear creature—my sweet love!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, astounded at this outbreak of petulance on the part of his loving and beloved wife.

"Pray do not distress yourself, my dear Sir Christopher," said the lawyer. "We are accustomed to receive sharp rebukes from the ladies sometimes," he added, with as courteous a smile as he could possibly manage under the circumstances. "But pray be seated. Will your ladyship take this chair?"—and he indicated the one nearest to the fire.

Lady Blunt quitted her husband's arm, but made an imperious sign for him to bring his chair close to hers; and he obeyed her with a submission which left no doubt in the lawyer's mind as to the empire already asserted by the bride.

"I am very glad you have called to-day, Sir Christopher," said the lawyer; "for——"

"He couldn't very well come before, sir," interrupted Lady Blunt; "because we only came back from the matrimonial trip last night."

Mr. Howard bowed, and was preparing to continue, when the knight exclaimed, "My dear sir, what *is* all this to-do about the highwayman who robbed me of the two thousand pounds? I thought I told you so particularly that I would rather no steps should be taken in the matter; and now—the moment I come back to town——"

"Instead of having all our time to ourselves, to gad about cozie together," again interrupted Lady Blunt, "we are forced to come bothering here at a lawyer's office."

"The ends of justice must be met, Lady Blunt," said Mr. Howard drily. "In consequence of particular information which I received, I caused this Thomas Rainford to be apprehended; and I appeal to Sir Christopher himself—who has served the high office of Sheriff ——"

"And once stood as a candidate for the aldermanic gown of Portsoken, until I was obliged to cut those City people," added the knight, drawing himself up.

"And why should you cut the City people?" demanded his wife. "For my part, I'd sooner see the Lord Mayor's show than Punch and Judy any day; and that's saying a great deal—for no one *can* be more fonder of Punch and Judy than me."

"My dear Charlotte," exclaimed the knight, who now seemed to be sitting on thorns, "you——"

"Charlotte at home—Lady Blunt in public, Sir Christopher—if *you* please," interrupted the bride. "But pray let Mr. Howard get to the end of this business."

"Well, my dear," exclaimed Sir Christopher, "if it annoys you, why *would* you come? I assured you how unusual it was for ladies to accompany their husbands to the office of their solicitors——"

"Oh! I dare say, Sir Christopher!" cried Charlotte. "You don't think that I'm going to trust you out of my sight, do you now? I'm not quite such a fool as you take me for. Why, even when we are walking along the street together, I can see your wicked old eye fixed on the gals——"

"Lady Blunt!" exclaimed the knight, becoming literally purple; "you—you—you do me an injustice!"

"So much the better. I hope I am wrong—for both of our sakes," returned her ladyship. "Depend upon it——But, no matter now: let Mr. Howard get on with his story."

"With your permission, madam, I shall be delighted to do so," said the lawyer. "I was observing just now that having received particular information, I caused this scoundrel Thomas Rainford, *alias* Captain Sparks, to be apprehended; and on Monday morning, Sir Christopher, you must attend before the magistrate to give your evidence."

"But who authorised you to proceed in this affair, Mr. Howard?" demanded the knight.

"What a strange question?" exclaimed the lawyer, evidently unwilling to give a direct answer to it. "Only reflect for a moment, my dear Sir Christopher. A robbery is committed—you, your nephew, and myself are outwitted—laughed at—set at defiance,—and when an opportunity comes in my way, I very naturally adopt the best measures to punish the rogue."

"Quite proper too, sir," said Lady Blunt. "The idea of any one daring to laugh at Sir Christopher! I'd scratch the villain's eyes out, if I had him here. To laugh at Sir Christopher, indeed! Does he look like a man who is meant to be laughed at?"

Lady Blunt could not have chosen a more unfortunate opportunity to ask this question; for her husband at that moment presented so ludicrous an appearance, between his attempts to look pleasant and his fears lest he already seemed a henpecked old fool in the eyes of his solicitor, that a man possessing less command over himself than Mr. Howard would have laughed outright.

But with the utmost gravity in the world, the lawyer assured her ladyship that nothing could be more preposterous than to laugh at a gentleman of Sir Christopher Blunt's rank and importance; and he also declared that in arresting Thomas Rainford, he had merely felt a proper anxiety to punish one who had dared to ridicule the knight, after having robbed him.

Lady Blunt was one of those capricious women who will laugh at their husbands either as a matter of pastime or for the purpose of manifesting their own independence and predominant sway, but who cannot bear the idea of any other person taking a similar liberty. She therefore expressed her joy that Mr. Howard had caused Rainford to be apprehended, and declared, of her own accord, that Sir Christopher should attend to give his evidence on the ensuing Monday—"for she would go with him!"

"Well, my dear, since such is your pleasure," observed the knight, "there is no more to be said upon the subject. I *will* go, my love; and I think that when the magistrate hears my evidence, he will feel convinced that I know pretty well how to aid the operation of the laws, and that I have not been a Sheriff for nothing. Although sprung from a humble origin——"

"Oh! pray don't begin that nonsense, Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the lady; "or I shall faint. It is really quite sickening."

At that moment the door opened somewhat violently; and Mr. Frank Curtis entered the room.

"Ah! Sir Christopher, my jolly old cock—how are you?" exclaimed that highly respectable young gentleman, whose face was dreadfully flushed with drinking, and who smelt so strong of cigars and rum-punch that his presence instantly produced the most overpowering effect.

"Mr. Curtis!" began the knight, rising from his chair, and drawing himself up to his full height, "I——"

"Come—it's no use to be grumpy over it, uncle," interrupted Frank. "Matrimony doesn't seem to agree with you very well, since you're so soon put out of humour. Ah! my dear Char——my dear aunt, I mean—beg your pardon—quite a mistake, you know;—but really you look charming this afternoon."

"Get out with you, do!" cried Lady Blunt, who was somewhat undecided how to treat Mr. Curtis.

"What! doesn't matrimony agree with you, either, my dear and much respected aunt?" ejaculated Frank. "Why, I once knew a lady who was in a galloping consumption—given up, in fact, and the undertaker who lived over the way had already begun to make her coffin—for he knew he should have the order for the funeral; when all of a sudden a young chap fell in love with her, married her, and took her to the south of France—where I've been, by the bye—and brought her home in six months quite recovered, and in a fair way to present him with a little one—a pledge of affection, as it's called."

"Mr. Curtis, I am surprised at you," exclaimed Sir Christopher, in a pompous and commanding tone;—"to talk in this way before a lady who has only recently passed through that trying ordeal."

"I'll be bound to say it wasn't so recent as you suppose, old buck," cried Frank, staggering against the lawyer's table.

"Sir, Lady Blunt has only been recently—very recently married, as you are well aware," said the knight sternly. "And now let me tell you, sir, that the detestable devices schemed by Miss Mordaunt and you have recoiled upon yourselves——"

"Miss Mordaunt and me!" exclaimed Frank, now unfeignedly surprised: "why—I never spoke to Miss Mordaunt in my life!"

"The monster!" half screamed Lady Blunt.

"The audacious liar!" vociferated the knight.

"Pretty names—very pretty," said Frank coolly; "but I'm rather tough, thank God! and so they won't kill me this time. But I can assure you, uncle, you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick when you say that me and Miss Mordaunt planned any thing against you. As I once observed to my friend the Count of St. Omers,—'My lord,' says I.—'What?' asks the Marquis.—'My Lord Duke,' I repeated, in a firmer tone——"

"Cease this nonsense, Mr. Curtis," interrupted Sir Christopher Blunt sternly.

"Yes—and let us come along, my dear," said Lady Blunt, rising and taking her husband's arm. "Your nev-vy does smell so horrid of rum and cigars——"

"And very good things too," cried Frank; "ain't they, Howard? Me and a party of young fashionables have been keeping it up a bit to-day at my lodgings—on the strength of my intended marriage with Mrs. Goldberry, the rich widow——"

"Your marriage, Frank!" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "What—how—when——"

"Lord bless you, my dear uncle," said Mr. Curtis, swaying himself to and fro in a very extraordinary manner, "you don't half know what kind of a fellow I am. While you was away honeymooning and nonsense——"

"Nonsense, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, indignantly. "Come, Sir Christopher—it's no good staying here talking to Mr. Imperance."

"Going to Conduit Street—eh, aunt?" said Frank, with a drunken leer. "But, by-the-bye, you regularly choused me out of five guineas, you know, aunt—and something else, too——"

"Eh?—what?" said Sir Christopher, turning back. "Mr. Curtis, do you dare to accuse Lady Blunt——"

"Of having made a very great fool of me, but a much bigger one of you, old fellow," added Frank; and, snapping his fingers in his uncle's face, he exclaimed, "I don't care a penny for you, Sir Christopher! In a few days I shall marry Mrs. Goldberry—you are very welcome to be as happy as you can with your Abigail there. So remember, we're cuts in future, Sir Christopher—since you want to come the bumptious over me."

The knight was about to reply; but his better-half drew him hastily away from the lawyer's office, saying, "Come along, you great stupid! What's the use of staying to dispute with that feller?"

The door closed behind the "happy couple;" and Mr. Frank Curtis, throwing himself into the chair which Lady Blunt had just quitted, burst out into a tremendous fit of laughter.

"You have gone too far, Frank—a great deal too far," said the lawyer, shaking his head disapprovingly. "Sir Christopher has been a good friend to you; and although he has committed an egregious error in running off with that filly, still——"

"What do I care?" interrupted Frank. "I proposed to Mrs. Goldberry yesterday—and she accepted me, after a good deal of simpering and blushing, and so on. She's got five thousand a year, and lives in splendid style in Baker Street. I made her believe that I wasn't quite a beggar myself: but all's fair in love and war, as my friend the late Prince of St. Omers used to say in his cups. But what about this fellow Rainford? and how the deuce did he come to be arrested?"

"I received information of his residence," answered Howard coolly; "and I gave him into custody accordingly."

"It's very odd," continued Frank, "but I met him last Sunday night; and I don't mind telling you that we went into the middle of Hyde Park and had an hour's wrestling together, to see who was the better man. I threw him nineteen times running, and he threw me seven; then I threw him three times—and he gave in. So we cried 'quits' for old scores, and I gave him my word and honour that nothing would ever be done against him in respect to the little affair of the two thousand pounds. You may therefore suppose that I'm rather vexed——"

"The officers had already received instructions to apprehend him at the time your *alleged* wrestling match came off," said the lawyer; "and your evidence will be required next Monday morning."

"And I suppose the whole affair of the robbery will come out?" observed Curtis interrogatively.

"Decidedly so. You must state the exact *truth*—if you can," added Mr. Howard.

"If I can! Damn it, old fellow, that observation is not quite the thing—coming from you; and if any body else had uttered it, egad! I'd send him a hostile message to-morrow morning—as I did to my most valued friend, the Marquis of Boulogne, when I was in Paris. I'll just tell you how that was——"

"Not now Frank," interrupted the lawyer; "because I'm very busy. It's getting on for post time—and I have not a minute to spare. But mind and be punctual at the Borough police-office on Monday morning at ten."

"Well—if I must, I must," said Curtis. "But, after all, I think it's rather too bad—for this Sparks, or Rainford, or whatever his name is, seems a good kind of fellow, after all."

"The law must take its course, Frank," observed the attorney in an abrupt, dry manner.

Curtis accordingly took his leave, and returned to his lodgings, where by dint of cold water applied outwardly and soda-water taken inwardly, he endeavoured to sober himself sufficiently to pay a visit to Mrs. Goldberry.

For it was literally true that there *was* such a lady—that she lived in splendid style in Baker Street—that Frank had proposed to her—and that he had been accepted;—but we have deemed it necessary to give the reader these corroborative assurances on our part, inasmuch as the whole tale would otherwise have appeared nothing more nor less than one of the innumerable children of Mr. Curtis's fertile imagination.

CHAPTER LI.
LORD ELLINGHAM IN THE DUNGEON.

Four weeks had elapsed since the arrest of Tom Rain and the extraordinary adventure which had snatched the Earl of Ellingham from the great world and plunged him into a narrow—noisome cell.

Yes—four weeks had the nobleman languished in the terrible dungeon,—ignorant of where his prison-house was situated—why his freedom was thus outraged—and who were his persecutors.

Every morning, at about eight o'clock, a small trap in the door of his cell was opened, and food was passed through to him. A lamp had been given him the day after he became an inmate of the place; and oil was regularly supplied for the maintenance of the light. His food was good, and wine accompanied it;—it was therefore evident that no petty spite nor mean malignity had led to his captivity.

Indeed, the man who brought him his food assured him that no harm would befall him,—that his imprisonment was necessary to suit certain weighty and important interests, but that it would not be protracted beyond a few weeks,—and that the only reason for placing him in such a dungeon was because it was requisite to guard against the possibility of an escape.

Often and often had Lord Ellingham endeavoured to render his gaoler more communicative; but the man was not to be coaxed into garrulity. Neither did he ever allow the nobleman to catch a glimpse of his features, when he brought the food to the trap-door. He invariably stood on one side, and spoke in a feigned tone when replying to any question to which he did vouchsafe an answer.

The day after his strange and mysterious arrest, Arthur received from this man the assurances above mentioned; and a considerable weight was thereby removed from his mind. His imprisonment was not to be eternal: a few weeks would see the term of the necessity that had caused it. But still he grieved—nay, felt shocked to think of the state of suspense in which those who cared for him would remain during his long absence. This source of affliction he mentioned to the man who attended upon him; and the reply was to some extent satisfactory.

"I will supply you with writing materials, and you can address letters to your friends, stating that sudden business has called you abroad—to France, for instance; and that you may probably be absent six weeks. Write in this manner—the excuse will at least allay any serious fears that may be entertained concerning you; and those letters shall be sent through the post to the persons to whom they are addressed. But you must deliver them unsealed into my hands, that I may satisfy myself as to the real nature of their contents."

Small as the satisfaction resulting from this proceeding could be to Lord Ellingham, it was still far preferable to the maintenance of a rigid silence in respect to his friends. He accordingly wrote a laconic letter in the sense suggested by his gaoler; and addressed copies to Lady Hatfield, Thomas Rainford, and Mr. de Medina. The next time his gaoler visited him—or rather, came to the door of the dungeon, the prisoner was informed that the three letters had been duly forwarded through the twopenny post.

The reader will scarcely require to be informed of the mental anxiety which the nobleman suffered during his incarceration. This was naturally great—very great. He was also frequently plunged in the most bewildering conjectures relative to the authors, the motives, and the locality of his imprisonment. Nor less did he grieve—Oh! deeply grieve, when he thought of the surprise—the alarm—and the sorrow with which Lady Hatfield on one side and Rainford on the other must view his mysterious absence. He had left the former with the intention of seeing the latter, and she would naturally expect him to return if for no other reason than to give her an account of their interview; and he had quitted Rainford with the promise to perform a certain task, and also having pledged himself to use his influence and his wealth in his behalf.

The idea of the feelings that must be entertained by Rainford relative to his absence, afflicted him more than any other. That generous-hearted man had told him to keep his coronet and his fortune to the prejudice of *him—the elder brother, legitimately born*; and yet that interview in Horsemonger Lane Gaol seemed destined to be the last which they were to have together! What would the poor prisoner think when the Earl returned not, and when a letter containing a cold and wretched excuse was put into his hands? Oh! this was the maddening—maddening thought; and the Earl shrank from it far more appalled than from the stern reality of his dungeon! Because Rainford might be judged, and, alas! the law might take its course—its fatal course—ere *he*, the Earl, could stretch out a hand to save that generous-hearted half-brother.

But amidst all the bitter and bewildering reflections which tormented him during his imprisonment of four weeks in that dungeon of unknown neighbourhood, there was still a predominant idea—a gleam of hope, which, apart from the assurance that his captivity would soon have a term, cheered and animated him often.

For whither will not the rays of Hope penetrate? Even when Hope is really gone, her work is often done by Despair; and the latter feeling, in its extreme, is thus often akin to Hope herself.

The hope, then, that cheered and animated the Earl at times, was—ESCAPE!

Yes: he yearned to quit that dungeon, not so much for his own sake—oh! not nearly so much, as for that of his half-brother, who was involved in such peril, and who needed influence and interest to save him! For the Earl well knew that the law in criminal cases is not so tardy as in civil matters; and that to take away a man's life, all its machinery is set into rapid motion—although to settle his claims to a fortune or to give him justice against his neighbour, it is, heaven knows! heart-breakingly slow and wearisome!

To send a man to the scaffold, takes but a few weeks at the Old Bailey:—to decide the right of this man or that man to a particular estate, or legacy, occupies years and years in the Court of Chancery. Oh! how thirsty do our legislators appear to drink human blood. How rapidly all technicalities and causes of delay are cleared away when the capital offender stands before his judge! A day—perhaps an hour is sufficient to decide the death of a human being; but half a century may elapse ere the conflicting claims to an acre of land or a few thousand pounds can be settled elsewhere.

And, strange—ah! and monstrous, too, is it, that the man who loses a case in which he sues his neighbour for twenty pounds, may appeal to another tribunal—have a new trial granted—and, losing that also, perhaps obtain a *third* investigation of the point at issue, and thus three verdicts in that beggarly business! But the man who is doomed to die—who loses his case against the criminal prosecutor—cannot appeal to another tribunal. No judges sit solemnly *in banco* for him: *one verdict* is sufficient to take away a life. Away with him to the scaffold! In this great commercial country, twenty pounds—consisting of pieces of paper printed upon and stamped with particular figures—are of more consequence than a being of flesh and blood! What though this being of flesh and blood may have others—a wife and children—dependent on him? No matter! Give him not the chance of a new trial: let one judge and one jury suffice to consign him to the hangman! There can be no appeal—no re-investigation for his case, *although it be a case of life and death*: but away with him to the scaffold!

What blood-thirsty and atrocious monsters have our law-givers been: what cruel, inhuman beings are they still, to perpetuate so abominable—so flagrant—so infamous a state of jurisprudence! For how many have been hanged, though innocent,—their guiltlessness transpiring when it is too late! But there is no court of appeal for the man accused of a capital crime: he is a dog who has got a bad name—and public opinion dooms him to be hanged, days and weeks before the jury is sworn or the judge takes his seat to try him!

And wherefore is not this infamous state of the law, which allows appeals to the case of money-claims, but none to the case of capital accusations,—wherefore is not this state of the law altered? Because our legislators are too much occupied with their own party contentions and strifes;—because they are ever engaged in battling for the Ministerial benches—the "loaves and fishes" of power: because it seems to them of more consequence to decide whether Sir Robert Peel or Lord John Russell shall be Prime Minister—whether the Conservatives or the Whigs shall hold the reins of power. Or else, gentle reader, the condition of Greece—or Spain—or Turkey,—or even perhaps of Otaheite,—is a matter of far greater importance than the lives of a few miserable wretches in the condemned cells of criminal gaols!

But, in *our* estimation—and we have the misfortune to differ from the legislators of the country—the *life of one of those wretches* is of far greater consequence than the state of tyrant-ridden Greece—the Spanish marriages—the quarrels of the Sultan and his Pachas—or the miserable squabbles of hypocritical English missionaries and a French governor in Tahiti. Yes—in *our* estimation, the life of *one* man outweighs all such considerations; and we would rather see half a session of Parliament devoted to the discussion of the grand question of the PUNISHMENT OF DEATH, than one single day of that session given to all the foreign affairs that ever agitated in a Minister's brain.

It was the twenty-eighth day of Lord Ellingham's imprisonment; and it was about six o'clock on the evening of this day.

The nobleman was at work upon the masonry of his dungeon,—his efforts being directed to remove the stones from the immediate vicinity of a small square aperture, or sink in the corner of the cell.

His implements were a knife and fork, and one of the screws of the frame-work of his bed.

But with these he worked arduously.

Nor was this the first day of his labours. No! for twenty-six days had he been toiling—toiling—toiling on, to make an opening into what he believed to be the common sewer,—even at the risk of inundating his dungeon, and thus perishing miserably!

But all those toils, and all that risk, were sustained and encountered for thee, Tom Rain!

Slowly—slowly—slowly had the work progressed; but now—on the twenty-eighth day—Arthur found himself so far advanced that escape from the dungeon was at least open to him.

But escape into what region?

Into those drains and sewers which run beneath the streets of London, and form a maze to which the only clue is a knowledge of the point whence he, who enters the labyrinth, originally starts! And this clue was not possessed by Arthur; for in what part of London his dungeon was situate, he had not the least idea. It could hardly be said that he was confident of this dungeon being in the metropolis at all;—and yet he had many reasons to believe that it was. For, in the first place, his gaoler had mentioned the fact of his letters having been sent by the *twopenny post*; secondly, he had ascertained that his cell was situate in the very vicinity of a common sewer, and sewers were not at that time formed in the villages surrounding the metropolis; and thirdly, he could scarcely believe that those who had arrested him *in* London, would have run the risk of removing him out of its precincts—for he was well aware that atrocious outrages and diabolical crimes may be perpetrated with greater chances of impunity in the metropolis than elsewhere.

But, although he was thus tolerably well convinced that his prison-house was within the boundaries of London, he had not the least

notion of the precise locality. And when he had removed sufficient of the massive masonry to form an aperture large enough to permit a full-grown man to pass into the sewer,—and when he heard the muddy, slimy waters gurgling languidly in the depths below, he shuddered, and his blood ran cold—for he thought within himself, "I have heard of men who venture into these places in search of treasures, and who, having wandered for miles and miles beneath the streets of London, have issued safely forth again. But *they* knew whence they started; and thus that starting-post was a clue to guide them in the maze. But *I* know not whether, on entering that slimy shallow, I should turn to the right or to the left,—nor which channels to pursue in that terrible labyrinth!"

Then, ashamed of his fears—reproaching himself for his hesitation, he drank a deep draught of the wine that had been supplied him in the morning; and holding the lamp in one hand, and in the other a stout stick cut from one of the cross-beams that supported the mattress of his bed, he entered the common sewer.

His feet sank down into the thick slime, and the muddy water reached to his knees. There was a nauseous odour in the dreary passage, and the filthy fluid was very thick. These circumstances convinced him that it was low water in the river Thames; and by examining the masonry forming the sides of the sewers, he saw that the tide was running out. He therefore resolved to follow the course of the muddy stream, with the hope that he might at length reach one of the mouths by which the sewers discharge their contents into the river.

Armed with his stick to protect himself against the rats as well as to sound his way so as to escape any hole or abrupt depth that there might chance to be in the bottom of the sewer,—and holding the lamp in his left hand, the great peer of England pursued his appalling path in a channel seven feet wide and beneath a vaulting twelve feet high.

From time to time the sudden rush of a number of vermin along a ledge by the side of the channel, and then the sound of their plunge into the slimy water, startled him to such a degree that he almost dropped his lamp: and then the conviction which flashed to his mind *that if he lost his light, he should be inevitably devoured by those vermin*, caused such a chill to pass through him—as if ice were unexpectedly placed upon his heart—that his courage was oftentimes nearly subdued altogether.

But he thought of his half-brother who had manifested so much generosity towards him,—he thought of her whom he had promised to love as a *sister*,—and he also remembered that were he to retrace his steps, *even if he could find the way back*, he should be returning to a dungeon:—of all this he thought—and he went on—on, in that revolting and perilous maze!

Yes: with lamp held high up, and stick groping in the filthy mud—stirring up nauseating odours,—on—on went the daring, enterprising, chivalrous nobleman—breathing an infected and almost stifling air,—an air formed of such noxious gases, that it might explode at any moment, ignited by the lamp!

But, hark! what is that rumbling sound—like thunder at a vast distance?

Arthur pauses—and listens.

The truth in a few moments flashed to his mind: he was beneath a street in which vehicles were moving. Oh! now he felt convinced—even if he had entertained any doubts before—that he was in London.

Watching the progress of the slimy stream, he turned first to the left, up a channel that branched off from the one which he had originally entered;—then he turned to the right into another—the hollow rumbling sounds overhead gradually increasing in volume and power.

Suddenly he beholds a light glancing upon the putrescent surface of the slimy stream through which he is wading knee-deep. That light is half-a-dozen yards in front of him—flickering playfully.

He advances: sounds of footsteps—human footsteps—come down from overhead. He looks up—and, behold! there is a grating in the street above; and through that grating the light of the lamp streams and the sound of the footsteps comes.

He hears voices, too—as the people pass,—the voices of that world from all communication with which he is for the time cut off!

Shall he cry out for assistance? No: a sense of shame prevents him. He would not like to be dragged forth from those filthy depths, in the presence of a curious—gaping—staring crowd. He prefers the uncertainty and the peril of his subterranean path, in the fond hope that it may speedily lead to some safe issue.

The Earl accordingly passed on—disturbing the water on which the light from the street-lamp played,—disturbing, too, the vermin on either side with the splash of the fetid fluid as he waded through it.

But when he had proceeded a dozen yards, he looked back—as if unwilling to quit the vicinity of that grating which opened into the street.

In another moment, however, he conquered his hesitation, and pursued his way in a straight line, without again turning off either to the right or to the left.

Upwards of an hour had elapsed since he had quitted the dungeon—and as yet he had found no issue from that labyrinth of subterranean passages.

Grim terrors already began to assume palpable forms to his imagination, when suddenly he beheld a dim twinkling light, like a faint star, at a great distance a-head.

That light seemed a beacon of hope; and as he drew nearer and nearer, its power increased. At last he saw another twinkling light, struggling as it were betwixt glimmer and gloom;—and then a third—and then a fourth. The air appeared to grow fresher too; and the Earl at length believed that an opening from the maze must be near.

Yes: he was not mistaken! The lights increased in number and intensity; and he was soon convinced that they shone upon the opposite bank of the Thames.

A few minutes more—and all doubt was past!

The fresh breeze from the river fanned his cheek—and, as he reached the mouth of the sewer, and hurled away his lamp, he saw the mighty flood stretched out before him—a bridge spanning its width at a little distance on his left hand.

He knew that bridge;—he recognised it by the pale lustre of the moon—for the evening was clear and fine.

It was Blackfriars Bridge!

Then, from which direction had he come?

Remembering the turnings he had taken, he could fix upon the district of Clerkenwell as the scene of his late imprisonment. But he did not pause to reflect on a matter now so trivial,—trivial, *because he had escaped, and was once more free*!

It was low water—and a bed of mud received him knee-deep, as he leapt from the mouth of the sewer.

But what cared he for his uncouth and filthy appearance?—*since he had escaped, and was once more free*?

For four weeks his beard had not been shaved, nor his toilette carefully performed; and his hair, too, was long and matted. It was therefore necessary to cleanse himself and change his attire as soon as possible.

Hastening along the muddy margin of the river's bed, he ascended the steps of a wharf, and plunged into the district of Whitefriars. There, selecting the humblest-looking public house he could find, he entered; and, as he had his purse about him (for those who had imprisoned, did not rob him), he was enabled to command the necessaries and attentions which he required. Indeed, the landlord willingly supplied a complete change of linen and a suit of his own clothes to a guest who spared not his gold; and as "mine host" and the Earl happened to be of the same height and equally slender in figure, the garments of the former suited well enough the temporary need of the latter.

A hundred times, while performing his hasty toilette, was the Earl on the point of summoning the landlord, and making inquiries concerning Tom Rain; but the extraordinary appearance which he himself had worn on entering the public-house, must, he felt convinced, have already engendered strange suspicions concerning him; and prudence suggested to him the necessity of avoiding any conversation which might strengthen these suspicions, and thereby lead him into some embarrassment from which the revelation of his name and rank might alone extricate him.

But, oh! how painful—how acutely painful was the suspense which he endured while passing through the details of ablution and change of attire; and, although never were the duties of the toilette more necessary, yet never had the Earl hurried them over with such feverish excitement.

At length, as St. Paul's Cathedral proclaimed the hour of eight, on that eventful evening, Arthur sallied forth from the public-house—leaving the landlord and landlady a prey to the wildest and most unsatisfactory conjectures as to what he was, and how he had happened to be in the condition in which he at first presented himself at their establishment. They, however, both agreed that it was a very good evening's work for them; inasmuch as their strange guest had paid them with a liberality which would have rendered a similar visit every night of their lives a most welcome God-send.

In the meantime the Earl of Ellingham had gained Fleet Street, with the intention of entering some tavern or hotel where a file of newspapers was kept. But he was struck by the deserted appearance of the great thoroughfare—for the shops were all shut, and the vehicles, instead of pouring in two dense streams running different ways, were few and far between.

It then struck him that it was Sunday evening:—for though, in his dungeon, he had been enabled to count the lapse of each day through the date afforded by the morning visits of his gaoler, yet he had not kept so accurate a calculation as to mark each day by its distinctive name.

As he stood in Fleet Street, uncertain how to proceed, it suddenly struck him that he would purchase a newspaper. The office of the *Weekly Dispatch* was facing him: he entered, and bought that day's number.

Such was his intense curiosity—nay more, his acute and agonising suspense,—and so awful were the misgivings which crowded upon his soul,—that he lingered in the office to glance over the newspaper.

And, my God! How he started—how his brain reeled—how crushed and overwhelmed did he feel, when his eyes encountered the dreadful words at the head of a column—

THE CONVICT RAINFORD.

He staggered against the wainscot of the office, and the journal nearly dropped from his hands. He endeavoured to master his emotions, and refer to the fatal column for farther particulars: but his brain swam—his eyes were dim—his glances could not settle themselves upon the point which he vainly endeavoured to make the focus of his attention.

The clerk in the office fancied that he was suddenly attacked with indisposition, and made a polite inquiry to that effect. But the Earl, without giving a direct reply, put hasty and impatient questions to him; and, though his ideas were strangely confused, he nevertheless understood the appalling announcement—*that Rainford had been condemned to death and that the sentence was to be carried into execution on the following morning at Horsemonger Lane Gaol*!

The Earl threw down the paper—and darted from the office,—recovered from his state of stupefaction, but only to become the prey to the most maddening feelings of despair.

An empty hackney-coach was passing at the moment: he stopped it, and leapt in—exclaiming to the driver, "To Horsemonger Lane Gaol."

The coachman saw that his fare was impatient to reach that place; and he whipped his horses into a decent pace. Over Blackfriars Bridge—down the wide road went the vehicle: then it turned to the left at the Obelisk—and, in a short time, it stopped in front of the gaol.

The Earl sprang forth, and was rushing up to the entrance of the governor's house; when an ominous hammering noise fell upon his ears.

He instinctively glanced upwards:—and there—on the top of the gaol—standing out in bold relief against the moon-lit sky, *were the black spars of the gibbet which the carpenters had already erected for the ensuing morning's work*!

CHAPTER LII.
LORD ELLINGHAM'S EXERTIONS.

Not a cry—not a word—not even a moan betrayed the feelings of the Earl of Ellingham, as this frightful spectacle met his eyes.

He was paralysed—stunned—stupified.

Despair was in his heart;—and he could not lower his glances, which were fascinated—rivetted by that awful engine of death on the summit of the gaol.

This state of complete prostration of all the intellectual energies was suddenly interrupted by a gentle pull at his sleeve; and turning abruptly round, he beheld, by the pale light of the moon, a young lad of sickly appearance standing at his elbow.

"Do you know me? what would you with me?" demanded the Earl sharply.

"Yes—my lord, I know you," was the answer, delivered in a mournful—melancholy tone; "and I also know that good—generous, man who——"

The lad burst into an agony of tears, and pointed wildly towards the gibbet.

"Oh! you know Rainford!" exclaimed the Earl eagerly. "Tell me, my boy—speak—have you seen him lately?"

"This day—this evening," replied Jacob Smith—for it was he: "and I have taken leave of him—for ever! He begged me not to visit him—to-morrow——"

"For ever!" echoed the Earl, in a low and hollow voice. "But," he continued, again speaking eagerly and rapidly, "how does he support his doom?"

"With a courage such as the world has seldom seen," replied Jacob: "and he frequently speaks of you, my lord!"

"He speaks of me, my boy——"

"Yes: my lord—he fears that some tidings—some evil reports which you have probably heard, have set you against him—for he received a letter from you a day or two after his arrest——"

"My God! he suspects me of coldness!" exclaimed the Earl, in an impassioned tone. "Oh! I must see him—I must see him this moment——"

And he was rushing towards the governor's door, when Jacob again caught him by the sleeve, saying, "It is useless, my lord! you cannot be admitted to-night."

"The keeper of the prison dare not refuse me," cried the Earl; and he hastened to the door.

"Would it not be better, my lord," asked Jacob, who had followed him, "to use the valuable time now remaining, for the purpose of saving him?"

"True!" exclaimed the Earl, struck by the observation. "An interview with him at this moment would effect no good, and would only unman me altogether. Come with me, my lad: you take an interest in Rainford—and you shall be the first to learn the result of the application which I will now make in the proper quarter."

Thus speaking, Arthur hurried back to the hackney-coach, and as the door closed upon himself and Jacob, he said to the driver in a firm tone, "To the Home-Office!"

During the ride, the Earl put a thousand questions to Jacob Smith relative to the convict.

From the answers he received it appeared that Rainford was well convinced that neither Sir Christopher Blunt nor Mr. Curtis had directed Mr. Howard to prosecute him for the robbery for which he was doomed to suffer: indeed, they had declared as much when giving their evidence at the police-court and at the Old Bailey. Neither did he believe that Howard had instituted the proceedings through any personal motive of spite; but he entertained the conviction that some secret and mysterious springs had been set in motion to destroy him, and that Howard had been made the instrument of the fatal design.

It seemed that Jacob had visited him as often as the prison regulations would permit; and that he had been the bearer of frequent letters between Rainford and the beautiful Jewess, who had removed from Brandon Street a few days after his arrest—this change of residence being effected by the express wishes of Tom Rain, who was afraid lest the malignity of his unknown enemies might extend to herself. Jacob also casually mentioned that the very first time he had been sent to see the Jewess (which appeared to have been the morning after Lord Ellingham's laconic letter was received by Rainford) she enclosed a number of papers in a packet, which she carefully sealed and which Jacob conveyed to the prisoner.

"When I was with him this evening," added the lad, "he gave me that packet, which he re-directed to your lordship, and desired me to leave it at your lordship's residence to-morrow—when all should be over; but since I have thus unexpectedly met you——"

Sobs choked the youth's utterance, as he passed the sealed packet to the Earl, who received it in profound silence—for well did he divine the nature of its contents, and his heart was rent with anguish as he felt all the generosity of that deed on thy part, Tom Rain!

But, in a few moments, the spark of hope that already scintillated within him, was fanned into a bright and glowing flame: for he now possessed proofs to convince the Secretary of State that in allowing the law to take its course, an individual rightly entitled to an Earldom would suffer death; and Arthur was well aware of the influence which such an argument would have in supporting his appeal for a commutation of the sentence.

"Thy generous act in giving up the papers which *thou* mightest have used to save thy life," he thought within himself, apostrophising his doomed half-brother, "shall not be thrown away on me! Ingratitude to thee were impossible!"—Then, turning to Jacob, he said aloud, "I am much mistaken, my boy, if these papers which you have placed in my hands will not effect the great object that we have in view."

"Oh! my lord," exclaimed Jacob, with the most sincere joyfulness of manner, "is there really so much hope? Ah! if not for him—at least for that poor lady who loves him so deeply——"

"Has she seen him?" hastily inquired the Earl.

"Once—once only," answered Jacob: "and that was this afternoon. I was not present at the farewell scene: but I was in the neighbourhood when *she* came out again—and I do not wish ever to witness a beautiful woman's grief again. My lord, I have passed through much—seen much,—and distress and misery in all their worst forms are known to me. But as long as I live will the image of that poor creature, as the wind blew aside her veil for few moments——Oh! I cannot bear to think of it!"

"He shall be restored to her, my lad!" exclaimed the Earl emphatically. "The more I ponder upon the case, the more firmly do I become convinced that it is one in which the Home Secretary may exercise the prerogative of mercy. It is not as if blood had been shed——"

At this moment the hackney-coach stopped at the door of the Home Office; and the Earl alighted, bidding Jacob await his return.

But what language can describe the violence of that sudden revulsion of feeling which Arthur experienced, when, on inquiry, he learnt that the Home Secretary was neither at his official nor his private residence in London, as he had set out on the preceding evening for his country-seat in the north of England!

With the rapidity of lightning did the Earl calculate the chances of overtaking him by means of fleet horses: but a few moments' reflection showed him the impossibility of accomplishing that undertaking in time to make its result, supposing it were successful, available to the doomed victim. The reprieve might be granted—but it would arrive in London too late!

The Earl was well aware that it was useless to seek the Prime Minister; as that functionary would have no alternative save to reply that he could not possibly interfere in a case so essentially regarding the department of the Home Secretary.

Arthur's mind was accordingly made up in a very few moments:—he would repair at once to the King, who, as he learnt at the Home Office, was, fortunately for his purpose, at Buckingham Palace!

It was now ten o'clock at night: there were but ten hours before him—but in that interval much might be done.

Returning to the coach, he desired to be driven to his own house; and, while proceeding thither, he acquainted Jacob with the cruel disappointment he had sustained by the absence of the Secretary of State, and stated his resolution to repair at once to the dwelling of the King.

Thus the poor, wretched lad became, by his generous sympathy for Tom Rain, the companion and confidant of the great noble!

Great was the joy which prevailed amongst the Earl's household, when he made his appearance once more at his own abode. The servants had indeed heard from Dr. Lascelles as much as the physician himself had learnt through the medium of the vague and laconic letter which the Earl was permitted to write to him from his dungeon: but still the protracted absence of their master had occasioned them the most lively uneasiness; and they were therefore heartily glad to behold his return.

But he was compelled to cut short the congratulations proffered him; and the orders that he issued were given with an unwonted degree of impatience.

"Let the carriage be ordered round directly. Let some one hasten to acquaint Lady Hatfield with my return; and also send up to Grafton Street to request Dr. Lascelles to come hither as soon as possible, and to wait for me—never mind how late. Let this lad be taken care of," he added, indicating Jacob: "and see that he wants for nothing."

Then, hastening up stairs to his own chamber, he locked himself in, having declined the attendance of his valet.

He tore open the packet which Jacob had given him, and beheld a small leathern case. This case contained a roll of letters and other documents, *tied round with a piece of riband so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been*. There was also, accompanying this roll, a brief note addressed to himself.

With trembling hand he opened the note, and, with beating heart and tearful eyes, read the following words:—

> "I have sent you the papers, my dear brother—for so I shall make bold to call you still,—to convince you that I did not forge an idle tale when we met last. Whatever your motive for abandoning me in my last hours may be, I entertain no ill feeling towards you: on the contrary, I hope that God may prosper you, and give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute.

"I had promised to leave behind me a written narrative of my chequered and eventful history for your perusal: but—need I explain wherefore I have not fulfilled this promise?"

"T. R."

The Earl wept—Oh! he wept plenteously, as he read those lines.

"He thinks that I have abandoned him—and he expresses the most generous wishes for my prosperity!" he cried aloud. "Oh! my God—I must save him—I must save him!"

He waited not to examine the roll of papers: his half-brother intimated that the necessary proofs were *there*—and, though no human eye watched the Earl's motions at that instant, still he would not imply a doubt of Rainford's word by examining the documents.

But he hastened to dress himself in attire suitable to his contemplated visit to the King; and his toilette was completed just as the carriage drove round to the door.

A few minutes afterwards he was rolling rapidly along in the vehicle towards Buckingham Palace, the papers carefully secured about his person, and his heart palpitating violently with the cruel suspense of mingled hope and fear.

Alas! he was doomed to another disappointment.

Though it was but little past eleven o'clock, King George the Fourth had already retired to rest,—or rather had been borne away in a senseless state from one of those beastly orgies in which the filthy voluptuary so often indulged.

This much was intimated to the Earl by a nobleman attached to the royal person, and with whom Arthur was well acquainted.

Quitting the palace in disgust combined with despair, Lord Ellingham returned home.

But, no—we were wrong: he did not entirely despair. One hope of saving Rainford's life—one faint hope remained,—a hope so wild—so extravagant—and involving a chance with such fearful odds against it, that it could only have been conceived by one who was determined to leave no means, however difficult, unadopted, in order to attain a particular end.

On crossing the threshold of his door, Arthur's first inquiry was whether Doctor Lascelles had arrived.

The reply was an affirmative; and the Earl hastened to the apartment to which the physician had been shown.

It is not however necessary to relate the particulars of their interview; inasmuch as the nature of the conversation which passed between them will be developed hereafter.

CHAPTER LIII.
THE EXECUTION.

The fatal Monday morning broke, yellow—heavily—and gloomily; and the light stole—or rather struggled by degrees into the convict's cell.

Shortly before seven o'clock Tom Rain awoke; and casting his eyes rapidly around, they successively fell upon the turnkey who had sate up with him—the still flickering lamp upon the common deal table—the damp stone walls—and the massive bars at the windows.

For an instant a cold shudder convulsed his frame, as the conviction—the appalling truth burst upon him, that the horrors of his dreams were not to cease with the slumber that had given them birth.

But, with knitting brow and compressed lip—like a strong-minded man who endeavours to conceal the pain inflicted on him by a surgical operation of a dreadful nature—he struggled with his emotions; and, when the governor and clergyman entered the dungeon, they found him firm and resolute, though not insolent nor reckless.

The chaplain offered to pray with him; and he consented to join in devotion.

There was profound sincerity—but no affectation, no hypocrisy, no passionate exclamation—in the prayer which Tom Rain uttered extemporaneously.

As the clock chimed half-past seven, he arose from his knees, saying, "I am now prepared to die."

But there was yet another half hour before him.

Scarcely had the clock finished chiming, when the door was opened, and the Earl of Ellingham entered the cell.

Heedless of the impression which his conduct might produce upon the prison authorities present, Arthur rushed forward and threw himself into Rainford's arms, exclaiming, "No—I had not willfully abandoned you, Thomas!"

"Just now I said that I was prepared to die," answered the convict, returning the embrace with congenial warmth; "and now I may even add that I shall die contented!"

"The time is too precious to waste in mere details," returned Arthur; "or I would tell you how I have been kept away from you by force—by a vile outrage. But you do not now believe that I was willingly absent—that I wantonly neglected you?"

"No—no," exclaimed Rainford. "I seek not an explanation—I require none. It is enough that you are here now—at the last hour!"

The Earl then related, in a few hurried words, the vain exertions he had made on the preceding evening on behalf of Rainford, who expressed his lively gratitude.

Arthur next requested the governor to permit him to have a few minutes' private conversation with the prisoner: but this favour could not be granted—and the Earl dared not persist in his demand, as the chaplain hinted that the convict had bidden adieu to the affairs of this life, and had but little time left for devotion.

Thus was it that Arthur and Rainford had no opportunity of speaking together in private,—although the former had something important to communicate, and the latter perceived that such was the fact.

"Arthur," said Tom, approaching close to his half-brother, and speaking in a low solemn tone, "is there any hope?"

"None—*on this side of the scaffold*," returned the Earl, with a significant glance as he dwelt on his words: and, as he spoke, he took the prisoner's hand as if to wring it fervently.

But Rainford felt something in the Earl's palm, and instantly comprehended that it was an object which he was to take unnoticed by the gaol authorities. Then, rapid as the lightning flash, he perceived a double meaning in the words—"*on this side of the scaffold*;" because he knew that Arthur would not use those awful words, "*the scaffold*"—but would have said "*the tomb*," had he not had some special, profound motive.

And Rainford *did* comprehend the hint—the hope conveyed; and though he thanked his half-brother with a rapid, expressive glance, yet a sickly smile played upon his lip—indicative of the faintness of that hope so created.

At the same instant heavy footsteps were heard approaching the cell; and the chaplain said in a solemn tone, "The hour is almost come!"

Then Arthur once more threw himself into the prisoner's arms, and whispered rapidly in his ear, "Keep the tube in your throat—and you will be saved!"

Rainford murmured an assent; and the brothers embraced with a fervour which astonished those present, to whom their relationship

was totally unknown.

Arthur then tore himself from the cell:—not for worlds could he behold that horrible process termed *the toilette*.

He had also another motive for quitting the dungeon before the last moment:—this was to meet the Sheriff of the County in the passage.

And, behold! in the corridor, he encountered that functionary, the javelin-men, and the under-sheriff, behind whom came the executioner and his assistant.

The Earl accosted the Sheriff, with whom he was acquainted, and who was naturally surprised to meet the nobleman there.

Drawing him aside, Arthur said in a hasty tone, "I have a favour—a great favour to ask of you. The convict is well connected, and his friends demand the body to bury it decently. The earnest prayer that I have to offer you on their behalf, is that you will not prolong the feelings of shame and ignominy which they will experience during the time the corpse remains suspended."

"My lord," replied the Sheriff, "the body shall be cut down at twenty minutes past eight, and delivered over to the unhappy man's friends."

"A thousand thanks!" said the Earl, pressing the Sheriff's hand.

He then hurried away; and the procession moved on to the cell.

Immense was the crowd gathered around the gaol to witness the execution of the celebrated highwayman who had been proved on his trial to be none other than the notorious Black Mask who some years previously had performed the most extraordinary deeds of daring and audacity in the county of Hants.

Yes: immense was the crowd;—and not only did the living ocean inundate all the open spaces about the gaol and all the thoroughfares leading thither,—but it seemed to force its off-shooting streams and channels *up* the very walls of the surrounding dwellings, so densely filled with faces were the open windows—even to the house-tops.

Near the front gate of the gaol stood a black coach and a hearse;—and concealed between the vehicles and the prison wall, were the Earl of Ellingham, Dr. Lascelles, and three of the nobleman's own men-servants, all muffled in black mourning cloaks, and holding white handkerchiefs to their faces so as to hide their features as much as possible.

Lord Ellingham was convulsed with grief. Far—far more than the convict himself did the generous-hearted nobleman suffer on this terrible morning. He was benumbed with cold—his body felt like a dead weight which his legs could scarcely sustain—his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—a suffocating sensation oppressed him—and he felt as if all the most frightful misfortunes had suddenly combined to fall with crushing burden on his own head!

The clock of St. George's in the Borough began to strike eight—the clock of the prison echoed those iron notes, which sent upon the wing of the air the signal for death.

Suddenly the hum of the multitudes ceased; and an awful silence prevailed.

The Earl and the physician knew by those signs that the convict had just appeared on the roof of the gaol.

But from where they were stationed they could not command a view of the dreadful scene above: and even if they had been differently placed, Lord Ellingham at least would not have raised his eyes towards the fatal tree!

And now, amidst that solemn silence, a voice was heard,—the solemn, deep-toned, monotonous voice of the chaplain, saying, "*I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*"

The voice ceased: a sudden sensation ran through the crowd like an electric shock;—and the Earl of Ellingham groaned deeply—groaned in the bitterness of his spirit,—*for he knew that the drop had just fallen*!

"Compose yourself, my dear friend," whispered the physician: "for now is the time to arm yourself with all your energies!"

"Thanks, doctor—a thousand thanks for reminding me of my duty," said the Earl. "But this is most trying—most horribly trying! I have lived a hundred years of agony in the last few minutes!"

"Hope for the best, my dear Earl," rejoined the physician. "Do you think that he fully understood you——"

"He did—I am convinced of it!" replied Arthur, anxious to argue himself out of all doubts as well as to convince his companion. "He received the silver tube, and I saw him conceal it in his sleeve. But, alas! we had no opportunity to speak alone—though I had so much to say to him—so many explanations to give—such numerous questions to ask——My God! if after all, *this* plan should fail!"

"If that boy Jacob will only follow my instructions to the very letter," answered Lascelles, "I do not despair of success!"

"Oh! he will—he will!" returned the young nobleman, as he glanced towards the hearse. "He is as intelligent as he is attached to my dear brother!"

The railings in front of the gaol kept the crowd at a considerable distance from the mourning vehicles; and thus the observations which passed between the Earl and the physician were not heard by any save themselves.

And now how languidly—how slowly passed the interval of twenty minutes during which the Sheriff had stated that the body must remain suspended.

To the Earl it seemed as if each minute were a year—as if he were living twenty years in those twenty minutes!

And the crowds had broken the silence which had fallen upon them like a spell;—and ribald jests—obscene remarks—terrible execrations—and vile practical jokes now proclaimed how efficacious is the example of public strangulation!

At last the prison-clock chimed the quarter past eight; and more acute—more agonising grew the suspense of the Earl of Ellingham.

A thousand fears assailed him.

Rainford might not have been able to use the silver tube,—or its imagined effect might have failed,—or the knot of the rope might have broken his neck? Again—the Sheriff might forget his promise, and allow the convict to hang an hour according to the usual custom? And even if all these fears were without foundation, the physician might not be able to fulfil his expectations?

Cruel—cruel was the suspense,—appalling were the apprehensions endured by the young nobleman.

He looked at his watch: it was seventeen minutes and a half past eight.

Two minutes and a half more—if the Sheriff had not forgotten his promise!

But, no: he was even better than his word;—for scarcely had Arthur returned the watch to his pocket, when a sudden sensation again pervaded the multitude—and several voices cried, "*They are going to cut him down!*"

Then came a dead silence.

An intense heat ran, like molten lead, through the Earl's veins; and, at the next moment, he turned death-like cold, as if plunged into an ice-bath.

If he had hitherto lived years in minutes—he now seemed to exist whole centuries in moments!

All the fears which had previously struck him one by one, now rushed in an aggregate crowd to his soul.

The next two minutes were all of fury and horror—fury in his brain, horror in his heart!

But at last the gate of the gaol opened; and a gruff voice exclaimed, "Now then!"

The Earl's three men-servants hastened to range themselves near the door of the hearse, which one of them opened: and when the gaol-officials appeared, bearing the coffin, these servants advanced a few paces to relieve them of their burthen, and thrust it into the hearse, while Dr. Lascelles diverted the attention of the officials by distributing money amongst them.

This proceeding, which had been pre-arranged by the Earl and the physician with the three servants, was absolutely necessary: *because Jacob Smith was concealed within the hearse*!

The affair having proceeded successfully thus far, the hearse moved away; and the five persons who acted as mourners entered the black coach, which also drove off.

For the sake of appearances it was necessary that the vehicles should move slowly along, until the outskirts of the multitude were entirely passed: and then—when Blackman Street was reached—the hearse and the black coach were driven along at a rate which is adopted by funeral processions only when the obsequies are over.

CHAPTER LIV.
GALVANISM.

By the time St. George's Church was passed, the drivers had whipped their horses into a furious gallop;—and on—on went the mourning vehicles like the wind.

The sleek and pampered black horses panted and foamed; but the coachmen cared not—they were well paid for what they were doing.

Down Union Street rolled the chariot and the hearse—into the Blackfriars Road—up the wide thoroughfare to the river—over the bridge—along Farringdon Street—and through Smithfield to Clerkenwell Green.

In an incredibly short space of time, the two vehicles stopped at the door of a house in Red Lion Street.

Dr. Lascelles was the first to leap from the mourning coach, and, taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door of the house, into which, quickly as active men could move or work, the coffin was borne from the hearse.

Jacob Smith was helped out immediately afterwards, and he followed the Earl, the physician, and the three servants into the house, while the mourning coach and the hearse still waited at the door.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the coffin, *with the lid now screwed down*, was borne back to the hearse;—the three servants returned to the mourning coach, and the funeral procession was set in motion again—but with slow and suitable solemnity.

In another half hour, the coffin, with the name of "THOMAS RAINFORD" upon the plate, was interred in St. Luke's churchyard; and thus ended this ceremony.

But did that coffin really contain the cold corse of the once gallant highwayman?

No: it had been hastily filled with stones and straw at the house in Red Lion Street.

And the body——

The moment the coffin was borne into the house in Red Lion Street, in the manner already described, Jacob Smith closed the door behind him, and exclaimed in a triumphant tone, as he produced the silver tube from his pocket, "It was in his throat! I took it out—and I rubbed his temples with hartshorn and applied it to his nostrils the whole way from the goal to this place! Oh! he will be saved—he will be saved!"

The lid of the coffin, which had not been screwed down, was removed; and in the shell lay the highwayman—with eyes closed—and pale as death!

The Earl of Ellingham shuddered convulsively, and uttered a groan of anguish; but Dr. Lascelles gave his instructions with so much presence of mind and yet such rapidity, that the intensity of the nobleman's grief was soon partially absorbed in the excitement of the scene that now followed.

The body was removed as hastily as possible up stairs, and carried into a spacious laboratory, where it was immediately stretched upon the table.

The three servants then retraced their way down stairs, filled the coffin with stones and straw, screwed the lid tight, and departed with it, as already stated, to St. Luke's churchyard.

In the meantime, the physician, the Earl, and Jacob Smith remained in the laboratory; and now was the profound scientific knowledge of Dr. Lascelles about to be applied to the most wonderful act of human aims—*the resuscitation of a convict who had been hanged*!

The poles of a powerful galvanic pile were applied to the body, from which the animal heat had not altogether departed when it was taken from the coffin; and the force of the electric fluid almost immediately displayed its wondrous influence.

An universal tremor passed over the frame of Rainford; and ejaculations of ineffable joy burst from the lips of Lord Ellingham and Jacob Smith.

Dr. Lascelles continued to let fall upon the body a full quantum of the electric fluid; and in less than a minute the right arm of the highwayman moved,—moved with a kind of spasmodic quivering: then, in a few seconds, it was suddenly raised with eagerness and impatience, and the hand sought the throat.

With convulsive motion that hand kept grasping the throat as if to tear away something that oppressed it—as if the horrible rope still encircled it.

Then Rainford's chest began to swell and work with the violence of returning respiration—as if a mighty current of air were rushing

back to the lungs.

"He breathes! he breathes!" cried Ellingham and Jacob Smith, as it were in one voice.

"He will be saved," said the physician calmly, as he again applied the poles of the battery;—"provided congestion of the brain does not take place—for that is to be dreaded!"

But the nobleman and the poor lad heard not this alternative of sinister and dubious import: they had no ears for anything save those blessed words—"He will be saved!"

And they were literally wild with joy.

Lascelles, without desisting from his occupation of applying the electric fluid, and apparently without noticing the excitement—the delirium of happiness and hope which had seized upon his two companions, began leisurely to explain how it was necessary to adopt means to equalise the reviving circulation; and though he called for hartshorn, he was not heard. At length he stamped his foot violently on the floor, exclaiming, "Will neither of you give me the hartshorn? Do you wish him to die through *your* neglect?"

The Earl instantly checked the exuberance of his joyous emotions, and hastened to obey all the instructions which the physician gave him.

The hartshorn was applied to Rainford's nostrils; and in a few moments his lips began to quiver:—then, on a sudden, as Lascelles let fall upon him a stronger current of the electric fluid, a terrific cry burst from the object of all this intensely concentrated interest!

But never was cry of human agony more welcome to mortal ears than now; for it told those who heard it that life was in him who gave vent to it!

The physician felt the highwayman's pulse: it beat feebly—very feebly—but still it beat!

And now his limbs moved with incessant trembling,—and he waved his right hand backwards and forwards, his breast heaving with repeated sighs, and gasps, and painful moans.

The doctor applied a small mirror to Rainford's mouth and nostrils; and it was instantly covered with a cloud.

He now opened his eyes slowly; they were much blood-shot—but the pupils indicated the reviving fires of vitality.

His breathing rapidly grew more regular; and though he retained his eyes open, yet he seemed unconscious of all that was passing around him, and gazed upwards with the most death-like indifference.

Lord Ellingham cast a glance of frightful apprehension towards the physician; but the countenance of Dr. Lascelles wore an expression of calm and complacent satisfaction—and the Earl was reassured.

Twenty minutes had now passed since the galvanic operation had commenced; and at last Dr. Lascelles said emphatically, "*He is saved!*"

The Earl embraced him as if he were a father who had just manifested some extraordinary proof of paternal love, or who had forgiven some deep offence on the part of a son.

"We must put him to bed immediately," said the physician, with difficulty extricating himself from the nobleman's embrace, and fearing lest he should be compelled to undergo a similarly affectionate process at the hands of Jacob Smith, who was equally enthusiastic in his joy:—"we must put him to bed immediately," repeated Dr. Lascelles; "and fortunately for us, there is a bed-chamber in the house."

The three then carefully lifted Tom Rain into a small room furnished as a bed-chamber, and where they undressed him and deposited him in the bed.

"And now," said Jacob Smith, "we should remember that there is one, who will feel as much joy as ourselves——"

"True!" cried the Earl. "But where does she live?"

"I am acquainted with her abode," returned the lad. "If your lordship will allow me——"

"Yes, my good boy," interrupted Arthur. "It is for you to convey these joyous tidings. But perhaps she may have returned home to her father—for, after all that has occurred, and considering Mr. de Medina's affection for his daughter——But all this while we are talking enigmatically in the presence of my excellent friend the doctor, from whom there must be no secrets——"

"Never mind me," said Lascelles laconically, who perfectly well comprehended the nature of their allusions. "I care little for your secrets; and, even if it were otherwise, I am too much occupied with my patient here——"

"Then we will not trouble you with explanations at present," interrupted the Earl. "Jacob, my lad, hasten to the lady of whom we speak—break the happy tidings to her gently—and bring her hither."

"Yes, my lord," answered the lad, delighted at being chosen as the messenger of good tidings in such a case. "Fortunately, Miss de Medina moved from Brandon Street into the heart of the City, by Mr. Rainford's positive directions: and I shall not be long before I come back with her."

The Earl put gold into his hand; but Jacob returned it, declaring that he was not without money; and in another minute the front door of the house closed behind him.

CHAPTER LV.
THE LABORATORY.—ESTHER DE MEDINA.

When Jacob had taken his departure, Dr. Lascelles returned to his laboratory, mixed some liquid ingredients in a glass, and returning to the bed-chamber, poured the medicine down Rainford's throat.

He then felt his pulse, applied his ear to his chest to listen to the pulsation of his heart, and carefully examined his eyes, which were far less blood-shot than when they opened first.

"He is getting on admirably," said the physician, "his pulsation is regular, and neither too quick nor too slow—but just as I could wish it. He seems inclined to sleep—yes—he closes his eyes; and he will awake to perfect consciousness.—But do you know, my dear friend, that in order to oblige you, I have incurred an awful risk?" continued the doctor. "The law would not believe me, were I to declare that it was in the interest of science I made these galvanic experiments, and that having succeeded in recalling the man to life, I was not capable of delivering him up to justice."

"Let us hope that there will be no necessity to make such an excuse at all," said the Earl. "You have rendered me an immense service, doctor——"

"Then I am satisfied," interrupted Lascelles; "for, after all you told me last night, I cannot help liking your half-brother here. He is a generous-hearted fellow; and one would risk much to save such a man from death."

"You had frequently mentioned to me your galvanic experiments," said the Earl: "and last night, when nearly driven to desperation by the absence of the Home Secretary, the reminiscence of all the wonders you had at different times related to me in respect to galvanism, flashed to my mind—and I sent for you as a drowning man clings to a straw."

"In the adjoining room," observed the physician, "I have tried the influence of galvanism upon thousands of animals and on several men. I have paid high prices to obtain the bodies of convicts as soon as they were cut down;—but never until this day did I succeed in restoring the vital spark. Neither would this experiment have been successful, had we not adopted all the precautions I suggested. The tube in the throat to allow respiration—and Jacob Smith in the hearse to remove the suffocating night-cap from Rainford's head, and the tube from his throat, and then to apply the hartshorn to his nostrils and his temples. Step with me again into the laboratory: you have not yet had time to examine its curiosities," added the physician with a smile. "Rainford sleeps," he continued, glancing towards the bed; "and we shall have a little leisure to inspect the laboratory."

They accordingly proceeded into the adjacent room, where Lascelles directed his companion's attention to the various galvanic and electrical apparatus.

"I am also a devoted disciple of Gall and Spurzheim," observed the physician, when he had expatiated upon the discoveries of Galvani. [25] "Behold that row of plaster of Paris casts of heads," he continued, pointing to a shelf whereon upwards of fifty of the objects mentioned were ranged: "they have afforded me much scope for curious speculation and profound study."

"I observe that you have casts of the heads of several celebrated criminals amongst them," said the Earl: "Arthur Thistlewood—Daniel Hoggart—George Barrington—Henry Fauntleroy—John Thurtell—William Probert——"

"And many others, as you perceive, my dear Earl," interrupted Lascelles. "The prejudice is as yet so strong amongst people, in respect to phrenology and craniology, that it is difficult to obtain the casts of living heads: I am therefore forced to make friends with the turnkeys in gaols and with the relations of criminals who are hung or who die in prison, to get casts. Moreover, the heads of men who have led remarkable lives, or who have suffered for their crimes, afford such interesting subjects for study and comparison——"

"Comparison between the head of the man and the monkey!" said the Earl with a smile.

"Decidedly," exclaimed the physician. "But I will not bore you with my theories and speculations on this subject. You may, however, suppose that I am not a little enthusiastic in the matter, since I have taken the trouble to have human heads prepared and articulated to facilitate my studies."

Thus speaking, he opened the door of a cupboard.

The Earl started back—for four human countenances met his astonished and horrified gaze, and four pairs of human eyes seemed to glare ominously upon him. At the same time his nostrils were assailed with a strong odour of spices.

"You need not be afraid of them!" ejaculated the physician, laughing: "they will not speak to you."

"But how—whence did you obtain——"

"I suppose you think I murdered four men for the sake of their heads?" cried Lascelles, laughing more heartily still. "Why, my dear Earl, you would be surprised, perhaps, to learn that I often pass whole nights in this laboratory, making galvanic experiments, or pursuing my phrenological and craniological researches. But these heads were obtained from the hospitals, and I myself embalmed and prepared, as you now see them."

"I was not aware that you possessed this laboratory," observed the Earl, "until you stated the fact last night."

"Nor would you ever have known it, had it not been for the desire which you expressed that science should exert itself to rescue your half-brother from the grasp of death," answered the physician. "The truth is, I have had this laboratory upwards of seventeen or eighteen years. I was always devoted to science, especially that on which my own profession is based; and the spirit of anatomical inquiry made me anxious to obtain as many *subjects*—or in plain terms, dead bodies—as possible. I was therefore thrown into perpetual intercourse with resurrection-men, who, of course, are not the best of characters. But I was afraid of having corpses brought to my own house in Grafton Street; and I was also desirous to fit up for myself a laboratory in some retired neighbourhood, where I could pursue my studies without the least fear of interruption, on such occasions when the humour might seize me. I hinted as much to one of the rascals who sold me *subjects*; and he put me in communication with a man of the name of Tidmarsh. After some haggling and hesitation on the part of Tidmarsh—and when he had consulted, or pretended to consult, his principal—he introduced me to this house, and I hired this room at an enormous rental. I did not, however, care about the high rate demanded of me for the use of the place, because it is not only in a most retired neighbourhood, but there is also a private and subterranean means of egress and ingress from another street, which is useful, you know, for one who has to deal with resurrectionists."

"And are you the only tenant of this house?" inquired the Earl; "for I presume that the bed-chamber in which poor Thomas lies is not your own."

"No: some old man occasionally visits the house, and now and then sleeps in that room," returned the physician. "But I have only seen him once or twice and do not even know his name. I have my own key for the front-door, and I am acquainted with the secret of the subterranean passage; but I never hold any communication with Tidmarsh, beyond paying him the rent when it is due;—and when I happen to meet the old man I have alluded to, we merely exchange a word and pass on. He has his rooms in the house, and I have mine; and as he does not interfere with me, I never trouble myself about him nor his concerns."

"Then, for aught you know, doctor," said the Earl, "you may occupy an apartment in the house of bad character?"

"What do I care?" exclaimed Lascelles. "I could not well have such a laboratory as this at my own residence—my servants would talk about these human heads, and those plaster casts, and the galvanic experiments, and I should be looked upon as a sorcerer, or at all events with so much suspicion and aversion as to lose all my practice. And, by the bye, my dear Earl, you should be the very last," added the doctor, with a smile, "to hint at the possibility of this house being connected with bad characters; for had I not a laboratory in so quiet a street—a street, too, where no questions are ever asked nor observations made—your poor brother might have waited long enough for the chance of resuscitation by galvanic means."

"True, my dear doctor—I was unjust," said the Earl. "But you will forgive me?"

"Say no more about it, Arthur. Were men of scientific research to be over particular, they might as well abandon their studies at once. The experiments I have made on corpses in this room, could scarcely have been performed at my own residence; and, to tell you very candidly, I believe that the old man who has the other apartments on this floor, is either a miser or a rogue;—but I care nothing about him or his affairs. And now I will mention to you one very extraordinary circumstance. It must have been, as near as I can guess, five weeks ago that I was one night pursuing my galvanic experiments in this room—I had been operating on divers rabbits, frogs, and rats—and, may be, for anything I recollect, a few cats,—when I was compelled to go down stairs for a particular purpose. On my return, as I came back by that door," he continued, pointing to one at the farther end of the room, "and which leads to the staircase, I was startled—nay, positively astounded at seeing a man standing near this cupboard, and gazing fixedly on the human heads. I confess I was alarmed at the moment, because I had heard voices in the house during the half-hour previously; and I remember that I rushed back and instinctively barred and bolted the door. But the man turned round before I had time to close the door—and I caught a glimpse of his face. That man—now who do you think he was?"

"It is impossible to guess, doctor," said the Earl.

"He was your half-brother, who now lies in the adjoining room!" added Lascelles.

"Thomas!—here!" cried Arthur, profoundly surprised.

"I could not possibly make a mistake, because I had seen him before—no matter how or where—and knew him immediately," continued the physician. "Well, I must confess that I was uncertain how to act. I did not wish him to recognise me—although perhaps he had already done so; and I could not very well leave the house and return to Grafton-street at once, because I had on a dressing-gown, and had left my coat in this room. I was half-way down the stairs leading to the hall, when I heard some one opening the front door with a key. Knowing that it must be either the old man I have before mentioned, or Tidmarsh, as they alone besides myself had keys of the front door, I waited till the person came in; and it *was* Tidmarsh. I immediately told him what I had seen.—'*Ah!*' said he, '*I suspected there was something wrong, and that made me get up, dress, and come round*.'—His words astonished me; and I requested an explanation; but he seemed sorry that he had uttered them inadvertently, and gave some evasive reply. He however accompanied me up stairs: we entered the laboratory, and no one was there. We went into the next room—the one where Rainford is now sleeping—and there we found the carpet moved away from the trap-door——"

"The trap-door!" exclaimed the Earl.

"Yes—a trap-door that leads to the subterranean passage which I have mentioned to you," added Lascelles; "but you must remember

that all I have told you about this house is in the strictest confidence. Well, we found the carpet moved away from the trap-door, though the trap itself was closed. Old Tidmarsh instantly fastened the trap with a secret spring which there is to it, and spread the carpet over the floor again.—'*But does he know the means of getting out at the other end?*' I inquired, shocked at the thought of Rainford being immured in the subterranean.—'*Do you think he would venture down there if he were not acquainted with the secrets of the place?*' demanded Tidmarsh. This struck me as being consistent with common sense; and moreover I began to fancy that Tidmarsh and Rainford must be connected together—pardon me, my dear Earl, for saying so: and that suspicion was encouraged in my mind by the singular and mysteriously significant observation that Tidmarsh had dropped when I met him on the stairs. So I felt no farther uneasiness; but took my departure for Grafton Street. Tidmarsh quitted the house with me, and left me at the corner of Turnmill Street close by—as he lives there."

"Do you know," said the Earl of Ellingham, who now appeared to be occupied with an idea which had just struck him,—"do you know that all this conversation about subterraneans, and secret passages, and trap-doors, has created a strange suspicion in my mind?"

"Relative to what?" demanded the physician.

"I briefly explained to you last night the cause of my disappearance for four long weeks," continued the Earl; "I also acquainted you with the manner of my escape. Now, I am convinced, by the direction I took, in threading those dreadful sewers, that I was a prisoner somewhere in Clerkenwell; and perhaps—who knows—indeed, it is highly probable, that the very subterranean, of which you have spoken, may contain dungeon——"

"You shall soon satisfy yourself on that head," interrupted the physician. "I confess that I have never been there more than three or four times—and then only to help old Tidmarsh convey to my laboratory a *subject* for my galvanic or anatomical experiments, and which the resurrectionists had deposited at his house in Turnmill Street. So you may believe that I know but little of the precise features of the subterranean. But we will visit it at once; and if there be a dungeon or cell there, such as you describe, we shall discover it."

The physician and the Earl proceeded into the bed-chamber, where Rainford still slept. Lascelles felt his pulse, examined his countenance attentively, and turned with a smile of satisfaction to the young nobleman, to whom he whispered, "He is beyond all danger."

Arthur pressed the doctor's hand with fervent gratitude, while tears of happiness trembled upon his long lashes.

The physician then proceeded to raise the trap-door; and, having procured a lamp from his laboratory, led the way down the spiral staircase of stone.

But the huge door at the bottom was bolted on the other side; and thus further investigation was rendered impossible on that occasion.

They accordingly retraced their steps to the bed-room, closed the trap-door, and spread the carpet over it again.

The Earl nevertheless made up his mind to institute farther search in those mysterious premises at some future day.

"My dear young friend," said the physician suddenly, as they stood by the side of the bed, watching the countenance of the sleeper, "I had almost forgotten that when *he* awakes presently, it will be necessary to administer a little stimulant—either port-wine, or good brandy, if such a thing can be got in this neighbourhood."

"I will hasten and procure both immediately," returned the Earl. "Give me the key of the front-door that I may let myself in without troubling you to descend to open it."

Lascelles handed the key to the nobleman, who immediately sallied forth to purchase the spirits required.

Having procured a pint-bottle of brandy at the most respectable tavern which he perceived in St. John Street, whither he repaired for the purpose, he was retracing his way, when his eyes were suddenly attracted by a lovely female form crossing the street just mentioned, and proceeding in the direction of Northampton Square.

But the lady was not dressed in mourning; and therefore he conceived that he must be mistaken relative to the idea which had struck him.

And yet that symmetry of form, set off rather than concealed by the ample shawl which she wore,—that dignified elegance of gait,—that gracefulness of carriage, were well-known characteristics of Esther de Medina.

The Earl hastened after her, and pronounced that name.

The lady turned—raised her veil—and extended her hand to the nobleman.

Yes—it was Esther;—but how pale—how profoundly mournful her countenance!

"I am rejoiced to meet you," said the Earl in a rapid and excited tone; "for I have news to communicate which will give you joy! But—come with me—I implore you—I know all—look upon me as a friend—and in my presence you need not blush. Delay not—I beseech you—come with me at once!"

And drawing her arm in his, he hurried her away towards Red Lion Street.

"My lord," she said, "I am at a loss to understand——"

"Oh! you know not how nearly that which I have to communicate—to give you evidence of—affects your happiness!" interrupted Arthur. "But I must not tell you all in a breath—it would be too much for you to hear:—and I am glad—Oh! I am rejoiced that I have thus met you—for I had dispatched a messenger to seek you—and he might have broken the happy tidings too abruptly——"

Esther gazed upon his countenance in astonishment mingled with an expression of surprise and even alarm: but the Earl perceived not

the strange impression that his words had produced, as he hurried her along at a rate which in a more refined neighbourhood would have attracted disagreeable attention.

The house in Red Lion Street was reached; and the nobleman opened the door with extraordinary impatience.

For an instant Esther hesitated to follow him; but, confident of the honourable intentions of the Earl, and anxious to relieve herself from the state of wonder and suspense into which his words had thrown her, she entered the gloomy-looking tenement.

He led her up the dirty, decayed staircase into the laboratory, where he begged her to wait for a moment. He then softly opened the door communicating with the bed-chamber, in order to acquaint Dr. Lascelles with her presence there, and in a few hurried words explain the motives which had induced him to bring her thither; for he supposed that all those circumstances which had led him to believe that the Jewess was the mistress of his half-brother, were unknown to the doctor.

But the moment he opened the door, he started—and an ejaculation of the wildest surprise burst from his lips.

For there—standing by the bed, with hands clasped and eyes upraised in thankfulness to heaven—was the living counterpart of Esther de Medina!

Arthur turned hastily round to convince himself that Esther had not passed in before him: but Esther was indeed a few paces behind him—alarmed by the exclamation which had burst from his lips.

The truth flashed like lightning to the Earl's brain:—Esther de Medina had a sister—so like herself that, when apart, they might well be taken for each other:—yes—that must be the solution of the enigma which had bewildered him so often!

"Miss de Medina!" he said, hastily taking her hand, "I have been labouring under a strange mistake. But you will perhaps understand how it arose, when——"

He led her into the room:—she started back, exclaiming, "Oh! heavens—my oath!"—but in the next moment the sisters—for such indeed they were—rushed into each other's arms!

25. Mr. Peck, B. A., in his interesting papers on Electricity in *Reynolds's Miscellany*, gives the ensuing particulars:—"The discovery of galvanic electricity was the result of accident. Madame Galvani, the wife of a distinguished Italian philosopher, being recommended by her medical adviser to partake of broth prepared from frogs, several of these little animals were procured, and were placed prior to their being cooked, in the laboratory of her husband. Some of Monsieur Galvani's friends happened to be amusing themselves with an electrical machine, which was standing in the room, and, by chance, one of the frogs was touched with a scalpel. To Madame Galvani's surprise, she observed the limbs of the frogs exhibit a convulsive motion. Upon examining them closely, she perceived that the muscles were affected at the very time when sparks were received from the machine. When her husband returned, she acquainted him with the circumstance. For some time previously M. Galvani had entertained a belief that muscular action was affected by electricity, and had been experimenting for the purpose, if possible, of verifying this hypothesis. Delighted by the discovery, he lost no time in trying a variety of experiments. At first he tested the effect of sparks alone, on dissected frogs, gradually varying the intensity of the spark. In every case, however, even when the electric action was feeble, he noticed that the muscles of the frogs gave evidence of susceptibility to its influence. He next made experiments with atmospheric electricity. The same result ensued as when the electric action had been elicited by artificial means."

 In another paper of the same interesting series, the following account is given:—"On the evening of January the 28th, during a somewhat extraordinary display of northern lights, a lady became so highly charged with electricity, as to give out vivid electrical sparks at the end of each finger, to the face of each of the company present. This did not cease with the heavenly phenomenon, but continued for several months, during which time she was constantly charged; and giving off electrical sparks to every conductor she approached; so that she could not touch the stove, nor any metallic utensils, without first giving off an electrical spark, with the consequent twinge. The state most favourable to this phenomenon was an atmosphere of about 80 deg. Fahrenheit, moderate exercise, and social enjoyment. It disappeared in any atmosphere approaching zero, and under the debilitating effects of fear. When seated by the stove, reading, with her feet upon the fender, she gave out sparks, at the rate of three or four each minute; and, under the most favourable circumstances, a spark that could be seen, heard, or felt, passed every second! She could charge others in the same way, when insulated, who could then give sparks to others. To make it satisfactory that her dress did not produce it, it was changed to cotton and woollen, without altering the phenomenon. The lady is about thirty, of sedentary pursuits, and delicate state of health."

 We avail ourselves of the digressive facility afforded us by this note to the text, to relate *a true history* of the resuscitation of a man who had been hanged—a history which is perhaps one of the most extraordinary "romances of real life" upon record. It is as follows:—Ambrose Gwinett was hanged at Deal for the murder of a man who merely disappeared, and whose body was not found. Circumstantial evidence certainly pointed strongly to Gwinett as a murderer; but still it was not proved in the first instance that a murder had been really committed. Gwinett and another man, of the name of Collins, arrived together at an inn in Deal. Gwinett borrowed Collins's clasp-knife during supper-time, in the presence of the waiter. On the following morning Collins was missing; and Gwinett had been met on the stairs, in the middle of the night, coming up from the garden. Blood was found in the garden, and in the midst of the blood was the clasp-knife, open. The traces of blood were continued down to the sea-side, and there they ceased. Gwinett was moreover found to have in his pocket Collins's purse, which the waiter had seen over night in Collins's possession. Gwinett's defence was that he had received the purse, after the waiter left the room on the preceding evening, in consequence of an arrangement that he (Gwinett) should be paymaster for them both; that he had gone down stairs in the night, for a certain purpose, to the garden; that his nose had bled dreadfully; that he had used the clasp-knife to

raise the latch of the door, and had dropped it in the dark; and that he had walked down to the sea-side close by to wash his face and hands, and stop the bleeding at the nose with the cold salt-water. This tale was not believed; Gwinett was found guilty of *Murder*, and hanged on Sandown Common. But a shepherd, passing by the gibbet a few hours after the execution, and while the victim was hanging in chains, perceived signs of life in him, and cut him down. Gwinett was recovered: and the kind-hearted shepherd sent him abroad. In a distant colony, Gwinett met Mr. Collins, *the very man for whose alleged murder he had been hanged*! An explanation immediately ensued. On the night in question, Collins had also gone down stairs to the garden, and had been carried off by a press-gang who passed along the sea-shore at the time. He was conveyed to a boat, and in that transported to the tender-vessel lying in the Downs: the vessel sailed next morning, and Collins had heard nothing of the dilemma of his friend until they met as just described.

CHAPTER LVI.
A HISTORY OF THE PAST.

Mr. de Medina was the son of a Spanish merchant, who died, leaving a considerable fortune behind him, and of which this son was the sole inheritor. But, by the villainy of his relations and the corrupt decision of a Spanish judge, Mr. de Medina found himself despoiled of the riches which were rightfully his own; and at the age of two-and-twenty he quitted his native land in disgust, to return to England, where indeed he had been educated, and the language of which country he spoke as fluently as his own.

It is hardly necessary to state that Mr. de Medina was of the Jewish persuasion; and on his arrival in London, he naturally applied to the eminent merchants of his own creed for employment. It is the fashion in this country to decry the Jews—to represent them as invariably sordid, mercenary, avaricious, and griping—indeed, to carry the charges laid against them to such a length, as to associate with their names a spirit of usury amounting to the most flagrant and dishonourable extortion. And these charges have been repeated so often, and echoed seriously by so many persons deemed a respectable authority, that the prejudice against the Jews has become interwoven with the Englishman's creed. But the exceptions have been mistaken for the rule; and—strange as the assertion may sound to many ears—we boldly proclaim that there is not a more honest, intelligent, humane, and hospitable class of persons on the face of the earth than the Jews.

The fact is, when an Englishman is broken down in fortune, and can no longer raise funds by mortgage on his estate, nor by the credit of his name, he flies to the money-lender. Now Jews are essentially a financial nation; and money-broking, in all its details, is their special avocation. The class of Israelite money-lenders is, therefore, numerous; and it is ten to one that the broken-down individual, who requires a loan, addresses himself to a Jew—even if he take the money-lender living nearest to him, or to whom he is first recommended. Well—he transacts his business with this Jew; and as he can give no security beyond his bond or his bill, and his spendthrift habits are notorious, he cannot of course obtain the loan he seeks save on terms proportionate to the risk incurred by the lender. Yet he goes away, and curses the Jew as an usurer; and thus another voice is raised to denounce the entire nation as avaricious and griping. But does this person, however, reflect that had he applied to a Christian money-broker, the terms would have been equally high, seeing that he had no real security to offer, and that his name was already tarnished? Talk of the usury of the Jews—look at the usury practised by Christians! Look at the rapacity of Christian attorneys!—look at the greediness of Christian bill-discounters!—look, in a word, at the money-making spirit of the Christian, and then call the Jew the usurer *par excellence*! It is a detestable calumny—a vile prejudice, as dishonourable to the English character an it is unjust towards a generous-hearted race!

We deem it right to state that these observations are recorded as disinterestedly and as impartially—as honestly and as conscientiously, as any other comments upon prejudices or abuses which have ever appeared in "The Mysteries of London." Not a drop of Jewish blood flows in our veins; but we have the honour to enjoy the friendship of several estimable families of the Jewish persuasion. We have, therefore, had opportunities of judging of the Israelite character; and the reader must be well aware that the writer who wields his pen *against* a popular prejudice is more likely to be instigated by upright motives than he who labours to maintain it. In following the current of general opinion, one is sure to gain friends: in adventurously undertaking to stem it, he is equally certain to create enemies. But, thank God! this work is addressed to an intelligent and enlightened people—to the industrious classes of the United Kingdom—to those who are the true pillars of England's prosperity, glory, and greatness!

When Mr. de Medina arrived, friendless and almost penniless, on the British soil, he addressed himself to the heads of several eminent commercial firms in the City of London,—firms, the constituents of which were of his own persuasion. The Jews always assist each other to the extent of their means:—do the Christians? Answer, ye cavillers against the persecuted race of Israel! Mr. de Medina, accordingly, found occupation; and so admirably did he conduct himself—so well did he promote the interests of his employers, that by the time he reached the age of thirty, he found himself a partner in the concern whose prosperity his talents and his industry had so much enhanced. He then repaired to Liverpool, to establish a branch-house of trade, and of which he became the sole manager. His partners dying soon afterwards, he effected an arrangement with their heirs, by which he abandoned all share in the London business, and retained the Liverpool house as his own.

His success was now extraordinary; and his dealings were proverbially honourable and fair. He went upon the principle of doing a large business with small gains, and paying good wages to those who were in his employment. Thus, though naturally of a stern and severe disposition, his name was respected and his character admired. At the age of thirty-five—twenty years before the opening of our tale—he married a lady of his own nation—beautiful, accomplished, and rich. Within twelve months their union was blessed with a daughter, on whom the name of Tamar was bestowed; and at the expiration of another year, a second girl was born, and who was called Esther. But in giving birth to the latter, Mrs. de Medina lost her life; and for a considerable time the bereaved husband was inconsolable.

The kindness of his friends and a conviction of the necessity of subduing his grief as much as possible, for the sake of the motherless babes who were left to him, aroused Mr. de Medina from the torpor of profound woe; and he became so passionately attached to his

children, that he would fondle them as if he himself were a child. As they grew up, a remarkable resemblance was observed between them; and as Esther was somewhat precocious in a physical point of view, she was as tall when ten years old as her sister. Strangers then took them for twins, although there was really twelve months' difference between their ages. But they actually appeared to be counterparts of each other. Their hair was of precisely the same intensely black and glossy shade: their eyes were of the same dark hue and liquid lustre;—their countenances presented each the same blending of the white and rich carnation beneath the transparent tinge of delicate olive or bistre which marked their origin; their very teeth were of the same shape, and shone, too, between pairs of lips which Nature had made in the same mould, and dyed with the same vermillion. Twin-roses did the lovely sisters seem,—roses on the same stalk; and by the time Tamar was sixteen and Esther fifteen, the ripe beauty of the former and the somewhat precocious loveliness of the latter, appeared to have attained the same glorious degree of female perfection.

But their minds were not equally similar. Tamar was vain of her personal attractions, while Esther was reserved and bashful: the former was never so happy as when she was the centre of attraction in a ball-room, while the latter preferred the serene tranquillity of home. In their style of dress they were equally different from each other. Tamar delighted in the richest attire, and loved to deck herself with costly jewels; and, well aware that she possessed a splendid bust, she wore her gowns so low as to leave no room for conjecture relative to the charming fullness of her bosom. Esther, on the contrary, selected good, but not showy materials for her dress, and never appeared with a profusion of jewellery. Though of proportions as rich and symmetrical as her sister, yet she rather sought to conceal their swelling contours than display them. Tamar was of warm and impassioned temperament, and her breast was easily excited by fierce desires; but Esther was the embodiment of chaste and pure notions—her soul the abode of maiden innocence!

Mr. de Medina often remonstrated with Tamar upon her love of splendid attire, and her anxiety to shine in the circles of gaiety. But her ways were so winning, that when she threw her arms around his neck, and besought him not to be angry with her, or to allow her to accompany some female friends to a ball or concert to which she had been invited, he invariably yielded to her soft persuasion.

Tamar was a few weeks past the age of sixteen, and Esther had accomplished her fifteenth year, when an incident occurred which was fated to wield a material influence over the career of the elder sister. One night Mr. de Medina, while returning home on horseback from a neighbouring village where he had dined with a friend, was stopped and plundered of his purse and pocket-book. He was by no means a man who was likely to yield without resistance to the audacious demands of a highwayman; but he was unarmed at the time—and by some accident he was unattended by his groom. The robber, who wore a black crape over his countenance, was armed to the teeth, and seemed resolute as well as desperate: Mr. de Medina, therefore, risked not an useless contest with him, but surrendered his property as above mentioned. On his return home, and while conversing on the incident with his daughters, he suddenly recollected that the pocket-book contained a paper of great value and importance to himself, but of no use to any other person. He accordingly inserted advertisements in the local newspapers, offering a reward for the restoration of that document, and promising impunity to the robber, if he would give it up. But for several days these notifications remained unanswered.

A week elapsed, and one morning an individual, dressed in a semi-sporting style, called at the house and inquired for Mr. de Medina. But Mr. de Medina had just left home for the purpose of conducting Esther to the dwelling of some friends who resided in the neighbourhood of Liverpool, and with whom she was to pass a few days. Tamar was, however, at home; and as the servant informed her that "the gentleman said his business was important," she desired that he might be shown up into the drawing-room. He was evidently struck by the dazzling beauty of the Jewess who had thus accorded him an audience; and there was something so dashing—so rakish—so off-hand, without vulgarity, in his manner,—a something between the frankness of an open-hearted man and the easy politeness of one who knows the world well,—that Tamar did not treat him with that degree of cold courtesy which seems to say, "Have the kindness to explain your business, and then you may depart." But she requested him to be seated; and when he made a few observations which led to a connected discourse on the gaiety and "doings" of the Liverpool folks, she suffered herself to be drawn into the conversation without pausing to ask the motive of his visit. Thus nearly half-an-hour passed away: and while Tamar thought to herself that she had never met a more agreeable gentleman in her life—and certainly never one who possessed such a brilliant set of teeth, or who looked so well in tops and cords,—the stranger came to a conclusion equally favourable concerning herself. Indeed, he was quite charmed with the personal attractions and the conversation of the beautiful Jewess; and when he took his leave, she forgot that he had not communicated his business, nor even his name.

When her father returned home in the afternoon, she mentioned to him the visit of the stranger; but added that he only remained a few moments, and would not explain his business to her. Mr. de Medina immediately expressed his belief that the call had some reference to his advertisement concerning the lost paper. But Tamar enthusiastically repelled the suspicion; declaring that, though he had not stayed a minute, yet his manners, appearance, and address, were of too superior a nature to be associated with a dishonourable avocation. Mr. de Medina asked if he had intimated when he should call again; to which question Tamar, fearful that it would appear strange to give a negative reply, answered—"In a few days." Thus terminated a conversation in which Tamar had been guilty of much duplicity, and which was marked by the first deliberate falsehood which she ever unblushingly told her father.

On the following day the stranger returned; and Mr. de Medina, not having expected him so soon, was not at home to receive him. But Tamar was in the drawing-room, to which he was conducted as on the previous day. It was summer-time, and she was engaged in tying up the drooping heads of some flowers in the large balcony. The stranger begged her not to desist from her occupation; but, on the contrary, offered, in his gay manner of frank politeness, to assist her. She could not refuse his aid—she did not wish to refuse it; and they were soon engaged in a very interesting conversation. He held the stalks of the flowers, too, while she tied the thread; and her beautiful hand passed over that of the stranger's—*not* without touching it; while her breath, sweeter than the perfume of the flowers themselves, fanned his cheek. Once, when he stooped a little lower, under pretence of examining a particular rose-bud more closely, his hair mingled with hers, and he could see that the rich glow of excitement flooded her countenance—her neck—and even extended to the bosom, of which he was enabled, by her stooping posture, to catch more than partial glimpses.

When next their eyes met, there seemed to be already a tacit kind of intelligence established between them,—an intelligence which

appeared to say she knew he had allowed his hair to mingle with hers on purpose, and that she had not withdrawn her head because the contact pleased her. The interesting conversation was continued; and an hour had passed before either the stranger showed the slightest sign of an intention to take his leave, or Tamar remembered how long they had been alone together. When he did at length take up his hat and his riding-whip, he also picked up a flower which Tamar had accidentally broken off from its stem in the balcony; and placing it in his buttonhole without making the slightest allusion to the little incident, he bowed and quitted the room.

He had been gone at least ten minutes ere Tamar again recollected that he had not mentioned his business nor told his name. She had been thinking of the incident of the flower;—yes—and also of the commingling of her raven locks with his fine, manly light hair. When her father returned home on this occasion, she did not mention the fact of the stranger's visit at all. Throughout the remainder of that day she wondered whether he would return on the following one; and she made up her mind, if he did, not to suffer him to depart before she had elicited his business and his name. In the evening she went out to make a few purchases at a shop in a neighbouring street; and she was retracing her way, when two young men, walking arm-in-arm, and smoking cigars,—having withal something most offensively obtrusive in their entire appearance,—stopped short in front of Tamar, literally barred her way, and began to address her in that flippant, coarse style which, without being absolutely obscene, is nevertheless particularly insulting. "Gentlemen—if such you be," said Tamar, in a dignified manner, "I request you to let me pass."—"Well, won't you let us escort you home, wherever it is?" demanded one; "for you're a devilish sweet girl, upon my honour."—Scarcely were these words uttered when the long lash of a riding-whip began to belabour the backs of the two young swells in a fashion that made them almost scream with agony; and Tamar, who instantly stepped aside, recognised in the champion that had thus come to her assistance, the very individual who was uppermost in her thoughts at the moment when she was stopped in the insulting manner described.

The two swells were for an instant so taken by surprise that they dropped each other's arm and their cigars simultaneously, and began to caper about in the most extraordinary manner, the stranger continuing to lash them with so good a will, and yet in such an easy, unexcited manner, that Tamar could scarcely forbear from laughing heartily. But when they perceived that there was only one assailant, they rushed in upon the stranger, and endeavoured to close with him. He did not retreat a single step, but hitting one of them a heavy blow on the wrist with the butt-end of his whip, he sent *him* off roaring, while with his left hand he caught the *other* by the collar of the coat and swinging him round—apparently without any extraordinary effort—laid him on his back in the dust. He then offered his arm to Tamar, and led her away as quietly as if nothing had happened, at the same time commencing a discourse upon some totally different topic, as if he would not even give her an opportunity of thanking him for the manner in which he had chastised the insulting youngsters.

But Tamar *did* thank him—and very warmly too; for this feat was just one of the very nature calculated to improve the hold which the stranger already had upon the heart of the beautiful Jewess. She now looked upon him with admiration; for all women love bravery in a man;—and his bravery was so real—so natural—so totally devoid of impetuous excitement when called into action, and so free from any subsequent desire to elicit flattery,—that she beheld in him a character at once generous and noble. She could have thrown her arms round his neck, and said, "Stranger! whoever you may be, I admire—I love you!" And when he *did* take her hand, as she leant upon his arm, and when he pressed it gently—then let it fall without uttering a word, but fixed his deep blue, laughing, and expressive eyes upon her countenance with a steadiness that meant much though his tongue was silent, a soft—a delicious languor came over her, congenial with the moonlight hour.

He conducted her to within a few doors of her father's house, and then took leave of her, saying, "I shall see you again to-morrow." She entered her dwelling, and retired immediately to her chamber; for her heart was filled with a happiness which she knew that her countenance would betray. When she met her father at supper, she was more composed; and she said not a word to him concerning the occurrence of the evening.

On the following day the stranger called again; and again did he find Tamar alone in the drawing-room. On this occasion she extended to him her hand, which he took and pressed to his lips. The maiden did not withdraw it; and her cheeks—her neck—her bosom were flushed with the thrilling glow of excitement, while her eyes expressed a voluptuous languor. The stranger drew her towards him—their lips met: they embraced tenderly. Then he declared his love for her—and she murmured words in reply which convinced him that he was loved in return. Thus, on the fourth occasion of their meeting, did they pour fourth the secrets of their hearts; and Tamar plighted her affection to one whose name she as yet knew not!

Their happy interview was suddenly disturbed by a loud knock at the street-door; and Tamar exclaimed, "My father!" The stranger implored her to compose herself; and she had succeeded in assuming a collected and tranquil demeanour, when Mr. de Medina entered the room. Her lover was standing at a respectful distance from Tamar, with whom he appeared to be exchanging the mere courteous observations which usually pass between perfect strangers. Mr. de Medina requested him to be seated, and inquired his business. "I have called relative to the advertisements which you inserted in the newspapers," was the reply.—"I thought as much!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina: then, turning towards his daughter, he said, "Tamar, my love, you can leave us."—The maiden dared not disobey the hint thus conveyed; but as she passed behind her father to quit the room, she darted upon her lover a look so full of meaning—so expressive of ardent affection, that it seemed to say, "Be you who and what you may, I shall never cease to adore you!" And he returned that look with a glance more rapid but equally significant of tenderness.

When she had left the room, Mr. de Medina continued by observing, "May I have the pleasure of learning your name?"—"Certainly," was the off-hand answer. "I am called Thomas Rainford."—"And your business with me, sir," added Mr. de Medina, in a cold tone and with suspicious manner, "is relative to the paper of which I was robbed?"—"Precisely so," exclaimed Tom Rain. "A more suitable person than myself could not possibly have called respecting the affair."—"How so, sir?" demanded Mr. de Medina, his manner growing still more suspicious.—"Simply, because it was I who robbed you," was the cool answer; and Tom Rain's merry laugh rang through the room.—"You!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, starting from his seat. "Then how dare you show your face here?"—"Oh! very easily," replied Rainford, without moving from his chair. "In the first place your advertisements promise impunity to the robber, on

condition that he restores the document; in the second place, if you contemplated any treachery, it would only be the worse for you and would not injure me; and thirdly, it struck me that I had better come in person to give you up the paper, because it might have miscarried through the post, or a messenger might have lost it. However, here it is, Mr. de Medina; and had you not advertised for it, I should have restored it to you. I am no rascally extortioner: I never hold men's private papers as a means of drawing money from them. What I do, I do boldly and in true John Bull fashion. A jolly highwayman, Mr. de Medina, is as different from a sneaking pickpocket or a low swindler, as an attorney in grand practice is different from the paltry pettifogger who hangs about the doors of criminal courts or police-offices. It is not often I boast in this way, Mr. de Medina; but I thought you might as well understand that a principle of honour alone, and neither fear nor hope of reward, has induced me to restore you that document. As for fear, I never knew it; and as for reward, I should not think of taking it, were you to offer any."—Mr. de Medina gazed upon Rainford in astonishment, as much as to say, "You are really a very extraordinary person!" But his lips uttered not what the countenance expressed.

The highwayman rose, bowed with easy politeness to Mr. de Medina, and quitted the room. As he was crossing the landing towards the stairs, the door of an apartment adjoining that where he had just left Mr. de Medina, was cautiously opened, and Tamar thrust a note into his hand. He caught a glimpse of her countenance as he received it; and he saw that she had been weeping. When he reached the street, he tore open the note, and read as follows:—"*I have overheard all! But I do not love thee the less, my brave—my gallant Rainford! This evening, I shall have occasion to call at two or three shops in the same street where you rescued me from insult yesterday.*"—Need we inform our readers that Tom Rain kept the appointment thus given him? Or need we say how the lovers subsequently met as often as Tamar could leave the house without exciting suspicion? Yes—they met frequently; and each interview only tended to strengthen the profound attachment which they had formed for each other.

And no wonder that Tom Rain loved his beautiful Tamar; for beautiful—ravishingly beautiful she indeed was! To behold her countenance, was passion;—to gaze on her admirable shape, was rapture;—to meet the glances of her fine black eyes was fascination! And, oh! how devotedly she loved Rainford in return! To her he was a hero; for, although she knew him to be a highwayman, yet well was she aware that he never stooped to a petty meanness, and that his soul was endowed with many noble—many generous qualities. One daring feat which he performed a few weeks after she first became acquainted with him, converted her admiration into a positive enthusiasm; so that the Empress Josephine could not have more ardently worshipped Napoleon than did Tamar her Tom Rain!

Thus it happened:—One night the Liverpool and Manchester coach was stopped on its way to the former town, by a single highwayman, who wore a crape over his face, was well mounted, and equally well armed. Although the coach was crowded with passengers, most of whom were men, yet so terrible was the robber even in his very coolness—so formidable with his easy air of unconcern, that all were paralysed with fear. No resistance was offered him; and he reaped an excellent harvest from the purses of the passengers. One gentleman, who happened to be the Mayor of Liverpool, was so bewildered by terror, that though only asked for his money, he handed to the highwayman both purse and watch. The latter was returned, the robber declaring that he scorned any thing save the current coin of the realm or good Bank-notes. From the female passengers he took nothing; and, perceiving by the moonlight a poor shivering girl of about fifteen seated outside at the back of the coach, he asked her a few questions. The brief and timid replies which she gave were ample enough to render intelligible a tale of suffering and woe; and the highwayman, drawing forth five guineas, said, "Here, my dear, you need not be afraid to accept this trifle. It comes from a pocket into which none of these gentlemen's gold has gone."—And before the poor girl could utter a word in reply, the highwayman put spurs to his horse, and disappeared in a few moments.

But this action on his part did not disarm the male passengers, who had been robbed, of their rage and their rancour. The Mayor was particularly indignant: the entire town of Liverpool had been insulted—grossly insulted in his worshipful person! Such wrath required a vent; and it found an issue by means of advertising the daring robbery. The Mayor announced, in all the local papers and by means of placards, "*that any one who should be instrumental in bringing the highwayman before him, would receive the sum of two hundred pounds as a reward*." But a week elapsed before these proclamations received any answer. At the expiration of that time the following incident occurred. One evening, the Mayor entertained a select party of friends at a splendid banquet. The cloth had been removed some time—the ladies had retired to the drawing-room—and the gentlemen, about a dozen in number, were passing the wine rapidly round, when a servant entered to inform his master that a person wished to speak to him in the hall. The servant's manner was somewhat embarrassed; and, upon being questioned, he said that the stranger seemed to wear a mask, as his face was too hideous to be possibly a human one. The Mayor trembled; and his guests caught the infection of his terror. His worship hazarded an opinion that the visitor was perhaps in some way connected with the highwayman who had robbed the Manchester and Liverpool coach; and he directed the servant to show the stranger into the study and then run and fetch a constable. But scarcely were these commands issued, when the door opened; and in walked the object of interest and fear. The Mayor and his guests uttered simultaneous ejaculations of terror; for never did mortal man possess so frightful a face; and as it was partially shaded by a huge quantity of hair and a large slouched hat, it was impossible to decide whether it were really a mask or a natural physiognomy. The nose was enormous, and studded with carbuncles and warts: the cheeks were fiery red; and the chin was of dimensions proportionate with the nasal promontory. This terrible being was enveloped in a long cloak; but through the holes cut for the purpose appeared his arms, the hands holding each a tremendous horse-pistol as big as a blunderbuss.

Placing his back against the door, the intruder said, in a voice which he rendered as hollow and fierce as possible, "Most worshipful Mayor! you have advertised that any one who is instrumental in bringing a certain highwayman before you, shall receive the sum of two hundred pounds as a reward. *I am* the highwayman alluded to: I have brought myself before you; and I appeal to the wisdom and justice of the intelligent gentlemen seated round your board, whether I have not fairly earned the recompense promised?"—"But," stammered the Mayor, "I meant that any one who would bring the robber a prisoner before me, should be entitled to the reward."—"I don't care what you meant," returned the highwayman: "I only know what your advertisements and placards say. You should get the corporation to vote funds to enable you to attach a grammarian to your establishment. He would be more useful than the sword-bearer, I think," added the audacious robber, with a merry laugh in his natural tone. "But I have no leisure to bandy words with you. Tell out

the two hundred pounds; or I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of allowing one of these little instruments to empty its contents in the direction of your head."—And, with these words, he raised a pistol. The Mayor uttered an exclamation of terror, and cast an imploring glance rapidly around. But all his guests were sitting like statues—in blank dismay. The Mayor saw that he must not look to them for assistance; and yet he was very loath to part with two hundred pounds in such an unsatisfactory manner.—"But how do I know that you really are the person who robbed the coach?" he asked, the words evidently costing him a most painful effort to enunciate them.—"Because I can tell you every incident that occurred on the occasion," was the answer.—"That information you may have received from hearsay or gleaned from the papers," returned the Mayor, gathering courage as he found the robber willing to argue the point with him.—"I will give you another proof," said the robber. "There was a bad guinea in the purse I took from you. Are you satisfied now?"—"Not quite," rejoined the Mayor, hoping that by gaining time, some chance might place the daring visitor in his power.—"Then I have one more proof to offer you," said the robber. "In a corner of the purse there was a scrap of paper containing the receipt of an overseer of some parish in Manchester for the quarter's money due for the maintenance of your worship's bastard; and so I suppose you had been to that town to pay it."—The Mayor was aghast as this announcement burst upon him; for, though he had lost the receipt in question, it had never struck him that he had placed it in his purse when he paid the money at Manchester. The guests surveyed their worshipful host in astonishment; and the servant giggled behind his chair.—"*Now* are you satisfied?" demanded the highwayman. "Remember, you brought it on yourself."—The Mayor, partially recovering his presence of mind, affected to laugh off the matter as a capital joke on the part of the robber; but he made no farther objection to pay the two hundred pounds. This he was enabled to do, by borrowing all the money that his guests had about them, and adding it to the contents of his own pocket; for the highwayman would neither take a cheque nor allow him to quit the room to procure the requisite sum from his strong-box. The robber would not even leave his post at the door, but compelled the Mayor to rise from the table and bring the cash and notes to him—a proceeding which his worship liked as little as might be, seeing that it brought him into awful vicinity with the nose, the chin, and the pistols. At length the business was settled; and the highwayman withdrew, locking the door behind him,—but not before he had assured the company that if they attempted to open the windows and raise an alarm in the street after him, he would instantly return and put them all to death.

This incident was in every body's mouth next day, throughout the good town of Liverpool and its environs; and the Mayor was most heartily laughed at. But Tamar alone knew the name of the daring individual who had perpetrated so audacious a feat.

The beautiful Jewess carefully concealed her amour from her sister and her father. Indeed, Esther never saw Tom Rain during the whole time that he remained in Liverpool. But one day Tamar disappeared, leaving a note behind her, addressed to her sister, whom she begged to break to their father her flight and its cause. She stated that her happiness—her life were wrapped up in Thomas Rainford: and that as she was well aware her sire would never consent to her union with him, even if the usages of the Jewish nation sanctioned an alliance with a Christian, she had taken a step which she should regret only on account of the distress it might create in the minds of her father and sister. Esther could scarcely believe her eyes when she read the appalling contents of this note. She fancied that she was in a dream: then, when the full conviction of the truth burst upon her, and she comprehended that her sister had really fled with Rainford, she gave way to all the wildness of her grief—for she was deeply, deeply attached to Tamar!

But how did Mr. de Medina bear this cruel blow? He wept not—he gave vent to no passionate exclamation—he manifested no excitement. But, after remaining wrapt up in profound meditation for upwards of an hour, while Esther sate near, watching him with the deepest—most acutely painful suspense,—a long, long hour of utter silence, broken only by the frequent sobs that told the maiden's anguish,—Mr. de Medina spoke in a calm, deliberate, but stern and relentless tone:—"Henceforth, Esther, I have but one daughter—*thyself*! Let the name of Tamar never more be uttered in my presence. Destroy every thing in the house which may tend to remind me that there once dwelt such a being here—the music whereon her name is written, the drawings which she executed, the very window-hangings which she embroidered. Destroy them all, Esther—keep them not—I command you, as you value my blessing! And henceforth—whatever may occur, never speak of your sister. In the presence of those who are aware that you *had* a sister, cut short any allusion that the thoughtless might make respecting her, by observing emphatically—'*I have no sister now!*'—for should such allusion be made before me, my reproof and my response would be, '*I have but one daughter—and her name is Esther*!' It is my intention to wind up my affairs as speedily as possible and retire from business. Had not *this* occurred, I should have toiled a few years longer to amass an immense fortune to be divided between *two*: now the fortune which I possess will be immense enough for *one*. And that *one*, Esther, is thyself! But two or three years may elapse before I shall be enabled so to condense the vast details of my undertakings into such a narrow compass that I may terminate them all prosperously. During these two or three years we must remain in Liverpool: but our sojourn here shall not last a day—no, nor an hour longer than my affairs render imperatively necessary. We will then repair to London; for it is in the giant metropolis alone that we may hope to conceal from the world this disgrace—this infamy—this blight which has fallen upon a family whose name, I had fondly hoped, would have gone down untainted from generation to generation—even as it had descended to me from a long line of honourable and honoured ancestors! These, Esther, are my resolves: seek not to move me.—I am now inflexible! Nay—implore me not to change my determination, stern though it may appear: it is immutable as those Median and Persian laws whereof mention is made in the Book of Books. *Henceforth I have but one daughter!*"

And having thus announced the inexorable resolves on which his mind had settled itself during that long, long hour of deep and silent meditation, the Jew bent down and kissed the brow of his kneeling daughter with an affection which in its tenderness contrasted strangely with the stern severity of the conduct that he had determined to pursue in respect to the lost—the guilty—the disowned Tamar! He then hurried from the room; and Esther—poor Esther! was left alone to shed torrents of unavailing tears, and give vent to fruitless sobs and sighs.

But, oh! what pen can describe the acuteness of her affliction—the anguish of her gentle heart, when, not daring altogether to disobey the will of her sire, she removed from their frames the charming landscapes which Tamar had painted in water-colours, and placed out

of sight the music copies whereon the name of Tamar was penned in her own sweet, fluent handwriting! And blame not Esther, gentle reader—no, blame her not, if, disobedient as to the literal meaning of her father's commands, she retained those paintings and that music,—retained them as memorials of the lost sister whom she so fondly loved! But she secured them in her own chamber; and, alas—poor girl! as she placed the pictures one by one in a drawer, their best tints and their brightest colours were marred by the scalding tears that fell upon them! For, oh! acute as the pain inflicted by the merciless knife which the surgeon wields to amputate a limb, was this task to the sensitive heart of Esther,—a task involving a deed wearing in her eyes the semblance of profanity,—for little short of *that* appeared the removal from their wonted places of those memorials of the disowned and cast-off Tamar. 'Twas like crushing all the reminiscences of a sweet sisterhood,—'twas like cutting away from her heart the brightest thoughts that had hitherto clung around it—tearing rudely off the flowers that encircled Hope's youthful brow, and entombing the choice memories of a happy girlhood!

Then, when the music-books and the pictures were thus removed from the places where she had so long been accustomed to see them, how mournful to her was the sight of the tuneful, but now silent piano on which the former had been piled up—how naked appeared the walls to which the latter had hung! And next she was compelled to take down the very hangings which Tamar had embroidered for the drawing-room windows; and there was fresh cause for tears—fresh motive for the renewal, or rather for the continuation of her grief! But the task was nevertheless completed; and the drapery was also retained by Esther as a memorial of her sister. Not for worlds could she have brought herself to that frame of mind which would have been necessary to enable her to achieve the *destruction* of all those objects,—no—not even were her father to menace her with his direst curse! When Mr. de Medina again appeared in the suite of rooms which had been subject to the changes just detailed, he cast a rapid glance around him, and perceiving that his orders had been obeyed so far as *removal* went, asked not a question relative to the manner in which the various objects had been disposed of: but, settling his looks upon Esther's countenance, after that hasty survey, he said emphatically, "*Thank God! I possess an obedient—a dutiful—an affectionate child!*"

In the meantime Tom Rain and the beautiful Tamar were far away from Liverpool, on their road to London; and when they reached the great metropolis, they hired a neat lodging in a secluded neighbourhood—for they entertained apprehensions that Mr. de Medina might endeavour to trace his fugitive daughter. Tamar did not, in this respect, know her father's disposition well. Judging by his past kindness, she argued accordingly—little imagining that he had strength of mind sufficient to adopt the fearful alternative of casting her off for ever! Rainford had so well stocked himself with coin during his sojourn in Liverpool and its neighbourhood, that there was no immediate necessity of exercising his *professional skill*, or rather *valour*, to supply resources; and several weeks glided away happily—the happiest of his life! He loved Tamar most tenderly and devotedly; and she not only loved him in return—but absolutely adored him. Oh! how she worshipped her gallant highwayman, who was so brave—so generous—and withal so kind to her. Never was there a better temper than that of Tom Rain: it was impossible for him to be put out of humour. He would have scorned the idea of raising a quarrel for the mere sake of making it up again. He saw no amusement in such maudlin proceedings: dissensions, bickerings, and domestic feuds were his abhorrence. He looked upon woman as the weaker vessel, whom man was bound to protect. He thought it beneath him to dispute with a female; because with him it could be a mere warfare of words, to which none but a coward would put an end by means of a blow. Besides, he hated that strife which is waged with the tongue: if a man offended him, he did not wait to argue the point, but quietly knocked him down. That was his first and last reason when irritated: but he could not adopt the same course with a woman, and he therefore most rationally concluded that it was perfectly useless to quarrel with her.

Tamar, like all young and beautiful women—especially being placed as it were in an equivocal position—was jealous. Tom Rain loved to visit all the strange places in which London abounds, that he might make himself acquainted with the "lights and shades" of metropolitan life; and sometimes Tamar complained that he was too long absent. "Now, my dear girl," he would say, "I give you as much of my time as possible; and when I tell you that I shall be home at a certain hour, I never disappoint you. But do not show ill-humour because I take a couple of hours to myself. So now kiss me, and do not teach that pretty face to frown." His good temper invariably proved irresistible; and in the course of time his mistress never thought of manifesting any opposite feeling. Indeed, he was so kind—so good—so attentive towards her, that, had it not been for the frequent intrusion of a painful reminiscence concerning her father and sister, Tamar would have been completely happy.

After remaining for some months in London, Rainford and his beautiful mistress set off for the northern counties, where the highwayman reaped a rich harvest. His midnight expeditions were frequent, because his mode of living was by no means economical: he delighted in good cheer—denied himself nothing that he fancied—and yet was neither a drunkard nor a glutton. He was moreover generous and liberal to an extreme, and, emulative of the character of Robin Hood, gave to the poor no inconsiderable portion of what he took from the rich. Tamar was, moreover, fond of handsome apparel and resplendent jewellery; and Rainford took a delight in gratifying all her whims and fancies. Thus money was lavishly expended by them; but the highway was an inexhaustible treasury to which Rainford never had recourse in vain. The perils he incurred, in these predatory expeditions, were of course numerous and great; but his dauntless valour—his wonderful presence of mind—and the determined resolution with which he as it were met danger face to face, invariably saved him from capture. At first Tamar was dreadfully frightened when Rainford took leave of her to "get a draught on his treasury cashed," as he laughingly termed his nocturnal expeditions; but as he invariably returned home about the hour he had promised, those apprehensions wore off, and she at length became comparatively easy in her mind during his absence.

Thus did time pass away, until nearly three years had elapsed since Tamar first met Rainford at Liverpool. During the whole of this period she had heard nothing of her father and sister; and no allusion was ever made to them by her lover or herself when together. But she did not the less devote frequent thoughts to the author of her being and the much-loved Esther, both of whom she longed—oh! ardently longed to embrace once more.

The reader has already learnt the motives which induced Tom Rain to visit the metropolis towards the close of the year 1826. The important information which, during his travels about England in company with Tamar, he gleaned from the gipsy Miranda, led him to betake himself once more to London. It happened that Mr. de Medina and Esther arrived in the capital almost at the same time; for the

merchant had not been able to wind up his affairs until that period. Retiring from business with a large fortune, he had resolved to quit Liverpool—a place which constantly brought back the most painful reminiscences to his mind, in spite of his stern resolve to disown his elder daughter for ever. But Esther—had she forgotten Tamar? Oh! no—the memory of the fond sister was immortal; and she would have given whole years of her life to clasp Tamar in her arms again!

This tender aspiration was speedily destined to be gratified. One afternoon, towards the close of October, 1826, Esther de Medina was returning home to Great Ormond Street, after having been to make a few purchases in Holborn, when she encountered her sister Tamar, who was also alone at the time. Fortunately the street where they thus met was in a quiet neighbourhood and at that moment almost deserted: otherwise, the ejaculations of surprise and delight which the sisters uttered, and the eagerness with which they flew into each other's arms, might have drawn upon them an attention by no means agreeable. As it was, they escaped any particular notice; and hastening to the least frequented side of Queen Square, they entered into long and serious conversation together. Tamar implored Esther to tell her how their father had received the tidings of her flight; and the younger sister was so overcome by her emotions, that she allowed the entire truth to be extracted from her by the questioning and cross-questioning of the impatient Tamar. Thus was it that the latter learnt how she had been disowned—cast off for ever! Terrible were the efforts which it cost her to subdue a violent outburst of grief; and her heart seemed as if it would break, when in a low tone she addressed her sister thus:—"Esther dearest, my father has no cause to apprehend that I shall proclaim myself his daughter. No—let him boldly declare that he has but *one* child—*thyself*! I know not how long I may remain in London; but this I faithfully promise you, that I will appear abroad as little as possible, and then only with my countenance concealed by a dark veil, so long as the interests of him whom I love may compel him to dwell in this city. That we shall be long here, I do not believe. Tell our father, Esther, that we have thus met; and communicate to him those assurances that I have now given thee."—Esther clung to her sister for support: that language was distressing to the young maiden to hear.—"And are you happy, Tamar?" she asked, weeping bitterly.—"As happy as woman can be, whose father has disowned her and who is separated from her sister," replied Tamar, now weeping also. "Yes, dearest Esther, I am happy with *him* whom I love so well, and who is so kind, so fond towards me!"—"This assurance diminishes my grief," murmured Esther. "Oh! how glad I am that we have thus met: this interview has suddenly relieved me of a tremendous weight of cruel uncertainty regarding thee! But, alas! Tamar, why did you desert your happy home? why did you abandon a father and a sister who loved you so tenderly?"—"Esther, hast thou not yet known *that love* which is so different from the affection existing even between parents and their children, or between those who are so closely linked in the bonds of kinship as yourself and I?"—"No!"—"Well, then, Esther, I can scarcely make you comprehend how much more deserving of pity than blame I am! He whom I love so well came to the house—I did not seek him; and my heart soon—oh! full soon became his. Could I help it? It were vain and idle to say that we can control those feelings which constitute the passion of Love! No earthly power could have restrained the current of that attachment which hurried me along to the accomplishment of what became my destiny. And when one loves as I loved and still love, Esther,—and as I am loved in return,—father, sister, home, kindred, friends—all are forgotten! Oh! this is true—so true, that you would not blame me, did you know what it is to love as I love!"—"Blame you, dearest sister!" exclaimed Esther. "Never! never!" And she clasped Tamar fervently in her arms; but it was now dark, and that part of the square to which they had retired for the purpose of unrestrained discourse, echoed to no voices save their own.

When the sisters were a little more composed, Esther informed Tamar of all that had occurred since they had last seen each other,—how their father had renounced the cares and fatigues of business, and had resolved to settle altogether in London; and how he was then negotiating with the Earl of Ellingham for the tenancy of a small but compact estate near Finchley. The sisters then agreed to correspond together; for Esther secretly hoped that her father would not deny her the pleasure of receiving letters from her sister. Tamar was accordingly to address her correspondence to Great Ormond Street; and Esther was to direct her letters to "*T. J., South Moulton Street*," where Rainford and his mistress were then passing under the name of Jameson. The sisters were now about to part, when, Esther, drawing a diamond ring from her finger placed it in Tamar's hand: then taking a small pair of scissors from her reticule, she cut off the end of one of her own ringlets, which, having folded in a piece of paper, she also presented to her sister, saying in her softest, sweetest tones,—"Tamar, the love which subsists between us, no circumstances can destroy—no length of absence impair. We are about to separate: and, though with the hope of meeting again, still that meeting might be deferred by accidents at present unforeseen. I would that you should possess some memorial of your sister——"—"Oh! is it necessary?" exclaimed Tamar, in an impassioned tone of profound sincerity.—"If not necessary, it would be at least soothing to my feelings," said Esther; "for I possess memorials of you, in your drawings and your music. Grant me, then, the favour which I am about to ask you."—"Name it, sister," replied Tamar, now deeply affected in her turn.—"It is, dearest," continued the amiable Esther, "that you dispose of the ring which I have now presented to you, and that with the proceeds you will have made a locket in which my hair may be set, and on the inner side of which my name may be engraved. This I implore you to do, my sister; and I know that you will not refuse me."—"The next time we meet, Esther," said Tamar, in a tone tremulous with emotion, "I will show you the locket."—The sisters then separated with aching hearts.

On her return home, Esther frankly and candidly confessed to her father all that had occurred. For some minutes Mr. de Medina remained silent; and Esther observed that a tear trembled upon his lash. But the hope thereby excited within her, died away, when her father turned abruptly round, and said, "Esther, you have not acted well. That you should speak to her who was once my daughter, is natural. But that you should arrange with her the means of correspondence, was wrong. I desire that the first letter which she may address to this house, shall also be the last."—The Jew then quitted the room, leaving his daughter in tears.

On the very next day Tamar wrote a long and most affectionate letter to her sister; and Esther was compelled to inform her, in the reply, of the harsh command issued by their father. But that very severity on the part of Mr. de Medina to some extent—at least in this particular instance—destroyed that frank and open-hearted confidence which Esther had hitherto manifested towards him, and which was inherent in her nature. She could not make up her mind to break off all correspondence with her sister; and yet she dared not receive any future letters at the house in Great Ormond Street. The idea of having Tamar's letters addressed elsewhere, naturally suggested itself, therefore, to her imagination; and she accordingly made an arrangement at the post-office in Southampton Row, by

which the woman who kept the shop consented to receive and keep for Esther any missives that might be thus addressed:—"*A. B. C., Post Office, Southampton Row. To be left till called for.*" That same evening Esther wrote another letter to her sister, acquainting her with this arrangement; and we should observe that Tamar duly communicated all these circumstances to Tom Rain, who was delighted to find that she whom he so fondly loved had experienced so much happiness by thus meeting and corresponding with her sister. The highwayman was not, however, a little astonished when he had learnt from Tamar that Mr. de Medina was about to become the tenant of the Earl of Ellingham; and it was then for the first time that he communicated to his mistress the full particulars of all that the gipsy Miranda had told him, and which had made him acquainted with his parentage,—particulars already so well known to the reader.

The seventh day after these events was the 31st of October—a date rendered memorable, so far as this narrative is concerned, by the affair of the diamonds. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon of the day named, that Tamar called on Mr. Gordon, the diamond-merchant in Arundel Street, to dispose of her ring. Rainford would have transacted the business for her, but he was occupied at the time in effecting his negotiations with Old Death; and, moreover, Tamar considered it to be a matter exclusively regarding herself. We must confess that the idea of possessing the means of procuring a beautiful locket shared in her mind the place that ought to have been entirely occupied by the proofs she had received of her sister's devoted attachment. But Tamar was passionately enamoured of resplendent jewellery; and when, in Mr. Gordon's apartments, she beheld a beautiful set of diamonds lying in an open case upon the table, the temptation became irresistible. It cannot be supposed that she had been very nearly three years the companion of a highwayman without having her notions of *mine* and *thine* considerably shaken; and through her brain instantly flashed the thought ——"Wherefore should not I make myself the mistress of those charming jewels, as well as Tom render himself the possessor of a purse on the main road?" Scarcely was the idea conceived, when she resolved to execute it; and she haggled with the diamond-merchant relative to the price which he was to pay for the ring, merely to gain an opportunity to self-appropriate the diamonds. That opportunity served; and she departed alike with the produce of the ring and of the theft!

But scarcely had she reached the street, when her sentiments underwent a complete revulsion; and she would have given worlds to be able to recall the last ten minutes. For an instant she paused, hesitating whether she should not return into the presence of Mr. Gordon and restore him the diamonds. Fear, however, prevented her,—a fear lest he might consider her deserving of punishment for having abstracted them at all. She accordingly hurried away towards South Moulton Street. But during her walk thither, she reflected that Rainford might be much annoyed with her for the deed she had committed; and the more she pondered thereon, the more powerful became her conviction that he would be more than annoyed—in fact, deeply incensed. She accordingly made up her mind to conceal the circumstance from him, and seek the earliest possible opportunity of sending back the diamonds, by some safe means, to Mr. Gordon.

On her arrival in South Moulton Street, she found a letter from Esther. It contained assurances of ardent affection, but apologised for its brevity, on the ground that it was then already one o'clock in the day, and that at two Lord Ellingham's carriage was to be at the door to convey his lordship, her father, and herself to view the mansion and estate near Finchley. She added that they were to dine at the mansion, and were not to return until late in the evening. Tom Rain was present in the room when Tamar read this note; and she communicated its contents to him. Two nights afterwards he departed on a little expedition; and on this occasion Lady Hatfield was robbed by the highwayman near Bedfont.

On the ensuing morning Rainford was arrested, and conveyed to Bow Street; but he escaped with impunity, in the manner already described. But how great was his astonishment when he heard the name of Esther de Medina pronounced in the court; and with what interest—with what respectful admiration, did he survey the sister of his Tamar—that sister who loved her whom the father had disowned! When Mr. Gordon was called forward, and stated his name and calling, Rainford began to grow uneasy; for he knew that Tamar had sold him the ring three evenings previously. But as the diamond-merchant gradually explained the details of the robbery of the diamonds, the highwayman's heart sank within him—for he had no difficulty in penetrating the mystery. He was still meditating upon the course that should be adopted to prove Esther's innocence, when it suddenly struck him that she must have been at the estate near Finchley, at the very moment when the theft of the diamonds occurred. The reader knows the rest: Lord Ellingham's attendance at the court was ensured by the intervention of Rainford, and Esther was discharged. Her father, it will be remembered, appeared at the police-office just as the case was about to terminate; and the expression which he made use of to his daughter,—"*Oh! Esther—Esther, I can understand it all! You have brought this upon yourself!*"—is now accounted for. When Esther turned *an appealing glance towards her father, as if to remind him of some duty which he ought to perform, or to convey some silent prayer which he could well understand*,—it was to beseech him to satisfy the diamond-merchant for the loss of his jewels, and thus save Tamar from any unpleasant consequences which might ensue were the theft traced to her. But, as we have seen, *he affected not to notice that rapid but profoundly significant glance*.

During the few minutes that Mr. de Medina remained in the court, Rainford was concealed as it were—or at least shrouded from observation—amongst the crowd; and thus he escaped the notice of the Jew. We should also state that it was on this occasion Rainford first beheld his half-brother, the Earl of Ellingham, *whose fine blue eyes indicated a frank, and generous disposition*, and in whose favour the highwayman was immediately prepossessed; for it must be remembered that *his eyes were also of a deep blue, and indicated not only good humour, but a certain generosity of disposition*. Indeed, it was only in respect to the eyes and the brilliant teeth, that the Earl and Rainford possessed the slightest family resemblance to each other. Yes:—it was on this occasion that Rainford first saw him whom he knew to be his half-brother; and the Earl noticed him also,—noticed him amongst the crowd of spectators who thronged the court;—but he knew not then how nearly that good-looking man, with the florid complexion and light hair, was related to him!

When Rainford returned home to South Moulton Street, he upbraided Tamar for the deed which she had perpetrated, and which had involved her sister in such a cruel embarrassment. But he did not reproach her in harsh nor brutal terms: of such conduct he was incapable. He spoke severely and coldly—manifesting his displeasure in a way which touched her to the quick, but provoked no recriminations. She was almost wild with grief when she heard the narrative of her sister being dragged to a police-office upon so

degrading a charge; and, producing the diamonds, she implored Rainford to hasten and send them back to their owner. He intimated his intention of performing that duty in person; and ere he went away, Tamar implored his forgiveness. "I have no right to assume to myself the power of pardon," he answered; "seeing that my example has done this. But, oh! Tamar—if not for *my* sake—if not for *your* sake—at least for that of your estimable sister who is so devoted to you, abstain from such deeds in future!"—He then embraced her, and issued from the house.

In the meantime Esther de Medina had succeeded in persuading her father to advance the money,—advance to *her* the means wherewith to liquidate the amount of the value at which the jewels were estimated. But in giving the sum required, Mr. de Medina said sternly, "Esther, it is to *you* only that I concede this favour—and not for the sake of her who was once my daughter, and whom the infamy this day brought to light has estranged more remotely than ever from my heart!"—He then retired to another room, as was his wont when he wished to avoid an unpleasant topic: moreover, he thought that his daughter had suffered enough that day to render any further reproach on his part unnecessary—indeed cruel; and he knew that were the subject of conversation persisted in, he should not be able to restrain his ire.

The reader has already seen how Esther de Medina called upon the diamond-merchant, and paid him the sum of six hundred pounds—the amount at which he valued his jewels. He offered her a receipt; but she declined to take it—for she thought that as she was settling the affair from motives purely honourable and through regard towards *another*, it would appear as if she were really interested *personally* in the transaction were she to reduce it to a mere matter of business. Not that she meditated a revelation of the fact that she had a sister so like herself that, when seen apart, they might well be taken for each other, and that this sister was the real culprit:—oh! no—she would not, even if she had dared, admit that her father had *another* daughter! And if she *lingered—as if anxious to say something more*—'twas merely because her feelings of natural pride prompted her to exclaim, "Oh! sir, believe that I am innocent of this dreadful charge!"—but a second thought convinced her that such a declaration would not be credited, unless supported by a feasible explanation; and she *abruptly quitted the house*—bearing the stigma, in Mr. Gordon's eyes, of having committed a deed of which she was utterly guiltless!

Scarcely had Esther quitted the diamond-merchant's dwelling, when Tom Rain called to restore the diamonds; and great was his surprise upon learning *that Miss de Medina herself had called and paid the six hundred pounds at which they were valued*. He, however, left the diamonds, with the certainty that Esther would hear of their restoration either from Mr. Gordon himself or direct from Tamar. Rainford then returned to South Moulton Street, where he found Tamar in a very excited state. The occurrences of the day had made a profound and most painful impression upon her mind: the indignity offered to her sister—the certain indignation of her father—the upbraidings of Rainford, who had never spoken to her so severely before—and the bitter regrets which she experienced when she contemplated her conduct,—all these circumstances had combined to madden her. Thinking that Rainford was absent longer than the business on which he had set out seemed to warrant, she was filled with the most fearful misgivings. At one moment she fancied that, in disgust at her behaviour, he had abandoned her for ever: then she imagined that he must have been arrested as the possessor of the stolen diamonds. Her mind was agitated like the ocean in a storm. She went out in a fit of desperation, and purchased some arsenic at a chemist's shop. She returned;—Rainford had not yet arrived. She sate down, and tried to wrestle with her maddening thoughts: but an invincible idea of suicide dominated them all. She struggled—Oh! she struggled bravely against that terrible sentiment; and at length Rainford came back. He exerted himself to calm her—said all he could to tranquillise her mind. He declared that he forgave her from the bottom of his heart, and lavished every token of tenderness upon her. She endeavoured to triumph over the fearful excitement under which she was labouring; but all she could do was to *appear* calm. Two or three hours passed away, and Rainford hoped she was recovering her equanimity. But a species of delirium suddenly seized upon her: she rushed to the bed-room, and, before Rainford even knew her intention, she swallowed the poison. By the time he had followed her into the room—alarmed at the precipitate speed with which she had hurried thither—the deed was accomplished; and the paper which he picked up, as she threw herself frantically at his feet, explained to him the whole truth.

Not a moment was to be lost. Entrusting Tamar to the care of the servant-girl, Rainford rushed from the house; and, as a hackney-coach was fortunately passing at the moment, he leapt into it, desiring the driver to take him to the nearest physician of eminence. The name of Dr. Lascelles was best known to the honest jarvey, and to Grafton Street did the vehicle accordingly proceed. The physician accompanied Rainford to South Moulton Street, and Tamar was saved. But ere Lascelles took his departure, the highwayman had resolved on adopting some plan to prevent any disagreeable consequences occurring in respect to Esther de Medina on account of this attempted suicide on the part of Tamar. For Rainford naturally reflected, that as the physician was constantly moving in society, and must necessarily have an immense circle of acquaintance, it was more than probable that he might, sooner or later, encounter Esther, whom he would mistake for the sister—his real patient. Hence the solemn promise which Rainford exacted from Lascelles—*that when once his professional visits had ceased in South Moulton Street, he would forget that he had ever beholden Tamar; and that, should he ever meet her, alone or in company, he would not even appear to recognise her—much less attempt to speak to her—unless formally introduced, when he would consider his acquaintance with her to be commenced only from the moment of such introduction.* On the ensuing morning, at seven o'clock, Rainford and Tamar took their departure from South Moulton Street, and repaired to Lock's Fields, where the highwayman had already engaged lodgings previously to the affair of the diamonds, as he was anxious, for many obvious reasons, to dwell in a spot as secluded and retired as possible. Tamar then wrote a long and pathetic letter to her sister, imploring her forgiveness for the indignity which she had undergone on account of one so worthless as herself; and requesting her to address all future letters to her (until further notice) in this manner:—"*T. R., No. 5, Brandon Street, Lock's Fields*."

On the same day that Rainford and Tamar thus removed to the vicinity of the Elephant and Castle Tavern, Mr. Gordon called upon Esther de Medina in Great Ormond Street. Esther was much embarrassed when the diamond-merchant was announced; for she feared that if her father were at home, he would naturally hasten to the drawing-room to learn the object of this call, and a renewal of many painful reflections, as well as of much unpleasant observation, would follow. It was therefore with a feeling of pleasure that Esther found, upon inquiry of the servants, that Mr. de Medina had gone out a few minutes previous to Mr. Gordon's arrival. When the

diamond-merchant mentioned *the particulars of the visit which he had received from the light-haired gentleman*, Esther instantly comprehended that the individual alluded to must be Rainford; for though she had never seen him to her knowledge, yet she had heard a few details relative to his personal appearance, three years previously, at Liverpool. Mr. Gordon acquainted her with the restoration of the diamonds, and *her countenance suddenly assumed an expression of joy*, because she could not help recognising a certain evidence of good principle, and of kind feeling towards herself, in the fact of such restoration.

Two days afterwards Tamar and Esther again met; and the younger sister breathed the most tender expressions of forgiveness in the ear of her whom, though so guilty, she loved so tenderly. On the following evening they met for the third time; and then Esther used all her powers of persuasion to induce Tamar to accompany her home—to throw herself at the feet of their father, and implore his forgiveness. But Tamar answered in a firm tone, while tears nevertheless streamed down her countenance,—"It is impossible, Esther! Rainford loves me so devotedly, that I should esteem myself the veriest wretch upon the face of the earth to desert him; and on this condition alone could I hope to obtain my father's pardon. No: my destiny is fixed; to him I am linked until death shall separate us! Think not, dearest Esther, that I love thee the less because I cannot, dare not, take a step that would probably unite us again at the blessed domestic hearth, and beneath the sacred roof of our father's dwelling. Oh! God knows how sincerely, how earnestly, I wish that such happiness was in store for me! But it is impossible, Esther,—impossible!" And the sisters parted again, each weeping bitterly. Mr. de Medina had noticed that Esther was absent from home a long time on those two occasions; and he taxed her with having seen Tamar again. She did not deny the charge; but falling at her father's feet, she implored him to leave her that source of consolation. Her grief was so excessive, that Mr. de Medina, who in his heart admired these evidences of sisterly affection, gave no reply on that occasion: a negative trembled upon his tongue—but he dared not utter it. He recognised all that was generous and noble in the disposition of Esther; and he felt proud of her as his daughter—the *only* daughter whom he considered himself to possess. But, when in the solitude of his study, he reflected maturely upon these interviews which were taking place between the sisters, and which, if not at once checked, would naturally become more frequent, his mind was impressed with an idea that Tamar was utterly and irredeemably profligate—abandoned in character beyond all hope: and he feared lest Esther should be corrupted by her conversation. He therefore resolved, painful as the duty was, to put an end to those meetings, and yet mitigate the severity of this blow by winking, as it were, at the continuation of their epistolary correspondence—but still with the firm intention of crushing that indulgence also at a very early period. He knew that oral communication is far more dangerous than written interchange of thought; the former therefore was to be suspended first. He accordingly chose the anniversary of the day on which Tamar fled with Rainford to administer to Esther a solemn oath, binding her never to see her sister again. And to this vow was the unhappy girl compelled to pledge herself. It was the conversation which passed between the father and daughter on this occasion, that Lord Ellingham overheard—or rather, detached portions of which met his ears, producing such strange misgivings in his mind relative to the purity of Esther de Medina.

When the weeping Esther retired to her chamber, after having taken that oath, it struck her that her father had not prohibited her from *writing* to Tamar: and Esther was too glad to avail herself of this circumstance, to unburthen her grief to her sister through the medium of that epistle which Old Death intercepted and perused, but which he afterwards returned to the letter-box in Holborn. And if the reader will refer to that letter, he will perceive that it was specially addressed to Tamar, although when first glanced at, and while the impression remained unfavourable to Esther's character, it might have seemed to appeal to Rainford himself.

We have now cleared up all the mysteries relating to the family of Mr. de Medina; and we doubt not our readers will be pleased to find that Esther is indeed a model of purity—innocence—and sisterly affection. Oh! despise not, then, the Jewess—for Christians might be proud to emulate her virtues! And Rainford was a man who readily recognised and appreciated all the excellence of her disposition—all the glorious traits of her character, though he knew her not. But he admired—enthusiastically admired the soul that could cling so devotedly to its love for a sister; and from the first moment that the sisters met in London, he vowed that Esther should never again be compromised by any act or deed on the part of Tamar, if he were able to prevent it. Thus was it that, on the night when Mr. Dykes and his myrmidons invaded the house in Lock's Fields, Tom Rain gave such positive injunctions to Tamar not to visit him in prison, should he be captured; for he feared lest any one acquainted with Esther might meet Tamar under such circumstances, the inevitable result being that the one would be mistaken for the other. But on the day previous to his execution, he yielded to the imploring—beseeching letters which Tamar sent to him by means of Jacob Smith; and consented that she should take a last farewell of him, on condition that she concealed her face as much as possible with a veil.

When Esther read in the newspapers of Rainford's arrest, she felt deeply—deeply for her poor sister, whom she knew to be so devotedly attached to the highwayman. And, oh! Esther herself had begun to comprehend the feeling of love; for she had not beheld with indifference the handsome—the elegant—and the generous hearted Earl of Ellingham;—and all that Tamar had said relative to the wondrous influence of that passion, would at times recur strangely to her memory. Yes—Esther loved the good young nobleman; but her soul was too pure—her manners to deeply fraught with maidenly reserve, to betray the slightest evidence of her attachment. Nor had she yet so far admitted, even in the secret depths of her own mind, the existence of this inclination towards him, as to ponder upon it seriously, or to invest it with the aspect of reality. She knew that he was attached, and believed him engaged to be married to Lady Hatfield and she sighed involuntarily—scarcely comprehending wherefore—when she thought thereon. Still she loved him—while she believed, in the innocence of her own heart, that she merely felt interested in him as a friend. Nor did her imagination define the true distinction between the feeling which she actually experienced, and that which she only conceived to animate her,—no, not even when the glowing description of love which her sister had drawn on one occasion of their meeting, presented itself to her mind. But she could yet the more easily understand how it was possible for Tamar to love Rainford so devotedly as she did. Hence the acute anguish that Esther experienced, on account of her sister, when she read the arrest of the highwayman. Mr. de Medina did not of course remain ignorant of the occurrence; but he made not the slightest allusion to it in the presence of Esther. Nor did he put into force his previously contemplated plan of forbidding any future epistolary correspondence between the sisters. He felt deeply for Tamar, in spite of his stern silence respecting her; and he would not deprive her, under the weight of such dire afflictions, of the consolation which he naturally conceived the letters of Esther must prove to her. He even gave Esther, though unasked, a considerable sum of money, casually

observing "that she might wish to purchase herself a new piano, or any thing else she might fancy;"—and the young maiden pressed her father's hand, for it struck her that he meant her to be the medium of conveying assistance, in case it should be needed, to Tamar. But Tamar, in reply to the letter which Esther wrote proffering pecuniary aid, gave her the assurance that, though bowed down by the weight of affliction, poverty was not amongst the sources of her deep sorrow.

Day after day did Esther fondly hope that her father would speak to her relative to the now unfriended position of her sister; but Mr. de Medina preserved a profound silence. There were, however, moments when Esther fancied that his countenance looked anxious and care-worn, as if a struggle were taking place in his mind. Still time wore on, and he said nothing respecting Tamar:—he mentioned not her name! But one night, when Esther could not sleep, she thought that she heard a moaning sound in her father's room, which was on the opposite side of the passage communicating with her own; and, alarmed lest he might have been seized with sudden indisposition, she stole silently from her chamber and listened at his door. He was pacing the room with agitated steps, and speaking aloud in a manner indicative of acute mental anguish. "O Tamar! Tamar—my daughter Tamar! wherefore didst thou ever abandon me? God of my fathers! that such misery—such disgrace—such infamy should have fallen upon my race! And yet—though I have disowned thee—though I have cast thee off for ever—though, obedient to a stern duty, I have interdicted thy meetings with Esther, the darling of my heart,—nevertheless, my heart yearns towards thee, my Tamar! Oh! to reclaim thee—to bring thee back to the paths of virtue—to see thee happy and gay as thou once wast,—Oh! to do all this, I would consent to become the veriest beggar who crawls upon the face of the earth!" There was a long pause; and Mr. de Medina continued to pace his room with steps still more agitated than hitherto—while Esther stood in breathless suspense at the door, not daring to make her father aware that she had overheard him, and yet unable to retrace her steps to her own chamber. "But it may not be!" suddenly exclaimed the Jew, in an impassioned—rending tone; for the triumph which he had achieved over his softer feelings, cost him pangs as acute as if his heart-strings were being torn asunder. "No—it may not be! I have pronounced the fatal words, Tamar—I have disowned thee; and I may not recall the *fiat*! But if that man——who led thee astray——should be cut off by the hand of justice——" and the Jew's voice grew tremulous as in broken sentences he uttered these words——"then thou will be alone in the world——friendless——perhaps in want——starving——Oh! my God! my God!"

And Esther knew that her father was overcome with the bitterness of grief. For a moment her hand was raised to knock at the door; but in the next the thought struck her that she would be doing wrong to wound, and even humiliate him, by suffering him to know that she had become aware of the sorrow which he devoured in secret! And it also flashed to her mind that beneath the cold, stern, and severe demeanour which he had maintained ever since the flight of Tamar from the paternal roof,—beneath, also, that unbroken—profound silence which he had maintained towards her in respect to the misfortune that had fallen upon Tamar by the arrest of Rainford,—beneath all this, there agitated within his breast feelings and emotions keenly sensitive, but which were seldom if ever allowed to reflect themselves in the mirror of the countenance. Deeming, therefore, her father's grief too sacred for intrusion—too solemn to be broken in upon, Miss de Medina stole back to her chamber, and moistened a sleepless pillow with her tears. Nevertheless, a gleam of light penetrated the dark clouds of grief which hung upon her mind; for she had ascertained, beyond all possibility of doubt, that Tamar was not entirely unloved by her father—that his heart was not a tomb in which her memory was interred!

For, oh! that heart yearned towards thee, Tamar—lost, fallen though thou wast! and this conviction was an anodyne to the lacerated feelings of thy sister Esther! Time passed on—and still Mr. de Medina remained silent respecting the matter to which the charming maiden daily and hourly hoped to hear him allude. At length the trial took place—and the gallant highwayman was condemned to death. Oh! had it not been for that terrible oath—an oath from which her sire only could release her—Esther would have flown to console her sister at that season of her bitter grief. But, alas! all she could do was to impart solace by means of letters; and how cold is even the most fervent language of the pen when compared with that which the heart feels it should utter through the medium of the tongue! Tamar replied to those letters; and Esther was astonished to perceive that the afflicted woman wrote with a certain degree of calmness:—but she feared that it was indeed the calmness of despair! A second time did Mr. de Medina place in Esther's hands a considerable sum of money, telling her to use it as she thought fit; and the beauteous maiden, while her heart fluttered with hope and anxious expectation, exclaimed in an appealing tone, "Oh! my dear father—God grant that I do not misunderstand thy motives! Thou knowest that I have no need for all this gold; and *she* requireth a sire's pardon, but not the aid of his purse."—"I do not—I dare not understand you, Esther," returned Mr. de Medina, with difficulty assuming a cold tone, but with tears starting into his eyes:—and then he hastily quitted the room. Esther saw how deeply he was moved: and hope increased—not diminished—within her gentle breast. Then, when she pondered on all her father had uttered aloud, on that night when she had listened at his chamber door,—and when she reflected on all his proceedings since the day of Rainford's arrest,—she fancied that she could fathom his motives and intentions. "Should my dear—dear sister," she thought within herself, "be left friendless and alone in the world, by the hand of justice striking at the existence of him whom she loves—*then*, and only *then*, will the door of the paternal dwelling be opened, and a father's arms be extended, to receive the exile once more."

At length the fatal morning came—the morning on which Rainford was to suffer, and to which date we have now brought up our history. On the preceding Saturday Tamar had written to Esther to say that the hours of her bitterest—most crushing trials were now at hand; and that if she survived the soul-harrowing anguish then in store for her, it would be only with the hope of yet finding herself restored, sooner or later, to the sweet companionship of her sister, and also for the sake of the little boy whom Rainford's kindness had adopted, and who was so completely dependent upon her. "The moment all shall be over on Monday morning," added Tamar in her letter, "my preparations to leave London will commence. It is my intention—my firm intention to proceed to America, and there remain—burying my woes in a strange land, and devoting myself to the care of this boy—until it may please God to move my father's heart to recall me home! Let me receive a letter from thee, then, my beloved sister, on Monday morning—a letter that may console me by the assurances of thy continued love—if consolation there be for me in this life! Let your much-coveted communication reach me, sweetest Esther, at about ten o'clock on Monday. May God bless you, dearest—dearest Esther!"

Accordingly, on Monday morning, at about half-past nine, Esther despatched a letter, by a messenger, to Tamar's lodgings in the City. Need we say that this epistle contained all the tender assurances of love and unvarying affection which the affectionate disposition of the Jewish maiden could suggest, or which were calculated to console where consolation was so difficult? When the messenger, whom she had gone out to hire, had departed with the letter, Esther de Medina felt too restless—too nervous—too unsettled, to return home again immediately. The idea that one whom her sister loved had suffered an ignominious death that morning, and that Tamar was at that very moment crushed down to the earth by the weight of her afflictions,—this idea was more than Esther could contend against.

She wandered listlessly about—unmindful whither she was going; and it was in this frame of mind that she suddenly heard her name pronounced. She knew the voice, which somewhat recalled her to herself; for it was the voice of Lord Ellingham, whose absence from home had been made known to her by means of the laconic letter which he had addressed to her father from his dungeon.

The reader knows the rest:—with strange rapidity was she hurried away by the Earl towards Red Lion Street; and in the house to which she was conducted, she found her sister, who had arrived there only a few minutes previously, guided by Jacob Smith.

CHAPTER LVII.
A FATHER.

While the scenes related in the fifty-fifth chapter were taking place at the house in Red Lion Street, Mr. de Medina was pacing in an agitated manner his private apartment at his own residence.

Esther had rightly divined his thoughts and intentions: he had indeed been debating in his own mind, for some time past, whether his duty, as a father and as a man, did not command him to forgive a daughter whom the hand of the Lord had so severely stricken.

The Jew thought of his wife long dead, and murmured to himself—"Were she alive still, she would be kneeling at my feet, imploring me to pardon the erring Tamar! And does she not now look down upon me from those empyrean heights where her sainted spirit is numbered with the blest? Nay, more; do I not see her image now kneeling before me? Oh! can this be imagination? Yes—it is,—it is,—and yet how like the reality!"

Mr. de Medina was so painfully excited that his fancy for a moment conjured up the semblance of his deceased wife, as she had appeared in the pride of her loveliness, long years before.

But when the evanescent illusion had passed away, he again paced the room, a prey to the most painful indecision and doubt.

He longed to recall Tamar to his favour; and yet he feared to compromise his character for firmness and decision;—so strange and yet so sure it is, that, even in those moments when our best feelings are agitating within us to the purest and holiest ends, a miserable sentiment of worldly vanity intervenes, and if it do not altogether mar good deeds, at least impairs the merit of their excellence, by engendering hesitation, wavering, and delay.

Mr. de Medina's conflicting—battling meditations were suddenly interrupted by a loud knock at the street-door; and a servant shortly after announced to his master that the Earl of Ellingham was waiting in the drawing-room.

The Jew remained in his chamber a few minutes to compose his countenance, and collect his scattered ideas, ere he descended to meet the nobleman.

When he entered the drawing-room, he immediately saw by Arthur's face that it was no visit of mere ceremonious courtesy which was now paid to that house.

"My dear Earl," said Mr. de Medina, "you have been lost to the world for some weeks; and I must confess that when I received the letter which you did me the honour to address to me nearly a month ago, I entertained fears lest business of an unpleasant nature called you thus abruptly away from England."

"That letter, my dear sir," answered the Earl, "was not precisely such an one as I should have written to you had I been free from restraint."

The nobleman then related, in as few words as possible, the outrage that had been perpetrated upon him—the imprisonment he had endured for four mortal weeks—and the manner in which he had escaped.

Mr. de Medina expressed his indignation and surprise at the treatment which the young nobleman had undergone, and inquired if the motive could be accounted for.

"I am totally at a loss to conjecture who were my enemies, and the cause of their abominable proceedings," answered the Earl. "But let us waive that subject for the present, my dear sir," he continued; "as it is my duty to engage your attention with other and more important matters."

Mr. de Medina pointed to a seat near the fire, and then drew a chair for himself to within a short distance of that taken by the Earl.

"I am about to mention a name to you, my dear Mr. de Medina," continued the nobleman, "which may perhaps—nay, will certainly sound unpleasantly upon your ears; but you know me too well to imagine for an instant that I should thoughtlessly or wantonly give you pain. I allude to Thomas Rainford."

The Jew started, and his countenance fell.

"This Thomas Rainford, Mr. de Medina," resumed Arthur, "has wronged you—wronged you deeply; and not for a moment do I attempt to defend his conduct."

"But how know you, my lord, that the wretched man, who is now no more, and against whose memory common humanity orders me not to nourish animosity——"

"Mr. de Medina," interrupted the Earl in a low and solemn tone, as he bent towards the Jew, "Thomas Rainford lives!"

"Lives!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, in a voice loud with excitement and surprise.

"Hush! speak low—in a whisper—the walls have ears!" said Arthur impatiently. "In the name of heaven! compose yourself—calm your mind, Mr. de Medina—for I have much to communicate to you—and that much of the first importance."

"Proceed, my lord," said the Jew coldly: "I am all attention."

"It is, then, true that Rainford lives——"

"And yet scarce an hour has passed since men were crying the account of his execution for sale in the street—beneath this very window," observed Mr. de Medina, in an incredulous tone.

"It is as true that he is now alive as that he underwent the ordeal of the terrible rope, even as the pamphlet-venders proclaimed beneath your window," continued the Earl. "In a word, he has been resuscitated by the wondrous agency of galvanism."

"Good God! my lord—is this possible?" cried Mr. de Medina: "or do my ears deceive me?"

"Again I implore you to master your feelings," said the Earl; "for I have another circumstance, almost equally strange, to reveal to you. Thomas Rainford is nearly related to me——"

"To you—to your lordship!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina.

"Yes: the same father was the author of our being—though different mothers bore us. He is my half-brother—and all the proofs thereof are in my possession. Nay, more—and *this* I reveal to you to prove the confidence I place in *you*—he is my elder brother, legitimately born, and is the rightful Earl of Ellingham!"

Mr. de Medina gazed on the young nobleman in speechless astonishment,—with an amazement, indeed, so profound, that it seemed as if he were suddenly paralysed by the announcement which had just met his ears.

The Earl then rapidly sketched the outline of Rainford's birth; and, without in any way alluding to Lady Hatfield, stated that accident had brought them together, and had led to the revelation of all those wondrous circumstances. Arthur did not however forget to mention the generous conduct of Rainford in refusing to avail himself of papers which would have placed a coronet on his brow and vast estates at his disposal, and also in consigning those papers to the possession of Arthur himself.

Mr. de Medina was perfectly astounded at all he heard; and he listened in silent wonderment—no longer interrupting the narrator with comment or question.

The Earl proceeded to inform him how the whole scheme for the resuscitation of the doomed man had been arranged between himself and Dr. Lascelles, and how it had perfectly succeeded.

"Indeed," added Arthur, "I left my half-brother just awakened from a profound sleep, and, though much enfeebled, still beyond the reach of danger. But spare me the necessity of describing to you the first moments of horror—boundless, appalling horror—which he experienced, when, slowly opening his eyes, he awoke to the recollection of all he had this morning gone through, and to the wildest doubts as to where he was and what had actually become of him! Oh! Mr. de Medina, it was a scene which the memories of those who beheld it, never—never could fail to retain—even though madness were to destroy the discriminating powers of the intellect! But all that is passed—gone by; and my brother lives—conscious, too, of resuscitated existence!"

"My dear Earl," said Mr. de Medina, at length breaking the long silence which had been maintained on his part, "I have read and heard many wildly wonderful narratives in my time,—truths also far stranger than fictions,—genuine occurrences which outvie all the marvels of romance. But never—never, do I firmly believe, has mortal tongue related, nor mortal ear listened to, a history more amazing—more solemnly interesting, than this. Should these facts ever transpire to the world, and be seized upon by the novelist as the basis of a tale, those who may read, having been previously unacquainted with those facts, would exclaim, *'Tis impossible!*' Oh! what a work might be written, under the title of THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON! But pardon me for wasting your valuable time with these comments:—I say, pardon me—because I perceive that you have more yet to relate."

"I have indeed," said the Earl, trembling for the success of the mission which had taken him to Mr. de Medina's house; "and I am now compelled to touch upon a subject which cannot be otherwise than painful to you——"

"I understand you, my lord," interrupted the Jew: "proceed—for I know that you would not refer to that topic without a well-intentioned motive."

"Such is indeed the case," said the Earl. "But not to use more words than are necessary—as time is precious—I shall at once inform you that I am acquainted with the sad episode in my half-brother's life, which relates to—to—your elder daughter."

"Go on, my lord," said the Jew, mastering his emotions.

"But not until this morning—till within an hour ago," continued the Earl, "was I aware that you possessed *two* daughters. The moment that Rainford was pronounced to be out of danger, I despatched a faithful messenger to break the tidings to her who loves him, and whom he loves so well; but while this messenger was absent, I had occasion to leave, for a short time, the house where Thomas Rainford now lies; and accident led me to encounter Miss Esther. Pardon me, when I state that a variety of circumstances, which I will some day explain, had for several weeks past induced me to believe that she—whom I now know to be an angel of purity and goodness—was the being so dear to my brother; and, anxious to relieve her mind, as I thought, from the agony of grief into which the supposed fate of Rainford must have plunged her,—anxious also that her presence should greet *his* eyes upon awaking from the deep sleep that followed the galvanic resuscitation,—I led her—dragged her, with me to the house I ere now spoke of—saying heaven only knows what incoherent things to her as we sped along, and to which, I remember now, she listened and replied with an amazement since

explained. But, in the meantime, Jacob Smith—the messenger whom I had sent to your elder daughter—had arrived with *her*; and thus—you perceive how innocently on my part,—the sisters were brought together by the bed-side of my brother!"

"Esther and Tamar together!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, starting from his seat, in mingled anger and surprise: then, suddenly changing to an aspect of profound sorrow, he murmured, "Oh! Esther! thine oath—thine oath!"

"She did not violate it, Mr. de Medina," said the Earl emphatically. "As well might it be asserted that, had you sworn never to enter my house, and were you carried thither by force, your vow would be wilfully—wickedly broken. No:—Miss de Medina knew not whither she was going—knew not whom she was to see—knew not that her sister would be there! If any one has erred in all this, 'tis I; and yet I, Mr. de Medina," added the Earl proudly, "am incapable of doing a bad deed. There lives not the man who, with truth, could impute to me aught that I should be ashamed to have published before all the world. And it is not to boast of untarnished rectitude—of a bright fame—of an unsullied reputation, that I now speak;—but it is to convince you—you, Mr. de Medina, a man of the world—yourself upright beyond all doubt—honourable beyond all possibility of impeachment,—it is to convince you, that if I have incurred your displeasure, I did not the act wantonly—and that I deserve forgiveness."

"Excellent young man!" exclaimed the Jew, grasping the Earl's hand, and wringing it with even paternal warmth: "who shall dare to impute sinister motives to one like you? No,—Oh! no:—were all the scions of the aristocracy as noble-hearted as yourself—endowed with such feelings as you possess, they would be a blessing instead of a curse and a shame to this country. I was unjust," added Mr. de Medina, more slowly,—"unjust towards my beloved and amiable Esther—and unjust also in respect to you. But, oh! my lord," continued the Jew, while tears rolled down his cheeks, "it is hard—it is hard to have the honour of one's name tarnished by a disobedient daughter:—and such is the lost—the unhappy Tamar!"

"The best of us in this world are but poor, erring, sinful mortals in the eyes of Him who is all-perfect but who is likewise all-merciful," said the Earl in a solemn and impressive tone. "Alas! but a few minutes have passed since I proclaimed my rectitude, vain boaster that I was—and lauded your integrity, miserable flatterer that I was! But I then spoke as men speak—as we mortals are accustomed to estimate our characters for honour and probity. Nevertheless, in the sight of heaven, we are sinners—wretched sinners; and our only hopes are in God's illimitable mercy! Then, Mr. de Medina,—as you hope for salvation in another world,—as you expect forgiveness at the hands of the Almighty for those failings wherewith the very best of us are characterised,—I implore—I beseech you, to pardon your daughter Tamar!"

Glorious—almost god-like, was the enthusiasm with which the fine young nobleman urged his strong appeal—the stronger for all the sincerity of the argument which prefaced it.

Mr. de Medina gazed upon him with mingled wonder and admiration: but when the Earl had done speaking, the Jew turned aside and paced the room in a manner betraying the most painful agitation.

"Think not," resumed Arthur, also rising from his seat, "that I am one of those wretched hypocrites, who, in their sickly cant, make use of the holiest names and the most sacred arguments to win a cause in which they are interested only through selfish and worldly motives. No!—I should scorn to reduce myself to such a level—I should hate myself were I capable of such contemptible duplicity. It is not he who prays longest and loudest, that is the most sincere. But I appeal to you by all things sacred—I, the Christian, appeal to you, the Jew—by those doctrines which form the basis of the creed in which we both put faith,—doctrines which teach us the goodness of the Almighty, as manifested towards the Israelites,—by all He did for your forefathers—thereby do I appeal to you to receive an erring daughter back to your arms, and assure her of your pardon!"

Still Mr. de Medina replied not—but continued to pace the room.

"Were your daughter Esther—the amiable, the excellent Esther here," continued Lord Ellingham, "she would not perhaps intercede so vainly as I. During the rapid explanations which were ere now vouchsafed to me by the repentant Tamar herself,—explanations which have shown me how ineffably beyond all human praise is the conduct of the younger towards her elder sister,—I learnt more of the heart of woman than ever I knew before. My ideas—my sentiments, concerning woman and her mission here, have always been of the loftiest kind: but now I am led to recognise something angelic—something heavenly in her disposition. Oh! Mr. de Medina, had I such a sister as Esther, never—never, would I permit a tear to dim the brightness of her eye, if it were in my power to wipe it away!—never—never, would I allow a pang to steal into her gentle breast, if deed or word of mine could avert it. For I declare your younger daughter to be a very angel of excellence and moral worth; and your entire nation should be proud of the name of Esther de Medina!"

"My lord—my dear Earl," faltered the father, approaching the young nobleman, and taking his hand, "if the Jews should be proud of Esther, the Christians may with good cause glory in their Arthur of Ellingham! But if this *must* be—if Tamar should once more receive from me the name of DAUGHTER—how——"

"I understand you, my dear friend," interrupted the nobleman: "you would ask—you would know what course is to be pursued in respect to my half-brother."

The Jew made a hasty sign for his companion to proceed.

"I must confess that this difficulty struck me forcibly ere I came hither just now," continued Arthur. "My half-brother is devotedly attached to your daughter; and Tamar is equally wrapped up in him. To separate them, in my opinion, would be the height of cruelty: for you to forgive your daughter and consent to allow her to dwell in concubinage with Rainford, are things I know to be incompatible. But is there no course open to them? Listen to the plan which I suggested before I left those who are no doubt so anxiously waiting my return. It is this: To-morrow night, if Dr. Lascelles accord his permission, I shall accompany my half-brother to France, whence he will proceed as soon as possible to the United States of America. For in the hasty explanations which ere now took place between us all, I learnt that he had already expedited thither a considerable sum of money, his intention having been to proceed with Tamar to the New

World when his project was suddenly marred by his arrest. While he is away, and in safety, I shall exert myself to obtain his full pardon; for I shall privately represent to the Minister all the circumstances of this most extraordinary case. To-morrow night, then, we proceed to Dover, whence we shall embark for France. 'Tis for you and your daughters to follow us to Paris; and there the hands of Tamar and Thomas Rainford may be united in the chapel of the British Embassy. I am well aware that it will be a Protestant marriage only;—that in your eyes it may be insufficient, so far as it regards the creed of your daughter;—but it is the least of two evils. For, believe me, Tamar and my brother are so devoted to each other that they would never consent to separate:—no—Tamar would not quit him even to receive her father's pardon! Thus they would continue to live in that state which is repugnant to the feelings of society—a state unhallowed by the rites of the Church. But where two hearts are thus closely connected and are wedded to all intents and purposes, by the mere fact of their binding affections,—tell me—tell me, does it matter much at which of God's altars the blessing of heaven shall be invoked? You will pardon your daughter—you will receive her back into your arms,—you will give her to one who loves her most tenderly and who has ever treated her as if she were his wife—and, after the ceremony shall have been performed, albeit a Protestant one, you may say proudly and unblushingly to those who learn that you have another daughter, and who inquire concerning her,—you may say fearlessly, 'She is married!'"

Mr. de Medina walked towards the window for a few moments to conceal his tears.

But he could not conceal them; and with the holy dew trickling down his cheeks, he turned again to the nobleman, saying in a tremulous and broken voice,—"My friend—my dearest friend, I yield!—you have subdued me! It shall all be as you have designed it!"

The Earl pressed Mr. de Medina's hand with fervent warmth—with the ardour of gratitude.

"Come with me at once—delay not a moment!" exclaimed Arthur, his own eyes also dimmed with tears.

And he hurried Mr. de Medina to the hackney-coach, which was waiting at the door.

CHAPTER LVIII.
THE RESUSCITATED.

Touching was the scene in the bed-chamber at the house in Red Lion Street,—that scene which the return of the Earl of Ellingham, accompanied by Mr. de Medina, was to render more touching still.

But previously to their arrival, the group was interesting and must be specially noticed.

Rainford was seated in the bed, propped up with the pillows; for he still felt very weak, though all danger had completely passed.

Standing by his side, with one hand locked in his, was Tamar, clad in deep mourning—a mourning now no longer necessary, and which covered a heart beating with ineffable joy.

Dr. Lascelles and Esther de Medina were also standing close by the bed; and Jacob Smith was leaning over the foot-board, surveying Rainford with eyes dimmed by tears, and in a kind of wonderment as if he were scarcely able to convince himself of the miracle the *living evidence* of which was before him.

The hearts of all were too full for connected discourse; for even the doctor himself was more moved by the incidents in which he had that day performed so prominent a part, than ever he had felt before.

At length Tamar turned towards her sister, and said in a low, tremulous tune, "Do you think, dear Esther, that Lord Ellingham will succeed—can you hope it?"

"I have every hope," replied Esther, firmly. "His lordship suggested a plan by which all our father's scruples may be overcome."

"And by which we shall not be separated, save for a few days, Tamar," observed Rainford.

"I would not quit you even for an hour," answered the elder sister, emphatically; "were it not that I was previously assured of being speedily re-united to you."

Rainford pressed her hand tenderly.

"If my friend Arthur does not succeed with Mr. de Medina," said Dr. Lascelles, "I must go myself, and see what I can do. But I confess that I should despair of producing any effect, were Arthur's eloquence to fail."

"Hark!" cried Jacob Smith: "the front door opens!"

The physician hastened to assure himself that no unwelcome step was approaching; and the sisters exchanged looks indicative of the most acute suspense.

"Bravo!" cried the good doctor, returning in a few moments, and clapping his hands together.

But before he had time to give any explanation as to the cause of a joy so unusual in one of his calm and unexcitable disposition, footsteps approached the room.

The eyes of Rainford, the sisters, and Jacob Smith were anxiously cast towards the door.

Lord Ellingham entered first—his countenance radiant with joy. Another moment—and Tamar bounded forward to meet her sire, in whose arms she was immediately received.

"Oh! my dear—dear father!" exclaimed Tamar; "is it possible that you can forgive me—that this happiness is not a dream?"

"Let the past be forgotten, my child!" said Mr. de Medina, pressing her again and again to his breast: for now that she *was* forgiven, all the long-smothered generosity and tenderness of his heart in respect to her revived with fresh vigour. "And you, Esther, my well-beloved," he added, "come also and share your father's joy that the day of pardon has at length arrived!"

Most affecting was the scene. The physician pretended to be busily occupied in wiping his eye-glass; but the tears fell fast upon it:—Rainford and Lord Ellingham both wept aloud; and Jacob Smith whimpered like a little child.

At last the party grew somewhat composed; and Mr. de Medina advanced towards the bed.

"Mr. Rainford," he said, extending his hand, which the resuscitated highwayman grasped with grateful warmth, "to you also do I say, '*Let the past be forgotten*.' From the very bottom of my heart do I forgive you; and this forgiveness I the more readily accord, because I learn that your conduct has been uniformly kind and tender towards my daughter,—because you are prepared to make her your wife according to the ritual of your creed,—and also because I have heard from your noble relative—far more noble in nature even than in name—that you have manifested so many proofs of an excellent heart and a generous disposition towards *him*, that it is impossible not to admire your behaviour in this respect. I have now said all that I intend to utter upon these subjects; for if I be stern and severe in my displeasure, I am equally sincere and profound in my forgiveness."

"My dear Earl," whispered Dr. Lascelles, in the most solemn manner possible, and in a tone audible only to himself and the young nobleman, "I did not think of asking you for any reward for all I have this day done to serve you and yours. But I am so charmed with this Jew, who positively shows more good feeling than many Christians whom I know, that I would give any thing to possess a cast of his head. Do you think——"

"Depend upon it, my dear Doctor, I will not forget your wish," said the Earl, smiling: "but you must admit that this is not precisely the time to ask a favour of so delicate a nature."

"True!" observed Lascelles. "And yet the interests of science——"

"Hush!" said Lord Ellingham: "you will be overheard."

As soon as the party were sufficiently composed to deliberate upon the course now to be adopted, considering the position of Rainford, a solemn conclave was held.

The results of the council may be thus summed up:—Dr. Lascelles, feeling convinced that Rainford was totally out of danger, proposed to return without delay to the West End, to visit his patients who would be otherwise astonished and vexed at his absence. Mr. de Medina was to repair home with his two daughters: and while the young ladies made all the necessary arrangements for the trip to France, their father undertook to proceed to Dover, and secure a sailing-vessel to be in readiness by the time that Lord Ellingham and Rainford should reach that port. Mr. de Medina would then return to London to fetch his daughters; and the family would follow the half-brothers as speedily as possible to Paris. On his side, Lord Ellingham expressed his intention of remaining with Rainford until the moment for their departure together should arrive. Jacob Smith was to stay also in the house in Red Lion Street, and to accompany Tom Rain not only to France, but also to America; for the poor lad was devotedly attached to him, and Rainford felt it almost a duty to remove the youth from the scene of his former temptations and miseries.

Dr. Lascelles accordingly quitted the house, first having promised to see Rainford again next day. Mr. de Medina and his daughters next took their departure, Tamar having taken a tender farewell of him whom she loved, and whom, according to present arrangements, she was not to meet again until they arrived in Paris. As for Esther, ere she turned to quit the room, she gave her hand to Rainford, who respectfully touched it with his lips.

At length the Earl and Jacob were left together with the resuscitated highwayman, who now lost no time in narrating to them the particulars of his visit to that very house a few weeks previously. For when, on awaking from his deep sleep, he was sufficiently recovered to collect his scattered ideas,—and when the first emotions attendant upon his meeting with Tamar had passed,—he had recognised the chamber in which he was lying. But finding himself under the care and protection of Dr. Lascelles, whom he had seen, it will be remembered, in the house on the night of his memorable adventures beneath that roof, he had so far mastered his surprise and momentary alarm, as to maintain a profound silence relative to his recognition of the place.

But now that there was leisure to converse on matters of secondary importance, and that she in whose breast he was fearful of exciting fears for his safety was no longer present, he detailed at full length all the particulars with which the reader is acquainted, not even omitting the impression existing in his mind that Old Death was no more. Then Lord Ellingham learnt how Rainford had happened to visit the laboratory when he was disturbed by the entrance of Lascelles; and he also heard for the first time how his half-brother had recovered his money, with compound interest, and had obtained all the private papers proving the history of his birth and the marriage of the late Earl of Ellingham with Octavia Manners. Jacob, likewise for the first time, learnt that the very house in which he then was, contained the store-rooms of Old Death; and he now also ascertained the cause of that individual's sudden and mysterious disappearance.

Arthur, in his turn, related the entire particulars of the outrage perpetrated upon him—his imprisonment in a dungeon for four long weeks—the reason of his writing the laconic letter which Rainford had received in prison—his escape by means of the sewers—and his suspicion, in consequence of all he had heard that morning from Dr. Lascelles, that the scene of his late incarceration was not altogether unconnected with the mysterious subterranean of that very house.

But conjecture was useless in respect to all these circumstances; and the only point to which any positive decision could be arrived at, was the absolute necessity that existed for defending the house from all intruders so long as Rainford should remain in it.

Jacob Smith went out to purchase refreshments; and Rainford felt himself so well that he was enabled to make a hearty meal.

Hour after hour passed; and at length evening came.

"Arthur," said Tom Rain, breaking a silence during which he had partially dozed, and now aroused by a sudden idea that had struck him,—"Arthur, I have a strange fancy—a whim, which I much desire you would gratify——"

"Name it, Thomas," returned the nobleman.

"I should like to see the evening paper," continued Tom Rain. "I need scarcely tell you that never again will the highways of this nor any other country be rendered dangerous by me—never shall this right hand of mine perpetrate a crime. My career as a desperate plunderer terminated this morning—on the roof of the gaol: from the instant of my resuscitation I date a new term of existence—new in a moral as well as in a physical sense. But I *should* like to see what is said of me *in my last moments*."

For an instant the Earl hesitated—but only for an instant; and Jacob Smith was sent to purchase the evening newspaper.

In due time he returned; and Rainford sate up in bed *to read the account of his own execution*!

"I am glad of that!" he exclaimed, as his eyes ran down the column headed with the awful words—EXECUTION OF THOMAS RAINFORD; and his countenance became flushed with excitement, as he read aloud, in a tone that trembled not in the least degree, a

few of the sentences which seemed to give him pleasure:—"*He underwent the dreadful process of pinioning with extraordinary courage*"—"*his footsteps were as firm as if anything save a scaffold were his destination*"—"*he ascended the stairs leading to the roof of the prison with steps that faltered not*"—"*the same dauntless courage sustained him as he mounted the fatal ladder which conducted him to the drop*"—"*nor did he once exhibit signs of fear; no, not even when the executioner descended beneath the platform to draw the bolt that was to launch him into eternity.*"—"*Thus died a man who possessed a courage that would have rendered him distinguished had his destinies cast him in the profession of arms.*"

"For heaven's sake, no more of this, my dear brother," exclaimed the Earl, painfully excited.

"Burn the paper, Arthur," said Tom Rain, handing it to the nobleman, and then throwing himself back on his pillow. "I have seen enough—and never wish to read that narrative again. But pardon me for having given you pain; and think not it was any frivolous sentiment of vanity that made me desirous to peruse the account, or that excited me as I read it. I merely wished to convince myself that no injustice was done me, Arthur," he added, very seriously; "for, of all things, I abominate a coward; and I confess—it may be a weakness on my part—that I should not like *my last moments* to have been misrepresented. But let us talk no more on this topic—since it gives you pain. And now, by way of changing the conversation, I will tell you some of the plans I have shadowed out in my mind. Perhaps they may never be realized:—I hope they may."

Arthur had set fire to the newspaper by means of a lamp which was burning upon the table; and, having crushed out the expiring flames with his foot, he drew his chair towards the bed, to listen with attention to his half-brother.

Jacob Smith leant over the foot-board, anxious to drink in the words which Rainford was about to utter.

"I have been thinking," resumed this individual, "that my past life requires a great atonement through the medium of my new existence. I am not, however, one of those men who turn saints, and who hope to win the good opinion of the world and the favour of heaven by means of incessant prayer. No—my ideas are quite at variance with such proceedings. I believe that one good *deed* is worth ten thousand *psalms*. It certainly is more beneficial to our fellow-creatures, and must therefore be more acceptable to the Almighty. I have been thinking, then, how pleasant it would be for one who possesses an independence, to employ his leisure time in seeking out those poor, unhappy beings whom adverse circumstances, or even their own faults, have plunged into misery. If they be cast down through misfortunes unconnected with errors, it would be delightful to aid them: but doubly pleasing must it be to reclaim those who have erred, and to afford even the felon a chance of quitting his evil ways and acquiring an honest livelihood."

"Oh! it would—it would, indeed!" ejaculated Jacob Smith, all the adventures and incidents of his own chequered life rushing to his memory.

"I have been reflecting, moreover—not merely within the last few moments," continued Rainford, "but ever since I heard the narrative of one who became an ill-doer in spite of himself,"—looking significantly for an instant towards the lad,—"but who struggled successfully at last against temptation, cruel attempts at coercion, and almost unheard-of wretchedness,—I have been reflecting, I say, that society is wrong in refraining from the adoption of strenuous means to reform those whom it considers to be the most abandoned. The reformist does not enter the criminal gaol: he considers it to be useless. But whither should he go, if not *there*? He should reason with himself that it is impossible for men willingly to cling to the unnatural—the feverish excitement of a life of incessant crime, if they had any chance of adopting pursuits unattended with constant peril. Setting aside the morality of the case, nine-tenths of those very persons who sing the loudest, swear the hardest, and appear the most depraved, would gladly quit a course that makes their conscience see a constable in every shadow. I think I can give you a parallel case, which will fully illustrate my meaning. It is the custom to vilify the Irish—to declare that they cling with a species of natural tenacity to their rags, their dirt, and their penury—to assert that they themselves are the foes to any civilizing principles which may be applied to them. But look at Irish labourers in England—look at the Irishman when in *this* country, supplied with plenty of work, earning adequate wages, and removed from scenes of political excitement. Does he not work hard? is he indolent? does he adhere lovingly to rags and misery? No such thing! Well, then, it is equally absurd to suppose that criminals cling with affection to crime, prisons, and an existence harassed by constant apprehensions. Remove the thief or the housebreaker from the sphere into which circumstances have cast him, and from which he cannot extricate himself,—give him a chance of earning an honest livelihood, and of redeeming his character,—and in nine cases out of ten, he may be reclaimed. There are, of course, exceptions to all rules; but I am convinced, from all I have seen and heard, that I am now speaking of a rule, and not of the exceptions. Well, then, these considerations lead me back to the starting point which I chose; and I repeat my former words,—that were some man to devote himself to the visitation not only of the dwellings of the honest poor, but also the haunts of crime, and the abodes of vice, the deep sinks of impurity, and even the felons' gaols themselves, he would be able to effect an immense amount of good. You may be surprised to hear such sentiments come from my lips——"

"I am delighted—ineffably delighted!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, speaking with the enthusiasm of unfeigned joy; "and I agree with every opinion you have put forth. I see that our laws are miserably deficient, while they seek only to punish and not to reform—that our legislators are short-sighted if not actually wicked, in neglecting to adopt means to prevent crime by reforming the criminal, rather than encourage turpitude by rendering the criminal a desperate outcast."

"Oh! my dear brother," cried Tom Rain joyfully, "how happy I am to hear you thus express your adhesion to those theories which I have so rapidly glanced at. And are not you a legislator of England—an hereditary legislator? and do you owe nothing to your country? Believe me, when I declare that were you to apply your intellect—your talents—your energies, to this great question, you would render your name so illustrious that the latest posterity would mention it with veneration and gratitude!"

"Rest well assured, Thomas, that these words of your's shall not be thrown away upon me," returned Arthur solemnly.

"And, on my side—humble individual that I am, *and that I intend ever to remain*," added Rainford, with a significant glance towards the Earl, "my resolution is fixed to make some atonement in another part of the world for all the bad deeds I have committed in this.

Should I reach America in safety, it will be my task to reduce to practice some of these theories which I have just now broached; and I believe that the results will fulfil all my expectations."[26]

"There is no doubt of it—oh! there is no doubt!" exclaimed Jacob Smith, catching the enthusiasm which now animated him who was *once*—and so lately—a lawless highwayman, but whom circumstances, and the never altogether crushed sentiments of a rightly constituted mind, had suddenly imbued with the hope of atoning for the past by means of the good which he meditated towards his fellow-creatures.

"Poverty is a fertile source of crime," observed Lord Ellingham; "but then it is declared that many are poor only through their own idleness. How are such persons to be reformed? I am prepared to answer the question. Education will teach them the value of industry, and the necessity of rendering themselves independent of parochial relief and eleemosynary assistance. If a child offend, we say, '*He knows no better*.' The uneducated individual is as ignorant of the real principles of right and wrong as the lisping child; and therefore must instruction—not merely religious, but an enlightened species of education—be provided for the millions."[27]

"It is for you to urge those great and glorious points in the proper place—in the Parliament of England!" said Rainford: "and, I repeat, posterity will honour your name!"

"I am not such a hypocrite as to deny the existence of those charms which a laudable ambition possesses," returned Arthur; "no selfish considerations will, however, influence me in the public course which I am now determined to adopt. But I am forgetting, dear Thomas, that this prolonged discourse on an exciting topic may be prejudicial to you, weak and enfeebled as you are. Let us not, therefore, pursue the theme at present: it is now growing late—and you stand in need of repose. Jacob and myself will watch by your bed-side."

Rainford pressed his brother's hand, and composed himself to woo the advance of slumber.

In about ten minutes he was fast asleep!

The Earl of Ellingham was seated close by the head of the bed: Jacob drew a stool near the foot, and the two observed a profound silence.

The Earl looked at his watch: it was half-past ten o'clock.

The lamp burnt upon the table.

Suddenly, slow and heavy steps were heard *beneath*—as if some one were ascending the flight of stairs under the floor.

Lord Ellingham placed his finger upon his lips to enjoin Jacob to maintain the strictest silence, and then instantly extinguished the light.

In another moment some one was heard preparing to raise the trap-door—a proceeding which Arthur did not attempt to thwart. He knew that if the person or persons now approaching were debarred the ingress which was sought, the front door would be the alternative next essayed; and he therefore resolved that, come what might, he would endeavour to capture and secure any intruders whose presence threatened in any way to interfere with his plans.

These calculations were all weighed in a single moment by the energetic and brave young nobleman.

The trap-door was raised slowly—the carpet was thrust aside from the aperture by the arm of him who was ascending; and a light suddenly gleamed from beneath.

The intruder carried a lamp in his hand.

Arthur and Jacob Smith maintained the most death-like silence—the former nerved for the trying scene, the latter ready to sink with apprehension on account of Rainford, who still slept soundly.

Having removed the carpet from the aperture,—a task which occupied nearly a minute, as the intruder held the lamp in his left hand and was compelled to support the trap-door in a half-open position with his head or back, while he worked with the right hand,—the individual—for Lord Ellingham was by this time pretty well satisfied that only one person was approaching—prepared to ascend into the room.

But the moment he had removed the carpet, and advanced another step or two upwards, the lamp was dashed from his hand, and he was violently seized by the collar, in the powerful grasp of Lord Ellingham, who exclaimed at the same instant, "Be silent—or you are a dead man!"

The individual thus captured, uttered a low growl, but said nothing.

Then, quick as thought, and with a degree of strength which astonished even him who exercised it, the Earl dragged the man up the steps into the room, but fortunately without awaking the soundly-sleeping Rainford.

All this took place amidst the most profound darkness, be it remembered; but, acting with wonderful energy and presence of mind, Arthur dragged the man along the floor of the bed-chamber into the laboratory; and then, without relaxing his hold, he exclaimed, "Jacob, light the lamp and bring it hither!"

"Jacob!" muttered the prostrate intruder, "Jacob!"

"Silence!" cried the Earl. "You are in the grasp of a desperate man," he added in a menacing tone; "but if you mean no harm, you will receive no injury."

Scarcely were these words uttered, when Jacob Smith, having hastily relighted the lamp, entered the laboratory, closing the door behind him—for he fully comprehended the Earl's motive in dragging the man, whoever he might be, away in the dark from the chamber where Rainford was lying.

But hardly had the light of the lamp fallen upon the countenance of the individual who was now half-lying—half-sitting on the floor, restrained by the vigorous grasp of Lord Ellingham, who bent over him,—when Jacob uttered a cry of mingled horror and alarm, exclaiming, as he staggered back, "*'Tis Old Death!*"

The lamp fell from his hand, and was instantly extinguished.

26. Mr. Brandon, in his admirable preface to Mr. Miles's work on *Poverty, Mendicity, and Crime*, places on record the ensuing observations:—

 "It is a generally-admitted axiom that among the uneducated, the human mind is more prone to evil than virtue; how greatly, then, must vice be disseminated, and the evil propensities encouraged, by persons of all descriptions, from the hardened murderer to the truant-playing apprentice, mingling and without one admonitory antidote to check them, all unemployed, all uneducated in the proper school of morality. The idlers, tyros in crime, or petty misdemeanants, be they boys or adults, will listen with eager curiosity to the gossiping of the old and hardened offenders, while relating to each other the exploits they had achieved, or when giving instruction how to escape detection in certain situations, which from their own experience they have been led to conceive the best, and to hear them plot fresh depredations to be committed as soon as they shall have finished the term of their captivity, or be set at large upon a verdict of 'not guilty;' what but evil can arise from such a state of congregating? the mind cannot fail to become contaminated in some degree, even in the best disposed among them; whilst others, incited by the picture of pleasure they have described in the event of a successful enterprise, and from the encouragement given to the growing desires by the hardened wretches, enter recklessly into the path of vice as soon as they have turned their backs on the prison door; future accomplices and companions of the 'gaol bird,' who had been their tutor; commencing their career perhaps by a robbery planned whilst in prison. Minds, not over strong nor sufficiently guarded by moral education, are easily led astray, and the very punishment they are enduring as a requital for faults committed, will be used as the rudder by which they are steered to crime, in persuading them that they are aggrieved victims instead of criminals paying the penalty due to offended justice. This is the certain effect of the present system, and to expect any thing like repentance or thorough reform in a criminal, would be ridiculous.

 "In a work published some time since, which is generally considered authentic, 'The Autobiography of James Hardy Vaux,' a notorious thief, is the following anecdote, which, as it corroborates and is illustrative of the facts above stated, namely, that vice is taught in prison, is here inserted:—

 "He (Vaux) had in a most systematic manner robbed jewellers' shops, and, as he conceived, every one of note had fallen under his lash. He was at length taken up for stealing a gold snuff-box, and committed to Newgate, where he made acquaintance with two brothers, both of the same profession as his own, and committed for a similar offence; they were very communicative to each other, and Vaux discovered that there were some of his favourite shops which had escaped his notice. 'They pointed out,' says the text, 'about half a dozen shops which it appeared I had omitted to visit, arising either from their making no display of their goods, or from their being situated in private streets where I had no idea of finding such trades. Although I had little hopes of acquittal, it was agreed that in the event of my being so fortunate that I should visit these tradesmen I had overlooked, and I promised, in case I was successful, to make them a pecuniary acknowledgment in return for their information.' He was further instructed in what manner to proceed, and what sort of goods to order, and a Mr. Belger, a first-rate jeweller in Piccadilly, was particularly recommended to his notice as a *good fiat*. He succeeded in getting acquitted, and in robbing the shops pointed out to his notice, when, like a 'man of honour,' he did not fail to perform his promise to the two brothers—his associates in Newgate. The *good fiat* he robbed more than once, and once too often, for Vaux was discovered by him at last, and through his instrumentality convicted."

27. Mr. Brandon has these remarks in his Preface, just quoted from:—"Poverty is one of the great causes, and proceeds from both public and private abuse. It is the originator of minor crime, when it arises from want of employment commensurate to earn sufficient to maintain a large and growing family so often to be found in the hovels of the poor; of the greater offences, when it is owing to idleness, and a total dislike to labour, of which there are but too many instances, the individuals never attempting to work more days than will procure food, and of that a scant portion for the family, while for their particular self they make up the deficiency by a quantity of those pernicious spirits so destructive to health, and become besotted the rest of their time, until they are compelled to labour for a supply of provision; at length work fails altogether, either from a slackness in trade, or the party having become too enfeebled or besotted to use proper care and exertion. Then, with poverty staring him in the face, his favourite liquor refused, and he turned out of the same house in which he had squandered so much, when flushed with cash, he becomes half mad, the inflamed state of his mind from drink adding to it, and the wretches he had associated with in his boozing hours, being of the worst description, giving bad advice, he is tempted and fails.—But there are others who struggle in vain, and can only get a partial employ at most; who find, strive to their utmost, they cannot gain sufficient to drive 'the gaunt wolf, famine' from the door, and are doomed to behold the wife and children of their love, dearer to them than life, in a state of starvation—what wonder that they should be induced to steal food to soften the cravings of hunger, and alleviate the bitter cries of the young and helpless infants? Parental affection is strong, and what for himself a man would scorn to do, for the sake of his poor and suffering child he rushes to, and rather than behold his family dying in the agony of starvation, he begins by robbing victuals; for this he is placed in prison with a set of reckless vagabonds, by whom he is taught to become as degraded as

themselves, and crime following crime, he stops not till he rises to the acme of his profession. Whereas, if this description of prisoners had been kept apart, he would have returned to society nothing the worse for his incarceration.—Early marriages are one of the great causes of poverty, a folly to which the labouring classes are greatly addicted, getting large families before they are enabled by their strength or abilities to maintain them. Dr. Granville made a very curious table, showing the ages at which they marry, and as his calculation is made upon his Lying-in Hospital Practice, which is confined to the lower classes, none else taking the benefit of such institutions, it is confirmatory of the fact, and of the extent of this evil."

CHAPTER LIX.
THE JEW'S FAMILY.

In the meantime Mr. de Medina had passed a happy afternoon in company with his two daughters and little Charley Watts.

Tamar acquainted her father and sister with the generous conduct of Rainford towards the boy, who was accordingly fetched by a servant from the lodging which he and his adopted mother had recently occupied in the City.

Tom Rain's kindness in respect to Charley made a deep impression upon Mr. de Medina, who had already heard and seen enough to convince him that the seducer of his daughter possessed many good qualities; especially a generosity of disposition which might have made the envy of a monarch.

Charley had been fortunately retained in complete ignorance of the real cause of the protracted absence of him whom he called by the endearing name of "father." He was too young to entertain suspicions or misgivings on the subject; and the excuses which Tamar had constantly made to account for that absence, had so far satisfied his mind, that he entirely believed them, although he pined for the return of Rainford. When he beheld Tamar weep, which was often—very often—he exerted himself to console her, throwing his little arms round her neck, and yet weeping also! Even when Tamar, with the bitterest anguish, arrayed herself in deep black on the awful morning the results of which she could not have possibly anticipated, she had not the heart to exchange Charley's coloured garments for the mourning ones which had been prepared for him. No—she threw them aside: she had not strength sufficient to place before her own eyes an evidence of the dreadful loss which she deemed herself that hour to sustain!

The dinner-table at Mr. de Medina's house that day, was gayer—oh! far more gay than usual; for a forgiven daughter sate at the board—and Charley Watts was so happy to see his "dear mamma" smile once more, and to receive the positive assurance that he would meet his "papa" in a few days, that it was delightful to behold his sweet countenance animated with such heart-felt, innocent joy.

The attendance of the servants was dispensed with, in order that the conversation might flow unreservedly; and Mr. de Medina felt the full amount of that pleasure which consists in pardoning, as Tamar experienced the ineffable happiness of being by a father pardoned.

And, Esther—beauteous, amiable, generous-hearted Esther,—oh! she was as gay and smiling as she was ever wont to be in her girlhood, ere Tamar's disgrace had carried sorrow into the heart of the family!

In the evening Mr. de Medina bade adieu to his daughters and little Charley, and departed in a post-chaise for Dover, according to the arrangements already made.

That night, when the sisters retired to rest, a touching scene occurred in Esther's chamber; for this amiable girl led Tamar to her drawers, in which she showed her all the music-books and the pictures that had been so religiously preserved.

Then Tamar threw herself, weeping with gratitude and joy, into Esther's arms; and delicious was the embrace of purest affection in which the sisters clasped each other.

"Oh! how can I ever repay thee for so much love, dearest Esther?" murmured Tamar in a tone expressive of her unfeigned sincerity.

"By thinking of me frequently when you are far away," replied Esther, the tears streaming from her eyes as she reflected that they were no sooner re-united than they were about to separate again—for a long, long period—perhaps for ever!

"I shall never cease to think of thee, my Esther," answered the elder sister, as she now began to set at liberty the shining masses of her rich black hair, preparatory to retiring to rest; for she was to share Esther's bed, little Charley being already asleep in an adjoining chamber, the door of communication being left open in case he might awake:—"no, never shall I cease, to think of thee, Esther!" repeated Tamar; "for thou hast always manifested so much devoted affection towards me—and then, too," she added, casting down her blushing countenance, "thou hast endured so much for my sake!"

"Oh! have we not agreed that the past is to be forgotten?" hastily exclaimed Esther, for a moment desisting from the occupation of laying aside her garments. "The deeds that are gone should only engage our thoughts when no hope survives for the future. And how much hope is there yet for *you*!" she added, with an emphasis upon the pronoun.

Tamar started, and gazed steadfastly upon her sister's countenance; for, apart from that emphasis which was not unnoticed, there seemed something mournful in the sweet, liquid tones of Esther's voice.

"Hope for me!" exclaimed Tamar. "Yes—there *is* hope of happiness for me and for him whom I love so tenderly! But you spoke, my beloved sister, as if there were hope for me *alone*—and that there was none for you. Ah! Esther, have no secret from me—for I will never henceforth refuse you my fullest confidence, in the letters which I shall address to you so often—so very often! Esther, my sweet sister—you love!"

The maiden buried her countenance in Tamar's bosom.

"I am not deceived!" continued the latter. "Yes—you love, Esther; and perhaps you are not loved in return? But tell me all, and I may counsel you."

Esther murmured a name; and, as she thus whisperingly pronounced it, her face was burning in its contact with Tamar's bosom—so deeply did she blush in the confusion and shame of that confession of virgin love.

"The Earl of Ellingham!" cried Tamar, echoing the name which her sister had breathed.

"Alas!—yes," answered Esther, raising her beauteous countenance, still suffused with the rich carnation hues of modesty; "I can conceal the truth from my own heart no longer! But he loves another——"

"Whom he can never marry," added Tamar; "and therefore, my beloved sister, there is hope for thee!"

"Can never marry Lady Hatfield!" exclaimed Esther, in a tone of profound surprise.

"Rainford assured me that such is the case," continued Tamar. "I am not aware of the reason, because he did not volunteer an explanation; and it never has been my habit to question him respecting affairs on which he has not spoken freely of his own accord. But this much I can assure you—that Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham will never be united, and that they no longer entertain even the idea of such union. Do not, therefore, perplex yourself relative to the cause of their severance, my darling Esther; but nourish hope—for, oh! it is delicious to feed love upon the manna of hope! And, believe me, the Earl of Ellingham already surveys you with so much admiration—already entertains so exalted an opinion of your character—already looks upon you with such respect, that he cannot fail to experience feelings more tender still!"

"O Tamar! talk not thus—I may not listen to thee!" exclaimed Esther, with fluttering heart and swelling bosom; for, model of purity and innocence as she was, the words of her sister excited pleasurable sensations within her breast.

And thus ever is it with the most chaste, most virtuous, and most unsophisticated maiden, who loves for the first time!

"Nay—do not compel me to keep silence on a topic which *is*—which *must be* dear to your soul, my Esther," said Tamar. "Were human beings to feel shame at loving, there would not be an unblushing cheek in the whole world, save amongst children. Sooner or later, dear sister, every one must feel the influence of that passion, which spares no one. Oh! cold and cheerless, indeed, would this world be, were not the hearts of those who have grown up, and who have cast aside the frivolities of childhood, warmed and irradiated by the beams of Love! Feel not ashamed, then, dearest Esther, on account of this passion which has so imperceptibly stolen upon thee."

"But, after all you have said, Tamar," returned the coy and bashful maiden, "I shall not be able to meet the Earl again without blushing! And then—were I mad enough to indulge in such a hope as you would have me nourish—remember the difference of our creeds!"

"Was it not the Earl himself who suggested the means by which matrimonial rites could be celebrated between his own half-brother and myself?" demanded Tamar eagerly.

"Yes," replied Esther, every feature of her fine aquiline countenance deriving additional charms from the crimson hues which mantled on that splendid face, and spread themselves over her arching neck, her gracefully sloping shoulders, and the rich contours of her virgin bust, which, in the presence of her sister, no invidious drapery now concealed:—"yes, Tamar," she replied; "but there are other—oh! and far more important considerations. Consider how exalted is the rank of that great nobleman—and consider, also," she added, in a mournful tone, "how much our race is still despised even in this land, which boasts of an almost consummate civilisation!"

"The Earl of Ellingham, I feel convinced, despises such absurd—such pitiful prejudices," said Tamar, labouring only to render her sister happy by means of joyous hope. "As an enlightened man, he must recognise how deeply his country is indebted, in respect to its wondrous prosperity, to the commercial enterprise and the financial skill of our nation. Moreover, do we not believe in the same God? For the Almighty whom the Christians worship, is the same who brought our forefathers out of Egypt, and gave them the promised land. In a word, my beloved Esther, Arthur of Ellingham is too noble-minded a being to despise you because you cling to the creed in which you were brought up; and something tells me that my sister is destined to become the Countess of Ellingham."

Esther sighed, but made no response.

Tamar continued to discourse in the same inconsiderate strain for several minutes. She was actuated by the most generous motives towards her sister; but, in the enthusiasm of her affection and gratitude, she forgot that she might only be exciting hopes destined never to receive a fulfilment, and encouraging a passion which, after all, was perhaps doomed to experience the bitterness of disappointment.

At length Esther turned towards her, and exclaimed hastily, "Tamar—if you love me, speak on this topic no more. It may be false shame on my part,—but it seems to me that it is unmaidenly thus to discourse on a subject in which one, who is separated from me by so wide a gulf, is concerned. Alas! deeply do I regret that, in a moment of weakness, I admitted aloud that which my heart had not hitherto dared to whisper even to itself! I should have exercised more command over myself. Oh! I have been foolish—very foolish to permit such a thought even to assume the faintest shape in my imagination. But we will abandon the topic;—and again I say, Tamar—if you love me, renew it not!"

There was a minute's pause, at the expiration of which Esther began to converse gaily and rapidly on Tamar's future prospects in the clime to which it was contemplated that herself and Rainford were to proceed; and the amiable girl communicated to her sister all that she had read concerning the United States of North America. This little manœuvre on the part of Esther was to change the topic of discourse: and Tamar did not attempt to renew a subject which offended the maiden pride of her sister. Oh! happy was Tamar to sleep beneath her father's roof that night—to know, to feel that she was in the parental dwelling again! When she awoke once, while it was yet dark, she fancied that she had been dreaming—so strange did all the incidents of the preceding day appear to be—so truly incredible! But, as she stretched out her arms, they encountered the form of her sister; and then—in the silence and obscurity of the night—Tamar joined her hands and prayed fervently,—far, far more fervently than she had prayed for some years past! And, Christian! darest thou believe that the prayers of the despised Jewess were not wafted with thine own to the throne of the Eternal?

CHAPTER LX.
SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT'S DOMESTIC HEARTH.

It was the morning following the incidents just related; and the scene changes to the house of Sir Christopher Blunt, in Jermyn Street.

The worthy knight and his lady were seated at breakfast.

The table literally groaned beneath the weight of the cold viands placed upon it; for the ex-lady's-maid was particularly addicted to good things, and she moreover thought that it was "quite the rage" to see cold fowls, ham, tongue, Perigord pie, and all kinds of marmalades spread for the morning repast.

Lady Blunt was in her glory of premeditated negligence and studied *deshabillée*. She was arrayed in a pea-green silk wrapper, trimmed all down the front with scarlet bows; and the cape was braided with the same glaring hue, so much affected by a certain Lady of Babylon. Her cap was decorated with ribands likewise of scarlet, and she wore red slippers. Her appearance was indeed most flaming, as she lolled, in delightful lassitude, in a capacious easy chair, with her foot upon an ottoman.

A stranger would have thought that so fine a lady could not possibly touch any thing more substantial than a thin slice of toast or half a muffin for her breakfast; but she had in reality paid her respects—and with a good will also—to every dish upon the table.

Sir Christopher was seated opposite to her, looking like a fish out of water; for, in order to please his dear wife—or rather, to have a little peace and quiet in the house—he had consented to adorn his person with a light blue dressing-gown, fastened by a gold cord and huge tassels at the waist, and a pair of bright red trowsers, large and loose like a Dutchman's. Moreover, a scarlet silk cap, with a long gold tassel, was perched airily over his left ear; so that altogether he seemed as if he were dressed out to enact the part of a Turk at a masquerade.

"Shall I cut you a *leetle* slice more ham, my love?" enquired Sir Christopher, in a mincing tone, as if he were afraid of receiving a box on the ears for not speaking civilly enough.

"No, Sir Christopher," answered the lady sharply: "you shan't send me a *leetle* ham, as you call it. I don't like the ham—and that's flat."

"And yet, my love—that is, my dear—" remonstrated the knight gently.

"And yet what?" demanded his wife.

"I *think* I had the pleasure of helping you three times, my love," added Sir Christopher, astonished at his own boldness in uttering the words, the moment they had escaped his lips.

"Three times!" ejaculated the lady, turning as red as her ribands or as her husband's trowsers. "And if I like to be helped six times—or nine times, Sir Christopher—what should you say *then*?"

"Well, my love—I should say——"

"What should you say?" again asked the lady, assuming a menacing attitude.

"Why, my love—that you had a very good appetite," responded the knight, looking as miserable as if he expected eight finger nails to fasten on his cheeks the very next moment.

"I have no appetite, Sir Christopher!" cried the lady in a petulant tone, as she sank back again into her lounging attitude: "three miserable bits of ham, and a trifle of cold pie, with may be a taste of the chicken, and just one cut out of the tongue——"

"And two eggs, my love," suggested Sir Christopher meekly.

"Well—and two tiny eggs," continued the lady;—"I am sure all that doesn't say much for one's appetite. Why, when I was at Lady Hatfield's, I used to eat three great rounds of bread-and-butter, crustinesses and all."

"But you are no longer at Lady Hatfield's, my angel," said Sir Christopher, simpering; "you are with one who adores you—who has given you his name—a name, I flatter myself, that carries weight with it, in certain quarters; although, when I did so far forget myself as to put up for Portsoken——"

"Now, Sir Christopher, pray let us have none of that nonsense, if *you* please!" interrupted Lady Blunt, in a tone and with a manner which showed that she knew full well she should be obeyed. "I can't a-bear to hear even the word *Alderman* mentioned, ever since a lady I lived with once in the City talked something about the Guildhall police-court when she missed the silver spoons——"

"My dear, my dear," said Sir Christopher; "you forget that you are now Lady Blunt! Pray let us change the topic."

"Well, so we will," she cried sharply; "and I'll tell you what we'll talk about."

"What, my best love?" asked the knight.

"Your best love!" almost shrieked the lady. "Then you must have other loves, if I'm your best! Oh! Sir Christopher, was it to hear this that I gave up every thing—all my prospects in life—to become yours?"

"My dear girl," said the knight meekly, "I most humbly submit to you that I do not think you had so very much to give up when I asked you to become Lady Blunt."

"What! do you call a good place and being my own mistress, nothing to give up?" cried Charlotte. "Twenty-four guineas a-year, and the chance of marrying a Duke or a Prince!"

"Well—well, my love, we will not dispute," said the knight, who in his heart wished to God that she never *had* given up the prospects she spoke of; or that she *had* married some Duke or Prince—in which latter case Sir Christopher would not have envied either his Grace or his Royal Highness, after the trifling experience he had already enjoyed relative to the fair one's temper.

"No—I should think *you* would *not* dispute, either, Sir Christopher!" cried the vixen, tossing her head. "But I was going to tell you what we would talk about, when you interrupted me so rudely. I was going to say that I do not approve of that ham—or yet the chicken—or yet the tongue; and I do not mean to have my breakfast spoilt in this way. Ring the bell, Sir Christopher."

"My dearest Charlotte——"

"Ring the bell, Sir Christopher!" repeated the lady in a still more authoritative tone, as she looked daggers—nay, regular bayonets—at her miserable husband.

The knight rang the bell accordingly, gulping down a sigh—a very profound sigh—at the same time.

A footman answered the summons.

"John!" said the mistress of the house.

"Yes, my lady," was the reply.

"Tell Mrs. Bodkin to step up—*immediately*," added the wife of Sir Christopher's rash choice.

"Yes, my lady;"—and the footman disappeared, thanking his stars that *he* was not "in for it,"—the bad humour of his mistress being very evident indeed.

In due time Mrs. Bodkin made her appearance, in the shape of a stout, matronly-looking female, "of a certain age," as a housekeeper ought to be;—for Mrs. Bodkin was neither more nor less than that high female functionary in the establishment.

"Mrs. Bodkin!" said Lady Blunt, endeavouring to distort her really pretty face into as stern an expression as possible.

"Yes, my lady," returned the housekeeper.

"That ham is detestable, Mrs. Bodkin."

"Indeed, my lady."

"The cold fowl's abominable!"

"Sure now, my lady!"

"And the tongue frightful!"

"Lawk-a-daisy!—your ladyship don't say so!"

"I *do* say so, though, Mrs. Bodkin!" cried Sir Christopher's better half; "and I just tell you what it is—I don't mean to have my breakfast spoilt in this way; and if you can't find tradesmen who'll supply good things——"

"Why, please your ladyship," interrupted the housekeeper, quite astounded at these accusations against comestibles which she knew to be excellent: "Mr. Smuggs, who sent in the ham and tongue, is purveyor to His Majesty; and——"

"Then if His Majesty chooses to put up with Mr. Smuggs's rubbish, Lady Blunt will *not*!" exclaimed the mistress of the house, glancing indignantly, first at the petrified Mrs. Bodkin and then at the dumb-founded Sir Christopher.

There was, as romancists say, an awful pause.

Mrs. Bodkin knew not whether she were standing on her head or her heels: Sir Christopher was in an equally strange state of bewilderment as to whether he had heard aright or was labouring under a delusion; and Lady Blunt was triumphant in the impression she had evidently made upon her audience.

"But, my dear angel—my love," at length stammered the knight, "surely you will not—that is, you cannot—I appeal to you, my sweet, as a woman of sound judgment——"

"Sound fiddlestick, Sir Christopher!" interrupted her ladyship contemptuously. "I know what I am saying, and I mean what I say. Mrs. Bodkin, I order you once for all not to deal no more at Smuggs's; and if you can't choose good things, you'd better pack up your things and go about your business."

Now it happened that Mrs. Bodkin had managed, during long years of servitude and by rigid economy, to scrape together a very comfortable independence; and, feeling that she *was* independent, she did not choose, as she afterwards observed to a friend, "to put up with any of missus's nonsense."

"Go about my business, eh!" she accordingly exclaimed. "Well, ma'am—the sooner I do that the better, I think: for since I can't give

saytisfaction here, I'd much raythe resign at once."

"Resign!" echoed Lady Blunt, again turning red as her ribands.

"Yes, ma'am," continued the housekeeper; "*resign* I said; and *you* ought to know that's the right word—for I b'lieve you wasn't always used to sit in the parlour."

"Oh! you wretch!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, now manifesting a violent inclination to go off into hysterics. "Sir Christopher! can you sit there and hear me insulted by that owdacious woman? Turn her out of the house, Sir Christopher—let her bundle, neck and crop, this minute!"

"I raythe think there's no need for bundling in the matter," said the indignant Mrs. Bodkin. "Sir Christopher is too much of a gentleman to ill-treat me, after being eleven years in his service come next Aperil. But I don't require no favours at *your* hands, ma'am—leastways, I wouldn't except them if they was offered."

And in a most stately manner Mrs. Bodkin walked out of the room, leaving the door wide open behind her.

"Sir Christopher!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, bursting into tears—but tears of rage, and not shame.

"Yes, my love," said the knight, who was rendered so nervous by this scene that he appeared to be labouring under incipient *delirium tremens*.

"You're a brute, Sir Christopher!" cried the angel in the pea-green wrapper and the red bows.

"My dear!—my love!" stammered the knight. "It was not my fault—you brought it on yourself—I really think——"

"Oh! I did, did I?" screeched Charlotte; and, unable to control the fury of her passion, she darted upon Sir Christopher, adown whose cheeks the marks of her nails were in another moment rendered most disagreeably visible.

"Lady Blunt!" vociferated the miserable man, struggling to extricate himself from the power of the fury.

"There! now I've taught you not to nag me on another time," said Charlotte, throwing herself back into her chair, already sorry and ashamed for what she had done, but too deeply imbued with vulgar and mean-spirited pride to manifest the least proof of such compunction.

Sir Christopher wiped his bleeding face with his cambric pocket-handkerchief: but his heart was too full to speak. He felt all the indignity which he had just sustained—and yet he had not courage enough to resent it.

The embarrassment of the newly-married pair was relieved, or rather interrupted, by a loud and unusually long double knock, which at that moment awoke every echo, not only in the house itself, but also half-way up Jermyn Street.

A few minutes elapsed, and then the footman entered the breakfast-parlour to announce to Sir Christopher that a gentleman, who had been shown into the drawing-room, wished to speak to him immediately upon most urgent business.

At the same time the servant placed upon the table a card, bearing the name of CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS.

"Tell the gentleman I'll be with him in a moment, John," said Sir Christopher.

The servant bowed and retired.

"Do you know who he is?" asked Lady Blunt.

"No, I do not," responded the knight, more sulkily than he had ever yet dared to speak to his wife.

"Come, now, Sir Christopher," exclaimed her ladyship; "don't have any of your ill-humours with me, because I can't a-bear them. Say you're sorry for what you've done, and I'll not only forgive you, but also patch your face for you with diakkulum plaster. Come, now—do what I tell you."

And as her ladyship seemed to examine her finger nails, as she spoke, in a manner which portended her readiness to make another onslaught, the miserable husband muttered a few words of abject apology for an offence which he had not committed, and the amiable Charlotte vouchsafed a pardon which she should rather have besought than bestowed.

Then there was a little fond—or rather foolish kissing and hugging; and this farce being concluded, the lady hastened to fulfil her promise relative to the diachylon plaster.

When this operation was likewise ended, Sir Christopher cast a rueful glance into the looking-glass over the mantel; and never did a more miserable wight see reflected a more woefully patched countenance. The wretchedness depicted on that face, apart from the long slips of plaster stuck upon the cheeks, contrasted in a most ludicrous fashion with the absurd splendour of the knight's morning attire; and, to use a common phrase, he wished himself at the devil, as he wended his mournful way to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER LXI.
CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS.

Captain O'Blunderbuss was a gentleman of Irish extraction, and, according to his own account, possessed of vast estates in the Emerald Island; but it was evident to all his friends that the rents were very irregularly paid, inasmuch as their gallant proprietor was frequently under the necessity of soliciting the loan of a guinea, and when he could not obtain that sum, his demand would suddenly drop to half-a-crown or even eighteen-pence.

But whenever the Captain talked of his estates, no one ventured to suggest a doubt relative to their existence; for the gallant officer was a notorious duellist, having been engaged as principal in thirty-seven of those pleasant little contests, and as second in ninety-two more.

He was about forty-five years of age, and of exceedingly fierce appearance. His crown was entirely bald; but huge bushes of red hair stuck out between his temples and his ears—enormous whiskers of the same meteoric hue and portent covered half his face—and a formidable pair of moustaches, red also, curled ominously over his upper lip, the ends being twisted and greased so as to look like two small tails.

In person he was tall, thin, but not ill-made. He held himself particularly upright; and as he wore a military undress coat, all frogged and braided in the Polish fashion, and grey trousers with red stripes down the legs, he really looked like what he called himself and was called by others—namely, a CAPTAIN.

But he was not wont to be more explicit relative to his military services than he was definite concerning the locality of his estates. No one knew, and assuredly no one ever ventured to ask him, to what regiment he had belonged. He stated himself to be *unattached*; and that was sufficient.

We should, as faithful chroniclers, observe that it *had* been whispered—but then, scandal is so rife in this wicked world!—that Captain O'Blunderbuss was never in the army at all, and that his formidable name was merely an assumed one; and the newsmongers who propagated these reports behind the gallant gentleman's back, not only ridiculed the idea of his estates, but actually carried their malignant spite so far as to insinuate that he was once the driver of a jaunting-car in Dublin, and at that period bore the name of Teddy O'Flaherty.

Be all this as it may, it is nevertheless very certain that Captain O'Blunderbuss was a great man about town—that he was nodded to by loungers in the Park—shaken hands with by dandies in Bond Street—and invariably chosen as a second in every duel that took place on Wormwood Scrubs, Wimbledon Common, or Battersea Fields.

Such was the terrible individual who was standing on the rug, in a most ferocious attitude, when Sir Christopher Blunt entered the drawing-room.

The Captain desisted from twirling his moustaches, and indulged in a good long stare at the knight, whose half-ludicrous, half-doleful appearance was certainly remarkable enough to attract an unusual degree of attention.

"You resayved my car-r-d, Sir Christopher Blunt?" said the Captain, speaking in a strong Irish accent, and rattling the r in a truly menacing manner.

"Yes, sir—I received the card of Captain O'Blunderbuss," replied Sir Christopher, not knowing what to think or make of his strange visitor.

"And, sure, I'm Capthain O'Bluntherr-buss!" exclaimed the military gentleman, twirling his moustache; "and I've come on the par-rt of my friend Capthain Morthaunt—an honour-r-able man, Sir-r Christopher Blunt!" added the gentleman emphatically, looking awfully fierce at the same time, just as if the unfortunate knight entertained the idea of questioning the honour of Captain Mordaunt.

"I—I've no doubt of it, sir," stammered the intimidated Blunt, looking more wretched in proportion as the tone of his visitor became more excited.

"By the power-rs, I'm glad ye don't doubt it!" cried the Captain; "or you'd find yerself desayved in yer man. Well, Sir-r Christopher, the shor-t and the long of the affair is just this:—My friend Capthain Mordaunt feels himself aggraved on behalf of his sisther-r, and he's put the little business into my hands to manage for-r him."

"I'm convinced that Captain Mordaunt could not have chosen a better friend, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the knight, scarcely able to utter a word, so sorely was he oppressed by vague alarms. "But I hope—that is, I mean, I—in a word——"

"What do ye mane?" demanded the Captain, advancing a pace or two towards the knight.

"Oh! nothing—only——" stammered Sir Christopher, dodging round the table, for fear that the formidable O'Blunderbuss intended an

attack upon him.

"Only what, man?" vociferated the Captain. "Sure, now, ye don't think I'm afther ayting ye up!"

"No—oh! no! I'm not afraid of any gentleman eating me, exactly," observed Sir Christopher. "But if you would state the object of your visit——"

"Be Jasus! and that's soon done!" exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss. "The shor-rt facts is these:—Capthain Morthaunt is mightily attached to his sisther-r, Miss Julia, who's a most amiable lady—for I've jist been breakfasting with her-r and her-r brother at their lodgings in Half Moon Street. Miss Morthaunt, as per-rhaps you are aware, returned home to her father's mansion—a sweet place, by the bye, in Connamar-r-ra—when you desayved her in the most gross—the most infamous manner, by running away with a lady's-maid instead of her dear self——"

"Captain O'Blunderbuss," said Sir Christopher, "she of whom you speak is now Lady Blunt."

"And much good may she do ye, Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the Captain. "But, as I was saying, Miss Morthaunt comes back to London again, smar-rting under the influence of her wrongs, which her brother has resolved to avenge. And, therefore, Sir Christopher, you'll be so good as jist to say whether it shall be on Wor-rmwood Scr-rubs or Wimbledon Common; and we'll be there punctual to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

The worthy knight looked perfectly aghast. He began to understand the real drift of Captain O'Blunderbuss's visit; and he entertained the most unmitigated abhorrence of the mere idea of a duel.

"Well, Sir Christopher, say the wor-rd!" resumed the gallant gentleman with as much unconcern as if he were making arrangements for a party of pleasure. "But per-rhaps ye'd like to consult a frind—or refer-r me to him. That's the best way! Leave it to your frind and me; and we'll settle everything so comfortable that you'll not have the least throuble in the wor-rld. You can get your breakfast a thrifle earlier than usual——"

"Breakfast!" echoed Sir Christopher, in a deep sepulchral tone; "breakfast—when one is going out to be shot at!"

"Be the power-rs! and why not?" demanded the warlike Captain. "But here we are, wasting our precious time, while we ought to be settling the little business and thrying the pisthols at the Gallery."

"The pistols!" groaned Sir Christopher, his visage lengthening most awfully, and his under-jaw completely dropping through intense alarm.

"Be Jasus! and what would ye fight with, if it isn't pisthols?" cried the Captain.

"But pistols—pistols are so apt to—to—kill people," observed the knight, shaking from head to foot.

"Is it afraid ye are?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, twirling his moustache, as he surveyed Sir Christopher with cool contempt.

"I do not admit such an imputation," answered the knight; "but I will not fight with this mad-cap Mordaunt. The law shall be my protection. I am my own master—I married whom I chose—and I will not be bullied by any man living."

The astonishment depicted on the countenance of Captain O'Blunderbuss, as these words met his ears, was mistaken by the knight for a feeling of apprehension; and thus he had grown bold, or at least energetic in his language, as he had proceeded.

"Yes, sir," he added emphatically, "the law shall protect me."

"Is it shir-rking that ye mane?" asked the Captain. "Because, if it is, I shall feel myself bound to administer a dacent drubbing to ye, Sir Christopher. Why, sir—it's a rale insult to *me* to refuse to fight with my frind!"

And, as he uttered these words, the Captain advanced in a menacing fashion towards the knight.

"Keep off, sir! don't attempt violence against me!" exclaimed Sir Christopher Blunt, rushing towards the fire-place to seize the poker. "I'll not stand it, Captain O'Blunderbuss—I have been a Sheriff in my time—I once put up for Portsoken—and I'll not submit to any insult."

"Then name your frind, sir!" thundered the gallant officer; "or-r I'll not lave a whole bone in your skin."

"Well—I will, I will!" ejaculated Sir Christopher, anxious to get rid of his fire-eating visitor on any terms. "Go to my nephew, Mr. Frank Curtis: he has killed his man often enough—according to his own account——"

"Be the power-rs! that jist suits me to a tay!" exclaimed the Captain; "for may be he and me could jist amuse ourselves with an exchange of shots afther you and my frind Morthaunt have settled your own small thrifle. 'T would be a perfect God-send to me; and I've no doubt your nev-vy will be of the same mind. Where does he hang out?"

Sir Christopher hastily mentioned the address of Mr. Frank Curtis; and Captain O'Blunderbuss stalked away, hugely delighted at the idea of being about to form the acquaintance of a gentleman every way so worthy of his friendship as the knight's nephew appeared to be.

Fierce indeed was the aspect of Captain O'Blunderbuss as he marched through the streets to the address indicated by the knight; and to the great joy of the military gentleman, he found, on his arrival, that Mr. Frank Curtis was at home.

"But he's not up yet, sir," said the spruce-looking tiger who opened the front door at which the Captain had given one of his tremendous double knocks.

"Never mind, my boy," exclaimed the visitor in an awe-inspiring tone. "Your masther will be glad to see me, or I'm mightily

desayved."

"What name shall I say, sir?" inquired the tiger.

"Faith! and I'll just take my name up along with me, my lad," returned the Captain. "Which floor may it be now?"

"First floor, sir,—and the bed-room's at the back."

"By Jasus! you're a smar-rt lad, and a credit to your masther!" exclaimed the Captain. "The next time I come, I'll make ye a present of sixpence."

And with these words Captain O'Blunderbuss marched up stairs.

On reaching the landing, he knocked at the back-room door with his fist, as if he were practising how to fell an ox; and to this peremptory summons an invitation to "come in" was returned.

The Captain accordingly stalked into the chamber, where Mr. Frank Curtis was breakfasting in bed, a table well spread being drawn up close by the side of his couch.

"Be Jasus! I knew you was a boy afther my own heart!" ejaculated the Captain, as he caught sight of a bottle of whiskey which stood near the tea-pot: then, closing the door, he advanced up to the bed, and, pulling off his buckskin glove, said, "Misther Curtis, here's my hand. Tip us your's, my boy—and let's know each other without any more pother."

Mr. Frank Curtis accepted the proffered hand with delight; for the amiable deportment of the visitor now relieved his mind from the vague fears that had been excited in it by the unceremonious entry and ferocious appearance of the Captain.

"And how are ye, Misther Curtis?" continued this gentleman, drawing a chair close to the bed, and depositing his gloves in his hat, and his hat on the table.

"Quite blooming, old fellow, thank'ee!" returned Frank, to whom all this familiarity was by no means displeasing. "But what will you take? shall I ring for another cup and plate? or will you take a dram of the whiskey?"

"The potheen, my boy—the potheen for me!" exclaimed the Captain, grasping the bottle.

"You'll find it rather good, I fancy," said Curtis. "My friend the Russian Ambassador sent it round last night, with his best respects ——"

"And my respects to him and to you both!" cried the Captain: then, having drained his glass, he drew a long breath, and said, "Be Jasus! that's some of the right sor-rt!"

"Help yourself then, old fellow!" said Frank, in as free and easy a manner as if he had known his visitor all his life. "I can get plenty more where that came from. Old Brandyokouski, the Polish Ambassador's butler, has had orders to give me the entire run of his master's cellar; for me and his Excellency are as thick as two thieves. He is pestering me from morning to night to dine with him——"

"No wonther, Misther Curtis!" interrupted the Captain; "for you're the most agreeable jintleman I've the honour to be acquainted with."

"And what's your name, old boy?" asked Frank, as he proceeded with his breakfast.

"Captain O'Blunderbuss, at your service, my dear frind," was the answer, while the individual who gave it helped himself to another glass of the whiskey, which was certainly the best that the *Stilton Cheese* round the corner could supply.

"Delighted to form your acquaintance, Captain!" exclaimed Curtis, suddenly becoming a trifle less familiar,—for the name was well known to him, in connexion too with the notoriety of a duellist. "And might I inquire what business——"

"Oh! we'll talk about that presently," interrupted the Captain. "Your uncle, Sir-r Christopher Blunt, recommended you to me in the strongest ter-rms—the most flatter-ring ter-rms, I may say——"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mr. Curtis, with unfeigned surprise—for he had not seen, nor spoken to the knight for some weeks.

"Be the power-rs! he gave you a splindid char-r-acter, Misther Curtis!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss; "and it was quite longing to know ye, I was. But we'll talk on business presently. I'm in no hurry—and we'll have a cozie chat first. May be my name is not altogether strange to ye?"

"By no means," answered Curtis, now thoroughly convinced that the object of his new friend's visit was altogether of an amicable character. "I have heard of your renown, and must say that I have envied it. But I've done a little in the same line myself—chiefly in France, though. I'll be bound the name of the Marquis of Soupe-Maigre is not unknown to you."

"Yes—I've heard spake of it," returned the Captain, helping himself to another glass of whiskey.

"Well—the Duke and me fought with small swords for three hours one morning," continued Frank; "and at length I managed to scratch the little finger of his left hand. In France, you know, a duel always ends when the first blood is drawn; and so the Count flung away his sword, acknowledged that I'd beat him, and we've been bosom friends ever since."

"Give me your hand, my broth of a boy!" exclaimed the Captain: "I was not desayved in you! You're as fine spirited as your potheen. Why! be the power-rs, you're a confir-rmed duellist."

"To be sure! and I have killed my man, too," responded Frank, delighted to perceive that he had made a deep impression on his companion. "There was the famous Spaniard, you know—what was his name again? Oh! ah! Don Juan Stiletto del Guerilla! He was a dreadful fellow—the terror of all Paris, where he was staying when I was also there. Well, one evening—it was at the King's fancy-ball—this Portuguese fellow gave himself such airs that there was no bearing him. He insulted all the gentlemen, and smirked at all the

ladies. At length the Archbishop of Paris, who was in full canonicals, appealed to me to put down the insolent Italian; I undertook the task—and picked a quarrel with him in no time. The ladies all looked upon me as one devoted to death: and though I say it who shouldn't, a great deal of tender sympathy was shown towards me. Well, next morning me and the German met on the very top of Montmartre; and in a quarter of an hour my gentleman was weltering in his blood. That affair won for me the love of the beautiful Countess of Dunkirk:—but she is gone down to the tomb—and I am left behind to mourn her loss!"

And Mr. Frank Curtis took a large bite of a muffin, doubtless to subdue the sigh which rose to his lips at this sad reminiscence.

"Be the holy poker-r! it's a touching business," cried the Captain, who had by this time fully seen through the mendacious braggadocio of Mr. Frank Curtis, and had come to the conclusion that he was as great a coward in reality as his uncle.

But the gallant Captain O'Blunderbuss did not choose to suffer the young gentleman to perceive that he understood him, as the whiskey was too much to his taste to allow him to lose the chance of emptying the bottle by a too precipitate rupture.

Frank, firmly believing that all his fine stories were taken as gospel by his visitor, rattled away in his usual style—heaping lie upon lie at such a rate, that, had his falsehoods been mountains, the piling thereof would have outdone the feats of Titan with Ossa and Pelion.

At length the Captain began to thrust in a few words edgeways, as the contents of the bottle got lower and lower.

"Your uncle, Misther Curtis, seems a nice old jintleman. His face was rarely plasthered this mornin', as if he'd been in the war-r-rs a thrifle or so."

"Perhaps his wife had been giving him a taste of her claws?" said Frank, with a coarse giggle.

"Be Saint Path-rick! and that's just what struck me!" exclaimed the Captain.

"She's a very devil, I know," continued Frank. "But, I say, old fellow—what little business was it that took you to old Sir Christopher's, and made him refer you to me?"

"Is it the little business?" cried the Captain. "Och? and be Jasus! then, it's jist that affair of my friend Morthaunt, who manes to shoot Sir Christopher-r to-mor-r-row mor-r-r-ning before breakfast."

"Shoot Sir Christopher!" ejaculated Frank, apparently more surprised than annoyed.

"Or else jist get shot himself, be the power-rs!" added Captain O'Blunderbuss. "And it's becase it's myself that's Morthaunt's frind, Sir Christopher has referred me to you as his frind."

"Then it's a regular duel?" said Frank, opening his eyes wider and wider.

"The purtiest little affair I ever had a finger in, Misther Curtis," responded the Captain, now looking tremendously fierce; for although he had imbibed at least a pint of pure spirit without experiencing the least inconvenience in respect to his brain, the effects were nevertheless apparent in an awful rubicundity of countenance: "the purtiest little affair, certainly," he continued; "and it now only remains for you and me jist to settle the place—time being of cour-rse in the mornin at eight."

"And do you mean to say that my old uncle has agreed to fight this duel with Captain Mordaunt?" inquired Frank.

"Be Jasus! it's for you to bring him to the scratch, Misther Curtis; or else——"

"Or else what?" demanded the young gentleman, oppressed by a vague presentiment of evil.

"Or else, be the holy poker-r! you must fight *me*!" returned Captain O'Blunderbuss, twirling his moustache in the coolest and calmest manner possible.

"Fight *you*?" ejaculated Frank, turning ashy pale.

"As a matther of cour-rse!" answered the Captain. "A famous duellist like Misther Curtis, can't be at a loss on a point of honour."

"But why the devil should I fight *you*?" demanded the young gentleman, his heart palpitating audibly.

"Why the devil shouldn't ye?" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Answer me that, my frind?"

"My dear sir—it's really—I mean, you—that is to say, I think, with all due deference——" stammered Frank, growing every moment more and more alarmed.

"Be Jasus! I've said nothing I don't mane to stick to!" exclaimed the martial gentleman, now assuming an expression of countenance so fierce that Frank Curtis began to have serious misgivings that his visitor intended to assault him then and there.

"But, my dear Captain——this proceeding——" said Frank, assuming a tone of excruciating politeness.

"Is going on beautifully, Misther Curtis. And so, as you seem to have a little delicacy in putting yourself too for-rward in the matther," continued the Captain, "we'll jist say Battersea Fields, to-morrow mornin', at eight o'clock. Good bye, Misther Curtis."

With these words the Captain took up his hat, and stalked majestically out of the room, banging the door violently after him.

Frank Curtis fell back in his bed, and gave vent to his feelings in a deep groan.

The door opened again with a crash; and the Captain thrust in his inflamed visage, exclaiming, "Ye'll remember, Misther Curtis, that I hould ye responsible in this matther; and that if ye can't bring the uncle to the scratch, ye must come yourself; or, be Jasus! I'll be afther ye to the inds of the ear-rth!" The head was withdrawn again, and the door once more slammed violently. Frank Curtis gave a hollow moan, thrust himself down in the bed, and drew the clothes over his face, as if to shut out some dreadful spectre from his sight.

CHAPTER LXII.
FRANK'S EMBARRASSMENTS.

Thus remained Mr. Frank Curtis for some minutes—each moment expecting that the bed-room door would again open, and that the voice of the terrible Irishman would once more convey some hideous menace to his ears.

But Captain O'Blunderbuss had fairly departed this time; and at length the miserable young man slowly pushed down the clothes, and glanced timidly round the room.

It was no dream—as for an instant he had endeavoured to make himself believe that it was; for there was the chair in the very place where the Captain had sate—there also was the bottle which the Captain had condescended to empty.

"A duel!" groaned Frank, in a sepulchral voice—he who had fought so many in imagination!

Then he remembered that there existed a means of averting all danger from himself; and, elated by the sudden thought, he leapt nimbly from his bed, with the affectionate intention of proceeding forthwith to his uncle, and compelling the old gentleman to go forth and be shot at, whether by Captain Mordaunt or Captain O'Blunderbuss, Frank did not care a fig.

Having hastily dressed himself, the young gentleman hurried off to Jermyn Street: and, on his arrival, he was surprised to find the knight's travelling-carriage at the door, while the servants were busily employed in piling up portmanteaus, and hat-boxes, and bandboxes, and carpet-bags.

"Halloa!" cried Frank to Jeffreys, the groom, who was in the act of hoisting one of the aforesaid articles of luggage to another servant who stood upon the roof of the vehicle: "what does all this mean?"

"Means travelling, Mr. Frank," responded the domestic. "The order was given in a violent hurry—and so I haven't a moment to spare. But here's master and her ladyship."

And, sure enough, Sir Christopher and Lady Blunt made their appearance at that instant, the former enveloped in his great coat and with a silk handkerchief tied round all the lower part of his face,—and Charlotte muffled in a splendid cloak.

"I say, Sir Christopher!" cried Frank: "this won't do at any price, you know."

"What won't do, sir?" demanded the knight in a stern tone. "Now, then, Jeffreys—down with the steps."

"Yes, sir:"—and the steps were lowered accordingly.

Frank stood aghast, as he saw the knight hand his better half into the carriage: and the said better half pouted up her really pretty mouth in a disdainful manner as she passed the forlorn youth.

Sir Christopher was about to follow her into the vehicle, when Frank suddenly seized him by the skirts of his great coat, exclaiming, "You shan't sneak off in this manner: you shall stay to—to——"

"To what?" growled Sir Christopher from the depths of the silk handkerchief which came up to his nose.

"To be shot at!" returned Frank, almost driven to desperation.

The lady inside uttered a scream—Sir Christopher gave a desperate groan, and, breaking away from his nephew, rushed into the carriage—Jeffreys put up the steps and banged the door—and the vehicle rolled away, leaving Curtis standing alone on the pavement, the very picture of the most ludicrous despair.

What was to be done now? The formidable Captain O'Blunderbuss held him—yes, *him*—Frank Curtis—answerable for the appearance of Sir Christopher Blunt on the field of battle; otherwise——but the alternative was too dreadful to think of!

What, then, *was* to be done? Frank saw the impossibility of nerving himself so as to encounter the desperate fire-eater; and yet he knew that the Captain would find him out, even if he removed his abode from the West-End to West Smithfield.

Yet something *must* be done—and that speedily; for it was now two o'clock in the afternoon—and next morning at eight the Captain would expect him at the place of appointment.

An idea struck Frank:—he would go and consult Mr. Howard, the attorney.

To that gentleman's offices he accordingly repaired, composing himself by the way as well as he could, so as not to express by his countenance the alarms which agitated within his breast.

Mr. Howard was disengaged, and gave him an immediate audience.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied, now that you hanged that poor fellow yesterday morning," said Frank, as he took the chair to which the

solicitor pointed.

"It was a duty which I owed to society," returned Howard, laconically, as if the subject were not altogether a pleasant one.

"What an idea!" ejaculated Frank. "But, however, it is done, and can't be undone. After all, he was a brave fellow—a man just such as I could have admired, barring the highway part of his calling. And now, you who are such a stickler about duties to society, and so on—suppose you heard, for instance, that a duel was going to take place between some friends of yours and another party—of course you'd do all you could to stop it—you'd go to Bow Street, and you'd give private information concerning the *where* and the *when*;—or perhaps you'd speak openly, and get the persons bound over to keep the peace—eh?"

"I should not do anything of the kind," answered Howard, who already began to suspect that Mr. Frank Curtis had some special reason of his own for speaking with so much earnestness—indeed, with such an air of appeal, as he now displayed.

"You wouldn't—eh?" exclaimed Frank, grievously disappointed at the ill-success of his little manœuvre. "And why not?"

"Because I should only lose my time for nothing," responded Mr. Howard.

"The devil! Then, did you get Tom Rain hanged because the prosecution put money into your pocket?" demanded Frank.

"Did you merely come to chatter with me, or on business?" asked the lawyer evasively. "If the former, I am busy—if the latter, make haste and explain yourself."

"Well—the fact is," continued Frank, now feeling certain that the entire affair of Tom Rain's prosecution was a very sore subject with the lawyer,—"the fact is, I wanted to speak to you about a little matter—in which my precious old uncle has placed me in a complete fix——not that I care about a duel, you know—I'd see a duel damned first, before I'd care for it—still——"

"Still you would rather not fight it?" observed Mr. Howard, with a slight curl of the lip.

"You see, my dear fellow," proceeded Curtis, "that I have so many affairs of my own to attend to, I really cannot undertake to conduct those of other people. There's my marriage with Mrs. Goldberry coming off in a few days——and now, bother to it! up starts this duel-business——"

"Do explain yourself, Frank!" exclaimed Howard impatiently.

"Well, I will—and in a few words, too. It seems that Captain Mordaunt has taken a tiff at my uncle's conduct towards his sister; and so he sends Captain O'Blunderbuss——"

"Captain O'Blunderbuss, eh!" ejaculated the attorney, now becoming suddenly interested in the narrative of Mr Curtis.

"Yes: a terrible-looking, wild Irishman," returned this young gentleman: "but he didn't frighten me, though——*I* should think not! Do you know him?"

"Only by name," answered Mr. Howard coolly, as he glanced at a suspicious-looking slip of parchment that lay upon his desk. "But go on."

"Well, this O'Blunderbuss, it appears, goes to my uncle, who refers him to me—naturally enough, seeing that I am pretty well experienced in all matters of duelling," pursued Frank. "So the Captain calls on me a couple of hours ago; and we discuss the business in a very friendly way. Every thing is settled pleasantly enough; but before the Captain takes his leave, I catch hold of him by the button, and let him know that if he fails to produce his principal on the ground to-morrow morning, after all the trouble entailed on me, I shall hold *him* answerable accordingly. The Captain looks rather glum at that, because I did tumble down upon him a little unexpectedly with my threat. However, he agrees; and we separate. But, lo and behold! I go to Sir Christopher to tell him how comfortably I have settled the whole business for him—and he is gone—fled—bolted—mizzled—cut his stick—baggage and all, including his wife!"

"And, therefore," observed Howard coolly, "you will have to fight Captain O'Blunderbuss, because *you* will not be able to produce *your* principal."

"It's just this that bothers me," exclaimed Frank. "If the man had offended me, I shouldn't of course mind: in that case, one of us should never quit the ground alive—for I'm a desperate fellow, when once I am in earnest. But here's a poor devil who has never done me any injury, but who seems to me to be a capital hand at the whiskey-bottle,—and my fire-eating temper places us both in that position which compels *him* almost, poor creature! to insist on our exchanging shots. I really feel for the Captain——"

"And not at all for yourself, Frank?" said the lawyer, in his usual quiet manner.

"Oh! not an atom!" ejaculated Mr. Curtis. "But don't you admit that something ought to be done to prevent Captain O'Blunderbuss from becoming the victim of a display of temper so unjust and uncalled for on my part? I wish to heaven my friend the Duke of the Tower Hamlets was in town—he would pretty soon put matters on a proper footing, and save me from the chance of killing a man that has never injured me. But as his lordship the Marquis is *not* in town, why—I must throw myself on your friendship."

"Well—I will undertake to prevent the duel, in this case," said Howard, speaking as quietly as if he believed every word of Mr. Frank Curtis's version of the affair.

"Will you, though?" cried the young man, unable to conceal his joy.

"I will indeed," returned Howard: "so make your mind perfectly easy on that head. Where is the duel—or rather, where ought it to take place?"

"In Battersea Fields, to-morrow morning, at eight precisely," answered Frank.

"Very good," said the lawyer. "Now, you must be with me at a quarter before seven—here, at my office; and I will have a chaise ready to take us there."

"But need we go at all?" asked Frank, his countenance suddenly assuming a woeful expression again.

"We *must* go to the field," replied the solicitor; "but trust to me to settle the matter when we *do* get there. Again I tell you not to make yourself uneasy: I will guarantee the complete settlement of the affair—and in a most peremptory manner too."

"Thank'ee kindly," returned Frank, again reassured. "You have taken a load from my breast: not that I care about fighting, you know—but it must be in a good cause. That was just what I said when my best friend, the Prince of Scandinavia——"

"There's enough of it for the present, Frank," interrupted the lawyer. "Leave the affair to me—and I shall manage it to your complete satisfaction. Be here at a quarter to seven—not a minute later—to-morrow morning,—and now you must permit me to attend to my own engagements."

Frank Curtis took the hint and his leave accordingly, wondering how the lawyer would so manage matters as to subdue the terrible fire-eating propensities of the redoubtable Captain O'Blunderbuss. Nevertheless, the young man placed implicit reliance upon Mr. Howard's promise; and it was with a comparatively light heart that he sped towards use dwelling of Mrs. Goldberry, in Baker Street.

CHAPTER LXIII.
THE MEETING IN BATTERSEA FIELDS.

According to instructions given to his landlady, Mr. Frank Curtis was called at a quarter to six on the morning following the incidents just related; and leaping from his warm bed, he proceeded, with quivering limbs and chattering teeth, to strike a light.

Having, after a great deal of trouble, persuaded the short wick of his candle to catch the flame of the match which he held to it, he drew aside the window-curtains and looked forth to ascertain the nature of the weather.

The result of this survey was by no means reassuring; for a mizzling rain was falling, and a cheerless mist appeared to hang against the window.

Frank closed the curtains again, and looked wistfully at the bed, as if he were more than half inclined to return to it, and leave Captain O'Blunderbuss to do his worst;—but, on second thoughts, he knew that this was a hazardous venture—and, accordingly, he began to huddle on a portion of his garments.

Then commenced the process of shaving—always an unpleasant one, but doubly so by candle-light, and when the hand is so nervous that the chances are equal whether you mow off the hirsute stubble or the tip of your nose.

"Bother to this razor!" cried Frank: "it won't cut at all this morning!"

The fault was not, however, in the razor, but with him who wielded it.

At length, by dint of reiterated scraping, and steadying the right wrist with the left hand, Mr. Frank Curtis managed to achieve this portion of his toilette.

When occupied with his ablutions, he thought that the water had never appeared so icy cold before; and his teeth chattered like a box of dominoes rattling.

The fact was, that the nearer the eventful moment approached, the more alarmed became this heroic young gentleman, lest the lawyer should disappoint him, or deceive himself, in the task of taming the formidable Captain O'Blunderbuss.

It was half-past six before Mr. Curtis quitted his bed-room; and he had just time to take a cup of coffee in his sitting apartment while the girl of the house ran to fetch a cab. She speedily returned with, or rather *in* the vehicle; but when Mr. Curtis had taken her place, he perceived to his dismay that the horse had such an unpleasant knack of suddenly bolting round each corner he came to, and the driver was already so drunk, even at that early hour in the morning, that the chances were decidedly in favour of an upset.

He, however, reached the lawyer's office in safety, though not before the clocks at the West-End were striking seven.

A hackney-coach was already waiting at the door; and the moment Frank rang the office-bell, Mr. Howard appeared.

"Come, jump in—we have not a minute to lose," said the latter.

Frank accordingly entered the coach, in which, to his surprise, he found two ill-looking, shabbily-dressed fellows ensconced. Mr. Howard followed him—the door was closed hastily—and away rolled the vehicle in a westerly direction.

Mr. Curtis was now enabled to examine at his ease—or rather at his leisure, for easy he was not—the two individuals just mentioned.

One was a man of about forty, dressed in seedy black, and with a beard of at least three days' growth, and a shirt that seemed as if it had been worn and slept in too for a fortnight. His face was pale and cadaverous, and its expression sinister in the extreme. His companion was worse-looking and dirtier still; but *his* countenance was red and bloated with intemperance. He carried a stout stick in his hand, and smelt awfully of rum.

"Got your pistols, Frank?" inquired Mr. Howard, when the coach had moved off the pavement.

"Pistols!" repeated the young gentleman, turning dreadfully pale. "I thought you—you—you——"

And his teeth chattered violently.

"I know what I promised; and what I promised I will perform," responded the attorney. "But I thought you might like to make a show of an intention to fight, before I interfered."

"Oh! you know I never bully," exclaimed Frank. "If I made a show of fighting, as you call it, I *would* fight—and not pretend merely."

"Well—just as you like," observed Howard. "We will settle the business the instant we get down there."

"But is the gen'leman sartain the Cap'ain'll be there?" asked the man with the stout stick and the red face.

"Hold your tongue, Proggs!" growled his companion in the shabby black. "These gen'lemen know what they're up to."

Silence then prevailed in the vehicle; and Frank Curtis sate wondering who the strange-looking twain could be. At last he came to the conclusion that they must be constables whom Mr. Howard had called into requisition for the laudable purpose of putting a stop to the duel. Still, such seedy constables were seldom seen: but then, reasoned Frank within himself, they might perhaps be in a state of insolvency—a suspicion certainly warranted by their outward appearance.

The mist-like rain continued; and, though the morning grew a trifle brighter, it was in a very sickly manner. Frank had seldom felt more dispirited in his life, the weather leaguing itself with his own vague apprehensions to render him utterly miserable.

At length the coach reached the vicinity of Battersea Fields; and Mr. Howard pulled the check-string as a signal for the driver to stop.

He then descended; Frank Curtis followed; and the two queer-looking gentlemen alighted also.

"You will keep at a decent distance, Mr. Mac Grab," said Howard, addressing himself to the individual in seedy black.

"Wery good, sir. Proggs," continued Mr. Mac Grab, turning to his companion, "you make a circumbendibus like, so as to cut off the Captain's retreat down yonder. I'll skirt the river a short way, and then drop down on him.".

"All right," growled Mr. Proggs; and off he set in the direction indicated by his master, Mr. Mac Grab.

Howard then took Frank's arm; and they walked on together, the young gentleman shivering and trembling violently.

"What *is* the matter with you?" demanded the lawyer. "You shake just like an aspen."

"Oh! nothing—nothing!" returned Frank, in a faltering tone. "Only it's very cold this morning—and this cursed mist——But there's the Captain already!" he suddenly ejaculated, making a full stop.

Howard glanced in the same direction towards which Frank's eyes were turned, and beheld two individuals at a short distance. One, who was wrapped in a cloak, was standing still; the other was pacing rapidly up and down in the immediate vicinity of his companion, and tossing his arms about as if in a perfect fury of indignation.

"Come on," said the lawyer, dragging forward the terrified Frank Curtis. "There! the person who is walking up and down like a maniac, has caught sight of us——"

"That's the Captain!" almost whimpered the young man. "Oh! my stars! how fierce he does look!"

"Now, then, ye shir-rkers! is it keeping us waiting ye mane?" vociferated the terrible Captain, sending his voice half-way across a field in a tone of awful indignation. "Be Jasus! it's a rale insult to me and my frind, to be seven minutes and a half behind time in this way!"

"We are coming, sir, as fast as we can!" exclaimed Howard: "and may be a little faster than you will find to be agreeable."

"My God! don't irritate him!" implored Frank. "He's capable of——of——shooting us both—as we walk along."

"Don't be such a fool, Frank. You will see a rare bit of fun in a few minutes. Come along!"—and the lawyer dragged his shrinking companion forward.

"Be the holy poker-r!" vociferated the Captain, as Howard and Curtis now drew near enough for him plainly to recognise their countenances: "be the holy poker!" he repeated, his eyes glaring furiously, "Sir Christopher is not here! Morthaunt, my dear frind, ye are swindled—robbed—plunthered—chated of the pleasure of a duel this cold mornin'. But I'll avenge ye, my boy—for I tould that Misther Curtis there that I'd hould him responsible——"

"Come, come, Captain!" exclaimed Howard, as he and Frank now stopped at the distance of a few paces from the warlike officer and his friend Mordaunt: "don't bluster and sputter in this fine fashion——"

"Is it blusther and sputther to me ye mane!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Be Jasus; sir-r—ye shall ate the wor-rds afore we're done. But I'll shoot Mr. Curtis first; and 'tis yourself I'll send headlong afther him. Morthaunt, my frind, instead of being principal now, 'tis second ye must be. So give us the pisthol-case from under your cloak, man."

"With all my heart, Captain!" said Mordaunt, who was a tall, awkward gentleman, about thirty-five years of age, and as like Miss Julia as brother could be to sister.

"Howard—my dear friend—my good fellow," gasped Frank Curtis in the ear of his companion; "is it possible that—that—you've——"

"Be Jasus! we're watched!" suddenly exclaimed the Captain, whose quick eye now caught sight of a man approaching from the next field.

"It's only my servant, sir, who is bringing my case of pistols," remarked Howard. "Not knowing whether you would be here, we kept them in the coach at a short distance."

"Not be here!" repeated the Captain. "Do ye take us for as great cowards as ould Sir Christopher Blunt? Be Jasus——But that man don't look like a servant anyhow!" ejaculated the warlike gentleman, interrupting himself, and fixing a ferocious look upon Mr. Mac Grab, who now came running up to the spot, completely out of breath.

Howard glanced rapidly to the left, and beheld Proggs approaching from that direction.

"Here's another fellow!" exclaimed Mordaunt, who had marked and followed the lawyer's scrutinizing look. "Gentlemen, what *does* this mean?"

"Yes—and be Jasus!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss: "what does this mane? Have ye had recourse to the dirthy expadient of getting constables to come for-ar-rd to spile the purtiest little affair that was ever to come off on a misty mornin'?"

"It don't mean nothink of the kind, Captain," said Mr. Mac Grab gruffly: then, as with a side glance he convinced himself that his follower Proggs was now only a few paces distant in the rear of the warlike Irishman, he continued thus:—"The fact is, I'm a hofficer—and you're my prisoner."

"An officer-r-r!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, his countenance becoming actually purple with rage, while Frank Curtis, suddenly assured that all prospects of a duel were at an end, began to enjoy the scene amazingly.

"Yes, sir—this person is an officer," said Mr. Howard, in the calmest manner possible; "and I am the attorney for the plaintiff—Mr. Spriggins—at whose suit you are now captured for three hundred and forty-seven pounds, including costs."

"Blood and thunther-r!" roared Captain O'Blunderbuss, swelling so tremendously with passion that he seemed as if about to burst through his military frock-coat with its frogs and braidings: "this is a rale insult not ounly to me, but also to ould Ireland. Mor-r-thaunt, my boy——"

"It's a very awkward business, Captain," said the gentleman thus appealed to. "But I do not see why it should prevent the business on which we met. Pistols first—prison afterwards."

"That won't do," said Mr. Mac Grab.

"Not a bit," growled Proggs, who was now stationed close behind the Captain.

"Bastes of the ear-rth!" roared O'Blunderbuss: "do——"

"Come now—enough of this gammon," interrupted Mac Grab. "If you won't walk quiet off with us, we must see what force will do."

"It is no use to resist, my boy," whispered Mordaunt to his friend, who was literally foaming at the mouth. "But we will find another occasion to punish these cowardly fellows," he added aloud, casting fiery glances upon the lawyer and Frank Curtis.

"Be Jasus! and I'll have some of it out of 'em now!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss; and springing upon the unfortunate Frank, he administered to this young gentleman three or four hearty cuffs, before a hand could be stretched out to withhold him.

Curtis roared and wriggled about with the pain; but he was speedily released from the effects of this onslaught, Mac Grab, Proggs, and the lawyer, hastening to his assistance.

The warlike Captain was then borne away to the hackney-coach, in which he was safely deposited, Mordaunt obtaining leave from Mr. Howard to accompany his friend in the same vehicle as far as the prison to which he was to be consigned.

Frank Curtis declined forming one of the party; and while the coach proceeded in as direct a line as possible for Horsemonger Lane gaol, the young gentleman sped merrily along alone and on foot, delighted, in spite of the drubbing which he had received, to think that the redoubtable Captain O'Blunderbuss was on his way to a place where his warlike propensities stood every chance of being "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd," at least for a season.

You may conceive, gentle reader, that Captain O'Blunderbuss was in a dreadful rage at being interrupted in the midst of his favourite pursuit—especially as the interruption was of so unpleasant a nature as that described. But his vapouring and blustering produced little effect upon Messrs. Mac Grab and Proggs, who never spoke a word during the journey from Battersea Fields to Horsemonger Lane, save to answer in an affirmative when Mr. Howard proposed that they should stop at a public-house for a few moments to partake of some refreshment; and then they each responded—"Yes—rum, please."

The Captain himself was accommodated with a glass of whiskey: Mordaunt and the lawyer took nothing.

The vehicle then proceeded, without stopping, to the prison, where the gallant Captain—oh! most ignominious fate!—was handed over to the care of the turnkeys in the debtors' department of the establishment.

CHAPTER LXIV.
OLD DEATH AND HIS FRIEND TIDMARSH.

The incident which occupied the preceding chapter occurred, as will probably be recollected, on the morning of the Wednesday after the Monday on which Thomas Rainford was hanged and resuscitated.

It was on the evening of the same Wednesday, and at about eight o'clock, that we must again introduce the reader to the laboratory in Red Lion Street.

A cheerful fire burnt in the grate; and before it sate Dr. Lascelles and the Earl of Ellingham, engaged in conversation and also in the discussion of a very excellent bottle of claret conveyed thither from the Earl's own cellar in Pall Mall.

"I wish Jacob Smith would return," said the young nobleman, looking anxiously and nervously at his watch.

"In the same manner have you renewed the conversation after every pause that has occurred during the last two hours," observed the physician. "My dear Arthur, there is nothing like patience in this world. You may depend upon it, all goes on well—or you would too soon have received the tidings of any evil that might have occurred. Bad news fly uncommonly fast."

"I wish that I possessed a small amount of your calm and unexcitable temperament, doctor," returned the Earl. "But I am so fearful lest any untoward accident should mar the success—the complete success of all our plans."

"Do not meet evils half way," said the doctor. "Every thing has gone on well as yet. Mr. de Medina acted with the dispatch of a regular man of business. No one could possibly have managed better. He left on Monday evening for Dover, where he remained but just long enough yesterday morning to hire a cutter and arrange with the captain to have her in readiness to leave at a moment's warning. He was back in London again last night by seven; and fortunately your half-brother was so far recovered as to be able to depart in company with Jacob. The disguise you procured for him was impenetrable to even the eyes of the most experienced Bow Street runner. He and his young companion reached Dover early this morning; and I dare swear that long before this hour gallant Tom is safe in Calais, where Mr. de Medina and his daughters will also be some time to-morrow. Then off they all go to Paris, where you are to rejoin them."

"Yes: all has been well arranged by Mr. de Medina," said the Earl; "and I have no doubt that the results will be as you anticipate. But I charged Jacob to return post-haste to London—I begged him not to spare the gold with which I furnished him, so that he might be back here as soon as possible to assure us of my brother's safe embarkation for France. And yet the lad is not with us yet! You must admit, doctor, that I am not to be blamed for my apprehensions: for misadventures and obstacles, altogether unforeseen—never dreamt of, indeed—do start up so suddenly, that I confess I shall enjoy no peace of mind until I receive from Jacob's own lips the assurance that the object of my anxiety is beyond the reach of all danger."

"How can it be otherwise than that he is already safe?" demanded the physician somewhat impatiently.

"Who can tell what may happen?" asked the Earl. "On Monday night, while Thomas was sleeping and profound tranquillity as well as perfect security seemed to prevail in the house, was not the grand secret suddenly menaced by the appearance of one whom only a few hours previously I had been led to consider numbered with the dead? Yet doubtless you thought at the moment, while at your house in Grafton Street, that all was calm and unendangered in Red Lion Street."

"The sudden turning up of that old scoundrel whom Thomas Rainford supposed to be dead, and of whom you have since told me so much, was certainly very remarkable," observed the physician. "But you certainly managed the matter most cleverly—the more so, too, inasmuch as my patient knew nothing of the transaction until it was all over."

"Fortunately he slept, as I have already told you," said the Earl. "That excellent lad Jacob was for a few minutes completely overcome—stunned—stupified, indeed, when he recognized the countenance of Benjamin Bones; and I myself was strangely excited when those terrible words, '*'Tis Old Death!*' fell upon my ears—for I knew to whom they applied. Moreover, Jacob let the lamp fall; and I dared not move to obtain another light—for Bones began to struggle furiously. I was sadly alarmed lest my half-brother should awake: but fortunately his slumber was profound."

"And then, I believe, Jacob Smith recovered himself and procured another light?" said the physician interrogatively.

"You see, doctor," returned the Earl, with a smile, "that you did not listen very attentively to my narrative of the transaction, when you came back to the house yesterday morning."

"Because, I remember, you would persist in telling me the story at a time when I was thinking of the best restoratives for my patient," answered Lascelles, also with a good-natured laugh. "But pray give me all the details now—and the occupation will while away the time until Jacob makes his appearance."

"God grant that he may soon come!" exclaimed the Earl. "But let me resume at the point where we interrupted ourselves."

"I asked you if Jacob did not procure another light the moment he had recovered his presence of mind," said the physician: "but I remember now that you availed yourself of the opportunity afforded by the darkness, to drag the old man back to the staircase leading into the subterranean, and that the terrible menaces you whispered in his ears reduced him to the passiveness of a lamb. He is a hideous-looking man—for, after all you learnt from your brother concerning him, it is clear that he is the same whom I had seen in this house on one or two occasions, but whose name I did not then know."

"He is clearly the same person," said the Earl.

"Well—and so you got him down the break-neck stairs," added the doctor; "and *then* it was you called to Jacob to procure another light, Rainford continuing asleep the whole time. But, after all that had taken place in the morning, his slumber would necessarily be heavy."

"I can assure you that a more dangerous task I had seldom undertaken than that of dragging the old villain down those stairs," said the Earl; "and how it was that we both escaped broken necks, I am at a loss to divine. However, I did get him safely down to the bottom; and the great door being then bolted only on the same side as the stairs, I had no difficulty in opening it. Jacob came down with the light; and I compelled the old man to rise, and enter the subterranean with me."

"I will be bound his hideous countenance was convulsed with rage and alarm?" exclaimed the doctor. "But I must get a cast of his head when he dies—which I dare say will be upon the scaffold."

"Yes: he was positively horrible with mingled wrath and fear," continued the Earl. "But I had no pity for him—as I have none now. I made him walk a few paces in front of me, Jacob accompanying us with the light. Once he turned round, and fixed on the lad a look so full of infernal spite—of demon-like malignity, that I was horrified to think that such hateful emotions could find an abode in the breast of any human being. Jacob Smith recoiled in affright—as if from the glare of a serpent's eyes; but I whispered a word to reassure him—and almost at the same moment I beheld, by the light of the lamp, a door in the side of the subterranean. You know the suspicions which had already filled my mind: they then returned with renewed vigour to my memory—and I felt convinced that I touched on the threshold of a discovery. I commanded the old man to stop—suffering him to believe that I had pistols about me, and should not hesitate to use them in case of need. The door was speedily opened——"

"And it led into the very dungeon where you were confined for four weeks," said Dr. Lascelles. "The villains—the scoundrels, who perpetrated such an outrage!"

"Yes—it was the very same dungeon," continued the Earl; "and my blood ran cold as I glanced within. Jacob Smith understood the discovery that I had made, and uttered an ejaculation of horror. '*I now know at least one of the authors of* my *imprisonment*!' I said, turning to Old Death, whose eyes were again glaring fiercely upon the lad. '*But*,' I added, '*this is no time for question and answer on that head.*'—Then, taking the lamp, I held it in such a manner as to be able to throw its light upon that part of the cell where I had opened to myself the means of escape; and I perceived that the masonry had not been replaced. I accordingly resolved not to imprison the old man there: and yet, what could I do with him? Turning round to examine more minutely the nature of the place, I beheld another door, on the opposite side of the subterranean. Old Death marked the fact of my eyes lingering thereon; and he gave vent to something between a menace and a prayer.—'*I seek not to harm you*,' was my reply; '*but as it once suited* your *purposes that I should become a captive here for a few weeks, it is now expedient according to* my *views that you should become a prisoner for a few days. In with you, old man!*' I added, having in the meantime opened the door of this second cell!"

"And there the old reprobate is now cooped up, along with his friend Tidmarsh," exclaimed the physician, laughing at the idea of the two cronies being caught in one of their own snares;—for that they *were* companions in iniquity he had now but little doubt.

"You must admit that the case was a desperate and an urgent one," continued the Earl. "From all you had told me concerning this Tidmarsh, I felt well persuaded that he was likely to visit the subterranean; and I knew that, were such a casualty to ensue, Old Death had merely to raise his voice in order to obtain his release."

"And so you quit the subterranean and run round to Turnmill Street to tell old Tidmarsh that Dr. Lascelles wishes to see him immediately in his laboratory?" exclaimed the doctor, again laughing heartily—for the entire affair seemed to have touched a long slumbering chord of merry humour in his breast.

"Precisely so," returned the young nobleman. "Tidmarsh, however, eyed me very suspiciously, and muttered something to himself about the doctor being very indiscreet;—but I affected not to notice his peculiarity of manner. He came round to the house—and you know the rest."

"Yes: you took him down to join his friend Old Death, as it seems the rascal is called," observed the doctor.

"And there they must remain until Jacob Smith shall have returned with the tidings of my brother's safe embarkation," continued the Earl. "It is true that they are both utterly ignorant of his escape from death—his extraordinary resuscitation, thanks to your profound knowledge and generous aid, doctor;—but, as we have every reason to believe at least one of them to be Thomas's enemy, they shall neither obtain a chance of discovering the secret of his *new existence*, as I may indeed term it—at all events not until he shall be beyond the reach of danger. And, do you know, it strikes me most forcibly that Tidmarsh was the gaoler who attended upon me during my incarceration in the dungeon below? Although the person who *was* my gaoler, invariably spoke in a feigned tone, and as laconically as possible, yet I am almost certain that it was the voice of Tidmarsh. Moreover, he seemed for a moment so astounded—so struck, when I presented myself at the door of his dwelling in Turnmill Street, to deliver the forged message which induced him to accompany me round to this house, that I am convinced he knew me. For, though he never permitted me to catch a glimpse of his countenance, when he used to visit me at the trap in the dungeon-door—still he might have seen my face. However, when I presented myself at his abode in the way which I have described, my manner appeared so off-hand and sincere, that had any suspicions of

treachery entered his mind, they were dispelled almost immediately. But, doctor, I abominate the necessity of having to use duplicity even towards villains of that stamp!"

"Your compunction is carried too far, my dear Arthur," returned Lascelles. "It was necessary to get that scoundrel Tidmarsh into such a snare, as to place him beyond the possibility of doing mischief; and, though the narrative which you have now given me more in detail than you did yesterday morning, when you hastily sketched these incidents to your brother and myself,—though, I say, it makes me laugh—a habit not frequent with me—I really commend your foresight in averting danger, as well as your bravery in carrying into effect the requisite precautions."

"I deserve and require no praise, doctor," answered the Earl. "What would I not have done to ensure the safety of him who has behaved so generously to me? During the whole of Monday night, I sate by his bed-side, anxiously awaiting the moment when slumber should leave his heavy eye-lids; for I knew that I had welcome—most welcome tidings for his ears. But he slept on until you came: and then, doctor, you were a witness of the joy which he experienced on learning that he had not been the cause of the death of Benjamin Bones—miscreant though the man be!"

Scarcely were these words uttered, when a low but hasty knock at the front door caused Lord Ellingham to spring from his seat—seize the lamp—and hasten to answer the summons.

Dr. Lascelles could hear the Earl ejaculate the words—"Jacob Smith!"—then a hurried whisper took place in the hall;—and, in another moment, the joyous exclamation—"Thank God! thank God!" bursting from the young nobleman's lips, met the physician's ears.

And Dr. Lascelles thereby knew that Rainford had succeeded in quitting the shores of England in safety!

CHAPTER LXV.
THE EXAMINATION.

The reader will remember that, according to the arrangements originally chalked out, Lord Ellingham and Jacob Smith were to have accompanied Tom Rain to France. But this project was disturbed by the appearance of Old Death in the house in Red Lion Street, and the incidents to which it gave rise, as narrated in the last chapter.

For, the Earl—having succeeded in making Old Death and Tidmarsh his prisoners—resolved to remain in the house, not only that he might, by means of frequent visits to the subterranean, guard against their escape, but also to supply them with food and to liberate them when circumstances should render their farther confinement unnecessary.

Thus was it that Tom Rain and Jacob had proceeded without the Earl to Dover, and that the lad had returned thence to London the moment he had seen Rainford safe on board the cutter which Mr. de Medina had hired especially to convey him to France. Nay—Jacob was not content with merely witnessing the embarkation of the individual to whom he had become so deeply attached; but, in spite of the instructions he had received alike from the Earl and Tom Rain himself to return with the least possible delay to the metropolis, he had lingered on the pier at Dover until the white sails of the cutter were no longer in sight.

He therefore arrived somewhat later in London than had been expected, although he travelled post and spared not the gold placed at his disposal to urge the postillions on: but when he frankly admitted to Lord Ellingham and the doctor the reason of his retarded appearance in Red Lion Street, they could not find it in their hearts to utter a word of reproach or blame.

No:—for Lord Ellingham's joy was now as exuberant as his apprehensions had a short time previously been strong and oppressive; and he wrung the hand of the humble Jacob as if that lad had been his own brother!

"We will presently liberate our prisoners," said the Earl, when Jacob had related the particulars of his journey with Rainford to Dover, and of the latter's safe embarkation. "But, before I suffer them to go at large, it behoves me not only to adopt the means requisite to elicit certain explanations interesting to myself, but also to take those steps that will effectually prevent the mysterious subterraneans and dungeons of this establishment—or rather, of the *two* houses—from being accessible or available to the miscreants whom we are about to set free. Conceiving that Jacob would be sure to come back this evening, and intending that his return should be followed by the examination and liberation of those two men, I have ordered the three faithful domestics who assisted us so materially on Monday morning, and on whose fidelity I can rely with so much confidence, to be here at half-past nine o'clock."

"For what purpose?" demanded the physician, in astonishment.

"To increase our number so as to overawe the wretches who are to appear before us," replied the Earl. "It is not that I fear to give them an inch of vantage-ground; but were they to find themselves in the presence of only two men and this lad, they might attempt resistance, and use a violence that would alarm the neighbourhood;—and I need hardly say, doctor, how necessary it is for all our sakes that we should not be placed in a position which would compel us to give to a magistrate any explanation of the modes in which we severally became acquainted with this establishment or those two vile men."

"Your precautions are most admirably forecast, my dear Earl," responded Dr. Lascelles. "Hark! there is a single knock at the front door!"

"Run, Jacob, my boy," said the Earl: "my servants have arrived."

The lad left the room without taking a light, but the young nobleman almost immediately rose and followed him—a second thought suggesting the prudence of assuring himself against the coming of any unwelcome intruder instead of his servants.

By the time the Earl reached the middle of the stairs leading down into the hall, Jacob had opened the street-door.

"Mrs. Bunce!" exclaimed the lad, starting back half in affright, as he recognised her wizen countenance by the feeble light that streamed from an adjacent window.

"What! Jacob—you here!" cried the woman. "Why—how come you in this house? and what have you been doing with yourself lately? I began to think you was playing us false: but now that I find you here, I suppose you know all about the trick of Mr. Bones's pretended death, and have made every thing right with him. But is he here?"

"Yes," answered Jacob boldly—for he had by this time recovered his presence of mind. "Walk in:—he wants very much to see you."

"And so do I want to see him," added Mrs. Bunce as she entered the hall, while Jacob barred the door carefully. "I haven't seen him ever since Monday night; and he was to be sure and come up to the Dials last evening. So I got alarmed, and come down to see, I went to Turnmill Street—but I could make no one hear there—for I suppose you know by this time all about Tidmarsh and the other crib ——"

"Yes—and the subterranean too," added Jacob: "all the secrets, so long kept from me, are now revealed. But walk up, Mrs. Bunce—walk up."

The woman, suspecting nothing wrong, and not altogether displeased to find (as she believed) that Jacob had risen so high in favour with Old Death as to become one of his confidants,—the woman, we say, walked up the staircase, which was well known to her; but, scarcely had she reached the first turn, when she was suddenly grasped by a vigorous hand, and a voice exclaimed, "Make no noise, Mrs. Bunce—or it will be the worse for you."

"Thank God, you are there, my lord!" cried Jacob now hastily running up the stairs. "This woman is one of the gang which it has fallen to your lordship's lot to disperse."

"Oh! Jacob," ejaculated Mrs. Bunce, "you don't know what you are doing! But who is this lord—and what have I done to injure him?"

"I am the Earl of Ellingham, woman," said Arthur; "and perhaps you are not ignorant of the long imprisonment which I endured in this place. But proceed—I will follow you: and remember that you are in the power of those who will not suffer you to escape."

At that instant there was another knock at the door.

"Remain here," said the nobleman to Mrs. Bunce. "Jacob, let me answer that summons."

Arthur accordingly proceeded to the door, and gave admittance to his three men-servants.

They then all repaired to the laboratory together, where the Earl made Dr. Lascelles acquainted, in a hasty whisper, with the cause of Mrs. Bunce's appearance on the stage of their present proceedings.

The moment the woman emerged from the darkness of the landing outside to the light of the laboratory, she cast a hasty and inquiring glance around on those present; but her eyes settled on Jacob Smith, and she was evidently much astonished to see him dressed in a plain but most respectable manner, and looking neat, clean, and even interesting in his appearance. For the lad possessed good features—very bright eyes—and a set of white, even teeth; and though his countenance was still somewhat indicative of a sickly constitution, it nevertheless showed a state of health considerably improved by the excitement of travelling and by the happiness imparted to his soul by the successful escape of Thomas Rainford.

Jacob saw that Mrs. Bunce surveyed him with interest; and at the moment he felt pity for the woman who had on many occasions shown him some kindness, and towards whom he had also experienced at times unaccountable heart-yearnings;—but he could not blame himself for having just now entrapped her into the power of Lord Ellingham, because he knew how important it was to assemble in the presence of that nobleman as many of Old Death's accomplices as possible. Besides, he was well aware that no harm was intended her; and this assurance he conveyed to her in a hasty whisper—though not in such a way as to induce her to believe that he was any longer an accomplice also.

"You will now accompany me *below*," said the Earl, addressing himself to his three servants.

Jacob hastened to light another lamp (of which there were several in the laboratory); and the Earl, attended by his domestics, proceeded into the adjoining bed-room, whence they passed down into the subterranean.

Dr. Lascelles, Mrs. Bunce, and Jacob were left together in the laboratory.

"What does all this mean?" demanded the woman, accosting the lad in an imploring manner—for she was afraid, in spite of the whispered assurance she had received from him.

"I cannot give you any explanation," answered Jacob aloud. "But I may go so far as to promise you—and this good gentleman," he added, turning towards the doctor, "will confirm my words—that no harm is intended to you, provided you give faithful replies to the questions that will be put to you presently."

"The lad speaks quite properly, woman," said the physician; "and you had better hold your tongue until *the prisoners* make their appearance."

"The prisoners!" muttered Mrs. Bunce; and it struck her that allusion must be made to Old Death and Tidmarsh.

Nor was she mistaken; for, in a few minutes, the Earl and his domestics re-appeared, escorting into the laboratory those two individuals, whose hands were fastened by strong cords.

Benjamin Bones looked more hideous than ever. A white bristling beard, of three or four days' growth gave an additional death-like aspect to his countenance; and his eyes glared, from beneath their shaggy brows, with mingled rage and alarm.

Tidmarsh manifested less emotion; but, on entering the laboratory, he cast a rapid and scrutinizing glance around, as if to ascertain who were present.

Old Death did the same; and when his eyes caught sight of Jacob Smith, his forehead contracted into a thousand wrinkles with the intense ferocity of his malignant hate: then he exchanged a rapid glance with Mrs. Bunce, who gave him to understand, by a peculiarly significant look, that she was not there as a witness against him, but as a prisoner herself.

Dr. Lascelles stood with his back to the fire, contemplating the various persons assembled, in a manner which showed that he was far from being an uninterested spectator of the proceedings: indeed, he not only prepared to listen with attention to all that was about to be said, on account of the friendly feelings which he experienced towards the Earl of Ellingham,—but he likewise occupied himself in studying the physiognomies of Old Death, Tidmarsh, and Mrs. Bunce—a survey which led him to the comfortable conclusion that if

they did not all three perish on the scaffold sooner or later, it would not be their own fault.

Lord Ellingham ordered the three prisoners to be accommodated with chairs; and, when they were seated, he addressed them in the following manner:—

"You are now in the presence of one who has the power to punish you for your numerous misdeeds, and who, should you refuse to answer the questions to be put to you, will not hesitate to hand you all three over into the grasp of justice. The individual who possesses that power, and who is now about to question you, is myself. All your secrets are known or suspected—and, even should you refuse to answer my queries, or if you reply to them falsely, I have the means of arriving at the truth. To you, Benjamin Bones, do I address myself first:—answer me, then—and say wherefore your agents or accomplices waylaid me, and bore me off to that dungeon opening from the subterranean. Speak, villain—and see that you speak truly!"

"One word, my lord," said the arch-miscreant, his sepulchral tones quivering and tremulous with mingled rage and alarm: "let me say one word to you in private!"

"Not a syllable! Speak openly—and cause not idle delay," exclaimed the young nobleman.

"Do you know," asked Old Death, "that it is in my power to publish a secret which would not redound to your honour?"

"I can well divine to what you would allude," returned Arthur; "and I despise your menace. Go and say, if thou wilt, that the Earl of Ellingham is the half-brother of him——"

"Who was hanged on Monday morning!" growled Old Death; and then he chuckled horribly in the depth of his malignity. "Ha! ha! ha! the proud and wealthy Earl of Ellingham the brother of a highwayman who was hanged,—and that brother, too, the elder one, and born in lawful wedlock! Ah! this would be a pretty tale to circulate at the West End!"

"Scoundrel! you cannot provoke me to anger," said the Earl, calmly; "but you may move me to invoke the aid of justice to punish you for daring to imprison me during four long weeks in a noisome dungeon—a crime for which the penalty would be transportation for the remainder of your miserable life. Moreover, that same justice would require of you full and ample explanations respecting those rooms filled with property of immense value, and of such a miscellaneous nature that the various articles could not have been honestly obtained! Ah! you shrink—you recoil from that menace! Think you that any ridiculous punctilio has prevented me from forcing the locks of those rooms and examining their contents? No: the day after *you* became *my* prisoner here, and when I ascertained beyond all doubt that *you* were the tenant of those rooms, I hesitated not to visit them, to glean evidence against you. Now, old man, you see that you are in my power; and you will do well not to push my patience beyond the sphere of indulgence."

"And what if I tell you all you want to know?" said Benjamin Bones, appalled by the unveiling of the fearful precipice on which he stood.

"Give me the fullest and completest explanation of many circumstances in the unravelling of which I feel a special interest—spare me the trouble of adopting other means to obtain the solution of those mysteries to which I possess a clue," exclaimed the Earl; "and I shall forthwith liberate you and your companions, having previously taken measures to prevent you from holding any farther interest in this house or the tenement in Turnmill Street, with which the subterranean passage communicates."

"And—and my property?" gasped Old Death.

"To allow you to retain it, were a sin," answered the Earl emphatically: "to give it up to the magisterial authorities, or to dispose of it for the benefit of the poor, would be to court an inquiry which must inevitably lead to the mention of your name and the consequent apprehension of your person—a result which would be an indirect forfeiture of the promise I have given and now repeat: namely, to permit yourself and companions to depart with impunity on condition that you make a full and complete confession in regard to all the points wherein I am interested. What, then, can be done with that property?" exclaimed the nobleman: "there is but one course to pursue—and that is, *to destroy it*!"

"Destroy it!—destroy it!" groaned Old Death, writhing with mental anguish on his chair: "what? destroy all that hard-earned wealth—those treasures——"

"Every article!" interrupted the nobleman emphatically; "and consider yourself fortunate in quitting this house to breathe the air of liberty, rather than to be consigned to a gaol."

"Oh! my God! my God!" cried Old Death, reduced to despair by the lamentable prospect now placed before him.

"Blaspheme not, villain!—invoke not the sacred name of the Almighty!" ejaculated Arthur. "Rather implore pardon for your manifold iniquities!"

"It would take a long life of repentance to purge *his* soul of all the atrocity that harbours in it," observed the physician, who had intently watched all the variations of the old man's countenance during this colloquy.

"My dear doctor," said the Earl, "there is hope for even those who are most deeply stained with sin—yes, even for this miserable man, who would sooner cling to his ill-got wealth than adopt the only means now open to him of avoiding the grasp of justice. But it is useless to prolong this discussion. Benjamin Bones! once for all, do you consent to make a full confession, as the first atonement for a life of crime, and to surrender all your treasures as the second?—or shall I send forthwith to summon hither the officers of justice?"

"But, if you take mine all, you send me forth into the world a beggar!" cried Old Death, in a tone which seemed to indicate that he was about to weep for very rage.

"On that night," said the Earl solemnly, and almost sternly, "when Thomas Rainford took from thy treasury the money which he

conceived to be his due, did he not leave ample sums behind? and wilt thou tell me that thou hast not since disposed of those sums in other places of security? Thou seest, villain, that I can read all thy secrets: so prate no more about being reduced to beggary."

Old Death's eyes fell beneath the fixed gaze of the Earl of Ellingham, who thereby perceived that the conjecture which he had just hazarded was indeed the right one.

"And you will let us go free if I answer all your questions?" said the arch-miscreant, after a brief pause, during which he consulted his companions in iniquity by means of a rapid interchange of glances.

"I will," replied the nobleman emphatically.

"But what if I should tell you more than you already seem to suspect—through ignorance of the precise extent of your real knowledge," said Old Death,—"and thus make you acquainted with things likely to render you vindictive——"

"I scorn a mean and petty vengeance!" exclaimed the young nobleman. "My word is pledged to a certain condition; and that promise shall be redeemed, whatever the nature of your revelations may be."

"Then I consent!" exclaimed Old Death. "Bear witness, Dr. Lascelles—for you are an honourable man——"

"The Earl of Ellingham is too lenient," interrupted the physician. "But, as it is, I guarantee my word of honour that his lordship will faithfully fulfil his promise."

"In spite of any thing that may transpire, and for which he may not be prepared?" added Old Death, determined to drive as sure a bargain as possible: "because," he continued, "it is quite impossible for me to foresee the nature of the questions you are going to put to me, my lord—and, in answering them, I may only commit myself. I am in your power; but pray use that power mercifully."

"Mercifully!" cried the Earl, in a tone of mingled scorn and disgust. "I have no sympathy with you of any kind, old man—you are loathsome to me! I merely make a compact with you—and that bargain shall be adhered to on my part, if it be fulfilled on yours. I however warn you, that should I detect you in aught at variance with the truth, our compact ceases—my promise is annulled—and you remain at my disposal as completely as if no pledge relative to your safety had ever issued from my lips. Weigh well, then, the position in which you stand," continued the young nobleman sternly: "for I am not to be trifled with!"

"I will tell you all you require to know—all—all," responded Old Death, gasping convulsively: "only let this scene end as soon as possible—for it does me harm."

"We will proceed at once to business," said the Earl: then seating himself in front of the prisoners, he addressed his questions to Old Death, saying, "In the first place, why was I imprisoned in the subterranean dungeon?"

"To prevent you from using your wealth to bribe the gaol-authorities to let Rainford escape, or your interest to save him if he was condemned," answered Old Death, in a slow and measured tone.

"Then, villain that you are," cried the Earl, scarcely able to subdue his resentment, "you had an interest in hurrying the son of your own half-sister Octavia to the scaffold!—Oh! I understand it all! Thomas felt assured that some profound, secret, and malign influence was at work against him; for those who were put forward as the prosecutors—the knight and his nephew—went as unwilling witnesses! Then it was you," continued the nobleman, in a tone of fearful excitement,—"it was *you* whose gold doubtless bribed the attorney Howard to institute those fatal proceedings!"

"It was—it was!" ejaculated Old Death, trembling from head to foot. "But Rainford deserved it;—he outraged me—I was good and kind to him—I threw excellent things in his way—but he made me bring him to this house—he learnt all my secrets—he robbed me of my treasures—he carried off my private papers——"

"Silence!" exclaimed the Earl, in a tone which made the arch-villain and his fellow-prisoners all three start convulsively: "give not a false colouring to that transaction! Rainford learnt, when in the country, who you were and how nearly you were allied to his late mother;—he knew also how you had plundered him of his inheritance—and he was justified in the conduct he pursued towards you. The money which he took was legitimately his own, allowing for the accumulation of interest and compound interest; and the papers were not *yours*—but rightfully his property!"

"Then why did he not tell me who he was?—why did he entrap me, and compel me at the muzzle of the levelled pistol to conduct him to my secret places?" demanded Old Death impatiently.

"Your villany and your craft could only be met by stratagem and counterplot," returned the Earl emphatically; "and in that way did Rainford meet you. And yet—for the truth of my assertion you cannot deny—you have sent your own nephew to the scaffold!"

"It was his own fault!" persisted Old Death doggedly. "He should not have crossed my path—he should not have proclaimed warfare against me. I would have been his friend——"

"His friend!" exclaimed the Earl, in a tone of bitter scorn.

"Yes—his friend, after his own fashion—in the way he wanted a friend!" continued Old Death, becoming garrulous with nervous excitement. "But he outraged me in a way I could not forgive nor forget—he penetrated into all my secrets—he might have returned and helped himself again and again from my stores—*he knew too much* for me to be safe—and moreover he bound me to a chair in such a way that I fell into a fit, and should have died had it not been for this man here," added the miscreant, indicating Tidmarsh. "All those things combined to render Rainford's death necessary—and he has paid the penalty of his conduct towards me."

Lord Ellingham recoiled in horror from the fiend-like man who could thus seek to palliate the foul deed of having sent his own relative to the scaffold, through no moral motives, but merely to gratify his vengeance and remove one who seemed to be dangerous in his

path.

"Let us know more of the sham-death business on your part, Mr. Bones—or whatever your name is," said Dr. Lascelles.

"You remember that night I came round to the house here and met you, sir?" hastily exclaimed Tidmarsh, thinking that he should serve himself by exhibiting a readiness to volunteer any explanation that was required. "Well—you recollect that it was the night you saw Rainford in your laboratory, and we knew that he had gone down into the subterranean. Then, if you please to remember, we went away together—and I took leave of you at the corner of Turnmill Street. But I suspected there was something wrong—although I did not dare offer to go into Mr. Bones's rooms while you were with me. As soon as you had left me, however, I returned to the house—not by the subterranean, be it well understood,—and passing through your laboratory——"

"Then you possess counterpart keys, rascal!" exclaimed the physician angrily. "But go on."

"Well, sir—I passed through your laboratory into the bed-room there, locking the door of communication after me. Then I entered the first store-room; but I had scarcely put foot therein when I heard a violent noise as if some one was trying to break through the trap-door in the bed-chamber. I confess that I was frightened—because I knew it must be Rainford, and I suspected him to be a desperate man who meant no good in that house. I remained quite still—heard him break open the trap and come forth. I also heard him, dash open the door of your laboratory, through which he passed; but as I had neglected to lock the other door there—leading to the landing—he was not compelled to force that also. Well—I waited a few minutes, till I thought he had left the house; and then, having great misgivings on account of Mr. Bones, I went into the next store-room. But there I caught a glimpse of Rainford, standing over Mr. Bones, who was tied in his chair. I was about to retreat, I must confess—but Rainford bolted away like a ghost; and I ran up to my friend, who I thought was dead. I however saw enough, at a second glance, to convince me that he was only in a kind of trance-like fit; and in a short time I recovered him. That's my part of the story, sir; and, I hope——"

"Enough!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham abruptly. "*I* have now a question to ask *you*, Mr. Tidmarsh:—Were you not my gaoler when I was a prisoner in the subterranean?"

"Well, my lord—it's no use denying it," answered the man; "but——"

"Spare your comments. I cannot complain of the way in which you executed a task doubtless imposed on you by your master here. Moreover, you even showed me some indulgence, by permitting me to write those letters to my friends——"

"Give my friend Bones his due, my lord," interrupted Tidmarsh; "for I showed 'em to him first before I posted them."

"And as they could do no harm, I let them go," hastily exclaimed Old Death; "for I did not want to punish *you* more than I could help. Besides, I was glad you wrote them;—in the first place because they prevented any noise amongst your friends on account of your disappearance—and, secondly, because the one you wrote to Rainford was enough to convince him he had nothing more to hope from you."

"Even while you seek to conciliate me, you cannot prevent the manifestation of your fiendish hate against him who was the son of your sister Octavia!" said the Earl, gazing upon Old Death in profound surprise,—surprise that his heart could be so irredeemably black. "But now answer me another question," he continued after a few moments' pause: "how came you to know that I was likely to use my interest or my gold on behalf of Thomas Rainford?"

"My spies were stationed about Horsemonger Lane gaol," answered Old Death; "and I had a lodging in the immediate neighbourhood. They came and told me that you had just gone into the prison to see Rainford; and I concluded that you must already be aware of the relationship which existed between you. To resolve and to act with me are the same thing; and I sent back my men to seize you and convey you to the subterranean."

"And why had you stationed spies about the gaol?" demanded the Earl.

"Because I suspected that Rainford would send for you, or that you would go to him of your own accord," replied Old Death; "for he had taken from me the papers which *proved* who he was—and I supposed that his first act on possessing them, must have been to communicate with you; and in that I cannot have been far wrong."

By dint of questioning and cross-questioning, the following additional facts were elicited;—

When Tidmarsh recovered Old Death from the species of trance or fit into which he had fallen when bound to the chair, the latter determined to encompass at least the transportation, if not the execution, of Tom Rain. For two or three days he remained quiet at Tidmarsh's abode in Turnmill Street, brooding over his scheme of vengeance, and communicating with none of his friends elsewhere—not even with the Bunces. In planning the punishment of Tom Rain, Old Death knew that he had a most delicate and difficult game to play; for the highwayman was to be sacrificed to his hatred and his interests—and yet in such a manner that the victim should not know by whom the blow was struck nor the source whence his ruin came. The deed must be effected with so much dark mystery that Rainford should not even have any ground for supposing that Bones was the real prime mover of the prosecution; and in this case the arch-villain felt convinced that Rainford would not even mention his name nor allude to his establishments in Clerkenwell, when placed before the magistrate or on his trial. The affair of Sir Christopher Blunt's three thousand pounds seemed the best point on which to set the whole of this complicated machinery in motion; and Old Death knew sufficient of Mr. Howard's cold, calculating, and money-making disposition to be well aware that his aid in the business could be readily secured. He communicated all his plans to Tidmarsh; and this latter individual suggested that Rainford should be led to believe that Old Death was no more. "For," said Tidmarsh, "when I entered your store-room and saw Rainford gazing at you in your fit, I concluded you were really dead, and I am certain that such was the impression of the highwayman. Besides, he fled in horror; and Rainford is not the person thus to act save under extraordinary circumstances." This hint was adopted; and it was resolved that Rainford should be induced to suppose that Benjamin Bones was positively defunct—a belief that would of course preclude the possibility of any suspicion that the said Bones was the

individual who set in motion the springs of that conspiracy which was to carry the victim to the scaffold. These projects being all settled between Old Death and his man Tidmarsh, the latter was despatched to Mrs. Bunce to whom the entire scheme was communicated. She was instructed to set spies to watch Tom Rain, and to convey to him, if possible, the information that Benjamin Bones was dead. It was also determined not to trust Jacob Smith with the plan of vengeance to be carried out, but, as a precaution on the right side, to let even him also believe that Old Death was no more. At the same time the lad was to be used as a spy on Rainford, his devotion to whom was not of course suspected. When Mrs. Bunce met, or rather overtook Rainford in Gray's-Inn-Lane on the Saturday night previous to his arrest, it was really by accident; and she availed herself of that opportunity to inform him that Old Death had gone to his last account, according to the instructions communicated to her in the morning of that very day. She endeavoured to watch whither Rainford went, after she parted from him; but he disappeared, and she concluded that he had entered some house in that vicinity. That he had quitted Lock's Fields was known to her; and she therefore imagined that his new domicile must be in the Lane. Jacob was accordingly set to watch that neighbourhood; but he misled her purposely, as will be remembered, by stating that he had knocked at every house in the street, and had ascertained that no such person as Rainford lived there. Tom was, however, seen by one of the spies, in Piccadilly, on the ensuing (Sunday) evening, as he was returning from Lady Hatfield's house; and he was dogged over to his old abode in Lock's Fields. In the meantime, Tidmarsh had been to Mr. Howard, whom he bribed heavily with gold supplied by Old Death for the purpose; and the lawyer was induced to instruct Dykes, the Bow Street runner to arrest Rainford on the charge of robbing Sir Christopher Blunt. This arrangement with the solicitor was effected on the Saturday afternoon: it was on the Sunday evening that Rainford was dogged to his own abode; and that very night, as soon as the spy could communicate with Mrs. Bunce and Dykes, the arrest of the victim was accomplished in the manner described in a previous chapter. Throughout all these and the subsequent proceedings, Jacob Smith's friendly disposition towards Rainford was not suspected; nor were his visits to Horsemonger Lane Gaol known to the conspirators—inasmuch as the spies, who had been placed in that neighbourhood to watch for Lord Ellingham, had no farther business there when once the Earl was captured and secured.

Such was the substance of the confession, partly elicited fairly and partly extorted from the three worthies—Old Death, Mrs. Bunce, and Mr. Tidmarsh—who were now so completely in the power of the Earl of Ellingham.

"Thus," said Arthur, who, as well as the physician and Jacob Smith, was appalled at the dreadful discoveries now brought to light,—"thus was this tremendous conspiracy to take away the existence of a human being, minutely—I may almost say, scientifically planned in all its details, and carried on with a secrecy and a success that manifested the most infernal talent for wicked combinations! Monsters that ye are!" he cried, unable to retain his feelings any longer; "what vengeance do ye not merit at my hands? But, no—vengeance is for cowards and grovelling miscreants like yourselves! Were I inclined—did I stoop to retaliate and repay ye in your own coin for this enormous misdeed—for you, old man," he added, turning his indignant glances upon Benjamin Bones, who shrank back in dismay,—"you ere now alluded to that cause which makes me interested in all that regards—or rather regarded," he said, correcting himself, "your unfortunate victim Thomas Rainford! But, as I was observing—did I choose to wreak revenge on ye three, how easy were it done! I might imprison ye for the remainder of your lives in your own dungeons: I might gag and bind ye in such a way that no cry could escape your lips, and no avenue of escape be possible, and then either leave ye to starve—yes, to starve to death in this room; or I might set fire to the house and consign ye to the torture of flames!"

Mrs. Bunce uttered a faint shriek, and Old Death gave vent to a low moan, as these awful words fell upon their ears: but Tidmarsh remained passive and silent.

Jacob Smith and the domestics gazed upon the Earl in anxious suspense, not unmixed with awe; for, as he spoke, he seemed as if he were armed with an iron eloquence to reproach, and a vicarious power to punish fearfully.

The physician surveyed the three prisoners with ineffable disgust.

"But, no!" resumed the Earl: "I would not condescend—I would not degrade myself so low as to snatch from your hands the weapons with which you work, and then use them against you! I have yet another point on which I require information: and when your answers, old man," he continued, again addressing himself to Bones, "shall have been given, all that will remain for me to perform is the destruction of your ill-got property, and the adoption of a measure to deprive you of any future interest in these houses with their dark subterranean passage and their horrible dungeons. Benjamin Bones," exclaimed Arthur, after a few moments' pause, "wherefore did you seek to possess yourself of that little boy whom Thomas Rainford had so kindly—so generously—so charitably adopted?"

Old Death explained that as he hoped to be enabled to discover the maternal parent of the lad, and as he conceived that Charley might afford him information calculated to assist him in that pursuit, he had endeavoured to get the child into his power.

"The letter which was found on the person of the deceased Sarah Watts," said the Earl, "doubtless furnished you with ideas of enacting a scheme of extortion against the boy's mother, should you be enabled to find her out, and believing as you do that she is high-born and perhaps wealthy. That letter fell into the hands of Rainford—no matter how; and, though I have not seen it, yet the nature of its contents have been communicated to me. Now, answer me—and answer me truly, if thou canst,—have you any farther clue beyond that which your acquaintance with the nature of that letter furnishes?"

"I have not—I have not," replied the old villain hastily: "if I had, I should not have wanted to get the boy into my power, that I might glean from him as much as he could impart to me."

"I now, then, warn you to think no more of that child, old man," said the Earl; "for he is already beyond the reach of your vile aims—and, even were he not, *I* would protect him. You see that all your atrocity—all your intriguing—all your black wickedness does not invariably conduct you to the goal of success. But moral lessons are thrown away on such as you. We will therefore terminate this scene as speedily as possible." Then, turning to his domestics, he added, "You will repair into the store-rooms of this house, and you will so destroy and ruin all the rich garments and the larger articles which are there piled up, that they will become comparatively valueless. The jewellery you will convey into the subterranean; and all those trinkets you will throw into the sewer, to which there is an

opening from one of the dungeons. Jacob, you will guide my servants in this task."

"No, Jacob—Jacob!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunce hysterically: "have nothing to do with a business which——"

"Silence—silence, I command you!" growled Old Death, turning a savage glance upon the woman, and then fixing a look of demoniac hatred upon the lad, who was already leading the servants into the adjoining rooms.

Mrs. Bunce remained quiet, in obedience to the order she received from Old Death.

"And now relative to these houses—this, and the one in Turnmill Street?" said the nobleman. "Whose property are they?"

"They are my own freehold," responded Bones,—"bought with my money, long, long ago. But you will not——"

"I will not rob you," interrupted the Earl emphatically. "Where are the papers proving your title to the possession of this freehold?"

"In the iron-safe, in one of the store-rooms."

The nobleman quitted the laboratory, but presently returned, saying in a tone of authority, "The key of that safe!"

"It is here—here, in my pocket," muttered the arch-villain. "But my hands are bound——"

The Earl took the key from the pocket of Old Death and again left the laboratory. In a few minutes he re-appeared, holding a bundle of papers in his hand.

"I see by the endorsement that these are the deeds which I require," he said. "Now set a value upon your property, and I will pay you the amount. But stay—I will release you, so that you may execute a document which my solicitor has already prepared, and which simply requires the necessary filling up to render it available."

The nobleman drew a parchment deed from his pocket; and, aided by the papers which he had brought from the store-room, inserted the requisite particulars in the blanks left for the purpose.

He then removed the cords which confined Old Death, who named a large sum as the purchase-money of the freehold, and for which the Earl wrote a cheque on his banker without hesitation.

Then the deed of sale and transfer was duly signed by Old Death, and witnessed by Dr. Lascelles.

"This proceeding on my part," said the Earl, when the business was concluded, "may appear arbitrary and even vindictive; but it is necessary, and is not instigated by the spirit of revenge. I have paid you more than double the value of the property; and, therefore, you cannot complain. If you feel aggrieved, remember that it is in my power to transport you for life, on account of the outrage you perpetrated upon me by making me your prisoner in the subterranean which shall never be rendered available to you again. I have now performed the whole of the task which I had imposed upon myself; and you may all three depart!"

Thus speaking, the Earl unbound Tidmarsh; and, having compelled this individual, as well as Old Death, to surrender their pass-keys to the two houses, he followed those two villains and the equally vile Mrs. Bunce to the front-door.

The three passed out into the street; but before they sped away, Old Death raised his hand, and shaking it ominously, exclaimed, "Lord Ellingham, I will yet be avenged!"

The young nobleman did not condescend to offer a reply, but closed the door, and retraced his way to the laboratory.

"Well, my dear Arthur," said the physician, "I think you have had to deal with as pretty a sample of miscreants as ever underwent examination. None of those," he added, pointing towards the shelf on which the casts of the felons' heads were ranged, "could possibly have competed with them."

"Do you approve, doctor, of all the steps which I have taken?" demanded the young nobleman.

"You have acted admirably," replied Lascelles. "Indeed, you have behaved too well to the chief of those fiends, by paying him double the value of his houses."

"I would not allow even so vile a wretch as he to think that I had wronged him," returned the nobleman. "You can now remain in uninterrupted possession of your laboratory, doctor," he added with a smile. "But let us see how progresses the work of destruction in the other rooms."

Thither the doctor and the Earl proceeded accordingly.

It would have broken Old Death's heart outright to contemplate the rapid work which the nobleman's servants and Jacob Smith were making of the task allotted to them. In the room adjoining the bed-chamber, two of the domestics were employed in breaking the china, tearing the clothes, burning the silk handkerchiefs and the parcels of rich lace, ripping to pieces the muffs and boas, smashing the looking-glasses and pictures, and committing a havoc such as only the peculiar circumstances of the case could have justified. In the other store-room, the third servant and Jacob Smith were unpacking boxes and cases of jewels, and crushing the various valuables with billets of wood.

The fires were lighted in both rooms, and as much property was destroyed as it was safe to consume by those means: the jewellery was all conveyed to the subterranean, and thrown into the common sewer through that aperture which the hands of the nobleman had so lately hollowed in the wall of the dungeon.

The day dawned ere the work of destruction was completed: and then the store-rooms exhibited an appearance forming a strange contrast with their late wealthy aspect.

The physician returned to his house in Grafton Street; and Lord Ellingham hastened home to Pall Mall, leaving his servants and Jacob

Smith to follow at their leisure.

In the course of the day he called upon Lady Hatfield, to whom he had already written two or three notes, acquainting her with the outlines of the numerous incidents which had so rapidly occurred since the moment of his escape from the dungeon: and he now gave her a detailed and oral account of all those exciting occurrences.

Their demeanour towards each other was that of an affectionate brother and a fond sister; and when the Earl bade her adieu, they embraced with feelings far different from those which once had filled their hearts.

In the evening, Arthur, accompanied by Jacob Smith, and attended by only a single valet, departed in his travelling-carriage for Dover, whence on the ensuing morning he embarked for France.

CHAPTER LXVI.
MRS. SLINGSBY AND THE BARONET AGAIN.

A few days had elapsed since the events related in the preceding chapter.

We must now again introduce our readers to the abode of Mrs. Slingsby, in Old Burlington Street.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning; the breakfast things had just been cleared away; and the pious lady was sitting in an abstracted —nay, positively mournful mood, holding in her hand the *Morning Herald*, on which, however, her looks were not fixed.

There was something on her mind. She was the prey alike to a source of disquietude and to the embarrassment caused by a projected scheme, beset with difficulties which seemed insuperable.

At length a double knock at the door interrupted her painful reverie; and in a few minutes Sir Henry Courtenay, whom she had been expecting, was announced.

The baronet's countenance was lighted up with an expression of joy and triumph; and, as soon as the servant had retired, he embraced his mistress with more than his wonted ardour. Still that ardour seemed not to exist on account of her, but rather to arise from feelings which required a vent: it was an embrace that appeared to say, "Congratulate me, for I have succeeded!"

"You are unusually gay this morning, my dear Henry," observed the lady, somewhat piqued at his manner; for her perception was quite keen enough to comprehend the real nature of the baronet's emotions, as we have just described them.

"Martha, my love," responded Sir Henry, "I have just brought a well-laid plot to a successful issue—at least, so far successful, that there can be no doubt as to the result."

"I dare say the project has but little interest for me," exclaimed the lady. "You have become a general *intriguant* I am convinced, Sir Henry; and your conduct is not fair or proper towards me."

"My dear Martha, I have before told you that it is impossible for me to remain completely faithful to you," answered the baronet. "I would not bind myself to any one woman, for all the world. If there be a woman to whom I could so bind myself, it is decidedly yourself."

"Thank you, Sir Henry, for the compliment," said Mrs. Slingsby, a little softened.

"But it is impossible, I repeat. Moreover," continued the baronet, "you must not complain of me—for I do all I can to render you happy. My banker's book is at your service——"

"Well, well," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby, "we will not dispute. Indeed, I have matters of too great an importance upon my mind to permit me to devote attention to petty jealousies and idle frivolities; and I perceive that you have also much to occupy your thoughts. But the revelation shall commence with you. Come, Henry, tell me all you have to say; and when we have discoursed on your affairs, you shall listen to mine."

"Be it so, Martha," said the baronet; then drawing his chair close to that of his mistress, he continued thus: "You are well aware how vexed and annoyed I was when you allowed the two girls to depart in so sudden a manner from the house."

"And you are also aware how cruelly I was discovered and reproached by my nephew Clarence," added Mrs. Slingsby.

"I have not forgotten all you told me on that head, Martha," returned the baronet; "and perhaps what I am going to tell you may set your mind at ease relative to that same nephew of yours."

"Poor Clarence!" exclaimed the lady, really touched as she thought of him. "He has been dreadfully ill ever since that shabby trick which Mr. Torrens played him. For three weeks he was confined to his bed, and was delirious——"

"I know all that, Martha," interrupted the baronet somewhat impatiently. "But do listen to me, as I am going to tell you things which I have hitherto kept altogether to myself. Well, you must know, then, that I was determined not to be discomfited by the abrupt return of Rosamond to her father's house; and I was well aware that, after all which had occurred between Villiers and yourself, you could not possibly give me any further assistance. So I acted for myself. I ascertained every requisite particular relative to this Mr. Torrens; I discovered that he is overwhelmed with difficulties—trembling on the verge of insolvency—and anxious to do any thing that may save him from so ignominious a fate. I also learnt that he is a man who will sacrifice his best feelings and principles for money. He has a mania for building speculations; and he conceives that if he be only assisted with adequate funds, he shall make a rapid and princely fortune. Love for his daughters he has not: he merely regards them as beautiful objects, to be sold to the highest bidder—and on what terms he scarcely cares, so that they become the means of producing him money. Such is the person on whom I have had to work—and I have not worked ineffectually."

"Then you have formed an acquaintance with him?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby.

"An acquaintance!" cried the baronet, chuckling; "I have formed an intimate friendship."

"What! in four or five weeks!" said Mrs. Slingsby.

"Exactly so. I obtained an introduction to him through his surveyor, who also happens to be mine; and under pretence of bargaining with him for the purchase of some of his houses, I wormed myself into his confidence. He at length informed me that there were heavy mortgages on all his buildings, and that he was anxious to sell some in order to be able to proceed with others. When I encountered the young ladies, I affected to be greatly surprised that they should prove to be the daughters of the very Mr. Torrens to whom my surveyor had recommended me."

"You have worked systematically indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, with pouting lips. "But pray proceed."

"Sometimes I was enabled, when I called," continued the baronet, "to obtain a few minutes' conversation with Rosamond alone; for Adelais, the elder sister, usually remains in her own chamber, a prey to the deepest melancholy. But Rosamond never appeared to comprehend any of the significant though well wrapt up hints which I dropped relative to my feelings concerning her. It is evident that you proved either a bad tutoress, Martha, or she a dull pupil."

"I presume you are coming to a crisis, Henry," said Mrs. Slingsby; "for your narrative is somewhat of the most tedious."

"I will endeavour to render it a little more interesting," observed the baronet complacently. "A few days ago I called at Torrens Cottage, and found the house in the greatest confusion. An execution had been levied in the morning, and the broker was there, putting a value upon the property. Mr. Torrens was in a state of dark and sombre despair; the young ladies were in their own apartment. I had a long private conversation with the father. He made me acquainted with the entire position of his affairs; and I discovered that five thousand pounds would be required to redeem him from utter ruin. It was then that I gradually unveiled my purposes—it was then that I dropped mysterious hints of my objects and views. At first he was astounded when the light began to dawn upon him, and he caught a glimpse of my meaning; but as I carelessly displayed a roll of notes before him, he grew attentive, and appeared to reflect profoundly."

"*The man who deliberates, is lost*," said Mrs. Slingsby, quoting the hackneyed proverb, and shuddering—bad, criminal, worthless as she was—at the tremendous amount of guilt which she now more than half suspected to be already perpetrated, or at all events to be approaching its consummation.

"While we were yet far from coming to an open explanation," continued the baronet, as calmly as if he were narrating a history of but little moment, "an event occurred which hastened the affair to the catastrophe that I contemplated. A sheriff's officer entered and arrested Mr. Torrens for a considerable amount—seven hundred pounds. The execution levied on the property in the house was for three hundred and forty; and thus he required an immediate advance of upwards of a thousand pounds to save himself from a prison, and his furniture from a public sale in due course. I requested the officer to withdraw from the room for a few minutes, stating who I was, and pledging myself that Mr. Torrens should not attempt to escape. I will not tell you all that then took place between me and the father of those girls: let it suffice for you to learn, that at the expiration of nearly an hour's discourse—varied on his part by appeals, threats, prayers, and imprecations—*he agreed to sell his daughter Rosamond*!"

"As your wife?" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby, in a hoarse, hollow tone.

"No: as my mistress—as any thing I choose," returned Sir Henry Courtenay, emphatically.

Mrs. Slingsby shuddered from head to foot.

"How silly of you to affect horror at such an event!" exclaimed the baronet.

"Yes—it *is* silly on my part!" cried Mrs. Slingsby, bitterly; "silly, because I ought to have played a different part when first you touched upon the subject a few weeks ago. But, my God! Henry—you cannot mean—you will not, surely—surely——"

"Martha, this passes all endurance," said the baronet sternly. "If you do not choose to listen to me, I can retire: if you will not assist me, there is an end to every thing between you and me—and then, how will you live?"

"What assistance do you require?" asked the widow, in a low and tremulous tone—for she was shocked at all she had heard, and she was terrified by the menace which the baronet had just uttered.

"You shall learn," answered the latter. "I advanced the sums necessary to save Mr. Torrens from a prison and his furniture from the effects of the levy, taking his note of hand, payable on demand, for the amount—so that should he wish to retract from his bargain, he is completely in my power. I have agreed to give him five thousand pounds in all—*as the price of his daughter*. But he represented to me that the project can never be carried into execution, until Adelais and Rosamond shall have been separated. I was not unprepared for such an objection; and I accordingly proposed that he should permit Clarence Villiers to marry Adelais without delay—her drooping health serving as the plea for this relenting disposition on his part. I moreover promised my special protection on behalf of Clarence, for whom I can speedily obtain a government situation of far greater emolument than the paltry clerkship which he now holds. Then, when the wedding is over, and the young couple have quitted London, to pass the honeymoon somewhere in the country, *you will request Rosamond to spend a few days at your house*."

And the baronet fixed a significant look upon his mistress as he uttered these words, so pregnant with terrible meaning.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby: "if the deed were done here—beneath this roof—it would ruin me!"

"Ridiculous!" cried the baronet; and he proceeded to argue his hellish project in a manner which showed how fully he had considered it in all its details, and how artfully he had devised the means to render an exposure improbable.

But we cannot place on record all that was urged by him, or objected to by his mistress, on this particular point; suffice it to say that, influenced by the menaces more than by the reasoning which came from his lips, the pious lady at last consented to become the pander to his damnable machinations.

"Mr. Torrens shall this day write a letter to your nephew and invite him to the Cottage," said the baronet, when the whole plan was fully agreed upon. "Clarence will not of course be suffered to know that any interference on my part has brought about a reconciliation between him and the father of his beloved. The marriage will be hurried on as much as possible, and then Rosamond will become mine! But is Clarence sufficiently recovered from his illness to leave his dwelling?"

"He is much better than he was a few days ago," returned Mrs. Slingsby; "but when he first awoke to consciousness, after a month's duration of alarming illness and almost constant delirium, he received a severe shock, which produced a partial relapse. In a word, he inquired concerning the highwayman Thomas Rainford; and, on hearing that he had suffered the penalty of death, he exhibited the most painful and heart-rending emotions."

"But can he leave his room? Is he well enough to move out again?" demanded the baronet impatiently.

"Yes: he was here yesterday," answered Mrs. Slingsby. "Moreover, a letter conveying to him such joyful news as those which Mrs. Torrens will have to impart, cannot fail to restore him speedily to health and good spirits."

"Thus far all goes well," said Sir Henry Courtenay. "And now, Martha, my love, it is your turn to speak."

"I have consented to serve you, Henry, in a most difficult and dangerous scheme," observed the lady, after a few moments' reflection; "may I hope for aid and support from you in a plan which *I* have formed?"

"Certainly. Proceed—my curiosity is already excited."

"Henry," said Mrs. Slingsby, sinking her voice to a low and serious tone; "I am again——"

The baronet started.

"Yes—again with child," added the widow; "and on this occasion I intend to turn to a good account what would otherwise be deemed a terrible misfortune."

"I cannot for the life of me understand you," exclaimed Sir Henry Courtenay.

"I will explain myself," resumed Mrs. Slingsby. "You are well aware of the readiness which even well-informed persons in this country manifest to put faith in anything monstrous or preposterous that may be proclaimed or established under the cloak of religion. The greater the falsehood, the more greedily it is swallowed. There is that scoundrel and hypocrite Sheepshanks, for instance, who was so completely exposed a few weeks ago: he has taken a chapel somewhere in the Tottenham Court Road, and preached for the first time last Sunday. He has now become a dissenter; and in his initial sermon he dwelt boldly and long on the errors of which he had been guilty. He declared that he had been sorely beset by Satan, to whom he had for a time succumbed: hence his disgraceful fall. But he proceeded to aver that he and Satan had since then had a long and desperate struggle together, throughout an entire night, in his bed-chamber; and that he eventually succeeded in sending the Evil One howling away just as the day broke. He therefore proclaimed that he had now emancipated himself from the thraldom of hell, and was a chosen vessel of heaven once again. This discourse produced such an effect, that when he descended from the pulpit, many of the congregation pressed forward to shake him by the hand; and he is now in a more fragrant odour of sanctity than ever."

"To what is all this to lead, Martha?" inquired Sir Henry, completely bewildered by the long tirade relative to Mr. Sheepshanks.

"I merely mentioned the circumstances which I have related, for the purpose of convincing you how easily the world is duped by persons professing extreme sanctity," continued Mrs. Slingsby.

"To be sure!" ejaculated Sir Henry: "there are always plenty of fools to assemble at the beck and word of a knave."

"And it is with these impressions," added the widow, "that I intend to convert my present misfortune into an honour and a source of immense profit."

"May I be hanged if I understand one word of all you are saying!" cried the baronet, completely bewildered. "You are in the family way again, it appears; and yet you glory in the circumstance!"

"Doubtless you have heard the story of Johanna Southcott?"[28] said the widow, with a glance full of meaning.

"And you would imitate that imposture!" exclaimed Sir Henry: "'tis madness—sheer madness! Your nephew, who knows how intimate you and I are together, would expose the miserable trick."

"That is the principal difficulty which I should have to encounter," said Mrs. Slingsby, in a calm tone: "and even that is not insurmountable. I require your aid, indeed, on that very point. The change which, to suit *your* views, has taken place—or will speedily take place—relative to the position of Clarence and Adelais, already smoothes down much of the difficulty alluded to. Clarence will receive the benefit of your interest: exert that interest, then, to procure him a situation in some distant colony—or the East Indies, if you will—and his absence will alike render *you* more secure in the enjoyment of your Rosamond's person, and will remove to a distance the only individual who could possibly interfere with *my* project."

"Martha, this scheme of yours is utter madness, I repeat," exclaimed the baronet. "I will have nothing to do with it. If you attempt to palm so ridiculous a deceit on the world, all sorts of prying inquiries will be made, and the real nature of our intimacy must in that case be inevitably discovered. No—it shall not be done! I will give you money to go abroad, if you choose, when your situation may render necessary a temporary disappearance from London; but to consent to this insane project——"

"Well, well, Henry," interrupted the lady, terrified by the vehemence of the baronet's manner, "you shall have your own way."

"Now you are reasonable," said Sir Henry, drawing his chair closer to that in which she was seated, and beginning to toy with her.

But we need not prolong our description of this interview. Suffice it to say, that Mrs. Slingsby consented to abandon her atrocious scheme of representing herself as a second Johanna Southcott, and on the other hand promised to lend her aid to the no less infamous conspiracy formed against the honour of the unsuspecting Rosamond Torrens—for which concessions the pious and excellent lady received a cheque for a considerable sum on Sir Henry Courtenay's bankers.

The plan which Mrs. Slingsby had conceived, would never for one moment have obtained any degree of consistency in her imagination, had she not been well aware that there were thousands and tens of thousands of credulous gulls—superstitious dolts and idiots—miserable and contemptible fanatics, who would have greedily swallowed the impious, blasphemous, and atrocious lie.

In earnest belief of the Christian religion, and for profound veneration of all the sublime truths and doctrines taught by the Bible, we yield to no living being:—but it is not with common patience that we contemplate that disgusting readiness which so many of our fellow-countrymen exhibit to put faith in the false prophets and hypocrites who start up on all sides, each with some saving system of his own.

Not many years have elapsed since the Reverend Mr. Irving electrified all England with his "unknown tongues;" and there were impostors and fanatics, or fools and knaves, prompt to give an impulse to that memorable delusion by lending themselves to the cheat.

In this civilized country, too—in the nineteenth century—in a land whose sons proclaim themselves to be farther advanced in knowledge and enlightening principles than any other race on the surface of the earth—in one of the counties, moreover, where the refinement of intellect is supposed to prevail to a degree of brilliancy certainly not excelled in other parts of the kingdom,—there—in the neighbourhood of the cathedral city of Canterbury—did a madman, at no very remote date, assemble a host of enthusiastic believers in his horrible assumption of the name and attributes of the SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD! Yes—in the vicinity of a town presumed to possess all the benefit which the knowledge and learning of innumerable clergymen can possibly impart, did Mad Tom successfully personate the Messiah for several days!

But, oh! how sad—how mournful is it to contemplate the course which the Government of England is taking at the instant while we are penning these lines! A General Fast, to propitiate the Almighty, and to induce Him to avert his wrath from Ireland! Holy God! do thy thunders sleep when men thus blaspheme thy sacred name—thus actually reproach Thee with the effects of their misdeeds?

When misgovernment has brought Ireland to the verge of desperation,—when landlords have drained the country of its resources to be expended in the British metropolis,—when the agents and middlemen have exercised the full amount of petty tyranny and goading oppression upon the unhappy tenants,—when the Irish pride has been insulted by the symbols of subjection until endurance is no longer possible,—when the ambition of many gifted minds has been chafed and irritated at being excluded from a career of honour they would otherwise have pursued,—when all the humanizing effects of civilization have been restricted by a perpetual collision between the triumphant Protestant religion on the one hand domineering with insolence, and the defeated Catholic religion on the other looking for the chance of regaining a lost ascendancy,—when, too, an unprincipled system of agitation has fanned the flame of the worst feelings and extorted the few pence from the pockets of the half-starving peasantry,—when all these influences, forming an aggregate powerful enough to crush the most flourishing country upon the face of the earth, have been brought to bear upon unhappy Ireland, and have reduced her population to a misery which with such fertile causes was inevitable,—there are to be found men who are bold enough, in their deplorable ignorance or their abominable impiety, to accuse the Almighty of having purposely afflicted Ireland!

People of the British Isles! be not deceived by this blasphemous proceeding—a proceeding that would shift an awful responsibility from the shoulders of incompetent statesmen, and lay it to the account of heaven! Our blood runs cold as we write these lines—we shudder as we contemplate the wickedness of this impious subterfuge!

A General Fast to propitiate the Almighty—when the misgovernment and the misdeeds of men have worked all the horrible results complained of! Carlile, Hone, Richard Taylor, Tom Paine, and the whole host of avowed infidels were never prosecuted by the Attorney-general for blasphemy worse than that which attributes to the Almighty the effects of the errors, ignorance, despotism, and short-sightedness of human beings!

God has given us a fair and beauteous world to dwell in,—he has endowed us with intelligence to make the most of the produce of the soil,—and his revealed laws and doctrines have supplied us with precepts competent to maintain order and regularity in society. HE manifests no caprice—no change: the seasons come in due course, each bringing its peculiar bounties;—and it depends on ourselves to render our abiding-places here scenes of comfort, happiness, and contentment. But if by our own ignorance, wickedness, or tyrannical behaviour, we succeed in rendering any one spot of this fair and beauteous world a prey to famine and its invariable attendant—pestilence,—if we undertake to govern a country which we have conquered, and instead of applying beneficial and suitable measures, heap insult, wrong, error, and oppression upon its people,—how can we be surprised that the worst results should ensue? and how can we be so wickedly blind, or so vilely hypocritical, as to attempt to cast upon the dispensations of Providence those lamentable evils which we ourselves have engendered?

Again we say that a more abominable insult to the Majesty of Heaven was never perpetrated, than that conveyed by the motives set forth as a reason for a General Fast! The Ministers who have advised Queen Victoria to assent to such a hideous mockery, are unworthy the confidence of the nation. England will become the laughing-stock—the scorn—the derision of the whole world. Oh! we feel ashamed of belonging to a country in which such monstrous proceedings are set in motion under the solemn sanction of the Sovereign and her Ministers!

28. Partington's "Dictionary of Universal Biography" contains the following brief but faithful account of that impious and abominable impostress, Johanna Southcott:

"She was a singular fanatic, whose extravagant pretensions attracted a numerous band of converts in London and its vicinity, said to have, at one period, amounted to upwards of 100,000. She was born in the west of England, about the year 1750, of parents in very humble life, and, being carried away by a heated imagination, gave herself out as the woman spoken of in the book of Revelation. In this capacity she for awhile carried on a lucrative trade in the sale of seals, which were, under certain conditions, to secure the salvation of the purchasers. A disorder subsequently giving her the outward appearance of pregnancy, after she had passed her grand climacteric, she announced herself as the mother of the promised Shiloh, whose speedy advent she predicted. The faith of her followers, among whom were several clergymen of the established church, rose to enthusiasm. A cradle of the most expensive materials, and highly decorated, was prepared by her expectant votaries at a fashionable upholsterer's, and every preparation made for the reception of the miraculous babe that superstition and credulity could induce. About the close of the year 1814, however, the prophetess began to have her misgivings during some comparatively lucid intervals, in which she declared that, 'if she was deceived, she had, at all events, been the sport of some spirit, either good or evil;' and the 27th December in that year, death put an end to both her hopes and fears. With her followers, however, it was otherwise; and though for a time confounded by her decease, which they could scarcely believe to be real, her speedy resurrection was confidently anticipated. In this persuasion many lived and died, nor is her sect yet extinct: but, within a short period, several families of her disciples were living together in the neighbourhood of Chatham, in Kent, remarkable for the length of their beards and the general singularity of their appearance. The body of Johanna underwent an anatomical investigation after her death, when the extraordinary appearance of her shape was accounted for upon medical principles; and her remains were conveyed for interment, under a fictitious name, to the burying-ground attached to the chapel in St. John's Wood."

CHAPTER LXVII.
THE MARRIAGE.—ROSAMOND.

A fortnight had passed since the interview between Mrs. Slingsby and Sir Henry Courtenay; and the machinations of the latter had so successfully prevailed in accelerating the matters in which he was interested, that on the morning, when we must request our readers to accompany us to Torrens Cottage, the marriage of Adelais and Clarence Villiers was to take place.

The young man was still pale from the effects of recent and severe indisposition; but the happiness which he had experienced during the last fourteen days had worked a greater physical improvement in him than six months' sojourn in the south of France could possibly have done.

Firmly believing that the declining health and drooping spirits of Adelais had alone induced Mr. Torrens to revoke a decree which was to have separated them for ever,—and not over anxious to revive past topics in connexion with the subject,—Clarence gave himself completely up to the happiness which now awaited him; and his Adelais was equally ready to bury in oblivion any disagreeable reflections relative to the late conduct of her father.

Mr. Torrens was cold, moody, and distant: but this was his manner—and, as the young people knew not what fierce fires raged beneath that aspect of ice, they did not bestow any unusual attention on the subject.

The only source of grief which the sisters knew was their approaching separation; for Mr. Torrens had arranged for the young couple to proceed into Devonshire and pass the honeymoon with some distant relations of his own, who were anxious to see their beautiful cousin Adelais. Rosamond was to remain with her father, Mrs. Slingsby not having as yet sent her an invitation to Old Burlington Street, for fear that Clarence might throw some obstacle in the way of its being accepted.

Thus stood matters on the bridal morning,—when Adelais appeared pre-eminently beautiful in her garb of virgin white—emblematical of the innocence of her own heart,—and when Clarence Villiers could scarcely persuade himself that he was actually touching on the threshold of complete felicity. Rosamond—poor Rosamond smiled amidst the tears that flowed fast down her pale cheeks; for she felt as if she were losing her best—her only friend in the approaching departure of Adelais.

There was a young lady—a friend—who acted as joint bridesmaid with Rosamond; and there were two or three other acquaintances of the family;—and of the persons thus enumerated consisted the bridal party. The sisters had naturally invited Mrs. Slingsby; but that lady, aware that her presence would not be agreeable to her nephew, had sent to plead indisposition as the excuse for her absence.

And Mr. Torrens—what was the nature of his feelings now? Forced by his necessities—or rather by that indomitable pride which urged him to make every sacrifice rather than boldly meet his embarrassments in the Bankruptcy Court—he had assented to bestow his elder daughter on a young man whom he disliked, and to sell his younger child to an atrocious villain, who had not even manifested the delicacy of hinting at marriage!

Reader! think not that when we record the dreadful fact of *a father consenting to sell his own daughter for gold*, we are fabricating for a romance an incident which never occurred in real life! Such things have been done often—are done often—and will be done often, so long as the human species shall exist. The immense wealth of that corrupt and detestable monster, the late Marquis of Hertford,[29] enabled him to purchase the favours not only of Lady S——, but also induced that profligate woman to sell to him every one of her daughters! And those daughters have since married titled men, and live splendidly upon the riches bequeathed to them by the horrible voluptuary. Again, but a few years have elapsed since a certain Lady H——sold her beautiful daughter Priscilla to a most ignoble lord; and the atrocious deed became the topic of numerous articles in the English and continental newspapers, the tribunals of France having taken cognizance of the scandal!

We could make mention of innumerable instances of this kind, the greater portion of which are, however, confined to the aristocratic circles. For it must necessarily occur that the "upper classes," as they insolently denominate themselves, are the most profligate, unprincipled, and licentious of all the sections into which society is divided. Wealth and idleness, associated, must, as a general rule, give a fearful impulse to immorality: rich viands and generous wines must heat the blood; and nights of dissipation—balls, routs, *soirées*, and card-parties—inflame the imagination. The voluptuous dances which prevail in those fashionable assemblies—the indecent manner in which the ladies of the "upper class" display so much of the bosom that but little scope is left for the exercise of fancy—the positive encouragement that is given in high life to men whose reputation as vile seducers is notorious,—all these circumstances foster licentiousness, and provide a constant aliment to sustain immorality.

Again, the morals of the fashionable world have not recovered from the effects of that dangerous poison which was instilled into them by the evil examples of the family of George the Third, and the flagrant conduct of the beastly voluptuary, George the Fourth. The licentiousness of the Princesses of that family became the public scandal of the day; and from the ladies of the Court emanated the fashion of wearing hoops to their dresses, for a purpose which need not be particularly described. But fashion subsists by the artifice of constant change; and when hoops had enjoyed their day, those ladies who had found them so convenient, actually devised the scheme

of giving vogue to a padding in front *to make the wearers appear in the family way*! This is no fiction; and young, unmarried girls, as well as married ladies, actually submitted to this disgraceful and immoral fashion through servile obedience to the example of the Princesses. This was positively holding out a premium to licentiousness—because the fear of a false step indicating itself by its consequences, was annihilated.

Everyone knows that many titled ladies gloried in the reputation of being (as they really were) the mistresses of George the Fourth. With all these frightful examples in view, how could the entire sphere of the fashionable world fail to become dreadfully demoralised? and how was it possible to prevent the contaminating influence from spreading to the inferior grades? Therefore is it that the fashionable world especially—being the first to experience that influence and the most likely to perpetuate it—has not yet recovered from the effects of the evil example of the Court. True is it, thank God! that Queen Victoria has not followed the same course which so many of her near relatives adopted: but still even her bright example can only gradually mitigate, and not in a moment destroy, the effects of the moral poison instilled into fashionable society by her royal predecessors.

Previously to the first revolution in France, the aristocracy were steeped in licentiousness and profligacy. But a glorious nation rose in its might—hurled down a throne encrusted with the miseries of the people—annihilated the bloated and infamous nobility—and even gave the proud and arrogant clergy such a lesson as they have never since forgotten. The aristocracy of France have never recovered that blow—and, thank heaven! never will. The hereditary peerage exists no longer in France; and titles of nobility are valueless. Thus, by virtually destroying the aristocracy of rank and birth, France has suppressed a sewer of filth and corruption which distilled its abominations through every grade and phase of society. The aristocracy of talent has been substituted; and the mechanic may now rise to be a minister—the ploughman has his fair chance of becoming a politician—the delver of the soil can aspire to the post of deputy. France is regenerated: England can become so only by the destruction of its hereditary aristocracy.

From this long digression, we return to the bridal party assembled at Torrens Cottage, and now about to repair to the adjacent church, where the nuptial bond was to be indissolubly tied.

And to that church did the party proceed,—the father, who looked upon his daughters as the means of filling his purse,—the daughters, who knew not the utter selfishness of their sire,—the young man, who was so indescribably happy in at length accompanying to the altar her whom he loved so well,—and the guests, who thought as much of the excellent breakfast which followed as of the solemn ceremony itself.

The banquet passed—and the time came for the departure of the newly married couple. A post chaise drove up to the door—the trunks were hastily conveyed to the vehicle—and Adelais was torn away from the arms of her young sister Rosamond, who clung frantically to her.

An hour afterwards, the guests were gone—and Rosamond remained alone with her father.

"God grant that my dearest sister may be happy!" said the maiden, her voice almost completely lost in sobs.

"If she is not, it will be her own fault," observed Mr. Torrens harshly, as he paced the room. "She would have the young man—she set her heart upon him—and I have yielded. I suppose you are now sorry that she is gone; and yet I dare swear you thought me a brutal tyrant for separating the love-sick pair a few weeks ago."

"My dearest, dearest father!" exclaimed Rosamond, profoundly afflicted and even annoyed at the manner in which she was addressed,—"wherefore speak to me thus! Have I ever given you any reason to suppose that I was so undutiful as——"

"As to run away from the house with your sister—eh?" interrupted Mr. Torrens in a biting, satirical tone. "A young lady who could take such a step, would not be very particular in her observations on her father's conduct."

"Heavens! how have I deserved these reproaches—at least to-day?" asked Rosamond, bursting into an agony of tears. "Shall not the past be forgotten? will you ever continue, my dear father, to recall those events which are naturally so painful——"

"Well, well—let us say no more about it, Rosamond," cried Mr. Torrens, ashamed of having vented his ill-humour upon his daughter.

And he paced the room in a manner denoting a strange and indomitable agitation.

The fact was that the miserable father recoiled in horror from the atrocity he had agreed to perpetrate; and, with an idiosyncracy so common amongst men who tremble upon the verge of committing a fearful crime, he turned on the intended victim as if she were the wilful and conscious cause of those black feelings that raged within his breast. He had not moral courage sufficient to retreat while it was yet time:—he dared not make the comparatively small sacrifice of himself to avoid the immeasurably greater one which involved the immolation of his daughter.

Rosamond was already deeply afflicted at parting with her sister—that sister from whom she had never been separated until now:—but she was doomed to experience additional sources of grief in the harsh manner and alarming agitation of her father.

At length, unable any longer to endure the state of suspense and uncertainty in which she was suddenly plunged concerning him, she rose from her seat—advanced timidly towards him—and, throwing one of her snowy arms over his shoulder, murmured in a plaintive tone, "Father—dearest father, what dreadful cause of sorrow oppresses you now? Are you fearful that Adelais will not be happy—that Clarence will not always be good and kind to her? Oh! yes, dearest father—I am sure he will——"

"I am not thinking of the daughter who is gone," exclaimed Mr. Torrens, suddenly interrupting the maiden, and speaking in a tone no longer harsh, but positively wild with despair: "my thoughts are intent on the daughter who is left behind!"

"Am I a source of affliction to you, father?" asked Rosamond, contemplating her sire in so plaintive, melancholy, and yet tender a manner that his vile heart was for a moment touched, and he felt ready to throw himself at her feet and implore her pardon for the ill he

meditated towards her. "Tell me, my beloved parent," she said, "have I given you offence in any way—by word or deed? Oh! if I have, bitter will be the tears that I shall shed; and sincerely—most sincerely shall I beseech your forgiveness."

"No, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens, crushing the better feelings of his soul as he thought of the ruin that would envelop him were he to retract his engagements with the baronet: "you have not offended me—and I believe I spoke harshly to you just now without a cause. But let us talk no more on that subject. Compose yourself—wipe away those tears. I shall now retire to my study—for I have letters of importance to write."

But at that moment the well-known knock of the postman resounded through the house; and almost immediately afterwards a servant entered the room, handed a letter to Rosamond, and then withdrew.

"A note for *me*!" exclaimed the young lady, in surprise, while Mr. Torrens' blood ran cold and his brain whirled. "Oh! it is from dear Mrs. Slingsby—I recognise the handwriting."

And hastily opening it, she glanced over the contents.

Mr. Torrens was about to leave the room, as if the arrival of the letter were a matter of perfect indifference to him.

"One moment, dear father," said Rosamond, detaining him by the arm: "you must read this beautiful letter which Mrs. Slingsby has written to me; and though I cannot think of accepting the kind invitation which it conveys——"

"What does Mrs. Slingsby say in her letter, then?" demanded Mr. Torrens, all his ill-humour returning as this further step in the hideous plot re-awakened his most poignant reflections; "what does she say, that you speak in such enthusiastic terms of a mere letter?"

Rosamond placed the note in his hand; and Mr. Torrens, turning aside towards the window, read the contents, as follow:—

> "It has greatly distressed me, my beloved young friend, to have been unable to attend at the solemnization of the holy and yet deeply affecting ceremony, which, by the time this reaches you, will have united my excellent nephew and your sweet sister. But it has pleased the Almighty, in his inscrutable wisdom, to afflict me with a severe rheumatism at this time, as I assured you in a previous note; and although I sincerely hope that, by the blessing of that all-wise Being and the aid of the lotion which Dr. Wagtail has sent me, I shall be well in a few days, yet I am compelled for the present to remain within the house. It is my most sincere and heart-felt hope that your dear sister and my beloved nephew may experience all that happiness which the Omnipotent may deign to bestow upon his elect. One circumstance must essentially tend to smooth down those mundane asperities which, alas! they will have to encounter in the rough path of life; and that is the religious faith with which they are both imbued. For myself, I can safely declare that if it were not for the consolations which the Holy Bible imparts to all who study its divine doctrines, and for the solace afforded me by a few kind friends (amongst whom I must include that most choice vessel of the Lord, Sir Henry Courtenay), I know not how I should bear up against the grievous pains wherewith it has pleased the Most High to afflict me, and which have just passed from the right foot into the left. Doubtless it is for my eternal welfare, in a better world, that I am thus chastened in this; although Dr. Wagtail, with a levity unbecoming a professional man of his age and standing, declares that if I keep my feet well swathed in flannel and take mustard baths on going to bed, I shall triumph over the ailment. But, oh! my dearest young friend, what is flannel without the blessing of heaven? what is mustard without the aid of the Most High? I am very lonely, sweet Rosamond; and I am fearful that you must miss your dear sister much. I know that Mr. Torrens' occupations take him much from home; and thus you cannot always enjoy the presence and the consolations of your excellent father, whom, I regret to say, I only as yet know by good report, but whose hand I hope to press some day in friendship. Will you, my love, come and pass a week or two with me? It will be a perfect charity on your part; and I am convinced also that change of scene will cheer your spirits. Come to me, my dearest Rosamond, early to-morrow morning (God willing)—if your good kind father can spare you.
>
> "Ever your sincere and attached friend,
> "MARTHA SLINGSBY."

The vile hypocrisy which characterised this letter enhanced, if possible, the blackness of that crime towards the consummation of which it was so material a step; and Mr. Torrens stood gazing upon the document until all its characters seemed to move and agitate on the surface of the paper like a legion of hideous reptiles swarming together.

But at length mastering his horribly painful emotions, he turned towards his daughter, saying, "And wherefore, Rosamond, should you not accept an invitation as kind as it is considerate?"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed the maiden, "I could not think of leaving you at a time when you have just lost the society of one of your children. Moreover, I perceive that you are not entirely happy—I fear that those recent embarrassments——"

"Speak not of them, Rosamond," interrupted Mr. Torrens sternly; for so great was his pride, that he could not endure the idea of his own daughters being acquainted with his late pecuniary difficulties. "To return to the subject of that letter," he added, after a few moments' pause, "I think you cannot do better than accept the invitation:—indeed, it would appear unkind were you to refuse it. Mrs. Slingsby is suffering from indisposition—and she is evidently anxious to have a companion. Therefore, Rosamond, I must beg you to commence your preparations for the visit."

The young lady urged various remonstrances against this resolution; but her father over-ruled them all—and it was accordingly determined at length that she should repair to Old Burlington Street on the following morning.

But when the morning came, and the vehicle which was to convey her to London drove up to the door, how appalling were the feelings which agitated,—nay, absolutely raged in the breast of Mr. Torrens!

Acute—intensely acute was the pain which he endured in endeavouring to subdue those emotions,—or rather in composing his features in such a way that his countenance might not indicate the awful warring that disturbed his soul.

With streaming eyes did Rosamond take leave of her father; and as she stepped into the chaise, a presentiment of evil flashed across her imagination.

But she was young—naturally inclined to look upon the bright side of things—and too inexperienced to know much of the dreadful pit-falls which the artifice of man has hollowed in the pathways of the moral world. Her misgiving was therefore forgotten almost as soon as it was entertained; and she was in comparatively good spirits—though still affected by her recent separation from her sister—when she alighted at the door of Mrs. Slingsby's residence in Old Burlington Street.

29. Represented as the Marquis of Holmesford in the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

CHAPTER LXVIII.
DR. WAGTAIL.—ROSAMOND TORRENS.

Rosamond Torrens found the pious lady reclining on a sofa, and so profoundly absorbed—at all events, apparently so—in the perusal of a chapter in the New Testament, that she did not immediately look up when the drawing-room door opened to give the young maiden admission.

"Ah! my dearest girl—is it indeed you?" at length said Mrs. Slingsby in a dolorous tone of voice, as she laid aside the sacred volume. "Come and embrace me, sweet Rosamond."

"I hope you are better to-day, my dear madam," was the sincere observation made by the intended victim of a damnable plot, as she pressed her pure lips to Mrs. Slingsby's polluted brow.

"Heaven blessed me with a good night's rest, my love," returned the pious lady; "and Dr. Wagtail would insist upon my taking a little warm brandy-and-water—although, as you well know, I loathe alcoholic liquor, which I do not consider to be a '*good creature of God*,' nor '*fitted for our use*.' But, as a medicine, Rosamond—and when accompanied by urgent prayer—it is beneficial. And now tell me, sweet girl, how passed off the bridal ceremony? Was the conduct of my nephew becoming and proper? I could scarcely suppose otherwise—seeing that for years he has been benefited by the advice and example which it has been my happy lot to afford him. And Adelais—was she much affected, my love?"

Rosamond described the particulars of the wedding; and Mrs. Slingsby was in the midst of some very comforting remarks thereon, when the door opened and Dr. Wagtail made his appearance.

This gentleman was a short, fat, important-looking personage—with a powdered head and a pig-tail—delighting, too, in small-clothes and black gaiters, and carrying a thick bamboo cane, the gold head of which he invariably applied to his nose when he wanted to appear more than usually solemn. He enjoyed a large practice, and was yet miserably ignorant of the medical art. What, then, was the secret of his success? We will explain the mystery.

His father was a very wealthy man, and paid a premium of £800 to apprentice the subject of this sketch to the house-surgeon of one of the great metropolitan hospitals. But young Wagtail, though cunning and crafty enough, was a wretched dolt, and only succeeded in passing his examination by dint of the most extraordinary cramming. By these means, however, he became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, and set up in business for himself. The house-surgeon of the hospital soon after hinted to him that he intended to resign; and Mr. Wagtail senior, on hearing this private communication made to his son, immediately sent the house-surgeon a five-hundred pound note in a gold snuff-box, "as a token of esteem for his high character and of admiration for his splendid talents." This was intelligible enough. The house-surgeon immediately began to canvass his friends on behalf of young Wagtail as his successor; and when the resignation of the said house-surgeon was publicly announced, the majority of the persons who had a right to vote were already enlisted in the cause of Mr. Wagtail. Several of the most eminent surgeons became candidates for the vacancy; but their abilities stood no chance when weighed against Mr. Wagtail's interest—and Mr. Wagtail was accordingly elected. He thus jumped into renown and handsome emolument almost as soon as he entered the profession; and things went on smoothly enough for three or four years, until he one morning took it into his head to cut off a man's leg, when amputation was positively unnecessary. A disturbance ensued—the thing got into the newspapers—and Mr. Wagtail employed three poor authors constantly, for six months, at half-a-crown a day each, to get up the pamphlets which he issued in his defence. He so inundated the British public with his printed statements that he literally bullied or persuaded the majority into a belief that he was right after all; and then, with becoming indignation, he threw up his berth at the hospital—took a magnificent house at the West End—got his doctor's diploma at the same time—and announced through the medium of the *Morning Post*, *Morning Herald*, and *St. James's Chronicle*, that "Dr. Wagtail might be consulted daily, at his residence, from 2 till 7." His father died soon afterwards, leaving him a handsome fortune; and as the doctor, when the time of mourning (which he cut as short as possible) had expired, began to give splendid entertainments, his dinners procured him friends, and his friends procured him patients. In fact, he eventually rose so high in public estimation at the West End, that he was quoted as the rival of the celebrated Dr. Lascelles;—but wise men shook their heads, as much as to intimate that Dr. Lascelles had more medical knowledge in his little finger than Dr. Wagtail possessed in his entire form. But then Dr. Wagtail was so important-looking, and had such a knowing and mysterious way with him;—and he never insulted his patients, as Dr. Lascelles sometimes did, by telling them that they had nothing the matter with them, but were mere hypochondriacs. On the contrary, he would gratify their fancies by prescribing pills and draughts till he made them ill in reality; and then he had some little trouble in curing them again. But as he administered plenty of medicine—shook his head a great many times even when ordering a foot-bath or a bread poultice—and dropped mysterious hints about its being very fortunate that he was called in just at that precise moment, or else there would have been no answering for the consequences,—as he did all this, and was particularly liberal to nurses, valets, and ladies-maids, he had worked his way up to a degree of eminence which real talent, legitimately exercised, struggled fruitlessly in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred to arrive at.

Such was the physician who now entered the drawing-room where Mrs. Slingsby was reclining on the sofa with Rosamond seated near

her.

Bowing with important condescension to Miss Torrens, the doctor quietly took the chair which she vacated, because it was close to his patient.

Rosamond was about to quit the room, when Mrs. Slingsby desired her to remain, adding, "Dr. Wagtail does not require your absence, my love: there is nothing so very important in my case—is there, doctor?"

"Important, my dear madam, is not precisely the word," returned the physician, with his gold-headed cane to his nose; "inasmuch as your ailment *is* important—as all ailments are, when, though trivial in themselves, they *may* lead to dangerous consequences. But how are we to-day, my dear madam? how is the pain in our legs? did we suffer much last night? or did we feel a *leetle* easier?"

"Yes, doctor—thank you," replied the sufferer, who had nothing at all the matter with her, but who had merely simulated indisposition as an excuse for absenting herself from the bridal: "I passed a better night—by the blessing of heaven!"

"Well—come—and so we are getting on nicely, eh?" observed the doctor. "And what did we take for supper last evening?"

"A little gruel, doctor—as you ordered," answered Mrs. Slingsby, in a lachrymose tone—which was really natural enough, seeing that she could have eaten a roast fowl instead of the farinaceous slop.

"And did we take a very *leetle* brandy-and-water hot?" asked Dr. Wagtail, in a most insinuating voice, as much as to say that he knew very well how revolting such a beverage must have been to Mrs. Slingsby; although, in his heart, he had recommended it simply because experience had taught him that ladies of a certain age did *not* object to a small dose of cognac:—"did we take a *leetle* brandy-and-water?"

"I did so far follow your advice, doctor," replied Mrs. Slingsby; "but I hope I am not to continue it?"

"Indeed but we must though, my dear madam," exclaimed the physician, shaking his head most solemnly and with all the air of a man enforcing the necessity of swallowing a nauseous draught:—"indeed but we must though,—and a trifle stronger, too—a mere trifle;—but stronger it must be, or I really cannot answer for the consequences."

And here he looked at Miss Torrens, as much as to imply that Mrs. Slingsby's life would perhaps be endangered if his advice were not punctually and accurately followed.

"Well, doctor," said the suffering lady, in a more doleful tone than ever, "if it must be stronger, it shall be: but pray make a cure of me (God willing) as soon as possible, so that I may renounce that vile alcoholic beverage."

"We must have patience, my dear madam—great patience," said Dr. Wagtail with increasing solemnity, as he rubbed his nose against the gold-headed cane. "Indeed, so long as this nasty rheumatism hangs about us, we must keep to the brandy-and-water."

The physician knew very well that his words would cause the rheumatism to hang about the excellent lady for a considerable time,—indeed that she would be in no hurry to get rid of it, so long as he proscribed "the vile alcoholic beverage";—and he foresaw a goodly number of fees resulting from the judicious mode which he thus adopted of treating an ailment that did not exist.

"And now, my dear madam," he continued, "how is our tongue! Ah—not quite right yet! And how are our pulse?"

Then, as the case was pronounced to be important, the doctor lugged out an enormous gold stop-watch, and bent over it with a mysterious and even ominous expression of countenance as he felt the patient's pulse.

"Well, doctor—what do you think?" asked Mrs. Slingsby, looking as anxious and miserable as if she had been in the dock at the Old Bailey, about to hear the verdict of the jury.

"We must take care of ourselves, my dear madam—we must take care of ourselves," said the physician, shaking his head: "our pulse is not quite as it ought to be. How is our appetite? do we think we could manage a little slice of boiled fowl to-day? But we *must* try, my dear madam—we *must* try; and we must take a glass or two of wine—Port wine, of a good body. We must not reduce ourselves too low. And this evening, for supper, we must take gruel again—and the brandy-and-water as an indispensable medicine, afterwards."

"I will endeavour to follow your advice, my dear sir," said Mrs. Slingsby; "though heaven knows that the idea of the old Port wine at dinner——"

"Well, my dear madam—I know it is repugnant to you—very repugnant," interrupted the physician in a calmly remonstrative tone: "but the world cannot afford to lose so excellent a member of society as yourself. Consider your friends, my dear madam—exert yourself on their account. Triumph over these little aversions to wine and brandy—and take them as medicines, in which sense do I offer them. And now, my dear madam, I will write you out a *leetle* prescription. You had better get it made up as usual at Timmins and Jakes, in Bond Street. I have no interest in recommending them, you know—not the slightest;—but I am sure their drugs *are* good, my dear madam."

Which was as much as to imply that the drugs of other chemists were *not* good; and we may here observe that the disinterested physician merely received a thousand a-year from Messrs. Timmins and Jakes for recommending all his patients to send his prescriptions to their shop.

The doctor wrote some professional hieroglyphics upon a slip of paper, and scrawled at the bottom something which would have represented the name of Snooks, or Brown, or Thompson, quite as well as it did Wagtail.

He then rose, received from Mrs. Slingsby his fee neatly wrapped up in a piece of tissue paper, and took his departure, holding his stick to his nose all the way down stairs.

The afternoon passed away somewhat tediously for Rosamond; and when dinner was placed on the table, Mrs. Slingsby contrived to do honour to the boiled fowls; and though she held forth at considerable length upon her abhorrence for Port wine, she managed to swallow four glasses of the generous juice in a manner which Rosamond considered highly creditable to her moral courage, seeing how much she detested it.

Shortly after dinner, which was served in the drawing-room, Sir Henry Courtenay made his appearance.

The baronet's eyes sparkled with delight when he beheld his intended victim at the pious lady's abode, and looking more sweetly beautiful—more divinely interesting than she had ever yet appeared to him. The blood boiled in his veins, as his glances rapidly swept her slight but symmetrical form, and as he thought within the recesses of his own iniquitous heart, "This night thou shall become mine!"

It will be remembered that, during the last few days of her previous sojourn at Mrs. Slingsby's abode, Rosamond had been taught to form a very high opinion of the baronet; but the pious lady had not gone so far as to instil any voluptuous sentiment into the mind of the young maiden. Thus, when the baronet, on the occasion of his visits to Torrens Cottage, had addressed her in a somewhat equivocal manner, she did not comprehend him; and hence Sir Henry's reproach against Mrs. Slingsby, "that she was but an indifferent tutoress."

Still Rosamond was predisposed to admire the baronet's character, as it had been represented to her by Mrs. Slingsby; and she was by no means sorry that he had arrived to vary the monotony of the evening.

He exerted all his conversational powers to please her; and she could not conceal from herself the delight which she experienced in listening to those outpourings of a well-informed mind and a richly cultivated intellect.

The supper-hour arrived while she thought the evening was still young—so rapidly had the time passed away. Mrs. Slingsby partook of her gruel with as good a grace as she could possibly assume; but she ever and anon cast a longing glance towards the more substantial and succulent viands spread upon the board. The brandy-and-water was, however, a consolation; and this the baronet, who mixed for her, made as strong as she could wish, and much stronger than Dr. Wagtail, were he really sincere in his advice, could have possibly intended her to take it.

Shortly before eleven the baronet rose and took his departure, Mrs. Slingsby ringing the drawing-room bell for the servant, to open the front door for him, with a ceremony the object of which was to let every one in the house know that he had departed, and the hour at which he went—*in case of any exposure following the dread plot now in progress*!

Mrs. Slingsby and Rosamond then remained in conversation for a few minutes, the topic being the excellent qualities of Sir Henry Courtenay.

"Rosamond, my love," at length said Mrs. Slingsby, "before you retire to your own chamber, have the kindness to lock the side-board in the drawing-room and bring me the keys. For really servants are so neglectful——"

The beautiful girl departed with the alacrity of an obliging disposition to execute this little commission:—but the moment she had quitted the drawing-room, Mrs. Slingsby emptied the dark contents of a very small phial into the only half-finished glass of Port wine which Rosamond had left.

The infamous woman then resumed her recumbent position upon the sofa; and—oh! the abominable mockery!—appeared to be occupied with her Bible, when the artless, innocent, and unsuspecting maiden returned to the room.

"Here are the keys, my dear madam," said Rosamond; "and every thing is safe down stairs. I shall now wish you a good night's rest."

"Finish your wine, my love, before you retire," observed Mrs. Slingsby, in a softly persuasive tone: "I am not mean, but you know that I am averse to waste in any shape."

Rosamond blushed at having merited the species of reproach thus conveyed, and drank the contents of her wine-glass: then, as it struck her that the flavour of the *wine* was somewhat less pleasant than it should be—but without attaching the least importance to the idea, and forgetting it altogether a moment afterwards—she ate a small piece of bread to take away the disagreeable taste.

"Good night, my dear madam," said the maiden, bending over the pious lady and kissing her cheek.

"Good night, Rosamond my love," returned Mrs. Slingsby. "I shall remain here for a quarter of an hour to perform my usual devotional exercises; and then I shall retire to my own chamber."

Rosamond withdrew, and sped to the room prepared for her.

She felt wearied, and made haste to lay aside her garments and arrange her hair. But in the midst of her occupation a sensation of deep drowsiness came over her; and she was glad to step into bed as speedily as possible—omitting, for perhaps the first time since her childhood, to kneel down first in prayer.

A minute afterwards—and she was sound asleep.

Three persons at that precise period had their minds filled with the image of Rosamond!

In the solitude of his chamber, at his lonely cottage, Mr. Torrens endured the torments of the damned,—mental torments, indescribably more severe than the most agonising of physical pain could possibly be.

Mercenary—selfish—cold—callous as he was, he could not stifle the still small voice of conscience, which told him he had done a flagrant—a vile—an awful deed, which would fill his cup with a bitterness, that no earthly pleasure, no mundane reward, could possibly counteract or change.

He felt that he was a monster in human shape: he was afraid to catch a glimpse of his own countenance in the glass—for when he once surveyed it rapidly, its workings were horrible to behold!

To sell his daughter for the filthy lucre which had tempted him!—It was horrible—atrocious!

And then,—then, at that very moment while he was pacing his chamber, the fell deed might be in consummation!

He walked to the window:—how black was the night—how menacing were those clouds that seemed laden with storm!

He started back with a look of horrified amazement: was there not some dreadful shape in the air?—assumed not those clouds the form of a tremendous being, with a countenance of lowering vengeance and awful threatenings?

No: it was fancy—and yet the temporary creation of that fancy was dreadful to behold,—as cloud piled on cloud, for an instant wore the semblance of a supernal, moving phantom, black and menacing with impending storm!

The guilty, wretched father clenched his fists—gnashed his teeth—knit his brows—and compressed his lips together to prevent his voice from suddenly shrieking forth in accents of heart-felt agony.

Having remained for about twenty minutes in the drawing-room, Mrs. Slingsby summoned her maid, by whose assistance she gained her own chamber—although she in reality no more required such aid than did the servant who afforded it.

The maid helped her mistress to divest herself of her clothing, and then retired.

And now Mrs. Slingsby, instead of seeking her couch—that couch which had been the scene of guilty pleasure, when Jacob Smith had lain concealed beneath it—seated herself in a large arm-chair, to wait until the house was quiet.

"I could wish that any thing rather than *this* was to take place!" she murmured two or three times. "Heaven only knows what will be the end of it! But Henry appears so confident of being able to appease her—so certain of reducing her even to the position of one who beseeches instead of menacing—that I am inclined to suppose he has well weighed all the difficulties of his task. At all events he has promised to spare me—to make me appear innocent! But will Rosamond be so deceived? No—no: she will view me with suspicion—her eyes will gradually open——And yet," thought Mrs. Slingsby, suddenly interrupting the current of her reflections, "she will be so completely in my power—at my mercy,—her honour will be in my hands—her reputation will depend on my secresy——Oh! how I wish this night was past!" she cried passionately: "for the deed which is to mark it, is horrible to contemplate!"

And the third person whose mind was so full of the image of Rosamond Torrens, at the time when she lay down—beauteous and chaste virgin as she was—to rest beneath the roof of one whom, in her ingenuous confidence, she believed to be a pattern of female excellence and virtue,—that third person was Sir Henry Courtenay.

The baronet, on quitting Mrs. Slingsby's house, had returned home in his carriage, which was at the door ready to convey him thither; and, on entering his abode, he had immediately repaired to his own chamber.

Dispensing with the services of his valet, he sate down to pass away in voluptuous reflections the hour that must elapse before he could set forth again, to return to the dwelling of his mistress in Old Burlington Street.

He was of that age when the physical powers somewhat require the stimulus of an ardent and excited imagination; and he now began to gloat in anticipation of the joys which he promised himself to experience in the ruin of the hapless Rosamond.

Remorse and compunction touched him not:—if he thought of the grief that was to ensue, it was merely because he re-arranged in his head all the details of the eloquent representations he must make to soothe that woe! Besides, his licentious imagination represented to him the beauteous Rosamond, more beauteous in her tears; and he had worked himself up to a pitch of such maddening desire, by the time it was necessary for him to sally forth, that he would not have resigned his expected prize—no, not if the ruin and disgrace of ten thousand families were to ensue.

Leaving his house stealthily, by a means of egress at the back, Sir Henry Courtenay hastened back to Old Burlington Street.

A few moments after he had reached the immediate vicinity of Mrs. Slingsby's residence, the clocks of the West-end churches proclaimed the hour of one.

That was the appointed time for his admission into the house.

Nor had he long to wait—for the front-door was soon opened noiselessly and cautiously, and by a person bearing no light: but the voice which whispered, "Is it you, Henry?" was that of Mrs. Slingsby.

And noiselessly and cautiously, too, she led the way up stairs, he having previously put off his shoes, which he carried in his hand.

At the door of her own bed-room, Mrs. Slingsby made the baronet pause for an instant while she procured a taper; and as she handed it to him, and the light revealed their countenances to each other, they shrank from each other's gaze,—for human nature at that instant asserted its rightful empire, and while the woman recoiled with horror from the man who was about to commit an awful outrage on a member of her own sex, the man felt a momentary loathing for the woman who was aiding and abetting in the work of this foul night.

Mrs. Slingsby hurriedly pointed towards a door at the bottom of the passage, in the most retired part of the house; and she then

retreated into her own room, a prey to feelings which a convict in Newgate need not have envied.

Meantime Sir Henry Courtenay had passed on to the extremity of the passage: and now his hand is upon the door.

He opens that door—he enters—he closes and fastens it behind him.

Advancing towards the bed, he holds the taper so that its light falls upon the pillow; and the soft, mellow lustre of the wax-candle reveals a charming countenance, with flushed cheeks and with rosy lips apart.

For Rosamond's slumber is uneasy, though profound,—doubtless the effect of laudanum upon the nerves of one so entirely unaccustomed to its use, and who has imbibed so large a dose!

And one of those flushed cheeks reposed on a round, full, and naked arm, like a red rose-leaf upon Parian marble;—and the other arm was thrown over the bed-clothes, which had been somewhat disturbed by the uneasiness of the maiden's sleep, and left exposed the polished shoulders of dazzling whiteness and the bosom of virgin rotundity and plumpness.

Oh! what a charming picture was thus revealed to the eyes of the lustful miscreant, whose desires were increased to almost raging madness by the spectacle!

He placed the taper on the mantel, and hastened to lay aside—nay, almost to tear off his garments; and in less than three minutes he was lying by the side of the young virgin.

But scarcely had his rude hand invaded the treasures of her bosom, when she awoke with a faint scream and a sudden start—the result of some disagreeable dream; and then the baronet clasped her with all the fury of licentiousness in his arms.

A few moments elapsed ere she was aroused sufficiently to comprehend the dreadful—the horrible truth; but when the torpor produced by the laudanum had somewhat subsided, she became a prey to the most frightful alarms, produced by the conviction that some one had invaded the sanctity of her couch—and a glance showed her the features of Sir Henry Courtenay.

She would have given vent to her anguish and her horror in appalling screams; but he placed his hand over her mouth—he muttered fearful menaces in her ears—he called God to witness his resolution to possess her; and, though she became bewildered and dismayed—though her brain whirled, and her reason seemed to be deserting her—yet she battled with the ravisher—she maintained a desperate, an awful struggle,—and so unrelenting was the violence which he used to restrain and overpower her, that murder would have perhaps been done, had not the poor victim become insensible in his arms!

And then her ruin was accomplished.

Oh! ye clouds, laden with storm, why gave ye not forth your forked lightnings—why sent ye not abroad your thunders—to smite the hero of that foul night?

For, oh! while the father was still pacing his chamber in his own dwelling, the hell that raged in his breast defying all hope of slumber,—while, too, the no less infamous woman who had pandered to this work of ruin, was trembling rather for what might be the consequences than for the deed itself,—there, in that room to which Rosamond had retired in the pride of innocence and chastity—there was she despoiled—there became she the victim of the miscreant ravisher!

"Release me—let me depart—let me fly!" implored the wretched Rosamond, in a tone so subdued with anguish and with weakness, that there was no fear of its alarming the house.

"Rosamond, hear me—I beseech you!" exclaimed the baronet, as he held her by the arms in such a manner that she could not escape from the bed. "Hear reason, if you can! What would you do? Whither can you fly? The past cannot be recalled; but there is much to think of for the future. The occurrence of this night is a secret known only to yourself and to me: your dishonour need never transpire to the world?"

"Oh! my God! my God!" murmured Rosamond, in a tone of ineffable anguish: "my dishonour!—my dishonour!"

And she repeated the word—the terrible word, in so thrilling, penetrating, and yet subdued a voice, that even the remorseless baronet was for a moment touched.

"O Rosamond!" he said, in a hurried and excited manner; "do not repine so bitterly for what cannot be recalled! Think how I love you, dearest one—remember that my passion for thee amounted to a frenzy,—and it was in frenzy that I acted thus. Instead of loathing me ——"

"No—no, I do not loathe you!—my God—no!" said Rosamond, becoming the least degree calmer. "I now perceive how dependant I am upon you—how necessary it is that your love should console me! But my dear father—should he learn his daughter's disgrace—Oh! heaven, have mercy upon me!"

And she once more burst into an agony of weeping.

"Rosamond—Rosamond, compose yourself!" said Sir Henry Courtenay, with that tenderness of tone which he so well knew how to assume, and on which he had so much relied as an emollient means to be applied to soothe the grief of the victim of his desires. "Shall I repeat how deeply I love thee—how ardently I adore thee? Oh! my best beloved, do not thus abandon yourself to the wildness of a vain and useless despair!"

"But have I not been made the victim of a dreadful conspiracy?" said Rosamond; "was I not inveigled hither to be ruined? Oh! I will fly—I will fly—I will hasten home to my father—I will throw myself at his feet and tell him all—and he will pardon and avenge me!"

Again she endeavoured to spring from the bed; but Sir Henry Courtenay held her back—and, through sheer exhaustion, she fell weeping on his breast.

Then the task of consoling her—or rather of somewhat moderating the excess of her anguish, became more easy; and the baronet reasoned and vowed—argued and protested—and pleaded for pardon so touchingly and with so much apparent contrition, that Rosamond began to believe there was indeed some extenuation for one who loved her so passionately, and who had been led away by the frenzy of those feelings of which she was the object.

"Oh! why, my adored girl, are you so beautiful?" murmured the baronet: "rather attribute my crime to the influence—the irresistible influence of thine own charms, than to any deeply-seated wickedness on my part! I should have become raving mad for love of thee, had not the fury of my passion hurried me on to that point, when, reckless of all consequences, I had recourse to this stratagem. I know that my conduct is horrible—that it is vile and base in the extreme;—but I sue to thee for pardon,—I, so proud and haughty—yes, I implore thee, my darling Rosamond, to forgive me! And, oh! if all the remainder of my life, devoted to thine happiness, can atone for my turpitude of this night,—if the most unwearied affection—the most tender love can impart consolation to thee, my angel—then wilt thou yet smile upon me, and the past shall be forgotten."

"Then you will make me your wife?" murmured Rosamond.

"Yes, sweet girl—thou shall become mine—mine in the sight of heaven!" said the baronet, who would have made any pledge at that moment, in order to solace and reassure his victim.

"But wherefore not have told me that you loved me—why not have demanded my hand of my father, and have married me as Clarence did my sister?" asked Rosamond, a doubt striking to her heart's core.

"I said many things to make you understand how dear you were to me," answered the baronet; "and you did not comprehend my meaning. Remember you not that, one day when I called at your father's house, I met you alone in the parlour; and as you offered me your hand, I said, '*Happy will the man be on whom this fair hand shall be bestowed!*' And on another occasion, when you and I were again alone together, the conversation happened to turn upon death, and I remarked that '*it was dreadful to contemplate the idea of dying, but that I could lay down my life to serve you!*'"

"Oh! yes—I remember now!" murmured Rosamond. "And I even thought of those observations after you were gone; and they seemed to afford me pleasure to ponder upon them."

"Do you not now understand, then, dearest angel, how disappointment at finding that I was not at once comprehended, drove me to despair?" said the wily baronet. "Can you not pardon me, if—thus driven to desperation—I vowed to possess you—to make you mine—so that you would be compelled to accept my hand, as you already reigned undisputed mistress over my heart?"

"If you will fulfil your solemn promise to make me your wife, I shall yet be happy—and this dreadful night may be forgotten. No—not forgotten," continued Rosamond, hastily; "because the memory is immortal for such hours of anguish as these! But you will, at least, make all the atonement that lies in your power—and I may yet look the world in the face!"

"Rosamond—my sweet Rosamond, within a month from this time thou shalt be my wife!" said the baronet.

"With that assurance I must console myself," returned the still weeping girl. "And now, I adjure you—by the solemnity of the pledge which you have made me, and which I believe—I implore, you, by that love which you declare you entertain for me,—to leave me this moment!"

The baronet was fearful of reviving the storm of grief which his perfidious language had succeeded in quelling; and he accordingly rose and resumed his apparel.

Not a word was spoken during the two or three minutes which thus passed; and when Sir Henry was once more dressed, he approached the ruined girl, saying, "One embrace, Rosamond, and I leave thee till the morrow."

"One word ere we part," she said, in a hurried and almost hollow tone: "does Mrs. Slingsby know——But surely, surely, she could not have lent herself——And yet," added the bewildered Rosamond, a second time interrupting herself abruptly, "how could you have gained admittance into the house, and in the middle of the night? Oh! heavens, the most fearful suspicions——"

"Calm yourself—compose your feelings, dearest," said the baronet. "Mrs. Slingsby knows that I adore you—is aware that I love you: because the long acquaintance—indeed the sincere friendship which exists between us—prevents me from having any secrets unrevealed to her. But wrong not that amiable, that excellent, that pure-minded woman, by unjust suspicions! I entered her house like a thief—by means of a window accidentally left unfastened; and in the same manner must I escape now. Not for worlds would I have her suspect the occurrences of this night! Therefore, my angel, compose yourself, so that your appearance may not engender any suspicion in her mind when you meet at the breakfast table in the morning:—for, remember, my Rosamond, you will shortly become my wife,—and then, as you yourself observed, you will be enabled to look the world in the face!"

"And until that moment comes," said Rosamond, with a deep sob, "I shall blush and be compelled to cast down my eyes in the presence of every one who knows me. Oh! my God—what cruel fears—what dread thoughts oppress me! And my sister is doubtless so happy! Heaven grant that she may never know the anguish which wrings my heart at this moment!"

"By every thing sacred, I conjure you to compose yourself, Rosamond," exclaimed Sir Henry Courtenay, now afraid to leave her, lest in the dread excitement which was reanimating her, she might lay violent hands upon herself:—for, by the light of the taper, he could perceive that her countenance was ashy pale, and that while she was uttering those last words relative to her sister, her features were suddenly distorted by an expression of intense mental agony.

"Compose myself! Oh! how can I compose myself?" she exclaimed; and then she burst into a torrent of tears.

The baronet knew the female heart too well not to allow her to give full vent to the pearly tide of anguish; and three or four minutes elapsed,—he standing by the bed, contemplating with but little emotion, unless, indeed, it were of lust, the beauteous being whom he had so ruthlessly ruined,—and she burying her face in her hands, the tears trickling between her fingers, and her agonising sobs alone breaking the solemn stillness of the night.

Sir Henry Courtenay waited until the violence of this renewed outburst of ineffable woe had somewhat abated; and then he again endeavoured to console the unhappy victim of his foul desires—the ruined sufferer by his hellish turpitude!

And Rosamond had so much need of solace, and was so dependent on hope for the future to enable her to sustain the almost crushing misery of the present, that she threw herself upon his honour—his mercy—his deceitful promises; and she even smiled—but faintly—oh! very faintly—when he again employed his infernal sophistry to prove the deed of that dread night to be the surest testimony to his ardent love.

At length she was sufficiently composed to induce him to take his departure; and, like a vile snake as he was in heart, he crept away from the chamber of the deflowered—the ravished girl.

As he stole thus stealthily along the passage, he observed a light streaming from Mrs. Slingsby's room, the door of which had been purposely left ajar.

He entered, and found his accomplice still up; nor had the abandoned woman felt the least inclination to retire to rest.

For her mind had been a prey to the most terrible alarms, from the moment when the baronet had first set foot in Rosamond's chamber.

"I have succeeded—and she will not proclaim the outrage to the world," said Sir Henry Courtenay, in a low tone. "I have, moreover, kept my word with you, and have made her believe that you are innocent of any share in the proceeding."

Mrs. Slingsby gave no answer, but bit her under lip forcibly—for vile as she herself was, she could hardly prevent herself from exclaiming to her companion, "You are a black-hearted monster!"

Sir Henry did not, however, notice that she was influenced by any emotion hostile to him; or if he did, he cared not to show that he perceived it;—but, wishing his mistress "good night," he quitted the room, and stole out of the house.

CHAPTER LXIX.
MISERY AND VICE.

A week had elapsed since the perpetration of the atrocity described in the preceding chapter.

The scene changes to a miserable garret in one of the foul courts leading out of King Street, St. Giles's.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening; and the rain pattered on the roof and against the little window of the wretched room, which, small as it was, was scarcely lighted by the candle that flickered with the draught gushing in from beneath the door.

On a mean and sordid mattress stretched upon the floor, and with but a thin and torn blanket to cover him, lay a man who was not in reality above five-and-twenty, but who seemed nearly double that age—so ghastly was his countenance, and so attenuated was his form with sickness and want.

Near him a young female—almost a mere girl—was seated on a broken chair. Her apparel was mean, and so scanty that she shivered with the cold; and though the traces of famine and care were plainly visible upon her features, yet they had not carried their ravages so far as to efface the prettiness which naturally characterised the composition of that countenance.

Beautiful she was not, nor ever had been; but good-looking she decidedly was;—and though attired almost in rags, and with an expression of profound misery upon her face, there was something interesting in the appearance of that poor creature.

The reader will remember that, in the earlier chapters of this tale, we introduced him to one of those dens of iniquity called low lodging-houses, in Castle Street, Long Acre; and he will also recollect that a mock marriage took place in that "padding-ken," between a thief, called Josh Pedler, and a poor labourer's daughter, named Matilda Briggs.

The man lying on the mattress in the garret, was Josh Pedler; and the girl sitting near him, was Matilda Briggs.

"Well, now," suddenly exclaimed Pedler, as he raised himself with difficulty to a sitting posture, "what do you say in answer to my last question? are we to die of starvation? or are we to have bread by some means or another?"

Matilda burst into tears, and wrung her hands bitterly.

"Don't sit whimpering there, damn your eyes!" cried the ruffian. "Blubbering won't do no good—and you know that as well as me. Here have I been on my beam-ends, as one may say, for the last three weeks, and unable to go about to pick up a single farthing—the landlord swears he will have some money to-morrow morning—all the things is pawned—and here am I only wanting a little proper nourishment to set me on my legs again; but that I can't get."

"God knows I have starved myself to give you all I could, Josh," said Matilda, her voice broken with frequent and agonising sobs. "When you have asked me if I had kept enough meat or bread for myself, I always answered yes; and I turned my back towards you that you mightn't see how much—or rather how *little* I had kept back. But what can I do? My father and mother are gone back into the country to throw themselves on their parish—I have no friends to apply to—and your's seem unable to assist you at present."

"Something must be done, Tilda," said the man. "We can't starve—we must do any thing rather than that. I am as hungry as the very devil now—and I know that if I had a good steak and some porter, it would put me all right again."

"But, my God! we have not even the means to buy a penny roll!" almost shrieked the young woman. "There isn't a thing left to pawn. I have nothing but this old gown on my back—every thing else has gone—gone!" she added hysterically, as she threw a wild glance around the naked and dismantled garret. "How cold it is, too! What can we do? what can we do?"

And she rocked herself to and fro in a manner denoting an utter despair.

"You keep asking what can be done," said Josh Pedler, brutally, "and yet you know all the time that there's only one thing to be done, and that it must come to *that* at last."

Matilda started, and turned a glance of horrified amazement upon her companion.

"Well—so I suppose you understand what I mean," continued the ruffian; "and, therefore, there's no use in gammoning about it no longer. We're starving, and there's the rent to pay: that's one side of the question. You're a good-looking young o'oman, and can do as other vimen do: that's t'other side of the question."

"Oh! Josh—and would you have me become a prostitute?" shrieked Matilda, in a tone of mingled horror and reproach.

"Come—none of your nonsense, my lady," said Josh Pedler; "or I shall precious soon know how to settle your hash. Either go and earn some tin, or cut your lucky altogether. If I starve, I'll starve by myself——"

"My God! I will not abandon you!" murmured the unhappy young creature, terrified by this menace of separation from one to whom

she had grown greatly attached. "No—I cannot—I will not leave you, Josh: and yet——"

"Let's have no more of this humbug, Tilda!" exclaimed the man, brutally. "Leave off whimpering—or, ill as I am, I'll give you something worth crying for. Come, put on your bonnet and tramp; or, by hell——"

"Oh! you could not—you would not do me a mischief!" she cried, clasping her hands together. "And if I obey you now, in what you have ordered me to do, shall you not hate and detest me ever afterwards?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Josh Pedler, softening a little as he perceived that his point was already well nigh gained: for the poor young woman found powerful incentives to yield to the commands of the ruffian—she herself being almost famished. "Not a bit of it!" he repeated. "You ought to have turned out when I was first taken ill; and then if I'd had common necessaries I should have got well by this time. So be a good girl, and see if you can't bring back something good to eat and drink, and a trifle to pay the landlord."

With a bursting heart, Matilda rose from her seat, and put on her bonnet and her scanty shawl—a poor rag which the pawnbroker had refused to advance a single penny upon.

"Give us a kiss afore you go, old gal," said Josh Pedler, by way of affording her some encouragement to begin the frightful course of prostitution to which he strove to urge her.

She bent down, and pressed her lips upon his forehead, murmuring, "Are you sure that you will not loathe me *afterwards*?"

"Don't have any more of that gammon, Tilda," he cried; "but cut along—or else I shall be tempted to bite a piece out of your face, I'm so thundering hungry."

Matilda shuddered from head to foot, and rushed from the room.

As she was about to quit the house, a door in the passage opened, and a stout ill-looking fellow, without a coat, and smoking a short pipe, came forth, exclaiming, "Ah! I know'd it was you by your sneaking step. Now I tell you what it is, Mrs. Pedler—if so be I don't have my rent, or a good part on't to-night, you and your man must tramp before I shuts up. I've got people as will be glad to have a airy and comfortable room like your'n and as will pay; leastways I'll get rid of *you*."

Matilda stayed to hear no more, but rushed wildly from the house, the threat of the landlord ringing like the knell of hope in her ears.

She observed not which direction she was pursuing;—she saw not the passengers who jostled her on either side:—her eyes were open—and yet the surrounding and the passing objects formed only one vast void—one tremendous blank to her.

Her pace was hurried, like that of a person intent on some important mission, and having some defined and positive end in view:—and yet she had even forgotten the motive that had sent her forth into the streets that evening, to dare the cold wind and face the pattering rain,—she who had but so scanty a clothing to protect her!

There was a humming noise in her ears: but she could not discriminate the sounds of voices from the roll of carriages;—and even when she crossed a street, it was through no caution exercised on her part that she was not ran over.

At last her ideas began to assume a more settled shape; and her thoughts, rescuing themselves as it were from utter confusion, settled gradually down into their proper cells in the brain—the racking brain which held them!

She walked slower, and with more apparent uncertainty of aim; objects assumed a defined shape to her eyes; and her ears recognised the various sounds which raised the echoes of the streets.

At length she stood still in the midst of Holborn, and tears burst from her eyes; for she now remembered that she was there—there, in the wide and open thoroughfare—to commence the dread avocation of a prostitute!

She shuddered from head to foot—but with no ordinary tremor: it was a convulsion which began at the very heart, and vibrated with electric rapidity and spasmodic violence throughout the entire form.

"Now then, young voman—out o' the vay!" cried a porter carrying a huge load upon his head.

And, like a startled deer, Matilda hurried along.

She glanced to the left and to the right, and beheld magnificent shops teeming with merchandise, and crowded with purchasers:—she lingered in front of the pastry-cooks' establishments;—and she stopped to devour with her eyes the smoking joints, the piles of vegetables, and the large tins full of pudding, in the windows of the eating-houses!

But she knew it was useless to implore a meal;—and moreover it was something beyond food that she required,—for money to pay her heartless landlord she must have!

She resumed her mournful, melancholy walk, now slow in pace and drooping in gait.

Time was wearing on—nine o'clock would soon strike—and if she were ever to take the first step in a loathsome trade, now was the moment!

Think not, reader, that because this young woman had become the mistress of a thief, and had passed through all the training of a low lodging-house and several weeks of misery and want,—think not that she was prepared to rush at once and in a moment on a career of public prostitution! No: she was attached to her lover, in the first place;—and secondly, she was no brazen-faced slut, whose mind had derived coarseness from intemperance, or callousness from ill-treatment.

She shrank from the path which alone seemed open to her: she recoiled from the ways into which a stern necessity commanded her to enter.

While she was endeavouring to subdue the bitterness of the reflections which crowded upon her soul, a young woman, scarcely a year older than herself, accosted her, and said, "My dear, are you come on this beat to be one of us?"

Matilda saw by a glance that the female was one of the lowest class of prostitutes; and she burst into tears.

"Oh! then, you *are* come out for that purpose!" exclaimed the other. "Well, you must pay your footing at all events;"—and making a signal to several of her friends who stood at a short distance, she cried, "Here's a precious lark! a gal which wants to be one of us, and is blubbering at it!"

Matilda was now surrounded by loose women, who vowed that she should treat them, or they would tear her eyes out.

Vainly did she protest that she had no money: tears and remonstrances were of no avail; and the prostitutes were growing more clamorous,—for, it must be remembered, there were no New Police in those days,—when an old man, decently dressed, but horribly ugly, stopped near the group and asked what was the matter.

"Here's a young gal which wants to go upon the town, and can't pay her footing," explained one of the loose women; "and so she shan't come on our beat."

"Come, come," said the old man; "don't tease the poor thing! Which is she? Oh! rather good-looking. Well, my dears—here's half-a-crown for you to get something to drink—and I'll get the young woman to take a little walk along with me."

Thus speaking, the old man handed the coin to the girl who had given him the above recorded explanation; and she and her friends were too much rejoiced at the receipt of this unexpected donation, to trouble themselves further concerning Matilda Briggs.

When the loose women had disappeared, the old man turned towards Matilda, and said, "Take my arm, my dear; and I'll conduct you to a nice place where we can have a chat together for half an hour or so; and I'll make you a present of half-a-guinea before we part."

The unfortunate girl obeyed in silence; but not quite mechanically:—gratitude for the seasonable assistance she had received from the old man, and the idea of obtaining enough money not only to buy food but also liquidate the greater portion of the arrears of rent due to the merciless landlord, were powerful motives to stifle compunctious feelings in her breast.

The old man was one of those sexagenarian voluptuaries who dishonour gray hairs—one of those hoary sinners who prowl about the streets after dusk, to pick up girls of tender age, and who seldom choose females of ripe years. Under ordinary circumstances this old man would not have bestowed the slightest notice upon Matilda; because she was between fifteen and sixteen, and he affected children of eleven and twelve. But the incident which had brought them together had given him a sudden zest for novelty; and thus the gray-headed reprobate, who was old enough to be Matilda's great grandfather, tucked her under his arm and led her off to the nearest brothel with which he was acquainted.

It was eleven o'clock when the door of the garret in which Josh Pedler was lying, opened abruptly and Matilda made her appearance.

"Well, what news?" demanded the man anxiously "You've left me long enough——"

"I could not return sooner," answered the young woman, in a hoarse and strangely altered tone. "But sit up and eat your fill, Josh—for here is a good plate of meat——"

"And the landlord?" interrupted the thief joyfully.

"Is paid every farthing. I have earned a sovereign by yielding to the hideous embraces of an old man," she added in a tone expressive of deep and concentrated emotion,—"an old man whose touch was horrible as the pawings of an imp or some filthy monster. But he gave me double what he first promised; and now you may eat—if you can," she exclaimed, with a hysterical laugh.

"And you will sit down and eat with me, Tilda," said the thief in a coaxing tone—for he now saw that his mistress might become serviceable to him, and he was anxious to conciliate her.

"No—not a morsel," she replied impatiently. "I am not hungry—*now*: besides, even if I was, it would seem to me that I was eating my own flesh and blood. But I have got some spirits in a bottle, Josh—and I can drink a drop with you."

"I thought you didn't like spirits, Tilda?" observed the man, contemplating with some degree of alarm her pale countenance on which there appeared an expression of settled despair.

"Oh! I dare say I shall like spirits well enough now!" she said. "At all events I feel an inclination for them to-night. But, come—sit up and eat."

Thus speaking, she spread open a large brown-paper parcel before the thief, whose eyes sparkled when he beheld a quantity of slices of recently cooked meat, a loaf of bread, and some cheese.

Forgetting how the viands were procured, Josh Pedler began to devour them with the voracity of one who had fasted a long time; and Matilda hastened to fetch him some beer.

When she returned, she sate down, and drank two glasses of raw gin, with but a few moments' interval between the drams; and then, bursting out into a hysterical laugh, she said, "Blue ruin is capital stuff! I feel myself fit for any thing now!"

"That's right, old gal—cheer up!" exclaimed Josh Pedler. "Take another glass—and then you'll be able to eat a bit of this meat."

"Well—perhaps I may," cried Matilda. "I was tipsy when you and me were married by the old parson in the padding-ken; and I'll be tipsy to night, as it's the first of a new period of my life."

"Damn it! you are coming out strong, Tilda!" ejaculated Josh Pedler. "*Blue ruin—padding-ken*—why, I never heard you patter flash before."

"Oh! you don't know what you may see me do yet," said the young woman, in a voice indicative of unnatural excitement. "And what does it matter? Perhaps you'll hear me cursing and swearing to-morrow! Any thing—any thing," she added, her voice changing to a tone of deep, intense feeling,—"any thing, so long as one can only grow hardened!"

And having tossed off a third glass of liquor, she accepted and ate the portion of food that Josh Pedler handed to her—although but a few minutes before she recoiled from it, as if it were her own flesh and blood!

"Now you are acting like a sensible woman," said Josh; "and you make me feel more comfortable. But when you first come in, I couldn't make out what the devil possessed you: you looked all queer like—just as if you was going to commit suicide."

"Suicide!—ha! ha!" laughed Matilda strangely. "Well—I did think of it as I was coming home; but I remembered that you was here—hungry—starving—and too ill to get up and shift for yourself. So I came back, Josh. But won't you have some gin? You don't know what good it does one. If I had only taken some before I went out just now—that is, if I had had the money to buy it—I shouldn't have gone whimpering along the street as I did. No wonder all the poor girls who walk the pavement drink so much gin. I am already quite another person. I do declare that I could sing. But here comes some one up the stairs: it can't be for us."

"Yes, it is though," said Josh Pedler, as the heavy steps of a man halted at the door, to which a fist was applied by no means lightly. "Come in!"

The visitor obeyed this invitation without farther ceremony; and the moment Josh caught sight of his countenance, he cried joyfully, "Tim the Snammer!"

CHAPTER LXX.
TIM THE SNAMMER.

The individual who rejoiced in the name of *Tim the Snammer*, was a tall, athletic, well-built man of about thirty-two, and tolerably good-looking. His attire consisted of a shabby bottle-green surtout, a dark waistcoat, and drab trousers; and he wore his hat very far down on his head—probably because it was too large for him, his hair being particularly short, all his superfluous curls having fallen beneath the unsparing scissors of a gaol-barber.

"Holloa! Josh, my boy!" cried Tim, as he closed the door behind him. "Why, you are taking it cozie there in bed."

"I have been desperate bad, Tim," was the answer; "or I shouldn't lie quiet in such a damned empty garret as this here, you may take your davy. But when did you get out?"

"My time was up to-day at eleven o'clock," returned Tim. "I called at the old crib in Castle Street—Thompson's, twenty-three, and stayed with Mutton-Face till now. She told me you'd been ill, and also where I should find you. So I've come round to see you, old feller—and, may be, arrange a little job that I've got in my head. But since you're unable to get up——"

"Tim, my boy," interrupted Josh, "I've just had a deuced good supper, and I'm sure of a breakfast and a dinner too, and may be a supper also, to-morrow; and if I ain't well with all that in two days' time, my name isn't Pedler. So, if you've got any thing that'll keep so long, do let me be in it. Matilda, my dear, this is my friend Mr. Timothy Splint, generally knowed as Tim the Snammer: and Tim, this young o'oman is my jomen. We was regularly spliced at the padding-ken by old Barlow; and she's staunch to the backbone. So now you're acquainted with each other; and you needn't be afraid, Tim, of talking secrets. But how goes the gin, Tilda?"

"There's plenty left—and I borrowed two glasses of the landlord as I came up," answered the young woman: "so here's one for Mr. Splint."

"Call me Tim, my dear," said that individual "We have no *misters* and *missuses* among us. Here's your health, Tilda, then—since that's your name: here's to ye, Josh."

"Thank'ee. But what plan is it that you've got in your head?" asked Pedler.

"I'll tell you in a brace of shakes," returned Splint, smacking his lips in approval of the dram which he had just imbibed. "You may very well suppose that I've no great reason to be pleased with the conduct of that scoundrel Old Death."

"The damned thief!" cried Josh. "He sacked the sixteen pounds, and then never made a move to help you when you was had up again afore the beak."

"No thanks to him that I wasn't transported," said Tim Splint, with a fierce expression of countenance. "The prigging wasn't proved very clearly, and so I got off with two months at the mill as a rogue and vagabond. But, by hell! I'll have my revenge on the bilking old scoundrel that humbugged you and Mutton-Face Sal. And what's more, I know how to go to work, too."

"What do you mean, Tim?" demanded Josh Pedler.

"Why, I mean this—that Mutton-Face knows where Old Death is hanging-out," responded the Snammer. "She saw him last night in the Borough; and she dogged him into some crib. This was about eight o'clock. Well, she was determined to see whether he lived there, or not—and she was afraid of raising suspicion and alarming him by making any inquiries: so she watched near the place for a matter of three hours, and he didn't come out. So it's pretty clear he does live there. But to make all sure, Mutton-Face has gone over there again to-night; and she'll watch to see when he comes in, if he does at all—and then she'll stay to see whether he comes out again. If it's all right, you and me will just pay a visit to Old Death; and I'll be bound we shall find something worth the trouble of going for."

"Old Death always has money about him," observed Josh; "and I should think that there's no one wants blunt more than you and me, Tim, at this moment."

"I haven't a blessed mag," returned Splint. "If it wasn't for Mutton-Face Sal, I shouldn't have had a dinner to eat, when I got out of quod this morning, till I'd prigged the money to pay for one. And after all I've spent in Thompson's padding-kens, I couldn't get a lodging there for love, I know. But Sal has managed to keep herself while I've been lumbered; and now I must begin to keep her again. She's got just enough to carry us on till either this business of Old Death or some thing else turns up: and that's all I care about."

"Well," said Josh Pedler, "I hope I shall be able to get up in two or three days; and then I'm your man for any thing you like. But, I say, Tim, what a life this is of our'n, to be sure!"

"You don't mean to say you're a-tired on it—do you?" cried Splint, with a species of anxiety and almost convulsive shudder, proving that a truth of an unwelcome nature, and to which he never liked to be awakened, was suddenly recalled to his contemplation.

"By God! I wish I could turn honest man, Tim!" exclaimed Pedler, with unmistakeable sincerity. "It's all very well while the excitement of drinking or *business* goes on; but it's when one is lumbered in bed, as I've been for some weeks, that one feels queer and qualmish, Tim. That's why I always hate to have the least thing the matter with me. I can't a-bear to have time to brew and mope over things. I wish there wasn't no such thing as *thought*, Tim."

"Blest if I didn't often say so to myself when I was cooped up in that cursed prison, Josh!" exclaimed the Snammer. "I tell you what it is. People say we're reglarly depraved—that's the word, Josh—and so they invent treadmills and all them kind of things. But it's quite enow for chaps like us to be left alone with our own thoughts—and there's no denying it. Now my idear is jist this:—Put a man like us into gaol, if you will and don't torture him with hard labour: but let him have time to *think*. Then, when he comes out, say to him, '*Here's work for you, and a chance to get an honest living*.' My opinion is that nine out of ten would awail themselves of the offer. But suppose only one or two did it—why, it must be a blessin' to society to reduce the number of them as preys upon it. What do you think, Josh?"

"I can't a-bear to think about it, Tim," returned the invalid thief. "Now, then, Tilda—what the hell are you piping your eyes for? I s'pose you think my friend Splint is a Methodist parson? But he ain't though—and don't mean to be. Damnation! Tilda, leave off blubbering like that—and hand round the gin. There—that's a good girl. Blue ruin is the mortal enemy of unpleasant thinking—and that's why we all takes to it as nat'ral as one does to opium when he's accustomed to it."

"I've often thought, Josh," said Tim Splint, after draining the glass which Matilda handed him, "that I should like to go over to America, and bury myself in the backwoods that you hear talked of or read about. I wish I had a chance! And, raly, if we do get a good haul from Old Death, I think I shall try the game. For, arter all—and you and me may say it between ourselves in this here room, 'cause Matilda, being a o'oman, goes for no one,—but, arter all, there's few on us that wouldn't give up prigging if we could. I wonder why they don't establish societies to reclaim and provide for men-thieves, as they do for unfortunit vimen. Blowed if I wouldn't go into such a place in a minute!"

"And do you mean to say," exclaimed Matilda, wiping her eyes, and speaking with strange energy, "that if you choose to leave off this kind of life, you can't? Why, you'd be happier, Josh, as a labourer with only twelve or fifteen shillings a week, than you are now;—for I never heard so much from your lips as I have to-night."

"Who the devil will employ people without characters?" demanded Josh Pedler. "Do you think that if you tried to get a place even as a scullion in a gentleman's family, you could obtain it? No such a thing. Lord bless your dear heart! them as talks most about the depravity of the lower classes, is always the last to give us a chance."

"Yes:—and yet we wasn't all nat'rally wicked," said Tim the Snammer. "Some on us was made so by circumstances; and that was the case with me."

"How came that about?" asked Josh Pedler, who, being in no humour to sleep, was well disposed for conversation.

"Yes:—how came that about?" inquired Matilda, feeling interested in the present topic.

"You don't mean to say you would like to hear me tell my story, do you?" exclaimed Tim.

"I should, by all means," answered Josh Pedler.

"And I too——Oh! above all things!" cried Matilda: "particularly, if you can show——what you said," she added hesitatingly.

"You mean to say, if I can prove that I didn't become what I am through my own fault?" observed the Snammer. "Well—I think I *can* prove it. But you shall judge for yourselves. So, here goes."

And, with this free-and-easy kind of preface, the thief commenced his narrative, which we have expurgated of those grammatical solecisms and characteristic redundancies which, if preserved, would only mar the interest and obscure the sense. At the same time, we have kept as nearly to the original mode of delivery as possible.

CHAPTER LXXI.
THE HISTORY OF TIM THE SNAMMER.

"My father was a small farmer in Hampshire. He had about thirty-six acres of his own, all well cultivated and well stocked, and free of all mortgage and encumbrance of that kind. The farm was small enough, God knows; but it yielded a decent living,—for my father was as industrious as a bee,—always out by sunrise,—and my mother was as saving, thrifty, and prudent a housewife as any in the county. They were not, however, mean: no—very far from that. The beggar was never turned away unassisted from their door; and if a neighbour got a little behind-hand with his rent, and deserved aid, it was ten to one if the china tea-pot in my mother's cupboard did not contain a few pounds, which were speedily placed at his disposal. Farmer Splint, as my father was called, was always regular in his attendance at the village church on Sunday; and the only person who looked upon him as a mean-spirited fellow, was the landlord of the ale-house—because my father so seldom entered the *George and Dragon* even to take a glass of beer at the bar,—and never stopped there to pass an evening.

"My mother was a very handsome woman, and had been the village-belle before her marriage with Farmer Splint. This marriage was one of affection on both sides; for though my mother's parents were very poor and unable to give their daughter any thing, yet Farmer Splint preferred her to the wealthier young women of the neighbourhood. On her side, though my father was nearly ten years older than herself, she refused the offer of a rich young farmer, and became the spouse of a man whom she could respect and esteem as well as love. The fruits of this marriage were two children,—a daughter, named Marion, and myself. Our mother found time, even amongst the numerous duties and cares of the household, to teach us to read and write. The village schoolmaster then taught us a little arithmetic, history, and geography; and we were as well instructed as the children of poor parents were likely to be, and much better than those of even many richer people living in our neighbourhood.

"Now, from all I have just told you, you will see plain enough that our mother and father were good, honest, moral, and well-intentioned people. Their only care was to toil with all possible diligence, to make both ends meet,—put by a little savings, when the harvest was very plentiful,—and bring up their children in a respectable and decent manner. My father was particularly anxious to prevent his boy from resembling the young black-guards of the village: he would never let me play about in the high road at marbles,—nor yet go bird's-nesting, which he said encouraged cruelty, and was also the first step to poaching. But he did all he could to render me hardy, and promoted innocent sports of an athletic nature. Altogether, farmer Splint's family was considered to be the best-behaved and the happiest in all the county.

"It was in the year 1807, that my history now dates from. I was then thirteen years old: my sister, Marion, was eighteen, and a sweet beautiful girl she was, with fine blue eyes, flaxen hair, and a figure that couldn't have been made more graceful if clothed in silk or satin. She was at that time engaged to be married to the only son of a farmer in the neighbourhood, and who was well to do in the world. A finer fellow than young George Dalton you would never wish to see; and when he and Marion walked to church arm-in-arm, on a Sunday, every one noticed them, as much as to express a conviction of the fitness of the intended union of such a handsome, manly youth, and such a modest pretty girl. Well, it was the summer of 1807, and the marriage was to take place in October, when all the harvest was got in, and the good ale was brewed for the ensuing year. Every thing appeared gay and smiling for the young people; for George's father had promised to give up his farm to his son, but to continue to live in the house, as soon as Marion should have become his daughter-in-law.

"About three miles from our farm stood the beautiful seat of Squire Bulkeley. This gentleman had been left an orphan when young; and his estates were managed by his guardians, until he came of age, he living with one of them in London. But when he attained his majority, he soon showed himself to be tired of a London life; and he came down to take possession of Bulkeley Hall, and settle there. This was in the beginning of 1807; but for two or three months the Squire kept himself pretty quiet. All of a sudden, however, he became as gay as he was before tranquil and retired; and this change, we learnt, arose in consequence of his guardians leaving him, they having accompanied him to the Hall and remained there until all the papers and deeds connected with his accession to his property were signed. The moment they were gone, a number of fashionable gentlemen from London arrived as guests at the old mansion; and the long silent rooms echoed to the sounds of their late revellings. Then there were steeple-chases, and horse-racing, and cock-fighting, and badger-baiting, and all kinds of sports of that nature; and sometimes the young squire was more than half tipsy when he lounged into church in the middle of the Sunday evening service. His residence at the Hall did no good to the village tradespeople, because he had every thing sent down from London;—and thus no one was rejoiced at his settling in that neighbourhood. My parents, particularly, had no good opinion of Squire Bulkeley; but, as the farm was their own, they had no positive fear of him, although our land joined his estates. This was not so, however, with the Daltons, who were only tenant-farmers, and rented their fifty or sixty acres of the Squire. The farm had been in old Dalton's family for many, many years, and was one of the best tilled and best stocked in the county; and as Mr. Dalton was always regular with his rent, it did not seem probable that the lease, which was shortly to expire, would be refused renewal.

"One morning,—it was in the month of June, I remember, Marion and myself happened to be alone together in the house, when the

Squire, attended by his groom, rode up to the door. Marion sent me out to learn the cause of his visit. 'This is Farmer Splint's, my boy, I believe?' said the Squire, who, I should observe, was a handsome young man in spite of his dissipated appearance. I replied in the affirmative, adding, that my father was not at home. 'Who is at home, then?' asked the Squire; 'for I caught a glimpse of a face so pretty just now at the window, that I should not mind beholding it again.'—'That was my sister, Marion, sir,' I answered, not seeing any thing insolent in his remark; but, perhaps, rather pleased by it, as it flattered a sister of whom I was very fond.—'Well, my boy,' said the Squire, leaping from his horse, 'here is a crown for you; and now be off and try and find your father, as I want to speak to him. In the mean time I will walk in and rest myself.' Catching the coin which he threw me, I hurried away, delighted with the handsome present, and naturally thinking that the visit of so liberal a gentleman must be with a motive beneficial to my father. But after hunting every where for him about the farm, I remembered that he and my mother had gone to the village to make some purchases. The village was a mile and a half distant from our house; and as I knew that they would be back to dinner at one, I returned straight home, expecting to find them already arrived. The groom was walking the horses up and down at a little distance; and, therefore, I was convinced that the Squire was still waiting within. My hand was just upon the latch of the door, when a scream burst upon my ears; and immediately afterwards I heard Marion's voice reproaching the Squire bitterly for some insult which he had offered her. I hastened into the house, and my presence appeared to disconcert Mr. Bulkeley completely. He was standing in the middle of the room, as if uncertain what course to adopt in a case of embarrassment; and he turned as red as scarlet when he saw me. Marion was at the further end of the apartment, near a door opening into the kitchen; and she was arranging her hair, which had been disordered; while her cheeks were also crimsoned, but, as I thought, with the glow of indignation; whereas the face of the Squire was flushed with shame.

"I advanced towards Marion, asking, 'What is the matter? why did you scream out? and what has he been doing to you?'—'Nothing, Tim,' she replied, but with a profound sob. 'Have you met father?'—'No; I forgot that he'd gone to the village; but he will be home in a minute or two, as it's close on one.'—'I shall call another day, then, Miss,' said the Squire; and he hurried abruptly away. For some minutes neither Marion or myself spoke a word. I suppose she was endeavouring to compose herself, and also deliberating what course she should pursue; while, on my side, I did not like to question her. At length she approached me, and said, 'Tim, you are a good boy, and always do what sister tells you. Now, mind and don't mention a word about that gentleman having been rude to me. I have reasons of my own for it. And don't say either, that you were so long away when he was here.' I promised to follow Marion's injunctions; for I was very fond of her, as I have before said. Accordingly, when my father and mother had come back, and we were all seated at dinner, Marion remarked in an indifferent manner that the Squire had called to see our father, and that he had given me a five-shilling piece. 'I wonder what he can want with me?' said my father: 'it was certainly very kind of him to make Tim such a handsome present; but after all I have heard of him, I would rather that he should honour us with his visits as rarely as possible. However, he can do us no harm—nor any good, that I know of; for he has no land to let at present, and I am not disposed to hire any even if he had.' There the subject was dismissed, at least so far as remarks thereon were concerned; but I saw that Marion was thoughtful and even melancholy during the remainder of the day.

"About a week had elapsed, and my father and I were one afternoon proceeding along the borders of our land, just where it was separated by a quick-set hedge from the Squire's estate, when Mr. Bulkeley himself, alone and on foot, suddenly appeared at a stile. My father and I touched our hats with the usual respect shown by country people to great folks; and the Squire, who had for a moment shrunk back on seeing us, exclaimed, 'Farmer Splint, you are the very man I wanted to fall in with; and that very field in which you are standing is the object of my business with you.'—'How so, sir?' asked my father.—'Why,' returned the Squire, 'you see it cuts awkwardly into my estate, and breaks in on the very best preserves I have in this quarter.—'Begging pardon, sir,' said my father, 'I could wish it broke a little more on your preserves: for your hares and pheasants do a world of harm to my fields when the corn is just springing up. I lost more than an acre by them last year, sir.'—'So much the greater folly on your part, Farmer Splint,' exclaimed the Squire, 'to persist in remaining a landowner. You never can get a good living out of so small a farm as your's.'—'I get enough for all our wants sir, and am able to assist a friend now and then,' said my father.—'Well, but if you sell your land and become a tenant-farmer, you will be much better off,' observed the Squire. 'Suppose, for instance, I bought the land? why, you would have received compensation for the injury done to your crop by the game in my preserves.'—'But I should lose my independence, sir,' said my father, in a firm though perfectly respectful manner.—'Your independence!' ejaculated Mr. Bulkeley, with a sneer. 'Then, I am to imagine that you consider yourself a regular landowner, one of the lords of the soil. May be you will dub yourself *Squire* next! Squire Splint, eh?'—'I am plain Farmer Splint, sir, and so I hope to remain,' was the answer.—'Then you will not sell me that field?'—'I had rather not, sir.'—'But you may have an equivalent portion of my seven-acre field over by the mill yonder; and your property will be much more compact.'—'But the land is not equally serviceable, sir,' answered my father, 'and therefore I must decline the bargain. Besides, it may be fancy on my part; but it is true notwithstanding, that I am rather superstitious in making boundary changes in a farm that has been so long in my family; unless it was to extend it by a purchase of land, and *that* I can't afford. So good day, sir;' and my father, touching his hat, walked on. I saw the Squire's lips quivering with rage as he stood looking after us; and, young as I was, yet I thought my father had made an enemy of him—for the conversation which I have just detailed, produced a deep impression upon me.

"Six or seven weeks had passed away since this little incident, when I one day met the Squire as I was going on an errand for my mother to the village. He was on horseback, and his groom was in attendance. I was thinking whether I ought to touch my hat to him or not, after his insolence to my father, when he pulled up, exclaiming, 'Holloa! youngster—your name is Splint, I believe?'—'Yes, sir.'—'Ah! I remember. You are a very good lad, and I should wish to become a friend to you. I think I gave you a crown once: well, here's another. And now answer me a question or two. Did your sister ever say a word to her father or mother about that visit of mine some weeks past, you know?'—I was so bewildered by the apparent liberality of the Squire, and, boy-like, was so rejoiced at the possession of the coin which I was rolling over and over in my hand, that I suffered myself to be sifted by him at will; and I acquainted him with the injunctions that my sister Marion had given me on the occasion to which he had alluded. He seemed much pleased, but not particularly astonished. In fact, it is of course easy to understand what was passing in his mind, although I could not *then* fathom his thoughts. The respect which my father had shown him when they met in the fields, evidently induced him to believe that Marion had *not* acquainted her parents with his rudeness to her; and now he was pleased to receive from my lips a confirmation of his

conjecture on that point. It was also natural for him to imagine that Marion was not in reality so much offended with him as she had appeared to be; and it was doubtless with this impression upon his mind that he proceeded to address me in the following manner:—'To tell you the truth, my boy, I behaved rather rudely to your charming sister; and I have repented of it ever since. I do not like to call and offer an apology, because your father or mother, or both, might be present. But if you will deliver a note to her privately, I will write one; for I shall not feel happy till I have convinced her that I am sorry for the past.'—'I am sure, sir,' I replied, 'I shall be most happy to deliver such a letter to my sister, and she will be most pleased to receive it; because she has often told me that we always ought to forgive those who show repentance for their errors.'—'An excellent maxim, my boy!' cried the Squire. He then desired me to wait for him in a particular shop, which he named, in the village; and, turning back, he rode thitherward, followed by his groom. I walked on, thinking that the Squire was a much better man than he had at first seemed,—wondering, too, how he could have been so harsh and unjust in his observations towards my father, and yet so ready to acknowledge the impropriety of his conduct towards my sister.

"Arrived in the village, I performed the commission entrusted to me by my mother, and then repaired to the shop of Mr. Snowdon, chemist and druggist, as directed by the young Squire. This gentleman was leaning on the counter, writing on the sheet of paper with which the obsequious Mr. Snowdon had provided him; and when it was terminated, the Squire folded it, sealed it, and addressed it to *Miss Marion Splint*. Mr. Snowdon caught a glimpse of the superscription, although he pretended to be looking quite another way. The letter was then handed to me by the Squire, accompanied by a whispered injunction to be sure and give it privately to Marion; while another crown-piece anointed my hand at the same time. I promised compliance with the instructions given, and hurried back home. George Dalton was there, and he stayed to dinner; but he departed soon afterwards, taking an affectionate leave of Marion as usual. My father also went out to his work; my mother repaired to the dairy; and I was now alone with my sister. 'Marion, dear,' said I, 'I have got a surprise for you.'—'A surprise for me, Tim!' she exclaimed.—'Yes; a letter from Squire Bulkeley.'—'Tim!' she cried, 'you surely ——.'—'Pray read it, Marion dear,' I interrupted her. 'Its contents are a most respectful apology for his conduct some weeks ago. In fact, he spoke quite like a gentleman about it, and said how sorry he was.' Marion no longer hesitated to open the letter; but I saw that her countenance suddenly became crimson, and she hastened up to her own chamber, without uttering another word.

"An hour passed away, and she came down again. Having assured herself that our mother was still occupied in the dairy, she said to me, 'Tim dear, you must do me a kindness this very evening.'—'That I will, Marion,' I answered. 'What is it?'—'Here is a letter for Squire Bulkeley,' she said; and it struck me that there was something singular, and not altogether natural in her voice and manner. 'If you meet father on the way, say that you are going to inquire after neighbour Jones's little daughter; and never tell any one, Tim, that you did this for me. You are not old enough yet to understand my motives; but when you are, you shall know them.'—I was never accustomed to question my sister, nor even to deliberate on any thing she did; and away I sped to Bulkeley Hall. The Squire was not at home; and so I left the letter. On my return to the farm-house, I told Marion what I had done: she said I was a good boy, and repeated her injunctions of the strictest secrecy.

"About a week after this incident, George Dalton took me out for a ramble with him. I never saw him so happy and in such excellent spirits. He spoke of the prospects of a good harvest; and observed that every thing seemed to hold out a promise of happiness for Marion and himself. Then he told me how glad he would always be to see me at his farm when my sister should have become his wife. In this way he was talking, and I was listening very attentively, when, as we were crossing a field on Squire Bulkeley's estate, that gentleman suddenly appeared on the other side of the hedge. 'Holloa! you fellows,' he cried; 'don't you know you're trespassing?'—'I wasn't aware of it, Sir,' replied George, touching his hat: 'the field has always been used as a short cut by the people of the village; and there have been a foot-path and a stile at each end, ever since I can remember.'—'And if my guardians chose to permit the village people to use this short cut, it is no reason why I should,' exclaimed the Squire, purple with rage. 'And so I order you off at once, both of you.'—'Well, sir,' said George, still respectfully but firmly, 'we shall never trespass again, now that we know it is trespassing.'—'Go back, then!' cried Mr. Bulkeley.—'As we are nearer the other end of the field, we may as well continue our walk in that direction, sir,' returned George. 'It can't possibly make any difference to you.'—'Yes, but it does though,' shouted the Squire. 'I order you off; and you shan't advance another step.' Thus speaking, he sprang through the hedge, and came towards us in a menacing manner.—'Look you, Squire Bulkeley,' said George Dalton, without retreating a single pace: 'you warn me off your grounds, and I am prepared to obey. But you shall not bully me, for all that.'—'Bully you!' cried the great man, now turning perfectly white: 'do you think a gentleman like me knows what it is to bully?'—'I think it seems very much as if you did, sir,' answered George coolly.—'Low-bred scoundrel, insolent clod-hopper!' exclaimed the Squire: 'you are not fit to stand in the presence of a gentleman. Go back to your Marion, and console yourself with my leavings in that quarter!'—'Villain! what do you mean?' cried George, rushing forward to grasp the Squire by the throat.—'Wait one moment!' exclaimed the latter, raising his arm and stepping back a few paces. 'I tell you that Marion knows how to prefer a gentleman to a swineherd; and that boy there can prove it,' he added, pointing to me.

"George Dalton turned a hasty and angry glance upon me; and I saw him become deadly pale and tremble violently—I suppose because he saw that my manner was embarrassed and confused. 'Tim,' he said, in a hoarse and thick voice, 'do you know what this person means?' and he pointed disdainfully towards the Squire, who seemed to feel a diabolical delight at the evident pain which he was inflicting upon my sister's lover.—'If that boy tells the truth,' said Mr. Bulkeley, 'he will admit——.'—'The children of Farmer Splint were never known to tell a falsehood,' interrupted George Dalton; 'and though you, sir, have made most cowardly and insulting allusions to Marion, you are well aware that there breathes not a purer being than she is, nor a greater scoundrel and liar than you are. And if I restrain my hands from touching you, it is only because you are too contemptible for serious notice. Come, Tim: let us move on.'—'One word, George Dalton!' cried the Squire, his lips quivering with rage. 'Ask that boy whether he knows of any thing that has ever taken place between me and Marion. Remember, I am your landlord; and your father's lease expires next Christmas.'—'We don't care for the threats of a man like you, who endeavours to cause a breach between me and a young lass that never did you any harm.'—'Oh! not at all; but a great deal of good, on the contrary,' said the Squire, with a chuckle of triumph. 'Why, it is but a week ago since that boy was the bearer of the last notes which passed between us.'—'Liar!' thundered George Dalton; and he was again on the point of rushing on the Squire, when he checked himself, and turning to me said, 'Now, Tim, you are no story-teller; and, indeed, I

ought scarcely to insult Marion so far as to ask such a question. But can you not tell this man to his face that he is what I just now called him; namely, a liar?'—'Not if he tells the truth,' observed Mr. Bulkeley coolly.—I hung down my head, and wished at the moment that the earth would open and swallow me up.—'Tim,' said George Dalton, again speaking in a hoarse tone, as dark suspicions were revived in his mind, 'does this person who calls himself a gentleman utter facts? did you ever convey letters between him and your sister? Come, answer me, my boy: I cannot be angry with *you*.'—I faltered out a faint 'Yes.'—'Then God have mercy upon me!' exclaimed George Dalton, in a voice of piercing anguish, as he clasped his hands convulsively together.

"The Squire stood gazing upon him with fiend-like malignity. I cannot describe the dreadful picture of despair which George at that moment seemed to be. At length he turned again towards me, and, grasping my shoulder so tight that I nearly screamed out with pain, he said, 'Tim, tell me all, or I shall do you a mischief. Does Marion receive letters from Mr. Bulkeley?'—'She did one,' I stammered in reply, 'because I took it to her. The Squire wrote it at Mr. Snowdon's.'—'And did Marion answer it?' he demanded.—'She did,' I answered: 'but——'.—'Have you ever seen the Squire and Marion together?' he asked in a hurried and now dreadfully excited tone. —'Yes, once,' I said: 'but——.' And again I was about to give certain explanations relative to what the Squire himself had represented to me to be the nature and object of his letter to my sister—namely, to apologise to her for some insult which he had offered her: but George Dalton had not patience to hear me. Rushing upon the Squire, he struck him to the ground, exclaiming, 'Vile seducer! you glory in the ruin you have accomplished!' and then he darted away, clearing the hedge with a bound, and was almost immediately out of sight.

"The Squire rose slowly and with pain from the ground, muttering the most dreadful threats of vengeance; and I, afraid that he might do me a mischief, hurried off as quick as possible. I was old enough to comprehend that George Dalton believed my sister to have been faithless to him; and the same impression rapidly forced itself on my own mind. Still I was sorry that George had not waited to hear all the additional circumstances which I was about to relate; and it somehow or another struck me that he would call on Mr. Snowdon, the chemist. I cannot now account for this idea which I entertained: but I suppose it must have been because that person's name was mentioned in the conversation, and because I must have thought it probable that George would seek the fullest confirmation of his cause of unhappiness. It is, however, very certain that I hastened off to the village as quick as my legs would carry me. But just as I entered Mr. Snowdon's shop, I caught sight of George Dalton, standing at the counter talking to that individual. He had his back towards me; and the chemist was so occupied with the subject of conversation, that he also did not notice my entrance. I knew not whether to advance or retreat; and while I stood hesitating, I overheard Dalton say, 'And you are sure that the letter was addressed to Marion?'—'I happened to catch a glimpse of the direction,' answered the chemist, 'and I saw the Squire give the lad Timothy some money.'—'Then am I indeed a wretched, miserable being!' exclaimed George Dalton; and he rushed wildly from the shop, not noticing me as he hurried by. I was so alarmed by his haggard looks and excited manner, that I was nailed as it were to the spot; and it was not until Mr. Snowdon had asked me two or three times what I wanted, that I recollected where I was. Then, without giving any reply, I quitted the shop, and repaired homewards.

"I was afraid to enter the house; for I felt convinced that poor Marion's happiness was menaced, and that even if she was not already aware of the presence of the storm, not many hours would elapse ere it would burst upon her head. And when I did reach the farm, my worst fears were confirmed. The place was in confusion; Marion was in a state bordering on distraction; and my father and mother were vainly endeavouring to comfort her. An open letter lay upon the table:—without reading its contents I could too well divine their nature and whence the missive came. For some minutes my entrance was unperceived; but when at last the intensity of Marion's grief was somewhat subdued, and her eyes fell on me, she exclaimed, 'Oh! Tim, what have you done? what have you been telling George, that he has written to say he will abandon me forever, and that *you* can explain the cause?'—'Reveal the whole truth, boy,' said my father sternly, 'as some atonement for the misery which you have been instrumental in producing.'—I then related all that had occurred with the Squire and at the apothecary's shop.—My father and mother showed, by their lowering countenances and searching glances towards my sister, that they were a prey to harrowing suspicions; but they did not interrupt the current of my story. Then, when I had concluded, Marion, without waiting to be asked for an explanation, gave it in the following manner:—

"'You cannot, my dear parents, think for a moment that I have acted unworthily. Imprudent I may have been—but guilty, Oh! no—no! One day the Squire called here, as you are well aware; and he sent Tim to search after you, father. This was most probably a mere vile subterfuge on his part; for when Tim had departed, the bad man began to speak to me in a disparaging way of George; and when I begged him to desist, as he was wronging an excellent being, his language took a bolder turn. He paid me some compliments, which I affected not to hear; and at last his language grew so insulting, that I was about to quit the room, when he caught me round the waist. Oh! how can I tell you his insulting language?—but he proposed to me—to me, your daughter, and beloved by George Dalton as I then was,—the detestable man implored me to fly with him to his mansion—to become his mistress!'—Here my father and mother made a movement indicative of deep indignation; and Marion then continued thus:—'I started away from him—I was rushing towards that inner room, when Tim returned. I was now no longer alarmed, though still boiling with anger: nevertheless I had presence of mind sufficient to command my emotion so far as not to utter a word of reproach or complaint in the presence of my brother. For, in a moment, did I perceive how necessary it was to retain in my own breast the secret of the gross insult which I had received. I reasoned to myself that the Squire was the landlord of the Daltons—that their lease would expire at the end of the year—that it would break the old man's heart to be compelled to quit a farm which had been in his family for so many years—and that George possessed a fiery spirit, which would render him blind to the consequences of avenging on the Squire the insults offered to me. Of all this I thought: those ideas flashed rapidly through my brain;—and I therefore not only resolved to remain silent in respect to the insolence of Mr. Bulkeley, but also tutored Tim to be so reserved, that you, my dear father and mother, should not notice any thing unusual having occurred. When Tim brought me the Squire's note, a week ago, I scarcely hesitated to read it, thinking that it might indeed contain an apology. But, oh! you may conceive my feelings, when I discovered that it repeated the insulting proposals made to me on the first occasion. I knew not how to act; and prudence struggled with wounded pride. But I reflected that Mr. Bulkeley was wealthy and powerful enough to crush us all—for we *have* seen instances, my dear parents, of the rich landowners ruining the small farmers, who

to all appearance were independent of them: and again I resolved to adopt a cautious line of conduct. I accordingly answered the Squire's note. I implored him, as he was a gentleman and a Christian, not to molest me more with importunities from which my very heart revolted; I besought him not to ruin for ever the happy prospects of two families by any means of vengeance with which circumstances or accident might supply him; and I conjured him to believe that, in keeping secret all that had hitherto passed between us, I was actuated only by the best of motives. That letter was the one which Tim conveyed to the Squire; and now, my dear parents, you know all.'

"I remember perfectly well that my father and mother were greatly affected by the narrative which my pure-minded sister thus related to them, and which was frequently interrupted by bursts of bitter anguish on her part. She moreover added that she possessed the Squire's letter to her and a copy of the one which she had written to him.—'Give me those papers, my dear child,' said my father: 'and I will at once proceed to neighbour Dalton's house. If I find George at home, I will undertake to bring him back with me to pass the remainder of the day, and to implore your forgiveness for his unjust suspicions; and if he is not there, I am sure to see my old friend, to whom I will give all the necessary explanations.'—Marion was somewhat soothed by the hopes thus held out; and our father departed to the Daltons' farm, which was about a mile off. Two hours elapsed before he came back; and when at last we perceived him returning through the fields, he was alone. Marion burst into tears: a presentiment of evil struck a chill to her heart; and as our father approached, the serious expression of his countenance filled us all with alarm. He entered and seated himself without uttering a word. Marion threw herself into his arms, saying in a broken voice, 'Father, tell me the worst: I can bear every thing save suspense.'—'My dearest child,' answered the old man, tears trickling down his cheeks, 'it has pleased heaven to afflict thee, and all of us likewise through thee. George has quitted his home, and——.'—And what?' demanded Marion hastily.—'And his father knows not whither he has gone,' continued he: 'but when the first fever of excitement is over, there can be no doubt that he will return. Old Mr. Dalton is perfectly satisfied——.'

"But Marion heard not the words last addressed to her: she had fainted in her father's arms;—and, when she was restored to consciousness, she was so unwell that she was immediately removed to her own chamber. For three weeks her life was despaired of; and she was constantly raving of George Dalton. But at last, youth, a good constitution, and the care taken of her, triumphed over the rage of fever; and she was pronounced out of danger. Alas! what replies could be given to her anxious, earnest questions concerning George? Old Dalton had not heard of him since the fatal day when he disappeared. Was he no more? had he in a moment of frenzy laid violent hands upon himself? There was too much reason to suppose that such was the case: otherwise, would he not have written, or returned? As gently as possible was the fatal truth, that no tidings had been received of him, broken to Marion; and a partial relapse was the consequence. But in another week she rallied again; and then the first time she spoke of him, she said in as excited a tone at her feebleness would allow, 'Had he ceased to love me—had he loved another, I could have borne it! But that he should think me lost—faithless—degraded,—oh! that is worse than even the bitterness of death!'

"Slowly—slowly did Marion recover sufficiently to rise from her bed: but how altered was she! The gay, cheerful, ruddy girl, blooming with health and rustic beauty, was changed into a pale, moping, mournful creature, whose very presence seemed to render joy a crime and smiles a sacrilege. The autumn came—the corn was cut—the harvest, as plentiful as had been expected, was gathered in. Had George been there then, that was the period settled for the wedding. And, strange as it may seem, it was precisely on the day originally resolved upon as the one to render the young couple happy,—that old Dalton *did* receive tidings of his son. George was alive, and had enlisted in a regiment then stationed at Chatham, but shortly to embark for India. The young man wrote a letter communicating these facts, and referring to a former letter which he had written to his father a few days after he had quitted home, but the miscarriage of which had produced so much uncertainty and painful suspense. The colour came back to Marion's cheeks when she heard that her lover was alive; and she said, 'Even though I may never see him more, I can yet be happy; for he will now learn that I am still as I have ever been, his faithful and devoted Marion!' Meantime, old Dalton and my father were deliberating together what course to pursue; and it was determined that the discharge of George should be immediately purchased. The proper steps were taken, under the advice of an attorney in the nearest market-town; and in the mean time his father wrote to him a full account of the Squire's treachery and Marion's complete innocence. The return of post brought the tenderest and most pathetic letter to Marion, imploring her forgiveness, and assuring her that his extreme love had driven him to such a state of desperation as to render his native district hateful to him, and had induced him to enlist. I need scarcely say, that Marion now enjoyed hopes of happiness again: her cheeks recovered their lost bloom—her step grew light as formerly, and her musical voice once more awoke the echoes of the homestead. In six weeks time we heard that George was free, and on his way home. He came:—it is impossible to describe the unbounded joy of the meeting!

"And now there was no longer any obstacle to the union of the lovers, nor any wish in any quarter to delay it. The marriage was accordingly celebrated and a happier pair never issued from the village-church; nor did ever the bells appear to ring so merrily before. There were grand doings at our farm-house, for my mother was determined to give a treat to all her neighbours;—and the feast was such a one as I never can forget. Long after George had borne away his bride to his father's house, which, as already long before arranged, was to be the young couple's home, the dancing was kept up on the green in front of our dwelling, though the cold weather had already begun to show itself. But all hearts were gay and happy, and warm with good feelings; and the old ale and the punch flowed bountifully; for it was one of those days in people's lives which are a reward for whole ages of care. Ah! when I look back at those times, and think of what I was—and now reflect for a moment on what I am——But, no; I must not reflect at all. Let me continue this history without pausing for meditation!

"The happiness of both families was now complete; for even old Dalton declared that he had so much reason for joy in the turn which circumstances had lately taken, that he could even make up his mind to receive a refusal when he should apply for the renewal of his lease. But just at this time fortune seemed determined to be propitious; for Squire Bulkeley, who was in London when the return of George and the marriage took place, sent down a legal gentleman to make arrangements with his steward for the sale of a part of his estate in Hampshire, as he wanted to make up the money to purchase a small property in Kent. He was a wild and reckless fellow, and full of whims and fancies; and he cared not which portion of his land was sold, so long as his preserves and park were left. Well, it happened that old Dalton, hearing of this, went straight to the lawyer, and proposed to purchase the farm which had been rented by his

family for so many years. The offer was accepted: by the aid of my father the money was made up and paid. Dalton was now a landowner; but he did not remain so long—for he made over all his newly acquired property to his son George, who laboured hard to improve it.

"Shortly after this transaction, it was rumoured in the neighbourhood that the Squire had flown into a tremendous passion when he received the news that the Daltons had purchased the farm. He had no doubt intended to turn them out at Christmas; but he had omitted to except their farm from the part of the estate to be sold. The Daltons cared nothing for his anger; and George even said that he now considered himself sufficiently avenged upon the perfidious gentleman. Shortly after Christmas the Squire came down to Bulkeley Hall with a party of friends; and the mansion once again rang with the din of revellers. And now I come to a very important incident in my narrative.

"One day George Dalton had occasion to visit the neighbouring market-town to buy a horse; and he stayed to dine in company with the other farmers at the principal inn. The landlord of the inn dined at the same table with his guests; and, during the meal, he informed the company that a poor discharged gamekeeper had died at the house on the preceding evening, leaving behind him his only possession—the only thing that he had been able to retain from the wreck of his former prosperity,—namely, a beautiful greyhound. The farmers were interested in the tale, and instantly made a subscription to defray the expenses of the poor man's funeral, and remunerate the good landlord for the care and attention which he had bestowed on the deceased during his last illness. The hound was brought in, and every one admired it greatly. The landlord observed that his wife had such an aversion to dogs, he did not dare keep it on the premises; and he proposed that the farmers should raffle amongst them to decide to whom the hound should belong. This was assented to; and the lot fell on George Dalton. He accordingly took the dog home with him, and related all that had occurred to his father and his wife, both of whom were much pleased by the acquisition of such a fine animal, and under such interesting circumstances. The poor gamekeeper's dog accordingly became an immediate favourite.

"About a week or ten days afterwards, and in the month of February, George went out early, accompanied by the hound. The morning was fine and frosty, but excessively cold; and George whistled cheerily as he went along, Ponto trotting close at his heels. Suddenly a hare started from her form; and away dashed the greyhound after her. George knew that he had no right to pursue game even on his own land; and he ran after the dog as hard as he could, calling him back. But he might as well have whistled against the thunder: Ponto was too eager in the chase to mind the invocations of his master. Well, after a short but exciting run, the hound caught and killed the hare in the very last field belonging to George's farm, the adjoining land being the Squire's. And, sure enough, at that very instant Mr. Bulkeley appeared, accompanied by two gamekeepers, on the other side of the boundary palings. 'George Dalton, by God!' cried the Squire, with a malignant sneer on his countenance.—But George took no notice of his enemy; for he had promised Marion in the most solemn manner to avoid all possibility of quarrelling with so dangerous an individual.—'I did not know that you took out a certificate, Mr. Dalton,' observed the Squire, after a pause.—'Neither do I, sir,' replied George in a cold but respectful manner; 'and I have done nothing that I am ashamed of; for, if you have been here many minutes, you must have heard me trying to call the dog off.'—'We know what we heard, Mr. Dalton,' said the Squire, with a significant grin at his gamekeepers;—and away the gentleman and keepers went, chuckling audibly. The very next day an information was laid by the Squire against George Dalton, who accordingly attended before the magistrates. Squire Bulkeley was himself a justice of the peace; and he sate on the bench along with his brother magistrates, acting as both judge and prosecutor. The two gamekeepers swore that they saw George encourage the dog to pursue the hare; and it was in vain that the defendant represented the whole circumstances of the case. He was condemned in the full penalty and costs, and abused shamefully into the bargain. Smarting under the iron scourge of oppression, and acting by the advice of an attorney whom he had employed in the case, George Dalton gave notice of appeal to the Quarter Sessions. His wife, my father, and old Mr. Dalton implored him to settle the matter at once and have done with it: but he declared that he should be unworthy of the name of an Englishman if he suffered himself to be thus trampled under the feet of the despotic magistracy. The attorney, who was hungry after a job, nagged him on, too; and thus every preparation was made to carry the affair before the Sessions.

"The event made a great stir in that part of the country, and the liberal papers took George's part. They said how utterly worthless, as an engine of justice, was the entire system of the unpaid magistracy; and they denounced that system as a monstrous oppression, instituted against the people.[30] Well, the case came on before the assembled magistrates; but on the bench sate not only the justice who had condemned George Dalton, but likewise Squire Bulkeley, the prosecutor himself! Judgment was given against my brother-in-law; and he suddenly found himself called upon to pay about sixty pounds—the amount of all the aggregate expenses which the original case and the appeal occasioned. The money was made up with great difficulty, and not without my father's aid; and though George Dalton was thus relieved from any fears of the consequences, yet he became an altered man. He went to work with a heavy heart, because he could not prevent himself from brooding over his wrongs. He also found frequent excuses for visiting the village; and on those occasions he never failed to step into the ale-house for a few minutes. There he found sympathizers; and his generous nature prompted him to treat those who took his part. One pot led to another; and every time he entered the ale-house, his stay was prolonged. Care now entered both the farm-houses. In one, old Dalton and Marion deplored the change which had taken place in George; and in the other, my parents could not close their ears to the rumours which reached them, nor shut their eyes against the altered manner of their son-in-law. The great proof of dogged obstinacy which George gave, was in his conduct respecting the hound. Those who wished him well, implored him to dispose of it; but he declared that he considered himself bound, by reason of the manner in which he had acquired the dog, to maintain and treat the animal kindly. He, however, kept Ponto chained up in the farmyard.

"Time wore on; the summer arrived and passed; and the autumn yielded so good a harvest that the produce was a complete set off against the heavy expenses entailed on the two families by the unlucky appeal. This circumstance somewhat cheered George's spirits; and the birth of a fine boy restored him almost completely to his former gaiety. In the evening, instead of finding some pretence to repair to the village, he sate with his beloved Marion; and happiness once more entered the homestead. But misfortune was again

impending over the head of George Dalton. It was one morning in the month of November, that he was repairing to his work, with a spade and a hoe over his shoulder, whistling as he was wont to do ere oppression had wronged him; and wondering, also, how he could ever have been so foolish as to pay such frequent visits to the public-house in the village. His mind was occupied, too, with the image of his Marion, whom he had left nourishing her babe; and perhaps his heart was never lighter than at that moment. But suddenly, he heard a slight noise behind him; and, turning round, he beheld Ponto, who, having succeeded in slipping his collar, had scampered after his master. George's first impulse was to secure the dog; but, as the devil would have it, at that very instant a hare jumped from her form close by. Ponto escaped from George's grasp, and the chase ensued. My brother-in-law was bewildered—he knew not how to act; but at last he pursued the hound, taking care, however, not to call him. Away went Ponto—the hare doubled and turned—George managing to keep them in sight. At length, to his horror, the hare swept towards a hedge, which in that point separated the Daltons' property from the Squire's preserves:—the hedge was passed by the pursued and the pursuing animals, and the chase was now maintained on Mr. Bulkeley's estate. But the run soon terminated by the death of the hare; and George, after casting a rapid glance around to assure himself that the coast was clear, sprang through the hedge to secure Ponto. He was, however, doomed to misfortune on this, as on the former occasion. The gamekeepers were up before he could retrace his steps into his own property; and he was immediately seized as a poacher and a trespasser. In dogged silence he accompanied the keepers to the house of the same magistrate who had before convicted him; but that 'worthy gentleman' was absent in London, and the prisoner was accordingly taken before the rector of the parish, who was also in the commission of the peace. The Squire was sent for, and the case was entered into under all the unfavourable circumstances of a previous conviction—a fruitless appeal—the exaggerated or positively false representations of the gamekeepers—the malignity of the Squire, and the readiness of his Reverence to believe every thing that was set forth to the prejudice of the prisoner. The parson-justice determined to send the case to the Sessions; and George was ordered to find bail. This was easily done, and he was accordingly liberated.

"This second misfortune, of the same kind, plunged the two families into the deepest affliction, and made Marion very ill. George said but little on the subject: he refused this time to employ any legal advice in getting up his defence, both on account of the expense, and because it was notorious that the unpaid magistrates always dealt more harshly with those persons who *dared* to show fight with the weapons of the law. Again there was a great sensation in the neighbourhood; and every one waited anxiously for the day of trial. That day came; and George left his Marion on a bed of sickness, to repair to the market-town. The Squire, the parson-justice, and the magistrate who had convicted the defendant on the previous occasion, and who had by this time returned from London, were all on the bench. The two gamekeepers swore that George Dalton had coursed with the same hound which had led him into trouble before—that he had persisted in keeping the dog in spite of the remonstrances of his friends—that in the case then under the cognisance of the court, he had encouraged the dog to chase the hare—that he had followed into the Squire's land—and that he was in the act of concealing the hare about his person when he was stopped by the keepers. George told the entire truth in defence, and implored the magistrates not to allow him to be crushed and ruined by the malignity of Squire Bulkeley. He was then about to enter into explanations to show wherefore the Squire persecuted him; but the chairman stopped him abruptly, saying, that he had no right to impute improper motives to any member of the court. The Squire, moreover, indignantly—or, at least, with seeming indignation—denied any such selfish purposes as those sought to be imputed to him; and it was very evident, that even if the magistrates were not already prejudiced against Dalton, this attempt at explanation on his part fully succeeded in rendering them so. George was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in the County House of Correction; and he was forthwith removed thither without being allowed to go home first and embrace his sick wife.

"You may suppose that Marion was distracted when she received this intelligence, although my mother went and broke it to her as gently as possible. Old Dalton was so overwhelmed with grief that he became dreadfully ill, took to his bed, and died three weeks after his beloved son's condemnation. My mother went to stay altogether with Marion until George's return, which took place at the expiration of his sentence. But how he was altered!—altered in mind as well as in personal appearance. He was gaol-tainted: his honourable feelings were impaired—his generous sympathies were ruined. He was still kind and tender to Marion and his child; but his visits to the ale-house soon re-commenced, and he neglected his work more and more. One night, about six weeks after his release from prison, a tremendous conflagration was seen in the immediate neighbourhood of the Squire's mansion: all the out-houses and farms were on fire; and, despite of the assistance rendered by Mr. Bulkeley's people, those premises were reduced to ashes. That it was the work of an incendiary was clearly ascertained; and suspicion instantly pointed to George Dalton. He was taken before a magistrate and examined; but nothing could be proved against him. The magistrate, however, observed, that he felt convinced of George's guilt, and deeply regretted the necessity there was to discharge him. I well remember that my father and mother evinced by their manner their fears that George was indeed the incendiary.

"From that moment a dreadful change came over my sister Marion. She grew profoundly melancholy; but not a murmur nor a complaint escaped her lips. There can be no doubt that *she* was aware who the incendiary was; and that knowledge was the death-blow to her happiness. The child, deprived of its proper nutriment—for Marion wasted to a mere shadow—drooped and died; and the poor mother declared hysterically that its loss was the greatest blessing which could have happened to her. This was the only allusion she was ever heard to make, direct or indirect, to the unhappy state of her mind and of her home. George continued kind to her; but kind rather in the shape of forbearance than in tokens of affection: that is to say, he never said a harsh word to her—nor beat her—nor slighted her; but he gave her little of his society, and was usually silent and thoughtful when in her presence.

"One day the parson-justice, whom I have before mentioned, called on the Daltons, and remonstrated with George on his conduct in absenting himself from church.—'I shall never go again, sir,' was the dogged answer.—'And why not?' demanded the clergyman. —'Because I got no good by it,' replied Dalton. 'The more I strove to be respectable, the more I was persecuted. The hound I liked, almost as if it was a human being, and which got me into two dreadful scrapes, was obliged to be given away; my father was killed by grief for my wrongs; and my wife's sorrow has led to the death of my child. My character is gone; and I know that sooner or later, I must be ruined, as I have no heart for work. Every thing that one prays for, and that I have so often prayed for, has been swept away: I

mean an honest reputation; the bread of industry; a cheerful disposition, and the health and long life of those who are near and dear to us.'—'Then you refuse to go to church any more?' said the parson-justice.—'I do,' was the answer; 'and the law can't compel me.'—'We shall see,' observed the Rector; and away he went. A few days afterwards the Squire issued a summons for George Dalton to attend before him. George went, and found that the Rector had laid an information against him, under an obsolete Act of Parliament,[31] for having absented himself from divine service during a period of six months. George was astounded at the charge, but could not deny its truth. The Squire accordingly sentenced him to a month's imprisonment in the House of Correction; and George was taken back to his old quarters—to the farther contamination of a gaol!

"This was another dreadful blow for Marion; and it produced such an effect upon our father, that, like old Dalton, he fell ill, and soon died. When George was liberated once more, he was compelled to part with his farm at a great loss; for his misfortunes and his absence on two occasions had left it but indifferently cultivated; and, moreover, as my father was now gone, it was thought better that we should all live together. Dalton's farm was accordingly put up for sale; and the Squire became the possessor of the land once more. George was now almost constantly at the ale-house. Instead of expending the money realised by the sale of the farm, after paying the debts due, in increasing the stock and improving the tillage of our land, he squandered it away on worthless companions. His wife never remonstrated when he came home late; but would sit up for him patiently and resignedly: and if ever my mother said any thing, she would observe, 'Poor George feels his wrongs too acutely to be able to bear up against them: there are great allowances to be made for him.' Thus did about two years pass away; and, though I and the two labourers whom we kept worked hard on the farm, yet it wanted the master-hand to superintend; and we found that its produce now scarcely yielded a bare maintenance when every thing was paid. Marion gradually got worse; but her endurance was inexhaustible. It often gave me pain to look at that poor, pale, wasted young woman, and think of her blooming charms when she first loved George Dalton. Her heart was breaking slowly—slowly—slowly! Had she been passionate, or liable to the influence of strong emotions, she would have gone rapidly down to the tomb; but she was so meek—so amiable—so resigned—so patient—so enduring, that her very weakness was her strength.

"Upwards of two years had passed since George's second liberation from confinement, when it was found necessary to raise money to increase the stock of the farm, and buy seed for sowing. George applied to the same attorney who had got up his defence on the occasion of his appeal; and this man offered to induce one of his clients to lend a certain sum on George's and my mother's joint bill of exchange, which he said would save all the expense of a mortgage. My mother objected strongly; but George promised so faithfully to amend his conduct if she would consent, that she did agree. The money was raised; but a considerable portion found its way to the public-house before any purchases were made. Even then, George forgot his pledges, and became, if possible, more idle and dissipated than before. The bill became due, and there were no assets to meet it. The lawyer, however, undertook to manage the affair; and he induced George and my mother to sign some parchment deed, which he previously read over in a hasty mumbling way, and in which blanks were left for the names of another person who appeared to be interested in it; and also blanks for certain dates, fixing the particular conditions as to time. My mother inquired why the name of the other party was not filled in; and the lawyer replied, with a chuckle, 'Oh! that is for the name of my client; and as he has only lent the money to serve you, and not as a mere lender, motives of delicacy induce this suppression for the time being.'—My mother did not like it; but George urged her to sign, and she did so.

"Three months after that an execution was levied upon the farm, at the suite of Squire Bulkeley, the lawyer's accommodating client, who had hitherto kept his name secret! George Dalton was at first a prey to the most terrific rage; but he mastered his feelings at the intercession of Marion and our mother. We were compelled to quit the farm, which now became the property of the Squire, by virtue of the roguish deed which had been drawn up by the unprincipled attorney; and we retired to a humble lodging in the village. Need I say how we all felt this sad reverse—this dreadful degradation? My mother and Marion strove hard to subdue their anguish, in order not to irritate the already much excited George; but there were moments when his outbursts of rage were furious in the extreme. He invoked curses upon the head of the Squire, whom he denounced as the murderer of his father and of mine, and also of his child; and he vowed to wreak a deadly vengeance upon him. At the ale-house, it seems, these threats were repeated, accompanied with the bitterest imprecations. On the following day George was arrested, and conveyed before the parson-justice, on a charge of threatening the life of Squire Bulkeley. He was ordered to find good bail for keeping the peace; but security was impossible in respect to one so fallen, lost, and characterless as he. To prison, then, again he was sent; and for three months he languished there, doubtless brooding over the awful wrongs which the Squire had heaped upon him. And all this time the Squire held up his head high; and no one in his own sphere of life seemed to think that he had acted at all unjustly or tyrannically. On the contrary, the gentry and the influential farmers in the neighbourhood, looked on George Dalton as an irreclaimable scamp, who had only got what he well deserved. Even those persons of the poorer class, who were formerly our friends, looked coldly on us, and shook their heads when the name of George Dalton was mentioned. So sure is it that if you give a dog a bad name, you may hang him.

"We lived as sparingly as possible on the wreck of our little property, during the three months that George's third imprisonment lasted; but I found it very difficult to get work, as the farmers said '*that I was as bad as my brother-in-law*.' And yet there was not a steadier lad in the whole county than myself; and, though invited, I never set foot in the ale-house. I was moreover regular in attendance at church, along with my mother and sister. But I got a bad name without deserving it; and even when I could procure a little employment, I was subjected to a thousand annoyances. Unpleasant hints would be dropped about the burning down of the Squire's out-houses, and the name of George Dalton was darkly alluded to in connexion with that business; or, if I refused, on a Saturday night, to accompany my fellow-labourers to the ale-house, I was taunted with knowing something that I was afraid of confessing in my cups. At that time I often thought of running away, and seeking my fortune elsewhere; but when I looked at my poor mother, now deprived of almost necessaries, and my sister pining away, I had not the heart to do it. Besides, I was greatly attached to George Dalton, and was anxious to see in what state of mind he would come out of prison. Three times during his incarceration was Marion allowed to visit him; and on each occasion she returned home to our humble lodging weeping bitterly. Neither my mother nor myself ever questioned her much; for we knew her extreme devotion to George, and that she would not only always endeavour to conceal his failings as much as possible, but that she likewise strove to hold out hopes of his complete reformation. But when he was emancipated once more, he

had become sullen, dogged, and morose—*forbearing* only in respect to Marion, to whom he could no longer be said to be positively *kind*. He did not mention the name of the Squire, nor in any way allude to him; neither did he visit the ale-house—and thus my mother and I began to hope that Marion's fond hopes were likely to be fulfilled.

"Having recruited his strength by a few days' rest, after his half-famished sojourn in the gaol, George one morning said to me, 'Now, Tim, you and me will go out and look for work.' We accordingly set off, but applied fruitlessly at all the farm-houses in the neighbourhood. Some did not want hands: others positively refused to have any thing to do with George Dalton or any one connected with him. We were returning homeward, mournful enough, when we passed a large lime-kiln, the owner of which had been very intimate with George's father and mine. He happened to be coming up from the pit at the moment when we were passing; and stopping us, he entered into conversation. Finding that we were in search of work, he offered to employ us in the chalk-pit; and we readily accepted the proposal. Next day we went to work; and when the Saturday night came round, we were paid liberally. Thus several weeks elapsed; and we earned enough to keep the home comfortably. Our master was good and kind to us; and the spirits of my brother-in-law appeared to revive. But he never mentioned the Squire, nor alluded to the past oftener than he could help.

"We had been employed in this manner for about three months, when one evening George and I stayed later than the other labourers in the chalk-pit, to finish a job which we knew the owner wanted to be completed as soon as possible. It was ten o'clock before we made an end of our toil; and we were just on the point of retiring, when we saw two persons walking slowly along the brink of the chalk-pit. The moon was bright—the night was beautifully clear; and we obtained a full view of the two figures: but as we were at the bottom of the precipice, they could not have seen us, even if they had looked attentively downward. 'Tim,' said George, in a low, hoarse whisper, 'one of those men is the Squire. I recognised his infernal countenance just now when the moonlight fell full upon it.'—We remained perfectly quiet at the foot of the chalky side of the pit; although I do not believe that George had any bad intention in view, and I only stayed because he did.

"The Squire and his companion began to talk together; and by the name in which Mr. Bulkeley addressed the other, George and I immediately knew that he was one of the very gamekeepers who had twice perjured themselves in mis-stating the circumstances connected with the exploits of Ponto.—'And so you say that the scoundrel Dalton works in this pit now, eh?' observed the Squire.—'Yes, sir,' replied the other: 'he's come down to that at last.'—'By God! I never shall be contented till I send him to Botany Bay, or to the scaffold!' exclaimed the Squire. 'But sooner or later, you see, I obtain vengeance on those who offend me. Old Splint refused to sell me his field, and spoke insolently to me: he died of grief through all that has happened, and the entire farm is now mine. Old Dalton contrived to buy his land, through my cursed neglect in forgetting to tell my agent to except his property from any part that might be sold; but he also died of grief, and the land has come back to me. Ah! ah! I bought that in again too, no doubt to the vexation of young Dalton. Then, next we have the insolent jade Marion: she refused my overtures, and persisted in marrying Dalton; and what has she gained? Nothing but misery. As for George Dalton himself, he insulted and struck me, besides carrying off Marion as it were before my very eyes and making her his wife, when she was much more fitted to become my mistress;—and what has *he* got for his pains? I have crushed and ruined him, and I will never stop till I have shown him what it is to dare to offend an English landowner. But you say that this is the pit where he works?'—'Yes, sir,' answered the gamekeeper.—'Well, I shall see his master to-morrow,' continued the Squire; 'and I'll be bound to say George Dalton will not do another week's work in this place. You may now go and join your men in the preserves; and I shall return to the Hall, by the short cut through the fields. The night is uncommonly fine, however, and is really tempting enough to make one stay out an hour or two.'—'It is very fine, sir,' answered the gamekeeper. 'Good night, sir;'—and the man walked rapidly away, the Squire remaining on the edge of the pit, about thirty feet above the spot where George and I were crouched up.

"'Tim,' said George at last,—and his voice was deep and hollow, although he spoke in a low whisper,—'do you remain here quite quiet: I must have a word or two with that man.'—'For God's sake, George,' I said, 'do not seek a quarrel.'—'No, I won't seek a quarrel exactly,' returned my brother-in-law; 'but I cannot resist the opportunity to tell my mind to this miscreant who is now seeking to deprive us of our bread.'—And before I had time to utter another word, George was gliding rapidly but almost noiselessly up the craggy side of the chalk-pit, holding by the furze that grew in thick strong bunches. I confess that a strong presentiment of evil struck terror to my soul; and I remained breathless and trembling, where he had left me, but gazing upwards with intense anxiety. 'Holloa!' suddenly exclaimed the Squire, who had remained for nearly three minutes on the top of the precipice after his gamekeeper had quitted him—most likely brooding over the new scheme of vengeance which his hateful mind had planned: 'holloa!' he said; 'who is there?'—'I, George Dalton!' cried my brother-in-law, suddenly leaping to within a few paces of where the Squire was standing, and confronting the bad man like a ghost rising from a grave in the presence of the murderer.—'And what the devil do you want here, scoundrel?' exclaimed the Squire.—'Rather what do *you* want, plotting against me still?' demanded George. 'I overheard every word that passed between you and your vile agent; and if there was any doubt before as to your detestable malignity, there is none now.'—'Listeners never hear any good of themselves,' retorted the Squire; 'and if I called you a rascal, as perhaps I might have done, I meant what I said, and you heard yourself mentioned by your proper name.'—'Villain! miscreant!' cried George, now quite furious; 'you shall no longer triumph over me!'—And in another moment they were locked in a firm embrace, but not of love; and in the next moment after that, they rolled over the edge of the precipice, down to within a few paces where I was standing.

"A scream of terror escaped me; for I thought that they must be killed. The Squire lay senseless; but George leapt upon his feet—and almost at the same instant a low moan denoted that his enemy was not dead.—'Thank God, murder has not been done!' I exclaimed.—'But murder *will* be done, Tim, this night,' said George, in a voice not loud, but so terrible in its tone that it made my blood run cold in my veins. 'Yes,' he continued, 'my mortal enemy is now in my power. For a long time have I brooded over the vengeance that I had resolved to take upon him when no one should be near to tell the tale; for *you* will not betray me, Tim—you will not give me up to the hangman on account of what I may do?'—'George, I implore you not to talk thus,' I said, falling on my knees at his feet.—'As there is a living God, Tim, above us,' said George, solemnly, 'if you attempt to thwart me, I will make away with you also!' And having thus spoken, he raised the Squire in his arms, while I still remained on my knees, horrified and speechless. Never, never shall I forget the

feelings which then possessed me! The Squire recovered his senses, and exclaimed, 'Where am I? Who are you?'—'George Dalton, your mortal enemy,' was the terrific reply.—'Oh! I recollect now,' cried the Squire, wildly. 'But do not murder me!'—'Your last hour is come! and your death shall be as terrible as human revenge can render it!' said George, in a voice which I should not have recognised without a foreknowledge that it was actually he who was speaking.—'Mercy!' cried the Squire, as George dragged him away towards the middle of the pit.

"Oh! then I divined the dread intent of my brother-in-law; but I could not move a hand to help, nor raise my voice to shout for assistance in behalf of the victim. There I remained on my knees—speechless, stupified, deprived of motion,—able only to exercise the faculty of sight; and that showed me a horrible spectacle! For, having half stunned the Squire with a fearful blow, inflicted with a lump of chalk, George dragged him towards the kiln in which the lime was still burning, diffusing a pale red glow immediately above. 'Mercy!' once more cried the Squire, recovering his senses a second time.—'Mercy! miscreant,' exclaimed George; 'what mercy have you ever shown to me?' and, as he uttered these words, he hurled his victim, or rather his oppressor, into the burning pit! There was a shriek of agony—but it was almost immediately stifled; and the lurid glow became brighter, and the form of my brother-in-law seemed to expand and grow vast to my affrighted view; so that he appeared some dreadful fiend bending over the fiery receptacle for damned souls!

"Still was I a motionless, speechless, stupified spectator of that horrible tragedy, at a distance of about twenty yards. But no words can describe the dreadful feelings that seized upon me, when I suddenly beheld an object reach the top of the burning kiln, and cling there for an instant, until George Dalton with his foot thrust him back—for that object was indeed the Squire—into the fiery tomb! Then a film came rapidly over my eyes—my head seemed to swim round—and I fell back senseless. I was aroused by a sensation of violent shaking; and, on opening my eyes, I saw George Dalton bending over me. I shuddered fearfully—for all the particulars of the dreadful deed so recently performed, rushed to my mind with overwhelming force; and I remember that I clasped my hands together in an agonising manner, exclaiming, 'My God! George, how could you do it?'—'Tim,' he replied, 'I do not repent what I have done. Human endurance could not stand more. If I had to live the last hour over again, I would act in the same manner. *Your* father—*my* father—and my child, were all as good as murdered by that man: and he has deserved death. Death he has met at last; and the sweetest moments I ever tasted were when I saw him crawling painfully up from the smouldering bottom of the pit, with his flesh all scorched, his clothes singed to tinder, and his face awfully disfigured,—clinging, too, with his burnt hands to the burning lime, and too wretched—yes, too full of horror, even to utter a moan. Then I kicked him back, and I watched his writhings till all was over. He died with difficulty, Tim; and my only regret is that he was not ten hours in the tortures of that death, instead of as many minutes. But, come, get off your knees, and let us be going. I do not ask you whether you mean to tell of me, because that would not prevent you if you have the intention.'—'George, do you think it possible!' I exclaimed, scarcely able to recover from the horrified sensations which were excited by the cold, implacable manner in which he had described the dying efforts and agonies of his enemy.—'Well, Tim,' he said, 'I don't ask you for any promises: you can do as you like. One thing is very certain, I could never harm you; and so, if you do take it into your head to turn round upon me, you would be treating me as I never should treat you. Let us say no more about it; and if you *can* keep a composed countenance before the women, do.'

"We left the pit; and when we reached the top, George said, 'You go one way, and I will go another. If you are met out late by any one, you would not be suspected; but I should—and I would not involve you in any danger by your being seen with me; for, remember Tim,' he added, as we were about to separate, 'if I should happen to be caught out, I shall never say that you were present. And now get home as soon as you can; and say that you left work an hour ago, but that you took a walk, or something of that kind, before you went home. You can also seem surprised that I have not yet come back: that is, if I don't get home before you.' We parted, and I took the nearest road to the village, which I reached a little after eleven. Marion and my mother were rather uneasy at our absence; and I was quite unable to master my feelings so far as to appear composed and comfortable. Indeed, they were already overwhelming me with questions, when George made his appearance. I was astonished to see how happy he appeared: there was, positively, a glow of animation in his countenance, as if he had done some admirable deed. Somehow or another, his good spirits were catching; and I began to think that an admirable deed had really been accomplished, in ridding the earth of a monster whose delight was to crush and oppress the poor. George said that he had been to deliver some message to the owner of the kiln, after he had separated from me; and that made him so late. I had already stated that I had taken a good long walk, and our tales were believed. But, when the two women retired to rest, and George and I were left alone for a few minutes, his manner suddenly changed, as he said in a hoarse, low whisper, 'Tim, there is danger menacing *me*. A few minutes after you and I parted, I met the Squire's gamekeepers near the pit, as they were going their rounds on account of the poachers; and they recognised me. My only chance of safety is in the probability that the lime will consume the body entirely. At all events I shall be the first at the pit in the morning.' I was horror-struck at what he told me, and conjured him to seek safety by flight; but he declared his resolution to await the issue of events, and trust to fortune. He said that he felt perfectly happy in having wreaked his vengeance upon the Squire, and should not experience other feelings, were he on the scaffold. He then rose and went to join Marion, while I prepared to spread my bed as usual on the floor of our little parlour.

"It was not yet day-light when I was awakened by hearing a noise in the room; and on inquiry, I found that it was George, about to sally forth, as he had intimated to me on the preceding night. I offered to get up and accompany him; but he said, 'Not for the world, Tim. Should any thing happen to *me*, *you* must be at least safe, for those poor creatures of women cannot be left without a friend and protector.' He then left the room, and in a few moments I heard the street-door closing gently. I lay down again and tried to sleep, but could not. An indescribable feeling of uneasiness was upon me, and I found myself, even against my will, balancing and calculating the chances for or against the detection of the murder. At length my mind was worked up to such a pitch of excitement that I could remain in bed no longer; and I rose and dressed myself. Having opened the shutters, I found that the day was just breaking. I cleared away the bedding, and laid the breakfast-table, as was my custom. Presently my mother and Marion made their appearance; and we sate down to the morning meal. But I could eat nothing; and my uneasiness was soon perceived. 'Tim,' said Marion, 'there is something upon your mind: I know there is. You cannot conceal it; and if you deny it, you will not be speaking the truth. In the name of heaven, tell me what grieves you! And why has George gone out so unusually early and without his breakfast this morning?'—I assured both my sister and mother that there was nothing the matter with me, and that George had merely gone out early to do a good day's work, as he hoped to get an increase of wages. Marion was not satisfied; but she saw that it was useless to question me, at least before our mother: accordingly, when the latter left the room after breakfast, my sister again urged me to make her acquainted with the cause of the secret anxiety which she knew was preying upon me. I renewed my protestations that she was mistaken. 'Well, Tim,' she said in her quiet, plaintive manner, while her blue eyes filled with tears, 'if any thing should happen, the blow will be certain to kill me, because I shall be unprepared for it.'—For a few moments I hesitated whether I would confide to her the terrific secret of the murder; but I had not the courage, and hurried away to join my brother-in-law at the kiln.

"As I passed through the village, with my pickaxe on my back, I met a person whom I knew. 'Splint,' said he, 'have you heard any thing?'—I know that I turned deadly pale, as I stammered out, 'No, nothing particular.'—He did not notice my change of countenance, but added, 'The Squire is missing, and foul play is suspected. That is all I have heard. But where is George?'—'Why should you instantly ask that question, after mentioning the report about Squire Bulkeley?' I asked; and it was with the utmost difficulty that I could restrain my feelings so as to speak in a manner at all composed.—'Oh! only because if any thing should be wrong, you know, I am afraid that George Dalton would be suspected first; as every one is aware that he is no friend to the Squire;'—and the man passed on his way, not having intended to say any thing cruel or cutting, for he was a good kind of a fellow. My alarms increased; and I felt so terribly uneasy, that I knew not whether to throw down my pickaxe and run away altogether, or whether I should proceed to the chalk-pit. But while I was still weighing in my mind all the chances for and against detection, I came within sight of the fatal spot where the dreadful murder had been perpetrated. There was the height from which my brother-in-law and the Squire had rolled down, so firmly locked in each other's hostile embrace: there was the chimney of the kiln, in the burning-pit of which the wretched man had endured such fearful agonies before death released him!

"I know not how it was—but, though I really wished to fly from the fatal spot, some strange influence urged me on, or rather attracted me thither. When I reached a point from which I could command a view of the depths of the chalk-pit, an icy chill struck to my heart. George was in the grasp of the Squire's two principal gamekeepers; and the labourers of the pit were gathered round the mouth of the kiln, in a manner which convinced me that they had made some discovery. At that instant the words which George had addressed to me that morning, flashed back to mind:—'*Should any thing happen to me, you must be at least safe; for these poor creatures of women cannot be left without a friend and protector.*'—My soul recovered all its power, and I felt that the truth of those words was strong indeed. Yes—what would become of my poor mother and the unhappy Marion, if both of their protectors were snatched away from them? Never was presence of mind more necessary. With a firm step I descended the sloping path leading into the pit, and affected extreme surprise when I beheld George in the custody of the gamekeepers. A rapid but significant glance on his part encouraged me to maintain the part I was playing; and fortunately no one suspected that a mere lad of fifteen or sixteen like me had any hand in the dreadful deed of which there was now evidence to prove the perpetration. It was however with no affected horror that I gathered from the hurried words of the labourers the particulars of the discovery. It appeared that the absence of the Squire from home all night had created an alarm; and this was augmented when it was ascertained that the Squire had been with one of his gamekeepers at the chalk-pit, and that half an hour afterwards this same keeper and another had encountered George Dalton in the same vicinity. The gamekeepers, finding that the Squire had not returned home all night, repaired direct to the chalk-works, where they found George Dalton had just arrived; and the dawn of day showed them enough at the bottom of the lime-pit to convince them that murder had been perpetrated. To the questions put to him by those who arrested him, George replied that he had parted from me at about a quarter to ten o'clock on the previous evening—that I had returned home—and that he had remained behind to finish his work;—but he denied having seen the Squire at all.

"I may as well state now, although I was not aware of the fact till some hours later on that terrible day, that the Squire's bailiff had been sent for the moment George was arrested and the murder was discovered; and that, having heard George's answers to the questions put to him, he set off for the village by a short cut over the Bulkeley estate; whereas I took the main road to the pit, and therefore had not met him. It appears that on his arrival at the village, the bailiff went straight to our lodgings, and began to question Marion and her mother as to whether George had been home at all during the night; and if so, at what hour he had returned. Marion named the hour at which he had returned; adding, that he was so late because he had been, on leaving off work, to deliver a message to the owner of the chalk-pit. The bailiff then brutally revealed the whole terrible truth to the two females; and though I was not there to witness the same, yet it is easy to believe that it was terrible and heart-rending indeed. But, heedless of the misery which his abrupt discourse had produced, the bailiff hastened off to the owner of the chalk-pit, and learnt from him that George had *not* been near him on the preceding evening. Back to the pit went the bailiff, now accompanied by its owner; and the next step was to convey the prisoner before the nearest magistrate, who happened to be the rector of the parish. I was desired to go with the party; but no suspicion was attached to me. It was proved that the calcined remains of a human body were found in the hole where the lime was burnt; and that the metal buttons picked up were those which belonged to the coat the Squire had on the previous evening. I need not detail the nature of the

evidence which appeared to tell against George Dalton; because you can well understand it from all the circumstances I have already related. He conducted himself with wonderful calmness and presence of mind throughout the long examination, which lasted for several hours; and when the magistrate asked him if he had any thing to say in his defence, or to show why he should not be committed for trial, he answered in a firm tone, 'I am innocent, and have nothing more to say.' He was accordingly committed for trial—handcuffs were put upon him; and he was removed to an out-house, guarded by constables, until a cart could be got in readiness to convey him to the County Gaol.

"But in the yard of the rector's abode a heart-rending scene took place. Marion was there, waiting to see her husband, of whose guilt *she*, poor thing! could entertain no doubt. She had left our mother, who had fallen down in a fit when the disclosure was so rudely made by the bailiff, to the care of the landlady of the house in which we lived; and, crushed with deep affliction—weak—sickly—almost heart-broken as she was, she had dragged herself to the place where she heard the examination was going on. 'Oh! George, George!' she exclaimed, as she rushed forward to embrace her husband, whose manacles rattled, as, forgetting that he wore them, he endeavoured to extend his arms to receive her. How poor Marion wept!—what convulsive sobs escaped her bosom! George wept also; but he said every thing fond and endearing to console her. The parson-justice appeared at the door of his house; and, perceiving the sad spectacle, said, 'Take that woman away: I will not have such scenes under my windows. She is no doubt as bad as he.'—Never shall I forget the look of imploring anguish which Marion turned towards that *minister of the Gospel*, who spoke so sternly and so unjustly; then, in the next moment, she fell senseless upon the ground. The constables rushed upon George to drag him off to the out-house: but he hurled them away, manacled as he was, crying in a voice that struck terror to my soul, 'I will not move an inch till I see this poor innocent creature properly cared for. Keep off—or I shall do *another murder*!'—'Another murder!' exclaimed the rector: 'then he confesses that of the Squire!'—But George heard not the observation; nor did he seem to notice the tremendous oversight which he had committed in the bewildering anguish of the moment. Bending over Marion, he raised her with his chained hands, while one of the rector's servants, more humane than his master, brought out water to sprinkle upon her countenance. At length she slowly opened her eyes; and George, beckoning to me, said, 'Now, Tim, take her away: I cannot bear this scene any more!'—I approached, and lent my support to poor Marion, while George, of his own accord, hurried to the out-house, not once casting a look behind him.

"I know not how I got my wretched sister home;—and I was nearly as wretched as herself. But at length we reached our humble lodging, where the landlady, who appeared to be the only friend left to us in the world, did all she could to console the miserable young wife. Had it not been for that kind-hearted woman, we must all have perished through sheer want; for I received notice from the owner of the chalk-pit that my services would be dispensed with in future, and no one else would give me work. A week after George's committal, my mother died; and she, who was once the wife of a farmer well-to-do in the world, was now buried at the expense of the parish! When the funeral was over, and Marion grew somewhat more composed, she insisted upon removing to Winchester, so as to be near the gaol wherein her husband lay. 'If we go,' said I, 'we must beg our way.'—'Then we will beg our way, Tim,' answered Marion; 'for, whether innocent or guilty, George is my husband, and I can never cease to love him.'—I offered no farther remonstrance; so, bidding our kind landlady farewell, we set out, with only half-a-crown in our pockets; and for that sum we were indebted to that same good landlady.

"On our arrival at Winchester, we took a small lodging near the goal; and Marion went to see her husband. She insisted upon going alone; and I did not thwart her in any of her wishes. When she returned to me, she seemed a little more tranquil than she had yet been since the dreadful disclosure of George's arrest on an accusation of murder. She was consoled by having seen her husband, although she could not do otherwise than believe him guilty. But of that she never spoke to me; and I was very careful not to touch upon the point. I now tried to obtain work; but, at some places where I applied, *character* was inquired about, and at others no assistance was wanted. At last I was actually compelled to go into the streets and beg, for Marion was attacked with severe indisposition. One evening, as I was returning home without having succeeded in obtaining a single halfpenny all day long, and in a state bordering on despair, I was warned by a beadle that if I was seen begging in the streets again, I should be taken up as a rogue and vagabond. Frightened by his threats, I hurried away, and was already in sight of the house in which we lived, and where I had left my poor sister in the morning, when, by the light streaming from a shop-window, I saw an old gentleman drop something on the ground as he drew out his pocket-handkerchief. He went on without noticing the occurrence; and I picked up the object, which proved to be his purse. Gold glittered through the net-work at one end—silver was in the other. I ran after the gentleman as hard as I could, hoping to receive a reward for my trouble; but I could not find him. Thinking he had entered some house in the street, I waited for nearly an hour—but still he appeared not. It came on to rain hard: I was soon wet through to the skin, for my clothes were old and tattered; and the pangs of hunger were now dreadful. The idea of using a small portion of the money in the purse, by degrees grew stronger and stronger in my mind. I thought of poor Marion, who was famished as well as myself;—the temptation was too strong—and I yielded. Rushing to a baker's shop, I procured bread: thence I proceeded to a general-dealer's, and purchased a little tea, sugar, butter, and other necessaries. I then returned home, and told Marion that a charitable gentleman had given me half-a-crown, and that I was also promised work. 'Alas! my poor brother,' she said, 'you are compelled to think of supporting me as well as yourself: but it will not be for long, Tim,' she added: 'I feel it *there* now,'—and she touched her forehead,—'as well as *here*,'—and she placed her hand on her heart.—I burst into tears, and implored her not to talk in that mournful way. She shook her head, sighing piteously—but said nothing.

"Next day I went out and remained absent until night. When I came home again I said that I had obtained work, at the rate of two shillings a day and was to be paid every evening. So I laid two shillings on the table. I forgot to observe that the purse contained about eleven pounds in gold and silver; and I was determined to dole it out in such a way that Marion should not suspect me of deceiving her. As often as the gaol regulations would permit, she visited her husband; for the little comforts which I was now able to provide for her, restored her strength in a trifling degree—at all events, sufficiently so to enable her to drag her drooping form along to the dungeon which held all she deemed most dear. Once only did I see George before the day of his trial; for Marion preferred to visit him alone. He was greatly affected at beholding us together, and thanked me for my kindness towards my sister.

"At last, after the lapse of about three months, the Assizes commenced; and on the second day the trial came on. George had counsel to

defend him: for I supplied the means from the purse, having invented some tale to account for the possession of the requisite sum to fee the barrister, so that Marion was satisfied. It was with the greatest difficulty that I could persuade her to remain at home during the proceedings, at which I was compelled to be present as a witness. I need not detail all the particulars of the evidence given against my unhappy brother-in-law: circumstances all told in his disfavour, and the observation which he had let slip, '*I shall do another murder*,' was made the most of by the counsel for the prosecution. I was examined, and I swore that I had quitted the prisoner at the lime-kiln at a quarter to ten on the night in question. It was proved that it was not until *past* ten that the gamekeeper accompanied the Squire to the neighbourhood of the fatal place; and therefore no questions were put likely to embarrass me. The counsel for the defence argued most ingeniously in George's favour; but the Judge summed up against him.[32] The Jury did not deliberate ten minutes; and the verdict was *Guilty*! George was standing in the dock all the time that the Jury were whispering together and when the foreman pronounced his doom; and a slight muscular twitching of the lips was the only sign of emotion. The Judge put on the black cap,[33] and sentenced him to death in the usual horrible terms. I must confess that, though I had but little room in my soul for reflection of any kind—so much was it occupied with the *one* dreadful fact of the day—I shuddered and looked with loathing upon the Judge,—to hear that old man, himself having one foot in the grave, uttering such a disgusting, cruel, and inhuman sentence as this:—'*You shall be taken back to the place whence you came, and thence to a place of execution, where you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead!*' Then, when man has done his worst, and will not forgive nor attempt to reform the criminal, the awful atrocity concludes with the damnable mockery—'*And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!*' I call it a mockery, because it is insulting to heaven to invoke that pity and compassion which human beings so positively refuse. But then the old Judge was a mere mouthpiece through which the blood-thirsty law spoke; and he was compelled to do a duty for which he was so well paid. Still I loathed that old man who could *sell* his feelings for money, and who could be allured by the temptation of a large income to undertake an office which constrained him to doom his fellow-creatures to die the deaths of mere dogs. I wondered whether he could sleep comfortably in his bed afterwards; and I thought at the time that I would sooner be the veriest beggar crawling on the face of the earth, than a Judge with all his money—all the respect shown to him—and all his titles of Lordship!

"But I have wandered away from my subject. Poor George was removed from the dock:—I mean, he accompanied the turnkeys back to the gaol; for he walked as firmly as I could do at this moment. I now had a most dreadful duty to perform—to convey the result to Marion. But I hastened back to her, fearful lest she should learn that result from lips which might not break the horrible tidings slowly to her. When I entered the garret where I had left her, I found her on her knees praying aloud and fervently. The sight was too much for me; and I burst into tears. She rose slowly, took me by the hand, and said, 'Tim—dear Tim, you need not attempt *to break it gently to me*, as I know you have come to do. I feel—something tells me, indeed—that it is all over: and I have been long prepared for this awful moment! I have never allowed myself to indulge in vain hopes. The world, I was convinced, would persecute my poor husband until it drove him to——but I cannot, cannot say where! That he was guilty of the deed, Tim, I have known all along; and, dreadful as that deed was, I could not reproach him for it. He was goaded to desperation by wrong heaped upon wrong; and, instead of being treated as a criminal, he should be looked upon as a victim himself.'—Marion had spoken with an unnatural calmness, which made me tremble lest her reason was deserting her; but when she had concluded her address to me, she threw herself into my arms, and burst into a violent flood of weeping. I endeavoured to console her: she grew frantic. The command which she had maintained over herself throughout that dreadful day, and in the solitude of that garret, had tried her powers of endurance too severely; and now that her long pent-up anguish burst forth, it was awful in the extreme. 'Oh! my God!' I exclaimed; 'what have we done that we should be thus tortured on earth, as if we were in hell?'—and then I thought of the crime I had committed in appropriating the contents of the purse to my own use—and I felt ashamed. But in a few moments other feelings came over me: it struck me that there was no use in being good. Old Dalton—my father—my mother—poor Marion—and, until the date of that one deed, myself,—none of us had ever been wicked—and yet, how awfully had we suffered. The three first had positively been *killed* by misfortune. And George too,—there was not a more upright, honourable, generous-hearted man in existence than he, until oppression and cruel wrong wrought a change in his nature. Such were my thoughts; and again I asked myself, what was the use of being good? From that moment I determined to do as I saw the world doing around me.

"The execution was fixed for the second Thursday after the trial, which took place on a Tuesday; and during the interval Marion saw her husband three times. I accompanied her on each occasion; for I was afraid to allow her to venture out alone. George maintained his courage in an astonishing manner; but never alluded to the crime in our presence. He showed the greatest affection towards his wife, and the warmest attachment for me; and implored her not to give way more than she could help to grief on his account. The third interview was on the evening previous to the fatal day; and that was heart-rending indeed. Marion, no longer resigned and enduring, was absolutely frantic; and she was borne away, raving wildly, from the condemned cell. I managed to get her home; and some female lodgers in the same house put her to bed. A surgeon was sent for, and he pronounced her to be in the greatest danger. I sate up with her all that night, throughout which she slept at intervals, awaking to rave after her '*dear murdered husband*!' Had she not been my sister, I never could have supported the horrors of that awful night. Towards morning she seemed quite exhausted, and fell into a deep slumber. The execution was to take place at twelve precisely; and I hoped, sincerely hoped, that she might sleep until all should be over. Hour after hour passed—eleven o'clock struck, and still she slept. Every now and then she started convulsively, and murmured the name of her husband. Oh! how anxiously did I then wait for the chimes that proclaimed the quarters! and how slowly went the time! 'Poor George! what are your feelings now?' I kept repeating to myself. A quarter past—half-past eleven,—a quarter to twelve,—these had all struck, and still she slept. As I sate by her bed-side, I could hear the rushing crowds in the street below; and I also heard all the lodgers hastening down the stairs to witness the execution! But still Marion slept; and, in the bitterness of my own grief, this circumstance was a slight consolation.

"At length the chimes announced the hour—the fatal hour! Scarcely had they done playing, when Marion awoke with a sudden start, and raised herself to a sitting posture in the bed. Wildly she glanced around—and again she started fearfully as, the chimes being over,

the clock began to strike the hour. '*One—two—three*,' she began in a tone of piercing anguish; and on she went counting the strokes till her tongue had numbered *twelve*! 'My God! 'tis the hour!' she exclaimed, with a dreadful shriek; then extending her arms wildly, she cried, 'I come, George—I come!' and fell back heavily in the bed, as if shot through the heart. She was no more!

"It appeared that the drop fell about half a minute after the last stroke of twelve; and, therefore, by a strange chance, poor George must have breathed his last almost at the very instant when Marion uttered those words so wildly—'*I come! I come!*'—Thus died my persecuted brother-in-law and my poor sister; and I was now left alone—friendless—unprotected in the wide world.

"A strange whim now suddenly entered my head: I would bury the remains of the ill-fated couple in the same grave! Such was my idea; and so determined was I to carry it into execution that I set out deliberately and calmly for the purpose of robbing some one to obtain the means for the purpose. When I got into the street I found the crowds dispersing after having witnessed the execution of my brother-in-law. How I loathed the inhuman creatures, who had shown such eager curiosity to view the last struggles of a man hung up like a dog by the blood-thirsty mandates of the law! Some were laughing and joking together as they walked along; and such observations as these caught my ears:—'How game he died, didn't he?'—'That Jack Ketch is a devilish clever fellow at his business!'—'It was the best turnoff I have seen for a long time.'—'I propose that we don't go to work to-day. Let's make a holiday of it? For my part, I never fail to attend all executions that take place in the county, and I always look upon it as a holiday; just like Easter Monday or Whit Monday for instance.'—'What fun it was to see that old chap whom I bonneted in the crowd! How he did curse and swear just as the parson was reading the last prayer on the scaffold!'—'I never had such a jolly good lark in my life. I had my arm round Tom Tiffin's wife's waist all the time.'—'What a precious sight of pickpockets there was in the crowd!'—These, and a hundred other observations of the same kind, met my ears as I walked along the streets through which the people were returning from the execution. At length I passed the door of a public news-room; and there several gentlemen were standing, in conversation about the hideous spectacle, which one of them had witnessed, and which this individual was describing with wonderful minuteness to his companions. I pretended to be looking at some pictures in the shop-window, but was in reality surveying the group, thinking that one of them might become paymaster (though against his will) for the funeral of my sister and brother-in-law.—'You don't mean to say that the woman really did it?' cried one of the gentlemen.—'I mean to say,' answered the person who had witnessed the execution, 'that immediately after the criminal was dead, or rather as soon as he had ceased to struggle, the woman went up on the scaffold and the executioner put the murderer's hand upon her face to cure the King's evil; and when she had gone down again, a countryman ascended to the platform, and was touched in the same way for a wen which he had got upon his head. I saw it all myself.'—'Well, I could scarcely believe it,' said the other gentleman who had spoken.—'I will lay you ten guineas,' exclaimed the one who had witnessed the execution, 'that if you ask any other person who was present, he will tell you the same thing: and, thus speaking, the gentleman drew out his purse. His friend, however, declined the wager; and the purse was re-consigned to the pocket, but not before I had seen enough of it to convince me that its contents were worth having. I felt the less remorse in robbing that man, because he had described, with such methodical cold-bloodedness, all the minute details of the execution; and, availing myself of on opportunity when the group had got deep into a loud and excited discourse on the incidents of touching for the King's evil and the wen, I managed to extract the purse in even a far more skilful manner than I had expected. The robbery was not immediately perceived; and I got clear away.

"On returning to my miserable garret, and by the side of the bed whereon lay the remains of my once beautiful and amiable sister, I counted the contents of the purse. 'Eleven guineas!' I murmured to myself; and, as I glanced tremblingly at the corpse, it actually seemed to me at the moment as if an expression of deep gloom and sorrow suddenly passed over its countenance. 'Oh! my sister—my dear sister!' I cried; 'I have done it for your sake:'—and then, unable to remain any longer near one who seemed to reproach me even in death, I hurried away to the prison to claim the body of my brother-in-law. This request was granted without difficulty; and in the course of the day the husband and wife lay together upon the same bed—side by side—motionless, white, and cold,—the former murdered by the law, the latter by cruel wrong and diabolical oppression. The undertaker had received my instructions, and the preparations for the funeral were in progress. But two nights did I pass in the same room with those dead bodies; for, although I was afraid, yet something seemed to whisper to me within, that it would be heartless and cruel to abandon even those inanimate remains until the grave should close over them! And as I sate by their side, while a candle burnt dimly on the table, I thought to myself, 'All this tremendous amount of sorrow, calamity, and woe has been caused by a wealthy and unprincipled landlord! Had it not been for Squire Bulkeley, those two would still have been alive, and would have been happy, prosperous, and useful to society. But the tenant or the small landowner has no chance against the proprietor of great estates, if the latter chooses to be a tyrant. The herring has as much right as the whale to swim in the waters which God has made; and yet the whale swallows up the herring! So is it with the great and the small landholder!'

"Well, the funeral took place—and there were four mourners, one real and three sham. The real one was myself—the three sham were the undertaker and two of his dependants. Nevertheless, my aim was accomplished: George and his wife slept in the same grave; and the money of a man who had greedily devoured the hideous spectacle of public strangulation had served to bury them! In spite of my grief I chuckled at this idea; it seemed something like retributive justice. I had now no object in staying at Winchester; and, with eleven shillings in my pocket, I set out to walk to London. During my journey I passed the chalk-pit where the dreadful deed had taken place—I passed it purposely, because I now wanted to harden my mind as much as possible, for I saw it was no use for a poor friendless orphan like me to think of being honest. In the most civilised country (as it is called) in the world, I had seen such abominable acts of oppression perpetrated, under colour of law, that I envied those naked savages in islands a great way off of whom I had read in books; *for I thought that it was better to be barbarians without the pretence of civilisation, than to be barbarians with that pretence*. I had heard a great deal said by my father, by old Mr. Dalton, and also by the clergyman from the pulpit, about the paternal nature of the English Government; but I now began to perceive that it had been mere delusion on the part of my well-meaning parent and Mr. Dalton, and rank hypocrisy and wanton deception on the part of the parson. All I could now think of the paternal Government was, that it favoured institutions by means of which poor men might be driven to desperation, and then they were coolly and quietly hanged for the deeds to the perpetration of which they had been so goaded. I began to look upon the English people as the most chicken-hearted

and contemptible nation in the world for allowing the aristocracy to ride rough-shod over them; whereas the great and high-minded French people, as I had read in books, had risen up like one man and overthrown *their* aristocracy altogether.[34] But let me continue my history. Having passed by the chalk-pit—the fatal chalk-pit—I visited the immediate neighbourhood of the farm-house where a happy family had once dwelt—my own! Now it was tenanted by strangers. I went on, and came to the house to which George Dalton had borne my sister Marion a blooming bride: that tenement was now deserted—and it struck horror to my heart to observe—or rather to *feel*—that death-like silence which pervaded a place where the joyous laugh of George Dalton and the musical voice of my dear sister had once been heard. O God! that so much misery should have fallen upon *two* families who strove so hard to live honestly and in peace with all mankind!

"The tears streamed down my face as I turned back into the high road and pursued my way towards London. I now thought, as I went along, that if I could, *possibly* obtain honest employment in the great city, honest I would endeavour to remain,—I say *remain*, because although I had committed two thefts, yet I was far from being utterly depraved. The tears which painful remembrances had called forth, had softened my heart; and the image of my lamented sister appeared to urge me to virtue. Armed with this resolution, I proceeded towards the metropolis. It was evening when, after two days' fatiguing journey, I entered London, and put up at a miserable lodging-house in the window of which I saw a bill stating that single men might have a bed for fourpence a night. Eight hours' good rest gave me strength and spirits to begin my search after employment. I went into the City and inquired at several warehouses if a light porter was wanted. Having met with many refusals, and being wearied with walking about, I went into a public-house to get some refreshment; and happening to mention my situation to the landlord, he very kindly recommended me to apply at a certain warehouse which he named and where he knew that a porter was wanted. I did so, and was fortunate enough to succeed in obtaining the place, with a salary of twelve shillings a week.

"I commenced my new avocation on the following morning, and exerted myself to the utmost to obtain the good opinion of my master. I was regular in the hours of attendance, and frequently remained behind at the office, when the clerks had departed, to finish the labours which had been assigned to me in the morning. I was economical and prudent in my expenditure; and the pittance which I received was ample to keep myself. At the expiration of four months from the time when I first entered this establishment, I had entirely gained the confidence of my employer. My salary was increased; and I began to think that fortune was once more inclined to smile upon me; when a circumstance occurred which convinced me that the long lane of life had not yet taken a turn. My employer one morning desired me to proceed to a particular address, at the West End of the Town, and insist upon the payment of a bill, which, in the course of business, had fallen into his hands, and which had been protested. I instantly set out for the place intimated; and, having inquired for the gentleman, whose name was familiar enough to me, though I could not suspect the identity which proved to be the case. I was shown into an elegant apartment, where a gentleman was sitting with his face to the fire and his back to the door, smoking a cigar. 'Who the devil's that?' demanded the occupant of the room, without turning his head, but in a voice which was not unknown to me. 'If you're a dun, I ain't at home.'——'I have called for payment——,' I began.—'Holloa! who have we here?' ejaculated the gentleman; and, rising from his chair, he disclosed the features of the magistrate who had first committed George Dalton for poaching. 'What! Tim Splint!' he cried: 'is this you?'—'It is I, the brother-in-law of the man whom you helped to persecute,' I returned, equally surprised at this unexpected encounter.—'No impudence, my good fellow,' said the magistrate, very coolly; 'or else I shall be compelled to kick you out of the room. But what vulgar thing have you got in your hand there?'—'A bill, with your name to it, and the payment of which I am come to require,' was my immediate answer.—'Oh! that's it—is it?' ejaculated the magistrate, casting his eyes over the document which I displayed to his view. 'Well, let me see, how shall I pay this? In Bank notes, or by kicking you out of the house, or by recommending the holder to read his bill again this day six months? Oh, I have it;'—and, sitting down to an elegant writing-table, he penned a hasty note, sealed it, and desired me to give it to the person who had sent me. I then withdrew, anxious to avoid a dispute which would be perfectly useless, and which would probably prejudice the interests of my employer. I returned to the office in the City, and delivered the note. The merchant opened it, and his countenance changed as he perused its contents. For some moments he remained absorbed in thought; and then, apparently acting in obedience to a sudden impulse, passed the note to me, who had been anxiously watching the strange demeanour of my master. The letter contained the following words:—'*Mr.——would be much obliged to the holder of his acceptance, for a hundred and sixty-eight pounds, if he would forbear from sending the brother of a man who has been hanged, to demand the amount, as such persons are by no means welcome at the abode of Mr.——, however well they may suit the holder of his bill. The meaning of this request would be ascertained, were the porter Timothy Splint, questioned as to his connexion with the murderer George Dalton.*'—I folded up the letter, returned it to my employer, and said, 'I cannot deny the truth of its contents; but I am innocent, although my poor brother-in law died on the scaffold.'—'You should have been candid at the commencement,' interrupted my employer, firmly but mildly. 'Whether you are innocent or not, matters not now. Had you told me your real position when you first came to me, I should have admired your frankness, and given you a fair trial. As it is, we must part at once.'—I attempted to justify my silence respecting the ignominious end of my relative; but the merchant was inexorable in his determination not to hear any thing in the shape of an explanation. He paid me the wages due to me, with a sovereign over, and dismissed me.

"I forthwith began to look after a new situation; and I remembered the parting words of the merchant whom I had left, resolving to be candid in the first instance, when soliciting a new place. My duties at my recent situation had compelled me to visit other mercantile firms on many occasions; and I had formed the acquaintance of several of the persons employed in those establishments. To some of them I repaired to ascertain where vacancies were to be filled up; and, having obtained a considerable list, I set out upon a round of applications. The first house I inquired at was that of a general merchant and warehouseman, who required a porter and collector of monies.—'Have you ever served in that capacity before?' was the first demand.—'I was in the employ of a highly respectable merchant,' I returned, mentioning his name, 'whose service I only left a few days ago.'—'I remember that you were engaged there; I thought your face was familiar to me,' said the merchant. 'And I also recollect that I heard you spoken of in the highest possible terms,' he continued; 'indeed, you were represented to me as being invaluable in your particular department. But, of course, you did not leave your late employer for any misconduct on your part?'—'Not at all, sir,' was my answer. 'I must, however, explain a certain circumstance ——.'—'Well, I will just send round, merely for the form's sake, you know, and ascertain that it is all right; and if you will call to-

morrow morning, I have no doubt I shall be enabled to give you a favourable answer.'—'I must really, sir,' said I, 'speak to you very seriously for a moment before you take any trouble on my behalf. If you will have the kindness to listen to me, I shall explain my real position. The truth is, though perfectly innocent of any crime myself, I have the misfortune to be related to a persecuted man, who was driven by despair to commit a deed for which he suffered on the scaffold.'—'The scaffold!' ejaculated the merchant in dismay.—'Yes, sir,' I continued, hastily endeavouring to give a full explanation; 'and if you will but permit me to tell you in a few words the melancholy history, you will see no reason to be displeased with my candour. On the contrary, you will, I am sure, pity me, sir.'—'I thank you for such candour,' interrupted the merchant, buttoning up his breeches-pockets, and locking his desk; 'but I regret that, under circumstances, I cannot think of taking you into my service.'—'But do pray listen to me, sir,' I exclaimed: 'you are doubtless a man of sense, of justice, and of impartiality; and I appeal to you——.'—'My good young man, it is no use to take up my time,' interrupted the merchant impatiently; 'I am certainly not going to receive you into my service, under existing circumstances.'

"I was compelled to take my departure. I left the house, ashamed and abashed—fearful that my evil doom was sealed—afraid to look those whom I met in the face—and fancying that every one seemed to know who and what I was. But a few moments' reflection taught me to believe that I had no reason to anticipate failure every where, because I had met with a repulse in one place. I accordingly proceeded to another establishment where a light porter was also required. The head of this firm was a venerable old man, with long grey hair falling over his coat-collar, a bald head, and a huge pair of silver spectacles on his nose. There was altogether something so kind, so unassuming, and so philanthropic in the appearance of this individual, that I was immediately inspired with confidence. I began my narrative, and related the main incidents, without interruption from my hearer, who listened to me with the greatest attention and apparent interest.—'My good young man,' said the merchant, taking off his spectacles, and wiping them, 'I feel deeply for you. Every word which you have told me, I firmly believe; your manner and your language inspire me with confidence. Merciful God! into what a state would society be plunged if innocence that had been wronged, could not obtain the credence of those to whom it offered its justification! I repeat, I am interested in you; I feel deeply for you. You have had your share of misfortune, poor young man! Most sincerely do I hope that your future prospects will not be equally embittered. I have a son of just your age;—he has gone to the East Indies in a free-trader in which I have a share; and, if it were only for his sake, I should feel interested in you, for you resemble him in person. Heaven! what a world this is! Why, man is a cannibal in a moral sense, for he is constantly devouring his fellow-man! Upon my word, I could weep, I could shed tears, when I think of the misfortunes which you have endured.'—'I am overcome by your kind sympathy,' said I, now certain that this time I had encountered the man who would not allow my misfortunes to stand in the way of my appointment to the vacant situation. 'How much did you receive per week at your last place?' asked the old gentleman.—I named the sum.—'And what hours did you keep?'—This question I also answered.—'Was your master kind and considerate?' proceeded the venerable merchant, in a compassionate tone of voice.—'He was very kind in his manners; but at parting he behaved harshly and ungenerously, when he discovered all I have just told you; and I think I had reason to complain.'—'Ah! it was cruel, it was ungenerous,' said the venerable old gentleman, musing. 'But don't you see,' he added, 'that as society is at present constituted, and I admit that its constitution is vitiated in the extreme, it is impossible for a man who depends upon the world for his subsistence, to act contrary to the received notions and usual habits of that world. Now, for my part, I should be glad, I should be delighted to take you in a moment; but I dare not. I am very sorry, but I really *would* strain a point to serve you, if I possibly could.'—You may suppose that I was astonished at this announcement. I had made sure of the situation from the first moment that the old merchant had addressed me; and I now saw my hopes cruelly and fatally defeated. With a heavy heart I went away; and the tears ran down my cheeks, as I reflected upon all I had just heard. Never did my situation in the world appear more lonely—never more truly desperate!

"My position was too hopeless to allow me to apply at another mercantile establishment for upwards of an hour. It required that interval to soothe and soften down my feelings; and I then ventured into the warehouse of an export merchant upon a very extensive scale, whose name was down upon my list. I was introduced into the presence of a young man, who wore a large blue figured satin stock with an enormous gold pin, and a chain hanging over an elegant silk waistcoat. This gentleman sate on one side of a desk; and his partner, who was dressed as well as he was, occupied the other. I immediately attracted their attention; and the elder partner, laying down his pen, exclaimed, 'Why, you're a devilish smart looking fellow. Here, sit down and take a glass of porter; you seem tired. By the bye, we haven't had our cigars yet, Dick,' he added, addressing his partner; 'let's smoke and talk over this business at the same time. Sit down, my man: we have no humbug about us, I can tell you.'—And so indeed it appeared; for the two gentlemen produced cigars and bottled porter, and I was very soon engaged in a most comfortable chat with them. At length they began to speak about the business which had taken me there, and when I told them my story in a straight-forward manner, they declared, with an oath, that 'they would take me on my word, and that they didn't want any damned reference, or any thing of that kind.' The terms were agreed upon, and I was to commence my duties on the following morning. When I took my leave the two partners shook hands with me, expressing their conviction that 'I was a damned good fellow and understood what was what,' and also that 'I was just the kind of bird they had some time been looking for.' I accordingly entered on this new place; but I had not been there long, before I began to notice, though I was regularly paid, that a great many persons called for money, and never could obtain a settlement of their accounts. On some occasions the partners were denied, although they were in the counting-house, drinking and smoking; and then the applicants were very much disposed to be insolent, making use of such terms as 'swindlers,' 'rogues,' &c. Some would express their conviction 'that it was all a regular *do*,' while others felt equally certain 'that it was nothing but a *plant*.' There was also another circumstance which astonished me; and that was the singular mode in which the business of the firm was conducted. No sooner did the bales of goods arrive by the front door, than they were carried out at the back, and sent away in vans. Altogether it was a most extraordinary firm; and one morning I discovered that the doors were closed, the partners had bolted, and the City-officer was inquiring after them, in consequence of a warrant which he had with him for their apprehension. Thus I lost a place where the duties were easy, but where the respectability attached to it was not very likely to increase my own.

"I was thus thrown once more upon the world; and again was I compelled to look out for a situation. I applied at numerous warehouses and offices; but when I stated my real condition,—when I revealed the secret that I was related to a man who had been hanged,—I was thrust from the doors of some, reproached for my impertinence in calling by others, and treated with coolness or contempt by a third

set of men. No one seemed to believe that I could possibly be honest. Day after day saw the renewal of disappointment, and that sickening at the heart which leads to despair;—night after night did I return to my lodging, to meet a landlady who wanted the money I owed her. At last she would have no further patience; and one night when I went back late, she poked her head out of a window, desiring me to begone and loading me with abuse. I slunk away, almost-heartbroken at the treatment I had just received, and at the deplorable situation to which I was reduced. Accident, or rather necessity, conducted me back to the low lodging-house at which I had put up on my first arrival in London; and there I fell in with some persons who were very willing to assist me in a certain way. In fact they proposed that I should join them in a robbery which they were arranging; and after vainly struggling with my better feelings, I consented. It is no use to tell you how I got on from bad to worse:—you can both very well guess how it is that when once a man gets regularly into this line, he seldom or ever gets out of it again till his career is cut short by transportation or the scaffold."

Thus terminated Tim the Snammer's History, which, as we stated at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, we have greatly modified in style and changed in language, without however omitting, altering, or exaggerating any one incident, nor any one sentiment.

It was now late; and the Snammer took his leave of Josh Pedler and Matilda Briggs, having promised to call again next day, and arrange with the former the contemplated robbery of Old Death.

30. Taken as a body, there is not a more infamous and tyrannical set of authorities on the face of the earth than the unpaid magistracy of England. How the high spirited people of this country can endure such an atrocious system, is to us surprising. Almost entirely irresponsible—chosen on account of their wealth and influence in their respective counties, but without the least reference to their abilities—and, by the very circumstances of their position, opposed to the interests of the masses, the justices of the peace are so many diabolical tyrants vested with a power which completely coerces the industrious and labouring classes. If it be necessary to have *paid barristers* as magistrates in the cities and great towns, why should not the same rule apply to smaller towns and to rural districts? To invest an irresponsible, narrow-minded, and prejudiced body of men with such immense powers as those wielded by magistrates, is a foul blot upon our civilisation. Prison-chains, fines, and treadmills are at the disposal of these justices; and the use they make of their power proves that the entire system on which their attributes and jurisdiction are based, deserve universal execration. Thousands and thousands of honest, well-meaning, hard-working families have been ruined by this hierarchy of terrestrial fiends. Talk of the freedom of the British subject, and boast of the trial by jury! Why, any magistrate, by his own *single* decision, can award heavy fines or months of imprisonment! The unpaid magistracy exists as a protection and also as an agency for the infernal Game Laws. Their local powers and influence give them immense weight in general elections, for poor people are afraid to offend them. But the worst kind of unpaid magistrates are the clergymen who are in the commission of the peace. These men usually act more like off-shoots of the Czar of Russia than as magistrates in a civilised country and as ministers of the charitable and generous doctrines of the Christian faith.

31. This act is not only still unrepealed, but was put in force about eighteen months or two years ago, by certain county magistrates against two or three poor labourers.

32. It is generally understood that the Judge should be merely an expounder of the law affecting the cases brought under the cognizance of the court, and also a means of refreshing the memories of the jurymen by reading over his notes, or the salient points in them. At least, to our thinking, a Judge should never allow his own opinion on the point at issue to transpire. If he do, he is almost sure to bias the jury. But, unfortunately, nearly all the Judges in this country act in a dictational manner with regard to juries. They *direct* the verdicts returned. This assumption on the part of the Judges of the privileges and attributes of juries, renders the latter perfectly unnecessary. For ourselves, we believe that trial by jury is in these islands a mere farce—an idle mockery—a contemptible delusion: the Judges are the real juries after all. And yet we boast of the institution! That institution would indeed be a glorious one, were the Judges to discharge their duties properly: *but, in nine cases out of ten, they do not.*

33. There is something uncommonly barbarous in many of our institutions and customs. Were it not associated with such solemn occasions, we should laugh at the mountebank piece of solemn humbug of the black cap—as if the Judge himself could not assume a demeanour serious and dignified enough for the awful and atrocious duty which the law imposes upon him in pronouncing death sentences. The custom of Judges and barristers disfiguring themselves in huge wigs is a mere relic of barbarism, and unworthy of a civilized age. If the law cannot maintain its solemn majesty without such wretched aids, heaven knows there must be something radically wrong either in the constitution of the tribunals themselves or in the conduct of the functionaries of justice. Away with all such mockeries and fools'-play as wigs and black caps, and let men distribute the justice *of* men *as* men, and not muffled up and disguised like old women. The maintenance of all customs which our barbarian ancestors handed down to us shows an aversion to *progress* on the part of the Government and the Legislature. The wisdom of those ancestors existed, we imagine, only in the *wig*: let the wisdom of the present day show itself by the fact of discarding all useless pomp and vain ostentation.

34. "The Aristocracy of England, a History for the People," by John Hampden, Junior (the pseudonym of a very clever writer, whatever his real name and whoever he may be) is a work which should be read by all classes—by the aristocratic sections of society, because it may warn them of the impending storm; and by the middle and poorer grades, because it will shew them their oppressors in their true characters. This and William Howitt's "History of Priestcraft" (both published by Messrs. Chapman, Newgate Street) are glorious signs of the times in which we live. From the first-mentioned book we quote the ensuing passage:—

"Look at France. Every one is familiar with the dreadful condition to which its proud and imbecile aristocracy reduced it. Every one knows in what a storm of blood and terror the oppressed people rose and took an eternal vengeance on their oppressors. If we read the accounts of France, just previous to the Revolution, we cannot avoid being struck with a terrible similarity of circumstances and features with those of our own country now. Nay, the following description by their own historian, Thiers, seems to be that of England at present:—'The condition of the country, both political and economical, was intolerable. There was nothing but privilege—privilege vested in individuals, in classes, in towns, in provinces, and even in trades and professions. Every thing contributed to check industry and the natural genius of man. All the dignities of the state, civil, ecclesiastical, and military, were exclusively reserved to certain individuals. No man could take up a profession without certain titles, and the compliance with certain pecuniary conditions. Even the favours of the crown were converted into family property, so that the king could scarcely exercise his own judgment, or give any preference. Almost the only liberty left to the sovereign was that of making pecuniary gifts, and he had been reduced to the necessity of disputing with the Duke of Coigny for the abolition of a useless place. Every thing, then, was made immoveable property in the hands of a few, and every where these few resisted the many who had been despoiled. The burdens of the state weighed on one class only. The noblesse and the clergy possessed about two-thirds of the landed property; the other third, possessed by the people, paid taxes to the king, a long list of feudal *droits* to the noblesse, tithes to the clergy, and had, moreover, to support the devastations committed by noble sportsmen and their game. The taxes upon consumption pressed upon the great multitude, and consequently on the people. The collection of these imposts was managed in an unfair and irritating manner; the lords of the soil left long arrears with impunity, but the people, upon any

delay in payment, were harshly treated, arrested and condemned to pay in their persons, in default of money to produce. The people, therefore, nourished with their labour, and defended with their blood, the higher classes of society, without being able to procure a comfortable subsistence for themselves. The towns-people, a body of citizens, industrious, educated, less miserable than the people, could nevertheless obtain none of the advantages to which they had a right to aspire, seeing that it was their industry that nourished and their talents that adorned the kingdom.'—Is not that a wonderful fac-simile of our own present condition? But these circumstances produced revolution in France; what will they produce here! If they are allowed to continue they will produce the very same thing. The French historians assert, that had the cries of the people been listened to before they grew maddened with their miseries, there would have been reform instead of revolution, and their nation would have been spared the years of unexampled horror and self-laceration through which it had to wade. Now is the same saving crisis with us! The people, the most industrious of them in town and country, starve by tens of thousands, or lead a sort of half life in incessant labour, rags, and hunger. All parts of our social system call out for relief. The manufacturer, the farmer, equally complain; the agricultural labourers are reduced to a condition worse than serfdom—to a condition of unparalleled destitution; and in some districts gangs of them are driven to the field, as we learn from parliamentary reports, under gang-masters, and are lodged promiscuously like cattle—men, women, and children, in temporary booths, fitter for beasts than human beings. In many parts of this once happy country the agricultural labourers are getting but five and six shillings per week; while they are asked 8*l*. an acre for bits of land to set a few potatoes on."

The author of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" would not have his readers imagine him to be in favour of "physical force." No—we abhor war even with foreign powers; but no words are strong enough to express our loathing and abhorrence of the bare idea of that infernal scourge—a civil war. Another quotation from the work of John Hampden, Junior, will serve to express also our opinions on the point:—

"The neglect of the public interest it extends to the whole frightful mass of *delegated taxation*, under which the nation groans, even more heavily than under the direct national imposts. The reviewer justly remarks that the maxim of legislators is 'Every one for himself, and the public for us all!' But could this state of things possibly exist if Englishmen did their duty, if they resolved to do their own *public* business, as they do their private—to do it themselves, and not foolishly intrust to men who have shown themselves at once so incapable and so unworthy of trust in every respect? Is there any reason why the people of England, who conduct their commerce, their manufactures, their domestic trade and affairs so admirably, should not conduct the affairs of their government just as well if they were to set about it? Is there any reason that a man who guides a ship round the world, clear of rocks and breakers, should not as well help to steer the vessel of state? Why should not he who governs a steam-engine just as well govern or assist in governing a country? The great Oxenstiern, Chancellor of Sweden, said to his son, 'Mark, my son, with what a small stock of talent a nation may be governed.' But our aristocracy have for ages demonstrated that they do not even possess this 'small stock of talent,' or of as much honesty; and the remedy for the evils they have covered us with is as clear as the day-light:—*The power must be wrested from them!*' But how? By arms? No: Englishmen know too well the dangers of revolution: they have too much to lose; and they have too much humanity. The soil of England will not willingly drink in the blood of its children, as in the barbarous ages; the remedy is alike simple and conspicuous. It lies in one joint rising and stern demand of all and every class in the country. All—manufacturer and farmer, gentleman and ploughman, merchant and shop-man, artizan and labourer—all must combine, and with one dread voice, like another Cromwell, command the aristocrats to quit the people's house, and 'give place to better men.' This is the simple and sole remedy. A thousand evils are complained of. 'The whole head is sick and the whole heart is sore;' but 'THE GREAT ROOT OF ALL' is the usurpation of the Commons House of Parliament by the aristocracy. One party proclaims that the whole people is corrupted by the bribery of these patrician senators, and demand the *universal franchise*, and in that they demand the true and only remedy. But because some are for this, and some for that, and do not all join in the *hearty rending shout* for the FRANCHISE—*that magic word in which lies the constitution*—that cure for all bribery (for who can bribe thirty millions of people)—that guarantee for the steady maintenance of the constitution—for, once in the hands of the totality, the totality will never relinquish it again—they cry, but they cry in vain. Till we obtain the *franchise* we obtain *nothing*; when we obtain *that* we obtain *every thing*. Every petition, every demand, however stern or resolved, that asks for any thing short of the UNIVERSAL FRANCHISE, is the preparation of an absurdity, and the greatest of all absurdities. He is just as wise who asks short of this, as if he prayed the Pope to abolish the Catholic religion, or a Jew to give you all he is worth. The aristocracy have usurped the House of Commons—for what? Just for this very purpose—of resisting the proper demands of the people—of maintaining and perpetuating all the evils for whose removal you pray. It is true the people, combining on some great emergency—driven, as it were into this combination by some desperate pressure—may alarm the aristocracy into some individual concession, as in the case of the Reform Bill. But this is a stupendous exertion, a violent and convulsive sort of action in the political system, which wrests only, at the point of famine or national ruin, its own rights from the usurping party. Public opinion is said, in this country, to be the actual ruling power; but it is a fitful and irregular power. Like the Indian, or the boa-constrictor, it is aroused to action only by hunger or imminent impending danger; at the smallest return of ease it pauses; it becomes drowsy again, and the mischief goes on for another period. If public opinion really rules, it should lift itself to the necessary height of command, and do its work effectually. That would save us all much trouble. There is but one perfect permanent remedy—but one means of absolute cure for our perpetually recurring evils: *We must have these usurpers out of the people's house, and rule in it ourselves!* and this is to be done only by insisting on *the franchise, the whole franchise, and nothing but the franchise*."

CHAPTER LXXII.
MR. AND MRS. CURTIS.

It was about two o'clock on the following afternoon that a travelling-carriage with four posters thundered along Baker Street, to the great admiration of that semi-fashionable neighbourhood, and at length stopped at a house the door of which was immediately opened by a footman wearing a livery of such varied colours that the rainbow was nothing to it.

Divers countenances appeared at the windows of the neighbouring dwellings; for it would seem that the travelling-carriage—or rather the persons whom it contained, were an object of curiosity and interest to the elderly ladies in turbans in the drawing-rooms and the servant-maids in the garrets, the latter of whom completely flattened their noses against the panes in their anxiety to obtain a view of the fashionably dressed gentlemen who handed the magnificently attired lady from the vehicle, while the footman in the transcendent livery assisted the lady's-maid to alight from the high seat behind.

And since all the neighbourhood of Baker Street appears to know right well who the arrivals are, we shall not affect any mystery with our readers; but plainly, distinctly, and at once declare that the fashionably dressed gentleman was Mr. Frank Curtis, and the magnificently attired lady was Mrs. Curtis, late Mrs. Goldberry.

This excellent couple had just returned home, after passing their honeymoon in the country, as all rich and fashionable people are bound to do; and five little Goldberrys were crowding at the front door to welcome their mamma and their "new papa." These specimens of the Goldberry race formed, in respect to their ages, an ascending scale commencing with Number 5 and terminating with Number 13, and exhibiting as much pleasing variety as could possibly exist in the pug-nose species and the chubby-face genus.

These delightful children set up a perfect yell of joy, which was heard at least ten houses off, when their "new papa" assisted their old mamma to alight from the carriage; for Mrs. Goldberry could not be said to be *young*, she being on the shady side of forty, though blessed with such a juvenile family.

"Happy is the *man*," says the psalmist, meaning also *woman*, "who hath his quiver full of them:" but Mrs. Goldberry fancied that it rather spoilt the effect of a bride's return, to behold a hall full of them. Nevertheless, she gave them each a maternal hug; and the youngest set up a shout because she did not give him a box of toys into the bargain.

Let us suppose half an hour to have elapsed since the return of the "happy pair." At the expiration of that period we shall find them seated in the drawing-room, enjoying a pleasant *tête-à-tête* chat until the early dinner which had been ordered should be duly announced by the rainbow-excelling footman.

Mrs. Goldberry was, as above stated, a trifle past forty; although she never acknowledged to more than thirty-one. She was somewhat stout, had coarse masculine features, a tolerably good set of teeth, certainly fine eyes, and was as yet independent of the adventitious aids of the wig-maker and rouge manufacturer. Little of her history was known by Mr. Curtis until the period (a few weeks previously to the marriage) when he became acquainted with her through the simple process of picking up her youngest boy who happened to fall into some mud one day when the lady and her children were taking a walk in the vicinity of Baker Street. This little act of politeness on the part of Frank had naturally led to the exchange of a few observations; the exchange of a few observations brought Mrs. Goldberry to her own door; her own door admitted her into the house, whither Frank was politely invited to follow her; the following her in was followed by the serving up of luncheon; the luncheon led to increased communicativeness; and the communicativeness made Frank aware that his new acquaintance was the widow of the late Mr. Goldberry, gentleman, and the undisputed possessor of a clear income of five thousand a year. Glorious news this for Frank, who suffered the lady to understand that he enjoyed a similar income; and then they laughed a great deal at the funny coincidence. When Frank took his leave, he requested permission to call again; and this favour could not be refused to a gentleman who had picked the child out of the mud and who had five thousand a year. Thus frequent visits led to tender proposals; the tender proposals ended in marriage; and the marriage ended in——

But we were going on much too fast; and therefore we must pause at the point indicated ere we commenced this brief digression—namely, at the *tête-à-tête* discourse while awaiting the announcement of dinner.

"Well, my love," said Frank, "here we are once more in London. Upon my word, there's nothing like London after all—as my friend the Earl of Blackwall says."

"And yet I think we were very comfortable in the country, Frank?" observed Mrs. Curtis, late Mrs. Goldberry, with a simper as fascinating as she could possible render a grimace formed by a large mouth.

"Oh! but you and I can be happy any where, dear," said Frank. "We mustn't remain in Baker Street, though: I shall take a slap-up house in Grosvenor Square, if I can get one there: at all events, somewhere more in the fashionable quarter. Now, I'll tell you what I've been thinking of—and I'm sure that you'll approve of my plan. You see, there's all those dear children of your's—I'm sure I love them as well as if I was their real father, the darlings——"

"You're quite a duck, Frank," exclaimed Mrs. Curtis, tapping him slightly on the face.

"Well—I don't think I'm a bad fellow at all," continued the young gentleman, smoothing down his hair very complacently; "And the plan I'm going to propose to you will prove it. Indeed, it's just what my very particular friend the Marquis of Woolwich did, when he married under similar circumstances—I mean a lady with a young family."

"And what did his lordship do?" inquired Mrs. Curtis.

"He made this arrangement with his wife," explained Frank:—"All his own property was to be left in the funds to accumulate for the benefit of the children—never to be touched—to be locked up like a rat in a trap, as one may say; and the lady's property was to serve for the household and all other expenses. Now, this is just what I propose we shall do. My hundred and forty thousand pounds shall be so locked up; and your income, my love, will do for us to live upon. In fact, I'll make a will to-morrow, settling all my fortune on you in case you survive me, or on the children at your death."

It is astonishing how blank Mrs. Curtis's countenance became as her beloved husband proposed this arrangement: but she managed to hide her confusion from him by means of her handkerchief, while he flattered himself that his generous consideration of her children had drawn tears from her eyes.

"This little arrangement will decidedly be the best," continued Frank; "and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that your dear children are well provided for. In fact, it was but the day before the happy one which united us, that I met my friend the Duke of Gravesend, and he was advising me how to act in the matter, saying what he had done, as I told you just now. And his Grace's authority is no mean one, I can assure you, my dear. But you don't answer me: what are you thinking about?"

Mrs. Curtis was thinking of a great deal;—a horrible idea had struck her. Was it possible that Frank's vaunted property was all moonshine, and that he was now inventing a means of concealing this fact from her. She had been vain enough to suppose all along that he was enamoured of her person far more than of her alleged five thousand a year; and he had given her so many assurances of the disinterestedness of his affection, that she had congratulated herself on hooking him most completely. She knew that he was the nephew of the rich Sir Christopher Blunt, and had readily believed, therefore, that he himself was rich also; and, experienced though she were in the ways of the world, she had not instituted any inquiries to ascertain the truth of his assertions relative to his property. In a word, she fancied she had caught a green, foolish, but wealthy young fellow; whereas she was now seized with the frightful apprehension that she had laboured under a complete delusion. And this alarm was the more terrible, as the reader may conceive when we inform him that she herself was a mere adventuress—without a farthing of annual income derivable from any certain source—and overwhelmed with debts, her creditors having only been kept quiet for the last few weeks by her representations that she was about to marry a young gentleman of fortune. In a word, she had only taken the house in Baker Street on the hopeful speculation of catching some amorous old gentleman of property: and she had deemed herself particularly fortunate when she received the proposals of an amourous *young* gentleman who, in the course of conversation, happened to intimate that he possessed five thousand a year.

Mrs. Curtis's confusion and terror,—nay, absolute horror, may therefore be well conceived, when the dreadful suspicion that she herself was as much taken in as her husband, flashed to her mind.

"You don't answer," repeated Frank: "what the deuce *are* you thinking of?"

"I was thinking, my love," replied the lady, subduing her feelings as well as she could, and still clinging to the faint hope that all might not be so bad as she apprehended,—"I was thinking, my love, that your arrangement is not feasible, for this simple reason—that *my* fortune is so locked up and settled on my children, I can only touch the dividends: and I shall have nothing to receive till July. Moreover, I run very short at my banker's now—indeed, I believe I have overdrawn them—and so, all things considered, it will be impossible, and unnecessary even if possible, to carry your generous proposal into effect."

"I didn't know your money was so locked up!" exclaimed Frank, looking mightily stupid, in spite of his strenuous endeavours to appear perfectly happy and contented. "I thought your fortune was at your own disposal?"

"Certainly—the interest," responded Mrs. Curtis, now finding by her husband's manner that her worst fears were considerably strengthened.

"The devil!" murmured Frank petulantly.

"What did you say, dearest?" asked the lady.

"Oh! nothing, love—only that it doesn't signify at all, so long as we have the interest of the money settled on your children—and that's five thousand a year."

"Which, with your five thousand a year, makes us ten, love," added the lady, eyeing him askance.

"To be sure!" said Frank: and, walking to the window, he hummed a tune to conceal his desperate vexation.

This worthy pair had, however, each a consolation left—one real, the other imaginary.

The real consolation was on the side of the lady, who had saved herself from the danger of a debtor's prison by marrying Mr. Curtis. The imaginary consolation was the idea which this gentleman nourished that his amiable spouse enjoyed at all events the annual income of five thousand pounds. Moreover, as he glanced round the elegantly furnished drawing-room, and in imagination at all the other apartments in the dwelling, he thought to himself, "Well, hang it! with five thousand a year and this splendid house, I think I can manage to make myself pretty comfortable. Of course every thing's paid for—and that's a blessing!"

Scarcely had Mr. Curtis disposed of this solacing reflection, when the livery servant entered to announce that "dinner was served up."

Frank offered his arm to his lady in the most jaunty manner possible—for, as the reader may suppose, he had many reasons to induce him to be uncommonly attentive to one who (as he thought) held the purse; and the lady, on her side, accepted in a most charming manner the homage thus paid her—because she was not as yet quite certain that her husband's property was really aerial, and even if it should prove so, he must become the scapegoat between herself and her ravenous creditors.

Indeed the little tokens of endearment which the "happy couple" thought it fit to lavish upon each other as they descended the stairs, created such huge delight on the part of the livery servant following them, that this individual, totally forgetting the dignity which should have accompanied such a gorgeous livery, actually and positively diverted himself by means of that wonderful arrangement of the hands commonly called "taking a sight."

The dinner passed off in the usual way; and when the cloth was removed and the domestic was about to retire, Frank exclaimed in an authoritative manner, "John, bring up a bottle of claret."

"Yes, sir—claret, sir?" said the servant, fidgetting about near the door, and glancing uneasily towards his mistress, who did not however happen to observe him.

"I specified claret as plain as I could speak, John," cried Mr. Curtis angrily; "and so make haste about it."

"Yes, sir,—only—" again hesitated the domestic.

"Only what?" vociferated Frank.

"Only there ain't none, sir," was the answer.

"No claret, John?" cried Mrs. Curtis, now taking part in the discussion.

"No ma'am. There was but two bottles of wine left when you went away, ma'am—with master—and them's the Port and Sherry on the table now ma'am."

"John, you must be mistaken!" exclaimed Frank. "Your mistress assured me that the cellar was well stocked——"

"Yes, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Curtis: "and I was so far right in telling you what I did, because on the very morning—the happy morning, dear, you know—when we went away, I wrote to Mr. Beeswing, my wine-merchant—or rather *our* wine-merchant, I should say—to order in a good stock of Port, Sherry, Champagne, and Claret."

"And what the devil, then, does Mr. Beeswing mean by this cursed neglect?" cried Frank. "There's Log, Wood, and Juice, my friend Lord Paddington's wine-merchants, who would be delighted to serve us. Did you know of this order, John, that your mistress gave?"

"Ye-e-s, sir—I did," was the stammering reply, delivered with much diffidence and many twirlings of the white napkin.

"Well, my dear—it is no use to make ourselves uncomfortable about the business," said Mrs. Curtis, evidently anxious to quash the subject at once. "You can put up with what there is to-day; and to-morrow you can give an order to your noble friend's wine-merchants. That will do, John—you can retire."

"No—by God! that will not do!" vociferated Frank. "This fellow Beeswing has behaved most shamefully. It's a regular insult—as the Prince of Gibraltar would call it! But I dare say he forgot it: and since you knew of the order, John, why the devil didn't you see that it was executed while we were away?"

"My dear——" began Mrs. Curtis, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Answer me, you fellow!" cried Frank, turning in a threatening way towards the domestic, and unable to resist the opportunity of indulging his bullying propensities. "Why the devil didn't you attend to the order given by your mistress?"

"Well, sir—and so I did," responded the servant, now irritated by the imperious manner of his master. "I went a dozen times to Beeswing's while you and missus was away."

"Frank, dear—do leave this to me," urged the lady.

"No, my dear—this concerns me, as the master of the house," exclaimed Frank, looking very pompous and very fierce. "Well, John—and what the deuce did Beeswing say when you did see him?"

"Please, sir, he said he'd raythe not," was the astounding answer.

Mr. Frank Curtis looked aghast.

"I always knew he was the most insulting fellow in the world—that Beeswing!" cried the lady, colouring deeply and affecting violent indignation. "But we will never deal with him again, I vow and declare! John, tell him to send in his bill——at once, mind——"

"He has, ma'am," interrupted the servant "In fact, there's a many letters waiting for master."

"Then why the devil didn't you give them to me before?" exclaimed Frank, not knowing precisely what to think of Mr. Beeswing's conduct, but in a very bad humour on account of the disappointment relative to the claret.

John, the servant, made no reply to the question last put to him, but advancing towards the table, produced from his pocket about thirty letters and other documents, all of which he laid before his master, his countenance the while wearing a most curious and very sinister expression, as much as to say, "You're a very bumptious kind of a young man; but these papers will, perhaps, bring you down a peg or two."

"You may retire," said Frank, savagely; and this intimation was forthwith obeyed. "Very curious conduct, that of Beeswing, my dear?" continued Mr. Curtis, as soon as the door had closed behind the servant.

"Very, dear—I can't make it out," responded Mrs. Curtis. "But pray don't bother yourself with those letters and papers now. They can't be very particular; and you will have more time to-morrow, dear."

"Oh! I can look over them, and we can go on talking all the same," said Frank: "because I can't think how the deuce so many letters should be addressed to me *here*—instead of at my own place;—I mean, I shouldn't have thought that such a lot of my friends would have already heard of our union, love," he added, with a tender glance towards the lady, who was sitting very much in the style figuratively represented in common parlance as being "on thorns."

And Mr. Curtis's visual rays, having thus benignly bent themselves on his companion, were once more fixed on the pile of letters and documents lying before him.

The lady tossed off a bumper of Port, and filled her glass again, in an evident fit of painful nervousness; while her husband opened the first letter, the contents of which ran as follow:—

Oxford Street.

"SIR,

"We beg to enclose our account for furniture supplied to Mrs. Curtis, late Mrs. Goldberry, and respectfully solicit an early settlement, as the bill has been running for a considerable time.

"Your obedient Servants,
"TUFFLE and TUNKS."

"The devil!" ejaculated Frank, as he cast his eyes over the inclosure: "'*Bill delivered*, £876 6*s.* 6*d.*' God bless my soul! that's a stinger! Why, I thought all the furniture must have been paid for, my dear?"

"Not exactly, love—you perceive," returned the lady. "One never pays an upholsterer's bill for so long a time, you know: indeed—it quite slipped my memory, it's such a trifle!"

"Well, so it is, dear," observed Frank, reassured by the calm and indifferent way in which his wife disposed of *the trifle*: and he proceeded to open another letter, which announced a second trifle in the ensuing manner:—

Furnival's Inn.

"SIR,

"We are desired by Messieurs Ore and Dross, jewellers, to apply to you for the payment of 377*l.* 10*s.* being the amount of debt contracted by your present wife, late Mrs. Goldberry, with our clients; and unless the same be paid, together with 6*s.* 8*d.* for cost of this application, within three days from the date hereof, we shall be compelled to have recourse to ulterior measures without farther notice.

"Your obedient Servants,
"DAWKINS and SMASHER."

"What a thundering lot of jewellery you must have, to be sure, dear!" exclaimed Frank, as he handed this letter to his wife. "But, 'pon my soul! I think you've been rather extravagant, love—haven't you?"

"Oh! my dear—ladies *must* have jewellery, you know," returned Mrs. Curtis; "and, after all I have paid Ore and Dross, I really am surprised at their importunity. But we will pay them, and have done with them, dear."

"So we will, love," responded Frank; "and I'll ask my friend the Duke of Hampstead to recommend *his* jeweller to us. But here's a precious letter! Why—what the deuce? There's a dozen pawnbroker's tickets in it, I declare!"

Mrs. Curtis fell back almost senseless in her chair, while her husband perused the ensuing letter:—

"i rite maddam 2 inform u that I can't sel the dewplikets wich u Placed in mi ands as seckeuraty for mi Bil and has u've married a gent wich as propperti i ope u'll now settel my Bil wich as bin a runnin for 18 munce and i ope u'll settel it soon leastways as soon has u cum ome becaus i ham in rale want of it being a loan widder wich as lorst mi Usban 2 yere cum missummer an having 5 young childern an another cumming bi axident but i shan't do so no more an shal be verry appy to go on washin for u wen u've pade this Bil wich is thirty fore pouns thrippense dere maddam pray do this 2 oblege me the instunt u cum ome u can send it upp by mr jon yure futman or els mi Littel gal shal wate on u at anny our u no i've never prest u an i tuk the dewplikits 2 oblege u but coodn't dew nuththink with them an now they've run out and its no falt of mine becaus i'd no munny to pay the interesk and u was gorn out of town with ure new usban wich i ear is a very fine young man wich I'm glad to ear for ure sak dere maddam eggskews this long letter becaus the doctor should say i shal be konfined this weak an its hard lines to ave no munney at such a time i arn't sent ome the last batch of linning becaus i ware obleged to mak a way with it butt I send the dewplikit of that has wel has the dewplikit of the wotch and chane an other trinklets wich i ope u'll reseave saf an now as u'r all rite and r a ritch wumman u'll not be angree with me for puttin ure linning upp the spont att such a crittikal moment dere maddam pray eggskews this riting wich i no is verry bad butt mi pen is verry bad an ime in grate pane wile i rite ure obejent umbal servant kummarn susan

spriggs.
mary lee bone
"Mrs. Kirtis lane wigmore strete
baker cavenditch
strete squair."

"Madam, it's all a cursed plant!" vociferated Frank Curtis, starting from his seat, and throwing down the letter, during the perusal of which he had been scarcely able to control his impatience. "I see it all—it's a cursed imposition—an infernal plant—and I'm a—a—damned fool!"

Thus speaking, the young gentleman shook his better half violently by the shoulders; and she, having nothing to urge in explanation of the extraordinary letter of her washerwoman, screamed just loud enough to appear hysterical without alarming the servants and went off into a fit, as a matter of course.

"Fooled—duped—done brown, by God!" exclaimed Curtis, as he began to pace the room with no affected agitation. "Saddled with a wife and five children—overwhelmed with her debts and my own—and, what's a deuced sight worse, made an ass of! I've regularly sold myself, as my friend the Duke——no, damn the Duke! I'm in no humour for Dukes and that kind of nonsense now—I don't know a Duke, and never did—and never shall—and so it's no use telling a parcel of lies any more! Plague take this old cat with her half-dozen brats—or near upon that number——"

"And plague take you, then!" screeched the newly-married lady, recovering with most surprising abruptness from her fit, and starting up like a fury. "Why, you swindling scoundrel, how dare you call me names? I'll tear your eyes out, I will, if you say over again what you've just said."

"I say you're a regular adventuress!" cried Frank.

"And you are an impostor—a cheat!" yelled the lady.

"Your fortune is all a gammon!" exclaimed Curtis.

"And your's all moonshine!" retorted his wife.

"You've taken me in shameful!"

"And you've done the same to me!"

"You're——" cried Frank, nearly suffocated with rage.

"And so are you, whatever you're going to call me!" vociferated the late Mrs. Goldberry.

Curtis was unable to give forth any rejoinder; and Mrs. Curtis, resuming her seat, had recourse to the truly feminine alternative of bursting into tears.

A long pause ensued, constituting a truce to recriminations and vituperations for several minutes, and affording the pair leisure for reflection.

We will describe the ideas that gradually expanded in their minds, as such explanation will the more easily prepare the reader for the result of the quarrel.

Frank Curtis, on his side, recognized the grand truth, that what was done could not be undone; and then he came to the philosophical conviction, that it would be prudent to make the best of a bad job. He reflected on the folly of an exposure, which would be attended with immediate ruin;—bringing about his ears a host of creditors, who would only become the more clamorous when they were brought in contact with each other, and were placed in a condition to ascertain their number and compare the amounts of their claims. He fancied that by allowing himself to be represented as a man of property his wife might silence the creditors for a time, during which the war could be carried on; and though an explosion must sooner or later take place, yet it was some consolation to the young gentleman to think that the evil day might be postponed by keen manœuvring and skilful generalship. He feared being laughed at much more than the idea of a debtor's prison; and delay was every thing to a man in his desperate circumstances. "There was no telling what might turn up;" and he thought that if he could only dazzle the eyes of his uncle Sir Christopher with fine stories relative to the brilliancy of the match which he had formed with the late Mrs. Goldberry, he might contrive to wheedle a large sum of money out of the old gentleman on some such pretext as a desire to discharge divers debts, and a disinclination to confess to his wife that he had contracted them.

On the other hand, Mrs. Curtis fell into a similar train of thought. It would, she fancied, be easy for her to visit the numerous creditors, assure them that she had as yet intercepted all the letters they had written to her husband, and implore them not to ruin her in his good opinion by exposing her liabilities to him. She even arranged in her head the very words which she would use when calling on them:—"My husband is about to sell an estate in Ireland, and the moment the purchase money is paid, I am sure to be enabled to obtain from him a sum sufficient to liquidate all my debts. Have a little forbearance, therefore, and all will be well." Thus *she* also recognised the utter inutility and monstrous folly of exposing themselves by means of quarrels; and as their minds were, by these parallel systems of reasoning, prepared for reconciliation—or at least the show of it—the making up of their dispute was no very difficult matter.

Frank was the one to break the ice with the first overture.

"Well, I think we're two pretty fools," he said, approaching the chair in which she was rocking herself to and fro: "don't you?"

"To alarm all the house, and let our servants know every thing," added the lady.

"No—no: it isn't so bad as *that* yet," returned Frank. "But I vote that we have no more quarrels."

"I am sure I agree to the proposition, Frank," was the answer.

"It's carried then, without a dissentient voice," exclaimed Curtis; "as my friend the Duke——"

"Let us have no more falsehoods," interrupted his wife. "You said just now that you knew no Duke—never had known one—and never should——"

"But I thought you was in a fit at that moment, my dear?" said Frank.

"Maybe I was—but still I could hear all that passed, as you very well know. However, let us be good friends, and hold a consultation how we are to proceed."

"Good!" cried Frank. "And we will begin with a glass of wine each. There—let us drink each other's health. Here's to you, my dear. And now to business. I suppose all these letters and bills are about unpaid debts of yours?"

"Precisely so, love," answered Mrs. Curtis.

"How much do you think they amount to?"

"About eighteen hundred pounds, I should say?"

"And how much money have you got towards paying them, dear?" inquired Frank.

"Eighteen-pence, love," responded the lady, extracting that sum from her pocket.

There was a pause, during which Frank Curtis refilled the glasses; and then the "happy pair" looked inquiringly at each other, as much as to ask, "Well, what shall we do?"

"This is devilish awkward!" observed Frank. "But I'll tell you what I've been thinking of."

"I am all attention, dear," said his better half.

Mr. Curtis then conveyed in words the substance of those reflections which we have recorded above, and which had bent his mind towards a reconciliation.

"I entirely approve of all you say," remarked Mrs. Curtis; "and I will now tell you what I have been thinking of."

"Fire away, love," was her husband's encouraging observation.

The lady detailed, in her turn, the reflections which had occupied her mind a few minutes previously.

"Then we both hold the same opinions?" exclaimed Frank.

"Exactly. And if we play our cards well, there is no immediate danger of any thing," remarked the lady.

"But all the threatened writs—the probability of a sudden arrest—and the clamours of such small tradesmen or other persons as your delectable washerwoman, who is about to add to her family two years after the death of her husband?" exclaimed Frank interrogatively.

"I have trinkets, plate, and such like things which will realise a hundred pounds," said Mrs. Curtis; "and with that sum we can settle the little claimants, who are always more noisy and clamourous than the large ones."

The colloquy had just reached this highly satisfactory point, when a tremendous double knock threatened to beat in the front door, and the bell was instantaneously afterwards set ringing in frantic accompaniment.

"Some one's ill," cried Frank, "and they take this house for a Doctor's."

"At all events it is no dun," observed Mrs. Curtis.

Here the thundering knock and insane ring were repeated.

"I just tell you what, my dear," resumed the young gentleman, rising from his chair, and looking as fierce as possible: "I've a deuced great mind to go out and ask who the devil it is that dares knock and ring twice in half a minute at our door in that fashion. I'm certain it's no friend of your's—and it's none of mine. So—as sure as my name is Francis Curtis, Esquire, of Baker Street—I'll—"

But at this instant the dining-room door was thrown open by the domestic in gorgeous livery; and the countenance of the warlike Francis Curtis, Esquire, of Baker Street, grew white as a sheet, when the servant announced—"CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS!"

CHAPTER LXXIII.
CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS AGAIN.

"Be Jasus! and it is my dear friend, Misther Frank Cur-r-tis!" exclaimed the redoubtable officer, as he stalked into the room: then, perceiving the lady, he untiled his head in a most graceful manner—or, in plain terms, removed his foraging cap with a certain rounding sweep of his right arm, saying, "Your servint, Mim. I presume that I have the honour-r to pay my rispicts to Mrs. Curtis?"

"Ye-es—that is Mrs. Curtis, Captain," said Frank, while the lady gave a somewhat cold inclination of the head.

"And a sweet and iligant wife ye've got, ye dog!" cried the Captain, bestowing a friendly poke in the ribs of the newly married gentleman. "Come, shake hands, Misther Cur-r-tis: men like you and me mustn't harbour animosity against each other. Let the past *be* past, as the saying is: and an excellent saying it is too, ma'am," he added, in a tone of bland appeal to the lady, as he nearly wrung her husband's fingers off in the enthusiasm of his anxiety to convince him that *this time* at least he came for no hostile purpose.

"Sit down, Captain," said Frank, now feeling more at his ease than he had done since the unexpected appearance of the famous duellist. "Will you take a glass of wine? There's Port and Sherry on the table; and there's Champagne, Claret, Hock, and Burgundy in the cellar—as well as capital whiskey."

"Be the holy poker-r!" exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, "and I'll jist throuble ye for the potheen. The thrue Irish potheen, ma'am," he continued, turning once more towards Mrs. Curtis, "is the most iligant beverage unther the sun. On my estates in ould Ireland I allow no water at all; and my pisanthry is the finest to be seen in the whole counthry."

"Indeed, Sir," observed Mrs. Curtis, beginning to grow amused with the strange character who had thus intruded himself upon the momentous discussion which she and her husband were carrying on at the time.

"Be Jasus! Mim, and it's as thrue as you're sitting there!" exclaimed the Captain. "In my own counthry, Mim, I'm a Justice of the Pace, and I never allow my pisanthry to be interfered with by the gaugers. I let them keep as many illicit stills as they like; and the consequence is they adore me."

"I should think that to be very likely," said Frank. "But here's the whiskey—and there's hot water. Now, John, put the sugar on the table: that's right!"

The servant having retired, Captain O'Blunderbuss proceeded to compound his favourite beverage by mixing equal parts of spirit and water, and adding thereto three lumps of sugar.

"I always brew the first glass sthrong Mim," he observed, "in honour to ould Ireland. Your health, Mim."

"But I'm not Irish, sir," responded the lady, laughing.

"Then I'm sure ye ought to be, Mim," cried the Captain; "and, be Jasus! if ye was, ye'd be an honour to the counthry!"

Mrs. Curtis simpered, and bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Come, old fellow," said Frank, "you needn't mind my wife being present—she's a woman of the world, as my friend the Archbishop of Paris used to say of his niece;—and so you may as well tell us how you managed to get out of a certain place and what made you think of honouring us with this visit."

"Och! and be Jasus, I'll answer the last question fir-rst, Mr. Cur-rtis," responded the Captain. "Well, thin, ye must know that I've taken a great affection for ye, because, be the power-rs! I've heard spake of your bravery in a many quar-rters; and it isn't me that would cherish animosity against a gallant fellow."

The Captain might have added that, being in want of grog, supper, and lodging, he had racked his brain all day to think of some soft, easy individual amongst his acquaintance, on whom he could quarter himself for a week or so; and having at length remembered to have seen the marriage of Mr. Curtis and Mrs. Goldberry duly announced, at the time, in the fashionable newspapers (the said announcements having been duly paid for, as a matter of course), it had struck him, that he might make himself very comfortable in Baker Street for a short period.

"Well, I feel highly flattered by your good opinion of me," said Frank. "It's quite true that I've killed a man or two in my time, and winged half a dozen others;—but really those are trifles which one scarcely thinks of any value. At the same time, Captain, we duellists, you know, are devilish chary of our reputation; and so it's just as well that the world should talk in a respectful way about us—eh?"

"Be the holy poker-r! and ye're right, my boy!" exclaimed the Captain, mixing the second glass of grog; then, turning towards Mrs. Curtis, he said, "I always make my second jorum, Mim, a little stronger than the first, for the honour of ould England; because that's always my second toast! So here's for ould England! And now," continued Captain O'Blunderbuss, after having taken a long draught of

the potent liquor, "I'll answer your first question, Misther Cur-r-tis. And sure it's how I got out of limbo that ye was asking about. Well, I'll tell ye; and, be Jasus! ye'll say that such a rum start never was seen. The cowardly bastes locked me up in Horsemonger Lane, ye know, at the suit of one Spriggins, for three hundred and forty-seven pounds, including costs. For three whole days I was jest for all the world like a rampagious lion. There's an infer-r-nal iron grating all round the yar-rd where the prisoner-rs have to walk about; and, be Jasus! I chafed and foamed inside those bar-rs, till the other prisoner-rs got so frightened they sent a petition to the governor to get me locked up in the sthrong room. So the governor sends for me, and says he, '*Capthain O'Bluntherbuss, ye're a terror to the other people in the debtors' department of the prison, and ye'd betther be after thinking of making some arrangement with your creditor, or I shall be forced to put you by yourself in the sthrong room.*'—'*Be Jasus!*' says I, '*and I'll skin any man who shall dar-r to lay even the tip of a finger on me for such a purpose.*'—'*Well,*' says the governor, '*but if you've ever so little in the shape of ready money to offer your creditor, I'll see him myself and thry what I can do for ye.*'—So I pulled out my purse; and behold ye! I'd jest two pound three shillings, and sixpence, to pay three hundred and forty-seven pounds with.—'*Is it three-halfpence in the pound ye'll be afther offering?*' asks the governor.—'*Jest that same,*' says I; '*and if ever Misther Spriggins gets another farthing out of me, then I'll skin myself!*'—So away goes the governor to the creditor; and heaven only knows what blarney he pitches him;—but in the course of a day or two, down comes a discharge on condition that I pay the three-halfpence in the pound.—'*Now,*' says I, '*that's trating an Irish jintleman as he deserves;*' and so I got clean out of that infer-r-nal place. Here's your health, Mim."

And the Captain emptied his glass.

"You managed that business capital," exclaimed Frank Curtis, who began to think that it would be no bad speculation to maintain the martial gentleman altogether in Baker Street to frighten away the creditors,—or, at all events, to employ him to go round to them, in case they should prove inclined to act in a hostile manner towards him.

At that moment his eyes met those of his wife; and the glance of intelligence which was exchanged between them, showed that the same thought had struck them both, and at the same time.

"Help yourself, Captain," said Frank. "That whiskey was sent me as a present by the Crown Prince of Denmark, for having been second to his illustrious wife's uncle's stepmother's first cousin's nephew, in a duel three years ago."

"Blood and thunther-r!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, "what a disthant relation! But the potheen is beautiful. I always mix my third glass sthronger than the two first, because in this same thir-rd I dhrink to the ladies—the sweet-hearts—and God bless 'em!"

Mrs. Curtis again acknowledged the compliment with a simper and an inclination of the head; and by the time the Captain had disposed of his third glass, the domestic in transcendent livery announced that coffee was served in the drawing-room.

Thither the party accordingly proceeded; Captain O'Blunderbuss escorting Mrs. Curtis, with a politeness which would have been perfectly enchanting had he not smelt so awfully of poteen.

And now, in a few minutes, behold the trio seated so cozily and comfortably at the table in the drawing-room, sipping the nectar of Mocha; while a friendly little contest took place between Frank and the Captain, to decide who could tell the greatest number of lies in the shortest space of time.

"Be Jasus!" cried O'Blunderbuss; "this coffee is an iligant beverage! But, saving your prisence, Mim, it don't come up to the coffee which I grew on my own estate in ould Ireland. The thruth was, I had such a vast extent of bog-land that I was at a loss what use to tur-rn it to—so I sent my steward off to Arabia,—yes, be the holy poker-r, direct off to Arabia,—to buy up as much coffee as he could get for money. Och! and with a power-r of coffeeberries did he come back, in the next West Indiaman, up the Meditherranean; and wasn't it a sowing of them same berries that we had in the bog! Ye should have seen the land eight months afterwards, with the coffee-plants grown up bigger than gooseberry bushes, and making the whole counthry smell of coffee for eight miles round. I rayalized seven hunthred pounds by that spec the first year; and I have gone on with the culthure of coffee ever since."

"Oh!" said Frank, "it is astonishing what improvements might be introduced in that way, if one only had the sense to do it. When I was staying in Paris, I was very intimate with the Governor of the Bank of France, and he had a beautiful conservatory on the top of the Bank. He took me up one day to see it: 'twas in the middle of winter, and cold as the devil in the open air—but warm as a toast inside the conservatory. Well, there I saw melons as large as a bumb-shell growing in flower-pots no bigger than that slop-bason—pine-apples hanging over the sides of tea-cups—and a kind of fruit the name of which I've forgotten; but I know that it was as large as a horse's head, and of the same shape. So I said to my friend the Governor of the Mint, says I——"

Mr. Curtis stopped; for the radiant footman entered the room, saying, "Please, sir, two men wish to speak to you immediately."

"Two men!" exclaimed Frank, casting an uneasy glance towards his wife, who, it was evident, shared her husband's very natural apprehensions.

"Yes, sir——But here they are," added the footman: then turning round towards the intruders, he said, "Why didn't you wait quiet down in the hall till I'd informed master that you wanted to speak to him?"

"'Cos we doesn't do business in that ere way, old feller," responded a voice which was not altogether unknown to either Mr. Curtis or the Captain.

"Proggs, the officer-r—by God!" vociferated the latter, starting from his seat.

"Yes—it's me and my master, Mr. Mac Grab, at your service, gen'lemen," said Proggs, pushing his way past the footman, and entering the room with his hat on his head and his stout stick in his hand. "Please, Mr. Curtis, sir—you're wanted."

And as these words were uttered by the subordinate, the principal himself—namely, Mr. Mac Grab—made *his* appearance (and a very dirty one it was too) in the door-way; while the footman stood aghast, and Mrs. Curtis went off into hysterics.

"Wanted!" cried Frank, casting an appealing glance towards the Captain: "who the devil wants me?"

"Whose suit is it at, sir?" asked Proggs, turning towards his superior.

"Beeswing, wine-merchant—debt, two hundred pounds, owing by the lady," answered Mr. Mac Grab.

"Is it arresting my friend Misther Curtis, ye mane?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, advancing towards the officers with tremendous fierceness, now that he found his own personal security unendangered.

"And why not?" growled Mac Grab, shrouding himself behind his man Proggs.

"Is it why not, ye're afther asking?" shouted Captain O'Blunderbuss. "Now, be Jasus! and if ye don't both make yourselves as scarce as ye was before ye was bor-rn, it's myself that'll tayche ye a lesson of purliteness in the twinkling of a bed-post."

"Oh! that's all gammon," muttered Proggs. "Mr. Curtis must either pay the money or come along with us."

"He won't do neither the one nor the t'other, ye bastes of the ear-rth!" exclaimed the Captain.

"I say now——" began Mac Grab: but, before he had time to utter another word, the redoubtable Captain wrenched the short stick from the hands of Mr. Proggs, and throwing it to a distance, boldly attacked the officers with his long sinewy arms in such an effectual manner, that they disappeared from the drawing-room in as short a space of time as their assailant had represented by that beautiful figure of rhetoric—"the twinkling of a bed-post."

Mrs. Curtis had deemed it most prudent to go off into a fit—Frank was nailed to the floor by the terror of being captured and dragged off to a debtor's prison—the footman considered it wise to remain a mere spectator of the fight;—and thus the Captain was unassisted in his gallant onslaught upon the sheriffs' officer and his man.

The Captain, however, had an advantage on his side: namely, that when he had once succeeded in driving the enemy back as far as the staircase, it was comparatively an easy matter to fling them headlong down—a feat which he performed without the least ceremony or hesitation, to the infinite alarm of the female-servants in the kitchen, who came rushing up into the hall from that lower region, screaming as heartily as they could under the conviction that the house was tumbling about their ears.

"Hold your pace! my dears," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, rushing down the stairs after the vanquished enemy,—his countenance purple with whiskey and excitement—every vein in his forehead swollen almost to bursting—and his fists clenched for a renewal of the onslaught.

"We'll make you smart for this, my man!" growled Mac Grab, as he rose painfully from the hall-floor.

"I'm jiggered if we don't too!" added Proggs, picking himself up as it were from the last step, and feeling his legs and arms to see if any of his bones were broken.

"Out of the house, ugly bastes that ye are!" thundered the Captain.

The officers had received sufficient evidence of the redoubtable gentleman's warlike propensities, to induce them to beat a rapid retreat,—and the moment they had evaporated by the front-door, the Captain banged it violently after them, securing it with bolts and chain.

"That's the way we serve out the riptiles in ould Ireland, my dears," he exclaimed, turning towards the female servants, who, having at length comprehended the nature of the amusement going on, had ceased to scream and were enjoying the animated scene as much as if it had been a play.

Frank Curtis had heard the front door close violently; and the drawing of the bolts afterwards convinced him that the house was cleared of its invaders. He accordingly descended the stairs, laughing heartily now that the immediate peril had been averted by the prowess of the Captain. The resplendent footman was following close behind his master—very anxious to solicit his wages and his discharge there and then, and only prevented from acting thus abruptly by the formidable presence of Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Now, my frinds," exclaimed this gallant gentleman, who was quite in his element under existing circumstances, "the house is in a complate state of siege! Ye must look to me as the commander of the garrison. So let the area and the ground-floor windows be all properly fastened: take care of the back door, wherever it leads to—and, be Jasus! we'll keep the rascals out! I know 'em well! They'll be thrying all manner of dodges to get in: but they'll find themselves as mistaken as the old lady was when she scratched the bed-post and thought she was scratching her head."

Then, with wonderful alacrity, Captain O'Blunderbuss hastened to superintend the arrangements and the precautions which he had briefly suggested. He examined the windows in the drawing room—he descended to the kitchen—went out into the area—poked his nose into the coal-cellar—inspected the yard at the back—issued his orders—saw that they were executed—and then drank off half a tumbler of whiskey neat, both as a slight refreshment after the exertions of the evening, and as a token of his satisfaction at the various measures which he had adopted with a view to convert the house into an impregnable fortress.

By this time Mrs. Curtis had made up her mind to recover from her fit; but she was so dreadfully shocked at the exposure which had taken place before the servants, that she retired to her bed-chamber forthwith.

The Captain and Frank then sat down to hold, as the former gentleman expressed it, "a council of war-r-r;" and as one bottle of whiskey had been emptied, and there was not another in the house, the martial gentleman was kind and condescending enough to put up with gin, of which exhilirating fluid he found, to his great satisfaction, there was a large supply in the cellar.

"What the devil would you have me do in this cursed embarrassment?" asked Frank.

"Be Jasus! and I'll jest tell ye now," answered the Captain. "Let me see?—this is Thuesday. Well, we must maintain the siege until Sunday; and then you must give the traps leg bail into another counthy. Whose furnitur-r is it in the house?"

"Why—it's ours, and it isn't," responded Frank.

"Och! and be asy now—I understand ye, my boy!" cried the Captain. "It isn't paid fur, ye mane—but possission is nine points of the law; and, be the holy poker-r! we'll make it the whole twilve. Jest allow me to carry ye through this little affair. Next Sunday night, me lad, ye must be off into Surrey with the lady and little ones; and lave me to manage here. On Monday, at the top of the mornin', I'll have in a broker and sell off every stick; and I'll bring ye over the proceeds like a man of honour-r as I am."

"So far, so good," said Frank. "But how are we to get things to eat between this and Sunday, if no one is to stir out of the place?"

"Is it ayting ye mane, when there's three gallons of gin in the house?" demanded Captain O' Blunderbuss, with something like indignation in his tone and manner.

"Well, but the wife and the children can't live upon gin, Captain," observed Frank; "even though the servants should have no objection."

"Not live upon gin, me boy!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, in a state of astonishment as complete and unfeigned as if some one had just shown him his own name in the Army List, or presented him with the title-deeds of his often vaunted Irish estates: "not live upon gin, Misther Curtis!" he repeated, surveying Frank as if this young gentleman were actually taking leave of his senses. "Show me the discontended mortal, my frind, that says he *won't* live upon gin, and I'll jest——"

"Just what?" asked Frank, somewhat dismayed at this irascibility on the part of his companion.

"I'll skin him—by the holy poker-r!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss, rapping his clenched fist violently upon the table.

There was a long pause, during which the two gentlemen emptied and refilled their glasses.

"Be the way, me boy," suddenly exclaimed the Captain, as if an idea had just struck him, "is that old uncle of yours in town at present?"

"Yes: he came back some days ago, I understand," replied Frank.

"D'ye think he'd bleed?" asked the Captain: "for 'tis supplies to carry on the war-r in an iligant style for a long time to come, that we want; since now that we're once on a frindly footing together, Curtis, I'm not the boy to desert ye in your throubles."

He might have added that he would stick to Mr. and Mrs. Curtis so long as they had a bottle of spirits to give, or a shilling to lend him.

"I really think that it's very likely you might be able to draw the old bird," said Frank: "and to tell you the truth, I had already entertained the idea. Besides, he won't *dare* refuse *you*, Captain."

"Be Jasus! I should take it as an insult if he did," exclaimed the man of war, caressing his moustache. "But let us strike the ir-r-ron while it is hot. Dthraw up a letter to Sir-r Christopher-r in your best style; and I'll be off with it at once. Trust me for getting out of the garrison safe and coming back again in the same way; but mind and keep a sharp watch while I'm gone."

Frank promised compliance with this injunction, and hastened to pen a letter to his uncle, the Captain kindly undertaking to dictate the sense in which it was to be written.

The precious document ran as follows:—

> "My dear Uncle,
>
> "I hope this will find you blooming, as it leaves me; and as you and me have both made ourselves happy by marriage, don't let us have any more animosity between us. In fact, I will show you at once that I mean to forget the past, and treat you as an uncle ought to be treated by his dutiful nephew.
>
> "Well, then, to come to the point. My friend, Captain O'Blunderbuss, whom you have the pleasure of knowing, and who improves vastly on acquaintance, has kindly lent me five hundred pounds, just to settle a few pressing debts which I had contracted during the time that I was so unfortunate as to be on bad terms with you; and as the Captain wants his money again, and I don't like to tell my wife so soon after marriage that I owe this sum, you will greatly oblige me by giving the Captain a cheque for the amount—or else Bank notes at once—he isn't very particular which, I dare say;—and I will repay you the moment I get my quarter's allowance, as the beloved and angelic creature, whom I shall have so much pleasure in introducing to you and to my dear aunt Charlotte, has promised me seven hundred pounds every three months to spend as I like and no questions asked.
>
> "So no more at present, my dear uncle, from your dutiful, attached, obliged, and grateful nephew,
>
> "Francis Curtis."

"What do you think of *that*?" demanded Frank triumphantly, when he had read the letter aloud for the opinion of his friend.

"Is it what I think?" exclaimed the Captain. "Be the power-rs! and it's as well as I could have done it myself, if I'd studied it for a week."

"Thanks to your suggestions," added Frank. "And now I'll just seal and direct it, while you finish your glass."

Captain O'Blunderbuss *did* drain the contents of his tumbler, as Frank foresaw that he would do; for it was one of that gallant

gentleman's maxims never to waste good liquor;—and, being thus fortified with upwards of a pint of whiskey and ditto of gin—the effects of which were evident only in the fiery hue of his complexion, but by no means in his gait nor speech—he prepared to set out on his expedition to the dwelling of Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Frank," said he, putting on his foraging cap and conveying the letter to his pocket, "take the poker-r."

"The poker!" repealed the young man, with mingled surprise and dismay.

"And what else would ye take to dash out the brains of any man who should thry to spring in at the door while I go out!" exclaimed O'Blunderbuss. "That's right, me boy," he added, as Curtis shouldered the fire-implement. "Not that it's likely for any of them bastes of the ear-rth to be lur-rking about so soon afther the little affair of jest now: but it's as well to be on our guar-rd."

Accordingly, Frank Curtis stood behind the front door, poker in hand, as the redoubtable officer issued forth; but the coast was clear so far as the retainers of the Sheriff were concerned; and the peace of the garrison remained unmolested.

Frank closed, chained, and bolted the door again; and Captain O'Blunderbuss wended his way with an awful swagger down the street, frightening by his fierce looks all the small children whom he happened to encounter.

CHAPTER LXXIV.
THREE MONTHS AFTER MARRIAGE.

Sir Christopher Blunt was pacing his drawing-room in a very agitated manner; and the expression of his countenance was so ludicrous, in its reflection of the thoughts that were stirring within his breast, that it was impossible to say whether he was influenced by commingled hope and suspense on the one hand, or by fear and shame on the other.

It was pretty evident that he had not been out all day; for he was unshaven—and he wore the light blue dressing-gown, the bright red trousers, and the scarlet silk cap, which his dear wife had devised as a most becoming morning costume, but which gave him the appearance of a Mussulman quack-doctor, as the golden lustre of the handsome lamp brought forth all the flaunting effects of the garb.

Advancing towards the time-piece, Sir Christopher compared his watch with that dial.

"A quarter to nine!" he murmured to himself, as he restored the huge gold repeater to his fob; "and the doctors have been an hour with her already! Well—I never heard of such a thing before—three months after marriage—it's impossible—quite impossible! Dr. Wagtail is a very clever man, no doubt—but he's wrong for once in his life. If it was six or seven months, now—one might suppose that a premature birth—but three months——"

And the worthy knight paced the apartment in a manner which showed that "he didn't know wha the deuce to make of it."

"Well," he continued, again speaking in a murmuring tone, after a short pause, "it may be so, after all! For really science does discover such wonderful things now-a-days, and the world seems to undergo so many strange changes, that upon my word I should not be at all surprised if, on going out some morning, I was to see the people walking on their heads along Jermyn Street. Ah! things weren't like this when I was a boy! But then I must recollect that I live in the fashionable quarter of the town *now*, and ladies at the West End ain't like those vulgar citizens' wives. Thank God that I didn't get in for Portsoken! It was quite enough to have filled the high and responsible office of Sheriff, and to have received the distinguished honour of knighthood——But, three months!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, interrupting himself, and flying back with ludicrous abruptness to the idea that was uppermost in his mind; "three months! And, after all, who knows but that it's the fashion at the West End; and I'm sure that if it is, I shall be very glad that it has happened so. And yet the most extraordinary part of the business is that—when I suspected something of the kind, and just hinted at it to Lady Blunt—she—she scratched my face to pieces for me. Very extraordinary, indeed!"

Sir Christopher now became lost in a maze of conjecture, vague suspicion, and bewilderment, through which he certainly could not find his way; and heaven only knows how long he might have remained in the labyrinth, had not Dr. Wagtail appeared to his rescue.

"Well, doctor?" exclaimed the knight, hastening to meet the physician.

"My dear Sir Christopher, I congratulate you!" said Dr. Wagtail, considering it decent and becoming to assume a joyous and smirking expression of countenance for the occasion, while he wrung the knight's hand with most affectionate warmth: "for it is my duty," he continued, now suddenly adopting the pompous and important style of the fashionable physician to a rich family,—"for it is my duty, Sir Christopher, to announce to you that you are the happy father of a charming boy, with whom her ladyship has been kind enough to present you."

"A boy—eh, doctor?" faltered the knight. "But of course it isn't—I mean—it can't be—a—a—full grown child?"

"Well, my dear Sir Christopher," responded Dr. Wagtail, who perfectly understood where the shoe pinched, "from what Mr. Snipekin, the talented and much-sought-after accoucheur whom I deemed it prudent to call in just now,—from what Mr. Snipekin says, Sir Christopher, I do believe that the dear little creature has come a leetle before his time. But pray don't make yourself uneasy on that account, my dear Sir Christopher; for the sweet babe is in no danger, and is an uncommonly fine child, to be sure!"

"Then it is a little before its time, doctor—eh!" said Sir Christopher. "But—doctor—you and me are old friends, and you can speak candidly, you know——and—the truth is——you must remember that—that—our marriage only took place—three months ago—and it seems to me rather unusual—not that I suspect dear Lady Blunt's virtue for a moment—on the contrary—I know her to be a perfect paragon of morality: at the same time—three months, doctor—and a fine boy——"

"My dear Sir Christopher," responded Dr. Wagtail, foreseeing that the amount of his fee would depend vastly upon the state of mind in which the Knight might be when he should give it, and acting moreover upon his favourite principle of humouring the whims and wishes of all persons with whom he had any professional connexion,—"my dear Sir Christopher," he said, looking very solemn indeed, "your avocations in the world have not allowed you time to dive into the mysteries of science and investigate the arcana of learning—much less to pursue with sesquipedalian regularity the routine of that course of study which, in the abstract, and also considered in a purely professional point of view—and having due regard to the wonders of physiological science,—in fact—ahem!—you understand

me, Sir Christopher?"

"Ye-e-s, doctor," drawled forth the bewildered knight. "But I think you were going to satisfy me—you know—about the three months—and a fine boy—doctor——"

"I was coming to that point, my dear Sir Christopher," said Dr. Wagtail. "In fact, I was about to observe that *physiology*, properly considered in its etymological signification, comprehends the entire science of Nature; but I must impress upon your mind, Sir Christopher, that the ratiocinative propensities of modern physicians have induced them, doubtless after much profound cogitation, to restrict the term to that department of physical knowledge relating, referring, and belonging exclusively to organic existence. And thus, Sir Christopher——ahem!—you follow me?"

"Oh! quite easy—indeed!" returned the knight, wondering in his own mind whether it were dog Latin that stunned his ears, and also how any one individual could possibly pick up and retain such an immense amount of knowledge. "But—the point was, doctor——"

"Precisely, my dear Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the physician, looking as wise as all the seven sages of Greece put together: "it was to that very point which I was coming;—but I thought that a detailed and full explanation would prove most satisfactory to you."

"Oh! decidedly, doctor:—and I am sure I am very much obliged to you for taking the trouble to—to——"

"Well, then, my dear Sir Christopher," interrupted the fashionable physician; "all my premises being granted, and the arguments which I have adduced being fully admitted, I think that the demonstration is easy enough. Consequently, Sir Christopher, it is quite apparent that a child *may* be born three months after marriage; at the same time, I think I can assure you, that in future your excellent and amiable lady will not be quite so premature in her accouchements."

"It is not unusual, then, doctor, amongst your female patients?" said Sir Christopher, who was not entirely satisfied yet.

"It is by no means unusual that a *first* child should be born a few months after marriage, my dear Sir Christopher," answered the physician.

"And perhaps—perhaps, it's rather fashionable than otherwise?" asked the knight, in a hesitating manner.

"Well—I don't know but what it is, Sir Christopher," replied Dr. Wagtail, taking a pinch of snuff. "And now that your mind is completely set at rest on this point—as indeed it must and ought to be, after the full and professional explanation which I have given you,—I will return to the chamber of your amiable and excellent lady, and see whether you can be permitted to visit her for a few moments."

"Do, my dear doctor. And, doctor," cried the Knight, as a sudden idea struck him; "pray don't—I mean, it is not necessary to let Lady Blunt know that—that—in a word—that I asked you any questions——"

"Oh! certainly not, my dear Sir Christopher," exclaimed the physician; and he then quitted the room.

"Well," thought the knight to himself, as soon as he was again alone; "and so I am the father—the happy father,"—and he made a slight grimace,—"of a fine boy. A fine boy—eh! 'Pon my honour, I'm very glad—very glad, indeed! A son and heir—a little Christopher! How very kind of my dear wife: it is a tie which will bind us together—perhaps soften her temper a leetle—and make her more sparing in the use of her finger nails. Well—if it's only for that, the coming of this child will be a great blessing—a very great blessing. But I really do wish the dear babe had made its appearance about six months later. Not that it matters much—seeing that I must be its father, and that the thing is rather fashionable than otherwise. Besides—Doctor Wagtail is such a clever man—such a very clever man—and his explanation was so completely satisfactory—so very lucid and clear—a fool might understand it. Well, I really ought to be a very happy fellow!"

But all the knight's attempts at self-persuasion and self-consolation were futile: there was a weight upon his spirits that he could not throw off—and in the depths of his secret soul there was an awful misgiving, to the existence of which he vainly endeavoured to blind his mental vision. He strove to be gay—he tried to establish the conviction that he was perfectly happy and contented—he did all he could to make himself admit *to* himself that the doctor's reasoning was conclusive:—still he could not shut out from his heart the ever recurring thought that the physician's argument might be very conclusive indeed, but that he was totally unable to understand a word of it.

Then came the fear of ridicule;—and this was the most galling sentiment of all. But, on the other hand, there was an apprehension which was not without its weight: namely, the anger of his wife, in case she should discover that he had dared to doubt her virtue.

Thus, by the time the doctor came back, the silly old gentleman had determined to take matters just as he found them: and, though half suspecting that there was something wrong in the business, he resolved to maintain as contented an air as possible, as the only means of combatting ridicule should he experience it, or of quieting his wife should she hear of any thing to excite her irritability.

"We are getting on so well, my dear Sir Christopher," said the physician, "that we can see you for a few minutes; but we cannot bear any loud speaking as yet, and we establish it as a condition that you do not attempt to kiss our child more than once, for fear you should set it crying and make our head ache."

Sir Christopher attempted a pleasant smile, and followed Dr. Wagtail to the chamber of the indisposed lady.

The moment the door was opened, the shrill but nevertheless apparently half-stifled cry of a newborn child saluted the knight's ears; and, hastening up to the bed, he bent over and kissed his wife.

"See what heaven has sent us, Sir Christopher!" said the lady, in a low and weak voice, well suited to the solemnity of her observation; and, slightly uncovering the bed-clothes, she exhibited a tiny object, looking amazingly red, but which she assured him was "the

sweetest little face in the world."

"That it is—the pretty creatur!" observed a hoarse voice, which appeared to emanate from the chimney, but which in reality came from no further off than the fire-place, and belonged to an elderly woman of tremendous corpulency, who was arranging some baby-linen on a clothes-horse. "I've nussed a many ladies," continued the stout proprietress of the hoarse voice, "but never such a patient dear as your'n, Sir Christopher: and I never see such a angel at its birth as that babby. Why," continued the woman, advancing towards the knight and giving him a good long stare, while, potent odours of gin assailed his nostrils all the while, "I do declare that the babby is as like his father as he can be."

Sir Christopher "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," and slipped half-a-guinea into the nurse's hand, at which proof of his generosity she dropped him a curtsey that shook the house so profoundly as nearly to drop her through the floor.

"Yes—the babby's as like you, Sir, as two peas is like each other," continued the nurse, while Dr. Wagtail and the accoucheur exchanged rapid but intelligent glances at the excellence of the idea, and Sir Christopher grunted like a learned pig which has just put its snout upon the right card in a show. "I'm sure, Sir, you ought to be wery much obleeged to missus for presenting you with such a cherub. Poor dear! she had a sad time of it—but she bore it like a saint, as she is. Won't you let master have just one kiss at the little dear, my lady?"

The saint was just at that moment wondering whether the child, as it grew up, would bear any resemblance to a certain tall footman in a certain family at the West End: but why such an idea should enter her head, we must leave to the readers to divine.

The nurse repeated her question, adding, "Do let the little dear's pa just kiss it once; and then we must turn him out, you know, ma'am, for the present."

"Yes, Sir Christopher—you may kiss the little cherub, if you like," said Lady Blunt, in a tone which was meant to impress on her husband's mind a full sense of the favour conferred upon him: "but pray don't make the sweet child squeal out—for you're so rough."

The knight accordingly touched the babe with his lips, which he smacked to make believe that the kiss was a hearty one in spite of his wife's injunction; and, this ceremony being completed, he was turned out of the room by the nurse, whose power on such occasions amounts, as all fathers know, to an absolute despotism.

"The nurse" is a species exhibiting but little variety. Stout and in good spirits she must always be; and bottled stout and ardent spirits she highly esteems. She moreover has an excellent appetite, and is fond of many meals in the course of the day. She awakes at five or six in the morning, and makes herself strong hot coffee and a couple of rounds of toast, putting a great deal of sugar to the former, and a vast quantity of butter to the latter. At nine she is ready for her *breakfast*—the first meal not being so denominated and in fact considered as nothing at all. If her mistress be awake, the nurse will amuse her with innumerable stories relative to her former places; and she will not fail to make herself out the very best nurse in the world. She will describe how one lady was inconsolable because she could not have her at the desired time; how another lady would eat nothing unless prepared by the said nurse's own hands; how a third would have died if it had not been for her care and attention; and how she never slept a wink nor put her clothes off once for a whole month while in attendance upon another lady. Then she is sure to be well connected and to have seen better days: and if asked for her address, she is certain to reply, "Lord bless you, my dear: all you have to do is to send and inquire for me in such-and-such a street, and any body will tell you where I live." In fact she is as well known in her quarter of the town as the Queen is at Pimlico. But—to continue the category of meals—at eleven o'clock she is quite prepared for a mutton-chop and half a pint of stout; and she forces a basin of gruel down her mistress's throat, accompanied with many a "Poor dear, I'm sure you must want it!" At two o'clock she has a good appetite for her dinner; and then she manages to get on pretty comfortably till tea-time. The nurse is very fond of her tea, and likes it strong. After tea, as her mistress most likely sleeps, she gets hold of an odd volume of a romance, or a newspaper not more than a week old; and it is ten to one that she believes every word she reads in both. If her mistress happen to be awake, the nurse will comment upon what she reads. The newspaper, especially, is sure to set her talking on the "hardness of the times," and arouse all her reminiscences of "when she was a gal." She will often express her mysterious wonder at "what the world is coming to," and invariably speaks as if every thing had undergone a great change for the worst. She is sure to know a poor family whom she is mainly instrumental in saving from starvation; and she is equally certain to descant upon the necessity of sobriety and frugality amongst the working classes. Then she remembers that it is time "for missus to take her medicine;" but when she goes to the shelf or the cupboard, she stays a little longer there than is quite necessary to pour out the medicine aforesaid; and, as she approaches the bed to administer the same, she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, and her eyes are observed to water. The invalid lady may now thank her stars if she be not assailed with an odour of ardent spirit while she receives her medicine from the hand of the nurse. Well, the time passes away somehow or another until the supper hour; and it is a remarkable fact, that the nurse never seems wearied of the monotony of her avocation. But, then, in the evening she manages to get half-an-hour's chat with the servants down stairs; and the chat is rendered the more pleasant by a little drop of something short out of a black bottle which the cook mysteriously produces from the cupboard. On these occasions the nurse exhibits all her importance. She assures the listening domestics that it was very fortunate *she* happened to be sent for to attend upon "missus," as if any other nurse had been called in the results would have been most unpleasantly different. She then expresses her opinion of the medical attendant; and her estimation of this gentleman is invariably regulated by the amount of his liberality towards her. If he gave her the odd shillings which accompanied the sovereigns in the little piece of paper containing the fee, then he is sure to be a very clever man indeed; but if he forgot this important duty, then in the nurse's estimation he is certain to be a most unfit doctor to call in; and "it was quite a wonder that he didn't kill poor dear missus." Having thus delivered her opinion, which is received as gospel by the servants, she hastens up stairs again, and relates to her mistress her own version of the conversation which has taken place down below. After supper she no longer partakes of ardent spirit on the sly, and unblushingly brews herself a potent glass. But then she is sure to have an excuse—such a dreadful pain in the stomach, or a bad cold; and her mistress, whose peace of mind depends on keeping her attendant in a good humour, says in a mild, languid voice, "Do make yourself comfortable, nurse!" And

the nurse obeys the hint to the very letter. The liquor induces her to descant upon spirits in general; and she is sure to inform her mistress that the *Duke of Wellington* doesn't sell near such good things as the *Duck and Drake*; but that "the beautifullest gin is at the public round the corner." Sometimes—and this is one of the worst features in her character—the nurse will take it into her head to relate gloomy stories to her mistress; and when once she gets on this subject, the devil himself could not stop her. She tells how she knew a lady who went on very well for ten days, and then popped off all on a sudden; or else she was once in a house which caught on fire in the middle of the night, and the poor lady and child were burnt to death. If the husband should happen to be out late, the nurse, when she is in this gloomy vein, talks mysteriously of the danger of the streets; and says how she knew a gentleman who was run over by an omnibus during the fog. But, in justice to the nurse, we must observe, that these horrible subjects are not very frequently touched on by her—and only when she gets somewhat maudlin with too much ardent spirit or bottled stout. For the first week she is in her place, no one comes to see her; but in the course of the second, she is visited by her married daughter and her married daughter's eldest girl. During the third week, the nurse is constantly wanted by people who come to see her, or inquire for her; and at the beginning of the fourth the front door bell is rung frantically, and the nurse hears, with a countenance so innocent that it is almost impossible to think she has pre-arranged the whole matter, that Mrs. So-and-so, whom she has pledged herself to attend upon, is just taken in labour, and she (the nurse) must go to her directly. Her mistress is by this time well enough to do without her; and the nurse receives her full month's wages for three week's attendance.

But let us return to Sir Christopher Blunt, whom we left at that pleasant point when, having undergone the ceremony of embracing the babe which, according to his lady's account, heaven had sent him, he wended his way back to the drawing-room.

At that precise moment Sir Christopher would have given just one half of his fortune to be enabled to undo all he had done three months previously. He had married in haste, and he now repented at leisure. But it was too late to retract; and he found, to his infinite mortification, that he must "grin and bear it."

The accoucheur shortly entered the room to report that "all was going on as well as could be expected;" and, having received his fee, he took his departure.

Soon afterwards the pompous and self-sufficient Dr. Wagtail made *his* appearance, and received *his* fee, which, out of sheer ostentation, the knight rendered as liberal as the physician had anticipated.

These little matters being disposed of, Sir Christopher rang the bell, ordered up a bottle of claret and was about to console himself with the solitary enjoyment of the same, when an astounding double knock and tremendous ring at the front-door startled him so fearfully that he spilt the wine over his red trousers and nearly upset the table on which his elbow was leaning.

"Who can this be?" he exclaimed aloud.

"Captain O'Blunderbuss!" cried the footman, throwing open the door as wide as possible to afford ingress to the swaggering officer.

CHAPTER LXXV.
THE KNIGHT AND THE CAPTAIN.

"Captain O'Blunderbuss!" murmured Sir Christopher, in a faint tone, as he sank back dismayed into his seat.

"Be the power-rs! and how are ye, my hearty old cock?" was the polite salutation of the gallant gentleman, as, advancing close up to the knight, he grasped his hand and shook it with as much energy as if he were a policeman carrying off a starving mendicant to the station-house for the *heinous crime* of begging.

"Thank you, Captain—I—I'm pretty well," responded Sir Christopher.

"Well, that's a blessing, be Jasus!" cried the Captain, coolly taking a seat. "Is it claret that you're after dhrinking, Sir-r Christopher?" he demanded, taking up the bottle and holding it between his eyes and the lamp. "Iligant stuff in its way—but not my lush. Have ye no potheen in the house, Sir Christopher-r?"

"Potheen?" repeated the knight, not understanding the name nor half liking the intrusion.

"Is it you, Sir-r Christopher, that don't know what rale Irish potheen is?" cried the Captain. "Why, there's niver a child in ould Ir-reland that can't spell potheen. Whiskey, Sir Christopher—whiskey! But I'll save ye the throuble of ringing for it yourself:"—and, with these words, Captain O'Blunderbuss applied his hand most vigorously to the bell-pull.

The footman answered the summons.

"Your masther says, sirrah," exclaimed the Captain, "that ye're to bring up a bottle of the best Irish whiskey—rale potheen—with a tumbler, a spoon, a lemon, hot water, and sugar and look shar-rp about it, too!"

The domestic retired, and Sir Christopher stared in amazement at the Captain; for the worthy knight was so astounded by the free and easy manners of his visitor, that he was not quite certain whether he, Sir Christopher Blunt, was actually in his own house at the moment, or whether he was in some public coffee-room where every one had a right to order the waiter about as he chose.

"I hope you're not offinded with me, Sir Christopher-r, by making myself at home?" said the Captain: "but it isn't me that's the boy to stand on any ceremony."

The knight thought that his visitor could never have said a truer thing in his life.

"Not I, be Jasus!" continued Captain O'Blunderbuss. "But thin I'm the man to let others do the same with me; and if you should ever find yourself in the wilds of Conamar-r-ra, Sir Christopher, jist ask the first naked urchin ye meet with to show the way to Bluntherbuss Park, and see if I won't trate ye as ye deserve to be trated. Blood and murther! it's me that keeps open house save whin the sheriff's-officers are prowling about the neighbourhood, which is generally from the 1st of January to the 31st of December in every year."

The servant now made his appearance with the whiskey and the *et ceteras* which the gallant gentleman had ordered; and the said gallant gentleman straightway began to brew himself some toddy, with the air of an individual who had had nothing stronger than mild ale to drink all day long.

"May I request to be informed——" began Sir Christopher, his courage reviving now that the Captain's visit appeared to be one altogether of an amicable nature.

"Faith! and is it to be informed ye'd be?" ejaculated O'Blunderbuss, as he stirred his whiskey-and-water up with the spoon. "But don't alarm yourself, Sir Christopher-r: my call this evening was merely jist to ask ye how ye do and present ye with a little note from that rale broth of a boy, Misther Frank Curtis."

"Frank—my nephew!" exclaimed Sir Christopher: "what can he want with me? Surely 'tis not to congratulate——But, no—he can't have heard of *that* yet."

Be the power-rs! and is there any thing to congratulate ye upon, Sir Christopher?" cried the Captain. "Have ye been made a baronet—or elected an alderman?"

"I would have you know, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the knight, in a solemn tone, "that I was once so unadvised as to put up for Portsoken——"

Be Jasus! have nothing to do with Port—it lies heavy on the stomach, my frind!" interrupted the gallant officer. "Dhrink potheen—and you'll niver grow old nor yet gray. But we were spaking of congratulations. Is it possible that your dear wife has tumbled down stairs and broken her neck? or has she presented ye with a pledge of her affiction?"

"Since you must know, Captain O'Blunderbuss," responded the Knight, "it is——the latter."

"I give ye joy, old brick!" vociferated the gallant officer and seizing Sir Christopher's hand, he subjected it to such a process of violent shaking, that the victim almost yelled out with agony. "But from what Frank tould me," continued the Captain, at length relinquishing the hand which he had so unmercifully squeezed, "I thought you hadn't been married long enough for such a happy evint to take place. However—I wish ye joy, my frind; and now to business. Read this little bit of a note, and ye'll be charmed with the kind way in which Frank Curtis spakes of ye."

The knight received the letter which the Captain handed to him; but ere he had time to break the seal, the door opened and the nurse made her appearance.

"Well, nurse—what is it?" demanded Sir Christopher.

"Please, sir," was the reply, "missus wants to know who it was as come with such a chemendous knock and ring that it has set her poor head a-aching ready to split, and the blessed babby a-crying as if he was in fits."

"Tell your misthress, nurse," exclaimed the visitor, in an imperious tone, "that it's Captain O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Ir-r-reland," with an awful rattling of the r's; "and prisint my best rispicts to your lady and the babby."

"Thank'ee, sir," replied the nurse; "but missus says, Sir Christopher, please, that she hopes you won't make no noise in the house."

"Very well—very well, my good woman!" exclaimed the knight hastily. "Tell your mistress I shall not be engaged long, and will come up and see her presently."

"Wery good, sir;"—and the nurse withdrew.

Sir Christopher then proceeded to open the letter; but it was with trembling hands,—for the visit of the nurse had thrown him into a most unpleasant state of nervousness—he being well aware that he should receive a blowing up on account of the Captain's call,—although no one could possibly wish more devoutly than himself that such a call had not taken place.

"Ye thrimble, Sir Christopher!" cried the Captain; "but there's no need to be alar-r-med—for your nev-vy hasn't sent ye a challenge. So let your mind be at pace—and read the little note at your leisure. I'm in no hurry for an hour or two."

And indeed the Captain appeared to be quite comfortable; for he brewed himself a second glass of whiskey and water—threw some coals upon the fire—and trimmed the lamp in such a way that the flame rose above the globe.

Meantime Sir Christopher perused the letter with great attention, and did not altogether seem to relish its contents.

"I really cannot oblige my nephew in this respect," he said, fidgetting the paper about in his hands. "The truth is—he has not behaved altogether well to me—nor to Lady Blunt;—and if I was to do this for him, Lady Blunt would be so angry. He must fight his own way in the world, Captain O'Blunderbuss, as I did; for I have no hesitation to admit that I rose from nothing—indeed, I glory in the fact: and having filled the high and responsible office of Sheriff, with credit to myself and advantage to my fellow-citizens——"

"Damn the high office of Shiriff!" exclaimed the gallant gentleman, striking his fist upon the table. "I want my money—and it isn't Captain O'Bluntherbuss that ye'll be afther putting off in this snaking fashion."

"But, my dear sir," said the knight, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "*I* don't owe you the money."

"Be Jasus! but your nev-vy does—and therefore it's all in the family!" cried the Captain.

"That is a proposition I cannot agree to, my dear sir," returned the knight.

"D' ye mane to differ from me?" demanded the Captain, looking desperately ferocious.

"Why—as for that—I—I——"

"D' ye mane to differ from me, I repate?" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss, again striking the table with his fist, but so violently this time that the bottles and glasses danced a hornpipe: "answer me that, Sir-r Christopher-r!"

"I don't wish to offend you, Captain—I couldn't wish to do that; but," added the knight, "I must beg leave most respectfully to dissent from the proposition that I am in any way answerable for the debts of Mr. Curtis. And since he has married a lady of fortune, let him be candid with her at once; and——"

"Is it candid that he's to be, when the wife would kick up hell and blazes?" cried O'Blunderbuss. "But I tell you purty frankly, my frind, that if ye don't shell out the seven hunthred pounds——"

"Seven hundred!" ejaculated Sir Christopher. "It says only five hundred in the letter."

"I don't care two r-raps for the letther," answered the Captain: "all I know is that Misther Frank Curtis, your nev-vy, had seven hunthred of me—and, be Jasus! I'll have seven hunthred of you."

"It can't be done," said Sir Christopher doggedly.

"Then, be the holy poker-r! I'll shoot ye to-morrow mornin'!" vociferated the gallant officer: "so name your frind; and I'll take care that ye shan't be afther shir-r-king this time as ye did when ye had to mate my frind Morthaunt."

"Really, Captain O'Blunderbuss, this strange conduct on your part—is—is—" stammered the knight, scarcely knowing what to say or do; while his countenance became elongated to an awful extent.

"Sthrange!—sthrange! do ye say?" exclaimed the Captain. "Why, ye're adding insult to injury, man. But don't desayve yourself—ye won't come the counterfeit-crank over me, be Jasus! I'm not the boy to be bullied afther this fashion, Sir Christopher-r. So shell out the eight hunthred—or be the Lor-r-d Harry!——"

"Eight hundred!" murmured the miserable knight, now cruelly alarmed at the ferocious manner and the progressive attempt at extortion on the part of his visitor.

"Eight hunthred is what I lent, and eight hunthred is what I'll have back," said the Captain, in a determined tone: "and if ye're afther denying your debts of honour-r, Sir Christopher, I'll make such an example of ye as shall let all the wor-rld know what ye are—as soon as I've shot ye dead, which I'll do in the mornin'."

"You surely wouldn't commit such a crime—without—without just provocation?" urged the knight, in a coaxing manner.

"I'll not hear another word of palthry excuse, sirrah," replied the Captain, starting from his seat; "and if the money isn't forthcoming in the twinkling of a bed-post, I'll flay ye first and shoot ye aftherwards."

"Oh! dear—Oh! dear," said the wretched Sir Christopher: "what shall I do?—I wouldn't mind the five hundred that my nephew asks for—since he promises so faithfully to pay me again· but eight hundred——"

"Nine!" thundered the Captain. "D'ye mane to tell me as good as that I'm a liar-r, and that I can't recollect amounts?—Be Jasus! I niver was so insulthed in my life—and nothing but blood can wash it away!"

"Blood!" murmured Sir Christopher: "my blood! and I the father of a family, as I may say."

"So much the more dishonour-r-able for ye to dispute a just debt, and thry to shir-rk off in this bastely fashion!" cried the Captain, twirling his moustache, and eyeing Sir Christopher in a way which made the latter tremble in every limb. "I always thought that ye was a man famous for your straight-for'ard dalings; but I'm desayved—grossly desayved;—and I'll sind my frind to ye to-morrow mornin', before you've had time to break the shell of your first egg at breakfast."

"Well, Captain—to oblige *you*," said Sir Christopher, "I don't mind if I write a cheque for five hundred pounds; but I positively will give no more—I won't indeed—I can't."

"Put down the palthry five hunthred, then, on the dhraft," exclaimed the Captain; "and I'll make Misther Curtis fork me out the rest at his convaynience."

The miserable Sir Christopher, though feeling that he had been completely bullied into the settlement of the demand made upon him, nevertheless stood in such awful dismay of the warlike Irishman, that he wrote a cheque for the five hundred pounds, which said cheque the Captain secured about his person, exclaiming, "And now, my frind, I'll look over all the insulting words ye have applied to me this evening. But, be the power-r-s! if I hadn't a great respict for ye, I'd make a mummy of ye before ye was twelve hours oulder."

Having thus spoken, the Captain tossed off the remainder of his whiskey-and-water, shook the knight violently by the hand once more, and took his departure, just as the nurse was coming down to desire that Sir Christopher would get rid of his guest and send up the keys of the wine-cellar to her ladyship.

Now, strange as it may appear to the reader,—considering all that they know relative to the character of Captain O'Blunderbuss,—it is nevertheless a fact that he never once thought of appropriating to his own use the amount just extorted from the knight. He was a man who would not hesitate to get into debt, without the least intention of ever paying the same,—he moreover thought that he had accomplished a highly meritorious deed in extorting the five hundred pounds from Sir Christopher: but he was honourable after his own fashion—that is to say, he would scorn to perpetrate an actual robbery, or to betray the trust reposed in him by an accomplice. He was, in fact, one of those curious, but not uncommon beings, who might be trusted with a thousand pounds to convey to the bank for a friend, but who would borrow eighteen-pence without the remotest intention of ever repaying it, and who thought that the most brilliant act a gentleman could achieve was to chouse a creditor.

Accordingly, the clock had scarcely struck eleven, and Frank Curtis was already beginning to get uneasy, when the Captain's thundering knock at the front door in Baker Street, proclaimed his return; and in a few moments the young gentleman was made acquainted with the success experienced by his friend.

"And now, be the holy poker-r! we'll make a night of it," said the Captain, when, the front-door having been duly secured, the two worthies were once more seated in the dining-room: "and it's myself that'll tell ye stories and sing ye rale Irish songs to keep ye awake, my boy."

And a night they did make of it, heaven knows!—and tremendous inroads were effected upon the supply of gin then in the "garrison," as the Captain now termed the house. Such lies, too, as the Captain and Frank Curtis told each other! until the latter gentleman began to entertain the pleasing idea that the room was spinning round, and that there were four candles on the table instead of two. The gallant officer, on the other hand, carried his liquor like a man who was inaccessible to its inebriating fumes; and when Curtis fell dead drunk upon the carpet, the Captain considerately picked him up, tossed him over his shoulder as if he was a sack of potatoes, and thus transported him to the door of his wife's bed-room, at which he deposited the senseless gentleman, having intimated in stentorian tones that Mrs. Curtis would do well to rise and look to her husband.

The Captain then went down stairs again, finished the bottle last opened, and, throwing himself on a sofa, fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER LXXVI.
TIM THE SNAMMER AND JOSH PEDLER OUT ON BUSINESS.

He who delights in wandering amongst the mazes of this mighty city of London,—this wilderness of brick and mortar,—and who can view, with the eye of a philosopher or a moralizer, the various phases in which the metropolis is to be considered, may find ample food for reflection, and much changing interest of scene, if he post himself at that point in the Borough of Southwark, called Newington Butts.

From this point diverge Blackman Street, the Newington Road, the Borough Road, and Horsemonger Lane.

Blackman Street and the Newington Road constitute the great thoroughfare between London Bridge and the *Elephant and Castle* tavern; and incalculable are the multitudes—innumerable are the vehicles, which pass along the busy way,—oh! so busy, because the love of money and the love of pleasure cause all those comings and goings,—those hurryings hither and thither,—those departures, and those returns!

What a tremendous conflict of interests,—what a wondrous striving to accomplish objects in view,—what an energy—what an activity—what an unwearied industry, are denoted by a great thoroughfare like this! Nor less does that bustle speak of recreation and enjoyment—parties of pleasure to end in dissipation—amusement, diversion, and holiday, too often to be dearly paid for thereafter!

Close by Newington Butts you behold a portion of the wall of the Bench Prison, with its *chevaux de frise*, denoting rather the criminal prison than a place of confinement for unfortunate persons. What a horrible cruelty it is to incarcerate men who are unable to liquidate their liabilities—as if such immurement would place within their reach the philosopher's stone. Where one dishonest debtor finds his way thither, a dozen human beings who are enclosed within that gloomy wall, would gladly—willingly, acquit themselves of their responsibilities if they had the means. And shall the law be so framed that, in order to punish one, it must cruelly oppress twelve individuals? Is such a principle consistent with common sense, justice, or civilisation? Many and many a heart has been broken within those walls: many and many a fine spirit has been crushed down to the very dust; and the man who went into that prison with honourable feelings and generous sympathies, has gone forth prepared to play the part of a sneaking swindler. For a creditor to lock his debtor up in prison, is the same as if a master took away the tools from a mechanic and said, "Now do your work as usual." The Legislature does not understand this. It allows an expensive process to take place, so that the debtor who cannot originally pay 50*l.*, for instance, has his liabilities immediately increased to 60*l.*: then, when responding negatively to the demand for this larger sum, he is taken away from the avocations by pursuing which he might obtain the means to settle with his creditor, and is thrown into prison. The routine is precisely this:—If a person cannot pay a debt, you increase it for him: and, having increased it, you tie his hands so that he shall have no chance of paying it at all! Merciful heavens! is this common sense?[35]

The system of imprisonment for debt falls trebly hard upon the poor. The gentleman, though reduced himself, has friends who can assist him; but the poor are too poor to aid each other. Then money can purchase bail when a schedule has been filed in the Insolvents' Court; but the poor man must languish in prison until his hearing. Oh! the advantages of wealth or wealthy connexions in this mercenary land!—oh! the benefits of being by birth *a gentleman*!

It was about ten o'clock in the evening, when Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler encountered each other, by appointment, at Newington Butts; and, as it was yet too early for the business which they had in hand, they repaired to a public-house hard by, where they drank porter, smoked pipes, and conversed, until the clock in the tap-room denoted the hour of eleven.

They then rose, paid their score, and took their departure,—bending their way into Horsemonger Lane.

Tim the Snammer now fell a few paces behind his comrade, Josh Pedler, who hurried a short distance up the lane, and stopped at the door of a house of mean, sordid, and sombre appearance.

He knocked at the door, which was opened by an old and hideous-looking woman, holding in her hand a candle, by the light of which she surveyed the visitor in a very suspicions manner.

"I want to speak to a genelman of the name of Bones which lives here," said Josh, placing his foot, with apparent carelessness, in such a way over the threshold that the door might not be shut against his inclination.

"No sich a person don't live here," returned the woman gruffly; and she was about to close the door, when Josh again addressed her.

"Well," said he, "if he don't pass by that there name, he does by another—and it's all the same. We ain't partickler, ma'am, as to names; but my business is partickler, though—and I've got an appintment with Mr. Benjamin Bones—or Old Death—or whatever else he calls his-self or is called by others."

"It ain't of no use a standing bothering here, my good man," said the woman, "'cause vy—no sich a person lives here, I tell you—and I

don't know sich a person by sich a name at all."

"Humbug!" cried Josh and, giving a low, short whistle, he pushed into the house.

A moment had not elapsed ere Tim the Snammer was at his heels—the door was forcibly closed—the candle was wrested from the old woman's hand—and she was threatened with throttling if she attempted to raise an alarm.

The two men bound her with a cord, and carried her into the room opening from the passage. They then left her, vowing with terrible oaths to return and "do for her," if she dared make the slightest disturbance.

"There isn't a room on t'other side of the passage, is there, Tim?" demanded Josh of his companion, who carried the light.

"No. And now let's creep up stairs as gentle as if we was mice," said the Snammer.

"You've got your barkers, Tim?" asked Pedler.

"Yes—and a damned good clasp knife too," replied the ruffian, with a significant leer at his accomplice, and speaking in a low whisper. "I don't think we shall find any one else in the house besides that old woman and Ben Bones his-self, 'cause Mutton-Face Sal is a devilish keen one—and she would have found it out if there was any lodgers."

"Well, cut up stairs, Tim," said Josh Pedler, "and don't let us be a-standing here palavering—or the old scamp may overhear us and get out by the back windows, or some such a dodge. I'll go fust, if you like."

"No—I'll go fust, Josh," answered the Snammer; "for it's me that has got the most spite agin the ancient willain."

With these words, Tim Splint crept cautiously up the narrow and dirty staircase, Josh Pedler following close behind him.

The robbers stopped at the door on the first landing, and knocked; but, no answer being returned, they broke it open in a few moments by means of a small stout chisel such as housebreakers are in the habit of using.

"Who's there?" cried the deep, sepulchral voice of Old Death, as he started from the arm-chair in which he had been taking a nap.

"It's only two of your friends," returned Tim the Snammer; "and *as* friends you had better treat us, too—or it'll be the wuss for you."

"I don't know that I ever treated you in any way but as friends," said old Death, glancing somewhat uneasily from the one to the other. "As for you, Tim—I can guess why you're angry with me; but I wasn't at liberty—I wasn't my own master, I can assure you—on that Saturday when I promised to get you out of the Jug; or I should have kept my word. But it's too long a story to tell you now—even if I was disposed to do so; and so the shortest way to make us all right, is for me to give you back the money that was placed in my hands by Josh Pedler."

"And what'll pay me for the two months of quod that I had all through you, you cheating old fence?" demanded Tim Splint, placing his back against the door in a determined manner.

"I couldn't help it, Tim—I couldn't help it," returned Old Death with a hideous grin. "And may be—may be," he added, with the hesitation habitual to him, "I can put something in your way, that will make up for the past."

"Well—that looks like business, at all events," observed Tim, exchanging a rapid glance with his companion; for it struck the two robbers at the same moment, that they should perhaps act prudently to join Old Death in any enterprise which he might have in hand, and then plunder him afterwards—provided that the affair he had to propose, gave promise of a better booty than that which they stood the immediate chance of obtaining from him.

Old Death looked leisurely round the small, mean, and ill-furnished room, as much as to say, "What can you hope to get out of me?"—for the meaning of the glances which he had observed to pass between the two robbers, was perfectly well understood by him.

"Is the business you hinted at for to-night?" demanded Josh Pedler, after a brief pause.

"For to-night," replied Benjamin Bones. "But sit down, my good friends, and may be I can find a dram of brandy in the bottle for you."

"Thank'ee, we'll stand, old chap," said the Snammer; "but we shan't refuse the bingo, for all that."

Old Death regaled his two visitors each with a wine glass full of brandy, and then took a similar quantity himself.

"Yes," he said, continuing the discourse: "it is for to-night—and a good thing may be made of it, if you're staunch and resolute. In fact, I wanted to meet with a couple of such active fellows as you are, for I have been sadly used lately—in more ways than one."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Tim the Snammer. "You know that we're the lads to do any thing it ought to be done; and I don't see the use of wasting time, if the business is really for to-night."

"I have had positive information," continued Old Death, his dark eyes gleaming snake-like beneath the shaggy brows that overhung them, "that a gentleman, who lives in a lonely house not many miles off, this morning received a considerable sum of money at a banker's, on a cheque which he get cashed there; and in a few days he will pay it all away to his creditors—for he has been building a great number of houses at Norwood; and so I think," added Bones, with a horrible chuckle, "that it would be just as well to anticipate him."

"And can you rely on this information?" asked Tim the Snammer. "Come—let us know all the particklers."

"Two or three days ago he took into his service a man named John Jeffreys—a groom who was lately in the household of a certain Sir Christopher Blunt," said Old Death; "and this person sells his secrets to those who pay him best."

"In plain terms he's in your pay," exclaimed Josh Pedler. "Well—that's all right. What next?"

"Nothing more than that if you like to crack that crib, you can do it to-night; and I'll smash the notes, which will be of no use to you till they're melted into gold," answered Old Death; thereby intimating to them, first that he should take no active part in the business, and secondly that it would not be worth their while to cheat him of his share of the plunder, inasmuch as they were totally dependent on him for rendering the hoped-for booty at all available.

Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler consulted together for a few moments in low whispers.

"But how do we know," said the former, suddenly turning round upon Old Death, "that this isn't all a cursed plant to get us out of the house here—or may be to inveigle us into some infernal trap—eh? Answer us that."

"Read John Jeffreys' note," said Old Death coolly, as he produced the letter from the pocket of his capacious old grey surtout coat.

Tim the Snammer, and Josh Pedler, accordingly read the contents of the paper, which ran as follow:—

> "This cums to tel you, sir, that Master resceved a chek for about twelve undred pouns yesterday from Sir enry courtenee, a barrow-night, and that master got it keshed this mornin at the benk, wich I no becos I had to go with him in the gigg to the benk, and I see him cum out of the benk a-countin the notes, and I no he will pay it all away in 2 or 3 days to his bilders and arkitecks and carpinters at norwood. anny thing you leeve for mee in a broun paper parsel at the ushoul crib will reech mee. Yure fatheful servant,
>
> "J. J."

"Satisfactory enow," exclaimed Tim the Snammer, with an appealing glance to his comrade, who nodded his head approvingly. "Well," continued the thief, "give us the necessary description of the place; and we'll be off at once. It's fortnit that we've got our tools about us."

"Which you have used against my miserable lodging," observed Old Death, with a grim smile. "However, I would rather you'd have introduced yourselves in that way, than not come at all; for I should have let this matter," he added, pointing to Jeffreys' note, which now lay on the table, "go by without attending to it. So it's lucky for us all that you did make your appearance; and if you serve me well in this case, you shall not want employment of my finding."

"Good again, old tulip," said Tim the Snammer; "and now tell us where this Mr. Torrings lives—or whatever his name is—and we will lose no time."

Old Death gave the necessary explanation; and the two men took their departure, having first acquainted their employer with the condition in which they had left the old woman down stairs—a piece of information which made him hasten to her rescue.

35. The records of the Insolvent Debtors' Court prove that the average dividend paid upon the estates of persons who take the benefit of the Act is *one farthing* in the pound!

CHAPTER LXXVII.
THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

Proceed we now to Torrens Cottage, on the road to which place we have just left Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler.

It was past eleven o'clock, and Mr. Torrens was seated alone in his parlour, examining a pile of papers which lay before him. A decanter more than half emptied of its ruby contents, and a wine-glass also stood upon the table; and the flushed countenance of the unprincipled man showed that he had sought to drown the remorseful feelings of a restless conscience by means of the juice of the grape.

But he could not;—and though ten days had now elapsed since the sacrifice of the beautiful Rosamond had taken place, there were moments when the father felt even more acutely than on the fatal night when, in the solitude of his chamber, he endured the torments of the damned,—*mental torments, indescribably more severe than the most agonising of physical pain could possibly be*!

He had received the price of *his* infamy and *her* dishonour: the last portion of the "price of blood" he had drawn from the bankers in the morning—and he was now arranging and casting up his accounts to satisfy himself that he had actually obtained sufficient to settle all his liabilities.

But his occupation was every moment interrupted by a gush of terrible thoughts to his maddening brain;—and if he laid down the pen, it was to grasp the bottle.

What would the world say if his black turpitude were to transpire?—how should he ever be able to meet Clarence Villiers and Adelais again, if they were to become acquainted with Rosamond's dishonour? He knew that the baronet had hitherto managed somewhat to tranquillise the ruined girl by promises of marriage and eternal affection;—he was also aware that Rosamond had endeavoured to subdue her anguish as much as possible in order to avoid the chance of arousing any suspicion on the part of Mrs. Slingsby! But a term must at length arrive to those specious representations and mendacious assurances adopted by Sir Henry Courtenay to lull the agonising feelings of the unhappy girl;—and then—oh! it was then, that the danger would be terrible indeed! Of all this Mr. Torrens thought; and he suffered more acutely from his fears than from his consciousness of infernal iniquity.

The time-piece upon the mantle had struck the hour of eleven some time, and Mr. Torrens was in the midst of his terrible meditations, when a loud, long, and impatient knock at the front-door caused him to start from his seat.

He had already desired the servants not to sit up on his account, as it was probable that he should be occupied with his papers until a late hour in the night; and he was therefore now compelled to answer the summons himself.

A cold chill struck to his heart—for he entertained a presentiment of what was about to occur: indeed, such an anticipation was natural on his part when we reflect that his soul was a prey to conscious guilt, and that the knock at the door was hasty and imperative.

For a moment he staggered as if about to fall: then, calling all his firmness to his aid, he proceeded to open the front-door, the knocking at which was repeated with increased vehemence.

His presentiment was correct;—for, scarcely had he drawn back the bolt, when the door was pushed open—and Rosamond rushed into the house.

"My dearest father!" she exclaimed, and fell insensible into his arms.

He conveyed her to a sofa in the parlour, tore off her bonnet and shawl, and sprinkled water upon her pale—her very pale countenance.

Merciful heavens! how acute—how agonising was the pang which shot to his heart, as he contemplated that lovely brow on which innocence had so lately sate enthroned, until the spoiler had pressed the heated lips of lust thereon! Then for a few moment all the father's feelings were uppermost in his soul; and he gnashed his teeth with rage at the thought that he himself was dishonoured in that dishonoured daughter!

Oh! to have given her back her purity and her self-respect,—to have known that she could raise her head proudly in maiden pride,—to have been able to embrace her as the chaste and spotless being she was ere hell suggested its accursed machinations to achieve her destruction!

But it was too late!—Here lay the ruined child—and there were piled the notes and gold which had purchased her virtue!

Three or four minutes elapsed, and still Rosamond gave no signs of returning animation. Suddenly the father desisted from his endeavours to restore her; for an infernal thought flashed to his mind.

He would suffer her to die!

No sooner did the atrocious idea enter his soul, than he longed to see it fulfilled. He dared not meet her eyes—even should she be

unsuspicious relative to his unnatural treachery. No—it were better that she should die!

But the infernal hopes of the wicked man were not to be realized;—and, monster that he was, he could not slay her with his own hands!

Slowly, at length, her bosom began to heave—a profound sigh escaped her—she opened her eyes, and gazed vacantly around.

"Rosamond," said her father, now mastering his feelings of bitter disappointment so far as to be able to speak in a kind tone: "Rosamond, dearest—what ails you? Fear not—you are at home! But why do you look at me so wildly!"

"Oh! my God—what have I done, that I should have deserved so much misery!" exclaimed the young girl, in a voice of the most piercing anguish, as she covered her face with her hands and burst into a flood of tears:—then, raising herself to a sitting posture on the sofa, she seized her father's hands, saying in a different and more profoundly melancholy tone, "My parent—my only friend! I am unworthy to look you in the face!"

"Do not speak thus, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens, seating himself by his daughter's side, and maintaining a demeanour which bespoke the deepest interest in her behalf. "Something has cruelly afflicted you?" he added interrogatively—as if *he* had yet the fatal truth to learn!

"Oh! heavens—your kindness kills me, dearest father!" shrieked Rosamond. "Yes—never did you appear so kind to me before—and I—I——But, merciful Saviour! my brain is on fire!"

"My sweet child," returned Mr. Torrens, whose soul was a perfect hell as he listened to the words which came from his daughter's lips,—"you can surely have no secrets from me? Has any one caused you chagrin? has any one dared to insult you? And what means this sudden arrival at home—at so late an hour—and when I fancied that you were staying with that excellent woman, Mrs. Slingsby?"

"Mrs. Slingsby!" repeated Rosamond, with a shudder which denoted the loathing and abhorrence she entertained for that woman. "Oh! my dear father, that Mrs. Slingsby is a fiend in human shape—a vile and detestable hypocrite, who conceals the blackest heart beneath the garb of religion!"

"Rosamond—Rosamond—you know not what you are saying!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, affecting to be profoundly surprised and even hurt at these emphatic accusations.

"Alas! I know too well—oh! far too well, the truth of all I am saying!" said Rosamond, a hectic glow of excitement appearing upon her cheeks, hitherto so ashy pale. "Yes, father—that woman is a disgrace to her sex! This evening—but two hours ago—I accidentally heard a few words pass between her and Sir Henry Courtenay——"

"Sir Henry Courtenay is at least an honourable man," said Mr. Torrens.

"Sir Henry Courtenay is a monster!" cried Rosamond emphatically: then, bursting into tears again, she threw herself at her father's feet, exclaiming, "Oh! that I had a mother to whom I could unburthen all the woes that fill my heart:—but to you—to you—my dearest parent—how can your daughter confess that she has been ruined—dishonoured—undone?"

"Unhappy girl!" cried the hypocrite, affecting a tone and manner denoting mingled indignation and astonishment: "what dreadful things are these that you have come home to tell me?"

"The truth, my dear father—the horrible, the fatal truth!" continued Rosamond, in a fearfully excited tone.

"Speak lower—lower, my child," said Mr. Torrens: "the servants will be alarmed—they will overhear you. And now resume your seat near me—rise from that humiliating posture—and——"

"Humiliating indeed," interrupted Rosamond, sinking her voice to a comparative whisper, but with an utterance that was almost suffocated by the dreadful emotions raging within her bosom:—"because I myself am so signally humiliated!" she added. "And yet I am innocent, dear father—it was not my fault—not for worlds would I have strayed from the path of virtue! But a hideous plot—a diabolical scheme of treachery—devised between that bad woman and that still more dreadful man——"

"No more—no more, Rosamond!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, still maintaining a well-affected semblance of indignation and astonishment. "I understand you but too well—and you shall be avenged!"

"Alas! vengeance will not make me what I once was—a happy and spotless girl!" said Rosamond: "and now that I am dishonoured, it would require but the contumely with which the world would treat me, to drive me to utter desperation—to madness, or to suicide!"

Mr. Torrens said all he could to console his unhappy child; and he very readily promised her to abandon all ideas of vengeance on those who had been the authors of her shame.

"Until this evening," said Rosamond, her head reclining upon her father's shoulder, "I had hoped that Sir Henry Courtenay would repair the wrong he had done me by means of marriage,—for, alas! my dear father, I loved him! But—two hours ago—I overheard a few words pass between him and Mrs. Slingsby,—a few words which rivetted me to the spot where I was at first only an involuntary listener. Then I became a willing and attentive eaves-dropper,—for, oh! the little which had already met my ears, intimately—too intimately regarded myself! And, dear father, you can conceive with what horror and dismay I learnt enough to convince me, that she whom I had loved and esteemed as a dear friend and a model of perfection, was a vile—an abandoned—an infamous woman,—the mistress of Sir Henry Courtenay, and in the way to become a mother also! I could not believe my ears—I fancied that I was dreaming. But, alas! it was indeed a frightful reality;—and then I heard that I had been sold,—yes, *sold*—I, your daughter, *sold* to Sir Henry Courtenay,—and, I suppose, by that dreadful woman! Yes—yes—father," she continued wildly, "I was sold to his arms,—and he never intended to marry me! I screamed not,—I uttered not a word: I was crushed too low—I had too great a load of misery upon my soul to

be able to give vent to my feelings; but I dragged myself away from the spot where I had overheard that terrible discourse,—a veil had fallen from before my eyes, and I saw all the extent of my hopeless position in its true light. How I managed to reach my bed-room I know not: my brain began to whirl, and I thought that I should go mad! Of what followed I have but a dim recollection; but methinks that, having put on my bonnet and shawl, I was flying from the house, when Sir Henry Courtenay pursued me down the stairs—and how I escaped from him I cannot say! There was a chaos in my bewildered brain; and when I was enabled to collect my scattered thoughts—when consciousness, as I may term it, came back, I found myself hurrying along the streets. I looked round, fearful of being pursued; but there was no cause for alarm. Nevertheless, I hastened on,—and all that long distance have I accomplished on foot, dear father; for, oh! I felt that home was the place where my deep sorrows would receive sympathy, and where only I could hope to enjoy security. And now, my beloved parent," added Rosamond, throwing her arms around his neck, "you will not spurn your unhappy daughter,—you will not thrust her from you! My God! why did I ever reveal to you all this? Oh! it was because my heart was so full of woe, that if I had not unburthened it to you in the hope of receiving consolation, it would have broken—it would have broken!"

"Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens, "you did well to reveal all these dreadful things to me; because I alone am the proper person to counsel and console you. A fearful crime," he continued, shuddering at his own monstrous duplicity, "has been perpetrated; but, alas! the criminals must go unpunished. Yes,—Rosamond, you were right when you declared that vengeance would lead only to exposure; and that exposure would kill you. My poor child, not even your sister must be made acquainted with this awful calamity."

"No—no!" exclaimed Rosamond: "it is sufficient that *you* are aware of the ignominious treatment which I have received! Not for worlds would I have the bridal happiness of my dearest sister poisoned by the revelation of my wrongs! And Clarence, too—Clarence—oh! from him, of all men, must this secret be kept; or he would, perhaps, be urged to wreak on his aunt, and on that vile baronet, a vengeance which would lead to exposure, and render Adelais miserable for ever!"

"It charms me, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens, "to perceive that the wrongs heaped upon you have not impaired your prudence. Between you and me shall this secret now remain,—for, depend upon it, the authors of this cruel outrage will not themselves be anxious to publish their own infamy. You are now beneath the paternal roof—and here you are certain to enjoy security; and from this night forth, Rosamond, let us place a seal on our lips so far as the *one* dread topic is concerned."

"And you, my father," asked the ruined girl,—"shall you not love me the less? Shall you not look with loathing and abhorrence upon your daughter? Oh! if there be a change in your sentiments towards me, I shall have no alternative save to die!"

The miserable and criminal father embraced his dishonoured child, and said every thing he could to console her.

Rosamond then retired to her chamber,—that chamber which she had left ten days previously a pure and spotless virgin, and to which she now returned a deflowered and ruined girl!

Mr. Torrens remained in the parlour.

Amidst all the horrible thoughts that forced themselves upon his mind, he saw one glimmering of consolation: and this was that Rosamond suspected not his complicity in the nefarious plot which had destroyed her. It was evident that in the conversation which she had overheard between Mrs. Slingsby and the baronet, *his* connivance had only been hinted at,—too darkly and mysteriously for Rosamond to comprehend the meaning of those words which alluded to the fact of her having been *sold*!

But what pen can describe the tortures which the guilty man experienced, as he pondered on the scene that had just occurred? In spite of that gleam of solace he was the prey to ineffable anguish,—for he could not help feeling as a *father*: nature asserted her empire,—and he was in despair as he contemplated the awful crime which had led to the dishonour of his own child!

Never had she appeared to him so beautiful as when, ashy pale, she had awakened from the deep trance into which she fell on crossing the parental threshold;—never did he feel more inclined to love her, or to be proud of her charms, than when he afterwards saw her kneeling at his feet, the light of the lamp falling with Rembrandt effect upon her upraised countenance! Alas! through him was she ruined—by his machinations was she destroyed! And of what avail was that beauty now, since honour was lost?

He fixed his eyes upon the gold, and endeavoured to console himself with the contemplation of the glittering metal.

It seemed dross—vile dross in his eyes; and could he have recalled the deeds of the last ten days, he would gladly have fallen back into the inextricable labyrinth of his pecuniary difficulties, and have dared even the disgrace and punishment of a debtors' prison, so that he might not have had to reproach himself with *the sale of his daughter's virtue*!

CHAPTER LXXVIII.
RETRIBUTION.

It was long past midnight—and Mr. Torrens was still pacing the parlour with uneven steps, when a low double knock at the front-door aroused him from his painful meditations.

Wondering who could visit the cottage at that late hour, he hastened to reply to the summons; and, to his surprise, the lustre of the parlour-lamp which he carried in his hand, streamed full upon the pale and agitated countenance of Sir Henry Courtenay.

Making a sign to the baronet not to speak, Mr. Torrens led the way into the parlour; and the visitor, in the excitement of the feelings which had brought him to the cottage, neglected to shut the front-door close as he entered, but merely pushed it back in such a way that the bolt of the lock did not catch.

This little incident was unperceived by the two gentlemen.

When they were both in the parlour, Mr. Torrens shut the room-door, and said in a low whisper, "She has come home!"

"Thank God! she is safe then!" observed the baronet, also in a subdued voice. "The fact is, Mrs. Slingsby and myself were so dreadfully frightened that she might either make away with herself, or else adopt some measure that would lead to a certain exposure, that we have both been hunting for her through all the streets at the West End; and at last I determined, late as it was, to come over and acquaint you with her flight. But it never struck me that I should hear of her return home."

"She is unaware of my sad complicity in the dreadful business," replied Mr. Torrens sternly. "But pray repeat to me the whole conversation which took place between Mrs. Slingsby and yourself, and which she unfortunately overheard. I shall then be enabled to judge whether reflection on that discourse may lead her to imagine that her own father was indeed a party to her ruin; for I must confess that I have terrible fears lest she should indeed imbibe such a suspicion."

"Give me a tumbler of wine, Torrens," said the baronet, throwing himself upon the sofa which had so lately been pressed by his victim when in a state of insensibility: "I am regularly exhausted, for I have walked all the way hither;—and, when I have a little recovered myself, I will detail all the conversation which took place between me and Mrs. Slingsby, as nearly as I shall be able to recollect it."

Mr. Torrens produced a bottle of wine from the side-board, he having already emptied the decanter upon the table.

"Help yourself, Sir Henry," he said: "and in the meantime I will steal cautiously up stairs and see if Rosamond be yet retired to rest—for I would not for worlds have her come down and find you here."

"A wise precaution," observed the baronet.

Mr. Torrens accordingly quitted the parlour, and hastened up stairs. He stopped at the door of his daughter's chamber, and listened. Profound sobs and impassioned ejaculations, indicative of terrible grief, met his ears; and he grew alarmed lest she should feel herself so thoroughly wretched and lonely as to be unable to sleep, and perhaps return to the parlour.

He accordingly knocked gently at the door, and Rosamond speedily opened it.

She had not as yet divested herself of a particle of her clothing, nor made any preparation to retire to rest; and her countenance was so truly woebegone—so thoroughly the picture of a deeply-seated grief, that even her iron-hearted father was affected to tears. She threw her arms around his neck, and thanked him for his kind solicitude. He remained with her nearly half-an-hour, exerting all his power of language to console her; and the anxiety which he experienced to induce her to seek her couch, so that he might return to the parlour and get rid of Sir Henry Courtenay as soon as possible, rendered him so eloquent and so effective in the (to him) novel art of administering solace, that he succeeded fully.

"Now I am convinced that you do not loathe, despise, and hate your daughter," said Rosamond at length; "and this impression has removed an immense weight from my mind. Though true happiness may never more be mine, yet shall I find a substitute in Christian resignation to my fate; and henceforth, dear father, I will not make *you* unhappy by compelling you to act the part of a comforter. And now, good night, my only friend—my beloved parent; and fear not that I shall give way again to that violent outpouring of grief in which you so kindly interrupted me."

Mr. Torrens embraced his daughter, and a pang shot to his heart as he thought of his infernal conduct towards that good and affectionate girl!

As he descended the stairs he heard her lock her chamber-door; and he was just congratulating himself upon the success of his attempt to console her, when the murmuring sounds of voices, apparently coming from the front parlour, caused him to redouble his pace thither—for the idea flashed to his mind that Mrs. Slingsby might also have visited the cottage in her alarm concerning Rosamond, and that the baronet had probably afforded her admission while he was up stairs with his daughter.

Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler, bent on their predatory intent, and hoping to reap a good harvest at the house of Mr. Torrens, approached that dwelling nearly half an hour after Sir Henry Courtenay had entered it.

Perceiving a light gleaming from the divisions in the parlour-shutters, they crept cautiously up to the window, and through those crevices beheld the glittering gold piled upon the table, and a person lying upon the sofa, apparently in a profound sleep.

The fact was that the baronet was completely exhausted with his long walk from Old Burlington Street to the Cottage; and, having tossed off a tumbler of wine, he lay down on the sofa to await Mr. Torrens' return.

But we have seen that the father had found his daughter in such a state of profound affliction as to be totally unable to leave her for nearly half an hour; and during that interval an irresistible drowsiness stole over Sir Henry Courtenay,—speedily wrapping him in a deep slumber.

Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler were determined to risk "the crack," in spite of the sleeper whom they descried upon the sofa, and whom they believed to be Mr. Torrens; for neither was this gentleman nor the baronet known to them by sight.

With their housebreaking implements they were on the point of making an attempt on the front-door; when it yielded to their touch, and swung noiselessly open. At this they were not at all surprised; for it immediately struck them that John Jeffreys had expected the visit that night, and had left the door ajar on purpose.

They stole into the house, and succeeded in entering the parlour without arousing the baronet.

Tim the Snammer instantly drew forth his clasp-knife, and, bending over Sir Henry Courtenay, held the murderous weapon close to his throat, while Josh Pedler hastily secured the notes and gold about his person.

"We may as well have the plate, if there is any," whispered this individual to his companion. "In fact, we'll have a regular ransack of the place; and if he awakes——"

"I'll cut his infernal throat in a jiffey," added Tim the Snammer.

Josh grinned an approval of this summary mode of proceeding, and opened one of the side-board drawers. But the noise which a sugar-basin or some such article made inside the drawer, by falling over with the sudden jerk, aroused the sleeper.

Sir Henry Courtenay started—opened his eyes—beheld a strange countenance hanging over him—and was about to utter a cry of alarm, when the terrible clasp-knife was drawn rapidly and violently across his throat.

There was a dull, gurgling noise—a convulsive quivering of the entire frame,—but not a groan—much less an exclamation of terror,—and Sir Henry Courtenay was no more!

"Come along, Tim," said Josh Pedler, whose face was ghastly pale. "We've done enough for to-night."

"Yes—let us be off," returned the murderer, now shuddering at the dreadful deed which he had just perpetrated.

And they were issuing from the room, when the noise of footsteps on the stairs made them redouble their speed to gain the front-door.

It was Mr. Torrens who had thus alarmed them; but they escaped without molestation—for when that gentleman reached the hall, and beheld two men rushing towards the front-door, he was himself seized with such profound terror—painfully strung as his feelings had been that night—that he was for a few moments stupified, and rivetted to the spot.

But when he saw the front-door close behind the strangers, he took courage—hastily secured it within—and then hurried to the parlour, in agony of fear lest his gold and notes should have become the prey of plunderers!

One glance at the table was sufficient:—the money was gone!

Mr. Torrens dashed his open palm against his forehead with frantic violence, and was about to utter a cry of rage and despair, when the remembrance of his unhappy daughter sealed his lips.

At the same instant he looked towards the sofa:—but, holy God! what a spectacle met his view!

For there lay the baronet with his head nearly severed from his body,—murdered—barbarously murdered upon the very sofa where his victim had so lately reposed in trance-like insensibility. On that sofa slept he his last sleep; and, even in that appalling moment when Mr. Torrens recoiled, shuddering and shocked, from the dreadful sight, it struck him that there was something of retributive justice not only in the loss of his own treasure but also in the death of Sir Henry Courtenay!

The frightened man uttered not a murmur as that spectacle encountered his eyes. His amazement was of so stupifying a nature that it sealed his lips—paralysed his powers of utterance. With staring orbs he gazed on the grisly corpse from which he recoiled staggeringly; and several minutes elapsed ere he could so far command his presence of mind, as even to become aware of his own dreadful predicament.

But as the truth dawned upon him, he was seized with indescribable alarms—with horrible apprehensions.

The double crime of robbery and murder, had been perpetrated so speedily and so noiselessly, that not a soul in the house was alarmed by any unusual sound—and Mr. Torrens felt the sickening conviction that it would be a difficult thing to persuade a jury that *he himself* was innocent! Suspicion must inevitably attach itself to him:—circumstantial evidence would be strong against him! In a word, the appalling truth broke in upon him, that *he* would be accused of the assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay!

Mr. Torrens sate down, and, burying his face in his hands, fell into a profound but most painful meditation.

Should he raise an alarm—arouse Jeffreys and the female-servant, as well as his daughter—and proclaim all he knew about the horrible transaction! No:—something whispered in his ear that he would not be believed. Rosamond, not knowing that he was the baronet's accomplice in achieving her dishonour, would naturally conceive that the murder was the result of paternal vengeance. It was, then, impossible to suffer the occurrence to transpire. But what was he to do with the body?—how dispose of it? Terrible dilemma!

All the atrocity of his crime towards his daughter now returned with a tremendously augmenting intensity to his mind. His punishment on earth had already begun:—he was doomed—accursed. Wretched man! gold was thy destroyer! Ah! gold—but thou hast lost thy gold,—and in a few days the creditors who yet remain unpaid, will be upon thee! But——

What!—does such an idea actually strike him?—urging him to plunder the murdered victim of any coin which there may be about the corpse! Yes:—and now behold the father, who sold the honour of his child, about to examine the pockets of that child's assassinated ravisher?

The purse contains some fifteen or sixteen sovereigns; and these Mr. Torrens self-appropriates. The pocket-book of the deceased is next scrutinized. But there are no Bank-notes—nothing save papers and memoranda, totally valueless.

Mr. Torrens stamps his foot with rage:—his predicament is truly awful. Ruin still menaces him on one side in respect to his affairs—for, having reckoned on the money to be produced *by the sale of his daughter's virtue*, he had contracted fresh liabilities within the last ten days: and on the other side is the terrible danger in which the presence of that corpse may involve him! Add to these sources of agonising feelings, the conviction that the sacrifice of Rosamond will, after all, have proved ineffectual in respect to the complete settlement of his affairs, even should he succeed in burying the more serious event—namely the murder—in impenetrable mystery,—and the wretched state of mind in which Mr. Torrens was now plunged, may be conceived.

He rose from the chair, on which he had a second time flung himself, after plundering the corpse, and approached the time-piece.

It was half-past one o'clock.

But as Mr. Torrens glanced at the dial, which thus told him how short an interval remained for him to take some decisive step, if he really intended to dispose of the corpse before the servants should be stirring, he caught a glimpse of his countenance in the mirror over the mantel.

He recoiled—he shrank back with horror.

Was it indeed *his own* countenance that he saw?

Or was it that of some unquiet ghost, wandering near the spot where its mortal tenement had been cruelly murdered?

He turned round suddenly, to avoid farther contemplation of that ghastly visage;—and again he recoiled from an object of terror—staggered—and would have fallen, had he not caught the back of a chair for support.

For in the half open door way he beheld a human face, which was withdrawn the moment his eyes encountered it.

Driven to desperation, and reckless now of what might happen to him, the maddened man rushed into the hall, in time to observe a figure turn the angle of the staircase.

In another moment he had caught that figure by the arm; and, dragging the person forcibly down, beheld his new man-servant John Jeffreys, by the light of the lamp streaming from the open parlour-door.

Totally forgetful at the instant of the presence of the corpse in the room,—so terribly excited and bewildered was he,—Mr. Torrens dragged Jeffreys into the parlour to demand the reason why he was up and *dressed* at that hour of the night—or rather morning:—and it was not until he saw the man himself turn ghastly pale as his eyes encountered the hideous spectacle on the sofa, that Mr. Torrens remembered the frightful oversight which he had committed.

Then, hastening to close the room-door, which he locked also, Mr. Torrens said, "Why are you up? and wherefore were you prying about the house?"

The fact was that Jeffreys had expected a visit from some of Old Death's gang that night, and had never retired to bed at all. He heard the two double-knocks at the door—the first being that given by Rosamond, and the other by the baronet;—and when the robbers had quitted the house, closing the front-door after them, Jeffreys thought it must be the last visitor (whoever he might be) going away. After that the house had remained quiet for some little time; and Jeffreys fancied that Mr. Torrens had retired to bed. He had accordingly stolen down from his bed-room to unfasten a window shutter, and thus render the ingress of the expected robbers an easy matter: but perceiving a light in the parlour, he began to suspect that they must be already there. Accordingly he crept cautiously up to the door, and was for a moment stupified when he obtained a glimpse of the reflection of his master's ghastly countenance in the mirror, a view of which he could command from the hall.

"Why are you up? and wherefore were you prying about the house?" demanded Mr. Torrens.

"The truth is, sir, I heard a noise, just now, and I was afeard that thieves was breaking in," was the ready reply: "so I got up and dressed; but, sir—"

And he glanced significantly towards the dead body.

"Jeffreys," said Mr. Torrens, in a hurried and excited tone, "a dreadful event has occurred to-night. This gentleman came to call upon me late—on very particular business—I left him here, while I went up stairs to speak to my daughter, who has returned home—and, on coming down stairs again, I saw two men escaping from the house. When I entered the parlour, a considerable sum of money, which I had left on the table, was gone—and my poor friend was as you now see him!"

The man-servant believed the tale; but he affected not to do so—for he was villain enough to rejoice at such an opportunity of getting his master completely in his power.

"You smile incredulously, John," said Mr. Torrens; "and yet I take heaven to witness——"

"It's orkard, sir—very orkard," observed Jeffreys; "and may be it'll lead to scragging, if the stiff'un isn't put away."

Mr. Torrens shuddered from head to foot.

"What *do* you mean to do, sir?" asked Jeffreys. "I am quite ready to assist you; but it's getting on for two o'clock——"

"Yes, I know it," interrupted Mr. Torrens. "I am mad—I am driven to desperation! What would you advise? But will you be faithful? Will you keep the secret? I can reward you——"

"We'll talk of that another time, sir," said Jeffreys; "for the present let's think of making away with the stiff'un. We must bury it. Stay here a moment, sir, while I go and get the stable lanthorn and a sack."

"Or rather," observed Mr. Torrens, "I will fetch some water to wash the carpet; fortunately, the blood has not trickled upon the sofa."

Noiselessly the two crept away from the parlour—one to the stables, the other to the kitchen.

In a few minutes they met again by the side of the corpse, which they thrust into the sack; and between them the load was conveyed to the stable.

"You go and clean the carpet, sir," said John Jeffreys, whose superior presence of mind served to invest him with authority to direct the proceedings; "while I dig a hole in the garden."

Mr. Torrens hastened to obey the suggestion of his servant, and returned to the parlour, where he cleansed the carpet, as well as he could. He then took a bottle of Port-wine from the side-board, and broke it over the very spot where the blood had dripped down, leaving the fractured glass strewed about, and drawing the table near the sofa, so as to produce the appearance of the bottle having been accidentally knocked off it.

Nearly half an hour was consumed in this occupation; and Mr. Torrens, whose mind was already much relieved, hastened back to the garden, where Jeffreys was busily engaged in digging a grave for the murdered baronet. When the servant was tired, his master took a turn with the spade; and, as the soil was not particularly hard, an hour saw the completion of the labour.

The corpse was thrown into the hole, and the earth was shovelled over it—each layer being well stamped down by the feet.

When the task was accomplished, Mr. Torrens and Jeffreys re-entered the house; and, ere they separated to retire to their respective rooms, the former said, in a low whisper, "Once more I conjure you to maintain this secret inviolable, and I will find means to reward you well. For the present take this!"

And he slipped ten sovereigns—a portion of the murdered baronet's money—into the hands of Jeffreys.

"Don't be afeard that I'm leaky, sir," responded the man, clutching the gold, and consigning it to his pocket, where he had already stowed away the baronet's handsome repeater and gold rings—to which valuables he had helped himself, while his master was busily engaged in cleansing the carpet in the parlour;—for Mr. Torrens had merely plundered the corpse of the contents of the purse, and had not touched the jewellery, through fear that it might lead to the detection of the murder, if seen in his possession.

Master and man now separated—the former to seek a sleepless couch, and the latter to dream of the good fortune which that night's adventure had brought him.

And in his unconsecrated grave—a victim to the assassin's knife—slept the once gay, dissipated, and unprincipled Sir Henry Courtenay!

CHAPTER LXXIX.
THE EARL OF ELLINGHAM AND LADY HATFIELD AGAIN.

It was about two o'clock, on the day following the incidents just related, that we shall find the Earl of Ellingham seated with Lady Georgiana Hatfield, in the drawing-room at the residence of the latter.

Arthur had returned on the preceding evening from France, accompanied by Mr. de Medina and Esther, after having seen Tom Rain, Tamar, and Jacob Smith embark at Havre-de-Grace for the United States.

Rainford and Tamar were united in the bonds of matrimony in Paris; and Mr. de Medina had insisted upon placing in the hands of his son-in-law a sum of ten thousand pounds, as a proof of his perfectly cordial feeling towards him, and of his determination, also, fully to recognise Tamar as his daughter again.

The Earl communicated all these incidents to Lady Hatfield, who listened to them with the greatest interest.

"I propose to introduce the Medinas to you shortly, Georgiana," said the young nobleman. "You will find the father a person of very gentlemanly manners, well read, and particularly agreeable in conversation; while his daughter, Miss Esther, is as amiable and accomplished as the child of such a man should be."

"Arthur," replied Lady Hatfield—for they now addressed each other in the same friendly, or rather familiar manner, when alone together, as if they were brother and sister—"I would rather not form the acquaintance of your friends for the present."

The Earl appeared surprised and vexed.

"Georgiana," he exclaimed, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "is it possible that you entertain any of those ridiculous prejudices[36] which only very ignorant or very narrow-minded persons can possibly entertain towards a most estimable race?"

"Oh! no—no," cried Lady Hatfield emphatically. "I have read much concerning the Jews, and I feel convinced that they are most unjustly treated by Christians. Heaven knows, Arthur, that I have no bad prejudices of that nature; and were I imbued with them, I would never rest till I had stifled such evidences of an illiberal and narrowed mind."

"I am delighted to hear you thus express yourself," said the Earl. "During my sojourn in France with the Medina family, I have obtained a great insight into the Jewish character; and I am convinced that it is fully as benevolent, as generous, and as liberal as that of the Christian. But we were speaking of my proposed presentation of Mr. de Medina and his daughter Esther to you. From all that I have said to them concerning you, they are most anxious to form your acquaintance; and you have yet to explain to me the meaning of your observation that you would rather postpone the introduction."

"To justify myself," returned Georgiana, blushing, "against your suspicion that I entertain illiberal prejudices, Arthur, I will frankly state my motives for expressing that wish. Indeed, I know not why any consideration should induce me to retain those motives a secret—especially as the explanation of them will afford me an opportunity to give you my advice. For have we not agreed to be unto each other as brother and sister?—and in what can a sister more conscientiously advise her brother than in matters regarding his happiness?"

"My happiness!" exclaimed the Earl, starting slightly, and evincing some degree of astonishment at Lady Hatfield's remark.

"Yes, Arthur—your happiness!" repeated Georgiana, with difficulty suppressing a sigh. "Now, listen to me attentively. I have heard that Miss Esther de Medina is eminently beautiful—excessively accomplished—very amiable—and endowed with every qualification to render her worthy of becoming even a monarch's bride."

"Georgiana!" cried the Earl of Ellingham, his heart fluttering with mingled suspense, surprise, and joy.

"Yes," observed Lady Hatfield; "and since you have learnt," she added more slowly, and in a softly plaintive tone—though she endeavoured to subdue the emotion which so modulated her voice,—"since you have learnt that *our* union is impossible, Arthur,—since you have ceased to look upon me otherwise than as a sister,—it is probable—nay, it is both natural and certain that you cannot have beheld Esther de Medina with indifference."

"Georgiana," exclaimed Arthur, in a solemn tone, "I never can forget that my first love was devoted to you; and—although circumstances have, alas! prevented our union—yet I should be unwilling to promise to another that heart which I so freely—so gladly gave to you!"

"It is alike unjust and ridiculous for me to suppose that, as I cannot become your wife, Arthur, you may never marry. No," continued Lady Hatfield; "I should despise myself, were I to entertain such abhorrent selfishness. My ardent desire is to know that you are happy; and Esther de Medina is well qualified to ensure your felicity. Nay—interrupt me not: remember, it is now a sister who counsels a

brother! Granting even that you could never love another as you have loved me—and this is a supposition which I have not vanity enough to entertain for a moment—but, even granting it, for argument's sake, you may yet treat a beautiful and affectionate wife with that tenderness—those delicate attentions—and that cherishing kindness which will make *her* happy. Oh! believe me, such a state of bliss would soon beget love in your heart,—a love for Esther as ardent and sincere as that with which you honoured me; for it is the mere idle theory of romance-writers, that the same heart cannot love twice. Nature herself proclaims the falsehood of the doctrine; and the experience of all wise legislators, whether secular or ecclesiastic, declares the same, by the mere fact of allowing second marriages. Believe me, Arthur, I am speaking solely in regard to your happiness; and the day shall come when your lips breathe the words, '*Georgiana, I thank thee for the counsel thou gavest me.*'"

The Earl surveyed with respectful admiration that noble-hearted woman who thus stifled her own feelings through generous solicitude for his felicity.

"And now," she resumed, after a moment's pause, "you can divine the reasons which induced me to express a wish that my introduction to the Medinas should be postponed for the present. I am but a weak woman;—and though I can proudly say that no petty feeling of jealousy would ever enter my heart—yet I would rather not awaken in my mind painful recollections of *what might have been*, by beholding you in the society of one to whom you would be engaged. Moreover, as Miss de Medina has doubtless heard that *our* union was once resolved upon," added Lady Hatfield, now unable to suppress a profound sigh, "it would not be agreeable for her to visit me, if she accept you as her husband, until after your marriage. Those are my motives, Arthur: and now you will admit that, so far from entertaining any illiberal prejudices against the Jews, I have proved the very contrary, by earnestly recommending you to espouse an amiable and beautiful lady belonging to that nation."

"Dearest sister—for such indeed you are to me," said the Earl of Ellingham, "I appreciate all the excellence of your intentions in thus advising me; and I will frankly admit to you, that did I now think of uniting my fate with any woman, Esther de Medina would be the object of my choice, since my alliance with yourself has been rendered impossible. But I am not quite prepared to take that step—nor do I even know whether Miss de Medina would accept my suit, were I to proffer it."

"If her affections were not engaged before she saw you—before she knew so much of you," exclaimed Georgiana, "she loves you now. Oh! of this I am convinced," she continued enthusiastically. "Consider how much you have done to render her grateful to you; and gratitude in woman is the parent of affection! You have saved her beloved sister Tamar from the depths of despair by adopting those wondrous schemes, by which he who is now her husband, was snatched from the jaws of death;—you reconciled a father to a long discarded daughter;—and you have at length seen that daughter made a wife—the wife of the man she adores! Oh! Arthur, think you not that Esther ponders on all this? Yes—and, in the gratitude of her generous soul, she already sees a god-like being in the Earl of Ellingham."

"You will render me quite vain, Georgiana," said the young nobleman; "for you are magnifying into glorious achievements a few very common-place acts on my part."

"I am giving you your due for all that is great and noble in your disposition—all that is excellent and estimable in your character," replied Lady Hatfield, in a tone of fervent sincerity. "And that you are every thing I describe is so much the more to your credit, inasmuch as you belong to a class not famous for good qualities. The aristocratic sphere is characterised by intense selfishness—by a love of illegitimate power—by an abhorrence of the inferior grades,—and by a hollowness of heart which brings shame and reproach upon their hierarchy. When, then, we find this corrupted and vicious sphere possessing a glorious exception such as yourself, the world should be the more ready to recognise your merits. But I will say no more on this head, my dear Arthur," added Georgiana, with a smile, "for fear that you should think I wish to coax you into following that counsel which I, ere now, so seriously and so conscientiously gave you."

"And on that advice will I reflect deliberately," replied the Earl, who could not conceal from himself that he was rejoiced it had been given. "And now, Georgiana, I must take my leave of you for the present," he added, rising from his seat: "for I have a commission of a somewhat important nature to execute for my half-brother. Indeed, the mention thereof reminds me that I have never made you acquainted with one of the best traits in his character. But does it annoy you,—does it vex you to hear me speak of him?"

"No—no," answered Georgiana, somewhat hurriedly. "Since I have known that he is your brother, I have been pleased to hear you say as much good of him as possible."

"And this incident to which I allude," continued the Earl, "is not the least praiseworthy of the many fine deeds which must be placed to his account on the bright side. It appears that about three months ago he adopted a little boy under very peculiar circumstances. A poor woman died suddenly, through want and exposure to the inclemency of the weather, at an obscure house in Seven Dials. Rainford happened to be there at the time, and he took compassion on the little boy whom this poor woman had in charge. The boy was not the woman's child—as a certain letter found upon the person of the female proved. This letter was at first detained by those miserable wretches who so persecuted my poor brother: but it subsequently fell into his hands; and he entrusted it to a Mr. Clarence Villiers, in order that this gentleman might institute inquiries relative to its contents. I am now about to seek Mr. Villiers, and obtain the letter from him; because, it appears from all I have heard, that it is indubitably addressed to some lady of title, although no name be mentioned in it. In fact, the poor woman—whose name was Sarah Watts——"

"Sarah Watts!" repeated Lady Hatfield, with an hysterical scream, a deadly pallor overspreading her beautiful countenance.

"That is the name——But, my God! you are ill!"—and the Earl rushed forward to catch Georgiana in his arms, as she was falling from her chair.

He conveyed her to the sofa; but for some moments she seemed insensible. He was about to summon her female attendants, when she

opened her eyes, glanced wildly around her, and then said in an excited tone, "Do not ring for any one,—I shall be better in a minute—remain with me, Arthur,—I have now much to tell you!"

Surprised and grieved at the effect which his words had produced on Lady Hatfield—yet unable to comprehend wherefore the mere mention of a name should have so seriously touched her feelings,—the Earl gazed upon her with interest and curiosity.

At length a faint tinge of red appeared upon her cheeks; and, with reviving strength, she sate up on the sofa, motioning the young nobleman to take a chair near her.

"Arthur," she said, "I ought not to have kept that *one* secret from you—for are we not now brother and sister? But, alas! you—with your generous heart and fine feelings—can well understand how painful it is for me to speak of my own dishonour,—and the more so, since that degradation—that deep disgrace was caused by *him* who is nearly allied to you."

"What! can it be possible?" exclaimed the Earl, a sudden light breaking in upon him: "that child—that boy, whom Rainford has adopted as his own——"

"Is mine!" said Georgiana, in a voice of despair;—and, covering her face with her hands, she burst into an agony of tears.

The Earl of Ellingham started from his seat, and began to pace the room in a manner denoting the most painful excitement.

He was, indeed, deeply afflicted.

How wronged—how profoundly wronged had Georgiana been!—and by *him* who, as she herself had said, was so nearly allied to him!

Oh! Tom Rain—Tom Rain! that was the darkest episode in thy life!

Thus thought the Earl likewise;—and bitter was his sorrow at the revival of such appalling reminiscences as those which now rent Lady Hatfield's heart with anguish, and called forth the floods of grief from her eyes.

"Arthur," at length she said, exercising a violent effort to subdue her sorrow, "give not way to bitter reflection on my account. For *your* sake, all has been forgiven—though it may never be forgotten; for memory is immortal! But that child—that boy of whom you speak—he is indeed with his own father; and Providence doubtless willed that it should be so!"

She paused, and stifled the sobs which rent her bosom.

"You may think me a cruel and heartless mother, Arthur," she resumed at length, now speaking in a mournful, plaintive tone, "thus to have abandoned my offspring: but reflect ere you blame me! I was as it were alone in a house situated in a retired part of the country—a man entered at night—he found his way to my chamber—he took advantage of my loneliness——O God! how have I survived that disgrace—that infamy? Desperate was my resistance—but vain: and the ravisher, as you already know, was Rainford! Alas! pardon me if I then mentioned his name with bitterness; but human patience could not speak it calmly when such a cloud of crushing reminiscences come back to the soul."

Again she paused: the Earl remained silent. What could he say? He loathed—he abhorred the conduct of his half-brother, whom he would not attempt to justify;—and his good sense told him that it were worse than mockery to aim at consoling the victim of that foul night of maddened lust and atrocious rape.

"Some weeks afterwards," continued Lady Hatfield, in a voice scarcely audible and deeply plaintive, "I found that I was in a way to become a mother. You may conceive——But no: it is impossible to imagine the state of mind into which this appalling conviction threw me. And yet I was compelled to veil my grief as much as possible;—for at that time a suspicion of my condition on the part of the world, would have driven me to suicide. I need not—I could not enter into the details of the plan which I had adopted to conceal my dishonour. Suffice it to say, that I succeeded in so doing—and, in a small retired village, and under a feigned name, did I give birth to a son. To Sarah Watts was the babe confided;—and, for a sum of money paid down at once, she agreed to adopt it as her own. By an accident she discovered who I was—my name was on an article of jewellery which I had with me. But she promised the strictest secrecy, and I put faith in her words. Oh! do not blame me, if I acted as I have now described—if I abandoned that child whose presence near me would only have been a proof of my dishonour, and a constant memorial of the dread outrage which no levity—no encouragement—no fault on my part had provoked!"

"Blame you, Georgiana!" exclaimed the Earl, approaching and taking her hand kindly;—"how could I blame you? You acted as prudence dictated—and, indeed, as circumstances inevitably compelled you. But—now that the parentage of this child is at length discovered—how do you wish me to act? Remember, Georgiana, every thing in this respect shall be managed solely with regard to your wishes—solely according to your directions. Shall I communicate in a letter to my half-brother the secret which has thus strangely transpired this day?—or shall I leave him in ignorance of the fact that he has adopted his own son?"

"He knew not that the outrage he perpetrated led to that consequence," said Lady Hatfield, now cruelly bewildered and uncertain how to decide. "No—he could not even suspect it—for I never met him again until that night on the Hounslow road—and even then I recognised him not—and it was only at the police-office in Bow Street that I again beheld him who had been my ruin!"

"I am convinced," observed the Earl, "that Rainford has not the least suspicion that you indeed became a mother. And, oh! when I touched upon the subject of his atrocious behaviour towards you—while we were in Paris—had you seen the tears of contrition—heart-felt contrition which he shed——But, no," added the Earl, suddenly interrupting himself,—"it were impossible that you could forgive him!"

"I forgive him for *your* sake, Arthur," said Georgiana, in a mild but firm tone. "And now, relative to that child—yes—he shall know that he is with his father; and your brother must be informed that he has adopted his own son! Providence indeed seems to have so willed it; for we cannot believe that accident alone threw the child thus wondrously into the way of the author of its being. Arthur," she

added, taking the young nobleman's hand,—"you will write to Rainford—and you will tell him all. It is not necessary to enjoin him to treat the child with kindness—for you say that his disposition is naturally generous. Nevertheless—I should wish," continued the lady, looking down as she uttered these words, and sinking her voice almost to a whisper—for *maternal feelings* were stirring within her bosom,—"nevertheless, I should wish that you impress upon the mind of your half-brother the necessity of bringing that child up in the paths of virtue and honour."

"Your wishes shall be complied with," answered the Earl. "But fear not that Rainford would inculcate evil principles into the mind of his son. No—he is thoroughly changed, and will become a good, and, I hope, a happy and prosperous man."

The young nobleman then took leave of Lady Hatfield, whom he left a prey to emotions of a very painful nature.

For deeply and tenderly did she love Arthur; and great violence did she to her feelings when she so generously and conscientiously counselled him to take the beautiful Jewess as his wife!

And as the Earl returned home to his mansion in Pall Mall, to pen a letter to Rainford, who was then on his voyage, under an assumed name, and accompanied by Tamar, Jacob Smith, and little Charley, to the United States,—he reviewed all the details of that long and interesting conversation which had that afternoon passed between Lady Hatfield and himself;—and he found that the tendency thereof was to make him ponder more seriously and more intently upon the image of the charming Esther than he ever yet had done.

36. We have been much gratified by observing that our attempt to vindicate the Jews against most of the unjust charges which it seems to be a traditionary fashion to level against them, has not passed unnoticed. All the Jewish papers have quoted the exculpatory passage at page 172 of this Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON:" many provincial journals have also transferred it to their columns; and in No. 173 of *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* (New Series) it was printed, with the following record of approval on the part of the Editors of that well-conducted periodical:—"*We cordially agree in this manly defence of a cruelly misrepresented people*."

 In this enlightened age it is really horrible to think that the most abominable prejudices should prevail amongst Christians against the Jews. England boasts her high state of civilisation; and yet the Jews labour under innumerable disabilities, which have been abolished in France. After all, the French understand what civilisation really is much better than the English. The idea of a Jew sitting in the House of Commons would send all the Church party raving mad: but in France there are many Jews in the Chamber of Deputies. The learned Selden said very justly, "Talk what you will of the Jews, that they are cursed, they thrive where'er they come; they are able to oblige the prince of their country (and others too) by lending him money; none of them beg: they keep together; and for their being hated, my life for your's, Christians hate one another as much."

 The worst feature in the malignant persecution and misrepresentation of the Jews, is that the evil prejudice against them has been, and still is, fostered by Christian Divines and Theological writers. A Spanish theologian has placed on record the following infamous specimen of malignity:—

 "The tribe of Judah treacherously delivered up our Lord, and thirty of them die by treason every year.

 "The tribe of Reuben seized our Lord in the garden, and therefore the curse of barrenness is on all they sow or plant, and no green thing can flourish over their graves.

 "The tribe of Gad put on the crown of thorns, and on every 25th of March their bodies are covered with blood from deep and painful wounds.

 "Those of Asher buffeted Jesus, and their right hand is always nearly a palm shorter than the left.

 "Those of Napthali jested with Christ about a herd of swine, since when they are all born with tusks like wild boars.

 "The tribe of Manasseh cried out, 'His blood be on us and on our children,' and at every new moon they are tormented by bloody sores.

 "The tribe of Simeon nailed our Lord to the cross, and on the 25th of March, four deep and dreadful wounds are inflicted on their hands and feet.

 "Those of Levi spat on the Saviour, and the wind always blows back their saliva in their faces, so that they are habitually covered with filth.

 "The tribe of Issachar scourged Christ, and on the 25th of March blood streams forth from their shoulders.

 "The tribe of Zebulon cast lots for the garments, and on the same day the roof of their mouth is tortured by deep wounds.

 "The tribe of Joseph made the nails for crucifying Jesus, and blunted them to increase his sufferings; and therefore their hands and feet are covered with gashes and blood.

 "Those of Benjamin gave vinegar to Jesus; they all squint and are palsied, and have their mouths filled with little nauseous worms, which, in truth (adds our author), is the case with all Jewish women after the age of 25, because it was a woman who entreated the tribe of Joseph not to sharpen the nails used for the crucifixion of our Lord."

 That wretchedly prejudiced and unprincipled writer, Justin Martyr, wrote as follows, while apostrophising the Jews:— "God promised that you should be *as the sand on the sea shore*; and so you are indeed, in more senses than one. You are as numerous, and you are as barren, and incapable of producing any thing good."

CHAPTER LXXX.
MRS. SLINGSBY AND MR. TORRENS.

While the scene, related in the preceding chapter, was taking place at the residence of Lady Hatfield, in Piccadilly, incidents requiring mention occurred elsewhere.

Mrs. Slingsby was seated in her drawing-room, a prey to the most frightful alarms.

Sir Henry Courtenay had left her the evening before to acquaint Mr. Torrens with Rosamond's flight, and consult with him relative to the necessary steps to be taken to prevent the exposure which himself and Mrs. Slingsby so much dreaded. On thus parting with her, the baronet had faithfully promised to call early in the morning and inform her of the particulars of his interview with Mr. Torrens;—but it was now past one o'clock in the afternoon, and he had not made his appearance.

What could his absence mean?—had any thing disagreeable occurred?—was it possible that Rosamond could have made away with herself, and that Sir Henry had taken to flight through dread of an exposure and its consequences?

The suspense which Mrs. Slingsby endured, was horrible—horrible!

Guilty consciences invariably magnify into giants even the most dwarf-like causes of apprehension; and there was no exception to this rule on the present occasion.

A hundred times had she glanced at the elegant or-molu clock on the mantel—and as hour after hour passed, and he came not, her restlessness increased to such a degree that it at length reached a state of nervous excitement no longer endurable.

She accordingly hurried to her chamber, dressed herself in her walking-attire, and having left word with her servants that in case Sir Henry Courtenay should call, he was to be requested to wait until her return, sped to the nearest hackney-coach stand, where, stepping into a vehicle, she ordered the driver to take her over to Torrens Cottage.

Yes—thither she was determined to proceed without delay, even at the risk of encountering Rosamond; though she could scarcely believe that the wronged girl had returned home. For, not precisely remembering all the details of the conversation which took place between herself and the baronet, and which Rosamond had overheard, the guilty woman imagined that something more than mere allusions might have been made to the connivance of Mr. Torrens in the ruin of his daughter; and hence Mrs. Slingsby's very natural supposition that the victim of the infernal plot had not returned to the parental dwelling.

The coach did not proceed with particular celerity, and the distance from the West End to Torrens Cottage was great:—Mrs. Slingsby had therefore ample leisure to continue her harrowing meditations upon the real or supposed dangers which menaced her.

In sooth, her position was by no means an enviable one—unless indeed a convict under sentence of death might have preferred her state to that of imminent and ignominious death. For circumstances appeared suddenly to combine against her. She was in the family-way—and this was alone sufficient to cause her the most serious chagrin, especially as her impious scheme of proclaiming herself a second Johanna Southcott had been so completely frustrated by the determined opposition of her paramour. Then there was the affair of Rosamond Torrens, one word from whose lips would have the effect of tearing away the mask of hypocrisy which Mrs. Slingsby had so long worn, and exposing her to the world in all the hideous nudity of her criminal character. Lastly, the unaccountable absence of the baronet filled her mind with the most serious misgivings; for she knew that if he had indeed absconded, and if he should cease to maintain her in a pecuniary sense, her position would become lamentable in the extreme.

All these maddening reflections raised a storm of agitation in her guilty mind; and she could scarcely subdue her excitement so that it should escape the notice of the coachman, as he opened the door of the vehicle when it stopped opposite Torrens Cottage.

Mr. Torrens was at home; and Mrs. Slingsby was immediately conducted by Jeffreys to the parlour—the very parlour where her paramour had been murdered on the preceding evening!

Rosamond, from her bed-room window, had observed the arrival of the hateful woman, and was lost in surprise at her conduct in daring to visit her father's abode.

Mr. Torrens received Mrs. Slingsby in the apartment where, as we have just stated, the awful tragedy of the previous night had been enacted; and this was the first time the criminal pair had ever met.

Bad as Mr. Torrens himself was, he could not help feeling a sentiment of extreme loathing and disgust for the woman who concealed so black a heart beneath the garb of religious hypocrisy;—and, though he endeavoured to speak politely to her as he desired her to be seated, his manner was cold, reserved, and indicative of the influence which her presence produced upon him.

"We know each other by name, Mr. Torrens," began Mrs. Slingsby; "but it is only now that we have met. You can doubtless conjecture the object of my visit——"

"Yes, madam," exclaimed Rosamond, suddenly bursting into the room, evidently in a state of fearful excitement: then, hastily closing the door, she added, "My father can too well divine the purport of this insolent intrusion. You doubtless seek to recover possession of *me*—to take me back to your infamous abode—to surrender me up to your own vile paramour! Oh! my dear father, surely—surely you will not allow this polluted creature to remain beneath your roof a minute longer!"

"Rosamond—Rosamond," said Mrs. Slingsby, becoming the colour of scarlet, "you will regret those harsh words. I came for the purpose of giving certain explanations to your respected parent——"

"Explanations, madam!" cried the young girl, with a bitter smile of contempt. "What explanations can *you* offer which *I* have not already given?"

"I have every reason to believe that you overheard a conversation between Sir Henry Courtenay and myself," said Mrs. Slingsby, growing bolder as she perceived that the atrocious complicity of Mr. Torrens was not suspected by his daughter; "and that conversation seems to have alarmed you—for your flight from the house was wild and precipitate."

"Had I not already tarried there too long?" demanded Rosamond emphatically. "Oh! think not to be able to delude me any more with your specious misrepresentations—your disgusting sophistry! A veil has fallen from my eyes—and I now behold *you*, madam, and that baronet whom you so much vaunted, in your proper colours."

"You are wrong thus to suspect us so cruelly," said Mrs. Slingsby. "The conversation which you overheard was but the repetition of another conversation which Sir Henry Courtenay had himself overheard between two persons whom you know not, and which he was relating to me. But I appeal to your father whether *he* believes me——"

"Enough, madam!" exclaimed Rosamond, in a tone which convinced the base woman that she was indeed no longer to be imposed upon. "My father knows you to be a degraded hypocrite—and your insolence is extreme in thus daring to violate the sanctity of the paternal dwelling to which I have been forced to return for shelter and refuge. And were it not," she added bitterly, "that I should be proclaiming my own dishonour, not a moment's hesitation would I manifest in tearing away the mask from your face, and exposing you to the world. Oh! when I think of all the insidious wiles which you have practised—all the abhorrent tutoring which you have brought to play upon my mind, I deplore—yes, deeply do I deplore that necessity which compels me to place a seal upon my lips!"

Mrs. Slingsby had heard enough to satisfy her that no exposure would take place at the hands of Rosamond; and she was not very solicitous to prolong her visit. The cause of the baronet's absence she had yet to learn; but she concluded that it was not at Torrens Cottage she must seek to have her curiosity in that respect gratified.

She accordingly rose—bowed to Mr. Torrens, who had remained a mute but most alarmed spectator of the whole scene—and hastily withdrew, just in time to avoid coming in collision with John Jeffreys; for that worthy, judging by the excited manner in which he, himself unobserved, had seen Rosamond rush into the parlour, that something extraordinary was connected with the arrival of Mrs. Slingsby, had very coolly and quietly listened at the parlour-door to every word that was uttered within.

Mrs. Slingsby returned home, somewhat consoled by the conviction that her character was safe from any vindictiveness on the part of Rosamond: but she was still alarmed in respect to the baronet;—and this fear increased greatly, when, on her arrival in Old Burlington Street, at about four o'clock, she learnt that he had not called.

She immediately despatched a note to his residence; but the domestic returned with the answer that Sir Henry Courtenay had not been home since the preceding day—a circumstance which caused no small degree of alarm in the baronet's household, inasmuch as though he often slept away from his abode, his servants were invariably kept ignorant of those proofs of irregularities on his part. In a word, he was accustomed so to arrange matters, that his nocturnal outgoings were never suspected at his own residence—and thus his absence on this occasion had naturally inspired some degree of apprehension.

Mrs. Slingsby was astounded at the message which her servant had brought back. She could not even hazard a conjecture relative to the cause of Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance; and she was at a loss where to search for him.

She therefore resolved to remain at home in the hope that he would presently call upon her; but time passed—and still he came not.

At length there was a loud double knock at the door; and she fancied it was the announcement of Sir Henry's arrival. But, instead of the object of her anxiety, Mr. Torrens was ushered into the drawing-room.

"I fancied, madam," he said, "that you had some particular reason in calling upon me just now, and which the presence of the unfortunate Rosamond prevented you from explaining. I therefore lost no time in waiting upon you."

"My alarm was somewhat appeased by the words which fell from your daughter's lips," answered Mrs. Slingsby, motioning to her visitor to be seated; "inasmuch as she expressed her intention of remaining silent on a subject which neither I nor you would wish to become a matter of public gossip. But I am astonished and grieved at the behaviour of Sir Henry Courtenay, who left me last night with the intention of proceeding direct to your house, and whom I have not since seen."

"He came not to me, madam," answered Mr. Torrens, with an unblushing countenance.

"This is most extraordinary—most alarming!" cried Mrs. Slingsby; "for he has not been home all night—nor yet to-day—and I begin to have vague suspicions that something wrong must have occurred."

"Sir Henry Courtenay is a gallant man——"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Slingsby hastily, as if the subject were not a very agreeable one: "but he also *maintains* a character for propriety and good conduct—and his dependants are never suffered to know that he stays away from home at night. You see that I am compelled to be candid with you—for the affair is most serious. Now, only reflect for a moment, Mr. Torrens, upon what my state of

mind would be, were I questioned relative to Sir Henry's disappearance. Suppose, I say, that he did not soon come back—that he continued to be missing,——it would transpire that he was with me until late last evening—that we went out together,—for we *did* go out, to search for Rosamond,—and that I came back alone."

"No one could suspect *you*, madam, of having made away with him," observed Mr. Torrens.

"No—but I should be overwhelmed with the most embarrassing questions," exclaimed Mrs. Slingsby hastily. "And, do you know, that remark of your's has inspired me with horror and alarm? No one would suspect *me* of having made away with him! Of course not:—how could a weak woman assassinate a man in the streets of London, and not leave a trace of the dreadful deed behind? But might not inquiries be made—might it not be discovered that Sir Henry and myself were frequent visitors—I must speak candidly to you—to a house of ill-fame? And then—oh then! what a dreadful exposure would take place!"

"You are torturing yourself with vain apprehensions, Mrs. Slingsby," said Mr. Torrens, experiencing the greatest difficulty to conceal his own agitation.

"I should have thought that *you*, Mr. Torrens, would have assisted me with your advice—considering how we have been involved in the same transaction—rather than treat my fears with levity," said Mrs. Slingsby, in an excited manner. "And, if I tell you the candid truth," she added, fixing her eyes upon his countenance in a way which seemed intended to read the inmost secrets of his soul, "I must declare my conviction that *you* know more of the cause of the baronet's disappearance than you choose to admit."

"I—madam!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, shrinking from the accusation in spite of himself.

"Yes—*you*," returned the lady, growing more and more excited: "and that suspicion which I hazarded, I scarcely know why, is now confirmed by your manner. I again say, yes—you know more of the cause of Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance than you are willing to admit. I am convinced that he *did* visit you last night—and if he never came back, what account will you give?—what explanation will you render? Your anxiety in coming after me just now,—the singularity of your remark that no one would suspect *me* of foul play towards the baronet,—and your trepidation when I named the suspicion which had flashed to my mind concerning you,—all these circumstances convince me that you are no stranger to the cause of Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance."

"Madam—this outrageous charge—implying a crime of which I am utterly incapable——" began Mr. Torrens, scarcely knowing how to meet the accusation, and seriously inclined to divulge the whole truth.

"I do not say that you have *murdered* Sir Henry Courtenay," interrupted Mrs Slingsby, speaking in a low tone, and giving a strong, hollow emphasis to that dreadful word which few can breathe without a shudder: "but that some quarrel may have taken place between you—that you were compelled to appear violent and vindictive in respect to him, your daughter perhaps being present—and that all this led to a fatal issue, are things which now seem to form a complete and connected train of horrible impressions in my mind. At all events, Mr. Torrens," she added, sinking her voice to a low whisper, "be candid with me—tell me the whole truth—and we will consult together, circumstances having already rendered us colleagues in *one* transaction."

"I have nothing to tell you, Mrs. Slingsby, in respect to this business," said Mr. Torrens; "and I am as astonished at Sir Henry Courtenay's disappearance as yourself."

"Then, if I were questioned," observed the lady, "you would have no objection to my saying that I parted last night from Sir Henry Courtenay near St. James's Church, Piccadilly, his last words being to the effect that he was about to call at Torrens Cottage on particular business?"

As she thus spoke, Mrs. Slingsby fixed her eyes in a searching—nay, a piercing manner upon the countenance of her companion, who for a moment quailed and betrayed evident signs of the desperate efforts he was making to conceal his agitation.

"Yes—you may safely say *that*, if you perceive any utility in so doing," returned Mr. Torrens at length: then, his features suddenly assuming a ferocious expression, he added, "But why proclaim war against me! Do we not know too much of each other to render such a warfare safe or useful to either? Were you not the paramour of Sir Henry Courtenay?—did you yourself not admit ere now that you visited a house of ill-fame with him?—and are you not at this moment with child by him? Woman—woman," muttered Torrens between his teeth, "provoke me not,—or it shall be war indeed—war to the knife!"

"Be reasonable, sir," said Mrs. Slingsby, now assuming a cold and resolute air; "and let us talk as two accomplices ought to converse—and not with menaces and threats."

"Agreed, madam—but be you reasonable also," returned Mr. Torrens.

"Then wherefore keep anything secret from me?" demanded Mrs. Slingsby. "I have read the truth—I have divined it—and your language has just confirmed my impression. But think not that I care for Sir Henry Courtenay, as a loving mistress or wife might care for him. No," she added contemptuously: "any affection which I may ever have experienced towards him, has long since vanished."

"And of what avail would it be to you to know that Sir Henry Courtenay was no more, even for a moment granting that he indeed exists no longer?" asked Torrens.

"I will tell you," replied Mrs. Slingsby in a low and hoarse whisper, while she looked intently and in a manner full of dark meaning into her companion's eyes, as she bent her countenance towards him. "If I were assured that Sir Henry Courtenay was indeed no more, I would become possessed of two thousand pounds by ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, his mind instantly conceiving the idea of sharing the produce of whatever plan the lady might adopt to accomplish her purpose—for we have already said that his necessities were still great, and that, unless he shortly obtained funds, he would be as badly off as he was ere he sold the virtue of his daughter.

"Yes," resumed Mrs. Slingsby; "and to show you that I have more confidence in you than you have in me, I will give you a full and complete explanation. Sir Henry Courtenay promised me two thousand pounds as a reward for my connivance in the plan respecting Rosamond."

"Go on—go on," said Mr. Torrens hastily.

"That reward I have not received, because the payments which Sir Henry had to make to you, and other claims upon him, had caused him to overdraw his bankers. But yesterday morning he paid in eight thousand pounds; and he intimated to one of the partners that he should give me a cheque for two thousand in the course of the afternoon. The fact is," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "those bankers believe that I have property in India, which Sir Henry Courtenay's agent there manages for me, and that the proceeds therefore pass through Sir Henry's hands. This tale was invented to account for the numerous and large cheques which I have received from the baronet on that bank:—it was the saving clause for my reputation. Now, those two thousand pounds which were promised me I can have for little trouble and a small risk."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Torrens, becoming more and more interested in this explanation.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Slingsby, "and I will tell you how almost immediately. But I must first observe that I should have received the cheque last evening had not the sudden flight of Rosamond interrupted the discourse which I was having with the baronet, and thrown us into confusion. But,"—and again she lowered her voice to an almost inaudible whisper—"I can imitate the handwriting of Sir Henry Courtenay to such a nicety that it would defy detection. Now, do you understand me?"

"I do—I do," answered Mr. Torrens.

"And you perceive that I have full confidence in *you*," added the widow.

Mr. Torrens rose and paced the room for a few minutes. He was deliberating within himself whether he should repose an equal trust in Mrs. Slingsby; and he decided upon doing so. She saw what was passing in his mind, and remained silent, confident as to the result.

"My dear madam," he said, resuming his seat, "I will at once admit to you that Sir Henry Courtenay is indeed no more."

The lady heard him with breathless attention; for though she was fully prepared for the avowal, yet when it came it sounded so awfully—so ominously, that she received it with emotions of terror and dismay.

"It is indeed too true," continued Torrens: "but think not for a moment that I am a murderer! No—no; bad as I may be—as I know myself to be, in fine—I could not perpetrate such a deed as that. A strange and wonderful combination of circumstances led to the shocking catastrophe. Listen—and I will tell you all."

Mr. Torrens then related every incident of the preceding evening, suppressing only that portion of the tale which involved the fact of his servant John Jeffreys being acquainted with the occurrence, and having lent his aid in disposing of the body. This circumstance he concealed through that inherent aversion which man ever has to confess that he is in the power of any one; and he made it appear, by his own story, that, unassisted, he had buried the corpse.

At first Mrs. Slingsby was incredulous relative to the version of the murder which she heard. She thought that Torrens was himself the perpetrator of the act; but when he declared how cruelly the robbery of his money had embarrassed him, and when she reflected that there really could have been no reason urgent or strong enough to induce him to make away with the baronet, she ended by fully believing his narrative.

"Then he is indeed no more!" she exclaimed. "But, my God! what will be thought of his disappearance?—and will not those enquiries, which I so much dread, be made?"

"As no suspicion can possibly fall upon either yourself or me," responded Mr. Torrens, "it is far from likely that any such enquiries will be instituted. No—you need not be alarmed on that head, my dear madam. I should rather be inclined to entertain apprehensions for the success of your own scheme of——the forgery," he added, after a moment's pause.

"No danger can possibly attend that undertaking," said Mrs. Slingsby. "The baronet stated at the bankers' that he should give me the cheque yesterday; and it will be paid in a moment, even if they have already heard of his disappearance, which is scarcely probable, because the fears excited by that fact have not as yet become so strong as to lead to the suspicion that he has indeed met with foul play."

"You are, then, confident of being enabled to counterfeit his handwriting successfully?" asked Mr. Torrens.

"Beyond all possibility of doubt," replied the widow.

"And shall you want my assistance?" inquired Torrens, thinking how he could start a pretext for claiming a portion of the expected proceeds of the nefarious plan.

"Listen to me," said Mrs. Slingsby, after a few moments' deliberation, and now speaking as if she had finally come to a settled resolution on a particular point, which she had been revolving in her mind almost ever since Mr. Torrens entered the room: "I have something to propose to you which regards us both, and which may suit yourself as well as it would suit me. You are involved in embarrassments?"

"I am indeed," replied Mr. Torrens, now awaiting breathless suspense the coming explanation, which, by the leading question just put, appeared to relate to some scheme for relieving him of his difficulties.

"And these embarrassments are very serious?" continued the widow.

"So serious that they are insurmountable, as far as I can see at present," was the response.

"Then you fear executions—arrest—prison—and all the usual ordeal of an insolvent debtor?" asked the lady.

"Just so: and sooner than enter on that ordeal, I would commit suicide," rejoined Mr. Torrens.

"The alternative I have to propose to you is not quite so serious nor alarming as that," resumed Mrs. Slingsby. "I have shown you that I can put myself in possession of two thousand pounds to-morrow morning: will that sum relieve you completely from your difficulties?"

"And enable me to carry out those speculations which must produce a large fortune," answered Torrens.

"Then those two thousand pounds are at your disposal, on one condition," said Mrs. Slingsby.

"And that condition?" gasped Mr. Torrens, in mingled joy and suspense.

"Is that you marry me," returned Mrs. Slingsby, as calmly as if she were making a bargain of a very ordinary nature.

"Marry you!" exclaimed her companion, quite unprepared for this proposal.

"Yes—marry me," repeated the widow. "You want money to save you from ruin—I want a husband to screen me from disgrace. You are involved in pecuniary troubles—I am in a way to become a mother. I can save your person from a gaol—you can save my character from dishonour."

"The arrangement is indeed an equitable one," said Mr. Torrens, not without the least scintillation of satire in his remark: "but I see one fatal objection."

"And that is your daughter Rosamond," observed Mrs. Slingsby. "Surely the whim—the aversion—or the phantasy of a girl will not induce you to reject a proposal which will save you from ruin and imprisonment?"

"And yet, what could I say to her? how could I explain my conduct? what would she think, after all she knows of you?" demanded Mr. Torrens.

"She has not the power to prevent the match; and that is the principal point in the matter," returned Mrs. Slingsby coolly. "You may as well urge as an objection that Clarence Villiers, my nephew, is your son-in-law; but I am not so foolish as to be alarmed at such scruples, and you must have seen too much of the world to allow yourself to be irretrievably ruined for the sake of a few idle punctilios. Give me your decision at once—aye or nay. If it be the former, the marriage may be celebrated by special license to-morrow evening; if it be the latter, there is at once an end of the business, and we need not be the less good friends."

"You regard the whole proposition, then, entirely as a matter of *business*," said Mr. Torrens. "Well—that is indeed the way to look at it. Of course, if we strike a bargain and unite our fortunes, we shall require only one establishment. Will you break up this in Old Burlington Street, and be contented to dwell at my Cottage?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "The sale of my furniture will pay my debts, and perhaps leave a surplus; at all events we shall have the two thousand pounds clear."

"And that sum you will place in my hands to-morrow morning?" said Mr. Torrens interrogatively.

"No—to-morrow evening, *after* the ceremony," responded the widow.

"Then we cannot trust each other?" continued Mr. Torrens.

"I think we should act prudently to adopt as many mutual precautions as possible," observed Mrs. Slingsby coolly.

"Granted!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens. "And what guarantee have I that, when once the indissoluble knot shall have been tied, you will hand me over the promised sum?"

"Simply the fact that I do not wish to marry a man who will be the next morning conveyed away to a prison."

"That is a mere assertion, and no security," remonstrated Mr. Torrens; "we are talking the matter over in a purely business-like sense. Now, as far as I can see, the advantages will be all on your side. If you happen to be in debt, you will have a husband on whose person your creditors will pounce instead of on your own; and, at all events, as you are with child, you will have a person whom you can represent as the legitimate father of the expected offspring."

"I will tell you how the business can be managed," said Mrs. Slingsby, after a pause. "A thought has struck me! I will lodge the money in the hands of a very respectable solicitor whom I know, and you can accompany me to his office for the purpose. In his keeping shall it remain, with the understanding that it is to be paid to you on your becoming my husband."

"Good!" observed Mr. Torrens. "Who is the solicitor?"

"Mr. Howard," was the answer.

"I know him, and have no objection to him as the agent in the business. I think we have now got over all obstacles in that respect. A difficult task will it however prove to me to prepare my daughter this evening for the step which I am to take to-morrow."

"Oh! I have no doubt you will succeed," said Mrs. Slingsby: "it would be indeed hard if a father could not overcome, with his reasoning, the objections of his own child."

"I must do my best," observed Torrens, rising. "At what hour to-morrow shall I call to accompany you to the lawyer's?"

"At about twelve. I shall go to the bank between ten and eleven; and you can in the meantime obtain the marriage-license."

"It shall be done," returned Mr. Torrens. "The ceremony will be performed here?" he added interrogatively.

"Yes—at seven o'clock in the evening. I will make arrangements with two ladies whom I know, to be bridesmaids, and Dr. Wagtail will give me away. After the ceremony we will repair to Torrens Cottage."

Thus, calmly and deliberately, was settled the solemn covenant between the man who had sold his daughter's virtue and the licentious woman who was now prepared to commit a forgery!

And the worthy pair separated, Mr. Torrens having embraced his intended wife, because he considered a kiss to be as it were the seal of the bargain just concluded, and also because Mrs. Slingsby by her manner appeared to invite the salutation.

CHAPTER LXXXI.
ROSAMOND AT HOME.

We shall follow Mr. Torrens homeward, and see how he acquitted himself of the disagreeable and difficult task of breaking his matrimonial intentions to his daughter, the fair but ruined Rosamond.

It was past nine o'clock in the evening when he reached the cottage; and Rosamond, with a charming filial solicitude to render her parent's home as comfortable as possible, had superintended the preparations for supper. Exercising a command, too, over the sad feelings which filled her bosom, and invoking resignation with Christian fortitude to her aid, she even manifested a species of cheerfulness as she opened the front-door at the sound of his well-known knock. But, alas! it was not the innocent—artless cheerfulness of other days:—it was merely the struggle of the moonbeam to pierce the mass of dark and menacing clouds!

And now behold the father and daughter seated at the supper-table—that repast which the care of Rosamond had endeavoured to render as agreeable as possible, but which was disposed of hastily and without appetite on either side.

At length, when the things were cleared away and Mr. Torrens had fortified his courage with sundry glasses of wine, he prepared to enter on the grave and important subject which occupied his mind.

"Rosamond, my love," he said, speaking in as kind a tone as it was possible for his nature to assume, "I have something to communicate to you, and shall be glad if you will hear me calmly and without excitement. I have this evening seen Mrs. Slingsby."

"That woman!" exclaimed the daughter, starting. "Oh! I had hoped that her name would no more be mentioned in this house."

"I begged of you not to give way to excitement—I warned you to be reasonable," said Mr. Torrens severely. "Surely you can accord me your attention when I am anxious to discourse with you on matters of importance?"

"Pardon me, dearest father—and, oh! do not blame nor reproach me if I manifest a very natural irritability—a loathing—an abhorrence ——"

She could say no more, but burst into a flood of tears.

Mr. Torrens suffered her to give full vent to her emotions; for he knew that the reaction would produce comparative calmness.

"Rosamond," he at length said, "you *can* be reasonable when you choose—and I do hope that you have sufficient confidence in your father to accord him your attention and to believe what he may state to you. Listen then—and rest assured that I should never take the part of any one against my own daughter. I have seen Mrs. Slingsby."

Rosamond gave a convulsive start; but her father, appearing not to observe it, proceeded.

"It struck me," he continued, "that she would never have had the presumption and impudence to call here this morning, if she were really as guilty as you supposed her to be. I therefore deemed it an act of justice to ascertain the nature of those explanations which she proffered in this room, and which your presence cut short. With that object in view, I proceeded to her abode; and she assured me that she was entirely innocent of any connivance in the atrocity perpetrated by Sir Henry Courtenay——"

"Innocent!" almost shrieked Rosamond. "Oh! my dear father, you know not how specious—how plausible that woman can be when she chooses; and it has suited her purpose to be so with you. But be not deceived——"

"Do you imagine that I am not old enough and sufficiently experienced to discriminate between sincerity and duplicity?" demanded Mr. Torrens. "I tell you, Rosamond, that you wrong Mrs. Slingsby—that your suspicions are most injurious! Reflect—consider before you thus condemn! You overheard a few words which immediately threw you into a state of such excitement that your imagination tortured all the subsequent discourse into an evidence of guilt on the part of a lady who is deeply attached to you—who loves you as if she were your own mother—and who will die of grief if you continue thus to misjudge her. Yes, Rosamond—Mrs. Slingsby has declared that she will put a period to her existence if you persist in your present belief! She accuses you of ingratitude towards her, after all her affectionate kindness in your behalf; and, should she carry her dreadful threat into execution—which I much fear, for she seems literally distracted—her blood will be upon your head!"

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Rosamond, appalled by this terrible announcement. "But if I cannot command my own convictions?" she added hastily.

"You must cherish a Christian spirit—you must be less prompt in forming opinions—less ready to arrive at those convictions which you represent to be uncontrollable," said Mr. Torrens, endeavouring to bewilder his daughter, and thereby render her spirit ductile and her mind pliant, so that he might manage both as he pleased. "So far from nourishing malignity against Mrs. Slingsby, you should seek consolation with her; for your own mother is not here to console you!"

"God be thanked that my mother is not here to witness my disgrace!" ejaculated Rosamond, clasping her hands fervently.

"For the sake of my daughters I was wrong—yes, I was wrong not to have married again," said Mr. Torrens, as if musing to himself. "I should have given a protectress to my children—a lady who would have been a second mother to them; and then all this would not have occurred! But it is not yet too late to ensure your future welfare, Rosamond, by those means," he added, turning towards his daughter, who had listened with surprise to her father's previous observations; "and in accomplishing that aim, I may at the same time afford a convincing proof to a deserving, wrongly-suspected, and misjudged woman of my own esteem, and inferentially of your regret at the calumniatory sentiments you have cherished concerning her."

"My dear father—I do not understand you!" cried Rosamond, a dreadful suspicion weighing on her mind; and which, nevertheless, seemed so wild and ridiculous—so utterly impossible to be well-founded, that she fancied she had not rightly comprehended the sentiments of her parent.

"I am thinking how I can best ensure your welfare and happiness, Rosamond," he said, "by giving you a substitute for that maternal protectress whom you have lost—one who will be a companion and a friend to you——"

"Father!" exclaimed Rosamond, horrified at the idea of having a step-mother, and trembling with indescribable alarms lest she had indeed too well read her sire's intentions respecting the *one* whom he proposed to invest with that authority.

"Will you hear me with calmness?—will you subdue this excitement, which amounts to an undutiful aversion to all I am projecting for your sake?" demanded Mr. Torrens, again assuming a severe tone: then, perceiving that his daughter was dismayed by his manner, he hastily added, as if determined at once to put an end to a painful scene, "If I have consulted you, Rosamond, on the step that I propose to take, it was because I deemed you sensible and reasonable enough to merit that proof of confidence on my part, and obedient enough to submit becomingly to the dictates of my superior wisdom and experience. Know, then, that it is my intention to marry again—*for your sake*—and that my inclinations, as well as my interests, induce me to fix my choice upon Mrs. Slingsby."

Rosamond uttered not a word, but fell back senseless in her chair.

"Obstinate fool!" muttered Torrens between his teeth, as he hastened forward to save her from slipping off on the fender. "But I will neither argue nor consult any more—I will command, where I wish to be obeyed."

He applied a scent-bottle to her nostrils; and she soon gave signs of returning animation. Opening her eyes, she glanced wildly at her father, as if to interrogate him whether that were really true which appeared to have been haunting her like a horrid dream.

"Father—father," she murmured, grasping his hands; "you will not—no, you will not do what you have said! Oh! I implore you—I conjure—sacrifice not your own happiness and mine at the same instant! I was not mistaken in one syllable that I overheard between that woman and that man—and their discourse filled me with horror. She is his paramour, father—she is in a way to become a mother ——"

"Silence, daughter!" cried Mr. Torrens, sternly. "And now listen to me, while I make you acquainted with my *commands*! Not only is it my intention to marry Mrs. Slingsby, but I desire that you will treat her with respect—if not with affection. And as you value my love and the continuance of my kindness, you will observe these instructions. If any thing more be wanting to induce you to comply with my desire, that additional argument will, perhaps, be found in the fact that if I do not marry Mrs. Slingsby, I shall be ruined—utterly undone—my property wrested from me—my person conveyed to a prison—and *you* thrust out, houseless and penniless, into the wide world, without a soul to protect or befriend you. Now I have told you all—and it is for you to decide whether your prejudices shall prevail against my most substantial interests."

Rosamond was astounded at the words which met her ears; and she knew not how to reply.

For a few moments she stood gazing vacantly upon her father's countenance, as if to read thereon a confirmation of words, the import of which seemed too terrible to be true: then, probably experiencing the necessity of seeking the solitude of her own chamber for the purpose of giving vent to the overflowing fulness of her heart's emotions, she hurried from the room.

Poor friendless girl! dreadful was the position in which she found herself placed! Oh! why were not Clarence and Adelais near to console her—to receive her beneath their protecting influence? Alas! she would not have dared to face them, even were they in the metropolis at the time; for she could not have revealed to them her dishonour—Oh! no, she would sooner have died!

Throwing herself on a seat in the privacy of her bed-chamber, she burst into tears, and gave vent to her anguish in heart-rending sobs.

An hour passed—and still she thought not of retiring to rest;—she was in a state of utter despair!

She heard her father ascend to his chamber: but this circumstance reminded her not that the usual hour when she herself sought her couch had gone by.

Suddenly she was aroused from the deep reverie of woe that had succeeded the violent outburst of her anguish, by the movement of the handle of the door, as if some one were about to enter her room.

She started and listened, the bed being between the place where she was and the door, so that she could not see the latter.

Yes—some one was indeed entering the chamber.

With a faint scream she darted forward, and beheld a man in the act of closing the door behind him.

The intruder was Jeffreys, the recently-hired servant.

"What has brought you hither, John?" enquired Rosamond, in hasty and anxious tone—for she feared lest something had happened to her father.

"Nothink but your own beautiful self, Miss," answered the ruffian, advancing towards her as well as he was able—for he was much intoxicated.

"Begone!" cried Rosamond, her whole countenance becoming suddenly crimson with indignation. "Begone, I say—and to-morrow my father will know how to punish this insolence."

"Your father, Miss, won't do no such a thing," returned Jeffreys; "and it'll be all the worse for you if you holler. I know a many things that wouldn't render it safe for master to quarrel with me. So give me a kiss——"

"Villain!" exclaimed Rosamond, bursting into tears: "how dare you thus insult me? Leave the room—or I alarm the house at any risk!"—and she rushed towards the bell-pull.

"None of that nonsense, Miss—*or I'll hang your father, as sure as you're alive*!" said Jeffreys, placing his back to the door, folding his arms, and surveying Rosamond with the insolence of a licentious, drunken bully.

"Hang my father!" repeated the unhappy girl, staggering back and sinking into a chair—for so many dreadful things had recently occurred, that her mind was more attuned to give immediate credence to evil than to receive good tidings.

"Yes, by jingo!" said Jeffreys: "I can hang him any day I like. But what's more, I know pretty well all that's happened to you. I didn't listen for nothink at the parlour door this morning when that Mrs. Bingsby or Stingsby, or whatever her name is, was here."

"My God! my God!" murmured Rosamond, pressing her hands to her brow with all her might—for she felt as if she were going mad.

"Now don't take on so, Miss," said Jeffreys: "I'm sure I didn't mean to vex you like that. But the fact is I've took a great fancy to you: and if so be I let out that your father did draw a knife across the throat of that baronet which come here last night, and which I s'pose was the same you spoke of this morning to Mrs. Bingsby——"

"Monster!" shrieked Rosamond, in a shrill, penetrating tone—for she was unable any longer to subdue the horrible emotions which racked and tortured her, goading her almost to madness.

In another instant Mr. Torrens was heard to rush from his chamber—a moment more, and he forced his way into his daughter's room, hurling the villain Jeffreys forward with the violence exerted in dashing open the door.

"Father—dear father!" exclaimed Rosamond, springing into his arms; "save me—save me from that monster, who has told me such dreadful—dreadful things!"

"Be calm, Rosamond," said Mr. Torrens in a low and hoarse tone; "or you will alarm the other servant. Jeffreys," he added, turning towards the fellow who was swaying himself backwards and forwards, in the middle of the room, in that vain attempt to appear sober so often made by drunken men, "how dare you to intrude here? But follow me—I must speak to you alone."

"Father—one word," said Rosamond, in a voice indicative of deep feeling. "This man uttered a frightful accusation against you—Oh! an accusation so terrible that my blood curdles——"

"Nonsense, Rosamond!" interrupted Mr. Torrens, cruelly agitated: "you see that he has taken a drop too much—he is a good well meaning fellow—and will be very sorry in the morning——"

"Sorry! why the devil should I be sorry?" cried Jeffreys, with the dogged insolence of inebriation. "I don't know what I've got to be sorry for——"

"Come, come," said Mr. Torrens, gently pushing his daughter aside, and approaching the man-servant in a coaxing, conciliatory way; "this is carrying the thing too far, John——"

"Well—well, we can talk it over in the morning, Miss—and I dare say we shall make matters right enough together," stammered the drunken hind, as he allowed himself to be led away from the chamber by Mr. Torrens. "You're a pretty gal—and if I said anythink amiss——"

The almost maddened father hurried him over the threshold, and Rosamond hastened to secure the door behind them both.

Then flinging herself into a chair, she exclaimed, "My God! what horrors have met my ears this night! Misfortunes—crimes—woes—fears—outrages have entered the house, like an army carrying desolation along with it! But my father—a murderer—Oh! heavens—no—no—it cannot be! And yet that dread accusation—so cool—so systematic——my God! my God!"

And she wept as if her heart would break.

From this painful—or rather most agonising condition of mind, she was aroused by a low knock at her door; and, in answer to her question who was there, the voice of her father replied.

She hastened to admit him;—but, as he entered, she started back, appalled by the ghastliness of his countenance, every lineament of which denoted horror and fearful emotions.

"Father, tell me all—keep me not in suspense—let me know the worst!" exclaimed Rosamond, clasping her hands in an imploring manner. "Dreadful things have happened, I am sure—and my brain is reeling, maddening!"

"Daughter," said Mr. Torrens, taking her hand, "you *must* and you *shall know* the worst now—for I find that the miscreant Jeffreys has indeed told you too much for me to attempt to conceal the truth——"

"Just heavens! my father—stained with blood—the blood of vengeance on account of his dishonoured daughter;" said Rosamond, speaking in broken sentences and with hysterical excitement, while her eyes were fixed intently and with a fearfully wild expression

upon the haggard countenance of her sire.

"No—not so, Rosamond," answered Mr. Torrens emphatically. "Sit down—there—and try and compose yourself for a few moments, while I give you an explanation which circumstances have rendered imperative."

The wretched girl suffered herself to be placed on a seat: her father then drew another chair close to the one which she occupied—and, leaning with folded arms over the back of it, he continued in these terms:——

"Last night—after you had retired to your room—Sir Henry Courtenay called. Yes—he dared to visit the house into which such dishonour and so much misery had been brought by his means. But he came to offer every possible atonement which it was in his power to make; and then I ascended to your room—here—to make you aware of his presence in the parlour below and of the proposals which I had received. But I found you in a state of mind too profoundly excited to bear the announcement—I remained with you to console and tranquillise you—and, when I saw that you were growing more calm, I retraced my way down stairs. Merciful heavens! what a spectacle then met my eyes!"

And Mr. Torrens, having introduced his fearful history by this deceptive and well coloured preface, proceeded to narrate the facts of the murder precisely as they had really occurred,—not forgetting to mention the robbery of a sum of money which he had left on the table. He then explained the part which John Jeffreys had subsequently performed in the occurrences of the preceding night; and he wound up in the following manner:——

"Thus you perceive, dear Rosamond, how a fearful combination of circumstances would fix dark and dreadful suspicions on me, were this tragedy to be brought to light. And now, too, you can understand how that miscreant Jeffreys dared to presume upon his knowledge of the shocking event—how, believing me to be completely in his power, he fancied that I dared not defend my own daughter from his licentious ruffianism. And, more than all this, Rosamond—Mrs. Slingsby holds me also beneath the rod of terrorism! For she knew that the baronet came hither last night—she knew also that he did not return—and I was compelled to reveal to her the whole truth, even as circumstances have now forced me to reveal it to you. And this is the secret of my intended marriage with her—a marriage that will take place to-morrow, and into which she has coerced me! Thus, Rosamond, if you ever loved and if you still love your unhappy father—pity him, pity him—but do not reproach him—nor aggravate his grief and his mental anguish by thought or deed on your part!"

So ingeniously had Mr. Torrens blended truth and fiction in his narrative, to work upon the feelings of his daughter,—so artfully had he combined and explained the various incidents in order to represent himself as the victim of cruel circumstances—that the generous-minded Rosamond felt the deepest commiseration and sympathy on behalf of her father rapidly taking possession of her soul.

"My dearest parent," she said, "I crave your pardon—I implore your forgiveness, for having wronged you by the most unjust—the most horrible suspicions! But the conduct of that man Jeffreys—his awful accusation—the reluctance you appeared to exhibit in dealing summarily with him, when you entered the room the first time this night,—all these things operated powerfully upon my mind, which has been attenuated by so many dreadful shocks within the last ten or twelve days! Alas! what sorrows have overtaken us—what perils environ us! Let us fly from this neighbourhood, dear father—let us leave England——"

"It is impossible, Rosamond!" interrupted Mr. Torrens hastily. "I had myself thought of that means of ensuring personal safety: but I abandoned the idea almost as soon as formed—for it was better to stay here, surrounded by danger, yet having bread to eat, than seek a foreign clime to starve!"

"We can work, dear father—we can toil for our livelihood! But, no—never should you be reduced to such a painful necessity, so long as your daughter has health and strength to labour for our mutual support!" exclaimed the excellent-hearted girl. "Oh! let us fly—let us quit this country—let us repair to France! I have some few accomplishments—drawing—music—a knowledge of all the branches of needlework; and it will be hard indeed if I cannot earn enough to procure us bread."

"No—no, Rosamond—it cannot be!" said Mr. Torrens, tears now trickling down his cheeks—for the better he became acquainted with the admirable traits of his daughter's character—traits which adversity, misfortune, and danger now developed—the more bitterly did his heart smite him for the awful treachery he had perpetrated with regard to her.

"And wherefore is it impossible?" she asked. "Consider, my dear father, by what circumstances you are now surrounded. On one side is Jeffreys whom you dare not offend—whom you cannot discharge—and from whose ruffianism your daughter is not safe. On the other side, is this marriage with Mrs. Slingsby—a marriage which I now perceive to be forced upon you—a marriage that will bring into this house a person whom neither of us can ever love or respect!"

"Enough! enough! Rosamond," exclaimed Mr. Torrens: "all these sad things—these dangers and these sacrifices—have become interwoven with the destiny which it is mine to fulfil; and I must pursue my painful course—follow on my sad career, in the best manner that I may. I cannot risk starvation in a foreign land—I could not support an existence maintained by the toils of my daughter. Besides, I am confident of being able to realise a fortune by my speculations in this neighbourhood. Here, then, must I remain. And now, Rosamond, it remains for you to decide whether you will receive the mother-in-law whom imperious circumstances force upon you—or whether you will abandon your father!"

"Never, never will I leave you!" cried the affectionate girl, throwing her arms around her parent's neck, and embracing him tenderly.

The interview—the painful interview between the father and his child then terminated. The former retired to his own apartment, a prey to feelings of the most harrowing nature; and the latter sought her couch, to which slumber was brought through sheer exhaustion.

But the horrors of the early portion of the night were perpetuated in her dreams!

CHAPTER LXXXII.
THE FORGED CHEQUE.

Oh! what a strange, and, at the same time, what a wondrous world is this in which we live;—and how marvellous is human progress! The utmost attainments effected by the wisdom of our ancestors were but ignorance and short-sightedness compared with the knowledge of the present day. Antiquity had its grand intellects and its sublime geniuses; but it furnished not the same abundance of materials to act upon as is afforded by the discoveries and likewise by the spirit of this age!

But are we proportionately happier, on this account, than were our forefathers? Is the working-man, for instance, more prosperous, more comfortable, more enviable as to his condition, than the aboriginal Briton who lived in a cave or the hollow of a tree, and who painted his body to protect it against the cold?

With all our prosperity—with all the grandeur, the glitter, and the refinement of our civilisation—with all our moralising institutions and our love of social order and mental improvement, we yet find the national heart devoured, tortured, and preyed upon by that undying serpent—PAUPERISM!

Yes: the millions are not so happy, so prosperous, or so comfortable as they ought to be;—for they are compelled to gnaw the tares of civilisation's field, while the proud and heartless oligarchy self-appropriate the corn!

Proud and heartless, indeed, are the rulers and the mighty ones of this land; and if the millions remain passive and patient, that pride and that heartlessness will grow, the one more despotic and the other more selfish.

It was but a few days ago that we marked two distinct articles in the morning newspapers, which formed a contrast fearfully significant in its evidence of the pride and the heartlessness which we abominate on the one hand, and of the distress and suffering which we so deeply deplore on the other.

One of these articles consisted but of *four lines*: the other occupied nearly *two columns*.

The first stated as laconically as possible that bread had risen to thirteen-pence the quartern loaf, and recorded a rapidly-disposed of regret that provisions should be so dear, on account of the poor. The second gave a laboured, fulsome, and tediously wire-drawn narrative of "Her Majesty's State Ball."

Thus the misery endured by millions in consequence of dearness and scarcity, is a trivial matter deserving only of *four lines*; whereas the trumpery nonsense and childish tom-foolery of a royal dance are deemed of sufficient importance to merit nearly *two columns*!

Oh! instead of giving balls and splendid entertainments at such a time, if the Sovereign of this land were to say to the people, "Ye are starving, and it makes my heart bleed to think that from your very vitals are wrung the hundreds of thousands of pounds which are wasted by myself and the other members of the Royal Family on our frivolities, our whims, our caprices, and our wanton extravagances: therefore will I give ye back one half of the enormous income which I have hitherto enjoyed, in the full confidence that my example will be imitated by many others who prey upon you;"—did the Sovereign thus speak to the nation, the nation would be justly proud of its Sovereign; and yet this Sovereign would only be performing a duty dictated by humanity and common justice.

What would be thought of the father of a family who feasted on turtle and venison, accompanied by generous wines, every day, while his children were thrust into the cold, humid cellar, to devour a mouldy crust and drink water?

Yet the Sovereign delights in the attribute of a general and comprehensive paternal solicitude in the welfare of the people: but it is an attribute which exists only in the imaginations of grovelling courtiers or lick-spittle historians.

Royalty and Aristocracy are intensely—necessarily—and thoroughly selfish: and as for any anxiety on behalf of the toiling and suffering millions, the idea is absurd—the notion is a mere delusion—the assertion that such a feeling exists, is a lie—a monstrous, wicked, atrocious lie!

There is more of the milk of human kindness in a single cottage than in all the palaces of Europe taken together.

There is more true philanthropy in one poor man's hovel, than in a thousand mansions of the great and wealthy in the fashionable quarters of London.

Oh! if the father or the mother can dance and be glad while the children are famishing, the sooner all ties are severed between such worthless parents and such an oppressed and outraged offspring, the better!

Nero danced and sang on the summit of a tower at the spectacle presented to his eyes by burning Rome;—and festivity and rejoicing reign in our English palaces, at a moment when scarcity menaces the land with famine and its invariable attendant—pestilence!

People of England! ye now understand how much sympathy ye may expect on the part of those who derive all their wealth from the sweat of your brow!

People of Ireland! ye now comprehend how much pity your starving condition excites on the part of your rulers!

People of Scotland! ye now perceive how worthy the great ones of the realm are of your adulation!

But it is sickening, as it is sorrowful, to dwell on this subject. Some of our readers may perhaps ask us wherefore we broach it at all? We will reply by means of a few questions. Is not every individual member of a society interested in the welfare of that society? or ought he not at least to be so? Is he not justified in denouncing the errors or the downright turpitude of the magistrates whom that society has chosen to govern it, and who derive their power only from its good will and pleasure? or is it not indeed his duty to proclaim those errors and that turpitude? Should not this duty be performed, even if it be unpleasant? and can we ever hope to ameliorate our condition, unless we expose the abuses which oppress, degrade, and demoralise us?

Oh! let no one rashly and in a random manner say that he cares nothing about politics! Such an assertion denotes a wilful disregard not only of his neighbour's interests, but also of his own. Were all men to entertain such an indifference, the people would be the veriest slaves that an unrestrained despotism and an unwatched tyranny could render them. It is as necessary for the industrious classes to protect their rights and privileges by zealously guarding them, as to adopt precautions to save their houses from fire.

One word more. It is a common saying, and as absurd as it is common—"Oh! women have no right to meddle in politics." Women, on the contrary, have as much right as "the lords of the creation" to exhibit an interest in the systems and institutions by which they are governed. For the sake of their children, as well as for their own, they should assert and exercise that right. It is a lamentable delusion to suppose that the intellect of woman is not powerful nor comprehensive enough to embrace such considerations. The intellect of woman is naturally as strong as that of man; but it has less chances and less opportunities of developing its capacity. The masculine study of politics would aid the intellect of woman in putting forth its strength; and we hope that the day is gone by when the female sex are to be limited to the occupations of the drawing-room, the nursery, or the kitchen. We do not wish to see women become soldiers or sailors, nor to work at severe employment: but we are anxious to behold them *thinkers* as well as *readers*—utilitarians as well as domestic economists. And we know of no greater benefit that could be conferred on society in general, than that which might be derived from the influence of the well developed intellect of woman. Her mind is naturally better poised than that of man: far-seeing and quick-sighted is she;—a readiness at devising and combining plans to meet emergencies, is intuitive with her. Her judgment is correct—her taste good;—and she profits by experience far more usefully than does man. Is it not absurd, then—is it not unjust—and is it not unwise to deny to woman the right of exercising her proper influence in that society of which she is the ornament and the delight?

Alas! that there should be such exceptions to the general rule of female excellence, as Martha Slingsby,—a woman whose principles were thoroughly corrupt, whose licentious passions were of the most devouring, insatiable kind, and whose talent for wicked combinations and evil plottings was unfortunately so great!

Let us return to this hypocritical and abandoned creature, and follow her in the vile scheme which now occupies all her attention.

Having breakfasted at an early hour, she seated herself at her desk, whence she drew forth a packet of letters received by her at various times from Sir Henry Courtenay, and the signatures of which now became the objects of her special study. The art of counterfeiting the late baronet's autograph was practised by her for nearly half an hour; for though she was already tolerably confident of her ability to forge his signature most successfully,—as she had assured Mr. Torrens,—she nevertheless deemed it prudent to render the imitation as perfect as possible.

At last the atrocious deed was accomplished to her complete satisfaction; and a cheque for two thousand pounds lay, drawn in a thoroughly business-like manner, upon her desk!

She was bold and courageous in the execution of plots and the carrying out of deep schemes;—but this dark and dangerous crime which she had just perpetrated, caused her to shudder from head to foot! Hitherto all her wickedness had been of a nature calculated only, if detected, to involve her in disgrace, and not in peril—to ruin her character, but not place her life in jeopardy! Now she had taken a step—a bold and desperate step—which at once set her on the high road that conducts all those who are found treading its pathway, to the foot of the scaffold!

Yes—she shrank back and she trembled violently as she rose from the desk whereon the forged cheque now lay; and for a moment she was inclined to seize it—to rend it into a thousand pieces—and thus to dispel at once and in an instant the tremendous black cloud of stormy danger which she had drawn over her own head.

But, no—she had courage enough to be wicked and rash; but she had not strength of mind sufficient to render her prudent. She therefore decided on daring all—risking everything, by the presentation of the forged cheque!

Having dressed herself in a style of unusual elegance, she proceeded in a hackney-coach to Lombard Street, and alighted at the door of the banking-house on which the cheque was drawn.

Saying to herself,—"Now for the aid of all my courage!"—she entered the spacious establishment, and advanced towards the counter.

One of the numerous clerks in attendance instantly received the cheque which she handed across to him;—and, as it left her hand, a chill struck to her heart—and she would at that moment have given worlds to recall it.

Her composure was now only the effect of utter desperation: but so unruffled was her countenance, that not a lineament was so changed as to be calculated to engender suspicion.

The clerk took the cheque to the nearest desk upon the counter; and after reading it with more than usual attention, as Mrs. Slingsby thought, he said, "This is dated the day before yesterday, madam. Have you seen Sir Henry Courtenay since then?"

"I have not," answered Mrs. Slingsby, wondering how she was able to speak in a tone so cold and collected. "I believe," she added,

"that he is gone out of town."

"Pardon the question, madam," observed the clerk; "but one of his servants was here last evening, just before closing time, to enquire if we had seen Sir Henry:"—then, after a few moments' pause, he said, "How will you have this?"

Immense was the relief suddenly experienced by the guilty woman! She seemed as if drawn abruptly forth from the depths of an ocean in which she had been suffocating—drowning. The revulsion of feeling was so great, that, whereas she had been enabled to stand without support throughout the few minutes of frightful ordeal just passed, she was now compelled to cling to the counter, though the clerk observed not her emotion.

Having specified the manner in which she desired the amount of the cheque to be paid her, Mrs. Slingsby received the produce of her crime, and quitted the bank.

She was now so astounded at the complete success of her scheme,—although, when able to reflect calmly upon it, she had never once doubted the issue,—that she could scarcely believe in its realization. Her brain whirled—her heart palpitated violently, as she ascended the steps of the hackney-coach;—and its motion, as it rolled away from the door of the bank, increased the excitement under which she was now labouring.

On her return to Old Burlington Street, she found Mr. Torrens waiting for her, it being nearly twelve o'clock—the hour appointed for their visit to the solicitor.

The moment she entered the drawing-room, Mr. Torrens rose from his seat, and advanced towards her, his eyes fixed intently upon her countenance.

In fact Mr. Torrens was deeply anxious to learn the result of the bold venture which Mrs. Slingsby was that morning to make. With him it was now a matter of pecuniary ruin or salvation; and he had overcome so many difficulties already,—stifling his own scruples at taking an immodest woman for his wife, and reducing his daughter to a belief in the necessity of his submitting to this matrimonial arrangement,—that he trembled lest some unforeseen accident should thwart him just at the moment when he appeared to be touching on the goal of success. Moreover, he had that morning, ere quitting home, so contrived matters with John Jeffreys as to induce this man to leave his service without delay; and he had enjoyed the supreme satisfaction of seeing that dangerous person leave his house ere he himself had set out to keep his appointment with Mrs. Slingsby. Thus every thing had progressed in accordance with Mr. Torrens' views and wishes, so far as the preliminaries to his change of condition were involved.

"Well, my dear madam, what tidings?" he eagerly demanded, as he approached to meet Mrs. Slingsby.

"I have succeeded," she said, throwing herself into a chair. "But I would not for worlds undergo again the same dreadful alternations between acute suspense and thrilling joy—cold tremor and feverish excitement."

"And yet the transaction has given a charming glow of animation to your countenance," observed Mr. Torrens, now for the first time inflamed by desire in respect to the amorous widow whom he was shortly to make his wife. "I have procured the license; and——"

"And Rosamond—what of her?" demanded Mrs. Slingsby hastily.

"She will receive you with a respectful welcome at Torrens Cottage," was the answer. "By dint of reasoning with her, I overcame all her scruples, and rendered her pliant and ductile to our purposes."

"All progresses well, then," said Mrs. Slingsby. "Let us now away to Mr. Howard."

And to that gentleman's office did the pair proceed. Their business was soon explained to the attorney, who manifested no surprise nor any particular emotion at the singularity of the transaction; for Mr. Howard was a perfect man of business, ready to receive instructions without expressing any feelings at all calculated to annoy his clients, and never indicating a curiosity to learn more than those clients might choose to confide to him.

"I am to keep this sum of two thousand pounds until such time as Mr. Torrens may claim it in the capacity of your husband?" he said, as coolly and quietly as if he were receiving a deposit on the purchase of an estate.

"Exactly so," answered Mrs. Slingsby.

"And to-morrow morning, my dear sir," added Mr. Torrens, with a smile, "I shall come to claim it."

"Good," exclaimed Mr. Howard, locking up the bank-notes and gold in his iron safe. "I give you joy, Mr. Torrens: Mrs. Slingsby, I wish you all possible happiness."

Thus speaking, the attorney bowed his clients out of the office.

Mr. Torrens escorted Mrs. Slingsby back to Old Burlington Street, and then repaired as fast as his horse and gig would take him to his own dwelling, to sit down to an early dinner, and afterwards dress himself for the interesting ceremony of the evening.

But on his arrival at the Cottage, he learnt from the female servant who opened the door, that his daughter Rosamond had left home an hour previously.

"Left home!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens. "But she will return?" he continued interrogatively. "Did she not say that she would return?"

"She desired me to give you this note, sir," answered the domestic.

Mr. Torrens tore open the letter placed in his hands, and read the following impressive lines:—

"Pardon me, dearest father, for the step which I am now taking; but I cannot—cannot support the idea of dwelling beneath the

same roof with that lady who is soon to be my mother-in-law. I know that I promised not to desert the paternal home: that promise was given in sincerity—though maddening reflections now render me incapable of keeping it. You are well aware how dreadfully my feelings have been wounded—how cruelly my heart has been lacerated, during the last few hours; and I have struggled against the violence of my grief—I have endeavoured to subdue my anguish;—but the occurrences of last night—the outrage attempted by that villain Jeffreys—the revelation of the terrible secret relative to Sir Henry Courtenay——Oh! my dear father, a mind ten thousand times stronger than that of your unhappy daughter could not endure the weight of all this aggregate of misery! Therefore, sooner that my presence should render my father's house unhappy, I depart thence, hoping to be followed by your blessing! Grieve not for me, dear father—heaven will protect me! From time to time I shall write to you; and should happier days arrive——but of that, alas! I dare entertain no hope at present. To you must I leave the painful task of accounting to my dearest, dearest sister and her esteemed husband for my absence when you see them again. Farewell—farewell, my beloved father! I scarcely know what I have written—my brain is on fire—my heart is ready to burst—my eyes are dimmed with tears."

The servant watched the countenance of her master with evident interest and curiosity as he perused this note.

"Did Miss Rosamond appear much excited?" he asked, in a tremulous tone, and without raising his eyes from the letter which he held in his hand.

"She was crying very much, sir," responded the servant; "and it made me quite sad to see her. I attempted to comfort her; but she only shook her head impatiently, and then sobbed as if her heart would break. I knew that she was going to leave, because she had a small package in her hand; and she did cry so dreadful when she told me to give you this note."

Mr. Torrens turned aside, and hastened to his chamber, where he remained until half-past five o'clock. He then descended to the parlour, dressed for the nuptial ceremony. To the servant's enquiry relative to the serving up of the dinner, he replied that he had no appetite, and immediately gave orders for the horse and gig to be got ready by a stable-boy, who had been hastily hired in the morning to take the place of Jeffreys until a more efficient substitute could be found.

This command was soon obeyed, and shortly before seven o'clock Mr. Torrens arrived in Old Burlington Street.

The flight of his daughter from home had proved a more severe shock to him than the reader might imagine, considering the cold and heartless disposition of this man. It was not that he felt he should miss her society;—no—he did not love her enough to harbour a regret of that nature;—but her departure from the paternal dwelling had made him writhe beneath the maddening—the galling conviction that his independence was in a measure gone, and that a stern necessity had compelled him to assent to link his fate with that of a woman so vile and abandoned, that his own child fled at the idea of her approach.

Influenced by such feelings as these, it was no easy task for Mr. Torrens to assume a complacent demeanour suitable to the occasion of his nuptials. He, nevertheless, managed to conceal the emotions which wrung him so acutely, and played his part with tolerable satisfaction to Mrs. Slingsby as she introduced him to Dr. Wagtail and the other guests, including a clergyman, who were already assembled at her house.

The ceremony was performed by the reverend gentleman just alluded to, Dr. Wagtail giving the bride away. A splendid banquet was then served up; and shortly after ten o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Torrens departed together for the Cottage.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.
THE REWARD OF CRIME.

At half-past eleven on the following morning, Mr. Torrens entered the office of Mr. Howard, the solicitor.

His countenance wore a smile of satisfaction, in spite of the various events which had lately occurred to harass him; for he was about to receive a large sum of money—and his fingers itched to grasp the bank-notes and the gold which he had seen stowed away in the safe on the preceding day.

He already beheld his debts paid—his mind freed from pecuniary anxieties—and his speculations prospering in a manner giving assurance of the realization of a splendid fortune; and these pleasing visions, with which his imagination had cheered itself during the drive from the Cottage to the attorney's office, naturally tended to bestow on his countenance the expansiveness of good humour.

And, after all, it is a pleasant thing to enter a place where one is about to receive a good round sum of money, even though the amount will not remain long in pocket, but must be paid away almost as soon as fingered.

Mr. Torrens had never felt more independent than he did on this occasion; and the look which he bestowed upon a poor beggar-woman with a child in her arms, as he ascended the steps leading to the front-door of Mr. Howard's abode, was one of supreme contempt—as if a pauper were indeed a despicable object!

Well—Mr. Torrens entered the office with a smiling countenance:—but he was immediately struck by the strange aspect of things which there presented itself.

The place was in confusion. The clerks were gathered together in a group near the window, looking particularly gloomy, and conversing in whispers;—several gentlemen were busily employed in examining the japanned boxes which bore their names and contained their title-deeds;—and two or three females were weeping in a corner, and exchanging such dimly significant observations as —"Oh! the rascal!"—"The villain!"—"To rob us poor creatures!"

Mr. Torrens recoiled, aghast and speechless, from the contemplation of this alarming scene. A chill struck to his heart: and, in common parlance, any one might have knocked him down with a straw.

"Good heavens! gentlemen," he exclaimed, at length recovering the use of his tongue: "what is the meaning of this?"

"Ask those youngsters there, sir," said one of the individuals engaged in examining the tin-boxes: and the speaker pointed towards the clerks in a manner which seemed to imply that the news were too shocking for *him* to unfold, and that it was moreover the duty of the lawyer's subordinates to give the required information.

"Well, gentlemen, what *is* the matter?" demanded Mr. Torrens, turning to the clerks. "Has any thing sudden happened to Mr. Howard?"

"Oh! very sudden indeed, sir," was the answer vouchsafed by one of the persons thus appealed to, and accompanied by a sinister grin.

"Is he dead?" enquired Mr. Torrens, his excitement now becoming absolutely intolerable.

"No, sir—he isn't dead exactly—but——"

"But what?" cried Torrens, trembling from head to foot.

"He's bolted, sir!" was the astounding answer.

"Absconded!" murmured Mr. Torrens faintly;—and, reeling like a drunken man, he would have fallen had he not come in contact with the wall.

Yes—it was indeed too true: Mr. Howard—the cold, phlegmatic, matter-of-fact, business-like lawyer—had decamped no one knew whither, though numbers had to mourn or curse his flight!

"Are you ill, sir?" enquired one of the clerks, at the expiration of a few moments; for Mr. Torrens was leaning against the side of the room, his countenance pale as death, his eyes rolling wildly in their sockets, and his limbs trembling convulsively.

"No—no—I shall be better in a minute," groaned the unhappy man. "But this blow—is cruel—indeed!" he gasped in a choking voice. "Two thousand pounds—ruin—ruin!"

"Ah! there's many who'll be ruined by this smash, sir," said the clerk: "you're not the only one—and that's a consolation."

A consolation indeed!

It was none for Mr. Torrens, who saw himself ruined beyond all hope of redemption,—ruined in spite of the immense sacrifices he had made to avert the impending storm—the sacrifice of his daughter's innocence to Sir Henry Courtenay, and the sacrifice of himself to an abandoned and profligate woman!

Miserable—miserable man! what hast thou earned by all thine intriguings—thy schemings—thy black turpitude—and thy deplorable self-degradation? Oh! better—better far is it to become the grovelling, whining beggar in the streets, than to risk happiness—character—name—honour—all, on such chances as those on which thou didst reckon!

And now, behold him issue forth from that office into which he had entered with head erect, self-sufficient air, and smiling countenance:—behold him issue forth—bent down—crushed—overcome—ten years more aged than he was a few minutes previously,—and an object of pity even for that poor beggar-woman whom ere now he had treated with such sovereign contempt!

Miserable—miserable man! has not thy punishment commenced in this world?—is there not a hell upon earth?—and is not thy heart already a prey to devouring flames, and thy tongue parched with the insatiate thirst of burning fever, and thy soul tortured by the undying worm? Oh! how canst thou return to thy house in the vicinity of which lies interred a corpse the discovery of which may at any time involve thee in serious peril?—how canst thou go back to that dwelling whence thine injured daughter has fled, and over the threshold of which thou hast conducted a vile strumpet as thy bride?

When we consider how fearfully we are made,—how manifold are the chances that extreme grief—sudden ruin—and overwhelming anguish may cause a vessel in the surcharged heart to burst, or the racked brain to become a prey to the thunder-clap of apoplexy,—it is surprising—it is truly wondrous that man can support such an enormous weight of care without being stricken dead when it falls upon him!

And yet to what a degree of tension may the fibres of the heart be wrung, ere they will snap asunder!—and what myriads of weighty and maddening thoughts may agitate in the brain, ere reason will rock on its throne, or a vein burst with the gush of blood!

In the meantime occurrences of importance were taking place at Torrens Cottage.

Mrs. Torrens—late Mrs. Slingsby—was whiling away an hour in unpacking her boxes and disposing of her effects in the wardrobe and cupboards of her bed-chamber; congratulating herself all the time on the success which her various schemes had experienced. She had obtained a husband to save her from disgrace; and that husband had set out to receive, as she fancied, a considerable sum of money, which would relieve him of his difficulties, and enable him to pursue his undertakings in such a manner as to yield ample revenues for the future! She was moreover rejoiced that Rosamond had quitted the house;—for, shameless as this vile woman was, she could not have failed to be embarrassed and constrained in her new dwelling, had that injured girl met her there!

While Mrs. Torrens was thus engaged with her domestic avocations and her self-gratulatory thoughts in her bed-chamber, the stable-boy, who had been hired on the preceding day, was occupying himself in the garden.

"Well, what do you think of your new missus?" he said to the maid-servant, who had just been filling a stone-pitcher at the pump in the yard.

"She seems a decent body enow," was the reply. "But I haven't seen much of her yet. What are you doing there, Harry?"

"Why, you must know that I'm rather a good hand at gardening," answered the lad, desisting from his occupation of digging a hole in the ground, and resting on his spade: "and I'm going to move that young tree to this spot here—because it's all in the shade where it stands now, and will never come to no good."

"Ah! that's one of the young trees that Jeffreys planted—him who went away so suddenly yesterday morning, and which made me come and fetch you to help us here," observed the maid. "But, come—go on with your work," she added, laughing; "and let me see whether you really know how to handle a spade."

"Well—you shall see," returned the boy; and he fell to work again with the more alacrity because a pretty girl was watching his progress. "But I'll tell you fairly," he said, after a few minutes' pause in the conversation, "this digging here is no proof of what I can do; because the ground is quite soft—and the more I dig, the surer I am that the earth has been turned up here very lately."

"That I am certain it has not," exclaimed the maid-servant.

"But I say that it has, though," persisted Harry. "Look here—how easy it is to dig out! Do you think I don't know?"

"You fancy yourself very clever, my boy," said the female-domestic, laughing: "but you're wrong for once. We had no man-servant here before Jeffreys come—and he never dug there, I declare."

"Now, I just tell you what I'll do for the fun of the thing," cried the lad. "I'll dig out all the earth as far down as it has been dug out before—because I can now see that a hole *has been dug* here," he added emphatically.

"You're an obstinate fellow to stand out so," said the maid. "But I'll come back in five minutes and see how you get on."

The good-natured servant hastened into the kitchen with the pitcher of water in her hand; and the lad continued his delving occupation in such thorough earnest that the perspiration poured down his forehead.

By the time the maid-servant returned to the spot where he was digging, he had thrown out a great quantity of earth, and had already made a hole at least three feet deep.

"Still hard at work?" she said. "Why, you have made a place deep enough to bury that little sapling in! And what a curious shape the hole is, to be sure! Just for all the world like as if it was dug to put a dead body in! I wish you wouldn't go on digging in that way, Harry—I shall dream of nothing but graves——"

A cry of horror, bursting from the lips of the boy, interrupted the maid-servant's good-natured loquacity.

"What is it, Harry?" she demanded, peeping timidly into the hole, from which the boy hastily scrambled out.

"You talk of dead bodies," he cried, shuddering from head to foot, and with a countenance ashy pale;—"but look there—a human hand ——"

The maid shrieked, and darted back into the kitchen, uttering ejaculations of horror.

Mrs. Torrens heard those sounds of alarm, and hastily descended the stairs.

"Oh! missus," cried the boy, whom she encountered in the passage leading from the hall to the back door of the house; "such a horrible sight—Oh, missus! what shall we do?—what will become of us?"

"Speak—explain yourself!" said Mrs. Torrens, amazed and frightened at the strange agitation and convulsed appearance of the boy.

"Oh! missus," he repeated, his eyes rolling wildly, and his countenance denoting indescribable terror; "in that hole there—a dead body—a man's hand——"

"Merciful heavens!" shrieked Mrs. Torrens, now becoming dreadfully agitated in her turn—for, rapid as lightning-flash, did the thought strike her that the corpse of Sir Henry Courtenay was discovered.

"Yes, missus—'tis a man's hand, peeping out of the earth," continued the lad; "and I'm afraid I hacked it with the shovel—but I'm sure I didn't mean to do no such a thing!"

The newly-married lady staggered, as these frightful words fell upon her ears—and a film spread over her eyes.

But a sudden and peremptory knock at the front-door recalled her to herself; and she ordered the trembling maid, who was now standing at the kitchen entrance, to hasten and answer the summons.

The moment the front-door was opened, two stout men, shabby-genteel in appearance, and smelling uncommonly of gin-and-peppermint, walked unceremoniously into the hall.

"Is Mrs. Torrens at home, my dear?" said one, who carried an ash-stick in his hand: "'cos if she is, you'll please to tell her that two genelmen is a waiting to say a word to her."

"What name?" demanded the servant-maid, by no means well pleased at the familiar tone in which she was addressed.

"Oh! what name?" repeated the self-styled gentleman with the ash-stick: "well—you may say Mr. Brown and Mr. Thompson, my dear."

"*I* am Mrs. Torrens, gentlemen," said that lady, who having overheard the preceding dialogue, now came forward; "and I suppose that you are the persons sent by the auctioneer about the sale of my furniture in Old Burlington Street."

"Well—not exactly that neither, ma'am," returned the individual with the ash-stick. "The fact is we're officers——"

"Officers!" shrieked the miserable woman, an appalling change coming over her.

"Yes—and we've got a warrant agin you for forgery, ma'am," added the Bow Street runner, who was no other than the reader's old acquaintance Mr. Dykes.

Mrs. Torrens uttered a dreadful scream, and fell senseless on the floor.

"Come, young o'oman, bustle about, and get your missus some water, and vinegar, and so on," exclaimed Dykes. "Here, Bingham, my boy, lend a helping hand, and we'll take the poor creatur into the parlour."

The two officers accordingly raised the insensible woman and carried her into the adjacent room, where they deposited her on the sofa—that sofa which had proved the death-bed of her paramour! In the meantime the servant-maid, though almost bewildered by the dreadful occurrences of the morning, hastened to procure the necessary articles to aid in the recovery of her mistress; and in a few minutes Mrs. Torrens opened her eyes.

Gazing wildly around her, she exclaimed, "Where am I?"—then, encountering the sinister looks of the two runners, she again uttered a piercing scream, and clasping her hands together, murmured, "My God! my God!"

For a full sense of all the tremendous horror of her situation burst upon her; and there was a world of mental anguish in those ejaculations.

"She's a fine o'oman," whispered Dykes to his friend, while the good-natured servant endeavoured to console her mistress.

"Yes, she be," replied Bingham; "what a pity 'tis that she's sure to be scragged!"

"So it is," added Mr. Dykes. "And now, you stay here, old chap—while I just make a search about the place to see if I can find any of the blunt raised by the forgery."

Thus speaking, the officer quitted the room.

"Oh! ma'am, pray don't take on so," said the good-natured servant-maid, endeavouring to console her mistress. "It must be some mistake—I know it is,—you never could have done what they say! I wish master would come home—he'd soon put 'em out of the place."

"My God! my God! what will become of me?" murmured Mrs. Torrens, pressing her hand to her forehead. "Oh! what shall I do? what will the world say? Just heavens! this is terrible—terrible!"

At that moment the parlour door was opened violently, and Mr. Dykes made his appearance, dragging in the lad Harry, who was straggling to get away, and blubbering as if his heart were ready to break.

"Hold your tongue, you damned young fool!" cried Dykes, giving him a good shake, which only made him bawl out the more lustily: "no one ain't a going to do you no harm—but we must keep you as a witness. Bless the boy—I don't suppose you had any hand in the murder."

These last words brought back to the mind of Mrs. Torrens the dread discovery which had ere now been made in the garden, and the remembrance of which had been chased away by the appalling peril that had suddenly overtaken her: but at the observation of the Bow Street runner to the boy, she uttered a faint hysterical scream, and fell back in a state of semi-stupefaction.

"Murder did you say, old fellow?" demanded Bingham.

"Yes—summut in that way," returned Dykes. "At all events there's a man with his throat cut from ear to ear lying at the bottom of a hole in the garden——"

"You don't mean to say he was left all uncovered like that?" exclaimed Bingham.

"No—no," answered Dykes. "Them as did for him, buried him safe enough; and it seems that this boy has been a-digging there, and comes to a hand sticking out of the ground. So he's too much afeared to go down any farther; but I deuced soon shovelled out the earth—and, behold ye! there lies the dread-fullest spectacle you ever see, Bingham, in all your life. But it wont do to waste time in talking here. You cut over to Streatham and get a couple of constables—'cos there's plenty of work for us all in this house, it seems."

Bingham departed to execute the commission thus confided to him; and Dykes remained behind in charge of the premises.

It would be impossible to describe the wretchedness of the scene which was now taking place in the parlour. The lad Harry was crying in one corner, despite the assurances which Dykes had given him;—the maid-servant, horrified and alarmed at all the incidents which had occurred within the last quarter of an hour, was anxious to depart from a house which circumstances now rendered terrible; but she could not make up her mind to leave Mrs. Torrens, who was in a most deplorable condition;—for the unhappy woman lay, gasping for breath and moaning piteously, on the sofa—her countenance distorted with the dreadful workings of her agitated soul, and her eyes fixed and glassy beneath their half-closed lids!

Dykes accosted the boy, and, was beginning to put some questions to him with a view to ascertain when it was likely that Mr. Torrens would return, when that gentleman suddenly drove up to the door in his gig.

"Now, my lad," said Dykes, "go and open the door, and mind and don't utter a word about what has taken place here this morning."

The boy hastened to admit Mr. Torrens, who passed him by without even appearing to notice his presence, and proceeded straight to the parlour in a mechanical kind of manner, which showed how deeply his thoughts were occupied with some all-absorbing subject.

But the moment the ruined, wretched man opened the door, he shrank back from the scene which offered itself to his view; for the condition of his wife, and the presence of so suspicions-looking a person as Mr. Dykes told the entire tale at once—the forgery had been discovered!

"Oh! master," exclaimed the servant-maid, "I am so glad you're come back;—for your poor dear lady——"

"Yes, master—and that dreadful sight in the garden," interrupted the boy, whimpering again,—"the murdered man in the hole——"

Mr. Torrens staggered—reeled—and would have fallen, had not Dykes caught him by the arm, saying, "Sit down, sir—and compose yourself. I'm very sorry that I should have been the cause of unsettling your good lady so, sir: but I'm obleeged to do my dooty. And as for t'other business in the garden—I s'pose——"

"I presume you are an officer?" cried Mr. Torrens, suddenly recovering his presence of mind, as if he had called some desperate resolution to his aid.

"That's just what I am, sir," answered Dykes.

"And you have come here to—to——"

"To arrest Mrs. Slingsby that was—Mrs. Torrings that is—for forgery, was my business in the first instance," continued Dykes; "and now its grown more serious, 'cos of a orkard discovery made in the garden——"

"What?" demanded Torrens, with strange abruptness: but he was a prey to the most frightful suspense, and was anxious to learn at once whether any suspicion attached itself to him relative to that discovery, the nature of which he could full well understand.

"The dead body—the murdered gentleman, master!" exclaimed the lad Harry, throwing terrified glances around him.

"I do not understand you!" said Mr. Torrens, in a hoarse-hollow tone: "what do you mean? All this is quite strange—and therefore the more alarming to me."

But the ghastly pallor and dreadful workings of his countenance instantly confirmed in the mind of Dykes the suspicion he had already entertained—namely, that Mr. Torrens was not ignorant of the shocking deed now brought to light: and the officer accordingly had but one course to pursue.

"Mr. Torrens, sir," he said, "the less you talk on this here business, perhaps the better; 'cos every word that's uttered here must be repeated again elsewhere; and it will be my dooty to take you afore a magistrate——"

"Take me!" ejaculated the wretched man: and his eyes were fixed in horrified amazement on the officer.

"I'm sorry to say I must do so," answered Dykes.

"Martha—Martha!" ejaculated Torrens, starting from the seat in which the officer had just now deposited him, and speaking in such wild, unearthly tones that those who heard him thought he had suddenly gone raving mad: "why do you lie moaning there? Get up—and face the danger bravely—bravely! Ah! ah! here is a fine ending to all our glorious schemes!"—and he laughed frantically. "Howard has run away—absconded—gone, I tell you! Yes—gone, with the two thousand pounds! But I did not murder Sir Henry Courtenay!" he continued, abruptly reverting to the most horrible of all the frightful subjects which racked his brain. "No—it was not I who murdered him—you know it was not, Martha!"

And he sank back, exhausted and fainting, in the seat from which he had risen.

"Sir Henry Courtenay!" cried Dykes. "Well—this *is* strange; for it's on account of forging his name that the lady is arrested—and notice of his disappearance was given at our office this morning."

Late that evening the entire metropolis was thrown into amazement by the report "that a gentleman, named Torrens, who had hitherto borne an excellent character, and was much respected by all his friends and acquaintances, had been committed to Newgate on a charge of murder, the victim being Sir Henry Courtenay, Baronet." And this rumour was coupled with the intelligence "that the prisoner's wife, to whom he had only been married on the previous day, and who was so well known in the religions and philanthropic circles by the name of Slingsby, had been consigned to the same gaol on a charge of forgery."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.
OLD DEATH'S PARTY.

While these rumours were circulating throughout the metropolis, Old Death was preparing for the reception of visitors at his abode in Horsemonger Lane.

The aged miscreant, assisted by the old woman who acted as his housekeeper, arranged bottles, glasses, pipes, and tobacco on the table—made up a good fire so that the kettle might boil by the time the guests should arrive—and carefully secured the shutters of the window in order to prevent the sounds of joviality from penetrating beyond that room.

When these preparations were completed, the old woman was despatched to the nearest cook's-shop to procure a quantity of cold meat for the supper; and shortly after her return with the provender, the visitors made their appearance—arriving singly, at short intervals.

The housekeeper was dismissed to her own room: and the four men, having seated themselves at the table, began to mix their grog according to their taste.

"I s'pose you've heard the news, Mr. Bones?" said Jeffreys.

"About your late master and his wife—eh?" asked Old Death.

"Just so. They're in a pretty pickle—ain't they?" exclaimed Jeffreys, with a chuckle. "We little thought last night, when we was a talking over the whole business and dividing the swag, that the corpse would so soon turn up again. But, I say," he added, now breaking out into a horrible laugh, and turning towards Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler, "it was rather curious, though, that I should have had a hand in burying that there feller which you made away with."

"And still more curious," replied Tim, "that we should have done for a stranger, while the master of the house his-self escaped altogether. But 'tis no use talking of that there now. I wish it hadn't happened. It was however done in a hurry——"

"Never mind the little windpipe-slitting affair," said Josh Pedler impatiently. "We got the swag—Old Death here smashed the screens[37]—and that's all we ought to think of. Twelve hundred between us wasn't such a bad night's work—although it did lead us to do a thing we never did afore."

"And now my late master is certain sure to be scragged for it," exclaimed Jeffreys; "for no one could believe such a tale as he must tell in his defence. Well—I'm not sorry for him: he is a harsh, reserved, sullen kind of a chap. But there's one thing I'm precious sorry for ——"

"What's that?" demanded Old Death.

"Why—he promised me fifty pounds, to be paid this evening at seven o'clock," answered Jeffreys; "on condition that I'd leave his service at an instant's notice: and the blunt isn't of course forthcoming."

"Never mind that—don't make yourself uneasy, my boy," said Old Death, with a significant chuckle. "You've got plenty of money for the present: and the business which we've met to talk about, will put ever so much more into your pocket."

"Well—let's to business, then," exclaimed Jeffreys. "The fact is, I shan't go out to service no more; for, since I'm reglarly in with you fellers now, I shall stick to you."

"And I can always find you employment, lads," observed Old Death. "Come—help yourselves: we shall get on so much more comfortable when we're a little warmed with good liquor."

"The cunning old file!" exclaimed Tim the Snammer, laughing and winking at his comrade, Josh Pedler; "he wants to make us half lushy so as to get us to undertake anythink, no matter how desperate, on his own terms."

"'Pon my word, Tim," said Old Death, affecting a pleasant chuckle, which however sounded like the echo of a deep-toned voice in a cavern, "you are too hard upon me. I don't mean any such thing. I'll treat you liberally whatever you do for me."

"And so you ought, old boy," returned Tim Splint: "for you know how I suffered by you—and how cursed shabby you behaved towards me."

"We agreed yesterday to let bygones be bygones," said Benjamin Bones, somewhat sternly. "Do you mean to keep to that arrangement? or am I to consider that you still bear me a grudge?"

"No—no," cried Tim. "What I said was only in fun. So tip us your hand, old boy. There! Now we'll each brew another glass—and you shall explain your business, while we blow a cloud."

The fresh supplies of grog were duly mixed: Jeffreys, Josh Pedler, and Tim Splint lighted their pipes;—and Old Death addressed them

in the following manner:—

"There is a man in London who has done me a most serious injury—an injury so great that I can never cease to feel its consequences as long as I live. In a word," continued Old Death, his features becoming absolutely hideous with the workings of evil passions, "he discovered my secret stores—he destroyed all the treasures, the valuables, and the possessions which I had been years and years in accumulating."

"Destroyed them!" cried Tim Splint. "Stole them, you mean?"

"No—destroyed them—wantonly destroyed them—destroyed them all—all!" yelled forth Old Death, his usually sepulchral voice becoming thrilling and penetrating with hyena-like rage. "The miscreant!—the fiend! All—all was destroyed! Thousands and thousands of pounds' worth of valuables wantonly—wilfully—methodically destroyed! I did not see the work of ruin: but I know that it must have taken place—because the man of whom I speak is what the world calls honourable! Perdition take such honour!"

"But of what use was all that property to you, since you didn't convert it into money?" demanded Josh Pedler.

"Of what use?" cried Old Death, again speaking in that yelling tone which manifested violent emotions. "Is there no use in keeping precious things to look at—to gloat upon—to calculate their value? To be sure—to be sure there is," he continued, with a horrible chuckle. "But of that no matter. It is sufficient for you to know that I was deprived in one hour—in one minute, as you may say—of that property which had been accumulating for years. And the house, too, which was mine so long—which I had purchased on account of its conveniences,—even those premises this man of whom I speak, made me sell him. But I swore to have vengeance on him—I told him so when we parted—and I will keep my word!"

"Who is this person that you speak of?" asked Tim the Snammer.

"The Earl of Ellingham," was the reply.

"He is a great and a powerful nobleman, I suppose," observed Tim. "It will be difficult and dangerous to do him any harm."

"What's a nobleman more than another?" cried John Jeffreys. "I for one will undertake any thing that our friend Mr. Bones may propose."

"And so will I—if we're well paid," added Josh Pedler. "But there's one thing I must mention while I think on it. Don't none of you ever speak about that affair down at Torrings's, you know—the cut-throat business, I mean—before my blowen, Matilda. I like to have a little comfort at home; and a woman's tongue is the devil, when it's set a wagging in the blowing-up way."

"We'll mind our p's and q's before 'Tilda," said Tim the Snammer. "It isn't likely that any of us would be such fools as to talk of that business to women, or to others besides ourselves. But let Mr. Bones continue his explanations."

"I have told you enough," resumed Old Death, "to convince you that this Earl of Ellingham deserves no mercy at my hands: and if I say that I will give each of you a hundred pounds—yes, a hundred pounds each—to do my bidding in all things calculated to accomplish my vengeance on that man,—if I make you this promise, I suppose you will not refuse to enlist yourselves in my employ. But, mark you!" he added hastily, and with a sinister knitting of the brows; "before you give me your answer, bear in mind that my vengeance is to be terrible—terrible in the extreme!"

"You mean to have the Earl murdered, I suppose?" said John Jeffreys.

"Murdered—killed!—no—no," exclaimed Old Death; "that would be a vengeance little calculated to appease me! *He must live to know—to feel that I am avenged*," added the malignant old villain. "He must experience such outrages—such insults—such ignominy,—that he may writhe and smart under them like a worm under the teeth of the harrow. He must be made aware whence the blow comes—by whose order it is dealt—and wherefore it is levelled against him. Will you, then, for one week devote yourselves to my service? If you agree, I will at once give you an earnest of the sums promised as your recompense: if you refuse, there is an end of the matter—and I must look out elsewhere."

"But you haven't told us what we are to do to earn our reward," said Josh Pedler.

"There is no murder in the case," observed Old Death, emphatically.

"Then I for one consent without another minute's hesitation," exclaimed Josh Pedler.

"And me too," said Tim the Snammer.

"And I'm sure I'm not going to hang back," cried John Jeffreys.

"Good!" continued Benjamin Bones. "Though you've all got plenty of money in your pockets, there's no harm in having more. I will give you each thirty pounds on account of the business I have now in hand," he added, taking his greasy pocket-book from the bosom of his old grey coat.

The specified amount was handed over to each of the three villains, who received the bank-notes with immense satisfaction.

"Three or four more things like Torrings's and this," observed Tim the Snammer, "and we shall be able to set up in business as genelmen for the rest of our lives."

"Now listen to me," resumed Old Death, his countenance expressing an infernal triumph, as if his vengeance were already more than half consummated. "In the first place I must tell you that I'm going to move to-morrow morning up to Bunce's house, in Earl Street, Seven Dials; and to-morrow night must you perform the first duty I require of you."

"And what's that?" demanded Josh Pedler.

"You know that a few weeks ago a certain person, named Thomas Rainford, was hanged at Horsemonger Lane Gaol," proceeded Old Death, glancing rapidly around from beneath his shaggy, overhanging brows.

"The very prince of highwaymen—a glorious fellow,—a man that I could have loved!" exclaimed Josh Pedler, in a tone the enthusiasm of which denoted his heart's sincerity.

"Well—well," said Old Death, impatiently: "but he's put out of the way—dead—and gone—and it's no use regretting him. I suppose," he added, "that if you saw Tom Rain's body here, you wouldn't mind spitting in the face of the corpse, or treating it with any other kind of indignity, if you was well rewarded for your pains!"

"Why—my respect for the man while he was living wouldn't make me such a fool to my own interests as to refuse to do what you say now that he's dead," answered Josh Pedler. "Besides, a dead body's a lump of clay, or earth—or whatever else you may choose to call it: at all events it can't feel any thing that's done to it. But what in the world has made you touch on such a queer subject?"

"Because it is with Tom Rain's body that you will have to come in contact to-morrow night!" responded Old Death, in a low, sepulchral voice, and now fixing his eyes as it were on all the three at the same time.

And those three men started with astonishment at this extraordinary and incomprehensible announcement.

"Yes," proceeded Benjamin Bones: "it is just as I tell you—for the late Thomas Rainford was the elder brother of the Earl of Ellingham, and was legitimately born!"

This declaration excited fresh surprise on the part of the three men to whom it was addressed.

"And therefore," continued the aged miscreant, his countenance contracting with savage wrinkles, "it must be by the desecration of the corpse of Tom Rain, that the Earl will be alike exposed to the whole world and goaded to desperation by the insult offered to the remains of his brother. Now do you begin to understand me? No! Well, then I will explain myself more fully. It is known that the Earl demanded of the Sheriff the corpse of the highwayman—that his request was complied with—and that the body was interred privately in consecrated ground. I set people to make enquiries; and it was only this morning—this very morning—I learnt that a coffin, with the name of THOMAS RAINFORD on the plate, was buried in Saint Luke's churchyard. This intelligence my friend Tidmarsh gleaned from the sexton of that church. To-morrow night," added Old Death, "it is for you three to have up that coffin and convey it to the Bunces' house in Earl Street, Seven Dials."

"Do you want us to turn resurrectionists?" demanded Josh Pedler, in unfeigned surprise.

"I wish you to do what I direct, and what I am going to pay you well for," answered Benjamin Bones. "If you refuse, give me back my money, and I'll find others who will be less particular."

"Oh! I don't want to fly from the bargain," said Josh; "only you'll allow me the right of being astonished if I choose—or rather if I can't help it. As for the resurrection part of the business, I'd have up all the coffins in Saint Luke's churchyard on the same terms."

"I thought you were not the man to retreat from a bargain," observed Old Death. "Well—when you have brought the coffin to Earl Street, we'll take out the body, put a rope round its neck, and a placard on its breast: and that placard shall tell all the world that *it is the corpse of Thomas Rainford, the famous highwayman who was executed at Horsemonger Lane Gaol, and who was the rightful Earl of Ellingham*! This being done, it will be for you to convey the body to Pall Mall, just before daybreak, and place it on the steps of the hated nobleman's mansion."

"There will be danger and difficulty in performing that part of the task," said Tim the Snammer.

"Not at all," exclaimed Old Death. "A light spring cart will speedily convey the burthen to Pall Mall; and it will be but the work of a few moments to achieve the rest. Besides, at that hour in the morning there is no one abroad."

"All this can be managed easy enough," observed Jeffreys. "I don't flinch, for one. Is that every thing we shall have to do?"

"No—no," replied Ben Bones, with a grim smile: "I can't quite give three hundred pounds for one night's work. But since we are on the subject, I may as well explain to you what else I require in order to render my vengeance complete."

The three men replenished their glasses and their pipes; and Old Death then proceeded to address them in the following manner:—

"From certain information which I have received, I am confident that the Earl of Ellingham experiences a great friendship towards Esther de Medina, who was, I am pretty certain, Rainford's mistress."

It must be remembered that Benjamin Bones knew nothing of those incidents which have revealed to the reader the existence of Tamar—her beautiful sister's counterpart.

"This Esther de Medina is now in London, having been absent for a short time with her father. Another important point is that the newspapers some weeks ago announced the intended marriage of the Earl of Ellingham and Lady Hatfield. We are therefore aware of these two facts—that the Earl is attached to Esther de Medina as a friend, and to Lady Hatfield as her future husband."

It may also be proper to remind the reader that as Old Death knew nothing more of the position in which the nobleman and Georgiana stood with regard to each other, than what he had gleaned from the fashionable intelligence in the public prints,—so he was completely ignorant of all the circumstances which had tended to break off the alliance thus announced.

"Now," resumed the malignant old fiend, his eyes glistening with demoniac spite, as he glanced rapidly from Josh Pedler to Tim the Snammer, and from Tim the Snammer to John Jeffreys,—"now, it is my intention to wound the heart of that hated Earl—that detested nobleman, through the medium of his best affections! Yes—by torturing those ladies, I shall torture him: by subjecting them to frightful inflictions I shall punish him with awful severity. For to-morrow night, my good friends, your occupation is chalked out: for

the night after, the task will be to inveigle Esther de Medina to the house in Earl Street; and on the night after that, Lady Hatfield must also be enticed thither. How these points are to be accomplished, I will tell you when the time for action comes."

"And what do you mean to do with the two ladies when you get them there?" demanded Tim the Snammer.

"What will I do to them?" repeated Old Death, his features animated with a malignity so horrible—so reptile-like, that he was at the moment a spectacle hideous to contemplate: "what will I do to them? I will tell them all I have endured—all I have suffered at the hands of the hated—the abhorred Earl of Ellingham;—and you three will be at hand to hold them tight—to bind them—to gag them,—so that I, with a wire heated red, may——"

"What?" demanded Jeffreys impatiently.

"Blind them!" returned Old Death, sinking his voice to a whisper, which sounded hollow and sepulchral.

The three villains—villains as they were—started at the frightful intention thus announced to them.

"Yes—I will put out their beautiful eyes," said Benjamin Bones, clenching his fists with feverish excitement: "then I will leave them bound hand and foot in the house, and will send a letter to the Earl to tell him where he may seek for them! Will not such vengeance as this be sweet? Did you ever hear of a vengeance more complete? The Earl I leave unhurt, save *in mind*—and *there* he will be cruelly lacerated! But *he* must have *his eyes* to see that those whom he loves are blind—he must be spared *his* powers of vision, that he may read in the newspapers the account of those indignities which will have been shown to the corpse of his elder brother!"

And, as he feasted his imagination with these projects of diabolical vengeance, the horrible old man chuckled in his usual style,—as if it were a corpse that so chuckled!

The three miscreants, whom he had taken into his service, expressed their readiness to assist him in all his nefarious plans; for the reward he had promised them was great, and the earnest they had received was most exhilirating to their evil spirits.

The infernal project having been fully discussed, and it having been agreed that Tidmarsh should proceed with one of the three villains in the morning to Saint Luke's churchyard, to point out the precise spot where the coffin bearing the name of Thomas Rainford had been interred,—all preliminaries, in a word, having been thus settled, the old housekeeper was summoned to place the supper upon the table.

The meal was done hearty justice to; and when the things were cleared away, Old Death, who was anxious to conciliate his friends as much as possible by a show of liberality, commissioned John Jeffreys to compound a mighty jorum of punch, the ingredients for which were bountifully supplied from the cupboard, the wash-hand basin serving as a bowl.

And now the four villains—four villains as hardened and as ready for mischief as any to be found in all London—dismissed from their minds every matter of "business," and set to work to do justice to the punch.

"Come—who'll sing us a song?" exclaimed Tim the Snammer.

"Don't let us have any singing, my dear friend," said Old Death: "we shall alarm the neighbours—and it's better to be as quiet as possible."

"Well, we must do something to amuse ourselves," insisted Timothy Splint. "If we get talking, it will only be on things of which we all have quite enough in our minds; and so I vote that some one tells us a story: I'm very fond of stories—particklerly when they're true."

"I'll tell you a true story, if you like," said Jeffreys: "for I don't mind about smoking any more. In fact, I'll give you my own history—and a precious curious one it is, too."

"Do," said Josh Pedler. "But mind and don't introduce no lies into it—that's all."

"Every word is as true as gospel," observed Jeffreys.

The glasses were replenished—Old Death snuffed the candles with his withered, trembling hand—and Jeffreys then commenced his narrative, which, as in former instances, we have modelled into a readable shape.

37. Changed the notes.

CHAPTER LXXXV.
THE HISTORY OF A LIVERY-SERVANT.

"My parents were very poor, but very honest; and I was their only child. My father was a light porter in a warehouse, earning fifteen shillings a week; and my mother took in washing to obtain a few shillings more. We lived in a court leading out of High Holborn, and occupied one room, which was very decently furnished for people in my parents' condition of life, the things moreover being all their own. My father had a good suit of clothes, and my mother a nice gown, bonnet, and shawl, for Sundays and holidays; and they also took care to keep me neat and decent in my dress. Neither of them ever went to the public-house except just to fetch the beer for dinner and supper; and they were always regular in their attendance at church. In addition to all these proofs of good conduct and respectability, they put by two or three shillings a-week as a provision against a rainy day; and you may be sure that to be able to do this, they lived very economically indeed. In fact a more industrious couple did not exist than my father and mother; and you will admit that they deserved to succeed in the world. This much I have heard from people who knew them; for they died when I was too young to be able to understand their ways or judge of their merits.

"It seems that my mother was a very pretty young woman. She had been a servant in the family of the merchant in whose warehouse my father was; and, an attachment, springing up between them, they married. The merchant, whose name was Shawe, had a son—a dissipated young man, addicted to gaming and bad company, and consequently a source of great uneasiness to his parents, who were highly respectable people. During the time that my mother was in service at the merchant's, Frederick Shawe was on the Continent, his father having sent him to a commercial establishment at Rotterdam, in the hope that he would amend his ways when under the care of comparative strangers. But this hope, it appears, was completely disappointed; and the young man was after all sent back to his father's house as irreclaimable. At this time my parents had been married three years, and I was two years old. My mother was in the habit of taking my father's dinner to him at the warehouse, whenever his duties prevented him from running home to get it; and on one of these occasions, Frederick Shawe saw her as she was going out of the establishment. He followed her, made insulting proposals, and behaved most grossly. She had me with her; and this circumstance rendered his conduct the more abominable, if any thing was wanting to aggravate it. Indeed, his persecution was carried to such an excess, that she was obliged to take refuge in a shop, where she went into hysterics through fright and indignation. Shawe sneaked away the moment he found that the master of the shop was disposed to take my mother's part against him; and when she was a little recovered, she was sent home in a hackney-coach. On the return of my father in the evening, she told him all that had occurred; and it seems that she had scarcely made an end of her narrative, when Frederick Shawe entered the room. He declared that he had come to express his sincere penitence for what he had done, and to implore that his father might not be made acquainted with his behaviour. He seemed so earnest, and so excessively sorry for his infamous conduct, that my parents consented to look over it. He thanked them over and over again, and took his departure. My father, however, desired his wife never to come to the warehouse to him any more, as he was unwilling to expose her to even the chance of a repetition of the insult.

"A few weeks after this occurrence Frederick Shawe one evening, when under the influence of liquor, called at our lodgings, my father being absent, and renewed his outrageous conduct towards my mother. An alarm was created in the dwelling—a constable was sent for—and the young gentleman was taken off to the watch-house. Of course the matter was now too serious to be hushed up; and the elder Mr. Shawe necessarily learnt all the particulars. His son was fined and held to bail to keep the peace towards Mrs. Jeffreys; and my father obtained another situation—for though the old merchant knew that his son was alone to blame, yet my father thought that he could not prudently remain in a place where he must daily meet a person who, he felt convinced, was now his sworn enemy. And such indeed did Frederick Shawe prove to be; for by misrepresentations and heaven only knows what other underhand means, he so successfully avenged himself that my poor father soon lost his new situation, and was totally unable to find another. The most infamous reports were circulated concerning him; and he took the cruel treatment he had received so much to heart, that his spirit was completely broken—he fell ill, and died in a few weeks.

"Poverty and despair thus seized upon my mother at the same moment. She saw all her happiness suddenly blasted by the agency of a reckless villain; and, to add to her afflictions, the only friend who showed any compassion for her or who came forward to assist her in the midst of her wretchedness—namely, the old merchant—was suddenly snatched away by the hand of death, ten days after the earth had closed over my father's remains. The poor woman was unable to bear up against her sorrows: she languished for a few months, and then departed this life, leaving me a friendless and unprotected orphan at the tender age of three years! You may guess what then became of me: I was taken to the workhouse!

"I have sketched these circumstances just to show you how unfortunate I was in my earliest infancy. My parents would have lived to thrive and prosper had it not been for the miscreant Frederick Shawe; and under their protection I should have been happy. However, it was destined that my father and mother should be cut off thus early; and their cruel fate threw me as a pauper-child upon the parish. At the workhouse I remained until I was thirteen; and it was from an elderly couple whom distress brought to the same place, and who had known my parents well, that I learnt all the particulars which I have related to you. Well, at the age of thirteen I was transferred to

the care of a surgeon and accoucheur, who took me into his house to clean the boots and shoes, run on errands, and beat up drugs in the mortar. Finding me active and, as he said, a good-looking lad—for I was not then seared with the small-pox as I am now—he put me into the regular livery of a doctor's boy after I had been with him a few months; and I was then entrusted with the delivery of the medicine. My master was an old man; and his wife was a bustling, active, elderly lady, in whom implicit confidence might be placed as long as she was well paid for her services and her secresy. You will understand what I mean very shortly. In fact one day I noticed a great deal of whispering between the doctor, his wife, and the housekeeper; and their looks were mysterious and important. Certain preparations, too, commenced, which showed me that a visitor was expected; for I was a shrewd and observing boy for my age. I was ordered to clean the windows in the spare bed-room and the well-furnished little parlour communicating with it; and while I was thus occupied, the housekeeper put the two apartments into the nicest possible order. I asked her if any one was coming to stay at the house, and was desired to mind my own business. I accordingly held my tongue; but my curiosity was only the more excited in consequence of the answer I received and the mystery in which the motive of the preparations in progress was involved. At an earlier hour than usual I was ordered to retire to my own room; but as it commanded a view of the street—it was Brook Street, Holborn—I sate up, watching at my window—for I felt sure that I had not been dismissed to my attic without some good reason. Nor was I mistaken. At about half-past ten a hackney-coach drove up to the door: two trunks were carried into the house, and a lady, muffled in a cloak, was assisted to descend from the vehicle by the doctor and his wife, who seemed to treat her with the greatest respect. I was able to notice all that passed, because the moon was bright and I was looking out of the open window. The lady accompanied the doctor and his wife in-doors; and the coach drove away.

"Next morning I saw the housekeeper take up a breakfast-tray to those rooms which I had now no doubt were occupied by the lady who had arrived the night before; but I was cautious not to appear even to notice that any thing unusual was going on, much less to ask questions,—for I remembered the rebuff I had already received in this latter respect. The cook and housemaid were as mysteriously reserved as the housekeeper herself; and I could not for the life of me make out what it all meant. To be brief, a month passed away; and though I never saw the tenant of the spare-rooms all the while, yet I knew that a tenant those rooms had; for the meals were regularly taken up—the doctor looked in there two or three times a day—and his wife passed hours together there. At length the housemaid, who was a pretty, wicked-looking girl of about nineteen, undertook to initiate me into the secret which so much puzzled me; and, taking advantage of a Sunday evening when she and I were alone together, the other servants having gone out, she explained how some young lady, who was not married, was about to become a mother—and how the spare-rooms were always kept for lodgers of that kind.—'Have you seen her?' I asked.—'No,' she replied; 'nor am I likely to see her. I have been four years in this house, and during that time there have been eight or ten ladies here in the same way; but I never caught a glimpse of the face of any one of them. They pay, or their friends pay for them, a good round sum to master for the accommodation; and that is the manner in which he has made so much money; for you can see that his regular practice is not very great. But you must not tell any body that I have been talking to you in this style, John; or else I shall lose my place.'—I promised her not to betray her.—'How old are you, John?' she asked.—'Going on for fourteen,' I said.—'You are a pretty boy,' she continued. 'Would you like to give me a kiss?'—'You would think me very rude,' I answered.—'No, I shouldn't: try.'—'But I should feel so ashamed,' I said.—'Then you are a fool, John,' exclaimed the pretty housemaid; and she got into a pet, which lasted all the rest of the evening.

"I lay awake a long time that night thinking of what I had heard concerning the lady in the private apartments; and, I can't say how it was—but I felt an extraordinary longing to catch a glimpse of her. The more I reflected on this wish, the stronger it grew: and at last I determined to gratify it somehow or another. Having come to this resolution I fell asleep. Next morning the twopenny postman at eight o'clock brought a letter directed to my master; but in the corner were two or three initials which I could not quite make out. I took it into the parlour, where the doctor was seated alone at the time; and, when he had glanced at the address, he said, 'Oh! it is to go up stairs: give it to the housekeeper:'—and he went on reading his newspaper. Here was an opportunity which presented itself almost as soon as my desire to see the tenant of the spare-rooms had been formed; and, without any hesitation, I hurried upstairs. I knocked at the door of the parlour communicating with the bed-chamber; and a sweet voice said, 'Come in.' I accordingly entered the room and beheld a beautiful creature of about seventeen or eighteen, dressed in a morning wrapper, all open at the bosom, and reclining in an arm-chair. She uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw me, and drew the wrapper completely over her breast. It was evident that she had expected to see either the housekeeper or my mistress. I handed her the note, stammered out something about 'Master having told me to bring it up,' and then retired, awkward and embarrassed enough. A few minutes afterwards the bell of the spare-rooms was rung rather violently; and the housekeeper went up. She shortly came down again, and went into the parlour, to which I was presently summoned. The doctor and his wife were seated at the breakfast-table, looking as gloomy and solemn as possible, and the housekeeper was standing in the middle of the room. I suspected that a storm was brewing. 'John,' said the doctor, 'what induced you to take such a liberty as to enter the apartments of a lady who is lodging in my house?'—'Please, sir,' I answered, as boldly as possible, 'you told me to take up the letter; and I did so.'—The doctor, his wife, and the housekeeper looked at each other by turns; and then they all three looked very hard at me. 'Well,' said the doctor, 'I suppose it *was* a misunderstanding on the boy's part;'—for I did not blush nor seem at all confused while they were all staring at me.—'But you must not tell any one that you saw the lady up stairs, John,' exclaimed my mistress.—'I don't know a soul who would care about knowing such a simple thing, ma'am,' I replied, pretending to be very innocent indeed. I was then told to withdraw; and thus passed off this little affair.

"Throughout that day I saw the pretty housemaid showing great anxiety to speak to me alone; but circumstances so occurred, that we had not an opportunity of exchanging a word in private together. At half-past nine I went to bed as usual, an hour before the other servants; and I soon fell asleep. But I was awoke by some one shaking me gently; and I was also startled by seeing a light in the room. In another moment my fears subsided; for my visitor was the pretty servant-girl in her night-gear. She sate down on the edge of the bed, and asked me what I was called into the parlour for in the morning. I told her all that had occurred. 'You are a dear boy,' she said 'not to have confessed that I had put you up to any thing; for that was what I was afraid of:'—and she gave me two or three hearty

kisses. Then she asked me a great number of questions about the lady I had seen—what she was like—how old—the colour of her hair and eyes—and all sorts of queries of that kind. I replied as well as I could; and she seemed vastly to enjoy the idea of my cool impudence in taking up the letter just for the sake of getting a peep at the lady. In fact she was so much pleased with me, that she kept on kissing me; and all this ended just as you might suppose—for the pretty housemaid shared my bed during the remainder of the night. This occurrence was most unfortunate to us both; for we over-slept ourselves,—and the housekeeper, doubtless having vainly searched for us down stairs, came up to look after us. We were discovered fast asleep in each other's arms; and a terrible scene ensued. The housekeeper alarmed the doctor and his wife with her cries—for I suppose the old lady was quite scandalised, though she herself had often chucked me under the chin in a tender manner. The result was that the pretty housemaid was packed off without delay; and I was stripped of my livery, compelled to put on my workhouse clothes again, and sent back to the parish officers.

"At the very moment when I was conveyed into the presence of the overseers by the doctor, a middle-aged lady, magnificently dressed, was returning to her carriage which waited at the door. She immediately recognised the doctor as an acquaintance, and he addressed her by the name of Mrs. Beaumont. The exchange of a few remarks led the lady to observe that she had applied to the parish officers for a well-conducted, genteel-looking lad to take the place of a page in her household; and, as she spoke, she eyed me very attentively. The doctor informed her that I had been in his service and was a good boy in all respects save one:—and he explained to her the indiscretion which had compelled him to part with me; adding, 'The lad was no doubt won over by the young woman herself; but as my professional success depends on the reputation of my house, I could not overlook this occurrence.'—The lady declared that she entertained great compassion for me, and said what a pity it was that such a nice boy should be thrown back on the parish. In a word, the business ended by her agreeing to take me on trial; and, before the doctor left me, he whispered in my ear, 'You see, John, that I have not ruined your character as I might have done; and therefore you must be a good lad, and never mention to any one that you saw the lady who is now lodging at my house.'—He then took his departure; and Mrs. Beaumont, having arranged with the overseers relative to receiving me into her service, desired that I might be sent to her abode in the evening. The instructions were obeyed; and I entered my new place, the first appearances of which pleased me much.

"Mrs. Beaumont was a widow-lady of about six-and-forty, and was still a very handsome woman considering her age. Her house was in Russell Square; and she lived in an elgant style—keeping a butler, a footman, and three female domestics. She had a Miss Stacey residing with her as a companion; and this lady was about five or six-and-twenty—somewhat stout—and rather good-looking. The moment I entered my new place, I was supplied with a page's livery, and was informed that I was to consider myself at the orders of the butler. I soon found that I had got into very comfortable quarters; for the best of provisions were consumed in the kitchen as well as in the parlour, and the butler, who was fond of a glass of good liquor himself, often treated me to some likewise. Mrs. Beaumont saw a great deal of company; and there were dinner-parties or evening-parties at least three or four times every week. I had not been many days in this place, before I began to notice that both Mrs. Beaumont and Miss Stacey treated me with much the same kind of innocent familiarity which the housekeeper at the doctor's had shown towards me. They would pat me on the cheek, or chuck me under the chin, and tell me I was nice boy: but this they never did before each other—only when I happened to be alone with either one of them. Indeed, when they *were* together, and I entered the room to answer the bell or for any other purpose connected with my duties, they would both appear as indifferent towards me as if they had never shown any other feeling in my behalf. Of the two I liked Miss Stacey much the best, because she was younger; and I felt a strange excitement come over me whenever she began to toy about with me in the way I have described. One day, when I entered the drawing room, where I found her alone at the time, she said to me, 'John, you are a very nice boy; and here is half-a-guinea for you to buy what you like. Only don't let any one know that I gave you the money.'—'Certainly not, Miss,' I replied.—'And now, John,' she continued, 'I want you to answer me a question which I am going to put to you. Will you tell me the truth?'—I of course declared that I would.—'Then tell me,' she said, patting my face, and looking full at me with her large blue eyes, 'does Mrs. Beaumont ever play about with you as I do?'—'Oh! never, Miss,' I answered immediately, and without undergoing the least change of countenance.—'You are a good boy, John,' she said; and pulling me towards her, covered me with kisses. A double-knock at the front-door interrupted her amusement, which, as you may suppose, I took in very good part; and she hurried me out of the room, enjoining me not to tell any one that she played about with me.

"The next day Mrs. Beaumont was rather indisposed, and kept her own chamber until the evening, when she descended to the drawing-room. Miss Stacey had gone out to a party at a married sister's; and, the footman being absent likewise, it devolved upon me to take up the tea-tray. 'Well, John,' said my mistress, 'are you comfortable in your present place?'—'Quite, thank you, ma'am,' I replied.—'You like it better than the doctor's?' she continued, smoothing down my hair, and then passing her hand over my face.—'Oh! a great deal ma'am.'—'But do you not miss the pretty servant-girl, John?' she asked, with a sly look and a half smile. 'Why, what a naughty boy you must be, and at such an age too!'—'It was all the young woman's fault, ma'am,' I said; 'and I hope you do not think any the worse of me for it.'—'If I had I should not have taken you into my service, John,' she answered. 'And to show you that I am really attached to you and consider you to be a very good boy, here's a sovereign for you. It is not on account of your wages, mind; but a little gift. You must not however tell any body that I gave it to you, or else you will make the other servants jealous.'—'I'll be sure not to tell, ma'am,' I said: 'and I thank you very much.'—'And now, John,' continued Mrs. Beaumont, 'I have one question to put to you, and you must tell me the truth. Does Miss Stacey ever speak kindly to you? I mean, does she ever do any thing to show you that she likes you better than the other servants?'—'No, ma'am,' I replied. 'On the contrary, I fancy she sometimes speaks sharp to me.'—'Oh! indeed,' said Mrs. Beaumont; and she then subjected me to the same kissing process that I had undergone on the part of Miss Stacey—only I did not like it quite so well. The old lady hugged me very tight, and seemed as if she wanted to say something, but did not exactly like to do so. At last she spoke out plainly enough, though in a whispering tone. 'John,' she said, 'I just now gave you a sovereign, because you are a good boy; and I will give you another if you will do what I ask you and not tell any one about it. Should you like to have another sovereign?'—'Very much indeed, ma'am,' I answered.—'Well, then,' continued Mrs. Beaumont, 'you must come to my room to-night, when the house is all quiet; because I want to speak to you very particularly indeed.'—'But I promised the servants, ma'am, to sit up to let Miss Stacey in,' I answered.—'So much the better,' observed Mrs. Beaumont. 'Miss Stacey has promised to be back by twelve at latest; and as soon as you have let her in, you can go up to your own room, and then a few minutes afterwards come down to mine.'—I

promised to do exactly as I was desired; and, having received a few more kisses and pawings about, was suffered to return to the kitchen.

"The footman came back at eleven; and as Mrs. Beaumont had already retired to her chamber, all the servants except myself went off to theirs. I then remained alone in the kitchen, thinking of what had occurred between my mistress and myself, and not half liking the idea of sleeping with her—for I knew very well what her object was in asking me to go to her room. I wished it had been Miss Stacey who had made such an appointment with me; for, young as I was, I was greatly smitten with that lady; and I thought she had never looked so well as when I saw her that evening dressed for the party to which she had gone. She had on a very low gown, and her neck was so beautifully white, and her naked arms seemed so plump, that I was really quite in love with her. It gave me great pleasure to think that I had been chosen to sit up for her, and I longed for her return. The clock struck twelve; and a few minutes afterwards a vehicle stopped at the door. I knew it must be Miss Stacey who had come back; and I did not wait for the knock and ring, but hurried to the hall to admit her. She seemed pleased when she saw who it was that opened the door for her; and I observed that her countenance was rather flushed, as if she had been drinking an extra glass of champagne, of which I knew she was very fond. The moment I had closed and bolted the door, she asked me in a low whisper, whether any of the other servants were up. I answered in the negative.—'Does your mistress know that you are sitting up for me?' she next inquired.—'No, Miss,' I unhesitatingly said.—She began to caress me, and I found that she smelt rather strong of wine; but she looked so nice that I did not care about that; and I was so excited that I kissed her in return.—'Light me up stairs, John,' she at length said; 'and let us go as gently as possible, so as not to make any noise, on account of Mrs. Beaumont, who is unwell.'—I led the way up stairs, my heart beating violently; for I more than half suspected that I should not keep my appointment with my mistress that night. Nor was I mistaken: for, on reaching the door of Miss Stacey's chamber, she took my hand, drew me towards her, and said in a low, hurried whisper, 'Come down to my room in about a quarter of an hour: I wish to speak to you very particularly indeed.'—I promised to do so, and hurried up to my own chamber, Miss Stacey having previously lighted her candle and said, 'Good night, John,' in a tolerably loud voice, but making a sign to convince me that it was only a precaution on her part. When I reached my room, I sate down on the bed to think how I should act. My inclination prompted me to keep the appointment with Miss Stacey: my fears urged me to keep the one given me by Mrs. Beaumont. I cared nothing about the sovereign promised me by my mistress, now that I had received such an invitation from her pretty companion; and I thought that it would be very easy to excuse myself to Mrs. Beaumont, should she question me next day, by saying that I fancied her to be only joking, or perhaps trying me. So, at last, I resolved to follow my inclinations, and disregard my fears; and I acted in pursuance of this determination. I accordingly repaired to Miss Stacey's room, and was completely happy.

"We had been an hour together, when a knock at the door alarmed us. Who could it be? what could it mean? We remained silent as the dead. The knock was repeated, and was immediately followed by Mrs. Beaumont's voice, saying, 'Miss Stacey, dear! Miss Stacey!'—'Good God! what can she want?' whispered Miss Stacey to me; 'she is perhaps unwell, and will come into the room to speak to me. John, my dear boy, you must get under the bed, and keep as quiet as a mouse.'—This was done in a moment, and Miss Stacey bundled my clothes under the bed after me. She then opened the door, and, sure enough, my mistress entered the room, saying, 'I am sorry to disturb you, my dear; but I am so unwell I cannot sleep. I have got such nervous feelings that I am really afraid to be alone.'—'Had I not better call up one of the servants and send for the doctor, my dear madam?' asked Miss Stacey, her voice trembling; I could well conjecture why.—'No, thank you, dear,' answered the lady; 'if you have no objection, I will pass the remainder of the night with you.'—'Oh! with pleasure, ma'am,' exclaimed Miss Stacey. 'I will accompany you to your room directly.'—'We may as well remain here,' replied Mrs. Beaumont; and it struck me that there was something strange in the way that she spoke. Miss Stacey urged that it was very injurious for persons in delicate health to change their beds; but Mrs. Beaumont declared it to be a mere prejudice. Miss Stacey invented some other frivolous excuse, and I suppose that this confirmed Mrs. Beaumont's suspicions; for she immediately exclaimed, 'Really, one would suppose that you wished to get rid of me, Miss Stacey!'—'To speak candidly, my dear madam,' was the reply, 'I can't bear sleeping with another person.'—'Indeed!' said Mrs. Beaumont. 'Hey day! what shoes have we here? Why, surely these cannot be your's, my dear?'—I have noticed that the more spiteful ladies are together, the more they '*dear*' each other.—'It must be some oversight on the part of one of the servants,' said Miss Stacey, in a faint tone.—'It's very strange!' cried Mrs. Beaumont; and I heard her stoop down and take up the unfortunate shoes. Oh! how I did shiver and tremble! and how sincerely I wished both the amorous ladies at the devil at that moment! But matters grew speedily much worse; for, in stooping down to pick up the shoes, Mrs. Beaumont had spied my trowsers; and these she fished up in another moment. Miss Stacey shrieked; Mrs. Beaumont raised the drapery hanging round the bed to the floor—and, behold! by the light of the candle which had been left burning in the room, she discovered unfortunate me!

"I cannot tell you what a scene ensued. Mrs. Beaumont raved like a mad-woman, and Miss Stacey protested her innocence. The house was alarmed—the other servants came down to the door—and Mrs. Beaumont's reproaches and upbraidings, levelled against Miss Stacey and myself, made every thing known to them. I scarcely know how I had pluck enough to play the part which I did play; but it is, notwithstanding, a fact that I was resolved to screen Miss Stacey, and throw all the scandal on Mrs. Beaumont. I accordingly begged to be allowed to explain; and when I could obtain a hearing, I swore that Mrs. Beaumont had given me a sovereign, and promised me another to sleep with her—that I had mistaken the room—and that the moment I had seen Miss Stacey enter and perceived my error, I had managed to creep under the bed, unnoticed by her. Mrs. Beaumont went into strong hysterics at this accusation, and was conveyed away to her own apartment by the female servants, while I hurried off to my own room. You may suppose that I scarcely slept a wink all the remainder of the night. I knew that I had lost both my place and my character—but I felt satisfied in having done all I could to screen poor Miss Stacey, though it did not strike me at the time that my version of the business could not possibly be taken as a very probable story. Next morning the butler came up to me very early, and in a long, humbugging speech, assured me that, out of good feeling towards me, Mrs. Beaumont had consented to keep me in her service, and look over the affair, if I would confess the truth. I however persisted in my original statement, and displayed the sovereign that Mrs. Beaumont had given me. The butler went away, telling me not to leave my room until he came back. Half an hour passed before he returned, and again he tried to argue me into his views; but I was obstinate, and the interview ended by his desiring me to pack up my things and leave the house directly. This I very

willingly agreed to, and in a few minutes my preparations were complete. 'Where are you going to, youngster?' asked the butler, when he had paid me the amount of wages due.—'I don't know,' was my reply.—'Well,' he said, 'I should advise you to take a room at the family washerwoman's. She has got one to let, I know; and if you hold your tongue about what has occurred in this house, I will try and get you another place.' I readily gave the required promise, and also followed the advice relative to the lodging, in which I was installed in another half hour.

"In the evening the butler came to me, and gave me the addresses of several families in whose service pages were wanted. 'You will have to apply to the butlers at those houses,' he said, 'and therefore you can refer them to me. I will endeavour to make it all right for you, as I should be sorry to see a promising young lad ruined for want of a character.' I thanked him very much, pretending to see nothing but pure friendship in his conduct, although I was quite enough experienced in the ways of the world to understand that Mrs. Beaumont herself had instigated this lenient treatment as a means of sealing my lips. I ventured to ask him about Miss Stacey, and he at once told me that she had left the house at a very early hour in the morning. I longed to enquire if he knew where she was gone, but dared not. On the following day I called at the various addresses which the butler had given me, and was not considered suitable at any. At one I was thought too young—at another too old: here I was too short—there I was too tall. In fact, the objections were trivial, but fatal. I was returning to my lodging along Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, when I saw in a shop window a notice that a livery boy was wanted, and that applications were to be made within. I entered the shop, and received the address of a house in the same street. There I went, and was shown into a small parlour, where I was kept waiting for nearly a quarter of an hour. At last a gentleman and lady—an elderly couple—entered the room, and I was immediately subjected to no end of questions, all of which I answered in the most satisfactory manner, because I did not hesitate to say 'Yes' when an affirmation was required, and 'No' when a negative was necessary. At last the gentleman said to the lady, 'Well, my love, what do *you* think?'—'What do *you* think, my dear?' asked the lady.—'I think, my dear——' began the gentleman.—'So do I, Mr. Turner,' exclaimed the lady, without waiting to hear what her husband *did* think. It however appeared that they perfectly well understood each other; for the lady, turning towards me, said, 'We will give you a trial if the butler at your last place speaks as well of you as you assure us he will. But you will have to be very active here, for I must tell you that this is a boarding-house——'.—'A boarding-house of the highest respectability,' interrupted the gentleman, looking very solemn indeed, as if he was afraid that I was going to say I didn't believe him.—'And there are many ladies and gentlemen to wait upon,' continued Mrs. Turner: 'but we shall see.' I then withdrew. Mr. Turner went about my character in the evening, and found every thing satisfactory; and next day I entered my new place, wondering what adventures would befal me here.

"This boarding-house proved to be the hardest place I ever was in. I had to get up at five in the morning to clean six pairs of boots and ten pairs of ladies' shoes. If they did not shine well, I was blown up on all sides; and if I did make them shine well, Mrs. Turner blew me up for wasting the blacking. Then I had to bees-wax heaven knows how many chairs and tables, and to clean the windows from top to bottom at least twice a-week. In the middle of my work I was constantly interrupted by knocks at the door, or errands to run upon. Then at meal-times something was always wanting—something had always been forgotten. The cleaning of knives and plated forks and spoons would have alone been a good four hours' work for a strong man. If I did them properly and devoted time to them, I was scolded for being slow and lazy: and if I knocked them off in a hurry, they were sure to be found fault with. Sometimes the bells of half a dozen rooms would ring in the morning, when the boarders were getting up, all at the same instant; and if I was long in taking up any particular gentleman's hot water to shave, or any lady's shoes, I was certain to hear of it when Mrs. Turner came down into the kitchen. In fact, it was a hard life, and an unthankful office; for when I did my best, I could not give satisfaction; and yet the cook and housemaid—the only servants kept besides myself—were candid enough to declare that I was the best lad that had ever been in the house during their time.

"There was one elderly lady—a Miss Marigold—who seemed to have taken a particular hatred for me; and only because when, one day, she began to caress me in the same way that Mrs. Beaumont and Miss Stacey had done, I laughed in her face and told her to keep her wrinkled old hands to herself. From that minute she grew desperately malignant against me, and was always finding fault. I determined to have my revenge, and waited patiently for the opportunity. That occasion came at last. One evening Miss Marigold retired earlier to bed than usual; and Mrs. Turner rang for me in the parlour. I went up and found my mistress alone. 'John,' she said, 'go directly with this box,'—pointing to a round paste-board one on the table—'to the hair-dresser's, and tell him that you will call for it at eight precisely to-morrow morning. Then, in the morning, when you come back with it, send it up by the housemaid to Miss Marigold's room.'—I took the box, which was tied round with string, and was particularly light. It immediately struck me that it must be Miss Marigold's wig: for I was convinced she wore one. Accordingly, as I went along the street, I stepped up an alley; and by the light coming from the window of a house, unfastened the strings to peep inside. Sure enough, it was Miss Marigold's wig. It immediately struck me that her going to bed earlier than usual was only an excuse to be able to send her wig in time for the hair-dresser to do it up that night; and this circumstance, joined to the fact that she wanted it the very next morning, convinced me that Miss Marigold had but one wig belonging to her. I therefore resolved that some accident should occur to the wig before it went back to her; but in the meantime I took it to the hair-dresser. He seemed to understand what it was; for without opening the box, the strings of which I had carefully re-fastened, he promised me that I should have *the article* when I came back in the morning, shortly before eight.

"I must now inform you that there was an elderly gentleman at the boarding-house, whose name was Prosser. Captain Prosser he was called; and a jovial kind of old bird he was too. He was amazingly fond of breaking out now and then, staying away all night, and coming home between six and seven in the morning, so precious drunk that he could not see a hole through a ladder. But he was always sensible enough to know that he must not make a noise; and when I let him in on these occasions, he would put his fore-finger by the side of his nose in such a comical fashion, as much as to say, 'Don't let any body know it!' that I could scarcely keep from laughing. Well, on this very night, when the affair of the wig occurred, the Captain went out for a spree; and it happened that he came home rather later than usual the next morning. I had just returned with the wig-box, and had it still in my hand, when the Captain's low sneaking knock at the door summoned me to open it. He came in worse than I had ever seen him before: he could scarcely keep upon his legs, and his head rolled about on his shoulders just as if he had no bones in his neck at all. His hat, too, was smashed completely

in; and his coat was slit completely up the back to the very collar. Such a comical figure I never saw in my life. He staggered into the hall, seeming quite to forget where he was, or what he wanted there. A thought struck me, and I resolved to put it into execution. He was so uncommonly drunk, and yet so quiet and tractable, that I saw I could do with him just as I liked: so I led him into the parlour where the long table was laid for breakfast; but no one had come down yet. I seated him on the sofa in such a way that he could not fall off, and in a few moment he was in a sound sleep. I removed his hat, took the wig from the box and fixed it all awry upon his head, purposely tumbling all the curls, so as to make it appear as if he had thus adorned himself with his own hand. I then stole away from the room; and, having suffered about ten minutes to elapse, so as to bring the time nearer to breakfast before the exposure should take place, I went into the kitchen to tell the housemaid that there was a box in the parlour which she must presently take up to Miss Marigold. But she, not knowing what the box might contain, waited a few minutes more to finish something that she was about; and I did not choose to hurry her. At last Miss Marigold's bell rang; and I laughed in my sleeve to think that the poor lady would vainly wait for her wig. The housemaid hastened to answer the summons, and I followed her as far as the parlour, under pretence of taking up some plates for the breakfast-table. But just before we reached that room, seven or eight of the boarders, ladies and gentlemen alike, came pouring down stairs to breakfast; and the moment they entered the parlour, such screams of amazement burst from the women, and such roars of laughter from the men. The housemaid hurried into the room, and I behind her; and almost immediately afterwards in came Mr. and Mrs. Turner, and all the rest of the boarders, except poor Miss Marigold!

"And what a sight burst upon their view! The screams and the roars of laughter had awoke Captain Prosser; and he was sitting, propping himself up, in the corner of the sofa, and looking stupidly about him, as if quite unconscious of where he was, and certainly ignorant of the reason which drew all eyes upon him. Such a comical spectacle as he was, with the wig perched all crooked upon his head! At length the ladies began to give vent to their indignant feelings. 'Shameful!' said one.—'Well, I never!' cried another.—'And *this* in a respectable boarding-house!' exclaimed a third.—'It all comes of having such a monster as the Captain in the place!' observed a fourth.—'But whose wig is it?' cried one of the gentlemen, a humorous fellow in his way; and, approaching the leather box, he took it up. 'MISS MARIGOLD!' at length he exclaimed, his eyes catching some writing in the inside.—Mrs. Turner, who had suspected the ownership of the wig, declared that she should go into hysterics; but her husband begged her not to do any thing of the kind; and so she followed his advice. Of course no suspicion fell upon me. When questioned, I said that I had brought home the box without knowing its contents; that I had put it on the sofa; and that before I had gone down stairs to tell the housemaid to take it up to Miss Marigold, I had opened the front door to let in the Captain. The thing was therefore clear:—the Captain had come in, in a state for which he ought to be ashamed of himself; and nothing would please him but he must decorate himself with poor Miss Marigold's wig! Such was the explanation agreed upon by all present; and while two or three of the gentlemen conveyed the Captain up to his own room, the wig having been previously removed from his head, Mrs. Turner went up to break the fatal news to Miss Marigold. To make an end of this part of my story, I need only say, that Miss Marigold left the house on the sly the moment her wig was done up again by the hair-dresser; and Mrs. Turner easily persuaded the ladies to forgive the Captain, on condition that he would stand a dozen of wine—which he did.

"Several months passed away after this incident without any adventure worth relating. It was a most unpleasant place; but there was amusement in it; and moreover there was a certain love-affair in progress, in which I felt interested, and the end of which I was determined to wait and see. Not that I was an actor in it at all; but only a go-between. The fact was, that amongst the boarders there was a widow-lady, of about seven or eight and twenty—a very pretty woman, whose name was Percy. There was also a young gentleman of very effeminate appearance, but possessing a handsome—or rather a beautiful countenance, and a very slight figure. He was also short—a complete doll of a man; for he was within four years as old as the widow. His name was Hulse. This couple fell in love with each other: or rather, I think, the love was all on the side of the young gentleman, who possessed some little property and better prospects, whereas the widow was notorious as a husband-hunter ever since she had been in the boarding-house, and was moreover very poor. She was however sweetly pretty; and she had such wicked eyes that it gave me strange sensations to meet her looks. It was in this way that I came to know of the love-matter existing between Mr. Hulse and Mrs. Percy. About the time when the adventure of the wig took place, Mr. Hulse one evening asked me to give a letter privately to the widow-lady; and he slipped half-a-crown into my hands. You may have already seen that I possessed no small degree of curiosity, and I longed to know what that letter could possibly contain. I took it up into my own room with me, and tried to catch a glimpse at the writing inside; but it was so carefully folded that I could not. At last, to my joy, I perceived that the wax was stamped with a seal which was invariably left lying in the ink-stand drawer in the parlour, for the general use of the boarders. I therefore hesitated no longer to open the letter, breaking the wax as carefully as possible. The letter was a declaration of love, the writer stating that he had not courage to make the avowal in words; and he implored a written answer, observing that the lad John was to be trusted, as he seemed a quiet steady youth. I was much amused by the letter, and early next morning I re-sealed it by means of the stamp in the ink-stand drawer: then, watching the opportunity when Mrs. Percy descended to breakfast, I gave it to her as she was coming down stairs. In the evening she put into my hands an answer, accompanied by a shilling for myself; and as she smiled significantly, and showed her pretty white teeth, I felt that I could do any thing to obtain a kiss from that sweet mouth. Fortunately this letter was also fastened with the house-seal, and I was therefore able to read its contents. It thanked Mr. Hulse for the favourable opinion he had entertained of her, and stated that she felt she could love him, but that she required a more explicit avowal of his intentions. This letter I re-sealed and gave to the young gentleman. A reply was ready in the evening; and another half-crown was slipped into my hand. This letter I likewise read, and found that Mr. Hulse professed the most honourable intentions, but begged that their engagement (should the correspondence have that result) might be kept a secret, as he had an uncle (from whom he had considerable expectations) to consult, but who was at present abroad and would not be in England again for several months. The lady's answer, which also passed through my hands, was quite satisfactory; and in the course of a few days I saw that the tender pair exchanged significant looks when they thought themselves unperceived, and that Mr. Hulse was gradually losing much of his bashfulness. Nevertheless frequent notes passed between them, and several presents were made to the lady by the young gentleman, all of which went through my hands and were duly inspected by me. It may seem strange that two people living in the same house should require the aid of a go-between; but such was the fact—for I believe Mr. Hulse to have been one of the very

sentimental and romantic class of lovers who are fond of mystery and of tender correspondence.

"This absurd courtship went on for several months; and the lovers little suspected that I was as well acquainted with its progress as themselves. At length I perceived by one of Mr. Hulse's letters that his uncle was expected home in a few days, and he spoke of the necessity which would compel him to go on a visit to the old gentleman, but also expressed his hopes that the result would be according to the wishes of the lady and himself. And in less than a week he did depart on the proposed visit, having previously exchanged most tender and affectionate letters with the widow. The very next morning a new boarder arrived—a gentleman who in every respect was quite different from Mr. Hulse. He was tall, largely-made, and wore a great deal of hair about his face. Without being handsome, he was a very fine man; and he talked away at a rapid rate, getting on good terms with all the other boarders by the time breakfast was over, and very intimate indeed before the cloth was removed after dinner. He sate next to the widow, to whom he paid great attention; and she appeared very well satisfied with his civilities. In fact, in one single day he made more progress in thrusting himself into the good graces of Mrs. Percy than Mr. Hulse had done in a week. The name which the gentleman bore at the house was Jameson; but I did not believe it to be his right one, because his hat had the initials of F. S. in it; the same letters were marked, as I heard from the housemaid, on all his linen; and they were also described by means of brass nails on the lid of his trunk. However, a few days passed; and I saw that Mr. Jameson and Mrs. Percy were becoming more and more intimate. They sate together at meals—they lounged together on the sofa in the drawing-room—and, as I watched them narrowly, I saw that they exchanged glances which convinced me that Mr. Hulse had been forgotten by the faithless lady. Somehow or another I took an immediate hatred to Mr. Jameson, the moment he set foot in the house; and this feeling was increased by his harsh and commanding ways towards me. I was moreover sorry for Mr. Hulse, who had been kind and generous in his behaviour to me; and I longed to do Jameson some evil turn. The opportunity arrived sooner than I expected; for one morning—about a fortnight after he had arrived at the establishment—I was accosted in the street, when going on an errand, by an ill-looking fellow who was loitering about, and who said he wanted to speak to me particularly. I asked him his business; but he would not exactly explain it. He however said he was very anxious to learn some tidings of a certain gentleman, and that he had received a hint of the person alluded to being at a boarding-house in Great Russell Street, under a feigned name. It instantly struck me that the gentleman thus enquired about was Jameson; and I was moreover convinced, by the appearance of the enquirer, that he had no good intentions towards the individual whom he was seeking. I therefore readily gave such information as convinced the man that Mr. Jameson was the person he was looking for; and I then learnt, to my astonishment, that this Mr. Jameson's real name was Frederick Shawe! I now showed myself so much interested in the affair, and expressed myself in so hostile a way relative to Mr. Frederick Shawe, that the man at last admitted to me that he was a sheriffs'-officer's follower, and had a writ against the man who, I was convinced by all I now heard, was the same that had treated my deceased parents in so scandalous a manner. We did not part before we came to an understanding together; and I returned to the boarding-house, overjoyed to think that the moment of vengeance was not very far distant.

"The dinner-hour was five o'clock; and on the day of which I am speaking, there was company present besides the boarders. Mr. Jameson, as usual, sate next to Mrs. Percy; and his attentions were of the most amiable description. Had Mr. Hulse returned at the moment, he would not have been very well pleased at the way in which she received them. But a storm was brewing over the head of the successful rival; and I was longing for it to burst. Towards the close of the meal Jameson asked me for a glass of porter. I pretended not to hear him, and waited on some one else. He called me again; and when I at length drew near his chair to serve him, he said in a harsh voice, 'You're very neglectful, John; and I wonder how Mrs. Turner can keep such a stupid boy in the house.'—'Then why don't you ask her to discharge me, *Mr. Shawe*?' I said.—You should have seen how he turned—first as white as a sheet, and then as red as scarlet.—'*Mr. Jameson* you mean, John,' exclaimed Mr. Turner. 'Call gentlemen by their proper names, and don't be rude, sir, or you shall leave the house directly.'—'I did call *this gentleman* by his proper name, sir,' I answered: 'and that name is *Shawe*.'—'The poor boy is labouring under a mistake,' said Shawe, dreadfully confused and stammering as he spoke; 'but don't be harsh with him: he did not intend any harm.'—'I do not want *you* to speak in favour of me, sir,' I exclaimed; 'and perhaps you'll guess why, when you know that my name is *Jeffreys*.'—The villain's countenance now showed the most awful dismay; and the scene produced great excitement amongst all present. But at that moment, a knock at the front-door was heard; and I ran to answer it, well knowing who were there. How my heart beat with joy when I admitted the officer and his follower (the man I had seen in the morning) into the house; and, without caring how my master and mistress might take it on my part, I threw open the dining-room door, led the officers in, and, pointing to the person they wanted, said, '*This* is Mr Frederick Shawe!' The officers instantly arrested him; and a scene of extraordinary confusion followed. Mrs. Turner fainted in right earnest, and while several of the ladies flocked round her, others began tittering and whispering, and Mr. Turner requested Mr. Shawe to pay his bill before he went to prison. But the conduct of Mrs. Percy was the most extraordinary part of the whole performance. It is, however, most probable that she acted in the way she did to conceal her vexation and annoyance. For, bursting out into a loud laugh, and casting a look of contempt at the man with whom she was on such good terms a few minutes before, she expressed her surprise that '*fellows of his stamp* should dare to force their way into *genteel society*!'—To be brief, Mr. Turner could not get the amount of his claim on Shawe, whose trunks he accordingly detained; and the scoundrel was conveyed away by the officers. I followed the party to the street-door, and took good care to let Shawe know that it was I who had betrayed him. The exposure of this person caused such a sensation in the house, that my share in it created a feeling of curiosity; and, when questioned by Mr. Turner before all the company, I explained how he had treated my parents, so that I was rather praised than blamed for what I had done. But Mrs. Percy applauded me the most, and spoke warmly in my favour—at which I was very much pleased.

"Two or three days after this occurrence, Mr. Hulse returned—but only for a few hours; and during that time he was alone with Mrs. Percy in the parlour. The nature of their interview was soon known throughout the house; for it appeared that the news he had brought from his uncle were favourable, and their engagement was now no longer kept secret. It was fortunate for the widow that he did not remain in the boarding-house until their marriage; for, if he had, some kind friend would have been sure to tell him of the flirtation that had gone on between herself and the scoundrel Shawe. As it was, every thing turned out well: Mr. Hulse took and furnished a nice house in Bloomsbury-square, and in a few weeks he and Mrs. Percy were married. My former services were not forgotten by either;

but, on the contrary, were rewarded on the wedding-day by a guinea from the gentleman and half that sum from the lady. I had thus seen the end of this very extraordinary courtship, and being thoroughly tired of my place, began to look out for another. I accordingly made the usual enquiries, and heard of several vacancies. My very first application was successful, and I was engaged by the Honourable Mr. Ilverton, Mr. Turner giving me a good character and expressing no dissatisfaction at my desire '*to better myself*.'

"The Honourable Mr. Ilverton resided in St. James's Square. He was a gentleman of about forty years of age, and was on the point of marriage with a lady much younger than himself, and who was one of the numerous daughters of the Marquis of Mountcharlton. But as Mr. Ilverton was very rich, and the Marquis was but a poor peer, the match was considered a very desirable one by the friends of Lady Hortensia Stanhope. I heard my fellow-servants in my new place say that she was a very beautiful creature; and I longed to see her; but six weeks were yet to elapse before the celebration of the marriage. The place was a very nice one; and the establishment was on a large scale. There were six female servants, and four men, besides the butler and coachman. Two of the footmen were constantly on duty in the hall, that is, they had nothing to do for the four hours that their turn lasted, but to look out of the hall-windows, and attend the front-door. When their four hours expired, the other two took their place for a like interval. There was a great deal of aristocratic feeling amongst these servants. The butler had *his* room, and the housekeeper had *her* room; and they took their meals apart from the rest. The other servants were obliged to say '*Sir*' to the butler, and '*Ma'am*' to the housekeeper. The cook and the two housemaids were likewise above the kitchen-maids, who said '*Miss*' when addressing either one of them. The footmen also considered themselves above the coachman; but they allowed the latter to take his meals at their table. As for myself, I was looked upon as a mere child by the men; and probably by the women too—for they were very much addicted to fondling me when I happened to be alone with either one of them.

"Well, the six weeks passed away; and the day came on which Mr. Ilverton was to be married. The ceremony was performed at St. George's, Hanover Square; and the 'happy couple,' as the newspapers always call new-married people, started off for Mr. Ilverton's country-seat. A fortnight elapsed; and then came the day when the town-mansion was to receive its new mistress, whom I had not yet seen. I remember the profound curiosity which I felt on that occasion, my fellow-servants, who had frequently beheld her, having spoken so high of her beauty. It was about six o'clock in the evening when they were expected to arrive, dinner having been provided for seven. I stationed myself in the hall to obtain as early a view as possible of Lady Hortensia Ilverton; and shortly after six the carriage drove up to the door. From the hall-window I saw her ladyship alight; but she had a veil over her face. I was, however, enabled to admire the beauty of her figure, which was very finely proportioned; and I thought, as she stepped from the vehicle, that I had never before seen such a charming foot and ankle. The loveliness of her form rendered me the more anxious to behold her face; and this curiosity on my part was soon gratified. For, on entering the hall, the lady threw back her veil;—but no words can explain the full extent of my astonishment, when I beheld the very same charming creature of whom I had once before caught a hasty glimpse at the doctor's house in Brook Street! A faint exclamation of surprise escaped my lips; no one however heard it—and I instantly mastered my feelings. Lady Hortensia passed through the hall, leaning on her husband's arm, without looking either to the right or to the left;—and as she did not therefore observe me, I had no opportunity of knowing whether she would remember me or not.

"It was a part of my duty to help to wait at table; and I longed for the dinner-hour to arrive, to clear up that point. At length my doubts were set at rest;—dinner was served up—the lady saw me; and I felt convinced that she had completely forgotten my face. I was not however quite a year older than when I saw her at the doctor's, and therefore not much changed: nevertheless, she evidently did *not* know me again. I really felt relieved on her account; for she was such a beautiful creature, and seemed so amiable, that I should have been sorry for her to have experienced any annoyance or vexation on my account. During the whole of dinner, I took my station near her chair, and watched her attentively; and though she conversed pleasantly enough with her husband when he started a subject, or addressed himself to her, yet it struck me that she was not altogether happy—for she seldom commenced a topic of her own accord, but seemed rather to love silence; and I now and then fancied that she sighed in a subdued manner. I don't know when I ever felt a deeper interest in any one than I did in this lady; and it seemed to me as if I could do any thing to serve her. But I am afraid that I am tiring you with this long story;"—and Jeffreys abruptly broke off.

"Not at all, old fellow," exclaimed Tim the Snammer. "It's only just struck twelve by St. George's; and we don't mean to separate yet awhile."

"No—not quite yet, I should hope," observed Josh Pedler. "Besides I'm getting deucedly interested in that Lady Hortensia of your's. I all along expected that the beautiful young creature at the doctor's would turn up again somehow or another."

"To be sure," said Old Death: "it wouldn't be a regular romance if she didn't."

"It's all as true as gospel!" cried Jeffreys. "Do you think I could invent such a pack of curious adventures? If you don't believe what I've told you already, I'm sure you won't believe what there is to come; and so I'd better hold my tongue."

"Now don't be angry, my dear boy," said Old Death: "I was but joking. I like your story amazingly: so pray finish it. We're in no hurry, and there's plenty of drink."

Jeffreys accordingly complied with the solicitations of his comrades, and proceeded uninterruptedly to the end of his narrative.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.
CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF A LIVERY-SERVANT.

"I am now going to take a leap of about six months in my story; because, during that time, nothing of any importance occurred in the establishment of the Honourable Mr. Ilverton. I may, however, observe that my suspicion relative to the unhappiness of his wife was confirmed the more I saw of her; for she was often dull and melancholy—and once or twice I saw that she had been shedding tears. Her husband was very kind and attentive to her; but he was a great deal from home, as he had large estates in the country which he was frequently obliged to visit, and he was also canvassing a borough for the approaching elections. Her ladyship preferred remaining in town, because she could then enjoy the society of her mother and sisters, who were almost constantly with her. Well, as I just now said, six months had passed away without any adventure of importance, and I was already wearied of the sameness of the life I was leading, when something occurred which tended to excite my curiosity and interest. It was about four o'clock, one summer afternoon that the little incident took place; and this was it. A letter came, addressed to her ladyship; and the hall-porter gave it to me to take up into the drawing-room. I went up stairs, and my hand was on the drawing-room door, when sounds of sobbing and low whispering, coming from inside, met my ears. I stopped and listened. 'My God! you know that I love you, Herbert,' said the voice of Lady Hortensia, who no longer spoke in a whisper.—Then another voice made some reply which I could not catch; and several minutes passed in a whispered conversation, not one single word of which did I overhear. At last I could judge that the visitor was about to take his leave; and I entered the room, first making as much noise as I could with the handle of the door so as to warn those inside that some one was coming in. But a single glance was enough to show me that Lady Hortensia was in great confusion, while a tall, handsome, young gentleman who was with her turned aside and walked towards the window. They were both standing when I went in; but her ladyship seated herself the moment after I entered and passed her handkerchief rapidly over her charming face. I endeavoured to appear as if I saw nothing to excite my curiosity, handed my mistress the letter, and retired. I waited in the hall to catch another glimpse of the gentleman when he went out; and in a few minutes he took his departure. I asked the hall-porter who he was. 'I never saw him before,' was the answer; 'but I heard him desire the footman to announce him by the name of Mr. Herbert Remington.'—'Well,' thought I to myself, 'Mr. Herbert Remington is a very fortunate man to be loved by such a beautiful lady.' But I did not breathe to a soul what I had overheard, nor any thing that I knew concerning my mistress.

"Mr. Ilverton was in the country at this time; and I now observed that Mr. Remington called regularly every day at about four o'clock. The other servants did not appear to notice it as at all extraordinary; but I had my own reasons for thinking a good deal on the subject. Several times, on the occasion of these visits, did I creep to the drawing-room door, and listen; and much of their conversation did I thus overhear. From that I gleaned that Mr. Remington and Lady Hortensia had been attached to each other for a long time; but that their marriage had been rendered impossible by his poverty. I also learnt enough to convince me that he was the father of a child of which she had been delivered at the doctor's house, but which had died a few hours after its birth. I felt no small degree of importance in knowing myself to be acquainted with all their secrets; and I considered myself not only bound to keep those secrets to myself, but also to assist them in any way I could, if an opportunity served to render my humble aid available. And the time to put me to that test soon came. Mr. Ilverton returned home from the country much sooner than was expected; and the servants, when talking together in the kitchen, said that he had come back in a very queer humour. He was, however, more amiable than ever with her ladyship at dinner on the day of his return; and I saw nothing to prove the truth of what I had heard down stairs. Lady Hortensia retired early that evening, saying she was unwell; and her maid observed on returning to the servants' hall, after attending on her mistress in her bed-chamber, that her ladyship appeared very unhappy. Then for the first time did the servants speak of the constant visits of Mr. Remington; and as they talked on the subject, suspicions seemed to spring up in their minds. But the entrance of the housekeeper put an end to the gossip; and soon afterwards the drawing-room bell rang. I hastened up to answer the summons, and found Mr. Ilverton walking up and down the apartment in so excited a manner that he did not even notice my entrance. At length he perceived me; and, throwing himself in a chair, beckoned me towards him. 'John,' said he, laying his hand on my shoulder, and speaking in a strange tone of voice, 'I think you will tell me the truth, if I ask you a few questions,'—I said that I would.—'And will you keep to yourself whatever I am going to say to you?' he asked.—'I will, sir, certainly,' was my answer.—'I thought you were a good and discreet lad,' he continued, putting a couple of sovereigns into my hand: 'act as you ought towards me, and you shall never want a friend. Now, tell me, my boy, whether a gentleman named Remington has called here every day during my absence this last time?'—'Not every day, sir, I should think,' was my reply; for I saw that a storm was brewing, and felt determined to screen my mistress as much as possible.—'Yes, but he has though,' returned Mr. Ilverton sharply; 'you may not, however, have observed it,' he added immediately afterwards, in a milder tone: 'now answer me truly my next question; and don't be afraid that I shall be angry, or shall say any thing about it if you reply in the affirmative. Do the servants talk amongst themselves of Mr. Remington's visits?'—'I have never heard a word said on the subject, sir,' was my answer.—'Then I am not laughed at in that quarter!' he muttered to himself; but I heard his words plain enough, although he seemed to forget that he had spoken them a minute after they had left his lips. 'John,' he continued, his fingers actually griping my shoulder, 'you can do me a great service if you will; and I will reward you handsomely.'—'It is my duty to do all I can for you, sir,' I replied.—'Yes,' he said; 'but what I

now require is something out of the way of your ordinary duties, and is rather the part of a friend, than a servant towards a master.'—'I will do any thing I can, sir, to oblige you,' I exclaimed.—'And you will swear solemnly not to breathe to a soul a word of all that now takes place between us, or that you may have to do for me, unless I call upon you to proclaim any thing in a court of justice.'—'I will obey you in all things, sir,' I replied.—'You are a good lad,' he said; 'and I am not mistaken in you. To tell you the truth,' he continued, 'I have received an anonymous letter, creating the most painful suspicions in my mind. This letter assures me that a gentleman whom I do not know, and whose name is Remington, is a too frequent visitor at this house. But before I act, I must be satisfied that his visits are injurious to my honour. Do you understand me, my boy? You see, I am obliged to be open and candid with you, as I require an important service at your hands.'—'I understand you perfectly, sir.'—'What, then, do I mean?'—'Why, sir, that my lady should not receive that gentleman's visits so often, and while you are away,' I answered, pretending first to reflect for a few moments.—'Exactly so!' he cried. 'And now I will explain what I require of you. To-morrow at about half-past three o'clock,' he continued, 'I will give you a letter addressed to some friend of mine at a little distance; and you must tell the butler you are going to take it, and that you shall be upwards of an hour away. By these means you will not be missed by the servants. But, instead of leaving the house, you must steal up to the drawing-room, and conceal yourself under the sofa. There must you lie as quiet as possible, and listen to all that may take place between Lady Hortensia and Mr. Remington, who, not knowing of my return, will be sure to call at his wonted hour.'—'But suppose, sir,' I said, 'that I should be discovered?'—'Then leave it to me to extricate you from the difficulty, which is not likely to arise,' answered Mr. Ilverton.—'But,' I again argued, 'if her ladyship should happen to come down earlier to the drawing-room than usual, how shall I be able to conceal myself beneath the sofa?'—'Should this occur, I will devise some means to induce Lady Hortensia to quit the room for at least a few minutes, at about half-past three. Be you on the watch.'—'I will sir,' was my answer.—'And if you serve me faithfully, John,' he added, 'you will find a friend in me; but if you disobey me in one single point, I will find means to punish you somehow or another.'—I, of course, made all the necessary promises; and he dismissed me, apparently well satisfied with my assurances of fidelity.

"I slept but little all that night. I saw that a dreadful storm hung over the head of my mistress; and I lay awake, planning a thousand schemes to avert it. It was very easy for me to hide myself under the sofa; and, whatever I might overhear, afterwards assure my master that not a word had been said which he could possibly be angry at. But I was experienced and cunning enough to fear that Mr. Ilverton wanted a witness; and that though I might be listening under the sofa, he would also be listening at the door, and would burst into the room in case his suspicions respecting his wife should receive confirmation. Even if he should not adopt this plan, but merely use me as a means of ascertaining whether his wife was faithful or not, and take my word respecting the particulars of the anticipated interview between herself and Mr. Remington,—nevertheless, I saw the necessity of warning my mistress that such suspicions did exist concerning her, and put her fully upon her guard. This I resolved to do; and at last I made up my mind to speak frankly to her next day. But when that day came, I saw no chance of having an opportunity of carrying my intention into effect;—for her ladyship did not come down stairs to breakfast nor to luncheon, she being still indisposed, as I heard from her own maid. I loitered upon the landing near the drawing-room as much as I dared; and once or twice, when my master went up or down stairs, he nodded approvingly of my conduct, thinking that I was there only to serve his interests. At last, just as the clock had struck three, to my joy I saw Lady Hortensia descend from her own chamber, and enter the drawing-room. Not a moment was to be lost. I rushed in after her, closed the door, and said, 'My lady, listen to me for one instant, I implore of you.' She looked at me with mingled surprise and anger; for my manner must have appeared not only strange, but also boisterously rude. I am sure I do not recollect now—for I did not remember ten minutes after this scene occurred—what words I used, or how I introduced the subject; but it is very certain that I told her how I was the very lad who had seen her at the doctor's; how her husband had bribed me to watch her; how I was determined to warn her of the plot in progress against her; and how I would do any thing in the world I could to serve her. She seemed perfectly astounded at all I told her: she sank on the sofa, turned red and white a dozen times in a minute, and then burst into tears. I dared not say a word: the idea of a poor servant like me venturing to console a great lady like her was ridiculous. But I was in a dreadful state of alarm lest Mr. Ilverton should come in.—'John,' she said at last, wiping away her tears, 'if all you have told me is true, you are one of the best lads that ever lived. But how am I to know that this is as you represent it?'—I understood what she meant: she feared lest it was only a trap to ensnare her into something amounting to a confession.—'My lady,' I answered, 'if I wished to injure you, could I not have at once revealed to Mr. Ilverton all that took place at the doctor's house in Brook Street?'—'True!' she said, blushing scarlet. 'Yes—you are faithful!' and she put her purse into my hand. I returned it to her, declining to take any reward; but she forced it upon me, and I was compelled to accept it. 'Now retire,' she said hastily; 'and follow your master's bidding in respect to concealing yourself. I shall afford you an opportunity,' she added: then, turning away, she again burst into tears.

"I hastened from the room, well pleased with the success of my interview with her ladyship, and feeling myself so important a person that I scarcely knew whether I stood on my head or my heels. The secrets of the family were in my keeping,—in the keeping of a boy not sixteen years old; and it was enough to make me proud. Besides, I felt so satisfied with my conduct in respect to her ladyship, that it seemed to me as if I had done a great and a glorious deed. Well, on quitting the drawing-room, I went up to my own chamber, to compose my feelings; for I was really so much elated as to be quite unfit to meet my master for a few minutes. But at the expiration of that time I hastened down stairs, received the letter which he had in readiness for me, and, after looking in at the servants' hall for a moment, just to say I was going out on an errand, stole up to the drawing-room, where I found no one. I therefore thrust myself under the sofa, and awaited anxiously the termination of the adventure. Just as the time-piece on the mantel struck four, her ladyship returned to the room; and almost immediately afterwards Mr. Remington was announced. Hasty whispers were exchanged between them in a language—most likely French—which I did not understand; and then they seated themselves on chairs at some distance from each other, Lady Hortensia having previously rung the bell. I was surprised at this proceeding: what could she possibly mean? But I was more astonished still, when, on the entrance of one of the footmen, she said, 'Ask your master if he will have the kindness to favour me with his company for a few minutes.' The servant retired to execute this command; and I was now frightened lest her ladyship intended to accuse her husband of his stratagem, and thereby expose my want of faith towards him. But second thoughts convinced me that this was not the case; because her ladyship must remember that it was in my power to ruin her effectually if she meditated any treachery

towards me. A few minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Remington and my mistress conversed on the most common-place subjects—such as the weather, the new opera, and so on; and at length Mr. Ilverton entered the room. 'I am sorry to disturb you, my dear,' said Lady Hortensia, speaking in her most amiable manner, 'since I know that you are so fully engaged with election matters and other important business; but I have a favour to ask of you. This gentleman is Mr. Remington. Mr. Remington,' she added, 'Mr. Ilverton:' thus calmly and quietly introducing them.—I do not know how my master looked, but I could fancy that he felt very queer: at all events, he said nothing.—'Mr. Remington, my dear,' continued Lady Hortensia, speaking with a tranquil affability that quite astonished me, 'is a gentleman to whom our family are under the greatest obligations; for it was he who saved my brother Edward's life at Oxford a few years ago.'—'I remember to have heard that your brother Edward had a narrow escape from being drowned in the river on a boating excursion,' said Mr. Ilverton; 'but I was not until now acquainted with even the name of the gentleman who so generously risked his life to save him.'—'It was a deed which scarcely deserves such warm praise, sir,' observed Mr. Remington.—'On the contrary, Mr. Remington,' exclaimed Lady Hortensia, 'Mr. Ilverton must, as my husband, experience the same gratitude which I feel towards you, and ever shall, for your noble conduct.'—'Certainly, most decidedly,' exclaimed my master, who, I could very well suppose, was now feeling particularly sheepish.—'And I am convinced, my dear,' continued her ladyship, addressing herself altogether to her husband now, 'that you will approve of certain steps which I have taken in order to convince Mr. Remington of the gratitude of the near relatives of him whom he saved from a premature death. Mr. Remington has a sister who has been left a widow, and who is anxious to turn her accomplishments to a good account. She is desirous of entering some family as a governess; and I have supplied Mr. Remington with letters of introduction on behalf of his sister to several of our friends and acquaintances. He has this day called to inform me of his sister's success in obtaining the situation she requires, by means of one of those letters.'—Mr. Ilverton expressed his entire approval of this proceeding on the part of her ladyship; and Mr. Remington rose, and took his leave in that formal manner which seemed to show that he did not even pretend to be considered in any other light than a mere acquaintance.

"When he was gone, Lady Hortensia said, 'I am really glad that I have been able to serve that young man's sister, for they are both very poor, it seems and the service which he rendered our family in saving the life of my brother was not one that should have gone unrewarded.'—'Oh! decidedly not, my love,' said Mr. Ilverton. 'But will you accompany me to the library now, and see the new picture that I bought some weeks ago, and which has been sent home this morning? It was kept to be framed.'—'Certainly,' answered Lady Hortensia; and she quitted the room with her husband. I of course understood that he had purposely enticed her away to allow me an opportunity of leaving my hiding-place; and I was very glad to get from under the sofa, where I was most terribly cramped, not having dared to move, and scarcely able to breathe free through fear of being heard. I was highly delighted at the clever manner in which Lady Hortensia had got herself out of the serious scrape that for a time seemed to threaten her with total ruin; and I was heartily glad to think that her husband must be thoroughly ashamed of having exposed himself so completely to me. At dinner-time Lady Hortensia gave me a glance which seemed to thank me again for the part I had acted towards her; whereas Mr. Ilverton never once looked me in the face—not even when I was close by his side and he ordered me to serve him with any thing. Shortly after dinner her ladyship retired to the drawing-room; and the moment I was alone with my master, he beckoned me to approach him, and said in a low tone, 'John, what took place between your mistress and that gentleman before I came in?'—'Mr. Remington said he came to thank her ladyship for her kindness towards his sister,' I answered, taking my cue from what I had heard before; 'and then her ladyship said that you was at home, sir, and she would introduce Mr. Remington to you.'—'Then I have been altogether misled, John,' he observed: 'and mind that you never breathe a syllable of what has passed to a living soul.'—'Certainly not, sir,' I replied. He put a couple of sovereigns into my hand, telling me I was a good boy, and repeating his injunction of strict secresy.

"I was now a very great favourite with both my master and mistress, though, in each other's presence, they neither showed any particular kindness towards me. Mr. Remington came no more to the house; but her ladyship now and then gave me letters to put privately into the post for her, and which were addressed to him. Thus three months more passed away; and the general election came on. Mr. Ilverton went out of town; and he had not left the house an hour, before Lady Hortensia gave me a note to convey by hand to Mr. Remington's lodgings in Sackville Street, with directions to wait for an answer. Mr. Remington seemed greatly delighted at the contents of the note, and gave me the reply, which, in his hurry and joy, he omitted to seal, although he had lighted a taper on purpose. I hastened away, and went into a public-house to read the letter. To my surprise I found, by its contents, that an appointment had been made for the lover to pass the night with Lady Hortensia, she having already admitted her maid into her confidence, thereby arranging for his admission into the house at twelve o'clock. I was now dreadfully annoyed at being no longer treated as a confidant, I who had done so much to protect them from exposure! My interest in behalf of my mistress suddenly turned to hate; and I thought seriously of revenging what I considered to be a slight. I however ran back to Mr. Remington's lodgings, and said to him, 'Sir, you have not sealed this letter; and I would rather not take it like this to her ladyship, for fear she should think I had read it, which I would not do for all the world.'—He looked very hard at me, and seemed dreadfully confused at his oversight; but, perceiving that I did not change colour, and that I met his gaze steadily, he was more satisfied. Having sealed the letter, he returned it to me, putting half-a-guinea into my hand; and I then hastened away with it to my mistress, from whom I received double that sum. But a wonderful change had come over my mind. I saw that I was made a mere tool of; whereas so long as I thought myself important as a confidant, I was happy. I had moreover hoarded near twenty pounds, by means of the presents I had received; and I thought how foolish I was not to turn my knowledge of certain secrets to account, and extort a good round sum from her ladyship. In a moment I grew avaricious and spiteful. I know how it was: while my vanity was flattered, I was contented; but the instant I saw that I was a tool, and not a confidant, I was mortified, and therefore changed. It did not strike me then that delicacy would of course prevent Lady Hortensia from making use of me to give admittance to her lover; and I looked on myself as a person badly used. I did nothing that day; but I lay awake during the best part of the night settling in my mind how I should proceed. Thus, while the lovers were in each other's arms—as I had no doubt they were—a storm was brewing against them in a quarter from which they little expected it.

"The very next day I went into the drawing-room when I knew that her ladyship was there alone, and, shutting the door, advanced in a resolute manner towards her. She seemed astonished, and asked me what I wanted. 'A hundred pounds,' I answered in a dogged style.—'Do you mean to request that sum as a favour, or to demand it as the price of the secrets you have promised to keep faithfully?' she

said in a mild and reproachful way, which made me more than half repent of my conduct; but I had gone too far to retreat.—'Whichever your ladyship likes,' I replied.—'I will give you *two* hundred if you will leave the house this minute, and let me make what excuse I choose for sending you away,' she said.—The offer was too tempting to be rejected; and I immediately accepted it. Two hundred pounds! it was a fortune, and I fancied that I should never be able to spend it.—'Pack up your boxes, and prepare to depart,' said Lady Hortensia, 'If the servants ask you any questions, steadily refuse to answer them, beyond merely stating that I have ordered you to leave immediately; and if you will call on Mr. Remington this evening at eight o'clock, he will give you two hundred pounds in gold.'—I was overjoyed at this arrangement, and gladly took my departure on such terms, caring little what reason her ladyship might allege for the abruptness with which I left. Two hundred pounds to be received in a few hours! Oh! how happy I was!—and what castles did I build in the air! I removed my trunk to a public-house in St. Martin's Lane; and having had a pint of wine to celebrate the occasion, strolled out to purchase new clothes—for I had of course left my livery at Mr. Ilverton's house, and was not overwell dressed. Having bought all I required, thereby making a considerable hole into the twenty-five pounds which, with my hoardings and wages, I had in my pocket when I came away, I returned to the public-house, and put on my new things. I then went out again to while away an hour till eight o'clock, it being now seven. As I was going along Piccadilly, I saw an elegantly dressed lady step out of a carriage at a shop-door; and to my joy I recognised Miss Stacey. She immediately knew me; and, seeing me so well attired, did not hesitate to stop and speak to me. We conversed together for a few minutes, during which I told her that I was no longer under the necessity of working for my living, as fortune had been kind to me. She expressed her pleasure, gave me her address, and asked me to call upon her; telling me, however, that I must be sure to come between two and seven, and at no other time. I promised to visit her; for she looked sweetly pretty and very amorous;—and we parted.

"Precisely as the clock struck eight, I knocked at Mr. Remington's door,—none of your sneaking single knocks; but a good loud double one—for I felt all the importance of a man who has two hundred pounds to receive. Mr. Remington was at home, and I was shown up into his room. He desired me to be seated; but in a very cold tone and with a haughty manner. I did not however care one fig for that: the idea of the two hundred pounds rendered me as independent as possible. When I sate down, Mr. Remington rose from his chair; and, advancing close up to me, he said in a low, savage tone, 'You are a contemptible villian!'—'I did not come here to be abused,' I exclaimed insolently: 'give me my money, and let me be off.'—'Your money, indeed!' he cried: 'not one farthing will you receive of me, or of Lady Hortensia Ilverton. Now, listen, young man, and be cautions how you act. Had you conducted yourself fairly, you would always have found friends in me and her ladyship; but you have shown yourself a villain, and we are determined to crush you at once. You think you have us in your power; but you are mistaken. Her ladyship has already stated to her entire household that you were discharged suddenly for an atrocious attempt to extort money from her: and say but one word of scandal, utter one syllable against her, and you will be handed over to justice. Begone, sir; and take care how you conduct yourself. One word, by the way, before you leave me—and that is a word of friendly warning. The hall-porter in St. James's Square has instructions to give you over to the care of a constable, if you present yourself again at that mansion.'—'You cannot bully me,' I exclaimed; 'I know too much! Every thing shall now be made known to Mr. Ilverton.'—'And he will not believe a word you utter,' answered Remington. 'This night's post bears to him a letter in which Lady Hortensia declares that you threatened to expose both him and her if she did not give you a sum of money; and that you dared to assert that her husband had bribed you to conceal yourself under a sofa. *She* of course pretends to think her husband incapable of such mean and cowardly conduct; and he will be sure to deny it; at the same time he will never forgive nor believe you.'—'But there is the affair at the doctor's house in Brook Street,' I cried.—'The doctor will deny that such a lady was ever there,' returned Mr. Remington, with a triumphant smile.—'And the maid who knows that you passed an entire night with her mistress?' I said, my courage sinking rapidly.—'You had better ask her what she knows of the business! Now, mark me, young man; every precaution is taken to put you to confusion. You are forestalled in every possible way. Say what you will, positive contradictions and denials will meet your assertions; and the result will be to you transportation for life, for attempting to extort money! Now, then, reflect well before you plunge yourself headlong into difficulties.'—'But I am thoroughly ruined!' I exclaimed, tears starting into my eyes, as I saw the truth of all he said. 'I have lost my place and my character!'—'It is your own fault,' replied Mr. Remington. 'At the same time,' he added, after a few moments consideration, 'I do not wish you to be crushed completely down to the very mire. I will give you one chance. Sign a paper, stating that all your accusations are so many falsehoods, and that you make this acknowledgment to save yourself from being handed over to justice; and I will then present you with fifty guineas.'—Thus speaking, he took out a handful of notes and gold, to tempt me to conclude the bargain.—'But every thing I can state is true!' I exclaimed.—'Never mind *that*,' he answered: '*we* can prove it to be all false. So, haste and decide: my time is precious.'—What could I do? I wanted money, and I saw that he was determined to resist all attempts at positive extortion. I therefore expressed my readiness to sign the paper, which was already drawn up; and, having done so, I received the fifty guineas promised.—'Now,' said he triumphantly, as he folded up the document and placed it in his pocket-book, 'you know the consequence of a single slanderous whisper!'—I took my departure, terribly nettled, but still somewhat consoled by the possession of the fifty guineas; for I thought that one third of the sum at first expected, was better than none at all.

"I longed to be revenged on Lady Hortensia and Mr. Remington; but I knew not how. I smarted dreadfully under the treatment I had received;—I uttered bitter words against my folly in consenting to leave the house before I had the money paid down; and I pondered on a thousand different ways of venting my spite on my enemies. For several days I rambled about by myself, racking my brain with devices. At last I resolved to abandon the idea, at least for the present; and then I set to work to enjoy myself—or rather to see how soon I could make away with my money. A few weeks beheld the bottom of my purse—and I was astonished to think that so many guineas should have disappeared in so short a time. I was now seriously troubled what to do for a living; because I had no character. Suddenly I bethought myself of Miss Stacey's invitation, and hastened to call on her, it being then about three o'clock in the day. I found her living in elegant lodgings in Maddox Street: and she received me most kindly. I told her, word for word, all that had occurred to me since I last saw her; and she was equally candid with me. In fact, she was then in keeping by one of the Cabinet Ministers, who allowed her ten guineas a week, paid her rent, her milliner's and her wine-merchant's bills, and also the hire of her carriage. We soon came to an understanding together; she wanted a page, or tiger, just at that moment, and I accepted the post. The very next day I

entered my new place—the most comfortable I had ever yet been in, because I shared my mistress's bed nearly every night. But I soon discovered that the Cabinet Minister and myself were not the only persons who enjoyed the favours of Miss Stacey. Several gentlemen called during those hours when she knew there was no chance of her 'friend' making his appearance: in fact, the lady had become a regular wanton. It was not however for me to make any observations on her conduct: I was well satisfied with my place—and that was enough. I learnt from her that Mrs. Beaumont had died a few months previously, having just before married her butler, who came into possession of all her fortune and had set up as a gentleman, driving his cab and finding plenty of people to honour his champagne parties with their presence. Miss Stacey also gave me a little sketch of herself. She had been seduced, when only fifteen, by the husband of a lady with whom she was placed as companion; and she unhesitatingly admitted that in all the families where she had lived, she had maintained an intrigue with some one, either master, man-servant, or page. Since she had left Mrs. Beaumont she had been in keeping with the Cabinet Minister;—'but,' she added with a smile, 'you see that I am not particular where I take a fancy.' She was indeed a licentious woman, but very good-natured, and possessing a temper that nothing could ruffle.

"I had been with her about three months, when I saw in the newspaper an account of the sudden death of the Honourable Mr. Ilverton, M.P., who was found a corpse in his bed one night by the side of his wife. There was a Coroner's Inquest; and the verdict was 'Died of apoplexy.' I however had my suspicions that some foul play had been practised. In a little less than a year afterwards, I learnt, by the same channel of intelligence, that Lady Hortensia Ilverton had become the wife of Herbert Remington, Esq. About the same time I met Mrs. Hulse—the pretty lady, you remember, who played such pranks with her two lovers at the boarding-house. She stopped and spoke to me. I inquired after Mr. Hulse; and she said that he was quite well, and that they lived very happy together. I then asked her slyly if she had seen Mr. Frederick Shawe lately.—'What!' she exclaimed, 'do you not know all that happened to him?'—I assured her I did not. —'He committed a forgery some months ago,' she replied, 'and was hanged for it. It was down in the country; but I forget where. The whole account was, however, in the papers at the time.'—I was delighted to hear that the enemy of my parents had come to such a miserable end. Mrs. Hulse gave me half-a-sovereign, and bade me good bye.

"A short time after these little incidents, and when I had been in Miss Stacey's service nearly eighteen months, the Cabinet Minister suddenly withdrew his protection from her—I never heard why. It is however more than probable that her numerous intrigues reached his ears. The immediate result of the stoppage of funds in that quarter was a bolt from the lodgings, my mistress being over head and ears in debt. She removed to Norfolk Street, Strand: and I accompanied her. It was at this time that I was attacked by the small-pox, and obliged to leave. I went to the hospital, where I remained dangerously ill for several weeks; and, when I did recover, I was marked as you now see me. I may therefore say without vanity, that before this unfortunate occurrence I was a very good-looking lad; and it was no wonder that the women used to take a fancy to me. Well, I left the hospital with only a few shillings in my pocket, which I had about me when I went in; and my first step was to enquire after my late mistress in Norfolk Street. But there I learnt a sad tale. She had been greatly reduced in circumstances, and had made away with the things in her ready-furnished lodgings. The landlady gave her into custody; she was committed for trial, and sentenced at the Old Bailey to transportation for seven years. But this sentence was commuted to imprisonment for two years, by an order from the Home Office, although the judge who presided at the trial declared it to be a most aggravated offence. I thought I could understand the secret of this leniency; nor was I mistaken; for, on calling upon my poor mistress in Newgate, where she was imprisoned, she told me that she had written to her late 'friend,' the Cabinet Minister, who had procured the alteration in her sentence. She was very happy, and made me promise to call and see her again. But I never had the opportunity; for some Member took up the case in the House of Commons, and asked the Home Secretary the reason why the original sentence was not carried out, seeing that the jury had given no recommendation to mercy, and that the judge had pronounced a strong opinion on the matter. The affair made such a noise, and the *Weekly Dispatch* took it up in such strong terms, that the Government was obliged to order the sentence of transportation to be put into immediate effect.[38] The consequence was that the poor lady was sent out of the country as soon as possible; and I never saw her any more. I felt for her deeply: she had been kind to me—and, with all her faults, there were many excellent points in her character. But, somehow or another, I never did meet a woman who, let her be ever so bad, had not some redeeming qualities. I have met hundreds of men so thoroughly bad, that they had not a single thing to recommend them: but it has not been so in my experience with the other sex. I don't believe that any woman can become so utterly depraved, as not to retain a little amount of good feeling about her. I wish I could say as much for men.

"But let me make haste and bring this story to an end. I was now a miserable, friendless wretch in the world, and knew not what to do for a living. I had no character, and could not get a place. At last, when driven to desperation, I resolved to call on the person whom Mrs. Beaumont married, and who was for many years her butler. I accordingly went up to Russell Square, and knocked at the well-known door. A servant in splendid livery answered the summons; and I was shown into the hall, where I was kept waiting for nearly two hours. At last I was shown up into the drawing-room, where the ex-butler lay lounging on the sofa, reading the *Morning Post*. 'Just sit down, young man, for a moment,' said he, with an affected drawl, although he was an old fellow of sixty, 'while I finish the *Fashionable Intelligence*; because, you see, I'm interested in it.'—So I took a seat, and was kept waiting for another half-hour. At last the *gentleman* laid aside the paper, and enquired my business. I told him who I was, and how distressed was my position. He stared at me for a long time, as if to make sure that I was really the John Jeffreys whom he had once known—for I was cruelly disfigured; and when he was convinced that I was no impostor, he gave me half-a-guinea, saying that he had been a looser by the late Derby, and had lent his friend Lord Mushroom so much money lately, that he could do no more. I thanked him very sincerely and went away. I walked on to Great Russell Street, being in the neighbourhood, and called at the Turners' boarding-house. But I learnt from the servant that Mr. Turner was dead, and Mrs. Turner had *declined* business in consequence, and would see nobody. I went away with a heavy heart; for I knew that the half-guinea would not last for ever. At length I was so tired with walking about, that I entered a public-house to get some refreshment. Two men were sitting in the parlour, drinking ale; and their conversation, singularly enough, happened to turn on a friend of theirs who, as I heard them say, had just got a situation as footman in a good family.—'But how the devil did he manage, though?' asked one; 'since he only came out of quod for stealing that plate, you know, ten days ago.'—'Why, he got a character of that chap who lives at the house with the balcony, up in Castle Street, Portland Place, to be sure,' was the answer.—'You don't mean old Griffiths, do you?' said the other.—'Of course I do,' replied his friend: 'he's been in that line now for the last six months, and makes an excellent

thing by it. I've recommended several poor devils of men-servants to him.'—'The deuce you have!' I exclaimed: 'I wish to God you would recommend me!'—'Are you out of place and got no character?' demanded the man.—'Just so,' I answered; 'and if I don't get a situation soon, I shall starve.'—'Have you got any tin about you?' asked the man.—'Ten shillings, when I've paid for what I've had,' I replied.—'That'll just do the trick!' cried the man: 'you must stand a pot to me and my friend here; and you'll have to pay seven-and-sixpence entrance fee to old Griffiths. Then you'll have a trifle left to take you on till to-morrow.' I readily paid for a pot of the best ale; and when we had disposed of it, I received a note of recommendation to the Mr. Griffiths spoken of. He was an old, respectable-looking man, with a bold crown, and grey hair at the back and sides of his head; and he was sitting in a neat office, with a large book before him. He read the note, which explained my business, and then demanded the entrance fee. This I paid; and he put down my name in the book. 'I will give you the addresses of several families who require a young livery-servant,' he said; 'and you may refer them to Captain Elphinstone, No.—, Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square. You may say that you lived with that gentleman for three years, and only left him on account of ill health. And now I must tell you the nature of the bargain which exists between you and me. You are sure to obtain a situation; and when your first quarter's wages are paid, you must bring me a sovereign; and a sovereign from second quarter. You will then always have me as your friend, and need never be afraid of remaining long out of place. But if you do not keep faith with me, I shall find means to make you repent it.'—I assured the old gentleman I would do the thing that was right; and took my leave of him, rejoiced at the prospect of obtaining a situation.

"Next morning I made myself as tidy as I could, and called at the places pointed out by Mr. Griffiths. I was soon successful, and gave Captain Elphinstone as my reference. The gentleman of the house said he would call on the captain in the course of the day, and I was to return in the evening for the answer. This I did, and found that an unexceptionable character had been given of me. I was therefore admitted into the gentleman's service at once. It was a quiet place, and a small establishment, only consisting of myself and two female servants—a cook and housemaid; for Mr. Farmer, our master, was an elderly bachelor. There I stayed for several years, and was very happy and comfortable indeed. But one day Mr. Farmer took it into his head to marry the cook; and as she could not bear to have in her house the same people who had known her as a fellow-servant, the housemaid and myself both got our discharge. We, however, had good characters, but we did not avail ourselves of them—for, having each scraped up a little money, we agreed to club our savings, and open a shop in the chandlery line. We had long been intimate enough to render the parson's services quite unnecessary in enabling us to live together; and so we commenced business, passing ourselves off as man and wife. The thing did not, however, succeed; and care drove me to the public-house. It was then that I met you, Mr. Bones; and you suggested how much good might be done if I would go back into service, and give you notice of any little things worth your knowing. This I resolved to do; and, leaving my female companion to do what she liked with the shop, I took leave of her. We parted very good friends; and by the aid of old Griffiths I very soon obtained a place. I need not say any more,—unless it is that since then I've been in situations at many houses, and have generally managed to do a pretty decent amount of business with Mr. Bones."

Jeffreys ceased speaking; and his three companions expressed the amusement they had derived from his narrative.

A few more glasses of grog were drunk, as well as a few more pipes smoked; and it was not until past three in the morning that Old Death's visitors left him.

We cannot close this chapter without a few observations relative to that large and important class—domestic servants.

And first of female servants. It is said that great numbers of them are immodest, and that from their ranks the class of unfortunate women, or prostitutes, is largely recruited. We believe that the immorality of female servants is considerably exaggerated by these representations, and that the cases of frailty are the exceptions and not the rule. There are thousands and thousands of females amongst this class as respectable and well conducted as women ought to be, and who take a pride not only in maintaining a spotless character, but in so behaving themselves that there shall be no chance of its becoming tainted. And this is the more creditable to them—the more to their honour, inasmuch as the temptations to which they are exposed are very great. Sent out on errands at all hours—compelled to go to the public-houses to fetch the beer and spirits for the use of the family—constantly placed in contact with the serving-men belonging to the family's tradesmen—exposed to the chance of sustaining insulting liberties at the hands of the visitors to the house—and often persecuted by the lustful addresses of some male inmate of the establishment, such as a brother or son of the master, and perhaps the master himself,—what strength of mind—what moral courage must the servant-maid possess to resist these temptations and escape from so many perils! We mean to say, then, that if she do fall, there is far more scope for pity and a far greater amount of extenuation on her behalf, than on that of the lady who surrenders herself, unmarried, to the embraces of her lover!

And in many—too many instances—what a life of slavery is that of the female servant!—and how little enviable is the lot of the poor maid-of-all-work! Talk of the hard fate of the negress—think of the hard fate of the maid-of-all-work! Excellent saint of Exeter Hall! you need not send your sympathies travelling some thousands of miles across the sea: there is plenty of scope for their exercise at home, if you be really sincere—which we know you are *not*! Look to the maid-of-all-work—up at five in the winter, and heaven only knows when in the summer,—compelled to keep an entire house neat and decent—to black all the boots and shoes—to run on all the errands—to put herself in awful peril by standing or sitting outside the windows which she is compelled to clean—and very frequently half-starved by those whom she serves so assiduously and so faithfully,—what a life is hers![39]

Female servants are treated with much greater kindness in France than in England. In the former country they are considered rather in the light of humble friends of the family than as mere slaves, which is the estimation in which they are usually held, we are sorry to say, in the British Islands. Let them be treated with kindness and forbearance: they have much to try their patience and sour their tempers by the very nature of their condition and the miscellaneous character of their avocations. A man or a woman who is unkind to a servant, is a wretch deserving obloquy and execration. But a master or a mistress who, through petty spite or sheer malignity, refuses to give to a discharged servant the good character which such servant may in reality deserve, is a very fiend, unfit to remain in civilised society.

Before we take leave of this subject, we cannot resist the opportunity of expressing our opinion relative to a practice adopted at Court: we mean the fact of the Queen being waited upon in her private apartments by ladies of high rank and good family, instead of by female servants. Who is Queen Victoria, that a Duchess must select her gown, and a Marchioness hook it? Is she a goddess that a Countess must help her to put on her shoes, and a Baroness tie them? Must not royalty be touched by the hands of a female servant? Alas! we strongly suspect that Queen Victoria is a woman made of the same flesh and blood as the most ordinary mortals: and we feel confident that the practice of attaching ladies of rank and title to her august person is as pernicious to her, as it is degrading to the ladies themselves, and as flagrantly insulting to the entire class of well-conducted ladies'-maids. But royalty in this country must be idolized—deified: no means must be left untried to convince the credulous public that royalty is something very different from commonalty. This delusion shall, however, be dispelled;—the people must be taught to look on Victoria as nothing more than the chief magistrate of the country, deriving her power from the nation at large, and holding it only so long as the majority of the inhabitants of these realms may consider her worthy to retain it. The contemptible farce of firing cannon to announce her movements—of illuminating dwelling-houses on her birth-day—of cheering her whenever she appears in public, just as if she cared two figs for the bawling idlers who gaze on Majesty with awe and astonishment,—all this miserable humbug should be abolished. *The more a Sovereign is deified, the more the people are abased.* Instead of the nation being obliged to Queen Victoria for ruling over it, Queen Victoria ought to be very much obliged to the nation for allowing her to occupy her high post. For the only real *sovereign power* is that of the people; and the individual who looks on royalty as something infallible—divine—supernally grand and awe-inspiring, is a drivelling, narrow-minded idiot, unworthy of the enjoyment of political freedom, and fit only to take his place amidst the herds of Russian serfdom.

38. This incident is founded on fact. Many of our readers will doubtless recollect the case of J——N——and her mother, who were convicted of robbing ready-furnished lodgings about ten years ago. Miss J——N——had been the mistress of a noble lord who was a Cabinet Minister at the time of the condemnation of her mother and herself, *and who is a Cabinet Minister at the present moment*. The affair created a great sensation at the time; but the *Dispatch* and other independent newspapers took it up; not in order to persecute the unhappy women, but on public grounds. The result was that the original sentence passed upon them, and which Ministerial favouritism sought to commute to a much milder penalty, was carried into force. The entire business, so far as the noble lord was concerned, was vile and scandalous in the extreme.

39. We avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded us by the glance which we are taking at this subject, to recommend to perusal an admirable little work, written by our esteemed and talented friend, Mr. John Taylor Sinnett, and entitled "The Servant Girl in London." It is published by Hastings, Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields; and is a little book which should be found in all families, as it contains sentiments and precepts useful alike to the employer and the employed.

In a work from which we have frequently quoted in the Notes belonging to the present Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON,"—we allude to "Poverty, Mendicity, and Crime,"—we find an important passage bearing strongly upon the subject of the text. It runs as follows:—"We must now direct attention to the class of female servants, and they form no insignificant number: from these the higher ranks of our prostitutes are recruited. Thirst for dress and finery, which has crept on to such a degree that it is not a very rare sight to behold them waiting on their mistress in the morning, bedecked in silks and ornaments equal to the young ladies themselves, even where the ladies are of the highest class of the community. Great censure is due to ladies, especially those who are mothers, for not restraining their servants from squandering away the whole of their money, loss of place ought to be the consequence of not laying by a small portion of wages to sustain themselves in the event of illness or other unforeseen calamity; the dress of a female servant ought to be good, but perfectly void of ridiculous ornament and frippery. The ladies' maids of our aristocracy are a race the most highly culpable of their sex, aping all the pride and airs of their lady, and desiring to appear abroad with equal *éclat*, to effect which, the wardrobe of the mistress is not unfrequently resorted to, and the purse not always held sacred, or she becomes a prostitute whilst under the roof of her employer, till descending from one false step to another she at length links her fate to some favourite of the swell mob, to whom she at first listened as a suitor, and ends in her being accessary to robbing the family which had fostered her. It is ascertained, beyond doubt, that most of the houses that are robbed, arises from the connexion and intimacy which the servant has contracted with some of the petty workmen who have been employed about the premises, many of whom are thieves themselves, or connected with some gang of villains who resort to that expedient to learn what property is kept on the premises, and how it is disposed of at night. 'A great deal of crime,' says Mr. Nairn, in his evidence, 'is generated in consequence of the tradesmen who employ journeymen to work for them, in gentlemen's houses, not taking care to inquire into their character: by getting acquainted with servants, they get a knowledge of those parts of the house where anything valuable is kept. A number of men that were in the prison were painters, plasterers, and bricklayers, they were in the practice of communicating with thieves, and it is in that secret manner that they get information where property is kept.'—*Vide J. H. Nairn, p. 370, 2nd Report, Lords, on State of Gaols, 1835.*

"There is a most infamous conspiracy existing between the purveyors or housekeepers of the aristocracy and their tradespeople, the latter paying the former a large per centage on the bills for the sake of 'gaining their custom.' Twenty per cent. is often given, and it has been known to rise as high as fifty; unfortunately, the nobleman considers it as derogatory to his high rank to look into his pecuniary domestic affairs; but taking it in a moral point of view, it is his duty to do so for the sake of preventing this species of peculation, which is an absolute theft and one of the stepping-stones to crime generally, as the money so attained is mostly as lightly spent, and the servants out of place for a length of time, the difficulty to procure the wherewithal to keep alive their former extravagance makes them not hesitate to become *regular thieves*, the fine sense of honesty having been destroyed by the transaction with the tradesman, who had not failed, in his turn, to make out a bill more than sufficiently long to cover merely his generosity in bestowing Christmas boxes upon the domestics of his patron. These tradesmen are a rank disgrace to their more honest fellow shopkeeper; they are worse than fences, and it is greatly to be regretted that a complete *expose* cannot take place, and all such tradesmen dealt with according to their merit.

"Another evil in society that is pregnant with mischief is giving a false character to servants, which ladies are constantly in the practice of doing, to avoid being plagued, or 'perhaps,' as they say, 'insulted by the discarded servant,' whose character, if correctly stated, would not be such as easily to procure a new situation; thus a pilferer having once had the luck to start off in a private family with a good name, is from this shameful habit let loose upon the public to commit his depredations at leisure and convenience, with the chance of blame falling upon an honest individual, through the crafty machination of the wicked. By making servants conscious that they would only procure such a character as they really deserve, great good would accrue to the public generally, and the servants themselves would be taught to curb their temper and other bad propensities, by which they would become infinitely more contented and happy beings, and valuable members of society.

"It is too often the case that servants are looked upon as little better than slaves, and so to treat them. To say the least of such conduct it is unwise, for in proportion to the kindness with which they are treated, so will they study in return to make us enjoy numberless little comforts so delightful to experience, and which it is in their power to give life to or destroy. Humanity ought to suggest that the situation in which these persons are placed, witnessing nightly those scenes of pleasure, without being permitted to join in them, is sufficiently grating, for they all have their feelings, in common with the best of us, and it ought to be one of the first cares of the heads of families to lighten, as far as consistent with the rules and shades of society, the state and labours of their dependants. In France the servants are in an enviable condition compared with those of England, and if the plan were followed in this country, giving them their little pleasures, many a one, whose propensities were wavering, would be confirmed in virtue, and become a useful member, instead of a disgrace to society."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.
THE BLACKAMOOR.

Upon quitting Old Death's abode, Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler proceeded together in the direction of Blackfriar's Bridge; while John Jeffreys, having wished those worthies "good night," pursued his way up Horsemonger Lane, and plunged into the maze of narrow, obscure streets lying at the back of the prison.

Although he had said "*good night*" to his companions, it was in reality *morning*; for the clock of the gaol chimed a quarter-past three as Jeffreys passed by that dismal-looking establishment.

Having reached the door of the house in which he lodged, and which was in one of the streets above alluded to, he drew a pass-key from his pocket, and was about to apply it to the lock, when the sounds of footsteps close by fell upon his ears, and almost at the same moment a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

The conscience of Mr. John Jeffreys was not quite so free from sources of alarm as to prevent him from being painfully startled by this occurrence; and turning suddenly round towards the individual who had thus accosted him, he found himself face to face with a blackamoor.

"Fear not—no harm is intended you," said the negro, in a deep, solemn, and sonorous voice, but without the least peculiarity of accent; "that is," he added, "if you follow my directions."

"And who are you?" demanded Jeffreys, reassured by the certainty that he was addressing no myrmidon of the law.

"It is not for you to question, but to answer," said the Black in a cool and authoritative manner which seemed to indicate the consciousness of possessing the power to enforce his will, even against any resistance that might be offered. "But I have no time to waste in unnecessary discourse. You must accompany me whither I shall lead you."

"And if I refuse?" asked Jeffreys, trembling he scarcely knew why.

"Then I shall summon to my aid those who are ready at hand, and who will carry you off by force," calmly replied the Black.

"But if I raise an alarm," said Jeffreys, gradually yielding to a sensation of awe in the presence of the mysterious stranger who spoke with the confidence of power and authority, "the neighbours will come to my rescue, and——"

"A truce to this argument," interrupted the Black, sternly. "If you accompany me of your own free will, it will be to your advantage, and no harm shall befall you: but if you venture to resist me, I shall unhesitatingly make you my prisoner by force; and we shall then see what account John Jeffreys can give of his long and intimate connexion with Old Death."

"I will go with you—I will do any thing you command," said the villain, trembling from head to foot. "Only——"

"Again I tell you that you have nothing to fear and much to gain," observed the Black; and taking Jeffreys' arm, he led him hastily back towards Horsemonger Lane, neither of them uttering a word as they thus hurried along.

The night—or rather morning, was dark and sombre, and there were no lamps in the streets which they were threading. Thus, although arm-in-arm together, Jeffreys could obtain but a very imperfect view of his companion's features: nevertheless, it struck him that though the stranger's countenance was black as that of an African negro, the facial outline was not characterised by the protuberant thickness of lips and hideous flatness of nose which usually belong to that race. But Jeffreys was too much alarmed—too much bewildered by the sudden and mysterious adventures which had befallen him, to be able to make any very steady reflections; and whenever he threw a furtive glance towards his companion's countenance, he was instantly met by eyes the pupils of which seemed to glare upon him from their brilliant whites like those of a basilisk.

It was, indeed, an awe-inspiring and most uncomfortable situation in which Jeffreys found himself placed. Having numerous misdeeds upon his conscience, he shuddered at the idea of coming in contact with the law; and if he offered any resistance to his strange companion, such contact was the alternative with which he was menaced. But who was this strange companion? who was this Black that spoke with a tone of authority, and acted in a manner denoting a consciousness of power? For what purpose was he now hurrying Jeffreys along through the darkness of the silent night? and whither were they going? Even had the man been armed with conscious innocence, his position was one calculated to engender acute suspense, painful doubt, and wild apprehension;—but, knowing that he had been guilty of many deeds any one of which would be sufficient to involve him in serious trouble with regard to the law, the miserable wretch had every thing to fear, and scarcely any thing to hope.

It was true he had received assurances that no harm should befall him; and that the incident would, on the other hand, prove advantageous to him. But the influence of those assurances was completely absorbed in the vague and terrible alarms which the dread mystery of the adventure was so well calculated to excite. Conscious guilt made him a complete coward; and his ideas became so

confused—his nervousness so great—his excitement so wild, that he began to fancy he was in the power of some unearthly being of evil nature and design. As this impression grew stronger in his attenuated mind, he cast in his terror more frequent glances at his companion;—and now it seemed as if the black countenance were rapidly changing—becoming hideous to behold, and lighted up with eyes that burnt in their sockets like red hot coals!

John Jeffreys felt his legs failing beneath him—his brain whirling—his reason going;—and he was on the point of falling to the ground, overcome by the terror that oppressed him, when his companion's voice suddenly broke upon his ear, dispelling all the superstitious portion of his alarms, and recalling him to his senses.

"Step in!" said the Black;—and Jeffreys found himself by the side of a hackney-coach which was waiting beneath the wall of Horsemonger Lane gaol.

He obeyed the command issued in that authoritative tone which he dared not resist; and the Black followed him into the vehicle, which immediately drove away.

"I must now blindfold you," observed the mysterious stranger; "and I warn you not to attempt to discover the road which we are about to pursue. Even in the darkness which prevails in this coach, I shall be able to distinguish all your movements."

"Where are we going?—what are you about to do with me?" asked Jeffreys, in an imploring voice.

"If you are such a coward as you now seem to be, you will prove of little service to me, I am afraid," said the Black, as he fastened a handkerchief over his prisoner's eyes. "Cheer up, man," he added, in a tone not altogether free from contemptuous disgust: "if I meant to deliver you into the hands of justice, for your numerous misdeeds, I should not take this round about manner of accomplishing the task. Once more I tell you that the result of this adventure depends wholly and solely on yourself. It may prove a fortunate occurrence for you, if your conduct be such as to beget confidence and merit forbearance and protection."

"Then you wish me to do something for you?" said Jeffreys, considerably reassured by the words just addressed to him.

"A great deal," was the laconic answer. "But we will not continue the discourse at present, if you please."

This intimation was followed by profound silence; and the vehicle rolled along at a rapid rate. Jeffreys was now so far relieved of the oppressive fears which had recently paralysed his intellectual energies, that he could even smile at the superstitious alarm which had seized upon him; and he endeavoured to follow in imagination the route pursued by the coach. But he soon became aware that it was taking such a circuitous and tortuous way as fully to destroy all possibility on his part of instituting any clue to its course; and he at last threw himself back in the vehicle, to give way to reflections on another subject—thus abandoning the idea of studying the direction in which he was being hurried along.

For an hour did the coach proceed, making numerous turnings into fresh streets, and often appearing to retrace the way it had previously pursued. At length it stopped; and, one of the doors being immediately opened, the Black took Jeffreys' hand and assisted him to alight. The mysterious guide then hurried his prisoner into a house, up a flight of stairs and into a room, where he conducted him to a seat.

"Remove the bandage from your eyes," said the Black.

This command was instantly and cheerfully obeyed; and Jeffreys, casting a rapid glance around, found himself to be in a well-furnished apartment, of which he and his mysterious guide were the only occupants. The curtains were drawn completely over the windows; and Jeffreys had not the least idea of the locality to which he had been brought.

Opposite to him, but in such a manner that the light of the candles did not fall upon his countenance, sate the Black, whose person Jeffreys was now enabled to examine more narrowly than when they were walking arm-in-arm in the neighbourhood of Horsemonger Lane Gaol; and that survey showed him a man of middle height, well-built, and dressed in good but plain attire. His features were too delicate to be of the negro cast: he had no whiskers, and his hair was of the glossiest jet and seemed to curl naturally. On the table near him lay a pair of pistols; and over the mantelpiece two swords hung cross-wise, beneath a formidable blunderbuss.

The Black allowed Jeffreys leisure to examine the apartment, probably with the view of convincing him, by the appearance of the weapons distributed about, that he was in a place where treachery could be punished in a moment, and that it would be prudent for him to resolve beforehand to accept any conditions that might be proposed to him.

After a short pause, the Black assumed an attitude significant of his intention to open the business of the morning's adventure.

"John Jeffreys," he said, in his calm but imposing manner, "I am well acquainted with all that concerns you; and I know your readiness to serve those who pay you well. Now, however well Old Death may have already paid, or may promise to pay you, for any thing you may have done or may have to do for him, I will pay you better. Do you choose to enter my service—my service exclusively, remember; because, in serving me, you can really serve none other?"

"You seem to know me well, indeed, master," said Jeffreys, assuming a familiar tone, now that he began to fancy the Black to be no better than he should be.

"Dispense with jocularity, sir," exclaimed the other sternly; and Jeffreys shrank from the severe look fixed upon him and the haughty manner which accompanied the words just uttered. "Look you," continued the Black,—"I may as well inform you at once that the companionship which you may expect to enjoy with me, will not be of the kind to which you are accustomed with such men as those from whom you parted an hour ago. If you serve me, you must become my slave: you must execute my bidding without even pausing to reflect on the motives which may instigate the commands I shall give you. You must consent to become a mere automaton in my hands—a machine that is to move only as I choose to direct. There will be no familiarity between us—no friendship. All will be

enveloped in the strictest mystery; and you will often have to act without comprehending what you are doing, or the objects you are destined to accomplish. You will moreover be watched by invisible spies—at least by persons whose supervision you will not suspect; so that the least attempt at treachery on your part will be sure to meet with instantaneous punishment—and that punishment is *death*."

"I see nothing to object to, sir, in all that," said Jeffreys, now speaking in a respectful tone, "providing the advantages are as great as they ought to be."

"The advantages to you will be immense," resumed the Black; "and I will explain them. In the first place, there is nothing criminal in my service—nothing that can make you tremble when a stranger taps you on the shoulder. On the contrary, I will protect you even from the effects of the crimes which you have already committed, should they transpire by accident or by the treachery of any of your former accomplices. Your salary shall be liberal and regularly paid; and thus you will be freed from those vicissitudes which make such men as you rich to-day and poor to-morrow. When the time shall come—which it must—that I no longer need your services, I will settle on you an income for the remainder of your days. These are the advantages which I offer you."

"If you only fulfil one tenth part, sir——" began Jeffreys, delighted at the prospects opening before him.

"I am not in the habit of promising more than I can perform," interrupted the Black haughtily. "If my service suits you, you enter it from this moment."

"I accept the terms with joy and gratitude," said Jeffreys.

"Good!" exclaimed the Black; and tossing a well-filled purse towards his new servant, he said, "There are a hundred pounds to confirm the bargain. One piece of advice I must give you:—indeed, it involves a condition on which I must insist; and this is, that you do not, through idle vanity, display your gold to those persons who may be likely to suspect that you have not come honestly by it. For you will not be able to give any satisfactory explanation; and I do not choose you to get into any difficulty just that I may have the trouble of getting you out of it again. Why I say that you will be able to give no satisfactory explanation relative to the source of your prosperity, is because you will not know who your master is—nor where he lives—nor any thing concerning him. You will have no one to refer to, in case you fall into difficulty: at the same time, I should hear of it, and would hasten to assist you, if you be worthy of my regard—if you deserve that I should care for your welfare."

"But how am I to receive your orders, sir, if I do not know where you live nor who you are?" inquired Jeffreys, his astonishment and awe increasing with every word that came from the lips of his new master.

"Shall not I know where *you* live?" said the Black, smiling for the first time since they had met: "and can I not come to you when I require your services? Will not the post convey my letters? and have I not messengers to dispatch to you? Leave all those matters to me; trouble not yourself relative to the means of communication between us: and ask no questions which do not bear upon the mechanical and even blind service which you are to devote to me. You will find me a good and liberal master, if you prove faithful, diligent, and sincere; but should you attempt to practise perfidy against me—should you deceive me in any one single thing, however trifling, I shall become a terrible and implacable enemy."

"I can have no interest in deceiving you, sir, considering all the advantages your service holds out," said Jeffreys: "and yet I should like to know a little more of the nature of what you will require at my hands—what I shall have to do, indeed."

"No—I will explain nothing," returned the Black. "I have already assured you that my service is safe, so far as the laws of the country are concerned, and that you will never be called upon to do a deed of which you need be ashamed—supposing that you have any shame in you. I say this, because I know that you have hitherto pursued evil courses—that you have maintained a desperate connexion with Benjamin Bones—and that many robberies have taken place through your instrumentality, if not actually perpetrated by your hands. But if you remain in my service, I hope to render you a better man—I hope to see the day come when you will know what proper shame is, and will blush at many of the actions of your earlier years. Of this enough, however, for the present. I did not bring you hither to listen to moral lectures or sermons from my lips. Neither do I believe that precepts are of much benefit to a man who has pursued a long career of vice and error. Example does much more—but experience most of all. When you shall have learnt the value of good conduct and the advantage of fidelity to him whom you serve, you will see how far preferable it is to dwell without the fear of incurring the resentment of outraged laws than to lead an existence of harassing excitement produced by the perpetual dread of falling into the grasp of justice. But, again I say, of this enough. Do you still adhere to your desire to enter my service?"

"I do, sir," was the answer, delivered in a firm tone.

"I must then warn you," resumed the Black, "that though I exact the most complete fidelity from you—and though I should punish, in a terrible manner, the least perfidy on your part,—yet, in respect to others, you will often be compelled to exercise stratagem and practise plots which at first sight may appear treacherous. You will have to wage war, perhaps, against some of your old companions—to defeat their projects—even to betray their schemes. Are you prepared to agree to all this?"

"I am prepared to obey your orders in all things," was the reply.

"Without even questioning my motives?"

"That was a condition already imposed by you, and agreed to by me."

"And you will undertake never to breathe to a single soul a word relative to the secret service in which you are engaged? Remember," added the Black, hastily, "I merely mention this as a warning; because I should immediately detect any treachery on your part, and should not hesitate to punish it terribly."

"I wish you would at once put me to the test in some way or another, sir," said Jeffreys. "You seem to know all about me—but in what way you got your information, is of course a mystery to me. However, you *do* know me well—and, having that knowledge of me, I can

perfectly understand that you do not feel disposed to trust to my bare word in any thing. Now give me something to do—put me on trial in some way or another—and then judge whether I am the man to serve a good paymaster, or not."

"You speak to the point—and I will at once put you to the test you solicit," returned the Black; "and mind how you reply to my questions—because, even were you to amuse me with deceptive answers now, in a few hours I should discover the real truth, and my vengeance would overtake you—aye, even in the midst of those companions whom I am about to ask you to betray. In a word, then, what was the nature of the business which took you and two other men to Old Death's lodgings last evening, and detained you there a great portion of the night?"

"One word, sir, before I answer the question!" exclaimed Jeffreys. "If I reveal to you every thing which took place between myself, those two men and Old Death last night, will you not think that in the same manner I shall betray to them what is now taking place between you and me?"

"I have already told you that the greatest proof of faithful service towards *me* is to betray *others*," returned the Black; "and I have given you ample assurance that if you attempt to betray *me* to *others*, certain vengeance will overtake you."

"Then if you consider my treachery towards others as a proof of fidelity to you, sir," continued Jeffreys, "I am content to be put to such a test. You ask me what took place between Old Death, Tim the Snammer, Josh Pedler, and myself last night; and I will tell you word for word. A few weeks ago one Thomas Rainford was hanged at Horsemonger Lane gaol, and was buried in St. Luke's churchyard. To-night Old Death means to have the coffin dug up, and conveyed to the house of certain people named Bunce, in Earl Street, Seven Dials; to which house he himself will move to-day. It seems that this Rainford was the eldest brother of the Earl of Ellingham, against whom Old Death has a dreadful spite; and so he intends to have the body of Tom Rain taken out of the coffin, a rope put round its neck, and a placard on its breast, stating that the famous highwayman was the Earl's brother. The body is then to be conveyed to Pall Mall, and placed on the steps of the nobleman's house. This is one part of the scheme concocted last night, and which me and the two other men were engaged to execute."

"Go on," said the Black, in a low tone.

"The part that's to come is worse than what I've already told you, sir," observed Jeffreys; "and I am afraid that if you know I consented to serve in the matter——"

"Go on—go on," exclaimed the Black, impatiently.

"Well, sir—since I must, I will tell you all," continued Jeffreys. "Old Death has found out that a lady, named Esther—Esther—I forget ——"

"Never mind! Go on, I say," cried the Black, more impatiently than before.

"I was saying that Old Death had found out that this lady was the mistress of Tom Rain, the famous highwayman, and that the Earl has a great esteem for her. He has also heard that the Earl *is* going—or *was* going—to marry another lady, named Hatfield; and he has made up his mind to have these two ladies carried off and conveyed to Bunce's house in Seven Dials. When he has got them there, sir, he intends——But I really——"

"Go on, man!" exclaimed the Black. "What does he mean to do?"

"To put their eyes out," replied Jeffreys, in a low tone, and speaking with considerable hesitation.

"The fiend!—the monster!" ejaculated the Black, starting from his chair; but instantly composing himself, he resumed his seat, saying, "Was that the full extent of the atrocity planned and agreed upon last night?"

"That was the whole scheme, sir," answered Jeffreys. "Benjamin Bones agreed to give us each a hundred pounds for serving him in those matters, and he paid us each thirty on account."

"Show me your share," said the Black, abruptly.

Jeffreys hesitated, and turned pale.

"Beware how you deceive me—take care how you trifle with me!" exclaimed his master. "If you received those thirty pounds from Old Death, you must have them about you now; for *I know*," he added emphatically and significantly, "that between the time you left his lodgings and stopped at your own door, whither I followed you expressly to ascertain where you lived, you entered no place at which you could have deposited the money."

Jeffreys no longer dared to hesitate; but taking a large roll of Bank-notes and a quantity of gold from his pocket, he spread them upon the table, saying, "The thirty pounds I received from Old Death last night are amongst this lot."

"And whence did you obtain such a large sum?" demanded the Black, hastily glancing over the amount, "there are several hundreds of pounds here!"

"Well, sir," said Jeffreys, completely over-awed by the tone and manner of his new master, as well as by the mystery which surrounded him; "I will tell you all about it—and then you will be convinced that I am ready and anxious to secure your good opinion. I was until very lately in the service of a Mr. Torrens——"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Black, starting as if with sudden surprise at the information he had just received: then, again composing himself, he said in his usual calm, but authoritative manner, "Proceed."

"This Mr. Torrens was paid a sum of money a few days ago—about fifteen hundred pounds," continued Jeffreys; "and I put Old Death up to it."

"Benjamin Bones again—Benjamin Bones at the bottom of every villainy!" cried the Black, in an excited manner.

"Well, sir—and so Old Death sent two men—the very same men who was with me at his lodgings last night—to rob Mr. Torrens of the money. They succeeded, and Old Death changed the large notes into small ones and gold; because large notes are useless to such men as Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler. If they attempted to change a fifty pound note, they would get taken up in a moment; whereas they can manage to smash small notes at the public-houses where they deal. So Old Death had his share of the plunder; and mine is part of that heap. I have now told you every thing, sir——"

"No—not every thing!" said the Black, in a more serious and solemn tone than he had yet adopted during his interview with Jeffreys. "Mr. Torrens is in Newgate—charged with a fearful crime," he continued; "and his daughter Rosamond is in a state bordering on despair at the house of kind and generous people with whom I am acquainted."

"Good God! who are you?" exclaimed Jeffreys, surveying his master in terror and amazement. "You know every thing—every body! The least word that is uttered leads to a subject with which you are sure to be acquainted! Oh! sir—if you have had me brought here to do me a mischief—to get me into trouble—to make me confess things—"

"Fear not, Jeffreys!" interrupted the Black, in a reassuring tone. "I am acquainted with Mr. Torrens' version of the history of that murder—and I know that suspicion rests not upon you. But I now perceive clearly that the tale which Mr. Torrens has told to his daughter, and which his daughter has repeated to those friends of mine who have granted her an asylum,—I perceive that this tale is, alas! too true, strange and incredible as it at first appeared. Yes: Mr. Torrens did not deceive his daughter! The house was entered by two men and robbed, as he described the occurrence—and those two men were the real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay! Jeffreys," continued the Black, in a lower and more measured tone, "you are now completely in my power. Nay—start not—fear not: it is far from my intention to harm you. But it is as well for you to know that you are now bound to me in two ways: first, because I pay you for your services—secondly, because I will denounce you as an accomplice and an accessory before the fact, in respect to that murder, if you hesitate to fulfil my orders! On the other hand, if you remain faithful—if you serve me with that blind obedience and implicit zeal which I exact from you, you have nothing to fear, but every thing to hope."

"Before I was in your power I had made up my mind to serve you in the manner you state," said Jeffreys; "and now of course I am compelled to do so. Give me your orders—what is there for me to undertake? Shall I inform against Josh Pedler and Tim Splint? or shall I go and set the constables upon Old Death, who was an accomplice in the robbery, since he sent those two men to commit it."

"Silence, Jeffreys!" exclaimed the Black imperiously: "it is not for you to suggest any thing—but to perform what is suggested by myself! And remember—I will not allow you to take a single step in these matters, unauthorised by me. Stir not of your own accord—or you will only involve yourself in ruin. See the position in which you are placed! If the two men who murdered Sir Henry Courtenay, be surrendered up to justice, they may confess all—and their confession would implicate you and Benjamin Bones. Nevertheless, an innocent victim shall not be sacrificed to the blood-thirsty law which authorises the punishment of death: Mr. Torrens must be saved! This is an affair which demands the greatest caution; and if you utter a word more than I direct you to speak, or take a single step unknown to me, you will be undone! But time has passed rapidly—more rapidly than I had expected, while we have been thus conversing together," added the Black, looking at his watch. "It is now day-light—and you cannot depart hence until the evening."

He knew by the hour that morning had dawned some time; but the window-shutters were closed, and the curtains were thick and ample, so that not a gleam of sunshine penetrated into that apartment, where the candles were still burning.

"Yes—you must remain here until the evening," repeated the Black. "At what time was it arranged that you should meet the other agents of Old Death in order to visit St. Luke's churchyard?"

"To-night at eleven," answered Jeffreys; "and the place of appointment is at the back of the burial-ground. But do you intend, sir, that I should fulfil my agreement with Benjamin Bones?"

"Ask me no questions!" cried his master, evidently much excited—if not absolutely perplexed by the various ideas that were agitating in his brain. "I have not yet resolved how to act: I must be alone for some hours to meditate! In the meantime you no doubt stand in need of rest? Follow me."

With these words the Black took up a candle and led the way into an adjoining room, which was fitted up as a bed-chamber. There also the shutters were closed, and the curtains drawn over the windows.

"This will be your apartment until the evening," said the Black: "but as I am accustomed to adopt all proper precautions to ensure the complete carrying out of my views, I shall be compelled to place some one with you, and I most moreover request that those shutters remain closed throughout the day."

Jeffreys' new master rang a bell; and in a few minutes a tall, thin, genteel-looking lad, but of a complexion as dark as his own, answered the summons.

"Cæsar," said the elder Black, addressing the lad, "you will stay in this room until I give you permission to leave it; and you will see that Jeffreys, whom I have taken into my service," he added significantly, "is supplied with every thing which he requires in the shape of refreshments."

"Yes, sir," replied the youth, in a respectful manner.

The Black then quitted the room; and Jeffreys remained with the lad who had been addressed by the name of Cæsar.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.
SCENES AT THE BLACKAMOOR'S HOUSE.

When the Black returned to the parlour where he had received from the lips of Jeffreys revelations which had produced a strange effect upon his mind, he threw himself upon the sofa, and gave way to his reflections.

Although he had been up all night, yet he experienced no sensation of weariness: he possessed a soul of such indomitable energy that by a natural kind of sympathy between mind and matter, it sustained even the physical powers to a wondrous degree.

We must follow him in the train of meditations into which he was plunged; for the affairs in which he suddenly found himself interested, through the confessions of John Jeffreys, were of so complicated and so difficult a nature,—involving, too, so many delicate points,—that to a mind endowed with one whit less of courage, or with one gleam less of clearness, those affairs would have appeared to be entangled beyond all possibility of a safe and prudent unravelling.

Let the reader bear in mind that there were two distinct affairs in question; although they might at a first glance be confounded, because certain persons who were connected with one were also involved in the other.

The first of these affairs was the scheme of Old Death to avenge himself on the Earl of Ellingham,—a scheme involving many frightful details, such as the exhumation of a coffin, the capture of Esther de Medina and Lady Hatfield, and the atrocity of blinding those fair and interesting creatures.

The other affair was the accusation of Mr. Torrens of a crime which he had not committed, and the necessity of proving his innocence.

"If those miscreants Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler be informed against," reasoned the Black within himself, "they will be certain that either Benjamin Bones or John Jeffreys has betrayed them, and they will accordingly give a full and complete explanation, the result of which would be that the whole four would swing together. But I am bound to save Jeffreys from that terrible fate; and God forbid that that I should be the means, direct or indirect, of sending Benjamin Bones to the scaffold! And yet, on the other hand, knowing all that I have elicited from Jeffreys, and acting in the true spirit of that mission which I have voluntarily undertaken, I dare not allow this innocent man Torrens to be condemned by a frightful combination of circumstantial evidence, when the utterance of a single word will prove him guiltless and fix the crime on those who really perpetrated it. How stands the matter, then? Torrens must be saved on the one hand; but the real murderers must be allowed to escape on the other! Oh! this is a fatal necessity—a dreadful alternative; and yet it is imperious!"

The Black rose and paced the room with slow and measured steps. He reflected profoundly. He separated all the details of the two complicated matters which occupied his thoughts, and examined them one by one.

"In respect to the vengeance of Benjamin Bones,"—it was thus that his musings were continued after a time,—"*that scheme* must be completely strangled at once—annihilated at its very commencement. Not for worlds must aught scandalous or degrading occur to Arthur, Earl of Ellingham!—not for worlds must the relationship subsisting between him and Thomas Rainford be published and proclaimed! Yes—Benjamin Bones must be rendered powerless for the future;—and yet how can this be accomplished without permitting a legal tribunal to seize upon him?"

The Black continued to pace the room, his sable countenance denoting by its workings the searching keenness with which his mind seized upon and examined each successive project that suggested itself as a means to accomplish all his objects and carry out all his aims in a manner certain to produce the results which he was anxious and resolved to bring about.

At length one particular scheme flashed to his mind; and the smile which appeared on his countenance, as his imagination seized on that project, was an augury of its subsequent adoption. He weighed it well in all its details—he calculated its consequences—he minutely examined all its certain results,—and he arrived at the conviction that, though a large and even a dangerous measure, it was the only one whereby all his designs could be effected.

Having resolved to carry it into execution, the Black felt his mind relieved of a considerable load;—and, seating himself at the table, he wrote the following letter:—

> "The account which Rosamond Torrens received from her father relative to the assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay, and which that unfortunate girl recited to you, is strictly and substantially correct. Accident has enabled me to discover the real perpetrators of the crime; *and Mr. Torrens shall be saved!* You will know in what terms to convey this assurance to that poor, suffering creature whom you have taken under your protection."

The Black sealed this note, and addressed it to "*Miss Esther de Medina, Manor House, Finchley*." He then repaired to the room where he had left Jeffreys and Cæsar together, and found that the former, having partaken of some refreshments, had thrown himself on the bed and fallen into a profound sleep.

"Cæsar," said the Black, "you must hasten to Finchley with this letter. Take your horse and delay not. On your return, come back by way of Grafton Street, and tell Dr. Lascelles that I desire to see him as soon as he can possibly visit me."

Cæsar immediately departed to execute these commissions; and the Black seated himself by the side of the bed on which Jeffreys was sleeping.

Nearly an hour passed, and the man did not awake. The Black rang the bell, and a domestic in plain clothes answered the summons.

"Wilton," said his master, "remain here, and keep watch upon this person,"—pointing to the sleeper. "When he awakes, ring the bell."

The servant bowed obedience to these instructions; and the Black left the room.

Several hours had passed away, and it was three o'clock in the afternoon.

Cæsar had returned with letters for his master, who had scarcely made an end of their perusal when Dr. Lascelles was announced.

"Well, my dear friend," said the physician, "what new scheme have you now in view? in what new project do you require my assistance?"

"Sit down, Doctor, and listen to me attentively," observed the Black; "for many and strange incidents have occurred since I saw you last. But perhaps you have been to Finchley; and in that case, one of those circumstances to which I allude will have been made known to you."

"No, my dear friend," replied Dr. Lascelles, depositing his hat and gloves on one chair and himself in another: "I have not had time to call upon the Medinas since they removed to their country residence. I have been experimentalising on a most splendid brain which the surgeon of St. Bartholomew's Hospital was kind enough to send me as a present. But of what nature is the circumstance of which I should have heard at Finchley, had I called? Nothing disagreeable, I hope?"

"I will explain it to you in as few words as possible," answered the Black, seating himself opposite to the physician. "The day before yesterday—at about five o'clock in the evening—Mr. de Medina and Esther were walking along the high road in the immediate vicinity of the Manor, to which they had removed, as you are well aware, in the morning, when they saw a beautiful young creature sitting on the step of a stile, and evidently a prey to the most heart-rending anguish. They accosted her—spoke kindly to her—and at length induced her to tell just so much of her sorrowful tale as to enlist their warmest sympathies in her behalf. They took her to the Manor; but on their arrival, the poor girl was so overcome by illness, fatigue, and distress of mind, that Esther insisted on her retiring to rest. Yesterday morning she was so far recovered as to render it unnecessary to send for you in your medical capacity; and Esther assured her that she might not only look upon the Manor as her home, but that she should be treated with all the kindness, attention, and respect, due to her misfortunes. It then appears that the poor creature made a confidant of Esther, and revealed her entire story, which shows how deeply she is to be pitied, and how cruel were the circumstances that had driven her from her home, and made her resolve to fly from London as from a city of pestilence. The entire details of that story I will give you presently. Yesterday afternoon I repaired to the Manor, and the particulars connected with the young lady were confidentially narrated to me by Mr. de Medina. Last night the metropolis rang with the rumours of a dreadful murder having been discovered——"

"The assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay," remarked the physician; "and the murderer, a gentleman named Torrens, is in Newgate."

"The *alleged* murderer, you mean, doctor," said the Black, emphatically. "And now prepare yourself to hear an amazing revelation—for the young creature who found an asylum at Finchley Manor, is the daughter of that *alleged murderer*, and her name is Rosamond."

"But surely she could not have been in any way implicated——"

"Patience, doctor—patience," said the Black. "On hearing last night of the arrest of Mr. Torrens, I immediately dispatched Cæsar to Finchley with a note to Mr. de Medina, containing the sad intelligence; and I find by letters which I have just received," he added, glancing towards the documents which lay open on the table, "that the news were broken as delicately as possible to the unhappy girl: nevertheless, she is, as you may suppose, a prey to the most lively grief; and it has been with the greatest difficulty that Mr. de Medina and Esther have restrained her from flying to Newgate to console her father. Let me now relate her history to you."

The Black then detailed those incidents in connexion with Rosamond, which are already known to the reader—save and except the dreadful fact that Mr. Torrens had sold his daughter's virtue to Sir Henry Courtenay; for though the unhappy girl had confessed the outrage which had been perpetrated on her, she knew not—as the reader will remember—that her own father had been an accomplice in the fearful deed.

"I have now some further explanations to give you, doctor," continued the Black; "and then I shall have completed my long, long preface to the business which induced me to request your presence here now. In pursuance of that grand and difficult project, the nature of which is so well known to you, I resolved to enlist one of Old Death's confederates, or rather instruments, in my own service. Accordingly, last night, as soon as I had dispatched Cæsar to Finchley with the note containing the intelligence of Mr. Torrens' arrest, I went into the Borough, and watched in the neighbourhood of Old Death's lodgings: for I informed you a few days ago, if you recollect, that Cæsar had succeeded in discovering the abode of that terrible man. Well, I kept not my watch uselessly; for I soon beheld three men enter the house in Horsemonger Lane, individually and at short intervals. Two of them were unknown to me—although I have since found that their names were by no means unfamiliar; but the third was a fellow of whom I knew something. This was John Jeffreys—once a servant in the employ of Sir Christopher Blunt. Now it immediately struck me that this was the very man who would suit my purposes; for he is crafty—intelligent—and always ready to serve the best paymaster. I accordingly resolved to enlist him in my employ; and to this determination I was the more readily brought, because I felt convinced that mischief was brewing under the auspices of Old Death. The fact of the three men arriving so mysteriously—singly and at short intervals, on the same evening,

evidently by appointment—and the length of time they remained in the place, were sufficient arguments to prove to a far less experienced person than myself, that a council of desperate men was being held for no good purposes. It was not until past three this morning, that the villains separated. I had already made up my mind how to act, and a hackney-coach was ordered by me to wait beneath the wall of Horsemonger Lane. I fancied that Old Death's visitors would depart singly as they had arrived; and my expectations were so far realised that Jeffreys went off by himself. I resolved to follow him home first—for I suspected that he lived at no great distance; because, I thought that if I could not succeed in inducing him to accompany me, I should at least know where to find him on another occasion. At his own door I accosted him; and, by working on his fears by means of my mysterious behaviour, as well as by holding out to him vague threats that I was prepared to carry him off by force, if he should resist me, I succeeded in bringing him blindfold to this house."

"Well done!" exclaimed the physician. "And so I presume you have regularly enlisted the respectable Mr. Jeffreys into your service—thereby securing the aid of a spy in the enemy's camp."

"The very object aimed at—the very point gained!," cried the Black, "Jeffreys, under the joint influence of bribery and menaces, is completely mine: and he gave me proofs of his fidelity by revealing to me many interesting matters. Indeed, it was providentially fortunate that I got him into my power and service just at this particular time; as you shall judge for yourself."

He then related the details of the damnable conspiracy planned by Old Death, and to be executed by his myrmidons, against the peace of the Earl of Ellingham and the happiness of Lady Hatfield and Esther de Medina.

"This man is a perfect monster!" ejaculated Dr. Lascelles indignantly. "How is it possible that you can have any forbearance, my dear friend? Set your retainers to watch for him—have him captured—and lock him up for life in one of the dungeons which he himself doubtless rendered serviceable to his own purposes on more than one occasion."

"Patience, doctor," said the Black: "nothing must be done rashly nor without due consideration. Besides, you are well aware that my object is to endeavour to reform that bad man——"

"Reform the devil!" cried the physician impatiently. "You know very well that I ridiculed the idea when you first started it."

"And I intend to try the experiment, doctor," observed the Black, calmly but firmly. "In the meantime, pray listen to me. In the course of the conversation which I had with Jeffreys this morning, he mentioned the name of Torrens; and to my surprise I found that he had lately been in that gentleman's service. When Rosamond told her story to Esther, the poor girl alluded several times to her father's man-servant, as I stated to you just now; but as she did not happen to mention his name—or if she did, it was not mentioned to me—I was unaware of the identity of that domestic and Jeffreys till the latter himself suffered the fact to transpire. Then was it that I also received a corroboration of the truth of the version which Mr. Torrens had given his daughter of those circumstances that led to the death of Sir Henry Courtenay; for Jeffreys instigated the robbery at Torrens Cottage—Benjamin Bones appointed two men to execute it—and those men assassinated the baronet."

"You have thus become the depositor of a very agreeable secret, my dear friend," said the doctor, somewhat ironically. "How do you intend to act? For my part, I consider the position to be embarrassing; for if those two men are arrested, they will perhaps inform against Jeffreys and Old Death,—and, in this case, you lose not only your new dependant, but also the opportunity of trying your great moral theory—which I call great moral nonsense—upon the respectable Mr. Benjamin Bones."

"Doctor—doctor," exclaimed the Black, in a reproachful tone: "is this your friendship for me? is this the way in which you fulfil your promise of assistance?"

"Pardon me, my dear fellow," cried the good-hearted physician, wringing his companion's hand violently. "If I talk to you in that fashion, it is simply because I am deeply anxious for your welfare, and that—in consequence of certain circumstances which we need not specify—I look upon you just as if you were my own son. You know that I am ready to serve you by day and by night—that you may command me at all times, and my purse to its fullest extent——"

"A thousand thanks, doctor, for these proofs of generous friendship," interrupted the Black. "Your assistance I indeed require: on your purse, thanks to the liberality of Mr. de Medina and the Earl of Ellingham, I shall not be compelled to make any inroad."

"Then in what way can I assist you?" demanded the physician.

"I will explain myself," continued the Black. "But first I must tell you that the very two men who murdered Sir Henry Courtenay, are of the gang employed by Old Death to persecute the Earl and the two ladies in whom we all feel an interest—I mean Georgiana Hatfield and Esther de Medina."

"This makes the business more complicated," said the doctor: "because if those two men are arrested on the charge of murder, they may perhaps confess not only that Old Death urged them to the robbery and that Jeffreys was an accomplice in it; but they may also state the services which Benjamin Bones hired them to perform respecting the Earl and the two ladies,—thereby at once publishing to the world that Thomas Rainford was indeed the elder brother of the Earl, and propagating the infamous scandal relative to Esther de Medina having been the said Thomas Rainford's mistress."

"You embrace the whole difficulty—or rather the greater portion of it at once, my dear doctor," exclaimed the Black, delighted to find that his friend entered so minutely and with such keen perception into the affair. "The business presses in every way. In the first place, it is necessary that an innocent man should be relieved as speedily as possible from the dreadful charge hanging over his head; and secondly, the exhumation of the coffin in Saint Luke's churchyard must be prevented this night."

"Certainly it must;" observed Dr. Lascelles. "For if once Old Death knew that the coffin contained not the remains of Thomas

Rainford, the discovery might engender certain suspicions in the mind of such an astute old scoundrel as he."

"In a word, doctor, Torrens must be saved; and yet the two men, who rejoice in the names of Joshua Pedler and Timothy Splint, must not be handed over to justice," observed the Black.

"Such ought to be the policy adopted," said the physician: "and, remember, that though these two men are not to be rendered up to justice, they must be taken such care of for the future as to commit no more murders and accept no more employ in the service of such miscreants as Old Death."

"Of that I shall indeed take good care," said the Black.

"But how will it be possible to save Torrens without handing Splint and Pedler over to justice in his place?" demanded the physician. "You will be a clever fellow if you accomplish that difficulty."

"I am prepared to encounter it, doctor," returned the Black; "and you must aid me in the business. Are you so intimately acquainted with any magistrate or justice of the peace, that you could invite him to dinner?"

"What an extraordinary question!" cried Dr. Lascelles, laughing. "How will my asking a magistrate to dinner serve your purposes?"

"Only thus far," responded the Black: "that you would have the kindness to walk a little way with him on his return home in the evening, and that I should have you both very quietly kidnapped, blindfolded, and carried off to some place where you would both have to receive and witness the statements made by two men named Joshua Pedler and Timothy Splint, whom I shall have safe in my own custody within a few hours."

"I understand," said the physician, laughing heartily. "Capital! capital! But, by the bye,—when I think of it—your old friend Sir Christopher Blunt was gazetted two days ago to be one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex. Would he not serve your purpose? or do you think——"

The physician paused and looked the Black steadfastly and significantly in the face.

"He will answer admirably!" exclaimed the latter, after a few moments' reflection. "Yes—better than any other, all things considered! I will undertake to get him into my power without giving you the trouble to ask him to dinner. But I must request, doctor, that to-morrow night at eleven o'clock you will take a lonely walk in some very retired spot, and at a good distance off too, so that you may lose all trace of the path pursued by your kidnappers."

"You do not require two persons, surely?" said Lascelles.

"Yes—it will be better," responded the Black; "a Justice of the Peace, and a competent and credible witness. Do you happen to have any patient in the neighbourhood of Bethlem, for instance?"

"Let me see," said the doctor, in a musing manner. "Yes," he cried: "an old lady whom I have not visited for some time."

"Very good," observed the Black. "Then you can call on her to-morrow evening; and between ten and eleven, as you are returning on foot—on foot, remember—you will be set upon by half a dozen ruffians," he continued, laughing, "who will blindfold you, shove you into a chaise, and carry you off—you never will be able to say whither."

"I understand you, my dear friend," said the physician, laughing heartily also. "Your scheme is admirable and certain of success."

"Thus far, then, the business is settled," observed the Black.

At that moment Cæsar entered the room, and informed his master that the man Jeffreys had just awoke, having slept uninterruptedly for many hours.

"But you have not left him alone, Cæsar?" exclaimed the Black.

"No, sir—Wilton is with him," was the answer given by the youth.

"Good!" observed his master: then, turning towards the doctor, he added, "If that fellow were to open the shutters and look out into the street, he might recognise the locality; and I intend to allow him no opportunity of playing me false."

"You act wisely," said the physician, who then took his departure, while the Black repaired to the chamber where Jeffreys was remaining.

The man rose and bowed respectfully on the entrance of his master, who, having dismissed Wilton, seated himself and proceeded to address his new dependant in the following manner:—

"I have resolved how to act in the emergencies which have arisen, and to which I have devoted my best consideration. You will not only be saved from the consequences of your connivance with the robbery which took place at Torrens Cottage, and which ended in so tragic a manner; but you will likewise be rendered secure from the possibility of being in any way implicated hereafter. My promises will be faithfully kept, if you prove faithful. But if, on the other hand, you deceive me, I will find you out wheresoever you may hide yourself; and you shall assuredly perish on the scaffold! For you cannot conceive the extent of my power to reward, nor of my ability to punish."

"I have seen enough, sir, to be convinced that you are some great person," said Jeffreys, "and I assure you that you will find me faithful and devoted."

"Act according to your words, and you will bless the day when you first encountered me," observed the Black. "And now listen to my instructions. Soon after it is dark you will be conveyed away from this house; and, at the proper hour, you will keep your appointment

to-night with Pedler and Splint. You say that you are to meet them behind St. Luke's church. Do you mean in the road which separates the two burying-grounds from each other?"

"That is the place of meeting, sir," was the answer.

"Very well," continued the Black. "Is there any chance of Old Death forming one of the party?"

"Not the slightest, sir. He loves to plan and plot; but he usually pays agents to execute."

"I could have wished it had been otherwise. However, you will meet your two friends according to agreement; and you will endeavour to keep them in conversation for a few minutes in the road between the two burial-grounds. This will give my people time to surround them, as it were: for it is my intention to arrest those two men this very night."

Jeffreys looked alarmed and said, "They will be sure to think that I have betrayed them, sir."

"Leave all that to me," returned the Black. "I will take care that they shall never have the opportunity of injuring you. Wilton—the servant who has just left this chamber—will conduct the expedition to night; and he will allow you to escape. You will then proceed as quickly as possible to Seven Dials, where Old Death, according to what you told me this morning, must have already taken up his abode;—and you will tell him that when it came to the last moment, Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler were afraid to undertake the business of digging up the coffin, and resolved to have nothing more to do with him or his affairs. But you will assure him that you remain faithful to him, and that you can recommend two friends of your own who will be delighted to do all he requires for a quarter of the sum he agreed to pay Pedler and Splint. If he accepts the service of your pretended friends, you will make an appointment to meet him in some, low neighbourhood the day after to-morrow, in the evening. Let the time named be a late hour; and should he wish you and your friends to call on him in Earl Street, raise objections, as it does not suit my purpose that the appointment should be there. It must be a place of meeting *from which he has to walk home afterwards*."

"I understand all your commands, sir," said Jeffreys; "and you may depend upon them being faithfully executed."

"I rely upon you," observed the Black; and, after a few moments' consideration, he added, "To-morrow evening at nine o'clock, punctually, you must be in Wilderness Row, beneath the wall of the Charter House gardens; and I shall send some one to receive an account of your proceedings with Old Death, and give you further instructions. But once more I say, be faithful—be prudent—and avoid any vain or foolish display of your money."

"I wish you would have more confidence in me, sir," exclaimed Jeffreys: then, after a brief pause, he said, as an idea struck him, "I have a great deal of money about me, sir—and I wish you would take care of it for me."

"Now I am convinced of your honest intentions, my good fellow," said his master, in a kinder tone than he had yet adopted towards the man. "If you propose to leave your money with me as a guarantee of your good faith, I do not now require any such security: but if your object be to place it in safety, I will accept the trust."

"Well, sir—let it be in the way you have just mentioned," returned Jeffreys.

"Here is a drawer—lock up any thing you choose therein, and take the key with you," said the Black.

Jeffreys did as he was desired: Wilton was again summoned—an excellent dinner was supplied the new dependant and the servant who was appointed to remain with him;—and the Black retired to his own apartment.

Soon after it was dark, Jeffreys was blindfolded and conducted to a private carriage, which was waiting. Wilton accompanied him in the vehicle, which, after driving about for nearly an hour, stopped at last; and Jeffreys, on removing the bandage from his eyes, and alighting, found himself in an obscure street in the immediate vicinity of Shoreditch Church.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.
THE SURPRISE.—JEFFREYS AND OLD DEATH.

The deep tones of St. Luke's bell, proclaiming the hour of eleven, oscillated though the gusty air, as Tim the Snammer entered the narrow road dividing the two burial-grounds belonging to the church. John Jeffreys was already at the place of appointment; and not many moments had elapsed after those two met, ere Josh Pedler joined them, bringing with him the necessary implements for the work of resurrectionists, and which he instantly threw over the wall.

"What a windy night it is," said Tim the Snammer; "and how precious dark."

"All the better for our business," observed Josh Pedler. "I should have been here a little earlier; but I had such a cursed deal of trouble to get rid of that bothering wench 'Tilda. She wouldn't let me come out at first; and swore that if I did, she'd foller me."

"And did she follow you?" demanded Jeffreys.

"Deuce a bit," answered Josh. "I was obliged to give her a good drubbing because she whimpered, and then another to make her hold her tongue; and afterwards we kissed and made it up—and so she went quietly to bed. What strange things women are, to be sure! If you beat 'em, they're sure to love you all the more."

"Well, are we going to stand here talking all night?" cried Tim the Snammer. "Who knows but what there's a watchman about here?"

"I know there isn't," said Jeffreys: "because I made the enquiry in a careless kind of way at a public-house close by, where I bought some brandy in a pint bottle."

"That's capital!" cried Tim. "Give us a dram, old feller."

"I got it on purpose to keep the cold out and our spirits up," said Jeffreys, playing his part admirably so as to gain time, in obedience to the orders he had received from his master. "Who was it that came with Tidmarsh this morning to see the place where Tom Rain is buried?"

"I did," answered Tim the Snammer, smacking his lips in approval of the brandy, and handing the bottle to Josh Pedler.

"Ah! Tom Rain was a fine fellow!" said Jeffreys. "I knew him well. In fact, I was with old Sir Christopher and Frank Curtis the night he robbed them. What a bold, dashing, and yet cool-headed chap Rainford was!"

"The finest highwayman that England ever had," observed Josh Pedler, returning the bottle to Jeffreys.

"Beat your Dick Turpins and your Jack Sheppards all to nothink!" added Tim the Snammer. "I say, Josh, let you and me take to the road when we've done Old Death's business for him, and sacked the blunt he's still got to pay us."

"Well—well, we'll see about it, Tim," answered Pedler. "But—hush! here's some one coming. Let's pretend to be walking on: we haven't time to jump over after the tools."

The three accordingly put themselves in motion; but Jeffreys knew pretty well that the critical moment was now at hand. Tim the Snammer affected to whistle a tune in a careless way; and Josh Pedler began talking loud on some indifferent subject.

Meantime, the footsteps advanced; and it was evident that more than one person was approaching. In fact, there seemed to be three or four; but Josh Pedler and Tim Splint had not the least suspicion of impending danger: they thought that a party of jovial fellows were returning from the public-house—an idea that was excited by the merry song which one of the persons now approaching was singing.

A few minutes brought the two parties within ten paces of each other; when a sudden and suspicious noise was heard, as of a rustling of clothes against the walls which bounded the road. Both Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler stopped short, alarmed and irresolute: the next instant they, as well as Jeffreys, were seized by two persons who leaped upon them from the walls, and by those who had advanced along the road.

Jeffreys was liberated the moment he mentioned his name; and he hurried away as quickly as possible from the scene of the surprise and capture;—but not before he had witnessed enough, even in the obscurity of the night, to convince him that Josh Pedler and Tim the Snammer were gagged and rendered powerless in the grasp of the agents of the mysterious Blackamoor.

And such was indeed the fact. Before they were able to offer the slightest resistance, or even utter a cry, they were reduced to the condition just described. Their captors immediately divided into two parties, each bearing off a prisoner, so that the villains had not even the consolation of remaining together.

So well were all the arrangements made to ensure the complete success of the affair, that a vehicle was waiting in the vicinity of each end of the road separating the burial-grounds; and the moment the prisoners were thrust inside, bandages were tied over their eyes.

Tim the Snammer was the first who arrived at the place of the villains' destination. At the expiration of an hour from the time of his capture, the vehicle, which had purposely driven about in a circuitous manner, stopped at a house, into which the prisoner was hurried. Up a flight of stairs he was then led—through several rooms—and at length down a long spiral descent of stone steps, a trap shutting with a crashing sound above, and a huge door opening and closing with the din of massiveness below,—then along a place in which the rapid tread of the numerous feet echoed with a gloomy and hollow sound, as if in a paved and vaulted passage,—and lastly into a dungeon, where the wretched man was deposited, unbound, and left to himself, the huge door closing upon him,—such was the hurried progress and ultimate destination of Tim the Snammer in the strange and unknown place to which his captors had borne him!

The treatment experienced by Josh Pedler was precisely the same, save that he did not enter his prison-house until a good half hour after the arrival of his companion in iniquity.

In the meantime, John Jeffreys proceeded to Seven Dials, and found Old Death seated with Mrs. Bunce, Toby having been dismissed—as was usual when Mr. Bones had business to transact in Earl Street—to the public-house to amuse himself with his pipe and his pint.

Old Death was surprised and alarmed when he beheld Jeffreys make his appearance so early, and unaccompanied by Tim Splint and Josh Pedler.

"Is any thing the matter?" enquired the ancient miscreant, as Mrs. Bunce carefully closed the room door.

"No great harm—only something to delay your business," replied Jeffreys.

"Well—if it's no worse, there isn't much harm done," said Old Death. "But where are the others?"

"It's just on account of them that nothing has been done to-night," answered Jeffreys. "In two words, they funked over the affair and have given it up."

"What!" cried Old Death, his countenance becoming grim and ghastly with rage and disappointment: "those scoundrels have received my money—my good money—thirty pounds each, in advance—and have given up the business! You are joking, Jeffreys,—you are bantering me! Why, Tim the Snammer would go through fire and water for such a sum of money as I promised him; and Josh Pedler would sell his skin for half the amount."

"All I can say is this, Mr. Bones," continued Jeffreys, "that I was punctual at the place of meeting at five minutes to eleven; and when Tim Splint and Josh Pedler made their appearance, they said they had changed their minds and should not proceed farther in the business, and that I might come and tell you so if I liked."

"The villains!—the rascals!" growled Old Death, clenching his fists, and working his toothless jaws about horribly as he spoke.

"I asked them what had made them come to such a resolution," proceeded Jeffreys; "and they said that on account of Torrens's affair they had plenty of money, and it was useless to risk transportation by turning resurrectionists, at least before it was all spent. I argued with them—but it was all in vain: they went away to some public-house; and as I couldn't do the job myself, I started off here to tell you what had occurred."

"Those men don't know me, or they would not attempt to play their tricks in this fashion," murmured Old Death: then, turning towards Jeffreys, he said in a louder tone, and in a conciliating manner, "But you are a good fellow—you are faithful and true, as I always found you; and I am pleased with you. The day will come when Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler shall bitterly repent of their conduct! But in the meantime I am not to be disappointed in my vengeance—I will not be foiled: I have set my mind on a particular course—and I will follow it."

"There are other men in the world who can do all you require, Mr. Bones, besides Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler," said Jeffreys. "I wish you had spoken to me first of all——"

"Why so?" demanded Old Death, hastily.

"Because I could have got a couple of chaps to help me to do all the business, and who would have been contented with a quarter of the money you promised those sneaking scoundrels Splint and Pedler," answered Jeffreys.

"Indeed!" cried Old Death eagerly. "You are a good fellow, Jeffreys—an excellent fellow; and you may always calculate upon having me as your friend. But where are these people that you speak of?—who are they?"

"You don't know any thing of them, I fancy," was the reply. "They are like myself—servants out of place; but they are a precious sight worse off than me in respect to money-matters, and would be glad to do any odd job for a ten-pound note or so."

"And when can you see them?" demanded Old Death.

"When can I see them?" repeated Jeffreys in a musing tone, as if he were giving the matter his most serious consideration: "why—I might hunt them up to-morrow night—in fact, I'm sure I could——"

"And you can make an appointment for me to see them the night after?" said Old-Death, with fiendish eagerness to consummate the atrocious vengeance which he had planned.

"I will undertake to do that, Mr. Bones," returned Jeffreys. "Shall I explain to them the nature of the business before they see you, or not?"

"No—let me see them first!" said Old Death. "Or stay—you may sound 'em about the resurrection business—but mention no names at all. Don't tell them who has employed you to treat with them——"

"Mr. Bones is a good judge of people's faces," observed Mrs. Bunce; "and knows by their looks whether they're to be trusted or not."

"Generally speaking, I do—generally speaking," said Old Death. "Now, for instance," he added, staring from beneath his shaggy, overhanging brows, full upon the countenance of Jeffreys, "I know that you're faithful—and I can trust you."

The man to whom these words were addressed, met the searching look fixed upon him with an unchanging cheek and eyes that quailed not; although for a moment he feared lest Old Death had suddenly entertained some suspicion concerning him. But it seemed that the ancient miscreant, with all his boasted skill in reading the human physiognomy, was on this occasion completely at fault.

"To tell you the truth, Jeffreys," he continued, "I never liked the looks of the Snammer: but I thought that good pay would make him faithful. However, he will yet repent his conduct towards me—and so shall Josh Pedler. If it wasn't for their infernal treachery, my vengeance would be by this time in a fair way towards prompt and speedy gratification. For if that Earl was allowed to go scot-free—if I didn't punish him—aye, and fearfully too—for all the injuries he has done to me, I should go mad! My property all destroyed—my riches taken from me—the very house that was so useful to me——"

"Don't take on so, Mr. Bones!" interrupted Mrs. Bunce, in a coaxing manner. "Come—shall I put a leetle brandy on the table?"

"No—gin!" ejaculated Old Death savagely: then, turning towards Jeffreys, he said, "You won't bring those friends of yours here, mind, the night after to-morrow: it will be quite time to let them know where I live and where business will afterwards lead them to meet me, when I have satisfied myself that they are of the right sort."

"You don't think I would ask you to employ any one that I wasn't sure of?" exclaimed Jeffreys, affecting an angry tone.

"No—no, my good fellow," hastily responded Old Death: "but experience—experience teaches us much; and my experience is greater than yours. Come—take a glass of gin-and-water, and don't be annoyed. I didn't mean to vex you."

"Say no more about it, then," observed Jeffreys. "Where shall we meet the night after to-morrow?"

"Let me see," mused Benjamin Bones aloud: "I have an appointment for that evening in the actual neighbourhood of St. Luke's Church; and there's a flash ken in Helmet Row, called the *Stout House*. We will meet there between ten and eleven."

"Agreed," said Jeffreys. "Have you any farther instructions?"

"None—none, my good fellow," answered Old Death: "only don't promise your two friends too much for the services required of them. You see how I have lost already by those scoundrels Pedler and Splint: but I will be even with them—I will!"

"The two persons I shall introduce to you will do your work well and cheap, Mr. Bones," replied Jeffreys; "and I am sure you will be satisfied. I shall now be off—because I may perhaps find them to-night. At all events we meet at the *Stout House*, Helmet Row, the night after next."

"Exactly," said Old Death. "By the way, if you run against Tim the Snammer or Josh Pedler, just try and find out where they are to be met with, and let me know."

"I'll bear it in mind," answered Jeffreys.

He then took his departure, well pleased at the success which had hitherto attended his proceedings in working out the designs and fulfilling the instructions of his master.

But who was that master?—and where dwelt the mysterious personage? Ah! these were points which defied all conjecture.

On the following evening, shortly before nine o'clock, Jeffreys was pacing Wilderness Row, in obedience to the appointment arranged by his employer.

He was not kept waiting many minutes, ere the youth Cæsar accosted him.

"Our master," said the lad, "has sent me to inquire of you the result of your interview with Old Death; and he desires me to assure you that he is well satisfied with your conduct of last night, inasmuch as you effectually amused your companions until their captors came up. But what of Old Death?"

"He has completely fallen into the snare laid for him," answered Jeffreys; "and will meet me and *my two friends*," he added significantly, "at the *Stout House*, Helmet Row, to-morrow night between ten and eleven."

"Good!" observed Cæsar. "Wilton and another of our master's retainers, both dressed in a suitable manner, will meet you at that place to-morrow night shortly before ten, so that you may have time to arrange the plan of proceeding together, before Old Death makes his appearance."

"I shall not fail to be there at a quarter to ten," answered Jeffreys. "Have you any further orders for me?"

"Yes," replied Cæsar: "listen! To-morrow you must endeavour to find out the abode of one Tidmarsh, a friend of Old Death's."

"That will be easily accomplished to-morrow night when I meet Benjamin Bones," said Jeffreys. "You are aware that the object of my appointment with him, is to introduce to him two friends of mine who will undertake to dig up the remains of Tom Rainford, the famous highwayman."

"Yes—yes," said Cæsar hastily.

"Well," continued Jeffreys, "I am supposed to be the leader of the party by whom that task is to be performed; and I shall tell Old Death that he must send Tidmarsh with me in the morning to point out the place where Rainford is buried. He will then let me know where

Tidmarsh lives; or else will at once make him write a note to that person to arrange an appointment."

"I understand," said Cæsar. "But suppose that Old Death will do neither, alleging that he will call himself on Tidmarsh and send him to meet you on the following morning at some place named? In this case all will be wrong, because Old Death is to be captured to-morrow night on his way home. Had you not better call in Seven Dials to-morrow morning, tell Old Death that you have found your friends and made the appointment with them for the evening, and then ask him to let Tidmarsh at once afford you the clue you will require to—to—the grave of Rainford?" asked the lad, his voice trembling and hesitating slightly as he uttered the concluding words of his question.

"I understand you perfectly, Cæsar," replied Jeffreys. "Leave it to me to manage as our master desires: I will undertake to be able to give Wilton good news of Tidmarsh to-morrow night."

"Our master will rely upon you," said the youth. "Meantime farewell;"—and he hurried rapidly away, Jeffreys not offering to follow him.

CHAPTER XC.
THE NEW JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.

Sir Christopher Blunt was seated in his library, on the same evening which saw the interview between Cæsar and Jeffreys; and his countenance was animated with a glow of indescribable delight as he glanced his eyes over several letters which he opened one after another.

He was dressed in a very elegant manner; though he had somewhat punished his corns by persisting to wear tight boots in order to make his feet look small, and he might have felt a trifle or so easier at the waist if he had not tied his waistcoat strings so tight. But if Sir Christopher Blunt chose to enhance the fascinations of his appearance by converting himself into a voluntary victim of that all-powerful Inquisition called "Fashion,"—if Sir Christopher Blunt, like a great many other silly, old gentlemen of this age, smiled at his self-martyrdom with the equanimity of a saint broiling on a gridiron,—it is no business of any body save the Sir Christopher Blunt aforesaid.

In spite of the pinching boots end the excruciating tightness of the figured silk waistcoat, the worthy knight was in a most glorious humour. It was not because fortune had favoured him with great wealth: he was so accustomed to riches by this time that a little poverty might have proved an agreeable variation, if only for the excitement of the thing. Neither was it the pleasing fact that his dear spouse had been in such a hurry to present him with a son and heir, that she could not wait longer than three months after their marriage;—for Sir Christopher was already accustomed to the cries of the child, and somehow or another was growing less and less proud of his paternal honours every day, the reasoning of Dr. Wagtail relative to the premature birth appearing more and more illogical each time he sate himself down to reflect upon it. "Then, what *was* the cause of the worthy knight's joyousness and good humour on the evening in question?" demands the impatient reader: to which query we hasten to reply—"Sir Christopher Blunt had just been placed in the commission of the peace, and congratulatory letters from his friends were pouring in on all sides!"

"Well, upon my word, this is very pleasant," said Sir Christopher to himself: "I should not have thought that I was so beloved! Not a man in England has such a host of dear, disinterested friends as I seem to possess. Scarcely does my name appear in the *Gazette*, when —whisk! in come the letters, by twopenny post and general—by hand and by conveyance! And some too are from people that really had no particular cause to be so devoted to me—people that I never spoke to six times in my life! But let's see—what have we here? A sheet of foolscap completely covered—and crossed in some parts. God bless me! what a letter. Why, it must have taken the man an hour to write it; and I am sure it will take me two to read it. But who does it come from? *Henry Atkins!* Henry Atkins—who the deuce is he? Oh! I remember—the gentleman who allowed me a seat in his pew at Hackney, when I went to lodge there four years ago for the benefit of my health. Well, it's very kind of him to write me this long letter of congratulation—for I never exchanged ten words with him in my life. But let's see what he says. '*My dear Blunt.*' Very friendly indeed! '*It was with indescribable delight and supreme satisfaction that I heard of your appointment to a position which no man in Europe can fill with more suitable dignity than yourself.*' Well, come—that's a good beginning. '*Your business habits, your high standing in society, your great name, your unblemished character, your brilliant talents, and your immense benevolence, render you most eligible to fill that office, and most competent to discharge its functions.*' Upon my honour, it's very prettily worded—quite sonorous! It reads admirably. And this sincere and heart-felt congratulation is from a man whom I scarcely know. But he seems to know me well enough, however. '*In these times of agricultural distress and commercial embarrassment—in this age when England's heaven is overcast with lowering clouds, and the storms of anarchy and discontent menace us imminently—it is delightful to reflect that authority is so judiciously entrusted as in your case.*' That's the best rounded period I ever met with in my life. What a clever, far-seeing, shrewd man this Atkins must be: and what an idiot I have been not to cultivate the acquaintance of such a sincere friend! '*But it is chiefly your benevolence—it is principally your boundless charity, which is the theme of all praise, which is chanted by all tongues, and which is hymned beneath every roof throughout the length and breadth of the land.*' Well, I could not have believed that I was so famous—particularly on that score. However, it must be so, since Atkins says it is. '*Yes, my dear Blunt,*'—very friendly indeed!—'*it is your boundless charity, your anxiety to do good to deserving persons, that will hand your name down to posterity, and send it floating like an eternal bark, over the waves of Time.*' Egad! that's splendid. Milton never wrote any thing finer. I have never read Milton, it is true; but I am sure Atkins can beat him. Let us see how it goes on. '*It is under these impressions, and acting in obedience to these convictions, that I have ventured to address you.*' And I am very glad he has: I'll write to him presently and tell him I shall always be delighted to hear from him. Let's see —where was I? Oh!—'*ventured to address you for the purpose of soliciting your aid under very peculiar circumstances.*' Hem! I don't like that sentence so much as the others. '*I am a man possessing a large family and very limited means; and business having been lately indifferent, I have fallen into sad arrears with my landlord.*' The style gets worse—that's clear! '*At this present moment I have an execution in my house for forty pounds; and when I look around me, I behold a distracted wife on one side, and a grim bailiff in possession on the other.*' This is the least interesting part of his letter: that period was not at all well turned. Milton beats him hollow there.—'*If, then, my dear Blunt,*'——damned familiar, though, with his '*dear Blunt,*' upon my honour!——'*If, then, my dear Blunt, you would favour me with the loan of fifty pounds for three months,*'——Confound his impudence!" ejaculated the knight, throwing the

letter into the waste-paper basket. "A man I know nothing of—who knows nothing of me—who never saw me ten times in his life—to ask me for fifty pounds! It is absurd—preposterous!"

And the knight's countenance underwent a complete change, which lasted for several minutes, until its joyous expression was gradually recalled by the perusal of letters which contained congratulations only, without soliciting favours.

Presently a servant entered the room, and stated that a gentleman named Lykspittal requested an interview with Sir Christopher Blunt.

"Show him up—show him up immediately!" exclaimed the knight. "I have been expecting the gentleman this last half-hour," he added, looking at his watch. "It is now nine—and he was to have been here soon after eight."

The domestic withdrew, and speedily returned, ushering in a thin, pale, elderly, sneaking-looking man, dressed in a suit of black which would not bear too close an inspection in the day-time, but passed off well enough by candle-light.

"Sit down, Mr. Lykspittal—pray sit down," said the knight, looking, in contrast with the visitor, just like a wax figure recently added to Madame Tussaud's exhibition, so bright was the red of his animated cheeks, so glossy his coat and trowsers, and so stiff and starch his attitude. "You have been well recommended to me, Mr. Lykspittal, by a friend to whom your literary labours have given complete satisfaction, and who speaks highly of you as a man in whom implicit confidence may be placed."

"I am very much obliged to you, Sir Christopher, for the kind opinion you have formed of me," answered the visitor in a tone of the deepest veneration and respect, and appearing by his manner as if he did not dare to say that his soul was his own. "Allow me to congratulate you, Sir Christopher, on your appointment as one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace. I am convinced a worthier selection could not have been made."

"Well, you're very kind, Mr. Lykspittal," returned the knight. "All my friends seem to agree that the Lord Chancellor acted in a wise and prudent manner in placing my name before his most gracious Majesty for the purpose: and it will be my endeavour, Mr. Lykspittal," added Sir Christopher, pompously, "to discharge the duties of my office with credit to myself and benefit to my country."

"It is not every one who possesses your advantages, Sir Christopher," observed his visitor, in a cringing tone and with a sycophantic manner which would have disgusted any person endowed with good sense and proper feeling; but which were particularly pleasing to the shallow-pated, self-sufficient old beau.

"At the same time," said Sir Christopher, "whatever advantages I may possess—whatever be those merits which have placed me in this—this——"

"Enviable and responsible," suggested Mr. Lykspittal, meekly.

"Enviable and responsible position," continued the knight, adopting the epithets as coolly and quietly as if they were prompted by his own imagination;—"at the same time," he said, "it will not be amiss if certain measures be adopted to—to——"

"Enhance the popularity of your name," observed Mr. Lykspittal, in the same low, cringing, and meek tone as before.

"Just so," exclaimed the knight. "In fact, I mean to take a high stand in the county—to put myself more forward than I have hitherto done—to attend public meetings and——"

"Public dinners," suggested Mr. Lykspittal.

"Exactly," said Sir Christopher: "in a word, I want to—to——"

"Become a public man," added the ready-witted gentleman, whose business it was to furnish ideas to those who furnished him with cash in return.

"You understand me as well as I understand myself, Mr. Lykspittal," observed the knight.

"It's my business, sir," was the answer. "Besides, you are so enlightened and enlightening a man, Sir Christopher, that you may be regarded as a lamp constantly diffusing its lustre even upon the darkest and most chaotic ideas. Pardon me, Sir Christopher, for being so bold as to express my opinion: but it is the truth—and I never flatter."

"I am convinced you speak with sincerity, my dear sir," said the new Justice of the Peace, playing with his eye-glass. "Well, then, Mr. Lykspittal—to go back to our original subject—the subject of this interview—I think you fully comprehend me: indeed, I know that you do. It is my object and my determination to take a high position in the county—so that I may in a short time reckon upon the honour of being one of its representatives in Parliament."

"Very easily managed, Sir Christopher," said Mr. Lykspittal. "The electors would be proud of such a man as yourself:—pardon me for making the observation—but I never flatter. In the first instance, however, it is necessary that they should know you well."

"Now we are coming to the point, my dear sir," exclaimed the knight.

"Will you permit me to offer my suggestions?" asked Mr. Lykspittal, in a tone of insinuating meekness.

"Certainly—by all means. Proceed."

"Well, Sir Christopher, in the first place I should propose that a pamphlet be written on some taking subject, and addressed to your worship," continued Mr. Lykspittal. "Suppose we say the *Corn Laws*—or *Prison Discipline*—or *Catholic Emancipation*—or *Church Extension*—or *Parliamentary Reform*—or *Labour in Factories*——"

"All good subjects, Mr. Lykspittal—all good subjects," observed the knight. "But I do not mind telling you in private, that I know nothing about any one of them."

"Of course not, Sir Christopher," exclaimed Mr. Lykspittal. "It is not to be expected that a man of your standing will trouble himself about the details of such trivial matters. But which side will you take—the Liberal or the Tory?"

"Oh! the Tory, by all means!" cried Sir Christopher.

"Very good, my dear sir," said Mr. Lykspittal. "It is all the same to me—I can write on one side as well as on the other. Suppose, then, we take up the subject of *Catholic Emancipation*, which begins to make a great noise.[40] A pamphlet must be got up, supposed to be written by '*A Friend to the Established Church*,' and it must be in the shape of a letter addressed to yourself. I should begin by saying, —'SIR,—*The interest which you are known to take in this great and important question—the perseverance you have manifested in making yourself acquainted with all the bearings of the case, its certain results and its inevitable influences—the stanch and long-tried ardour which you have evinced in maintaining and upholding the institutions of the Established Church—the numerous proofs which you have given of your attachment to the Protestant Faith—and the fact that the eyes of the whole country are upon you as a man resolved, at any personal sacrifice, and at all individual risks, to oppose all dangerous innovations and resist all perilous changes,—these motives, sir, have induced me to address the following pages to you.*'"

"Nothing can be better, Mr. Lykspittal!" exclaimed the knight. "I should, however, be glad if you will, in the course of the pamphlet, allude especially—and more than once, too—to the fact that I have been the artificer of my own fortune—that I raised myself from nothing—and that the greatest mistake the livery-men of Portsoken ever made was to reject me as a candidate for the aldermanic gown of that ward."

"I shall not forget, Sir Christopher," observed Mr. Lykspittal.

"And you may add, my dear sir," continued the knight, pompously, "that you are well aware that circumstances have since occurred to make me rejoice at that rejection."

"I will declare it to be a well known fact amongst all your friends," said the accommodating literary gentleman.

"And you may touch upon the zeal—the ability—and the efficiency with which I performed the duties of the shrievalty—the very arduous duties of that office," observed the new Justice of the Peace.

"I shall certainly do so, Sir Christopher," replied Mr. Lykspittal; "and it will only be telling the exact truth."

"You may likewise touch upon the reward which it graciously pleased the illustrious Prince to confer upon me," continued the magistrate: "I mean—the honour of knighthood."

"As a matter of course, my dear sir; and never was that title bestowed upon a gentleman better calculated to wear it worthily."

"I thank you, Mr. Lykspittal," returned Sir Christopher, "for your very flattering opinion of me. When can the pamphlet be got ready?"

"I shall set about it immediately, sir," was the answer. "The moment it is published, you must seize upon some point, which I shall purposely leave open for discussion, and write a letter to a morning newspaper, declaring that you agree with the general tenour of the work, but that you totally dissent from that particular doctrine."

"Decidedly," said Sir Christopher. "You will then write a reply, through the same channel, and signed '*A Friend of the Established Church*.'"

"That is my intention. We shall thus excite an interest relative to the pamphlet, and your name, Sir Christopher, will be kept before the public. The discussion may lead to a second pamphlet——"

"Stay!" exclaimed the knight, smiling with the brightness of the idea which had just struck him: "we will manage better than all that! You shall write a pamphlet which you must address to me in the terms just now specified by you; but the work must contain throughout opinions totally opposed to mine, and the object of the pamphlet must seem to be my conversion to your particular way of thinking. Then I must write another pamphlet in answer—or rather, you must write it for me; and you must cut up, hip and thigh, and completely refute all the doctrines set forth in the first pamphlet. In fact, you must start a theory in that first pamphlet, and knock it down altogether in the second, which must be supposed to come from me."

"A very ingenious idea, my dear sir," said Mr. Lykspittal, "and just such an one as I should have expected from a man of your enlightened mind. I admire the plan amazingly; and will set to work at once."

"Very good," exclaimed Sir Christopher. "I will write you a cheque for thirty guineas on account. You will of course make all the necessary arrangements with the printer and stationer, and you may apply to me for money as you require it. I shall do the thing handsomely, and spend fifty pounds at least in advertising each pamphlet."

Mr. Lykspittal coincided altogether in the propriety of these intentions—indeed, he never was known to differ from a patron in the whole course of his life; and, having received the cheque, he took his leave, walking backwards to the door in homage to the great man who had just been placed in the commission of the peace.

Almost immediately after the departure of Mr. Lykspitttal, a servant entered, announcing Captain O'Blunderbuss.

40. The reader will observe that this was said in the year 1827, *before* the emancipation of the Catholics took place.

CHAPTER XCI.
CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS AGAIN.—ANOTHER STRANGE VISITOR.

Sir Christopher Blunt was a man having many antipathies. Since his rejection for Portsoken he had disliked all aldermen, individually and collectively; and since his union with the present Lady Blunt, he had conceived a violent aversion for all lady's-maids. He abominated Italian organ-players, and hated mendicants. Many other dislikes had Sir Christopher Blunt;—but of the whole batch, none was more settled, more genuine, and more sincere than his antipathy for Irishmen generally, and Captain O'Blunderbuss in particular.

His interview with Mr. Lykspittal had left complacent smiles upon his countenance;—but these suddenly yielded to clouds of the darkest description when the domestic announced the name of that dreadful and dreaded man.

"Be the powers, and how is your wor-r-r-ship?" roared Captain O'Blunderbuss, at the top of his stentorian voice, rattling the r most awfully, as he strode towards the knight with outstretched hand: "tip us your fin, my hearty—and allow me to congratulate ye on your appintment to the Commission of the Pace!"

Thus speaking, the captain shook with such exceeding violence the member which he metaphorically designated as a fin, that the wretched Sir Christopher groaned aloud, while tears started into his eyes.

"Be Jasus! and it's proud I am to own ye as my frind, Sir Christopher!" continued the gallant officer, not observing the pain which his proof of extreme cordiality inflicted upon the worthy knight: then, throwing himself into a chair, he exclaimed, "That rascal of a lacquey of your's told me you was out; but I wasn't to be desayved in such a gross fashion any how. So I just tould him my mind—"

"And what was that, captain?" asked the knight, in a half terrified—half sulky tone.

"That he was an insolent blackguard, Sir Christopher," returned O'Blunderbuss emphatically; "and be Jasus! I was just on the point of taching him how to behave towards his superiors, when I saw the gentleman who was last with ye coming out, and he tould me that your wor-r-r-ship was at home."

"But I—I am very particularly engaged, captain," said the knight; "and if you would excuse me now—another time I shall be happy—when you are passing this way——"

"Be the holy poker! and there's no time like the prisint!" interrupted the captain; "and as I want just to have a little cozie chat with you, my dear frind, may be ye'll orther up the whiskey at once, and so save us the throuble of talking dry-lipped."

"Really, Captain O'Blunderbuss," stammered the knight, "as a gentleman—as a—ahem—a person being in the Commission of the Peace—I—must protest against—this—this intrusion——"

"Inthrusion do ye call it?" vociferated the captain: then, after a few moments' pause, during which he surveyed Sir Christopher in a most ferocious manner, he suddenly assumed a milder demeanour, and, coolly ringing the bell, said, "Be Jasus! I'll save ye the throuble of giving any orthers at all, my frind."

"Captain O'Blunderbuss," cried Sir Christopher, plucking up a spirit, "I will not be treated in this manner! One would think that I am not master in my own house. I have already told you that I am very particularly occupied with business—in consequence of my recent appointment to——"

"To the Commission of the Pace!" added the captain. "Well, my frind—and we are going to dhrink success to the Commission and the Pace and all the rist of it. My good fellow," he continued, addressing himself to the footman who now entered the room, "bring up the whiskey and hot wather; with the sugar and a lemon—d'ye hear?"

"Don't do any such thing," exclaimed Sir Christopher, now in a furious passion. "Who are you, sir, that thus dares to give orders in the house of—of an ex-sheriff and an actual magistrate?" demanded the knight, in a stern and pompous tone, for the presence of the servant seemed to be a kind of protection beneath the shield of which the old gentleman grew every moment more valourous.

"Be the powers! and that same is soon answered," said the captain, rising from his chair and drawing himself up to his full height. "Is it myself that ye are afther enquiring about, Sir Christopher? Be Jasus, then—it's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss, I am—of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemara; and it's a pair of pisthols I've got for any man who dares to insulth that same Capthain O'Bluntherbuss. So, if you're for war-r-r, Sir Christopher-r-r," roared the gallant gentleman, "it shall be war-r-r; and if ye're for pace, let it be pace—and potheen!"

The captain looked so very terrible—grew so awfully red in the face—seemed to swell out so tremendously at the chest—and raised his voice to such a thundering tone, as he enunciated his name and that of his imaginary estate, that Sir Christopher's valour, like the courage of Bob Acres, oozed rapidly away, and the servant drew back as near the door as possible so as to be able to beat a retreat, in case of need, without any assistance from the warlike Irishman's foot.

"Is it war-r-r, or pace?" demanded the captain, seeing that the enemy was discomfited.

"Peace—peace, captain,—by all means," returned the knight, in a tremulous voice. "You'll alarm Lady Blunt—and—and make the dear baby cry—"

"It's pace—and potheen, sirrah," said the military gentleman, addressing himself in a tone of stern determination to the domestic, who instantly disappeared. "Now, my dear frind, ye're too impatient be half," continued the captain, resuming his chair and again speaking to the knight: "you don't give me time to explain to ye the nature of my business and the rayson of me calling; for sure and it was to tell ye how plazed your nev-vy Misther Frank Curtis is to think that ye're put in the Commission of the Pace—and how sorry he is to think that ye should have lost any thing by that scounthrel Howard—and how plazed he is to learn that your son and heir is flourishing just like a green bay-leaf—and how sorry he is to think that your frind Torrens should have got himself into such a tirrible pother—and how plazed he is to be able to send ye back the thrifling amount of five hunthred pounds which ye was kind enough to advance him t'other day—"

"Oh! he has done *that*, has he?" said Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands, and evidently getting into a better humour. "Well, I am glad he has fulfilled the little engagement, at all events; and I shall not hesitate to receive it, because—because I am sure he would not have sent it, if he couldn't have spared it."

"Your nev-vy, my dear sir, is a man of honour-r—like myself!" cried the captain, striking his breast very hard, so that it gave forth a hollow, rumbling sound, as if he had a small drum buttoned inside his frock-coat. "But, be the powers! here's the potheen; and it's over the glass that we'll settle the little business of the five hunthred pounds."

The servant placed the tray upon the table, and withdrew. Sir Christopher then, with the politeness of a man who is about to receive the payment of money which he had never expected, did the honours in a most affable manner, and only seemed contented when the captain, having poured half a tumbler of scalding hot toddy down his throat, declared that it was excellent!

"And now for the little business," resumed the gallant gentleman; and he forthwith began to fumble in his pockets, producing various pieces of paper, and discarding them one after the other as soon as he consecutively glanced at their contents. "That's not it, be the powers!" he said, laying down a piece of a play-bill;—"and that's not it, be the holy poker!" he added, throwing aside an old account of his washerwoman's: "nor yet that, be Jasus!" he continued, similarly disposing of a tailor's bill. "Why—what the blazes could I have done with the note?"

"Dear me, captain," observed Sir Christopher, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, "it is very imprudent of you to carry notes about loose in that way."

"So it is, my dear frind," returned the gallant gentleman; "but it's a fashion I have, d'ye see—and it's hard to break one-self of habits of the kind. Be the powers! and here it is at last!"

"All right—all right," said Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands.

"Ye can give me change out of a thousand pounds, can't ye, my dear frind?" demanded the captain, crunching a bit of paper in his hand as he spoke.

"Oh! I can write a cheque for the difference, you know," returned the knight. "I presume it's a note for a thousand pounds?"

"Just so," responded the captain; "and as good as a Bank of England note, be the powers—although 'tisn't quite payable at sight."

"Not payable at sight!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, in astonishment. "Why—I never heard of the Bank of England issuing notes that weren't payable on demand."

"Egad, nor I!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss. "But sure it isn't a Bank of England note at all, at all: it's just my own acceptance——"

"Your acceptance!" groaned the knight, his countenance becoming suddenly blank.

"Yes—be Jasus! and here it is, my dear frind," returned O'Blunderbuss, thrusting the rumpled slip of paper into Sir Christopher's hand. "It's as dacent a note for a promissory one as ever you'd wish to see, and as good as any of the palthry flimsy stuff that the Bank of England ever issued—or the Bank of Ould Ireland either: and that's not even saying enough for it."

Sir Christopher—looking indeed like a knight of the rueful countenance—turned the document over and over in his hands, having glanced impatiently at its contents, which were drawn out in the usual style of a bill of exchange, Captain O'Blunderbuss having accepted it in favour of Frank Curtis, for the amount of One Thousand Pounds, and at three months after date.

"Well, Sir Christopher, and what d'ye say to that, my old buck?" cried the captain, apparently surprised that the knight had not already expressed his admiration at the whole proceeding.

"What—what would you have me do with this?" asked Sir Christopher, in a hesitating manner; for the fact is, he could not think well of it, and he dared not speak ill of it.

"Is it what you should do with it?" vociferated the captain. "Arrah! and be Jasus, man, pay yourself out of it and write me a cheque for the balance."

"But, captain—I—I am no discounter," remonstrated the knight. "This little slip of paper is no use to me."

"Why! sirrah, and just now you was prepared to pay me the difference if it had been a Bank-note!" cried O'Blunderbuss. "D'ye suspict the thing, my frind? For if you mane to infer that it isn't as good as a Bank-note, it's a direct insult to myself; and, be the Lord Harry! it's me that'll resint it."

With these words, the captain assumed a most menacing attitude; and Sir Christopher was already in a dreadful fright lest he should be compelled to submit to this new demand on the part of the extortioner, when the footman entered to announce that a gentleman was waiting in the parlour down stairs to speak to him upon very particular and urgent business.

"You must excuse me for a few minutes, Captain O'Blunderbuss," said the knight, rising to quit the apartment.

"By all manes," cried that gentleman. "We can finish the little matther prisintly; and during your absence I'll pay my respicts to the potheen."

Sir Christopher accordingly repaired to the ground-floor parlour, where he beheld a venerable old man who rose from the sofa whereon he was seated, to greet him.

The stranger's aspect was indeed most imposing and respectable. From beneath a black silk skullcap flowed hair as white as silver; and his form seemed bowed by the weight of years. He was dressed in a complete suit of black, having knee-breeches, silk stockings, and shoes with large silver buckles. He supported himself by means of a stick, and appeared to walk with considerable difficulty.

"Pray be seated, sir," exclaimed the knight, already prepossessed in favour of his venerable-looking visitor, who resumed his place on the sofa in such a manner that the light of the lamp should not fall upon his countenance, which however appeared to be very pale and drawn up about the mouth with the wrinkles of age.

"Sir Christopher Blunt," said the old gentleman, in a tremulous voice, "I have ventured to intrude myself upon you, for the purpose of soliciting a very great favour. It is not of the ordinary nature of boons—it involves nothing of a pecuniary kind; for, thank heaven! I am placed far above the necessity of requiring such succour. Indeed, I may say that I enjoy affluence."

"Be assured, my dear sir," returned the knight, whose respect for his visitor was amazingly enhanced by this announcement,—"be assured that if I can serve you in any way—compatible with my honour as a man, and with my position as an individual in the Commission of the Peace——"

"It is just because you are a magistrate, Sir Christopher," interrupted the old gentleman, his tone becoming slightly less tremulous as he continued, "that I have now visited you. Not that any other magistrate would have failed to answer my purpose; but I have heard so much in your favour—the admirable manner in which you filled the office of Sheriff—the becoming way in which you presented the address to his present Majesty, when Prince Regent, and which was so very properly rewarded by the honour of Knighthood—the dignified manner in which you left the ungrateful livery-men of Portsoken to ruminate over their folly in bestowing their votes on your unworthy rival in that grand contest,—in a word, Sir Christopher, the whole tenour of your life, from the period when you were poor and friendless until now that you are a rich, esteemed, and influential member of society——"

"My dear sir—my dear sir," cried Sir Christopher, absolutely whimpering for joy at hearing his praises thus chanted by a gentleman of so venerable and saint-like an appearance; "I really must know you better—I—I—am quite at a loss to express my thanks—my——"

"No thanks are required by one who proclaims the truth," said the stranger, shaking his respectable old head in a solemn and imposing manner. "You will yet be a great—a very great man, Sir Christopher; or my experience, which is of four-score winters, is miserably—miserably deceived."

"Do you really think so, my dear sir?" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "Well, I suppose you know—or perhaps you may not—that I am a very stanch and sincere friend to the Established Church—that I am entirely opposed to Catholic Emancipation—that I have made the subject a profound study, and have devoted——I wish to God Lykspittal was here to prompt me," he muttered in an under-tone to himself.

"I was not exactly aware of all that, my good—my worthy Sir Christopher Blunt," responded the old gentleman; "but I respect you all the more now that I am acquainted with those facts. Indeed, I am proud and delighted to have the honour of your acquaintance—an honour for which I have long craved urgently. But let me return to the subject of my visit? I was saying that you could render me a great—a very great favour, and at the same time convince the world how zealous, how active, and how worthy a magistrate you are."

"My dear sir, I shall be quite delighted to serve you," cried Sir Christopher, catching also at the idea of serving himself by performing some duty which would put him in such a comfortable and desirable light before the world.

"The fact is, most estimable man," continued the stranger, his voice again becoming very tremulous, as if with deep emotion, so that Sir Christopher was positively affected in no ordinary degree, "two men, stained with a dreadful crime, and now in a position which precludes the possibility of their appearing before a magistrate, are anxious to confess their enormity to some competent authority; and I have selected you for the reasons which I mentioned just now."

"You have done me infinite honour, my dear sir," cried the knight. "I presume that this confession will be published to the world——"

"Decidedly so," interrupted the venerable stranger; "and your name will go forth as that of the zealous, trustworthy, and highly respectable magistrate who was selected under such peculiar circumstances to receive the confession."

"Really this is no favour which you ask of me, my venerable friend," exclaimed Sir Christopher, rejoiced at the lucky chance which thus gave promise of publishing his name in so remarkable a manner. "I shall be delighted to serve you in that or any other way. When do you require me to visit these unhappy men?"

"Immediately—at once," answered the old gentleman. "My own carriage is at the door; and we can proceed to the place of destination with a privacy which the nature of the circumstances renders imperative."

Sir Christopher rose and signified his readiness to accompany his venerable visitor, the joy which he experienced entirely obliterating in his mind all remembrance of the fact that he had left Captain O'Blunderbuss in his library.

Giving his arm to his new friend, who walked with considerable difficulty, Sir Christopher led him into the hall, where the knight only stopped for a moment to take down his hat from a peg. They then issued forth together, and Sir Christopher assisted the old gentleman to ascend the steps of the vehicle which was waiting. He then leapt in himself; and the footman belonging to the carriage had just closed the door, when Captain O'Blunderbuss rushed from the house, exclaiming, "Be the powers, and this is the greatest insulth 'twas ever my misfortune to mate with in all my life!"

"Oh! the dreadful man!" murmured the knight, throwing himself back in the carriage in a state of despair.

"Sir Christopher-r-r!" cried the captain, thrusting his head in at the carriage window: "Sir Christopher-r-r!" he repeated, with a terrible rattling of the r: "is this the way ye mane for to trate a gintleman? Now, be the holy poker! if ye don't come forth and finish the little business——"

At this moment the captain was abruptly stopped short in a most unexpected manner; for the old gentleman, growing impatient of the delay, and perceiving that Sir Christopher was cruelly annoyed by the presence of the Irishman, suddenly dealt so well applied and vigorous a blow at the gallant officer, that his countenance disappeared in an instant from the window, and he rolled back upon the pavement, exclaiming, "Blood and thunther!" in a tone of mingled rage and astonishment.

At the same moment the coachman whipped his horses, and the vehicle rolled away with extraordinary rapidity; while a merry laugh burst from the lips of the venerable old gentleman who had so successfully discomfited the warlike captain.

As soon as Sir Christopher Blunt had recovered from the alarm and excitement which the conduct of Captain O'Blunderbuss had caused him, he was seized with a strange surprise, not altogether unaccompanied by vague fear, at the sudden demonstration of vigour and strength made by his companion. This feeling was enhanced by the youthful tones of the merry laugh, which lasted long after the performance of the pleasant feat; and the knight began to tremble with apprehension, when that same mysterious companion hastily drew up the windows and the wooden blinds of the carriage, the interior thus being thrown into a state of utter darkness.

"My dear Sir Christopher Blunt," said a voice, now tremulous no more, but still evidently disguised, "you will pardon me for having practised upon you a slight deception, which would indeed have been sustained until the end of the present adventure, had not the chastisement which I was tempted to administer to that bullying fellow convinced you that I cannot be an old gentleman of four-score. In all other respects no duplicity was practised upon you; for I am a great admirer of your character—the object I have in view is precisely the one I named to you—and I selected you to receive the confessions of the two men, because I knew no magistrate better qualified to answer the purpose in every way."

A faint degree of irony marked the manner in which these last words were uttered; but Sir Christopher Blunt observed it not—for he was now a prey to oppressive fears and vague apprehensions.

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear sir," resumed the stranger: "I pledge you my most solemn word of honour that no harm shall befall you. Circumstances which I cannot disclose render it necessary to observe all possible mystery in respect to the present transaction. To you the results will be just as I ere now promised. You will receive and attest the confession of two criminals; and in forty-eight hours the contents of that confession, coupled with an account of how you became possessed of it, will appear in every London newspaper. Thence the whole transaction will be transferred to the provincial press; and in less than a week, the name of Sir Christopher Blunt, Knight, and Justice of the Peace, will be published and proclaimed throughout these islands."

"And you really mean me no harm?" said Sir Christopher, considerably reassured as well as consoled by this intelligence.

"Give me your hand, my dear sir," exclaimed his companion. "There! And now I swear that as there is a God above us, you hold the hand of friendship in your's; and may that hand wither if I forfeit my word, or do you harm."

"I believe you, sir—I believe you," said the knight, pressing the hand which he held, with convulsive ardour. "But who are you that act thus mysteriously? what is your name? where do you live? and whither are we going?"

"Not one of those questions can I answer," was the reply; "and it is expressly to prevent you from ascertaining the route which we are pursuing that I have drawn up the wooden blinds. I must also inform you that ere we alight at the place where you will have to receive the confession of the two men, I must bind a handkerchief over your eyes, so that you may obtain no clue to the point of our present destination. Recollect, the event of this evening will give you an immense popularity: you will become the hero of one of the most romantic—one of the most extraordinary—one of the most unheard-of adventures that have ever occurred, or will again occur in this metropolis. You will be courted by all the rank, beauty, and fashion of the West End, to learn the narrative from your own lips; and if you write a novel founded upon the occurrence," added the stranger, again in a slight tone of unperceived irony, "you will instantaneously become the most popular author of the day."

"Upon my honour—my dear sir," said Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands, "I am not altogether sorry that—that—ahem!—that you should have pitched upon me to become the hero of this adventure: at the same time you must confess that never was a hero placed in a position so well calculated to alarm him."

"The character of a hero is not to be bought cheaply in the world," observed the knight's companion. "To become such a character, one must necessarily pass through extraordinary circumstances; and extraordinary circumstances are never without their degree of excitement."

"Very true, my dear sir—very true," said Sir Christopher. "But I don't care how extraordinary the circumstances may be, so long as I run no risk. It's the risk—the danger I care about; and I shall be very happy indeed, if I can become a hero—as you are pleased to call it—without undergoing any such peril."

"You shall become a hero, Sir Christopher, without having undergone the slightest danger," returned his companion; "and that's even

more than can be said by people who go up in balloons or by men who put their heads into lions' mouths in menageries."

"Upon my honour, your observations are most true—most just," exclaimed the knight, now finding himself almost completely at his ease. "I suppose that if I do get my friend Lykspittal to write me——I mean, if I do write a novel founded on the occurrences of this night, you will have no objection to my putting in all our present conversation?"

"Oh! not the least!" cried the stranger. "It is however a great pity that the night is calm, serene, and beautiful."

"Why so?" enquired Sir Christopher, in a tone of profound astonishment.

"Simply because it would be such scope for a splendid opening, if there were a fearful storm, with all the usual accessories of thunder and lightning," observed the stranger, in a cool, quiet, but dry way. "Only fancy, now, something like this:—'*It was on a dark and tempestuous night—the wind blew in fitful gusts—the artillery of heaven roared awfully—the gleaming shafts of electric fluid shot in eccentric motion across the sky*;'——and so on."

"Upon my honour, that commencement would be truly grand!" cried the knight, altogether enraptured by the turn which his companion had given to the discourse. "And, after all, as it would be a novel, I might easily begin with the storm. Let me see—I must recollect that sentence which you composed so glibly. How did it run? Oh! I recollect:—'*It was on a dark and tempestiferous night—the wind roared—the artillery blew in fitting gusts—the streaming shafts of electricity shot across the eccentric sky*.' Eh? that will do, I think," exclaimed Sir Christopher, rubbing his hands joyously. "You see I have not got such a very bad memory, my dear sir."

"Not at all," answered the stranger; "and I should certainly advise you, Sir Christopher, not to lose sight of the novel. If you publish it by subscription, you may put down my name for half a dozen copies."

"But I don't know your name," cried the knight. "And yet," he added, after a moment's pause, "I suppose you must have one."

"I believe that I have," responded the stranger, in a tone suddenly becoming solemn—even mournful; and it struck Sir Christopher that his ear caught the sound of a half-stifled sigh.

But he had not many instants to reflect upon this occurrence—nor even to continue the discourse upon the topic which had so much interested him; for the carriage suddenly stopped, and his companion immediately said, "Now Sir Christopher, you must permit me to blindfold you."

The operation was speedily completed; and the stranger led the knight from the vehicle, into a house, the door of which immediately closed behind them. Up a flight of stairs they then proceeded, and entered a room, where the stranger desired Sir Christopher to remove the bandage.

As soon as this was done, and the knight had recovered his powers of vision, he found himself in a well-furnished room, with the shutters closed, the curtains drawn, and a lamp standing in the middle of a table spread with wine and refreshments of a luxurious description.

His companion still retained the garb and disguise, but no longer affected the decrepitude of old age; and, seating himself with his back to the light, he invited Sir Christopher to take wine with him.

They then sate chatting for upwards of half an hour, when the sound of several footsteps ascending the stairs fell upon their ears: the door opened—and two men entered, leading between them a gentleman with a bandage over his eyes.

The two men retired,—and the stranger desired the gentleman to remove the bandage, adding, "Dr. Lascelles, you will pardon this apparent outrage, the motives of which have doubtless been explained to you by my dependants."

"I am led to believe that my presence is required to witness the confession of two criminals," said the physician, affecting complete ignorance alike of the mysterious master of the house and his affairs; "and if no treachery be intended towards me, I do not feel inclined to complain much of the treatment I have already received."

"I am delighted to hear you express yourself in these moderate terms," observed the prime mover of those widely ramified schemes which are now occupying the reader's attention. "Allow me to introduce you to a gentleman whose name is doubtless familiar to you—Sir Christopher Blunt:" then, turning towards the knight, he added, "Sir Christopher, this is Dr. Lascelles, the eminent physician."

"I think I have had the honour to meet Sir Christopher Blunt on a former occasion—at Lady Hatfield's," said the doctor, offering the knight his hand.

"It is therefore a strange coincidence which has thus brought you together again under such circumstances as the present," observed the stranger. "But you are both no doubt anxious to depart hence as speedily as possible, and I will not detain you longer than is absolutely necessary."

He then rang a bell; and in a few minutes four of his dependants entered the room, leading in Tim the Snammer and Josh Pedler, both strongly bound with cords, and having handkerchiefs over their eyes. These bandages were removed—the two villains cast rapid and searching glances around them—the stranger ordered them to be seated and his dependants to retire—and the business of that memorable night commenced.

CHAPTER XCII.
THE CONFESSION.

"Sir Christopher Blunt," said the stranger, "in your capacity of one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, you will have the kindness to receive the confession of the two men now before you; and you, Dr. Lascelles, as a gentleman of the highest respectability, will witness the present proceedings."

Thus speaking, he drew a writing-table close up to the place where Sir Christopher Blunt was sitting; and the knight, inflated with the pride of his official station, and conscious of the importance of the part which he was now enacting, assumed as dignified and solemn a deportment as possible. A Bible was produced; and he directed the two prisoners to be sworn, the stranger administering the oath.

"Now, my men," said the Justice of the Peace, "it is my duty to hear and receive any confession which you may have to make to me. But I give you due warning that it is to be published, and, from what I have already been told, will be used elsewhere. Remember, also, that you are now upon your oaths; and you must consider yourselves in just the same position as if you were in a regular police-court, under usual circumstances."

Having thus delivered himself of what he believed to be an admirable prelude to the proceedings, Sir Christopher glanced complacently towards Dr. Lascelles, as much as to say, "That was rather good, I flatter myself;" and the physician responded with a sign of approval. The knight then fixed his eyes in a searching manner upon the two prisoners, who, however, appeared to be much less in awe of the magisterial dignity than of the presence of the mysterious stranger, at whom they from time to time cast furtive looks of terror and supplication.

"Sir Christopher Blunt," said that individual, who throughout the proceedings spoke in a feigned tone, and sate in such a manner that the light never once fell fully upon his countenance, "it is now necessary to remind you that a gentleman with whom you are well acquainted, and whose name is Torrens, is now in a criminal gaol, charged with the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"I heard the news with grief, and indeed with incredulity as to the truth of the accusation," observed the knight.

"Ask those men, sir," said the stranger, in a low and impressive voice, "what they know of that foul assassination."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, much agitated: "surely these men now before me are not the—the——"

"The real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay!" added the stranger solemnly.

"Is this possible?" cried the Justice of the Peace, surveying the prisoners with apprehension and horror.

"That's the confession we have to make, your worship," said Tim the Snammer, in a dogged tone.

"Dreadful! dreadful!" murmured the knight: then, somewhat mastering his emotions, he asked, "What is your name?"

"Timothy Splint, your worship," was the reply.

"And your's?" demanded Sir Christopher, making notes as he proceeded.

"Joshua Pedler, your worship."

"Where do you live?—and what are you?" were the next questions.

"Where we *did* live, your worship means," said Tim the Snammer; "but it doesn't much signify answering that query—since we don't live now where we used to do; and as for what we are, your worship can pretty well guess, now that we've confessed having murdered Sir Henry Courtenay—which was all through a mistake."

"A mistake!" repeated Sir Christopher.

"Yes, sir," continued the Snammer; "and I'll tell you all about it."

"Speak slow—very slow," said the knight; "because I shall commit to paper every word you utter, remember."

"Well, sir," resumed Timothy Splint; "it happened in this way. Me and my companion here, Joshua Pedler, took it into our heads to break into Torrens Cottage, for no good purpose, as you may suppose."

"To rob the house—eh?" said Sir Christopher.

"Just so, your worship. Well, we reached the Cottage between twelve and one o'clock at night—or nearer one, I should think—and looking through the chinks of the shutters, for there was a light in the parlour, we saw a pile of gold and a heap of notes on the table, and a gentleman asleep on the sofa."

"You follow this man, Dr. Lascelles?" said Sir Christopher, turning towards the physician.

"Word for word," was the reply.

"Go on, then," exclaimed the knight.

"We opened the front-door in a jiffey, your worship, and without making any noise," continued Splint; "and we went into the parlour. Josh Pedler secured the notes and gold; and I held my clasp-knife close to the throat of the gentleman sleeping on the sofa."

"Did you know who he was?" demanded the knight.

"Not a bit of it, your worship. We took him for Mr. Torrens, as a matter of course," continued the Snammer. "Josh Pedler went to ransack the side-board, and upset a sugar-basin, or some such thing in the drawer. The gentleman awoke, and was just on the point of crying out, when I drew the clasp-knife across his throat."

"Merciful goodness!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, shuddering from head to foot, and glancing uneasily around him.

"Shocking! shocking!" said the doctor, with unfeigned emotion.

"The very knife that I did it with was in my pocket," observed Tim the Snammer, "when we was made prisoners and brought here."

The stranger, who had remained silent for some time, now rose from his seat, and took from the mantel the fatal weapon, which he laid upon the table before Sir Christopher, saying, "This is collateral evidence of the truth of the deposition now made."

"Well, upon my honour," observed the knight, recoiling from the ominous-looking instrument, "I have commenced my magisterial functions in an extraordinary—I may say, unheard-of manner. But let the prisoner proceed with his confession."

"I've very little more to say, your worship," answered the Snammer. "As soon as the deed was done, I could have wished it to be undone; and I know that my companion in trouble here, wished the same. We didn't go with the intention of doing it: it come upon us by itself, like—and I hope mercy will be showed us," he added, with a significant glance of appeal towards the mysterious individual of whom he seemed to be so much in awe.

"You and your comrade then left the house immediately, I suppose?" said Sir Christopher, interrogatively.

"Exactly so, your worship," replied Timothy Splint.

"And do you," continued the knight, addressing himself to Joshua Pedler, "admit the truth of all that your companion now states?"

"Every word of it, your worship," answered the man.

"We must therefore suppose," observed Dr. Lascelles, "that Mr. Torrens, upon discovering the dreadful deed, feared lest suspicion should fall upon himself, and buried the corpse in the garden where it was found."

"True!" said Sir Christopher. "And now, Joshua Pedler, you will inform me what you did with the money which you took away with you."

"I divided it, sir; and the big notes was changed into small ones," was the answer. "When me and my companion here was made prisoners, we had ever so much of the money about us; and it was took from us."

The stranger produced from his pocket a small parcel which he handed to Sir Christopher, saying, "There is the amount taken from the two prisoners."

"Very good," said Sir Christopher: then, after a few moments' profound reflection, he turned towards Dr. Lascelles, in whose ear he whispered these words, "To me it is very clear that those men have confessed the truth, and that they are the dreadful villains they represent themselves to be. But, as this statement is to be published, in connexion with our names, we must render the evidence *against* those fellows as complete and satisfactory as possible."

"I am perfectly of your way of thinking, Sir Christopher," returned the doctor, also speaking in a low whisper. "Since we are here on such an unpleasant business, we must do our duty effectually."

"Then those men should be examined separately in respect to the very minutest details of their self-accusing evidence," said the knight, still addressing himself in an under-tone to the physician; "or else the world will immediately declare that the whole thing was a mere farce, contrived by some of Torrens' friends to save him, and of which you and I were the dupes and the instruments."

"A very just fear on your part, Sir Christopher," observed the doctor, who, from the little he knew of the knight, would not have given him credit for so much penetration and forethought.

"But—but," said Sir Christopher, "I hardly like to propose it to the gentleman who had us brought here——"

"Oh! I will take that duty upon myself," interrupted Dr. Lascelles; and, immediately turning towards the stranger—who was however no stranger to him—he said in a loud and firm tone, "We wish to examine these men separately."

"Certainly," was the reply; and the mysterious master of the house forthwith rang the bell.

Wilton answered the summons, and was ordered to conduct Joshua Pedler into an adjoining room.

When this command was obeyed, and the domestic had led the prisoner away, Sir Christopher proceeded to question Timothy Splint again.

"You said just now that when you looked through the window, you saw a gentleman sleeping on the sofa? Now, did your companion also peep through the crevices in the shutters?"

"He did, your worship," was the answer.

"And which way was the gentleman lying?"

"With his feet towards the window, and his head on that end of the sofa which was nearest to the door."

"And when you both went into the house, who entered first?"

"Myself, your worship."

"And when you went away again, who departed first?"

"I think Josh Pedler was in advance—in fact, I'm sure he was, because I remember shutting the front-door behind me."

"Which side of the table were the pile of gold and the heap of notes on?" inquired Sir Christopher, racking his brain for as many minute questions as possible.

"The money was all lying on a large book at that end of the table next to the window, your worship," responded Tim the Snammer.

The knight put several other queries of the same trivial, but really important nature; and Splint was then removed from the room, Joshua Pedler being led back again to his place.

Precisely the same questions which had been asked of the Snammer, were now put to the other villain; and the answers corresponded in the minutest particulars.

"There is no possibility of doubt as to the genuine character of the present scene," whispered the knight to Dr. Lascelles.

"I have been all along of that way of thinking," replied the physician. "At the same time I admire the precautions you have adopted, Sir Christopher, and the skilful manner in which you have examined and cross-examined these self-inculpatory scoundrels."

"You really are of opinion that I have done the thing well—eh, doctor?" said the Justice of the Peace, with a complacent smile. "Well—I am rejoiced to perceive that I have given you satisfaction. Our unknown friend there may now have the other villain brought back again; so that the two partners in crime may sign these depositions."

Dr. Lascelles intimated the knight's desire to the stranger, who forthwith caused Tim the Snammer to be reconducted to his place in the room where this extraordinary scene was enacted.

Sir Christopher then read over, in a slow and measured tone, the whole of his notes—containing the voluntary confession of the miscreants, and the subsequent examination.

"You, Timothy Splint, and you, Joshua Pedler," he said, when that task was accomplished, "will now sign, or otherwise attest, this document."

The unknown rang the bell twice, and the four dependants who had conducted the two prisoners into the room in the first instance, immediately re-appeared; and, on a signal from their master, they loosened the cords which confined the hands of the villains, in such a way that the latter were enabled to affix their signatures to the depositions, Dr. Lascelles acting as the witness.

"You may now remove those men altogether," said the unknown.

The four dependants immediately blindfolded them, and led them away from the apartment, carefully closing the door behind them.

"I presume that Sir Christopher Blunt and myself are now at liberty to depart?" said the doctor.

"Not before you have each given me a solemn pledge that you will not publish nor even hint at the occurrences of this night until twenty-four hours shall have elapsed," returned the stranger.

"For my part I don't at all object to give the promise required," exclaimed the knight hastily; for the mystery of the whole proceeding had imbued him with the utmost awe in respect to the unknown.

"And I will as readily pledge my solemn word of honour to maintain that condition," observed the doctor.

"In that case, gentlemen," said the stranger, "you shall be conveyed hence without delay. I need hardly enjoin you to use that confession, which you will take away with you, in the manner alone calculated to save the life of Mr. Torrens and relieve him from the dreadful charge hanging over his head."

"Rest assured that all shall be done which the emergency of the case requires, and which we have now the means to effect," said Sir Christopher. "And now, with your permission, I shall take a draught of wine and water—for I feel somewhat exhausted with these proceedings."

While Sir Christopher was helping himself at the table, Dr. Lascelles stepped up to the individual whom circumstances compel us to denominate "the stranger" or "the unknown," and said in a low and hasty whisper, "What is the reason of this delay of twenty-four hours in respect to the proclamation of Torrens' innocence?"

"Because Old Death and others must be in my power, ere the occurrences of this might be published," was the answer, likewise spoken in a hurried whisper; "or else *they* will suspect *where* these scenes have been enacted."

"But are you sure of capturing them?" demanded Lascelles.

"Confident," was the brief but emphatic reply.

The unknown then rang the bell, and significantly intimated to Wilton, who answered the summons, that his guests were ready to depart. The domestic bowed and withdrew: but in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by another dependant; and the two domestics proceeded to blindfold both the doctor and the knight, the unknown apologising for the necessity of renewing this process.

He himself then conducted them to the carriage which Wilton had ordered round to the door, and into which the stranger followed them.

It then drove away at a rapid rate; and, after taking sundry windings, stopped, at the expiration of an hour, opposite St. James's church, Piccadilly, just as the clock struck two in the morning.

The knight and the doctor descended, having already bade farewell to the mysterious individual whom they left inside; and the carriage instantaneously drove off.

CHAPTER XCIII.
NEWGATE.

Yes—'twas two o'clock in the morning; and the hour was proclaimed by the iron tongues of Time, from the thousand steeples of the mighty metropolis.

How solemnly does the sound of those deep, sonorous, metallic notes break upon the dead silence of that period when darkness spreads its sable wing over an entire hemisphere!

And though 'tis the time for rest, yet repose and slumber are not the companions of every couch.

Crime, sickness, and sorrow close not their lids in balmy sleep, weighed down with weariness though they be: too much happiness has likewise an excitement hostile to the serenity of the pillow.

For sleep is a fickle goddess, who succumbs not to every one's wooing at the hour when her yielding is most desired: now coy and coquettish, she hovers around, yet approaches not quite close:—now sternly and inexorably obstinate, she keeps herself at a great distance, in sullen mood.

And when the iron tongues of Time proclaimed the hour of two, were the eyes of the wretched Torrens or his miserable, guilty wife closed in slumber?

No—no: beneath the same roof, though in compartments far asunder, they writhed and tossed upon their hard pallets, in feverish excitement—craving, longing for sleep to visit them,—and sleep would not!

In those hours of wakefulness, and amidst the solemn stillness and utter darkness of the night, how terrible are the trains of thought which pass in rapid procession through the guilty mind,—as if imagination itself were being hurried along an endless avenue of horrors—grim spectres, hideous phantoms, and appalling sights on the one hand and on the other!

Then with what tremendous speed does memory travel back through the vista of a mis-pent life, all the foul deeds of which become personified in frightful shapes, and muster themselves in terrible array on either side!

In his narrow stone-cell, the wretched Torrens felt as if he were in a coffin, suffocated, hemmed in around;—and yet his imagination possessed boundless space wherein to raise up the awful shapes that haunted his pillow.

Was it possible that he was there—in Newgate? Did he dream—was he the sport of a hideous phantasy? Could it be true that he was dragged away from his comfortable home—snatched as it were suddenly from the world itself—and flung into a felon's dungeon?

No—no: it was impossible—absurd. Ha! ha! the folly of the idea was enough to make one laugh!

But—oh! merciful heavens!—he extended his arms, and his hands touched the cold—rugged—uneven wall: thence they wandered to the iron of the bed-stead—and came in contact with the coarse horse-cloth which covered his burning, feverish limbs!

Then a dreadful groan burst from him,—a groan which, even were he ten thousand, thousand times more guilty than he really was, would have been lamentable, heart-rending to hear,—a groan of such ineffable anguish that Satan himself might have said, "This man hath suffered enough!"

Suffered!—holy God, how deeply—deeply has he suffered since the massive door of that mighty stone sepulchre first closed upon him,—appearing to shut out the pure air of heaven, the golden light of day, and to mark a point where even human sympathies could follow no farther!

Suffered!—the wretched felon whose foot is upon the first step of the scaffold, never suffered more than the crushed, ruined, accused Torrens;—for all his guilt had arisen from the lack of moral courage to meet misfortune face to face; and now that misfortune had thrust itself upon him, and compelled him to gaze on its pale and death-like countenance, he was completely weighed down.

His infamy in respect to Rosamond, lay as heavily upon his conscience as would have lain the crime of murder, had he really perpetrated it; and he suffered more on account of the deed which he had committed, but for which the law *had not* touched him, than on account of the charge of which he was innocent, but for which the law *had* seized upon him.

Miserable—miserable man! Darkness—silence—and sleeplessness were indeed terrible to him,—so terrible that, as he lay tossing upon his feverish pallet, he wished that he was dead:—yet, had he possessed the means of inflicting self-destruction, he would have been afraid to die!

He was not placed in a ward along with other prisoners; because the charge against him was so black and terrible—the charge of murder—that he was lodged in a dungeon by himself—a cell that had seen many, many previous occupants, most of whom had gone

forth to the scaffold!

For in Newgate the possession of a room to one-self—if a room such a coffin of masonry can be called—is the horrible privilege of him who is accused of *murder*; and those whose alleged offences are of a less deep dye, herd together in common wards, where a fetid atmosphere is the medium of communicating the foulest ideas that words can convey or ears receive.

Oh! what a plague-spot is that horrible gaol—that pandemonium of Newgate—upon the civilisation of the metropolis of these realms!

Shame—shame, that it should be allowed to exist under the management of an incapable, ignorant, and monstrously corrupt body—the Aldermen of London:—shame, shame that it should be permitted to remain as a frightful abuse of local jurisdiction, just because no statesman has yet been found bold enough to wrest a barbarian charter from an overgrown, bloated, and despicable corporation!

The wife—the newly married wife of Mr. Torrens,—that woman so well known to our readers by the name of Martha Slingsby,—was not lodged by herself:—being accused of a crime one degree less heinous than that of murder, she was placed in a ward with several other females.

And she also heard the iron tongue of Time proclaim the hour of two in the morning;—and she also tossed upon a hard, sleepless, and feverish pallet.

For she had not even the solace of conscious innocence as an anodyne for her lacerated heart and wounded spirit: she knew that she was guilty of the crime imputed to her—and that knowledge lay upon her soul like a weight of lead.

And—O horror! she was well aware that the black deed of forgery would be indubitably fixed upon her: and the penalty of that deed was—*death*!

Yes:—death by the hand of the common executioner—an ignominious death upon the scaffold!

She knew that almost her very minutes were now numbered—that, as the clock struck eight on some Monday morning, not very far distant, she must be led forth to die—that after her trial, which was sure to end in her condemnation, she should be consigned to the condemned cell—that from this cell she must proceed through several dark and dismal passages to that door upon whose very threshold would appear the gibbet, black and sinister—that she would have to ascend, or perhaps be carried up, the steps to the platform of the horrible machine—that she should see myriads and myriads of human beings crowding around to behold her dying agonies—that she would be placed upon a drop soon to glide away from beneath her feet and leave her suspended in the air—that the few minutes during which she must stand upon that drop, while the chaplain said the parting prayer, would comprise whole years, aye, centuries of the bitterest, bitterest anguish—that her attentive ear would catch even the sound caused by the finger of the executioner, when he touched the bolt of the drop an instant before he pulled it back—and that her soul would be yielded up in the agonies of strangulation!

Thus—thus, in spite of herself, did the wretched woman's imagination picture in frightful detail the whole of the dreadful ceremony of a violent death: thus—thus did she shadow forth, in imagination, every feature—every minute particular of the appalling ordeal;—and, in imagination also, did she now pass through it all, as vainly she craved for sleep in the silence and the darkness of the prison-ward!

The dread routine of the whole ceremony assumed an historical exactitude, a palpable shape, and a frightful reality in her mind.

Terrible—terrible was it for her to think upon what she now was, and upon what she might have been.

Not a hope was left to her in this world: she must be cut off in the meridian of her years;—she must bid adieu for ever to all the pleasures, the enjoyments, the delights of society and of life!

Oh! for the power—oh! for the means to avert her maddening, harrowing thoughts from the prophetic contemplation of that fatal morning when she must walk forth to the scaffold—when the close air of that prison would suddenly change to the fresh breeze of heaven, as she stepped forth from the low dark door which the passer-by outside ever beholds with a shudder,—and when she should raise her eyes to that black and ominous frame-work, with the chain hanging from the cross-beam, and her own coffin beneath the drop! All this was horrible—horrible,—sufficient to deprive the strongest mind of its reasoning faculties, and to paralyse the boldest with excess of terror!

For, oh! the reward of crime is dispensed in two ways upon earth,—by the law, and by the criminal's own thoughts;—and far—far more dreadful is the punishment inflicted by the guilty conscience than by the vengeance of outraged justice. Even the horrors of the scaffold, immense—tremendous though they must be in the reality, are magnified a hundred-fold by the terror-stricken imagination!

From the examples of the wretched man and the guilty woman of whom we have been speaking, and on whose heads afflictions and miseries fell with such frightful rapidity and crushing weight,—from their examples let the reader judge of the *folly*—setting aside the *wickedness*—of crime.

Gold—deceitful gold—was the will-o'-the-wisp which led them on through the devious ways of iniquity, until they suddenly found themselves in Newgate!

For the woman forged for gold—and the man sold his daughter's virtue for gold; and from the moment when Torrens consented to that vile deed, every thing went worse with him—nothing was bettered—and the circumstances resulting from that one act, combined to overwhelm him with afflictions, and even to fix upon him a horrible charge of which he was really innocent!

To err, then, is to be foolish, as well as wicked;—and this grand truth has doubtless been felt and acknowledged, when too late, by many and many a wretched being within those very walls and that sombre enclosure of Newgate!

Newgate!—what numberless ties have been severed on its threshold;—and what countless thousands of individuals, on entering that

dread portal one by one, have gnashed their teeth with rage at the folly, even though they have felt no compunction for the guilt, of the career which they pursued and which had its natural ending there!

It was ten o'clock in the morning, when a hackney-coach stopped at the door of the governor's house, which stands in the centre of the front part of Newgate; and a fine, tall, handsome young man, having leapt forth, assisted a closely veiled lady to alight from the vehicle.

They were almost immediately admitted into the office of the governor, the young lady clinging to her companion's arm for support, for she was labouring under the most dreadful mental anguish.

These persons were Clarence Villiers and his beauteous bride, Adelais.

Returning from Devonshire, whither they had been to pass the honeymoon, they heard on the road, ere they reached the metropolis, the astounding intelligence that the aunt of the one had been committed to Newgate on a charge of forgery, and that the father of the other was consigned to the same place under an accusation of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay. They also learnt at the same moment and for the first time, that the wretched pair had only just been united in matrimonial bonds when this fearful fate overtook them; but they were too much shocked by the more grave and serious portion of the tidings which thus burst upon them, to give themselves even leisure to express their surprise at the less important incident of the marriage of Mr. Torrens and Mrs. Slingsby.

They had arrived in London on the preceding evening, and had repaired direct to Torrens Cottage, hoping—and, indeed, expecting as a matter of course—to find Rosamond there.

But they were disappointed—cruelly disappointed that anticipation!

The female servant and the lad were, however, still at the Cottage; and from the former they learnt tidings which enhanced, if possible, the grief that already rent the heart of Adelais, and which excited vague but terrible suspicions in the mind of Clarence.

For the servant informed them that Miss Rosamond went to stay with Mrs. Slingsby almost immediately after the wedding—that she remained there almost ten days, and came home the very night when the murder was committed, and seemed dreadfully unhappy during the short time that she did remain at the Cottage—and that she departed no one knew whither, the second day after her return, leaving a note for her father.

While Adelais sate weeping at these tidings, to her so completely inexplicable, a torrent of suspicions and terrible ideas rolled through the mind of her husband Clarence. For he knew—as the reader will remember—that Sir Henry Courtenay was not only the paramour of his aunt, but that he had likewise cast lustful looks upon Rosamond; and he was equally aware that the young girl's imagination had been excited and inflamed by the false representations his aunt had made in respect to the character of the baronet. Then that second visit of Rosamond to Old Burlington Street—her unhappiness on returning home—the assassination of Sir Henry Courtenay at Torrens Cottage—the sudden marriage of two persons who were almost entire strangers to each other—and the contemporaneous flight of Rosamond from her home,—all these incidents seemed of so suspicious and terribly mysterious a nature as to strike Clarence with dismay.

The version which Mr. Torrens had given Rosamond of the particulars of the murder—and which, as the reader is aware, was the true one so far as the actual perpetration of the deed itself was concerned—was unknown to Clarence, inasmuch as it had not been published in the newspapers;—for, when arrested by Dykes and Bingham, Mr. Torrens had immediately sent for able counsel, to whom he told his story previously to the examination before the magistrate, and by the advice of his legal assistant, the prisoner had contented himself by simply declaring his innocence, stating that he should reserve for his defence the explanations whereon that assertion was founded.

Thus Clarence Villiers could not help believing that Torrens was really guilty of the murder; and he shuddered at the idea which forced itself upon him, that his aunt was an accomplice in the crime. In fact, it naturally appeared as if that woman and that man had suddenly blended their congenial spirits for the purpose of working out deeds of the blackest dye; and he dreaded lest the honour of Rosamond had been wrecked in the frightful convulsion produced by that association.

But none of his awful misgivings did he impart to Adelais. On the contrary, he strove to console her by assurances of his hope that her father must be the victim of a terrible junction of adverse circumstances, and that his innocence would yet transpire. Such ideas he was in reality very far from entertaining;—but it cut him to the quick to behold the anguish of his young wife—and he uttered every thing of a consolatory nature which his imagination was likely in such a case to suggest as a means of imparting hope and affording comfort.

They remained at the Cottage that night; and on the ensuing morning repaired to Newgate, as we have already stated.

The governor, upon learning the degree of relationship in which Mrs. Villiers stood towards Mr. Torrens, expressed himself in terms of the kindest sympathy, and offered to proceed in the first instance to the prisoner's cell to prepare him for the meeting with his daughter and son-in-law. This proposal was thankfully accepted; and the governor, after remaining absent for about ten minutes, returned to conduct the young couple into the presence of the prisoner, with whom he left them.

Adelais threw herself into her father's arms, embraced him with a fondness that was almost wild and frantic, and sobbed bitterly upon his breast,—while Clarence Villiers stood a deeply affected spectator of the sad—the touching scene.

"My child—my dear child," exclaimed the father, more moved by paternal tenderness than he ever yet had been,—"I am innocent—I am innocent!"

"Almighty God be thanked for that assurance!" murmured Adelais, as she fell upon her knees, and bent her burning face over her father's emaciated hands:—for Mr. Torrens had become frightfully thin—altered—and care-worn,—and his entire appearance denoted

how acute his mental sufferings had been.

"Clarence," he cried, after a few moments' pause during which he raised his daughter, and placed her upon a seat,—"Clarence, did you hear my declaration? I am innocent!"

"I heard it—and I rejoice unfeignedly—oh! most unfeignedly," returned the young man, not knowing what to think, but speaking thus to console his heart-wrung wife.

"But whether I can prove my innocence—whether I can triumph over the awful weight of circumstantial evidence which has accumulated against me," continued Mr. Torrens, "is a point which God alone can determine."

An ejaculation of despair burst from the lips of Adelais.

"For heaven's sake, compose yourself, dearest!" said Villiers. "You have heard your father declare his innocence——"

"Yes—yes," she cried: "but if the world will not believe him? It is not sufficient that *we* should be convinced of that innocence! Oh! my God—wherefore has this terrible affliction fallen upon us?"—then, suddenly struck by another idea, she exclaimed, "And Rosamond, dear father—what has become of my sister Rosamond?"

Mr. Torrens turned away, and burst into tears—for that question revived a thousand agonising reminiscences in his mind.

"My father *here*—my sister *gone*," mused Adelais, her manner suddenly becoming strangely subdued, and the wild intensity of her earnest eyes changing in a moment to an expression of idiotic vacancy;—"and Clarence—where is he? Methought he was with me just now——"

"Merciful God! her senses are leaving her!" exclaimed Villiers, in a frantic tone: then, throwing his arms around her, he said, "Adelais—my beloved Adelais—Clarence is here—by your side! Oh! look not at me so strangely, Adelais—do you not know me?—speak—speak!—I am Clarence—your husband—he who loves, who adores you! My God! she does not recognise me!"

And the young man started back, dashing his right hand with the violence of despair against his forehead; while Adelais remained motionless in the chair, gazing on him with a kind of vacant wonderment,—and the miserable father staggered against the wall for support, murmuring in a tone of ineffable emotion, "Great God! where will all this end?"

But at that moment the heavy bolts were drawn back—the door opened—Adelais uttered a scream of mingled amazement and delight—and in an instant Rosamond was clasped in her arms.

Long and fervent was that embrace on the part of the sisters: nor were Torrens and Clarence Villiers alone the witnesses thereof—for the heavy door of the stone cell had, ere it closed again, given admittance to Esther de Medina.

Fortunate for Adelais was it that Rosamond appeared at such a moment,—a moment when the reason of the young bride was rocking on its throne, and the weight of an idea no heavier than a hair would decide whether it were to be re-established on its seat or overturned for ever!

Faint and overcome by the sudden revulsion of feeling produced by this sudden meeting with her sister, Adelais slowly disengaged herself from Rosamond's arms, and falling back in the chair, beckoned Clarence towards her, saying, "My dearest husband—keep near me—stay with me—for I know not what dreadful ideas have been passing in my mind;—and it seemed to me for a time that I was in utter darkness—or that I was buried in a profound sleep."

"But you are better now, dearest?" exclaimed Clarence, overjoyed at this sudden return of her senses.

"Yes—I am better now," said Adelais; and, falling upon her husband's neck, she burst into a flood of tears.

Meantime Rosamond was weeping also in her father's arms; and the eyes of the generous-hearted—the amiable Esther de Medina were overflowing at the contemplation of this mournful and touching scene.

"Father—father," murmured Rosamond, her voice almost suffocated with the sobs which agitated her bosom,—"there is hope—every hope——"

"Hope!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens, catching at the word as if the halter were already round his neck and the cry of "a reprieve!" had fallen on his ears.

"Hope, did you say?" exclaimed Adelais, now so completely relieved by the issue her pent-up anguish and shocked feelings had found in copious weeping, that all the clearness of her intellect had returned.

"Hush—Rosamond!" said Miss de Medina, advancing towards the group: "hush—my dear madam," she added, turning hastily towards Adelais; "that word must not be breathed here aloud *yet*! Nevertheless, it is true that there *is* hope—and every hope—nay, even certainty——"

"Great God! I thank thee!" cried Adelais, clasping her hands together in fervent gratitude, while Mr. Torrens was so overcome by emotions of joy and amazement that he sank upon that prison-pallet whereon he had passed a night of such horrible watchfulness.

"I implore you to restrain your feelings as much as possible," said Esther, speaking in a low and mysterious tone, which made Torrens, Clarence, and Adelais suddenly become all attention and breathless suspense; "the proofs of your innocence, sir," she added, looking at the prisoner, "have been obtained! Nay—give utterance to no ejaculation—but hear me in silence! Within twenty-four hours from this time your guiltlessness will be proclaimed to the world. Already are the proofs in the hands of a magistrate but circumstances, with which I am not myself altogether acquainted, render that delay imperiously necessary. It would, however, have been cruel to have left you in ignorance of this important circumstance; and——"

"And this admirable young lady, at whose father's house I found a home," hastily added Rosamond, "would not refuse me the joy—the indescribable joy of being the bearer of these tidings. Nay—more: she offered to accompany me——"

"God will reward you for all your kindness to my sister, dear lady," said Adelais, embracing Esther with heart-felt gratitude and affection.

"You are doubtless anxious to learn how the proofs of Mr. Torrens' innocence have been obtained," resumed Esther, after a pause: "but my explanation must be very brief. Suffice it to say that in this mighty metropolis, which contains so much evil, there is a man bent only on doing good. Accident revealed to him certain particulars which convinced him of your innocence, sir," continued the beautiful Jewess, addressing herself now especially to Mr. Torrens: "upon the information which he thus received, he acted—and he has succeeded in obtaining and placing in the hands of a Justice of the Peace the confession of the real perpetrators of the awful deed——"

"Then the murderers are in custody, doubtless?" exclaimed Clarence, astonished and delighted at all he heard.

"They are not in the grasp of justice," answered Esther. "But on this head you must ask me no questions. Rest satisfied with the assurance that the innocence of Mr. Torrens will completely and unquestionably transpire—that he will soon be restored to you all—and that his secret friend watches over him even from a distance. Who that individual is, you cannot know—and perhaps never may. All the recompense he demands at your hands is the subduing in your minds of every sentiment of curiosity that may prompt you to pierce the mystery which shrouds his actions; and remember also that every syllable I have now uttered, is to remain a secret profoundly locked up in your own breasts until the proclamation of innocence shall be made from that quarter to which the solemn duty of publishing it has been entrusted."

"We should be wanting in common gratitude, indeed, to him who has thus interested himself in behalf of the innocent, were we to act in opposition to those injunctions," said Clarence Villiers. "But through you, lady, do we each and all convey our heart-felt thanks for that generous intervention which is to produce so vitally important a result."

"Yes—and to you also, dearest Miss de Medina, is our eternal gratitude due!" exclaimed Rosamond—an assurance that was immediately and sincerely echoed by Adelais, Clarence, and Mr. Torrens.

Hope had now returned to that prison-cell,—hope in all her radiance and her glory,—with her smiling countenance and her cheering influence!

The name of Mrs. Torrens—late Mrs. Slingsby—was not mentioned by a soul during this meeting: her husband uttered it not—Clarence, through motives of delicacy, remained silent likewise in that respect—and the sisters had too much to occupy their thoughts relative to their father's position and the hope of his speedy release, to devote a moment's attention to that woman.

For the interview was necessarily short, in consequence of the severity of the prison regulations; but when Mr. Torrens was again alone in his cell, he could scarcely believe that so sudden a change had taken place in his prospects.

On leaving the gaol, after having taken a tender and affectionate leave of their father, the sisters looked inquiringly at each other, as if to ask whither each was going.

"We have taken up our abode at the Cottage," said Adelais, breaking silence; "where we shall remain, doubtless," she added, glancing towards her husband, "until our father shall be restored to us."

Clarence signified his assent.

"I should be grieved to separate you from your sister immediately after your unexpected meeting to-day," said Esther, addressing herself to Adelais; "but if Rosamond will continue to make our house her home——"

"Yes—yes, my dear friend," exclaimed Rosamond, hastily: "I will intrude a little longer upon your hospitality—for I feel that my nerves have been too much shaken by recent occurrences to allow me to return to the Cottage, at least for the present."

The reader need scarcely be informed that the young lady desired to avoid the painful prospect of being alone with her sister and Clarence: for what explanation could she give of her flight from home?—an explanation which she knew would naturally be required of her.

Adelais, indeed, felt somewhat hurt at the decision which her sister had made in respect to remaining with Miss de Medina: but she concealed her vexation, and they parted with an affectionate embrace.

Thus, Clarence and Adelais proceeded to Torrens Cottage, while Esther and Rosamond returned in Mr. de Medina's carriage to Finchley Manor.

During their ride home in the hackney-coach, Villiers and his wife discussed all the incidents which had just occurred; but during a pause in the conversation, Adelais bethought herself for the first time that day of her mother-in-law.

"Clarence," she said, laying her hand upon her husband's arm, "we have been sadly culpable——"

"I know to what you would allude, dearest," interrupted Villiers. "To-morrow I shall call upon my wretched aunt; but it is by no means necessary for you to accompany me. Your father did not once mention her name during the interview: we will not seek to penetrate his motives for that silence—but we will endeavour to imitate him in that respect as much as possible."

"I do not clearly understand you, Clarence," said Adelais, gazing at him enquiringly.

"I mean that the less we speak concerning my aunt, the more prudent it will be, my love," responded Villiers; "for I fear that *she* will not prove to be innocent of the crime imputed to her—and, under all circumstances, you can owe her no sympathy nor respect, either as my relative or your mother-in-law." Adelais made no answer; and Clarence immediately changed the conversation.

CHAPTER XCIV.
"THE STOUT HOUSE."

London is a wondrous city for the success with which the most flagrant quackery is accomplished. Things not only improbable, but absolutely impossible, are puffed off with matchless impudence; and, what is more extraordinary still, they obtain an infinite number of believers. Thus we have snuffs which will cure blindness when the most skilful oculists are at fault,—oils and pomatums that will make the hair grow in spite of nature's denial,—cosmetics that will render every skin, though tawny as a gipsey's, white as a Circassian's,—pills so happily compounded as to be an universal panacea, annihilating diseases of even the most opposite characters, and effecting for thirteen-pence halfpenny what all the College of Physicians could not accomplish for millions,—lozenges by which a voice cracked like a tin-trumpet, may become melodious as a silver bell,—ointments that will cure in a week ulcers and sores which have baffled all the experience of famous hospital-surgeons for a quarter of a century,—decoctions prepared on purpose to prolong life, although the *elixir vitæ* of the alchemists has long been regarded as an absurd fable,—boluses competent to restore to all their pristine vigour constitutions shattered by years and years of dissipation and dissolute habits,—pulmonic wafers efficient to wrestle against the very last stage of consumption, and restore lungs entirely eaten away,—tonics so wonderful that they will even give new coats to the stomach, though the old ones have been destroyed by ardent spirits,—and heaven only knows how many more blessings of the same kind!

Seriously speaking, it is deplorable to perceive how tremendously the millions are gulled by all these details of an impudent and most dishonest quackery. The coiner who passes off a base shilling, representing it to be a good one, is punished as a felon and stigmatised as a villain. But the quack who sells articles which he announces to be capable of performing physical impossibilities, is not tangible by the law, nor does he become branded in the opinion of the world. Such are the conventional differences existing in civilised society!

Of all the demoralising species of quackery practised now-a-days, certain medical works are decidedly the worst. We allude to those beastly things which are constantly announced in the advertisement-department of newspapers, but which, with a scintillation of good taste on the side of the printers, are invariably huddled together in the most obscure nook. It is evident that newspaper-proprietors are ashamed of the filthy advertisements, although they cannot very well refuse to insert them. But we warn all our readers against suffering themselves to put the least confidence in the representations set forth in the announcements alluded to. The works thus puffed off are contemptible as regards medical information, demoralising in their very nature, and delusive in all their promises.

An amusing species of quackery exists with repect to many public-houses. Passing along a thoroughfare, or visiting some fresh neighbourhood springing up in the outskirts of the metropolis, you will probably see a new building, destined for the "public" line, and with the words—"NOTED STOUT HOUSE"—painted on a board, or cut in the masonry. The cool impudence of proclaiming an establishment to be famous for a particular article, before it is even finished, is too ludicrous to provoke serious vituperation. The merit of the place is agreed upon beforehand between the architect and the proprietor. Never mind how worthless the beer to be retailed there may eventually prove, it is a Noted Stout House all the same! But so accustomed are the inhabitants of London to behold such things, that the springing up of such a structure causes no sensation in its neighbourhood: good, easy people that we are now-a-days—we take every thing for granted and as a matter of course!

The *Noted Stout House* in Helmet Row, St. Luke's—called by its patrons, for abbreviation's sake, the *Stout House*—was one of those flash boozing-kens which are to be found in low neighbourhoods. And noted it indeed was—not on account of its beer, unless the fame thereof consisted in its execrable nature—but by reason of the characters frequenting it. The parlour was large, low, and dark; and in the evening it was invariably filled with a miscellaneous company of both sexes. Prostitutes and thieves—old procuresses and housebreakers—dissolute married women, and notorious coiners,—these were the principal supporters of the *Stout House*.

Had Machiavelli once passed an evening there, he would not have declared as a rule that "language was given to man for the purpose of disguising his thoughts;" inasmuch as no attempt at any such disguise at all was made in that place. Every one spoke his mind in the most free and open manner possible,—calling things by their right names—and expressing the filthiest ideas in the plainest phraseology. If foul words were capable of impregnating the air, the atmosphere of the *Stout House* parlour would have engendered a pestilence.

At about half-past nine in the evening, John Jeffreys sauntered into the establishment, took a seat at the table, and gave his orders to the waiter for the beverage which he fancied at the moment.

Whenever a new-comer appears in a public room of this kind, the company invariably leave off talking for a minute or so, to enjoy a good stare at him; and they measure him from head to foot—turn him inside out, as it were—and form their rapid and silent conjectures regarding him, just as a broker "takes stock" in his mind, with a hasty survey around, on putting an execution for taxes or rates into a defaulter's house.

We cannot exactly say what opinion the company present on this occasion at the *Stout House* formed of John Jeffreys; but we are able

to assure our readers that, much as he had seen of London, and well as he was acquainted with its vile dens and low places of resort, he thought to himself, as he glanced about him, that he had never before set eyes on such a dissipated-looking set of women or such a repulsive assemblage of men.

"Well, and so Mother Oliver's place is broke up at last," observed one of the females, addressing herself to another woman, and evidently taking up the thread of a conversation which the entrance of Jeffreys had for a few moments interrupted.

"Yes—and the poor old creature has been sent to quod by the beaks at Hicks's Hall, till she finds sureties for her good behaviour in future," was the reply.

"What—is that the Mother Oliver you mean, as kept the brothel in Little Sutton Street, t'other side of the Goswell Road there?" demanded a man, desisting from his occupation of smoking, for a few moments, while he asked the question.

"To be sure it is," returned the female, who had previously spoken; "and a bad thing it is for me, I can tell you. I was servant there—and a good living it were. But I'll tell you how it all come about. It was a matter of six or seven weeks ago that a young feller came to the house, quite on his own accord, as you may suppose; and he stayed there three whole days, for he was quite struck, as one may say, with a fair-haired gal which had been lodging with us for some time. Well, he orders every thing of the best, promising to pay all in a lump; and so Mother Oliver gives him tick, like a fool as she was. But at last she wanted to see the colour of his money; and then he bullied, and swore, and kicked up a row, and went away without paying a mag. Well, the debt was given up as a bad job, and we thought no more about it, till we heard a few days afterwards that the house was to be indicted. So off Mother Oliver goes to the Clerk of the Peace: but, lo and behold ye! the young gentleman was a clerk in his office; and not content with reglarly robbing the poor old o'oman, he must try and ruin her into the bargain. Mother Oliver got to see the Clerk of the Peace, and began to tell him all about the trick his young man had played her; but he said he knowed every thing already, that she had enticed the young feller into her house, and that was the reason she was to be indicted. So the thing come on yesterday before the Middlesex magistrates at Hicks's Hall, and Mother Oliver was sent to gaol."

"There's been a reglar rooting out of them kind of cribs all over the parish," observed one of the company; "and it's the same in a many other parishes."

"Yes: but I'll tell you what it is," exclaimed the woman who had related the above particulars; "it's only against the poor sort of houses that these prosecutions is ever got up. Lord bless you! before I went to Mother Oliver's, I was servant in a flash brothel at the West-End—a reglar slap-up place—beautifully furnished, and frequented by all the first folks. It was kept—and still is kept—by a Frenchwoman. I was there as under-housemaid for a matter of seven year; and should have been there till now, only I was too fond of taking a drop the first thing in the morning, to keep the dust out in summer and the cold out in winter."

"Ah—I des say you was always a lushing jade, Sally," observed an individual in his shirt-sleeves, and who seemed to know the woman well.

"Well, old feller—and what then?" cried she, for a moment manifesting a strong inclination to draw her finger-nails down the cheeks of her acquaintance: but, calming her anger, she said, "It don't matter what comes from your lips—so I shan't be perwoked by you. Howsomever, as I was telling you, I was servant in the flash house at the West-End for upward of seven years; and such scenes as I saw! The old Frenchwoman used to entice the most respectable gals there by means of advertisements for governesses, ladies-maids, and so on; and they was kept prisoners till they either agreed to what she proposed, or was forced into it by the noblemen and gentlemen frequenting the place. And all this occurred, I can assure you, in one of the fashion-ablest streets in London. But there was never no notice taken by the parish-authorities; and as for the Society—what's its name again?—that prosecutes bad houses, it didn't seem to know there was such a brothel in existence. And I'll tell you how *that* was, too. The Frenchwoman gave such general satisfaction to her customers, and was always treating them to such novelties in the shape of gals, that she was protected by all the gay noblemen and gentlemen at the West-End. Lord bless you! some of her best customers was the Middlesex magistrates themselves; and two or three of the noblemen and gentlemen that I spoke of, was members of the Committee of that very Society which prosecutes brothels. So it wasn't likely that the house would ever be interfered with. I recollect the old Frenchwoman used to laugh and joke with the great Lords and the Members of the Commons that patronised her, about the way they talked in the Parliament Houses, and the bother they made about the better observance of the Sabbath, and so on. It used to be rare fun to hear the old lady, in her broken English, repeating to them some of their fine speeches, which she'd read in the newspapers; and how the gals used to laugh with them, to be sure!"

"You don't mean to say that them Lords and Members, which is always a-going on about the Sabbath, used to frequent the brothel you speak of?" exclaimed a man.

"Don't I, though?" cried the woman, in a tone of indignation at the bare suspicion against her veracity implied by the question: "I do indeed, my man; and I should think you ought to know the world better than to be astonished at it. It was through having the patronage of all them great people, that the old Frenchwoman never got into trouble. But none of the fine brothels at the West-End are ever prosecuted: no one would think of such a thing! It's only the low ones in the poor neighbourhoods."

"Well, I always heard say that poverty is the greatest possible crime in this country," observed the man who had recently spoken; "and now I'm convinced on it."

"I never had any doubt about it," said another. "A rich man or a rich woman may do anythink; but the poor—deuce a bit! That's quite another thing. Why, look at all these Bishops, and great Lords, and Members of the Commons, which are constantly raving about Sunday travelling: don't they go about in their carriages? and ain't Hyde Park always more filled with splendid vehicles on a Sunday than on any other day? The very Bishops which would put down coaches on a Sabbath, goes in their carriages to the Cathedrals where they preach."

"By all I can hear or learn," observed another individual present, "there's a precious sight more religious gammon in the Parliament Houses than anywheres else."

"I should think there is too," exclaimed the woman who had told the tale relative to the brothel-keepers. "Some of them noblemen and gentlemen that I spoke of was the most terrible fellows after the young women that I ever see in all my life; and they was always a bothering the Frenchwoman to send over to France, or down into the country, to entice more gals to the house. The Frenchwoman used to send out agents to entrap innocent creatures wherever she could—farmers' and clergymen's daughters, and such like. I remember what a spree we had with one of the religious Members of the Commons one night. He had been bringing in a bill, or whatever you call it, to protect young females from seduction, and had drawed such a frightful picture of the whole business, that he made all the other Members shed tears. Well, as soon as he'd done, he came straight off to our place, and asked the old Frenchwoman if she had got any thing new in the house. That very day a sweet young gal—a poor marine officer's daughter, who wanted to be a governess—had been enticed to the brothel, and the Member that I'm speaking of gave the old Frenchwoman fifty guineas for the purchase of that poor creatur'."

The woman was entering into farther details, when Wilton and another of the retainers of Jeffreys' mysterious master entered the parlour of the *Stout House*, both disguised as servants out of place. The place was too much crowded to enable them to converse at their ease: they accordingly all three repaired to a private room, Jeffreys having left at the bar a suitable message to be delivered to Old Death who was well known at that establishment.

Wilton ordered up glasses of spirits-and-water; and when the waiter had retired, after supplying the liquor, Jeffreys proceeded to acquaint his colleagues with the promised tidings relative to Tidmarsh.

"I called at the Bunces' house in Earl Street, Seven Dials, this morning," he said, "and saw Old Death, who was quite delighted when I assured him that I had already found the two friends of whom I had spoken to him, and that that they would be here punctual this evening at half-past ten. I then told him that as the resurrection affair in St. Luke's churchyard would most likely come off to-morrow night, and as I should be engaged the best part of to-morrow on my own business, he had better let Tidmarsh go with me at once and show me the exact spot where Tom Rain was buried. The old man bit directly, and said, '*Well, Jeffreys, you're a faithful and good fellow, and can be trusted. Tidmarsh lives here now, and is up stairs at this moment.*'—So Tidmarsh was sent for; and away him and me went together to St. Luke's. In the course of conversation I found out that Tidmarsh, Bunce, and Mrs. Bunce were to go out with Old Death on some business this evening; and that while Old Death came here to meet me, the other three were to wait for him at another flash house in Mitchell Street close by."

"This is admirable!" said Wilton. "We have now the whole gang completely in our power. Fortunately, I have several of our master's people in the neighbourhood; and I will go at once and give them the necessary instructions. Wait here, Jeffreys, with Harding," he added, indicating his colleague with a look; "until I return. My absence will not be long."

Wilton left the room, Jeffreys and Harding remaining alone together.

In a quarter of an hour the Black's trusty dependant returned.

"All my arrangements are now complete," he said, resuming his seat; "and the entire gang must inevitably fall into our hands."

Jeffreys then acquainted Wilton and Harding with the exact nature of the proposal which would be made to them by Old Death; and scarcely were these preliminaries accomplished when the ancient miscreant made his appearance.

"This is business-like indeed—very business-like, my good fellow," said Old Death, taking a chair, and addressing himself to Jeffreys while he spoke. "And these, I suppose," he continued, fixing a scrutinizing glance upon the others, "are the friends you spoke of."

"Just so," replied Jeffreys. "This is Bill Jones," he added, laying his hands on Wilton's shoulder; "and there's no mistake about him. T'other is named Ned Thompson, and knows a thing or two, I rather suspect."

"All right—all right!" chuckled Old Death, rubbing his hands joyfully together. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Jones—and your's too, Mr. Thompson."

"And we're not sorry to form yours, Mr. Bones," said Wilton, affecting a manner and tone suitable to the part he was playing. "Our pal Jeffreys here has told us quite enough to make us anxious to know more of you."

"And so you shall, my dear friends," exclaimed Old Death. "I can always find business for faithful agents—and I can pay them well likewise."

"Jeffreys has told us *that*," observed Wilton.

"And I've also explained to them what you want done to-morrow night, Mr. Bones," said Jeffreys.

"Good!" ejaculated Old Death. "Well—is it to be done?"

"There's no manner of difficulty that I can see," said Harding; "and as for any risk—why if the reward's at all decent——"

"The reward shall be liberal—very liberal," interrupted Old Death hastily. "What—what should you say to a ten-pound note a-piece?"

"Deuce take it!" cried Wilton, thinking it would look better to haggle at the bargain: "remember, there's the chance of transportation—and my friend and I are not so desperate hard up——"

"No—no—I understand," observed Old Death, fearful that his meanness had disgusted his new acquaintances and that he should lose their services unless he immediately manifested a more liberal disposition: "I meant ten pounds each on account, and ten pounds more for each when the job is done. Besides," he added, "there's other business to follow on: this is only the first scene in the play that I'm

going to get up, and in which you must be prominent characters."

And the aged miscreant chuckled at his attempt at humour.

"What you have now said," observed Wilton, "quite alters the case. Twenty pounds each, and the chance of more work, is a proposal that we can accept. What say you, Thompson?"

"I say what you say, Jones," replied Harding.

"Now then we understand each other, my friends," continued Old Death; "and I will at once give you the earnest-money."

Thus speaking, he drew forth a greasy purse, and presented the two men each with ten sovereigns, which they appeared to snatch up with much avidity.

"I have now nothing more to say to you," resumed Benjamin Bones, his fierce eyes sparkling beneath his overhanging brows with the hope of speedy vengeance on the Earl of Ellingham. "You must place yourselves at the disposal of your friend Jeffreys here, who will inform you how to act and show you precisely in what way my wishes are to be executed. I must now leave you: but to-morrow evening," he added, in a tone of savage meaning, "I shall see you in Earl Street with the coffin!"

"You may rely upon us, Mr. Bones," replied Wilton.

"But won't you stay and take a glass with us?" demanded Jeffreys.

"Not to night—not to night," was the answer. "I took something short at the bar as I passed by; but to-morrow night, my friends—to-morrow night," he exclaimed emphatically, "you shall find a good supper ready for you in Earl Street when you come, and a drop of the right sort."

"So much the better," said Jeffreys: "I like a good supper. But what's your hurry at present, Mr. Bones?"

"To tell you the truth, my dear boy," answered the old man, "I have got three friends waiting for me at a ken in Mitchell Street; and I promised not to keep them longer than I could help. So you must excuse me on this occasion; and, therefore, good bye."

Old Death shook hands with the three men, and took his departure—chuckling to himself at the idea of having secured the services of Jeffreys' friends at so cheap a rate, inasmuch as he would cheerfully have given them, griping and avaricious as he was, three or four times the sum stipulated in order to secure their services in the scheme of carrying out his atrocious plans of vengeance.

But for once, Old Death! the laugh was against yourself—as you speedily discovered to your cost!

We must not however anticipate.

The moment the old man had left the room, Wilton, Harding, and Jeffreys exchanged glances of satisfaction and triumph.

"Bunce, Tidmarsh, and Bunce's wife are all three at the flash house in Mitchell Street—that is quite clear," said Jeffreys.

"Yes," observed Wilton: "and the moment for action is now at hand. Let us depart."

The three men accordingly left the tavern, and hastened in the direction which they knew Old Death must pursue in order to reach Mitchell Street.

As they passed by another public-house in Helmet Row, Wilton bade them pause for a moment, while he went in to give the necessary instructions to the persons who were associated with him in the expedition of this night, and whom he had ordered to remain there until his return. He speedily rejoined Jeffreys and Harding; and all three were once more on the track of Old Death.

At the same time, half-a-dozen men, dressed as labourers, issued from the public-house at which Wilton had called; and, dispersing themselves, hurried singly by different ways towards the road separating the two burial-grounds.

Precisely at the corner where Mitchell Street joins Helmet Row, and just as he was in the act of turning into the former thoroughfare, Old Death was suddenly seized by three men, and gagged before he had time to utter a single exclamation. The moon shone brightly; and his eyes flashed the fires of savage rage and wild amazement, as their glances fell upon the countenances of Wilton, Harding, and Jeffreys. He stamped his feet in a paroxysm of fury, and then struggled desperately to release himself: but his efforts were altogether unavailing—though he exerted a strength which could scarcely have been expected on the part of so old and feeble a man. He was borne off to the Black's carriage, which was waiting close by; and, being thrust in, was immediately bound and blindfolded by two persons who were already seated inside the vehicle, which drove away at a rapid rate.

This important feat being accomplished, Wilton desired Jeffreys to proceed to the flash-house in Mitchell Street, and induce Tidmarsh and the Bunces to accompany him into the ambush prepared for them.

Jeffreys accordingly repaired to the boozing-ken alluded to, where he found the objects of his search seated at a table, and occupied in the discussion of bread and cheese and porter.

"Sorry to interrupt you, my friends," said Jeffreys; "but you must come away with me directly. Mr. Bones has sent me to fetch you ——"

"Is anything the matter?" asked Mrs. Bunce, in a low but agitated voice, as she glanced towards the strangers present in the room.

"I can't say what's the matter," replied Jeffreys, "because I don't know. But Mr. Bones seems much excited—and he's walking up and down the road between the burying-grounds. He told me to desire you to come to him directly."

"Is he alone there?" inquired Toby Bunce, looking particularly frightened.

"Yes—quite alone. There's no danger of any thing, if that's what you mean: but I think Mr. Bones has met with some annoyance. Come on!"

Tidmarsh and the Bunces accordingly rose, paid for what they had ordered, but which they had not time to finish, and repaired with Jeffreys to the place mentioned by him.

"Where *is* Mr. Bones?" demanded Mrs. Bunce, in her querulous voice.

But ere Jeffreys had time to give any answer, his three companions were set upon and made prisoners by the Black's retainers.

It is only necessary to state, in a few words, that they were gagged, blindfolded, thrust into a second vehicle which was in attendance, and conveyed to the same place whither Tim the Snammer, Josh Pedler, and Old Death had preceded them.

Wilton, having superintended this last transaction, remained behind along with Jeffreys, to whom he addressed himself in the following manner, as soon as the carriage had departed:—

"I am commissioned by my master, who is also your's, to state to you his entire approval of your conduct. Measures have been taken to save Mr. Torrens, in a manner which cannot implicate you. Keep your own counsel: be prudent and steady—and you may not only atone for past errors, but become a respected and worthy member of society. For a few days it will be necessary for you to remain as quiet as possible at your own lodgings; and whatever extraordinary reports you may hear concerning the affairs of Mr. Torrens—however wonderful the means adopted to proclaim his innocence of the crime of murder may be—keep a still tongue in your head! So much depends upon your implicit secrecy, that you would not be now left at large, did not our master entertain a high opinion of your fidelity. But beware how you act! You have had ample proofs not only of his power, but likewise of his matchless boldness and unflinching determination in working out his aims."

"For my own sake, Mr. Wilton," said Jeffreys, "I shall follow all your advice."

"And you will live to bless the hour when you first encountered our master," was the answer. "It is not probable that your services will be required again for some days: but should it be otherwise, a letter or a messenger will be dispatched to your abode. Our master retains in his hands the money that you left with him; and the next time he has occasion to see you, he will advise you in what manner to lay it out to your best advantage. In the meantime he has sent you a moderate sum—not from your own funds, but from his purse—for your present wants; and so long as you remain in his service, your wages will be liberal, but paid in comparatively small and frequent sums, so that the possession of a large amount may not lead you into follies. By this course he will train your mind to recognise the true value of money honourably obtained, and fit you for the position in which the funds he holds of your's may shortly place you."

Jeffreys and Wilton then separated, the former more astonished than ever at the bold and yet skilfully executed proceedings set on foot by his mysterious master.

CHAPTER XCV.
CLARENCE VILLIERS AND HIS AUNT.

The church of Saint Sepulchre on Snow Hill, was proclaiming the hour of nine on the following morning, when Clarence Villiers again entered the office of the governor of Newgate, and solicited permission to see Mrs. Torrens, representing the degree of relationship in which he stood with regard to that unhappy woman.

We have before stated that Mrs. Torrens had been placed in a ward where there were several other prisoners of her own sex; and the governor, animated by a proper feeling of delicacy, and supposing that the interview of relatives under such circumstances was likely to be of a nature which it would be cruel to submit to the gaze of curious strangers, immediately conducted Clarence into his own parlour, whither the guilty aunt was speedily conducted.

When they were alone together, Clarence endeavoured to find utterance for a few kind words; but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—and he burst into tears.

Mrs. Torrens threw herself into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and expressed the anguish of her soul in deep and convulsing moans.

"Oh! my dear aunt," exclaimed Clarence at length; "in what a frightful position do I find you! What terrible changes have a few short days effected!"

"Do not reproach me, Clarence—Oh! do not reproach me," said the wretched woman, extending her arms in an imploring manner towards him: "I am miserable enough as it is!"

"My God! I can well believe you," cried Villiers, speaking in a tone of profound commiseration, and forgetting for a moment the iniquity of which his aunt had been guilty: for she was frightfully altered—her plumpness was gone—her cheeks were thin and pale—and she even stooped, as if with premature old age.

"Oh! yes—I am indeed very, very miserable," she repeated, in a tone of intense bitterness, and clasping her hands together in the excess of her mental agony. "Such nights as I have passed since I first set foot in this dreadful place! No human tongue can tell the amount of wretchedness which I endure. In the day-time 'tis too horrible—oh! far too horrible to think of: but at night—when all is dark and silent, and when my very thoughts—my very ideas seem to spring into life and assume ghastly shapes——"

"Oh! my dear aunt, do not allow your imagination thus to obtain dominion over you!" interrupted Clarence. "Endeavour to compose yourself a little—if only a little—for it does me harm to see you thus! Besides, I have so much to say to you—so many questions to ask you—so much advice to give you——"

"Alas! the only counsel you can give me, Clarence," said the wretched woman, shaking with a cold shudder, though the perspiration stood in big drops upon her brow,—"the only counsel you can give me, Clarence, is to bid me prepare for another world."

"Is it possible?" cried Villiers, shocked by the appalling significance of these words: "have you no hope—no chance——"

"Would you believe me were I to assure you that I am not guilty of the crime imputed to me—the forgery of a draft upon the bankers of the late Sir Henry Courtenay?" demanded Mrs. Torrens, fixing her sunken, lustreless eyes upon her nephew. "No—no: you are convinced that I *am* guilty—and a jury will pronounce me to be so! Think not that I blind myself against all the horrors of my position! I know my fate—I know that I must die eventually by the hand of the executioner——"

"God have mercy upon you!" exclaimed Villiers, pressing his hand to his brow as if to calm the dreadful thoughts which his aunt's language excited in his brain.

"Yes, Clarence—that must be my fate," she continued: "unless I obtain a short respite—of a few months—by confessing——"

"Confessing what?" cried Clarence impatiently.

"Oh! no—not to you can I make that avowal!" she exclaimed, in a shrieking tone.

"But I understand you! Yes—a light breaks in upon me—and——"

"Do not spurn me altogether, Clarence!" said the wretched woman, throwing herself upon her knees before him and grasping one of his hands with convulsive tightness in both her own. "Oh! I know what you would reproach me with! If not for my own sake—yet for that of the unborn child which I bear in my bosom, I should have avoided this awful risk—recoiled from that fatal crime! But I was so confident of success—so certain of avoiding exposure,—and my affairs, too, were so desperate—without resources—Sir Henry Courtenay having disappeared in such a mysterious manner——"

"Aunt," interrupted Clarence, in a firm and solemn tone, as he raised her from her suppliant posture, and placed her in a chair,

—"answer me as if you were questioned by your God! Are your hands unstained with the blood——"

"Holy heavens! would you believe me capable of murder?" cried Mrs. Torrens, in a penetrating, thrilling tone of deep anguish. "Listen, Clarence," she continued, her voice suddenly becoming low and hollow, as she rose also from her seat and laid her emaciated hand upon his arm,—"listen, Clarence, for a few moments. I have been of all hypocrites the most vile—I have led a dissolute life, the profligacy of which has been concealed beneath the mask of religion—I have subsisted upon the wages paid to me by a paramour for the use of my person—I have forged—I have become the accomplice of the ravisher of innocence,—but a murderess—no—never—never!"

"God be thanked for that assurance, which I now sincerely believe!" exclaimed Clarence. "But you speak of being the accomplice of the ravisher of innocence? Is it possible—answer me quickly—that Rosamond—my sister-in-law——"

"Oh! kill me—kill me, Clarence!" cried the miserable woman, again throwing herself at his feet in the anguish of her soul: "kill me, I say—for that was the blackest crime which one woman ever perpetrated towards another!"

"Then all my worst fears are confirmed!" groaned Clarence; and, turning abruptly away from her in sudden loathing and horror, he broke forth into violent ejaculations of rage.

But in less than a minute the sounds of grief, more bitter than his fury was terrible, forced themselves on his ears; and glancing round, he beheld his aunt lying prostrate on the floor, her face buried in the carpet, and her whole frame convulsed with an anguish which in a moment renewed all the feelings of commiseration in his really generous heart.

Springing towards the spot where she had fallen when he burst so rudely away from her, he raised the wretched creature in his arms, conveyed her once more to a seat, and endeavoured to address her in terms of consolation and kindness. He even implored her pardon for what he termed his brutality towards her.

"Oh! you have no forgiveness to ask of me, Clarence," she murmured, in a faint and half-suffocating tone. "Your indignation is most natural—and I am the vilest being in female shape that ever cursed the earth with a baleful presence, or brought dishonour on a glorious sex! My God! when I look back and survey all my crimes—all my misdeeds, I despair of pardon in another world!"

"And now you add another wickedness to those of which you spoke," exclaimed Clarence: "for the mercy of God is infinite! It must be so—it would be an awful sin, a monstrous impiety to believe otherwise! A great and good Being, possessing omnipotent power and a will which there is none to question, can have no pleasure in casting your soul—poor, frail, crushed-down woman!—into a lake of eternal fires! Oh! believe me—there is hope even for greater criminals than yourself! But every atonement which it is possible for you to make upon earth, *must* be made; and, whatever be your fate amongst beings who forgive nothing, you will experience the blessings of salvation at the hands of a Being who forgives every thing!"

"I am penitent—oh! believe me, Clarence, I am very penitent!" exclaimed his aunt. "Would to God that I could live the last twenty years of my life over again! Not an error—no, not even a frailty should stain my soul! But these thoughts come upon us when it is too late to take them as the guides of our conduct."

"Alas! such is indeed the case!" said Clarence, mournfully. "And now, aunt, I am about to ask you to perform a duty which will perhaps lacerate your bosom—revive a thousand bitter reflections—"

"I understand you, Clarence," interrupted Mrs. Torrens, subduing her emotions as much as possible, and speaking in a comparatively tranquil tone: "you require from my lips a true and faithful narrative of all that has occurred since you left London with your beautiful bride? Well—that narrative shall be given. Sit down by me—and listen: but, in so listening, you will only receive fresh proofs of my black turpitude! For systematically and coolly—not in the excitement of moments when evil passions were more powerful than reason—have I perpetrated those crimes which now weigh so heavily upon my soul!"

Clarence took a chair by his aunt's side, and prepared to hear her story with an earnest but mournful attention.

His aunt then related to him the particulars of the dreadful conspiracy which had been devised by herself, the late Sir Henry Courtenay, and Mr. Torrens against the honour of Rosamond; and Clarence now learnt for the first time that Mr. Torrens had only consented to his marriage with Adelais in order to get them both out of the way, so that the younger sister might be completely in the power of those who had thus leagued against her happiness and her virtue.

"Although I deplore that such motives should have been the favouring circumstances which led to my union with Adelais," said Clarence, "yet I rejoice that my charming and adored wife is safely removed by the fact of that marriage from the power of such a monster of a parent."

Mrs. Torrens sighed profoundly, and then entered upon those details which explained to her nephew how she became acquainted with Mr. Torrens—the whole particulars of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay, as she herself had heard them from the lips of Mr. Torrens—the forgery of the cheque, to which crime that individual was privy—the way in which she had compelled him to marry her—and the flight of Howard, the attorney, with the produce of the crime for which she was now in a felon's gaol.

"And you believe that Mr. Torrens is really innocent of the black deed imputed to him?" said Clarence, inquiringly—for he was now anxious to ascertain whether the tale which he had just heard in explanation of that mysterious event, would correspond with the proclamation of Mr. Torrens' innocence which was to be that day made to the world, according to the assurances given on the preceding morning by Esther de Medina.

"I am confident that the account given by Mr. Torrens, and which I have now related to you, is correct," answered Mrs. Torrens: "for," she added, after a few moments' hesitation, "when once we understood each other—when once our hands were united—there was no necessity to maintain any secrets from each other. We plunged headlong into crime, hand-in-hand—and felt no shame in each other's

presence. Besides, he had no motive to perpetrate such a deed: on the contrary, he deprived himself of a friend whose purse was most useful to him."

"True!" observed Clarence, struck by the truth of this reasoning.

"In respect to myself," resumed the unhappy woman, "I have made up my mind how to act. I shall not aggravate my enormity by denial: I shall plead guilty to the charge of forgery—and without implicating that wretched man on whom the charge of murder now presses with such a fearful weight of circumstantial evidence. No—I shall not mention him in connexion with that deed of mine; so that if he escape from the cruel difficulty in which he is now placed, no other accusations, beyond those of his own conscience, may injure his peace."

"You have determined to adopt the course which I should have counselled," said Clarence. "It would be useless to attempt the defence of that which is so clearly apparent. The forged signature had not the baronet's private mark attached to it; but the clerk who cashed it for you, did not think of scrutinising it so closely at the moment, as you were well known to him. A subsequent examination of it proved the forgery. Stands not the case so? At least, it was thus reported in the newspapers."

"The statement is correct," answered Mrs. Torrens, mournfully; "and I feel convinced that I shall possess a greater chance of obtaining the royal mercy, by pleading guilty at once and confessing my error. Oh! to escape death—a premature death—a horrible death!" she cried, suddenly becoming nervously excited again.

"Compose yourself, aunt—compose yourself!" exclaimed Clarence; "for you have an act of justice to do towards an innocent man. In a word, I wish you to sign the account of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay, as you received it from the lips of Mr. Torrens, and as you have now related it to me. I will draw it up briefly; and no one can tell of what benefit the existence of such a document may prove to your unhappy husband."

Clarence hastened to procure writing materials from the governor's office; and, on his return to the parlour, he drew up the statement, combining it with a confession of the forgery, though not mentioning the name of Mr. Torrens in connexion with that latter crime. The penitent woman then signed the paper in a firm handwriting; and it immediately appeared as if a load were taken from her mind.

Villiers now informed her that Rosamond had found an asylum with some kind friends of the Jewish persuasion; but, faithful to his promise to Esther de Medina, he did not drop even so much as a hint of the hopes which that admirable young lady had held out with regard to the expected proclamation and existing proofs of Mr. Torrens' innocence. It struck him, however, that the paper which he had that moment received from his aunt might assist the steps that were in such mysterious progress elsewhere to remove from the head of his father-in-law the dreadful charge which rested upon it.

"I must now leave you, aunt," said the young man, rising from his seat.

"Shall you visit Mr. Torrens?" she inquired, in a hesitating manner.

"Not to-day," was the answer. "The prison regulations do not permit visitors to call on the same inmate of this gaol two days consecutively. In fact—for I abhor every thing savouring of duplicity—I will candidly inform you that Adelais, myself, Rosamond, and the young lady with whom that poor girl is staying, saw Mr. Torrens yesterday."

"You visited him first!" murmured the wretched woman. "But I do not blame you—I cannot reproach you, Clarence," she added hastily. "It was natural that your wife should wish to see her father—and equally natural that you should accompany her. Besides, I know that it must have cost you a painful effort, to enter the presence of one so stained with crime—so polluted—so infamous as I!"

"Your contrition has obliterated from my mind all feelings save those of regret and commiseration," returned Clarence warmly. "Would that justice could so easily forget the past as I!"

"Oh! I thank you for those generous assurances," exclaimed Mrs. Torrens, bursting into tears; "for sympathy in such a place as this is dearer to the soul than all the enjoyments which the great world outside could possibly bestow! The kind word—aye, and what is more, the word of forgiveness—is the holy dew of heaven. For years and years, Clarence, was I a vile hypocrite, and such sentences as those flowed glibly from my tongue—because they were the means whereby I deceived the world. But now—oh! now, I feel all I say; and whatever may be my doom, I shall at last appreciate the sublime truths of that religion which I so long used as a mask. Clarence," she added, in a more measured tone, "always suspect the individual who makes a display of his religion. Be assured that true religious feelings do not obtrude themselves in all unseasonable moments upon society. The man or the woman who enacts the part of a *saint*, is nothing more nor less than a despicable hypocrite; and I believe that more profligacy is concealed beneath such a mask as I so long wore, than can possibly exist amongst those who make no outward display of religion. But I will not detain you longer: I know that Adelais must be cruelly shocked by all that has lately happened. One word, however, before we part:—you will not—you can not acquaint *her* with—with——"

"With the ruin of Rosamond!" cried Clarence, seeing that his aunt hesitated. "Oh! no—no: it would kill my poor wife! Not for worlds would I allow her to learn that dreadful secret! And now I understand full well wherefore Rosamond preferred to remain with her new friends, rather than accompany her sister and myself."

Mrs. Torrens and Clarence embraced and separated; the former returning to her ward in company with the matron, who had waited in an adjacent room during this interview;—and the latter repairing to the office of the governor, to whom he handed the document which his aunt had signed.

The young man then proceeded to the house of some friends dwelling in the City, and with whom he had left Adelais during his visit to Newgate.

We should observe that he was fully enabled thus to dispose of his time according to his own will, he having obtained six weeks' leave

of absence from the Government Office to which he belonged.

In the course of the morning, he called at the lodgings which he had occupied in Bridge Street, Blackfriars, previously to his marriage with Adelais, to see if there were any letters lying there for him. There was only one; and the contents of that ran as follow:—

"*Pall Mall West.*

"The Earl of Ellingham presents his compliments to Mr. Villiers, and requests that Mr. Villiers will, on his return to town, favour the Earl with an interview relative to private business of some importance."

"There must assuredly be some mistake in this," observed Clarence, as he showed the letter to Adelais, "for I am totally unacquainted with this nobleman, and cannot understand what private business he can possibly have to transact with me. However, I will call to-morrow or next day and ascertain the point, when the excitement connected with your father's situation shall have somewhat subsided by the declaration of his innocence."

We need hardly say that Clarence had communicated to his beloved wife the fact that his aunt had narrated to him the particulars of the manner in which Sir Henry Courtenay came by his death, and that he had drawn up the narrative, which, upon being signed by her, had been deposited in the hands of the governor of Newgate.

CHAPTER XCVI.
SIR CHRISTOPHER BLUNT A HERO.

It was about mid-day when an extraordinary rumour began to spread like wildfire throughout the metropolis.

The report was, that between ten and eleven o'clock that morning, Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles had presented themselves to the sitting magistrate at Bow Street, and had not only communicated to that functionary a surprising account of certain adventures which had happened to themselves, but had likewise placed in his hands a document which proclaimed the innocence of Mr. Torrens, who was lying in Newgate under an accusation of murder.

The adventures alluded to were of such an amazing character, that, had they been related by persons of a less honourable reputation than Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles, they would have been treated as a pure invention on the part either of maniacs or unprincipled friends of the accused.

But the known integrity of those two gentlemen gave no scope for even the slightest breath of suspicion; and their tale, though wonderful, was so consistent in all its parts, that it was received as one of those truths which are "stranger than fiction."

The entire metropolis was in amazement!

Two respectable gentlemen—an eminent physician and a wealthy Justice of the Peace—had been conducted, blindfolded, to a house where they had received the depositions of two men who confessed themselves to be the murderers of the late Sir Henry Courtenay. There was no appearance of fraud in that confession. The men had been cross-examined apart, and had agreed in the minutest details. Every one therefore believed that Mr. Torrens was indeed innocent; and the sitting magistrate at Bow Street expressed the same opinion.

But who was the individual that had caused Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles to be thus made the recipients of the confession of the murderers? Where was the house to which those gentlemen had been taken? What motive was there for screening the assassins? Why was so much mystery observed in the entire transaction? And wherefore had Sir Christopher and the physician been enjoined to withhold the publication of the matter for twenty-four hours after its occurrence?

These questions were in every body's mouth; but no one could suggest any thing resembling even the shadow of a satisfactory solution.

The weapon with which the crime had been perpetrated, and a portion of the proceeds of the robbery effected at Torrens Cottage at the same time, accompanied the depositions placed by Sir Christopher Blunt in the hands of the magistrate; and a surgeon, on examining the corpse which had been removed to the deceased's house previous to receiving the rites of Christian burial, declared that the throat must have been cut by such an instrument as the one thus produced.

But this was not all. The moment the rumour of what had occurred at Bow Street reached the prison of Newgate, the governor hastened to the police-office, and submitted to the magistrate the confession made that morning by Mrs. Torrens.

This confession not only admitted her guilt in respect to the forgery—but gave such a version of the murder, as completely tallied with the depositions made by Timothy Splint and Joshua Pedler.

Looking at the entire case, as it thus stood, there was no doubt of the innocence of Mr. Torrens; and all that gentleman's friends—who, by the bye, had hitherto kept aloof from him—crowded to Newgate to congratulate him on the facts which had transpired.

The sensation created by the affair, throughout the capital, was tremendous; and when the evening papers were published, the copies were greedily caught up in all directions. It was a fine harvest for those journals; and their sale that day was prodigious.

An individual often spoken of, but never yet seen—namely, "the oldest inhabitant in the metropolis"—was duly mentioned on the occasion.

"Never," said each of the evening papers—as if the reporters had all been suddenly struck by the same idea,—"never, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the metropolis, has so extraordinary a case transpired."

And certainly no event for many years had produced such a powerful excitement, animating even the most callous and indifferent dispositions with a desire to know more, and setting a-thinking many who had quite enough in their own affairs to occupy all their thoughts.

The taverns, public-houses, and coffee-shops became the scenes of loud and interesting discussions, but even the knowing-ones found no opportunity of displaying their sagacity, for the mystery of the whole affair positively defied conjecture.

"But who can the man be that is at the bottom of all this? and where can his residence be situated?" were the questions which every tongue uttered, and to which no one could reply.

That such an extraordinary incident could occur in the metropolis, without leaving the faintest trace or the smallest clue to the elucidation of the enigma, appeared almost incredible.

As for Sir Christopher Blunt—he certainly did not appear to know whether he stood upon his head or his heels. The Home Secretary sent for him in the course of the afternoon, and received from his lips a full and complete statement of the whole occurrence; for the Government was naturally indignant that any individual should unwarrantably usurp the functions of the proper authorities by holding murderers in his own custody and adopting his own course to prove the innocence of a man in the grasp of justice. Sir Christopher was, however, unable to afford the slightest information which was likely to lead to the discovery of that individual, or of his place of abode.

On his return to his own house in Jermyn Street, Sir Christopher found several noblemen and influential gentlemen, including three or four Members of Parliament, waiting to see him; and he instantly became the lion of the company.

No pen can describe the immense pomposity with which he repeated his narrative of the mysterious transaction: no words can convey an idea of the immeasurable conceit and self-sufficiency with which he described the cross-examination of the murderers.

In fact, the knight made himself so busy in the matter—was so accessible to all visitors who were anxious to gratify their curiosity by asking a thousand questions—and was so ready to afford the newspaper-reporters all the information which he had to impart respecting the incident, that no one thought of applying to Dr. Lascelles in a similar manner. This circumstance was the more agreeable to the physician, inasmuch as he not only disliked wasting his time in gossip, but was well pleased at escaping the necessity of giving vague answers or positive denials in an affair the details of which were in reality no mystery to him.

To all his visitors Sir Christopher Blunt took care to speak in the following terms:—"You see, the individual who is the prime mover in this most extraordinary proceeding, required the assistance of no ordinary magistrate. He wanted a man of keen penetration—the most perfect business-habits—and of the highest character,—a man, in a word, who would probe the very souls of the two miscreants to be placed before him, and on whose report the world could implicitly rely. *That* was the reason wherefore I was pitched upon as the Justice of the Peace best qualified to undertake so difficult a business."

Sir Christopher became a perfect hero, as the mysterious stranger had predicted; and during the remainder of that memorable day on which the innocence of Mr. Torrens was proclaimed, Jermyn Street was literally lined with carriages, the common destination being the knight's abode;—so that a stranger in the metropolis would have supposed that such a scene of animation and excitement could only be occasioned by the arrival of some great foreign prince, or that the Prime Minister lived in that house and was holding a levée.

When all Sir Christopher's visitors had retired, and he found himself alone in his drawing-room at about half-past ten that evening, he threw himself on a sofa, exclaiming aloud, "Egad! that old fellow, who knocked down the Irish Captain and afterwards turned out to be a young man, was quite right. I am a hero—a regular hero! This popularity is truly delightful. I really do not envy the Duke of Wellington his having won the battle of Waterloo. No, indeed—not I! Sir Christopher Blunt is a greater man than his Grace, although only a knight."

Scarcely had the worthy gentleman arrived at this very satisfactory conclusion, when Mr. Lykspittal entered the room, holding his portfolio in his hand, and bowing so low at every third step which he took in advancing towards the knight, that it really seemed as if he were anxious to ascertain how close to the floor he could put his nose without rolling completely over like the clown at Astley's.

"My revered patron," began Mr. Lykspittal, "I have taken the liberty of bringing the first half dozen pages of the manuscript of the pamphlet——"

"The deuce take the pamphlet, Mr. Lykspittal!" shouted Sir Christopher, leaping from the sofa, and, in the exuberance of his joy, kicking the portfolio from the literary gentleman's hands up to the ceiling, so that the papers all showered down upon the head of their author, who stood amazed and aghast at this singular reception.

But in the next moment it struck the discomfited Mr. Lykspittal that Sir Christopher Blunt had suddenly taken leave of his senses—or, in other words, had gone raving mad; and he rushed to the door.

"Stop—stop!" cried Sir Christopher, darting after him. "What the deuce is the matter with the man?"

"No—don't—don't injure me!" roared Mr. Lykspittal, falling upon his knees, as the knight caught him by the arm.

"Injure you, my good fellow!" exclaimed Sir Christopher, surveying him with the utmost amazement. "What could possibly put such a thing into your head? I am not angry with you: I'm only mad——"

"I know you are!" cried Mr. Lykspittal in a tone of horror, while his countenance expressed the most ludicrous alarm.

"Yes—mad—literally mad—insane—my dear fellow!" vociferated Sir Christopher, quitting his hold upon the literary gentleman and absolutely dancing round him.

"O Lord! O Lord!" groaned Mr. Lykspittal, still upon his knees and nailed by terror to the spot.

"Insane—mad with joy!" cried the knight. "But get up—and don't be frightened. I am not angry with you. But I suppose that the idea of entering the presence of a man like me is too much for you, my poor fellow," added Sir Christopher, stopping short in the midst of his capering antics, and surveying the literary gentleman with immense commiseration.

"Oh! only mad—with joy?" murmured Mr. Lykspittal, considerably relieved by the assurance, and starting to his feet: then, dexterously catching at the suspicion which Sir Christopher, in his boundless self-conceit, had expressed, the literary gentleman suddenly resumed his usual cringing manner, and said in a tone of deep veneration, "Pardon me, my excellent patron, if—for a moment overcome by your presence—the presence of a man whose name is upon every tongue——"

"Say no more about it, my good fellow!" cried the knight, with all the bland condescension of a patron. "To tell you the truth, I am quite beside myself with joy; but I should not expose myself thus to any one save yourself. You are, however, a privileged person—behind the scenes, as it were; and you know how necessary popularity is to me. Egad! Mr. Lykspittal, I little thought when I began life as a poor boy, that I should one day become a great——"

"A *very* great," meekly suggested the sycophant.

"A very great man," added Sir Christopher, emphatically, as he surveyed himself in a neighbouring mirror. "I tell you what, Mr. Lykspittal—those vulgar citizens of Portsoken must now be ready to cut their throats——"

"A person *did* expire in that ward very suddenly to-day, Sir Christopher," observed the literary gentleman, drawing upon his imagination for this little incident, which he knew would prove most welcome to the knight's vanity; "and there's every reason to suppose that his death was caused by vexation."

"No doubt of it!" exclaimed the Justice of the Peace, playing with his shirt-frill. "Don't you see that there will be now no necessity for the pamphlets?"

Here Mr. Lykspittal's countenance fell.

"But you shall write instead," continued the knight, "a complete narrative of my most romantic and extraordinary adventures."

Here Mr. Lykspittal's countenance brightened up again.

"No—you shan't, though," cried his patron, an idea striking him.

Again the sycophant's brow became overcast.

"You shall write the history of my life!" added Sir Christopher.

And again the literary gentleman's brow expanded.

"Yes—*The Life*——"

"And *Times*," suggested Mr. Lykspittal.

"*The Life and Times of Sir Christopher Blunt*," exclaimed the knight triumphantly.

"In three volumes, large octavo, with portraits," added the sycophant.

"Egad! that's a capital suggestion of your's—the portraits, I mean," said Sir Christopher. "But you must show that, although I began the world with nothing, yet I am of an ancient and highly respectable family——"

"Certainly, my dear sir. There was no doubt a Blunt at Crecy or Agincourt," observed Mr. Lykspittal. "At all events it is easy to say there was, and in a note put '*See M.S.S., British Museum.*' That is the way we always manage in such cases, my dear Sir Christopher. The British Museum is a most convenient place——"

"What—to write in?" asked the Justice of the Peace.

"No, sir—to furnish pedigrees for those who haven't got any."

"Ah! I understand!" cried Sir Christopher, chuckling. "Capital! capital! Well, my good fellow, set about the *Life and Times* directly. But, by the bye, I wish the work to begin something in this way—'*It was on a dark and tempestiferous night—the wind roared—the artillery flew in fitting gusts—the streaming shafts of electricity shot across the eccentric sky*,'—and so on. That's a pretty sentence, you perceive; and being entirely my own composition—striking me, in fact, at the moment—and not suggested by any other person——"

"It does you infinite credit, Sir Christopher," interrupted Mr. Lykspittal, with an obsequious bow; "and with a *leetle* correction——"

"Oh! of course you will use your discretion. Well, now we understand each other, Mr. Lykspittal; and you will begin the work immediately. Of course you must introduce a great quantity of correspondence between myself and the leading men of this age, but who are now all dead."

"Have you any such letters by you, sir?" enquired the literary gentleman.

"Not I!" ejaculated Sir Christopher Blunt, speaking bluntly indeed.

"Oh! that's no matter—I can easily invent some," observed Mr. Lykspittal. "I thank you most sincerely for your kind—your generous patronage, my dear Sir Christopher. In fact, I can never forget it—I—I——"

And Mr. Lykspittal, by way of working his sycophancy up to the highest possible pitch—or, shall we not say, down to the lowest degree of self-abasement—affected to burst into tears and rushed from the room.

"Poor fellow! he's quite overcome by his feelings," murmured Sir Christopher to himself. "That's what I call real gratitude, now!"

And, having mused upon this and divers other matters for some few minutes, the worthy knight went up stairs to see his affectionate spouse and the baby, ere he retired to his own apartment.

CHAPTER XCVII.
CARLTON HOUSE.

We are now about to relate an incident which, at present, may appear to have little to do with the thread of our narrative, but which, we can assure our readers, will hereafter prove of immense importance in the development of the tale.

On the evening of that day when the innocence of Mr. Torrens was proclaimed, as related in the preceding chapter, King George IV. gave a grand entertainment at Carlton House.

This splendid mansion was that monarch's favourite residence—not only when he was Prince of Wales and Regent, but likewise while he wore on his unworthy brow the British diadem.

Execrable as the character of this unprincipled voluptuary and disgusting debauchee notoriously was, he unquestionably possessed good taste in choosing the decorations of a drawing-room, selecting a paper of a suitable pattern to match particular furniture, and superintending the fittings of a banquetting-hall. Carlton House was accordingly rendered a perfect gem of a palace under his auspices; and there the King loved to dwell, passing his evenings in elegant orgies and his nights in lascivious enjoyment.

The interior of Carlton House was indeed most sumptuous in all its arrangements. The state-apartments were fitted up with a grandeur properly chastened by elegance; and convenience and comfort were studied as much as magnificence. The entrance-hall was paved with veined marble, the roof being supported by Ionic columns from the quarries of Sienna. The west ante-room contained many fine portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds. But the most splendid of all the apartments was the Crimson Drawing-room, which was decorated in the richest and yet most tasteful manner. The rich draperies, the architectural embellishments, the immense pier-glasses, the chandeliers of cut glass, and the massive furniture all richly gilt, evinced the state of perfection which the arts and manufactures have attained in this country.

Adjoining the Crimson Drawing-room was the Rotunda, the architecture of which was of the Ionic order, every part having been selected from the finest specimens of ancient Greece. The ceiling was painted to represent the sky, and was in the shape of a hemisphere. Another beautiful apartment was the Rose Satin Drawing-room, fitted up after the Chinese fashion, and in the middle of which stood a circular table of Sevres porcelain, the gift of Louis XVIII. to the King. Many pictures by the old masters likewise embellished that room.

We must also mention the Blue Velvet Room, remarkable for the refined taste displayed in its decorations,—and the Library, Golden Drawing-room, Gothic Dining-room, Bow Room, Conservatory, Armoury, Vestibule, and Throne Room, the last of which was fitted up with crimson velvet, and produced, when illuminated, a superb effect.

This rapid glance at the interior of Carlton House may serve to afford the reader a general idea of the splendour of that palace,—a splendour almost dazzling to contemplate, if we consider it for a few moments in juxta-position with the deplorable misery of thousands and thousands of cottages, huts, and hovels in which so large a number of the working population are forced to dwell!

But kings and queens care nothing for the condition of their people. So long as their selfish desires can be gratified and all their childish whims or extravagant caprices can be fulfilled, the industrious millions may rot in their miserable hovels, crushed by the weight of that taxation which is so largely augmented by the wants of Royalty!

It is absurd to venerate and adore Royalty; for Royalty is either despicably frivolous, or vilely arbitrary:—and he who admires or adores it, is an enemy to his own interests.

Let us, however, return to the subject of this chapter.

It was ten at night; and carriage after carriage, in rapid succession, set down the noble and beauteous guests at the entrance of Carlton House.

The palace itself was a blaze of light; and the brilliant lustre, shed throughout the spacious rooms by the magnificent chandeliers, was reflected on the numerous pier-glasses and enhanced by the splendour of the diamonds worn by the ladies.

Upwards of four hundred guests—constituting the *élite* of the fashionable world—were there assembled; and amongst them moved the King himself—undoubtedly a polished gentleman, although the few—the very few qualifications which he did possess have been greatly exaggerated by writers of the Lykspittal school.

It was a *re-union* of beauty, rank, and fashion, of the most brilliant description, though on a limited scale. A full band was in attendance; and dancing commenced in the drawing-rooms shortly after ten o'clock.

Amongst the guests was the Earl of Ellingham,—conspicuous by his fine form and handsome countenance, and more deserving of respect on account of his noble nature than by reason of his noble name: for a title is a thing which any monarch can bestow—but God

alone can create the generous heart and the glorious intellect!

Lady Hatfield was likewise there; for, averse as she was to the assemblies of fashion, yet having received a card of invitation to this *re-union*, she could not refuse to obey the "royal commands."

And beautiful she appeared, too—with diamonds sparkling on her hair, and in a dress which enhanced the loveliness of her complexion and set off her graceful figure and rounded bust to their utmost advantage.

She had accompanied the ladies of a noble family with whom she was intimately acquainted; and when the party was presented to the King, he contemplated Lady Hatfield with an admiration which he did not attempt to conceal. Indeed, he addressed himself particularly to her during the few minutes that he remained in conversation with the party to which she belonged. But other guests speedily demanded his attention, and he moved away, not however without bestowing another long and even amorous look upon Georgiana, who felt relieved when the monarch was no longer near.

The Earl was speedily by Lady Hatfield's side, as soon as she was seated; and, after a few cursory observations upon the entertainment, she said to him, "Have you lately visited Mr. de Medina?"

"Not for the last two or three days," he replied. "I have been kept much at home by the necessity of preparing materials for the speech which I shall have to make on Monday evening next, on moving, according to the notice which I have already given in the House of Lords, for certain papers calculated to throw some light on the state of the industrious classes."

"You at last intend to shine as a great statesman, Arthur?" said Lady Hatfield, with a smile.

"I intend to apply myself to the grand subject of proposing those measures which may ameliorate the condition of millions of human beings," answered the Earl. "Do you not remember, Georgiana, that I told you how one whose name I need not mention, adjured me to do my duty as a British legislator? and have you forgotten that I explained to you the deep impression which his language on that occasion made upon me?"

"I have forgotten nothing that you ever told me," answered Lady Hatfield; "and I am rejoiced to hear that you are now seriously resolved to apply your great talents to so useful a purpose. You must give the necessary orders to enable me to obtain admittance to the House of Lords on Monday evening next; for I would not for worlds be disappointed in hearing your sentiments upon so grand and important a question."

"If we were not in the light of sister and brother to each other, Georgiana, I should say that I am flattered by your words," remarked the Earl: "but, as it is, I can only assure you that I receive the expression of your desire to be present in the House of Lords next Monday, as a mark of that sincere attachment—that profound friendship which you bear towards me, and which is so entirely reciprocated."

"And have you reflected upon the conversation which occurred between us the other day relative to Miss Esther de Medina?" enquired Georgiana.

"I have," was the answer; "but as yet I have arrived at no decision."

"The next time you call upon me, then," said Lady Hatfield, smiling, and yet subduing a sigh at the same moment, "I shall repeat to you all the arguments in that respect which I used on the former occasion. Now give me your arm, and we will walk into the next room through the open folding-doors of which I catch a glimpse of some fine paintings."

To the adjacent apartment they accordingly proceeded, and inspected several fine pictures, some by the old masters, and others by the most celebrated professors in modern art.

While they were thus engaged, the King approached them, greeted the Earl with urbane cordiality, and proceeded to point out to Lady Hatfield the best compositions amongst the works which she was admiring. The monarch then proposed that she should visit the Armoury; and as, when he had first approached, she had, through deference to Royalty,[41] relinquished the arm of the Earl of Ellingham, she was now compelled to accept that of the King. His Majesty, however, implied by his manner that Arthur was to accompany them; and the young nobleman accordingly followed the monarch and Georgiana to the Armoury.

As they passed through the rooms leading thither, many an envious glance was bent upon Lady Hatfield by the wives and daughters of aristocracy, each of whom would have given ten years of her life to obtain so much favour in the eyes of Royalty; although the King was, at this period, upwards of sixty-four years of age.

There was, nevertheless, nothing in Lady Hatfield's manner which indicated a consciousness of triumph: her deportment was modest, yet dignified—and manifesting that ease and self-possession which constitute such important proofs of good breeding.

"This is the first time that I have seen your ladyship at Carlton House," remarked the King, as they passed slowly on towards the Armoury.

"I have never had the honour of visiting your Majesty's palace until the present occasion," was the reply.

"You must not be forgotten in future," said the King: then slightly sinking his voice, he added, "A palace is the fitting region to be adorned by beauty such as your's."

Lady Hatfield affected not to hear the observation; and the Earl of Ellingham actually did not.

"I am an enthusiastic admirer of female loveliness," continued the King; "and I envy those who possess the talent of pourtraying upon canvas the features which are most dear to them. By the way," added his Majesty, as if a sudden idea had just struck him, "I intend to have a Diana painted for my Library. Beautiful Lady Hatfield, you must be the original of my Diana! Grant me that favour—I shall

esteem it highly; and to-morrow Sir Thomas Lawrence shall call upon your ladyship to receive your commands relative to the first sitting."

"Your Majesty will deign to excuse me," said Georgiana, in a cold but profoundly respectful tone.

"Indeed, I shall receive no apology," observed the King, laughing. "But here we are in the Armoury; and it will give me infinite pleasure to direct your attention to those curiosities which are the worthiest of notice."

George the Fourth then pointed out to Lady Hatfield and the Earl of Ellingham, the swords which had belonged respectively to the Chevalier Bayard, the great Duke of Marlborough, Louis XIV., that glorious patriot Hampden (would that we had such a man at the present time!), General Moreau, Marshal Luckner, and other heroes. There was also a hunting knife which had belonged to Charles XII. of Sweden; and in addition to these curiosities, there were many military antiquities, especially in costume, all of which the King explained to the lady and the Earl.

From time to time it struck Lady Hatfield that her royal companion pressed her arm gently in his own, and not in an accidental way, as he addressed himself to her; and he also looked at her more than once in a very peculiar manner. Had he been of a less exalted rank, she would have instantaneously quitted him; but she reflected that it would be an evidence of insane vanity and conceit on her part were she to interpret in a particular way attentions which after all might have nothing more than a common significancy. She however remained cold, but respectful; and if the King really meant any thing more than the usual courtesy which a gentleman naturally pays to a lady, he received not the slightest encouragement.

"Ellingham," he said, turning abruptly towards the Earl, "do you carry a snuff-box?"

"I do not, sire," was the answer.

"That is provoking! I left mine on the porcelain table in the Chinese Drawing Room."

The young nobleman understood the hint, bowed, and departed to fetch the box—not however for a moment suspecting that the King had any sinister motive in sending him away from the Armoury, where his Majesty and Georgiana now remained alone together; for that museum had not been thrown open for the inspection of the guests generally.

"Beautiful Lady Hatfield," said George the Fourth, the moment the folding-doors had closed of their own accord behind the Earl, "you will consent to allow Lawrence to copy your sweet countenance for my Diana?"

"Your Majesty will deign to excuse me," was the cold and now reserved answer; for Georgiana's suspicions, previously excited in a faint degree, had gathered strength from the fact of her royal companion having got rid of the Earl in the manner already described.

"No—I will not excuse you, beautiful lady," exclaimed the King, enthusiastically—or with affected enthusiasm. "Your's is a countenance which, being seen once, leaves behind a desire to behold it again; and as I shall have no chance of often viewing the original, I must content myself with the contemplation of the picture."

"Your Majesty is pleased to compliment me thus," said Georgiana, more coldly than before: "and your Majesty is of course privileged. But such words, coming from a less exalted quarter, would be deemed offensive."

"I am unfortunate in not being able to render myself agreeable to Lady Hatfield," observed George the Fourth, drawing himself proudly up to his full height—for he was really piqued by the lady's manner—he who never sued in vain for a beauteous woman's smiles! But, probably reflecting that his haughtiness was little suited either to his previous conduct towards Georgiana or to his aims with regard to her, he immediately unbent again, saying in his blandest and most amiable tones, "Not for worlds would I offend you, charming lady: on the contrary, I would give worlds, did I possess them, to be able to win a single smile from those sweet lips."

Georgiana withdrew her hand from the King's arm, and became red with indignation.

"Forgive me—pardon me," said the monarch hastily: "I perceive that you are vexed with me—and I am very unfortunate in having offended you."

Thus speaking he again proffered his arm, which Lady Hatfield took, saying, "Would your Majesty deign to conduct me back to the company?"

At this moment the Earl of Ellingham returned to the Armoury, and handed the King his snuff-box. The party then retraced their way to the splendid saloons, the monarch conversing the while in a manner which seemed to indicate that Lady Hatfield had no ground to fear his recurrence to subjects that were disagreeable to her. At length he resigned her to the care of Lord Ellingham; but ere he turned away, he gave her a rapid and significant look, as much as to say, "I throw myself upon your generosity not to mention my conduct towards you."

The King now withdrew from the apartments thrown open for the reception of the company, and remained absent for nearly an hour. When he returned, his countenance was much flushed; and it was evident that he had been enjoying a glass or two of his favourite curaçoa-punch, in company with a few boon-companions, who had been summoned to attend him in a private room remote from the state-saloons.

One of the boon-companions just alluded to, was a certain Sir Phillip Warren—an old courtier who was supposed to enjoy the confidence of the King, and who, it was rumoured, had been the means of extricating his royal master, when Prince of Wales, from many a difficulty in financial matters as well as from the danger of exposure in divers amatory intrigues. Without any defined official position about the person of the King, Sir Phillip was nevertheless a very important individual in the royal household—one of those useful, but mysterious agents who, while enjoying the reputation of men of honour, are in reality the means by which the dirty-work of palaces is accomplished. In appearance, Sir Phillip Warren was a stout, red-faced, good-humoured-looking man; and not the least of

those qualifications which rendered him so especial a favourite with the King, was the aristocratic faculty that he possessed of taking his three bottles after dinner without seeming to have imbibed any thing stronger than water.

Such was the courtier who, accosting the Earl of Ellingham, shortly after the King's return to the drawing-rooms, drew that nobleman aside with an intimation that he wished to say a few words to him in private.

Taking the Earl's arm, Sir Phillip Warren led him away from the brilliantly lighted saloons, and introduced the nobleman into the Blue Velvet Closet—a small but elegantly decorated room, where a single lamp was burning upon the table.

"His Majesty has been speaking to me concerning your lordship," said Sir Phillip Warren, when Arthur and himself were seated alone together in the Closet; "indeed, our royal master has been graciously pleased to intimate that he is much prepossessed in your favour."

The Earl bowed a cold recognition of the compliment,—for he was far too enlightened a man not to feel disgust at the sycophantic language in which that compliment was conveyed—and he was likewise convinced that there was some ulterior object in view.

"A young nobleman such as your lordship, may rise to the highest offices in the State by means of the royal favour," continued Sir Phillip. "Your talents are known to be great—and your influence in the House of Lords is consequently extensive. But his Majesty regrets to learn that your lordship seems inclined to proclaim opinions so far in advance of the spirit of the age as to be dangerous to the institutions of the country—those institutions which the wisdom of our ancestors devised, and which the experience of ages has consecrated."

"Really, Sir Phillip Warren," said the Earl, unfeignedly surprised at this address, "I am at a loss to conceive wherefore you should seek to lead me into a political discussion on such an occasion as the present."

"I will explain myself," returned the courtier. "His Majesty retired just now, with a few of his faithful servants, amongst whom I have the honour to be included, to partake of a little refreshment; and while we were thus engaged, his Majesty made an observation highly in favour of yourself. A nobleman present thereupon informed his Majesty that your lordship had placed a certain notice upon the books of the House of which your lordship is so distinguished an ornament. The nature of that notice is displeasing to his Majesty, who is graciously pleased to think that the common people already consider themselves of far greater importance than they really are."

"If, sir, by the contemptuous phrase '*the common people*,' you mean that enlightened and respectable body—*the working classes*," exclaimed the Earl indignantly, "I must beg to declare that I differ totally from the opinion which his Majesty has expressed concerning them."

"Well—well, my dear Earl," said Sir Phillip, in a conciliatory tone: "every one has a right to his own opinion—we are aware of *that fact*. But permit me to represent to you that you will gain no personal advantage, by espousing the cause of the masses."

"I seek no personal advantage," cried Arthur, with an impatient gesture, indicative of his desire to terminate the interview at once. "I am not putting myself forward as a factious demagogue—I seek not the honours of a democratic championship: but *this* I intend and contemplate, Sir Phillip Warren—to exert all my energies, use all the little influence I may possess, and devote any amount of talent which God has given me, for the purpose of directing the attention of the Legislature to the neglected, oppressed and impoverished condition of that fine English people which constitutes the pillar of the State."

"By adopting such a course, my lord," remonstrated Sir Phillip, "you will offend his Majesty, who is now so well disposed towards you, that were you inclined to enter his service in the sphere of diplomacy, your wishes might be complied with at once. Indeed, the post of Envoy Plenipotentiary to the important Grand Duchy of Castelcicala is at this moment vacant; and if your lordship——"

"In one word, Sir Phillip Warren," interrupted the Earl of Ellingham, rising from his seat, "you are desirous to tempt me into a compromise. Wherefore do you not frankly explain yourself at once, and say, '*Withdraw your notice from the books of the House of Lords, and depart as Ambassador to the Court of Angelo, Grand Duke of Castelcicala*:' to which I should immediately reply, '*No possible reward which an earthly monarch can give, should induce me to abandon that task which a sense of duty has imposed upon me*.'"

Sir Phillip Warren was astonished at the firmness and boldness with which the Earl spoke; for such manly independence was quite unusual in the atmosphere of a corrupt Court and venal political world. The fact was that Sir Phillip had undertaken the task of effecting the desired compromise with the Earl: the King had specially entrusted the matter to him;—and the courtier trembled at the idea of being compelled to report the total failure of the negotiation to his royal master. He was therefore cruelly embarrassed, and knew not what course to adopt.

But suddenly an idea struck him;—for he perceived that the Earl was not a man to be tempted by reward; but he thought that the nobleman might perhaps be overcome by the powers of eloquent reasoning.

"My dear Earl," he accordingly said, "you are too honourable and too highly-principled a statesman not to yield to conviction. Grant me, in common justice, one favour: I ask it in the name of his Majesty."

"Speak," exclaimed Arthur, resuming his chair to show that he was prepared to listen with courteous attention.

"The Prime Minister is present at the *re-union* this evening," said Sir Phillip: "will you hear any argument which he may address to you upon the subject of your notice for next Monday night, and consider whatever may pass between you to be strictly confidential?"

"I should be unreasonable to refuse to listen to any observations which so high a functionary as the Prime Minister may address to me," answered the Earl; "and I shall consider our interview to be private and confidential, on condition that no insult be offered to me in the shape of temptation or promise of reward. If it can be shown by fair argument that I am wrong in pursuing the course which I have adopted, I will yield to conviction; but I shall spurn with contempt and indignation any other means that may be adopted to induce me

to withdraw my notice from the books of the House."

"The Interview shall take place upon the condition your lordship has stipulated. Be kind enough to await my return with the Prime Minister."

Sir Phillip Warren then withdrew, closing the door behind him.

But scarcely had he left the Blue Velvet Closet, when the lamp upon the table suddenly grew dim; and in a few moments the light expired altogether, doubtless through lack of oil—leaving the room in total darkness.

The Earl was uncertain how to act; and while he was still deliberating with himself whether to leave the Closet in search of a servant to procure another light, or await the return of Sir Phillip Warren, the door opened.

"This room is in darkness, sire," immediately said a female voice, which the Earl of Ellingham recognised to be that of Lady Hatfield.

"I pledge you my royal word that I was ignorant of the fact when I conducted you hither," returned the King. "But, pray enter, beauteous lady: we may at all events converse at our ease for a few minutes."

And to the amazement of the Earl, Georgiana complied with the King's request, accompanying his Majesty into that dark room, the door of which was immediately closed. Indeed, so astounded—so shocked was Arthur by this incident, that he sate motionless and speechless in his chair at the further extremity of the apartment.

"My dearest Lady Hatfield," said the King, "I thank you most sincerely for having thrown aside that chilling—freezing manner which you maintained in the early part of the evening, when I sought to make you understand the profound admiration with which your beauty has inspired me. How unfortunate are princes! They cannot obey the dictates of their hearts—they dare not bestow their hand where their affections are engaged. But society is justly lenient in their behalf; and thus the lady who becomes a monarch's favourite, is regarded with envy and respect, and not with contumely or reproach."

"But no lady who entertains the slightest feeling of self-respect," observed Lady Hatfield, in a low and tremulous tone, "will abandon herself in a moment even to a monarch. There must be proofs of real attachment on his side——"

"Granted, beauteous Georgiana," interrupted the King impatiently. "Show me how I can demonstrate my affection towards yourself—ask me any boon which I have the power to grant, and which I dare accord——"

"Oh! if your Majesty would only fulfil this pledge!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield joyfully.

"Do you doubt me?" demanded George the Fourth. "Put me to the test, I say—and you shall be convinced of my readiness, my anxiety to prove how deeply I am attached to you, although the impression made on my heart be so sudden."

"Sire," resumed Lady Hatfield, "I shall be so bold as to take your Majesty at your word. To-morrow your Majesty will receive a certain paper; and I warn your Majesty beforehand that its contents will be most singular."

"I shall ask no farther explanations than you may choose to give, beauteous Georgiana," observed the King. "But when I receive the paper, what next do you require?"

"That your Majesty shall affix to it your royal signature, and likewise direct your Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department to countersign it," responded Lady Hatfield. "This being done, the document must be returned to me."

"All that you have stipulated, shall be carried into effect," said the King: then, sinking his voice and assuming a tender tone, he added, "But will there be room for me to hope, sweet lady——"

"Your Majesty must remember the observation I made ere now," interrupted Georgiana. "Before a woman, whose affection is really worthy of being possessed, can consent to surrender herself entirely even to one so highly placed as you, sire, her heart must be won by kindnesses shown—by proofs of attachment given——"

"I accept the condition implied, charming Georgiana," exclaimed the King. "You imagine that I am now influenced by a sudden caprice—that the love which I bear for you is the phantasy of a moment. Well—I will convince you to the contrary; and when I shall have proved to you that my passion survives the passing hour—then—then, sweet lady, you will not suffer me to hope in vain! Come—let us return to the drawing-room; and believe me when I declare that you have made me supremely happy. But, ere we again seek that society where a cold ceremony must keep us under a rigid restraint, allow me to seal upon your lips that pledge for which I have already given my royal word."

"No, sire—not now—not yet!" cried Lady Hatfield, in a tone which showed that she felt herself to be in a position to dictate to her regal admirer.

"Cruel charmer!" said the King: "but I suppose you must be permitted to have your own way. Send me the paper to-morrow—let it be addressed to me under cover to Sir Phillip Warren;—and you shall see by the haste with which it will be returned to you, that I shall count every minute an hour, and reckon every day to be a year, until that happy moment comes when you will be wholly and solely mine."

George the Fourth then opened the door, and led Georgiana away from the room in which this singular scene had taken place.

But what of the Earl of Ellingham?

So completely stunned and stupified was he by all that had occurred, that he never moved a muscle and retained his very breath suspended while his ears drank in every word that passed between the King and Lady Hatfield. Thus did he become an unwilling and unintentional listener to a discourse which created the most painful emotions in his breast.

Was it possible that the Lady Hatfield whom he looked upon as the very personification of virtue, in spite of the terrible misfortune which had deprived her of her chastity,—was it possible that she, whose soul he had imagined to be so pure, though dwelling in a body polluted by the ravisher,—was it possible that she had already suffered herself to be dazzled by the delusive overtures of royalty? and was she seriously about to resign herself to the King's arms—to become the mistress of that regal debauchee of sixty-four?

"My God!" thought the Earl: "I, who had such an exalted opinion of female virtue!"

Then he remembered that portion of the conversation which had turned upon the document Lady Hatfield was to send to the King for his royal signature, and which she had prepared him to find of a most singular character. Of what nature could that document be? Conjecture was vain and useless.

The first impulse of the Earl was to inform Lady Hatfield that he had overheard her conversation with the King, and conjure her to reflect seriously ere she committed a fatal step of which she would assuredly have to repent for the remainder of her life. But second thoughts convinced him that he must retain profoundly secret the fact of his acquaintance with the understanding existing between Georgiana and the monarch; for in confessing himself to have been an eaves-dropper, he should have to blush in the presence of one whom he was to take to task. He saw it would be difficult to make the lady believe that he himself was so stupified by her conduct, as to be totally unable to declare his presence in a room where a private conversation was in progress; and she would naturally upbraid him, he thought, for what might be looked upon as a proof of mean and contemptible curiosity on his part—although, as the reader is aware, he was indeed animated by no such vile sentiment.

Moreover, in resigning all claim to her hand—or rather, in recognising the impossibility of contracting an alliance with a woman whom his brother had ravished—the Earl had ceased to enjoy any right to advise or control her in respect to her moral conduct;—and it now struck him that, painfully situated as she was—unable to become the wife of any honourable and confiding man—she had accepted overtures which would render her a monarch's mistress. In a word, he conceived that he should best consult her happiness, as matters stood, by affecting a complete ignorance of the understanding so suddenly established between herself and George the Fourth.

Having come to this determination, he quitted the Blue Velvet Closet, and was retracing his way to the scene of brilliant gaiety, when he encountered Sir Phillip Warren in the corridor.

"I searched every where for the Minister, and was unable to find him," said the courtier. "At last, upon making enquiries, I learnt that he had taken his departure."

"I am not sorry that it is so," returned the Earl of Ellingham; "for I feel convinced that no argument, although I should have listened to it as a matter of courtesy, could deter me from advocating the cause of the working classes."

With these words the nobleman bowed coldly to Sir Phillip Warren, and passed on to the state-apartments, in one of which he found Lady Hatfield seated with the friends in whose company she had arrived at the entertainment.

Her manner was calm and collected; and if there were any change, it was in the slight—the very slight smile of triumph which played upon her lip:—at least, it struck the Earl that such an expression her rosy mouth wore, as he approached her. But it disappeared as she began to converse with him; and he so subdued his own feelings, that she did not observe any thing to lead her to suppose that he was aware of her understanding with the King.

Precisely at midnight the supper-rooms were thrown open; and a magnificent banquet was served up. We need scarcely say that the most costly wines, the most expensive luxuries, and every delicacy that gold could procure, appeared upon the board, which absolutely groaned beneath the weight of massive plate, superb porcelain, and brilliant crystal.

The festivity was kept up until a late hour: indeed it was past two in the morning before the company began to separate.

But when the Earl of Ellingham was once more at home, and had retired to his chamber, sleep would not visit his eyes, fatigued though he were:—the scene which had occurred in the Blue Velvet Closet was so impressed upon his mind, that he could not divert his thoughts into another channel. It was not that he was jealous of Lady Hatfield:—no—circumstances had changed his love for her into a sincere and deeply-rooted friendship. But he felt disappointed—he felt deceived in the estimate he had formed of her character: he had believed her to be possessed of a mind too strong to be dazzled by the splendours of Royalty, and to yield herself up to a man whom it was impossible for her to love, merely for the sake of becoming a King's mistress.

Had George the Fourth been estimable on account of character, amiable in disposition, and worthy of admiration as a sovereign, the Earl thought that there would in this case have been a shadow—but even then, only a shadow—of an excuse for the conduct of Georgiana. The reverse, was, however, the precise fact;—for the King was notoriously a hardened profligate—a confirmed debauchee—a disgusting voluptuary—and an unprincipled monarch,—in a word, such a man as a refined and strong-minded woman would look upon with abhorrence.

So thought Lord Ellingham;—and when he recalled to memory the frightful behaviour of George the Fourth towards the unhappy Caroline, against whom his vile agents trumped up the most unfounded accusations, and who was hunted to death by the blood-thirsty instruments of a hellish system of persecution,—when the Earl reflected upon all this, his amazement at the conduct of Lady Hatfield increased almost to horror.

At length his thoughts wandered to Esther de Medina—or rather, the beautiful Jewess became mixed up with them; for it was impossible that the scene in the Blue Velvet Closet could be entirely banished from his mind;—and, as he pondered upon *her* innocence—*her* artlessness—*her* amiable qualities, his confidence in woman revived, and he exclaimed aloud, as he lay in his sumptuous couch, "Oh! wherefore do I delay securing to myself the possession of such a treasure? Yes, Esther—dearest Esther—thou shalt be mine!"

~~41. It is contrary to C~~ourt etiquette for a lady and gentleman to remain arm-in-arm when conversing with a Royal personage.

CHAPTER XCVIII.
AN ACQUITTAL AND A SENTENCE.

The Blackamoor, in his mysterious abode, beheld the successful progress of his grand schemes; and while all London was busy with conjectures relative to the daring unknown who seemed to have constituted himself the instrument of justice and the champion of innocence wrongly accused, the object of this general interest and curiosity remained in impervious concealment.

The Secretary of State offered a reward of two hundred pounds to any one that should give such information as to lead to the discovery of the person who had enticed Sir Christopher Blunt to his unknown abode, and who had caused Dr. Lascelles to be conveyed thither by force; and the most astute Bow Street agents were employed in instituting enquiries in every part of the metropolis with a view to find out the dwelling of the individual in question.

The newspapers teemed with the most absurd and contradictory reports on the subject; and a thousand wild rumours were constantly circulating throughout the metropolis. The result of all this was that those who were employed in the enquiries above alluded to, were so mystified and bewildered, that they worked like drunken men in the dark,—taking up and following any ridiculous information which they obtained either from wags or from persons who wished to appear more knowing than their neighbours,—and pursuing what at first might seem to be a clue, but which invariably led to nothing satisfactory at last.

The Blackamoor's own retainers, who were all faithful to their master, augmented this confusion of rumours and ideas, by mingling amongst the gossips in places of public resort, and gravely propagating reports which were sure to direct the attention of the Bow Street runners from the very point where its object lay; and all that Dr. Lascelles had been known to hazard in the shape of conjecture in the matter, was a hint that, to the best of his belief, the carriage in which he had been borne away on the memorable night of the confession, had eventually stopped in one of the most easterly suburbs of the metropolis. The consequence of this suggestion was, that Wapping, Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, and Globe Town were regularly explored by the Bow Street officials—but entirely without success.

Although the innocence of Mr. Torrens was universally believed, yet, as he had been committed for trial, it was necessary that he should undergo the ordeal. This ceremony took place a few days after the publication of the confession of the real murderers—indeed, on the very Monday following the grand entertainment at Carlton House.

The prisoner was arraigned on the charge of having assassinated Sir Henry Courtenay; and the Recorder of London presided on the bench. The counsel for the prosecution merely stated the particulars of the discovery of the corpse of the deceased baronet, and the circumstances which had led to the prisoner's committal; but he did not for a moment insist that those circumstances were conclusive against him. Sir Christopher Blunt then detailed in evidence all that he had given in narrative at Bow Street; and Dr. Lascelles corroborated his statement. The confession signed by Joshua Pedler and Timothy Splint, and likewise the one in which Martha Torrens had attested to certain facts in favour of the prisoner, were read by the clerk of arraigns; and the counsel for the defence was about to address the Court, when the jury declared that their minds were already made up.

The *acquittal* of the prisoner immediately followed; and the first person who shook hands with him as he was released from the dock, was Sir Christopher Blunt.

Mr. Torrens accepted a seat in the knight's carriage, and repaired to a friend's house in the neighbourhood, where Clarence Villiers, Adelais, Rosamond, and Esther de Medina were assembled to welcome his acquittal, relative to which none of them had felt at all uneasy.

But it was evident that, although thus relieved from the dreadful charge and appalling danger which had recently hung over him, Mr. Torrens was an altered man. He had received a blow which had shaken his constitution to its very basis:—his mental energies were impaired;—and instead of a hale man of between fifty-five and fifty-six, which was his actual age, he seemed to be a feeble, tottering octogenarian.

When the excitement produced by the meeting with his family after his release had somewhat subsided, Mr. Torrens said with nervous impatience, "Rosamond, my dear child, I shall leave England this very day. Will you accompany your father?"

"Leave us the moment you are restored to us!" exclaimed Adelais, bursting into tears.

"Yes—yes," returned the unhappy man: "I cannot—dare not remain in England. Though released from a criminal gaol, yet I am in danger of being plunged into a debtors' prison; for I am ruined, as you all know—totally, irredeemably ruined. Besides—never, never again could I dwell in that house where so many frightful things have occurred. Yes," he repeated, "I must leave England at once; and you, my poor Rosamond," he added, with tears trickling down his sunken cheeks, "will have to support your father, by means of your accomplishments, in a foreign land."

"No—that must not be," said Esther de Medina, passing a handkerchief rapidly over her eyes: "Rosamond has friends to whom,

although they have known her but for so short a period, her welfare is dear. Foreseeing some such decision as that to which you have now come, relative to leaving England, my father has desired me to place a thousand pounds at your daughter's disposal," continued the beautiful Jewess, addressing herself to the wondering Torrens, and at the same time placing a sealed packet in Rosamond's hands.

"Oh! my generous—my excellent-hearted friend," exclaimed Rosamond, embracing the Jewess tenderly: "how is it possible that I could have merited this kindness—this extraordinary bounty at your hands?"

"We are fellow-creatures, though of a different creed," said Esther modestly;—but she was compelled to receive the thanks of the astonished Torrens and of the admiring Clarence and Adelais.

Villiers now drew his father-in-law aside, and spoke to him concerning Mrs. Torrens.

"I cannot see her, Clarence—I cannot meet her again," he replied. "Besides, an interview would be useless. Our marriage was not one of affection, as you are well aware: and, moreover——But," he added, suddenly interrupting himself, and looking tremblingly in the young man's face, while his voice sank to a low, hollow whisper,—"she has doubtless told you *all*?"—and then he glanced toward Rosamond, who was conversing with Esther de Medina and Adelais at the farther end of the room.

"Yes—I know *all*," returned Villiers; and the words seemed to convulse his wretched listener with horror. "But it is too late to amend the past—and it is not for me to reproach you *now*. Your own conscience, Mr. Torrens, will prove a sufficient punishment for the frightful wrong you have done to that poor girl. And fear not that I shall impart the sickening truth to my wife, who is already too deeply affected by all that has lately occurred."

"Thank you, Clarence—thank you, at least for that assurance," said the old man, his voice almost suffocated with terrible emotions. "You perceive how impossible it is that I should remain in England—with so many dreadful reminiscences to make me ashamed to look those who know me in the face. This very instant will Rosamond and myself set out on our way to a foreign land: you will be kind enough to send my trunks after me to Dover."

"I do not attempt to dissuade you from this step," observed Villiers; "because I can see no more agreeable alternative."

Mr. Torrens' decision was then communicated to the three ladies: and the farewell scene between the sisters was affecting in the extreme. Nor less did Adelais deplore the necessity which compelled her to separate from her father; but she at least had a consolation in the midst of her grief—a solace in the possession of a husband who loved her devotedly, and whom she adored.

A post-chaise was speedily in attendance: and Mr. Torrens took his departure from the English capital, in company with his younger daughter.

Esther de Medina did not take leave of Clarence and Adelais before she had made them promise to pay her an early visit at Finchley Manor; and the young couple returned to Torrens Cottage more than ever prepossessed in favour of the beautiful Jewess, who seemed to delight only in doing good.

On the ensuing day Martha Torrens was placed in the dock, before the Recorder of London, charged with the crime of forgery.

The court of the Old Bailey was crowded with persons belonging to those religious associations of which the prisoner had lately been so conspicuous a member. There was Mr. Jonathan Pugwash, President of the *South Sea islands Bible-Circulating Society*, not only with a face indicative of its owner's attachment to brandy, but also with a breath smelling very strongly of that special liquor: there also was the Reverend Malachi Sawkins, looking so awfully miserable at the scandal brought by the prisoner's conduct on the religious world, that a stranger would have supposed him to be at least her brother, if not her husband;—and there likewise was the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks, who, having made his peace with the members of the above-mentioned Society, had latterly come out much stronger than ever in the shape of a saint. Many other sleek and oily, or thin and pale, religious gentlemen were present on this occasion; and in the gallery were numerous old ladies, all belonging to the ultra-evangelical school, and who appeared to divide their attention between the task of wiping their eyes with white cambric handkerchiefs and strengthening their nerves by means of frequent applications to little flasks or bottles which they took from their pockets or muffs.

Mrs. Torrens was supported into the dock by two turnkeys of Newgate; for she was overcome with shame and grief at the position in which her crime had placed her. She was indeed a pitiable object; and it was evident that, whatever penalty the Bench might award, her punishment in this world had already begun.

The indictment being read, she pleaded *Guilty* in a faint voice; and the prosecutors strongly recommended her to mercy.

The Recorder[42] put on the black cap, and proceeded to address the prisoner in a most feeling manner. His lordship said that the law left him no alternative but to pronounce sentence of death. He however observed that, considering the contrition manifested by the plea of *Guilty* and the intercession of the bankers who had been defrauded of their money by the forgery, he should recommend the prisoner to the mercy of the Crown. His lordship concluded by an intimation that she must make up her mind to pass the remainder of her days as an exile in the penal settlements, but that her life would be spared.

She was conveyed in a fainting state away from the dock; and the religious gentlemen present gave so awful and simultaneous a groan, that the judge was quite startled upon the bench, and the jury were horrified in their box.

42. At the period of which we are writing, this high civic functionary tried cases involving capital penalties as well as those of a less serious nature. Since the establishment of the Central Criminal Court, the great judges of the kingdom preside at the Old Bailey to try prisoners charged with grave offences.

CHAPTER XCVIX.
THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASSES.

In the afternoon of that same Monday on which Mr. Torrens was acquitted and his wife condemned, vast crowds collected in the vicinity of the Houses of Parliament.

The multitude consisted chiefly of members of the industrious classes, many individuals being accompanied by their wives and children. They were attired in the best raiment that they possessed; and their conduct was most orderly and creditable.

At about a quarter to five o'clock, the carriages began to arrive and set down at the respective entrances the Members of the two Houses of Parliament: some, however, proceeded thither on horseback; and others on foot. The crowds neither cheered the popular, nor hissed the unpopular legislators who thus passed through the mass which had divided to make way for them; until at last one long, hearty, and glorious outburst welcomed the appearance of the Earl of Ellingham, as he proceeded on horseback, attended by his groom, to St. Stephen's.

The young nobleman acknowledged this outpouring of a people's gratitude—not with a patronising condescension, but with an affability which seemed to say, "I am one of yourselves—we're all equal—and I am proud of being considered your *friend*!"

Long after he had entered the portals of the House of Lords, and was lost to the public view, did the cheering continue outside; for the multitudes appreciated all that was great and generous in the task which a member of a proud aristocracy had undertaken to perform that day in their behalf.

There was a full attendance of Peers, Temporal and Spiritual; and the strangers' galleries, overlooking the throne and the woolsack, were crowded with fashionable gentlemen and elegantly dressed ladies. Amongst the audience there assembled, were Lady Hatfield, Mr. de Medina, and Esther. Georgiana was not however seated near the Jew and his daughter, she being unacquainted with them otherwise than by name, as the reader is already aware.

Soon after five o'clock the Earl of Ellingham rose from his seat, advanced towards the table, and proceeded to address the House on the motion of which he had given notice.

He began by expressing a regret that so important a subject as that which he proposed for discussion—namely, the condition of the industrious population—should not have been taken up by some noble lord more competent than himself to do it adequate justice; and he declared most solemnly that no selfish idea of obtaining popularity had influenced him in the course which he was pursuing. He then proceeded to expatiate upon the state of the working classes, and to urge upon the House the necessity of adopting measures to ameliorate their lamentable condition. It was too frequently alleged, he observed, that those classes were thoughtless, improvident, ungrateful, and intellectually dull; but this assertion he emphatically denied. Despair, produced by their unhappy condition, naturally led to dissipation in many instances; but were the working-man placed in a position so that his livelihood should be rendered less precarious than it now was—were his labour adequately remunerated—were he more fairly paid by the representatives of property—were a scale of wages established, having a fixed *minimum*, but no fixed *maximum*, the increased comfort thus ensured to him would naturally remove from his mind those cares which drove him to the public-house. His lordship would have no fixed *maximum* of wages, because wages ought always to be increased in proportion to the value of productive labour to employers: but he would have a *minimum* established, to obviate the cruel and disastrous effects of those periods when labour exceeded the demand in the market. This could not be considered unfair towards employers, because when the markets were brisk and trade was flourishing, they (the employers) reaped the greatest benefit from that activity, and enriched themselves in a very short time: therefore, when markets were dull and trade was stagnant, they should still be compelled to pay such wages as would enable their employed to live comfortably. The profits gained during prosperous seasons not only enabled employers to enjoy handsome incomes, but also to accumulate considerable savings; and as the best wages scarcely enabled the employed to make any thing like an adequate provision for periods of distress, it was not fair that the representatives of property should use the labour of the working classes just when it suited them, and discard it or only use it on a miserable recompense when it did not so well suit them. For the labour of the employed not only made annual incomes for the employers, but also permanent fortunes; and the value of that labour should not be calculated as lasting only just as long as it was available for the purpose of producing large profits. Labour was the working man's *capital*, and should have constant interest, as well as money placed in the funds—that interest of course increasing in proportion to the briskness of markets; but never depreciating below a standard value—much less being discarded as valueless altogether, in times of depression. A thousand pounds would always obtain three per cent. interest, under any circumstances; and, at particular periods, might be worth six or seven per cent. Labour should be considered in the same light. Stagnant markets diminished the profits of employers, but did not ruin them: if they did not obtain profit enough to live upon, they had the accumulations of good seasons to fall back upon. But how different was the case with the employed! To them stagnation of business was ruin—starvation—death;—the breaking up of their little homes—the sudden check of their children's education—the cause of demoralisation and degradation—and the terrible necessity of applying to the parish! The

supply and demand of labour were necessarily unequal at many times, and in many districts; and the Government should therefore adopt measures to prevent those frightful fluctuations in wages which carried desolation into the homes of thousands of hard-working, industrious, and deserving families. In fact, a law should be passed to ensure the working-man against the casualty of being employed at a price below remuneration. In England the poor were not allowed to have a stake in the country—there were no small properties—the land was in the possession of a few individuals comparatively; and thus the landed interest constituted a tremendous monopoly, most unjust and oppressive to the industrious classes. The only way to remove this evil influence, and ameliorate the condition of the working population—the only way to countervail the disastrous effect of that monopoly, short of a Revolution which would treble or quadruple the number of landed proprietors,—was to compel property to maintain labour as long as labour sought for employment and occupation. The noble Earl then proceeded to state that if the working-classes were thus treated, they would not be driven by their cares and troubles to the excessive use of alcoholic liquors: they would not become demoralised by being compelled to migrate from place to place in search of employment—going upon the tramp, sleeping in hideous dens of vice, where numbers were forced to herd together without reference to age or sex: they would not be unsettled in all their little arrangements to bring up their children creditably and with due reference to instruction;—they would not be made discontented, anxious for any change no matter what, vindictive towards that society which thus rendered them outcasts, and sullen or reckless in their general conduct. But as things now were, the industrious man never felt settled: he knew that the hut which he called his home, was held on the most precarious tenure;—he felt the sickening conviction that if he had bread and meat to-day, he might have only bread to-morrow, and no food at all the day after. It was positively frightful to contemplate the condition of mental uncertainty, anxiety, and apprehension in which millions of persons were thus existing; and those who reproached them with recklessness or sullenness, should blame themselves as the causes of all that they vituperated. Lord Ellingham next proceeded to show that although there had been a vast increase of wealth and comfort amongst the middle and upper classes, yet the condition of the industrious millions was not only unimproved, but had positively deteriorated. The population was increasing at the rate of 1000 souls a day—and pauperism was keeping pace with that increase. Unrepresented in Parliament—without any means of making their voice heard—positively incapacitated from having a stake in the country, the industrious millions were the mere slaves and tools of the wealthy classes. Thus an immense mass of persons was kept in bondage—in absolute serfdom by an oligarchy. Was such a state of things just? was it rational? was it even humane? The millions were ground down by indirect taxes, in which shape they actually contributed more to the revenue, in proportion to their means, than the rich. The only luxuries which the poor enjoyed, and which had become as it were necessaries,—namely, tea, sugar, tobacco, beer, and spirits,—were the most productive sources of revenue. If noble lords reproached the poor for dirty habits, as he well knew that it was their custom to do, he would ask them why soap was made an article subject to so heavy a tax? It was a contemptible fallacy to suppose that because the poor contributed little or nothing in the shape of direct taxation to the revenue, they were positively untaxed. He would again declare that the poor paid more in indirect taxes than the rich did in both direct and indirect ways, when the relative means of the two parties were taken into consideration. From these subjects the Earl passed to the consideration of the inequality of the laws, and the incongruity, severity, and injustice of their administration towards the poor. Every advantage was given to the rich in the way of procuring bail in those cases where security for personal appearance was required; but no poor man could possibly give such security. He must go to prison, and there herd with felons of the blackest dye. Perhaps on trial his innocence would transpire; and then what recompense had he for his long incarceration—his home broken up during his absence—and his ruined family? It was possible—nay, it often happened that a man would lie thus in prison for four or five months previously to trial; and during that period it would be strange indeed if he escaped gaol contamination. Then, again, there were offences of a comparatively venial kind, and for which penalties might be inflicted in the shape of fines, the alternative being imprisonment. These fines were insignificant trifles in the estimation of a rich man; but the smallest of them was quite a fortune in the eyes of the poor. Even a person with a hundred a-year would pay a fine of five pounds rather than go to prison for a month or six weeks: but a labouring man, earning ten or twelve shillings a week, could no more satisfy the demand thus made upon him than he could influence the motion of the earth,—unless, indeed, he pawned and pledged every little article belonging to him; and the infliction thereby became a blow which he never afterwards recovered. Did a poor man offend a clergyman, he was forthwith put into the Spiritual Court, as the common saying was; and the expensive proceedings, which he could not stay, involved him in utter ruin. When a poor man was oppressed by a rich one, it was vain and ludicrous to assert that the Courts of Law were open to him: law was a luxury in which only those who possessed ample means could indulge. In a case where some grievous injury was sustained by a poor man—the seduction of his wife or daughter, for instance—redress or recompense was impossible, unless some attorney took up the case on speculation; and this was a practice most demoralising and pernicious. But if left entirely unassisted in that respect, the poor man could no more go to Westminster Hall than he could afford to dine at Long's Hotel. With regard to the subject of education, the noble Earl declared that it was positively shocking to think that such care should be taken to convert negroes to Christianity thousands of miles off, while the most deplorable ignorance prevailed at home. The Church enjoyed revenues the amount of which actually brought the ministers of the gospel into discredit, as evidencing their avaricious and grasping disposition;—while the people remained as uneducated as if not a single shilling were devoted to spiritual pastors or lay instructors. He boldly accused both Houses of Parliament and the upper classes generally of being anxious to keep the masses in a state of ignorance. Where instruction was imparted gratuitously, it was entirely of a sectarian nature; just as if men required to study grammar, history, arithmetic, or astronomy on Church of England principles. The whole land was over-run by clergymen, who lived upon the fat of it—Universities and public schools had been richly endowed for the purpose of propagating knowledge and encouraging learning,—and yet the people were lamentably ignorant. It was a wicked and impudent falsehood to declare that they were intellectually dull or averse to mental improvement. Common sense—that best of sense—was the special characteristic of the working classes; and those who could read, were absolutely greedy in their anxiety to procure books, newspapers, and cheap publications for perusal. The fact was, that the mind of the industrious population was a rich soil wherein all good seed would speedily take root, shoot up, and bring forth fruit to perfection: but the apprehensions or narrow prejudices of the upper classes—the oligarchy—would not permit the seed to be sown. Now, as the soil must naturally produce something, even of its own accord, it too often gave birth to rank weeds; and this was made a matter of scorn, reviling, and reproach. But the real objects of that scorn—that reviling—and that reproach, were those who obstinately and wickedly neglected to put the good soil to the full test of

fertilization. Lastly, the Earl of Ellingham directed attention to the state of the criminal laws. These were only calculated to produce widely spread demoralization—to propagate vice—to render crime terribly prolific. A man—no matter what his offence might have been—should be deemed innocent and untainted again, when he had paid the penalty of his misdeed; because to brand a human being eternally, was to fly in the face of the Almighty and assert that there should be no such thing as forgiveness, and was no such thing as repentance. But the nature of punishments in this country was so to brand the individual, and so to dare the Majesty of Heaven. For the gaols were perfect nests of infamy—sinks of iniquity, imprisonment in which necessarily fastened an indelible stigma upon the individual. He either came forth tainted; or else it was supposed that he must be so. Under these circumstances, he vainly endeavoured to obtain employment; and, utterly failing in his attempt to earn an honest livelihood, he was compelled perforce to relapse into habits of crime and lawlessness. This fact accounted for an immense amount of the demoralization which the Bishops so much deplored, but the true causes of which they obstinately refused to acknowledge. The criminal gaols were moral pest-houses, in which no cures were effected, but where the contagious malady became more virulent. Society should not immure offenders solely for the sake of punishment—but with a view to reformation of character. The noble Earl then summed up his arguments by stating that he was anxious to see measures adopted for a *minimum* rate of wages, to prevent the sudden fluctuation of wages, and to compel property to give constant employment to labour:—he was desirous that indirect taxes upon the necessaries of life should be abolished;—he wished the laws and their administration to be more equitably proportioned to the relative conditions of the rich and the poor;—he insisted upon the want of a general system of national education, to be intrusted to laymen, and to be totally distinct from religious instruction and sectarian tenets;—he desired a complete reformation in the system of prison discipline, and explained the paramount necessity of founding establishments for the purpose of affording work to persons upon leaving criminal gaols, as a means of their obtaining an honest livelihood and retrieving their characters prior to seeking employment for themselves;—and he hoped that the franchise would be so extended as to give every man who earned his own bread by the sweat of his brow, a stake and interest in the country's welfare. The noble Earl wound up with an eloquent peroration in which he vindicated the industrious millions from the aspersions, misrepresentations, and calumnies which it seemed to be the fashion for the upper classes to indulge in against them; and he concluded by moving a number of resolutions in accordance with the heads of his oration.

The Earl's speech was received with very partial cheering by the assembled Lords, to whom its tenor was most unpalatable: but such was its effect upon the auditors in the strangers' galleries, that, contrary to the established etiquette, it was loudly applauded by them. The Lord Chancellor immediately called to order; and in a few minutes a dead silence reigned throughout the House.

The leading Minister present then rose to answer the Earl's oration; which he did in the usual style adopted by official men under such circumstances. Entirely blinking all the main arguments, he declaimed loudly in favour of the prosperity of the country—dwelt upon the happiness of English cottagers—lauded the "wisdom of our ancestors"—uttered the invariable cant about our "glorious institutions"—spoke of Church and State as if they were Siamese twins whom it would be death to sever—and, after calling upon the House to resist the Earl of Ellingham's motion, sate down.

Several noble Lords and Right Reverend Fathers in God took part in the discussion; and at length the House divided, when the Earl's motion was of course lost by an overwhelming majority against it. Arthur was by no means disappointed: he had foreseen this result—but he had made up his mind to renew the subject as often as he could, in the full hope that a steady perseverance would ultimately be crowned with success.

The House adjourned—the strangers' galleries were speedily cleared—and the Lords, Spiritual and Temporal, rolled home in their carriages, the multitudes, who still remained assembled in the vicinity of St. Stephen's, preserving a profound silence, until the Earl of Ellingham was observed to issue forth by those persons who were nearest to the Lords' entrance. Then arose a shout more loud—more hearty even than that which had greeted his arrival a few hours previously: it was the voice of a generous and grateful people, expressing the sincerest thanks for the efforts which the noble patriot had exerted in their cause.

CHAPTER C.
THE EARL OF ELLINGHAM AND ESTHER DE MEDINA.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the scene just described, that the Earl of Ellingham and Esther de Medina were walking in the gardens attached to Finchley Manor.

The beautiful Jewess leant upon the arm of that fine young nobleman who had suddenly appeared before the world in the light of the champion of the industrious classes.

Never had Esther seemed so ravishingly lovely as on this occasion:—a rich carnation hue tinged her cheeks, beneath the clear, transparent olive of her complexion; and her fine large black eyes mirrored the enthusiasm of her soul, as she listened to her companion, who was expatiating upon the wrongs and sufferings endured by the sons and daughters of toil.

Her generous heart beat in entire sympathy with his own in this respect. Until the previous evening she had known little more of the condition of the people than is generally gleaned by young ladies of good education from the works which they peruse. But the Earl's lucid and convincing exposure had shed a marvellous light upon her soul: she comprehended how much the industrious millions were neglected by the Government—how sorely they were oppressed by a selfish, grasping, greedy oligarchy—how noble a task it was which the Earl had imposed upon himself.

His brilliant eloquence—his logical reasoning—the tone of deep conviction in which he had spoken—the conscientious earnestness of his manner—and the honest fervour that animated him when, having disposed of the more argumentative portion of his speech, he burst forth in his impassioned peroration,—all this had made a profound impression upon Esther de Medina. For hitherto her gentle heart had loved him for all those qualities of person and of mind which usually engender tender feelings in the maiden's bosom: but now she felt that she could adore him—that she could worship him as a hero who had stood forth in honest championship of a cause which it was so glorious to undertake.

Therefore was it that her cheeks were tinged with the carnation glow of youthful enthusiasm: therefore was it that her fine dark eyes flashed with the fires of so generous a fervour, as she now dwelt upon every word that the nobleman was uttering in reiteration of those sentiments which he had so boldly enunciated the night before.

But by degrees the conversation took a different and more tender turn; and as they entered an avenue of trees verdant with the foliage of an early Spring, the nobleman found himself speaking in obedience to those feelings of admiration which he experienced towards the beautiful Jewess.

"It was not to treat you with a political disquisition, Miss de Medina," said the Earl, "that I came hither to-day. I had another and very different object in view; for I am about to ask you to bestow upon me a boon which, if accorded, shall ever—ever be most highly prized. Esther—dearest Esther," added the nobleman, sinking his voice to a tender whisper, and gazing upon her affectionately, "it is this fair hand which I solicit!"

"Oh! my lord," murmured Esther, casting down her swimming eyes, while she felt that her cheeks were burning with blushes, "you have not well considered the step which you are now taking."

"I have reflected deeply upon the course which I am adopting," answered the nobleman, "and I am convinced that my happiness depends upon your reply. Tell me, Esther dearest—can you love me? Will you accept me as your husband?'

"Did I consult only my own heart, my lord," replied the beautiful Jewess, her countenance still suffused in virgin blushes, and her voice tremulously melodious, "I should not hesitate how to reply—oh! how could I? But I cannot forget, my lord, that I am the daughter of a despised—a persecuted—a much maligned race,—that the prejudices of your country and your creed are hostile to such an alliance as this, the proposal of which has done me so much honour."

"You are well aware, my beloved Esther," said the Earl, "that I have none of those absurd prejudices. The proudest Christian who wears a crown might glory in being the son-in-law of such a man as Mr. de Medina; and, even were he otherwise than what he is, it were a worthy aim of ambition to become the husband of his daughter Esther."

"I am well aware, my lord," resumed Esther, "that your heart harbours every noble and ennobling sentiment—that you are all that is great, and liberal, and good. Proud and happy, then, must that woman esteem herself who shall be destined to bear your name. But not for me, my lord—not for the despised Jewess must that supreme honour be reserved. No," she continued, her voice faltering, and her bosom heaving convulsively,—"no, my lord,—it may not be!"

"Esther," exclaimed the Earl of Ellingham, in an impassioned tone, "tell me—I conjure you—is this the only motive which induces you to hesitate? Is it simply on account of those absurd prejudices which my illiberal fellow-countrymen entertain in reference to your

race? is it solely on this account that you deny me the boon I demand?"

"That reason—and another," murmured the lovely Jewess, in a low—hesitating—and tremulous tone.

"Ah! that *other*—I can divine it!" cried the young nobleman. "You know that I was engaged to Lady Hatfield;—but that engagement exists no longer—has ceased to exist for some time! I will not attempt to persuade you, dearest Esther, that I did not love Georgiana;—but I now feel that my passion in respect to her was very different from the affection which I entertain for you. Georgiana was the idol of my imagination—you are the mistress of my soul. My attachment to her was wild and passionate—to you it is tender and profound. Dazzled by her splendid beauty, I was bewildered—captivated—held in thraldom: but such a love as that contained not those elements which might render it durable. Your modest and retiring charms, sweet Esther—your amiability—your gentleness—your goodness, all combine to render my love permanent and impossible to undergo diminution or change. Moreover, circumstances which I need not—cannot explain to you, suddenly transpired to alter my sentiments in respect to Lady Hatfield—to make me look upon her as a sister, and never more in any other light. But if you will give me your love, my Esther, you shall experience all the happiness which can arise from an alliance with one who will make your welfare the study of his life. Indeed, if you still hesitate on the score of those prejudices to which we just now alluded,—then—sooner than resign my hope of possessing this fair hand of your's, I will renounce the society in which I have been accustomed to move—I will dwell with you, when heaven's blessing shall have united us, in some charming seclusion, where we shall be all in all to each other—I will devote myself entirely to you and to that task which I have taken upon myself in respect to the industrious classes—that fine English people, in whom my sympathies are so deeply interested—"

"Oh! my lord," murmured Esther, in a joyous though subdued tone, "how have I merited all the proofs of attachment which you now lavish upon me?—how can the obscure Jewess flatter herself that she is worthy of becoming the bride of one of England's mightiest nobles?"

"Then you *do* consent to become mine, Esther?" cried the handsome young peer; and, reading her answer in her eloquent eyes, he caught her in his arms—he pressed her to his heart—and on her virgin lips he imprinted the first kiss which Esther had ever received from mortal man save her own father.

A few minutes elapsed in profound silence,—a few minutes, during which the happy pair exchanged glances of sincere, and pure, and hallowed love.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps drawing near fell upon their ears: they turned, and beheld Mr. de Medina approaching down the avenue of trees.

Then the Earl of Ellingham, taking Esther's hand, advanced towards the Jew and said in a firm and manly tone, "Mr. de Medina, I am glad that you have come hither at this moment, for I have a great boon to beg of you—a precious gift to solicit!"—and he glanced tenderly towards the blushing maiden who stood by his side.

"I understand you, my dear Arthur," returned Mr. de Medina, smiling. "But I presume that the whole business is already settled and arranged between you," he added, looking slily and benignantly at his daughter.

"Miss de Medina has consented to bestow her hand upon me, my dear sir," answered the nobleman; "and I scarcely dread a refusal on your part."

"A refusal!" ejaculated Mr. de Medina, the tears of joy and gratitude starting to his eyes: "there is indeed no danger of that! On whom would I consent to bestow my jewel, my pride, if not upon you—*you*, my dear Arthur, who are all that an Englishman ought to be? Yes—I give you my daughter; and may God ensure your happiness!"

The venerable Jew embraced the Earl and Esther; and the happiness of those three deserving and admirable persons was complete.

The Earl of Ellingham passed the remainder of that day at Finchley Manor; and it was past eleven o'clock in the evening when he alighted from his carriage at the door of his own abode.

On the ensuing morning Clarence Villiers called upon the nobleman, by whom he was most courteously received; and the Earl proceeded to explain to him the nature of the business which had induced him to request the favour of that interview.

"Mr. Villiers," said Arthur, "it will be sufficient for me to inform you that I had reasons for experiencing a more than common interest in behalf of Thomas Rainford, with whom you were somewhat intimately acquainted. What those precise reasons were, you, as a gentleman, will not enquire: but I believe that you have in your possession a particular letter, which Thomas Rainford entrusted to you; and circumstances now render it necessary that this document should pass from your hands into mine."

"The high character of your lordship commands immediate compliance on my part," said Villiers, producing the letter from his pocket-book and tendering it to the Earl.

"I thank you for this proof of confidence, Mr. Villiers," observed the nobleman: "but to set your mind completely at rest, I can show you a written authorization, signed by Thomas Rainford, to enable me to receive the paper from you."

"It is not at all necessary, my lord," answered Clarence, rising to take his departure.

"One moment," said the Earl, much struck by the frank, candid, and gentlemanly demeanour of Villiers: "any one who felt an interest in Thomas Rainford—especially one in whom he reposed sufficient confidence to entrust with that letter—has a claim on my friendship. I should therefore be delighted to serve you, Mr. Villiers; and let this assurance tend to convince you that I am animated by no idle curiosity in enquiring relative to your position in life. I believe you hold a situation in Somerset House?"

Villiers answered in an affirmative.

"And the salary you at present receive is only ninety or a hundred pounds a-year?" continued the Earl. "You see that Thomas Rainford made me acquainted with your circumstances, and that I have not forgotten them. Indeed, he requested me to exert myself in your behalf; and I am anxious to fulfil his desire. I called at your lodgings in Bridge Street, and learnt that you had been very recently married. Now, ninety or a hundred pounds a-year," continued the Earl, with a smile, "are little enough to enable you to support your changed condition in comfort; and the state of political parties forbids me to ask any favours of the men in power. I will make you a proposal, which you may take time to reflect upon. I require a private secretary: and that post I offer to you. The emoluments are four hundred a-year, and a house rent-free. The dwelling is a beautiful cottage belonging to me, and situate at Brompton. Moreover, I will give you three hundred guineas for your outfit and furniture."

Clarence Villiers was astonished—nay, perfectly astounded by the liberality of this offer; and, unable to utter a word, he gazed upon the Earl with eyes expressive of the most sincere gratitude, mingled with admiration at his generous behaviour.

"I know," resumed the Earl, "that a government situation is a certainty, and that you have every chance of rising in your present sphere: think not, therefore, that I now offer you a precarious employment. No—whether I continue in that activity of political existence on which I have just entered—or whether I be compelled by circumstances to renounce it,—you shall be duly cared for."

"My lord, I accept your generous proposal," exclaimed Clarence, at length recovering the power of speech; "and I shall exert myself unweariedly to deserve your lordship's good opinion of me."

"The bargain is therefore concluded," said the nobleman. "I will give you a note to my solicitor, who will immediately put you in possession of the lease of the house at Brompton."

The Earl seated himself at a writing-table, and penned the letter to his professional agent: he also wrote a cheque on his bankers for three hundred guineas; and the two documents he handed to Clarence Villiers, who took his leave of the kind-hearted nobleman, his soul overflowing with emotions of gratitude and admiration.

How joyous—oh! how joyous a thing it is to carry glad tidings to the beloved of one's bosom,—to hasten home to a fond, confiding, adoring wife, and be able to exclaim to her, "The smiles with which thou greetest me, dearest, will not be chased away from thy sweet lips by the news which I have in store for thee! For God is good to us, my angel—and happiness, prosperity, and buoyant hopes are ours! From comparative poverty we are suddenly elevated to the possession of affluence; and we enjoy the protection of one who will never desert us, so long as we pursue the paths of rectitude and honour!"

Oh! to be enabled to say this to a loved and loving creature, is happiness ineffable; and that felicity was now experienced by Clarence Villiers, and shared by his charming wife.

Wealth in the hands of such a man as the Earl of Ellingham was like anodynes in the professional knowledge of the physician who attends the poor gratuitously:—the power to do good is the choicest of the unbought luxuries of life, and far more delicious than all the blandishments that gold can procure.

From the midst of a selfish and bloated aristocracy, how resplendently did the Earl of Ellingham stand forth as a glorious example of generosity, manliness, and moral worth! He was the true type of a sterling English gentleman—an Englishman of education, enlightened soul, and liberal sentiments;—not one of those narrow-minded beings, who believe that birth and wealth are the only aristocracy, and whose ideas are limited as the confines of the land to which they belong. Your prejudiced Englishman is a most contemptible character:—borrowing so much as he does from foreign nations—even to the very fashion of his coat and hat, or his wife's gown—he boasts in his absurd and pompous pride, that England is all and every thing in itself. Britain is indeed a wonderful country; but Britain is not the whole world, after all. In all that is useful as far as the solid comforts of life are concerned, she stands at the head of civilisation; but she cannot compete with France in the refinements and elegancies of existence, nor in the progress of purely democratic principles. If Great Britain be a wonderful country, the French are a wonderful—aye, and a mighty and noble nation, likewise; and in France at least the principles of equality are well understood, and the battering ram of two Revolutions has knocked down hereditary peerage—class distinctions—religious intolerance—and that vile *prestige* which makes narrow-minded Englishmen quote the "wisdom of their ancestors" as a reason for perpetuating the most monstrous abuses!

But let us return to the Earl of Ellingham, who, having terminated his interview with Clarence Villiers, repaired to the dwelling of Lady Hatfield.

Georgiana was at home, and Arthur was immediately admitted to the drawing-room where she was seated.

He had not now the same feelings of pleasure which had lately animated him, when entering the presence of one whom he had sought to love as a sister: the scene at Carlton House haunted him like an evil dream;—and as he contemplated the calm and tranquil demeanour of Georgiana, he felt grieved at the idea that beneath this composure must necessarily reign the excitement experienced by a woman who had resolved on becoming the King's mistress.

Nevertheless, in pursuance of the resolutions already established in his mind, he conquered—or rather, concealed his sentiments; and, though a bad hand at any thing resembling duplicity of conduct, he managed to greet her without exhibiting any thing peculiar in his manner.

"I have two important communications to make to you, Georgiana," he said, as he seated himself opposite to her. "The first relates to a delicate subject, which we will dispose of as soon as possible. In a word, I have this morning seen Mr. Villiers; and he has given me this paper."

Lady Hatfield eagerly received the document from the hands of the nobleman, and ran her eyes rapidly over it. Her countenance grew deadly pale, and tears trickled down her cheeks, as she murmured in a tone of subdued anguish, "My God! they were in want—they were starving—that woman and my child—and I——"

Then, stopping suddenly short, she threw herself back upon the sofa, covered her face with her hands, and no longer sought to repress the outpourings of her grief.

The Earl interrupted her not: he understood the nature of those emotions which constituted a subject of self-reproach on the part of the unhappy lady, who was so deeply to be commiserated; and he thought within himself, "She possesses a kind—a feeling heart!"

At length Georgiana broke the long silence which prevailed.

"Yes—there can be no doubt?" she exclaimed: "that boy is my child—and he is now with his father! May heaven bless him!"

"Rest assured that he is with one who will treat him kindly, although some weeks must elapse ere *he* can learn who the boy really is," observed the Earl of Ellingham. "And now for the second communication which I have to make to you, Georgiana," continued the nobleman, desirous to change the topic as speedily as possible. "I have taken your advice—I have followed your counsel——"

"And Esther de Medina is to become the Countess of Ellingham?" said Lady Hatfield, in a low and mournful tone of voice.

"Esther has consented to be mine," added the Earl; "and her father has expressed his joy and delight at the contemplated alliance."

For a few moments Georgiana turned aside her head, and appeared to struggle violently and painfully with the emotions which filled her bosom.

"Arthur," she said at last, evidently scarcely able to stem the flood of her agitated feelings, "I am happy to learn these tidings. You will be blessed in the possession of one who has been represented to me in such an amiable—such an estimable light. I congratulate you—and *her* likewise. You deserve all the felicity which this world can give; and she who is destined to be—your bride," added Georgiana tremulously, "must feel proud of you. Yes, Arthur—your high character—your talents—your generous disposition—your noble nature ——"

She could say no more: in summing up all his good qualities, she seemed to be reminded how much she had lost—and she burst into tears.

Arthur was painfully affected: he had not expected such a scene as this!

Was it possible that a woman who, either yielding to the cravings of a voluptuous disposition or dazzled by an ignoble and false ambition, had consented to become the mistress of a King,—was it possible that such a woman could manifest so much true and profound feeling on learning that he whom she had once loved was about to wed another, she herself having counselled the alliance? Was it possible that he was still so dear to her, and that her own generous nature had suggested that union through a conscientious belief that it would result in his happiness, though she herself sacrificed all her tenderest feelings in urging him to adopt a course which must necessarily interfere even with the friendship which had conventionally succeeded their love? He had indeed, in the first instance, fancied that the advice which Georgiana had given him arose from the best and kindest motives; but the scene at Carlton House had made him mistrustful of her. Now, then, all his good opinion of her revived in its pristine strength;—and yet he was bewildered when he thought that one, who was susceptible of such noble conduct, could have become so suddenly depraved as to consent in a single hour to resign all the purity of her soul in homage to the advances of a royal voluptuary.

But Georgiana understood not what was passing in his mind; and she supposed, by his embarrassed manner and air of profound thought, that he felt only for her in regard to the position in which they had been formerly placed.

"Let no thought for me mar your happiness, Arthur—dear Arthur," she said, in a voice of solemn mournfulness. "Believe me, I have your welfare sincerely—deeply at heart—far more than perhaps you imagine," she added, with strange yet unaccountable emphasis. "At the same time, I am but a poor weak woman, and cannot altogether restrain my feelings. I rejoice that you are about to form an alliance with an amiable and beautiful young lady, who is so well deserving of your love: at the same time, my memory—oh! too faithful memory—carries me back to those days—indeed, to only a few months ago, when *my* hopes were exalted and *my* prospects of happiness bright indeed. However," she added hastily, "let me not dwell upon that topic—and pardon my momentary weakness, Arthur. May God bless you!"

With these words, Lady Hatfield hurried from the room; and the Earl of Ellingham took his departure, grieved and bewildered by all that had just occurred.

"If Georgiana be really serious in resigning herself to King George the Fourth," thought Arthur, as he returned in his carriage to Pall Mall, "she sacrifices the purity of the most generous—the tenderest—the noblest heart with which woman ever was endowed,—save and excepting my own well-beloved Esther!"

CHAPTER CI.
THE BLACKAMOOR'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening of the same day on which the above-recorded interview took place between the Earl of Ellingham and Lady Hatfield, that the Blackamoor, clad in a very plain—almost a mean attire, sauntered along Pall Mall West, and stopped for a few moments in front of the nobleman's house.

He gazed wistfully at the windows—murmured something to himself—uttered a sigh—and passed on.

His appearance attracted the notice of two gentlemen who were walking arm-in-arm in the same direction; and, as they examined him more closely by the light of an adjacent lamp, one said to the other, "Since his Majesty has taken it into his head to have a black servant, I really think that the very man to suit the purpose is now before us. He is a well-made, good-looking fellow."

"My dear Warren," said the gentleman thus addressed, "you are positively absurd with your notions that you have only to *ask* in a King's name in order to *have*. How do you know that this man wants a situation?"

"He looks as if he did, Harral," replied Sir Phillip Warren. "See—he lounges along as if he had no fixed object in view—his clothes do not appear to be any of the best—and his whole demeanour gives me the idea of a lacquey out of place."

"My dear friend," whispered Sir Randolph Harral—who, like his companion, was one of the King's courtiers, "you are really wrong. That man is something far superior to what you conceive him to be: there is even an air of subdued gentility about him——"

"Pooh! pooh! Harral," interrupted Sir Phillip Warren: "you do not understand these matters so well as I do. At all events there is no harm in questioning that fellow—for I should rejoice to be able to fulfil to-night a whim which our royal master only expressed this afternoon when he saw the French Ambassador's splendid black *chasseur*."

"Well, as you please, Warren," observed Sir Randolph Harral: "but as I do not wish to get myself knocked down for insulting a person of a superior class to what you imagine, I shall leave you to pursue the adventure alone."

This conversation had been carried on so close to the Blackamoor, that, although the two courtiers had spoken in a very low voice, and had not of course intended that their remarks should be overheard, yet scarcely a word had escaped his ears. Affecting, however, all the time to continue his lounging, listless walk, he took no apparent notice of the gentlemen behind him, and even pretended to start with surprise when Sir Phillip Warren—Sir Randolph Harral having re-entered Carlton House—tapped him on the shoulder.

"My good man," said the courtier, in a patronising fashion, "I wish to have a few moments' conversation with you."

"Certainly, sir," exclaimed the Blackamoor, touching his hat just like a lacquey, and assuming the tone and manner of one.

"I thought so—I knew I was right?" exclaimed Sir Phillip, rubbing his hands in proof of his satisfaction; then, attentively scanning the Black from head to foot, by the aid of the lamp at the door of a neighbouring mansion, he said in a less excited tone, "I suspect you, my good fellow, to be a person in search of employment——"

"Yes—sir," interrupted the Blackamoor, now enjoying the farce that he was playing; "I should very much like to obtain a good situation, and can obtain a first-rate character from my late master."

"The very thing!" cried Sir Phillip Warren, hugely delighted at the opportunity of crowing over his friend Sir Randolph Harral: then, once more addressing himself to the Black, he said, "Now what should you think if I proposed to you to enter the household of his most gracious Majesty?"

"I should be afraid that the offer was too good to be realized, sir," was the answer, delivered in a tone of deep respect; although the Blackamoor was laughing in his sleeve the whole time.

"It all depends upon me, my good fellow," said Sir Phillip: "and if *I* am satisfied with you, the matter is settled immediately. But we cannot continue to talk in the open street: so follow me to my own apartments in the palace."

Thus speaking, the courtier led the way to Carlton House, the Blackamoor following at a respectful distance, and saying to himself, "What object I propose to myself in embracing this adventure, I know not. It, however, tickles my fancy, and I will go on with it. Besides, having an hour to spare, I may as well divert myself in this way as any other."

Accordingly, he followed Sir Phillip Warren into the royal dwelling; and in strict silence did they proceed, until they reached an ante-room leading to a suite of apartments which were occupied by the old courtier. In that ante-room they stopped; for Sir Phillip was immediately accosted by his valet, who, starting from a seat in which he had been dozing, said, "If you please, sir, his Majesty has sent twice, during the last half-hour, to desire your presence."

"Very good, Gregory," exclaimed Sir Phillip: "I will attend to the royal command this moment; and do you take the present of hot-

house fruit at once to my sister, Lady Maltoun. Her ladyship requires it for her grand supper to-night. Tell her that I am enabled to send it through the goodness of my royal master."

"Yes, sir," answered the valet, and instantly took his departure.

"My good fellow," said Sir Phillip Warren, turning towards the Blackamoor, "you perceive that it is impossible for me to speak to you at present. You must sit down and wait patiently until my return. I shall not be very long away; but, in any case, wait!"

Sir Phillip Warren, having issued these injunctions, hastened into the inner apartments to amend his toilette after his evening's stroll; and in a short time he came forth again, with knee-breeches and silk stockings, all ready to attend upon the king. In passing through the ante-chamber he repeated his command that the Black should await his return; and the latter promised to obey.

When left alone, this individual seated himself, and gave way to his reflections, forgetting for a time where he was. At length he started up, looked at his watch, and found that upwards of half-an-hour had elapsed since the old courtier had left him. He was already wearied of waiting; but a natural love of adventure and of the excitement of novelty induced him to remain a little longer to see the issue of the affair which had led him thither. He accordingly whiled away another half hour with a newspaper which lay on the table; and, that interval having passed, he began to think of taking his departure without farther delay.

Issuing from the ante-room, he proceeded along a well-lighted corridor, from the extremity of which branched off two smaller passages, one to the right, and the other to the left. The Blackamoor was now at a loss which path to pursue; for he could not, for the life of him, remember by which passage the old courtier had led him on his arrival an hour previously.

He was not, however, a man at all capable of hesitating to explore even a royal palace, in order to find a mode of egress, when it did not suit him to wait for the return of his guide: and taking the passage to the right, he hastened on until he reached a pair of colossal folding doors. Perfectly recollecting to have passed through those doors on his arrival—or at all events through folding-doors exactly like them—he pushed them open, and entered a large ante-room, well lighted, and containing four marble statues as large as life.

"Now," thought the Blackamoor, "I am mistaken; for I do not remember to have seen those statues as I followed the old gentleman into the palace just now. And yet I might have passed through this room without noticing them. At all events, I well recollect those large and splendid folding-doors; and so I must be right."

It happened, however, that he was altogether wrong in the path which he had pursued in order to find an egress from the palace; and he was deceived by the fact that at each end of the long passage, from the middle of which the corridor branched off, there were folding-doors of an uniform shape, size, and appearance. But, conceiving himself to be in the right road, he crossed the ante-room, and, pushing open a door at the farther extremity, found himself in a magnificent apartment, the furniture of which was of the French fashion of King Louis the Fifteenth's time. The hangings and drapery were of crimson velvet, of which material the cushions of the chairs and the sofas were also made. Several fine pictures, by old masters, and vast mirrors with elaborately decorated frames, graced the walls; and the whole was displayed by a rich, subdued, golden lustre, diffused throughout the room by lamps, the globes of which were of very thick ground glass. It was a mellow light, sufficient, yet without glare—misty, without being positively dim—and calculated to produce a lulling sensation of voluptuous indolence, rather than to dazzle the eyes with a wakeful brilliancy. In fact, there was altogether something ineffably luxurious in the general appearance of this apartment, which was magnificent without being spacious, and the perfumed atmosphere of which stole like a delicious languor on the senses.

The Blackamoor forgot for a few moments that he was an intruder—or, if he remembered the fact, he was indifferent to it: and, though the instant he entered this apartment he saw that he had indeed taken a wrong path, yet he could not help advancing farther into it to admire its sumptuous elegance and fine pictures. He was thus gratifying his curiosity, when he heard voices in the ante-room through which he had just passed; and, obeying a natural impulse, he slipped behind the rich velvet curtains drawn over the immense window, near which he happened to be standing at the moment.

The door opened, and two persons entered the apartment.

"I will await her here, Warren," said one, in a commanding and triumphant tone: "and see that during our interview, we are secured against interruption of any kind."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," answered Sir Phillip. "Have you any farther orders, sire?"

"None, my faithful friend," returned the King. "Stay—have I the document?"

"I gave it to your Majesty ere now, after having myself fetched it from the Home Office," said the courtier.

"True! I have it safe," said George the Fourth. "And now hasten to receive the fair one, Warren: it is past ten o'clock, and I am impatient to behold her charming countenance again."

Sir Phillip departed; and the King, throwing himself upon one of the voluptuous ottomans, exclaimed aloud, "Now for a new pleasure! I know not how it was, but I never before took so sudden and ardent a fancy for any woman, as for this Georgiana Hatfield. There is something truly bewitching—ineffably captivating in her sweet countenance; and the calm repose which characterises the general expression of that face, has for me an influence profoundly voluptuous. Then her bust—oh! her bust—*that* is charming indeed,—so full—so richly proportioned—and yet evidently so firm! She has never been married, and Warren says that her reputation is untarnished. It will be a luxury of paradise to revel in her virgin charms. And yet, somehow or other, the joys of love are not generally unknown to ladies in the fashionable world who have reached the age of four or five and twenty. No matter! be she virgin or not, she is an adorable woman; and I am madly impatient for her coming."

The King rose from the ottoman, and walked slowly across the apartment, stopping opposite a mirror in which he surveyed himself. His admirably fashioned wig was entirely to his taste: there was not a curl nor a wave which he could have wished otherwise than it

was. His false teeth were white, fixed firmly in his mouth, and had a perfectly natural appearance. The tie of his cravat—borrowed from the fashion set by his once all-powerful favourite, Beau Brummell—was unexceptionable. The white waistcoat had not a crease, so perfectly did it fit the portly form of the royal voluptuary. The above-mentioned Beau Brummell could not, even in his ire against the King, have found the shadow of an excuse for a cavil against the black dress-coat, so artistically was it made. No tailor in the famous city of Paris could have achieved a greater triumph in respect to the pantaloons: and as for the polished dress-boots——O immortal Hoby!

Well satisfied with the result of his survey, George the Fourth returned to the ottoman, and relapsed into a train of voluptuous imagings with respect to Lady Hatfield. This current of thought, whereby, in his emasculated old age, he endeavoured to invigorate his physical powers through the medium of an excited and heated imagination, led him to reflect upon all the beauteous women—and their name was Legion—who had ever surrendered themselves to his embraces; and his ideas naturally wandered to the enjoyments, luxuries, and pleasures which his exalted rank and immense resources enabled him to procure. Then he chuckled with triumphant delight at the egregious folly of the great and powerful English people tolerating a King at all. But he likewise knew that his own conduct and example had done more harm to the cause of Monarchy than all the republic pamphlets or democratic disquisitions ever published. He was well aware that, without intending to be so, he was the most effectual means of opening the eyes of the civilised world to the insanity and madness of maintaining monarchical institutions: and, though he foresaw that the industrious millions of this realm must inevitably, sooner or later, overthrow Monarchy and establish a pure Democracy, yet he consoled himself, in his revolting selfishness, with the conviction that "the throne would last during his time, at all events."

It was about half-past ten, when the door opened; and the Blackamoor, peeping from behind the curtains, beheld a lady, closely veiled, enter the room, the door immediately closing behind her.

"Adorable Georgiana!" exclaimed the King, hastening forward to receive her, and then conducting her to a seat: "I am rejoiced that you have thus yielded to my wishes—that you have come to me this evening."

"But wherefore, sire, did you insist upon this visit?" asked Lady Hatfield, in a low and tremulous tone. "Our compact stipulated that I was first to receive a certain document, as a proof of your Majesty's sincerity——"

"Dearest Georgiana, raise that odious veil—lay aside that invidious bonnet, which conceals your charming countenance!" exclaimed the monarch, in an impassioned voice.

"Oh! sire, I have taken a step at which I tremble," said Lady Hatfield, raising her veil, but retaining her bonnet. "On my way through the corridors, guided by Sir Phillip Warren, I met two or three of your Majesty's retainers; and if they recognised me—in spite of the thick veil——"

"Fear not on that account," interrupted the King. "I admit our compact was as you just now stated it to be, and that the paper should have been forwarded to you. But I was so anxious to see you soon again, that I could not resist the temptation of that idea which suggested to me how much better it would be to solicit you to come hither this evening and receive from my hands the document which you so much desire. Here it is, beloved Georgiana—signed by myself, and countersigned by the Secretary of State."

The King presented the paper to Lady Hatfield, who received it with joy flashing from her eyes: and she immediately secured it about her person.

"My curiosity prompts me to ask an explanation of the extraordinary contents of that document," said the monarch; "but, on the other hand, delicacy forbids."

"And I thank you for this delicacy, sire," exclaimed Lady Hatfield, with earnest sincerity. "It were a long tale to tell—and an useless one——"

"Yes—useless, indeed, when we have a far more interesting topic for our discourse," interrupted George the Fourth, throwing one of his arms round the lady's neck.

"Sire!" cried Georgiana in a reproachful tone, as she hastily withdrew herself from that half-embrace, and retreated to the further end of the ottoman.

"Oh! wherefore play the coy and the cruel?" exclaimed the King. "Have I not given you a signal proof of my attachment, by affixing my signature to a paper the contents of which I scarcely understand, and by ordering the Minister to legalize it with his name? And think you, sweet lady, that it was an easy task to induce that responsible functionary to obey me in this respect? But I menaced and coaxed by turns; and all this for your sake! Do I not, therefore, deserve the reward of your smiles—the recompense of your caresses?"

"I recognise all that is generous in the conduct of your Majesty towards me in respect to this document," said Lady Hatfield: "but were I to succumb to you now, sire, I should loathe myself—I should become degraded in my own estimation—I should feel that I had been purchased by a bribe! No—sire: I cannot renounce every consideration of purity—every sentiment of propriety, in a single moment."

"What further proof do you require of my attachment?" demanded the King, in a tone of vexation which he could not altogether subdue.

"No other proof, save your forbearance on this occasion," answered Georgiana. "Remember, sire, what I told you the other night: I am not a woman of impure imagination—no—nor of depraved character; and I cannot consent to become your mistress, without a mental effort on my part—without wooing on your's. In yielding myself to your Majesty, it will be as a wife who is forced to dispense with the ceremony which alone can make her one in reality; and if your Majesty deem me worth the winning, let me be won by means of those delicate attentions which would be shown in honourable courtship."

"Perdition!" ejaculated the King, who was as much unaccustomed to hear such language as he was to sue at the feet of beauty: "how long will you keep me in this suspense, fair lady?—how long must I endure the tortures of deferred hope? Consider—I love you madly: you are so beautiful—so sweetly beautiful! Oh! to press you in my arms——"

"Pardon me, sire, for daring to interrupt you," said Georgiana; "but if there be nothing save the impulse of the senses in this *liaison* of ours, your Majesty will soon become wearied of me—and I shrink in horror from the idea of becoming the cast-off mistress of even Royalty itself. Let me seek to engage your affections, as you must endeavour to enchain mine; so that our connexion may be based upon the sentiments and feelings of the heart."

"But I already love you sincerely—devotedly, cruel Georgiana!" cried the King, his eyes greedily running over the outlines of the exquisitely proportioned form of the lady, and the rapid survey exciting his desire almost beyond endurance.

"Not with a love calculated to be permanent," said Georgiana quietly; "and unless I become the object of such an affection, never—never shall I so far forget myself——"

"This is cruel—this is maddening!" exclaimed the King; and he extended his arms towards Lady Hatfield.

"Sire, do not treat me with outrage," she said, rising from the ottoman, and speaking in a dignified manner. "If your Majesty supposed that your sovereign rank would so far dazzle my imagination as to make me throw myself into your arms at the very first words of encouragement which fell from your lips, your Majesty has sadly misunderstood the character of Georgiana Hatfield."

"Be not angry with me, adorable creature!" exclaimed the King: "I love you too much to risk the chance of losing you by any misconduct on my part. Name, therefore, your own terms. Or rather, let me ask whether you will consent to visit me every evening for an hour, and allow us an opportunity to become better acquainted with each other?"

"Now your Majesty speaks in a manner calculated to win my esteem," observed Lady Hatfield, avoiding a direct reply to the question put to her; "and when the esteem of a woman is once secured——"

"I understand you," interrupted George the Fourth, hastily: "her love speedily follows. Be it as you say, sweet lady," he continued, in a slower tone; "and let us secure each other's affections. You shall find me docile and obedient to your will—and this is much for *me* to promise. But let me hope that the period of probation will not be long—that the hour of recompense is not far distant——"

"Hush, sire!" exclaimed Georgiana, in a reproachful voice: "this is the language of sense—whereas you must secure my affections by the language of sentiment. If you treat me as a woman who is to be purchased as your mistress, let our connexion cease this moment: but if you will woo me as a wife should be won—although I am well aware that your Majesty's wife I can never be——"

"Would that I could marry you this moment!" cried the King, fixing his eyes upon her beauteous countenance; "for you are ravishingly lovely! I would give a year of my life to obtain all I crave this night. Oh! Georgiana, be not so coy and cruel with me—for you madden me—my veins seem to run with molten lead. Be mine at once—and render my happiness complete. Behold that small low door in yonder corner: it opens into a room which may serve as our nuptial chamber. Come, then, dearest Georgiana—let me lead you thither—not cold, hesitating, and resisting—but warm, and impassioned, and prepared to revel in the delights of love! Our privacy will be complete: no intruder need we fear;—and the world will never know that you have become mine."

"Sire, this language on your part—in spite of all the arguments and remonstrances which I have used," exclaimed Lady Hatfield, "is unworthy of a great King and a polished gentleman."

"The madness of love knows nothing of regal rank nor the shackles of etiquette," said the monarch, speaking in a tone of great excitement; "and, in spite of the promises which I just now so rashly made, I cannot endure delay. No—sweetest lady—you must be mine at once!"—and he wound his arms around Georgiana's form, the fury of his desires animating him with a strength against which she could not long have resisted.

But at that moment succour was at hand!

Forth from his place of concealment sprang the Blackamoor; and an ejaculation of surprise and rage burst from the lips of the King, while a cry of joy emanated from those of Lady Hatfield.

"Who are you? and what signifies this intrusion?" demanded George the Fourth, instantly releasing his intended victim at this sudden apparition.

But, without answering the monarch, the Blackamoor hastily led the half-fainting Lady Hatfield to the door—opened it to allow her to pass out of the room—and, closing it behind her, placed his back against it,—the whole being effected with such speed, that Georgiana had disappeared before the King could recover from the astonishment into which the very first step of the bold proceeding had thrown him.

"Villainous negro!" cried the disappointed monarch, at length recovering the power of speech: "do you know who I am, that you have thus dared to outrage me?"

"I know full well who you are, sire—and I am grieved to the very soul at the idea of being compelled to acknowledge you as my King," returned the Black, in a calm—collected—and somewhat mournful tone.

"This insolence to me!" ejaculated George the Fourth, becoming purple with rage. "Make way, sirrah, for me to pass hence!"

"Not until I have allowed Lady Hatfield sufficient time to escape from this house which the country has given as a palace for your Majesty, but which seems to be used for purposes too vile to contemplate without horror," was the firm reply.

The King fell back a few paces in speechless astonishment. Never before had he been thus bearded:—but in that momentary interval of

silence, a crowd of recollections rushed to his mind, warning him that the individual who thus seemed to defy his rank and power, had been present during the whole of the interview with Lady Hatfield,—and that this individual had learnt how the Royal and Ministerial signatures had been given as a means of propitiating a coy beauty, without any reference to the interests of the State:—when the King remembered all this, he was alarmed at the serious manner in which he suddenly found himself compromised. For that Blackamoor could make revelations of a nature to arouse against him the indignation of the whole kingdom; and, reckless as George the Fourth was of public opinion, he trembled at the idea of exciting public resentment.

Thus did a few moments of reflection show him the precipice on which he stood, and carry to his mind a conviction of the necessity of making terms with the sable stranger who had obtained such a dangerous power over him. But the mere thought of such a compromise was sorely repugnant to the haughty spirit of George the Fourth: and yet there was no alternative! He accordingly addressed himself with the best grace he could assume, to the task of conciliation.

"My good sir," he said, approaching the Black, "I seek not to deal harshly with you: and yet you owe me an explanation of the motives which induced you to penetrate into the palace, and the means by which you gained access to my private apartments."

"I feel bound to answer your Majesty with candour and frankness, in order to clear myself from any injurious suspicion which my concealment in this room might naturally engender," was the reply. "The explanation, sire, is briefly given:—I was accosted by an elderly gentleman in Pall Mall, and asked if I required a situation. In truth I do not; but it being intimated to me that the proffered place was in the royal household, curiosity prompted me to follow the gentleman into the palace. He left me alone in his ante-room for upwards of an hour; and, growing weary of waiting, I sought a means of egress. But, losing my way, I found myself at length in this room; and almost immediately afterwards your Majesty entered with the very gentleman I am speaking of, and whose name I learnt to be Warren. I concealed myself behind the curtains—with no bad intention; and indeed I was about to come forth and explain the reasons of my presence to your Majesty, when certain words which fell from your Majesty's lips made me acquainted with the fact that Lady Hatfield was expected here every moment. That name nailed me to the spot—and I was prompted by an uncontrollable curiosity to wait and satisfy myself whether Lady Hatfield could have become so depraved as to surrender herself to your arms."

"You are acquainted with her, then!" exclaimed the King. "And yet," he added, a moment afterwards, "she did not appear to recognise you."

"No, sire—she did not recognise me," returned the Black.

"But you must know her well, since the mere mention of her name rendered you thus anxious to see the issue of our interview?" said the King, impatiently.

"I know her well, sire," was the guarded response: "and yet she knew not me."

"Who *are* you, then?" demanded George the Fourth, fixing a searching look upon the stranger. "You certainly are not what Sir Phillip Warren took you for——"

"I must firmly, though respectfully, decline to give any account of myself," said the Blackamoor. "Your Majesty will now permit me to withdraw."

"One moment," cried the King. "How stand we in respect to each other? Do you constitute yourself the enemy of your sovereign?—will you publish your knowledge of all that has transpired here this evening?—or can I offer you some earnest that I myself am not offended by the manner in which you ere now thought fit to address me?"

"I have no interest in making known to the public those secrets which have so accidentally been revealed to me," answered the Blackamoor. "It is never a pleasing task to an honest man to publish the frailties or failings of a fellow-creature—much less when that fellow-creature is placed at the head of the nation. As for any reward—or rather *bribe*, to induce me to remain silent, none is necessary. At the same time," he added, hastily correcting himself as a second thought struck him, "it may be as well that I should avail myself of your Majesty's offer; for it might so fall out that the privilege of claiming a boon at your royal hands——"

"May prove serviceable to you some day or another—eh?" added the King, impatiently. "Well—be it so; and, stranger though you be to me, I rely in confidence upon your solemn pledge to place a seal on your lips relative to the incidents of this night."

Thus speaking, the monarch seated himself at the nearest table, and opening a drawer, took forth writing materials: then, with a haste which showed his desire to put an end to a painful interview, he penned the following lines on a slip of paper:—

> "We acknowledge a sense of deep obligation to the bearer of this memorandum, the said bearer having rendered us especial service; and we hold ourselves bound to grant him any boon which he may demand at our hands, so that it be not inconsistent with our royal honour, nor prejudicial to the interests of the State.
>
> "Given this 3rd of March, in the year 1827.
>
> "GEORGE REX." (L.S.)

The King lighted a taper, and affixed his royal seal to this document, which he then handed to the Blackamoor, saying, "You perceive what confidence I place in you: see that the good name of Lady Hatfield on the one side, and your Sovereign's honour on the other, be not compromised by any indiscreet revelations on your part."

"Your Majesty may rest assured that I shall maintain the incidents of this evening a profound secret, and that I shall not abuse the privilege conferred upon me by this paper which bears your royal signature."

The Blackamoor bowed, and retired from the presence of King George the Fourth, whom he left in no very pleasant humour at the turn

which his meditated attack upon the virtue of Lady Hatfield had taken.

On this occasion, the Black had no difficulty in finding the way to the private staircase up which Sir Phillip Warren had originally introduced him; and he was about to issue forth from Carlton House, when he suddenly encountered that old courtier and Sir Randolph Harral in the hall.

These gentlemen were disputing in a loud tone; but the moment the Blackamoor appeared, Sir Phillip Warren sprang towards him, exclaiming, "Why, where have you possibly been? But no matter," he added, in a triumphant tone, "since you are here at length to settle the question between me and my friend."

"The fact is, my good sir," said Sir Randolph, "I have laid Sir Phillip Warren twenty guineas——"

"Yes—twenty guineas," interrupted Sir Phillip hastily, "that you are——"

"That you are *not*——" cried Sir Randolph.

"I say that you are!" exclaimed Sir Phillip.

"And I say that you are *not*!" vociferated Sir Randolph.

"Gentlemen, pray explain yourselves," said the Blackamoor.

"Well—I say that you are a lacquey out of place," observed Sir Phillip Warren.

"And I say that you are *not*," cried Sir Randolph Harral, in his turn; "whereupon we have bet twenty guineas."

"And you must decide who has won," added Sir Phillip.

"Then, gentlemen," said the Blackamoor, in a merry tone, "I can soon set the matter at rest. So far from being a lacquey out of place, I have upwards of a dozen dependants of my own. I wish you a very good night."

"Why—I am robbed as if it were on the highway!" exclaimed Sir Phillip Warren, his countenance suddenly becoming as awful and blank as such a Port-wine visage could possibly be.

"Ha! ha!" chuckled Sir Randolph: "robbed or not—please to hand me over twenty good guineas."

And the cachinnation of the winning courtier was echoed by the merry laugh of the Blackamoor, as this individual issued forth from Carlton House.

Again, as he passed along Pall Mall, did the Black pause for a few moments opposite the splendid mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, and gaze at it with the attention of no common observer. He was about to continue his way, when two men, belonging to the working class, stopped likewise for an instant in front of the house; and one said to the other, "That is where the Earl lives. God bless him!"

"Yes—God bless him!" repeated his companion, with the emphasis of unfeigned sincerity: "for he is the people's friend."

The two men then passed on.

"Who dares to say that the industrious millions have no gratitude?" murmured the Blackamoor to himself, as he also pursued his way. "O Arthur! you are now indeed worthy of the proud name which you bear: and I likewise exclaim from the very bottom of my heart, '*May God bless you!*'"

CHAPTER CII.
A STATE OF SIEGE.

Return we now to Frank Curtis, his excellent wife, and Captain O'Blunderbuss, who were living in a complete state of siege at the house in Baker Street.

The captain was the commandant of the garrison, and superintended all the manœuvres and the devices which it was necessary to adopt to keep out the enemy. The front-door was constantly chained inside; and every time there was a knock or a ring, John the footman reconnoitred from the area. Whenever any one was compelled to go out to order in provisions, the captain stood at the door, armed with the kitchen poker, and looking so grim and terrible that the officers who were prowling about in different disguises, dared not hazard an encounter with the warlike gentleman.

The grocer, the butcher, and the baker lowered their respective commodities down the area by means of a rope and basket provided for the purpose; but they all took very good care to receive the cash first. The milkman and pot-boy were enabled to supply their articles through the opening afforded by the door with the chain up inside; and they likewise strenuously advocated the ready-money principle.

This condition of siege was a source of great delight to Captain O'Blunderbuss. He was completely in his element. Little cared he for the opinion of neighbours: *his* feelings were by no means concerned. The house, from the first moment he set foot in it, was in a state of perpetual excitement. He was constantly ordering the servants to do something or another: a dozen times a-day did he perform what he called "going his rounds," armed with the poker in case a bailiff should have crept into the place through some unguarded avenue;—and it was indeed with the greatest difficulty that Mrs. Curtis could divert him from a plan which he had conceived and which he declared to be necessary—namely, the drilling of all the inmates of the house, male and female, including the five children, for an hour daily in the yard. As it was, he compelled John, the footman, to mount sentry in the yard aforesaid, every morning while the housemaid was dusting her carpets and so forth—indeed during the whole time that the domestic duties rendered it necessary to have the back-door open. If John remonstrated, the captain would threaten, with terrible oaths, to try him by a court-martial; and once, when the poor fellow respectfully solicited his wages and his discharge, the formidable officer would certainly have inflicted on him the cat-o'-nine-tails, if the cook had not begged him off—she being the footman's sweetheart.

Mrs. Curtis took a great fancy to the captain, and allowed him to do pretty well as he chose. She considered him to be the politest, genteelest, bravest, and most amusing gentleman she had ever known; and it soon struck her that his various qualifications threw her husband considerably into the shade. Whenever she felt low-spirited, he had a ready remedy for her. If it were in the forenoon, he would exclaim, "Arrah and be Jasus, Mim, it's no wonther ye're dull, with the inimy besaging us in this way: and it's a nice mutton chop and a glass of Port-wine that'll be afther sitting ye to rights, Mim." Then forthwith he would ring the bell, and order three chops, so that himself and Frank might keep the dear lady company. If it were in the evening that Mrs. Curtis was attacked by those unwelcome visitors termed "blue devils," the captain would recommend "a leetle dhrop of the potheen, brewed afther the fashion in ould Ireland;" and while he exhausted all his powers of eloquence in assurances that it should be "as wake as wather, and not too swate," he would mix the respectable lady such a stinger, that her eyes would fill with tears every time she put the glass near her lips. Sometimes he would undertake to amuse the children up in the nursery, by going on all fours and allowing them to play at horse-soldiers by riding on his back; and then, what with his shouting and bawling, and their laughing and screaming, it was enough to alarm the whole neighbourhood—and very frequently did.

All these little attentions on the part of the captain either to herself or her children, gave Mrs. Curtis an admirable opinion of him; and he rose rapidly in her favour. His success in obtaining the five hundred pounds from Sir Christopher Blunt was considered by her as sublime a stroke of mingled policy and daring as ever was accomplished; and his tactics in opposing a successful foil to all the stratagems devised by the sheriff's-officers to obtain admission into the dwelling, made her declare more than once that had *he* commanded the Allied Army at Waterloo, it would have been all up with the French in half-an-hour.

The female servants in the house did not altogether admire the position in which they were placed; but, they were so dreadfully frightened at the captain, that they never uttered a murmur in his hearing. They moreover had their little consolations; for Sir Christopher's five hundred pounds enabled the besieged to live, as the captain declared, "like fighting-cocks,"—so that the kitchen was as luxuriously supplied with provender as the parlour; and no account was taken of the quantity of wine and spirits consumed in the establishment.

We have before hinted that the house was a perfect nuisance in Baker Street. And no wonder, indeed, that it should have been so considered; for it seemed to be the main source whence emanated all the frightful noises that could possibly alarm nervous old ladies or irritate gouty old gentlemen. No sooner did the day dawn, than Captain O'Blunderbuss would fling up the window of his bed-room, which was at the back of the house, with a crashing violence that made people think he was mad; and, thrusting forth his head with a white night-cap upon it, he would roar out—"John! John! to arms!" as lustily as he could bawl. This was not only to save himself the trouble of repairing to the footman's chamber to summon him, but also for the purpose of letting the sheriff's-officers, if any were in the

neighbourhood, know that he was on the alert. Then John would poke his head out of another window, and answer the captain's call; and a few minutes afterwards the back-door would open and shut with a terrific bang, and John would be seen to sally forth to mount sentry in the yard, with shouldered poker. Then an hour's interval of comparative silence would prevail, while the captain turned in again to take another nap; but, at length, up would go the window again—out would come the head—and, "John! hot wather!" would roll in awful reverberation throughout the entire neighbourhood.

The confusion and dismay produced by these alarms were terrific; and the neighbours all threatened their landlords to give warning on the next quarter. For it was not only in the morning that the noise prevailed, but throughout the entire day—aye, and the best part of the night also. Sometimes the captain would take it into his head to discharge his pistols in the yard: or else he would have a fencing-match with Frank Curtis, the weapons being pokers, which made a hideous clang. Then there were the rows in the nursery, which were truly awful; and, by way of a variety, Captain O'Blunderbuss would occasionally show himself at the drawing-room windows and vociferate the most appalling abuse at any suspicious characters whom he might happen to behold prowling about. These exhibitions frequently collected crowds in front of the house; and the captain would harangue them with as much earnestness as if he were a candidate at a general election. On one of these occasions the parish-beadle made his appearance, and from the pavement remonstrated with the gallant officer, who kept him in parlance until Frank Curtis had time to empty a pitcher of water over the enraged functionary from the front bed-room window.

But the worst part of the whole business consisted in the goings-on at night-time. Just when sedate and quiet people were getting cozily into their first sleep at about eleven o'clock, Mr. Frank Curtis was getting uncommonly drunk; and, though the captain seemed proof against the effects of alcohol, no matter in what quantity imbibed, he nevertheless grew trebly and quadruply uproarious when under the influence of poteen. Thus, from eleven to twelve the shouts of laughter—the yells of delight—the cries of mirth—and the vociferations of boisterous hilarity, which came from the front parlour, made night perfectly hideous: but no amount of human patience ever possessed by good and forgiving neighbours, could possibly tolerate the din and disturbance which prevailed during the "small hours." Then would the captain and his friend Curtis rush like mad-men into the yard, shouting—roaring—and bawling like demons, so that the residents in the adjacent houses leapt from their beds and threw up their windows in horror and alarm, expecting to find the whole street in a blaze. These performances on the part of Frank and O'Blunderbuss were intended to show the officers that they were upon the alert; and they not only had the desired effect, but accomplished far more—inasmuch as they produced an absolute panic throughout an entire neighbourhood.

Thus it was that Mr. Curtis's abode—lately so serene and quiet in the time of Mrs. Goldberry—became a perfect nuisance and a scandal; and had Bedlam in its very worst days been located there, the noise and alarm could not have been greater.

It will be remembered that the captain's plan, when first he took up his residence in Baker Street, was to get Mr. and Mrs. Curtis and the children away on a Sunday night, and sell off all the furniture on the Monday morning. But this scheme was postponed at first for one week—then for another, because the officers kept such a constant look-out, that the captain saw the necessity of standing the siege until the creditors should be completely wearied of paying those disagreeable spies to watch the premises. This determination was the more readily come to, inasmuch as the five hundred pounds obtained from Sir Christopher Blunt, supplied sinews to carry on the war in grand style.

When the captain paid the second financial visit to the worthy knight with a view to the effecting of a further loan on the assignat which himself and Frank Curtis had resolved to issue, it was not because money was scarce in Baker Street; but simply because the captain admired "the fun of the thing," and also considered it prudent to raise as ample a supply of bullion as possible. The rage which he experienced at his discomfiture on this occasion, can be better conceived than described; and, firmly believing that it was Sir Christopher himself who had dealt him from the carriage window the tremendous blow which sent him sprawling on the pavement in a most ignominious manner, he vowed the most deadly vengeance against the new Justice of the Peace. Picking himself up as well as he could—for the gallant gentleman was sorely bruised—he repaired to the nearest public-house, to "cool himself," as he said in his own mind, with a tumbler of the invariable poteen; and, having reflected upon the insult which he had received, he thought it best not to communicate his dishonour and discomfiture on his return to Baker Street. Accordingly, having returned to "the garrison," into which he effected an easy entry—for no one dared approach the door when it opened to give *him* egress or ingress—he assured Mr. and Mrs. Curtis that the knight was out of town, and would not be back for a week. However, in a couple of days, the wonderful adventures of Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles burst upon the metropolis like a tempest; and, as the morning newspapers were duly dropped down the area of the besieged dwelling in Baker Street, the entire report was read aloud by Frank Curtis at the breakfast table. It therefore being evident that Sir Christopher was not only in town at that moment, but was likewise in London when the captain had called upon him, the gallant gentleman affected to fly into a violent rage, swearing that the knight was denied to him on purpose, and vowing to make him "repint of his un-gintlemanly conduct." O'Blunderbuss did not, however, in his heart mean to do any such thing as call again in Jermyn Street; for he had despaired of inducing the knight, either by threatenings or coaxings, to advance a further supply; and, now that the worthy gentleman was a Justice of the Peace, the captain thought that it would be somewhat imprudent to visit him for the mere sake of committing an assault and battery. He accordingly invented divers excuses, day after day, for remaining in "the garrison;" and as funds were abundant, no one urged him to undertake another financial mission to Sir Christopher Blunt.

The reader must remember that Messrs. Mac Grab and Proggs were very roughly handled by captain O'Blunderbuss, when they visited the house in Baker Street for the purpose of arresting Mr. Frank Curtis; and, the honour of a sheriff's-officer being particularly dear to its possessor, those worthies considered their's to be at stake, unless they fully vindicated it by capturing the aforesaid Mr. Curtis in the long run. They therefore had recourse to all kinds of devices to obtain an entry into the house, being armed not only with a writ against that gentleman's person on behalf of Mr. Beeswing, but also with an execution against the furniture at the instigation of another of Mrs. Curtis's creditors.

The tricks practised by these worthies to obtain an entry into the besieged domicile, were as varied as they were ludicrous. On one

occasion, Mr. Proggs, dressed for the nonce as a butcher, and carrying a leg of mutton in a tray on his shoulder, hurried up to the door, gave the loud, sharp, single knock peculiar to the trade, and shouted "T-cher!" in the most approved style. But the parlour window was thrown up, and out popped the head of the ferocious O'Blunderbuss, the countenance as red as a turkey-cock, and the mouth vomiting forth a torrent of abuse; so that the discomfited Mr. Proggs was compelled to retreat with all the ignominy of a baffled strategist. On another occasion, Mr. Mac Grab, attired as a general postman, rushed along the street, stopped at the door of the besieged house, gave the two clear, rapid strokes with the knocker, and immediately began to look over a bundle of letters with all the feverish haste of the functionary whose semblance he had assumed. But John came forth from the area; and again was the sheriff's-officer's object completely frustrated. Next day, however, two sweeps appeared in the street, as black as if they had never known soap-and-water, and were accustomed to lodge, eat, and sleep in chimneys as well as cleanse them; but upon arriving opposite the parlour-windows, they beheld the captain and Frank Curtis "taking sights" at them, the two gentlemen having "twigged the traps" without much difficulty. Thus, defeated in all their endeavours to accomplish their aims by cunning, Messrs. Mac Grab and Proggs worked themselves up to the desperate resolution of using force; and they accordingly took their post at the front-door of Curtis's house, with the apparent determination to rush in the first time it should be opened. But, when it *was* opened as far as the chain inside would permit, and they beheld, to their horror and dismay, the terrible captain wielding the poker, they exhibited that better part of valour which is denominated *discretion*. At last, however, they could no longer endure the jeerings of their friends exercising the same agreeable and lucrative profession; and moreover, the attorneys who employed them in the Baker Street affair spoke out pretty plainly about gentlemen bribing bailiffs not to execute writs, and so forth. All these circumstances induced Mr. Mac Grab and his man Proggs to hold a council of war over two four-penn'orths of rum-and-water; and the result was a determination, that as the various devices and stratagems they had practised to enter the dwelling had failed, and as they feared to carry it by storm, the stronghold must be reduced by a *surprise*.

It was on the very evening when the Blackamoor experienced so strange an adventure at Carlton House, that the following scene took place in Baker Street.

The clock had struck ten; and, supper being disposed of, the whiskey, hot water, glasses, and *et ceteras* were placed upon the table, at which Frank Curtis, his amiable wife, and Captain O'Blunderbuss were seated—as comfortable a trio as you could wish or expect to see, especially under such adverse circumstances.

"John!" vociferated the captain, as the domestic was about to leave the room; "stop a moment, you rogue, and answer me this. Is the area all safe?"

"Yes, sir," was the ready response.

"And the kitchen-windows—and the back-door—and the yar-rd gate—all right, eh—John?"

"All right, captain: I've just been the rounds."

"And all the provisions in the garrison, John?—plenty of potheen?" demanded O'Blunderbuss.

"Plenty, sir. There'll be no more going out again to-night."

"That's a blissing!" exclaimed the gallant captain. "John!"

"Yes—sir."

"Take a glass of whiskey, mate—and slape with the kitchen poker-r under your pillow, my frind," enjoined the officer. "We must be ar-rmed at all pints, be Jasus!"

"I shan't forget, sir," said John: and having tossed off the spirit, he quitted the room.

"Now then to make ourselves cozie," observed the captain, drawing his chair a little closer to Mrs. Curtis. "Pray, Mim, how d'ye feel your dear self this evening?—is it in good spirits ye are, Mim?"

"Thank you, captain," returned Mrs. Curtis, "I am quite well—but the least, least thing nervous. This strange kind of life we're leading ——"

"Strange, Mim!" ejaculated the captain: "it's glor-r-ious!"

"Glorious, indeed!" cried Frank. "I only wish the Marquis of Shoreditch was here along with us—how he would enjoy himself!"

"You will permit me, Mim!" said the captain, grasping the bottle of whiskey, and addressing the lady in an insinuating manner.

"Now, really, captain—if I must take a very *leetle* drop——" began Mrs. Curtis, with a simper.

"Well, my dear madam, it shall be the leetlest dhrop in the wor-rld, and so wake that a baby of a month old might dhrink it and niver so much as thrip up as it walked across the room," exclaimed O'Blunderbuss, whose knowledge of the physical capacities of infants was evidently somewhat vague and limited. "There, Mim!" he added, placing before the lady a large tumbler, the contents of which were equal portions of spirit and water: "you may tell me I'm a Dutchman and unwor-rthy of ould Ireland, if that isn't the purtiest dhrink iver brewed for one of the fair six."

"You're very kind, captain," said Mrs. Curtis, in a mincing—simpering manner.

"It's you that's kind to say so, Mim," remarked the captain, placing his foot close to that of the lady, and ascertaining by the readiness with which she returned the pedal pressure, that the tender intimation he wished thereby to convey was by no means unwelcome.

Frank did not of course notice what was going on under the table, and the conversation progressed in the usual manner—the captain and Frank vieing with each other in telling the most monstrous lies, and the silent interchange of love's tokens continuing with

increasing warmth between the gallant gentleman and the stout lady. Mrs. Curtis's spirits, however, seemed to require a more than ordinary amount of stimulant on this occasion: she declared herself to be "very low," although she contrived to laugh a great deal at the captain's lively sallies and marvellous stories;—but as the clock struck midnight and she rose to retire to her chamber, she found that the *three* glasses of toddy which she had been persuaded to imbibe, had somewhat unsettled the gravity of her equilibrium. The captain sprang from his seat to open the parlour-door for her; and as he bade her "good night," she pressed his hand with a degree of tenderness which, as novel-writers say, spoke volumes.

"Curthis, my frind," said the captain, as he returned to his seat, "be the holy poker-r! you possess a rale jewel of a wife. She's the most amiable lady I ever knew and takes her potheen without any nonsense. Be Jove! she's an ornamint in a jintleman's household; and we'll dhrink her health in a bumper!"

"With all my heart," exclaimed Frank, already more than half-seas over. "But, I say, captain—do you know that I'm getting very tired of the life we're leading? I wish we could put an end to it somehow or another."

"Be the power-rs! and that's the very thing I was going to recommend to ye, Frank!" cried the captain, who was more affected by liquor on this particular night than ever he had been before since the first moment he had taken up his abode in Baker Street.

"But—how can it be done?" hiccoughed Curtis.

"Is it how the thing's to be done!" cried O'Blunderbuss. "Can't ye, now, bolt off to France to-morrow night, and lave me in charge of the house? I'll manage to sell every stick to a broker; and then it's myself that'll bring over the wife, the children, and the money to ye as safe as if they were all my own!"

"I don't like the idea of going away alone, captain," observed Frank, as he refilled his tumbler. "But suppose we talk the matter over to-morrow—when we've slept off the effects of the toddy!"

"Be Jasus! the toddy has no effects upon me!" exclaimed O'Blunderbuss, who nevertheless sate very unsteadily in his chair, his body swaying to and fro in spite of all his efforts to the contrary.

The conversation now languished; but the drinking was maintained, until Frank Curtis suddenly fell from his seat in a vain attempt which he made to reach the whiskey-bottle. The captain burst out into a roar of laughter, and while endeavouring to pick up his companion, rolled completely over him. He however managed, by means of many desperate efforts, to place the young gentleman upon the sofa, where he left him to repose in peace; and, taking up a candle, he staggered out of the room, muttering to himself, "Be the power-rs! if I didn't know—hic—that it was impos—sossible—hic—I should say that I—hic—was—dhrunk!"

This was a conclusion which the captain was by no means willing to admit; and, in order to convince himself that he was perfectly sober and knew what he was about, he proceeded to examine the front-door according to his invariable custom ere retiring to rest.

"Well, be the power-rs!" he murmured, as he stood contemplating the door with all the vacancy of inebriation; "it's John that's a clever fellow—hic—afther all—hic! Be Jasus! and it's two chains he's put up—and two bolts at the top—hic—and two bolts at the bottom—hic—and, be the holy poker-r!" exclaimed the captain aloud, his face expanding with an expresion of stupid joy; "the house is safe enough—hic—for there's two doors!"

Supremely happy at having made this discovery, and moreover fancying himself to be lighted by two candles—in a word, seeing double in every respect,—the gallant officer staggered along the passage, and commenced the ascent of the staircase, which appeared to have become wondrously steep, ricketty, and uneven. Stumbling at every step, and muttering awful imprecations against the "thunthering fool of a carpenter that had built such a divil of a lath-er," Captain O'Blunderbuss contrived to reach the first landing in safety; but, his foot tripping over the carpet, he fell flat down, extinguishing the light of the candle, though at the same time giving his head such a knock against the balustrades, that a million meteoric sparks flashed across his visual organs.

"Blood and hounds!" growled the gallant gentleman; "there must either be an airthquake—hic—or else, be the power-rs! I'm—hic—raly—hic—dhrunk!"

Picking himself up, the captain groped about for the staircase; and, finding it with some little trouble, he continued his ascent in a pleasing state of uncertainty as to whether he were walking on his head or on his feet, but with the deeply settled conviction that he was spinning round at a most terrific rate.

"Capthain O'Bluntherbuss," he said, apostrophising himself, as he staggered along, "is this raly you or another person? If it's yourself it is—hic—I—I'm ashamed of ye, be the holy poker-r; and I've a precious good mind—hic—to give ye a dacent dhrubbing, captain—hic—O'—hic—Bluntherbuss."

Thus soliloquising, the martial gentleman reached the second landing; but here he paused for a few minutes in a state of awful doubt as to which way he should turn in order to reach his own room. He knew that his door must be somewhere close at hand; though whether to the right or to the left, he could not for the life of him remember. At length he began to grope about at a venture; and, having encountered the handle of a door, he hesitated no longer, but entered the chamber with which the said door communicated.

CHAPTER CIII.
THE SURPRISE.—A CHANGE OF SCENE.

It was about half-past three o'clock in the morning, and profound silence reigned in Baker Street, when four men, bearing a ladder upon their shoulders, passed like phantoms through the obscurity of the thoroughfare, and halted in front of Mr. Curtis's house; where their operations, so far from being at all ghost-like, assumed very much the appearance of those proceedings which are carried on by creatures of flesh and blood.

Thieves, however, they were not: but sheriff's-officers they were,—being our old friends Mac Grab and Proggs, assisted by two other queer-looking fellows of the species which chiefly abounds in the tap-rooms and parlours of public-houses in Chancery Lane.

Mr. Mac Grab having satisfied himself by a close scrutiny of the number on the front-door, that they had pitched upon the right house, the ladder was forthwith placed against the little iron railings forming the balcony at the drawing-room window; and Mr. Proggs was ordered to mount first. But Mr. Proggs, having perhaps recently studied some book upon etiquette, would not think of preceding his master; and Mr. Mac Grab was doubtless too meek a man to take upon himself the post of honour. As for the two underlings, they very bluntly assured Mr. Mac Grab that they would see him unpleasantly condemned before they would venture first; and thus the entire project was threatened with discomfiture, when Proggs, overcoming his fears, consented to lead the way.

Up the ladder did this hero accordingly drag himself; and had he lost his life in the desperate deed, the epic muse would have been compelled to deplore the death of the last of the famous house of Proggs. But fortune beamed upon Proggs, though the moon did not; and he reached the balcony in safety. Mac Grab ascended next—and the two subordinates followed,—by which time the intrepid Proggs had obtained admission into the house by the simple process of cutting out a pane with a glazier's diamond, and thrusting in his hand to undo the fastening of the window.

And now, behold the four men safe in the drawing-room—in actual possession of the place,—four heroes who had just carried a strongly fortified castle—by surprise!

A lanthorn, which Mr. Proggs took from his pocket, was lighted; and a flask of rum, which Mr. Mac Grab took from *his* pocket, was drunk. The heroes then stole gently from the apartment—descended the stairs—opened the front-door—and laid down the ladder along the area railings, so that the watchman, on going his rounds, might not raise an alarm of "thieves." This being accomplished, they re-entered the house, and fastened the street-door, the key of which Mr. Mac Grab secured about his own person.

The officers next entered the parlour on the ground floor, where they found Frank Curtis lying asleep upon the sofa.

"That's our chap," said Mac Grab, in a tone of deep satisfaction, as he threw the light of his lanthorn full upon the young gentleman's countenance. "I shall take him off at once, with one of the men; and you, Proggs, will remain in possession along with t'other."

"Two on us isn't enow to keep possession agin that devil of an Irisher," exclaimed Proggs, bluntly; and the loudness with which he spoke disturbed Mr. Curtis.

Starting up, Frank rubbed his eyes—then stared around him with the stupid vacancy of one who had only half slept off the fumes of whiskey—and at last, as the truth gradually glimmered upon him, he said in a hoarse, thick tone, "Well—who the devil are all you fellows?"

"You'll know soon enow who we be," growled Mac Grab. "Come—get up, young genelman; and don't sit there a-staring at us, as if you was a stuck pig and we was ghostesses."

"So you've got in at last—have you, old fellow?" said Frank, with an awful yawn. "But I feel precious seedy, though. Can't you let me sleep a little longer."

"You won't sleep no more till you gets to Chancery Lane," returned Mac Grab; "and then you can have a turn-in if you like."

"What o'clock is it?" demanded Frank, his teeth chattering and his whole frame shivering alike with the cold and the unpleasant petition to which he had been awakened.

"It's getting on for a quarter to four, or thereabouts," said Mac Grab, consulting a huge silver watch of the turnip species.

"Then I must have been asleep here for some time," mused Frank aloud; and, glancing at the table, he added, "Oh! I remember—I was precious drunk last night——"

"Well, I'm blest if I didn't think you was," said Proggs, expressing his opinion with more bluntness than politeness. "You'll find a many lushing coven over in Spike Island."

"Spike Island?" ejaculated Frank: then, as a light broke in upon him through the mist and fumes of whiskey, he added, "Oh! I understand—the Bench, eh? Well—never say die, my boys; as my friend the Crown Prince of Holland used to observe. If it must be

the Bench, it must: but you'll let me tell my wife what's happened."

"We won't let you rouse that Irisher, young gentleman," said Mac Grab. "Let us get you safe off, and then he may wake up, and be damned to him."

"I pledge you my word I will not attempt to rouse the Captain," exclaimed Curtis: "but I must speak to my wife."

"Well, that's only fair and reasonable," said Mac Grab; "although you don't deserve no good treatment at our hands, seeing how we was served by that owdacious Irish friend of yourn. Howsomever, you shall speak to your good lady; but mind, I ain't going to lose sight on you."

"You can come with me as far as the bed-chamber door," observed Frank; "and I shan't keep you many minutes."

"Proggs, you'll come along with me," said Mac Grab. "And now, mind, Mr. Curtis, what you're up to. We've got pistols with us; and blowed if we don't use 'em in self-defence if that Irish friend of your's happens to wake up and tries it on again with any of his nonsense."

"It wasn't my fault that he acted as he did the last time you was here," returned Frank. "But come along, you two—if you must go with me."

Curtis lighted a candle, and led the way gently up stairs, Mac Grab and Proggs following close at his heels. They reached the second landing, where Frank stopped at a door, which he was about to open, when the first-mentioned officer said in a low tone, "Now, mind—no nonsense!—we won't be done a second time, remember."

"I assure you this is my wife's room," returned Curtis, also speaking in a whisper; and he entered the chamber, the two bailiffs remaining at the door, which was left ajar.

Frank, carrying the light in his hand, approached the bed, and was just on the point of saying, "My dear—my dear!"—when he stopped short—aghast—stupefied—his mouth wide open—and every faculty which he possessed, save that of sight, entirely suspended.

For there—by the side of his wife—lay Captain O'Blunderbuss!

Both were fast asleep; and the countenance of the gallant officer seemed absolutely on fire, so red was it in contrast with the white pillow.

"By Jove—this is too bad!" exclaimed Curtis, at length recovering the powers of speech and movement; and, influenced only by the sudden rage which took possession of him, and which rendered him bold and courageous for the instant, he seized a water-jug from the washing-stand and dashed the contents completely over Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Blood and thunther!" roared the man of war starting up in a towering passion;—and, springing from the bed, he was about to inflict summary chastisement on his friend, when a shriek issued from the couch—and the captain, stopping short and looking around him, ascertained where he was. The cause of Frank's conduct towards him was instantly apparent; and, subduing his anger, he exclaimed, "Be Jasus! and it was all a mistake, me boy! I dhrank too much of the potheen——"

"The Irishman, by goles!" growled a hoarse voice in the landing outside.

"Well—never mind, Proggs!" cried another voice: "if he touches us, we'll fire. Holloa! you fellows down there—come up!—come up!" roared Mac Grab.

And now the whole house was in confusion.

Mrs. Curtis lay screaming and shrieking in bed—the captain rushed upon the landing, with nothing on save his shirt, and looking as if he had just sprung out of a water-butt—Curtis followed, sulky and not half satisfied with the apology he had received relative to the presence of the officer in his wife's chamber—the two men who had been left down stairs were running up as hard as they could—and the servants were calling from the garrets to know what was the matter, but rather suspecting something very much like the real truth in respect to the invasion of the bailiffs.

"Down—down with ye, wild bastes that ye are!" vociferated the captain, as the light which Curtis still carried showed the gallant officer the well known faces of Mac Grab and Proggs.

But the two men, who had worked their courage up to the sticking point, produced each a heavy horse-pistol; at the appearance of which formidable weapons the captain hung back, and Curtis shouted out in alarm, "No violence! I'll keep my word and go off with you quiet enough."

"Be Jasus! and you shan't though, my dear frind!" cried O'Blunderbuss, looking rapidly round in search of some object which he might use as an offensive weapon against the invaders; but the two men from down stairs now made their appearance, and Curtis put an end to all further hostilities by surrendering himself to them without any more ado.

"Frank! Frank!" shrieked his wife from the bed-room.

"Curthis, my frind—don't be a fool!" roared the captain: "we'll bate 'em yet!"

The young gentleman, however, took no notice either of his wife's appeal or his friend's adjuration, and rapidly descended the stairs, followed by the sheriff's-officers. He was not only afraid of the pistols; but he was likewise too much annoyed at the bed-chamber scene to care about remaining in the house any longer. Not having courage enough to resent the wrong which he conceived to have been done him, he was nevertheless unable to endure it passively; and here signed himself, moodily and sulkily, to the lot which

circumstances had shaped for him.

Mac Grab and one of the subordinates accordingly departed with their prisoner to the spunging-house in Chancery Lane; while Proggs and the other man remained in possession of the dwelling in Baker Street.

It was about half-past four o'clock on that dark and chilly morning, when Frank Curtis entered the lock-up establishment owned by Mr. Mac Grab, the sheriff's-officer. A racking head-ache, the result of the preceding night's debauch—a cold nervousness, amounting almost to a continuous shiver,—and thoughts of by no means a pleasant nature, all combined to depress the young man's spirits to a very painful degree; and, as the door of the spunging-house closed behind him, he murmured to himself, "Oh! what a fool I have been!" Fortunately, he had plenty of ready money in his pocket; and, putting a guinea into Mac Grab's hand, he said, "Let me have a private room; and have a fire lighted directly."

"Please to sit down for a few minutes in the office here," observed the bailiff, pocketing the coin, "while I call up the servant."

In the meantime the subordinate had lighted a lamp in the little, dirty, cold-looking place, dignified by the name of "the office;" and while Mac Grab went to summon the domestic, Curtis, who was a prey to that fidgety sensation which seems the forerunner of something dreadful, endeavoured to divert his thoughts from gloomy topics by scrutinizing the objects around him.

A sorry desk, much hacked about with a pen-knife and stained all over with ink—a small shelf containing a few old law books—a law-almanack with thick black lines in the calender denoting Term-times—a list of the sheriffs and undersheriffs of England and Wales—printed papers showing the arrangements of the Courts for the sittings in and after Term—two or three crazy chairs—and a Dutch clock, which ticked with a monotony calculated to drive a nervous person out of his senses,—these were the objects which met his view. Every thing appeared musty and worm-eaten;—the office looked as if it never were swept out;—and there was an earthly smell of a peculiarly unpleasant nature.

In this miserable place—so cold and cheerless—Frank Curtis was kept waiting for nearly half-an-hour; while the man who remained with him sate dozing in a chair, and every now and then awaking with a sudden dive down and bob up of the head which painfully augmented the nervousness of the prisoner. At last Mr. Mac Grab returned, smelling very strong of rum, and followed by a dirty-looking old woman, who seemed to have huddled on her clothes anyhow, and to be in a particularly ill-humour at being disturbed so early in the morning.

"Now then," she said, in a short, sulky tone, addressing herself to Curtis, without however looking at him: "this way."

Frank followed her into a short passage, and then up a narrow staircase, the miserable candle which she held in one hand and shaded with the other on account of the draught, affording only just sufficient light to render apparent the cheerless aspect of the premises. It was not that there was any thing mean or poor in the interior of the dwelling, the office excepted: but there was an air of deep gloom, and also of dirt and neglect, which struck even so superficial an observer as Mr. Frank Curtis.

The old woman led the way into a moderate-sized front room on the second floor, where she lighted two candles, and then set to work to persuade a few damp sticks smothered with small coal to burn up in the grate. The apartment was fitted up as a sitting-room, but had a bed in it. The walls were hung with numerous pictures the frames of which were an inch thick in dust and cob-webs; and there was a side-board covered with old-fashioned cut glass. The carpet was worn out in many places, and was also much soiled with grease and beer: the table-cover was likewise stained with liquor and spotted with ink. The curtains, which were of good material, were completely disguised in dust; and the windows were so dirty that at mid-day they formed a pleasantly subdued medium for the sun-light. Altogether, there was an air of expense mingled with the most cheerless discomfort—an appearance of liberal outlay altogether neutralized by neglect and habits of wanton slovenliness.

The fire burnt feebly—the old woman slunk sulkily away—and Frank Curtis threw himself upon the bed. He was thoroughly wretched, and would have given all the money he had left in his pocket for a few hours' tranquil repose. But sleep would not visit his eyes; and, after tossing about for some time in painful restlessness, he got up as the clock struck eight.

His burning, feverish countenance craved the contact of cold water; and the idea of a refreshing toilette rendered him almost cheerful. But the jug was empty; and there were no towels. He rang the bell: five minutes elapsed—and no one came. He rang again; and at last, another five minutes having gone tediously by, the old woman made her appearance. His wishes were expressed; and the harridan took away the jug. A third interval of five minutes passed, ere she returned. Then she had forgotten the towels; and now a quarter of an hour dragged its slow length along before she came back, bringing with her a miserably thin rag of about a foot square. She was about to leave the room again, when Curtis discovered that there was no soap; and ten minutes more were required for the provoking old wretch to produce a small sample of that very necessary article. Yet for all this *discomfort*, the prisoner had paid a guinea in advance!

"Pray let me have some breakfast us soon as you can, my good woman," said Frank, humiliated and miserable.

"As soon as the kittle biles down stairs," answered the servant, in a surly tone, as she turned to leave the room.

"And how long will that be?" demanded Curtis.

"Don't know: the kitchen fire ain't alight yet:"—and she hobbled away.

In a fit of desperation the prisoner addressed himself to his toilette: but the feeling of utter discomfort still clung to him. The water seemed thick and clammy, instead of cool and refreshing; and the towel was so small that it became saturated in a few moments, and he was compelled to dry his face with a corner of one of the sheets. Having no nail brush, he could not cleanse his hands properly; and the want of a comb left his hair matted and disordered. In fact, he positively felt more uncomfortable and dirty after his ablutions than he did before he began them; and that disagreeable sensation kept him dispirited and wretched.

He walked about the room, examining all the pictures one after the other, until he became as thoroughly acquainted with their subjects

as if he had lived for years in that room. He then posted himself at one of the windows, and watched the people passing up and down the street. It was now nine o'clock, and the law-clerks were proceeding to their respective offices. Seedy-looking men were hurrying along with mysterious slips of paper in their hands; and now and then a better-attired person, in a suit of black, would be seen wending his way towards the Chancery Court, carrying the blue bag of his master, a barrister. Small parties of threes or fours would likewise pass up the lane, affording to the initiated the irresistible idea—which was also the true one—of tipstaves conducting insolvents to the court in Portugal Street.

At the public house, opposite the barred window from which Curtis was gazing, a small knot of very shabby men had collected; and it required but little knowledge of the specimens of animated nature in Chancery Lane, to recognise their especial calling. In fact they were individuals who belonged to the outworks of the strong entrenchments of the law,—process-servers, sheriff's-officers' assistants, and men who hired themselves out to be left in possession at dwellings where executions were levied. When not actively engaged, they regularly haunted the public-houses, of which they seemed the very door-posts; and if they stepped inside to take something, which was very often indeed, they appeared on intimate terms with the landlord, said "Miss" to the bar-girl, and called the waiter by his Christian name. They had a dirty, seedy, mean, and cringing look about them; and yet, if not adequately recompensed by the unfortunate victims of the law with whom they had to deal, they would become doggedly insolent and grossly abusive.

Half-an-hour passed away; and Chancery Lane grew more attractive. A few barristers, in all the imposing dignity of the black gown and the awful wisdom of the wig, were seen moving along to the Rolls' Court: well-dressed attorneys alighted from their gigs, cabs, or phaetons at the doors of their offices;—and articled clerks, having thrown away their cigars when within view of the windows of their places of business, made up for lost time by cutting briskly over the pavement, flourishing short sticks, and complacently surveying their polished boots, tight-fitting trousers, and flash waistcoats.

Frank Curtis sighed as he beheld so many, many persons in the enjoyment of freedom;—but his mournful reverie was at length broken by the entrance of the old woman with the breakfast-tray. His throat was parched, and he had been unable to drink the water: he now, therefore, eagerly applied himself to the tea. But it was wretched stuff; and even extreme thirst could not render it palatable. He tried to eat a piece of toast; but the butter was so rank that his heart heaved against it. He broke open an egg: it however tasted of straw, and nearly made him sick.

Having forced himself to swallow a couple of cups of tea, Frank rang the bell and ordered the woman to bring him a sheet of paper. This command was complied with, after a long delay; and, by the aid of a worn down stump of a pen and ink which flowed like soot and water, Frank managed to pen a brief note to a lawyer whom he knew, and who dwelt in Carey Street hard by. After a great deal of trouble, a messenger was found, who, for the moderate reward of eighteen pence, undertook to convey the note to its place of destination—just fifty yards distant; and in the course of half an hour, Mr. Pepperton, the legal limb alluded to, made his appearance in the shape of a short, thin, sallow-faced man, with small piercing eyes, and very compressed lips.

"Well, Mr. Curtis," said the lawyer, as he entered the room; "got into a mess—eh?"

"Rather so," replied the young man. "But I don't care so much about that, as on account of being locked up in this cursed place. The fact is I must go over to the Bench; and I dare say Sir Christopher won't let me lie very long there."

"You require a *habeas*, you know," observed the lawyer. "But are you sure that you're sued in the Court of Queen's Bench? because, if it is in the Common Pleas or Exchequer, you will have to go to the Fleet."

"The devil!" ejaculated Frank. "But here's a paper which Mac Grab gave me——"

"Ah! that's right," said Mr. Pepperton, examining the document placed in his hands. "Yes—it's in the Bench, safe enough. Holloa!" he exclaimed suddenly, after a few moments' silence: "here's an error in the description. Your name is Francis, and not Frank."

"Just so!" cried the prisoner, his heart fluttering with the vague hope which his legal adviser's words and manner had encouraged.

"Well—I think—mind, I *think* that it is highly probable we may set the caption aside," continued Pepperton. "At all events it would be worth the trying. But I must apply to the Judge in Chambers this afternoon; and if we *do* happen to fail—mind, I say *if* we *do*—why, then you can pass over to the Bench to-morrow."

Somehow or another, persons locked up in spunging-houses always feel confident of getting out on the slightest legal quibble that their ingenious attorneys may suggest. They do not apprehend the chance of failure, and of disbursing two or three guineas, which they can so ill afford, for nothing: the process of applying to a Judge in Chambers seems so certain of a triumphant issue, and there is such a spell in the bare idea, that the door of freedom appears already opening to the touch.

Frank Curtis was not an exception to the general rule which we have mentioned; and he forthwith desired Mr. Pepperton to adopt the necessary steps, although this gentleman assured him that nothing could be done until the after part of the day.

Poor, deluded captive! Little did he think Mr. Pepperton was well aware beforehand that there was not the shadow of the ghost of a chance of success; but that his only motive in suggesting these proceedings was to make as much out of his client as possible.

When Pepperton had left the room, Frank Curtis began to pace it as if he were a Wandering Jew confined to a very miniature world; and he examined the pictures over and over again, until they seemed the most familiar friends of the kind he had ever known. Then he returned to the window, and beheld Mr. Mac Grab and one of his men just starting in a queer-looking gig upon a suburban expedition; and having watched the equipage until it was no longer visible, he bethought himself of asking for a newspaper. He accordingly rang the bell, and intimated his wishes to the old woman, who, after keeping him in suspense as usual for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, returned with a *Weekly Dispatch* a fortnight old and a *Times* of ten days back. Curtis could scarcely control his indignation; and, tossing a shilling to the harridan, he desired her to send out and buy him a morning paper. She departed accordingly, and in half-an-hour returned with that day's *Times*, whereby Mr. Frank Curtis was enabled to divert himself until two o'clock, when he partook of an

execrable chop nearly raw, a potato that seemed as if it were iced, and a pint of wine which appeared to have been warmed.

Then how heavily, heavily did the weary hours pass away; and Curtis more than half regretted that his friend O'Blunderbuss did not call upon him. He felt that, for the pleasure of his society, he would overlook and forget the treatment he had received at his hands. But the gallant officer came not; and, what with another examination of the pictures, a complete spell of the advertisements (the news being already disposed of) in the *Times*, and a cigar or two, Frank managed to dispose of the time, though miserably enough, until five o'clock.

Mr. Pepperton then came back; and Frank awaited the report in excruciating suspense.

"Well, my dear fellow," said the lawyer, flinging himself in a chair as if regularly worn out by hard work, "we have lost the point; but we have this consolation——"

"What?" demanded Curtis, in the anxious hope of seeing another loophole promising emancipation.

"Why—that we as nearly gained it as possible," returned Pepperton. "It was old Justice Foozlehem that was at Chambers to-day; and, when I argued the point, he rubbed his nose with the feather-end of the pen—he always does that when the thing is very ticklish——"

"Damn Judge Foozlehem!" emphatically cried Mr. Frank Curtis. "A miss is as good as a mile; and that was what the Prince of Malabar said when my bullet whistled close by his ear at that duel which him and me fought at Boulogne three years ago. But, to speak seriously of business—I suppose that there's nothing left for me to do——"

"Save to pay the debt or go to the Bench," added the lawyer, putting the alternatives in as nut-shell a compass as possible.

"Well—the Bench it must be, then!" ejaculated Frank.

"I will take out the *habeas* to-morrow," observed Mr. Pepperton; "and at about five o'clock in the afternoon the tipstaff will be at Serjeant's Inn waiting for you—or may be, you'll have to go over to him at the public-house opposite."

Curtis invited the lawyer to pass the evening with him: but Mr. Pepperton was engaged elsewhere; and the prisoner was therefore compelled to drink and smoke in solitude, occasionally varying the occupation by another spell at the *Times*—another long gaze of envy from the window—and another scrutiny of the pictures.

At last, when ten o'clock struck, Mr. Curtis was thoroughly worn out by feverish excitement, suspense, and annoyances of all kinds; and he retired to rest with the fervent hope of enjoying an uninterrupted slumber till morning. But scarcely had he begun to get drowsy, when a tickling sensation commenced in a thousand parts of his body and limbs; and, to his dismay, he found himself assailed by a perfect legion of those abominable little torturers termed bugs.

Now, Mr. Curtis was most peculiarly sensitive in this respect; and if there were ever a flea or a bug in a bed, it was certain to find him out—aye, and feast upon him too. But never, in the whole course of his life, had he experienced such an attack as on the present occasion: never till now had he known bugs so numerous, nor bites so pungent.

At length he jumped up in rage and agony, and lighted a candle. But vain was all search: not a bug could he find. The legion *appeared* to have suddenly *disappeared*. Like Destiny, they were always to be felt, but never seen. He could not sleep with a light in the room; so, having extinguished it, he laid himself down once more.

For a few minutes he was suffered to remain quiet enough; but at last, back came his tormentors by slow degrees; and scarcely had he torn the skin off one part of his body, than he was compelled to flay another. In this manner hour after hour passed; and, when he did at length fall asleep between one and two in the morning, he was pursued by a legion of bugs and sheriff's-officers in his dreams.

CHAPTER CIV.
THE VISIT.—THE HABEAS CORPUS.

Frank awoke at seven o'clock, depressed in spirits and unrefreshed in body. His head still ached; and he was sore all over through having nearly torn himself to pieces on account of the bugs. His face betrayed marks of the ravages committed upon him by his little tormentors; and his eyes were swollen from the same cause. He had not even the comfort of copious ablutions; for the process of the toilette was not more satisfactory on this occasion than it had been on the previous day. Thus all circumstances conspired to make him wretched.

Before he sate down to breakfast, he despatched a messenger to Baker Street for a few necessaries which he required; and, as he did not choose to write to his wife, and knew not whether O'Blunderbuss might still be there, he sent a verbal intimation of his wishes.

The breakfast of this morning was no improvement on its predecessor: indeed, it struck Curtis that he had got from bad to worse by trying the desperate experiment of ordering coffee instead of tea. He, however, knew that it was useless to grumble; and so, having disposed of the meal as best he could, he sent for the morning paper, with which he whiled away an hour and a half until the return of his messenger, who came laden with a portmanteau.

"Well, who did you see in Baker Street?" demanded Frank.

"Please, sir, I see Mr. Proggs and t'other man which is in possession," was the answer.

"And who else?" enquired Curtis.

"Please, sir, I see a stout lady as give me a glass of gin, and a tall genelman as give me a rap over the head," returned the man.

"And what did he do that for?" cried Frank, laughing in spite of himself.

"'Cos he said, sir, that I didn't speak in a speckful way to him. But here's a note as the genelman give me to give to you, sir."

Curtis tore open a curiously folded letter which the messenger handed to him, and the contents of which ran as follow:—

> "Be Jasus, my frind, and it's myself that has a right to complain of unfrindly tratement. Here have I been waiting to resave a bit of a note from ye, and divil a line or a word at all, at all. Your poor wife's distracted and has lost her appetite, and all because of your injurious suspicions; but I do all I can to consoul her. If you come to reflict upon the matther, Frank, ye must admit that though appayrances was against me, yet it isn't Capthain O'Blunderbuss that would wrong ye. For, be the powers! and it's mistaken in the bed I was—what with botheration and potheen and the candle's going out; and divil a hayp'orth did I drame where I was, till ye powred the wather all over me. So shake hands, me boy, and let us be frinds again; and sure it's myself that will bring Mrs. Curtis down to dine with ye at two o'clock this afthernoon, and we'll send in the dinner and the potheen first. Proggs and his man are in possission; and I feel like a defated ginral: but they're on their best behaviour, and so I have not been forced to give either of them a taste of the shillaylee. I'm sadly afraid that the chap you have sent up is a fool; so if he should forget to give you this letter, mind you ask him for it. Your wife sends you a million kisses through me; and believe me, my frind, to remain
>
> "Ever yours,
> "GORMAN O'BLUNDERBUSS."

"Very good," said Frank Curtis, as he brought the perusal of this curious epistle to an end: and having paid and dismissed the messenger, he sate himself down to reflect upon the manner in which he ought to receive his wife and the gallant gentleman.

On the one hand was the sense of the injury he had received, or fancied he had received; for he could not well embrace the double conviction that Mrs. Curtis was *not* faithless, and that the captain was *not* treacherous. On the other hand were numerous motives persuasive of an amicable course,—the want of society, the shame of declaring himself to be a cuckold—and last, though not least, the infinite terror in which he stood of Gorman O'Blunderbuss. These reasons were weighty and powerful; and they grew stronger and stronger as the dinner-hour advanced,—until they became completely triumphant when a hamper was sent up, containing cold fowls, ham, wine, dessert, whiskey, and cigars.

No longer hesitating what course to pursue, Frank superintended the laying of the cloth and the arrangement of the provisions upon the table: he decanted the wine—tasted it—and found it excellent;—and, those little proceedings having put him into a thorough good humour, he received his wife and the captain, when they made their appearance, as if nothing had occurred to ruffle his mind with regard to them.

Mrs. Curtis thought it necessary to go into hysterics at the sight of her beloved husband in a spunging-house; but she speedily recovered upon the said beloved husband's kindly recommending her not to make a fool of herself;—and the trio sate down to dinner,

at which they made themselves very comfortable indeed. The captain proposed that as the wine-glasses were particularly small, they should drink their Sherry from tumblers; and the motion was adopted after a feeble opposition on the part of the lady.

"Well, Cu-r-r-tis, me boy," exclaimed the gallant gentleman, when they had made an end of eating, having done immense justice to the viands provided, "what are ye afther now? It isn't staying here all your life that you can be thinking of——"

"Nor do I intend to stop in this cursed hole many hours longer," interrupted Frank. "I expect to go over to the Bench, at five o'clock."

"The Binch!" cried the captain, overjoyed at the plan chalked out: "be Jasus! and it's the wisest thing ye can be afther, my frind! The Binch is a glor-rious place—and ye'll be as comfortable there as at home. The porther is the best in all London; and it's worth while to be in the Binch for the pleasure of dhrinking it. Not that I'm a great admirer of malt, Mim," he added, turning politely towards Mrs. Curtis; "but the porther of the Binch is second best to rale potheen. Then the amusements of the Binch, Mim, are delightful! There's the parade to walk upon—and there's the racquet ground when ye're tired of the parade—and there's the dolphin-pump—and the coffee-house, a riglar tavern——In fact," exclaimed the gallant gentleman, quite lost in admiration of all the beautiful views and scenes he was so enthusiastically depicting, "the Binch is a perfect palace of a prison, and I only wish I was there myself."

"I'm sure I should be most happy to change places with you, captain," observed Frank Curtis drily.

"I wouldn't deprive ye of the pleasure, me boy, for all the wor-r-ld!" cried O'Blunderbuss, in a tone of the utmost sincerity. "But what's to be done next? Those bastes of the earth are in possession of the garrison, and every stick will be sould up by them—the ragamuffin scamps that they are!"

"The wife and children must take a lodging over the water, close by the Bench," said Curtis; "and if Sir Christopher won't come forward to assist me, I must either get the Rules or go through the Insolvent's Court—I don't care much which. My friend, the Earl of Billingsgate, did both——"

"Be the holy poker-r! and it's myself that will call on Sir Christopher-r in such a strait as this," vociferated the captain; "and although he did knock me down from the carriage window, the last time——"

"What!" ejaculated Frank, as much amused as astonished at the information which the gallant officer had so inadvertently let slip; "Sir Christopher knocked you down!"

"Blood and thunther!" roared the captain, becoming as red as scarlet; "and was it afther making a fool of myself that I was? For sure and it was Sir Christopher that was knocked down—and I didn't like to tell ye about it before, seeing that he's your own nat'ral uncle. But it's myself that will call upon him and offer the most abject apology; and I'll skin him alive if he don't come for'ard as he ought to do, and pay all your debts, my dear boy. So you persave that there's some use in having such a frind as Gorman O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemar-r-ra, Ir-r-reland!" added the martial gentleman, with an awful rattling of the r's.

"The sooner I move over to the neighbourhood of the Bench, the better," said Mrs. Curtis; "for I am sick and tired of living in Baker Street. Just now, when I came out, it seemed to me that all the people I met laughed in my face, as if they knew our circumstances."

"I wish I had seen them dar-r to laugh!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss, lifting up an empty bottle, and flourishing it over his head: "I'd have sent them slap into the middle of next week, so that they should miss resayving their money next Saturday night."

In such pleasant chat as this, did the trio while away the time until about a quarter to five, when Mr. Pepperton made his appearance to announce that the office had been searched, that three detainers had been found, and that the *habeas corpus* was all in apple-pie order.

Frank Curtis accordingly rang the bell, and ordered his bill. In about a quarter of an hour it was brought;—and thus it ran:—

MR. CURTIS'S ACCOUNT.

	s.	*d.*
Room	10	6
Breakfast	3	0
Eggs	0	6
Messenger to Carey Street	2	6
Reading Newspapers	1	0
Dinner	5	0
Porter	0	6
Gin and Cigars	5	6
Bread and Cheese for Supper	2	0
Porter	0	6

Room		10	6
Breakfast		3	0
Eggs		0	6
Messenger to Baker Street		3	0
Use of table-cloth, knives, and forks, &c., gentleman providing his own dinner		2	6
Extras		5	0
	£2	15	6

"Why, my good woman," exclaimed Frank Curtis, amazed as such a terrific attempt at imposition, "this account is absurd. Besides, there are two things in it that I paid for myself—I mean the messenger yesterday and to-day."

"Master says it's all right, sir," observed the harridan.

"And then you charge a shilling for reading two newspapers a fortnight old," cried Frank, more and more bewildered as he studied the items of the bill: "and five shillings for *extras*! Why—what the devil are the *extras*, since it seems to me that you have taken precious good care to omit nothing?"

"The extras is soap, and candles, and so on," said the woman, growing impatient.

"Then, be Jasus! and just let me soap over Mr. Mac Grab with a shillaleh!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, starting from his seat. "It's afther robbing my frind, ye are—ye bastes of the earth!"

Mr. Pepperton however interfered, and represented to the two gentlemen that there was no possibility of obtaining redress—that sheriff's-officers might charge exactly what they liked—and that it would be much better to pay the bill without any haggling. The amount was accordingly liquidated, and the old woman received half-a-crown as a gratuity, which she took in a manner most unequivocally denoting that she had expected at least four times as much.

"Well," exclaimed Frank Curtis, as soon as she had left the room, "of all infernal impositions this is the greatest! Supposing I was a poor devil——"

"Then you would have been bundled straight off to Whitecross Street at once," observed Pepperton. "Lord bless you, my dear sir—there's an aristocracy amongst debtors as well as in every thing else in this country."

"I always thought the law was the same for rich or poor," said Curtis.

"You never were under a greater mistake in your life," returned the solicitor. "Money is all-powerful in England, and makes the gentleman; and gentlemen are treated quite differently from common people. Such establishments as the Bench and the Fleet[43] are for those who can afford to pay for a *habeas*: while those who cannot, must go to the County Gaol. These spunging-houses, too, are places of accommodation, for the use of which people must pay liberally."

"Or rather be robbed vilely," said Frank. "But never mind—it can't be helped. When shall I have to go over to the Bench?"

"The tipstaff is no doubt already waiting at the public-house opposite," replied the lawyer.

"Then I'll be off at once," exclaimed Curtis, rising from his chair.

"Be the power-rs! but we'll see ye safe over to the Binch," cried Captain O'Blunderbuss; "for it may be that I shall have to thrash the Marshal or skin a tur-rnkey to renther the people dacently civil in that iligant istablishment."

"Yes—you come with me, captain," said Frank, who had been thinking of some means to separate his amiable wife and his devoted friend. "You can put Mrs. C. into a hackney-coach; and to-morrow morning, my dear," he added, turning towards his spouse, "you can look out for a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood of the prison."

"But you don't mean me to remain all alone to-night in Baker Street, with those odious officers in the house?" exclaimed Mrs. Curtis, not admiring the proposed arrangement.

"It would not be proper for the captain to stay in the house now that I am away," said Frank, hastily, and without daring to look at his gallant friend: indeed, scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when he was surprised at his courage in having dared to utter them.

Fortunately the captain took the observation in good part, and even expressed his approval of it; for it struck the martial gentleman that he should stand a much better chance of amusing himself with Frank Curtis in the Bench, with the interior arrangements of which he was pretty well acquainted from old experience, than in the society of Mrs. Curtis in Baker Street. The lady could not, therefore, offer

any farther opposition to the arrangement proposed; but she darted an angry look upon the captain, who responded by one of earnest appeal to her mercy.

She now took leave of her husband, and was escorted by Captain O'Blunderbuss to the nearest coach-stand; and as some time elapsed ere he returned to the spunging-house, it is presumable that he had a little difficulty in making his peace with her.

At length, however, he did re-appear; and, the messenger having conveyed the portmanteau over to the public-house opposite, for which he only charged a shilling, the prisoner proceeded thither in company with Mr. MacGrab and Captain O'Blunderbuss, Pepperton bidding them farewell at the door.

In a little front parlour on the first floor of the public-house alluded to, sate half-a-dozen seedy-looking men, who were delectably occupied in smoking cigars and drinking hot gin-and-water. Their conversation was doubtless very amusing to themselves; but it would have been very boring to strangers;—for the topic seemed entirely limited to what had taken place that day at the Insolvent Debtors' Court, or at the Judges' Chambers. There, in that same room, were those men accustomed to meet every afternoon (Sunday excepted), at about the same hour; and their discourse was invariably on the same subjects. They were tipstaffs—or, more properly speaking, perhaps, tipstaves: they lived in the atmosphere of debtors' prisons and law-courts;—and all their information was circumscribed to the transactions thereof. When they were not hovering about the lobbies of the Fleet or the Bench, they were "down at Westminster," or "up at Portugal Street;" and if not in any of those places—why, then they were at the public-house.

It was to one of these worthies that MacGrab introduced Mr. Francis Curtis; and as the tipstaff thus particularised had not finished his cigar nor his gin-and-water, Mr. Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss sate down to keep him company till he had. Half an hour afterwards a hackney-coach was sent for; and the prisoner, his gallant friend, and the officer were speedily on their road to the King's Bench prison.

Curtis spoke but little during the transit: he felt nervous at the idea of going to his new home. But the captain rattled away as if he were determined to speak for himself and his friend both; and the tipstaff was still in a state of uncertainty as to whether he should set the gallant gentleman down as a very extraordinary personage, or as a most wondrous liar, when the vehicle stopped at a little low door in a gloomy brick wall.

"Be Jasus! and here's the Binch already," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, thrusting his head out of the coach-window. "That house there, with the trees before it, Frank, is the Marshal's—and a very dacent berth he's got of it: I shouldn't mind standing in his shoes at all, at all. But come along, me dear frind."

Thus speaking, the captain leapt from the vehicle, followed by Frank Curtis and the tipstaff; and, having traversed an enclosure formed by the gloomy-looking wall above alluded to and the high spike-topped boundary of the prison itself, the trio ascended a few steps which led them into the upper lobby of the King's Bench.

43. Within the last few years the Fleet has been suppressed, and the Bench, under the general name of the Queen's Prison, has become the receptacle for all metropolitan debtors who are enabled to purchase the luxury of a *habeas corpus*.

CHAPTER CV.
THE KING'S BENCH PRISON.

The upper lobby was a small, dirty, and sombre-looking outwork of the vast establishment. A huge clock hung against one of the walls—a roasting fire burnt in the grate—and a stout, elderly turnkey, who spoke with a provincial accent, was seated on a high stool near the inner door, watching the persons who came *out* of the prison, and on whose countenance the glare of a powerful light was thrown by a tin reflector. Grouped near him were several char-women and messengers, engaged in the double occupation of discussing a pot of the best ale and the scandal of the Bench; while another turnkey—a short, active, bustling little fellow, who rejoiced in the nick-name of "Buffer"—was seated inside a small enclosure formed by wood-work breast-high, examining a greasy and well-thumbed book containing sundry hieroglyphics which were supposed to be entries of the prisoners' names.

To Mr. Buffer was Mr. Frank Curtis duly introduced by the tipstaff; and the young gentleman's appellations were forthwith inscribed in the greasy book. He was then desired to pay his gate-fees, which he accordingly did; and, these little matters being settled, Mr. Buffer politely informed him that he might "go inside." The head turnkey—who was the stout, elderly man above alluded to—thereupon opened the door at which he was seated; and Captain O'Blunderbuss led the way, first across a small yard, next through the lower lobby—and thence into the grand enclosure of the King's Bench itself.

Captain O'Blunderbuss turned sharp round to the left, and stopped in admiration before a low building with a roof slanting down from the high wall against which it stood.

"There!" cried the gallant officer, in an ecstacy of enthusiasm: "what place should you be afther taking *that* to be?"

"Why—I should say it was the scullery or the coal-cellars," replied Frank.

"Be Jasus! me dear frind—and you're insulthing the finest fature in this fine prison," exclaimed the captain: "it's the coffee-house."

Mr. Curtis did not like to say how deeply he was disappointed at the unpromising exterior of an establishment which his companion seemed so especially to admire; and he therefore silently followed his guide into the coffee-room, which was just large enough to contain four very little tables and yield accommodation to about a dozen people at a time.

There was nearly that number present when Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis entered the place; and as there were not two seats disengaged, the gallant officer put his arms akimbo, fixed his eyes sternly on a stout, inoffensive-looking old gentleman, and, without positively addressing his words to him, exclaimed, "Be the holy poker-r! and I should advise some one to be afther making room on a binch for my frind and myself—or I'll know the rayson why!"

The inoffensive-looking gentleman shrank dismayed into a corner, and, two or three others pressing closer together, sufficient space was obtained to afford Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis seats; and the former, as he took his place at a table, cast a particularly ferocious glance around on the assembled company, as much as to say, "Be the power-rs! and ye'd betther not be afther having any of your nonsense with me!" But as no one at the moment seemed at all inclined to make even an attempt to interfere with the gallant gentleman, his countenance gradually lost its menacing aspect; and he ordered the waiter—a slip-shod, dirty boy—to bring a bottle of wine, spirits not being allowed.

The company presented to the view of Mr. Frank Curtis rather a motley aspect. There was a sample of nearly all kinds of social distinctions,—a sprig of the aristocracy—a broken-down sporting gentleman—a decayed tradesman—a bankrupt merchant—an insolvent parson—a ruined gamester—a prize-fighter—a horse-chaunter—an attorney, who had over-reached himself—a poor author—and one or two others who bore the vague and much misappropriated denomination of "gentleman." All these were herding together in a glorious state of democratic equality; for a debtors' prison goes far to level distinctions, the lordling being very often glad to obtain a draught of ale from the pewter-pot of a butcher.

The entrance of Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis, both of whom were taken for new prisoners and stared at accordingly, seemed to have interrupted a conversation that was previously going on;—and for a few minutes a dead silence prevailed. But at last, when the wine which the captain had ordered was brought in, and that gallant gentleman and Curtis gave evident proofs of an inclination to enjoy themselves by enquiring likewise for cigars, the company recovered the feeling of hilarity on which the awful appearance of O'Blunderbuss had seemed for a few minutes to throw a complete damper.

"Well, how did Jackson get on to-day at Portugal Street?" enquired a rakish, dissipated looking young gentleman, who was smoking a cigar and drinking a pint of Port-wine.

"He got sent back for six months," answered the person to whom the question was put, and who was a stout, big man, in very seedy attire. "It seems that his schedule was made up of accommodation bills, and the opposition was desperate."

"You talk of accommodation bills, Muggles," observed the young gentleman; "why, all my debts are in paper of that kind. There's

seventeen thousand pounds against me at the gate; and I'd take my affidavit that I never had more than three thousand in actual value. So I suppose I shall get it from the old Commissioner?"

"No, you won't, Pettifer, my boy," cried a short, elderly, dapper-looking man, putting down a quart pot in which his countenance had been buried for upwards of a minute before he began to speak; "your father's a lord—and that's enough," he added, looking mysteriously around.

"Well, so he is," said the Honourable Mr. Pettifer, lolling back in a very aristocratic manner, and speaking for the behoof of Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis; "it's true that my father is Lord Cobbleton, and that I'm his second son. But, after all—what's a nobleman's second son?"

"Be Jasus! and what indeed?" cried the captain. "Why, my grandfather was Archbishop of Dublin—and my father was his son—and I'm my father's son—and yet, be the power-rs! I'm only a capthain now! But if I hadn't half a million, or some thrifle of the kind locked up in Chancery, I should be afther rowlling in my carriage—although I do keep a buggy and a dog-cart, as it is—and my frind Curthis here, jintlemen, wouldn't be in the Binch for two hunthred thousand pounds, as he is and bad luck to it!"

"Well—but you know, captain," said Frank, who was determined not to be behind his gallant companion in the art of lying, and who therefore very readily took up the cue prepared for him,—"you know, captain, that the moment my god-father the Duke comes home, I shall be all right."

"Right!—right as a thrivet, me boy!" vociferated O'Blunderbuss; "and then we'll carry on the war-r-r with a vengeance."

These remarks on the part of the captain and Frank Curtis produced a deep impression upon the greater portion of the company present; but two or three of the oldest prisoners tipped each other the wink slyly, as much as to say, "Ain't they coming it strong?"—although they did not dare provoke the ire of the ferocious Hibernian by any overt display of their scepticism.

"Speaking of Chancery," said an old, miserable-looking man, in a wretchedly thread-bare suit of black, and whose care-worn countenance showed an intimate acquaintance with sorrow,—"speaking of Chancery," he repeated, leaning forward from the corner in which he had hitherto remained silent and almost unobserved,—"you can't know Chancery, sir—begging your pardon—better or more bitterly than I do."

"Ah! tell the gentlemen your story, Prout," exclaimed one of the company. "'Pon my soul 'tis a hard case, and a stain upon a civilised country.

"A stain!" ejaculated the old man, whose name appeared to be Prout;—"a stain!" he cried, in a tone of painful irony:—"it is a horror—an abomination—an atrocity that demands vengeance on those legislators who know that such abuses exist and who will not remedy them! Chancellors—Vice-Chancellors—Judges—Law-Lords—Members of Parliament—Attorney-Generals—Solicitor-Generals—all, all for the last two-and-twenty years, so help me God! have been familiar with my case—and yet the Court of Chancery remains as it is, the most tremendous abuse—the most damnable Inquisition—the most grinding, soul-crushing, heart-breaking engine of torture that the ingenuity of man ever yet invented! Yes—all that—and more—more, if I could find stronger language to express myself in—is that earthly reflection of hell—the Court of Chancery!"

The old man had spoken with a volubility which had increased in quickness and in emphasis until it positively grew painful to hear;—and his countenance became flushed with a hectic, unhealthy red—and his eyes, usually leaden and dull, were fired with an unnatural lustre—and his chest heaved convulsively—and his lips quivered with the dreadful excitement produced in his attenuated and worn-out frame by the remembrance of his wrongs.

Remembrance!—as if he ever forgot them! No—the Chancery Court was the subject of his thoughts by day and his dreams by night: every thing he heard, or saw, or read, was so tortured by his morbid imagination as to bear some analogy, remote or near, to the proceedings of the Chancery Court;—when he had a meal, he wondered that the Chancery Court had left it to him—and when he had none, he said that the Chancery Court made him starve;—if he felt in tolerably good health, it was because he heard of some case in Chancery even more flagrant than his own—and that was a consolation to his diseased mind; and if he felt ill which was nearly always the case, he declared that the Chancery Court made him so:—in fact, he was truly a victim, in every sense and way, of that tremendous tribunal which has instruments of torture far more terrible for the feelings than those which the Inquisition of Spain ever invented for the body!

"Yes," exclaimed Prout, after a few moments' pause, "and all that diabolical tyranny is carried on under the semblance and with the solemn forms of justice. You go into a fine court, where you see a man of splendid intellect, fine education, and profound knowledge, seated in a chair, with the wig and gown; and before him are rows of barristers almost as learned as himself. Well—would you not think that you were in a tribunal worthy of the civilisation of this country! Yet—better were it if savages from the South Sea Islands became your judges; better to die upon the threshold of that court, than enter its walls. It is a damnable and a cursed tyranny, I repeat; and the English are a weak—a pusillanimous—a spaniel-like race, that they do not rise in rebellion against that monstrous tribunal!"

Again he paused, overpowered by excitement:—but there was something terribly real and awfully sincere—aye, and sternly true—in that man's denunciations!

"Yes—I say," he resumed, after having refreshed himself from a pewter-pot near him—though there had been a time when he was accustomed to drink wine,—"the English people are a nation of paltry cowards for allowing this hideous Chancery Court to uprear its head amongst them. Did not the French destroy their Bastille?—and was the Bastille ever half so bad, in one way, as this Chancery Court is in another? It is all useless for two or three people to declaim, or two or three authors to write, against such a flagrant abuse. 'Tis a public grievance, and must be put down by the public hand! The whole body of lawyers are against law-reform—and the

profession of the law has vast influence upon both Houses of Parliament. From the Houses of Parliament, then, we have no hope: the strong hand of the people must do it. You might as well ask the Lords to abolish hereditary aristocracy, or the King to dethrone himself, as expect the Houses of Parliament to sweep away the Chancery Court."

"But could we do without it?" enquired an attentive listener.

"Do without it!" exclaimed Prout, indignantly—almost contemptuously, at the nature of the question: "certainly we can! France does without it—Holland does without it—Prussia does without it—Switzerland does without it—and the United States do without it;—and where is the law of property better administered than in those countries? There the transfer of land, or the bequeathing of other property, is as simple as that of merchandize or stock; but here—here, in England, which vaunts its freedom and its civilization, the process is encumbered with forms and deeds which leave the whole arrangement liable to flaws, difficulties, and endless embarrassments. Talk of Equity indeed! 'tis the most shameless mockery of justice ever known even amongst barbarians. But let me tell you an anecdote? In 1763, a suit was commenced in Chancery relative to some lawful property on which there was a windmill. The cause was not referred to the Master till 1796—thirty-three years having elapsed, and the lawyers, who had grown old during the proceedings, not having been idle. In the Master's office did the case remain till 1815—though the new lawyers who had succeeded the old batch that had died off in the meantime, were as active as the matter would allow them to be. Well—in 1815 the Master began to look into the business; but, behold! the windmill had disappeared—it had tumbled down—it had wasted away into dust—not a trace of it remained!" actually shrieked out the old man, in the excitement of his story.[44]

"Thus the affair was fifty-two years in Chancery, and was knocked on the head after all?" observed one of the company present.

"While Law slept, Time was awake and busy, you see," said Prout, with a bitter irony which actually chilled the hearts of his auditors. "But I can give you plenty of examples of the infernal—heart-breaking delays of Chancery—and my own amongst the rest presently," he continued. "There is the case of *Bute* versus *Stuart*: it began in 1793—and in 1813 *a step* was made in the cause![45] Then, again, you have the case of the *Attorney-General* versus *Trevelyan*: it commenced in 1685, and is an affair involving an endowment for a Grammar-School at Morpeth. This cause never will be finished![46] But how much property do you suppose there is locked up in Chancery—eh? Ah! now I am going to tell you something astounding indeed—and yet as true as the Gospel! *Thirty-eight millions sterling* are locked up in that dreadful tribunal. A tribunal!—no—it is a sepulchre—a tomb—a grave in which all justice and all hopes are interred! But you will say that this enormous fund is only as it were in temporary trust, to be in due time portioned out to its rightful owners. Pshaw!—nonsense! More than *one-third* concerns persons who are dead and have left no heirs, or else whose representatives are ignorant of their rights. The Suitors' Fund is a bank of plunder—of shameful, diabolical plunder effected under the *forms of the law*!"

"But what about your own case, old fellow?" enquired the Honourable Mr. Pettifer.

"I'll tell you in a moment, gentlemen," cried Prout, rejoiced to observe the interest created by his strictures on the most hellish tribunal that ever disgraced a civilised country. "Twenty-five years ago," he said, "I was a prosperous man, having a good business in the City; and I had managed to save four thousand pounds by dint of strict economy and the closest attention to my affairs. A lawyer—a friend of mine—told me of a favourable opportunity to place the sum out at good interest and on the best possible security. A gentleman, in fact, wanted to borrow just that amount on mortgage, he having a capital estate. The matter was fully investigated, and the security was considered unexceptionable. So I lent the money; and for three years the interest was regularly paid, and all went on well. The gentleman suddenly died; and his nephew, who inherited the estate, hunted out an old entail, effected a hundred and fifty years previously, and of the existence of such an entail no mention had been made in subsequent deeds. So the nephew would not acknowledge the validity of the mortgage, and refused to pay me a fraction of my four thousand pounds. He would not even settle the interest. I was therefore forced into Chancery; and seven years afterwards I got a decree in my favour, but I was sent into the Master's Office on account of certain details which I will not stop to explain to you. This was fifteen years ago—and I am still in Chancery! I have spent three thousand pounds in costs—and am totally ruined. The excitement and worry of law made me neglect my business: my affairs fell into confusion—my creditors took all my stock in trade—and here have I been eleven years for the balance of my liabilities. Twenty-two years have I been engaged in *law*—and have not yet got *justice*! And yet I am told that I live in a civilised country, where the laws are based on consummate wisdom, and where the meanest as well as the highest individual is sure to obtain justice. Justice indeed!—such justice as one finds in the Chancery Court! My original claim was for four thousand pounds—and I have spent three thousand in costs, and owe my lawyer five hundred pounds more. But what do you think of this? Eight years ago a *written question* was put by the Master to the respondent in the suit; and it is still a matter of dispute whether he is to answer it or not! Here's law for you—here's justice! Why—it is enough to make a man curse himself for belonging to a country in which such things take place: it is enough to make me ashamed of being an Englishman! Suppose a savage from the South Sea Islands came to England—beheld all the glitter and glory of our outward appearance of civilisation—studied our language, and was then told of such cases as these? What would he think. He would say, '*After all, you are in reality a very barbarous people; and I shall be glad when I get back to my own far-off island!*'"[47]

"As far as all this goes, you are right enough," observed an attorney, who was one of the company present: "but had you gone much farther, you would have been equally correct. You may denounce nearly all our laws and statutes to be radically bad and a disgrace to civilisation. But it is useless to hope that an efficient reform will be ever effected by the Parliament; because the Parliament is loth to interfere with existing usages, and is afraid to meddle with existing rights. Nothing short of a Revolution can possibly accomplish a proper change."

"Why—this is treason!" exclaimed the Honourable Mr. Pettifer, his aristocratic feelings deeply wounded by the lawyer's bold and manly declaration.

"It may be treason—but it is nevertheless the truth," said the attorney, with the cool firmness of a man entertaining an honest

conviction of the justice of his observations. "I declare most of our laws to be a disgrace and a shame. In France all the laws are contained in one book, accessible to every person: here, in this country, they are totally inaccessible to the community in general. Do you think France would ever have had her Code without a Revolution?[48] Do you know how silly, absurd, and contradictory are some of our statutes—those statutes which are approved of by the Law-Officers of the Crown, and enacted by wise senators? There is a statute, for example's sake,[49] which decrees that one half of the penalty inflicted in a particular case is to go to the informer, and the other half to the King. And yet under this statute Judges sentence men to transportation—say, fourteen years' transportation, to be halved by the informer and the King! Then there are statutes still upon the book, and which, though unrepealed, could scarcely be put into execution without inflicting an odious tyranny. A statute of Edward VI. forbids agricultural labourers to hire themselves out, or be hired, by the day, and not for less than a year. By a statute of William and Mary, no peasant may sell goods in a town, except at a fair; and a statute of Henry VII. decrees, under severe penalties, that no cattle shall be killed in a walled town, nor in Cambridge. There is also a statute, I forget of which reign, enacting that no shoemaker may be a tanner, nor a tanner a shoemaker. The laws relating to Marriage are in many respects absurd, and in others obscure. A marriage contracted by persons under age, by means of license, without the consent of their parents, is unlawful; but such persons may contract a lawful marriage by banns, although without the consent of their parents. Thousands and thousands of persons have been led to believe that it is lawful for a man to marry his deceased wife's sister; whereas it is *not lawful*, and the issue of such a marriage is illegitimate."

At this moment the learned gentleman was interrupted by the clanging of a loud bell, carried by a person who was proceeding round the main building of the prison, and who every now and then stopped ringing for the purpose of vociferating as loud as he could —"Strangers, women, and children, all out!"

"Shall you have to leave?" demanded Frank Curtis, in a whisper to his friend the captain.

"Divil a hap'orth of it, me boy!" exclaimed O'Blunderbuss. "The person who keeps the Coffee-house will be glad to give me a bed as well as yourself; for money, frind Cur-r-tis, procures everything in this blissed Spike-Island."

Another half-hour was passed in discourse on various topics, the inmates of the Coffee-house parlour having become wearied of commenting upon the laws of their country; and, at the expiration of that interval renewed shouts, now emanating from the immediate vicinity of the lower lobby, warned all strangers to quit the prison. At the same time the parlour was rapidly cleared, O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis alone remaining there:—for it seemed to be a rule on the part of the prisoners to rush to the gate, for the purpose of seeing the "strangers" take their departure.

The captain now gave a furious pull at the bell; and, when the slip-shod waiter appeared, he demanded a conference with the keeper of the Coffee-house. This request was speedily complied with; and satisfactory arrangements were entered into for beds. Another bottle of wine was ordered, the captain persuading Curtis that it would be better for him to take his first survey of all the grand features of the Bench in the morning, and to pass the evening in conviviality. This they accordingly did until eleven o'clock, when the lights in the parlour were put out, and the two gentlemen were shown to their respective bed-chambers—the said chambers being each about twice as big as a coffin, and quite as inconveniently angular.

44. The anecdote is a positive fact!

45. It is not terminated yet!

46. Mr. Prout's prophecy seems likely to be fulfilled; for the case pends yet, having now lasted *one hundred and sixty-two years*!!! In 1710 Lord Chancellor Harcourt made a decree commanding the boundaries of the litigated land to be ascertained; and the commissioner appointed to carry this decree into effect, reported that no boundaries could be traced! Proceedings continued; and on the 25th of January, 1846, the case was re-argued before Vice-chancellor Shadwell, eight counsel being engaged for relator, lessee, trustees, corporation, and the various other parties interested. The Vice-Chancellor of England referred the matter to the Master's Office, where it is not likely to be disinterred for the next half century! Really, we English are a highly civilised people: a law-suit may be perpetuated through a dozen generations, without any delay or fault on the side of the parties interested—*the whole and sole blame resting upon the Chancery Court*.

47. Mr. Commissioner Fane, of the London Bankruptcy Court, was brought up as a Chancery lawyer; and in a recent "Letter to Lord Cottenham" he thus explains the causes of that shameful dilatoriness which characterises Chancery proceedings:—

 "In Chancery the suitor applies first to the judge: every thing is done in writing. The judge, after great expense has been incurred and after a long delay, makes a decree: that decree tells the Master, in endless detail, what he is to do (just as if he required to be taught the simplest matters): the decree is drawn up, not by the judge, who might be thought wiser than the Master, but by the registrar, who, in teaching the Master, frequently omits some material direction; the parties then adjourn to the Master's office; there the matter lingers, month after month and year after year; at last the Master makes his report, tells the Court what he has found, and sometimes what he would have found if the registrar had authorised him to do so, and at last the Court either acts or sends the matter back to the Master with new directions. Meanwhile, as Lord Bacon said about two hundred years ago, 'Though the Chancery pace be slow, the suitor's pulse beat quick.' I know of nothing to which to compare this process except the game of battledore and shuttlecock, in which the poor suitor plays the part of shuttlecock, and is tossed from the judge to the Master, and from the Master to the judge, over and over, till the scene is closed only too often by despair, insolvency, or death."

48. "The *Code Napoleon* is sometimes declared to be a failure; but it has been no failure. In place of the previously differing laws of the provinces of the ancient kingdom it has substituted a consistent uniform code for the entire of France. But it is urged, that it

has been buried under a load of commentaries. Of course there has risen a pile of judicial constructions, as must be the case with the text of every code. But these constructions have a platform to rest upon, framed in the light of modern science. Ours are wholly different; they have no such foundation to settle upon: they rest upon a mingled heap of rubbish and masonry, of obsolete laws and laws in force. Even the basement storey has not been firmly laid, as in France. This, however, it is that the nation requires to have done; it requires an entirely new legal edifice to be erected. All that is good in the past it would have preserved under a new and better arrangement; and then the mass of statutes, reports, and text-books from which the analysis had been made, and which had long embarrassed both the learned and unlearned—declared by parliamentary authority to be no better than waste paper—null and void, and no more citable for any purpose of legal argument, illustration, or decision."—*Black Book of England.*

49. 53rd, George III.

CHAPTER CVI.
A FARTHER INSIGHT INTO THE KING'S BENCH.

At half-past seven o'clock on the following morning, the slip-shod waiter knocked at Mr. Curtis's door, exclaiming, "Please, sir, you must get up, and go down to the lobby by eight, 'cos you're wanted."

"Who want's me there?" demanded Frank, leaping from his bed, and suddenly animated by the hope that Sir Christopher had accidentally heard of his predicament and had come to pay his debts.

But the boy had hurried down stairs again; and Curtis was accordingly compelled to hurry over his toilette in a state of profound suspense. By the time his ablutions were performed and he was dressed, it was close upon eight o'clock; and he repaired to the gate, having bestowed *en passant* a thundering knock with his clenched fist on the door of the captain's crib.

The gate of the lower lobby was not as yet opened; but in its immediate vicinity several of the prisoners were collected—some in dressing-gowns, others in their shirt-sleeves, and all having a certain air of seediness not observable elsewhere. At length, when the massive portal *did* expand, in rushed a motley assortment of messengers, char-women, and such itinerant venders as milk-men, water-cress boys, and the fustian-clad individual who sold red herrings and shrimps.

When this influx of varied specimens of animated nature had passed, Frank Curtis entered the lobby and demanded of a one-armed turnkey standing before the fire, "who it was that required his presence?".

"Me and my partners, sir," was the reply.

"And what for?" enquired Frank.

"Just to take your likeness, sir," was the farther explanation given.

"My likeness!" cried the young gentleman, glancing rapidly around in the expectation of beholding an artist with pallet and brushes all ready; but, not perceiving any such individual, he began to look very ferocious indeed, under the impression that the turnkey had a mind to banter him.

"We call it taking the likeness of a new prisoner, sir," observed the one-armed functionary, who was really a very civil fellow, "when we have him here by day-light just to take a look at him—so that we may know him again," he added significantly. "You see, sir, there's between three and four hundred prisoners in the college—we call it a college, sir, sometimes—and it isn't a very easy thing to remember every new-comer, unless we have a good look at him."

"Oh! now I understand you," exclaimed Frank, laughing heartily at the idea of having his likeness taken in such a style.

While he was yet indulging in this expression of his mirth, the other turnkeys made their appearance, and, each individually wishing him a "good morning," they scanned him from head to foot—apparently committing to memory every one of his features *seriatim*. Frank tried to look as unconcerned as possible; but he nevertheless felt very uncomfortable, and was heartily glad when the operation, which lasted about five minutes, was over. The other turnkeys then withdrew; and Curtis remained alone with the one-armed official.

"Nice place this, sir, for a prison—ain't it?" asked the latter, taking his seat on a stool near the door, which stood open, and whence the eye commanded a view of the spacious racquet-ground and a small portion of the main building.

"Well—it might be a great deal worse," replied Frank. "You must have some strange characters here?" he added, enquiringly.

"I b'lieve ye!" exclaimed the turnkey, fixing his looks mysteriously upon the young gentleman in a species of dim intimation that it was indeed a very remarkable place. "You see that old feller in the rugged blue coat, a-rolling the fust racquet-ground there? Well—he come here to this prison twenty year ago in his carriage, and had his livery servants to wait upon him; and now he's glad to drag that roller every morning for a few pence."

"And can't he manage to get out?" asked Frank, with an ominous shudder.

"Lord bless you, sir," cried the turnkey, "he's his own prisoner!"

"His own prisoner!" repeated Curtis. "What—do you mean to say that he keeps himself in the Bench?"

"I do, sir—and a many does the same," continued the turnkey, in a low, mysterious tone. "These poor creaturs, sir, stay in prison so long that all their relations and friends dies off; and if they went out, they wouldn't have a soul to speak to, or a place to go to. So, if their creditors dies too and their discharge is sent 'em, they keep it in their pockets and never lodge it at the gate—'cos they prefer staying inside, where they have companions and can get a bit of something to eat in one way or another."

"This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life," said Frank.

"There's many things more stranger still *here*," returned his informant, who was pleased with the mysterious importance which his position as narrator of these marvels gave him. "What should you think of men putting themselves into prison, and making up their minds to stay here all their lives perhaps?"

"I should think you were joking if you said so," answered Curtis.

"Joking! Lord bless you, sir, I wouldn't joke about no such a thing," exclaimed the turnkey, with a spice of indignation in his manner. "But I'll tell you how it is. There—you see that stout man in the shooting-jacket a-bargaining for them bloaters with the chap that's sitting on the bench outside the Tap? Well—he committed a forgery, or summut of that kind; and, knowing there was a warrant against him, and not choosing to run away from London for fear of being took in the country, he got a friend to arrest him for debt. So he immediately passed over to the Bench by *habeas*; and the warrant for felony was lodged at the gate against him. But his debts must be paid before the warrant can be executed; and as you see he's in a manner his own detaining creditor—leastways, his friend outside is—he isn't likely to have his discharge till the felony business can be settled somehow or other."

"The Bench is then a most convenient place for people who ought to be in Newgate?" said Curtis. "But live and learn; and the more one sees of the world——"

"The more curiouser it is—ain't it?" cried the turnkey. "Well—now you see that tall, stout gentleman there, walking up and down in front of the State House with the stick in his hand? He's been here some years, and is wery likely to stay a many years longer. His creditors allows him three guineas a week for his kindness in remaining a prisoner in the Bench."

"What!" ejaculated Curtis, now more astonished than ever. "His *creditors* pay him for staying *here*!"

"It's as true as you're alive, sir," was the reply; "and it's easy enough to explain, too. That gentleman has got a good landed estate, which is in the hands of his two or three principal creditors, who manage it and receive all the rents for the purpose of paying themselves their claims upon him. Well, now—if he went through the Insolvents' Court, *all* the creditors would come in for their share of the proceeds of the estate; and so the two or three principals ones allow him three guineas a week to keep him here and prevent him going through the Court. It's a deuced good thing for him, I can tell you; and he's as happy as a King. He has his wife—leastways, his lady with him,—we call 'em all *wives* here;—and he's got a batch of the loveliest and nicest children you ever see. There they are, sir—the little innocents—a-playing there in the mud, just as if there wasn't no such place as prison at all; and yet they was all born up in that room there in the State House, with the green safe at the window and the flower-pots."

"And who is that lame, elderly man, running about with newspapers in his hand?" enquired Frank.

"He's the newsman of the Bench—and a prisoner like the rest on 'em," was the answer. "Ah! some years ago he was a rich man, and in a flourishing way of business. But he got into Chancery, and that's the same as getting into the Bench; 'cos one always leads to t'other—for even to be a vinner in Chancery, one must pass at least a dozen years or so here fust. That seems to be the rule, as far as I can understand it. Well, sir—now that lame man is obliged to turn newsman; so you see there's a many rewerses in this world, sir. Ah! the world's a queer place, ain't it?—almost as queer as the Bench itself!"

What the turnkey's notions of the world might be, it is not easy to conceive: but they were evidently somewhat dim and misty—inasmuch as he seemed impressed with the belief that the Bench and the world were two distinct places:—but, then, the Bench was *his* world, though not a prisoner there himself; and perhaps he established a distinction as existing between the "world within" and the "world without." Alas! many—many who *were* prisoners did the same!

"Who are those two ladies that have just come down to walk on the gravel there, by the side of the racquet-ground?" enquired Frank Curtis, much amused by the turnkey's gossip.

"We call that gravel-walk *the parade*," observed the official. "Those ladies are mother and daughter; and it's the daughter that's a prisoner. She's a devilish fine gal; and the old woman stays with her to take care of her. But she and the Honourable Mr. Pettifer are deuced thick together; and the mother winks at it. Such things will happen in the best regilated families—particklerly in the Bench, where no one ain't over and above partickler. This isn't the shop for morals. Mr. Curtis: all the young single women that comes here, is sure to get corrupted. But that's no look-out of mine;"—and with this solacing conclusion, the turnkey hit the lock of the door a tremendous blow with his key.

"Be the power-rs! and is it afther staling a march upon me that ye are?" vociferated a well-known voice at this moment; and the captain stalked up to the gate, looking quite fresh and blooming after a good night's rest and copious ablutions.

"They had me down to take my likeness," cried Frank; "or else I dare say I should have slept on till now."

"Well—we'll just make the round of the Binch, me boy," exclaimed the captain; "and by that time the breakfast will be ready. I've orthered it—hot rolls and coffee, with kidneys, eggs, cresses, and such like thrifles; and a walk will give us an appetite."

Curtis accordingly took his friend's arm; and they set out on their limited ramble.

"That building on your right, Frank," said the captain, "is the State House, where Government prisoners and such like spalpeens are kept—or ought to be; but the prisoners for debt get hould of the rooms there, and the divil himself can't turn 'em out. But here's the Tap: and this is the first lion of the Binch."

They entered a low and dirty-looking place, in which there were several common tables of the roughest description, and the surfaces of which were completely carved out into names, initial letters, men hanging, and a variety of devices—these ingenious and very elaborate specimens of wood-engraving having been effected by penknives. A tremendous fire burnt in the grate, round which were assembled several of the poorer class of prisoners and the messengers, eating their breakfast;—and, at one of the tables just alluded to, the newsman was sorting his papers.

As the captain and Curtis were retracing their way from an inspection of the interior of the tap-room, the former stopped at the bar, exclaiming to the man in attendance, "Two half pints, Misther Vernon—and good mornin' to ye."

"You would not drink malt liquor so early, will you?" asked Frank, with a look of astonishment at his companion.

"Be Jasus! and it's for you to taste the porther, me boy!" exclaimed the captain. "Don't you remimber all I said yesterday in its praise? Come—dhrink!"

And Mr. Curtis was accordingly compelled to swallow half a pint of porter, though malt liquor before breakfast was somewhat repugnant to his taste. The beer was veritably of first-rate quality; and the captain was as proud to hear the young gentleman's eulogy on its merits, as if he had brewed it himself.

"Now let us continue our ramble," said he;—and away they went, arm-in-arm, the two or three poor prisoners who were lounging at the door of the Tap respectfully making room for them to pass.

Entering upon the parade, Frank now for the first time obtained a full view of the front of the main building—a long, gloomy, barrack-like structure, with half a dozen entrance-ways leading to the various staircases. Fixed to the ledges of many of the windows, were safes in which the prisoners kept their provisions; and in several instances these safes were covered with flower-pots containing sickly plants. Precisely in the centre of the building was the chapel; and over the chapel was the infirmary. Most of the rooms on the ground-floor were fitted up as little shops, the occupants being prisoners, and the business carried on being entirely in the "general line." The lumps of butter—wedges of cheese—red herrings—slices of bacon—matches—balls of twine—candles—racquet balls—sweet-stuff—loaves of bread—rolls—soap—eggs—and other articles of the nature usually sold in such magnificent marts of commerce, were arranged so as to make the best possible show, and carry out the spirit of competition which raged as fiercely in that little community as in the world without. A peep through the window of one of those miniature shops, showed the canisters of tea and the jars of tobacco and snuff standing orderly upon the shelves of three feet in length; and behind a counter, along which Tom Thumb could have walked in two strides, stood the stout proprietor of the concern, examining with rueful looks the wonderful increase of chalk-marks which the morning's sales had compelled him to make upon a slate against the honoured names of his customers.

"Now look this way, me frind," cried the captain, as he forced Frank to turn round towards the racquet-courts. "D'ye see nothing particular?"

"Nothing but the high wall, with the spikes on the top, and the netting to prevent the balls from going over," answered Curtis.

"There—there, me boy!" vociferated O'Blunderbuss, impatiently pointing in a particular direction. "Now d'ye see any thing worth looking at?"

"Well—I see the pump there," said Frank, vainly searching after a more interesting object.

"Be Jasus! and that's jist what I wanted ye to see," exclaimed the captain. "It's the Dolphin-pump, me boy—the finest pump in Eur-r-rope—the pride of the Binch——But, be the power-rs! ye shall taste the wather and judge for yourself!"

Curtis protested that he would rather not;—the captain was however resolute; and a tumbler was borrowed from a prisoner who was smoking an early pipe at one of the ground-floor windows. Then the captain began to pump away like a madman; and Frank was compelled to imbibe a deep draught of the ice-cold water, which would have been pronounced delicious by any one who did not admire alcoholic beverages much better than Adam's ale.

"Don't you mean to take a glass, captain?" enquired Frank.

"Be Jasus! and I know it of ould," returned that gallant gentleman: "so there's no need for me to pass an opinion upon it. Besides it's not to astonish my stomach with any unusual dhrink that I'd be afther, Frank: but you're a young man, and can stand wather better than me."

Curtis did not consider the reasoning altogether conclusive: he however refrained from farther argument;—and the two gentlemen resumed their walk.

Between the eastern extremity of the main-building and that part of the wall which looked directly upon the Borough, was the market-place,—an assemblage of miserable sheds, where a butcher, a fishmonger, a greengrocer, and a vender of coals carried on each his peculiar traffic—the said spirited traders being prisoners as well as the shopkeepers above alluded to.

At a stall in the centre of the market, and at which vegetables, fruit, and fish were sold, stood a tall, thin, weather-beaten old woman, resembling a gipsey in dress as well as in complexion, and having an ancient bonnet perched most airily upon the top of her head. This respectable female was denominated "Old Nanny," and was in such wise greeted by Captain O'Blunderbuss, who informed Frank in a whisper that she was not a prisoner, and, in spite of competition, had pretty well the monopoly of the market.

"The fact is, me boy," he said, "she has the advantage of money. Those fellows in the sheds there, set up in business with a floating capital of eighteen-pence each, and can't afford to give credit: and a tradesman in the Binch who can't give credit, stands no more chance, be Jasus! of getting custom than if he began with an empty shop."

The captain now proceeded to show his friend the public kitchen, which was in the immediate vicinity of the market; and thence they passed up the back of the main building, O'Blunderbuss especially directing Frank's attention to that quarter which was denominated "the Poor-Side."

The Poor-Side!—Yes in every public establishment in England, is the line of demarcation drawn between the rich and the poor,—in the debtors' prison as well as in the church of God! Oh! what a disgraceful thing is poverty made in this country! Why—the contamination of Newgate, if borne by a man possessing a well-filled purse, will be overlooked in society; while the rags that an unsullied character

wears, are a ban—a stigma—a reproach! "He has been in the workhouse," or "She has been on the parish," are taunts as bitter in meaning and as keen in spirit, as the phrase "He has been in Newgate," or "She has just come from the treadmill." Aye—and even amongst the lowest classes themselves, it is a deeper stain to associate a name with the workhouse, than to connect it with the felons' gaol! Such is the dreadful—demoralizing consequence of that example set by the upper classes, whose ideas of men's excellence and worth are guided chiefly by the standard of the purse.

The Poor-Side!—And for whom is the Poor-Side of debtors' prisons instituted? For those who go penniless to gaol,—the best proof that they have profited nothing by the losses of their creditors,—the best evidence that their liabilities were legitimately contracted! But the fashionable swindler—your man-about-town—your *roué*—your rake, who gets into debt wherever he can, and without the slightest intention of ever paying a single farthing,—*he* drives down in his cab to the prison—treats the bailiff to wine upon the way—and takes with him into confinement all that remains to him of the plunder of duped tradesmen, there to spend it in riotous living and in the best room which the best quarter of the gaol can afford! If a debtors' prison have a *Poor-Side*, it ought also to have a *Swnidlers'-Side*.

No word in the English language is used so frequently and so contemptuously as the monosyllable *Poor*. "Oh! he is a poor devil!" is a far worse character to give of any one, than to say at once, "He is dishonest." From the latter sentence there is a hopeful appeal in the question—"But *can* he pay?" "Yes—he can, if he chooses." "Oh! then, if he *can*, we will trust him and risk it." But from the former sentence there is no appeal; it is a judgment without qualification—a decision too positive and weighty to admit of a doubt. The objection—"Well, he may be poor; but he may also be honest," is never heard. The idea of poverty being honest! Why—in the estimation of an Englishman, *poverty* is a word expressing all that is bad. To say that a man is *poor*, is at once to sum up his character as every thing unprincipled and roguish. Such magic is there in the word, that rich men, and men well-to-do in the world, instantly button up their breeches' pockets when they hear it applied to a person. They seem to consider that a poor wretch can have no other possible object in view than to get the better of them. Poverty, in their eyes, is something that goes about preying upon the rich—something to be loathed and shunned—something that ought not to intrude itself into respectable places. A man may just as well be leprous, as be poor!

So undeniable are these truths—so universally recognised are these facts, that designing individuals always endeavour to seem well off, even if they be insolvent. They dress well, because they know the sovereign influence of a good coat. They talk largely—because they see how necessary it is "to keep up appearances." They toss about their last few guineas, as the only means of baiting a hook to catch fresh dupes. It is impossible that a man, with fine clothes, well-polished boots, elegant guard-chain, and lemon coloured gloves,—it is impossible that such a man can be poor! Oh! no—trust him with anything! Why—what poor man would be perfumed as he is?—the aristocratic odour of wealth surrounds him as with an atmosphere peculiar to the rich. Trust him by all means!—But that poor-looking devil, who sneaks along the shady side of the way—who has a wife and half-a-dozen children at home—and who is struggling from morning to night to earn an honourable crust,—don't trust him—have nothing to do with him—don't assist him with the loan of a single sixpence—on the contrary, give him a thrust farther down into the mud, if you can;—because he is undisguisedly *poor*!

Such appear to be the rules of conduct in this enlightened and glorious country. God help the poor!—for poverty is a terrible crime in "merry England!"

The Poor-Side of the King's Bench struck Frank Curtis as being particularly miserable:—it quite gave him the horrors! And no wonder;—for the architect—a knowing fellow was he!—had so arranged the building, that the windows of the Poor-Side should look upon the dust-bins and the conveniences. Yes—a knowing fellow was that architect! *He* understood what the poor are worth in this free and civilised land,—*he* saw in a moment where they ought to be put;—and therefore he arranged for their use a number of dens where the atmosphere was certain to be one incessant pestilential odour; and where he would have been sorry,—very sorry to have placed the kennel of his favourite hound!

Yes:—well might Frank Curtis feel the horrors—callous and indifferent as the young man naturally was—on beholding the Poor-Side. The ground-floor rooms were even at mid-day in a state of twilight, the colossal wall being only a few feet distant:—the windows were blackened with dirt; and from the upper ones hung a few rags—the miserable duds of the miserable, miserable inmates. Half-starved, pale, and emaciated women—the wives or daughters of those poor prisoners—were loitering at the doorways,—some with children in their arms—children, Oh! so wan and wasted—so sickly and so death-like—that it must have made their parents' hearts bleed to feel how light they were, and how famine-struck they seemed! And yet those little, starving children had their innocent winning ways, as well as the offspring of the rich; and they threw their skeleton arms around their mother's necks—and their lips sent forth those infantile sounds so sweet to mothers' ears;—but still the little beings seemed to be pining rapidly away through actual want and in the prison atmosphere! "God help the poor," we said ere now: but, Oh! with tearful eyes and beating heart do we exclaim—"God help the children of the poor!"

Frank Curtis and the captain, having now completed their walk round the prison, entered the parlour of the Coffee-house, where an excellent breakfast awaited them, and to which they did ample justice.

The repast being disposed of, Captain O'Blunderbuss took a temporary leave of Frank Curtis, it being arranged that the gallant officer should proceed to Baker Street in order to induce the men in possession, either by means of bribes or menaces, to allow Mrs. Curtis to remove as many valuables from the house as possible; and, this notable aim being achieved, the captain was to pay his respects to Sir Christopher Blunt.

Frank Curtis, being now temporarily thrown upon his own resources for amusement, strolled out upon the parade, and was gazing at the racquet-players, when Mr. Prout accosted him.

"Good morning, sir. Have you taken a survey of the Bench yet?" said the Chancery prisoner.

"I have been round the building, and seen all that's worth seeing, I believe," replied Curtis. "But the Poor-Side appears to be a wretched

place."

"Wretched!" cried Prout, in a bitter tone: "ah! you may well make that observation, sir! But if my affairs do not end in a speedy settlement, I shall have to move to that quarter myself."

"How is that?" enquired Frank.

"Do you not know—have you not yet learned that you must pay even to have a room in this prison—a place to which you do not come of your own accord?" said Prout. "A shilling a week is the room-rent; and he who cannot pay it, must go over to the Poor-Side. This is English justice, Mr. Curtis! You must pay to live in a prison!"

"It seems to me monstrously unfair——"

"Unfair! 'tis vile—rascally!" cried the Chancery prisoner. "But, talking of the Poor-Side puts me in mind of a strange story connected with that quarter of the Bench; and if you have nothing better to do for an hour or so, and will step up to my room——"

"I shall have great pleasure," interrupted Curtis; "for, to tell you the truth, the time does hang rather heavy on my hands;—and till my friends the Marquis of Aldersgate and the Prince of Paris, who is staying in London, come over to see me, I may just as well amuse myself with your story."

Prout accordingly led the way to his room, which was in the front of the building and commanded a view of the parade and racquet-grounds. It was very plainly furnished, but neat and clean; and its owner informed Curtis that he had a married daughter who visited him every day, was very kind to him, and superintended his little domestic concerns.

"But I will not detain you longer than I can help, sir," observed Prout; "and I can promise you that you are about to hear a true tale of deep interest. I have thought of it so often, and have so frequently repeated its details to myself, in the solitude of this chamber, that I am enabled to give you the whole story in a connected form; although it was not in the same continuous manner that the vicissitudes I am about to relate, became known to me. Alas! 'tis a sad—sad tale, sir; but I am afraid that, bad as it is, it still is not the worst that might be told of human nature."

Frank Curtis seated himself opposite to the old man, who, after a short pause, commenced his narrative in the following words.

CHAPTER CVII.
A TALE OF SORROW.

"It was about thirty years ago that a poor but respectable and kind-hearted tradesman, of the name of Craddock, came up from Plymouth to London to receive a hundred pounds which had fallen to him through the death of a relative of whom he had not heard for years until he received the lawyer's letter announcing his decease and the legacy. Craddock was a linen-draper in a very small way at Plymouth: and though industrious, temperate, and obliging, he never had succeeded in doing any thing better than earning a mere living. He was about forty-five years of age at the time of which I am speaking, and had long been married to a woman as generous-souled as himself. They were childless; and, in spite of their poverty, they often regretted that they had no offspring to become the object of their affection, and to comfort them when old age should overtake them. Indeed, it appears that they had seriously thought of adopting some poor person's child: but circumstances of various kinds had opposed this plan; and they at last ceased to converse upon it—endeavouring to render themselves as happy as they could in each other's society. And happy, for that matter, they were too; for the mutual attachment which linked their hearts together, was firmly established; and, as they advanced in years, they seemed to become so necessary to each other, that when Craddock received the lawyer's letter summoning him to London, it was with the greatest difficulty his wife would allow him to set out alone. He however succeeded in making her understand that a hundred pounds did not constitute an independent fortune,—that it was absolutely necessary to carry on the shop,—and that therefore she must remain at home to manage it. Accordingly, the worthy dame tarried at Plymouth, and her husband came up to London by the stage—at that period a journey of no inconsiderable importance.

"It was the first time Mr. Craddock had ever been in the metropolis: but he did not stay a moment longer than his business absolutely compelled him, which was four or five days. The lawyer with whom he had to transact his little affair, was a kind and conscientious man—for there *are* many good lawyers as well as bad ones;—and he hastened the business as much as possible. Accordingly, Mr. Craddock received his money in less than a week; and he instantly went to the Belle Sauvage on Ludgate Hill to take his place home again by the coach. There was only one inside-seat vacant by the stage that was to start in the evening; and Craddock secured it. He then returned to the little lodging where he had slept during his sojourn in London, and which was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons. Having packed up his portmanteau, he shouldered it, and was wending his way to the Belle Sauvage, when his attention was drawn to a little boy who was sitting on a door-step in one of the narrow, secluded streets in that district. The child, who was very neatly dressed and about two years old, was crying bitterly. Craddock stopped and spoke kindly to him; and though the boy was too young to give any explanation of the cause of his grief, it was easy to divine that he had strayed from home, or been lost by a negligent servant. Two or three other persons stopped likewise; and some of the neighbours came out of their houses: but the boy was unknown to them. Craddock tried to console him; but the little fellow wept as if his heart would break. By accident the parish-beadle passed that way, and, on learning what was the matter, said, 'Oh! the best thing I can do, is to take the poor child to the workhouse.'—Now, the mere name of a workhouse was terrible to the ears of the kind-hearted Craddock; and, obeying the impulse of the moment, he exclaimed, 'No, no: not while I have a crust to give him, poor child!'—'Why don't you take him home with you, then?' demanded the beadle: 'the parish will be very glad to be quit of such a bargain as a lost child promises to be.'—'But I live at Plymouth,' returned honest John Craddock.—'Never mind if you live at the devil, so as you agree to take the child,' persisted the parochial authority.—'Well, I have not the least objection: on the contrary, I shall be delighted to do so,' said Craddock, his eyes filling with tears as the poor boy's grief became more heart-rending. 'I will give you my address; and if you hear any enquiries made by the parents of the child, you can let me know.'—'Very good,' exclaimed the beadle, as he received the card on which John Craddock's name, calling, and abode were printed in bold type. The worthy linen-draper then took up the boy in his arms, the beadle consenting to carry the portmanteau; and in this manner they proceeded to the Belle Sauvage, the kind looks, soothing tone, and fond caresses of Craddock having the effect of somewhat diminishing the little fellow's grief.

"The coach was just ready to start; and Craddock took his place, with the child upon his knees. The beadle renewed his promise to write in case he should hear any thing relative to the boy's parents; and the stage rolled out of the old inn yard. It was evening—the shops glared with light; and the scene, as well as the ride in the coach, amused the boy, so that his violent weeping ceased—but frequent sobs agitated his little chest, until at last he fell asleep in worthy John Craddock's arms. It was now for the first time that the linen-draper had leisure to reflect upon the step which he had taken; and it struck him that he had acted imprudently. He was taking away the child from the city to which he most probably belonged, and where he was alone likely to be found by his parents,—taking him away to a far distant town. But, on the other hand, he remembered the beadle's declaration that the lost child must be conveyed to the workhouse; and he likewise felt certain that should the little creature's parents make proper enquiries concerning their child, the parochial authority would know what explanation to give. Craddock therefore came to the conclusion that he had performed a Christian deed and an Englishman's duty; and, having thus set all scruples at rest, he began to reflect upon the pleasure which his wife would experience in receiving the foundling. For the child was a most interesting one—with curly flaxen hair, sparkling blue eyes, and a sweet complexion; and as he lay sleeping in Craddock's arms, and the lights of the shops in the outskirts of London, which the coach

was then traversing, beamed through the window upon the boy's countenance, the worthy linen-draper thought that he had never seen a face so truly cherub-like. But tears came afresh into the worthy man's eyes—for he reflected that an afflicted father and a distracted mother might at that moment be calling upon heaven to restore them their lost child; and, as he bent down and kissed its cool and firm cheeks, on which the traces of weeping still remained, he murmured to himself, 'If thy parents never succeed in recovering thee, my boy, I will be as a father, and I know that my wife will be as a mother to thee!'—The other inside passengers admired the child greatly; but when honest John Craddock told them the story connected with his possession of the boy, they merely hem'd and coughed drily as if they thought him a very great fool for so burthening himself. Craddock understood what was passing in their minds; and he only hugged the child closer to his bosom.

"During the night, the little fellow frequently awoke, and cried for his papa and mamma; and the good linen-draper was indefatigable in his exertions to console and comfort him—uttering all possible kind things, and purchasing nice cakes for him at the way-side inns. Throughout the following day, too, Craddock was compelled to persevere in this affectionate and conciliatory treatment, which he, however, maintained with a good heart; and as the long, tedious journey of two hundred and sixteen miles drew towards a close, and evening was again drawing on, he had the satisfaction of observing that his little charge seemed to appreciate—or at least to understand his attentions. At last the coach entered the famous sea-port; and in a very short time Craddock was set down at his own door, the stage passing through the street in which he lived. You may suppose that his wife was greatly astonished when she perceived the present that the worthy linen-draper had brought her: but she was not many moments before she took the child in her arms, and covered it with kisses. Then how the kind-hearted dame wept when Craddock explained to her the manner in which he had become possessed of the boy; and as he spoke she pressed the little being all the closer and all the more fondly to her bosom. The social tea-table was spread, and the servant-girl was sent out to procure some cakes and other nice things for the boy; and then how he was petted and made much of—and how happy the good couple seemed when their attentions and caresses were rewarded with smiles!

"Several days passed, during which Craddock received no intelligence from the beadle who had promised to write to him in case of enquiries being instituted respecting the lost child:—weeks elapsed—and still no tidings! The idea—I had almost said the fear—which the worthy couple entertained that they might be compelled to part with the child just as they were getting fond of it, grew gradually fainter and fainter; and at length, when six months had passed and little Alexander (for so they called the boy) had grown not only reconciled to his condition, but appeared to have forgotten that it had ever been otherwise,—by the time six months had passed, I say, Mr. and Mrs. Craddock ceased to contemplate even the chance of being called upon to surrender their charge. Not but that those excellent people would have rejoiced, in one sense, to restore little Alexander to the arms of his parents; but in another sense they could not quench in their secret souls the fond hope that he might be left undisturbedly in their care. Thus time passed on: Craddock's business, which had only required a little capital to give it an impetus, exhibited every sign of improvement since the investment therein of the hundred pounds received in London; and Alexander throve apace.

"I shall now take a leap of twenty years, which brings us up to a date of only ten years ago; and at that time great alterations—but all for the better—had taken place in the circumstances of the Craddocks. Indeed, they had retired from business, having made a considerable fortune; and were settled in a handsome dwelling at a short distance from Plymouth—their native town. Craddock and his wife had, however, descended tolerably far into the vale of life, sixty-five winters having passed over their heads; but in Alexander—now a fine, tall, handsome young man of twenty-two—they had a source of real comfort and happiness. Though acquainted with the circumstance which had led to his adoption by Mr. and Mrs. Craddock, and, therefore, knowing well that they were not his real parents, his attachment to them was so great—his affection so sincere—and his gratitude so boundless, that he never once manifested any desire to quit them for the purpose of instituting enquiries relative to his birth. His constant and unwearied endeavour was to show himself deserving of all they had done for him,—the tender care they had taken of him in his infancy—the excellent education they had given him in his boyhood—and the affectionate consideration with which they treated him now that he was grown to man's estate; for in all respects did they regard him as their son, and in this light was he looked upon by their friends and dependants. In fact, nothing was wanting to complete the happiness of Alexander Craddock. He had become enamoured of a beautiful girl, the orphan daughter of an officer in the Navy, and who resided at Plymouth with an old aunt. Lucy Middleton had no fortune; but she possessed the invaluable treasures of amiability of disposition—a sweet temper—a kind heart—and those sterling qualities which fitted her for domesticity, and gave promise that she would prove an admirable housewife. Alexander loved her, and was loved in return; and his adopted parents gave their consent to the match. Accordingly, one fine Spring morning, when the heavens appeared as auspicious as the prospects of the youthful pair, the hands of Alexander Craddock and Lucy Middleton were united; and, after a six weeks' tour in Wales, they returned to Plymouth to take possession of a commodious and handsome dwelling, which the adopted father of the young man had furnished during their absence for their reception. A year passed away, at the expiration of which Lucy presented her husband with a lovely boy; but almost at the same time the family experienced a severe loss in the death of old Mr. Craddock, who was carried off in a moment by the lightning-stroke of apoplexy. Alexander was dreadfully grieved at this shocking occurrence—a feeling in which his excellent young wife largely shared; but they were compelled to restrain their sorrow as much as possible, in order to console the bereaved widow. Mrs. Craddock was, however, unable to bear up against this heavy affliction: the suddenness of its arrival and the awful manner in which her husband fell down dead at her feet, when as it were in the midst of a state of perfect health, gave her a shock which she never recovered. She was spirit-broken, and could not rally, in spite of the tender devotion and unwearied attentions shown her by Alexander and Lucy, as well as by the aunt of the latter. Thus was it that in less than six weeks from the sudden demise of Mr. Craddock, his affectionate relict was consigned to the same tomb which held his remains.

"When Alexander had so far recovered himself, after experiencing these cruel inroads upon his happiness, as to investigate the affairs of his late adopted parents, he found that he was left sole heir to the handsome fortune acquired by their honest industry: but, though the will and other papers were strictly correct and accurate in all points, he found that certain circumstances connected with his inheritance would compel him to repair to London, and probably retain him in the capital for some weeks. He was not sorry at the idea of quitting Plymouth for a time, his spirits having been deeply affected by the deaths of his adopted parents; and he found Lucy and her

aunt, who now lived altogether with them, perfectly agreeable to shift their place of abode. It was accordingly about eight years ago that this family arrived in London, and took a house in a genteel but quiet neighbourhood. Alexander found his income, chiefly derived from funded property, to be seven hundred a-year; and on this he knew that he could live well, but not extravagantly. A natural curiosity—which was the more lively now that he had lost his adopted parents—prompted him to make certain enquiries in the district of Doctors' Commons, with the hope of solving the mystery of his birth. The only intelligence he gleaned, was, that the beadle who figured in the opening of the tale, had been dead just twenty-two years; and as Alexander was now twenty-four, he could calculate pretty accurately that the parochial authority alluded to must have been carried off by the hand of the destroyer within a few weeks, if not within even a very few days, from the date when he himself, as a young child, had fallen into the charge of Craddock. Beyond this fact Alexander could ascertain nothing at all calculated to assist in rolling away the veil of mystery which covered his parentage: none of the inhabitants in the street where Craddock had found him sitting on the door-step, remembered any thing of the loss of a child at the period named;—no tradition of the fact remained. Alexander felt somewhat disappointed with these unsuccessful results of his enquiries; but he possessed too many elements of happiness—too many substantial accessories to comfort and mental tranquillity—to remain long affected or dispirited by the apparent permanence of that mystery which enveloped his birth.

"Alexander was naturally of an active disposition, and abhorred a life of idleness. He had been married two years, and was the father of two children; and contemplating the probability of having a numerous offspring, he felt anxious to augment his worldly possessions. 'My adopted father,' he would reason with himself, 'carried on business until a late period of his life, and was happy in the occupation which it afforded him. Why should not I embark in some eligible and safe undertaking which will give me a few hours' employment every day and yield a profit at the same time?' The subject of his musings was communicated to his amiable wife and her aunt; and those ladies joyfully encouraged a spirit so praiseworthy and so indicative of steadiness and prudence. The matter had been under discussion one morning at the breakfast-table, when the daily newspaper was brought in; and an announcement, worded somewhat in this way, met Alexander's eyes:—'ELIGIBLE INVESTMENT.—Any gentleman having a few thousand pounds at his immediate disposal, and desirous to occupy a few leisure hours each day in a highly respectable and advantageous manner, is requested to apply to Edward Walkden, Solicitor, Bush Lane, Cannon Street.'—Alexander read this advertisement aloud; and the ladies agreed with him that the nature of it was tempting enough to prompt farther enquiry. Accordingly, the young man proceeded in the course of the morning to the address indicated, and found Mr. Walkden's establishment to be large and having every appearance of respectability as well as solidity. Half-a-dozen clerks were busily employed in the front office; and the shelves were covered with japanned tin cases, containing the papers of the most substantial clients. Upon being introduced into the lawyer's private office, Alexander found himself in the presence of a tall man, whose years were upwards of sixty, and whose countenance, once handsome, wore an expression of mingled mournfulness and severity. He was attired in a plain suit of black: his manners were cold and reserved; but there was a business-like air about him and his office, which augmented the good opinion already entertained by Alexander in respect to the lawyer and his establishment.

"Walkden was evidently a man of very few words; and therefore, when Alexander had explained the object of his visit, the information he sought was speedily given. 'I have a client,' said the lawyer, 'who has taken out a patent for a particular purpose; and he requires five or six thousand pounds to work it effectually. The person advancing the amount, will become an equal partner with the patentee, and will find a few hours of pleasant and agreeable occupation daily in superintending the commercial branch of the concern, while the patentee directs the manufacture of the article. There are the papers, sir: take them with you, and read them at your leisure.' Walkden handed the young man a bundle of documents tied round with red tape, and then bowed him out of the office. On his return home, Alexander examined the papers, and was highly delighted with the prospect which they opened to him. He felt convinced that an immense fortune was to be made: the thing was as clear as day-light! The patentee possessed the secret of effecting vast improvements in the manufacture of broad-cloths, which he undertook to produce not only of a superior quality, but likewise at a very reduced price. The calculations showed that large returns were certain to follow a comparatively small outlay, and that the business might be extended to a wonderful degree in proportion to the capital advanced to work upon. In a word, the whole affair was of the most roseate hue: Alexander, his wife, and her aunt were in raptures at the brilliant prospect thus fortunately opened to their contemplation; and it was resolved that he should lose no time in securing a share in so excellent an undertaking. Accordingly, on the following morning, he returned to Mr. Walkden, who received him with cold politeness, and requested his speedy decision in the matter—'as so promising a business had already attracted the notice of several capitalists, who were eager and willing to embark their funds.'—'And you will guarantee the respectability of your client, sir?' enquired Alexander.—'I have been established in this profession for upwards of thirty years, young man,' said the lawyer, almost sternly; 'and never have I allowed my office to be made the means of carrying out an illegitimate transaction. My client, Mr. Scudimore, is a man of integrity and honour; and whatever he promises, *that* will he perform!'—'In this case, Mr. Walkden,' observed Alexander Craddock, 'the sooner I have an interview with Mr. Scudimore, the better.'—The lawyer made no farther observation, but furnished his visitor with the address of the patentee; and Alexander accordingly repaired to Mr. Scudimore's dwelling, which was situated somewhere near Finsbury Square.

"Mr. Scudimore was an elderly person—very well dressed—plausible in his discourse, and over-polite in his manners. In fact, he seemed to be the very reverse of his solicitor in respect to disposition; for he received Alexander as if he had known him all his life; and the young man found himself sitting at lunch, and on the best possible terms with his new friend, almost before he had time to look round him. Then, if the affair which thus brought them together, had looked well upon paper, it assumed so glorious an aspect, when described in the glowing language of Mr. Scudimore, that Alexander Craddock, generous, frank, and confiding as he naturally was, came to a complete understanding with the patentee ere he took his departure. On the following day Scudimore dined at his house; and the ladies were quite charmed with their new acquaintance. Matters progressed rapidly through the business-like attention which Walkden devoted to the affair; and in less than a fortnight the deeds of partnership between Alexander Craddock and James Scudimore were duly signed at the lawyer's office, in Bush Lane, Cannon Street. Immediately afterwards, Alexander sold out six thousand pounds, which he paid into a bank to the joint account of Craddock and Scudimore; and in the course of a few days the latter gentleman took his departure for a manufacturing town, where he was to hire premises and establish a factory without delay, Alexander remaining in

London to prepare a warehouse to receive the goods. For some months all appeared to go on to the complete satisfaction of both parties: Scudimore wrote up the most pleasing accounts from the country; and at last he informed his young partner that the factory was in perfect readiness to commence operations. It however appeared that more money was required; and Alexander, after an interview with Walkden, threw a farther sum of four thousand pounds into the business, all the funds being completely at the disposal of Scudimore. But almost immediately after the advance of this second sum, the letters from the provincial town ceased. Several weeks passed away: no communications were received from Scudimore;—and Mr. Walkden appeared to be as astonished as Alexander himself. A visit to the banker created a vague suspicion in the mind of the young man that all was not right;—for though Scudimore had drawn out the first amount by means of a number of successive cheques, he had received the whole of the second advance on one draught, and almost immediately after it had been paid in. A little farther enquiry convinced Alexander that Walkden had presented all the cheques for payment at the bank. Without, however losing a moment by calling on the lawyer for an explanation, Alexander proceeded post-haste to the provincial town where he expected to find Scudimore; and there all his fears were speedily confirmed. No premises had been hired by any such person—no factory established in such a name: but Mr. Scudimore had resided at an hotel in the place for several months, and had taken his departure, no one knew whither, at a date which, on calculation, Alexander found to be precisely four days after he had paid the second sum into the banker's hands. No doubt now remained in his mind that he was the dupe of a designing villain; and he was convinced that Walkden was an accomplice. To London he returned without delay; and, on his arrival, he repaired direct to the lawyer's office. That professional gentleman received him with his usual cold and reserved politeness, affecting not even to notice the excitement under which the young man was labouring.

"'Your friend Mr. Scudimore, sir, is a villain!' exclaimed Alexander.—'Such language is intolerable in my office, sir,' said Walkden, in his chilling, phlegmatic manner.—'Intolerable or not, it is the only language I can use under such circumstances,' cried the young man. 'Scudimore has absconded with the whole sum of ten thousand pounds which I advanced in this swindling concern; and it was through you and your representations, sir, that I have been thus cruelly deceived and basely plundered.'—'Softly, Mr. Craddock, if you please,' observed the lawyer; 'because your language conveys an imputation which I repel with scorn and contempt. My character is too well established to be injured by the calumny of an obscure stranger. You requested me to give you Mr. Scudimore's address in the first instance: I did so; and it was with *him* that you made all your arrangements. You then both came to me, informed me that every thing was settled between you, and employed me professionally to draw up certain deeds.'—'But you gave me the highest character of your friend Scudimore!' ejaculated Alexander.—'I spoke of him as I had always found him up to that hour when you questioned me,' said Walkden: 'but I never pretended to possess the power of prophesying that he would continue honest up to the day of his death!'—'Contemptible, vile sophistry!' exclaimed Alexander, his cheeks glowing with indignation. 'It is a base conspiracy to plunder me; and I will unmask you!'—'And supposing that I have incurred a chance of losing as much as yourself through this Mr. Scudimore?' said the lawyer, without losing his temper, but with a smile of malignant triumph on his lips.—'*You* lose by him!' cried Alexander, in a tone of bitter irony: 'you knew him too well to trust him.'—'At all events I may have somewhat calculated upon *your* joint responsibility,' observed Walkden, fixing his cold, grey eyes upon the young man whom these ominous words startled.—'What do you mean?' he demanded, his heart sinking within him.—'I mean,' answered Walkden, 'that I have discounted your acceptances to the amount of eight thousand pounds; that I have passed away those bills of exchange in the course of business; that when they fall due shortly, I shall be unable to take them up; and that the holder will therefore look to you for the payment of them?'—Alexander sank, speechless and powerless, into a seat as the whole scheme of villainy was thus fully developed to his horrified contemplation.—'As you were in partnership, and all the deeds establishing that partnership were drawn up in the regular way and strictly binding, Scudimore had not only a right to sign bills in your joint name,' proceeded the lawyer, 'but you cannot for an instant dispute your liability in respect to them.'—'Is it possible,' gasped Alexander, 'that I can have been so foolish and you so wicked? Oh! my poor wife—my beloved children, what will become of you, now that I am ruined by my own madness and this awful combination of villainies!'—'Mr. Craddock,' said Walkden, drawing himself up to his full height, while his iron features remained implacable and rigid, 'you must not allow your tongue a license in respect to me. Again I tell you that my character is too well established, and my reputation too substantially good, to be injured by false calumnies. Indeed, I am not at all clear that I have not some grounds to complain of conspiracy and villainy: for it certainly looks suspicious—most suspicious that your partner should obtain from me advances to the amount of eight thousand pounds, and then abscond. You would not come out of court with very clean hands, Mr. Craddock, I can tell you.'—'Wretch!' ejaculated the unhappy young man, now goaded to desperation: 'how dare you hint at any connivance on my part with the scoundrelism of your own friend—*you* who presented at the bank all the drafts for the money which I was insane enough to lodge there!'—'I certainly received several sums on behalf of Mr. Scudimore, to whom I duly remitted them,' said the lawyer, still in that cold, reserved tone which so much aggravated the rage of the ruined Craddock. 'But we will now put an end to this interview, sir,' he added; 'as my time is precious.'—'Yes, I will leave you, treacherous miscreant that you are!' exclaimed Alexander; and rushing into the clerks' office, he vociferated with mad excitement, 'Gentlemen, if you wish to behold the greatest villian on the face of the earth, go and look at your master!'—He then hurried away, the victim of a mingled rage and grief which it would be impossible to describe.

"But how could he face his dear wife—her affectionate aunt—his much-loved children? '*Ruined—totally ruined*:' how awfully do these words sound upon the ears! A man, when alone in the world and with none dependent on him or his exertions, may murmur those words to himself with comparative calmness: but the individual who has a wife and children looking to him for every necessary of existence—ah! *he* indeed feels his heart seared as with red-hot iron when his lips, expressing the conviction which circumstances force on his startled mind, frame the frightful words, '*Ruined—totally ruined!*' Miss Middleton (the aunt) and Lucy were already acquainted with the unpleasant nature of the suspicions which Scudimore's protracted silence had created in the mind of Alexander; and they were likewise aware of the object of his journey into the country. But they had yet to learn the fatal result of the enquiries which he had instituted; and it was still left for him to break to them the particulars of his interview with Walkden. On his return home, his anxiety and mental suffering were betrayed by his countenance,—for he was unskilled in the schools of duplicity, and knew not how to conceal a lacerated heart beneath a tranquil exterior. The ladies pressed him with questions: they saw that something dreadful had occurred—and they implored him not to keep them in suspense. He told them all,—told them how Scudimore had plundered him of ten thousand

pounds—how he remained liable to Walkden for eight thousand more—and how the payment of this imminent liability would sweep away the whole of his fortune, leaving him a ruined man! Then, in that hour of bitter trial, he found how dear is woman as a 'ministering angel;'[50] and, having been comparatively soothed and tranquillised by the consolatory language of his Lucy and Miss Middleton, he proceeded to the office of his own solicitor, whom he resolved to consult relative to the posture of his affairs.

"The moment he had left the house, Lucy and Miss Middleton held a hasty council together. 'Do you think it would be imprudent or improper, my dear aunt,' asked the young wife, 'if I were to call upon this Mr. Walkden, and implore him not to press the payment of a debt which will deprive Alexander of all the resources that he might render available for the purpose of retrieving himself?'—'On the contrary, I approve of the step,' was the reply. 'Alexander says that Mr. Walkden was stern and severe; but then Alexander himself may have been hasty and indignant. After all, this Mr. Walkden has perhaps been duped, as well as your husband, by Scudimore.'—'I fear that this is not the case,' said Lucy: 'I am impressed with the conviction that the lawyer and Scudimore were in league together. Nevertheless, as we are entirely at Walkden's mercy, it would be unwise to irritate, but prudent to conciliate him.'—'Go, my dear child,' exclaimed the aunt; 'and may you succeed in softening the heart of this man who holds your dear husband in his iron grasp.'—Lucy accordingly attired herself in a simple and modest manner, and proceeded to the office of Mr. Walkden, who, happening to be disengaged at the time, immediately received her.

"'I have called, sir,' began Lucy, whose courage almost failed her when she found herself in the presence of a man of such stern, cold, and indeed forbidding aspect—for this was the first time she had ever seen him,—'I have called, sir,' she repeated, 'on behalf of my husband, whose ruin is certain unless you show him some degree of mercy.'—'Mr. Craddock behaved in a manner the most insulting, and dared to utter suspicions the must derogatory to my character, even in the presence of my clerks,' observed Walkden, in a tone so chilling that it seemed as if the breath which wafted those words to the young wife's ears, passed over the ice of the poles.—'But surely, sir,' urged Lucy, the tears trickling down her cheeks, 'you will make some allowances for the excited feelings of a young man just entering the world as it were, and so cruelly struck on its very threshold by the hand of misfortune? At least, sir, if not for his sake, I implore you for that of his innocent children to be lenient and merciful.'—'Law forms and ceremonies are not influenced by such considerations, madam,' said Mr. Walkden. 'At the same time, I have no objection to search the Commentaries; and if I there find leniency recommended in filing a declaration, or mercy enjoined in signing judgment, I have not the slightest objection to instruct my common-law clerk accordingly.'—Lucy stared at the attorney in wild bewilderment and uncertainty as he thus delivered himself in a measured tone of such frigidity that it seemed as if an automaton of ice were speaking; but at length she murmured, 'May I then hope, sir, that you will not press for the payment of this heavy debt when the bills become due?'—Walkden fixed his eyes upon the lovely and tearful countenance which was upturned so imploringly towards him; and at the instant he thought within himself that he had never before seen a female face of such surpassing beauty. Then his glance slowly and deliberately wandered from the faultless features to the contours of the well-formed bust, developed even by the plaits of the thick shawl which Lucy wore; and thence his survey was continued until his contemplation had embraced the wasp-like waist, and the flowing outlines of a symmetrical form, terminating in feet and ankles ravishingly modelled.—'You are doubtless much attached to your husband, madam?' he said, his tone becoming the least thing more tender—or rather losing one small degree of its cold severity.—'Attached to him, sir!' exclaimed Lucy, perfectly astonished at the question: 'I love—I worship him! He is the best of husbands and the best of fathers!'—'Then you would make *any* sacrifice to restore him to peace of mind?' said Walkden, his voice becoming more tender still, and his demeanour gradually unbending from its stiff formality.—'Oh! yes,' cried the artless Lucy; '*any* sacrifice would I make to see my Alexander happy as he was wont to be!'—'*Any* sacrifice,' repeated the lawyer, now positively allowing his features to relax into a faint and significant smile, while his voice was lowered and changed into a tone of soft familiarity; 'consider what you say—*any sacrifice*! Well, then on that condition'—and he took her hand.—A light broke instantaneously upon the mind of Lucy; and, snatching back her hand as if from the maw of a wild beast, she started from her seat, uttered a cry of indignation and abhorrence, and disappeared from the office before the baffled and disconcerted lawyer had time to make an effort to detain her.

"Lucy's heart was still swelling with mingled resentment and anguish, when she reached her home; and Alexander who returned at the same time, saw in an instant that she was a prey to no ordinary emotions. Throwing herself into her husband's arms, Lucy burst into tears—her pent-up feelings no longer obeying the control of that restraint which she sought to impose upon them. Then, by dint of questioning, Alexander gleaned enough to convince him that his beloved wife had been flagrantly insulted by the villain who had already heaped such grievous wrongs upon his head. Maddened by this fresh injury, Alexander was about to rush from the house and inflict some dreadful chastisement upon the cold-blooded monster Walkden, when his wife and her aunt threw themselves at his feet, and implored him, with tears and impassioned entreaties, not to aggravate the perils and embarrassments of his position by involving himself in a quarrel with their enemy. Alexander was moved by the prayers of those whom he loved; and he faithfully promised them not to suffer his indignant feelings to master his prudence. When calmness and composure were somewhat restored, he proceeded to explain the result of the visit which he had just paid to his own solicitor. That gentleman had said to him, 'It is as clear as day-light that you are robbed by Walkden and Scudimore conjointly; but I really do not think that you could *prove* a conspiracy in a criminal court. I should, however, decidedly advise you to resist the payment of the bills; and, as Walkden is tolerably sure to push the matter on to trial, the verdict of a jury in the civil case will enable us to judge how far we may hope to punish the scoundrel attorney in another manner.' Alexander had accordingly placed himself entirely in his solicitor's hands; and there rested the business for the present.

"But a serious change took place in the disposition and habits of Alexander Craddock. Smarting under the wrongs which he had received, he grew restless and unsettled—experienced less delight than he was wont to feel in the society of his wife and children—showed signs of irritability, and an impatience of the slightest contradiction, however trivial—and remained longer over his wine after dinner. Lucy beheld all this, and wept in secret: but when with Alexander, she redoubled her attentions, and sought every possible opportunity of proving her devotion. She implored him to give up the house they then occupied, and adopt a more economical mode of life; but his answers were at first evasive—then impatient—and at last so sharp and angry, that she was compelled, though with reluctance, to abandon the topic, at least for the present. To add to Lucy's grief, her aunt, who had so long fulfilled towards her the

duties of a mother, was attacked with sudden indisposition, which increased with alarming rapidity, and carried her off in the course of a few days. Alexander manifested far less sorrow than Lucy had expected him to have shown; and this proof of an augmenting callousness on his part, pierced the heart of the amiable young lady to the very quick. But scarcely had the remains of Miss Middleton been consigned to the tomb, when a fresh misfortune occurred to increase the irritability of Alexander. The bills for eight thousand pounds fell due, and were dishonoured by him, in accordance with the advice of his solicitor. He was immediately after arrested: and, as he had resolved to defend the action, he paid into court the whole sum in dispute, a proceeding whereby he could alone save himself from remaining in prison until the trial. He had, however, gone through the ordeal of a spunging-house, and he considered himself disgraced; the irritability of his temper increased—he daily grew more attached to the bottle—and his affections towards his wife and children were evidently blunted. Oh! how ramified and vast are the evil effects of the villainy of one man towards another,—striking not only the individual victim, but rebounding and reacting on his wife, his children, and his friends!

"Lucy again revived the expression of her wish that a cheaper dwelling should be taken and a more economical style of living adopted. But Alexander would not listen to the proposal. He declared his certainty of gaining the suit and of recovering his money from the court—a result, he said, which would enable him to employ his funds in some legitimate commercial enterprise. On this subject he spoke so confidently, that Lucy entertained the most sanguine hopes of beholding happiness restored beneath a roof where naught save happiness had once prevailed; and it was but with little apprehension that she marked the arrival of the day fixed for the trial. The most able counsel had been retained on both sides; and the cause excited immense interest. Walkden had been established for years, and bore an excellent character: indeed, none of his friends or clients could for a moment believe that he was an accomplice of the villain Scudimore. The whole question, as presented to the cognizance of the tribunal, was whether Mr. Walkden had given value for the bills, and was a *bona fide* holder of securities which he had legitimately and honourably discounted in the course of business. The evidence he adduced to establish these points was certainly of a nature likely to prove most convincing to a jury, though Alexander knew full well that Walkden had suborned the grossest perjury on the part of his clerks and the other persons whom he put forward as witnesses. Nevertheless, the verdict was in Walkden's favour; and Alexander returned home a prey to the liveliest grief and the most bitter resentment. Lucy did all that woman's goodness and ingenuity could suggest to console him; but the excitement of his feelings gained upon him with such overwhelming violence and rapidity, that he grew delirious, and a brain-fever supervened. The best medical advice was procured for him by the almost heart-broken Lucy; but weeks and weeks passed away without enabling the physicians to pronounce him beyond the reach of danger. During that period he had many lucid intervals, on which occasions he recognised his wife and children—embraced them tenderly—wept over them—implored heaven to bless them—and then, in the bitterness of overwhelming reminiscences, desired them to look upon him as one who was dead,—his excitement relapsing into delirium again. Poor Lucy! seldom was it that she reposed her aching head upon a pillow, throughout the period of her beloved husband's illness—and never until completely crushed with the fatigue of long vigils and the burthen of a grief beneath which she herself was sinking. At length—just as her pecuniary resources began to fail, and the want of funds excited alarms which augmented her afflictions—Alexander's malady took a sudden turn which filled her mind with the most joyous hope; and when the delirium had altogether passed away, his manner was so kind and gentle—his language so endearing and affectionate—and his temper so entirely devoid of irritability, that Lucy's heart became elate with the most cheering aspirations and delightful visions. Alexander spoke of his misfortunes with calmness and resignation; and said, 'Our property is all swept away, dearest; but I am young, and shall soon be strong and active again; and then I will work to obtain a livelihood for us all. And who knows, my beloved Lucy, but that the bread of honest though perhaps severe toil, may not prove the sweetest we shall have ever eaten?'—Then, when his wife heard him discourse in this manner, she would throw herself into his arms, and thank him—yes, thank him fervently for becoming a consoler in his turn.

"The fond pair had been conversing in this style one afternoon—the first day on which Alexander was enabled to walk down stairs to the parlour without assistance,—and their children were playing in a corner of the apartment, when the door was suddenly and violently opened, and two or three coarse-looking fellows unceremoniously made their appearance. Their mission was soon explained. The money paid into court had only just covered the amount of the bills of exchange which had formed the ground of action; and Alexander was now arrested by Walkden for the costs, which had been taxed at a hundred and odd pounds. The unfortunate young couple had not the money; and Lucy had already made away with their plate, jewellery, and other valuables in order to provide her husband with every comfort and luxury in his illness. The furniture was worth more than the amount of the costs: but arrears of rent were due to the landlord. Lucy implored the bailiffs, with tears in her eyes, not to remove Alexander for a few days, when he might have recovered the shock of this new and unforeseen blow; but they were inexorable, intimating pretty plainly that they were instructed to show no leniency of any kind. She, however, by dint of entreaties—actually going down upon her knees to the officers—succeeded in inducing them to wait while she repaired to his own solicitor. But this gentleman was unable to assist her to the amount she required: he nevertheless manifested the kindest and most respectful sympathy towards her, giving her a few guineas for immediate necessities, and promising to incur the expense of the measures necessary to enable her husband to remove next day from a lock-up house to the King's Bench. It was some consolation to the almost heart-broken young lady, to find that Alexander possessed at least one friend in the world; but even this faint and poor gleam of solace vanished, and gave way to the keenest apprehensions, when on her return she found her husband a prey to all that fearful excitement which had proved the forerunner of his late dangerous malady.

"What was to be done? There seemed but one alternative; and this she was determined, in her affectionate solicitude and zeal, to adopt without the knowledge of Alexander. Indeed, he scarcely appeared to be aware of what was going on; but raved, talked wildly, and menaced and wept by turns in the presence of the officers who surrounded him. Away sped Lucy to Bush Lane; and a second time did she enter the establishment of that individual who had brought such rapid—such signal—such unredeemable ruin on the heads of a once happy family. Walkden received her in his private office, and coldly desired her to be seated, a smile of infernal triumph relaxing his stern and usually rigid features; while his eyes scanned the wasted, but still touchingly beautiful and deeply interesting countenance of that afflicted young lady. Lucy was for some minutes so overcome by the intensity of her feelings, that she was unable to utter a word; and when she did speak, it was a mere gasping forth of disjointed sentences, broken by frequent sobs of convulsing agony. The lawyer bent over her, like Satan whispering to a desperate creature the terms on which wealth and power might be purchased,—bent

over that crushed, much-enduring, and amiable young wife, and murmured in her ears *his* terms of mercy towards her husband. She rose and looked at him in amazement and horror. Was he a human being, or a veritable fiend? His cold, grey eyes sank not beneath the reproachful and indignant glance of that outraged lady; and a smile of demoniac triumph again played upon his lip. Doubtless he thought that her anger was only momentary, and that the sternness of necessity would force her to a compliance with his will. But he knew not the mind of Lucy. 'Villain! monster!' she exclaimed: 'has your infamy no bounds?' and she fled from the presence of the cold-blooded scoundrel as if the atmosphere which he breathed were fraught with the plague.

"With what a heavy heart did she return home—that home from which her husband must now be dragged immediately and before her eyes,—a home which, perhaps, would not long remain so for herself and children. But suddenly, and as if by divine inspiration, she remembered that all her courage was now required to enable her to bear up against her afflictions for the sake of Alexander—for the sake of her offspring;—and it is astonishing how, in the midst of the deepest sorrows, woman can ofttimes display an energy of which the stronger sex is altogether incapable. And so it now was with Lucy Craddock. She even succeeded in comforting her husband and soothing his excitement, by reminding him that the more he appeared to be crushed, the greater would be the delight of his savage and unrelenting enemy. This species of remonstrance, so kindly—so gently administered, had the desired effect; and Alexander, animated with a spirit of endurance, and fortified by the example of his admirable wife, rose if possible superior to his misfortunes, and proceeded with a feeling of proud resignation to the lock-up-house. Thence on the ensuing day he was removed to the King's Bench: and it was here that I first formed his acquaintance, when he entered the prison six years ago.

"Immediately after his arrival, his spirits gave way rapidly; and it was necessary for his wife to take up her abode with him altogether. She accordingly disposed of the furniture in their house, paid the landlord and the few other small creditors, and brought her children over to the small cheerless chamber in which her husband was lying on a bed of sickness. Thus was this once happy family—like so many, many others, reduced from a state of comfort, and even affluence, to poverty and a prison-room. Heaven only knows what misery—what privations they had undergone, when it was first whispered to me by a char-woman that the Craddocks seemed to be in great distress. I was then a little better off than I am now; and I immediately repaired to their room, inventing some excuse for my intrusion. Oh! what a scene of destitution—what a heart-rending spectacle met my eyes! The furniture which the Craddocks had hired, had been all removed away in consequence of their inability to pay for its use: Alexander, pale and emaciated, was sitting upon a trunk; the two children, thin and wasted, were crying for food; and the poor, heart-rent Lucy was looking over a few things in a hatbox, evidently with a view to select the most likely articles to be received by the pawnbroker—while her scalding tears fell fast upon her hands as she turned over the only relics left of a wardrobe once extensive and elegant. It went to my very soul to contemplate that scene! I shall not pause to explain all the particulars which rendered me intimate with the Craddocks: suffice it to say, that they accepted my assistance, and that in a few hours their chamber once again wore an aspect of such comfort as the restitution of the furniture and a well supplied table could possibly afford in a prison. I did not learn their history immediately—nor all its details at once: portions of it were communicated by degrees—some of the particulars oozed out incidentally—and the feelings and sentiments experienced by the sufferers in the various phases of their eventful tale, transpired from time to time,—until at length I gleaned all those facts which I have now related to you. But by far the most terrible portion of the history of the Craddocks is yet to come."

Prout paused for a few moments, and then enquired of Frank Curtis if he were wearied of the narrative. The young gentleman assured him that, so far from being tired of the story, he was deeply interested in its progress; whereupon the Chancery prisoner proceeded in the following manner.

50.

O woman in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;—
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!

WALTER SCOTT.

And such is woman's love—the secret power
That turns the darkest to the brightest hour;
That smothes the wrinkles care has learned to plough,
And wipes the trace of anguish from the brow!
And Oh! if spite of war and wasting pain,
Feelings so noble—so divine remain,
Where were the brighter star to cheer our gloom,
Make heaven of earth, and triumph o'er the tomb!

UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM.

CHAPTER CVIII.
CONCLUSION OF THE TALE OF SORROW.

"Although I was enabled to administer temporary assistance to this unfortunate and persecuted family, and, under the delicate guise of a *loan* of money, *gave* them the wherewith to make themselves comparatively comfortable, it was nevertheless necessary for Alexander to resolve upon some decisive step. To remain in prison was to bury his talents in a manner so as to render them completely unavailable,—to think of liquidating the enormous burthen of debt which lay upon his shoulders, was ridiculous,—and to move the stony heart of Walkden was a hopeless idea. The only alternative was the Insolvents' Court. Good food, medical attendance, and the altered appearance of his wife and children, who had all improved greatly, restored Alexander to some degree of health and spirits; and he soon began to discuss with me and Lucy his present position and plans for the future. The lawyer who had enabled him to pass over to the Bench, returned to town at this precise period, after some weeks' absence; and he not only agreed to provide the funds to take Alexander through the Insolvents' Court, but also promised to give him employment as a clerk on his release. Thus was it that this good man infused hope into the bosoms of the Craddocks; and the necessary steps were adopted to effect the emancipation of the prisoner. But scarcely were the initiatory proceedings set on foot, when intelligence was received to the effect that Walkden was resolved to oppose Alexander's discharge by all the means that were within his power. This intimation, which reached the prison through a private channel, aroused Alexander's fury against the man who so unrelentingly persecuted him; and it required all the attentions of his amiable wife and all the manifestations of friendship which I was enabled to offer, to restore him to comparative tranquillity.

"Well, the day fixed for his examination at the Insolvents' Court arrived; and Alexander proceeded thither in the usual charge of a tipstaff. His case was called on at an early stage of the day's business; and he found a formidable array of counsel employed against him. I shall not pause to dwell upon all the details of the proceeding: suffice it to say that Walkden was placed in the witness-box, and, being examined by the barristers whom he had feed, made the entire case look so fearfully black against Alexander Craddock, that he was remanded to gaol for twelve months, his discharge to take place at the expiration of that period. Fearful was the state of excitement in which he returned to the Bench; and in the course of a few hours he was delirious. It was frightful to hear his ravings, in which the name of Walkden was uppermost, and associated with the bitterest imprecations and menaces. Poor Lucy! I thought her heart would break, as she sate watching by her husband's bed; but she was rewarded to some extent for her vigils and her sorrow, when, on the return of his senses, he recognised her before he even knew his own children, much less me—his humble friend,—and manifested his purest love for her in the most impassioned language and with the tenderest embraces. But though the delirium left him and returned no more, he soon fell into a deep and brooding melancholy, from which it was scarcely possible to arouse him. He fancied himself dishonoured—permanently dishonoured by the sentence passed upon him by the Insolvents' Court; and though the friendly lawyer and myself, as well as Lucy, endeavoured to reason with him against the belief,—pointing out every circumstance calculated to prove that he was a victim, and not a culprit,—he took the matter so to heart that it was evident his spirit was broken!

"My own resources began to fall off at this period, and I was unable to assist the Craddocks as much as I could wish. Moreover, Alexander and Lucy both felt averse to remain dependant upon me; and the friendly lawyer had proved so generous that they were naturally delicate in applying to him. Lucy accordingly made up her mind how to act. She proposed that they should remove over to the Poor-Side, and receive the County money. They would thus obtain a room rent free, and a few shillings a-week to purchase bread. Alexander's pride struggled against this project; but he yielded at last to the entreaties and representations of his excellent wife, who assured him that she felt no shame in showing that she was poor, and that the only real disgrace lay in dishonesty. 'Wherefore, then, should we contract any debts which we cannot pay?' she enquired; 'and if we continue to live in this part of the prison we must keep up certain appearances, which we have not the means to do.'—Alexander succumbed, I say, to this reasoning; and to the Poor-Side they accordingly removed. I never shall forget the day when this change took place. Lucy had made the new chamber look as neat at possible; and she endeavoured to maintain a smiling exterior as she arranged the little furniture and the few things of their own which were left to them. But every now and then she glanced anxiously towards her husband, who sat in a musing—or rather an apathetic manner—watching her proceedings; and I observed that a tear frequently started to her eye, and that every now and then she caught up her children and pressed them passionately to her bosom. I insisted upon providing dinner on that day; and I did all I could not only to make this poor family as comfortable as possible, but also to raise Alexander's spirits. But if he smiled it was so faintly, or sickly, that my heart sank within me as if he had been my own son.

"A few weeks passed away, and I observed that Lucy managed to keep the family pretty comfortably. They had no lack of plain and humble food—and the children were always neat and clean. Whenever I called at their room, I found Lucy busy in some way or another—either washing or mending the clothes, or ironing out her husband's linen, or else plying the needle at work which, though I know little of such matters, did not seem to me to have any reference to the family wardrobe at all. One night I could not sleep, and got up to take a walk round the prison. It was between twelve and one; and, as I passed round by the Poor-Side, I chanced to look up at the

window of the Craddocks' room. To my surprise, I observed a light burning; and the truth flashed upon me. Poor Lucy was sitting up to work—to waste her youth, her health, and her spirits over the needle, that she might obtain the means to purchase comforts for her husband and children! The conviction went to my very heart like a pang; and I thought how bitter is often the mission of a good and virtuous woman in this world! I remember that I had no inclination to retire to rest again that night; and I kept walking—walking round the prison, impelled by some invincible influence thus to wander about the gloomy place, as if to watch how long the feeble light would be burning in that one room! It was nearly four o'clock when that light was extinguished; and I heaved a sigh as I murmured to myself the name of poor Lucy Craddock! When day came, and I was enabled to call upon Alexander after breakfast. I examined the young wife and mother with more attention than usual; and it then struck me that she was visibly wasting away. Her health was evidently declining; and her spirits were entirely forced. She was gay and lively as ever; but that gaiety and liveliness were assumed, not real—artificial, not natural,—the veil which an excellent and amiable woman—a most affectionate wife and the best of mothers—put on to cover the secret of her breaking heart!

"Three mouths of the year for which Alexander had been remanded, passed away; and Lucy beheld her children drooping and pining through want of proper air and exercise. This discovery was a new affliction. She would not permit the little things to play about along with the ragged, dirty offspring of the other prisoners on the Poor-Side; and she was unable to spare the time to take them out herself. I understood the struggle that was passing in her mind. If she devoted an hour or two each day to them, she must give up some of the work which, as I found out, she had obtained from a warehouse in the Borough; and by so doing their comforts and those of her husband would be abridged. On the other hand, she could not see those poor innocents confined to a close room and pining for fresh air. She accordingly resolved to take them out for a certain period each day, and to steal another hour or two from her repose. I knew that she did this, because when I either walked about until very late, or else rose early to take my ramble about the prison, I saw the light in the chamber even at five o'clock in the morning! My God! It is as true as I am here, that this poor, devoted woman at length limited herself to only three hours' rest; and though her children improved in health, her own was suffering the most frightful ravages. It was evident that Alexander did not suspect the labour and toil which his wife endured: he had sunk into a species of apathy which blinded him to a fact that I discovered so easily, and which gave me the acutest pain. You may be sure that I did all I could for the family, and in as delicate a way as possible,—always proposing to join my dinner to their's when I knew that I had a better one than they; but my own resources were becoming daily more cramped; and my accursed Chancery business not only lingered on, but absorbed all the funds I could raise or my friends could muster in my behalf. Thus six months passed away—Lucy in the meantime being worn down to a skeleton, and seeming only the shadow of her former self. Still she grew not, slovenly: dirt—that too frequent companion of poverty—was not the characteristic of her little chamber; and her husband always had his clean shirt for the Sabbath, and even decent apparel, considering that he lived on the Poor-Side of the King's Bench Prison!

"It was Term Time; and my business compelled me to take a day-rule. That is to say, I obtained permission to go out for a day to attend to my affairs, my friends giving security to the Marshal of the Bench for my safe return. I resolved to avail myself of this opportunity to call on Walkden, and represent to him the cruelty and absurdity of keeping Alexander in confinement, when by withdrawing the detainer he might restore him to freedom. I was prepared to find Walkden a severe and hard man; but the reception I experienced was calculated to make me set him down as a fiend in mortal shape. The moment I mentioned my business, he stopped me short,—rising from his seat, and saying in a cold, icy manner, 'The name of Craddock is abhorrent to me, sir. I was grossly insulted by his injurious suspicions; and he shall rot in prison before I permit him to escape my vengeance. He thinks that he will be freed in six months' time; but he is mistaken.'—'No, sir,' I exclaimed indignantly, 'it is you who are mistaken. The fiat of the Insolvents' Court is stronger than your vindictive will.'—'We shall see,' observed Walkden, in an implacable tone; and I was compelled to withdraw, not only grieved at the ill-success of my visit, but filled with vague apprehensions that fresh persecutions were in waiting for my unhappy friend. But I did not breathe a word to either Alexander or Lucy relative to the step which I had taken nor the fears thus excited within me; although I could not banish the lawyer's dark menace from my thoughts. Months passed away—Lucy still managing to keep the wolf from the door, as the vulgar phrase goes; while her health was sinking rapidly.

"At length the period drew nigh when Alexander expected to obtain his deliverance; and now his spirits began to rise. He gradually shook off the apathy which had so long clouded his intellect and impaired his energies; and he spoke highly of the prospect of release. But Walkden watched him from a distance, and seemed to gloat over the new scheme of vengeance which he had in store for this hapless family. Indeed, the blow came on a day when Alexander had declared to me that he had not felt his heart so light for a long, long time. A detainer was lodged against him at the gate—a detainer for a thousand pounds! The fact was that a mistake had been committed in Alexander's schedule, and an item to that extent omitted. The judgment of the Court was therefore void and null in respect to a debt not inserted in the schedule; for such is the atrocious law, made on purpose to persecute those unfortunate debtors who do not come within the meaning of the Acts which enable traders to apply to the Bankruptcy Court. The way that I heard first of the detainer being lodged at Walkden's suit was in this wise:—A char-woman came to my room, saying that Mrs. Craddock, who appeared to be in great distress of mind, wished to see me immediately. I hurried to the Poor-Side, a misgiving preparing my mind to receive intelligence of farther persecution on the part of the fiend Walkden. On entering the Craddock's chamber, I found Alexander lying almost senseless on the bed, deep and prolonged gaspings alone denoting that he was alive. Lucy was on her knees, imploring him not to give way to despair; and the children were crying piteously, although they were too young to understand the nature of the misfortune which had fallen on their parents' heads. I strove to awaken my unhappy friend to the necessity of enduring this new affliction with courage; and in a short time my representations, joined to Lucy's prayers and entreaties, succeeded to some little extent. 'You must petition the Insolvents' Court again,' I said; 'and you are sure of having no farther remand. In six weeks you will be free.'—'But the means—the means to pass this ordeal a second time!' he exclaimed almost frantically.—'The Marshal has some charitable funds at his disposal,' I observed; 'and I will instantly wait upon him, and present the whole circumstances of the case.'—Alexander was in that feverish state of excitement which cannot endure suspense when any gleam of hope is afforded in the midst of despair; and he urged me to lose no time in seeing the Marshal. As I quitted the room, Lucy pressed my hand in a manner expressive of deep emotion, as she murmured in a low tone, 'You are our only friend!'

"Within ten minutes I was seated in the Marshal's private office, explaining the nature of my business. I unreservedly and frankly revealed to him Alexander Craddock's whole history; and you may be sure that I did not forget to dwell upon the admirable conduct of Lucy. The Marshal is a humane man, although nothing more than a superior kind of gaoler; and he listened to me with great interest. When I had concluded my narrative, which was rather long, he said, 'Mr. Prout, I will lose no time in calling myself upon Mr. Walkden, whom I know well by name, and whose character has certainly appeared to me this day in a new light. I am well aware that he is harsh and severe; but I do not think him capable of keeping this man in prison under all the circumstances which you have detailed to me. I will see him, and endeavour to excite his compassion by unfolding to him all the particulars of Craddock's history, as you have now related them to me. If he should persist in retaining him in gaol, I will then from my own pocket advance the necessary funds to enable your poor friend to petition the Court again. In the meantime give Craddock this guinea.'—I returned my warmest thanks to the Marshal for his goodness, and was hurrying back to the Craddocks with the money and the hopeful intelligence I had in store for them, when, as I passed through the upper lobby, my attention was directed to a new prisoner who had just arrived; for on the turnkey asking him his name, he replied—SCUDIMORE! A moment's scrutiny of the man convinced me that he was the same who had plundered Craddock, a description of his personal appearance having been frequently given to me by Alexander. I was sorry to find that he had become an inmate of the same place as the individual whom he had so deeply injured, and whose excited feelings I feared might lead him to some act of violence towards the villain. Well aware that Alexander could not be long before he must inevitably learn the fact of Scudimore's arrest, I resolved to mention it to him without delay, so as to prepare him to meet his enemy within the precincts of the Bench. I, however, communicated my good news first; and Lucy was overjoyed when she learnt that the Marshal had resolved to interest himself in her husband's behalf. But Alexander's manner suddenly became so strange—so unaccountably sombre and gloomy—and so menacingly mysterious, when I revealed to him the circumstance of Scudimore's presence in the prison, that both Lucy and myself grew terribly alarmed. We implored him not to notice Scudimore even when they should meet; but he gave no reply. I, however, whispered to Lucy my hopes that the Marshal would succeed in inducing Walkden to liberate her husband at once; and thereby remove her husband from the vicinity of the scoundrel who had ruined him. I also resolved to be as much with Alexander as possible; and I was delighted to find that he showed no inclination to leave his room for the purpose of taking his usual walk up and down the back of the prison-building.

"In the course of a couple of hours the Marshal sent me in word that he had not succeeded in finding Mr. Walkden at his office, but had made an appointment with the head-clerk to call again in the evening, when the result of his interview with the lawyer should be immediately communicated to me, even if the gates were closed. I therefore saw that the Marshal was in earnest in carrying out the business he had taken in hand; and Lucy was inspired with the same strong hopes that I entertained. But Alexander received the Marshal's message with an apathetic coldness which filled me with alarm; and it was evident that his mind brooded over other affairs, which I could not help thinking were connected with the arrival of Scudimore at the Bench. I was, however, glad to observe that Lucy did not participate in my fears to the same extent as she did in my hopes: poor creature! the thought of seeing her husband soon free was the absorbing sentiment in her mind! I remained with the Craddocks on that eventful day up to almost nine o'clock, when a letter which I received by the last post compelled me to go to my room for a few minutes to look out a few papers connected with my own case, and which my attorney required the first thing in the morning. I assured Lucy that I would return as soon as possible, the promised intelligence from the Marshal being now every moment expected by us.

"And now I come to a frightful portion of my sad tale. I had been about five minutes in my room, and had just sealed up the packet which was to be given to a messenger that night to deliver early next day to my solicitor, when Lucy rushed in without knocking. She fell exhausted upon the floor; and it was some moments before she could articulate a word. I was cruelly alarmed; and my hand trembled so as I poured her out some water that I could scarcely hold the glass. At length I learnt that Alexander had suddenly started from his chair, a minute after I left him, and seizing a knife, had rushed from the room. Before Lucy could reach the bottom of the stairs, he had disappeared; and, in a state bordering on distraction, she had naturally flown to me. While she was gasping forth the few words which thus made me acquainted with the cause of her visit, cries of horror suddenly burst from the parade-ground and struck upon our ears. I cannot at this moment remember what we thought, or what we said—no, nor how we got down the stairs: the next incident that I *do* recollect, after hearing those appalling cries, was finding myself elbowing my way through a group of prisoners assembled on the parade; and then, by the moonlight, what a spectacle met my eyes! A man was lying on the ground, weltering in his blood; and another was passive and motionless in the grasp of three or four prisoners. The former was Scudimore: the latter was Alexander Craddock. Then female shrieks of anguish rent the air; and Lucy threw herself wildly into her husband's arms, exclaiming in a tone so piercing that it still rings in my ears—'You did not do it, Alexander! Oh! no—you could not—you would not! Tell me—I conjure you,—tell me that you did not do it!'

"Almost at the same moment a cry was raised of—'The Marshall'—and immediately afterwards that gentleman came up to the spot, accompanied by *another individual*, whom, as the moonlight fell upon his countenance, I instantly recognised to be Walkden. And that countenance—how was it changed! No longer cold and implacable, every feature bore the imprint of ineffable anguish and black despair. Then, when in a few hurried words, the assassination of Scudimore was communicated by the bye-standers to the Marshal and Walkden, and Alexander Craddock was mentioned as the murderer, a scene of the most wildly exciting interest ensued. For Walkden sprang towards the guilty—unhappy young man, and throwing his arms frantically around him,—poor Lucy shrinking back at his appearance,—exclaimed, 'My son!—my dear, and long-lost son! Pardon me—pardon me—I am the cause of all this—Oh! my God! how frightfully am I punished!'—and the wretched Walkden fell heavily upon the ground, overpowered—stunned—crushed by emotions too awful to be even conceived!

"I must here pause for a few moments to give a word or two of necessary explanation. The Marshal had found Mr. Walkden at his office in the evening, and had begged him to grant Alexander's release. But the miscreant was inexorable, alleging that he had received at the prisoner's hands insults of a nature which rendered mercy impossible. The Marshal, hoping to touch the man's heart by a recital of all the interesting circumstances of Alexander's life, began to tell his story; but scarcely had he explained how Alexander had been

found by the late Mr. Craddock in the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons, when Walkden's whole manner suddenly underwent an appalling change: he turned ghastly pale—trembled like an aspen-leaf—and then, in another minute, covered his face with his hands, exclaiming in a tone of the deepest anguish, '*Merciful God! it is my own son whom I have plundered and persecuted thus vilely! Oh! wretch that I am—miscreant, demon that I have been!*'—The Marshal was naturally overwhelmed with astonishment at these terrific self-accusations, which nevertheless appeared to be too well founded; for it was indeed the only child of the miserable lawyer who had been lost by a neglectful servant years ago in the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons; and the sudden death of the beadle happening the very next day, had destroyed the only clue to the infant. Mrs. Walkden died of a broken heart; and it was most probably these misfortunes which, acting upon a morbid mind, rendered the attorney the harsh, severe, merciless man which he had so effectually proved himself to be.

"And what miseries had he piled up, to fall on his own head! He had ruined his son—rendered him a murderer—and also endeavoured to seduce that son's wife. Oh! it was a fearful scene, which took place on the parade-ground on that eventful evening. Scudimore lay a corpse at the feet of the man whom he had injured; and senseless by the side of the corpse, fell Walkden who had made Scudimore his instrument and accomplice in the iniquitous transaction which paved the way for this accumulation of horrors. Alexander understood nothing that took place. He saw it all—but comprehended it not. His reason had fled; and it is most probable that he was already a maniac when he rushed from his room armed with the fatal knife—and perhaps even when I observed the strange change come over him on his learning from my lips that Scudimore was an inmate of the Bench. As for Lucy—poor, crushed, heart-broken Lucy—she had fainted when Walkden proclaimed himself her husband's *father*! But I must hasten and bring my story to a conclusion. The Marshal speedily gave the orders necessary under the circumstances which had occurred; and, on Lucy being recovered from her swoon, she found that she had not been the prey of a hideous dream, as she at first supposed—but that her husband had been taken from her, and lodged in the strong-room—a maniac and a murderer! Oh! what a heart-rending duty it was for me to implore her to take courage for her children's sake! Walkden, who had in the meantime been restored to his senses, begged her to make his house her home in future, and look on him as a father;—but she shrieked forth a negative in so wild a tone and accompanied by such a shudder, that the wretched man could not be otherwise than deeply convinced how ineffable was the abhorrence that she entertained for him. The Marshal kindly took charge of the stricken woman and her young children; and the corpse of Scudimore was conveyed to a room there to await the attendance of the Coroner on the following day.

"But little more remains to be told. During the night that followed the deplorable events which I have just related, Alexander Craddock grew furious with excitement, and became raving mad. A brain-fever supervened; and in less than twelve hours from the moment when his hand avenged his wrongs on the villain Scudimore, he himself was no longer a denizen of this world! Ten days afterwards the Marshal received a letter from Walkden, which he subsequently showed to me, and the contents of which ran thus as nearly as I can recollect them:—'*I am about to quit England, and shall never be again heard of by one who has to much reason to shudder at the mere mention of my name. I allude to my deeply-injured daughter-in-law. My share of the ten thousand pounds, of which Scudimore plundered her husband, was precisely one half. This amount, with compound interest, I have placed in the funds in her name; and I implore her to forgive a man who is crushed and heart-broken, and who loathes himself!*'—Lucy, who had only for her children's sake been able to sustain anything like the adequate amount of courage necessary to support her afflictions, was somewhat solaced—if solace there could be in the midst of such bitter, bitter woe—by the certainty that those children were now secure against want. She accordingly removed with them into a small but comfortable dwelling near Norwood—but not before she had called on me, to express all her gratitude for the kindnesses which I had been enabled to show the family. She moreover endeavoured to compel me to receive a sum of money, as she said in repayment for the amounts I had at various times lent them; but that sum was a hundred times greater than any I had ever been able to assist them with. I would not receive a fraction; and I wept on parting with her, as if she had been my own daughter. During the year which she survived the loss of her husband—for she only *did* survive it a year—she came frequently to visit me, always accompanied by her children; and on every occasion she brought me some touching and delicate memorial of her esteem. But her health had been undermined by the long vigils—the deep anxieties—the corroding cares—the serious toils—and the frightful shocks, which had characterised her existence in this accursed prison; and she died in the arms of an affectionate female friend, who dwelt in her neighbourhood, and whose bosom her misfortunes had deeply touched. This friend promised to be a second mother to the poor children; and she has fulfilled her word. Two respectable gentlemen accepted the guardianship of the orphans, so far as their pecuniary interests are concerned; and those orphans will be rich when they become of age,—for Walkden died a short time ago, leaving them all his fortune. Poor Lucy sleeps in the same grave with her husband; and thus ends my TALE OF SORROW."

The old man wiped away the tears from his eyes: and Frank Curtis was not only deeply interested in the narrative which he had just heard, but even affected by its lamentable details, on which he was about to make some remark, when, happening to glance from the window, he espied the captain on the parade staring about him in all possible directions. Curtis therefore took leave of Mr. Prout, after thanking him for the recital of the melancholy tale, and hastened to join his friend.

Captain O'Blunderbuss had no good news to relate. The officers in possession in Baker Street had positively refused to allow Mrs. Curtis to take any thing, beyond wearing apparel, away with her; and the excellent lady had accordingly moved, with her two trunks and her five children, to a lodging in Belvidere Place.

The captain had likewise been unsuccessful in his visit to Sir Christopher Blunt. He had seen the knight, it is true; but neither menaces nor coaxings had proved potent enough to induce that gentleman to draw forth his purse or sign his autograph to a cheque.

"What the devil, then, must I do?" demanded Frank Curtis, shuddering as he thought of the Poor-Side.

"Be Jasus! and go dacently and genteelly through the Insolvents' Court," exclaimed the captain; "and I'll skin the Commissioners alive if they dar-r to turn you back, my frind!"

"I really think there is no other alternative left but to petition the Court," observed Frank Curtis; "and therefore I'll make up my mind at once to do so."

CHAPTER CIX.
THE PRISONERS.

We must leave Mr. Frank Curtis to adopt the necessary measures in order to effect his emancipation from the Bench *viâ* the Insolvents' Court, and suppose that a month has passed since the period when the Blackamoor consigned to his dungeons Tim the Snammer, Josh Pedler, Old Death, Mrs. Bunce, her husband, and Tidmarsh.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, when the Blackamoor, attended by Cæsar, who bore a light, entered the subterranean passage containing the doors of the cells in which the prisoners were separately retained. Wilton followed, bearing a large basket; and two more of the Black's retainers brought up the rear, one carrying a naked cutlass and the other a pair of loaded pistols in their hands.

Opening the door of the first cell, the Blackamoor took the light from Cæsar's hand, and stopping on the threshold, said, "Timothy Splint, another sun has set, and the close of another day has come. Had you been surrendered up to the justice of the criminal tribunals of your country, you would ere this have ceased to exist: your guilt would have been expiated on the scaffold."

"Oh! I would rather it had been *that*," exclaimed the man, in a tone which carried to the hearts of his listeners a conviction of his sincerity,—"I would rather it had been *that*, than this frightful lingering in utter darkness! The light, sir, is as welcome to me as food would be if I was starving," he added with profound emphasis.

"Are you afraid to be alone and in the dark?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"It is hell upon earth, sir!" cried Tim the Snammer. "What! can you ask me whether I'm afraid, when the place is haunted with dreadful spectres?"

"The spectres are created by your own guilty conscience," answered the Black, mildly but solemnly: then, advancing farther into the dungeon, so that the light fell upon the haggard countenance of the prisoner, he said, "You see that there are no horrible apparitions now; and why should they not remain here when you can enjoy the use of your eyes as well as when you are involved in darkness?"

"That is what I say to myself—that is what I am always asking myself," exclaimed Timothy Splint. "And yet I can't help thinking that *he* is there—the murdered man, you know—with his throat so horribly cut——Oh! yes—when I am alone and in the dark, I am sure he is there—just where you are standing now. He never moves—he stands as still as death—and his eyes glare upon me in the dark. It is dreadful—dreadful!"—and the wretched criminal hid his face in his hands.

"Are you sorry, then, that you killed Sir Henry Courtenay?" asked the Black.

"Sorry!" repeated Splint, in a thrilling—agonising tone. "I wish that I could only live the last few months over again! I'd sooner beg—go to the workhouse—break stones in the road—or even starve, than rob or do any thing wrong again! Oh! I would indeed! For I see now that though a man may only mean for to rob, he stands the chance of taking away life; and it's a horrid—horrid thing to say to one's self, '*I am a murderer!*' But it's more horrid still to see the dreadful spectre always standing by one—quite plain, though in the dark—and never taking his cold eyes off his assassin."

"If you had a light, Timothy Splint, you would no longer think of your crimes," said the Blackamoor; "and then you would be ready to fall back into your old courses, if you had your liberty given to you once more."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the man, his frame convulsed with a horrible shudder. "I wish I had never known such courses at all: I wish I could live over again during the whole period that I've been so wicked. I am sure I should be a good man then—if so be I had all my experience to teach me to be so. I never thought it was such a shocking thing to be wicked till I came to be left alone in darkness—yes, all alone with my frightful thoughts! I would sooner be put to death at once: but—but—" he added, in a hesitating manner—"I haven't the courage to brain myself against the wall, because the spectre of the murdered baronet seems to stand by to prevent me."

"And have you, then, ever thought of suicide, since you first became a prisoner here?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"Often and often, sir—very often," exclaimed Splint, emphatically.

"You never told me this before; and yet I have visited you regularly every evening to bring you food and talk to you for a short time," said the Blackamoor.

"But you never spoke to me so kindly as you do now, sir," cried the criminal, earnestly; "and when a man has been upwards of thirty days—yes, I have counted your visits, and this is the thirty-first,—when a man, I say, has been thirty-one days all alone and in darkness, except for a few minutes every evening, he begins to feel the want of hearing a human voice—and when that voice speaks in a kind manner——"

Timothy Splint's tone had gradually become tremulous; and now he burst into tears. Yes—the villain—the robber—the murderer wept; and those were tears such as he had not shed for a long, long time!

When the river is ice-bound by the cold hand of winter it seems unconscious of the presence of the flower thrown on its impenetrable surface; but when thawed by the warm sun, and flowing naturally again, the stream opens its bosom to receive the rose-bud which it caresses with its sparkling ripples, and wafts gently along as if rejoiced at the companionship. So was it with the heart of this man; and the slightest word spoken in a kind manner was now borne on by the current of feelings thawed from a state of dull and long-enduring obduracy.

"Your crimes are manifold and great," said the Blackamoor; "but there is hope for even the vilest," he added, unable altogether to subdue a profound sigh; "and contrition is all that remains for sinful mortals, who cannot recall the past."

"I *am* penitent, sir—I *am* very penitent, I can assure you," exclaimed the man, in a tone of deep emotion. "A few weeks ago I should have been ashamed to utter such a thing; and now it does me good to say so.—And I'll tell you something more, sir," he continued, after a moment's hesitation; "though I suppose you will not believe me——"

"Speak frankly," said the Blackamoor.

"Well, sir—I have tried to recollect a prayer; and last night when I repeated it, I thought that the spectre gradually grew less and less plain to the view, and at all events seemed less horrible. I was praying again when you came just now—and I shall pray presently—for I know that there is some consolation in it."

"You do well to pray, Timothy," observed the Blackamoor. "Would you not like to be able to read some book?"

"If I only had a candle and a Bible, sir," exclaimed the man, speaking under the influence of feelings deeply excited but unquestionably sincere, "I think I should even yet be happy in this dreadful dungeon."

"What makes you fancy that the Bible would render you happy?" enquired the Black.

"Because I used to read it when I was a lad, and I remember that it contains many good sayings," answered Splint. "Besides, it declares somewhere that there is hope for sinners who repent; and I should like to keep my eyes fixed at times upon God's own promise. I am sure that my mind would be easier; for though I know that the promise *is* given, yet I feel a desire to repeat it over and over again to myself—and also to learn whether God ever forgave any one who was so bad as I am."

"You shall have a light and a book," said the Blackamoor.

"Oh! you are jesting—you are deceiving me!" cried Splint. "But that would be so cruel, sir, on your part——"

"I am not jesting—the subject is too serious to be treated lightly," was the answer: then, making a sign to Wilton to step forward, he took from the basket which that dependant carried, a lamp already trimmed and a couple of books. "There is a volume of Tales—and there is the Bible," he continued: "take whichever you prefer."

"The Bible, if you please, sir," cried Splint, eagerly, while his countenance denoted the most unfeigned joy. "I know not how to thank you enough for this kindness!"—and tears again started from his eyes.

"Had you chosen the Tales, you should not have had either book or light," said the Black.

Wilton now gave the prisoner a plate containing bread and cold meat, and a bottle of water, while Cæsar lighted his lamp; and the door was then again closed upon him.

"That man is already a true penitent," whispered the Blackamoor to Wilton. "Let us now visit his late companion in iniquity."

The party proceeded to the next cell, in which Joshua Pedler was confined, the two armed dependants stationing themselves in such a manner as to be visible to the inmate of the dungeon when the door was opened.

"Thank God! you are come again," he cried, starting up from his bed the moment the light flashed in upon him. "But why do you come with swords and pistols in that fashion?" he demanded, savagely.

"In case you should offer any resistance," answered the Blackamoor. "I do not choose to put chains upon you; and therefore I am compelled to adopt every necessary precaution when I visit you in this manner."

"I really would not harm you, sir—I would not for the world," said Pedler, in a milder tone. "You are not cruel—though severe; and I feel very grateful to you for not giving me up to justice. I hope you are not offended with me for speaking as I did: I try to be patient—I endeavour to be mild and all that——"

"What is it, then, that irritates your temper?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"My own thoughts, sir," answered Josh Pedler, bitterly. "Just before I heard the key grating in the lock, I was a thinking what a fool I have been for so many years, and how happy I might be, perhaps, if I was a labouring-man."

"You are sorry that you have been wicked?" observed the Black, interrogatively.

"And so would any one be when he comes to be locked up here in the dark," returned the man. "It is all very well when one is at liberty, and has friends to talk to, and plenty of drink; because company and gin *can* prevent a body from thinking. But here—here—oh! it is quite different; and my opinion is that a dark dungeon is a much worse punishment than transportation—leastways, judging by all I've heard from men which has been transported and has come home again when their time was up."

"Would you rather be transported at once, then—or remain here?" enquired the Blackamoor.

"I would sooner remain here, for several reasons," said Pedler. "In the first place, I don't want to get into bad company again; because I'm afraid I should go all wrong once more;—and, in the second place, I know that the thoughts which I have are good for me, though

they're not pleasant."

"But if you could this minute join some of your old friends to drink and smoke with them, would you not gladly do so?" asked the Black.

"I scarcely know how to answer you, sir," replied Pedler, musing. "I am afraid I might—and yet I am very certain that I should be a fool for my pains. I would sooner earn an honest living somehow or another: I should like to have good thoughts——But that is impossible—impossible!" he added, shaking his head gloomily.

"Why is it impossible?" demanded the Black.

"Because a man to have good thoughts, must do something that is good," was the prompt rejoinder; "and I have been a wicked fellow for so many years. I wish I had been good; but it is too late now!"

"It is never too late to repent," said the Blackamoor.

"I know that the Bible promises that," observed Pedler; "but then people would never believe that a rascal like me could become good for any thing. Besides, after all that has happened, I don't hope for any opportunity of showing that I feel how stupid I have been to lead such a life as I have done. Who would trust me with any work? what honest person would associate with me? It's no use questioning me, sir: you see that even you yourself don't feel comfortable in visiting this place, since you come with armed people."

"If you could obtain your liberty by killing me, would you not do it?" asked the Black.

"As true as you are there, I would not harm a hair of your head!" cried Josh Pedler, emphatically. "I shudder when I think of that dreadful business down at the Cottage yonder—in fact, I can't bear to think of it. I don't say that I am actually afraid at being in the dark; but darkness causes terrible thoughts. It seems as if the mind had eyes, and couldn't shut them against particular things;—and now that I have found out this much, I should be a long time before I did a wrong deed again, even if I was turned out into the midst of London this very minute without a penny in my pocket."

"What would you do if you were set free this moment?" demanded the Blackamoor. "At the same time, do not suppose that you are about to have your liberty."

"I am not mad enough to fancy it possible," replied Josh Pedler. "But if such a thing did happen, I would go to Matilda—the gal that I spoke to you about, sir——"

"And who is now in a comfortable position," added the Black.

"Yes—thanks to your kindness," said the man; "and I should like you as long as I lived, if it was only on account of what you have done for her. But, as I was going to tell you—supposing I was set free, I would take 'Tilda with me into the country—as far away from London as possible; and then I'd change my name, and try to get work. Ah! I should be happy," he continued, with a profound sigh, "if I could only earn enough to keep us in a little hut. But don't make me talk in this way any longer: I feel just—just as if I—I was going to cry."

The man's voice became faltering and tremulous as he uttered these last words; and his lashes were moistened with tears.

"Should you feel pleasure in writing a letter to Matilda?" asked the Blackamoor, in a kind tone.

"Yes—above all things!" eagerly cried the criminal. "I am no great penman; but she could make out my scribbling, I dare say;—and it would do me good to give her some proper advice—I mean, just to let her know what my thoughts is at times. Besides, now that I'm separated from her, I find that I liked her more—yes—a good deal more than I used to fancy I did; and I should be glad to beg her forgiveness for what I made her do when I was sick and in want."

"You shall have a light and writing-materials," observed the Black.

"You are a good man—I feel that you are, sir!" exclaimed Josh Pedler, the tears now trickling down his cheeks. "If I had only fallen in with such a person as yourself, when I was young, I shouldn't have turned out as I did. But though people may never know that it is possible for a fellow like me to alter, yet altered my mind *is*—and I don't look on things as I used to do."

Wilton gave Josh Pedler a supply of food, a lamp, and writing-materials, the dungeon already containing a table in addition to the other necessary but plain and homely articles of furniture. The criminal was overjoyed at the indulgence shown him on the occasion of this visit: and he saw the door close upon him with feelings which seemed to have experienced a great relief.

END OF VOL. I. OF THE SECOND SERIES.

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CHAPTER CX.

CONTINUATION OF THE BLACK'S VISITS TO HIS PRISONERS.

Having quitted the dungeon in which Josh Pedler was confined, the Blackamoor proceeded to the next cell; but, instead of opening the door, he merely drew back a small sliding-lid that covered a grated trap, and the faint rays of a light streamed from the inside.

"Tidmarsh," said the Blackamoor, in a feigned tone, "has your mind grown easier?"

"Yes, sir—oh! yes," replied the prisoner from the interior of his dungeon. "Since you allowed me a light and good books, I have been comparatively a happy man. I know that I deserve punishment—and it seems to do me good to feel that I am atoning for my offences in this manner. I am not afraid of being alone now; and when I put out my light, I am not afraid of being in the dark."

"You pray with more composure?" said the Black, interrogatively.

"Yes, sir—I can settle my mind to prayer now," was the answer; "and I am sure that my prayers are heard. But pray believe, sir, that I never was so wicked—so very wicked as that bad man who kept me for years in his employ. I know that I was too willing an instrument in his hands; and I am sorry for it now. The thing that lays heaviest on my mind, is the share I had in sending poor Tom Rain to the scaffold."

"You are sorry for that deed?" enquired the Black, in a low and slightly tremulous tone.

"Oh! God, forgive me!" exclaimed Tidmarsh, his voice expressing sincere contrition. "I do indeed deeply—deeply deplore my share in that awful business; and the ghost of poor Tom Rain used to haunt me when I was first here. In fact, Tom Rain was ever uppermost in my thoughts; and—strange though it may seem—it is not the less true, sir, that your voice appeared to penetrate to my very soul, as if it was Tom Rain himself that was speaking to me. But I have got over all those ideas now—since I learnt to pray; and when I grow dull, I read the good books you have lent me. Sometimes I study the Bible; and I find that if I pore over it too much, it makes me melancholy. Then I turn to the Travels and Voyages; and I become tranquil again."

"Should you not rejoice at any opportunity of retrieving your character—even in your old age—and earning an honest livelihood for yourself?" asked the Black.

"Oh! if such a thing could be!" cried the man, in a tone of exultation. "But, no—it is impossible!" he added, after a pause, and speaking in an altered voice. "I have sinned too deeply in respect to poor Tom Rain, to be able to hope for such happiness. God is punishing me in this world, you being his instrument;—and yet I can scarcely call it punishment, since you treat me with such kindness. There are times when I even wish that I was more severely punished *here*, so that I might expiate all my sins and feel certain about my fate in another world."

"God is full of forgiveness, Tidmarsh," said the Black: "I feel that He is," he added in a somewhat enthusiastic manner. "The prospect I distantly hinted at in respect to yourself, may possibly become practicable. You are old—but you may still have many years to live; and it would be wrong—it would be detestable not to give you a full opportunity, sooner or later, of enabling you to testify your contrition. But I cannot speak farther on this subject at present. I have brought you some more books: one is a tale—'*The Vicar of Wakefield*'—the perusal of which will do you no harm. It will show you how virtue, though suffering for a time, was rewarded at last. In a few days I shall myself visit you again."

The Black closed the trap, and stood away from the door, which Wilton now opened; and the basket furnished the prisoner with his provisions and also with some volumes of good and beneficial reading.

The visiting-party next proceeded to the cell in which Toby Bunce and his wife were confined together; and here, as in the immediately preceding instance, the Black spoke to them through a sliding trap, from which a light also gleamed.

"For three days have you now been together, after dwelling some time apart," said the Blackamoor, continuing to speak in a feigned tone; "and I now conjure you to tell me truly whether you would rather be thus in each other's company, or separated as before?"

"Oh! leave us together, sir—leave us together, I implore you!" cried Mrs. Bunce, in a voice of earnest appeal. "We are now the best friends in the world; and I have promised my husband never to say a cross word unnecessarily to him again."

"She seems quite an altered woman, sir," observed Toby. "But then——"

“But then what?” demanded the Black, seeing that the man hesitated.

“Well, sir—I will speak my mind free,” continued Bunce; “because I’m no longer afraid to do so. I was going to say that p’rhaps it is this loneliness in which we are placed that makes Betsy talk as she does; and that if we was to be again together out of doors——”

“You would not find me change, Toby,” interrupted the woman, but not in a querulous manner. “I like to hear you read to me from the Bible, and from the other good books that the gentleman has given us. I wish we had passed more of our time in this way before we got into all this trouble. But, pray, sir,” she added, turning towards the door, “do tell me whether you mean to keep us here all our lives!”

“You must ask me no questions, remember,” said the Black, in a mild but firm tone. “I have told you this before. Learn to subdue all impatience, and to become resigned and enduring. You have made others suffer in the world;—you have been the agents and tools of a wicked man;—and you now see that heaven is punishing you through the means of one who has power thus to treat you.”

“Oh! how I wish that I had never known that detestable Bones?” exclaimed the woman, covering her face with her hands.

“And how I wish that I had stuck to my trade in an honest manner!” cried Toby Bunce, in a voice of unfeigned contrition.

“Think of all that—repeat those sentences to each other—as often as you can,” said the Blackamoor. “In the course of a few days I shall visit you again.”

With these words, he stood back from the door, which Wilton opened; and the two inmates of the dungeon received supplies of wholesome food and moral or instructive books.

The party then proceeded farther along the subterranean passage from which the various cells opened.

“Do you mean, sir, to fulfil your intention of this night visiting *him*?” enquired Cæsar, addressing his master in a low, faint, and tremulous tone, as if he were a prey to some vague terror.

The Blackamoor did not immediately answer the question; but, placing his hand upon his brow, appeared to reflect profoundly for almost the space of a minute.

Wilton—who seemed acquainted, as well as Cæsar, with all his master’s secrets—likewise surveyed the Black with mingled curiosity and apprehension.

“Yes!” at length exclaimed the mysterious personage; “I will now, for the first time since he has been my prisoner here, hold personal communication with Benjamin Bones!”

The party proceeded in silence to a cell near the extremity of the long subterranean passage; and on reaching it, the Black handed the lamp to Cæsar, at the same time making a sign to that youth and the other dependants to stand back so that no gleam of the light should penetrate into the dungeon when the door was opened. They obeyed in profound silence; and their master immediately entered the cell, closing the door behind him with that rapidity which is exercised by a brute-tamer when introducing himself into the cage of a wild beast.

The interior of the dungeon was as dark as pitch,—so dark, that there was not even that greyish appearance which obscurity frequently wears to eyes accustomed to it. It was a darkness that might be felt,—a darkness which seemed to touch and hang upon the visual organs like a dense black mist.

“Who is it?” demanded the sepulchral voice of Old Death, his tone marked with a subdued ferocity and a sort of savage growling which seemed to denote a rancorous hate and pent-up longings for bitter vengeance against the author or authors of his solitary imprisonment.

“I am the person who keeps you here,” answered the Black, studying to adopt a voice even more feigned and unlike his natural tones than when he was ere now addressing Tidmarsh and the Bunces.

Still that voice had in it some peculiarity which appeared to touch a chord that vibrated to the very core of Old Death’s heart; for he evidently made a starting movement, as he said hoarsely and thickly, “But who are you—a spectre or a living being? Tell me who you are!”

“I am a living being like yourself,” was the reply, delivered in a voice disguised in deeper modulations than before. “Are you afraid of being visited by spectres?”

There was a long pause, during which the deep silence was interrupted only by the heavy breathing of Old Death, as if the utter darkness of the place sate oppressively upon him.

“Are you afraid of spectres, I ask?” demanded the Black, who was leaning with folded arms against the door, and with his eyes in the direction where he presumed Old Death to be seated; though not even the faintest outline of his form could he trace amidst that black obscurity.

“Bring me a light, or let me out—and I will answer all your questions,” cried Benjamin Bones, his anxiety to obtain his freedom giving a cadence of earnest appeal to his voice in spite of the tremendous rage which his bosom cherished against the individual who had proclaimed himself to be his gaoler.

“Do you deserve mercy?—do you merit the indulgence of man?” asked the Black, in a tone profoundly solemn.

“What do you know of me?—who are you?—why did you have me brought here?—and by what right do you keep me in this infernal place?” demanded Old Death, rapidly and savagely.

“Is it not a just retribution which makes you a prisoner in a subterranean where you have often imprisoned others?” said the Black.

“Then ’tis that miscreant Ellingham who has put me here!” exclaimed Bones, in a tone which showed that he was quivering with rage. “Demon!—fiend!—yes—you are Lord Ellingham—I thought I knew your voice, although you tried to disguise it. At the first moment I fancied—but that was stupid,—still it struck me that it was the voice of Tom Rain which spoke. Ha! ha!” the old wretch chuckled with horrible ferocity and savage glee—“I did for him—I did for him! I sent him to the scaffold—I got him hanged—and now he is food for worms! Ellingham—for I know you *are* Lord Ellingham—I can have the laugh at you, you devil, although you keep me here!”

“Miserable old man,” said the Black, in a tone of deep pity, though still disguised in modulation,—“are you insensible to the whisperings of conscience?”

“Yes—now that you are here!” cried Benjamin Bones, his clothes rustling as if with the trembling nervousness of enraged excitement. “You made me sell you these houses—you took them away from me by force, as it were; and now you keep me a prisoner here. It is all through vengeance that you do it—*you* who pretended to be above all thoughts or intentions of revenge!”

“As God is my judge, I harbour no such sentiment towards you!” said the Blackamoor, emphatically. “But will you converse tranquilly and calmly with me?”

“Well—I will try,” returned Old Death. “What do you want to say to me?”

“To remind you that you are an old—very old man, and that you cannot hope to live much longer——”

“Fiend! would you kill me in cold blood!” interrupted Bones, in a sort of shrieking, yelling tone that indicated mingled alarm and rage.

“Had I intended to slay you, I might have done it when you were first brought here as my prisoner,” answered the Black. “Rest satisfied on that head——”

“Then you do not mean to kill me?” exclaimed Old Death, with all the hysterical joy of a coward soul, in spite of his natural and still untamed ferocity.

“Heaven forbid!” ejaculated the Blackamoor.

“There—now ’tis the voice of Tom Rain once again!” cried Old Death, evidently shuddering as he spoke. “But, no—I am a fool—you are the Earl! Yes—tell me—are you not the Earl of Ellingham?”

“No matter who I am,” was the solemn reply. “If you ask me questions, I will immediately leave you.”

“No—don’t go for a few minutes!” exclaimed Old Death, imploringly. “I have been here a month,—yes—for I have counted the visits of your men, who come, as they tell me, every night to bring me food,—and I know that I have been here a month. In all that time I have only exchanged a dozen words with human beings—and—and—this solitude is horrible!”

“You have leisure to ponder on all your crimes,” said the Black.

“Who made you my judge?” demanded Old Death, with a return of his ferocity of tone and manner. “If you want me to confess all my sins, and will then set me free, I will do it,” he added in a somewhat ironical way.

“Confession is useless, without true repentance,” observed the Blackamoor. “Besides, all your misdeeds are known to me,—your behaviour to your half-sister, Octavia Manners, years ago—your treatment of poor Jacob Smith—your machinations to destroy Thomas Rainford——”

“Then, by all this, am I convinced that you *are* the Earl of Ellingham!” cried Old Death. “Ah! my lord,” he immediately added, in a voice which suddenly changed to a tone of earnest appeal, “do not keep me here any longer! Let me go—and I will leave London for ever! Reflect, my lord—I am an old man—a very old man,—you yourself said so just now,—and you are killing me by keeping me here. Send me out of the country—any where you choose, however distant—and I will thank you: but again I say, do not keep me here.”

“When the savage animal goes about preying upon the weak and unwary, he should be placed under restraint,” said the Blackamoor.

“You are not repentant, Benjamin Bones! A month have you been here—a month have you been allowed to ponder upon your enormities,—and still your soul is obdurate. Not many minutes have elapsed since you gloried in one of the most infamous deeds of your long and wicked life.”

“I spoke of Tom Rain to annoy you—because I was enraged with you for keeping me here,” returned Old Death, hastily. “There have been moments,” he added, after a short pause, “when I have felt sorry for what I did in that respect. I would not do so over again—no, my lord, I assure you I would not! I wish your poor half-brother was alive now—I would not seek to injure him, even if I had the power.”

“You speak thus because you have been alone and in the dark,” observed the Blackamoor, in a mournful voice: “but were you restored to freedom—to the enjoyment of the light of God’s own sun—and to the possession of the power of following your career of iniquity, you would again glory in that dreadful deed.”

“No,” answered Old Death: “I am sorry for it. I know that my nature is savage and ferocious: but will you tame me by cruelty? And your keeping me here is downright cruelty—and nothing more or less. It makes me vindictive—it makes me feel at times as if I hated you.”

“I shall keep you here, nevertheless, for some time longer—aye, and in the dark,” returned the Blackamoor; “because you seek not to subdue your revengeful feelings. It is terrible to think that so old a man should be so inveterately wicked. Do you know that your gang is broken up—rendered powerless? In the cells of this subterranean are Timothy Splint—Joshua Pedler—Mrs. Bunce and her husband—and your agent, Tidmarsh.”

“Then I have no hope *from without*!” growled Old Death, his garments again rustling with a movement of savage impatience; and for an instant it struck the Blackamoor that he could see two ferocious eyes gleaming in the dark—but this was doubtless the mere fancy of the moment.

“Yes,—you are beyond the reach of human aid, unless by *my* will and consent,” said the Blackamoor. “Your late companions or tools in iniquity are all housed safely here;—and, what is more, they are penitent. Listen for a moment, Benjamin Bones; and may the information I am about to give you, prove an instructive lesson. Timothy Splint is at this instant reading the Bible, therein to search for hope and consolation, which God does not deny to the worst sinners when they are truly penitent. Joshua Pedler is occupying himself in writing a letter of advice to a young girl who became his mistress, whom he drove to prostitution, but who is now earning her livelihood in a respectable manner. Tidmarsh deplores the folly which made him your instrument; and he is reading good books. Bunce and his wife are together in the same dungeon; and the woman is rapidly yielding up to her husband that empire which she had usurped. They too regret that they ever knew you; and the Bible is their solace. Of six persons whom I imprisoned in this place which was once your own property, five are already repentant: you, who are the sixth, alone remain obdurate and hardened.”

“And my old friends curse me!” moaned the ancient miscreant, his voice seeming more hollow and sepulchral than ever, as if he were covering his face with his hands. “What—the people who owe so much to me—the Bunces—Tidmarsh——”

“Would not speak to you, unless it were to convert you,” added the Black. “Thus, you perceive, you—who, in the common course of nature, are of all the six the nearest to the threshold of the tomb,—you, who have so many years upon your head, and such deep and manifold crimes to expiate,—*you*, Benjamin Bones,” continued the warning voice, “are the last to show the slightest—the faintest sign of penitence. Is not this deplorable? And even now you appear to regret that your late companions in crime should be in their hearts thus alienated from you. Doubtless you trusted to the chapter of accidents—to the hazard of chances to enable them to discover your place of imprisonment and effect your rescue?”

Old Death groaned heavily, in spite of himself.

“Yes:—such was your hope—such was your idea,” resumed the Black; “and now you are unmanned by disappointment. Even your friend Jeffreys turned against you—he led you into the snare which I set for you—he will not raise an arm to save you from my power. He does not even know where you are.”

“Then I am abandoned by all the world!” shrieked forth the wretched miscreant, unable to subdue the agonising emotions which this conviction excited within him.

“He who finds himself abandoned by all the world, should throw himself upon his Maker,” said the Blackamoor.

“There—there—’tis the voice of Rainford again!” cried Old Death, evidently seized with ineffable terror. “But, no—no—you are the Earl of Ellingham—you must be the Earl! Yet why do you every now and then imitate the tone of Tom Rain? Is it to frighten me, my lord? Tell me—is it to frighten me?”

“You seem inaccessible to fear of any kind,” answered the Black,—“I mean a fear which may be permanent and salutary. You have occasional qualms of conscience, which you cannot altogether resist, but which almost immediately pass away. Have you no wish to make your peace with heaven? Would you pray with a clergyman, were one to visit you?”

“No:—I am unfit for prayer—I should not have the patience to stand the questioning of a clergyman,” answered Old Death hastily:

then, almost immediately afterwards, he said, “But I was wrong to give such a reply! Yes—send me a clergyman—let him bring a light—do any thing to relieve me from this solitude and this darkness. My lord—for I know that you are the Earl of Ellingham—pray take compassion upon me! I am an old—a very old man, my lord; and I cannot endure this confinement. I told you just now that I was sorry for what I did to your brother-in-law; and you know that I cannot recall him to life. Neither will you do so by killing me. Have mercy upon me, then, my lord: let me leave this horrible place——”

“To enter the great world again, and renew your course of crime?” interrupted the Black. “No—Benjamin Bones, that may not be! Let me first become assured that you sincerely and truly repent of your misdeeds—let me be impressed with the conviction that you are sorry for the crimes which have marked your long life,—and then—*then*, we will speak of ameliorating your condition. For the present, do not consider me as your enemy—do not look upon me as a man acting towards you from vindictive motives only. No:—for were I inclined to vent on you a miserable spite or a fiendish malignity, the means are not deficient. I might keep you without food for days together—but each day your provender is renewed: or I might even kill you outright—and yet I would not violently injure a hair of your head! To-morrow evening I will visit you again: in the meantime endeavour to subdue your feelings so that you may then speak to me without irritation.”

With these words the Black abruptly thrust the door open, and quitted the dungeon; but at that instant Cæsar, who had been pacing up and down with Wilton in the immediate vicinity of that particular cell, was so close to the entrance that the light of the lamp which he carried in his hand streamed full upon the countenance of his master as the latter sprang forth from the deep darkness of Old Death’s prison-house.

The glare for a moment showed the interior of the dungeon; and the Black, mechanically turning his eyes towards the place where he presumed Benjamin Bones to be, caught a rapid glimpse of the hideous old man, seated—or rather crouched on his bed, his hands clasped round his knees, and his form so arched that his knees and chin almost appeared to meet.

In another instant the dungeon-door was closed violently by the Blackamoor, who, as he locked and barred it, said in a low and somewhat reproachful tone to Cæsar, “You should not have been so incautious as to throw the light upon me just as I was leaving the cell. Old Death had time, even in that single moment during which the glare flashed upon my countenance, to observe me distinctly.”

“I am truly sorry, sir, that I should have been go imprudent,” answered Cæsar, in a tone of vexation at his fault. “But it is impossible that he could recognise you.”

“I believe so,” observed the Black: “and therefore we will say no more upon the subject. The old man remains obdurate and hardened,” he continued, still speaking in a low whisper; “and yet I have hopes of him as well as of the others.”

Wilton supplied Benjamin Bones with provisions through the trap in his dungeon-door; and the party then quitted the subterranean by the mode of egress communicating with the house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell—for the reader now perceives, as indeed he may long ago have conjectured, that the Black’s dwelling was established in the quarters lately tenanted by Old Death.

CHAPTER CXI.

A CONVERSATION.

Pass we over another month—eight weeks having now elapsed since the six prisoners were first consigned to their dungeons, and four weeks from the date of those visits the description of which has occupied the two proceeding chapters.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening; and the Blackamoor was seated in his apartment, looking over some letters, when Cæsar ushered in Dr. Lascelles.

"Good evening, my dear sir," said the Blackamoor, shaking the worthy physician cordially by the hand. "Be seated—and Cæsar will bring us a bottle of that claret which you so much admire. I am delighted that you have at length found time to give me an hour or two, in order that I may enter into full and complete explanations of certain matters——"

"I understand—I understand," interrupted the doctor, good humouredly. "Your theory has proved to me more practical than I expected: but I shall not say any more about it until you have given me all the details of its progress. And before you begin, I must observe that the case which took me out of town six weeks ago, and has kept me at Brighton all the time, has ended most satisfactorily. I have effected a complete cure."

"I am delighted to hear tidings so glorious from you, doctor," said the Black. "A case which had baffled all the physicians who had previously been concerned in it, is now conducted to a successful issue by yourself. It will wondrously and deservedly increase your reputation, great as that fame already was."

"My dear friend," replied the physician, "without for a moment seeking to recall any thing unpleasant connected with the past, I must inform you that galvanism was the secret of the grand cure which I have effected. But let us pass on to another subject," exclaimed the doctor hastily, as if considerately turning the discourse from a disagreeable topic. "I have been absent for six weeks—quite a strange thing for me, who am so wedded to London; and you are one of the very first of my friends on whom I call. All day long I have been paying hurried visits to my patients; and now I come to sit a couple of hours with you. I suppose you have plenty of news for me?"

"None of any consequence beyond the sphere of my own affairs in this place," answered the Black. "You are of course aware that the Earl has made Esther an offer of his hand——"

"To be sure, my dear friend," interrupted Lascelles: "that engagement was contracted, you remember, two or three weeks before I left London, when summoned to Brighton. But I presume that the Earl is still ignorant of——"

"All my proceedings?" exclaimed the Black, finishing the sentence for the physician. "Yes—he remains completely in the dark respecting every thing. The time may, however, soon come when he shall be made acquainted with all; and then I do not think he will blame me."

"Far from it!" cried Lascelles, emphatically: "he doubtless owes you his happiness, if not his life—for there is no telling what that miscreant, Old Death, might not have done to gratify his frightful cravings for vengeance. The monster!" exclaimed the physician, indignantly: "he would even have inflicted the most terrible outrages and wrongs upon the amiable Esther and the generous-souled Lady Hatfield, in order to wound the heart of the Earl."

"And yet I do not despair of reforming that man, bad as he is," observed the Black.

"Reform the Devil!" cried the doctor. "But I will not anticipate by any hasty opinion of mine the explanations which you are going to give me. By the bye, have you had any intelligence relative to that Mr. Torrens?"

"Yes," answered the Black. "Esther received a letter from his daughter Rosamond a few days ago. The poor girl and her father were on their way to Switzerland, where they intended to settle in some secluded spot. The old gentleman is worn down and spirit-broken; and Rosamond states that she is afraid he is oppressed with some secret care beyond those with which she is acquainted."

"And your man Jeffreys?" said Lascelles, interrogatively.

"The next time you visit Hackney, doctor,—should your professional avocations take you to that suburb," replied the Blackamoor, "forget not to look out for the most decent grocer's shop in Mare Street; and over the door you will see the name of JOHN JEFFREYS. He entered the establishment only a few days ago; and I believe he is a reformed man. I tried his fidelity as well as his steadiness in many

ways, during the last two months; and I have every reason to entertain the best hopes relative to him. At all events, he has every chance of earning an honest and good living; for he has purchased an old-established business, which Wilton previously ascertained to be a profitable concern."

"Have you heard or seen anything lately of our friend Sir Christopher Blunt?" enquired the physician, laughing as he spoke.

"I have not seen him since that memorable night when he fulfilled the duties of a magistrate in this room," answered the Black, smiling: "but I have occasionally heard of him. He is so puffed up with pride in consequence of the importance which he derived from his adventure here, that he looks upon himself as a perfect demigod. By the bye, I saw an advertisement in this day's papers, announcing the speedy publication of the '*The Life and Times of Sir Christopher Blunt. By Jeremiah Lykspittal, Esq. With numerous Portraits; and containing a mass of interesting correspondence between the Subject of the Biography and the most Eminent Deceased Men of the present Century.*' So ran the advertisement."

"At which you of course laughed heartily," exclaimed the doctor. "But here is Cæsar with the wine—and long enough he has been in fetching it up, too."

The lad made some excuse, placed the decanters and glasses on the table, and then withdrew.

"Now for the promised explanations, my friend," cried the physician, as he helped himself to the purple juice of Bordeaux.

"First," began the Blackamoor, "I shall speak to you of the six prisoners generally—or rather of my system, as applied to them. My belief originally was that bad men should become to a certain extent the reformers of themselves through the medium of their own thoughts. It is not sufficient, I reasoned within myself, that criminals should be merely placed each night in a situation to think and reflect, and then enjoy the light of the glorious day again. A night's meditations may be poignant and provocative of a remorse of a salutary kind: but when the day dawns, the mind becomes hardened again, and all disagreeable redactions fly away. The most guilty wretches fear not spectres in the day-time: 'tis in the darkness and silence of the night that phantoms haunt them. In a word, then, the natural night is not long enough to make an impression so deep that the ensuing day can not easily obliterate it."

"Good!" exclaimed the physician: "I follow you attentively."

"These considerations," resumed the Black, "led me to the conclusion that a wicked man's thoughts could only be rendered available as a means to induce sincere repentance and excite a permanent remorse, by extending their train to a long, long period. If a night of a few short hours' duration would produce a very partial and limited effect upon the mind of a criminal, I reasoned—why not make *a night* of many weeks, and hope for a proportionately grand and striking result? Accordingly, I resolved to subject those six prisoners to the test; and I will now give you a detailed account of the consequences."

"Proceed," said the physician: "I am becoming deeply interested."

"The six prisoners were each placed in a separate cell, and not allowed any light in the first instance," continued the Blackamoor. "Each dungeon was plainly but comfortably furnished; and every evening they were supplied with a sufficiency of food for four-and-twenty hours. They were ordered to perform their ablutions regularly under pain of having their meat stopped; and you may be sure that they did not fail to obey the command. Twice a week the men were shaved by one of my people; and twice a week also they were supplied with clean linen. The woman was of course provided with additional changes; and as her health was more likely to suffer than that of the men, I allowed her to walk up and down the long subterranean for two hours each day, watched by Wilton so that she might not communicate with either of the prisoners. But I am now about to enter on details connected with each individual."

The physician drew his chair a little closer to the Black.

"Tidmarsh was the first who showed any signs of contrition," resumed the latter. "He could not endure that one, long, endless *night* into which I had plunged him,—a night interrupted only by the short and regular visits of myself or my people. He was ever alone with his own thoughts, which no intervals of a long day broke in upon: the impression created by his thoughts was ever in his mind—the *continuous night* kept that impression *there*! By degrees he began to see the error of his ways—and, when his thoughts were on one occasion intolerable, and his imagination was filled with frightful images, he had recourse to prayer. The next time I visited him he assured me that his prayers had relieved him, but that he could not sufficiently settle his mind to pray so often as he desired. That was the moment to give this man a light; and I did so. At the same time I offered him his choice between the Bible and a Tale-book; and he chose the former with unaffected readiness. Had he selected the latter, I should have seen that he craved for amusement only—and he would have had neither lamp nor books until he had gone through a farther ordeal of his lonely thoughts in utter darkness. Well—this Tidmarsh, by the aid of the light, was enabled to study the Bible and settle his soul to prayer. But a continual and unvaried perusal of the Bible is calculated to render the mind morbid, and convert a sinner into a grossly superstitious fanatic. Accordingly, when I saw that Tidmarsh began to grow gloomy—which was in a very few days—I gave him books of Travels and Voyages; and his soul was refreshed by the change. The improvement in that man was far more rapid than I could have possibly anticipated. During my visits to him, I tested his sincerity in a variety of ways,—by means of questions so artfully contrived as to admit of two kinds of answers: namely, one kind hypocritical, and the other sincere—and at the same time implying a sort of promise of release if the hypocritical reply were given. But I found him straight-forward and truly conscientious in his answers. In due time I allowed him such novels as '*The Vicar of Wakefield*,' '*Paul and Virginia*,' '*Elizabeth, or the Exiles of Siberia*,' to read: but I found that he preferred the Travels, Voyages, and Biographies of good or great men. Indeed, scarcely six weeks had elapsed from the date of that man's incarceration in the

dungeon, when I felt convinced that he was so far a reformed character as to be anxious to earn an honest livelihood if he were only afforded the chance. Then I removed him from his dungeon, and lodged him in a room up stairs. He was still in reality a prisoner, because any attempt to escape on his part would have been immediately detected—so narrowly yet secretly was he watched. To him, however, it must have seemed that he was free: but he never evinced the least inclination to avail himself of the apparent liberty which he enjoyed. Every circumstance spoke in that man's favour; and the night before last he was sent off, in company with one of my dependants, to Portsmouth, whence they embarked together for the little island of Alderney, where Tidmarsh is to settle in a small way of business, to establish which the means will be found him. My retainer will remain for a few weeks—or perhaps months—so as thoroughly to watch his conduct; and if during that period, and in a place where there are no evil temptations, he manifests an uniform steadiness of conduct, I think we may safely calculate that there is no fear of a relapse."

"And all this has been effected in two short months!" exclaimed the physician, with a tone and manner indicative of mingled surprise and admiration. "I could scarcely have believed it possible."

"Listen to my next case, doctor," said the Black; "and you will see that my system is most salutary. I shall speak of the two Bunces collectively. The man Bunce I always looked upon rather as a soft-pated, hen-pecked fool than a radically wicked fellow; and accordingly, the moment he began to exhibit very serious alarm and horror at being alone and in the dark, I gave him a lamp and the Bible. The *length of night* which I made him endure was not more than two-thirds of a week. In respect to his wife, the first demonstration of repentance which she showed, was in a desire to speak to her husband if only for a few minutes and through the trap-door of his cell. Of course I issued orders that the request should be complied with; and it was evident that the woman derived comfort from this indulgence. Next day she was permitted to converse with him at the trap-door for nearly half an hour; and then she was overheard begging his pardon for the ill-treatment which he had so often endured at her hands. For many, many successive days this short intercourse was allowed them; and on one occasion, Toby Bunce read her a few verses from the Bible, he being in his cell with the lamp, and she standing outside his door in the dark subterranean passage. The manner in which she received the passage thus read to her, induced me to order that she also should be provided with a light and a Testament: for the *night* which she endured, and which could scarcely be said to have been even interrupted by the daily walk in the dark passage, was just *three weeks*. It gave me pain, doctor—oh! it gave me pain, I can assure you, to punish that woman so severely: but her mind was very obdurate—her heart very hardened;—and darkness was long before it produced on her the effect which I desired. At length, a few days after she had been allowed a lamp,—and a little more than one month ago—I yielded to her earnest entreaties that she might be lodged with her husband. Then what a change had taken place in her! She was tamed—completely tamed,—no longer a vixenish shrew, but questioning her husband mildly and in a conciliating tone relative to the passages of the Bible, or the Travels and other instructive books, which he had read to her. Good feelings appeared to establish themselves rapidly between this couple. I had them put to several tests. On one occasion Wilton persuaded Toby Bunce that he was not looking very well, and some little luxury was added to the evening's supply of food, it being intimated that the extra dish was expressly for himself. Wilton remained near the cell, and listened to what passed within. Bunce insisted upon sharing the delicacy with his wife; and she would not hear of such a proposal. He urged his offer—she was positive; and in this point she once again showed a resolution of her own, but not in a manner to give her husband offence. The very next day—this was a week ago—I had the pair removed to a chamber over-head, giving them the same apparent chance of escape as in the case of Tidmarsh. They did not however seek to avail themselves of it; and yesterday evening they were separated again—but only for a short time. In fact, Bunce was last night sent off to Southampton, in company with one of my people; and thence they doubtless embarked for the island of Sark this morning. Mrs. Bunce will leave presently, guarded by my faithful dependant Harding and his wife, who will not only take her to rejoin her husband in the little islet opposite Guernsey, but will also stay with them there for a period of six months. Bunce will follow his trade as a tailor, Harding finding a market for the clothes which he makes in St. Peter's Port, which is the capital of Guernsey, as you are well aware."

"So far, so good," exclaimed the physician, highly delighted with these explanations. "Should your system produce results permanently beneficial, you may become a great benefactor to the human race; for it is assuredly far better to reform the wicked by a course of a few weeks' training by playing upon their feelings in this manner, than to subject them to the contamination of a felons' gaol and inflict years of exile under circumstances which are utterly repugnant to all hopes of reformation. But pray answer me one question. Should either of these Bunces, or Tidmarsh choose to resist the control and authority of your dependants who have charge of them at present—and should any one of those quasi-prisoners demand their unconditional freedom—how can your men exercise a power or sway over them?"

"These quasi-prisoners, as you term them," answered the Black, "have not, as a matter of course, the least idea who I really am. Their minds, somewhat attenuated by their incarceration and all the mysterious circumstances of their captivity, are to a certain extent over-awed. They know that they have been, and still believe themselves to be, in the power of one who wields an authority which they cannot comprehend; and fear alone, if no better motive, therefore renders them tractable. This ensures their obedience and their silence at least for the present. Eventually, when they again become accustomed to freedom, they will find themselves placed in a position to earn an honest and very comfortable livelihood—care being taken to keep alive in their minds the conviction that the business which produces them their bread and enables them to live respectably, only remains their own so long as they prove worthy of enjoying its advantages. Now, my calculations and beliefs are these:—People who have entered upon a course of crime, continue in it because it is very difficult, and often impossible, to leave it for honest pursuits. But when once they have experienced the dreadful effects of crime, and are placed in a way to act and labour honestly, very few indeed would *by choice* relapse into evil courses. Therefore, I conclude and hope that the Bunces on the one hand, and Tidmarsh on the other, will, if from mere motives of policy and convenience alone, steadily continue in that honest path in which they are now placed, and the advantages of which they will soon experience."

"Good again," said that doctor. "If your calculations only applied to six criminals out of ten, you would be effecting an immense good

by means of your system. But I hope and indeed am inclined to believe that the proportion in your favour is even larger."

"I am certain that it is," answered the Blackamoor. "Well, I now come to Timothy Splint—the man, who, as you may remember, was the actual assassin of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"If you succeed in redeeming that fellow," exclaimed the physician, "I shall say that your system can have no exceptions. Stay, though!" he cried, a thought striking him;—"I had forgotten Old Death. Ah! my dear friend, you may as well endeavour to tame the boa-constrictor, as to reform that dreadful man."

"You shall hear of him in his turn," said the Black, his tone assuming a slight degree of mournfulness, as if he were less satisfied in respect to the application of his system to Old Death, than in either of the other cases. "For the present," he observed, "you must have patience enough to listen to certain details relative to Timothy Splint."

"Go on, my dear friend," cried Dr. Lascelles. "I am all attention—and patience too, for that matter. Your narrative is too interesting to be tedious."

"Timothy Splint," continued the Blackamoor, "appeared to suffer more horribly from the darkness than all the others. The spectre of the murdered baronet was constantly by his side, and even prevented him from committing self-destruction. For a whole month did his *night* continue; and during that period he must have endured the most frightful mental tortures. This was all the better: such a state of mind naturally drove the man to pray;—and prayer relieved him. I remember how touchingly, although in his rude style, he assured me one evening that when he prayed the spectre grew less and less. Now, notwithstanding I was well pleased to find him in this frame of mind, I did not choose to encourage superstitious notions: and therefore I explained to him that the only apparitions which existed were those that were conjured up by a guilty conscience. At the expiration of, I think, exactly thirty-one days, I allowed this man a light and a Bible. Then I pursued the same treatment with him as in respect to Tidmarsh and the Bunces: I mean, I gave him books of Travels and Voyages and moral Tales. He seemed very grateful—not only seemed, but really was; and his hard heart was melted by my kind treatment. A few days ago, he gave me the outlines of his early life; and I found that circumstances had driven him into the ways of crime. His reformation was, therefore, all the easier; because he had a youth of innocence to look back upon and regret. He moreover assured me that even with his late companion in crime, Josh Pedler, he had frequently spoken, in mournful mood, of the unhappiness which often marks the hours of men of lawless character; and, all these circumstances tended to give strength and consistency to his declarations that he longed—deeply longed to have an opportunity of earning an honest livelihood for the future. What to do with him I scarcely knew. Whenever I reflected on this subject, I remembered that he was a murderer—stained with the blood of a fellow-creature; and his case was therefore widely different from that of the Bunces and Tidmarsh. At length it struck me that emigration to a far-distant land was the only fitting course to adopt; and I proposed it to him. He was rejoiced at the idea; for he instantly saw how, by changing his name, and commencing the world anew in another sphere, he should be removed from old haunts where either unpleasant reminiscences would be awakened, or temptations present themselves. Moreover, he beheld the necessity of repairing to some part of the earth where he stood no chance of being recognised by either friend or foe. His consent to my proposed arrangement being thus obtained, and all his best hopes and feelings being warmly enlisted in the plan, I had then to ascertain whether any one of my dependants would consent to accompany such a man on a long voyage and to a far-off clime. Fortunately my enquiries amongst my retainers were followed by success; and at a very early hour this morning Timothy Splint and his guardian, or rather companion, set off for Liverpool, thence to embark for the United States. There, in the backwoods of the Far West, let us hope that this man—this murderer, whom the savage law would have *hanged*,"—and the Blackamoor shuddered, as he pronounced the word,—"let us hope, I say, that Timothy Splint will some day rise into a substantial farmer, and that he may yet live to bless the period when he went through the ordeal of the subterranean dungeon."

The Black paused, and drank a glass of the cooling claret; for his mouth had grown parched by the simple fact of giving utterance to *that one word* on which he had shudderingly laid so great an emphasis. The physician, who appeared to guess full well what was passing in his mind, made no remark; and in a few moments the other continued his explanations in the ensuing manner:—

"I now come to Joshua Pedler. His disposition is naturally savage and brutal; and *a long night of darkness* produced on him effects which varied at different periods. His thoughts were dreadful to him; and sometimes, when I visited him, he would at first speak ferociously. But a kind word on my part immediately reduced him to meekness. He had not been many days in the dungeon when, doubtless encouraged by my manner towards him, he told me that he was not only unhappy on his own account, but also on that of a young woman whom he had married according to the rights of the vile class with which he had so long herded. I immediately undertook to provide for the girl; and Pedler really demonstrated a sincere gratitude. You need scarcely be told that I kept my promise. Wilton sought her out; and she was found in a state of starvation and despair. A comfortable lodging was taken for her; and when she was somewhat restored to health, needle-work was supplied her. But all this was done without allowing her to believe that any other circumstance beyond a mere accidental discovery of her wretched condition had thus rendered her the object of Wilton's charity. The assurance which I gave Pedler that Matilda was provided for, had a most salutary effect upon his mind; although he frequently afterwards showed signs of savage impatience. The tenour of his thoughts was chiefly a regret that he had been so foolish as to pursue an evil career. He reproached himself for the folly of his wickedness, rather than for the wickedness itself, he disliked solitude and darkness, but was not so much influenced by fears as his late companion, Splint. During the first month he remained in darkness, and never once spoke to me of prayer. Two or three times he alluded to the Bible, but did not express a wish to read it. At last he admitted to me his conviction that the thoughts which oppressed him were beneficial to him, though most unpleasant. I fancied this to be a favourable opportunity to test his worthiness to receive some indulgence. I accordingly asked him if he would like to be able to write to Matilda. My calculation was just: I had touched him in a vulnerable point;—and he was that night allowed a lamp and writing-

materials. Moreover, on that very occasion, he shed tears; and I no longer despaired of taming the last remnants of ferocity which lingered in his nature. A few days afterwards he gave me a letter to send to Matilda. Of course I opened and read it; for it was to obtain a precise insight into the real state of his mind that I had suggested the correspondence with his mistress. The contents of that document confirmed the hopes I already entertained of him; and I saw that his affection for that young woman might be made a most humanizing means in respect to him. I accordingly had her brought into this house, and lodged in one of the attics. Then I broke to her as gently as possible the fact that Joshua Pedler was my prisoner. I shall not pause to describe her joy at receiving intelligence concerning him; suffice it to say that she read his letter with tearful eyes, and gladly consented to reply to it. In the evening I took her answer to the prisoner; and he wept over it like a child. I then knew that his reformation was a certainty. Two or three days afterwards, he begged me to allow him a Bible; and his request was of course complied with. The correspondence that passed between him and Matilda was frequent and lengthy; and, that he might feel himself under no restraint, I assured him that I neither saw his letters nor his replies. 'Twas a falsehood on my part—but a necessary, and therefore an innocent one. For I *did* peruse all this correspondence; and Matilda was aware of the fact by which I was enabled to watch the gradual but sudden change that was taking place in the mind of that man. At length I perceived that I might in safety think of providing for him elsewhere; and I was as much embarrassed how to accomplish this aim, as I was in the case of Timothy Splint. But in the midst of my bewilderment I happened to notice an advertisement in a daily newspaper, stating that by a particular day two men, or a man and his wife, were required to undertake the care of Eddystone Light-house. You may start with surprise, doctor—you may even smile: but I assure you that this advertisement appeared most providentially to concur with the object I had in view. Without a moment's delay I spoke to Matilda respecting the matter; and she expressed her readiness to follow my advice in all things, so long as there was a prospect of her being reunited to Josh Pedler. Her consent being procured, it was no difficult task to obtain that of the man. On the contrary, he accepted the proposal with joy and thankfulness. Wilton soon made the necessary enquiries and arrangements; and at this moment Joshua Pedler and the young woman are the sole inmates of the Eddystone Light-house!"

"Thus, my dear friend," said the physician, counting the names of the persons upon his fingers, "you have disposed of Tidmarsh in Alderney—the Bunces are to go to Sark—Splint is bound as an emigrant to the Far West—and Joshua Pedler is on the Eddystone rock."

"And Pedler is the only one who is unaccompanied by an agent of mine," observed the Black; "because Matilda is a good young woman; and I can rely upon her. Moreover I should tell you that I procured a license for them; and Wilton saw them legally married at Plymouth, before they embarked for the Light-house."

"I congratulate you upon the success of your projects thus far," said the physician. "It is truly wonderful how admirably you have managed thus to redeem and satisfactorily dispose of some of the greatest villains that ever lurked in the low dens of this metropolis. But now, my friend, I wish to hear something of that arch-miscreant, Old Death."

At this moment the door opened; and one of the Black's dependants entered the room.

"The woman Bunce, sir," he said, "is most anxious to communicate something to you before she quits London. She declares that she has a secret preying upon her mind——"

"A secret?" exclaimed the Black.

"Yes, sir—a secret which she says she must reveal to you, as it is too heavy for her heart to bear. She cried a great deal, and implored me to come to you."

"Doctor," said the Blackamoor, after a few moments' profound reflection, "you know wherefore I do not wish that woman to behold my features—even though they be thus disguised. During her incarceration I never spoke to her save through the trap of her dungeon door; and since she has been an inmate of the house I have not visited her. It will be as well to continue this precaution: do you, then, hasten to her and receive the confession, whatever it be, which she has to make."

"Willingly," replied Lascelles; and he followed the servant from the room.

CHAPTER CXII.

THE CONVERSATION CONCLUDED.

Upwards of a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when Dr. Lascelles returned to the apartment in which he had left the Blackamoor.

“Yes,” exclaimed the physician, throwing himself into the chair which he had recently occupied; “that woman is indeed penitent—truly penitent!”

“What proof have you acquired of this fact, doctor?” demanded the Black.

“The confession which she has just made to me—or rather the motive which induced her to make it,” answered Lascelles. “But not to keep you in suspense, my dear friend, she has revealed something which only confirms a suspicion that you yourself had long ago entertained, if I remember right.”

“And that suspicion——”

“Is relative to Jacob Smith,” added Lascelles.

“Ah! the woman has confessed it?” exclaimed the Blackamoor.

“She has confessed that Jacob Smith is her own son, and that Benjamin Bones is his father,” replied the physician, in a solemn tone.

“My God! what a parent that man has been!” cried the Black, his brows contracting, and his voice indicating the emotions of horror that were suddenly excited within him. “When I recall to mind every detail of the history of poor Jacob,—his neglected infancy—his corrupted youth,—when I reflect that his own father was the individual who coolly and deliberately initiated him in the ways of crime ——Just heavens! I begin to think with you that the reformation of such a monster is an impossibility!”

“Subdue your excitement, my dear friend,” said the doctor; “and let us converse calmly and reasonably upon these matters.”

“First, then, explain to me the nature of your interview with Mrs. Bunce,” observed the Black. “I shall listen with earnest attention.”

“I went up stairs to the room in which she is located,” said Lascelles; “and she rose from a chair the moment I entered; but she started back in evident disappointment mingled with surprise when she saw me. ‘*It was not you, sir,*’ she almost immediately observed, ‘*that I wanted to see. I know that the master of this house is of dark complexion; for I have caught a glimpse of him when he has visited my dungeon below.*’—I explained to her that I was a friend of yours, and that you had deputed me to receive any confession which she had to make. She appeared to hesitate for a moment, and then burst into tears. ‘*I have been wicked—very wicked, sir,*’ she said, in a voice broken by deep sobs; ‘*and it is only very lately that I have had my eyes opened to my sinful life. The dark gentleman, who I suppose is the master here, has done this good thing for me: and now he is going to provide for me and my husband. But I shall not go away happy, unless I tell him every thing that weighs on my soul.*’—I spoke a few words of comfort to her; and in a few minutes she confessed that the lad who bore the name of Jacob Smith is her own son, born while she was the mistress of Old Death, and before her marriage with Bunce. I informed her that Jacob was well provided for and happy; and she seemed deeply grateful for this assurance. Then I recommended her not to reveal this secret to her husband when they should be united again; inasmuch as, having entered on a new phase of existence together, it would be useless and wrong to acquaint him with a fact calculated only to disturb that harmony. She promised to follow my advice, and appeared much eased in mind by having unbosomed her secret to me.”

“You gave her most excellent counsel, doctor,” said the Black: then, after a few moments’ reflection, he added, “Jacob ought not to be informed of this secret of his hideous parentage——at least not for the present.”

“By no means!” exclaimed the physician. “His mind is tranquil—he feels a certain confidence in himself—and your friendship is his greatest delight. Let not that salutary equanimity be disturbed.”

“No—it would be wrong and useless,” said the Black, musing. “I remember that in the course of the long narrative which he gave me of his life, he mentioned the occasional scintillations of kindness which marked the conduct of Mrs. Bunce towards him. I also recollect that he observed to me how there were moments when he thought a great deal of any gentle words which she ever uttered to him, or any kind treatment she ever showed him.”

“Nature, my dear friend—Nature!” exclaimed the good physician. “Even in a woman so bad as she was at the time of which he spoke,

there were certain natural yearnings which she could not altogether subdue; while, on his part, there existed filial inclinations and tendencies which he could not understand. How much that villain Benjamin Bones has to answer for!"

"Alas—alas! I fear that he is beyond redemption!" cried the Black, bitterly. "But—no," he added immediately afterwards, in a changed and more decided tone: "we must not despair!"

"I am now anxiously waiting to hear your report concerning him," observed Lascelles.

"He is still in darkness—*his night* still continues," was the answer. "A month has elapsed since I visited him for the first time in his dungeon; and during the other four weeks that have subsequently passed, I have had several interviews with him in the same manner. These interviews have taken place in the utter obscurity of his cell; and I have been constrained, though with pain and difficulty, to assume a feigned tone on each of those occasions. At my first visit he declared, in terror and amazement, that he recognised in my voice something which reminded him of that of Thomas Rainford; and then he seemed to be impressed with the conviction that I was the Earl of Ellingham. His rage against the Earl was deep and terrible; and I saw too plainly that if he relapsed into a milder tone, it was but to deceive me as to the real state of his mind, and induce me to grant him some indulgences—if not his freedom. I visited him again on the following night; and he spoke less savagely, and more meekly: but I mistrusted him—yes, I mistrusted him, and I fear with good grounds. I cannot give you a very satisfactory description of our subsequent meetings. At one moment he has appeared touched by my language, and has even expressed penitence and contrition for the past: at the next moment, he has exhibited all the natural ferocity of his disposition. Sometimes he has assumed a coaxing manner, and has endeavoured to move me to grant him a light;—but I have hitherto refused. One thing I must not forget to mention—which is that never since the first visit I paid him has he once alluded to the impression made upon him by the sounds of my voice; and never has he again addressed me as Lord Ellingham. In moments of excitement or rage, he has demanded in a wild and almost frantic tone who I am: but seldom waiting for the reply, he has relapsed either into a humour of stubborn taciturnity, or of a meekness which I knew to be assumed. Indeed, there are many points in his character and conduct, since he has been an inmate of the dungeon, which I cannot comprehend. It is however certain that darkness has not produced on him the same rapid and important effects as upon the other five: something more severe in the shape of punishment, or something better calculated to touch his heart and appeal to his feelings, is requisite. At the same time, I believe him to be already moved and shaken in his obduracy to a certain degree: but reformation in respect to him must be a work of time."

"On the whole, you have hopes?" said the physician, interrogatively.

"Yes—when I call to memory all the particulars of his conduct and language from the first occasion of my visits until the last, which took place yesterday, I can recognise a change," answered the Black. "Indeed, I am almost convinced that if it were possible for me to speak to him at very great length—to argue with him on the folly and wickedness of his past life—to reason with him unrestrainedly, I should be able to move him deeply. But the necessity of maintaining an assumed tone, and the impossibility of taking a light with me so as to watch the chantings and workings of his countenance and follow up those appeals or those arguments which appear to have most effect with him,—in a word, the disguise I am compelled to sustain and the precautions I am forced to adopt, militate considerably against my system in respect to *him*."

"It would be imprudent for *me* to visit him on your behalf," observed the physician. "On that memorable night when Lord Ellingham had him, Tidmarsh, and Mrs. Bunce in his power in an adjacent room, and wrested from them all the secrets of their damnable plots and schemes,—on that occasion, you know, I was present; and Old Death would therefore cherish only rancorous feelings with regard to me."

"True," said the Black, musing: then, suddenly starting from a deep reverie of a few minutes, he exclaimed, "Doctor, I have thought of a plan which I hope and trust, for the honour of human nature, may prove efficacious in respect to that obdurate sinner: but I hesitate—yes, I hesitate to put it into execution!"

"Explain yourself, my dear friend," replied Lascelles; "and I will give you my advice candidly and frankly."

"In a word, then, doctor," continued the Blackamoor, "I have such faith in the soft persuasion of woman, that I am half inclined to conjure Esther de Medina to assist me in this good work. Would she but consent to visit this great sinner—or rather to address him through the sliding-panel of his dungeon door, I am certain that her eloquence, aided by the musical tones of her voice and the deep feeling which would characterise her language,—I am certain, I say, that she would succeed in touching a chord in his heart, which no words—no appeal of mine can reach."

The physician heard with attention, and began to reflect profoundly.

"For my part," continued the Blackamoor, "I believe that the eloquence of woman, when rightly used and properly directed, is endowed with an influence and a power almost irresistible. Woman's mission is to tame and humanize the ferocity of man's disposition; and the more antagonistic are the characters of two beings of opposite sexes thus to be brought in contact with each other, the better for the purpose. Now, decidedly no two living creatures can be more dissimilar in all respects than Benjamin Bones and Esther de Medina,—the former so savage and unrelenting; the latter so mild and forgiving,—the one possessing a soul blackened by every possible crime; the other endowed with every virtue that approximates the nature of woman to that of the angel!"

"I like your project—I see not the least objection to it, my dear friend," said Dr. Lascelles, after a long pause, during which he pondered deeply on the plan suggested. "Do you think that Miss de Medina would consent to aid you in this matter?"

“I have no doubt of it,” returned the Black. “You perceive that the dilemma is somewhat serious, and not slightly embarrassing. I cannot allow Benjamin Bones to go forth again into the world, to recommence his vile intrigues: besides, to give him his liberty thus, would be to defeat the primary object which I had in view in breaking up his gang. To release him at present is therefore impossible; and I scarcely feel myself justified in keeping him locked up much longer in a dark dungeon. It would be unsafe to remove him into one of the apartments of either this house or that in Turnmill Street; for such a crafty fox can alone be kept secure by massive stone walls and iron bolts. What, then, am I to do with him?—how am I to dispose of him? Esther will assist me in this difficulty; and God send that through her agency, some salutary impression may be made upon Old Death’s mind!”

“Bear in memory,” exclaimed the physician, an idea suddenly striking him, “that one of this man’s horrible schemes was to avenge himself on Lord Ellingham by torturing Esther de Medina.”

“And when he hears her sweet voice revealing to him her knowledge of his atrocious designs, and sincerely promising him her pardon, —when he discovers how much virtue and goodness there is in woman,” continued the Black, in an impassioned tone, “he will be moved—he will be led to contemplate the blackness of his own heart—he will find himself placed in such frightful contrast with that forgiving angel——”

“Yes—yes!” cried the physician, emphatically: “it must be done! You have devised the only means to produce a real and effectual impression on that bad man’s heart; and if he prove inaccessible to the persuasiveness of Esther’s tongue, his case may be looked upon as hopeless.”

The deep-toned bell of Clerkenwell church now struck the hour of eleven; and scarcely had the sound died away in the silence of night, when a post-chaise drove up to the door of the house.

“Mrs. Bunce is now about to take her departure,” said the Black. “Everything is prepared in that respect—Harding and his wife have already received full instructions and the necessary funds—and the sooner that the woman is safe out of this mighty city of temptation, the better.”

The sounds of several footsteps were now heard descending the stairs; and a minute afterwards, the post-chaise drove rapidly away from the house.

“Of all my prisoners, Old Death alone remains to be disposed of,” observed the Black, as soon as the din of the wheels was no longer audible.

“And it is to be hoped that *he* will not be a source of difficulty or embarrassment to you for many weeks more,” said the physician, rising to take his departure.

CHAPTER CXIII.

ESTHER DE MEDINA AND OLD DEATH.

It was on the third day after the explanations given to Dr. Lascelles, and between five and six o'clock in the evening, that Esther de Medina was conducted by the Blackamoor into the subterranean passage, the latter holding a lamp in his hand.

"Shall I remain near you, Esther?" he enquired, in a whisper.

"No—it is not necessary," she answered. "I am not afraid of being in this place, gloomy as it appears; and since I am merely to address the miserable man through the trap-door of his dungeon, no harm can reach me."

Thus speaking, she turned and received the light from her companion,—her manner being calm and even resolute, though her countenance was very pale.

"God bless you, Esther!" said the Black, emphatically: "your willingness to aid me in this important matter is not the least admirable trait in your character!"

"It is a duty—though a painful one," responded the beautiful Jewess. "And now leave me—I would rather proceed alone to the prisoner's cell."

"Remember," said the Blackamoor, "it is the last on the right hand side of this long subterranean passage."

He then retraced his way up the stone-staircase communicating with the house in Red Lion Street, while Esther advanced along the gloomy cavern, in which the lamp shone but with feeble lustre.

In less than a minute she reached the door of Old Death's dungeon: and there she paused for nearly another minute, a sensation of loathing and horror preventing her from immediately announcing her presence to the terrible inmate of that cell. For the Black, in order to prepare her as fully and completely as possible for her philanthropic mission, had been compelled to reveal to her all the details of those dreadful designs which Benjamin Bones had cherished against herself and Lady Hatfield, and which had been made known through the medium of John Jeffreys. It was therefore natural that Esther de Medina should shrink from the bare idea of holding the slightest communication with a miscreant of so ferocious a character: but a short—a very short interval of reflection was soon sufficient to arm her with the courage necessary to support the ordeal.

Drawing back the sliding-panel which covered the small aperture in the upper part of the massive door, she said in her soft, musical voice, "Prisoner, will you grant me your attention for a few minutes?"

"Who are you?" demanded Old Death, starting as if from a lethargic state—a movement that was indicated by the sudden rustling of his garments and the creaking of the bed whereon he was placed.

"I am Esther de Medina," was the answer; and the beautiful Jewess allowed the lamp to cast its light upon her countenance, which was so close to the aperture that Old Death caught a momentary but perfect view of her features.

She then placed the lamp upon the ground, thus again leaving the interior of the cell in complete darkness.

"Yes—it is Miss Esther de Medina!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, in a voice which he endeavoured to render as mild and conciliatory as possible. "Dear young lady, open the door, and let me out of this horrible place. I am sure you possess a good heart——"

"A heart good enough to forgive you for the dreadful atrocity which you contemplated against me upwards of two months ago," interrupted Esther, scarcely able to subdue a shuddering sensation which came over her. "Yes—I know every thing," she continued: "you would have entrapped me into your power—you would have deprived me of the blessing of sight,—and yet I never, never injured you."

"But you say that you forgive me!" cried Old Death, impatiently. "Open the door, then, my sweet young lady—and I will find means to reward you well. Listen," he exclaimed, approaching the trap, and speaking in a confidential kind of hollow, murmuring whisper, —"don't be offended at what I am going to say—but I know that you are fond of jewellery—and it is natural for such a beautiful creature as you are——"

“Silence, sir!” interrupted Esther, indignantly. “I am well aware to what you allude; and it is time to undeceive you on that head,” she added, in a proud tone: “indeed, there is no longer any necessity for concealment in that respect! In my turn I desire you to listen—and listen attentively. You entertain a belief so prejudicial to my character, that I cannot allow even such an one as *you* to cherish it another minute. Know, then, that I have a sister so like myself in outward appearance——”

“By Satan! it must be so,” ejaculated Old Death, a light breaking in upon his mind as in a single moment he took a rapid survey of all the circumstances which had originally led him to suppose that Esther was the thief of Mr. Gordon’s diamonds and the mistress of Tom Rain. “Yes—yes—I understand it all now!” he added, in a tone that appeared to imply vexation at his former blindness in respect to these matters.

“With pain and sorrow am I thus compelled to allude to a sister who is so dear—so very dear to me,” resumed Esther: “but this explanation was necessary—not only for my own sake, but likewise to convince you of the folly and wickedness of endeavouring to induce *me*, by the promise of reward or bribe, to draw back the bolts of your prison-door. No—my visit to you is inspired by the earnest desire to move your soul to the contemplation of all the dreadful deeds which have marked your life——”

“Then you will not set me free?” exclaimed Old Death, in a tone of subdued rage and latent ferocity.

“Not now—not now,” repeated Esther. “But listen to me attentively!”

“Go on,” growled the inmate of the dungeon, as he retreated from the door, and threw himself upon his bed again.

“If you entertain the slightest hope that you will ever be allowed an opportunity to re-enter on a course of wickedness and crime, you are sadly mistaken,” continued Esther, speaking in a conciliatory and yet energetic tone. “Even were you liberated this moment, measures would be adopted to render you completely powerless for the future in respect to the perpetration of fresh enormities. Reflect, then, whether it will not be better for you to devote the remainder of your days—and in the ordinary course of nature they must necessarily be few—to the important duty of making your peace with heaven! Do not despair of pardon—oh! no—do not despair! You see that I, who am a mortal being, can forgive you for the wrongs you meditated against me,—and surely the mercy of heaven is greater than that of human creatures! Yes—repent ere it be too late; and God will not cast you off eternally. *His* mercy is infinite: *His* pardon is never asked in vain by the penitent sinner.”

“Continue to speak to me thus,” cried Old Death, in a tone strangely subdued and wondrously meek, considering the ferocious excitement which so lately animated him.

“Oh! I sincerely hope that you will recognise the error of your ways, ere it be indeed too late!” exclaimed Esther, in a tone of enthusiasm deeply felt by her generous soul. “Consider your advanced age—and think how soon the hand of Death may be laid upon you! Then how wretched—how awful would your feelings be,—and how would you shudder at the idea of being about to stand in the presence of that Almighty Power whose laws and mandates you have so often violated! For, after all, what have you gained by your long, long career of wickedness? All your treasures were annihilated in one hour——”

“Yes—yes,” interrupted Old Death, in a voice half suffocated with emotions which the Jewess fondly believed to be those of remorse.

“The hoardings of many years and the produce of innumerable misdeeds were thus swept away,” she continued, impressively; “and Providence at length decreed that you should become a prisoner in the very place where you had so long ruled as a master. Does not heaven, then, afford you solemn and significant warnings that your career of crime is no more to be pursued with success?—and do not those warnings move your heart to repentance and remorse? Neglect not such warnings as these, I conjure you!”

“Your words do me good, young lady!” exclaimed Old Death. “I am glad that you have come thus to speak to me.”

“And shall you ponder upon what I have said?” she demanded.

“Yes. But you will not leave me yet?—and you will come again?” he said, in a voice indicative of suspense and anxiety relative to the answer that was to be given.

“I will return to-morrow,” observed Esther.

“Thank you!” exclaimed Old Death, his tone now denoting a profound emotion.

But Esther did not immediately leave the vicinity of the cell on the present occasion. Believing that she had succeeded in making some salutary impression upon him, she was desirous of following up the promising commencement of her mission; and she accordingly continued to reason with him for nearly half-an-hour longer. In the course of the observations and arguments which she addressed to the ancient sinner, she displayed a sound judgment and a deep but enlightened religious feeling: there was nothing bigoted—nothing fanatical in her language. She indulged in no quotations from the Old Testament—the book that formed the basis of her own nation’s creed: but she expatiated on the goodness of the Creator—the hope that exists for penitent sinners—the terrors of a death-bed without previous repentance—and the folly, as well as the wickedness, of the course already pursued by the prisoner. Old Death interrupted her but seldom; and when he did interject an observation, it was in a tone and of a nature calculated to inspire the charming Jewess with the hope that her mission had not been undertaken in vain.

At length she quitted the vicinity of the cell, having reiterated her promise to return on the following day.

And this pledge was faithfully kept;—and again do we find the Hebrew maiden persevering in her humane—her noble task of awakening proper feelings in the breast of a terrible sinner. To her question whether he had meditated upon his spiritual condition, Old Death replied earnestly and eagerly in the affirmative; and throughout this second visit, he not only sought to retain the young lady near him—or rather at his door—as long as possible, but likewise seemed sincere in his endeavours to inspire her with the belief that her reasoning and her representations had not been thrown away upon him.

On the third day, Esther fancied that there was even a still more striking change in his language when he responded to her questions or her remarks; and not once, during the hour that she remained standing outside his dungeon, addressing him in a style of fervid eloquence which came from her very heart,—not once, we say, did he give the least sign of that ferocity and savage impatience which characterised his behaviour on the first occasion of her visit.

For a fortnight did the Hebrew maiden continue her visits regularly, without however venturing to enter the dungeon. On the fifteenth day she found the prisoner anxiously expecting her arrival as usual; and almost immediately after she had drawn aside the panel and announced her presence, he said, “Oh! dear young lady, I am so glad you are come! I have been thinking so much—so very much over all you have lately told me; and I have felt comforted by repeating to myself the arguments you advance urging me to repentance. Ah! Miss, I have been a dreadful sinner—a dreadful sinner; and I see that I am righteously punished. But though I am penitent, you have no confidence in me yet—and that gives me pain. Yon are afraid to trust yourself with me! Do you think that I would harm you?”

“I hope not,” replied Esther; “and you shall not much longer have to accuse me of want of confidence in you. I am pleased to observe that you at length *feel* how shocking it is to become an object of mistrust and suspicion.”

“You are an angel, young lady!” exclaimed Benjamin Bones, approaching the door on the outer side of which stood the Hebrew maiden. “No one on earth save yourself could have made such an impression upon my mind, and in so short a time. But will you promise me one thing?”

“Name your request,” said Esther.

“That you will not send any man to converse with me,” answered Old Death. “You are of the gentle sex—and that is why your sweet voice has had such power and influence with me. Had that gentleman—whoever he is—continued to visit me, he would have done no good. I suspect my own sex:—I do not think that men can be so sincere—so conscientious——”

“The gentleman to whom you allude will not visit you again without your consent,” interrupted Esther. “I have undertaken this mission, and will fulfil it to the utmost of my ability. I have now something important to communicate,—important indeed, I should imagine, to one who has been so long in darkness. In a word, I intend to give you a lamp——”

“Oh! excellent young lady!” cried Benjamin Bones, in a voice expressive of the most unfeigned joy. “Make haste and open the door—give me the light——”

“Nay—I must not manifest too much confidence, in you all at once. See what it is to have been so long the votary of crime and wickedness—you inspire a mistrust which cannot be dissipated in a moment.”

“What can I do to convince you of my penitence—my gratitude?” demanded Old Death, in an earnest—anxious tone.

“Leave me to judge for myself relative to your state of mind,” said Esther. “You perceive that I already begin to entertain hopes concerning you: the proof is that I now give you a lamp—and a book also, if you have a sincere inclination to examine its pages.”

As she uttered these words, Esther unfastened the grating which covered the aperture, and passed the lamp through to Old Death—then the volume to which she had alluded.

The light flashed upon his countenance as he received the lamp; and it struck Esther that there was something hideous even in the expression of joy which now animated those repulsive features:—but she knew that looks which had grown sinister and become stamped with ferocious menace during the lapse of many, many years, could not be changed nor improved in a moment, however great were the moral reformation that had taken place within.

“Thanks, dear young lady—a thousand thanks!” exclaimed Old Death, as he placed the lamp upon the table: then, after a few minutes’ pause, during which he looked into the book, he said in a tone of surprise, “But you have brought me a Bible containing the New as well as the Old Testament—and yet yourself only believe in the latter?”

“I respect the religion of the Christian, although I have been taught to put no faith in it,” answered Esther de Medina, in a modest and subdued tone. “But I must now depart: and to-morrow I shall visit you again.”

Esther withdrew, in the firm belief that a most salutary impression had been made upon the mind of one of the greatest criminals of modern times. Her report was received with the most heart-felt joy by the Blackamoor; and he was enthusiastic in his expressions of gratitude towards the beautiful maiden for her exertions in what may unaffectedly be denominated “a good cause.”

“Do you return to Finchley Manor with me this evening?” she asked, cutting short his compliments with a good-humoured smile.

“No—I have particular business to attend to, Esther,” he replied. “But you may tell a certain young lady,” he added, now smiling in his turn, “that I shall be sure to see her to-morrow evening.”

“To-morrow!” repeated Esther. “You forget——”

“Ah! I did indeed forget,” interrupted the Black. “To-morrow is the day on which Arthur returns to town; and I must not risk a visit to the Manor. The fortnight of his absence has soon expired, methinks: but doubtless in that time he has made all the necessary preparation to render his country seat in Kent fitting and comfortable to receive his bride,” observed the Black, smiling again. “Nay—do not blush, Esther: he is a noble fellow, and well deserving of all your love! And, by the bye, this absence on his part has proved most serviceable in one sense,” he continued, again assuming a serious tone: “for had he remained in town, you never would have been able to devote the time you have given each day to the reformation of that wretched man below.”

“To speak candidly,” observed Esther, “I foresee a considerable difficulty relative to my future visits to the unhappy prisoner: but I feared to mention my embarrassment in this respect—I fancied that you might suppose me to be wearied of the task I had undertaken ——”

“I know you too well to entertain such an injurious suspicion,” interrupted the Black, hastily and emphatically. “But it is natural, now that Arthur and yourself are so shortly to be united, that he should seek your society as often and for as long a period each day as circumstances will permit——”

“Yes,” observed Esther, with a modest blush: “and though his welfare is so deeply interested in our present enterprise—though, in a word, so many grave and important interests depend upon the success of our endeavours to humanize and reform that wretched prisoner, and disarm him for the future—still I could not stoop to any falsehood or subterfuge to account to the Earl of Ellingham for my daily absence from home for several hours. It is true that my father is in the secret of our proceedings—that he even approved of the course which you suggested, and which I have adopted——”

“Stay! an idea strikes me!” suddenly ejaculated the Black. “You told me ere now that Benjamin Bones implored you to continue your visits to him, and not allow me to take your place; and from this circumstance we have both drawn favourable auguries relative to his ultimate and complete repentance. He already looks upon you as his guardian angel—the means of his salvation; and it would be perhaps productive of evil results—it might even lead to a moral reaction on his part—were he to believe that you had deserted him. You have so well prepared the way in the grand work of reformation with regard to this man, that *another* might now undertake *your* duties—and Benjamin Bones would still continue to believe that it is the same Esther de Medina who visits him.”

“I understand you,” said the Hebrew maiden, evidently rejoiced at a suggestion which relieved her mind from the fear of a serious difficulty. “But would *you* be satisfied with such an arrangement?”

“I see no alternative,” replied the Black. “Arthur will call daily at Finchley Manor—and your frequent absence would, to say the least of it, appear strange.”

“Oh! wherefore not allow Arthur at once to be made acquainted with the whole truth?” demanded Esther, in an earnest and appealing manner.

“No—no—that may not be!” exclaimed the Blackamoor. “My projects must first be carried out to the very end: for it would be my pride and my triumph, when all danger shall have passed away, to say to him, ‘*Arthur, you were surrounded by perils which you did not suspect: demons were plotting every kind of atrocity against your peace;—and I have annihilated all their schemes, and tamed the schemers themselves!*’ Urge me not therefore, my dear Esther, to deviate from the course which I have chalked out for myself, and which I consider to be to some extent an atonement for the misdeeds of my own life. Yes—for he who accomplishes a great good, assuredly expiates a great amount of evil.”

“For heaven’s sake, recur not to the past!” murmured the beautiful Jewess, turning pale and shuddering at the crowd of unpleasant—nay awful reminiscences which her companion’s language recalled to her mind.

“No—let us deliberate only for the present,” exclaimed the Black; “and the more I think of the plan which I have suggested, the more suitable does it appear. Yes,” he continued, “this is the only alternative. Let *your* visits to Benjamin Bones cease, Esther—and yet let him still continue to believe that he is not neglected nor deserted by Miss de Medina. I need say no more: the rest lies with you.”

“I understand you,” returned the Hebrew maiden; “and it shall be as you desire.”

She then took her departure.

CHAPTER CXIV.

OLD DEATH IN THE DUNGEON.

It was five o'clock in the evening of the following day; and Old Death was crouched up, like a wild beast, upon his bed in the dungeon, which was now lighted by the lamp that Esther de Medina had given him.

His natural emaciation had so frightfully increased, that he seemed but a skeleton in the clothes which hung upon him as if they had never been made for one so thin as he. The skirts of his old grey coat were wrapped around his wasted shanks—for, though it was now the month of May, yet it was cold in that dungeon. His countenance was wan and ghastly;—but its expression was little calculated to excite pity—for any thing more diabolically ferocious than the old miscreant's aspect, cannot be well conceived. His face was the horrible reflex of a mind filled with passions and longings of so savage and inhuman a nature, that the mere thought makes one shudder.

"She will come presently," he muttered to himself, with a kind of subdued growling which indicated the fury of his pent-up rage: "she will come presently," he repeated, his eyes glaring like those of a hyena beneath his shaggy, over-hanging brows; "and perhaps it will be for to-day! Who knows? she may think me penitent enough to be no longer dangerous: and then—then——"

He paused, and ground his jaws savagely together as if they were filled with teeth; and his hands were clenched with such spasmodic violence that the long nails ran into the palms.

"For two months and a half," he continued at length, and still musing to himself, "has the fiend—the infernal wretch—my mortal enemy, kept me here! For two months and a half have I been his prisoner! Perdition seize upon him! That man was sent into the world to be my ruin—to thwart me—to persecute me! From the first moment I ever met him six or seven months ago, all has gone wrong with me. But the day of vengeance must and shall come,—yes—vengeance—vengeance—though it costs me my life. Ah! he fancies that I am ignorant of his secret: and yet I understand it all now—yes—all, all! Rapid as was the gleam of the lamp which showed me his features the first time he ever visited me here, so quick did a light flash to my mind—so quick did the truth break upon me! Yes—yes—I understand it all *now*;"—and he chuckled in a scarcely audible manner, yet the more horribly menacing because it was so subdued and low. "But how can it be?—how could he have been saved?" he asked himself, in his sombre musings: then, after a brief pause, during which he rocked to and fro on the bed, he continued, "Never mind the *how*! That such is the fact I am confident—and that is enough for me! Yes—yes—that is enough for me! Fool that I was ever for a moment to suspect him to be Lord Ellingham! And yet I should have clung to this belief, had not the lamp glared upon his face as he darted out of the cell! Ah! ah! he little thinks that I know him now—that I have known him ever since the moment when the light showed me his features, blackened as they were! Ah! ah!" again chuckled Old Death: "I fancy that I have lulled them into an idea of my penitence! They imagine that the work of reformation has begun with me! Ah! ha! I played my cards well there! I did not whine and weep too soon—I appeared to be precious tough, and precious obstinate; and my slow conversion seemed all the more natural. They will fall all the easier into the snare: they ——"

At this moment a slight noise at the door of the cell made the ancient miscreant start; and he instantaneously composed his features into as mournful and sanctimonious an expression as such a horribly hang-dog countenance could possibly assume.

The trap-door opened; and a sweet, musical voice said, "I am here again, according to my promise: you see that I do not desert you."

"Ah my dear young lady," cried Old Death, affecting a tremulous tone, "you are too good to such a dreadful sinner as I have been! My God! when I think of all the atrocity that I once planned against you, I feel inclined to implore you to depart from even the vicinity of such a wretch as me!"

"Have you not been already assured that you are fully and completely forgiven in reference to the wickedness to which you allude?" demanded the young lady, whose beautiful countenance was now plainly visible to Old Death through the grating over the aperture in the door.

"Yes, Miss de Medina," returned the wretch, assuming a still more penitent tone; "but I cannot forgive myself. You are an angel, dear young lady—and I am a demon. I know I am! All last night I endeavoured to read the Bible that you gave me yesterday: but I cannot settle my mind to the task. I want some one to read it to me—if only for half an hour every day. But this cannot be—I am aware it cannot! You—the only person living that could have made such an impression upon me—are afraid to enter my cell. You told me so yesterday. But am I not a human being?—am I a wild beast? Ah! dear young lady—I could not injure you!"—and the old miscreant appeared to weep.

“Do you think it would console you if I were to place confidence in you—enter your cell—and read you a portion of the Word of God?”

“Why do you tantalize an old, old man who is miserable enough as it is?” asked Old Death, in return to this question. “Do you suppose that I am not weighed down to the very dust by an awful load of crime? If you are afraid to come into the cell, send me a clergyman. But, no—no,” he added, as if yielding to the sudden influence of a second thought: “I will pray with no one but yourself! You have been my good angel—you first touched my heart. I must wait till you have sufficient confidence in me to follow up the blessed work you have already begun so well. Yes—yes—even if I must remain here for a whole year, I will not receive consolation from any one but you!”

“If I only thought that you were so far advanced in the path of penitence——”

“Can you doubt it?” hastily demanded the prisoner. “Have you such little confidence in your own powers of persuasion? Oh! my dear young lady,” continued the wretch, falling upon his knees on the floor of the cell, and joining his hands together, “have pity upon me—have pity upon me! Your mistrust of me pierces like a dagger to my heart. I crave—I long to be able to show you my gratitude;—and that can only be by proving my contrition. Dear young lady, have mercy on an old, old man, who would embrace the very ground on which you tread!”

“It would be wicked—it would be a crime to refuse your demand,” said the sweet, musical voice, now tremulous with emotion, of her whom the demon-hearted hypocrite called his good angel. “Stay—I will fetch the key—and on my return I will read the Bible to you.”

And the Hebrew lady hurried away from the vicinity of the dungeon; and, having ascended the spiral stone staircase with rapid steps, entered the apartment usually inhabited by the Blackamoor. But he was not there: and she paused—uncertain how to act; for she now remembered that he had gone out for a short time immediately after giving her certain instructions relative to the conduct she was to maintain towards Old Death.

“I should not like to do this without his consent,” she murmured to herself: “and yet the prisoner is so penitent—so contrite, that it would be a sin—nay, a crime, not to confirm the salutary impression which is now so strong upon him. Yes—yes,” she continued: “I will take this step upon my own responsibility! Surely *he* will not blame me for thus exceeding his instructions, when the cause is so good and the need seems so urgent!”

Thus speaking, she took down a large key from a nail inside a cupboard, and retraced her way to the subterranean.

In the meantime—during the ten minutes which her absence lasted—Old Death was agitated by a thousand conflicting thoughts. At one moment an infernal joy filled his heart, and he rubbed his hands together in horrible and fiend-like glee: at the next instant his countenance became convulsed with the hideous workings of his fears lest something should occur to prevent the Jewess from entering his cell. He seemed to live an age in that ten minutes; and he felt that if the terrific excitement which he thus endured, were to last for an hour, it would crush and overwhelm him. All the worst passions of his diabolical nature were set in motion like the waves of the sea: and in that short space of time were awakened feelings which, for intensity of awful spite and inveterate malignity, were probably never before nor since paralleled in the breast of man!

At length there was a slight rustling of a silk dress and the sound of a gentle though hasty tread in the passage without; and in a few moments the beautiful countenance of the Jewess appeared at the grated aperture.

“Blessed young lady!” exclaimed Old Death, suddenly exercising an immense mastery over his ferocious passions, and assuming a tone of mingled gratitude and hope.

“Heaven grant that the step which I am now taking may have a permanently beneficial effect!” said the Jewess, in a voice profoundly sincere, as she placed the key in the lock.

Then, with her gentle hands, she drew back the massive bolts; and in another moment she entered the dungeon in which the greatest miscreant that ever disgraced human nature was crouched upon the bed, like a tiger ready to spring from its lair.

For upwards of a minute this dreadful man could scarcely believe his eyes—could scarcely credit his own senses. Was it possible that she was there—there, in his presence—there, in his power? It appeared to be a dream; and a momentary dizziness seized upon him.

“Give me the Bible,” said the Jewess, taking the chair; “and do you draw near me.”

“Here is the book,” observed Old Death, in a deep tone which might well be mistaken for the sign of solemn feelings, and was indeed so interpreted.

The lady placed the sacred volume upon the table before her, and began to turn over its leaves in order to find the passage which she deemed most appropriate and suitable for the circumstances of the occasion. Having discovered the chapter which she sought, she raised her eyes towards Old Death’s countenance in order to assure herself that he was in readiness for her to begin; but a sudden sensation of horror and apprehension seized upon her, as she caught a glimpse of the diabolical expression of those features on which the pale light of the flickering lamp fell with sinister effect.

Then, with a howl of ferocious rage, that old man, whom the deep craving after a bloody vengeance now rendered as strong as a giant,—that old man precipitated himself upon the terrified Jewess with all the fury of a ravenous monster, the chair broke down beneath the shock; and with dreadful shrieks and appalling screams the Hebrew lady fell upon the dungeon-floor, held tight in the grasp of the miscreant, who was uppermost.

In another instant those shrieks and screams yielded to subdued moans; for his fingers had fixed themselves round her throat like an iron vice. Desperate—desperate were her struggles,—the struggles of the agony of death: but Benjamin Bones seemed to gather energy and force from the mere act of this strong resistance;—and as his grasp tightened round his victim's neck, low but savage growls escaped his lips.

By degrees the struggling grew less violent—and a gurgling sound succeeded the moans of the Jewish lady. Tighter—and more tightly still were pressed the demon's fingers, until his long nails entered her soft and palpitating flesh. Oh! it was horrible—horrible,—this scene of ruthless murder in that subterranean dungeon!

At length the movements of the victim became mere convulsive spasms: but her large dark eyes, now unnaturally brilliant, glared up at Old Death, fixedly and appallingly. Nevertheless, he was not terrified—he was not stricken with remorse! No—still, still he clung to his victim, his own eyes looking down ferociously into hers, and the workings of his countenance displaying a fiend-like triumph—a savage glory in the awful deed which he was perpetrating.

Nearly five minutes had elapsed from the instant when the murderer first sprang upon the unfortunate Jewess: and now, suddenly starting to his feet, he seized the lamp and dashed it upon her head. A low moan escaped her—and all was silent.

Yes—all was silent, and all was darkness too; for the light had been extinguished:—and Old Death precipitated himself from the dungeon.

He hurried along the subterranean, which he knew so well,—hurried along towards the spiral stair-case, wondering whether he should be enabled to effect his escape, yet almost reckless and desperate as to what might become of him, now that his savage vengeance was accomplished.

He ascended the stone steps—he entered the room which had for years and years served him as a bed-chamber, before he had been compelled to dispose of the house to Lord Ellingham. He passed into the laboratory: and as yet he had proceeded without interruption. Joy! joy! he should escape yet—the adjoining room, now fitted up as a handsome parlour, was likewise untenanted at the moment:—joy! joy! he is descending the stair-case leading to the hall!

Is it possible that he will escape? Fortune seems to favour the diabolical murderer; and his hand is now upon the latch of the front-door—he stands as it were once more upon the threshold of that great world which is so wide and has so many channels for the machinations of the wicked! The house seems deserted—not a questioning voice falls upon his ear,—not the step of a human foot, save his own, interrupts the silence of the place! Yes—it appears as if escape be now a certainty,—escape for him who dared not hope for it, and did not even think of it, when intent on the all-absorbing scheme of his vengeance!

And now the front-door opens to his touch: but—ah! he has blood upon his hands—the blood that had flowed from the neck of the murdered Jewess. He starts back—he hesitates for a moment,—but only for a moment: Old Death is not the man to remain long uncertain how to proceed in such a strait!

Thrusting his hands—his gore-stained hands—into his pockets, the demon-hearted monster issues as coolly and calmly from the house as if it were his own and he had nothing to fear. The fresh air of heaven—untasted by him for ten long weeks—comes gushing upon his face: he is free—he is free!

"Ah!" is the hasty ejaculation which now falls on his ear: he looks around—a man is bounding, flying towards him—and in another instant he is in the grasp of the Blackamoor.

A short and desperate struggle takes place; and a crowd immediately gathers near—for the Sessions are being held at Hicks's Hall, on Clerkenwell Green, so that the neighbourhood presents the bustling appearance usual on such occasions.

"Seize him—hold him!" yells forth Old Death, as his powerful opponent hurls him towards the house-door, which the miscreant had not closed behind him.

"He is a mad-man—escaped from a lunatic asylum!" exclaimed the Blackamoor, horrible apprehensions filling his soul relative to the Jewess—for his eyes had caught sight of the blood upon Old Death's hands.

"No—no—I am not a mad-man!" shrieked out the latter. "Seize him—hold him, I say:—*he has escaped the scaffold—he is* Tom Rain, *the highwayman*!"

At that dreadful announcement the Blackamoor was struck speechless and motionless, as if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet; and in the next instant he was in the grasp of Dykes and Bingham, who, having business at the Sessions House, happened to be amongst the crowd gathered at the entrance of Red Lion Street.

“Yes—seize him—hold him tight!” yelled Benjamin Bones: “he is Tom Rain, I tell you—his face is coloured purposely—but I knew that he is Tom Rain!”

“And hold that miscreant also!” ejaculated Rainford—for he indeed the Blackamoor was: “seize him—let him not escape!” he cried, recovering the power of speech, as his eyes again caught a glimpse of the blood-stained hands of Old Death. “There has been murder committed in this house——My God! my God!”

The crowd had now not only increased to such an extent as to render the way perfectly impassable; but a tremendous sensation suddenly seized upon the assemblage,—the news that Tom Rain, the celebrated highwayman, had escaped death by some miraculous means, and was once more in custody, circulating like wild-fire. Dykes and Bingham, knowing that in such a case the sympathies of the mob were most likely to turn in favour of the prisoner, hurried him and Old Death into the house, whither they were followed by three or four other constables; and the door was immediately closed in the face of the crowd, and secured within.

On reaching the sitting-room the first-floor, the party halted; and Old Death, now completely overcome by the excitement of the incidents which had so rapidly succeeded each other in a short half-hour, threw himself exhausted into a chair.

“Well, Mr. Rainford,” said Dykes, with something like a malicious grin, “I am sorry for this business—but how, in the name of all that’s wonderful, did you escape after being so deuced well hung as I seed you was with, my own eyes?”

“Silence!” ejaculated Rainford, in an imperious tone: “and come with me at once down below. For, as sure as you are there, murder—a horrible murder has been committed by that wretch,” pointing to Old Death, who now quivered beneath his furious looks; “and, if you doubt it, behold the blood upon his hands!” added Tom Rain, with a cold shudder.

“Bring him along with us, Bingham,” said Dykes, addressing his brother officer.

“No—no—I won’t go down there again!” yelled forth the murderer, his countenance becoming convulsed with horror; for he was now afraid of his crime, in the revulsion of his feelings.

“Well—let him stay here in custody,” observed Dykes; “and me and a couple of the runners will go with Mr. Rainford.”

The officer and the two myrmidons whom he had selected, accordingly proceeded with Tom Rain into the room where the trap-door of the spiral stair-case had been left open by Old Death; and the constables surveyed each other with, mingled apprehension and astonishment.

“You are not afraid?” exclaimed Rainford, in a contemptuous tone, as he lighted a lamp: then, with impatient excitement, he cried, “Do your duty, and come with me. Life may still be left in her—come—come!”

“Yes—yes: we shall go along with you, sure enough,” growled Dykes, as he led the way, followed by Rainford—the two runners closing the rear.

In three minutes more the little party entered the dungeon which had so lately been the prison-house of Old Death: and there what a dreadful spectacle met their eyes! The murdered lady was stretched upon the floor—her countenance horribly discoloured and swollen—the forehead completely smashed by the blow inflicted by the lamp which had been dashed at her—and her eyes staring with a stony glare, as if about to start out of their sockets.

“O Tamar! Tamar! my dearest—best beloved Tamar!” cried Tom Rain, in a tone of bitter—bitter anguish, as he threw himself upon his knees by the side of the corpse.

The officers, rude in heart, and rendered obdurate as they were by the very nature of their profession, stood back in respectful silence at this outburst of sorrow from the lips of the resuscitated highwayman.

“My God!” murmured the unhappy man, clasping his hands together; “who shall break these fearful tidings to your father and your sister? And will they not reproach me?—will they not attribute this frightful calamity to that project of reformation which I had devised in behalf of Benjamin Bones? O Tamar—my dearest Tamar—who could have foreseen that such a terrible destiny was in store for thee!”

And, bowing down his head, he wept bitterly.

Suddenly loud voices were heard from the top of the spiral stair-case, summoning Dykes thither.

“Come along, sir—it is useless to remain here!” cried the officer, speaking hastily but respectfully to Tom Rain, who suffered himself to be led away—or rather, he did not offer any resistance to those who conducted him thence.

“Well—what now!” demanded Dykes, hurrying up the steps, at the head of which his friend Bingham was continuing to shout after him.

“Why—don’t you know,” was the reply, “that Government has offered a reward for the diskivery of the chap wot carried off Sir

Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles—about that there Torrens's affair——"

"Well—what then?" cried Dykes, impatiently.

"Blowed if it ain't Tom Rain," responded Bingham: "he did it—and we've knabbed him. So that's a cool two hundred and fifty a piece!"

"By goles!" ejaculated Dykes, his countenance expanding into the most glorious humour possible, as if all remembrance of the horrible scene he had just witnessed were banished from his mind: "this is good news, though," he added, as he emerged from the stair-case into the little back room with which it communicated. "But how do you know that the chap as kidnapped the knight and the doctor is Mr. Rainford?"

"Because I've been talking with old Ben Bones," answered Bingham; "and he told me as how he'd been kidnapped too, and kept a prisoner down there for a matter of ten weeks;—and how there was a lot on 'em—and Josh Pedler and Tim Splint among the rest. So, when he mentioned them names, I pricks up my ears—and I asks him a question or two; and I find that they was all kidnapped just at the time that the Torrens affair was a-making sich a noise: so it's a clear case."

"Clear enough, to be sure!" exclaimed Dykes.

"Ben Bones doesn't seem to know any thing about that affair," continued Dykes: "cos why, he was lugged off and took down in that there place afore the business was made public by Sir Christopher and the doctor. But, I say—what has happened below?"

"A young o'oman killed—that's all," answered Dykes. "So here's a pretty day's business for us, Bingham: a man that had been hung, took up fust—then a murder diskivered, and the murderer in our power—and now this here affair about the Government reward. Well—we've been rather slack lately—and a little okkipation's quite a blessin'."

Thus conversing together, Mr. Dykes and Mr. Bingham returned to the apartment where Old Death was still sitting in a chair, watched by a couple of constables: but the moment Rainford, who had only a confused idea, of what was passing around him, was led into that room, he started back in horror—exclaiming, "No—no: I cannot bear to be in the company of this dreadful man!"

Old Death, to whom he pointed, grinned in savage triumph: but Rainford had already rushed back into the laboratory, attended by Dykes and two runners. Almost at the same instant, the lad Cæsar who had heard from the crowd outside enough to convince him that Rainford had been discovered, and also that a person answering the description of Old Death had first denounced the resuscitated highwayman, and had then himself been arrested on a charge of murder,—Cæsar, we say, now made his appearance, and threw himself at his master's feet, exclaiming wildly, "Oh! no—my generous friend—my more than father—they shall not take you from us!"

"Jacob," said Tom Rain, raising the distracted youth, who was no other than the reader's former acquaintance, Jacob Smith,—"do not yield to grief. We have need of all our courage on this occasion. I have received a frightful blow—wounded I am in the tenderest point—oh! I can scarcely restrain my anguish, while conjuring you to be calm! And yet it is necessary to meet my afflictions face to face! Hasten, then, to Finchley—and break the sad intelligence to Mr. de Medina and Esther: tell them, Jacob—as gently as you can—tell them that Benjamin Bones has crowned all his enormities by——"

"My God! it is then too true!" ejaculated the youth; covering his face with his hands.

"Yes—Tamar is no more!" added Rainford, tears gushing from his eyes. "My poor wife has been brutally—foully murdered by that miscreant!"

Jacob Smith hurried away, his own heart feeling as if it were about to break.

"And now," said Tom Rain, suddenly turning towards Dykes, "I appeal to you as men to allow me to superintend the removal of the remains of that lady, who was my wife, to a chamber in this house; and then, that duty being performed, I shall be ready to accompany you whithersoever you may choose to conduct me."

"We are not particular for an hour or so, Mr. Rainford," returned Dykes. "Indeed, it would be better to let the crowd disperse a little; and if so be you don't mind staying here a bit, we'll wait till dark. The evenings is long now, you see——"

"I should have wished to remain here until the relatives of the deceased lady had time to arrive and take charge of the body," interrupted Tom Rain: "but I dared not ask such a favour at your hands. As it is, however, I thank you."

"But you must likewise let old Ben Bones stay here, until after dusk at least," urged Dykes: "for if it was knowed to the people outside that it was the ancient fence who had killed a woman, they'd be after tearing him to pieces. So we must smuggle him out presently."

Rainford gave his consent to the proposition: he was too sick at heart—too profoundly overwhelmed by misfortune, to attempt to argue any question that might arise from the lamentable incidents of that evening.

CHAPTER CXV.

THOMAS RAINFORD.

The arrest of Tom Rain and Old Death took place at about twenty minutes to six on the evening in question; and by ten o'clock that night the news were circulated throughout every quarter of the metropolis.

The incidents involved in the double arrestation were well adapted to produce as much excitement as the extraordinary adventures of Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles ten weeks previously.

In the first place, a man who had been publicly executed at Horsemonger Lane, was now discovered to be alive, having been doubtless resuscitated in some extraordinary way; although the more credulous and wonder-loving portion of the community were firmly convinced that Tom Rain had never been hanged at all, but that the body of some prisoner recently deceased at the time was ushered through the dreadful ordeal instead of the formidable highwayman.

In the second place, this said Thomas Rainford was said to be the mysterious personage who, usurping the attributes of justice, had kidnapped Dr. Lascelles and Sir Christopher Blunt, and had somehow or another disposed of the real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay, after having devised the necessary means to prove and make public the innocence of Mr. Torrens.

In the third place, a notorious fence, named Benjamin Bones, who had defied the police and the laws for many, many years, had at last fatally entangled himself with justice, by committing a diabolical murder upon the person of Thomas Rainford's wife.

And, in the fourth place, it had been discovered that there were situate two houses in the very heart of London having a subterraneous passage connecting them, and this subterranean communicating with several dark and gloomy dungeons, decently furnished, and in which half-a-dozen prisoners had recently been confined. One of these prisoners was now known to be Benjamin Bones; but what had become of the other five?

Such were the circumstances which took the whole town by storm, and produced a tremendous sensation from one end of London to the other—the intelligence reaching even Lady Hatfield, retired and secluded as was her mode of living.

Shortly after ten o'clock on that eventful evening, a private carriage drove up to the house in Red Lion Street; and Mr. de Medina, Esther, and Lord Ellingham alighted. Jacob Smith leapt down from the box; and in a few moments the entire party entered the dwelling, thus disappearing from the gaze of the assembled crowd.

The Jew, his daughter, and the young nobleman were immediately conducted by one of Rainford's dependants into the apartment where the unhappy husband of the murdered Tamar was pacing up and down, Dykes sitting in a corner watching his movements. The prisoner was no longer disguised: during the interval which had elapsed since his arrest, he had, by the officer's express desire, washed off the black dye from his face and hands; and he now wore his natural aspect in one sense—though, in another, his expressive countenance was altered by the despair that filled his soul.

"Oh! Thomas—what terrible afflictions have occurred!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, as he flew into his half-brother's arms.

"You will not reproach me, Arthur——-Oh! do not augment my grief!" cried Rainford: and he wept bitter tears.

"No one will reproach you, excellent young man," said Mr. de Medina, taking the hand of his bereaved son-in-law. "But——Oh! my daughter—my daughter, Tamar! Great God! thou hast chosen to afflict me deeply—deeply!"

In the meantime, Esther de Medina had thrown herself into a chair, giving way to the wildest paroxysms of grief—the Earl of Ellingham having vainly accosted her with the hope of importing some slight consolation. But, alas! he himself was a prey to the most poignant anguish: and, even had he been more calm, how was it possible to comfort Esther de Medina for the loss—the cruel assassination—of that sister whom she loved so tenderly and so well?

"Thomas," at length said the Earl, approaching his half-brother, "has Jacob Smith told us the dreadful tale correctly?—and is it—he—Benjamin Bones—who has done this? My God! I have scarcely been able to comprehend all the terrible particulars!"

"It is true—it is too true—I know that it is!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina, shaking his head in despair. "Yes—Tamar is no more; but—at least—let me behold her remains!"

Rainford turned an appealing glance towards Dykes, as much as to say, “You surely will allow me to proceed unwatched and unguarded along with these mourners to the chamber where the corpse lies?”

But Dykes, who understood the meaning of that glance, said in a respectful though firm tone, “I dare not trust you out of my sight!”

“I will be answerable for him, officer!” cried the Earl of Ellingham. “Do you know me? I——”

“I know who you are, my lord,” answered Dykes; “but I cannot oblige you.”

“Is not grief such as that which you now contemplate,” said the nobleman, indicating the weeping father and sister of the deceased lady,—“is not such grief as this too solemn for the intrusion of a stranger?”

“Since your lordship forces me to speak plain,” returned Dykes, “Mr. Rainford is my prisoner on two charges——”

“On two charges!” ejaculated the Earl: then, remembering all that his brother had passed through, he said mournfully, “But, just heavens! *one* is enough!”

“As your lordship observes,” began Dykes, “one is——”

At that moment another private carriage rattled up to the door of the house, and a lady, alighting with feverish impatience, was instantaneously admitted into the dwelling. In less than a minute she was ushered by Jacob Smith into the room where the mourning party were assembled.

“Lady Hatfield!” cried Tom Rain, the moment she raised her veil: and, as if her presence were another blow on such an occasion, he staggered and would have, fallen had not the Earl of Ellingham caught him in his arms.

“Pardon this intrusion,” said Georgiana, advancing into the middle of the apartment; “and believe me when I assure you that nothing save the hope of being in some degree able to lighten the afflictions which pour upon you all—nothing,” she added emphatically, “but such a hope as this would have induced me to break upon your privacy. The dreadful rumours current in the metropolis reached me ere now—and I flew hither, only—alas! to hear them confirmed. But—Mr. Rainford——”

She stopped short—trembled—and seemed for an instant overcome by feelings of an unutterable nature. The bitterness—the intensity of grief which oppressed the others, was in some degree absorbed for the moment by the profound interest which the presence of Lady Hatfield excited, her words having given promise of hopes the nature whereof defied all conjecture.

But suspense on the part of her listeners was not destined to last long.

“Mr. Rainford,” she resumed, exercising a powerful control over her emotions, “you have sustained an affliction so great that it is almost impossible to impart consolation to you. Yet—even in the midst of such woe as this which has overtaken you—it may at least be a satisfaction to learn that the judgment of a criminal tribunal no longer hangs over you—that the past is indeed the past, and cannot be revived——”

“Georgiana!” cried the Earl of Ellingham, surveying her in profound astonishment; “what mean you?”

“I mean that Thomas Rainford is pardoned!” exclaimed Lady Hatfield: “I mean,” she continued, the wildest astonishment having sealed the lips of all who heard her,—“I mean that the sentence passed upon him months ago is dissolved—annihilated;—and here is the royal decree—bearing the Sovereign’s seal—and countersigned by the Secretary of the Home Department! ’Tis a full pardon for Thomas Rainford!”

Thus speaking, she handed Lord Ellingham a paper: but it fell from his hands—for his half-brother had sunk senseless upon the floor.

Water was speedily procured and all the usual means adopted to restore him. It was, however, some time ere he gave signs of life; and then, beckoning Georgiana towards him, he said in a faint tone, “May the great God above us bless you—for you are an angel!”

It was undoubtedly an immense alleviation of the general sorrow to learn that Rainford had received a full pardon for all those offences which had drawn down on his head the sentence of death pronounced at the Old Bailey; and the Earl of Ellingham, having now hastily glanced over the paper which decreed this act of royal mercy, submitted it to the examination of Mr. Dykes.

“Well, my lord,” said that officer, “I see and hear plain enough that one of the charges on which I held Mr. Rainford prisoner, is knocked on the head; and I’m glad of it—’specially as ’tis the most serious of the two. But I must still keep him in custody, he being the man who kidnapped Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles——”

“Wait—one moment!” exclaimed Rainford, a sudden thought flashing to his mind and restoring him to the wonted energies of his character.

While all present watched his movements with breathless interest, he hastened to a writing desk standing on a table in a recess; and thence he took a pocket-book, which he opened, and the contents of which he scanned rapidly as he turned over the various papers one

after the other.

“Here it is!” he cried triumphantly at last; and, drawing forth a slip of paper, he handed it to Lord Ellingham, who mechanically read it aloud:—

> “We acknowledge a sense of deep obligation to the bearer of this memorandum, the said bearer having rendered us special service; and we hold ourselves bound to grant him any boon which he may demand at our hands, so that it be not inconsistent with our royal honour, nor prejudicial to the interests of the State.
>
> “Given this 3rd of March, in the year 1827.
>
> “GEORGE REX.” (L.S.)

“You are saved, Thomas—you are saved, in all respects!” exclaimed Mr. de Medina, pressing with affectionate warmth the hand of his son-in-law, while tears trickled down the old man’s venerable countenance.

“All this is so truly astonishing,” cried the Earl of Ellingham, “that I am bewildered. How you, my excellent friend—my sister,” he added, turning towards Lady Hatfield, “obtained the royal pardon for Thomas Rainford, I well know—indeed, I have all along known.”

“You!” ejaculated Georgiana, in profound astonishment.

“Yes—I overheard your interview with the King in the Blue Velvet Closet at Carlton House,” continued the Earl; “and now I comprehend all the greatness and generosity of your conduct! Oh! and you must pardon me too, for having become a listener on that occasion, and for having ever since entertained suspicions most injurious to your honour.”

“The remainder of the tale can then be told by myself,” said Tom Rain, hastily: “for it was I—I, the Blackamoor—the negro—who saved your ladyship from insult and outrage, also at Carlton House. But—” he continued, glancing in a significant manner towards Dykes,—“all these explanations shall be for another and more convenient opportunity. In the meantime, Arthur,” he added, “it is for you to repair at once to the Home Secretary, and obtain from him all we require to ensure my complete freedom, by virtue of that acknowledgment bearing the sign-manual of the King.”

The Earl of Ellingham instantaneously undertook this commission, although at so late an hour; but he fortunately happened to be aware that the Secretary for the Home Department had a reception that evening, and was therefore certain to be at home. Dykes, who had been led on from one source of astonishment to another, and who perceived that Thomas Rainford not only possessed powerful friends, but likewise the patronage and favour of the King himself,—the worthy Mr. Dykes, we say, now volunteered to withdraw into another room, merely requesting his prisoner to pledge his honour not to leave the house until the order of the Secretary of State should fully and completely release him from custody. The promise was given forthwith; and Dykes repaired to the apartment where Old Death was still remaining in the custody of Bingham and the other constables. Immediately after the officer had retired, Georgiana rose to take her departure. This was the first time that she had ever seen the Medinas; but she accosted them with the affability of a well-bred lady, and proffered them her deepest and sincerest sympathy on account of the dreadful loss which they had sustained. They received these proofs of friendship in a manner which denoted the gratitude of their hearts; and Georgiana, on taking leave, shook them cordially by the hand. Then, extending her hand likewise to him whose mere name had hitherto been sufficient to send a cold shudder through her entire form,—yes, extending her hand to him also, in the true spirit of Christian forgiveness,—but without raising her eyes to his countenance, she said, “Mr. Rainford, may you yet know many years of happiness!” He pressed her hand with grateful fervour—and a tear dropped upon it: but he could not utter a word. His heart was too full to allow him to express his thanks—his admiration of the noble conduct of that woman whom, in a moment of delirium, as it were, he had outraged and ruined! Ah! bitter—bitter were thy reminiscences as thus thou didst stand before thy generous benefactress, Tom Rain! Mr. de Medina—perceiving that his son-in-law was overcome by emotions which were not altogether intelligible to him—offered his arm to escort Lady Hatfield to her carriage; and Georgiana drove home with a heart rejoicing at the good she had done—for Lord Ellingham’s sake! The Jew returned to the apartment where he had left Esther and Rainford; and there they all three mingled their grief together, for the loss of the lovely and much-loved Tamar. But over this scene we shall draw a veil: sorrow such as they experienced cannot be adequately described. Neither shall we do more than allude to the violence of the grief and the poignancy of the anguish which were felt when they repaired to the chamber to which the remains of the murdered Tamar had been conveyed. The reader does not require to be informed that this was a ceremony of the most painful description. While, therefore, Mr. de Medina, Esther, and Rainford, are mingling their tears and lamentations,—while, too, the Earl of Ellingham is absent on his mission to the Home Secretary, armed with the document which bore the autograph and seal of George the Fourth,—we shall request our reader to accompany us to the apartment where Old Death remains in the custody of Bingham and the subordinate officials.

CHAPTER CXVI.

OLD DEATH.

When Dykes made his appearance in the room just alluded to, he found Benjamin Bones rocking himself to and fro on the chair in which he was seated, while Bingham and the runners were partaking of refreshments at the table.

The old miscreant was horribly pale; end there was a wild glaring of the eyes which enhanced the ghastly expression of his countenance. The man was in fact hideous to behold.

Now that he had leisure for reflection, and that the excitement attending the perpetration of his bloody vengeance had passed away, he had become fearfully alive to the awful predicament in which be stood; nevertheless his entire aspect denoted dogged obduracy; and could he have recalled the past, it is more than probable that he would have played precisely the same part over again.

“Well, Mr. Dykes,” said Bingham, as the worthy thus addressed entered the room, “will you jine us here in a bit of grub? You see, we’re pitching into the cold jint like bricks; and the beer is fust-rate.”

“So is the pickles,” growled one of the runners, who was naturally of a surly disposition, and could not help speaking in a grunting tone even when best pleased.

“Come, sit down with us,” urged Mr. Bingham. “But, I say though, what have you done with Tom Rain?”

“Done with, him, indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Dykes, swelling with the importance of a man who had astounding news to communicate: “what hasn’t he done for his-self, you mean?”

“Has he cut his throat—or taken poison?” demanded Old Death, eagerly.

“Not he!” cried Dykes. “Why—you cursed old fence, you’ve always got wicked notions in your head—you have. Mr. Rainford is a genelman, every inch of him—and I always knowed it. He’s got a power of slap-up friends as won’t leave him long in the lurch, I can tell you.”

And the officer bestowed a significant wink upon his listeners, whose curiosity he had now worked up to the highest pitch.

“What—what has he done?” gasped Old Death, terribly excited with suspense. “Do you mean to say——that is—has he ——*escaped*?” he demanded, scarcely able to give utterance to the word; so fearful was he lest Tom Rain, against whom he cherished a fiend-like hatred, should not again figure upon the scaffold.

“Patience—patience,” said Mr. Dykes, taking a chair. “In the fust place, you must know, that in comes a lady—and who should she be but that very same Lady Hatfield as I’m sure Tom Rain robbed some months ago near Hounslow, although I couldn’t bring the thing home to him at the time——”

“Well—well,” muttered Old Death, the agony of whose suspense was perfectly excruciating.

“But fust I should tell you,” resumed Mr. Dykes, “that Miss de Medina comes in with her father and Lord Ellingham——”

Old Death gave vent to a savage growl.

“And now I understand all about that diamond affair, Bingham, you know,” continued the officer; “*for, although one of the sisters is a corpse and her face is disfigured*, I never in my life see such a likeness as there is between them.”

We should observe that Old Death had already learnt, from the communications which had been made in his presence by the runners who were first in charge of Tom Rain on this eventful evening, that it was not Esther de Medina whom he had slain, but Tamar—the wife of the man whom he considered to be his most mortal enemy.

“But as I was a-saying,” continued Dykes, “in comes Lady Hatfield; and, behold ye! she makes a regular set speech to prepare us all for what’s about to take place; and then she tells us plump that Tom Rain has received his Majesty’s free pardon!”

“No—no!” yelled forth Old Death: “it’s a lie—it’s a lie!”

“Hold your tongue, you cursed fence!” exclaimed Mr. Dykes, deeply indignant at having his word thus unceremoniously called in question. “Lady Hatfield had the paper with her, all reglar according to the stattit in that case made and purwided.”

“It’s a forgery—a rank forgery!” shrieked Benjamin Bones, his countenance becoming truly appalling with its hideous workings. “And you have let him go, upon that pretence——you——you have——”

And he fell back in his chair, gasping for breath.

“Wot an inweterate old scoundrel it is,” observed Bingham. “Here—give him a glass of beer, Bill; for, by goles, he’ll suffocate—and the scaffold will be cheated of its dues after all.”

The runner, to whom the command was addressed, approached Old Death and offered him a tumbler of porter: but the savage monster repulsed it brutally, ferocious growls escaping from his breast.

“Well—leave him alone, then,” said Bingham.

The runner accordingly resumed his seat and his attack upon the cold viands at the same time.

“I tell you what it is, Mr. Ben Bones,” exclaimed Dykes: “I have seen a many free pardons—’specially where genelmen that got into trouble was concerned, for it’s seldom that a poor devil has interest enough to get such a thing—and I know precious well that the one I see just now, was as reglar as possible. It had the King’s own name—his sign-mangle, they call it—and his precious big seal—and the Home Secretary’s signatur underneath.”

“He will escape—he will escape yet!” yelled forth Old Death, clasping his hands together, as if in mortal agony. “The wretch—he will escape the gibbet—he—he——”

And again he gasped in so frightful a manner that his eyes seemed to be starting from his head, and his attenuated frame literally writhed in convulsive spasms.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, after a long pause, during which his shocking appearance had produced a dead silence of horror and amazement: “I have thought of something”—and he grinned malignantly. “Did you not say that men had been spirited away—in that Torrens’ affair ——”

“To be sure I did,” answered Bingham, to whom the question was addressed: “and Tom Rain did it. Well, what about that, Mr. Dykes?”

“Why—that seems to be knocked on the head also,” was the reply: “though I have no doubt we shall get the reward, because we did our dooty in arresting him; and if so be that the Home Secretary chooses to grant him a pardon in that respect also——”

“He won’t—he won’t!” ejaculated Old Death, with feverish—nay, with hysterical excitement. “He does not dare do it! No—no—Tom Rain must swing for that, at all events! ’Tis as good as being accessory to the murder—’tis shielding the murderers! Ha! ah! he will swing for that—he will swing for that!”

“I’m blessed if he will, though,” said Dykes, bluntly; “for it seems that he’s got a paper signed by the King which will put him all to rights—and though I don’t exactly understand that part of the business, I’m pretty sure Tom Rain is in no danger. Lord Ellingham has got the matter in hand; and he has gone up to the Home Office. That’s why I left Mr. Rainford at liberty—just taking his word of honour that he wouldn’t bolt.”

“He’ll deceive you—he’ll run away—he’ll escape!” cried Old Death. “You are mad to trust him! Go—seize on him again—put handcuffs——”

“Yes—on *you*, in no time—if you don’t hold your tongue,” interrupted Mr. Dykes. “But ain’t all this a rummy business, though?” he demanded, turning towards Bingham and the subordinate officials. “The old Jew seems a most respectable gentleman—I’d take his bail for any amount, if I was a magistrate. And really his daughter is a sweet young o’oman: the Earl’s going to marry her, I’ll swear to it.”

“Mr. Dykes—Mr. Dykes,” whispered Old Death in his ear; and the officer, turning suddenly round again, perceived that the tall, gaunt form of the fence was close behind him.

“Well—what do you want?” demanded the functionary.

“One word—one word only,” murmured Bones, in a low, guttural, sepulchral tone, while his frame shook with nervous excitement: “one word, I say—only one word.”

“Now, then—what is it?” asked Dykes, suffering the old man to draw him towards the recess containing the door which opened into the laboratory.

“I must speak to you in private—I have something particular to tell you,” was the urgent and impatient reply. “Come into this room—I

shan't keep you a moment."

"Well—I suppose I must humour you," said the officer, in a surly tone. "One should look upon you as a dead man; for besides your nick-name, the law will soon make you one in right good earnest."

With this brutal jest—brutal even in respect to so awful a miscreant as Old Death—the Bow Street functionary conducted him into the laboratory, where a light happened to be burning, and the door of which apartment Benjamin Bones closed cautiously behind them.

"Now, then—make haste, and tell us all you have got to say," said Dykes, eyeing the old man suspiciously and in such a meaning fashion as to imply that any attempt at escape would assuredly prove abortive.

"Mr. Dykes, you are a good man—and a kind man—I know you are," began Old Death, in a coaxing tone and with a manner indicating the most dreadful state of nervous excitement: "you would not like to see a poor, miserable old creature like myself sent to—to—the scaffold. No—no—you would not—you would not. But I know that it must be made worth your while—you understand me—and—and—I will give you all I have—yes, all I have—several thousand pounds—for I have got several thousands!" he added, with a ghastly grin. "But no one knows where they are except myself,—and you and I can go together to the place—and I will give you every guinea—yes, every guinea, Mr. Dykes—remember, every guinea I say—if you will agree to this."

"Agree to what?" demanded Dykes, affecting not to comprehend the old villain.

"Oh! just as if you didn't understand me, my dear friend—my good, kind friend!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, becoming more coaxing in his tone, which was as low and subdued as his sepulchral voice would admit. "Do consider for an instant—an old man like me to be in such trouble! You wouldn't be happy if you had it on your mind that you had been the means—the actual means of sending such a wretched creature as myself to the scaffold? Speak to me, Mr. Dykes! Five thousand pounds—yes—five thousand pounds, in good gold guineas—if—if——"

"If what?" asked the officer, with the most provoking determination not to understand any thing that was not explained in unmistakeable words.

"If you—you will let me escape!" whispered Old Death, while his eyes seemed to penetrate to the very soul of the man towards whom he bent in a confidential way as he spoke.

"Now that's English," said Dykes, whose countenance gave not the least indication of the manner in which he intended to receive the proposition.

"And—and you will agree, won't you?" asked Bones. "Remember—five thousand guineas—all to be paid in one lump—this very night——"

"Well, now—it can't be done, old chap," interrupted Dykes, in a cool—almost brutal manner, as if he were glad of the opportunity to encourage hope for a time, merely for the sake of destroying it with a rude hand and in an abrupt way.

"It can't be done," murmured Old Death, despair seizing upon him: "it can't be done, you say?"—and his eyes glanced wildly around.

"Is this all you have to tell me?" demanded the officer. "Because, if so——"

"Five thousand guineas!—and he refuses it!" ejaculated Bones. "My God! what will become of me?—what will become of me?"

And still his looks wandered rapidly about the apartment.

"Now, then—let as go back into the next room, if you please," said Dykes; "for I don't see no use in staying here, wasting our time."

At that instant Old Death's eyes settled upon something on a shelf close at hand; and, suddenly springing aside, he seized upon a bottle—the particular object for which he had been searching with his eager glances.

Dykes, without even having a moment's leisure to make a single conjecture relative to his intentions, but instinctively foreseeing that something wrong was contemplated, closed upon the old man in an instant.

With the speed of lightning did Benjamin Bones raise the bottle which his right hand grasped; and in leas than the twinkling of an eye would it have been smashed down upon the officer, who, seeing his danger, by a natural impulse held down his head—when a yell of agony burst from the lips of the old miscreant.

For, as he raised the bottle, the glass stopper fell out, and the burning vitriol streamed down on his head and over his countenance, a few drops only falling upon Dykes, and those principally on his clothes.

The officer instantaneously fell back; and Old Death threw himself on the floor, where he rolled in horrid agonies—writhing like a stricken snake, and shrieking franticly, "Oh! my eyes! my eyes!"

Bingham and the subordinate functionaries rushed in from the adjoining apartment; and, having assured themselves that Dykes was unhurt—although his escape from the burning fluid was truly miraculous—they turned their attention towards Old Death. One of them obtained water, and dashed it over him; but still he rolled and writhed—uttering dreadful cries, mingled with horrid imprecations—and rubbing his face madly with his hands. For the miserable wretch was burnt in an appalling manner; and his sight was gone!

We must pause for a single moment to explain his design—that design which so signally failed and brought down such frightful consequences upon himself. Perceiving that all hope of being able to bribe Mr. Dykes was frustrated, he thought of the only alternative that could possibly be attempted—an escape. At the same instant that this last idea was formed, it flashed to his mind that Dr. Lascelles had been accustomed to keep many deadly poisons and ardent fluids in the laboratory. His eyes wandered round in search of them; and they lighted upon a large bottle, labelled “Vitriol.” To break it over the officer’s head, and escape in the confusion that must ensue by means of the little chamber which had once been his bed-room, and which, as the reader may recollect, had two doors—one opening from the laboratory, and the other into apartments beyond,—this was the hastily conceived but discomfitted design of Old Death!

The desperate project had failed—and in a desperate manner, too: for the miscreant had received mortal injuries—and his sufferings were horrible. A pint of vitriol had streamed over his head—penetrating beneath his clothes, all down his neck and chest—burning him horribly, even to his very eyes in their sockets!

Rainford, alarmed by the hideous yells which had reached him in another part of the spacious house, rushed into the laboratory to ascertain the cause, having begged Mr. de Medina and Esther to await his return. At the same instant that he entered by one door, Jacob Smith made his appearance by another; and Dykes hastily explained what had occurred. Rainford accordingly issued immediate orders to transport the dying man to a bed-chamber; and fortunately, at this crisis, Dr. Lascelles arrived at the house.

The physician had been alarmed by the rumours which prevailed relative to the incidents that had occurred in Red Lion Street: but a few words, rapidly exchanged with Tom Rain, relieved the doctor of all apprehensions on account of his friend—and all his attention was now devoted to Old Death.

But though the laboratory promptly supplied all the remedies needed in such a case, their application was vain. They gave relief, it is true: but they could not arrest the rapid advances which death was making upon the wretched old man.

“Jacob,” cried the doctor: “Jacob Smith, I say,” he repeated more impatiently, the lad not having heard his first summons; “hand me that bottle, and——”

“Jacob Smith!” cried Old Death, his moanings suddenly ceasing at the mention of that name: “is he here? Then let me tell him——My God! this burning sensation——Jacob—Jacob—my poor boy——Oh! my eyes—my eyes——doctor, do something to my eyes—they are like red hot coals in my head——Jacob—I—I—am your——father!”

“My father!” almost shrieked the lad, in the wildness of his amazement at these tidings: then, falling on his knees by the bed-side, he exclaimed, “Oh! if you are indeed my parent——”

“I am—I am, Jacob,” exclaimed the dying wretch: “but these tortures——why do they tear my flesh with pincers?—why do they put hot skewers into my eyes? Doctor—doctor——take away the red-hot iron——lift me out of the fire——take me away, I say—save me—save me—I am in flames—I am burning——My God! I am burning!”

“Father—father,” cried Jacob, in a tone of agonising appeal; “compose yourself—think of all your sins—repent——”

“Will no one snatch me from the fire?” yelled forth Old Death, writhing and tossing upon the bed in mortal pains: “perdition seize ye, wretches—I am burning—I am in flames—my eyes scorch me—my flesh is all seared over with red-hot irons——Oh! it is hell—it is hell! Yes—I am in hell——My God! this is my punishment! Oh! send me back to the world again—let me retrieve the past—let me live my existence once more—I will be good—I will not sin! No—no—for hell is terribly—terrible—and these fires——Oh! horror—horror—snakes of flame have seized upon me——they are gnawing at my heart—they have thrust their fiery stings into my eyes—they wind themselves round and round me—horror—horror—there—I feel them now—Oh! mercy—mercy——mercy——mer——”

“This is frightful!” whispered Tom Rain to Dr. Lascelles; and all the others present at the dreadful scene; shuddered from head to foot.

Jacob Smith buried his face in his hands and sobbed convulsively.

The dying man still continued to rave, and shriek, and yell for a short time longer: but his powers of articulation rapidly failed—his writhings grew less violent, until they ceased altogether,—and in a few minutes, the dark spirit which had never spared and never pitied human creature, fled for ever!

CHAPTER CXVII.

AN EXPLANATORY CONVERSATION.

Three days had elapsed since that eventful evening on which so many exciting incidents occurred; and the scene now changes to the dwelling of Dr. Lascelles in Grafton Street.

It was about four in the afternoon and the physician was seated in his study, Lord Ellingham being his companion at the time.

"At length, my dear doctor," said the nobleman, "you have found leisure to accord me an hour to give me those explanations which my afflicted brother feels himself incapable to enter into at present. The loss of Tamar, whose funeral is to take place the day after to-morrow, has proved almost a mortal blow to his generous heart: but the kindness of Mr. de Medina and Esther, who insisted upon having him with them at Finchley, must in some degree mitigate his grief. And yet, alas! that bereaved father and mourning sister have themselves such bitter need of solace! Just heaven! it was a frightful catastrophe!"

"And the murderer perished in a frightful manner," added the physician. "But now that the excitement created by these appalling events, and by all the other circumstances which Old Death's crime was the means of bringing to light, has somewhat subsided,—not only in respect to the public, but likewise with regard to the minds of those persons privately interested in the whole affair,—we may venture to converse upon the topic in the hope of approaching it with some degree of calmness. In the first place, my dear Arthur, tell me how you fared with the Home Secretary—I mean, give me the details of your visit to that Minister."

"On my arrival at his official residence," said the Earl, "on the dreadful night in question, I sent up my card with a message soliciting an immediate and private audience; and the favour was instantaneously granted. In as succinct a manner as possible, I explained to the Minister all that it was necessary to communicate. I told him that Thomas Rainford, who had been doomed to death and publicly executed, had survived the frightful ordeal of the scaffold; but relative to the means or the agents of his resuscitation, I proffered no explanation—and none was demanded of me. The Minister instantly recollected the circumstance of having signed a full and complete pardon on behalf of Rainford, some weeks ago, and at the intercession of the King; and, doubtless knowing well the wayward character of George the Fourth, he perhaps thought that the less he enquired into the business, the better. I then gave him as much information relative to the recent proceedings of Rainford as was known to myself; and when the Minister heard that he was the individual who had played so mysterious a part in the affair of Torrens, his brow lowered. But I immediately showed him the document signed by George the Fourth; and I gave him to understand that Rainford was acquainted with such proofs of the King's profligacy and unprincipled character, as would positively compromise the safety of the throne if they were published. This species of threat I was compelled to hold out, inasmuch as the Home Secretary seemed inclined to permit matters to take their course without any interference on his part. But, when he heard that the King had given that solemn acknowledgment of obligation in order to hush up some affair of which he was ashamed and likewise seriously alarmed, the Minister intimated his readiness to do any thing I required to avoid a scandal that might compromise his royal master. He nevertheless urged that an immense excitement had already been created in the metropolis, and which would of course spread to the provinces, by that sudden discovery that Thomas Rainford had not only escaped the scaffold, but had actually taken upon himself the functions of a judge in disposing of the murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay, according to his own caprice and will. '*In fact*,' said the Minister, '*the public will imagine that Rainford himself was an accomplice in the assassination of the baronet; and every one will ask what has been done with the two men, Splint and Pedler, who have thus been spirited away*.'—To this I could only reply that I was well assured of Rainford's complete innocence in respect to the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay; that he had adopted certain opinions relative to the reformation of criminals, and had chosen to test his system by applying it to those men; that the men were no longer in the country, but whither they had been sent I knew full well Rainford would never divulge to the Government; and that the Minister must decide between two alternatives—namely, whether he would dare public opinion in the case, or whether he would have his royal master seriously compromised. I can assure you, my dear doctor, that it gave me great pain and was most repugnant to my feelings to be compelled to hold out any menace of this kind but could I leave a stone unturned that would serve the interest of my generous half-brother?"

"You already to some extent know the motives which induced Rainford to return to England instead of proceeding to America, and adopt the disguise under the cloak of which he broke up Old Death's gang?" said the physician, enquiringly.

"I gathered a few rapid and broken details from the Medinas, during the ride from Finchley to Red Lion Street, on that fatal evening when Jacob Smith came to the Manor, where I happened to be at the time, to announce the awful event which had occurred," replied the Earl. "But you may readily believe that both Mr. de Medina and Esther were too profoundly afflicted to be able to give me any very minute explanations. Moreover, I was myself so terribly excited, and so full of serious apprehensions——"

"I understand—'twas quite natural," interrupted the doctor. "But pray proceed with your narrative of the interview with the Secretary

of State."

"I have little more to say upon that subject," observed Lord Ellingham. "The Minister balanced for some minutes between the alternatives which I submitted to him, and it was evident that he felt deeply grieved and chagrined at the consequences of the royal indiscretions,—indiscretions which had led the King to sign two important papers, both seriously affecting the proper and legitimate course of justice. But, in the end, he yielded to the alternative which was favourable to our wishes; and, placing himself at his desk, he wrote the order to set Thomas Rainford free, which I delivered to the Bow Street officers on my return to Red Lion Street shortly after midnight."

"It is therefore certain that no further apprehensions need be entertained on that head?" enquired the physician.

"None," answered the Earl of Ellingham. "The Coroner's Inquest, which sate upon the bodies of Tamar and Benjamin Bones yesterday, elicited, as you are well aware, the fact that the old man had been imprisoned by Rainford, and visited first by Esther, and on the last and fatal occasion by her unfortunate sister, merely with a view to his reformation and redemption from a course of crime——"

"And, therefore," added the physician, "public opinion is actually in favour of Rainford at this moment. But how happened it that Lady Hatfield was enabled to procure that document which conferred a full pardon upon him?"

"That woman possesses a most generous—a most noble heart!" exclaimed the Earl. "The voluptuous monarch sought to render her the victim of his lust; and it suddenly struck her, when his designs became unmistakeably apparent, that she might avail herself of the circumstance to perform an act calculated to exhibit her sincere friendship for me. She accordingly affected to yield in a certain measure to his disgusting overtures: she overcame the natural scruples of a pure soul, so far as to give vague promises and encourage the King's passion, in order to obtain from him the document which she required. And she succeeded. But, on the occasion of that interview with the King at which he presented her with the precious paper, she was nearly falling a victim to her generous conduct and to his brutal violence. An extraordinary combination of circumstances, however, had led Rainford into the palace on that very evening; and accident enabled him not only to deliver Georgiana from the power of the King, but likewise to extort from his Majesty that written promise of deep obligation which has proved so vitally important to his interests."

"The entire affair is truly romantic," observed the doctor. "And now you wish me to give you in detail an explanation of all Rainford's late proceedings?"

"I am already acquainted with much concerning them, and conjecture enables me to comprehend more," resumed the nobleman: "at the same time, I should be pleased to hear a connected account from your lips."

"It is by no means a disagreeable task for me to narrate incidents which prove the existence of so many generous traits in the heart of that man whom I was the means of restoring to life and to the world," said Dr. Lascelles; "for since that day on which he opened his eyes in my laboratory, I have regarded him almost in the light of a son. I must begin by informing you that Rainford was deeply touched by a conversation which he had with you, relative to the miseries and crimes of the poor and ignorant classes of society——"

"That conversation took place in the evening following his resuscitation," observed Arthur,—"the same evening on which I captured Benjamin Bones, as he was ascending from the subterranean."

"The discourse which yourself and your half-brother had together on that occasion," resumed the doctor, "induced him to reflect profoundly upon the nature of crime—the circumstances which engender, and afterwards encourage it—and the best modes of producing a reformation. That train of thought led him to ponder upon other matters, essentially regarding yourself. For he saw that Benjamin Bones would prove your most implacable enemy: he knew that old man's character well—and he felt assured that he would devise and carry into effect some atrocious schemes of vengeance against you. These convictions filled Rainford's mind with the gloomiest apprehensions, although he contrived to veil them from you. He trembled lest you should fall into the snares which that incarnate fiend—God forgive me for speaking ill of the dead—was certain to spread at your feet; and he resolved to adopt some means to counteract the effects of that man's malignant spite. In a word, he determined, at any sacrifice, to watch over that brother who had acted so generously and nobly towards him. But not to a soul did he communicate his ideas, until he had safely embarked, with Tamar, Jacob Smith, and Charley Watts, on board the American packet-ship at Havre-de-Grace. Then he revealed his intentions to Tamar; and she immediately fell into his views—for she knew no will save his own. The captain of the ship consented, for a reward, to touch at Guernsey; and there Rainford, his wife, the youth, and the boy, were landed in the middle of the night. The next morning, your half-brother and Cæsar appeared in the disguise of blackamoors; and from Saint Peter's Port, the capital of the island, they sailed for Weymouth—Tamar with Charley Watts proceeding by way of Southampton. The rendezvous was London; and all Rainford's plans, so far as he could forecast them, were already arranged. On her arrival in the metropolis, Tamar immediately sent for her father and sister to the inn at which she alighted; and to them she communicated her husband's design. It was of course necessary to keep the entire scheme concealed from yourself; as it was well known that you would never rest until you had persuaded your brother to quit the country again, were you aware of his return. At that time you were not engaged to Esther; and she had therefore no hesitation in maintaining this much of duplicity towards you. Subsequently—I mean, after your engagement together—she felt herself bound still to guard inviolably a secret that had your welfare as its basis. Well, then, Mr. de Medina and Esther lent themselves to the project—and cheerfully too, because they recognised all the importance of allowing Rainford to adopt the necessary measures to ensure your complete safety. Tamar and Charley Watts accordingly took up their abode at Finchley Manor, the proper precautions being taken to enable them to dwell there in the strictest privacy, and the fidelity of the servants being well assured in respect to their presence at that

house. So far all proceeded satisfactorily; and in the meantime Rainford, accompanied by Jacob Smith, whom he named Cæsar, arrived in London. You may conceive my surprise when one evening, having been informed by my servant that an East Indian gentleman was waiting to see me in the drawing-room, I proceeded to that apartment and found myself in the presence of Thomas Rainford! I did not recognize him at once; but he speedily made himself known to me; and, when his plans were developed, I readily agreed to aid him in their accomplishment. As he had expected and indeed calculated, I had full and complete control over the houses in Red Lion and Turnmill Streets; and he felt convinced that you would never think of visiting them. You had purchased them merely to deprive Benjamin Bones of the power of plunging his victims into the subterranean cells; and you allowed me the use of the premises for my laboratory. Under all these circumstances, the house in Red Lion Street was the best suited to Rainford's designs; and it was speedily furnished in a suitable manner. The neighbours believed that a retired East Indian merchant had taken the place; and therefore no surprise—no excitement was occasioned, when they perceived that the new tenant had his private carriage and numerous dependants. But how did Rainford manage to obtain the assistance of several faithful persons, who were blindly obedient to his will, and to one of whom—named Wilton—he entrusted his entire history? They were all poor and deserving persons whom I knew well—men who had at different times been my patients, and in whom I felt an interest. Thus, in a very few days, the most complete arrangements were effected; and just at the moment when Rainford was prepared to commence operations, and when he had succeeded in tracing the abode of Benjamin Bones, chance threw him in the way of a certain John Jeffreys, whom he resolved to render subservient to his purposes in uprooting the atrocious gang."

The physician then proceeded to relate the manner in which Rainford had drawn Jeffreys into his service,—the revelations made to him by that individual's unfolding all the dreadful schemes of vengeance contemplated by Old Death, and directed against the happiness of the Earl himself,—the projected exhumation of the coffin in Saint Luke's church-yard, and the ferocious idea of blinding Lady Hatfield and Esther de Medina,—the mode in which these diabolical aims were frustrated by the arrest of all the members of Old Death's gang,—and the faithful conduct of Jeffreys. Dr. Lascelles also narrated the proceedings of Rainford in the difficult affair of Mr. Torrens,—how, disguised as an old man, and admirably sustaining that character, he had entrapped Sir Christopher Blunt to the house in Red Lion Street to preside at the examination of the two prisoners,—and how he (Dr. Lascelles) had become a party to that transaction,—all of which particulars are well known to the reader. Finally, the physician made the Earl acquainted with the nature and the results of the system of reformation applied to all the members of the gang,—how it had succeeded in respect to Tidmarsh, the Bunces, Pedler and Splint,—and how Esther de Medina had deputed her unfortunate sister to visit Benjamin Bones on that fatal evening which was characterised by a savage murder!

There was only one point connected with Rainford's affairs, on which the Earl and the physician did not touch; and this was the parentage of little Charley Watts. The doctor was unacquainted with the fact that Rainford had some years back forcibly violated the person of Lady Hatfield, and that the issue of this crime was the boy who still bore the name by which we have just called him. The Earl of Ellingham naturally veiled the circumstance even from a friend so intimate and sincere as Lascelles; and though the doctor knew that Lady Hatfield had been a mother, he also kept this knowledge to himself, and was very far from suspecting the true history of Charley Watts. Lascelles, it will be remembered, had made the discovery relative to Georgiana on that occasion when he attended her in her severe illness, and when he gave her a soporific, as recorded in the early part of this work: but he had never mentioned that discovery to a soul;—and the Earl of Ellingham was as far from supposing that Lady Hatfield's loss of chastity was known to the physician, as the physician was from entertaining even the remotest idea relative to the parentage of the boy.

But Rainford was already aware that this boy was his own son—the issue of the outrage which he had perpetrated upon Lady Hatfield! Yes—on the evening before this interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Dr. Lascelles, the former had so far intruded upon his brother's profound grief, as to make to him a revelation which a sense of duty forbade him to delay. Rainford also learnt, at the same time, that Georgiana was herself acquainted with the fact of her child being in his care—placed under his protection as it were by the inscrutable decrees of Providence! But for the sake of the honour of Lady Hatfield, and of sparing Rainford from the necessity of giving unpleasant and degrading explanations to his friends, it had been determined between Lord Ellingham and himself that the boy should still continue to bear the name of Watts, and that his real parentage should be unacknowledged—at least for the present.

In order not to dwell with tedious minuteness upon this portion of our narrative, we shall briefly state that the funeral of Tamar took place on the day appointed; and if the tears of heart-felt grief streaming from the eyes of true mourners can avail for the souls of the departed, then the spirit of the murdered Jewess must have received ample solace and full propitiation in those regions to which it had taken wing!

But how deep a gloom had fallen upon the family of Medina;—and how poignant was the anguish which the bereaved father and sister experienced for the departed!

Nor less acute was the sorrow of the husband who survived that fair but prematurely crushed flower of Israel;—for immense was thy love for her, Tom Rain!

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE INSOLVENT DEBTORS' COURT.

Passing through Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, you may perceive a low, dingy-looking building, protected by a row of tall iron railings, and with steps leading to the front entrance. This structure is of so dubious an aspect that it places the stranger in a profound state of uncertainty as to whether it be the lobby of a criminal prison or a Methodist chapel; and the supposed stranger is not a little surprised when he learns, on inquiry, that this architectural mystery is neither more nor less than the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors.

At about nine o'clock in the morning the immediate vicinity of the Court begins to wear a very business-like appearance: that is to say, both sides of the street are thronged with the most curious specimens of human nature which it is possible to encounter outside of Newgate or of the Bench. The wonder is whence such a host of ill-looking fellows can have sprung, or whither they can be going, unless it is to either of the two places just named. Then comes the natural question, "But who are they?" The answer is at hand: some are the turnkeys of the County Prisons and the tipstaves of the Bench, having in their charge prisoners about to be heard at the Court,—others are the usual hangers-on and errand-seekers who are always to be found lurking about such places,—while a third set are the friends or else the opposing creditors of the Insolvents. The public-house opposite the Court, and the one at the side are also filled with persons of those descriptions; and before ten o'clock in the morning many pots of porter are disposed of—many quarterns of gin dispensed in two or three "outs"—and many screws of tobacco puffed off in smoke.

Inside the Court, business commences in somewhat a more serious manner. Four or five barristers take their places in a large box divided into two compartments like pews in a church: a couple of Commissioners seat themselves on a bench made in very humble imitation indeed of those in the Courts at Westminster;—a single reporter lounges into the snug crib so kindly allotted to the representatives of the press;—several attorneys and attorneys' clerks gather round the table between the counsel's seats and the bench:—the Insolvents are penned up altogether in a sort of human fold on the right as you go into the tribunal;—and at the back a crowd of unwashed faces rise amphitheatrically in the compartment appropriated to the audience. The Commissioners endeavour to look as much like the Judges of the Land as possible;—the barristers affect all the consequence and airs of Serjeants-at-Law or King's Counsel;—the Insolvents try to seem as happy as if they had nothing awkward in their schedules to account for;—and the spectators raise heaven and earth to appear respectable: but each and all of these attempts are the most decided failures which it is possible to conceive. A general air of seediness pervades the place: the professional wigs are dirty and out of curl, and the forensic gowns thread-bare;—and the disagreeable impression thus created on the mind of the visitor, is enhanced to no trifling degree by a sickly smell of perspiration combined with the stale odour of tobacco smoke retained in the garments of the audience.

Amongst the Insolvents were two individuals whose appearance formed a most striking contrast. These were Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks and Mr. Frank Curtis.

The former was dressed in deep black, with a white neck-cloth, and black cotton gloves a great deal too large for his hands: he had also put black crape round his hat, in the hope of creating the sympathy of the Commissioners by producing the impression of having sustained some serious and recent family loss. His sallow face was elongated with the awful sanctimoniousness which characterised it: his black hair was combed sleekly down over his forehead;—and he sate bolt upright on the hard bench, every now and then raising his eyes to heaven—or rather to the lanthorn on the roof of the Court—as if in silent prayer.

Mr. Frank Curtis was attired in his habitually flash manner; and as he lolled back in his seat, he now and then bestowed a significant wink upon his attorney at the table, or exchanged a few familiar observations with the tipstaff, whom he had treated to egg-hot at the public-house opposite before they entered the Court.

But where was Captain O'Blunderbuss? Had he deserted his friend on this trying occasion? Gentle reader, do not suppose for an instant that the gallant officer was capable of what he himself would describe to be the "most bastely maneness"—so long as Frank had a shilling left in his pocket, or the ability to raise one! The captain, then, *was* there—and in the vicinity of Mr. Curtis; for the terrible Irishman had posted himself as near as possible to the box in which the Insolvents stand to be examined—in the first place, that when Frank should mount to that "bad eminence," he might be close by to encourage him with his looks; and, in the second place, he had taken that particular stand as the one whence he could best dart ferocious glances at the Commissioners, in case these functionaries should take it into their heads to deal harshly with his friend.

And now the business of that day's proceeding, commenced; and the Clerk of the Court bawled out in a loud tone—"Joshua Sheepshanks!"

“Here, my Christian friend!” groaned the religious gentleman, drawing himself slowly up to his full, thin, lanky height, and beginning to move slowly and solemnly towards the box above-mentioned.

“Now, then—Joshua Sheepshanks!” cried the clerk, in a sharp tone.

“Come—Joshua Sheepshanks—look alive!” grumbled the official who administers the oaths to the Insolvents.

“Cut along, old fellow,” whispered Frank Curtis, giving the sanctimonious dissenter a hearty pinch on the leg as he passed by.

Mr. Sheepshanks uttered a low moan—cast up his eyes towards the lanthorn—muttered something about his having “fallen amongst the ungodly”—and ended by hoisting himself into the box with some degree of alacrity, his slow movements having rendered the Court impatient.

“Does any counsel appear for you, Joshua Sheepshanks?” demanded the clerk.

“None—unless it be the Lord’s will that I should be supported by divine grace,” answered the dissenting minister, in so doleful a tone and with such a solemn shaking of the head that the whole Court was alarmed lest he was about to go off in a fit.

“I appear to oppose on behalf of several creditors,” said Mr. Bulliwell, one of the leading barristers practising in that Court.

“Oh! the persevering bitterness of those rancorous men!” exclaimed Mr. Sheepshanks, clasping his hands together, and turning up the whites of his eyes in an appalling fashion.

“Silence, Insolvent!” cried the clerk, in a sharp tone.

Meantime, the Commissioners had both been taking a long and simultaneous stare at the religious gentleman; and though one was purblind and the other in his dotage, they nevertheless seemed to arrive in the long run at pretty well the same conclusion—which was, that Mr. Sheepshanks was a dreadful humbug. The glances they interchanged through their spectacles expressed to each other this conviction; and the sharper of the two, who rejoiced in the name of Sneesby, forthwith proceeded to examine the schedule.

“I see that you were once a missionary in the *South-Sea Islands Bible Circulating Society*, Insolvent?” said this learned functionary.

“Under the divine favour, I was such a vessel in the good cause,” answered Mr. Sheepshanks, with the invariable nasal twang of hypocrisy.

“A what?” demanded Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, in an impatient tone.

“He says he was a *vessel*, sir,” observed Mr. Bulliwell, the barrister. “It is a word much in vogue amongst the religious world.”

“Oh! the Insolvent calls himself a vessel—does he?” exclaimed the Commissioner. “Well—he has come to a pretty anchorage at last.”

“And yet, sir, I can assure you he is no anchorite,” said Mr. Bulliwell.

These were jokes on the part of the Commissioner and the counsel; and therefore the attorneys, the clerks, and the audience tittered, as in duty bound when the wig forgot its wisdom and indulged in wit; and the Insolvents all laughed too—but for another reason. In fact, Mr. Frank Curtis had applied his right hand to his nose, and extended it in a fan-like form—or, in other words, he “took a sight” at the learned Commissioner, and worked an imaginary coffee-mill at the same time with his left hand.

Order being restored, the business proceeded.

“And, having been a missionary, I observe by your schedule, that you turned a Dissenting Minister, Insolvent?” said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, interrogatively.

“I was a brand snatched from the burning, sir,” replied Mr. Sheepshanks; “and, having sorely wrestled with Satan——”

“Give me a direct answer, man!” cried the Commissioner, sharply. “Did you leave an institution connected with the Established Church and become a dissenter?”

“Heaven so willed it,” responded the sanctimonious insolvent, in a droning voice: “I had a call—and I obeyed it.”

“Who opposes this man?” enquired the Commissioner.

“Jeremiah Chubbley!” vociferated the Clerk of the Court.

“Here!” growled a man dressed as a bricklayer.

“Now, then, Jeremiah Chubbley—stand up in the witness-box,” continued the clerk.

“Come, Mr. Chubbley—make haste,” said Mr. Bulliwell, the barrister, speaking more civilly and using the honorary prefix of *Mister*, because he had been retained by the individual to whom he applied it.

Mr. Chubbley mounted the witness-box; and while the oath was being administered to him, both the Commissioners inflicted a long stare on his countenance just to satisfy themselves by this physiognomical scrutiny whether he were a trust-worthy person or not;—for Commissioners in the Insolvents’ Court are great physiognomists—very great physiognomists indeed.

“Your name is Jeremiah Chubbley?” said Mr. Bulliwell, rising in a stately manner, and darting a ferocious glance towards Mr. Sheepshanks, as much as to say—“Now, my man, I am going to elicit things against you that will prove you to be the greatest rogue in existence.”

“Yes—my name be Chubbley, sir,” answered the opposing creditor. “But I paid you to tackle that there sneaking-looking chap over there, and not to ke-vestion me.”

“My dear sir,” said Mr. Bulliwell, blandly, “this is the way of conducting an opposition where counsel is employed. Your name is Jeremiah Chubbley; and you are a master-bricklayer, I believe?”

“I told ’ee so a veek ago,” replied the opposing creditor, savagely.

“Yes—yes: but you must tell the learned Commissioners all over again what you told me,” gently remonstrated Mr. Bulliwell. “I believe you are the proprietor of a chapel in the Tottenham Court Road?”

“Yes—I be, sir,” responded Mr. Chubbley. “I built she—and a stronger, better, or more comfortabler place of washup you wouldn’t find in all London—least ways, barrin’ St. Paul’s.”

“Well—and this chapel was to let some three or four months ago, I believe?” continued Mr. Bulliwell.

“Yes—it were, sir: and I had blackguards up at the grocer’s round the corner——”

“Had what, man?” demanded the Commissioners simultaneously, and as it were in the same breath.

He means that he put placards up at a neighbouring grocer’s, sir,” mildly explained Mr. Bulliwell, then, turning again to the opposing creditor, the learned counsel said, “And I believe that the Insolvent was attracted by the placards, and applied to you in consequence?”

“He come round to my house, sir, jest as me and my missus was a sitting down to dinner,” answered Mr. Chubbley. “It was biled pork and greens we had, I remember; cos says I to my missus, says I——”

“Well—well, Mr. Chubbley,” interrupted the counsel: “we will proceed, if you please. The Insolvent came round to you, and enquired about the chapel that was to let?”

“Yes—he did: and he axed a many ke-vestions about the orgin and the pulpit, and the westry—and so on.”

“And, being satisfied with your replies, he agreed to take the chapel?”

“Yes—and to pay a ke-varter in adwance, which was eleven pound ten,” answered Mr. Chubbley.

“Well—what took place next?” inquired one of the Commissioners, growing impatient, while his brother-judge took a nap.

“Please, my lud, he sits down and pitches into the biled pork and greens,” responded the opposing creditor.

There was a laugh amongst the audience; but as the joke did not arise from either the bench or the bar, the ushers bawled out “Silence!” as loudly as they could.

“The Insolvent, I believe, not only omitted to pay the quarter in advance,” said Mr. Bulliwell, “but succeeded in obtaining from you the loan of forty pounds?”

“In hard cash—and that’s what aggerewates me and my missus so agin him,” replied the opposing creditor.

“But in what manner did he obtain those forty pounds?” asked Mr. Bulliwell. “Tell the learned Commissioners——”

“Vy—one on ’em’s asleep—and so it’s no use a-speaking to he!” exclaimed Mr. Chubbley.

There was another laugh, which the clerks and ushers immediately suppressed; and Captain O’Blunderbuss ran a narrow risk of being ignominiously bundled out of the Court for observing in a tone somewhat above a whisper, “Be Jasus! and that’s as thrue as that every rale Irishman loves potheen!” But the best of the business was that the somnolent Commissioner woke up; and catching the fag end of a laugh accompanied by the loud cries of “Silence!” on the part of the officials of the Court, he immediately fancied that some person had perpetrated a great breach of decorum, and exclaimed in a severe tone, “Whoever is the cause of disturbance must be turned out.” Hereupon there was another laugh; and even Mr. Bulliwell himself was compelled to stoop down and pretend to examine his brief in

order to conceal the mobility of his risible muscles.

“Come, come—let the business proceed,” said Commissioner Sneesby, anxious to relieve his brother-functionary from any farther embarrassment; for the latter learned gentleman was quite bewildered by the renewed hilarity which his words had provoked.

“Tell the bench how the Insolvent obtained from you the forty pounds, Mr. Chubbley,” exclaimed Mr. Bulliwell.

“Please, sir—my missus has on’y got von eye——”

“Well—and what has that to do with it?” demanded Mr. Commissioner Sneesby.

“Jest this, my lud—that that ’ere sneaking feller got on the blind side of she, and began a pitching into she all kind of gammon,—calling his-self a chosen wessel, and telling her how she would be sartain sure of going to heaven if we on’y let him have the funds to set up in business as a preacher. He swore that all the airistocracy was a-dying to hear him in the pulpit: and so he persuades my missus to be pew-opener; and he gammons me to call myself a Helder——”

“A what?” exclaimed Commissioner Sneesby.

“An Elder, sir,” observed Mr. Bulliwell: for it is to be remarked that when Judges at Westminster or Commissioners in Portugal Street cannot understand any thing—or affect not to do so—the counsel are always prepared to give them an explanation;—yet when these counsel become Judges or Commissioners in their turn, they grow just as opaque of intellect and as slow of comprehension as those whom they were once accustomed to enlighten.

“Well—go on, man,” said Commissioner Sneesby, addressing himself to the opposing creditor.

“Well, my lud,” proceeded Mr. Chubbley, “that there sniggering feller come over us all in sich a vay vith his blessed insinivations, that we all thought him a perfect saint; and we was glad to vipe off the dust of sich a man’s shoes, as the sayin’ is. So I goes to my friend Cheesewright, the grocer, and I says, says I, ‘Cheesey, my boy, you must be a Helder, too.’ So Cheesewright axes what a Helder is; and when I tells him that it’s to purside over a chapel in which a reglar saint holds forth, and that all Helders is booked for the right place in t’other world, he says, says he, ‘Chubbley, my boy, tip us your fist; and I’m your man for a Helder too.’”

“And now tell the learned Commissioners what this business has to do with your opposition to the Insolvent’s discharge,” said Mr. Bulliwell, seeing that the bench was growing impatient.

“Vy, my luds,” continued Chubbley, scratching his head, “that there insinivating chap gets Cheesey to lend him his acceptance for thirty pounds, and he comes to me and gets me to write my name along the back on it—and so he gets it discounted, and leaves us to pay it.”

Here Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks held up his hands and groaned aloud—as if in horrified dismay at the construction put upon his conduct.

“Silence, Insolvent!” exclaimed the usher, ferociously.

“And now, Mr. Chubbley,” resumed Mr. Bulliwell, “what answer did you obtain from the Insolvent when you stated to him that you had heard certain reports which made you anxious to receive security for the rent of the chapel, the forty pounds, and the amount of the bill for which you were liable?”

“He said as how that the chapel hadn’t succeeded as he thought it would have done—that he’d been disappinted—and that me and Cheesewright must have patience.”

“And when you told him that you and Mr. Cheesewright would not wait any longer—what did he say?”

“He said we was a generation of wipers.”

“And when you put him into prison?”

“He sent for me, and said I mustn’t hope to be paid in this world; but as I’d laid up for myself a treasure in heaven, he expected me to let him out of quod for nothink.”

There was a general titter in which bench and bar joined; and the only demure countenances present were those of the creditor who was done, and Mr. Sheepshanks who had done him. In fact this pious gentleman was so overcome by the unpleasantness of his position, that he compared himself, in the religious anguish of his spirit, to the man who went down to Jericho and fell amongst thieves.

Silence being again restored, two other opposing creditors were examined in their turn; and their evidence went to prove that Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks had obtained from them a quantity of goods under such very questionable pretences, that he might think himself exceedingly fortunate in having been sent to the King’s Bench instead of to Newgate.

The opposition having arrived at this stage, Mr. Bulliwell proceeded to address the Court in a long and furious speech based upon the

testimony that had been given against the Insolvent. The agreeable appellations of “sanctimonious hypocrite,” “double-faced ranter,” “unprincipled trader in pious duplicities,” and such like terms, were freely applied to Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks in the course of this oration. The learned gentleman dwelt bitterly—but not one atom more severely than the subject deserved—upon the rascally scoundrelism which is practised by those persons who are denominated “saints;” and he concluded a rather eloquent speech by praying the Court to express its sense of the Insolvent’s criminality by remanding him for as long a period as the Act of Parliament would allow.

When called upon for any thing he might have to say in his defence, Mr. Sheepshanks applied a white handkerchief to his eyes; and, after shaking his head solemnly for several moments, he revealed his lugubrious countenance once more—purposely elongating it until he fancied he had tortured himself into as impressive a pitch of misery as one could wish to behold. He then began a tedious and doleful dissertation upon the “vanity of earthly things”—marvelled that his opposing creditors should “prefer the filthy lucre to the welfare of their immortal souls”—declared that when he first went amongst them he found them “lamentably benighted,” but that he had “at one time brought them to a state of grace”—complained that they had treated him as if he had been “a vessel of wrath,” whereas he flattered himself that he was in “a most savoury state of godliness”—hinted rather significantly that he looked upon his present predicament as a “glorious martyrdom in the good cause”—and wound up with an earnest prayer to the Commissioners that they would not be “moved by the men of Belial against him,” but that even as “heaven tempered the wind to the shorn lamb,” they would modify their judgment according to his lamentable condition.

To this speech, delivered in the most approved nasal twang of the dissenting pulpit, and with many doleful moans and frightful contortions, Commissioner Sneesby listened with exemplary patience: so, indeed, did his learned brother-judge—but in this latter case it was with the eyes shut. The moment, however, the harangue was brought to an end, the eyes alluded to opened slowly and gazed rather vacantly around: but with judicial keenness, they speedily comprehended the exact stage of the proceedings; and the possessor of the sleepy optics forthwith began to consult with his coadjutor in solemn whispers. Their conversation ran somewhat in the ensuing manner:—

“It is getting on for one o’clock, and I begin to feel quite faint,” said the somniferous Commissioner.

“A chop and a glass of sherry will do us each good,” observed Mr. Sneesby.

“Bulliwell does make such long-winded speeches!”

“Well—so he does: but I always pretend to listen to them—and thus he enjoys the reputation of having *the ear of the Court*.”

“I am going to dine with Serjeant Splutterby this evening—and so I shall leave at about four o’clock.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby. “I shall sit till six. But what are we to do with this canting hypocrite of an Insolvent?”

“Six months, I suppose: he is a dreadful villain.”

“Yes—and while you were asleep he made a frightful long speech——”

“Oh! in that case, then, let us give him a twelvemonth—and then for the chops and the sherry.”

“Good: a twelvemonth—and then the chops and the sherry.”

Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, having thus assented to the suggestions of his sleepy coadjutor, turned in a solemn manner towards Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks and addressed that miserable-looking creature in the following terms:—

“Insolvent, the Court has maturely deliberated upon your case. We have listened with deep attention to the evidence of the opposing creditors and the address of the learned counsel on their behalf. We have likewise followed you with equal care throughout your defence; and we feel ourselves bound to pronounce an adverse judgment. Your conduct has been most reprehensible—aggravated, too, by the fact that your offences have been committed under the cloak of religion. My learned brother agrees with me in the opinion that your proceedings have been most fraudulent. We might even use harsher terms; but we will forbear. The judgment of the Court is that you, Joshua Sheepshanks, be remanded at the suit of your three opposing creditors for the period of twelve calendar months from the date of your vesting order.”

“Stand down, Insolvent!” cried the clerk.

The discomfitted Mr. Sheepshanks raised his eyes and hands upwards, and gave vent to a hollow groan, which made the audience think for a moment that it was a ghost from the tomb who was passing through the Insolvents’ Court.

“Silence, Insolvent!” vociferated an official, making much more noise to enforce his command than the pious gentleman did in provoking the injunction.

“You must swear to your schedule,” said the usher, as Mr. Sheepshanks was descending from the box.

“Damn the schedule!” muttered the reverend Insolvent, in a savage whisper.

“What do you say?” demanded the usher.

“I pray to heaven to have mercy upon my relentless persecutors, even as I forgive them!” answered Mr. Sheepshanks, with a solemn shake of the head.

He then quitted the box, and forthwith accompanied the tipstaff who had charge of him to the public-house opposite, where he drowned his cares in such a quantity of hot brandy-and-water, that the tipstaff aforesaid was compelled to put him into a cab and convey him back to the King’s Bench in a desperate state of intoxication.

In the meantime the two Commissioners retired to partake of their chops and sherry: the learned counsel likewise withdrew to *their* private room, where *they* also refreshed themselves;—the attorneys stole away for a quarter of an hour:—and the audience took little portable dinners of saveloys and biscuits from their pocket-handkerchiefs, so that the compartment of the Court allotted to spectators suddenly appeared to have been transformed into a slap-bang shop on an inferior scale.

The fifteen minutes’ grace having expired, Commissioners, counsel, and lawyers returned to their places—the audience wiped their mouths—and the Clerk of the Court called forth the name of “FRANCIS CURTIS!”

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE EXAMINATION OF MR. FRANK CURTIS.

Captain O'Blunderbuss surveyed his friend with a degree of admiration amounting almost to envy, as the latter leapt nimbly into the box; but when the two Commissioners inflicted upon the Insolvent the simultaneous long stare which seemed to form a portion of the judicial proceedings, the gallant officer fixed upon those learned functionaries a look of the most ferocious menace,—muttering at the same time something about the "punching of heads." As for Mr. Frank Curtis, he returned the stare of the Commissioners in so deliberately impudent and yet good-humoured a manner that it was quite evident the physiognomical discrimination of the bench was at least for once completely set at naught. In plain terms, the Commissioners did not know what the deuce to make of the young gentleman.

"I appear for the Insolvent, sir," said one of the learned counsel, Mr. Cadgerbreef by name.

"And I attend for an opposing creditor, sir," observed Mr. Bulliwell.

The Clerk of the Court handed up the schedule to the Commissioners, who occupied some minutes in looking over it, the document being somewhat a lengthy one.

"I see you have got upwards of a hundred and fifty creditors, Insolvent," said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, fixing his eyes severely upon the youthful candidate for the process of white-washing.

"Be Jasus! and my frind's a jintleman—every inch of him!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "and no jintleman could think of petitioning the Court with less than a hunthred and fifty creditors."

The whole Court was struck with dismay—the bench being perfectly aghast—at this interruption; while the captain stood as dauntless and menacing as if he seriously contemplated the challenging of Commissioners, learned counsel, lawyers, and all. Even the usher was so astounded by his conduct that he forgot to bawl out his usual noisy cry for silence.

"Who is this person?" enquired Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, turning towards his brother-judge, as if the latter knew any better than himself.

"*Person*, be Jasus! Don't call me *a person*," vociferated the gallant gentleman, stamping his martial foot heavily upon the floor. "Is it me name ye'd be afther finding out? If so, I'll hand ye my car-r-d—and you'll find that I'm Capthain O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemar-r-ra, Ir-r-reland!" added the Insolvent's bosom-friend, rattling the r in such an appalling manner that it seemed as if a waggon laden with iron bars was passing through the Court.

"Turn him out!" exclaimed Mr. Commissioner Sneesby.

"Be Jasus! and it'll take tin of ye to do that!" ejaculated the captain, taking so firm and dauntless a stand that he appeared literally nailed to the ground. "But we'll make a compromise, if ye plaze—and that is, I'll hould my tongue."

“You had better, sir,” said the Commissioner: then, perceiving that none of the officials seemed inclined to assail the impregnable front which the ferocious Irishman presented, he thought it prudent to pass over the interruption and continue the business before the Court. “Who attends to oppose?” he accordingly demanded.

“Me!” ejaculated a little, dapper-looking, flashily-dressed person, elbowing his way through the crowd behind the barristers’ seats, and getting his glossy beaver smashed flat as an opera hat in the desperate struggle: indeed, what with the smell of onions from one man and tobacco from another,—what with the squeezing, and pushing, and crushing—the treading on toes, and the danger of having one’s coat slit up the back or one’s pocket picked,—it is no easy nor pleasant matter to transform oneself into a human wedge to be applied to such a stubborn, compact mass as a multitude in a Court of Justice.

At last, however, the little man succeeded in reaching the witness-box,—but not without being compelled to smart under the disagreeable conviction that the studied elegance of his toilette was entirely marred—his shirt-frill tumbled, his white waistcoat soiled through contact with a coal-heaver, and all the polish trodden off his boots.

Adjusting himself as well as he could in the box, he made a profound bow to the bench, simpered in a familiar fashion towards his counsel, glanced complacently at the attorneys, and then turned a look of indignant contempt upon the Insolvent,—so that the little gentleman’s transitions from excruciating politeness to extreme hauteur were very interesting indeed.

“Your name is Kicksey Fopperton, I believe?” said Mr. Bulliwell, the opposing creditor’s own counsel, specially retained and fee’d for the purpose of getting Mr. Frank Curtis remanded during as lengthened a period as possible.

“That is my name, sir,” was the answer, delivered with a bland smile and a half bow.

“What are you, Mr. Fopperton?”

“A tailor by trade, sir;”—for persons of Mr. Fopperton’s calling never describe themselves briefly as “tailors,” but always as “tailors by trade.”

“A tailor by trade,” repeated Mr. Bulliwell. “And you carry on business——”

“In Regent Street, sir,” replied Mr. Fopperton, glancing towards the bench to notice what effect such a fashionable address had produced upon the Commissioners: but one was dozing, and the other seemed to be looking at nothing—just as horses appear when they are standing idle.

“In Regent Street,” repeated Mr. Bulliwell. “And I believe the Insolvent called upon you, and ordered clothes to a considerable amount?”

“I have supplied him for the last three years,” answered Mr. Fopperton, “and never yet saw the colour of his money.”

“You never yet saw the colour of his money. But he has seen the colour of yours, though?”

“I have discounted bills for him to the amount of a thousand pounds.”

“To the amount of a thousand pounds. Now, on what pretence—or rather, under what circumstances did the Insolvent introduce himself to you?” inquired Mr. Bulliwell.

“He drove up to my door in a dashing gig, sir,” answered Mr. Fopperton, “leapt down, rushed in, and enquired if his friend the Archbishop of Canterbury had been waiting there for him? I assured him that his Grace had not visited the shop, to my knowledge, in all his life. ‘*God bless me!*’ exclaimed Mr. Curtis; ‘*I must have made a mistake, then! But don’t you make the leather breeches which his Grace wears when he goes out hunting?*’ I replied that I never made leather breeches at all. ‘*Nor galligaskins?*’ said Mr. Curtis. ‘*Nor galligaskins, sir,*’ I said. ‘*Then blow me tight*’ says he, ‘*I have come to the wrong shop. My intimate and particular friend the Archbishop of York——*’. I suggested ‘*Canterbury,*’—‘*Canterbury I meant!*’ exclaimed Mr. Curtis: ‘*his Grace promised to introduce me to his own tailor; and here have I been promising introductions likewise to Lord Pumpleby and the Marquis of Dublin, and a whole lot of my fashionable friends. There is a perfect rage all on a sudden to employ his Grace’s tailor!*’—I was struck by all this fine-sounding talk, and handed Mr. Curtis my card. ‘*Egad!*’ said he, laughing, ‘*I’ve a precious good mind to have a lark, and pit you against his Grace’s tailor. My eyes! what fun it would be!*’”

“And it ended by the Insolvent actually putting you in competition with the imaginary tailor which he had conjured up?” enquired Mr. Bulliwell.

“Just so, sir,” returned Mr. Fopperton “and though I heard sometime afterwards that Mr. Curtis received a handsome income from his uncle Sir Christopher Blunt, yet I never got a sixpence.”

“Be Jasus! Sir Christopher-r is a regular ould screw!” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss.

“Eh?—what?” cried the Commissioners, the one awaking from his nap and the other from his obliviousness.

“Is it afther distur-r-bing ye I’ve been again?” demanded the gallant gentleman: “then, be the holy poker-r! I ask your pardon—and I’ll hould my pace!”

With these words the captain put his arms akimbo—pursed up his mouth in a most extraordinary fashion—and stood as still as a post and as demure as a methodist parson, to the huge delight of the unwashed audience.

“It appears,” said Mr. Bulliwell, resuming his examination of the opposing creditor, “that the Insolvent obtained clothes to the amount of four hundred pounds, and cash to the amount of a thousand?”

Mr. Fopperton bowed an assent.

“And you have every reason to believe that he only talked about the Archbishop’s tailor and his noble acquaintances, in order to throw dust into your eyes?”

“To make a fool of me, sir,” cried Mr. Kicksey Fopperton.

“To make a fool of you,” repeated Mr. Bulliwell.

“And an ass of me, sir!” ejaculated the tailor, with increasing warmth.

“And an ass of you,” echoed the learned counsel.

“Yes, sir—and to make a stupid old owl of me!” vociferated Mr. Fopperton.

“A stupid old owl of you,” still repeated Mr. Bulliwell, in the most matter-of-fact style possible: then, perceiving that his client had exhausted alike his self-reproaching epithets and his breath, the learned counsel sate down.

Thereupon up rose Mr. Cadgerbreef, who had been retained for the defence of the Insolvent; and as he pulled his gown over his shoulders and prepared to cross-examine the opposing creditor, Captain O’Blunderbuss turned partially round, and forming an arch with his hand on one side of his mouth, said, in a pretty loud tone however, “Be Jasus! and if ye don’t make mince mate of him, it’s meself that’ll skin him alive!”

The learned counsel nodded his head in a significant manner, as much as to say, “Just wait a moment—and you shall see how I’ll serve him;”—and the gallant captain appeared satisfied with the tacit promise thus conveyed.

“Now, Mr. Fopperton,” cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, who was considered to be particularly skilful in badgering and baiting an opposing creditor, “you’ll be so kind as to remember that you are upon your oath:” and the learned counsel glanced towards the bench, as much as to intimate that the Commissioners were keeping a sharp look out on him, the opposing creditor aforesaid, and would send him to Newgate without remorse at the least symptom of perjury that might transpire.

Mr. Fopperton cast his eyes timidly in the same direction; and it was no doubt some satisfaction to him to observe that the sleepy Commissioner *was* fast asleep, and that the other was just going off into a doze.

“Well, Mr. Fopperton,” exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef, in a very loud and very overbearing tone, “so you have come to oppose the Insolvent’s discharge—have you? Now answer me this question: have you ever been in that box yourself?” pointing at the same time in a resolute and determined manner towards the place occupied by Mr. Curtis.

“Am I bound to answer that question?” asked Mr. Fopperton, becoming considerably crest-fallen all on a sudden, and appealing meekly to his own counsel.

“I am afraid you must,” returned Mr. Bulliwell.

“Well, then,sir—I have had the misfortune to pass through this Court,” said the fashionable tailor, his countenance growing excessively blank.

“You *have* been insolvent,” exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef. “Now, sir, how often have you petitioned the Court and been discharged from your liabilities through the proceedings of this Court?”

“Really, sir—I—I——” stammered the West-End tailor, becoming awfully red in the face.

“Shall I repeat the question, sir?” demanded the learned counsel, affecting a politeness that was even more galling than his severity had been.

“You had better answer, Mr. Fopperton,” said Mr. Bulliwell.

“I can’t say—that is—not exactly——”

“Oh! very well—then we shall see!” cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, taking up a pen, dipping it deep into the ink, and making believe that he

was about to take down the answers to be given to his questions—so as to catch the opposing creditor out perjuring himself if possible: "will you swear, Mr. Fopperton, that you have not been insolvent seven times?"

"Yes, sir—I *will* swear to that," returned the tailor with alacrity.

"You will swear. Well—will you swear that you have not been insolvent five times?"

"Yes, sir—I will swear to that too."

"You will swear to that, too. Now mind what you're about, Mr. Fopperton: take care what you say," cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, in a tone of awful menace. "Will you swear that you have not been insolvent three times?"

"No, sir—I—I can't swear to that," answered the tailor, looking very miserable.

"You can't swear to that. Now, can you deny it?" "No, sir—I cannot," said Mr. Fopperton.

"You cannot," repeated Mr. Cadgerbreef, casting a glance at Captain O'Blunderbuss, which seemed to say, "I have him now!"—then, again addressing himself to the opposing creditor, he exclaimed in a domineering, browbeating manner, "Take care what you are about, Mr. Fopperton;—and now tell me whether you have not been bankrupt, as well as insolvent, several times."

"No—only once bankrupt," cried Mr. Fopperton, impatiently.

"Well—once bankrupt—and enough too, when coupled with three insolvencies!" said the learned gentleman, in a tone which very significantly implied his belief that the opposing creditor was the greatest scoundrel in the universe. "And pray how much have you ever paid in the shape of dividend, sir?"

"I really can't say at this moment: I——"

"Oh! you can't—can't you!" cried Mr. Cadgerbreef: "then I'll see if I can refresh your memory;"—and, taking out of his pocket a letter from some friend or relation, he pretended to examine it with very great attention, as if it contained some damning testimony relative to Mr. Fopperton's dealings—although, in reality, it had no more connexion with him or his affairs than with the man in the moon.

"I think I recollect now, sir," said the West-End tailor, getting frightened: "I—I——"

"Well, sir—can you answer my question?" demanded Mr. Cadgerbreef, laying his fore-finger on the letter in a marked and formal manner, just as if he were pointing to the very paragraph which furnished all requisite information respecting the tailor. "I will repeat it again for you: how much have you ever paid, collectively and under all your numerous insolvencies and frequent bankruptcies, in the shape of dividend?"

"Two-pence three farthings in the pound, sir," answered Mr. Fopperton, in a low tone.

"Speak out, sir!" vociferated the learned counsel, although he heard perfectly well what had been said. "Two-pence three farthings in the pound," exclaimed the unfortunate Snip, who already repented most bitterly that, by coming to oppose Mr. Frank Curtis, he had fallen into the hands of Mr. Cadgerbreef.

"Two-pence three farthings in the pound," repeated this learned gentleman, tossing up his head as if in unmitigated abhorrence at such awful villainy. "And pray, sir, what was the aggregate of liabilities under all your innumerable insolvencies and your equally numberless bankruptcies?"

"I never was bankrupt more than once, sir," mournfully and imploringly remonstrated the tailor, now worked up to a frightful pitch of nervousness and misery.

"Don't shirk my question, sir!" exclaimed the barrister, sternly. "How much did all your liabilities—"

"Thirty thousand pounds, sir," hastily cried Mr. Fopperton, anticipating the repetition of the query on the part of the learned gentleman.

"Be Jasus! and he's a complete villain!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss, in such a loud tone that both the Commissioners woke up: whereupon the gallant officer affected to be seized with a sudden inclination to gaze up abstractedly at the sky-light, just for all the world as if he were quite innocent of any fresh interruption.

"Now, Mr. Fopperton," exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef, seeing that the Commissioners were all attention just at this moment, and taking a skilful advantage of the circumstance, "under your numerous insolvencies and frequent bankruptcies—don't interrupt me, sir—you have paid two-pence three farthings in the pound, on aggregate liabilities amounting to thirty thousand pounds. The Court will be pleased to notice these facts. And yet, Mr. Fopperton, we find you discounting a thousand pounds' worth of bills for my client, the Insolvent. The Court will again please to take a note of this fact."

Of course the Commissioners could not help making—or at least affecting to make the memoranda suggested by the learned counsel:

so the sleepy one scrawled a zig-zag line across his note-book, and the other hit off a rapid sketch of Captain O'Blunderbuss's face, Mr. Commissioner Sneesby being very proficient in that style of drawing. The two functionaries then laid down their pens, and looked as solemn and serious as if they had actually and positively taken the notes in the most business-like manner possible.

"Now, sir," continued Mr. Cadgerbreef, once more turning to the opposing creditor, "will you tell the Court how much hard cash you gave the Insolvent for his acceptance of one thousand pounds?"

"Really, sir, the occurrence is so long ago—I—I——"

"Will you swear, man, that you gave him two hundred pounds?" demanded the learned counsel, impatiently.

"Yes, sir—I will," was the instantaneous answer.

"Will you swear that you gave him four hundred?"—and Mr. Cadgerbreef dipped his pen into the ink with an air of awful determination.

"Why—no—I can't exactly——" stammered the tailor, every instant becoming more and more nervous.

"Will you swear that you gave him three hundred and twenty pounds in hard cash for that bill?" demanded Mr. Cadgerbreef.

"That was just what I did pay in money," replied Mr. Fopperton, in a hesitating manner.

"That was just what you did pay. Now tell the earned Commissioners what else you gave the Insolvent for that bill."

"There was three hundred and twenty in cash—and four hundred and twenty in wines, pictures, and other objects of value——"

"Come—that only gives us seven hundred and forty," cried the barrister: "how do you make up the rest?"

"A hundred pounds *discount*, sir—and——"

"A hundred pounds discount. Well—what next?"

"Sixty pounds *commission*, sir—and——"

"Sixty pounds commission. You have still another hundred to account for, Mr. Fopperton," said the learned counsel, sharply. "Come—about that other hundred? and mind what you tell the Commissioners."

"Well, sir—the hundred pounds was for *bonus*," answered the fashionable tailor.

"That will do, sir: you may stand down," said Mr. Cadgerbreef, looking significantly at the learned Commissioners, with a view of impressing it on their minds that he had just succeeded in fully unmasking a most awful rogue.

Mr. Bulliwell now rose and made a very furious speech against the Insolvent; so that a stranger unacquainted with the practice of English Courts of Justice, would have fancied that the learned counsel had some bitter and deadly motive of personal hatred against the young gentleman;—whereas all that apparent venom—that seeming spite—that assumed virulence—and that fierce eloquence were purchased by Mr. Kicksey Fopperton for a couple of guineas. The speech was cheap—yes, very cheap, when we take into consideration the almost excruciating pains that the learned gentleman took to get Frank Curtis remanded to prison for six months. So much perspiration—such frantic gesticulation—and such impassioned declamation were well worth the money; and if it did Mr. Bulliwell good to earn his two guineas on such terms, it must have been equally satisfactory to Mr. Kicksey Fopperton to obtain so good a two guineas' worth.

During the delivery of this oration, Captain O'Blunderbuss could scarcely contain his fury: as insulting epithet after epithet poured from the lips of Mr. Bulliwell, who was always more eloquent when conducting an opposition than when arguing a defence, the gallant Irishman literally foamed at the mouth;—and it was only in the hope of Mr. Cadgerbreef's ability to mend the business, that he succeeded in controlling his passion. At length Mr. Bulliwell sate down; and the captain muttered in a pretty audible tone, "Blood and thunther! he shall repint of this as long as he lives, if my frind is sent back to the Binch!"

Mr. Cadgerbreef rose to defend his client, Frank Curtis; and as the best means of making that young gentleman appear white was to represent the opposing creditor as particularly black, the learned counsel forthwith began to depict Mr. Kicksey Fopperton's character in such sable dyes that the unfortunate tailor soon found himself held up to execration as a species of moral blackamoor. In fact, the poor little man was stunned—astounded—paralysed by the vituperative eloquence of Mr. Cadgerbreef; and as the learned counsel proceeded to denounce his "numerous insolvencies" and "his frequent bankruptcies" as proofs of unmitigated depravity,—as he dwelt upon the features of the bill-transaction, and spoke with loathing of the *discount*, with disgust of the *commission*, and with perfect horror of the *bonus*,—Mr. Fopperton began to say to himself, "Well, upon my word, I begin to fear that I am indeed a most unprincipled scoundrel: but the fact was never brought home to me so forcibly before!"

In the meantime Captain O'Blunderbuss was in perfect ecstacies: he forgot all that Mr. Bulliwell had said, in listening to the counter-

declamation of Mr. Cadgerbreef;—and his delight was expressed in frequent ejaculatory outbursts, such as “Be Jasus, and there ye have him!” but which passed comparatively unnoticed amidst the thundering din of the learned counsel’s torrent of words. As for Mr. Frank Curtis, he had cared little for the violent assault made upon him by Mr. Bulliwell; but he was immensely pleased at the slaughterous attack effected by Mr. Cadgerbreef on the dismayed and horrified tailor.

The defence being concluded, the two learned Commissioners consulted with each other in whispers; and when they had exchanged a few remarks having no more reference to the case before them than to the affairs of the Chinese Empire, Mr. Commissioner Sneesby proceeded to deliver the judgment of the Court.

Looking as awfully solemn as possible, he said, “Insolvent, it is perfectly clear that you have run a career of extravagance and folly which must be summarily checked. While enjoying a handsome allowance from your worthy uncle, you contracted numerous debts in a most reckless manner; and it is probable that Sir Christopher Blunt withdrew that allowance in consequence of your spendthrift habits. Insolvent, the Court is of opinion that you cannot be allowed your freedom again until you shall have passed a certain time in confinement, both as a punishment for the past and as a warning for the future. The judgment of the Court is, therefore, that you be remanded at the suit of your opposing creditor, Mr. Fopperton, for the space of five calendar months from the date of your vesting order.”

“Thin bad luck to ye, ye slapy-headed ould scoundrels!” vociferated Captain O’Blunderbuss.

“Holloa, there!” cried the usher, unable to pass over such a flagrant breach of decorum as this, in spite of the awe with which the terrible Irishman inspired him; and, springing towards the captain, the official clutched him by the collar—while, to use the words of the newspaper reporter, “the most tremendous sensation pervaded the Court.”

But Gorman O’Blunderbuss was not the man to be thus assailed with impunity; and, knocking down the usher with one hand and Mr. Kicksey Fopperton on the top of him with the other, he made a desperate rush from the tribunal, no opposition being offered to his exit.

A few minutes afterwards he was joined at the public-house over the way by his friend Frank Curtis and the tipstaff who had charge of the latter; and the three worthies, following the example of the pious Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks, drank spirits-and-water until they were compelled to return to the King’s Bench in a hackney-coach.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE LAPSE OF NINETEEN YEARS.

How easy is it to record upon paper the sweeping words—"Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences just related:"—how easy is it with a few moments' manipulation of the pen to leap over a period embracing almost the fifth part of a century!

Nineteen years!—a few short syllables—a drop of ink—a scrap of paper—and a minute's trouble,—these are all that the novelist needs to enable him to pass by the deeds of nineteen years!

Oh! this very power compels us to look with suspicion upon the utility of our own avocations,—to reflect how far removed from *the* natural is even the *most* natural of the works of fiction,—and to feel the nothingness of all the efforts of the imagination when placed in contrast with the stern and stubborn facts of the real world!

For though the novelist, exercising a despotic power over the offspring of his fancy, may dispose of years—aye, even of centuries, with a dash of his pen,—yet of Time, as the universe actually experiences its march, not one instant can he stay—not one instant accelerate.

Great Kings, who have proclaimed themselves demigods and compelled the millions to abase themselves round their mighty thrones,—at whose awful nod whole nations have trembled as if at the frown of Olympian Jove, and whose impatient stamp on the marble pavement of their palaces has seemed to shake the earth to its very centre,—proud and haughty monarchs such as these have been powerless in the hands of Time as infants in the grasp of a Giant. Though heads would fall at their command, yet not a hair of their own could they prevent from turning gray: though at their beck whole provinces were de-populated, yet not a single moment could they add to their own lives!

Time is a sovereign more potent than all the imperial rulers that ever wore the Tyrian purple,—stronger than the bravest warriors that ever led conquering armies over desolated lands,—less easy to be moved to mercy than the fiercest tyrants that ever grasped earthly sceptres.

To those who, being in misery, look forward to the certain happiness that already gleams upon them with orient flickerings from the distance, Time is slow—oh! so slow, that his feet seem heavy with iron weights and his wings with lead:—but to those who, being as yet happy, behold unmistakeable auguries of approaching affliction, Time is rapid—oh! so rapid, that his feet appear to glide glancingly along like those of a sportive boy in pursuit of a butterfly, and his wings are as light and buoyant as the fleetest of birds.

The wicked man, stretched upon the bed of death, cries out, "Oh! for leisure to repent!"—but Time disregardeth his agonising prayer, and saith, "Die!" The invalid, racked with excruciating pains, and wearied of an existence which knows no relief from suffering, exclaims, "Oh! that death would snatch me away!"—but Time accordeth not the shrieking aspiration, and saith, "Live on!"

Passionless and without feeling though he be, Time shows caprices in which the giddiest and most wilful girl would be ashamed to indulge,—sparing where he ought to slay—slaying where he ought to spare: insensible to all motives, incompetent to form designs, he appears to act with a method of contradictions and on a system of studied irregularities.

"Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapters!"—Such is the sweeping assertion which we have now to make.

Nineteen years!—how much joy had been experienced, how much misery felt, during that interval: what vast changes had taken place over the whole earth!

In these islands that period was marked with the names of three sovereigns:—George the Fourth—William the Fourth—Victoria.

The debaucheries, vices, and profligacies of George lessened the value of Monarchy even in the eyes of its stanchest supporters: the utter incompetency, weakness, and even downright silliness of William reduced it to a still greater discount;—and the accession of Victoria proclaimed the grand fact that Monarchy is a farce, since a mere school-girl can be put up as the throned puppet of the Punch-and-Judy show of Royalty.

During nineteen years, then, did the value of Monarchy experience a rapid and signal decline: and, though it still endures, it is

hastening with whirlwind speed to total annihilation. Men are becoming too wise to maintain a throne which may either be filled by a voluptuary, a fool, or a doll: they see something radically and flagrantly bad in an institution which is fraught with such frightful contingencies;—and they look forward to a convenient moment and a proper opportunity to effect, by moral means, and without violence, a complete change. The throne is worm-eaten—its velvet is in holes and covered with dust: and no earthly power can repair the wood nor patch up the cloth. It is old—ricketty—and good-for-nothing; and the magisterial seat of a President, elected by the nation at large, must displace it. Monarchy falling, will drag down the ancient Aristocracy along with it; and the twenty-six millions of these realms all starting fair together on a principle of universal equality, those who succeed in reaching the goals of VIRTUE and TALENT will constitute and form a new Aristocracy.

Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapters; and it was now the summer of 1846.

The July sun gave forth a heat of intense sultriness; and not a breath of air fanned the stifling streets of the West-End, nor agitated the green foliage of St. James's Park. Nevertheless all that fashionable quarter of London which lies within the immediate vicinity of the old palace that gives its name to the park just mentioned, presented a bustling and animated appearance; for Queen Victoria was to hold a grand reception at noon that day.

Pall Mall was thronged with well-dressed persons of both sexes;—and the windows and balconies in that thoroughfare were crowded with elegantly-attired ladies and gentlemen, who were either the occupants of the houses at the casements of which they were thus stationed, or had hired seats at the shops where the cupidity of the proprietors turned to advantage the curiosity of the public.

It was evident, then, that the reception to be holden this day was of no ordinary character, and that some great or illustrious personage was expected to attend the royal levee. For, amongst the thousands that thronged the streets, an immense anxiety to secure the best places prevailed; and in all quarters was the eager question asked—"But is it certain that the Prince will come this way?"

We must pause for a few minutes to notice a group occupying the balcony of the drawing-room windows at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham. This group consisted of six persons—three gentlemen, and three ladies.

The first of the three gentlemen was a fine, handsome, noble-looking man of about forty-five years of age—with a countenance indicating feelings of the most lofty honour, great generosity, and a splendid intellect. This was the Earl of Ellingham.

Near him stood an old and venerable gentleman, whose years were verging fast to three-score-and-ten, but whose small, restless, sparkling eyes beamed with the fires of genius, and whose compressed lips showed that although he had consented to become a spectator of the gay scene about to take place, his thoughts frequently wandered to subjects of a more serious kind and more congenial to his nature. This was Sir John Lascelles—the most eminent physician of the age, and who had received the honour of knighthood in recompense for the great services which he had rendered to the art of medicine.

The third gentleman was about twenty-five years of age. Tall, handsome, well-formed, and genteel in appearance, he seemed a fit and suitable companion for the lovely girl who leant upon his arm, and of whom we shall speak more fully anon. The fine young man at present alluded to, was called by the name of Charles Hatfield: but in the former portion of this work he was known, when a little boy, to the reader as Charley Watts.

The first of the three ladies was about thirty-seven years of age; and her beauty, in the finest, chastest, and most elevated Hebrew style, was admirably preserved. The lapse of years had only matured her charms, and not impaired them: time had touched not the pearly whiteness of her teeth, nor dimmed the brilliant lustre of her large dark eyes. Her hair was still of the deepest and glossiest jet,—silken and luxuriant, as when we first described it in the fourth chapter of our narrative:—for she of whom we are speaking now, was Esther, Countess of Ellingham.

Conversing with the noble Jewess—for she clung to the faith of her forefathers—was a lady whose style of beauty was of that magnificent and voluptuous kind which sets the beholder at naught in his calculations and conjectures relative to the age of the object of his admiration;—for though forty-four years had passed over the head of Lady Hatfield, she was still endowed with a loveliness that, though matured, seemed to have known only the lapse of summers and never to have passed through the snowy storms of as many winters.

And now we must speak more in detail of that charming girl to whom we alluded ere now, and who was leaning on the arm of Lady Hatfield's son. Ravishingly beautiful was this young creature of seventeen—with the aquiline countenance of her mother, and the Saxon complexion of her father. Yes—lovely indeed was Lady Frances Ellingham, the only issue of the alliance which took place between the Earl and Esther one year after the murder of Tamar, and consequently eighteen years previous to the period of which we are now writing. Much of the description which we gave of Esther in the opening of our tale, would apply to the charms of her daughter, whose forehead was high, broad, and intelligent,—whose mouth was small, and revealing in smiles teeth white as orient pearls,—whose eyes were large and dark,—and whose figure was tall, sylph-like, and graceful. But Lady Frances Ellingham's hair, though dark, was several shades less jetty than that of her mother; and her complexion was delicately clear, with a slight tinge of rich carnation appearing beneath the dazzling purity of the skin.

Such was the interesting group of six persons stationed in the balcony of the Earl of Ellingham's mansion. But while they are awaiting the presence of the illustrious individual who is expected to pass through Pall Mall to the Queen's levee at St. James's palace, we will place on record a few short facts that will render less obscure to our readers the interval of nineteen years over which we have thought fit to leap in our narrative.

For a long—long time after the murder of Tamar, Tom Rain appeared inaccessible to consolation: but at last his naturally strong mind and vigorous intellect began to exercise their energies—the former to combat against the deep and depressing sense of affliction—and the latter to teach him the necessity of putting forth all his powers in the struggle, not only on account of the inutility of repinings, but likewise for the sake of those who were interested in him. It was, however, chiefly on the occasion of Lord Ellingham's marriage with Esther de Medina, that Rainford perceptibly rallied; for it did his generous heart good to behold the happiness of his half-brother. As time wore on, Tom Rain recovered much of his former cheerfulness; and after the lapse of three years from the date of Tamar's death, he began to listen with attention, if not with interest, to the representations made to him by the Earl, urging him to the performance of a duty which it was now in his power to fulfil. Arthur reminded him of Georgiana Hatfield's generous conduct in obtaining the royal pardon,—he assured Rainford that her ladyship no longer thought of him with abhorrence and aversion, but would cheerfully bestow her hand on the father of her child,—and the nobleman moreover advised the alliance on the ground that the boy would then dwell with both his parents. The death of Mr. de Medina, which happened about that time, delayed the negociations thus commenced; but at the expiration of a year the proposal was revived, and the necessary arrangements were speedily adjusted. In fine, it was settled that Rainford should abandon the name by which he had hitherto been known, and assume that of Hatfield,—that the boy should be thenceforth called in the same manner, but should be brought up in the belief that he was Rainford's nephew,—and that after the marriage, which was to be solemnized in the most private manner possible, the wedded pair should proceed to the continent, and there reside for some years. All these arrangements were duly carried out. Rainford—whom we shall henceforth call by his wife's name—became the husband of Lady Georgiana Hatfield;—and, taking with them their child, who was represented to be their nephew, they forthwith repaired to Italy, where they dwelt for nearly fifteen years. Thus, on their return to London, only a few weeks before the date up to which we have now brought the incidents of our tale, all the stirring circumstances once associated with the name of Tom Rain were pretty well forgotten; and none, save those few who were in the secret, suspected that the pleasant, gentlemanly, good-natured Mr. Hatfield was identical with the individual who nineteen years previously had filled all England with his fame.

While we have been thus digressing, the sensation amongst the crowds in Pall Mall has increased;—for the carriages of several eminent or illustrious personages have passed along in their way to the royal levee.

In the balcony at the Earl of Ellingham's drawing-room window, a degree of curiosity and excitement prevailed which certainly could not have been aroused on the part of the intelligent individuals there assembled, by the mere display of gorgeous equipages. Let us see whether the conversation passing in that balcony will throw any light upon the subject.

"Well," exclaimed Sir John Lascelles, almost in a petulant tone, "I wonder how much longer your cynosure of attraction will be before he makes his appearance? Truly, it was worth while for my friend Ellingham here, to drag me away from my experiments in order to catch a glimpse of a foreign Prince——"

"Nay, doctor," interrupted the Earl, smiling: "It was precisely because this illustrious Prince is *not* a foreigner—but an Englishman by birth and a true Briton in his noble heart—that I thought you would be pleased to join those who are desirous to behold a youthful hero whose name occupies so memorable a page in history."

"Well, well," said the physician, somewhat more mildly: "I will have patience—and since you assure us that the object of all curiosity is indeed an Englishman——"

"Surely you can neither doubt the fact, nor be ignorant of his great achievements, doctor?" exclaimed the Earl. "But if you wish to receive positive assurances as to his Royal Highness's English parentage, Lady Hatfield will satisfy you."

"Yes—truly," observed Georgiana. "When we were staying in Italy, we not only became as it were eye-witnesses of the great Revolution which was conducted to so signally triumphant an issue by the young hero of whom you are speaking; but we subsequently had the honour of forming the acquaintance of his Royal Highness and that of his Princess, who is as amiable as she is beautiful."

"And now that the Prince has come to visit his native land once more," said Charles Hatfield, his eyes flashing the fires of that enthusiasm which filled his soul, "the people assemble in crowds to do honour to their illustrious fellow-countryman. Oh! how delicious must his feelings be, when he reflects that as an obscure individual he once moved, unnoticed and unknown, amidst the mazes of this great city,—and that by his own brilliant merits he has raised himself to that pinnacle of rank and glory which renders him the admiration of the myriads now assembled to welcome his presence."

"Well spoken, my dear Charles," exclaimed Lady Hatfield. "Look up and down the street—it is literally paved and walled with human faces! In the balconies on either side of this house—and opposite too—I recognise many ladies and peers of the highest rank. Yes—Charles, you are right: the feelings of the Prince must indeed be joyous when he reflects that this vast congregation of all classes has gathered to do honour to the fellow-countryman of whom they are so justly proud."

"History teems with examples of bold, bad, and ambitious men usurping power and decorating themselves with lofty titles," continued Charles, addressing himself partly to Lady Hatfield and partly to the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham: "but in the present instance we have a young Englishman, of generous soul, enlightened opinions, and even rigorous rectitude of conduct, raising himself from nothing

as it were and acquiring the proudest titular distinctions. For what a glorious elevation was it from plain *Mr. Richard Markham* to *His Royal Highness Field-Marshal the Prince of Montoni, Captain-General of the Castelcicalan Army, and Heir-Apparent to the Grand-Ducal Throne*!"

Scarcely had Charles Hatfield enunciated these sounding titles in a tone which afforded full evidence of the enthusiasm that filled his soul as he thought of the splendid career of Richard Markham,[1] when far-off shouts of welcome and of joy suddenly reached the ears of the group on the balcony:—then those sounds came nearer and nearer, as the crowd took up the cries from the direction where they commenced;—and never was Royalty saluted with a more cordial greeting than that which now welcomed the hero of Castelcicala.

"Long live the Prince of Montoni! God save Richard Markham!" were the words sent up by thousands and thousands of voices to the blue arch of heaven.

In a short time a handsome carriage, drawn by four magnificent horses, came in sight of the spectators in the balcony; and nothing could now exceed the enthusiasm of Charles Hatfield, as he once more beheld the object of his heroic idolatry—that fine young Prince whom he had so often admired and envied when in the vast square of the ducal palace of Montoni his Royal Highness reviewed the garrison of the Castelcicalan capital.

The Prince, who was accompanied in his carriage by two aides-de-camp, wore the uniform of his high military rank: his breast was covered with Orders; and in his hand he carried his plumed hat, which he had removed from his brow through respect to the generous British public from whom he now received so enthusiastic a welcome.

His Royal Highness was in the prime and glory of his manhood. He was thirty years of age: his dark hair, which he wore rather long and which curled naturally, enclosed a forehead that appeared to be the seat of genius of the highest order;—and his fine black eyes were bright with the fire of intelligence and the animation of complete happiness. His magnificent uniform set off his symmetrical and graceful figure to its fullest advantage; and he acknowledged with affability and modest condescension the demonstrations of joy and welcome which marked his progress.

As his equipage passed opposite the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, his eyes were attracted to the balcony; and, recognising Lady Hatfield and the enthusiastic Charles, he bowed to them in a manner which testified the pleasure he experienced at again beholding those whose acquaintance he had formed in the ducal capital of Castelcicala.

"He is certainly a very fine young man," said Sir John Lascelles. "I have seldom seen a countenance so expressive of vast mental resources:" then, after a short pause, the worthy physician added, "I would give much for a cast of his head."

The Earl was about to make some reply, when his own name was suddenly shouted forth by a voice in the street: and that name, taken up by tongue after tongue, was echoed by thousands of individuals who were delighted to associate the stanch friend of the industrious classes of England with their enthusiastic welcomings of the royal champion of constitutional freedom in Italy.

"Long live the Marshal-Prince of Montoni! three cheers for the Earl of Ellingham!" were now the cries that made the very welkin ring; and these shouts were prolonged for some time, until the carriage of his Royal Highness turned into the court-yard of St. James's palace, and the Earl on his side withdrew from the balcony.

"You sigh, Charles?" said Lady Frances Ellingham, in a low and somewhat anxious tone, and speaking apart to him whom she believed to be Lady Hatfield's *nephew*.

"I was only thinking, dear Fanny," answered the young gentleman, "that much and earnestly as I may strive to elevate myself, it will never be my good fortune to have such opportunities as the Prince of Montoni found for distinguishing his name and acquiring on immense reputation."

"Are you envious of him, Charles?" enquired the beautiful maiden, in a somewhat reproachful tone. "I thought that you recked not for titles and high rank——"

"No—not when they are hereditary," hastily replied Charles Hatfield: "and this assurance I have often given you in secret—because I should not like to make such an observation before your noble father, whose title *is* hereditary. But I admire—yes, and I envy too, the honours which a great man acquires by his own merits! Do you imagine that the English people would have assembled in vast crowds to hail and welcome one of their own royal Dukes? No, indeed! And yet they seem as if they could not testify their joy in too lively a manner, when the Prince of Montoni appears amongst them."

While this little dialogue was taking place in one part of the spacious drawing-room at the Earl of Ellingham's mansion, the nobleman himself was conversing with his wife and Lady Hatfield in another—the entire group having withdrawn from the balcony, and Sir John Lascelles having quitted the apartment.

"Yes," said the Earl, in answer to a question put to him by Lady Hatfield; "I have understood that the Prince proposes to stay some weeks in London. The Princess Isabella has not accompanied him—her royal parents, the Grand Duke Alberto and the Grand Duchess, being loth to part with her. The Prince has taken up his abode—at least, so states the morning newspaper—at Markham Place, the house where he was born and where all his youth and a portion of his manhood were passed. Accordingly, as you desire, Georgiana, I

will call upon his Royal Highness to-morrow; and I will request him to accept of an entertainment at this mansion."

"How did it occur," enquired the Countess of Ellingham, "that Thomas was not with us just now to behold the progress of the Prince to St. James's?"

"You know, dear Esther," answered Lady Hatfield, "that my husband loves privacy and seclusion, and especially avoids appearing in crowded places. He fears to be recognised," she added, sinking her voice so as to be inaudible to Charles and Lady Frances, who were at the opposite end of the apartment: "and he is perhaps right—although so many years have elapsed since those occurrences——"

"To which we will not refer," interrupted Lord Ellingham, hastily. "How very seriously the young people appear to be conversing together," he added, glancing towards Charles Hatfield and Lady Frances.

"Charles has imbibed certain romantic ideas and hopes of distinguishing himself in the world," observed Georgiana; "and I think it right to encourage such noble—such generous aspirations. But your charming daughter is evidently remonstrating with him upon some point: and yet the two cousins appear to be much attached to each other," she added, with rather an anxious look at the Earl, as if she were uncertain how he might receive the observation, into which she threw a degree of significancy.

"You have mentioned a circumstance which gives me much pleasure—nay, not only myself, but likewise my dearest Esther," said the nobleman. "We have already adopted it as the basis of many happy plans for the future——"

"Yes," observed the Countess of Ellingham, emphatically: "an alliance between Charles and our beloved daughter, would prove a source of felicity and satisfaction to us all."

"Arthur—and you, too, dear Esther," murmured Lady Hatfield, in a tone indicative of deep emotions, "I thank you for these assurances. All my earthly ambition—my sole hope, would be accomplished on the day that such an union took place. Alas! poor boy—it is distressing—Oh! it is distressing to be compelled to veil from him the real secret of his parentage—to hear him at times question me relative to his parents—his *supposed* parents, who are represented to be no more! Yes—and it is cruel, too, to be forced to deceive him—to hear him call me his *aunt*—I, who am his *mother*!"

"Georgiana—dearest Georgiana, do not thus afflict yourself!" murmured Esther, pressing Lady Hatfield's hand in a tender manner, and speaking in a tone of consolation and sweet sympathy.

But almost at the same instant a piercing scream burst from Georgiana's lips; and she fell senseless into the arms of the Countess of Ellingham—while the Earl, turning mechanically and hastily round, beheld Charles standing close behind him,—pale—astounded—petrified! For the young man had advanced unperceived—and his tread unheard on the thick, soft carpet—towards the group formed by Lady Hatfield, the nobleman, and the Countess: and his ears had caught these words—"to hear him call me *aunt*—I, who am his *mother*!"

For a few instants he stood motionless—amazed and stupefied by what he had heard:—but, suddenly recovering the power of movement and yielding to the ineffable sensations which were excited in his breast, he sprang forward—and catching his still insensible parent in his arms, he cried, "Oh! my dearest mother—my beloved, my adored mother—open your eyes—look upon me ——"

"His mother!" exclaimed Lady Frances, overwhelmed with surprise, and unable, in the innocence of her virgin heart, to form even the slightest notion that might serve as a clue to what was still so deep a mystery to her.

"Yes—my dearest Fanny," said the Earl, hastily drawing his daughter aside and speaking to her in a low and rapid tone: "Charles is indeed the *son*—and not the *nephew*—of Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana. But reasons of an imperious necessity—reasons which you are too young to comprehend, and too discreet to enquire into——"

"My dear father, I seek to know no more than it may please you to tell me," interrupted the young lady, with a decision as amiable as it was dutiful and re-assuring: "and my behaviour shall henceforth be as if I had not been accidentally made the spectatress of this scene."

"You are my own beloved—darling daughter!" exclaimed the Earl enthusiastically, as he pressed his lips to the pure and chaste forehead of the charming countenance that was upturned so lovingly towards his own.

By this time Lady Hatfield had been recovered through the kind attentions of Esther; and, awaking to consciousness, she clasped her son to her bosom, murmuring in a faint tone and broken voice, "Now you have learnt my secret, Charles—a secret which—But another time—another time, you shall know all! Oh! Charles—I feel so much happiness and so much sorrow—strangely blended—at this moment——"

"Compose yourself, dearest—dearest parent!" exclaimed the young man, his tears flowing freely. "I now know that you are my mother—and I care to know nothing more! Never—never shall I question you concerning the past: the enjoyment of the present, and the hope which gilds the future—these are enough for me!"

“My poor boy!” murmured Lady Hatfield, straining him to her breast: “I feel as if an immense weight were taken from my mind—I seem to drink of a purer source of happiness than I have ever yet known——Oh! why did I ever hesitate to tell thee that thou wast my son!”

And again she pressed him closer and closer still to her bosom, covering his brow and cheeks with kisses; while tears flowed from the eyes of the Countess and of Lady Frances at the touching spectacle—and the Earl turned aside to conceal his emotions.

CHAPTER CXXI.

MR. HATFIELD.

In the meantime Sir John Lascelles had repaired to the library in the Earl of Ellingham's mansion; and there he found, as he had anticipated, his friend Mr. Hatfield—*late* Tom Rain.

This individual was now in his fiftieth year; and he was much changed by time as well as by art. He still possessed the fine teeth which caused the beholder to forget the somewhat coarse thickness of the lips;—but the laugh that came from those lips, when he was in a happy mood, was more subdued and quiet than when the reader first made his acquaintance many years previously to the present date. Though never inclined to corpulency, he had nevertheless become thinner: yet his form was still upright, muscular, and well-knit. In his calm moments, especially when he was alone, a slight shade of melancholy appeared upon his countenance;—and he even sighed at times as he thought upon the past

These were the changes which the lapse of years had effected in regard to him; and the appliances of art rendered it still more difficult to recognise in the Mr. Hatfield of 1846 the rollicking Tom Rain of 1827. For his hair and whiskers were dyed a very dark hue; and his attire was a plain suit of black.

Was he happy? Yes—to a certain extent, in spite of the shade of melancholy and the occasional sighs. His was a disposition originally so gay and joyous, that it could not be completely subdued—only mellowed down. Years of rigorous integrity—boundless charity—never-failing philanthropy—and innumerable good deeds, had established in his mind a confidence that the errors of his early life were fully expiated;—and so complacently could he look upon the present, that he no longer reproached himself for the past.

This was the usual tenour of his mind: but, as we have already hinted, there were now and then moody intervals in which thought became painful. These were, however, of no frequent occurrence;—and, thus—on the whole—we may assert that Mr. Hatfield *was* happy.

The conduct of Lady Georgiana towards him, from the moment of their union, had been of an affectionate and touching nature. She studied to enact the part of the tender wife—the sincere friend—and the amiable woman: and she succeeded fully. Espousing him at first solely on account of their child, she soon began to like her husband—next to admire him—eventually to love him. She found him to be possessed of numerous good qualities—noble and generous feelings—and sentiments far more refined than she could possibly have anticipated. The terms on which he lived with her, therefore, aided in insuring his happiness; and the fine principles as well as handsome appearance of their son, were a source of profound delight to them both.

Mr. de Medina had died possessed of great wealth—one half of which was bequeathed to Mr. Hatfield. This amount, joined to Lady Hatfield's fortune, rendered them very wealthy; and their riches were almost doubled by the demise of Sir Ralph Walsingham, Georgiana's uncle, who left them all his fine estates. Thus their income might be calculated at thirty thousand a-year; and no inconsiderable portion of this splendid revenue was devoted to humane and charitable purposes.

When Sir John Lascelles entered the library, as above stated, Mr. Hatfield hastened to welcome him with all the affectionate assiduity of a son receiving a visit from a kind and venerable parent; and the worthy physician evidently experienced a greater elasticity of feeling towards Mr. Hatfield than to any other friend whom he possessed on earth. The one never could forget that he owed his life to the science of the doctor: the other looked on Hatfield as a person whom he had actually restored to the world, and as a living proof of the triumph which had crowned long years of research in respect to a particular study.

"My dear friend," said Sir John Lascelles, when they were both seated, "I have just witnessed a spectacle that I must candidly admit to have been very gratifying. The English are a most generous-hearted people, and are quick also in the appreciation of sterling merit. The Earl's name was just now coupled with the shouts of applause that welcomed the Prince of Montoni."

"I am rejoiced to hear these tidings," observed Mr. Hatfield. "Indeed, it struck me, as the sounds of the myriad voices reached my ears in the seclusion of this room, remote though it be from the apartment whence you have just come,—it struck me, I say, that I heard my brother's name mentioned. For nineteen years has Arthur now struggled in the interests of the middle and industrious classes: session after session has he passed in review the miseries and the wrongs endured by the sons and daughters of toil;—and what has he experienced from the several Administrations which have succeeded each other during that period? Though Whigs and Tories have held the reins of power in their turns, the treatment received by my brother has been uniformly the same. The most strenuous opposition to all his grand proposals has been offered; and when some trifling point has been conceded, 'twas as if a boon were conferred instead of an act of justice done. But although Arthur has thus failed in inducing the Government to adopt large and

comprehensive measures for the relief, benefit, and elevation of the industrious classes, he has at least succeeded in giving such an impetus to Liberal sentiments out of doors—beyond the walls of the Senate-house—that he has taught millions to think, who never thought before, upon their political condition. Though baffled in the Legislative Assembly—though thwarted by the old school of aristocracy, and the supporters of those vile abuses which are summed up in the phrase '*the landed interest*'—though opposed with unmitigated hostility by the worshippers of '*the wisdom of our ancestors*,'—nevertheless, Arthur has returned undaunted to the charge. Never disheartened—never cast down—always courageous in the People's Cause, he has fearlessly exposed the rottenness of our antiquated institutions, and mercilessly torn away the veil from our worn-out systems. The millions recognise and appreciate his conscientious—his unwearied strivings in their behalf; and they adore him as their champion. Unassuming—honest—and free from all selfishness as he is, it must nevertheless have been a proud moment for my brother when he heard his name associated ere now with that of the illustrious Prince who achieved the liberation of Castelcicala beneath the walls of Montoni."

"The gratitude of the industrious classes is the most welcome reward that a well-intentioned and a true patriot can possibly experience," observed Sir John Lascelles. "The Earl certainly seemed pleased with the high but merited compliment thus paid to him—although not for one minute did he seek it, when he appeared at the balcony; for I noticed that he rather endeavoured to conceal himself behind the window-curtain. But speaking of the Prince—he is a very handsome young man."

"The Castelcicalans absolutely worship him," said Mr. Hatfield; "and they look upon him as in every way fitted to succeed the Grand Duke Alberto, whenever death shall snatch away that great and enlightened sovereign from the throne."

"It was in the Castelcicalan capital that poor Jacob Smith breathed his last—was it not?" enquired the physician.

"Yes—in the suburbs of Montoni," answered Mr. Hatfield. "As you are well aware, the poor youth never recovered the shock which he sustained on learning that he owed his being to that dreadful man—Benjamin Bones; and the horrible way in which that remorseless wretch died, augmented the weight of the fearful blow caused by that discovery. Jacob scarcely ever rallied—scarcely ever held up his head afterwards: the only gleam of happiness which he knew was afforded by the good tidings that we received relative to the Bunces—and even that was insufficient to sustain his drooping spirit. He languished away—for six years he pined in sorrow, accessible to no consolation that travelling, change of scenery, or our attentions could impart. It was several years before the Great Revolution, which, conducted by Richard Markham, gave freedom to Castelcicala and raised up that hero to a princely rank,—it was some years before this glorious era, that Jacob Smith—for he always retained that name—breathed his last. We buried him in a picturesque cemetery on the banks of the river Ferretti; and a cross—according to the custom of that Catholic country—was placed to mark his last home."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the doctor. "He was always sickly—and the discovery of his hideous parentage was too much for so weak a constitution. And now let us turn to another subject:—have you received the letters which you expected concerning the various individuals——"

"I know to whom you allude," interrupted Mr. Hatfield; "and I have now before me," he added, glancing at several letters, "the correspondence relating to those persons. Timothy Splint still remains the occupant of a fine farm in the backwoods of the United States; and the last nineteen years of his existence have proved the sincere penitence which he feels for the crimes of his earlier days. He possesses a competency—if not positive wealth. By his marriage with the daughter of a neighbouring settler, he has a numerous family; and he brings up his children in the ways of morality and virtue. Indeed, I am well aware *that he has lived to bless the period when he went through the ordeal of the subterranean dungeon*."

"You prophesied that he would!" exclaimed Sir John Lascelles. "Yes—those were the very words which you used when speaking of him to me nineteen years ago. I recollect them perfectly;—for age has not impaired my memory, thank heaven!"

"I now come to Joshua Pedler," resumed Mr. Hatfield, "You will remember, my dear doctor, that this man and his wife Matilda were appointed to the charge of the Eddystone Light-house. There they remained for six or seven years—as indeed I wrote to you to this effect a long time ago——"

"Yes—and then you sent them out as emigrants to Canada," interrupted Sir John Lascelles; "and they continued to do well. What say your last accounts concerning them?"

"They are still happy—contented—and prosperous," answered Mr. Hatfield. "Their shop at Quebec thrives admirably; and they have managed to put by several hundred pounds. Pedler says that the sweetest bread he has ever eaten in his life, has been that which he has earned by his honest toils. I have reason to feel convinced, moreover, that he is kind and good towards his wife, and that his only regret is their not having any children."

"And the Bunces are still living in St. Peter's-Port, after having acquired a competency in the Island of Sark?" enquired the physician.

"Yes—they are still in the capital of Guernsey," was the response. "Bunce tells me in his letter that his wife's health does not improve; in fact, she doubtless received a cruel shock when she heard of the death of Jacob Smith—for it had been her hope that he might some day take up his abode with her and her husband—a hope which she however nourished in secret."

"Bunce himself has never learnt the real parentage of Jacob, I believe?" said the physician. "Indeed, I remember you told me the other day that his wife, always bearing in mind the injunctions you conveyed to her through Mrs. Harding, had retained as a profound secret her former illicit connexion with Benjamin Bones."

“Yes—it was useless to make a revelation which would only have troubled their domestic peace,” said Mr. Hatfield. “Harding divined the hope that the woman had formed relative to Jacob—and in his letters he communicated his ideas to me. But even if death had spared Jacob, he would not have quitted me—no, not though it were to dwell with his own mother!”

“And Jeffreys?” asked the physician: “what of him?”

“He is well pleased that he removed last summer from Hackney to Liverpool. The money he had saved during a period of eighteen years at his shop in the London suburb, enabled him to take a very handsome establishment in the great commercial town in the north; and he is carrying on a large and flourishing business.”

“Thus, in every instance, save that of Old Death, have you succeeded in reclaiming those wicked people whose reform you took in hand,” said Sir John Lascelles. “Tidmarsh died tranquilly in his bed in the Island of Alderney—and the others still exist, worthy members of society.”

With these words the physician rose and took his leave; and almost immediately after he had quitted the library, the Earl of Ellingham entered, closing the door behind him with the caution of one who has some important or mysterious communication to make.

“Arthur, you have evil tidings for me?” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, advancing towards his noble half-brother.

“Nay—they can scarcely be called evil, Thomas,” was the reply: “and yet—’twould perhaps have been better——”

“Speak! Keep me not in suspense,” interrupted the other.

“Charles—your son——”

“Ah! he has discovered his parentage!” cried Hatfield. “Yes—I am sure that this is the circumstance which you came to communicate;”—and he walked twice up and down the room in an agitated manner: then, suddenly turning towards his brother, he said, “How did this occur, Arthur?”

The Earl related the incident just as it had taken place, not forgetting the short but impressive dialogue which he had with his own daughter, Lady Frances, respecting the sudden and accidental revelation of the secret of Charles Hatfield’s birth.

“After all, I am not sorry that this has so happened,” observed the nobleman’s half-brother. “Sooner or later the truth must have been confided to my son—my dear son;—and since the secret may still be preserved in respect to the world and to those whom we would not wish to become acquainted with it——”

“Sir John Lascelles himself does not even suspect it,” interrupted Arthur. “It is known but to our immediate family—and Georgiana’s honour is as safe as ever it was. The breath of scandal cannot reach it.”

“Thanks, my dear brother—a thousand thanks for this assurance!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. “And now let my son come hither to embrace me as his father:—but, Arthur,” he added, sinking his voice to a low and solemn tune, “let him not enquire into the motives which induced his parents to envelop his birth in mystery. Enjoin him to forbear from any attempt to gratify his curiosity in that respect!”

“I hope—indeed, I believe that you have no painful ordeal of such a nature to apprehend,” replied the Earl of Ellingham; and having thus spoken, he quitted the library.

Two minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Hatfield once more paced the apartment in an agitated manner: for, knowing the fine spirit of his son, he trembled lest it should be checked or even broken by the mortifying suspicion that he was illegitimate!

“A falsehood is abhorrent to me,” he thought within himself: “and yet—if he should question me respecting his birth—I dare not avow the truth! I must not confess to my own son that his being resulted from an atrocious outrage perpetrated by myself:—nor must I permit him to suspect the honour of his mother! Silence on my part, I now perceive, would engender such suspicion in respect to her; and she must not lose one particle of the dignity of virtue in the eyes of her own offspring! Alas! painful position!—and, Oh! with what foolish and short-sighted haste did I ere now affirm that I was not sorry for the discovery which he had made!”

At this moment the door opened, and Charles sprang forward into his father’s arms, which were extended to receive him.

For some minutes they remained silent—each too profoundly the prey to ineffable emotions to give utterance to a syllable.

“I am proud—I am rejoiced to be able to call you by the sacred name of *Father*!” at length exclaimed Charles, speaking with the abrupt loosening of the tongue which was caused by a sudden impulse. “But are you—are you well pleased that accident should have thus revealed to me——”

“Charles—my dear boy,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, summoning all his firmness to his aid, “you must be aware that weighty reasons—the weightiest reasons—could alone have induced your mother and myself to practise a deception towards you and the world in respect to the degree of relationship in which you really stood with regard to us. Is it sufficient for you to know at last that you *are* our son?—

or do you demand of me an explanation wherefore you must still pass as our *nephew*?”

“Oh! then Lord Ellingham spoke truly as he brought me hither just now!” cried Charles, in a tone of vexation: then, in another moment brightening up, he added feelingly, “But by what right do I dare to question the conduct of parents who have ever treated me so kindly? No—my dear father—I seek not any explanation at your hands—I am content to obey your wishes in all things.”

“Generous youth!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. “Though you must pass as my nephew, Charles, yet in all respects shall you continue to be treated as my son! You are doubtless aware that I am rich—very rich;—and all that your mother and myself possess is bequeathed to you.”

“One word, father—only one word!” cried Charles. “I have an ardent longing to ask a single question—and yet I dare not—no—I cannot tutor my lips to frame the words——”

“Speak!” said, Mr. Hatfield, emphatically: “I can almost divine the question you hesitate to put to me.”

“Ah! my dear father—I would rather know the truth at once than remain in suspense, a prey to a thousand wild conjectures—the truth regarding one point—and only one!” repeated the young man, in an earnest and imploring tone. “And imagine not,” he continued, speaking with increased warmth and rapidity, “that I should ever look less lovingly or less respectfully upon my dear mother—if——”

“Set that suspicion at rest, my son,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn manner. “Your mother has ever been an angel of innocence and purity! As God is my judge she has never been guilty of weakness or frailty—no—never—never!” he added emphatically.

“And therefore no stigma is upon my birth?” asked Charles, his heart palpitating—or rather fluttering violently, as he awaited the response.

“None!” replied his father, with an effort which was, however, unnoticed by the young man in the excitement of his own feelings.

“God be thanked!” exclaimed he, wringing Mr. Hatfield’s hand in gratitude for this assurance. “And now I seek to learn no more.”

CHAPTER CXXII.

TWO OF THE READER'S OLD FRIENDS.

Bucklersbury—a tortuous street, leading from Cheapside to Walbrook—abounds in dining-rooms, where for fifteen pence the "City man" can procure a meal somewhat on the "cheap and nasty" principle. There's ten-pence for a plate of meat, cut off a joint—two-pence, a pint of porter—a penny, potatoes—a penny, bread—and a penny the waiter.

The moment a person enters one of these establishments and seats himself at a table, a waiter with a dirty apron to his waist, and a ditto napkin over his arm, rushes up, and gabbles through the bill-of-fare, just in the same rapid and unintelligible manner as an oath is administered to a juryman or a witness in a court of justice.

It was while the preceding scenes were taking place at the West End of London, that two gentlemen lounged into a dining-room in Bucklersbury, and took their places, facing each other, at one of the numerous little tables that were spread with dirty cloths and strewn in a random fashion with knives, forks, salt-sellars, pepper-boxes, and vinegar-cruets,—all in preparation for the afternoon's process of "feeding."

Scarcely had the two gentlemen thus brought themselves to an anchor, when the waiter darted up to them as if the necessity of speed were a matter of life or death;—and, heedless whether the visitors were attending to him or not, the domestic functionary hurried over the list of delicacies at that moment in readiness in the kitchen.

"Roast beef—biled beef—roast leg of pork—biled leg of pork and pease pudding—fillet of veal and 'am—beef steak pie—biled leg of mutton and caper sarse—greens—colliflowers—and taturs. Give your orders, gentle-*men*."

But were the rapidity of the waiter's utterance properly represented in print, his repetition of the bill-of-fare would more properly stand thus:—

"Roast beef biled beef roast leg of pork biled leg of pork and pease pudding fillet of veal and 'am beefsteak pie biled leg of mutton and caper sarse greens colliflowers and taturs give your orders gentle-*men*!"

"Well—what shall we have, old fellow?" said the younger gentleman of the two to his companion.

"Be Jasus! 'an it's afther boiled leg of por-r-rk and paze pudding that I am, my frind!" was the emphatic reply, delivered with a ferocious look at the waiter as much as to let that individual know that he had better not have any of his nonsense—although nothing was farther from the poor devil's thoughts at the moment.

"Very good, sir!" cried the waiter. "Biled pork and pease pudding!" he shouted out for the behoof of the young lady within the bar at the remote end of the room.

"And the same for me," said the Irishman's companion.

"Same for gentle-*man*!" bawled the waiter, again addressing himself to the young lady just alluded to. "Ale or stout, gentle-*men*?"

"Porther—a pint!" exclaimed the ferocious Hibernian.

"Pale ale for me," intimated his friend.

"Pint of porter and pint palale for gentle-*men*!" vociferated the waiter. "Weggitubles—bread?" he next demanded.

"No bread—greens!" ejaculated the Irishman.

"Bread and potatoes for me," said his companion.

"One bread—one greens—one taturs—for gentle-*men*!" cried the waiter, thus conveying his last instructions to the young lady who officiated at the bar; and the said young lady sent each fresh order down a pipe communicating with the kitchen—her own voice being as affected and her manner as lackadaisical as the waiter was natural, rapid, and bustling.

But before the various luxuries thus commanded were hoisted from the kitchen to the bar by means of the moveable dumb-waiter that worked up and down between the two places just mentioned,—we must pause to inform our readers—if indeed they have not already

suspected the fact—that the two visitors to the dining-establishment in Bucklersbury, were our old friends Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Francis Curtis!

The gallant Irishman had now numbered sixty-four years; and although the lapse of time had rendered his head completely bald, and turned his whiskers and moustachios to a bright silver, the ferocity of his aspect remained unaltered, and his fiery disposition was unsubdued. He was still the terrible Captain O'Blunderbuss—ready to exchange shots with any one and on all occasions—and more devoted to poteen than ever. His form was as erect as when in the prime of life; and his military coat, all frogged and braided, was buttoned over an ample chest that no stoop had contracted. The captain had grown somewhat stouter than when we took leave of him nineteen years previously to our present date; but his physical strength seemed to have remained unimpaired.

Frank Curtis was now forty-three. He also had "filled out," as the phrase is; but his countenance, in fattening, had lost nothing of its ignoble expression of self-sufficiency and impudent conceit; and his manner was as flippant as ever. Neither had he laid aside any portion of his mendacious habits, but had rather added thereto by varying the style of his boastings and the nature of his lies. He continued to dress in a flashy way—delighting in a hat of strange appearance, and in a waistcoat concentrating in a yard of stuff all the colours which have existence and name upon earth.

We must however admit—for the truth cannot be blinked in this respect—that there was a certain air of seediness about both the captain and Mr. Frank Curtis, which neither the bullying insolence of the former nor the impertinent self-sufficiency of the latter could altogether throw into the shade. It was evident that they had lost the confidence of their tailors and hatters—and even of their washerwomen;—for their garments might have been less thread-bare, and their wristbands a trifle cleaner. We say "wristbands," because those were the only portions of their shirts which met the eye—the captain's frogged coat and Mr. Curtis's faded double-breasted waistcoat being each buttoned up to its owner's throat.

"Waiter-r!" vociferated the gallant officer, when about a minute and a half had elapsed from the time that the orders had been given for the repast.

"Yes, sir—coming, sir," cried the functionary thus addressed, as he hurried away in quite another direction.

"Be Jasus!" ejaculated the captain, thumping his fist so vigorously down upon the table that the pepper box danced the polka with the mustard-pot, and the knives and forks performed a *pas de quatre*. "Is that boiled por-r-rk and paze pudding afther coming to-day at all, at all?"

"Just coming, sir!" said the waiter, under no excitement whatever, though in an immense bustle—for waiters always remain cool and imperturbable when most in a hurry.

"If it don't come in sivin seconds, ye villain," thundered the captain, "I'll skin ye alive!"

"Very good, sir," said the waiter, as he hastened to attend upon some new-comers.

"The beauty of the French eating-houses is that the moment you order things they appear on the table by magic," observed Frank Curtis, in a tone loud enough to let every one present know that he had been in France. "When I was in Paris—on that secret mission from the English Government, you know, captain——-"

"Be Jasus! and I remimber quite well," exclaimed the gallant officer. "'Twas at the same time that I wint to offer my swor-r-d and services to the Imperor of the Tur-r-rks—the Sulthan, I mane."

"Just so," said Frank. "Well—as I was going to tell you——"

"Two biled pork—two pease pudding—for gentle-*men*," cried the waiter at this juncture, as he set the plates upon the table. "One—bread—one greens—one taturs—for gentle-*men*."

The captain and Mr. Curtis fell to work upon the delicacies thus placed before them; and after an interval of silence, during which the boiled pork and *et ceteras* disappeared with astonishing rapidity, the latter leaning across the table, said in a low whisper, "It was a deuced lucky thing that I met my friend Styles just now; for if he hadn't lent me this sovereign, we might have gone without dinner as well as without breakfast."

"Be Jasus! and that's thrue enough, Frank!" returned the gallant officer, likewise in *sotto voce*. "Where did ye appint to mate Misther Styles again this afternoon?"

"At a nice quiet little public that I know of—where there's a good parlour and capital spirits," answered Mr. Curtis.

"Ah! the thrue potheen—the rale cratur!" said the captain. "Well that's a blissing, at all evints! And, be Jasus! I hope your frind Misther Styles will be after putting us up to do a something, as he suggisted—for, be the power-r-rs! Frank, it's hard work looking about for the sinews of war-r-r!"

"Styles is a splendid fellow, captain," replied Mr. Curtis, smacking his lips after his last glass of pale ale—or "palale," as the waiter denominated it. "Why, God bless you! It was him who got up the London and Paris Balloon Conveyance Company, with Parachute

Branches to Dover and Calais."

"And how came it to fail?" demanded the gallant officer.

"Simply because it was never meant to succeed," answered Frank, in a matter-of-fact way. "The object was to make money by showing the balloons and parachutes that were to be used in the business; and the press took up the affair quite seriously. As long as curiosity was kept alive, Styles cleared upwards of five guineas a-day by the admissions at a shilling a head. Ah! he's a clever fellow—a deuced clever fellow, I can tell you. But it's pretty near time we went to meet him: for, though he hasn't any thing particular to do at present, he always pretends to be in a hurry, and never waits one minute over the hour for an appointment:—that's the way he has got himself the character of a man of punctuality and business-habits."

"Waiter-r!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Coming, sir!" cried the functionary thus adjured: then, rushing up to the table, he said interrogatively, "Cheese, gentle-*men*?"

"No. What's to pay?" demanded Curtis.

The waiter enumerated the items in a rapid manner and mentioned the amount, which was forthwith discharged by Frank, who ostentatiously threw down a sovereign as if he had plenty more of the same kind of coin in his pocket. On receiving his change, he gave the waiter sixpence—a specimen of liberality which induced that discriminating personage to disregard all the other demands made at the moment upon his services, until he had duly escorted the two gentlemen to the door.

Upon quitting the dining-rooms, Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis proceeded arm-in-arm into Cheapside; and, on catching a glimpse of the clock of Bow Church, the latter gentleman said, "We are in lots of time. It's only half-past two—and we're to meet Styles at three at a public in Fleet Street. So we needn't gallop along as if a troop of sheriffs' officers were at our heels."

"Be Jasus! d'ye remember what fine fun we had with the snaking scoundrels up in Baker Street?" cried the gallant officer. "Why—it must be upwards of twenty years ago—or nineteen at the laste!"

"Yes—and do you remember what larks we had in the Bench too, during the time that the sleepy old Commissioners remanded me for?" said Curtis.

"Be the holy poker-r! and I've forgotten nothing of all that same!" ejaculated the captain. "But it was a sad blow to ye, my frind, when Sir Christopher-r died without laving ye a single sixpence!"

"I can't bear to think of it, captain—although a dozen years or more have passed since then. But who do you think I saw the other day, riding in her carriage just as if she had been a lady all her life?"

"Be Jasus! and ye mane Sir Christopher's wife that was!" exclaimed the gallant officer. "Had she got the fine stout livery-servant standing up behind as usual?"

"Yes—and young Blunt was inside," added Curtis. "He's as like the stout footman as ever a lad was to a middle-aged man in this world—the same pudding face—sandy hair—stupid-looking eyes——"

"Now be the power-rs! I think you're too hard upon the footman, Frank!" interrupted the captain. "He's not such an ugly fellow as you would be afther making him out. I don't say, for insthance, that he's so handsome as you, my dear frind—or yet so well made as me, Frank——"

"Very far from it, captain," cried Mr. Curtis. "I don't think that we're the worst looking chaps in Cheapside at this moment. That's exactly what Styles said to us this morning. '*I want a couple of genteel fellows like you*,' says he, '*to join me in something that I have in hand.*'"

"We're the very boys to co-operate with him, Frank!" exclaimed the captain: "and what's more, you and me can play into ache-other's hands. 'Tisn't for nothing that we've been frinds for the last twinty years."

"In which time we've seen many ups and downs, captain," observed Frank,—"had many a good dinner, and gone many a time without one—spent many a guinea, and seen many a day when we didn't know where the devil to get a shilling——"

"Be the power-rs! and had many a rar-r lar-r-rk into the bargin!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss. "D'ye renumber our gitting into the station-house the night afther your dear wife left ye to jine the old gintleman that fell in love with her, and——"

"And who was kind enough to take her off my hands, children and all!" exclaimed Frank, laughing heartily. "Ah! that was a glorious business—that was—I mean, old Shipley relieving me of my dear spouse and the five responsibilities."

"And didn't I conduct the bargin for ye?" demanded the captain. "Didn't I make him pony down a thousand pounds to prevint an action of *crim. con.*? Be the potheen of ould Ireland—I did that same business as nate and clane as iver such a thing was setthled in this wor-r-rld!"

“True enough, captain,” said Frank. “But it’s just on the stroke of three, I declare!” he exclaimed, glancing up at Saint Bride’s, which they were now passing. “How we must have dawdled along! I wish you wouldn’t loiter to stare at the gals so, captain,” he added, laughing.

“Be Jasus! and it’s yourself, Frank, that ogles all the lasses that we mate,” cried the captain, throwing back an insinuation that was intended as a friendly compliment. “But which is the place, me boy?”

“Here,” said Curtis, turning into a public-house in Fleet Street just as the clock struck three.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

A MAN OF BUSINESS.

Mr. Bubbleton Styles was a gentleman of about fifty years of age. Short, thin, dapper, and active,—with a high, bald forehead, and small restless, twinging eyes,—he seemed a perfect man of business—an impression that was enhanced by a certain sly knowingness which he had assumed years before, and which was now habitual to him. He was uneducated and ignorant: but he had studied the manner in which well-instructed persons spoke—he compared their language with his own—and he had actually weeded his style of speech of the solecisms and grammatical errors that originally characterised it. He had not, however, been able to improve himself in spelling, with equal facility; and therefore he took care never to write a letter. He always had some plausible excuse for throwing this duty in business matters upon some other person more competent than himself.

Astute and cunning, he forebore from touching on topics which he did not understand: but if the conversation did turn, in spite of his endeavours to the contrary, on subjects whereof he was ignorant, he so artfully managed his observations that even those who knew him well were far from suspecting that he was otherwise than profoundly acquainted with the matter under discussion. Every body thought him a very shrewd fellow;—and he had a habit of looking so knowing and critical when any one was speaking, that his opinion, when subsequently delivered, was received with respect and deemed an authority.

The reader may therefore perceive that Mr. Bubbleton Styles was a thorough man of the world. He took care never to commit himself. In small money transactions he was always regular and correct: he therefore escaped the imputation of meanness, and actually acquired at a cheap rate the denomination of “an honourable character.” The consequence was, that when he failed—which was very often indeed—in large transactions, he was considered merely as “a spirited but unsuccessful speculator,”—never as a dishonest person.

He had an office in the City: but were any of his friends to ask, “What *is* Styles?” the answer would be a vague generality—such as, “Oh! he is a City man, you know—engaged in business and all that!”—a reply leaving the enquirer just as wise as he was before. And yet, at his office, there were all the symptoms and evidence of “business,”—a letter-box at the door—a clerk engaged in writing at the desk—a pile of letters here, and a heap of account-books there—samples of many kinds of goods on the mantel and shelves—mysterious-looking bales and hampers on the floor—files covered with dingy papers, looking like invoices and bills of lading—and the words *Bills for Acceptance* labelled over a slit in the board-work that enclosed the desk. Thus the place had a very business-like aspect: and yet no one could define what was the precise nature of the business carried on there.

But we have travelled to Mr. Bubbleton Styles’s office in Crosby Hall Chambers; whereas Mr. Bubbleton Styles himself is just now in a tavern-parlour in Fleet Street.

The clock had just *begun* to strike three as Captain O’Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis entered the public-house: and by the time they reached the aforesaid parlour it was six seconds *past* three.

There sate Mr. Bubbleton Styles—with his silver watch in his hand, and gazing at the Dutch clock over the mantel-piece, as if he were anxiously comparing the two dials, and found himself much put out because there happened to be a slight difference between them.

“If I thought it was my watch that was wrong,” he said aloud, apparently in a musing manner, but really because he caught a glimpse of the entrance of Curtis and Blunderbuss at the moment, and he never lost an opportunity of impressing even his best friends with an idea of his punctuality,—“if I thought it was my watch that was wrong, I would trample it to pieces beneath my heel.”

“No—don’t do that, old fellow!” exclaimed Frank, advancing towards him. “Much better give it to me!”

“I would not do any thing so prejudicial to a friend as present him with a watch that went irregularly,” returned Mr. Styles, in a solemn tone. “But the fault is *not* with my watch, I am convinced: it lies with that rascally old clock. However, you are only six seconds after your time: I should have allowed you the full minute—and then I should have waited no longer. Come, sit down, Curtis—Captain O’Blunderbuss, sit down; I have just one hour to devote to you. As the clock strikes four, I must be off. What will you take?”

“Potheen for me, if ye plaze,” said the gallant officer.

“Brandy for me,” observed Frank.

“And wine-and-water for me,” added Mr. Bubbleton Styles. “I never take spirits until after supper.”

The various beverages required, were immediately ordered and supplied; and the three gentlemen proceeded to business, the parlour at

the tavern—or rather public-house—being occupied only by themselves at the moment.

“Well, old fellow,” said Mr. Frank Curtis, addressing himself to Mr. Styles, “what good thing can you put us up to?”

“A speculation that will enrich us all three,” replied the gentleman thus appealed to. “I do not mind telling you that I have been rather unfortunate lately in one or two enterprises—and I want something to set me square again. I have a few bills coming due in a couple or three months, and would not have them dishonoured on any account. Thank God! however, I have no paltry debts—no mean milk-scores—no peddling affairs. I always avoid them. Still I must make a bold stroke for the sake of my larger transactions;—and I presume that neither of you are averse to earning a little money easily and speedily.”

“Arrah! and be Jasus! that’s the most wilcome thing ye could be afther saying to me, my frind!” exclaimed the captain, surveying the speculator with deep admiration.

“Now,” continued Mr. Styles, “I have been thinking that we three can work the oracle well together—and I propose——”

“What?” demanded Mr. Curtis, anxiously.

“Hould your tongue—and have patience, Frank!” ejaculated the gallant officer. “It shall be your turn to spake prisintly. Well, sir—and what is it, thin, that ye’re afther proposing!”

“A Railway!” returned Mr. Bubbleton Styles.

“Divil a betther idea could ye have formed!” cried the captain, enthusiastically.

“Glorious!” exclaimed Curtis, in an equally impassioned tone of approval.

“Don’t be excited—take things calmly—in a business-like way,” said Mr. Bubbleton Styles. “It is now twenty minutes past three: we have forty minutes more to converse upon the subject. Much may be done in that time. Here,” continued the speculator, drawing a skeleton-map of England from his pocket, and spreading it on the table; “you see this line drawn almost longitudinally from one end of Great Britain to the other? Well—that is my projected Railway. You perceive, we start from Beachy Head in Sussex—right on, as straight as we can go, to Cape Wrath on the northern coast of Scotland. Of course we avoid as much as possible placing any portion of our line in competition with railways already existing; but we shall have Branches to all the principal cities and manufacturing towns, and Single Lines wherever they may be asked for.”

“Capital, be Jasus!” exclaimed the Hibernian officer, unable to restrain the exuberance of his delight at this magnificent scheme. “And be what title d’ye mane to call this purty little bantling of yours, Misther Styles?”

“The Grand British Longitudinal Railway,” answered the speculator, in a measured and emphatic manner.

The captain was so elated by the grandeur and vast comprehensiveness of this denomination, that he rang the bell with furious excitement, and ordered the waiter to replenish the glasses.

“Now,” continued Mr. Bubbleton Styles, “having expounded my views, it is necessary to take into consideration the mode of procedure. Of course I am the promoter of the scheme; and to-morrow I shall register it. This will only cost five pounds—and then the thing is secured to us. ‘*Provisionally Registered, pursuant to 7 and 8 Victoria, cap. 110;*’—and so forth. Capital £8,000,000, in 400,000 shares of £20 each. Deposit, £2 2s. per share. You, Frank, must be the Secretary; and you, captain, Consulting Engineer.”

“Is it an Ingineer ye’d be afther making of me in my ould age?” cried the gallant officer: “for, be the power-rs! I’ve forgot more than I ever knew of that same!”

“Oh! the place will be quite a sinecure—good pay and nothing to do,” said Mr. Styles. “We shall have a regular Engineer, as a matter of course; but it will look business-like to speak in the prospectus of having ‘*secured the valuable services of that eminent Military Engineer, Captain O’Blunderbuss, of Blunderbuss Park, Ireland; who, having surveyed the whole of the proposed line, in concert with the Company’s Civil Engineer, has reported most favourably of the scheme, and has offered suggestions which will produce a saving to the Company of nearly half a million sterling in the progress of the works*.’ This is the way to manage business, gentlemen,” added Mr. Styles, glancing in a satisfied manner at his two companions, one after the other: then, looking at his watch, he exclaimed, “Just ten minutes more to stay—and I must be off! Now, we have settled that I am to be Promoter—you, Curtis, are to be Secretary—and you, captain, Consulting Engineer. This evening I will draw up the prospectus: we must have about thirty good names for the Provisional Committee—and by to-morrow afternoon the document will be printed and ready.”

“You will not have time to call on the people to ask them to let you put down their names?” said Frank Curtis, conceiving at the moment that his friend was going a trifle too fast.

“Nonsense, my dear fellow!” exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles: “I know that I can take the liberty of using the names of at least half of my intended Provisional Committee-men; and the others will not think of contradicting the prospectus, when they see that we have got Mr. Podgson as chairman.”

“What—Podgson!” cried Mr. Curtis, almost wild with joy and surprise. “You don’t mean to say that you’ve got Podgson?”

“Not yet,” answered the speculator, with his characteristic coolness: “but I *shall* have him by this time to-morrow.”

“I thought that you had not spoken of your scheme to a soul before you met me and the captain this morning——”

“Neither had I—and Podgson is totally unaware at this moment that such a project is in existence,” interrupted Mr. Styles, calmly and deliberately. “But I know how to deal with him: I have read his character from a distance;—and, although I have never yet exchanged a word with him in my life, depend upon it I shall hook him as our chairman before I am twenty-four hours older. Three minutes more!” cried the speculator: then, as if to make the most of the hundred and eighty seconds at his disposal, Mr. Styles closed the present interview in the following business-like and highly gratifying manner:—“You are both as shabby as you well can be; and you must obtain new clothes as soon as possible. Here is a ten-pound note for each of you. Moreover you must get respectable lodgings at once; and you can give a reference to me. To-morrow, at three o’clock punctually, there will be chops and sherry in readiness at my office—and I shall expect you both. Not a moment before three, remember—because you will be interrupting me: and if you’re a moment after, I shall decline any farther transactions with you. So good bye—I haven’t time to shake hands.”

Thus speaking, Mr. Styles rushed from the room, it being four o’clock to an instant;—and it is perhaps as well to observe that this perfect man of business had only made an appointment with his friends at the public-house in Fleet Street, because he had another gentleman to meet in the neighbourhood at six minutes past four.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

CHARLES HATFIELD.

It was past midnight; and in only one chamber throughout the Earl of Ellingham's spacious mansion was a light still burning.

In that chamber Charles Hatfield was pacing to and fro—his mind filled with thoughts of so bewildering, exciting, and painful a nature, that he felt the inutility of endeavouring to escape from them by retiring to his couch.

This young man of twenty-five years of age,—so handsome, so intelligent, and with the certainly of inheriting vast riches,—possessing the most brilliant worldly prospects, and knowing himself to be the object of his parents' devoted affection—entertaining, too, a profound love for the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham, and having every reason to hope that his passion was reciprocated,—this young man, with so many advantages in respect to position, and so many sources of felicity within his view,—Charles Hatfield was restless and unhappy.

The striking incident which had marked the day—the sudden discovery that those whom he had hitherto looked upon as his uncle and his aunt, were in reality his parents,—the assurance which he had received respecting the honour of his mother and the legitimacy of his birth,—then the mysterious fact that his parentage was still to remain a secret to the world,—all these circumstances combined to torment him with doubts and misgivings—to excite his curiosity to a painful degree—and to animate him with an ardent longing to penetrate into all that was so obscure and suspicious.

It was true that he had promised his mother never to question her relative to a subject that might be disagreeable to her;—for the moment, too, he had been satisfied with the assurances of his legitimacy which he had received from the lips of his father. But when he found himself alone in his own bed-chamber—surrounded by the stillness of night—he could no longer check the natural current of his reflections:—the deep silence in which the mansion was enveloped—the secluded position of his apartment—and the slightly romantic turn of his mind,—all united to give an impulse to thoughts which were so intimately associated with subjects of mysterious and strange import.

Then, many circumstances, remembered in connexion with his early boyhood, but until now never before pondered upon with serious attention,—recollections, hitherto vague and disjointed,—gradually assumed a more intelligible aspect to his mental contemplation:—memory exerted herself with all her energy, to fill up blanks and bring vividly forward those reminiscences that until this moment had been like dim and misty vapours floating before the mind's eye:—he fixed his gaze intently on the past, until the feeblest glimmerings assumed a bolder and more comprehensible light;—and by degrees the confusion of his ideas relative to his early being, yielded to something like order—so that he became enabled to fit incidents into their proper places, and even make some accurate calculations with regard to the dates of particular occurrences.

In a word, a light had streamed in upon his soul—illuminating many of the hitherto unexplored cells of his memory,—giving significancy to recollections on which he had never before paused to ponder, and investing with importance various reminiscences that had not until this period engaged his serious attention.

Naturally of a happy—cheerful disposition,—and intent on soaring aspirations relative to the future, rather than on speculations and wanderings connected with the past,—he had never until now been struck with certain facts which, though having a dwelling-place in his memory, had failed to occupy his meditations or excite any thing like suspicions in his mind.

But *the incident* of the day had set him to work, in the silence of his chamber and the depth of night, to call forth all those sleeping reminiscences—examine them one by one—connect them together—make them up as well as he could into a continuous history—and from the aggregate deduce a variety of truths intimately regarding himself.

All this was not done through any disrespect for his mother or his father—any change of fueling in reference to them. No:—he loved them the more tenderly—the more fervently, now that he knew they were *his parents*, and not *mere relations*. But if he fell into the train of thought in which we now find him engaged, it was that he could no more help yielding to that current of reflections than a child could avoid being carried whirlingly along the rapids of the Canadian stream which had engulphed it.

And now let us see into what connected form the meditations and recollections of Charles Hatfield had settled themselves?

Seating himself at the table, on which he leant his elbows, and supporting his head on his hands, in which he buried his face, he pondered in the ensuing manner:—

"My earliest remembrances carry me back to a period when I must have been about five years old; and then I was accustomed to call a good woman whose name was Watts, my *mother*. But she died—I forget precisely under what circumstances; and then, when I was nearly six, I was taken care of by a gentleman named Rainford. Yes—and he had a beautiful wife named Tamar;—and this Tamar was the sister of the Countess of Ellingham. Mr. Rainford and Tamar were very kind to me, I remember well; but I was not with them long. And now there is so much confusion in my thoughts—so much bewilderment in my reminiscences touching that particular period in my life, that I scarcely know how to render my ideas continuously accurate. I fully recollect, however, that he whom I grew accustomed to call by the endearing name of '*father*' although I knew that he was not my father—I mean this Mr. Rainford,—I recollect, I say, that he was absent for some weeks, and that I pined after him. Then Tamar would reassure me with promises of his return—but I remember that she used to weep very much—oh! very much! One day she put on black clothes—and she was going to dress me in mourning also; but she cried bitterly, and threw the dark garments away. Next I recollect being taken to the house of Mr. de Medina, where I saw Esther for the first time—that Esther who is now Countess of Ellingham. The happiness I experienced that day dwells in my mind; for I recollect as well as if it were but yesterday, that all Tamar's sorrow had suddenly disappeared, and that she gave me the most earnest promises that I should soon see Mr. Rainford again.[2] And I did behold him again soon—but it was at some town in France, whither I was taken by Mr. de Medina and his two daughters.[3] Then we all travelled in a post-chaise and four—and we repaired to Paris, where I remember that the Earl of Ellingham and Jacob Smith joined us.[4] Next we went to Havre-de-Grace—I remember it was that town, because I have seen it since; and there Mr. de Medina, Esther, and the Earl of Ellingham left us—Mr. Rainford, Tamar, Jacob Smith, and myself going on board of a ship.[5] We were not very long at sea, but the next incident which I remember was travelling alone with Tamar to London, where we took up our abode at the country-seat of Mr. de Medina.[6] That was at Finchley. We never went out, I remember—but kept close to our own room, Esther and Mr. de Medina frequently visiting us. How long we lived in this manner I cannot recollect: but now my mind settles with horror on the never-to-be-forgotten lamentation which, child as I was, struck horror to my soul as it echoed through the dwelling! For Mr. de Medina and Esther had suddenly learnt that Tamar—the good, kind Tamar—who had been absent a considerable time that day, was foully and brutally murdered. Oh! how I cried—how bitterly I wept: but if I asked any questions—which I must naturally suppose that I did—they were not answered, or were answered vaguely. Yes—all particulars were carefully kept from me;—and this was doubtless nothing more than a mere matter of prudence—for I was but a child of between six and seven! Mr. Rainford now came back to live at Finchley; but how unhappy he was! I remember well one evening—a very few days only after the dreadful death of her whom I was wont to call '*my mamma*'—that Mr. Rainford, after a long conversation in whispers with Lord Ellingham, suddenly turned towards me—caught me up in his arms—and covered me with kisses. Yes—that incident has ever remained indelibly impressed upon my memory![7] It was followed very soon by Tamar's funeral; and almost immediately afterwards I was sent to a school at a great distance—for I remember that Mr. de Medina and Esther themselves took me there, and that we travelled all day in a post-chaise. Ah! and now I recollect too—yes—it flashes to my mind, that before they left me they charged me never to mention the name of Rainford at the school;—for my own name was at that time Charles Watts. For three years did I remain there, Mr. de Medina and Esther frequently visiting me, even after she had become the Countess of Ellingham. Every six months I went home to Finchley for the holidays, and found Mr. Rainford always staying at Mr. de Medina's house, and always ready to receive me with kindness. Then Mr. de Medina died; and we all went into mourning for him. I returned to school for another year; and when between ten and eleven I was suddenly sent for home—that is, to the manor-house at Finchley, which Mr. Rainford had continued to occupy after Mr. de Medina's death. But instead of meeting Mr. Rainford, as I had expected, I was taken into the presence of a gentleman and a lady, neither of whom I had ever beheld before. These were Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana!"

Here the young man paused in his meditations, as if to fix all his powers of thought with as much intensity as possible upon that era of his life whence dated at it were a new existence. But his ideas came rushing in upon his soul with such overwhelming force, as literally to hurry him along; and, obedient to the current of continuous and self-linking reflections, he thus proceeded in that silent history

which he was repeating to himself:—

“And what were my first impressions on entering into the presence of Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana? I scarcely know now—for I remember that the lady snatched me to her bosom—folded me in a fond embrace—covered me with kisses—and even wept over me. It was the first time I had ever seen her, to my recollection. Mr. Hatfield then embraced me in his turn, and with as much fervour as if he had been the Mr. Rainford whom I had expected to meet and to behold! I was then, as I just now reckoned, between ten and eleven when all this happened; and it struck me—I recollect it well—that there was a considerable likeness between Mr. Rainford and Mr. Hatfield:—but then Mr. Rainford had light hair, and Mr. Hatfield black,—Mr. Rainford had reddish whiskers, and those of Mr. Hatfield were dark as jet. Yes: those were my ideas at the time; but I suppose that they were the offspring of a delusion. Nevertheless, when I call to mind the features of that Mr. Rainford who was so good to me in my infancy, it even seems now that I can recollect a resemblance between them and the countenance of my own father such as it now is. Still, this is most probably mere fancy;—and I wish to arrive at truths, not indulge in idle speculations. Well, then—to go back to that interview,—that first interview between myself and those who have since turned out to be my parents,—I can call to mind each look they bestowed upon me—each word they uttered. They told me that they were my uncle and my aunt—that they were rich, and intended to have me to live with them altogether thenceforth, and be recognised as their heir—that Mr. Rainford had gone upon a long, long voyage to settle in a far-off land, whence perhaps he should never return—and that they would supply the place of the parents whom I had lost in my infancy and of the generous friend who had thus quitted his native shores for ever! There was so much in the voice—manner—and language of Mr. Hatfield which reminded me of Mr. Rainford, that this circumstance materially consoled me for the deprivation of my long-loved protector; and I was moreover just at that age when kindness, handsome clothes, indulgence, and the change of scene which immediately followed, were fully calculated to attach me to those who gave me so many enjoyments. Thus, I am afraid that I was ungrateful to the memory of Mr. Rainford—by loving Mr. Hatfield too soon and too well,—for I could not then suspect that he was my father;—no—nor did I ever until the truth burst so suddenly on me this day! But, ah! it was nature which prompted that feeling;—and I remember well how joyous and happy I was when told, on the occasion of that first interview, that thenceforth I must bear the name of *Hatfield*!”

Here he paused again, as if in doubt whether he had omitted any detail, reminiscence, or incident which should constitute a link in the narrative that he was endeavouring, in his progressive thoughts, to render as complete as possible;—and solemnly—profoundly interesting would it have been for a human observer, himself unobserved, to have contemplated that fine and handsome young man, thus devoting the hours when others slept to the task of tracing, by memorial efforts, his career from the days of infancy to the present moment! But no eye beheld him save that of Him who beholdeth all things, and who sleepeth never!

“Scarcely had I thus been taken into the care of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Hatfield,”—it was thus he proceeded in his continuous meditations,—“when we repaired to the Continent. Having travelled through France, we crossed the Alps, and entered the delicious land of Italy. The Sardinian States were traversed by us in that leisurely manner which allowed us to view every thing worthy of inspection;—for some weeks we stayed at Florence, the capital of the beauteous Grand Duchy of Tuscany;—thence we journeyed to Rome,—and for several months did we sojourn in the Eternal City. But the health of a young man who was with us, and whose name was Jacob Smith, required a change of climate. Mr. Hatfield was deeply attached to this youth, who, on his side, treated my father with the utmost deference and devotedness. The Roman physicians recommended the genial air of Montoni; and we accordingly removed to the sovereign city of Castelcicala. But Jacob Smith appeared to have some secret sorrow preying upon him; and he pined away before our very eyes. Yes—he *had* a secret source of grief: for I remember well now, that one night he uttered dreadful screams and ejaculations in his sleep, which awoke and alarmed me—for I slept in the next room to him. I recollect that I rushed in, fearful lest his chamber had caught on fire; and that before I could arouse him, he shrieked forth in thrilling tones—‘*Old Death—Benjamin Bones—my father! No—no!*’—Poor fellow, he died soon afterwards; and I wept much—for he was always kind and good to me! But that ejaculation of ‘*Old Death—Benjamin Bones!*’ even then seemed to touch some chord within my soul, as if awaking a long dormant but vague reminiscence: and now again, that name of *Benjamin Bones*—that frightful appellation of *Old Death*,—Oh! they do not seem so unfamiliar to me as if I had never heard them mentioned but that once, and by the lips of Jacob Smith. Were not those names, in fact, in some way associated with recollections of a much earlier date? Did I never hear those names pronounced in my earliest boyhood? It appears to me that I did; and yet I vainly—oh! how vainly endeavour to plunge my eager glances through the mist—the dense, dark mist, which envelopes that idea,—reducing the thought to a suspicion so dim and vague that I dare not adopt it as a link in this history of mine! And yet why does the name of *Old Death* produce a kind of shuddering within me, as if the influence of a very early recollection still partially remained? Wherefore does the appellation of *Benjamin Bones* seem more familiar to me, than I can possibly conceive a reason for? There are moments when I appear to obtain the least glimmering—the least scintillation of a light at the remote profundity of this mystery,—a light which for an instant seems to promise an elucidation of all I wish to know in that respect, and then becomes suddenly extinguished—leaving me in a deeper and darker uncertainty than before!”

Charles Hatfield pressed his hands violently to his forehead, as if to awaken recollections that slumbered too soundly to be otherwise aroused: but he could not conjure up nor evoke a single idea that was calculated to throw any light on the obscurity which enveloped every thing in his mind respecting the two names, the utterance whereof thrilled to his very soul.

“What means that horrible phrase—*Old Death*?” he asked himself a hundred times: “and is it in any way connected with the name of *Benjamin Bones*? Is the phrase a name itself likewise? and if so, are *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* one and the same person? Why should those names produce upon me a disagreeable effect, as if I suddenly came in contact with a loathsome snake? I know not:—and yet it is so! The more I ponder upon that night when poor Jacob Smith shrieked out in his sleep—the more vivid do my recollections become concerning the horror that convulsed him, and the piercing—tense anguish which marked his tone! Oh! then, there must have been something dreadful—appalling—terrible in the associations which the names of *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* conjured up in

the young man's mind at the time; and this Benjamin Bones must have been a bad—a very bad person. But wherefore do I say '*must have been*?' May he not be alive now? In a word—what do I know of him? Nothing! nothing! And yet—and yet, something seems to tell me that I did know more of him once than I do now! Perhaps, when I was a child, I heard evil things said of him,—things which have long since fled from my mind, leaving only a general and very faint impression behind—and that impression unfavourable to the object of it. Let me not then dwell longer on this point of my narrative—that narrative which I seek to compile from the myriads of ideas that until this night have been all scattered in my brain—never concentrated and reduced to order until now! Yes—from that chaos of memories, I have succeeded in rescuing reminiscences and thoughts sufficient to form a somewhat continuous and connected history;—and heaven must guide me, if its will so be, sooner or later to clear up all that is still obscure, and gratify my craving—ardent curiosity unto the fullest extent! But wherefore am I devoured with this burning desire to know all that there may be to know relative to myself? Alas! 'tis in my nature: the incident of the day just past has suddenly aroused that curiosity within me—for I feel, I have an innate conviction that there is a mystery attached to my birth, the elucidation of which must some day or another have a powerful influence upon my destinies! And oh! if it should prove that I am pursuing investigations which must end in stamping *me* with the stigma of illegitimacy, and bringing to light the dishonour of my mother——But, no—no! this cannot be! My father would not otherwise have given me the solemn assurance that my mother is *an angel of innocence and purity, and never has been guilty of weakness or frailty*!"

Again he paused: and now he arose from his seat, and paced the room for several minutes—agitated by the fear that he was militating against the wishes, or perhaps even the interests, of kind parents, by venturing to give full rein to the impetuous curiosity that had seized upon him. And yet—as ere now observed—he could not restrain the ardour of that sentiment, which, more powerful than himself, engulphed him in its onward, eddying influence.

Resuming his seat,—resuming likewise his meditative attitude,—and with his countenance again buried in his hands,—the young man took up the chain of his thoughts from that point where he had suddenly broken off to reflect on the secret and mysterious influence which the words *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* produced upon him.

"I reached in my mental narrative that epoch when poor Jacob Smith died. I was then about thirteen—a little more than thirteen; and I mourned sincerely for him. Frequently did I visit his grave in the beautiful cemetery where he was buried; and often—often as I wandered on the bank of the clear and broad Ferretti, down to whose chrystal margin that cemetery stretched,—often did I marvel who that departed youth was—and what secret tie might have linked him to Mr. Hatfield! Years passed rapidly away,—years unmarked by any incident on which my mind need pause to ponder: I grew up—happy, gay, and seldom thinking of the past. The bright and shining future—decked with all the glorious and golden hues which a sanguine imagination could devise—was ever the topic of my thoughts. Oh! well do I recollect that when between eighteen and nineteen years of age, I began to comprehend the affairs of the great world—to study well the political condition of nations—and to observe that the State of Castelcicala languished under the tyranny of the Grand Duke Angelo. Then I longed to become a hero—to have an army at my command—to achieve the independence, not only of Castelcicala, but of all Italy. These aspirations continued until I became an enthusiast in the cause of freedom; and though of English birth, yet deeply—sincerely did I sympathise with the generous-hearted Castelcicalans, when the treachery and despotism of the Grand Duke Angelo called a mighty Austrian army into the State, to besiege and overawe the capital! But Providence suddenly sent a champion to rescue a fine country and a noble people from the power of the invaders. No Castelcicalan native—no Italian patriot watched the career of Richard Markham with so much anxiety, such burning hope, and such deep suspense as I! When I heard those persons who were his best-wishers in their hearts, shake their heads and declare that the Constitutional Cause could not possibly succeed with so youthful a leader and such slender resources, I thought otherwise:—yes—I thought otherwise—because I wished otherwise. Then as victory after victory marked the progress of the hero—Estella, Piacere, and Abrantani giving their names to the triumphs of the Constitutional Army,—I longed—Oh! I longed to fly into the presence of the conqueror, and implore him to permit me to wield a sword in the same cause. But we were then prisoners as it were within the walls of Montoni, which was besieged by the Austrians; and while all was dismay—confusion—and terror around, I alone seemed to entertain a conviction as to the result. Nor was I mistaken: the Constitutional Army, under the command of Richard Markham, advanced to raise the siege—and beneath the walls of Montoni was fought the most sanguinary action of modern times. From morning's dawn till the evening, lasted that terrific encounter;—but at eight o'clock on that evening the capital was delivered. Yet why should I now dwell on all these incidents,—why detail to myself all that followed?—the flight of the Grand Duke Angelo—the accession of Alberto to the ducal throne—and the subsequent arrival of Richard Markham, then Prince of Montoni, to settle with his lovely wife, the Princess Isabella, in the capital of the State which owed so much to him! Never—never shall I forget the exuberant joy which greeted his return to Montoni; and to render that day the more remarkable, the Grand Duke, his father-in-law, had convoked for the first time the Chambers of Senators and Deputies, instituted by the new Constitution previously promulgated! And the first act of those Chambers was to recognise the Prince as heir-apparent to the throne; while the Grand Duke appointed him Captain-General of the Castelcicalan Army—that army which he had led to conquest and to glory! It was a joyous and a memorable day for me when Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana, having left their cards at the palace, received an invitation to a ball given by the Grand Duke and Duchess to celebrate the arrival of their son-in-law and beauteous daughter;—for I was permitted to accompany those whom I at that time believed to be my uncle and my aunt. Then did I find myself in the presence of Royalty for the first time; and I was agreeably disappointed and surprised to discover that condescension, affability, and great kindness of manner were fully compatible with the loftiest rank,—for such was the bearing of the Grand Duke Alberto and his Duchess, as well as of the Prince and Princess of Montoni. From that time forth I have become almost a worshipper of his Royal Highness the Prince,—an enthusiastic admirer of his genius, his character, and his glorious achievements:—to me he appears unrivalled as a warrior, faultless as a statesman, and estimable as a man,—endowed with every virtue—every qualification that can ennoble him not only as an individual who created rank and honours for himself by his high merits, but who is also the most splendid specimen of Nature's aristocracy that the world has ever yet seen!"

The young man raised his head as he reached this climax in his thoughts; and as the light of the lamp beamed upon his countenance, it was reflected in eyes brilliant with enthusiasm and with the glow excited by a heart swelling with the loftiest aspirations.

“Oh! shall I ever be able to raise myself to eminence?” he exclaimed, clasping his hands together, as if in earnest appeal to heaven: “may I hope ever to make for myself a name which the whole world shall pronounce with respect and admiration? But first—first,” he continued, still speaking aloud and in an excited tone,—“I must satisfy this ardent curiosity which has seized upon me! Wherefore all these dreadful mysteries?—wherefore do not my parents acknowledge me as their son, if I be really legitimate?—why am I still to pass as their nephew? Are they ashamed of me?—have I ever done aught to bring disgrace upon their name? No—no: and they gave me that name—their own name of Hatfield, and of their own accord! But who was the good woman, Sarah Watts, that I used to call by the title of *mother*?—why was I entrusted in my infancy to her care?—for what motive was it that my parents never took charge of me until I was upwards of ten years of age?—and who was that kind and generous Mr. Rainford that I loved so much, and whom I have not now heard of for many long—long years? Oh! I must find the solutions of all these mysteries—the answers to all these questions! Yes:—whatever be the result,—whatever be the consequences, I must tear away the veil which conceals so much of *the past* from my view!”

Charles Hatfield rose from his chair as he pronounced these last words with strong emphasis; and, beginning to pace the room in an agitated manner, he was repeating his impassioned determination to clear up all that was at present obscure and dark, when a remorse struck to his soul—producing a sensation that made him reel and stagger!

For had not he said to Lady Georgiana but a few hours previously—“*I now know that you art my mother—and I care to know nothing more! Never—never shall I question you concerning the past: the enjoyment of the present, and the hope which gilds the future—these are enough for me!*”

And had not he said to his sire—“*By what right do I dare to question the conduct of parents who have ever treated me to kindly? No—my dear father—I seek not any explanation at your hands—I am content to obey your wishes in all things.*”

Charles Hatfield was a young man of fine principles and noble feelings; and the solemn nature of those assurances, striking with suddenness and force upon his mind, filled him with bitter regret that he should have ever thought of violating such sacred pledges.

“No—no!” he exclaimed in an impassioned manner,—“I will not play so vile a part towards my parents—I will not render myself so little in my own estimation! Let me endeavour, rather, to fly from my thoughts—to crush, subdue, stifle this wicked curiosity which has seized upon me—let me indeed be contented with the happiness of the present and the hopes of the future, and not seek to tear away the veil that conceals the past! The secrets of my parents must be solemnly preserved from violation by my profane hands:—how dare I—presumptuous and wilful young man that I am,—how dare I institute a search into the private matters and histories of the authors of my being?”

Then—enraged and indignant with himself, in one sense, and satisfied with the timeous decision to which he had come in another—Charles Hatfield hastened to retire to his bed, where the exhaustion and fatigue of long and painful thought soon sealed his eyelids in slumber.

But will he succeed in crashing the sentiments of curiosity which have been awakened within him?—or is he already preparing the way, by this night’s long meditation, for a vast amount of sorrow to fall upon and be endured by many?

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE PROJECTED RAILWAY COMPANY.

It was striking ten by all the clocks at the West End, on the morning of the day following the incidents which have occupied the five preceding chapters, when a cab drove with insane speed along a fashionable street, in that district of the metropolis just alluded to; and having stopped at the door of the best house in the said street, out leapt Mr. Bubbleton Styles, with a large roll of papers in his hand.

"I told you that you would not do it by ten o'clock," said this gentleman, addressing the reproach, accompanied by an angry look, to the cab-man.

"Not done it by ten, sir!" exclaimed the astonished and indignant driver: "vy, it's on'y jest a-finished strikin' by every blessed clock in this here part o' the town."

"Just finished striking!" cried Mr. Styles, pulling out his watch: "it's a minute and a quarter past ten, I tell you. Here's your fare."

"Two bob, all the vay from Crosby Chambers!" growled the man, turning the money over and over in a discontented fashion in the palm of his hand: "come, come—that von't jest do, if *you* please, sir. You promised me three bob if I brought you here by ten——"

"And you did not fulfil the bargain," sharply interrupted Mr. Styles, as he hurried up the steps of the large house and knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by a servant in such a splendid—outrageously splendid livery—that no other indication was required to distinguish the mansion of a *parvenu*—or, in other words, a vulgar upstart. "Is Mr. Podgson at home?" demanded Mr. Styles.

"Yes, sir. Walk in, sir. What name, sir?" were the hurried phrases which came from the domestic's lips.

"Vell, ain't ye a-going to pay us the extra bob, you gent?" cried the cab-man, as he mounted sulkily to his seat and drew a sack round his knees although it was in the middle of summer—so strong is the force of habit.

Mr. Styles deigned no reply to this derogatory adjuration; but, having given his card to the servant, he entered the great man's great house—while the cab drove away at a pace which seemed to intimate that the horse had become as sulky as its master.

The hall was very magnificent: but every thing was new. The statues—the vases—the marble pillars—the gilding on the doors that opened into the ground-floor apartments—even to the liveries of the servants lounging about,—all was new! Mr. Styles was shown into a small parlour, where the pictures—the mirrors—the mantle ornaments—the furniture—the carpet—the hangings,—every thing there was likewise new. The paint scarcely seemed to have dried, nor the putty in the window-frames to have hardened.

In a few minutes the domestic, who had left Mr. Styles alone during that interval, returned with the intimation that Mr. Podgson would see him at once; and the railway projector was forthwith conducted up a wide and handsome marble stair-case—through a splendidly furnished ante-room—into a sumptuous apartment, where the great man was seated at a table covered with railway plans, letters, maps, newspapers, visitors' cards, and Acts of Parliament, all scattered about in a confusion that had been admirably well *studied* and *purposely arranged*.

The impression of the *newness* of every thing in the mansion was strengthened in the mind of Mr. Bubbleton Styles at every pace which he had taken from the hall-door into the room where he now found himself. It appeared as if Mr. Podgson—or Mr. Podgson's wife—or both, had endeavoured to the utmost of human power to crowd the apartments, the stair-cases, the landings, and, in fact, every nook and corner, with as many evidences of wealth as possible. Fine paintings by old masters, set in bran new glittering frames, were hung in the very worst lights, and without the least regard to their relative styles, colouring, or subjects. Each room had two or three time-pieces in it; and as they were not in accordance with respect to the hour, Mr. Bubbleton Styles's ideas of precision and punctuality received a severe shock when he heard ten o'clock proclaimed half-a-dozen different times during the first twenty minutes which elapsed after he first set foot in the mansion. In a word, the entire aspect of the house was a reflection of the vulgar, untasteful, and self-sufficient minds of the "stuck-up people" who, having grown suddenly rich, did not know how to render their dwelling elegant and comfortable without making it gaudy and ridiculously ostentatious in its appointments.

Mr. Podgson was a short, stout, thick-set man, with an enormous stomach, a very wide back, and little stumpy legs. His head seemed to be stuck on his shoulders without the intervening aid of any neck at all; and his features were coarsely ugly, and totally inexpressive of even the slightest spark of intelligence. His tongue appeared to be much too large for his mouth, his speech being remarkably disagreeable: indeed, his free utterance seemed to be impeded as if he were always sucking a large lollipop, or had an enormous quid

of tobacco stuck in his cheek. When he walked, it was with the most ungainly waddle that can possibly be conceived; and his clothes, though no doubt made by a fashionable tailor, sate upon him just as if they had been thrown on with a pitch-fork. Had this man been invested with regal robes,—had he arrayed himself in the Tyrian purple which Rome's Emperors were wont to wear,—he could not have looked otherwise than a low vulgarian,—which he was!

We shall not pause for a moment to give any account of the rise of Mr. Podgson from obscurity to that renown which the sudden acquisition of great wealth established for him. Having sprung from the people, he turned against the people when he became a rich man. His property enabled him to *purchase* a borough; and the instant he found himself in Parliament, he joined the Protectionists—the bitter enemies of the popular cause!

Had this man taken his place amongst the Liberals, we should not have remembered his physical ugliness and his immense vulgarity of manners: we should have admired and esteemed him. But *he* to associate with aristocrats,—to squeeze that squat, podgy form amongst the "exquisites" and the "exclusives" of the West End,—to affect the most refined notions, and ape every thing fashionable,—for *him* to do all this——Oh! it is really too ridiculous—too ludicrous—too absurd to permit us to keep our countenance when we think of it!

Persons cannot help being naturally vulgar, any more than they can help being ugly: but the vulgar should not thrust themselves into those scenes and spheres where they are certain to stand out in most ignoble prominency, thereby forcing on all beholders the effect of the ludicrous contrast;—neither should the ugly adopt such an awful swagger and assume an air of such insufferable self-complacency as to render themselves most disagreeably remarkable and conspicuous.

Mr. Podgson had acquired his immense wealth by railway speculations; and the disgusting sycophants who invariably attach themselves to rich men with weak minds, had nonsensically dubbed him the *Railway Lion*! Had they called him the *Railway Elephant*, in allusion to his unwieldy proportions—or the *Railway Bear*, in reference to his manners—or the *Railway Donkey*, in respect to his intelligence,—they would have been more faithful to truth. But the *Railway Lion* he was;—and it was now in the presence of this tremendous animal that Mr. Bubbleton Styles stood.

Without rising from his chair, Mr. Podgson, M.P., waved his hand with all the majesty of a stage-monarch; and as this gesticulation was intended to be a fashionable—no, a dignified mode of desiring Mr. Bubbleton Styles to be seated, Mr. Bubbleton Styles seated himself accordingly.

Mr. Podgson then stared very hard at his visitor; and this was the Railway Lion's method of intimating that he was "all attention."

"I believe, sir," said Mr. Styles, in a very polite and courteous manner—but without any thing like cringing servility,—"I believe, sir, that you last night received a letter from Alderman Tripes——"

"Oh! ah!" exclaimed Mr. Podgson, in his thick voice: "I remember! My very particular and intimate friend, Mr. Alderman Tripes, assures me in his communication that you have a famous project on the tappy——"

Mr. Podgson meant *tapis*—but could not precisely achieve the correct pronunciation.

"And that project I shall have much pleasure in submitting to you, sir," added Mr. Styles, proceeding to unfold the large roll of papers which he had brought with him.

"Well—I don't mind—that is, to obleege you, I'll just look over them," said Mr. Podgson, in an indifferent—careless way. "But," he added, glancing at the elegant watch which he drew with affected negligence from his waistcoat pocket, "I've got an appointment at a quarter to eleven—and I must be punctual to the rendy-woo."

Mr. Styles assured the great man that he would not detain him a moment beyond the time named for the *rendez-vous*; and, spreading his plans and maps upon the table, the small speculator began to explain his objects and views to the large capitalist.

"Who's the engineer?" enquired the latter: then, looking at the corner of the plan, and perceiving the name, he cried, "Oh! Dummerley—eh? Well—he's a good man—a very good man! I was talking to Lord Noodleton the other day about him—Lord Noodleton and me are intimate friends, you know—very intimate——"

"His lordship has reason to be proud of your friendship, sir," observed Mr. Styles, adroitly availing himself of the opportunity to pay a compliment.

"Hem! well—Noodleton *does* seem grateful," said, the Railway Lion, glancing complacently at one of his boots. "But, about this spec of yours, Mr. Styles? Shall you have a good list of Provisional Committee?"

"First-rate, sir—especially if you will condescend to head it," returned the small speculator with a bow to the great one.

"Well—we shall see!" exclaimed Mr. Podgson. "But first as to the probability of success? Let me just make a calculation or two—nothing is done without calculations; and I'm raythe quick at figures. Now, your capital is £8,000,000 in 400,000 shares. Good! Deposit, £2 2*s.* per share. Good again! But about the expenses and receipts—the outlay and the incomings, on which we may reckon with certainty? Let me see—twice two's four—and twice four's eight—and nine times nine's eighty one—and eleven times eleven's a hundred and twenty one—that gives us five hundred thousand there—then there's two hundred thousand here——Well!" cried the

great man, suddenly interrupting himself in the midst of calculations which, though they were as unintelligible as the Chinese language to Mr. Styles, it is to be hoped were a trifle more comprehensive to the gentleman who was making them in a musing, half-whispering tone, and counting mysteriously on his fingers at the same time:—"well!" he cried, suddenly desisting from the arithmetical process with the satisfied air of a man who had arrived at a conviction by means of the most subtle considerations,—"well, I *do* think it will succeed, Mr. Styles—and I——I——"

"Will condescend to become our Chairman, Mr. Podgson?" said the other, finishing the sentence which the Railway Lion's extreme modesty and sensitive bashfulness had left thus incomplete. "I am well aware, sir,—and the public are well aware likewise—that you have entered into the grand affairs of the Railway World with no interested motive,—that you never took a single share with the idea of making it a means of gain! No—sir—your views have been wholly and solely to benefit your fellow countrymen. Indeed, you yourself have proclaimed as much in your place in the House of Commons—and the civilised world echoes with the mighty truth! You are a benefactor, sir—a philanthropist—a patriot; and no sordid ideas ever influenced you! It is upon this ground, and on this ground only,—without even venturing to hint that there will be five thousand shares reserved for the Chairman and Provisional Committee-men, and that they are certain to rise to a high premium the moment they are issued,—without daring to mention such a thing in *your* presence, sir—but relying solely on your known readiness to countenance every fair—legitimate—and honourable undertaking which promises to benefit our fellow-men and produce fifty per cent. profits,—'tis upon these grounds, Mr. Podgson, that I solicit you to become the Chairman of the Grand British Longitudinal Railway!"

Mr. Styles narrowly watched the effect which this magniloquent oration produced upon the Railway Lion; and as he beheld the fat, ignoble, vulgar countenance of that stupendous animal slowly expanding with satisfaction, he knew that he was as sure of nailing Mr. Podgson for a Chairman, as he was sure of seeing Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis in the afternoon at three o'clock to partake of chops and sherry at Crosby Hall Chambers.

Nor was Mr. Bubbleton Styles mistaken. In as dignified a manner as it was in his nature to assume, and in as good English as it was in his power to employ, the great Mr. Podgson gave his assent to the proposition; and Mr. Styles was already in the midst of a set speech of thanks, when a pompous-looking livery-servant entered the room.

"Well, Thomas—what now?" demanded Mr. Podgson.

"Please, sir," answered the domestic, whose countenance denoted offended dignity and wounded pride, "there's a troublesome gentleman down below who says he must and will have a hinterview with you, sir——"

"Must and will!" ejaculated the Railway Lion, sinking back in his chair with an amazement which could not have been greater had some one rushed in to tell him that the Chinese had invaded England and made a Mandarin Lord Mayor of London.

"Yes, sir—must and will!" groaned the horrified domestic.

"Well—I never heard such impudence in my life!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, affecting the deepest indignation—a little piece of hypocrisy which completely won the Railway Lion's heart.

"And does this *person*—for you was wrong to call him a *gentleman*, John," said Mr. Podgson, somewhat recovering from his stupefaction,—"does this *person*, who *must* and *will* see *me*—*me*, John—*me*, Mr. Styles,—does this *person*, I say, give his name or business?"

"Please, sir, he gave me his card," returned the flunkey; "and here it be."

The high and mighty Railway Lion took the pasteboard between the tips of his thumb and fore-finger; and having glanced at it, he tossed it with sublime scorn into a waste-paper basket, exclaiming in his rough, disagreeable voice, "Mr. Clarence Villiers—eh? Well—I suppose I'd better see him. Don't move, Mr. Styles: you shall just see how I'll serve the insolent fellow that *must* and *will* have an interview with ME!"

The domestic retreated without turning his back upon his master,—or, in other words, stepped backwards to the door, as if he were quitting the presence of Royalty; and Mr. Styles again vented his well-affected indignation and surprise that "people should be so bold and inconsiderate as to obtrude themselves into the presence of Mr. Podgson in such a manner."

"Bold and inconsiderate!" repeated the Railway Lion. "It is owdacious and intolerable."

"Shameful!" cried Mr. Styles.

"Perfectly insupportable!" vociferated Mr. Podgson.

"Monstrous in the extreme!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, actually working himself up into a passion.

"But I'll put a stop to it!" continued the Railway Lion, dealing a tremendous blow with his clenched fist upon the table: "I'll bring in a Bill next Session, Mr. Styles, to protect public men from insolent intrusion!"

"It will serve the scoundrels quite right, my dear sir," responded the small speculator, approvingly.

“By Gad! I’ll pay the reskels off for it!” exclaimed the mighty man, who could command hundreds of thousands of pounds, but not the minutest fraction of his temper.

The door now opened again; and the pompous domestic, whose countenance was expressive of deep indignation, ushered in the reader’s old friend—Mr. Clarence Villiers,—now a fine, handsome man, in the prime of life.

“Well, sir—and what do *you* want?” demanded Mr. Podgson, with all the overbearing insolence of a contemptible *parvenu*.

“In the first place, sir,” replied Clarence, speaking in a firm but gentlemanly tone, and glancing towards the servant who lingered near the door, “I must take the liberty of advising you to recommend your lacquey, to treat at least with respect, if not with courtesy, those persons whom business may bring to your house; for I can assure you that it required no ordinary forbearance on my part to restrain my hand from laying this cane across his shoulders.”

“What, sir—you dare, sir——” stammered Mr. Podgson, his vast, ignoble countenance becoming the colour of scarlet.

“I dare chastise any one who is insolent to me, be he who or what he may, sir,” answered Villiers, in a very significant way, and in so determined a tone, too, that the pompous domestic evaporated and the Railway Lion was struck speechless with amazement—for he felt as if he were literally bearded in his den! “Being myself a gentleman by birth and education, and I hope in manners and conduct, I am accustomed to treat my equals with courtesy and my inferiors with kindness; and I will tolerate insult from neither. But enough of that subject, Mr. Podgson,” continued Villiers: “the object of my visit is soon explained. For many years I have enjoyed a confidential situation in the service of the Earl of Ellingham——”

“Oh! I really beg your pardon, Mr. Villiers!” exclaimed the Railway Lion, with a start as if the piles of a voltaic battery had suddenly been applied to his unwieldy carcase. “I wasn’t aware that you knew Lord Ellingham—or else——But pray take a chair, Mr. Villiers.”

“Thank you, sir—I would rather stand,” answered Clarence, in a cold—almost contemptuous tone; for he saw full well that this sudden politeness was not paid to *himself*, but to his connexion with aristocracy. “Yesterday afternoon, Mr. Podgson, I returned from the country by the Western Provinces Railway; and I was most anxious to reach London at the usual hour for the arrival of that particular train, inasmuch as the business which I had in hand for my noble employer was urgent and pressing. Conceive, then, my annoyance when the train stopped for three quarters of an hour at a midway station—and without any substantial reason. I remonstrated with the persons on duty at that station: I even alighted, and saw the clerk. Several other gentlemen, whose time was likewise precious, joined me in my endeavours to prevent farther delay,—but all in vain! And the excuse was—*that the train had to wait for a basket of fruit, for Mrs. Podgson, the lady of the Chairman of the Company*! Now, sir, with all possible respect for the fair sex, I submit to you that it is too bad——”

“And pray,sir,” interrupted the mighty Railway Lion, flying into a furious passion, “why should *not* my wife receive her fruit in time? By Gad! sir—the train should have waited an hour for it, had it been necessary; and it would have been as much as the situations of the guard and engineer were worth to have continued the journey without that basket!”

“Then you mean me to understand, sir,” said Villiers, in a calm and gentlemanly tone which contrasted strongly with the insolent, overbearing manner of the purse-proud vulgarian-upstart,—“you mean me to understand that you approve of the conduct of your underlings in delaying a train containing upwards of a hundred persons, to most of whom time was precious, for the sake of a basket of fruit!”

“*Approve* of it!” cried the Railway Lion, astonished that any doubt should exist upon the point: “why—I *ordered* it! sir!”

“Then all I can say in comment upon such improper conduct is—that if the Government and the Legislature have permitted Companies to grasp these tremendous monopolies in order to use them as instruments of private convenience, without the slightest regard to the time or feelings of the public,—then, I for one,” continued Clarence Villiers emphatically, “protest against so atrocious a despotism; and I begin to be ashamed of my own country, when I find it becoming the scene of a petty tyranny that would raise an outcry even in Russia or Austria.”

“Oh! ho! the shoe pinches there—does it,” cried Mr. Podgson, in the vulgar triumph effected by wealth over the popular interests. “I tell you what, sir—and I shall not attempt to disguise the matter:—we *monopolists*, as you call us, have got the railways in our own hands—and we mean to keep ’em—aye, and to do with ’em just as we like! Do you know how many hundred miles of railway I’ve got under my control? Ask the first person you happen to meet—and you’ll be sure to find out. Well—do you think I won’t use my rights and privileges,—I may almost say *prerogatives*—eh, Mr. Styles?”

“Oh! decidedly, my dear sir,” exclaimed that gentleman, approvingly.

“Well,” resumed the Railway Lion,—“do you think I won’t use my prerogatives as I choose and fancy? If Mrs. Podgson wants even so trifling a thing as a new-laid egg from any particular station, the train shall wait for it. Talk to me about people’s time—what the devil do I care for it? People must put up with things as they find ’em. They can’t help themselves: we’ve knocked all the coaches off the roads—and you have no alternative but to go with us. But perhaps, when a train is late at starting, or when it is kept as it was yesterday, some of you knowing gentlemen will be after taking a post-chaise at the Company’s expense? I’d just advise you to do it! You’d have to sue us for the amount—and we’d ruin you in return. To recover five guineas you should have to pay as many hundreds in law costs.

Why, sir—it is perfect madness to think of fighting great Public Companies;—and we'll let the people know it too."

Having arrived at this liberal and enlightened determination, the Railway Lion ceased through sheer exhaustion,—the volubility of passionate declamation not suiting his guttural voice.

"Although, sir, I obtain at your hands no satisfaction for the infamous delay to which the train was subjected yesterday," said Mr. Villiers, who had listened with calm and gentlemanly attention to the furious mouthings of the upstart,—"I am nevertheless pleased that I should have taken the trouble to call upon you in reference to the matter. I have learnt a lesson which I had not expected. I find that the sudden acquisition of wealth is calculated to set a man who rises *from* the People, *against* the People; and that monopoly is a more tremendous engine of oppression in the hands of narrow-minded and self-sufficient persons than even its greatest haters could have conceived. I do not envy you your riches, sir—nor your sovereign sway over many miles of railroad—no, nor even the title with which a fulsome and contemptible flattery has invested you:—for the poorest mechanic who does his duty towards his fellow-creatures, is a worthier and more estimable being than you."

With these words—uttered not savagely, but in a tone of firm and measured reproach—Clarence Villiers retired from the presence of the Railway Lion, who appeared for the moment to have had "a calf's skin" thrown about "his recreant limbs," so astounded and amazed was he at the language which his visitor had *dared* to address to him.

“This is the most atrocious proceeding I ever knew in the whole course of my life!” at length exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, who in reality had been much amused by the scene.

“I suppose that the riff-raff—as I always call the People—will be telling us next that railways are public property!” cried Mr. Podgson: “but we’ll show ’em the difference—eh, Mr. Styles?—won’t we, Mr. Styles?”

And the Railway Lion condescendingly thrust his fingers in a jocular way into the small speculator’s ribs;—and then the great man and the little man had a hearty laugh together—that of the former being in the boisterous “ho! ho! ho!” style, and that of the latter in the more respectful and submissive “he! he! he!” fashion.

Having got upon this very comfortable and pleasant understanding together, Mr. Podgson and Mr. Styles chatted for about a quarter of an hour respecting the new railway scheme: and the latter took his departure, highly delighted with the reception he had experienced and the success of his visit.

Punctually as the clock struck three that afternoon, did Captain O’Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis present themselves at the office in Crosby Hall Chambers; and as the third stroke was proclaimed by the churches in the neighbourhood, they entered the speculator’s private room, where that gentleman was seated at the table with his watch in his hand.

“Good!” exclaimed Mr. Styles, returning the watch to his pocket: “this is business-like—and I am well pleased. The chops, you perceive, are smoking hot—the sherry, I know, is first-rate.”

Thus speaking, he did the honours of the table and the two guests did honour to the meal. The chops speedily disappeared—so did a bottle of wine; and a second was already opened before a word had been uttered on business matters.

“Now, gentlemen,” at length cried Mr. Styles; “I will give you a toast. Here’s the health of our Chairman—the Railway Lion!”

“No! you don’t mean to say——” ejaculated Mr. Curtis.

“Hould your tongue, Frank—and let Misther Sthyles say whatever he chooses!” exclaimed the captain. “Dhrink the toast, man—and that’s all about it!”

“I can assure you, gentlemen,” continued the promoter of the new concern, “that I have fulfilled the promise which I made you yesterday. Podgson is ours!”

“Hooray!” vociferated Frank Curtis.

“Hur-rah-ah!” thundered Captain O’Blunderbuss.

“It is indeed a subject for gratulation,” said Mr. Styles, “The next point I wish to speak to you about is the prospectus, a proof of which I have received from the printer. It would have been all ready for issue by this time, only my interview with the Railway Lion was prolonged far beyond the hour at which I had expected to be back in the City again;—and you may be sure that I was in no hurry when engaged with *him*,” added Mr. Bubbleton Styles, smiling significantly. “Here, you see,” he continued, displaying the proof of the flaming prospectus which he had drawn up,—“here is the glorious document. It is sufficient to set the very Thames on fire. Never were such magnificent promises—never such brilliant hopes held out! And look—thirty-two names of the most eminent Aldermen, merchants, Common Councilmen, and gentlemen——”

“Why—half of them have got F.R.S. to the end of their names!” ejaculated Frank Curtis: “what the deuce does that mean? And, by Jove!” he cried, now completely beside himself with astonishment,—“this is strange! Here’s the ‘*Secretary, Francis Curtis, Esq., F.R.S., M.A., M.S.L.S., &c. &c.*’ My dear friend Styles——”

“Patience—patience, Frank,” said that gentleman, with bland complacency. “Those initials stand for various honorary distinctions which give respectability to the name. For instance, you are represented as being a *Fellow of the Royal Society*, a *Master of Arts*, and a *Member of Several Learned Societies*. God bless you, my dear fellow! even the very *et ceteras* have their weight in a Railway Prospectus.”

“But I am nothing of all that you describe!” ejaculated Frank Curtis, surveying Mr. Styles with an expression of amazement that was quite ludicrous.

“I am well aware of that,” answered the City gentleman, coolly: “neither are half the Aldermen or Common-Councilmen F.R.S.’s or any thing else—unless it is A.S.S.’s. But no Railway scheme can be got up without this kind of *gammon*—for that is precisely the word; and an Alderman who would send a poor devil to the treadmill for obtaining goods under false pretences if he only represented himself as Jones instead of Noakes, will himself assume any honorary distinction that is calculated to gull the public. Look at Alderman Higgs Higgs, for example’s sake! Glance over the list of different Railway schemes—and amongst the Provisional Committee-men belonging to each you will see ‘*Higgs Higgs, Esq., Alderman, F.R.S., &c. &c.*’ Even that consummate ass, Alderman Sun, has dubbed himself in a similar fashion;—and therefore I see no reason why Frank Curtis, Esq., or Captain Gorman O’Blunderbuss, should not be an F.R.S. likewise.”

This explanation was highly satisfactory to the two gentlemen last mentioned; and on the strength of it they drank bumpers to the success of the projected enterprise.

“I have duly registered the Company,” observed Mr. Styles; “and I have had an interview with Dummerley, the Engineer, this afternoon! Oh! I can assure you that I have not been idle. Dummerley is ready to swear that he has surveyed the whole line from the south of England to the north of Scotland——”

“But how is that possible?” demanded Frank, again lost in astonishment: for, crafty and cunning as he was in petty trickeries, he was altogether bewildered in the mazes of colossal swindles. “You only thought of the plan a few days ago—and Dummerley would not have even had time to travel the whole distance there and back post haste—much less to survey it leisurely.”

“You are quite green in these matters, Frank,” observed Mr. Styles.

“Green!” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss: “be Jasus! the Imerald Isle itself isn’t so green as my frind Frank in cer-r-r-tain respicts. But it’s afther enlightening him ye are, Misther Sthyles—and he’ll be all the betther for the taching.”

“Dummerley is a regular good fellow, I can assure you,” resumed the promoter. “‘*You will be the Engineer*,’ said I to him this afternoon: ‘*I told Podgson that you would*.’—‘*Most certainly*,’ he replied.—‘*And in case the Bill should be opposed in Committee, you will be ready to swear that you particularly surveyed the part of the line relative to which objections may be raised?*’—‘*Oh! of course*,’ was his answer.—‘*And you will also swear that your plans are perfectly correct?*’—‘*As a matter of course*,’ he again replied.—‘*Well, then*,’ said I, ‘*here’s a five pound note for you; and now fall to work as hard as you can to get all the plans up in such a business-like way that they may look legitimate*.’—Dummerley accordingly took himself off as happy as a prince; and thus every thing goes on completely in our favour. But it is now three minutes to five; and at five precisely I step into the Hackney omnibus at the Flower-Pot,” added Mr. Styles, looking at his watch for the hundredth time during the last quarter of an hour.

Frank Curtis and Captain O’Blunderbuss took the hint and their departure; and the promoter of a scheme for raising millions treated himself with a six-penny ride in an omnibus as far as Cambridge Heath Gate, in which suburban quarter this great man resided in a six-roomed house, including the kitchens.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

ELUCIDATIONS.

At the conclusion of the hundred and twenty-fourth chapter we asked whether Charles Hatfield would succeed in crushing the sentiments of curiosity that had been awakened within him?

Alas! no—it was impossible!

His better feelings, aroused by the startling remembrance of the assurances he had respectively given his father and mother, had for a few hours triumphed over that insatiable longing to penetrate into the mysteries of the past:—but when he again found himself alone in his chamber, in the silence of night, he could not subdue the thoughts which forced themselves upon him, and which were all connected with those mysteries.

Thus was it that we again find him pacing his chamber while others slept,—pacing up and down in an agitated and excited manner, and maintaining a desperate struggle within his own soul.

For the irresistible temptation which beset him, was to ponder once more and deeply on the incidents of his early days, and to endeavour to retrieve from the abysses of his memory any other recollections that might be slumbering there. For the sake of the pledge given to his mother—for the sake of the assurance made to his father, he strove,—yes—sincerely, ardently he strove—to vanquish that temptation: yet he could not—human nature possessed not so grand a power;—he might have ruled his actions by his will—but his thoughts defied all controul.

Yielding, therefore, at length to their current, he was whirled along by the same eddying tide of reflections which had swept him through so considerable a portion of the preceding night;—and now the efforts of memory—by one of those superhuman strainings which, while they seem as if they must break the very fibres of the brain, also appear to evoke a sudden flash from the depth of some profound cerebral cell,—those powerful and painful efforts in a moment, as it were, established a connexion between the name of *Benjamin Bones* and *the murder of Tamar*!

Yes: Charles Hatfield suddenly became aware that the name and the incident were in some way associated:—and he necessarily supposed that, in his childhood, he had heard facts mentioned which had created that impression at the time, but the nature of which he could not now for the life of him recall to memory. This impression was probably vague even at the period when it was engendered; because Charles recollected full well that the utmost caution was adopted by those around him not to discourse upon the particulars of the foul murder in his presence, nor even to respond otherwise than evasively to the questions he put,—he being a mere child at the time.

As the young gentleman paced up and down, his mind labouring with the new reminiscence which had arisen within, it suddenly struck him that there were means of informing himself of all and every detail of that murder, whereof he at present entertained only a vague and general impression of its atrocity. His long absence on the continent had prevented him from ever, even accidentally, falling in with an English book of criminal annals, or a file of English newspapers, to which he might have referred, had the thought struck him so to do. But now what was to restrain him from making those searches which would throw every light on an occurrence of such fearful interest?

Scarcely was this idea conceived, when the means of instantaneously carrying it into execution suggested itself. For Charles Hatfield remembered that in the well-stored library of the mansion he had observed a complete set of the *Annual Register*, from the very origin of that useful work until the most recent date of its publication!

And now he trembled from head to foot—he literally gasped for breath, at the thought of being enabled to tear away the veil of mystery from at least one incident which was so materially connected with his childhood: for Tamar had been as a mother to him during the few months that he was in her care!

There was in his soul a deep and yet undefined presentiment that he stood on the threshold of strange discoveries—that important revelations were about to be made to him;—and, without being superstitious, he bent to the influence of this solemn but dim forecasting—this awe-inspiring but vague prescience.

Taking the lamp in his hand, he stole gently from his chamber—descended the wide and handsome staircase—traversed a long corridor, in the niches of which stood beautiful specimens of sculpture—and entered the spacious library.

On each side of the door was a marble statue as large as life; and the young man started—but only for a moment—as the white and motionless effigies stood out suddenly as if it were from the deep darkness which the lamp illumined. It was not that he had forgotten such statues were there—nor that he was positively frightened at their appearance:—but his soul was influenced by one of those presentiments which are of themselves superstitions in character—and moreover he was on the point of seeking information relative to the details of a foul and horrible murder.

Instantly recovering himself, and blushing at his fears, he advanced into the library, closing the door carefully behind him: then, approaching a particular range of shelves, he reached down the *Annual Register* for the year 1827.

In less than a minute he was seated at the table, with the book opened at the proper place before him;—and greedily—Oh! how greedily he plunged as it were into its contents.

But—great heavens!—why starts he thus? What discovery has he made?—what revelation has been afforded him?

He learns, with a frightful sinking of the heart, that Rainford was a highwayman—that he had been executed at Horsemonger Lane Gaol—that he had been resuscitated by some means or another with which the writer was unacquainted—that he had reappeared in London in the disguise of a Blackamoor—and that he had received the royal pardon for all his crimes. These details were incidentally given in the course of the narrative of the foul murder of Tamar, who was represented to have been Rainford's wife;—and now also Charles Hatfield discovered how terrific was the connexion between the name of Benjamin Bones and the assassination of that ill-fated daughter of Israel. Yes—and he perceived, too, that *Benjamin Bones* and *Old Death* were one and the same individual;—and he shuddered from head to foot as he perused—nay, almost rushed through the details of the crime which had been committed nineteen years previously in the subterranean cells belonging to a house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell!

But Charles Hatfield is not satisfied with what he has already *devoured*—for we can scarcely use the word *read*:—his curiosity to know more has become insatiable;—and guided by the hints and the observations occurring in the narrative of the murder, he refers to an earlier page in that volume, in order to obtain a full and complete insight into the trial and condemnation of Rainford—that Rainford whom he had loved so well!

The whole particulars were given in detail and with accuracy,—the robbery of Sir Christopher Blunt—the capture of Rainford by Dykes and his myrmidons in Lock's Fields—the trial—the condemnation—and the execution!

Charles read—read on with horrified feelings which often threatened to get the better of him;—but there was one point in the evidence which rivetted his attention. Dykes, the officer, in explaining the mode in which the highwayman had been taken into custody, used these words:—"*When I and my people gained admittance into the house in Brandon Street, the prisoner was in bed with his mistress, a Jewess*."

"Then," thought Charles Hatfield immediately, "Tamar was not his wife! Ah! that is clear enough—although the narrative of the murder would imply otherwise. But the only inference that can be drawn from this discrepancy, is that the reporter of the assassination was delicately and judiciously sparing of the feelings of the Medina family—whereas, in the former case, it was absolutely necessary to record the evidence just as it was given. Poor Tamar!—no wonder that thy name is never mentioned now by those who once knew thee—no wonder that even thy very sister, the Countess of Ellingham, seems to have forgotten thee!"

Thus, Charles Hatfield suddenly adopted the belief that Tamar was not Rainford's wife. Neither, indeed, was she at the time when Rainford was arrested by Mr. Dykes; and it never struck the young man that the matrimonial ceremony might have been performed between the period of Rainford's resuscitation and the murder of the Jewish lady. For when the nuptial blessing *was* performed in Paris, Charles—being then a mere boy—was not present at the proceedings which took place as privately as possible in the British Ambassador's Chapel. As for his suspicion that the Countess of Ellingham was ashamed to breathe the name of Tamar,—Oh! the reader may judge how erroneous was that belief! In her heart of hearts did the generous Esther treasure the image of that dearly-beloved sister;—and if neither herself nor her noble husband ever breathed her name, it was through kind feelings towards Mr. Hatfield and motives of delicacy in respect to Georgiana. But Charles, being as yet ignorant that his father and Rainford were one and the same person, could not possibly suspect the necessity for the exercise of such kind feelings on the one hand or such delicacy on the other.

"And thus," murmured Charles to himself, as he closed the book which had made such marvellous and horrifying revelations,—"and thus Thomas Rainford was a highwayman! The good—kind-hearted—generous man who loved me, was a felon—a criminal: he passed through the hands of the public executioner! Oh! my God—what dreadful things have I this night learnt!" he exclaimed aloud, pressing his hand to his forehead. "But how came this Thomas Rainford to have the care of me?—how was it that my parents could have left me so long in his hands—or at his disposal? Oh! no wonder—no wonder that Mr. de Medina and Esther should have charged me, when first they left me at school, never to mention the name of Rainford! And now how many gaps in the earliest portion of my reminiscences are filled up,—that absence of Mr. Rainford for several weeks, during which period I pined after him—that constant weeping of Tamar—then the removal to Mr. de Medina's house, and the sudden revival of joy which Tamar experienced there. But—a highwayman—a felon—a criminal! Oh! what awful mysteries envelop all this matter still! For the Earl of Ellingham was intimate with Rainford—and it was said, I remember, that at Mr. de Medina's death he left to this same Rainford a large fortune. A fortune to whom?—to the seducer of his daughter—to one who had passed through the hands of the public executioner! And Lord Ellingham was intimate with the man who seduced the sister of his intended wife;—and Esther was friendly likewise with him who ruined that sister. Gracious God! all this is most unaccountable—so unaccountable, that I am lost and bewildered! But most mysterious—ten thousand

times the most mysterious of all these incidents, is that one grand fact to which I cannot but recur,—how could my parents have left me in the care of a highwayman! 'Tis true that he received the royal pardon: but that pardon——Ah! the *Register* says that it was procured through the interest of Lady Hatfield—that Dykes, an officer of justice, was present at the time when that lady announced——Just heavens! a light breaks in upon my soul——Oh! no—no——and yet that resemblance——May God have mercy upon me!"

And the young man, groaning bitterly—bitterly, in the anguish of his spirit, fell back in his chair—covering his face with his hands.

Yes—a light had indeed broken in upon him, elucidating a terrible mystery in a terrible manner! Lady Georgiana Hatfield had procured the royal pardon:—Lady Georgiana Hatfield must therefore have had strong reasons thus to exert herself in behalf of a convicted felon, who had passed through the hands of the hangman, but had been recalled to life and restored to the world in some wondrous manner. But of what nature were those potent reasons? Naturally did it strike Charles Hatfield that *love* must have been the cause;—and when he recollected the resemblance which existed between his own father and that Thomas Rainford who had once been his friend and protector, it flashed to his mind that he in whom Lady Hatfield had shown such tender interest—even to the compromising of her fair fame in the eyes of the world,—he for whom she had so far stepped aside from the precise course of female delicacy as to implore the royal pardon,—he it must be who was her husband!

Yes—yes: it was now as clear as the sun at noon-day:—Mr. Hatfield and Thomas Rainford were one and the same individual,—and he—Charles Hatfield—was the son of a highwayman who had been tried—convicted—and ushered through all the ignominious ordeal of the scaffold!

For several minutes the young man sat motionless—crushed, stupefied, astounded by the appalling truth which he had elicited from his fatal investigations into the past:—for several minutes it must have been a mere balancing of chances whether he should awake from that dreadful reverie to the light of reason once more, or suddenly start up a howling, hopeless maniac!

But this latter condition was not to be his frightful doom. By degrees—by very slow degrees, he recovered so much of his self-possession and composure as to be enabled to look his misfortune in the face, and even fall into additional reflections on the subject.

"Yes—Thomas Rainford and Mr. Hatfield are the same individual—and *he* is my father! It was but little more than nineteen years ago when the trial and the ordeal of the gallows took place—and I am twenty-five! Was my mother—was Lady Hatfield my father's *wife* at that time? In other words—am I legitimate? '*As God is my judge*,' said my father yesterday, '*she has never been guilty of weakness or frailty*.' Then what am I to believe? That my father and my mother were married privately in an honourable manner—and that I was the offspring of that lawful union;—then, that my father deserted my mother, and became enamoured of Tamar, whom he took as his mistress;—and, lastly, that after Tamar's death, my parents were reunited! This—this must be the truth—and therefore my father deceived me not when he so emphatically proclaimed my mother's virtue and my legitimacy. But—Oh! my God!—well might he have said that *the weightiest reasons had alone induced him and my mother to practise a deception towards myself and the world in respect to the degree of relationship in which I really stood with regard to them*! Yes—for the world perhaps dates the marriage of my parents only from the time when they were reunited a few years after Tamar's death:—and hence the necessity of calling me their *nephew*! I understand it all now—Oh! yes, I understand it all too well! I am legitimate—but I am the son of a highwayman: my God! how bitterly—bitterly is my curiosity punished this night!"

And now the young man sobbed as if his heart would break.

Whither had flown his dreams of ambition?—where now were his hopes of emulating the career of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Montoni?

"The son of a highwayman!"—these were the words that fell ten times in a minute from his tongue:—that was the idea which now sate, dominant and all-absorbing, but like a leaden weight, upon his soul.

And did he loathe his father?—did he curse the author of his being?

No—no: a thousand times, *no*! Deep—profound—immeasurable was the pity which he entertained for his sire;—and if he loathed any thing, it was his own existence—if he cursed aught, it was his own being!

For, oh! terrible indeed was it for that fine young man, of lofty principles, generous nature, and soaring aspirations,—terrible was it for *him* to receive a blow so sudden—a shock so rude—a rebuff so awful!

Better—better far had it been for him to remain in ignorance of his parentage,—still to have looked on Mr. Hatfield as his uncle, and on Lady Georgiana as his aunt,—rather than have learnt a secret which only prompted him to fathom collateral mysteries and clear up associated doubts! For the result of those researches was the elucidation which had flashed on him with almost lightning effect,—blasting—searing scorching!

"Accursed book!" he suddenly exclaimed, hurling the *Annual Register* across the apartment, as if the volume were a living thing, and endowed with human feelings, so as to be susceptible of the venting influence of his rage.

But in the next moment he reflected that no trace of an untimely or mysterious visit to that library must remain,—that none must suspect his pryings or his researches: for not for worlds—no, not for worlds—would he have his father or mother know that he had

made the discoveries which characterised this memorable night! He accordingly rose from his seat—raised the volume from the floor—and turned to the book-case to replace it.

This act, so simple in itself, was destined to lead to a circumstance thenceforth influencing the entire destiny of Charles Hatfield: for as he thrust the volume back into the place on the shelf whence he had taken it, he heard a sharp abrupt sound, like the click of a lock.

He was in that humour when every incident, however trivial, was calculated to assume an importance in his imagination; and, standing on a chair, he proceeded to examine the wainscotting at the back of the shelves—for which purpose he removed several of the books. To his surprise, he observed a small aperture formed by the opening of a sliding panel, and which revealed a recess in the wall of about a foot square,—the violence with which, in his excitement, he had thrust the book on the shelf, having acted on the secret spring whereby the panel was fastened.

Under ordinary circumstances, Charles Hatfield would have immediately closed the recess, in which he beheld a small leathern case and a packet of letters,—in the same way as he would have abstained from reading a manuscript lying on a desk or evidently left about through inadvertence. But, on the present occasion, he was not his own master:—his honourable feelings were triumphed over by emotions of the most painful nature;—and it was impossible, in this state of mind, that he should avoid catching at any circumstance savouring of mystery,—every such circumstance apparently linking itself with his own concerns.

Thus, obedient to an impulse which he could not controul, he seized the leathern case and the documents as if they were a glorious prize; and, returning to his seat, proceeded to examine them.

The leathern case contained a roll of letters, and other documents *tied round with a piece of riband so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been*. The writing in the papers was, however, still completely legible—the leathern case, and the total absence of damp in the little recess, having preserved them for a period of half a century!

Wrapped round the roll of papers in the case, was a letter, addressed to the Earl of Ellingham; and it instantaneously struck Charles that it was in the handwriting of his father—Mr. Hatfield! By the comparative darkness of the ink, it was of a far more recent period than the documents which it accompanied;—but the precise time when it was written did not immediately appear, no date being attached to it.

Without pausing to reflect upon the impropriety of violating the sanctity of correspondence concealed with so much precaution in a secret recess,—but carried away by the influence of those feelings which we have above attempted to describe,—Charles Hatfield devoured the contents of this letter; and though they are already familiar to the reader, yet for the purposes of our narrative we quote them again:—

> “I have sent you the papers, my dear brother—for so I shall make bold to call you still,—to convince you that I did not forge an idle tale when we met last. Whatever your motive for abandoning me in my last hour may be, I entertain no ill feeling towards you: on the contrary, I hope that God may prosper you, and give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute.
>
> “I had promised to leave behind me a written narrative of my chequered and eventful history for your perusal: but—need I explain wherefore I have not fulfilled this promise?
>
> “T. R.”

“His brother—his dear brother!” gasped Charles Hatfield, as the letter dropped from his hands; but his eyes remained intently fixed upon it: “his brother!” he repeated. “My God! then am I the nephew of the Earl of Ellingham?—am I the cousin of Lady Frances, whom I already love so well? But——gracious heavens!” he ejaculated, as another and still more thrilling idea flashed to his mind: “if Mr. Hatfield be indeed the brother of the Earl of Ellingham—as he assuredly is,—then is he the elder brother! And if the elder brother, he himself should be the bearer of the title—and I—I should be a Viscount! But—ah! perhaps my father is the illegitimate offspring of the late Earl—and that this is the reason wherefore the family honours and estates have devolved upon the younger brother! And yet—what mean these words?—‘*give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute*!’ Oh! here again is some dreadful mystery: just heavens! what a fated—doomed family is ours! Doubt—uncertainty—secrecy characterise all its history:—at least the experience of the last two days would lead me so to believe!”

At this moment the young man’s eyes fell upon the roll of paper which he had taken from the leathern case: and with feverish impatience—yet still with care, inasmuch as the documents were as fragile with old age as tinder—he proceeded to examine them.

And, oh! how deep—how intense suddenly became the interest with which he now perused the diary and the letters of the unfortunate Octavia Manners! His excitement was stilled—his impatience was subdued: a deadly pallor succeeded the hectic flush upon his cheeks;—still and motionless sate he, his eyes devouring the contents of those important papers!

The frightful treachery of Old Death towards his half-sister, the beautiful but ill-fated Octavia, was revealed step by step;—but there was likewise an elucidation which touched a chord that thrilled to the inmost recesses of young Hatfield’s heart,—and this was the fact that Octavia was wedded by the late Earl of Ellingham previous to the birth of the child! Yes—there was the marriage-certificate: there, too, was the certificate of the child’s baptism;—and that child was therefore, at its very birth, the heir to the proud title and the entailed

estates of a mighty Earldom!

Here let us pause for a few moments to afford an explanation which now becomes necessary.

If the reader will refer to the forty-seventh chapter of this narrative, he will find recorded so much of the history of poor Octavia Manners as Arthur himself was acquainted with. In relating that history to Lady Georgiana Hatfield, Arthur had stated that Octavia fled away from her vile half-brother's house the very day after her disgrace was consummated. "For several months no trace was discovered of her: it was feared she had committed suicide." During that interval the first Countess of Ellingham died. At length the Earl (Arthur's father) accidentally discovered that Octavia was living, and that she was in a way to become a mother. "He hastened to the miserable garret which she occupied, and found her in the most abject state of poverty—endeavouring to earn a subsistence with her needle." All his affection for her revived, with renewed vigour; and his heart smote him with remorse for the appalling treachery which he had perpetrated towards her. He saw her ruined in health, character, and spirits,—ruined by him,—still surpassingly beautiful, but only a wreck of what she once was;—he saw all this—and he was horror-struck at the effects of his crime! He threw himself on his knees—he offered her every possible reparation which it was in his power to make;—and then—for the sake of the child which she bore in her bosom—she said, "If you would prove your contrition, my lord—if you would impart one single gleam of hope, however faint, to my goal—you will make me your wife! It is not for myself that I demand this boon at your hands,—for a boon it becomes when the violater espouses the violated,—yes, a boon in the estimation of the world, though only an act of justice in the eyes of God! No—it is not for myself; 'tis for our child! Think not that I—the sister of the marine-store dealer—shall ever assume the name or adopt the rank of Countess of Ellingham! Let our union be secret—only let it take place at once, so that our child may be legitimate!" Thus spoke Octavia Manners on that occasion; and the Earl of Ellingham, her violater, consented to all that she asked. They were married with so much privacy that even Miranda—the faithful gipsy girl who had formed so strong an attachment to Octavia—remained ignorant of the important occurrence. But the very next day Octavia fled! No affection had she for the noble who had ruined her—who had been the cause of her severance from the object of her first and only love: she had only asked him to marry her for the sake of the honour of their child's parentage—and, the ceremony being performed, she withdrew herself into the strictest solitude and obscurity, to brood over her woes and sufferings in secret!

Such was the substance of that portion of Octavia's own diary which revealed to Charles Hatfield the fact that the injured girl was indeed the Countess of Ellingham when her child was born! And that child's career could be traced—yes, satisfactorily traced—step by step, by means of the papers which the young man had taken from the leathern case, and the packet of letters that he had likewise found in the recess;—and it was evident, beyond the least possibility of doubt, that the individual whom the world had known as Thomas Rainford, and whom it now knew as Mr. Hatfield,—it was clear, even beyond the remotest ground of suspicion to the contrary, that this individual was the rightful Earl of Ellingham!

Recollect, too, reader, that Charles Hatfield had become firmly impressed with the belief that he was the *legitimate* offspring of his parents;—and now, therefore, conceive the wild enthusiasm of his delight, when he came to the conclusion that he was in reality a Viscount by present rank, and had an Earldom in the perspective!

Forgotten was the fact that had ere now stunned and stupefied him,—the fact that his father was the notorious highwayman, Thomas Rainford:—he thought of that no more, in the delirium of his rapture at the idea of having a noble title within his reach. But had he not, on the previous day, assured Lady Frances Ellingham that he envied only the greatness which had made itself, and not that which was obtained by the accident of birth? Yes: and at the time he conscientiously believed that he spoke his own thoughts correctly. Now, however, that the temptation appeared to be within his reach, it possessed charms and attractions of irresistible power!

Recalling to mind the sounding titles of the object of his admiration and heroic worship, he began to fancy that *the Right Honourable the Earl of Ellingham* was not comparatively so very insignificant, even when uttered after the swelling appellations of *His Royal Highness Field Marshal the Prince of Montoni, Captain-General of the Castelcicalan Army, and Heir-apparent to the Grand Ducal Throne*.

Suddenly, as it were, we behold the young man, whose sentiments were so noble and generous while he deemed himself to be a mere civilian having every exertion to make in order to rise to eminence,—suddenly we behold him seized with an insatiable ambition, now that a coronet appeared to be actually within his reach.

But did he contemplate the immediate adoption of measures to force his father to wrest the title and estates of the Earldom from Arthur? We know not all that passed through the mind of Charles Hatfield on this fatal night:—we can, however, aver that having fully perused the valuable documents which had made to him such important revelations, he did not restore them to the secret recess where he had found them, but secured them about his own person.

Previously to quitting the library, he closed the sliding panel, and replaced the *Annual Register* in such a manner that the shelf did not appear to have been disturbed.

The west-end clocks were striking three, and the light of a July morning was streaming through the windows of the mansion, when Charles Hatfield retired to his own chamber. His first care was to consign to his writing-desk the documents and letters which he now considered to be the arbiters of his destiny; and, this being performed, he sought his couch.

But slumber would not visit his eyes:—myriads of conflicting ideas were in his brain. He felt that he had to play the hypocrite—to keep a bridle on his tongue—to control every look, and measure every word, until the time should come for proclaiming all he knew.

For the present he would not distress his parents by allowing them even to suspect that the things which they considered to be such profound secrets, were no longer so to him. No:—he would endeavour to appear the same gay—frank—confiding—affectionate Charles Hatfield that he hitherto had been!

These were amongst the principal reflections which chased sleep from his pillow until long past four o'clock;—and when at length his heavy lids were weighed down through sheer exhaustion of the mental and physical energies, his slumber was agitated with wild and varying visions, and he awoke unrefreshed, and still suffering with the fatigue of his long vigil.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE WANDERERS.

The night on which Charles Hatfield made the important discoveries detailed in the preceding chapter, was marked by other events of a scarcely less interesting nature.

It was about eleven o'clock—the weather was intensely warm—and not a breath of air agitated the foliage on the way-side, as two females toiled slowly and painfully along the high road between Dartford and Shooter's Hill.

One was a hideous old harridan whose years could not have been less than sixty-two or sixty-three; and yet, though her form—once tall, symmetrical, and on a large scale—was bowed with age and sufferings, she still possessed considerable physical energy. The countenance was weather-beaten and tanned to such an extreme that, had she been dressed in male attire, no delicacy nor feminine cast of features would have betrayed her real sex: her short grizzled locks were confined by an old kerchief wound round her head in a gipsy fashion;—and her garb denoted the utmost penury and distress. Not only did she leave upon the mind the disagreeable impression of revolting ugliness;—but her look was sinister and repulsive. The wrinkles beneath her eyes and about her closely compressed lips, bespoke a ferocious and determined character,—a soul resolute and nerved to every evil purpose;—and the acute observer might also mark in that countenance traces of those stormy and impetuous passions which had influenced her earlier years.

Her companion was a young woman of about nineteen; and though she was dressed almost as wretchedly as the old harridan, yet how different was the form which those rags covered! For her figure, though full even to a maturity beyond her years, was exquisitely modelled,—a waist not ridiculously small, but still small enough to develop in all their voluptuous proportions the swelling hips and fine bust. Clothed in stockings covered with darns, and shod with large clumsy shoes, were limbs and feet that for symmetry might have been envied by a queen;—and, as if anxious in the depths of her penury to preserve her charms as completely as possible, she wore an old pair of gloves upon her beautifully sculptured hands. Then her face, though sun-burnt was of a beauty which event an anchorite must have turned to admire,—yet a beauty of a bold and masculine style, and stamping her rather as a very handsome than as a very lovely woman. Her features were of the Roman cast,—the strong facial aquiline denoting a voluptuous and profoundly sensual disposition;—her fine large grey eyes looked boldly and wantonly from beneath dark brows majestically arched and almost meeting between the temples, and above which rose the high, straight, wide forehead, crowned with intelligence. Her hair was of a dark brown and singularly luxuriant, glossy, and silken;—and it was evident that not even the bitter miseries of poverty rendered her indifferent to the care which that glorious covering required to maintain its splendour unimpaired. Her mouth was small,—the upper lip thin—the lower one fuller, but not pouting;—her teeth, the least thing large, were nevertheless perfectly regular and of pearly whiteness;—and her chin was prominent, but well rounded. The general expression of her countenance was indicative of strong passions and fierce desires—great resolution of purpose—and something approaching even to a resolute sternness of purpose, amounting almost to implacability. She was not above the middle height; and her carriage was more commanding than graceful:—at the same time, it would have struck a beholder that were she attired in a befitting manner, her gait and gestures would have been characterised by nothing positively inelegant.

The reader will perceive that great, in many respects, was the contrast between the mother and daughter—for in such close relationship did the two females stand to each other: but in some points there was a marked resemblance. For instance, the countenances of both indicated strong passions and indomitable resolution;—both were totally devoid of all moral principle, though they could simulate the sanctity of anchorites to suit their purposes or serve their interests;—and both could be implacable enemies, while friendship was a mere name with them at which their lips would curl into a sneer.

In spite of her natural energies and the somewhat substantial remains of physical strength, the old woman dragged herself slowly and painfully along the road towards London; while her daughter exhibited scarcely less evident symptoms of fatigue—approaching almost to total exhaustion.

"Perdita," said the harridan, suddenly breaking a silence that had been of long duration,—"Perdita," she repeated, "we cannot reach London this night: it will be impossible,—I feel it will be impossible."

"Then we must lie down by the road-side and perish with hunger," answered the young woman, who bore, it seemed, the singular Christian name of *Perdita*.

We have above spoken of contrasts and resemblances in respect to these two females, who are destined to play no unimportant part in the forthcoming chapters of our narrative;—but we must pause to observe that it would be impossible to conceive a greater discrepancy in tones than that which marked the voices of mother and daughter.

The voice of the old woman was masculine—hoarse—disagreeable—and grating to the ear; and although she spoke the English language with the most grammatical punctuality, and there was nothing positively vulgar in her manner of speech, yet the impression it seemed calculated to produce upon a stranger was singularly unpleasant. On the other hand, the whole sphere of harmony has known nothing more melodious than the voice of Perdita,—a voice which was capable of many modulations, each characterised by a charm peculiar to itself; for whether she were speaking in indignation—or in softness,—in outbursting passion—or in dogged ill-humour,—still were the tones of that voice metallic, rich, and flowing.

"The heartless wretches!" exclaimed the old woman, again breaking an interval of silence,—"to thrust us on shore at Deal with only a shilling in our pockets!"

"This is not the least hardship we have ever endured, mother," said Perdita, rather in a tone of remonstrance than consolation. "For my part, I have scarcely ever seen any thing but privation and misery——"

"You ungrateful wretch!" ejaculated the harridan, furiously. "When I had but a morsel of bread to give you, did I ever take a portion for myself! For you, Perdita," she continued, speaking in a milder and even more tender tone,—"for you I have gone through sufferings unknown and unheard of in this country,—for you have I toiled beneath the scorching South Australian sun of summer, and amidst the noisome damps of a South Australian winter! Yes—for years and years have I toiled on—toiled on, that your beauty might not be impaired by want or privation,—at least that you might endure as little want and privation as possible."

"Well—well," cried the young woman, somewhat softened by her mother's words; "don't let us look back to the past. We are now in England—and you say that we are not many miles from London. Good! We will endeavour to sustain each other's courage and strength to reach the fine city where you hope to change our rags into silks and satins, and fill our empty pockets with gold."

"Yes—and you shall see whether I have deceived you, Perdita!" exclaimed the harridan, in a tone partaking of enthusiasm. "Nearly nineteen years have elapsed since I last saw the mighty metropolis; and, unless its people be much changed, there is a fortune to be made by an experienced woman and a beautiful girl, leagued together."

"And you are the experienced woman, mother?" said Perdita, actually seeking a compliment—for inordinate vanity was amongst her failings.

"Yes—and you are the beautiful girl—and you know it," returned the old harridan. "Being of accord as we are together, it is impossible that we can fail to accomplish our grand designs. Why was it that I implored you not to accept the offers of marriage which needy settlers made you in New South Wales? Because your charms can command thousands of pounds in London; whereas, in that frightful colony, all you could have hoped to gain was what is termed '*a comfortable position*.' And to one possessing your notions—your pride—your strong passions—your soaring disposition,—aye, and to one endowed with your loveliness too,—a mere *home* is not sufficient. You require luxuries—although you have never yet tasted them,—fine clothes—although you have never yet worn them,—a splendid equipage, although you have never yet known the use of one! It was for this that I brought you to England,—it was for this that I besought you to contract no marriage in the colony,—it was for this that I conjured you to abstain from any connexion that might become permanent!"

"I am well aware of your motives, mother," said Perdita. "In a word," she added, with a strange mixture of pride and irony, "you considered my beauty to be more marketable in London than in New South Wales. And after all that you have told me of the English people and England's capital, I am inclined to believe that you have not misled me. But supposing that I contract some splendid marriage in London—that I find my way into the highest circles—and that I become the *belle* of the great city,—will there not be the constant risk—the ever imminent chance of falling in with the officers of some of those regiments which have returned from Sydney or Botany Bay——"

"I see now that you scarcely understand me—that we do not altogether comprehend each other!" interrupted the old woman, impatiently. "There is no need for you to count only on the chance of making a good match: 'tis indeed far more probable that you may ensnare some young gentleman of birth, family, and fortune,—or some old voluptuary of immense wealth,—and there is more to be gained as the mistress of one of these, than as a wife. Do not marry, Perdita—do not dream of marriage: remain independent—and the moment you have ruined one lover, you can take another. There—that is plain speaking; and now do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly," answered the young woman: then, under the influence of the wanton thoughts which rushed to her imagination, she said, "Yes—I comprehend you, and I confess that your views now become more suitable to mine. I could not chain myself to one individual, with any hope of being faithful to him:—*love* is a passion which will never obtain over me that influence which it so often exercises over the weak, the simple-minded, or the infatuated."

"Be not too confident on that point, Perdita," said the old woman. "In Sydney and Botany Bay your amours were only the result of a warm temperament;—for carefully as I watched over you——"

"Now, mother, let us have no moral teachings from your lips!" exclaimed the young woman, in an imperious and authoritative tone; "for had you been so very immaculate yourself, I should never have beheld the light of day, neither would you have passed some eighteen or nineteen years of your life in a penal colony. And such a colony as it is! Why—let a pretty girl be hemmed in by all the precautions which a parent can imagine, circumstances must inevitably lead her astray in South Australia! And you,—*you*, who know all this so well,—can you wonder if I were seduced at the early age of thirteen, and if from that period until your pardon arrived and we

embarked to return home, I have not failed to indulge my fancy without hesitation? On the one side I obeyed your instructions,—I accepted no offer of marriage, and lived with no man permanently as his mistress: but, on the other, I hesitated not to intrigue with the gayest and most dashing officers——”

“Enough! enough!” ejaculated the mother, who, bad as she herself was, felt a cold chill come over her at this open, audacious, and unblushing avowal of her daughter’s depravity,—a depravity that was not however unknown, either in circumstances or extent, to the old woman. “Give me your arm, Perdita—assist me to mount this hill,—for I am ready to drop. There! you are a good girl! Ah! Perdita—I was once young and beautiful as you are now,—well-formed too, and elegant in carriage! I was a lady in every sense of the word—as far as outward appearance and manners went. But now—oh! how altered I am! My toothless mouth was once filled with pearls as white as yours—my bust was as voluptuous and as firm—my figure was as upright—my feet and ankles as delicate—and my step as light! Ah! that was many—many years ago, Perdita!”

“Shall you not be glad, mother, to visit London again?” demanded the young woman.

“Yes—for ’tis the only city in the world where adventuresses like ourselves—beggars, I may say—are certain to succeed. Oh! you have no idea of what a pandemonium is the great metropolis of England!” exclaimed the harridan, with strange emphasis. “’Tis a furnace in which millions of passions, interests, and ideas are ever boiling—boiling madly and as if in rage: ’tis a scene of immense iniquity and of boundless luxury—of wondrous intrigues and ineffable enjoyments.”

“Oh! how I long to plunge headlong into that fine city!” cried Perdita. “It is a vortex that will suit my disposition well.”

“Aye—and play your cards as I shall prompt,” observed her mother; “and you will speedily be the mistress of all the pleasures which London can afford. But, oh! I am ready to drop with weariness—I am dying with hunger and thirst, Perdita: and not a penny have we to purchase a morsel of bread——”

“I see a strong light yonder—there, mother—in that bye-lane,” said the young woman. “Shall we repair in that direction—perhaps it may be a hospitable cottage——”

“No: ’tis a gipsy’s encampment—I can distinguish the cart and the tent,” interrupted the old wretch. “But the gipsy race are good and generous; and they will not refuse us a morsel of bread and a cup of water.”

The two wanderers accordingly proceeded towards the strong light which Perdita had first discovered, and which proved to be, as her mother had surmised, the fire of a gipsy encampment situate in a bye-lane. As they approached, they observed a female form crouching over the blazing faggots, in spite of the intense sultriness of the weather, and apparently watching with attention a huge cauldron that was suspended above the fire in the usual gipsy fashion. When Perdita and her mother drew nearer still, they obtained a more perfect view of that female, whose countenance was thrown out in strong relief by the lurid flame; and they now perceived that she was a very old woman, bent down with the weight of years, but having nothing in her appearance of that weird-like character which so generally marks gipsy women of advanced age. She seemed to be all alone in the encampment at the time;—and her attitude, which had at first struck the wanderers as being that of a person watching the culinary process, now assumed a more thoughtful and serious character.

“Good dame,” said Perdita, “we are sinking with fatigue and famishing through want; and we crave your hospitality.”

“Ah! a woman as old as myself doubtless?” exclaimed the gipsy-crone, surveying Perdita’s mother with attention. “Come—sit down—you are welcome—you are welcome! I am all by myself for the present: my people have gone to a short distance—on business of their own—but *that* is of no matter to you. Young woman,” she continued, addressing herself to Perdita, “you are strong and active: I was once so myself! Ascend into the cart—you will find wooden bowls and spoons—and help yourselves to the contents of the pot. There will be enough for my people when they come back.”

The old gipsy spoke in so strange—vague—and peculiar a manner that the wanderers were both impressed with the idea that she must be in her dotage; and the rapid look of intelligence which passed between mother and daughter, showed that they had simultaneously entertained the same idea. Perdita, however, hastened to obey the directions which she had received; and, returning with the utensils, she and her mother commenced a hearty meal upon the broth and soddened poultry and meat which the cauldron contained.

While the two wanderers were thus employed, the old gipsy began rocking herself to and fro, and uttering her thoughts aloud. First she addressed herself to her guests: then, by degrees forgetting their presence, and becoming more and more enshrouded in the mists of her own failing mind, she still continued her musings in an audible tone.

“An old woman and a young one—eh?—then you are doubtless mother and daughter? Ah! I wish that I had a daughter so comely to look upon as yourself, my pretty dear;—but I should not like her to be quite so bold in her demeanour as yourself. You are very lovely: and yet methinks you are scarcely as virtuous as you are beautiful. Oh! now the red blood mantles in your cheeks: but do not take offence. ’Twere a sorry deed on my part to offer insult to those who share my hospitality. Yes—I wish that I had a daughter, who would love me in my old age. My own people neglect me: they leave me alone—alone—for many long hours together;—and then I have no other companions but my own thoughts. And strange companions are they at times, I can assure you. Let me see—what was I thinking of when you came up? Oh! I remember now:—yes—I remember now. Fifty years ago—no—it was about forty-nine, I nursed a male child,—the child of Octavia Manners and the Earl of Ellingham. I do not mean this present Earl:—no—no—’twas the late Earl. The child had a peculiar mark on the right arm: ’twas near the shoulder. Then I was turned away by the dead Octavia’s half-brother, Benjamin Bones—a horrible man, who knew no pity. But the child again fell in my way—Egyptia had it in keeping. Ah! I loved that child—I would have adopted it as my own. For seven years did I retain the boy with me—the dear boy, whom methinks I see now. But, the wretches—they sent him away: they lost him in Winchester—cast him off purposely on the wide world. Oh! how I regretted that dear, flaxen-headed boy! They told me he was dead—and I mourned for him. Years and years passed away: heaven only knows how many—I cannot stop to count them now. But it must have been twenty or twenty-one years ago that I met the flaxen-haired boy. Boy! no—no—he was a man—a fine, dashing, jovial, rollicking man;—yes—and, woe is me—a highway robber!”

By this time the two wanderers, who had not lost a single word of all that the gipsy crone was thus uttering aloud in her musings, became interested in the wild, yet still connected history which she was relating,—a history that was revealed by the development of her own thoughts and reminiscences, and which she seemed to experience a “pleasing pain” in reciting. But it was the elder of the two listeners—Perdita’s mother—who paid the deepest and most particular attention to the crone’s audible meditations, and who seemed to

experience a presentiment that they were furnishing a subject which might be turned to her own and her daughter's advantage.

"Yes—yes," continued the old gipsy, "we met in Hampshire—and circumstances revealed him to me. The mark on the arm then proved that it was indeed he! I told him the history of his birth—and he expressed his intention to visit London and seek to recover from Old Death—that was the villain Benjamin Bones—the money of which he had been plundered. Alas! poor Tom Rain—you went to the great city to meet your doom! You were captured—you were tried—you were cast for death—and you were hanged on the roof of Horsemonger Lane gaol. Yes—I saw it all with my own eyes: for I was amidst the crowd—drawn thither by God alone can tell what strange infatuation! And if in the deep anguish that rent my heart, there was a single gleam of joy—a single gleam, however faint—'twas to mark how boldly you died, my brave Tom Rain! Died—died!" exclaimed the old gipsy, now speaking with thrilling emphasis: "no—no—you did not die! Methought, however, as did the rest of the multitude, that you were indeed no more: and for years—for many years—for nineteen years have I held that same belief. And during that interval, oft—oft have I thought of thee,—thought of thee as once I knew thee, Tom Rain—a flaxen-headed boy, and before thou didst bear that name of Rainford! Yes—I have thought of thee—aye, and wept bitterly, bitterly. But—am I dreaming—am I becoming crazy?—or is it indeed true that ten days ago, when in London, I saw thee—yes, thee—alive and in the full enjoyment of health and wealth? Ah! I recollect—'twas not a dream: no—no—I saw thee,—and I recognised thee, too, disguised though thou wert. For not even the hair dyed black—nor the change effected by time—nor the plain and unassuming garb,—no—naught could deceive me, Tom Rain, in respect to you! I beheld you in a carriage, with your half-brother the Earl of Ellingham, and with a fine young man whose countenance was of glorious beauty."

These words suddenly made Perdita as attentive and interested a listener as her mother, both having by this time finished their hearty meal.

"Yes—a young man divinely handsome," continued the gipsy-crone, rocking herself to and fro; "with a countenance that would ensnare any young female heart! And I made enquiries—and I learnt that my Tom Rain was now Mr. Hatfield, and that this young man was his nephew. Oh! I know it was Tom Rain: but how came he thus alive?—by what means was he resuscitated?—who snatched him from the grave? No—no—I am not a drivelling fool—a dreaming idiot, as my people said: I know full well that it was he—I could not be mistaken;—and yet, 'tis impossible to say how he was snatched from death! He is married, too—married to Lady Georgiana Hatfield, whose name he has taken. And they are now all dwelling together at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall. I longed to go thither and tell Tom Rain—no, Mr. Hatfield, I mean—that I had recognised him,—tell him that in me he beheld the Miranda whom he once knew: but my people laughed at me—they told me that I was in my dotage—that I was dreaming,—I, who have intellects as keen as ever—and sight so sharp that I knew my dearly-beloved Tom Rain in spite of his dyed hair and his changed aspect! Then my people forced me away with them;—but they cannot prevent me from thinking of Tom Rain as much and as often as I choose!"

The gipsy-crone ceased; and now she seemed to become suddenly aware again that she was not alone. But not reflecting that she had been speaking aloud the whole time, and that her two guests had overheard every syllable she had uttered, she turned towards them, making some remark of a perfectly indifferent character. It was easy to perceive that the poor old creature was half demented, in spite of her self-gratulation on the keenness of her intellects: but Perdita's mother was sharp and far-seeing enough to know that many important truths were evidently commingled with the gipsy's rhapsodical reminiscences.

"You have journeyed far to-day?" said Miranda—for such indeed was the crone's name.

"Many miles," replied Perdita's mother: "but now that we are refreshed through your kindness, we shall push more speedily on to London."

"Ah! you are taking that pretty child of yours to the great city, which we gipsies abhor and never visit unless on urgent occasions," observed Miranda. "What is your name, young woman?"

"Perdita," was the answer.

"Perdita!" repeated the gipsy. "That is a strange name. We have singular names amongst our race: but I never before heard so remarkable a one as that which *you* bear. What does it mean?"

"Have names any meaning at all?" demanded Perdita's mother, in a tone of impatience. "But, come, daughter—let us thank this good woman, and be off!"

The gipsy was however again rocking herself to and fro before the fire, and seemed to have relapsed into her profound reverie, save that this time she did not give audible utterance to her musings. She was however so much absorbed in thought that she did not hear the thanks that were tendered by the wanderers, nor mark their departure.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED AND CONCLUDED.

Perdita and her mother exchanged not a word until they reached the high road once more; but when their faces were again turned towards London, the latter exclaimed in a tone of chuckling triumph, "'Twas a lucky chance which threw us in with that gipsy!"

"Yes, mother—as far as obtaining a good meal was concerned," replied Perdita.

"Silly child! it was the old crone's talk that elicited the remark which I just made. Did you not hear the strange facts she suffered to ooze out in her idiotic musings? Did nothing strike you——"

"Yes: her description of a young man of such divine beauty made so strong an impression upon me, that my very veins appeared to run with lightning," interrupted Perdita.

"Ah!" cried her mother, evidently struck by a sudden thought: "you were pleased with her allusion to that handsome young gentleman? Well, Perdita—trust me when I declare emphatically that this same young gentleman shall sue at your feet for those favours which unasked you would this moment bestow upon him!"

"Mother, you yourself will soon appear to me to be indulging in idiotic musings!" cried Perdita, half in delight—half in contemptuous incredulity. "You never saw this young man—you know nothing of him——"

"Know nothing of him!" repeated her mother, scornfully. "We know enough, Perdita, to compel a whole family to implore our forbearance and our mercy,—to reduce that Mr. Hatfield, Lady Georgiana, and their nephew to the necessity of beseeching our silence on their bended knees!"

"Do you really put faith in the rhodomontade of that gipsy about the identity of the Mr. Hatfield of whom she spoke with a certain Tom Rain who had been hanged?" demanded Perdita, impatiently.

"Yes—because I know it to be true!" ejaculated her mother. "Listen, Perdita:—you were not born at that time—but it was only a few months before your birth when the whole metropolis was astounded by the sudden discovery that Tom Rain, the highwayman, was indeed alive. I was in London at the time——"

"In Newgate, mother?" asked her daughter, as coolly as if it were the most common-place question.

"Yes—in Newgate, if you must have me be particular in every detail," answered the old harridan, bitterly.

"Where I was born," remarked Perdita. "One of the first places I shall request you to show me, will be that same Newgate. But go on—I am listening attentively."

"Well, then—I was in Newgate at the time that all London was astounded by certain discoveries relative to this same Tom Rainford—all brought about in consequence of a dreadful murder committed by that very Benjamin Bones whom you heard the gipsy mention. The story is too long to tell you now; but you shall have it shortly in its fullest details—for it may regard our interests more nearly than you at present imagine. One fact I must however state,—which is that Thomas Rainford was a famous highwayman who was hanged, and that by some means which never transpired, he was rescued from death—resuscitated, in fine. He received the royal pardon for all the deeds he had committed in opposition to the laws; and what afterwards became of him I knew not——"

"Because you had to leave England in pursuance of your sentence, I suppose, mother?" added Perdita, enquiringly.

"Precisely so. And now chance throws us in the way of an old crone who, in the audible musings of dotage, informs us that this same Tom Rain is actually living under a feigned name—aye, and at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham. It is clear that the gipsy had never heard of the wondrous fact that Rainford appeared in London disguised as a Blackamoor, only a few months after his execution, as I may call it: it is evident that the circumstance of his having survived the scaffold was unknown to her and to her companions. Thus was she struck with amazement and surprise, as well she might be under such circumstances, when she beheld him in Lord Ellingham's carriage. But gipsies go so little into great cities and towns—hold so little intercourse with any save their own people—and are so little curious in respect to matters which do not immediately concern themselves, that it is not surprising if the old gipsy had never heard reported the well-known fact of Rainford's resuscitation."

“Then you presume that this Rainford is now living, honourably and respectably, in London, under the name of Hatfield,” said Perdita, enquiringly; “and you mean to use your knowledge of his real name to work out our particular aims?”

“You now comprehend me, daughter,” returned the old woman; “and you may perhaps begin to understand how his nephew shall become bound to you by silken cords.”

“I have set my mind upon that handsome young man,” said Perdita, emphatically; “and believe me, I shall omit nothing that will tend to gratify my passion.”

“Wanton—voluptuous, even as I was,” muttered the harridan to herself;—“aye, licentious and depraved as was her father!”

“What are you mumbling to yourself, mother?” demanded Perdita. “Something about me, I warrant.”

“No harm—no harm,” responded the wretch, hastily. “But, to return to the subject of our conversation, Perdita; what do you think of our prospects now?—knowing all we do of this Mr. Hatfield, and able as we are to overwhelm him, his titled wife, and his nephew in disgrace, if we choose to utter a single word.”

“I think that all will go well enough in respect to money; for *that* we have the means of extorting,” said Perdita. “But I cannot see how, by such a course, we shall do otherwise than disgust the nephew, and make an enemy of him.”

“Ah! short-sighted girl” ejaculated her mother. “We must not commence with extortion! I know that Lady Georgiana Hatfield was very rich when I was a resident in London years ago; and it is not probable that she has become poor since. Then again, this Hatfield or Rainford must be on intimate terms with the Earl of Ellingham, since he and his family are residing at that nobleman’s mansion. All this denotes that the young man can command ample funds at will;—and the young man, then, must be ensnared by your wiles. But if you surrender yourself to him immediately——”

“Trust me for knowing how to play my cards well!” interrupted Perdita, impatiently. “But on our arrival in London to-night, where are we to find a dwelling-place?—how are we to clothe ourselves decently to-morrow?—how, in a word, are we to live until all these grand schemes begin to work?”

“You shall see, Perdita,” answered her mother. “During my long sojourn in Australia, one person in England wrote to me frequently—one person sent me sums of money occasionally. Otherwise, Perdita, after I obtained my ticket of leave, we should have starved: for the labour of my hands, severely as I toiled, produced not sufficient to maintain us both. This one person lives in London: I know his address;—and to his door must we first repair before we can even procure the wherewith to obtain a bed!”

“Is it the friend who, as you told me, interested himself to procure your pardon?” demanded Perdita.

“The friend!—the relation you mean,” said her mother, hastily. “Yes—he is my relation—the only one I possess in the world save yourself, if a daughter can be called by that name.”

The conversation, which may have served to throw additional light upon the depraved character of these two women, was interrupted by the necessity of stepping to the side of the road to permit a cart, which was on the point of overtaking them, to pass. The vehicle was driven along at a rapid pace by a sturdy, good-natured butcher; and as it was whisking by the two females, the pure moon-light falling fully on the handsome countenance of Perdita, enabled the man to catch a glimpse of the surpassing beauty of that face.

Instantly pulling up, he said, “Holloa! my good women, you are out late—or rather early—for ’tis two o’clock in the morning.”

“We are very tired, and are anxious to reach London as soon as possible,” replied Perdita’s mother.

“I am going as one may say right through London,” observed the butcher: “in fact, to Oxford Street—and if you like to have a ride, both of you, I’ll put you down at the nearest point to where your business leads you.”

The old woman greedily snapped at the offer; and the good-natured butcher helped her daughter and herself into the cart, which immediately drove on again at a spanking pace.

And now full soon did the myriad lights of London greet the eyes of the travellers; and Perdita felt her heart dilate with ineffable emotions as she drew near that sovereign city of a thousand towers, pinnacles, and spires,—that mighty Babylon in which all her hopes, her aims, her ambitious views were centred. A misty haze of light, resembling a faintly illuminated fog, appeared to hang over the vast metropolis;—and as the vehicle approached nearer and nearer still, the countless dwellings began to stand out in relief from the bosom of that dimly lustrous shroud. On—on the travellers go: the houses are scattered along the road;—but in a short time they become continuous ranges of habitations;—and now it may be airily said that the wheels of the cart rattle on the pavement of London.

But a feeling of disappointment seizes upon Perdita: instead of lordly mansions, she sees dingy-looking tenements of no considerable size, and presenting any thing but an imposing appearance, especially at that sombre hour. Nevertheless, the farther she advances the more satisfied does she become;—and now the travellers reach that great junction-point for cross-roads, where stands the Elephant and Castle.

The tap is open—the butcher stops, alights, and disappears inside the establishment. In a few minutes he returns with a steaming hot glass of brandy-and-water,—for a good-natured fellow is this butcher;—and he kindly proffers it to the two females. It was not because Perdita was so handsome, that he did it: no—it was through pure kindness, and as much for the sake of her mother as of herself. Nor did the two females require much pressing to partake of the welcome beverage; and while they were drinking *their* glass, their good-hearted friend hurried back to the tap to enjoy *his own* reeking jorum.

And now away they speed again—up the Waterloo Road—over the bridge. Then and there it was that a splendid and soul-stirring spectacle burst upon the sight of Perdita:—for an instant her admiration was rivetted to that magnificent piece of masonry constituting the finest viaduct of the kind in the whole world;—but in the next she threw her glances right and left, embracing thus rapidly all the splendid features of a scene bathed in silver by the cloudless lamp of night. The bosom of the mighty Thames reflected the lights on the banks and the bridges,—those very lights tracing the course of the proud stream and marking its ample width:—then her looks dwelt on the mighty dome of Saint Paul's, rearing its colossal head to the deep purple summer sky;—and lastly they ran rapidly along the northern shore, embracing each point of interest, until they stopped at the New Houses of Parliament, so gleamingly white in the chaste lustre of the moon.

"Yes, mother," she whispered, in an exulting tone: "this is indeed a stupendous city!"

"You have seen nothing of it as yet," was the reply. "But here we must alight," added the old woman, the moment the cart reached the Strand.

The wanderers accordingly descended; and, having proffered their hearty thanks to the butcher for his kindness, they continued their journey on foot, their way now lying in the direction of Brompton.

Along the Strand they proceeded—through Spring Gardens—into St. James's Park,—Perdita admiring the fine buildings which she passed; for the morning was now breaking, and each grand feature of that part of the metropolis emerged slowly and majestically from obscurity.

Perdita's mother, in pointing out Carlton House to her daughter, observed, "When I was last in England George the Fourth was King; and that was his favourite residence."

They proceeded through the park;—and now Perdita beheld the abode of the Queen of England—that palace on which so much of the country's money has been shamefully squandered, and with the arrangements of which her Majesty is still dissatisfied! God help Victoria, if she cannot contrive to make herself comfortable at Buckingham House; we sincerely hope that she will always find such quarters gratuitously provided for her, and that she will learn not to grumble at them. Contrast that palace with the working-man's home, and then let us see whether Parliament would be justified in voting another sixpence to enlarge or improve the sovereign residence. Oh! how loathsome—how revolting to our mind are the caprices, the selfishness, and the insolence of Royalty!

The two wanderers now entered the spacious district of Pimlico, which they traversed painfully—for they had become almost as wearied as when they were toiling on between Dartford and Shooter's Hill.

"Shall we soon be there, mother?" enquired Perdita, her handsome countenance bearing a care-worn expression as if patience and strength were alike nearly exhausted.

"In less than twenty minutes now," was the answer, "we shall reach the place whither we are bound."

"And suppose your nephew should not be in London?" said Perdita.

"Ah! now you have touched the very chord which vibrates with anguish to my heart's core!" exclaimed the old woman. "But let us not yield to despondency," she added, almost immediately.

"No—it is useless to meet evils half way," observed Perdita.

The two proceeded in silence for upwards of a quarter of an hour, until they reached a particular part of Brompton, when the elder wanderer said, "It must be somewhere about here that he lives. Ah! Number Seven! Yes—*this* is the house, Perdita!" she added, indicating a beautiful cottage-residence, standing alone in the midst of a pleasant garden. "But it will be useless for you to accompany me," continued the hag: "on the contrary, many reasons, which I will hereafter explain, render it advisable that my nephew should not come to know you by sight."

"Just as you please, mother," said Perdita, in the quiet way which was habitual to her when she had no inclination either on one side or the other. "There it a large stone at the angle of the road yonder: I will rest there until you return."

"Do so," replied the old woman; and, having paused for a few moments to dwell admiringly on the fine symmetry of her daughter's form as Perdita repaired slowly towards the point indicated, the harridan advanced to the door of the house in which her relation dwelt.

She knocked and rang;—and in a few minutes a servant-maid, throwing open a window, enquired who it was that came at such an unseasonable hour.

“Is your master at home?” demanded the old woman.

“He is: but——”

“Thank God!” ejaculated the visitor, considerably relieved by this announcement. “You must inform him that an elderly female wishes to speak to him on particular business——”

“I cannot venture to disturb him,” answered the servant. “Come at eight o’clock: master and missus will be up then.”

At this moment another window was opened, and a gentleman, who had evidently slipped on a dressing-gown in great haste, appeared at the casement, exclaiming, “I will see you now—at once!”

And in less than a minute the old woman was admitted into the dwelling by the gentleman who had thus addressed her.

Not a word was uttered,—merely hasty glances of recognition were exchanged, and those looks dubious on her part and reserved on his,—until they entered a parlour, the door of which the gentleman carefully closed, while his visitress sank exhausted upon a sofa.

“I am returned at last, Clarence,” she said, in a low and hoarse voice,—for she was now evidently much moved at finding herself in the presence of her relative, and by no means so confident as she had appeared to her daughter with regard to the reception she was likely to experience.

“Yes—returned, against my express desire—against the solemn promise that you sent me to remain in the colony if I procured your pardon!” exclaimed Mr. Villiers—for it was he—in a reproachful tone.

“Would you have had me bury myself in that horrible place of exile?” demanded his aunt—Mrs. Torrens, or Mrs. Slingsby, or whatever she now denominated herself.

“I would have had you keep your pledge so sacredly given,” replied Clarence; “and on my side I should have fulfilled my engagement by remitting you forty pounds every half-year. Why—why have you come back to England?”

“Because I would sooner die than remain in a colony where I have endured so much,” responded the woman.

“Yes—you have endured much indeed,” said Mr Villiers, still more bitterly than before: “but it has been your own fault. Do you remember the interviews I had with you in prison both prior and subsequent to your condemnation? Did you not exhibit every sign of the deepest contrition—utter every possible vow of amendment? And what were the results? Arrived in the colony, you became unruly—profligate—a perfect scandal where all is scandalous—shameless where every thing is shameful——”

“Listen to me, Clarence!” exclaimed his aunt, rising from the sofa and advancing towards him: “it is so easy to reproach—but not so easy to admit of extenuation for guilt. As God is my judge, my penitence in Newgate was sincere—my contrition unfeigned! I even longed for the hour of my departure to arrive, that I might for ever quit a country where I had played so vile a part, and to some extent retrieve my character in a penal colony. But when I set foot on board the convict-ship, I found myself thrown into the depths of a very sink of immorality,—plunged into an infernal stew of profligacy, from which escape was impossible. I threw myself on my knees before the surgeon, and implored him to remove me from that dreadful assemblage of fiends in female shape: he laughed at me, and bade me return to my place. Then my companions abused and ill-treated me for having dared to complain;—and the babe which I bore in my arms was made the subject of the bitterest taunts and most cutting gibes. I had named her *Perdita*—as you well know—that her lost and hopeless condition, through the infamy of her mother, might ever be retained fresh in my memory, and that the necessity of toiling hard and honourably for her might be impressed on my soul even by the warning nature of that very name. But, oh! those wretches, with whom I was forced to associate, levelled the most cruel jeers and jests against me on account of that innocent babe; because she was born in Newgate! And nothing is so galling—nothing so terribly afflicting—nothing so poignantly cutting, as to insult a woman through the medium of her illegitimate, helpless babe! My God! what bitter tears I shed on board that convict-ship,—tears which seemed to sear my very countenance as they fell, so scalding were they! Then the frightful scenes which were enacted in our cabin,—the quarrelling that took place, the imprecations that accompanied even the simplest remark, the obscene tales that were told,—oh! it was horrible, horrible. I struggled against the contamination as mortal being never struggled before:—but it was like a combat between a drowning person and the fury of a whelming torrent,—a vain, ineffectual, and useless fight, in which I felt myself to be completely powerless;—until, in despair, I resigned myself to the flood that was whirling me along in its triumphant course;—and I found relief even in drinking of that feculent, fœtid stream from which there was no escape. Yes—thus was I drawn down into the whirlpool of immoralities and profligacies on the brink of which the law placed me:—and if my vows of contrition—my asseverations of penitence proved so many delusions, you must blame the system to which I was subjected—and not myself.”

“And do you mean, then, to inform me that you endeavoured to be moral, reserved, pious, and tranquil on board the convict-ship—but that it was impossible to avoid being dragged into the common abyss of depravity?” demanded Clarence, now speaking in a mild and even compassionate tone.

“Most solemnly do I swear that such is the fact!” exclaimed his aunt, with an emphasis which spoke volumes in favour of her sincerity.

“Then are you to be pitied, poor woman,” said Clarence; “and the Government of that day most bear all the blame of your relapse and

subsequent depravity. But where is your daughter Perdita?"

"She is in the neighbourhood—waiting for me," was the answer. "I did not choose to bring her beneath your roof. Indeed, naught save necessity—necessity the most stern—should have led me hither."

"The accounts which I received from a correspondent at Sydney, spoke, alas! most unfavourably of your daughter," observed Clarence. "My God! could you not at least have saved her from entering the paths that lead to perdition?"

"Behold, now, how ready you are to blame me!" cried his aunt, in a voice expressive of vexation. "I was allotted as a servant to a free-settler in the penal colony; and the man made me his mistress. There was no compliance on my part in the first instance: 'twas absolute compulsion. Then I yielded to my fate, seeing that it was useless to contend against it. I had to work hard all day; and the moment Perdita was able to run alone, she played in the streets with the other poor children of Sydney. I could not prevent it—do all I would to endeavour to keep her in doors. Well, at last I obtained a ticket of leave, and tried to earn a livelihood by the toil of my own hands. But to do this, I was compelled to be out all day;—and then, where was Perdita? Where was she?" almost screamed the woman, becoming much excited: "why—*lost*—as her name implies;—not lost as you lose an object and can find it no more,—but lost *morally*—irretrievably lost! 'Tis true that I imparted to her as much knowledge as I myself possessed or had leisure to instil into her—and that to do this I deprived myself of my natural rest. But how could I teach her virtue?—how could I read the Bible with her? My story was known throughout the colony;—and Perdita learnt before even she had intelligence to understand the meaning of the facts, that she was a bastard—born in Newgate, the great criminal prison of London—and that her mother was every thing infamous and vile! My God! circumstances would not allow me to nurture her in moral ways, even if I had possessed the inclination: but by the time she was old enough to learn, I had myself become as deeply steeped in profligacy as any other woman in the colony. Can you wonder, then, that she soon fell into the ways of vice? Beautiful as she was—and is—she soon attracted notice;—and your fine English officers—the gentlemen sent out to protect the colony,—*they* were the authors of her ruin—and they encouraged her in a career of infamy. Oh! Clarence, it is a frightful thing for me to stand before you—you, who are my own nephew—and have to make such horrible revelations: but you reproach me for my own wickedness—you would seek to represent me as the cause of my daughter's wickedness—and I am forced to explain to you the appalling nature of the influences acting upon us, and the circumstances surrounding us. Now—now, I could weep in humiliation;—but an hour hence, I shall be obdurate and hardened as ever. The world has made me so."

"And now what do you propose to do?" enquired Clarence. "It is impossible for me even to advise you in the frightful position in which you are placed, and since you have acted so completely in opposition to my counsel by returning to England. Pecuniary assistance—*that* I can afford you to a limited amount——"

"Give me fifty guineas, Clarence—and you shall never see me more," interrupted his aunt.

"I will spare you a hundred," answered the generous-hearted young man; and quitting the room, he returned in a few minutes, bringing the money in a bag. "Here," he said,—"take that, my poor aunt—and may God make it prosper in your hands. But, oh! suffer not your daughter to continue in the ways of vice and depravity: remember that she possesses an immortal soul—and that there is another world in which an account must be given for the conduct pursued in this."

The old woman made no answer; but, clutching the bag eagerly, she secured it amongst her tattered garments. Then, ashamed of the greedy impatience which she had manifested, and seeking to avert her nephew's attention from the fact by turning the conversation into another channel, she said, "I hope you continue to enjoy that happiness, Clarence, which yourself and your excellent Adelais so much deserve!"

"Thank God! my felicity is as complete as man's can be in this world," was the reply. "Having now for upwards of nineteen years held the good situation which my kind patron, the Earl of Ellingham, gave me, I have enjoyed a certain means of existence—have acquired influential friends—and have been enabled to rear my sons and daughters in a way which, I hope, will be salutary to them on their entrance into life."

"And that man—my husband—have you heard of him lately?" enquired Villiers' aunt, in a low tone and hesitating way.

"Never since the occasion—and that is now nine years ago—when he wrote to announce the death of poor Rosamond at Geneva. I mentioned that fact to you in a letter which accompanied one of the remittances I made to Sydney on your behalf——"

"And from that time you have received no tidings of my husband?"

"Not once!" replied Villiers. "Whether he be alive or dead—what has become of him, I cannot tell you. This uncertainty relative to her father's fate is a cause of uneasiness to Adelais:—but every state and station in life has its annoyances and its sorrows. Poor Rosamond! she fell into a slow decline shortly after leaving England—and for nearly ten years did she linger on, wasting away! Adelais and I saw her once during that period: we visited Switzerland on purpose. Then how deeply was my wife shocked when she behold the wreck that remained of her once lovely and blooming sister. But I cannot dwell upon that episode in our lives——"

"No—no," exclaimed Perdita's mother, now in haste to depart. "I will not distress you," she added, with a hypocritical appearance of sympathy, "by exacting the painful narrative from you. Farewell, Clarence—farewell."

The generous-hearted Villiers proffered his hand to his aunt,—that aunt who was once so fine a woman, so elegantly dressed, and the

mistress of a splendid mansion,—but who was now hideous to look upon, clothed in rags, and as yet homeless on the face of the earth!

For a few instants her heart swelled with profound emotions as she pressed that hand which was thus kindly extended to her, and tears rose to the very brims of her eyes, but did not run over.

Then she hurried away from his presence:—and the moment she set foot on the threshold of the dwelling—or rather, when its door closed behind her—she subdued the feelings that had well nigh overpowered her; and gave all her attention—all her interest—all her thoughts to the precious bag which she had concealed amongst her garments.

“Well, mother, I thought you were never coming back!” cried Perdita, in a reproachful tone: then, perceiving by the old woman’s countenance that she had good news, she allowed her own to brighten up, as she hurried to meet her.

“Perdita—we have now the means——”

“Of obtaining shelter and a breakfast, I hope?”

“Of purchasing good clothes—taking fine lodgings——”

“Oh! then your nephew—or relation of some kind, whatever he may be—has behaved well!” cried the young woman, overjoyed by this intelligence.

“A hundred guineas, Perdita—a hundred guineas in this bag!” exclaimed her mother, shaking the precious object of her avaricious worship: then, again concealing it beneath her rags, she said, “But come, Perdita: let us betake ourselves to another quarter of the town—for I have promised Clarence Villiers that he shall see my face no more.”

The old hag and the handsome young woman retraced their way into the heart of London; and, arriving in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, they entered an early breakfast-house, where they partook of a copious meal, to which appetite and good spirits enabled them to do honour.

The repast being despatched, the elder of the two wanderers had a few minutes’ whispering conversation with the landlady of the establishment; the result of which was that a bed-room was speedily placed at the disposal of the guests, who retired to partake of a few hours’ most necessary repose.

It was near mid-day when the mother and daughter rose; and then another interview with the landlady was shortly followed, in obedience to the instructions given her, by the arrival of a woman who sold second-hand female apparel, and who came laden with band-boxes. The contents thereof were speedily examined; and the wanderers having selected the articles which seemed most appropriate for their temporary use, the slop-seller was well paid and dismissed.

And now Perdita and her parent began to assume each a very different appearance from that which they had so recently worn. Copious ablutions and decent clothing made the elder less revoltingly ugly, and the younger more strikingly beautiful.

As they thus performed their toilette together, in the little chamber of the coffee-house, the mother surveyed, with pride and admiration, the features and form of her daughter,—calculating at the same time how large a fortune the judicious sale of such loveliness was likely to amass;—while on her side the young woman stood in superb complacency before the glass, exercising a thousand little arts to render the details of her toilette as perfect as circumstances would admit.

Perdita’s dark brown hair was combed out with the utmost care, and arranged in simple bands, glossy and massive on either side of her fine forehead. By chance she had obtained from the second-hand dealer a gown which precisely fitted her, and which, being very low in the body, displayed her full and swelling bust to its greatest advantage. The darned stockings and the clumsy shoes wore superseded by more fitting articles; and now the robust leg, the slender ancle, and the long narrow foot were as faultless in proportion as if a sculptor had modelled them to his own exquisite but voluptuous taste. A neat straw bonnet and an ample shawl completed her attire;—and now well, but by no means splendidly nor elegantly dressed, Perdita appeared a creature so exceedingly handsome, that even her mother was surprised as much as she was delighted.

And, as for the old woman herself, she had assumed an air of greater respectability than at first might have appeared possible—seeing that her look was sinister and repulsive, and her countenance so weather-beaten and marred by suffering!

Forth went the mother and daughter into the streets of London;—and their first care was to purchase a variety of articles of attire of a far better kind than that which they had just procured,—likewise a little jewellery and the necessary *paraphernalia* of the toilette. The goods were all sent to the coffee-house where they had hired a chamber; and a couple of large trunks were the last objects they bought, and which were despatched to the same place.

These matters having been accomplished, the old woman conducted her daughter into the fashionable quarter of Regent Street; and there Perdita beheld enough to excite her wonder and her admiration. The magnificent shops—the fine buildings—the splendid equipages—and the handsomely dressed gentlemen on horseback, all shared her attention in their turns:—nor was she, an observer, unobserved—for many an old voluptuary and stripling gallant paused to bestow a second glance upon the plainly but decently dressed young female whoso countenance was so strikingly beautiful, and in whose looks there was a subdued wantonness engendering the

most voluptuous sensations.

To Perdita's mother how altered did London seem! Here was a street which she had never seen before—there a street had been pulled down to make way for some great thoroughfare. Here buildings once familiar had disappeared: there strange edifices had sprung up! In Regent Street she looked for the shops at which she had been accustomed to deal long years before, when she dwelt in the immediate neighbourhood, and when she was deemed a *saint*: but most of the establishments she sought had changed their proprietors and their nature,—a grocer's having become a book-seller's, a milliner's a china warehouse, and so on. She had a great mind to pass into Burlington Street; but she had not quite the necessary courage to do *that*—at least for the present.

Having threaded Regent Street from Oxford Circus to Waterloo Place, the two women turned into Pall Mall West, along which they proceeded for a short distance; when the mother suddenly clasped her daughter's arm almost violently, exclaiming in a hasty whisper at the same time, "This is the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham!"

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door was opened, and forth came Charles Hatfield. Passing by the two females without noticing that he had immediately become the object of their most earnest attention,—and indeed, without observing them at all, so deeply was he absorbed in thought,—he moved on at a slow and uncertain pace, as if he had merely come out to seek the fresh air, and having no particular destination.

Yes:—he had indeed become the cynosure of attraction on the part of the old woman and her daughter,—the former devouring him with her eyes, in order to read his character and disposition in big countenance, and assure herself from that physiognomical perusal that he was fitted for her purpose,—and the latter embracing with a look of ardent, wanton scrutiny every feature of his fine face and every proportion of his symmetrical form.

He passed on:—and for a few minutes the mother and daughter preserved a deep silence, each occupied with her own thoughts.

"That young man may be rendered pliant and docile according to our will," said the old woman at length.

"He is beyond all doubt the one whom the gipsy alluded to in such glowing colours," observed Perdita, with a voluptuous languor in the eyes, a flushing of the cheeks, and a slow but deep heaving of the bosom.

"And he has something on his mind—that is clear!" added the old woman.

"Which we will soon make him divulge to us," said Perdita. "But how do you intend to proceed in order to form his acquaintance?"

"Oh! nothing is more easy!" returned her mother. "In the first place we must take handsome lodgings. I know of a nice, quiet, retired street in the neighbourhood. Come along, Perdita—we must not waste valuable time."

The two women repaired direct to Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East; and in the window of a house of handsome appearance they saw a card announcing furnished apartments to be let. The lodgings were speedily inspected and hired, the prepayment of a month's rent immediately ensuring the good opinion of the landlady and rendering references unnecessary.

Back to the coffee-house in the vicinity of Covent Garden did the wanderers hasten; and in a few minutes all their packages and new purchases were transported to a hackney coach, which was fetched from the nearest stand. The coffee-house keeper was liberally rewarded, and a handsome fee was bestowed upon the driver of the vehicle to induce him to state, in case of being questioned in Suffolk Street, that he had brought the ladies from some respectable hotel.

All these matters being arranged, the mother and daughter proceeded in the hackney-coach to their new lodgings, where they at once took up their quarters under the imposing name of Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge.

Had the worthy butcher who a few hours previously took pity on the two ragged, sinking mendicants, and sustained their strength and courage by means of hot brandy-and-water at the Elephant and Castle,—had he now beheld Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge sitting down, elegantly attired, at a well spread dinner-table, and at the fashionable time of six in the evening,—he would not for an instant have supposed that the way-worn beggars of the morning's adventure and the ladies of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, were identical: or if, by chance, he should have recognised Perdita's handsome countenance, he would have thought that the delusions of enchantment had been practised upon him or her.

And now we have prepared the way, with due prefatory explanation, for one of the most striking and remarkable episodes in this narrative—an episode showing how Perdita's arts and Perdita's beauty accomplished aims which women of less enterprise than herself and her mother would have deemed impossible.

Oh! fatal influence—that influence which the depraved and wanton Perdita wielded by means of her transcendant charms!

CHAPTER CXXIX.

THE ADVERTISING AGENT.

On the day after the one the incidents of which have just been related, Mr. Bubbleton Styles called, precisely as the clock struck eleven in the forenoon, upon an advertising agent dwelling in the immediate vicinity of Cornhill.

The agent, knowing that Mr. Styles was the registered promoter of a scheme which had obtained the patronage of the high and mighty Mr. Podgson, was particularly civil and urbane; and having bowed him into the private office, and presented him with a chair, he said, "Now, Mr. Styles, sir—what can I do for you?"

"I intend to give the newspapers a round of advertisements," answered the City gentleman, pulling out his prospectuses.

"Softly—softly, my dear sir," exclaimed the agent: "you must be guided by me in this. If you went to the generality of agents, they would say, '*Oh! advertise by all means in every paper in existence*:'—but I, Mr. Styles, am a little more conscientious. There are some journals, in fact, which are perfectly useless as advertising media: it would be money completely thrown away."

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness," said Mr. Styles. "Of course we shall advertise in the *Times*."

"As a matter of course!" cried the agent. "'Tis the great daily Leviathan which every body sees, no matter what his politics may be. The *Morning Chronicle*, too, is a good medium: the *Herald*, *Post*, and *Advertiser* must likewise be included;—and it would be folly to omit the *Sun*, *Globe*, and *Standard*."

"Well—and what about the *Daily News* and the *Express*?" asked Mr. Styles, apparently astonished that no reference should have been made to those print.

"The *Daily News*!" ejaculated the agent, in perfect wonderment: "the *Express*!" he cried, in horrified amazement. "Excuse me, my dear friend—but are you mad? have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I hope not," responded Mr. Styles, in his usual calm, business-like manner. "What makes you think so?"

"What makes me think so!" repeated the agent: "why, the idea that you should for an instant entertain the notion of advertising in those contemptible abortions! They are a perfect disgrace to newspaper literature, sir," proceeded the agent, who was speaking conscientiously, and indeed truly. "Did you ever happen to read the *Daily News*?"

"I have never seen the paper in my life," answered Mr. Styles: "I had only heard of it."

"And you are not likely to see it," returned the agent, "unless you go into the heart of Wapping or explore the back slums of Whitechapel. No respectable newsman keeps it: not that newsmen are more particular than other shop-keepers—but they only keep what they can sell, Mr. Styles. As for the *Express*, it is a regular cheat of an evening paper—made up entirely of the articles in the *Daily News*, without even having the bad grammar and the typographical errors corrected. But both prints are the most contemptible threepenny things I ever saw in my life; and one would be inclined to fancy that all the real newspaper talent had been absorbed by the pre-existing journals, leaving only the meanest literary scrubs in London to *do* the *News* and the *Express*."

"And yet I thought that the *News* had been started under the auspices of Mr. Charles Dickens—the immortal *Boz*?" said Mr. Styles, interrogatively.

"So it was," replied the advertising agent: "but the name of Charles Dickens was rather damnatory than useful to a newspaper-speculation. Every one must admit that *Boz* is a great novelist—a very great novelist indeed—the Fielding of his age; but he is totally incapable of writing for a newspaper. The proprietors of the *News* made a tremendous splash with his name; but they only created a quagmire for themselves to flounder in. When their paper was first coming out, every body thought it was to do wonders. The *Times* was to lose half its subscribers; and the *Chronicle* was to be ruined altogether. But, alas! never did so labouring a mountain produce such a contemptible mouse; and people began to fancy that the wags engaged on *Punch* had started the *Daily News* as a grand parody on the newspaper press. The leaders were rubbish—the criticisms of new works, mere nonsense—the dramatic reviews, utter balderdash. It however seems that in the lowest depths there is a deeper still even with the bathos of journalists; for when the *News* tumbled down (which it soon did) to a two-penny halfpenny print, the rubbish, the nonsense, and the balderdash became more astounding still. There is a young man named Bilk who does the '*moral department*' of the paper; and he is the most grovelling ass that ever was created. He undertakes to review a whole batch of cheap publications in a lump; but what he calls *reviewing* is nothing else

than *abusing* the works with an insolence so cool, and a rashness so indiscriminate that he must be as consummate a coxcomb as he is an unprincipled ruffian. The *News* affects a moral tone, and entrusts its conscience to this half-buffoon—half-barbarian, in the hope that the lucubrations of the ungrammatical scribe may acquire for it the reputation of a serious, sober, and sedate journal. The despicable being to whom I allude is the son of the proprietor of the *Assinæum*—a paper which Bulwer mauled and exposed so terribly in one of his admirable novels many years ago. The articles in the *Assinæum* may be termed TWADDLE UPON STILTS——"

"You are really very inveterate in your denunciations of these prints," observed Mr. Styles, who having an hour to spare, did not experience any impatience in listening to the agent's remarks.

"Not at all inveterate—only justly indignant," was the answer. "I am indignant, because I admire the newspaper press of Great Britain—I am proud of it—I glory in belonging to the country which possesses it; and therefore when I see journalism prostituted to the lowest and meanest purposes—when I behold such despicable abortions as the *Daily News* and the *Express* daring to show themselves in that sphere where respectability and talent alone existed until those threepenny things made their appearance,—I am angry—I am disgusted! Only see how the *News* has been tinkered and hacked about with the idea of making it a property. First it was five-pence—then it was two-pence halfpenny—next it was three-pence;—and yet with all this derogatory experimentalising, the owners have failed to make it a property. What a miserable thing does it look, with its beggarly three columns of advertisements! The *Times* has as many in a day as the *News* has had altogether since its sickly existence began. The very Parliamentary Reporters engaged upon the *News* are ashamed of their connexion with such a scurvy affair; and the doorkeeper of the Gallery of the House of Commons looks on them with kind commiseration, knowing how degrading it must be to their feelings to take their places in the seats allotted to the representatives of that three-penny hodgepodge. You never see the *News* quoted from nor alluded to by its contemporaries. It is not recognised as a member of the newspaper press. It has tried all imaginable kinds of manœuvres to force itself into notoriety,—sometimes currying favour with the superior journals, and at others abusing them; but all to no purpose. Its contemporaries will *not* notice it: they will not be bullied nor coaxed into such condescension. Why—would you believe that the very Editor is heartily ashamed of his post: but he knows that if he resigned it, he should be compelled to relapse into the lowest walks of penny-a-lining, whence he was dragged forth to conduct the *thing*."

"How is it possible that such a contemptible journal continues in existence?" asked Mr. Styles.

"There! now you puzzle me indeed!" exclaimed the advertising agent. "The question you have put to me involves one of the greatest mysteries of London; and I am quite incapable of affording you the solution. Time will however show: for, in this case, time *must* clear up all doubt and uncertainty regarding the matter. For the present, however, take my advice and refrain from advertising in a paper which is contemptible in circulation and influence—scurrilous[8] or hypocritical, according to circumstances, in its literary articles—and wishy-washy in the extreme in its leaders."

"Well, I am excessively obliged to you for this most useful warning," observed Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "You have nothing to say against the *Weekly Dispatch*—the *Sunday Times—Bell's Life in London*——"

"All good papers!" exclaimed the advertising agent. "But here is a list of those metropolitan and provincial journals in which I should recommend you to advertise."

"I place myself entirely in your hands," answered the promoter of the grandest railway scheme ever devised: and, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, he rattled a little silver and a great many halfpence, saying, "Shall I give you a hundred or so in advance? or will you send in the account——"

"Pray do not think of offering any sum in advance, Mr. Styles—my dear Mr. Styles!" cried the agent. "It is but a trifle: three hundred guineas will cover the outlay for this first batch of advertisements—and I will send in my little account to the secretary when the Board meets."

"Very good," rejoined the promoter;—and, having come to this excellent understanding, the two gentlemen parted—Mr. Styles betaking himself to Garraway's Coffee-house, where he ate his lunch standing at the bar, and afterwards returning to his office at Crosby Hall Chambers.

CHAPTER CXXX.

PERDITA.

A week had elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge in the great metropolis; and as yet they appeared to be no nearer to an acquaintanceship with Charles Hatfield than they were on the day when they first beheld him issue from Lord Ellingham's mansion;—for that it was he whom they had seen on the occasion alluded to, the mother had satisfactorily ascertained.

Indeed, the old woman had not been idle. Every evening, for a couple of hours, did she watch in the immediate vicinity of the Earl's dwelling to obtain an interview with the young man: but he did not appear to go out after dusk.

Mrs. Fitzhardinge accordingly began to think of changing her tactics, and endeavouring to catch him in the day-time, when fortune at last favoured her views;—for on the eighth night of her loiterings in Pall Mall, she had the satisfaction of seeing him sally forth shortly after nine o'clock.

Unhesitatingly accosting him, she said, "Mr. Hatfield, will you accord me your attention for a few moments?"

The young man turned towards her, and beheld a very ugly, plainly-attired, old lady: he nevertheless answered her respectfully, because she had addressed him in a manner denoting genteel breeding. We should observe, too, that she had purposely assumed a humble apparel on the occasion of these evening watchings, in order to avoid the chance of attracting the attention of passers-by or policemen, who would naturally have wondered to see a handsomely apparelled person thus loitering about.

"Certainly, madam," replied Charles: "I will listen to any thing you may have to say to me. Will you walk into the house which I have just left: 'tis the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham."

"I know well who lives there, Mr. Hatfield," answered the old woman; "and it is precisely because I wish to speak to you alone, that I have accosted you in the street. Can you pardon such boldness?"

"If your business with me be of importance, madam," said Charles, "no apology can be necessary on your part."

"Yes—my business is indeed of importance," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with mysterious emphasis. "But I cannot speak to you here ——"

"I have already requested you to accompany me to the house where I am residing with my relatives and friends," said Charles, with the least indication of impatience in his manner.

"And I have already assured you that I am anxious to converse with you alone," responded the old woman, nothing daunted. "Do not mistrust me, sir—do not suppose that I have accosted you for the purpose of soliciting any assistance of a pecuniary kind——"

"Then, madam, what *do* you require of me?" asked Charles, hastily.

"Ten minutes' private conversation—on matters of importance—of deep importance to yourself!" replied Mrs. Fitzhardinge, as rapidly and as firmly as the other had spoken: then, before he had time to make any rejoinder, she added, "For your own sake, Mr. Hatfield—if for no other consideration—you will accompany me to my own dwelling, which is close at hand. What! you hesitate? Then continue to cherish the secret grief which weighs upon your mind——"

"Ah! what did you say?" ejaculated the young man, starting as if a chord had been touched so as to vibrate to his very heart's core.

"I mean that if you refuse to accompany me, you will repent the loss of an opportunity to receive revelations nearly concerning yourself, and which opportunity may not speedily occur again."

As Mrs. Fitzhardinge uttered these words, she fixed a strange, mysterious, and almost ominous look upon Charles Hatfield, who was bewildered and amazed by her language. The old woman had dealt her random shots with good effect; and she experienced an inward triumph at her skill, and a sure conviction of its success.

"Who are you? and what do you know of me?" demanded Charles, breaking silence abruptly after more than a minute's pause, and speaking in a tone of earnestness denoting mingled suspense, wonder, and curiosity.

“My name is Fitzhardinge,” replied the old woman; “and I know all—every thing concerning you,—aye, much more than you can possibly suspect. But not another word of explanation will I utter here; and you may now decide whether you will at once accompany me——”

“I *will* accompany you, madam,” interrupted Charles Hatfield, in a decided manner. “In which direction does your abode lie?”

“Five minutes will take us thither,” was the answer.

The old woman and the young gentleman now proceeded in silence towards Suffolk Street, Pall Mall—the latter wondering who his companion might be, what she could possibly have to communicate to him, and how she had acquired the information which she alleged to be so important and was about to impart. He naturally associated the promised revelations with the mysterious circumstances which he had so recently fathomed by means of the letters and manuscripts found in the secret recess of the library at Lord Ellingham’s mansion;—and yet he was at a loss to conceive how a Mrs. Fitzhardinge, whose name was entirely strange to him, could possibly have any connexion with his own family affairs. At one moment he fancied that the proceeding on her part was nothing more nor leas than a plot to inveigle him to some den for predatory purposes: for he had heard that London abounded in such horrible places, and also in persons who adopted every kind of stratagem to lure the unwary into those fatal snares. But when he considered the quarter of the great metropolis in which his companion evidently resided, as she had assured him that her abode was only a few minutes’ walk from the spot where she had first accosted him,—when he again noticed the respectability of her appearance, and reflected that there was something superior in her manners, language, and address,—and lastly, when he remembered that amidst circumstances so complicated and mysterious as those which regarded his own family, it was highly possible for that aged female to be interested in them in some way or another,—he blamed himself for his misgivings, and resolved to see the end of the adventure.

Scarcely was his mind thus made up, when Mrs. Fitzhardinge turned into Suffolk Street; and in less than another minute, she knocked in an authoritative manner at the door of a handsome house. The summons was instantaneously responded to by a respectable female-servant; and Charles Hatfield followed the old lady up a wide stair-case lighted by a lamp which a statue in a niche held in its hand. On reaching the first landing, Mrs. Fitzhardinge threw open a door, saying, “Walk into this room, Mr. Hatfield: I will join you in a few moments.”

Charles entered—and the door immediately closed behind him.

The young man found himself in a well-furnished apartment, in which the light of the wax candles placed upon the mantel was reflected in a handsome mirror. The atmosphere was rendered perfumed and refreshing by vases of fresh flowers tastefully disposed around: and on a side-table stood a large globe filled with the clearest water, in which gold and silver fish were disporting. The curtains were closed over the windows; but still the room was cool and the air grateful in that sultry summer season.

These observations were made at a rapid glance;—and then Charles Hatfield’s looks were concentrated in the cynosure which instantly absorbed all interest—all attention. For, half sitting, half reclining upon the sofa, was a being of such transcendant beauty that never in the wildest of his dreams had he conceived the like. When reading a novel or a poem, his imagination had often depicted to itself the semblance of the heroine—and this mental portraiture was invariably drawn with the utmost perfection of form and feature which impassioned and enthusiastic youth could devise. But no flight—no soaring of that fervid imagination had ever yet idealised such dazzling, brilliant charms as those which now met his astonished gaze,—charms that intoxicated while they delighted, and that ravished while they infused a warm voluptuousness into the soul of the beholder.

And, in sooth, well might Charles Hatfield experience ineffable feelings and tender emotions as he contemplated the fiend in an angel’s shape that was half reclining on the sofa; for Perdita was surpassingly lovely on this occasion! She was attired in a light pink muslin dress, made very low in the body, so that her neck and shoulders were set off in all their dazzling whiteness against the deep purple velvet of the sofa—and her full, swelling, firm bosom was more than half revealed. Her hair was arranged in long ringlets, glittering like hyperions, luxuriant, and sweeping those glowing globes that appeared to heave to their caresses. Her large grey eyes beamed with voluptuous languor, although a brilliant light shone in the depths of the dark pupils;—and her vermilion lips, parted with a smile, displayed the white and even rows of pearls, so faultless in their beauty. The slightly sun-burnt tinge of her face appeared to be the rich hue of an Italian complexion—the carnation glow of health, and youth, and warm blood animating her cheeks. Then her arms were naked,—those arms which were dazzlingly white, robust, and yet admirably modelled, and which seemed ready to stretch out and clasp a favoured lover to the panting breast. One foot was raised on the sofa—the other rested on an ottoman;—and thus, as Charles Hatfield’s eyes swept the rich and fine proportions—the undulating contours of that splendid form, it seemed to him as if a halo of voluptuousness surrounded this enchanting being—a very perfume of beauty enveloped her in its intoxicating influence.

She had heard him ascending the stairs—and she had purposely placed herself in an attitude which should seem as if he had disturbed her unexpectedly, and thus serve as an apology for the negligent abandonment of limb which gave to her position an air alike wanton and lascivious. While she, therefore, affected to gaze on him in soft surprise, he was intently devouring her with looks of unfeigned amazement;—and while she still retained that voluptuous attitude as if unwittingly, he was rivetted to the spot near the door where he had stopped short on first catching sight of her. This dumb-show on the part of both,—artificial with her, and real with him,—lasted for nearly a minute;—and during that time Perdita had an opportunity of surveying the young man’s handsome appearance with even more searching scrutiny than when she had seen him in Pall Mall the very day of her arrival in London,—while, on his side, Charles Hatfield had leisure to scan a combination of charms such as transcended all his ideal creations, and which, had he beheld them in a picture, he would have declared to be impossible of realization.

Again must we observe how different was this elegantly-attired, captivating creature as she now appeared, from the ragged, way-worn wanderer that she was when first we introduced her to our readers! But oh! dangerous—trebly dangerous Perdita,—a snake with the loveliest skin—a demon with the most heavenly form—utter profligacy in the most witching guise!

And now the young man, who has been brought within the sphere of this perilous influence, recovers his self-possession so far as to be able to stammer forth an apology for what he conceives to be an intrusion occasioned by some strange mistake.

“No excuse is necessary, sir,” replies Perdita; “The lady whom you state to have conducted you hither, is my mother; and she has doubtless sought her chamber for a few minutes to change her attire. Pray be seated.”

But Charles Hatfield once more stood still—rivetted to the spot, after having advanced a few paces towards Perdita;—for the sound of her voice, so sweetly musical—so enchantingly harmonious, appeared to inspire him with ecstatic emotions and infuse an ineffable delight into his very soul.

Then Perdita arose from the sofa, and indicating a chair close by, again invited the young man to be seated,—accomplishing this courtesy with so ravishing a grace and such a charming smile, that he felt himself intoxicated—bewildered—enchanted by the magic of her beauty, the melody of her silver tones, and the soft persuasion of her manner. For the consciousness of almost superhuman beauty had rendered Perdita emulative of every art and taught her to study every movement which might invest her with a winning way and a witching power;—and thus this singular young woman had acquired a politeness so complete that it seemed intuitive, and a polish so refined that it appeared to have been gained by long and unvaried association with the highest classes.

Sinking into the chair thus gracefully offered him, Charles Hatfield could not take his eyes off the magnificent creature who remained standing for a few seconds after he was seated; for, affecting to alter the position of one of the wax candles on the mantel, as if it were too near the mirror, she placed herself in such an attitude that the young man might obtain a perfect view of the flowing outlines of her glorious form,—the splendid arching of the swan-like neck—the luxurious fulness of the bust—the tapering slenderness of the waist—the plump and rounded arms—the large, projecting hips—and the finely proportioned feet and ankles.

The effect thus produced by the artful, designing creature, whose voluptuous position seemed all natural and all unstudied, was precisely that which she had intended;—for Charles Hatfield experienced a delirium of emotions till then unknown—and he felt that he could almost spring from his seat, catch that bewitching form in his arms, and, covering her with kisses, exclaim, “Pardon me—but I am mad—intoxicated—raving with passion!”

“My mother will not be many minutes, sir,” said Perdita, now returning to her seat upon the sofa; “and in the meantime I must solicit you to exercise your patience—for I am afraid you will find me but a dull companion.”

“Impossible!” cried Charles, enthusiastically; then fearing that he had spoken in too decided and earnest a manner to one who was a perfect stranger, he added in a more subdued and reserved tone, “But perhaps I am intruding on your privacy, as I am afraid that when I entered—I mean, I fear that I—I disturbed you——”

“I certainly was not aware that my mother expected a visitor this evening,” answered Perdita; “and it is I who should apologise, inasmuch as you caught me in such a lounging, lazy attitude. But since I have been in London I have experienced a heaviness in the atmosphere that engenders indolence—for I have hitherto been accustomed to the country.”

“Then you have not long resided in London, Miss Fitzhardinge?” said Charles, hazarding this mode of address with the determination of ascertaining whether the beautiful young woman were married or single.

“We have only been in this city for one week,” she replied in an acquiescent way which convinced him that she had not changed the parental name by means of wedlock—a discovery that infused a secret glow of pleasure into his very soul, though at the same instant his heart smote him as if he were already playing a treacherous part in respect to Lady Frances Ellingham. “No,” continued Perdita, “we have not long resided in London. Urgent affairs have compelled my mother to visit the capital; and as our stay is likely to be of considerable duration, we are about to take a house. For my part, I am not sorry that we are thus to settle in London: for, in spite of its oppressive atmosphere, its smoke, and its noise, it has many attractions.”

“You have already seen enough, then, to induce you to prefer London to the country, Miss Fitzhardinge?” said Charles, now admiring the fine aquiline profile of which he was suffered to obtain a perfect view, as Perdita half averted her looks on purpose, though quite in a natural manner.

“I have seen enough to render me an enthusiastic admirer of your great city,” she replied, now turning her full countenance upon him, and smiling so as to display her brilliant teeth: “but I am anxious to behold more, and my wish cannot very readily be gratified. For, save our attorney, we have no acquaintances—no friends in London: we are perfect strangers here—and we cannot very well ask our solicitor to escort us to the theatre and to those places of amusement which ladies would hardly choose to visit unless accompanied and protected by a gentleman.”

“Is it possible that *you*, Miss Fitzhardinge, should have to experience the want of such a *chaperon*?” demanded Charles Hatfield, again hurried by his enthusiasm into language too little reserved and distant for a perfect stranger to address to a young lady:—at least, so he thought and feared immediately after he had made the observation.

“It is very possible,” replied Perdita, in a mild and almost plaintive tone. “In the country we had numerous friends; but here——”

And the artful creature, stopping short, stooped down to pick up her handkerchief as if to apply it to her eyes:—at the same instant Charles, obeying the impulse of polite attention, bent down also to save the lady the trouble and perform the little act of courtesy, when their hair—their very cheeks came in contact,—accidentally as the confused and bewildered Charles imagined, but intentionally on the part of the wanton and astute Perdita.

And that contact—Oh! it was thrilling in the extreme; and Charles Hatfield felt as if his veins ran with liquid fire;—for the perfume exhaled from the lady’s hair—the velvety feeling of the luxuriant curls—the softness and the warmth of her carnation cheek—and then the view which he could not possibly avoid for a moment obtaining of the glowing breast which her stooping posture completely revealed,—all this was sufficient to madden him with passion and excite him to a degree when all self-command becomes nearly impossible. But he still possessed a sufficiency of mental energy to controul himself; and, stammering forth an awkward apology, he hurriedly observed, “Would you not think me too bold, Miss Fitzhardinge, I should be proud to offer my services as a *chaperon* to yourself—and your mother,” he added for decency’s sake.

The instant this offer was made,—made without the least forethought and in the confusion of the young man’s mind arising from the incidents just related,—he repented of his rashness: he would have given worlds to be able to recall the proposal. For, in a moment to his mind flashed the image of the lovely Lady Frances Ellingham—the reflection that he was offering his attentions to a young person totally unknown to him—the remembrance that he had many matters of importance to occupy his leisure—and the general impression that he had committed himself in a most singularly foolish and inconsiderate manner.

Perdita saw what was passing in his mind: at least, she perceived that he repented of the proposal which he had so precipitately made, and which it had rejoiced her so much to receive;—and she resolved to conquer his scruples—overcome his repugnance—and confirm him in the act of vassalage to which her transcendent charms and her wanton arts had already prompted him.

Laying her soft warm hand upon his, and approaching her countenance so near to his own that her fragrant breath fanned his cheek, she said, in a tone apparently of deep emotion, “Mr. Hatfield, this proposal is so generous—so kind—so unexpected, that I know not how to answer you otherwise than by expressing my sincere gratitude. And yet—so frankly have you made the offer, that it would be a miserable affectation on my part to hesitate or to appear leas candid and open in accepting it. I *do* therefore accept it, my dear sir—and with renewed thanks. And think not that in constituting yourself the friend—for in such a light must I henceforth consider you—of Miss Fitzhardinge, you are doing aught derogatory to yourself. No: for my mother is descended from an old and illustrious family,—a family which has enumerated amongst its members personages of rank, eminence, and renown;—and should the Chancery suit which she has come to London to prosecute, result favourably to her, she will recover an enormous fortune that has been accumulating for years through remaining in a dormant state.”

While Perdita was delivering this tissue of falsehoods with an air of the most profound sincerity, she still kept her hand upon that of the young man—still retained her countenance near his own—and likewise fixed upon him looks at once languishing, tender, and voluptuous.

Again did he lose all power of sober reflection and, completely yielding to the influence which the syren had in so short a time gained over him, he said, “I shall be proud and delighted to act as your escort, Miss Fitzhardinge. But you just now addressed me by my name—and yet I thought you were unprepared for my presence here this evening.”

“I was well aware that my mother wished to see you on particular business,” said Perdita, having a ready reply for every question that might be put to her; “and therefore when I saw you enter the room, I concluded that you must be Mr. Charles Hatfield.”

“And are you acquainted with the nature of the business concerning which Mrs. Fitzhardinge desired to speak with me?” inquired the young man, wondering why the old lady did not make her appearance.

“Yes—I am well informed on that subject,” returned Perdita; “but pray do not ask me to talk to you on business! I detest the very name! And now perhaps you will consider me a silly—flighty—volatile creature——”

“I consider you to be an angel of beauty!” exclaimed Charles, unable to restrain the raptures which hurried him on to this impassioned ejaculation.

“I was told before I came to London that the gentlemen of the great metropolis were very fond of paying silly young ladies vain and empty compliments,” said Perdita, looking with good-humoured archness at her companion, while her eyes beamed with wickedness and her bosom heaved visibly.

“Is it the first time that you have been assured of your beauty?” asked Charles, still carried away by an uncontroullable influence.

“No—not precisely the first,” responded Perdita, with a *naiveté* so admirably assumed that her companion believed it to be completely genuine. “There was a young gentleman—or rather a nobleman, but I must not mention his name—in the country, who offered me his hand;—and he paid me many very fine compliments.”

“And you accepted the proposal? you are engaged to him?” exclaimed Charles, with a strange fluttering of the heart.

“Neither the one nor the other,” answered Perdita. “I could not love him—and therefore I declined the honour. My mother was angry with me, and talked a great deal about the excellence of the match and so forth: but I was obstinate—yes, very obstinate, Mr. Hatfield,” she said archly; “for never—never,” she continued, her tone suddenly becoming earnest and her manner serious,—“never could I bestow my hand where I cannot likewise give my heart!”

“And you have resolved wisely, Miss Fitzhardinge!” exclaimed Charles. “Matrimony without sincere affection can afford no promise of happiness. But one so beautiful as yourself—impressed too with such sterling sentiments and harbouring such pure principles—oh, you will prove indeed a treasure to the man who is fortunate enough to secure your heart and hand!”

“Again you compliment me, Mr. Hatfield,” said Perdita, looking down and blushing,—for even her very blushes she could command at pleasure. “In reference, however, to the observation you have just made, I should remark that I have never yet met with one of your sex whom I could comprehend fully and who could understand me. I admire openness, candour and sincerity,—that generous frankness, too, which at once establishes friendship and dissipates cold formality. For I believe that the trammels of ceremonial politeness positively spoil the heart,—tutoring it to curb its enthusiasm where enthusiasm would be so natural! I know not how to express myself clearly; but what I mean to imply is this—that I am a believer in the possibility of friendship at first sight——”

“And of love at first sight also?” exclaimed Charles Hatfleld, in an impassioned tone.

“Yes—and of love at first sight also,” repeated Perdita, again hanging down her head—again commanding a deep blush—and likewise speaking in a low, melting tone of deep emotion, as she drew a long sigh.

“Was it that possibility of experiencing the feeling of friendship at first sight, which led you to accept my proposed services as an escort to the places of public amusement?” enquired Charles.

“Wherefore do you seek thus to probe the secret feelings of my soul?” asked Perdita, turning upon him a look indicative of mingled pleasure and amazement.

“Have I offended you by the question, charming lady?” exclaimed Charles.

“Oh! I do not so readily take offence, Mr. Hatfield,” cried Perdita. “But—frank, candid, and ingenuous though I believe myself to be—I still have my little feelings of pride, and I could not think of making an avowal to a gentleman otherwise than as a reciprocity.”

“Then were I to declare sincerely and solemnly—and on my honour as a man—that it was a sentiment of friendship, experienced at first sight and according to your own doctrine, which prompted me to offer my services as a *chaperon*,” said Charles, hastily and enthusiastically, “would you deign to answer my question?”

“Such a declaration on your part, sir, would necessarily elicit—nay, demand some kind of a response on mine,” returned the artful beauty, looking down, and tapping the carpet with her foot in such a manner that her ankle peeped from beneath her dress, and the young man’s eyes could catch a glimpse of the exquisitely white skin through the net work of the dainty silk stocking.

Charles hesitated: an avowal of friendship trembled on his tongue—but he thought how dangerous such a confession would be—he thought, too, of Lady Frances Ellingham!

And Perdita again perceived that he hesitated; and instantly had recourse to a new artifice to display her charms to their utmost advantage. Stooping down, she affected to arrange the ottoman in the most convenient manner for her feet;—but, in this attitude which seemed so natural, ingenuous, and artless, she revealed so much of the treasures of her bosom that no room was left for imaginings—and Charles Hatfield felt himself seized with a delirium in which he would have made over his soul to Satan had such been the price demanded for the possession of Perdita.

“Miss Fitzhardinge,” he said, his voice almost subdued and his tongue parched through the maddening fierceness of passion, “on my honour as a gentleman, I swear that the offer I ere now made you was dictated by a feeling of friendship! Yes—of a friendship that sprang up in my soul in a single instant—that took birth in a moment—a friendship that prompted me to declare how proud and delighted I should be to act as your escort! For I am candid, frank, and ingenuous as I perceive *you* to be,—and I will give you another proof of the existence of these qualities in respect to myself—even at the risk of offending you. From the first moment that I set foot in this room until now, I have experienced emotions such as I never felt before. In my delirium I apostrophised you as an angel of beauty;—and an angel of beauty must you indeed be to exercise such prompt—such speedy—such witching influence as that which has enthralled me. For it appears as if there were a spell upon me—an enchantment, from which there is no escape. Sweet lady, pardon me for having spoken thus frankly——”

“I again assure you that I do not very readily take offence,” answered Perdita: then, laying her hand upon his—for the designing woman sought to excite him almost to madness—and again approaching her countenance so near his own that he could look into the depth of her large, wanton eyes,—she said, “You have made a certain avowal, and you have a right to expect a candid and unreserved reply from me. Then learn, Mr. Hatfield, that never should I have accepted your services as a *chaperon*—never should we have talked thus familiarly—never would you have been suffered to read so much of my disposition as within the last hour you have learnt—had not I likewise experienced a feeling of friendship at first sight for you!”

“Oh! my God—this is happiness so unhoped—so unlooked for—so unexpected, that I am bewildered-dazzled—amazed!” murmured the young man, a mist obscuring his brain—and yet a glorious, lustrous, golden mist through which he seemed to catch glimpses of paradise. “Friendship did you say, charming lady? Yet is not friendship a dangerous word for lips like ours to breathe—and a dangerous sentiment for hearts like ours to feel?”

“You speak as if you were under an apprehension that you are doing wrong?” said Perdita, in a tone of soft reproach. “Oh! is this candour and frankness? If you regret that you have pledged me your friendship—for such I augur of your words—I release you, Mr. Hatfield, from the bond: nay—I should be too proud to ask you to adhere to it!”

And now the young man beheld the fascinating woman in a new phasis of her charms;—for, with that ready versatility of aspect and demeanour which she had so completely at her command, she suddenly invested herself with all the majesty of sublime haughtiness;—no longer melting, tender, wanton, and voluptuous as Venus—but terrible, domineering, superb, and imperious as Juno,—no longer wearing the cestus of the Goddess of Love—but grasping, as the Queen of Heaven, the thunders of Olympian Jove.

Her eyes flashed fire—her cheeks flushed—her nostrils dilated—her lip curled—her neck arched proudly rather than gracefully—her bosom heaved as if it would burst the low corsage which only half restrained it—and her very form seemed to draw itself up into a height, which, even as she sate and of middling stature as she was, appeared colossal at that moment to the astounded gaze of the young man.

Never was artifice more successful—never was triumph more complete, on one side;—never was defeat more signal—never was humiliation more contrite, on the other. For, overwhelmed as it were by the sovereign majesty of that anger which he believed himself to have provoked, Charles Hatfield fell upon his knees before the haughty beauty, and seizing both her hands in his, he extravagantly devoured them with kisses, exclaiming, “Pardon—pardon!”

“Yes—yes: it is as frankly accorded as sincerely demanded!” exclaimed Perdita, not offering to withdraw her hands from the lips which were now glued to them: and in an instant her whole manner and appearance changed again—and when Charles Hatfield ventured to look up into the syren’s face, he saw her bending over him with cheeks flushed it is true, but not by anger—and with eyes that seemed to swim in wanton, liquid languor.

Rising from his suppliant posture, and now taking a seat by the side of Perdita on the sofa,—relinquishing her hands at the same time, for fear of giving offence by retaining them,—the infatuated young man, drunk with passion, said in a low murmuring tone, “We have not been acquainted more than one hour, and we have exchanged vows of friendship—is it not so?”

“Yes—if you do not repent now, and never will repent of that pledge on your part,” answered the dangerous young woman, who thus conducted her designing machinations with such consummate skill.

“No—never, never!” cried Hatfield. “And now we know each other as well as if we had been intimate since our infancy! To you, then, henceforth I am *Charles*; and you are to me——”

“*Perdita*,” said she.

“Oh! beautiful—singular—and yet ominous name!” exclaimed the young gentleman. “Yes—you are my friend—my dear friend Perdita! And now, Perdita, I will avail myself of this romantic yet not the less sincere friendship that is established between us, to ask you what caprice or fancy gave you so remarkable a Christian name?”

“Because in my infancy—shortly after my birth, and before I was baptised—I was lost,—or rather stolen by gipsies,” answered Perdita, investing herself and her history with as much of the charm of mysticism as possible: “and when I was recovered from the kidnappers by my parents, they christened me Perdita—or The Lost One.”

“Every thing connected with you seems to be imbued with deep and enthralling interest, my dear friend,” said Charles: “a supernatural halo appears to surround you! Your beauty is of a nature so superior to aught of female loveliness that I ever before beheld—your voice has something so indescribably melting and musical that it awakens echoes in the inmost recesses of the soul—your history is strange, wild, and impressive in its very commencement—your disposition is characterised by a frankness and candour so generous that it inspires and reciprocates profound friendship the instant it meets a kindred spirit—and then there is about you a something so witching, so captivating, so enchanting, that the best and most virtuous of men would lose all sense of duty, did you—sweet syren that you are—undertake to lead them astray.”

“If I have indeed found a kindred spirit in you, Charles,” said Perdita, taking his hand and pressing it as if in grateful and innocent rapture to her heaving bosom—an act which only tended to inflame the young man almost to madness,—“I shall have gained that which I have long sought, and never yet found. For my heart has hitherto been as complete a stranger to a sincere friendship as to love! When I spoke ere now of our friends in the country, I meant those acquaintances whom custom denominates by the other title.”

“Perdita—my friend Perdita, the amity that we have pledged each other shall be eternal!” exclaimed Charles, in an impassioned tone.

“And you will return to visit me to-morrow?” said the young woman, her fine grey eyes beaming with an unsettled lustre, as if the mingled voluptuousness of day and night met in those splendid, eloquent orbs.

“Yes—oh! yes!” cried Charles, as if it were unnecessary to have asked the question. “And now I shall leave you, Perdita: I shall depart to feast my imagination on the pleasures of this interview.” Thus speaking, the young man pressed Perdita’s hand to his lips, and hurried from the room, intoxicated with a delirium of bliss, and scarcely conscious of where he was or whither he was going.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE SYREN’S ARTS AND CHARMS.

On gaining the street, Charles Hatfield hurried along like one demented,—positively reeling with the influence which Perdita’s charms, allurements, and arts had shed upon him,—and feeling within his soul a glow of such ineffable happiness that he appeared to have been snatched from the world and wafted to Elysium. Had he just quitted a banquet where his head had been pillowed on the bosom of beauty, and the fair hands of the charmer had held to his lips brimming goblets of champagne of which he had drunk deeply, he would not have experienced a more extraordinary degree of excitement, nor such felicitous sensations.

But the moment of reaction came; and though the revulsion was slow, yet it was powerful—and even painful.

He had found his way into Saint James's Park; and hurrying to the most secluded quarter, he was still giving rein to the luxuriousness of his thoughts, when it suddenly flashed to his mind that he had not received from the lips of Mrs. Fitzhardinge the important communications which she had promised him. Indeed, he had not seen her again from the moment when she showed him into the drawing-room where he had found the lovely creature to whom his friendship—his eternal friendship was so solemnly plighted.

Striking his repeater,—for obscurity reigned in that portion of the park where he now was, and he could not see the position of the hands of his watch,—he was amazed to discover that his interview with Perdita had lasted two hours.

Two hours!—and it scarcely seemed to have occupied ten minutes!

But now his reasoning faculties returned;—and he began to ask himself innumerable questions.

"Wherefore was I conducted to that house? was it really to receive important revelations from the mother? or only to be thrown into the way of the daughter? Why did not the mother make her appearance once during those two hours which I passed with the daughter? Was it a stratagem devised by designing women to ensnare me? or was Mrs. Fitzhardinge unexpectedly prevented from joining us so soon as she had intended? My God! I am bewildered—I know not what to think! For if they be women of evil repute and having sinister aims in view, Perdita would not have given me to understand that they are at ease in their circumstances, and hope to be even rich very shortly? But that young creature—so beautiful,—so indescribably—so enchantingly beautiful,—what object could she have in pledging her friendship to me—to *me*, a stranger whom she had never seen before? Fool that I am! wherefore did I give a similar promise to her? Oh! it was in a moment of delirium—of enchantment—of intoxication;—and might it not also have been the same with her? Ah! that belief would denote a boundless vanity on my part;—and yet women have their sudden caprices—their instantaneous attachments, as well as men! Yes—it must be so—Perdita loves me!—she loves me—and I already love her deeply—madly, in return!"

But scarcely had these thoughts passed through his brain, when his heart smote him painfully—severely,—reproaching him with his treachery towards Lady Frances Ellingham, and suggesting a comparison between the retiring, bashful beauty of this charming young creature, and the warm, impassioned, bold loveliness of the syren Perdita.

The more Charles Hatfield pondered upon the strange scene that had taken place in Suffolk Street, the less satisfied did he feel with himself. He saw that his conduct had been rash, precipitate, and thoughtless;—and yet there was something so pleasurable in what he blamed himself for, that he was not altogether contrite. Indeed, he felt—he admitted to his own secret soul, that had he the power of recalling the last two hours, he should act precisely in the same manner over again. For when he thought of Perdita,—remembered her witcheries—dwelt on her faultless charms—and recalled to mind the mystic fascination of her language and the delicious tones of her voice,—his imagination grew inflamed—his blood ran rapidly and hotly in his veins—and it seemed that were she Satan in female shape, he could sell his soul to her!

It was late when he returned to Ellingham House; and he repaired at once to his chamber. But he could not sleep: the image of Perdita haunted him;—and were it not so unseasonable an hour he would have returned to Suffolk Street under pretence of soliciting the promised revelations from Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

When he retired to rest, and sleep did at last visit his eyes, that beauteous image followed him in his dreams. He thought that he was seated by the side of the witching fair one on the sofa, and that she was reclining, half-embraced, on his breast, with her countenance, flushed and wanton in expression, upturned towards his own. This delicious position appeared to last for a long—long time, neither uttering a word, but drinking deep draughts of love from each other's eyes. Then he fancied that he stooped to press his lips to her delicious mouth;—but at that instant the lovely face changed—elongating, and undergoing so horrible a transformation that his eyes were fixed in appalling fascination upon it,—while, at the same time, he became sensible that the soft and supple form which he held in his arms was undergoing a rapid and signal change likewise,—till the whole being, lately so charming, so tender, and so loving, was changed into a hideous serpent. A terrible cry escaped him—and he awoke!

The rays of the gorgeous sun were streaming in at the window, as Charles Hatfield started from his slumber; and, to his surprise, he found his father standing by the side of the bed.

"You have been labouring under the influence of an unpleasant dream, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, taking his son's hand.

"Yes—'twas indeed a hideous dream!" exclaimed the young man, shuddering at the idea which still pursued him.

"And was that dream a reflex of any thoughts which occupy you when awake?" asked his father, in a kind and anxious tone.

Charles surveyed his parent with astonishment, and then became absolutely crimson in the face;—for this early and unusual visit seemed to imply that its object was in some way connected with matters that had lately been occupying, as the reader knows, no inconsiderable share of the young man's reflections—we mean, the family secrets into which he had so strangely penetrated.

"Yes, Charles," continued Mr. Hatfield; "I feared that you had something upon your mind; and your manner now confirms that

apprehension. For the last week you have not been the same gay, happy, lively being you so lately were;—and, although you have endeavoured to conceal your sorrow from observation, yet it has not escaped the eyes of your affectionate mother and myself. Tell me, Charles—tell me candidly, I implore you—is it in consequence of the discovery that we are your parents, and not mere relatives——"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed the young man, "that discovery made me happy, I solemnly assure you!"

"Then wherefore are you melancholy and thoughtful at times?" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of deep interest.

"Melancholy and thoughtful!" repeated Charles, mechanically.

"Yes, my dear son: and even at this moment——"

"Even at this moment," still repeated Charles, whose imagination was wandering to Suffolk Street, the influence of his dream having been to fill his soul with a more profound terror than he had ever before experienced from the worst of sleep's delusions.

"Yes—even at this moment you are abstracted—your ideas are unsettled—and there is a wildness in your looks which terrifies me!" cried Mr. Hatfield, speaking with strong emphasis and in an earnest manner. "Charles! again I implore you to tell me the cause of this change which has so lately come over you!"

"Dear father, why will you press me on the subject?" cried the young man, now brought to himself, yet knowing not how to reply. "Oh! believe me—believe me, it will be better for us both that you do not persist in questioning me!"

"On the contrary, Charles," returned Mr. Hatfield, speaking more seriously and firmly than before, "it will be far more satisfactory to me—yes, and to your mother also—to be made the depositors of your secret cares. You have assured me that you are not unhappy on account of the discovery made on the day when the Prince of Montoni was received at Court; and therefore I must conjecture the existence of some other cause of grief. Charles, my dear boy," added his father, gazing steadfastly upon him, "you love Lady Frances—and you are fearful of avowing your passion?"

The young man had expected that his father was about to speak on some of those family matters into the mysterious depths of which he had penetrated; and, therefore, when Mr. Hatfield addressed to him that species of interrogative accusation, Charles experienced a relief which betrayed itself as well in the brightening up of his countenance as in the surprise wherewith he regarded his parent.

"Ah! now I have penetrated your secret!" cried the latter: then, wringing his son's hand, he said impressively, "Fear nothing—but hope every thing, Charles;—and if you have reason to believe that Lady Frances reciprocates your attachment, hesitate not to offer her your hand."

With these words, Mr. Hatfield hurried from the room, leaving his son amazed and bewildered at the turn which the scene had so unexpectedly taken.

"Yes," exclaimed the young man aloud, after a long pause, during which he reflected profoundly alike on his fearful dream and his father's suggestion; "I will banish Perdita from my memory—for that vision was a providential warning! The most deadly serpents often wear the most beauteous skins;—and Perdita—the syren Perdita—has secret ends of her own to serve in thus throwing her silken chains round me. There is mischief in her fascination:—the honey of her lips will turn to gall and bitterness in the mouth of him who presses them! And Frances—my charming cousin Frances, who knows not that she is thus related to me,—sweet Lady Frances is endowed with every quality calculated to ensure my happiness. Yes—I will adopt my father's counsel: I will secure the hand of this amiable girl! Then, although I must sooner or later compel my sire to wrest the earldom from his younger brother, the blow will fall the less severely on the latter, inasmuch as his daughter will become a Viscountess in espousing me, and a Countess at my father's death!"

Thus reasoned Charles Hatfield, as he performed the duties of the toilette; and when he descended to the breakfast-parlour, there was so fine a glow of animation on his countenance, and so much happiness in his bright eyes, that his parents were rejoiced to mark the change. They did not, however, make any audible observation on the subject; but the rapid and significant glances which they dealt at each other, expressed the delight that filled their souls.

Lady Frances looked more than usually beautiful and interesting on this occasion: at least so thought Charles Hatfield, as, seating himself by her side, he ministered to her the attentions of the breakfast table.

The conversation turned upon an important event which was to take place in the evening—the Prince of Montoni having accepted the Earl of Ellingham's invitation to a banquet at the lordly mansion in Pall Mall. It was resolved, in order to render befitting honour to the illustrious guest, that the entertainment should be of the most sumptuous description; and no expense was to be spared on the occasion. A select number of the noble Earl's acquaintances were invited; and these were chosen not on account of great names and sounding titles,—but on the score of personal merit and consideration.

Soon after breakfast Charles Hatfield and Lady Frances found themselves alone together in the apartment; and the young maiden, approaching her companion, said in her artless, fascinating manner, "I am delighted to see that you have recovered your natural gaiety. Do you know, Mr. Charles, that you have latterly been most desperately moody and reserved?"

"Not towards you, I hope, dear Fanny," he replied. "Not for worlds," he added emphatically, "would I give you cause to think ill of

me."

"As for thinking ill of you, Charles," she observed, "*that* would be impossible! But may I not seek to know the reasons of your late unhappiness?"

"Let us not discourse upon the past, Fanny," said the young man, earnestly. "I am happy now, at all events—happier, too, than ever, because I perceive that my welfare is not altogether indifferent to you."

"Far from it," observed Lady Frances, with the ingenuous emphasis of her extreme artlessness. "Do we not live beneath the same roof?—are we not friends?—are not our parents very dear friends to each other?—and is it not therefore natural that I should feel interested in all that concerns your happiness?"

"Adorable creature!" exclaimed Charles, as he drew a rapid contrast between the charming *naiveté* of the beautiful Lady Frances and the forward, bold manner of the voluptuously lovely Perdita: then, taking his cousin's hand, and gazing tenderly upon her innocent countenance, he said, "Fanny, were our parents to sanction our marriage, would you consent to be mine?"

Lady Frances withdrew her hand hastily; and, blushing deeply, she gazed for a few seconds in the most unfeigned surprise on her companion.

"You are not offended with me?" asked Charles. "I had hoped—I had flattered myself——"

"No—I am not offended with you," returned Fanny, now casting down her eyes and blushing even more deeply than before: "but I fear—I tremble lest I am doing wrong thus to listen to you——"

"A virtuous affection is no crime," said the young man, hastily. "And now, my dearest Frances, if you feel that you *can* love me, I will at once declare to your noble parents the attachment—the deep attachment which I experience towards you."

"Whatever my father and mother counsel, will become a law for me," answered Lady Frances, in a low and tremulous tone, which convinced the suitor that he was not indifferent to her.

Charles pressed her hand to his lips, and hurried from the room with the intention of immediately seeking the Earl of Ellingham; but in the passage he encountered a domestic who gave him a note which had just been left by a messenger. The address was in an elegant female hand; and the word "Private" was written in the corner. Charles hastened to his own apartment, and read the note, the contents of which ran as follow:——

> "My dearest Friend,—Before you see my mother again, I must have a few words with you in private. She is compelled to visit her solicitor at mid-day, and will be absent for at least two hours. I shall expect you as soon after twelve as possible.
>
> "PERDITA FITZHARDINGE."

"No—I will not accept the invitation!" exclaimed the young man, aloud: then, gazing again at the note, he murmured, "What a charming hand-writing—and how beautiful does her mystic and romantic name appear upon paper! *Perdita!*—'tis a name which possesses an irresistible attraction! But—oh! that dream! And yet it was but a dream—and a very silly dream, the more I contemplate it. Heavenly warnings are not sent by such means; and Lady Frances might as well have been the subject of the vision as Perdita. What can she require with me? She must have a few words with me in private before I see her mother again. Then her mother expects and intends to have an interview with me—and she must therefore have certain communications to make, after all. This does not appear like delusion nor trickery:—no—the old lady really has matters of import to discuss with me;—and I should be wrong—I should perhaps be criminally neglectful of my own interests, were I not to hear whatever she may have to state. And, Perdita—it would be at least rude and ungentlemanly on my part not to attend to this missive, the nature of which appears to be urgent. Yes—I will call on Perdita: 'tis already verging close upon mid-day—and there is no time to be lost. But—after all that has passed between dear Frances and myself this morning—I shall be as distant and reserved as politeness will admit: I shall arm myself against the fascinations of the syren;—and if she offer to release me from the pledge of friendship so inconsiderately given, I shall not fail to accept with joy the proposed emancipation."

But, before he repaired to Suffolk Street, did he not seek his father to communicate to him the important fact that he had duly followed his counsel and solicited the hand of Lady Frances?—or did he not obtain an interview with the Earl and acquaint him with the nature of the conversation which had taken place between himself and that nobleman's daughter?

Alas! no:—for it was close upon twelve when the young man received Perdita's note;—and he thought that it did not precisely signify for an hour or two when he might make those statements; whereas it was necessary to see the syren without delay.

Thus reasoned Charles Hatfield to himself;—and the reader will agree with us in deciding that the necessity which constituted the excuse for his conduct, was not quite so urgent as he chose to fancy it.

Moreover,—since Charles Hatfield resolved to appear as reserved and formal as he well might be, towards Perdita,—it was assuredly strange that he should devote more than usual attention to his toilette, arranging his hair in the most becoming style, and surveying with inward satisfaction his very handsome countenance in the mirror.

The clock struck twelve as he quitted the house;—and it was impossible to conceal from himself the fact that he was rejoiced at having an excuse to call upon Perdita.

Then, as he proceeded with some degree of rapidity towards Suffolk Street, he could not possibly prevent his imagination from indulging in exciting conjectures how Perdita would be dressed—how she would look by day-light—and how she would receive him when she observed his studied coolness and his constraint of manner.

“Poor girl!” he murmured to himself: “if she really hoped to find a sincere friend in me, how will she bear the disappointment which is in store for her? It grieves me—Oh! it grieves me to be compelled to inflict a wound upon her gentle heart; but duty—yes, my duty towards Lady Frances leaves me no alternative.”

With a beating heart he knocked at the door;—and in less than a minute he was conducted to the drawing-room, where Perdita was waiting to receive him.

The young lady was dressed in an elegant morning wrapper; and, the weather being intensely hot, the ribbands which should have fastened it round her neck, were left untied, so that it remained open at the bosom. Her hair was arranged in bands, and she wore a cap of the slightest material, but the snowy whiteness of which enhanced the glossy richness of those luxuriant masses that crowned her fine forehead. Her large grey eyes, with their dark pupils, were as bright and lustrous as on the preceding evening; and the noon-day sun detracted not from the exquisite whiteness of the neck and shoulders, and the healthy hues of the complexion of the countenance, which had shone to such advantage by candle-light.

No: Perdita was as ravishingly beautiful on this occasion, as on the former;—and there was a freshness—yes, even an appearance of virgin freshness, about her, matured and developed as her charms were, which counteracted the impression that her wanton looks and the forwardness of her manner might otherwise have created in respect to her virtue. Her depravity in Australia had not impaired her loveliness, nor marred the youthfulness of her beauty: her face—her figure afforded not an intimation that she had been steeped in licentious enjoyments from the age of thirteen until she embarked on board the ship that wafted her to England.

The moment Charles Hatfield entered the room, he was struck by the enchanting loveliness of Perdita as much as he had been on the preceding evening—indeed, as completely as if this were the first time that he had ever seen her. For an instant he stopped short as if he dared not proceed farther within the sphere of that Circean influence which a warning voice within his soul seemed to declare was alluring him on to total destruction but, fascinated as is the tremulous bird by the eye of the serpent, he advanced towards the beautiful creature who rose from the sofa to receive him.

Then as he felt her warm hand in his,—as her countenance beamed upon him in all the glory of its loveliness,—as her soft, musical, and delicious voice flowed upon his ear, borne on a breath fragrant as the perfume of flowers, and issuing from lips that seemed to have robbed the rose of its tint,—he felt his stern resolves thawing within him, and experienced the impossibility of manifesting coolness towards a creature of such exquisite charms and such rare fascinations.

“I thank you, my dear friend, for this punctuality,” she said, gently drawing him to a seat by her side on the sofa, when she resumed her place. “Have you thought of all that passed between us last evening?—and have you reflected that we played the part of silly children in pledging eternal friendship, total strangers as we were to each other?—or did you regard the proceeding as a natural and solemn compact, to be inviolably maintained?”

“Wherefore these questions, Perdita?” enquired Charles, dazzled by the impassioned looks that were fixed upon him. “Have you yourself repented——”

“I never repent of any thing that I may do,” answered Perdita, hastily. “I do nothing without being convinced beforehand that I am acting judiciously and properly; and when I most appear to be the child of impulse, I am on those occasions the most considerate, cautious, and reflective. But this may not be the case with you: and, therefore, it was incumbent upon me to ascertain your feeling in respect——”

“In respect to that friendship which I have sworn!” exclaimed Charles, no longer master of himself. “Not for world’s would I recall the pledge I gave——”

“Then we are friends—friends in the manner I had hoped we should be,” said the young woman. “But it was necessary that I should be assured of this before I spoke to you on a subject which otherwise would have been indifferent to you,” she added, bending on her companion a look that seemed to invite him to kiss the red, pouting lips which, now parting with a delicious smile, revealed her somewhat large, but pearly, even, and admirably shaped teeth.

“Proceed, my dearest—dearest friend,” exclaimed Charles, no longer thinking of Lady Frances, but totally absorbed in the fascination which attracted him towards the bewitching Perdita.

“You call me your friend—and it is as a friend that I wish to consult you, Charles,” said the young woman, heaving a deep sigh. “You must know that, singular being that I may appear to you, and even unmaidenly hasty in forming so sincere a friendship——”

“No—no: you obeyed the dictates of a generous heart—a heart as ingenuous and innocent as it is fervid and warm,” cried Charles,

seizing one of her hands and pressing it in both his own.

“Ah! now you comprehend my sentiments just as I would have explained them had I been able to find language for the purpose!” she said, abandoning her hand to him as if unwittingly. “But, as I was about to observe, I am all candour and frankness:—that is my deposition;—and when you left me last evening, I immediately hastened to my mother, who was seized with a sudden indisposition which prevented her from joining us in this room; and to her I revealed at once and unhesitatingly every word of the conversation that had occurred between you and me.”

“And she doubtless reproached you for opening your heart so freely to one who was a complete stranger to you?” said Charles, now fearful lest Mrs. Fitzhardinge should forbid his visits to Perdita in future.

“She reproached me indeed—but mildly and blandly,” answered the deceitful young woman, assuming a plaintive tone; “and yet not so mildly as was her wont on former occasions—for it appears that she has formed certain views in regard to me—views of marriage ——”

“Marriage, Perdita!” repeated Charles Hatfield, bitterly.

“Yes,” she responded, her voice growing more mournful still. “A man of immense wealth—and with a noble title, but whose name I do not even yet know, and whom I have never seen——”

“Oh! this is infamous, thus to dispose of you to a person whom perhaps you may never be able to love!” cried Charles, with strange emphasis and excitement of manner.

“Love! I shall hate and abhor him, even though he be handsome and amiable beyond all conception,” exclaimed Perdita. “I shall detest him for the mere fact that I am compelled to espouse him.”

“But will you yield with docility to an arrangement which seems to me—pardon the freedom with which I speak of your mother—to be indelicate and unjust?” demanded the young man.

“Alas! I fear that I have no alternative save to yield with as good a grace as I can assume,” answered Perdita, tears now starting to her eyes, and trembling on her long dark lashes; “for the nobleman whom my mother would thus force me to wed, is her opponent in the law-suit—and he has discovered a means of establishing his claims beyond all possibility of farther dispute.”

“Oh! I understand the dreadful selfishness that is now at work in respect to you!” cried Charles. “He will allow your mother to enjoy the fortune, provided you are immolated—sacrificed——”

“Yes: those are the terms;—and now you may easily comprehend how I shrink from such a fate!” exclaimed the young woman, sobbing profoundly.

“But this nobleman—who is he? what is his name?” demanded Hatfield, powerfully excited.

“I know so little of my mother’s private affairs, that I am unable to answer the questions,” said Perdita. “To speak candidly, she refused even to mention the name or the age of this unknown suitor for my hand: and therefore I apprehend the worst. Indeed, from an observation which she inadvertently dropped, I am convinced that he is old—very old——”

“And you who are so young—and so beautiful!” cried Charles Hatfield, gazing upon her with admiration—nay, with adoration and enthusiastic worship. “It were an infamy—a crime—a diabolical crime, thus to sacrifice you!”

“Yet such is my mother’s intention,” murmured Perdita; “and therefore was it that she reproached me for vowing a permanent friendship with you.”

“Then Mrs. Fitzhardinge will immolate you on the altar of selfishness—she will sell you for gold,—sell you, perhaps, to an old man who may be hideous, and who is certain to be loathsome to you?” exclaimed Charles, speaking with all the rapidity of wild excitement.

“Yes:—and it was not until last night that I was aware of the frightful arrangement which my mother had thus made—the dreadful compact to which she had assented. It seems that this nobleman had heard of me—and the description given of my appearance pleased him; so that when he yesterday discovered the existence of some paper which at once annihilated all my mother’s previously conceived hopes of gaining the law-suit, he promised his hateful conditions.”

“And Mrs. Fitzhardinge has now sought her attorney——”

“For the purpose of declaring that I assent to this most unnatural union!” added Perdita, with the well-feigned emphasis of violent sorrow.

“But was it possible that you could hold out to your mother even the faintest prospect of thus sacrificing all your happiness suddenly and in a moment?” demanded Charles.

“When I beheld my mother weep—heard her implore and beseech—and was made aware of the ruin that threatened her unless I agreed to the proposals of this unknown suitor, I wept also—and, my tears choking me, my silence was taken for assent. Then my mother departed to visit her solicitor: and in my despair I despatched a note to you, praying you to call on me during her absence.”

“My God! what counsel—what advice can I give you?” exclaimed Charles, bewildered by the tale which was told so plausibly that not a doubt of its truth existed in his mind. “I cannot see you sacrificed thus:—yet how can I save you? Oh! were I possessed of a fortune, I would bestow it upon your mother that she might leave you free and unshackled to obey only the dictates of your own will—follow your own inclinations—and bestow your hand where you could likewise grant your affections!”

“Ah! my generous friend,” murmured Perdita, advancing her countenance towards his own as if unwittingly and in the excitement of her feelings: “how deeply grateful to you am I for these assurances! I knew that I should receive your sympathy—if not your aid,—your commiseration—if not your assistance.”

“How can I assist you, dearest Perdita?” exclaimed Charles, pressing her hand violently in his own. “The liberality of my pa——my uncle and aunt, I mean—have enabled me to accumulate some seven or eight hundred pounds—for my allowance is far more liberal than my expenditure: and that amount is at your mother’s service. But it is so small—so contemptibly small in comparison with the fortune which she doubtless hopes to acquire——”

“Nevertheless, it may procure a delay, by rescuing my mother from the immediate embarrassments in which this sudden change in the aspect of her affairs has plunged her,” said Perdita: “for, to speak candidly to you, her solicitor has been advancing her a regular income during the time that the suit has lasted;—and now, since all hope of gaining it is destroyed, no farther supplies can be expected from that quarter.”

“Yes—it may procure a delay,” said Charles, in a musing tone; “and with leisure to reflect calmly—deliberately—much may be done! O Perdita—never, never could I see you thus sacrificed to a man whom you would abhor!”

“Generous friend—’twas heaven who sent you to me!” exclaimed the young woman, drooping her head upon his breast, and weeping, —weeping tears of gratitude, as he fondly believed.

He threw his arms around her—he pressed her to his heart—he clasped her with such fervour that the embrace was passionately violent —he strained her as it were to the seat of his very soul: then, hastily loosening his hold, he raised her face—her warm, blushing face—and on her lips he imprinted a thousand rapturous kisses,—those lips that were literally glued to his own. He looked into her eyes, and read love, desire, and passion in those orbs, now melting with languor and wantonness;—for Perdita herself had almost entirely lost all power of self-controul, and clung to him as if inviting the full extreme of voluptuous enjoyment. He felt her bosom heaving against his chest; and, maddened with excitement, his daring hand invaded the treasures of those swelling, palpitating globes, so snowy in their whiteness—so warm with their licentious fires.

But at that instant Perdita recovered her presence of mind: and it flashed to her memory that it was no part of her scheme to surrender herself completely up to him until she had ensnared his affections so fully—so inextricably, that all subsequent escape or estrangement, through repentance and remorse, should be impossible.

Accordingly—wresting herself from his embrace, and retreating to the farther end of the sofa, she hastily arranged her cap and dishevelled hair—drew the wrapper over her breast—and, turning upon him eyes that still seemed to swim in liquid languor, said in a half-reproachful manner, “Oh! Charles—is this friendship? would you ruin me?”

“Sweetest—dearest creature,” exclaimed the young man, “did I not tell you yester-night that *friendship* was a sentiment dangerous for us to feel, and a word perilous for our tongues to utter? O Perdita—it is not friendship that I feel for you: ’tis love—ardent, sincere, and devoted love! And ’twas not friendship at first sight that I experienced for you the moment I last evening set foot in this room: but ’twas love—love, my Perdita—such love as never before did man entertain for woman!”

“And it was because I love you, Charles,” murmured Perdita, in her softest, tenderest tones, “that I loathe and abhor the idea of that union which my mother has so inconsiderately—so rashly—so cruelly planned for me!”

“You love me, Perdita!” ejaculated the young man, wild with joy: “oh! thanks—ten thousand thanks for that assurance, my own sweet Perdita! I was happy in the possession of your friendship: but I am now mad—demented in the confidence of owning your love! For the love of such a being as yourself is something that would make a paradise of the blackest and most barren desert on the face of the earth! Is it possible, then, that I possess your love, Perdita—dearest Perdita? Oh! tell me so once more: it is so delicious to hear such an avowal from your lips!”

“Yes, Charles—I love you—I do indeed love you,” replied the young woman, throwing as much softness into her melting tones, as much witchery into her manner, and as much voluptuous languor into her glances as she possibly could.

It was like a scene of enchantment for that young man of wild and fervid impulses; and he was completely—wholly absorbed in its magic interest,—an interest so enthralling, so captivating that he felt as if he had been suddenly wafted into a new world of delights unknown in this sublunary sphere. Lady Frances was forgotten—his parents, his ambitious aims, and even his admiration of the Prince of Montoni,—all, all were forgotten in the delirium of passion which had seized upon him.

“You love me—you do indeed love me!” he exclaimed; and, approaching the object of his worship, he again wound his arms around her—again drank in the sweetness of her moist red lips.

“Charles—Charles,” she murmured; “you are gloriously handsome—and I adore you!”

But as she thus spoke, she once more disengaged herself from his maddened embrace—for she felt that her own passions, ever violent, were raging to a degree that became almost uncontroullable.

“And now listen to me—patiently and tranquilly if you can; and I will lay down the conditions on which our complete happiness may be based,—conditions which have for their elements that generous confidence, that mutual reliance, and that candour and frankness which alone constitute pure affection.”

“Proceed, dearest Perdita,” said Hatfield: “I am all attention—and your voice is sweeter in my ears than the most delicious music.”

Perdita once more arranged her cap and the massive bands of her glossy hair: then, turning with a simulation of charming artlessness towards her companion, she addressed him in the following manner.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE DANGEROUS SOPHISTRY OF A LOVELY WOMAN.

“You are now about to discover a new phasis in my character, dear Charles; and perhaps you will look upon my notions and opinions as unmaidenly and bold—if not positively immoral. But remember that I am not like the generality of my sex; and that my sentiments, though audacious as innovations, are nevertheless as sincerely believed in as they are tenaciously clung to by me.”

“It is because you are so different from other women, not only in the loveliness of your person, but also in the tone and strength of your mind,” said Charles, “that I am thus enamoured of you—yes, and proud too of possessing your affection in return.”

“But I am about to preach a doctrine which you may think repugnant to the befitting delicacy of my sex,” returned Perdita: “for it is of the uselessness of the marriage rites that I have now to discourse.”

“Proceed, dearest,” said Charles; “and I will frankly give you my opinion on your views in this respect.”

“Ah! now you encourage me to open my heart to you, my dear friend,” exclaimed Perdita; “and you do not affect the sanctimonious hypocrite, who frowns even before he has heard the argument broached. Thus stands our present position in my estimation:—We love each other——”

“Devotedly—earnestly,” added Charles, with strong emphasis, the image of Lady Frances being as completely banished from his mind as if such a person as that charming creature did not exist in the world.

“Yes—we love each other devotedly and earnestly,” continued Perdita; “and the extent as well as the ardour of our passion is a something which should remain a solemn and sacred mystery to the vulgar and curious observer. ’Tis a secret which we should cherish between ourselves,—a secret whose charm is spoilt, or at all events marred, by being revealed to others who are indifferent to us. This is one reason wherefore I consider the pompous ceremony of marriage to be actually detrimental to the fervid, ardent, and warm attachment which seeks to hide itself in the bosoms of the fond couple who entertain it. Then, again, I should not be happy were I to have the conviction that I was so enchained to you by legal trammels that you could not cast me off did I become displeasing to you;—for I should never know whether you still clung to me through the endurance of real affection, or because an indissoluble bond forged by human legislation united us. No:—I would rather that our love rested upon its own basis alone—existing by its own vitality, and through no borrowed and artificial auxiliary,—that it should be a mutual confidence—a mutual reliance,—free and independent in one sense, and compulsory in none. If on these terms you will take thy Perdita to thine arms, Charles—then indeed shall I gladly become thine:—but if our union must be characterised by solemn ceremonies and cold, inanimate rites—then, heartbreaking as the alternative will be, I can never—never be more to thee than a sincere and faithful friend.”

“Dearest Perdita,” exclaimed Charles, “I receive all these confessions of your peculiar sentiments as new proofs of your love for me! For by the very nature of the conditions which you stipulate, you convince me of the trust which you repose in my fidelity and honour.”

“Yes—because in defiance of the opinion of the world, I surrender myself up to you, to be a wife in every thing save in respect to that ceremony which is the first object of a virtuous woman’s thoughts,” murmured Perdita. “And now, dear Charles, do you entertain a mean opinion of my principles, because I dare to chalk out a path of happiness according to my own fancy?”

“No—no. Perdita!” cried the young man, pressing to his lips the hand which was extended to him with such an appearance of ingenuousness that it quite enchanted him. “But how is it possible that you—so young—should have pondered so seriously on the subject of love and of marriage? For you have assured me that you never loved till now——”

“Though nineteen summers have not yet passed over my head,” interrupted Perdita, “my mind has travelled much in the realms of thought and meditation;—and though, as I will candidly confess to you, I have read but little, yet have I pondered much.”

“And there is about you a mystery as charming and as interesting as your loveliness is indescribably great,” said Charles: “and you know, angel that you are, how I adore you!”

“Then if we plight our faith to each other to-day, as solemnly and as emphatically as yester-night we vowed an eternal friendship, shall you ever repent the step you will have taken?” asked Perdita, gazing affectionately on her handsome companion, whose looks seemed to devour her.

“Repent!—what,repent the step that makes you mine?” he exclaimed. “No—never, never!”

“And you take me as your wife on the conditions I have named—that I am to be a wife, and no wife?” said Perdita, her musical voice sounding soft as a silver bell and tremulously clear,—ravishment in her tone, love in her eyes, and warmth in the tender pressure of the hand which the young man had grasped.

“Yes—I take you as my wife on those conditions,” he returned, pressing her to his bosom. “But there are still many things to be considered, my Perdita,” he observed, after a short pause, during which they exchanged the most rapturous kisses. “In the first place, your mother——”

“I shall boldly acquaint her with what I have done,” said Perdita; “and she will not seal my unhappiness by an opposition—which, after all, would be vain and useless,” added the syren.

“And will not Mrs. Fitzhardinge recoil in horror from the idea that her daughter should have formed this connexion, without bearing the legal name of a wife?” demanded Charles, gazing earnestly on her beautiful countenance.

“Leave me to make my mother a convert to my own principles respecting marriage,” was the reply. “And now, with regard to yourself, my Charles,—you need be under no restraint. Continue to dwell with your family—and visit me as frequently as you can. In fact, I shall of course expect you to pass as much of your time as possible with me,—but never when your relatives and friends require your presence.”

“Oh! on these terms we shall indeed be supremely happy!” cried Charles. “And now you are my wife?”

“Yes—and you are my husband,” blushingly answered the syren, as she drooped her head upon his breast.

He wound his arms around her; and then their lips met in warm and luscious kisses. Charles grew bolder: his hand wandered to Perdita’s glowing bosom,—and Perdita no longer restrained him—no longer shrank back. Still, however, she did not choose to surrender herself immediately: a little more tantalization would only rivet his enthusiastic attachment and confirm the madness of his devouring passion;—and, accordingly—at the moment when, wild with desire, he was about to claim the privilege of a husband, she started from his arms, exclaiming, “Hush! my mother has returned—I hear her approaching!”

They separated—retreating to the ends of the sofa; and Perdita arranged her disordered hair once more.

No one however came: it was a false alarm,—as Perdita indeed well knew it to be.

“You must leave me now, Charles,” she said; “for my mother cannot be long ere she comes back. To-morrow, at mid-day, I shall be again alone—for I am aware that she will have to pay another visit to her attorney. Come, then, at that hour—and I will tell you all that has passed between my parent and myself.”

“Not an instant later than twelve to-morrow shall I be!” exclaimed Charles. “And now,—forgive me for returning for a moment to worldly affairs—quitting the paradise of happiness to which you have raised me, my Perdita,—but in respect to the small sum——”

“Oh! I had forgotten all our arrangements with regard to that matter,” said Perdita: “and, indeed—I detest and abominate money-affairs. But now—as your wife, dearest Charles—I may mention my wishes on that head without a blush. I should therefore be pleased if you could forward the amount to me in the course of the afternoon; and I will use it to the best possible advantage with my mother.”

“In less than an hour it shall be here in an envelope, sealed, and addressed to yourself,” said Charles. “Farewell, my sweet Perdita—farewell, until to-morrow!”

They embraced each other fervently; and Charles Hatfield took his departure.

Before he returned home, he walked into the park to collect his scattered thoughts and acquire some degree of composure. His perfidy—his infamous treachery towards Lady Frances now burst upon him in all its hideousness. That very morning had he demanded his cousin’s hand in marriage;—and within an hour afterwards he had solemnly contracted a strange and scarcely comprehensible union with Perdita Fitzhardinge.

His conduct seemed vile in the extreme: his heart, smote him painfully.

Yet was he so completely infatuated with Perdita, that he could not calmly contemplate the idea of breaking with her for ever. He was like a gambler who loathes himself for his ready yielding to a ruinous vice—but who nevertheless returns with renewed zest to the gaming-table.

For Charles thought of the happiness which he had so nearly attained on this eventful day, and which he felt assured must await him on the morrow:—he could not banish from his imagination the recollection of those charms which had plunged him into a perfect delirium of passion;—and the more he thought on the witching loveliness of Perdita, the less inclined was he to resign her.

Then came the almost inevitable results of the sophistry which the designing woman had called to her aid,—results which may be

explained the more completely by following the current of the young man's thoughts.

"After all, I am not indissolubly bound to Perdita—nor has she for ever linked her destiny with mine. No marriage ceremony has taken place between us—nor will any. I am not inextricably fastened to her apron-strings. And yet—and yet, is it honourable of me to make such calculations, the inferences to be drawn from which I am ashamed even to express to my own secret self? No—no: because no legal ties exist between us, I am the more imperiously bound to remain faithfully attached to her! Beautiful—enchanting—mysterious Perdita, how hast thou enthralled me! But—my God! am I not your willing slave?—do I not accept the yoke which thou hast thrown upon me?—would I release myself from those silken chains, even were I able? No—ten thousand times *no*, my adored—my worshipped Perdita! I care not whether thou dost exercise a supernatural enchantment over me: if thou art Satan in a female shape—or a serpent, as my dream appeared to give warning—I cannot cease to love thee,—no—never—never!"

But what of Lady Frances Ellingham? Oh! it was rash—it was indiscreet of him to solicit her hand;—but had he not acted in pursuance of the advice of his father?—and had he gone so far as to be unable to retreat?

Alas! Charles Hatfield, the sophistry of Perdita has rendered thee sophistical, until thou dost stand on the very threshold of—villainy!

Reckless art thou of the whisperings of conscience:—thou art infatuated with the fatal beauty of thy Perdita—and the hope, the burning hope of tasting in her arms the pleasures of paradise, renders thee studious only to subdue the remorse that whispers to thee the name of the outraged Lady Frances Ellingham!

Having wandered in the park for upwards of half an hour, Charles Hatfield bethought himself of the promise to send the amount of his savings to his beauteous Perdita; and, hastening home, he sought his chamber, which he reached unperceived by any one save the domestic who gave him admission. That he was thus unobserved, was a source of satisfaction,—inasmuch as he felt that his cheeks were flushed, and he feared lest his appearance might seem singular.

Opening his desk he took from a secret drawer the Bank-notes which constituted his savings; and enveloping them in a sheet of paper, he issued forth again to leave the parcel at the house in Suffolk Street. This being done, Charles returned to the park, where he roamed about until the hour arrived when it was necessary for him to return home in order to dress for dinner.

The reader must not forget that a splendid banquet was to take place that evening at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham,—a banquet given in honour of the Prince of Montoni, and at which his Royal Highness was to be present.

As the hour approached, Charles Hatfield felt his heart beat; and all his admiration of the illustrious hero revived;—so that his mind was labouring under no inconsiderable degree of excitement, as he thought of Perdita on the one hand—the Prince on the other—and also of Lady Frances Ellingham!

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

A THRONE SURROUNDED BY REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS.

The entertainment was of the most splendid description—worthy of the hospitality and taste of the noble host and hostess.

The Prince of Montoni was dressed in plain clothes: but on his breast gleamed the star denoting his rank; and on his left leg he wore the English Garter, his Royal Highness having been admitted on the previous day a member of that illustrious Order.

He was seated on the right of the Countess of Ellingham, Lady Frances being next to him, and Charles Hatfield occupying the place immediately following. In addition to these personages and the Earl of Ellingham, Mr. Hatfield, and Lady Georgiana there were Sir John Lascelles, Clarence Villiers and Adelais, and the select few who had been invited to the banquet on this occasion.

The Prince was naturally of a modest and unassuming disposition,—though endowed with ample dignity to maintain his lofty rank and honourably fill his high position,—yet bearing himself so condescendingly and affably, that every one felt completely at ease in his presence. Even Sir John Lascelles, who had grown somewhat morose, and difficult to please in his old age, was quite delighted with the youthful hero, whose conversation was characterised by so much sound sense and such a total absence of obtrusiveness.

Charles Hatfield was delighted at the thought of being once more in company with the object of his worship; and he seemed to hang upon every word that fell from the lips of the Prince of Montoni, as if he were listening to a demigod.

When the ladies had retired, the conversation turned upon political matters; and the Earl of Ellingham questioned the Prince relative to the condition of the Castelcicalans, whom report, newspapers, and books represented to be in the highest possible state of civilisation prosperity, and happiness.

“His Sovereign Highness, my revered father-in-law,” said the Prince, “has exerted himself in all possible ways to render his people contented and flourishing. The task may seem to be difficult for a monarch to undertake; but it really is not so. Honourable, upright, and liberal-minded Ministers are to be found in all countries, if the sovereign have but the discrimination to select them: indeed, a Chamber of Deputies, rightly constituted, will be sure to indicate the most efficient and trust-worthy men to whom the responsibilities of government may be safely confided. Every man in Castelcicala, having a habitation in which he may be said to be settled,—no matter whether it be a house of his own, or a mere lodging,—has the right of suffrage. The elections take place by ballot; and thus, considering that all save absolute mendicants have the power of voting, and seeing likewise the immense number of voters that there are, bribery is almost impossible. But to ensure, as much as mortal means can, the purity of election, any attempt at bribery or intimidation is counted a misdemeanor, and is punished by a fine, imprisonment, and the loss of civil rights for a period of seven years. Under these circumstances our elections take place in an orderly, quiet, and honest manner: the people conduct themselves with propriety, because they recognise the generous confidence reposed in them by their sovereign, and endeavour to render themselves worthy of it.”

“When your Royal Highness liberated Castelcicala and opened the way for the Grand Duke Alberto to the throne,” said Sir John Lascelles, who had listened attentively to the Prince’s observations, “the Castelcicalans were in a state of abject slavery. Were these boons of consummate freedom conferred upon them in a moment?—and if so, were the people prepared in any way to receive them?”

“A nation in slavery, Sir John,” answered the Prince, “is like a body in a condition of deep disease. Now, would you restore that body to perfect health all in a moment, if you had the power?—or would you only effect the restoration by slow and almost imperceptible degrees?”

“As a conscientious and an honest man, I should of course adopt the mode of instantaneous cure,” replied the physician.

“Then, Sir John, your question whether the Castelcicalans were prepared to receive the consummation of their freedom in a moment, is answered,” said the Prince, smiling. “Believe me, those statesmen who talk of the necessity of gradual reform are either weak and timid, or else in their hearts opposed to the interests of the people. Freedom is a nation’s right; and a right cannot be recognised too suddenly nor too frankly. Were your fortune in the grasp of a rapacious monarch, should you be contented by receiving it in small instalments according to his caprice and good pleasure? No: certainly not! You would demand and expect to receive the whole at once—and would consider yourself the victim of a monstrous tyranny, were your claims refused, or ridiculed, or set at naught. Yes, Sir John—the Castelcicalans obtained in a moment, as it were, their emancipation from tyranny and oppression. Immediately after His Sovereign Highness ascended the throne of that powerful State, he promulgated a decree, not merely conceding universal suffrage as a boon, but at once proclaiming it as the recognised right of the people. He did not say, ‘*I give it to you*:’ but he said, ‘*I do not for an instant attempt to withhold it*.’ The people saw that they were not treated as children, but as a free and enlightened nation; and they generously proffered gratitude, and testified their admiration and respect for their monarch. The Chambers assembled in due time—both Senators and Deputies being elected, and the principle of an hereditary Peerage being totally eschewed. Not even is the President of the Senate appointed by the Grand Duke: he is chosen by his compeers, as is the President of the Chamber of Deputies. The Grand Duke pledged himself to retain in power or to nominate only those Ministers whom the parliamentary majority pointed out; and, accordingly, the Cabinet which I had the honour to appoint during the period when I exercised the functions of Regent, immediately after the battle of Montoni, has remained in office ever since that time—because it is supported by the majority. There is an Opposition in both Chambers,—an Opposition consisting of the Aristocracy of the Old School, High Churchmen, and a few very wealthy landowners; and indeed an Opposition is necessary to all good government, because were measures passed by universal acclamation, there would be no sifting of all their details to the very bottom. The Progressist Ministry in Castelcicala is therefore rather thankful to the Opposition than otherwise;—but the popular voice is entirely in favour of the Ministerial party.”

“The Grand Duke is therefore almost a cypher in Castelcicala?” observed Sir John Lascelles.

“Not so,” returned the Prince, mildly but firmly. “There must be a chief magistrate—an executive—in every State; and he is that chief magistrate. Do you suppose that the task of discriminating and rewarding merit,—in patronising the arts and sciences,—in raising the humble but deserving individual,—and in performing all the various services to a country which the supreme ruler must ever have the opportunity of doing,—do you not suppose, Sir John Lascelles, that these are duties which render a good Prince any thing but a cypher? It is true that Castelcicala has a Throne: but it is surrounded by Republican Institutions;—and it matters very little whether Alberto be called President, Grand Duke, Emperor, or King. There is nothing in the name of the office: all that merits our attention is the extent of the privileges of that office.”

“But the sovereignty of Castelcicala is hereditary,” said Sir John Lascelles; “and yet your Royal Highness is an opponent to the hereditary peerage. If the principle be objectionable in the one case——”

“Pardon me for interrupting you, sir,” exclaimed the Prince: “but you are arguing on a false premise. The hereditary principle is abolished even in respect to the sovereignty. Alberto voluntarily abdicated this dynastic privilege; and one of his first acts was to place his diadem at the disposal of the Chambers. He told them that he was willing to obey the sovereign will of the people. The Chambers

confirmed him in his high office; and of their own accord they honoured me by naming me the heir-apparent to the throne. But the hereditary principle is virtually annihilated; because one generation cannot bind its successor; and the law which thus appointed me as the heir-apparent, may be repealed by a new Chamber. It is monstrous to suppose that the hereditary principle can be tolerated by a nation knowing its own power and appreciating its own interests: for that principle may give you a good sovereign to-day, and a tyrant, an idiot, or a degraded sensualist to-morrow."

"I admit the force of your Royal Highness's argument," said Lascelles; "and if I object, it is rather to seek information on these subjects than to question the excellence of the system of government introduced into Castelcicala. I would now deferentially seek to learn how far that system has benefitted the people of your Highness's adopted country?"

"In the first place, Sir John," returned the Prince, "the people have the elections entirely in their own hands, and return to Parliament representatives who do not buy their seats, but who are chosen on account of their merits. At least, this observation applies to the great majority of the Senators and Deputies. The elections take place every two years; so that ample opportunity is allowed the constituents of getting rid of persons who may chance to deceive them or prove incapable; while a sufficient space of time is afforded for giving the representatives a fair trial. The result of these arrangements is, that the majority of the representatives legislate for the interests of the mass—and not of the few. Good measures are the consequence; and the happiness of the people is promoted, while civilisation progresses rapidly, and the prosperity of the country increases daily. My lord," continued the Prince, turning towards the Earl of Ellingham, "history has recorded the memorable speech which your lordship delivered nineteen years ago in the House of Lords—the speech that first introduced your lordship to the world as the generous defender, vindicator, and champion of the People;—and it rejoices me unfeignedly to be enabled to inform you, my noble friend—for so you will permit me to call you—that the speech I allude to, and all your subsequent orations on the same subject have been studied, weighed, and debated upon in the Councils of the Sovereign of Castelcicala."

The Earl acknowledged the compliment in befitting terms; and the Prince of Montoni continued in the following manner:—

"To prove to your lordship that it is no idle flattery—of which, indeed, I am incapable—that I am now addressing to you, I will at once inform you that every suggestion which your lordship's first and grandest oration contained, has been carried out with complete success in Castelcicala. Anticipating the pleasure of being enabled this evening to give your lordship some account of the condition of the Castelcicalans, I had furnished myself with a copy of the memorable speech to which I have already several times alluded; and I will now explain in detail the results of your lordship's views, as exemplified in their application to the Grand Duchy."

The Prince produced a manuscript; and, spreading it before him, his Royal Highness continued in the ensuing terms,—addressing himself to a most attentive and delighted audience:—

"Your lordship stated that it was too frequently alleged that the industrious classes are thoughtless, improvident, ungrateful, and intellectually dull: but this assertion you emphatically denied; and you proceeded to reason thus:—'Despair, produced by their unhappy condition, naturally led to dissipation in many instances; but were the working man placed in a position so that his livelihood should be rendered less precarious than it now was—were his labour adequately remunerated—were he more fairly paid by the representatives of property—were a scale of wages established, having a fixed minimum, but no fixed maximum, the increased comfort thus ensured to him would naturally remove from his mind those cares which drove him to the public-house.'—Well, my lord and gentlemen," continued the Prince, "the suggestion has been adopted in Castelcicala: a fixed minimum for wages has been established—the lowest amount of payment ensuring a sum sufficient to enable the working man to maintain himself and his family in respectability. The results may almost be said to have been instantaneous. Crime diminished rapidly: statistical returns soon proved that intemperance experienced a remarkable decrease; and such was the falling off in the consumption of spirituous liquors, beer, and tobacco, that the Government found it necessary to grant a compensation to the licensed victuallers, publicans, and tobacconists who suffered by this change in the habits of the people. Even *employers* speedily began to recognise the advantage of the new state of things in the improved condition of their *employed*, the increase and the excellence of the labour they obtained, and the superiority of their agriculture or their manufactures. No *maximum* of wages has been fixed in Castelcicala; and when I left the country a month ago, those wages were higher than ever they were known to be before. The demand for labour has greatly increased; and, though the territory be densely populated, employment may be found for all. If a man be now a pauper or mendicant in Castelcicala, it must be either through physical infirmity, or through his unwillingness to work. Of this latter, however, we have comparatively few examples—emulation and patriotism acting powerfully in a country where so much happiness and such prosperity prevail. Now, with a slight alteration in your lordship's speech, one of the most remarkable passages in that speech reads thus when applied to Castelcicala:—'There is no fixed *maximum* of wages, because wages are always to be increased in proportion to the value of productive labour to employers: but there is a *minimum* established, to obviate the cruel and disastrous effects of those periods when labour exceeds the demand in the market. This is not considered unfair towards employers, because when the markets are brisk and trade is flourishing, they (the employers) reap the greatest benefit from that activity, and enrich themselves in a very short time; therefore, when markets are dull and trade is stagnant, they are still compelled to pay such wages as enable their employed to live comfortably. The profits gained during prosperous seasons not only enable employers to enjoy handsome incomes, but also to accumulate considerable savings; and as the best wages scarcely enable the employed to make any thing like an adequate provision for periods of distress, it is not deemed fair that the representatives of property should use the labour of the working classes just when it suits them, and discard it or only use it on a miserable recompense when it does not so well suit them. For the labour of the employed not only makes annual incomes for the employers, but also permanent fortunes; and the value of that labour is not calculated as lasting only just as long as it is available for the purpose of producing large profits. Labour is recognised in Castelcicala and positively stated to be the working man's *capital*, and bears constant interest, as well as money placed in the funds—that interest of course increasing in proportion to the briskness of markets; but never

depreciating below a standard value—much less being discarded as valueless altogether, in times of depression. A thousand pounds always obtains three per cent. interest, under any circumstances; and, at particular periods, is worth six or seven per cent. Labour is considered by the Castelcicalans in the same light. Stagnant markets diminish the profits of employers, but do not ruin them: if they do not obtain profit enough to live upon, they have the accumulations of good seasons to fall back upon. But how different used to be the case with the employed! To them stagnation of business was ruin—starvation—death;—the breaking up of their little homes—the sudden check of their children's education—the cause of demoralisation and degradation—and the necessity of applying to the parish! All these terrible evils have been completely annihilated by the system introduced into Castelcicala. The supply and demand of labour are necessarily unequal at many times, and in many districts; and the Government has therefore adopted measures to prevent those frightful fluctuations in wages which carry desolation into the homes of thousands of hard-working, industrious, and deserving families. In fact, a law has been passed to ensure the working-man against the casualty of being employed at a price below remuneration.'—Thus, my lord, you perceive that so far your views have been most successfully carried out: they are no longer a theory—I have seen them reduced to positive practice; and I pledge myself most solemnly and sacredly to the admirable working of this enlightened reformatory system."

"Would that I could see my own fellow-countrymen rendered thus happy—raised thus high in the social sphere—and thus tenderly cared for by their rulers!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, in the impassioned tone of the most earnest and heart-felt sincerity.

"The day must come," observed the Prince of Montoni, "when the English people will recognise all the grand truths which you enunciated nineteen years ago from your place in the House of Lords. And, if in England you have failed to convince the aristocracy and the landowners of the wickedness of the course they are pursuing,—are not your labours in some degree rewarded by the knowledge that your lordship's plans have been carried out to the very letter in the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala,—yes, and carried out too with such unequivocal success?"

"The information which your Royal Highness now imparts, gives me the most unfeigned pleasure," said the Earl. "I had indeed read and heard of the recent grand improvements which had taken place in that Italian State where there is a Throne surrounded by Republican Institutions: but I was not aware—indeed, the loftiest flights of vanity never could have suggested to me that my views and theories had in any way contributed to the prosperity of the MODEL STATE, as the Liberals in England now denominate Castelcicala."

"To convince you, my lord, how far your ideas have been applied to the elevation of Castelcicala to its present proud eminence," said the Prince, "I will again refer to a passage in your lordship's ever memorable speech, and point a few contrasts. 'In England the poor are not allowed to have a stake in the country:' I have shown you that the very reverse is the case in the Grand Duchy. 'In England there are no small properties: the land is in the possession of a few individuals comparatively; and thus the landed interest constitutes a tremendous monopoly, most unjust and oppressive to the industrious classes.'—In Castelcicala the law of primogeniture is annihilated; there no man can leave his estate solely to his eldest son; it must be divided amongst all his male children equally, a charge being fixed upon it for the support of his daughters. Thus the territory is rapidly undergoing a process of sub-division, which admits thousands to the enjoyment of a real stake in the country, and breaks down the tremendous monopoly of the landed interest. In Castelcicala, moreover, 'property is compelled to maintain labour as long as labour seeks for employment and occupation.' What now, then, is the condition of the Castelcicalan people? Being well treated, rendered free, and having every possible avenue opened to them for the attainment of real property, 'the working-classes are not driven by their cares and troubles to the excessive use of alcoholic liquors; they do not become demoralized by being compelled to migrate from place to place in search of employment—they are not forced to go upon the tramp, sleeping in hideous dens of vice, where numbers are forced to herd together without reference to age or sex: they are not unsettled in all their little arrangements to bring up their children creditably and with due reference to instruction;—they are not made discontented, anxious for any change no matter what, vindictive towards a society which renders them outcasts, and sullen or reckless in their general conduct.'—On the contrary, they feel settled in their condition; they know that the cottage which constitutes their home, is not held upon a precarious tenure: they never feel the sickening conviction that if they have bread and meat to-day, they may have only bread to-morrow, and no food at all the day after. The industrious classes in Castelcicala are no longer the mere slaves and tools of the wealthy classes: they are no longer retained in bondage—no longer kept in absolute serfdom by an oligarchy. I now pass to another subject," said the Prince: "and here again I refer to the speech of the Earl of Ellingham—applying to Castelcicala the observations which he used in reference to England. The Castelcicalan industrious classes, then, 'were ground down by indirect taxes, in which shape they actually contributed more to the revenue, in proportion to their means, than the rich. The only luxuries which the poor enjoyed, and which had become as it were necessaries—namely, tea, sugar, tobacco, beer, and spirits,—were the most productive sources of revenue. If aristocrats reproached the poor for dirty habits, as he well knew that it was their custom to do, he would ask them why soap was made an article subject to so heavy a tax? It was a contemptible fallacy to suppose that because the poor contributed little or nothing in the shape of direct taxation to the revenue, they were positively untaxed. The real fact was that the poor paid more in direct taxes than the rich did in both direct and in indirect ways, when the relative means of the two parties were taken into consideration.'—Such was the state of the industrious classes of Castelcicala until their voice was heard in the legislative assemblies; and all taxes upon the necessaries of life were speedily removed. Luxuries alone were left to bear the weight of taxation—the duties upon carriages, livery servants, armorial bearings, hunters, racers, hounds, and foreign wines being doubled."

The Prince of Montoni paused; and the Earl of Ellingham exchanged a rapid but significant glance with Mr. Hatfield—for they both remembered the time when, nineteen years previously, and when the latter lay on the bed in Old Death's house, they had conversed upon the best means of ameliorating the condition of the suffering millions.

His Royal Highness, finding that his auditors were most anxious that he should continue his explanations, and perceiving that Sir John Lascelles had become especially interested therein, resumed his subject in the following manner:—

“The inequality of the laws, and their incongruity, severity, and injustice towards the poor, long constituted a crying evil in Castelcicala. ‘Every advantage was given to the rich in the way of procuring bail in those cases where security for personal appearance was required; but no poor man could possibly give such security. He must go to prison, and there herd with felons of the blackest dye. Perhaps on trial his innocence would transpire; and then what recompense had he for his long incarceration—his home broken up during his absence—and his ruined family? It was possible—nay, it often happened that a man would lie thus in prison for four or five months previously to trial; and during that period it would be strange indeed if he escaped gaol contamination.’—In order to remedy these evils, vast facilities were afforded in respect to bail, the respectability and not the monied qualifications of the sureties being considered. Thus a working man may be bailed by any two of his associates who can obtain a good character from their employer: this of course applies to charges of a lighter kind, heavier responsibility being required where a serious accusation is involved. But even should an accused have to go to prison until his trial, he is not placed in a felons’ gaol: he is not, while still untried, subjected to that indignity and contamination. He is confined in a building having no connexion with a prison, and termed *A House of Detention*. Again, the judges have the power to order a compensation to every one whose innocence transpires on trial; and I must inform you that the trial may take place as soon after committal as the individual chooses. All depends on the speed which he makes in getting up his defence. When committed, he is asked if he have the means of retaining counsel: if he prove to the magistrate that he is poor, a barrister is immediately provided for him. The trial may come on the very next day; for there are local Courts throughout the Grand Duchy, and these courts have no recess—no holiday. Were I, on my return to Castelcicala, to inform a person not well acquainted with English laws and customs, that in this very same enlightened England a man may languish several months in a common gaol awaiting his trial, I should scarcely be believed.”

“And what is the nature of the punishments inflicted in the country of your Royal Highness’s adoption?” enquired Sir John Lascelles.

“I will tell you,” said the Prince. “In the first place we have abolished the punishment of death, as barbarian, un-Christian, and demoralizing. Murder is punished by imprisonment for life; and imprisonment, fine, confiscation of property in the cases of single men having no persons dependent on them, and the loss of civil rights—these are the penalties used amongst us. The individual who is condemned to imprisonment, is not on that account rendered an useless member of society. Every criminal gaol is an assemblage of workshops where all trades and manufactures are carried on; and each prisoner must work at his own trade, or be taught one. If he have a family out-of-doors, his earnings go to support that family: if he have none, they accumulate until the day of his release. Should he refuse to work, he is put upon bread and water; and this fare soon compels him to adopt habits of industry in order to obtain plentiful and wholesome meals. Castelcicalan prisons resemble vast factories rather than gaols; and so admirable—so salutary—so reformatory is the discipline maintained in them, that a prisoner on his emancipation finds no difficulty in obtaining work again. Employers consider, in such a case, that he has expiated an offence which should not be remembered to his prejudice; and he begins the world again with a new character. He has, as it were, passed through a criminal bankruptcy court, and obtained his certificate. Should he, however, experience any difficulty in finding employment, the local authorities are bound to supply him with work at the average rate of wages. The results of all these arrangements are striking. In the first place, a Castelcicalan prison is reformatory instead of being a sink of contaminating iniquity: secondly, a man on leaving a criminal gaol, is not forced back into the ways of vice. If he relapse, it must be through determined wickedness: but relapses are very, very rare in the Grand Duchy—for happily those individuals are few who remain in the ways of crime for crime’s sake! And now, my lord, you will perceive how far the framers of all these salutary enactments respecting prisoners and prison discipline, were indebted to the following passage in your speech:—‘The criminal laws of England are only calculated to produce widely spread demoralization—to propagate vice—to render crime terribly prolific. A man no matter what his offence may have been—should be deemed innocent and untainted again, when he has paid the penalty of his misdeeds; because to brand a human being eternally, is to fly in the face of the Almighty and assert that there should be no such thing as forgiveness, and that there is no such thing as repentance. But the nature of punishments in England is so to brand the individual, and so to dare the majesty of heaven. For the gaols are perfect nests of infamy—sinks of iniquity, imprisonment in which necessarily fastens an indelible stigma upon the individual. He either comes forth tainted; or else it is supposed that he must be so. Under these circumstances, he vainly endeavours to obtain employment; and, utterly failing in his attempt to earn an honest livelihood, he is compelled perforce to relapse into habits of crime and lawlessness. This fact accounts for an immense amount of the demoralization which the Bishops so much deplore, but the true causes of which they obstinately refuse to acknowledge. The criminal gaols are moral pest-houses, in which no cures are effected, but where the contagious malady becomes more virulent. Society should not immure offenders solely for the sake of punishment—but with a view to reformation of character.’”

“Castelcicala has the honour of having taken the initiative in all the great and glorious reforms which you suggested,” said Mr. Hatfield, turning with admiration towards the Earl of Effingham. “In England reform is much talked of; and when a small concession is made—for a *concession* it is in this country, to all intents and purposes—the people congratulate themselves as if their complete emancipation were at hand.”

“There is a passage in the Earl’s speech,” resumed the Prince, “which particularly struck the Grand Duke and the Ministers when they were deliberating upon the proposed reforms and ameliorations to be introduced to the Chambers. That passage ran thus:—‘When a poor man is oppressed by a rich one, it is vain and ludicrous to assert that the Courts of Law are open to him: law is a luxury in which only those who possess ample means can indulge. In a case where some grievous injury is sustained by a poor man—the seduction of his wife or daughter, for instance—redress or recompense is impossible, unless some attorney takes up the case on speculation; and this is a practice most demoralizing and pernicious. But if left entirely unassisted in that respect, the poor man can no more go to Westminster Hall than he can afford to dine at Long’s Hotel.’—Now in Castelcicala, a plan has been adopted which seems to meet the difficulties set forth in the Earl of Ellingham’s speech, and which does not involve the additional danger of rendering law so cheap as to encourage litigation in every paltry quarrel. To every Local Court are attached officers denominated the *Peoples’ Attorneys-General*;

and any poor man having a ground of complaint against a neighbour, addresses himself to one of those officers, who immediately examines into the affair, and if he see that the plaint be well founded, he prosecutes on behalf of the poor man. These officers are paid fixed salaries by the Government, and dare not take fees. They are selected with care, and are as incapable of bribery as the judges themselves;—and thus every means is taken to guarantee the poor man justice. Seduction and adultery are not made mere pecuniary matters in Castelcicala: they are punished by imprisonment;—and the penalty is very heavy in a case where a rich man debauches a poor man's daughter. I now pass on to the subject of Education; and your treatment of this subject, my dear Earl, in your speech, is not the least remarkable portion of the oration. You declared that 'it was positively shocking to think that such care should be taken to convert negroes to Christianity thousands of miles off, while the most deplorable ignorance prevailed at home. The Church enjoys revenues the amount of which actually bring the ministers of the gospel into discredit, as evidencing their avaricious and grasping disposition;—while the people remain as uneducated as if not a single shilling were devoted to spiritual pastors or lay instructors.' You boldly 'accused both houses of Parliament and the upper classes generally of being anxious to keep the masses in a state of ignorance. Where instruction is imparted gratuitously, it is entirely of a sectarian nature; just as if men required to study grammar, history, arithmetic, or astronomy on Church of England principles. The whole land is over-run by clergymen, who live upon the fat of it—Universities and public schools have been richly endowed for the purpose of propagating knowledge and encouraging learning,—and yet the people are lamentably ignorant. It is a wicked and impudent falsehood to declare that they are intellectually dull or averse to mental improvement. Common sense—that best of sense—is the special characteristic of the working classes; and those who can read are absolutely greedy in their anxiety to procure books, newspapers, and cheap publications for perusal. The fact is, that the mind of the industrious population is a rich soil, wherein all good seed will speedily take root, shoot up, and bring forth fruit to perfection: but the apprehensions or narrow prejudices of the upper classes—the oligarchy—will not permit the seed to be sown. Now as the soil must naturally produce something, even of its own accord, it too often gives birth to rank weeds; and this is made a matter of scorn, reviling, and reproach. But the real objects of that scorn—that reviling—and that reproach, are those who obstinately and wickedly neglect to put the good soil to the full test of fertilisation.'—All these observations," continued his Royal Highness, "were as applicable to Castelcicala a short time back as they have ever been and still are in England. But the reforms in the Church and in the Educational System were not the least important of those which characterised the new order of things. The two institutions were separated, and rendered entirely independent of each other, the Church being abandoned entirely to the voluntary principle, and the duty of educating the people being attached to the State, a Minister of Public Instruction being appointed. All sectarianism in education is now abolished: the system is entirely secular. The schoolmasters are appointed by the municipal corporations in the various localities, and their salaries are paid by the State. They are all laymen; for it is now a principle established in the Grand Duchy that parents shall train up their children in the creed which they may prefer. Thus Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all receive the blessings and benefits of the secular education; no tampering with religious opinions—no proselytism being permitted. The whole scheme is on the broadest basis of liberality; and the people are delighted with its working. As for the Church, it is entirely separated from the State; and the order of Bishops has been suppressed. The Catholic religion is still that of the great majority: but it is shorn of its pomp; and ecclesiastical ostentation and vain display have received a blow which they will never recover. The result is, that the Christian creed has been restored to something resembling its primitive simplicity, and such as its Divine Founder intended. I have now, my lord and gentlemen, given you a hasty, but I hope intelligible sketch of the condition of Castelcicala at the present day; and it only remains for me to sum up the reforms which have been accomplished, and which completely carry out the views and the theories so ably propounded by you, my dear Earl, nineteen years ago. In the first place, there is a Throne surrounded by Republican Institutions; and the hereditary principle as well as the law of primogeniture have been annihilated—never to be revived. Then, we have adopted 'a *minimum* rate of wages, to prevent the sudden fluctuation of such wages, and to compel property to give constant employment to labour:—indirect taxes upon the necessaries of life have been abolished;—the laws and their administration are equitably proportioned to the relative conditions of the rich and the poor;—a general system of national education has been established, and intrusted to laymen, totally distinct from religious instruction and sectarian tenets;—a complete reformation in the system of prison discipline has taken place; and establishments have been founded for the purpose of affording work to persons upon leaving criminal gaols, as a means of their obtaining an honest livelihood and retrieving their characters prior to seeking employment for themselves;—and the franchise has been so extended as to give every man who earns his own bread by the sweat of his brow, a stake and interest in the country's welfare.'"

The Prince ceased speaking; and those who had been his auditors expressed their sincerest thanks for the gratifying explanations he had given them with so much readiness and affability. Nor less were they charmed to find that a truly liberal and enlightened system of policy would stand such remarkable tests, and work so well. The question, whether the nations of Europe are civilised enough to receive Republican Institutions, was completely solved, to their satisfaction; and even Sir John Lascelles, who was somewhat tainted with the doctrines of the Old School, acknowledged himself to be a convert.

The party then joined the ladies in the drawing-room where political subjects gave way to discourse upon less serious topics;—and when the company took their departure, the inmates of the lordly mansion did not separate to retire to their respective chambers until they had exchanged many enthusiastic comments upon the character, disposition, talents, and bearing of his Royal Highness, the Prince of Montoni.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

A PAINFUL SCENE.

We deemed it advisable to break as little as possible, by comment or extraneous explanation, the thread of the Prince of Montoni's discourse upon the reform that had been introduced into the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala. We therefore refrained from giving any account of the manner in which Charles Hatfield listened, and received—or rather, greedily drank in—the narrative of his Royal Highness.

To say that the young man heard with enthusiasm, were to convey but a feeble idea of his emotions as he hung upon every sentence—every word, that fell from the lips of the Earl's illustrious guest:—when, however, we declare that even Perdita's image fell into the back-ground of his mind, during the whole time that the Prince was discoursing, our readers may form some notion of the nature of that impression which was made upon him.

On retiring to his chamber at about one o'clock in the morning, Charles Hatfield thought not of seeking his couch: but, throwing himself into an arm-chair, he gave way to the agitating—conflicting—turbulent ideas which had been excited in his soul.

"The modesty of the Prince," he thought, "concealed the fact that nearly all the reforms which he detailed, were suggested by himself. Oh! what would I give to be enabled to raise myself to eminence in the world! Twenty years of my life?—Ah! yes—willingly—willingly would I yield up a quarter of my probable existence to gain a name, honoured and renowned as that of the Prince of Montoni! And is not rank within my grasp? Can I not in a moment—by the waving of my hand, as it were—place upon my brow the coronet of a Viscount? May I not yet stand before the world as the heir-apparent to the Earldom of Ellingham? Yes;—and if once I find my way into the supreme legislative assembly, shall I not be enabled to advocate the cause of the People, and obtain a glorious renown? It were trifling with my own interests—it were wronging myself, to abstain from asserting my just rights! If my father choose to remain a simple commoner and allow his younger brother to wear the honours and hold the estates of a proud Earldom, am I to be bound by his will? No—no: and my father acts not a parent's part towards me in thus keeping me in obscurity. 'Tis clear that my sire's early life renders him desirous to shun all circumstances that may attract attention towards him: 'tis clear—my God! how dreadful to think of!—'tis clear, I say, that he feels the impropriety of a highwayman laying claim to a lordly title! Oh! the sins of the father are indeed visited on the child in my case! But I am innocent: my life has been spotless and pure—my character is untarnished. Wherefore should I suffer for my parent's crimes? It is unjust—most unjust; and even filial duty, in its best and holiest sense, cannot compel me to renounce the distinctions to which by birth I am the heir! No—no: a young man of my ambition—my talents—my feelings—my burning hopes, must not immolate himself for the sake of a father who acts unjustly towards him. For how stands the case between us? The question is whether a parent should make any and every sacrifice for his child; or whether the child must make all possible sacrifices for his father. In asserting his rights, claiming his title, and thereby enabling me to assume my own, he doubtless would have to make a sacrifice: he must declare who he is—my God!—the Resuscitated Highwayman! But, on the other hand, in consenting to keep his secret, do I not wilfully blind myself to my own interests—wantonly thrust aside those opportunities of gaining distinction and acquiring renown which are within my reach—crush with suicidal hand the glorious aspirations which I have formed—and purposely trample on all the hopes that are developing themselves before me?"

Charles Hatfield rose—paced the room in an agitated manner—then, reseating himself, again plunged into his ominous reflections.

"I have read that those who yield to the influence of false sentimentalism, never rise in the world. He who would attain to the pinnacle of eminence, must harden his heart,—even as did Napoleon, when he put away from him that charming Josephine who loved him with such pure and fervid devotion. Yes—family, kith, and kindred must be sacrificed—all sacrificed—by him who follows the dictates of his ambition. And yet—and yet, did not Richard Markham rise by his virtues, as much as by his talents and heroism, to that eminence which enabled him to take his place amongst the mightiest Princes of Europe? Oh! but *he* had opportunities which may never occur again—he is the one in the thousand whom Fortune takes by the hand. If I remain obscure—unknown—plain *Mr. Charles Hatfield*—I am but an unit amidst the millions which, constitute the mass called *the People*. But if I suddenly stand forth as a Viscount, and the heir of a wealthy Earldom, shall I not at once be placed in a position to carve out a career for myself? Oh! how glorious—how thrilling would it be, to have the power of saying to my Perdita, '*Beautiful angel! I am not the obscure young man I appear to be: in me behold Viscount Marston, the heir to the Earldom of Ellingham!*' Ah! Perdita, then would you feel honoured in my love—and I should not be compelled to evince my gratitude to thee for loving me! Charming, adorable Perdita—thine image is coupled with the bright dream of ambition that now animates me;—for when I shall have distinguished myself in the Senate, how delicious will it be to see thee welcome with pride and admiration my return to thine arms,—to behold thy fine eyes fixed upon me, eloquently proclaiming how proud thou art to own the love of a man who is filling the world with his fame! Yes—I must assert my rights:—but how? Oh! I will confide all to Perdita—and she possesses a mind so strong and an intellect so powerful, that she will assist me with her counsel in this

difficulty. And it will be so sweet to receive advice from her lips—so delightful to mark the interest which she will take in my affairs!”

Again he rose from his seat: for a sudden thought had struck him—accompanied by a severe pang,—a pang that went through his heart like a barbed arrow.

“My mother!—my poor mother!” he murmured to himself: “Oh! what a blow will it be to *her* if I compel my father—compel her husband—to assert his claims to the Earldom of Ellingham! And yet—was I not for years neglected by her?—did she care for me—did she even have me to dwell with her during my infancy? No—no: I was abandoned to the woman Watts;—and had I become a thief in the streets—a prowling, houseless vagabond—my mother would have been to blame!”

Thus was it that this young man, having imbibed from Perdita the art and facility of sophistical reasoning,—thus was it that he crushed all the naturally generous feelings of his soul, and struggled desperately to subdue the promptings of his really good disposition.

Love and ambition produced these baneful effects!

But his love,—was it a pure and honest love inspired by a virtuous being?—or was it a frenzy engendered and sustained by a depraved and designing woman endowed with the most glorious beauty?

And his ambition,—was it that fine spirit of emulation which warms the generous heart, and prompts the enlightened mind to seek distinction for the sake of being enabled, by means of influence and high position, to benefit the human race?—or was it a selfish craving after rank and power, in order to enjoy the sweets of applause, become the object of servile flattery, and obtain the honour ever shown in this country to sounding titles and a proud aristocracy?

The reader can answer these questions for himself.

Having passed nearly two hours in the wild reverie which suggested schemes so menacing in their nature to his own and his parents’ happiness, Charles Hatfield retired to rest;—and in his dreams he beheld a variety of scenes and images, incongruously grouped and confusedly jumbled together,—the voluptuous form of Perdita stretched in a witching undress on the sofa, and extending her arms to welcome him to her embraces,—the Marshal Prince of Montoni, seated on horseback, surrounded by a brilliant staff,—thousands and thousands of persons gathered together to witness the passing of a gay cavalcade, of which he fancied himself to be the leader as well as the hero of the occasion,—and then his father and mother kneeling and weeping at his feet, and proffering some prayer to which he refused to accede. Then he thought that he was roving in a delicious garden, where the singing of birds, the hues of the flowers, and the fragrance of aromatic shrubs made every thing delightful to the senses, and where Perdita was his companion. She appeared to be clad in the loose and scanty drapery which heathen goddesses are represented to wear,—fastened by a clasp on the left shoulder, flowing so as to leave the right bosom entirely bare, and confined by a zone to the waist. Airily, airily they tripped along together, until they beheld a temple standing at a distance: then Perdita suddenly assumed the majesty of a queen—and conducting her lover to a shrine within the temple, made him kneel down while she crowned him with a wreath of flowers, while unseen minstrels poured forth a strain of delicious music.

Under the influence of this last dream he awoke;—and the image of Perdita still remained uppermost in his mind.

Then as he performed the functions of the toilette, he reconsidered all the arguments and plans—repeated to himself all the sophistical reasoning—into which he had fallen before he retired to rest;—and, hardening his heart in respect to his parents,—yes, and hardening it, too, with regard to Lady Frances Ellingham,—he resolved to sacrifice all and every thing to the two idols of his soul—ambition and Perdita!

In this frame of mind he descended to the breakfast-parlour, where the Earl and Countess of Ellingham, Lady Frances, Mr. Hatfield, and Lady Georgiana were already assembled. Charles assumed as gay an appearance as possible: for he was resolved to mask his knowledge of all the family secrets as well as his sinister designs, until he should have consulted with Perdita. But in spite of himself, there was a certain constraint and embarrassment in his manner when he spoke to Lady Frances; and this artless, beautiful young creature surveyed him with astonishment and grief.

The fact was that the heart of Charles Hatfield smote him for the vile and perfidious part he had enacted towards his cousin; and he scarcely dared to look her in the face.

Her parents and his own, as well as she herself, noticed the peculiarity of his demeanour in this respect; and Lady Georgiana was so affected by his apparent coolness towards the Earl’s daughter that it was with difficulty she could restrain herself from questioning him then and there on the subject. A hasty whisper, however, from her husband sealed her tongue and gave her the assurance that he would soon ascertain the cause of their son’s altered behaviour towards the young lady who was already looked upon as his future wife.

Accordingly, when the morning repast was concluded, Mr. Hatfield beckoned his son to follow him to the library; and now Charles was struck with a sudden fear—conscience exciting the apprehension that his schemings were discovered and seen through by an outraged, indignant father.

On entering the library, Mr. Hatfield motioned him to take a seat near him: then, fixing his eyes upon the young man’s countenance, he said, “Charles, has any misunderstanding occurred between Lady Frances and yourself?”

“No—not that I am aware of,” returned Charles, considerably relieved by the question that indicated the nature of the colloquy which it opened. “Wherefore should you entertain such an idea?”

“Because your manner towards Lady Frances at the breakfast-table was cool, constrained, and embarrassed,” said Mr. Hatfield. “She herself noticed the circumstance; and I observed that Lord and Lady Ellingham were pained by it likewise. As for your mother, Charles—she was deeply grieved; and I was both hurt and annoyed.”

“I am sorry, my dear father—but—but, I was not aware of any difference in my demeanour towards her ladyship,” stammered Charles, unskilled as yet in the arts of duplicity and guile.

“My son—my dear son, do not attempt to deceive me!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, emphatically. “Lady Frances, in the artlessness of her soul—in the confiding candour of her amiable nature—yesterday acquainted her mother, the Countess of Ellingham, with all that had taken place between yourself and her in the morning. You made her an offer of your hand, in pursuance of the counsel which I gave you;—and her parents will cheerfully yield an assent to your suit. Indeed, the Earl expected to see you on the subject yesterday afternoon; but it appears that immediately after your interview with Lady Frances, you went out and remained absent for some hours. How you dispose of your time, it is not for me to enquire: you are of on age when you are entitled to be your own master. But this I implore of you,—lose no time in seeking a private interview with the Earl, and soliciting him to accord you the hand of his daughter. ’Tis a mere ceremony which a parent, and a personage of his standing, naturally expects you to perform;—and I promise you that there is no chance of a refusal.”

“My dear father,” said Charles, the natural candour of his nature asserting its empire; “I was too hasty in proposing to Lady Frances. Would to God that I could recall the step I thus rashly took!”

Mr. Hatfield surveyed his son in profound astonishment for nearly a minute: then, breaking forth indignantly, he exclaimed, “What, sir! you have dared to trifle with the affections of an amiable and accomplished girl?—you decline a match which is so desirable in every point of view, and on which your mother’s heart is set?”

“I must decline the honour of this alliance,” answered the young man, speaking with a courage which even surprised himself.

“Do you know, Charles,” demanded his father, with on utterance almost suffocated by indescribable emotions,—“do you know that your conduct is that of a villain? And shall it be said that you—*you*, a young man of whom such lofty expectations have been formed ——”

“By whom have these expectations been formed?” suddenly cried the rebellions son, his choler rising as all his wrongs, real or imaginary, rushed to his mind,—those wrongs which he believed himself to have received and to be still enduring at the hands of his parents.

“By whom?” repeated Mr. Hatfield, much pained by the tone, words, and manner of the young man. “By whom should such hopes be experienced, save by your parents?”

“My parents!” cried Charles, with withering irony. “Wherefore am I not acknowledged as your son?—why do you not proclaim yourselves to be my parents? Was not the discovery on my part a matter of mere chance?—and should I not have been kept for ever ignorant of the fact, had not an accident revealed it to me?”

“Oh! my God!—this a retribution!” murmured Mr. Hatfield, bowing himself down, and covering his face with his hands.

At that moment the door opened—and Lady Georgiana, pale as death and scarcely able to support herself on her tottering limbs, made her appearance.

Unable to endure the state of suspense in which she had been plunged relative to the altered manner of her son towards Lady Frances at the breakfast-table,—and having a vague presentiment that some unpleasant scene was occurring between him and her husband in the library,—she had determined to repair thither and relieve herself at once from an uncertainty that was intolerable. But upon reaching the door she heard Charles talking loudly and bitterly: she instinctively paused;—and those terrible questions which he addressed to his father, smote upon *her* ear like the voice of the Angel of Death.

Staggering into the room, she mechanically closed the door behind her; and then leant against it for support. Her fine—her handsome countenance denoted the most poignant anguish: it was absolutely distorted—while a frightful pallor overspread it.

“My mother—my dear mother!” exclaimed Charles, bounding towards her;—for his soul was touched by the pitiable appearance which she presented to his view.

“Just heaven! Charles—what have you said to your father!” she asked, in a tone of despair;—and flinging herself into her son’s arms, she gave vent to a flood of tears.

“I implore your pardon, my dear parents, if in a moment of haste and impatience I said aught that can give you offence,” exclaimed the young man: “but I was not master of my emotions—for you, my father, had termed me a *villain*!”

“Let us not recriminate,” said Mr. Hatfield, rising and taking his son by the hand, Lady Georgiana having in the meantime sunk into the chair to which Charles conducted her. “I was wrong to address you thus harshly: but your refusal to form an alliance with Lady Frances, to whom you only yesterday imparted a confession of attachment——”

“O Charles! is it possible that your parents are to experience such bitterness of disappointment as this?” exclaimed Lady Georgiana, turning a look of appeal—of earnest appeal—upon her son. “You know not how profound will be my sorrow if you thus enact a perfidious part towards Lady Frances Ellingham!”

“Would you have me wed when my heart is not fixed?” demanded Charles, warmly. “I laboured under a delusion: I fancied that I loved Lady Frances as one whom I should wish to make my wife—but I now find that it was only with the affection of a brother or of a very sincere friend that I in reality regarded her! Yesterday morning you, my dear father, entered my chamber, at a moment when the confusion of ideas caused by unpleasant dreams was scarcely dissipated;—you urged me to confess an attachment to Lady Frances—to seek her hand;—and I obeyed you! But I acted under an impulse for which I could not account;—I yielded to some unknown influence which I could not resist. And yet it was not love, my dear parents;—no—it was not love! In making Lady Frances my wife I should only ensure the unhappiness of an excellent—a beautiful—an accomplished girl——”

“You admit all her admirable qualities, Charles,” interrupted his mother; “and yet you refuse to avail yourself of an opportunity to secure so precious a prize—to link your fortunes with one who is certain to make the best of wives!”

“It is truly incomprehensible!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, whose knowledge of the world and large experience of the human heart convinced him that there was something more at the bottom of his son’s conduct than the alleged reasons for so abruptly breaking off a match that, he thought, must appear in every way so eligible and advantageous to the young man.

“My dear parents, this scene is most painful to us all,” said Charles, who, glancing rapidly at the time-piece upon the mantel, saw that the hour was approaching for his to visit Perdita.

His father, observing that impatient look cast towards the clock, instantly comprehended that his son had some appointment to keep; and connecting this discovery with the strangeness of his conduct in respect to Lady Frances, it flashed to his mind in a moment that the young man had formed some attachment elsewhere.

“Charles,” he accordingly said, turning abruptly towards his son and looking him full in the face, “you love another?”

The young man became red as scarlet, and stammered out a few unintelligible words, which his father soon cut short.

“Now we have discovered the truth! But surely you have formed no unworthy attachment?—surely you cannot love one whom you are ashamed to name?” cried Mr. Hatfield.

“Speak, Charles—speak! Answer your father!” said Lady Georgiana, in an imploring tone, as she perceived her son turn away towards the mantel.

For rebellious thoughts again rose in the mind of the young man;—and he felt hurt and vexed that his conduct should thus be questioned by parents who never had acknowledged him as their son until the necessity was forced upon them by his accidental discovery of the secret of his birth, and who now kept him out of what he conceived to be his just rights. Moreover, was he not twenty-

five years old?—and was that an age at which he should thus be tutored and treated like a child? Lastly, it was verging fast upon twelve; and had he not assured his Perdita that he would not be a minute later mid-day?

“Charles, why do you not answer me?” asked Mr. Hatfield, approaching him: “wherefore do you treat your parents with contempt?”

“Wherefore did my parents treat me with such unnatural neglect as to bring me up as their nephew?” demanded the young man, turning abruptly—almost savagely round upon his father. “Wherefore do they now pass me off to the world in that latter capacity?” he cried, becoming fearfully excited.

Lady Georgiana uttered a faint scream, covered her face with her hands, and fell back in her chair sobbing bitterly.

“You speak of unnatural conduct!” cried Mr. Hatfield, growing excited in his turn. “Tell me at once, Charles—do you mean to throw off all allegiance to your parents? If so—remember that it is in our power to deprive you of the immense fortune which is otherwise destined for you——”

“Ah! menaces!” ejaculated the young man: and darting upon his father a look of mingled regret and anger—of united sorrow and indignation,—a look so strange, so ominous that Mr. Hatfield started with horror,—he rushed from the room.

“Stay! stay!” cried Lady Georgiana, springing towards the door.

But her son heeded her not: he obeyed not her voice;—and the unhappy mother sank upon the floor, gasping for utterance, and feeling as if her heart would break with the wretched sensations that filled her bosom.

Mr. Hatfield hastened to raise his wife—to place her in a chair—and to breath words of consolation in her ears.

When she was somewhat recovered, she clasped her hands convulsively together; and, looking up appealingly into his face, said, “Is this a reality? or is it a dream?”

“Alas! it is a terrible reality,” responded Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of mingled bitterness and sorrow.

“And what can it all mean?” asked Lady Georgiana, wildly: for she was bewildered by the strangeness of her son’s conduct—amazed by the sudden alteration of his matter from respect to insolent indifference towards his parents.

“Heaven alone can solve that question for us at present,” returned her husband. “Can it be that he has learnt any thing—that he suspects aught of the past? No—no: that is impossible! But ever since the discovery of his real parentage, he has been altered;—sometimes moody and thoughtful—at others petulant and hasty,—now unnaturally gay and excited—then deeply depressed and melancholy,—but never unruly and overbearing, disobedient and rebellious, as he has shown himself this forenoon.”

“’Tis easy to perceive, I fear, that he is troubled by the mystery which induced us to conceal his position with regard to us,” said Lady Georgiana;—“and likewise—yes, likewise,” she added hesitatingly, “the circumstance that he still passes as our nephew weighs upon his mind!”

“Oh! this is a terrible retribution for my sins!—an awful punishment for the foul misdeeds of my earlier years!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, wringing his hands bitterly.

“My dear husband,” said Lady Georgiana, whose turn it now was to console; “give not way thus to your sorrow! Let us hope that he will repent of this strange unruliness of conduct——”

“Alas! I have sad forebodings of evil!” cried the unhappy man. “I fear that he has formed some unworthy connexion, Georgiana: but let us dissemble our sorrow—let us not afflict the Earl and the amiable Esther by giving them any account of the occurrences of this day.”

“And yet what can we say respecting the union that was contemplated between their amiable daughter and our son?” demanded Lady Georgiana, in an anxious tone.

“We will by some means find an excuse for the embarrassment and coldness of manner which Charles exhibited at the breakfast-table,” returned Mr. Hatfield; “and I will seek the earliest opportunity to reason with him fully and calmly upon the subject.”

“If he should have formed an attachment elsewhere——”

“That is scarcely probable, when we come to look calmly at the matter—since he yesterday morning declared his affection to Frances.”

“Alas! ’tis a mystery which pains and alarms me,” said Lady Georgiana.

“A mystery which I will penetrate, my dear wife!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, in a resolute—almost stern tone of voice. “But for the present, it is useless to hazard a conjecture.”

CHAPTER CXXXV.

CHARLES HATFIELD AND MRS. FITZHARDINGE.

It was a little after twelve o'clock when Charles Hatfield reached the house in Suffolk Street.

"Is Miss Fitzhardinge at home?" he enquired of the female servant who answered his summons at the door.

"Have the kindness to walk up into the drawing-room, sir," was the response; and, with beating heart, the young man followed the domestic into the apartment where he expected again to behold his beauteous Perdita.

But, to his disappointment—a disappointment which he could not conceal, he found himself in the presence of her mother.

"Be seated, sir," she said, coldly and formally indicating a chair, into which Charles Hatfield fell as if in obedience to the command of a witch. "I have many matters whereon to converse with you; and, to speak candidly, scarcely know how to commence. One subject personally regards you: another intimately relates to my own interests. But I will begin with that which so nearly concerns yourself."

"I am all attention, madam," said Charles, endeavouring to assume as respectful a demeanour as possible, but in reality glancing with much impatience towards the door—as if by his eager looks inviting the entrance of Perdita.

"My daughter will not interrupt us, Mr. Hatfield," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with an affectation of malice which seemed ominous and foreboding to the young man. "Indeed, whether you will ever see her again, depends upon the result of our present interview."

"My God! madam," cried Charles, in an imploring tone; "have I offended your beautiful daughter—or yourself?"

"I am not precisely offended, Mr. Hatfield," said the old woman, assuming a more conciliatory manner: "but certain explanations are necessary between us;—and indeed, it depends entirely on yourself whether you ever behold Perdita again."

"Then I shall behold her again, madam," returned Charles, emphatically. "And now I can really listen to you with attention——"

"And perhaps with patience," added Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her rigid features at length relaxing into a faint smile. "But I will not tax that patience longer than I can help. Firstly, then, we are to speak of the matters which concern yourself. And now—will you not be surprised when I assure you that I am acquainted with many strange and marvellous secrets connected with your family?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles, starting.

"But perhaps I even know more than you yourself are acquainted with?" said Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"No, madam—no: that is impossible!" he cried, emphatically.

"Do any of those secrets give you pain to contemplate?" she asked, fixing her eyes searchingly upon him. "Pardon me for thus questioning you——"

"And why, madam, do you so question me?" he demanded, almost angrily.

"Because I am as yet ignorant to what extent your knowledge may go in certain respects," she replied.

"Then believe me, madam—believe me," cried Charles Hatfield, bitterly, "when I assure you that I know much more than you can possibly have an idea of!"

"Is the name of Rainford familiar to you?" asked the old woman, steadily watching the effect of her question.

"Madam," exclaimed Charles, starting from his seat, and approaching Mrs. Fitzhardinge in a threatening manner, "would you taunt me with the infamy of my birth?—for I see that it is no secret to you! But imagine not—if such indeed be your idea—that I am unworthy the love of your daughter Perdita! You were about to marry her to an old nobleman: what if a young nobleman were to demand her hand?"

"A young nobleman!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, now surprised in her turn: for it must be remembered that all she knew concerning the present subject was gleaned from the musings of the old gipsy; and those musings had led her to believe that Charles was the

nephew of Mr. Hatfield, *alias* Thomas Rainford.

“Yes—madam—a young nobleman!” he repeated, carried away by the excitement of feelings under which he laboured: for he fancied that the old lady had intended to reproach him—*him*, the son of the resuscitated highwayman—with having dared to love her daughter. “And now, perhaps, it is your turn to be surprised: for, as surely as you are seated there, I am not the plain, and humble, and obscure Charles Hatfield—but the *Lord Viscount Marston*, heir to the Earldom of Ellingham!”

Mrs. Fitzhardinge restrained her surprise with the utmost presence of mind—exerting indeed an extraordinary power of self-controul; and, surveying him with an unblushing effrontery, she said, “Well, my lord, your lordship is at length led to confess who you really are!”

“My lord”—“your lordship!”—Oh! how sweetly—how sweetly sounded those words on the ears of Charles Hatfield:—he forgot that he was the son of the resuscitated highwayman—he remembered not that his sire had passed through the ordeal of a scaffold: he heard only that he was saluted with a title of nobility; and already did it seem as if half his ambition were gratified.

“Madam,” he said, at length recovering his self-possession, and subduing as much as possible the wildness of that joy which had seized upon him, “then it appears you were acquainted with my right to a title of nobility?”

“I was,” she answered, with an air of the most perfect truthfulness: “and believing *you* to be ignorant of that fact, I was anxious to make the revelation to your lordship.”

“You are consequently acquainted with every thing that regards me?” continued Charles, not perceiving, in the still elated condition of his mind, that the question was foolish became it embraced a vague and undefined generality.

“Everything, my lord,” returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge, repeating the titular appellation, because in her latent shrewdness she saw full well the pleasure that its swelling sound afforded to the young man.

“This is most strange—most singular!” cried Charles, musing audibly: “for I came hither with the intention of revealing all—every thing—to your Perdita, through whom you would have learnt the entire particulars in the course of this day;—and, behold! I am anticipated—for you already are as well acquainted with those most mysterious circumstances as I myself! But may I ask, madam,” he exclaimed, turning abruptly towards Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—“may I ask how you came to know that Mr. Hatfield is my father, and that he is the rightful Earl of Ellingham, legitimately born?”

Mrs. Fitzhardinge had hitherto known nothing at all of those circumstances; but, without manifesting the least surprise, she said, “Pray be seated, my lord—compose yourself—give not way to unnecessary excitement; and I will at once proceed to explain all my conduct to your lordship.”

Charles Hatfield threw himself into an arm-chair, and showed a disposition to listen with attention.

“Has your lordship ever heard of a gipsy named Miranda?” enquired Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

“Yes: I lately read the entire history of that Octavia Manners who became Countess of Ellingham, and who was my father’s mother. The gipsy of whom you speak was her faithful friend: but she must now be very old—even if she be in existence!”

“She *is* in existence—or at least was a short time back,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “From her lips did I receive the entire history of your family.”

“But she could not have known that the late Earl of Ellingham married the injured Octavia Manners,” cried Charles: “she could not have been aware of my father’s real rank and position.”

“Yes—she knew all,” returned the wily woman, uttering a deliberate falsehood: “how and by what means, it matters not—neither, indeed, did she inform me. When the whole tale was revealed to me, I thought that you must be in ignorance of your just rights; and, having by accident heard a good account of your lordship’s generous heart and amiable qualities——”

“From whom?” demanded Charles.

“Oh! I must not gratify your curiosity in these minute details,” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “Suffice it that I adhere to the important points of our present topic.”

“Proceed, madam: I will not again interrupt you unnecessarily,” said the young man.

“Well, then, my lord—I fancied that it was a flagrant shame and an abhorrent cruelty thus to retain you in ignorance, as I supposed, of your true standing in the world; and a sense of justice determined me—although a total stranger to you—to acquaint your lordship with those facts which, it however appears, were already well known to you.”

“To speak candidly, my dear madam,” said Charles, “I *was* in complete ignorance of all those circumstances until eight or ten days ago, when they were revealed to me by the strangest accident in the world.”

“May I, without appearing indiscreet, enquire the nature of the accident that thus put your lordship in possession of such important—such vitally important facts?”

“Assuredly, my dear madam,” returned Charles Hatfield. “You yourself have behaved to me with so much kindness and candour in this respect, that I owe you my entire confidence. A mere chance threw in my way certain papers which fully prove that Octavia Manners was the wife of the late Earl of Ellingham when their child was born; and that my own father, who now bears the name of Hatfield, but who was so long and so unhappily known by that of Rainford, was the child to whom allusion is made.”

“And those papers—have you them in your possession?” asked Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

“I have—carefully concealed in a private compartment of my writing-desk, in my own chamber at Lord Ellingham’s mansion.”

“But has your lordship no hesitation in proclaiming your rights and titles—or rather in acquiring them by forcing your father to proclaim his own?” demanded the old woman, again fixing her eyes steadfastly upon his countenance.

“Ah! *there*, madam, you touch the wound in my heart!” exclaimed Charles, the sudden workings of his countenance displaying the anguish which the thought excited within him. “I am loth to take the grand—the important—the irrevocable step on the one hand; and I cannot bear to surrender up all my privileges on the other. Moreover, my parents have not acted towards me in a way to render necessary every sacrifice on my part;—and even this morning—this very morning—my father added a new injury to the list of those already committed against me—a new wrong, by upbraiding me, under particular circumstances, with harshness—even brutality.”

“Certainly your lordship cannot permit a false sense of filial duty to mar all the golden prospects which open before you!” exclaimed the vile woman, who was thus encouraging evil thoughts in the young man’s mind. “Consider your youth—your handsome appearance—your great talents—the brilliant hopes which develop themselves in the horizon of the future——”

“Oh! I have thought of all this—I have weighed every thing for and against the course which I long to adopt, but which the interests of my parents oppose——”

Charles paused—dashed his hand against his heated brow—and, rising, paced the room in an agitated manner.

“My lord, this excitement is useless,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “If you will deign to consider me as a friend——”

“I do—I do!” he cried, approaching her, and pressing her shrivelled hand with fervent, but oh! with how mistaken gratitude: “have you not proved yourself my friend? Did you not, though a stranger, contemplate the generous act of revealing to me secrets which you considered as necessary to be known to me? And have you not even now given me advice which is consistent with my interests?”

“Then, if your lordship will thus regard me as a friend, permit me to suggest that you do not on the one hand abandon your determination to assert your rights, nor on the other adopt any course that has not been well deliberated upon. Consider,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, “your lordship will have to steel your heart against a father’s prayers—a mother’s tears: you will have to contend against the entreaties of you uncle, the Earl—and of his handsome Jewish wife,—aye—and the beseechings of their daughter too;—for I understand that your lordship has a beautiful cousin——”

“Oh! how many hearts may I not have to break in piling up the fabric of my ambition!” exclaimed Charles Hatfield, his heart once more smiting him severely,—or rather with an anguish that was intolerable.

“Yes—those are the considerations which lie before your lordship,” resumed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “But you must also reflect, my lord, upon the immense interests you have at stake. Is it better to remain simple *Charles Hatfield* all your life—or——”

“You need not finish the question, madam,” said the young man, suddenly interrupting the infamous old harridan, and now speaking in a cold tone of desperate resolution. “I must persevere: my destiny is fixed—and even if hearts break in the struggle, I will not shrink from the contest that is to give me my just rights! But let us talk no more of this for the present. May I be permitted to enquire after your charming daughter——”

“You have now, my lord, turned the conversation on the second subject which required discussion between us,” interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “Perdita has confessed to me all that has taken place between herself and your lordship——”

“And you are doubtless offended!” exclaimed Charles Hatfield, observing that the old lady’s countenance had again become very serious.

“No, my lord—I am not precisely angry,” she returned; “but I tremble to approach a topic which involves so many difficulties.”

“Ah! madam—with your strong mind, all difficulties are surmountable,” said Charles “and you have only to stipulate, in order that I shall assent to every thing that you may propose.”

“In the first place,” resumed the wily woman, “you are aware of the strange—fanciful—and, I must say, unfortunate notions which my daughter has imbibed relative to marriage; and your lordship must be aware that—supposing your mutual passion be allowed to take its course unrestrained—the world will regard her only as your lordship’s mistress!”

“Madam—I would cheerfully conduct her to the altar——”

“Whither she will not go,” added the old woman, emphatically. “No—my lord, it is useless to reason with that strong—headed, obstinate girl on the subject. Admitting, then, that I—her mother—placing her happiness above conventional opinions, and entertaining implicit faith in your honour and integrity,—admitting, I say, that I consent to the union of hearts proposed in this case,—waiving the ceremony of the union of hands,—can you, my lord, undertake to ensure my daughter against the contingencies of poverty?”

“Situated as I now am, the means at my disposal an limited indeed,” said Charles Hatfield: “but the moment my rights are proclaimed and recognised——”

“Then, at the same instant, the family estates, at present held by the Earl of Ellingham, will pass into the hands of your father—and you still remain totally dependant upon him until his death,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, embracing at a glance the whole range of contingencies.

“True!” cried Charles, suddenly becoming much embarrassed, and seeing difficulties most unexpectedly start up.

“*But*,” resumed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, after a few minutes’ pause, and laying strong emphasis upon the monosyllable,—“*but*, my lord, even should you immediately quarrel with your father by compelling him to wrest the titles and estates from the hands of his younger brother who now holds them, there are ways and means for your lordship to raise money—those estates becoming inalienably yours in the perspective.”

“Yes—I understand—there is that alternative!” exclaimed Charles. “But my father would not discard me altogether—he would not deprive me of the means of support during his life-time——”

“You know not, my lord, what may be the results of the family convulsion—the domestic revolution—which your contemplated proceedings will bring about. Pardon me, my dear Viscount, if I thus dwell upon matters so purely worldly;—but remember that I myself am now placed in a cruel position by the total wreck of the brilliant hopes which my claims in Chancery so recently held out;—and unless I succeed in raising a few thousand pounds within a week, I shall positively be menaced with imprisonment in a debtors’ gaol.”

“Merciful heaven!” cried Charles Hatfield: “how can I possibly assist you?”

“You will not think me mercenary, my lord——”

“Oh! no—no, my dear madam!” he exclaimed impatiently. “Tell me if there be a means of raising the amount you require; and my readiness to adopt those means must be received by you as a proof of my anxiety to render myself worthy of Perdita’s love and your esteem.”

“Generous nobleman!” cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, pretending to be affected by the scene: “my daughter will indeed be happy in the possession of your heart! Listen, my lord,” she continued; “and our interview may soon be brought to a close—for I know that you are as anxious to see a certain person as she is dying to behold you. Your lordship ere now alluded to particular papers which prove the legitimate birth, rights, and identity of you father:—by means of those papers, and on your lordship signing a document, I can undertake to procure as large a sum of money as may be required either by my necessities or for your own present wants.”

“This evening, my dear madam, I will place the papers in your hands,” said Charles, who was anxious to terminate this interview as speedily as possible—for his impatience to behold Perdita began to exceed his powers of endurance.

“At eight o’clock this evening I shall expect your lordship,” observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge: and, with these words, she quitted the apartment.

Charles Hatfield approached the mirror—arranged his hair in the most becoming manner—and had just snatched a last satisfactory glance at the reflection of his handsome countenance, when the door opened and Perdita entered the room.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

INFATUATION.

Perdita was dressed in a more modest and, to speak truly, in a more delicate manner than on either of the former occasions when Charles had seen her. A plain morning gown, made with a high corsage, set off her fine figure, without affording even a glimpse of the charms the full proportions of which its shape developed. Her hair was arranged in plain bands; and there was altogether an appearance of so much innocence, candour, and maiden reserve in her demeanour, that it seemed to Charles as if he now beheld in her some new phasis of her wondrous beauty.

Hastening forward to meet her, he caught her in his arms and covered her lips, her cheeks, and her brow with kisses: for—whether it were imagination or reality we know not—but she appeared to be far more lovely than ever in his eyes.

“Dearest—dearest Perdita!” he exclaimed,forgetting at that moment all and every thing in the world save the object of his adoration.

“Charles—my lord—how am I to call you henceforth?” she murmured, in that soft, musical tone which flowed like the harmony of the spheres in unto the very soul.

“Am I not *Charles* to you, dear girl?” he demanded, looking at her tenderly and half reproachfully: then, conducting her to a seat, and placing himself near her, he added, “I have had a long interview with your mother, Perdita; and from all that I could gather, she has no opposition to offer to our love.”

“I know it,” responded the girl, casting down her eyes with a modesty so admirably assumed that it would have deceived the most experienced individual. “And are you well satisfied that she has thus proved favourable to our hopes?”

“Will you always seem to doubt my affection?” demanded the young man, in an impassioned tone: “will you ever appear to believe that I am so volatile—so fickle—so inconstant, as to regret to-day a step that I took yesterday?”

“Pardon me, Charles—pardon me,” said Perdita, looking up into his face with an expression of the most charming *naiveté*: “but my mother heard a rumour—and yet it might be unfounded——”

“Speak—speak, Perdita!” cried the young man, impatiently.

“A rumour to the effect that you were looked upon as the future husband of Lady Frances Ellingham,” added Perdita, in a tremulous tone, as if scarcely daring to give utterance to the jealous suspicion that the words implied.

Charles Hatfield became suddenly red as scarlet; and Perdita burst into tears.

“Oh! then the rumour is true—and you are deceiving me, my lord!” she exclaimed, affecting a passionate outburst of grief: but, in a few moments, she seemed to exercise an abrupt and powerful controul over her feelings, and rising from her seat, drew herself up into a demeanour of desperate calmness, saying, “Viscount Marston, I will show you that my affection is of no selfish nature. If you love this young lady, who must be your cousin, from all I have heard and know through my mother,—if you prefer the beauteous Frances—for beautiful I am aware she is,—Oh! then I release you from your vows to me—I restore your plight—and I, the obscure and neglected Perdita, will pray in secret for your welfare,—yes, and for the welfare of her who will have robbed me of your affections!”

“No, Perdita—no!” cried Charles, profoundly touched by this well-enacted piece of apparently generous self-denial: “I do *not* love my cousin Frances—and it was only this very morning that I disputed with my parents because I refused to form an alliance on which their hearts are set. Perdita—my beloved Perdita, I thank thee—Oh! heaven alone knows how sincerely I thank thee for this manifestation of generosity,—a generosity that, if possible, has rivetted my affections more indissolubly on thee!”

“And you will pardon me, Charles—if in a moment of jealousy——” murmured the designing young woman, hanging down her head in a charming kind of confusion and bashfulness.

“Pardon thee!” repeated her dupe, catching her in his arms, and straining her passionately to his breast: “what have I to pardon? Must I pardon thee for loving me so well, my Perdita?—for only those who love well, can know what jealousy is! And, did I think that I had cause, should I not be jealous of thee, sweet Perdita? Oh! yes—and my jealousy would be very fierce and terrible in its consequences. But on neither side shall there be cause for jealousy——”

“At least not on mine, Charles,” returned the young woman, gently extricating herself from his arms, and resuming her seat upon the sofa. “And now, my lord,” she added playfully, “when do you intend to take some charming suburban villa—fit it up in a chaste, elegant, and beautiful style—and bear thither your bride,—for your bride am I prepared to become on the conditions which have already been established between us?”

“Without a day’s—without an hour’s unnecessary delay, my beloved Perdita,” answered Charles, his cheeks flushing and his eyes sparkling with the hopes and voluptuous thoughts inspired by the question thus put to him; and throwing his arms around her, he drew the bewitching syren towards him.

“Charles—Charles,” she murmured, as he glued his lips to her warm, glowing cheek; “you are adorably handsome—and I love you as woman never loved before. But I implore you to release me now—for—my mother might return to the room—and—and—Oh! Charles—you clasp me too violently——”

And she succeeded in disengaging herself from his arms, having maddened him as it were by the contact of her fine, voluptuous form, and the caresses she had allowed him to lavish upon her.

“Perdita, you are more reserved with me than you were yesterday,” said Charles, half reproachfully.

“Or rather say that yesterday I was so hurried away by the rapturous thoughts—the delightful emotions—the elysian feelings which were excited within me by the certainty of possessing your love,” murmured the young woman, “that I had no controul over myself.”

“And now that you are assured of my love, you have grown comparatively cold and reserved,” said Charles, with the least degree of humour.

“Should you think the better of me if I were without the least particle of maiden reserve?” she asked, in a reproachful tone. “Listen, my beloved Charles—and look not angrily on your Perdita!”

“No—not for worlds!” he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips, and feeling in the renewed infatuation of his soul that he was prompt to do her bidding and yield to her will in all things.

“Now you are kind and good—and I love you, dear Charles,” said Perdita, in a tone of captivating artlessness. “Although we shall have no bridal ceremony as performed at a church,” she resumed, “yet must our wedding-day—if I may so call it—be duly fixed and celebrated. When, therefore, you have provided for me and my mother such a home as you would wish me and my parent to possess—then shall you bear me thither, my dearest Charles, as your bride—and—and—I will be unto thee as a wife in all respects,” she added, bending her beauteous head down upon his bosom, and concealing her blushing countenance there.

“Be it as you say, my sweet Perdita!” he exclaimed. “And in all things will I do your bidding—for I love and adore you. You are an angel of beauty;—your manners are irresistibly winning;—your voice has the charm of the sweetest melody;—and your looks would kindle love in the breast of an anchorite.”

“Ah! flatterer,” she cried, raising her head, and tapping him gently upon the face. “Will you always think thus well of me?”

“Yes—always, always!” he exclaimed—so completely infatuated was he with the syren. “And now tell me, my charmer—in which part of London should you wish me to fix upon a beautiful villa for your reception?”

“The more secluded the spot—the better,” said Perdita. “I do not wish to form the acquaintance of prying and curious neighbours, nor shall I court the presence of visitors. When you are with me, I shall have no thought but for you: when you are absent, to think of you will be sufficient occupation. I have heard that in the neighbourhood of Holloway there are some delightful villas, newly built——”

“Holloway! It is there—in that neighbourhood—that Markham Place, the mansion where the Prince of Montoni is staying, is situated.”

“And you are acquainted with that Prince?” said Perdita. “Yes—for in this morning’s newspaper I read, amongst the Fashionable Intelligence, that his Royal Highness had yesterday partaken of a banquet at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall.”

“Oh! he is a great and illustrious Prince, Perdita!” cried Charles, his cheeks suddenly glowing with animation.

“But he is not so handsome as you, Charles?” said Perdita, half enquiringly—half playfully.

“He is very handsome, dearest,” was the reply: “but his heroic deeds—his noble disposition—his boundless philanthropy—and his staunch support of the Rights of Man, constitute attractions which, were he ugly as Satan, would render him adorable as an angel.”

“And have you none of those qualities, my Charles?” demanded Perdita. “Are you not gloriously handsome?—have you not a proud title, which you can claim when you will—aye, and which you will claim shortly?—and will you not some day be a Peer of the Realm, and able to electrify the senate with your eloquence? For that you would be eloquent, Charles, I am convinced;—and, oh! what pleasure—what unfeigned, heart-felt pleasure would it give your devoted Perdita to occupy even the humblest, most secluded nook in the place where you were delivering yourself of the burning thoughts and splendid ideas——”

“Oh! Perdita—do you too hope that I shall yet create for myself a great and a glorious reputation?” demanded the young man, surveying his beauteous companion with joy and surprise.

“Yes, Charles: for do I not love thee?” she asked, in her dulcet, silvery tone.

“Now—oh! now can I understand how the image of the Princess Isabella might cheer and hearten on the once obscure Richard Markham to the accomplishment of those great deeds which have placed him on so proud an eminence! Now,” continued the enthusiastic, infatuated Charles,—“now can I comprehend how gallant knights, in the days of chivalry, would dare every peril—encounter every danger, at the behest or command of their ladye-loves! And you, my Perdita,—you shall be as a Princess Isabella in my eyes—you shall be my ladye-love;—and animated by thy smiles, will I yet carve out for myself a glorious career in the world.”

“I long to see thee in possession of thy titles, Charles—to behold thee, too, occupying thy place in the House of Peers,” said Perdita. “But, hark—the clock strikes two; and now I am compelled to accompany my mother into the City——”

“To her attorney’s?” asked Charles, a sudden fear seizing upon him.

“Yes—to her solicitor’s office,” responded Perdita: then, after suffering him to manifest a sentiment of pique and annoyance for a few moments, she threw her arms around his neck, exclaiming, “And so you are very jealous, sir—are you?—and you thought perhaps that I was about to call upon this lawyer to signify to him my readiness to accept the hand of the old nobleman who is my mother’s relentless opponent in the suit? But I can assure you that the object of my visit in that quarter is one which you will no doubt highly approve. It is to inform the legal gentleman, with my own lips, that I utterly and totally decline the honour of the proposed union——”

“Charming—dearest Perdita!” ejaculated Charles, straining her in rapture to his breast.

“Inasmuch,” she added, with playful artlessness—or rather with an affectation of that delightful *naiveté*,—“inasmuch as the solicitor will not believe that I can possibly resist so splendid an offer; and he is determined to hear the truth from me—and from me only.”

“And were he to over-persuade you, Perdita—to impress you with the necessity of yielding in this instance——” began Charles, still labouring under the vague apprehension with which the artful creature sought to inspire him in order to attach him the more completely to her.

“Have you so much to fear on the part of an old nobleman whom I have never seen, as I have on the part of that beautiful Lady Frances who dwells beneath the same roof with you?” enquired Perdita, in the most melting tones of her flute-like voice.

“Pardon me—pardon me, dearest girl!” cried Charles, embracing her fondly.

“I have no more to pardon in you at present, than you had to forgive in me ere now,” murmured the guileful woman, placing her warm cheek against his own and allowing their hair to mingle.

For a few moments she remained with him in this position,—a position that enchanted, thrilled, and intoxicated him: then suddenly withdrawing herself from his arms, she said, archly, but impressively, “It now remains with you, Charles, when our wedding-day is to be celebrated.”

“Ah! if you were only as impatient as I!” he exclaimed.

They parted—the young man hastening, as was his wont after these visits, to the park to feast his imagination with a delicious reverie the whole and sole subject of which should be Perdita!

A few minutes after he had taken his departure, Mrs. Fitzhardinge sought her daughter in the drawing-room; and the ensuing dialogue took place.

“Every thing tends to forward our designs with respect to this young man,” observed the old woman, seating herself in a chair opposite to her daughter, who was reclining upon the sofa.

“And yet I cannot *now* altogether comprehend your policy, mother,” returned Perdita.

“In which particular point, my child?” demanded the vile parent.

“Respecting the nature of the connexion which is to subsist between myself and Charles,” said Perdita. “It was all very well for me to calculate upon being his mistress before we were aware that he is in reality a Viscount, and must be an Earl: but since you succeeded so nicely in extracting those revelations from him this morning, why should we not secure so glorious a prize by a means more durable and powerful than mere sophistry and the love which he bears me? Consider, mother, how instantaneously he took a fancy to me; and believe me when I assure you that coolness will follow as rapidly, after full satiety, on his part.”

“Silly girl! thou art thyself in love with him!” cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, in a tone of vexation.

“Yes—more than half: I acknowledge it,” returned Perdita, coolly.

“And yet—but a few days ago you assured me that you could not chain yourself to one individual with any hope of being faithful to him,—that love was a passion which would never obtain over you that influence which it so often exercised over the weak, the simple-minded, and the infatuated.”

“It is perfectly true, mother, that I said all which your memory has so faithfully treasured up, and your lips so accurately repeated,” said Perdita, still speaking without excitement. “But *then*, my dear mother,” she added, almost satirically—no, almost jeeringly, as if diverting herself with her parent’s evident vexation,—“*then*, you know, I had not seen Charles Hatfield.”

“And I told you not to be too confident on that point to which we are alluding,” cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “My dear Perdita, renounce all ideas of marriage with this young man: indeed, you have compromised yourself too deeply in your denunciations of the marriage-tie to be able to recall your sentiments on that head.”

“Not at all,” said Perdita, authoritatively. “In the same way that I induced Charles to accede to my proposals, and even fall into my views—so can I, in a very short space, and by means of other sophistry, convince him that I had merely been playing a part to test the value of his affection——”

“No—no, Perdita: you must not attempt such a perilous proceeding,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, evidently listening with great uneasiness to the words that fell from her daughter’s lips.

“I dare and will attempt all I choose or fancy with that young man!” cried the head-strong Perdita, in an imperious tone.

“Will you not follow my counsel?” demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “Have I not fulfilled all my promises to you?—did I not declare that in London you should find luxury, plenty, and ease?—did I not pledge myself that the young man should sue at your feet and implore your love?—and could you have brought about all these results for yourself?”

“I do not pretend that I could, mother,” returned Perdita. “But am I to be your tool—your instrument—an automaton in your hands?—am I not to have an opinion in our councils?—or am I to pay blind obedience to you, even though I have reasons for questioning the prudence of your proceedings?”

“And do you now question the prudence of my proceedings?” demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge, growing every moment more and more irritable.

“Yes—I do!” answered Perdita, firmly and resolutely—at the same time fixing her brilliant eyes rebelliously upon her mother. “I admit that if we had only ensnared in our toils a simple commoner—a plain Charles Hatfield—with limited resources within his reach, it would have been advisable to form no lasting connexion with him. But now—*now* that we are assured, beyond all possibility of doubt, that he is himself a nobleman and the heir to enormous wealth, it would be madness—it would be folly not to bind him to us by irrefragable chains. Why—here is a position to be obtained and ensured at once,—a position which will render us rich for the remainder of our days! And think you, mother, that I have not a little feeling of ambition in my soul? Would it not be a proud thing for you to be enabled to call the Vicountess Marston—and in due time the Countess of Ellingham—your daughter? All these considerations never flashed to my mind until immediately after Charles had quitted the room ere now: or I should have assuredly commenced the undoing of all that stupid work which, by your persuasion and so well tutored by you, I achieved in respect to the conditions whereon our connexion was to be based. What!” she cried, her eyes absolutely flashing fire: “have a coronet within my reach—and refuse it!—have a wealthy noble—or one who will be enormously wealthy—sighing at my feet, and not wed him! Mother,” she cried, actually exciting herself into a passion, “you must think me to be a fool—an idiot—a mad woman!”

“I shall think you to be a fool—an idiot—and a mad woman if you persist in thwarting my plans or proceeding contrary to my advice,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her tanned, weather-beaten countenance becoming absolutely livid with rage.

“Ah! you have some sinister purpose to serve, mother!” cried Perdita, a sudden idea striking her: “else never would you oppose yourself so completely to the dictates of common sense. What were your words to me when I spoke to you—and spoke as rashly—about the inaccessibility of my soul to the passion of love? You advised me not to count only on the chance of making a good match: you declared it to be far more probable that I might ensnare some young gentleman of birth, family, and fortune—or some old voluptuary of immense wealth;—and you added that there was more to be gained as the mistress of one of those, than as a wife. In fine, your advice was that I should remain unmarried and independent, so that the moment I had ruined one lover, I might take another.”

“Yes—and that counsel was the wisest I could proffer you,” said her mother, actually speaking in a savage tone, and looking as if she could have leapt, tigress-like, upon her daughter and torn her with her nails as if they were claws.

“Oh! the advice was good enough under certain circumstances,” exclaimed Perdita. “It was good in so far as it related to the probability of my securing a succession of lovers, each with only a comparatively small fortune, and each individual, therefore, to be soon set aside. But now that, at the very outset, chance has thrown in my way a young noble, who must sooner or later inherit a vast fortune which no extravagance can completely dissipate,—a fortune, indeed, which will minister to all extravagances, and yet remain unimpaired,—should I not be the veriest fool that ever tossed gold into a river or hurled diamonds into an abyss, were I not to secure the brilliant advantage thus placed within my reach?”

“Daughter,” exclaimed the old woman, with difficulty preventing a complete outburst of her fury, “I tell you that this may not be! Secure Charles Hatfield—or rather Viscount Marston—as your paramour: *I* will undertake to raise as much money, as you can persuade him to lavish upon you;—and then—*then*, my child,” she added, adopting a tone of fawning conciliation, “you can choose a new lover and make inroads into another’s fortune.”

“I am determined to pursue and follow out the plan which my own convictions indicate as the most rational—the most sensible—the most advisable!” exclaimed Perdita; “and, therefore, the present dispute is useless and absurd.”

“Dispute!” repeated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her countenance again becoming absolutely livid, and her whole form trembling with rage: “I do not choose to dispute with you, insolent girl that you are! Now listen to me, Perdita—and know once for all that I *will* be obeyed in this, as in all things—or I will abandon you to your own resources—I will hurl you back into rags, want, and poverty——”

“Not while I possess this beauty of which a queen might be proud!” said Perdita, in a quiet manner, as she glanced with self complacency at her own handsome countenance as it was reflected in a mirror opposite.

“Oh! think not that beauty is the only element of fortune!” cried the old woman, surveying her daughter with almost an expression of fiend-like hate: “for, if you dare to thwart me, Perdita, I will become your bitterest and most malignant enemy, though you are my own child:—I will pursue thee with my vengeance;—wherever you may be, I will spoil all your machinations and ruin all your schemes;—nay, more—I will compel your very lovers to thrust you ignominiously forth from them! For I will boldly proclaim how that Perdita who has enthralled them, was accursed from her very birth—born in Newgate—thence taken by her mother to a penal colony, where she became lost and abandoned at the early age of thirteen—and how every handsome young officer in garrison at Sydney could boast of the favours of this profligate young creature!”

A mocking laugh came from the lips of Perdita,—a laugh that rang more horribly in the ears of her mother than an explosion of maledictions, recriminations, and insults would have done,—a laugh that seemed to say, “Wretched—drivelling old woman, I despise thee!”

“You will repent this conduct, vile girl—you will repent it!” muttered Mrs. Fitzhardinge, approaching Perdita, and gazing on her with eyes that seemed to glare savagely. “Whatever be the risk—even though I involve myself in the downfall of our splendid prospects—I will ruin thee, if thou darest to oppose and thwart me! Abandon thy scheme of marrying the young nobleman—and we will be friends again: persist in it—and we separate, as mortal enemies. Yes—and the first step which I shall take will be to repair to Charles Hatfield—implore his forgiveness for having been a party to the scheme plotted against him and his—and give such a character of thee, Perdita, that his blood shall run cold in his veins at the mere thought of ever having been placed in contact with thee! And, oh! the picture which a mother will draw of her daughter in such a case,—that picture will be terrible—very terrible! Pause, then—reflect ——”

“One word, mother,” said Perdita, who had maintained an extraordinary degree of composure throughout this scene—doubtless because she knew that she must triumph in the long run. “You threaten bravely: let us look calmly and deliberately at what must be the inevitable results of a fearful quarrel between you and me:—let us see who would get the better of it! On one side would be you—old—ugly—disgustingly ugly, I may say—so that to become anything save a beggar, grovelling in the kennel would be impossible. On the other side would be myself—at all events handsome enough to gain the favour of some soft fool: and, spoil my character as you will, you cannot prevent me from finding a paramour amongst those who care nothing for the reputation, but every thing for the beauty, of their mistresses. Bread to me is certain: rags and starvation to you are equally well assured. My life of pleasure, gaiety, and dissipation is to come: yours has passed—and naught remains for you save to die in a workhouse or on a dunghill! Pardon me, my dear mother, for speaking thus openly—thus plainly,” added the young woman, now throwing a spice of irony into her tone: “but you did not spare me when you summed up my characteristics just now. And before I quit the subject, I may as well observe that you yourself are not the most immaculate woman upon the face of the earth. Heaven only knows how prolific were the debaucheries of your youth: but you veiled them all beneath the aspect of a *saint*! Oh! that was excellent, dear mother—excellent, indeed!” cried Perdita, her merry, musical laugh echoing through the apartment: “only conceive you once to have been a *saint*! In good truth, you have not much of the appearance of a saint now, mother: neither had you when living with the free-settler as his mistress!”

“Perdita—Perdita!” gasped the wretched Mrs. Fitzhardinge, writhing like a snake at these bitter words, and shaking convulsively from head to foot: “you—you will drive me mad!”

“Ah! what—do you possess *feelings*, then, my dear mother?” demanded the young woman, assuming an air of profound astonishment. “And yet you must have imagined that your daughter was totally without those same little feelings which it is so easy to wound, and so difficult to heal. Well—I will forbear: otherwise, I was about to have reminded you of those glorious times—before I was born, indeed—when you were the paramour of Sir Henry Courtenay, whose name you so pleasantly and quietly forged to a slip of paper one day ——”

“Silence—Perdita—silence!” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, in a hoarse and hollow tone—clasping her hands convulsively at the same time. “I was wrong to provoke you thus: you are very hard upon me—you have the best of it, Perdita—and I—I——”

Here the old wretch burst into tears,—not an assumed grief—no crocodile weeping,—but a flood of genuine tears, wrung from her by the cutting, biting, bitter sarcasms which her daughter had so mercilessly—so slaughterously levelled against her.

Perdita suffered her to weep without offering the least consolation: for the young woman was hurt and wounded on her side as well as the old harridan was hurt and wounded on the other.

The recriminations of those two females—that mother and daughter—had been terrible in their implacability, and appalling in their unnatural malignity.

There was a long pause—during which Mrs. Fitzhardinge sate sobbing—being absolutely hideous in her grief,—while Perdita—with flashing eyes dilating nostrils, flushing cheeks, and palpitating bosom, lay half reclined upon the sofa—tapping the carpet petulantly with the tip of her long, narrow, exquisitely shaped shoe.

“My dear child,” at length said the old woman, “are we to be friends or enemies?”

“That depends entirely upon yourself, mother,” was the answer: “I am not to be tyrannised over by you—nor menaced in the fearful way in which you have threatened me to-day, without showing resentment in return. Really, one would have supposed that you were addressing yourself to the bitterest enemy you had in the world—rather than to your daughter who has done all she could to place you in a comfortable position for the remainder of your days.”

“Well—well—let us be friends, Perdita!” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

“Yes—we will be friends,” responded the daughter. “But remember that my views in respect to Charles Hatfield—or rather, Viscount Marston—are to be carried into effect.”

“Without again quarrelling,” interrupted her mother, “let me assure you that I cannot—cannot possibly consent to this deviation from our original arrangements. It was an express understanding between us that *marriage* was, in every case, to be out of the question——”

“And may not circumstances transpire to change original plans?” demanded Perdita, beginning to divine the reasons of her mother’s uncompromising opposition to her matrimonial scheme.

“A truce to these arguments!” cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, again growing irritable. “Remember that this evening your love-sick swain will deposit in my hands all the papers containing the evidence of his father’s right to the earldom and estates of Ellingham——”

“And you will use your power to coerce me?” said Perdita, in her quiet way, which nevertheless seemed to breathe defiance.

“I do not affirm *that*, my child,” cried the old woman, smothering her rage. “But I would ask you of what use those papers would be without my assistance to raise money on them?”

“Of no more utility than our acquaintance with Charles would be to *you*, were it not for *me*,” returned Perdita. “And now, mother, I may as well inform you at once that I can penetrate into all the motives which prompt you thus to oppose my marriage views with respect to Charles. You imagine that if I become his mistress only, I shall be so completely in your power that I must still continue your slave,—that a word from you relative to my past life would send away Charles Hatfield in disgust,—and that in order to prevent you from speaking that word, I shall obey you blindly. In fine, you hope to exercise a despotism alike over him and me,—dispose of the purse—and control the household with sovereign sway. On the other hand, you imagine,—nay, do not look so black, my dear mother—we are only telling each other a few agreeable truths——”

“Go on, vile girl!” gasped Mrs. Fitzhardinge, trembling—suffocating with rage.

“On the other hand, then,” pursued the young woman, in a placid, unexcited manner,—“on the other hand you suppose that if once I become the wife of Charles Hatfield—if once he shall have taken me for better or worse—if once the indissoluble knot be tied, your power over me would cease. For were you to avenge any slight by making revelations respecting me, I might lose my husband’s esteem and love, but should not the less remain his wife. You therefore dread lest you should become a cypher—dependant upon us for your daily bread—unable to control the purse and the domestic economy——”

“And what will you do to guarantee that all you are now saying is not a predictive sketch of what you know must happen in case I permit your marriage?” demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge, dismayed by this accurate reading of her heart’s secrets on the part of her daughter.

“I can only assure you this much, mother,” was the answer,—“that if you conduct yourself well towards me, I shall act well towards you,—that you shall have your own way in every thing where my will is not violently thwarted,—and that I will co-operate with you cheerfully for our mutual interests, so long as you do not attempt to drive me as a slave.”

“And all this you faithfully promise, Perdita?” demanded her mother, eagerly; for she was now glad to effect any compromise rather than come to an open rupture with her daughter, who, she saw, had in reality so much the better of her.

“Be assured, mother,” replied Perdita, “that I am not for war;—and if we quarrel any more, it will be your fault.”

“We will *not* quarrel, Perdita,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge: “you shall marry Charles Hatfield—or Viscount Marston, as we ought to call him;—and here let our dispute finish.”

“With all my heart. And now tell me, mother, how—where—and with whom you intend to raise the money upon these papers which Charles is to send or bring in the evening?”

“A few evenings ago, when I was lurking about Pall Mall waiting for that young gentleman, I suddenly encountered a person whom I had known years and years since, and who played me a vile—a very vile trick. He was much altered,” continued Mrs. Fitzhardinge; “but I knew him—knew him the moment the light of the lamp flashed upon his features. I accosted him—told him who I was—and upbraided him for his villainy of former times. He spoke softly and in a conciliatory manner—and we fell into a more amicable train of conversation than at first. We soon understood each other; and giving me his address—for, by-the bye, he has taken a new name—he invited me to call upon him—and we parted. Since then I have made enquiries in the neighbourhood where he dwells; and I learn that he is reputed to be immensely rich—a miser and money-lender. He is therefore the man whom I require;—and we may reckon confidently upon his aid in the business of raising funds on the documents. This very evening I will call upon him——”

“You will permit me to accompany you, mother,” said Perdita, rather in a tone of command than of interrogatory.

“Yes—if such be your pleasure,” was the reply: for the old woman saw that it was useless and totally adverse to her own interests to thwart her daughter in any single respect.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

TWO MORE OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the same day when these scenes took place, that an old man, coming from a northern direction, entered the metropolis by the suburb of Pentonville.

He was upwards of seventy-four years of age,—tall—thin—and retaining so much muscular vigour as only to stoop slightly in his gait. His complexion was perfectly cadaverous in hue, ghastly and careworn, and sinister in its expression. His attire was shabby, threadbare, and travel-soiled,—his dusty boots denoting that he had journeyed some distance on foot. Nevertheless, there was about him a certain air which, in spite of his repulsive features and his sordid garb, denoted gentility; and an observer would have pronounced him to be, as indeed he was, a decayed gentleman.

Having passed by the Model Prison, he struck out of the highway into the fields where so many houses are now rapidly springing up, and which lie in the immediate vicinity of the Barnsbury and Liverpool Roads.

It was evident, however, that he had no definite object in view—no home whither he was proceeding; and he had turned into the fields merely to rub off the dust from his boots in the long grass, and rest himself for a few minutes in a secluded place.

At length he rose; and his wandering footsteps led him into the vicinity of the detached rows of small houses and cottages which dot the immediate neighbourhood of the Caledonian Road.

Once he stopped beneath a lamp; and taking his money from his pocket, counted it slowly. And heaven knows that the amount of his pecuniary property did not require long to reckon; for two shillings in silver and a few halfpence constituted all the store.

"This will at least purchase me a meal and procure me a bed for to-night," he murmured to himself; "and then—to-morrow—I must present myself to those who have not heard of me for so long a time."

With these words, the old man resumed his slow and painful walk—for he was wearied and exhausted by the length of his day's journey. It was evident that he had been absent many—many years from the capital; for, though he had once known this neighbourhood well, yet now it was so changed that he gazed around him with astonishment,—aye, and paused to gaze around, too,—streets, rows of houses, and gardens having taken the place of the open fields.

He had now reached a spot where the dwellings were more thinly scattered, and where the path was as yet unpaved and the road was thickly strown with flints.

It was now close upon nine o'clock; but the July evening was so beautiful that it was far from dark—only dimly obscure;—and thus, though there was no lamp in the neighbourhood where the old man was pursuing his way, yet was it sufficiently light for him to obtain a good view of objects, and even of the countenances of the few people whom he met.

Not that he paid any particular attention to the latter:—still, a stranger just arriving in London, or a person who returns to the capital after a very long absence, observes and marks every thing and every body with an earnest scrutiny at first.

The old man was passing by two small houses, forming one isolated building, and standing back from the road, when he encountered an individual whose face immediately struck him as being one which he had formerly known full well; and in the next instant a light flashed in upon his mind.

"Yes—'tis he!" he ejaculated to himself; and, laying his hand upon the other's shoulder, he said, "Mr. Howard, we meet at last—after a separation of upwards of nineteen years!"

"My name is not Howard—and I know nothing of you, sir. Let me go!" was the impatient reply, delivered by the individual whom the old man had accosted, and who was himself well stricken in years—being now midway between sixty and seventy.

"Were I on my death bed, I could swear that your name was *once* Howard, and that you were an attorney in London—an attorney who absconded, ruining thousands," exclaimed the old man.

"What means this insolence?" asked the other, affecting a tone of deep indignation mingled with surprise. "Pass on your way, sir—and let me pursue mine!"

“Not till I have had recompense or vengeance,” growled the old man, ferociously. “For a sum of money did I sell myself to a vile and abandoned woman—a certain Mrs. Slingsby, whom you knew well;—and this money was deposited with you, villain that you are! For you fled—and the loss of that money was not the lightest of the myriad misfortunes that fell upon me at the time. Now do you know who *I* am, Mr. Howard?—for I know *you* full well!”

“You have spoken of a number of unintelligible things to me, sir—mentioned names with which I never was acquainted—alluded to circumstances entirely unknown——”

“Liar!” ejaculated Mr. Torrens—for he was the old man who had just now so wearily entered the suburb of Pentonville: “liar!” he repeated, seizing the other individual by the collar; “what should prevent me from raising an alarm and giving you into custody? For though years have elapsed, yet your offences have never been expiated——”

“Softly—softly, my good sir,” interrupted the person thus addressed, and whose manner began to evince trepidation and alarm. “Let us adjourn somewhere and talk amicably on this matter——”

“No!” cried Mr. Torrens. “How do I know but that you intend to inveigle me into a den where you may perhaps silence my tongue for ever?”

“Fool—dotard!” muttered the other between his lips: “does he take me for a murderer?”

“I believe you to be capable of any villainy,” returned the now infuriated Torrens, whose ears had caught the sense of those low mutterings. “But I shall not lose sight of you until I have received full and complete satisfaction for the wrongs I endured at your hands many years ago. And that you *are* able to give such satisfaction, your appearance proves full well,” he added, as his eye caught a glimpse of the gold chain and massive seals which depended from the other’s fob.

“Mr. Torrens—I will no longer attempt to conceal a fact of which you are so well assured. I *am* the Howard to whom you allude: but, in the name of God! do not ruin me—do not expose me. Here—this is my dwelling,” he continued, pointing to one of the two houses in front of which this colloquy took place: “walk in with me—and—and we will converse at our ease——”

“Yes—I will accompany you,” said Mr. Torrens, in a laconic manner: “lead the way, sir.”

Mr. Howard drew forth a small key from his pocket, and with it opened the iron gate of the railings in front of the house. Torrens followed him across the little enclosure; and with another and larger key he opened the door of the dark and gloomy-looking dwelling. No domestic appeared; and the lawyer, entering the parlour, groped about in the dark until he found some lucifer-matches—Torrens remaining all the while in the passage. At length a light was obtained; and the visitor was requested to enter the room, which, by means of the one poor candle that now threw a feeble gleam around, appeared to be but indifferently furnished,—so that the aspect of the small and cheerless house somewhat damped the hopes which Torrens had entertained of compelling the individual whom he had thus accidentally encountered, to disgorge the sum embezzled by him upwards of nineteen years previously.

“Do you live all alone here?” he demanded, taking the seat to which Howard pointed.

“Yes—all alone,” was the reply. “I am too poor to keep a servant.”

“Too poor!” exclaimed Mr. Torrens, his heart sinking within him.

“Yes, indeed! How should I be possessed of any money?” said Howard, glancing around with nervous anxiety, as if he were afraid of being overheard. “From the moment that I was forced, by unexpected reverses and sudden misfortunes, to fly from London, I have led a life of continued struggles; and although, a few years ago, I was venturous enough to return to the metropolis and settle in this little cottage, which I got at a cheap rent as it was only just built,—yet my affairs have not improved——”

“But you must have some means of subsistence?—you pursue some avocation?—you doubtless continue to practise——”

“No—no,” interrupted Howard, hastily. “I have been compelled to change my name—and it is as Mr. Percival—*poor Mr. Percival*—that I am known in this neighbourhood.”

“You adopt strange precautions for a poor man,” said Torrens, pointing to the strong iron bars that fastened the shutters of the window: then, turning a look full of sardonic meaning upon Howard—or Percival, as we shall call him,—he added, “And methinks that when you opened your front door just now, a heavy chain rattled. Assuredly your little house is well protected.”

“What would you infer from these facts?” demanded Percival: “that I have money—that I have turned miser?” he cried, with a forced and unnatural laugh. “Absurd! The person who lived here before me, had those bars put up to the window-shutters, and that heavy chain to the street door——”

“I thought you got the house cheap because it had only just been built?” said Torrens, smiling with malignant incredulity.

“Yes—but I did not tell you that I was the first person who occupied it,” exclaimed Percival, as if eager to explain away an inconsistency in his statements and efface from the mind of his visitor the disagreeable impression made there.

“This is mere child’s play, Mr. Howard—or Percival—or whatever your name may be!” cried Torrens. “You have got money—and you wish me to believe you poor. For myself, I *am* poor—so poor that I have but wherewith to obtain a meal and a bed for one night. It is true that I have a daughter and a son-in-law in London;—and it is likewise true that necessity—stern, imperious necessity has driven me at last to this city to seek assistance at their hands. But for nine years have I remained as one dead to them: for nine years have I wandered about the world, caring not what might become of me, and wishing to be believed dead in all reality by my daughter who suspects that I have been very criminal, and by my son-in-law who knows that I have! Yes—yes: I have purposely left them in uncertainty relative to me—unhappy man that I am,—purposely left them so, I say, in order that they may apprehend the worst! Stern want, however, was driving me to them when I encountered you: to-morrow morning I should have appeared in their presence,—in the presence of the daughter whom I do not love, and of her husband whom I hate—*hate*, for his very virtues, and because he knows me to be so vile!” added the old man, bitterly. “But now, sir, that I have met with you, your purse must save me the pain—the humiliation—the annoyance of encountering those beings face to face! Come, Mr. Percival—I have spoken to you frankly: do you be equally candid with me.”

“Candid in what?” demanded the individual thus addressed.

“In respect to your own means and resources,” returned Torrens. “I do not wish to be hard upon you; but a portion of the money that you robbed me of, I must and will have.”

“These are harsh words—and unavailing, too,” said Percival: “for I have not a sixpence to bless myself with! But,” he added, with a malicious grin, “if I cannot give you money, I may perhaps impart a piece of agreeable intelligence.”

“What! to me?” exclaimed Torrens, in a tone of surprise.

“Yes—to you. What would you think if I were to tell you that your dearly-beloved wife was in London at this very moment, and passing under the aristocratic name of Fitzhardinge?”

“My wife!” repeated Torrens, turning positively livid as these words struck upon his ears. “No—impossible! I would not meet that dreadful woman for thousands of pounds!”

“Then if you remain here you will assuredly encounter her,” said Percival; “for I received a note from her this evening announcing her intention to honour me with a visit,” he added, intently watching the effect which these words produced upon his companion.

“Villain! you are endeavouring to get rid of me as speedily as possible!” cried Torrens, almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

“Should you recognise your wife’s handwriting?” demanded Percival, a diabolical grin still distorting features which, once handsome, had been marred and rendered repulsive by time and evil passions. “Though she is now stricken in years and has become positively hideous in personal appearance, that handwriting retains all the grace and fluency which ever characterised it.”

With these words, he took a perfumed note from his pocket-book, and handed it to Torrens, who, hastily glancing over its contents, read the following words:—

> “Mrs. Fitzhardinge presents her compliments to Mr. Percival, and will call upon him between nine and ten o’clock this evening on very particular business. She therefore hopes that Mr. Percival will have the kindness to remain at home to receive her.”

“Now are you satisfied?” demanded Percival, who perceived by the workings of Torrens’ countenance that the handwriting had been fully recognised.

“And on what matters is she—that vile woman—coming to you?” asked Torrens, impatiently.

“I cannot answer the question. You perceive that she speaks only of *particular business* in a vague fashion. I met her by accident some few days ago—and have not seen her since.”

“And she comes between nine and ten,” mused Torrens: “and it is already close upon ten o’clock! I would not meet her for the world: ’twould recall to my mind, with intolerable force, all the anguish—all the sufferings——No—no,” he cried, suddenly interrupting himself and starting from his chair; “I will not—I cannot meet her!”

“Then you had better depart at once,” said Percival, evidently most anxious to see the unwelcome visitor turn his back upon the house.

“Yes—I shall depart indeed,” exclaimed Torrens: “but you must give me money first. Nay—no more excuses: I am a desperate man ——”

At that instant a double knock at the street door echoed through the little dwelling.

“’Tis your wife!” said Percival.

“Hide me—or let me escape,” cried Torrens, manifesting a violent and most unfeigned reluctance to encounter the woman whom for so many reasons he loathed and abhorred.

“Here—by the back gate,” said Percival; and, taking the light in his hand, he hastily conducted the almost bewildered Torrens along the passage—down a few steps—and thence to a door opening upon a piece of unenclosed waste ground at the back of the house.

At that instant the double knock was repeated—more loudly than before and evidently with impatience.

“Good night, Mr. Torrens,” said Percival, scarcely able to subdue a spice of lurking satire in his tone.

“Good night,” returned the other, savagely. “But I shall visit you again to-morrow morning.”

Percival closed the back gate as if to shut out this intimation from his ears; and, hurrying to the front door, he gave admittance to Perdita and her mother.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge were attired in the plainest possible manner, so that they seemed to be some poor tradesman's wife and daughter. But the moment the light of the candle fell on Perdita's countenance, Mr. Percival literally started as the glorious beauty of that face was revealed to him. The young woman perceived the effect of her charms on the old lawyer; and a smile of triumph played on her haughty lip,—for she said within herself; "Wherever I go, men pay homage to my loveliness!"

Hastily closing the front door, Percival now conducted his two visitresses into the back-parlour, which was far more commodiously furnished than the one where his interview with Torrens had taken place. The shutters of this room were, however, as strongly protected by iron bars and as well secured as those in the other; and Mr. Percival had multiplied in them the number of holes cut in the shape of a heart, in order that he might be enabled to fire his blunderbuss at a moment's warning, and in almost any direction, through the shutters, in case of an attempt on the part of burglars to effect an entry in the rear of the building.

For it was perfectly true, as he had informed Torrens, that he lived alone in the house: but he was reported to be a miser—and such indeed he was. Having been extravagant and profligate in his earlier years, he had fallen into the opposite extreme; and when he absconded from his creditors, the money which he had taken with him he hoarded carefully. For a long time he had remained concealed in a distant town, placing out his funds in small loans at an enormous interest; so that as his wealth augmented, his parsimonious habits increased. At last, become greedy and griping as any miser whose renown has been preserved in tale—book or history, Percival—as we shall continue to call him—resolved on venturing to London, where the field for his cupidity was more ample than in the provinces. Trusting to the alteration that years had made in his personal appearance, and to the disguise of the name which he had assumed, he settled in the secluded neighbourhood and comparatively lonely house when we now find him;—and, without seeking business obtrusively, he soon found plenty. One person whom he obliged with a loan would give his address to another also requiring assistance; and thus his clients or patrons—whichever the reader may choose to call the borrowers—increased. He was almost constantly at home—formed no acquaintances—and was short and pithy in his mode of transacting business. He never advanced money save when he perceived the security to be ample; and if occasionally he made a bad debt, he employed an attorney who asked no impertinent questions to sue the defaulter in his own name, it being alleged that the unpaid bill had been passed in a legitimate manner to the pettifogger aforesaid. An elderly widow, of the name of Dyer, occupied the house next door; and she acted in the capacity of charwoman for Mr. Percival—keeping his dwelling in order and preparing for him his frugal meals.

Having recorded these few necessary particulars, we shall now return to the little back parlour, where Mr. Percival and his two visitresses were seated. His back was turned to the window: but Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita, who sate opposite to him, faced it,—while the candle stood on the mantel,—so that had any one peeped through the heart-holes in the shutters, the countenances of the women must have been plainly visible to such curious observer outside the casement.

"Your daughter, madam, I presume?" said Mr. Percival, with a polite inclination of the head towards the handsome Perdita.

"Yes, my dear sir," was the reply. "And she is about to form an excellent match with a young gentleman who is indeed a nobleman by right, and who will shortly assert his title to that distinction. He wishes to borrow money for his immediate purposes and also to assist me: hence my visit to you this evening."

"Well—well, my dear madam," said Percival; "if the security be good——"

"The security is ample," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "He is indubitably the heir to vast estates—and his bond——"

"Will be quite sufficient," added Percival. "That is—presuming him to be of age——"

"He is twenty-five years old," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "But the history of himself and family is most extraordinary: and his father is not altogether unknown to you:—for, if I remember aright, it was you who prosecuted the celebrated highwayman, Thomas Rainford, for the robbery of the late Sir Christopher Blunt?"

"What earthly connexion can exist between Tom Rain and the young nobleman who wants to borrow money?" demanded Percival, with unfeigned astonishment.

"Grant me your patience, my dear sir," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, "and I will explain the matter as concisely as possible. Thomas Rainford was in reality the son of the late Earl of Ellingham—the eldest son, and legitimately born, of that nobleman, who privately

married a certain Octavia Manners. The individual who at present bears the title and enjoys the estates of the Earldom of Ellingham, is the offspring of a second marriage contracted by his father. He and Rainford are consequently half-brothers. All these facts are proven by certain papers now in the possession of myself and daughter. One of the documents is the marriage-certificate of the late Earl with Octavia Manners,—another the baptismal certificate of their son,—a third the journal of Octavia Manners explaining many matters connected with the whole affair,—and then follows a variety of documents establishing the identity of Thomas Rainford with the son of the late Earl and the Countess Octavia. Thus far the rights of Thomas Rainford are clearly made out. I must now inform you that Rainford and Lady Georgiana Hatfield have long been united in matrimonial bonds, and that the husband has for a considerable time adapted his wife's name. The offspring of this alliance is the young gentleman of whom I have already spoken to you, and who at present bears the denomination of Charles Hatfield. Now, his father being the rightful Earl of Ellingham, this Charles Hatfield is actually the Viscount Marston, and heir to the title and estates of the Earldom."

"Your history, my dear madam, is clear and comprehensive enough," said Percival, already calculating the enormous gains which might be derived from the fact of becoming the banker to a young noblemen having a vast fortune in the perspective, and whom he supposed to be as extravagantly inclined as youthful scions of the aristocracy in such cases generally are. "And you possess the proofs of all the singular facts which you have detailed?"

"The proofs—the positive proofs," replied Mrs. Fitzhardinge, emphatically;—and turning towards her daughter, she said, "Show Mr. Percival the papers."

"It is useless," answered Perdita, in a firm but quiet manner, "unless he first agree to advance a certain sum of money, should they be satisfactory."

"True," said her mother, biting her lip at the thought that her daughter was more keen than herself: then, addressing herself to the miser, she observed, "You heard the remark that fell from the lips of Miss Fitzhardinge?"

"Yes—yes," returned Mr. Percival. "We shall most likely do business together—most likely," he repeated. "At the same time, I must see my way very clearly——"

"And we must be careful not to reveal unnecessarily any more of the important secrets of which we are the depositories," said Perdita.

"Quite right, young lady!" exclaimed the miser, who experienced no slight degree of embarrassment: for he was afraid, on the one hand, of letting a good chance slip through his fingers—and he was fearful, on the other, of admitting that he had ample resources immediately available.

Not that Percival dreaded on the part of Mrs. Fitzhardinge the same attempt at extortion, or rather of obtaining restitution, which had been made by Mr. Torrens; because he knew full well that she was occupying a false position in the world, and living under an assumed name as well as himself;—and should she take it into her head to threaten him with an exposure as being no other than Howard the run-away attorney, he could in a moment retaliate by proclaiming her to be Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Torrens—the woman who had been transported for forgery!

No:—Mr. Percival dreaded not menace on the part of Mrs. Fitzhardinge; but the naturally suspicious disposition of the miser, and the vague fears that ever haunt the avaricious man when questioned as to the amount and whereabouts of his resources—these were the influences which made Percival hesitate to plunge too precipitately into the transaction now submitted for his consideration.

"Well, sir,—are you prepared to negociate with us—or not?" demanded Perdita, after a short pause, during which the miser fidgetted nervously upon his chair.

"It all depends, Miss—it all depends on the amount your noble friend requires," he answered at length.

"The entire business is left in our hands," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge; "and we wish to raise between five and six thousand pounds in the first instance——"

"Of which one thousand must be paid to-night," added Perdita, "as an earnest that the transaction is seriously entered into."

"A thousand pounds to-night!" cried the miser. "But how is that possible—even if I had the money in the house," he asked, looking anxiously around, and sinking his voice to a low whisper,—"how is it possible, I say, since the young nobleman is not here to give me any acknowledgment?"

"This objection was naturally anticipated by us," replied Perdita. "Viscount Marston, instead of sending us the papers this evening, did us the honour to call personally with them; and his lordship confided to me,—and to *me* alone," added Perdita, with a rapid glance of triumphant meaning at her mother,—"his note of hand for one thousand guineas."

"I must congratulate you, my dear madam," exclaimed Percival, addressing himself with a smile to the old woman,—"I must congratulate you on possessing a daughter of the most business-like character in the person of Miss Fitzhardinge."

"Then pray let us transact our present affairs in a business-like manner," said Perdita, who was rapidly putting herself more forward in the matter, and proportionately throwing her mother into the back-ground: so that the old woman more than once bit her lip to restrain

her rising choler;—but, remembering the terrific scene of the morning, she saw no alternative save to allow her daughter to have her own way—trusting, however, to the chapter of accidents to restore to her in the long run that paramount influence which she had lost.

“You wish me to discount at once that note of hand for a thousand guineas?” said the miser, fixing his eyes admiringly on Perdita’s splendid countenance.

“Yes—as an earnest that you are not prompted by mere curiosity to look farther into this most extraordinary, mysterious, and yet easily understood affair,” replied Perdita.

“I will accede to your terms, Miss Fitzhardinge,” said Percival, after a few minutes’ deliberation,—“provided that the documents in your possession bear out your mother’s statements.”

“Place the money on the table, sir,” returned the young woman, in her quiet though somewhat imperious manner; “and these papers,” she added, producing a sealed packet at the some time, “shall be submitted to your perusal.”

“Good!” cried the miser.

He then rose from his seat; and, having once more cast a furtive look around him, as if it were possible for an intruder to secrete himself in a room fourteen feet by ten, and which the three inmates already nearly filled, he proceeded to open an iron safe that was fitted into a kind of cupboard in one corner. Thence he took forth a tin cash-box, which, when opened, revealed heaps of Bank-notes, and a large amount in gold.

“There, ladies,” said he: “I have now convinced you of my ability to proceed farther in this transaction; and it is your turn, Miss,” he added, looking at Perdita, “to take the next step.”

“Granted!” was the reply; and, opening the packet, she handed the several papers, which were properly classed and numbered, one by one to the miser,—receiving back each before she gave him the next following.

Mr. Percival read the documents without much emotion. His pecuniary avocations had blunted the sentiment of curiosity in his soul: he viewed the matter only in a business-light;—and so long as the security was good, he cared not if all the highwaymen in the world should turn out to be noblemen in their own right. He thought of the profits that might arise from ministering to the extravagances, as he supposed, of a young nobleman having excellent certainties in the perspective; and it was not of the slightest importance to him how Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita had contrived to inveigle him into their meshes—how they had gotten possession of the papers—or how the money raised was to be expended.

“This is completely satisfactory as far as it goes,” he said, returning to the young woman the last paper which she had placed in his hand. “The documents show that Rainford is the real Earl of Ellingham; but there is no evidence to prove that your Charles Hatfield is his son.”

“We are well convinced of that fact,” said Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

“Yes—I suppose it may be admitted,” observed Percival, who had not the least idea that Charles Hatfield had ever passed and was still passing as the nephew of those whose were really his parents. “But there is still one question which must be fully cleared up;—and this is the legitimacy of the young man’s birth. If he be the lawfully begotten son of the rightful owner of the title and estates of the Earldom—then is he the heir, beyond all possibility of doubt: but if he be illegitimate——”

“The idea is absurd,” interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “There can be no hesitation in declaring that Thomas Rainford and Lady Georgiana had been privately married long before the man himself was condemned to death: else wherefore should she have exerted her interest to obtain a pardon for him at the hand of George the Fourth?”

“I remember the transaction,” said Percival; “and I have no moral doubt that all you tell me is perfectly correct. Indeed, I am so well assured of it, that I have not the least objection to discount the note of hand, on condition that the defective evidence be supplied me before I am called upon to make further advances.”

“Most certainly,” exclaimed Perdita. “Charles will give you every satisfactory proof of the validity of his claims. You require testimony to show that he is the lawfully begotten son of those who now pass under the name of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Hatfield?”

“The certificates of *their* marriage and *his* birth,” said the miser. “Where is the note of hand?”

Perdita produced it; and a little altercation then arose respecting the rate of discount. Mrs. Fitzhardinge manifested a greedy anxiety to conclude the bargain on the miser’s own exorbitant terms: but Perdita argued the point with him in a resolute manner. At last, however, an amicable understanding was arrived at; and the miser was permitted to deduct seventy-five pounds for the discount. Perdita received the amount which he then told down upon the table; and the old woman’s features grew distorted with rage—a rage the more intense, because she was forced to restrain it—when she found that her daughter did not offer to render her the guardian of the purse.

But Perdita had that day asserted an empire which she was resolved to maintain—a domination which she was determined to grasp indivisibly. Without positively offending or irritating her mother by pointed and overt insult, she nevertheless had made up her mind to

act as the mistress in all things;—and thus had the punishment of the vile old woman already begun, even on account of the new schemes of wickedness which she had set on foot.

Having secured the precious packet of papers and the money about her person, the beautiful Perdita rose from her chair, saying, “We may now take our departure, mother.”

“One word first!” exclaimed Percival, a sudden reminiscence striking him: then, turning towards Mrs. Fitzhardinge, he said, “My dear madam, I have some news to impart which I had almost forgotten in the absorbing nature of the business that has occupied us for the last hour,—news which will not a little astonish you——”

“Then pray keep me no longer in suspense!” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, Perdita’s conduct not having put her into the best of possible humours.

“Just before you knocked at the door this night——”

“Well, well?” ejaculated the impatient woman.

“A man was with me——”

“And that man?” repeated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, gasping for breath, as if she anticipated the reply.

“Was your husband!” added the miser.

A hideous expression passed over the countenance of Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—an expression of mingled hate, apprehension, and rage; and she staggered for a moment as if she were about to fall.

But subduing her emotions, she approached the miser, and said in a low, hoarse, grating tone, “Does he know that I am in London?—is he aware that I am in England—passing by the name of Fitzhardinge——”

“No—no,” replied Percival hastily: for he saw by the old woman’s manner that she would not thank him were he to inform her that he had made her husband acquainted with so many particulars concerning her.

“You are sure—you are certain?” demanded she, breathing somewhat more freely.

“Since Mr. Percival has already answered you satisfactorily, mother, wherefore require additional assurances?” said Perdita, who was in haste to depart—for it was now waxing very late.

“Because I would sooner meet one of those hideous snakes that I have seen in Australia, than encounter that man!” responded the old woman. “I know not why,—but I hate him—I loathe and abhor him——”

“Come along, mother,” interrupted Perdita, impatiently: “Mr. Percival cares nothing about all this.”

“True! but one word more,” cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “Tell me, sir—is that man—*my husband*,”—and the words appeared almost to choke her,—“is he well off—or poor and wretched?”

“He seemed to be very miserable,” answered the miser;—“so miserable that he wished to obtain assistance from me! But I—I never give,” he added, after a moment’s hesitation.

“I believe you, sir,” remarked Perdita, a faint smile of contempt curling her haughty but beauteous lip. “Now, mother, at last you are ready, I presume?”

“Allow me to light you to the door,” said Percival; and, with a bow, he preceded the two females into the passage.

He opened the front door, and Perdita, wishing him “good night” bounded forth first into the open air—for she felt relieved at escaping from the miser’s cheerless abode:—her mother followed more slowly—and just as she passed by Percival, who stood on the threshold officiously holding the candle, the light streamed fully on the countenance of the old woman. At that same instant Mrs. Dyer—the widow who lived at the next house—was returning home from a neighbour’s; and she caught a complete view of the face of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. It struck the good woman at the moment that she had seldom beheld such a repulsive, sinister countenance: but she was accustomed to see strange-looking people visit the miser’s abode;—and the circumstance therefore made no particular impression on her mind.

She merely said “Good night, sir,” to the miser, and forthwith entered her own abode.

Percival’s door closed at the same instant; and Mrs. Fitzhardinge having overtaken her daughter, the two retraced their way to the City Road, whence they took a cab to Suffolk Street.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE MISER ALONE IN HIS DWELLING.

Having carefully barred and bolted the street-door, Percival entered the front room, and assured himself that the shutters were safely fastened.

He then returned to the back parlour; and, seating himself at the table, proceeded to examine the contents of his cash-box.

He looked at the note of hand which he had received that night, and which bore the signature of *Marston*—for, in compliance with the suggestion of Mrs. Fitzhardinge, the infatuated Charles Hatfield had signed the document with the name to which he believed himself to be entitled.

The first sensations of the miser, as he fixed his eyes on the "promise to pay" at a specific date the sum of *one thousand guineas*, were of pleasure: for he calculated the profit he had derived from the transaction—and he flattered himself that he had gained seventy guineas in a single hour.

"And with so little trouble, too," he muttered to himself.

But, in the next moment, a gloomy shade began to cross his countenance: for the thought stole upon him that perhaps he had acted too precipitately—that the women might have forged a number of papers to delude him—that, after all, there might be no such person in existence as Charles Hatfield, or Viscount Marston.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed emphatically, as he endeavoured to banish these unpleasant reflections from his mind; "it is all right—and I am a fool thus to yield to misgivings. Why should not Tom Rain be the rightful Earl of Ellingham? Things more strange and improbable have occurred in this world. And if he be really the elder brother of the nobleman now bearing the title, why should he not have a son who is the heir to that title and likewise to the estates? Yes—yes: it is all feasible enough! Besides, amongst those papers were the marriage certificate of the late Earl and Octavia Manners—and the baptismal certificate of their child. Well, then—granting that there is a Charles Hatfield,—or, in other words, a Viscount Marston,—what is less extraordinary than that so beautiful a creature as this Miss Fitzhardinge should have captivated the young noble? She is a splendid girl—a very splendid girl! Even in the plain garb which she wore this evening—a sort of disguise, no doubt—she looked truly bewitching. What eyes!—what a profile!—what teeth!—what hair! Ah! I wish that I was a young man now—that I had not these sixty-five winters on my head: I would even yet endeavour to rival Viscount Marston! But, no—no: that were impossible! These young girls are smitten with titles more than with money: and, on my honour, Miss Fitzhardinge will become the rank of Viscountess full well. She has the dignity—the stateliness—and yet the grace and elegance of a woman of fashion! All this, doubtless, must be the work of nature: for where could she have become familiar with the manners and customs of the drawing-room? Ah! was not that a noise?"

And the miser, hastily shutting up his cash-box, started to his feet.

He listened—but all was still!

"A false alarm," he murmured to himself—and resumed his seat.

But the incident had completely disturbed the current of his thoughts which were flowing into a more voluptuous channel than for years and years they had done,—the beauty of Perdita having made a deep impression upon the mind of the miser, and for a few minutes weaned away his attention from the hitherto all-absorbing gold that he worshipped so devotedly.

And now that alarm,—whether false or real, we cannot as yet determine,—recalled his errant thoughts to the one engrossing subject: and carefully depositing his cash-box in the safe, he next secured the safe itself.

Then, having placed the key in his pocket, he took the candle in his hand, and once more inspected the street-door—the shutters in the front-room—and the bolt of the back-gate.

He descended into the kitchen,—that kitchen which no domestic occupied, and the hearth of which so seldom sparkled or shone with blazing coal or wood,—a cursed hearth which, even in the very midst of summer, seemed cheerless and cold! The area that gave light to the kitchen-window was strongly barred over: the window itself was likewise barred;—and the door opening into the area was well secured with bolts and chains.

All these multiplied precautions were duly inspected by the miser. Forgotten now was the image of Perdita:—gold—gold—*his* gold,—this was the one absorbing idea!

No—not the only *one*: for with the thought of possessing gold is ever associated the dread of losing it;—and at this moment the man's mind was a prey to vague fears—undefined alarms—gloomy misgivings.

He did not like that noise which he had heard:—it haunted him like a spectre;—it was something that weighed upon his soul like lead.

He felt—he knew that he was really *alone* in that house,—aye, and that the house was lonely in situation likewise: for he could not count for aid, in case of need, on the elderly widow next door and her two or three poor female lodgers. Thus, the fact that there *was* a house adjoining did not detract from the sense of utter loneliness awakened in his mind respecting his own abode.

But were not the bolts secure—the chains fastened—the bars all firm and strong? Oh! he had not spared his money to obtain the best iron and the best work when those precautions were adopted: and, since he had become a miser, he had never paid a bill so cheerfully as that which the defences of his dwelling had incurred.

Yes:—the bolts *were* secure—the chains *were* well fastened—and the bars *were* all firm and strong;—and yet Percival was not at ease

in his mind.

That unknown, unaccountable noise had alarmed him. It was a noise the nature of which he could scarcely explain to himself,—nor whether it had occurred inside or outside the house: no—nor whether it were the creaking of timber—or the shaking of the shutters—or the sound of a human voice speaking low, hoarse, and in a disguised tone.

Having convinced himself that all was secure in the kitchen and the little scullery at the back, Percival once more ascended to his back parlour. He looked at his watch, and found it was half an hour past midnight:—still he felt no inclination to sleep! Vague and oppressive fears continued to haunt him;—and the more he essayed to wrestle with his reflections, the more intolerable did they become,—till at last horrible ideas were forced upon his imagination,—of how misers had been murdered for their gold—how their blood had been poured out even on the very treasure-chests to which they clung with desperate tenacity while the blows of the assassins rained down upon their heads!

Of all these things he thought; and his brain appeared to whirl. He cast his eyes around: objects of terror seemed to encounter them in all directions—for his fevered, excited imagination conjured up the most horrifying phantoms.

Suddenly taking his head as it were in his hands, and pressing it violently, he exclaimed aloud. “Perdition take this cowardly nervousness! What have I to fear to-night—more than any other? I need rest—repose—slumber;—and when I awake in the morning, I shall laugh at myself for the absurd terrors to which I have yielded now!”

Taking the light in his hand, he was about to quit the room and seek his chamber up stairs, when a sound, as of the back door slowly opening, fell upon his ears;—and so great was the alarm with which this circumstance filled him,—striking him as it were with a sudden paralysis,—that he let the candle fall upon the floor—and the light was immediately extinguished.

Then there was the rush of a man up the stairs leading from the back door to the parlour;—and in another moment Percival was assailed in the dark, and in a desperate manner. A heavy blow, as with a bludgeon, felled him to the ground,—not quite stunning him, but so far depriving him of his physical energies that he could not even cry out. But he grasped the murderer by the throat; and a short struggle ensued. The assassin, however, was armed with the determination, if not with the strength, of a demon;—and, dashing the miser back on the floor again with all his force, he seized the bludgeon and wielded it with such fearful effect, that in a few instants the victim lay motionless and silent beneath him!

This fearful crime was accomplished in the dark; and yet the murderer appeared not to be afraid—nor to lose his presence of mind. It would also seem that he was acquainted with the nook where the miser’s gold was concealed: yes—even circumstances more minute still were known to him. For, stooping down, and passing his hand over the corpse, he felt in the very pocket where Percival had placed the key of the cupboard enclosing the iron safe;—and then, groping his way to that cupboard, he opened it,—opened likewise the iron safe,—and drew forth the tin case containing the miser’s gold and bank-notes. Breaking open the lid of the box, the miscreant secured all the coin, notes, and papers about his person, and then stole away from the dwelling by means of the back-gate, which he closed behind him.

At half-past seven o’clock in the morning, Mrs. Dyer knocked at the door of the miser’s house, and was somewhat surprised when, five minutes having elapsed, her summons remained unanswered.

“Perhaps he has over-slept himself,” she muttered to herself: “I will come back again presently;”—and the woman returned to her own abode.

But something like a misgiving had stolen into her mind,—a vague and indefinable fear—a presentiment against which she could not wrestle. A gloom had fallen on her spirits: she was in that humour when people who are in any way superstitious, expect bad news. Not that she had heard any noise in the course of the night, or that she had any motive for suspicion:—the feeling that oppressed her was excited by no accountable and intelligible cause,—unless, indeed, it were that during the five or six years she had waited upon Mr. Percival, this was the very first occasion on which she had failed to find him already up and dressed, and ready to admit her at a stipulated hour.

Having performed a few domestic duties in her own house—but in a strange manner, as if she scarcely knew what she was doing,—Mrs. Dyer returned to the miser’s front-door, at which she knocked again.

But again there was no response: all was silent.

The widow-woman was now seriously alarmed; and, hastening back into her dwelling, she informed her female lodgers that she could not make Mr. Percival hear next door, and was afraid something had happened. The three women, to whom these observations were addressed, accompanied her to the miser’s house; and as all within was still silent as the grave, they proceeded round to the back-door with the intention of looking in through the window shutters, which, as we have before stated, were perforated with many heart-holes. But Mrs. Dyer first happened to try the back-gate, and, to her surprise, found it unfastened. She and the other women then entered the house; and their attention, now rendered keen by dark suspicions, was immediately attracted to the fact that the part of the door-post

into which the bolt of the back-gate fitted, had been cut away, *from the outside*, in such a manner that it was an easy affair to slide back the bolt. The females beheld this ominous appearance with dismay;—but how shuddering were the looks of deep apprehension which they rapidly and silently exchanged, when they likewise noticed an old piece of iron still sticking in the lock,—a sure indication of that lock having been picked, also from the outside!

Had either one of the women now manifested the least hesitation to proceed, the others would have gladly followed the example to retreat. But, huddling all together—and in deep silence—they slowly ascended the stairs leading to the back parlour.

The door of this room was half open; and as the widow endeavoured to push it farther back still, it was stopped by something that evidently was not a table nor a chair,—no—nor aught made of wood.

The women slowly entered the parlour:—and then their tongues were suddenly loosened—and piercing shrieks burst from their lips. For the prismatic light which streamed through the heart-holes of the closed shutters, played on the smashed, gory, and disfigured countenance of the murdered man!

Terror for a few minutes rooted to the spot the spectatresses of this horrible spectacle:—and, clinging—hanging to each other, they remained gazing, in terror and dismay, on the remains of him whom they had all seen alive and in health on the preceding day!

At length the female who was nearest to the door seemed suddenly to recover the use of her limbs; and, with another ejaculation of horror, she fled precipitately,—her companions following her with a haste which seemed to indicate that they were afraid lest the murdered man should stretch forth his hand and clutch the hindermost by the garments.

Oh! what terrors are inspired by the cold—inanimate—powerless remains of mortality! And yet men of the strongest minds have had their fears in this respect;—and heroes who would have faced a serried rank bristling with bayonets, or hunted the savage tiger in the jungles of Hindoostan, have feared to remain alone with the corpse of a fellow-creature!

Full soon was the dreadful rumour spread throughout the neighbourhood that the miser Percival had been murdered during the night;—and the police were speedily upon the spot.

The dead body indeed presented a hideous spectacle to the view:—the countenance was so disfigured as to defy recognition;—and the skull was fractured in several places. By the side of the corpse lay a heavy stake; and, as it was covered with blood, and some of the hair from the murdered man's head was sticking to it, there was no difficulty in pronouncing it to have been the weapon used by the assassin. The candlestick was found on the floor close by;—the cupboard and the iron safe were open;—and the tin-box, emptied of its contents, was stumbled over by one of the officers.

Not the slightest suspicion could possibly be attached to the widow-woman or her lodgers occupying the adjacent house;—but they were necessarily questioned by the inspector, with a view to elicit any particulars that might aid the officers of justice in sifting the most mysterious and horrible affair.

Mrs. Dyer stated that she had heard no disturbance during the night; and her lodgers all made a similar declaration.

"I passed the evening with a neighbour," said the widow, naming the friend at whose house she had supped; "and I returned home about half-past eleven o'clock. Mr. Percival was at that moment taking leave of some visitors at his own door: and——Oh! I remember now," exclaimed Mrs. Dyer, a sudden thought striking her,—"there were two women—one apparently young, if I might judge by the hasty glimpse I caught of her figure—for I did not see her face, as she was standing by the gate opening into the road——"

"And the other woman?" demanded the inspector.

"Was old and very ugly," returned the widow. "I saw her countenance plainly enough; for the light which Mr. Percival held, streamed full upon it;—and I thought at the moment that I had never in my life beheld such a repulsive—horrible-looking creature. I was really frightened—there was something so unpleasant in her looks."

"And was any man with them?" enquired the officer.

"No: the two women were alone. They took leave of Mr. Percival, and, I suppose, went away. At all events, I know that he closed his door just at the same moment that I shut mine. I said 'Good night' to him: and that was the last time I saw the poor gentleman alive."

"It is highly important," observed the inspector, "that we should find out these two women of whom you speak—as they were, to all appearances, the last persons who were with the deceased?"

Mrs. Dyer then gave as accurate a description as she could of the personal appearance of the old woman whose countenance had struck her as being so repulsive and sinister;—and the inspector, having left a couple of officers on the premises where the crime had been committed, departed to acquaint the Coroner with the dreadful occurrence.

CHAPTER CXL.

FRESH SCENES AND MORE TROUBLES AT HOME.

While the discovery of the assassination of the old miser was being made in Pentonville, as just related, a scene of some interest occurred simultaneously at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, in Pall Mall.

Charles Hatfield had risen early, after having passed a restless night; and, his toilette being completed, he was just meditating—unpleasantly meditating on the demeanour that it was proper for him to assume at the breakfast-table,—when the door opened, and his father entered the chamber.

The young man had not encountered his parents since the dispute of the preceding morning: he had purposely avoided them throughout the day—not appearing at the dinner-table, and absenting himself likewise from the usual family meeting at the supper-hour. He therefore felt himself somewhat disagreeably situated,—being totally unprepared to meet his father, and having decided on no definite course to pursue with regard to him.

"My dear son," said Mr. Hatfield, approaching and taking the young man's hand, "it is necessary that we should have an immediate explanation. I allude to the occurrences of yesterday morning; and I regret that you should have adopted the unusual course of absenting yourself throughout the day——"

"I returned home between seven and eight last evening," interrupted Charles, hastily, but not disrespectfully.

"I am aware of it," said Mr. Hatfield, fixing his eyes upon his son in a penetrating manner. "But you only remained in the house a few minutes;—and, having visited your chamber, you hurried away again. Were you afraid to encounter your parents? Remember, Charles, if you felt that your conduct of the morning had been undutiful and improper—nay, I will even say *cruel*, towards us—yet a single word expressive of contrition would have made us open our arms to receive you."

"You denounce my behaviour as cruel towards you," exclaimed Charles: "but did you not first provoke *me*, father?—did you not call me harsh names? And if, in return, I complained of what I considered to be the unnatural conduct of my parents toward me——"

"Wherefore thus pertinaciously endeavour to penetrate into those secrets which, for good and salutary reasons, your parents keep concealed from you?" demanded Mr. Hatfield: "for I presume that you allude to the fact of our still desiring that you should pass as our nephew."

"You have assured me that I am legitimate—that there is no stigma upon my birth," cried Charles;—"then wherefore not acknowledge me as your son? You claim from me the duty of a son—and yet you deny me the title! And again I must remind you, father, that to an accident alone am I indebted for the knowledge of my birth!"

"I would ask you, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in a serious and impressive tone, "what all this has to do with the proposal of marriage that you made to Lady Frances Ellingham: for it was on *this* point that our dispute commenced yesterday morning. Am I to suppose that my son, being unwilling to contract an alliance so honourable to him, seeks other grounds whereon to base his design of flying in the face of his parents?—am I to conclude that, being resolved to thwart us in this—our dearest hope, you seize upon another and ignoble pretext to justify your rebellion against us!"

"No—ten thousand times *No*!" exclaimed the young man, cruelly hurt by these suspicions. "In first place, I do not love Lady Frances Ellingham otherwise than as a brother may love a sister——"

"Because," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, fixing his eyes sternly upon his son,—"because you have formed some connexion of which you are ashamed——"

"Ah!" cried Charles, starting violently. "Has my father acted the spy upon me?"

"Listen," said Mr. Hatfield, to whose countenance the indignant blood rushed as his son thus insolently addressed him: but he chose to controul his feelings—and he succeeded: "listen, Charles—and then decide whether you ought to judge me so harshly. Your conduct of yesterday morning towards your mother and myself was of such an extraordinary—unaccountable—distressing nature, that you cannot blame me if I resolved to discover the motives that had actuated you. In this determination I was fixed by your protracted absence throughout the day—your stealthy return in the evening—your short visit to your own chamber—your avoidance of all the inmates of this house—and your hasty and also stealthy departure again. I confess, then, that I followed you last evening——"

“You followed me, father?” repeated Charles, in a low, hoarse, and hollow voice.

“Yes—I followed you to Suffolk Street,” continued Mr. Hatfield, with a firmness and a cool determination of tone and manner which he hoped would overawe the rebellious young man: “and, on inquiry in the neighbourhood, I learnt that at the house which you entered, dwells a very beautiful young lady. Now, I give you my honour, Charles, that I asked no more—was told no more than this one fact. I have no desire to become acquainted with the *liaisons* of my son:—indeed, I know that young men will be—what shall we call it?—*gay*, if you will. All I wished to ascertain was whether there were any grounds for supposing that you had formed a connexion which you may believe to have *love* for its basis, and which induced you yesterday morning to refuse the fulfilment of your own offer to Lady Frances Ellingham.”

“Father,” said Charles Hatfield, scarcely able to restrain an outburst of indignation, reproach, and bitter recrimination,—in which, had he allowed that torrent of feelings to force a vent, all that he knew of his family and their secrets would have been revealed, or rather proclaimed, in no measured terms;—“father,” he said, fortunately subduing the evil promptings of the moment,—“I have listened to you with attention—though not without impatience. Yesterday you reviled me—you heaped bitter reproaches upon me—you menaced me with disinheritance: then, in the evening, you enacted the spy upon my actions—you watched me—you followed me——”

“It was my duty—and a most painful one, I can assure you,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, alarmed by the strange—the ominous coldness that characterised his son’s tone and manner.

“Your duty!” ejaculated Charles, now speaking with an indignation that burst forth in frightful contrast with the unnatural tranquillity on which it so abruptly broke; “and wherefore have you not performed your duty in all things? Duty, indeed! But know, father, that there are other duties to fulfil than merely playing the part of a spy on your son’s actions:—there are such duties as giving him his proper name—allowing him to assume his just rights—and placing him in that social position which he ought to occupy! You menace me with the loss of fortune, father?—Oh! you know how vain and ridiculous is this threat—and how it aggravates the wickedness of all your former conduct towards me! I am no longer a child to be held in leading-strings—no longer a silly sentimentalist who, through maudlin and mawkish feelings of a false delicacy, will consent to have my nearest and dearest interests trampled upon—my privileges altogether withheld—my rights cruelly denied me! You have played the mysterious too long,—you have enacted the cruel and unnatural until endurance has become impossible;—and now you would assume the part of the absolute dictator—expecting to find me still a pliant, docile, grovelling slave,—without spirit—without courage—without even the common feelings of a man! But you are mistaken, father:—and if I have thus been driven to tell you my mind, you have only yourself to reproach, for so distressing—so painful a scene!”

Thus speaking,—and before his father had so far recovered from the amazement into which this volley of words threw him, as to be able even to stretch out a hand to retain him,—Charles seized his hat, and rushed from the room.

In less than a minute the front-door of the house closed behind him; and he hurried on, like one demented, to Suffolk Street.

But before we accompany him thither, we must pause to explain the effect which this scene had upon his father.

Indeed, Mr. Hatfield was struck with an astonishment so profound—a bewilderment so complete, that his heart seemed as if it were numbed against pain. He could not comprehend the drift of Charles’s passionate address,—otherwise than by supposing that the young man required to be recognised as a son, and not as a nephew. For it did not—as, in fact, it could not—for a single moment enter Mr. Hatfield’s head that Charles had discovered all the occurrences of former years, and that he had thence drawn the false and fatal inference that he—this same infatuated young man—was the heir to the proud title and vast estates of the Earldom of Ellingham. He therefore saw in his son’s conduct only the rebellious spirit of an individual who, having formed a connexion of which he was most likely ashamed and which he knew to be improper, endeavoured to meet his parents’ reproaches with recriminations, and seize upon the least shadow of an excuse or pretext for resisting the paternal authority.

When reflection thus diminished the wonderment which Mr. Hatfield experienced at the behaviour of the young man, pain and sorrow succeeded that first feeling. Indeed, the unhappy father was cruelly embarrassed: he knew not how to act. Charles was of that age when,—even did circumstances permit Mr. Hatfield to acknowledge that he really was his son,—no legal authority could be exercised, nor constraint practised; and he felt assured that any farther attempt to interfere with him in the connexion which he had formed, would only aggravate the irritability of the wrong-headed young man.

Then again, it was impossible to abandon him thus to courses which might hurry him on to utter ruin;—and moreover, the Lady Frances Ellingham had been so cruelly trifled with, that an explanation with *her* parents became absolutely necessary.

Now was it that Mr. Hatfield cursed the hour when he had been induced to leave Italy, and return to England on this visit to his half-brother—a visit which the Earl had by letter urged him to pay, and to which he had assented in full confidence of the complete safety of the step.

Bewildered with the variety of his conflicting thoughts, and feeling the necessity as well as recognising the propriety of consulting the Earl, Mr. Hatfield repaired to the library, whence he despatched a message to the nobleman requesting his lordship to join him there as speedily as possible:—for it still wanted upwards of half-an-hour to the usual breakfast time.

The Earl of Ellingham was just issuing from his chamber when the message was delivered to him; and, immediately apprehending

some evil news, he hastened to the library, where he found his half-brother pacing up and down in an agitated manner.

Mr. Hatfield, without any disguise, hesitation, or circumlocution, immediately unfolded to the Earl all that had taken place, both on that and the preceding day, in respect to Charles;—and Arthur listened with emotions of mingled pain, astonishment, and apprehension.

"Much as it would have delighted me," he at length observed, "to witness the union of my daughter and your son, Thomas, I cannot for a moment recommend that the young man's inclinations should be forced. Such an union seemed necessary—almost imperiously necessary under the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed. While you, the elder brother, renounce the title which is your just right—I, the younger one, have long borne it and bear it still;—though, heaven knows that I value it indeed but little——However," added the Earl, interrupting himself hastily,—"I was about to observe that, situated as we thus are, it appears but natural and proper that your son should receive a positive and acknowledged admission into the family by means of an alliance with my daughter. And she, poor girl—she loves him," continued the nobleman, his voice faltering; "and he has acted unwisely—to use no harsher term—in declaring an attachment which he does not feel, and making a proposal which he cannot accomplish."

"I am at a loss how to act!" said Mr. Hatfield. "My God!" he cried, in a tone expressive of deep feeling, "am I ever to be the means of giving annoyance and vexation to you, my dear Arthur,—you, who have been so kind and generous a friend to me?"

"Not on *this* account must you distress yourself, Thomas," returned the Earl, emphatically: "you are not responsible for the wayward humours of your son. But surely this sudden manifestation of a rebellions disposition on his part, cannot arise wholly and solely from the connexion which you believe him to have formed. Have you enquired concerning the character of the women—the mother and daughter—whom he visits in Suffolk-street?"

"No: I contented myself with ascertaining that at the house which I saw him enter, there is a young lady of very extraordinary beauty."

"And are you convinced that Charles has learnt nothing relative to the events of former years—nothing calculated to diminish——"

"I understand you, Arthur," said Mr. Hatfield, seeing that his half-brother hesitated: "you would ask whether I have any reason to believe that he has learnt aught which may have a tendency to diminish the respect he had until within these two days past maintained towards his parents? On this head I am of course unable to answer you positively: but my impression is that he is as much as ever in the dark relative to the dread occurrences of the past. Indeed, how can he have possibly learnt a single fact——"

"May not the discovery that he is your *son*, and not your nephew, have induced him to seek for farther information?" enquired the Earl of Ellingham. "May not some sentiment of ardent curiosity have been awakened within him——"

"But where could he address himself to this task of raising the veil from the mysteries of by-gone years—even if he have the slightest ground to suspect that such mysteries do exist?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, interrupting the Earl. "To what source could he repair for the means of elucidation?"

"I know not: and yet—I am now impressed with suspicions of a most unpleasant nature," observed the Earl. "It is very essential that some immediate step should be taken to redeem this fine young man from a career of error—perhaps of depravity——"

"Oh! yes—yes!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "My God! if the sins of the father be in this case visited upon the son, life will become intolerable to me!—Rather would I at once have a full and complete understanding with Charles,—tell him all—yes, *all*,—reveal to him who I really am—open to him the means of a complete retrospection, embracing all my sad history,—and then throw myself on his mercy—imploring him at least to have pity upon his innocent mother, if not on me who am so guilty!"

"No—no, Thomas: this humiliation may not be!" ejaculated the Earl. "For if, as you believe, your son has at present no suspicion of the past, it would be madness to make unnecessary revelations."

"I am bewildered—cruelly perplexed: I know not how to act!" cried Mr. Hatfield. "Oh! if I were confident that he has no such suspicions—that he has learnt or surmised nothing calculated to diminish the respect due to his mother and myself——"

"How can he have fathomed the obscurity which hangs over your former life?" demanded the Earl. "And as to supposing that he could, by any possible means, obtain even the shadow of an idea of your real birth and parentage——"

"No: for the papers—those important papers which I gave you years ago, and which I requested you to destroy,—those papers, I say," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, "could alone make such important revelations to my son: and, thank heaven! they are not in existence."

"My dear brother," returned the Earl of Ellingham, taking Mr. Hatfield's hand, and speaking in a very serious tone, "I most frankly and honestly inform you that those papers have *not* been destroyed. At the same time, they have been kept in a place of perfect security—a secret recess known only to myself——"

"And wherefore were not such dangerous documents burnt—annihilated!" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a reproachful tone.

"I dared not perform a deed which would argue so much selfishness on my part," replied the Earl of Ellingham, now speaking with a strong emphasis—the result and impulse of his generous, lofty, honourable feelings. "So long as those papers remain in existence, you, my dear brother, can at any moment say to me, '*I repent of the step which I took in renouncing my just rights and privileges; and I now*

claim them:'—and should you at any time thus address me, it would only be for me to produce the papers that establish your claims."

"Oh! Arthur, you are generous—even to a fault!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "You know—or, at least, I again assure you for the hundredth time, that not for worlds would I heap disgrace on a noble name by daring to assume it! Merciful heavens! shall the coronet which becomes you so well, be snatched from your brows, and transferred to those of——"

"Hush! Thomas—hush! this excitement is most unnecessary," interrupted the Earl. "You must not blame me for the motives which induced me to keep the documents;—and now—if you will have them restored to you——"

"Yes—yes: give them to me, Arthur," cried Mr. Hatfield, resolving to destroy the papers without farther delay.

"You claim them—they are yours—and they shall at once be returned into your hands," said the nobleman. "But I conjure you to act not hastily nor rashly——"

"Fear nothing, Arthur," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield: "but give me the papers! There is no time to lose—the ladies will be waiting for us at the breakfast-table——"

"True!" ejaculated the Earl: and, approaching that shelf at the back of which the secret recess was formed, he said, "Once every year have I inspected this well concealed depository: once every year have I assured myself that the precious documents were safe;—and on those occasions, I have cleansed them of the dust which even accumulates in a place that is almost hermetically sealed."

As the Earl thus spoke, he took down from the shelf the books which stood immediately before the recess; and Mr. Hatfield, receiving the volumes in his hands, placed them upon the table. While performing this simple and almost mechanical act, his eyes were suddenly attracted to the name and date of one of the books;—and his looks were rivetted, as it were, on the words—"*Annual Register, 1827*."

For the nature of the volume and the date of the year whose incidents it recorded, suddenly revived the poignancy of many bitter recollections, the sharpness of which had been somewhat blunted by time: and it was in a moment of strange nervousness—or idiosyncratic excitement, that he opened the book which thus had aroused those painful memories.

An ejaculation of horror—irrepressible horror—escaped his lips: for he had lighted on the very page which contained the account of his *Execution* at Horsemonger Lane:—and at the very same instant a cry of mingled amazement and alarm burst from the Earl of Ellingham.

"Oh! is this a mere accident?" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield: "or a warning——"

"Merciful heaven—the papers!" ejaculated the nobleman.

"A warning that my son has seen this?" added the unhappy father, almost distracted with the idea.

"Some miscreant has done this!" cried the Earl, stamping his foot with rage: and it was seldom that *he* thus gave way to his passion.

The brothers turned towards each other—exchanging hasty glances of mutual and anxious enquiry.

"The papers are gone!" said the Earl, clasping his hands in despair.

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Hatfield, staggering as if struck by a sudden blow. "And this book—this book," he faltered, in a faint tone, "was in the immediate vicinity of the recess! He who took the papers—might have read also—in that volume—the terrible account——"

Mr. Hatfield could say no more: overpowered by his feelings, he sank exhausted on the nearest seat.

The Earl glanced at the open page which his half-brother had indicated; and, observing the nature of the statement there recorded, he instantly comprehended the cause of Mr. Hatfield's emotions, and also of the suspicions which had suddenly seized upon him.

"Yes—yes: this book has been read lately," said Arthur, in an excited and hurried manner: "behold! the corners of the covers have been recently injured. Oh! my God! what does all this mean?"

It will be recollected that on the memorable night when Charles Hatfield pursued his successful researches in the library, he had hurled away from him, in his rage and almost maddening grief, the volume that made such strange—such appalling revelations: and the violence of the action had so far injured the book, as to bend and graze the corners of the binding,—the marks of the injury remaining clearly visible, and the white interior of the leather being laid bare, and thus proving how recently the work had been used.

"The book has been read very lately," murmured Mr. Hatfield, in a musing tone; "and the papers have perhaps been stolen lately—-"

"Yes," exclaimed the Earl: "for not a month has elapsed since I inspected that recess and found them safe."

"Then who could have done this?" cried Mr. Hatfield, starting from his seat, in a sudden access of excitement which was accompanied by a return of moral and physical energy. "Oh! is it possible that Charles is the author of all that seems so mysterious? Has he searched for the records of my earlier life?—has he by accident discovered and purloined those papers—those fatal papers?"

“Yes—it must be he!” exclaimed the Earl: “for did you not tell me that he spoke of claims—and rights—and privileges unjustly withheld,—and that be has harped upon what he termed the unnatural conduct of his parents in concealing from him the secret of his birth? Thomas—my dear Thomas,” continued Lord Ellingham, speaking in a lower—more measured—and more impressive tone, “I can see it all! That young man has found out who you are: be has learnt that you are the rightful heir to the honours and estates which I enjoy;—and, believing himself to be your legitimate son—according to the assurance that you were forced, for your wife’s sake, to give him—the deluded, deceived Charles Hatfield fancies himself to be the lawful heir to the Earldom!”

“You have divined the truth, Arthur!” cried Mr. Hatfield, his heart wrung to its very core by all the maddening fears and torturing reflections which were thus suddenly excited within him. “Oh! what dreadful embarrassments—what frightful complications, will this misapprehension entail on my unhappy son—on you—on me—on all who are connected with us!”

“There is not a moment to lose!” exclaimed Lord Ellingham. “We must hasten after this infatuated young man——”

At that moment the door opened; and Clarence Villiers entered the library,—the Earl having requested him on the previous day to visit him at the hour when, true to the appointment, he thus made his appearance.

Villiers, perceiving at the first glance, that something unusual was agitating Lord Ellingham and Mr. Hatfield, was about to retire, when the Earl, beckoning him to advance, turned hastily round to his half-brother, and said in a hurried whisper, “We will entrust this matter to Villiers: he will conduct it with less excitement than you and I; and, as he knows your secret——”

“Yes:—but all he *does* know is that the Mr. Hatfield of to-day is identical with the Thomas Rainford of former times,” interrupted the Earl’s half-brother, also speaking in a low and hasty tone: “remember—he is unacquainted with aught of our family secrets—ignorant of the parentage of Charles——”

“Neither is it necessary that he should be made acquainted with all these facts,” interrupted Arthur:—“but leave the matter to me.” Then, turning towards Clarence, he said, “My dear Mr. Villiers, you come most opportunely to render us an important service. We have every reason to believe that Charles has formed an improper connexion with a young female of great beauty, residing with her mother in very handsome lodgings in Suffolk Street: we likewise conclude that he is there at this present moment. Hasten thither, my good friend—demand an immediate interview with Charles—and tell him that certain discoveries have been made at home, in which he is deeply interested. In a word, compel him to accompany you away from the designing women who have doubtless entangled him in their meshes——”

“Nay: let us not judge hastily,” cried Mr. Hatfield: “remember—I have heard nothing against the characters of these ladies; and it may be a virtuous and honest affection, after all, that renders Charles a visitor at their house. Let Mr. Villiers, then, act with circumspection—and behave with the strictest courtesy towards these ladies, should he encounter them.”

“Yes—but under any circumstances you must persuade Charles to return with you immediately to this house,” said the Earl. “Mr. Hatfield will acquaint you with the precise address of the lodgings in Suffolk Street——”

The Earl’s half-brother mentioned the number of the dwelling to which he had traced his son on the preceding evening;—adding, “The name of the ladies is Fitzhardinge—and I heard that the daughter bears the singular denomination of *Perdita*.”

“Perdita!” cried Villiers, starting violently. “Oh! if this be the case——unhappy, lost Charles Hatfield!”

“Good heavens! what mean you?” demanded the wretched father, rendered terribly anxious by those ominous words that fell on his ears like a death-knell.

“Two ladies—mother and daughter—dwelling together—and the girl named *Perdita*,” mused Clarence Villiers, not immediately heeding the earnest appeal of Mr. Hatfield: “yes—yes—it must be they!—my aunt—my wretched, wretched aunt who has returned from transportation—and her profligate but beauteous daughter!”

“Do you mean that Mrs. Slingsby who—years ago—you know to what I allude?” asked Mr. Hatfield, in a hurried tone, as he grasped Clarence violently by the wrist.

“Yes—I *do* mean that bad woman!” exclaimed Villiers, who had now become painfully excited in his turn: “and I regret—Oh! I regret to say that she has brought over to England her daughter, whom report mentions as an angel of beauty and a demon in profligacy——”

“My God! Mr. Villiers—save Charles—save my Charles from these incarnate fiends!” cried Mr. Hatfield. “Or I myself——”

And he was rushing to the door of the library, when the Earl held him back, saying, “No, Thomas—you must not go in this excited state: let Villiers take the affair in hand.”

Mr. Hatfield fell back into a seat, a prey to the most painful—the most agonising emotions; while Clarence hurriedly departed to execute the commission entrusted to him.

The Earl now addressed himself to the task of consoling his unfortunate brother-in-law;—and he had just succeeded in inducing Mr. Hatfield to assume as composed a demeanour as possible, preparatory to their joint appearance at the breakfast-table, when Clarence

Villiers rushed into the room.

Not a quarter of an hour had elapsed since his departure;—and this speedy return, together with his agitated manner, raised new alarms in the breasts of the Earl and Mr. Hatfield.

“They are gone—fled—all three together!” cried Villiers, throwing himself exhausted on an ottoman, and panting for breath.

“Gone!” repeated the miserable father, surveying Clarence with eyes that stared wildly and unnaturally.

“Yes—gone!” said Villiers. “Ten minutes before I reached Suffolk Street, my aunt, her daughter, and Mr. Charles departed in a post-chaise, which had been sent for apparently in consequence of some sudden plan: for the people of the house were previously unacquainted with the intention of their lodgers thus to leave so abruptly.”

“But where was the chaise hired? and which road has it taken?” demanded Mr. Hatfield, now manifesting an energy and determination that proved his readiness to meet the emergency and adopt measures to pursue the fugitives.

“I sought for that information in vain,” returned Clarence Villiers. “It appears that my aunt herself went out to order the post-chaise; and that care was taken not to allow the people of the house any opportunity to converse with the post-boys. The rent and other liabilities were all duly paid; and the landlady of the lodgings accordingly makes no complaint of the women who have quitted her abode.”

“What course do you intend to adopt?” hastily demanded the Earl, turning to his half-brother.

“Order me your best horse to be saddled forthwith,” said Mr. Hatfield; “and I will proceed in pursuit of the runaways. ’Tis ten to one that I will obtain some trace of them. Perhaps Mr. Villiers will likewise mount horse, and take the northern road.”

“While I shall do the same, and pursue a westerly direction,” observed the Earl.

“Good: for it was my intention to choose the route towards Dover,” added Mr. Hatfield. “And now one word more, Arthur,” he continued, the moment Villiers had left the room to give the necessary orders respecting the horses: “as it is probable that we may recover and reclaim my self-willed son—and as, in that case, penitence on his part might induce you to forgive this absurd freak, so that the result may yet be favourable to our nearest and dearest wishes,—under all these circumstances, I say, suffer not Frances to learn aught disparaging to his character.”

“I understand you, Thomas,” exclaimed the Earl, wringing his half-brother’s hand in token of cordial assent to this proposition. “I will even speak as warily and cautiously as I may to my wife;—while, on your side——”

“Oh! I must tell every thing to Georgiana,” said Mr. Hatfield: “suspense and uncertainty would be intolerable to her. I shall now seek her for the purpose of making a hasty but most sad communication: and then away in pursuit of the ingrate!”

A quarter of on hour afterwards, the Earl of Ellingham, Mr. Hatfield, and Clarence Villiers—all three equipped for their journeys—repaired to the nobleman’s stables in the immediate vicinity of the mansion;—and thence they speedily issued forth, well mounted, and each taking a separate direction.

CHAPTER CXLI.

THE FLIGHT.

Upon breaking away from the presence of his father, in the manner already described, Charles Hatfield hurried to the house in Suffolk Street; and bursting into the room where Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita were seated at breakfast, he exclaimed, “I have at length thrown off all allegiance to my parents;—and I must now act wholly and solely for my own interests.”

“Not altogether for *your own*, Charles—dear Charles,” said Perdita, fixing upon him a plaintive and half-reproachful look, which made her appear ravishingly beautiful in his eyes.

“No—not altogether for myself will I act,” he cried, embracing her tenderly: “but for thee also, my angel—yes, for thee whom I love—adore—worship!”

“What has occurred this morning to render your lordship thus agitated?” enquired Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

“Oh! a quarrel with my father,” exclaimed Charles, who, in the enthusiasm of his blind devotion to Perdita, had forgotten the old woman’s presence. “He has played the part of a spy upon me—he has followed me to your door—he knows that I visit you—and he will doubtless endeavour to cause a breach between us!”

“Let us depart hence—now—at a moment’s warning!” cried Perdita. “We have ample funds for the purpose. Last night a money-lender discounted your note, Charles: and I have the proceeds safe in my own keeping.”

“Fortune favours us, then!” said the infatuated young man. “Yes—we will depart without delay: we will hasten to some retired place where we can deliberate, fearless of interruption, on the course which it will now be necessary for me to pursue.”

“I will hasten to order a past-chaise,” observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. “This task had better be performed by myself—so that we may leave behind us no trace of the route we shall have taken.”

“Thanks—a thousand thanks, my dear madam!” cried Charles: then, when the old woman had left the room, he caught Perdita in his arms and pressing her fondly to his bosom, said, “My parents are resolved to force me into a marriage with Lady Frances Ellingham—they would separate me from you——”

“Oh! Charles—were such a destiny in store for me,” said Perdita, affecting to be melted to tears, “I should not be able to bear up against the misfortune. For on you are all my hopes now fixed,—to you have I given my heart—irrevocably given it;—and were you the veriest mendicant on the face of the earth, I would never cease to love you as now I love!”

“Adored Perdita!” cried the young man, enraptured by the tender words and the enchanting manner of the syren, as he strained her to his breast and imprinted a thousand kisses on her brow, her cheeks, and her lips. “Oh! never—never could I prove faithless to thee, my beloved Perdita! Would that you were mine indissolubly—that you were mine by the rites of the Church and the sanction of the law;—for then we might defy the world to separate us!”

“Would you have me renounce the peculiar opinions which I have formed?” asked Perdita, her heart palpitating with joy—for the young man had thus, of his own accord, broached the delicate subject on which she longed to speak, yet knew not how to begin. “Because, if such be your wish, my beloved Charles, I will make even the sacrifice of my strongest prejudices to your heart’s desire ——”

“Now, indeed, do I know that you love me, sweetest—dearest girl!” interrupted Charles, experiencing ineffable happiness at the idea of possessing the beauteous Perdita on terms which would not render him ashamed of his connexion. “Yes—yes: I *do* demand that sacrifice at your hands;—and, if you yield to my wishes in this respect, I shall receive your assent as the most eloquent—the most convincing proof of the attachment you avow! And, moreover, Perdita—dearest, dearest Perdita—I shall be so rejoiced to place a coronet on that fair brow of thine,—so proud to present thee to the world as my wife! Never—never will enraptured husband have experienced a triumph so complete as that which will be mine, when I shall conduct thee—so radiant, so dazzling in thy beauty—amongst the friends whom the declaration of my rank will gather around me,—and when I shall introduce thee, adored one, as the Viscountess Marston! Yes—I shall indeed be proud of thee, my angel;—and now—will you not breathe the word that is to promise me all this triumph and all this joy?—will you not say, ‘*Charles, for thy sake, I will accompany thee to the altar, and wed thee according to the rites of the Protestant Church and the exigences of the community*!’”

“Oh! not for another instant can I hesitate, my well beloved—my handsome—my generous Charles!” exclaimed the syren, casting her arms round his neck, and pressing him as if in rapture to her glowing bosom: then, in the sweetest, most dulcet intonations of her melodious voice, she said, “Yes—Charles, for thy sake, I will accompany thee to the altar, and will wed thee according to the rites of the Protestant Church and the usages of that society in which we live!”

“Now am I supremely happy!” cried Charles Hatfield, his tone and manner fully corroborating his words. “We will repair to Paris, my beloved Perdita—for there we can be united by the chaplain of the British Embassy without an instant’s unnecessary delay; and thence also can I write to my father, solemnly and formally calling upon him to assert his right to the peerage which he has so long permitted his younger brother to usurp. And in Paris my Perdita will be the cynosure of all interest——”

“Oh! yes—let us visit that delightful city of which I have heard so much!” interrupted the young woman, her eyes gleaming resplendently with the pleasing sensations excited by the idea. “But I must now leave you for a moment, to prepare for this sudden journey—as my mother cannot be long before she returns.”

Perdita rose from the sofa, and hastened from the room, kissing her hand with playful fondness to her lover as she crossed the threshold. Even that simple action on her part excited the most ravishing feelings in his soul;—for as she thus turned round for an instant ere the door closed behind her, his looks swept all the fulness—all the contours—all the rich proportions of her voluptuous form,—while the morning sun-light, rosy from the hues of the hangings through which it penetrated, shone on her beauteous countenance, giving splendour to the fine large eyes, freshness to the vermilion lips, and a halo to her glossy hair!

She disappeared; and Charles, who had risen from his seat simultaneously with herself, advanced to the window. The street was quiet;—but the sounds of the rapid vehicles in Cockspur Street met his ears;—and he wondered whether the post-chaise were yet approaching the dwelling.

This idea led him to ponder on the step which he was about to take;—and a sensation of sadness slowly crept upon him, as he reflected that he was on the point of leaving his home—abandoning his parents and friends! The recollection of his mother smote him—smote him painfully;—and yet he did not seek by inward, silent reasoning to improve this better state of feeling, and act upon its warnings. No:—with that perverseness which so frequently characterises those who are on the point of adopting a measure which they secretly know to be injudicious and unwisely precipitate—even if no worse,—he sought in sophistry and specious mental argument an apology for his conduct. Again he reminded himself that his parents had acted unnaturally towards him,—and that their uniform conduct in this respect had now been followed up by harshness, upbraidings, menaces, and *espionnage*, on the part of his father. Then he feasted his imagination with the thoughts of possessing Perdita:—in a few days she would be his—irrevocably his, and in a manner which would enable him to present her proudly to the world as his wedded wife. From this strain of meditations he glided into glorious, gorgeous, visions of future greatness:—the words, “My Lord,” and “Your Lordship,” only so recently addressed to him, sounded like delicious music in his ears;—and his painful reflections were subdued by the feelings of triumph now once more awakened within him. Love—ambition—hope,—all—all his yearnings, all his cravings were now on the point of being gratified: he should cast off that parental yoke which had latterly weighed so heavily upon him;—he was about to visit Paris—he would appear as a Viscount, and with a beauteous bride, in the sphere of fashion the most refined, elegance the most perfect, and civilisation the most consummate,—and he already fancied himself walking in the delicious gardens of the Tuileries, with Perdita—the observed of all observers—leaning fondly on his arm!

These visions—sweeping like a gorgeous pageantry through his excited imagination—brought him to that state of mind, in which all regrets were banished—all remorse was forgotten;—and when Perdita returned to the apartment, ready attired for the journey, he flew

towards her—he wound his arms around her wasp-like waist, and pressed her enthusiastically to his bosom.

This was the first time that he had seen her in a walking-dress;—and he thought that she even appeared more ravishingly beautiful than when in her morning *déshabillée*, or her drawing-room garb. The pink crape bonnet, adorned with artificial flowers, set off her fine countenance with such admirable effect:—the flowing drapery of the elegant summer-shawl meandered over the proportions of the symmetrical form—developing each contour with its wavy undulations:—and the straw-coloured kid gloves, fitting tightly to a fault, described the shape of the beautiful tapering fingers.

"You are lovely beyond the loveliness of woman!" murmured Charles Hatfield, surveying her with an admiration the most unfeigned—the most sincere.

"And you, Charles—are not you my own handsome, dearly beloved Charles—so soon to be my husband?" asked Perdita. "You said just now that you should be proud to present me as your wife to your friends:—Oh! I feel—yes, I feel that I shall also be proud to be so presented. My mind seems to have undergone a complete change since I made you that promise to wed you at the altar;—and you must forget, dear Charles, that I ever wished it otherwise!"

Hatfield, for all answer, impressed a burning kiss upon her rosy lips;—and the young woman's eyes became soft and melting in expression—voluptuous and languid with desire.

At this instant her mother returned, with the announcement that the post-chaise would be at the door in less than a quarter of an hour; and the old woman hastened to the bed-rooms to pack up the trunks. Her daughter, who kept the purse, then gave her the necessary money to liquidate all liabilities due to the landlady of the house; and while this was being done, Perdita placed the gold and Bank-notes in Charles's hand, saying, "In the excitement of the morning's incidents I forgot to tender you this amount before."

"Henceforth all that I have is yours equally, my beloved," said the young man, as he secured the money about his person.

The post-chaise-and-four now appeared; and while the trunks were being strapped on to the vehicle, Mrs. Fitzhardinge superintended the process, apparently with the bustling officiousness of an old woman of particular habits, but in reality to prevent any communication between the post-boys and the people of the dwelling;—for she knew how inquisitive lodging-house keepers were apt to be, and that postilions were proportionately communicative.

At length all the arrangements were completed;—Charles handed his Perdita into the vehicle—manifested the same politeness towards the old mother—and then entered it himself. Mrs. Fitzhardinge had placed herself with her back to the horses, on an imperious sign from Perdita to that effect;—so that the young couple were next to each other on the same seat.

The post-chaise rolled rapidly away from Suffolk Street, and passed down Whitehall towards Westminster Bridge. So long as the wheels rattled over the stones, but little conversation took place inside the vehicle,—though Charles and Perdita conveyed to each other many tender assurances by means of the eloquent language of the eyes and the pressure of hands. When, however, the chaise emerged from the more crowded, thoroughfares of the metropolis, and entered upon the Dover Road, the travelling party were enabled to discourse at ease.

The day was very sultry;—but the upper part of the barouche was now thrown open; and the speed at which they travelled, created a current of air that mitigated the intensity of the heat. However, Perdita put up her parasol; and as the faces of the happy pair were not very far apart, the silk canopy, circumscribed though it were, shaded those fine countenances which really seemed made to be side by side with each other,—both being so handsome!

For a short time the conversation was general amongst the three:—gradually, however, Mrs. Fitzhardinge was, as it were, excluded from its range—not rudely so,—but because it became of a tender description between the young gentleman and her daughter;—and then it languished somewhat, inasmuch as the old woman was a restraint upon them.

At length there was a pause altogether; but still Charles and Perdita felt no weariness in each other's society. They gazed on each other—drinking draughts of love in each other's looks,—and often pressing each other's hands

For Perdita really loved the young man,—loved him with a deep and ardent affection, of which however sensuality formed no inconsiderable portion. Nevertheless, she *did* love him after the fashion of her own heart;—and thus to some extent the snarer had become ensnared!

It was in a humour of melting and voluptuous languor, that, suddenly breaking the silence noticed above, Perdita said in her soft, dulcet tones, "Charles, how delicious is it to travel in this manner! Do you know that I feel as if I should like you to repeat to me a piece of poetry—or tell me some interesting tale—for it is so sweet to hear the sound of your voice. But if you thus gratify my caprice—this whim of the moment—let the theme of your recitation be love!"

"I will endeavour to please you, my charmer," returned the young man;—"and at this moment I bethink me of a Love Story that I wrote myself some few years ago—one day, when the mania for scribbling suddenly seized upon me."

"Oh! that will be truly delightful!" exclaimed Perdita. "A story of your own composition! Begin, Charles—dear Charles: I am dying to

hear this specimen of your abilities."

"I am afraid it will prove but a poor one," returned Hatfield. "At the same time, such as it is, I will repeat it."

Mrs. Fitzhardinge, having overheard this dialogue, intimated the pleasure she should experience in listening to the tale;—and as the chaise was now rolling along a road rendered, as it were, soft by the accumulation of the dust of summer, Charles was not compelled to pitch his voice to a key unpleasantly high, in relating the ensuing narrative.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE DRESS-MAKER: A LOVE STORY.

“It was between nine and ten o’clock on a dark and rainy night, in the month of November, 1834, that a young female, plainly but decently attired, was wending her way along Oxford Street. She had a large parcel beneath her cloak;—and this parcel she protected against the rain with the most jealous care,—thinking more, in fact, of the object of her solicitude than of picking her path with sufficient nicety to enable her to avoid the puddles of water that were ankle-deep in some parts of the pavement—but more especially at the crossings. For, in sooth, it was a bitter—bitter night:—the windows of heaven appeared to be indeed opened, and the rain fell in torrents. The streets seemed to be positively covered in with an arcade of umbrellas, on which the quick drops rattled down with the violence of hail. The young female whom I have mentioned, had an umbrella;—but she found it rather a difficult task to hold it comfortably with one hand, while her left arm encircled as it were the precious parcel beneath her cloak. For the passengers in the streets of London are never over remarkable for their civility to each other—still less so on such a night as the one I am describing. The consequence was that there was an incessant struggle amongst the strong to push their umbrellas safely through the mass, and amongst the weak to prevent their own umbrellas from being dragged out of their hands;—but it naturally happened that the latter fared the worst.

“The young female was meek, timid, and unobtrusive. She only sought to be permitted to pursue her way in peace, without being molested;—for, heaven knows! she had not the least desire on her part to inconvenience a soul. But first some rude, hulking fellow would thrust her against the houses—almost through the shop windows; then, if she moved over to the kerb-stone of the pavement, she found herself speedily pushed into the mud. To pursue a middle course was impossible; because the two streams of persons carrying umbrellas were the monopolists there;—and so the young female began to lament the necessity which had sent her forth into the streets on such a night as this. At length she reached the iron gates leading into Hanover Square; and she rejoiced—for she thought within herself that she had now got clear of the crowd, and need entertain no farther apprehension of having the precious parcel knocked out of her hands. But just as she entered the Square, a rude, coarse fellow rushed against her as he was running hastily round the corner; and such was the violence of the concussion, that the parcel was knocked from beneath her arm. The ruffian who had caused the accident, burst into a ferocious laugh, as if he had just performed a most humorous or clever feat, and darted away. But the young female was disconsolate at what had occurred; and tears started into her eyes. Though bruised and hurt by the man’s violence, she thought not of herself—she felt no pain:—it was on account of the parcel that she was so deeply grieved. Hastily picking it up, she hurried to the nearest lamp; and the moment she examined the packet beneath the gas-light, she found her worst apprehensions confirmed. For the parcel contained a costly silk dress, well wrapped up in brown paper;—but the side on which it had fallen was dripping wet and covered with mud!

“‘O heavens! no food *again* to-night!’ exclaimed the young female aloud—for in her despair she paused not to notice whether she were noticed or overheard. And she *was* both noticed and overheard,—and by a tall, handsome individual, of gentlemanly appearance, and muffled in a capacious cloak. He had issued from the nearest house at the moment the accident occurred; and, perceiving the brutality of the encounter, though too late to prevent it or to chastise the perpetrator, he stood still to observe the young female, whose countenance, as the rays of the lamp fell upon it, struck him as being remarkably beautiful. In that rapid survey, partial as it was by the flickering light, which was moreover dimmed by the mist of the falling rain, the stranger fancied that he perceived—independently of the despair which that countenance now wore—a certain settled melancholy expression, that at once rivetted his interest and excited his sympathies. But when those words—so terrible in their meaning,—‘O heavens! no food *again* to-night!’ fell upon his ears, he accosted the young female, and said, in a tone of respectful though somewhat condescending pity, ‘My poor girl, it appears that a sad accident has befallen you.’—The young woman, or rather girl—for she was not more than eighteen years of age—looked up into the face of the individual who thus addressed her; and, perceiving that it was no insolent coxcomb who spoke, she replied in a tone of deep melancholy, ‘Yes, sir: it is to *me* a great misfortune!’—The stranger read, or fancied he read, an entire history in those few and plaintively uttered words,—how, perhaps, a young dress-maker had toiled to finish a particular piece of work in the hope of receiving instantaneous payment on taking it home,—how the article had been thrown down, soiled, and rendered at least unfit to be delivered that night to its owner, even if it were not spoilt altogether,—and how the poor girl had lost her only chance of obtaining the wherewith to procure a meal. Upon more closely, though still with great delicacy, questioning the young female, the stranger found all his surmises to be correct; but she could not tell whether the silk dress were injured beyond redemption or not. ‘In any case,’ she added, still weeping bitterly, ‘I shall tell the lady the truth when I take home the dress to-morrow.’—These words, uttered with the most unquestionable sincerity, made a deep impression upon the gentleman who was addressing her; for they denoted an unsophisticated uprightness of character which augmented the interest he already felt in the poor young creature.—‘And who is the lady you speak of?’ he enquired.—‘The Dowager Marchioness of Wilmington,’ was the reply.—‘Ah!’ ejaculated the stranger: then, after a moment’s pause, he said, ‘Pardon me, young woman, for having asked you so many questions: but it has not been through motives of idle curiosity. Here is a small sum that will procure you immediate necessaries;’—and thrusting a coin into her hand, he hurried away. The deed took

the poor girl completely by surprise;—for although it has occupied me some time to relate all that passed between her and the generous stranger, yet in reality their dialogue was of scarcely more than two minutes' duration; and the dress-maker had not yet recovered from the grief into which the accident to her parcel had plunged her. When, therefore, the light of the lamp flashed upon a bright yellow coin, she could scarcely believe her eyes:—she fancied that her benefactor had made a mistake, and intended to give her a shilling,—and then, in spite of the cold night, the warm blood rushed to her cheeks, at the idea of any one treating her as a mendicant—for she had her little feelings of pride, poor though she were! But her next thought was that the stranger might really have intended to present her with a sovereign; and—so strange a sentiment is human pride, even in the most virtuous bosoms—her soul revolted not from receiving that amount. And now, lest this circumstance should induce you to form an evil opinion of my heroine, I must inform you that it was no selfish nor avaricious feeling that made her draw a distinction between the gift of a shilling and that of a sovereign:—but she had been tenderly and genteelly brought up—and the comparison which her mind drew, was simply as between the alms that one would toss to a mendicant, and the pecuniary aid which a delicate benevolence would administer to a person in temporary embarrassment.

"Of all these things she thought as she retraced her way along Oxford Street,—holding her umbrella with her right hand, and with her left arm encircling the parcel more carefully than before. She came to the conclusion that the sovereign was not given by mistake; and she resolved to avail herself of the bounty which Providence itself had appeared to bestow upon her in the hour of her bitterest need. She thought of the little brother who was anxiously expecting her return, and who had fared so scantily for the last few days,—that little brother of only eight years old, whom the sudden, premature, and almost simultaneous death of their parents, about two years previously, had left so completely dependant upon her! As she drew near the street in which she lived, she stopped at the baker's where she was accustomed to deal, and purchased some nice buns;—and then she hurried on until she reached the house wherein she rented a small back room on the third floor. On entering the little chamber, which, though poorly furnished, was very clean and neat, a beautiful boy, with light brown curly hair and fine blue eyes, but with cheeks somewhat pale, sprang towards her, exclaiming 'Oh! dear sister Julia, I am so glad you have come back: for I cannot bear to be left alone so long!'—'I have brought you something nice, Harry,' said the kind girl, smiling sweetly upon him; and, she placed the bag containing the buns in his hand. Joy sparkled in his eyes;—but in another moment he observed that his sister had brought back the parcel, which she had opened, and was carefully examining the silk-dress to ascertain the amount of injury done to it. Throwing the cakes upon the table, the boy hastened to question her; but poor Julia could not answer him—scalding tears were trickling down her cheeks—a suffocating grief filled her bosom,—for she found, to her dismay, that the dress was completely spoilt!

"She sate down, and gave full vent to her anguish;—and then little Harry threw his arms round her neck, and endeavoured to console her. The flood of tears which she shed, and the affectionate conduct of her little brother at length considerably soothed her;—and the poor girl made up her mind to meet her misfortune with resignation. 'You are dripping wet, dear Julia,' said Harry: 'and there is not a morsel of coal left,' he added, looking at the miserable remnant of a fire which was fast extinguishing in the grate.—'Poor boy! you have been cold,' exclaimed the dress-maker, not thinking of herself.—'No, dear Julia,' he answered; 'for I have been walking up and down the room, to keep myself awake till you came back. I was only afraid that the candle would not last.'—'Nor will it many minutes longer, Harry!' cried Julia, starting from her seat. 'But do not be afraid, my dear little fellow; for I have plenty of money to buy all we want for the moment. A good kind gentleman took compassion upon me, and—and——'; she did not choose to say, '*and gave me some money*;'—for, somehow or another, her pure soul revolted from the idea that she had been the object of eleemosynary benevolence on the part of a stranger:—so, cutting the matter short, she kissed her little brother tenderly, bade him eat his cakes, and, promising to return in a few minutes, hurried away. She ordered up coals and wood from the nearest shed,—thence she repaired to the grocer's, where she purchased a few articles,—and lastly, she sped to the baker's, to buy bread. But the moment she entered this shop, the master rushed from behind the counter, seized her rudely, called her by many opprobrious names, and, raising an alarm, attracted the attention of a policeman who was passing by. The constable entered the shop, and enquired the cause of the disturbance; but poor Julia had fainted;—and she, therefore, heard not the charge that was made against her. When she came to her senses, she gazed wildly around, thinking that she had just awoke from a horrid dream;—but, alas! it was all too true! She was seated in a chair in the middle of the shop—a policeman standing near her—and a gaping, curious crowd collected at the door. 'Now, young woman,' said the officer, 'come along with me!'—Julia cast upon him a look so full of horror and amazement, that the man's heart was for an instant touched;—but, being accustomed to endless varieties of imposture on the part of offenders, he speedily recovered the cold indifference so characteristic of his class, and said sternly, if not brutally, 'None of this nonsense: you must tramp off to the station-house!'—'But what have I done? what offence have I committed?' asked Julia, in a tone of the most pathetic entreaty. 'Oh! there must be some dreadful mistake in all this!'—'No mistake at all,' said the officer; 'and you'll know all about it in the morning, when you go before the magistrate!'—'The magistrate!' repeated the girl, with the emphasis of despair. 'But my poor little brother, what will become of him?'—'That's no business of mine,' returned the constable: 'come along!'—and he dragged the half-fainting Julia from the shop.

"Away to the nearest station-house was the unhappy young woman rather borne than conducted;—and so stunned—so stupefied was she by this sudden, unaccountable, and overwhelming misfortune, that her tongue refused to give utterance to the questions which her suspense prompted her lips to frame. The station was close by; and thus was it that before she had leisure to recover from her bewilderment and terror, she found herself thrust into a dark cell—all dripping wet from head to foot as she was. When full consciousness returned, and she was enabled to look her misfortune in the face, she found that all the articles she had purchased at the grocer's and all the remainder of her money were gone. Yet she could not possibly conceive on what charge she had been thus rudely treated;—and her conscience inspired her with the hope that her complete innocence must become apparent in the morning. But the thought of her little brother excited the most painful sensations in her bosom:—her heart was rent with pangs that seemed to threaten her very existence! The poor little fellow!—she fancied she saw him sitting in the cold, lonely chamber, crying bitterly at his sister's prolonged absence:—and then a thousand fears haunted her—all distracting in the extreme. Might he not take it into his head to go out

to look after her?—he, who was so ignorant of London!—and then might he not be lost in the mazes of the mighty metropolis, and on a night when it would be almost death to him to wander about the flooded streets? Oh! all these fears—these thoughts were terrible;—for she dearly loved her little brother—loved him, perhaps, the more affectionately, the more tenderly, because their orphan condition rendered him so completely dependant upon her,—and because he was so much attached to her, and his ways were so winning—his disposition so cheerful!

"In the midst of these harrowing meditations a policeman opened the trap in the door of the cell, and called her by name—'*Julia Murray!*' She answered in a faint and feeble tone; and the officer was about to close the trap, satisfied that his prisoner was not ill nor had attempted suicide,—when the young woman suddenly exclaimed, 'Stop one moment!'—'Well, what is it?' demanded the constable.—In a few hurried words Julia explained to him how she had a little brother expecting her return, how he would be overwhelmed with grief at her unaccountable absence, and how grateful she should feel if any one could be sent to inform the child that his sister would be certain to return in the morning. The constable, who was a kind-hearted man, promised that her request should be complied with; and he was about to depart when, a thought striking him, he said, 'But are you so sure, young woman, of getting off so easy as you imagine. The charge is a serious one, mind!'—'The charge!' she repeated: 'I do not even yet know what it is!'—'Oh! that's all gammon,' cried the constable, closing the trap abruptly; and now, his opinion of the prisoner being that she was a hardened impostor, and had some sinister motive in view in sending a message to her lodgings, determined to trouble himself no more concerning the matter. It was, however, some consolation to the poor girl to believe that her commission would be duly executed;—for, though she had heard the officer's unfeeling, cutting observation relative to her ignorance of the accusation against her, she could not for an instant suppose that he would neglect to fulfil his promise regarding her little brother. But wearily—wearily passed away that night—not once did the poor dress-maker close her eyes—and she counted every hour that was proclaimed from the neighbouring church-clock—often saying to herself that never, never had time travelled with such leaden pace before! She had not tasted food for many hours—and yet she was not hungry; but she experienced a terrible faintness at the chest, and an oppressiveness on the brain, that at intervals made her mind wander. Her cloak was dripping wet when she had been locked up, and her shoes, stockings, and the lower part of her dress were saturated;—but she had thrown her cloak aside, and her garments had dried upon her;—and now she felt not positively cold—only a numbness in her limbs, which gave her however no pain.

"At length the dull, misty, wintry morning dawned upon the metropolis—though all was still dark in her gloomy cell. Presently an officer entered, and gave her a cup of hot coffee and a piece of bread. She asked him if the message had been sent to her brother;—but he was not the same constable who had made the round of the cells at midnight, and therefore knew nothing about the matter. Moreover, he was a stern, sulky man; and she dared not speak farther to him—much as she longed to ascertain the real nature of the charge against her. She drank the coffee, which seemed to do her good;—but she could not force a single mouthful of the bread down her throat—though the cravings of hunger now began to oppress her cruelly. But, to use a common phrase, her heart heaved against food. A couple of hours more passed away, and then the same policeman who had arrested her on the preceding evening came to conduct her to the police-office. While they were proceeding thither, Julia enquired the nature of the charge against her; and she now learnt for the first time that the coin which she had changed at the bakers, and which she had believed to be a sovereign, was only a gilt counter, of the kind used at card tables in genteel society. She was cruelly shocked at this information, and frankly and candidly explained to the officer the manner in which she had become possessed of it; but he only shook his head, and seemed to put but little faith in her story. Julia was, however, too much absorbed in the vexation and ignominy she had thus been subjected to, and was still enduring, to notice the man's incredulity;—but she clung to the hope that her tale would be believed by the magistrate before whom she was about to appear. It happened that the usual charges of drunkenness were just disposed of, at the moment when the young female entered the court; and she was accordingly at once placed at the bar—the baker being already in attendance to prefer his charge against her. This he did in a plain and straight-forward manner,—showing no ill-feeling against the prisoner—but, on the contrary, alleging that he had always believed her to be a highly respectable, industrious, and praise-worthy young woman until the present transaction took place. He added that he had given her into custody in a moment of irritation, believing himself to have been duped; and that he should be truly delighted if she could make her innocence apparent. Julia's courage was somewhat restored by the forbearing conduct of the baker—for her own good sense told her that the case was really one involving much unpleasant suspicion;—and she now told her tale with an artlessness and sincerity that produced no inconsiderable effect upon the bench. Nevertheless, as the magistrate observed, it certainly appeared strange that a gentleman should have given her a gilt counter in mistake for a sovereign,—strange also that a mere stranger should have intended to bestow upon her a sovereign at all. The magistrate proceeded to state that the prisoner must be remanded, in order that the gentleman of whom she spoke—if her story were true—might come forward, upon seeing the report of the case in the newspapers, and tender his evidence. Julia burst out into an agony of weeping, when she heard that she must go to prison for a week; and the baker requested the magistrate to re-consider his decision. This appeal was, however, made in vain; but it was intimated that bail would be received for the prisoner's re-appearance. The baker gave a whispered assurance to the unhappy girl that he would get two of his friends to become security for her; and this promise consoled her. When she was removed from the office, on her way to a cell in the rear of the establishment, the baker told her that his wife had taken care of her brother, who had passed the night at their house: and he expressed his deep regret that he should have proceeded against her, as he had learnt from her landlady that she was a young woman of most exemplary character. To be brief, the baker performed his promise of procuring bail for the prisoner; and at about two o'clock in the afternoon she was enabled to return home.

"Little Harry was speedily brought back to her by the baker's wife, who, it appeared, had bitterly reproached her husband on the preceding evening for his conduct towards Miss Murray, and, with considerate kindness, had at once sent for her brother, whom the good woman consoled with some plausible tale accounting for his sister's absence. Julia was not however happy, even though restored to liberty; for the charge still hung over her—and so much depended on the chance of the appearance of her unknown benefactor, who, she still firmly believed, had accidentally and most unintentionally given her the gilt counter which had led to so much wretchedness

and serious embarrassment. Her first care was now, however, to proceed to the house of the old Marchioness of Wilmington, with the silk-dress, which was completely spoiled; and Julia's heart was heavy as she hurried along Oxford Street. The weather was dull and gloomy; but the rain had ceased, and the two streams of people flowed on, in different directions, without the hurry, bustle, and struggling that had prevailed on the preceding evening. Julia's bosom palpitated nervously when she reached the spot where the accident had occurred—that accident to which her present sorrows might be traced. On reaching the house of that marchioness in Hanover Square, the poor girl was conducted into the presence of the dowager—a proud, stately dame whose age exceeded fifty, but who endeavoured by means of rouge, false hair, false teeth, and the appliances of the toilette, to appear at least twenty years younger. Her ladyship was seated in a small, but elegantly furnished parlour, and was occupied in reading—no, in skimming—the last new novel, which, according to the usual fashion, had been carefully spun out into three volumes, though all the incidents it contained might with advantage have been condensed into one. At a beautiful little work-table, sate a lovely creature of two-and-twenty, with hair as dark as jet, fine large black eyes, and a tall symmetrical, but rather robust figure. On this fair young lady's countenance there was a slight shade of melancholy; and her cheeks were somewhat pale—but apparently through a secret care, and not ill-health. This was Lady Caroline Jerningham, the only daughter of the marchioness, and consequently sister to the Marquis of Wilmington, her ladyship's only son.

"On entering the presence of these ladies, Julia, who had previously arranged in her own imagination the precise terms in which she proposed to tell her tale,—with a strict adherence to truth,—forgot all her studied task, and became overwhelmed with confusion. The marchioness looked so stately—so prim—so queen-like in her deportment, not to say positively austere, that the poor girl was seized with vague apprehensions and unknown terrors, as if she had committed a great and grievous fault. Lady Caroline, however, cast upon her a look of such kind encouragement, and also of such significance, that it almost struck Julia at the moment that the young patrician lady had a fore-knowledge of the disaster which had occurred to the dress. Yet how was that possible?—and as the absurdity of such an idea forced itself upon the girl's mind the instant after the idea itself was entertained, her confusion and embarrassment were increased, and she burst into tears. The dowager uttered an ejaculation of surprise; and Julia, hastily wiping her eyes, cast an appealing glance on Lady Caroline, who, to her relief and amazement, she beheld gazing upon her with an expression of reassurance and deep—almost tender interest. Encouraged by the evident graciousness of the young lady, Julia proceeded to open the parcel; and, while so doing, she began an explanation of the accident which had occurred to the dress. The countenance of the marchioness, to whom she glanced timidly, lowered and contracted;—but Lady Caroline hastened to observe, in a kind and condescending manner, 'Whatever has happened to the dress, Miss Murray, I am confident my mother will attribute to a misfortune, and to no blameable neglect on your part.'—'Permit me to answer for myself, Lady Caroline,' said the dowager, in a tone of haughty remonstrance to her daughter, and with an austere look at the trembling Julia. 'Young woman,' she continued, now addressing herself direct to the poor girl, 'you were recommended to me by Lady Lumley, as an efficient, honest, careful, and deserving person,—one, who, having been brought up tenderly and by parents moving in a genteel sphere until the time of their decease, was suddenly compelled to have recourse to the needle to earn a subsistence. Under such circumstances, and with this recommendation, I sent for you—I agreed to give you a trial—and, as I perceive, you have spoilt for me a dress that will cost me ten guineas to replace it.'—'I admit, my lady,' said Julia, 'that you have great cause to be dissatisfied. But heaven is my witness that it was an accident; and if your ladyship will permit me, I will toil day and night until I shall have obtained the wherewith to make good the loss.'—'No, young woman,' observed the marchioness, somewhat mollified by the artlessness and respectful demeanour of Julia Murray; 'I cannot, being rich, oppress you, who are poor. All that I can do in the case is to decline giving you any farther employment. You may retire:' and, having thus spoken with a sententious pomposity that would have become a statesman, the noble lady waved her hand authoritatively.

"Julia's eyes filled with tears, which nearly blinded her—so that she observed not how peculiar was the interest with which Lady Caroline Jerningham was surveying her:—but, having vainly endeavoured to stammer forth a few words imploring a continuance of the patronage of the marchioness, she hurried from the room. On the landing outside she paused for a few moments to wipe away the traces of tears from her countenance and somewhat compose herself; for she shrank from the idea of attracting unpleasant notice on the part of the lacqueys lounging in the hall through which she must pass to reach the street-door. Suddenly she felt a gentle touch upon the shoulder; for she had seated herself in a chair on the landing, being overcome with grief and physical exhaustion;—and starting up, she beheld Lady Caroline standing by her side. 'Hush!' said the fair patrician, placing her finger upon her lip, and glancing towards the parlour-door, as much as to imply that she had stolen away from her mother's presence and would not have her motive suspected: 'here, my poor girl, take this—and, when you require a friend, fear not to apply to me—but by letter, remember, in the first instance!'—Thus speaking, Lady Caroline thrust five sovereigns into Julia's hand, and instantly returned to the parlour, not waiting a moment to receive the thanks of the astonished and delighted girl.

"Julia Murray now hurried home, and found little Harry anxiously expecting her return;—for, although he was too young to comprehend the nature of the alarms which she had experienced, when sallying forth, on account of the spoilt dress, yet he was fearful lest she might remain away from him for several hours again. He had no cares—that poor little fellow—when his sister was with him; and he now asked her, in so sweet yet earnest a manner, not to leave him any more during a whole night, that she felt as if she would go through fire and water for that darling boy. But she had no work in hand; and though she possessed five sovereigns,—real sovereigns, and no gilt counters this time,—yet she could not bear the idea of being idle. She however promised to remain at home all that day; and she prepared a nice little dinner, which made Harry so happy that she wished—Oh! how sincerely she wished—she could always provide for him in the same manner. She endeavoured to appear as cheerful as she could;—but there was a weight upon her spirits—for the accusation still hung over her head, and she was in suspense whether the unknown would see her case in the papers, and appear to justify her. Besides, would not the publicity given to the affair injure her with those kind patronesses who had hitherto taken such an interest in the orphan girl? and, should the stranger-gentleman not be forthcoming, would not a stigma be affixed upon her character, even though the magistrate (as the baker assured her must be the alternative) should dismiss the case? Of all these things

she thought;—and when Harry noticed her not, a pearly tear would trickle down her pale but beauteous face. For Julia *was* very beautiful. Her hair was of a rich dark brown—her eyes of melting blue—her teeth of pearly whiteness—and her shape elegant, graceful, and sylph-like.

"On the ensuing morning, after breakfast, Julia had just put on her bonnet and shawl to go out for the purpose of calling upon her various patronesses and enquiring whether they needed her services, when the landlady of the house in which she lodged, entered the room and said, 'Miss Murray, a gentleman wishes to speak to you: he will not walk up to your apartment, as he does not know whether you may choose to receive him here; and he is accordingly waiting in my parlour.'—A ray of hope flashed to the mind of the young woman: what if it were the unknown who had given her the gilt counter? The suspicion was strengthened by the delicacy of his behaviour in not ascending to her chamber; for, during the brief discourse which she had with him on the night so fatal to her, he had manifested a disposition quite in accordance with the propriety of conduct and considerate proceeding adopted by the individual who now waited to see her. Telling Harry that she should not be long, Julia hurried down stairs; and in a few moments she found herself in the presence of the individual who was uppermost in her thoughts. Yes:—it was indeed he—the unknown,—the same tall, handsome man,—and enveloped, too, in a cloak richly lined with sables. He was about eight-and-twenty years of age; and there was something noble and commanding, though gracious and encouraging, in his air and demeanour. The moment Julia made her appearance, he rose from the chair in which he had been seated, and taking her hand, said in a tone of the most earnest sincerity, 'Miss Murray, I know not in what terms to express the shame and grief which I experience at the misfortune that has overtaken you. It was not until I saw this mornings newspaper, that I even dreamt of the mistake—the dreadful mistake I had made: and the instant the case met my eyes, I hurried hither. The explanation which I have to give, you can of course anticipate:—I had purchased some gilt counters only half-an-hour before I met you in Hanover Square, and I put them loose into the same pocket which contained my money.'—'I never for an instant imagined, sir,' said Julia, 'that you had purposely trifled with my feelings.'—'Generous young woman, to put such a construction upon a matter which has caused you so much suffering!' exclaimed the unknown. 'But it is now my duty to accompany you at once to the police-court, and place your character in the same honourable light in which it originally stood.'—Julia was overjoyed at this announcement; and the gentleman, giving her his arm, escorted her to the police-court, calling however on the baker in their way to desire him to attend immediately before the magistrate. During the walk, the stranger asked the young woman a great many questions—not of an impertinent nature, nor denoting an idle curiosity,—but rather evincing an interest in the orphan girl. It however struck Julia as somewhat singular that he did not put a single query to her relative to the spoilt dress: it seemed as if he had quite forgotten that incident!

"On their arrival at the police-office, the gentleman immediately handed his card to the magistrate, to whom he whispered a few words at the same time; and his worship became all civility and politeness. The case was called on without a moment's delay: the gentleman concisely but effectually explained the affair of the gilt counter; and the magistrate, on declaring Julia to be discharged, assured her that she would leave the court without the slightest stain on her character. The stranger placed ten pounds in the magistrate's hands for the use of the poor-box, and then departed in company with Julia, whom he escorted back to the house in which she dwelt. On reaching the door, he paused, and taking her hand, said, 'Miss Murray, I shall not insult you by offering a pecuniary recompense for the mortification, annoyance, and distress you have undergone through that gilt counter. But I shall endeavour to serve you in another way. Farewell for the present: you will shortly see me again; for, be assured,' he added, gazing earnestly upon her for a moment, 'I shall never forget you.'—Thus speaking, he pressed her hand and hurried away;—and it was not until he had disappeared from her view that she remembered she was still in profound ignorance of who or what he was. It, however, struck her that the case would be again reported in the newspapers; and she therefore hoped that the morrow would clear up the mystery. But it was with some degree of anxiety and painful suspense that she thus awaited the publication of the journals of the ensuing day;—and she could not account to herself for the feelings that thus agitated her. Although her character had been completely cleared from the imputation thrown upon it, and her innocence was made unquestionably apparent,—although she had ample funds, through the generosity of Lady Caroline Jerningham, to provide for all present wants,—and although a secret voice seemed to whisper in her soul that she possessed a good friend in the stranger-gentleman,—yet, somehow or another, poor Julia was not entirely contented. Was it that the handsome countenance of her unknown benefactor had made any impression on her heart?—was it that his kind and sympathising conduct had touched a tender chord in her pure and innocent bosom? It is impossible to answer these questions at present: but it is very certain that Julia experienced a disappointment almost amounting to a positive shock, when she found that the morning papers seemed to be in as much ignorance as herself relative to her unknown benefactor. The report merely alluded to him as '*a gentleman whose name did not transpire*;'—and this mystery in which her friend evidently wrapped himself, became a source of secret trouble to the young dress-maker. Wherefore had he not revealed his name to her? Disreputable that name could not be; else how could it have produced so magical an effect upon the magistrate? Was it, then, a great—a famous—or a noble name? Julia sighed—and dared not hazard any conjectures: but in her heart there suddenly appeared to arise a hope—a secret wish, that the stranger was *not* so very highly exalted above her own social sphere!

"Again was Julia preparing to sally forth and visit the various ladies for whom she was accustomed to work, when her landlady brought her up a note. It was from Lady Caroline Jerningham, requesting Miss Murray to call upon her in the evening at a stated hour, as her ladyship had a quantity of work to place in her hands. The young maiden was overjoyed at the receipt of this missive, which not only promised her employment, but likewise seemed to be an assurance of the tender interest which the charming Lady Caroline had taken in her. She did not therefore stir out until the evening;—and little Harry was delighted that his sister remained at home with him. But when the appointed hour drew near, she tranquillised her brother with a promise of a speedy return; and away she sped, with a heart full of hope, towards Hanover Square. On reaching the splendid mansion occupied by the Dowager-Marchioness, Julia was received by Lady Caroline's own maid, and was forthwith conducted to the chamber of her fair patroness, who treated her in the most kind and condescending manner. 'I regret, Miss Murray,' she said, 'that I am forced to admit you thus stealthily into the house; but my

mother is of a peculiar temper, although in reality possessed of a good heart.'—'I understand your ladyship,' returned Julia: 'the Marchioness cannot forgive me for what she considers neglect. I am however deeply grateful to your ladyship for thinking otherwise, and for giving me such substantial proofs that you entertain so favourable an opinion.'—'My dear Miss Murray,' observed Lady Caroline, 'I will do any thing I can to serve you; for I can well imagine how grateful must be the sympathy of a friend to one who is acquainted with sorrow!'—These words were uttered with almost a mournful emphasis, as if the fair speaker craved that sympathy and friendship for herself which she proffered to another;—and Julia could not help regarding her with mingled surprise, gratitude, and tender interest. They were alone together—that elegant patrician lady and that beautiful milliner,—the maid having retired; and it appeared as if a species of sisterly feeling suddenly sprang up between them, inspiring them with mutual confidence, and for the time annihilating the barrier that social distinctions had raised up between them in the eyes of the world. Thus was it that when Lady Caroline saw Julia's looks fixed upon her in so earnest and plaintive a manner, she felt herself irresistibly urged to respond to that tacit yet eloquent proffer of sympathy and affection. 'Ah! my dear Miss Murray,' she said, 'you must not imagine that unhappiness exists only with those who have to toil for their daily bread. Perhaps, indeed, their lot is preferable to that of the rich who have causes of grief;—for *you* have a constant occupation which allows little leisure for disagreeable reflection; whereas *I* have so much time——'.—Lady Caroline checked herself, turned away, and hastily passed a handkerchief across her face. She had perhaps said more than she intended: for, from speaking of the richer and poorer classes in general terms, she had been carried into personal illustration of the truth of her remarks by pointedly placing herself and Julia in juxta-position. Miss Murray, though totally devoid of artfulness, was yet endowed with an intellect keen enough to perceive this fact: and she now learnt, then—as indeed she had previously suspected—that Lady Caroline was unhappy. But it was not for her to invite a revelation of the fair patrician's cause of sorrow: she therefore remained silent.

"'Julia,' said her ladyship, suddenly turning towards her again, and taking her hand as she thus spoke,—'Julia,' she repeated, in an earnest, appealing tone, 'I will be a friend to you; but it may happen that I also shall require the aid and sympathy of a friend——'; and, once more checking herself, she sighed profoundly.—'I would serve you night and day, dear lady!' exclaimed the young milliner, pressing to her lips the hand which still grasped her own.—'I have not read your disposition inaccurately, dearest girl,' responded Lady Caroline: then, assuming a more cheerful tone, she said, 'Be it understood, we are friends! And now you must leave me, as my mother will be enquiring after me.'—Julia received a parcel containing a variety of costly stuffs, which she was to make up into dresses for her fair patroness, and which would furnish her with work for at least a month; and, as she was leaving the room, Lady Caroline said, 'My own maid will call upon you every Saturday evening and bring away whatever you may have finished, until the whole be complete.'—They then separated, Lady Caroline pressing Julia's hand warmly at parting; and the young dressmaker hurried homeward, her heart beating with joy at the kindness which she had experienced and the friendship she had formed. 'After all,' she murmured to herself, as she ascended the stair-case to her chamber, where little Harry was sitting up to await her return.—'after all, the adventure of the spoilt dress has proved a service, rather than an injury, to me: and perhaps,' she added,—but it was her heart, and not her lips, that now spoke,—'the affair of the gilt counter may likewise bring me good luck!'

"Julia now addressed herself to the work of which she had such profusion; and while she sate plying her needle, with little Harry playing about the room, she often thought of the handsome unknown. Every day, after the frugal dinner, she took her brother out to walk for an hour, that a little exercise and fresh air might benefit them both; and, of an evening, when she laid aside her work, she gave him instruction in many useful branches of education. During the day, too, he learnt his lessons; and never did she suffer him to go out alone into the streets—no, not even on the slightest errand. In fact, this excellent young woman took as much care of her little orphan brother as if she had been his parent, instead of his sister; and it was a charming as well as touching sight to behold them repairing to the parish church on a Sabbath-morning,—each attired with so much neatness, and yet in a plain and unobtrusive manner. Well, three weeks had passed since the interview between Julia and Lady Caroline; and on each Saturday evening her ladyship's maid called to receive and pay for the work that was finished. The domestic was sure to have some pretty present from her mistress for Julia, and a handsome toy—such as a transparent slate, or puzzle, or a miniature carpenter's tool-box—for Harry; and the grateful milliner sent back her kindest but most respectful regards to her good patroness. But during those three weeks she had neither seen nor heard any thing of the handsome stranger;—and yet, had he not promised that he would shortly call again? Wherefore should he call? Julia never paused to ask herself that question;—but she did sometimes admit, within the secret recesses of her own heart, that she thought it somewhat unkind he did not fulfil his promise, after the distress she had endured in consequence of the mistake he had made respecting the gilt counter. One day the landlady tapped at Julia's door; and, on being desired to enter, the good woman informed her that '*the gentleman in the cloak,*' was waiting in the parlour below. A blush instantly spread itself over Julia's cheeks; whereupon the landlady said in a low but impressive tone, 'you need not be ashamed of an honest attachment, Miss; and I know you are too good a girl to form any other. In fact, I told the gentleman what an excellent creature you were, and how well you behaved to your little brother.'—'You told him all *that*?' exclaimed Julia, looking up in a surprise mingled with secret pleasure, while the blush upon her beauteous countenance deepened.—'Certainly I did, Miss,' replied the landlady: 'but not to-day. It was when he called on account of that unpleasant little affair, you know; and before he sent me up to fetch you down, he asked no end of questions about you; and he seemed so pleased when I told him that you were such a good, industrious young person, and so kind to your orphan brother; and how you kept yourself so quiet and respectable, having no acquaintances scarcely, and certainly no visitors except your lady-customers or their maids.'—'But the gentleman did not ask all those questions?' said Julia, in a hesitating manner and with a tremulous voice, while her heart palpitated with emotions of unknown pleasure.—'Indeed he did, Miss,' returned the landlady. 'But, dear me! now I think of it, he charged me not to tell you that he had asked any thing at all concerning you: and by the same token, he gave me a sovereign to hold my tongue in this respect; and therefore, Miss, you must not even *look* as if you knew a syllable of what occurred on that occasion. I am sure he is some great person in disguise; and I am also certain that he has fallen in love with you.'—Julia's countenance now became scarlet; and she was about to make a remonstrative reply, when little Harry, who began to grow impatient of so much mysterious whispering between his sister and the landlady, approached them, saying, 'Is any thing the matter, dear Julia?'—'Nothing, my darling boy,' was the cheerful reply: 'I shall return in a few minutes;'—and Julia hastened down stairs, the landlady remaining with Harry.

"Though the young maiden endeavoured to compose herself as much as possible, yet all that the landlady had told her rushed to her mind with renewed force and stronger significancy just as she crossed the threshold of the parlour and appeared in the presence of *the gentleman in the cloak*. He observed her confusion—noticed the blush that mantled on her cheeks—and, mistaking the cause said, as he took her hand, 'I am afraid, Miss Murray, that you consider it indiscreet for me thus to pay my respects to you; and indeed, that fear has prevented me from calling sooner.'—Julia started, cast down her eyes, and made no reply; for in her artless innocence, it had never before struck her that, an evil construction might be placed upon the visits of the gentleman: but now the conviction that such was indeed the result to be apprehended, was forced—yes, painfully forced—upon her sensitive mind. The stranger read what was passing in her imagination; and if he were delighted to observe that the danger which he had specified was previously unsuspected by her ingenuous soul, he was not the less gratified to acquire the certainty that her pure thoughts were shocked by the idea of compromising her reputation.—'Fear not, Miss Murray,' he continued, again taking her hand; 'I should be the last person on the face of the earth to do you a wilful injury in any way. I have merely called, as in duty bound, to assure myself that you have perfectly recovered from the effects of the distressing ordeal through which you were compelled to pass in consequence of my carelessness. But innocence, Miss Murray,' he added, emphatically, 'will invariably triumph in the long run; and virtue will not ever languish unrewarded. Your exemplary conduct, Miss Murray, must sooner or later be adequately recompensed: your tenderness towards your orphan brother must ensure for you the esteem and respect of all liberal and honest persons. May I request, as a particular favour, that you will presently call on Mr. Richardson, the solicitor, in Berners Street, close by; as I know that he has some tidings, of rather an agreeable character, to

impart to you.'—With these words, the stranger pressed the young maiden's hand, and respectfully took his leave of her.

"Julia hastened back to her own chamber, and related to the worthy, well-meaning, but garrulous landlady, every thing that *the gentleman in the cloak* had said to her. 'Ah! Miss,' cried the woman, 'I seemed to have a fore-knowledge that something good was to happen to you; and now I am sure of it. But pray make haste and see what the lawyer wants with you.'—Julia did not require to be pressed upon this point: she herself was too anxious to solve this new mystery to permit any unnecessary delay to take place; and, having dressed little Harry in his Sunday apparel, she put on her best bonnet and shawl, and away the sister went with her little brother to the lawyer's. They entered an office in which there were a great many clerks, who all left off writing to turn round and have a look at the pretty young lady—for a lady did Julia really seem, as she actually was by birth, education, and manners;—but when she timidly mentioned her name, she found herself the object of the most respectful attention. The head clerk ushered her and her brother into a handsome apartment, where an elderly gentleman, with a benevolent countenance, was seated at a desk covered with papers; and the reception which he gave Julia Murray was more than courteous—it was cordial and, as it were, paternally kind. 'Sit down, young lady,' he said, handing her to a chair: 'and you, my little fellow, place yourself near your sister. And now, Miss Murray,' he continued, raising his large silver spectacles from his eyes to his forehead, 'I have some good news to communicate to you; and I am sure, after all I have heard of you, I am proud and happy to be the medium of conveying any thing agreeable to your ears.'—'You are very kind, sir,' murmured the young maiden, still in the deepest suspense.—'Did you ever hear your late father speak of any one who owed him a sum of money?' enquired the lawyer.—Julia reflected for a few moments, and then replied in the negative.—'Well, perhaps he did not mention his private affairs before you,' observed the lawyer; 'it is nevertheless a fact, that many years ago he advanced a certain sum to a friend who was in difficulties; but these embarrassments continued, ending in bankruptcy or something of the sort; and so your poor father lost the whole amount thus advanced. The friend went abroad; and he has latterly returned to England, a rich man—having retrieved his fortunes in a foreign clime. He made enquiries after your parents, and to his sorrow learnt that they were no more; but he could not succeed in tracing you out. At length he saw a report of a certain case in the newspaper, and ascertained that you were the young lady therein mentioned. His sorrow at the first appearance of the affair was only equalled by his joy when he beheld the result; for he has your interest deeply at heart. He has, however, been compelled to leave London in a great hurry;—but before he went away, he gave me certain instructions, which I have fulfilled with all possible despatch. The sum which he borrowed of your father, with compound interest, amounts to six hundred pounds; and this money I have laid out for you in the purchase of a neat little house, with good, serviceable furniture, in Camden Town. There is an excellent young gentlemen's school close by; and my client has paid a year in advance for Master Harry's tuition. He also intends that you shall be at no expense for the boy's education. Over and above all this, I am instructed to place these fifty pounds in your hands; and if my client has thus done more than his actual liability to your father required, it is simply as a recompense for the long delay which has occurred in refunding a loan so generously advanced and so vitally necessary to him at the time. Now, my dear young lady, I have no more to say, farther than that this card furnishes the address of your house, of which I likewise present you the key; and may this little gleam of good fortune encourage you to pursue the course which has hitherto won for you so much esteem, and which may yet lead you to the highest pinnacle of happiness and prosperity.'—With these words, the kind-hearted man shook Julia warmly by the hand; the young maiden endeavoured to express her heart-felt gratitude for the unexpected benefits thus showered upon her: but tears—tears of happiness flowed down her cheeks—and her bosom was so full of strange and conflicting emotions, that her powers of utterance were suspended. Even as she took up the bank notes, the key, and the card, and thrust them all together into her little silk bag, her hands trembled so that she could scarcely perform those simple acts; and when in a few minutes she found herself walking along the street, with little Harry by her side, she could not remember leaving the lawyer's office. She fancied that she had been giving way to some wild hallucination—some absurd delusion of the brain: but when she felt in her bag, *there* were the proofs of the reality!

"It was no easy task to make little Harry comprehend the altered nature of their circumstances. He could not conceive how his sister had possibly obtained a house of her own, and fancied that she was joking with him; for he had not been able to understand very much of what the lawyer had said to Julia. However, all doubts on the boy's part vanished, when he heard his sister explain to their landlady every thing that had taken place at Mr. Richardson's, and conclude by requesting that good woman to accompany her forthwith to Camden Town. This desire was complied with; and away they all three went in a cab to the address designated upon the card. In due time the vehicle drew up opposite a neat house forming one of a terrace recently built; and the little party entered the dwelling with the least possible delay. It was all new from top to bottom,—the furniture, which was substantial and good, was new likewise;—the hangings to the windows and the carpets had been selected with admirable taste in reference to the colour and pattern of the paper on the walls:—in fact, the abode was fitted up in the most comfortable manner! 'I congratulate you, my dear Miss Murray,' exclaimed her companion; 'and I am sure I am as delighted as yourself, although I shall lose you as a lodger. But you do not, then, think that it was *the gentleman in the cloak* who has done all this?'—'No,' answered Julia; 'that cannot be, because I am sure the gentleman you speak of never knew my father; and moreover the kind friend who has thus handsomely repaid the money my father lent him, has gone out of town.'—'Then how came *the gentleman in the cloak* to call and tell you, Miss, that the lawyer wished to see you?'—'Ah! I never thought of *that*!' exclaimed Julia. 'And yet,' she added, after a few moments' serious reflection, 'Mr. Richardson said that my father's debtor had found me out through the medium of the newspaper report; and this circumstance may have brought him and *the gentleman in the cloak* together.'—'True!' ejaculated the garrulous woman. 'Oh! what a sweet place this is, to be sure!'—'It is too good for me,' said Julia, in a mournful tone, the first feelings of delight now yielding to sober reflection: 'the occupant of such a house as this requires a servant, and should possess a certain income; whereas I cannot afford the former, not possessing the latter.'—'Oh! Miss, are you blind to all the advantages now spread before your eyes?' demanded the woman. 'Here you are in your own house, rent free, and with fifty pounds in your pocket—Harry's schooling to be paid into the bargain! All your kind patronesses will give you as much work as you can possibly manage, now that they will see how you are getting on in the world; and the number of your customers must increase. Then you can have the assistance of one or two respectable young girls; and you will not only obtain a good living, but be able to save money.'—Julia saw the truth of these observations; and her heart was relieved from a heavy load.—'Besides,' said the

talkative but well-meaning woman, 'it would seem like flying in the face of Providence not to be thankful for such bounties.'—'Yes,' ejaculated Julia, touched more profoundly by this remark than by the worldly reasoning previously advanced by her companion: 'I *do* sincerely and firmly believe that HE, who watches all our ways and knows all our steps, has taken compassion upon me and my darling brother; and I receive in thankfulness the blessings thus showered upon me!'—Thus speaking, the young maiden turned aside for a few moments; and heart-felt though short was the prayer which she breathed in silence to the Almighty Ruler of the Universe!

"On the following day Julia and her little brother removed to their new house. It would be vain to attempt to describe the joy and delight experienced by little Harry at this change, the more so inasmuch as there was a large piece of ground attached to the back part of the dwelling, where he could play when the weather was fine. Through the agency of her late landlady, a poor widow-woman, of middle age, steady habits, and great respectability, was recommended to Julia as servant or housekeeper; and thus commenced the economy of the little household. Julia's first care was to address a note to all her kind patronesses to acquaint them with her removal; and Lady Caroline Jerningham was not forgotten. Harry commenced his attendance at the neighbouring school, the master of which called upon Miss Murray and informed her that he had received from Mr. Richardson a year's payment in advance for the boy's tuition; and the preceptor being a kind, worthy man, Harry soon became a great favourite with him. Several weeks passed away; and it was astonishing how Julia's business increased. Carriages were constantly stopping at her door, the number of her patronesses rapidly augmenting; and, on enquiry, she usually found that the new recommendations emanated from Lady Caroline, who appeared, by these results, to be constantly thinking of her friend, the young milliner. In fact, Julia had so much work upon her hands that she was compelled to give a great portion out to respectable needle-women in the neighbourhood; for she preferred this mode of fulfilling her engagements, rather than by taking assistants into the house.

"Four months had thus passed away; and during this interval Julia had never once seen *the gentleman in the cloak*; nor had she received a visit from her father's debtor, to whose honesty and generosity she owed so much. She called once upon Mr. Richardson to express a hope that the individual thus alluded to would give her an opportunity of thanking him personally; but the lawyer assured her, and, as she thought, somewhat abruptly, that he had left the country on a long voyage; and she returned home, much vexed at the tidings she had received. One evening—it was a Saturday evening, and at about nine o'clock—a cab stopped at the door, and a double-knock immediately announced some visitor. It happened that the housekeeper was absent on a visit of two or three days to some relations in the country—the girl who had been temporarily hired to do her work, and who did not sleep in the house, had gone for the night—and Harry was in bed in his own little room adjoining his sister's bed-chamber up-stairs. Julia was accordingly compelled to answer the door herself; and her surprise was only equalled by her delight, when she found that her visitress was Lady Caroline Jerningham, who had arrived thus mysteriously in a common street-cab, which she had dismissed on alighting at her young friend's house. Miss Murray received her with the most sincere manifestations of joy, and conducted her into the parlour, where a cheerful fire was burning in the grate; for though it was now the month of April, yet the evenings had not entirely lost the chill of winter. You must remember that Julia had not seen Lady Caroline since that evening when the latter sent for her to the mansion in Hanover Square, and on which occasion they had exchanged vows of friendship. Nearly five months had passed since that date; and it struck Julia, as the light of the candles flashed upon the fair patrician's countenance, that she was much altered. Her face was pale and care-worn; and her eyes beamed not with their wonted fires. 'My dear Julia,' she said, seating her self near the fire, 'I had intended to call upon you long ago; but I have been ill and suffering, in mind and body. However,' she added, hastily, 'I have never once forgotten you; and I am delighted to find that your business has prospered so well.'—'I am under obligations to your ladyship which I can never repay,' exclaimed Julia, taking the patrician's hand, and conveying it to her lips.—'Do not address me in that formal style, Julia,' said Lady Caroline. 'My God!' she cried, bitterly, 'would that I were *not* of noble birth: would that I were a daughter of toil; for *then* I should not have the thousand Argus-eyes of *the world* upon me!'—and she clasped her hands in a manner indicative of deep mental anguish.—'Dearest Lady Caroline,' exclaimed Julia, 'what ails you? Oh! tell me, and show me how I may minister to you in your sufferings!'—'You once assured me, Julia, *that you would serve me by day and by night*,' said Lady Caroline, speaking in a low and almost hollow tone, and casting anxious glances around as if she were afraid of being overheard.—'Yes, dearest lady,' returned Julia, emphatically; 'and I renew that pledge! By day and by night can you command me.'—'Are we in danger of intrusion?' demanded Lady Caroline anxiously.—'Not in the least, dear lady: excepting my little brother, who is asleep in his own chamber, we are alone in the house.'—'Heaven be thanked!' ejaculated Caroline Jerningham, speaking as if at least some portion of the heavy weight that lay upon her heart, were removed by this assurance.—'My generous friend,' said Julia, 'I see that you have a terrible but secret cause of grief; make me your confidant, I implore you! If I can aid you, I shall rejoice indeed to have the opportunity of proving my gratitude for all the kindness I have received at your hands; and if I cannot assist, I may at least be able to console you!'—'Dearest Julia, I do indeed require a friend at this moment; for surely never was wretched woman in such dreadful embarrassment as myself! For the last few weeks I have lived only like one distracted—keeping my chamber, and affecting an illness, though steadily refusing to receive the advice of the family physician! And now, fortunately my mother has gone on a visit for a few days to some friends in the country; and my own maid is in my confidence and is trustworthy. Thus my absence from home will not be suspected; and in this is now my only hope! O Julia, Julia—can you not understand my meaning?'—then, casting herself at the feet of the young milliner, the almost heart-broken Lady Caroline exclaimed, in the wildest paroxysm of bitter, bitter grief, as she joined her hands imploringly, 'Save my honour, Julia—save my reputation,—and by so doing you save my life: for I would perish by my own hand rather than endure exposure!'—'My God! dearest lady, what do you mean?' demanded Julia, fearful lest her friend's senses were leaving her, and that she was uttering meaningless phrases in the incipient aberration of the intellect: 'tell me, how can I save you in any way? for you know that you may depend upon me to the utmost!'—'How can you save me!' repeated the agonising young lady, in a voice of the most plaintive appeal: 'Oh! do you not comprehend my condition, Julia? And yet I am about to become a mother!'

"These words fell with stupefying, astounding effect upon the ears of Julia Murray: indeed, she could scarcely believe that she had rightly interpreted their meaning. The unhappy Caroline mistook the cause of the young milliner's silence and amazement; and, rising

from her suppliant posture, she exclaimed, while the proud patrician blood rushed to her cheeks, ‘I understand you, Miss: you are shocked at the announcement I have made, and you are indignant that I should apply to you to screen me. I will drag myself away from your house, therefore; imploring you only to keep the secret which I have been so foolish, so inconsiderate to reveal to you.’—‘Just heaven! what do I hear? reproaches from your lips!’ cried Julia; and embracing the unhappy lady with sisterly warmth, she said, ‘No, no: you have misunderstood me! Grief and surprise for a moment sealed my lips: but you find me ready to succour you, dearest benefactress, to the utmost of my power!’—‘Thank you, kind friend,’ murmured Lady Caroline, falling back exhausted into her seat; for the agitated state of her feelings, and the harrowing emotions which the dread of Julia’s coldness had just caused her to experience, produced effects of a most perilous nature. The young milliner knew not how to act: she was bewildered; and, wringing her hands, exclaimed, ‘Oh! what shall I do? how can I aid her?’—Lady Caroline partially recovered her presence of mind as these words fell upon her ears; and giving a few hasty instructions, these were instantly obeyed. Julia conducted, or rather supported her to her own bed-chamber; and then, throwing on her bonnet and shawl, hurried away to fetch the nearest surgeon. The medical man whom she sought was at home; and he accompanied the milliner to the house, where he arrived just at the moment that his services were required. In a word, Lady Caroline Jerningham that night became the mother of a fine boy, although the birth was premature by nearly a month, and she had risked much by the necessity of adopting the indispensable means in regard to dress to conceal her situation for many weeks past.

“The surgeon, who had every reason to be satisfied with the liberality of Julia on behalf of her unhappy friend, and who was moreover a discreet man, perceived that his patient was a young lady of superior grade in society, and therefore volunteered his aid in ensuring the concealment of the affair. In fact, he stated that he was acquainted with a poor woman in the neighbourhood, who, having just lost her own infant, would be delighted to take charge of the newly-born babe. Lady Caroline was so far recovered as to be able to take part in this conference; and, without suffering the slightest hint to transpire as to who she was, she nevertheless intimated her readiness and ability to remunerate in the most liberal manner those who might be instrumental in completing the arrangement suggested. The surgeon accordingly undertook the settlement of the business; and, after an hour’s absence, he returned, accompanied by a young, good-looking, healthy woman, who was willing to embrace the proposal that had been made to her. She was married to a labouring man; her name was Porter; and she lived at the distance of about half a mile from Julia’s house. Lady Caroline had a well-filled purse; but even if the contrary had been the case, her friend the milliner could have supplied the funds required. As it was, the young mother gave Mrs. Porter twenty pounds in advance; and having mentioned a feigned name and address, when questioned on that point, Lady Caroline parted with her babe—though not without many a bitter pang and a torrent of heart-wrung tears!

“That was a wretched night for poor Julia Murray. In the warmth of her gratitude and friendship, she had become an accomplice in what she fancied, when she had leisure for sober reflection, to be something bordering upon the nature of a crime. Her pure soul shrank from the idea of the unnatural abandonment by a mother of her child to the mercy of a stranger, rendered necessary even though the proceeding were by the peculiar circumstances in which that mother was placed. Moreover, the readiness with which Lady Caroline had given a false name and address had somewhat shocked the truth-loving Julia;—and then she feared lest the whole matter should by any possibility become known, and compromise her own reputation. All these thoughts and apprehensions swept across her mind, after the surgeon and Mrs. Porter had taken their departure, and while Lady Caroline slept. But the generous girl strove to banish from her mind reflections which tended to diminish her respect for the patrician lady who had manifested so much kindness towards her: moreover, the natural feelings of a woman towards one of her own sex placed in such interesting though embarrassing, not to say *alarming* circumstances,—the sentiments of commiseration, deep sympathy, and tender friendship, soon triumphed over all other considerations;—and when Caroline awoke, just as the grey dawn of morning was breaking into the chamber, she found the young milliner watching by her bedside. The suffering lady was considerably refreshed and strengthened by the long sleep she had enjoyed: her mind was moreover relieved from the most excruciating anxieties:—and she poured forth her gratitude to Julia Murray in the most sincere and heartfelt manner. Then, in the fulness of the tender confidence which had arisen between them, Caroline told her friend how she had loved her cousin, a young lieutenant in the Navy,—how their union was forbidden by her proud mother though assented to by her generous brother, the Marquis of Wilmington,—how her mother had used her interest privately to get the young man appointed to a ship and sent to sea with only a few days’ warning,—and how, in the anguish of parting, she—Lady Caroline—had fallen a victim to her fatal passion! This narrative moved Julia to tears;—for the young milliner now comprehended what love was—and she felt that she also loved,—and that when she sorrowed in secret at the protracted absence of the stranger who had given her the gilt counter, it was in consequence of the impression which he had made upon her heart! Thus did Julia Murray at length obtain the reading of the mysterious sensations that stirred within her own soul.

“Fortunately there was a means of egress from little Harry’s room, without the necessity of the boy’s passing through his sister’s chamber; and thus was the presence of Lady Caroline retained a profound secret from him. You must also recollect that the incidents just related occurred on the Saturday night; and Harry had by chance received an invitation to pass the Sunday with his schoolmaster’s family. Every circumstance thus appeared to favour the complete concealment of Lady Caroline’s confinement. But it was now necessary that Julia should repair to the mansion in Hanover Square, and acquaint the young lady’s confidential maid with the event which had taken place, as well as to arrange for Caroline’s unobserved return home on the Monday evening;—for though at the risk of her life, she was resolved to remain away no longer than the time specified. This commission Julia faithfully performed; and after an absence of upwards of two hours, she reached her own abode once more. The patient was improving rapidly; and when the surgeon called a second time on that Sunday, he was astonished to find her so strong and in the possession of so much physical and moral energy. To be brief, on the Monday evening, according to agreement, Lady Caroline, well wrapped up, disguised in the attire of a daughter of the middle class, and with a dark green veil drawn carefully over her countenance, accompanied Julia in a hackney-coach to Hanover Square; and the two were admitted into the mansion, the hall-porter believing his young mistress to be a friend and equal of the milliner. In this manner they reached Caroline’s own chamber without the truth being for an instant suspected; and the confidential

maid was in readiness to receive her lady. Julia remained there until the maid had ascertained that the hall-porter had been relieved by another domestic during the supper-hour; and then the milliner took her departure, accompanied by the fervent gratitude and blessings of the fair patrician whom she had thus extricated from a maze of the most frightful difficulties.

"The very next morning, while Julia was seated at work in her parlour, reflecting upon the incidents of the three preceding days, she heard the iron gate in front of the house groan upon its hinges; and, looking up, she beheld from the window the tall, handsome gentleman approaching the door. The day was fine; and he no longer wore his cloak;—and his garb was plain, unpretending, and perfectly genteel. The housekeeper having returned home that same morning, Julia awaited with a beating heart in the parlour the presence of her visitor; and when he entered, she felt so confused—for a variety of reasons—that she could not utter a word. In the first place she knew that she loved him;—secondly she remembered all the enquiries he had put to her late landlady concerning her;—and thirdly, she recalled to mind the gentle, good, and almost paternal way in which he had addressed her when last they met; and she fancied that in her conduct respecting Lady Caroline she had deviated somewhat from the strict line of integrity, truth, and virtue for pursuing which he had so emphatically commended her, and in which he had with equal earnestness enjoined her to persevere. Taking her hand, he said, 'Miss Murray, have you completely forgotten me?'—'Oh! no, sir,' she cried, with a start as if at an imputation of ingratitude: 'that were impossible!'—'And yet why should you remember me?' he asked, gazing intently upon her: 'have I ever done you any service that deserves a thought? The only incident which is likely to dwell in your mind respecting me, is the wretchedness and embarrassment to which my thoughtless conduct exposed you. But for all that you then endured, have I ever made you the slightest recompense?'—'Oh! sir,' cried Julia, the blood rushing to her cheeks, 'do you think for a moment that I ever sought or looked for a pecuniary indemnification? Heavens, how have you mistaken my character!'—and she burst into tears. The stranger gazed upon her, and even smiled as if in satisfaction: but he said nothing.—'No, sir,' resumed the young milliner, hastily passing her handkerchief across her countenance and wiping away the traces of her grief; 'I am not a mercenary person, such as you appear to suppose me. I *did* remember you *with gratitude*,' she continued, her voice becoming mournful and plaintive in spite of herself; 'because you spoke kindly to me on that evening when the accident occurred to the silk dress—because you proffered me assistance at a moment when I and my little brother really needed it—because I always believed and still believe that it was on your part entirely an error which led me into such a serious difficulty—because you *then* told me that you would not insult me by offering me any pecuniary recompense—and because, when you called again, you spoke kindly to me as before, gave me good advice, and also brought me intelligence from Mr. Richardson, which has led to my present prosperity. For all these reasons, sir,' she added emphatically, 'I have thought of you often and often; and I considered myself to be deeply your debtor.'—'Excellent girl!' exclaimed the gentleman, surveying her with mingled admiration and interest: 'not for worlds would I insult your feelings, nor wound your generous heart! And it was precisely through delicacy in those respects, that I never did openly proffer you any pecuniary assistance, since that one unfortunate occasion in Hanover Square. Again, let me observe, that if I have not visited you for four long months, I have not been unmindful of your welfare. I have, as it were, watched over you from a distance; and I have learnt with supreme satisfaction, that your conduct *has* continued most exemplary. Miss Murray, I am perhaps singular and eccentric in my notions; and, though highly placed in the social sphere, yet I have determined to consult only my own happiness, at least for the future, in the most important step which a man can adopt in life. I allude to marriage.'—Julia started, blushed, and cast down her eyes; and this confusion on her part seemed to encourage her visitor to proceed.—'I must candidly inform you,' he resumed, 'that I have been a husband already, and that the alliance which I formed almost in my boyhood, and in obedience to the dictates of an imperious mother, was an unhappy one. My wife was a heartless coquette—vain—frivolous—and possessing no *mind*. I sought by gentleness and kindness to render her attached to her home, although I never really loved her; but all was useless. At last she caught a severe cold when returning from a rout, early on a winter's morning; and a rapid decline soon carried her to the tomb. This occurred two years ago. I then vowed that if I should ever contract a second union, it must be where the heart alone was interested. This resolve I declared to my mother; and it has in a measure, I regret to say it, incensed her against me. The very first time I ever saw you, I felt myself suddenly and mysteriously attracted towards you. All that I have since heard or seen of you has tended to confirm that favourable impression; and I am come this morning to offer you my hand, as you already possess my heart.'

"A faintness—an indescribable sensation of mingled joy and apprehension came over Julia, as these last words met her ears,—joy in the hope that she had heard aright, apprehension lest she were the prey of a delightful vision which was too soon to be dissipated. But when she felt her hand pressed to the lips of that handsome suitor who now knelt at her feet, and listened to the tender assurances of an honourable and lasting affection which he breathed with manly sincerity in her ears, she exclaimed, under the sudden impulse of her heart's emotions, 'Is it possible that so much happiness can be in store for me?'—Her suitor received those words as an assent to his proposal; and, pressing the young maiden to his bosom, he said, 'Then without knowing my name you have loved me, dearest Julia?'—She murmured an affirmative; and a rapid interchange of questions and replies convinced him that the young maiden had all along remembered him not *with gratitude*, but *with affection*! Thereupon, seating himself by her side, and retaining her pretty hand in his, he said, 'Then henceforth, Julia, there need exist no mystery on my part. I am the pretended debtor to your deceased father; and Mr. Richardson, my own attorney, followed my secret instructions in providing for yourself and your brother. My object was to place you in comfort, yet still leave you in a condition that rendered you to a certain degree dependant on your own honest industry; and I have been overjoyed to find that prosperity has not induced you to relax your energies, nor led you into extravagances, nor in any way proved injurious to your fair fame, your amiable disposition, and your steady perseverance. With delight, then, shall I accompany so worthy a woman to the altar; and with pride shall I present you to the world as the Marchioness of Wilmington!'—'Oh! my lord,' murmured Julia, a greater faintness than before now coming over her, as the lofty rank of her suitor was thus announced to her, 'is it possible that you can be the brother of that young lady to whom I owe so much?'—and then she blushed deeply, and a cold shudder passed over her frame as she remembered what a tremendous secret she had retained in her bosom, and must retain inviolably concerning the sister of him who offered to make her the partner of his rank and fortune.—'Yes,' said the marquis, attributing her emotions to the happiness as well as the maidenly confusion which it was natural for her to experience under existing circumstances;

‘that Lady Caroline whom you know, is my sister. You may judge my surprise when, on the night that I first encountered you in Hanover Square, you informed me that the spoilt dress was my mother’s. The very next morning I called at her residence and privately acquainted Caroline with the little adventure, casually saying that I had been a witness of the accident which was occasioned through no neglect nor carelessness on your part, and desiring her when you presented yourself to mitigate as much as possible my mother’s certain resentment against you. Since that period my sister has frequently spoken to me concerning you, and has recommended you extensively to her numerous fashionable acquaintances. But, much as I love and would trust Lady Caroline, I have never informed her of the attachment I experienced for you, nor of the fact that I was your father’s pretended debtor. This reserve originated merely in the determination to watch your conduct,—I may tell you all this now, dear girl,—from a distance; so that time might decide whether I should lay my coronet at your feet, or renounce all farther idea of an alliance with you. Thank, heaven! the former is the happy destiny; and now I have explained all that may have seemed strange or mysterious in your estimation.’

“Julia could scarcely find words to express her gratitude for all the delicate attentions and generous acts of which the nobleman had thus been the hitherto unknown author: but he sealed her lips with a fond kiss, and then proceeded to address her in the following manner:—‘I propose, dearest girl, that our union shall take place in six months from the present time. The reason that I suggest so long a delay is that I may visit you occasionally, in company with my sister, be it understood, so that you may learn to know me better than you now do; and as I shall at once make a confidant of Caroline, and am well acquainted with the generosity of her disposition, you need not apprehend any coolness or hostility on her part. Quite the contrary: she will love you as a sister. Ah! I observe that you sigh and experience an agitation of feeling, my Julia; but you have no cause to dread any exhibition of foolish pride with Caroline. Relative to my mother, I say nothing—promise nothing: at the same time I cannot permit her will to rule my happiness. And now I shall take my leave of you for the present, Julia; and I shall at once hasten to Hanover Square, to confide all that has occurred between us to my sister, who, I regret to state, has been confined for some days past to her own chamber. Alas! she, poor girl, has suffered in her best and holiest affections through her mother’s pride; but I rejoice to say that happiness awaits her yet. By the sudden death of a young cousin, Lieutenant Quentin has become Lord Hartley, and his ship will return in a few months to England. This most unexpected succession to title and wealth, will smooth down all the difficulties which my mother has hitherto interposed in the way of her daughter’s happiness; and who knows, Julia,’ added the marquis, smiling, ‘but that the two marriages may be celebrated at the same time?’—‘God grant that they may!’ exclaimed the young milliner, with a strange emphasis; then, immediately afterwards she observed, ‘For, believe me, I have your sister’s happiness most sincerely at heart.’—‘I shall not fail to tell Caroline all you say,’ returned the marquis; ‘and she will be prepared to love you the more tenderly. And now, dear Julia,’ he added, rising to depart, ‘I must bid you farewell for the present. The next time I call I shall give you due notice beforehand, so that you may have little Harry here to see me. But permit me, before I depart, to request you to divest yourself by degrees of the business and occupations which have accumulated upon you. To speak plainly, you need receive no more work from any person; and you will permit my solicitor, Mr. Richardson, to supply you monthly with such sums as you may require for your expenditure.’—All this was said by Lord Wilmington in so delicate yet tender a manner, that it increased Julia’s attachment to him, as well as her high esteem of his character; and they parted, more than ever pleased with each other.

“In the afternoon, Julia was sitting at her work, pondering upon all that had occurred, and scarcely able yet to convince herself that she was not a prey to some delusive vision, when Lady Caroline’s maid called with a note from her mistress. In this *billet* the fair patrician said, ‘*My brother has told me all, dearest Julia; and believe me when I assure you, that it will afford me unfeigned delight to hail you as a sister. Never, never can I forget all your goodness towards me in the hour of my bitter extremity. But, for heaven’s sake! guard well my secret! This injunction, however, I need scarcely give you. And yet, there is one thing which now affects me; this is——shall you not blush to acknowledge* ME *as your sister-in-law, since you are acquainted with my disgrace? My heart tells me that you commiserate and sympathise: but my fears—Oh! until I receive from you an assurance that may calm them—those fears are truly painful!*’—The generous Julia hastened to pen a reply, conveying in the tenderest terms the assurance solicited; and, having ascertained that the young lady was progressing rapidly towards complete convalescence, she dismissed the maid with the letter entrusted to her. Three weeks, however, elapsed before Lady Caroline was sufficiently recovered to call upon her friend Julia; and then she came alone—for her mother’s heart yearned to visit her child. Under the influence of this feeling, she was moved to tears when she learnt that every alternate day Miss Murray had made it a point to call at Mrs. Porter’s residence and assure herself that the poor babe was duly cared for. ‘This is another proof of your goodness, Julia!’ exclaimed Lady Caroline, falling upon her friend’s neck and weeping with mingled gratitude and joy. They presently proceeded together to the good woman’s abode; and the young mother was charmed to find her child thriving to her heart’s best satisfaction. On the following day Lady Caroline revisited Julia; but this time it was in company with her brother the Marquis;—and little Harry was at home to see them. You may suppose that the party was a happy one; and it gave the nobleman ineffable delight to observe that his sister and his intended wife were on the best possible terms with each other. But he little suspected the tremendous secret that had thus cemented their friendship;—and it cost poor Julia many a pang when she reflected that she was compelled to retain any secret at all from the knowledge of the generous man who reposed such confidence in her! There was however no help for it;—and yet Julia felt as if she were acting with blameable duplicity in veiling a circumstance which for her friend’s sake, she would nevertheless rather die than reveal: and after her noble visitors had taken their departure, she did not experience that amount of happiness which, with her present brilliant prospects, she knew she ought to enjoy.

“I must not dwell upon this portion of my narrative. Let us suppose five months to have passed away; during which period the marquis had been constant in his visits to Julia, but always in the company of his sister. So delicate was his behaviour in respect to the reputation of his intended bride, that he avoided every chance of compromising her; and although the neighbours saw a gentleman, whose name they did not know, call three times a-week upon the beautiful milliner, they never beheld him repair thither alone. Thus there was no scope for scandal; and Julia’s conduct was always so circumspect as to prove a complete antidote to calumny. I should observe that during the five months mentioned, the attachment subsisting between the pair increased, and warmed into the most ardent love; and I must not forget to state that Lady Caroline visited her child at Mrs. Porter’s house as frequently as she was able. But Julia

seldom failed to call there every alternate day; and thus the rearing of the poor infant was strictly watched by its mother, and that mother's bosom friend. Sometimes Harry accompanied his sister in her walk to Mrs. Porter's cottage; but the little fellow was always made to wait in one room while Julia was shown the baby in another—and thus the real motive of her visits there was unsuspected by him. Not that she feared he would reveal any thing which he was enjoined to keep secret; but Julia believed—and rightly believed—that it was alike more prudent and delicate to leave him in total ignorance of the object which took her to the cottage. Thus time wore on, as I have already mentioned; and now I must remark that in compliance with the wishes of Lord Wilmington, Julia had by this time altogether ceased to receive work; but instead of drawing on the funds placed at her disposal in the hands of Mr. Richardson, she subsisted upon the savings which she had been enabled to accumulate. I mention all these little circumstances, to afford you as good an idea as I can convey of the excellence of her disposition, and the total absence of selfishness from her character. In fact, the more the marquis saw of her, the more enamoured of her did he become, and the greater grew his admiration of her amiable qualities. It was therefore with joy the most unfeigned that he at length considered himself justified in fixing the day for the bridal; and this ceremony was settled to take place precisely on the completion of the six months from the hour in which he had offered her his hand.

"While Julia was occupied in preparing her own wedding-dress, the Marquis busied himself in rendering his splendid mansion in Belgrave Square as suitable as possible for the reception of his bride. In the meantime he had communicated to the Dowager-Marchioness his intended marriage; but, as he had feared, his design experienced the most decided disapproval on her part. Vainly did he reason with her on the subject—uselessly did he represent that his happiness was seriously involved: his mother refused to listen to him;—and he had the mortification to incur her most serious displeasure. The bitterness of her hostility to the match he however concealed from Julia; and, much as he deplored the breach which now existed between himself and his only surviving parent, not for a moment did he entertain the thought of yielding to her tyranny. Thus the time passed on; and it was now within three days of the one fixed for the bridal ceremony, when an incident occurred which produced a terrible change in the aspect of affairs.

“It was a fine summer morning, and the clock was striking eight just as Julia and little Harry were sitting down to breakfast, when the old housekeeper entered to inform her mistress that a woman by the name of Porter desired to speak to her without delay;—for you most remember that the housekeeper was entirely ignorant of the transaction which so nearly concerned Lady Caroline Jerningham, and to some extent involved Miss Murray, at least as an accessory, in the mysterious business. Mrs. Porter was instantly admitted into the parlour; and when she appeared, and the housekeeper had retired, Julia approached her in an agitated manner and with an enquiring look,—for it struck her that this visit—the first which the woman had ever paid to the house since that night when the infant was entrusted to her—augured something unpleasant. In her excitement she forgot the presence of her brother Harry—whom the woman herself likewise overlooked; and, to the anxious glance darted upon her, Mrs. Porter verbally replied by exclaiming, ‘Oh! Miss, the dear child has been suddenly taken dangerously ill!’—‘The child dangerously ill!’ repeated Julia, who had learnt to love the infant almost as much as if it were her own: ‘I will accompany you directly;’ and, hurrying from the room, she presently reappeared with her bonnet and shawl. Then, noticing Harry, it flashed to her mind that he had overheard what had been said: but a second thought told her that more harm would be done by attempting to explain away any impression that might have been made upon his mind, than by leaving the matter as it then stood;—and, having merely observed to him that she should return shortly, Julia hastened away in company with Mrs. Porter. Harry finished his breakfast, not thinking much of the few words which had caught his ears, but which he could not rightly understand; and, as it was holiday-time, he was about to repair to play in the garden at the back of the house, when a double knock at the front door made him hasten to the window. Perceiving that the visitor was the Marquis, he ran to give him admittance; and the nobleman entered the parlour. ‘Where is your sister, Harry?’ he asked, caressing the boy in a kind manner.—‘She is gone out, my lord,’ was the reply.—‘This early!’ exclaimed the Marquis; ‘and I had promised myself the pleasure of breakfasting with you both. The morning was so fine, and as I am a very early riser, I rode out as far as the turnpike, and have sent my horse back with the groom.’—The nobleman spoke this rather in a musing tone, than actually addressing himself to the boy; and, after a pause, he observed, ‘I suppose your sister will not be long?’—‘I do not know, my lord,’ answered Harry. ‘A woman came just as we were sitting down to breakfast, and Julia seemed much vexed at what she told her.’—‘I hope that nothing disagreeable has occurred?’ cried the Marquis, in a tone of alarm.—‘The woman, whose name is Porter, informed Julia that the child was dangerously ill,’ responded Harry; ‘and then they went away together.’—‘Oh! I understand,’ said the Marquis: ‘the child of some poor woman named Porter is unwell, and your sister has gone to see it.’—‘No, my lord, I don’t think the child is Mrs. Porter’s,’ returned Harry, ingenuously, and with boyish communicativeness; ’for I have often called at her cottage with Julia, and I have heard Mr. Porter say that his wife’s own baby died last winter.’—‘And Julia has often called there?’ exclaimed the Marquis, a horrible suspicion suddenly arising in his mind.—‘Very often indeed,’ answered Harry, totally unconscious of the tremendous amount of mischief he was occasioning. ‘When we have been out walking together, we have come round that way, and stopped at the cottage; and then I have waited in the kitchen with Mr. Porter, who used to give me cakes or marbles, while Julia went up stairs with Mrs. Porter.’—‘And did you ever see the child?’ asked the nobleman, assuming as much composure as he could possibly call to his aid.—‘No; Julia never told me a word about it.’—‘And how did you first hear of it?’—‘Just now, when Mrs. Porter rushed in and said that the child was ill’—‘And was Julia very, very sorry?’ demanded the Marquis.—‘Oh! yes, indeed!’ cried the boy, who saw nothing strange nor unusual in the nobleman’s tone or manner, and regarded this dialogue as mere chit-chat.—‘And whereabout is Mrs. Porter’s cottage?’ asked Wilmington, in whose bosom a perfect hell was now raging.—‘Shall I show your lordship the way?’ said Harry. The nobleman nodded his head affirmatively; and the little fellow hastened to fetch his cap. They then proceeded in silence until they came within sight of the cottage, which Harry pointed out.—‘You may now go home again,’ said the Marquis; and Harry obeyed the hint, still totally unsuspicious of the harm which his candid garrulity had accomplished.

“The nobleman, when thus left alone, could no longer restrain the emotions which agitated within him. Turning aside from the path leading towards the cottage, he rushed into the fields, exclaiming aloud, ‘Just heavens! on what an abyss was I hovering! But can such diabolical perfidy exist on the part of one so young? Oh! yes—it is too apparent; and my mother was right when she counselled me never to bestow my hand on a woman moving in a sphere beneath my own!’—Having thus given vent to his excited feelings, Wilmington grew more composed; and he now approached the cottage. The door stood open; and, entering without any ceremony, he saw a woman at the same instant descend from a staircase. ‘Is your name Porter?’ he enquired, speaking in as mild a tone as possible.—‘Yes, sir,’ she answered.—‘And it is here that a child who has been, as it were, abandoned by its unnatural mother, is lying dangerously ill?’ he said, fixing his eyes keenly upon the woman’s countenance.—‘Thank God, the dear innocent is better!’ exclaimed Mrs. Porter, taken completely off her guard, and even entertaining a suspicion that the gentleman himself might be the father of her nursling.—‘Now, confess every thing,’ cried the Marquis, ’or it will be the worse for you! Was it not Miss Murray who engaged your services——’.—‘No, sir: it was the surgeon who attended the lady in her confinement,’ interrupted Mrs. Porter, terrified by the stern tone which her querist had suddenly adopted; ’but it was at Miss Murray’s house——’.—‘Enough! enough!’ ejaculated. Wilmington; and he hurried away from the cottage.

“In the meantime Julia had returned home, having assured herself that the child was out of danger; and as she retraced her way by means of a bye-path, it happened that she did not encounter her brother and the marquis. But little Harry was light of foot; and he, having been dismissed by the nobleman in the way above stated, reached the front door at the same instant as his sister. She was surprised to find that he had been out—still more so when she learnt that Lord Wilmington had called so early. But a frightful sensation seized upon her, when Harry ingenuously observed that the nobleman had taken him to lead the way to the cottage. Subduing her emotions, however, as well as she could, she proceeded to question her brother; and in a short time she ascertained all that had passed between him and the Marquis. Each answer that he gave—each detail that he mentioned, increased the horrible fears which now oppressed her; and, at last—comprehending the full extent of her misfortune,—perceiving the nature of the suspicions which were sure to have seized upon her intended husband,—she uttered a piercing cry, pressed her hands in anguish to her throbbing brow, and exclaimed in a piercing tone, ‘Oh! Harry, Harry, you know not what you have done!’—The boy was frightened; and, darting towards

his sister, he threw his arms around her neck, imploring her to forgive him if he had acted improperly. Even in the midst of her bitter, bitter anguish, she could not find it in her heart to continue angry with her little brother, who had not wantonly nor wickedly inflicted this appalling injury upon her; and, assuming an appearance of calmness, she became the consoler. In the depth of misery there is a crisis that makes even despair the immediate precursor of hope; and Julia began to reason to herself that all might not be so dark as she had feared. But while she was thus endeavouring to persuade her inmost soul to render itself accessible to consolation, a note was put into her hand by the housekeeper. She glanced at the address which was hurriedly—almost illegibly written, and the ink of which was scarcely dry,—so that she knew it had been penned somewhere in the neighbourhood. With trembling hands she tore it open; and her strength and mental energy sustained her sufficiently to permit the entire perusal of the letter. Its contents ran thus:—'*I have discovered your frailty, your guilt, your hypocrisy, just in time to save myself from an alliance which would have brought dishonour on my name, and heaped endless miseries on my head. I shall not attempt to reproach you at any length for your conduct towards me: my generous confidence has been met by the blackest duplicity—the most diabolical ingratitude; and your conscience will punish you more—oh! far more severely than any words that I may address to you. Neither shall I adopt the mean and petty revenge of exposing you: but if you ever dare to boast that you were once engaged to be married to the Marquis of Wilmington, then shall I consider that it would be a sin to spare you.*'

"The letter dropped from Julia's hand; and, with a wild shriek, she fell senseless on the floor. The housekeeper administered restoratives, while little Harry, who was himself a prey to the liveliest grief he had ever yet known, hurried to fetch the surgeon. It was the same medical man who had attended upon Lady Caroline Jerningham; and he was prompt in repairing to a house where his former services had been so liberally rewarded. Julia had somewhat recovered in the meantime; but he pronounced her to be in a dangerous state—and, indeed, she seemed quite unconscious of every thing that was passing around her. She was conveyed to her chamber,—medicine was prescribed,—and the surgeon recommended the housekeeper not to leave her mistress alone more than was absolutely necessary, inasmuch as he feared that her brain was affected. Little Harry was inconsolable at his sister's illness—the more especially that he reproached himself with having been the cause of it all; though how he had done the harm he could not by any means understand. Seated by Julia's bed-side, he fixed his tearful eyes on her pale countenance, as she slumbered uneasily; and when hours had passed, and evening came, and still she awoke not, he was afraid that she was dead. The housekeeper, however, assured him to the contrary; and then he bent softly over his sister, to whom the surgeon had administered an opiate, and gently kissed her lips. She murmured a name—it was his own name—and opened her eyes. Complete consciousness returned in a few minutes; and as she rapidly surveyed her misfortune and calculated its extent, she shuddered at the idea of even attempting to meet it with resignation. But for that little brother's sake—the sake of him whom she had found bending over her, and whose name was the first that her lips breathed on her waking,—for *his* sake she nerved herself to wage war with the world once more. Though a word of explanation—the mere revelation of Lady Caroline's secret would at once restore her to that position so full of hope which she had occupied in the morning,—still her generous heart would not allow her to betray her friend. No: she would sooner pine away and go down to an early grave, heart-broken and spirit-crushed, than proclaim to the Marquis the secret of his noble sister's dishonour!

"It was about seven o'clock in the evening of this dreadful day that a hasty and impatient double-knock at the front door was heard; and a few moments afterwards Lady Caroline Jerningham was ushered into the chamber where Julia was lying. The moment she entered, the patient made a signal for the housekeeper and little Harry to withdraw; and when the two friends were alone together, a most affecting scene took place. It appeared that the marquis had that afternoon written a letter to his sister, of which the following were the enigmatical contents:—'*I am almost heart-broken, my dearest Caroline, and cannot see you at present. I shall retire into the country for a few weeks—perhaps months—to hide my grief from every eye, and endeavour to regain somewhat of that mental composure which has been almost completely wrecked this day. Julia is unworthy of my love and of your friendship: what the proof of this may be, ask not—seek not to learn;—but I charge you to visit her no more. Your afflicted brother,*' &c.—On the receipt of this note, Lady Caroline, who could not help suspecting that this suddenly wrought change in the sentiments of the Marquis arose from some fearful misunderstanding or some partial discovery respecting the child, had hastened, almost distracted and a prey to intolerable suspense, to Julia's abode; and there she was shocked to find her generous-hearted friend stretched upon a bed of sickness. Embracing each other affectionately, they gave mutual explanations; and Lady Caroline perceived that her worst fears were confirmed. The Marquis had indeed made a discovery relative to the infant; but he was deceived with regard to its maternity. And now who can describe the admiration which Lady Caroline experienced for the character of her friend, when she learnt that the poor girl would rather lie under the dread suspicion of the Marquis—rather resign all her brilliant prospects, and see her heart's fondest affections blighted,—rather, in fact, resign herself to immolation than betray her whose secret she deemed so sacred!

"'No—no!' exclaimed the fair patrician, throwing herself upon Julia's bosom, and weeping plenteously; 'this may not be! Never can I permit you, noble-hearted girl, to endure infamy, reproach, and wretchedness for my sake! I will at once follow my brother into the country, throw myself at his feet, confess all, and bring him back to you!'—'And then what will become of *you*, Caroline?' asked Julia, mingling her tears with those of her friend.'—'Oh! I shall retire from the world, and bury myself, with my innocent babe, in some solitude—in some far-off village, perhaps, where, under a feigned name, I may escape the world's scorn for this fatal weakness which has caused so much misery!'—and, as she spoke, Lady Caroline's voice indicated the most acute anguish of heart. 'Unless,' she added, her tone suddenly becoming hoarse and hollow, and her manner unnaturally subdued,—'unless, indeed, my brother, in the first ebullition of his rage should stretch me dead at his feet; and that is the most probable result!'—'Then, dearest Caroline,' exclaimed Julia, speaking in a tone of mingled alarm and earnest entreaty, 'for heaven's sake renounce this mad project! Do not think of seeking your brother and thus exposing yourself to his rage. I owe you a deep, deep debt of gratitude; and now let me pay it by enduring that weight of suspicion against which I may haply bear up, but which would crush and overwhelm you. For never, never can I forget that when I appeared, full of terror and trembling, with the spoilt dress in your mother's presence, your looks gave me encouragement, and your kind words reassured me. Then, when I was leaving your dwelling without the means of even procuring a loaf for my dear little

brother and myself, you put gold into my hand. Oh! dear lady, these are manifestations of generosity which never can be forgotten; and, noble as you are by name, you are nobler in heart. It will be my joy—my pride to screen *you*, who have proved so kind a friend to me; and there is no sacrifice that I am unprepared to make in order to save you from unhappiness and shame!'—'It is an angel that speaks!' murmured Lady Caroline, overpowered by this generosity on the part of Julia Murray. 'But nothing, nothing,' she continued, with reviving energy, and after a few moments' pause, 'shall induce me to yield to your desire. I recognise all that is great and noble in your conduct; and so long as I remain possessed of intellect and memory, I shall pray night and morning for the Almighty to bless you, my dearest Julia. I have been frail, and I must bear the consequences. Seek not to wean me from this intention: I should never know a happy moment, were I to permit *you* to become the victim of *my* shame!'[9]—'One word!' exclaimed Miss Murray, after a minute's profound reflection: 'I will no longer urge you to act contrary to your heart's dictates; but promise me that you will not take a single step towards revealing every thing to your brother and exculpating me, until four-and-twenty hours shall have elapsed. During that interval we shall both have time for serious and calm meditation; and no advantage will result from precipitate haste.'—'Yes; I make you this promise, Julia,' returned Lady Caroline; 'on the condition that when we meet again to-morrow evening, it shall not be to argue whether I am to confess or not, but in what manner the confession can be most suitably and safely made.'—'Agreed!' cried Miss Murray: 'and to-morrow evening, at seven o'clock, you will visit me again?'—'I will,' answered Lady Caroline Jerningham; and she then took her leave of her friend, whom she embraced with the warmth of the most sincere affection.

"On the following day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, a letter, addressed to Lady Caroline Jerningham, was delivered at the mansion in Hanover Square by a porter, who hurried away the moment he had placed it in the servant's hands. The contents of this note ran as follow:—'*Dearest Caroline, it is useless for you to call this evening at the house which I have occupied for so many months, and which was purchased by your excellent brother's money. I shall no longer be the occupant of that house, when this note reaches you. My mind is made up to endure every thing for your sake; and I therefore this day withdraw myself, in company with Harry, into a retirement and an obscurity whither you cannot follow me. It will therefore be unnecessary and ridiculous—I may almost say* wicked—*for you to make any revelations to your brother. By sacrificing yourself, you would confer no benefit upon me; as nothing shall induce me to alter the plans I have formed respecting the future. Retain profoundly secret all those circumstances the confession of which can have no useful result; and think sometimes of me—for I shall often, often think of you, my well-beloved friend,—although we may never, never meet again!*'—This letter, on which were the traces of weeping, produced a stupefying sensation on the part of Lady Caroline. Was it possible that Julia, in the zeal of her ardent friendship, had outwitted the fair patrician, and had won the generous game at which they were playing? No wonder that Miss Murray had requested Caroline to suspend all proceedings for twenty-four hours: in that time, the noble-hearted girl had consummated the sacrifice of herself! And now nothing could exceed the sincerity and the depth of that grief which seized upon the lady: for an hour after she received the note, she was as one demented; and her confidential maid experienced the utmost difficulty in restraining her from manifestations of feeling which would have excited the strangest suspicions in the household. At length, when she had grown comparatively calm, Lady Caroline, attended by her maid, repaired to Camden Town; but there they only beheld those appearances which corroborated the statements contained in Julia's letter. For the house was shut up; and, on enquiry being made of a neighbour, it was ascertained that Miss Murray, her servant, and her little brother had taken their departure soon after mid-day, although, according to the same authority, the young milliner was evidently suffering from indisposition. The fair patrician's last hope of seeing her friend and weaning her from her intention, was thus destroyed; and the poignancy of her grief was renewed. She proceeded to Mrs. Porter's cottage, where she learnt that Julia had called in the morning to assure herself of the child's convalescence and imprint upon its little countenance a farewell kiss. This touching instance of Julia's goodness of heart moved Lady Caroline to tears; and she reproached herself bitterly for having been the cause of all her friend's present sorrows.

"There, however, appeared to be a remedy which might yet be adopted; and to this measure did the lady make up her mind. She resolved, in fact, to write to her brother without delay, inform him of every thing, and urge him to lose no time in discovering the retreat of Julia, that justice—full and ample justice—might be done to her. Accordingly, on the following morning she penned a long letter to the Marquis of Wilmington, imploring him to forgive her for the dishonour she had brought upon the family, and drawing such a picture of Julia's generosity in sacrificing herself for a friend, that she wept long and plentifully over the pages as she perused them. When this epistle had been despatched to the post, Caroline's heart felt easier; and she said to herself, 'Even if my brother should wreak the bitterest vengeance upon me, I can endure his resentment with resignation; for I now have the consciousness of performing a sacred and solemn duty.'—The Dowager-Marchioness, in the meantime, had been suffering through indisposition which confined her much to her chamber; and she did not therefore perceive any particular variations in the manner and aspect of her daughter.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF THE DRESS-MAKER: A LOVE STORY.

“Two days after Lady Caroline Jerningham’s letter had been sent, the Marquis of Wilmington arrived in London; and, hastening to Hanover Square, he obtained an immediate interview with his sister. Pale, trembling, and unable to endure his glance, she awaited in torturing suspense the first words that should issue from his lips; and never was relief from agonising feelings more welcome or more complete, than when the Marquis, taking his sister’s hand, said in a gentle though mournful voice, ‘Caroline, I am not come to reproach you—much less to add to your afflictions by the heartless cruelty and absurd inutility of an exposure. No: I give you all my sympathy; and I thank you most sincerely for having confessed every thing, that you might restore your friend to my favour.’—Lady Caroline threw herself into her brother’s arms, and wept upon his breast; but when the emotions attendant upon this meeting had somewhat subsided, the Marquis said, ‘Heaven be thanked that Julia is innocent! Deeply, deeply as I deplore the sad circumstances involved in your revelation, Caroline, yet it is a relief to know that she—that poor, suffering, wrongly suspected girl—is worthy of all my love! And if I before loved her—if I before esteemed and admired her as the pattern of every thing great and noble, generous and amiable in Woman,—Oh! now what strength have those sentiments acquired! No time must be lost in finding her out; and this moment shall I enter upon the search.’—The Marquis then took a hasty leave of his sister, and in the first instance repaired to Mr. Richardson to consult him upon the subject. Without in any way compromising his sister, the Marquis related enough to let the worthy lawyer know that Julia had been unjustly suspected—that her innocence was completely established, and that he now longed to find out her retreat, with the view to make her the fullest possible reparation. Mr. Richardson then stated that three days previously a porter had called on him, bringing the key of the house at Camden Town, with an intimation that Miss Murray surrendered up the tenement to its proprietor, with all the furniture it contained,—in fact, in the same condition as when the property was made over to her. A tear stole into the eye of the Marquis, as he received this proof of Julia’s strict integrity; and Mr. Richardson advised that an advertisement, drawn up in a manner calculated to strike Miss Murray’s comprehension, but ambiguous to the public generally, should be kept standing in the *Times* and other widely circulated newspapers until her retreat should have been discovered. The Marquis approved of this plan; and, leaving his solicitor to execute it, he departed from the office to pursue his search elsewhere. He now proceeded to Camden Town, and (having the key with him) entered the house; but delicacy forbade him to penetrate into any other rooms save the parlours; and there he found not a letter nor a scrap of paper that might afford any clue to the place whither Julia had retired. His heart was heavy—his grief was profound; and frequent sighs rent his manly breast as he repaired to the cottage where the child—his sister’s child—dwelt under the care of Mrs. Porter. His strange manner on his previous visit did not obtain for him a very welcome reception at the hands of that female; but when she found that he spoke kindly and inquired anxiously concerning the infant, her reserve began to dissipate, and she at last thought him a very agreeable gentleman. The child was brought to him, and he kissed it affectionately. An allusion which Mrs. Porter happened to make to Miss Murray, enabled the Marquis to turn the conversation upon that loved being who seemed lost to him; and now he heard the warmest and sincerest praises uttered in regard to her; but not a syllable affording a trace of her present abode. In fact, it was very evident that Mrs. Porter was as ignorant as himself in that respect; and still was it with a heavy heart that the nobleman turned away to prosecute his search elsewhere.

“He had learnt from his sister that Julia, her little brother, and the old housekeeper had taken their departure together in a hackney-coach; and he concluded that the vehicle was hired from some stand in the neighbourhood. Behold, then, this rich and well-born peer visiting all the stations of cabs and coaches in the vicinity, and pursuing his enquiries amongst a class of men whom his liberality alone succeeded in divesting of their habitual insolence. But still all his endeavours to solve the painful mystery were fruitless; and, after a weary day’s researches, he returned home, exhausted in physical energy and worn down by mental depression, to his magnificent house in Belgrave Square. His reliance was now in the advertisements which were to be inserted in the newspapers; but even this hope was almost stifled within him by the reminiscence that Julia seldom read the public journals. Day after day passed—weeks glided by—these had swollen into months in the lapse of time—and winter returned;—but still no trace of Julia! In the interval, matters of importance had occurred in respect to Lady Caroline Jerningham. The child had died in a fit of convulsions, to which it was subject, and in spite of the tender care of Mrs. Porter and the attentions of the medical man: the remains of the infant were interred in the churchyard of Old Saint Pancras; and the Porters, who were well rewarded for their kindness to the child from the moment of its birth until that of its death, still remain in ignorance of the real name and the rank of its mother. Not many weeks after the removal from this earthly sphere of the evidence of Lady Caroline’s frailty, Lord Hartley returned home from abroad; and his first act, on arriving in London, was to hasten to Hanover Square. His heart had remained constant to Lady Caroline; and he now boldly claimed her hand of the Marchioness, who received him most graciously, there being, in the Dowager’s eyes, a vast deal of difference between the noble and wealthy Baron Hartley of Hartley, and the poor Lieutenant Quentin of His Majesty’s Ship *The Tremendous*. The *Morning Post* accordingly announced the ‘approaching marriage in high life;’ and the ceremony took place in November, 1835,—precisely one year after the date of the commencement of our tale.

“Thus Lady Caroline Jerningham became Lady Hartley: she was united to the object of her affection;—but her happiness was not

complete. Every day—every hour did she think of poor Julia Murray; and her husband, to whom she had confided every thing, shared in her deep anxiety to obtain a clue to that excellent young woman. The Marquis of Wilmington had put into execution every means which human ingenuity could devise to procure that clue: but all to no effect; and he now gave himself up to despair. His health began to fail him; and his appearance speedily grew much altered. Vainly did his sister endeavour to console him: she also required solace, and almost in respect to the same cause,—for if the one mourned the loss of an intended bride, the other deplored that of a dear friend!

"I said that the incident of my tale had brought me down to the month of November, 1835; and it now becomes necessary to make some mention of Julia Murray. It was a night of pouring rain and gushing wind, as on that when she first encountered the Marquis of Wilmington; and the unhappy young woman was seated in a miserable garret in some street near Covent Garden Market. The cheerless chamber was almost completely denuded of furniture; and the little that was in it, belonged not to her. Not a spark of fire appeared in the hearth;—the cupboard door was opened, but no food was seen on the shelves;—and the candle that shed a fitful light around the bare, damp walls, was every moment in danger of being extinguished by the cold draught from the ill-closed window. Leaning her head upon her hand, and her elbow on the table, Julia sate, gazing down on the upturned countenance of her brother who occupied a stool at her feet. Pale and wan were their faces: gone was the bloom of health from the cheeks of the once happy, beauteous boy,—gone, too, was the delicate tinge of carnation that had been wont to enhance the loveliness of his sister. Misery was in that garret—misery for *two*—misery for that almost heart-broken young woman and that affectionate, grateful boy. The want of needle-work and illness had plunged Julia into the direst poverty: she could have borne it all had she been by herself—borne it almost without repining;—but when she looked on the pale face of her little brother, saw that he was famishing for want, and knew also that he endeavoured to conceal his hunger from her for fear of increasing *her* grief,—oh! it was this—it was *this* that crushed and overwhelmed her! She glanced around: there was not an article of clothing that could be now spared to pledge, save her scanty shawl—and then how could she go abroad to ask for needlework without it? Heavens! twelve hours had the boy already fasted—twenty-four hours had elapsed since Julia had tasted a morsel of food;—for she had almost forced the last crust into his mouth! And now how many hours more must elapse ere a chance might present itself to afford them a meal? And if no work could be obtained, what were they to do? What, indeed!

"In the midst of all these bitter—harrowing reflections, a thought—or rather a reminiscence flashed to Julia's mind;—but it was only to plunge her more deeply into the abyss of woe, and not to solace her. Just one year had elapsed since she had first met the Marquis of Wilmington,—just one year, day for day: and through how many vicissitudes had she and her darling brother passed in that period! They had known prosperity and happiness: they had also experienced the bitterest misery, and yet they had not deserved the vengeance of heaven: but, then, those whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth! Still pure and guileless—still innocent and artless, Julia Murray's principles had remained unshaken by the rude contest which she had been compelled to endure with the world's ills; and her brother was still the same affectionate, good, endearing boy as when I first introduced you to him. Oh! it was cruel—it was cruel that *they* should suffer thus—those poor orphans who had never injured a living soul, who clung to each other so tenderly, and who night and morning put up their prayers to the Almighty that He would be pleased to change their wretched, wretched lot. But, alas! those supplications—so sincere, so earnest, so respectful and adoring towards the Majesty of Heaven—remained apparently unheard; and on the particular night to which allusion has been made, do we find that sister and brother on the verge of perishing through sheer destitution!

"'Harry,' said Julia, after a long pause, 'are you not very hungry?'—'Not very, dear sister,' he returned, while tears started into his eyes.—'Oh! my darling boy, you are starving!' she cried frantically, as she strained him to her breast: then, growing more composed, she said, 'But this must not be! Here, Harry, take this shawl over to that shop which you see opposite, give it to any one whom you may see behind the counter, and you will receive some money and a small card in exchange. Then go to the baker's and buy a loaf; and return as quickly as you can.'—The boy hesitated; and at length said, 'But, Julia dear, what will you do without your shawl? You cannot go out.'—'And you cannot starve,' she returned hastily; as she almost thrust him, but not harshly, out of the room. Then, when the door closed behind him, she reseated herself, and burst into an agony of tears. It was the first time she had ever sent Harry to the pawnbroker—the first time she had ever allowed him to go out into the streets alone after dusk. And this was not all that pained her: Oh! she was oppressed with the most direful apprehensions—for now she was indeed a prisoner in that wretched garret—she could not go out to seek for work, and work would not be brought to her. And again, and again, and again—for the thousandth time that day—did she ask herself what was to be done, and what was to become of them? While she was wrapt up in these harrowing reflections, she heard certain well-known—too well-known steps ascending the stairs; and now she felt that even the crushing amount of misery which already weighed upon her, was not complete. The door was thrown open; and a stout, elderly, red-faced woman, who had evidently been drinking, walked unceremoniously into the chamber. 'Now, Miss,' she cried, almost ferociously, 'are you going to pay me the three weeks' rent that's due? If not, be so kind as to tramp, and make room for them as will pay; 'cos I've a respectable married couple which is ready to take the place this very night.'—'If you will wait a few minutes,' answered Julia, in a faint tone, 'I will pay you as much as I can.'—'Come, that won't do for me,' vociferated the woman: 'I see your brother go out with your shawl, and I know what's what. But if you're obliged to spout your things to pay a trifle this week, how will you be able to pay any at all next Saturday, much less cash up altogether?'—'Heavens! have patience, my dear madam, and I will endeavour to pay you all, as soon as possible!' said the poor young woman, reduced to despair.—'Patience, indeed!' repeated the landlady, contemptuously: 'and who will have patience with me? There is the Taxes will call on Monday morning; and the Water Rate has been put off till he's tired of coming near the place. So I can't and won't wait no longer for such a beggar as you.'—At this goading insolence Julia's grief redoubled.—'Oh! crying won't pay no bills,' ejaculated the inhuman landlady. 'And now I think on it, I'll just look at the bed-clothes and see that you haven't pawned none of the blankets!'—'I would sooner starve—aye, and see my brother perish through want also, than commit such an act!' cried Julia, starting to her feet, while her indignation actually tended to mitigate the acuteness of her grief. 'Well, I 'spose you're honest,' said the woman, somewhat ashamed of herself: 'but I must have my money to-night all the same; if not, you and your brother had better turn out at once.'—'I repeat that it is impossible for me to pay you all I owe this evening,' exclaimed poor Julia, now

condescending to the adoption of a tone of appeal; ‘and I implore you not to drive me and that dear boy homeless into the streets.’—‘A pretty gal like you need never want money,’ said the woman, fixing a meaning look upon the unhappy dress-maker; ‘and if you would only take my advice——.’—‘Begone,’ cried Julia in a voice so penetrating that it seemed to thrill through the brain of the vile wretch who was about to develope the most infamous resources to the view of that pure-minded girl—‘Begone, indeed!’ repeated the woman, recovering her insolence: ‘that’s a pretty thing to say to me, that you owe money to. However, once more I tell you that I *will* be paid to-night; or else, when my husband comes home from the public-house, off you’ll bundle!’—Thus speaking, the wretch bounced out of the room, leaving the door wide open behind her.

“Julia wrung her hands in despair; and again she asked herself those unanswerable questions—What would become of them? and what was to be done? At this moment, when her brain appeared to reel and reason was rocking on its throne, the sounds of hasty steps ascending the stairs met her ear, and she heard Harry’s voice exclaim, ‘Up higher still—to the very top!’ And up those hasty footsteps came:—good heavens! were fresh miseries in store for her? But scarcely had this thought traversed poor Julia’s imagination, when some one darted into the room—and as she was sinking on the floor, through terror, want, and exhaustion, she was received in the arms of the Marquis of Wilmington!—‘Julia, dearest Julia!’ he cried, in an impassioned tone, as he strained the insensible form of his beloved one to his breast: and that voice, sounding on her ear as if heard in the midst of a dream, recalled her to herself;—and opening her eyes slowly, she encountered the tender looks that were bent upon her.—‘Is it possible!’ she exclaimed, tearing herself from the nobleman’s embrace: ‘your lordship here?’—‘Yes: here to implore your pardon for the past; to declare to you how profound is the regret and how bitter the remorse I have experienced for the unfeeling haste with which I judged you on the barest suspicion; and to offer you my hand, Julia,’ added the Marquis, ‘if you will now condescend to accept it!’—But I need not pause to describe in detail the discourse which now ensued: suffice it to say that the nobleman gave the fullest explanation of all that had occurred since he had last seen Julia—how his sister had confessed her frailty, and thus cleared up the suspicion which had so unfortunately fallen upon Julia—how the child had died—how Lady Caroline had married Lord Hartley—and how every possible search had been made for so many long, weary months, after Miss Murray. It must be added that the Marquis, in his almost ceaseless wanderings about the metropolis in the prosecution of that search, happened on this memorable evening to pass through the very neighbourhood where Julia resided; and as Harry emerged from the pawnbroker’s shop, the light flashed full upon the little fellow’s countenance, which, in spite of its altered appearance, was immediately recognised by the Marquis.

“But little more remains to be told. A messenger was instantly despatched to Hartley House with a note from Lord Wilmington; and in less than an hour his sister Caroline, accompanied by her faithful lady’s maid, who had charge of a box full of clothes, arrived in her carriage at the door of the house where Julia occupied the miserable garret! Affecting indeed was the meeting between the two friends; and while the Marquis took Harry away with him to the nearest ready-made clothes’ shop to equip the boy from head to foot in new apparel, Lady Hartley hastily made such a change in Julia’s appearance, by means of the contents of the box before alluded to, that when his lordship returned he was charmed to see that, though pale, she was still eminently beautiful. In the meantime the rumour had spread throughout the house how a great nobleman and a great lady had come to take the poor dress-maker away in their carriage; and now the vile woman who only an hour before had menaced Julia with ejectment—who had insulted her by offering to search the few miserable things in the room to see if any had been made away with—and who had hinted at an infamous proposal from which the young creature’s soul recoiled in horror and loathing,—that same detestable wretch was now most assiduous in offering the use of her parlour and rendering herself so officiously busy, that Lady Hartley was forced to order her in a peremptory manner to retire. In fine, all necessary preparations being made so that Julia and her brother might appear in a becoming way at the splendid mansion whither they were now about to repair, the happy party entered the carriage, which drove straight to Hartley House, where Caroline’s husband received Julia and Harry in the kindest possible manner.

“Thus was the aspect of affairs signally changed; and from the cold, cheerless garret, where want stared them in the face, were the sister and brother suddenly wafted into the very bosom of luxury, comfort, and happiness. Virtue met with its reward, after the many trials to which it had been subjected, and the numerous temptations it had triumphantly passed through. Mr. Richardson, the lawyer, was overjoyed when the Marquis called upon him next morning and related all that had happened; and the instant his lordship had taken his departure, the worthy solicitor hastened to Hanover Square, resolved, if possible, to accomplish a certain project which he had in view. Presenting himself to the Dowager-Marchioness, he argued with her upon the inutility and injustice, the folly and the cruelty of her opposition to an alliance which so nearly regarded her son’s happiness; and he dilated so warmly upon the good qualities of Julia Murray, that her ladyship, who had at first heard him with impatience, began to listen attentively. In a word, Mr. Richardson succeeded in persuading the Marchioness to have the credit of assenting to an union which she had not the power to prevent; and the policy of this step at last triumphed over her other repugnances. She accordingly rang the bell, ordered the carriage, and proceeded with the lawyer to Hartley House, where her presence augmented the happiness already experienced beneath that roof. Thus nothing was now wanting to complete the felicity of all those in whom, I hope, you are interested; and it was astonishing how speedily the bloom came back to the countenance of Julia, and the ruddy hues of health to the cheeks of little Harry.

“Six weeks after the discovery of the orphans in their wretched garret, Julia became the Marchioness of Wilmington. Happy—happy was that bridal, and beautiful was the blushing bride—so beautiful that a stranger would not have suspected the privations and miseries which she had undergone. And, as if heaven, in its justice, were determined to afford a signal proof that though it can chasten, it can also reward as fully—from the day that this union took place, Julia and her brother have not known a care. Possessing the power to do good, the Marchioness of Wilmington has been enabled to soothe many an afflicted heart; and her experience of the past has taught her that the severest misery is that which pines unseen and hides itself in garrets—not that which obtrudes itself, in the shape of mendicity, upon the public eye. Her *secret charities* are therefore boundless; and the elevation of such a woman to rank and the possession of immense wealth, has proved beneficial to thousands. I must not forget to observe that the housekeeper who had accompanied her on

her departure from Camden Town, and who had subsequently returned home, at Julia's request, to her friends, once more became an attendant in the household of the mistress whom she loved; and every one who had in any way shown kindness to my heroine when she was but the humble dress-maker, was sought out and liberally rewarded, by her whose heart had undergone no change although she had become the Marchioness of Wilmington."

CHAPTER CXLIV.

DOVER.

It must not be supposed that this long tale was related without an interval of rest. When it broke off at the end of the hundred and forty-second chapter, the travellers were just on the point of entering Rochester, where they lunched; and, after this brief halt, they pursued their journey, Charles resuming the thread of his narrative, to which Perdita listened with deep interest.

The young woman experienced an ineffable pleasure in drinking in with her ears the rich tones of her lover's voice; and the pathetic nature of his story increased the tenderness which she felt for him. She, who had defied the influence of the blind deity, was wounded by his shaft; and the more she saw of Charles Hatfield, the less selfish became her passion—the more sincere her attachment.

Mrs. Fitzhardinge read, with a keen eye, all that was passing in her daughter's mind; and there were moments when she could scarcely restrain her rage at the idea that Perdita had succeeded so skilfully in throwing her into the back-ground. But the old woman resolved to abide her time—in the hope that circumstances might yet enable her to resume her sway, and compel the enamoured couple to bend to the dictates of her will.

The journey was pursued in safety, and in freedom from any unpleasant interruption, until the post-chaise entered the town of Dover. Then the travellers were to pass the night; and thence they were to embark on the ensuing morning for Calais.

They took up their quarters at an hotel, where an excellent dinner was provided; and in the evening Charles Hatfield and Perdita rambled together upon the beach, Mrs. Fitzhardinge remaining at the inn on the plea of fatigue, but in reality because her daughter made her a private sign to intimate that her company was not needed.

It was a summer evening of surpassing loveliness: the sea was calm and tranquil in its mighty bed, agitated only at its margin when wavelets, so small that they might almost be denominated ripples, murmured on the beach;—and the western horizon was gorgeous with purple, and orange, and gold—the swathing robes of the setting sun.

There were many ladies and gentlemen walking on the Marine Parade, and enjoying the freshness of the air after the oppressive heat of the sultry day. Amongst the loungers, several officers belonging to the garrison were conspicuous by their scarlet coats; and giddy, silly young ladies of sixteen or seventeen felt themselves supremely happy if they could only secure the attentions of these military *beaux*.

Here and there were long seats, painted green, and occupied by ladies, their male companions standing in lounging attitudes; and the conversation that occupied these groups was for the most part of a frivolous nature,—for people at watering places only seek to kill time, and not to use it for intellectual purposes.

On one of the benches just alluded to, was placed a middle-aged mamma with her three marriageable daughters, who were pretty, chatty, agreeable girls, according to the general meaning of the epithets: at all events, whenever Mrs. Matson appeared on the Parade with the three Misses Matson, the officers were sure to steal away from other groups or parties in order to join the new-comers—to the immense gratification of the objects of this preference, and to the huge mortification of the Jones's, the Smiths, the Jenkins, the Greens, and the Browns.

"Were you at Lady Noakes's last evening, Captain Phinnikin?" enquired the eldest Miss Matson of a gallant officer of some four or five and twenty, who was lounging near her.

"No—not I, faith!" was the reply given in a drawling tone, as if the gallant officer aforesaid were a martyr to that dreadful malady termed *ennui*. "Lady Noakes's parties are such slow affairs—I have quite abjured them. Besides," he added, suddenly recollecting that this was an excellent opportunity to throw in a compliment, "I knew *you* weren't to be there."

"Oh! dear, no!" exclaimed Miss Julia Matson—the second of the marriageable sisters: "one does meet such strange people at her ladyship's, that we really could not think of accepting the invitation."

"Well, but you must recollect, my dear," observed Mrs. Matson, in a tone which seemed to be of mild reproof, "that poor dear Lady Noakes is only the widow of a brewer who was mayor of Deal or Sandwich, I forget which, and was knighted by William the Fourth for taking up some address to his Majesty."

"That's all!" said Miss Anna-Maria Matson, the third sister: "and therefore I am sure no one need be surprised that Lady Noakes is glad to fill her rooms with any body she can get."

“Well, I was there last night,” observed another young officer—a lieutenant in the same regiment with Captain Phinnikin, and who formed one of the group at present occupying our attention: “and I must say that the supper was excellent.”

“Oh! but, Mr. Pink,” exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson, reproachfully, “it is so very easy to give a good supper—but not so easy to make the evening agreeable.”

“Granted!” rejoined the lieutenant: “and I must candidly admit that no parties are so agreeable as those at your house.”

“Flatterer!” cried Miss Matson, with a sweet smile. “I suppose the Browns were at her ladyship’s last night.”

“Oh! certainly. You meet them every where.”

“And, faith! Miss Amelia Brown is a deuced pleasant girl—deuced pleasant,” observed Captain Phinnikin.

“Well, I really never could see any thing particular in her,” said the eldest Miss Matson. “Besides—you know what her grandfather is?” she added, sinking her voice to a confidential tone, and hastily glancing around to assure herself that the object of her remark was not nigh enough to overhear her.

“’Pon my honour, I never heard!” responded Captain Phinnikin.

“They *do* say—but mind, I will not assert it on my own authority,” continued Miss Matson,—“at the same time, I believe it is pretty well ascertained——”

“Oh! certainly—beyond all doubt,” exclaimed Miss Julia, tossing her head contemptuously.

"*I* never heard it contradicted!" added Miss Anna-Maria.

"What do they say the grandfather is?" demanded Captain Phinnikin.

Again did Miss Matson look anxiously around: then, lowering her voice to a whisper, and assuming as mysterious an air as possible, she said, "A hatter!"

"Oh! you naughty, gossiping girls!" cried Mrs. Matson, shaking her head with an affected deprecation of her daughters' scandal-loving propensities, but in reality enjoying the tittle-tattle.

"Well, ma," said Miss Julia, "I am sure there is no harm in telling the truth; and I thought that every one knew what Miss Brown's grandfather was—just the same as it's no secret about the Greens being related to a soap-boiler."

"Hush! my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Matson, putting her finger to her lip: "we really must not pull people to pieces in this way. At the same time I candidly confess that it *is* annoying to find so many low persons at the very watering-place which we chose for the summer. I don't wish to be severe upon any body; but if Mr. Thompson, who is known to be a retired draper, *will* allow people to address their letters to him as *Thomas Thompson, Esquire*, he must expect to be talked about."

"And then those Miss Thompsons who give themselves such airs!" cried the eldest Miss Matson, with an indignant gesture.

"I am sure they made quite frights of themselves last Sunday at church," added Miss Julia, "with their dresses after the latest Parisian fashion!"

"Besides, pink bonnets don't at all become their dark complexions," observed Miss Anna-Maria.

"Ladies must have very good complexions indeed, for pink bonnets to suit them," drawled forth Captain Phinnikin, smiling languidly at the same time;—for the three Misses Matson all wore bonnets of a roseate hue—a fact which they *appeared* to have entirely forgotten while speaking of the Misses Thompson.

At this moment, Lieutenant Pink uttered an ejaculation of surprise; and the rest of the group, turning their eyes in the same direction in which his were bent, beheld a very handsome young gentleman to whose arm hung a young lady of marvellous beauty.

"They are strangers here," observed Miss Matson the elder.

"New-comers," continued Miss Julia.

"But nothing very particular, I dare say," added Miss Anna-Maria.

And having thus expressed themselves, the three sisters turned towards the officers; but they were much piqued and annoyed to find that those two gallant gentlemen were still surveying the attractive couple with the deepest interest.

"That face is familiar to me, Pink," cried Captain Phinnikin.

"And to me also. But where I have seen it before, I cannot recollect," observed the lieutenant. "Upon my soul, she is a magnificent woman!"

"A splendid creature!" ejaculated the captain, forgetting his habitual drawl for a moment. "Faith! I remember——and yet—no—it is impossible!"

"Yes—it *is* impossible—it *cannot* be!" cried Mr. Pink, as if divining and echoing the other's thoughts. "But I am sure I have seen her before! And will you believe me, Phinnikin, when I assure you that, at the first glance, I thought——"

"Egad! it is her profile—her figure!" cried the captain, pursuing the train of his own thoughts, as his eyes followed the young couple who were passing leisurely along at a little distance, and quite unconscious of the interest that one of them at least was creating.

"Well—it strikes me that it is the same!" observed the lieutenant, his amazement every moment becoming greater, and his uncertainty less.

"Who do you take her to be?" demanded Phinnikin, turning abruptly towards his brother-officer.

"Perdita," responded the lieutenant, without hesitation.

"And yet—in England—so changed too, in circumstances—and in company with that genteel young fellow——"

"All those things occurred to me likewise," interrupted Mr. Pink.

"Let us convince ourselves!" cried the captain; and the military gentlemen, with a somewhat abrupt and unceremonious bow to the

Matson family, walked away together, arm-in-arm.

“Well, I never!” exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson, now tossing her head more indignantly than on any previous occasion, yet looking wistfully after the two really handsome and elegant, though conceited and coxcombical young officers, whose fine figures were rapidly receding along the parade.

“I could not have supposed that Captain Phinnikin would have been guilty of such rudeness!” said Miss Julia.

“Oh! as for the captain—I was prepared for any thing with *him*,” observed Miss Anna-Maria: “but it’s Mr. Pink that *I’m* astonished at!”

“I am sure the captain is the best behaved of the two,” exclaimed Julia.

“That shows your ignorance, Miss,” said Anna-Maria, tartly.

“I know what’s genteel as well as you, I should hope,” retorted Julia.

“Don’t be cross, my love,” said Anna-Maria, affecting a soothing tone.

“And don’t you pretend to know better than one two years older than yourself,” cried Julia. “As for *you*,” she continued, addressing herself to her eldest sister, “I was quite surprised to hear how you went on about the Browns and the Thompsons. How foolish we should all look if it were found out that Uncle Ben was a pawnbroker in Lambeth Marsh——”

“Hush! girls—hush! Drat your tongues—how they are going!” interrupted Mrs. Matson, in a hoarse and hasty whisper.

“I am sure, ma, Julia talked as much about the Browns and the Thompsons as I did,” said the eldest daughter; “and now she is trying to quarrel with me about it. But here come the Thompsons,” she added abruptly, as her eyes wandered along the parade.

Mrs. Matson and the three young ladies all smoothed their countenances in a moment; and nothing could be more amiable, affable, or charming than the manner in which they rose simultaneously to greet the Misses Thompson—two tall, handsome, well-dressed, and really most genteel girls, let their father have been what he might.

“Oh! my dear Miss Thompson,” cried the eldest Miss Matson, “I am so delighted to see you! How well you are looking, to be sure!”

“We were talking about you only a few minutes ago, to Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink,” said Julia; “and we were admiring those dears of bonnets that you wore last Sunday at church.”

“I am glad you liked them,” responded the elder Miss Thompson. “But how happened it that you were not at Lady Noakes’s last night?”

“Well—we don’t mind telling you, dear,” said Miss Matson the elder: “the truth is that we were not invited; and I suppose it must have been an oversight of her ladyship.”

“Her ladyship was quite surprised that you were not present,” returned Miss Thompson: “she assured me that a card had been duly forwarded to you.”

“Oh! how provoking!” cried all three Misses Matson at the same moment, and as it were in the same breath. “The invitation must have miscarried somehow or another. We would not have been absent for the world if we had received the card.”

“But, my dear Miss Thompson,” continued the eldest Miss Matson, “as you and your dear sister are so intimate with Lady Noakes, perhaps you would just hint that the invitation did miscarry——”

“Oh! certainly,” replied the good-natured young lady thus appealed to. “But we must say good bye now—for we promised papa not to stay out late, and it is already near eight o’clock.”

“How is that dear good soul, Mr. Thompson?” asked Mrs. Matson. “I was speaking of him to Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink just now, and saying what great respect we all entertained for him.”

“Thank you, my dear madam—papa is quite well,” returned Miss Thompson. “But we must really say good bye, for we expect the Greens to drop into supper presently——”

“Delightful girls, the Miss Greens!” exclaimed Mrs. Matson; “and very well connected, I have heard.”

“Oh! certainly—their uncle is a Member of Parliament,” responded Miss Thompson. “But good bye.”

“Good bye,” repeated her sister; and away they went—happy, joyous, kind-hearted, and good girls, who would not have suffered their tongues to utter a word of scandal,—thus proving a striking contrast with the Matson family.

“What a vulgar buoyancy of spirits the eldest Miss Thompson always has!” exclaimed the senior of the three sisters, after a pause. “I

really can scarcely seem commonly polite to her."

"And the youngest is just like her in that respect," observed Julia.

"They are the rudest and worst-behaved girls in Dover, except the Miss Greens," added Mrs. Matson.

"Well," said Anna-Maria, "since I have heard that the Greens are related to a Member of Parliament, I don't fancy them to be so vulgar as I used to do. Oh! what a thing it would be to get acquainted with a Member, and have him at our parties next winter! Wouldn't the Snipsons be in a way?"

"And the Styles's!" added Julia.

"Yes—and the Tubleys, who are so proud of their Irish Member!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson. "Oh! ma, let us make up to the Greens and get as friendly with them as possible; so that we may be on visiting terms with them when we go back to London—and then we shall be introduced to their uncle, the Member."

"By all means," said Mrs. Matson, charmed with the suggestion. "I will persuade your papa to allow us to give a party next week, on purpose for the Greens."

In the meantime Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink had proceeded somewhat rapidly along the Marine Parade, until they had reached the extremity, when they turned, and walked more slowly, so as to meet Charles Hatfield and Perdita.

"To-morrow, at this time," said the infatuated young man, as the syren leant confidingly upon his arm, "we shall be far on our road to Paris: and within three days from this moment, my beloved one, you will be mine! Oh! I believe firmly that we were intended for each other—and therefore happiness awaits us!"

"To be with you, Charles, is happiness indeed," returned Perdita, with that melting softness of tone which gave her words so exquisite a charm, and made every chord in her lover's heart thrill with rapture: then, casting upon him a sweet glance which drank in his own, she said, "I am rejoiced that we have taken this decided step—for in London, I was so fearful that your relatives might adopt means to separate you from me!"

"No—that could not be, dearest Perdita," he observed: "for I am of an age at which no parental despotism could be legally enforced; and I have acquainted you with every thing that has already passed between my father and myself. Were I a weak-minded boy, I should perhaps have yielded to his threats or to my mother's entreaties: but I have chosen to act for myself and on my own responsibility—and I do not repent the decision."

"And never—never shall you repent, my beloved Charles," murmured Perdita, with no affectation of feeling, but under the influence of that passionate tenderness which she in reality experienced towards the young man. "And, oh! how delightful is it to be your companion in such a delicious evening walk as this—by the scarcely rippling sea—and at the hour when the sun is sinking to its ocean-bed!"

"Yes;—and while with you, my Perdita," responded Charles, "I seem to feel as if we two were alone together—sole witnesses of the scene! I observe not the other loungers: I see only my Perdita—hear only her voice!"

At this moment his fair companion, to whom he was addressing those words of heart-felt tenderness, appeared to start violently; for his arm to which she clung was suddenly jerked by her hand with some degree of force. Charles instinctively raised his head, which had been bent partially towards her ear; and glancing straight before him, he beheld two officers staring most rudely, as he thought, at his well-beloved and beauteous Perdita.

"What means this insolence?" he exclaimed, in a tone of irritation.

"Let us turn back, Charles—dearest Charles" murmured Perdita, in a faint and tremulous tone; and she wheeled him round, as it were, with extraordinary alacrity.

A load burst of laughter on the part of the officers met their ears; and Charles, uttering an ejaculation of rage, was about to relinquish his fair companion's arm and rush back to demand an explanation, when Perdita said, "In the name of heaven, molest them not—I implore you!"

And she hurried him away.

"My God! Perdita," he said, when they were at some distance from the spot where the officers had stopped short to gaze upon Perdita, and where their complete recognition of her had betrayed them into an act of rudeness which they almost immediately afterwards regretted—for they felt that they had no right to insult the young woman by laughing at her altered circumstances: "my God! Perdita," said Charles, labouring under a painful state of excitement; "what means this conduct of those unmannerly fellows? and wherefore will you not permit me to chastise them?"

"Would you expose me to the ridicule of all the persons assembled on the Parade?" demanded Perdita, who had now recovered her

presence of mind—at least sufficiently to feel the necessity of immediately allaying her lover's excitement.

"But those officers insulted you—insulted you grossly, Perdita!" cried Charles, who did not, however, entertain the remotest suspicion prejudicial to the young woman, but merely felt deeply indignant at an insolence which he could not understand, and which was so completely unprovoked.

"They insulted *us*—they insulted *you* as well as myself, Charles," answered Perdita, hastily: "it was because you were bending, as it were, over me while you spoke—because your head was approached so close to my ear—and because I was listening with such unconcealed delight to your tender words! They saw that we were lovers—that we felt as if we were alone even amidst the crowd of loungers——"

"Yes: it must have been as you say!" cried Charles, receiving Perdita's ingenious explanation as natural and conclusive, and now absolutely wondering at his own stupidity in not penetrating the matter before.

"You may conceive," resumed the artful girl, "how ashamed and bewildered I suddenly felt, when, on raising my eyes, I saw the two officers standing still only a dozen yards in advance, and gazing upon us in the rudest possible manner. I instantly understood the truth: women, dear Charles, are sometimes more sharp-sighted than your sex. It flashed to my mind that our manner had betrayed that we were lovers; and hence my emotions! And can you wonder, my beloved Charles, if I hurried you away from a scene where you incurred the chance of becoming involved in a quarrel with those fire-eaters?"

"In good truth, my Perdita," said Hatfield, now smiling, "they seemed to me—if I might judge by the short glimpse I had of them—to be rather fitted for the drawing-room than to smell gunpowder."

"Oh! that may be," exclaimed the young woman, her voice still continuing tremulous and her manner imploring: "nevertheless, I would not for the world that you should fall into danger! Consider, Charles, how dreadful would be my feelings, were I to know that you were about to fight a duel! Oh! my blood runs cold in my veins when I think of it! But were you to fall in such hostile meeting ——Ah! my God, what would become of your unhappy, wretched Perdita?"

"Dearest—sweetest girl!" cried the enraptured young man: "how blest am I in the possession of such a love as thine!"

And he gazed tenderly upon her as he spoke, pressing her arm at the same time with his own: for now her countenance was flushed with the emotions that agitated in her bosom; and, as the rays of the setting sun played upon her face, she seemed lovely beyond all possibility of description.

They returned to the hotel; and, having partaken of supper, sought their respective chambers at a somewhat early hour—for Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita complained of fatigue, and Charles knew that the ensuing day's travelling would prove even more wearisome still.

The reader has seen how artfully the young woman contrived to find an explanation for the untoward and menacing event which had occurred upon the Marine Parade. The real truth was that while Charles was pouring words of tenderness and love into the ears of Perdita, she suddenly raised her eyes, and was horror-struck at beholding the countenances—too well-known countenances—of Captain Phinnikin and Lieutenant Pink. For their regiment had been stationed at Sydney; and those two officers had enjoyed the favours of the beautiful and voluptuous Perdita. She saw that she was recognised; and for a moment the chances were equal whether she should sink beneath the blow, as if struck by a thunder-bolt—or whether she should recover her presence of mind. The latter alternative favoured her on this occasion; and her sophistry, her demonstrations of tenderness, and the horror which she expressed at the idea of a duel, succeeded in completely pacifying her lover.

CHAPTER CXLV.

A MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE.—THE JOURNEY CONTINUED.

Our travellers rose early in the morning; for the French mail steamer, *Le Courier*, was to start for Calais at nine o'clock.

Breakfast over, Charles Hatfield and Perdita walked down to the pier at twenty minutes to nine—Mrs. Fitzhardinge, who was determined to make herself as busy and also as necessary as possible, remaining behind to see that the baggage was safely consigned to the porter in readiness to convey it.

The weather was delightful; and the fresh sea breeze, with its saline flavour, seemed to waft invigorating influences upon its wing. Charles and his beloved were in high spirits; although Perdita threw ever and anon an anxious glance around, to assure herself that the dreaded officers, who had caused her so much alarm on the preceding evening, were not near to renew that terror. Every thing was satisfactory in this respect; and never had the heart of the young woman been more elate, than when she stepped upon the deck of the gallant steamer, which was already puffing off its fleecy vapour with a snorting noise, as if it were a steed impatient of delay.

Seating themselves upon a bench, Charles and Perdita were soon absorbed in a conversation of a tender nature; and, forgetful of every thing save the topic of their discourse, they noticed not the lapse of time until they happened to perceive the captain standing on one of the paddle-boxes, and heard the orders which he gave to the busy French sailors.

These symptoms of immediate departure instantaneously aroused the attention of Charles and Perdita to the fact that Mrs. Fitzhardinge had not joined them.

"Where is my mother?" demanded the latter, embracing with a rapid glance the entire range of the deck, and unable to discover the object of her search amongst the passengers scattered about the vessel.

"Wait here one moment, dearest—and I will see," said Charles; and he hastened forward, thinking that perhaps the funnel might conceal the old woman from their view.

But she was not to be found; although a glance at the piles of baggage in the immediate vicinity of the chimney showed him his companions' boxes, together with a portmanteau of necessaries which he had purchased for himself on the preceding evening.

Yes: there was the baggage—but where was Mrs. Fitzhardinge?

What could have become of her?

Perhaps she had descended to the cabin.

This idea seemed probable; and Charles was about to hurry back to the bench where he had left Perdita, when she joined him, saying, "I have been into the cabin; and my mother is not there."

Before Charles had time to make any reply, a porter in his white frock approached him, and, touching his hat, said, "Please, sir, are these your things?"—pointing to the boxes.

"Yes," answered Hatfield: "but where is the lady who was giving you instructions about them when we left the hotel?"

"Please, sir, she came after me as far as the beginning of the pier," returned the porter; "and there, as I happened to look round, I saw her speaking to two men. I went on—looked round again, and could see nothing more of her."

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed Hatfield.

"I cannot comprehend it," observed Perdita: then, suddenly struck by the idea that Charles might propose to land and search after the old woman, she added hastily, "But we need not alarm ourselves: if any thing has happened to detain my mother a short time, she will doubtless follow us by the next boat."

At this moment the huge paddle-wheels began to turn—Charles hastily tossed the porter half-a-crown—and the man leapt on the pier in company with several others of his own calling,—while the steamer moved away with stately steadiness of pace.

Perdita and Charles Hatfield paced the deck, arm in arm, and conversing on the unaccountable disappearance of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. The

latter could conjecture no possible key to the mystery: nor did Perdita offer any suggestive clue—although she thought it probable that her mother, having lost her despotic authority, had withdrawn, in a moment of ill-temper, from the company of those whom she could not hope to reduce to the condition of slaves. But the young woman said to herself, "She will soon repent of her folly and rejoin us;"—while to Charles she expressed an uneasiness and an apprehension lest any accident should have befallen her mother.

On sped the steamer: the harbour is cleared—and now she enters upon the expanse of green water, over which she walks "like a thing of life,"—the huge paddles raising a swell, which, covered with foam, marks the pathway of the gallant vessel.

On—on she went;—and now the white cliffs of Albion diminish and grow dim in the distance,—while, still far ahead, the coast of France, like a long brown streak in the horizon, appears in view!

And, oh! may that green sea never waft a hostile navy from one shore to the other;—may the peace which now subsists between the two greatest nations in the universe, remain undisturbed! Let France and England continue rivals,—not in the art of war,—but in the means of developing every element of civilisation and progress. Such a striving—such a race between the two, will be glorious indeed; and the whole world will experience the benefit.

Shame, then, to those alarmists who are now endeavouring to spread terror and dismay throughout the British Islands, by their calculations of the facility with which the French may invade us, and by their predictions of the consequences of such an invasion.

Well aware are we that were France to entertain the project, its realization would be easy;—for with our navy dispersed over the world, our coast-defences so few and far-between, and our totally insufficient army, we have no means of resisting an invading force of eighty or a hundred thousand men so admirably disciplined as the soldiers of France.

But neither Louis-Philippe nor his Government entertains the remotest idea of disturbing the peace of the world;—and it is madness—it in wickedness on the part of the public journals and of pamphleteers to write for the very purpose of creating an impression that an invasion by the French is imminent.

A terrible panic has been raised throughout the length and breadth of the land;—and with sorrow do we record the fact that the DUKE OF WELLINGTON has placed himself at the head of the alarmists!

To consummate the folly, all that is now required is—what?

To give Prince Albert the command of the Army!

----Or rather, O Englishmen! does not the apprehension of danger from an invasion by a foreign power lay bare, in all its nakedness, the monstrous folly—the astounding absurdity of suddenly elevating that young and inexperienced man to the rank of a Field-Marshal?

A Field-Marshal, who has never smelt powder save in the heartless, inhuman cruelty of a *battue* of game,—and who has never in his life seen a shot fired in anger!

England does not require such a Drawing-Room Field-Marshal: she wants a Captain-General who, if need be, can compete with such a man as Bugeaud.

But where will Royal Folly stop?—and when will any statesman have the courage to resist the childish caprices of the Queen?

In the same newspapers which are constantly telling us that the French meditate an invasion—that if the Cuirassiers enter London on the east, the best thing the Horse-Guards can do, will be to march out on the west—that the conquerors will be sure to levy contributions upon us, demand the settlement of old scores, strip us of our colonies, and humiliate us in every way,—in the very same journals which tell us all this, we read that *the Queen it anxious for Prince Albert to become Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Wellington retiring to make room for him*!

Merciful heavens! is such a monstrous absurdity to be consummated? Is that grey-headed veteran, who won the field of Waterloo, to be superseded by a mere boy? Much as we have disliked the Duke of Wellington as a politician, yet we have felt proud of him as our national hero;—and no words can convey an idea of the disgust with which we perused the paragraph intimating that this mighty warrior was to be put upon the shelf, to make way for a Prince who knows no more of military matters than he does of the hieroglyphics on the Pyramids of Egypt.

If the Duke be desirous of withdrawing into private life, let him be succeeded by some great Captain who knows what hard blows in the field are—let his place be supplied by one of his own companions-in-arms.

Have we none of the heroes of the Peninsular battles still alive?—have we no names rendered glorious by victories achieved on the banks of the Sutlej?

It would be an insult the most glaring—the most flagrant, to all the illustrious chieftains alluded to, were a young man who never saw an angry shot fired, to be placed in authority over their heads! Already have the great warriors of England been sufficiently humiliated by the elevation of that young man to the rank of Field-Marshal:—but really if the English Court be allowed to "play at soldiers" in this disgraceful manner, it is no wonder that such men as the Duke of Wellington should look with apprehension at the consequences of

a French invasion.

Prince Albert may be very resolute and very determined in worrying a poor otter with his dogs,—or he may be desperately brave in firing vollies of small shot upon harmless birds: but as for his capacity or his courage to lead an army——the idea is ridiculous!

The English people have not gone stark, staring mad—even if some few of their rulers have: and most sincerely do we hope that, if the attempt to raise Prince Albert to the post of Commander-in-Chief be persisted in, the country will oppose it by all moral and legal means,—by memorial, petition, and remonstrance,—by public meetings and the omnipotent voice of the public press,—in fine, by an universal agitation such as that which knocked down the Corn-Laws!

For the consummation of so astounding an absurdity will prove the ruin of the British Army!

Surely it is not in civilised England, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, that Royalty is to play its fantastic tricks, and use all our grandest institutions as playthings? If so, we shall have the Prince of Wales created on Admiral very shortly, and Dr. Howley may resign the Archbishopric of Canterbury to little Prince Ernest Alfred. And why not? Such appointments would be quite as rational as that of Prince Albert to the post of Commander-in-Chief.

Let not our readers suppose that we seek to bring Princes into ridicule: they have a right to be Princes, if the people are foolish enough to let them; but when they make themselves ridiculous by grasping at offices for which they are totally unfitted, it is time for us to speak out.

We are inspired by no awe and entertain no solemn terror in dealing with Royalty: for, after all, royal persons are only human creatures, as well as we—and they seldom possess the good feelings and sterling qualities which are to be found in honest, hard-working, enlightened mechanics.

After a most agreeable voyage of two hours and a half, the French steam-packet entered Calais harbour.

Charles and Perdita proceeded to Dessin's Hotel; and there they determined to wait at least a few hours until the arrival of an English steamer which was to leave Dover about a couple of hours later than *Le Courier*.

During this interval Charles bethought himself that, should Mrs. Fitzhardinge not join them in the course of the day, Perdita and himself would be compelled to continue their journey to Paris; and, with a due sense of delicacy towards her who was to become his wife, he saw the impropriety of their travelling alone together. He accordingly intimated to Perdita the necessity of procuring for her a lady's-maid without delay; and though she would have much preferred that herself and lover should be the sole occupants of the interior of the post-chaise, she nevertheless comprehended that the expression of such a wish on her part would give him but a poor idea of her modesty. She therefore assented to his proposal with apparent cheerfulness, and thanked him for his kind consideration.

By the agency of Madame Dessin, the landlady of the hotel, a French lady's-maid, who understood English, was speedily obtained and engaged; and Perdita was now by no means displeased to find herself elevated to the position of a woman of some consequence. She, who but a short time before had entered London in a butcher's cart and clad in the meanest apparel, was now provided with a special attendant and could choose dresses of the latest fashion and the costliest material.

The lady's-maid was a pretty young woman of about three and twenty, with fine hair and eyes, good teeth, and a beautiful figure; and her attire was of the most tasteful, though quiet and unassuming, description. Her manners were very agreeable, and would be termed lady-like in this country: but, beneath a modest and innocent-looking exterior, she concealed a disposition for intrigue and no small amount of subtlety. At the same time, Rosalie—for that was her name—would not for the world seek to lead a virtuous mistress astray; and to such virtuous mistress she would doubtless prove an excellent, faithful, and trust-worthy servant. But should she have to deal with a mistress given to gallantry, then Rosalie would cheerfully exercise all her arts of duplicity—all her little cunning machinations—and all her aptitude for the management of an intrigue, and would take delight in enabling her lady to deceive a husband or a lover.

Such was the young person who now became Perdita's attendant: but it must be observed that the character of Rosalie, as far as it was known to the landlady of the hotel, was unimpeachable:—that is to say, she bore the reputation of honesty, cleanliness, a perfect knowledge of her duties—in fine, all those qualifications which are sought and required in an upper servant of her description.

Having waited until the arrival of the English packet, and finding that Mrs. Fitzhardinge did not make her appearance, Charles, to whom her absence was unaccountable and bewildering to a degree, ordered the post-chaise to be got ready; and, while this was being done, he proceeded with Perdita to the British Consul's to obtain passports. Finally, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, our travellers took their departure from Dessin's Hotel in a chaise and four—Rosalie occupying a seat inside, for the sake of appearances.

Oh! had Charles Hatfield known that the young woman—his intended bride—for whose reputation he manifested so much delicate care,—had he known that she was so thoroughly polluted in body and mind,—could he have heard the history which the two officers at Dover might have told of her, had they chosen—he would have been shocked and horrified,—he would have spurned her from him—and all his ardent, enthusiastic love, amounting to an adoration and a worship, would have changed into feelings of abhorrence,

loathing, and hate.

But he believed her to be pure and virtuous,—possessing some strange, wayward, and eccentric notions, it is true,—and yet endowed with a spirit so plastic and ductile as to yield willingly to good counsel and to be ready to sacrifice any peculiarity of opinion to the man whom she loved.

It is likewise true that he remembered how she had permitted him, in moments of impassioned tenderness, to toy with her—to press her glowing bosom—to glue his lips to hers, as if she herself would on those occasions accord even more: but he likewise recollected how invariably she started from his arms—withdrew herself from his embrace—and manifested a suddenly resuscitated presence of mind, when he had grown too bold and, maddened with desire, had sought the last favour which a woman, in amorous dalliance, can bestow. He therefore reasoned that, although her naturally warm temperament had led her to bestow upon him such unequivocal proofs of her love, yet that a virgin pride and a maiden's prudence had enabled her in every instance to triumph over temptation;—and this belief enhanced his profound admiration of her character.

But from the moment that Charles had first beheld Perdita, his brain had been in an incessant state of excitement,—an intoxication, an elysian delirium which made Perdita on angel of beauty and almost of excellence in his eyes:—and those fervent caresses which he had been permitted to bestow upon her, and those slight foretastes of the most voluptuous enjoyments which he had been allowed to snatch, had only tended to sustain that excitement—increase the dreamy delights of that intoxication—and enhance the bliss of that continuous delirium.

Then, in addition to the fascinating influence of the syren—in addition to the enthralling witchery which her charms, her arts, her conversation, and the silver sounds of her dulcet voice exercised over him,—were his ambitious hopes, his soaring aspirations!

All these circumstances had combined to unsettle, if not altogether change, in an incredibly short space, a disposition naturally good—a mind naturally energetic and powerful: and then those unhappy scenes with his father, when neither fully understood the meaning and drift of the other's observations, had aided to produce an excitement which was thus hurrying the young man along apparently to his utter ruin!

Unless, indeed, some good angel should yet intervene, ere it be too late——

But we must not anticipate.

On the contrary, let us return, from this partial though not unnecessary digression, to the thread of our narrative,—so that we may all the sooner be enabled to bring our readers back to that metropolis—that mighty London, of which we have still so many Mysteries to unfold!

The travellers pursued their journey all night, Charles being anxious to reach the French capital with the least possible delay, and Perdita seconding him fully in the wish.

Let us therefore succinctly state that in the morning they breakfasted at Amiens—in the afternoon they dined at Beauvais—and at ten o'clock in the evening they entered the splendid city of Paris.

Did our limits and the nature of the tale permit us, we would here gladly pause for a few minutes to describe that peerless capital which we know and love so well: but this may not be;—and we therefore hasten to state that Charles and Perdita, attended by Rosalie, proceeded to a respectable family hotel, where they hired a handsome suite of apartments.

And now for an important event in this section of our narrative,—an event which nevertheless may be related in a few words!

For, at eleven o'clock on the morning following their arrival in Paris, *Charles Hatfield, claiming to be Viscount Marston, and Perdita Fitzhardinge were united in the bonds of matrimony, at the British Ambassador's Chapel in the Rue Saint Honoré, and by the Chaplain to the Embassy*.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

TWO UNPLEASANT LODGERS.

In the meantime certain little incidents had occurred in London, which we must faithfully chronicle before we proceed with the adventures of the newly married couple,—adventures, which, could Charles have possibly foreseen——

But we were for a moment oblivious of the scenes that require our attention in London, and which took place while Charles Hatfield and Perdita were as yet on their way to Paris.

Charterhouse Square—situate between Aldersgate Street and St. John Street (Smithfield)—has a mournful, gloomy, and sombre appearance, which even the green foliage in the circular enclosure cannot materially relieve. The houses are for the most part of antiquated structure and dingy hue—the windows and front-doors are small—and, pass by them when you will, you never behold a human countenance at any one of the casements. The curtains and the blinds,—and, in the winter time, glimpses of the fires burning in the parlours,—these are, to a certain extent, symptoms that the houses are tenanted: but no farther signs of the fact can be discovered. Often and often as we have passed through that Square, we never beheld a soul coming out of, nor going into, any one of the gloomy abodes: we have observed a baker's boy and a butcher's ditto hurrying rapidly round—but never could satisfy ourselves that either of them had any particular business there, for they did not knock at a single door;—and on one—and only one occasion—when we met a two-penny post-man in the Square, he seemed to be as much astonished at finding himself in that quarter as we were to encounter him there. As for the beadle—his occupation seems to consist of lounging about, switching a cane, strolling into the Fox and Anchor public-house, and chatting for half-an-hour at a time with the very sober-looking porter of the Charter House.

There is a something really solemn and awful in the silence of that Square,—not a silence and a repose which seem to afford relief to the mind and rest to the ear after escaping from the tremendous din of the crowded streets,—but a silence that strikes like a chill to the heart. Whence arises this sensation?—is it because, while traversing the Square, we are reminded that in the vast cloistral building to the north are pent up eighty old men—the Poor Brothers of the Charter House,—eighty denizens of a Protestant Monastery in the very heart of civilised London,—eighty worn-out and decrepid persons who drag out the wretched remnant of their lives beneath the iron sway of a crushing ecclesiastical discipline! Does the silence of the Square borrow its solemnity from that far more awful silence which reigns within the Charter House itself,—a silence so awe-inspiring—so dead—so tomb-like, that even in the noon of a hot summer-day, the visitor shudders with a cold feeling creeping over him as he crosses the cloistral enclosure!

The reader will probably remember that, when Mr. Bubbleton Styles had propounded his grand Railway scheme to Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis, he gave each of those gentlemen a ten-pound note, desiring them to take respectable lodgings, and refer, if necessary, to him. We know not precisely how it happened that the gallant officer and his friend should have selected Charterhouse Square as the place most likely to suit them with regard to apartments; but thither they assuredly did repair—and in that gloomy quarter did they hire three rooms: namely, a parlour on the first floor, and two bed-chambers on the second. The landlady of the house was a widow; and, having some small pittance in the shape of regular income, eked out by letting a portion of her abode. She was an elderly woman—tall, starch, and prim—and very particular in obtaining good references—or, at least, what she considered to be good ones—respecting any applicants for her apartments; and therefore, previously to admitting Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis into her house, she had sought all possible information concerning them at the hands of Mr. Styles. His account was satisfactory, and the two gentlemen were thereupon duly installed in their lodgings at Mrs. Rudd's, Charterhouse Square.

The first two or three days passed comfortably enough, because the captain and Frank, having ready money in their pockets, took their dinner and supper—aye, and their grog too—at some convenient tavern,—troubling Mrs. Rudd only in reference to their breakfast, which she cheerfully prepared for them, because she thereby obtained whole and sole controul over their groceries. She was a very pious woman, and attended a Methodist Chapel regularly every Sunday; but being, as she often expressed herself, "a lone widow," she thought there was no harm in using her lodgers' tea, sugar, and butter for her own repasts. "Heaven was very good to her," she would often tell her neighbours, "and enabled her to make the most of her little means:" she might have added—"and of her lodgers' also."

The captain and Frank, however, soon began to find that their evening entertainments at the tavern were very expensive; and, as they could not again draw upon Mr. Styles for some time—all his resources being required for the promotion of the railway—they resolved to economise. The best method of carrying this object into effect, was to take their dinner, supper, and poteen at home; and Mrs. Rudd, on being sounded in respect to the plan, willingly assented—for the excellent woman felt assured that her lodgers would not miss a slice or two off a cold joint any more than they noticed the marvellous disappearance of their groceries. So the captain and his friend became more domestic; and as Frank did not get particularly drunk on the two first evenings, Mrs. Rudd had no complaints to make.

But at last she began to suspect that she had some ground for doubting the steadiness of her lodgers. It was on a Sunday evening, and

the worthy woman had just returned from chapel, where she had heard a most refreshing and savoury discourse by the Reverend Mr. Flummery,—when, on crossing the threshold of the house door, and while still ruminating on the truly Christian manner in which the eloquent minister had promised hell-flames to all heathens,—she was suddenly startled by hearing a terrific noise proceeding from up-stairs.

She paused—and listened!

Yes: the sound *did* emanate from above; and most strange sounds they were, too. Deeply disgusted—nay, profoundly shocked at this desecration of the Sabbath, Mrs. Rudd crept up stairs; and the nearer she drew to the parlour-door, the more convinced did she become that Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis were fighting a single combat with the shovel and poker. The conflict was, however, only in fun: for the clash of the fire-irons was accompanied by tremendous shouts of laughter, and such ejaculations as these:—"There, be Jasus! I have ye again, Frank! Blood and thunther, keep up your guar-r-d, man! Now, would ye be afther a feint? Be the powers! and ye can't touch me at all, at all! Hit hard, me friend—niver mind the damned ould poker-r-r—the ould woman is at chapel!"

Mrs. Rudd was astounded—stupefied. Was it possible that these were the lodgers whom Mr. Styles—a respectable "City man"—had recommended as the very patterns of quietness and steadiness? Why, if she had let her rooms to two Bedlamites, things could not have been worse! She was positively afraid to go in to remonstrate; and, having recovered the use of those limbs which wonder had for several minutes paralysed, she hurried down stairs to consider what was best to be done, while supping off her racketty lodgers' cold joint.

That same night Frank Curtis got so gloriously inebriated, that he threw up his bed-room window and treated the whole Square to a specimen of his vocal powers—singing some favourite Bacchanalian song, and introducing the most terrific yells by way of variations. The captain, who had also imbibed a little too much, soon after threw up *his* window, and exerted all the powers of *his* lungs in chorus with his friend; so that the deep, solemn, and awe-inspiring silence of Charterhouse Square was broken in a fashion that seemed to surprise the very echoes themselves. Without any figure of speech, it is certain that the inhabitants were surprised; for their night, usually passed in such death-like tranquillity, was unexpectedly and suddenly "made hideous;" and several nervous old ladies, dwelling in the neighbourhood, fancied that the frightful yells were warnings of fire, and went off into strong hysterics.

Vainly did Mrs. Rudd knock first at the captain's door—then at Frank's: they heard her not—or, if they did, took no heed of her remonstrances;—and when the beadle, who had been aroused from his bed, came and thundered at the front-door, the two lodgers simultaneously emptied their water-pitchers on his head. Then, satisfied with this exploit, they closed their windows and retired to rest.

When they descended to their parlour to breakfast in the morning, Mrs. Rudd acquainted them, in a tone evincing the most violent concentration of rage, that she could not possibly think of harbouring Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis any longer. But, to her amazement, they both swore that they were perfectly innocent of the disturbance of the previous night,—alleging that they themselves were as much annoyed by the row as the landlady herself. Mrs. Rudd could scarcely believe her ears: had she been dreaming? No: the noise had really taken place—for her lodgers admitted that they had heard it—though, to use a common phrase, they swore "eyes and limbs" that they had not made it. However, she gave them a week's warning, and then calmly reminded them that a week's rent was already due; whereupon Captain O'Blunderbuss flew into a terrific rage at the idea of "the maneness of the woman in spaking of such a thrifle!" Mrs. Rudd was frightened, and turned in an appealing manner to Mr. Frank Curtis, who declared point blank that the captain was cashier, and that she must draw upon him: but, finding that the gallant officer was a cashier without cash, Mrs. Rudd was compelled to retire—muttering something about her being "a lone widow," and intimating a hope that the two weeks' rent would be paid "all in a lump" on the following Monday morning.

The captain and Mr. Curtis now completely threw off the mask. They no longer affected even to be "steady, quiet men of regular habits," as Mr. Styles had represented them; but they drank poteen "till all was blue," as Frank Curtis said—or, in the language of the gallant officer, "till they couldn't see a hole through a lath-er." The disturbances they created at night were hideous; and poor Mrs. Rudd received from all her neighbours the most positive threats that they would indict her house as a nuisance. At last, in the depth of her despair, she had recourse to that excellent man, the Reverend Mr. Flummery; and the Reverend Mr. Flummery, having heard her sad tale, undertook to go in person and remonstrate with "these men of Belial."

Accordingly, one afternoon, just as the captain and Frank had finished a couple of bottles of stout by way of giving themselves an appetite for dinner, they were somewhat surprised when the parlour-door was thrown open, and in walked a short, podgy, red-faced man, dressed in deep black. Still more amazed were they when he announced himself as the Reverend Emanuel Flummery, and stated that he had come to remonstrate with them on their behaviour towards "a lone widow." The captain, winking at Curtis, desired the minister to be seated, and proposed to discuss the business over another bottle of stout. His reverence thought there was something so affable in the offer, that it would be churlish to refuse it; and he accordingly gave his assent. The stout was produced; and Mr. Flummery, being thirsty and hot, enjoyed it excessively.

He then began a long remonstrance with the two gentlemen—the gist of which was that Mrs. Rudd would be very much obliged to them if they would pay their rent and remove to other lodgings. The captain and Frank pretended to listen with attention; and the reverend minister, finding them in such a tractable humour, as he supposed, did not choose to mar the harmony of the interview by declining a second bottle of stout. Talking had renewed his thirst—and, moreover, if there were one special beverage which the Reverend Emanuel Flummery loved more than another, it was Guinness's stout. Accordingly, he emptied his tumbler, and then continued his remonstrance and his representations, in which, however he was cut short by a sudden pain in the stomach—doubtless

produced by the effervescent malt liquor. The captain was prompt with a remedy; and Mr. Flummery had swallowed a good dram of whiskey before an eye could twinkle thrice. Thus cheered, and finding the two gentlemen most docile and respectful, his reverence consented to partake of a hot glass of toddy with them, just to convince them that he was inclined to be friendly;—and this one glass led to a second—and then Frank Curtis cunningly brewed him a third, while the reverend minister was expatiating upon the good qualities of Mrs. Rudd. In fine, Mr. Emanuel Flummery became so much disguised in liquor, that, when he took his leave, he swore the captain and Frank Curtis were two excellent gentlemen—begged them not to put themselves to any inconvenience in moving—and assured them that he would make it all right with the landlady.

Mrs. Rudd, however, was mightily shocked when she beheld the condition in which the reverend gentleman presented himself at her own parlour-door; and she could indeed scarcely believe her eyes. But when, after hiccupping out some unintelligible words, that self-same reverend gentleman—the pastor of an admiring flock, and whose sermons were so refreshing and so savoury,—when *he*,—the individual whom she had looked upon as the essence of human perfection,—when *he*, we say, cast his arms around her neck and administered to her somewhat wrinkled cheeks a hearty smack,—*then*, what did she do? Why—she put up with the affront—doubtless to save the reputation of the minister;—and, perhaps with the same charitable desire to avoid the scandal of an exposure, she permitted him to repeat his caresses as often as he chose during the half-hour that he remained in her company. She even made him some tea, which materially tended to sober him; and, when he had at length taken his departure, she muttered several times to herself, "Well—after all, this saint of a man is mere flesh and blood like any other!"

But when Mrs. Rudd's more pleasurable reflections had ceased,—for pleasurable they certainly were, both during the reverend gentleman's presence and for a short time after the door had closed behind him,—she remembered that her disagreeable lodgers were, still in the house, notwithstanding the remonstrances which, according to his statement to the widow, the pious minister had most eloquently addressed to them. And that they *were* still in the dwelling, she was very soon made to understand;—for the obstreperous behaviour of those "dreadful men," to use Mrs. Rudd's own words, recommenced in the form of the most hearty peals of laughter—and the clashing of the fire-irons—and the stamping of feet, as if the two gentlemen were mad.

"They have begun their booze," said Mrs. Rudd to herself, looking up in despair at the ceiling, as if she thought the captain and his friend must inevitably come through upon her devoted head. "But never mind!" she suddenly exclaimed aloud, as a thought—a very bright thought struck her: "I will put up with it for this once—and to-morrow—to-morrow——"

Here Mrs. Rudd stopped short; for she would not even trust the empty air with the lucid idea which had struck her.

We may however inform our readers that this said idea was nothing more nor less than to lock out the two gentlemen when they went for their usual walk on the morrow.

Tranquillized by the excellence of the scheme, Mrs. Rudd refreshed herself with a small drop of brandy, and then spread her huge Bible open on the table before her—not to read it, but merely because "it looked pious-like," as she thought, if any of her neighbours should happen to drop in. For Mrs. Rudd delighted in the reputation for sanctity which she enjoyed amongst her acquaintances in general, and the frequenters of the reverend gentleman's chapel in particular.

Let us now return to Mr. Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss, who, as the landlady rightly concluded, were enjoying themselves in their own peculiar fashion up-stairs.

Having partaken of a cold joint, and the slip-shod girl of the house having provided them with a jug of hot water, the two gentlemen commenced the evening's orgie. The whiskey-punch which they brewed was of that kind which is libellously alleged to be peculiarly affected by ladies—namely, "hot, strong, and plenty of it;"—and, under its influence, they soon manifested their wonted exuberance of spirits. First, Captain O'Blunderbuss would insist upon giving Frank a lesson with the broad-sword—the one using the poker, and the other the shovel;—and every time the gallant officer thrust his friend in the ribs, a hearty shout of laughter burst from their lips—for they considered it prime fun.

When they were tired of this amusement, they resumed their seats—replenished their glasses—and chatted on divers matters interesting to themselves. Presently Frank started up, and leapt over a chair in order to show his agility, although he had grown somewhat stout of late years;—and as he acquitted himself in a clumsy manner, the captain volunteered to teach him how to do it. But the gallant officer only tumbled over the chair, causing a tremendous split in his trousers—an accident at which they nevertheless both laughed more heartily than ever.

"Be Jasus!" cried the captain, "and it's the only pair of unmintionables that I possess! But niver mind: I'll be afther telling the gal to take them round to the tailor's the first thing in the morning; and so I'll take my breakfast in bed, Frank. They'll soon be sent home again."

"Let's see? we've got to meet Styles to-morrow at three in the afternoon," said Curtis; "and, by Jove! we must make him come down with the dust."

"Be the power-rs! and you're right, my frind!" exclaimed the captain. "It's eighteen-pince that's left in my pocket at this prisint spaking ——"

"And nothing at all in mine," interrupted Frank, both his hands diving at the same time down into the depths of the empty conveniences alluded to. "Deuce take this railway affair! It gets on precious slow. I remember when I was in Paris two or three-and-twenty years ago, they were making a new path-way through my friend the Archbishop's estate at Fontainbleau; and if his Grace didn't go and swear at the men all day long, they never would have got on with it."

"Be the power-rs! if it's a thrifle of swearing that would make Misther Styles push a-head," said the gallant officer, "I'm the boy to help him on with that same."

“You see there’s been what they call a tightness in the Money-Market lately,” observed Frank: “at least, that’s what Styles told me the other day——”

“And it’s an infer-r-rnal tightness that’s got hould of *our* Money-Market, my frind,” interrupted the captain. “Be Jasus! there’s the potheen bottle empty—and no tick at the public!”

“You’ve got eighteen-pence in your pocket, captain,” suggested Curtis.

“Right, me boy!”—and he rang the bell furiously.

The slip-shod girl answered the summons, and was forthwith despatched for a supply of whiskey at the wine-vaults which the lodgers honoured with their custom.

“Now we’re altogether aground,” said Curtis, after a pause which had followed the departure of the servant. “But we’ve every thing necessary in the house for to-morrow morning’s breakfast, except the milk——”

“And bar-r-ring my breeches, ye spalpeen!” cried the captain. “They must be immediately menthed, any how.”

“Oh! the tailor won’t think of asking for the money when he brings them home,” said Curtis: then, beholding the comical expression of his friend’s countenance, which was elongated with sore misgivings respecting the amount of confidence the snip might choose to put in his honour, Frank burst out into a tremendous fit of laughter.

“Arrah! and be Jasus! and it’s all mighty fine for you, Misther Curtis, to make a damned fool of yourself in that fashion,” exclaimed Captain O’Blunderbuss, becoming as red as a turkey-cock: “but I can assure ye that it’s no joking matther for me to contimplate the prospict of lying in bed for a week or two till I get my breeches back again. And now, if you’re not afther houlding your tongue, Frank, I’ll tip ye a small rap on the head with the poker—by the howly poker-r, I will!”

“Don’t get into a rage, captain,” said Curtis, putting a bridle upon his mirth in consequence of the threat just held out—a threat which he knew his amiable friend was perfectly capable of putting into force. “I will go out the first thing in the morning and see Styles—and I have no doubt he will give me some money. I shall be back again by the time the tailor comes home with—with——”

“The unmintionables!” vociferated the captain, his wrath reviving as he saw that his friend was once more on the point of giving vent to a hearty cachinnation. “But here’s the gal coming up stairs with the potheen; and so we’ll be afther enjoying ourselves for the prisint, and think of the tightness of the Money-Mar-r-rket in the morning.”

“Well, what the deuce has made you so long?” demanded Frank Curtis, as the slip-shod domestic entered the room.

“Long, sir!” echoed the girl, as if in surprise. “Lor, sir—I ain’t been a minit!”

“Not a minute!” cried Frank, who always bullied servants—when they weren’t footmen who could knock him down for his impudence: “I tell you, you’ve been more than a quarter of an hour.”

“Well, sir—and if so be I have,” said the girl, suddenly recollecting something which had occurred to hinder her on her errand, “it was because as I went out of the street-door a man come up and asked me if so be as Mr. Smith lived here. ‘*No,*’ says I: ‘*he don’t.*’—‘*Well, then,*’ says the man, ‘*Mr. Brown does.*’—‘*No, he don’t, though,*’ I says, says I; ‘*nor yet Mr. Jones, nor Mr. Noakes neether.*’—‘*Well, who does live here, then?*’ says the man; and as I thought it would teach him not to be so precious knowing another time, I out and told him slap as how two gentlemen lived here as was named Blunderbuss—leastways, O’Blunderbuss, and Curtis.”

“The devil you did!” ejaculated the two lodgers as it were in the same breath, and exchanging significant glances which expressed the same apprehension.

“To be sure I did, sir,” responded the girl, not perceiving the alarm which she had created in the minds of the gentlemen, but rather attributing their excited ejaculations to an approval of her conduct: “for I thinks to myself, thinks I, ‘*Now, my fine feller, you’ll believe that there’s no Smiths or Browns here; and you won’t be quite so positive another time.*’”

“Well—and what did the man say?” demanded Frank Curtis, darting another uneasy glance at his friend.

“He only said ‘*Oh!*’ and went away,” returned the girl; “and that’s what kept me a little in going——”

“What sort of a looking fellow was he?” asked Curtis.

“He warn’t a gentleman, sir—and he smelt horrible of drink,” said the domestic.

“But what should you take him for?” demanded Frank, impatiently.

“A thief, sir,” was the ingenuous response.

“Be Jasus! and thin it’s a shiriff’s——” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss, starting in his chair: but, instantly stopping short ere he

completed the sentence, he added in a few moments and in a less excited tone, “You may go down stairs, my dear; and if any one comes and asks for Misther Frank Cur-r-tis or Captain O’Bluntherbuss, ye must deny us, mind—or I’ll be afther skinning ye alive!”

“Lor, sir!” cried the girl; and, horrified by the dreadful threat, she hastened from the room as if the individual who had uttered the menace were preparing to carry it into execution.

For some few minutes after she had taken her departure, Captain O’Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis sate eyeing each other in silence,—the same idea evidently occupying both—and both fearful to express it; as if to give utterance to the thought were positively to meet the dreaded misfortune half-way.

“Well,” exclaimed Curtis, at length, “and what do you think of that?”

“Be Jasus! and it’s what do *you* think of it?” cried the captain.

“For my part I think it’s Rumrigg and Kaysay the lawyers, who’ve found out where we are, and mean to take us on that cursed cognovit we gave them last Christmas for the discounter’s affair,” said Mr. Curtis, who, having now fully expressed his fears, no longer hesitated to look particularly blank upon the matter.

“Faith! and that same’s my opinion also,” exclaimed the gallant officer; then, grasping the poker very tight in his hand, he said, “But if the thunthering villains of shiriff’s-officers crape into this house, it’s myself that’ll sind ’em out again with a flay in their ear. So don’t make yourself unhappy at all, at all, my frind; but let’s dhrink bad luck to the bastes of the airth!”

“With all my heart,” cried Frank, brewing for himself a strong glass of toddy. “The only thing is——”

“Is what?” demanded the captain, suddenly desisting from his occupation of mixing a tumbler of grog for himself, and fixing his eyes sternly upon his friend.

“The breeches,” was the laconic answer.

“Ah! now—and can’t ye be asy about those same unmintionables?” cried the gallant officer. “I suspicted it was afther them ye was harping again and again. It’ll become a sore subject in time, Frank. So dhrink—and bad luck to the inexprissibles.”

And the two gentlemen did drink, until the bottle was empty, when they retired to rest—the captain having previously informed the servant-girl that he should leave his trousers outside his chamber door, and that she must take them round to the tailor the very first thing in the morning, with instructions for him to mend and return them as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE CAPTAIN'S LUDICROUS ADVENTURE.

Mr. Curtis arose at a very early hour—at least for him,—it being only eight o'clock when he sallied forth with the intention of seeking Mr. Bubbleton Styles, on whose purse he contemplated as deep an inroad as that gentleman's circumstances would permit.

But before he quitted the house, he partook of breakfast, and likewise carried in some tea and toast to his friend the captain, who was compelled, "under painful circumstances," as Frank observed, to keep his bed for an hour or two. The gallant officer charged his companion and ally to return without delay—the prudence of shifting their quarters as soon as convenient, being strongly suggested by the enquiries instituted regarding them on the preceding evening.

Having disposed of his breakfast. Captain O'Blunderbuss turned himself round in his bed and took a nap—in which luxurious state of light and dreamy repose he remained for upwards of an hour, when he was suddenly awakened by a low, sneaking, suspicious kind of double knock at the street-door.

He started up in bed; and, as he hastily collected his scattered ideas, the affair of Rumrigg and Kaysay flashed to his mind.

Leaping from his couch as a chesnut bounces from a shovel on the fire, Captain O'Blunderbuss pulled on his stockings, thrust his feet into his slippers, and stole out upon the landing, where he held his breath and listened attentively.

At that very instant the servant-girl, who invariably kept people waiting at the door as long as possible, answered the summons; and the captain overheard the following colloquy.

"Is the genelmen at home, my dear?" asked a rough, harsh, grating voice.

"Oh! you're the one that stopped and spoke to me last evening," responded the girl.

"Just so: but it was o'ny to make a few civil enquiries consarning your missus's lodgers. I 'spose they're at home; and so me and my friend will just walk up, my dear—'cause our business is partickler."

"Well, then, it ain't of no use to go up now," said the servant-girl: "for Mr. Curtis has gone out, and the captain isn't out of bed—leastways, he hasn't left his room yet; and he brekfusted there."

"Never mind, my dear," persisted the man with the hoarse voice: "we'll just walk up and pay our respeks to the captain, who is a wery nice genelman no doubt."

From this conversation the gallant officer learnt that there were *two* persons enquiring for him, although *one* only appeared to speak in the matter. His worst suspicions were confirmed: they were bailiffs, come to arrest him on the cognovit given jointly by himself and his inseparable friend Mr. Francis Curtis to those astute gentlemen, Messrs. Rumrigg and Kaysay.

What was to be done? He must dress himself in all possible haste, and fight his way desperately out of the house!

This was his first idea.

But it was so easy to think of dressing—and so difficult to carry the scheme into execution: for, alas! the gallant officer's unmentionables were at the tailor's; and he knew that Frank possessed not a second pair!

What, then, was to be done?

Should he surrender himself into the hands of the officers, and be borne ignominiously to Whitecross Street? The thought was ridiculous with such a man as Captain O'Blunderbuss!

Locking his own door, and taking the key with him, he scud up to the top storey, and sought refuge in the bed-chamber of Mrs. Rudd, who, he felt assured, had gone out to market as usual—otherwise she would have been certain to emerge from her parlour below and join in the conversation which had taken place between the bailiffs and the servant-girl.

The captain's first thought, in thus flying to his landlady's bed-chamber, was merely to seek refuge there, and leave the officers to suppose that he had gone out. It struck him that they would knock at his door—would force open that door on not receiving any answer

—and would then conclude that he really was not at home. In the meantime he should have leisure to decide upon the best means of ultimately avoiding the bailiffs altogether.

But scarcely had he entered Mrs. Rudd's room when a new and truly magnificent idea suggested itself—or rather, was suggested by the fact that an open cupboard revealed the worthy landlady's best silk gown, while upon a chest of drawers stood the good woman's Sunday bonnet, to which she had been putting a new ribband that very morning before she went out. The bonnet, which was of fine straw and of a large shape, was provided with an ample blue gauze veil; for Mrs. Rudd liked to be smart on the Sabbath—if it were only to compete with her female neighbours who attended the "ministry" of the Reverend Emanuel Flummery.

The appearance of the two articles of dress just specified, determined the gallant officer how to act; and his arrangements were made with almost lightning speed.

The reader will recollect that he had no clothes at the moment to put off before he put others on—he having sought the landlady's room in his shirt, stockings, and slippers. To slip into the silk dress was therefore the work of an instant: to assume the Leghorn bonnet was an affair accomplished with equal speed;—and to ransack the widow's drawers for a shawl was a matter scarcely occupying ten seconds. Then, drawing the veil in thick folds over his moustachioed and whiskered countenance with one hand, and grasping Mrs. Rudd's parasol in the other, Captain O'Blunderbuss took a hasty survey of himself in the glass, and was perfectly satisfied with the result.

We have before stated that Mrs. Rudd was very tall, starch, and prim; and the reader is aware that Captain O'Blunderbuss was no dwarf—neither was he particularly stout. Thus, although he certainly appeared a very colossal woman, he might still pass as one at a pinch—and surely need was never more pinching than on the present occasion. At all events he was resolved to make the attempt; and the exciting nature of the incident was just of the kind which he particularly relished—though, perhaps, he would rather have had the fun without the danger of the thing.

In the meantime he had not been in a state of ignorance of what was passing on the landing of the floor below; for the bailiffs, having ascended to that height, stopped at his own chamber door, at which they knocked. But receiving no answer, the one with the hoarse voice exclaimed, "Captain O'Blunderbuss, I've got a message for you wery particklar from a friend of your'n."

Still there was no response; and the man, addressing himself to the servant-girl, asked her if she were sure that the captain was at home.

"I'm certain he is," was the reply; "because he's sent out his—his—trousers to be mended, and is lying a-bed till they come back."

"But mayn't he have another pair?" demanded the bailiff.

"I don't b'lieve he have," said the girl: "leastways, I never see more than one either on or off him."

"Then the captain *is* at home," growled the sheriff's-officer; "and we must do our dooty, Tom."

These last words were evidently addressed by the speaker to his companion; and the captain comprehended that the forcing of the door would be the next step. Nor was he wrong in his conjecture;—for, before the servant girl could divine the intention of the two men, they had effected an entrance into the chamber which the gallant officer had only quitted three minutes previously.

The captain, who had been listening at the door of Mrs. Rudd's own bed-room, now partly descended the stairs, and again stood still to listen—his proceedings being conducted as noiselessly and cautiously as possible.

"Well—I'm blowed if he's here!" exclaimed the bailiff with the hoarse voice.

"No more than a cat," returned his companion.

"How's this, my dear?" continued the first speaker: "have you been a-making fools on us?"

"No," answered the girl sharply: "I thought the captain was here—but he ain't. So I s'pose he's gone out without my hearing or seeing him. But now you've broke the lock of the door and must pay for it—or else missus will blow me up finely when she comes home from market."

"Then she *is* at market," said Captain O'Blunderbuss to himself, his hopes becoming more elated by the assurance thus conveyed to him through the servant-girl's remark to the bailiffs.

"Pay for it, indeed!" growled the one with the hoarse voice. "That won't suit our books neither. S'pose we fix the lock on agin in such a way that it won't be knowed as how we ever busted the door open at all?"

"Well—do what you like; but make haste about it, 'cause missus is sure to come home in a minit or two—leastways if she's raly out; for I didn't see her go. But I s'pose she is—or else she'd have been down afore this to know what all the row's about."

"We'll see to it, my dear," observed the hoarse-speaking bailiff. "But I say, Tom—here's the captain's cap, and coat, and veskitt. Bless'd if I believe he's gone out arter all! Let's search t'other rooms: this gal is a-playing tricks with us."

“Come into Mr. Curtis’s chamber and see,” exclaimed the juvenile servant; and the captain heard the party pursuing their domiciliary visit in the quarter alluded to. “Well, now?” said the girl, with a derisive laugh: “is he there? Oh! ah! you may look under the bed! Why don’t you search the drawers—or get up the chimley and look out on the tiles?”

“Don’t be sarsy, my dear,” growled the bailiff. “Come—here’s a shillin’ for you. Now tell us the truth—ain’t the captain somewhere in the house?”

“Yes—I’m sure he be,” returned the girl; “’cause his breeches is gone to be mended, and his coat and wescutt and cap is in his own room—and I know he ain’t got two suits of clothes. Besides,” she added, sinking her voice to a tone of mysterious confidence—though not so low as to be inaudible to the gallant officer on the stairs above, “his bluchers is down stairs to be blacked—and I’ll swear he ain’t got two pair of them.”

“Then he is in the house,” said the bailiff. “Now, Tom, I tell’ee what we must do. You stay here, and me and the gal will just toddle down stairs and look in the kitchen, and scullery, and sich-like places.”

“Oh! but you must put the lock right first,” exclaimed the girl; “for if missus—Lor! here she is!” added the affrighted servant, in a hurried whisper.

The fact was that the captain, by some awkward and unintentional movement, at that very instant rustled the silk gown loud enough for the sound to catch the ears of the girl and the bailiffs; and he was about to curse his folly, when, finding that all had suddenly become still on the floor below, it instantly struck him that the juvenile servant had imposed silence on the officers for fear her mistress should stop to enquire the cause of their presence and thereby notice the damaged lock.

He was perfectly correct in his conjecture: and, perceiving that the sudden stillness remained unbroken, he boldly descended the stairs—imitating as well as he could the measured walk of the sanctimonious landlady, and treading with feminine lightness in his slippers.

On reaching the landing—the dreaded landing whence opened the room where the officers were concealed with the servant girl—Captain O’Blunderbuss felt a violent inclination to make a precipitate rush down the remainder of the stairs to the bottom: but, fearing that such a proceeding would only lead to his capture, as it was certain to excite an instantaneous suspicion of the truth and a vigorous pursuit in consequence, he pursued his way with measured tread, taking good care to rustle the silk dress as much as possible.

The landing of the first floor was gained in safety: he was descending the last flight—and his escape appeared certain,—when a loud double knock at the front-door echoed through the dwelling.

For an instant the gallant officer was staggered: but a second thought convinced him that it was not his landlady’s knock—and he sped boldly on.

Drawing his veil as closely as possible over his countenance, and tucking the parasol under his arm for the moment, he opened the front-door.

The visitor was the Rev. Mr. Emanuel Flummery.

“Ah! my dear madam,” said that pious man, stepping into the passage with all the unceremonious ease of a familiar friend, and not at the instant noticing the extraordinary height of the person whom he thus addressed; “I looked in just to ask you how you were—and—and,” he added, sinking his voice to a low whisper, “for the purpose of tasting in your arms a renewal of those favours which you yesterday——”

But to the ineffable wonderment of the reverend gentleman, the fictitious Mrs. Rudd dealt him such a sudden and violent blow with a heavy clenched fist, just between his two eyes, that he was floored on the spot; and the captain seizing the front-door key, darted out of the house.

Banging the door behind him, the gallant officer locked it, and marched away with a haste and a manliness of step which, had any one been passing at the time, would have betrayed his real sex in a moment.

Suddenly, however, it struck him that he was playing a female character; and, instantly relaxing his speed, he assumed a gait so mincing, affected, and fantastic, that his appearance was most comical and ludicrous.

He put up the parasol, and held it so as to screen his countenance, over which he likewise kept the blue gauze veil in many folds; and, in this manner, the gallant gentleman pursued his way half round the Square—not daring to take precipitately to his heels, yet fearful every instant of hearing a hue and cry raised behind him.

“Lauk-a-daisy me!” cried a female voice, suddenly breaking upon the captain’s ears, and speaking close by.

“Be Jasus! mim—and is it yourself?” ejaculated the gallant gentleman, stopping short: “because it’s me that’s afther being Misthress Rudd just at the prisint spaking!”

“You Mrs. Rudd!” exclaimed the infuriated landlady. “Here—murder—thieves——”

“Hould, mim!” said the captain, in a tone so ferocious that it silenced the woman in an instant: “if ye’re afther raising an alarm, mim, I’ll bethray ye to all the wor-r-ld for having bestowed your favours yesterday on that spalpeen of a methodist parson—that will I, Misthress Rudd, and bad luck to ye!”

The landlady was thunderstruck—astounded.

“So now, mim, just walk on quietly to your own house, of which I hereby prisint ye with the kay,” continued the captain; “and mind ye don’t look once behind ye until ye reach your own door—and I’ll sind your toggery back again this evening—and you’ll be sure to give mine to the missinger that brings yours, paying likewise for my throusers, mim. And bewar-r-r, mim,” added the gallant gentleman, with a terrific rattling of the r’s, “how ye bethray me in any way—if ye valley the sacret of your indecent proceedings with the methodist parson.”

Thus speaking, the captain handed the bewildered Mrs. Rudd the key of her house, and hurried on.

From the moment that he had quitted the dwelling until the termination of this scene, scarcely three minutes had elapsed: but the captain was well aware that the bailiffs would not be much longer before they discovered his flight, as the Rev. Mr. Flummery, whom he had so unceremoniously knocked down in the passage, would speedily and inevitably give them such information as would open their eyes to the real truth of all the recent proceedings.

Accordingly, the gallant gentleman’s object was to get away from Charterhouse Square within the shortest space of time possible; and the moment he parted from Mrs. Rudd he struck into the Charter House itself, under the impression that there was a thoroughfare in this direction.

But before he turned under the gloomy archway of that monastic establishment, he looked round and beheld the landlady still standing on the spot where he had left her—motionless, and apparently petrified with horror and astonishment at the threats which he had held out. Her back was, however, turned towards him,—and he therefore felt more at ease in his mind as he entered the Charter House.

“Who do you want, mem?” said the porter, as he emanated from his crib.

But Captain O’Blunderbuss affected not to hear the challenge, and passed on—adopting that mincing affectation of gait which we have before noticed, and which made him appear such a comical figure.

“Well, I’m blowed if I ever see sich a o’oman!” mattered the porter to himself, as he returned to his lodge. “Vonderful giantesses ain’t nothink to her. And her petticuts—my eye! ain’t ’em short too? But she hasn’t a wery bad leg neither—though her stockins might be a trifle or so cleaner.”

The captain continued his way,—still shading his head with the parasol—still keeping the veil closely folded over his countenance,—but not the less able to reconnoitre the place in which he now found himself for the first time in his life.

He beheld a wide, open space, laid out in grass plats, bordered and intersected by gravel walks, and surrounded by low continuous buildings, of uniform architecture and cloistral appearance.

Here and there were scattered groups of old men—collected in knots of threes and fours, and apparently basking in the summer sun, which warmed their frames so attenuated and chilled by age. They did not appear happy—scarcely comfortable or contented;—and could the captain have overheard the remarks which they mumbled and muttered to each other, he would have found that they loathed and detested—hated and abhorred the monastic gloom, the rigid discipline, and the monotonous course of life to which necessity had consigned them.

When the gallant officer made his appearance in this enclosure, his strange and ludicrous figure instantly attracted the notice of the various groups alluded to; and the old fellows began to wonder whom the tall, stately-looking dame was about to honour with a visit.

But by this time Captain O’Blunderbuss had arrived at the unpleasant conviction that there was no thoroughfare either into Goswell Street or Wilderness Row; and he once more found himself, as he subsequently observed, “in a divil of a pother.”

The reader is, however, well aware that our gallant friend was not precisely the man to turn back and surrender to his enemies, who, he felt assured, must by this time be instituting an active search after him in the vicinity—even if they had not become aware that he had sought refuge in the Charter House.

What was to be done?

Nothing—save to enlist some kind inmate of the establishment in his interests;—and on this proceeding he at once decided.

From an upper window he beheld a good-natured, red, round, jolly face looking forth, the casement being open;—and a rapid glance showed the captain the staircase that led to the particular room in which the proprietor of that face must be.

He accordingly walked on with the steady pace and apparent ease of a person who had the assurance of knowing his—or should we not rather say *her*—way;—and entering the building, he ascended the stairs, until he reached a door on which was a brass-plate bearing the

name of Mr. Scales.

Without any ceremony, the captain walked into the room; and the gentleman with the red face, turning away from the window, began to contemplate his supposed visitress with the most profound amazement.

But how much was this surprise enhanced, when the apparent lady threw down the parasol, exclaiming in a voice of singularly masculine power, “Bad luck to ye! ye damned spalpeen of an umbrilla!”—and then immediately afterwards raised a veil which revealed a face embellished with a fierce pair of moustachios and a very decent pair of whiskers—to say nothing of a certain ferociousness of expression and a weather-beaten complexion, which added to the unfeminine appearance of the whole countenance.

“What the deuce does all this mean?” demanded the Brother of the Charter House, at length recovering the use of his tongue, and with difficulty subduing an inclination to laugh;—for he was a jolly old bird, as his face denoted, and doubtless fancied that some masquerading amusement was in progress.

“What does it mane!” ejaculated the gallant officer; “why, just this, me frind—that I’m no more a woman than ye are yourself—but it’s Capthain O’Bluntherbuss I am, of Bluntherbuss Park, ould Ireland. The shiriff’s people are afther me—and I ’scaped ’em in this toggery. So now it’s your own precious aid and assistance I want—and, be the pow-r-rs! ye’ll not repint of any kindness ye may show to a genthleman in timporary difficulties.”

Mr. Scales—for such was indeed the name of the red-faced Brother whose hospitality and aid the captain thus sought—now burst out laughing in good earnest; and the gallant officer laughed too—for he dared not show any ill-feeling on the score of his new friend’s merriment. Besides, that very merriment seemed to augur a willingness to render the assistance demanded: and therefore the two laughed in concert very heartily and for upwards of a couple of minutes.

At last Mr. Scales’s mirth subsided into a low chuckle, until it became altogether extinct so far as its vocal expression was concerned;—and then he enquired in what manner he could render his aid to Captain O’Blunderbuss.

The gallant gentleman very frankly revealed to him his real position: namely, that he had been compelled to beat a precipitate retreat from his lodgings, where he had left his cap, coat, waistcoat, and boots,—that his breeches were at the tailor’s,—that he had nothing on but his landlady’s garments, barring his own shirt, stockings, and slippers,—that he had not a penny in his pocket, nor indeed any pocket at all as he then stood equipped,—and that he was most anxious to get into the City, where he could obtain funds in a minute.

Mr. Scales indulged in another laugh, and then proceeded to comment on the statement which had been made to him.

“I have got a couple of sovereigns in my pocket,” he began, “and don’t mind advancing them for your service if they will do any good.”

“Faith! and they’ll pay the landlady and the tailor!” ejaculated the captain, quite delighted at the prospect just held out.

“Very well,” said Mr. Scales. “Then we can recover your clothes for you. But how will it be if the officers are in the house, and, seeing your landlady give me the garments, should follow me?”

“Be Jasus! and Misthress Rudd is complately in my power-r!” cried Captain O’Blunderbuss:—“just tell her that if she don’t manage the thing slily for ye, that I’ll split upon her and the Riverind Mr. Eminuel Flummery—and she’ll turn as make and as mild as a lamb. But I must be afther sinding her back her own toggery.”

“I’ve got a large band-box in my little bed-room adjoining,” said Mr. Scales; “and I don’t mind carrying out the gown and the bonnet and shawl in it. Never do things by halves—that’s my motto. In the meantime, you can put on my dressing-gown:—I am sorry my own clothes would be much too small for you—or else——”

“Oh! be Jasus! and I’d sooner get back my own,” cried the captain. “I niver should dar-r to prisint myself in any other toggery to my frind in the City.”

“Well and good: you can step into my bed-room and undress yourself,” said Mr. Scales; “and I’ll be off as soon as you are ready.”

“And them ould fogeys down stairs in the yard,” observed the captain,—“they’ll be afther quistioning ye, my frind, about the tall lady in the black silk gown that’s a foot and a half too shor-r-t for her.”

“Oh! leave them to me,” said the good-natured Brother of the Charter House: “I’ll tell them it’s my sister. Bless your soul, they’re all purblind, and never will have noticed any thing peculiar in your dress. It’s the nurses that I most fear—the charwomen of the establishment, I mean;—for if any of them saw you——”

“I didn’t observe one of them, my dear frind,” interrupted the captain. “But we’ve niver a ha’porth of time to lose—and so I’ll be afther getting out of this infer-r-nal silk gown and Lighorn bonnet.”

From the moderate-sized, but lofty and airy apartment in which this colloquy took place, the captain passed into a little chamber only just large enough to contain a bed, a chest of drawers, and a toilette-table: and there he speedily extricated himself from the feminine

apparel, all of which he thrust pell-mell into the band-box which his friend had pointed out to him for the purpose. He then wrapped himself in Mr. Scales's dressing-gown; and this being done, he gave the good-natured Brother the necessary instructions how to proceed with regard to the landlady and the tailor.

Having tied a string round the band-box, so as to carry it the more conveniently, and likewise with a better appearance of negligent ease, Mr. Scales now set out on his mission—previously enjoining the captain to keep the door carefully locked until his return, and mentioning a signal by which his knock at the door might be known, so that the gallant officer should not incur the danger of admitting any other person. The moment the martial gentleman was left to himself, he advanced straight up to the cupboard, which he unceremoniously opened; and, to his huge delight, perceived a bottle containing a fluid which was unmistakeably of that alcoholic species so widely known under the denomination of gin. The captain took a long draught of the raw spirit, and, much refreshed, sate down to await his new friend's return.

A quarter of an hour passed, during which he calculated the chances of eventual escape from the bailiffs.

If they had not discovered the trick which was played them, before the captain had entered the Charter House, there was every prospect in his favour; because he felt assured that Mrs. Rudd, even if she had seen him take refuge there, would not dare to betray him.

But if, on the other hand, they had ascertained the whole truth while he was as yet outside the Charter House gates, then they had most probably rushed to the windows and obtained a glimpse of his person in the Square.

And yet, recurring to the chances that were favourable to him, he reasoned that when the noise attendant upon knocking down the methodist minister had reached the ears of the officers, some time would then be lost in receiving explanations from that reverend gentleman, and in vain attempts to open the door—until Mrs. Rudd's return with the key; and in the interim his place of concealment would have been gained, and would remain unsuspected by the bailiffs.

On the other hand, once more, what if the officers had not waited for Mrs. Rudd's return at all, but had leapt out of the ground-floor windows?

"Oh! bad luck to the pro and con!" ejaculated the captain aloud. "I'm safe here—and that's enough. For if the spalpeens had suspicted that I *am* here, they'd have been afther me long ago!"

Rising from his seat, he crept cautiously up to the window and took a survey of the enclosures through which he had passed a short time before; and this reconnoitring process was highly satisfactory. The old Brothers were lounging about as he had just now beheld them; and not a shadow of a sheriff's-officer was to be seen.

Highly delighted by the hopeful assurances which the aspect of things thus conveyed to his mind, Captain O'Blunderbuss paid another visit to the cupboard, and regaled himself with another refreshing draught from the gin-bottle—after which potation, he smacked his lips in approval of the alcoholic beverage, and resumed his seat and his meditations.

The latter continued for another quarter of an hour; at the expiration whereof the gallant gentleman paid his respects a third time to the cupboard; and scarcely had he closed the door of that commodious recess, when the concerted signal was given, announcing his friend's return.

As Mr. Scales entered the room, a glance showed the captain that his friend had succeeded in his mission; for the red countenance wore a triumphant smile, and the band-box had not come back empty.

"Be Jasus! and you're a thrump!" exclaimed the gallant Irishman, as he marked these indications of success. "But what news of them bastes of the airth——"

"Oh! you're all safe, my dear fellow," interrupted Mr. Scales, wiping the perspiration off his rubicund countenance. "The clothes are in the box—the landlady is intimidated, and therefore in your interests—and the bailiffs have got entirely on a wrong scent. In fact, they had left the house before I got there: but there's no doubt they're waiting about in the neighbourhood—and therefore it will be better for you to remain here until dark, if you possibly can. I will give you a bit of dinner—and may be a glass of grog——"

"Potheen—rale potheen!" ejaculated the captain, viewing with supreme satisfaction the present prospect of affairs.

"Well—whiskey, if you prefer it," said the obliging Mr. Scales. "At all events we'll have a jolly afternoon of it, and drink to our better acquaintance."

"Betther acquaintance!" cried the Irishman, who, in spite of his adventurous kind of existence, possessed many of the truly generous qualities of his much maligned and deeply injured fellow-countrymen; "betther acquainted we can't become, my frind: for when a man has done all he could for another, and that other a tothal stranger to him, I mane to say it makes them inthimate at once. And, be Jasus! Misther Scales, if ye've an inimy in the whole wor-r-ld, tell me his name and give me his address, and it's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss that'll be afther paying him a morning visit, sinding up his car-r-d, and then skinning him alive!" Mr. Scales expressed his gratitude for these demonstrations of friendship, but assured the gallant gentleman that he had no enemy whom he wished to undergo the process of flaying at that particular time. The captain now entered the little bed-room, and hastily equipped himself in his own clothing—the breeches, which the good-natured Brother had paid for at the tailor's, being neatly mended: so that the Irishman speedily re-appeared in the semi-military garb which became him rather more suitably than the habiliments of Mrs. Rudd.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE CHARTER HOUSE.

Captain O'Blunderbuss, having made himself thus far comfortable, wrote a note to Curtis, which Mr. Scales despatched by a messenger to Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in the City;—for the Irishman calculated that if Curtis should return to the lodgings in Charterhouse Square before the said note reached him, he would, on hearing the adventures of the morning, retrace his way to Crosby Hall Chambers—there to await either the presence of the captain, or at least some communication from him. This arrangement appeared to be far more prudent than to trust Mrs. Rudd with either letter or message announcing the place where the captain was concealed.

The note being written, and the messenger despatched with it, Mr. Scales proposed a luncheon of bread and cheese and porter, as it was only eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and he intended to order dinner for half-past two. A "nurse," as the charwoman was called, making her appearance about this time, the refreshments above mentioned were duly procured; and Mr. Scales intimated to his attendant that he should not dine in the common hall that day, but would entertain his friend with steaks and potatoes in his own apartment.

When the captain and the worthy Brother were again alone together, they fell into a conversation upon the establishment to which the latter belonged and in which the former had found so hospitable a refuge.

"Ye seem to have a comfortable berth of it, my frind," observed the martial gentleman, after burying his countenance for nearly a minute in a pewter-pot.

"Well, the fact is," returned Mr. Scales, "I manage to make myself happy, because I am naturally of a gay and lively disposition, and I have a great many friends who come to see me. Moreover, I have a few pounds coming in from a snug little annuity—and therefore I can afford those luxuries which the others have no chance of obtaining. But if it weren't for these circumstances, captain," added Mr. Scales, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, "I should never be able to endure the place."

"Not endure the place!" repeated the captain, who manifested unfeigned surprise at the observation. "Be the holy poker-r-r! and it sames a broth of a place, it does!"

"Ah! it's all very well for people out of doors to be told of the existence of the charity," resumed the Brother; "and how it gives an asylum to eighty poor men, who are widowers and past fifty years of age: but it's the discipline, my dear sir—the interior discipline,—and then the manner in which we are treated by the authorities of the establishment!"

"Then there's abuses in the Charter-r-r House as well as elsewhere?" said the captain, interrogatively. "Blood and thunther! where the divil aren't there abuses, if this same is the case?"

"No where, when the Church has any influence in the matter," returned Mr. Scales. "But I will explain myself more fully. This institution, you must know, was founded for the purpose of affording an asylum to poor and deserving men, chiefly of the literary or learned professions. But will you believe it? There's scarcely a literary man in the place; and the only one of any repute at all is Mr. Valcrieff, the celebrated dramatic author. The patrons put in their old and worn-out butlers or lacqueys;—but this would not matter, so long as worthy, deserving, and respectable characters were nominated—which is not the case——"

"Then you have some quare characters among ye, I'll be afther guessing?" exclaimed the captain.

"We have indeed, my friend," responded Mr. Scales; "and that is what I chiefly complain of. For instance, we've lately had a certain Colonel Tickner thrust upon us—but who is no more a Colonel than I am. A short time ago he called himself Major Tickner—and a little while before that, he was Captain Tickner. So, you perceive, he rises rapidly—and I have no doubt he will be a General next week."

"A Ginral, be Jasus!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss. "It's thrue I might have been one myself by this time, if I'd only stuck to the service: but I'll swear by the holy poker-r, that your Colonel Tickner is nothing more nor less than an imposthor—a vile imposthor,—and it's meself that'll unmask him."

The gallant gentleman deemed it necessary to fly into a passion relative to the pretences of the self-styled Colonel Tickner to a high military rank; inasmuch as such a display of indignation on his part at the assumption of another, seemed to justify his own right to the honourable grade of Captain.

“Well, it is shameful for men to pretend to be what they are not,” observed Mr. Scales. “This Colonel Tickner sometimes bores me with his company; and it is not at all improbable that he may look in after dinner. If so, we will have some rare fun with him.”

“If he dar-r-rs to have any of his impudence to me,” cried the captain, looking particularly ferocious at the moment, “I’ll trate him as I trated a French dhragoon at Water-r-r-loo. ‘*Come hither, ye spalpeen, and let me cut ye down to the middle!*’ says I.—‘*Oui, Monsieur,*’ says he; and on he comes with a rush.—‘*Blood and thunther!*’ says I, ‘*is it fighting ye mane, when I’ve as good as taken ye prisoner before-hand?*’—and griping him by the throat, I throttled him, sir, in less time than ye’d be in tossing off a thimblefull of potheen. But pray go on telling me about the Charter House, my frind—and let’s hear all your little gravances. Ye were spaking of the discipline of the place just now;—and sure It’s meself that knows what discipline ought to be.”

“Ah! my dear sir, the discipline of the Army and that of the Church are two very different things,” said Mr. Scales. “We’re eighty Poor Brothers in this establishment; and every night the curfew rings—eighty strokes of the bell! When one dies, there are only seventy-nine strokes until the vacancy is filled up;—and you may believe me when I tell you that there is something horrid in sitting in one’s lonely room of a dark wintry night, and counting the bell to see whether a Brother has not died since we all met in the common hall in the afternoon. For there are some very, very old men here; and old men go off, you know, like the snuff of a candle. Then, when one does die, and we hear the bell stop at seventy-nine, it sends the blood all cold and icelike to the heart—and a shudder creeps over the frame, from head to foot,—for there’s no saying whose turn it may be next. Ah! captain, it may seem but a trifling thing to you—a very trifling and paltry thing, this tolling of the curfew-bell: but I can assure you that to us, who are pent up here, it is no such trivial matter. For, in the deep, deep silence of this cloistral building, the dreary, dull, monotonous tolling of that bell suddenly arouses the most painful thoughts,—thoughts of approaching death, and coffins, and shrouds, and new-made graves, and all the sombre ceremony of funerals. But to hear that bell toll one *less*,—to know that a Brother has succumbed to the icy hand of the destroyer—to feel that there is a gap in our fraternity—a vacancy in our association,—even though we may not have loved—perhaps not even respected the individual who is gone,—still to have forced open us, by the deep-toned monitor, the conviction that he *is* gone,—this—this is terrible in our cloistral loneliness!”

The captain made no observation; but he evidently listened with profound attention;—and Mr. Scales, warming in his subject, went *on*.

“I told you just now that I am naturally of a gay and cheerful disposition, and that I can make myself happy under most circumstances. But when I am alone here of an evening, and listen to the curfew-bell, I—yes, *I* also am seized with a cold shuddering, and my blood creeps with an ice-chill in my veins. And if I hear the strokes stop at seventy-nine, it suddenly appears to me that a shape, dim, shadowy, and wrapped in a shroud, flits past me;—and I cast my eyes around—almost dreading lest the pale and ghastly spectre of the deceased Brother should be standing behind my chair. And, when there *is* one lying dead in the Charter House, I feel afraid at night—and sleep visits not my pillow. I do not believe in ghosts—at least, I do not believe in them when it is day-time; but in the deep, silent, and dark night,—yes, *then* I believe in them—and I tremble! Oh! you can form no idea of the horrors endured in this place while the curfew-bell tolls: for if it give forth a single note less than the eighty, then every one shudderingly says within himself—aye, and in the solitude of his own chamber—‘*Who knows but that it may be my turn next?*’ Is it not cruel, then, to maintain that monastic custom of ringing the nightly bell,—to alarm weak and trembling old men, whose intellects are attenuated by the weight of years, and whose imaginations are so susceptible of all influences likely to engender the gloomiest forebodings: for such is the case with the great majority of the Poor Brothers of the Charter House.”

The captain made a brief remark to show that he was listening with deep attention—as indeed he was; and Mr. Scales proceeded in the following manner:—

“Yes—the greater portion of the Poor Brothers are very infirm old men, who need companionship to enliven them, and little attentions to cheer them, and indulgences to render their existence tolerable. But every morning,—summer and winter—hot or cold—sunshine above, or snow knee-deep below,—they must all turn out at an early hour from their warm beds; and while still fasting, must repair to the chapel to attend prayers. And in the performance of this duty, which is rigidly enforced by fine, we are compelled to wear long, dark cloaks, so that when thus muffled up we appear to be a procession of monks, each wrapped in his cowl! Here again you may observe that there is no harm in the custom;—but you must remember that there is a vast difference between what one does spontaneously, and what he is forced by a rigid, inexorable discipline to do. The fact that these poor old men are thus compelled to wear the badge of monastic pauperism is the iron that enters into their souls. They have been compelled by their necessities to accept an asylum in this place—and they feel that they are treated as paupers. Their old age, which the world without believes to be passing in a serene and tranquil happiness here, unruffled by mundane cares, is rendered miserable and wretched by a thousand little vexatious points of discipline which make up an aggregate sum of tremendous ecclesiastical oppression. In the deep silence of the night—the awful silence that reigns throughout this pile,—and in the solitude of his gloomy apartment,—each of those poor old creatures broods upon what he deems to be his wrongs;—and you need not be surprised when I tell you that they are often driven to the very verge of despair—or to the threshold of madness! Ah! and it is not only the curfew-bell—nor the compulsory attendance at chapel—nor the long, dark cowls,—it is not all this alone,” continued the Brother, now speaking with solemn earnestness;—“but it is that we are watched by spies—watched in all our movements within or without the walls,—watched to be caught tripping, be it never so lightly—in order that we may be punished—or perhaps expelled, to make room for some one whom the Master or any other authority is anxious to provide for. The surgeon is a spy upon us—the porter is a spy upon us—all the nurses are spies upon us; and what is worse,” added Mr. Scales, now sinking his voice to an ominous whisper, and bending his head forward so as almost to reach the captain’s ear with his lips,—“and what is worse,” he repeated, bitterly but still in that low tone,—“we are spies upon each other!”

Captain O’Blunderbuss started, and surveyed his new friend with astonishment.

“I do not mean to say that I am a spy upon the rest,—nor will I assert that we are all spies with regard to each other,” resumed Mr. Scales: “but this I declare—that there are many inmates of the place who do enact the part of spies against their fellows. Some wish to curry favour with the Master, Archdeacon Hale—others carry their tittle-tattle to the surgeon;—some gossip of their Brethren to the manciple, or steward—others endeavour to worm themselves into the good graces of even the cook;—and all the nurses, with scarcely an exception, are the spies of the matron. I tell you, sir, that there is a monstrous system of supervision and *espionnage* in existence within these walls;—and one Brother cannot talk as a friend to another—because he is afraid that he may be all the time making revelations to an individual who will betray him! We have no confidence in each other—we are all afraid of one another. There is not such a thing as a good-natured chat and harmless conversation in the Charter House. If you make the most common-place observation

upon things the most indifferent, Brother Gray, or Brother Jones, or Brother Jenkins will shake his head knowingly, as if he saw something covert and mysteriously significant at the bottom of the remark. But wherefore does such a state of things prevail in the Charter House, you will enquire;—and perhaps you will observe that if the Brethren enact the part of spies upon each other, they alone are to blame for making themselves miserable. Pause, however—and reflect that it is all the fault of the authorities. *They* encourage this contemptible tittle-tattle—*they* show favour to the poor silly old dotards who carry them tidings of all the complaints, expressions of discontent, or occasional instances of convivial excess which occur on the part of the rest. These spies are favoured by the authorities: the others know it, and become spies themselves;—and thus they all spy upon each other, even as the Jesuits do in obedience to the rules of their Order. Oh! the mean and contemptible littleness of mind which such a state of things engenders! I am sick—disgusted,Captain O'Blunderbuss, when I think of it."

"Be Jasus! and well you may be, my dear frind!" cried the gallant gentleman. "But who is the governor, d'ye say?"

"Archdeacon Hale is the Master, as he is called—Archdeacon Hale, the notorious pluralist who fattens upon the loaves and fishes of the Church, without ever having done a single thing to render him deserving of such fine preferment and such large emoluments. He it is who presides over this Protestant monkery,—who enforces in the nineteenth century the grinding discipline of the sixteenth,—who moves the whole machinery of *espionnage*, and rules us as a mitred abbot was wont to sway his Romish brotherhood. If a gentleman, reduced by adversity, once enters those walls as an inmate, he must resign himself to the treatment of a pauper. The authorities look upon us in that light; and the servants behave to us accordingly. The very porter will sometimes call us by our Christian or surnames, without the prefatory *Mister*. If the surgeon visit us, it is evident that he considers himself to be doing us a great favour—just as you may suppose that the medical man belonging to an Union of Parishes behaves towards the pauper invalids requiring his services. Should the Matron have occasion to call upon us, it is with all the airs of a fine lady—she who curtseys and does not dare sit down in the presence of the Archdeacon's wife! The manciple, or steward, is likewise a great man;—and woe to the Poor Brother who does not receive *him* with all possible respect. The nurses attend upon us in a slovenly, negligent manner; and we dare not complain nor remonstrate—for we know that they are spies ready to report us for every incautious word that we may utter, or even to *invent* charges against us. It was but the other day that one of the inmates—a poor old man of nearly seventy—*did* venture to complain of the shameful neglect which he experienced at the hands of his nurse. What was the consequence? She made a counter-charge, to the effect that he had taken liberties with her! The woman's statement—her unsupported statement was believed in preference to the denial and the complaint of the old man, and he was expelled the Charter House for six months—turned out upon the wide world to live how he could, or die as he might![10] Oh! you have no idea of the tremendous tyranny that is perpetrated within these walls, where all is so silent and all appears to be so serene and tranquil! A short time ago a Brother, driven to despair by the horrors of the place, went away—took an obscure lodging—and put an end to his life by means of poison. The authorities hushed up the matter as well as they could—prevented the interference of the Coroner—and had the man buried within three days from the moment of his self-destruction.[11] These are all facts, sir—stubborn facts; and the public should know them. Yes—the public should learn that there are eighty old men dwelling in a monastic institution in the very heart of London—enduring a discipline as severe, and subject to a system as despotic and oppressive as in the olden times and in those very cloistral establishments which Henry the Eighth destroyed! The public should be informed that then eighty old men are the victims of ecclesiastical tyranny, and that they are compelled to endure neglect and even insult at the hands of the very servants who are so liberally paid to attend upon them."

"Be the power-r-s! it's a bur-r-ning shame!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "and what's worse of all, is that it's the parsons who are your governors and by consequence your opprissors in this establisment. Bad luck to 'em, say I!"

"A good parson is a most estimable, as well as a most necessary character in society," said Mr. Scales; "and this every sensible man must admit. But an intolerant, illiberal, tyrannical parson is the greatest curse that can be inflicted upon a community. Such is our case—such is our misfortune. We have half-a-dozen parsons belonging to the institution; and their main object is to get all the loaves and fishes to themselves. Though they rule us with a rod of iron, they do not mind breaking the regulations themselves. For instance, if a Poor Brother remains away from chapel without the surgeon's leave, or returns home a little after hours in the evening, he is reported and fined—fined out of the beggarly pittance of seven pounds ten shillings a quarter allowed him to purchase tea, sugar, milk, and the many other necessaries which the establishment does not supply. But though the regulations specify in distinct terms that the Master is to reside constantly upon the premises, he laughs at the enactments, and passes weeks or months together in the country. No fine—no punishment for him! Who would dare to talk of calling the Very Reverend Archdeacon Hale over the coals? But who does *not* hesitate to kick Poor Brother Gray, or Poor Brother Jones, or Poor Brother Scales from pillar to post, and from post to pillar, if he be caught tripping in the slightest degree?"

"Jist now, me frind," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, looking particularly fierce, "ye assured me that ye hadn't an inimy in the wor-r-ld: but it sames pritty clare to me that I must be afther punching the head of your Archdeacon—or manciple—or porter—or some one, jist to revinge your wrongs and create a little sinsation for the Poor Brothers, as ye call yourselves."

"My dear fellow, do nothing mad or rash!" cried Mr. Scales, positively believing at the moment that the formidable Irishman was about to declare war against the authorities of the institution, and that he would experimentalise with his fists upon the first of those functionaries who might chance to come in his way. "All that I have been telling you is sacred between you and me;—and as a man of honour, I must appeal to you——"

"Be Jasus! and if it's to me honour-r-r ye appale," interrupted the captain, slapping his left breast with the palm of his right hand, "I'll not brathe a wor-rd to a sowl that I'm acquainted with any gravances at all, at all. But, remember, if the time should come when ye may feel inclined to administher a thrilling dhrubbing or so to any of thim spalpeens of whom we've been talking——"

“Hush!” cried Mr. Scale?, suddenly: “some one is ascending the stairs. Let us pretend to be speaking on matters quite indifferent.”

“With all my heart!” said the captain: and, elevating his voice for the behoof of the person who was approaching the room from the stairs, he exclaimed, “Yes—’tis a very fine mornin’, Misther Scales—a very fine mornin’ indeed!”—just as if, in the natural course of things, he would have made, after a visit of nearly three hours, the remark with which a conversation is usually commenced.

Mr. Scales burst out laughing at this display of his new friend’s ingenuity; and the captain laughed heartily likewise—though he knew not precisely at what.

In the midst of this cachinnation, the door opened, and the nurse, or charwoman, entered to lay the cloth for dinner.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

A STRANGE NARRATIVE.

The nurse was a tall, middle-aged, powerfully-built woman, with brawny arms, and a countenance that indicated a slight affection for an occasional drop of “something short.” In fact, it was observed by the Brethren on whom she waited, that she never looked sulky when requested to repair to the public-house to order any thing in the shape of beer or spirits; but if entrusted with an errand of another kind—such as the purchase of half a quire of writing-paper or a stick of sealing-wax—it was a very great chance if she would be seen any more until the next day. Her manners were of the free-and-easy school; and she was accustomed to address the Poor Brothers in a half-pitying, half-patronising style, as if they were patients in a hospital or in the infirmary of a debtors’ gaol. If wearied, she would unhesitatingly seat herself without being asked, and glide imperceptibly into a familiar kind of discourse, while wiping the perspiration from her rubicund face with her blue checked cotton apron; and if it were in the cold weather, she would wait upon her masters with a black bonnet, like an inverted japan coal scuttle, on her head—the propriety of leaving the tegumentary article in the passage outside, never for a moment striking the ingenuous and simple-minded creature.

If this excellent woman had any special failing,—besides such little faults as drunkenness, inattention, slovenliness, cool impudence, and deep hypocrisy,—it was a propensity to gossip and a love of scandal. If she were only carrying a pail down the stairs, and met another nurse with a pail coming up the stairs, they must both set down their pails on the landing, and stop to have a quarter of an hour’s chat on the affairs of their respective masters. Then one would whisper how Poor Brother Smith was the meanest skin-flint on the face of the earth; and the other would declare that it was impossible for him to be worse than Poor Brother Webb, who was always complaining and yet never gave her even so much as a drop of gin;—and in this manner the two women would unburthen their minds, to the sad waste of their time and the neglect of those whom they were well paid to render comfortable. But Mrs. Pitkin—for that was the name of the nurse who waited on Mr. Scales and the other gentlemen living in the chambers opening from the same staircase,—Mrs. Pitkin, we say, was a more inveterate gossip than any other charwoman in the place; and, as a matter of course, when she had no trifling truths to retail or make much of, she deliberately and coolly invented a pack of lies, purporting to be the most recent sayings and doings of her masters. The consequence was, that a great deal of mischief resulted at times from these playful exercises of Mrs. Pitkin’s imaginative qualities; and more than one poor Brother was looked upon as an habitual drunkard, or as a sad old fellow amongst the women, without any other ground for the entertainment of such an opinion than the mysterious whispers of Mrs. Pitkin.

Well, it was this same Mrs. Pitkin who made her appearance, as already described, to lay Mr. Scales’s cloth and get the dinner ready.

“What o’clock is it, nurse?” asked Mr. Scales suspiciously.

“Only a little after two,” she replied: but scarcely were the words uttered, when the Charter House bell proclaimed the hour of three. “Well, I’m sure!” she cried, affecting the profoundest astonishment; “I never could have believed it were so late. Deary me! deary me! But it’s all through that disagreeable Mr. Yapp, who would have his cupboard washed out this morning—though I told him it wasn’t near six months since he had it done last.”

“Well—where have you put the potatoes to boil?” demanded Mr. Scales.

“The taturs, sir? Lor, sir—did you order taturs?” asked Mrs. Pitkin, now pretending to seem more astounded than ever. “Well, I’m sure I thought as how you said you’d have your chops without any weggitables at all!”

“Chops!” repeated Mr. Scales, now waxing positively wroth: “I ordered steaks——”

“Steeks!” cried the woman, holding up her hands as if in amazement. “Why—how could I ever have misunderstood you so? But it’s no matter—I can just as well get steeks as chops; and one don’t take much longer cooking than another.”

“Then, am I to understand that you have as yet got neither chops nor steaks?” asked Mr. Scales, subduing his anger as much as possible.

“Lor, sir! how could I go to the butcher’s when there’s three of my masters is inwalids and dines in their own rooms to-day? But I’ll be off at once—and you shall have dinner in a jiffey, I can promise you!”

Thus speaking, the woman walked lazily out of the room; and when the door was closed behind her, Mr. Scales, turning to the captain, said; “Now you perceive how we Poor Brothers are waited upon by these nurses. You heard me give her specific orders to have a steak and potatoes ready for us at two. She comes in at three, and has totally forgotten all about the dinner—for *that* is the English of it. And

yet I dare not complain against her: I dare not even speak harshly to the woman's face. But should you not imagine that, after her neglectful conduct, she would make all possible haste to get the meal ready? No such thing! Look there," continued Mr. Scales, motioning Captain O'Blunderbuss to the window: "she has fallen in with another nurse, and they are stopping to have a gossip. Now they are going out together; and before we shall see Mrs. Pitkin again, she will have paid a tolerably long visit with her companion to the bar of the Fox and Anchor."

"Be Jasus! and shall I be afther her, my dear frind?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, rushing towards the door.

"It is useless," said Mr. Scales, holding him back: "we must have patience. But do you see that old man, standing apart from the rest ——"

"And laning on a stick?" cried the captain.

"The same," returned the good-natured and communicative Brother. "Observe how pensive—how melancholy he seems! That is Brother Johnson—late Alderman and once Lord Mayor of London."

"Be Jasus! and I ricollict!" exclaimed the captain: "'tis the hero of the Romford Bank affair."

"Precisely so," responded Mr. Scales. "And now do you perceive that short, stout, elderly gentleman, leaning on the arm of a friend from outside——"

"He walks as if he was blind," interrupted the captain.

"And blind he unfortunately is," said Mr. Scales: "but not irremediably so. There is every prospect that, with care and good medical advice, he will recover his sight. He is a man who has made some noise in the world—but with high honour to himself: in a word, he is Valcrieff, the celebrated dramatic author."

"And a most rispictable-looking gintleman he is," observed the captain. "I've laughed many times at his farces, and little thought I should iver have the pleasure of seeing the writer-r himself, even at a disthance."

"There is one inmate of this establishment," said Mr. Scales, quitting the window and returning to his seat—an example followed by the gallant officer,—"there is one inmate whose early history is very peculiar; and the most extraordinary circumstance connected with the matter is that he believes the events of his younger days to be entirely unknown and unsuspected within these walls. I should not point him out to you, even were he amongst the loungers in the court at this moment: neither shall I mention his name—or rather the name by which he is here known. But I may state that thirty years ago I knew him by the name of Macpherson. We met in Paris, shortly after the peace—and he was living, with a beautiful French woman as his mistress, in very handsome apartments. Her name was Augustine; and she certainly was the most lovely creature I ever saw in my life. Macpherson adored her; and while he believed that she worshipped him in return, her infidelity was notorious amongst all his friends. He had succeeded to a small fortune, by the death of an uncle; and, on visiting Paris, had fallen in with this young lady, whose charms immediately enthralled him. She was a banker's cast-off mistress, and was glad to ensnare a handsome English gentleman in her meshes. Her extravagance was unbounded; and in less than a year Macpherson's resources were completely exhausted. It would appear that Augustine at that period introduced to him a Frenchman whose real name was Legrand, but whom she passed off as her brother. This Legrand was elegant in manners and agreeable in conversation, as well as handsome in person; but he was unprincipled, dissipated, and of broken fortunes. From all I subsequently learnt, and from the knowledge I had of Macpherson's character, I feel convinced that Legrand made my English friend his dupe and victim; and that Macpherson was entirely innocent of any intentional complicity. Certain however it is that one morning I was thunder-struck by the tidings that Macpherson had been arrested on a charge of forgery. I hastened to him in prison; and he declared most solemnly that he was guiltless. It was true that he had negotiated the instrument which was discovered to be fictitious: but he assured me that Legrand had induced him to do so. The examination before the Judge of Instruction led to the arrest of Legrand; and it was confidently hoped by Macpherson and his friends that the real truth would transpire at the trial. But when the case came on, Augustine—the faithless, treacherous, ungrateful Augustine—gave such evidence as entirely to exonerate Legrand and fix all the guilt upon Macpherson. She committed perjury; but her tale was believed,—for it was consistent, though false—delivered with plausibility, though based on the most damnable deceit. In fact, the vile woman sacrificed the Englishman whom she had ruined and never loved, to the French paramour whom she had passed off as her brother; and Macpherson, being pronounced guilty, was condemned to be exposed and branded upon a scaffold on the Place de Grêve, and to be afterwards imprisoned for a period of five years at the galleys at Brest. Myself and another English gentleman drew up a memorial to the King, setting forth a variety of circumstances in favour of Macpherson, and imploring the royal mercy on behalf of our unhappy fellow-countryman. Louis the Eighteenth referred the petition to the Judges who had condemned Macpherson, and as they stated that they had taken every thing into consideration when they pronounced his punishment, the Minister of Justice and Grace could not hold out to the petitioners any hopes of a commutation of the sentence. We had endeavoured to obtain the remission of that portion of the sentence which condemned Macpherson to be publicly exposed and marked with a red hot iron—but, alas! this indignity could not be spared the unhappy sufferer. Well, the fatal morning arrived, when this dread public ceremony was to take place. Macpherson rose early, and devoted unusual care to his toilet. His countenance was ghastly pale—his eyes were fixed,—his lips compressed. He did all he could to appear calm, and endeavoured to meet his punishment with firmness. But to be condemned for an offence of which he was innocent;—to see the fairest years of his youth destined to be passed in a horrible state of servitude;—to know that he was about to be branded with an infamous mark, which he would carry with him to the grave,—all this must have been beyond human endurance. Had he been really guilty, his sufferings

would not have been so acute;—had he deserved his punishment, he would have bowed to those destinies which he would have thus prepared for himself. But he was innocent—innocent; and the world did not know it:—only a few faithful friends consoled him by the assurance that they believed in his innocence. On the fatal morning which was to consummate his disgrace, I visited him early; but when I found him so apparently resigned and calm, I did not offer those consolations which I would otherwise have tendered, and which were all I had now to offer.

"It was about eleven o'clock, in the forenoon," continued Mr. Scales, "when Macpherson was summoned to the lobby of the prison. Two gendarmes were waiting there to conduct him to the Place de Grêve, where he was to remain exposed for two hours, and then be marked. He resigned himself to their custody, and, accompanied by myself, proceeded towards the great square where the hideous ceremony was to be performed. Immense crowds were collected in all the avenues leading to the Place, which was itself thronged to excess. Two lines of soldiers kept a pathway clear for the march of the prisoner up to the foot of the scaffold. He did not cast his eyes downwards:—nor did he glance to the right or to the left; but he kept them fixed upon the scaffold towards which he was advancing. He ascended the ladder with a firm step, accompanied only by the gendarmes; for I was compelled to remain below. The moment he appeared upon the platform, a tremendous shout arose from the thousands and thousands of spectators assembled to witness his punishment; but no indignity of a violent nature was offered to him. He cast a hurried and anxious glance around: the whole square seemed literally paved with human faces, which were continued up every street communicating with the Grêve, as far as he could see. The quay behind him, the bridges, the windows and roofs of all the houses, and even the towers of Nôtre Dame and the parapet of the Hotel-de-Ville were crowded with human countenances. Macpherson remained exposed for two hours, seated upon a chair on the scaffold, while the populace, with hyena-yells and laughter, were contemplating him as if he were a wild beast which they delighted to see, but of which they were afraid. The idea, whether this penalty were deserved or not, never entered the head of one single individual in that vast multitude;—all that they cared about was the man and his punishment—and both were there! At the expiration of the two hours, the crowd suddenly opened, and the public executioner, attended by his two sons, appeared at the foot of the scaffold. One of the lads carried a small iron pot, at the bottom of which there was a grating: in this vessel was a bright fire of red hot cinders and charcoal. The other boy carried an iron implement in his hand. It was like a very small shovel, with a tolerably long handle. The three wretches ascended the ladder, and the shouts and the hootings of the mob recommenced with increased violence as the public functionary bowed jocosely to Macpherson. A horrible laugh issued from those who stood nearest, and who comprehended the fashion of the executioner's salute. This individual then arranged his *paraphernalia* in a convenient manner. He placed the brazier close to the convict's chair, and put the shovel-looking implement into the fire. He next proceeded to inform Macpherson that he must take off his coat and other vestments from his left shoulder. The prisoner obeyed mechanically. He doffed his coat and his waistcoat on the left side; and the executioner instantly cut a large square piece out of his shirt, just above the left shoulder-blade, immediately above the curve of the shoulder. The most breathless suspense now prevailed; and not a cry—not a murmur was heard throughout the dense masses of people wedged together around. 'Take courage, my boy,' said the executioner, half ironically and half in pity; 'it will only be the affair of a few moments.' I heard him make these remarks—for I was close by the scaffold. He then proceeded to strap the convict tightly down in his chair, confined his arms and legs, and twisted the cords in such a manner around his body and the back of the seat that he was rendered as motionless and powerless as if he were a statue. Ten minutes elapsed, and the thick part of the iron was by that time red hot. This was the crowning moment of the whole day's amusement—an amusement provided by the law that forbade bull-baits and punishes cruelty to animals! The executioner stooped down, seized the iron, and applied it to Macpherson's flesh—to that bare part which the square cut out of the shirt had left exposed. The iron hissed on the young man's shoulder; and a fearful yell escaped his lips. The iron remained upon the flesh for two or three instants: the sufferer writhed in agony; but only that one loud, long, and piercing cry escaped his lips. The implement was withdrawn;—one of the executioner's sons placed a cup-full of water to the convict's lips, and thus saved him from fainting in the chair. The cords were then unbound,—the young man's dress was adjusted,—and the gendarmes told him that they were ready to convey him back to prison. As he passed through the dense multitude that had witnessed his punishment, he now hung down his head—abashed and ashamed. Even had he not felt the smart of the burn upon his back, the knowledge that he was branded with the mark of infamy would have been sufficient thus to humble and subdue him. Women held up their children to gaze upon him as he passed along;—he heard an old father bid his son take warning from the example he had just witnessed; and as he emerged from the crowd, and entered a comparatively deserted street, on his way back to prison, he caught the following words which were uttered, with a laugh, by one spectator to another,—'Oh! there's the man who has just been marked!'—'Marked! eh—and with a scar that he would carry to his grave!' thought I, shuddering from head to foot. He returned to the prison of La Force; and the moment he entered the lobby, he fell into my arms; for I had walked by his side from the Place de Grêve. The courage of the man now failed him altogether; and he burst into a violent passion of grief. The tears flowed in torrents from his eyes; his breast heaved convulsively. I endeavoured in vain to console him; and then I thought it best to allow his agony to have full vent, and he would feel relieved. The truth of this opinion was speedily confirmed; and, when Macpherson dried his tears, he exclaimed, 'Now that the first bitterness of my career of misery is over, I feel nerved and resigned to encounter the ills which heaven has in store for me.'—'My dear friend,' I said, 'you must yet hope for many happy years: the term of your incarceration will soon pass away, and you will then hasten to England, where friends will be prepared to receive you with open arms, and enable you to forget the sorrows that will then be over!'—'Alas!' he cried—and the words still ring in my ears,—'how can I forget all this degradation and infamy? How can I ever again appear in the great world, every member of which will have read my trial, and many of whom have this day seen me writhing beneath the hot iron in the hands of the public executioner? Even supposing my innocence be eventually proved, and that all moral infamy be separated from my name, who will remove the scar from my shoulder? who will not remember that for five years I shall have herded with the refuse of mankind? who will believe that, even if guiltless I went to the galleys, uncontaminated I have been released from them? What father will entrust his daughter to the convict? what mother will consent to the union of her child with a man who has been publicly marked upon the scaffold? what brother would allow his sister, pure and chaste, to link herself to one whose outset in life has been so horribly characterised as mine? And lastly, lastly,' added he, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and clenching his fists and grinding his teeth as he spoke,—'and lastly, who can remove the deep, deep scar from my heart,

even should there be a physician skilful enough to efface the one upon my shoulder?'—I was then compelled to take leave of him; and, on the following day, he was removed to Bicêtre, and lodged with the other convicts who were about to travel the same road together. He now found that his situation was wretched indeed. Compelled to associate with men who had been guilty of the most horrible crimes, and who gloried in their infamy, his ears were offended with their obscene conversation and their fearful blasphemies; and he was ill-treated by his fellow prisoners, because he would not laugh at their jokes or join in their revolting discourse. If he threatened to complain, he was reviled and mocked. But I shall hasten to the end of my story—or at least to this part of it. The day for the departure of the Chain of Galley-Slaves arrived; and I took leave of my unfortunate friend. He was conducted to Brest, where he worked on the port for a short time; and then, on account of his good conduct, he was made a clerk in the office of the Governor. This was the last account I heard of him while he was at the Galleys; for just at that period the death of a distant relative called me to England, and the inheritance of some property was accompanied with the condition that I should change my name to that of the individual whose fortune thus devolved upon me.

"Six years had passed," continued Mr. Scales,—"six years since the events which I have just related to you, when accident enabled me to obtain a complete assurance of that which I had all along fully believed,—namely, the innocence of Macpherson respecting the forgery. I was passing down Aldersgate Street late one evening, when a sudden shower began to fall; and I entered a gate-way for protection, having no umbrella with me, and there being no hackney-coach stand near. Almost immediately afterwards, a gentleman in a cloak took refuge in the same place; but as I was standing farther in the gate-way than he, and as it was pitch dark there, we did not observe each other's countenance. Presently he stepped out into the street to see if the rain continued; and I noticed that he was accosted by a female, dressed in gaudy attire, and who murmured something to him in French, to which he did not however pay immediate attention. But an exclamation from her lips—an exclamation of surprise, which was instantly followed by the mention of his name—aroused him from his reverie. He gazed at the female who thus appeared to recognise him; and, by the light of the adjacent lamp, the well-known but somewhat altered countenance of Augustine was revealed to him and myself at the same time. Amazement rooted me to the spot, and compelled me to become a listener. 'What, Augustine!' cried Macpherson—for he it was: and all the while my presence was unsuspected.—'Yes, Augustine—that is my name!' said the young lady, somewhat flippantly, 'But what are you doing in London?' she asked immediately afterwards, and in an altered tone.—'How can you ask me, Augustine, after my present pursuits or my future prospects, when you were the principal agent in consummating my ruin in Paris?' demanded Macpherson. 'Oh! you know not the serious injury—the irreparable injury which you have inflicted upon me. All my hopes, all my endeavours, have one after another been defeated and destroyed by the consequences of that fatal period. My life is a series of misfortunes, of strugglings against adversity, of ups and downs, of long intervals of misery, with short and distant gleams of happiness; and this career of sorrows and disappointments, was prepared and marked out by the infernal schemes of yourself and Legrand. Oh! inauspicious was the day on which I first became acquainted with you and the miscreant whom you represented to be your brother?'—'And will you believe me when I assure you that I have never known a moment's peace since the fatal moment when I bore false evidence against you in the French tribunal?' exclaimed Augustine emphatically. 'I was compelled to take that step, although repugnant to my feelings; for I had not then lost all principle,' she added mournfully. 'Legrand possessed such power over me; and I also knew that he was as capable of sacrificing me as well as yourself to his own interests, if I did not fall into his views. That false step on my part has reduced me to my present state of degradation; I became reckless and ceased to sustain even the appearance of respectability which I had observed while I was living with you. Legrand was killed in a quarrel at a gambling-house; and I then became the mistress of——.'—'Oh! distract me not with a catalogue of your vices, Augustine,' exclaimed Macpherson, interrupting her recital. 'Can I sympathise with you, who have caused my ruin? can I commiserate with one whom, were I vindictive, I should crush beneath my heel? Oh! could you speak to me of the means of redeeming my character, which is lost—innocent though I am, as well you know,—could you give me back my peace of mind, my self-respect, my confidence in myself, the esteem and respect of men, and the enjoyment of an unsullied name,—could you efface the mark from my shoulder, Augustine, and wipe from my memory the dread impression of the exposure in the Place de Grêve with the five long years' sojourn at the galleys,—could you do all this, Augustine, I would throw myself at your feet, I would forgive you the wrongs I have endured, I would almost worship you!'—'There is something which may yet be done,' said Augustine, after a long pause, 'which would partially remedy the evil, and which would at all events prove my contrition for the part that I enacted in the matter.'—'And what is it that you propose?' demanded Macpherson: 'to what do you allude?'—'I would willingly make a confession which would establish your innocence, and so far retrieve your character in the eyes of the world,' said Augustine.—'But the world reviles me, and cries shame upon me, without waiting to ask itself if I am really guilty!' returned Macpherson, bitterly.—'The thinking portion of the community,' began the frail woman earnestly, 'will ever——'.—'That is a mere idle phrase, Augustine,' interrupted Macpherson. 'There is no thinking portion, as a complete section, of any community. Ask any individual singly and alone, if he would scorn and shun a man who had endured an infamous punishment, but who was innocent of the crime attributed to him, and he would launch forth into an eulogium of the liberality of his own views, and indulge in a tirade against the narrow-mindedness of his neighbours. He would say, "*Prove your innocence, and I will be your friend.*" So would reply every one whom you thus questioned individually. But take all those persons together—assemble them in one room—invite them all to a banquet—and then introduce amongst them the man concerning whom they had singly expressed so much liberality of opinion; and collectively they would scorn—they would shun him,—they would hunt him from their company—they would expel him as if he were infected with a pestilence! Where, then, is the thinking portion of society? of what men is it composed? who can separate the section from the mass? Talk no more of proving my innocence, but let me now ask you a question relative to your own position.'—'My position!' repeated the young woman bitterly; 'oh! I feel its degradation so thoroughly, that it appears to me as if every body must see and appreciate it also! My shame clings to me, like a mass of dingy cobwebs to a wall: I cannot shake it off; I cannot divest myself of the sense of its utter loathsomeness; for if I seek to brush it away with one hand, it clings to the other. I dare not go to church to seek the comforts of religion:—a prayer in my mouth would be pollution;—I dare not even implore heaven to change my condition, so thoroughly degraded am I in my own estimation! And there are some of us—and when I say of *us*, you will fully comprehend to what sad sisterhood I belong—who are young, beautiful, and even educated; and from their lips—their red and inviting lips—issue imprecations and

blasphemies at all hours. But I am not so bad as that;—nor do I drink as they do! God only knows, however, to what abyss I may fall!'—With these words the wretched creature hurried away in one direction, while Macpherson slowly pursued his path in another. I did not think it right to follow him; for I fancied from the tenour of his bitter outpourings to Augustine, that he wished to be forgotten by the world, and pass as a stranger in the mighty city. Well, years and years elapsed; and misfortunes overtook me. I lost all my property save a very small annuity—a mere pittance insufficient to keep body and soul together;—and through the interest of a friend I obtained a berth in the Charter House. To my surprise I found, on my entrance, that Macpherson was already a Brother;—and thus, after a separation of five-and-twenty years—for it is five years ago that I came hither—our destinies cast us into the same asylum. But, though I recognised him, he knew not me. You must remember that I had changed my name, and my personal appearance had undergone an immense alteration; and therefore it was not singular that he should fail to perceive in me the friend who had consoled him in his misfortunes at Paris in 1816. I have never revealed myself to him within these walls—and never shall. It would doubtless embitter his sorrowful existence were he aware that his secret was known to a living soul in the establishment which his necessities have compelled him to make his home, and from which he will remove to no other abode—save the tomb. Here, then, we dwell—he brooding over the undying sorrow that fills his heart,—I not daring to call him friend and console him."

At this moment the clock struck four, an hour had elapsed since Mrs. Pitkin had departed with a promise to return "in a jiffey;"—and she now reappeared, her countenance much flushed, and her breath exhaling the strongest perfume of the juniper berry.

She however had her excuse: the matron had sent for her on particular business!

"If so, it must have been at the Fox and Anchor," muttered Mr. Scales: but perceiving that she had brought up a cooked steak in a covered dish, he suffered himself to be appeased by the prospect of dinner;—and it was agreed both by himself and the captain to dispense with potatoes, Mrs. Pitkin having again quite forgotten that they were ordered.

The repast was now served up; and it must be taken as a proof of contrition for previous neglect on the part of the worthy woman, that when she sallied forth for the beer and spirits she only remained a short half-hour away—it being usually calculated in the Charter House that a commission which one might perform for himself in five minutes, occupies a nurse exactly fifty-five to accomplish.

At last Mr. Scales and the captain were enabled to make themselves comfortable; and when the dinner-things were cleared away, hot-water was speedily procured by the aid of a batchelor's kettle. The poteen was first-rate;—the two gentlemen were in excellent spirits; and the hilarity of the evening was soon increased by the arrival of Mr. Frank Curtis, who had duly received his friend's letter at Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in the City.

CHAPTER CL.

THE COLONEL AND THE CAPTAIN.

The captain related to Frank all the numerous and varied incidents which had occurred during the forenoon of that eventful day; and the listener not unfrequently burst into shouts of laughter, as the gallant gentleman described the most ludicrous part of his adventures —we mean the little episode of the escape from the sheriff's-officers in Mrs. Rudd's garments.

Frank, in his turn, gave his gallant friend a hurried but significant intimation that Mr. Bubbleton Styles had "come down" with ten sovereigns—a figure of speech implying that the City gentleman had advanced that amount for the special behoof of Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis.

The first use the Irishman made of this subsidy, was then and there—fairly and cheerfully—to refund to Mr. Scales the monies advanced by the worthy Brother in the morning; and this little arrangement increased the good feelings of that gentleman towards his new friends, and enhanced the harmony of the evening.

By degrees, as the good liquor produced its exhilarating effect, the captain began to talk magniloquently of his Irish estates, "which were unfor-rtunately locked up in Chancery,"—Mr. Curtis told a great many wonderful stories of his intimacy with Princesses and Duchesses, "when he was in France,"—and Mr. Scales related a number of interesting anecdotes connected with the Charter House, and which had a signal advantage over the narratives of his companions, inasmuch as the former were all true, and the latter all false.

In the midst of the conviviality a knock at the door was heard; and on Mr. Scales exclaiming "Come in," the invitation was obeyed by a gentleman who was immediately introduced to the captain and Frank Curtis as Colonel Tickner.

The new-comer, who was an inmate of the Charter House, was a man of middle height, and was much older than he thought fit to appear to be; for by the aid of false teeth, a handsome wig, and whiskers well dyed, he was enabled to pass himself off as "just over fifty"—whereas his years had certainly numbered a good fifteen in addition to the amount specified. He was well dressed, and had rather an imposing exterior: but there was an unpleasant expression about the eyes, and in the lines around the mouth, which gave his countenance a sinister aspect, and denoted low canning, duplicity, and artfulness.

"Sit down, colonel," said Mr. Scales, when the ceremony of introduction had taken place; "and mix a glass for yourself. I told the captain you were sure to come—and he was most anxious to see you; for I know that military men are particularly fond of meeting each other."

This remark was made with a sly touch of satire, Mr. Scales glancing the while at the captain, as much as to say, "Now the ice is broken, and you can unmask him;"—for as sincerely as the worthy Brother did *not* believe Tickner to be a military man at all, so in proportion was he convinced that O'Blunderbuss *was*.

The colonel looked uneasy for a moment, while the captain, whose natural impudence was increased by his potations, put a bold face upon the matter, and eyed Tickner with lurking ferocity.

"And pray, sir, in what rig'ment had you the honour-r-r to ser-r-rve?" demanded the Irishman at length, with a menacing reverberation of the ominous r's.

"Oh! in several," returned the colonel, mixing his toddy without raising his eyes. "Might I ask the same question of you, captain?"

"Be Jasus! and ye may ask, sure enough, my frind," exclaimed O'Blunderbuss: "but it would be more polite on your par-r-t if you was afther answering my quaries first;—and thin it's meself that'll give ye my whole pidigree from the beginning to the ind of that same."

"I should beg to observe, sir," said the colonel, stirring up his liquor, on which he still kept his eyes fixed, "that it would be more in accordance with the rules of military etiquette if you were to give the first explanations—seeing that I have the honour to hold a higher rank than yourself in her Majesty's service."

“And, be the holy poker-r!” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss, flying into a passion: “that remains to be proved! There’s many a discharged cor-r-poral that dubs himself colonel, to my knowledge.”

“And there’s many a discharged cad to an omnibus that calls himself——”

But Colonel Tickner suddenly stopped short: for Captain O’Blunderbuss started from his seat, and, grasping the poker, exclaimed, “Be this holy insthrument, I shall be afther daling ye a gintle tap on the head, my frind, if ye dar-r to utther a wor-r-rd derogatory to my honour-r-r!”

Colonel Tickner stared in ghastly silence at the ferocious Irishman; and to add to the dismay of the former, Frank Curtis, who relished the proceeding hugely, whispered hastily in his ear, “For God’s sake, don’t provoke him! He’s the most terrible duellist in all London; he shot the Duke of Boulogne last year in Paris!”

“I really——did not——in fact, it was very far from my intentions——” stammered the discomfited colonel, casting a glance toward the door, to ascertain if there were any possibility of escape: but, alas! *that* was out of the question.

“Nothing but a mating, or the most abjict apology will suffice!” vociferated Captain O’Blunderbuss, perceiving that he had completely over-awed his antagonist. “Frank, my frind, run over to our lodgings and fetch my pisthols—in the box covered with green baize, you know—and, be the power-rs! we’ll fight it out across the table, each houlding the ind of a handkerchief:—that is to say, with Mr. Scales’ lave and, per-r-mission.”

“Oh! I shan’t interfere,” said the red-faced Brother enjoying the scene as much as Mr. Frank Curtis, who rose from his chair as if to depart for the purpose of executing the little commission respecting the pistols.

“Really, gentlemen,” stammered Colonel Tickner, glancing in bewilderment and dismay from one to the other: “I—I am sure—I did not——”

“Did ye mane to insult me?” demanded the captain, brandishing the poker, while his aspect seemed to acquire increased ferocity every moment.

“No—no—certainly not,” responded the colonel, catching at the hope of extricating himself from the deadly perils which appeared to hem him in around.

“And ye acknowledge yourself to be a liar and a scounthrel?” vociferated the terrible Gorman O’Blunderbuss.

“Why, my dear sir—as for that——”

“Don’t ‘*dear sir-r*’ me!” interrupted the Irishman, fiercely, “Acknowledge yourself to be a liar and a scounthrel—and on my part I shall be ready to acknowledge in retur-r-n that ye’ve made such an apology as a gintleman ought under the circumstances.”

“Oh! yes—mutual concessions,” observed Frank with a wink at Mr. Scales, who could scarcely keep, his countenance through a violent inclination to laugh.

“A liar and a scounthrel!” repeated the captain, as he advanced in a threatening manner towards the wretched victim of this egregious bullyism.

“Well, my dear sir—if it will satisfy you—and, as your friend observes, on the principle of mutual concessions—I—I——”

“Out with it, man!” roared the captain: “don’t keep us waiting all day—for the hot wather is getting could——”

“You’d better not provoke him any more,” whispered Frank: “or I shall be compelled to run and fetch the pistols—unless you prefer having your brains dashed out with the poker.”

“Oh! murder! ejaculated the miserable Tickner, turning deadly pale at the awful alternative suggested: “give me time to breathe, Captain O’Blunderbuss——”

“Not a moment!” cried the ferocious gentleman thus appealed to: “I must have complate satisfaction before ye brathe another puff!”

“Well, then—I admit that I—I am—what you said,” returned the colonel.

“Repate the words! A liar and a scounthrel!”

“A liar and—and—a scoundrel,” echoed the humbled and trembling wretch, wishing that the floor would open and swallow him up—or that any other equally improbable casualty might occur, so long as it should remove him from the presence of the ferocious Irishman.

“Ye hear his wor-rds, my frinds?” cried the captain: “he declar-rs himself to be a liar and a scounthrel. And now, as a man of honour-r,

I confiss myself completely satisfied. The apology is most handsome—and such as reflicts the highest credit on him as a gintleman. Give me your hand, sir-r!"

The colonel diffidently extended the member thus demanded; and the gallant Irishman shook it with such hearty good will, that its owner winced and writhed with the pain of the iron pressure.

"And now we'll spake no more on milithary matthers," said Gorman O'Blunderbuss; "but dhrink potheen at our aise, and converse on all kinds of things."

By this little arrangement the captain got rid of the necessity of giving any explanation relative to his own military career; and Colonel Tickner, speedily forgetting the deep humiliation to which the bullying character of the Irishman and his own craven spirit had subjected him, paid his respects with so much earnestness to the whiskey, that Frank was soon compelled to sally forth and procure another bottle—Mrs. Pitkin having returned to her own domicile under the plea of being "very ill," which in plain English meant "very drunk."

The conviviality was maintained until half-past ten, when Captain O'Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis rose to take their leave of Mr. Scales and the colonel. But before they departed, the Irishman renewed his expressions of gratitude and his protestations of friendship to the worthy Brother who had manifested so much kindness towards him;—and, highly delighted with their evening's entertainment, the two "inseparables" walked off arm-in-arm together.

Now how gloomy—how truly monastic appeared the Charter House, as they traversed the spacious court, bounded by the low, uniform ranges of buildings. Most of the windows were dark; but here and there a flickering light was gleaming—feeble and faint as the spirit of the old man for whose long lonely hours even that poor candle was a species of companion.

In spite of the natural liveliness of the two friends' dispositions—in spite of the whiskey they had imbibed—they shuddered as the aspect of the place, in the more than semi-obscurity of the starlight, seemed cold and cheerless to the view,—aye, and struck so to their very hearts.

Their footsteps raised echoes which sounded hollow and gloomy, as if coming from the midst of tombs; and if they paused for a moment, the silence was so deep—so profound, it seemed impossible that the place was in the very midst of the mightiest metropolis in the world.

The feelings of the two friends were such, that they could not have uttered a ribald word nor given vent to a jest or a laugh, as they traversed an enclosure where the stillness was so awful and the cloistral aspect of the scene so coldly, sternly monastic.

Had their way lay through a vast cathedral, at the silent midnight hour, they could not have experienced a sense of more painful oppression; nor would a deeper gloom have fallen upon their spirits.

It was a great relief when the porter closed the wicket of the massive gates behind them;—and as they hastily skirted Charterhouse Square—keeping a good look-out for fear of unpleasant prowlers in that region—the captain whispered to his companion, "Well, Frank—and, be Jasus! I'd sooner be knocked about the wor-r-ld as you and I are at times, me boy, than take up my quar-r-ters altogether in that place. It's all very pritty, no doubt, while one has his frinds with him; but whin they're gone, Frank, it strikes me that the loneliness becomes tin thousand times more lonely."

"I'm just of the same opinion, captain," returned Mr. Curtis. "And now where shall we put up for the night?"

"Be the power-rs! and we've cash in our pockets—aad it's afther pathronising some tavern we'll be until the morning, whin we'll take fresh lodgings," exclaimed the gallant gentleman, his naturally good spirits reviving, as he found himself safe in Aldersgate Street, and no suspicious-looking characters dodging him in the rear.

CHAPTER CLI.

THE CALM.—THE TEMPEST.

Return we now to Charles Hatfield and Perdita.

The gorgeous lustre of a Parisian summer morning streamed through the muslin curtains of a handsome chamber in the hotel at which they had taken up their abode: and the glory of that sun-light shone upon the nuptial couch, where the newly-wedded pair still slept.

The night of bliss had passed; and, wearied with love's dalliance, they had fallen into a deep slumber, the dreams of which were soft and voluptuous, and gave no forewarning of a coming storm.

The long, luxuriant, deep brown hair of Perdita flowed over the snowy whiteness of the pillow; and the dark, thick, slightly curling fringes of the closed eye-lids reposed on cheeks flashed with the ecstatic nature of her visions.

A gentle smile played upon her moist lips of richest red,—a smile that subdued the expression of resoluteness which her countenance was wont to wear, and gave an indescribable charm of serenity and sweetness to features usually indicative of such strong passions and such fierce desires.

But those passions were now lulled to rest: those desires were for the time assuaged;—and happiness filled the soul of the sleeping woman.

One fine, white, and robust arm lay outside the coverlid: the other supported the head, or rather half embraced the neck of her young and handsome husband.

The sunbeams seemed to kiss her flowing hair,—seemed to play with the exquisitely modelled arm that lay completely exposed,—seemed also to revel in the treasures of her naked bosom, so firm, so rounded, and so regularly heaving.

Sleep likewise sealed the eyes of Charles Hatfield: smiles likewise played open his lips;—and his countenance appeared a perfect specimen of god-like beauty incarnate in man.

Yes: they were a handsome pair;—and so far there was a remarkable fitness in their union—but in naught beside!

In perfect happiness had they sunk into the profound slumber which still enwrapped them;—for, on the one side, Charles Hatfield had become possessed of that woman of glorious loveliness who had enchanted—captivated—enthralled his very soul;—and, on the other, Perdita believed herself to have gained the title of *Vicountess Marston* already, and to have that of *Countess of Ellingham* in perspective.

It was nine o'clock in the morning—the morning succeeding the bridal night: and thus were the newly-wedded pair still sleeping in the nuptial couch.

Presently the door opened, and Rosalie entered the room,—Rosalie, naturally so gay, blythe, and full of spirits—but now with a cloud upon her brow, and evident anxiety in her manner.

Advancing towards the bed, she paused—gazed for a few moments upon the sleepers—and murmured to herself in French, "How handsome and how serenely happy they appear to be! What a pity it is to awake them!"—then, after another short pause, she said hurriedly, "And yet it must be—for *the stranger* is imperative."

Thus speaking, she touched Charles Hatfield gently on the arm; and he woke up, with a start. But Rosalie immediately put her finger to her lip to enjoin silence; and the young man, now completely aroused, surveyed her with mingled surprise and anger,—surprise at her mysterious behaviour, and anger at her intrusion.

"Hush!" she said, in a low but emphatic tone. "A gentleman insists upon seeing you—and, as his manner is so curious, I thought I had better awake you *first*, sir," she added, glancing significantly towards her mistress, who still slept on.

"A gentleman!" repeated Charles, a suspicion—almost a certainty of the real truth flashing to his mind: "describe him!"—and he also spoke in a whisper, though with emphasis.

Rosalie gave a hurried sketch of the individual who so imperiously demanded an immediate interview with her master; and Charles found that his conjecture was correct—too correct, indeed!

“Go to him—and say that I shall be with him in five minutes,” he observed, in a tone expressive of deep vexation;—and Rosalie retired.

Charles immediately rose from the couch, but without awaking Perdita; and, having hastily slipped on some clothing, he proceeded to the sitting-room belonging to the suite of apartments which he had hired at the hotel.

He now found himself face to face with his father!

Mr. Hatfield was pacing the parlour in an agitated manner, when the young man entered;—his countenance was very pale, and wore an expression of deep care: indeed, Charles was shocked when his parent, turning round to accost him, thus presented to his view an aspect so profoundly wretched—so eloquently woe-begone.

The young man, during the few minutes which had intervened from the time that Rosalie quitted his bed-chamber until the instant when he repaired to the sitting-room, had nerved himself with all his energy—braced himself with all his courage—mustered all his resolution, to undergo what he knew must prove a painful trial; for he expected accusations of disobedience and ingratitude—reproaches for unmanly conduct towards Lady Frances Ellingham,—in fine, a repetition of those scenes which had bitterly occurred at the Earl’s mansion in Pall Mall, and which, characterised by so much misconception as they had been, had materially tended to diminish the authority of the father and the respect of the son.

Yes: he had made up his mind to bear upbraidings and encounter the most painful remonstrances;—he had even resolved to recriminate in the old style—reproaching his father for the wrongs which he imagined himself to have sustained at his hands relative to the secrets attendant upon his birth and social position. But when he beheld the expression of deep care and the ashy pallor which sate upon that father’s countenance, his rebellious heart softened—his stern resolves gave way—his better feelings once more stirred within him;—and all on a sudden it struck him that there must be some reason for his parent’s altered appearance, of a nature more grave—more serious, than the mere grief which this runaway match could possibly occasion.

The thought that evil had happened to his mother flashed to his mind;—and in an instant all his imaginary wrongs were forgotten.

“Father—dear father,” he exclaimed, in a tone of earnest appeal; “keep me not in suspense! My mother——”

“Is as well, I hope, as under circumstances she can possibly be,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in a hollow and sombre tone.

“Thank God!” cried Charles, fervently.

“Is it possible that you still love your mother?” demanded Mr. Hatfield, whose countenance brightened up in the faintest degree, but in a manner as sickly as if the gleam of a dying lamp fell upon the rigid features of a corpse.

“Is it possible that you can ask me the question?” exclaimed the young man. “Oh! you know that I love my mother—my dear mother,” he repeated, as a thousand proofs of her affection for him suddenly rose up in his mind—rapidly as the spell of an enchanter might cause flowers to appear upon the surface of a stern and arid waste. “And you, my father,” he continued, taking his parent’s hand, and pressing it to his lips, “I love you also—in spite of what you may suppose to be my disobedient conduct!”

“No—no—you love me not!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, hastily withdrawing his hand which for a few moments he had abandoned to his son: “else never would you have acted thus. But tell me, Charles—tell me,—for I did not condescend to question your flippant French servant,—tell me—have I come too late to save you?—are you married to that young woman——”

“If you mean, father, whether Perdita Fitzhardinge is now my wife,” began Charles, drawing himself up proudly, and speaking in a resolute—almost indignant tone,—“I——”

“Perdita Fitzhardinge!” repeated the unhappy man, staggering as if from a sudden blow dealt by an invisible hand: “oh! then ’tis indeed she—and all my worst fears are confirmed! Villiers was right—and those officers were right also!”

“What mean you, father!” demanded Charles, now seriously alarmed—though knowing not what to think. “You speak of a young lady of ravishing beauty—elegant manners—spotless character——”

“Charles Hatfield, is she your wife?” asked the parent, now advancing close up to the young man, and pressing his arm so violently with the strong spasm which convulsed his fingers that Charles winced and almost cried out through the pain inflicted; for his arm felt as if it were grasped by fingers of iron!

“Yes, father—I am proud to inform you,” he said, again assuming an air of noble independence,—“I am proud to inform you——”

“Fool—madman—senseless idiot!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, his rage suddenly bursting forth with such volcanic fury that his son fell back in terror and dismay and eyed his father as if he thought that *he* must be insane: “you know not what you have done—the misery, the wretchedness you have prepared for yourself—the ashes you are heaping upon your own head—the infamy and disgrace you have

brought down upon yourself and all connected with you——”

“Father—father!” cried Charles, now becoming full of wrath in his turn: “you exceed the license which belongs to a parent even when the son is in his nonage! Remember that you are alluding to the marriage which I have thought fit to contract——”

“A marriage which will embitter the remainder of your days, sir,” retorted Mr. Hatfield, turning sharply round upon his son, and speaking with almost savage rage.

“This is unworthy of you—and I shall hear no more,” said Charles, in a haughty tone and with a dignified manner, as he made for the door.

“Stop, sir!” cried Mr. Hatfield, rushing after him and detaining him forcibly by the arm: “we may not part thus——”

“Speak not evil, then, of my wife!” exclaimed Charles, turning round, and darting on his sire a look of superb defiance.

“Your wife!” repeated Mr. Hatfield, his manly voice suddenly assuming the almost shrieking tone of a wild hysterical laugh: “your wife!” he said, now echoing his own words. “Oh! my God, that I should hear you call that woman—that vile, profligate woman, by the sacred name——

“Father!” ejaculated Charles Hatfield, now goaded to desperation, and raising his arm in a menacing manner: “forbear—forbear, I say,” he continued in a hoarse, thick voice,—“or, by the heaven above us! I shall strike even *you*!”

“Listen—listen, Charles—for God’s sake, have patience!” cried Mr. Hatfield, the thought now flashing to his mind that in his ungovernable passion he had dealt only in epithets and averments as yet unintelligible to his son—whereas he should at once have revealed facts, terrible and startling, crushing and overwhelming though they might be.

“I will hear you, father,” said the young man, now speaking in a tone of dogged sullenness “but again I warn you not to provoke me beyond the power of endurance.”

“No—no—I will not anger you, my son,” rejoined the unhappy parent, becoming comparatively calm and even mournful in his manner and aspect; “for, alas! I have tidings to reveal to you which will pierce like a dagger to your heart’s core. The woman whom you have wedded as your wife——”

“Again that contemptuous name of ‘*the woman*!’” ejaculated Charles, fire flashing from his eyes.

“Patience!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, firmly: “that woman has deceived you—duped you—entangled you, heaven alone knows how! to your utter undoing—for she is the profligate and abandoned daughter of a vile and tainted wretch—a returned transport!”

“’Tis false—false as hell!” thundered Charles, the workings of his countenance rendering him, handsome though he naturally was, hideous and horrible to behold.

“’Tis true—’tis true!” cried Mr. Hatfield, as if catching up the terrible emphasis with which his son had spoken. “Perdita Slingsby—for that is her name—is a wanton, beauteous though she may be: and it was but two days ago that I accidentally heard the full narrative of her profligacies in Sydney, from two officers quartered at Dover.”

When the dreadful accusation that his wife was a *wanton* had fallen upon the young man’s ears, his boiling rage was on the point of bursting forth, with all the violence of language and clenched fist, against the author of his being: but when the allusion to the officers at Dover immediately followed, the scene on the Parade suddenly flashed to his memory, and a faintness—a sensation of sickness came over him,—and he staggered to a sofa, on which he sank as if exhausted and overcome.

“Father—father,” he murmured, horrible suspicions now rising up one after another, with lightning speed, in his soul: “your words are terrible—they will kill me! And yet,” he added, in a firmer tone,as a ray of hope gleamed in upon his darkening thoughts,—“I am a fool to believe this tale! No—no—it is impossible! Perdita is pure and virtuous—and there is some dreadful mistake in all this.”

But even as he uttered these words, a secret voice seemed to whisper in his ears that he was only catching at a straw, and that he was in reality drowning in the ocean of truth which was pouring in with such sweeping rapidity and overwhelming might upon him.

“There is no mistake, my son,” said Mr. Hatfield, in a voice of profound melancholy. “Would to heaven that there were!” he added, with such deep conviction of the misery which his words implied, that all hope perished suddenly in the breast of his son. “You have become the prey to two designing women: for I heard terrible things at Dover, I can assure you! The officers to whom I ere now alluded, had recognised Perdita leaning on your arm——”

“Yes—yes: I see it all now!” exclaimed Charles, covering his face with his hands, and pressing his fingers with almost frantic violence against his throbbing brows.

“And those officers—with sorrow and grief do I tell you all this—had themselves shared the favours of Perdita in Sydney; and as for the mother of the abandoned girl—know you what has become of her?” suddenly demanded Mr. Hatfield.

“No: we missed her at Dover—just as we had embarked on board the French steam-ship——”

“Then you are doomed to receive another dreadful shock, my poor boy,” continued Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of deep commiseration: “for Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Fitzhardinge—or whatever she calls herself—was arrested at Dover, in consequence of a communication made by electric telegraph from London——”

“Arrested!” cried Charles, his amazement for a moment becoming stronger even than his deep—deep grief.

“Yes—arrested on suspicion of being concerned in a murder of an atrocious character at Pentonville!” added Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn and impressive tone.

“Merciful God!” ejaculated the young man, clasping his hands together as if in mortal agony: “surely I have fallen in with fiends in female disguise. But Perdita—Perdita,” he cried, the lingering remnants of affection causing him to hope that he was destined to hear nothing more terrible of *her* than the revelations which had already crushed him as it were to the very dust: “she at least, father, is unsuspected in this dreadful affair?”

“The old woman who *is* suspected, and whose countenance was seen by a witness as she issued from the house of the murdered man,—that old woman, who is no doubt Mrs. Slingsby, was accompanied by another and younger female——”

“Tell me no more, father!” almost yelled forth Charles Hatfield, literally writhing on the sofa, as if with the poignant anguish of a wound in a vital part.

“Compose yourself, my dear son—if it be possible,” said the disconsolate parent: “for I have many other things to tell you,—other dreams to destroy,—dreams equally as bright as the hallucinations which you had entertained relative to this wicked and hypocritical Perdita. But first I ought to observe that there appears to be no direct evidence to fix the murder of Mr. Percival——”

“Percival!” repeated Charles, another and still more dreadful pang shooting through his heart: “tell me—Percival did you say?—Percival—a money-lender——”

“The same,” cried Mr. Hatfield: “for I last evening read the entire account of the murder in an English paper which I saw at the hotel where I have put up.”

“Then is the horrible surmise too true—too accurate,” said Charles, in a hollow tone, while his face grew ghastly once more; “and it must have been these demons in female shape who caused his death. But on what night, father,” he demanded with abrupt impatience, “did the murder take place?”

“The night before you quitted London,” was the answer.

“Ah! then it is clear—clear—clear, beyond all possibility of doubt!” exclaimed Charles. “Yes—it was on the night in question that my note of hand was discounted by that same Percival—for Perdita has since told me that such was the name of the money-lender,” he continued, in his soul-harrowing musings.

“You have been raising money, then, Charles?” said Mr. Hatfield. “But that is a miserable—a contemptible trifle compared to all the rest! May I however ask you on what security—or on what prospects—you have obtained a loan and given a promissory note?”

“Father, henceforth there must be no secrets between us!” returned the young man, becoming respectful, submissive, and even imploring in his tone and demeanour. “The dreadful revelations of this morning have destroyed all that egotistical confidence in myself and my own wisdom——”

“Yes, Charles,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, taking his son’s hand and speaking in a kind, commiserating tone; “you have been too susceptible to first impressions—you have formed hasty opinions—you have grasped at shadows—you have revelled in delicious hopes and pleasing aspirations, without ever pausing to reflect that the very foundation-stone of all this castle-building was a mere delusion.”

“I do not comprehend you, father,” said the young man, now surveying his parent with profound surprise: “unless, indeed, you allude to the destruction of all the bright visions which I have conjured up respecting the false—the wicked—the abandoned Perdita.”

“No, my dear son—I am now seeking to direct the conversation into another channel,” responded Mr. Hatfield, with solemn emphasis; “for, alas! I can too well divine the deplorable error which you have adopted and cherished as a substantial truth.”

“An error, father!” repeated Charles, still completely mystified.

“Yes—an error of the most afflicting nature,—afflicting to you—afflicting to me—afflicting to your mother also,” added Mr. Hatfield, his voice becoming low and melancholy. “In a word, Charles, you believe yourself to be that which you are not—your ambition has blinded you—your pride has led you into the most fatal misconceptions——”

“Father, you allude to my birth!” exclaimed the young man, starting as he spoke. “Oh! is there any delusion in my recently formed

opinions in that respect?"

Mr. Hatfield rose—and paced the room for a few moments: the whelming tide of recollections of the past was now combined with that of the sorrows of the present and the fears for the future;—and his emotions were so powerful, that his voice was choked—his faculty of speech was for the time suffocated by ineffable feelings.

"Father—keep me not in suspense, I implore you!" said Charles, rising from the sofa and accosting his parent. "I am nerved *now* to hear any thing and every thing, however terrible, in relation to myself! Only keep me not in suspense, I beseech—I implore you!"

"Alas! my dear boy," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, turning towards him with tearful eyes,—"if I tell you all connected with your birth—I—I shall unmask myself—I shall stand revealed before you as a monster whom you must henceforth loathe and detest."

"No—no," cried Charles, now throwing himself into his father's arms and embracing him tenderly: "for the fatal difficulties—the cruel embarrassments, in which I have plunged myself by my accursed folly—my insane infatuation,—all these convince me that I need a kind friend and adviser—and in you, my dearest father, I shall find both!"

"Your language—your altered manner—your affection determine me to throw myself upon your mercy, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in a low and profoundly mournful tone; "yes,—'tis the strange—the unnatural spectacle of a father imploring a son to forgive *him*—the father—the stain and the stigma which mark that son's birth!"

"Holy God! have I heard aright?" ejaculated Charles, pressing his hand to his brow;—and, staggering back, he sank on the sofa,—not in a swoon—not in a state of insensibility,—but stunned and stupefied, as it were—and yet retaining a maddening consciousness of *all*!

"Yes," continued his father, speaking in a sepulchral, unearthly tone, and averting his head,—"you are, alas! illegitimate, my dear boy; and the hopes—the aspirations, which I *know* you have formed, are all baseless visions!"

"And yet," cried Charles, again starting suddenly from his seat, "you assured me—emphatically assured me, that my mother was pure—innocent—stainless;—and it was this averment that led me, in connexion with the discovery which I lately made of other great secrets,—it was this declaration on your part, I say, which led me to form those hopes—indulge in those aspirations!"

"Oh! my God—it is now that I am to appear as a monster in your eyes, Charles!" exclaimed the wretched father, in a voice of bitter anguish: "and yet to guard against all future misconceptions, since past ones have wrought such deplorable mischief—I must reveal every thing to you! Yes—your mother *was* stainless—*was* pure—*was* innocent;—and I—villain, miscreant that I was—I forcibly took from her that jewel of chastity——"

"Enough—enough!" almost shrieked forth Charles Hatfield, extending his hands imploringly: "utter not another word—I understand you too well already!"

"And you have *read* the history of my past life, Charles—is it not so?" asked the unhappy parent. "Yes—yes: I know you have *read*—in the *Annual Register*—the frightful narrative——"

"Father," said the young man, rising, and grasping the hands of his sire: "you must not blush in the presence of your son! Once for all, let me state that I *do* know every thing;—and now let the past—so far as it regards yourself—be buried in oblivion. My impertinent curiosity first led me to make those researches into mysteries which I should never have sought to penetrate;—and the knowledge I accidentally acquired, led me to form hopes which have exercised a fatal influence upon me! I discovered that you were the real Earl of Ellingham; and, deeming myself to be your legitimately born son, I conceived that you had wronged me by keeping me in darkness in respect to the title which I fancied to be my own,—in respect, also, to the higher title to which I believed myself to be the heir! Now—now, I can no longer blame you for having observed so much mystery: Oh! no—on the contrary, I have rewarded all your kindness towards me, with the blackest ingratitude."

"We will pardon and forgive each other," said Mr. Hatfield, solemnly: "you shall pardon and forgive me for the stigma that attaches itself to your birth—you shall likewise pardon me your mother's wrongs, even as she herself has long, long since pardoned me: and I, on my part, will think no more of all that you have lately done—save to extricate you from the cruel embarrassments in which by your hasty conduct, your imprudence, and your misconceptions, you have become involved. In a word, I will be to you as a kind friend and adviser;—and if henceforth I may not hope for your affection—at least I may reckon upon your gratitude."

"Yes—both, both!" cried Charles Hatfield, again embracing his father tenderly. "Oh! how wicked—how criminal I have been! A veil has fallen from my eyes—my soul has lost its dogged obstinacy—and I now perceive how ungrateful I have been to my dear mother and yourself. But if it be not too late to repair the past," he continued, retreating a few paces, and addressing his parent with a tone and manner of solemn earnestness,—"if it be not too late to regain my mother's love and yours also,—oh! then the remainder of my life shall be wholly and solely devoted to that one object! Yes—I will reinstate myself in your esteem—I will prove by years of affection and obedience how bitter is my remorse and how sincere is my repentance for the follies and indiscretions of a few weeks! But in the meantime, father—in the meantime, how am I to act towards the vile—the guilty woman, whom I lately loved so madly?"

"Where is she at present?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, profoundly touched by the contrition and altered feelings now manifested by his son.

“I left her asleep in a chamber belonging to this suite,” was the reply. “Oh! I dare not meet her again—for I fear that I should spring upon her like a tiger, and sacrifice her to my resentment! For all my affection has now turned to a bitter—burning hatred,—a hatred against herself and her more vile mother; and I am astounded when I reflect how completely I have been deluded by them. It appears to me a dream—a vision! I can scarcely bring myself to conceive that I could possibly have been so insensate—so mad—so blind—so besotted! Oh! I could dash my head against the wall, to punish myself for this atrocious folly!”

And the young man struck his clenched fists forcibly against his forehead.

“Compose yourself—in the name of God! compose yourself,” said his parent, rushing in upon him and restraining him from the commission of farther violence. “Give not way to despair, my dear son—meet your misfortune with courage——”

“Oh! it is easy thus to recommend patience and endurance,” exclaimed Charles, bitterly: “but think how cruelly I have been deceived! I was fascinated as by the eyes of a serpent;—the magic of her charms, the melody of her voice, the sophistry of her tongue, and the excitement of her caresses, threw spells of an irresistible nature upon me: I was enchanted—held captive in silken chains—dazzled by the almost superhuman beauty of that prodigy of deceit and wantonness! I was not allowed time for reflection—suspicion had no leisure to rise up in my bosom, much less to fix its habitation there;—for I was whirled along, as in a delirious dream, from the first instant that I met that woman until the instant when your revelations of this morning dispelled the entire illusion. The artfulness of that designing creature sustained a constant elysian excitement in my soul: a perpetual succession of insidious wiles, of apparent proofs of deep tenderness, and of caresses that would enthral the heart of a saint,—such—such was the magic course in which I was hurried madly along. Endowed with a wondrous presence of mind, she had a ready answer for every question that I put to her—even to the explanation of her singular name;—and, with a guile as profound as it was ravishing—with an artfulness as deep as it was calculated to enchant and captivate—she invested the history of her early days with a mystery which only increased my admiration, and made her appear more interesting in my eyes.”

“You cannot wonder, then, that you were so completely deceived, my poor boy,” said Mr. Hatfield, who had listened with great, though mournful interest to the eloquent delineation of causes and effects which the impassioned language of the young man had so graphically shaped. “But as for the designing creature’s name, I heard its origin from the officers whom I met at Dover. She is called *Perdita*, or ‘The Lost One,’ because she was born in Newgate—and her mother, in the moment of repentance for her own crimes, gave her that appellation as a memorial and a warning——”

“Heavens!” ejaculated Charles; “and I believed the specious—the plausible explanation which the artful girl gave me relative to her name! Oh! she is made up of deceit: the world has never known her equal in that respect. I have read of Circe, with her spells—and of the Syrens, with their perilous allurements;—I have read also of those Mermaids—with the heads and busts of beauteous women, and with the tails of monsters—and whose melting looks and ravishing songs enticed sailors to their coasts, only to fall victims to these unnatural devourers of human flesh:—but all these wonders of heathen mythology are surpassed by this modern Circe—this Syren of the nineteenth century—this Mermaid who preys, not on mortal flesh, but upon immortal souls!”

There was a terrible earnestness in the tone and manner of Charles, as he gave utterance to these words:—and his father perceived that the heart of the young man was painfully lacerated by the conviction of Perdita’s tremendous duplicity.

“Yes,” resumed Charles,—and Mr. Hatfield allowed him to speak on, knowing that feelings so powerfully excited as his had been and still were, must have a proper vent, in order that the soul might regain something approaching to the equilibrium of calmness:—“yes,” exclaimed the young man, passionately,—“she, whom I believed to be the mirror in which all excellent qualities were reflected, is the embodiment of every possible vice—every earthly iniquity. Oh! what a splendid personification of SIN would she make for the painter or the architect! But it must be a bold pencil or a powerful pen that could do justice to *her*,—aye, and a man deeply read in the mysteries of human life, to pourtray her character with accuracy! And that character I can read now;—and I know her to be a creature who has studied sensuality, with all the ardour of a glowing temperament—with all the vivid sensibility that could enhance the joys of amorous enchantment! Oh! mine was an idolatry such as a rapt enthusiasm pays, in its blind belief, to the Spirit of Evil, conceiving it to be the source of every virtue! Fatal mistake—deplorable error: shall I ever surmount the terrible consequences?”

“Yes—by taking courage, following my counsel, and placing me in full possession of all the minutest details of this distressing and perplexing case,” said Mr. Hatfield, assuming the part of a comforter, now that the indignation of his son had in some degree expended itself in those passionate outpourings which we have endeavoured to describe.

“Oh! fear not, my beloved father—my only friend,” cried Charles, warmly,—“fear not that I shall now conceal aught from you! I have obeyed the impulses of my own wrongheadedness—and I am suffering terribly in consequence: I have followed the dictates of my own wilfulness—and I have gone lamentably astray! The result is that I have no more confidence in myself: from the pinnacle of that proud independence which I sought to assume, I am dashed down into a state of childish helplessness. If you abandon me—I should not have courage even to attempt to extricate myself from this maze of embarrassments in which I am so cruelly involved: I should resign myself to my fate—I should sink into despair!”

“Cheer up, my beloved son—and think not for a moment of these dreadful alternatives,” said Mr. Hatfield: “but answer me a few questions, and I shall then know better how to act. Did you not find certain papers in a secret recess in the Earl’s library——”

“Yes—and those papers are safe,” replied Charles: “at least—Perdita has them secure in her writing-desk, and we will make her surrender them presently.”

“As her husband—alas! that I should have to speak of you as such,—you may break open that desk and take them by force,” said Mr. Hatfield! “Does the young woman know their contents?”

“Unfortunately she does,” was the mournful answer.

“And her mother——”

“Is equally well acquainted with them,” said Charles. “Even to save you a pang,—and heaven knows I would now do much to spare you any additional uneasiness,—I will not deceive nor mislead you in a single detail.”

“No—this is not a time nor a case for trifling, Charles,” observed Mr. Hatfield. “Then both these women know who I am?” he added, in a low and hoarse voice.

“Oh! my God!” cried Charles, giving vent to his deep vexation and obeying the impulse of his self-accusing spirit: “to what humiliations have I not exposed you, my dearest father? *Can* you—*will* you ever forgive me for all this?”

“Have we not had much to pardon—much to explain, on either side, already?” asked Mr. Hatfield, his voice now regaining its mildness—a mildness that was, however, mournfully subdued. “Well, then, my dear boy, give not way to these self-reproaches; for if I be anxious to obtain a certain knowledge of the full extent of these evils, it is only with the view of falling into no error and committing no oversight in extricating both yourself and me from the embarrassments that surround us. To return, then, to the immediate subject of our discourse—those women know *all*?”

“All—every thing,” replied Charles. “In that blind infatuation——”

“Compose yourself, my dear boy,” said Mr. Hatfield, in a voice slightly indicative of paternal authority. “Respecting the promissory note you gave the money-lender Percival——”

“Oh! now I shrink indeed from telling you the truth,” interrupted Charles, his countenance glowing with shame and confusion; “and yet—faithful to my promise—I will not mislead you. The note of hand to which you allude was signed—*Viscount Marston*!”

“If I recollect aright,” said Mr. Hatfield, “the account of the murder, as reported in the newspapers, states distinctly that no papers nor documents of any kind were found in the victim’s house—the tin-box, in which such things were probably kept, having been emptied of its contents. The assassin or assassins, then, whoever they may be, possessed themselves of all the poor man’s papers—and your note doubtless amongst the rest. In this case, we shall probably never hear of it again. But—knowing the two women as you do—can you believe that *they* were the murderesses?”

“No—I cannot think it!” exclaimed Charles. “What motive could they have had? Certainly not to recover my promissory note, since they believed me to be the heir to immense wealth;—and as they no doubt fancied that their connexion with me would place ample resources at their command, they were not likely to peril their lives by killing the man for the sake of the money which he might have had in the house. Besides, when I saw them on the following morning, there was no confusion—nothing on their part to denote that they had so recently committed a horrible crime; and, depraved—wicked—unscrupulous as they evidently are, I cannot bring myself to imagine that they could meet me with calm and unruffled countenances, only a few hours after having accomplished a midnight murder.”

“Let us hope that they are indeed innocent,” said Mr. Hatfield solemnly. “And now I will explain to you the manner in which I propose to deal with this Perdita.”

The interest and attention of Charles redoubled, if possible, as his father uttered these words.

“Thank heaven,” continued Mr. Hatfield, “I possess wealth; and by means of gold, every thing can be accomplished with such mercenary adventuresses as these. Perdita shall receive a handsome sum of ready money, and a suitable income allowed her so long as she shall consent to dwell upon the continent, take any other name than that which you have unfortunately given her, and never more molest you.”

But scarcely had Mr. Hatfield uttered these words,—and before his son had time to offer a single comment upon the proposed plan to be adopted,—the door opened, and Perdita entered the room.

CHAPTER CLII.

THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE SON'S WIFE.

The magnificent creature whom Mr. Hatfield now beheld for the first time, had perhaps never shone to greater advantage than on the present occasion.

She was absolutely dazzling—radiant—supernally grand, in all the glory of her queen-like beauty.

A French cambric wrapper, worked, and trimmed with costly lace, enveloped her form—fitting loosely, yet defining all the rich contours of her voluptuous shape;—and, though—having risen hurriedly almost immediately after awakening—she had no stays on, the natural firmness of her bust maintained its rounded proportions without any artificial support.

We have before said that her early initiation in a career of wantonness and the licentious course which she had pursued in Australia, had marred nothing of the first freshness of youth in respect to her;—and thus, though her wrapper was so far open at the bosom as to show that the glowing orbs of snowy whiteness were unsustained by the usual article of apparel, their contours were of virgin roundness.

Her dark brown hair had been hastily gathered up in two massive bands, silken and glossy, and serving as a frame to set off the height and width of the fine forehead, which rose above brows arching majestically, and almost meeting between the temples.

Her cheeks were slightly flushed with a carnation hue;—her large grey eyes shone brilliantly, and appeared to give a halo of light to her whole countenance;—her moist red lips, parted with a smile of happiness and satisfaction, revealed the teeth so perfectly regular and of such pearly whiteness;—and her neck arched proudly and with swan-like grace.

One arm hung negligently, but slightly rounded, by her side: the other, thrown across her form just above the waist, kept the folds of the wrapper together;—and from beneath the skirt of that elegant, tasteful garment, of almost gauzy lightness and transparency, peeped forth the beautifully-modelled ankles in their flesh-coloured silk stockings, and the charming feet in their embroidered slippers of pale blue satin.

Though, as we have before stated, she was not above the middle height, yet there was something truly regal and commanding in her deportment—something more than graceful and less than imperious in her carriage, and, altogether, she appeared a being to whom it would not be idolatrous to kneel.

On the contrary,—prejudiced and naturally inveterate as he was against her, Mr. Hatfield could well comprehend, even at the first glance which he threw upon her, how a young man of enthusiastic disposition and keen sensibility might love that enchanting creature with a devotion amounting to a worship.

The apartment was large and beautifully furnished,—the uncarpetted floor of oak was polished almost to mirror-like brightness,—vast looking-glasses, set in splendid frames, were suspended to the walls,—a massive or-molu time-piece and handsome porcelain vases filled with flowers freshly gathered that morning, stood on the mantel,—and through the casements, which reached from the ceiling to the floor, and which were only partially shaded by muslin curtains, flowed the gorgeous lustre of the cloudless sun, so that the room seemed filled with a transparent and impalpable haze of gold-dust.

Thus the whole aspect of that large and lofty apartment was magnificent and rich, bright and joyous;—and, had the minds of the father and son at the instant been in a different mood, they would have felt thrilled with admiration and delight at the presence of the magnificent creature who now entered an atmosphere so congenially glorious and sunny.

It seemed as if the beauteous being herself were surrounded with a golden halo,—as if the perfume of the freshly gathered flowers were the delicious fragrance of her breath,—as if the delicate feet and ankles bore her glancingly along a polished surface which she scarcely appeared to touch; while the immense mirrors multiplied the voluptuous form, as though other and kindred houris were moving about in attendance on their queen.

The effulgence of the warm sun played on her shining hair, as if a glory sate on that exquisitely shaped head,—gave additional brightness to the eyes that flashed with the natural fire of joy,—and rendered the fine and faultless countenance radiant and dazzling in its surpassing beauty.

Were that a room in a palatial dwelling,—were it an empress making her appearance,—and were the two men courtiers awaiting her

presence, the effect could not have been more grand—more striking,—and the courtiers would have fallen on their knees in mute adoration of a being that seemed almost divine!

But, alas! circumstances marred all those fine effects which the transcendant charms of a lovely woman might have produced;—for the soul of this woman corresponded not with her captivating exterior,—it was dark and hideous—inspiring horrible thoughts, and suggesting ideas of a nature so sinister, sombre, and gloomy, as to throw into the shade all the glory of the outward loveliness.

But, unsuspicious of the storm which was about to explode against her, Perdita entered that room;—and the influence of a night of love and voluptuousness and of elysian dreams lingered upon her countenance in the smile that it wore.

She had slept for nearly an hour after Charles Hatfield had risen so noiselessly from her side in the nuptial couch;—and when she at length awoke, she imagined that her young husband had been unwilling to disturb her when he himself arose. Nevertheless, she determined to seek him ere she passed through the routine of the toilette;—and hastily fastening up her hair, and assuming a slight apparel, she had proceeded to the sitting-room where she supposed him to be.

And there indeed he was: but not alone!

Still, when Perdita, on first entering the apartment, beheld *another person* with him whom she sought, she had no suspicion of the real truth, but imagined it must be some friend who had found out her husband's residence in Paris and had perhaps called to congratulate him on his bridal.

Thus was it that her countenance wore that delicious expression of pleasure and satisfaction, as she advanced towards Charles and *that other*;—and it was not until she was within a few paces of them, that she observed the foreboding looks which they cast upon her—even the aversion and the hate with which they *both* regarded her!

Then she stopped suddenly short, her countenance undergoing an immediate change—the smile disappearing, and giving place to an expression of proud defiance and haughty contempt; though she was still unconscious of the nature of the storm that she saw lowering so ominously.

"Charles, who is this person?" she demanded, indicating Mr. Hatfield with a movement of the head, accompanied by a slight inflection of the whole form—a gesture which would have become a queen.

"My father," answered the young man quietly;—and he turned away towards the mantel-piece.

For an instant Perdita seemed shocked by this announcement;—but in the next moment, as the thought swept across her brain that it was impossible for Mr. Hatfield to know aught seriously detrimental to her character, she crossed the room in a majestic manner, and, laying her long tapered fingers gently upon her husband's arm, said, "Is it possible that the remonstrances of your father should have induced you to repent of this alliance,—*you*, who have sworn to love and cherish me in spite of parents and all the world beside?"

"When a man discovers that he has taken a reptile to his bosom," said Charles, the words hissing through his almost set teeth, "he flings it away from him. He *ought* to crush it beneath his heel!"

The last sentence was added after a moment's pause, and ere Perdita, who was astounded at the tone, and manner, and words of her husband, had regained the power of utterance so as to enable her lips to shape a comment or a reply.

"Is it to me that this insulting allusion applies?" she demanded at length—her countenance becoming ashy pale, and her lips quivering with the rage which she still sought to subdue.

"It is to you that I addressed myself," exclaimed Charles, now turning round and confronting the woman whom he had lately loved with such madness, and whom he now loathed with such savage aversion. "Vile—polluted—wanton thing," he cried, unabashed—undismayed by the lightning glances that flashed from her wildly dilating orbs: "the mask is torn from your face as the film from my eyes—and I am no longer your dupe, though, alas! I am perhaps still your victim! I know all—all—every thing,—the depravity of your past life—the hypocrisy of your present course:—all—all is now revealed to me. Your evil fame has followed you from beyond the seas;—it overtook you on the Marine Parade at Dover;—and it now attaches itself for ever to your steps, in the capital of France. Oh! my God—how cruelly, how miserably have I been deceived!"

And the young man darted a glance of savage hatred upon the woman who, pale and motionless as a marble statue, seemed petrified by the crushing truths that fell upon her ears.

Meantime Mr. Hatfield stood aloof, with folded arms—listening to the words that his son addressed to Perdita, and marking their effect.

"That you were born in Newgate—of a woman condemned to death for felony, and then reprieved,—*this* was no fault of yours," continued Charles, in a slow and measured tone—for he sought as much as possible to prevent a violent outburst of the rage that boiled within him:—"that the mystic name of *Perdita*, or 'The Lost One,' should have proved prophetic of your after life, you also could not help;—and that, amongst the felonry of New South Wales, you should have become polluted—contaminated—and indeed *lost*, was perhaps a fate for which you are rather to be pitied than blamed. But here all sympathy ceases for you! Wherefore, on your arrival in England, did you seek *me* out to become your victim?—wherefore did your wretched mother dog my footsteps—accost me—ensnare me into a discourse to which she imparted a mysterious interest—and then lead me into your presence? Why did you open the battery of all your meretricious charms upon me?—why cast your spells around me—wean my affections from an estimable young lady who is white as snow compared with the blackness of *your* soul—and lead me on until the crowning act of ruin was accomplished yesterday in the Chapel of the British Embassy?"

“I have heard you with patience—and if you possess the generosity of a man and an Englishman, you will give me an equal share of your attention,” said Perdita, who, during her husband’s address, had recovered all her wonted presence of mind—though her heart was wounded in its very core. “It is true that I was born in Newgate—that I deceived you respecting the origin of my Christian name—and that I escaped not the contamination of a far-off clime into which my sad destinies threw me. But when my mother, for reasons which I think she made satisfactorily apparent to you, sought an interview with you,—and when that circumstance introduced us to each other, did you not proffer me your friendship of your own accord?—did you not next assure me that this sentiment had changed to the feeling of love?—did you not implore me, almost on your knees, to become your wife at the altar—I, who in the first instance had proposed and agreed to become your mistress only? And then you dare to speak of our marriage as the crowning act of you ruin,—that marriage on which you yourself so imploringly—so earnestly—so solemnly insisted?”

“Oh! yes—because I deemed you pure and virtuous!” exclaimed Charles, almost gnashing his teeth as the words of Perdita reminded him of all the arts which she had practised to ensnare him—all the sophistry she had used to make herself appear in his eyes every thing that she was *not*.

“Was it to be supposed,” she asked, impatiently and haughtily,—that shameless Perdita—“was it to be supposed that I would reveal to you the incidents of my past life? And yet, even if I had, I do firmly and sincerely believe that you would still have made me your wife!”

“No—never, never!” cried Charles, his voice and manner expressing loathing, abhorrence, and indignation. “But let us not bandy words thus. I have intelligence which—lost and depraved as you are, and vilely as you have treated me—I nevertheless grieve to have to convey to you,—for I cannot, even in my anger and hate, forget that you are a woman.”

“And that intelligence?” demanded Perdita, suffering not her countenance nor her manner to betray the deep curiosity and the suspense which her husband’s words had suddenly excited within her bosom.

“The intelligence regards your mother, and explains her mysterious disappearance at Dover,” continued Charles, who, as well as his father, now intensely watched the young woman’s countenance.

“Speak on!” she said, not a muscle of her face betraying any emotion:—and still she stood motionless and statue-like.

“Your mother was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Mr. Percival, the money-lender whom you represented to me as the discounter of my promissory note;”—and, as Charles uttered these words in slow and measured tones, he maintained his eyes fixed upon the pale but unchanging features of his wife.

“Then my mother has been accused of that whereof she is innocent,” said Perdita, in a voice so firm and resolute, yet devoid of passion, that her hearers felt convinced she was practising no artifice now. “It is true that Percival discounted your note: I myself received the money—and you can doubtless give your father a satisfactory explanation relative to the expenditure of the portion that is gone. If Percival have indeed met his death by violent means, it was not by the hands of two weak women that he fell.”

“Thank heaven! *this* crime at least cannot, then, be attributed to you,” said Charles. “There must be enough upon your conscience without *that*!”

“And have *you* nothing wherewith to reproach yourself?” demanded Perdita, still maintaining that majesty of demeanour which, with her now marble-like features, her motionless attitude, and her fine form enveloped in drapery that fell in classic plaits and graceful folds around her, gave her the air of a statue of Diana the Huntress or of Juno Queen of Heaven. “Have you inflicted no injury upon me?” she asked. “Yes—yes: and I will convince you that your conduct has been far from blameless in that respect. You loved me—loved me almost from the first instant that you beheld me. Yours was not a tranquil—serene—and sickly sensation: it was a fury—a wild passion—a delirium—a species of hurricane of the strongest, most fervent emotions. I was all—every thing to you: parents—family—friends,—Oh! you cared for none of these in comparison with me. The holiest ties you would have broken—the most sacred bonds you would have snapped—the most solemn obligations you would have violated, sooner than have resigned your hope of possessing me! All this is true—and you know it. Your love amounted to a madness—a frenzy, capable of the most unheard-of sacrifices, and as likely to hurry you into the most desperate extremes. For had I provoked your jealousy, you would have murdered me: had I fled and abandoned you, you would have pined to death—or committed suicide. In fine, yours was no common love—no ordinary affection. Poets never dreamt and novelists never depicted a love so boundless—so absorbing—so immense as yours. And what could result from such a love as this! The consequence was inevitable;—and that consequence was that I, who had never loved before, received into my soul a transfusion of the spirit that animated *you*. You were so happy in your love, that my imagination doubtless longed to revel in the same paradise which you had created for yourself;—and I was taught by you to love as profoundly and as well. In a word, you ensnared my heart—you obtained a hold upon my affections; and, as there is a living God above us! I swear that when you led me to the altar, you loved me not better than I loved you. And this love which I experienced for you, would have made me a good wife—a sincere friend—a conscientious adviser. I should have entered upon a new existence; and my soul would have become purified. True it is that I gave to the marriage-bed a body that was polluted and unchaste: but I gave also a heart that was wholly and solely thine;—and from the instant that our hands were united by the minister of God, it would have proved as impossible for me to have played the wanton with another as that the infant child should harbour thoughts of villainy and murder. Now you have learnt the antecedents of my life—and your love is suddenly changed into hatred. But did you not take me for better or worse?—did you not wed me, because you loved me!—did you not espouse me for myself alone! Oh! you should pity me for the past—and cherish

me at present and for the future: and your conscience tells you thus much even now!”

Charles Hatfield, who had listened with deep and solemn interest,—for his soul was absolutely enchained by this strange display of natural eloquence,—now shook his head impatiently.

“No! Then mark how fatal your love will have proved to me,” exclaimed Perdita. “You cast me off—you put me away from you;—and yet you cannot give me back the heart which you have ensnared. Wherefore—wherefore did you bring to bear upon me the influence of your ardent love, unless you were prepared to make every sacrifice unto the end? I am young—I am beautiful—and I might gain a high and a proud position by means of marriage: but, no—I am chained to *you*—and *you* are intent upon discarding me! Now reflect well on the probable consequences of this proceeding on your part,” continued Perdita, her melodious voice gathering energy, and a tinge of rose-bud hue appearing on her cheeks and gradually deepening into a flush,—while her eyes shone with a lustre that gave an almost unearthly radiance to her entire countenance: “reflect well, I say,” she repeated, “on the probable consequences of the resolution which you have taken. As your wife, and dwelling with you as such, I should have clung to, you—loved you with unceasing devotion—exerted all my powers to retain your esteem. Nay, more—in time I should have won your good opinion by my *actions*—as I had already secured it by my *words*. Amongst the entire community of women, there would have been none more exemplary than I;—and thus your love would have proved a saving influence—valuable to society at large, and blessed by the Almighty Ruler whom you worship. But how changed are these prospects! You are prepared to discard me—to thrust me away from your presence—to push me out into the great world, where I must battle for myself. *There* I shall find my circumstances terribly—-fearfully altered from what they were before your lips whispered the delicious but fatal tale of love in mine ears. For if I retain your name, I thereby proclaim myself a divorced wife: if I pass myself off as an unmarried young lady, I shall not dare to accept proposals for an alliance, be it never so advantageous—because the fear of a prosecution for bigamy would hang over my head. Will you, then, forgive me for the past, and receive me as an affectionate wife and reformed woman to your arms?—or will you send me forth, an outcast—with ruined hopes, blighted prospects, and a damaged character?”

Gradually, as she approached the end of this speech, Perdita had suffered her voice to lose its energy and its firmness, and grow tender, pathetic, and mournful—until at the close of her appeal, it became tremulously plaintive and profoundly touching,—while her form simultaneously relaxed from its statue-like rigidity—the head slightly inclining, the body bending in the least degree forward, and the hands joining as the last words fell from her lips.

For an instant Charles was about to yield to the appeal commenced with a dignity so well assumed, and terminated with a tenderness so well affected; but, at the critical moment, Mr. Hatfield, who had hitherto remained a mute spectator of this extraordinary scene, stepped forward, exclaiming, “No—no; a compromise of such a nature is impossible! Charles, the sophistry is indeed most specious—but the peril is likewise tremendous!”

“Yes—yes,” cried the young man, instantly recovering his presence of mind: “I told you, father, that she was a Circe—a Syren,—and now you have ample proofs of the assertion.”

While he was yet speaking, the appearance of Perdita underwent a rapid and signal change. She suddenly seemed to throw off the air of a suppliant, as if she were discarding a mean garment that was unbecoming and abhorrent: her cheeks acquired a deeper flush, her eyes a more dazzling brilliancy;—the blue veins in her forehead grew more clearly traceable—her nostrils dilated—her lips wreathed into an expression of sovereign disdain—and her entire form appeared to expand into more majestic proportions.

A moment before she had seemed a voluptuous beauty, in the melting softness of an appeal for pardon at love’s shrine: now she stood in the presence of the father and son,—proud—haughty—and magnificent as Juno,—and armed with authority to wield the lightning-shafts and the thunderbolts of Jove.

“Let us think of peace no more,” she exclaimed: “but war—terrible war,—war to the knife! Cast me off—thrust me from you—denounce me as the wanton Perdita—proclaim me to be born of a felon, and to have first seen the light in Newgate,—do all this if you will: I shall not the less remain your wife, Charles—and, as your wife, I am ennobled,—I bear the proud title of *Viscountess Marston*!”

“Miserable woman,” cried Mr. Hatfield: “you deceive yourself—even as Charles has been by himself deceived! For know that he is illegitimate——”

“’Tis false! you would delude—you would mislead me!” exclaimed Perdita, who, in spite of the tone of confidence in which she uttered these ejaculations, was painfully affected by the revelation that had elicited them.

“It is true—too true!” cried Charles, with a bitterness that carried conviction to the mind of Perdita.

“Then if I cannot proclaim myself to be Viscountess Marston,” she said, concealing with a desperate and painful effort the shock which she had just experienced,—“I can still have my revenge against you both;—for if *my* mother were a felon, Charles, *your* father was the same—if *I* were born in Newgate, the author of *your* being has passed through the hands of the public executioner!”

“Fiend—wretch!” ejaculated the young man, springing forward as if about to dash her on the floor and trample her under foot.

But the hand of his father suddenly grasped him as in an iron vice, and held him back; and all the while Perdita had maintained her ground—shrinking not a step, retreating not a pace.

“Coward!” she exclaimed, in a tone of ineffable contempt, as she kept her eyes—her large, shining grey eyes—fixed with disdain upon him whom she had lately loved so fervently and so well.

“Charles—Charles,” said Mr. Hatfield, in an imploring voice, as he held his son firmly by both arms,—“merit not by your actions that infamous woman’s reproaches. I was prepared for what she dared to address to me——”

“Oh! my dear father, this is terrible!” murmured the young man, who felt a faintness coming over him, as the words which Perdita had spoken concerning his parent still rang in his ears, and as he observed the deadly pallor which had spread over that parent’s countenance.

“Compose yourself, Charles,” said Mr. Hatfield, conducting him to a seat: then, turning round and accosting Perdita, he exclaimed, “Madam, let us treat this most unpleasant affair as a purely business-matter: in short, let us effect an arrangement which may be proper and suitable for both parties—the basis being the immediate separation of yourself and my son.”

“Yes—I have no longer any objection to offer to that proposal,” said Perdita; “for after his attempt to strike me, I despise even more than I hate him.”

“And just now,” exclaimed the young man, starting from his seat, “you declared that I possessed your heart. Oh! I am rejoiced that you have admitted your hatred towards me—because I have thereby received another proof of your boundless duplicity.”

Perdita smiled scornfully—but deigned no reply.

“Leave the affair in my hands, Charles,” said Mr. Hatfield, in an authoritative tone: then, observing with satisfaction that his son returned to his seat, the father addressed himself once more to Perdita, who remained standing near the mantel. “Madam,” he continued, “you have already heard that the bright hopes in which your husband had indulged, and the golden visions which he had conjured up, are all destroyed by the revelation which I have this morning made to him,—the revelation of the *one* fatal secret—his illegitimacy! Instead, then, of being *Viscount Marston* at present and *Earl of Ellingham* in perspective, he is still plain and simple *Charles Hatfield*—and so he is likely to remain. By consequence, you, madam, are *Mrs. Hatfield*—and not *Viscountess Marston* now, nor with any chance of becoming *Countess of Ellingham*. If you require proofs of what I am now telling you, I can exhibit them at once;—for, knowing beforehand the nature of the delusions in which my son had cradled his fancy, and the necessity of destroying them, I set out on this journey provided with several papers of importance. For instance,” continued Mr. Hatfield, taking forth his pocket-book; “here is the certificate of my marriage with Lady Georgiana Hatfield—and you may at once perceive by the date how impossible it is that our son could have been born in wedlock.”

While thus speaking, Mr. Hatfield had sunk his voice to the lowest audible whisper—so that Perdita alone heard him: for the revelation he was making was of a most painful nature, although rendered imperatively necessary under the circumstances.

Perdita glanced rapidly over the certificate, and bit her lip with a vexation she could no longer conceal;—for that document effectually set at rest the question of her husband’s legitimacy or illegitimacy; and she indeed found that instead of gaining a noble title by marriage, she had formed an alliance with an obscure young man who was dependant on his parents for even a morsel of bread.

“It now remains for you to decide whether you choose to proclaim yourself, wherever you go, to be the wife of Mr. Charles Hatfield;—or whether you will think fit to resume your maiden name—or any other that may suit your purposes—and maintain a strict silence henceforth relative to this most unfortunate alliance.”

Thus spoke Mr. Hatfield;—and Perdita appeared to be plunged in deep thought for a few minutes.

“And what are the conditions you annex to those alternatives?” she asked at length, fixing her eyes, which now shone with a subdued and sombre lustre, in a penetrating manner upon Mr. Hatfield’s countenance—as if she would *there* read the reply to her question even before his lips could frame it.

“If you proclaim yourself my son’s wife,” said he, meeting her look firmly and speaking resolutely, “I shall spare no expense in bringing the whole transaction before the proper tribunals in England, with the ultimate view of enabling him to obtain a divorce; and in this case I should not allow you one single farthing—no, not even to save you from starvation.”

“And have you not reflected,” asked Perdita, in a tone and with a gesture indicative of superb disdain,—“have you not reflected that a judicial investigation must inevitably lay bare all the tremendous secrets connected with yourself and family?—for you cannot suppose, that if you commence the part of a persecutor against *me*, I shall evince any forbearance towards *you*! No—it would be, as I said just now, a terrible warfare—a warfare to the very death,—and in which human ingenuity would rack itself to discover and set in motion all possible means of a fearful vengeance.”

“I have weighed all this,” said Mr. Hatfield, calmly; “and I have resolved to dare exposure of every kind—nay, to sacrifice myself, if necessary—in order to save my son.”

“And now for the conditions annexed to the second alternative?” said Perdita, maintaining a remarkable coolness and self-possession, although in the secret recesses of her soul she harboured the conviction that the triumph was as yet on the other side, and that she must

end by accepting the best terms she could obtain.

“If you will sign a paper, undertaking never to represent yourself as my son’s wife,” said Mr. Hatfield,—“never to molest him in any way—never to return to England, but to fix your abode in some continental state,—and lastly, that you will retain inviolably secret not only the fact of this most inauspicious marriage, but likewise all matters connected with myself and family,—if you affix your name to such a document,” continued Mr. Hatfield, “I will immediately pay you the sum of one thousand pounds, and I will allow you five hundred pounds a year so long as the convention shall be duly kept on your part.”

“And should you happen to die before me?” said Perdita, her manner now being of that cold, passionless nature which rendered it impossible for Mr. Hatfield to conjecture what sort of an impression his alternatives and their conditions had made upon her mind: “for you must remember,” she added, “that such an event is to be reckoned upon in the common course of nature.”

“Granted,” was the prompt reply. “My will shall contain a clause enjoining and empowering my executors to continue the payment of your income, from a fund especially sunk for the purpose, so long as your conduct shall be in accordance with the conditions stipulated.”

“And am I to understand that if I leave your son unmolested, I shall remain unmolested also!” demanded Perdita.

“I scarcely comprehend you,” said Mr. Hatfield, evidently perplexed.

“I mean,” replied Perdita, in a slow and measured tone, so that her words could not be misapprehended nor their sense mistaken,—“I mean that if I go forth into the world again as Miss Fitzhardinge, or Miss Fitzgerald, or any other name I may choose to take,—and if, receiving a suitable offer of marriage, I contract such an alliance,—I mean, then, to ask whether I may calculate upon acting thus with impunity at your hands?”

“My God! what interest can I have to molest you in any way?” cried Mr. Hatfield. “Would to heaven that you could both of you sign a paper effectually emancipating you from any claim on each other in respect to this accursed—this miserable marriage.”

“You are now speaking with unnecessary excitement, sir, after having reproved your son for the same fault—and also after having yourself proposed to discuss this matter in a purely business-like manner,” said Perdita, her lip curling slightly with an expression of scornful triumph.

“True, madam,” observed Mr. Hatfield, who, throughout this dialogue—since his son had remained seated apart—had treated Perdita with a perfect though frigid courtesy: “I was in error to give way to any intemperance of tone or manner—and I ask your pardon. You have now heard all that I have to propose——”

“And I accept the conditions,” she said. “Indeed, I shall be happy for this scene to terminate as speedily as possible.”

“A few minutes’ more will suffice, madam,” observed Mr. Hatfield. “If you will have the kindness to provide me with writing-materials, I shall not be compelled to intrude on you much longer.”

Perdita bowed slightly: and quitted the room,—not in haste—but with stately demeanour and measured tread, as if she were merely a consenting party to a business-transaction, and not a vanquished one on whom conditions had been imposed.

The moment the door closed behind her, Mr. Hatfield said to his son, “That woman is indeed a prodigy of beauty, and a very demon at heart. What an angelic creature would she have been were she as pure and virtuous as she is lovely!”

“Ah! my dear father,” returned Charles, who appeared to be completely spirit-broken and overwhelmed by the terrible occurrences and revelations of this memorable morning,—“you can now comprehend, perhaps,—at least to some extent,—the nature of that infatuation which I experienced in respect to this singular being. The world has never seen her equal for beauty and for wickedness.”

“The sooner you are removed from the sphere of her fatal influence, the better,” observed Mr. Hatfield. “When she re-appears, do you quit the room, and hasten as much as possible your preparations to depart with *me*.”

“Fear not, my dear father,” responded Charles, “that I shall, of my own accord, interpose any delay. But the papers—she will surrender them——”

“As a matter of course. You may have observed,” added the parent, “that, in spite of her haughty coldness, she was subdued and vanquished.”

At this instant the door opened, and Perdita returned, bearing her writing-desk in her hands.

Her countenance, though flushed, and thus presenting a striking contrast to its colourless appearance some time before, gave no indication of the nature of her feelings: impossible was it to judge of the emotions that might occupy her bosom, by that which is wont to be denominated the mirror of the soul.

Her step was still measured and stately, while her attitude was graceful; and, as she advanced towards the table—passing through the

golden flood of lustre that filled the room—the waving of her white drapes; gave an additional charm to the undulating nature of her motion.

From beneath her richly fringed lids, while affecting to keep her eyes half bent downward as if on the rose-wood desk which she carried, she darted a rapid glance at Mr. Hatfield—and then her look dwelt the least thing more lingeringly on her husband, who had risen from his seat and was leaning on the mantel.

By a natural effect of curiosity,—perhaps also in obedience to a last remaining particle of that immense love which he had so lately borne her,—Charles Hatfield likewise glanced towards her from beneath his half-closed lids, and also while he wished to appear as if fixing his gaze downward:—thus their looks met—unavoidably met,—and the blood rushed to the countenance of the young man, as he felt overwhelmed with shame, and bitterly indignant with himself, for having given way to this momentary proof of weakness.

On the other hand, a smile of triumph,—though faint, and perceptible only to her husband—not to his father, who saw not with eyes that had once looked love towards *her*,—curled the rich red lips of Perdita; and she thought within herself, "Even in the bitterness of your hate, the power of my charms revives a spark, albeit an evanescent one, of the fires that were wont to burn within your breast in adoration of me!"

All this dumb show—this mute expression of the strangest, and yet the most natural feelings on either side, occupied but a few moments;—and then, as Perdita placed the desk upon the table, Charles turned to quit the room.

"Here are writing materials, sir," she said to Mr. Hatfield, not choosing to appear to notice the departure of her husband; for all the pride of this extraordinary woman was aroused to a degree which in a being of lesser energy would have been totally incompatible with the frightful exposure that had been made of her depravity and deceit.

But the consciousness of possessing the loveliness of an Angel rose superior to the shame of being proved to be endowed with the profligacy of a Demon: the knowledge that she was so pre-eminently beautiful was for her a triumph and a glory which, in her estimation, threw into the shade the certainty of her wantonness and guile;—she flattered herself and fancied that, even were her true character revealed in its proper colours to all the world, the darkness of her soul would be absorbed and rendered invisible by the transcendant brilliancy of her outward charms.

Thus, even in the presence of the husband to whom she was unmasked, and of the indignant father who had unmasked her, the pride of her loveliness enabled her to maintain that haughty demeanour which we have explained;—for it was not Perdita who was likely to melt into tears—to supplicate for mercy—to acknowledge shame or remorse—or to kneel to those whom she now looked upon as her enemies. Unless, indeed, she had some grand object to accomplish, or some important end to gain;—and then she could veil her pride beneath an assumption of all the passions—all the emotions—and all the tender feelings which she might deem it expedient to affect.

To return to the thread of our narrative.

"Here are writing materials, sir," she remarked, as she placed the desk upon the table: then, drawing a chair near, she seated herself in a calm and dignified manner, and with all the appearance of one who knew and felt that she had important business in hand.

Mr. Hatfield bowed—seated himself likewise—and proceeded to draw up a document including the conditions which he had already specified, and which the lady had agreed to.

While he was writing, Perdita kept her eyes fixed upon him, as if she could tell by the movement of the pen the very words it was forming, as the hand which held it travelled rapidly over the paper.

At length the document was finished; and Mr. Hatfield presented it to Perdita for her perusal. While she was engaged in reading it, he drew forth his pocket-book, and counted thence ten notes, each of a hundred pounds, upon the table.

"I have no objection to offer to this deed," said Perdita, taking up the pen to sign it.

"Here is the amount promised," said Mr. Hatfield; "and I will now give you an undertaking relative to the payment of the income which I have promised you."

Perdita bowed coldly; and he immediately drew up the second paper.

"I must now request you to give me up all the *private documents* which my son placed in your hands for safe keeping," observed Mr. Hatfield.

"They are in the upper part of that desk—and you can take them," said Perdita, without the least hesitation; for she was naturally prepared for this demand, and had no object to serve in refusing it.

She then signed her undertaking, while Mr. Hatfield possessed himself of the documents and looked them carefully over to ascertain that none were missing.

Having satisfied himself on this head, he gave Perdita the money and the undertaking which he had prepared; and thus terminated this

strange business.

“I have now a few observations to make,” said Perdita; “but they are not of a nature to revive any unpleasant discussion. They concern matters entirely personal to myself. Although I have declared—and emphatically declare again—that my mother is innocent of the crime on suspicion of which you inform me that she has been arrested, the judicial investigation will naturally lead to a most unpleasant exposure of her *name*. It is therefore probable that my interests and views may be served by a change of *my name*—as I shall not of course bear that which the marriage-ceremony of yesterday gave to me. Should I adopt such a course, I will acquaint you by letter with the fact——”

“Pardon me for interrupting you, madam,” said Mr. Hatfield; “but I shall seek not to become acquainted with any particulars that may hereafter concern you. Every quarter you can draw upon me, through any banker, in any part of the world where you may happen to be; and you are at liberty to use any name you may think fit—save *one*. I shall know that the draft is yours; and you may rest assured that it will be duly honoured.”

“Then we have now no more to say to each other,” observed Perdita, rising from her seat, and mechanically drawing the muslin wrapper around her, in such a manner that it displayed all the full proportions of her fine figure.

Mr. Hatfield bowed a negative,—then immediately added, “But perhaps you will have no objection, madam, to remain here until my son shall have made his preparations for departure?”

“Oh! certainly.” cried the young woman, her lip curling haughtily. “Think not, sir, that I shall condescend to use any arts in order to win him back to me;—although well aware am I that if I chose to do so, I should speedily behold him languishing at my feet.”

Scarcely were these words uttered, when Rosalie entered the room, and addressing herself to Mr. Hatfield, said, “My master, sir, is waiting for you below.”

The abigail, who was evidently at a loss to comprehend the nature of all that was going on,—though she saw enough to convince her that something very uncommon and unusual was taking place,—retired as soon as she had delivered this message;—and Mr. Hatfield, as he glanced towards Perdita while bowing to take his leave, observed that her countenance had again grown marble-like with pallor.

For now that the conviction that Charles was really gone was forced upon her mind, a pang of regret struck to her heart,—regret to lose one—*the first*—whom she had ever really loved;—and for a few instants she felt as if all her affection for him had suddenly revived with tenfold violence.

But this weakness on her part was speedily dissipated: her pride resumed its empire,—and she remembered likewise that her connexion with him had not only put her in possession of a large sum of ready money, but had likewise assured her of a handsome annual income for the remainder of her days.

Thus, almost before Mr. Hatfield had reached the room-door, the colour had returned to her cheeks,—and her countenance became radiant with triumph,—for she murmured to herself, as she contrasted her present position with that in which she had first set foot on European soil, “It is my beauty that has done all this!”

CHAPTER CLIII.

FATHER AND SON.

Mr. Hatfield found his son waiting for him in the coffee-room; and, entering the *citadine*, or one-horse hackney-coach, in which the former had arrived, they proceeded to the hotel at which he had put up, and which was in the Place Vendôme.

It was now past eleven o'clock; for the incidents related in the two preceding chapters, had occupied two full hours:—and, during that interval, how many revelations had been made—what changes of feeling effected—what new emotions engendered—what bright visions destroyed!

Yet such is human life;—and two minutes, instead of two hours, are often sufficient to hurl down the finest fabrics of happiness which the imagination has ever built up in the realms of fancy or the sphere of reality.

On arriving at the hotel in the Place Vendôme, the father and son repaired to the apartment occupied by the former; and Charles threw himself on a sofa, as if exhausted and overwhelmed by the terrible excitement he had undergone that morning.

Mr. Hatfield related to him all that had passed between Perdita and himself after the young man had quitted the room; and Charles was rejoiced,—if rejoiced he could be in the midst of the strange thoughts and reminiscences which crowded upon him,—to learn that the family papers were secure in his father's possession.

"And those papers shall no longer be a source of alarm and embarrassment to those whom they so deeply regard," said Mr. Hatfield, when he had brought his brief narrative to a conclusion: then, ringing the bell, he ordered the waiter who answered the summons to bring him a lighted candle.

This command was speedily obeyed; and when the domestic had retired, Mr. Hatfield, having thrown all the documents upon the hearth, set them alight. While they were consuming,—those precious papers, which were worth an Earldom to him, did he choose to avail himself of the proofs which they contained,—both himself and his son watched them with a fixed gaze, but with different emotions. For Charles sighed as he thought of the bright dreams which the perusal of those papers had so lately excited in his imagination; and Mr. Hatfield experienced an indescribable relief in witnessing their destruction.

"Now," he exclaimed, in a tone of triumph, "no living soul can dispute my brother's right to the rank which he bears and the estates which he possesses! Nor think, Charles," he added, turning to his son, and speaking in a calmer and more measured voice,—"think not that it costs me a pang thus to dispose of these papers. The flame has died away—naught save a heap of tinder remains—and I have willingly and cheerfully resigned the power of ever doing mischief, or being made the instrument of wrong, towards a brother to whom I owe so much. But enough of this: and now tell me, Charles, in details as ample as you can bring your mind to endure, the whole particulars of your unfortunate connexion with these women, in order to convince me that nothing more remains to be accomplished to rid ourselves completely of them. For you must remember that though we have managed to dispose of the daughter, the mother still possesses a knowledge of many secrets which we would not have revealed."

Charles immediately complied with his father's request, and narrated how Mrs. Fitzhardinge had accosted him in the street,—how she had spoken mysteriously, and thereby induced him to accompany her to Suffolk Street,—how he had there found himself in the presence of Perdita,—and how Mrs. Fitzhardinge on a subsequent occasion mentioned certain family matters evincing her knowledge of special secrets which she alleged to have been revealed to her by the gipsy Miranda.

"Then it was not from your lips that she first learnt the circumstances connected with myself!" said Mr. Hatfield, interrogatively.

"No: she particularly mentioned the gipsy as her authority for all she knew and alluded to," was the reply.

"But the gipsy was unaware of the fact of my mother's marriage with the late Earl of Ellingham," observed Mr. Hatfield; "and consequently she was ignorant of the legitimacy of my birth and the rights belonging to me thereupon."

"Oh! now a light breaks in upon my mind!" exclaimed Charles. "I remember that she was surprised when I told her that I was a young nobleman, as I did then really believe myself to be; and I likewise recollect that she afterwards spoke to me in a manner which, while pretending a full and perfect acquaintance with all our family affairs, led me to give answers which were doubtless revelations of secrets to her. But all this did not strike me at the time: now, however, that the film has been removed from my eyes, I behold things in a clearer and truer light."

“Yes—and I also can understand this matter,” said Mr. Hatfield, after a few moments’ deep thought “On their return to England, these women must have fallen in with Miranda: from her lips they heard enough to put them in possession of secrets which they doubtless intended to use for the purpose of extorting money from *me* through *you*. Then your infatuation in respect to the daughter, led you to speak to the mother in such a random, inconsiderate manner as to make her more fully aware of our family’s position. Thus, while affecting to know all, she drew from you those details which filled up the chapters that were wanting in the history as Miranda originally told it. Yes—this must be the truth and the explanation of the whole affair;—and now it remains for us to hasten to England without delay, and, in case the old woman shall be relieved from the charge at present existing against her, purchase her secrecy and her exile in the same way as we have arranged with her daughter.”

“But how can I face my mother?” asked Charles, in a tone expressive of the deepest grief: “how meet the Earl of Ellingham, whom I have sought to injure—and Lady Frances, to whom I have conducted myself in so scandalous a manner?”

“Now you recognise the impropriety of your behaviour towards her!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. “Oh! I am rejoiced to perceive that your heart is open to impressions of such a saving nature!”

“The incidents of this day have made me an altered man,” said Charles, emphatically.

“Then am I almost happy that they have occurred!” cried his father. “The teachings have been bitter—bitter indeed, my poor boy; but the results may constitute an ample recompense alike to yourself and your parents. *We* have recovered a son—*you* have acquired an experience ten thousand times more valuable than the best precepts ever inculcated by mortal tongue.”

“Oh! this is true—most true, father!” exclaimed Charles. “But you have not answered the questions—the painful questions—which I have put to you.”

“First, then, with regard to your mother,” responded Mr. Hatfield, “you know that she will receive you with open arms. In respect to the Earl, he must be told all—every thing; and you may count upon his generosity. But it is with reference to Lady Frances Ellingham, who loves you—from whom the causes of your flight have been carefully concealed—and who cannot be informed of your sad connexion with a profligate woman,—Oh! it is in regard to her, that I know not how to act—that I am bewildered—cruelly embarrassed!”

“Remember, my dear father,” said Charles, in a tone of deep humility, “that henceforth I shall do your bidding in all things. You have but to speak—and I obey.”

“Think not, my dear son,” answered Mr. Hatfield, “that I shall claim of you a deference incompatible with your age and social position—or that I shall attempt to exercise an authority that may seem to have borrowed any taint of severity from the experience of the past. No: but I shall counsel and advise you as a friend—and in your best interest shall I ever speak. On our arrival in London, we will not return immediately to Pall Mall; but we will repair to an hotel, whence I will send privately for the Earl; and his advice will assist me in respect to the course to be observed towards his amiable daughter. And now, Charles, do you feel yourself capable of commencing at once our journey homeward?—or are you too much exhausted——”

“No—no: let us depart from Paris without delay!” exclaimed the young man. “I have no longer any object in remaining here.”

Mr. Hatfield rang the bell; and a waiter made his appearance.

“A chaise-and-four as speedily as possible,” was the laconic command given; “and you must have our passports backed for Boulogne or Calais.”

The domestic bowed and withdrew.

Two hours afterwards the father and son were seated together in the chaise, which was rolling rapidly along the road to Saint Denis.

“I will now give you some account of the adventures which I experienced in pursuit of you,” said Mr. Hatfield, who felt that the silence previously existing between himself and Charles was growing painful: for they had not uttered a word from the moment they entered the vehicle until Mr. Hatfield now spoke—an interval of nearly half-an-hour.

“I shall be pleased to hear them,” observed the young man, anxious to divert his thoughts from the painful topics that were naturally occupying them: “for I must confess that I am at a loss to conjecture how you happened to fall in with the officers at Dover, and how you were enabled to trace me to the hotel where you this morning found me.”

“The explanation of all this is readily given,” said Mr. Hatfield; and as the chaise was rolling along the unpaved part of the road, there was no effort necessary to make his voice audible. “I shall commence with the incidents of the morning on which you quitted London in company with the two females whose pernicious influence has worked so much mischief. You remember that a most painful interview took place between yourself and me in the library, and that you burst away—perhaps just at the moment when explanations might have arisen to convince you of the futility of your ambitious hopes and golden visions in respect to birth and title. Shortly after you thus left me, the Earl entered the room; and a conversation which took place, led to the mention of the secret papers. He sought for them in the recess to which he had consigned them—and they were gone. At the same moment I obtained the conviction that the

Annual Register for a certain year, and containing a certain dreadful narrative, had been lately read. Then a light broke in upon the Earl and myself; and we penetrated the motives of the strange conduct you had recently observed towards your parents. At this juncture, Mr. Clarence Villiers made his appearance; and, on consulting him, we learnt to our dismay that the women who passed under the name Fitzhardinge were his aunt and cousin,—Mrs. Slingsby, who was transported years ago for forgery—and Perdita, her illegitimate child, born in Newgate, a few weeks previous to her departure. You may conceive the anguish which we endured when we found that you had become connected with such women; and Villiers hastened to Suffolk Street to obtain an interview with you."

"Would to God that he had succeeded in finding me—that my departure with those wretches had been only delayed a few minutes!" cried Charles, still a prey to the most harrowing feelings.

“Alas! you had already fled,” continued Mr. Hatfield; “and when Villiers returned to communicate this fact, an instantaneous pursuit was resolved upon. Clarence took one road—the Earl another—and I chose the road to Dover. I was mounted on a good horse, and must have inevitably overtaken you before you had proceeded many miles, when, on turning an angle of the road, I suddenly encountered a light chaise-cart that was turning the corner at a furious rate. The shock was violent; and I was hurled from my horse with such force that I was stunned by the fall. When I recovered my senses I was lying on a bed at a small road-side tavern; and a candle was burning in the room. It was night: hours had elapsed since the accident which had occurred; and during that long interval I had remained senseless—unconscious of all that was passing. A surgeon had been sent for from Greenwich, near which place the accident occurred; and he was an ignorant quack who had adopted no effective measures to recover me. But nature had at length asserted her empire in that where medical mismanagement had necessarily failed to produce any good result; and I recovered my powers of thought—only to experience the bitterest anguish at the delay that had taken place. Ill and suffering as I was, I endeavoured to rise, with the determination of pursuing my journey; but this was impossible. For in the first place I was too much exhausted to leave the couch on which I was thus helplessly stretched; and, secondly, I learnt, to my increased annoyance, that my horse was injured in a serious manner. To be brief, I resigned myself to the necessity of at least remaining a few hours longer in that place; and a deep sleep came over me. In the morning I awoke, much refreshed, though still suffering from the pain of the severe contusions that I had received. All hope of continuing my journey on horseback was destroyed; and I accordingly procured a post-chaise in which I hastened on to Dover. There I arrived in the afternoon; and by accident I put up at the same hotel where you and your female companions had stopped. On inquiring I heard that yourself and the young lady had departed for Calais in the morning, and that the old one had been arrested on her way to the port, in consequence of a communication received by electric telegraph from London. No steam vessel was to leave for France until the following day; and I was therefore compelled to wait patiently at the hotel. Patiently, indeed! No—*that* was impossible;—for all these delays were maddening, under the circumstances. But I will not dwell at unnecessary length on any portion of my narrative—much less upon the nature of the feelings which I experienced at that time. In the evening I dined in the coffee-room—if the mere mockery of sitting down to table and eating nothing can be called dining; and, while I was thus seated at a repast which I did not touch, I was suddenly interested in a conversation which was taking place between two officers who were discussing a bottle of wine at an adjacent table.”

“Oh! I ought to have perceived that there was something mysterious and wrong in that adventure upon the Marine Parade!” cried Charles, literally savage with himself at his blindness and folly. “But I was so completely infatuated by that artful, designing creature ____”

“I must implore you to compose yourself,” interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in an earnest but kind tone: “for if I am now relating to you all that occurred to me, it is only that you may become acquainted with everything, and have nothing left behind as a cause for future excitement. Therefore I will be explicit with you respecting the substance of the conversation which was passing between those officers in the manner I have described. Indeed, you may conceive my astonishment when I overheard one of them mention the name of *Perdita*; for that is by no means a common one—and perhaps this woman is the only being on the face of the earth who bears it. I accordingly listened—and in a short time the whole adventure which had taken place on the Parade the evening before, became known to me. Then I addressed myself to the two officers, stating that I had overheard their remarks, apologising for my rudeness in listening, but excusing myself on the ground that the young gentleman whom they had seen with Perdita was nearly allied to me, and that I was, in fact, in pursuit of him. They assured me that no apology was necessary; and I joined them in conversation. Then was it that I learnt a dreadful tale of female depravity; for it appears that Perdita became indeed the ‘*Lost One*’ at a very early age, and that her favours were distributed in Sydney to any good-looking young man who might happen to please her fancy.”

“Vile—detested Perdita!” ejaculated Charles, almost gnashing his teeth with rage.

“Yes—you must know her character fully, my poor boy,” said Mr. Hatfield; “for fear that she should ever again endeavour to exercise her syren influence upon you.”

“Oh, such an attempt would be utter madness on her part!” cried Charles, now speaking with every symptom of the deepest indignation and even loathing. “But what more said the officers whom you thus singularly encountered?”

“It appears,” continued Mr. Hatfield, “that Perdita was not thoroughly depraved in the sense in which we allude to an unfortunate woman who plies her hideous trade for bread. No—she bartered not her charms for gold. Indeed, though very poor, she would scarcely ever receive any recompense from her favourites—unless delicately conveyed in the form of presents. But money she never took: her pride revolted at *that*,—and it was purely through the wantonness of her disposition and the burning ardour of her temperament that she plunged headlong into a career of licentiousness.”

“And I to have fallen the victim to such a polluted wretch!” exclaimed the young man.

“At Sydney,” continued Mr. Hatfield, “she was looked upon as a species of prodigy. Endowed with an intellect as powerful as her beauty was great, and possessing extraordinary natural abilities, she listened with eagerness to the conversation of those officers and other gentlemen who became her favourites, and treasured up all the information she could thus acquire. She was also fond of reading the newspapers sent from England, and all works treating of the mother-country and the principal nations of Europe; and thus she gleaned a vast amount of miscellaneous knowledge, fitting her to become a woman of the world. With singular facility, too, she studied and appropriated the gentility of gait, demeanour, and manners which she observed in her superiors; and the very bearing of the ladies in Sydney, as they walked abroad, was noted and adopted by her. Thus even in her poverty, to which she clung rather than surrender up

her independence by becoming a wife or a kept mistress—for she might have been either—even in her poverty, I say, there was an air of lofty pride and calm hauteur about her, which would have led a stranger to fancy that she had sprung from an aristocratic stock, whose family fortunes had decayed. Moreover, her spirit was indomitable and fiery; and she knew full well how to avenge an insult. Did she receive overtures from any one who was displeasing to her, she would reject them with scorn; and, if possible, she would punish the adventurous suitor, in one way or another, for his insolence in addressing her. It was her delight at times to throw around herself—her deeds—her words—and even her entire character, a veil of mystery, and to affect an eccentricity of habits and a singularity of manner which made many ignorant and credulous people imagine that she was a being of no common order. Amongst those who might be properly styled her equals, she was reserved, cold, and distant; and even to those whom, in the same sense, we may denominate her superiors, she demeaned herself condescendingly, as if conferring a favour on them by her presence. In her amours, she maintained this singular pride, as if she were a Catherine of Russia, inviting her lovers to her arms, but never yielding to an invitation that might come from them. In a word, this Perdita was looked upon as the most remarkable, and at the same time the most unintelligible—the most incomprehensible character at Sydney; and even the most respectable persons were anxious to have her pointed out to them, when they walked abroad. Endowed with such a splendid intellect—possessed of such rare and almost superhuman loveliness—robing herself, as it were, in mystery—and evincing so proud a spirit, as well as such an aptitude for the self-appropriation of the refinements and the etiquette of genteel breeding,—it cannot be wondered at if Perdita should have been regarded in no common light by the inhabitants of the penal settlement. But from all I have now told you, Charles, it is easy for you to comprehend how dangerous is the character of such a woman—how completely she must be the mistress of every art in the school of hypocrisy, guile, and deceit; and if I have been thus elaborate in my details respecting her—if I have thus minutely recapitulated all that I learnt from the two officers at Dover—it is simply to place you more effectually upon your guard with reference to that syren ——"

"I have already said," interrupted Charles, speaking with the vehemence of sincerity and of deep conviction, "that never—never could she resume her empire over me! Oh! my dear father, the lesson has been too terrible not to have served as a warning; and sooner would I seek the embrace of a hideous serpent, than suffer myself to be allured back to the arms of Perdita. And—oh!" ejaculated the young man, a sudden reminiscence flashing to his mind, "I should have taken warning, days and days ago; for I recollect a fearful dream which I had, and which I must now look upon as providential! Madman that I was to neglect so solemn a foreshadowing of the truth!"

"Compose yourself, Charles," cried Mr. Hatfield; "and now let me finish my narrative. I had reached that point which related to my accidental interview with the officers at Dover, where I was compelled to pass the night—a night of cruel and torturing suspense! Next morning, I crossed to Calais, and there I obtained a trace of you at Dessin's hotel. Without delay I took a post-chaise, and hurried on in pursuit. I reached Paris at five last evening, and put up at the hotel whence we started just now. But I had not any time to lose, for I felt convinced that you intended to marry Perdita. I accordingly hurried off to the British Embassy, either to know the worst, if the worst were indeed already accomplished—or to take any measures I could to anticipate the ceremony, in case it should not have been as yet performed. But I could not obtain any satisfactory intelligence; no one to whom I addressed myself was able to state whether certain persons whom I described had been married during the day or not. I drove to the dwelling of the chaplain—but he had gone a few miles into the country. I found out the abode of his clerk—but this official was likewise from home. Almost distracted, I sped to the Prefecture of Police to ascertain if it were possible to discover your address in Paris, knowing that the landlords of all hotels are under the necessity of making daily returns of the names of their lodgers to the proper authorities. But I found the Prefecture closed for the night; and I returned, exhausted with fatigue and disconsolate in mind, to the hotel. Summoning the *commissionaire*, I gave him the necessary instructions to make particular inquiries at the Prefecture, the moment that establishment should open in the morning. This he promised to do, and I retired to bed—but not to rest!"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed Charles, seizing his parent's hand, and pressing it with fervour to his lips, "how can you ever pardon me for all the uneasiness I have occasioned you?—and if *you* can, how shall I hope to receive the forgiveness of my mother, when she learns all the sorrow you have endured on my account?"

"It is not, perhaps, necessary that your mother should be made acquainted with *every thing*," observed Mr. Hatfield, emphatically: "but all this will depend upon circumstances—especially on the results of our previous and private interview with Lord Ellingham. As for you and me, Charles, we have already forgiven each other every thing," said Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn tone. "And now my narrative has reached its conclusion," he added; "for shortly after eight o'clock this morning, the *commissionaire* came and informed me that he had discovered the hotel where you were residing. You know the rest."

Charles sighed, but made no answer, and the journey was continued for a long time in profound silence.

CHAPTER CLIV.

MRS. FITZHARDINGE.

Return we now to Mrs. Fitzhardinge, whom the officers of justice had arrested at Dover, on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Mr. Percival, the miser.

The old woman, when made acquainted with the cause of her apprehension, was completely thunder-struck; for, in truth, she had not even heard until that moment of the dreadful deed which had taken place. But the Dover constables who took her into custody, and who were in plain clothes, insisted upon her accompanying them to London; and, yielding to the imperious necessity with as good a grace as possible, Mrs. Fitzhardinge cherished that consolation that her innocence must inevitably become apparent when the case should undergo a magisterial investigation.

For a variety of reasons, she made no mention of her daughter and Charles, who, she doubted not, had embarked in safety; neither did she volunteer any explanations relative to her acquaintance with Mr. Percival, or the business which she had with him on the night when, as it appeared, the murder was committed. She had already in her life passed through the ordeal of arrest—examination at a police-court—committal—trial—and condemnation—aye, and expiation also; and she was well aware that unseasonable garrulity, or explanatory remarks inconsiderately volunteered, seldom benefit even the innocent person when unjustly accused. She accordingly shrouded herself, or, rather, took refuge in a complete silence, from which the officers did not seek to draw her, as they all proceeded together by railway to London.

On their arrival in the metropolis at a somewhat late hour in the afternoon, Mrs. Fitzhardinge was consigned to Clerkenwell prison, where she passed the night; and at ten o'clock on the following morning she was removed in a cab to Marylebone police-court, to undergo an examination relative to the serious charge existing against her.

The prisoner, who had retained counsel in her behalf, and made other arrangements for her defence, appeared perfectly cool and collected; and although the sinister expression of her countenance might have told somewhat in her disfavour, in the estimation of common observers, yet, to the eye of the experienced magistrate, it spoke not of guilt in this instance. Nevertheless, that very experience which he possessed taught him not to judge either way by outward appearances; and he therefore prepared himself to give the matter the most searching investigation.

The first witness examined was Mrs. Dyer, who deposed as follows:—"I occupy a house adjoining that of the deceased. At half-past eleven o'clock on the night in question, I returned home from the dwelling of a friend in the neighbourhood, and saw deceased at his door, taking leave of two females. He had a light in his hand. One of the women, who seemed by her figure and general appearance to be young, was at the garden-gate; and I could not see her countenance. The light which the deceased carried fell fully upon the face of the other female; and I therefore obtained a good view of her. The prisoner at the bar is the female alluded to."

Mrs. Dyer then narrated how she and her lodgers had discovered the murder on the ensuing morning; but these details are already known to the reader.

The inspector of police who had the case in hand, was next examined, and his deposition was to the following effect:—"In consequence of the information I received from Mrs. Dyer, immediately after the murder was discovered, I instituted certain inquiries, and ascertained, in the course of the morning, that an old and a young woman had taken a cab in the neighbourhood of the Angel at Islington, on the previous night, which was the one in question. They drove to Suffolk-street, Pall Mall, where the young lady paid the driver his fare from a heavy and well-filled purse. The driver gave me a description of the elder female; and that description tallied with the one already given by Mrs. Dyer. I thereupon repaired to Suffolk-street, and learnt that the two women had taken their departure in a post-chaise, between nine and ten o'clock that morning. This was the morning after the murder. Previous to their departure, they were joined by a young gentleman who went away with them. He had called on several occasions at the lodgings; and his name was——"

Here the magistrate interposed, and said that it might not be necessary to mention this name publicly, as there was nothing to implicate the gentleman referred to.

The inspector accordingly proceeded thus:—"The chaise was sent for in a great hurry, and its destination was unknown to the landlady and servants of the house. No previous intimation of the intended departure of the lodgers had been given. They settled all their liabilities before they left. The prisoner at the bar paid the rent and other little matters owing; but did not display any large sum of money. Having ascertained all these particulars, I sent a description of the elder female to the various railways having electric

telegraphs; and the prisoner at the bar was apprehended at Dover, in consequence of the information thus conveyed."

Upon being cross-examined by the learned gentleman for the defence, the inspector fairly and impartially deposed as follows:—"The stake with which the murder was evidently perpetrated, was found by the side of the corpse. It was taken from a piece of unenclosed waste ground at the back of the house. I believe this to be the fact, because I have discovered a hole from which a stake had most likely been taken; and the stake now produced fits that hole. I also discovered marks of footsteps between the back door of the house and the spot where the stake had been pulled up. Those marks are of a man's boots. The soil of some part of the waste ground is moist and damp. There are marks on the window-ledge of the back parlour, as if some one with dirty boots or shoes had clambered up and stood there. The shutters have numerous heart-holes in them, so that a person standing up on the ledge, outside the window could see into the back parlour. I discovered no traces of any female footsteps on the waste ground neither are there two descriptions of marks. They are all produced by the same sized boots. The door-post of the back gate was cut away from the outside. Whoever did it must have known the precise place where the bolt fitted into the door-post in the inside. The cutting away rendered it easy to force back the bolt with the fingers. The work of cutting was performed, I should say, with a knife—most probably a pocket or clasp-knife. It must have taken half an hour at the least to accomplish; and the hand that did it must have been tolerably strong. There are marks of footsteps, indicated in the same manner as those on the window-ledge, up the stairs from the back door to the back parlour. The lock of the back door so often alluded to, was picked from the outside."

The inspector's evidence terminated here; and the counsel for Mrs. Fitzhardinge recalled Mrs. Dyer.

"Will you state, as accurately as you can, the hour when you returned home on the night of the murder?" he asked.

"Half-past eleven, sir," was the answer.

"That will do," said the learned gentleman, who forthwith proceeded to call the driver of the cab which Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita had taken on the night in question. "At what hour," he demanded, "did the prisoner and the young lady who accompanied her hire your vehicle?"

"It was twelve o'clock," replied the man. "I am sure it was precisely midnight, because I had just left a public-house when I was hailed by the ladies."

This witness was ordered to stand down; and the landlady of the house in Suffolk-street was called next. She deposed that she was sitting up for her lodgers on the night in question, and that they reached home at twenty minutes to one. She was certain as to the correctness of her statement, because she looked at the clock in the passage as she passed by to let the ladies in. There was nothing confused in their manner. She attended them to the door of their bed-chamber, and did not observe that their shoes were at all soiled with damp clay. She was convinced that they did not leave the house again that night. The ladies had always appeared to have plenty of money from the very day they entered her dwelling.

The learned counsel then proceeded to address the magistrate on behalf of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. He began by remarking on the meagre nature of the evidence against her—the mere fact that she and the young lady who was with her, and who was her daughter, were the last persons seen in the company of the murdered man;—and he complained bitterly that his client should have been arrested—ignominiously brought back to London—and forced through the ordeal of a public examination on such a shallow pretence. Every circumstance, adduced that morning—every feature of the evidence, tended only to exculpate the prisoner at the bar. In the first place, it was clear, from the testimony recorded, that the prisoner and her daughter had quitted the house of the deceased at half-past eleven—had taken a cab at the Angel at midnight—and had driven straight home, reaching Suffolk-street at twenty minutes to one. Now the distance from the scene of the murder to the Angel would require rapid walking for two females to accomplish in half an hour, and leave not an instant to accomplish the crime before they set out, much less to cut away the door-post, ransack the deceased's boxes, and so forth. From the Angel they were traced home, and they did not leave the house again that night. Now, the evidence of the inspector of police tended, to show incontestibly that the murder had been perpetrated by a man. He (the learned counsel) was instructed to state that Mrs. Fitzhardinge and her daughter had called upon Mr. Percival for the purpose of obtaining the discount of a bill; that he did discount the document, and that he left his cash-box open on the table during the negotiation. It was presumable that some man, who probably knew the premises well, had clambered up against the back-window, had beheld the cash-box and its contents, and, during the night, had perpetrated the bloody deed. The speedy departure of the prisoner, her daughter, and the gentleman who had been alluded to, on the morning following that night of the crime, was occasioned by the fact that the young people contemplated a matrimonial alliance unknown to the gentleman's parents; and the means of travelling having been procured by the discount already mentioned, there was no necessity to delay the departure for Paris any longer. This was the simple and plain explanation of the suddenly undertaken journey and the precipitate decampment from Suffolk-street. But the ladies did not act as if they had committed a crime, nor their male companion as if he had been an accomplice in one; for they travelled by post-chaise instead of by rail, to Dover; and there they waited quietly until the steam-packet left next morning, instead of hiring some small craft, as they might have done, to waft them across, the same night of their arrival, to Calais. Again, if the prisoner and her daughter had even entertained such a fearful idea as that of depriving the miser of his life for the sake of his gold, they would have had a better opportunity of carrying it into execution while alone with him in his back parlour, than by the roundabout manner suggested by the nature of the charge against Mrs. Fitzhardinge. During the short time the two ladies had dwelt at the lodgings in Suffolk-street they had not been embarrassed for want of funds; nor even when they sought the aid of the discounter was their need so pressing, much less was it of that desperate nature which could alone prompt to such a dreadful alternative as murder. The reason why the assistance of the deceased was sought at all, could be readily explained by the avowal that the bill to be discounted was not a security which any other class of money-lenders

would entertain: it was the promissory note of a young gentleman raising cash upon his expectations, and therefore of a character suiting only the purposes of a discounter who took an amount of interest proportionate to the risk which he ran. In conclusion, the learned gentleman insisted that there was not a shadow of evidence against his client.

The magistrate acquiesced in this view of the case, and discharged Mrs. Fitzhardinge forthwith. She was, however, compelled to repair from the Marylebone Police-court to the tavern where the coroner was holding an adjourned inquest upon the body; but the result of her examination before the magistrate being communicated to that functionary, she was not detained on his authority. A verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown" was returned, and the old woman once more found herself at liberty.

The evidence given by the inspector of police at the Marylebone court, and repeated in the presence of the coroner, had excited certain suspicions in the mind of Mrs. Fitzhardinge; and the more she pondered upon the subject—the more she reflected upon the occurrences at Percival's house on the night of the murder, and the details of the manner in which the deed itself must have been accomplished, the more confident did she become that she could name the assassin.

Had circumstances permitted, she would have remained in London to ferret out the individual whom she thus associated with the crime: but she could not now spare the time; for she was anxious to proceed, without delay, to Paris, and join her daughter and Charles Hatfield, who, she had no doubt, had reached that capital in safety.

Her examination at the police-court, and her attendance at the inquest, had however consumed the entire day; and she therefore waited until the next morning, when she departed by the first train for Folkestone, at which town she arrived in time to embark on board a steamer for Boulogne.

In order that we may accurately show the precise time when Mrs. Fitzhardinge reached Paris, we must request our readers to observe, that on the same day that Charles and Perdita crossed the water to Calais, the old woman was borne back to London by the constables: on the following day, while they were journeying towards the French capital, she was undergoing the examination already recorded;—on the third day, when they were married at the British Ambassador's chapel, she was hastening to join them;—and it was, therefore, in the after-part of the fourth day, being the one on which the separation of Charles and her daughter had occurred, that Mrs. Fitzhardinge entered Paris in the *diligence*, or stage-coach—thoroughly wearied out by the fatigue, annoyance, and excitement she had lately undergone.

The old woman repaired to an hotel in the immediate neighbourhood of the office where the coach stopped; and, having changed her apparel, drove forthwith in a hackney vehicle to the British Embassy: for it must be remembered that she was entirely ignorant of every thing that had taken place in respect to her daughter and Charles since she had been separated from them, and knew not where they had put up in Paris. Indeed, she even had her misgivings whether they were in the French capital at all, or whether they might not have set out upon some tour immediately after their marriage; for that they were already united in matrimonial bonds, she had no doubt. That they had returned to Dover to look for her, she did not flatter herself; inasmuch as she had latterly seen enough of Perdita's altered disposition to be fully aware that all maternal authority or filial affection were matters which the young lady was more inclined to treat with contempt than with serious consideration. But Mrs. Fitzhardinge was resolved not to be thrust aside without an effort to regain the maternal authority: as for the filial affection, her soul—tanned, hardened, rendered rough and inaccessible, and with all its best feelings irremediably blunted by the incidents of her stormy life—her soul, we say, experienced but a slight pang at the idea of having to renounce that devotedness which it is usually a mother's joy and delight to receive at the hands of a daughter.

No; the aim of this vile intriguing woman was merely the re-establishment of her former ascendancy over her daughter,—by fair means or by foul—by conciliation or intimidation—by ministering to her vanity and her pride, or by working on her fears—by rendering herself necessary to her, or by reducing her to subjection through a course of studied despotism and tyranny. Her imagination pictured the voluptuous and impassioned Perdita clinging to her young husband as to something which had become necessary to her very existence, and from which it were death to part; and she chuckled within herself, as she muttered between her lips,—"The girl would have this marriage; and it shall be made in my hands a means to subdue her! For in her tenderest moments—when reading love in *his* eyes, and looking love with *her own*,—when wrapt in Elysian dreams and visions of ineffable bliss—then will I steal near her, and whisper in her ear, 'Perdita, you must yield to me in all things; or with a word—a single word—will I betray you to that fond, confiding fool; I will blast all your happiness, and he shall cast thee away from him as a loathsome and polluted thing!'"

With such agreeable musings as these did Mrs. Fitzhardinge while away the half-hour which the hackney-coach occupied in driving her from the hotel to the British Embassy. It was now five o'clock in the evening, and she fortunately found the chaplain's clerk in an office to which the gate-porter directed her to proceed. From the official to whom she was thus referred, she learnt that Charles Hatfield and Perdita Fitzhardinge were united in matrimonial bonds on the previous day; and an inspection of the register, for which she paid a small fee, enabled her to ascertain the address they had given as their place of abode in the French capital.

Satisfied with these results, Mrs. Fitzhardinge returned to the vehicle, and ordered the coachman to drive her to an hotel which she named, and which was the one mentioned in the register. We should observe that the old woman spoke French with fluency; and thus she had no difficulty in making herself understood in the gay city of Paris.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

On arriving at the hotel indicated, Mrs. Fitzhardinge alighted, and inquired of the porter whether Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield were residing there. The man referred to a long list of names on a paper posted against the wall; and, after running his eye down the column, turned to the old woman with the laconic, but respectfully uttered observation,—"Removed to No. 9, Rue Monthabor."

To this new address did Mrs. Fitzhardinge repair, without pausing to ask any further question; and on her arrival at the entrance to a house of handsome appearance in the street named, she inquired for Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield.

"Oh! it is all right," said the porter. "I was told that if any persons called to ask for Mrs. Hatfield, I was to direct them to the lady who has taken the second floor."

Mrs. Fitzhardinge was somewhat surprised by this ambiguous answer: but it instantly struck her that Charles might have assumed his title of *Viscount Marston*, and that the name of *Hatfield* would, therefore, be unknown to the porter, had no particular instructions been left with him. At all events, she was in too great a hurry to remain bandying words with the man; and she accordingly hastened to ascend to the second floor, which, we should observe by the way, is the most fashionable in Parisian houses.

But as she mounted the staircase, it struck her that the porter, when replying to her query, had made no mention of any gentleman at all, but had plainly and clearly spoken of "the lady who has taken the second floor." The old woman was puzzled—indeed, bewildered by the mystery which suddenly appeared to envelope her; and a certain misgiving seized upon her mind, the nature of which she could not precisely define.

On gaining the marble landing of the second floor, she rang the bell at the door of the suite of apartments on that flat, and was immediately admitted by Rosalie into a handsomely furnished drawing-room.

"Whom shall I mention to mademoiselle?" inquired the French lady's-maid.

"Her mother," was the response.

Rosalie withdrew; and Mrs. Fitzhardinge, seating herself upon an elegant ottoman, cast her eyes around the splendid room.

"Perdita is well lodged, at all events," she mused inwardly. "But somehow or another, there is a mystery which I cannot comprehend. The porter spoke of no gentleman—the maid was equally silent on that head, and alluded to her mistress as *mademoiselle*[12] and not as *madame*. What can it mean?"

At this moment the door opened, and Perdita made her appearance in a charming *déshabillée*; for she had been assisting to arrange her effects in her newly-hired ready-furnished apartments.

The meeting between the mother and daughter was characterised by nothing cordial—much less affectionate: there was no embracing—not even a shaking of the hand, but only a mutual desire, hastily evinced on either side, to receive explanations.

"Where is Charles?" demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Gone," was the laconic reply.

"Gone!" ejaculated the old woman, now manifesting the most profound astonishment.

"Yes; gone—departed—never to return," said Perdita, with some degree of bitterness: then, in an altered tone, and with recovered calmness, she asked, "But how have you managed respecting the accusation——"

"Ah! then you have heard of *that*?" interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with a subdued feeling of spite; for she thought that her daughter took the matter very quietly. "I was taken back to London—examined at the Marylebone Police-court—and discharged without much difficulty. Now, in your turn, answer my next question—wherefore has Charles left you?"

"In the first place," said Perdita, "tell me how you discovered my abode?"—and she fixed her large grey eyes in a searching manner upon the old woman, as if to ascertain by that look the precise extent of her mother's knowledge relative to herself and Charles.

"*That* is speedily explained," observed Mrs Fitzhardinge, who instantly perceived that her daughter intended to reveal to her no more than she was actually compelled to do, and it flashed to her mind—she knew not why—that Perdita meant especially to throw a veil over the fact of her marriage with Charles. Else, why had she not immediately mentioned it?—why had she not hastened to satisfy her that the alliance had indeed taken place? But if Perdita *had* a motive in concealing that fact, then the knowledge of the secret might sooner or later prove serviceable to Mrs. Fitzhardinge; and she therefore resolved to feign ignorance. All these thoughts and calculations swept through the old woman's brain in a moment; and she preserved the while the most steady composure of countenance. "*That* is speedily explained," she repeated. "I went to the Prefecture of Police, and learnt your address."

"But you knew not by what name to ask for me," said Perdita, still keeping her eyes fixed on her mother's countenance.

"I inquired for you by the name of Fitzhardinge," answered the old woman, hazarding the falsehood; "and was referred to the hotel where you and Charles had put up——"

"And on your calling there?" asked Perdita, impatiently.

"The porter laconically told me that you had removed hither," returned the old woman. "But what means the absence of Charles? and has he not married you?"

"No," responded Perdita, reading in her mother's countenance more intently—more searchingly than hitherto: "he has played a perfidious part, and deserted me."

"The villain!" ejaculated the old woman, affecting to give full credence to the denial that the matrimonial alliance had taken place; while, on the other hand, Perdita was completely deceived by her mother's profound duplicity.

"The adventures I have experienced," said Perdita, "have been numerous and exciting. When every thing was settled for the ceremony to take place, the father of Charles suddenly appeared upon the scene, and exposed me in a cruel manner to his son. In fact, Mr. Hatfield proved himself to be well acquainted with all—every thing—relating to you and me; and he unsparingly availed himself of that knowledge. I retaliated—I convinced him that his family affairs were no secret to me;—and then he again assumed the part of one who triumphs in defeating the hopes of another; for he produced unquestionable evidence to the fact that his son is illegitimate, and entirely dependent upon him."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, who now fancied that she read the reason which had induced Perdita to conceal her marriage with the young man. "Then, after all, your suitor is plain Charles Hatfield, and not Viscount Marston?"

"Such is indeed the case, mother," returned Perdita; "and I think you will agree with me that I have had a fortunate escape."

"I do congratulate you on that point," answered the old woman, her dissimulation continuing impenetrable. "But where have you obtained the means to hire this handsome lodging?"

"You cannot suppose that I allowed Mr. Hatfield and his son to depart without making ample provision for me!" exclaimed Perdita. "No; I displayed a too intimate acquaintance with all their family affairs to permit them thus to abandon me. Besides, the very secret of the young man's illegitimacy—a secret which the father revealed in a moment of excitement, produced by the discussion that took place between us—that secret——"

"I understand you, Perdita," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge: "it was necessary to purchase your silence respecting a matter that involved the good name and the honour of Lady Georgiana Hatfield. Well, have you made a profitable bargain for yourself?"

"A thousand pounds in ready money; and five hundred a year for life, on condition that I return not to England," was the response.

"Good!" ejaculated the old woman, her eyes glistening with delight.

"And I have adopted another name, for a variety of reasons," continued Perdita. "In the first place, having learnt from that hated Mr. Hatfield of your arrest at Dover, and the nature of the charge against you, I feared lest the whole thing should be blazoned in the newspapers——"

"Well, well," interrupted her mother: "I understand! The name of *Fitzhardinge* would suit no longer. What is the new one?"

"I have taken that of *Mortimer*," answered the daughter. "Laura Mortimer sounds prettily, I think?"

"Then you have not even retained your Christian name?" said the old woman, interrogatively.

"No; for it is so uncommon, that it could not fail to excite attention, wherever whispered," was the reply.

"In this case, I am to become Mrs. Mortimer?" continued the mother.

"Precisely so; and as a matter of course, you will take up your abode with me."

“You do not appear particularly unhappy at the loss of the young man whom you fell so deeply in love with?” observed the old woman, whom we must now denominate Mrs. Mortimer.

“That dream has passed—gone by—vanished!” returned Laura—for by this Christian name is Perdita to be henceforth known; and as she spoke, her voice assumed a deep and even menacing tone. “Yes—that illusion is dissipated; and, if circumstances permit, I will have vengeance where I used to think only of love.”

“To what circumstances do you allude?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

“Can you not understand *my* position—aye, and *your own* position also?” exclaimed Laura. “At present we are dependent, to a certain degree, upon Mr. Hatfield, and must adhere to the conditions he imposed upon me: that is to say, we must reside on the continent so long as the income allowed by him shall be indispensably necessary. But the moment that I can carve out a new career of fortune for myself, either by a brilliant marriage, or by enchaining some wealthy individual in my silken meshes,—the instant that I find myself in a condition to spurn the aid of Mr. Hatfield’s purse, and can command treasures from another quarter,—then, mother, *then*,” added Laura, emphatically, “will be the time for vengeance! For, think you,” she continued, drawing herself proudly up to her full height, while her nostrils dilated and her eyes flashed fire,—“think you that, if I have loved as a woman, I will not likewise be avenged as a woman? Oh! yes—yes; and welcome—most welcome will be that day when I shall see myself independent of the purse of Mr. Hatfield, and able to work out my vengeance after the manner of my own heart! To be exposed by the father and discarded by the son—to have the mask torn away from my countenance by the former, and be looked upon with loathing and abhorrence by the latter,—oh, all this is enough to drive me mad—mad! And if I retained a calm demeanour and a stern composure of countenance in the presence of those men this morning, it was only the triumph of an indomitable pride over feelings wounded in the most sensitive point!”

“Vengeance, indeed, is a pleasing consummation,” said the old woman: then, after an instant’s pause, she added, “And I also have a vengeance to gratify.”

“You, mother!” ejaculated Laura, with unfeigned surprise.

“Yes. You remember the night that we called upon Percival? Well, you may recollect how he spoke of a certain visitor who had been with him——”

“Torrens—your husband,” observed Laura, quietly.

“The same. He was the murderer of Percival,” added Mrs. Mortimer, her countenance assuming an expression so fiend-like, that it was horrible to behold.

“How know you that?” demanded Laura, surprised.

“I am convinced of it,” returned her mother. “Listen! On that night when we visited the miser, Torrens had been with him: indeed, he had departed from the house only the moment before we knocked at the door. You remember that Percival said so? Well—and you also recollect that Torrens was represented to be poor and very miserable? While we were engaged with Percival, the cash-box was produced, and its contents were displayed. A man clambered up to the window, and looked through the holes in the shutters. This was proved at the police-office. We departed, and the miser was left alone. The back gate was forced open—or, rather, the wood-work was cut away in such a manner as to allow the bolt to be shot back with the fingers—and the lock was picked with a piece of iron. All this was done from the *outside*. Then, again, the stake whereby the old man was killed was taken from a piece of waste ground at the back of the house; and on the damp clayey soil the marks of boots were discovered. The murder was therefore perpetrated by the man whose footsteps were thus traced; and who could that man be but Torrens? I have no doubt of the accuracy of my conjectures.”

“They are reasonable, at the least,” observed Laura. “But wherefore do you trouble your head about him, when I require your assistance here in a matter of importance?”

“One moment, and you shall explain your views when I have made you acquainted with mine,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “Percival was a rich man, and that cash-box contained a treasure in notes and gold. Torrens has, no doubt, concealed himself somewhere in London;—a man who has committed such a crime invariably regards the metropolis itself as the safest hiding-place. My design is to ferret him out, and compel him by menaces to surrender into my keeping the treasure which he has obtained. You and I, Perdita—Laura, I mean—will know how to spend those thousands; and it will give me pleasure—unfeigned pleasure,” she added, with a fearful expression of countenance, “to know that *he* has been plunged back again into misery and want.”

“The project is a good one, mother,” said Laura; “and the money would prove most welcome. Possessed of a few thousands of pounds, I would at once act in complete independence of Mr. Hatfield. But wherefore this bitter vengeance against the man who is still your husband?”

“Because, when he was released from Newgate upwards of nineteen years ago, when imprisoned there on suspicion of having murdered a certain Sir Henry Courtenay,” said the old woman,—“when he was set free, I tell you, I still languished a prisoner in that horrible gaol. And he came not near me: he recognised me not—he loathed and abhorred me; and I knew it! *You*, Laura, have felt how terrible it is to be hated—shunned—forsaken by one on whom you have claims: *you* are still smarting under the conduct of Charles

Hatfield. Can you not, then, comprehend how I should cherish feelings of bitterness against that sneaking coward—that base wretch, who was a partner in my iniquity, and who abandoned me to my fate, doubtless hoping that a halter would end my days, and for ever rid him of me."

"But you loved not that man, according to all I have ever heard you say upon the subject," returned Laura; "whereas," she added, in a tone of transitory softness, "I did—yes—I *did* love Charles Hatfield."

"Granted the difference!" ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer; "and yet, even making every possible allowance for that, there is still room enough to admit the existence of my bitter hostility against Torrens. What! was I not arrested the other day—dragged ignominiously back to London—compelled to sleep in a prison; and forced to appear at the bar of justice,—and all on account of *his* crime! He reaped the benefit—I the inconvenience, the fear, the exposure, and the disgrace! It is true that I never loved him—never even liked him;—true, also, that ours was a marriage of convenience—both suspecting, despising, and abhorring each other. From the very first, then, I was his enemy; and ever since I have cherished an undying animosity against him."

"Well, mother, I shall not attempt to interfere with your vengeance any more than you will seek to mar the progress of mine. You have given me an explanation of your views; and it is now my turn to speak. This morning," continued Laura, "my hopes were suddenly defeated, and my golden dreams dissipated by the appearance of Mr. Hatfield. At half-past eleven o'clock, I found myself deserted by him whom I had loved, and alone as it were in a strange city. I instantly made up my mind not to yield to sorrow or give way to grief; and when a woman, placed in such circumstances, will not permit her tender feelings to get the better of her pride—when, in fact, she takes refuge in that very pride against the poignancy of sorrow—she necessarily conceives thoughts of vengeance. For the pride which becomes her defence and her shield in such a case, must be vindicated. I therefore determined to cherish this hope of vengeance, and gratify that hope when the proper time shall come. But, in the interval—and first of all—I must create a brilliant social position for myself. On these matters I reflected seriously this morning, so soon as Charles and his father had taken their departure. Then, to a certain extent, I made a confidant of my French lady's-maid, who has already become deeply attached to me, and in whom I speedily discovered a spirit of intrigue and a shrewd disposition. At the same time, I told her nothing more than was absolutely necessary to account for the abrupt departure of Charles and my change of name; and even those explanations which I did give her were not entirely true. In a word, I acted with caution, while I secured her fidelity and devotion to my interests. Having thus come to a certain understanding, as it were, we repaired to an agency-office, kept by an Englishman, and made inquiries for furnished apartments in a fashionable neighbourhood. The agent conducted us hither: I inspected the suite—approved of it—paid a half-year's rent in advance—and removed into my new abode, where you now find me, at about three o'clock this afternoon."

“You have lost no time in settling yourself thus far, at all events,” observed Mrs. Mortimer. “But proceed: you have more yet to explain to me.”

“Only to observe that *your* aid is now required, mother, to help me to that brilliant position which I am determined to reach, and the attainment of which will render us independent for the remainder of our days.”

“My aid and assistance you shall have, Laura—aye, and effectually too,” returned the old woman, with difficulty concealing the joy and triumph which she experienced on finding herself thus again appealed to as a means to work out a grand design: “but a fortnight’s delay will not prejudice your scheme. You will not lose one particle of your beauty in that time: on the contrary, you will recover your wonted hues of health—for your cheeks are somewhat pale this evening, and there is a blueish tint around your eyes. Doubtless,” she added, with a slightly malicious grin, “Charles Hatfield was a husband to you in everything save the indissoluble bonds!”

“No,” replied Laura, with an effrontery so cool, so complete, that, had the old woman been questioning her daughter on suspicion only, and not on a verified certainty, she would have been satisfied with that laconic, but emphatic negative.

“Ah! then your maudlin sentimentalism did not render you altogether pliant and docile to the impetuous passions of that handsome young man?” she observed.

“Believing that we were to be married,” answered Laura, “I necessarily refrained from compromising myself in his estimation. But wherefore these questions, mother?”—and again the fine large eyes of the young woman were fixed searchingly on Mrs. Mortimer’s countenance.

“I had no particular motive in putting those queries,” was the response, apparently delivered off hand, but in reality well weighed and measured, as was every word that the artful old creature uttered upon this occasion. “I was merely curious to learn whether your prudence or your naturally voluptuous temperament had prevailed in the strong wrestle that must have taken place between those feelings, while you were travelling and dwelling alone with a handsome young man whom you almost adored.”

“Not quite alone, mother,” exclaimed Laura, impatiently. “Rosalie was with us.”

“Oh! the French lady’s maid, who is so shrewd in disposition, and who manifests such an admirable capacity for intrigue!” cried the old woman, unable to resist the opportunity of bantering her daughter a little, in revenge for the cool insults which she herself had received at the hands of that daughter during the last few days of their sojourn in England.

“Mother, have you sought me out only to revive a certain bitterness of feeling which you so recently studied to provoke between us!” demanded Laura, her countenance flushing with indignation; and when she had ceased speaking, she bit her under-lip with her pearly teeth.

“No, no: we will not dispute,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “But you must admit that I warned you not to dream of marriage with that Charles Hatfield; and, had you followed my advice, and stayed in London, you might have retained him as a lover——”

“Let us not talk of the past,” interrupted Laura, with an imperiousness of manner which warned her mother not to provoke her farther. “The present is assured, and we are at least independent; but the future is before us—and *there* is the sphere in which my hopes are soaring.”

“To return, then, to the point whence I ere now diverged,” resumed Mrs. Mortimer, “I will repeat my assertion that one fortnight’s delay will not mar your plans. On the contrary, you will obtain physical rest after the fatigues of travelling, and mental composure after the excitement of recent occurrences. Your charms will be enhanced, and you will thereby become the more irresistible. This fortnight’s interval I require for my own purposes, as just now explained to you; and, whatever be the result of my search after Torrens, I pledge myself that, if alive and in health, I will return to you in the evening of the fourteenth day from the present date.”

“Agreed!” exclaimed Laura. “You purpose, therefore, to retrace your way to London!”

“Such is my intention. A night’s rest will be sufficient to recruit my strength,” continued Mrs. Mortimer; “and to-morrow morning I shall depart.”

“Now let us thoroughly understand each other, and in no way act without a previous constitution and agreement,” said Laura. “You are about to return to the English metropolis, and it may happen that you will encounter Charles Hatfield. It is my wish that you avoid him—that you do not appear even to notice him; and, for the same reasons which urge me to give you this recommendation, I must request that you attempt no extortion with his father—that you will not seek to render available or profitable the knowledge you possess of the private affairs of that family. Were you to act contrary to my wishes in this respect, you would only mar the projects which I have formed to ensure the eventual gratification of my vengeance.”

“I have listened to you with attention,” said the old woman, “because I would not irritate you by interruption. The counsel you have given me was, however, quite unnecessary. My sole object in visiting London is connected with Torrens; and were I to behold Charles Hatfield at a distance, I should avoid him rather than throw myself in his way. His father I know not even by sight. Besides, according to the tacit understanding which appeared to establish itself between you and me just now, we are mutually to forbear from interfering

in each other's special affairs; and on this basis, good feelings will permanently exist between us. On my return to Paris, fourteen days hence, I shall devote myself to the object which you have in view; and rest assured that, ere long, some wealthy, amorous, and docile nobleman—English or French, no matter which—shall be languishing at your feet."

"Yes—it is for you to find out the individual to be enchained; and it will then be for me to enchain him," cried Laura, her countenance lighting up with the glow of anticipated triumph.

The mother and daughter thus made their arrangements, and settled their plans in an amicable fashion; and the former, after passing the night at the handsome lodgings which Laura occupied, set out in the morning on her journey back to London.

We must here pause, for a brief space, to explain the sentiments and motives that respectively influenced these designing women during the lengthy discourse above recorded.

We have already stated, that even before Mrs. Mortimer found herself in the presence of her daughter, her suspicions and her curiosity were excited by two or three mysterious though trivial incidents that occurred; and she had not been many minutes in Laura's company, before she acquired the certainty that the young woman intended to conceal the fact of her marriage with Charles Hatfield. Mrs. Mortimer at first fancied that this desire arose from shame on the part of Laura, whose pride might naturally revolt from the idea of avowing that, in her eagerness to secure the hand of a nobleman, she had only linked herself indissolubly to a simple commoner, of illegitimate birth, and entirely dependent on his father. But, as the conversation embraced ampler details, and exhibited views more positive and minute, Mrs. Mortimer perceived that Laura was not influenced by wounded pride and shame only in concealing the fact of her marriage; but that, as she contemplated *another* matrimonial alliance, as soon as an opportunity for an eligible match should present itself she was unwilling to allow her mother to attain the knowledge of a secret that would place her so completely in that mother's power.

And Mrs. Mortimer had accurately read the thoughts and motives that were uppermost in Laura's mind. For, imagining from the observations made, and the questions put by her mother, that the fact of her marriage with Charles Hatfield was indeed unknown to the old woman, she resolved to cherish so important—so precious a secret. Well aware of the despotic character and arbitrary disposition of her parent, Laura chose to place herself as little as possible at the mercy of one who sought to rule with a rod of iron, and who was unscrupulous and resolute to a degree in adopting any means that might establish her sway over those whom she aspired to controul.

"No—no," thought Laura within herself: "my secret is safe—I am well assured of *that*;—and my mother shall not penetrate it! The lips of Rosalie, who alone could reveal it to her now, are sealed by rich bribes. For such a secret in my mother's keeping would reduce me to the condition of her slave! I should not dare to contract *another* marriage; because her exigences would be backed by a menace of exposure, and a prosecution for bigamy: and by means of the terrorism which she would thus exercise over me, I should become a mere puppet in her hands—not daring to assert a will of my own!"

On the other hand, Mrs. Mortimer's thoughts ran thus:—"Laura believes me to be ignorant of her marriage, and my dissimulation shall confirm her in that belief. Yes—I will act so as to lull her into complete security on this point. It would be of no use to me now to proclaim my knowledge of the fact that the marriage *has* taken place; because, at present, she requires my services, and will be civil and courteous to me of her own accord. But when once I shall have helped her to a wealthy and titled husband, and when my aid shall no longer be required, *then* she will re-assert her sway and attempt to thrust *me* aside as a mere cypher! But she shall find herself mistaken; and the secret that I thus treasure up must prove the talisman to give me despotic controul over herself, her husband, her household,—aye, and her purse! Yes—yes: she may marry now, without any opposition from me. For, whereas in the former case her marriage would indeed have reduced me to the condition of a miserable dependant, a new alliance will invest me with the power of a despot. Ah! daughter—daughter, you have at length over-reached yourself."

And such was indeed the case; for so well did Mrs. Mortimer play her part of deep dissimulation, that Laura felt convinced her secret was safe, and that the circumstance of her marriage was totally unsuspected. And it was as much to confirm the young woman in this belief, as for the purpose of slyly bantering her, that the mother questioned her as to the point to which her connexion with Charles Hatfield had reached, and astutely placed in juxta-position her daughter's prudence on the one hand, and voluptuousness of temperament on the other. Thus Laura was completely duped, while secretly triumphing in the belief that it was her parent who was deceived!

We must, however, observe, that the two women, under present circumstances, felt dependent on each other in many and important respects; and this mutual necessity rendered them easy to come to terms and settle their affairs upon an amicable basis.

On the one hand, Mrs. Mortimer relied upon her daughter for pecuniary supplies; and this very circumstance prompted her to undertake the journey to London in the hope of finding Torrens, and extorting from him the treasure of which, as she believed, he had plundered Percival. The possession of a few thousands of pounds, added to her knowledge of Laura's secret, would place her in a condition of complete independence; and that independence she would labour hard to achieve for herself. But she might fail—and then she would again be compelled to fall back on the resources of her daughter. Thus, for the present at least, she *was* in a state of dependence—and it was by no means certain that her visit to London would change her condition in this respect.

On the other hand, Laura was dependent on her mother for aid in carrying out her ambitious views. Ignorant of the French language as she was, she could not hope to succeed by herself alone; and, in intrigues which required so much delicacy of management, she could not rely solely on a lady's-maid. The assistance of her mother was therefore necessary; for she reflected that the astute old woman who had succeeded in inducing Charles Hatfield to accompany her to the lodgings in Suffolk-street, could not fall to lead some wealthy and amorous noble within the influence of her daughter's syren-charms in the Rue Monthabor.

We have now explained the exact position in which these two designing women were placed with regard to each other; and we must request our readers to bear in mind all the observations which we have just recorded, inasmuch as they afford a clue to the motives of many transactions to be hereafter narrated.

For the history of Laura is, as it were, only just commenced; and the most startling, exciting, and surprising incidents of her career have yet to be told.

She was a woman of whom it may be well said, "We ne'er shall look upon her like again!"

But the delineation of such a character as this Perdita—or Laura, as we are henceforth to call her—has the advantage of throwing into glorious contrast the virtues, amenities, and endearing qualities of woman generally,—inasmuch as she is a grand and almost unique exception, proving the role which asserts the excellent qualities of her sex.

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE HALF-BROTHERS.

It was about five o'clock in the evening of the second day after the incidents just related, that the Earl of Ellingham received a note, the address of which was written in a feigned hand, and with the word "private" marked in the corner.

The messenger, who left it at the mansion in Pall-mall, had departed immediately his errand was discharged, and without waiting for any reply.

Lord Ellingham happened to be alone in the library when the missive was placed in his hands, and on opening it he recognised the writing of his half-brother; for the address only was disguised—a precaution adopted in case the letter should be observed by the ladies before it reached the hands of the earl.

The contents convoyed a brief intimation that Mr. Hatfield had returned to London with his son, and that they had put up temporarily at the Trafalgar Hotel, Spring-gardens, where the presence of the nobleman was anxiously expected.

Thither the earl accordingly repaired, and a waiter conducted him to an apartment, in which he was received by his half-brother alone—the father having deemed it prudent that the son should not be present while the necessary explanations were being given.

The meeting between the nobleman and Mr. Hatfield was cordial, and even affectionate: how different from that of the mother and daughter in Paris, as described in the preceding chapter!

"You have recovered your son, Thomas," said the earl; "and under any circumstances I congratulate you. The fact that he has returned to London with you convinces me that the paternal authority is once more recognised."

"Yes—he is here—in an adjacent room, Arthur," replied Mr. Hatfield. "I thought it prudent, for many reasons, to send for you privately, and consult you before I ventured to take him back to his mother's presence. Indeed I know not, after all that has occurred, whether you will permit him to cross your threshold again—whether you can ever forgive him."

"He is your son, Thomas, and that is sufficient," interrupted the generous, noble-hearted earl. "Whatever he may have done, I promise to pardon him: however gravely he may have erred, I will yield him my forgiveness. Nay, more—I will undertake to promise the same for my wife, who you know is not a woman that harbours rancour."

"The amiable, the excellent Esther! Oh! no, no—she would not refuse pardon or sympathy to a living soul!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "And you, my generous brother—my never-failing friend—how can I sufficiently thank you for these assurances which you give me, and which so materially tend to lighten the sorrow that weighs upon my heart! I have suffered and undergone much during the few days of my absence from London."

"But you have recovered your son," hastily interrupted the earl, pressing his half-brother's hand with a fervour that was indeed consolatory; "and I am sure that, although his errors may have been great, he has not committed any thing dishonourable. He may have been self-willed—rebellious against the paternal authority—ungrateful—unmindful of those who wish him well; he may have yielded himself up to the wiles of an infamous woman——"

"All that has he assuredly done, Arthur," said Mr. Hatfield, in a melancholy tone; "and more still! For, as you yourself suspected on that day when we made so many distressing discoveries in the library, he found out who I *was*—who I *am*,—he believed himself to be my legitimate son—he even raised money by the name of *Viscount Marston*—he dared to contemplate measures to force me to assume *your* title, and claim *your* estates; and he would have sacrificed you—me—his mother—the countess—aye, and the amiable, excellent Frances—he would have sacrificed us all," added Mr. Hatfield, profoundly excited, "to his inordinate ambition! Now, my dear Arthur," he asked, in a milder and more measured tone—"*now*, can you forgive my son all this?"

"Yes—and more—ten thousand times more!" ejaculated the earl, emphatically. "Had he possessed the right to accomplish all he devised—aye, had he carried out his designs to the very end—even then, Thomas, would I have forgiven him for your sake."

"It is a god—an angel who speaks thus; and not a mere human being!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, embracing his half-brother with an enthusiasm and a fervour amounting almost to a worship. "Oh! why are not all men like you?—the world would then know not animosity, nor rancour, nor strife; and earth would be heaven!"

“Thomas, Thomas,” cried the earl, reproachfully, “attach not too much importance to a feeling on my part which you yourself would show under similar circumstances! But let us speak of your son. He has erred, and you have forgiven him—you, his father, who are the most deeply wounded by his temporary ingratitude, have pardoned him and taken him again to your heart. Shall not I, then, who look upon him in the light of a nephew—shall not I, an uncle, forgive and forget what a father can pardon and obliterate from his memory? Yes—and I will even find extenuating circumstances in his favour: I will search out and conjure up excuses for him! Endowed with an enthusiastic disposition—an ardent longing to render himself conspicuous in the world—a fervid craving to earn distinction and acquire a proud name,—he paused not to reflect whether it were well to shine with an adventitious lustre, or to win for himself and by himself the glory that should encircle his brow. The splendid career of the Prince of Montoni dazzled—nay, almost blinded him; and while he contemplated the eminence on which that illustrious personage stands, he forgot that his Royal Highness obtained not rank and power by hereditary right, but by his great deeds, his steady perseverance in the course of rectitude, and his ennobling virtues. While filled with lofty aspirations, your son suddenly made the discovery of certain family secrets which appeared to place a title within his reach. Ah! pardon him if he stretched out his hand to grasp the visionary coronet,—pardon him, I say—and wonder not if in the eagerness of his desire to clutch the dreamy bauble, he thrust parents, relatives, and friends rudely aside.”

“The generosity which prompts you to extenuate his grievous faults shall not be cooled nor marred by any opposite opinion on my part,” said Mr. Hatfield. “And, my God! is he not my son?—and have I not already—yes, already—while we were still in Paris—promised to forgive him every thing. But when I think of all the misery his insane ambition would have brought upon you and yours ——”

“Oh! the loss of title and wealth would not interfere with my happiness, Thomas,” interrupted the earl, smiling.

“And that loss you cannot now sustain—no—never, never!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, impetuously; “and I thank God that I am enabled to give you this assurance! For the papers—the fatal papers—the family documents, are all burnt—burnt with my own hand, and in the presence of that young man who dared to take them from the secret recess where you had deposited them.”

“Ere now you called me generous, Thomas,” said the earl,—“and for the performance of a common Christian duty—I mean, the forgiveness of one who has offended and who is penitent. But you, my brother—what generosity have you not shown towards me,—yes—and for years—long years;—and now, to crown it all, you have destroyed those evidences which would make you great at any moment. Oh! as the world’s ambition goes, and as human hearts are constituted, *your* generosity outvalues *mine* as immeasurably as the boundless Pacific exceeds the stagnant puddle in the street!”

And, as the earl spoke these words with an enthusiasm and a sincerity that came from the inmost recesses of his heart, he dashed away a tear.

Then, as if suddenly animated by the same sentiment—a sentiment of mutual regard, devotion, and admiration,—the half-brothers grasped each other’s hands; and the pressure was long and fervid—a profound silence reigning between them the while,—for, men of years and worldly experience though they were, their souls’ emotions were deeply stirred and their finest feelings were aroused.

“I have not yet told you all—perhaps scarcely even the worst, relative to my unfortunate son,” said Mr. Hatfield, after a long pause. “That vile woman of whom Villiers spoke—that Perdita Slingsby—or Torrens—or Fitzhardinge—whichever her name may be——”

“Ah! I understand you already,” interrupted the earl, in a tone of deep commiseration: “the artful creature has inveigled your son into a hasty marriage. Is it not so?”

“Alas! it is too true, Arthur,” said Mr. Hatfield; and he then proceeded to narrate to his brother all that had occurred during his absence from London,—the accident near Greenwich—the adventure with the officers at Dover—the interview with his son in Paris—the negotiations with Perdita—and the terms which he had finally settled with that designing woman.

“Oh! that you had been one day earlier,” exclaimed Lord Ellingham; “and this odious marriage would not have occurred. It is lamentable indeed, Thomas—and the more so, in consequence of the hopes that I had founded on the attachment which until lately existed between Charles and my daughter.”

“Ah! it is that—it is *that* which cuts me to the very soul!” cried Mr. Hatfield, with exceeding bitterness of tone and manner.

“And yet there is hope—there is hope for us yet!” exclaimed the earl, who, after pacing the room in deep thought for a few minutes, turned suddenly towards his half-brother.

“Hope do you say?” demanded the latter, his countenance brightening up—though he could not as yet conjecture, much less perceive the source whence the gleam of hope could possibly emanate.

“Yes—hope,” repeated the earl emphatically, but sinking his voice almost to a whisper, as if he were afraid that the very walls should hear the words he was uttering. “Did not that woman tell you she should contract *another marriage*——”

“She assuredly intimated as much,” answered Mr. Hatfield; “and by her words and manner I have no doubt that the intention was uppermost in her mind.”

“And from the knowledge which we now possess of her character,” added the earl, “we may rest satisfied that she will not refuse the first good offer that presents itself. Well, then—on the day that she contracts another marriage, Charles may consider himself absolved from the alliance which he so unhappily formed.”

“Ah! I comprehend you, my dear Arthur!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, his heart already feeling lighter. “But the legal tie will still exist,” he added an instant afterwards, his voice again becoming solemn and mournful.

“The law is an unnatural—a vile—and a miserable one, which would for ever exclude either that woman or your son from the portals of the matrimonial temple!” said the earl, speaking with impassioned emphasis, though still in a subdued tone, “Charles has discarded her—and she has consented never more to molest him. Already, then, are they severed in a moral point of view. But should that woman contract another marriage—take unto herself another husband—and thereby prove that her severance from the young man whom she ensnared and inveigled, is complete,—should she adopt the initiative in that respect, it would be a despicable fastidiousness and a contemptible affectation on the part of any one to say to Charles Hatfield, ‘*You must never know matrimonial happiness: but you must remain in your present false position, a husband without a wife, for the remainder of your days!*’ It were inhuman—base—and unnatural thus to address your son, when once the woman herself shall have ratified by her actions that compact which her words and her signature have already sanctioned. Were a father to consult me under such circumstances, and ask my advice whether he should bestow his daughter on a young man situated as your son will then be,—my counsel would be entirely in the affirmative. Can you therefore suppose for a moment that I shall shrink from acting in accordance with the advice I should assuredly give to another man who is likewise a father? No—no! If then, in the course of time, this Perdita shall contract a new marriage,—and if your son manifest, as I hope and believe he will do, contrition for the past—if his conduct be such as to afford sure guarantees for the future—and if his attachment for Frances should revive, as I am certain that hers, poor girl! will continue unimpaired,—under all these circumstances, Thomas, I should not consider myself justified in stamping the unhappiness of that pair by refusing my consent to their union.”

“Most solemnly do I assure you, Arthur,” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, “that, as an impartial person, and supposing I were disinterested in the matter, I should view it precisely in the same light: but I should not have dared to express those sentiments before you, had you not been the first to give utterance to them.”

“It is, after all, the mere common-sense aspect of the question,” said the earl. “A young man is inveigled into a marriage with a woman whom he looks upon as an angel of purity; and in a few hours he discovers her to be a demon of pollution. They separate upon positive and written conditions. The tribunals would take cognizance of the affair, and grant a legal divorce were they appealed to: but a private arrangement is deemed preferable to a public scandal. Well, the woman marries again—and every remaining shadow of claim which she might still have had upon the individual whom she had entrapped and deluded, ceases at once. The complete snapping of the bond—the total severance of the tie, is her own doing. It is true that the law may proclaim the first marriage to be the only legal one: but morality revolts against such an unnatural averment. These are my solemn convictions;—and, were I to ponder upon them for a hundred years, I should not waver one tittle in my belief.”

“There is more injustice committed by a false morality—more unhappiness inflicted by a ridiculous fastidiousness, than the world generally would believe,” observed Mr. Hatfield.

“Yes—and there is another consideration which weighs with me, Thomas!” exclaimed the earl, turning once more, and now with a smiling countenance, towards his half-brother. “You have shewn so much generosity towards me—you have annihilated documents which ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have prized and availed themselves of—and you have exhibited so much noble feeling in all your actions respecting myself and our family honour, that I consider myself bound to effect the union of my daughter and your son, if it be practicable. This, then, I propose—that the unfortunate marriage of Charles shall be kept a profound secret, and that he shall leave England for a short time, so that active employment may completely and radically wean his mind from any lingering attachment that he may entertain for the polluted Perdita. With regard to this latter suggestion I have a project which I will presently explain to you. Respecting the maintenance of the secret of his unhappy marriage, I should recommend its propriety even were there no ulterior considerations of the nature already stated. For of what avail can it be to distress my wife or yours—much less my daughter—by a revelation of the sad circumstance? In any case, Frances would not be permitted to learn that secret; and I should be loth indeed to afflict Lady Ellingham by the narration of such a history.”

“And you may be wall assured, Arthur,” observed Mr. Hatfield, “that it would prove no pleasant task for me to inform Lady Georgiana that her son, by his mad ambition and his fatal misconceptions, had compelled me to make known to him the fact of his illegitimacy. Neither should I wish to distress her by unfolding to her the secret of this most miserable marriage.”

“It is fortunate that we were so guarded with our wives on that morning when we made such alarming discoveries in the library,” observed Lord Ellingham: “it is a subject for self-congratulation that we merely intimated the fact of Charles’s departure that day with an abandoned woman——”

“Yes—and it was to your prudent representations that I yielded, when I was about to commit the folly of imparting every thing to my wife,—the loss of the papers—the certainty that Charles had not only taken them, but had likewise discovered every thing relating to my own past life——”

“It was scarcely my advice, Thomas, which prevented you from making all those revelations to Georgiana,” said the earl: “but it was when——”

“Yes—I remember: it was when we resolved to depart in search of the fugitive, that I found my wife was so overcome by the first word I uttered—the word which told her he was gone—that I could not feel it in my heart to afflict her by farther revelations.”

“You scarcely require to be informed that Villiers and myself each pursued the road that we respectively took, until we acquired the certainty that no travellers of the description given had passed that way; but it was late at night when I returned to London, and Villiers was an hour or two later still. While we are, however, conversing in this desultory manner,” said the earl, “we forget that Charles is waiting for us in another room.”

“And you forget, my dear Arthur,” observed Mr. Hatfield, “that you have a project respecting him, but which you have not as yet revealed to me.”

“True!” ejaculated Lord Ellingham; “and the explanation can be speedily given. Yesterday afternoon I received a hastily written note from the Prince of Montoni, stating the melancholy intelligence that his illustrious father-in-law, Alberto I., expired after a short illness twelve days ago. The Prince received the news yesterday morning by special courier——”

“And he is now Grand Duke of Castelcicala?” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield.

“Yes—he is a sovereign prince,” returned the nobleman,—“and one who will not only make his people happy, but who, I venture to predict, will be the means of regenerating Italy. His Sovereign Highness departs to-morrow for Castelcicala; and, although it be scarcely consistent with propriety to accost him with a request under such circumstances, yet I will do so—trusting that the explanations which I shall give, may excuse the apparent importunity at the present moment.”

“And that request?” said Mr. Hatfield, interrogatively.

“Is that the Grand Duke—for by this proud title must we now denominate him—will permit Charles to accompany him in the capacity of one of his *aides-de-camp*. Your son can speak the Italian language as fluently as his own; and his long residence in Castelcicala will have fitted him for the situation I propose to procure for him. Moreover, that aspiring nature—that ardent ambition which has already manifested itself, will be gratified and will find congenial associations and emulative stimulants In the career thus opened to him. If his ambition, in its first strugglings, have unfortunately led him into error, it was on account of the misconceptions to which he yielded, and the baleful influence which a designing woman exercised over him: but, with such a glorious example before him as the illustrious personage into whose service I propose that he shall enter, and keeping in view such legitimate aims as that service naturally suggests, I am much deceived indeed if your son do not prove himself a good, an estimable, and, perhaps, a great man.”

“Your advice is as excellent as your purpose is generous and kind,” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, overjoyed at the prospects thus held out.

“We may now release Charles,” said the earl, “from the suspense which he is doubtless enduring.”

Mr. Hatfield left the room, and shortly afterwards returned, accompanied by the young man, whose face was pale and whose looks were downcast, as he advanced towards the earl.

“My dear Charles,” said the good nobleman, embracing him,—“not a word relative to the past! All is forgiven—all forgotten, as far as the memory *can* forget.”

Charles shed tears, while his heart was agitated with many conflicting emotions,—gratitude for the assurance thus given to him—joy that he was so completely pardoned—bitter regret that he should have ever contemplated aught prejudicial to the interests of the generous earl—vexation on account of the facility with which he had been led astray—and shame at the deplorable errors he had committed.

But when he heard the kind, affectionate, and re-assuring language addressed to him alike by his father and Lord Ellingham,—when he learnt that the main particulars of his late proceedings were to be kept a solemn secret in respect to his mother, the countess, and Lady Frances,—and when he was made acquainted with the project which the earl had suggested relative to placing him about the person of the idol of his heroic worship—the new Grand Duke of Castelcicala,—a genial tide of consolation was poured into his soul; and he felt that the future might yet teem with bright hopes for him!

But not a word was breathed either by Mr. Hatfield or Lord Ellingham respecting *that other prospect* which had evoked so much enlightened reasoning and such liberal sentiments from the lips of the earl: we mean the probability of a marriage eventually taking place between the young man and the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham.

With the proposal that he should enter the service of the Grand Duke, Charles was delighted; and the earl promised to visit his Sovereign Highness early in the morning, at Markham Place, to proffer the request which he had to make as the necessary preliminary.

The nobleman, Mr. Hatfield, and Charles now repaired to the mansion in Pall Mall, where the presence of the two latter, especially of the last-mentioned, caused feelings of joy which we must leave the reader to imagine.

CHAPTER CLVII.

POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS.—THE DEPARTURE OF CHARLES HATFIELD.

Yes—it was true that the Prince of Montoni had become Grand Duke of Castelcicala; and those who have read the First Series of "The Mysteries of London," have now traced the career of Richard Markham from the period of his obscure boyhood until the time when his brow is circled by a sovereign crown!

And when we reflect that it was a Revolution which evoked his brilliant qualities as a warrior and a statesman,—when we call to mind the fact that it was the cry of "Liberty" which became the watch-word of his achievements and the herald of his triumphs,—we cannot do otherwise, on reaching this point in our narrative, than avail ourselves of so fitting an opportunity to notice the grand and glorious struggle that has so lately taken place in the capital of France.

Oh! the French are a fine people, and are destined to teach the world some signal lessons in the school of Political Freedom!

People of England! accord your sympathies—your best and most generous sympathies—to that gallant Parisian population which has so recently dethroned a miscreant Monarch, and hurled an execrable Ministry from the seat of power!

Let the English Sons of Toil—oppressed, ground down by taxation, half-starved, and deprived of their electoral rights as they are,—let the Industrious Classes of the British Islands, trampled upon and made tools of by the wealthy *few* as we know them to be,—let *them* do honour, at least by words to the working men of France who have dared to expel a demon-hearted tyrant and his bravo-hirelings.

The States of Italy—Bavaria—and France have all, within the last few weeks, manifested their scorn and contempt for the doctrine of "the divine right of kings;"—the People in those realms have exercised the power which they possess:—the cause has been righteous—the despots have yielded—and *one* has been overthrown altogether.

For the cause is always righteous when the People seek to wrest from their rulers that freedom which has been basely usurped, and which the tyrannical oligarchy refuses to surrender by fair means to the millions.

It is a monstrous absurdity and a hideous mockery to prate of treason, and sedition, and rebellion, when a people rises up in its might and its power to demand the privileges which are naturally its own.

The *few* cannot possibly possess an inherent or hereditary right to enslave the *many*: nor is the present generation to be bound by the enactments of the preceding one. If that preceding one chose to have a Monarchy, the present one is justified in declaring its will that a Republic shall exist;—and so long as the great majority of the inhabitants of a country are of accord in this respect, they have a right to upset the existing government at any moment and establish another. Nay, more; we will assert that the people need not even be wise or prudent in order to legitimatise their actions:—the great majority may act as they think fit, although they should be unwise or imprudent in respect to the institutions they choose to build up!

We are averse to the exercise of physical force;—but France has shown that when moral agitation fails, violence *must* be used;—and if freedom can be gained by the loss of a few drops of blood—why, then those drops should be shed cheerfully.

Suppose that in any country the great majority of the people sign a document addressed to the sovereign in these terms:—"We are very much obliged to you for having reigned over us hitherto; but we do not require your services farther. It pleases us to establish another form of government and raise up another ruler; and therefore we request you to descend from the throne and surrender up the power delegated to you." Were the sovereign to refuse compliance with this demand, then force should be used; and all the antiquated farces of "hereditary rights," and "treason," and "sedition," and such-like nonsense, would of course be disregarded by an insurgent people.

On the other hand, so long as a nation remains tranquil, and addresses to the sovereign no demand of the kind supposed above, that sovereign may continue to occupy the throne, as the people's executive magistrate; for it is the fault of the millions themselves if they be foolish enough to tolerate either a king or a queen.

Republicanism is the "order of the day;" and there is not a throne in Europe that is worth twenty years' purchase,—no—not even that of the Austrian Kaiser or the Muscovite Czar;—and from the banks of the Thames to the confines of Asia—from the cheerless regions of the North to the sunny shores of the tideless Mediterranean, the prevailing sentiment is adverse to the antiquated, useless, oppressive institutions of Monarchy.

Honour To the Great and Glorious French Nation! And let the Royalty which still exists in England beware how it caress, and pet, and

openly sympathise with the ex-Royalty which has taken refuge on this soil. For the Queen of England to adopt such a course, were to offer a gross and flagrant insult to the people of France, and inevitably provoke a war. Besides—is not Louis-Philippe a miscreant deserving universal execration? Did he not calmly and deliberately calculate upon butchering the brave Parisian people, in order to consolidate the power of his despot-throne? Are not his hands imbrued with blood? No sympathy, then—no pity for this royal Greenacre—this horrible assassin!

And were he to be received at the palace of our Queen, the insult would not only be monstrous towards the French people, who have expelled him, but equally great towards the English people, who abhor tyrants, and who are generous, humane, and merciful.

WORKING MEN OF ENGLAND! rejoice and be glad—for amidst the changes which have so recently taken place in France, there is one "sign of the times" that is cheering and full of prophetic significancy for *you*! I allude to the grand—the glorious fact, that in the list of the Provisional Government which the Revolution raised up, these words appeared—"ALBERT, Working Man."

Yes: a Working Man was included in that fine category of Republican names; and he has been instrumental in giving to the whole political world that impulse which must inevitably conduct *even the present generation* to the most glorious destinies.

Honour to Albert, the Working Man!

There is another point on which I must touch, ere I resume the thread of my narrative.

The Prime Minister of England has declared "that he has no intention whatever to interfere with the form of government which the French nation may choose for themselves." He therefore admits the right of the nation to establish any form of government which it chooses;—and this concession is an important one, when coming from the principal adviser of the Queen, and from a man who is, after all, nothing more nor less than the chief of an aristocratic clique.

Well, then—it being admitted by the Prime Minister that a nation has a right to choose its own form of government, the sooner the people of England begin to think of establishing new institutions for themselves, the better. For there is no use in disguising the fact—and no possibility of exaggerating it,—that England is in a truly awful condition. Already are we enduring a war-tax; and it was only through fear of seeing the glorious example of the Parisians immediately followed by the inhabitants of London, that the Ministers abandoned their iniquitous and execrable scheme of doubling that shameful impost. But the financial ignorance and the wanton extravagance of the Whigs have plunged the country into serious pecuniary embarrassments, from which nothing but the sweeping reform of a purely democratic Ministry can relieve it. With a tremendous national debt,—with no possibility of levying another tax,—with Ireland to care for and almost support,—with a vast amount of absolute penury and positive destitution in the country,—with an aristocracy clinging to old abuses, and with the land in the possession of a contemptibly small oligarchy,—with the industrious classes starving on pitiable wages,—with a pension-list which is a curse and a shame,—with a cumbrous and costly Monarchy,—with a Church grasping at all it can possibly lay hands on,—with a Bench of Bishops in inveterate and banded hostility to all enlightening opinions and popular interests,—and with a franchise so limited that nine-tenths of the people are altogether unrepresented,—with all these, and a thousand other evils which might be readily enumerated, we repeat our assertion that England is in an awful state; and we must add that great, important, and radical changes must be speedily effected.[13]

Oh! how well and how truly has a great French writer declared that "men have only to will it, in order to be free!" France has set England and the world a great and glorious example in this respect.

These English newspapers which are interested in pandering to the prejudices and the selfishness of a bloated aristocracy and an oppressive oligarchy, of landowners, represent revolutions as scenes of spoliation, social ruin, and other demoralisation. But the incidents of the Revolution which gave Louis Philippe a throne in 1830, and those of the grand struggle which has just hurled him from his despot-seat, give the lie—the bold, unequivocal lie—to such statements.[14]

The time has come when all true Reformers must band together for the public weal. Let there be union,—union of all sects and parties who are in favour of *progress*, no matter what their denomination may be,—whether Republicans, Radicals, Chartists, or Democrats. “Union Is strength,” says the proverb; and the truth thereof maybe fully justified and borne out in the present age, and in the grand work of moral agitation for the People’s Rights.[15]

We now proceed with the thread of our narrative; but it is not necessary to give at any length the particulars of the interview which took place between Lord Ellingham and Richard Markham, now Grand Duke of Castelcicala. Suffice it to say, that his Sovereign Highness, though deeply afflicted by the news of his father-in-law’s demise, welcomed the English nobleman with the utmost cordiality, and immediately consented to receive Charles Hatfield as one of his *aides-de-camp*. The Earl hastened back to Pall-mall, and, sending for the young man to his private apartment, reasoned with him in an impressive way upon the necessity of retrieving the past by the conduct which he should pursue in future. Charles listened with profound attention to all that the excellent peer said upon this occasion, and promised that his behaviour should henceforth render him worthy of all the signal favours bestowed upon him.

The preparations for his departure were in the meantime made with all possible despatch; and in the course of a few hours Charles Hatfield took leave of his family, and hastened to Markham Place, to join the suite of the new Sovereign of Castelcicala.

CHAPTER CLVIII.

Mrs. Mortimer in London.

Mrs. Mortimer,—as we must now call her whom we have already known as Mrs. Slingsby, Mrs. Torrens, and Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—arrived in London two days after the scene which took place between her daughter and herself in the Rue Monthabor at Paris.

The wily woman was intent upon accomplishing the aim that had brought her back to the English metropolis; but as the reader may well imagine, she had not the least trace of her husband—nor the slightest clue to his whereabout. Indeed, it was only a conjecture with her that he was in London at all;—but she had worked this suspicion up into a certainty in her own mind; and the object she hoped to gain was quite important enough to lead her to resolve upon leaving no stone unturned in order to arrive at a successful issue.

On setting foot in the metropolis, she took up her abode at a small coffee-house in an obscure street in the Borough of Southwark; and having assumed a somewhat mean attire, she repaired, in the dusk of the evening after her arrival, to the vicinity of the dwelling which in former times bore the name of Torrens Cottage.

This house, as the reader will recollect, was situate between Streatham and Norwood; and the old woman, who knew the world well, and read the human heart profoundly, calculated that Torrens, impelled by that inscrutable and mysterious curiosity which prompts persons under such circumstances, was likely, if indeed in London, to visit the neighbourhood where he had once dwelt, and which had proved for him the scene of such dire misfortune.

Mrs. Mortimer knew that Torrens had passed many happy days at that cottage, and had there cherished the grandest hopes of acquiring a great fortune by means of building-speculations: she was also aware that he had at the same place bargained for the sale of his daughter's virtue—beheld the ravisher lying murdered upon the sofa—and been arrested on suspicion of the heinous crime. The place, then, was replete with the most varied and conflicting reminiscences for the old man; and Mrs. Mortimer said to herself, "The morbid feelings which must exist in such a heart as his, will probably induce him to visit the neighbourhood of the house that once was his home."

Such was her calculation; and, acting upon this impression, she sped on foot towards the dwelling where she had once dwelt a few brief hours as the wife of the man whom she was searching after.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when she turned into the lane where twenty years before Tom Rain had robbed Frank Curtis of the two thousand pounds.

In a few minutes Mrs. Mortimer came in sight of the cottage, the walls of which were glistening white amidst the summer evening semi-obscurity; and her heart beat quickly as she thought of the long—long time that had elapsed since she last saw that spot where *she* also had been arrested on a capital charge!

What changes—what vicissitudes had marked her existence since that epoch!

She had been in Newgate, and had there given birth to a daughter, who had accompanied her into exile:—the daughter had grown up—had become as profligate, though not altogether as criminal as her mother—and had at length defied the authority of that parent who thus surpassed her in the extent of her iniquity!

Yes—many and striking had been the events that had characterised the old woman's career since last she saw those white, glistening walls:—but there was the cottage apparently unchanged in outward appearance,—although it was more completely hemmed in by trees than when she quitted it upwards of nineteen years back.

For the large trees which were there in her time, had grown larger, and the saplings had expanded into trees also;—and a high, thick, verdant hedge surrounded the garden.

"Ah!" thought the old woman to herself, as she sped down the lane, "I could almost wish that the cottage was mine, and that I might retire with a competency to this sweet seclusion, no more to commingle in the strife and turmoil of the great—the busy—the jarring world. But this may not be! My life is destined to be stormy until the end. I feel that it is—and I must yield to the destiny that urges me on!"

Melancholy sentiments had risen up in her soul as she gave way to these thoughts; but their current was suddenly cut short—or rather diverted into another channel, when, emerging from the lane, she found herself in front of the cottage.

A light was visible through the shutters of the parlour—that very parlour where Sir Henry Courtenay was murdered, and whither she herself was borne in a fainting fit, after having been arrested in the hall on a charge of forgery.

A cold shudder crept over the old wretch, hardened and heartless as she was: for she remembered all the acuteness—all the intensity of the anguish she had experienced, when she had awakened to consciousness on that dread occasion, and found herself in the custody of the servitors of justice.

Exercising, however, a powerful control over her feelings, she stepped up to the front-door, and knocked boldly,—not in a sneaking, timid, uncertain manner, but with firmness and decision.

The summons was almost immediately answered by a pretty-looking, neatly-dressed, and very respectable servant-maid of about eighteen or nineteen; and Mrs. Mortimer's eyes now commanded a view of the hall where the constables had made her their prisoner,—that fatal incident which became as it were an ominous and most conspicuous finger-post in the road of her chequered existence!

"Can I be permitted, without causing inconvenience, to speak a few words to your master or mistress?" inquired Mrs. Mortimer, subduing the feelings aroused by the reminiscences of the past, and addressing herself to the business of the present.

"Surely you must have made some mistake," said the servant-girl, speaking, however, in a mild and respectful tone. "No gentleman resides here."

"Then allow me to see your mistress, young woman," persisted Mrs. Mortimer, slipping two half-crowns into the maid's hand.

"I will carry your message to my mistress," said the domestic coldly, and at the same time indignantly repulsing the proffered bribe. "Walk in, if you please."

Mrs. Mortimer entered the hall; and as the light of the lamp suspended to the ceiling now fell fully upon her, the servant-maid saw that she was somewhat meanly dressed, and that her countenance was none of the most pleasant to look upon. The impression thus made upon the domestic was not particularly favourable towards the old woman; but the girl was artless and unsuspicious naturally, and therefore strove to smother a feeling which she fancied to be uncharitable towards a complete stranger. She was therefore about to enter the parlour to deliver the message of the visitor, when the door of that room suddenly opened, and a beautiful young creature, of about nineteen, made her appearance.

We must pause for a for minutes to describe the being that burst, like a seraphic vision, upon the amazed and dazzled sight of Mrs. Mortimer.

Picture to yourself, reader, a tall, sylph-like figure of exquisite symmetry, reminding the observer of the Grecian models of classic female beauty,—with the deeply-hollowed back—the swelling chest and bosom, well matured but not voluptuously large—and the high, swan-like neck on which the oval head was gracefully fixed,—then fancy a countenance of the most agreeable expression and rare loveliness, with eyes not very large, but of the deepest black and most melting softness, and with brows finely arched and somewhat thickly pencilled,—a forehead lofty and smooth, and over which the raven hair was parted in two massive, shining bands,—a nose with the slightest trace of the Roman curve, and with the nostrils pink as delicate rose-leaves,—a small mouth, the least thing plump and pouting, and revealing teeth small, even, and white as pearls,—and a complexion of a clear, living white, with the carnation flush of health upon either cheek;—picture to yourself all this assemblage of charms, gentle reader, and you will then have a complete idea of the enchanting creature of nineteen, who suddenly appeared on the threshold of the parlour-door.

We may, however, add, ere we resume the thread of our narrative, that this beauteous being was attired in a white dress, with a high corsage, and that she wore no other ornaments than a pair of ear-rings, and a fancy ring on one of her taper fingers.

Advancing towards Mrs. Mortimer, she said in a musical voice and a kind tone, "I think I overheard you request a few minutes' interview with the mistress of this house——"

"Such was indeed the favour I solicited," observed the old woman, hastily. "If my presence would not inconvenience you for a little while,—and if you will accept my sincere apologies for the apparent obtrusiveness of the request, as well as for the lateness of the hour at which it is made——"

"Oh! pray do not deem it necessary to excuse a proceeding which I am sure you will explain to my satisfaction," interrupted the young lady, with a sincerity which emanated from the artlessness of a disposition entirely unsophisticated. "Walk in, madam," she added, in a kind and by no means ceremonial tone, as she conducted Mrs. Mortimer into the parlour, the door of which the servant-maid immediately closed behind them.

Mrs. Mortimer now found herself in the very room which was fraught with so many exciting and varied reminiscences for her. The golden lustre of the handsome lamp which stood upon the table, was shed upon the scene of those crushing incidents that had suddenly made her a prisoner for a forgery which she had committed, and her husband a prisoner on a charge of murder of which he was innocent!

The old woman sank into a chair, and gazed around her with no affectation of emotion. The appointments of the room were changed—

materially changed, it was true: but her eyes, nevertheless, recognised full well—oh! full well—the very spot where had stood the sofa on which she had awakened to the consciousness of her desperate condition,—the spot, too, where Torrens was standing when the officers arrested him on suspicion of the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay!

For a few minutes the old woman was powerfully affected by the recollections thus vividly conjured up; but, at length calling all her courage to her aid, she regained her self-possession—and then a rapid survey made her acquainted with the elegant and tasteful style in which the parlour was now fitted up. All the furniture seemed to be nearly new. Upon the table in the middle were several drawings, in pencil and in water-colours, lying in an open portfolio—a box of paints and brushes—and several prettily bound volumes of the best modern English poets. Where a sofa had been placed in the time when Mrs. Mortimer last knew the cottage, a handsome upright pianoforte now stood; and in the nearest corner was a magnificent harp. On the cheffoniers in the window-recesses were porcelain vases filled with flowers; and to the walls were suspended several excellent pictures, the subjects of which were chiefly landscapes. Everything, in a word, denoted the chaste elegance and delicate refinement of the taste that had presided in the fitting up of that room.

Mrs. Mortimer, having recovered her self-possession, turned towards the young lady, who had been watching her with mingled interest and surprise.

“You will pardon me,” said the old woman, “if I were for a few moments overcome by reminiscence of an affecting nature——”

“Compose yourself, madam—pray, compose yourself,” interrupted the beauteous girl, in a sweet tone and winning manner; for not only was the most artless amiability natural to her, but she thought she perceived in the language of her visitor something superior to what the condition of her apparel and her personal appearance generally would have otherwise led her to infer.

“Never can I sufficiently thank you for the urbanity—the kindness, with which you treat me, my dear young lady!” exclaimed the old woman. “But am I not intruding upon your leisure—perhaps keeping you away from some companion——”

“Oh! no—I am all alone here,” said the young lady, with an ingenuous frankness that excited a feeling of interest—almost of admiration, even in the breast of such an one as Mrs. Mortimer. “When I say alone,” continued the beauteous creature, “I do not of course allude to the servants—because they cannot be called companions, you know; although the old housekeeper is very kind and good-natured; and Jane—the maid who gave you admission just now—is a sweet-tempered girl.”

“And is it possible that you dwell here in complete seclusion!” demanded the old woman, rendering her voice as mild and her manner as conciliating as possible.

“Oh! I am accustomed to this seclusion, as you style it, madam,” exclaimed the young lady, gaily: “for years I have lived in this manner, with my books—my music—my drawings;—and I am very happy,” she added, in a tone which left not a doubt as to the sincerity of her statement. “At the same time,” she continued, after a few moments’ pause, and in a somewhat more serious voice, “I could wish that my dear papa visited me a little oftener—and that circumstances, of which I am however ignorant did not prevent——”

“What! does not your father live with you, my dear young lady?” asked Mrs. Mortimer, surveying her with the most unfeigned surprise.

“Alas! he does not,” replied the artless girl, her looks and her tone now becoming suddenly mournful: but, in the next moment, her countenance brightened up, and she observed, “At the same time I am wrong to give way to sorrow in that respect, since my dear father assures me that the reasons are most important—most grave——”

She checked herself: for it suddenly struck her that she was bestowing her confidence upon one who was a total stranger to her, and that such frankness might possibly be indiscreet.

“And your mother, my dear lady?” said Mrs. Mortimer, interrogatively.

“I never knew her,” answered the lovely creature, in a low and almost sad tone. “But I have been all this time wearying you with remarks and revelations concerning myself—forgetting that I should have first suffered you to give the promised explanation relative to your visit. You may address me as Miss Vernon—or Agnes Vernon, if you choose: for that is my name. And now, tell me the object of your call.”

Mrs. Mortimer gazed in astonishment upon the charming being who was seated opposite to her. Never had the old woman beheld so fascinating a specimen of infantine artlessness and unsophisticated candour. There was nothing artificial—nothing unreal in Agnes Vernon: the innocence of her soul—the purity of her mind—the chastity of her thoughts, were apparent in every word she uttered and in every feature of her bewitching face!

Yes—the old woman gazed long and ardently upon the sweet countenance of that young creature,—gazed as if in an adoration forced upon a savage mind by the apparition of some radiant being from a heavenly sphere!

“Madam, I am waiting for you to reply to me,” said Agnes, looking down and blushing deeply, beneath the steadfast gaze thus fixed upon her.

“A thousand pardons, Miss Vernon,” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, recovering her self-possession. “I was lost in thought: many—many

reflections, of a varied and conflicting nature, pressed upon my mind,—for I must inform you that I was once the occupant of this beautiful little house——”

“Indeed!” ejaculated the young lady, who now began to suspect—or, at least, thought that she had obtained a glimpse of—the motive which had brought her visitor thither. “You have come, then, to cast your eyes upon a spot which is familiar to you?”

“Precisely so, Miss Vernon,” said the old woman. “And now let me announce myself to you as Mrs. Mortimer. I am the widow of a General in the army, and have only just returned from India.”

“Oh! then I can well understand, my dear madam,” cried Agnes, firmly believing every word that was said to her,—“I can well understand your anxiety and longing to visit the place where you doubtless once dwelt with the husband you have lost.”

“You have read my purpose accurately, Miss,” said the old woman, wiping her eyes as if she were moved to tears by reminiscences of the past.

“But this is most singular, indeed!” suddenly exclaimed the young lady.

Mrs. Mortimer gazed upon her with astonishment; for the observation that had just escaped Miss Vernon’s lips was as extraordinary as the impulse which had prompted it was mysterious.

“Yes,” continued the beautiful creature: “this is indeed most singular!”

“Are you surprised at my boldness in thus obtruding myself upon your presence?” asked Mrs. Mortimer, fixing her eyes in a searching manner upon the charming countenance of the young lady: “or do you doubt the existence of the sentiment which brought me hither?”

“Oh! no—no, madam!” exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of the deepest sincerity, while her features suddenly betrayed the grief which she experienced at being suspected of what she would have regarded as a cruel scepticism. “I am sure you could have no other motive for coming hither than the one you alleged: but I said it was singular—because, another person—a few days ago——”

“Ah!” ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer, a sudden idea striking her: in a word, she already felt confident that her visit would not prove abortive, and that she had acted with sagacity in seeking the first trace of Torrens at the very house which he had inhabited years ago.

“You now appear to be surprised in your turn,” observed Agnes, struck by the ejaculation which had burst from the old woman’s lips.

“Yes, dear young lady,” said Mrs. Mortimer; “I was indeed surprised—inasmuch as I gathered from your words that another person, actuated by the same sentiment as that which brought me to this spot——”

“And do you know *that other person*, then?” inquired Agnes.

“That is precisely what I have now to ascertain,” answered the old woman. “The moment I understood the sense of your observation respecting the visit of another individual to the cottage, I began to wonder whether it were any friend of my earlier years—perhaps even a relative——”

“He was an old man, with grey hair and a care-worn countenance,” said Agnes, perceiving that Mrs. Mortimer paused and seemed to be deeply affected; “and he told me that he also had once dwelt in this house. He sate down in this very parlour, and appeared to be overcome with grief for a long time. I offered to leave the room, that he might be alone with his mournful reflections: but he conjured me to stay. And then he informed me that he had known griefs so profound—vicissitudes so terrible—privations so great, that they had almost driven him mad; and, when I proposed in as delicate a manner as possible to afford him such relief as my means would permit, he assured me that he was poor no longer, and that he had gold at his command. Then, in another moment, he exclaimed, with an emphasis which almost frightened me—‘*But, oh! that I were indeed the penniless, half-starving wretch I was some days ago!*’”

“Ah! he said *that*—did he?” muttered the old woman to herself. “Remorse has already overtaken him—and he will the more easily yield to my menaces and become my victim!”

“I did not catch your observation, madam,” said Agnes.

“I was only musing, my dear child,” hastily responded Mrs. Mortimer, “upon the misfortunes of this strange world of ours. Doubtless some dreadful affliction had touched the brain of that poor old man of whom you have been speaking.”

“Such was indeed my fear,” exclaimed Agnes; “and, much as I pitied him, I confess that I was greatly relieved when he took his departure.”

“Was his visit a long one, my dear young lady?” asked Mrs. Mortimer.

“He remained here for upwards of an hour,” was the reply.

“And was it in the evening that he called?” inquired the old woman.

“Yes—between eight and nine o’clock; and he rose from his seat as the time-piece struck ten,” responded Agnes. “I know not precisely wherefore—but it is nevertheless true that his presence began to alarm me, although I had done him no injury, and indeed had never in my life seen him before. But there was such a wild expression in his eyes——”

“Ah! doubtless the poor old man was overcome by many painful recollections,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “I suppose he did not mention his name to you, Miss Vernon?”

“No—and I did not like to ask him,” was the frank and ingenuous reply. “His mind was evidently much unsettled,—for it alternated between a profound grief and a restless excitement—so that while he was here, I was at one moment moved to sympathise with him, and at another forced to regard him with vague apprehension. When he spoke of the fact that he himself had once been the occupant of this dwelling, he glanced hastily around the parlour, and murmured three or four times in a tone scarcely audible, ‘*This is the very room—the very room!*’ I could not divine what he meant, and of course dared not ask him,” added Agnes, with that charming ingenuousness of manner which denoted the pure child of nature, untainted by the artificial formalities of a vitiated state of society.

“How long have you resided here, Miss?” inquired the old woman, after a brief pause, during which she reflected on all that the beauteous girl had just told her,—at the same time chuckling inwardly at the certainty of having ascertained two grand facts: namely, that Torrens was possessed of plenty of gold, and that he was in London.

“I have lived in this pretty house for nearly three years, madam,” answered Agnes. “Before that period I——But now,” she added, checking herself, “I am again troubling you with my own affairs, whereas you have sufficient upon your mind to engross all your attention. Oh! yes—you must have,” exclaimed the artless girl,—“having only just returned to England after so long an absence in India! But you did not tell me whether you recognised in the old gentleman of whom I have been speaking, any relative or friend—any person, in fine, in whom you are interested.”

“Yes, my dear young lady,” responded Mrs. Mortimer; “methinks that he cannot be altogether unknown to me;—and yet, my thoughts are so bewildered at this moment—the reminiscences which have been awakened in my mind by this visit to a spot where I myself once dwelt, and where I have passed so many happy hours with my dear deceased husband, General Mortimer——”

“Oh! do not weep, madam—compose yourself, I beseech you!” exclaimed Agnes, whose unsuspicious soul was touched by the grief which her artful visitor simulated so aptly.

“Dear young lady,” murmured Mrs. Mortimer, pressing Miss Vernon’s hand to her lips, “you will perhaps allow me to visit you again?”

“Oh! certainly,” was the reply, given with cheerful and unaffected cordiality. “You are the widow of an officer of high rank—and therefore I cannot be doing wrong by receiving you at my house. At the same time,” added Agnes, after a moment’s reflection, “I do not imagine that my father——”

But the young lady’s remark was cut short in the middle by a loud knocking at the front-door. Mrs. Mortimer started up, as she felt that she was an intruder, and that her business there was of an equivocal character not likely to stand the test of any inquiry that might be put by a person less artless and unsophisticated than Miss Vernon herself: but that young lady, having a pure conscience, and not dreaming that she had even acted with imprudence in permitting a stranger to foist herself upon her, said in a cheerful manner, “Oh! it is my father’s knock—I know it well! You need not be uneasy.”

At this moment the parlour-door opened, and the pretty maid-servant appeared on the threshold to usher in a gentleman of whose personal appearance we must give a brief description.

CHAPTER CLIX.

MRS. MORTIMER'S ADVENTURES CONTINUED.

The individual alluded to was a man of middle height, of rather spare form, and slightly bowed—so that although his years in reality had scarcely numbered sixty, a casual beholder might have pronounced him to be above seventy. A closer observation would, however, have dispelled this first impression; for his features were handsome and well-preserved, his teeth remarkably fine, and his hands entirely free from those wrinkles which usually appear upon the fingers of persons in the winter of their existence. His hair was of that iron grey which showed that it still retained a faint shade of its former blackness; and baldness had not even begun to rob him of any part of that natural covering. He wore no whiskers; and his countenance was smooth, but pale. In a word, his frame still preserved much of its pristine vigour; though its spareness and the slightly curved back were calculated, as above mentioned, to impress a casual observer with the idea that the individual whom we are describing was older than in reality he was.

We have said that his features were handsome; and we should now state that their general expression was pleasing, conciliating, and agreeable. Amiability of disposition, generosity of heart, and an acquaintance with affliction, were easily read upon that calm, pensive countenance; but, commingled therewith, was an air of serene dignity which bespoke a consciousness of some kind of superiority—whether of rank, wealth, or intellect, could not, however, be immediately decided by the observer. At all events, the person whom we have now introduced to our readers was not one to be passed by with indifference, nor confounded with the ordinary mass of mankind. We must, however, explain that he was rather characterised by a distinguished air of good breeding and consummate politeness than by aristocratic hauteur; at the same time there was so much dignity and loftiness about him as to debar even the most obtrusive and unceremonious from taking advantage of that blandness of disposition which was expressed by the countenance. We have only to add that he was dressed with taste, if not elegance; and the reader has before him as perfect a picture as we can draw of the personal appearance of the individual who now entered the parlour of the cottage.

The moment he had crossed the threshold of the room, Agnes sprang towards him, saying, "My dearest father, I am delighted to see you! But let me hope that nothing unpleasant has caused this late visit."

And, as she spoke, she embraced with almost infantine tenderness the parent who affectionately returned her caresses.

"Nothing unpleasant, my dear child," was the reply; and then the young maiden's father cast an enquiring glance towards Mrs. Mortimer.

"This lady," said Agnes, "is the widow of a General who recently died in India; and, having herself occupied the cottage many years ago, she felt anxious, on her return to England, to visit the place which had so many pleasing and some melancholy associations for her."

"The lady is most welcome," observed the gentleman; "and her name——"

"Is Mrs. Mortimer," added Agnes: then, with ingenuous affability, she said, turning to the old woman, "Madam, permit me to introduce my beloved father, Mr. Vernon."

But Mr. Vernon bowed coldly, and even eyed the visitor suspiciously, as he observed, "I was not aware that any General-officer bearing the name of Mortimer had recently died in India."

"My deceased husband," said the old woman, with admirable presence of mind, "was not in the English service. He was in that of the Honourable East India Company."

"I was not aware," repeated Mr. Vernon, still in the same chilling tone, "that there were General-officers in the service of the East India Company. Madam," he continued, now fixing his gaze sternly upon her, "wherefore have you come hither?—on what pretence have you intruded yourself upon the sacred privacy of my daughter?"

"The motive was the one which Miss Vernon has explained to you, sir," replied Mrs. Mortimer, whose self-possession had been for a few moments considerably disturbed by the confident manner in which the young lady's father had exposed her second falsehood.

"Then, if that motive were really the true one, madam," he said, his sternness again changing to freezing politeness, "your object is probably gained by this time; and, as it is now ten o'clock, you will perhaps have the kindness to leave me with my daughter."

"Oh! assuredly, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, glad of an opportunity to escape from the house; and Mr. Vernon, with constrained

courtesy, hastened to open the door to afford her egress.

The old woman breathed more freely when she was once more outside the walls of the cottage; for the sudden advent of the young maiden's father had not a little embarrassed, even if it had not altogether discomfited her.

But no sooner was she in the open air, when she began to ask herself a thousand questions as she retraced her way up the lane.

What meant the mystery which evidently hung around the present occupant of the cottage?—wherefore did that charming creature dwell there alone?—why was her father only a visitor, instead of being a resident at his daughter's abode?—and for what aim, or through what motive, was so fair a flower buried in such seclusion?

That Agnes was indeed the pure, innocent, artless creature which she appeared to be, the old crone was sure. Too well acquainted with the world was Mrs. Mortimer not to perceive that the ingenuous *naïveté* of the young girl was real and natural, and not artificial and assumed. For an instant the impure imagination of the wretch had suggested that Miss Vernon might only be the pensioned mistress of some wealthy individual; but in another moment that hypothesis was altogether discarded. No: Agnes was not tainted with even the slightest—faintest shade of immorality: her mind was innocence itself—and her chastity as unblemished as the driven snow. Even the old woman, whose life had been so tremendously dissolute, was compelled to embrace this conviction; but the very experience which she herself had gained in the sphere of licentiousness, dissimulation, and guile, helped Mrs. Mortimer to arrive at that unquestionable conclusion.

Who and what, then, was Agnes Vernon;—who and what was her father?

Mrs. Mortimer was a person having an eye to her own individual advantage in every circumstance which, coming under her cognisance, seemed to present a chance of affording scope for her selfish, interested, sinister interference. Wherever a mystery appeared, there she beheld an opportunity for her officious meddling: this officious meddling led to the discovery of secrets and to the eliciting of revelations:—and the information thus gleaned became a sort of marketable commodity with Mrs. Mortimer. In a word, she would seek to gain the confidence of those who had matters of importance to communicate, so that she might subsequently render herself so useful as to deserve payment, or at all events acquire the position of one who could exact a good price for her secresy respecting the things so imprudently entrusted to her.

Calculations in accordance with this disposition on her part, and having reference to the cottage which she had just left, were passing in her mind as she sped along the lane,—when, midway in that narrow thoroughfare, she was overtaken by some one who had hurried after her, but whose footsteps she had not heard, in the pre-occupation of her thoughts, until they were close behind her.

She stepped—turned round—and beheld, by the bright starlight, a tall young gentleman, apparently handsome so far as she could distinguish his features, and dressed in an elegant style.

"Pardon me, my good woman," said he, "for addressing you; but observing that you came from the cottage yonder——"

"Yes, sir—I did," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, who, in her eagerness to learn the motive of the young gentleman's accosting her, gave him encouragement to proceed.

"Tell me," said he, speaking with an equal impatience,—"tell me—do you know the beautiful creature who dwells in that seclusion? But of course you must know her—you have been there—perhaps in her company——"

"I have only just left her presence," observed Mrs. Mortimer.

"And you are well acquainted with her, then?" cried the young gentleman, eagerly.

"Perfectly well," was the answer. "But wherefore these questions?"

"Oh! if I could trust you!" ejaculated the stranger, in a tone that alike proffered and invited confidence.

"You can—you may," said the old woman, impressively.

"If I were assured of that, I would reward you well," was his next remark.

"How can I prove that I am trustworthy?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

"By telling me all you know concerning the beauteous creature who resides in that strange seclusion," responded the young gentleman.

"Then you yourself know nothing of her or of her affairs?" said the old woman, interrogatively.

"Nothing—absolutely nothing—save and except that she is the most lovely being that mortal eyes ever beheld!"

"You are not even aware that she has resided there for these three years past?" observed Mrs. Mortimer, assuming a mysterious tone as if about to become more communicative.

“Yes—that fact I have learnt,” replied the young gentleman; “and also that her name is Agnes Vernon. I have moreover ascertained that an elderly gentleman visits her occasionally;—and I have sometimes harboured the worst fears——But, no—no,” he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself and speaking in an impassioned tone: “such suspicions are no doubt foully injurious to that charming creature! I have contemplated her, myself being unseen, for hours together when she has been walking in her garden,—and purity, innocence, artlessness are written upon her spotless brow—traced in every lineament of her bewitching countenance. Oh! If I could only obtain the assurance that the old man who thus visits her were a relation—a guardian—or a valued friend,—that he is nothing more to her than——”

“I can relieve you of this suspense, sir,” said Mrs. Mortimer, “and thereby give you a proof of my readiness to assist you. The elderly gentleman whom you have seen visiting at that cottage, and who indeed is there at this moment——”

“Yes—yes—I saw him enter,” exclaimed the young man, impatiently. “But who is he?”

“Her father!” answered Mrs. Mortimer.

“Her father!” repeated the stranger. “Oh! that is scarcely probable! You are deceiving me:—you are pretending to give me explanations relative to mysteries which are likewise enigmas to you,—or you are purposely deluding me! Her father!—impossible! What—would a parent leave his daughter—and that daughter so transcendently lovely—to dwell in such utter seclusion——”

“Such is indeed the case, sir,” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer; “and I have little cause to thank you for thus boldly and even insolently accusing me of wilfully deceiving you.”

And, as she thus spoke, the old woman moved rapidly away, well knowing that the young gentleman would not part with her in this manner.

“Stop one minute—stay—I beseech you—and pardon me!” he exclaimed, hastening after her. “I was wrong to address you in such a style: I insulted you grossly—and I crave your forgiveness. But I was bewildered with the intelligence you gave me: mingled joy and surprise deprived me, as it were, of my reason. I imagined the information to be too welcome and too extraordinary to be true!”

“And yet you ere now sought to persuade yourself that Agnes Vernon was chaste and pure, though you were then ignorant of the connexion subsisting between herself and the elderly gentleman who visits her—a connexion which, previously to the explanation I have given you, must at least have appeared suspicious, and calculated to raise the most serious misgivings in your breast.”

“I admit that my conduct is most inconsistent,” exclaimed the young gentleman, in answer to these reproachful words: “but I love Agnes Vernon—I adore her—I worship the very ground upon which she treads——”

“And you have never yet spoken to her?” asked the old woman.

“I have never dared to intrude myself so far upon her notice,” was the reply: “and yet she has seen me frequently in the neighbourhood ——”

“But she never gave you the least encouragement, sir,” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, as if making an assertion, instead of throwing out a remark for the sake of gleaning information.

“Never—never!” exclaimed the young man; “and therefore did I think so well of her character, in spite of the suspicious circumstances attending her seclusion.”

“You have, then, the vanity to suppose that if the beautiful Agnes could have smiled upon any man, you were destined to be that happy one;”—and, as Mrs. Mortimer made this remark, her voice assumed a somewhat caustic tone.

“Oh! you have misunderstood my words,” cried the stranger. “I intended to have you infer that I had never seen any thing in the demeanour and deportment of Agnes Vernon save what is becoming to a young lady of good birth, genteel breeding, and taintless soul. At the same time,” he added, proudly, “I flatter myself that there is nothing particularly disagreeable in my personal appearance, as there is assuredly everything favourable in my social position. But of *this* Agnes is ignorant; and I am desirous to obtain an interview with her—or to write to her in a respectful manner——”

“And what has hitherto prevented you from doing either?” asked Mrs. Mortimer.

“I have already told you that I dared not accost her. Often and often have I longed to burst through the green hedge which has concealed me from her view, and throw myself at her feet: but an invisible hand has restrained me—and I have experienced a species of awe for which I could not account, and which has made me feel as if I were in the vicinity of a goddess. Then, as to writing to her,” continued the impassioned young man, “I was once bold enough to commit a few words to paper—and I endeavoured to persuade the young servant-girl to give the note to her mistress.”

“And she treated you with contempt,” said Mrs. Mortimer, anticipating the fate of the *billet* from the fact that Jane, the pretty domestic, had so indignantly rejected her own proffer of five shillings.

“You have guessed rightly—and now I am more than ever convinced that you are well acquainted with the honest, upright, disinterested character of the dwellers in that cottage,” said the young gentleman.

Mrs. Mortimer remained silent for a few minutes. She was absorbed in thought. Should she enter into this new affair which seemed almost to force itself upon her? or had she not enough already upon her hands? She had promised to rejoin her daughter Laura by a particular day in Paris; and there was not much time to lose. Nevertheless, she had a good week, or even more, at her disposal—providing that she was speedily successful in tracing out Torrens; and, all things duly considered, she fancied that she might as well undertake a business which promised remuneration, and which would probably place her in a condition to learn secrets and dive into mysteries, a knowledge of which might prove serviceable in the hands of such an intriguing, mercenary disposition as her own. Moreover, the larger were her own special resources, the greater was her independence in respect to her rebellious daughter; and therefore, after a short interval passed in deep reflection, she said, “Sir, I am both ready and able to serve you. But my time is precious now, and will be so for a short time to come. Five days hence I will attend to any appointment that you may name.”

“I will give you my card,” said the young gentleman: “and I shall expect you to call upon me in the evening of the fifth day from this date.”

“Agreed!” ejaculated the old woman, as she received the card. “My name is Mortimer; and, although you do not address me as becomes my position, I can assure you that I am a lady by birth, education, and——”

She was about to say “conduct;” but the young gentleman, interrupted her timeously enough, though unwittingly on his part, to prevent her giving utterance to the atrocious lie;—for he observed, as he thrust his purse into her hand, “Pardon me, madam, if I have not behaved courteously towards you: but I presume that your circumstances are not as flourishing as they ought to be, and gold is no object to me. Five days hence we meet: till then, farewell.”

And, without waiting for any reply, he hurried away.

Mrs. Mortimer followed along the lane not with any purpose of watching him, but simply because her own route lay in the same direction. The echoes of his retreating steps, however, soon died in the distance; and the old woman sped along until she reached that public-house where, as the reader may remember, Tom Rain and Clarence Villiers met on the night of the elopement nearly twenty years before.

Approaching the window, whence a bright glare streamed forth, Mrs. Mortimer examined the card that had been placed in her hands, and, to her astonishment, found that the hero of her most recent adventure was Lord William Trevelyan, and that his residence was in Park Square. She knew enough of the English peerage to be well aware that the nobleman whom chance had thus thrown in her way was the second son of the Marquis of Curzon, a peer of immense wealth, and who permitted his three male children—all fine young men—to enjoy each a separate establishment for himself, for which purpose he allowed them handsome incomes.

Mrs. Mortimer was therefore well pleased at the encounter which she had that evening made; and in more ways than one was she rejoiced at having visited the cottage in the neighbourhood of Streatham,—especially as the purse which Lord William had given her contained thirty guineas.

An omnibus passing at this moment, the old woman entered the vehicle, and alighted in the Borough. She was speeding homeward—that is to say, to the coffee-house where she had fixed her temporary abode—when, as she was threading a narrow street that offered her a short cut to the place of destination, she was suddenly struck by the certainty that a man who was walking slowly in advance, add whom she had nearly overtaken, was neither more nor less than the object of her search!

For, as he had turned to cast a rapid, stealthy glance around, the light of a lamp had beamed fully upon his countenance;—and that countenance, altered though it were, was too well known to the old woman not to be immediately recognised.

Yes: there indeed was Torrens,—there—in her power—within a few paces of her;—and thus had accident once more materially served his malignant, evil-intentioned pursuer.

Mrs. Mortimer was so excited by this sudden discovery, that she was compelled to pause for a moment and lean against a wall for support. But, almost immediately afterwards recovering her energy and presence of mind, she hastened on, and came near enough up with Torrens to behold him enter a house of mean and miserable appearance.

“Now you are in my power!” muttered the old woman to herself, but in reality apostrophising the individual who was still her husband: and, without another moment’s hesitation, she knocked at the door of the dwelling.

Some minutes elapsed before it was opened; and at length a dirty, slipshod drab of a girl made her appearance.

“I wish to speak to the man who has just entered here,” said Mrs. Mortimer, unceremoniously pushing her way into the narrow, dark, and unpleasantly smelling passage.

“Oh! you means old Mr. Smith what lives down stairs, I des say,” observed the girl.

“I have no doubt of it,” returned Mrs. Mortimer, officiously closing the street-door. “Come, my dear, show me the way—and I will give you sixpence for yourself.”

This promise acted like magic upon the girl, who forthwith fetched a lighted candle from a room opening from the passage, and conducted the old woman to a precipitate flight of steps, down which she pointed, saying, “There—right at the bottom: the door faces you.”

Mrs. Mortimer placed the promised gratuity in her hand, and the girl held the candle high up to light her as she descended. “That will do, my dear,” said the old woman when she had reached the last step of the dangerous flight; and the girl disappeared, leaving the place in utter darkness. Before the candle had been thus removed, however, Mrs. Mortimer had hastily reconnoitred the locality; and, applying her hand to a latch, she opened a door, and in another moment found herself in the presence of her husband!

CHAPTER CLX.

THE HUSBAND AND WIFE.

The place where the husband and wife met thus, after a separation of upwards of nineteen years, was what the poor term “a kitchen,” but which rather merited the designation of “a cellar.” The roof was low and arched—the rough brick-work of the walls, once smeared with white-wash, was now dingy all over—and in the day-time a gleam of light was admitted by means of a miserably small window protected and also darkened by a grating set in the foot-way of the street. The den contained a fire-place, where the inmate might cook his victuals if he were able to bear the intolerable heat of a fire in the midst of summer; and at the extremity facing the window was a small bed. A table, two chairs, a few articles of crockery, and a washing-stand, completed the appointments of this wretched place, which was dimly lighted by a solitary candle.

The reader is already aware that Torrens was much altered in personal appearance: nevertheless, his wife had recognised him in the street without any difficulty. But it was not precisely the same on his part: had *he* met *her* in an accidental manner, he would not have known her, so remarkable was the change that had taken place in her. Yet he did know her now—for he had seen her in the little parlour at Percival’s house; and the moment she stood before him on the threshold of his present hiding-place, a cry of horror and alarm escaped his lips.

Mrs. Mortimer closed the door, and, taking a chair, motioned her husband likewise to be seated—a kind of command which he mechanically obeyed; for something told him that he was in the power of the woman whom he hated and abhorred.

“We meet after a long, long separation,” she said, in a low tone, which left him still in utter doubt as to whether the object of her visit was peace or war.

“Yes—yes,” he observed, nervously: “but wherefore should we meet at all?”

“Not to exchange caresses and endearing words—not to unite our fortunes or our misfortunes, as husband and wife,” responded the old woman. “Of *that* you may be well assured!”

“Then, again I ask—wherefore should we meet?” demanded Torrens.

“Because this interview suits my purposes,” returned Mrs. Mortimer, with a malignant grin; “and I may as well commence by assuring you that you are completely in my power.”

“In your power!” repeated the old man, casting a ghastly look of mingled apprehension and appeal on her who thus proclaimed her authority, and who seemed resolved to exercise it.

“Yes—in my power,” she exclaimed, in an impressive manner. “Do you know that I was arrested on suspicion of being the murderess, or at all events concerned in the murder—”

“Murder! oh—my God!” moaned Torrens, clasping his hands together in convulsive anguish, as he glared wildly around.

“Do not affect ignorance of the fact,” said Mrs. Mortimer: “because you are doubtless well aware that I *was* arrested for *your* crime.”

“No—no: you cannot prove that I did it—you can prove nothing!” cried Torrens, with a species of hysterical violence.

“I can prove that *you* were the murderer of Percival,” responded the old woman, fixing her eyes sternly upon her husband.

“Liar—wretch—I defy you!” exclaimed Torrens, his energy suddenly reviving as he saw the absolute necessity of meeting with boldness a charge which he felt convinced his wife could *not* prove against him: for how could she possibly entertain anything more serious than a bare suspicion?

“Harsh words and abuse will not intimidate me,” said she, in a quiet voice; “and all these variations in your manner—nervousness at one moment, terror the next, and then excitement—only tend to confirm me in my ideas. Listen, old man—and see whether I have just ground for those ideas, and whether you could explain away my tale, if told to the nearest police-magistrate.”

Torrens groaned audibly, and fell back in his chair—but not insensible—only in the exhaustion of his physical and the prostration of his moral energies; and his eyes glared in consternation on the countenance of the accusing fiend whose very presence would have

been intolerable, even if he had committed no crime for her to be able to accuse him of.

“Listen, I say,” resumed the implacable old woman. “You were at Percival’s house a few moments before myself and daughter called upon him. You seemed to be very miserable—so miserable that you wished to obtain assistance from him. These were the very words he used to me; and he observed likewise that he never *gave*—consequently you extorted nothing from him. But you watched through the window-shutters, from the outside, the interview which took place between him and myself and daughter: you beheld the gold and the notes displayed upon the table; and when the old miser was once more alone, you entered the house—and—and you murdered him with a bludgeon!”

Torrens started convulsively, and endeavoured to give utterance to an ejaculation of denial; but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and his throat was as parched as if he had been swallowing ashes.

“Yes—you murdered him,” repeated Mrs. Mortimer, apparently dwelling with fiendish delight upon the horrible accusation: “you beat the wretched man to death—your blows were dealt with a cruel, a merciless effect. Then you plundered the iron safe—you took all the treasure contained in the tin-case—gold and bank-notes to the amount of several thousands of pounds!”

“It is not true—it is not true!” said Torrens, partially recovering the power of speech.

“But it *is* true—all true—precisely as I now repeat the details,” cried Mrs. Mortimer, emphatically.

“You are mad to think me the possessor of such a treasure, when you find me in this miserable place, with thread-bare garments, and surrounded by every proof of a poverty amounting almost to utter destitution,” said Torrens, his courage to meet the charge somewhat reviving as he flattered himself that the argument just used was decisive and unanswerable.

“Do you imagine me to be so thoroughly ignorant of the world as to become your dupe on such easy terms?” demanded the old woman, in a tone of withering scorn. “Look at all I have passed through, and then ask yourself whether it be possible to deceive and mislead me! No, no—I understand it all. You believe that suspicion will never fall upon the wretched inmate of such a wretched place,” she continued, glancing slowly around the cellar—“and your calculation is a correct one. Here might you have concealed yourself—here might you have passed some weeks in apparent poverty, until the storm should have blown over. But it was destined that *one* person should obtain a clue to your guilt and a trace to your lurking-hole—and that person is myself! Nay, to convince you how well all your late proceedings are known to me, I have only to mention the fact that a few days ago you visited the cottage which once bore your name——”

“Ah!” ejaculated Torrens, startled by this new proof of how well-informed his hated wife in reality was concerning his movements.

“Yes—and to the fair inmate of that dwelling,” she added, with a look full of malignant meaning, “you admitted that you were poor no longer, but that you wished you indeed were the penniless and half-starving wretch you had so recently been! Thus the very outpourings of your remorse, old man, have furnished me with arguments—damning arguments—against you, and confirmed all my previous suspicions, if such confirmation were for an instant needed.”

“Why do you now come to me?” asked Torrens, in a faint and faltering tone, while his entire frame trembled nervously, and his countenance became so ghastly, that it was absolutely hideous to behold.

“My purpose is stern and immoveable,” replied the old woman.

“And that purpose—is——” faltered Torrens, trembling like an aspen.

“The surrender of every shilling—yes, every shilling—of the treasure which you plundered from the murdered Percival,” was the answer.

“Malediction!” ejaculated the wretched man, starting wildly from his seat as if he had received a sudden wound: then, sinking back again through sheer exhaustion, he pressed his hand to his throbbing brows, murmuring and lamenting in broken sentences such as these:—“My gold—my notes—the treasure I lost my soul to gain—the riches I had hoped to enjoy—the wealth to acquire which I imbrued my hands in blood—the blood of a fellow-creature—no—no—you shall not have my treasure.”

And he started up, flinging his arms wildly about him, while his eyes rolled horribly in their sockets, as if he were attacked by delirium.

Mrs. Mortimer sate calm and motionless, resolved to allow the paroxysm to pass ere she reiterated her stern demand. She knew—she saw that he was in her power,—now more so than ever, since he had admitted the dread crime by his unguarded exclamations.

“Woman, you will drive me mad!” suddenly cried her husband, falling back again into his seat, and looking at her with a hyena-like rage expressed upon his countenance.

“I do not seek such a catastrophe,” she observed, coolly.

“But you an urging me to it,” he replied, with savage fierceness. “No—no—I will not surrender my gold: you cannot compel me!”

“It is for you to decide whether you will adopt that alternative, or pass hence in a few minutes to the nearest station-house,” responded Mrs. Mortimer, her voice being still characterised by a calmness and deliberation indicative of the most implacable sternness of purpose.

“The station-house!” moaned Torrens, with a cold shudder: then, again becoming dreadfully excited, he exclaimed, “I will die first—and you shall perish also! Yes—I will murder you, and afterwards——”

“This is child’s play!” said Mrs. Mortimer, laughing at the threat, as she took up a knife which lay upon the table. “Advance towards me another pace—and I will plunge this sharp blade into your heart. The treasure, which is no doubt concealed somewhere in the room, will then fall into my hands all the same.”

“You are determined to rifle me of all I possess—to plunder me—to make me penniless!” cried Torrens, falling back in his seat, and giving way to his despair. “Can nothing move you? But, listen—listen: I will give you half—yes—one-half of the whole amount——”

“I came not to receive terms, but to dictate them,” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer. “And now reflect well upon your position, old man;—and remember also that your wild ravings may draw listeners to the door, and your guilt will be no longer a secret existing between you and me. Then, naught—naught can save your neck from the halter!”

“My God! she speaks truly,” murmured Torrens, bewildered by the dreadful thoughts that rushed to his brain as the woman spoke so calmly and deliberately of the ignominious death which might overtake him: “yes—she speaks truly!” he repeated; “and yet, if I give up all—surrender everything—on what am I to live? how am I to sustain my miserable existence?”

“You had no kind thought—no compassion for me, when you had friends to help you, and I was banished across the wide ocean,” said Mrs. Mortimer: “you cared not what became of me at that time, Torrens—and I have now no pity, no sympathy for you! I am aware that you loathe and detest me;—but your aversion surpasses not that which I entertain for you. There we are well matched: it is however in our relative positions that I have gained the ascendancy and can wield the authority of a despot. My crime is of old date, and has been expiated by many long, long years of horrible exile and servitude in a penal colony: your crime is new—the blood is scarcely dry upon your hands—your victim is scarcely cold in his grave—and your guilt can only be expiated on the scaffold.”

“Spare me—spare me,” groaned the wretched man, clasping his hands together in an anguish which, assassin as he was, would have moved any other than the soul-hardened, implacable Mrs. Mortimer.

“Spare you, indeed!” she repeated, in a contemptuous tone: “in what way can I spare you? If you ask me not to betray you into the hands of the officers of justice, I at once reassure you on that head—but with the one condition that you surrender up to me, and without further parley, every sixpence of the amount you have secreted somewhere in this place. I do not seek your life: I wish you to live, that you may be miserable—that you may know what starvation is—that you may wander the streets, houseless and penniless—dependent upon eleemosynary charity—begging your bread——”

“Merciful heaven! it is a fiend who is addressing these frightful words to me now!” ejaculated Torrens, surveying his wife with horror and astonishment.

“No—it is a woman,—a woman whom you deserted in her bitter trouble, and who now wreaks her vengeance upon you,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “Carry back your reminiscences some nineteen years or upwards, and contrast our positions then. You found friends and relations to console you while still in gaol, and to assist you after your release. But did you come near me? did you even send a word or a line to sympathise or to proffer aid! Miserable wretch that you are, I could wish that you were ten thousand times more miserable still!”

“Oh! that is impossible—impossible!” exclaimed Torrens, his cadaverous countenance denoting, by its hideous, painful workings, the sincerity—the profound sincerity that prompted the averment he had just made. “Were you to search the earth over, you could not find a being more miserable than I! And now—and now,” he continued, in a faltering tone, while tears trickled down his furrowed cheeks, —“now, will you have compassion upon me?”

“No—ten thousand times *no*!” ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer. “And I warn you to hasten and surrender your wealth—or I shall lose all power of restraining my impatience.”

Torrens rose from his seat, cast one look of malignant—diabolical hate upon the merciless woman, dashed the traces of grief away from his cheeks, and then turned towards the bed.

Mrs. Mortimer followed him with her eyes—those eyes now so greedy, suspicions, and anxious lest by any possibility her prey should escape her!

The wretched old man, whose heart experienced all the pains of hell, slowly and with trembling hands raised the miserable mattresses; and from beneath he drew forth a small parcel, wrapped in brown paper and tied with a thick string. This he handed to Mrs. Mortimer, who, heedless of the terrible glance which accompanied it, hastened to open the packet and examine its contents.

And now her triumph was complete;—for the parcel enclosed gold and notes to an amount which she proceeded in a leisurely manner

to compute.

“Five thousand four hundred pounds,” she said aloud, casting a malignant look upon Torrens, who had resumed his seat and appeared to be the victim of a despair that must terminate in the total wreck of his reason. “And here,” she continued, now musing to herself rather than speaking for his behoof,—“here is a document that may prove of some importance to me,—the promissory note of the young man who called himself *Viscount Marston.*”

Thus speaking, she carefully packed up the parcel once more, and secured it about her person.

“And you will not leave me a guinea—a single guinea?” asked Torrent, in a low, hollow voice—his entire aspect indicating that he was almost stupified by the merciless cupidity of his wife.

“Not a single guinea,” she replied. “The only consolation I can afford you is the assurance that your secret is safe with me. If you are ever sent to the scaffold—it will not be through my instrumentality.”

With these words, she retreated towards the door, walking backwards, so as to keep her eyes fixed upon Torrens the whole time, and thus be prepared for a sudden attack should he meditate mischief, or, in an ungovernable paroxysm of rage and despair, attempt it.

But the old man moved not from his seat, although he appeared to reel and sway unsteadily backward and forward in his chair; and at the moment when Mrs. Mortimer placed her hand on the latch, he fell heavily upon the floor.

She was about to depart when it struck her that, if he were dead, unpleasant suspicions might attach themselves to her, should she hurry away without raising any alarm; and she accordingly hastened towards him. He was senseless—but the spark of life was not extinct; and now through fear did the woman perform those duties to which she never could have been otherwise urged in respect to him. She raised him in her arms—she placed him on the bed—removed his neckcloth—and sprinkled water upon his face. In a few minutes he began to revive, and his eyes opened slowly.

“Where am I?—is it a dream?” he murmured in a faint tone: then, as his recollection returned with speed and vividness, and he knew the countenance that was bending over him, and remembered why the woman herself was there, he exclaimed, “Fiend! give me back my gold!”

“Never!” was the emphatic word that fell upon his ear in reply—and in another moment he was alone.

No—not alone: for Despair was now his companion.

And Despair is an appalling guest:—for, murderer as the man was, he had some kind of worldly consolation left in his treasure until the implacable woman wrested it from him. But now that only solace was gone—and he was left to the horror of his thoughts, and to the ghost of his victim. Beggary was before him—beggary, with all its hideous train of evils, and those evils rendered the more terrible because beyond loomed the black and ominous gibbet!

Oh! how was it that madness did not seize upon the old man’s brain, and rob him of the power of making these agonizing reflections?

Was it that his punishment was to begin upon earth? If so, assuredly the retribution was appalling, even on this side of the tomb;—and he had not even left to him the consolation that the gold for which he had bartered his soul was still in his possession—still at his command, and available for his use!

CHAPTER CLXI.

AGNES VERNON AND HER FATHER.

We must now return to the cottage near Streatham, were we left the beautiful and artless Agnes Vernon with her father.

The moment the old woman had quitted the house, Mr. Vernon turned towards his daughter, and, taking her hand, said, “My dearest child, how came you to admit a complete stranger into your presence in so unguarded a manner?”

“As I had never seen her in my life before, dear father,” replied the charming girl, “I could not for an instant suppose that she had any evil intention in visiting the cottage; because, having done her no harm——”

“But, my beloved Agnes,” interrupted her parent kindly, as he made her sit down near him as he also took a chair, “I have often told you that the world contains many wicked people, who frequently harbour the basest and most infamous designs towards young women who are pretty and unsuspecting as you; and this Mrs. Mortimer, as she calls herself, may be one of the class I have alluded to.”

“I am sorry indeed that I should have acted in a way to cause you any displeasure, my dearest father,” said Agnes, her eyes filling with tears; “but—”

“You do not understand me, my sweet child,” again interrupted Mr. Vernon, passing his hand affectionately over her glossy hair, and pure, polished brow; “I am not angry with you—indeed, it would be impossible to experience any irritation with such an amiable, excellent girl as you are. But I am alarmed lest evil-disposed persons should seek to do you an injury—and therefore I recommend caution and prudence on your part.”

“I cannot comprehend how the old lady who was here just now could possibly seek to harm me,” said the amiable Agnes, “since I have never harmed her, and, on the contrary, treated her with the respect due to her years and her afflictions.”

“What did she tell you, my love?” inquired Mr. Vernon.

Agnes forthwith related, in her own natural, simple, yet agreeable manner, the entire conversation which had passed between herself and Mrs. Mortimer.

Her father listened with earnest attention; and for some minutes after she had ceased speaking, he remained absorbed in deep thought.

“You are not pleased with the incident of this evening,” said Agnes, at length, and speaking in a timid voice, as she gazed with anxious fondness on her parent’s pensive countenance.

“Once more I assure you, my well-beloved child,” he responded, “that I am not angry with you. But you will, perhaps, be somewhat surprised to hear me declare that I do not believe one syllable of all the old woman told you. In the great world, Agnes, there is no such thing as that sentimentalism and sympathy which she professed to be the motives that led her to visit the cottage ere now. I detected her in two falsehoods—and I have every reason to suspect all the rest.”

“But was it not natural, dear papa, for her to be desirous to behold once more the scene where she had passed many happy days with her deceased husband?” inquired Agnes. “Oh! I can well understand such a feeling—and I therefore honoured and respected her for entertaining it.”

“Yes—there are a few generous hearts that would experience such sentiments,” observed Mr. Vernon; “for perhaps I was too hasty ere now in the sweeping condemnation which I levelled at what I termed the great world. At the same time, Agnes, you must not judge the world by your own pure and unsophisticated soul. And would to God that experience might never be destined to teach you other lessons than those which seclusion and good training have already inculcated: would to God that you might never be compelled to look upon the dark side of human affairs!”

“Have I other lessons to learn—other teachings to undergo—other experience to acquire, beyond what I already know?” asked the ingenuous and candid Agnes.

“Alas! yes—and in a variety of ways,” responded her father, with a sigh. “You have as yet seen only one phase of the world—that of tranquillity, serene happiness, and peace. You have not even heard the storms of that world in the distance. Hitherto your life has been passed under the most genial influences; and you know nothing—absolutely nothing, of what may be termed *life*. Again I say,

therefore, how deeply—how earnestly it is to be wished that your mind may never become acquainted with the bitter teachings of vicissitude or misfortune."

"I am already well aware, my dear father, from my historical studies and from the perusal of the books which you have selected for me, that mankind pursues many and varied conflicting interests, and that *gain* is the chief object thus sought after, But I am still at a loss," continued the beautiful Agnes, "to understand how people can be wicked enough to injure others who have never injured them, and when the infliction of such injury can confer no benefit upon the individual who is guilty of such flagrant wrong. Suppose, for instance, that this Mrs. Mortimer who was here just now, should in reality entertain some evil design towards me, how could she possibly acquire any personal advantage from the pursuit of such conduct?"

"You are as yet too innocent—oh! far too innocent, if not too young, to understand these matters," said Mr. Vernon, gazing with all a father's affection upon his beauteous and artless child. "Neither is it for me to remove the film from your eyes in this respect."

"And yet, dear papa," she observed, with the most endearing, amiable *naïveté*, "if no one will point out the shoals, rocks, and quicksands to me, how can I possibly avoid them? You see that just now I erred by receiving that person too frankly—too cordially ——"

"And the old man who called the other evening, too," said her father, with a smile. "Now, do you not perceive, my dear child, that there is something suspicious in these two visits, which indeed appear to have some degree of relationship to each other, and perhaps had the same instigation. I cannot conceive that accident should send two persons hither, separately and at a short interval, on the same pretence, unless they were acting in collusion. That such an accidental coincidence might happen, I admit; but prudence—worldly prudence, my love, makes us look suspiciously upon such events; and I confess that this is the light in which I view the present occurrences. The woman represented herself as the widow of a General who had lately died in India: now I happen to be so well-informed on these matters as to be enabled to state most emphatically that no General-officer of that name has existed for many years past. Finding herself at fault in respect to her first assertion, your visitor endeavoured to make good her tale by means of a second; but the falsehood was equally palpable in this latter case. Now, therefore, my dearest Agnes, you comprehend that there are good and just grounds for suspecting the motive which led her hither."

"Is it possible that persons can be so wicked?" exclaimed the young maiden.

"It is, alas! too true," replied her father; "and therefore you cannot be too much upon your guard in respect to strangers. I wonder that Mrs. Gifford did not represent to you the impropriety of allowing the old man to force his way into your presence a few days ago——"

"Both Mrs. Gifford and Jane spoke to me on the subject after he was gone," said Agnes, desirous to rescue her two servants from blame: "but I fancied their timidity had made them conjure up visions of thieves and housebreakers, and I only laughed while they remonstrated."

"Then you now perceive, dear Agnes, that they were right in the observations which they undertook to address to you," said Mr. Vernon.

"Yes—and I am sorry that I did not listen with more attention," answered the amiable girl. "In future, my dear father, I will allow no one to enter the house unless he or she be the bearer of a letter from you."

"This is precisely what I could desire, Agnes," exclaimed Mr. Vernon; "and you will afford me unfeigned pleasure if you adhere to this resolution."

"You know that I will do all you enjoin—even without questioning your motives," observed Agnes. "Command—and I obey."

"My dear child, the word '*command*' exists not in the vocabulary that I have to use when conveying my wishes to you. So dutiful—so good—so willing are you, Agnes, that I have never had occasion to speak with imperiousness or harshness to you. You do not even question me concerning those matters which might naturally awaken your curiosity and your interest."

"It is sufficient for me to know that you desire me to dwell in this seclusion," said Agnes; "and as you have exerted yourself, my dearest father, to surround me with every comfort—every element of happiness, I should be indeed ungrateful and unjust were I to seek prematurely those explanations which you have promised to give me when the proper time shall arrive."

"And that time is not so very far distant, Agnes," said Mr. Vernon. "Two years more—and I shall no longer have any secrets from you. But while we are thus conversing, I forget that it is waxing late and that I have not even as yet begun to account for the sudden and unexpected visit which circumstances have compelled me to pay you this evening."

Agnes now regarded her parent with some degree of suspense; for his remark had brought back to her memory the circumstance that he had never called at so late an hour before, and, moreover, that this was the third time he had visited her within the week—an occurrence at variance with his ordinary habit.

"My dear child," said Mr. Vernon, speaking in the kindest tone possible, "I am compelled to leave England on urgent business to-morrow."

“Leave England!” repeated Agnes, tears starting into her eyes.

“Yes, my beloved—and I regret to add that my absence may be of some weeks’ duration. Paris is the place whither this sudden and unexpected business calls me; and though I shall be away from you, yet will you ever be present in my thoughts, and I shall write to you frequently.”

“But how many weeks shall you be absent, my dear father?” asked Agnes, the pearly drops now chasing each other adown her cheeks.

“Eight or ten, my child,” responded Mr. Vernon: “but at the expiration of that period you will be certain to see me again. Remember, Agnes, that far longer intervals than this have occurred during which we have been completely separated—”

“Yes, my dear father—when I was staying in the country with my governess, who is now no more,” interrupted Agnes, unable to stifle her sobs: “but ever since her death I have seen you frequently—far more frequently.”

“Because I removed you to this cottage which I purchased for you, and which is so much nearer to London than was Mrs. Clement’s abode at St. Alban’s. However, my sweet Agnes—compose yourself—cheer up—and wipe away those tears. I cannot bear to see you weep,” he added, his own voice growing tremulous. “Two months or two months and a half will soon glide away; and I shall bring you a number of presents from Paris.”

“You spoil me with your kindness, my dear father,” exclaimed the beautiful girl, throwing her arms about his neck, and embracing him tenderly. “I am afraid that I must cost you a great deal of money—for you are always buying me something new. But then, you are very rich—are you not, dear papa!”

“Thank God, I am—and for your sake!” cried Mr. Vernon, returning her fond caresses. “The time will come, Agnes, when you will learn how powerful a talisman, in respect to happiness, is money. Some of the books which I have selected for you inculcate maxims against avarice, covetousness, and selfishness: while others even go further, and endeavour to prove that a moderate competency is more compatible with true happiness than an immense fortune can possibly be. But I much question whether the authors of those works would not have leapt at the chance of giving the truth of their assertions a fair trial through the medium of experience in respect to the possession of riches. Such books, however, do good; they infuse salutary thoughts into the mind—although the influence thereof must inevitably become subdued, if not altogether destroyed, in proportion as the individual advances in worldly knowledge, and finds worldly interests crowding upon him. Riches, my dearest Agnes, may become a blessing or a curse according to the manner in which the possessor uses them; and by this observation I believe that I shall have opened a new field for the exercise of your reflections and good sense.”

“Oh! you have indeed, my kind father!” exclaimed Agnes. “But—to return to the object of your visit this evening—may I express a hope that the business which calls you to Paris is of no unpleasant nature?”

“By no means, my love,” answered Mr. Vernon, smiling affectionately upon his amiable daughter. “And now I must take my departure—for it is eleven o’clock. You will remark, dear Agnes, the advice I gave you relative to the visits of strangers; for I should be unhappy indeed, if I thought that your artless, unsuspecting character were likely to be the very cause of exposing you to peril.”

“You may depend upon my prudence in future, dear father,” said Agnes; “and I am rejoiced that you have given me such timely warning. Oh! who could have thought that the old man who seemed so deeply affected, and the woman who spoke so tenderly of her deceased husband, could have harboured any sinister design? It is really enough to render one suspicious of everything and everybody in future.”

“No, my dear child—you must not fall into the opposite extreme,” cried Mr. Vernon, hastily. “Because, for instance, a mendicant to whom you give alms should turn out to be an imposter, do not argue therefrom that all destitute persons are rogues. I do not wish distrust and suspicion to take the place of your generous frankness and amiable candour; but I am desirous that, while preserving the artlessness and ingenuousness of your disposition, you should at the same time adopt those precautions which common prudence suggests. And now, my sweet Agnes, embrace me and then retire to your own chamber—for, ere I depart, I have a few instructions to give to Mrs. Gifford, whom you will please to send hither to me.”

The beauteous maiden once more threw her arms round her father’s neck and covered his face with her kisses and her tears: then, having received his blessing—a blessing which he gave from the very bottom of his heart—she reluctantly tore herself away from his arms, and quitted the room.

In a few minutes Mrs. Gifford, the housekeeper, made her appearance. She was a woman of about fifty-six years of age—stout, respectable-looking, and with a countenance in which honesty and good-temper were alike read as plainly as the words in a book.

On entering the parlour, she closed the door carefully behind her; and then her demeanour suddenly became profoundly reverential as she advanced towards the father of her young mistress.

“Mrs. Gifford,” said he, in a tone of friendly confidence, “I am about to visit Paris, and therefore thought it necessary to see you for a few moments, previous to my departure. Not that I need recommend my beloved child to your care—for I am well assured that you watch over her safety and her happiness as zealously as if she were your own daughter.”

“Your lordship—” began the housekeeper, in a tone of the deepest respect.

“Hush!” exclaimed he whom we must still call Mr. Vernon, in spite of the aristocratic title by which Mrs. Gifford had addressed him: “remember that walls have ears, my good friend! I was about to observe to you that Agnes, through the amiable confidence and ingenuousness which are natural to her, has allowed two strangers,—one a few evenings ago—the other this very night,—to intrude themselves upon her; and I tremble lest their motive be a bad one. The gardener and his assistant invariably sleep in the out-house, I hope?”

“Yes, my—I mean, sir,” answered Mrs. Gifford; “and they are resolute, determined men, who would not permit plunderers to enter these premises with impunity.”

“Good!” exclaimed Mr. Vernon. “Did you yourself see the old man who called here the other night?”

“I did not, sir,” replied Mrs. Gifford. “But Jane assured me his appearance was that of a man worn down with old age, wretchedness, and poverty, rather than of an evil-intentioned person. Shall I tell your lord—shall I tell you, sir,” said the good woman, hastily correcting herself, “what is my impression relative to that old man? Why, sir,” she continued, perceiving that Mr. Vernon nodded approvingly, “it struck me that it might be that Mr. Torrens, who used to live here many, many years ago, and of whom we heard such dreadful tales shortly after your lord—I mean, shortly after you bought the cottage.”

“But those tales—has Agnes learnt them?—have they reached her ears?” demanded Mr. Vernon, hastily: “because they might terrify and alarm her.”

“No, sir—she is entirely ignorant of all the legends attached to this house,” was the reply; “and it is not by any means likely that they can reach her ears. Jane is a discreet, good girl, and would not allude to them for worlds.”

“Thank God!” ejaculated Mr. Vernon; “for were Agnes to learn what we ourselves only heard after the entire purchase was concluded and you were located here,—were she to learn, I say, that a horrible murder had been committed in this house, I would at once procure her another dwelling. But you were speaking ere now about the very Torrens who was so unjustly accused of that foul crime.”

“I was observing, sir, that I fancied the old man who called here the other night might be he; for as Miss afterwards told me, he spoke of having lived here many years ago, and of the terrible misfortunes he had endured; and then he glanced round the parlour repeatedly, observing in an audible though anguished tone, *‘This is the very room—this is the very room!’* And *this* is the room,” continued Mrs. Gifford, “where the baronet was murdered; and therefore I conclude that the old man was none other than the wretched Torrens.”

“Your surmises are most natural,” said Mr. Vernon, after a few moments’ reflection. “But who, then, was the old woman that came just now? And yet,” he proceeded, “though I spoke of her lightly and irreverently as *an old woman*, I am bound to admit that there was really a something about her which gave me the idea of one who had seen better days. Her language was especially lady-like and correct. She said she had lived here many years ago—”

“And yet,” interrupted Mrs. Gifford, “the cottage was shut up for nearly eight years after the murder; and then the landlord into whose hands it had fallen, and who was a widower, came and resided here himself, as no one would take it. He occupied it until his death; and then your lord—and then, I mean, you purchased it, sir, together with the garden and orchard attached to it.”

“And what would you infer from all these circumstances?” inquired Mr. Vernon.

“That if the old woman really did live here many years ago, it must have been during Torrens’ time,” explained the housekeeper; “because he built the cottage, and resided in it until the murder; after which, as I just now said, it was shut up for a lengthened period. Now, strange though it may seem, an idea has likewise struck me relative to the old woman—or old lady—”

“And what is your idea!” asked Mr. Vernon.

“That she is that Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Torrens, who got into trouble at the same time as the husband she had just married. If my conjectures are correct, sir, I do not think that you have any cause for apprehension in the two visits which have been paid to the cottage.”

“I congratulate you upon the shrewdness which you have displayed in dealing with the subject,” said Mr. Vernon, smiling; “and I am inclined to adopt the views which your sagacity suggests. Perhaps, then, there is really nothing to fear: but, of course, Mrs. Gifford, you will exercise the utmost prudence and the most unwearying vigilance in regard to my darling child. You know how dear she is to me—you are also acquainted with the unhappy circumstances which force me to condemn her to this seclusion until she shall have attained her twenty-first year—unless,” he added, in a more measured tone, “death shall in the meantime snatch away that woman whom I cannot call my——”

“My lord! my lord!” exclaimed the housekeeper, in an imploring voice; “give not way to recollections which always excite you so painfully! With me your charming Agnes is safe—and you are well aware that I love her as much as if she were my own child! Besides, the deep—the many debts of gratitude which I owe to your lordship——”

“Hush! hush!” interrupted Mr. Vernon; “for again I tell you that the very walls have ears—and I would not that my rank should be even

suspected——”

“Pardon me—I forgot your oft-repeated injunctions on that head,” said Mrs. Gifford. “But you must not suppose that because I am thus sometimes oblivious in your presence, I ever allow a single word to slip from my tongue that may create a suspicion in the mind of Miss Agnes or Jane.”

“And now, Mrs. Gifford,” observed Mr. Vernon, “I have one more question to ask you:—has that young gentleman who once dared to ask Jane to deliver a note to my daughter—has he ventured into this neighbourhood since?”

“I must confess, sir,” was the answer, “that I have seen him loitering about the cottage on one or two occasions: but as he never seeks to obtrude himself upon the notice of Miss Agnes, I have not thought it worth while, nor even prudent, to suggest to the dear young lady what course she ought to pursue in case he should address her. Besides, he appears to be a gentleman in every sense of the word; and I do not apprehend any rudeness on his part towards your daughter. Indeed, he appeared much humiliated and very penitent when Jane so resolutely refused to become the bearer of his missive or to receive his bribe.”

“You have acted with prudence: it would be unwise to make any observation to Agnes relative to this stranger, under present circumstances,” said Mr. Vernon. “Were you to speak to her on the subject, you must necessarily explain the nature of that sentiment which has attracted the young gentleman to this neighbourhood—and to talk to her relative to the passion of love, were to destroy some portion of that artless innocence—that infantine purity of soul, which characterises her. In a word, I trust my dear child to your care and discretion, Mrs. Gifford;—and I shall expect that you will write to me at least once a week during my absence.”

Mr. Vernon then wrote upon a slip of paper the address where letters would reach him in Paris; and, having next placed a roll of bank notes in Mrs. Gifford’s hands for the expenses of the little establishment until his return, he took his departure.

CHAPTER CLXII.

LAURA IN PARIS.

We must now return for a short time to the beautiful, but licentious and profligate Laura, whom we left in Paris.

Although she reckoned materially upon her mother's aid in respect to her new designs, she nevertheless resolved to enjoy herself during the old woman's absence; and the thought even struck her that it was possible—though not very probable—for her to form some brilliant connexion without the assistance of her parent. At all events, she reasoned that there was no harm in making the trial; and therefore, the moment Mrs. Mortimer had taken her departure for England, Laura commenced her preparations for pleasure, and perhaps for intrigue.

She hired a private box at each of the principal theatres, and purchased a handsome carriage and a pair of beautiful horses; and then she engaged a celebrated artist to paint her portrait, well knowing that his *studio* was frequented by men of rank and fortune, and calculating that a view of the splendid countenance on the canvass would inspire the liveliest curiosity to behold the living original. She likewise secured the services of an eminent musician to give her lessons in the divine art; and this gentleman, believing her to be highly respectable, introduced her to his wife, and invited her to a musical soirée, where her beauty and the report which had been spread to the effect that she was an heiress who had just succeeded to her property, rendered her the centre of attraction.

By the means just enumerated, Laura gained one grand object—an entrance into respectable society; and this difficult point was accomplished in less than four days after her mother's departure from Paris.

She soon began to be talked about—but not with suspicion. No—it was her transcendent beauty that became the theme of discourse; and the admiration with which she had inspired both the French and English gentlemen at the soirée, rendered them so enthusiastic in her praise, that they unconsciously suffered themselves to be hurried into assertions guaranteeing her respectability and virtue, as well as expatiating on her charms.

Thus was it, for instance, that one of her French admirers would speak:—

"Never in my life did I behold so beauteous a creature as Miss Laura Mortimer, an English lady whom I met at the soirée last evening. What a pity it is that she cannot talk French: how sweet would our language sound when wafted by such a melodious voice! It is, however, fortunate that I myself understand the English tongue, or I should have been debarred the pleasure of exchanging a syllable with that houri. Houri! Mahommed never dreamt of such a glorious creature! Her hair is of the richest brown that I ever saw—glossy, luxuriant, and shining: her forehead is of a height and width deserving to sustain a queenly diadem; and her eyes, large and brilliant, are of a dark grey when looked into attentively, but seem to be of a deeper hue to the casual observer. Then her teeth—never were beheld such pearls! But her form—her figure—oh, it were impossible to find words to describe the charms of that magnificent shape! A critic, having the ancient models of classic female beauty in his mind, would perhaps pronounce her bust to be in proportions too voluptuous: but let him contemplate that graceful slope of the shoulders—the arching of the swan-like neck—the fine expansion of the chest—the perfect roundness of the bosom—the just symmetry of the waist—and the dazzling whiteness of the charms revealed by the low corsage of the evening toilette,—let the admirer of ancient models behold all this, and he will soon confess that he would have nothing changed in the contours of Laura Mortimer's figure. Oh! she was indeed heavenly in her elegant, but tasteful attire; and the lustre of her eyes outvied the brilliancy of her diamonds. But, in addition to her faultless beauty there is about her an air of virgin freshness that indicates a mind pure and untainted; though, at the same time, it is easy to perceive that Laura Mortimer is no inexperienced girl. She is, on the contrary, a young woman of fine intellect, proud soul, and independent spirit,—energetic, without being masculine,—firm, yet endowed with all the natural softness of her sex. That her passions are strong and her disposition even sensual, you may read in her eyes and in the lineaments of her aquiline countenance;—but that an honest pride enables her to put a curb upon her ardent imagination, is equally certain. Happy will be the man who shall win so inestimable a prize!"

"I understand," another enthusiastic admirer would observe, "that she is possessed of a fine property. Her deceased father, I am told, was a wealthy nabob; and she expects her mother shortly to join her in Paris. The old lady has gone to England to make certain transfers from the British to the French funds, in behalf of her daughter. Miss Mortimer is decidedly the most charming creature that ever burst thus suddenly upon the dazzled sight of the fashionable world in Paris. Oh! how I envy the professor of music who gives her lessons, and the artist who is painting her portrait! Never could I grow weary of contemplating that splendid countenance, or of listening to that voice so full of melody!"

In a word, within a very few days from the time when she took the handsome suite of apartments in the Rue Monthabor, Laura became the topic of conversation amongst all the nobles and gentlemen, French or foreign, in the fashionable quarters of Paris; and those who

heard the praises so lavishly bestowed upon her by the envied few that had already formed her acquaintance, longed to be presented to this goddess of beauty!

One danger she incurred—and of this she was sensible: it consisted in the fact that the persons belonging to the hotel where she and Charles Hatfield had at first put up, and likewise the British chaplain and his clerk, were aware that she was married! But she calculated that the chances of detection or exposure at their hands were very insignificant and scarcely worth a thought: for even though any of the parties alluded to should meet and recognise her, they would believe themselves to be mistaken in respect to the identity of Laura Mortimer with Perdita Hatfield. Besides, Paris was a very large city; and months might elapse before such a meeting or recognition took place; and in the meantime she hoped to have so successfully conducted her intrigues as to be able to return to England in complete independence of her convention with Mr. Hatfield.

It was on the sixth morning after Laura had taken up her abode in the Rue Monthabor that she saw a paragraph in *Galignani's Messenger*, the English journal published in Paris, announcing that His Sovereign Highness the Grand Duke of Castelcicala, who had just succeeded to that lofty rank in consequence of his father-in-law's demise, had arrived on the preceding evening in the French capital, on his way to Italy. The article, in the usual fulsome manner, stated that his Sovereign Highness intended to remain one day in Paris, in order to have a private interview with the King of the French; and the journalist proceeded to give a list of the noblemen and gentlemen composing the suite of the Grand Duke. In that category there was one English name;—and that name was CHARLES HATFIELD!

"Charles Hatfield!" exclaimed Laura, in astonishment, and scarcely able to believe the evidence of her own eyes; but a second reference to the paragraph assured her that she had indeed made no mistake. "Ah! I comprehend," she murmured to herself, as she laid the paper upon the breakfast table, at which she was seated; "this is the course that his stern father has adopted in order to throw him amidst new scenes, and remove him afar from the meridian of London as well as from that of Paris! He is to be sent into a species of ostracism in Italy, until he shall have been weaned from the lingering affection he entertains for *me*!"

Thus reasoning within herself, Laura rose from the sofa whereon she had been reclining, and approached a mirror, on whose bright and polished surface she beheld the glorious reflection of her countenance,—that countenance which was now radiant with the triumph that filled her soul.

"Yes," she murmured to herself, as she still continued to survey her image in the glass,—"his father is afraid that he will yet fly back to my arms—afraid that the magic of my beauty may once more draw him within the sphere of its influence!"

As these thoughts passed through her brain, her soul was filled with an ineffable exultation;—for she marked the flashing of her fine eyes, and the dazzling brilliancy of the teeth that appeared like pearls set between two rubies,—marked also the glow of rich carnation on her cheeks, in such striking contrast to the alabaster shoulders and swelling bosom whiter than Parian marble, and which, according to a habit produced by the natural voluptuousness of her temperament, were purposely left more than half exposed even when she was alone,—all those beauties—her own transcendent beauties—she beheld reflected in the faithful mirror; and never was woman more profoundly conscious of the sovereign power which perfect loveliness exercises over the heart of man, than was Laura Mortimer on this occasion.

The reader has already seen enough of this young woman to be well aware that she was a most extraordinary character; and, though her conduct would in another often warrant the belief that she was made up of *contradictions*, yet with her those very deeds or thoughts that might seem to deserve such a name, were in reality in perfect keeping with a disposition to the reading of whose depths and intricacies the key of no ordinary experience of the female heart would serve.

Thus was it that a wild—a strange—and a daring scheme rose up in her mind, as, surveying her peerless charms in the polished mirror, she repeated to herself, "Charles Hatfield is in Paris! He will be in the capital for twenty-four hours; and in twenty-four hours so much may be done! May I not take the first step in my meditated vengeance—a small step, it is true,—and yet a commencement! Yes—at the same time I may prove the irresistible power of my beauty, and wring his recreant heart with a jealousy—a jealousy so keen, so acute, so galling that he shall writhe in agony of spirit, and yet dare not utter a word! All this I can do, and still not violate my compact with his father. For how run the conditions? *Never to molest the young man in any way—never to return to England, but to fix my abode in some continental State—and never to reveal the fact of our marriage!* Not one of those conditions shall I break by the plan which now engages my attention. For if we happen to meet in the same room, or at the same public resort, it cannot be said that I molest him. No:—and now for the execution of my project—a project that, in its carrying out, will excite in his breast the tortures of hell!"

And the beauteous mouth was wreathed into a smile of malignant—almost fiend-like triumph, as those last words came hissing between her pearly teeth—not borne upon a voice melodious as a silver bell, but in a tone so changed for a few moments, that had she spoken in the dark, with her own mother or Charles Hatfield present, but able only to *hear* and not to *see*, that voice would not have been recognised by them!

Rosalie, the adept and intriguing lady's-maid, was now summoned to hold a conference with her mistress.

"It is my intention to appear in the Champs Elysées this afternoon, attired in the most becoming manner," said Laura. "The day is gloriously fine, and the carriage will be open. I wish you to exercise all your judgment and your best taste in the superintendence of my toilette. Let me have no gaudy colours—nothing savouring of splendour. Chaste elegance must characterise my costume: in a word, Rosalie, let my beauty be enhanced by my apparel, without appearing to be in any way indebted to artificial means."

“I understand you, *mademoiselle*,” said Rosalie; “and you may depend upon me.”

“But now I wish to appeal to your ingenuity, my dear girl,” proceeded Laura,—“having thus recommended myself to your good taste. Listen attentively! The Grand Duke of Castelcicala is in Paris; and his stay is limited to a few hours. Charles Hatfield,” she continued, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, as if the very walls had ears, “is in his suite; and I am desirous that *he*—Charles Hatfield—accompanied by three or four other gentlemen in the Duke’s service, should be allured by some means to the Champs Elysées this afternoon.”

“You wish that Mr. Charles and his companions may appear, either on foot or horseback, in the fashionable lounge at the time when you yourself will be there?” said Rosalie, interrogatively.

“You have expressed my desire with accuracy,” observed Laura. “Does your imagination suggest any plan by which this aim can be accomplished?”

Rosalie reflected profoundly for upwards of a minute: then, suddenly turning towards her mistress, she said, “Can you tell me the names of any of the nobles or gentlemen in the Duke’s suite, besides Mr. Charles Hatfield?”

Laura immediately directed Rosalie’s attention to the paragraph in the *Messenger*; and the cunning lady’s-maid, having perused it, exclaimed, “Will you leave this matter entirely in my hands, *mademoiselle*?”

“I will,” answered Laura. “But, whatever be your plan, remember that you must not compromise me. All I demand or require is that Charles Hatfield, accompanied by three or four of his comrades in the Duke’s service, shall visit the Champs Elysées this afternoon. The rest concerns me.”

“I understand you, *mademoiselle*,” said Rosalie: “you may trust entirely to my discretion, without entertaining the least dread of being in any way compromised.”

The abigail then retired, and Laura was left alone to meditate upon the scheme she had thus set on foot.

How her dependant proposed to act, in order to accomplish that part of the design which had been entrusted to her, Laura could not conceive: nor indeed did she give herself much trouble to conjecture. She placed full reliance upon the tact, discretion, and ability of Rosalie; and regarded success as certain.

In order to while away the time, she turned to her writing-table, and examined a packet which her music-master had left with her on the previous evening. The enclosure consisted of English translations of several of the most popular French songs and national airs; and Laura set herself deliberately to the study of these pieces, well aware that an acquaintance with their tendency and spirit would prove of advantage to her in conversation.

The first manuscript to which she thus earnestly addressed herself, was a free version of that soul-stirring hymn, *La Marseillaise*:—

LA MARSEILLAISE.

Sons of heroes, famed in story,
Onward march to death or glory!
For see, the foemen’s standard waves
O’er fields that soon must be their graves!
Hear ye the clashing of their arms—
Their shouts portending dire alarms?
Eager for slaughter, on they press
To make your children fatherless.
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th’ invaders’ blood to fertilise the land!

Wherefore to our peaceful coast
Rush those sanguinary hosts?
For whom have they prepared the chains
Which now they drag o’er verdant plains?—
Children of France, to us they come—
Those chains are forged to stamp our doom!
Just Heaven, that such disgrace should fall
Upon the free-born sons of Gaul!
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th’ invaders’ blood to fertilize the land!

What! shall we, afraid of war,
Take from tyrant hands the law?
What! shall a foreign cohort's pride
Intimidate our warriors tried?
Great God! our necks can never be
Subject to despots' tyranny:
Nor shall th' invaders of the State
Decide upon its people's fate!
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

Tremble! chiefs, perfidious all—
On your heads our curses fall!
Tremble! your projects, soon made vain,
Their merited return will gain;—
For France has armed her serried bands,
And placed her safety in their hands:
So that if hundreds fall to day,
To-morrow thousands join th' array.
Then let each warrior grasp the vengeful brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

In the darkling battle's strife,
Soldier! spare your victim's life,
When, armed against you in the field,
Feeble and weak, he cries—"I yield!"
Him may'st thou spare: but to the grave
Shalt thou pursue the chief who gave
Such dire example to the rest
That tear for food their mother's breast!—
Then let each warrior grasp the vengeful brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

Sacred fervour—patriot flame,
Urge us on to deeds of fame!
Freedom! assist the deadly blow
That we direct against the foe:
Conquest! may we to war be led,
Thy banners amply o'er us spread;—
And may the tyrant hosts retreat,
Or beg for mercy at our feet!
Then let each warrior grasp the gleaming brand,
And shed th' invaders' blood to fertilize the land!

The next manuscript which Laura studied on this occasion contained a translation of Casimir Delavigne's celebrated national air, written after the Revolution of 1830:—

LA PARISIENNE.

Gallant nation, now before you
Freedom, beckoning onward, stands:
Let no tyrant's sway be o'er you—
Wrest the sceptre from his hands!
Paris gave the general cry,
"Glory, Fame, and Liberty!"
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Keep your serried ranks in order:
Sons of France, your country calls!
Gory hecatombs award her—
Well she merits each who falls.
Happy day! the general cry
Echoed “Fame and Liberty!”
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Vain the shot may sweep along you,
Banks of warriors now arrayed:
Youthful generals are among you,
By the great occasion made!
Happy day! the fervent cry
Echoed “Fame and Liberty!”
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Foremost, who the Carlist lances
With the banner-staff has met?—
Freedom’s votary advances—
Venerable Lafayette!
Happy day! the fervent cry
Echoed “Fame and Liberty!”
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Triple dyes again combining,
See the squadrons onward go:
In the country’s heaven shining,
Mark the bold tri-coloured bow!
Happy day! the general cry
Echoed “Fame and Liberty!”
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Heroes of that banner gleaming,
Ye who bore it in the fray—
Orleans’ troops! your blood was streaming
Freely on that fatal day!
From the page of history
We have learnt the general cry.
Speed, warriors, speed,
Though thousands bleed,
Pierced by the leaden ball, or crushed by thundering steed:—
Conquest waits—your foemen die!

Muffled drum, thy music lonely
Answers to the mourners’ sighs:
Laurels, for the valiant only,
Ornament their obsequies!
Sacred fane of Liberty,
Let their memories never die!
Bear to his grave
Each warrior brave,
Who fell in Freedom’s cause, his country’s rights to save,
Crowned with fame and victory!

There was one more translation from the French in the packet which had been placed at Laura's disposal: and this was a portion of Victor Hugo's celebrated

O D E,
WRITTEN AFTER THE REVOLUTION OF 1830.

O friends of your country, immortal in story,
 Adorned with the laurels ye won in the fight;—
When thousands around you fell covered with glory,
 Ye turned not away from the enemy's might;
But ye raised up your banners, all tattered and torn,
Like those which your sires had at Austerlitz borne!

Ye have rivalled those sires—ye have conquered for France:
 The rights of the people from tyrants are saved:—
Ye beckoned to Freedom—ye saw her advance—
 And danger was laughed at, and peril was braved.
Then, if they were admired who destroyed the Bastille,
What for you should not France in her gratitude feel?

Ye are worthy your fathers—your souls are the same—
 Ye add to their glory, their pride, and renown;—
Your arms are well nerved—ye are noted by Fame,
 That the laurel and oak may unite for your crown!
Your mother—'tis France! who for ever will be
The mother of heroes—the great—and the free!

E'en England the jealous, and Greece the poetic—
 All Europe admired,—and the great Western World
Arose to applaud with a heart sympathetic,
 When it marked the French banners of freedom unfurled.
Three days were sufficient to shake off the chain,
And ye proved yourselves friends to your country again!

'Twas for you that your ancestors traced round the earth
 The circle of conquest, triumphant and glorious,
Which, extending to Cairo, from France took its birth,
 And proceeded through slaughter, but ever victorious:—
'Twas for you they encountered the Muscovite snows,
Or in Italy plucked for their trophies the rose!

O offspring of heroes and children of Fame!
 Applaud the achievements your sires did before you!
Extend their renown, while ye honour their name,
 And fight for the banners that proudly wave o'er you.
Remember, Napoleon has oft cast his eye
Through the long serried ranks of the French chivalry!

Thou, Herald of Jupiter—Eagle of France!
 'Tis thou that hast carried our thunders afar:
With thee for a sign did our armies advance—
 With thee as their symbol, they went to the war!
Look around thee—rejoice! for the sons of thy land
Are worthy the sires that thou erst didst command!
And France has awakened from stupor profound,
And the watch-word has raised all her champions around;
And the din of their weapons struck loud on the ear,
As it hearkened the tread of the cavalry near.
But the tyrant has marshalled his warriors in vain,
And his culverins thundered again and again;—
For the stones that the citizens tore from the street

For the stones that the citizens tore from the street,
Laid the cohorts of Royalty dead at their feet!
And their numbers increased—for they fought to be free,
And they poured on the foe like the waves of the sea,
While the din of the tocsin that echoed on high,
Was drowned in the fervour of Liberty's cry!

The tyrant has left you with sorrow and anguish,
Fair city—the glory of France and the world:
Three days have elapsed since in chains you did languish—
You have fought—you have won—and your banners are furled!
And wise were your counsels succeeding the strife—
For Revenge even smiled with the rest,
When Clemency bade her surrender the knife
Ere 'twas plunged in the enemy's breast!

The friends of the monarch with him are o'erthrown—
'Tis thus that a people its rights will defend;
For if Fate have determined the fall of a crown,
The schemes of the council accomplish the end.
The wretches! they deemed, in their insolent pride,
That France to their sceptre would bow;
But the Lord found them light when their balance was tried,
And reduced them to what they are now!

And, oh! let the lesson for ever remain—
When we raise up a King, we are forging a chain.
When we humble our necks to a monarch, we make
A bond that we leave for our children to break;
Since the breath of a King is the spark to the pan—
The musket explodes, and its victim is—man!

> Now let the funeral dirge be said,
> And let the priests lament the dead:
> But let them come with modest vest—
> No more in tinsel splendour drest;—
> No more with ostentatious air
> Need they commence a lofty prayer:
> No sign of worldly pomp should be
> Mingled with aught of sanctity;—
> Less welcome to the Lord on high
> Is grandeur than sincerity!

Henceforth to the priest be all splendour unknown—
Let his cross be of wood, and his cushion of stone:
The church is his refuge—the church is his rest—
In her arms he is safe—in her care he is blest!
For when the volcanic eruption is red,
Like the froth of the wine-press that Burgundy fed;
When the sides of Vesuvius are glowing and bright,
When Naples re-echoes with cries of affright—
'Tis then that the groans of the children resound,
And mothers despairingly fall to the ground—
'Tis then that in vain they expend to the air
The half-uttered words which are meant for a prayer;
While black lines of mist from the crater ascend,
And seem to foretell that the world's at an end!
Those lines have divided—a lustre, that broke
From the bowels of the mount, superseded the smoke:
Then Naples, adieu to the grots in thy vales—
Adieu to thy ships—the flame spreads to their sails;
The lava has fall'n on the sides of the hill,
As the locks of a maiden float wildly at will!
And farther—oh! farther the lava rolls on—
O'er meadows—o'er streams—to the gulf it has gone:
The smoke forms a canopy sombre and dread

The smoke forms a canopy sombre and dread,
Though the waves of the torrent be glowing and red.
And the homes of the great and the paladin's hall
Were doomed in that deluge to totter and fall.
'Twas a chaos of ruin! The cinders were strewed
O'er a town late so lovely—now shapeless and rude:
From dwelling to dwelling proceeded th' assail—
The houses ware burning in city and vale:
The earth was unsteady—the waves of the sea
Boiled white on the shore—and the tocsin rang free,
Though no human hand were the cause of the sound—
'Twas raised by the steeples that tottered around!—
'Twas a chaos immense! But the arm of the Lord,
That scattered such ruin and havoc abroad—
The arm of the Deity, powerful to kill,
And pour out the wrath of his thunder at will—
That arm, on the brink of the crater, can spare
The hermit who kneels to his Maker in prayer!

By the time Laura had completed the perusal of these poems, Rosalie reappeared: and the arch smile which the pretty lady's-maid wore, seemed to indicate that success had crowned the task that had been entrusted to her.

"What tidings have you for me?" asked Laura.

"I think, *mademoiselle*, that you may safely reckon upon beholding Mr. Charles Hatfield, together with two or three of his comrades in the Grand Duke's suite, in the Champs Elysées between four and five o'clock. But do not wait to ask me my reasons for giving you this assurance," added Rosalie, hastily: "it is nearly three o'clock, *mademoiselle*—and you must think of your toilette."

"Excellent Rosalie!" ejaculated Laura: "how deeply I am indebted to you for your proceedings in my behalf!"

Thus speaking, she repaired to her bed-chamber, whither the French abigail followed; and then the toilette commenced.

At about a quarter to four o'clock, Laura emerged from her private apartment, and descended to her carriage which was waiting for her. The equipage then moved rapidly away towards the Champs Elysées.

Glorious was the afternoon—and queen-like in her beauty was Laura Mortimer!

Contrary to her usual custom, she had her hair dressed in ringlets, which in a luxuriant shower framed her splendid countenance. There was a flush of health, heightened by her own heart's emotions, on either cheek: but, by the admirable control which she was enabled to exercise over her features, her countenance was serene, and her eyes shone not with a lustre unmellowed by feminine softness. She reclined back in her carriage, in a species of half-voluptuous lassitude and abandonment; but every change of posture was characterised with an elegance of motion that might be denominated poetic.

The equipage and its appointments were in the best possible taste; and the liveries of the coachman and attendant footman were plain and neat, not glaring and obtrusive. Altogether, the "turn-out" was that which a well-bred person, who knew the distinction between elegant simplicity and gaudy ostentation, was likely to possess.

The principal drive in the Champs Elysées was crowded to excess: seldom was there seen such a quantity of carriages or such a number of gentlemen on horseback. The foot-ways were likewise thronged with loungers and with ladies enjoying the afternoon's promenade.

Laura's carriage speedily fell into the line of vehicles proceeding in the same direction;—and now its progress was slow. This was just what she wished: for not only was the multitude enabled to obtain a better view of her—but she likewise had more leisure to watch for the appearance of *him* whom she expected to behold amidst the gay throng. Thus both her vanity and her convenience were successfully consulted at the same time.

Her patience was not put to a very lengthy nor severe test: for, scarcely had her carriage reached the mid-way point in the splendid avenue, when her keen glance signalled out the object of her thoughts from amidst the loungers on foot. Yes—there indeed was Charles Hatfield—proceeding at a short distance in advance of the carriage, and in the same direction. The critical moment was now almost at hand—and, though Laura's countenance still maintained its serenity, her heart palpitated with violence. While, too, she seemed to be reclining back in her carriage with a graceful ease which we might almost denominate an elegant languor,—and while she now more completely shaded herself with her parasol,—her eyes were fixed steadily and even intently in one direction.

"Yes—he has two friends with him," she said to herself: "they are all three in plain clothes—or rather, in mourning—doubtless for the father-in-law of their illustrious master."

Scarcely had these thoughts flashed through Laura's brain, when Charles and his two companions stopped—turned round—and gazed up and down the avenue for a few moments: then they interchanged some observations, and pursued their way.

Charles had not noticed Laura;—but *she* had caught more than a partial glimpse of *his* face. During the quarter of a minute that her eyes were fixed upon him, she had as it were devoured him with that earnest gaze. It was not love,—no—-and it was not hate; but it was a species of ravenous longing to decypher his thoughts through the medium of his countenance. And she saw that he was pale and pensive—but also strikingly handsome: indeed, at that moment Laura fancied his manly beauty had never before seemed so perfect in her eyes—and it was with difficulty that she repressed the sigh which rose almost to her lips.

A few minutes elapsed—and still the procession of carriages moved on in the broad straight road; and the tide of loungers on foot rolled along the pathway. The distance between Laura and the object of her thoughts was gradually diminishing; and almost immediately her carriage would overtake him and his companions. Again they turned—these three gentlemen—and looked up and down; and this time Laura rapidly scanned Hatfield's two friends. They were also young men of fine figure and attractive looks: natives of Castelcicala, they had the dark Italian complexion and the fine Italian eyes;—and as they wore moustaches, their appearance was more military than that of Charles. But they were not so handsome as he;—at least Laura thought so—and she was doubtless right.

The critical moment was now at hand: the carriage overtook Hatfield and his Italian companions—and it was just passing them, when Laura perceived that she was suddenly recognised by her husband. He started—stopped short—and kept his eyes fixed upon her, as if doubting their evidence; while his two friends, excited by his strange manner, looked also in the same direction and at the same object; and *their* gaze was likewise rivetted immediately upon the beauteous woman whose transcendent charms they naturally supposed to have produced such an effect on their companion. With a glance keen and rapid as lightning, Laura perceived that she was the idol of attention on the part of her husband and his two Italian friends, though the latter dreamt not that she was even known by name to Charles Hatfield: and while the eyes of all three were thus intently fixed upon her, her parasol suddenly escaped from her hand and fell within a few paces of the young men,—unobserved by the footman standing behind the carriage.

Of the two Castelcicalan officers, one was taller and more classically handsome than the other: and it was he that now darted forward to snatch up the parasol and restore it to its charming owner. So admirably had Laura managed the dropping of the parasol, that it had all the appearance of an accident to every one who observed the circumstance—save Charles Hatfield: and, quickly as the powder explodes after the match has been applied to it, did the conviction flash to his brain that the occurrence was intentional on the part of Laura. Al the same instant it struck him that never—never before had she appeared so marvellously beautiful—never so transcendently lovely as she now was,—with the flush of a gentle excitement upon her cheeks—her hair dressed in a style that he most admired—her pearly teeth partly revealed between the roses of her lips—her toilette so elegant and chaste, and setting off her splendid form to its greatest advantage—and her attitude so classically graceful, as she leant forward to receive the parasol that the handsome Castelcicalan now restored to her, after having carefully brushed off the dust with his white cambric handkerchief.

A thousand—thousand conflicting thoughts passed through the brain of Charles Hatfield during the few seconds that had elapsed from the escape of the parasol from her hand until its restoration by the Italian:—he saw his wife more beautiful than ever he had conceived her to be even when he was accustomed to worship her image—he remembered the witchery of her ways and the melting music of her voice—the joys he had experienced in her arms on the marriage night rushed to his mind—and as his eyes dwelt perforce upon the rich contours of her bust, he recollected that his head had been pillowed and his hand had wandered voluptuously there!

At the moment that Laura dropped her parasol, the carriage stopped, and she affected to perceive Charles Hatfield for the first time; and for a single instant she appeared struck by surprise and uncertain how to act:—then, immediately afterwards, she averted her eyes from him, and bent them on the handsome Castelcicalan who had sprung forward to recover the parasol. She purposely composed her countenance and modelled her behaviour, so that her husband should be left in a state of utter uncertainty and bewilderment as to what was passing in her mind, at least in regard to himself:—but when the Italian approached the carriage, took off his hat, and with a low bow, presented the parasol which he had so gallantly dusted with his cambric handkerchief, Laura bestowed so sweet a smile and so tender a look on the handsome foreigner, that the direst rage which jealousy can know was excited in a moment in the breast of Charles Hatfield.

A rapid glance—unseen even by her husband himself—made Laura aware of the effect produced upon him by her deportment towards the Castelcicalan; and the joy of a proud triumph filled her heart.

"I thank you, sir," she said in French to the Italian gentleman;—for she had already learnt more than enough of the language to be enabled to give utterance to that common phrase;—and, as she spoke, she again smiled sweetly, though not in a manner which might be construed into indelicate encouragement.

Her husband caught the words that were addressed to the handsome foreigner, and also marked the smile that accompanied them; and, as the music of that voice flowed upon his ear, and the witchery of that smile met his gaze, his countenance became absolutely livid with the emotions that rent his soul.

"Beautiful lady," said the Castelcicalan, enchanted by the condescending manner of the lovely woman, who was agreeably surprised and much delighted to hear him address her with the utmost facility in the English language,—"you have deigned to thank me for a thing so trivial that I am ashamed to merit your notice upon so slight a ground. Would that an opportunity could arise for so humble an individual as myself to perform some deed that might deserve your approval—and win your gratitude," added the Italian, sinking his

voice to a low tone.

“I know not, signor,” replied Laura, satisfying herself with another rapid glance that Charles Hatfield was still gazing with jealous fury upon this scene,—“I know not, signor,” she said, with all the witchery of tone and manner that she could summon to her aid, “how I can sufficiently thank you for the courteous behaviour which you demonstrate towards me. At the same time, I need scarcely be astonished at such chivalrous gallantry on your part—for, if I mistake not, you belong to that fine Italian clime which I shortly intend to visit.”

The young Castelcicalan gazed with the enthusiasm of adoration up into the enchanting countenance that was bending over him; and he felt as if he could have cheerfully consented to yield up the ten last years of his life to purchase the enjoyment of pressing his lips to the small plump mouth which looked redder than the rose moistened with the dew of morning.

“Oh! is it possible,” he exclaimed, in a joyous tone, “that you purpose to honour my native land with your presence! Be assured, lady,” he continued, “that if you visit Montoni, the Castelcicalan capital, you will become the object of a perfect idolatry.”

“Then should I do well to remain in France, signor—rather than lead your nation into such a crime,” said Laura, laughing gaily: and the rapid glance which she darted towards her husband convinced her that *he* was enduring the torments of the damned—torments which were increasing in proportion as she seemed to grow on more friendly terms with the young Italian officer.

“I should be wretched indeed, beauteous lady,” said he, in reply to her last observation, “did I think that any inconsiderate remark from my lips could deter you from carrying into effect a purpose already settled in your mind. Neither,” he added, with a sigh, “am I vain enough to suppose myself to be of sufficient importance to sway you in one way or another.”

“Nor am I vain enough to take in any sense save as a compliment the flattering observation you made just now relative to the reception I might expect at Montoni;”—and as Laura uttered these words, she cast down her eyes and blushed slightly.

The dialogue between the Castelcicalan and herself had been carried on in a low tone, and was therefore totally inaudible to the other Italian and Charles Hatfield, who were gazing, but with very different feelings, on the lovely woman. Neither had the conversation occupied one tenth part of the time which we have consumed in detailing it;—and in the interval, the carriages originally behind that of Laura, had passed hers by, so that the stoppage of her equipage caused no obstruction. The tide of pedestrian loungers was likewise still flowing on—there being nothing singular nor unusual in the fact of a gentleman on foot paying his respects to a lady who rode in her carriage.

But while the multitude, generally, saw naught peculiar in the scene which we are describing, it was nevertheless one of deep interest. By the carriage door stood the young Castelcicalan officer, his heart throbbing with the ineffable emotions which the wondrous beauty of Laura had excited, as it were by the wave of an enchanter’s wand;—in the vehicle itself sate the syren—bending forward towards that handsome foreigner as if she were already interested in him, though in reality she experienced not the slightest sensual feeling in his favour—other considerations occupying her thoughts:—at a little distance stood the other Italian officer, gazing upon her with an admiration which he could not conceal, and envying his comrade the privilege which a lucky accident had given him to address the houri;—and there also was Charles Hatfield—ghastly pale, his limbs trembling convulsively, and his lips white and quivering with rage.

Yes: terrible—terrible were the feelings which Laura’s husband experienced for the six or eight minutes that this scene lasted. There was a woman whose beauty excited universal admiration,—a woman in all the splendour of female loveliness;—and this woman was *his* wife—his own wedded wife,—a wife whom he could rush forward and claim in a moment, if he chose! And that woman was now coquetting before his eyes—coquetting with a studied purpose to annoy him. Oh! he could understand it all,—the means which had been adopted to induce him and his two companions to proceed to the Champs Elysées at that hour—the pretended accident of the parasol—and the smiles and tender looks which Laura now bestowed upon one who was entirely a stranger to her:—yes—all, all was now clear to Charles Hatfield,—and he was on the point of springing forward—not to catch Laura to his breast and claim her as his spouse—but to upbraid and expose her,—when he suddenly recollected that a portion of the agreement entered into between his father and her, was to the effect that *she* likewise was to be secure against molestation or recognition on *his* part, as well as he on hers. This reminiscence compelled the unhappy young man to restrain his feelings; and as he was forced to subdue his ire, his jealousy only became the more painful, because it required a vent of some kind or another. He writhed—he positively writhed before her eyes;—and now he was humiliated as well as tortured to such an intolerable degree!

Laura had cast down her looks and had called up a blush to her smooth cheeks, when she made to the handsome Castelcicalan the remark that we have last recorded: but almost immediately afterwards she raised her countenance again, and smiling with an archness so enchantingly sweet that it would have moved the rigid features of an octogenarian anchorite to admiration, she said: “At all events, signor, should I visit Montoni in the course of this summer, my stay would be very short—for I purpose to become a great traveller, and to travel very rapidly also. To-morrow I set out for Vienna.”

“Vienna!” repeated the Castelcicalan, in astonishment. “Surely Paris possesses greater attractions than the cold, dull, formal Austrian capital?”

“Oh! of that I must judge for myself,” exclaimed Laura, laughing—at the same time showing by her manner that she thought their conversation had lasted long enough.

The young Italian was too well-bred to attempt to detain her: but it was nevertheless with evident reluctance that he stepped back from the carriage-door and raised his hat in farewell salutation. Laura inclined her head gracefully in acknowledgment of his courtesy, and the vehicle drove on rapidly, the way before it being now comparatively clear.

Oh! what triumph was in her heart, as she threw herself back in the carriage and reflected upon all the incidents of the scene that had just occurred,—a scene which had not occupied ten minutes, and which had nevertheless stirred up so many and such varied feelings! Her vanity had been gratified by the homage paid to her beauty; and her malignity had for the time been assuaged by the contemplation of the almost mortal agonies endured by her husband. She had asserted the empire of her charms over even the very heart that ought to cherish hatred against her: she had inspired with the maddest jealousy the soul that was bound to think of her with loathing and abhorrence. She felt all the pride of a woman wielding a sceptre more despotic than that of a queen,—a sceptre which was as a magic wand in her hand, casting spells upon even those who detested, as well as those who admired her!

CHAPTER CLXIII.
LAURA AND ROSALIE.

Yes—it was a great triumph for Laura Mortimer,—a triumph all the greater, inasmuch as she knew that the agitation and rage of her husband could not speedily pass away; and that, when his friends had leisure to observe his emotions and seek an explanation, he would not dare to afford them any!

She had, moreover, made statements to the young Castelcicalan which he would doubtless repeat to Charles Hatfield, whom they were well calculated to mystify relative to her future proceedings; for the reader scarcely requires to be told that she had not the slightest intention to repair to Vienna nor to visit Italy.

In every respect she had ample reason to be well satisfied with the results of the scheme she had devised in the morning and so effectually carried out in the afternoon,—a scheme so wild and having so many thousand chances against its success, that none save the intrepid, resolute, far-seeing Laura could have possibly hoped to conduct it to a triumphant issue.

Having proceeded to the end of the avenue, she ordered the coachman to retrace his way and return home;—but she was not destined to reach the Rue Monthabor without experiencing another adventure, which may for the moment seem trivial, but which was nevertheless destined to exercise no mean amount of influence upon her future career.

As the carriage was emerging from the Champs Elysées, two gentlemen on horseback, just entering the fashionable lounge, were about to pass by, when one of them, recognising Laura, suddenly pulled up and made her a low bow. She immediately ordered the carriage to stop; for it was her courteous and obliging friend the professor of music, who had thus saluted her—and she was anxious to express to him the delight she had experienced from a perusal of the translations he had sent to her the preceding evening. After the exchange of the usual complimentary remarks, the professor, turning towards his companion, said, “My lord, permit me to introduce you to one of my fair pupils—my fairest pupil, I should rather observe,” he added, in a good-tempered manner: “Miss Laura Mortimer—the Marquis of Delmour.”

Laura was startled for an instant at finding her music-master in such aristocratic society; and as she inclined gracefully in acknowledgment of the nobleman’s courteous salutation, she observed that his lordship was an elderly, if not actually an old man, but that his countenance was far from disagreeable.

A brief conversation ensued; and although the marquis had no opportunity of speaking more than a dozen words, and even those on common topic Laura nevertheless saw enough of him to be convinced that his manners were of polished elegance, and that his disposition was frank and unassuming.

It was not therefore without emotions of secret pleasure that she heard herself thus addressed by the professor of music:—

“Miss Mortimer, his lordship, and myself, are old acquaintances, and he permits me to call him my friend. His lordship will honour my humble abode with his presence, to-morrow, evening: there will be a musical soirée of the same unpretending kind as that which you yourself graced with your company the evening before last. My wife will doubtless send you the formal card; but may I in a less ceremonial fashion, solicit you to favour us with your presence?”

Laura signified the pleasure she should experience in accepting the invitation; and all the time she was listening to the professor and replying to him, she had the agreeable consciousness that the marquis was gazing upon her with an admiration which he could not repress. She however affected not to be in the slightest degree aware that she was undergoing such an impassioned survey; and when she turned towards his lordship to make the parting bow, it was with the formal reserve and yet graceful dignity of a lady to whom a stranger has only just been introduced.

The carriage rolled on in one direction—the horsemen pursued their way in another;—and while the Marquis of Delmour was putting innumerable questions to his friend relative to the houri whom they had thus met, Laura was on her side resolving that Rosalie should without delay institute all possible inquiries respecting the position, fortune, and character of that nobleman.

We should here remind the reader that the professor of music was a man eminent in his special sphere, of high respectability, and great moral worth; and, moreover, he was a native of a country where talent is prized and looked up to, instead of being merely tolerated and looked down upon. It is not, therefore, extraordinary if we find him moving in the best society, and having his entertainments attended by the *elite* of the residents or visitors in the gay city of Paris.

On her return home to her splendid apartments in the Rue Monthabor, Laura was immediately waited upon by her lady’s-maid; and while the mistress was changing her attire in preparation for dinner, the dependant explained the means by which she had induced Charles Hatfield and the two Italian officers in the suite of the Grand Duke to repair to the Champs Elysées in company, and at the hour specified by Laura.

“When you first mentioned your desire to me this morning, *mademoiselle*,” began Rosalie, “I must confess that I was somewhat embarrassed how to accomplish the scheme; although I did not despair. But when I saw the paragraph in the paper, and ascertained the hotel at which the Grand Duke and his suite had taken up their temporary abode, I suddenly remembered that a day or two ago I met a young woman who had formerly been my fellow-servant, and that she was now filling a situation in that very hotel. This circumstance inspired me with a hope of success; and we Frenchwomen look upon an intrigue as being as good as carried successfully out, when it affords a hope to encourage us. Therefore did I promise you so confidently; and I lost no time in proceeding to the hotel. I soon found my friend, who is a chamber-maid there; and I told her just sufficient—without, however, mentioning your name or even alluding to you, *mademoiselle*—to induce her to afford me her assistance. Some of the officers of the Grand Duke’s suite were lounging in the court-yard of the hotel at the time; and my friend pointed them out to me one by one, naming each as she proceeded. I resolved to choose the two youngest and handsomest to be Mr. Charles Hatfield’s companions, *mademoiselle*; because,” continued Rosalie, with

an arch smile, “I tolerably well understood the entire nature of the project which you had in contemplation.”

“You are marvellously sharp-witted and keen-sighted, Rosalie,” said Laura, laughing good-humouredly. “But pray proceed. What step did you adopt next, after having thus passed the Grand Duke’s suite in a review of which they were however unconscious?”

“I must confess, *mademoiselle*,” resumed Rosalie, “that I was somewhat puzzled how to act. But suddenly an idea struck me; and, however ridiculous the plan may now appear to you, your own lips can proclaim whether it succeeded or not. In fact, I calculated upon the romantic disposition which the Italians are known to possess; and I also reflected that as Mr. Charles Hatfield, whom I likewise saw at the hotel (though he saw not me) appeared pensive and thoughtful, he would embark in any adventure that promised to wean his thoughts from their melancholy mood, and that offered some excitement of a novel character. I accordingly penned a note, addressed to Mr. Charles Hatfield, Captain Barthelma, and Lieutenant Di Ponta——”

“What is the name of the taller and handsomer of the two officers who accompanied Charles?” asked Laura, with a slight kindling of sensual feeling as she recalled to mind the pleasing features of the Italian who had picked up her parasol, and with whom she had exchanged the few complimentary observations already recorded.

“That one is Captain Barthelma,” answered Rosalie.

“Proceed,” said Laura. “You were telling me that you penned a note——”

“To the three gentlemen collectively,” added the lady’s-maid;—“and, as nearly as I can remember, the contents ran thus:—‘To Mr. Charles Hatfield, Captain Barthelma, and Lieutenant Di Ponta, an unhappy Spanish refugee ventures to address himself, having certain excellent reasons for being well aware that they will not refuse to listen to his sad tale, and interest themselves in his behalf. But as he is an object of suspicion to the French government, he dares not make his appearance at the hotel where a prince, who is known to be the redresser of wrongs, has taken up his abode. He will therefore walk this afternoon, from four to five, on the right hand of the central avenue of the Champs Elysées; and if the three gentlemen to whom he now addresses his humble but earnest application, will be at the place and time appointed, the unhappy writer of this petition will make himself known to them—will explain his business frankly—and will indicate the means by which he can be restored to wealth and happiness. Those means consist in one word which it will be for His Sovereign Highness the Grand Duke to speak, and which can only be spoken at the instigation of the three gentlemen to whom this letter is addressed.’”

“Upon my word, I give you credit for your stratagem!” exclaimed Laura, laughing heartily. “I have no doubt that Charles sees through it *now*: but he will not dare to give any explanations to his friends,” she added, in a musing tone. “They will imagine that they have been duped by some humorous person—and he will affect to fall into the same way of thinking.”

“Or else the two Italian gentlemen will suppose that the poor refugee was prevented, by some misadventure, from keeping the appointment,” observed Rosalie, now giving way to her mirth to such a degree that the tears came into her eyes.

“Well—make an end of your story,” said Laura, who had nearly completed her toilette; for, although she expected no one that evening, she nevertheless made it a rule to dress herself with the utmost care in case of a visit on the part of any of those persons whose acquaintance she had recently formed.

“I have little more to tell you, *mademoiselle*, responded Rosalie. “My friend, the chambermaid, left the note, which was duly sealed and properly addressed to the three gentlemen, upon the table of Captain Barthelma’s private apartment; and soon afterwards that officer went to his room. I waited at the hotel in the hope of ascertaining the effect that the *billet* would produce; and in a short time the captain returned in haste to his companions, who were still lounging in the court-yard—some of them giving directions to their grooms, and others smoking cigars. From the window of my friend’s chamber, I beheld Captain Barthelma draw Mr. Charles Hatfield and Lieutenant Di Ponta aside, and show them the letter. They evidently perused it with great attention; and I felt assured by their manner that they treated the affair seriously. I now requested my friend to hurry down stairs, and traverse the yard as if in pursuance of her avocations—but to pass as near the little group as possible, and endeavour to catch any remarks that they might be exchanging at the moment. This she did; and she heard quite enough to convince her that the appointment would be kept. I then retraced my way homeward, and was happy in being able to give you the assurance, *mademoiselle*, that your wishes would be fully gratified so far as the result depended upon me.”

“You are a good girl, Rosalie,” said Laura; “and I shall not be unmindful of the service you have thus rendered me. But I now require your aid in another matter——”

“Speak, my dear lady: I am entirely at your disposal,” observed the dependant, who, in proportion as she obtained a farther insight into the character of her mistress, felt the more certain of reaping a fine harvest of rewards, bribes, and hush-money.

“There is in Paris at this moment an English nobleman concerning whom I am desirous that you should obtain as much information as you can possibly glean, without creating any suspicion or in any way compromising me. I allude to the Marquis of Delmour,” continued Laura: “but I know not where he is residing; nor can I offer the least suggestion to guide you in instituting your inquiries.”

“Leave all that to me, *mademoiselle*,” said Rosalie.

“There is no time to be lost,” observed Laura, “this evening, or in the course of to-morrow, must I have the information which I seek.”

“I am not in the habit of letting the grass grow beneath my feet,” replied the French dependant, with an arch smile. “The moment you have sat down to dinner, *mademoiselle*, I will sally forth; and should I not return until a somewhat late hour——”

“No matter,” interrupted Laura: “I shall know that you are employed in my interests. Unless, indeed,” she added, laughing, “you possess a lover whose company may prove more agreeable to you than the task with which I have entrusted you.”

“I have no lover in Paris—at present, *mademoiselle*,” observed Rosalie.

“Then you admit that you have had a lover in your life-time?” said Laura.

“Oh! certainly, *mademoiselle*,” exclaimed the pretty Frenchwoman: “and—to speak candidly—I could not without some trouble reckon the number of those who have proclaimed themselves my admirers.”

“The name of your lovers is Legion, then?” cried Laura, again laughing: but it was the natural sensuality of her disposition which impelled her thus to interrogate her servant;—for a licentious woman experiences a voluptuous enjoyment in learning that another is as amorously inclined or as downright abandoned as herself. And now that Laura’s spite against Charles Hatfield was for the time appeased, and she had leisure to ponder upon the handsome countenance and elegant figure of Captain Barthelma, her imagination was becoming inflamed, and wanton ideas and aspirations rose up in her brain.

“Oh! *mademoiselle*,” exclaimed Rosalie, with an archness of expression that made her countenance particularly interesting at the moment; “you must think me very vain and very silly for having made the remark which fell so inconsiderately from my lips!”

“Not at all,” observed Laura: “you are pretty enough to have captivated many hearts. And now tell me, my dear girl—have you passed through such an ordeal without leaving your virtue behind? Be frank and candid: I wish to know you thoroughly, that I may determine how far I can trust you.”

“I dare say, *mademoiselle*, that you can form a tolerably accurate guess in that respect,” said Rosalie, in a low tone and with a blushing countenance. “Were I to tell you that I am pure and chaste, you would not believe me, *mademoiselle*—and—and, you would be right.”

“Suppose, then, that you had suddenly conceived a great fancy for a very handsome young man, Rosalie?” said Laura, her bosom heaving voluptuously as she gradually approached the aim and object of the present conversation.

“I should take care to let him perceive that if he chose to solicit, it would not be in vain,” answered Rosalie, who already comprehended that her mistress was not giving the discourse this turn without some definite end in view.

“And you would be deeply grateful,” continued Laura, in a low but significant tone, “to any friend who might assist you in the management of the intrigue?”

“Decidedly, *mademoiselle*” replied the Frenchwoman: “the more so that I myself should delight in rendering *my* aid when and where the services of so humble a being as I am could prove available.”

“Those services may be made available this very evening,” said Laura, a voluptuous glow spreading over her fine countenance, while her eyes became soft and melting in expression. “You must aid me, Rosalie, in gratifying an ardent longing which has sprung up within my bosom during the last few minutes, and which I may vainly struggle to subdue. But the intrigue requires so much delicate management——”

“I can anticipate all you would say, *mademoiselle*,” interrupted Rosalie: then, in a significant tone, she added, “Captain Barthelma is decidedly one of the handsomest men I ever saw in my life.”

“You have conjectured rightly,” said Laura; “you have penetrated my thoughts! Can you—will you serve me in the gratification of this caprice of mine? But, remember—I must not be compromised in respect to a living soul save Barthelma and yourself.”

“You know, *mademoiselle*, that you can trust to my fidelity, my sagacity, and my prudence,” said Rosalie. “At what hour shall the handsome Italian visit you?”

“At nine—this evening,” answered Laura: then referring to her watch, she added, “It is already six—and you have plenty of work upon your hands!”

“I will neglect nothing,” observed the lady’s-maid, in a tone of confidence. “Would it not be prudent to send the cook out of the way for the evening? For as the men-servants are on board-wages and sleep elsewhere, and the cook is therefore the only dependant who could possibly observe your proceedings, *mademoiselle*——”

“I leave all this to you, Rosalie,” interrupted Laura;—“and now we have nothing more to say to each other for the present. Order the dinner to be served up at once—and then must you hasten to fulfil the commissions with which you are charged.”

Having thus given her parting instructions, Laura repaired to the dining-room, where an elegant repast was speedily spread upon the table; and a glass of sparkling champagne soon enhanced the brilliancy of the voluptuous woman's eyes, and heightened the rich glow that suffused her countenance.

When the meal was over, a choice dessert was served up; and Laura was now left alone.

She was almost sorry that she had gone so far in respect to the intrigue which was to bring the handsome Castelcicalan to her arms: she had admitted Rosalie too deeply into her confidence—placed herself too completely in the power of her dependant. Even while she was conversing with the wily Frenchwoman, she perceived and felt all this;—but her sensuality triumphed over her prudence—her lascivious temperament carried her on with a force which she could not resist, much less subdue.

"And, after all," she now reasoned to herself, "wherefore should I not follow my inclinations in this respect? I am free to act according to the impulse of my passions and the prompting of my desires. The night that I passed with Charles—that one night of love and bliss—has revived those ardent longings, those burning thoughts that demand gratification. Besides, Rosalie will be trustworthy so long as she is well paid; and I shall take care to keep her purse well filled. Sooner or later she must have obtained a complete insight into my character: why not, then, at once as well as hereafter? And the more firmly I bind her to my interests, the less shall I need the services of my crafty, selfish old mother. Would that I could manage my affairs and execute my plans without my parent's aid altogether! And who knows but that even this consummation may be reached? Something tells me that the Marquis of Delmour and I shall yet be more intimately acquainted. He is old—but that is of little consequence. Wealth and a proud position are my aims—and I care not by what means they are acquired. Oh! the happiness of possessing such beauty as that wherewith I am endowed,—a beauty which can never fail to crown me with triumph in all my schemes!—in all my projects!"

She now regarded her watch, and discovered that it was eight o'clock.

"In another hour he will be here," she thought within herself; and her bosom heaved voluptuously. "Yes—in another hour that handsome Italian will be in my presence—at least, if Rosalie fulfil her task with her wonted sagacity and prudence. What will he think of me? Oh! let him entertain any opinion that he may: I will bind him to secrecy by the most solemn oaths—and I read enough in his countenance to convince me that he is a man of honour!"

In this strain did the lovely but wanton creature pursue her reflections, until it was nearly nine o'clock.

She then rose from her seat, and repaired to the kitchen, which was on the same floor as her suite of apartments. The cook was not there; and Laura was consequently satisfied that Rosalie had not forgotten the precaution herself had suggested.

The syren now proceeded to the drawing-room, where with her own fair hands she arranged wine, fruits, and cakes upon the table. She then drew the curtains over the window, lighted the wax candles upon the mantel, and scattered drops of delicious perfume upon the carpet and the drapery.

Scarcely were these preparations completed, when the bell of the outer door of the suite rang as if pulled by a somewhat impatient hand; and Laura hastened to answer the summons.

She opened the door—and Captain Barthelma, the handsome Castelcicalan, appeared upon the threshold.

"Is it possible that this can be true!" he exclaimed, his joy amounting to a delirious excitement as his eyes fell upon the heroine of the afternoon's adventure in the Champs Elysées.

Laura smiled archly as she placed her finger upon her lip to impose silence, at least until he should have entered her abode; and, having closed the door carefully, she conducted him into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER CLXIV.

LAURA'S AMOUR.

Seating herself upon the sofa, Laura motioned the Italian to place himself by her side—an invitation which he obeyed with a species of enthusiastic alacrity. But all the time he was unable to take his eyes off her—as if he still doubted whether it were indeed a fact that his good fortune had conducted him into the presence of her whose image had never once been absent from his mind since he first beheld her that afternoon in the Champs Elysées.

"Is it possible?" he again ejaculated, after a few minutes' silence. "The young woman promised me that if I were discreet, I might expect the happiness of meeting you—yes, *you*, sweetest lady—again: but I confess that I doubted her—and I came that I might not throw away a chance of felicity, rather than in the sanguine hope of attaining it."

"And, when you have leisure for reflection" said Laura, casting down her eyes and blushing, "you will despise me for my imprudence—my indelicacy of conduct in thus sending to invite a stranger to visit me."

"Adorable woman!" exclaimed the impassioned Italian; "I shall think of you with gratitude—with devotion—with love,—and never lightly. Oh! be assured of *that*!"—and, seizing her hand, he conveyed it to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

"Nevertheless, you must be surprised at my boldness in directing my servant to seek you, and to make this appointment with you," pursued Laura, her bosom heaving so as almost to burst from its confinement, as she felt the warm mouth of the Castelcicalan glued to the hand which she did not attempt to withdraw.

"I am only surprised at my own happiness," observed the young officer. "Sweetest Laura—for I now know your name—tell me how I have thus been deemed worthy of a favour of which a prince might envy me the enjoyment!"

"An accident threw us together for a few minutes this afternoon," said Laura; "and I was struck by your personal appearance—your manners—your conversation——"

"And, oh! how profoundly was I impressed by the magic of your beauty, Laura!" interrupted the ardent Italian; "how earnestly I longed to hear once more the music of that melodious voice—to look again into the depths of those magnificent eyes—to contemplate that glorious countenance—that admirable form;—and now—oh! now the desire is realised—and no human language has words powerful enough to convey to you an idea of the happiness which I experience at this moment!"

As he thus spoke he threw his arms around her waist, and drew her towards him.

"Charming creature!" he exclaimed, after a few moments' pause, during which he gazed upon her with a rapture which can only be conceived and not explained: "how can I make thee comprehend the extent of my love—my adoration—my worship? I have travelled much—have seen beauties of all climes and of all varieties of loveliness;—but never did mine eyes settle upon one so transcendently charming as thou! When I parted from thee this afternoon in the Champs Elysées, it was as if I were tearing myself away from some one whom I had loved all my life, and whom I was never to see again. I was a second Adam, expelled from another Eden! And now—now, I behold thee once more—I am seated in thy presence—thou smilest upon me——oh! it is heaven—it is heaven!"—and, as if in a transport of fury—so impassioned was his soul—he drew her still closer towards him, and literally seizing her head with both his hands, glued his lips to hers—sucking in her very breath.

Intoxicated with sensual happiness, Laura offered no resistance to the ardour of the handsome young man; but ere she completely yielded herself up to him, she remembered that something was due to prudence as well as to the delights of love.

Accordingly, withdrawing herself from his embrace, though still permitting his arm to encircle her waist, she said, "I can refuse you nothing; but first swear, by all you deem most sacred, that you will never betray me!"

"Never—never!" ejaculated Barthelma; "I take God to witness that my lips shall never breathe a word injurious to your honour! On the contrary," he cried, in a tone of deep sincerity, "should I ever hear a man speak lightly of you, I will provoke him to a duel that shall terminate only in the death of one—if not both; and should a woman dare to mention your name irreverently, I will even fabricate a tale injurious to *her* honour, that I may avenge *you*!"

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, my generous friend!" murmured Laura, one of her white hands playing with the long, dark, curling hair of the Castelcicalan. "But may you not—in an unguarded moment—when carousing, perhaps, with your brother-officers,—may you

not inadvertently allude to the adventure which happened to you in Paris, and then be unconsciously drawn out—under the influence of wine—to make revelations which will prove the ruin—the utter ruin—of the weak, but confiding woman who trusts so much to your honour this night?"

"May my tongue blister—may lightnings strike me—may I be cast down a corpse at the feet of those to whom I ever open my lips to speak irreverently or ungratefully of thee!" exclaimed the Italian, with a terrible energy. "No—my adored Laura! you have not the slightest ground for apprehensions of that nature. I am a man of honour—and I would rather shed the last drop of my blood to serve thee, than raise a finger to harm thee. Beautiful creature—adorable woman! who that possesses a spark of human feeling, could do aught to bring a tear into thine eye or chase away the smile from thy lips? I am thy slave, Laura—and I rejoice in wearing the chains which thy magic loveliness has cast around me!"

In this impassioned strain did the Italian pour forth his adoration; and, as Laura gazed upon him with eyes swimming in very wantonness, she thought that he was far more handsome than she had fancied him to be in the afternoon, or even when he had first appeared before her that evening.

He, too, on his part, found the syren a thousand times more witching—more beauteous—more attractive than she had seemed in her carriage; and yet even then he had been ready to fall down and worship her. Now he beheld her in a light evening toilette—with naked neck and naked arms,—no scarf—not even the most transparent gauze veiling her shoulders of alabaster whiteness,—and with her hair dressed in massive curls, instead of hyperion ringlets;—now, too, he could perceive, by the undulations of her attire, that her limbs were turned with a symmetry that was elegant and yet robust—admirable in shape, though full in their proportions.

"I thank you most sincerely for the assurances of secrecy which you have given me," said Laura, in the sweetest, most melting cadence of her delicious voice; "likewise for the chivalrous professions with which you have coupled them. You declare yourself to be my slave," she added; "but it will be for this night only!"

And she hid her countenance on his breast, as if ashamed of the invitation which her words implied—an invitation that welcomed him at her abode until the morning!

"In one sense I understand you, my charmer," he said, kissing her beauteous head as it lay reclining on his bosom; "and that alone ought to be happiness sufficient for me! But I am greedy—I am covetous; and I demand more! Listen, adored Laura—grant me your patience for a few minutes."

She raised her head, and gazed tenderly up into his animated countenance as he spoke.

"I am not a rich man," he continued; "but I possess a competency—nay, a handsome competency; and I care not how soon I abandon the service of even so good and excellent a prince as his Sovereign Highness—in order to devote myself wholly and solely to you. I know not who you are—I only know that you are the loveliest creature on the face of God's earth, and that your name is Laura Mortimer. Neither do I seek to know more. But I am ready and anxious to join my fortunes with yours—to marry you, if you will accept me as your husband,—or to become your slave—your menial! Tell me not, then, that we must part to-morrow: oh! let me remain with you, my charming Laura, until death shall separate us!"

"It cannot be, my handsome Barthelma!" murmured Laura. "But let me call you by your Christian name——"

"Lorenzo," said the Castelcicalan.

"You are, then, my handsome Lorenzo for this night—and for this night only," continued Laura, throwing her warm, plump, exquisitely modelled arms about his neck, and pressing her lips to his glowing cheek.

"Cruel—cruel Laura!" he exclaimed, returning the ardent caress.

"Oh! would that circumstances permitted——"

"No circumstances can separate us, if you should decide that we are to remain together," interrupted the Castelcicalan, in an impassioned tone.

"Alas! you know not——"

"If you are already a wife, I will kill your husband," cried Lorenzo, again speaking with vehement abruptness: "If you are engaged to wed one whom you dislike, I will dare him to wrest you from my arms;—and if you have relations—father or brothers—whom you imagine yourself bound to consult, you may rest well assured that in preferring my love to that of kith and kin you will be receiving the purest gold in exchange for comparative dross."

"Dear Lorenzo, I must seal your eloquent lips with kisses," said Laura, with an arch playfulness that was also full of wantonness: "yes—I must seal those red, moist lips," she murmured, after having pressed her mouth to his; "or you will persuade me to give an affirmative answer to your endearing solicitations—and that would only be to record a promise to-night which I most break to-morrow."

“Are you, then, my angel, the mistress of some man on whose wealth you are dependent, or in whose power circumstances have placed you?” demanded the impassioned Italian, with more fervid frankness than considerate delicacy.

“I am not—I never was—and I never shall be a pensioned mistress, Lorenzo!” answered Laura, her manner becoming suddenly haughty.

“Pardon me—Oh! I implore you to pardon me, my angel!” exclaimed the young officer, straining her to his chest. “Not for worlds would I offend you—not even to save my soul from perdition would I wrong you by word or deed! Tell me, Laura—tell me—Laura—tell me—am I forgiven?”

She raised her countenance towards his own, and when their lips met she sealed his pardon with a long, burning kiss.

“And now,” she said, “do not ask me again to do that which is impossible. I cannot marry you, although I am not married—I cannot be your mistress, although I am not the mistress of another—I cannot hold out any hope to you, although I am pledged to none other.”

“You are as enigmatical as you are charming—you are as mysterious as you are beautiful!” exclaimed Lorenzo, contemplating his fair companion with the most enthusiastic rapture.

“And it is not now for you to mar the pleasure which we enjoy in each other’s society, by seeking to render me less enigmatical or less mysterious,” observed the syren. “At the same time I cannot be otherwise than flattered by the proposals you have made to me, and the generous manner in which you have expressed yourself in my behalf. Come—let us drink a glass of champagne to enhance the happiness of the moment, and drown careful reflections.”

“Be it so, my charmer,” said Lorenzo: “and if I no more torment you with my entreaties—if I resolve to content myself with the amount of bliss which you have promised me,—nevertheless, my dearest—ever dearest Laura, I shall take leave of you to-morrow morning with the fervent hope that we shall shortly meet again. You told me this afternoon that you proposed to visit Montoni in the course of the ensuing autumn——”

“Yes—I have no doubt that I shall be enabled to fulfil that promise,” interrupted Laura, by way of changing the topic of discourse. “And now that you have given me to understand that you will not revive the useless but flattering, and, in some sense, agreeable proposals you made me just now, let us think only of the enjoyment of the present.”

“It shall be as you say, my angel,” returned Lorenzo; and he forthwith filled a glass with sparkling champagne, which he handed to his fair companion.

She quaffed it at a draught, and a flood of light seemed to suffuse her entire countenance, and render her eyes brilliant as diamonds: her lips, too, moist with the generous juice, acquired a deeper red—and her bosom panted with amorous longings.

Lorenzo beheld the effects of the rich fluid, and hastened to fill the glass again: then, ere he drained it of its contents, he studiously placed to his lips the side which Laura’s mouth had touched.

“You had two friends with you this afternoon in the Champs Elysées?” said the syren, interrogatively, when they were once more seated, half-embraced in each other’s arms, upon the sofa.

“Yes: one was a fellow-countryman of mine—the other a native of your land, my beloved,” answered Lorenzo. “But I must tell you the singular adventure that occurred to us: and, indeed,” he added, with a smile, “I am deeply indebted to a certain anonymous correspondent—for had it not been through him, I should not have this day visited the scene where I was fortunate enough to encounter you.”

“A singular adventure!” exclaimed Laura, with an admirable affectation of the most ingenuous curiosity.

“Judge for yourself, my angel,” replied Lorenzo then, taking Rosalie’s letter from his pocket, he handed it to Laura, who, consuming with strong desires though she were, could scarcely suppress a laugh as she perused the *billet*, with the contents of which she was already so well acquainted.

“And did you see the poor man who addressed you and your friends in this wild, romantic style?” she asked, restoring him the note.

“He did not make his appearance,” responded Barthelma. “But even if that letter were the production of some mischievous wag, or of a crazy person, I could not possibly feel otherwise than rejoiced at having been made the dupe of either a humourist or a madman: for, as I just now observed, the anonymous letter led to my meeting with you.”

And, as he spoke, he smoothed down her glossy, luxuriant hair with his open palm.

“But doubtless your two companions found more difficulty in consoling themselves for the disappointment?” said Laura.

“Faith! dear lady,” exclaimed Lorenzo, “they spoke but little on the subject: for, to tell you the truth, your beauty had not failed to produce a very sensible effect on them as well as upon myself.”

“Flatterer!” cried Laura, playfully caressing the handsome Italian.

“Oh! you know that you are lovely—transcendently lovely!” he exclaimed, in an ardent tone; “and you can well believe me when I assure you that my two friends escaped not the magic influence of your charms. But how different were the effects thus produced! Di Ponta—that is the name of my fellow-countryman—was enthusiastic and rapturous in your praise; whereas Charles Hatfield—the Englishman—became gloomy, morose, and sullen——”

“A singular effect for the good looks of a woman to produce!” cried Laura, laughing—while her heart beat with the joy of a proud triumph.

“Such, nevertheless, was the case in this instance, my angel,” said Lorenzo. “I do firmly believe that Hatfield was jealous of me in being the happy mortal who perceived the loss of your parasol, and had the honour of restoring it;—yes—jealous, dear lady, because that happy accident introduced me to your notice, and privileged me to address you.”

“Your English friend must be a very weak-minded young man,” observed Laura; “and I am truly delighted that it was *not* he whose acquaintance I was destined to make this day.”

“Nevertheless, he is very handsome,” said Lorenzo, gazing upon the syren with a playful affectation of jealousy.

“Not so handsome as you, my Barthelma,” replied Laura, with simulated enthusiasm; and, in order to dispel the partial coldness which a digression from amorous topics had allowed to creep over her, she cast her arms around Lorenzo’s neck and fastened her lips to his.

Then the blood began once more to circulate like lightning in her veins,—and her voluptuous bosom panted against the young Italian’s chest.

Here shall we leave the amorous pair; for, after a little tender dalliance and another glass of the exciting juice of Epernay, they retired to the chamber whose portal we must not pass to follow them.

At eight o’clock in the morning Lorenzo Barthelma took his departure; and shortly afterwards Rosalie entered Laura’s room.

The Frenchwoman, who was as discreet as she was an adept at intrigue, wore the usual calm and respectful expression of countenance; and not even by a sly smile nor an arch look did she appear as if she devoted a thought to the manner in which her mistress had passed the night.

“Did the captain depart unperceived?” inquired Laura, who, although she had given no instructions to that effect, was nevertheless well assured that her intelligent abigail had superintended the egress of the handsome Italian.

“Entirely unobserved, *mademoiselle*,” was the answer. “I amused the porter and his wife in their lodge for a few minutes while Captain Barthelma slipped out into the street. Three persons alone are acquainted with last night’s adventure,—you, the captain, and myself.”

“Good!” exclaimed Laura: then, drawing aside the curtain of the bed in which she was voluptuously pillowed, she said, “And now, my dear Rosalie, give me an account of your proceedings relative to the Marquis of Delmour.”

“I have learnt but a few facts, *mademoiselle*,” was the reply: “those, however, are of some importance. He is enormously rich—very generous—bears an excellent character——”

“Is he married?” demanded Laura, hastily.

“Yes: but he has been living apart from his wife for many years;—and respecting the cause of their separation, there is a great mystery which not even his best friends can penetrate, and into which, therefore, a casual inquirer like myself could not obtain the least insight.”

“And this is all you could ascertain concerning him?” said Laura, interrogatively. “Did you not think of asking if he had any family by his wife?”

“I did not forget to make that inquiry, *mademoiselle*,” answered Rosalie; “and I was assured that his lordship is childless.”

“You are a good and faithful creature,” observed Laura; “and your services will prove invaluable to me. That purse which lies on the toilette-table, contains no insignificant sum in gold. It is yours—a recompense for the work of yesterday. But as you now know more of me than you did before, and as in a few short hours I permitted you to obtain a deeper reading of my secret soul than you could possibly have acquired, had I shut myself up in a studied reserve, it is as well that you should understand me thoroughly. I mean this, Rosalie—that I can be a good friend, or an implacable enemy—”

“I shall never provoke your enmity, *mademoiselle*,” observed the abigail.

“I do not think you will, Rosalie,” resumed Laura: “but, as I said ere now, it is as well that you should comprehend my character in all its details—in all its phases. You will benefit yourself by serving me faithfully: you would only injure yourself by playing me false. When once I have said upon this subject all that I mean to say, I shall not again refer to it: but the better we understand each other, the more permanent will be our connexion. Reckon, then, on my friendship so long as you deserve it;—deceive me, and I will risk my very life to be avenged.”

“Oh! *mademoiselle*,” exclaimed Rosalie, absolutely frightened by the vehemence with which her mistress spoke,—“have I done anything to render you suspicious of me?”

“On the contrary,” said Laura, with a smile; “you have done all you could to serve me—and you see that I have not forgotten to reward you. But within the last twelve or eighteen hours I have permitted you to read all the weaknesses of my soul—and now it is requisite that you should understand its strength: I have made you my confident—but I deemed it prudent to convince you that I know how to punish treachery. That is all, Rosalie: I have no more to say upon the subject;—and now, let me see your pretty face cheer up and wear a smile.”

The Frenchwoman was reassured by these last words; and, finding that her mistress had only intended to give her a salutary warning, and not to upbraid her for any actual misconduct, she speedily recovered her wonted gaiety and good spirits.

CHAPTER CLXV.

LORD WILLIAM TREVELYAN.

The scene changes to the residence of Lord William Trevelyan in Park Square.

It was evening, and the young nobleman was pacing up and down in an elegantly furnished parlour, which was lighted by means of a brilliant gas-jet enclosed in a pale red glass globe—so that the lustre which filled the room was of roseate hue. The curtains, sofas, and cushions of the chairs were of a rich crimson; and the paper on the walls was of a kindred colour and splendid pattern. In each corner of the apartment stood a marble jar, filled with flowers recently gathered, and rendering the atmosphere cool and fragrant.

Lord William was tall and handsome, his complexion was somewhat dark, giving him the appearance of a Spaniard rather than of an Englishman; and yet the ruddy hues of health were upon his cheeks. His hair was black as jet, silky as that of a woman, and parted above a brow high, intellectual, and expressive of a noble mind. His eyes were large and dark, and full of the fire of genius; and there was something peculiarly pleasing—almost winning in his smile.

In disposition Lord William was amiable—in manners unassuming: his character was unimpeachable—and his political opinions were of the most liberal tendency. His charity was extensive, but entirely unostentatious: his dependants revered him as a good master, and his acquaintances loved him as a sincere friend.

He was in his twenty-fourth year; and, until he had set eyes upon Agnes Vernon, he had never experienced the influence of the tender passion. But one day, while on a visit to a friend at Norwood, he was strolling alone in the vicinity, and accident led his footsteps towards the cottage, in the garden belonging to which he beheld the beauteous creature whose image had ever since filled his soul.

Truly had he said to Mrs. Mortimer that he adored the fair recluse of the cottage—that he worshipped the very ground upon which she trod: his love amounted almost to an idolatry;—and yet he had never exchanged a word—scarcely even a look, with the object of his affection!

It could be no world-contaminated heart that entertained such a passion as this—no selfish soul that could cherish such a pure and holy attachment.

But it was a generous—upright—noble-minded young man, who was now anxiously waiting the arrival of the woman with whom he had made an appointment for the evening in question.

Were the English aristocracy to be judged generally by such nobles as the Earl of Ellingham and Lord William Trevelyan, the term of its existence would not now perhaps be within the range of prophecy.

But, as matters now stand,—as the aristocracy is corrupt, selfish, and cruel—self-sufficient and ignorant—proud and intolerant—unprincipled, profligate, and tyrannical,—it is not difficult to predict its speedy downfall.

Therefore is it that we boldly proclaim our conviction that Monarchy and Aristocracy will not exist ten years longer in enlightened England; but that a Republic will displace them!

The *hereditary principle*, either in Monarchy or Aristocracy, is the most detestable idea that ever entered the brains of knaves, or was adopted by fools.

In respect to Monarchy, we are gravely assured that the principle of hereditary succession guarantees a nation against the civil wars that may arise from the pretensions of numerous claimants to the supreme power. But the history of every monarchical country in the world gives the lie to this assertion. Crowns have been bones of contention from time immemorial, and will continue to be so until they be crushed altogether beneath the heel of Republicanism. Take the history of England, for instance—that England, where the hereditary principle is said to be admirable and efficacious beyond all question: thirty-three Kings or Queens and two minors have reigned in this country since the Conquest by the Norman ruffian—*and during that period we have had eight civil wars and nineteen rebellions!*

The LAWS OF GOD, moreover, bear testimony against Monarchy. What said the Prophet Samuel when the Jews insisted upon having a King? “I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great which

you have done in the sight of the Lord, *in asking you a King*. So Samuel called unto the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not; *for we have added unto our sins this evil, to ask a King*."

Either the Bible is true or false. If true—as assuredly it is—then is the institution of Monarchy *a positive crime*, tolerated by an entire nation!

And no wonder that Heaven itself should protest against a system which is nothing more nor less than setting up an idol for the millions to worship,—an idol as useless as an Indian pagod, but often as terrible and slaughterous in its baleful influence as Juggernaut in its fatal progress.

Never did Satan contrive a scheme more certain of promoting idolatry than the raising up of Kings and Queens as rivals to the Majesty of Heaven;—for the root of Monarchy is in hell—the laws of God denounce the institution as a sin—and the history of the whole world proclaims that blood inevitably attends upon it!

All men were originally equal; and in no country therefore, could any privilege of birth give one family a right to monopolise the executive power for ever: neither can one generation bind that which is as yet to come. The existing race of human beings has no property in the one unborn: we of the present day have no right to assume the power of enslaving posterity:—and, on the same principle, our ancestors had no right to enslave us. If those ancestors chose to make one set of laws for themselves, we can institute another code for our own government. But of course such a change as this can only be made by the representatives of the People; and in order that the people *may* have a fair representation, the following elements of a constitution become absolutely necessary:—

Universal Suffrage;
Vote by Ballot;
No Property Qualification;
Paid Representatives;
Annual Parliaments; and
Equal Electoral Districts.

Give us these principles—accord us these institutions—and we will vouch for the happiness, prosperity, and tranquillity of the kingdom.

The French now stand at the head of the civilisation of Europe. They are on the same level as the fine people of the United States of America; and England occupies an inferior grade in the scale.

Alas! that we should be compelled to speak thus of our native land: but the truth must be told!

As yet almost every country in Europe has demanded and obtained something of its rulers, in consequence of the French Revolution;—whereas England has as yet obtained nothing in the shape of Reform!

Oh! shame—shame! what has become of our national spirit?—are we all willing slaves, and shall we not agitate—morally, but energetically agitate—for our rights and liberties?

The aristocracy and the men in power treat the people's assemblies with ridicule, and denominate the working-classes, when so assembled, as "a mob." They will not discriminate between honest politicians and the respectable working-classes on the one hand, and the ragamuffinry of society on the other. They confound us all together in the sweeping appellation of "*the mob!*"

The insensates! Do they not reflect that if ten or fifteen thousand persons meet for the purpose of discussing some grand political question, some five or six hundred pickpockets and mischievous boys are certain to intrude themselves into the assemblage? Why—black sheep even find their way into the Houses of Parliament—aye, and into the very suite of Royalty itself.

But after recording all the above observations, we must once more declare that we do not recommend violence: we insist upon the necessity of a grand moral agitation—an agitation which shall pervade the entire country, as an ocean is roused by the storm into a mass of mighty waves. The people must assume an imposing attitude; and let the memorable words of Lafayette be repeated by every tongue:—"*For a nation to love liberty, it is sufficient that she knows it; and for a nation to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it!*"

And, oh! my fellow-countrymen, let not this glorious thesis be used in vain! By the misery and starvation which millions of ye endure—by the hopeless entombment to which the Poor Law Bastilles condemn ye, when work fails—by the denial of an honest recognition of the rights of labour, which is insolently persisted in—by the spectacle of your famished wives and little ones—by the naked walls of the wretched hovels in which the labouring population dwells—by the blinding toil of the poor seamstress—by the insults heaped on ye by a rapacious aristocracy and an intolerant clergy—by the right which a despicable oligarchy usurps to hold the reins of power—by the limited suffrage which leaves the millions unrepresented—by the oppressive weight of taxation laid upon the productive classes—by the sorrows which the hard-working operative endures throughout his virility, and the misery that attends upon his decrepitude—by the badge of pauperism that the sons and daughters of toil are compelled to wear in the accursed Union-houses,—by all your wrongs, we adjure ye not to remain at rest—not to endure the yoke which ye can cast off in a moment—not to stand still and gaze listlessly, while all the rest of the civilised world is in motion!

Returning from this digression to the thread of our narrative, we will suppose that Mrs. Mortimer has at length arrived at the house in Park Square, and that she is already seated with the young nobleman, who little suspected the infamous character of the woman whom he had admitted to his confidence.

"I have been looking forward with much impatience and anxiety to your coming," said Lord William: "but even now that you are here, I know not in which manner you can assist me."

"*Faint heart never won fair lady*, my lord," returned the old woman; "and you must take courage. The maxim which I quoted is a good one."

"I do not despair, madam," said the young nobleman: "and yet I seem as if I were involved in a deep mist, through which I cannot even grope my way. Alone and unassisted, I cannot hope to obtain access to that charming creature; and, if assisted, I will do nothing that shall violate the respect due to one so pure of heart as I believe her to be."

“I should have proposed to become the bearer of a letter from your lordship to Miss Vernon,” remarked Mrs. Mortimer, coldly: “but, perceiving beforehand that your scruples are over nice and your notions somewhat of the most fastidious, I really do not see how I can serve you.”

“I am afraid to write to her—she would perhaps be offended to an extent that might be irremediable,” exclaimed Lord William, a prey to the most cruel bewilderment.

“And yet your lordship once endeavoured to bribe the servant-girl to become the bearer of your amatory epistle,” said Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone of sarcasm—almost of disgust.

“Now you are offended with me,” cried the young nobleman. “It is true that I did pen a letter to Agnes—telling her how much I loved her and how honourable were my intentions—imploring her likewise to grant me a few moments’ interview, and to pardon the means that I thus adopted of accosting her, having no other mode of procuring an introduction. Such a letter I did indeed write,” continued Trevelyan: “but it was in a fit of despair—of madness—of insensate recklessness.—I know not how to explain myself! The servant refused to deliver that note—and my eyes were immediately opened to the impropriety of the proceeding which I had adopted.”

“And you therefore decline to entrust me, who am well acquainted with Agnes, to deliver a similar letter into her hand? Your lordship is wrong in thus refusing to be guided by me,” continued the crafty old woman. “Think you that with one so innocent, so artless as Agnes, I cannot prepare the way to render your letter acceptable—at least to prevent it from producing a sudden shock to her notions of maidenly propriety?”

“Much as I should be rejoiced could you accomplish that aim,” said Trevelyan, “I should be ten thousand times happier were you able to procure me an interview with her.”

“This is madness!” exclaimed the old woman. “Can I not more easily induce her to read a letter from a stranger, than to receive that stranger in person? Is not the letter the first and most natural step to the visit? Trust to me, my lord: I know the disposition of Agnes—I understand affairs of this nature—and I am also well aware that love blinds you to the ways of prudence.”

“Be it, then, as you propose,” said Lord William, after a long pause, during which be reflected profoundly. “I will write the letter this evening: will you call for it early to-morrow morning?”

“I will,” answered the old woman: “and in less than twenty-four hours I will undertake to bring you tidings calculated to encourage hope—or I am very much mistaken,” she added emphatically.

“You do not believe—you have no reason to suppose that the father of Agnes already destines her to become the bride of some person of his own choice?” asked Trevelyan, now for the first time shaping in words an idea that had haunted him for some days past. “Because,” he continued, speaking with the rapidity of excitement, “I cannot possibly comprehend wherefore he compels her to dwell in that strict seclusion.”

“I do not believe that you have any such cause for apprehension,” said Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone of confidence—as if she were well able to give the species of assurance which she so emphatically conveyed. “There is a mystery—a deep mystery attached to the fair recluse,—and what that mystery is, I am myself completely ignorant. But that the father of Agnes has no such intention as the one you imagined, and that Agnes herself has as yet never known the passion of love,—these are facts to which I do not hesitate to pledge myself most solemnly.”

“Oh! then there is indeed room for hope!” exclaimed Lord William, his countenance brightening up and joy flashing in his eyes.

“A nobleman in your position—blessed with wealth and a handsome person—endowed with agreeable manners and a cultivated mind,” said Mrs. Mortimer, “need not despair of winning the love and securing the hand of a maiden dwelling in utter obscurity and totally unacquainted with the world.”

“I would rather that she should learn to love me for my own sake, madam,” observed Lord William, in a serious tone, “than for any adventitious advantages of rank or social position that I may possess.”

“Well, my lord—we shall see,” said Mrs. Mortimer, rising to depart. “To-morrow morning I will call for the letter; and I shall proceed straight over to the cottage: In the afternoon, or evening, I will do myself the honour of waiting upon your lordship again.”

“I shall expect you with impatience, madam,” returned Trevelyan, as he politely hastened to open the door for her.

Mrs. Mortimer took her leave; and the young nobleman sate down to pen a letter to Agnes Vernon.

But this was not so easy a matter as he had anticipated. Sheet after sheet of paper did he spoil,—a hundred times did he commence—and as often did he throw aside his pen in despair. Now he fancied that his style was too bold—then he conceived it to be too tame and vague: now he imagined himself to be too complimentary in his language towards one possessing a mind so chaste and pure—then he felt assured that he was acting indiscreetly to write at all. In the course of an hour he was swayed by such an infinite variety of conflicting sentiments and impressions that he was almost inclined to throw up the task in despair.

At length, however, he made a beginning which pleased him; and his pen then ran fluently enough over the paper, until the letter was composed in the following manner:—

"Pardon a stranger who dares to address you, beautiful Miss Vernon, in a strain that might give you offence, were he not sincere in his language and honourable in his intentions:—pardon me, I implore you—and refuse not to read these few lines to the end! He who thus writes is the individual that you have observed occasionally in the vicinity of your dwelling; and you will perceive by the signature to this letter that he is not a man without ostensible guarantees for his social position. That his character is unimpeachable he can proudly declare; and that he will not address to you, Miss Vernon, a single word which he will fear to repeat in your father's presence, he solemnly declares.

"Let me, however, speak of myself in the first person again: let me assure you that your beauty has captivated my heart—and that, if anything were wanting to render me your slave, the description which the bearer of this letter has given me of your amiable qualities, would be more than sufficient. I am rich—and therefore I have no selfish motive in addressing you, even if you be rich also: but I would rather that it were otherwise with you, so that my present proceeding may appear to you the more disinterested. Had I any means of obtaining an introduction to you, beautiful Miss Vernon, I should not have adopted a measure that gives me pain because I tremble lest it should wound or offend you. But mine is an honest—a sincere—and a devoted attachment; and I shall be happy indeed if you will permit me to open a correspondence with your father on the subject. Were he to honour me with a visit, I should be proud to receive him. But if, in the meantime, you seek to know more of me—if I might venture to solicit you to accord me an interview of only a few minutes, you cannot divine how fervently I should thank you—how delighted I should feel! Let this interview take place in the presence of Mrs. Mortimer, if you will: I have nothing to communicate to you that I should hesitate to say before your father or your friends. Oh! how can I convince you of my sincerity?—how can I testify my devotion?—how can I prove the extent of my love?

"I beseech you to reflect, Miss Vernon, that my happiness depends upon your reply. Am I guilty of an indiscretion in loving you? Love is a passion beyond mortal control! He who knows no other deity, deserves not blame for worshipping the sun, because it is glorious and bright; and my heart, which knows no other idol, adores you, because you are beautiful and good. Treat not my conduct, then, with anger: let not your pride be offended by the proceeding which I have adopted in order to make my sentiments known to you;—and scorn not the honest—the pure—the ardent affection which an honourable man dares to proffer you. I do not merit punishment because I love you;—and your silence would prove a punishment severe and undeserved indeed! Again, I conjure you to remember that the happiness of a fellow-creature depends upon you: your decision will either inspire me with the most joyous hope, or plunge me into the deepest despair. At the same time, beauteous Agnes,—(the words—those delightful words, 'beauteous Agnes,' are written now, and I cannot—will not erase them)—at the same time, I say, if your affections be already engaged—if a mortal more blest than myself have received the promise of your hand,—accept the assurance, sweet maiden, that never more shall you be molested by me—never again will I intrude myself upon your attention. For with my love is united the most profound respect; and not for worlds would I do aught to excite an angry feeling in your soul.

"Your ardent admirer and devoted friend,
"WILLIAM TREVELYAN."

With this letter the young nobleman was satisfied. He considered it to be sufficiently energetic, and at the same time respectful: he saw nothing in it against which the purest mind could take exceptions; and, in the sanguine confidence natural to his age, and to the honourable candour of his disposition, he already looked upon his aims as half accomplished—his aspirations as half gained.

Having sealed and addressed the letter, he placed it upon the mantel-piece ready for Mrs. Mortimer when she should call in the morning: then, fetching a portfolio from an inner room, he opened it, and from amongst several drawings in water-colours, selected one on which his gaze was immediately rivetted with deep and absorbing interest.

For that painting—executed by his own hand—was a portrait of Agnes Vernon; and even the most fastidious critic, if acquainted with the original, must have pronounced it to be a living likeness.

Yes: on that paper was delineated, with the most perfect accuracy, the fair countenance of the *Recluse of the Cottage*,—every feature—every lineament drawn with a fidelity to which only a first-rate artist, or an amateur whose pencil was guided by the finger of Love, could have possibly attained. There were the eyes of deep blackness and melting softness,—there was the high, intelligent forehead,—there was the raven hair, silken and glossy, and seeming to flow luxuriantly even in the very picture,—and there was the rich red mouth, wearing a smile such as mortals behold upon the lips of angels in their dreams. How charming was the entire countenance!—how amiable—how heavenly the expression that it wore!

And no wonder that the likeness was so striking—so accurate—so faithful;—for the young nobleman had touched and retouched it until he had delineated on the paper the precise counterpart of the image that dwelt in his mind. Hours and hours had he devoted to that labour of love:—on each occasion when he returned home after contemplating, from behind the green barrier of the garden, the idol of his adoration, he addressed himself to the improvement of that portrait. At one time he had beheld the maiden to greater advantage than at another; and then he studied to convey to the card-board the last and most pleasing impression thus made upon his mind; until he produced a likeness so faithful that not another touch was required—no further improvement could be effected.

And, like Pygmalion with his Galatea, how Lord William Trevelyan worshipped that portrait! No—the simile is incorrect; because the

sculptor learnt to adore the statue that was cold and passionless—whereas the young nobleman was blest with the conviction that there was a living original for the image he had so faithfully traced upon his paper,—and it was that living original whom he made the goddess of his thoughts.

The clock had struck ten, and Lord William was still bending over the portrait that lay upon the table, when a footman entered the room to announce that a lady who declined to give her name solicited an interview with the young nobleman.

Lord William, hastily closing the portfolio, desired that she might be immediately shown into his presence.

The domestic bowed and retired.

In a few minutes he returned, ushering in the unknown visitor, who wore a veil over her countenance: but the moment the footman had withdrawn, she raised the veil, and disclosed a face that was strikingly handsome, though pale and careworn. She was apparently about thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age—with dark hair, fine hazel eyes, and good teeth. Tall and well-formed, her figure, which was rather inclined to *embonpoint*, was set off to advantage by the tasteful—indeed elegant style of her dress; and in her deportment there was an air of distinction denoting the polished and well-bred lady.

Lord William received her with becoming courtesy, requested her to be seated, and then awaited an explanation of her business.

“Your lordship is doubtless surprised at receiving a visit at so unseasonable an hour, and on the part of a complete stranger,” began the lady, in a pleasing though mournful tone of voice: “but I know not to whom else to address myself for the information I now seek—and if you cannot afford it to me, I shall be unhappy indeed.”

“Madam,” said Lord William, somewhat astonished at this mysterious opening of the conversation, “if it be in my power to serve you, I shall render that service cheerfully.”

“You are well acquainted, I believe, my lord, with Sir Gilbert Heathcote?” observed the lady, somewhat abruptly, as she bowed her thanks for the assurance the young nobleman had given her.

“Sir Gilbert Heathcote, though much older than I, is an intimate friend of mine,” observed Trevelyan.

“Do you know where he is—what has become of him?” demanded the lady, in a still more anxious tone than before.

“I really do not, madam,” was the reply.

“Merciful heavens!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands together in a paroxysm of sorrow.

“I have not seen him for this week past,” continued Trevelyan. “But—are you ill, madam? Can I offer you anything?—shall I summon assistance?”

And, as he spoke, the nobleman rose from his seat and approached the bell-pull.

“No—no, my lord!” cried the lady. “Do not ring—do not call your servants! I shall be better presently. But pardon me if I could not control my feelings,” she added, wiping the tears from her eyes.

The young nobleman, in spite of the adjuration to the contrary, hastened into the adjoining room and speedily returned with a decanter of spring water and a tumbler. He then filled the glass and presented it to his afflicted visitor, who thanked him for his delicate attention with a look expressive of gratitude—the words that she would have uttered being stifled in her throat.

Refreshed with the cooling beverage, she said, after a short pause, “My lord, have you the slightest conception where your friend Sir Gilbert Heathcote is? Did he intimate to you his intention to leave London? did he hint at the probability of his departure from England? Oh! I conjure you to tell me all you know: for—for—you cannot divine how much—how deeply I love him!”

Trevelyan was struck with astonishment at these last words,—words that were uttered in a tone of such convincing, such profound sincerity, that he could not for an instant question their import. And yet—though since the days of childhood Trevelyan had known Sir Gilbert Heathcote—he had never heard that the baronet was married: on the contrary, he had invariably understood him to be a single man. If this latter belief were the true one, then, was the lady now in his presence the mistress of his friend?—for assuredly she had not spoken with the confidence of a sister, but with the hesitation of one who reveals a fact that is in some way associated with shame.

The lady perceived what was passing in the mind of Trevelyan; and in a low but fully audible tone, she said, “My lord, circumstances compel me to reveal myself to you as your friend’s mistress. Yes: though I love him more than ever wife could love—yet am I only his mistress,—for, alas! I am the wife of another! And now, my lord,” she added, with deep feeling, “you may spurn me from you—you may command your lacquey to thrust me from your dwelling: but I implore you to give me tidings of Sir Gilbert!”

“Madam,” exclaimed Trevelyan, the moment he could recover from the bewilderment into which this impassioned address plunged him, “not for worlds could I do or say aught to augment year affliction—much less to insult you. I declare to you most solemnly that I have neither heard nor seen anything of Sir Gilbert Heathcote for a week. I called at his chambers in the Albany the day before

yesterday, and was simply informed that he was not at home. I left my card without thinking to make further inquiries—not suspecting that his absence had been for days, instead of hours."

"Oh! yes—upwards of a week has elapsed since I saw him," exclaimed the lady, with difficulty subduing a fresh outburst of grief. "Each day have I been to the Albany—and still the answer is the same—'*He has not returned!*' No—he has not returned," she added, clasping her hands together; "and he has not written to me! O God! I fear that some fatal accident has befallen him!"

"Do not give way to such a distressing belief," cried Trevelyan, feeling deeply for the unfortunate woman, whose grief was so profound and so sincere. "Shall I make inquiries—immediate inquiries—concerning him? Perhaps I may learn more than a lady possibly can."

"Generous-hearted nobleman!" exclaimed the visitor; "how can I ever repay you for this kindness towards an utter stranger?"

"Remember also, madam," said Trevelyan, "that, apart from my readiness to serve you or any lady whom affliction has overtaken, I begin to experience some degree of anxiety on behalf of a gentleman who has ever shown a sincere friendship towards me. Not another minute will I delay the inquiries which, alike for your sake and his, I now deem it necessary to institute."

Thus speaking, the young nobleman rose from his chair.

"My lord," said the lady, rising also, and speaking in a tone indicative of deep emotion, "may I hope to receive a communication from you as early as possible? My suspense will be great—it is even now intolerable——"

And she burst into tears.

"Madam," interrupted the young nobleman, profoundly touched by her affliction, which was evidently most unfeigned, "you can either accompany me, or remain here until my return. Perhaps the latter will be the more desirable—at least if you can restrain your impatience, so natural under the circumstances, for a couple of hours. But perhaps," he added, an idea striking him,—"perhaps you live at some distance——"

"I am the occupant of a house in Kentish Town," said the lady; "and therefore my dwelling is not very far from your lordship's. If you see no impropriety in it—if there be no one here whom my presence would offend," she continued, speaking in a subdued and almost timid tone, "I would rather—oh! much rather wait until you return."

"By all means, madam," exclaimed the generous-hearted young noble. "Should you require anything during my absence, the servants will obey your summons; and they will receive my orders, ere I depart, to pay you every attention."

"I shall not trouble them, my lord," was the reply: "but I return you my deepest—sincerest thanks for the kind consideration with which you treat me."

Trevelyan bowed, and then quitted the room.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

A SKETCH OF TWO BROTHERS.—A MYSTERY.

The nobleman's cab was got ready in a very few minutes; and while he is driving rapidly along towards Piccadilly, we will place on record some particulars respecting Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

The baronet was a man of about forty years of age, and of very handsome countenance, as well as of tall, commanding figure. He had never married; and report stated that a disappointment in love, experienced when he was very young, had induced him to make a vow to the effect that, as he had lost the idol of his heart's devotion, he would never accompany another to the altar. Such was the rumour which had obtained currency at the time amongst his friends, and was even repeated at the period whereof we are writing, whenever astonishment was expressed that a man enjoying all the advantages of personal appearance and social position should not have sought to form a brilliant matrimonial alliance. For the baronet was not only very handsome, as remarked above, but he also possessed the superior attraction of four thousand a year. His habits were nevertheless inexpensive: he lived in chambers at the Albany, and had no country seat. Indeed, he seldom quitted London, and was altogether of quiet—even retired habits. He was fond of reading, and was also an admirer of the fine arts: he used often to observe that the only extravagance of which he was ever guilty, consisted in the purchase of a fine picture or of articles of *virtû*;—but these he seldom retained—giving them as presents to his friends or to museums. Not that he was whimsical or capricious, and grew tired to-day of what he had bought yesterday: but he was pleased at the thought of rescuing good paintings and real curiosities from the auction-room or from Wardour-street; and he was wont to observe that he experienced more delight in seeing them in the possession of friends who could appreciate their value, or in museums where their safety was ensured, than in having them left to the mercy of servants in his "bachelor apartments." The fact was, that his disposition was naturally generous; but this generosity was displayed in a particular fashion—and as he himself admired objects of *virtû*, he fancied that they must likewise prove the most welcome gifts he could bestow upon his friends.

Sir Gilbert had a brother, who was very unlike himself. James Heathcote was an attorney—grasping, greedy, avaricious, unprincipled—and therefore rich. He was only two years younger than Sir Gilbert; but close application to business, evil passions, and parsimonious habits had exercised such an influence upon his personal appearance, that he seemed ten years older. His hair was grey—that of Sir Gilbert was quite dark: his form was slightly bowed—that of the baronet was erect as a dart. James also was unmarried—but not through any disappointment in early life. Indeed, he possessed a heart that might be susceptible of desire, but could not possibly experience the pure feeling of love. He lived in a handsome house in Bedford-row, Holborn; and his apartments were elegantly furnished;—for he was wont to observe that persons who are anxious to get on in this world, must make a good appearance, and that a mean office frequently turns away a person who might prove an excellent client. But his aim was to amass money—his object was to increase his wealth, no matter how: still he had always contrived matters so cunningly, that no one could positively and unequivocally prove him to be a rogue.

With such a dissimilitude of character between the two brothers, it cannot be supposed that any extraordinary degree of intimacy existed on their part. Indeed, they seldom saw each other—although the more generous nature of Gilbert would have cheerfully maintained a more consistent and becoming feeling: but the cold, reserved, matter-of-fact disposition of James proved absolutely repulsive and forbidding in this respect. So great, in fine, was the discrepancy between these men, that people were surprised when they learnt for the first time that the money-making, hard-hearted attorney was the brother of the urbane, amiable, and polished baronet.

These hasty outlines will afford the reader some idea of Sir Gilbert Heathcote on the one hand, and Mr. James Heathcote on the other. We shall see more of them both hereafter; and their characters will then become more fully developed. In the meantime we must return to Lord William Trevelyan, whom we left hastening in his cab, at half-past ten at night, towards the Albany.

On arriving at that celebrated establishment, the young nobleman instituted various inquiries concerning Sir Gilbert; but not the least particle of information of a satisfactory nature could he obtain. It appeared that the baronet had been absent for eight days, and that no communication had been received from him—neither had he given any previous intimation of his intended departure. His brother had been informed of this unaccountable absence; but it seemed that the attorney had taken no step to solve the mystery. This was the only fact which Lord William succeeded in gleaning in addition to the meagre knowledge he already possessed relative to the matter; and he returned homeward with a heavy heart, and experiencing strange misgivings in respect to his friend.

It was near midnight when he re-entered the room where he had left the lady. The moment he appeared on the threshold of the door, she rose from her seat and hastened forward to meet him, her looks revealing the intensity of the anxiety and the acuteness of the suspense which she experienced. But when she saw by his countenance, even before a word fell from his lips, that he had no good news to impart, a ghastly pallor overspread her face, and she would have fallen had he not supported her and led her back to her chair.

“I grieve to say, madam,” he at length observed, “that I have learnt nothing more than what you already know—unless indeed it be the fact that a communication respecting Sir Gilbert’s disappearance has been made to Mr. James Heathcote, and that he has treated the matter with unpardonable levity—if not with heartless indifference.”

“I do not know that brother—I never saw him,” said the lady, speaking in a broken voice: “but I have heard enough of his character to make me dread him.”

“At the same time, madam,” remarked Lord Trevelyan, in a tone of firm though gentle remonstrance, “there is not the slightest ground for suspicion against Mr. James Heathcote; and such an observation as that which a moment ago fell from your lips, might act most seriously to the prejudice of an innocent man. I likewise am unacquainted with Mr. Heathcote, otherwise than by name——”

“And your lordship is well aware that his reputation is not the most enviable in the world!” exclaimed the lady in an impassioned tone.”

“I have never heard any definite charges against him, madam,” said Trevelyan.

“No—not positive charges which may fix him with the perpetration of a special and particular deed of guilt,” she cried, as if determined to level her suspicions against the attorney: “but your lordship has doubtless heard a thousand vague accusations—usury—extortion—grinding down the poor to the very dust—hurrying on law proceedings with merciless haste—unrelentingly sweeping away the property of his victims——”

“All these charges I have certainly heard, madam,” said Trevelyan; “but I will not admit that they warrant the darkest, blackest suspicion which one human being can possibly entertain towards another. Understand me, madam—I have no motive in defending James Heathcote, beyond the true English principle of never judging a person through the medium of prejudices. For your satisfaction I will call upon Mr. Heathcote to-morrow—I will speak to him relative to the mysterious disappearance of his brother—I will hear his replies—I will even watch his countenance and observe his manner as he speaks. And believe me, madam,” proceeded the young nobleman, emphatically,—“believe me when I assure you that if there should transpire the least cause of suspicion—if there should appear aught to warrant the belief that James Heathcote could have possibly practised or instigated foul play in respect to his brother,—believe me, madam, I repeat, that I will pursue the investigation—I will leave no stone unturned—I will prosecute my inquiries until I shall have brought home that deep guilt to his door. But not for an instant—no, not for a single moment can I believe——”

“Act as you have said, my lord—and, depend upon it, you will find in the sequel that my opinions are not so unjust—so uncalled for—so reprehensible, as you now conceive them to be. But, oh!” exclaimed the lady, clasping her hands wildly together,—“it is terrible—terrible even for a moment to entertain the idea that he whom I love so devotedly may be no more!”

“Compose yourself, madam—tranquillise your feelings, I implore you!” cried Lord William Trevelyan. “We must not give way to despair—we must not harbour the dreadful thought that Sir Gilbert Heathcote has met with foul play, and that he ceases to exist. No—no: let us hope——”

“Oh! my lord, how can we hope in the face of such strange—such mysterious—such suspicious circumstances?” demanded the lady, with mingled grief and bitterness. “Even if he did not choose to acquaint his friends with his intended absence and its motives, he would not be equally reserved towards me. No—he would have seen me ere his departure—or he would at least have written. For you must now learn, my lord, that we have loved each other for upwards of twenty years,” she continued, in a low and plaintive tone. “For twenty years and more have our hearts beat in unison;—and never—never was love so devoted as ours! Alas! mine has been a strange and romantic life; and the influence that has swayed all its incidents was that passion which the worldly-minded treat so lightly. For my father was a worldly-minded man; and, though he knew how fondly I loved and how ardently I was beloved,—though I knelt before him and conjured him by all he held most sacred, and by the spirit of my mother who died in my childhood, not to sacrifice me to the object of *his* choice, and tear me away from the object of *mine*,—nevertheless, he ridiculed my prayers—he made naught of my beseechings—and I was immolated upon the altar of a parent’s sordid interest. Your lordship has perhaps already understood that the *one* whom I adored was Gilbert Heathcote. Never—never was love’s tale told with more enchanting sweetness than by his lips: never—never did woman cherish more devotedly than I that avowal of a sincere passion! At that time his personal beauty was sufficient to ensnare the heart of any maiden, though far less susceptible than mine;—and I loved him—loved him madly. But a wealthy noble had seen me; and my father beheld with joy the impression that I had been so unfortunate as to make upon that patrician’s fancy. Moreover, at that period, my sire was suffering cruel pecuniary embarrassments; and the brilliant marriage which he hoped to accomplish for his daughter, appeared the only means of extricating himself from his difficulties. Thus the suit of the nobleman was encouraged by my father—and I was induced by the menaces, the prayers, and the specious reasoning which he employed by turns to move me,—I was induced, I say, to tolerate the visits of the peer, although heaven knows I never could encourage them. Not that his personal appearance was disagreeable—nor that I paused to reflect that his age was more than double my own: no—for he was handsome—very handsome; and, though his years were twice mine, yet he was but in the prime of life. Wherefore, then, did I receive his addresses with loathing?—wherefore did I implore my father to save me from an alliance which was so desirable and so brilliant in every worldly point of view? Oh! it was because my heart was irrevocably given to another—because Gilbert Heathcote possessed all my love!”

The lady paused, and wiped away the tears which so many varied reminiscences had wrung from her eyes,—while profound sobs convulsed her bosom.

Lord William Trevelyan felt the embarrassment and awkwardness of his position; for it was now past midnight—and he began to

reflect that his servants might look suspiciously upon the fact of this protracted visit on the part of a lady who was still young enough, and certainly handsome enough to afford food for scandalous tongues. Not that Lord William was either a rigid saint or a stern anchorite in respect to the female sex: but, although unmarried, he behaved with the utmost circumspection, and would never have outraged decency so far as to make his own abode the place of an intrigue or gallant *rendezvous*. Moreover, the love which he entertained for Agnes Vernon had exercised such a purifying—such a chastening influence upon his soul, that he shrank from the idea of compromising himself by any real impropriety, or of becoming compromised by means of any indiscretion which scandal might think fit to attribute to him.

The lady was however too much absorbed in her own thoughts and emotions to mark how rapidly time was slipping away, or to reflect upon the imprudence of prolonging her visit. Her feelings were painfully excited, not only by the fears which she entertained on account of the absence of Sir Gilbert Heathcote—but likewise by the reminiscences which had been stirred up in her soul, and the outpouring of which to sympathetic ears seemed a necessary vent for a bosom so full of sorrow.

“Yes, my lord,” she resumed, after a short pause, her voice still being characterised by a tone of the most touching melancholy; “my father forced me into that hated marriage—and though I gained rank and a proud position, yet hope and happiness appeared to have forsaken me for ever. But I cannot tell you all,” she exclaimed, hastily, as if a sudden thought had struck her, warning her that she was about to be led by her feelings into revelations of a nature which she would repent, or which would at least be unbecoming and injudicious.

“Madam,” said Lord William, emphatically,—“I do not seek your confidence—I do not even desire it: but you have to do with a man of honour, by whom everything you may impart, whether with premeditation or unguardedly, will be held as sacred.”

“I thank your lordship for this kind assurance,” observed the lady. “Do not imagine that I wish to force you into becoming the depositary of my secrets, in order to establish a species of claim upon your friendship. No—my lord: I am not selfish—neither am I an intriguer,—only a most unhappy—a most unfortunate woman! But it is because you have manifested some little interest in me—because you have so generously promised to aid me in clearing up the mystery which surrounds the sudden disappearance of one so dear to me,—it is for these reasons, my lord, that I am anxious to explain so much of the circumstances of my connexion with *him*, as will convince you that nothing but the sincerest affection on my part could have placed me in a position which the world generally would regard with scorn. I have told your lordship how, loving Gilbert Heathcote, I was forced into a most inauspicious marriage with another: but the name of *that other* I need not mention. My father saw, when it was too late, that he had indeed sacrificed my happiness on the altar of his own selfishness; and he died of remorse—of a broken heart! My husband—my noble husband—was kind and generous towards me: but I could not love him—and he knew it. Then he grew jealous—and other circumstances,” she added, casting down her eyes and blushing deeply, “embittered our lives. At length—or, I should rather say, at the expiration of a few short years, I fled from him—fled from the husband who had been forced upon me—and sought refuge with the object of my heart’s sole and undivided affection. From that moment I have dwelt under the protection of Sir Gilbert Heathcote,—dwelt in the strictest privacy—happy in the possession of his love—a love which, as well as my own, has known no diminution with the lapse of years. To one of your generous soul—of your enlightened mind, my position may not appear so degrading—so humiliating, as it would to one incapable of distinguishing between the heart’s irresistible affection and a mere sensual depravity. Pardon me, my lord, for having thus obtruded this slight, and, I fear, rambling sketch, upon your notice: but I could not endure the conviction that I must appear in your eyes to be nothing more nor less than the pensioned mistress of your friend. The length of time that *his* love for me has endured, may be alone sufficient to persuade you that I am not to be confounded amidst the common mass of female degradation and immorality.”

“Madam, I thank you for this explanation—and I comprehend all the delicacy and peculiarity of your position,” said Lord William Trevelyan, rising from his seat, the lady herself having set the example—for it now struck her that she had remained until a very late hour.

“You will pardon me, my lord,” she said, “for having thus occupied so much of your time. But I know you to be one of Sir Gilbert’s best friends—indeed, the one of whom he was principally accustomed to speak, and whom he loved and relied upon the most. May I hope that you will favour me with a communication, so soon as you shall have seen Mr. James Heathcote? Although, in virtue of my marriage, I bear a proud and a great name, yet for years and years have I been known only as Mrs. Sefton—and by that appellation must I be known to you.”

The lady then mentioned her address in Kentish Town; and, extending her hand to the young nobleman, renewed her thanks for the kindness which he had shown her.

He offered to escort her to her home: but this she declined with a firmness, at the same time in such delicate terms, as to convince him that she would neither compromise herself, nor allow him to be compromised by a courtesy which he could not well have refrained from proposing, although he might not have been well pleased to carry it into effect.

He promised to call upon her as soon as he had anything important to communicate; and Mrs. Sefton then took her departure, Trevelyan ringing the bell in order that the servant might attend her to the door, so that there should be nothing clandestine nor stealthy in the appearance of the visit.

When Trevelyan was once more alone, he threw himself in an arm-chair, and gave way to his reflections—for the evening’s adventure had, in all its details, furnished ample food for thought. In the first place, there was the strange—the unaccountable disappearance of

Sir Gilbert Heathcote—a man to whom the young patrician was much attached, and whose friendship he valued highly. Then, in spite of the remonstrances which he had addressed to Mrs. Sefton, he found suspicions existing in his mind relative to James Heathcote—suspicions of a nature which he dared not attempt to define even in the secresy of his own soul; but which nevertheless every moment grew stronger, vague though they were. Next, he pondered upon the particulars of the slight autobiographical sketch the lady had given him; and he dwelt with a yet unsubdued surprise on the fact that his friend Sir Gilbert had maintained, for so long a time and entirely unsuspected, a connexion that fully accounted for his bachelor-life. Lastly, Trevelyan meditated upon the course which he must adopt to discover the baronet's fate, unless he should speedily re-appear and relieve from their cruel suspense and uncertainty those who were interested in him.

The young nobleman felt not the slightest inclination to retire to rest, although it was now one o'clock in the morning. The adventures of the evening had excited and unsettled him;—but having pondered on the various topics above enumerated, his thoughts insensibly reverted to his beloved Agnes.

Suddenly his eyes caught the portfolio that he had left upon the table; and, opening it, he took forth the portrait of the Recluse of the Cottage. But, ah! why did he start?—what did he see?

Rising from his chair, he held the picture in such a manner that the light gave him a perfect view of it: and, sure enough—beyond all possibility of mistake—there was a mark upon the dress,—a spot, as if a drop of water—perhaps a tear—had fallen upon it.

What could this mean?—how could such an accident have happened?

Again and again he looked,—looked steadfastly—earnestly; and the longer he gazed, the more convinced did he become that his eyes did not deceive him—that he saw aright—and that the stain or the spot was there!

Yet he had not noticed it when, after Mrs. Mortimer's departure, and previous to Mrs. Sefton's arrival, he had so long and so ardently contemplated that portrait. No: the mark was not there *then*; or else he—the lover, devouring the entire portrait,—he, the artist, scrutinising with satisfaction every minute detail of his own drawing,—oh! yes—he could not have failed to observe the slightest speck—the least, least spot that marred the general effect of that pleasing delineation!

Was it possible, then, that Mrs. Sefton had inspected the portfolio? Yes—such a supposition was natural enough. She was left alone in that room for nearly two hours; and, in spite of her sorrow, the time must have seemed so irksome to her as to induce her to have recourse to any means to while it away, if not to divert her thoughts into a less melancholy channel.

Yes—yes: he had divined the truth now, no doubt! At least such was his idea;—and then the tear—oh! It was easily accounted for. She was overwhelmed with grief at the mysterious and alarming absence of the man whom she loved; and she was weeping while she turned over the contents of the portfolio.

"Well—it is no matter," thought Trevelyan, as he arrived at these conclusions: "It would have been far worse had the tear fallen on the face of the portrait,—for I might labour for hours—nay, for days, without being enabled to catch and delineate so faithfully again that sweet expression of countenance which Agnes wears, and which I have succeeded in conveying to my paper. But the mark is upon the dress—and a single touch with the brush will repair the injury. Alas! poor woman," he added, in his musings, and alluding to Mrs. Sefton, "you have indeed enough to weep for, if you have lost all you love on earth—and, even had you spoilt the portrait altogether, I would have forgiven you!"

Trevelyan now returned the drawing to the portfolio, which he conveyed to the little room adjoining; and then, retracing his way into the parlour, he approached the mantel-piece to take the letter which he had written to Agnes.

But he was astounded—stupified by the conviction which burst upon him that the letter was gone!

Gone!—it might have dropped upon the floor—on the rug—in the fender? No:—vainly did he search—uselessly did he pry into every nook and corner he could think of;—the letter had disappeared!

He rang the bell furiously.

"Did any one enter this room during my absence just now, and while that lady was here?" he demanded of the domestic, who responded to the summons.

"No, my lord," was the answer.

"You are certain?" said Trevelyan, with interrogative emphasis.

"I am positive, my lord," replied the man; then, after a pause, he observed, "I hope nothing unpleasant has occurred, my lord?"

"Yes—no—you may retire," said the nobleman, abstractedly; and, when the domestic had left the room, he threw himself into a chair, overcome with amazement and grief at the mysterious circumstance that had occurred.

Could Mrs. Sefton have taken the letter? No: the idea was ridiculous. She was too much absorbed in her own sorrows to have leisure for the gratification of an idle and impertinent curiosity. Besides, was she a common thief?—for, let a lady be possessed with ever so prying a disposition, she would not carry her mania to such a point as to steal a letter—a sealed letter—unless she were absolutely dishonest and unprincipled. Surely this could not be the character of the woman whom he had seen in such deep affliction that evening,—a woman who was assuredly what she had represented herself to be, and whose appearance, manners, and language all forbade the idea that she was an abandoned wretch.

"No—I wrong her by entertaining such an injurious suspicion even for an instant!" thought Lord William, when those reflections had passed through his brain. "It is impossible that this afflicted lady can have taken my letter. Besides, had she done so, would she have waited until my return? And again, of what use—of what benefit could the letter be to her?"

He glanced around, and beheld several articles of value lying about in their accustomed places. He had gone out in such a hurry that he had left a purse containing gold upon the mantel—and, remembering the precise amount, he reckoned it and found it to be correct. Lying upon the table was a splendid gold seal, which he had used in closing the letter that was now missed:—in fine, there were numerous objects, either costly or curious, which an ill-disposed person might have self-appropriated, but all of which had been left untouched.

How, then, was it possible to suppose that Mrs. Sefton had purloined the letter?

Nevertheless, it had disappeared; and therefore some one must have taken it?—or else some accident must have happened whereby it was lost?

Trevelyan racked his brain to discover whether it was possible that he himself had removed it from the mantel after he had placed it there: but he felt assured that during the interval which elapsed between the writing of that letter and the arrival of Mrs. Sefton, he had not quitted the apartment.

The affair was most mysterious: nay—it was also alarming;—for how could he possibly account for the disappearance of a sealed letter? If it had indeed been taken by an ill-disposed person, the contents might be made known—perhaps to the prejudice of his suit with Agnes. But he was assured that no one had entered the room during his absence;—and he was so reluctant to fix the deed on Mrs. Sefton, and had so many reasons against such a supposition, that he became equally confident she was in no way connected with the strange occurrence.

At length he reasoned himself into the belief that he must have deposited the letter in some place which he could not recollect; and, as he had in the first instance made a rough draught, he resolved to write a fair copy all over again. This was soon accomplished; and, having sealed and addressed it, he took the new letter with him to his own bed-chamber, so that he might retain it in security until Mrs. Mortimer should call for it in the morning.

It was past two o'clock when Lord William retired to rest; but, though much fatigued, he could not immediately close his eyes in slumber. The affair of the letter haunted him—filled him with vague and undefined misgivings—and assumed an aspect the more mysterious, the longer he contemplated it. He endeavoured to persuade himself that the belief to which he had ere now temporarily lulled his mind was the real solution of the theory: but then would come the evidence of memory, proclaiming that he *had* placed the letter on the mantel in the parlour, and that he had *not* touched it afterwards.

In fine, he was bewildered amidst a variety of conflicting thoughts—and his brain grew wearied with the agitation which their jarring contention produced,—so that at length sleep stole upon him insensibly: but though it sealed his eyes in slumber, it did not protect him against the troubled dreams that visited his pillow.

At about nine o'clock in the morning he was awakened by the entrance of his valet, who came to inform him that Mrs. Mortimer had called for a letter which was to be in readiness for her.

Trevelyan started up and glanced anxiously towards the night-table, almost dreading lest that second *billet* should have disappeared as well as the first:—but it was there in safety—and he now desired his dependant to deliver it to Mrs. Mortimer.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

THE LAWYER.

Mr. James Heathcote, the attorney, was seated at a writing-table covered with papers, in his private office. He was wrapped in a loose dressing-gown, and his feet were thrust into large buff slippers. His grey hair was uncombed and his beard unshaven that morning; and his shirt was none of the cleanest. Indeed, his appearance denoted that, on awakening, he had risen hastily, thrown on a few clothes, and repaired straight to his office, where he immediately became absorbed in the study of certain documents in which he was deeply interested.

The countenance of this individual was by no means pleasing. A malignant light shone in his small, restless, dark eyes; and he had a habit, when vexed or irritated, of frowning—or rather contracting his brow to such a degree, that he brought them as it were to cover his very eye-lids: but, if pleased—especially when he had solved a difficult question or was struck by an idea that seemed particularly lucid or valuable—he would then elevate his brows to such a height that the movement displayed the whites all round his eyes, while the upper part of his forehead gathered into innumerable small wrinkles.

A superficial observer would have pronounced the expression of his pale features to be intellectual: but a more experienced phrenologist would be enabled to draw the proper distinction between an air of noble intelligence and one of profound cunning, shrewdness, and selfish watchfulness. These latter qualities were the real characteristics of James Heathcote: but with his clerks, and amongst the generality of his clients, he passed as a man of very fine intellect and great talents.

The room in which he was seated had what is usually called “a business-like air” about it. The grey drugget that covered the door would have sustained no harm from a vigorous application of a carpet-broom; and the window, which looked into a little yard at the back of the house, might have lost much of its dinginess if only cleaned once a week. But the panes appeared as if they had been purposely tinged a dirty yellow, so incrusted were they with the dust that had gathered upon them.

On one side of the room were rows of shelves containing a number of law-books, the relative ages of which were marked by the colour of the leather binding—there being a perfect ascending scale, from the bright buff, indicating the most recent purchase, to the deepest, dirtiest brown that characterised the long-standing and well-thumbed volume of remote date. Along the edges of these shelves were nailed long slips of dark-green serge—a meagre kind of drapery meant to protect the upper part of the volumes from the dust, and impart to the whole arrangement somewhat of the air of a regular book-case.

On another side of the room were rows of shelves much deeper and also much wider apart; and on these were huge japanned tin boxes, with names painted on them in yellow letters. To every box there was a little padlock; and the whole seemed to tell of title-deeds to vast estates—and mortgages—and bonds—and charges—and rent-rolls, contained in those sombre-looking repositories. But, alas! how few of the persons whose names were still recorded on the outside of those boxes, had any longer an interest in the deeds preserved within: how many had lodged their parchments in those usurious chests, never to recover them!

Over the mantel-piece was a portrait of Lord Eldon—a lawyer whom thousands and thousands were doomed to curse, but whom the “profession” still continues to cry up as the greatest of modern judges. Yes—for if clients complain of the law’s delays, the lawyers themselves rejoice; and he who is an execrable judge in respect to the former, is an admirable one in the eyes of the latter.

Stuck into the frame of that portrait was an infinite number of visitors’ cards, all covered with dust, as if that assemblage of bits of pasteboard were something sacred which the profane hand of a housemaid or charwoman dared not touch. On the mantel itself was an old time-piece, the mechanism of which was exposed; and how the wheels could move at all, clogged with dust as they were, must have appeared marvellous to any one who, entering that room, gave himself the trouble to devote a thought to the matter.

We have already stated that the table was covered with papers. Along that side opposite to the one at which the lawyer sate, were piles of those documents, all tied up in the usual fashion with tape that once was red, but which was now so faded that in many instances it was of a dirty white. They seemed to have been undisturbed for a long, long time; and perhaps were kept for show. Those papers that referred to matters actually pending, were placed more conveniently within the attorney’s reach, and were fresher in appearance, the tape also being of a livelier red. Three or four files, two feet long, and covered with letters densely packed one above another, lay upon the drugget; and near the lawyer’s feet was a waste-basket overflowing with letters crumpled up, and looking uncommonly like appeals for mercy and delay on the part of unfortunate debtors, but which had been tossed with cool contempt into that receptacle for all such useless applications!

It was now ten o’clock in the morning; and Mr. James Heathcote was, as we have represented, completely absorbed in the study of the

documents that lay spread before him upon the table. A thin, yellow hand supported his head; and every now and then he ran his long fingers through his iron-grey hair, as if that action aided him in the solution of a difficult subject.

Presently a low and timid knock at the door fell on the lawyer's ears; and he said "Come in" without raising his head or desisting from his occupation.

Thereupon a middle-aged man, dressed in a suit of rusty black—his office garb—made his appearance, holding in his hand a long thin book which was the diary of the business-proceedings of the establishment. This individual had a pale, sinister countenance, with brown hair combed sleekly down over his low forehead. He was, however, an important personage in many respects—being Mr. Heathcote's head clerk, and exercising despotic sway over half-a-dozen subordinates in the front office. With them and towards poor clients or unfortunate debtors he was cold—stern—harsh—and inexorable; but in the presence of his employer he was cringing—mean—sycophantic—and spaniel-like.

Advancing slowly and with noiseless steps—or rather creeping up towards the table, he stood in a respectful attitude—no, with a servile demeanour and in deep silence until it should please his master to take notice of him.

"Well, Green—what have you to say to me this morning?" at length demanded Mr. Heathcote, raising his head and throwing himself back in his capacious arm-chair.

"Gregson the upholsterer, sir, cannot meet the third instalment due this day on his warrant-of-attorney for eight hundred pounds," said Mr. Green, referring to the diary; "but he called just now and told me that if you would give him till next Monday——"

"Not an hour, Green," interrupted Mr. Heathcote, imperiously. "Let execution issue. He has enough property to satisfy the greater portion—and, as his brother-in-law is his security, we shall slap at him without delay for the residue. He is a toiling, striving man, and will beat up amongst his friends to raise the necessary amount by the time we have run him up some twenty pounds' costs. What is the next?"

"Sir Thomas Skeffington's bill for five hundred pounds comes due to-day, sir," continued the head clerk; "and he proposes to renew it."

"Let me see?" mused Mr. Heathcote. "It was originally two hundred pounds that I lent this young spendthrift baronet; and he has already renewed six times. Well—let him give another bill—for five hundred and fifty, mind—don't forget to tack on the fifty, Green. His uncle will pay the debt eventually—it is all safe. Go on."

"Thompson, sir, the defendant in Jones's case, has let judgment go by default," continued Mr. Green: "he says that he would do anything rather than run up expenses; and he has been here this morning to beg and implore that time may be granted. His wife has just been confined, and his eldest child is at the point of death. The debt is a hundred and eleven pounds with costs—and he proposes to pay it at five pounds a week."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Mr. Heathcote, almost savagely. "Let him go to prison! He will be writing imploring letters, and his father-in-law will call to make terms. Those letters and visits, Green, will be another six or seven pounds in my pocket: and *then* we will let him out on his warrant-of-attorney to pay the five pounds a-week. It is always better to send a man in his case to prison first, although you mean all the time to accede to his proposal in the long run. He is an industrious, enterprising fellow—and his father-in-law is a highly respectable man. So he will not knock up for this little affair. Go on."

"Beale's wife called last evening, sir," resumed Mr. Green, "and says that her husband is lying in a sad state in the infirmary at Whitecross-street prison. She and her children are starving—and she begs you for the love of God to let her husband out. It is their only chance; and he will pay you when he can."

"When he can!" exclaimed Mr. Heathcote, in bitter contempt. "And that will be *never*. I am surprised, Mr. Green, that you should have bothered me with such a trifle, instead of telling the woman at once that her husband may rot in gaol until he pays me every farthing."

"I should not have thought of troubling you, sir, in the matter," observed the clerk, in a tone of servile contrition; "only the woman did seem so very, very miserable—and she cried so bitterly—and she had a young child that looked half-famished in her arms——"

"And you pitied her, I suppose?" interrupted Mr. Heathcote, in a tone of cool irony. "You have been in my service for twelve years to some purpose."

"Pray forgive me, sir: but—but—I happen to know that Beale's wife and family are really starving," said the clerk, whose heart was a trifle less hardened than that of his master.

"Let them starve!" rejoined the latter, with an air of brutal indifference. "Now, what have you next upon your list?"

"William Fox, the ironmonger, sir, has called a meeting of his creditors," resumed Mr. Green, now regretting that he should have allowed himself to be carried away by a scintillation of humane feeling so far as to merit a rebuke at Mr. Heathcote's hands.

"Well—I know that," observed the lawyer. "But *I* never attend meetings of creditors—*I* never accept compositions, Mr. Green. But has

the fellow been here? and what does he say?"

"It appears, sir, that he laid a full and complete account of his affairs before his creditors," continued the clerk; "and that they were well satisfied with the statement. He showed them that his embarrassments arose from no fault of his own, but simply from the failure of a large house in Birmingham."

"And what did he offer?" demanded Mr. Heathcote.

"He asked for two years to pay off all his liabilities," was the answer. "He did not propose a composition, but will settle everything in full. His brother has offered to become security for him."

"Well, he must pay me at once—within twenty-four hours—or I shall sign judgment, Green," exclaimed the lawyer. "Or stop—it will be better to sign judgment at once, and issue execution. I shall then, get my money directly—and his other creditors may wait the two years. If he calls again to-day, tell him that I am out—and mind and have a seizure in his house by the evening."

"It shall be done, sir," said the head clerk: then, again referring to the diary, he proceeded thus:—"You remember that affair of Williamson, sir? He called and left seventy-two pounds the other evening to take up his bill, which had been sent back; and as you were out at the time, he could not have the bill delivered over to him. I offered him a receipt for the money: but he left it without taking any acknowledgment—saying, '*Oh! I can trust to your honour,*'—or words to that effect. Well, sir, he has called two or three times since for the bill——"

"Do the other clerks know that he paid the money?" demanded Mr. Heathcote, fixing his keen eyes significantly upon Green.

"No, sir," was the answer, accompanied by a look of intelligence showing that the man comprehended his master's meaning. "They were all gone—and I was just on the point of leaving likewise when Williamson called."

"Then issue a writ this very day for the recovery of the amount," said the lawyer. "Of course, Green, you will know nothing at all about having received the money from him?"

"Of course not, sir," replied the clerk.

"And should he go to trial, you will swear that he never paid you?" continued the lawyer, speaking with the imperious authority of a man who knew that the other was in his power.

"It would not be the first time, sir, that I have perjured——"

"Well—well!" cried Mr. Heathcote, hastily; for though he did not mind suborning his clerk to commit a crime, yet he did not like to have the deed designated in plain terms and exhibited to his eyes in all its dreadful nakedness and reality. "Let this be done, Green: and take a guinea for yourself—charging it in the office-expenses of the week. You are a faithful servant—and I am pleased with you," he added, in a patronising manner.

"I am truly grateful, sir, for your kindness and for your good opinion," said the clerk, with a low bow: but at the same time he was compelled to stifle the sigh that rose to his very lips at the idea of being so dependent upon his master, and so enthralled by circumstances as to be compelled to submit to be made the tool—the base instrument—the despicable agent of that master's hidden villany.

"Have you anything more in the diary?" demanded Mr. Heathcote.

"Nothing, sir," responded the clerk: "unless it be that the two doctors are to call to-day for the second halves of the reward promised them for signing the certificate."

"Good! pay them each immediately, the affair having been attended with complete success," said the lawyer: "and indeed, you may give them each five guineas beyond the sum originally promised."

"It shall be done, sir," returned Mr. Green. "Have you any farther commands?"

"I am at a loss how to proceed with respect to that woman," said Mr. Heathcote, his brows lowering in token of vexation, while at the same time he ran his skinny fingers through his wiry hair.

"You mean Mrs. Sefton, sir?" said the clerk.

"Mrs. Sefton—as she calls herself," observed Mr. Heathcote, with a grim smile. "Ah! little thought Gilbert," he continued in a musing, but also triumphant tone, "that for years past I have known all and everything connected with him! Little did he imagine that his *liaison*—his amour with that lady was no secret to me, secure and safe as he deemed it to be from all the world! But what am I do with regard to her, Green?" he demanded, as he abruptly turned towards the clerk, who stood like a menial in his presence.

"Your wisdom, sir, can doubtless suggest some plan," was the sycophantic reply. "Do you imagine that she is likely to be dangerous?"

“She loves my brother, Green,” answered the lawyer: “she entertains for him that passion which never has warmed my breast—and never shall,” he continued, in a contemptuous tone. “Oh! how I hate the very name of love! It is a sickly sentimentalism—a maudlin feeling, which is derogatory to the character of a man of the world, but which makes a woman dangerous indeed, when the object of her passion is outraged or wronged. Yes, Green—I do fear this Mrs. Sefton, as we will call her—since thus she chooses to denominate herself: I do consider her to be dangerous—and I know that she is of an intrepid, resolute character. She will leave no stone unturned to have what she will call *justice* done towards my brother; and by some means must I take from her the power of doing me an injury.”

“And those means, sir?” asked the clerk, timidly.

“I have thought of many plans, Green,” replied Mr. Heathcote: “but not one appears to be sufficiently decisive to meet the exigencies of the case. Could I only get her out of the country, or else have her locked up in some place of security, for a few weeks, I should in that interval have all my schemes so effectually carried out, as to be able to defy not only that woman, but likewise all the world.”

“And is it so very difficult, sir, to encompass one or the other of the two aims you have mentioned?” inquired Green.

“On what pretence can I imprison her?” demanded Mr. Heathcote, impatiently. “But I *might* be able to induce her to quit the country,” he added, in a more measured tone, and with a steadfast look at his clerk—a look which seemed to say, “Can I trust you?”

“Is there any way, sir, wherein my humble services will avail?” asked the man, thoroughly understanding the intent of that look.

“Yes—on you must I rely in this matter,” said the lawyer, after a few minutes’ deep cogitation. “Mr. Green,” continued Heathcote, again fixing on him his small, malignant, soul-reading eyes, “you will excuse me for a moment if I recall the past to your recollection ——”

“But why, sir—why!” exclaimed the clerk, his pale face suddenly becoming paler still and his limbs trembling convulsively.

“Because I choose,” returned his master, brutally: “because it suits my present purpose to remind you how much you are in my power.”

The wretched clerk moaned audibly, but uttered not another word.

“Twelve years ago, Mr. Green,” resumed Heathcote, with deep emphasis and in a measured tone, as if he were determined that not a syllable which he intended to say should be lost on the unhappy man who was thus undergoing a painful—agonising infliction, —“twelve years ago, Mr. Green, you were an attorney in practice for yourself. An accident, the particulars of which it is not necessary for me to recite, made me acquainted with a fact which placed you entirely at my mercy. You and a gentleman named Clarence Villiers had been left the joint guardians of a boy then a little more than eight years old; and a thousand pounds were invested in the funds in the name of yourself and the said Clarence Villiers. It had been agreed that you should be the acting trustee. You wanted money—you forged the name of Clarence Villiers to the necessary deed—and you sold out the thousand pounds.”

The miserable clerk groaned again, more audibly than before: but his master heeded not the intense agony his words inflicted.

“Yes—you sold out the money, and appropriated it to your purposes,” continued the remorseless attorney. “The fact came to my knowledge,—and I offered to save you, on condition that you should serve me—that you should devote yourself to me, body and soul —that you should see only with my eyes, hear only with my ears, and use your hands and your intellectual powers as I directed. I required a person of this description: I was looking out for such an one at the moment when accident thus placed you in my power. We soon came to terms. You gave up a business that was not worth retaining—and you became my head clerk. I have paid you two guineas a week with the most scrupulous regularity—and I have often made you little presents, as even this very morning have I done. But what more have I been generous enough to do for you? Why—I have regularly paid the interest of the thousand pounds for you, as if it were still in the Bank of England; and your ward suspects not that his capital is gone. Neither does your co-trustee Clarence Villiers suspect it, Mr. Green,” added Heathcote, emphatically. “But in six weeks’ time, the youth will have completed his twenty-first year; and he will apply to Mr. Villiers and yourself for his thousand pounds. Mr. Villiers will ask to accompany you to the Bank to make over the money in due form—for Mr. Villiers is an honourable man. But the money will not be there—unless I replace it for you, and thus save you from transportation for life!”

“And you have promised that you will replace it, kind sir—you have undertaken to save me from exposure, degradation, and punishment!” exclaimed the clerk, his voice and manner becoming almost wild in the earnestness of their appeal.

“Yes—and I will keep my word, Green,” responded Heathcote. “If I have now recapitulated circumstances which are necessarily so indelibly stamped upon your memory, it was merely to convince you that I have it in my power to save you from a terrible fate—or to crush you as I would a viper beneath my heel. We shall not be the worse friends because we understand our relative positions; and mark me—never, never would I place myself in the power of a man unless he were ten thousand times more entangled in my meshes than I could possibly be in his.”

“Surely—surely, sir, you do not suspect my fidelity?” said the clerk, the workings of whose pale countenance were dreadful to behold; “surely you do not think that I should be ungrateful or mad enough to breathe a word to your prejudice? If you have done much for me, sir, I have served you faithfully; and this I can assert without fear of contradiction. I am ever at your disposal—ever in readiness to obey your commands, without questioning their propriety.”

“All this I know, my friend,” said Heathcote, his brows now elevating themselves with triumph; for he saw that the trembling wretch before him was docile, pliant, and obedient as a deaf and dumb slave following the signals made by an oriental despot: “all this I know,” repeated the lawyer;—“but there is no harm in occasionally setting forth the grounds on which our connexion is based. This being accomplished in the present instance, we may at once revert to the business that we have now in hand.”

“Relative to Mrs. Sefton, sir?” remarked Green, anxious to convince his master that he was mindful of the grave and important interests now involved in connexion with that lady’s name.

“Yes—relative to Mrs. Sefton,” said Heathcote. “I have already observed that there are only two ways of dealing with her: either to lock her up in a place of security for a time, or to get her out of the country. The latter alternative must be adopted; and it is for you to play a part which, if ingeniously enacted, cannot fail of success.”

Mr. Green placed himself in an attitude of deep attention—for all this while, as the reader will observe, he had remained standing, his master never desiring him to be seated, however long their conference might last.

“The impatience of this Mrs. Sefton is doubtless growing intolerable,” continued the lawyer: “a week has now passed since Sir Gilbert disappeared—and she will speedily initiate active measures to discover what has become of him. There is not therefore another moment to lose;—and her own affection shall be made the means of which we will avail ourselves in order to baffle and defeat her. Do you repair at once to Kentish Town and seek an interview with her. She does not know you—she never saw you: she will suspect nothing—but believe everything. You will tell her that you have just arrived from Liverpool—that you are an intimate friend of Sir Gilbert—and that he has embarked for America, in consequence of serious pecuniary embarrassments. You must assure her that those embarrassments came on him so suddenly, menacing his person with arrest—and that he was so bewildered and excited by the danger and disgrace which thus threatened him, that he fled without having time to communicate even with her. You will then go on to say that he sent you up to London to break these news to her—to supply her with money—and to implore her to hasten after Sir Gilbert, whom she will join at New York. All this must you tell her;—and if you play your part properly, it is, as I have already observed, certain to experience success.”

“You may rely upon me, sir,” said the clerk.

“All your presence of mind—all your readiness of invention—all your impudence, will be requisite in the matter,” continued Heathcote: “for Mrs. Sefton is an intelligent woman—and the least hesitation in giving a reply to any of her questions, will assuredly awaken her suspicions, and spoil all. But if you be wary and cautious, you must come off triumphant. Believing that her connexion with Sir Gilbert is a profound secret, she will at once receive you as a friend of her lover’s, from the mere fact of your knowledge of their *liaison*: because she will suppose that you could not have become aware of it, unless he had in reality made you his confident. Then, again, the circumstance of your being the bearer of fifty guineas—which I will presently give you—as the means to defray the expenses of her voyage to New York, will confirm all you have stated and give a complete colouring to all your representations. Do you thoroughly understand me, Green?—and do you consider yourself competent to undertake this mission?—for I can assure you that it is of the highest importance for me to remove that dangerous woman from England for a few weeks.”

“I do not hesitate to charge myself with the enterprise, sir,” said Green, meekly,—“delicate though its management may be;—and, should it fail, it will be through no fault on my part.”

“Then it will *not* fail, sir!” cried Mr. Heathcote, emphatically. “And now I will give you the money necessary for your purpose—and you must accompany the lady to Liverpool, remember. If a packet be not about to start immediately, then lodge her at an hotel, alleging that you are an unmarried man as an apology for not inviting her to stay at your own house until her departure. You can put up at another hotel. But all these minor details I leave to your judgment and discretion.”

Mr. Heathcote now placed a quantity of notes and some gold in the hands of his clerk, who forthwith took leave of his wily master: ere he departed, however, he stopped in the outer office to issue instructions relative to the various matters entered in the diary. At length he was ready to issue forth on the mission entrusted to him; but at that moment a cab stopped at the door, and a tall, handsome, well-dressed gentleman alighted.

Entering the clerk’s office, the visitor inquired if Mr. Heathcote was at home.

“What name shall I say, sir?” asked Green.

“That is of no consequence,” was the hasty reply: “my business is of great importance.”

“Walk in, then, if you please, sir,” said Green: and, having shown the visitor into the lawyer’s private apartment, the head clerk was at length enabled to hurry away to his own lodgings, in order to make some change in his toilette ere he proceeded to Kentish Town.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

THE NOBLEMAN AND THE LAWYER.

On entering into the presence of Mr. Heathcote, the handsome visitor tendered his card; and the moment the lawyer cast his eyes upon it, a cloud passed hastily over his countenance—for he knew that Lord William Trevelyan, whose name appeared on that card, was an intimate friend of Sir Gilbert. He however composed himself in an instant, and, pointing to a chair, said, “Be seated, my lord.”

The young nobleman accepted the invitation, and then observed, “I have to apologise for intruding myself upon you——”

“Not if you come on matters of business, my lord,” interrupted the lawyer, in a tone which was intended to imply that his time was nevertheless very precious.

“I fear that you will scarcely consider my visit to be connected with business in the sense you would have me infer,” said Trevelyan, courteously: “at the same time, you will give me credit for the best intentions——”

“Pray, my lord, come to the point,” exclaimed Heathcote, impatiently. “I have a vast amount of work upon my hands—several appointments to keep—and my toilette not yet performed.”

“In one word, sir,” said Trevelyan, “may I inquire if you have received any tidings concerning your brother, who is a dear and valued friend of mine?”

“I have heard that my brother is absent, my lord,” answered Heathcote, coldly: “but I have no control over his movements—and he is not in the habit of consulting me respecting his actions.”

“At the same time, sir——”

“Pardon me, my lord: I have answered you—and I have not a moment to spare.”

“But as your brother’s friend, sir—his intimate friend——”

“I do not know you, my lord: neither do I trouble myself with my brother’s friendships.”

These last words were uttered so rudely—almost brutally, that the young nobleman’s countenance became the colour of scarlet, and he felt that were the lawyer a man less advanced in years, he would have knocked him down for his insolence.

“I am aware, sir,” he said, subduing his indignation as well as he was able, “that I have no claim upon your courtesy, beyond that which social conventions establish: but I regret to find that you should think it necessary to treat with such extreme incivility a person who has never offended you.”

“Then wherefore does your lordship force yourself into my presence, and persist in remaining here, when I tell you that I am occupied with serious matters?” demanded the lawyer, rising from his seat, while his brows were bent in such a way as to render his countenance particularly displeasing and sinister at that moment.

“Serious matters, indeed!” ejaculated Lord William, also rising; “is it not a serious matter that your brother—your own brother—has suddenly disappeared——”

“I have already told your lordship that I have no control over the actions of Sir Gilbert Heathcote,” said the lawyer; “and I am not to be forced into a discussion on any subject with one who is a complete stranger to me.”

“I repeat, sir, that I am your brother’s intimate friend,” cried the young patrician, indignantly.

“But I repeat, on my side, that you are no friend of mine—nor likely to be,” responded Heathcote. “Will your lordship, therefore, leave me to those pursuits which have better claims upon my time and attention?”

“Better claims! And yet you must surely have some of the ordinary feelings of human nature,” urged the nobleman, in a tone of mingled remonstrance and earnest appeal. “One word more, if you please, sir,” he continued, seeing that Heathcote was again about to interrupt him: “this matter is becoming serious! For eight days has your brother been missed from his place of abode and from the circle of his friends: an investigation into so mysterious an occurrence must necessarily take place—and without delay, too. What will

the world think of you, sir—*you*, the nearest living relative of one who may perhaps be no more—if you refuse your co-operation in this endeavour to ascertain what has become of him? I will even go farther, sir, and declare that a certain degree of odium will attach itself to you——"

"Young man, by what right do you thus insult me?" demanded the lawyer, completely unabashed, and measuring Lord William Trevelyan from head to foot with his keen, searching eyes. "Do you for a single instant dare to assert that if my brother should have met with foul play—as your words just now implied such a suspicion,—do you dare to assert, I ask, that the world would couple the slightest imputation with my good name? Though not of an aristocratic rank, my social position is an honourable one; and such as it is, my own talents—my own energies—my own hard toils, have made it. But because I can see nothing extraordinary in the absence of a man who has no domestic ties to bind him to one place, and who, acting upon a sudden caprice or fancy, may choose to depart from the metropolis, perhaps,—because I behold nothing remarkable in all this, am I to be reproached, vituperated, and even insulted by you, who adopt another view of the matter? Why, my lord, you are far more intimate with Sir Gilbert Heathcote than I, even though he is my brother;—and what would you say, were I to repair to your house—force myself into your presence—refuse to leave when solicited—and actually level the most injurious language, amounting almost to positive imputations, at your head? I appeal to your good sense, if you possess any, to consider the impropriety of your conduct here this morning, and to take your departure at once, before you irritate me more deeply than you have already done."

"I have listened, sir, with respectful attention to all you have said," returned Lord William Trevelyan; "and I declare emphatically that I am not satisfied with your reasoning. I impute nothing to you—because I know not what suspicions to entertain in the case. I frankly confess that I am bewildered, not only by the fact of my friend's unaccountable disappearance, but also by the manner in which you treat that circumstance. You declare that you cannot bring yourself to look seriously on this disappearance: surely it ought to alarm you, when I, who am so well acquainted with your brother, solemnly aver that I have particular reasons for knowing that he would *not* leave the metropolis in obedience to any sudden fancy or whim, without previously making a communication in a certain quarter."

"To you, I presume?" said Heathcote, fixing his eyes searchingly upon the patrician.

"No—not to myself," was the reply: "but to another."

"And that other?" observed the lawyer interrogatively: for he now began to fear that Trevelyan alluded to Mrs. Sefton, in which case he might repair straight to her abode after quitting that office—he might there meet the clerk whom he had seen on his arrival just now—and he might mar the entire scheme that had been concocted for the purpose of inducing the lady to leave England.

"Unless you yourself are acquainted with *that other person* to whom I alluded—or at least have some knowledge to whom I could so allude—I am not at liberty to make any revelations," observed Lord William.

"Oh! this is admirable!" ejaculated the lawyer, reseating himself and appearing no longer in a hurry to break off the conference: for he now perceived the necessity of detaining the nobleman as long as possible, so as to afford Green ample time to carry the deeply-concocted scheme into effect.

"You are pleased to be jocular at something, sir," said Trevelyan, biting his lip with vexation at an insolence which he could not chastise: and leaning against the mantel-piece, he surveyed the attorney with mingled anger and aversion.

"Yes—I am jocular," exclaimed the latter; "and I again declare that your conduct is admirable! You come to me to aid you in investigating what you are pleased to denominate a most mysterious occurrence; and, by way of inducing me thus to co-operate, you yourself start fresh mysteries, and make enigmatic allusions to unintelligible matters, concerning which you refuse to enter into any explanations."

"There may be certain circumstances, sir, which a man of honour dares not reveal," said Lord William, sternly; "and such is the case in the present instance."

"You have therefore a positive proof that Sir Gilbert's friends were more in his confidence than his own brother," replied the lawyer, in a sarcastic tone; "and this is tantamount to what I told you just now."

"Yes, sir—but the circumstances to which I allude have no reference to the mysterious disappearance of Sir Gilbert Heathcote," rejoined Trevelyan; "nor do they in any way relieve you from your responsibility as a brother."

"But, since you yourself are acquainted with some mysterious and unmentionable circumstances connected with my brother," said the lawyer, still in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "I have much more reason to accuse you of possessing a clue to the causes of his disappearance, than you have to level the same charge at me. Now, from your words—for I am a man of the world, my lord—I naturally infer that the *other person* to whom you so emphatically alluded, must be a lady——"

"I did not say so, sir—I gave you no reason for entertaining such an opinion," exclaimed Trevelyan fearful of now compromising a matter of great delicacy.

"But I choose to think so," said the lawyer, elevating his brows to an extraordinary degree, while a malignant light gleamed in his restless eyes: "and is it strange—is it unusual in the world, for a man to absent himself suddenly and even mysteriously, in order to

break off a connexion of which he is wearied, and which no longer has any charms for him?"

"One word, sir," interjected Trevelyan, annoyed with himself for having made any allusion to his friend's connexion with Mrs. Sefton: "your brother has undertaken no sudden journey—of *that* I am well assured. Would he quit his residence without leaving even a message behind him? Would he depart without even so much as a change of raiment—without the necessaries of the toilette?"

"Pooh! pooh!" ejaculated the lawyer, now throwing an expression of sovereign contempt into his tone. "A man with money can purchase a carpetbag or a portmanteau at the first town he stops at, and can stock it well, too, with linen and hairbrushes for a few shillings. Really, my lord, you compel me to treat you as an inexperienced child, who, having got some wild or romantic notion into his head, is determined to maintain it by any argument, no matter how preposterous or far-fetched."

Trevelyan bit his lip again: for he saw that the lawyer had really the advantage of him now; and he more than ever blamed his own indiscretion in having alluded to the affair of Mrs. Sefton.

"Come, my lord, be reasonable," proceeded Heathcote, in a conciliatory tone; "and I will pardon you the rudeness—or I will rather call it the *brusquerie*, of your first proceedings with regard to me. You cannot deny that there is a lady in the case: I am far-sighted enough to have made that discovery. Well, my brother is tired of her, or has quarrelled with her—or something of that sort; and he has therefore taken a sudden trip, heaven only knows where. Do you really imagine that if I had any serious fears, I would refuse to co-operate with you in instituting the necessary inquiries? Depend upon it, Sir Gilbert will re-appear again shortly amongst his friends; and he would not be over-well pleased if he found on his return, or if the newspapers wafted to him the fact, that a terrible hubbub had taken place in consequence of his sudden departure. I am a much older man than you, my lord,—and I look at these matters more calmly—more deliberately."

Trevelyan knew not how to reply to these observations. Though they did not dissipate the alarm which he experienced at the absence of Sir Gilbert, yet he began to think that the lawyer was really sincere in giving utterance to them. He, on one side, was disposed to view the affair seriously: Heathcote, on the other, put his own interpretation on it;—and, in the same way that Trevelyan could not resist the impressions made upon himself, he felt bound to allow the merit of equal conscientiousness on the part of the attorney.

At all events, there was no utility in protracting the discourse; and the young nobleman accordingly resolved to take his leave, suspending for the present any opinion relative to the conduct of Mr. James Heathcote.

"I am sorry, sir," said he, "that I should have intruded so long upon your valuable time: I am likewise sorry if, at the commencement of our interview, I should have been hurried by the excitement of my feelings into anything uncourteous or rude."

"Now that you speak in the manner that best becomes a nobleman and a gentleman," observed Heathcote, adopting the part of one who has something to forgive and overlook, "I am most anxious to welcome you as my brother's friend. Will you step up into the drawing-room, and honour my humble abode so far as to partake of such refreshment as at the moment I can offer you?"

This proposal was only made with a view to gain as much time as possible: for the lawyer in his heart had cordially hated the young nobleman from the instant that he had read his name upon the card.

"I return you my best thanks, sir," said Trevelyan; "but I am compelled to decline your hospitality on the present occasion."

Thus speaking, the young nobleman bowed and retired; and the moment the door closed behind him, the lawyer's countenance assumed an expression of such malignant triumph, that it seemed as if he were suddenly animated with the spirit of a fiend.

"Green has got her off by this time—there can be no doubt of *that*," he muttered to himself, as he rubbed his mummy-like hands gleefully together. "The woman loves my brother—and she will start away directly. Even her vanity will not induce her to tarry to pack up all her things, unless they are ready to hand; for the love of a woman who is sincere in her passion, rises superior to every other consideration. Oh! I know the human heart well; I know all its intricacies—its ins and its outs—the ravellings and unravellings of its smallest, most delicate fibres! It has been my business to study my fellow-creatures, in order that I might make them my instruments—my tools—my slaves. And I have succeeded!" he continued, with a chuckling laugh, while his brows were elevated with joy. "Otherwise I should not be the rich man that I am now. But if my wealth be already great—it must be greater. I must possess countless treasures—riches beyond computation; and until I have gained *them* I shall not be satisfied—neither shall I cease from toiling. That young aristocratic fool who was with me ere now—he affected to bully me, did he? I got the better of him. He affected to reason with me: I beat him with pure sophism,—and he has gone away entertaining a better opinion of me than when he first entered my presence. But I must examine these abstracts thoroughly," he added, still in a muttering tone, as he bent his eyes upon the documents which he had been studying; "I must note every point in these copies of the titles by virtue of which my brother holds his estates—for the management of these estates is already as good as in my own hands: and who knows—who knows how soon they may be mine altogether—yes—lands, messuages, tenements—aye, baronetcy and all?"

And as these last thoughts passed through his brain,—for he had not dared to give audible utterance to *them*,—there came such a diabolical expression—an expression of dark menace strangely mingled with the confidence of approaching triumph—over his countenance, that had any one been by at the time, the beholder must have dreaded lest that terrible man were about to throw off the mask of humanity and reveal himself in all the horrors of a demoniac nature.

We must however take leave of him for the present, and return to one whose generous and noble character forms such a striking contrast with this bad, designing man.

CHAPTER CLXIX.
A SCENE.

Lord William entered his cab, and drove rapidly away towards Kentish Town. It was mid-day when he reached the abode of Mrs. Sefton —for his interview with the attorney had been a very long one: but at length his equipage stopped at the gate of a beautiful little villa standing in the midst of a garden well laid out, and having iron railings along the side adjoining the main-road.

Leaping from the vehicle, Lord William opened the gate and hastened up to the front door, which was immediately opened to his summons, by a little page in a plain but neat livery.

To his inquiry whether Mrs. Sefton were at home, an answer in the affirmative was given—the boy however adding that his mistress was engaged at the moment.

Scarcely was the response thus conveyed, when the lady herself, having caught the sound of the young patrician's voice, came forth from a parlour opening from the hall; and, tendering him her hand, she said, "Oh! I am so glad you are come, my lord—for I am cruelly bewildered how to act!"

"Has anything new transpired, madam?" asked Trevelyan, unable to gather anything decisive from the expression of her countenance, which seemed to denote mingled hope and uncertainty—a gleam of satisfaction shining from amidst dark clouds of suspense.

"Come with me, my lord," she said; "and you will advise me how to act."

Thus speaking, she led the way into the parlour, followed by Trevelyan.

A man rose from a chair on his entrance; and the sinister countenance of that individual appeared to be not altogether unfamiliar to the young patrician, who could not however conjecture at the moment where he had seen or met that person before.

The individual himself seemed to recognise the nobleman—or at least to be troubled by his presence: but, almost immediately recovering his self-possession, he bowed low and resumed his seat.

"This gentleman, my lord," said Mrs. Sefton, "is a Mr. Green of Liverpool,—and he has brought me strange—nay, the strangest tidings relative to Sir Gilbert."

"And what may those tidings be, madam?" asked Trevelyan, addressing his words to the lady, but keeping his eyes fixed suspiciously on Mr. Green all the time.

"Remember, madam, that all I have said has been in the strictest confidence!" exclaimed the latter hastily, and with a manner which only tended to increase the young nobleman's suspicions.

"But Lord William Trevelyan is an intimate—a very intimate friend of Sir Gilbert," said Mrs. Sefton.

"It matters not, madam," observed Mr. Green: "my instructions were positive——"

"It matters greatly, however, sir," interrupted the lady. "Your tale appeared to me strange and inconsistent from the very first—though Heaven knows what motive you can have in deceiving me so cruelly, if deceit it be: but now my suspicions are painfully increased ——"

"Madam, you know not what you are saying," exclaimed Green: "you are insulting me, after all the trouble I have taken in this matter. But have your own way—my presence is no longer necessary here."

And, rising from his seat, he was moving towards the door, when a light suddenly broke in upon Trevelyan's mind—and it flashed to his recollection that he had encountered this individual that very forenoon in the office of Mr. James Heathcote, the attorney.

"Stop, sir!" he cried, seizing the clerk by the collar of his coat, and forcibly detaining him: "we have met before—I know you now! Scarcely two hours have elapsed since you conducted me into the presence of Mr. Heathcote, who is doubtless your master."

"Mr. Heathcote!" ejaculated Mrs. Sefton, a deadly pallor covering her countenance. "Ah! then my suspicions are to be confirmed—and he is persecuting *me* now!"

"Be seated, sir," said Trevelyan, pushing the discomfited clerk back into the chair which he had so recently left. "And now, madam," he continued, turning towards the lady, "will you have the kindness to explain to me all that this man has told you—the object of his visit, in fine?"

"Oh! my lord, what hideous treachery is at work!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, sinking upon a sofa, almost overcome by the varied emotions that agitated in her bosom. "This man introduced himself to me as Mr. Green of Liverpool, and as having brought me tidings of Sir Gilbert. He represented that Sir Gilbert, seized with a sudden terror through pecuniary difficulties, had fled to America——"

"'Tis false! false as ever diabolical deceit could be!" cried Trevelyan, emphatically. "I will stake my existence that so far from being in any financial embarrassment, Sir Gilbert Heathcote owes not a farthing in the world, and does not live even up to his income."

"Your lordship takes too much upon yourself in making such random statements," said Green: "since I am well assured of the exact truth of the story I have told the lady."

"This is a singular way for a man to express himself, if he be an actual emissary from Sir Gilbert," observed Trevelyan. "You are well

assured of the exact truth of your story—are you? Then you would have us infer that you had received it second-hand. But pray continue, madam:—what else did this fellow tell you? We shall unmask him altogether presently—and perhaps his next move will be from hence to the presence of a magistrate."

Mr. Green endeavoured to assume as much composure as he could possibly call to his aid: but he did not at all admire the aspect that things were taking—nor did he feel comfortable under the threat so plainly held out.

"Oh! my lord, what a snare has been spread for me!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, clasping her hands together in profound thankfulness that she had escaped the danger. "This bad man who now trembles in your presence, would have induced me to accompany him with the least possible delay to Liverpool,—thence to embark by myself in order to rejoin Sir Gilbert in New York. He has even about his person the funds to bear the expenses of my voyage:—and he would at once have hurried me away to Liverpool,—only, in the first place, a vague suspicion was excited in my mind,—and, secondly, I had particular—oh! very particular reasons for remaining in London at least a few hours longer——"

Mrs. Sefton suddenly checked herself: she was being hurried away by her excited feelings into allusions or positive revelations, on the verge of which she thus stopped short. Trevelyan did not, however, comprehend the motive of the abrupt pause which she made, but attributed it to the influence of her over-wrought emotions.

"Mr. Green—or whatever your real name may be," exclaimed the nobleman, turning round upon the clerk, "what explanation can you give, sir, in respect to all this?"

"I know not by what right you demand any explanation, my lord," said the man, determined to put as good a face upon the matter as possible.

"I will tell you by what right," returned the patrician: "by the right which every man has to protect and defend a lady against the machinations of her enemies—by the right that every honest member of society has to unmask a villain——"

"Do you allude to me, my lord?" demanded Green, rising from his seat.

"I do, sir," replied Trevelyan. "You are a villain, because you have lent yourself to an infamous trick. You cannot have been imposed upon—inasmuch as you have told many deliberate and wilful falsehoods. You pretend to have arrived straight from Liverpool, whereas you are undoubtedly a clerk in the office of Mr. James Heathcote—for you enacted the part of a clerk when I called there ere now. You would have induced this lady to quit London and repair to a foreign country, where nothing but disappointment—perhaps beggary—would have awaited her; and this act is so vile—so atrocious—so horribly base, that I can scarcely control my feelings—I can scarcely restrain my patience, while I thus upbraid you with your infamy. Were you a younger man, sir——"

But the nobleman stopped short, ashamed of wasting a menace upon one so unworthy of the honest ire of a generous soul.

"Now that your lordship has lavished all your abuse upon me, perhaps I may be permitted to depart," said Green, with much apparent coolness, though in reality he was terribly alarmed.

"Not until you have explained the meaning of this atrocious proceeding in which you have borne so prominent a part," replied Lord William. "Make up your mind to answer my questions in a way that shall carry truth upon the face of your words—or prepare to give an account of your conduct to the proper authority."

"What—what would you have me do, my lord?" asked the miserable wretch, now unable to conceal his terror—unable also to subdue the trembling of his limbs.

"Has foul play been adopted with regard to Sir Gilbert Heathcote?" demanded Lord William, speaking in a measured tone, and fixing his eyes keenly upon the clerk.

"Good God! Does your lordship suspect that he is murdered?" exclaimed Green, horrified at the bare idea. "No—no: thank Heaven—it is not so bad as that!"

"Thank Heaven also!" murmured Mrs. Sefton, her heart experiencing a relief so great and sudden—for the man was evidently speaking the truth—that she felt as if she were about to faint through excessive joy.

"I scarcely apprehended such a frightful alternative as my words may have seemed to imply," said Trevelyan. "But delay not, man—speak—tell me—tell this afflicted lady also—where is Sir Gilbert Heathcote?"

"My lord, I dare not——"

"Hesitate not another moment, sir," cried the nobleman, grasping the clerk violently by the collar of his coat: "hesitate not, I say—or I will drag you into the presence of the magistrate. Tell me—where is my friend?—where is Sir Gilbert?"

"My lord—my lord"—stammered the affrighted wretch, his countenance rendered hideous by its workings.

“Speak—sir—I command you!” exclaimed Trevelyan, in a tone of terrible excitement. “Trifle not with me—or I shall do you a mischief. Where—where, I ask for the last time, is Sir Gilbert Heathcote?”

“In——But you will kill me, my lord——”

“Speak, villain! Where is he?” demanded the infuriate noble.

“In a mad-house!” was the reply, absolutely wrung by terror from the clerk.

A piercing scream burst from the lips of Mrs. Sefton—and in another moment she fell heavily upon the carpet, with a dead sound as if it were a corpse that had rolled from the sofa.

Trevelyan—stupified by the astounding words that had fallen upon his ear—let go his hold on the wretched clerk, on whom he stood gazing for a few moments as if he had become petrified—turned into a statue—paralysed—motionless. But suddenly he seemed to be struck with the conviction that Mrs. Sefton needed his assistance; and, forgetting in the agitation and excitement of his feelings to keep a watch upon the clerk, he hastened to raise the prostrate lady from the floor.

He placed her upon the sofa, and sprinkled water (of which there happened to be a decanter full on the table) upon her countenance. In a few minutes she opened her eyes, and gazed wildly around her.

Trevelyan drew back a few paces so that the air might circulate freely about her—when, suddenly remembering the clerk, he looked hurriedly round.

But the villain had stolen away!

At this moment a bitter groan burst from the lips of Mrs. Sefton; for a remembrance of all that had just occurred came rapidly to her mind—and the horrible word “mad-house” seemed to echo in her ears and touch a chord that vibrated with a feeling of anguish to her very brain.

She covered her face with her hands, while her bosom heaved convulsively.

“Compose yourself, madam, I implore you,” said Trevelyan. “Even this certainty which we have acquired, is preferable to the suspense previously endured.”

“But is there hope, my lord—is there any hope left for *me*?” she inquired, removing her hands from her countenance—now so pale—and gazing up at the young patrician in a beseechful manner.

“Assuredly there *is* hope, my dear madam,” returned Trevelyan, emphatically. “I am confident that Sir Gilbert is in the possession of his intellects as completely as ever, and that he is a *victim*—but not a *maniac*. Indeed, I see through it all!”

“Oh! now you inspire me with hope!” exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, taking his hand and pressing it with fervent gratitude: and as her face was upturned towards his own, it suddenly struck him,—struck him like a flash of lightning,—that there was in that countenance an expression reminding him of Agnes Vernon,—although he had never beheld the features of the Recluse of the Cottage otherwise than tranquil, calm, and serene. Nevertheless, that idea seized upon him: but in the next moment he said to himself, “It is mere fancy!”—and as Mrs. Sefton at that instant settled herself in such a manner upon the sofa that her back became turned to the window and the variation of light produced a change in the expression of her countenance, that idea was immediately absorbed in other and more important considerations in the mind of the young patrician.

“Oh! now you inspire me with hope!” Mrs. Sefton had said; and her face brightened up—so that it was at the moment when this sudden lustre of joy was suffused upon her features, that the above mentioned idea had struck the nobleman.

“Yes, madam—there is every reason to hope,” he responded. “The entire plot, in all its terrible iniquity, is now before me as clear as the noon-day sun. I can read it as plainly as if it were in a book. The brother is at the bottom of it all.”

“Did I not tell your lordship that he was a villain?” asked Mrs. Sefton.

“Yes, my dear madam,” replied Trevelyan: “but I am slow to form injurious opinions of any man. Now, however, I have the conviction of his turpitude—and I hesitate no longer to proclaim him to be all that you represented him.”

“But—merciful heavens! while we are wasting time in words,” exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, seized with a sudden access of wild excitement, “Gilbert is in a horrible predicament—and we should be acting—not talking.”

“Haste and precipitation will effect no good in this matter, my dear madam,” said Trevelyan.

“But we must find out the place where he is confined—we must apply to the officers of justice—we must release him!” cried the lady, her excitement increasing.

“Pray, my dear madam, listen to me with some degree of composure,” said the young nobleman; “and I will explain to you how we must proceed, and why nothing can be done with that speed which would naturally be most consonant with your feelings.”

“I am composed—I am tranquil now, my dear friend—for in such a light you will permit me to consider you,” observed Mrs. Sefton, exercising as strong a control over her emotions as she possibly could command.

“In the first place I must tell you that I saw Mr. James Heathcote this morning,” resumed Trevelyan “and when I think of his cool villainy—his unblushing effrontery—his matchless impudence, I could tear my hair with rage at the idea of how I was duped. For though I entered his office with a strong suspicion—in spite of the remonstrance which I last night made to you—I quitted his presence with a very different impression.”

“And that man who was ere now with us, is his clerk?” said Mrs. Sefton. “But what could be the motive of their base attempt to induce me to quit the country with such extraordinary precipitation?”

“The reason is apparent enough, my dear madam,” answered Trevelyan; “and I will now explain to you the whole matter, as I understand it. James Heathcote has suborned two unprincipled villains, calling themselves medical practitioners, to grant a certificate of the insanity of his brother. The law of England permits such a proceeding——”

“Then the law of England is worthy only of barbarians!” exclaimed the lady, emphatically.

“You are not the only person in the country who entertains the same conviction,” observed Trevelyan, with a smile: then, instantly resuming a serious expression of countenance, he said, “By virtue of that certificate, Sir Gilbert is suddenly seized upon and carried off to a madhouse.”

“Oh! it is horrible!” cried the lady, in a tone of extreme bitterness mingled with anguish, while a convulsive shudder passed over her from head to foot.

“The iniquity is tremendous—and yet it is legal,” said Lord William. “Yes—I blush for my country when I declare such to be the fact,—I blush also for my fellow-countrymen that they should tolerate a system which savages themselves would regard with abhorrence! Well, madam, the deed is done—the atrocity is consummated—and Sir Gilbert Heathcote, though in the complete enjoyment of his intellects, is borne off to a lunatic-asylum. James—his vile brother—will obtain the control over his property; and that is the aim and object of his wickedness. But knowing that you are interested—deeply interested in Sir Gilbert’s welfare——”

“Oh! heaven can witness how deeply!” exclaimed the lady, clasping her hands with fervour.

“Knowing, I repeat, how profoundly you are interested in all that concerns my valued friend,” continued Trevelyan, “James Heathcote sought to expatriate you at least for a season—so that he might prevent you from adopting any measures to restore the victim to the enjoyment of freedom.”

“But of what avail would a few weeks’ delay be, even supposing that the plot devised against myself had succeeded?” asked Mrs. Sefton. “If I had gone to America, I should have found that Sir Gilbert was not in New York—and I should have forthwith returned to London. Unless, indeed,” she added, with a shudder, “my heart had broken with the immensity of its sorrow!”

“Ah! madam—and it was perhaps upon this catastrophe that the vile man reckoned!” said Lord William, his blood growing cold at the extent of the turpitude which he was contemplating. “And yet a more terrible suspicion still has come into my mind—a suspicion so dreadful——”

“Name it! Keep me not in suspense!” cried the lady, observing that her young friend was himself becoming painfully excited now.

“During your absence, madam,” returned he, his countenance darkening,—“during your absence, I say—supposing that you had been induced to depart—sufficient time would be gained to drive Sir Gilbert mad in reality; and then, on your reappearance in London, the lawyer would have defied all that you could possibly attempt or devise!”

“Merciful heaven!” ejaculated the horror-stricken Woman; “can so much black iniquity exist in the human breast?”

“Alas! such schemes as these are of frequent occurrence in this land which vaunts a consummate civilisation!” said Trevelyan. “Could we but penetrate into the mysteries of the mad-house, we should behold scenes that would make our hair stand on end—our blood run cold in our veins—our very souls sick! Yes, madam—too often, indeed, is the lunatic asylum rendered the engine of the most hideous cruelty: too often does it become a prison for the *sane*!”

“You will drive me mad, my lord!” cried Mrs. Sefton, dreadfully excited: “I shall myself become an inmate—and deservedly so—of one of those awful places!”

“Pardon me, dear madam—pardon me,” said Trevelyan, deeply afflicted at having suffered his excited feelings to hurry him into those passionate exclamations which had so terrified her. “I was wrong thus to dwell on the subject.”

“No—no: it is better that I should learn the worst,” she cried, with a strong spasmodic shuddering, while horror—ineffable horror—

convulsed her countenance. “But how shall we rescue him from that living tomb?”

“Abandon not yourself to despair,” replied Trevelyan. “In the first instance I must discover the place where our friend is confined: and then, trust to me to effect his deliverance!”

“Excellent man!—generous-hearted noble!” cried Mrs. Sefton, in a tone indicative of the most fervent gratitude. “But will not the law aid us in all this?”

“I have already explained to you, my dear madam, that every thing has doubtless been done by James Heathcote under colour of the most monstrous law that disgraces our statute-book,” responded Lord William. “Were I to apply to a magistrate, I could obtain no redress: he would be unable to assist me. The Commissioners in Lunacy would view the matter in the ordinary light, and tell me that when the time for the usual periodical visit to the various asylums arrived, due inquiries should be instituted. No—the lawyer must be assailed by other weapons: cunning must be met by cunning;—and much as I abhor duplicity, I will not fail to use it, if necessary, in this case. Believe me when I assure you that no time shall be lost, and that I will without delay adopt measures to discover the place where our friend is imprisoned.”

“God send you success!” murmured Mrs. Sefton, faintly: then, in a higher tone and with renewed excitement, she said, “But how can I calm my feelings—how can I tranquillize myself even for a moment, while this state of suspense shall last? And when I think of what *his* feelings must be——Oh! it is enough to drive him mad in reality where he is, and me likewise mad here!”

“But you *must* endeavour to exercise some degree of command over your emotions,” said Trevelyan. “Consider—reflect—I may require your aid in this work of deliverance; and——”

“Oh! now indeed you hold out an inducement calculated to calm me—to give me courage!” exclaimed Mrs. Sefton. “Yes—I *will* be tranquil: I *will* exercise a greater control over my feelings. I will throw aside the weakness of a woman, and become strong in the hope of Sir Gilbert’s rescue, and in the endeavour to accomplish it.”

“This frame of mind becomes you, my dear madam,” said Trevelyan. “And now permit me to take my departure—for there is no time to be lost.”

“Farewell for the present,” responded Mrs. Sefton, offering him her hand; “and accept my most unfeigned gratitude for your noble conduct towards me and your generous intentions in behalf of Sir Gilbert Heathcote.”

“You shall thank me when I have succeeded in my endeavour to restore him to you,” said Trevelyan pressing the lady’s hand with the cordiality of that friendship which, short as their acquaintance had been, circumstances had established and even cemented between them.

He then hastened away from her dwelling, and drove to his own house in Park Square.

CHAPTER CLXX.

AGNES AND MRS. MORTIMER.

In the meantime Mrs. Mortimer had not been idle.

Possessed of the letter which had been entrusted to her, she repaired in a hired vehicle to the immediate vicinity of the cottage, and alighted in the lane which was bounded on one side by the thick and verdant hedge that enclosed the garden.

The old woman had not precisely made up her mind how to proceed in the business which she had taken in hand: she knew that the task was a difficult one,—and she trusted rather to the chapter of accidents than to any settled or preconceived project.

For she naturally reasoned within herself that Mr. Vernon had doubtless warned his daughter not to hold any further communication with strangers: she had seen enough, on the evening of her visit to the cottage, to enable her to judge that her presence there was regarded suspiciously by that gentleman, and that her tale was not believed by him;—and she therefore calculated that Agnes had been duly and impressively counselled not to receive her again. Indeed, it was likewise probable that the young lady might have been taught to look upon her as a person having some evil object in view, and that the servants had been charged to maintain a strict watch upon her movements should she make her appearance in that neighbourhood again.

All these reflections were duly weighed by Mrs. Mortimer; and, under the circumstances which they suggested, she found it to be totally impossible to devise beforehand any particular method of carrying out her aims.

She, however, more than hoped that, as the morning was remarkably fine, with a warm summer sun rendering the face of Nature bright and joyous, Agnes would be certain to walk in her garden, if not farther abroad. Nor was she mistaken in the former portion of her expectation: for scarcely had she reached the verdant boundary of the enclosure, when she beheld, through the high hedge, the light drapery of the young lady, who, clad in a morning-dress, was advancing slowly along a gravel-walk, with a book in her hand.

How beautiful did she appear, even to the gaze of the old harridan who now surveyed her from behind the hedge! There was an æsthetic grace in her movements—an enchanting sweetness expressed in her countenance—a gentle refinement in her bearing—and a halo of innocence around her, which rendered her a being with whom it was impossible to associate ideas of sensuality, but whom the heart might worship with the purest, holiest poetic sentiment, as if hers were an ethereal nature.

Her eyes were bent upon the volume which she held in her delicate, white hands; and her little feet moved slowly along the gravel-walk—for she was absorbed in the perusal of the book. She had not fastened the white ribbons of the straw-bonnet that she had evidently put on with a hasty negligence; and those ribbons were thrown back over her shoulders, thus allowing a shower of raven curls to descend on each side of the fair face down to the bosom of her dress.

Around that charming creature streamed the flood of sun-light, making her tresses, dark though they were, glitter like hyperions, and imparting a dazzling whiteness to her drapery, which appeared in strong relief amidst the luxuriant green of the trees and shrubs.

Mrs. Mortimer was rejoiced when she beheld the young lady in the garden—still more rejoiced when she observed that Agnes was approaching that part of the hedge behind which the harridan was concealed.

Several minutes however elapsed before the beauteous creature was sufficiently nigh for Mrs. Mortimer to address her; because she not only advanced slowly, but stopped two or three times when she met with a passage of more than ordinary interest in the work she was reading. It was the novel of “Ivanhoe” that thus rivetted her attention; and she was in the midst of the exalting scene of the combat between Brian de Bois-Gilbert and Wilfred of Ivanhoe.

Suddenly she was startled by hearing her name mentioned;—and she glanced around almost in affright—but no one met her view.

“Miss Vernon—dear Miss Vernon,” repeated the voice: “approach nearer to the hedge—’tis a friend who thus addresses you.”

The maiden instantly recognised the peculiar tones of the old woman who had called upon her nearly a week previously; and, without giving any response, she stood undecided how to act.

“Pray do not refuse to hear me—pray do not go away, Miss Vernon,” resumed Mrs. Mortimer, whose form the young lady could now distinguish through the hedge. “I have something of importance to communicate—and not for worlds would I injure a hair of your head.”

“But I promised my father not to hold discourse with any one who came not with a letter from him,” said Agnes, at length breaking silence: “and moreover,” she added, with some degree of hesitation, “I am afraid that you do not mean any good towards me.”

“Alas! Miss Vernon, can you entertain such cruel suspicions regarding me?” cried Mrs. Mortimer, as if deeply afflicted at the mistrust implied in the maiden’s words. “Of what benefit would it be for me to injure you? or, indeed, how could I possibly injure you?”

“I know not—and yet——”

“Ah! you hesitate, my dear young lady—and you will accord me a hearing,” exclaimed the old woman, eagerly. “In fact, I appeal to your sense of justice not to refuse me this opportunity of vindicating myself against the suspicions which, I am well aware, your father entertains concerning me. But, tell me—what book is that which you hold in your hand?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer, half-suspecting that it might be a novel, and in that case hoping to find a pretext for giving the conversation a turn towards the topic of love.

“It is ‘Ivanhoe,’ madam,” said Agnes. “But really I must not remain here any longer: I should be sorry to suspect you—and yet my father——”

“Dearest lady, not even your parent’s prejudices should render *you* capable of an act of injustice,” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, with an emphasis that made Agnes pause as she was on the point of retreating. “You are engaged in the perusal of one of the finest tales in the English language,” she continued, abruptly diverting the conversation into another channel: “and doubtless you have sighed over the hopeless affection which the beautiful Jewess cherished for him whose heart was given to the Lady Rowena?”

“I have wept for the interesting and charming Rebecca,” said Agnes, in the natural ingenuousness of her character: “although I am well aware that she is only the heroine of a romance, and I cannot precisely understand wherefore she should have been so much attached to Wilfrid.”

“The description is so life-like—is it not?” asked Mrs. Mortimer.

“I know not—and yet it appears to me as if it were all true—as if I could easily persuade myself that such incidents really occurred, and such sentiments could positively exist,” responded Agnes. “But I must leave you——”

“One word, Miss,” interrupted the old woman. “You say that you could easily persuade yourself that such sentiments as those experienced by Rebecca for Wilfrid, and by Wilfrid and Rowena mutually, could actually exist. Believe me, then, when I assure you that although the incidents of that tale are a fiction, the sentiments are the very reverse—and that what the author denominates *love* is a passion felt and acknowledged throughout the universe.”

“Yes—the love of a father towards his children, and of children towards their parents,” said Agnes. “Oh! I am well aware that such a blessed feeling animates the mortal breast.”

“And there is another phase of that sentiment,” resumed the old woman, immediately: “or rather, the love which you described, is a *feeling*—whereas the love which Rebecca experienced for Ivanhoe, is a *passion*.”

“I cannot comprehend you, madam,” observed Agnes, who gradually grew more and more interested in this conversation, because Scott’s novel had made a deep impression on her mind, and had raised up a sentiment of curiosity which, through the very ingenuousness of her disposition, sought for an elucidation of those descriptions that were entirely unintelligible or only dimly significant to her.

“Suppose that Rebecca had addressed a letter to Ivanhoe, explaining the sentiments which she entertained towards him,” said the wily old woman: “would not Wilfrid have been unkind—ungenerous—even harsh and brutal, not to have perused that narrative of her feelings?”

“But his character *was* generous,” exclaimed Agnes, emphatically; “and he would not have refused to read such a letter.”

“Precisely so,” continued Mrs. Mortimer. “And now, my sweet young lady, let us suppose that it was Wilfrid who experienced an attachment for Rebecca, and that Rebecca suspected it not;—and suppose, likewise, that Wilfrid penned a letter, in respectful and proper language to the Jewess, describing the sentiments that animated him—what course should the beautiful Israelite have pursued?”

“She would have proved as generous on her side as we have already agreed that Wilfrid of Ivanhoe would have been generous on his part,” answered Agnes, without an instant’s hesitation.

“Such is your opinion, sweet maiden?” cried Mrs. Mortimer, interrogatively.

“I have no reason to think otherwise,” was the immediate response.

“Then, Miss Vernon,” said the old woman, in a tone of mingled triumph and solemnity, “I implore you to peruse the letter of which I am the bearer, and which is intended for you—and for you alone!”

Thus speaking, Mrs. Mortimer thrust Trevelyan’s missive through the hedge; and Agnes received it mechanically, though startled and

bewildered by so sudden and unexpected a proceeding.

“Read it, Miss Vernon—read it,” cried the old woman: “there is nothing in its contents to offend you—but perhaps much to please and delight.”

Thus adjured, the young maiden—innocent, artless, and unsophisticated as she was—hesitated no longer, but, opening the letter, commenced its perusal.

The first paragraph, as the reader will remember, ran thus:—

> “Pardon a stranger who dares to address you, beautiful Miss Vernon, in a strain that might give you offence, were he not sincere in his language and honourable in his intentions:—pardon me, I implore you—and refuse not to read those few lines to the end! He who thus writes is the individual that you have observed occasionally in the vicinity of your dwelling; and you will perceive by the signature to this letter that he is not a man without ostensible guarantees for his social position. That his character is unimpeachable he can proudly declare; and that he will not address to you, Miss Vernon, a single word which he will fear to repeat in your father’s presence, he solemnly declares.”

At first the maiden’s countenance wore an expression of profound astonishment when she found herself addressed by a person who avowed himself to be “a stranger,” and who proceeded to speak of sincerity of language and honourable intentions. What intentions, then, had he? This was the thought that flashed to her mind. In the next moment she discovered that the letter came from the gentleman whom she *had* observed, on more occasions than one, in the neighbourhood of the cottage; and now it struck her, as if with a ray of light darting into her soul, that he must have had some object, beyond that of a mere lounge, in so frequently loitering about the precincts of the garden. Something—a something that was nevertheless incomprehensible—told her that she ought to read no more; but at that instant the concluding words of the paragraph above quoted met her eyes—and she murmured to herself, “There can be no harm in perusing the words that he would speak to me in my father’s presence.”

She accordingly read on, until she came to the termination of the next paragraph:—

> “Let me, however, speak of myself in the first person again: let me assure you that your beauty has captivated my heart—and that, if any thing were wanting to render me your slave, the description which the bearer of this letter has given me of your amiable qualities, would be more than sufficient. I am rich—and therefore I have no selfish motive in addressing you, even if you be rich also: but I would rather that it were otherwise with you, so that my present proceeding may appear to you the more disinterested. Had I any means of obtaining an introduction to you, beautiful Miss Vernon, I should not have adopted a measure that gives me pain because I tremble lest it should wound or offend you. But mine is an honest—a sincere—and a devoted attachment; and I shall be happy indeed if you will permit me to open a correspondence with your father on the subject. Were he to honour me with a visit, I should be proud to receive him. But if, in the meantime, you seek to know more of me—if I might venture to solicit you to accord me an interview of only a few minutes, you cannot divine how fervently I should thank you—how delighted I should feel! Let this interview take place in the presence of Mrs. Mortimer, if you will: I have nothing to communicate to you that I should hesitate to say before your father or your friends. Oh! how can I convince you of my sincerity?—how can I testify my devotion?—how can I prove the extent of my love?”

While she perused this portion of the letter, the following thoughts and ideas ran rapidly through her mind:—

“My beauty has captivated his heart——Oh! then he believes me to be beautiful! Mrs. Mortimer has spoken well of me to him: in this case, she cannot be a bad woman, and she cannot mean me any harm. Assuredly my dear papa was wrong to suspect her. He has no selfish motive in addressing me—even if I be rich: then, whatever his intentions be, they must be honourable, as he says—because all wickedness is undertaken for the sake of gold. He is afraid of offending me. Oh! how can I be offended with one who addresses me in such a respectful manner, and who seems to fear that the simple fact of thus writing to me will excite my anger? ‘*A sincere and a devoted attachment!*’ Ah! such was the attachment that Rebecca entertained for Wilfrid, and that Wilfrid experienced for Rowena;—and now I perceive something different between *their* attachment and that which the Templar harboured towards the beautiful Jewess. He wishes to see my father—he wishes to obtain an interview with me!”—And the maiden’s heart began to palpitate, she knew not why: but at this moment it struck her that the writer of the letter was of agreeable person, and that he must be what the author of “Ivanhoe” would have denominated *handsome*. With a gradually increasing fluttering in her bosom, the artless maiden read on—until she suddenly found the paragraph close with the mystic name of *love*!

Then a gentle flush appeared upon her damask cheek; and a veil rapidly fell from her eyes. She now comprehended how it was possible for Rebecca to be attached to Wilfrid of Ivanhoe:—Agnes had already learnt by heart the alphabet of love! At the same time, her soul retained all its chaste purity, though it lost a trifle of its girlish artlessness:—love began to be comprehensible to her as a refined and poetic sentiment—and not as a less divine passion or earthly sensuousness. A dreamy and unknown joy was stealing into her bosom—as if she had just been blessed with a glimpse of the realms of ethereal bliss;—and, under the influence of these feelings, she read the letter on to its close:—

> “I beseech you to reflect, Miss Vernon, that my happiness depends upon your reply. Am I guilty of an indiscretion in loving you? Love is a passion beyond mortal control! He who knows no other deity, deserves not blame for worshipping the sun, because it is glorious and bright; and my heart, which knows no other idol, adores you, because you are beautiful and good. Treat not my conduct, then, with anger: let not your pride be offended by the proceeding which I have adopted in order to make my sentiments

known to you;—and scorn not the honest—the pure—the ardent affection which an honourable man dares to proffer you. I do not merit punishment because I love you;—and your silence would prove a punishment severe and undeserved indeed! Again, I conjure you to remember that the happiness of a fellow-creature depends upon you: your decision will either inspire me with the most joyous hope, or plunge me into the deepest despair. At the same time, beauteous Agnes,—(the words—those delightful words, '*beauteous Agnes,*' are written now, and I cannot—will not erase them)—at the same time, I say, if your affections be already engaged—if a mortal more blest than myself have received the promise of your hand, accept the assurance, sweet maiden, that never more shall you be molested by me—never again will I intrude myself upon your attention. For with my love is united the most profound respect; and not for worlds would I do aught to excite an angry feeling in your soul.

"Your ardent admirer and devoted friend,
"WILLIAM TREVELYAN."

While she perused this last paragraph in the letter, Agnes more than once felt an involuntary sigh stealing from her bosom—as if it were called up by a strain of music familiar to her childhood, and reviving many pleasing reflections.

The last portion of the letter became clearly intelligible to her, in consequence of the suggestive incidents which she had been reading in Scott's novel. For would not Rebecca have received Wilfrid's hand, had his love not been already plighted to Rowena? It was evident, then, that William Trevelyan sought her—yes, *her*—Agnes Vernon—as his wife; and that he feared lest she should be engaged to wed another! Oh! now she comprehended the full intent—the full meaning of that letter which he had addressed to her: she perceived that he loved her—that he had loitered about the cottage in order to behold her—that he wrote to her, because he feared to offend by accosting her—and that he dreaded no refusal on the part of her father, provided that she was not already pledged to become the wife of another suitor!

"You have read the letter, my child?" asked the old woman, who, even through the verdant foliage of the hedge, had watched every change in the expression of the maiden's countenance, and had thereby obtained a complete insight into what was passing in her mind.

"Yes, madam," murmured Agnes, in a tone that was scarcely audible—for she now felt embarrassed, bashful, and timid, she knew not wherefore.

"And you are not offended with Lord William Trevelyan——"

"Lord William Trevelyan!" exclaimed the beauteous girl, now seized with surprise: "is he indeed a nobleman? Oh! I am sorry for that!" she added, giving vent in her artlessness to an expression which confirmed the old woman's already existing suspicion that her employer was by no means indifferent to the Recluse of the Cottage.

"You are sorry that he is a nobleman, my sweet child?" said Mrs. Mortimer. "Are you afraid that he is too proud to make a humble maiden his wife?"

Agnes blushed deeply, and remained silent.

"Fear nothing on that head," continued the old woman. "He is no deceiver: his intentions are honourable. And now tell me frankly and candidly—has his letter displeased you?"

"I should be deceiving you were I to answer in the affirmative," responded Agnes; "and yet I feel—at least, it seems as if I feel that I ought to be displeased, although I cannot in truth declare that I am. But I will send this letter to my dear father, who is in Paris——"

"Ah! Mr. Vernon is in France," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, delighted to find the way thus cleared for the furtherance of the projects which she had in hand; for she was resolved to make herself particularly useful to Lord William in his suit with the beautiful Agnes, so that her claims upon him might be all the more considerable. "However, my dear child," she continued, "you would do well not to trouble your father at present, since he is doubtless engaged in particular business on the Continent——"

"Oh! my father will be delighted to find that I communicate to him everything that occurs," interrupted Agnes; "and since Lord William Trevelyan so especially alludes to my dear parent in his letter——"

"Miss Vernon—Miss Vernon," exclaimed the old woman, impatiently, "this is a matter of so much delicacy, that I must implore you to be guided by me——"

"Would you counsel me not to forward this letter to my father?" asked the maiden, in a tone so low and tremulous that it afforded no aid to the reading of the thoughts that dictated the question.

"Such is the advice that I should assuredly give you, my dear child—at least for the present," was the response.

"And do you think," continued Agnes, in a tone still lower and still more tremulous than before,—"do you think that Lord William Trevelyan would proffer me the same counsel?"

"I have no doubt of it, sweet maiden," hastily replied Mrs. Mortimer. "For *his* sake—for *your* sake it were best that none save myself should become acquainted with the secret of your love——"

“Oh! madam,” exclaimed Agnes, in a voice of touching remonstrance and pathetic reproach, “if this love of which you speak be a feeling that must alienate me from the sympathies of my father, and compel me to cherish a secret that I dare not impart to him, I can have no hope that happiness will be the result! Farewell, madam; restore the letter to him who honoured me by addressing me in those terms that for an instant dazzled and bewildered me—and tell him that it were better for him to think no more of Agnes Vernon!”

Having thus spoken, the maiden tossed the letter hastily, but not insultingly, over the hedge, and hurried away towards the cottage.

Mrs. Mortimer was for a few minutes stupified by this decisive and most unexpected proceeding. She had imagined that Agnes had become a complete dupe to the specious arguments she had used to ensnare her; and she was astounded to find that fair creature, so innocent and artless asserting an energy of volition which was inspired by the purest sentiments of rectitude, and which dominated over the nascent feelings of affection evidently engendered in her bosom by the suit of Lord William Trevelyan.

The old woman knew not how to act. She perceived that it was useless to endeavour to obtain another interview with Agnes—at least on the present occasion; and she was unwilling to return to her employer with the acknowledgment that her policy had rather marred than forwarded his interests. She therefore now began to reflect whether it were not better to abandon the business altogether, and return to Paris, where her daughter’s affairs might afford scope for her intriguing qualifications and likewise augment her pecuniary resources. She was already possessed of between five and six thousand pounds—the amount wrung from the hands of her miserable husband; and she came to the conclusion that it was scarcely worth her while to waste any more time in a matter which, even were she successful, would only bring her a recompense of a few hundreds.

Having made these hasty reflections, Mrs. Mortimer thrust Trevelyan’s letter into her reticule,—for she never destroyed documents that related to private affairs; and, returning to the hackney-coach, desired to be driven to the Borough.

She alighted in Blackman Street, and, having dismissed the vehicle, repaired to the coffee-house where she had taken up her abode.

As she was passing by the bar-parlour, in order to reach the staircase leading to her own chamber, the mistress of the establishment came forth and beckoned her into the room: then, closing the door, the woman said, in a tone savouring somewhat of cool insolence, “I tell you what it is, Mrs. Mortimer—the sooner you accommodate yourself with other lodgings, the better: ’cos, though I ain’t over partickler and makes no imperent inquiries about them as paytronises my house—yet, for all that, I can’t abide such wisitors as come on your account just now. Leastways, I’d raythe be vithout ’em.”

“My good woman!” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, surveying the landlady with an astonishment the most real and unfeigned, “you must be labouring under some mistake. I hope that I’m a respectable person; and I am sure that I shall bring no discredit on your house. As for any visitors who have called on my account, I expect none—and therefore there is an error in the matter.”

“No such a thing!” cried the landlady, her choler rising. “There was two men which come just now: and, what’s more, they was officers with a search-warrant—and I couldn’t perwent them from doing their dooty.”

“Officers!—a search-warrant!” ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer, now becoming frightened—although she could not conceive what feature of her recent conduct could have excited any suspicion on the part of the myrmidons of justice:—but suddenly a fear of an appalling nature seized upon her—for her money was all concealed in her chamber up-stairs. “Oh! it’s wery well on your part, ma’am, to put a good face on the bisness,” said the landlady: “but it’s nevertheless true for all that. A great tall hulking feller and a seedy-looking old man——”

“An old man!” repeated Mrs. Mortimer, now becoming sick at heart.

“Yes—an old man,” proceeded the coffee-house-keeper’s wife; “and he said he was a officer with a search-warrant, and that t’other was his assistant——”

“’Tis a trick—a vile trick! I see it all—I understand it now!” cried the wretched Mrs. Mortimer, staggering towards a chair and gasping for breath:—but in a few moments she seemed to be endowed with a sudden energy, and, bursting from the room, she rushed up-stairs to her own chamber—the landlady, who was a stout and therefore less active woman, following as quickly as she could.

Mrs. Mortimer entered her room, and darted towards her trunk. The lid resisted not her attempt to raise it—for the lock had been forced. She plunged her hand amidst the clothes that the box contained, and felt for *something* underneath:—but the object of her anxious—her desperate search, was not there;—and, with a groan as it were of mortal agony, she sank upon the floor.

The landlady, who entered the room at this moment, and who was not naturally a bad-hearted being, hastened to raise the miserable woman. She placed her on a chair, and tore off, rather than quietly removed, her bonnet and shawl: but Mrs. Mortimer’s jaw fell—her countenance was ghastly pale—she seemed to be dying.

On water being sprinkled on her face, she came to herself; and the landlady said, “What is the matter with you? I can’t understand the meaning of all this.”

“I have been robbed—foully robbed,” returned Mrs. Mortimer, in a hoarse and hollow tone: but she did not reflect that, no matter how her husband had obtained his money, she had played the part of a foul robber or extortioner towards *him*.

“Robbed!—what do you mean?” cried the landlady. “Wasn’t them real officers as come just now?”

“No—a thousand times *no*,” ejaculated the old woman, growing infuriate as her energies revived. “It was a base plot—a vile design:—but I will be avenged—terribly avenged! He must have found someone to advise him—some one to assist him in all this! They watched me—they marked when I went out—and, under pretence of being officers, they succeeded in searching my box—and, what is worse,” she added, with a demoniac contortion of the countenance,—“they succeeded in robbing me!”

“Was it the old man who did this?” asked the landlady.

“Yes: that ancient villain, with the pale face,” was the reply. “But tell me—was not his countenance pale and wrinkled?—and did he not seem nervously excited while speaking to you?”

“Just so,” answered the landlady.

“Ah! I thought that I was not mistaken!” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone that indicated a concentration of the most ferocious rage and diabolical hate in her savage breast. “But leave me now—I must be alone for a short time—I must ponder upon all this, and determine how to act. I am not altogether without friends—nor yet without resources.”

“Well, ma’am,” said the landlady, “I hope you won’t think no more of what I told you just now—I mean, about leaving the place. Since those fellers wasn’t officers, and you ain’t a suspicious person, I’m sure I don’t want to get rid of you.”

“I shall not leave you quite yet, my good woman,” responded Mrs. Mortimer; “and I am not angry on account of what you said just now. But pray let me be alone for the present.”

The landlady withdrew in obedience to this request; and Mrs. Mortimer sate down upon the bed to ruminate on the misfortune that had produced so sudden and deplorable a change in her position.

Scarcely, however, had she brought her mind to reflect with some degree of calmness on the situation of her affairs, when she heard heavy and hasty footsteps ascending the staircase.

Dreading lest some new calamity were about to overtake her, she started to her feet in trepidation and nervous excitement: nor was she reassured when the door was unceremoniously opened, and a man of most repulsive appearance bounced into the chamber.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

JACK RILY, THE DOCTOR.

The individual who thus intruded himself upon the presence of the affrighted woman, was about forty years of age—of middle height—somewhat stout—and of powerful form. He was not corpulent; but his build denoted immense strength,—his shoulders being broad and massive, and his limbs of large proportions. His neck was short and thick, like that of a bull; and his huge hands, when clenched, appeared as if they could fell an ox or batter down a wall.

His countenance was perfectly hideous. It was of dark complexion; and on the right cheek was a large scar of livid red, as if the flesh had been seared with a hot iron and left to heal without any surgical assistance. The low but broad forehead was overshadowed with coarse, black, matted hair, which the man wore long, and which he evidently much neglected—so that it had a dirty appearance, in spite of its jetty hue. His eyes were small and dark; and the whites—for we know not what other name to give them—were of a yellow hue,—so that an ominous fire seemed to animate those eyes, as if they reflected all the bad passions of a polluted soul. The nose, which was large, thick, and coarse, projected all on one side, and had enormous nostrils. Add to all these elements of ugliness a hare-lip, with an opening so large that it displayed two of the man's large white teeth up to the very gum, and the reader may form a tolerably accurate idea of the repulsive aspect of this individual.

He was dressed in a greasy velveteen shooting-jacket, a rusty black waistcoat, corduroy trowsers, and heavy high-lows; a blue cotton handkerchief was negligently tied round his neck;—and his shirt, which was none of the cleanest, was open in front, the buttons being deficient—so that a portion of his hirsute chest was visible. On his head he wore an old fur cap of a tawny colour, but sadly stained with grease, as if it were tossed in any dirty nook or corner when not in use.

As the man had no whiskers, and his complexion was so dark, it might have been supposed that he had some African blood in his veins. Such was not, however, the case;—he was born in England and of English parents—aye, and had received an English education likewise. But nature had given him a hideous aspect; and circumstances had imbued his soul with the ferocity of a hyena and the subtlety of a serpent.

It is not often that the savage disposition is characterised by a profound and latent cunning—because the violence of furious passions usually absorbs all reflection in its sudden impulses and outbursts. But this man was ferocious by nature, and subtle in consequence of possessing a powerful intellect and having received a good education. Not that intelligence and mental cultivation engender craft and cunning: no—but they teach the necessity of consideration and forethought;—and the result, in respect to the individual whom we are describing, was that he knew the world so well as to be fully aware that intrigue and machination frequently succeeded where brute force could accomplish nothing.

Thus, when there was no need to have recourse to artifice, this man appeared as a very demon let loose upon society: but when cunning could gain an end, he was enabled to control his savage propensities and exercise a complete domination over his ferocious instincts.

Such was the person who burst upon the view of the terrified Mrs. Mortimer in the abrupt manner already described.

She had risen from her seat on the bed, and now stood gazing on him in speechless apprehension and amazement: but he, not heeding the alarm which his presence inspired, closed the door carefully behind him, and then, throwing his greasy cap on a chair, approached the old woman, saying, "So I understand you have been robbed, ma'am? Well—don't give way to despair: I think I can help you to the recovery of your money."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Mortimer, considerably relieved by the hope thus abruptly held out, and at the same moment animated by the conviction that the man could not mean her any harm—as she had never seen him before in her life; and, moreover, the house was neither deserted nor lonely, and it was now the broad noon-day,—under which circumstances crimes of violence were seldom perpetrated.

"Yes—I think I can help you," repeated the man. "But there is plenty of time before us—and we must have a chat over the matter in the first instance."

Thus speaking, he seated himself in a free and easy fashion; and Mrs. Mortimer likewise took a chair—for she had now become deeply interested in the present visit, despite the revolting ugliness of the visitor.

"Who are you?" she asked: "and in what manner do you think you can aid me?"

“One question at a time, my dear madam,” returned the fellow, with cool familiarity. “First then, as to who I am. My name is Rily—Mr. Rily amongst mere acquaintances—John Rily in a police-sheet—and Jack Rily amongst intimate friends. But those who know me best call me *the Doctor*, because, you see, I was brought up to the medical profession. That was against my tastes, and only in obedience to the wishes of my parents; and so, as soon as they hopped the twig—which was when I was about two-and-twenty—I gave up mending broken legs, and took to breaking into houses. Instead of feeling pulses, I fingered purses—and found the new profession more profitable. Such a hand as this,” he continued, with a horrible grin, as he extended his broad and horny palm, “was rather intended to wield a crow-bar than a lancet, or grasp a pistol in preference to a scalpel. Now, my dear ma’am, I think you may begin to suspect who and what I am.”

“A burglar and a thief,” said Mrs. Mortimer, who had by this time recovered all her wonted calmness. “Well—you are the more likely to aid me in my present embarrassment—I mean, in the recovery of my money: and, of course, you can dictate your own terms.”

“I am perfectly assured of *that*,” responded the Doctor, again grinning maliciously with his horrid hare-lip, which seemed as if it were about to split completely up his cheek. “But, at that same time, I admit with all possible candour that I cannot act alone in this business: and therefore you have that guarantee for my good faith.”

“But in what way do you propose to act?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer, anxious to arrive at a more satisfactory understanding with her hideous visitor.

“I will tell you,” answered Rily. “I am not known at this coffee-house; and therefore I came in just now to take some refreshment and read the paper. I saw you enter, and thought that yours was a countenance which denoted a soul alive to mischief. That was the impression you made upon me; for I must tell you that I am a bit of a phrenologist in my way. However, I had almost ceased to think of you, when I saw you come rushing out of the bar-parlour and bolt up-stairs like a mad woman. Then I marked your countenance again—and I was seized with admiration towards you on account of the horrible expression of your features. I said to myself that if ever I had beheld a she-fiend, I had seen one then.”

“I am much obliged to you for the compliment,” observed Mrs. Mortimer, drily.

“Let me tell my story in my own way, my dear madam,” exclaimed Jack Rily, with mock politeness. “Well, I saw you bolt up-stairs, and the landlady after you; and I knew that there must be something queer in the wind. So I waited quietly reading the paper until the landlady came down again; and then I went to the bar to pay my money. A question or two that I put elicited the information that you had been robbed by two fellows pretending to be officers having a search-warrant; and the landlady, in her garrulity, gave me a description of those individuals. One of them—the old man—I know nothing of: he is a complete stranger to me;—but the other I do know,—and what is more, I owe him a grudge—it matters not why or for what. I thereupon told the landlady that I thought I could help you in the matter; and before she had time to make any answer, I rushed up to your room to introduce myself to your notice.”

“Now I begin to understand you, Mr. Rily,” said the old woman. “You are acquainted with one of the robbers—you probably know his haunts—and you have a spite to vent upon him. Is this it?”

“Just so,” answered the burglar. “You must also learn that the reading which I had of your countenance convinced me that I might with safety tell you who and what I am: because I never have any child’s play in the business I am engaged in. If you want to get back your money, you must put confidence in me and act as I tell you; and the only way to make you trust me, is to let you know my real character. You see in me, then, a cracksman and a prig: but I am stanch to the back-bone amongst pals.”

“And on what terms do you propose to aid me?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

“How much have these fellows robbed you of?” asked Rily.

The old woman hesitated for a few moments: she knew not whether it were prudent to tell the truth to her new friend, who so deliberately announced himself as a gentleman exercising a profession which could not possibly be characterised by any particular scruples or punctilios.

“Well—just as you like, ma’am,” said Jack, rising from his seat. “By declaring on to the swag,[16] I may get my reglars[17] from the two prigs, whom I can easily trace out; and therefore, if you are afraid to trust me, I shall be off at once. In this case, mind, you will never see a penny of the money you have lost.”

“Stay, Mr. Rily—stay!” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, who perfectly comprehended the man’s meaning, which was to the effect that he *might* obtain some of the booty for himself without her co-operation; whereas she could not recover a shilling unless assisted by him.

The burglar coolly reseated himself.

“You asked me of how much I was robbed?” she said, interrogatively.

“Yes,” was the laconic response.

“Five thousand four hundred pounds,” observed Mrs. Mortimer.

“My stars! is it possible?” exclaimed Rily, his horrible countenance expanding with delight.

“It is the truth, I can assure you,” rejoined the old woman.

“Five thousand four hundred pounds,” repeated the burglar, in a slow and measured tone, as if to prolong the enjoyment of the sweet music which the mention of such a sum made for his auricular sense.

“It is a serious loss—is it not?” asked Mrs. Mortimer, anxiously watching his countenance, its expression denoting hope—nay, even indicating a certainty of success in the endeavour to recover the amount: but that same tablet of the mind gave no assurance that the man would act honourably towards her in the end, and content himself only with a share.

“Five thousand four hundred pounds!” he again repeated, in a musing tone. “Yes—’tis a serious loss! The recovery, however, would be two thousand seven hundred a-piece: would that suit you?” he demanded, turning abruptly towards her.

“What?” she said, affecting not to comprehend the question.

“Will you agree to give me one half of the sum, if I recover the whole?” asked Rily. “That is plain English, I believe—and now it depends on you whether our conversation shall be prolonged or not.”

“Yes—I will cheerfully give you one half,” returned Mrs. Mortimer, making up her mind to keep to the bargain only in the case of her inability to depart from it with safety to herself.

“Well and good,” resumed Rily. “I must now inform you that the tall fellow who was with the old man is one of the most noted cracksmen in London—a desperate ruffian, who would think no more of shooting a person through the head than of eating his dinner. What his real name is, I don’t know—I never heard—although he and I have been acquainted for years past: but he is called *Vitriol Bob*, from a little peculiarity which he has introduced into *his* professional mode of doing business.”

“I do not catch your meaning,” said Mrs. Mortimer—though not without a shudder; for she *did* entertain a vague suspicion of the frightful origin of that singular pseudonym.

“I’ll explain myself more fully, ma’am,” returned the Doctor, “since we have all the day before us, and may chatter a bit to while away the time. You see that the individual of whom we are speaking, has an awkward knack of lurking about in bye-streets and secluded neighbourhoods, to way-lay gentlemen who happen to have gold chains hanging over their waistcoats or out of their fobs: for those little articles are pretty faithful evidences that the purses of such folks are not entirely empty. Well, in case of a struggle, our friend is apt to break a phial of vitriol over the face of his opponent, so that he may get away, and also that the said opponent may be blinded, and unable to identify him on any future occasion. Hence his name of *Vitriol Bob*; and such is the terror he has inspired throughout the districts of Kennington, Camberwell, Peckham, and thereabouts, that the moment any gentleman returning home from a party or from the tavern hears the ominous sound of ‘*Your money or your eyes*,’ he exclaims, ‘*Don’t throw the vitriol, and I’ll give up everything.*’”

“Is this possible?” cried Mrs. Mortimer, with a shudder that was colder and more perceptible than the former one.

“Oh! quite possible, ma’am, I can assure you,” said the Doctor, calmly. “You shall see Vitriol Bob to-night—and then judge for yourself whether he looks like a fellow who could do such a thing, or not. A more hang-dog countenance you never saw in your life. I know that I am not particularly handsome,” he added with a horrible grin and leer: “but I don’t look quite such a bravo as he does.”

Mrs. Mortimer thought that if Vitriol Bob were more hideous in outward appearance than Jack Rily, he must be frightful indeed.

“This is the chap we shall have to deal with to-night,” continued the burglar; “and therefore, as you perceive, we must go well prepared to play the game properly. Who his companion is in the robbery, I can’t make out——”

“But I know,” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, hastily: “he is a poor—weak—emaciated—nervous old man, whom I will undertake to subdue and even bind with cords in a few moments. Oh! he shall find me a very tiger-cat let loose upon him!” she added, her countenance suddenly expressing a hyena-like ferocity.

“Now you do seem handsome—royally handsome—although in reality you are so infernally ugly!” exclaimed Jack Rily. “That is the way in which I like to see a woman look. Why—perdition seize me! but I could almost love you. What a splendid couple we should make!”

And the idea tickled the wretch’s fancy to such an extent, that he laughed until the tears streamed from his yellow eyes, and ran down his dark countenance, while his hare-lip opened so wide that all his upper teeth—large, perfect, white, and even—were displayed to the gums.

“Cease this disgusting mirth, sir,” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, unable to restrain her feelings: for—ugly, criminal, and morally degraded as she knew herself to be—the observations of the monster and his consequent hilarity outraged her cruelly.

“Come—come; we must not be bad friends,” said Jack Rily, extending his huge palm towards the old woman, who proffered her hand in return through fear of offending the wretch that had become too useful for her to lose him until the contemplated business should

have been accomplished. “There—that’s right,” he added, as he shook her hand with a violence that made her wince: “now there is no ill-feeling between us. But really you must pardon me for what I said, and also forbear from taking offence so easily should I fall into such remarks again. For, look you, madam,—I do not care about female beauty—neither is old age disgusting to me. What I admire in a woman is her disposition—her *mind*: and when I see you flaring up like a hell-rat—when I behold you waxing infuriate as a beldame—I love you better than if you was the most lovely virgin on the face of the earth. However—enough of that——”

“Enough indeed!” cried Mrs. Mortimer, who experienced the most ineffable repugnance—the most profound loathing for the monster that thus dinned his hideous idiosyncrasies in her ears: but, veiling her abhorrence as much as she could, she said, “And now, perhaps, you will have the goodness to inform me how you intend to proceed in order to recover this large sum of money.”

“The explanation is simple enough,” responded the Doctor. “Vitriol Bob has a particular haunt—a certain lurking-hole, not a hundred miles from here; and I happen to know where the place is. In fact, Bob and I have been pals for a long, long time——”

“I thought you told me just now that you had a spite against him?” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, fixing her eyes keenly upon the Doctor, as if to read the secrets of his inmost soul and learn whether he were deceiving her.

“Ah! you may look, ma’am—and look as searchingly as you like,” exclaimed Jack Rily, who understood what was passing in her mind: “but you won’t find me out in any contradiction—nor yet to telling you any lies. I said that Vitriol Bob and I had been friends for a long time—and I said truly. But that doesn’t prevent me from having a hankering to be avenged for a trick he played me, and which he does not think I even suspect. The fact is, we robbed a house together; and Bob in ransacking a chest of drawers, got hold of a bag full of sovereigns. He stuck to them, and never uttered a word about them when we afterwards divided the swag. I found it out through an advertisement that appeared in the papers offering a reward for the apprehension of the burglars, and specifying the things stolen. He never saw that advertisement, I know; and I did not tell him of it. I however swore to have my turn against him sooner or later;—and I bided my time. That time is now come—and I shall let him know it before many hours are over his head.”

“But are you certain that you can find him? and, even supposing that you do succeed in tracing him to his lurking-hole, how do you know that the old man will be there also?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer.

“There is no tracing out Vitriol Bob in the matter,” exclaimed Jack Rily. “The moment he has committed a robbery, he always goes straight to his usual haunt, and remains there for a few days till the storm has blown over. As a mere precaution, he will compel his pal—this old man—to go with him; because if the latter was taken up by the Detectives, he might be induced to peach against Bob—and all that. So I am sure we shall find them together: unless, indeed,” added the Doctor, in a tone of diminishing confidence,—“unless, I say, the old man knows that you dare not raise a hue and cry touching this robbery.”

“On the contrary,” returned Mrs. Mortimer, “that old man, whose name is Torrens, has every reason to believe that I would persecute him with the most implacable vengeance which a human being is capable of experiencing or inflicting.”

“So much the better!” cried Jack Rily, grinning joyously: “in this case we are sure of our prey.”

“And is the game to be played by violence, or by cunning?” asked Mrs. Mortimer.

“By violence, my good lady—by violence, to be sure!” responded the burglar, his eyes glowing savagely, with their ominous yellow lustre—as if the orbs of a tiger were glaring upon the woman: and, though the gorgeous sun-light was flooding the small chamber with its golden haze, still shone that yellow lustre apart—distinct—and sinister.

“By violence?” repeated Mrs. Mortimer, awful thoughts relative to Vitriol Bob’s peculiar mode of proceeding rushing in upon her soul.

“How can it be done otherwise?” demanded Jack Rily. “When I first came up to you just now, I was going to propose to enlist in the service a pal of mine—and of Vitriol Bob’s also—who would aid and assist: but then he would require his thirds as a matter of course. Since, however, you have informed me that Bob’s companion in the robbery is an old, emaciated, feeble man, and that you can master him by yourself, you and I will keep the business in our own hands. I will undertake to tackle Vitriol Bob, if you will make sure of the other.”

“And supposing that your opponent should overpower you?” said Mrs. Mortimer.

“I will take care that he does not,” returned Rily. “Trust me to subdue him——”

“And without bloodshed?” observed the old woman, shuddering—for, depraved and wicked as she was, she grew cold and her heart sank within her at the idea of murder.

“Come, if you’re squeamish, you had better abandon the project and leave it all to me,” said the Doctor. “If Vitriol Bob should place my life in danger, at that moment he is a dead man. Self-preservation, ma’am, is the first law of nature. At the same time, I shall not kill *him*, unless it is to save *myself*: of this you may be assured.”

The old woman remained silent for some moments. Should she embark in an enterprise so replete with danger?—should she incur the risk of becoming an accomplice in a murder? She trembled at the thought: and yet her money—the money that she had come over to England to obtain—would be totally lost to her were she to shrink from the endeavour to recover it. It was true that, even if it were

regained, one half would pass into the hands of a stranger: but was it not better to return to Paris with two thousand seven hundred pounds in her pocket, than with an empty purse? The stake was worth venturing;—and her indecision vanished.

“I am *not* squeamish in the matter,” she said at length. “Our bargain and our arrangements hold good in all respects. That villain Torrens shall not have the laugh against me: on the contrary, I must be avenged upon him!”

“There!—now you are my fine old hyena—my adorable tiger-cat, once again!” cried the Doctor. “I long to see you pounce upon old Torrens, as you call him; and I would give the best five years of my life, could I endow you with a complete set of claws, instead of those comparatively harmless finger-nails! Wouldn’t you tear his eyes out of his head? wouldn’t you strike them deep into his flesh? Do you know that Satan will obtain a glorious acquisition when the time comes for him to make a fiend of you?”

And again the monster’s horrible hilarity rang through the little chamber, as he threw himself back in the chair and laughed with the most savage heartiness.

“For mercy’s sake! cease this unnatural gaiety,” exclaimed the old woman, scarcely able to subdue her rage.

“Oh! I must laugh,” cried the wretch, sputtering through his frightful hare-lip,—“if it is only to make you look as ferocious as you do now.”

Mrs. Mortimer turned towards the window with disgust; and the wretch’s mirth died away in guttural sounds.

“Come, now—I told you that you must not be angry with me, madam,” he said, at length. “It is my nature to laugh heartily at times—and surely you won’t check such an innocent propensity. But I will take my leave of you now; and at half-past ten to-night we must meet at some place as near Stamford Street as you choose.”

“Where shall it be?” asked the old woman. “Name the spot—and I shall be punctual to the moment.”

“There is a narrow lane running along the side of Christ Church burial-ground,” responded the burglar, after a few moments’ reflection: “it leads from the Blackfriars Road into Collingwood Street——I suppose you know London well——”

“Oh! perfectly. Go on,” said Mrs. Mortimer.

“Well—we will meet in that crooked lane at half-past ten exactly,” continued Jack Rily. “By the by,” he added, rising from his chair, “you had better tell the landlady down stairs that you found out I could do nothing for you, and that you have resigned yourself to put up with your loss. It will prevent her from suspecting anything queer on account of your going out so late and remaining away an hour or so.”

“Leave that to me,” replied Mrs. Mortimer: “I shall know how to make all the excuses that are necessary. Indeed, if we are successful, I shall not return again to this place,” she observed, sinking her voice to a low whisper.

“Well—that is your business. And now good-bye for the present: at half-past ten we meet in the place appointed.”

Mrs. Mortimer spoke a few words of assent; and the Doctor took his departure, bestowing upon the woman a familiar nod, accompanied by a grin and a leer, before he crossed the threshold and closed the chamber-door behind him.

When Mrs. Mortimer was left alone, she began to ponder deeply upon the particulars of this interview which had just terminated.

The man knew the hiding-place where it was presumed that Vitriol Bob and Torrens had taken refuge; and it was doubtless some cellar or dangerous place, where a crime might be committed with impunity, as well as where the perpetrators of crime might conceal themselves. Then, what guarantee had she that Rily would not make her his victim, after availing himself of her services in subduing the plunderers and recovering the stolen treasure?

She shuddered as she thought of the peril into which she was about to precipitate herself: she trembled from head to foot as she pondered upon the desperate character of the man who was to be her companion in the night’s enterprise.

And yet—in spite of his revolting ugliness and his avowal of a dark career of turpitude—there was something like fairness in his speech respecting a partner in any enterprise in which he might be engaged: moreover, had he not shown, by the mere fact of the spite which he cherished against Vitriol Bob, that his ideas of the honour that ought to prevail even amongst thieves, were of a fixed and positive nature? Lastly, had he not stipulated upon the precise amount that he was to retain for his services? And would he be thus minute and nice in details, if he cherished the intention of self-appropriating the whole?

These arguments, which Mrs. Mortimer seriously revolved in her mind, may not perhaps appear very convincing nor very satisfactory to the reader; for, after all, they were only so many suppositions placed in juxta-position with the atrocious character of an avowed desperado. But let it be remembered that we often reason ourselves into what we *wish* to believe, rather than into what we *ought* to believe; and we tutor our minds to put faith in those opinions that best suit our interests rather than our safety. This is like “hoping against hope:” still it is a general characteristic of human nature; and Mrs. Mortimer’s case proved no exception to the general rule.

In fine, she came to the conclusion that Jack Rily was a monstrous rogue in respect to the world, but an honest man towards his pals—that he would strip society, were society a single individual, of its last shirt, but would not lay his finger on the costliest robe if on the back of an accomplice—and that he meant to act, with regard to herself, in the fairest way possible.

Whether her expectations were fulfilled, will shortly appear.

We cannot, however, close this chapter without recording a few comments upon that extraordinary disposition in human nature to reason one-self into the belief which one wishes to adopt, to the repudiation of that which one ought to adopt. For instance, the man who is floundering about in a perfect morass of pecuniary troubles, from which he cannot possibly see any chance of emerging, incessantly dins in his own mental ears the most absurd sophisms to convince himself that his position is not so desperate as it appears. "Well, something must turn up," he says: "things are sure to take a turn soon. I can get Jones to renew the bill which he holds of mine, when it becomes due—Tomkins will hold his bill over for a few weeks—and Brown will lend me the money to satisfy Smith." In this manner does the poor devil go on with his castle-building, until he can no longer blow from his imagination's pipe another soap-bubble wherewith to amuse himself. Jones positively refuses to renew—Tomkins proves inexorable in his demand for instantaneous payment—Brown, having heard of his difficulties, will not lend him a farthing—and Smith, anything but satisfied, puts a clencher on the whole through the medium of the sheriffs'-officer. Then, when the self-deluded wretch awakes from his dream, on finding himself in gaol or on his way to the Bankruptcy Court, he says to himself in the bitterness of his spirit, "I always knew it would come to this!"—although for years he had been straining every effort of the imagination to lull his mind into a contrary belief!

In the same way does the bashful lover, who has not as yet proposed to the object of his affections, but who nevertheless longs to do so, yet fears, because he has seen her smile more sweetly upon a handsomer youth than ever she did on him,—in the same way does he strive to persuade himself that she *does* really love him—that he has observed stealthy glances cast from her brilliant eyes towards him—that her hand has trembled in his own—that her voice has faltered when she has responded to his common-place remarks upon the weather, the opera, and the new novel—that it is a mere flirtation between herself and the *other* handsome youth,—in fine, that she is dying to receive the proposal which he has not the courage to make. And in this manner does he tutor himself to lead a life of "pleasing pain," though all the while aware that the sorest misgivings lie at the bottom of his heart, beneath the superstructure of delusive hopes and fond imaginings which perforce he has conjured up there. Then, when at last he hears from some kind friend that the beautiful Miss So-and-so was married yesterday morning to the handsome young gentleman whom she had loved all along, the self-deluded wretch exclaims, "Ah! I never thought that she cared a fig for *me*!"

But worse—oh! far worse is it with the criminal! Let us take, for instance, the confidential clerk, who, for the sake of a mistress or through love of fine clothes and ostentatious display amongst his acquaintances, pilfers from his master's till. At first his peculations were small and insignificant; but, being undiscovered, he grows bolder and more deeply guilty,—while he endeavours to reason himself out of the agonising fears that haunt him day and night—pursue him like the spectres of murdered victims—and turn his wine into gall, and the sweets of Beauty's lip into bitterness. "It is impossible that I can be detected," he mentally exclaims a thousand times in an hour: "my precautions are so well devised. In a large business such as this, a few shillings are not missed. Besides, I so arrange the entries in the books that the expenditure and the receipts are proportionate. My employer, too, is kinder towards me than ever: I possess his confidence—not for an instant would he suspect me! And even if I were found out,—not that I can be,—but, I say, even if I were, he would not suffer me to be disgraced—he would hush it up: he would never let *me* be dragged into the felon's dock." Thus will the infatuated being reason on, although he sees that his master *is* growing cold in his manner, and that there *is* a suspicion of foul play somewhere,—until at length the explosion takes place—the self-deluded mortal is hurried to a felon's gaol—his employer proves inveterate and inexorable—he is doomed to transportation—and in the convict-ship he exclaims in terrible anguish of mind, while writhing as if in mortal agony upon his hard pallet, "Fool that I was not to have stopped short while it was yet time: for I always foresaw that this must inevitably be the end of it all!"

Gentle reader—never against your own settled convictions endeavour to set up a fabric of delusion: you may at length succeed in throwing the former into the background, and persuading yourself to believe that the latter is a substantial truth;—but you will in the long run discover to your cost that you have stepped out of the broad and straight highroad to flounder amidst the perils of an interminable bog.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

A MAIDEN'S FIRST LOVE.

The day, the incidents of which we are describing, and which are so numerous and diversified, was destined to be a memorable one in the life of Agnes Vernon.

The young maiden, on abruptly quitting Mrs. Mortimer, returned to the cottage; and, seating herself at the table in the elegant parlour, she arranged her drawing materials with the intention of continuing a landscape which she had commenced a few days previously.

But she was unsettled and restless: new sensations stole upon her—new feelings were excited in her bosom.

The solitude of the cottage suddenly appeared to be irksome; and she felt discontented with her condition—she knew not why.

Laying down her pencil, she rose from her seat, approached the window, and gazed forth upon the open country.

A carriage passed by: in it were two young ladies and two young gentlemen—and they were all in high spirits, conversing cheerfully and laughing gaily. Agnes sighed—for the thought struck her that she too might be happy, and she too might laugh gaily, if she only had friends and companions!

Presently a lady and gentleman, each on horseback, passed along the road in front of the cottage. They were proceeding at a very gentle pace, and were engaged in conversation. The veil was raised from the fair Amazon's countenance, and was thrown back over her riding-hat; her cheeks were blooming with a carnation tinge, and her eyes were bent with melting tenderness on her companion, whose face was turned towards her, and whose language was doubtless pleasing to her ears. The countenance of that lady indicated such real pleasure—denoted such pure and genuine happiness, that again did a sigh escape from the bosom of Agnes Vernon, as she marvelled why she herself was retained in the prisonage of solitude, while other maidens of her own age had their acquaintances and their associates, and were allowed to divert themselves in walking or riding about the rural lanes and the roads that stretched amidst the green fields.

Never before had anything in the form of repining—never until this time had a sentiment partaking of discontent, arisen in the breast of Agnes Vernon. She endeavoured to conquer the feeling: she turned away from the window and played with a beautiful canary bird that fluttered from its perch towards the front of its handsome cage the moment she approached it;—but its chirping sounded no longer as sweet music in her ears—and, in the natural goodness of her gentle soul, she reproached herself for her indifference to the joyous testimonials offered by the little feathered chorister to its mistress.

She resumed her seat, and once more directed her attention to her drawing: but she felt in no humour for an employment that until now was amongst her most favourite recreations. Closing her portfolio, she took up "Ivanhoe," in order to read the concluding pages of the tale: she however found her thoughts speedily wandering to other subjects,—the letter of Lord William Trevelyan—the discourse of Mrs. Mortimer—and the abrupt termination of her interview with that female. Throwing aside the book, she seated herself at the piano, and ran her taper fingers over the keys: but the music had no cheering influence upon her—produced no soothing effect on her restless soul.

Vexed and annoyed with herself for what she could not help, and almost alarmed at the change which had come over her, despite of her exertions to the contrary, the bewildered maiden returned to the garden and gathered fresh flowers wherewith to fill the vases in the parlour: but the tulip seemed less beautiful, the rose less fragrant, and the pink less sweet than she had ever before known them;—and her task was accomplished hurriedly and even neglectfully.

At length she sought an arbour in the most shady and retired part of the garden; and there—alone with her own thoughts—she fell into a profound reverie upon her secluded life, the mystery that enveloped her condition, the letter of Lord William Trevelyan, and the explanations that Mrs. Mortimer had given her respecting the passion of love.

For, oh! the gentle Agnes loved now:—hence this restlessness—hence this change which had come upon her!

She did not blame herself for the part she had enacted in respect to Trevelyan's letter: her conscience told her that she had behaved with prudence and propriety;—but she was grieved to think that any words which had fallen from the lips of Mrs. Mortimer should have cast suspicion upon the sincerity of the individual who had penned the contents of that missive.

Then she thought within herself that perhaps the old woman had deceived her—that Trevelyan could not possibly empower his

messenger to contradict with her lips the assurances he had committed to paper!

“Did he not say in his letter that he sought no secresy nor concealment in respect to my father?” she asked herself, in the course of her musings: “how, then, could he prompt his agent to enjoin the necessity of such secresy and such concealment? Ah! she has deceived *me*—and I have wronged *him*!”

A feeling of bitterness smote the tender heart of Agnes as she came to this conclusion: but, in the course of a few moments, the idea struck her that if Lord William Trevelyan received a faithful report of the particulars of her interview with Mrs. Mortimer that morning, he would recognise the propriety of her conduct in returning the letter.

But, ah! had she not bade Mrs. Mortimer desire the young nobleman to think no more of Agnes Vernon?—and might he not obey the injunction?

Poor, innocent Agnes! thine own love is as yet only in its infancy—and therefore thou comprehendest not the extent of that devotion which Trevelyan’s bosom harbours with regard to thee! Although within the space of a few hours thou hast learnt thy first lesson in the school of love, and though thy mental vision has obtained some insight into the mysteries of that passion which has at length shed its influence on thee,—although a portion of the veil has fallen from thine eyes, and thou canst now read more of the human heart than ever thou could’st before,—nevertheless, it is but a nascent flame—a germinating affection that animates thee,—a feeling as yet vague and undefinable: for thou art still so much the child of natural simplicity and artless ingenuousness, that thou canst not entertain a conception of the lasting and persevering nature of love;—thou knowest not enough of its essence and its power to initiate in thine imagination the thought that Trevelyan would no more heed thine injunction, even if it reached his ears, than the tempest will obey the human voice which dares to order its fury to subside!

For some hours did the beauteous Agnes remain in the arbour, plunged in love’s first reverie; and when the pretty housemaid appeared to inform her that dinner was served up, Miss Vernon started from the seat, exclaiming, “Is it possible that it can be four o’clock? I did not suppose that it was more than an hour past mid-day?”

Jane cast a look of surprise upon her mistress—but said nothing; and almost immediately afterwards the servant ceased to remember that there had been anything peculiar in the young lady’s manner—for Agnes composed her countenance, recalled her scattered thoughts, and hurried back to the cottage,—so that this very haste on her part was mistaken by the domestic for her usual gleesomeness of disposition.

The afternoon repast was soon disposed of; and Agnes returned to the garden, where she roamed about until the hour of sunset approached. The evening was warm and beautiful—the air was fragrant with the perfume of the flowers—and the hum of insect life was heard around. The scene had a soothing effect upon the young maiden’s soul; and, though she was wearied, she was unwilling as yet to return to the cottage. She felt less lonely in the spacious garden than she should be, as she well knew, in that parlour where she had vainly endeavoured in the morning to divert herself with her drawings, her music, and her books.

We know not how it was—but more than once during this evening ramble in her garden, did Agnes Vernon pass by that very spot where she had stood in the morning when held in conversation with Mrs. Mortimer. Those who love, or who have loved, will probably assert that it was the influence of some vague and undefined hope which thus occasionally directed the maiden’s footsteps thither,—a hope which nature prompted, although thus dimly, and in spite of the virgin purity and immaculate candour of her soul,—a hope, in fine, which whispered, softly as zephyr’s breath, in her ear, that Trevelyan’s messenger *might* return with an assurance from him that no instructions which he had given to that emissary in any way militated against the honourable, frank, and straightforward declarations contained in his letter.

And now, then, behold the beauteous Agnes standing on the very spot where in the morning she had read the letter that first awoke a scintillation of love’s fire in her bosom: behold her, motionless as a statue, amidst the foliage of that secluded part of the garden—her white dress delineating the soft and graceful outlines of her symmetrical form—and the rays of the sun, now low in the western horizon, playing upon her angelic countenance, as they penetrated through the trees that skirted the lane overlooked by the hedge.

Suddenly the maiden starts and listens—like the timid roe disturbed in the forest by a far-off sound resembling the bay of the hound.

The noise of wheels and of horses’ hoofs falls upon her ear: nearer and nearer that noise approaches—the vehicle is evidently coming down the lane!

Yet why does her heart palpitate?—why seems it like the fluttering bird in its cage? Is it an unusual thing for a carriage or a cart to pass that way? No: but there is in the maiden’s soul a presentiment that the occurrence *now* is not altogether unconnected with her destinies.

The sounds cease: the vehicle, whatever it may be, has stopped—and silence once more reigns around.

The sun is sinking lower and lower in the western horizon: yet it is still quite light;—but the ruddy lustre of the setting orb imparts a deep autumnal hue to the foliage—brings out into bolder relief the ripening apples, the yellow pears, and the crimson cherries that gem the boughs with their fruitage—and imparts a delicate glow to the beauteous countenance of the young lady, as, with lips apart and in attitude of suspense, she listens to catch the slightest sound that may indicate the approach of a human being.

And now there is a rustling as of silk and a tread as of light footsteps; and Agnes, who, in consequence of the surface of the garden being much higher than the lane on the other side of the hedge, can look over that verdant boundary,—Agnes beholds a lady advancing rapidly down the narrow thoroughfare.

A feeling of disappointment seizes upon her: she sees that it is not Mrs. Mortimer—and something tells her that Trevelyan would not employ another female emissary.

Then it strikes her that she ought to rejoice that no farther progress should be made in the young nobleman's suit during her father's absence; and she feels that she has done wrong even to remain standing in that spot under the influence of a contrary expectation and of a tender though dimly significant hope.

With a sigh, the beauteous creature is about to turn away and re-enter the cottage, when,—oh! wonder and amazement!—with renewed suspense and reviving hope, she hears herself called by her name—called, too, in the tenderest, most melting tones of a woman's voice.

"Agnes—dearest Agnes! Stay—oh! stay—if only for a few moments! Stay—I implore you—beloved girl: you know not who it is that thus addresses you!"

These words were uttered in a voice of warm and passionate affection—so that a deep and absorbing interest was at once created in the bosom of Agnes towards that lady of whose handsome countenance she had now a full view, and the earnest, appealing expression of whose features gave additional import to her enthusiastic exclamations.

"Madam—I will stay—I will not depart immediately," faltered Agnes, forgetting her father's injunctions relative to the caution which she was to exercise in regard to strangers: "but how do you know who I am?—and who are you?"

"Oh! that she should ask me who I am!" cried the lady, clasping her hands together in deep anguish. "But how beautiful she is!" exclaimed the stranger, in an altered and rejoicing tone: "how faithful, too, is the portrait! Agnes—dearest Agnes—I have much to say to you—much to impart that you will be delighted to learn: but must we continue to discourse thus, with this barrier between us? Can you not come to me?—or will you permit me to come to you? I long—oh! how I long to embrace you, dear girl that you are; and though we are but a few feet apart—yet does this garden-boundary separate us most cruelly!"

"Madam—I know not how to answer you," murmured Agnes, strange feelings of mingled pleasure, apprehension, and hope agitating in her heart, as if that heart were a well of deep, inexhaustible, and yet incomprehensible emotions. "Your words seem to move me more than I can explain——"

"Yes—Agnes—dear Agnes," ejaculated the lady, stretching out her arms in an appealing manner towards the maiden: "'tis the voice of nature that speaks within you! But you hesitate to trust yourself with me? Ah! doubtless you have been warned—doubtless you have been urged to act with caution——Oh! my God—that you should look with an eye of suspicion upon me!"

And with these words, which were uttered in a tone indicative of the most acute anguish, the lady burst into a flood of tears.

Agnes stood blanched, and trembling, and speechless,—having a deep conviction that the lady's fate was in some way linked with her own—yet not daring to form a conjecture as to the nature of the tie that thus mysteriously bound them together. A secret impulse appeared to urge her towards the weeping stranger; and she felt that were the arms again extended towards her, and were there no barrier in her way, she should precipitate herself upon that stranger's bosom, that they might mingle their tears together and interchange the sympathies that already drew them to each other.

"Agnes—dearest Agnes," exclaimed the lady, suddenly breaking silence and wiping away the traces of her grief,—speaking, too, in a voice of heart-touching appeal,—"I implore you to come to me—or to show me how I may enter those precincts without being observed by the inmates of the dwelling! But, say—tell me," she added, a sudden thought striking her,—"is he—your father—*there*?"

"My father is in Paris," replied Agnes: "he——"

"Thank God!" ejaculated the stranger, with an enthusiasm that astonished and even startled the maiden. "But Mrs. Gifford—is she still alive?—is she still in attendance on you?"

"She is in the house at this moment," returned Agnes, more and more surprised at these questions—not only on account of their nature, which showed that the lady was acquainted with many circumstances regarding her condition; but also in consequence of the vehemence with which they were put.

"Then how can I join you in that garden?" demanded the lady, in a tone of bitter disappointment. "Oh! Agnes, you know not how ardent are the yearnings—how intense the longings that prompt me even to dash through this hedge and fold you to my bosom! Cruel girl—keep me not thus in an agony of suspense; but come—come to my arms—as if I were your mother!"

"My mother!" exclaimed Agnes, in a voice of mingled hope and amazement—while such indescribable emotions started into existence in her bosom, that she felt overpowered by their influence, and staggering back a few paces, would have fallen to the ground had she not leant against a tree for support.

"Agnes—Agnes!" cried the lady, imploringly: "give not way to thoughts that will deprive you of your presence of mind—for you need all your self-possession now! Agnes—dear Agnes—answer me——"

"Who are you? O heaven! such strange ideas—such wild hopes—such bewildering presentiments crowd upon my soul," exclaimed the beauteous maiden, "that I know not how to act nor what to conjecture!"

And, again approaching the hedge, she passed her hand across her brow, throwing from her face the shower of curls that had fallen in disorder over that charming countenance—the luxuriant locks having been disturbed by the movement given to the neat little straw bonnet when she staggered against the tree.

“You ask me who I am,” said the lady: “oh! pity my suspense—have mercy upon me—come to my arms—and I will tell you all.”

“Stay there, madam—dear madam,” cried Agnes, without another instant’s hesitation—so earnest, so pathetic was that last appeal: “and I will join you at all risks!”

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

HOPES FULFILLED.

Without pausing to reflect upon the step which she was taking—forgetful of all the injunctions she had received from her father, and all the promises of prudence and caution which she had made to him—obedient only to the irresistible impulse of her feelings—as if nature's voice rose dominant above a sire's mandates,—the Recluse of the Cottage disappeared from the view of the lady, who remained in the path outside the garden, a prey to the most torturing fear lest the young maiden should be intercepted by the inmates of the dwelling.

But Agnes was not compelled to pass through the house in order to gain egress from the premises. From the stable-yard a gate opened into the lane; and by this avenue did she proceed—so that there was no necessity to exercise any wariness or precaution. Had the contrary been the case—had she been compelled to pause in order to reflect how she was to escape the notice of the servants, her artlessness of character and purity of soul would have prompted her to wait and reflect whether she were acting in accordance with her father's counsels. She would then have flown straight to consult Mrs. Gifford; and the result would have been inimical to the hopes and wishes of the lady who was so anxiously expecting her in the lane.

But as nothing impeded the maiden's progress, nor forced her to stay her steps even for a single instant,—the gate being always left open during the day-time for the convenience of the gardeners, and these men being engaged in front of the house on the present occasion,—the current of her thoughts, impelling her towards the lady, received no hindrance—no check; and in a few moments Agnes was speeding along the lane, with a heart influenced by emotions of hope, curiosity, suspense, and wild aspiration.

For that word "Mother"—that dear, delightful word, which had so seldom fallen on her ears, and which in an instant excited so many pleasurable reflections—so many ineffable feelings in her soul,—that word which, as if with electric inspiration, had suddenly opened to her view an elysium of the affections which she had never known before, and which gave promises of felicity the holiest and the purest,—that word, so fraught with the tenderest sympathies to one who had hitherto lived in a semi-orphan state,—that word it was which exercised a magic influence upon the maiden—absorbed all other considerations—and rendered her impatient to hear more from the same lips whence this word had come.

And yet she could not have accounted, had she paused to search, for the spring of the excitement that now ruled her actions. It was not that she cherished the conviction of finding a mother in the lady who was waiting to embrace her; but she did half suspect that such would be the case,—and she certainly hoped—oh! most fervently hoped that she was not destined to experience disappointment. The very artlessness of her disposition made her sanguine;—and under these influences did she hasten along.

The lady advanced to meet her;—and in a few moments they were clasped in each other's arms.

"My child—my dearest child!" murmured the fond mother, who had indeed recovered a daughter in Agnes Vernon.

"Oh! Is it possible?" exclaimed the beautiful creature, in an ecstasy of joy: "is it possible that you are my parent?"

"I am, my beloved Agnes—I am: and heaven can attest that, though separated from thee since thine infancy, I have never ceased to think of thee—never ceased to love thee!"

A faintness now came upon Agnes;—and her mother felt that she was clinging the more firmly to her in a convulsive effort to prevent herself from falling.

"Lean on me, my child—here—let me sustain you, my darling Agnes!" cried the lady. "Oh! how happy am I at this moment—with thee in my arms! But——My God! she faints!"

And the maiden, overcome by her emotions, fell into a state of insensibility.

The lady carried her in her arms along the lane: great was the strength which now animated the mother who had just recovered a long-lost daughter;—and in a few minutes a hackney-coach, that was waiting higher up the avenue, received the precious burthen.

When Agnes came to herself, she started as if, on waking from a delicious dream, she feared that it might prove all a delusion: but when, by the rays of the setting sun which streamed through the open windows of the vehicle, she beheld the handsome, pleasing, and yet mournful countenance of her mother bending over her, a glow of joy suffused the charming creature's face—and, throwing her arms around her parent's neck, she exclaimed, "Oh! tell me that it is not a dream! assure me once more who you are!"

“I am your mother, Agnes dearest—your own fond and loving mother, who has languished after you for years, and who will never separate from you again, unless by your own consent, or through the stern decree of an iron tyranny! Yes, Agnes—I am your mother; —and, beautiful though you be, I may without vanity declare that the stamp of nature proclaims you to be my child?”

“Yes—and my own heart’s emotions assure me that you are indeed my parent,” said the lovely girl. “But you observed that we should not part without my consent. Oh! can you suppose, dear mother, that I should ever ask to leave you—ever seek to separate myself from you?”

“No, my child—I am sure that you will not!” exclaimed the lady. “At the same time, Agnes,” she added, in a different and mournful tone, “it is my duty to inform you that if you choose to live with me, you must resign all hope of seeing your father again—at least for two years——”

“Oh! say not so!” ejaculated Agnes, bursting into tears. “Surely it must be with my father’s knowledge that you came to see me—that you are taking me away with you. And yet,” she added, a sudden reminiscence flashing to her mind, and causing her to start painfully, —“and yet, I recollect now that I left the garden stealthily—that you urged me to come round to you in the lane, unperceived by the servants—that you knew not my father was in Paris. Oh! mother, mother,” cried the young girl, again interrupting herself, and speaking with a burst of anguish,—“what does all this mean? Whom am I to obey—you or my father?—for it is clear to me that in yielding deference to the counsel of the one, I must prove disobedient to the other!”

“Tranquillise yourself, dearest Agnes—tranquillise yourself, I implore you!” exclaimed the lady, straining the trembling—almost affrighted maiden to her breast.

“Ah! dearest mother, when I hear your voice and receive your kisses, I have no thought save for you,” murmured the young girl. “Oh! and now your tears fall upon my cheek. Mother—dear mother—forgive me for what I said ere now—I will obey you—and you only. But do not—do not weep, my beloved parent!”

“May God Almighty bless you, Agnes!” fervently exclaimed the lady, her tears streaming in blinding torrents from her eyes.

“Oh! do not weep—I implore you!” cried Agnes, in a tone of the most tender affection. “Are you unhappy, dear mother? If so, tell me the cause of your sorrow!”

“I am both happy and unhappy, Agnes,” was the response, almost choked with sobs. “I experience ineffable pleasure and acute pain, all at the same moment! But your words soothe me—your voice descends into my soul like sweet music—your caresses are as a balm to my bruised and weltering spirit!”

“Dear mother, let me embrace you closer still!” murmured Agnes, clinging to her parent in that narrow chaise as if there were an imminent danger of their immediate separation. “But wherefore are you happy and unhappy at the same time?”

“I am happy because I have this evening recovered you, and thus seen accomplished the hope of long, long years,” returned the lady; “and I am unhappy because I fear that some untoward circumstance will part us again.”

“Oh! what circumstance can part us, dear mother?” asked Agnes, her bosom filled with vague alarms. “May I not dwell with you, if I choose—and if you choose to have me with you?”

“Yes—oh! yes, Agnes,” replied her mother, earnestly and in an impassioned tone. “But will you not pine—when the excitement of these new feelings shall have passed away,—will you not pine, I say, for your secluded cottage—your beautiful garden—and—and your father?” she added, her voice suddenly becoming low and tremulously plaintive.

“What is that lovely cottage—what are the choicest flowers of that garden, in comparison with thy love, my dearest—dearest mother?” exclaimed Agnes: “and, oh! if I must decide between you, on the one hand, and my father on the other——And yet he has been so kind —so very kind to me—that it goes to my very heart——”

“Agnes—Agnes—you love your father better than me!” exclaimed the mother, in a voice of the most piercing, rending anguish. “But it is natural—oh! it is natural—for you never knew me until now—at least not since your infancy! Yes, it is natural, I say! Oh! fool that I was to hope that you could love me well enough to consent to dwell beneath my roof in future! No—no—it is impossible: I see it all, Agnes—you would be wretched—miserable, were you to part from your father! I will take you back to your cottage, then, my child—I will leave you then—and we must separate upon its threshold, never—never to meet again, perhaps, in this life!”

“No, dearest mother—speak not thus despairingly—or you will kill me—you will break my heart!” cried Agnes, her voice choking with sobs. “You are unhappy—and it is my duty to remain with you——Oh! and God forgive me for saying it, if it be a crime—but—but—it is also my wish!”

And with these words, the maiden again threw herself upon her mother’s bosom and wept plenteously, while her arms clasped that parent’s neck with almost convulsive violence—as if she feared to lose her.

“Now, Agnes, I am happy—oh! supremely happy!” exclaimed the fond woman. “You will remain with me—and I shall not again submit your feelings to a painful test by proposing the alternatives which have already rent your bosom. Listen, however, to me for a

short space. I am a lonely and desolate woman, and have experienced a recent affliction of an almost overpowering nature. Indeed, I should have succumbed beneath its weight, had not accident—an accident of a most extraordinary character—last night revealed to me the place where you dwelt in such seclusion. Then I suddenly felt that I had something worth living for—and I came to you this evening, with the hope of seeing you—yes—and also with the hope of inducing you to accompany me, that we might dwell together in future. For, oh! Agnes, you cannot divine how tender—how lasting—how invincible is the love of a mother for her child. Years and years have passed since I saw you; and I have pictured to myself my darling daughter growing up in beauty and in virtue—endowed with elegant accomplishments, and trained in all that she ought to learn or that would become her—save a knowledge of her mother! Now, my dearest Agnes, you repay me for that immense—that boundless love which I have ever cherished for you: now you reward me for the anxious years—the age of sorrow, as I may term the period which has elapsed, for me, between your infancy and the present time. Your father is rich—is possessed of many resources for recreation and pleasure in the world, which a woman cannot enjoy. He has many, many friends;—and, deeply though he loves you, he will not miss you so much as I have missed you, and should miss you still, were you now to be separated from me. It is, then, a mother who implores her daughter to give her a daughter's love—to yield her a daughter's affection—and perform towards her a daughter's duty. All this, my Agnes, I see that you are prepared to accomplish—even at the sacrifice of your feelings in respect to your sire. Moreover, that sire has been blessed with your smiles ever since your birth—or at least has had you under his guardianship and control: and now—oh! now, am I asking too much when I beseech you to devote a few years of love to me,—to me who am your mother—who am unhappy—and who, without you, should now feel so lonely and desolate that the sooner the cold grave were to close over me, the better!"

"I will not leave you—I will die sooner!" murmured Agnes, her eyes streaming and her bosom heaving with convulsive sobs. "But you will not leave my father—nor that kind and good Mrs. Gifford—in ignorance of what has become of me?"

"I could not be guilty of such cruelty, my darling child," responded the mother. "And now," she continued, after a rapid glance from the window of the vehicle, which was at this moment passing by Kennington Common,—"and now listen again to what I have to say to you. My own house is in the northern suburb of London; and it is possible that Mrs. Gifford may be acquainted with the place of my abode. I know not whether she be; and I should conceive that she is *not*—nevertheless, there *is* the possibility, as I observed—and, in that case, she would adopt measures to tear you from my arms. For this night, then, you must consent to remain at the house of some ladies of my acquaintance. They will take care of you—they will be rejoiced to have you with them, though only for a few hours; and by to-morrow evening I shall have a dwelling fitted up for our reception. It is my intention to give up my villa which I now possess—and I know of a sweet cottage, with a beautiful garden, in the neighbourhood of Bayswater, which I shall hire at once. All these arrangements can be effected in the course of to-morrow—for by means of money incredible things are accomplished in London."

"Be it as you say, my dear mother," observed Agnes. "But you will remain with me this night?—you will not leave me with strangers?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"Certainly, my child, if you wish it, I will stay with you," returned her mother. "Listen, however, to me once again. The friends in whose care I propose to place you, are two elderly ladles, who will receive you as the daughter of one whom they sincerely love—for they are as devoted to me as if I were a near and dear relative, and are acquainted with much that concerns me. You will be as safe in their charge as if I myself were with you: for, remember,—by to-morrow night I must have a home—a good home—prepared for my Agnes,—and it will occupy me until a late hour *this* night to make the arrangements for the removal of all my furniture and other property in the morning. In addition to all this, Agnes, I should be compelled in any case to return to my house this evening,—as there may be a communication of importance for me there,—a communication from a generous friend—noble by nature as well as by name—and who is interesting himself for me and for *another*——"

"Say no more, my dearest parent," interrupted Agnes. "I am ready to obey you in all things and to follow your counsel: but promise to return and take me away with you as early as you can to-morrow," she added imploringly.

"Fear not, my darling Agnes," replied the mother: "I shall be as anxious to embrace you to-morrow as you possibly can be to see me."

While this conversation was in progress between the two ladles in the hackney-coach, the sun had set—twilight had become absorbed in the shades of night—but the vehicle was now proceeding along the Blackfriars-road, which was brilliant with the gas-lamps stretching away in two approximating lines, and ultimately becoming confounded together on the arching bridge in the distance.

At length the hackney-coach passed out of the Blackfriars-road into Stamford-street; and Agnes, looking from the left-hand window, saw that the three first houses on that side of the way, towards which her eyes were turned, were in a condition so ruinous and dismantled as to strike a chill to her susceptible heart. But the unpleasant sensation almost instantly vanished, when the coach drew up at the door of a house in excellent repair, and presenting, in outward appearance, a remarkable contrast to those dilapidated buildings.

Here Agnes and her mother alighted; and the young maiden no longer thought of the sinister-looking ruins adjoining, when she found herself in a comfortable parlour, where both herself and parent received a cordial welcome from two elderly ladies whose benevolent countenances, agreeable manners, and kind speech were calculated to inspire confidence at once.

The name of these maiden sisters was Theobald; and they were indeed possessed of excellent dispositions and endowed with the most amiable qualities. The moment that Agnes' mother entered the room, they rose to embrace her with the warmth of an unfeigned friendship; and even before the young maiden was introduced to them, they exclaimed, as if suddenly struck by the same sentiment, "Ah! this is the dear girl whom you have so long pined to recover? We need not wait to be told that she is your daughter: the likeness

between you proclaims the fact!”

And then they embraced Agnes in her turn.

The young lady’s mother drew the elder Miss Theobald aside, and said, “I propose to leave my beloved child with you for this night. Circumstances compel me to return home without delay. I have decided upon taking your beautiful little villa at Bayswater, and shall remove all my furniture thither the first thing in the morning. It is fortunate that the sweet dwelling should have been thus in want of a tenant at this moment.”

“I am delighted for your sake, my dear friend,” responded Miss Theobald, “that the villa is unoccupied. We will send one of our servants at day-break to make all the necessary preparations for your reception. Oh! how sincerely—how deeply do I congratulate you upon having recovered your long-lost daughter!” added the kind-hearted woman, in a tone of profound feeling.

“It is indeed a source of indescribable solace to my wounded spirit, as you, my dear friend, may well conceive—for you are acquainted with the principal events of my chequered existence. But I must now depart: it is growing late—and ere I seek my couch this night, I shall have arranged everything for my removal to Bayswater to-morrow.”

With these words the lady turned towards Agnes, saying, “My dearest child, I leave you in the care of these excellent friends, whom it is only necessary to know in order to love.”

“I feel that I do already love them, my dear mother,” responded the young maiden, as she threw herself into her parent’s arms.

“Farewell—till to-morrow, my sweet Agnes: soon after mid-day you may expect me—and the Miss Theobalds can tell you that the new home to which you are then to accompany me, will leave you nothing to regret in reference to your own little secluded cottage and beautiful garden in Surrey.”

“Wherever I may dwell with you, dear mother—there shall I enjoy contentment,” answered Agnes, tenderly embracing her whom in two short hours she had thus learnt to love with an affection that seemed to have existed for years.

“Adieu, my darling child,” murmured the fond mother; and she then took her departure.

Agnes listened until the sounds of the retreating wheels were no longer audible—or rather, until they were absorbed in the din of the numerous vehicles passing in the immediate neighbourhood of the house: and then a sudden chill seized upon her heart—a damp fell upon her spirits—her feelings, powerfully excited by the incidents of the day, experienced a rapid revulsion—and, unable to control her emotions, she burst into tears.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

A NIGHT OF TERRORS.

The two ladies hastened to console—or, speaking with greater accuracy, endeavoured to console the weeping girl. But, although she knew how friendly disposed they were towards her—although she felt the full extent of their kindness, and even reproached herself with her inability to yield to its soothing influence,—yet it seemed as if the departure of her mother had left her more alone in the world than ever she was before.

“Dry those tears, my sweet Agnes,” said the elder Miss Theobald, pressing the maiden’s delicate white hand with cordiality and tenderness.

“Oh! do not give way to a sorrow for which you have no real cause,” urged the younger of the two ladies. “A few hours will soon pass, my dear child, and your fond parent will return.”

But Agnes, though acknowledging by her gestures the kindness of the sisters, could not subdue her grief; and her sobbing became more convulsive.

For a tide of conflicting and painful reflections rushed in upon her soul. She remembered all her father’s goodness towards her—the strong injunctions he had given her not to hold intercourse with any one who was not the bearer of a letter from him—and the grief that he would experience when he heard of her departure. She thought, likewise, of the terror and dismay which must even already reign at the cottage on account of her mysterious absence: she beheld, in imagination, the excellent-hearted Mrs. Gifford and the good-natured Jane inconsolable at her loss;—and, apart from all these ideas, she now felt certain misgivings arise in her bosom relative to the step she had taken. Vainly did she endeavour to persuade herself that, acting by the counsel and in obedience to the prayers of her mother, she could not have done wrong: a secret voice appeared to reproach her—an unknown tongue seemed to whisper ominous things in her ears. Terror gained upon her; and, under its influence, her grief became less violent. But her thoughts grew confused—there was a hurry in her brain: she felt as if she had just awakened from a wild and painful dream, and was still unable to collect her scattered ideas;—and still amidst that confusion, flashed, with vivid brightness to her memory, the warning which her sire had so emphatically given to her respecting the snares that were set by the wicked to entrap the artless and the innocent. At length, overcome by the terror which thus rapidly acquired a complete empire over her soul, and forgetting all that was re-assuring and consolatory in her present petition, Agnes Vernon fell upon her knees before the two amazed ladies, exclaiming, as she extended her clasped hands wildly towards them, “Take me home again to my cottage—take me home again, I implore you!”

“My dearest child,” said the elder Miss Theobald, accompanying her soothing words with the tenderest caresses; “what do you fear?—wherefore do you wish to leave us? Are we not your mother’s friends?—and can you not persuade yourself to look upon us in the same light?”

“Oh! yes, madam—I know—I feel that you are my friend—that you wish me well!” cried Agnes, her apprehensions dissipating, but only to allow scope for her anguish to burst forth again.

“Why, then, do you thus give way to your grief?” asked Miss Theobald, raising the young maiden gently, and as gently leading her to a seat.

“I cannot explain my sensations,” sobbed the poor girl: “and yet I feel very—very unhappy.”

“You have doubtless been much excited this evening, my love,” was the reply: “but a good night’s rest will tranquillise you. And remember—you are beneath a friendly roof, and where harm cannot reach you.”

“But I tremble lest I have done wrong, madam,” exclaimed Agnes. “How is it that my father ordains one thing, and my mother counsels another? Oh! I am bewildered with misgivings—I know not what to think, nor how to act?”

“Are you not pleased at having at length embraced a mother?” said the younger Miss Theobald, in a tone of gentle reproach.

“Yes—oh! yes!” ejaculated Agnes, fervently: then, in a mournful voice, she observed, “But I have fled—surreptitiously fled from the home provided for me by a fond and trusting father!”

The two ladies fully comprehended the nature of the conflicting thoughts that were agitating in the breast of Agnes Vernon; and they exchanged rapid glances of mingled sorrow and apprehension. They saw that on one side was a suddenly awakened and ardent love for

a mother; and that on the other was a sense of the deference and obedience, as well as of the gratitude, due to an affectionate father. They were, therefore, filled with regret that family circumstances should have placed that pure, artless, and innocent girl in a position which compelled her to balance between the two; and, although they would have moved heaven and earth to induce her to decide in favour of the maternal parent, they recognised the difficulty of the task, and entertained the deepest alarm for its results.

“To-morrow evening, long before this hour, my dear Agnes,” said the elder of the ladies, “you will be comfortably settled in your new home. The villa which your mother intends to inhabit at Bayswater, belongs to my sister and myself. It is a neat little dwelling—neither too much secluded, nor too near to the neighbouring houses; and a large, well-cultivated, and delightful garden is attached to it. Then, my dear child, reflect—remember, that you will possess a constant, a devoted, and a loving companion in your mother: you will no longer pass many, many hours—indeed, the greater portion of your time—in solitude and loneliness, nor be thrown upon the incompatible society of servants, who, however good in heart and well-intentioned, are not such associates as you would select of your own free will.”

“Ah! madam—your words console me,” said Agnes, endeavouring to stifle her sobs. “But how happens it that you should be acquainted with my late mode of life?”

“I did but guess what that mode of life must have been,” returned Miss Theobald; “and I see that I was not far wrong. I knew that your father did not—could not dwell with you entirely—that he could only be a visitor at your place of abode, wherever it might be—and, therefore, I naturally conjectured that you were thrown almost completely upon your own resources.”

“And can you tell me, madam,” asked Miss Vernon, ingenuously, as the thought suddenly struck her,—“can you tell me how it is that my father should wish me to dwell under his guardianship only, and my mother wishes me to rely solely upon her? Or, indeed,” she added, after a few moments’ pause, “I should rather inquire the reason which prevents my parents from living together beneath the same roof, and having me with them? for, according to all the books I have ever read——”

“Ah! my dear Agnes,” interrupted the elder sister, “you would not seek to penetrate into those mysteries which so unhappily belong to the destinies of your parents?”

“Oh! no—no—if it be improper for a child to ask an explanation of such secrets!” exclaimed Miss Vernon, the natural purity of her soul instantly absorbing the sentiment of curiosity that had prompted her queries. “And now let me implore your pardon for having testified so much excitement——”

“It was to be expected, dear child,” said Miss Theobald; “and you have no pardon to solicit. We are delighted to perceive that you have at length recovered some degree of calmness. Rest assured that you will be happy in the society of your mother, whom we have known for years—yes—many, many years, and whom we love as much as if she were a near relative. You will be surprised to learn, Agnes, that when you were a babe, we often fondled you in our arms. Yes: you may regard me with surprise—but it is nevertheless the fact, that my sister and myself have frequently—very frequently nursed and dandled you for hours together.”

“Oh! I was wrong to exhibit so much mistrust and want of confidence in you just now!” exclaimed Agnes, her affectionate soul being deeply touched by assurances so well calculated to move her, and which were indeed strictly consonant with truth.

“Think not of what has gone by, my dear child,” said the younger sister. “We make all possible allowances for the excited state of your mind; and we sincerely hope, as we believe, that happiness awaits you. But it is growing late; and you doubtless stand in need of refreshment ere you retire to rest.”

Then, without waiting for an answer, she rang the bell; and the servant was ordered to bring in the supper-tray. Agnes was in no humour to partake of the meal: indeed, she was in that state of mind when the individual rather loathes the idea of eating, through a total suspension of the appetite. But so delicate were the attentions of the kind-hearted sisters, and so persevering were they in their endeavours to render their guest as much “at home” as possible, that Agnes sate down with them to table; and, if she scarcely ate anything, yet her spirits revived somewhat from the sociable nature of the evening repast.

It was a little after eleven when the Misses Theobald conducted the young lady to the bedchamber which had been prepared for her reception; and, having embraced her affectionately, the good sisters left her, as they hoped, to the enjoyment of that repose of which they knew she must stand much in need.

The moment she found herself alone, the maiden felt unpleasant thoughts returning to her mind; and, in order to escape from them, if possible, she began to lay aside her apparel with unwonted haste. Everything necessary for her toilette had been provided; and the chamber, which was at the back of the house and on the second floor, was elegantly furnished—having an air of comfort that would have been duly appreciated by one in a more settled state of mind than was the amiable girl at the time. In a few minutes she retired to rest; and, contrary to her expectation, sleep soon fell upon her eye-lids—for she was worn out and exhausted by the exciting incidents of the day.

Her dreams were not, however, of a tranquillising description.

In the first place, she fancied that she was roving in her garden, and that she beheld Lord William Trevelyan approaching down the lane. In a few moments he stood by her side; though how he passed the verdant boundary was not quite clear to her. She did not retreat,

—yet she felt that she ought to retire: but her feet were rivetted to the ground;—and when he took her hand, the same unknown and invisible influence which nailed her to the spot, forbade her to withdraw that hand which trembled in his own. Then she imagined that the young nobleman began to address her in a style similar to the contents of his letter: she cast down her eyes—she felt herself blushing—and, though she knew that she ought to retreat, she nevertheless listened with emotions of pleasure never experienced before. He pressed her to be allowed to visit her again; and she was raising her eyes bashfully towards his countenance, to read his sincerity in his looks, ere she murmured the affirmative reply that already trembled upon her tongue, when she was suddenly shocked to perceive a marvellous and signal change taking place in him. His face grew wrinkled—the handsome features became distorted and frightful—his clothes took another appearance—and, as she gazed upon him in speechless wonder and alarm, she saw standing in his place a hideous old woman, whom she at length recognised as Mrs. Mortimer. Agnes strove to cry out—but could not: a spell was upon her lips;—and the harridan's eyes glared upon her with savage malignity. The maiden felt herself sinking in terror to the ground—when the whole scene experienced a sudden variation; and she was now in the parlour of the cottage, with her father seated by her side.

Neither was this second dream of a tranquillising description.

Agnes fancied that her sire was angry with her—that he uttered reproaches for a disobedience of which she had been guilty. At first she could not comprehend the nature of the offence that had entailed upon her this vituperation, and rendered her father's manner so unusually severe towards her—but at last it flashed to her mind that she had been incautious in receiving at the cottage evil-intentioned visitors;—and then she suddenly found her father engaged in a violent dispute with Mrs. Mortimer, whose countenance seemed more than ever hideous and revolting. How this dispute originated, or how Mrs. Mortimer had got into the room, Agnes knew not: there she however was—and the quarrel waxed warmer and warmer. At length the old woman took her departure: but ere the door closed behind her, she turned on Agnes a look of such fiend-like malignity, that a shriek would have expressed the young maiden's affright, had not her lips been mysteriously sealed. When the harridan had disappeared, Mr. Vernon renewed his reproaches; and Agnes fancied that, on falling on her knees in the presence of her sire to demand pardon, he spurned her from him—upbraided her with her disobedience and ingratitude—and warned her, in a tone of solemnly prophetic meaning, that her readiness to repose confidence in strangers would bring down some terrible calamity on her head. She was about to promise never more to prove guilty of the disobedience which had elicited all these reproaches and produced all that unwonted harshness on her father's part, when a third person appeared on the scene;—and this third person was her mother!

But this new dream which now visited the sleeping maiden, was not of a tranquillising description.

She fancied that an earnest appeal was now made to her on either side, placing her in the difficult and most distressing condition of a child who had to decide as to which of her parents she would cling to, and which abandon. Here was her father, reminding her of all he had done for her: there was her mother, proclaiming herself to be unhappy and to need the society and solace of her daughter. On her right hand stood the sire whom she had always known: on her left was the maternal parent whom she had never known before. The countenance of the former expressed misgivings amounting almost to despair: that of the latter was bathed in tears, and indicative of all the agonies of a cruel suspense. Agnes felt that her heart was rent by this scene; and yet it appeared to her that she was bound to decide, and that promptly, in one way or the other. She looked towards her father; and he held out his arms to receive her—his countenance assuming an expression so profoundly wretched that it seemed to say, "If I lose you, I lose all I love or care for on earth." She turned towards her mother, in order to breathe a last farewell, for that she must accompany her father,—when she beheld her maternal parent on her knees, and extending her clasped hands imploringly, while the pale but beauteous face indicated that life or death was in the decision which was about to be pronounced. Agnes could not resist this earnest—silently eloquent appeal on the part of a mother who had proclaimed herself to be unhappy; and the maiden fancied that she threw herself into that mother's arms. A cry of misery burst from her father's lips; and Agnes awoke with a wild start,—awoke, to feel her entire frame quaking convulsively, and her heart palpitating with alarming violence.

For a few moments—nay, for nearly a minute, she lay stretched upon her back, endeavouring to compel her thoughts to settle themselves in their proper places, so that she might attain the assurance whether she had just beheld realities, or had only been the victim of distressing dreams;—and when she was enabled to arrive at the latter conclusion, she started up in her bed, exclaiming, "Nevertheless, this is more than I can endure!"

Then came the consciousness of where she was, and why she was there,—how she had fled from the home that her father had provided for her, and in spite of all his solemn injunctions and prudential warnings,—how her mother had left her in a strange place, and with persons who were strangers to her,—and how Mrs. Gifford would be certain to send to Paris without delay and communicate the afflicting tidings to Mr. Vernon.

The maiden's brain reeled, as these thoughts flashed through it;—and at this moment, when her senses appeared to be leaving her, the clock of Christ Church, in the Blackfriars-road, proclaimed the hour of *one*!

The sound came booming—rolling—vibrating through the air, like a solemn warning: at least, so it seemed to the disordered fancy of Agnes Vernon;—and, with feelings worked up to an intolerable pitch, she leapt from her couch.

To obtain a light was an easy matter—for the necessary materials were at hand; and when the flame burst from the tip of the lucifer match, Agnes cast a hurried and affrighted glance around, as if she dreaded to meet some hideous countenance or horrible form in the chamber. Not that she was naturally timid: no—far from it;—her very innocence and purity rendered her courageous on ordinary

occasions. But she was now under the influence of emotions powerfully wrung—of feelings strained to an unusual tension;—and she had no control over her imagination, which was disordered and excited.

One idea dominated all the rest. This was to escape from the house—to escape, at any hazard and at all risks. Not for worlds, she thought, could she return to that bed where such distressing visions had rent her soul;—and she could not pass the rest of the night alone, and in a strange place. No: she must return to the cottage—retrace her way to the home which her father had provided for her—and endeavour to reach that friendly threshold in time to prevent Mrs. Gifford from transmitting to her sire the news of her disobedience.

But her mother! Oh! she should see that parent again—she would explain everything—and perhaps arrangements might be made to suit the views and accomplish the happiness of all! In the mean time, however, she must escape—she must return home,—she could not endure the idea of remaining another hour—no—nor even a minute longer than was necessary—in that stranger-dwelling!

With lightning speed did all these thoughts,—or rather glimpses of thoughts—for they were too brief, too fleetingly vivid, to deserve the name of reflections—pass through the maiden's mind, as she threw on her apparel with a congenial haste; and in three minutes she was dressed. Her bonnet was in the parlour below: but that she could take on her way out of the house—or she cared not if she did not find it at all. She would escape in any case, and at all events; and if she could not find a vehicle to convey her home—she would walk, although she might have to ask her way at every step. For Agnes had worked herself up to a pitch of desperation: a fearful panic was upon her;—she knew not, neither did she pause to ask in her own soul, why she longed so ardently to fly from that house:—an irresistible and almost incomprehensible influence urged her on—and the hurry of her actions was in accordance with the hurry of her brain.

Her hair was flowing over her shoulders: she just waited a moment—a single moment, to fasten it up in a large knot behind; and then, taking the light in her hand, she stole noiselessly down the stairs.

A profound silence—a silence which her footsteps disturbed not—reigned throughout the house.

All, save the affrighted—half-maddened girl, slept.

She gained the hall—she endeavoured to enter the parlour to procure her bonnet: but the door was closed—and she now remembered that the elder Miss Theobald had taken the key with her when they had all quitted that room for the night.

But we have already said that Agnes cared not for the bonnet;—and without bestowing a second thought on the matter, she approached the front-door. Alas! there was a more serious disappointment still—the key of that door had likewise been taken up stairs.

An expression of bitter vexation passed over the pale countenance of the maiden—an expression more bitter than that beauteous countenance had ever before worn: but, in another instant, it was succeeded by something like a gleam of hope and joy,—for Agnes bethought her that there was a yard at the back of the house—she had seen it, in the moonlight, from her bed-room window—and there might be a means of egress in that direction.

Cautiously descending the stairs leading into the kitchens, which were below the level of the street, she hastened to the back-door, which, to her joy, proved only to be bolted.

Oh! now she would escape—she would escape, even if she were forced to climb a wall and enter the enclosure belonging to a neighbouring house: for, with the excitement occasioned by her present proceedings, the panic influence which urged her on acquired fresh power every moment.

Extinguishing the light, she left the candlestick in the house, and then emerged into the yard.

The fresh air, as it fanned her face, seemed to breathe whispering promises of freedom, and gave her renewed courage.

The moon was shining gloriously; and as she cast a glance of rapid survey around, she beheld the backs of the dilapidated houses the fronts of which had struck her with such sinister effect when she first entered Stamford Street, in the hackney-coach, in the evening.

There was no mode of egress from the yard save by scaling the boundary walls, which were low on either side.

Not an instant did Agnes hesitate: the fittings of a water-butt served as a ladder for her delicate feet;—and, behold! the sylph-like form of the maiden passes nimbly and lightly over the wall, into the yard belonging to the ruined house next door: for it strikes her that egress by means of an uninhabited building must be certain beyond all risk or doubt.

The moon-light streams, with silvery rays, upon the sombre walls—the dark window-frames, with the blackened fragments of glass remaining in them—the back-door hanging crazily and loosely on its hinges—and the rust-eaten bars of the back-kitchen window. The yard is overgrown with rank grass, reaching above the ankles; and the ground is ragged and uneven—the chances of tripping being moreover multiplied by the brick-bats and the broken bottles scattered about.

The ruined aspect of the house and the long-neglected condition of the yard, or small garden as it once was, behind the building, constituted a scene of desolation, and conveyed an impression of utter loneliness to the mind of the young lady that made her shrink back for a moment as she placed her hand on the rusty latch of the crazy door leading into the lower premises. And seemed she not the sprite of some maiden who had been foully dealt with in that gloomy, tomb-like place, and whose unquiet ghost came to haunt the scene where her blood had been ruthlessly spilt and her mortal remains lay concealed in unconsecrated ground? Yes—such she indeed appeared, with her ashy pale face—her white dress, rendered whiter still by the moonbeams that played upon it—and her long dark hair which, having become loosened in the act of scaling the wall, now flowed all wildly and dishevelled over her shoulders!

We said that she hesitated for a moment to push her way into the dark and ruined building, wrapped as it was in sepulchral silence: but the dominant influence which had hitherto impelled her, asserted its empire once again; and, thrusting open the door, which was by no means a difficult matter—she entered the dilapidated house.

A chill struck to her heart and a vague terror seized upon her, as she now plunged, as it were, out of the pure moonlight into the utter darkness of those premises: but, subduing her fears, she advanced a few paces, with her arms extended so as to grope for the stairs.

Her right hand encountered the bannisters, which were loose and crazy, and raised a rattling noise as she grasped them: no longer alarmed, however, but feeling that the means of escape were gained, she was about to ascend the steps, when a door suddenly opened immediately in front of her—a light appeared—and the rays of the candle thus abruptly thrust forth revealed a countenance so hideous—so monster-like, that for a few moments Agnes stood transfixed in speechless horror—stupified—paralysed—motionless as a marble statue.

And glaring with horror also, were the eyeballs whose rivetted looks met her own: then a loud, hoarse, and affrighted voice exclaimed, “The ghost! the ghost!”—and the light, dropping suddenly on the ground, was immediately extinguished.

A piercing shriek burst from the lips of Agnes; and she fell senseless at the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER CLXXV.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE IN STAMFORD STREET.

We must now carry our narrative backward for a few hours, in order to explain the incident which has just been described.

At the corner of Stamford Street and the Blackfriars Road, there are three houses in a most dismantled and dilapidated condition. They seem to have been ravaged by fire; but time and neglect have in reality produced that deplorable appearance. The walls are blackened with accumulated dirt; and the state of the windows bears unequivocal evidence to the fact that every pane has been broken, individually and separately, by stones flung from the streets by vagabond boys or other mischievous persons. The fragments of glass that remain, seem as if the material never could have been transparent, but had even in its manufacture been stained with an inky dye; and the shutters wherewith the casements are closed inside, are equally blackened, as if by a smoke as dense as that which proceeds from the funnel of a steam-packet or the chimney of a factory.

For the last twenty years have these three houses been thus left to fall into ruin: for the fifth part of a century has the work of dilapidation and decay been going on! That they were once habited is evident from the fact that the blinds, pulled up round their rollers, still remain—but so begrimed with black dust and dirt that it is scarcely possible to believe they were ever white. The cords used to pull them down, with the tassels at the end, are likewise still there, and totally discoloured also. Very mournful is the aspect of those ruined tenements, with these indications that they once were comfortable dwellings,—that cheerful fires once burnt in the grates —that lights streamed from the casements in years gone by—and that the walls echoed to the gay pealing laughter of merry children!

Desolate—desolate, indeed, are the three houses,—a disfigurement to the entire vicinity, and having an appearance well calculated to throw a damp upon the spirits even of the most strong-minded of the neighbours.

There is something picturesque in the aspect which ruins in the open country—perhaps on the summit of a hill—assume from gradual decay; because there the ivy grows upon the walls, and the naked hideousness of dilapidation is concealed by the invasion of a wilderness of shrubs and sweets. But when the golden rays of a summer sun pour upon the blackened walls and shattered casements of houses in the midst of a populous city,—houses which have dwelling-places adjoining them and all around,—the effect is sombre, sad, and sinister in the extreme.

Such is the impression produced by those three houses in Stamford-street. Not that the street itself is otherwise cheerful in aspect: on the contrary, the entire thoroughfare stretching between the Blackfriars and Waterloo Roads, is gloomy and inhospitable in aspect. The exterior of the houses has a dinginess of wall and a darkness of window that are unrelieved by the aristocratic grandeur and the richness of curtains inside, which characterise the rows of smoke-dyed dwellings in more fashionable quarters.

The inhabitants of Stamford Street are amazingly prone to the letting of lodgings, when they can find any persons willing to take them. But that such pliant and easily-persuaded tenants are rare in that quarter, is proved to demonstration by the numbers of cards and bills in the windows announcing furnished apartments to let.

It is a curious study, and one that affords matter for speculation, to examine the cards and bills thus displayed. Some are written in a neat feminine hand, so small that the passer-by must protrude his head far over the railings to enable his vision to decipher the delicate announcements: others are penned in a bold, coarse hand—and, in them, the chances are ten to one that the word *let* is spelt with a double t;—while others, again, are printed in the types which the experienced eye has no difficulty in tracing to Peel's famed establishment in the New Cut.

More than half of Stamford Street constantly appears to let; and, from all accounts, landlords experience no trifling difficulty in collecting the rents from the occupants of their houses. If you pass along Stamford Street just before quarter-day, and at a very early hour in the morning, or at a late hour in the night, you will be sure to perceive several vans loading with furniture; for the habit of "moon-shining it," or flitting surreptitiously, is unfortunately of frequent occurrence in that district.

But these are not the only indications that the affairs of the inhabitants and lodgers in Stamford Street are far from being in the most blooming condition: the fact may also be gathered from the careworn countenance of the tax-gatherer as he leaves a fresh notice at every door, and from the common occurrence of the water being cut off. Nor less does the Poor Rates' collector feel his task to be a most unpleasant one; while the tradesmen in the Blackfriars Road wonder, as they look over their ledgers, what the deuce Stamford Street is coming to. Visitors are frequently answered from the area—an unmistakeable precaution against the intrusion of sheriff's officers; and even when the butcher delivers in his meat or the baker his bread at the front door, the chain is in many instances kept up.

Such is the prevalent state of affairs in the long thoroughfare which we have thus briefly described: but it is with the dilapidated houses —or rather with one of them—that we have now to occupy ourselves.

As soon as it was dusk, two men emerged from the miserable rookery constituted by the district of Broad Wall; and, entering Stamford Street, they proceeded stealthily along until they reached the ruined house which was next to the dwelling of the Misses Theobald. One of the men—a tall, stout, ruffian-like fellow, whom we shall presently describe more particularly—took a key from his pocket and opened the door of the dilapidated tenement, into which he hastily entered, his companion closely following him. We should however observe that this ingress was effected at a moment when no other persons were near; and that the door was opened and shut in a noiseless manner, so that no sound might reach the ears of the occupants of the adjacent dwelling.

"Now give us your hand, old feller," said the ruffian-like individual, when they were safe inside the passage: "because the stairs is summut broke away, and the bannisters isn't to be trusted. Lord! how you tremble! Why—what the hell are you afeard on?"

"Nothing—nothing, my good friend," was the answer, delivered in a nervous tone: "only—it's—it's—so—very—very—dark."

"Dark!" cried the ruffian, with a hoarse laugh: "why, it wery often *is* dark in a house at night-time, and where there's no candle alight. But p'raps you're afeard of ghosteses," he continued, as he dragged rather than led the nervous old man down the crazy, rotting stairs towards the lower region of the place: "and if so, you're in the right quarters to see a speret—for they do say the young gal which was murdered here, walks in her shroud;—but, for my part, I never see her—and I han't got no fear of that sort."

By the time these words were uttered, in a tone of coarse jocularity, the ruffian had conducted his companion to the bottom of the stairs; and, halting at that point, he struck a lucifer-match against the wall, and lighted a piece of candle which he took from his pocket.

He then led the way into the front kitchen of the house, bidding the old man close the door behind him.

The place was black all over with accumulated dust and dirt: the ceiling appeared as if it had been originally painted a sable hue; and the floor, broken in several parts, conveyed the same impression. The shelves above the dresser were in a most dilapidated condition; and the dense cob-webs clung to them, as well as to the corners of the ceiling, like masses of rotten rags. The shutters were closed; and over their entire surface were pasted sheets of thick brown paper—evidently to prevent the light of candles from peeping through their chinks and being noticed in the street. There was an old ricketty table in the middle of the kitchen: there were likewise two chairs, which, being made of a tough wood, had withstood the ravages of time; and an empty beer-barrel was placed upright near the table, as if it occasionally served as a third seat.

The ruffian stuck the candle in the neck of a bottle; and, opening one of the dresser-drawers, he drew forth a bottle and a couple of small tumblers:—then, placing himself on the barrel, he proceeded in a leisurely manner to light his pipe, while the old man—his companion—sank, nervous and trembling, into one of the Windsor-chairs.

The reader has no doubt already guessed that these two individuals were Vitriol Bob and Torrens;—and, if so, the surmise is correct.

The latter person needs no description; but the former character must be more elaborately dealt with on the present occasion. He was indeed, as Jack Rily had represented him, one of the greatest miscreants that ever disgraced humanity,—not only in reality, but also in personal appearance. Of tall stature, athletic frame, and muscular build, he possessed vast physical strength. He was about thirty-six years of age: his countenance was naturally ugly even to repulsiveness—but huge black whiskers meeting under his chin, rendered it positively ferocious;—and the small, dark, reptile-like eyes glared from beneath thick, overhanging brows. His lips were remarkably coarse and of a livid hue; and his nose, broken in the middle, had a deep indentation, giving an appearance of death's-head flatness to the broad countenance. His apparel consisted of a seedy suit of black—a hat with very wide brims bent even to slouching—and a pair of heavy Wellington boots; and in his hand he carried a thick stick with a huge nob at one end and a massive ferrule at the other. This was his "life-preserver;" but he seldom had occasion to use it—for his proceedings were usually of the savage and diabolical nature described by the Doctor, and whence he derived the appellation of *Vitriol Bob*.

This terrible individual was well known to the police: but those functionaries trembled at the idea of molesting him. They would have experienced no such dread had his defensive weapons been confined to life-preservers or pistols: but there was something so horrible in the thought of having a bottle of burning, blinding fluid broken over the countenance, that the officers shuddered at the bare idea of tackling Vitriol Bob. Thus, whenever information was given of some nefarious deed which he had attempted or perpetrated, the police took very good care to search for him where they knew he was not to be found; and if they even met him in one of the bye-streets or obscure alleys on the Surrey side of the metropolis—the quarter which he chiefly honoured with his presence—they were suddenly seized with an inclination to look stedfastly into a picture-shop, or gaze up abstractedly at the sky, until he had passed.

Vitriol Bob knew that he was an object of terror to the functionaries of justice in general: but he was also well aware that there were exceptions to the rule, and that amongst so large a body as the police-force, some few individuals would pounce upon him at all risks. In fact, the impunity he enjoyed was not so completely assured as to render precaution unnecessary; and there was moreover such a thing as being taken by surprise. For these reasons he accordingly made use of one of the "haunted houses,"—for so they were denominated,—as a place of concealment whenever he had committed a deed calculated to lead to the institution of unpleasant enquiries.

Such was the individual whom we now find in company with Torrens; and the circumstance that threw them together in the first

instance, will presently transpire through the medium of the conversation that took place as soon as they were seated in the kitchen of the haunted house.

“Well, here we are safe at last, old feller,” cried Vitriol Bob, puffing deliberately at his pipe, as if he savoured deliciously the soothing influences of the tobacco. “By goles! it is one of the best larks I ever was engaged in. Such a lot of tin, and so easily got!”

“Two thousand seven hundred a piece—eh?” said Torrens, eyeing his companion with nervous suspense, as if he were eager to assure himself that a fair and equitable division of the booty would take place.

“Hah!” observed the ruffian, in a complacent manner, as he filled the two tumblers with brandy from the black bottle: “drink!”—and he emptied one of the glasses at a draught, just as if it were a mere thimble-full of the fiery liquid. “It was a good job, old feller,” he continued, after a short pause, “that you fell in with such a prime chap as I am—or raythe, it was fortnit that I lodged in the same house, and as I came in heard you moaning and groaning away in your cellar. It was also lucky that you let me worm out of you all that had happened—although you was precious chary of making a confidant of me. You remember that I couldn’t believe you at fust—I looked on you as a perfect madman. Thinks I to myself, ‘*There’s a precious lu-nattic just ’scaped out of Bedlam*:’ for how was I to fancy that you’d raly been robbed of such an amount, living in a cellar as you was!”

“But you believed me at last—you saw that it was all true and correct,” exclaimed Torrens, perceiving that it suited the man’s humour to talk on the subject.

“Well, I did,” returned Vitriol Bob: “and now,” he added, tapping his breeches pockets significantly, “I have got plenty of proof that you didn’t tell no lies. But, Lord bless ye! you could have done nothink without me: you would have sat down quietly under your loss. But I told you that I’d find the old voman out, if so be she was in London at all; and so I did. The description you gave me of her was not to be mistaken—’specially by a genelman of eggs-sperience like myself. I went about all over London, looking for her; and then, behold ye! arter all she’s living within a stone’s throw of us, as one may say. By goles! I never shall forget how my heart jumped in my buzzim when I clapped eyes on her yesterday, as she came out of the coffee-house: but you don’t know how I found out that she actiwaliy lived there?”

“No—I do not,” said Torrens, observing that his companion bent upon him a look of mysterious importance, as much as to invite a query that should furnish him with the opportunity of giving an explanation relative to the point alluded to. “How did it happen, then?”

“Why, when I see the old voman come out of the coffee-house, I went straight away to my blewen—that’s Pig-faced Polly, as she’s called—and I tells her to go to the place, take tea and toast, and wait till she found out whether the old voman lived there, or not. But I orders Polly not to make inquiries, for fear of eggs-citing suspicion. Well, my gal did as I told her—and waited, and waited a good long time; and when she’d had three teas and four or five buttered toastesses, she see the old voman come in, and she hears the landlady come out and say, ‘*Here’s your key, Mrs. Mortimer*.’ Then up goes Mrs. Mortimer—for such her name seems to be—to her room; and Pig-faced Poll returns to me with the hintelligence. I knowed that my game was now safe enough; and it was me which dewised the plan of our going as officers with a search-warrant, when we’d watched the old voman leave the coffee-house this morning.”

“Yes—yes: I know that you did it all,” said Torrens, terribly alarmed lest he who experienced the lion’s share of the trouble, should now claim the lion’s share of the booty. “But how long shall we be obliged to remain here? I am in a hurry to get away—with my share—my fair share of my own money——”

“Your own money, indeed!” ejaculated Vitriol Bob, with a chuckling laugh. “Was it your’n when Mother Mortimer had it safe in her own box? And I should just like to know how you fust come by it? Not honestly, I’ll swear, old feller. Such a seedy-looking cove, living in such a way as you was, couldn’t have got near upon six thousand pound by wot’s called legitimate means. But that’s neether here nor there: I don’t care two figs how you got the tin—and if I ask no questions, I shan’t have no lies told me. Von thing is wery certain—that I’ve got it now.”

“But—but—you surely—my dear friend—you—” stammered Torrens, absolutely aghast at the idea, of still remaining a beggar.

“Come, let’s have no more of this drivelling nonsense,” interrupted Vitriol Bob, in a tone of unmitigated contempt: then, as he refilled and relighted his pipe, be observed, “Why, you have been in a fidget and a stew all day, ever since we secured the swag at the coffee-house. Don’t you see, my dear feller, that people in our sitiwations must act with somethink like common prudence? The old voman may rouse hell’s delight about her loss; and that was why I thought we’d better keep ourselves scarce for a time. So I made you stay close with me at the flash lodging-ken in the Mint all the arternoon till it was dusk; and then I brought you here. And here,” added Vitriol Bob, “we are safe enow: ’cos only Pig-faced Poll, Jack Rily, and one or two others of my pals knows anythink about this place being my haunt when I’m afeard of getting into trouble;—and there’s no danger of them splitting on us. So far from that, the Pig-faced will be sure to come here presently, when she finds I don’t wisit her own quarters this evening; and she’ll bring a basket of prog along with her—so that we shall have a jolly good supper in due time. Drink, old feller!”

Thus speaking, the ruffian refilled his own tumbler, and pushed the brandy bottle across the dirty table to Torrens, who did not, however, touch it—for his glass was only half emptied; and he experienced such lively sensations of alarm, that he felt as if his brain were reeling and his intellects were leaving him.

There he was—a feeble, helpless, weak old man, entirely in the power of an individual whom he knew to be of the most desperate

character, but with whom he had joined in companionship only through the hope of recovering at least one-half of that treasure to gain which, in the first instance, he had imbrued his hands in blood. There he was—alone with that miscreant, in a place the aspect of which was sufficient to fill his attenuated soul with the gloomiest thoughts and the most melancholy forebodings,—alone with a demon in human shape, in a ruined and desolate tenement, to augment the cheerless influence of which superstition had lent its aid,—alone with a very fiend, in a haunt the ominous features of which were dimly shadowed forth and rendered more hideous by the dull, glimmering light of the solitary candle with its long wick and its sickly flame.

“Well—what are you thinking of?—and why don’t you drink?” were the words which, suddenly falling on the old man’s ears after a pause, awoke him as it were from a lethargy—a lethargy, however, in which the mind had been painfully active, though the body was motionless—petrified!

“I—I—was wondering how long we should have to remain here,” stammered Torrens, starting as if shaken by a strong spasm or moved by an electric shock.

“I asked you the question just now—and—and you did not give me a reply.”

“Well—it all depends, my fine feller,” answered Vitriol Bob. “Three or four days, perhaps——”

“Three or four days!” almost shrieked Torrens. “I shall die if I linger so long in this horrible place!”

“Die, indeed!” ejaculated the ruffian, in a contemptuous tone. “Why, Lord bless you—I’ve stayed here for three veeks at a time, afore now—without ever budging out. Not be able to linger, as you call it, in this comfortable crib—smoke and drink all day long—or drink only, if you don’t like smoking—and sleep in one of them Windsor-cheers as cozie as a bug in a rug! Besides, won’t you have me for a companion——”

“No—no: I can not—will not endure it!” exclaimed Torrens, starting up from his chair,—his countenance hideous with its workings—his nerves strung to the most painful state of tension—and a thousand frightful thoughts rushing in, with the speed and fury of a torrent, upon his appalled soul.

“Hold your cursed jaw, you fool!” growled Vitriol Bob, in a tone of sudden rage: “you will be heard in the street—and——”

“I care not!” screamed Torrens, louder than before. “Give me my share of the money—let me depart——”

“Be quiet, I say!” spoke the ruffian, in a still more irritated voice, while he sprang from his seat on the barrel; “or I shall do you a mischief.”

“I care not!” again cried Torrens—and again his tone grew still more piercing and shriekingly hysterical; for he was wrought up to a state of utter despair. “Give me my money, I say—give me——”

“Fool—be still!” exclaimed Vitriol Bob, rushing round the table, and grasping the old man by the throat.

But Torrens, inspired with a sudden strength that astonished the ruffian, broke away from his gripe, and rushed towards the door, crying “Murder—murder!”

“Damnation!” thundered Bob; and bounding after him, he sprang upon the old man with the fury and the force of a tiger.

“Murder!” again yelled the affrighted, desperate Torrens: but in another instant he was dashed violently against the wall.

A moan succeeded his agonising cry—and he fell heavily upon the floor. Vitriol Bob then jumped upon him—and the attenuated form of the wretched old man writhed beneath the heavy feet of the murderous ruffian.

There was a faint and stifling appeal for “Mercy! mercy!”—but the miscreant silenced it with a ferocious stamp of his heel on the mouth of the dying man;—and in a few moments all was over!

Vitriol Bob was now alone, in the gloomy, cheerless place, with the crushed and disfigured corpse of him whom he had literally trampled to death.

But scarcely was the deed accomplished, when a noise, as of gravel thrown from the street against the kitchen window, fell upon the ears of the murderer, whose countenance instantly expanded into an expression of grim delight at the well-known signal.

“Here’s Pig-faced Poll!” he exclaimed hastily: and then he paused to listen again.

At the expiration of about a minute the signal was repeated; and Vitriol Bob, no longer harbouring the slightest doubt, hurried up the stairs to open the street-door.

CHAPTER CLXXVI.

SCENES IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

At five-and-twenty minutes past ten, on this eventful night, Mrs. Mortimer entered the narrow lane leading from the Blackfriars Road into Collingwood Street.

We have already stated that she had persuaded herself into a belief of Jack Rily's fidelity towards his partner or pal in any enterprise: nevertheless, she could not help wishing that the business in hand was over—and she mentally exclaimed more than once, as she threaded the lane, "Would that to-morrow morning were come!" But she had such a powerful inducement to proceed in the affair at any risk, that the idea of retreating was discarded each time it faintly suggested itself; and when Jack Rily made his appearance, punctually to an instant, she felt her courage worked up to such a pitch that it was difficult to decide whether it arose from entire confidence or utter desperation.

"So, here you are, my fine old tiger-cat," said the doctor, grasping her hand, with a force that might have been very friendly, but was not the less painful on that account. "I thought you would not flinch: indeed, I made sure you'd come to the scratch."

"What have I to be afraid of—since you are so sure of being able to overpower the wretch whom you call Vitriol Bob!" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, in a firm tone. "I have already told you that I will undertake to manage the villain Torrens."

"I long to see you grapple with him," returned the doctor. "But we must not waste time in idle observations. Listen, my good lady, to our plan of proceeding. Vitriol Bob has a female acquaintance called Molly Calvert—or, in more familiar terms, Pig-faced Poll. This young woman knows his haunt—knows also the signals necessary to induce him to open the door. Besides, whenever he's missing, she goes straight there, with a basket of provisions and what not—because she naturally suspects that he has done something queer and has found it convenient to make himself scarce. Well—you must be Pig-faced Poll for the nonce——"

"I understand you," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer. "It is for me to give the signal and obtain admission——"

"Just so, my dear madam—and for us both—because if ever Molly Calvert and I go there together, it's always the young woman herself who whispers a word of assurance to Vitriol Bob when he opens the door."

"But suppose that the young woman you speak of, has already repaired to the robber's haunt—suppose that she is already with him ——"

"Now don't take Jack Rily for an arrant fool!" said the ruffian; and, dark though it were in the narrow lane where this colloquy took place, Mrs. Mortimer could see the huge white teeth of her companion gleaming through the opening of his horrid hare-lip. "I know what I am about," he continued. "Lord bless you! do you think I have been idle since I saw you this morning? No such thing! I went straight away to Molly Calvert, and made her send out for a bottle of gin. She is uncommonly fond of blue ruin—particularly when she drinks at another person's expense; and as she drank this afternoon at mine, she did not spare it. In a word, I left her in such a helpless state of intoxication, that if she moves off her bed before two or three o'clock in the morning, then tell Jack Rily he is a fool and incapable of managing any business whatsoever."

"I give you all possible credit for sagacity and forethought," said Mrs. Mortimer, purposely flattering the ruffian. "Well, then, the young woman you speak of is placed in a condition which will render her incapable of interfering with our proceedings; and I must personate her for a moment or two, just to obtain admission into the home."

"*Personate her* is scarcely the term, my dear madam," answered Jack Rily: "because if Vitriol Bob only caught a glimpse of you by the neighbouring lamp-light, he would know deuced well that it was not the Pig-faced who sought admission. But it is a mere matter of *vocal stratagem*, if you understand me."

"Speak plainly and briefly," said Mrs. Mortimer, with some degree of sharpness in her tone.

"I will put it all into a nut-shell," responded Jack Rily: then, with rapid utterance but impressive enunciation, he continued:—"The first signal is made by throwing a little gravel at a certain window; but, as that might be accidental, it is necessary to repeat it at the expiration of a minute or so. In a few seconds afterwards Vitriol Bob will open the front door as far as the chain inside will permit—and that is barely an inch: you must then immediately whisper, '*It's me and the Doctor*,' and the door will be instantly opened wide, Bob standing behind it. You pass rapidly in—and I'm at your heels; and as the passage and the stairs leading down to the kitchen are as dark as pitch, he won't observe that it is *not* Molly Calvert whom he has admitted into the house. Now, mind, you must walk straight

along the passage, and gain the stairs—and all this without any hesitation, but with an apparent knowledge of the premises. Go rapidly down the stairs, and you will then see a light straight before you. That will be in the front kitchen—and there you are certain to find Torrens. Spring upon him—tackle him desperately: there will not be a minute to lose—because the moment you appear in his presence, he will recognise you—he will utter a cry—and that must be the signal for the fight. Vitriol Bob will be just behind me—and——"

"You will assail him at the instant that I pounce upon Torrens?" said the old woman, with a bitter malignity in her tone, as she already gloated in anticipation upon the vengeance which she hoped to wreak upon her husband.

"Perform your part, ma'am—do all I have told you," observed Jack Rily; "and leave the rest to me. And now are you ready?"

"Quite," was the reply. "In which direction do we proceed?"

"The house is in Stamford Street," answered the Doctor. "But you had now better follow me at a short distance."

With these words, the man turned round, and proceeded along the narrow lane into the Blackfriars Road, up which he wended his way until he reached the corner of Stamford Street, where he looked back to satisfy himself that Mrs. Mortimer was in his track. He beheld her, by the light of the lamps, at a short distance behind; and, turning into Stamford Street, he was duly followed by her. Halting for a moment, he stooped down, gathered a few small pebbles from the side of the road joining the kerb-stone, and threw them at a window in the area of the dilapidated house which stood third from the corner. He then walked on a few paces, picked up some more little stones and hard crusted dirt, and turning back, met Mrs. Mortimer just opposite the house alluded to. The second volley was discharged at the window; and then they both stationed themselves at the door of the tenement, Mrs. Mortimer being placed in the most convenient position to give an answer to any summons that might issue from within.

The door was opened an inch or two; and the old woman, feigning the tone of a younger female, whispered hastily, "It's me and the Doctor." Thereupon the chain fell inside, and the door was opened half-way, Vitriol Bob standing behind it.

Mrs. Mortimer passed hastily in, followed by Jack Rily; and Vitriol Bob, closing the door noiselessly, readjusted the chain.

"Take care, Poll," he said, in a hoarse and low tone: "don't be in such a devil of a hurry to get down them stairs—'cos there's somethink in the door-way of the kitchen that you might stumble over."

"What is it, Bob?" demanded Jack Rily, hastily; for inasmuch as the real truth flashed to his mind in an instant, he feared lest Mrs. Mortimer should likewise suspect the fact, and, being thrown off her guard, betray herself by some sudden exclamation.

"What is it?—why, a stiff 'un," responded Vitriol Bob, with a chuckling laugh which sounded horribly in the midst of the total darkness that prevailed in the passage and on the stairs. "I s'pose Poll has let you into the business, since you've come along with her," continued the man; "and though I don't see what right she had to tell you anythink about it, I ain't sorry you have come—'cos you can help me to bury the old feller, and you shall have your reglars."

Mrs. Mortimer now fully comprehended that Torrens had been murdered; and an appalling dread seized upon her—for she felt that she was completely in the power of two diabolical ruffians, who were as capable of assassinating her as one had already been to make away with her husband.

A faintness came over her—and she staggered against the wall for support; when Jack Rily, in answer to Vitriol Bob's last observations, said, "Oh! Poll didn't tell me a single word about any business that you had in hand: but as I met her quite by accident and suspected she was coming here, I forced myself, as one may say, upon her company—for I thought you'd be glad to see an old pal, if you was under a cloud."

These words instantaneously re-assured Mrs. Mortimer. She comprehended that her confederate had uttered them, too, for that purpose; and it flashed to her mind that he only wanted to get Vitriol Bob down into the lower part of the house in order to make an attack upon him. She accordingly recovered her self-possession, and rapidly groped her way to the bottom of the stairs, when a feeble light, glimmering from the kitchen, showed her a sinister object lying just inside the threshold.

The blood ran cold in her veins: for, much as she had hated Torrens—anxiously as she had longed to be avenged upon him—profoundly as she abhorred the tie that to some degree had linked their fates, she nevertheless felt horrified at the conviction that the murdered man lay there—in her very path!

Nevertheless, she still maintained her courage as well as she could, and, hastily passing the lifeless form, entered the cheerless, gloomy kitchen, which indeed appeared to be the proper haunt for such a miscreant as Vitriol Bob, and the fitting scene for such a tragedy as the one which had been enacted there that night!

In the middle of the kitchen she paused, and listened with breathless suspense.

Jack Rily had just reached the bottom of the stairs leading thither: Vitriol Bob had only just begun to descend them.

"Well, here is indeed a stiff 'un," exclaimed the former, stopping short in the interval between the foot of the steps and the threshold of the kitchen. "What had he done to you, Bob?—and when did this happen?"

“Wait a moment—and I’ll tell you all about it,” was the reply. “I hope Poll has brought lots of grub—for the business hasn’t taken away my appetite.”

“She has got a basket with her,” said Jack Rily.

At this moment Vitriol Bob reached the bottom of the stairs, when the Doctor sprang upon him with the sudden violence of a savage monster; and the murderer was thrown back on the steps.

“Treachery!” he exclaimed, in a tone resembling the subdued roar of a wild beast irritated by its keeper; and the two men were locked in a close embrace—a deadly struggle immediately commencing.

A mortal terror struck to the heart of Mrs. Mortimer, who knew full well that if her confederate should succumb, her own life would not be worth a moment’s purchase; and for upwards of a minute she stood rivetted to the spot, listening to the sounds of the conflict which she could not see.

Suddenly it struck her that she might aid her companion; and, taking from beneath her shawl a coil of rope with which she had intended to bind Torrens, whom she had made certain of subduing, she rushed to the scene of the struggle.

The gleam of light that reached that place, was sufficient, feeble though it were, to show her that Vitriol Bob had the advantage. He had succeeded in getting uppermost; and Jack Rily was struggling desperately underneath the man whose strength he had miscalculated. The conflict was thus progressing, accompanied by deep, low, but bitter execrations, when Mrs. Mortimer, whom a sense of danger suddenly restored to complete self-possession, threw a noose round Vitriol Bob’s neck, and instantly drew it tight,—exclaiming, as she performed this rapid and well-executed feat, “Courage, Rily,—courage: grasp him firmly—loosen not your hold!”

“Damnation!” ejaculated Vitriol Bob, the moment he felt the cord upon his neck and heard a strange female voice,—at the same time making a desperate—nay, almost superhuman effort to tear himself away from his foe and turn round on his new enemy.

But the woman drew the cord as tight as she could, and a sense of faintness came suddenly over the murderer,—so that Jack Rily was in another instant enabled to get uppermost once more.

“Tie his legs, old lady—and then we’ve nothing more to fear!” cried he, as he placed one knee on Vitriol Bob’s chest, and held the vanquished ruffian’s wrists firmly with the iron grasp of his sinewy hands. “Now, keep quiet, old fellow—or you’ll be strangled,” he continued, addressing himself to the wretch whose eyes glared savagely up at him even amidst the obscurity of the place: “It’s useless to resist—you are my prisoner,—and if it’s necessary to make you safer still, I’ll draw my clasp-knife across your throat—which I should be sorry to do, on account of old acquaintanceship.”

“What—what have I done to you—Jack—to—to deserve this?” gasped Vitriol Bob, half strangled with the noose, which, however, was now somewhat relaxed in consequence of Mrs. Mortimer being occupied in tying the other end of the rope round his ankles—a task which she performed with amazing skill and rapidity, and which, in consequence of Rily’s menaces, the vanquished one did not think it prudent to resist.

“I’ll tell you presently what you have done, Bob,” said the Doctor, in answer to the other’s query. “Now that you are bound neck and heels, you are not very formidable: nevertheless, I must just make your arms secure—and then we’ll hold a parley. Here, old lady—put your hand in the pocket on the right side of my coat, and give me out the cord you’ll find there. That’s right! Come—be steady, Bob—or I shall do you a mischief yet.”

The conqueror then proceeded to bind the wrists of the vanquished; and when this was done, he said, “Now, my fine fellow, I will just carry you into the kitchen; and if there is any brandy there, you shall have a drop to wash the dust out of your mouth.”

With these words, Jack Rily raised Vitriol Bob in his arms, and bore him into the kitchen, where he placed him on a chair; and the murderer now perceived for the first time that the female who had mainly contributed to his defeat, was the one whom himself and Torrens had robbed.

Jack Rily, on examining the bottle which he found upon the table, discovered that there was plenty of liquor left in it; and, filling a tumbler, he placed it to the lips of Vitriol Bob, who greedily swallowed the contents—for his throat was indeed parched with the dust raised by the late struggle and the semi-strangulation he had endured.

“Now, my hyena friend—my tiger-cat accomplice,” said the Doctor, turning towards Mrs. Mortimer, who, exhausted in mind and body, had sunk into a chair, “you will likewise partake of the stimulant. And mark you, madam,” he added, with deep emphasis, and in a tone that was particularly re-assuring to the old woman, “I owe you my life—and, whatever my intentions concerning you originally were, I can only now say that I’ll do all that’s fair and honourable towards you. But enough of that: so, drink!”

Mrs. Mortimer, greatly delighted at the result of the night’s expedition, smiled as cordially as her repulsive countenance would permit; but Jack Rily surveyed her with much admiration, for she reminded him at the moment of a pleased hyena after a copious meal. His satisfaction was enhanced by the readiness with which she tossed off the burning fluid; and, taking his turn with the brandy, he drank to her health.

“Now to business once more!” he exclaimed, as he set the glass upon the table. “And first, where’s the money, Bob?” he demanded turning towards the helpless ruffian, who sat moody and scowling in the chair in which be had been placed.

“I suppose you mean to let me have my reglars, Jack?” he said, in a tone which he endeavoured to render as conciliatory and agreeable as possible.

“Not a blessed halfpenny, Bob—and that’s flat,” responded the Doctor, as he plunged his hands into the pockets of his prisoner. “Ah! here’s the swag—and a precious heavy parcel it is too!” he exclaimed, after a few moments’ pause, and in a joyous tone. “My dear madam,” continued the villain, handing the brown paper packet to Mrs. Mortimer, “count it over—see that it’s right—and divide its contents equally. You may as well be satisfied at once that I mean to do what is right towards you—and then, may be, you will think seriously of the propriety of our clubbing our fortunes together, and setting up as a gentleman and lady living on our means—that is, you know, as Mr. and Mrs. Rily.”

All the latter portion of this long sentence was lost—entirely lost upon Mrs. Mortimer: for the moment that her hands grasped the brown paper parcel—that parcel which was so significantly weighty—her whole attention was absorbed in the task of examining its contents. She placed it upon the table; and, by the dim flickering light of the miserable candle, she counted the yellow pieces—turned over the soiled notes—and carefully reckoned up the whole,—exclaiming, at the completion of the business, “It is all right, save in respect to a single sovereign, which I dare say the rogues changed and spent directly. Here is your share, Mr. Rily—and I thank you much for your valuable aid.”

“You are the handsomest ogress I ever saw, when you appear gloating over the recovered gold,” said the Doctor. “If I could afford it, I would actually and positively give you my portion just to have the pleasure of contemplating your physiognomy while you fingered it. But perhaps we may have all things in common yet between you and me.”

Thus speaking, the ruffian secured his share of the spoil about his person—an example that was immediately followed by Mrs. Mortimer in respect to her division;—and all the while Vitriol Bob sate looking on with a countenance of the most demoniac ferocity. It was evident that, could the wretch release himself from his bonds, his rage would endow him with a strength calculated to give matters quite another turn: but he was helpless—powerless,—and this consciousness of his enthralled predicament only rendered his hatred the more savage against his successful enemies, and made his longings for revenge the more eager and also the more torturing on account of their unavailing intensity.

“I will now tell you, Bob,” said Jack Rily, turning towards him, “why I have played you this trick—and you will acknowledge that it is only tit for tat. You remember the swell’s crib we broke into at Peckham? Well—you found a bag containing a hundred and twenty sovereigns, in a drawer—and you never mentioned a word about it when we came to divide the plunder.”

“It’s a lie—a damned lie!” ejaculated the villain, ferociously.

“Say that again,” cried the Doctor, his hare-lip becoming absolutely white with rage, while the scar upon his cheek grew crimson,—“and I will cut your throat from ear to ear. How could I invent such a tale? But I saw the advertisement in the papers about the robbery—I read that a bag containing a hundred and twenty pounds in gold was abstracted from a chest of drawers—and I well remembered that you searched those drawers, and afterwards assured me there was nothing in them worth taking. I did not tell you that I had thus become aware of your treachery, because I resolved to be revenged some day or other. That day has now arrived—and you have the consolation of knowing that you have lost thousands in consequence of your beggarly meanness respecting a paltry sixty sovereigns, which was my share of the sum you kept back.”

“Well—’sposing it is all as you say, Jack,” exclaimed Vitriol Bob, assuming a humble and indeed abject tone,—“ain’t you more than even with me to-night? and won’t you let me have my reglars? We shall then be good friends again.”

“I do not mean to give you one farthing of my money—and I know this old lady won’t,” responded the Doctor. “As to our being friends again, I care not whether we become so, or whether we continue enemies. You can’t do me so much harm as I can you, Bob,” added Rily, in an impressive manner, and without a particle of his usual coarse jocularity: “for you have to-night done a deed that, if known, would send you to the scaffold.”

A deadly pallor passed over the countenance of the murderer; and he writhed in his chair with mingled rage and terror.

“Now, my old hyena,” exclaimed the doctor, turning towards Mrs. Mortimer, “I told you that you should have a good opportunity of seeing Vitriol Bob in all his hideousness. Which do you think is the ugliest of the two—he or me?”

And he grinned so horribly with his hare-lip and his gleaming teeth, that the old woman was for an instant appalled by the fiendish, malignant joy that caused his countenance thus to assume so frightful an expression.

“Well—you don’t like to pass an opinion upon the matter,” he said, with a chuckling laugh: “may be you think I am the ugliest of the two, and that it would hurt my feelings to tell me so. Lord bless you, my dear madam—a right down savage, ferocious, revolting ugliness is a splendid subject for admiration to my mind. The uglier people are—provided it’s the right sort of ugliness—the handsomer they are in my eyes. This may seem paradoxical—but it’s the truth; and it’s on that principle I am ready to marry you to-morrow, if you’ll have me. However—think upon it: there’s no hurry for your decision, my dear creature—pardon me for being so

familiar. And now I may as well tell you that it was not my original intention to let you have one penny piece of all that swag," he continued, after a few moments' pause. "I had purposed to make use of you in obtaining it—and then self-appropriate it; because I didn't look upon you in the light of a pal with whom it was necessary to keep faith. The moment, however, that you interfered in the struggle just now, the case became suddenly altered: you saved my life—and I wouldn't harm a hair of your head for all the world. So you are quite welcome to take your departure at once if you will: but I should esteem it a mark of confidence if you'd remain here with me a few hours longer—and I'll tell you why."

"Show me a good reason,and I shall not object," remarked Mrs. Mortimer, knowing that the man, in spite of his conciliatory observations, had the power to enforce, if he chose, what he seemed to ask as a favour.

"I will explain myself," resumed Jack Rily: then glancing towards Vitriol Bob, he said, "Our friend here must remain in that condition until I can send Pig-faced Poll to release him from his bonds. It would not be worth while to risk another conflict by taking on ourselves the part of liberators. His young woman shall therefore be entrusted with that agreeable duty: but as she is drunk in bed——"

Vitriol Bob uttered a sound resembling the savage but subdued growl of a wild beast.

“As she is drunk in bed,” repeated Jack Rily, with a chuckle, “she won’t be fit to undertake the task until it’s pretty near daylight; and it would not be safe to leave the poor devil alone here for so many hours. I don’t seek his death; but he might fall off his chair, tumble flat on his face, and not be able to right himself—for it’s by no means an easy thing to shift one’s position when bound neck and heels like that. So remain with him I must and will. His company will not, however, prove the most agreeable after all that has occurred betwixt us; and now you can guess why I ask you as a favour to stay with me—say till two o’clock, when we will take our departure and send Poll Calvert, who will be sufficiently sober by that time, to cut his cords.”

“I consent to remain here until two o’clock,” said Mrs. Mortimer: “only——”

And she glanced, with shuddering aversion, towards the door.

“Ah! I understand you, my dear tiger-cat,” exclaimed Jack Rily: “you don’t admire the presence of the stiff ’un there. Lord bless you! if you’d only been my wife when I was a doctor, you would have become familiar enough with articles of that kind—aye, and have thought nothing of shaking hands with a resurrection man. But it’s all habit; and so, since you would feel more comfortable if that bundle over there was moved, I’ll just drag it into the back kitchen—and our friend here will doubtless amuse himself by burying it to-morrow night.”

Having thus delivered himself with characteristic levity, the Doctor rose from the barrel whereon he had been seated, and taking up the candle, proceeded to transfer the dead body of Torrens from the threshold of the door into the back kitchen.

Mrs. Mortimer was now left in the company of the murderer, and in total darkness; and though she knew that he was bound beyond a chance of self-release, yet a cold shudder passed over her frame, as she thought of what would be the consequences were it possible for him to cast off the strong cords that restrained him.

Scarcely had this reflection entered her mine, when a voice—stealing, at it were, like the hiss of an invisible serpent through the utter darkness of the place—smote upon her ear.

“Madam—Mrs. Mortimer—loosen the cord—and I will give you half of what I shall then take from that villain Rily!” were the earnest, hastily uttered words that were thus suddenly whispered by the murderer.

The old woman was so startled that she could make no reply; and in another moment the light reappeared.

She mechanically cast her eyes towards Vitriol Bob; and the returning glimmer fell upon a countenance infuriate with rage, disappointment, and renewed spite;—but she did not think it worth while to mention to the Doctor the treacherous proposal that had been made to her during his temporary absence.

“I have put the corpse in the back kitchen,” said Rily, resuming his seat on the barrel: then, after a few moments’ pause, he observed, “This is the second murder that has been committed in this house.”

“The second!” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, suddenly animated with a feeling of morbid curiosity.

“Yes—the second,” repeated Rily. “What! did you never hear how these three houses came to be shut up, and why they are supposed to be haunted?”

“Never,” answered the old woman, her manner convincing the garrulous Mr. John Rily that she had no objection to be enlightened on the subject.

“Well—as it can’t be more than half-past eleven o’clock, and we have two hours and a half to pass away, according to agreement, in this place,” resumed the Doctor, “I don’t mind telling you the whole story. Our friend Bob here has heard it often enough, I dare say: but he will himself admit that it bears telling over and over again.”

Jack Rily paused for a few moments, and then commenced the promised narrative, which we shall, however, put into our own language, the semi-jocular and flippant style of the Doctor not being quite suited for so serious a history.

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

HISTORY OF THE HAUNTED HOUSES IN STAMFORD STREET.

Twenty-five years ago there were not three nicer looking houses in Stamford Street than those which are now so dilapidated and so wretched in appearance both outside and internally. The corner dwelling was inhabited by an old gentleman and his son. Their name was Mitchell; and a handsomer youth than Leonard, who at that period had just completed his twentieth year, was seldom to be met with. But it was not only on account of his prepossessing person, elegant manners, and great talents, that he was a general favourite: it was likewise in consequence of his admirable behaviour towards his father. Mr. Mitchell was for many years a partner in an eminent mercantile firm; but the sudden death of a beloved wife, who had long been suffering with a disease of the heart, and who one evening fell a corpse at her husband's feet after having appeared gay and cheerful a few minutes previously, produced such an effect upon him that he was thrown on a sick bed, whence he arose at the expiration of several months—palsied in all his limbs! Although he still retained possession of his intellect, yet his spirit appeared to be completely broken, and his energies were crushed. An arrangement was accordingly effected, by virtue of which he withdrew from the firm on condition of receiving four hundred pounds a year for the remainder of his life. These incidents occurred during Leonard's seventeenth year; and the affectionate youth immediately devoted himself to the duty of rendering his afflicted sire's existence as pleasing—or rather, as little burthensome as possible. His attentions were unremitting, and yet so delicately administered that the old man was not suffered to feel how completely dependent he was, for solace and comfort, on his only child. When the weather was fine, Leonard invariably had some excuse to induce his father to go out for a walk; and as he supported the arm of that tottering, feeble, trembling parent, he conversed in a gay and unrestrained manner, conjuring up those topics which he knew to be agreeable to the invalid, and never—never exhibiting the least impatience at being thus chained as it were to the side of the sufferer. Of an evening, the young man would read aloud those works which best suited his father's taste: or he would sit for hours playing at chess—a game of which Mr. Mitchell was particularly fond. When invited to a party, Leonard would at first promise to attend, so that his father might not perceive that he remained away entirely on his account: but the youth was always sure to have a convenient head-ache or to sprain his ankle, or adopt some other ingenious and equally venial little device, in order to have an apology for staying at home. Now and then his father would see through his motive, and insist upon him keeping his engagement,—in which case Leonard was always sure to leave long before the breaking-up of the party; and, on his return home, he would creep noiselessly to his father's chamber to assure himself, ere he proceeded to his own, that the old man was comfortable and wanted for nothing. In a word, the devotion of this youth to his afflicted sire was such that all who knew him beheld him with mingled admiration and respect: and even the giddiest and most thoughtless young men of his acquaintance could not bring themselves to joke or jeer him for that conduct which, in any other, they would have looked upon as a steadiness and sedateness carried to an extreme.

Next door to the Mitchells—that is to say, in the central of the three houses to which this narrative relates—dwelt Mr. Pomfret, who, by the secession of the paralysed old gentleman, had become the head of the firm, the business premises of which were in the City. Mr. Pomfret was likewise a widower, and likewise possessed an only child. Ellen Pomfret was a year younger than Leonard; and she was as beautiful as he was handsome. They had been acquainted from childhood; and the affection which in its origin was such as exists between a brother and a sister, by natural degrees ripened into a devoted and profoundly-rooted love. In the estimation of all who know them, there was a remarkable fitness in the union of this admirable pair: their style of beauty—their dispositions—their manners—their acquirements, were of a nature to adapt them for each other. They were both tall, slight, and gracefully formed: Ellen's hair was of a rich brown, scarcely a shade deeper than that of Leonard;—their foreheads were high and intellectual;—their eyes were of deep blue—hers more melting and tender than his, which were animated with the fire of a noble and generous spirit;—and never did man nor woman possess finer teeth than theirs. Both were fond of music and drawing: both were imbued with deep religious feelings, sincere and even enthusiastic—but utterly devoid of bigotry and uncharitableness;—and both loved virtue for its own sake. Faith with them was a delight and an inspiration encouraging fond hopes in respect to this world and confidence in the next,—a religion that knew naught of ascetic gloom, but that seemed to trace life's pathway amidst love, and perfume, and flowers!

Mrs. Pomfret had died when Ellen was about fourteen; and for the two following years the maiden was blessed with the companionship and counsels of a kind aunt, who, immediately after the decease of her sister, took up her abode in the house. But death snatched her away to the tomb shortly after the sixteenth birth-day of her niece, who was thus left alone as it were with her father. Mr. Pomfret, though a kind and well-meaning man originally, was not a prudent one. He had an over-weening confidence in his commercial abilities and financial foresight; and he was thus led into speculations from which his friends, had he condescended to consult them, would have dissuaded him. Many of these speculations he undertook on his own private account, and independently of the firm of which, as above described, he became the head; and his numerous affairs accordingly kept him much away from home. Ellen was therefore a great deal alone: for maidenly prudence prevented her from calling in next door as often as she could have desired, or as Leonard would have wished to see her. Still she did now and then pass an hour or two with Mr. Mitchell and his son, relieving the latter in his task of reading or his post at the chess-table. The old gentleman was deeply attached to Ellen Pomfret; and the

more so, inasmuch as it appeared to be a settled thing that the two families were to be closely united by means of the marriage of the young people. But no day was fixed for this event—nor indeed did the engagement appear to be more than a tacit one; for the reader must remember that at the time when we introduce the hero and heroine of this narrative, the former was only twenty years of age, and the latter nineteen.

The third house to which our present history especially refers, was inhabited by an old bachelor, who at the time alluded to was upwards of sixty. He was a fine man for his age—boasted that he had not yet taken to spectacles—and walked as upright and as rapidly as if he were twenty years younger. His rubicund countenance was the very picture of good-nature: and a very good-natured being he in reality was. But he was whimsical and eccentric to a degree; and, though very rich and proud of his elegantly furnished abode, he seldom invited a grown-up person to cross his threshold—much less to partake of his hospitality. But, on the other hand, he was devotedly attached to children; and his greatest delight was to assemble a dozen or so of his neighbours' little sons and daughters in his comfortable parlour or handsome drawing-room, and make them all as happy as he could. This was certainly a strange and most unusual predilection for an old bachelor to entertain;—but there are exceptions to all rules—and Mr. Gamble was a living proof of the dogma. He was wont to say that it did his heart good to behold rosy-cheeked, flaxen-haired, laughing-eyed children romping about him,—that it awakened blessed feelings in his soul to hear their merry shouts and witness their innocent mirth,—and that he fancied himself young again when presiding at the table around which he gathered them, and where he dispensed fruit, cake, sweet wine, and comfitures with no niggard hand. Be it understood, then, that—at least to our mind—Mr. Gamble was a most estimable character: for he who is fond of children cannot possibly be a bad man—whereas we have no confidence whatever in the individual who does *not* experience a lively interest in those endearing, artless little beings. Mr. Gamble did not consider it to be at all derogatory to his nature or his age, to join in the infantile sports which he loved so much to behold; and when the curtains were drawn and the door closed, he would even consent to become an active party to a game of blind-man's-buff, or allow himself to be converted for the nonce into a horse for the express behoof of some chubby urchin more bold in his requisitions than the rest.

Mr. Gamble was indeed quite a character. He used frequently to declare that he knew nothing more silly than to give dinner-parties. "Friendship is a very queer thing," he would say, "if it must be shown by my eating at another's expense, or by him coming to me to eat at mine. I would sooner spend ten pounds upon cakes and oranges for children who really enjoy them, than ten shillings on a repast for a grown-up person, who eats in your presence as if under the influence of a chilling ceremony." Relative to adults, therefore, Mr. Gamble neither gave nor accepted invitations: but twice or thrice a-week he congregated his little friends around him—and the more they romped, the better he was pleased,—the more noise they made, the higher did his spirits rise. If they injured his furniture, he cared not, provided it was the result of an accident: but if he once discovered a predilection to wilful destructiveness, or if he were made the butt of coarse rudeness instead of the object of innocent merriment, he never again invited the offender to his abode.

Considering that the habits of Mr. Gamble were such as we have taken some little trouble to describe them, it may easily be supposed that the neighbours were not a little astonished when it was rumoured, and ascertained to be a positive fact, that Mr. Pomfret had veritably and actually been invited to dine with that eccentric gentleman. This was alone enough to create an impression that a revolution had taken place in the opinions of the old bachelor: but the wonderment was excessive when it was reported, and likewise discovered to be true, that Mr. Gamble had dined in his turn with Mr. Pomfret. At first it was supposed that the cunning merchant was seeking to ensnare the wealthy bachelor into a marriage with the beautiful Ellen: but when it was remembered that she was engaged to Leonard, and moreover when it was ascertained that she had passed the evening at the Mitchell's on the occasion of the old bachelor dining with her father, the above-mentioned speculation was instantly discarded. That a revolution *had* taken place in the habits of Mr. Gamble, was however very certain: for as time wore on, after those first interchanges of civilities between him and Mr. Pomfret, their intimacy appeared to increase, and the parties given by the old bachelor to his juvenile friends grew less frequent. At length not a day passed without an interview occurring between Gamble and Pomfret: they were often closetted together for hours in the evening, when the latter returned home from the City; and the merchant was moreover frequently seen taking bundles of papers and correspondence into the other's house. It was therefore surmised that they were engaged together in some speculation: but if this were the case, it was kept very quiet—for even Ellen herself could give her lover Leonard no explanation relative to the causes of the intimacy that had sprung up so suddenly between her father and Mr. Gamble.

A conversation which we are about to record, will however throw some light upon the subject. It was about six months after the intimacy had commenced, that Mr. Pomfret returned home from the City at a later hour than usual, and with a countenance so pale and careworn, that he appeared to his affrighted daughter ten years older than when he quitted her in the morning. Ellen anxiously implored him to inform her if anything unpleasant had occurred: but he gave her a sharp reply in the negative—as much as to enjoin her to abstain from questioning him in future. The poor girl turned aside to conceal the tears that gushed from her eyes; and Mr. Pomfret, struck by the sudden conviction that he had behaved most harshly to his amiable daughter, exclaimed, "Forgive me, Ellen: but—to tell you the truth—I *have* received disagreeable intelligence in the City to-day; and it probably soured my temper for the moment. You are a good girl," he added, kissing the tearful countenance that was now upturned towards his own; "and I was wrong to speak unkindly to you. But let that pass: I shall have more command over myself another time."—"Pray do not dwell upon the subject, my dearest father," said Ellen. "Will you have dinner served up at once?"—"No, my love," was the answer: "I do not feel in any humour for eating. I meant to say," he added, hastily, but with some degree of confusion, "I dined in the City to-day. And now I shall just run in and see Mr. Gamble for an hour or two; and you can go and play a game of chess with Mr. Mitchell. I shall return to supper presently: so mind and be home again by half-past nine."—"You told me the day before yesterday, dear papa," said Ellen, "that the next time I called on Mr. Mitchell, I was to be sure and ask you for a cheque for the quarter's income due to him, and which has been standing over for nearly a fortnight."—"Oh! it does not matter this evening!" ejaculated Mr. Pomfret, impatiently: "besides, I have not time to sit down and fill up a cheque at present," he added, a sickly expression passing over his countenance, as if his heart were smitten

painfully within his breast. Then, without making another observation and in evident haste to avoid further parlance on the subject, the merchant threw on his hat and hurried next door. A sigh escaped from Ellen's gentle bosom—for she saw that there was some profound grief in the depths of her father's soul, and, anxious to escape from the distressing thoughts which such a conviction was only too well calculated to engender, she made the greater speed to dress herself for a visit to her neighbours.

We must for the present follow Mr. Pomfret, whom we shall overtake in Mr. Gamble's back-parlour, which was fitted up as a library, and contained a small but choice collection of books. The old bachelor was discussing some cool claret—for it was in the midst of a hot summer; and the moment the merchant made his appearance, he rang for another glass. Mr. Pomfret sank upon a seat, with the air of a man who is exhausted in mind and body; and when the servant had retired, he fixed his eyes intently on his friend's countenance, as he said in a low and solemn tone, "Gamble, I have dreadful news for you!"—"For which I am not altogether unprepared," returned the old bachelor, his countenance becoming serious—if not absolutely severe.—"How? what do you mean?" demanded Pomfret, the gloomy expression of his features giving way to one of profound astonishment.—"I mean," replied Mr. Gamble, now bending his gaze with unmistakeable sternness on his companion, "that for a week past I have had forced upon my mind the painful conviction that you were deceiving me."—"Deceiving you!" cried Mr. Pomfret, his cheek blanching, and his tall spare form trembling either with rage or guilt, it was not easy immediately to decide which.—"Yes: deceiving me, and most grossly deceiving me too!" exclaimed Mr. Gamble, striking the table violently with his clenched fist.—Mr. Pomfret fell back in his chair, aghast and speechless, like a man from whose countenance the visor of duplicity has been suddenly torn.—"You doubtless desire an explanation," resumed Mr. Gamble; "and you shall have it. Six months have elapsed, sir," he continued, his tone becoming reproachful rather than angry, "since I called at your counting-house in the City to receive the amount of a draught which had been forwarded to me from abroad by a gentleman to whom I advanced a certain sum many years ago, and which I had given up as lost. The sudden and most unexpected recovery of that amount somewhat renewed my confidence in human nature—a confidence not altogether destroyed, but long dormant in my breast. You remember that we began to converse upon commercial topics; and you finally stated that if I did not immediately require the sum I had called to receive, you knew how to lay it out for me in a safe quarter and at good interest. I accepted the proposal;—firstly, because the funds were so high at the moment that I did not choose to buy the money in—secondly, because we were neighbours, and had known each other, to speak to at least, for some years—and thirdly, because I was in a good humour with mankind at the moment. You were pleased, on your side; and when you wrote to me a few days afterwards to state that the money was invested according to the terms settled between us, I resolved to carry my good feeling still farther—and I asked you to dinner. Subsequently you returned the compliment; and I began to think that my long-sustained misanthropy was founded in error. This belief opened my heart still farther towards you: and when I came to know your amiable daughter, I felt convinced that all men and women were *not* deceivers. Such was the state of my mind—progressing from a morbid to a healthy condition—when you proposed certain speculations to me. I accepted them to a limited extent, and on particular terms. I advanced the moneys you required to carry out your designs; but I adopted the precaution to avoid anything like a partnership. And this I did *only* as a wise precaution—for I had tutored myself to place the utmost confidence in you. As time wore on, you constantly demanded fresh supplies—and I did not refuse them, so specious were your representations. But by degrees I began to entertain vague suspicions that everything was not as you would have me view it; and I latterly instituted inquiries. A week only has elapsed since I acquired the certainty that the larger portion of the money advanced by me to you was never laid out in the way and for the purposes represented by yourself; but that it has been employed to stop up gaps and supply deficiencies in your deeply-embarrassed establishment!"—"My God! this is but too true!" murmured the miserable Pomfret. "But you will be merciful towards a man who is reduced to despair?"—"I shall not harm you, sir: neither shall I expose you," returned Mr. Gamble, while the merchant's countenance somewhat brightened up at this assurance. "Perhaps, indeed," added the old bachelor, after a slight pause, "I may even save you yet."—"Save me!" echoed Pomfret. "Oh! no: that is impossible! I am so deeply involved that I owe three times as much as all you are likely to possess."—"I am not so sure of that, sir," returned Mr. Gamble, almost in a good-humoured tone: then, immediately resuming his former seriousness of voice, he said "It is not so much the less of my fourteen thousand pounds that I deplore: but it is that you have changed my habits, and I am not so happy as I was. The dealings that I had with men in my earlier years, made me mistrust them and taught me to look upon them with unvarying suspicion. Therefore was it that when I became rich enough to retire into private life, and more than rich enough for my purposes, I abjured the society of those whom the world had spoilt, and sought the society of those who were too young to be tainted by that world. I withdrew myself from the hot atmosphere breathed by men and women, and joyed in the freshness of the pure air in which frank, merry, artless, and sportive children dwelt. My heart, while closing towards one section of the human race, expanded towards another; and I have loved the infantine race as dearly—oh! as dearly as if I had been the father of a vast family. But when I renewed my intercourse with adults—that is to say, when I was tempted to join your society and that of the two or three gentlemen and ladies whom I have occasionally met at your house—I felt my love for that infantine race diminishing: or rather, their presence afforded me less delight and amusement. It is all this that I deplore; and the result has been that my home now seems lonely, and the time hangs heavily upon my hands. Nay, more: you have been the means of effecting that change in me which has made me selfish: and I feel capable even of sacrificing the happiness of another so long as I can in any way minister unto my own."—"I do not understand you," said Pomfret, fearful that these last words implied some vindictive allusion to himself.—"I will explain my meaning," replied Mr. Gamble. "You tell me that you are so deeply involved that rain stares you in the face!"—"I am so utterly denuded of resources at this moment," answered Pomfret, "that I cannot even pay the quarter's income due to my neighbour and late partner, Mr. Mitchell."—"And if you fail, that poor paralytic old man will be reduced to beggary?" said Gamble.—Pomfret covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Nay, more than all this," continued the old bachelor, after a long pause, during which he appeared to be sipping his claret complacently, but was in reality reflecting profoundly,—"more than all this, your partners will be utterly ruined; and they will curse you as the fatal cause of their dishonour and their penury. Your daughter, too, will become a portionless girl; and she will moan the follies of her father that reduced her from a state of comparative affluence to a condition of toil for a poor pittance. Lastly, that fine young man, Leonard Mitchell, will hate and abhor you as the individual who has made his father's last years wretched and

intolerable,and deprived the afflicted septuagenarian of the very necessaries of life. All these terrible things, Mr. Pomfret, will be accomplished on the day when your house stops payment"—"I know it, alas! too well!" exclaimed the unhappy, ruined merchant, clasping his hands together in deep agony.—"You are not so old by ten or a dozen years as I am," continued Mr. Gamble: "and yet it does me harm to see you thus reduced to despair. But let us not waste precious time. What is the amount that will save you from ruin?"—"I dare not name it," returned Pomfret—"This is foolish," exclaimed the old bachelor, severely: "come, answer me, or else let our interview terminate at once. Again I demand of you the amount that can prevent all the lamentable occurrences which I just now detailed?"-"Eighty thousand pounds," was the reply, delivered almost in a fit of desperation.

Mr. Gamble rose, opened his desk, and taking out some Bank securities, directed the merchant's attention to the sums specified in those documents. "Ninety-five thousand pounds!" cried Pomfret, astonished at these evidences of a wealth far greater than he had supposed the old bachelor to be possessed of—"You perceive," observed Mr. Gamble, returning the papers to his desk, and resuming his seat,—"you perceive that I am the master of means sufficient to save you from destruction. Indeed, I can spare the sum necessary, and even then have four hundred pounds a year left to live upon."—"But is it possible that you can even entertain the idea of assisting me to such an extent?" cried Mr. Pomfret, scarcely able to believe his own ears, and trembling lest he was indulging in a hope that had no other existence than in a dream.—"It is quite possible, sir," responded the old bachelor, piqued that his word should be questioned even for a moment: "and now it all depends upon yourself."—"Upon myself!" repeated Mr. Pomfret, again surveying his friend with mingled amazement and incredulity—"Yes: upon yourself," cried Mr. Gamble: "for the amount you require is at your service, provided you consent to accept me as your son-in-law!"—These words were delivered with a solemn seriousness of tone which forbade the suspicion that they were uttered jocularly; and so completely astounded was the merchant that several minutes elapsed before he could make any reply During that interval Mr. Gamble still appeared to sip his claret with calmness: but he was in reality awaiting with no small degree of anxiety the answer that would be given to his proposal.

"But do you love my daughter?" inquired Pomfret at length.—"I have already told you that I begin to feel lonely and cheerless," replied Mr. Gamble; "and, moreover, I am irresistibly attracted towards Miss Ellen. I may also say that I should feel proud and happy to ensure her an independence: at the same time, I am not endowed with sufficient philanthropy to induce me to save her father from ruin, except on the condition of receiving her as a wife. If my suit be refused, you are ruined; and will it in that case be prudent to permit her to espouse that young Mitchell, who will likewise be reduced to penury? It is clear that if she do not accept my offer, circumstances will effectually interpose a barrier between herself and Leonard; and thus, happen what will, she must renounce all hope of becoming his bride."—"And with the conviction that she *does* love Leonard Mitchell, would you accompany her to the altar?" inquired Mr. Pomfret.—"Assuredly," replied Mr. Gamble. "I have set my mind upon it, and will risk everything. She is young, and a first love is seldom more than a blaze of straw, ardent while it lasts, but speedily exhausted. When she comes to know me well, and to reflect that I have saved her father from ruin and dishonour,—when, too, she perceives all the delicate attentions with which I shall surround her, and the constancy of my endeavour to ensure her happiness,—she will yield to the new influences to which she will be thus subjected; and she will learn to look upon the old man with respect and veneration, with gratitude and kindly feelings, if not with love. The trial may be for the first few weeks severe; and there may be deep regrets following upon the disappointment of the vivid hopes now cherished in her bosom. But, believe me, she will at length succumb to the conviction that her happiness has been better consulted by the course chalked out for her by us, than by that into which the present state of her affections might impel her."—Pomfret was man of the world enough to know that all this was mere sophistry; though Gamble himself believed that he was arguing on the truest principles: but the merchant was better acquainted than the old bachelor with the female heart. Nevertheless, the temptation was irresistible to the man who hovered upon the verge of ruin: the feelings of the father were sacrificed to the anxieties of the merchant, who saw destruction staring him in the face;—and, grasping Gamble's hand, he said in a deep, impressive tone, "She is yours!"

In the meantime Ellen Pomfret, little suspecting how her destinies were being disposed of elsewhere, was passing a couple of hours with Mr. Mitchell and Leonard. The young man had noticed, the moment she entered their parlour, that her countenance was pale; and, with the eagle glance of a lover, he likewise discovered that she had been weeping. Burning with impatience to ascertain the cause of her grief, and not choosing to elicit an explanation in the presence of his father, for fear anything might transpire to give the old gentleman pain, as he was much attached to the young maiden, whom he looked upon as his intended daughter-in-law,—Leonard exclaimed, as soon as she had paid her respects to his parent, "You are just in time, Ellen, to help me to tie up a few new plants which I have purchased:"—and, taking her hand, he led her into the little garden at the back of the house. A very little garden it was, too: but Leonard had made the most of the circumscribed space; and he had in reality bought some choice flowers in the morning. It was not however to them that he now directed the lovely girl's attention; but the moment they stood in the enclosure, he took her hand, saying, "Ellen, dearest, you are unhappy this evening: pray tell me what has annoyed you?"—Miss Pomfret, who was ingenuousness itself, instantly related the scene that had taken place between herself and her father; and the tears again started from her eyes, as she remembered the harsh—almost brutal manner in which he had spoken to her. Leonard hastened to kiss those diamond drops away from the damask cheeks adown which they trickled; and he consoled her by observing that persons in business were liable to those annoyances that occasionally soured the temper and rendered them severe or hasty even to the very beings whom they loved the most. Leonard's powers of persuasion were omnipotent with Ellen; and she speedily sniffled through her tears. "And now," continued the young man, "I will give you a piece of intelligence that will, I hope, indemnify you, dearest, for the little vexation you have just experienced. My father has this day received a letter from an influential friend, stating that I may rely upon being nominated to a clerkship in a Government Office in the course of a month or six weeks."—Ellen expressed her delight at these news; and after the interchange of a few tender sentiments, the nature of which our readers can well divine, the youthful lovers returned to the parlour. There they sate and conversed with the old gentleman until the time-piece on the mantel indicated that it was twenty-five minutes past nine, when Ellen rose and took her departure, Leonard escorting her to the door of the adjoining house, where she dwelt.

Her father had returned about ten minutes previously. The curtains were drawn in the parlour—the lamp was lighted—and the supper was in readiness. The moment she entered the room, the beautiful girl cast an anxious look towards her sire, to gather from his countenance, if possible, whether his mind had become more composed: but she was shocked to perceive that his cheeks were ashy pale, and that a strange, ominous light gleamed in his restless, anxious eyes. She withdrew her gaze instantly, fearful lest he might observe that she noticed his peculiarity of manner and altered appearance; and, making some casual remark, she turned to lay aside her bonnet and also to conceal the tears that again started into her eyes. For Ellen was of an affectionate disposition, and loved her father tenderly, and it touched her heart to the very core to behold the traces of deep, deep care upon his countenance.

"You have seen Leonard this evening, Ellen?" said Mr. Pomfret, in a tone so hollow that it startled her: and she could scarcely compose herself sufficiently to murmur an affirmative.—"And do you love him very, very much?" asked the merchant, after a long pause.—"Oh! my dearest father," she exclaimed, "you know that I do! Have we not as it were been brought up together from childhood?"—"Yes, yes: it is natural," said Mr. Pomfret, bitterly: and he walked to the mantel-piece, turning his back towards his daughter, to hide the emotions that swelled his heart almost to bursting. But Ellen caught sight of his agonising countenance in the mirror; and, terribly excited, she sprang towards him and threw her arms around his neck, crying, "Oh! my dearest parent, some dreadful grief oppresses you! May I not share it? Can I not console you? Is there anything that I, poor weak girl that I am, can do to ease you of this load of sorrow?"—"Yes, Ellen," hastily responded her father, determined to come at once to an explanation with his daughter; for suspense and delay were intolerable. "You can do all, everything for me: my honour in your hands! 'Tis for you also to decide whether we shall be reduced to penury, or remain in affluence—whether that poor palsied old man next door shall continue to enjoy the comforts of life, or be plunged into destitution! In a word, Ellen, my very existence is in your hands; for I will not live to witness all the terrible afflictions that my accursed folly will have entailed upon ourselves, as well as upon others!"—Ellen was so taken by surprise as these alarming revelations burst upon her, that she started back in dismay, and surveyed her sire with a look of such passionate grief, that he himself grew affrighted in his turn; and hastily approaching her, he led her to a seat, saying, "For God's sake, compose yourself, Ellen: you have need of all your firmness now!"—With a frantic gesture she besought him to keep her no longer in suspense, but to tell her the worst at once.—"I will not torture you, my love," said the wretched man, standing like a culprit in her presence. "Know, then, that I hover on the brink of ruin. It is not that I think bankruptcy dishonourable: no—the most upright men are liable to misfortune and cannot control adversity. But, were I to fail, as I am now circumstanced, I could not save my name from indelible disgrace, nor my partners and the Mitchells likewise from ruin!"—Speechless with horror and amazement, the young girl gazed fixedly on her father as he spoke.—"But there are still means of saving me and the others also," he resumed, in a tone so broken that it indicated how difficult and how painful it was for him to give utterance to this prelude to an announcement which he knew must prove terrible indeed.—"And those means?" demanded Ellen, recovering the use of her own voice: for she saw that there was allusion to herself in her father's words.—"Nerve yourself, my poor girl, to hear something very shocking to your gentle heart," said Mr. Pomfret.—"I am nerved *now*," she replied, her features assuming the settled aspect of despair. "But the means?" she repeated, more impatiently.—"That you renounce Leonard Mitchell, and accept Mr. Gamble as your husband," said the wretched father, speaking with averted head. A shriek escaped Ellen's lips—and she started wildly from her seat: then, staggering forward a few paces, she fell into her parent's arms—not insensible, but sobbing convulsively. She had been prepared for some dreadful tidings: she was not, however, nerved to meet such a frightful destiny as that so suddenly offered to her contemplation;—and she felt as if she must sink under the blow. Mr. Pomfret bore her to the sofa; and, placing himself by her side, said all he could to console her:—no—not all he *could*—but all he *dared;*—for he had not courage enough to recall the words that had sealed her fate!

We must, however, draw a veil over this afflicting scene. Suffice it to say that the noble-minded girl eventually came to the determination to sacrifice herself for the sake of her father—yes, and for the sake of the palsied parent of her lover also! There is a crisis in misery that is in reality despair, although it may have the outward appearance of resignation: and this was the condition of the young lady, when she said to her father, "I will not prove a disobedient daughter. I therefore consent to renounce Leonard Mitchell, and to become the wife of him who demands my hand as the price of the succour which he is willing to afford you in this embarrassment." Mr. Pomfret embraced her with the most unfeigned ardour, and thanked her in the most touching terms for her devotedness; and, strange as it may perhaps appear, Ellen besought him that the sacrifice should be accomplished as speedily as possible. This is, however, invariably the case with a noble heart that resolves upon the immolation of its best affections: the maiden feared lest selfish considerations should arise from delay, to turn her from her purpose;—and she was anxious that her self-martyrdom should be performed heroically and with a good grace. But, oh! in one short hour how changed was her pure soul: how bitter—how intense was now the disappointment that succeeded the golden dream she had cherished;—how stern, and bleak, and cheerless seemed that world on which she had lately looked as on a fair and sunny landscape, fragrant with flowers and beautiful with verdure. Yes—gloomy indeed is the earth, and worthless is existence, when viewed through the same mirror which reflects the heart's ruined hopes and blighted affections!

But who was to break the news to Leonard Mitchell? Ellen was not equal to that task: indeed, she dared not see him. She felt that if she were to gaze again upon his handsome countenance—if she were to read despair in his eloquent eyes and listen to the passionate accents of his melodious though manly voice, appealing to her against the stern resolve to which circumstances had impelled her,—she felt, we say, that she should yield, and that by so yielding she should fix her parent's doom. Mr. Pomfret therefore took upon himself the mournful task of imparting to the young man the disappointment that awaited him; and this was done the morning after the incidents which we have just described. The merchant threw himself upon Leonard's mercy, invoking him by all he deemed sacred not to seek to see his daughter nor dissuade her by letter from her holy purpose of self-devotion. At first the impetuosity of youth rendered the lover deaf to all reason and to all entreaties: but by degrees he appeared to receive a kind of chivalrous inspiration from the heroic example of her whom he adored; and he awoke to the necessity of consenting to that dreadful sacrifice, if only that his sire should not want bread in his helpless old age. He however begged that Mr. Mitchell might be kept in the dark relative to all these occurrences,

until Ellen should have become the wife of Mr. Gamble—when it would be too late to recall the sacrifice, and useless to repine against it. Moreover, Leonard resolved to break the news so gradiently to his father, that the effect of the blow occasioned by a son's deep disappointment might be as much mitigated as possible; and to these proposals Mr. Pomfret was only too willing to assent. And now, as another proof of Leonard's devotedness to his afflicted sire, must be mentioned the fact that, though bearing in his bosom a heart wrung almost to breaking, he still maintained a calm exterior; and during the week which elapsed ere Ellen became the wife of Mr. Gamble, Mr. Mitchell beheld nothing strange nor suspicious in his son's manner.

And at the expiration of that week, the sacrifice was consummated. The marriage was solemnised by special license, and with great privacy; and it was not known in Stamford-street until a late hour on the wedding-day that such an extraordinary alliance had taken place. By that time the victim-bride was far away from London—seated by the side of her old husband in the post-chaise that was bearing them to some country-place where they were to pass the honeymoon. Mr. Pomfret had received the price stipulated for his daughter; and his honour—his commercial honour, we mean—was saved! Alas! how many marriages of this unnatural kind are constantly taking place in this civilised—this enlightened—this Bible-reading—this moral country!—how many fair young maidens are purchased by old men's gold, the performance of the religious ceremony only adding a hideous mockery to a flagrant injustice! And yet how shocked are those mercenary fathers and match-making mothers who thus sacrifice their daughters' pure affections to the most selfish interests—how shocked, we say, are they when they read that there are countries in the world where men buy their wives outright! Oh! ye Exeter Hall Saints, who send forth missionaries to christianise the heathen amongst whom such barter or purchase prevails, have ye nothing to reform at home? Is the Mussulman who buys his Circassian or his Georgian wife in a slave-market more reprehensible than the tottering old lord or the nabob with his liver eaten away, who purchases an English, a Scotch, or an Irish beauty in the market of West End Fashion? Go, ye Exeter Hall Saints, into that sphere where all is glitter outside and hollowness of heart within, and count the many titled or wealthy septuagenaries to whose corpse-like side fresh and blooming girls of nineteen and twenty are bound by marriage-ties! Are such alliances founded upon those holy affections which God has implanted in the human breast?—or are they proofs of the rebellion which selfish interests consummate against nature's laws and heaven's own divine promptings? But if we direct our attention to that sphere wherein the industrious millions struggle with starvation, oppression, and wrong, do we find such instances of outrage against all that is natural, moral, and just? Do we discover the agricultural labourer or the mechanic of seventy with a wife of nineteen? Out of a hundred marriages in humble life, there is not more than one such case. And yet the aristocratic, the wealthy, and the great are ever declaiming upon the immorality of the poor! Immorality indeed! 'Tis you, ye aristocrats, who are in reality demoralised: 'tis you, ye oppressors, who would stand a far better chance of winning a place in heaven, were ye to imitate the humble virtues of the oppressed! Oh! the soul sickens at the idea that a lazy, insolent, intolerant oligarchy should be permitted to heap so much abuse upon the toiling, starving, deeply-wronged millions!

But to return to the thread of our narrative. It was in the evening of the day on which Ellen became the wife of Mr. Gamble, that Mr. Mitchell was seated at the open window of his front parlour, a wire-blind enabling him to note all that passed in the street, but preventing persons outside from seeing into the room. Leonard was sitting near him, and racking his brain for the best means to commence a conversation to which he might give such a turn as to enable him to break the news of the day to his father. But every time the young man prepared to speak, his heart's emotions rose as if to suffocate him; and at last he was obliged to hurry from the parlour and seek his own chamber in order to give free vent to feelings that could no longer be restrained. Scarcely had he left the room, when two gentlemen—dwellers in Stamford Street—encountered each other precisely opposite the Mitchells' window; and after the usual greetings, one said: "I am just going to call upon our mutual friend Mr. Pomfret, to congratulate him."—"Congratulate him!" exclaimed the other: "upon what event?"—"On the marriage of his daughter with the wealthy Mr. Gamble," was the reply. "What! you have not heard of it? Oh! It is quite true, I can assure you. The ceremony took place this morning: I have the fact from the clergyman's own lips."—"But I thought that Miss Pomfret was engaged to Leonard Mitchell?" observed the other gentleman, evidently much amazed by the intelligence he had just received.—"Hush!" said the first speaker, glancing significantly towards the open window; and, taking his friend's arm, he drew him a few paces farther on. But had they stayed to enter into further explanations, it would have been all the same: the conviction that his unhappy son had sustained a most frightful blow to his happiness, burst upon the mind of the wretched father like a tornado on a traveller in the desert; and when Leonard returned to the room, he found the old man a corpse in his chair!

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF THE HAUNTED HOUSES.

Three years had elapsed since the occurrences just related; and it was on a fine summer afternoon that a tall, handsome young soldier, in the graceful undress of a private in a dragoon regiment, was walking down Regent Street. His countenance was somewhat sunburnt; but there was about him such an air of gentility that, even had he been far less good-looking than he really was, it would have been impossible to pass him by with indifference. His figure was slight, but admirably formed and well knit: his legs were straight as a dart; and he carried his arms with that gentle rounding which is so compatible with military grace. His whiskers were small, but curling and glossy; and the slight moustache that he wore was quite sufficient to turn the head of any giddy girl—the more so that, as his lips were always kept the least thing apart, that fringe set off his fine teeth to greater advantage. His rich brown hair, worn short according to the regulation, stood out in small but natural curls from beneath his undress cap; and the somewhat darkly pencilled brows arched above eyes of deep blue, and in which there was a melancholy expression that did not however deteriorate from the masculine beauty of his person. His uniform was scrupulously neat: his boots well polished; his buckskin gloves white as snow;—and did he remove those gloves, his hands appeared to be almost as delicate in complexion as a lady's. In a word he was the very *beau ideal* of a soldier; and nature's stamp of aristocracy was upon him:—yet was he only a private—a humble private in his regiment!

We said that the day was remarkably fine; and it was at that hour when the fashionable world goes forth to while away the time until dinner. Regent Street was thronged with gay equipages filled with elegantly dressed ladies, and attended by domestics in gaudy liveries; and the footways were likewise crowded, but with a mere miscellaneous company. For when the daughters of fashion appear abroad in the afternoon, the daughters of crime likewise come forth; and yet we doubt whether the immorality that walks the pavement is so much greater than that which rides in carriages as the world generally supposes. Behold that magnificent equipage wherein the elderly dowager and the beauteous young girl of seventeen or eighteen are seated: it stops at the door of a fashionable linen-draper's, and the dowager leans heavily on the arm of the tall, handsome footman who hands her out, while the young lady throws a rapid but significant glance at the slim, graceful page who has likewise dismounted from behind the vehicle. Or again, behold that gentleman on horseback, moving leisurely along, and gazing intently at each carriage which approaches down the wide avenue: at length he recognises the equipage which he is so anxiously expecting—and, riding up, he exchanges a few words with the fair creature who is its sole occupant. A day, an hour, and a place are named for an appointment of even a far less innocent nature than this one; and the lover passes on with triumph in his heart, while the carriage whirls away the titled lady who has already assented to a step that must lead to the dishonour of her husband. Again, behold the splendid chariot, with a coronet on the panel, and in which three beauteous girls with their maternal parent—herself a fine woman—are seated. Would you believe that care was harboured in hearts where smiles appear on radiant countenances? And yet, the eldest of those sisters is a prey to a mortal apprehension: she has been frail—weak—the victim of her own strong desires and the opportunity afforded by some handsome, but obscure and ineligible lover; and now she dreads lest a few months should betray her unchastity and ruin her for ever. But we have not leisure to extend this picture:—we must return to the handsome dragoon who is walking, in a leisurely but somewhat thoughtful manner, down Regent Street.

And wherefore was he thus partially pensive? Because nearly three years had elapsed since he had last seen London, and his return to the capital revived a thousand reflections which were indeed sufficient to touch his heart painfully. He thought of his early youth—the hopes which he had cherished when the future was bright before him—the crushing disappointments and accumulated miseries that had suddenly fallen upon his head—and his present position, so different from what it ought to be. Yes—and he thought, too, of *one* whom he had loved so fondly—oh! so fondly, that his passion was a worship—an idolatry, and whose image was indelibly impressed upon his soul. Time had taught him the necessity of resignation to a lot which he could not alter—a fate which he could not change—a destiny which he could not subdue: and though that same resignation, aided by the faith of a sincere Christian and a firm reliance on Him who disposeth of all things, had deprived his anguish of its sting and blunted the iron that had entered into his soul—there were, nevertheless, moments when the cloud came over the handsome countenance, and the soldier's heart swelled almost to bursting. And this was now the state of his mind as he passed along the fashionable quarter of that metropolis where he had arrived with his regiment only the evening before. He had no particular aim in view—he was not on his way to see any friends: the only being on the face of the earth in whom he felt interested, was she whom he had once loved so devotedly—whom he still loved with the mellowed and almost embittered affection of disappointment—and whom he dared not inquire after, much less venture to visit. His return to the capital had unsettled him: he felt no inclination to remain in the barracks and pursue his favourite recreation of reading—and he had therefore walked abroad in the hope of diverting his mind from the unpleasant thoughts that intruded upon it.

The handsome dragoon had just entered the arcade of the Quadrant, when he was suddenly struck as if by paralysis—or as it were with a violent blow dealt by an invisible hand: he stopped short—then staggered back a few paces—and leant against one of the pillars for support,—his countenance the while denoting the most intense emotions. For, issuing from a shop, were two persons both of whom he instantaneously recognised, but on one of whom his eyes became rivetted as if by enchantment. Yes:—there was Ellen—the Ellen whom he had loved—whom he still loved—leaning on the arm of her old husband—that man who had robbed *him*—Leonard Mitchell—of the object of such a fervent and undying affection! But neither the lady herself nor Mr. Gamble observed the young soldier: for, on issuing from the shop, they passed down the Quadrant; and thus their backs were almost immediately turned upon him. Recovering his presence of mind, and passing his hand hastily across his brow, as if to tear away a mist that hung upon his eyes, Leonard Mitchell—for he indeed was the handsome young dragoon—was already pushing his way amidst the crowd and hurrying after Ellen, when the thought flashed, like blasting lightning, to his soul, that she was an elegantly dressed lady, leaning on the arm of a husband who was evidently a gentleman of substance—and *he* was a common soldier! Oh! never—never were the accursed class-distinctions of an artificial state of society felt so bitterly as on the present occasion. Not that Leonard mistrusted Ellen's heart—not that he feared of experiencing a cold reception from one of her generous nature: but a sense of propriety—a deep conviction of what was due, under circumstances, to herself and her husband, caused him suddenly to stop short;—then, in obedience to the new impulse which was received from this revulsion of his feelings, he turned abruptly from the Quadrant into one of those streets that stretch towards the district of Golden Square.

Walking on, like one intoxicated, and with eyes that saw nothing—as if all the powers of vision, physical and mental, were absorbed in the necessity of internal contemplation—the young man felt as if he were going mad. There was a fearful hurry in his brain; and yet, palpable and distinct, as it were, in his heart was the image that for years had been there, but each feature—each lineament of which had suddenly received the most vivid colourings of revival. She was beautiful as ever—more beautiful, if possible, in the glory of her womanhood; and, although her countenance was somewhat pale and had a melancholy—yes, a very melancholy expression—this only added to her charms, in his estimation, by rendering her the more interesting. By degrees, his thoughts grew more settled—the whirlwind that raged in his brain, abated in violence; and suddenly there sprang up in his soul a feeling of pleasure at the idea that her features wore that shade of mournfulness. For, oh! there could be no doubt as to the cause: she was unhappy—unhappy on account of him! She had not, then, forgotten him—she remembered their youthful loves: perhaps he was still dear to her? That thought became more delightful, as it seemed more consistent with probability; and now *he* was not altogether so thoroughly devoid of hope—so profoundly a prey to black despair, as he had been a few minutes previously. Hope, indeed! what could he hope? He knew not—he did not immediately pause to ask himself the question: but he abandoned himself to the delicious reverie into which the altered current of his thoughts thus madly hurried him. When he awoke, as it were, from this day-dream, he was astonished to find that it had lasted so long, and without interruption: for, while wrapped up in that vision, he had threaded many streets—accomplished a considerable distance—and was now close to the toll-gate of Waterloo Bridge. Entering upon that mighty viaduct, he seated himself in one of the recesses, and again gave way to the meditations which the incident of the afternoon had conjured up.

But how was it that Leonard Mitchell had taken the direction of Waterloo Bridge, in that species of somnambulism under which he had been labouring? Because it was the way to Stamford Street; and, in his walking reverie, an irresistible impulse had influenced his footsteps, even while he appeared to be proceeding at random. And what now was the nature of his reflections? He experienced an ardent longing to cross the bridge—to enter Stamford Street—and to behold once more the house where all his early years were passed: yes—and to behold also the dwelling of her whom he loved! But did he know that Mr. and Mrs. Gamble still resided in Stamford Street? He was completely ignorant on the subject; and an ardent curiosity impelled him to clear up the point in question. Still he hesitated: amidst all the feelings by which he was now animated, and the longings by which he was prompted, a sense of duty rose up in his mind,—of duty towards her whom he loved,—towards her husband—and towards himself. Why should he incur the risk of meeting her, and perhaps unsettling her studied attempts at unmixed devotion to him whose name she bore?—why should he do aught that might arouse the suspicion or excite the jealousy of the old man who doubtless treasured his young wife as a peerless jewel?—and why should he resuscitate all his own griefs and sorrows, by an encounter with one who was lost to him perhaps for ever? These questions did he ask himself over and over again: they were the basis of the reasoning which he held with his own heart—his own soul—in order to crush the promptings that urged him towards the scene of past and happier days. Alas! with all his natural rectitude of

principle—with all his generosity of disposition—with all his honourable feelings, Leonard Mitchell was but a poor weak mortal, like the rest of us;—and while still arguing with himself, he was traversing the bridge—he was directing his way towards Stamford Street!

As he drew nearer to the end of the long thoroughfare—that end which joins the Blackfriars Road—he relaxed his speed; and though his pace was slower, his heart beat more rapidly. At length he came within sight of the three corner houses: he paused—he stopped—heaven alone knows how acute were the emotions that agitated within him then! Again he moved onward—he called all his courage, all his presence of mind to his aid;—and now he passed by Mr. Gamble's house. Irresistibly he glanced towards the window: his eyes met those of Ellen;—and he heard the faint scream of astonishment that burst from her lips! But the beauteous countenance had disappeared: had she, then, fainted? No—her feelings had doubtless overcome her for a few moments;—but she speedily recovered—she reappeared at the window—and a rapid sign conveyed to him the intimation that she would come forth and join him presently. All this passed so quickly as to be unobserved by any of the neighbours; although it is probable that had ten thousand pairs of eyes been rivetted on the house, Ellen would have not acted differently—for she saw no one save him of whom she had heard nothing for three long years. Leonard, half intoxicated with joy at the signal that had been made by her fair hand, and aided in its interpretation by the expression of her countenance,—scarcely believing, however, that such happiness could indeed await him—and not pausing for a single instant to ask himself whether he were acting well or even prudently—Leonard, we say, passed on. The central of the three houses was still occupied by Mr. Pomfret; for his name was on the brass-plate on the front-door:—but the corner house—the house where Leonard had dwelt so many years, and where his revered father had died in so sudden and awful a manner—was shut up, a board intimating that it was to let. The young soldier had not, however, many minutes' leisure to reflect upon the scenes of past days; for, aware that Ellen could not prudently join him within a few yards of her own door, he crossed the Blackfriars Road, and loitered at the corner of Holland Street. In a short time he beheld her approaching: she saw him—she followed the direction which he took;—and he proceeded farther down the comparatively secluded place which he had deemed most fitting for this interview. At length he halted; and in another minute his heart's idol was by his side. She had purposely put on a cottage-bonnet and a plain shawl;—and thus the few people who passed saw nothing very remarkable in a modestly dressed female in company with a private dragoon.

But even if they had attracted disagreeable notice, what was it to them who had now no thought—no eyes—no ears save for each other? Without a word at first—but after a brief though earnest pressure of the hand—Leonard gave the young lady his arm; and they passed along Holland Street. A few low, but anxious inquiries were rapidly interchanged, and as speedily answered;—but frequent, long, and tender were the looks they fixed upon each other. A few minutes' walk brought them to Southwark Bridge, to which they ascended; and when seated in one of the recesses of that almost entirely deserted viaduct, the restraint under which they had hitherto laboured was immediately thrown aside.

"At length we meet again, Ellen," said Leonard, taking her hand and retaining it in his own, while he gazed fondly upon her.—"Yes," she replied, murmuringly, and holding down her blushing countenance: "but do you think the worse of me, because, yielding to a sudden and irresistible impulse, and availing myself of my husband's temporary absence, I thus stole forth to meet you—to hear from your own lips that you are happy?"—"Happy!" repeated Leonard, bitterly: then, unwilling to cause her additional pain, for his ejaculation had already brought the diamond-tears to her violet eyes, he said, "How can I think the worse of you, Ellen, when you come forth as a sister to pass a few minutes with a brother who can not, dares not visit you at your own abode? But rather let me ask, whether *you*, Ellen, are happy?"—The young lady endeavoured to give utterance to a reply: but, overpowered by her emotions, she burst into an agony of weeping. Unable to restrain his own feelings any longer, Leonard caught her in his arms, strained her to his breast and imprinted a thousand kisses upon her moist lips and her tear-bedewed cheeks: for no eye, save that of God, beheld them at this moment. Several minutes passed ere either could recover the faculty of speech; and then they spoke so low—so feelingly—and in such accents of deep, deep sorrow, that it was easy for each to perceive that the love of the other had not become impaired by time, separation, or circumstances.—"You were wrong, oh! you were very wrong, Leonard," said Ellen, "to abandon your home and your friends, the moment after your father's funeral. It is true that you did not leave us altogether in uncertainty and suspense relative to your fate—that you left for me a note acquainting me with your determination to enlist and earn your bread honourably! But, oh! wherefore have adopted that distressing alternative?"—"Can you not understand my feelings, Ellen?" asked the young man, almost reproachfully. "My father's death left me without interest to obtain the situation that had been promised to me through him; and his income likewise perished with him. I had no claim upon Mr. Pomfret: neither would I have accepted eleemosynary assistance. What could I do? I disposed of the furniture to pay off the few debts owing by my father and the expenses of the funeral; and I made all my arrangements with as much haste as possible, in order to be able to leave that once happy neighbourhood before you and—and—your husband should return to it. I then repaired to Hounslow, and enlisted. Yesterday my regiment was ordered to London; and within a few hours of my arrival, I experience the happiness—the indescribable happiness of thus encountering you. And now, Ellen, let us think—or, at all events, let us talk no more of the past. I cannot bear to look back upon it. But, my God!" he exclaimed passionately, and suddenly interrupting himself: "wherefore should I dread to retrospect, since the happiness of the present is only transitory, and there is no hope for the future?"—Thus speaking, the young man covered his face with his hands and moaned audibly.

"Oh! this is dreadful!" exclaimed Ellen, with accents of despair. "Leonard! I implore you not to give way to affliction thus. Listen to me, my beloved one—for you are as dearly and as fondly loved as ever; and I hesitate not to give you that assurance."—"Oh! is it possible? can I believe my ears?" cried the young dragoon, now turning upon the lady a countenance suddenly lighting up with the animation of indescribable joy and bliss, as the rays of the setting sun played upon those handsome features. "But you forget," he said, after a brief pause, and with a cloud again appearing upon his face, "that you are the wife of another?"—"Then it is you who love me not!" exclaimed Ellen, in a tone of disappointment and reproach.—"Not love you!" repeated Leonard: "Oh! how cruel of you thus to speak!"—and again snatching her to his bosom, he covered her lips and cheeks with kisses—kisses which she as fondly and as passionately returned. "Yes: Ellen, you know that I love and adore you!" he added in a voice of the tenderest sincerity.—"And I am not

ashamed, Leonard, to give you a reciprocal assurance," said the young wife of another. "Oh! wherefore should I attempt to restrain my natural feelings? Believe me that I am much changed since last we met: I no longer see things in the same light. For, to speak candidly, I have a deep conviction of the disgrace of having been sold and bought for that dross which men so much prize. I cannot help the thoughts that steal upon me; and therefore it is that I have long ceased to look upon my father with respect. I feel that he sacrificed me —me, his only daughter, whom he might have made so happy! I feel also that he who is my husband hesitated not to immolate the hopes of my youth to his own selfishness. These are sad—nay, terrible thoughts, Leonard: but I again assure you that I cannot combat against them. It is true that my father is now rich and prosperous, and that he sometimes thanks me as the authoress of his fortunes: true also is it that my husband treats me with the utmost kindness. But never—never ought I to have been placed in the position to receive such thanks from the one, nor such kindness from the other: for, between them, they have wrecked my happiness, blighted my hopes, ruined all my youthful dreams of felicity. There are times, then, when I feel as if it would be a relief to fly from the neighbourhood of a father whom I am almost compelled to look upon as an enemy, and from the arms of a husband who is loathsome to me!"—As she uttered these last words, in a low tone but with a bitter emphasis, Ellen bent her countenance—her burning countenance—over her lover's hand, which she pressed to her lips.—"Then you would fly with me even now, dearest," he said, in a voice rendered tremulous by indescribable emotions, "did circumstances permit me to accompany you?"—Ellen made no verbal answer; but the rapturous manner in which she again pressed his hand to her rich, red mouth was a sufficiently significant response —"Alas! that may not be," resumed Leonard mournfully; and now the young lady absolutely shuddered in his arms, as if an ice-chill had suddenly fallen upon a heart an instant before so warm with passion. "No—that may not be," continued Leonard, determined not to leave her in the least degree of suspense. "Behold this uniform—a uniform which is accursed under all circumstances, not only on account of the soul-crushing, merciless discipline and degrading servitude of which it is the badge, but also because it constitutes the barrier to the wishes which you so generously intimated and which I so enthusiastically share."—"But your discharge can be purchased, can it not?" asked Ellen, bending down her head to conceal her deep blushes.—"When I enlisted, Ellen," solemnly and mournfully replied Leonard, "I swore within myself an oath—an oath ratified by all I deem sacred in heaven and by all my hopes of an hereafter—to follow the course of this new destiny which I carved out for myself, and, if possible, to rise to distinction in this service which I dare not quit. I was young when I made that vow; and the hope which dictated it never will be fulfilled;—for the English soldier is a serf—a slave; and the idea of rising—ha! ha!"—and Leonard laughed wildly. "At all events," he added hastily, and again assuming a solemn tone, "I respect the oath that I took; and you, who love me, will not counsel me to break it. But we can see each other often, Ellen—we can meet, as we have met to-night——."—"Then with that assurance must I content myself, Leonard!" interrupted the impassioned young lady, in whom, as the reader may have surmised, the hand of affliction, the tyranny of a parent, and the selfishness of the old man who bought her with his gold, had deadened those delicate feelings and even undermined the virtuous principles which had characterised her in her days of happy innocence.—"Yes," returned Leonard, "with that understanding must we endeavour to console ourselves! And now, my beloved one, it is time for me to leave you: remember," he added bitterly, "that though a man in years, I belong to a service where I am treated as a child and limited to particular hours."—"Would to God that you were emancipated from this dreadful thraldom!" exclaimed Ellen, weeping.—"Nay, I was wrong to say aught to afflict you," returned Leonard, embracing her tenderly. A few minutes more did they pass together, exchanging the most passionate caresses and earnest protestations of unalterable affection; and when they separated at last, it was not without having arranged for another meeting at an early day.

It would be scarcely possible to describe the feelings which animated the young lovers as they respectively hastened to their abodes—the one to his barracks, the other to her home. As we have before stated, circumstances had so warped Ellen's mind, that she paused not even to reflect for an instant upon the dangerous course on which she had entered: she had no longer any ties to bind her with filial love to her father—and she never had any bond of affection to link her to her husband. Therefore all she now thought of, or cared to think of, was that she had recovered a lover whom she adored; and she would have ridiculed and laughed at the idea of disgrace and of a ruined reputation, had any friend counselled her in the matter. On his side, Leonard was less hardened—for such indeed is the term which might be applied to Ellen's state of mind—to the consequences of this new phase of his existence. He shuddered at the thought of inducing a young wife to conduct herself in a manner so injurious to her husband's happiness; and he resolved, in his calmer moments, that when he met Ellen again, according to the appointment already arranged, he would represent to her the necessity of their eternal separation. But when they did meet, and in a secluded place, she appeared so ravishingly beautiful, and spoke with so much tenderness, and seemed so completely happy in his society, and was withal so unfeignedly loving, that he could not bring himself to give utterance to the words that trembled upon his tongue—words that would have chased away those charming smiles, dimmed with tears the lustre of those melting eyes, hushed with sighs that language of fervid passion, and changed to dark despair all that bright and glowing bliss. Therefore they separated a second time with an arrangement to meet again:—and on the occasion of the third interview Leonard found himself less disposed than before to make a representation which would be fatal to the happiness of both. To be brief, interview succeeded interview, Leonard resolving that each one should be the last,—until at length love's dalliance became irresistible in its consequences; and, opportunity serving in all respects, the lovers were criminal! From that day forth Leonard thought no more of the impropriety of their meetings, which thereafter grew more frequent and longer in duration.

We shall here interrupt the thread of our narrative for a brief space, in order to make a few observations upon the condition of the private soldier. And, in the first instance, let us record our conviction that there is not a more generous-hearted, a nobler-minded, or a more humane set of men breathing than those who constitute the ranks of the British Army; while there is not a more tyrannical, overbearing, illiberal, and self-sufficient class than that composed of the officers of this army. But how is the latter fact to be accounted for? Because the Army is the mere plaything of the Aristocracy—a means of providing for the younger sons of noblemen, and enabling titled mammas to show off their striplings in red coats. What opinion can we have of the constitution of the army, so far as the officers are concerned, when we find Prince Albert suddenly created a Field-Marshal![18] Such a spectacle is nauseating in the extreme; and the German must have execrably bad taste, or else be endowed with inordinate conceit, to hold the *baton* of a Marshal when he has not

even the military knowledge of a drummer-boy. Since the Army is thus made a mere tool in the hands of a rascally Aristocracy, what sympathy can possibly exist between the officers and the men? The former look upon the latter as the scum of the earth—mere slaves on a level with shoe-blacks; and hence the barbarous cry of "Flog! flog! flog!" But there is no love lost between the classes: for the soldiers hate and abhor their officers, whom they naturally and most justly look upon as their tyrants and oppressors. It is enough to make the blood boil with indignation to think that those fine, stalwart, gallant fellows should be kicked about at the caprice of a wretched ensign or contemptible cornet just loosened from his mamma's apron-strings,—or bullied by older officers whose only "excellence" is their relationship to nobility, and their power to obtain promotion *by purchase*. The generality of the officers in the British Army are nothing more nor less than a set of purse-proud bloodhounds, whose greatest delight is to behold the blood streaming down the backs of those men who alone win their country's battles. When the Duke of York (who was a humane man, though as great a scamp as ever had a COLUMN OF INFAMY erected to his memory) limited corporal punishment to 300 lashes, the full amount was invariably inflicted in nineteen out of twenty cases: but even this would not satisfy the bloodhounds, who annoyed and pestered the Duke on the subject to such an extent that he was literally bullied into empowering them to hold General Regimental Courts-Martial, by whose decision 500 lashes might be administered to the unhappy victim. For years and years was the torture of military flogging in England a shame and a scandal to all Europe; and it was absolutely necessary that a fine fellow should be *murdered* at Hounslow by the accursed lash, before the barbarous Government would interfere. All the world knows that a BRITISH SOLDIER *was murdered* in this revolting manner, and in the presence of his horror-stricken comrades: for be it remembered that when these appalling spectacles take place, the eyes that weep and the hearts that grow faint are those of the soldiers—never of the officers!

Again we ask, then, what sympathy can possibly exist between the privates and those in command? None: the soldiers would be more grovelling than spaniels if they could possibly kiss the hands that cuff them, or lick the shoes of those who kick and spurn them. The British soldier has his feelings as well as others—aye, and his spirit too; and he feels the iron of a cruel discipline and a heartless system rankling in his very soul. The celebrated John Wilkes was wont to say, "The very worst use you can put a man to, is to hang him." We agree with the *dictum*: but we aver in addition that it is an equally vile use to flog him. In fact, the whole treatment of the soldier, from the day of his enlistment until that of his discharge, is one continuous system of tyranny. Deception is made use of to ensnare him into the service—a crushing despotism is maintained to render him a docile, pliant tool while he is in it—and the basest ingratitude marks his departure from it, when he is turned adrift on the world without a penny to help him. The infamy commences with the recruiting sergeant—is perpetuated by all the officers—and is consummated by the Government. Take the case of Leonard Mitchell, in respect to enlistment. The young man was assured by the recruiting sergeant that his pay would be a guinea a-week: it however turned out to be only 9*s.* 4*d.*, from which 5*s.* 10*d.* were stopped for messing and washing, 2*s.* 7½*d.* for clothes, and 3½*d.* for articles to clean his uniform with—leaving 7*d.* per week, or *one penny a-day*, for pocket-money! And this is the condition of a British dragoon—with less pocket-money than a school-boy receives from his parents!

The Government relies upon the fidelity of the Army from the fact that it is officered by the scions of the aristocracy, who are of course interested in upholding all kinds of abuses. Hence the belief which the Government entertains that in case of a popular convulsion the troops would be certain to fire upon the people. But, in spite of the lordlings and aristocratic offshoots who command the army, we firmly believe that it all depends upon the cause in which such popular convulsion might arise, whether the troops would really massacre their civilian-brethren. If it were a glorious and just struggle for rights pertinaciously withheld and privileges doggedly refused, the Army would *not* act against the people. Even the Government itself has fears on this head, ignorant though it be of the real state of feeling anywhere save in the circles of the oligarchy;—for on a recent occasion[19] when tremendous military preparations were made to resist an expected outbreak of the working-men of London, the Government set policemen in plain clothes to act as spies in respect to the private soldiers. These spies threw themselves in the way of the soldiers, enticed them into public-houses, plied them with drink, and, in an apparently frank and off-hand manner, questioned them as to their political opinions. Some of the gallant privates, thus treated and interrogated, and little thinking that they were in the fangs of the Government *mouchards*, candidly expressed their sympathy with the popular cause, and as generously declared that they would sooner cut their hands off than draw a trigger against the people—adding, "The working-men and the soldiers are brethren." What was the consequence? The spies followed these brave and open-hearted men home to their barracks, and laid information against them; so that numbers of British soldiers, thus shamefully entrapped, found themselves suddenly placed under arrest. Their commanding officers did not dare bring them to punishment; but they are doubtless marked men, and will be persecuted with all imaginable rancour and bitterness. To conclude this portion of our observations, we must remark that if any disturbance had really occurred on the great public occasion now especially alluded to, the troops were resolved *not* to fire upon the people; but they were equally determined to avenge themselves most signally upon the police.[20]

The day has gone by for the British soldier to permit himself to be made the tool of despotism: he will not be behind the French soldier in noble sentiments, generous conduct, and enlightened feelings, any more than he is inferior to him in bravery or discipline. But the British soldier must have his wrongs boldly proclaimed and speedily redressed. In many, if not in most regiments, the love of self-improvement is looked upon by the officers as a crime; whereas reading should be encouraged as much as possible. The barrack-room should be made more comfortable: at present it is so miserable and cheerless, that the private soldier is driven to the public-house in spite of his better inclinations. In many instances, men have become drunkards from this very fact, and are then entered in the Proscribed List; though all this might be avoided, were they encouraged to remain and pass their evenings at home. The food provided for the mess-tables is seldom of a good description, and frequently of the very worst: the meat especially is too often of the vilest kind, and unfit for human food. Yet the poor soldier dares not complain—no, not even in respect to that for the supply of which he is so heavily mulcted out of his miserable pittance. Drunkenness even every now and then is a heinous crime in respect to the private soldier; whereas the veriest stripling that was ever dubbed ensign or cornet, may get as tipsy as an owl every night of his life with utter impunity. In fine, the condition of the British soldier is wretched in the extreme; and while the officer, who *buys* his rank, enjoys every

privilege and riots in luxury and dissipation, the unfortunate private, who is basely inveigled into the service by a damnable fraud, is persecuted for the slightest offence, and treated on all occasions as a mere dog.

And now to return to our narrative. Six months elapsed; and during that period Leonard and Ellen met as often as the duties of the former would permit, while the latter cared not to what extent her husband's suspicions were aroused by her frequent and unaccountable absences from home. And that the old man did speedily entertain the most heart-rending suspicions, was a fact: but if he questioned his wife, she either took refuge in a stubborn silence, or answered him in a manner that only provoked him the more. Pride prevented him from complaining to her father; and he felt that he was now righteously punished for his selfishness in sacrificing the happiness of the fair young creature to his own desires. At length, unable any longer to endure the tortures of uncertainty, and anxious to know the worst at once, or else acquire the conviction that he had misjudged his wife altogether, he watched her movements: but she, aware of his proceeding, and without affecting to notice it, adopted such precautions as completely to outwit her husband, and to hold meetings with her lover, undiscovered as before. Up to this period—nearly three years and a half—the young man had conducted himself in his regiment with the utmost steadiness: he had never been reported—never incurred the slightest reprimand from his superiors. This was an extraordinary case, inasmuch as the private soldier has so many persons to please: first, the corporal—then the serjeant—then the serjeant-major—then the subaltern of the troop—next the captain—and lastly the commanding-officer. No—not *lastly*: for he must likewise please the Regimental Serjeant-Major, the Adjutant, and the Riding Master. Well, all these difficult objects had Leonard accomplished with success; and he was likewise beloved by all his comrades. He was ever in barracks of an evening at the proper hour; and during the first six months of his amour with Ellen, not even her sweet society had caused him to be late.

We must state that the more completely to enjoy the company of her lover, Ellen Gamble had taken a furnished lodging in the neighbourhood of his barracks; and there they were wont to meet. The landlady of the place asked no questions, her rent being regularly paid, and so little use being made of the apartments. It was Ellen's delight to provide succulent suppers for Leonard; and these he did not hesitate to partake of with her: but as for direct pecuniary assistance—when once she had offered it in as delicate a manner as possible, he refused it with so much firmness and with such a glowing countenance that she did not again allude to the subject. One evening,—it was at the expiration of the six months already alluded to—the conversation had become more than ordinarily interesting to the pair—the supper was later than usual—and Ellen had ordered a bottle of champagne by way of an additional treat. Leonard was remarkably temperate in his habits; and the wine excited him considerably. He was not however tipsy—only very much animated; and the time passed away more rapidly than the lovers had imagined. At length, a neighbouring clock proclaimed the hour when Leonard should be in quarters: and, starting up, he snatched a hasty embrace, and hurried away. He reached the barracks ten minutes after the proper time; and as he was traversing the yard, deeply regretting that he should be even such a trifle too late, he met a young cornet who had only joined the regiment six weeks previously. "Holloa, you sir!" cried Lord Satinet; for such was the officer's appellation: "what the devil do you mean by coming in at this hour?"—Leonard, perceiving that his lordship was so tipsy as to be scarcely able to stand, endeavoured to get away without making any answer.—"Stop there, damn your eyes!" exclaimed the nobleman. "What's your number? Oh! B 57. Very well. But, damn your eyes!" repeated his lordship; "you're drunk—as drunk as a beast, I declare."—"I am not, my lord!" cried Leonard, indignantly: and again he made for the door leading to his quarters.—"You infernal scoundrel!" vociferated the splendid specimen of aristocracy, flying into a furious passion: "how dare you tell me you are not drunk? Why, curse you, you can hardly stand." It was his lordship, however, who staggered.—"I am sober, my lord," responded Leonard, still keeping his temper: "and pray permit me to inform your lordship that I *once* was a gentleman, and that your lordship might have a little more consideration for a person so unfortunately circumstanced as I am!"—"A gentleman *once*!" repeated Lord Satinet, with an ironical laugh: "a pretty gentleman, I'll be bound! Your father was a costermonger, I suppose; and your mother an apple-woman? A gentleman, indeed! Why, damn your eyes, you'll be telling me you were a nobleman next. A gentleman, by the powers! a splendid gentleman! Of the swell-mob, most likely."—"Were I now as I was three years and a half ago, my lord," said Leonard, scarcely able to master his passion, "you would not dare to address me thus."—"Holloa! you threaten me, eh!" cried Lord Satinet. "Come, sir: tramp off to the guard-room; and I'll teach you what it is to insult your officer, and be damned to you!"

Poor Leonard was compelled to obey: but the mere circumstance of being forced to restrain his boiling indignation, gave him such an excited appearance, that when he arrived at the guard-room the Serjeant on duty immediately accused him of having been drinking. Leonard scorned to utter a falsehood; and he did not therefore deny the fact: but he declared that he was not inebriated—a statement which was treated with ridicule. To be brief, he was kept in custody for three days, at the expiration of which a court-martial assembled to try him. Lord Satinet made out the case as black as possible against the unfortunate young man, who in his defence most unwisely but very truly averred that his lordship himself was excessively tipsy on the occasion referred to. The nobleman denied the statement with much apparent indignation; and the judge-advocate declared that Leonard Mitchell had materially aggravated his own enormity by such an accusation—although the very officer who thus fulfilled the judicial functions could of himself have proved, had he chosen, that Lord Satinet *was* particularly disguised in liquor on the night in question. The result of that hideous mockery of a trial was that the accused was pronounced *guilty* of returning home late in a condition of extreme intoxication, and of grossly insulting and even menacing his officer. Leonard Mitchell was accordingly condemned to receive three hundred lashes with the cat-o'nine-tails: he was then removed to the black hole, where he passed a night scarcely enviable even by a man about to suffer the extreme penalty of the law. For, oh! how could he ever again look the world in the face?—how should he dare meet his much-loved Ellen? how survive this deep disgrace—this flagrant shame—this damning infamy? But we dare not pause to analyse the thoughts or describe the feelings of the wretched young man during the interval between his condemnation and the execution of the sentence.

The fatal moment arrived when the gallant British soldier, stripped naked to the waist, was tied up to receive the torture of the lash, in the presence of the entire regiment, which was marshalled for the purpose. Leonard's face was ashy pale—but the compressed lip, sternly-fixed eye, and determined expression of countenance indicated his resolution to meet the horrible punishment with as much

courage as he could invoke to his aid. On many an eye-lash in the ranks did the tear of sympathy—aye, of deep, deep commiseration tremble: but the officers looked on, the elder ones without emotion—the younger with curiosity, but with no better feeling. As for Cornet Lord Satinet—he could scarcely conceal his delight at the inhuman spectacle which he himself had caused to be enacted; and he thought what a "lion of the party" he should prove in the evening at his father's house, when detailing to his noble mamma and his dear sisters the particulars of the military flogging of the morning. But, hark! the drums beat—and the accursed torture commences!—the first blow is inflicted—and nine long livid marks appear upon the back of the victim. Still he winces not—and not a murmur escapes his lips. Again does the lash fall—and of a livelier red are the traces it leaves behind. A third time the instrument of torture descends—and now blood is drawn. But still the young man is silent—although his well-knit frame moves with a slight convulsiveness. A shudder—passing throughout the long ranks like an electric shock, from flank to flank—denotes the horror—the profound, intense horror, which strikes to the hearts of the brave dragoons who behold the appalling laceration of their comrade. And now faster falls each murderous weapon—for there are two executioners employed at the same time: and when they have dealt a certain number of blows, they are relieved by others, so that the victim may gain nothing by the slightest weariness of arm on the part of his torturers. Still he maintains a profound silence: but he cannot prevent his countenance from expressing a keen sense of the mortal agony that he endures. Down—down comes the horrible weapon, each stroke inflicting *nine* distinct blows; and, while the blood streams forth in many crimson rivulets, the knotted cords carry away pieces of the palpitating flesh. Oh! that such infernal cruelty should be perpetrated in a country vaunted as the chosen land of freedom, and peopled by beings who boast their humanity!—Oh! that such a blood-thirsty torture should be sanctioned by the laws of a nation paying upwards of ten millions a-year for the maintenance of the ministers of Christ! Gracious God! do thy thunders sleep when a creature fashioned after thine own image is thus enduring the torments of the damned,—torments inflicted not in a paroxysm of rage, and by the hand of a savage individual vengeance,—but in cold blood, in unprovoked mercilessness, and under colour of a sanguinary law which would disgrace a community of savages! People of England! let us blush—let us hang down our heads for very shame when we reflect that such appalling scenes are enacted amongst us; or rather let us gnash our teeth with rage—and tear our hair—and beat our breasts, to think that we are unable to compel our legislators to receive even a scintillation of that humane spirit which animates ourselves. For we have a Society to prevent cruelty to animals—and the man who beats his ox or his ass too severely, is punished; and if a poor man only happens to jostle against a police-officer, it is construed into *a savage assault* and attended with penalties. But there is no Society to prevent cruelty to human beings; and the lash—the accursed lash may be used, until the blood flows down the back—the skin is flayed away—deep wails are made in the quivering form—morsels of palpitating flesh are torn off—and the muscles are laid bare,—oh! all this may be done—all these revolting atrocities may be perpetrated—all these hellish cruelties may be accomplished, and there is no Association patronised by Royal Highnesses, Bishops, and Noble Lords, to interfere in behalf of the victims nor to punish the offenders!

Leonard Mitchell bore his murderous punishment as bravely as man could endure such fiendish torture. A hundred and fifty lashes had been inflicted, without eliciting a moan from his lips: but his countenance betrayed all the intensity of the anguish which he suffered. His eyes lost their lustre—his under-jaw fell slightly—there was foam upon his mouth—and his tongue protruded somewhat. As for his back——But, perdition seize upon the blood-hounds! the indignation which we feel at this moment will not allow us to extend *that* portion of the painful description. Better—oh! better far to be the vilest beggar that ever grovelled in the mire, than one of those Greenacres of the House of Commons who advocate corporal punishment, or those Barkers of colonels who delight in having it inflicted! As for poor Leonard Mitchell, he received upwards of two hundred lashes without a murmur; and then the surgeon ordered a pause. Drink was given to him—and he revived. But was he then removed? Oh! no—no: the feast of blood was not accomplished—the cup of gore was not full enough—the sum of human tortures was not finished. Again fell the accursed weapon: and now—we know not whether it were that after a brief cessation the agony of the renewal was more intense than before—or that the interval of rest had allowed the fine spirit of the man to flag,—whatever were the cause, it is nevertheless a fact that a piercing shriek of anguish burst from his lips—a shriek so strange, so wild, and so unnatural, that long, long after did it ring in the ears of those who heard it; for it seemed to lacerate the very brain as, in its horrible inflections, the rending sound was sent back from the barrack walls in penetrating echoes and frightful reverberations. A thrill of horror electrified the startled ranks of the victim's comrades; and the gloved hand of many a brave soldier was drawn rapidly across the countenance, to dash away the tears that trembled on the quivering eye-lids. For, oh! the British warrior may indeed well weep at such a scene,—weep—weep with mingled shame and sorrow—weep, too, with bitterness and indignation!

The punishment was over: soon as that piercing scream had died away, the prisoner fainted;—and he was forthwith hurried to the infirmary, where many hours elapsed ere he came to his senses. Then he awoke to consciousness amidst the most horrible tortures: for the means that were adopted to prevent his lacerated back from mortifying, inflicted the agonies of hell. Only fancy, Christian reader—a man in this country can be beaten into such a state that it is ten to one whether he will not die of his wounds, and all the surgeon's art can with difficulty resuscitate him! But pass we over the lingering illness endured by the unhappy Leonard—-an illness of eight long weeks; and let us see whether the tortures of the lash have made him a better man. Alas! far from it! His fine spirit was broken: he saw that it was useless to endeavour to be good—that it was ridiculous to practise virtues which experienced no reward. His religious faith was shaken—nay, almost completely destroyed; and he no longer believed in the efficacy of prayer. Instead of harbouring feelings of a generous philanthropy, he began to loathe and detest his superiors and look with suspicion on his equals. A doggedness of disposition, a recklessness of character, a species of indifference as to what might become of him, displaced all those fine qualities and noble attributes that had previously graced him. For he felt that he was a marked man in his regiment, and never could hope for promotion—that his character was gone—and that, like Cain, he bore about him the brand of indelible infamy. Moreover, he longed for vengeance—bitter, bitter vengeance upon that young scion of the aristocracy who had lied against him—lied foully as only such a wretch could lie—and who had brought down all that disgrace on his devoted head.

In such a frame of mind was it that Leonard Mitchell met Ellen for the first time after a separation of nearly ten weeks. The young lady

had learnt the misfortunes which had befallen her lover; and she was prepared, by an intimate knowledge of his character, to hear that he had been accused as unjustly as he had been punished savagely. She endeavoured to console him: but he assured her broadly and frankly that the only solace he could ever know was—*vengeance*! Ellen did not discourage this idea—did not rebuke this craving; for she also felt bitterly—bitterly against the despicable lordling who had persecuted him so foully. It was, nevertheless, with sorrow that she soon observed the alteration which had taken place in his disposition. He was still devoted to her: but his passion now partook rather of a gross sensuality than, of the refinement of love. How could it be otherwise? The best feelings of the man were blunted; and his brute impulses, unchecked by that delicacy of sentiment which had once so peculiarly characterised him, became the more violent. Especially did he soon manifest a loving for intoxicating liquors; and at the third or fourth interview with Ellen, after his release from the hospital, he suffered her to understand pretty plainly that he should no longer refuse pecuniary assistance at her hands. In the course of a few weeks he spoke out more plainly still, and unblushingly asked for the amount he required at the time; and ere many months had passed away, he never parted from her without receiving a portion of the contents of her purse. At first she herself was much shocked at this evidence of an altered disposition: but she was so deeply—so devotedly attached to him, that she reasoned herself into consolation even on that head; and the more selfish he became, the more anxious did she appear to minister to his wants. This was not all: for frequent intoxication irritated his temper—and he did not hesitate to vent his ill humour upon her. Sometimes, too, he failed to keep his appointments with her: and when they did meet at last, he abused her if she dared to reproach him. On one occasion he actually raised his hand to strike her; but the poor, loving creature, falling on her knees at his feet, turned up towards him a countenance so tearful and woe-begone, that the coward blow was stayed, and he implored her pardon. Nevertheless, she had received a shock which she could not forget: neither could she avoid contrasting the Leonard Mitchell whom military punishment had degraded to the same level as the brutes, with the Leonard Mitchell who formerly appeared the very type of a gallant, generous-hearted, and high-minded British Dragoon!

But Leonard Mitchell must not be blamed if his manners and habits were thus changed, and if he took inveterately to drinking. He was one of those whom bad laws had forced into evil courses; and if he flew to the intoxicating glass, it was because the alcoholic liquor contained the hours of oblivion. Persecuted as he had been—degraded as he felt himself, existence had become intolerable unless he lost the consciousness of at least a portion of it. His comrades noticed the alteration which had taken place in him, and they well understood the cause: for it had been the same with every one who had ever undergone the torture and the disgrace of the lash. In his sober hours Leonard experienced no remorse—no compunction for the ways which he was pursuing: he had grown dogged—morose—indifferent;—no—not altogether indifferent,—for he cherished—dearly, deeply cherished a scheme of vengeance. And the day and the hour for carrying it into execution arrived at last.

It was, indeed, on the anniversary of the memorable morning of his degrading punishment, that a grand review took place in Hyde Park. Certain German pauper Princes were on a visit to this country,—princes who received annual incomes from the English Treasury, heaven only knows for what services performed—and whose very travelling expenses to and from the Court of St. James's were duly paid from the public purse;—for those contemptible petty sovereigns of Germany are as mean as they are poor, and as proud as they are both mean and poor! Well, it was on the occasion of the presence of two or three of those princely beggars in the British metropolis, that the grand review took place. All the troops quartered in or near London were marched shortly after ten o'clock in the morning to Hyde Park; and as the day was remarkably fine, the spectacle was brilliant and imposing. The Duke of Wellington, the German Princes, and several General-officers, attended by a numerous staff, shortly afterwards appeared upon the ground: and the road was thronged with spectators. The review commenced in the usual manner: the entire force, infantry and cavalry, was drawn up to receive the Duke, the Princes, and their companions;—and after the inspection and the "marching past," various evolutions and manœuvres were practised. A sham fight was then ordered; and the troops were accordingly separated for the purpose into two divisions. The appearance of the dragoon regiment in which Leonard Mitchell served attracted general notice, not only on account of the reputation it had acquired of containing some of the finest men in the British army, but likewise in consequence of its discipline and its perfection in the evolutions already practised. But had some searching eye scanned each individual countenance, there was *one* in that regiment which would have rivetted the gaze: for, though strikingly handsome, there was then upon that countenance an expression of fiend-like satisfaction and sardonic triumph—and the portentous gaze, the curling lip, and the dilation of the nostrils on the part of the dragoon thus alluded to, would have convinced the observer that the man's thoughts were intent on some sinister design.

And now the sham-fight commences;—and there is advancing and retreating by turns—and there are echelons and deployings, and other evolutions—until a general attack commences on the side of the assailing party. The dragoons are armed with their carbines; and Leonard Mitchell grasps his weapon with an ardour—an affection—a species of gratitude, as if it were about to render him some signal service. The order is given to fire; and the carbines vomit forth volumes of white, vapoury smoke, which in a moment envelopes the entire corps. But from the midst of the cloud a piercing scream—a scream of mortal agony—breaks forth; and then, as the smoke moves slowly away on the lazy wing of the partial breeze, ejaculations of horror and dismay announce that some accident has occurred. All is now confusion; but a report spreads through the dragoon regiment, and thence circulates like wildfire amidst the troops and the spectators, that Lord Satinet has been wounded in the sham-fight. And true enough was the rumour; for there lay the young nobleman, fallen from his horse, and stretched bleeding and gasping on the green sward! The surgeon hastily proceeded to render all the assistance that human skill could administer: but the aid was vain and useless—the victim was mortally wounded by a bullet which had entered his back—and, without uttering an intelligible word, he shortly expired in the surgeon's arms. And now a sad and heart-rending scene took place: for the parents and the sisters of the murdered nobleman were upon the ground—and they hastened to the spot, guided by the common rumour which had appalled them, but which they hoped to find incorrect, or at all events fearfully exaggerated. They discovered, however, that it was, alas! too true; and the gala day was turned into one of bitter mourning for them. The review was broken up—and the troops were marched away to their respective barracks; while the spectators crowded to behold the sad procession that bore the corpse of the young noble to the family mansion in the neighbourhood.

During the return of the dragoon regiment to its quarters, those of Leonard's comrades who were near him frequently bent suspicious and enquiring glances upon him: but his countenance afforded no indication of guilt. He neither appeared triumphant nor downcast—neither nervous nor afraid; and the soldiers who thus beheld his calm and tranquil demeanour, were shaken in the idea which they had formed in respect to the authorship of the morning's tragedy. The moment the dragoons entered the barracks, every cartouche-box was examined; but in none was found aught save blank cartridges. The suspicions of the officers had naturally fallen upon Leonard Mitchell; and it was deemed necessary to place him under arrest until the coroner should have instituted the usual enquiry. But he energetically declared his innocence; and those who were the most ready to suspect him, were staggered by the sincerity which seemed to characterise his protestations, and by the indignation which he manifested at the crime imputed to him. On the ensuing day the inquest was held; and the result was favourable to Mitchell. No particle of evidence appeared to tell against him, unless indeed it were the fact that he had been flogged a year previously through the instrumentality of the deceased nobleman. But none of Leonard's comrades who were examined, could aver that they had ever heard him use a threatening expression in respect to Lord Satinet—no, not even in his cups, when the truth is so likely to slip from a man's lips and the real state of his feelings to be proclaimed by the tongue. That the nobleman's death was the result of an accident, was an alternative that could scarcely be adopted: for it was almost impossible that a ball-cartridge could have been mistaken for a blank one. Thus, though not a tittle of testimony could be brought against Leonard Mitchell,—and though he was discharged from custody,—yet in the minds of all the officers and of many of his comrades, there still dwelt a suspicion with regard to him. An open verdict was returned by the jury,—to the effect that "the deceased had met his death by a ball discharged from a carbine, but whether by accident or guilty intent, and by what hand, was unknown." A few days afterwards the remains of the young nobleman were consigned to the tomb; and the Tory newspapers, in passing an eulogium upon his character, grouped together such a variety of admirable qualities, that if he had only possessed one-tenth of them, he must have been a phœnix of

moral perfection and a prodigy of intellectual power.

The first meeting which took place between Leonard Mitchell and Ellen after the tragedy just related, was of a painful description. Scarcely were they alone together in the apartment which she had hired for these guilty interviews, when, seizing him violently by the wrist, and speaking in a low, thick tone—while her eyes looked fixedly and searchingly into the depths of his own—she said, "Leonard, is it possible that you have done this?"—"I told you that I would have vengeance," he replied, almost brutally, as he abruptly withdrew his arm from her grasp; "and you have even encouraged me in the project. Do you mean to reproach me now?"—"Oh! my God, it seems so horrible to contemplate!" cried Ellen, sinking into a chair, and pressing her hands to her throbbing brows: for, criminal—almost depraved, though she were, yet she was not so hardened as to be able to stifle the still small voice which whispered in her ears, "*Thou art the companion of a murderer!*"—"Horrible to contemplate!" repeated Leonard, with a brutal laugh. "You are a fool to talk in that style, Ellen. But perhaps you will go and betray me next?"—"Good heavens! how have I merited such treatment as this?" exclaimed the wretched woman, now bursting into a flood of tears. "Have I not sacrificed everything for you, Leonard?" she demanded, her voice broken with agonising sobs: "and can you find it in your heart to insult me thus? Oh! consider my position, and have mercy upon me! Tormented day and night by the suspicions and the increasing ill-humour of a husband whom I loathe and abhor—with the greatest difficulty avoiding the snares which he sets to entrap me, and to acquire proof of that infidelity which he even more than suspects and subjected latterly to the questions and remonstrances of my father, who has at length obtained a knowledge of my frequent and unaccounted-for absences from home,—think you not that I am sufficiently unhappy, perplexed, and bewildered, without receiving insult and injury from you?"—"Then why do you provoke me?" demanded Leonard. "For a year past I have been constantly telling you that I would have vengeance; and, as I said just now, you have encouraged me in the idea. But now that it is consummated, and that my mortal enemy sleeps in a premature grave, you affect horror and disgust."—"Oh! Leonard," ejaculated Ellen, throwing herself at his feet, "pardon me, and I will offend you no more! I am well aware that the provocation was immense, and that there are circumstances in which human forbearance knows no limit—can acknowledge no restraint. Such was your position; and I was wrong to utter a word deprecatory of your conduct."—"Well, well," said Leonard, raising the infatuated woman from her suppliant posture, and placing her on the sofa by his side: "let us talk no more of this little quarrel between us. For you must be aware that I should have been worse than the spaniel which licks the hand that beats it, if I had not avenged myself on that miscreant lordling, whom my hatred accompanies even in his grave. And let me tell you, that in times of war, many and many an officer is picked off by some soldier who has felt the iron hand of despotism press upon him, or who has suffered from the effects of individual persecution. It may be called *murder*, if you choose: but I look upon it as a *righteous retribution*."—Ellen gazed in mingled astonishment and horror, and with a ghastly pallor of countenance, upon her lover's face, as he enunciated this dreadful doctrine: then, perceiving that he was again about to become angry, she hastened to caress him. He returned the amorous dalliance; but Ellen could no longer abandon herself wholly and entirely to the delights of illicit love. Though the course of life which she had for some time adopted had rendered her insatiably sensual, she now experienced a feeling of loathing and disgust when in contact with her lover. This feeling she strove hard to conquer, by conjuring up all the voluptuous ideas that had ever existed in her soul: but, in spite of this straining against nature, a voice of blood seemed to ring in her ears, warning her that she was in the arms of a murderer! She gazed upon his handsome countenance, in the hope that its beauty would inspire her with sentiments of a purer affection;—but his eyes appeared to beam with fiendish triumph and demoniac malignity;—and if she pressed his hand to her lips, it seemed as if she were kissing flesh stained with human gore.

Unable to endure these torturing feelings, she hastened to prepare the supper-table, and bade him draw the cork of a champagne-bottle. Full readily did he comply; and, having tossed off a bumper first, he refilled the same glass, saying, "Now drink from this, to convince me that you do not love me less on account of what has happened."—The lady took the glass and placed it to her lips: but the words he had just uttered, recalled so vividly to her mind those images which she had striven so forcibly to banish from her imagination, that an invincible feeling of disgust came over her—a blood-mist appeared to obscure her sight—and as she drank, it seemed as if a draught from a sanguine tide were pouring down her throat. Nevertheless, she forced herself to drain the glass; and as soon as the exciting liquor began to circulate in her veins, these horrible images rapidly disappeared, and she felt that she could now abandon herself to a voluptuousness of soul unmarred by disgust or loathing. Ellen, therefore, as well as Leonard, discovered that there were charms in the crystal cup filled with sparkling wine; and she drank the exciting juice with the avidity of one who knows full well its efficacy in banishing care. Leonard was both surprised and rejoiced to behold the influence which the nectar had upon her; and for a long time he had not appeared so tender and affectionate as he was during the latter part of this interview.

And what was the consequence of that evening's incidents? That Ellen took a liking to alcoholic liquor. She had discovered therein a panacea for disagreeable thoughts; and her reflections in serious moments were by no means of a pleasurable nature. Thus was it that she, who was lately so abstemious as scarcely to touch a drop of wine even after dinner, and who had so deeply deplored the weakness of Leonard in yielding to the insidious temptations of strong drink,—thus was it that she, the elegant and lovely Ellen, gave way to that same fascination, and sought solace in the sparkling glass. At first she touched no wine until the dinner-hour: but she soon found that all the morning and afternoon she was a prey to low spirits, distressing reflections, and feelings of mingled loathing and fondness in respect to Leonard; and she therefore made the mid-day luncheon an excuse for taking her first glass. At dinner-time she would freely partake of her two or three glasses;—and on those evenings when she met Leonard, she indulged readily in the liquor provided for the supper-table. But as the habit rapidly gained upon the unfortunate young woman, she soon began to tipple slily at home; and, even before breakfast, she eventually found herself compelled by great mental depression to imbibe a dram. It was about this time that Mr. Gamble's intellects, racked and tortured for upwards of a year by the most harrowing suspicions and by the total estrangement of his wife's affections and even attentions, began to give way; and he would sit for hours together in his chair, with his eyes fixed upon vacancy. It was also at the same epoch that a turn once more manifested itself in Mr. Pomfret's affairs; and, a colossal speculation failing, he was again plunged into deep embarrassments. Further assistance from his son-in-law was out of the question; and Mr. Pomfret accordingly devoted all his energies to sustain the credit of his house in the hope that he might yet retrieve himself, or in any

case postpone the catastrophe for as long a period as possible. Thus the condition of her husband and the constant application of her father to his business left Ellen almost totally free from any supervision; and she was enabled to indulge at will in the fatal habit that was gaining so rapidly upon her. Leonard did not fail to notice this growing attachment to liquor on her part; and he rather encouraged it than otherwise—for he himself had become utterly depraved and reckless, and when his mistress was in a maudlin condition of semi-ebriety, she cheerfully parted with all the contents of her purse. The increasing childishness of her husband gave her a greater command over his finances; and she was therefore the better able to supply her lover's extravagances. At length she acquired the certainty that Leonard was unfaithful to her; and a desperate quarrel was the consequence. Nor was the dispute confined to mere words; for the young man beat her unmercifully—and she, half intoxicated at the time, retaliated to the best of her ability. The scene was shocking and disgusting; and when Ellen awoke next morning, and reflected upon all that had occurred on the preceding evening, she wept bitter—bitter tears, as she compared the guilty present with the innocent past. Then she vowed to abstain from liquor in future, and to see Leonard Mitchell no more; and, temporarily strong in this resolution, she sent him a note communicating her design. Moreover, under the influence of the better feelings that were thus awakening within her soul, her heart smote her for her conduct towards her husband, who was daily becoming more dependant upon her kindness, and whom she had long neglected altogether. She even felt happy when she pondered upon her newly-formed determination to resume a steady course of life;—but all her salutary schemes and hopes were annihilated in the afternoon of that same day, by the arrival of a letter from Mitchell, threatening to murder her and kill himself afterwards unless she repaired in the evening to the usual place of meeting.

Over that letter Ellen wept scalding tears—for she knew that if she yielded *now*, her fate was sealed: ruin, degradation, and disgrace must inevitably await her! She saw herself again entering upon the path which would lead her to the condition of a confirmed drunkard; and the awful menaces contained in the missive, filled her with presentiments that even her death might be premature and violent. Nevertheless, she had not the moral courage to resist the temptation of meeting her lover; and she consoled herself—or rather, she endeavoured to quiet her qualms of conscience and her presaging fears—by saying, "It shall be for the last time!" To the place of appointment she accordingly went; and Leonard Mitchell, who feared to lose a mistress possessed of such ample means to minister to his extravagances, played the hypocrite so admirably that Ellen—infatuated creature that she was!—believed in the sincerity of his protestations of undivided love for the future, and his regrets for the past. The wine-bottle circulated freely; and she forgot all her remorse—all her compunctions—all her resolves of reformation. She even went so far as to revive the proposal of purchasing Leonard's discharge; but to this he positively refused to accede. He quoted his oath as a reason: it was not however the correct one—for even that solemn vow had long ceased to have any influence upon his depraved and hardened mind. The truth was that he had become a confirmed voluptuary in respect to women; and he found that his uniform was an immense auxiliary towards success with the frivolous and giddy of the sex: moreover, he knew that were he released from the ranks, he should become completely tacked to the apron-strings of his mistress; and, as she held the purse, he would not in that case be able to exercise his independence. It therefore suited him better to remain in the army; and Ellen was foolish—infatuated enough to believe in the validity and genuineness of the motive which he alleged for declining her proposal. She accordingly forbore from pressing it; and the remainder of that evening was spent in voluptuous enjoyment—sensuality and champagne constituting the elements of that guilty pair's unhallowed pleasures.

Time passed on; and the position of the lovers—if such they could now be called—became daily more unhappy in respect to each other. Quarrels between them were of constant occurrence; and on each occasion blows were exchanged. The affection of Ellen had changed into a gross sensuality, having lost every particle of refining sentiment; and she became jealous in the extreme, frequently giving way to such fits of passion, when she reproached Leonard for his infidelities, that it was impossible to recognise in the furious, rabid, half-drunken demoness—the mild, amiable, and chaste young lady of former years. She still retained her beauty to a marvellous degree, in spite of the deep potations in which she indulged and the slovenliness that had crept upon her in respect to dress; and, as she was frequently out in the streets late of an evening, after her interviews with Leonard, she was subjected to the licentious proposals of the "young men about town" who are ever on the look-out for pretty women. The result was that, although she yielded not to such temptations, her mind became more thoroughly depraved, by being robbed of every chastening thought and feminine reflection; for, when under the influence of liquor, she would frequently converse with the rakes who accosted her in the manner described. Leonard himself suddenly grew jealous; and, having followed her one evening, he caught her in discourse with a young gentleman whom she had encountered more than once during her walks home. A dreadful scene ensued: and, though Leonard at length suffered himself to be appeased, simply because afraid of losing one whose purse was so convenient to him, he nevertheless entertained a firm but erroneous conviction, of her infidelity. They therefore now harboured mutual distrust, which on many occasions rose into absolute loathing. Bad as Leonard was, and much as he had encouraged her in her drinking habits, he was nevertheless often disgusted when he beheld her reeling under the influence of liquor, and when he felt upon his face that breath which, now heated with alcoholic fluid, was once so pure and balmy. On her side, she could never divest herself of the remembrance that she was consorting with a murderer; and frequently—oh! how frequently, the blood-mist would reappear before her eyes, and the liquor would seem gore in her glass, and sanguine stains would, in her heated imagination, dye his hands! Thus wretchedly did their connexion progress,—she still clinging to him through that infatuation which often belongs to sensuality of soul—and he still tolerating her because she possessed the means of supplying his pocket.

At length matters had reached a crisis, at which the amour was destined to have a most tragical termination. Ellen was returning home one evening, smarting under some insult which her lover had put upon her, and labouring as usual under the influence of wine, when she met the young gentleman above alluded to. On this occasion his entreaties were more urgent than ever; and she was more pliant than he had as yet found her to be. Her blood was inflamed; and she was moreover in that humour when to assert her independence of Leonard, even to herself, would prove a solace and a comfort. She accordingly yielded to the proposals of the stranger, and accompanied him to an improper house. It was midnight when they issued forth; and Ellen hastened homeward, having made an appointment for another evening. In the middle of Waterloo Bridge she heard hasty steps approaching from behind: it was a clear,

moonlit night—and on turning her head, she beheld Leonard Mitchell close at hand. A faintness came over her: she instantly suspected—nay, felt certain that he had watched her;—and, trembling with terrible apprehensions, she sank upon a seat in one of the recesses. In another moment the young dragoon was by her side. For almost a minute he spoke not; and this silence augmented her alarm. Raising her pale—her haggard countenance, on which the moon-light streamed in all its chaste and silvery purity, she endeavoured to frame some question that would lead to an explanation of his presence there: but her lips refused utterance to the words that rose to them. A mortal terror was upon her—a consternation, as if she beheld the skeleton form of Death hovering dimly in the obscure distance.

Taking her hand, and pressing it with convulsive violence, Leonard said in a low and hollow tone, "Now, Ellen, I have at last obtained ample proof of your infidelity."—"Mercy! mercy!" murmured the young woman, as gazing rapidly up and down the bridge, she saw that it was completely deserted.—"Oh! I deserve it," exclaimed Leonard, beating his brow violently with his open palm: "I know that I deserve it all! I have long entertained the suspicion that such was the case: but now that I have acquired the conviction, it seems too dreadful to bear! Again, however, I say that I deserve it: and yet, bad—vile—depraved as I am, I feel as if my heart had received a mortal wound."—"I take Almighty God to witness, Leonard," cried Ellen in an impassioned tone, "that this is the first time I have been unfaithful to you. Your conduct of the evening wounded me so deeply, that I longed to avenge myself—longed also to assert my independence of you, even if only to the knowledge of my own heart. By this I mean that I should have felt triumphant in proving false to you, even though you yourself were to remain ignorant of the proceeding. And now if you will pardon me, I promise never to err again. But, O Leonard—Leonard, do treat me with at least a little kindness!"—and as she uttered these words in a tone of deep feeling and profound pathos, she flung herself upon his breast, throwing her arms around his neck in a paroxysm of reviving fondness. So touching was her appeal, that it instantly brought to his soul an overwhelming cloud of reminiscences of all the harshness, brutality, and cowardly cruelty of which he had been guilty towards her,—reminiscences, too, of all her love for him—the sacrifices she had made for him—the generosity of her behaviour in his behalf. He recollected also—and all in a moment as it were—that if she were degraded by drink, and defiled by the hot breath of licentiousness, she was pure and chaste as a wife until he had sought her out on his return to London,—that her fall, in fine, might be unmistakeably traced to her fatal connexion with him. Then, too, he recalled to mind his own condition when two years previously he had crossed that bridge on his way to snatch a glimpse of the three houses in Stamford Street,—a condition which, unenviable as he had then deemed it, was one of supreme happiness compared with his present state. For the mark of the branding lash was upon his back, and the remorse of a murderer was in his heart; and he knew himself to be a drunkard—a disgrace to his regiment—a vile wretch, rioting in pleasures purchased by the coin that he wrung from the woman whom he ill-treated and abused. And, lastly, his thoughts were reflected back to those times when all was bright and smiling before him—when he and Ellen were alike untainted by guilt, and the willing votaries of virtue—when their loves were innocent and chaste, and they would have started back in horror and indignation had it been prophesied to them that they were one day destined to look upon each other with disgust. All these recollections and reflections poured in, like an overwhelming torrent, upon the mind of the young dragoon; and his soul was softened—his heart, long so hard, was touched—and, melting into tears, as he felt the miserable woman clinging to him with resuscitated fondness, he pressed her to his bosom, exclaiming, "Ellen, I have wronged you deeply—deeply: but can you—can you forgive me?"

The reconciliation was complete; and then Ellen, animated by a sudden thought, exclaimed, "But, gracious heavens! Leonard, you have absented yourself from your quarters—and, hark! the clock strikes one."—The booming note of St. Paul's iron tongue had indeed fallen upon their ears while she was yet speaking.—"I dare not return to the barracks again," said Leonard; and she felt that he shuddered convulsively in her arms.—"But what will you do?" she asked, diffidently.—"Anything!" he cried: "anything! rather than be flogged again."—"Flogged!" repeated Ellen, now shuddering in her turn.—"Yes: I should be assuredly condemned to that ignominy—that torture," replied Mitchell. "My conduct has for some time been so unsteady, and I have been so often reported '*late*,' that this time nothing could save me from the *cat*. I have determined not to return to the barracks," he added, doggedly.—"But what will you do?" again asked Ellen.—"I know not," he responded gloomily. "Unless I can find some secure place wherein to hide for a few days, until I may escape from the country, I cannot tell what will become of me."—"And must you quit the country?" demanded Ellen.—"Would you have me taken up as a deserter?" asked Leonard bitterly. "My punishment in that case would be worse than if I were now to go back and submit to the result of a court-martial on charges of irregularity, drunkenness, and late hours."—"Not for worlds would I have you return under present circumstances," cried Ellen, in an impassioned tone: "much less have you eventually incur the danger of being arrested as a deserter, Leonard," she added, after a few moments' pause, "if you leave the country, I will go with you."—"I thought that you would not abandon me," exclaimed the dragoon, pressing her closer to him. Then he whispered something in her ears; and they conversed in a very low tone for several minutes. At length Ellen yielded to the plan which her lover had suggested, but which had at first seemed fraught with difficulties.—"Yes," she said; "there is no alternative—I must conceal you at my house. And when I reflect, the two servants are devoted to me: you may suppose that I have all along bribed them heavily in order to induce them to wink at my irregularities; and if they refused to become Mr. Gamble's spies in these times when he was in full possession of his intellects, they will not betray me now that he is half childish and does not question them concerning me any more. Yes: It must be so;—there is no choice left. Come at once: I possess the latch-key, and can admit you without even disturbing the servants. It will be sufficient to make confidants of them to-morrow."

The reader may now understand that Ellen was about to consummate her imprudence by taking her paramour beneath her husband's roof. When the first moments of dissolving softness and better feelings had passed away in respect to Leonard, his selfishness again asserted its empire; and, while determining to desert, he at the same time bethought himself how he could still make Ellen's pecuniary means available for his own purpose. His object was therefore to gain admittance into the house—to ascertain the precise nature of her resources and find out the amount of valuables she could dispose of—and then induce her to elope with him, having previously plundered her husband and his dwelling of everything worth carrying off. We have seen how far his diabolical and hastily formed scheme succeeded. Two points were already gained: she would admit him into the house—and she had promised to accompany him to

another country. The robbery, he felt assured, he should be enabled to reason her into: if not, menaces could be effectually employed, no doubt. Such was the design which the once upright and honourable Leonard Mitchell now had in view; and he chuckled inwardly at the scheme, as he walked arm-in-arm with Ellen towards Stamford Street. In ten minutes they reached Mr. Gamble's house: Ellen opened the street-door by means of the latch-key which she had about her;—and the dragoon passed, unobserved and noiselessly, to her bed-room—for during the past eighteen months she and her husband had occupied separate chambers. The remainder of that night glided away: in the morning Ellen admitted the two domestics to her confidence; and as she at the same time slipped a heavy bribe into their hands, they willingly promised devotion to her interests. The day passed heavily enough for the dragoon, who was accustomed to exercise and bustle, and who could not endure the idea of being pent up within the narrow limits of a bed-room. He accordingly determined to put the remainder of his scheme into execution without delay; and he rejoiced when night once more spread its sable wing over this hemisphere.

It was eleven o'clock: Mr. Gamble had long before retired to rest—the servants had likewise sought their chamber;—and Leonard was seated at table with Ellen in the bedroom of the latter. A succulent supper and rich wines were placed before them: the curtains were drawn carefully over the windows; and a lamp diffused a mellow lustre throughout the apartment. Having eaten as much as he cared for, Leonard filled a tumbler with sherry, which he drank at a draught to inspire him with courage for the part which he had now to play—for, by fair or foul means, was he resolved to succeed. "Ellen," said he, after a pause, "we must quit the house to-night."—"To-night!" she exclaimed, in astonishment: "wherefore this hurry?"—"In the first place," he replied, "because I cannot bear confinement here; and secondly, because it may as well be done now as a week or a month hence."—"Let us postpone our departure until to-morrow night," said Ellen, imploringly.—"Why so?"—"Because I have not seen my father for many days," she answered: "he has been so much engaged in the City; and I should wish to bid him farewell for ever, if only mentally."—"This is childish!" ejaculated Leonard impatiently. "I thought you had lost all respect for your father?"—"Oh! but I cannot forget that he *is* my father," responded Ellen, the tears trickling down her cheeks: "and now that I have made up my mind to leave England for ever, I would embrace him once more."—"Then I must depart without you," said Leonard, rising from his chair—"Oh! this is unkind to a degree!" urged Ellen bitterly. "Surely you can allow me four-and-twenty hours for the necessary preparations?"—"Our preparations can be made in an hour," said Leonard obstinately: then, reseating himself, he drank off another tumblerful of wine. "Listen to me. What preparations have you to make, save to possess yourself of all the money, plate, jewels, and other valuables you can lay your hands upon?"—Ellen stared at her lover with the fixed gaze of mingled astonishment and horror.—"Well, what is the matter with you?" he demanded.—"Leonard, you are not in earnest?" she said at length: "you would not have me rob my husband of his plate?"—"Certainly," replied the ruffian: "and of his watch, and everything of value that is portable in the house. We must not go away empty-handed, I can tell you."—"Is it possible that you would counsel me to do this?" asked Ellen, speaking in a low and agitated voice. "Leonard, I have never hesitated to supply you with money, because that is an article which I believe to exist in common between a husband and wife. Moreover, the household has suffered in no way by the appropriation of those sums to your wants. But if you mean me to plunder my husband of his plate—his watch—and other things which are beyond all question his own exclusively, I declare once for all that I will not be a party to such a deed. It is sufficient," she added, tears now bursting from her eyes, "that I am what I am, without leaving behind me the reputation of a thief."—Leonard ground his teeth with rage: and again he had recourse to the wine-bottle.—"Pray recall the words that you have uttered," exclaimed Ellen: "tell me that you were joking, or that you only made the proposal in order to try me!"—"I never was more serious in my life," said Leonard, brutally.—"Oh! what do I hear?" cried the wretched woman, wringing her hands.—"Enough of this!" ejaculated the ruffian, starting from his seat. "Do you mean to accompany me, or do you not?"—"Yes, yes; I have pledged myself to *that*!"—"And are we to go empty-handed?"—"I have sixty or seventy pounds in money, and my jewels are worth as much more."—"And the plate?" demanded Leonard.—"Is always kept in a box beneath Mr. Gamble's bed; and therefore you see how impossible it is to obtain it, even if I were disposed to plunder him of property which has been in his family for so many, many years."

Leonard reseated himself—poured out more wine—drank it—and then fell into a deep meditation. Ellen watched his countenance, flattering herself that the reason she had alleged for forbearance in respect to the plate would prove efficient. But she had only confirmed the ruffian in his resolution to possess it; inasmuch as she had committed herself in two ways. Firstly, she had told him where it was; and secondly, by informing him that it had been in the family for many years, she had naturally left on his mind the impression that it was of considerable value—for heir-looms of that species are usually costly. What, then, was Leonard Mitchell really thinking of—thinking of, too, under the influence of the deep potations which he had imbibed? He was revolving a hellish project in his mind. If he endeavoured to possess himself of the plate contrary to the assent of Ellen, a disturbance would ensue in the house, and his arrest as a deserter might follow upon the discovery of his presence there. To depart without the plate was not at all suitable to his purposes: for if he repaired to a foreign country, it would not be to toil for a livelihood. How, then, was he to secure the coveted property, and carry it away without the chance of noise or detection? Only if Ellen were removed from his path! Yes—*this* was the project now revolved in the mind of the lost, depraved young man; and, having again fortified himself with liquor, he determined to put his diabolical scheme into execution. Suddenly rising from his seat, he approached Ellen, and, taking her hand, said, "Forgive me, dearest, for what I dared to utter just now. We will delay our departure until to-morrow night; and then you shall take with you just so much as you choose to select, and nothing more."—"I freely pardon you, Leonard," she replied; and yet, as he bent over her, there was a wild gleaming in his eye and a peculiarity of expression in his countenance which caused vague apprehensions to sweep across her mind. "But how strangely you regard me, Leonard," she said: "is anything the matter with you?"—"Nothing, nothing, dearest," he responded, throwing his arms round her neck and pressing her head as if in the fervour of affection against his bosom. All her alarms were immediately dissipated; and, thrown completely off her guard, she returned the embrace, abandoning herself entirely to him. At that instant his right hand was withdrawn; and, as he uttered some words of endearment, he possessed himself of the carving knife, unperceived by her.—"Let us now retire to rest, Leonard," she murmured, as her face lay buried on his chest: "It is growing late——Oh! heavens——"

And farther utterance was suddenly stopped; for, like a flash of lightning, the sharp blade, gleaming in the rays of the lamp, was drawn across her throat—the murderer turning her head and throwing it back at the same moment in order to aid his fell design. Death was almost instantaneous; and the miscreant gently lowered the body upon the floor. For nearly half a minute did he stand gazing upon that corpse—unable to believe that it was really what it seemed to be, and that he had perpetrated the deed. Then, as the awful conviction stared him fully in the face, and the entire sense of his enormity seized upon his soul, he would have given worlds, had he possessed them, to undo what was there done! But it was too late—oh! too late; and he must save himself—he must escape! A bumper of brandy gave him the courage of a brute: and, taking the lamp in his hand, he crept cautiously to Mr. Gamble's bed-room. The door was unlocked, and the old man slept profoundly. Beneath the bed was the plate-chest: but it was securely fastened with a padlock. Leonard raised the chest, and, placing it on his shoulder, was about to quit the room, when he espied upon a chair the clothes which Mr. Gamble had put off when retiring to rest. These garments the murderer likewise self-appropriated, as well as a hat, which was standing on a chest of drawers; and he noiselessly retraced his way to the chamber where the corpse lay. Turning his back towards that appalling spectacle, he proceeded to dress himself in Mr. Gamble's apparel, which fitted him quite well enough for his purpose, and was at all events a safer attire than his uniform. He next proceeded to break open the plate-chest—a task speedily effected by means of the same knife that had accomplished the murder. The contents of the chest, when rapidly scanned by his eager eyes, were evidently of great value; and he hastened to pack them up in towels, and lastly in brown paper. He then rifled the jewel-box of his murdered paramour; and, in addition to the costly articles which he found there, were the seventy pounds that the unfortunate woman had alluded to but a few minutes before she had ceased to exist. Leonard was satisfied with the booty thus acquired; and he was moreover in haste to depart. Having secured the money and jewels about his person, he took the parcel containing the plate under his arm, and stole cautiously down the stairs. All was silent throughout the house: several times did he pause to listen—but not a sound was heard;—and he gained the street without interruption. When, however, he was in the open air, he knew not whither to go—what plan to adopt,—whether to seek concealment in London until the coming storm should have blown over, or to make every effort to get out of England. The latter plan appeared to be the more advisable; and he accordingly pushed on towards the Dover road.

It was shortly after sun-rise that Mr. Gamble, awaking from a sound sleep, beheld a deep stain on the ceiling of his chamber; and, with eyes rivetted upon it, he lay reflecting what it could possibly be. The old man was half childish; and the strangest conjectures passed through his mind. At length he grew frightened: an unknown terror stole gradually upon him—and he rang his bell violently. In a few minutes the two female domestics entered the room, having hastily huddled on some clothing; and they found their master gazing intently up at the ceiling, with a wild vacancy in the eyes. Their own looks instantly took the same direction; and one of them suddenly exclaimed, with shuddering horror, "It is blood!" They then hurried up-stairs; and a frightful spectacle met their view. Their mistress lay upon the floor, with her throat cut from ear to ear; and the carpet was completely saturated with her blood. Screams and shrieks burst from the lips of the horror-stricken women; and rushing down stairs, they rashly communicated to Mr. Gamble, without any previous warning or preparation, the dreadful tragedy which had been enacted. The flickering, decaying lamp of the old man's intellect suddenly burnt up vividly for a few moments: the full powers of reason returned;—he comprehended the appalling news which were thus unguardedly made known to him; and with a horrible lamentation he sprang from his bed. With incredible speed did he ascend to his wife's chamber; and when the awful spectacle met his eyes, he threw up his arms in despair, gave vent to a piteous cry, and sank down on the blood-stained corpse. Meantime one of the servants had hastened next door to alarm Mr. Pomfret; and when that gentleman, accompanied by two or three of his own domestics, appeared on the scene of murder, assistance was immediately offered to Mr. Gamble. But all endeavours to recover him were ineffectual: the shock he had received was a death-blow—and life was extinct!

A few questions hastily put to the old man's servants elicited many facts dreadful for Mr. Pomfret to hear. He now learnt enough to convince him that his daughter had long maintained an illicit connexion with a handsome young dragoon—that her lover had been admitted the night before the one of the murder into the house—and that he must have been the author of the dreadful deed. Farther investigation corroborated this belief: the uniform was found, and a suit of Mr. Gamble's apparel had disappeared;—the plate, jewels, and money were likewise gone. The distracted father, having heard a long time previously that Leonard Mitchell had enlisted in a dragoon regiment, immediately suspected that he must be the criminal; and this idea was confirmed by the discovery of some letters in Ellen's desk. Information of the murder and robbery was accordingly given to the proper authorities; and Mr. Pomfret, crushed to the very dust by the weight of misfortune, crept back to his own cheerless dwelling—there to meditate upon the closing scene of the tragedy in which his own conduct had originally made his poor daughter the heroine. Bitterness was in the wretched man's soul—horror in his eyes—spasmodic shuddering in all his limbs; and, when he contemplated his child's horrible end and his own ruined fortunes, he felt indeed that he had nothing left worth living for. The cup of his adversity was not, however, quite full yet: but in a few hours it was overflowing—for his head clerk arrived in a cab, and, rushing into the parlour without ceremony, announced to him that the officers of justice were in search of him, a true bill of indictment having been found against him for certain frauds in his commercial transactions. "Thank you—thank you, for coming to give me this timely warning," said Mr. Pomfret, pressing his clerk's hand with painful violence: "I will depart immediately;"—and he staggered from the room. The clerk waited five minutes, and began to grow impatient: ten minutes elapsed and still his master did not reappear. The man rose and rang the bell furiously to summon one of the domestics; but at the same instant the constables entered the house. These officials, having learnt from the servant who admitted them, that Mr. Pomfret was at home, proceeded to search the dwelling; and the clerk, now entertaining the worst fears, accompanied them to the ruined merchant's bed-chamber. There these fears met with immediate confirmation: Mr. Pomfret had put a period to his existence—he had hanged himself to a strong nail in his sleeping apartment! The body was instantly cut down, and medical assistance promptly obtained: but the wretched suicide was no more.

In the evening of that same day a man was arrested under suspicious circumstances at Dover. The news of the awful occurrences in Stamford Street had not reached that town at the time—for there was neither railway nor electric telegraph between London and the Kentish coast in those days: but the individual alluded to, had presented a quantity of plate at a pawnbroker's shop, and, not being able

to give a satisfactory account of how it came into his possession, was detained until a constable arrived to take him into custody. On the ensuing morning the tidings of the murder in London reached Dover; and the particulars given by the newspapers of the preceding evening were ample enough to identify the person under arrest with the Leonard Mitchell who was accused of desertion, murder, and robbery. He was accordingly sent under a strong escort to the metropolis, where, on his arrival, he was immediately lodged in Newgate. In due course his trial came on: he was found guilty upon evidence the most conclusive:—and, upon being called upon to allege anything wherefore sentence of death should not be passed, he addressed the Judge in the following manner:—"I acknowledge, my lord, that I am guilty of the dreadful crime imputed to me; and although it be too late—far too late to express contrition now, I nevertheless declare that I am deeply, deeply penitent. My lord, lost—degraded—criminal—and condemned, as I stand here in your presence, I was once as sincerely attached to virtue as any man or woman who now hears me. Even when adversity entered the paternal dwelling, ravaging it with the desolating fury of an army, I yielded to no evil temptation: neither did my confidence in the justice, the goodness, and the wisdom of heaven abate. I enlisted, my lord, in order to obtain an honest livelihood, and to stifle in the bustle of a new state of existence the painful reminiscences of blighted hopes and crushed affections. The officers who have appeared before your lordship this day, have all admitted, in reply to the question I put to them, that up to the time when I was sentenced to three hundred lashes, I had never even received a reprimand nor had been once reported for the slightest irregularity. But from the moment that the first blow of the torturing and degrading weapon fell upon my back, my existence assumed a new phase—my soul underwent a sudden and immediate change. With each drop of blood that oozed from my lacerated back, ebbed away some sentiment of rectitude—some principle of virtue. My lord, it was the lash that drove me to drinking—that made me reckless of all consequences—that made me a liar and a voluptuary, a mean fellow and a paltry rascal—and that hardened my heart so as to render it inaccessible to every feeling of honour, mercy, or remorse. It was the lash, then, that has made me a murderer; and I might almost claim to be pitied, rather than to be looked upon with loathing. A cruel law taught me to be cruel: a merciless and barbarian punishment prepared me to become a ruthless and ferocious assassin. And now, my lord, I am about to reveal a fact which has long ago been suspected, and which, situated as I unhappily am, need not exist in doubt or uncertainty any more. My life must be forfeited for the crime which has been proved against me this day; and it will unburthen my soul of a heavy secret to confess another crime, which I perpetrated upwards of a year ago. Your lordship doubtless remembers that a young nobleman—an officer in the regiment to which I belonged—was shot at a review in Hyde Park. My lord, I was the assassin: the man accused me wrongfully—persecuted me unrelentingly—and lied most foully against me,—and I was avenged."

As Leonard uttered these last words in a firm tone and with marked emphasis, a thrill of horror passed through the crowded court; and the dead silence which had been observed while he was speaking, was succeeded by a subdued murmuring as of many voices commenting on what he had said. Erect, and with an evident determination to meet his doom courageously, the unhappy young man stood in the dock—his eye quailing not, his limbs trembling not; and, heinous as his offences were, he was not altogether without commiseration on the part of many present. The judge put on the black cap; and the sentence of death—that barbarian sentence—was pronounced in due form, the culprit receiving an intimation that he need entertain no hope of mercy. The hint was unnecessary: he had made up his mind to suffer;—and as firmly as he walked out of the dock back into the prison, so resolutely did he step from that same prison ten days afterwards on to the scaffold erected at the debtors' door. A tremendous crowd was assembled to witness the execution; and the unhappy criminal maintained his courage to the last.

From that time have the three houses in Stamford Street been shut up: from that period have they been suffered to fall into decay. In the first, old Mr. Mitchell expired suddenly: in the second, Mr. Pomfret hung himself;—and in the third, Ellen was brutally murdered. The hand of Fate had marked those three tenements to be the scenes of horror and of crime: and a superstitious feeling on the part of certain credulous and weak-minded neighbours soon engendered the report that they were haunted. It was said that the ghost of the young lady had been seen walking in her shroud, in the yard behind the house where she was murdered; and rumour added that on the anniversary night of the dread crime which had hurried her to a premature grave, she was wont to wander about the premises, uttering hollow and sepulchral moans. Such reports as those lose nothing by repetition during the lapse of years, especially while the buildings which were the scenes of the crimes engendering the superstition, continue to exist; and therefore is it that even at the present day the evil reputation of the HAUNTED HOUSES remains unimpaired in Stamford Street and its neighbourhood.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

THE GHOST.—AGNES AND MRS. MORTIMER.

The preceding episode has ran to a considerable length; but we hope and believe that our readers will experience no difficulty in resuming the thread of the general narrative.

It must be remembered that the leading incidents of the story just placed on record were related to Mrs. Mortimer by Jack Rily, by way of passing the few hours during which they had agreed to remain with Vitriol Bob, who, bound hand and foot, was seated helplessly in a chair.

"Yes," observed Jack Rily, when he had brought his history to a conclusion, "they do say that the young woman walks at times——"

"Don't speak in such a solemn tone," interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, casting a shuddering glance around: "you almost make me think that you yourself believe in the possibility of the spectral visitation."

"Well—I don't know how it is." returned the Doctor, feeling a certain superstitious influence growing upon him, and which he vainly endeavoured to shake off,—"but I certainly never before had such sensations as I experience now. Upon my soul;" he cried, striking the table violently with his clenched fist, "I am a prey to vague and undefined alarms to night:—but I will subdue them!"

"And are you sure that this is the house where the young lady was murdered?" asked Mrs. Mortimer, after a brief pause.

"There is no doubt about *that*!" responded Jack Rily. "Vitriol Bob there can tell you that the floor of the chamber where the deed took place is blackened with accumulated dust, yet in the middle there is a deeper stain; and on the ceiling of the room beneath, it is easy to descry the same sinister traces, even amidst dirt and cobwebs."

"Then, as you said just now," remarked Mrs. Mortimer, drawing her shawl over her shoulders—for she experienced the chill of superstitious terror gaining upon her,—"as you said just now, *this* is the second murder that has been committed within these walls!"

Scarcely had Mrs. Mortimer ceased speaking when the bell of the neighbouring church proclaimed the hour of *one*.

"Now is the time for the ghost," said Vitriol Bob, with a low but ferocious chuckle; for he experienced a malignant pleasure in observing that superstitious fears were gaining on the formidable Rily and the hideous old woman. "You don't like the near neighbourhood of the stiff 'un, I'm a-thinking! Well—I'll lay you a wager, Jack, that I'll go and shake the old feller by the hand quite in a friendly way—if you will but take off these cussed cords. There's no ill feelin' betwixt us now."

"I would much rather leave you where you are, and send Polly Calvert to release you," replied the Doctor.

"Yes—yes," hastily exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, "let him be where he is. But surely we may go now, Mr. Rily? It is getting on for two ——"

"It has only just this minit struck one!" cried Vitriol Bob, with a malignant leer from his dark, reptile-like eyes, which seemed to shine with a glare of their own, independent of and brighter than the dim light of the miserable candle. "Besides," he added, now purposely rendering his voice as solemn and ominous in its tone as possible, "'tis just the time for the ghost of the young gal—or rayther, the young o'oman to walk; and I should be wexed indeed if you didn't stay to have a look at her. I've seen her more than once——"

"That's an infernal falsehood, Bob!" exclaimed Jack Rily, starting from his seat on the barrel, and vainly endeavouring to subdue the nervous excitement that had gained so rapidly upon him.

"It's true—true as you're there!" cried the murderer, who felt a ferocious joy at thus inspiring terror in the mind of the strong and hardened ruffian who had conquered him. "And I'll tell you somethink more too," continued Vitriol Bob: "you said just now—and you said truly also—that on the anniwersary of the murder the young lady wanders about the place, uttering holler moans. Well—this is the night, then, that she was murdered just twenty years ago;—and the clock has struck *one*!"

The effect which these words produced upon Jack Rily and Mrs. Mortimer was as rapid as it was extraordinary. Although they were both of a nature peculiarly inaccessible to superstitious terrors on common occasions, and under any other circumstances would have laughed at the idea of spectral visitations and ghostly wanderings,—yet now they vainly struggled against the powerful influence of increasing terror; and, although in their hearts, they more than half suspected that Vitriol Bob had spoken only to aggravate their

alarms, yet they could not shake off the awe and consternation that seized upon their souls. In respect to Jack Rily, it was one of those periods of evanescent weakness which the most brutal and remorseless ruffians are known periodically to experience;—but, with regard to Mrs. Mortimer, it was the singularity of her present position—the consciousness that she was in a lonely place with two men of desperate character—the terrible remembrance that the murdered corse of her husband lay in the adjoining room—the impression made upon her mind by the appalling history of crime which had been to elaborately detailed to her—the thought that the very floors and the ceilings of the uppermost chambers in that house, bore testimony to the tale of blood—and the idea that the ghost of the assassinated lady was wont to wander in the depth of the night and on the scene of the crime,—it was all this that struck Mrs. Mortimer with awe and consternation, rendering her incapable of serious reflection, and levelling her strong mind as it were beneath the influence of superstitious terrors.

“Well—what the devil is the matter with you both?” demanded Vitriol Bob, after a pause.

“How do you mean?” asked Jack Rily, reseating himself, and grasping the brandy-bottle with a trembling hand.

“Why—you and the old lady looked at each other as if you already heard the light step and the rustling shroud of the apparition,” said the murderer.

“Hark! what was that?” ejaculated the Doctor, once more starting to his feet.

“It certainly was a noise somewhere,” observed Mrs. Mortimer, trembling from head to foot.

“Perhaps the old man in the back-kitchen has got up and is groping his way about,” said Vitriol Bob, speaking with an affectation of terror which was so natural that it cruelly enhanced the superstitious alarms experienced by his companions.

“This is intolerable!” exclaimed Rily, looking in a ghastly manner towards the door, as if he more than half expected to behold it suddenly thrown open, and some hideous form appear on the threshold. “I can’t make out what it is that has come over me to-night! ’Tis like a warning—and yet I never believed in ghosts until now.”

“Nor I—nor I!” murmured Mrs. Mortimer. “But to-night—I feel also as if——”

“Hark!” suddenly cried Vitriol Bob: “there is a noise again!”

“It must be the old man!” ejaculated the Doctor. “Are you sure that you did for him thoroughly?”

“If anythink like him meets your eyes, Jack, it must be his ghost, I can assure you,” was the solemn answer—although Vitriol Bob himself partook not in the slightest degree of the superstitious terrors that had grown upon his companions, but was on the contrary inwardly chuckling with malignant joy at their awe-struck state of mind.

“There! did you hear it?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer, in a hasty and excited tone. “I am sure it was a noise this time: there could be no mistake about it!”

And she endeavoured to rise from her chair;—but terror kept her motionless—paralysing every limb, though not placing a seal upon her lips.

“Something dreadful is to happen to-night—I know it—I feel it!” said Jack Rily, in a tone which indicated remorse for a long career of crime and turpitude. “By God! ’tis the back-door of the house that is opening——”

“Then this is serious indeed!” interrupted Vitriol Bob, now alarmed in his turn—but rather on account of constables than spectres. “Unloose me—let us fight—resist——”

“Silence!” muttered Jack Rily, in a low but imperious tone.

There was a pause of nearly a minute, during which the three inmates of the kitchen held their breath to listen, in painful suspense.

Suddenly the rattling of the crazy bannisters outside fell upon their ears; and Jack Rily, worked up to a pitch of desperation, seized the candle, saying in a hoarse and dogged tone, “By hell! I will face it, whatever it may be!”

With these words he tore open the kitchen-door;—and, behold! before him stood a female form—clothed in white—with a countenance pale as death—her hair flowing wildly and dishevelled over her shoulders—and with eyes fixed in unnatural brilliancy upon him.

The ruffian was for a few moments paralyzed—stupified with horror: then, unable any longer to endure the spectacle which his fears converted into a corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet, he exclaimed, “The ghost! the ghost!”—and dropped the candle upon the floor.

Total darkness immediately ensued.

At the same instant a piercing scream echoed through the house; and Mrs. Mortimer, now recovering all her presence of mind, started

to her feet, crying, “That is no apparition—save of flesh and blood! Haste, Jack Rily—procure a light! Where are you, man? Let us see who it is!”

“Here I am,” returned the Doctor, likewise regaining his self-possession. “Bob, where are the lucifers?”

“In my right-hand pocket,” growled the murderer, who, in the excitement of the past scene, and in the tremendous but ineffectual exertions which he had made to release himself from his bonds the moment the light was extinguished, had fallen from his seat and rolled upon the floor.

Nearly half a minute now elapsed ere the candle was found and lighted again; and then Jack Rily, closely followed by Mrs. Mortimer, hastened into the passage, where they beheld the form of a young female stretched senseless at the foot of the stairs.

The old woman stooped down to raise her: but scarcely had she caught a glimpse of the pale countenance, on which the finger of death seemed to have been placed, when, starting with surprise and joy, she exclaimed, “’Tis Agnes Vernon, as I am a living being!”

“Agnes Vernon—who is she? do you know her?” demanded the Doctor, holding forward the light. “By Jove! she is a sweet creature, whoever she is! That’s right—raise her gently. But is she dead, poor thing?”

“No—no: her heart beats—and her lips already begin to move,” responded Mrs. Mortimer hastily, as she held the still senseless maiden in her arms. “Well—this is a lucky chance that has thrown her in our way—and there’s money to be made out of it.”

“So much the better? Shall I get a little water?” asked the Doctor.

“Yes—and use despatch,” returned Mrs. Mortimer.

Jack Rily entered the kitchen, and filled a glass with water.

“Who is it?” demanded Vitriol Bob, whom the Doctor had previously restored to his position in the chair.

“A young lady that Mrs. Mortimer happens to know,” was the reply. “There is no danger from other visitors, according to all appearances: so keep quiet, and don’t alarm yourself.”

The Doctor hastened back into the passage, where Mrs. Mortimer was seated on the last step of the staircase, supporting Agnes in her arms.

“Now, will you follow my advice, Mr. Rily?” she demanded in a rapid tone, as she sprinkled the water upon the pallid countenance of the young lady.

“Yes—if it seems feasible,” was the immediate answer. “What is it?”

“That we do not keep this timid thing a moment longer in the house than is absolutely necessary,” continued Mrs. Mortimer. “For our own sakes we must guard against her beholding the interior of that place;” and, as she uttered these words in a low tone, she nodded significantly towards the door of the back kitchen where the corpse of Torrens had been deposited.

“Yes—yes: I understand,” said Jack Rily: “it might be thought that we were accomplices in the murder. In the same way it would do no good to let her see Vitriol Bob bound neck and crop in the front kitchen.”

“That is just what I was about to suggest,” observed Mrs. Mortimer. “We must get her out of the house as soon as possible, and into a cab——”

“Then don’t use any more means to recover her,” interrupted Jack Rily, snatching the glass of water from the old woman’s hand. “Let her remain for a short time longer in that trance: it will not kill her, depend upon it—and you have the advantage of possessing an Æsculapius in me.”

“What do you propose, then?” demanded Mrs. Mortimer, casting an anxious glance upon the countenance of the still senseless girl.

“Don’t be frightened, I tell you,” repeated Jack Rily: “I will guarantee that she shall recover. But let us be off at once. I will take her in my arms and carry her into Bennett Street; the neighbourhood is all quiet and deserted at this hour;—and you shall order round a cab from the stand in the road There are always two or three in attendance throughout the night.”

“Good!” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer. “We will be off at once.”

“This instant,” said Jack Rily, as he gently raised the motionless, senseless form in his powerful arms, while Mrs. Mortimer took off her shawl and wrapped it hastily over the head and shoulders of Agnes.

The Doctor gave a hurried intimation to Vitriol Bob that Molly Calvert should be sent to him as speedily as possible; and he then stole out of the house, Mrs. Mortimer having previously ascertained that the coast was perfectly clear.

Everything was effected as Jack Rily had proposed. He gained Bennett Street, with his lovely burthen in his arms; and there he waited in the deep darkness afforded by a large gateway, until Mrs. Mortimer came round with the cab. The maiden was placed in the vehicle, which the old woman entered in order to take charge of her; and Jack Rily, after having made an appointment with his accomplice for the next evening, bade her a temporary farewell.

The cab drove away towards Park Square; and the Doctor, on his side, hurried off to the lodgings of Pig-faced Moll.

But the thread of our narrative now lies with Mrs. Mortimer and the beauteous Agnes Vernon.

Scarcely had the cab moved away from the vicinity of the haunted houses, when Agnes began rapidly to recover; and, on opening her eyes, she became aware that she was reclining in the arms of a female, and that they were being borne speedily along in a vehicle. For an instant it struck her that she must be with her mother: but in the next moment the horrors of the night crowded rapidly into her memory,—and, starting up, she demanded in a hurried, anxious manner, “Where am I? and who are you?”

Scarcely were the questions put when the young maiden was enabled, by the silver moon-light, to catch a glimpse of the countenance of her companion; and she instantly recognised Mrs. Mortimer.

Her first emotions were of joy and gratitude;—for she was delighted to find herself in the care of a female—especially one of whom she knew something: and, taking the old woman’s hand, she said, “Madam, I know not how to thank you—and am scarcely aware of what I have to thank you for. But—if my impressions be correct—you must have rescued me from something very terrible! Yes—I recollect now—that door opening—a light appearing—and then that hideous, horrible face——”

And, with a visible shudder, the maiden threw herself back in the vehicle, pressing her hands to her throbbing brows in order to collect her still disjointed and somewhat confused reminiscences.

“You are labouring under dreadful recollections my dear child,” said Mrs. Mortimer, in a soothing tone. “Know you not—can you not suspect that you were in the power of a ruffian when I fortunately encountered you?”

“But where—where?” demanded Agnes, impatiently, as her settling ideas seemed to coincide with that belief.

“I should rather ask you, my sweet maiden,” said Mrs. Mortimer, “how you came to be in Stamford Street this night.”

“My mother took me thither—yes—I recollect it all now!” exclaimed Agnes. “She left me at the house of some dear friends—and I was ungrateful enough to entertain the most injurious suspicions respecting them,—yes—and relative to my own dear mother also.”

“Your mother?” repeated Mrs. Mortimer, in astonishment. “I thought you had never known her—or that she had died when you were in your infancy.”

“Oh! no—thank God! my mother is alive—and I know her now!” ejaculated Agnes, with all the enthusiasm of a strongly reviving affection—a powerfully resuscitating devotion for the parent whom she had so lately discovered.

“But where is your mother now?” enquired Mrs. Mortimer.

“Ah! that I know not!” replied Agnes. “And this reminds me,” she exclaimed after a few moments’ pause, “that you must take me back to the good kind ladies in Stamford Street, that I may remain there until my mother shall come to fetch me away to the new home which she has promised to prepare for me.”

“Who are those good ladies?” asked Mrs. Mortimer.

“Their name is Theobald, and they live in Stamford Street,” responded the artless girl. “You may know the house—or at least the driver of the vehicle can find it out, when I describe it as being situated fourth from the corner of the Blackfriars’ Road, and next to three deserted—dilapidated—sinister-looking houses——”

“Ah! then you must have found your way from the dwelling of your friends into one of those ruined places,” thought Mrs. Mortimer. “But I am really at a loss, my dear young lady, to comprehend all you tell me,” she said aloud.

“Before I give you the necessary explanations to enable you to understand it all,” said Agnes, “will you inform me which road the vehicle is pursuing?”

“I am taking you to a place of safety, my dear girl,” responded Mrs. Mortimer.

“A place of safety!” repeated Agnes, her countenance assuming an expression of deep anxiety: “am I, then, in any danger? and in what does the peril consist?”

“I know not, my love,” answered the old woman, speaking in the kindest tone of voice. “I only judge by the condition in which I found you—the circumstances which threw us this night together—and the observations which have fallen from your lips, that you were indeed in a state of extreme danger.”

“Just heaven!” ejaculated Agnes. “But what observations did I make——”

“That you had entertained suspicions relative to the friends to whose care your mother had consigned you,” said Mrs. Mortimer.

“Yes—and I told you truly,” resumed the ingenuous maiden. “I know not how it was—I cannot account for it now—but when I found myself alone in a strange house, terrible though undefined fears took possession of my soul—and I resolved to escape. I succeeded in getting as far as the next house, which I entered: but scarcely had I crossed the threshold of the back door, when a light suddenly appeared and a countenance was revealed to my affrighted gaze—a countenance so dreadful to look upon that I tremble now as I think of it. Then, so far as I can recollect, I heard a voice thundering something loud but unintelligible in my ears: I screamed—and fainted. When I came to my senses, I was in your arms and in this vehicle.”

“I can throw some light upon the matter,” said Mrs. Mortimer, whose object was to keep the attention of Agnes as much and as unremittingly engaged as possible, so as to prevent her from growing uneasy relative to the ultimate destination of the cab: for should she become alarmed, she might appeal to the driver for protection, and a disturbance in the streets would prove inevitable. “You must know,” continued Mrs. Mortimer, “that I was returning home from a friend’s house in Stamford-street, when I met a great, stout, horribly ugly man carrying a female form in his arms. The moon-light showed me his dreadful countenance—and I instantly suspected that some foul play was intended. I accordingly insisted that he should stop—which he did with much reluctance, declaring that you were his daughter, and that he was taking you home, as you had fallen down in a fit.”

“Oh! then some mischief was really meditated towards me!” exclaimed Agnes, clasping her hands together in shuddering horror of the perils through which she supposed herself to have passed.

“Yes—my dear child,” observed Mrs. Mortimer, “you doubtless owe your life to me——”

“Ah! madam,” interrupted Agnes, “how can I ever sufficiently thank you for your goodness?”—then, as a reminiscence struck to her artless mind with the pang of a remorse, she exclaimed, as she pressed the old woman’s wrinkled hands to her lips, “It seems fated that I should suspect those who are my best friends!”

“Do not think of that, my love,” said the wily old creature, who easily conjectured what was passing in that amiable maiden’s ingenuous soul. “When you know me better, you will appreciate my conduct towards you as it deserves. Doubtless your father set you against me—and then that little misunderstanding relative to the affair of Lord William Trevelyan——But enough of that for the present! Let me conclude my little narrative relative to yourself. Well, I was describing to you how I compelled the man to stop; and I was about to tell you that I was by no means satisfied with the explanations he gave me. Indeed, I threatened to summon the assistance of the police; and you may be well assured that this menace suddenly became a settled resolution, when, as the moonlight fell upon the countenance of the fair creature whom the man carried in his arms, I recognised yourself, my sweet Agnes! You can conceive my astonishment, perhaps—but you can form no idea of the apprehension that seized on me; for I really love you dearly, although I have seen so little of you. The man was dreadfully alarmed when he perceived that I knew you; and I had no difficulty in compelling him to surrender you into my charge. He then decamped; and I placed you in a cab which happened to be passing at the time. You now know all.”

“Ah! from what inconceivable perils have you not saved me!” exclaimed Agnes, full of enthusiastic and impassioned gratitude towards the woman whom she looked upon as her deliverer. “My dear mother will thank you warmly—earnestly—most sincerely for this generous act on your part; and I shall never, never forget the deep obligation under which you have placed me.”

“Enough on that subject, my dear child,” said Mrs. Mortimer. “You have spoken several times of your mother—may I ask how you came to discover her, or how she happened to have remained so long unknown to you?”

“I am bewildered when I think of all that!” returned Miss Vernon, in a mournful tone. “It was last evening that she came to me—that she sought me out in my retirement—that she announced herself as my parent; and my heart’s feelings gave me the assurance that she was indeed what she represented herself to be. Then I agreed to accompany her—for she told me that she was unhappy, and she claimed my love and my duty as a daughter. Oh! my dear madam, you can doubtless understand how joyous—how delightful were my emotions on thus encountering a mother whom I had never known till then! I only thought of giving way to those delicious feelings—until I found myself left in the charge of strangers. Then it was that I grew afraid—that vague and undefinable apprehensions took possession of my soul—that I became suspicions of all and everything—and that I fled! Foolish, mistaken creature that I was! That one false step of mine threw me into the hands of a monster, who would perhaps have killed me had you not rescued me from his power.”

Agnes paused, and arranged her hair—her dark, luxuriant, glossy hair—floating so wildly and yet so beauteously in its dishevelled state, over her shoulders;—and now, as the tint of the rose had returned to her cheeks, and her eyes had recovered their witching softness of expression, she appeared transcendantly lovely to the view of the old woman, whom the moon-light enabled to survey the charming creature seated opposite to her.

Suddenly the vehicle stopped;—and Agnes, hastily looking from the windows, beheld a row of handsome houses on one side, and an enclosure of verdant shrubs and plants on the other.

“This is not Stamford Street, madam,” she said to Mrs. Mortimer.

“No, my dear child,” was the almost whispered reply: “but it is a place of safety to which I have brought you. Do you imagine that I, who have saved your life this night, could intend you any harm? Wherefore be thus ever suspicious respecting your best friends?”

These words not only reassured Agnes, but made her blush at what she deemed to be her ingratitude towards her deliverer;—and, pressing the old woman’s hand fervently, she murmured, “Forgive me, I implore you!”

“Think no more of it, my love,” said Mrs. Mortimer, as she alighted from the vehicle: then, turning towards the maiden, she added, “Remain in your place for a few minutes until I have aroused the people of the house: the chill air of the early morning will give you cold, lightly clad as you are.”

Agnes signified an assent; and the old woman hastened up to the front door of the house at which they had stopped. She knocked and rang: but some time elapsed ere the summons was answered. At length a domestic, who had huddled on some clothing, made his appearance; and, to Mrs. Mortimer’s query whether his master were at home, an affirmative reply was given.

“Then hesitate not to arouse him—for I have called upon a matter of great importance to his lordship,” said the old woman.

“Certainly I will do so, madam,” returned the domestic; “since you assure me that your business is pressing. But will you not walk in and await his lordship’s readiness to receive you?”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Mortimer; “and I have a person with me who must accompany me. But listen to something that I have to urge upon you. You will conduct us both, as a matter of course, into the same room: but when your master is ready to receive me, take care that I obtain an interview alone with him in the first instance. It is of the highest consequence that these instructions should be fully attended to.”

“You shall be obeyed, madam,” said the servant.

Mrs. Mortimer now fetched Agnes from the vehicle, which she ordered to be kept waiting for herself; and the two females were conducted by the domestic into a handsome apartment, where, having lighted the wax-candles, he left them.

CHAPTER CLXXX.

AGNES AND TREVELYAN.

In spite of her anxiety to place confidence in Mrs. Mortimer—in spite of the deep obligation under which she believed herself to be lying towards her, Agnes could not subdue a partial feeling of uneasiness when she found that she was in a strange house, evidently the abode of a rich person.

She gazed round the walls covered with splendid pictures—on the chandelier suspended to the ceiling—on the elegant and costly furniture—the superb mantel-ornaments—and down upon the luxurious carpet, so thick that her tiny feet were almost imbedded in it, as if she were walking in snow.

Whose dwelling could it be? Assuredly not Mrs. Mortimer's—for she was only treated as a visitress. At length, after the lapse of a few minutes, the young maiden ventured to ask, "Who are the friends, madam, with whom you propose to leave me?"

"Does not that very question, Agnes, imply a suspicion injurious to me?" said Mrs. Mortimer, evasively.

"Oh! no—no!" exclaimed Miss Vernon, in a melting tone of the profoundest sincerity. "But may I not ask so simple a question without being liable to such a distressing imputation?"

"Can you not leave yourself in the hands of one who has saved your life and who wishes you well?" said the old woman, speaking in a voice of mingled reproach and conciliation.

"Yes—certainly, madam," was the immediate answer: "but you yourself are not going to remain here—inasmuch as you have ordered the cabriolet to wait for you."

"True, Agnes: because I have business of importance to transact at an early hour this morning, and at a considerable distance hence. Reassure yourself, my darling girl," continued the iniquitous hag: "you will be delighted to meet the person whom you will presently see. Indeed, it is only a little surprise which I am preparing for you—and, after all I have done for you, you surely will not deny me the pleasure which I promise myself in beholding the interview between yourself and the owner of this splendid mansion."

By degrees, as Mrs. Mortimer spoke, the countenance of Agnes brightened up; for it struck the young maiden that it was her mother whom she was now to meet—and this idea grew into a positive conviction by the time the old woman had uttered the last words of her sentence. She was accordingly about to express renewed gratitude for the happy surprise thus reserved for her, when the door opened and the domestic returned to the apartment.

"Madam, will you follow me?" he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Mortimer.

"My dear child," observed the old woman, turning towards Agnes and patting her face with a show of affection, "you will remain here for a few minutes—a very few minutes; and then," she added, with a sly smile, which meant as much as to intimate that she read the hope entertained by Agnes, and should speedily have the pleasure of gratifying it,—"and then, my love, you will not scold me for having kept you a little in suspense."

Tears of gratitude trembled upon the long dark lashes of the beauteous maiden, although her lips were wreathed in smiles:—but when Nature melts into April softness, 'tis with mingled rain and sunshine.

While Agnes remained alone in the handsome parlour, cradling herself in the hope that the lapse of a few minutes would see her embraced in the arms of her mother, Mrs. Mortimer was conducted into another apartment, where she found herself in the presence of Lord William Trevelyan, who had dressed himself with as much despatch as possible.

"Well, madam," he said, in a hasty and even anxious tone, "what has brought you hither at this unseasonable hour?—whom have you with you?—and wherefore this desire, as expressed to my domestic, to see me alone in the first instance?"

"My lord, it is Agnes Vernon who has accompanied me, and who is in the room which I have just left," answered the old woman.

"I thought so—I was afraid that it was so, when the servant gave me a description of her—a very rapid and partial one, it is true, inasmuch as he beheld her only for a few moments. But, great heavens! madam," continued the young nobleman, speaking with singular and unusual vivacity, "what means this strange proceeding?"

“That Agnes required an asylum, and I brought her hither,” was the response.

“And do you for an instant imagine, madam, that I am capable—that I would be guilty—that I——But, enough! I will say no more to you: I see through your real character—and I loathe and despise it! My God! to think that I should have enlisted a common procuress in my service! Oh! how can I ever look Agnes in the face?—how venture to accost her, after having thus offered her the most flagrant of insults? But, tell me, vile woman,” he exclaimed, seizing Mrs. Mortimer forcibly by the wrist, while his tone and manner alike indicated the most painful excitement,—“tell me, I say, by what detestable artifices you have induced that innocent and unsuspecting maiden to accompany you hither?”

“My lord, you will be ashamed of yourself for this unworthy conduct towards me, when you come to know all,—yes, ashamed and astonished at the same time,” said Mrs. Mortimer, assuming an air of offended dignity and wounded pride.

“How!—speak!” ejaculated Lord William, dropping the woman’s arm and surveying her with mingled surprise and repentance.

“I shall not waste precious time in entering into details,” resumed Mrs. Mortimer. “Yesterday morning I saw Agnes and induced her to peruse your letter. She was offended, and tossed it indignantly back to me.”

“Ah!” cried the nobleman, his countenance assuming an expression of extreme vexation.

“Yes—and here it is,” continued Mrs. Mortimer, producing the epistle from her reticule, and laying it upon the table.

“But she read it, you say?” exclaimed Lord William.

“Every word,” was the response. “Nevertheless, though softened and even pleased at first, she subsequently thought better of it, and rejected the communication in the manner I have described. I was disheartened, and felt unwilling to return to you with such unwelcome intelligence. An hour ago I quitted the house of a friend in Stamford Street; and in that same street the following adventure occurred to me.”

The old woman then related precisely the same anecdote which she had already told to Agnes, relative to the pretended rescue of that young lady from the power of a man who was bearing her along insensible in his arms.

The young nobleman was astounded; and his manner denoted incredulity.

“I perceive that your lordship puts no faith in my narrative,” said Mrs. Mortimer, who conjectured what was passing in his mind: “but the tale which Agnes can tell you, will corroborate it. She herself will inform you how she fell into the power of the ruffian from whom it was subsequently my good fortune to deliver her; and if you place confidence in her words, you will perforce be led to accord the same favour to mine?”

“And her tale—what is it?” demanded the nobleman, impatiently.

“Yesterday she discovered the mother whom she had lost since her infancy,” answered Mrs. Mortimer.

“Her mother!” exclaimed Trevelyan. “And where is that mother? who is she? Tell me, that I may hasten to her at as early an hour as possible, and implore of her to accord me the hand of her daughter.”

“Be not so hasty, my lord. I am totally unacquainted with Agnes Vernon’s mother; and she herself—poor artless girl! knows, I believe, but little more. It is however certain that the young lady was induced to accompany her newly-found parent from the cottage—that she was consigned to the care of two ladies named Theobald, and dwelling in Stamford Street—that in the night she became the prey to vague and unfounded terrors, which induced her to attempt an escape from the house—and that she fell into the hands of the man from whom I rescued her.”

“And wherefore have you brought her hither?” asked Lord William. “Why not have conducted her back to the ladies to whose care her mother had consigned her—or to the cottage where she has dwelt so long?”

“I have put you in the position of one who may perform a chivalrous action, and thereby win the permanent esteem, gratitude, and love of this beautiful creature whom you adore,” said Mrs. Mortimer; “and now you appear inclined to load me with reproaches. Yes—I perceive that reproaches *are* trembling upon your lordship’s tongue;—and I who have done all I could to serve you, shall experience nought save ingratitude. Oh! short-sighted lover that you are! Here is a young girl whom I pick up as it were houseless and homeless—and I am already half-way with her to your mansion, before I even learn from her lips how she came in Stamford Street at all, or that she has friends there. But when I do glean those facts, I find that she has escaped from the guardianship of those friends: and could I suppose that they would be willing to receive her again? Now, my lord, it is for you to grant her an asylum—to treat her with all imaginable delicacy and attention—and to leave me to find out her mother, that you may restore the lost daughter to the distracted parent. Doubtless the Miss Theobalds will give me the desired information: and then calculate the amount of gratitude that will be due to you! In spite of her father—whoever he may really be, and whatever opposition he might raise—Agnes is yours; and you gain the object of your heart’s dearest wishes.”

“And think you, woman,” exclaimed Lord William Trevelyan, unable any longer to subdue his resentment,—“think you that I will

blast the fair fame of this young lady by retaining her for even a single hour beneath my roof?—think you that I will obtain for her the inevitable reputation of having been my mistress, previously to becoming my wife? No—a thousand times no! And do you imagine that I read not your heart aright? do you suppose that I am your dupe? I tell you, vile woman, that in bringing the innocent and artless Agnes hither, you fancied you would be throwing in my way a temptation which I could not resist,—a temptation which would thaw all my virtuous principles and honourable notions, and lead me to sacrifice the purity of the confiding girl to my passion. Yes—such was your base calculation: or you would at once and unhesitatingly have conducted her either to the abode of her friends in Stamford Street, or home to her own cottage! Ah! madam, because I belong to the aristocracy, you imagine that I must necessarily be as vile, depraved, and unprincipled as ninety-nine out of every hundred individuals who bear lordly titles. But you have deceived yourself—grossly deceived yourself: and you shall at once have the proof that you are so deceived! Follow me."

Thus speaking, Lord William advanced rapidly towards the door, imperiously beckoning the vile woman to accompany him.

"Whither are you going, my lord?" she demanded, finding that she had indeed over-reached herself—that the nobleman's principles were more profoundly rooted than she had imagined—and that all her trouble was likely to go unrewarded.

"Follow me, I say: as you have done this amount of mischief, you shall at least see it remedied to the utmost of my power;"—and the nobleman burst from the room, literally dragging the old woman with him.

In less than a minute they entered the apartment where Agnes was anxiously—oh! most anxiously awaiting the presence of her mother;—and the moment the door was opened, she darted forward to precipitate herself into the arms of her parent.

But, recognising Lord William Trevelyan, she stopped short with a cry of mingled disappointment, surprise, and alarm; while an ashy pallor overspread her countenance.

"Reassure yourself, Miss Vernon—I am your friend, and a man of honour!" were the encouraging words which Trevelyan hastened to address to her.

"And my mother?" said the young maiden, bending a look of earnest appeal upon Mrs. Mortimer, who however shrank back in confusion.

"Your mother is not here, Miss Vernon," exclaimed the nobleman: "neither does this woman know where to find her. An act of the greatest imprudence has been committed in bringing you hither——"

"Oh! what do I hear?" cried Agnes, clasping her hands. "Is this your house, my lord? If so," she added, with dignity succeeding grief, "I am innocent of any intention to intrude: indeed, your lordship might full well conceive that I should not have come hither of my own accord—oh! no—not for worlds!"

And tears rolled down the cheeks of the gentle girl for she felt humiliated in the presence of the very man in whose eyes, if her young heart had a preference, she would have fain appeared in another light.

"Oh! Miss Vernon, it is you who do not understand me!" ejaculated Lord William, advancing and taking her hand. "If I spoke of the imprudence which had been committed, it was on your account only! For believe me when I declare that I should be proud,—yes, and in the enjoyment of an elysian happiness, could you enter this mansion to remain here—to command here, with honour to yourself! But I will not avail myself of this opportunity to urge a suit that I have already ventured to prefer, and in the prosecution of which I unfortunately selected so improper an agent."

As he uttered these words, he bent an indignant look upon Mrs. Mortimer, who turned away petulantly and made for the door.

"Stop, woman!" cried the young nobleman, hastening to detain her: "I cannot yet part with you, intolerable as your presence has become to me. "Miss Vernon," he continued, again turning toward the maiden, whose sense of humiliation had vanished, and who in her heart of hearts now rejoiced in the conviction that Lord William Trevelyan was indeed as noble in nature as he was in name,—"I need scarcely observe that circumstances compel me to procure for you an asylum for the remainder of the night as speedily as possible. You will permit me to conduct you to the abode of a lady of my acquaintance,—a lady who will receive you with open arms, and who will to-morrow—or rather, in a few hours' time—herself conduct you to the abode of your friends in Stamford Street, or to your own home near Streatham."

With these words, the nobleman took the hand of the blushing Agnes, and led her from the house to the vehicle that was still waiting.

"Now, madam, you may depart," he said sternly to Mrs. Mortimer, as soon as he had seated himself in the cab, opposite to Agnes.

The old woman turned sulkily away, muttering threats of vengeance; but these were unheeded by the chivalrous Trevelyan, who gave hasty instructions to the driver, and the vehicle rolled rapidly on towards Kentish Town.

Agnes could not do otherwise than appreciate all the delicacy of Lord William's conduct towards her; for it is no disparagement to the extreme artlessness of her mind to state that she comprehended wherefore he had compelled Mrs. Mortimer to wait until they had quitted the house. But she could scarcely collect her bewildered ideas into a settled state—so rapid was the whirl of incidents and adventures through which she was doomed to pass on this memorable night. Had she paused to reflect upon her position, with that

seriousness which it required, she would have requested the nobleman to conduct her at once to the dwelling of the Misses Theobald: but he had deported himself towards her with the generosity of a brother, and she acted in obedience to his suggestions without waiting to analyse them. In a word, she was full of confidence and ingenuous reliance in him; and she felt as if she had suddenly found a stanch and sincere friend in the midst of cruel difficulties and deep embarrassments. A dreamy kind of repose stole over her as she was borne along in the vehicle: and yet she not only heard the few remarks which her companion addressed to her, but likewise answered them in a befitting manner.

On his side Trevelyan was a prey to the strangest excitement; accident having not only thus procured him the acquaintanceship of her whom he loved so fondly, but having likewise placed them in a relative position, establishing as it were a friendship—almost an intimacy. Moreover, had he not touched her delicate white hand—touched it gently, it is true, and without venturing to press it,—but still touched it, and even held it for a few moments in his own? Had he not discovered, too, that if she appeared surpassingly lovely when seen from a distance, a nearer contemplation of her charms was only calculated to enhance his admiration and strengthen his devotion? And, lastly, had not the musical tones of her silver voice been breathed in his hearing, wafting words that were addressed to himself, and making every fibre in his heart vibrate deliciously to the dulcet sounds? Yes—all this he felt and appreciated; and he was happy.

The conversation that passed between them during the drive to Kentish Town was slight, and chiefly confined to such observations as a well-bred gentleman would address to a lady under circumstances of embarrassment, and to such responses as those remarks were calculated to elicit. The young nobleman was careful to avoid any allusion to the letter which he had sent to Agnes, or to the circumstances that had thus thrown them so singularly together; and she, understanding his forbearance and perceiving his unwillingness to take the least advantage of her peculiar position, felt her esteem—we might almost say her *love*—increase in his favour.

In about twenty minutes the cab stopped at the gate of a beautiful villa; and as the orient sky was now flickering with the first struggling beams of a summer sunrise, Agnes was enabled to obtain a tolerably distinct view of the picturesque spot. The fresh breeze, too, fanned her countenance, recalling the roses to her damask cheeks; and as she threw back the shining masses of hair from her forehead, Trevelyan's eye could trace the blue veins so delicately marked beneath the white skin of that fair and polished brow.

On alighting at the entrance to the villa, Trevelyan and his beautiful companion were both struck by the glimmering of lights which shone through the divisions in the parlour shutters, and the rays of which, peeping forth, struggled with sickly effect against the dawning of a new day. Those lights, too, were evidently moving about; and it was therefore clear that the inmates of the dwelling were astir even at that early hour.

The summons at the front door was almost immediately responded to by a female servant, who, in reply to the young nobleman's questions, stated that Mrs. Sefton was at home, and had risen thus early in order to make preparations for removal to a new house which she had taken in another suburb of London.

Trevelyan and Agnes were accordingly admitted forthwith; and the domestic conducted them to the parlour, where Mrs. Sefton was busily engaged in packing up her effects. She was much surprised when she heard Trevelyan's voice, and immediately apprehended that some misfortune was in store for her—some evil tidings, perhaps, relative to Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

But scarcely had Agnes reached the threshold of the apartment, when—the moment Mrs. Sefton turned to receive her visitors—the young girl gave vent to an ejaculation of mingled astonishment and joy, and, bounding forward, was in the next instant clasped in that lady's arms.

"My dearest—dearest mother!"

"Agnes—my beloved child!"

These were the words which explained to Trevelyan the scene that he now witnessed.

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

EXPLANATIONS.

The reader need scarcely be informed that if Lord William were amazed at the discovery of the relationship subsisting between two ladies whom he had hitherto deemed to be perfect strangers to each other, Mrs. Sefton was not less astonished at having her daughter thus unexpectedly introduced into her presence and at such an unseasonable hour.

For a few minutes, however, she had no leisure for reflection,—joy at once more being enabled to strain that beloved child to her bosom triumphing over all other considerations.

But when the first gush of feeling had somewhat subsided, a horrible suspicion entered her mind.

Could Lord William have seduced Agnes away from the care of those friends to whom she was consigned?—could he have entertained the vile and derogatory idea of using the villa as the receptacle for a young creature whom he intended to make his mistress?—did he suppose that Mrs. Sefton would lend herself to such an atrocious proceeding?—and had he unconsciously brought the child to the house of the mother, thinking to make a pander of the latter to the dishonour of the former?

All these thoughts flashed with lightning rapidity to Mrs. Sefton's mind, as, disengaging herself from the embraces of Agnes, she turned towards Lord William, and, with flashing eyes and quivering lips, peremptorily demanded an explanation of the circumstances which had rendered him the companion of her daughter at such an hour.

Trevelyan instantly divined what was passing in the lady's bosom; and, perceiving at once the awkwardness of his position and the grounds of her suspicions, he hastily gave such explanations as were satisfactory to Mrs. Sefton, Agnes herself corroborating the main facts.

"Pardon me, my dear friend," said the now happy mother, taking Trevelyan's hand and pressing it fervently in token of gratitude,—"pardon me if for a moment I entertained the most unjust and derogatory suspicions."

"Mention them not, madam," exclaimed Trevelyan warmly: "but let your daughter seek that repose which she must so deeply need—and I will then, as a man of honour, explain to you how I became interested in her, and how it was that the Mrs. Mortimer whose name has already been mentioned happened to bring her to my house."

A slight smile—almost of archness—played upon the lips of Mrs. Sefton, as she turned towards Agnes,—a smile which seemed to intimate that she already knew more than the young nobleman fancied, but was not vexed with him in consequence of the facts thus known to her.

"Come with me, dearest girl," she said, addressing her daughter, "and I will conduct you to a chamber where you may obtain a few hours' repose. You need not bid farewell to his lordship; for I have no doubt he will honour us with his presence at breakfast—when you will see him again."

Agnes blushed and cast down her eyes—she scarcely knew why—as these words met her ears;—and again the arch smile played upon her mother's lips. Trevelyan observed that there was some mystery, though not of a disagreeable nature, in Mrs. Sefton's manner; and in a moment—with galvanic swiftness—the reminiscence of the tears upon the portrait and the lost letter flashed to his mind.

The ladies disappeared, and Trevelyan threw himself in a chair, to muse upon the discovery which he had thus made, and which was well calculated to afford him pleasure. Inasmuch as it was evident from Mrs. Sefton's manner and the significant words she had uttered relative to the meeting at the breakfast-table, that she was *not* inimical to his suit.

In a few minutes she returned to the room.

"My dear madam," said Trevelyan, rising and advancing to meet her, "you already know that I love your daughter Agnes—that I adore her?"

"And you have already divined how the letter which you must have missed, came to be lost?" returned Mrs. Sefton, with a smile.

"Yes, madam—and I likewise observed the trace of a tear upon the portrait which I painted from memory," continued the young nobleman.

“Oh! then you can make allowance for the feelings of a mother!” exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, with enthusiasm: “and you will forgive me that act of apparent ingratitude—nay, of treachery—I mean the purloining of a document so sacred as a sealed letter—and at a moment, too, when I sought your aid, and you so generously afforded it?”

“It is for me to implore your pardon as a mother for having dared to address such a letter to your daughter,” said Trevelyan, with some degree of embarrassment.

“Then let us accord mutual forgiveness,” exclaimed the lady, extending her hand, which was immediately pressed with the fervour of gratitude. I am well aware that my conduct in taking that letter was improper to a degree,” she continued, after a short pause: “but pray consider all the circumstances.”

“I do—I do,” interrupted Trevelyan; “and you have nothing to explain. Oh! I am delighted at the discovery that the beautiful and much-loved Agnes is your daughter—delighted also to think that, by the perusal of that letter, you have acquired the certainty of the ardent and honourable feelings which animate me with regard to her.”

“And Agnes is deserving of your affection, my lord,” said Mrs. Sefton: “I am convinced that she is in heart and soul all she appears to be—ingenuousness, amiability, candour, and virtue!”

“Oh! I am well assured of the value of that jewel which, in due time, I shall implore you to bestow upon me!” exclaimed the generous and impassioned young nobleman: “and I rejoice that you not only observed the letter in my apartment, but that you also took it; for it has—”

“It has enabled me to discover my child, whom I had fruitlessly sought for years, and whom I longed to embrace!” added Mrs. Sefton, wiping away the tears of joy that started to her eye-lashes. “Oh! my lord, you may conceive my surprise—my joy, when I beheld that portrait in your portfolio. Although I had never seen my child since her infancy, yet it seemed as if a heavenly inspiration imparted to me the conviction that I was then gazing on her likeness. At all events I murmured to myself, while contemplating it, ‘*Such must Agnes now be: tall, beautiful, and with innocence depicted in her countenance, even as this portrait.*’ And then I wept as I thought that the dear girl was lost to me for ever—buried in some seclusion by *one* who cruelly kept us separated! I closed the portfolio—rose—and mechanically approached the mantel. There I beheld the letter—and the address immediately rivetted my attention. ‘*Miss Agnes Vernon!*’ Oh! yes—it was my own dear daughter whose portrait I had been contemplating; and I was not mistaken! For I may be allowed to say, without incurring the imputation of vanity, that in the countenance of the portrait I traced my own lineaments; and then—on discovering the letter—I felt assured that nature’s promptings had not been misinterpreted by me! Because I knew that Agnes passed under the name of Vernon: that fact I accidentally learnt years ago, through my husband’s solicitor, who was permitted from time to time to give me the assurance that my daughter was alive and in health. You can now conceive, my dear friend, how strong were the emotions which agitated within me, and which influenced me in seizing upon the letter—tearing it open—and devouring its contents.”

“And your first impression was doubtless one of indignation against me for having dared thus to address your daughter?” said Lord William Trevelyan.

“Far from it, I can assure you!” returned Mrs. Sefton, in a tone of the deepest sincerity. “I already knew enough of your character to be well aware that you were honourable in principle and generous in heart! and the whole tenour of the letter was respectful and delicate, though earnest and decided,” added the lady, with a smile, as Trevelyan’s cheeks were suffused with a deep blush. “Besides, my dear friend,” she continued, in a serious tone, “I have acquainted you with the history of the crushed hopes and the blighted affections of my own early years—and I should be the last person in the world to raise an obstacle in the way of a pure and honourable attachment on the part of those in whom I felt interested.”

“Then you approve of my suit in respect to your daughter?” exclaimed Trevelyan, his handsome countenance becoming animated with joy; “and you will not refuse me her hand?”

“When she attains her twenty-first year, my lord,” replied Mrs. Sefton, in a solemn tone. “Until then I dare not dispose of her hand in marriage. She is now nineteen——”

“Two years to wait!” exclaimed Trevelyan, mournfully: “and in the mean time how many adverse circumstances may occur to separate us!”

“Yours is the age when Hope smiles most brightly,” said Mrs. Sefton; “and if your affection for my daughter be as strong as you represent it, believe me, my dear friend, that time will not impair—but rather strengthen and confirm it.”

“Were years and years to elapse, ere Agnes could become mine, I should not love her the less!” exclaimed Lord William. “But this may not be so with her: indeed, I have no reason to hope—much less any assurance—that she in any degree reciprocates my passion.”

“Agnes will not prove indifferent to your lordship’s merits,” said Mrs. Sefton, encouragingly. “But we must postpone any farther conversation on this subject until another occasion. Behold the confusion that prevails in the house,” she continued, in a more cheerful tone, as she glanced round the room at the various boxes and packages on which she had been busied when the arrival of Trevelyan and her daughter had compelled her to desist from her occupation. “I am about to remove this morning to a beautiful little villa which I

have taken at Bayswater. By those means I hope to destroy all trace of my new abode, in respect to those who might seek to tear Agnes from my arms. But I have the law with me:—yes, the law is in my favour," she added, in an emphatic tone; "and I will not surrender up my daughter to *him*——"

She checked herself, and hastily advancing to the window, opened the shutters.

It was now quite light; and, having extinguished the candles, Mrs. Sefton returned to her task of placing various valuable effects in a box. Trevelyan volunteered his assistance, which was accepted; for circumstances had placed him and the lady on a footing of the most friendly intimacy together.

"I received your note on my return last evening," said Mrs. Sefton, after a pause; "and I regretted much to find that you had obtained no clue to the place where Sir Gilbert Heathcote is confined."

"But you must remember, my dear madam, that no time has been lost," observed Trevelyan. "It was only yesterday morning that we acquired the knowledge of Sir Gilbert's real position; and I have employed my valet Fitzgeorge, who is an intelligent and faithful man, to obtain an interview with Green, Heathcote's clerk, and bribe him to serve us. From the specimen of the fellow's character which we had yesterday morning in this very room, I entertain but little doubt of Fitzgeorge's success."

"God grant that it may be so!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, fervently. "And if you succeed in discovering the den where Sir Gilbert is confined, how do you intend to proceed?"

"Still by artifice, my dear madam. We must fight that bad man, James Heathcote, with his own weapons——"

"Oh! think you not, my lord, that our unfortunate friend is hemmed round with all imaginable precautions to prevent his flight?" demanded Mrs. Sefton.

"Doubtless," answered Trevelyan: "but the janitors and dependants of a lunatic-asylum are as accessible as other people to the influence of gold."

"I now more than ever, if possible, desire the restoration of Sir Gilbert," said Mrs. Sefton: then, after a pause, she added in a low and peculiar tone, "I have many—many strange things yet to tell you, Lord William: but the present is not the most fitting occasion. In a few days I will explain every thing—yes, everything," she said, emphatically; "and thenceforth there will be no secrets between you and me."

The lady again applied herself to the task of preparing for her removal; and the young nobleman assisted her with as much kindliness of manner and good-tempered alacrity as if he were her brother, or already her son-in-law. In this manner the hours passed away until the time-piece struck nine, when Agnes descended to the breakfast which was now served up. A messenger was despatched to the Misses Theobald to give them an assurance of the young maiden's safety; and in the course of the day the mother and daughter, accompanied by Lord William, removed to the beautiful villa prepared for the ladies' reception at Bayswater.

Lord William remained with them until the evening, when he took his leave—but not without observing that pleasure beamed in the eyes of Agnes as he intimated his intention of becoming a frequent visitor at the villa.

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

LAURA MORTIMER'S NEW INTRIGUES.

We must now return to Laura Mortimer, whom we left in Paris, and of whom we have lost sight for some time.

It was in the evening of the fourth day after the incidents recorded in the preceding chapter, that Laura was seated in her handsome drawing-room, wrapped up in deep meditation.

Her thoughts were not, however, of a disagreeable nature;—for ever and anon the fire of triumph flashed from her fine eyes, and her rich moist lips were wreathed into a smile.

She held a book open in her hand; but her gaze was fixed upon the ceiling as she lay, rather than sate, on the voluptuous cushions of the purple velvet ottoman.

The windows were open, and a gentle evening breeze, which had succeeded the stifling heat of a Parisian summer-day, fanned her countenance and wantoned with the luxuriant ringlets that floated over her naked shoulders,—those shoulders so white, so plump, so exquisitely shaped!

The perfumes of choice flowers and the odour of ravishing oriental scents rendered the atmosphere fragrant: gold and silver fish were disporting in an immense crystal globe which stood upon a marble table between the casements—and two beautiful canaries were carolling in a superb cage suspended in one of those open windows.

On the table near which Laura was placed, stood several crystal dishes containing the finest fruit that the Parisian market could yield,—the luscious pine, the refreshing melon, strawberries of extraordinary size and exquisite flavour, cherries of the richest red, and mulberries of the deepest purple.

A bottle of champagne stood in a cooler filled with ice; and in the middle of the table was a superb nosegay of flowers.

The entire appearance of the room and its appointments was luxurious in the extreme,—comfort being combined with elegance, and the means of enjoyment distributed with taste;—while she—the mistress of the place—the presiding genius of the scene—was pillowed voluptuously upon the immense velvet cushions. So complete was the abandonment of her attitude, in her deep reverie, that she seemed ten hundred times more charming than when her artifice devised a thousand studied graces in order to effect a conquest and captivate a lover.

One of her naked arms, plump, white, and beautifully formed, lay across her person as the hand held the book, on which the eyes rested not, and against the dark binding of which the taper fingers were set off in the dazzling purity of their complexion and the rosy tint of the almond-shaped nails: the other arm hung down negligently—not quite straight, but gently rounded—the fingers of that hand playing mechanically with the ottoman's golden fringe that swept the thick carpet. One of her legs lay stretched completely upon the ottoman: the other hung over the side, displaying the well-formed foot, the delicate ankle, and the robust swell of the calf. More voluptuously modelled than Venus, but with all the elegance attributed to the form of that fabled divinity,—handsome as Juno, without the stern imperiousness that characterised the queen of heaven,—and with that subdued nobility of demeanour which Diana, when out of sight of her attendant huntresses, might have been supposed to wear,—Laura Mortimer united in her own person the most fascinating of the charms belonging to the three principal goddesses of heathen worship.

But let us endeavour to ascertain the subject of her thoughts, as she lay thus wrapped up in a deep reverie.

"Fortune appears resolved to favour me, and I accept the auspicious omen with joy. The Marquis is in my power—is my slave—inextricably shackled by my silken chains! Four short days have been sufficient to accomplish this victory. When first introduced to him in the Champs Elysées, I saw that he regarded me with attention—nay, with admiration; and I that moment signalled him out as the man who is destined to place me in a proud position—to render me independent of Charles Hatfield's hated father! The evening before last I met him for the second time: this was at the party given by my music-master. The nobleman was almost instantly by my side, as soon as I made my appearance; and I knew full well how to gain his favour. When handsome young men approached me, I received them coldly, and continued my discourse with the Marquis in a more animated and friendly style than before. I even hinted to him—or rather suffered him to believe that it was a relief to escape from the frivolities of the average run of conversation, in the indulgence of discourse on intellectual subjects. I saw that the old man was flattered—that he thought highly of me: in a word, I secured his esteem as I had already acquired his admiration. We sate next to each other at supper; and he lavished all his attentions

upon me—attentions which I accepted with an air as if they came from a young and handsome gallant. The Marquis handed me to my carriage, and solicited permission to call. I signified an assent with an ingenuousness that could not possibly have seemed affected; and he squeezed my hand slightly as he bade me farewell. On the following afternoon he called: this was yesterday—and he remained a long time. Two hours passed—doubtless like two minutes to him: and I was completely triumphant. Never did I appear to such advantage: my glass told me that I was radiantly beautiful—and I could observe full well that my manner—my conversation—and the delicate artifices I called to aid, were pre-eminently successful. The old man was ready to fall upon his knees and worship me: he was in that humour when he would have laid his whole fortune at my feet. He appeared to be longing to throw his arms around my neck, and exclaim, '*Laura, I adore you!*' But when I had excited him to the highest possible pitch, I suddenly directed his attention to some subject of comparative indifference; and thus did I play with his feelings during two long hours. He went away half crazy—dazzled, bewildered, not knowing what to think or how to act—intoxicated with sensual passions mingling with the purer sentiments of a profound admiration and a cordial esteem. Then this morning he called again, and I made him become my companion at luncheon. I affected to be rejoiced that he had thus unexpectedly dropped in, as I had previously felt low-spirited and dull. He seemed charmed that his presence was calculated to cheer me: It was a delicate compliment paid to his conversational powers—and he was flattered and pleased. Oh! how admirably did I wind myself, as it were, around him during the three hours that he remained with me this morning: how successfully did I insinuate myself, as one may say, into his very soul;—not seizing upon his heart by a sudden attack—but gaining possession of it by means the more sure because so stealthy,—not carrying that heart by storm—but gradually and imperceptibly enmeshing it in snares and toils whence it never can escape, so long as my real character shall remain a mystery to him. Yes—and this morning, too, was he not a thousand times on the point of falling upon his knees, and exclaiming,'*Laura, I adore you!*' But still I tantalised him—still I worked him up to the highest possible pitch of excitement, and then suddenly discouraged him by some word or gesture that threw a coldness on all I had before said, and which yet would admit of no positive interpretation so as to render him hopeless altogether. And now he is to return again—this evening,—to return, by his own solicitation;—and this evening—yes—this evening," thought Laura, her lips wreathing into a smile of triumph,—"he *shall* fall down at my feet and exclaim, '*Laura, I adore you!*'"

Thus ran the meditations of this dangerous woman,—so strong in the consciousness of her almost superhuman beauty—so confident in the power of her matchless charms and in the witchery of her guileful tongue!

"Yes—four days will have been sufficient to reduce the proud English noble to the condition of a captive kneeling at my feet." she continued, in her silent but triumphant reverie. "What other woman in the world can thus effect a conquest with such amazing rapidity? The tigress hunts for her prey—pursuing the affrighted deer through bramble and through brake—by the margin of the lake in the depths of the forest—amidst the trackless mazes of the wild woods,—a long—tedious—and fatiguing chase, with the possibility of escape for the intended victim after all. But the boa-constrictor fixes its eyes upon its prey—fascinates it—renders it incapable of retreat—compels it even to advance nearer and nearer to its mouth—plays with it—tantalizes it—sets every feeling and every emotion into fluttering agitation—and even when about to gorge it, licks it over with his caresses. And thus do I secure my prey! I am the anaconda amongst women: none whom I choose to make my victim can escape from the influence of my witchery—the sphere of my fascination! With me it is no long, tedious, and wearisome chase: 'tis instantaneous capture and an easy triumph!"

And again the peculiar smile—half haughtiness, half sweetness—returned to the lips of the peerless beauty, who felt herself to be ten thousand times more powerful in the possession of her transcendent charms, than an Amazonian Queen clothed in armour of proof from head to heel.

Suddenly the bell at the outer door of her suite of apartments announced the coming of a visitor; and in a few moments the Marquis of Delmour was ushered into the room.

Laura had already assumed a sitting posture; and she now rose to receive the English nobleman.

"Good evening, charming Miss Mortimer," said the Marquis, taking her hand and gently touching it with his lips: then, leading her to the ottoman, and placing himself at a short distance from her, he looked at her tenderly, observing, "You perceive that I am punctual to the hour at which I was to make my appearance according to the kind permission you granted me."

"Your lordship is most generous thus to condescend to enliven an hour that would otherwise be passed in loneliness by me," said Laura, bending upon him all the glory of her fine bright eyes and revealing the splendour of her brilliant teeth.

"Beautiful, intellectual, and agreeable as you are, Miss Mortimer," observed the nobleman, "it is utterly impossible that you can feel yourself indebted to an old man like me for the recreation of a leisure hour. You would only need to throw open your drawing-rooms to the *élite* of Paris,to be surrounded by admiring guests."

"And what if I prefer an hour of intellectual conversation to an entire evening of empty formalities, ceremonial frivolities, and the inane routine of fashionable *réunions*?" asked Laura, with an affectation of candour which seemed most real—most natural.

"You possess a mind the strength and soundness of which surprise me," exclaimed the Marquis of Delmour, enthusiastically. "How is it that, rich and beautiful, young and courted, as you are, you can have taken so just a view of the world,—that you have learnt to prefer solid enjoyments to artificial pleasures,—and that you can so well discriminate between the *real* on which the gay and giddy close their eyes, and the *ideal* or the *unreal* which they so much worship?"

"You would ask me, my lord, I presume, wherefore I dislike that turmoil of fashionable life which brings one in contact with persons

who flatter in a meaningless manner, and who believe that a woman is best pleased with him who most skilfully gilds his *pretty nothings*. It is, my lord, because I do not estimate the world according to the usual standard,—because I am not dazzled by outside glitter and external show. If an officer in the army be introduced to me, I am not captivated by his splendid epaulets and his waving plumes: I wait to hear his discourse before I form *my* estimate of his character."

"Then neither youth nor riches will prove the principal qualifications of him who shall be fortunate enough to win your hand?" said the Marquis, fixing his eyes in an impassioned manner upon the syren.

"Oh! you would speak to me upon the topic of marriage!" exclaimed Laura, laughing gaily. "To tell your lordship the truth, I should be sorry to surrender up my freedom beyond all possibility of release, to any man in existence."

"What!" ejaculated the old nobleman: "do you mean me to infer that you will never marry?"

"I have more than half made up my mind to that resolution," responded Laura, casting down her eyes and forcing a blush to her cheeks.

"Never marry!" cried the Marquis, in unfeigned surprise. "And what if you happened to fall in love with some fine, handsome, eligible young man?"

"In the first place it is by no means necessary that a man should be fine, handsome, or young for me to love him," answered Laura, as if in the most ingenuous way in the world; "and when I *do* love, it is not a whit the more imperious that the person or the priest should rivet my hand to that of the object of my affections. It is within the power of man to unite hands—and that is a mockery: but God alone can unite hearts—and that is a solemn and sacred compact that should be effected in the sight of heaven only."

"I scarcely understand you, beautiful and mysterious being!" exclaimed the Marquis, drawing nearer to the syren, who did not appear to notice the movement.

"I am aware that some of my notions are not altogether in accordance with those of society in general," observed Laura, with an affectation of reserve and diffidence: "but since the conversation has taken this turn, I do not hesitate to admit that I do hold peculiar opinions with respect to marriage."

"You would have me understand, Miss Mortimer," said the Marquis, "that were you to find your affections enchained by some deserving individual, you would not hesitate to join your destinies to his, without the intervention of the Church to cement the union."

"Your lordship has interpreted my meaning in language so delicate as to be almost ambiguous," observed Laura. "And yet why should the truth be thus wrapped up in verbiage? I do not entertain opinions which I am afraid to look in the face. God forbid! In a word, then, I would ten thousand times rather become the mistress of the man I loved, than the wife of him whom I abhorred;—and in loving the former, and with him loving me, is it not that union of hearts which, as I ere now said, should be effected only in the sight of heaven?"

"And have you ever yet loved?" asked the nobleman, in a tone of profound emotion, as he gazed long and ardently upon the splendid countenance whereon the light from the casements now fell with a Rembrandt effect, delineating the faultless profile against the obscurity that had already begun to occupy the end of the room most remote from the windows.

"Oh! my lord, that is a question which you can only ask me when we come to know each other better!" exclaimed Laura, after a few moments' pause.

"And yet I already feel as if I had known you for as many years as our acquaintance numbers days," said the Marquis. "Methought yesterday—and this morning too—that a species of intimacy-a kind of impromptu friendship had sprung up between us; and now you are somewhat cold towards me—your manner is not the same——"

"If I have been guilty of any want of courtesy towards your lordship, I should be truly—deeply grieved," exclaimed Laura, surveying the nobleman with well affected astonishment at the accusation uttered against her.

"Oh! use not such chilling language, Laura—Miss Mortimer, I mean!" cried the old nobleman, half inclined to throw himself at her feet and implore her to take compassion upon him. "But I an mad—I am insane to appeal to you thus!" he continued, in a species of rage against himself. "How can I suppose that the society of an old man like me is agreeable to a young and beautiful creature such as you!—how can I give way to those glorious but fatal delusions that have occupied my brain for the last forty-eight hours! Oh! Miss Mortimer—would that I had never seen you!"

And the old nobleman, covering his face with his hands, literally sobbed like a youthful lover quarrelling with an adored mistress.

"My lord—my lord, what have I done to offend you?" demanded Laura, as if deeply excited; and, seizing his hands, she drew them away from his countenance, well aware that the contact of her soft and warm flesh would make the blood that age had partially chilled, circulate with speed and heat in his veins.

"If you had attempted my life," replied the Marquis, with fervid emphasis, "I should rejoice at a deed that would elicit such kindness from you as you manifest towards me now!"

And thus speaking, he raised her hands to his lips and covered them with kisses.

“Tell me—how did I offend you?” she asked, in a voice that was melting and musical even to ravishment.

“Oh! let us think not of what has passed,” he exclaimed: “but bless me with the assurance that you can entertain a sentiment of friendship for the old man!”

“I would rather possess your friendship, my lord, than that of the handsomest and wealthiest young gentleman whom we met at the party the other evening,” responded the artful woman, still abandoning her hands to the Marquis. “Did you not observe that I was pleased with your attentions—that I refused to dance in order that I might remain seated next to you, and listening to your conversation—that when the gay moths of fashion approached me with their fulsome compliments, I exhibited signs of impatience, and by my coldness compelled them to retreat—that I gave no encouragement to them in any way——”

“Yes—yes,” interrupted the enraptured Marquis: “I noticed all *that*—and were I a young man I should have felt myself justified in addressing you in the language of passion—aye, of ardent and sincere affection. But—although such are indeed my sentiments towards you—I perceive all the folly and ridicule of daring to give utterance to them in your presence: yet God knows that I am ready to lay my fortune at your feet—and could I offer to place the coronet of a marchioness upon your brow——”

“Were you in the position to do so, I should refuse it,” said Laura, emphatically. “All the rest I might listen to——”

“Then you are aware that I am married?” interrupted the nobleman, fixing an earnest and enquiring gaze upon her beauteous countenance.

“Rumour declares as much,” replied Laura; “and it likewise avers that you are not happy in your matrimonial connexion. I pity you from the bottom of my heart—and I behold in the fact itself a new argument in support of my own peculiar tenets relative to marriage-ties;—for assuredly you are endowed with qualities calculated to render a woman happy—or I am deeply, deeply deceived.”

“Ah! It is a sad tale—and I dare not venture upon the narration now,” said the Marquis, with a profound sigh. “But should our acquaintance continue—as I ardently hope it may—I will some day give you the fullest and most ample explanations. And you yourself, charming creature—is there not some mystery attached to you? How happens it that at your age you should be so well acquainted with the world?—how is it that you seem free to follow the bent of your own inclinations, uncontrolled even by your mother? For rumour declares that you have a mother alive——”

“I am independent of her in a pecuniary point of view, my lord,” interrupted Laura; “and I am determined to consult my own ideas of happiness, instead of adopting the standard of enjoyment and pleasure established by the fashionable world.”

“Would to heavens that it lay in my power to ensure your happiness—or even to contribute to it!” exclaimed the Marquis, gazing upon her with admiration and ardent passion. “Long years have elapsed since I encountered any woman who inspired me with even half the interest that I feel in you; and it seems to me that I become young again when in your sweet society.”

“And, on my side,” answered Laura, casting down her eyes and assuming a bashful demeanour, “I do not hesitate to admit that I experience greater enjoyment from your conversation than from that of any other nobleman or gentleman with whom I am acquainted.”

“Just now, my sweet Miss Mortimer,” said the Marquis, approaching still nearer to her, and speaking in a tone that was low and tremulous with emotion,—“just now you declared that ‘*all the rest you might listen to*’——”

“And I do not attempt to revoke the admission that thus fell from my lips,” murmured the designing young woman, turning a glance of half-timidity and half-fondness upon the old nobleman, who, in spite of a strong and vigorous intellect, was rendered childish and plunged as it were into dotage by the fascinating—ravishing influence of the syren-enchantress.

“What am I to understand by those words?” he asked, in an ecstacy of delight. “Oh! is it possible that you can become something more to the old man than a mere acquaintance—something more than even a friend——”

“I could wish to retain your good opinion—your esteem for ever!” said Laura, now turning upon him a countenance radiant with hope and joy.

“It is scarcely possible—I am dreaming—’tis a delicious delusion—a heavenly vision!” murmured the Marquis in broken sentences,—for he was dazzled by the transcendant beauty of the houri who seemed to encourage him in the aspirations which he had formed.

“Is it, then, so extraordinary that I should have learnt to love one who is so kind—so generous-hearted—so intellectual as yourself?” asked Laura, leaning towards him so that her fragrant breath fanned his countenance and her forehead for an instant touched his own.

“Great heaven! Is it possible that so much happiness awaits me?” cried the Marquis, scarcely able to believe his eyes or his ears: then, after gazing upon her for a few instants with all the rapturous ardour of a youthful lover, he sank upon his knees before her, exclaiming, “*Laura, I adore you!*”

The designing woman's triumph was complete: the Marquis was inextricably entangled in her snares;—and, throwing her arms around his neck, she murmured, "Oh! it is an honour as well as a joy to possess your love!"

Then the old man covered the charming young woman's countenance with kisses; and for several minutes not a word was spoken between them. But at length the Marquis, who could scarcely believe that he had won a prize the possession of which all the noblest, handsomest, and wealthiest young men in Paris would envy him, began to speak upon the course which it would be prudent for them to adopt. Laura at once gave him to understand that she should experience no sentiment of shame in appearing as his mistress; and she undertook—as well indeed she might do—to reconcile her mother to this connexion which she had formed.

"Let us then return to England without delay,' said the Marquis. "The business which has brought me to Paris is now in such a position that an agent may manage it for me. But tell me—is your mother dependent upon you?"

"Entirely," answered Laura, anticipating the course which her noble lover was about to adopt.

"And your fortune is doubtless large?" he continued, interrogatively.

"It is not nearly so large as rumour has alleged," was the reply. "Still it is a handsome competency for one person."

"Then, as there shall be nothing having even the slightest appearance of selfishness in my attachment towards you, Laura," resumed the nobleman, "you must immediately assign all your property to your mother; and I will at once—yea, at once—give you a proof of the boundless devotion with which you have inspired me. Permit me the use of your desk for a few moments."

Laura rang the bell, and ordered Rosalie to bring writing materials; and when this was done, the marquis seated himself at the table and wrote something upon a sheet of paper. He next penned a letter, which he folded up, sealed, and addressed; and, turning towards Laura, he said, "This draught, beloved girl, is for the sum of sixty thousand pounds, payable at sight at my bankers' in London. This letter, which you will have the kindness to send through the post to-morrow, is to advise them of the fact of such a cheque having been given, and to prepare them to meet it, so that there may be no hesitation in paying such a large amount. For it will be my joy and delight to enrich you, my dearest Laura; so that the old man may to some extent repay the immense obligation under which he is placed by the possession of such a heart as thine. I would not have you remain wealthy through your own resources: henceforth you must owe every thing to me—for if you cannot be my wife in name, you shall at least be the sharer of my fortune, as you have consented to be the partner of my destinies."

"Your generosity, my dear Marquis, only binds me the more closely to you," exclaimed Laura, lavishing upon the old man the most exciting and apparently fervent caresses. "At the same time permit me to remind you that there is nothing selfish in that affection which so suddenly sprang up in my bosom towards you: because I am no needy adventuress—no intriguing fortune-hunter,—and you are well aware that many a French nobleman would be proud to lay his title at my feet, were I disposed to decorate my brow with a coronet. My father—who, as you have doubtless heard, accumulated some money in India—left me well provided for; and that fortune I shall cheerfully abandon to my mother, preferring to remain dependent on yourself."

"Ah! your father dwelt a long time in India!" exclaimed the Marquis, as if struck by a sudden idea. "Is it possible, then, that I could have encountered your mother in England? But, no—that woman could not have been the parent of such a lovely, charming creature as yourself!"

"To whom do you allude, my lord?" demanded Laura, now seized with the apprehension that her mother might be known to the wealthy lover whom she had succeeded in ensnaring, and whom she intended to fleece of the greater portion of his fortune.

"It was but a momentary thought—it exists no longer in my mind, dearest," responded the nobleman, who, as he gazed upon the bright and splendid being before him, felt an ineffable disgust at having even for an instant associated her in any way with the loathsome old hag to whom he was alluding. "The fact is," he continued, "I met a certain female in London—or rather, in the neighbourhood of London—a short time ago—indeed, just before I left England; and this woman bore the name of Mortimer."

"It is not altogether an uncommon one," observed Laura, maintaining an unruffled countenance, though her heart palpitated with continued apprehension.

"The singularity of the coincidence is that the female to whom I am alluding announces herself as the widow of a General-officer who had died in India," resumed the Marquis.

"My lamented father was a merchant," said Laura.

"Then of course there can be no identity in that case," continued the nobleman. "Besides, having an intimate acquaintance with all military matters—as I myself held the post of Secretary at War many years ago, and have since taken a deep interest in that department—I am enabled to state that no General-officer of the name of Mortimer has recently died in India."

"The woman, then, of whom you am speaking, was an impostress?" said Laura, interrogatively.

"I have little doubt of it," answered the marquis. "But let us not dwell upon a subject so perfectly indifferent to us. We were talking of our plans. Will it suit you, dearest Laura, to quit Paris to-morrow, or the day after at latest?"

“To-morrow, if you will,” the young woman hastened to reply: for she now trembled lest her mother should suddenly return and perhaps prove, though unintentionally, a marplot to all the plans which her intriguing disposition had conceived.

“To-morrow, then, be it,” said the Marquis. “At noon I shall call for you in my travelling-chariot. We will return by easy stages to London; and, on our arrival in the English capital, the handsomest mansion that money can procure shall be fitted up with all possible speed for your abode.”

“I care not for a splendid dwelling in London itself,” replied Laura. “Rather let me have some beautiful and retired villa in the suburbs, where you can visit me at your leisure, and where we can pass the hours together without intrusion on the part of a host of visitors.”

“Your ideas on this subject concur with mine,” observed the Marquis, enchanted with the belief that Laura intended to retire from the fashionable world and devote herself wholly to him. “The seclusion of a charming villa will be delightful; and I think I can promise,” he added with a smile, “that the said villa will have more of my company than my town mansion. But I shall now take my departure—although with reluctance: it is however necessary for me to make certain preparations this evening, as I am to leave Paris thus unexpectedly to-morrow. For a few hours, then, my Laura, adieu—adieu!”

The old man embraced the young woman with the most unfeigned—unaffected fondness; and as his arms were cast about her neck, and he felt her bosom heaving against his chest, he longed to implore her to allow him to remain with her until the morning—for the dalliance and the toyings he had already enjoyed had inflamed his blood, and he aspired to be completely happy without delay. But he feared lest he should offend her by any manifestations of sensual longings; for he flattered himself that the connexion which had commenced between them had its origin in sentiment on her side. He accordingly withdrew—but reluctantly—from her embrace; and took his departure, promising to call for her punctually at noon on the following day.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT AND A DREADED ARRIVAL.

The moment Laura heard the outer door close behind the Marquis of Delmour, she exclaimed aloud, “I have triumphed! I have triumphed! He is in my power—he fell at my feet—he said, ‘*Laura, I adore you!*’—and the proof of his utter credulity is here—here!”

Thus speaking, she clutched the draught for sixty thousand pounds—devoured it with her eyes—and then secured it in her writing-desk.

“Yes: sixty thousand pounds!” she murmured to herself, as she resumed her voluptuously reclining position upon the ottoman;—“sixty thousand pounds—gained with but little trouble and in a short time! It would scarcely matter if I never touched another piece of gold from his purse; for I am now independent of him—of the hated Hatfields—of all the world! But I will not abandon my doating English Marquis in a hurry: I will not cast aside a nobleman who is so generous—so rich—so confiding! No—no: he will be worth two hundred thousand pounds to me;—and then—yes—*then*, I may espouse a peer of high title! My fortune is assured—my destiny is within the range of prophecy. I have taken a tremendous step this evening: an hour has seen me grow suddenly rich—already the possessor of sixty thousand pounds! Thanks to this more than human beauty of mine—thanks to that witchery of manner which I know so well how to assume—and thanks also to that fascinating influence wherewith I can invest my language at will, the Marquis has become my slave. Thus does the strong-minded—the resolute—the intellectual man succumb to woman, when she dazzles him with her loveliness and bewilders him with her guile. Sixty thousand pounds now own me as their mistress! ’Tis glorious to possess great wealth: but ’tis an elysian happiness—a burning joy—a proud triumph to feel that I am released from the thraldom of those Hatfields—or rather from a state of dependence upon the father of him whom I lately loved so well! And my mother, too—my selfish, intriguing, deceitful old mother, who has ever hoped to make a profitable market of my charms, and hold despotic sway over me at the same time,—she is no longer necessary to me—and I may in a moment assert my independence should she dare to attempt to tyrannise again. The mad old fool! to fancy that she will succeed in discovering Torrens,—or, even if she did, to hope that she could compel him to disgorge the treasures which he has perilled his life here and his soul hereafter to gain! She will return to me penniless—totally dependent upon me; and I shall allow her a small income on condition that she locates herself in some obscure spot, whence her machinations and her intrigues cannot reach me. Not for worlds would I have her fastened to my apron-strings in London—that London whither I am about to return, and where I may yet hope to punish that Mr. Hatfield who for a time so savagely triumphed over me! No—my mother must be forced into seclusion; her notoriety of character would ruin me. Constantly incurring the chance of being discovered as the Mrs. Slingsby of former years—certain to be recognised as the Mrs. Fitzhardinge who was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of the old miser—and having evidently entered into some intrigue which has brought her under the notice of the Marquis of Delmour, she can no longer be allowed to associate with me! *Her* day has gone by—*mine* has scarcely begun.”

Laura—the beauteous, wanton,unprincipled Laura—had reached this point in her musings, when she was startled by an unusually violent ringing at the front door bell; and in a few moments a gentleman burst into the room, his impatience having urged him to cast away all ceremony and dispense with the introductory agency of Rosalie, who had uttered an ejaculation of surprise on beholding him.

“Captain Barthelma!” cried Laura, in an astonishment which even surpassed that of her abigail.

“Yes—my angel: It is I!” exclaimed the enthusiastic young Italian, as, bounding towards Laura, he caught her in his arms.

His lips were instantaneously fastened to her ripe mouth; and, remembering the night of love and pleasure which she had passed with him, she experienced no vexation at his sudden and most unexpected appearance.

“Can you pardon me for this intrusion?” he demanded, at length loosening her from his embrace, but seating himself closely by her side on the ottoman and taking her hands in his own; “can you pardon me, I ask, adorable woman?” he repeated, gazing upon her in boundless and passionate admiration.

“It seems that it were useless to be offended with you,” she replied, smiling with voluptuous sweetness.

“Oh! then you will not upbraid me—you will not reproach me with having broken the solemn promise that I made you to depart and seek to see you no more in Paris?” he exclaimed. “But even if you were inclined to be angry, Laura, it could not in justice be upon me that your wrath would fall. You must blame your own matchless beauty—you must take all the fault unto yourself. I feel that I cannot live without you. Ever since we parted, my brain has been in a ceaseless ferment—my soul a prey to incessant excitement. By day and by night has your lovely image been before me: by day and by night have I fancied that I heard your voice pouring forth the most eloquent music:—I have dreamt that your lips, breathing odours and bathed with sweets, were pressed to mine:—and your looks, beaming love, and happiness, and joy, have ever been fixed on mine! Oh! my imagination has maintained me in a condition of such pleasing pain that I have been in a species of restless elysium,—a giddy and sometimes agonising whirl, although the scene was paradise! At length I could endure this state no longer: and when at a considerable distance from Paris, on the road to Italy, I suddenly and secretly quitted the service of the Grand Duke——”

“Oh! what madness—what insanity!” exclaimed Laura, grieved that the handsome young Castelcicalan should have made so deep a sacrifice for her—inasmuch as his generous devotion had not only flattered her pride, but also touched her soul.

“It may be madness—it may be insanity,” repeated Lorenzo Barthelma, with impassioned warmth: “but those words must in that case be taken only as other terms for the deepest—sincerest—and most ardent devotion. Were I a beggar on the face of the earth, I should have acted in the same manner; because I should have come to you—I should have thrown myself at your feet—I should have implored you to render me happy,—and in return I should have toiled from morning to night to make up for the deficiency of my means.”

“Generous Lorenzo!” exclaimed Laura, speaking with more sincerity than had characterised her words for years.

“Ah! then you are somewhat touched by my devotion, angelic woman!” cried the handsome young officer, drawing her still more closely towards him, and passing his arm round her slender waist. “But happily I am no pauper—fortunately I am *not* dependent upon my own exertions. When I was with you before, my adorable Laura, I told you that I possessed a competency; and I then offered to link my destinies with yours for ever. Now my circumstances have materially altered—and I rejoice in the fact! For the French papers of this day contain intelligence of the death of my cousin, the Count of Carignano, at Montoni; and by that unexpected event I have succeeded alike to his title and his princely revenues.”

“Oh! my beloved Lorenzo,” exclaimed Laura, now giving way to all that tenderness towards him which was really in accordance with her inclinations, but which her more selfish interests would have prompted her to subdue and stifle had not this last announcement met her ear: “Oh! my beloved Lorenzo,” she cried, pressing closer to him, so that he could feel her bosom throbbing like the undulations of a mighty tide—for she was now powerfully excited, alike morally and sensually: “how can I reward—how recompense this generosity on your part?”

“By becoming my wife—yes, my wife, Laura—if you will,” returned the enraptured young man. “For you know not how I love you—how intense is the passion with which you have inspired me. I am blind and deaf to all—everything, save your beauties and your witching voice. If you be the greatest profligate the world ever saw, I care not—so madly do I love you.”

“And when this delirium shall have passed away, Lorenzo,” murmured Laura, concealing her burning countenance on his breast, “you will repent the rashness which induced you to wed with one who had so easily abandoned herself to you when a complete stranger—and whom—whom—you knew to be unchaste even then!” she added, her voice becoming touchingly low and tremulously plaintive.

“To suspect even for an instant that I should ever repent of making you my wife, Laura, is to doubt my love,” said the Count of Carignano—for such we may now call him; “and *that* wounds me to the very soul! ’Tis sufficient for me to know that you are an angel of beauty—and I reck not if you are a demoness in character. But *that* I am sure is impossible. Your loveliness may have led you into temptations, and your temperament may have induced you to yield: but that you are generous—good—amiable, I am convinced, Laura;—and that you will prove faithful to one who places all his own happiness in you, and who will study incessantly to promote

yours—oh! of that I am well assured also. Say, then, my adored one—can you consent to become the Countess of Carignano, with a revenue of twelve thousand a year?"

"Not for the dross—oh! not for the despicable dross," murmured Laura, scarcely able to restrain her joy within reasonable bounds, and induce her suitor to believe that no selfish interests were mixed up with the motives for that assent which she was about to give,—"not for vile and sordid gold, Lorenzo, do I respond in the affirmative to the generous proposal that you have now made to me—because I myself am possessed of a fortune of sixty thousand pounds: but it is because I love you—yes—I love you, my handsome Lorenzo ——"

"Say no more, Laura—beloved Laura!" interrupted the impassioned young nobleman, straining her to his breast: then fondly—oh! how fondly did he gaze upon her—upon *her*, that guileful woman—reading the reflection of his own voluptuous feelings in her fine large eyes, and then bestowing upon her the most ardent caresses.

Several minutes passed away,—minutes that glided by with rapid and silent wings;—and the handsome pair scarcely noticed that a single second had elapsed since last they spoke.

"Tell me, my sweet Laura," at length said the Count, toying with the glossy and fragrant tresses of her hair,—"tell me what meant certain words which you addressed to me on that evening when I was first blessed with your kindness. You declared that you could not marry me, although you were not married—that you could not be my mistress, although you were not the mistress of another—and that you could not hold out any hope to me, although you were pledged to no other man."

"That language, apparently so mysterious, is easily explained," said Laura, forcing a deep blush into her cheeks as she spoke, and winding one of her snow-white and naked arms round her lover's neck, so that the contact of the firm warm flesh against his cheek sent the blood rushing through his veins in boiling currents. "I had abandoned myself to you in a moment of caprice—no, of weakness—of passion, which I could not subdue: I had yielded to an invincible impulse, not knowing its nature, and not waiting to ask myself the question. But when you had been with me a short time, I felt that I could love you—yes—deeply, tenderly love you; and as I fancied that, even though you protested the contrary, you could entertain no lasting affection for me, but on the other hand would soon regret any hastily and rashly-formed connexion, I was resolved not to place my own heart in jeopardy, nor incur the risk of loving well and then sustaining a cruel disappointment. For I feared that you addressed me in an impassioned tone only because you were labouring under the delirium of passing excitement and strong though evanescent feelings. Thus was it, then—for my own sake—that I spoke mysteriously to you, in order to convince you of the necessity of seeing me no more. But now, my Lorenzo—now, that you have had several days to reflect upon the proposal which you then made me—now that I have received such unequivocal proofs of your love, and that I no longer fear lest you should be acting in obedience to a sudden impulse,—oh! now, I say, I can hesitate no longer—and I will become your wife!"

The Count of Carignano drank in the delicious poison of her words until his very soul was intoxicated; and loving so well as did this generous-hearted, confiding young man, he paused not for an instant to demand of himself whether he were loving wisely. But he was contented to risk all and everything,—happiness—honour—fame—and name,—in this marriage upon which he had set his mind:—he longed—he burnt—he craved to possess Laura altogether—to have her to himself;—and he felt jealous of all the rest of the world until the nuptial knot should have been tied. It is in this humour and in such a temperament that the highest peer will marry an actress, who would jump at an offer to become his pensioned mistress for a few hundreds a-year.

And Laura—what was passing in her mind? The readers may easily conceive: and yet, lest there should be one or two of imaginations so opaque as not to be able to divine her thoughts, we will describe them as succinctly as possible.

She had run down the institution of marriage when in conversation with the Marquis of Delmour, because she knew that he was already bound in matrimonial bonds, and that *she* therefore could not become his wife. The result was that she was enabled to consent to become his mistress with much less apparent violation of decency, and without the risk of shocking his feelings. And his mistress she would have become, as she indeed promised, had not the arrival of the Count of Carignano turned her thoughts into an entirely new channel, and placed her interests altogether in a new light. From the moment that he announced his title and his wealth, Laura resolved to throw the poor Marquis of Delmour overboard and accept the proposals of the Italian nobleman.

In fact, Fortune appeared to favour Laura marvellously. Ere now she had beholden a coronet at the end of a vista of some years: in her musings, she had said, "The Marquis will be worth two hundred thousand pounds to me: and *then* I may espouse a peer of high title!" Such was her ambitious speculation previously to the arrival of Lorenzo: and now, since he had come, she no longer need pass through the apprenticeship of mistress to one nobleman in order to become the wife of another. No—a coronet was within her grasp: a few days—a few hours might behold her Countess of Carignano,—with a husband of whom she could not but be proud, and not with an animated corpse bound to her side.

Here was another triumph for Laura—another cause of glorification in the possession of those matchless charms which thus captivated so hastily and triumphed so effectually. Within a few short weeks she had seen Charles Hatfield—the Marquis of Delmour—and the Count of Carignano at her feet. The first and last had enjoyed her favours: the second was in anticipation of them—and, in that anticipation, had paid sixty thousand pounds. To the first she was wedded—and their marriage was a secret: to the last she had consented to be allied—and their union would be proclaimed to all the world!

Oh! associated with all these reflections, were triumphs—glorious triumphs for Laura Mortimer; and as those thoughts rushed through

her mind, as she lay half embraced in the arms of the fond and doting Italian nobleman, the delicious rosiness of animation spread over her cheeks, and kindred fires flashed from under her long silken lashes.

“How beautiful art thou, my adored one!” exclaimed Carignano, as he contemplated the glorious loveliness of her looks: and then he pressed his lips to that mouth which was so voluptuously formed, and which rather resembled a luscious fruit than anything belonging to human shape. “Oh! how I long to call thee mine—to know that thou art indissolubly linked to me! But say—tell me—when shall this happy, happy union take place?—when wilt thou accompany me to the altar?”

“Let us depart for England without delay, my dearest Lorenzo,” murmured Laura, lavishing upon him the most tender caresses; “and there—in London—our marriage can be celebrated immediately after our arrival. Have you any tie—and business on hand to retain you in Paris?”

“None in the world,” was the answer: “and even if I had, everything should give place to the accomplishment of my felicity and the fulfilment of your wishes.”

“Then let us take our departure as early as convenient to-morrow morning,” said Laura.

“And we shall not separate in the meantime?” observed the young Count, straining the syren to his breast.

She murmured a favourable reply; and, after some minutes of tender dalliance, she hastened to give her servants the necessary instructions relative to the preparations for her departure.

A delicate supper was then served up; and the sparkling champagne made the eyes of the lovers flash more brightly, and enhanced the rich carnation glow of their countenances.

The time-piece struck eleven; and they were about to retire to rest, when Rosalie hastily entered the room, and approaching Laura, said in an under tone, “*Mademoiselle*, your mother has this moment arrived. I told her that you were engaged—and she awaits your presence in the breakfast-parlour.”

“It is my mother, dear Lorenzo,” Laura observed to the Count, who had not overheard the abigail’s communication: “but her arrival will not in any way interfere with our arrangements,” she hastened to add, perceiving that the young nobleman’s countenance suddenly expressed apprehension.

“And yet you yourself appear to be but little pleased at this occurrence, dearest Laura,” he whispered, gazing fondly upon her.

“I could have wished it were otherwise,” she responded: “but no matter. There is nothing to fear: I am independent of my mother. Have patience for ten minutes—and I will return to you.”

With these words, she pressed his hand tenderly and then hurried from the apartment—the discreet Rosalie having already retired the moment she had delivered her message.

Laura hastened to the breakfast-parlour; and there she found her mother, whose garments indicated that she had just arrived in Paris after a journey in an open vehicle and on a dusty road.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

LAURA AND HER MOTHER.—ANOTHER INTERRUPTION.

“Here I am in Paris once more, Perdita—Laura, I mean,” said the old woman, without moving from the seat which she had taken, and without offering to embrace her daughter; “and I am within the fortnight stipulated, too.”

“You have travelled post from Calais or Boulogne, doubtless?” observed Laura, interrogatively: “for your clothes are covered with dust—and it is evident that you were not cooped up in the interior of a diligence. I may therefore conclude that you were successful in your search after Torrens and your designs upon him,” she added, fixing a penetrating glance upon her mother’s countenance.

“I was so far successful that I obtained certain intelligence concerning him,” responded the old woman: “but I failed altogether in my hope of becoming the possessor of his money.”

“And what was the intelligence to which you allude?” demanded Laura, who felt convinced from her mother’s manner that she had *not* failed in the object of her journey.

“I learnt, beyond all question or doubt, that Torrens really was the murderer of Percival, but that he himself had met with a violent death.”

“Ah! Torrens is no more?” exclaimed Laura: then, bending a look full of deep meaning upon her mother, she said in a tone of equal significancy, “You went to London to be revenged upon him—and he is dead! He has experienced a violent end. Well—I understand you—I read your secret—and you need not be more explicit.”

“By heaven! you wrong me, Laura,” exclaimed the old woman, starting in astonishment and alarm as the justice of her daughter’s horrible suspicion became suddenly apparent—a suspicion that she herself had so incautiously engendered by the mysterious manner in which she had announced Torrens’ death.

“It is not worth while disputing upon the subject,” said Laura, in a tone which convinced her mother—and, indeed, was intended to convince her, that no explanation could now possibly wipe away the suspicion alluded to. “You are doubtless well pleased that Torrens is no more—and that is sufficient.”

“Perdita—Laura, I mean,” said the old woman, speaking as if her tongue were parched, or as if ashes clogged up her throat, “why should you take delight in uttering things to vex and annoy me? For some time past—indeed ever since the date of your connection with Charles Hatfield, a barrier has appeared to rise up between us. We seem to act towards each other as if it were tacitly understood that we are enemies, or that we mutually harboured distrust and suspicion.”

“I am aware of it, mother—and it is all your own fault,” answered Laura. “You sought to exercise over me a sway to which I would not and never will submit; and you menaced me in a manner not easily to be forgotten.”

“But you had your revenge—for you abused me vilely,” retorted Mrs. Mortimer, with a malignant bitterness of accent.

“Acknowledged! And you yourself must admit that you provoked my resentment. But let us not remain here bandying words, which may only lead to an useless quarrel. Circumstances have opened to me a grand career—a career, in which my happiness and my interests may be alike promoted; and I have accepted the destiny thus favourably prepared for me. In a word, I am about to marry a young Italian nobleman whom I feel I can love—whom I already love, indeed—and who possesses a proud title and princely revenues.”

“Ah! you are about to be married?” said Mrs. Mortimer, speaking as if the project were perfectly natural and without an objection: but in her heart—in the depths of her foul and vindictive soul, she was rejoiced,—for this alliance would place her daughter completely in her power.

The reader will remember that the old woman was aware of Laura’s union with Charles Hatfield, but that the young lady herself was totally unsuspicious of that fact being thus known to her mother.

“Yes,” resumed Laura: “I am about to be married. I leave Paris for England to-morrow morning. I return to London, because I am now independent of the Hatfields; and at my leisure I shall devise means to avenge myself for the insults I have received at their hands. It now remains for you and me to decide upon what terms we are to exist in future. Be friendly—and I shall allow you a handsome

income: be hostile—and I shall dare all you can do against me."

"I am sorry that my daughter should think it necessary to propose such alternatives," said Mrs. Mortimer. "State what you require me to do."

"To settle in France—wherever you please," responded Laura; "and I will grant you an allowance of two hundred pounds every three months."

"The pecuniary portion of the conditions is liberal enough," said Mrs. Mortimer; "but the rest is as despotic and galling as the terms which Mr. Hatfield made the other day with you."

"I much regret that prudence should compel me thus to dictate to you," returned Laura: "there is, however, no alternative. 'Tis for you to yield to my conditions—or open war will at once commence between us."

"I consent—I agree," said the old woman, who knew that the time was not yet come for her to show her teeth in defiance of her daughter.

"So much the better!" exclaimed Laura, but in a tone indicating that the matter was one of perfect indifference to her; for she little knew—little suspected how irretrievably her marriage with the Count of Carignano would place her in her mother's power. "And now I have one question to ask you."

"Speak, Perdita," observed the old woman.

"Pray remember that my name is *Laura*!" cried her daughter, petulantly. "You perceive how necessary it is that we should dwell apart from each other. Your imprudence is really great; and the question I am about to put to you, refers to some matter in which you doubtless compromised yourself. Are you acquainted with the Marquis of Delmour?"

"The Marquis of Delmour!" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, with an expression of countenance denoting the most unfeigned astonishment. "No—certainly not. I have heard of him, it is true; but only in the same way that one hears of any other person conspicuous for rank, wealth, or station. I have never seen the Marquis of Delmour to my knowledge."

"Perhaps you have been in his company without knowing who he was," resumed Laura. "At all events, have you recently represented yourself, in any circle or place, as the widow of a General-officer whom you stated to have died in India?"

The system of duplicity which the old woman determined to adopt towards her daughter, had so well prepared her to sustain any questioning or cross-examination on any point, that she did not betray the least surprise, nor did her countenance undergo the slightest change as that interrogatory suddenly brought to her mind the conviction that Mr. Vernon and the Marquis of Delmour must be one and the same person. Without at the moment perceiving how this discovery could be in any way useful to her, but still acting with that reserve and wariness with which she had armed herself in order to meet her daughter, she resolved not to mention a single word of anything that had occurred in London relative to the beautiful Recluse of the Cottage, her father, and Lord William Trevelyan.

Accordingly, and without the least hesitation,—nor quailing, nor changing colour beneath the penetrating gaze which Laura fixed upon her,—she said, "I do not remember ever to have made any such representation as that to which you allude."

"It is singular—this coincidence," mused Laura, audibly; "and yet it is of little import to me."

"It would appear, at all events, that you must be acquainted with this Marquis of Delmour of whom you speak?" said Mrs. Mortimer, in a careless and indifferent tone.

Scarcely were the words uttered, when a violent ringing at the front door was heard; and in a few moments a voice, instantly recognised alike by Laura and her mother, exclaimed to Rosalie, "Has your mistress retired to rest yet? I must see her immediately."

The abigail, suspecting that it would be better not to allow the Marquis of Delmour—for he the visitor was—to be brought face to face with the handsome young Italian, unhesitatingly conducted the nobleman into the parlour where Laura and Mrs. Mortimer were holding their interview.

But the moment Rosalie had closed the door behind the Marquis, he uttered an ejaculation of mingled astonishment and rage, and springing towards Mrs. Mortimer, exclaimed, "Ah! I meet you again, vile woman! Give me up my daughter—tell me where you have hidden her!"

And he caught her violently by the arm.

"I know what you mean, my lord," said the old woman, hastily: "but you accuse me wrongfully."

"Wrongfully!" repeated the Marquis, his countenance white with rage: "no—no! I only accuse you justly—for it must be you who have spirited away my child—my beloved Agnes!"

“It is false!” ejaculated the old woman, with an emphasis which made him release his hold of her and fall back two or three paces.

“False, you say!” he cried. “Oh! then, if you have really not done this flagrant wrong—but if you are in possession of any clue—”

“I am—I am,” interrupted Mrs. Mortimer, seeing in a moment that a reward was to be obtained and her spite against Lord William Trevelyan to be gratified at the same time: for she *did* cherish the bitterest animosity against that young nobleman, on account of his conduct towards her when, four days previously, she had taken Agnes Vernon to his house in Park Square.

“And yet I cannot conceive you to be innocent in this matter,” exclaimed the nobleman, surveying her with deep distrust and aversion—and all this time taking no notice of Laura, so profoundly were his feelings engrossed by the subject which now occupied his mind: “for wherefore did you visit the cottage where Agnes dwelt?—why did you intrude yourself upon her presence?”

“All that can be readily explained, my lord,” responded Mrs. Mortimer, not losing an atom of her self-possession.

“Then tell me where my daughter is—tell me what has become of her?” cried the nobleman, in an appealing tone; “and if you have been concerned in removing her from the cottage, I will forgive you! Nay, more—I will reward you handsomely.”

“Your daughter is in safety—that much I can inform you at once,” said Mrs. Mortimer.

“Thanks—thanks for this assurance!” cried the old nobleman, clasping his hands together in gratitude for the relief thus imparted to his mind: then, suddenly recollecting the presence of Laura, he turned towards her, and in a tone of mingled suspicion and reproach, said, “But how is it that I find you with the very person of whom I spoke to you somewhat disparagingly two short hours ago?”

“She claims some distant relationship with me, my dear Marquis,” Laura hastened to observe—but without manifesting the slightest embarrassment; while the rapid and intelligent sign which she made to her mother, and which was altogether unperceived by the nobleman, was fully understood by the old woman.

“Ah! that is on account of her name being *Mortimer*,” said the Marquis, completely satisfied by the answer which Laura had given him—especially as the old woman offered no contradiction. “And now I must request you to accede to some alteration in our plans for to-morrow,” he continued, drawing Laura aside, and speaking to her in a low tone. “On my return just now to the hotel where I am staying, I found a letter containing the afflicting intelligence that a daughter of mine—a daughter whom circumstances have compelled me to keep in the strictest seclusion—had suddenly and most mysteriously disappeared from her dwelling in the neighbourhood of London. This happened five days ago;—but Mrs. Gifford—my dear child’s housekeeper, and I may almost say *guardian*—did not immediately write to me, hoping that Agnes would return. Oh! you may conceive how deeply this event has grieved me——”

“I sympathise sincerely with you, my dear Marquis,” interrupted Laura, affecting to wipe away tears from her eyes: for it suited her purpose to remain on good terms with the old nobleman until she should have cashed her draft for the sixty thousand pounds. “Yes—I sincerely sympathise with you,” she repeated: “and I can anticipate the proposed alterations in our arrangements. You intend to start immediately for England——”

“Without a moment’s unnecessary delay,” said the Marquis, who was greatly excited by the intelligence he had received from Mrs. Gifford: “the instant I return to my hotel, a post-chaise and four will be in readiness for me. But may I hope that you will follow me to London as speedily as convenient?”

“I shall depart to-morrow, my dear Marquis, at the hour already arranged,” responded Laura; “and deeply do I regret that my preparations are so backward as to render it impossible for me to offer to become your travelling-companion at once.”

“Dearest Laura!” murmured the Marquis, for a single moment losing the remembrance of his affliction in the doting passion he had formed for the beautiful woman who was thus grossly deluding him. “Our separation will not be very long,” he continued; “and I hope that when we meet in London three days hence, I may have good news to tell you respecting Agnes. Now, madam,” he exclaimed aloud, turning towards Mrs. Mortimer, who, while affecting to be examining the mantel-ornaments, was vainly endeavouring to catch the sense of what was passing at a little distance between her daughter and the Marquis; “now, madam,” he said, approaching her with an abruptness that made her start, “I do not think I shall be insulting you if I offer you a hundred guineas for the information which you professed yourself able and willing to give relative to my daughter—my dear and well-beloved Agnes.”

“A hundred guineas, my lord!” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, contemptuously: “if you really love that young lady whom you call your daughter, you must surely consider that it is worth five or six times the amount named in order to regain possession of her.”

“Laura dearest:——I mean, Miss Mortimer,” said the nobleman, impatiently, as he turned towards the young lady,—“oblige me with writing materials, and I will speedily satisfy this woman’s rapacity.”

“Perhaps I might also exact a recompense for keeping secret the good understanding which exists between your lordship and ‘*dearest Laura*,’ and which you so unguardedly betrayed?” observed Mrs. Mortimer, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, and with a malignant glance darted from her snake-like eyes at her daughter.

“Silence, woman!” ejaculated the Marquis, speaking with the emphasis of authority: then, the writing materials being now placed before him, he sate down and wrote a cheque, which he tossed across the table to Mrs. Mortimer, saying, “I am sorry that I have not

enough money about my person to satisfy your demands. I am therefore compelled to give you a draft upon my London bankers; and you will perceive that it is for *six times* as much as I at first offered you," he added, dwelling on the words which the old woman had herself used to indicate the amount of her expectations.

"Yes—my lord: I see that it is for six hundred pounds," she observed, coolly and quietly, as she folded up the cheque and secured it about her person. "And now I will tell you what I know concerning your daughter; and I take heaven to witness that I will not mislead you."

"If you do, my good woman," interrupted the Marquis, "you will find payment of the cheque stopped at the bank. Go on; and delay not —for my time is precious."

"In a word, my lord," said Mrs. Mortimer, the contemptuous manner in which she was treated by the haughty peer being fully counterbalanced by the handsome bonus that had just fallen into her hand,—"Lord William Trevelyan, whom you doubtless know well by name, if not personally, is deeply enamoured of your daughter; and he employed me to take a letter to her. I acquitted myself of the task: but Miss Agnes is a perfect dragon of virtue—and I could make little impression upon her."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated the Marquis, fervently.

"Well—although Lord William's passion is honourable enough, I have no doubt, yet Miss Agnes——"

"And is it Lord William who has taken her away?" demanded the Marquis, unable to restrain his impatience or any longer endure the tortures of suspense.

"No, my lord—it was her mother!" said Mrs. Mortimer, watching through profound curiosity the effect which this announcement would produce upon the nobleman.

"Ah! then my worst apprehensions are confirmed!" he exclaimed, in a tone of poignant anguish.

"But do not give way to despair, my lord," said Mrs. Mortimer: "for Miss Agnes subsequently escaped from the house where her mother placed her——"

"Oh! I then she loves me still—*me*—her father!" exclaimed the Marquis, in accents of joy: "and she yielded not to the wiles of that woman——But proceed, madam—proceed!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself, and again speaking in a tone of impatience.

"Having escaped, as I have just said," resumed Mrs. Mortimer, "Agnes fell into the power of ruffian, from whose hands I was fortunate enough to rescue her; and, not knowing precisely whither to take her, I thought it best to consult Lord William Trevelyan upon the proper course to adopt. His lordship, who is a man of honour—and pray remember to tell him that I say so," she added, with a slight accent of malignity,—"his lordship immediately placed her in the care of a lady of his acquaintance; and it is to him that you must apply, my Lord Marquis, for the address of your daughter's new abode."

"And all that you have told me is true?" exclaimed the old nobleman.

"If it should prove otherwise, your lordship has in your own hands the means of punishing me," responded Mrs. Mortimer.

"True!" cried the Marquis; "and now I am somewhat consoled by the tidings you have given me. My daughter is safe, and in the society of honourable persons. I thank you, madam."

He then turned away to shake Laura cordially by the hand ere he took his departure.

"You will leave to-morrow at mid-day, dearest," he said, in an under tone to her whom he fondly hoped to make his mistress, but who was so grossly deluding him.

"Yes—without fail," was the reply.

"And on your arrival in town you will instantly send me word at which hotel you take up your temporary residence?" continued the Marquis. "I shall hasten to join you, and hope to have a charming villa ready to receive you."

"You are too good, my dear Marquis, to think to much of me at a time when your heart is so severely lacerated on account of your daughter," said Laura, likewise speaking in a whisper.

"There is nothing that I would not do for you, beloved Laura," responded the infatuated old noble. "You hold already a cheque for sixty thousand pounds: that is nothing to what I will do for you, my dearest angel. And if I allude to pecuniary affairs at all, it is to convince you how anxious I am to ensure your happiness, not only now—but likewise when I shall be no more."

Thus speaking, the Marquis of Delmour pressed Laura's hand fervently, and was about to hurry away, when, suddenly recollecting something, he drew her still farther aside, and said in a very low whisper, "Have nothing to do with that woman dearest! I dislike her looks—I mistrust her altogether. She is evidently an adventuress. Oh! how could I have ever supposed even for an instant that such a

wretch was the mother of such an angelic being as my Laura?”

Another fond and impassioned look—another pressure of the hand—and the Marquis was gone.

Of all this latter dialogue which took place between that nobleman and Laura, and which was carried on in a very low tone, Mrs. Mortimer, who strained all her auricular faculties to catch even a syllable, succeeded only in overhearing a very short sentence. But that one sentence she did manage to catch; and a highly significant as well as deeply important one was it for her.

And these were the words which she thus caught—“*You hold already a cheque for sixty thousand pounds!*”

Quickly as the first glass of sparkling wine infuses a delicious sensation throughout the entire frame,—so speedily did that one sentence create a burning joy in the breast of the old woman. She saw through it all:—Laura had wheedled the Marquis out of that immense sum—and now she intended to jilt him, and espouse the Italian noble!

“A cheque for sixty thousand pounds!” thought Mrs. Mortimer within herself, while the Marquis and Laura were still whispering together: “sixty thousand pounds! Well—we shall see! It is better than a paltry six hundred.”

And, while thus musing, she affected to be smelling the flowers on the mantel-piece, until the door suddenly opened and closed again instantaneously—and then she turned round towards Laura, for the Marquis was gone.

“And you assured me that you knew nothing of the nobleman who has just left us?” said Laura, fixing her eyes with cold contempt on her mother.

“I knew him only as Mr. Vernon until I saw him here this evening,” was the answer.

“But it was to him that you had passed yourself as the widow of a General-officer in the Indian army,” persisted Laura: “and yet you denied having ever made such a representation to any one. You perceive, mother, that I cannot trust you: you are full of duplicity and deceit even to me—and still you complain that a coolness subsists between us.”

“I may observe, on my side, Laura,” retorted the old woman, with a subdued and cunning malignity, “that you were not more communicative to me relative to the Marquis of Delmour than I was disposed to be to you. We are therefore even upon that score; and, at all events, let us not dispute. I shall now leave you, Laura—for I am well aware that my room will be preferable to my company. It is my present intention to remain in Paris; and from time to time I will send you tidings of my whereabouts, so that you may duly remit me my quarterly income, as promised just now. The cheque of the Marquis I shall send through the medium of some Parisian banker.”

The old woman then took her departure, a cool “Good-bye” being all the farewell salutation that passed between her daughter and herself as she crossed the threshold of the handsome suite of apartments.

“Thank God! she is gone!” thought Laura, as she hastened to rejoin her handsome Castelcicalan, who was growing impatient of her protracted absence.

“The haughty and self-sufficient creature!” murmured Mrs. Mortimer to herself, an she hastily descended the stairs: “she is completely in my power—at my mercy—in every way!”

And did the old woman remain in Paris in fulfilment of her declared intention?

No:—wearied and exhausted by travel as she already was, but animated with an indomitable energy, Mrs. Mortimer hastened, late though the hour now was, to procure a post-chaise and four; and while Laura was passing a night of voluptuousness and love in the arms of the handsome Count of Carignano, her mother was speeding along the road to Boulogne, on her way back to London.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

THE LAWYER'S HEAD CLERK.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the day following the incidents just related, that Mr. James Heathcote, the lawyer, was seated at his writing-table in that private office which we have already described to our readers,—when a low, timid knock at the door fell upon his ears.

"Come in," he exclaimed, in his short, abrupt, and almost brutal manner, well knowing that the individual about to enter was the poor wretch whom he bullied when in an ill-humour, and whom on all occasions he was wont to make his vile agent and spaniel-like slave.

Creeping up as usual—rather than walking with the natural dignity of a man—towards the table, Mr. Green bowed humbly and waited until his dreaded, but also hated master should deign to give him leave to speak.

"Well, Mr. Green," said Heathcote, after a pause of a few minutes, during which he waited to see whether his grovelling serf would dare to open his lips until he received permission,—for the lawyer was a man who liked to ascertain the full extent of the power that he wielded over his subordinates, and also to make *them* feel that he *did* exercise that power;—"well, Mr. Green, what news this afternoon?"

And, throwing himself back in his arm-chair, he passed his thin, yellow hand through his iron-grey hair.

"If you please, sir, I have several things to report, as you were so much engaged this morning that you could not give the time to hear me," observed Green, in that subdued and almost affrighted tone of voice which years of servility had rendered habitual to him;—for such is ever the case with those who mistake the most abasing sycophancy for proofs of respect. And here we may observe that it is only in the demoralising and degrading influence of Royal Courts that this disgusting susurration is adopted as a species of homage to the divinity raised up by man's stupid and most reprehensible idolatry.

"Ah! I recollect—I was busy this morning," exclaimed Mr. Heathcote. "Well—what have you to report?"

"Please, sir," resumed the trembling clerk, "Gregson the upholsterer has put his affairs into the hands of Goodman and Meanwell, who have got all his creditors save yourself, sir, to sign a letter of license; and Mr. Goodman has been here this afternoon to say that unless you will give your name also, his client must inevitably go into the *Gazette*."

"Then let him go—and to the devil also, if he chooses!" vociferated Mr. Heathcote, flying into a passion—a most unusual thing with one so cool, calculating, and self-possessed as he. "Goodman and Meanwell are what are called *honest attorneys*—conscientious lawyers—straightforward practitioners;—and they will exert all their energies to carry their client through his difficulties. But I will thwart them, Mr. Green—by God! I will thwart them; Gregson *shall* go into the *Gazette*—even if I lose every penny he owes me. I *hate* your honest attorneys;"—and his lips were curled in bitter irony and demoniac malignity. "Go on, sir!" he exclaimed savagely, as if it were his wretched clerk who had irritated him.

"Thompson, sir—the defendant in Jones's case, you know," resumed Mr. Green, "was arrested yesterday—in pursuance of your orders, sir. I took the liberty of mentioning, sir, that his wife had just been confined——"

"Well?" exclaimed Mr. Heathcote, impatiently.

"And that his eldest child was at the point of death, sir," added Green, more timidly than before.

"Well—what next?" demanded the attorney.

"The poor child has since died, sir."

"The poor child, indeed! Who cares a fig about a child? Why—you are growing quite soft-hearted, Mr. Green," said Heathcote, in a tone of cutting irony. "The *poor* child, indeed! I suppose the wife has died also?" he added, with heartless jocularity.

"Indeed, sir, I am sorry to say you are right in your conjecture," responded Green, scarcely venturing to make the announcement.

"No!—is it really the case, though?" exclaimed Heathcote, startled for a moment at finding that what he had said as a brutal jest turned out to be a solemn and shocking truth. "Well—what next?" he demanded, mastering those emotions which he was ashamed at having

betrayed.

“Thompson himself, sir—driven to despair by these numerous afflictions—cut his throat in prison this afternoon,” added Mr. Green.

“Is this possible?” cried Mr. Heathcote, again excited to a degree more powerful than the clerk had ever before observed: but speedily subduing his feelings, by dint of a strong and almost superhuman effort—so sudden and effective was it—he said, “Well—it is not my fault. Maudlin sentimentalists will perhaps lay his death at my door——”

“I am afraid, sir, that *all* the three deaths will be attributed to you,” interrupted Green, with an affectation of exceeding meekness, while from beneath his brows he darted a rapid glance of fiend-like expression at his master—a glance which denoted how the man in his secret soul feasted upon the pangs which now rent the heart of the attorney.

“I am tough enough to bear everything that people may say of me, Mr. Green,” observed Heathcote, in his usually cold tone of irony. “But proceed with your communications.”

“Beale’s wife, sir, called this morning—you know Beale?—the man you put into Whitecross Street prison, and whose wife and children have been starving ever since——”

“Really, Mr. Green,” interrupted Heathcote, fixing a stern look upon his clerk, “it would appear that you are purposely entering into minute details this afternoon in order to annoy me. Of course I know who Beale *is*——”

“*Was*, sir, if you please,” said Green, with difficulty concealing the savage delight that he took in thus torturing—or, at least, endeavouring to torture, his master.

“What do you mean, sir?” demanded Heathcote, savagely.

“That Beale died in the infirmary at Whitecross Street last night, sir,” responded Green, his tone and manner becoming more abjectly obsequious in proportion as his internal joy augmented at the increasing excitement and irritation of his master.

“The man was doubtless a drunkard, Green,” observed Heathcote, roughly: “and therefore, when no longer able to get liquor, the reaction carried him off.”

“I dare say, sir, that you know best—and I am sure you must be right,” returned the clerk, with a low bow: “but the man’s friends *do* say that a more sober, hard-working, and deserving fellow did not exist.”

“And therefore I suppose that *his* death will be laid at my door!” exclaimed Heathcote, now for the first time in his life glancing timidly—almost appealing, at his clerk, as if to implore him to devise some excuse or start some palliation that might ease his troubled conscience.

But Green, whose very obsequiousness and servility afforded him the means of venting his spite on his hated master, pretended to take the observation as an assertion and not an interrogatory, and replied in a humble tone, “Your foresight and knowledge of the world, sir, are beyond all dispute; and, as you say, Beale’s death is certain to be laid at your door. But of course you are perfectly indifferent to the tittle-tattle of scandalous tongues.”

Heathcote rose from his seat—or rather started from it, and walked rapidly up and down the room thrice. He felt sorely troubled; for, hardened as his heart was—obdurate as his soul had become, he could not shut out the whispering voice of conscience which now proclaimed him to be the author of all the deaths that his clerk had enumerated. And, while he was racked by these painful convictions, the thought suddenly flashed to his brain that Green had displayed a savage delight in detailing those horrors; and, man of the world as James Heathcote was, it occurred to him, as a natural sequence to the suspicion just mentioned, that his clerk hated and abhorred him.

Acting under the influence of these impressions, he stopped suddenly short close by the spot where Green was standing; and he fixed his snake-like gaze upon the shabbily-dressed, senile-looking, self-debasing individual, who appeared to be maintaining his eyes bent timidly and reverentially on the floor—as if his master’s emotions were something too sacred to look upon.

“Green!—Mr. Green!” exclaimed Heathcote, laying his hand with such abruptness and also with such violence upon the grovelling wretch’s shoulder, that it made him start convulsively—though he knew all the while that his master had accosted him, and was also gazing on him.

“Yes, sir!” cried the clerk, raising his eyes diffidently toward Heathcote’s countenance.

“Do you conceive that the deaths of those people can be righteously attributed to me?” demanded the lawyer, speaking in a low, measured, and solemn tone, and looking as if he sought to read into the most secret depths of his clerk’s soul: “do you, I say, dare to associate any act or deed of mine with *their* fate?” he asked, raising his voice, while his face became terrible to gaze upon.

“Who?—I, sir!” ejaculated Green, as if in astonishment at the questions put to him; and his own countenance assumed such a sinister aspect that Heathcote surveyed him with increasing suspicion and distrust.

“Yes—you!” cried the lawyer, ferociously. “Now, mark me, Green,” he continued, in a lower and more composed tone of voice,—“if you dare to harbour ill feelings towards me—if even a scintillation of such feelings should transpire from your words or manner, I will crush you as I would a worm—I will send you to Newgate—abandon you to your fate—and, if necessary, *help* to have you shipped for eternal exile.”

“My God! how have I deserved these implied reproaches—these terrible menaces?” demanded Green, his countenance expressing real alarm, and his whole frame shivering from head to heel.

“Perhaps you have *not* deserved them—and in that case they will serve as a warning,” said Heathcote, now becoming suddenly calm and imperiously scornful: “but I think that you *did* merit all I have uttered—and now you know me better, perhaps, than you knew me before. However, let all this pass. I do not for an instant suppose that I possess your affection; but I will guard against the effects of your hate. Answer me not, sir: you cannot wipe away the impressions which this afternoon’s scene has conjured up in my mind. And now proceed with anything more that you may have to tell me.”

“Fox, the ironmonger, sir,” resumed Green, in a more timid and servile tone than ever, and with a manner so cowed and grovelling that it completely veiled the strong pantings for revenge and the emotions of bitter, burning hate which dwelt in the clerk’s secret soul, —“Fox, the ironmonger, sir, has realised all his property and absconded.”

“Did I not tell you to issue execution against his goods without delay?” demanded Heathcote, angrily.

“I obeyed your commands, sir, as soon as the usual forms were gone through,” responded Green: “but in the interval the man, knowing the steps you were taking against him, sold off everything and ran away—no one can tell whither.”

“Then all your intelligence is evil this afternoon, Mr. Green?” said Heathcote. “What about Mrs. Sefton?”

“The spy that I set to watch her has reported her removal from Kentish Town to a house at Bayswater, sir,” answered Green; “and as she has a young lady with her—a Miss Vernon, it appears—she does not seem to be busying herself in any way that might interfere with your interests.”

“But that insolent young nobleman—that Lord William Trevelyan?” demanded Heathcote.

“I do not think he is troubling himself any more in the business, sir,” answered Green.

“Good and well!” ejaculated the attorney. “These latter tidings constitute something like an agreeable set-off in respect to all your

former communications. Hah!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself, as the clock proclaimed the hour: "five already! Well, you may go now, Green—and see that your spies keep a good look-out upon the movements of Mrs. Sefton and Lord William Trevelyan."

"I will, sir," was the reply; and the clerk bowed himself out of the office.

Half an hour afterwards Mr. Green was wending his way towards the aristocratic quarters of the West End; and at length he entered a respectable-looking public-house in the neighbourhood of Portland Place.

Having called for some refreshment, he took up the newspaper to while away the time until the arrival of the person whom he was expecting: but he could not settle his thoughts to the perusal of the journal. He read an article through, from beginning to end; and, when he reached the termination, he had not retained a single idea of the subject.

The fact was that the man's mind was excited and bewildered by the scene which had taken place that afternoon with his master. He felt that he had been trampled upon—treated with every possible indignity—despised, menaced, and almost spit upon;—and he was compelled to suffer all—to bear everything—to endure those flagrant wrongs, without daring to murmur.

"But I will be avenged—terribly avenged!" thought he within himself, as he bent over the table in the public-house parlour, supporting his head upon his two hands: "yes—even though I should sacrifice myself, I will be avenged sooner or later. For years and years have I been his slave—his menial—his instrument—his tool;—and he has kept me in such utter subjection that it was not until lately I remembered that I really possessed a soul and a spirit of my own. The hard-hearted—cruel—remorseless wretch! I hate and abhor him with a malignant hatred and a savage abhorrence. No words are strong enough—no terms sufficiently potent to convey even to myself an idea of the magnitude of that aversion which I now entertain for him. But if he has me in his power in one way, he is at my mercy in many other others. He little suspects how deep an insight I possess into his affairs—his machinations—his dark plots. He thinks that I behold but the surface: he knows not that I have fathomed to the bottom!"

At this point in the clerk's musings, the door of the parlour was opened, and a respectable-looking man, dressed in black, but with a white cravat entered the room.

"You are somewhat behind your time, Mr. Fitzgeorge," said Green, as this individual—who was Lord William Trevelyan's valet—seated himself by the clerk's side.

"Only a few minutes," responded Fitzgeorge. "And now to business without delay. It is fortunate that we are all alone in this parlour at present: otherwise I should have proposed to adjourn to a private room. Have you thought well of the subject I mentioned to you yesterday?"

"I have," was the answer, delivered in a tone of decision: "and I am prepared to meet your wishes. But remember that I told you how completely I am in the power of the villain Heathcote; and if he were to discover that your noble master received his information through me——"

"He cannot possibly detect your instrumentality in the business, provided you do not betray yourself," said Fitzgeorge.

"Then I cannot hesitate to serve you," responded Green.

"Here are a hundred pounds in advance of the sum promised you," continued the valet, producing bank-notes to the amount named; "and the other moiety shall be paid the moment the information you are about to give me shall have proved to be correct."

"Ah! it is a long—long time since I could call so much money my own," said Green, with a deep sigh, as he gazed upon the notes—half doubting whether it were possible that they were about to find their way into his pocket.

"Take up the money and use despatch—for my time is precious," exclaimed Fitzgeorge.

The clerk followed the first suggestion with amazing alacrity; and his sinister countenance was now as radiant with joy as such a face could be.

"Your master is generous—very generous," he said, as soon as the notes were secured in his waistcoat-pocket; "and I will serve him to the utmost of my power. The mad-house to which Sir Gilbert Heathcote has been consigned, is kept by Dr. Swinton, and is situated in the neighbourhood of the new church facing the end of the Bethnal Green Road."

"I am well acquainted with the locality," said Fitzgeorge. "The church you speak of is in the Cambridge Road, and stands at one of the angles of the Green?"

"Precisely so," answered the clerk; "and the lunatic asylum looks upon the Green itself, its back windows commanding a view of Globe Town. But here is the exact address," continued the man, producing a card from his pocket.

"That is all I require," said Fitzgeorge. "Three days hence you can meet me here again; and if in the meantime I should have discovered that Sir Gilbert Heathcote is really confined in Dr. Swinton's asylum, the other hundred pounds shall be handed over to you." The valet and the clerk then separated.

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

DR. SWINTON.

The mad-house kept by Dr. Swinton was a spacious building, with a large garden, surrounded by a high wall, at the back.

It was by no means a gloomy-looking place, although the casements were protected by iron bars: for to mitigate that prison-like effect, the curtains were of a cheerful colour, and the window-sills were adorned with flowers and verdant evergreens in bright red pots. Moreover, the front of the house was stuccoed; and wherever paint was used, the colours were of the gayest kind.

The front door always stood open during the day-time, because there was an inner door of great strength which led into the hall; and a porter in handsome livery was constantly lounging about at the entrance.

The Doctor himself was an elderly person, of highly respectable appearance, and of very pleasing manners *when* he chose to be agreeable: but no demon could exhibit greater ferocity than he, when compelled to exercise his authority in respect to those amongst his patients who had no friends to care about them.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of the day following the interview between Fitzgeorge and Heathcote's head clerk, that a plain carriage and pair drove up to the door of Doctor Swinton's establishment.

The porter immediately rushed forward to open the door and let down the steps of the vehicle; and two persons alighted.

One was a tall, handsome young man of genteel bearing, and handsomely dressed: the other was some years older, and might be described as respectable without having anything aristocratic in his appearance.

"Have the kindness to say that Mr. Smithson, accompanied by his friend Mr. Granby, requests an interview with your master," were the words immediately addressed to the porter by the elder of the two visitors, while the other appeared to be gazing about him in a vacant and stolid manner.

"Walk in, gentlemen," said the obsequious porter, with a low bow: he then rang a bell, and a footman in resplendent livery opened the inner door.

Mr. Granby and Mr. Smithson were now conducted through a spacious hall into an elegantly furnished parlour, lighted by a superb lustre suspended to the ceiling.

"The Doctor will be with you in a minute, gentlemen," said the domestic, who immediately retired to acquaint his master with their arrival: but the moment the door had closed behind him, a smile of deep meaning instantly appeared upon the lips of the visitors, as they exchanged equally significant looks.

In a few minutes Dr. Swinton appeared—his countenance wearing such a benignant expression that if the Saints at Exeter Hall could only have bribed him to attend on the platform at their May Meetings, they would have secured a sufficiency of *outward appearance* of philanthropy to draw gold from the purses of even the most cynical. In fact, the doctor was precisely the individual from whose lips might be expected a most touching and lachrymose speech upon the "benighted condition" of the heathen, and the absolute necessity of procuring funds for the purpose of circulating a million of Bibles amongst the poor savages of the Cannibal Islands.

His thin grey hair was combed with precision over his high and massive forehead: a smile played on his lips, showing his well-preserved teeth;—and his eyes beamed with mildness—almost with meekness, as if he had succeeded, by long perseverance, in resigning himself to a profession which militated sadly against a natural benevolence of heart.

He was dressed in deep black; his linen was of the finest material and of snowy whiteness;—he wore a low cravat; and his enormous shirt-frill was prevented from projecting too much by means of a diamond pin that could not have cost less than fifty guineas.

The middle finger of his right hand was adorned with a ring of equal value; and a massive chain with a bunch of gold seals depended from his fob.

We should have observed that the Doctor wore black silk stockings and shoes—it being evening; and we have every cause to believe that the reader may now form a tolerably accurate idea of that gentleman's personal appearance.

Leaning forward as he walked, and with a kind of mincing gait—half familiar, and half obsequious—Dr. Swinton advanced towards the visitors, only one of whom rose at his approach;—and this was Mr. Smithson, the elder of the two. The other remained in an apparent state of apathetic laziness on the sofa, where he had taken his seat.

"Your most obedient, Mr. Smithson," said the Doctor, proffering his hand to the individual whom he thus addressed. "This is your friend Mr. Granby, I presume—the gentleman of whom you made mention when you honoured me with a visit this morning."

"Yes. Doctor—that is indeed my unfortunate friend Granby," responded Smithson, drawing the physician into the window-recess, and speaking in a whisper.

"He is a fine, handsome young man," observed the mad-doctor, glancing towards the subject of his remark, and likewise adopting a low tone. "What a pity it is!" he added, turning towards Mr. Smithson, and placing his fore-finger significantly to his forehead.

"A thousand—thousand pities, Doctor!" was the reply, delivered in a mournful voice. "Such a splendid intellect to be thus clouded!—such a genius to be thus crushed—annihilated!"

"No—do not anticipate such a calamity," hastily interposed the physician. "Rather let us hope that a judicious system—*my* system, Mr. Smithson—will eventually succeed in effecting a cure. But have you the regular certificates, my dear sir?—because you are well aware that a heavy responsibility rests upon gentlemen of my profession, who receive patients——"

"Everything is straightforward, Doctor," interrupted Mr. Smithson, producing two papers from his pocket. "These certificates are signed by medical men of eminence, and whose honour is unimpeachable."

"Oh! assuredly," exclaimed Swinton, glancing over the documents: "Dr. Prince is an ornament to the profession—and Mr. Spicer is equally well known. I have not the pleasure of their personal acquaintance—but I am no stranger to their high reputation and rigid integrity. So far, so good, my dear sir," continued the mad-doctor, restoring the certificates to Smithson. "And now, I think, we have little more to say in respect to arrangements——"

"Nothing that I am aware of," interrupted Mr. Smithson. "When I saw you this morning, you told me that your usual terms for first-class patients were six hundred a-year——"

"Each quarter payable in advance, you will please to recollect, my dear sir," said the physician, in a tone of bland insinuation. "It is a mere matter of form, you know—just the bare trouble of writing a cheque at the beginning instead of the close of the three months ——"

"Oh! pray offer no apology for such an excellent regulation," interrupted Smithson: "short accounts make long friends."

"Ah! ah! very good—very good indeed!" said the Doctor, with a jocular cachinnation. "You are quite right, my dear sir—quite right. Shall I give you a stamped receipt?" he asked, as Smithson placed in his hands two bank notes—one for a hundred and the other for fifty pounds.

"You can send me the acknowledgment at your leisure," answered Smithson. "And now, as I must take my leave, permit me to beseech you to bestow all possible attention upon my unhappy friend, and to spare no expense in rendering him as comfortable as possible. His relations, who have empowered me thus to place him in your establishment, are very wealthy, and will cheerfully augment the allowance, if required. No coercion is necessary with him: he is very tractable and by no means dangerous. At the same time, any thing resembling restraint would only induce him to move heaven and earth to escape. He cannot even endure to have his chamber-door locked at night; and you may safely trust him with a candle. Indeed, he *will* have a light. As for placing a keeper in his room, such a step would be as unwise as it is uncalled for. But I need not attempt to counsel a gentleman of your great experience and well-known skill——"

"Pardon me, my dear sir," interrupted Dr. Swinton, drawing himself up at the compliment thus paid to his professional ability;—"but I am always delighted to receive any hints which the friends of my patients are kind enough to give me; and I can assure you that your suggestions shall be fully borne in mind. Of course you will call upon Mr. Granby occasionally?" asked the Doctor, in a tone which was as much as to imply that the less frequent such visits were, the better he thought it would be.

"Yes—I shall call now and then," responded Smithson, catching the physician's meaning in a moment: "but not too often—as the visits of friends are likely, no doubt, to produce an injurious effect on those minds which, under the influence of your admirable system, are becoming settled and tranquil. It is however my intention to return in a few days, just to assure myself that Granby is comfortable, and likewise that you are not displeased with your patient."

"Very good," said the Doctor; "I shall be delighted to see you. But will you not remain and partake of supper with us? You will then have an opportunity of judging how I treat my patients—for we all sit down to table together,—at least, those who belong to the first class, and who may be termed the parlour boarders. Besides, I forgot to mention to you this morning that the religious principles of my patients are not neglected, and that I keep a regular chaplain in the establishment. If you will stay to supper, you will have the pleasure of hearing him say grace before meat, and deliver a most soul-refreshing exhortation afterwards. Indeed, I may consider myself highly fortunate in having secured the spiritual services and the constant companionship of such a worthy man as the Reverend Mr.

Sheepshanks."

"I should be much gratified by remaining to partake of your hospitality," answered Smithson,—"and even still more rejoiced to form the acquaintance of such an estimable character as Mr. Sheepshanks; but, unfortunately, my time is precious—and I must depart at once."

With these words Smithson turned away from the window; and approaching Mr. Granby, who was lounging upon the sofa, seemingly gazing on vacancy, he touched him on the shoulder, saying, "Good bye, my dear friend: you are going to stay here for a few days with Dr. Swinton—and you will find yourself very comfortable."

"I am already very comfortable," observed Granby, beginning to play with his fingers in a stolid, silly manner. "Can you talk with the hands, Smithson?"

"Oh! yes—and I will come to-morrow and hold a conversation with you by that method," was the answer.

"Well—don't forget," said Granby; "and bring all my friends with you,—twenty—thirty—forty of them, if you like. I shall know how to entertain them."

"In that case I will bring them all, my dear fellow," returned Smithson: then, in a whisper to the Doctor, he observed, "You perceive how childish he is—but perfectly harmless."

"Ah! I begin to fear with you that his cure will be no easy nor speedily-accomplished matter," responded the physician, also in a low tone.

"But you will do your best, Doctor, I know," said Smithson: then, turning once more to his friend, he exclaimed, "Good-bye, Granby—I am off."

"Well, go—I don't mean to accompany you," answered the patient, without moving from his recumbent position, and without even glancing towards Smithson; but maintaining his eyes fixed upon his fingers, with which he appeared to be practising the dumb alphabet. "Go along, I say—I am very comfortable where I am."

Mr. Smithson heaved a profound sigh, and, bidding the Doctor farewell, hurried to the carriage, with his cambric handkerchief to his eyes.

"Ah! he feels deeply for his afflicted friend," thought Dr. Swinton, as he remained for a few moments on the threshold of the front door, looking forth into the mild, clear, and beauteous night: "but I shall be the greatest fool in existence if ever I allow Mr. Granby to recover his reason. An annuity of six hundred pounds is not to be thrown away in a hurry. But I must prevent this fellow Smithson from calling more than once or twice a-year at the outside—and then only on stated days, or else with a week's notice. However, I shall get him here to supper in a short time, and will then cajole him into anything I propose. He is a soft-pated fool himself,—*that* I can see with half an eye."

Having arrived at this complimentary conclusion in respect to Mr. Smithson, the Doctor returned to the room where Mr. Granby was still lying upon the sofa, and still playing with his fingers.

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

Almost immediately after the departure of Mr. Smithson, supper was served up in a spacious and handsomely-furnished apartment.

The table literally groaned beneath the load of plate and China spread upon it: a splendid epergne, upon a large silver tray, occupied the middle of the board;—and numerous crystal decanters, containing choice wines of various sorts, sparkled in the flood of golden light poured forth from a magnificent lustre suspended to the ceiling.

Upwards of a dozen persons took their places at the table—all the first-class patients partaking of their meals in the delectable society of the Doctor.

That eminent individual seated himself at the head of the board; and our old friend, Mr. Sheepshanks, occupied the other extremity. The reverend gentleman, though now well stricken in years, was so little altered since the reader last found himself in his company, that no minute description of his personal appearance is again necessary: suffice it to say, that his long, pale countenance was as sanctimoniously hypocritical at ever,—his hair, now quite grey, was combed with its wonted sleekness over his forehead,—and his speech was as drawling in tone and as full of cant in respect to language, as when we beheld him holding forth to the members of the South Sea Islands Bible Circulating Society, or figuring so ignominiously in the Insolvents' Court.

Mr. Granby, being a new-comer, was placed in the post of honour—namely, on the Doctor's right hand: but the unfortunate young gentleman did not appear to understand, much lest appreciate the distinction—for he scarcely uttered a syllable, did but little justice to the succulent viands, and remained for the most part of the time gazing in listless vacancy straight before him.

We should however observe that, on first being introduced into the supper-room, he had darted a rapid and searching glance around,—embracing with that sweeping look the countenances of the dozen patients who were already assembled there: but immediately afterwards he resumed his stolid, meaningless expression, as if his mind were indeed a blank and mournful void.

"Now, Mr. Sheepshanks," said the Doctor, when all were duly seated at the table, "will you ask the usual blessing?"

"With your permission, most respected sir," replied the reverend gentleman: then, with a countenance as rueful as if he were about to go forth to the place of execution, he drawled out a lengthy grace in such a droning voice, that one of the lunatics fell fast asleep, and did not wake up again until the savoury odour of a plate of roast duck which was placed before him recalled to him his recollection and his supper.

"How do you find yourself this evening, Mr. Sheepshanks?" inquired Dr. Swinton, after having assured himself that all his guests were duly served. "You were complaining of a bilious attack this morning."

"Alas! yes, kind sir," responded the reverend gentleman, in a most doleful tone and with a profound sigh: "it pleased the Lord to ordain that the salmon of which I partook bountifully at yesterday's dinner should disagree with me—or peradventure it was the cucumber;—but, by the aid of the Divine blessing and the black draught, my dear patron, I have pretty well come round again. Nevertheless, I feel my appetite failing me."

And as he uttered these words, Mr. Sheepshanks helped himself to about a pound and a quarter of pigeon-pie—that being his second attack on the same dish.

"I shall be happy to assist you to some roast duck, Mr. Sheepshanks," said the Doctor, after a pause of about seven minutes.

"It would be an act of rudeness to decline an offer which bespeaks such delicate attentions on your part, worthy sir," returned the pious gentleman. "I have just managed to pick a morsel of this savoury pie; and I will endeavour to get through the wing of a duck, with heaven's assistance."

"So you shall," said the Doctor. "In the meantime I recommend you to take a little wine—for your stomach's sake."

"Ah! that was salutary advice which Paul gave to Timothy—'*a little wine for the stomach's sake,*'" drawled out the excellent Mr. Sheepshanks;—and to prove that he really thought so, he filled a tumbler with claret and imbibed the delicious draught without a pause.

By this time a plate, containing the wing, leg, and part of the breast of a duck, was placed before him; and, with a hollow groan as if he thought he should never get through it all, he commenced the attack.

We may here observe that the Doctor, who was a widower, was fond of good living himself, and was well pleased when he found any one inclined to keep him company in the enjoyment of the pleasures of the table. For this reason he especially admired the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks; and he well knew that when his chaplain pretended to have no appetite at all, he was in reality prepared to do ample justice to every dish. Hence the copious supply of duck which the physician had sent him; and that hospitable gentleman heard with secret pleasure the groan which Mr. Sheepshanks had given, and which was a sure indication that the modesty of the reverend glutton would be so far overcome as to induce him to allow the Doctor to help him again presently.

And here we may likewise remark that Swinton was no niggard of his good cheer. If he kept an excellent table, he liked to see justice done to the viands served up; and, as he received handsome remuneration from the friends of his first-class patients, he could well afford to regale them sumptuously, and amass a splendid fortune out of them into the bargain.

In conversation of the trivial kind of which we have just recorded a specimen, did the Doctor and Sheepshanks pass the time during supper,—the patients all maintaining a profound silence, and conducting themselves with the most perfect propriety. Indeed, were it not for a certain vacancy in the eyes of some, and a peculiar but inexplicable expression in the looks of the rest, it were impossible for a stranger to believe that there were any lunatics at all in the room.

After supper Mr. Sheepshanks delivered himself of a long prayer;—but as his libations had been somewhat copious, in spite of his bilious attack, his voice was occasionally so thick as to be unintelligible,—and it appeared as if he at times fancied himself to be an Irvingite speaking in the unknown tongues. Towards the conclusion of his oration, which very much resembled a funeral sermon in those parts where the meaning and sense could be caught, the reverend gentleman became so much affected that he began to weep; and had a maliciously-disposed person been present, he would have probably entertained the derogatory notion that Mr. Sheepshanks was in that maudlin condition vulgarly termed “crying drunk.”

However, the affair passed off to the satisfaction of the worthy Doctor, who, as he thought of all that his chaplain had eaten and drunk during the evening, felt really proud of having beneath his roof a man of such splendid qualifications.

The after-supper oration being concluded, the keepers, all dressed in plain clothes, made their appearance to conduct the patients to their respective chambers; but as this was Granby’s first night in the house, the Doctor volunteered to show him to the apartment prepared for his reception.

The new inmate of the asylum immediately obeyed the hint which the physician gave him relative to the hour for retiring; and he was forthwith escorted up a handsome staircase to a long corridor on the second floor. From this passage, which was carpeted, adorned with statues in recesses, and lighted by lamps hanging to the ceiling, opened several rooms, the doors of which were numbered.

At the entrance to the passage the Doctor pulled a wire which communicated with a bell on the storey overhead; and a matronly, respectable-looking woman made her appearance in answer to the summons.

“Which chamber is Mr. Granby to occupy, Mrs. Probert?” said the Doctor to his housekeeper—for such was the situation filled by the female.

“I have moved the gentleman—you know whom I mean, sir—that was in Number 7——”

“Ah! I understand,” interrupted the physician, with some degree of impatience, as if he were afraid that his housekeeper was about to be more communicative than was necessary in the presence of the stranger. “Well—you have removed a certain person——”

“To Number 12, sir,” replied Mrs. Probert; “and therefore Mr. Granby will please to occupy Number 7.”

“Very good,” said the Doctor. “Now, Mr. Granby, my dear friend—have the kindness to follow me.”

The request was instantaneously obeyed; and the physician conducted his docile patient into the room that had been selected for him, and which was indeed the most spacious, airy, and elegantly furnished bed-chamber in the whole establishment. It was usually appropriated to any new-comer of the first class whose friends appeared to take an interest in him; so that on the occasion of their first visit after his location in the asylum, the doctor might be enabled to show them, with pride, and even triumph, the magnificent apartment in which the patient was lodged. It was afterwards an easy matter to remove him to another and inferior, though still comfortable chamber—so as to make room for another arrival; and it was very seldom that a lunatic ever thought of mentioning to his friends, when they visited him again, the change of apartments that had taken place.

Having introduced Mr. Granby into the elegantly furnished chamber, the Doctor placed the candle upon the table, wished the young gentleman a good night’s rest, and then retired—closing, but not locking, the door behind him.

The moment he had departed, a remarkable and signal change took place in the appearance and manner of Mr. Granby. His countenance lost its stolid vacancy of expression, and became animated with its natural intelligence; and, instead of seeming a dull, drivelling idiot, he stood erect—a fine intrepid young man, conscious of the possession of superior mental faculties, and prepared to

carry out effectually the scheme which had already been so successfully commenced.

Indeed, all further mystery in this respect being unnecessary, we may as well at once declare that the fictitious Mr. Granby was the real Lord William Trevelyan—and that Smithson, who had so well performed the part of an afflicted and faithful friend, was none, other than the astute valet, Fitzgeorge.

The young nobleman had made confidants of his two friends, Dr. Prince and Mr. Spicer, who at his request had drawn up and signed the certificates necessary to procure his introduction into the abode of Dr. Swinton.

We must likewise here observe that when the short colloquy had occurred between the Doctor and his housekeeper, it instantly struck Trevelyan that allusion was made by them to Sir Gilbert Heathcote as being the individual whose sleeping-place had been changed from No. 7 to No. 12. He had noticed that the woman had observed a degree of mystery in referring, in the first instance, to the late occupant of the best bed-room—and that the Doctor, as if fearful that walls had ears, or that even a lunatic (such as he believed Trevelyan to be) might learn a dangerous secret, had hastily interposed to prevent Mrs. Probert from making a more direct allusion. All these circumstances induced Trevelyan to conjecture that the late occupant of his room was none other than Sir Gilbert; and, if this were the case, he had acquired the certainty that the baronet was the tenant of a neighbouring apartment in the same corridor.

It was now eleven o'clock; and the young nobleman resolved to wait until a much later hour ere he took any steps in pursuance of the clue which he believed himself to have gained relative to the chamber occupied by his persecuted friend.

He walked to the window, and looked forth through the iron bars, upon the mass of narrow lanes and squalid alleys constituting the suburb known as Globe Town, and all the features of which were brought vividly forward in the powerful moonlight,—for the atmosphere was as bright as if it were of transparent quicksilver.

But in a few minutes, Trevelyan grew wearied of the sameness of the prospect, so still and inanimate at that hour; and he began to examine, more minutely than at first, the chamber in which he found himself.

A massive wardrobe of dark mahogany, and elaborately carved, particularly attracted his notice; and, impelled by that curiosity which frequently seizes upon persons who seek to while away an hour or two by any means that opportunity or accident may afford, he opened the large and heavy doors. There were several shelves inside, filled with blankets and counterpanes, evidently deposited there during the summer-months, when the beds required less clothing than in winter.

Trevelyan was about to close the doors, when he suddenly caught sight of something that appeared to be a roll of papers thrust between the blankets. He drew forth the object of his attention, and found that his conjecture was correct; for he held in his hand a manuscript consisting of several folios of foolscap closely written upon in a genteel and fluent style.

A farther examination of the papers showed him, by means of certain dates, that the manuscript was only recently composed; and an indescribable feeling of interest, superior to any thing like vulgar curiosity, prompted him to read the documents that had thus strangely fallen into his possession.

Besides, he had determined to let a couple of hours slip away ere he took any step in pursuance of the design that had brought him to the mad-house; and he was by no means sorry at having discovered a mode of passing the interval otherwise than by restlessly pacing his chamber or gazing from the window.

He accordingly seated himself at the table, and commenced the perusal of the extraordinary document that will be found in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A LUNATIC.

"My blood has been boiling like a lava-stream. It appears to me as if I can now freely respire the fresh air, after having only breathed by gasps. What agony, then, has it been that has thus convulsed my soul?—of what kind was the anguish which has left such strange and unnatural sensations behind? Have I just awakened from a reverie of burning thoughts and appalling visions?—or was there any truth in the hideous things which seem to have passed like a frightful phantasmagoria through my brain? What means this suffocating sob that has struggled upward, and as it were spontaneously from my breast? O God! it appears to me now as if the wildest—most maniacal ideas have crowded into volumes, but become compressed into instants! Do I rave?—am I really here—in a room elegantly furnished—and seated at this table, writing? Is the bright sun-light streaming in at the open casement?—and does the breeze penetrate into the chamber, fanning my feverish cheek and throbbing brow, and wafting to me the delicious perfume of flowers? Is all this true—or a dream? Am I still a denizen of the earth,—that earth of which I seem for some time to have lost all forgetfulness—dwelling during the interval in a chaos peopled with horrible images—ghastly spectres—frightful beings of nondescript shape? Oh, I remember—I found this paper, this pen, and this ink in that large and massive ward-robe so exquisitely carved;—and something tells me that there are persons watching my movements—spying my actions—and who will be angry with me—perhaps ill-treat me—if they behold me writing down my ideas. Oh! I am afraid—I am afraid. My God! where am I? There is a hurry in my brain—my blood again begins to boil—my hand trembles as I write. But wherefore do I write at all? I know not:—and yet it seems to do me good!

"If any persons—any of those men whom I remember to have seen just now—should endeavour to enter the room, I will hide my papers in yonder ward-robe. Or else under the bed?—or between the mattresses? No: in that ward-robe—it is the safest place, I feel confident.

"But why should I not go forth and walk in that garden which I can see from the window?—or else penetrate into the fields at a great distance, and lie down and think? If the breeze coming into this room, does me good, how much more refreshed should I feel were I to ramble about in the open country! Yes—I will go.

"What does this mean? I have tried the door—and it is locked! Who dares to treat me thus—*me*—a gentleman of birth and fortune? I will not endure such conduct: I will appeal to my brother, the magistrate, for protection. He shall hang the wretches who have perpetrated this insolence.

"O God! what do I see? There are bars at the window! Great heavens! I shall go mad!

"MAD! Yes—that was the last word that I wrote yesterday—I suppose it must have been yesterday—when I so hastily concealed my papers, on hearing some one approach the door. I remember *that* full well! Yes—it was an elderly man, with a mild and benevolent countenance—dressed in black, with linen beautifully white—and with a massive chain and seals. I looked at him well: but I knew him not. I do not think that I ever saw him before. He sate down by my side—felt my pulse—and asked me several questions. Ah! a thought flashes to my mind: that good old gentleman is a doctor. And now,—yes—I think I can recollect it all,—I abused him—I insulted him very grossly;—and then some men entered and compelled me to go to bed. They undressed me by force. I struggled against them; but it was useless.

"Oh! what does it all mean? Why those men to coerce me?—why that doctor to attend upon me?—and why those bars at the window? Gracious God! it cannot be—no—no—the horrible thought——

"Yes: it must be so—I am really mad!

"Again I sit down, calmly and tranquilly, to write. I have weighed well my condition—have asked myself a thousand questions—have read what I have written above—have striven to recollect all the past—have carefully examined the present—and have dared to think of the future. By all this—and by the bars at the window—I know that I am *mad*!

"Yes: but I can write the word now without growing excited; and I must practise writing it again, so that I may by degrees gather to my

aid such an amount of self-possession as to be able to trace on this paper all that has occurred to me. Then shall I possess a positive memorial—a substantial key to the past; and should I again forget, in an interval of delirium, all that has occurred, I can speedily recommit the mournful history to my memory during a lucid interval like the present.

"*Mad—mad—mad—mad!* There—now I can write the word without the least excitement; and this is a triumph already achieved. By gaining a complete and accurate knowledge of my real position, I shall know how to act. I am aware that I am in a lunatic asylum: I am also aware that I have passed through intervals of fearful delirium. But I must compose myself as much as possible. I cannot remain in this horrible place;—and if I cannot become really sane again, I may at all events pretend to be so—and then they will let me out. But in order to regain my intellects, or appear to recover my reason, I must remember all that has occurred to me, so as to be enabled to converse calmly and sensibly on the subject. Stay! I will think—I will reflect profoundly for the rest of the day; and to-morrow I will resume my pen.

"God forbid that the doctor or his men—or that prying old housekeeper, should look into the wardrobe! I would not lose my manuscript for worlds.

"*June 13th, 1846.*

"I have learnt the day of the month. The doctor has been with me for an hour; and he readily complied with my request to be furnished with an almanack. He told me that this is the 13th of June; and henceforth I hope I shall be enabled to keep the dates accurately. When I was at school—but that is many years ago!—I used to make an almanack to calculate how long it was to the holidays; and every evening I scratched out the day that had just passed. Oh! happy—happy age of boyhood—wilt thou never come back? hast thou gone for ever? Now must I erase each day as it passes, and hope that the period of my release is near at hand. *That* shall be the holiday of my manhood, to which I must look forward with such anxious—fervid—burning hope!

"But to my narrative.

"A hundred thousand pounds became mine on the day that I attained my majority. That was nine years ago! I was my own master: my parents had long been dead—and my guardians attempted not even to advise me—much less control me. They were not relations—mere men of business to whom my fortune had been intrusted, with a view to its accumulation. The moment I became possessed of that wealth, I plunged headlong into the vortex of pleasure. Heavens! in what dissipation did I indulge. Who could drink deeper than I, and walk home steadily afterwards?—who was more sought after and caressed amongst the fair sex?—who was a more constant attendant at race-courses, gaming-houses, and the haunts of fashionable vice and aristocratic debauchery? Fool that I was! I imagined that to spend money profusely, was to enjoy life largely. I had three mistresses at the same time,—three women, having each a separate establishment, maintained at my cost! What were the consequences? At five-and-twenty my constitution was nearly ruined, and eighty thousand pounds of my fortune had been expended. The very principles of my existence seemed to be undermined—disease was gnawing at my vitals—an unbroken career of the wildest dissipation was hurrying me, with race-horse speed, to the tomb!

"Suddenly I awoke, as from a dream. But it was not because remorse touched me,—nor because good counsels were proffered me,—nor because some latent feelings of virtue sprang into existence. Neither was it because my fortune was nearly wasted and my health failing rapidly. No: but it was because I at that epoch saw my Editha for the first time! Oh! how can I retain my calmness *now*, when I think of her as I *then* beheld her,—beheld her in all the glory of her matchless beauty—radiant with that loveliness that seemed to surround her with the halo that only angels have! Yes—I was then twenty-five, and Editha Greville was nineteen—that delightful age when the female figure swells into womanly loveliness—round, full, and exquisitely modelled!

"We loved—almost at first sight; and though several weeks passed ere I ventured to declare my passion, I could read in Editha's eyes that I was far from being displeasing to her. She was an only child; her father was dead; her mother, though a woman of considerable wealth, mixed little in society; and the wildness of my conduct was not therefore fully known to Mrs. Greville. At the same time, she had heard that I was extravagant and imprudent; but when I implored her to bestow upon me the hand of her daughter, she yielded her assent, expressing a hope that I had sown all my wild oats by that time, and should grow steady in a matrimonial state. Thus was it that I became the recognised suitor of Editha; and when some of Mrs. Greville's friends, who knew me well, represented to her that I was notoriously a half-ruined rake, the old lady had too much confidence in all the promises of reformation which I had made, to revoke the consent she had given to our union. Besides, she saw that Editha was deeply attached to me, and that the beauteous girl's happiness depended on the smooth progress of love's course.

“But, alas! painful thoughts forced themselves upon my mind. I felt that my constitution was ruined—and I believed myself to be in a consumption. Faithful to the solemn pledges which I had made to Mrs. Greville, I established a complete change in my habits; and instead of drinking wine to excess, I foreswore all alcoholic liquor whatsoever. Likewise, instead of passing my nights in dissipation, I returned home at an early hour and sought my couch. But the suddenness of this alteration in my habits produced effects which I can only compare to the terrible reaction that a man experiences when waking in the morning after a night of deep debauch. A dead weight fell upon my spirits. I became so low and depressed that horrible thoughts of suicide were constantly floating in my brain. My nervousness was extreme, and intensely painful. An unusually loud knock or ring at the front-door would make me start as if I had committed a crime and was expecting the officers of justice to come and arrest me. I was constantly conjuring up the most shocking visions respecting the future; and when immersed in those reveries, I verily believed that I was contemplating realities—such was the morbid state of my mind!

“It was therefore natural that I should begin to reflect upon the step which I had taken with regard to Editha. I had sought and won the affections of a beautiful creature, who was possessed of a generous heart, an amiable disposition, and a loving soul; and I was shocked to think that such a being, in all the vigorous health of youthfulness, should be led to the altar by one whose constitution was shattered, whose vital energies were almost ruined, and who seemed to be hovering on the very verge of the tomb! Oh! how maddening were these thoughts! I looked upon myself as a villain—a deceiver; and often—often was I on the point of throwing myself at Mrs. Greville’s feet and exclaiming, ‘*Pardon me, madam, for having dared to ask the hand of your daughter in marriage! I am but a phantom—a shadow: the finger of Death is upon me,—and if Editha should accompany me to the altar, it is probable that in less than a year she will have to follow me to the tomb!*’—But when I thought of Editha’s matchless beauty, and pondered upon the immensity of the love that I experienced for her, I could not command the courage necessary to enable me to resign the hope of possessing such a treasure. Besides, in her society I could smile and be gay: her musical voice was more ravishing to my ears than the inspired strains of an improvisatrice;—her breath was more fragrant than the perfume of flowers—her lips more delicious than the honey-dew upon the blossoms! Oh! no—no: I could not resign my Editha! But no day had been as yet fixed for our marriage—and six weeks had already elapsed since I had proposed and was accepted. Shall I confess the truth? I dared not ask her mother to name the day: I shrank from the idea as if I were meditating a murder—had marked out my victim—but dreaded to settle in my own mind the night and the hour when the assassin-blow should be struck!

“I was lying in bed one morning, reflecting on all these things—for the dark fit of despondency was upon me—when my valet entered the room with the morning’s newspapers. I listlessly unfolded one of the journals, when my eyes suddenly caught sight of an advertisement, headed thus:—‘*Manhood, the Reasons of its Early Decline; with Plain Hints for its Complete Resuscitation.*’ This book was announced to be an emanation from the pen of T. L. Surtees and Co., Consulting Surgeons, residing in one of the streets leading out of Soho Square; and it appeared by certain quotations of notices from the leading newspapers, that the book was a medical treatise of great utility, merit, and importance. Hope now dawned in upon my soul. Perhaps my constitution was not irretrievably damaged? Perchance I might not be in a consumption, after all? Such were my thoughts, after perusing that advertisement over and over again; and I resolved to lose no time in calling upon the able practitioners who undertook the resuscitation of any constitution, no matter how hopeless the case might seem. Accordingly, having hastily dressed myself, I repaired in a street cab to the address indicated in the advertisement. The house was one of imposing appearance; and the words ‘*Surtees and Co., Consulting Surgeons,*’ were displayed in deep-black letters, on immense shining zinc-plates. The fawn-coloured Venetian blinds were drawn down; and I said to myself, as I alighted with a fluttering heart, ‘Doubtless these eminent practitioners have patients waiting in every room to consult them.’ Entering the passage, I found an inner door, with a bronze knocker and a ground-glass fan-light, on which were inscribed the same words as those that appeared on the polished zinc-plates. I was immediately admitted by a footman, and conducted up stairs to a drawing-room, every feature of which is at this moment as fresh in my memory as if I were seated and writing there now.

“This apartment at first sight impressed me with an idea of luxurious splendour; but a closer examination into its appointments showed me that the most vulgar taste had presided over its fitting-up. The paper was of crimson and gold; and to the walls were suspended several paintings set in magnificent frames, which only rendered the daubs the more miserably ludicrous. Two of them were covered with plate-glass, as if they were very valuable; whereas they were as wretched as the others. ‘Some unprincipled person,’ thought I, ‘must have imposed upon these worthy doctors, by recommending pictures to which I would not accord house-room. But men of philosophic minds and who are devoted to professional studies, are seldom good judges of works of art.’ Thus ruminating, I continued my examination of the apartment; and I was struck with surprise at the utter vulgarity and absence of taste which characterised the profusion of French porcelain ornaments scattered about. Here was a Chinese Joss, with a moveable head: and there was a pedlar mounted on a gigantic goat. At the corners of the fire-place were two paintings evidently cut out of a picture, and representing little charity-school girls. In the centre of the room stood a loo-table, upon which a writing-desk was placed; and this was surrounded by medical publications, bearing on their title-pages the magical names of those gentlemen whom I was so anxiously waiting to see. I had the curiosity to open one of the works: but I was disgusted with the obscenity of the coloured plates which it contained. A moment’s reflection, however, induced me to believe that there could be nothing indecent in the development of the divine art of surgery; and I felt ashamed of myself for having even for an instant entertained such scruples. As a concluding observation respecting the drawing-room itself, I must remark that its entire appearance indicated the taste of a vulgar upstart, rather than the refined elegance of a polished mind.

“Having waited nearly three quarters of an hour, a footman made his appearance, and, with many obsequious bows, conducted me down stairs into a dining-room most gaudily and extravagantly furnished. The same grovelling vulgarity of taste which I had noticed elsewhere was apparent in the crimson damask curtains with yellow fringes and tassels—the looking-glasses in ponderous frames—the showy daubs suspended to the walls—and the furniture arranged for the purpose of display. Folding-doors admitted me into an inner

apartment, of equally vulgar appearance; and beyond was a little room, only a few feet square, and which the footman, as he ushered me in, denominated *the surgery*.

“I must confess that my heart beat violently as I traversed those two apartments leading to the *sanctum* where I expected to find myself in the presence of the eminent medical practitioners. I had pictured to myself a couple of old and venerable-looking gentlemen, with genius stamped upon their high bald foreheads, and their eyes expressing all the powers of vigorous intellects. I was therefore somewhat surprised when, on being introduced into the surgery, I beheld only one individual, who was the very reverse of the portraiture I had drawn by anticipation. His features were of the Jewish cast: his complexion was of that swarthy and greasy description peculiar to the lower order of the Hebrew race;—his hair was black and very thick; and his whiskers met beneath his chin. His eyes were dark, and one of them was larger than the other: his bottle-nose was rather on one side; and his countenance altogether was as ignoble, as vulgar, and as unintellectual as ever served as an index to a sordid, grovelling soul. His dress was of the flashy kind which belongs partly to the upstart or *parvenu*, and partly to the swell-mob’s-man. He wore a blue dress-coat, a gaudy waistcoat, and large loose trousers hollowed at the instep so as to be shaped to the polished leathern boot. A profusion of jewellery decorated his person;—a thick gold chain, with a large key, depended to his watch—his worked shirt was fastened with diamond and blue enamel studs;—and his dirty hands were covered with costly rings, which appeared as ill-placed upon the clumsy, grimy fingers as pearls would be round the neck of a pig.

“Such was the individual in whose presence I found myself; and had I not been at the time in such a desperate state of mind that I was eager to clutch at a straw, I should at once have seen through the man and his system. But I reassured myself with the adage which teaches that we should never judge by outward appearances; and it flashed to my mind that many men remarkable for the brilliancy of their intellect, were far from being prepossessing in either person, manners, or address. Moreover, I never had partaken in the shameful, unjust, and absurd prejudices which too many of my fellow-countrymen entertain in respect to the Jews; and therefore the mere fact of this Mr. Surtees being a member of the Hebrew race produced on my mind no unfavourable impression with regard to him.

“‘Pray be seated,’ said the medical gentleman, with a tone and manner which I at the time mistook for professional independence, but which I have since discovered to be the vulgar insolence of an ignorant, self-sufficient upstart. I took a chair in compliance with the invitation given; and when he had seated himself at his desk, he extended his dirty but jewel-bedizened paw, saying, ‘Vill you obleege me vith yer card?’—I did as requested; but not without a little hesitation, for I had hoped to avoid giving my name and address.—‘Ah! I see,’ said Mr. Surtees, in a musing tone, as he examined the card: ‘*Mr. Macdonald*,’ he continued, reading my name. ‘By the vay, air you any relation to the Markiss of Burlington? ’cos his family name is the same as your’n.’—I replied that I was not a relative of the nobleman mentioned.—‘Vell, it don’t sinnify,’ proceeded Mr. Surtees. ‘The Markiss is a hexcellent friend of mine. He lays under a sight of hobligations to me. He come to me in the first hinstance vith a constitootion so veared out and shattered that no medical carpenter in all Hingland could have mended it up except me. But in the course of a foo weeks I putt him as right as a trivet; and now he’d go through fire and vater to sarve me. It on’y cost him a couple of thousand pounds to get quite cured; and that was cheap enow, ’evvins knows! But how comed you to call upon me this mornin’? Were it in consekvence of having perooged von of my medical vorks? Ah! them sells vell, them does! Or were it ’cos you seed my adwer*tise*ment in the noospapers?’—I was so completely bewildered by this outpouring of execrable English and vile grammar, that for some moments I was utterly unable to answer the questions put to me. Was it possible that this coarse, ignorant, and self-sufficient vulgarian could be an eminent medical authority—the author of valuable publications—the celebrated surgeon whom the extracts from newspapers[21] quoted in his advertisement, spoke of so highly? I was astounded. But again did hope blind me to what the man really was: again did I reassure myself by the reflection that Mr. Surtees might be an excellent surgeon, although he was a miserable grammarian; and I accordingly recovered my self-possession sufficiently to inform him that I had called in consequence of reading his advertisement in the newspapers.

“The doctor seemed pleased at my answer, and immediately exclaimed, ‘Vell, sir, and vot a blessin’ it is that people *do* read adwer*tise*ments: ’cos vy? they gets at the knowledge of heminent medikle prektishoners, which has devoted their lives to the hart of ealing all kinds of diseases. You see before you, sir,’ he continued, in a pompous tone, and with arrogant air, ‘a man vot knows hevery hin and hout of the human constitootion. No von knows so vell as myself wot consumption raly is.’—‘Then you have made consumption your particular study, sir?’ I observed, seeing that he paused, in order to elicit some remark from me.—‘Raythe r!’ was his laconic answer. ‘The fact is,’ he continued, ‘foo medikle men is aweer what consumption is, nor in vot part of the frame it begins. Vy, I vonce knowed a gentleman, sir, which had a rapid decline begin in the great toe of his left foot, and travel up’ards, till it spread itself over the hentire system. The doctors had all give him up, and the undertaker was actiwally thinking of the good job he should soon have putt into his hand, ven I vos consulted. I made him take seventeen bottles of my bootiful *Balm of Zura*, and he rekivered in less than a fortnit.’

“Weak, nervous, and attenuated as I was, this anecdote made a deep impression upon me. I forgot the bad grammar—I lost sight of the arrogance and self-sufficient vulgarity: I saw and heard only the man who solemnly assured me that he had redeemed a fellow-creature from the jaws of death, when all other members of the faculty had given up the case as hopeless. Mr. Surtees doubtless perceived that he had worked me up to the pitch suitable to his purposes; and he accordingly said, ‘Vell, my good sir, vill you be so good as to explain wot it is that you’ve come to consult me for?’ I then frankly and candidly confessed that I had expended four-fifths of a large fortune in a career of unbroken dissipation—that my constitution was grievously impaired, if not absolutely ruined—that since I had given up drinking and all other sources of unnatural excitement, I was subject to such frequent fits of despondency that the idea of suicide was almost constantly in my imagination—that I loved and was beloved by a beautiful girl who was possessed of property—but that I felt afraid to contract the matrimonial engagement, lest I should leave her an unprotected widow in the course of a short time. Mr. Surtees listened with great attention; and when I had concluded, he appeared to reflect profoundly. At length he said, ‘Vell, let’s feel yer

pulse.'—I extended my hand towards him; and he applied his thumb to a part of my wrist where I did not suppose that a pulse lay: but I concluded at the time that his great proficiency in medicine had led him to discover a new pulse, and that the best mode to test it was with the thumb.—'Wery veak pulse indeed!' he said, shaking his head with as much solemnity as the Chinese Joss up in his drawing-room might have been expected to display. 'But don't go for to give vay to despair, my dear sir; the case is a bad 'un, I admit—a wery, wery bad 'un; and I can't say as how that I ever knowed a wusser. Pray, who's the young lady which you intends to marry? I've a motive in axing.'—I thought that as the learned gentleman was already acquainted with my name and address, there could be no harm in answering this new question, the more especially as even if I refused to reply, he could easily institute those enquiries that would lead to a knowledge of the fact: I accordingly satisfied him on that head. 'Ah! I don't know her,' he observed, carelessly: then, after a few moments' reflection, he said 'Vell, I undertake to cure you; but the business vill be a hexpensive von. You must write me a cheque for a hundred guineas, my consultation fee; and then I'll tell you wot you must do next.'—Reassured by the promises he thus held out, I unhesitatingly gave him a draft for the amount demanded. He then opened a drawer, and drew forth a small case containing six bottles. 'This here is the rale elixir of life,' he said, in a tone of solemn mystery: 'it inwigorates the constitootion in no time, and puts a reglar stopper on the adwance of consumption. The Grand Turk has a case sent every veek to him through his Hambassador, and all the crowned heads in Europe is patients of mine, I may say. Take a bottle of this bootiful balm daily; and ven it's all gone, come back again to me. The price of them six is fifteen guineas; and you can write me out another cheque at vonce.'—I hastened to comply with this demand; and Mr. Surtees bowed me out of the surgery.

"But here I must leave off writing; for I am wearied—my brain begins to grow confused—and my memory fails me. Oh! what a fool—what an idiot I was, not to have seen through the man and his quackery on the occasion of that visit, the particulars of which I have detailed at such length.

"*June 18th, 1846.*

"I again resume my narrative. Five days have elapsed since I last put pen to paper; and that interval has been one of darkness. Yes—the fit was upon me: but it has passed—and I am now calm and collected once again. I have just read over all that I have written above; and I have laughed heartily at the fidelity and minuteness of my description of the first visit that I paid to the quack-doctor. Let me now continue my narrative; for the incidents are once more all fresh and vivid in my memory.

"I am well aware that the imagination has much to do with our diseases and our cures. Possessed of what I deemed to be a salutary medicine, my spirits rose; and at the close of each of the six days during which the supply of balm lasted, I said to myself, 'I certainly feel stronger and better.' The fits of despondency were far less frequent, and less intense: my appetite improved—and the colour came partially back to my cheeks. This change was no doubt effected principally by the steady life which I adopted, and by the increased mental tranquillity which I experienced. I was moreover filled with hope that a complete restoration to health would be accomplished; and thus, while at the time I attributed everything to the medicine, I have not the least doubt that the stuff was utterly valueless in itself. Editha was rejoiced to find my spirits so much improving; and her mother expressed her delight at the regular habits which I had adopted. I did not mention to a soul my visit to Mr. Surtees: that was my secret—and a sense of shame made me cherish it religiously. At the expiration of the week I called upon him again, and on this occasion was at once admitted into his surgery. There was another fee of a hundred guineas—another six bottles of medicine prescribed, and another cheque given for the amount thereof. He asked me if I had read his book yet; and I was compelled to reply in the negative. 'Vell, never mind,' he said; 'I ain't offended; but you shall have a hopportunlty of perooging it before you come agen. I'll jest step up into the drawing-room and get you von.' He accordingly quitted the surgery; and during his temporary absence an irresistible feeling of curiosity prompted me to look at a note which lay open upon the table. I read it; and thus it ran, word for word:—'*Dear Joe, You ax me 2 lend you mi dipplomy for a few days, just to make a show with to a new payshent; but i vunce for all tell you as how i'd rayther not lett it go out of my house. Besides, it's of no use to you, 'cos it's made out in the name of La'Vert, and you've took the name of Surtees. So no more from your affecshonate brother, &c.*'—This note was signed by the name of La'Vert; and therefore it was apparent that the real appellation of my friend Mr. Surtees was Joseph La'Vert. It struck me in a moment that I had become the dupe of a quack; but I had sufficient command over myself to restrain my indignation when he returned to the room. He was accompanied by a woman—I cannot say a lady—whom he introduced to me as his wife. And here I must pause to say a few descriptive words of her.

"Mrs. Surtees was a vulgar, dark-complexioned Jewess, with a long hooked nose. Her flesh seemed as if it had been smeared with oil, and then wiped with a dry towel; but on her cheeks she wore an immoderate quantity of rouge. She was exceedingly stout, with an enormous bust: her hair, rough and wavy, was arranged in bands and plastered down with quince-pips. She was dressed in the most outrageous style, and as she herself expressed it, 'was about to go hout for a haring in the carridge.' Her gown was of green velvet; her shawl of bright red; and her bonnet of rose pink, adorned with a profusion of artificial flowers, inside and out. She wore very pink silk stockings and short petticoats, as she had conceived the erroneous impression that there was something attractive in her elephantine leg. As a matter of course, she carried a complete jeweller's shop about her person. She wore no gloves; and her large red hands were covered with rings. Her ear-rings were of gold studded with turquoise; and now her portraiture is complete.

"Scarcely had the ceremony of introduction taken place, when another female bounced into the apartment, and she was immediately presented to me as Mrs. Surtees' sister. Such a pair was never seen before! They looked like a butcher's daughters in their Sunday's best; and they were attired with an evidently studied view to contrast. For the sister's gown was of blue velvet, her shawl of flaunting yellow hue, and her bonnet white. These ladles, having favoured me with a good long stare and a few observations relative to the

weather and such-like common-place topics, quitted the room to enter their vehicle which was waiting at the door. Mr. Surtees had the gallantry to accompany them as far as the carriage; and the moment I was alone again, I had the curiosity to traverse the two rooms and take a peep from the front window. The equipage was in perfect keeping with the appointments of the house and the attire of the occupants. It was a barouche, painted bright blue on the body: but all the under part and wheels were of straw colour. The inside was lined with yellow morocco. It was drawn by two brown cobs, the harness exhibiting a profusion of silver; and the coachman's livery was of a gaudy blue, with buttons also of silver.

"But while I was making these observations from the window, my ears were saluted with a brief colloquy that took place in the passage between Mr. Surtees and his wife, ere he handed her to the carriage. They doubtless believed that I had remained in the surgery, and little thought that I was near enough to catch all they said.—'Vell, Joe,' exclaimed Mrs. Surtees, 'any monzel[22] vith that pale-faced young feller vich you said were so 'ansome and made me come in to see?'—'A good moza-motton,'[23] he answered, with a vulgar chuckling laugh.—'Oh! then, he stumped the guelt?'[24] demanded the woman, joining in the cachinnation.—'To be sure he did, my love,' responded this precious consulting-surgeon: 'and I means to have a good deal more out on him afore I've done.'—'Oh! wery vell, then,' returned Mrs. Surtees: 'in this case the boy Abey must have a new polka hat, and little Joe a new welwet dress out of it'—'All right!' exclaimed the consulting-surgeon. 'Come, cut along, and astonish the natives in the park a bit. I shall jine you presently.' He then handed the two women into the carriage; and I hurried back to the surgery, where I seated myself till his return—so that he could not suspect I had quitted the place during his temporary absence. I longed to tell him all I knew or suspected relative to his real character: but a fear of exposure made me silent—and I took my leave of him with as much civility as I could bring myself to bestow upon such a person.

"I knew that I had been completely and thoroughly victimised: but on reflection, I was glad of it. I saw that the circumstance of taking the medicine had stimulated my imagination, and had thereby aided in improving my health. On my return home, I threw the six bottles away without drinking another drop of the trashy balm; and I sent at once for a respectable physician, who, for a fee of five guineas, gave me proper advice. I then came to the conclusion that it is always better, under any emergency, to have recourse to legitimate assistance than to seek the aid of advertisers—no matter whether the subject involved be medicine, law, or money. My health improved rapidly; and at the expiration of three months I became the happy husband of the equally happy Editha.

Here must I pause for a time: the recollection of my wedding-day has revived memories which overpower me!

"*June 20th, 1846.*

"I resume my narrative. Twelve months had elapsed after my marriage with the loveliest and most amiable woman in the universe; and nothing had transpired to interrupt our felicity. A boy had blest our union—and I was as happy as a husband and father could possibly be. My health was almost completely re-established; and my habits were regular and domestic. I loathed the idea of those exciting pleasures and feverish enjoyments in the vortex of which I had nearly wrecked everything—health, fortune, and reputation; and Mrs. Greville, who dwelt with us, would often assure me with a smile that I was the very pattern of good husbands. My brother, who had become a magistrate, was a frequent visitor at our house; and all was progressing in peace, comfort, and tranquillity, when an incident suddenly occurred to interfere with that smiling prospect.

"It was late one evening, shortly after my beloved Editha's recovery from her confinement, that I was informed that a person who refused to give his name desired to speak with me in private. I ordered the servant to show him into the library; and thither I immediately afterwards proceeded. The man whom I encountered there was a short, thick-set fellow, with a forbidding countenance: he was flashily dressed, and had about him an air of jaunty impudence as if he had come upon some evil mission in which he knew that he should succeed. I asked him his business, without inviting him to be seated—for I conceived a dislike to him the instant I set eyes upon his sinister features. 'Your name is Macdonald?' he said, flinging himself into a chair in a very free-and-easy manner.—'There is no necessity for you to acquaint me with that fact,' I observed, assuming as chilling a tone as possible.—'Oh! but there is, though!' he ejaculated: 'because I must make sure that I am speaking to the right person. Well, you admit your name: now will you tell me whether you're the gentleman that married Miss Editha Greville?'—'What means this impudence?' I demanded angrily. 'Explain your business, sir, without farther circumlocution.'—'I'll come to the point in a minute,' returned the man, quite unabashed. 'Fifteen or sixteen months ago you used to visit a certain gentleman who lives not a hundred miles from Soho Square.'—I started and turned pale: for it struck me in a moment that the fellow was alluding to the *consulting-surgeon*.—'Well, now I see that it's all right,' he exclaimed, doubtless drawing this inference from the confusion of my manner. 'Of course you would rather it shouldn't be known that you *did* visit the gentleman,' he added emphatically.—'I do not understand your meaning,' I replied.—'Look here, then,' continued the fellow: 'it would not be very pleasant to have your brother, your mother-in-law, your friends, your tradesmen, your servants, and even your wife, made acquainted with the fact that you were under Mr. Surtees for some time previous to your marriage.'—'I never visited him but twice!' were the words that I gasped out, for horrible sensations were coming rapidly over me.—'Never mind how often it was,' cried the man, in a brutal tone: 'you did call to consult him, and that's enough for me. Now then, 'tis for you to say how much you'll give me to keep the secret.'—'Wretch! extortioner!' I ejaculated, rage succeeding alarm in my breast—'It's of no use to attempt to bully me,' said the ruffian, with the most cold-blooded composure: 'I want money, and I mean to get it out of you.'—'Or else?' I said, all my wretched feelings returning, as I saw myself threatened with exposure, shame, and irretrievable degradation.—'Or else,' he repeated, 'I shall tell the secret to all the people I have named; and then we shall see whether you will ever hold up your head in society again.'—'And how much money do you require?' I asked, my heart sinking within me.—'Five hundred will do for the present,' he

responded imperiously.—‘For the present?’ I cried, echoing his words: ‘what! do you mean to visit me again for such a purpose?’—‘Not if you shell out at once, and without making any more words about it,’ he said.—There was no alternative save to comply; and I accordingly counted into his hand the Bank-notes for the sum named. In another minute he had taken his departure—and I was left alone to meditate upon the scene that had just occurred.

“It was a long time before I could so far compose my countenance and my feelings as to be able to return to the parlour without exciting the suspicions of my wife and mother-in-law that something unpleasant had taken place. But I managed to conceal the sorrow which the event of the evening had engendered within me; and early on the following morning I paid a visit to Mr. Surtees. He did not appear at first to recollect me—or, at all events, if he did, he was a wonderful adept in playing the part of forgetfulness: but when I mentioned my name, he exclaimed, ‘Vy, is it possible that you’ve come back to consult me again?’—‘Far from it,’ I answered, with a bitterness which I could not hide, and which he failed not to notice; for he bit his lip, and coloured deeply. I then related to him the particulars of the visit I had received on the previous evening, and accused him of being the prime mover in the matter. But he repelled the charge with so much indignation—whether real or feigned I cannot even now determine—that I certainly believed him at the time; and, were I at present writing for the purpose of having my narrative read by the world, I should be loth indeed to have it inferred that Mr. Surtees was in reality mixed up with the case of extortion. Much as I hate and despise him, I will not do him a wanton injustice; and I am therefore bound to state that he was warm and energetic in his assurances of complete innocence respecting the transaction. —‘But how could the man have known that I ever *did* visit you?’ I asked.—‘Vell things does get abroad in a many most unaccountable vays,’ he responded: ‘but I take my Gosh to witness that I’m as clear of this business as the babe vot’s unborn. Vot can I do to convince you that such is the fect?’—‘I do not entertain such a dreadful opinion of human nature as to disbelieve you, sir,’ was my rejoinder; and I took my leave. But, distressed and harassed as I was, I could not help noticing the strong and disagreeable odour of fried fish that came up from the lower regions of the dwelling: nor could I avoid a smile as I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Surtees, who was running hastily up stairs, having evidently emerged from the kitchen—for her swarthy countenance was as greasy as it could be, and her appearance was dirty and slovenly in the extreme. Yet, a few hours later in the day, this woman would doubtless turn out in all the flaunting gaud of her rainbow attire and in the profuse display of her costly jewellery!

“I must again repeat that I quitted Mr. Surtees’ abode with the conviction that he was anything but an accomplice in the scheme of extortion; and I said to myself, as I returned homeward, ‘The scene of last night is one of those penalties which we are doomed to pay for the irregularities and evil courses of our youthful years. But, even though Surtees himself be innocent, is not the extortionate deed all the same a result of an infamous system of quackery? Destroy that system—and the quietude of men’s homes could not thus be troubled by the visits of extortioners!’—By degrees my mind grew calmer; and as weeks and months fled away, I had almost ceased to think of the occurrence which had so much ruffled me, when one evening the man reappeared at the house. Again was the ominous message delivered to me while I was seated in the society of my beloved wife and her excellent mother—again did I see the man in private—and again was I compelled to endure his cool insolence and yield to his extortionate demands. Another five hundred pounds was transferred from my pocket to his own;—and once more was I forced to veil the real condition of my feelings when I rejoined the ladies in the parlour. And now, as time slipped away, I did not lose the misgivings that this second visit had excited in my mind—I could not forget that I was in the power of a villain, who was certain to come back again. Months passed; and a third time—I remember it well—it was on Christmas eve,—the fatal message was delivered to me. On this occasion I started so violently and betrayed so much confusion that both my wife and mother-in-law observed my agitation. I however hurried away, without responding to their anxious enquiries; and when once more in the presence of the extortioner, I heaped the bitterest reproaches upon him. He heard me with a coolness and a self-possession that only augmented my wrath; and at length I ceased speaking through sheer exhaustion. He then informed me, in his imperious and rude manner, that he had an opportunity of emigrating under the most favourable services—that he required a thousand pounds—and that if I gave him this sum, he would never trouble me again. I bound him by the most solemn oaths to that pledge; and, to save myself from a shame that would have crushed me down to the very dust and rendered life intolerable, I gave the miscreant a cheque on my bankers for the large amount which he demanded. But on my return to the company of my Editha and Mrs. Greville, I was compelled to invent falsehoods to account for my confusion; and I beheld, with pain and bitter grief, that they both saw that I was deceiving them—that I was concealing the real truth—and that there was something upon my mind![25]

“Oh! yes—and they conjectured truly; for my peace was now so thoroughly disturbed, that I despaired of regaining it. I felt convinced that, in spite of the villain’s solemn vows, he would come back again; and I dreaded to be at home—for every knock at the door made me start nervously. If I walked or rode out, on my return I dreaded lest the servants should inform me that a certain person had called for me during my absence, and would look in again in the evening. Thus my life became a veritable burthen to me; and my sorrow was aggravated by the stern necessity of retaining it all in my own breast. Often and often did I think of inventing some excuse to induce my wife and her mother to consent that we should break up our establishment in London, and repair to the continent. But what apology could I devise for such a strange proceeding?—and, moreover, would not the extortioner find me out, if he set himself to the work? because to imagine any feasible ground for changing our name, was impossible. Thus months passed away, without seeing me determine upon any plan to frustrate the extortioner should he return; and I saw that my Editha’s health and spirits began to fail—because she knew that I was secretly unhappy!

“And the extortioner *did* come back: and again was I forced to yield to his demands. Two thousand pounds did he obtain from me on this occasion; and when I reminded him of his solemn pledges and sacred vows, he laughed outright in my face. Oh! how I hated—abhorred—loathed that man! I could have slain him on the spot: but I thought of my dear wife and innocent boy, and I restrained my hand. And now my mind became seriously unsettled—a painful nervousness constantly maintained its influence over me—my health gave way again, as rapidly under the heavy weight of sorrow as it did beneath the wearing effects of dissipation. Oh! yes—and what

was worse than all, was that my Editha grew paler and thinner day by day—visibly;—and I dared not attempt to console her—I could not force my tongue to frame a lie to assure her that I myself was happy. Thus was our once happy home changed to a scene of gloom: a deep despondency hung upon us all—and I perceived, with ineffable anguish, that Mrs. Greville began to view me with distrust. Perhaps she thought that some crime lay heavy upon my soul: yes—this must have been her impression—or she would doubtless have questioned me. But she did not live long enough to behold the sad catastrophe: a short though severe illness snatched her to the tomb—and, circumstanced as I was, I rejoiced in secret at the event,—for I said to myself, 'There is at all events one being the less to deceive—one being the less to watch me with mournful and silently appealing looks!'—O God! It was not strange—it was not wonderful if madness were beginning even then to undermine the strong tower of my reason!

"Scarcely were the remains of my mother-in-law consigned to the tomb, when the extortioner reappeared at the house. His demands increased in proportion to the concessions which were made to him by my fears; but I was totally unable to comply with his present exigences. It is true that there was much property still left;—but it was settled on my wife—and I could not command from my own resources the sum needed. This I candidly told him, and besought him to be merciful;—yes, with tears in my eyes did I beseech him. The wretch! the monster! what cared he for my grief—my anguish? He desired me to have recourse to a discounter—gave me the address of a money-lender—and said he should return on the following evening. Accordingly—impelled by my wretched, wretched destiny—I visited the money-lender, who advanced me three thousand pounds on my own acceptance, and at most usurious interest. The whole of that money found its way into the pocket of the extortioner; and when he had taken his departure, I fell down in a fit. For days and days did I keep my bed; and when I awoke to consciousness, it was from a delirium. My dear wife was seated by my bedside; but, O God!—how pale—how altered—how wan she was with long vigils and deep grief! I questioned her guardedly to ascertain whether in my ravings I had betrayed my secret: but I learnt, beyond all doubt, that I had *not*. Then I began to breathe more freely; and she, throwing her arms about my neck, exclaimed, while tears streamed in torrents down her cheeks, 'My beloved husband, you have some dreadful grief preying upon your mind. May I not be made your confidant? I have observed that always after the visits of the man who calls every now and then, and invariably in the evening, you are stricken as with a heavy affliction. Oh! what does it all mean?—I endeavoured to console her—to soothe her—to reassure her as well as I could; but I saw that she only pretended to be solaced, for my sake!

"Well—I recovered: but happiness and I had shaken hands for ever. I felt as if I were followed about by an invisible demon, whose breath poisoned the very atmosphere that I breathed. I know that my brain was reeling—that my reason was tottering that I was going mad! Often did I think seriously of murdering my wife and child, and putting an end to my own existence. But I dared not lay violent hands upon *them*; and I had too much moral courage still left to seek death so long as there remained a single tie, however feeble, to bind me to life. But a new misfortune was in store for me—for *us*. A solicitor in whom I and my wife trusted, obtained our signatures to certain deeds under the foulest representations; and by virtue thereof he sold out all the stock standing in Editha's name in the Bank. He then absconded; and we were suddenly reduced from affluence to comparative penury. I was unable to honour my acceptance; and the discounter would listen to no terms. He said that he had passed it away in the regular course of business, and could not take it up himself. I was arrested and thrown into prison. My friends deserted me, believing that wanton extravagance on my part had led to this catastrophe. Yes: all save my beloved wife deserted me—and she, the angel! remained faithful to me! We had two hundred and fifty pounds a year still left; and on the houses which produced this income, my wife insisted on raising the money necessary to obtain my release. But such a proceeding would have left us beggars; and I could not endure the idea of misery for one—two—three persons! No: the property was so secured that my creditor could not touch it—and I resolved, by the advice of an attorney, to apply for relief to the Insolvents' Court. I did so; and the creditor opposed me on the ground of extravagance. I could give no account of the manner in which I had disposed of the money he had advanced me—and when the opposing counsel asked me, on my oath, whether I had not lost it at gambling, I greedily snapped at the means of explanation thus furnished, and perjured myself by the utterance of an affirmative. Oh! that miscreant extortioner!—he drove me to ruin—a prison—the Insolvents' Court—perjury—and lastly to a mad-house! Great God! how can I write thus tranquilly when I think of all the wrongs that I have endured?

"*July 23rd, 1846.*

"I have been compelled to desist again: but at length I resume my pen. My ideas are rapidly becoming more settled: I think that I shall recover altogether, if I can but manage to escape from this place!

"I stated that I appeared at the Insolvents' Court, and was opposed by the holder of the bill for three thousand pounds. The Commissioner remanded me to prison for twelve months as a punishment for wanton and profligate expenditure. I shall not dwell upon that long incarceration: it was horrible to a sensitive soul like mine. Even Editha, patient and loving as she was, failed to solace me altogether. There were intervals of anguish so bitter that I fancied myself at times to be already dead and enduring the torments of hell. Dreadful thought! But at length the time passed—and I was once more free. We took a neat little cottage in the suburbs of the metropolis; and tranquility seemed to have been restored to us at last. Our son throve gloriously: Oh! what a handsome boy he became—what a handsome boy he must be now! Nearly two yeas passed—and I was recovering my mental serenity, when one day I met the extortioner in the street. Oh! what a cold shudder came over me as I saw his eyes fixed upon me! It seemed as if a horrible spectre had suddenly started up from the earth to horrify and appal me. I beheld *Ruin* personified; and a faintness came over me. But I was recalled to a poignant sense of my misery by the well-known voice, that fell upon my ears, making fresh demands upon my purse. I took the man into an obscure public-house close by; and, as there was no one in the room save ourselves at the time, we could converse freely upon the business. Freely, indeed! when every word he uttered fell like drops of molten lead upon my heart—and every syllable I

breathed in return hissed from my parched tongue like water passing over red hot iron! What could I do? The fiend insisted upon having money, and swore that he would follow me home. He, however, measured his demands to my means, and insisted upon having three hundred pounds by a given hour the next evening. We parted—and I saw that he dogged me: indeed, he did not attempt to conceal himself nor his intentions as he followed me until I entered my own door—and I knew that it was useless either to turn upon him in a hostile manner, or to attempt to baffle his aim.

"Heaven only knows how I contrived to explain to my wife the reason of my altered appearance—or rather, how I managed to conceal the real cause beneath a falsehood. But I did succeed in reassuring her somewhat; and on the following day I went to the discounter—the same discounter who had lent me money before—to ask him for a loan. It was a desperate step, taken by a desperate man: but, to my surprise, he consented without the slightest hesitation to accommodate me. I received the money—gave my note of hand—and paid the amount to the extortioner. But things had now reached a crisis with me—and I became so unsettled in my mind that Editha was seriously alarmed. I remember that my brother, the magistrate, was sent for; and he visited the house after having been long estranged from me. Then a mist came over my memory; and, when I awoke, I was—here!

"Yes—here, where I now pen these lines! Oh! I have been mad—raving mad; and Heaven knows that I have endured enough to make me so. Such persecution could only end in insanity. But I am better now: nay—I am well—although my friends will not believe it. My brother was here yesterday; and I saw by the way in which he humoured me when I told him I was fast recovering my reason, that he still imagines me to be insane. I implored him to let me see Editha and my boy: he declared that I should have that pleasure next Sunday. He likewise told me that they were well in health, but deeply grieved on my account.

"Now I have made up my mind how to act. I shall escape from this horrible place, and proceed to France. There I shall adopt an assumed name—and thence I shall write to Editha to join me at once with our son. We shall be beyond the reach of the extortioner—and tranquil, if not happy days may yet await us. Yes—this is my hope! But shall I destroy the manuscript upon which I have laboured so arduously, and which has furnished me with an occupation that has done me so much good? No: I cannot consent to annihilate the papers which contain a narrative so fraught with awful warning. But does it not likewise contain my secret?—and is not my name mentioned in the course of the recital? Hark! footsteps approach—I must conceal my papers——"

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

SCENES IN THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

Thus terminated the extraordinary manuscript which Lord William Trevelyan found in the wardrobe, and the perusal of which occupied him nearly two hours.

He was undecided how to dispose of the papers. Should he return them to the place where they had been concealed?—should he destroy them?—should he take them away with him, in the hope of being one day enabled to discover their writer, and by restoring them to him convince him that they had fallen into the possession of an honourable man, who, though having had the curiosity to read them, would, nevertheless, religiously keep the secret which they contained?

For, from the abrupt termination of the manuscript, Lord William very naturally concluded that the unfortunate author had succeeded in effecting his escape from the lunatic-asylum very shortly after he had penned the last words in the narrative; and the young nobleman, therefore, considered it to be possible, though perhaps not very probable, that he might sooner or later encounter Mr. Macdonald in the great and busy world.

Lord William had likewise another motive for retaining the papers.

The reader has seen enough of him to be aware that there was in his disposition much of the same chivalrous spirit and philanthropic principle which characterised the Earl of Ellingham; and it was therefore natural that he should become suddenly impressed with the idea of adopting measures, in due course, for the purpose of fully exposing the atrocious system of quackery that was carried on by pseudo-medical advertisers.

He remembered that the newspapers contained many advertisements announcing such works as the one which had proved the means of ensnaring the unfortunate Mr. Macdonald; and he was resolved to lose no time in employing his solicitor to institute all the necessary inquiries into the characters, histories, proceedings, and social positions of the scoundrels who thus accumulated large fortunes by means of the most atrocious quackery, deceit, rascality, and extortion.

The manuscript which chance had this night thrown in his way, contained so many important particulars, and furnished such a complete clue to the entire ramifications of the dark iniquity which the young nobleman was determined to expose, that he regarded it as a powerful auxiliary to the crusade he was about to undertake; and this consideration, added to the motives already mentioned, decided him in retaining possession of the document.

It was now one o’clock in the morning; and a profound silence reigned throughout the lunatic asylum.

Lord William noiselessly opened the door of his chamber, and looked forth into the long passage, which was partially lighted by a single lamp that had been left burning.

No living being was to be seen; and nothing disturbed the dead stillness of the hour and the place.

It now struck the young nobleman that the door of the chamber which he was anxious to enter—namely, No. 12, in the same passage as his own apartment—was most probably locked; and, in this case, he made up his mind to force it at all risks.

A little farther reflection suggested to him that, inasmuch as he had seen the housekeeper with only a single key in her hand, it was probable that this key was a pass to all the chambers; and he thence inferred that the key of his own room might perhaps fit the lock of the door belonging to No. 12.

At all events this was the first experiment that he resolved to try; and, without any longer delay, he proceeded as cautiously as possible down the passage, until he reached the chamber which he hoped and believed to be the one occupied by his friend.

There was a bolt outside the door: this was immediately drawn back;—and Trevelyan essayed the key.

To his indescribable joy, the key turned easily in the lock; and, with a beating heart, the nobleman entered the room—closing the door behind him.

The chamber was quite dark: but Trevelyan speedily groped his way to the window and drew aside the curtains, so as to permit the powerful moonlight to pour its silver flood into the room.

He now approached the bed—and there, to his delight, he beheld the well-known, though worn and wasted, countenance of his friend Sir Gilbert Heathcote, who was wrapped in slumber.

Lord William shook him gently; the baronet awoke with a sudden start and ejaculation; but at the same instant a friendly voice said, hurriedly, “Fear nothing! ’tis I—Trevelyan—and I am come to deliver you from this accursed place.”

Sir Gilbert, who had raised his head from the pillow, fell back again, and closed his eyes for a few moments. He fancied that he was dreaming. He could not believe that those welcome words had in reality sounded in his ears, or that the moonlight had shown him the form of his friend by the bed-side.

Trevelyan did not choose to interrupt the baronet’s reverie immediately; he comprehended the prudence of allowing him to collect his scattered ideas, and compose his thoughts.

“Is it really you, my dear young friend?” Sir Gilbert asked abruptly; and, starting up in the bed, he seized Trevelyan’s hand, and gazed fixedly upon his countenance.

“Yes, it is no dream,” responded Lord William, pressing the baronet’s hand with all the fervour of his generous friendship; “I am here to effect your escape, and there is no time to be lost.”

Still the baronet could scarcely believe the joyful announcement thus made to him; and Trevelyan, duly impressed with the necessity of tranquilising and reassuring his friend’s mind as much as possible ere the attempt at departure should be made,—fearing likewise that the baronet’s intellect had been somewhat impaired by the sense of wrong and the horrors of imprisonment in a lunatic asylum,—began to speak upon such topics as were calculated to direct his thoughts into a salutary channel.

“My dear Heathcote,” he said, “endeavour to call to your aid as much calmness and self-possession as possible; for a single inadvertence or false step may ruin our project by alarming the house. Remember that the place is as well protected and defended, and probably as well watched, as a gaol: and we must proceed with caution—courage—and coolness.”

“But how did you find your way into the establishment?” enquired Sir Gilbert, his ideas becoming more settled.

“By pretending to be insane,” answered Trevelyan; “and I have succeeded in thoroughly duping the Doctor.”

“Oh! my generous—my noble-hearted friend!” exclaimed the baronet: “how can I ever sufficiently prove my gratitude——”

“Hush! speak not with excitement!” interrupted Trevelyan. “I am only doing towards you what you would unhesitatingly perform for me under the same circumstances. And now—as I am anxious to relieve your mind as much as possible from any uneasiness or suspense that it may experience—I must at once inform you that Mrs. Sefton is in good health, and at this moment in the happy expectation of shortly seeing you again; for she is aware of the scheme which I have adopted to restore you to liberty.”

“Heaven be thanked for these assurances!” exclaimed Sir Gilbert: then, after a few moments’ pause, he said, “I need scarcely ask you to explain how you became acquainted with Mrs. Sefton. She was no stranger to the friendship subsisting between you and me—and I therefore conclude that, alarmed by my sudden and inexplicable disappearance, she sought your counsel and assistance.”

“All has occurred precisely as you conjecture,” answered Trevelyan. “But do you now feel equal to the task——”

“Of making an effort to recover my freedom?” ejaculated Sir Gilbert, leaping from the couch. “Let us not lose another moment! The atmosphere of this place seems oppressive, and heavy to breathe. I pant—I yearn—I long for liberty.”

Thus speaking, the baronet began hastily to put on his attire, and in a few minutes he was dressed.

“Now,” said Trevelyan, “we must decide upon the course to be adopted. Doubtless there is a porter to keep watch all night in the hall?” he added, interrogatively.

“Yes,” answered Sir Gilbert: “and I am also certain that a man patrols the garden. Besides, the keepers inside the house are as wakeful and as watchful as the fiends of Pandemonium; and the least noise will bring half-a-dozen strong and desperate fellows upon us. For my part, I have not the slightest objection to embrace the alternative of fighting our way through all opposition——”

“But the consequences of defeat would be most disastrous,” interrupted Trevelyan. “The Doctor would thereby gain an excuse for coercing both you and me; and although I am as it were my own prisoner, yet I have sworn not to quit these walls unless accompanied by you.”

“Generous friend!” exclaimed Sir Gilbert. “Were we well armed, we might bid defiance to the Doctor and all his gang: but weaponless—powerless as we are——”

“Do not despond, Heathcote,” said Trevelyan, observing that the baronet spoke in a mournful tone: “the task that I have undertaken, I will accomplish! There appear to me to be two modes of procedure. The first is to descend as noiselessly as possible to the hall—seize upon the porter—master him—and then effect our escape by the front-door. The other is to force away the bars from the window of

this room—make a rope of the bed-clothing—descend into the garden—and take our chance with the watchman. Either project is attended with the risk of creating an alarm: but it is for you to decide, from your knowledge of the premises and the habits of its inmates, which scheme is the more feasible."

"The former," responded Sir Gilbert, after a few moments' deep reflection. "The watchman in the garden would probably observe us at the window, removing the bars; and an alarm would thus be raised even before we were prepared to attempt an escape by those means. On the other hand, the porter sleeps in the hall:—of *this* fact I am well assured, because I saw the bed temporarily made up for him there on the night that I was brought hither:—therefore our chances of success lie in that direction."

"Such also is my idea," observed Trevelyan. "Let us proceed at once—and permit me to take the lead."

The young nobleman and the baronet stole cautiously forth from the chamber, treading so lightly that their steps raised not a sound to disturb the silence which prevailed throughout the establishment.

They descended to the first floor in safety: and there they paused for a few minutes on the landing, listening with suspended breath.

The deep and regular respiration of the porter now reached their ears from the hall below; and they thus obtained the assurance that the man slumbered.

Exchanging looks of satisfaction, they descended the last flight of stairs;—and, by the hall lamp, they perceived the porter comfortably ensconced in a truckle-bed that was made up for him in a convenient corner. The light fell on his rubicund countenance, which was surmounted by a cotton nightcap: but the brawny arm that lay outside the coverlid, and the tracing of his form as shaped by the bed-clothes, showed full well that he was a man of herculean stature and proportionate strength.

Nothing daunted—but resolving upon a desperate effort to accomplish the purpose he had in view—Lord William Trevelyan led the way into the hall; and he had just ascertained the fact that there was a bunch of large keys peeping forth from beneath the sleeping porter's pillow, when the door of the supper-room suddenly opened, and Mr. Sheepshanks staggered forth.

The reverend gentleman carried a candle in his hand; and, by his flushed countenance, vacant stare, and unsteady walk, he was evidently in a pretty advanced state of intoxication. In fact—and there is no necessity to disguise the matter—the pious minister had sate up to enjoy himself alone; and he had carried his libations to such an extent that he was now, at two o'clock in the morning, most awfully drunk.

The moment Lord William caught sight of the inebriate minister, he sprang upon him—placed his hand tightly over his mouth—and, thrusting him back into the supper-room, said in a low but hasty and threatening tone, "Move hence at your peril!"

He then closed and locked the door.

But in the short and decided scuffle an untoward accident had occurred.

The candlestick had dropped from Mr. Sheepshanks' hand on the marble floor of the hall; and the consequence was that the porter sprang up, and was out of bed in a trice.

Sir Gilbert Heathcote rushed upon him: but not in time to prevent the man from springing a huge rattle and crying, "Help! help!"

Lord William Trevelyan hesitated not a moment how to act. He darted to the truckle-bed—seized the keys from beneath the pillow—and sprang to the door, leaving Sir Gilbert Heathcote wrestling desperately with the porter.

The reader will remember that there were two doors; and the young nobleman had only just time to open the first or inner one, when a rapid glance cast behind showed him his friend Sir Gilbert upon the floor, completely overpowered by the huge porter, who had placed his knee upon the baronet's chest.

It was Trevelyan's hope that his friend would have been able to keep the porter engaged in the struggle until he could have opened both the doors, when he would have turned to the scene of strife, to rescue the baronet; but scarcely had he observed that Sir Gilbert was already vanquished, when four of the keepers rushed down stairs into the hall.

With the rapidity and force of a tiger springing upon its prey, Lord William rushed on the huge porter, hurled him to a distance, and raised up the prostrate baronet.

All this was the work of an instant: but in another moment the keepers sprang upon the two friends, and closed with them.

The baronet was again borne down; but Trevelyan, who now saw that the conflict was really becoming desperate, used the bunch of heavy door-keys with such effect that he speedily disabled the two keepers who had assailed him,—stretching one senseless on the floor, and compelling the other to beat a retreat with the blood pouring down his face.

To turn his attention to the two men who were dragging away Sir Gilbert Heathcote, was the intrepid young nobleman's next step; and in a few moments the baronet, once more rescued from the enemy, was by the side of his intrepid friend.

“Take the keys and open the front door!” cried Trevelyan, impetuously pushing Sir Gilbert towards that extremity of the hall where the means of egress lay. “Escape, in the name of heaven!—think not of me!”

And having thrust the keys into his friend’s hand, Lord William seized the Doctor’s gold-headed cane, which hung to a hat-peg in the hall; and placing himself between the front-door and the keepers, he cried, “Beware how you provoke me—for I shall not hesitate to defend myself to the death!”

But scarcely were these words uttered, when the two keepers from whom he had rescued the baronet, returned to the charge, aided by the burly porter.

The foremost was instantaneously felled by a blow vigorously dealt with the cane; and, following up his advantage quickly as the eye can wink, Trevelyan darted at the other keeper, whom he also levelled on the spot. But in the next moment the gallant young nobleman was in the grasp of the porter; and, dropping the cane as no longer useful in a close tussle, he addressed himself with all his might to this last and most desperate single combat.

The scene was very exciting; and all that we have yet described since the first moment that the conflict commenced, did not occupy more than two minutes.

Scarcely had the intrepid nobleman and the herculean porter closed together, when the Doctor, attired in his dressing-gown and slippers, and with his cotton night-cap on his head, appeared at the bottom of the stairs, holding a chamber-candle in his hand.

At the same instant Sir Gilbert Heathcote had succeeded in opening the front door; and the morning breeze poured into the hall, in a manner doubtless highly refreshing to the porter, who, be it remembered, had nothing on but his shirt—*his* cap having fallen off in the conflict which he had maintained with the baronet in the first instance.

Two of the discomfited keepers, animated by the presence of the Doctor—or perhaps rendered ashamed of their pusillanimity—now returned to the attack upon Trevelyan, who was just on the point of hurling the porter to the ground. But Sir Gilbert, having made the entrance free, rushed back to help his friend; and the contest was again renewed with desperate energy,—the other two keepers, who had by this time recovered their senses, joining in the struggle.

And hard would it have gone with Trevelyan and the baronet against such odds, had not two new-comers suddenly appeared upon the scene.

For, the front door standing wide open, and the lamp being alight in the hall, two gentlemen who were passing by the house at the time beheld the extraordinary proceedings that were taking place within; and the foremost, perceiving in an instant that the odds were two to five,—namely, Trevelyan and the baronet against the four keepers and the porter,—exclaimed at the top of a stentorian voice, “Be Jasus! Frank, and we’ll just give a helping hand to the waker side!”

With these words, the redoubtable Captain O’Blunderbuss—nerved with all the courage attributed by Sir Walter Scott to Lord Marmion—“plunged into the fight.”

Or, in less poetical language, he darted into the hall—levelled the herculean porter with a well-directed blow between the eyes—and sent a couple of keepers sprawling over the aforesaid porter in an instant.

Frank Curtis, having imbibed just sufficient poteen to subdue his habitual cowardice and arm him with the bastard though not the less effectual valour which strong drink inspires, unhesitatingly followed the example of his gallant leader, and bore his part in the fray; so that in less than a minute a complete diversion was effected in favour of Lord William Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert Heathcote, the enemy being utterly discomfited.

“Villains! murderers! robbers!” shouted the infuriate Doctor, as loud as he could bawl; and then the screams and shrieks of the affrighted female servants were heard echoing from the stairs and landing-places.

“Let us depart!” cried Lord William Trevelyan; and, in a very few moments, he pushed the baronet, the captain, and Frank Curtis, out of the front door,—he himself pausing only for a single second to secure the keys.

In another instant he was outside the house; and closing the door behind him, he locked it so as to prevent the Doctor and his myrmidons from instituting an immediate pursuit.

“Be Jasus! and this is the rummest lar-r-k I iver had in all my life!” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss, panting for breath.

“Come with us, gentlemen,” said Lord William, hastily addressing that gallant officer and Frank Curtis: “you have rendered us a signal service—and we must know you better. We have likewise certain necessary explanations to give you relative to the strange scene in which you took so generous a part. But come away directly—there is not a moment to be lost—a hue and cry may be raised!”

“Be the power-rs! and is it bur-r-glars ye are?” cried the Captain, somewhat regretting the precipitation with which he had mixed himself up in the late affray.

“No—no: far from *that*!” exclaimed Lord William, laughing heartily at the idea. “But let us get as quickly as we can out of this neighbourhood.”

And away the four gentlemen scampered into the Cambridge Road, down which they sped until they reached Mile End, where they fortunately found a night-cab waiting for a fare.

Into the vehicle they got; and Lord William Trevelyan exclaimed, as an instruction to the driver, “Park Square, Regent’s Park!”

Away the cab went; and both Captain O’Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis, who had heard the aristocratic address thus given, were seized with an insatiable curiosity to learn who their new acquaintances could be.

CHAPTER CXC.

A SCENE IN A CAB.

“Ginthlemen,” exclaimed the gallant Irishman, “I mane to inthroduce myself and frind to ye without any more bother or pother. My frind, then, ginthlemen, is Misther Frank Cur-r-tis—discinded from a fine family, and once possissed of large estates, all of which, be Jasus! he’s managed to ate up as clane as if dirthy acres were plum-pudding. My name, ginthlemen, is Capthain O’Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemar-r-ra—where I shall be delighted to see ye any time ye may be afther visiting Ould Ireland and I’m at home.”

“Permit me to shake hands with you, Captain O’Blunderbuss,” said the young nobleman; “and with you also, Mr. Curtis. You have rendered me and my friend a service which we cannot easily forget.”

“And which we shall never seek to forget,” added the baronet, emphatically; and then there was a general shaking of hands inside the cab.

Lord William Trevelyan next proceeded to inform his new friends who he and Sir Gilbert Heathcote were; and the reader may conceive the huge delight experienced by Captain O’Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis when they found themselves in the company of a real nobleman and a real baronet.

“And now, my lor-r-d,” said the gallant officer, “will ye be so obleeging as to explain to us what house that was where all the pother took place, and what was the maning of the pother itself: for, be the holy poker-r! I can’t make head or tail of it!”

“The fact is,” responded Lord William Trevelyan, “it was a mad-house.”

“A mad-house!” ejaculated Mr. Frank Curtis, starting as if stung by a serpent lurking in the straw at the bottom of the cab—while a cold tremor came over him; for it instantly struck him that he and his Irish companion had been instrumental in the escape of a couple of lunatics.

“A mad-house!” repeated the Captain, immediately entertaining the same idea, although not sharing the apprehensions of his friend.

“Neither more nor less,” continued Trevelyan, perfectly unaware of the impression which his words had produced upon the two gentlemen: for, as the inside of the cab was quite dark, he could not observe the change that took place in their countenances.

“You—you—don’t mean to—to—say,” stammered Curtis, fidgetting uncommonly, and thrusting his hand outside the window to grasp the handle of the door: for he began to think that the sooner he emancipated himself from the cab, the better;—“you—you——”

“Hould your tongue, ye spalpeen!” vociferated the Captain, who, fully acquainted with the character of his friend, guessed pretty accurately all that was passing in his mind: for the worthy Irishman, on his part, was determined not to separate from his new friends, whether they were lunatics or not, until he had ascertained if any thing was to be got out of them either in the shape of money or whiskey, or both;—“hould your tongue, ye spalpeen! and let’s hear what his lor-rdship has to say upon the matther.”

“Well, as I was informing you, gentlemen,” resumed Trevelyan, who considered that a proper explanation was fully due to those who had acted such a gallant part in the late proceedings, “the house whence you just now so effectually aided us to escape, is a lunatic-asylum—and the men against whom you fought were the keepers.”

“And who—who were the—the—lunatics?” asked Frank Curtis, perspiring at every pore—for the effects of the whiskey which he had been drinking were completely absorbed in the terror that now influenced him.

“Be Jasus! and I won’t have such questions put to my intimate frind his lor-r-dship, and my parthicular frind the baronet!“ ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss, bestowing upon Frank’s ribs such an unmerciful nudge with his elbow that the gentleman who was made the recipient of the said poke writhed horribly in his seat. “Prosade, sir—my lor-r-d, I mane,” added the gallant officer, who, in spite of his civility towards the nobleman and the baronet, firmly believed that they were lunatics, and had usurped titles to which they had not the slightest claim nor right.

“Your companion asked me who were the lunatics,” said Trevelyan, beginning to be somewhat astonished at the manner of his new friends: “well, to tell you the candid truth, myself and Sir Gilbert Heathcote were supposed to be—although I leave you both to judge whether there could have been the slightest ground for such an idea.”

“O Lord!—O Lord!” murmured Frank Curtis; and again his hand, which he had withdrawn when the captain nudged him, was thrust out of the window to grasp the door-latch.

“Are you unwell, my dear sir?” inquired Sir Gilbert Heathcote, in a tone of much concern—for, being seated precisely opposite to Curtis, he had heard the murmured ejaculations which had escaped that individual’s lips.

“Yes—very,” replied Frank, with a hollow groan.

“Be asy, thin, can’t ye?” whispered the Captain savagely in his ear, at the same time favouring him with another barbarous nudge in the ribs. “Oh! it’s nothln’ at all, at all, with my frind, I can assure ye, my lor-r-d and Sir Gilbert,” exclaimed the gallant officer aloud: “he’s throubled with whazing in the throat when he’s been afther dhrinking an exthra dhrop of potheen—and may be the motion of the cab don’t quite agree with him, bad luck to his nonsense! Well, my lor-r-d, ye were afther telling us that your lor-r-dship’s ownself and Sir Gilbert were belaved to be the lunatics?”

“Just so,” answered Trevelyan; “and had not the affair proved a very serious one to my friend Heathcote, I should be inclined to laugh at the ludicrous manner in which it terminated. Heathcote was immured in that asylum under most treacherous circumstances a short time ago—although, I need scarcely inform you, there was not the slightest pretense for the imputation of insanity——”

“Be the holy poker-r! and any one that’s blind could see that same!” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss.

“O Lord!” again moaned Frank Curtis; and he slily and stealthily turned the handle of the cab door.

“Determined to rescue my friend,” continued Lord William Trevelyan, “I induced two medical gentlemen, who are under some obligations to me, and whom I admitted into my confidence, to sign the necessary certificates to consign me to a lunatic asylum——”

“O Lord—O Lord!” groaned Curtis, more deeply than before; for even if he had hitherto entertained any doubt as to the state of Trevelyan’s mind, the singular averment just made was quite sufficient to confirm him in the opinion that he was in company with a decided lunatic.

“What the divvel ails ye, man?” growled Captain O’Blunderbuss. “Prosade, my lor-r-d. I’m dapely intherested in your lor-rdship’s narrative.”

“Having thus obtained the certificates,” continued Trevelyan, “I tutored my valet how to act—and he accordingly consigned me to the care of Dr. Swinton—the old gentleman whom you saw in a dressing-gown and night-cap at the foot of the stairs.”

“An arrant ould scounthrel, I’ve no doubt,” interjected the Captain.

“It was necessary, under the circumstances,” resumed Trevelyan, “to fight Sir Gilbert’s enemies with their own weapons. Cunning against cunning—duplicity against duplicity! That was the plan I adopted; and I affected insanity so well, that the Doctor was completely deceived.”

“Be the power-rs! this is excellent,” ejaculated Captain O’Blunderbuss. “It’s not ivery one that could desayve a mad-docthor so well.”

“I really believe that he imagined me to be as mad as a March hare,” said Trevelyan.

“And so you are!” yelled forth Frank Curtis, suddenly throwing the door wide open and making a desperate attempt to leap from the cab, even at the risk of breaking his neck or fracturing his skull—for his terrors had risen to such a pitch that confinement in the vehicle along with two persons whom he firmly believed to be downright mad-men, had become utterly unendurable:—but the iron grasp of the Captain clutched him by the back part of his collar just as he was on the point of bounding franticly forth into the road—and he was compelled, not however without a struggle, to resume his seat.

This proceeding on the part of Frank Curtis suddenly opened the eyes of both Trevelyan and the baronet to the impressions which the recent proceedings had unmistakeably and naturally made on the minds of their new friends: as if a light had darted in upon them, they now comprehended the cause of Frank Curtis’s singular manner almost ever since they first entered the vehicle;—and they likewise perceived (though they did not rightly interpret) the courtesy which had not only rendered Captain O’Blunderbuss so good a listener to the explanations given by Trevelyan, but had also prompted him to silence and coerce his companion as much as possible.

Accordingly, Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert Heathcote simultaneously broke out into such a hearty fit of laughter that Frank Curtis began to console himself with the idea that they were at least harmless; while Captain O’Blunderbuss set them down as the merriest lunatics he had ever encountered in all his life, and joined with unfeigned cordiality in their glee.

“And so you really thought that we were mad?” exclaimed Trevelyan, as soon as he could compose himself sufficiently to speak.

“Oh! not at all, at all!” cried the Captain.

“But Mr. Curtis firmly believes that we are neither more nor less than lunatics?” said the young nobleman, enjoying the scene.

“Be Jasus! and if he darrs insulth your lor-rdship and your lor-rdship’s frind by even suspicting such a thing, he shall mate me to-morrow mornin’ at twelve paces on Wimbledon Common!” exclaimed the gallant and warlike gentleman.

“Really you excite yourself too much in our behalf, Captain,” observed Trevelyan, who saw plainly enough that O’Blunderbuss was adopting just such a tone and manner as one would use to conciliate and soothe lunatics. “Now tell us the truth, my dear sir,” continued the young nobleman: “do you not think that if we are actually and positively crazy, you and Mr. Curtis cannot boast of being perfectly sane?”

“Be Jasus! and that same is precisely what I’ve often been afther thinking!” cried the Captain, determined to humour the supposed lunatics as much as possible. “As for Frank Curtis here, he’s as mad as the Irish pig that wouldn’t go one particular way save and excipt at such times that it belaved it was being driv another. As for meself, bad luck to me! I’m not blind to my own failings—and I know purty well that I’m as cracked as any damned ould laky tay-kettle.”

The accommodating humour of Captain O’Blunderbuss, who unhesitatingly pronounced himself and his friend Mr. Curtis to be insane, under the impression that such an admission would prove highly gratifying to those to whom it was made, produced such an effect upon the young nobleman and the baronet, that they became almost convulsed with laughter: and it was indeed fortunate that this scene occurred, inasmuch as its extreme ludicrousness tended materially to raise the spirits of Sir Gilbert Heathcote after the wrongs he had suffered and the incarceration he had endured.

It is impossible to say how long the equivoque and the consequent hilarity would have lasted, had not the cab suddenly stopped in front of a handsome house in Park square.

“Now,” thought both Captain O’Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis at the same time, “we shall see the bubble burst very shortly; and it will transpire who our two mad friends really are.”

The summons at the front-door was speedily answered by the appearance of Fitzgeorge in his plain clothes and a couple of footmen in livery, all of whom had waited up the whole night in expectation of the probable return of their master.

As for Fitzgeorge, he ran up to the door of the cab, and perceiving Sir Gilbert inside, exclaimed with unaffected delight, “Thank God! your lordship’s scheme has proved triumphant!”

At these words Captain O’Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis uttered involuntary ejaculations of astonishment: for they began to think that one of their new friends was really a nobleman after all, and that they might neither of them prove to be lunatics in the long run.

Leaping from the cab, Trevelyan invited the gallant gentleman and his companion to enter the house, observing, with a laugh, “However insane we may all be, we will at least exercise the common prudence of taking a little refreshment after all the hard work and momentous proceedings of the night.”

In a few instants the Captain and Frank found themselves conducted into an elegantly furnished apartment, in the midst of which was a table laid out with costly plate, and spread with a cold repast consisting of dainties that made their months water even to gaze upon. It was likewise a source of great satisfaction to the two gentlemen to behold a buffet well stored with wine and spirits, amongst which latter the Captain had no difficulty in recognising some poteen of the real orthodox colour.

The nobleman and his guests took their seats at table, and did ample justice alike to viands and to wine. Indeed, it was amazingly refreshing to behold the appetite with which the Captain and Frank Curtis addressed themselves to the former, and the zest with which they partook of the latter. They no longer believed that either Trevelyan or Sir Gilbert was mad; and when the former gave them the whole particulars of the story which he had only half finished in the cab, they laughed heartily at the misconceptions they had formed.

Under the influence of the poteen, which was duly produced after supper,—if supper such a meal could called, as it was now long past three o’clock in the morning,—the Captain and Frank Curtis became particularly talkative; when it appeared that, existing under grievous apprehension of certain formidable beings denominated “sheriff’s officers,” they had hired lodgings in the classic region of Globe Town, and that, having spent the evening and best portion of the night at a public-house in the Hackney Road, they were taking a short cut homeward, past the Doctor’s house, when they became the witnesses of the scene wherein they immediately after bore so distinguished a part.

From these and other revelations, which the Captain purposely suffered to ooze out as if quite unintentionally, Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert gleaned sufficient to convince them that their new friends were “gentlemen under a cloud;” and they were not sorry at having ascertained a fact which at once placed them in a position to testify their gratitude for the services of the night.

Accordingly, after exchanging a few words in a low tone with Sir Gilbert, Lord William Trevelyan wrote something upon a slip of paper, and then addressed Captain O’Blunderbuss and Frank Curtis in the following manner:—

“You will pardon me, my friends, for the liberty I am about to take and the observations I am on the point of offering. But it has struck Sir Gilbert Heathcote and myself, from certain words which fell from your lips in the excitement of convivial discourse, that you have experienced some little disappointment respecting the arrival of remittances; and we shall be alike honoured and rejoiced if you will permit us to use the freedom of friends under such circumstances. It is probable that a few hundreds may be of some trifling service to

you at this moment; and it will prove a source of unfeigned delight to Sir Gilbert and myself if, in return for the generous aid you afforded us, we can in any way relieve you from a temporary inconvenience."

Thus speaking, Lord William handed the slip of paper to Captain O'Blunderbuss, who, hastily glancing at it as he folded it up preparatory to consignment to his pocket, observed that it was a cheque for five hundred pounds.

"Be Jasus! my dear frinds," he exclaimed, addressing himself to the young nobleman and the baronet, "ye do things in such a handsome way that I don't know how to expriss my thanks at all, at all. Curthis, ye spalpeen!" he cried, suddenly turning round upon his companion, "why the divvel don't ye jine in making a spache on the occasion?—since my lor-r-d and Sir Gilbert have lint us five hunthred pounds to relave us from our timporary difficulties. But I'll unthertake to repay that same, my frinds," he continued, again addressing his words directly to Trevelyan and Heathcote, "the moment I resave my rints from Ould Ir-reland—and bad luck to 'em! So here's afther wishing us succiss—and be damned to all mad-docthors, say I!"

Having achieved this beautiful peroration, Captain O'Blunderbuss tossed off at a single draught the entire contents of a large tumbler of scalding toddy, and then rose to take his departure.

Frank Curtis, who was in a most glorious state of mental obfuscation—beholding two Trevelyans, two baronets, two captains, and heaven only knows how many wax-candles—was with some difficulty induced to stand upon his legs; and his Irish friend was more troubled still to make him use the aforesaid legs when he did get upon them. However, after some little persuasion and more threatening on the part of the Captain, Frank Curtis suffered himself to be led forth from the hospitable mansion.

As soon as Trevelyan and Sir Gilbert Heathcote were alone, the former related to his friend the particulars of the various interviews which had taken place between himself and Mrs. Sefton—that lady's discovery of her daughter Agnes—and her removal to the villa at Bayswater.

The baronet was profoundly agitated—but it was with mingled surprise and joy—when he heard those tidings relative to Agnes: he rose and paced the room with uneven steps,—and then, reseating himself, appeared anxious to make certain revelations—or rather, unbosom his mind to his young friend. But, feeling perhaps unequal to the task at that moment, after the long hours of excitement through which he had just passed, he said, abruptly, "Trevelyan, I have matters of importance to confide to you: but it shall be for another occasion! I must now leave you—'tis nearly five o'clock—the morning has dawned some time—and I am impatient to repair to the villa at Bayswater."

"Will you not take an hour's repose before you depart?" inquired Lord William Trevelyan.

"Oh! I could not close my eyes in sleep again until I have embraced those who——But pardon me for this excitement—this agitation," exclaimed Sir Gilbert, interrupting himself suddenly. "To-morrow I will tell you all—everything," he added, pressing Trevelyan's hand warmly: "and then you will better comprehend the feelings which move me now. Farewell, my dear friend, for the present."

Sir Gilbert was about to take his departure, when Fitzgeorge entered the room, and addressing himself to his master, said, "My lord, I had forgotten to inform your lordship that when I returned hither last evening, after leaving you at Dr. Swinton's, I found the Marquis of Delmour waiting——"

"The Marquis of Delmour!" ejaculated Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

"Yes, sir," replied Fitzgeorge. "The Marquis appeared to be in a very excited state, and was most anxious to see your lordship," continued the valet, again addressing himself to his master. "I assured him that your lordship was gone out of town, and might not return for a day or two—whereupon he almost flew into a rage with me for giving him such information. He paced the room in great agitation, and asked me several questions relative to any ladies who might visit at the mansion: but I answered that your lordship was not accustomed to receive visitresses at all. At length he took his departure, stating that he should call again in the morning at ten o'clock, and take his chance of finding your lordship at home."

"I understand full well the meaning of this visit on the part of the Marquis," said Sir Gilbert Heathcote to Trevelyan, when the valet had retired; "but I have not time for explanations now. My impatience to repair to Bayswater is intense, unseasonable though the hour is for arousing ladies from their slumbers. One request I have, however, to make, my dear Trevelyan," added the baronet; "and this is, that you will not, under any circumstances, communicate to the Marquis of Delmour the address of the villa occupied by Mrs. Sefton and Agnes."

"Be well assured, my dear friend," answered the young nobleman, "that the secret is safe with me."

The baronet wrung Trevelyan's hand with the cordial warmth of deep gratitude and sincere attachment, and then took his departure.

Lord William lay down for a few hours, and enjoyed a sound slumber until nine o'clock, when he rose and dressed himself to receive the Marquis of Delmour.

Punctually as the clock struck ten, a handsome carriage drove up to the door; and the Marquis, hastily alighting, was immediately conducted into the drawing-room where Trevelyan awaited his presence.

CHAPTER CXCI.

THE OLD MARQUIS AND THE YOUNG LORD.

"My lord, you are a man of honour, I have heard," began the Marquis, without any prefatory observations; "and I feel assured that you will at once relieve me from a most painful state of suspense. Pardon the excitement which I display—and justify the good opinion I have conceived of you by giving me without delay the information I am about to seek. In a word, where is Agnes—my daughter Agnes—the young lady whom you have seen walking in the garden of the secluded cottage near Norwood?"

"Is that beautiful creature indeed your lordship's daughter?" exclaimed Trevelyan, not altogether surprised at the announcement: for the agitation which Sir Gilbert Heathcote had shown when the name of the Marquis of Delmour was mentioned, and the request which he had made to the effect that the residence of Mrs. Sefton should be kept secret, had already created in the mind of Lord William a suspicion of the real truth.

"Yes—Agnes is indeed my daughter—and I am proud of her!" cried the Marquis. "But I know that she was inveigled away from the cottage by one who——by her own mother, in fine——and I am likewise aware that you subsequently entrusted her to the care of a lady of your acquaintance. This latter information I obtained from a certain Mrs. Mortimer——"

"The information was correct, my lord," answered Trevelyan. "And now I must candidly confess that I have a very difficult part to perform: for I will not condescend to a falsehood—and I dare not reveal the truth. This much, however, I unhesitatingly declare—that, by a singular coincidence, the lady to whom I conducted your lordship's daughter proved to be none other than her mother."

"Her mother! then she is at this moment in the care of that woman?" ejaculated the Marquis, his excitement increasing: "and you will not tell me where I can find them?"

"That is the truth which, as I said ere now, I dare not repeat," responded Trevelyan, profoundly touched by the evident grief of the old nobleman.

"Will you be the means of separating a father from his child?" asked the Marquis, now sinking through exhaustion upon a sofa—for hitherto he had remained standing, although Trevelyan had twice courteously indicated the chair that had been placed for his accommodation.

"Were I to yield to your lordship's desire," said the young nobleman,—"were I to give you the address of—of—"

"Call *her* Mrs. Sefton, if you will," interrupted the Marquis, bitterly: "I know that she passes and has long passed under that name."

"Well, my lord—were I to give you the address of that lady," resumed Trevelyan, "I should be adopting a course calculated to separate a mother from her child."

"But that mother is unworthy of being entrusted with the care of her daughter!" exclaimed the Marquis of Delmour, emphatically.

"My lord, I have not the slightest inclination to enter into matters of a private nature, and regarding your own family," said Trevelyan, with firmness, yet courtesy—and even with commiseration for the sorrow of the old noble: "much less," he added, "should I like to be constituted a judge between your lordship and the Marchioness of Delmour—for such I presume Mrs. Sefton to be."

"Without placing your lordship in any disagreeable or invidious position," said the Marquis, growing more tranquil as his naturally powerful mind suggested the utter inutility of giving way to excitement, "I may yet address you not only in your capacity of a nobleman endowed with high intelligence and strict notions of integrity, but also as one who—unless I be much deceived—experiences an honourable passion for my daughter. Ah! I perceive by your countenance that such indeed is the sentiment you entertain for Agnes: and now, therefore, as her father will I address you—as her parent, her protector, and her natural guardian, I invoke your attention."

"It would be disrespectful alike to your age and rank, and also to your position as the father of her whom I sincerely and devotedly love, were I to refuse to hear whatever your lordship may have to communicate," said Trevelyan, after a few moments reflection.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" ejaculated the Marquis: "I shall yet move you in my favour! But tell me—you are acquainted with one whom, if you please, we will continue to call Mrs. Sefton: has she ever communicated to you any particulars of her earlier life?"

“Frankly and candidly,” replied the young nobleman, “she has confided to me a portion of those particulars; and I have this day learnt sufficient to fill up the few blanks which she left in her narrative.”

“You know, then,” resumed his lordship, “that I wedded her against her consent: but I knew not at the time—as God is my judge!—that I was so completely sealing her misery by that marriage. Sophia—that is her Christian name—was young and beautiful when I first saw her—Oh! so beautiful that I became madly in love with her: and you may perhaps be aware that love is selfish—claiming its object at any price, and at any sacrifice. Her father was in deep pecuniary difficulties—nay, more—he had done things which would have dishonoured his name and even endangered his personal safety. I had an enormous fortune at my command—I told him that I adored his daughter—and he promised me her hand. On that occasion he concealed from me the fact that the young lady’s affections were already engaged: indeed, he assured me that love was as yet a stranger to her bosom, but that she had been struck by my appearance, although I was so much her senior. The duplicity of the father was the first fault in that long chain of unpleasant circumstances and untoward incidents: and, relying on all that he had thus told me, I at once advanced a hundred thousand pounds to relieve him from his embarrassments. Soon, however, did I begin to perceive that my visits were rather tolerated than encouraged by his charming daughter Sophia; and then I learnt—but not from *her* lips—that she loved another. I felt indignant with the father—while I passionately coveted the daughter; and under the influence of those feelings I pressed my suit. I was resolved not to be made a dupe by the sire, and sacrificed by the young lady to a rival. Had she herself frankly and candidly revealed to me the state of her affections—thrown herself upon my mercy—appealed to my honour, I should have acted a generous part, my lord—yes—I should have been generous!”

“But the young lady was coerced by her father, who intimidated her at one time and ridiculed her at another,” observed Trevelyan: “I remember full well that she told me of her sire’s unfeeling conduct towards her.”

“Yes—and to me also she made the same revelation, when it was too late,” continued the Marquis. “However, it was under such inauspicious circumstances that our marriage took place; and again I appeal to heaven to attest the truth of my words when I declare that I treated her with all possible tenderness, affection, and regard.”

“She has done your lordship that justice in narrating those particulars to me,” remarked Trevelyan.

“But I could not render her happy,” resumed the Marquis: “she was constantly weeping—and our honeymoon resembled an interval of mourning after a funeral, rather than a season of felicity succeeding a bridal. Much as I exerted myself to please her—lavish as I was with money to procure her the means of recreation and enjoyment—profuse as I became with the most costly gifts, not only to herself but likewise to all her relatives and friends, I could never win a smile from her lips. Now your lordship will admit that this was more than an unpleasant life to lead—it was absolutely wretched. But your lordship may conceive the deep vexation which I experienced when, having succeeded on one occasion in inducing the Marchioness to appear at a ball given by some friends, I saw her pale countenance suddenly glow with animation and her eye light up with joy as Gilbert Heathcote advanced to solicit her hand for a quadrille. And she smiled, too—yes, she smiled—and, oh! how sweetly upon *him*, as her elegant figure moved with dignity and grace in the mazy dance. My soul seemed as if it were withering up within me: I am confident that I must have eyed them with the ferocity of a lynx. But Sophia appeared to have forgotten that I was present—that there was such a being in the world as I: her whole attention was devoted to my rival—her whole thoughts were absorbed in the pleasure of his society. She danced with him more than once—she sate next to him at the supper-table—and after the banquet she waltzed with him. I have ever detested that voluptuous—that licentious—that indecent dance: but how I loathed—oh! how I loathed it on this occasion! I tore myself away from the ball-room, and sought a secluded corner in the card-room. There I endeavoured to reason with myself upon the absurdity of my jealous rage—of the ridicule to which any manifestation of the feeling would expose me—and of the contempt I should inevitably draw down upon myself from my wife, did I allow her to perceive how much I was annoyed at what she would doubtless consider a trivial matter. Thus exercising a powerful command over my emotions, I even assumed a smiling countenance when we returned home, and when I congratulated her upon having been in such high spirits. But all her coldness and inanimation had come back, and I thought within myself that she would not appear thus if Gilbert Heathcote were still in her society.”

“My lord, pardon me—but wherefore enter into details which only arouse reminiscences so painful to yourself?” interrupted Trevelyan.

“Bear with me yet a little while,” said the Marquis, speaking in so mild and plaintive a tone that Lord William could not find it in his heart to manifest any impatience or any farther disinclination to hear the old nobleman’s narrative: “bear with me, I say—for I have a motive in entering into these details,” he continued. “At the same time, I will not be too prolix, although there are a thousand little circumstances which recur to my memory, and which might be quoted to prove how patient and enduring I was under the cruel indifference wherewith I was treated. But I will content myself by observing that Sophia smiled only on those occasions when she encountered Gilbert Heathcote in society or in the fashionable promenades: at other times she shrouded herself in a species of dreamy apathy. Her father, perceiving when it was too late how utterly he had wrecked his daughter’s happiness, died of a broken heart: but, strange to say, it was not long after this event that Sophia appeared suddenly to rally a little and seek a more active existence. She began to take frequent airings in the carriage—grew addicted to shopping—accepted every invitation that was sent for balls, routs, card-parties, and concerts—and requested me to take a box at the Opera: in fine, she speedily plunged into the routine of fashionable dissipation. Nevertheless, when alone with me, she was ever cold and reserved—if not positively sullen and morose. In the course of time she was in the way to become a mother—and I hoped that the birth of a child might subdue a portion of her coldness towards me, even if the tie were not strong enough to induce her to love me. But when Agnes—my darling Agnes—was born, her manner varied not one tittle in respect to myself. Time passed on—and at last I began to entertain serious suspicions of the fidelity of my wife—for I

found that she had frequent interviews, not altogether accidental, with Sir Gilbert Heathcote, who about that time succeeded to a baronetcy and a tolerable fortune. I remonstrated with the Marchioness upon her imprudence—to give her conduct no harsher name; and then began a series of quarrels, disputes and bickerings, which made my life more wretched than ever. On one of those occasions she reproached me for having married her—and she declared that she never had loved, and never could love me. Alas! I knew it but too well,—knew also that she *had* loved, and *still* loved another! And it was likewise after one of those disputes to which I have alluded that a horrible suspicion first entered my mind—a suspicion that the Marchioness had been unfaithful to me, and that Agnes was not my own child."

"Oh! my lord—continue this painful narrative no farther!" exclaimed Trevelyan. "It shocks me to be thus made the depositary of secrets of so delicate a nature!"

"Again do I implore your patience, Lord William," cried the Marquis: "and as I have advanced thus far in my sad story, permit me to carry it on to the conclusion. I was observing, then, that a dreadful suspicion seized upon me—and yet I dared not accuse my wife of incontinency. *She* divined what was passing in the depths of my tortured soul—*she* conjectured the nature of the apprehension which now began to haunt me like a ghost! Oh! how I longed to question her—to know the worst—or to hear her proclaim the injustice of my suspicion: but, no—I dared not touch upon the subject—my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth whenever I sought to frame the words that should accuse her. And in this manner did we drag on a wretched existence,—I experiencing all the misery of having a young wife who could not love me—and she feeling all the bitterness of her position in being allied to an old husband who had grown so jealous and so suspicious. At last the day came when all my repugnance to utter the fatal accusation suddenly vanished. I had been more than ordinarily provoked—for at a *dejeuner* given at the house of some friends, the Marchioness received with such evident satisfaction the marked attentions of Sir Gilbert Heathcote, that I felt myself insulted and outraged in the presence of the entire company. Accordingly, when we returned home in the afternoon, a violent scene took place between the Marchioness and myself; and it was then that, in a paroxysm of rage, I proclaimed the suspicion which I had for some time cherished—I accused her of infidelity—I revealed the doubt which existed in my mind relative to my paternal claims to the affections of the infant Agnes. Never—never shall I forget that memorable day! The Marchioness heard me—gazed on me fixedly—appeared stupefied and astounded for nearly a minute,—while her countenance became pale as marble—her lips quivered—and her bosom heaved convulsively. I was terrified at her manner—she appeared at that moment to be *Injured Innocence* personified—I could have thrown myself at her feet and implored her pardon! But, in a thick and hollow voice, she said, '*All is now at an end, my lord, between you and me! We part—for ever!*'—A dizziness came over me—I felt that I had done wrong—that I had gone too far,—and I would have given worlds to be able to recall the fatal accusation! For I was now as firmly convinced of her innocence, as I had a few minutes before been deeply imbued with suspicion;—and I cursed—I anathematised the rashness that had marked my conduct. It was a painful—a distressing scene: for I remember that I fell upon my knees to implore her forgiveness—to beseech her to remain, if not for my sake, at least for that of the child. But this appeal only excited her the more: and when I adjured her in the name of her infant daughter to stay, she uttered a wild cry and fled, as if suddenly seized with insanity, from the house."

Here the Marquis paused for a few moments, and passed his handkerchief rapidly over his eyes:—the reminiscences of the past were still powerful enough to move him to tears!

"I shall not now detain you long, my lord," he resumed. "Whither my wife went, I knew not;—but in a short time I heard that she was living in the strictest seclusion and under a feigned name. Will you not despise me when you learn that I employed a spy to watch her actions—to institute inquiries concerning her pursuits and her conduct? But I will conceal nothing from you—and I candidly admit that such was the course which I adopted: for, though I still believed that she was innocent up to the time when my abrupt accusation drove her from the house, I nevertheless naturally conjectured that, on thus quitting me, she had sought the protection of him whom she loved. I was not therefore surprised to hear that Sir Gilbert Heathcote was a frequent visitor at the abode of Mrs. Sefton—by which name she was now known:—but I was unable to glean any positive evidence of criminality on her part. And did I seek such evidence? Yes—for a raging jealousy had taken possession of me; and I longed to punish *her* for daring to love my rival as she did! But as time passed on and sober reflection worked its influence upon me, I grew ashamed of the course I had adopted—and I now resolved to hush up to the utmost of my power the unhappy position in which I stood with regard to my wife. For I already felt deeply attached to my little daughter—and I determined that, if human precautions could prevent such a misfortune, she should never have to blush for a mother's shame. I was strengthened in this resolve by the fact that the Marchioness herself was disposed to shroud the past in secrecy as much as possible: else wherefore the feigned name which she had adopted, and the seclusion in which she dwelt? But in the course of a few months certain events transpired which threatened to lay bare to the public the whole of this most painful history. I must explain myself more fully by stating that my wife's father had made a will leaving some landed property to me, and which was to descend to the child or children that might spring from my marriage with his daughter. A distant male relative of his now set up a claim to that property; and proceedings were taken in the Court of Chancery, from which it transpired that the Marquis and Marchioness of Delmour were living apart—by mutual consent, as it was alleged—and that their infant child was in the charge of the Marquis himself. I shall not weary you with particulars nor details: suffice it to say that the proceedings took such a turn and were of such a nature as to lead to a decree to this effect—that the claims of the distant relative were rejected—that trustees were appointed by the Court to administer the property, until Agnes should attain the age of twenty-one—and that, as no allegation of misconduct had been made against the Marchioness of Delmour, she should have the charge of her daughter!"

This portion of the Marquis's narrative will explain to the reader wherefore, when conversing with his daughter at the cottage, as detailed in Chapter CLXI., he said to her, "Two years more, and I shall no longer have any secrets from you:" because at the expiration of that period, Agnes would attain her majority. The decree in Chancery likewise explained the ground upon which Mrs. Sefton—*alias* the Marchioness of Delmour—had observed to Trevelyan, in Chapter CLXXXI., that "the law was in her favour," in respect to any

endeavour that might be made to wrest Agnes from her care; and the same fact elucidates the meaning of her ladyship's remark that two years must elapse ere she could venture to dispose of the hand of her daughter in marriage.

"Thus was it," resumed the Marquis, after a brief pause, "that those accursed proceedings which I did not provoke, and which, when once commenced, I could not arrest,—thus was it that they suddenly placed my infant daughter within the jurisdiction of the Chancery Court, and deprived me of the right of retaining her in my care. It is true that I might have instituted counter-proceedings in respect to this portion of the decree: but then I should have been compelled to attack the reputation of my wife—prove her to be an adultress, if such evidence could be acquired—and cover a noble family with shame, while a species of hereditary taint would cling to the reputation of my Agnes. Now, my lord, you can understand my motive in rearing her under circumstances of such privacy—such secresy,—in dooming her to an existence of seclusion—almost of solitude,—and of adopting all possible precautions to prevent her falling into the hands of her mother. And now, also, that you are acquainted with this most sad—this most unhappy history, I appeal to you whether you will be the means of permitting the innocent Agnes to remain in the care of her unworthy parent. If you really love her, my lord—if you propose to make her your wife when she attains her majority—I put it to your honour and to your good sense whether it be preferable that she should pass the interval of two years with her mother, who occupies so equivocal a position—or with her father, who has ever done his duty towards her."

Trevelyan was cruelly embarrassed by this appeal, which in reality carried so much weight with it and involved so important a point, that he knew not how to act. Much as he was disposed to make all possible allowances for Mrs. Sefton—as we had better continue to call her,—much as he pitied her in consequence of the wretched marriage into which she had been forced—and great as the excuse was for her connexion with Sir Gilbert Heathcote,—he nevertheless could not avoid being shocked at the idea of the young creature whom he intended to make his wife, remaining in the maternal care.

His good sense and propriety of feeling naturally prompted him, therefore, to advocate the father's claim to the guardianship of Agnes: but on the other hand, the solemn pledge he had given to Sir Gilbert Heathcote, and likewise his confidence in the good principles of Mrs. Sefton, in spite of her equivocal position—all this forbade him to side at once with the Marquis. Yet how was he to remain neutral?—he who had such a deep and tender interest in the welfare of the lovely—the innocent—the artless Agnes!

While he was still hesitating what course to adopt, and walking up and down the room in an excited manner,—while, too, the Marquis of Delmour, who remained seated upon the sofa, was watching him with the most intense anxiety,—a loud double knock and ring at the front door startled both the noblemen.

"I will not receive any one at present!" exclaimed Trevelyan; and hastily opening the drawing-room door, he hurried out upon the landing, whence he was about to give instructions to the hall-porter to deny him to the visitor, whoever it might be.

But the front-door was already opened; and both the Marquis and Trevelyan heard the hall-porter observing, evidently in reply to a question that had been put to him—"His lordship is particularly engaged, madam, at the present moment: the Marquis of Delmour is with his lordship in the drawing-room."

"The Marquis of Delmour—eh?" exclaimed a female voice, not unknown to either of the noblemen. "Oh! I am acquainted with the Marquis as well as with my friend Lord William—and I will therefore take the liberty of intruding upon them."

Before the hall-porter could offer any farther objection, the obtrusive female brushed past him and hurried up the marble staircase—Trevelyan having already retreated into the drawing-room.

In a few moments the young nobleman and the Marquis were equally annoyed by the appearance of Mrs. Mortimer, who, decked out in the gayest style, thus unceremoniously forced her way into their presence.

CHAPTER CXCII.

MRS. MORTIMER IN LONDON AGAIN.

"This is really most fortunate, my lords!" exclaimed the old woman, as she entered with a smirking countenance and a self-sufficient air. "I wished to see you both as early as convenient this morning—and, behold! I find you together. How is the pretty Agnes? Has not your lordship discovered that I told you the truth, when I referred you to this house for information respecting her?" she inquired, turning towards the Marquis.

"Yes, madam," he exclaimed, hastily: "and as I shall proceed direct hence to my bankers, to instruct them relative to certain cheques which I recently gave in Paris, you may present your draft in the course of the day with the certainty of receiving the amount. I presume that it was for this purpose you desired to see me!"

"Precisely so, my lord," responded the old woman, scarcely able to conceal the boundless joy which she now experienced: for the Marquis had given her precisely the very information which she was anxious to obtain—namely, *that his banker would in the course of the day be directed to cash the various cheques he had recently given when in Paris!*

"And what business can you possibly have to transact with me, madam?" demanded Lord William Trevelyan, in a tone of the most chilling hauteur.

"I thought of doing your lordship a service," answered Mrs. Mortimer; "and yet the manner in which I am received, is but a sorry recompense for my good intentions."

"To speak candidly, madam," said the young noble, "I mistrust your intentions and do not require your services."

"It is true enough that the presence of the Marquis here has forestalled the purport of my own visit," observed Mrs. Mortimer, secretly enjoying the vexation which she evidently caused Lord William by remaining in the room. "But I may as well prove to you that those intentions which you affect to mistrust, were really good; and therefore I will at once inform your lordship that I came to relate to you all that took place between the Marquis and me in Paris three days ago. For I thought that I might as well prepare you for a visit on the part of my Lord Delmour; and I was in hopes of being the first to reveal to you the high birth of the young lady whom you had believed to be plain *Agnes Vernon*."

"For which officiousness you would have expected a handsome remuneration," said Lord William, with a contemptuous curling of the lip. "No—madam: you will not obtain a single guinea from me! I can read your character thoroughly—and, grieved as I am to be compelled to address a female in so harsh a manner, I must nevertheless beg you to relieve me of your presence as speedily as possible."

"I have no wish to intrude myself any longer upon your lordships," observed Mrs. Mortimer; and, with a respectful curtsey to the Marquis and a stiff inclination of the head to Trevelyan, she took her departure.

"And now, my lord," said the impatient Marquis, "that we are relieved of the company of that despicable woman—for in no other light can I regard her—may I solicit your decision in the important matter that yet remains to be settled?"

"It grieves me—believe me, my dear Marquis, it pains me to keep you in suspense," returned Trevelyan: "but on one side my inclination prompts me to act in accordance with your wishes—on the other, my word is pledged to retain the abode of—of——"

"Mrs. Sefton," interrupted the old nobleman, hastily.

"To retain the address of that lady a profound secret," added Trevelyan. "But this much I will promise—this much I will undertake:—without delay to repair to Mrs. Sefton and urge her to deliver up Lady Agnes to your care. I have that confidence in her rectitude of principle, which induces me to hope for success when I shall have placed the entire matter before her in its proper light."

"With this assurance I must rest contented for the present," observed the Marquis. "But hear the resolution to which I have come," he continued, rising from his seat, and speaking in a tone of excitement. "Hitherto I have done all I could—aye, and far more than the generality of injured husbands would have done—to cast a veil over the unhappy circumstances which I have this morning related to you. But should she refuse to deliver up my daughter to my care—should she entrench herself behind the decision of the Chancery Court—I shall then remain peaceable no longer. It shall be war—open war—between her and me. I will appeal to the tribunals of my country—I will apply to the Ecclesiastical Court and the House of Lords for a divorce—and I will adopt the necessary proceedings and

furnish the proper evidence to induce the Lord Chancellor to deprive the erring mother of the care of her child. Such is my determination, Lord William—and you may use the menace, which is no idle one, to bring that woman to reason."

With these words the Marquis pressed the hand of the young nobleman, and took his leave hastily.

Mrs. Mortimer, who was seated in a cab at a little distance, watching for the departure of the Marquis, beheld him enter his carriage, which immediately drove away; and the humbler vehicle was thereupon directed to follow the more imposing equipage.

The carriage proceeded into the Strand, and stopped at the door of an eminent banking-house, which the Marquis entered.

Mrs. Mortimer, having dogged him thither, alighted at a little distance and dismissed the cab.

She watched the old nobleman come forth again; and then she repaired to a coffee-house in the neighbourhood where she ordered some refreshment to be served up in a private room. She likewise demanded writing materials; and when she was left to herself, she drew forth the cheque for six hundred pounds which the Marquis of Delmour had given her.

"Now for the grand blow," she thought within herself, as she carefully examined the draft: "and it must be struck boldly, too! But the aim is worth all the risk:—sixty thousand pounds or transportation—those are the alternatives! I have been possessed of enough money in my life to know how sweet it is—and I have seen enough of transportation to be well aware how bitter it is! And the former is so sweet that it is worth while chancing all the bitters of the latter to obtain it. Besides—apart from the delicious feeling of having a vast fortune at my command—how delightful will it be to over-reach the haughty Perdita—or Laura, as she chooses to call herself!"

And here the old woman's lips curled into a contemptuous sneer.

"I have hitherto managed matters cleverly enough," she continued in her musings. "Ah! hah! Lord William Trevelyan thought that I called upon him either to gratify some idle curiosity or to extort money. He little suspected my drift! It was to see whether the Marquis had been to him—to learn whether my information had been found correct—to ascertain whether I might present the draft at the bankers'. And then the old Marquis himself!—it was lucky that I found him there—I was saved the trouble of calling at his mansion to worm out of him whether he had instructed his bankers to pay the cheque,—not *my* paltry draft for six hundred—but Perdita's grand amount of sixty thousand! In all this I succeeded admirably: and now for the desperate venture."

Having thus communed with herself, Mrs. Mortimer partook of a little refreshment; for she was anxious to while away an hour before she went to the bank, so as not to present herself too soon after the visit of the Marquis of Delmour to the establishment.

When she had eaten and drank as drunk as much as she cared for, she addressed herself to the grand project which she had in view, and in furtherance of which she had demanded the private room and the writing materials at the coffee-house.

The writing of the Marquis was execrably bad; and it was not a very difficult matter to add *ty* to the *six*, and transform the word *hundred* into *thousand*, in the body of the cheque; while the simple addition of 00 to the 600*l.* written in figures in the corner, completed the forgery.

The cheque, therefore, now stood for *sixty thousand pounds*, instead of *six hundred*, payable to *bearer*, no particular name being mentioned as the intended recipient.

When the old woman had thus transformed the document, a glow of triumph animated her hideous countenance: but in a few moments a chill—a cold, creeping tremor came over her—as if a clammy snake were gradually coiling itself around her form, underneath her clothes;—for she remembered all the sensations which she had experienced when she committed the forgery of Sir Henry Courtenay's name nineteen years previously!

By a desperate effort the old woman shook off the painful feeling that thus influenced her; and, resolving to allow herself no more leisure for reflection, *lest her thoughts should make a coward of her*, she rang the bell—paid the trifling amount incurred—and took her departure from the coffee-house.

During her walk to the bank, which was close at hand, she rapidly calculated in her mind all the chances of success. The Marquis had unquestionably been thither to give instructions relative to the draft held by Laura as well as that which had been given to herself; and there was not the slightest reason to fear that her daughter had followed so closely on her steps from Paris as to have been able to visit the bank during the hour that had just elapsed. As for the excellence of the forgery—or rather of the alterations, Mrs. Mortimer entertained no apprehension on that score; and thus, all things considered, she deemed failure to be impossible.

With an apparent outward composure, but with a palpitating heart, the old woman entered the bank, and presented her cheque to one of the clerks. He surveyed it narrowly—took it into the private office, or parlour, doubtless to submit it to one of the proprietors of the establishment or some responsible person—and remained away upwards of two minutes.

Two minutes!—but that interval was an age—a perfect age in the imagination of the old woman! It was an interval composed of such intense feelings that the hair of a young person might have turned suddenly grey,—feelings of such burning hope and such awful suspense, of such profound terror and fervid expectation, that while molten lead appeared to drop upon one side of her heart, ice seemed to lay upon the other!

At length the clerk came back; and Mrs. Mortimer darted a rapid—searching—penetrating glance at his countenance.

Nothing save respect and civility could she trace thereon: and she instantly knew that she was safe!

Then came such a revulsion of feeling—such a subsiding of the terrors and such an exaltation of the hopes which she had conceived—that it was as if she were shooting upwards from the profundity of a deluge of dark waters and suddenly breathed the fresh air again and beheld the bright sun and the smiling heavens overhead.

The clerk proceeded to count out bank-notes for the sum specified in the cheque; and as he handed the fortune—yes, literally a fortune—over to the old woman, he considerately gave her a caution to take care of the vile characters who frequently lurked about the doors of banking-houses.

Mrs. Mortimer thanked the clerk for his well-meant advice, and sallied forth from the establishment, with a heart so elate that she could scarcely believe in the success of the tremendous fraud, now that it had passed triumphantly through the ordeal.

But as she was crossing the threshold, she heard a name suddenly mentioned; and, hastily turning her head, she found herself face to face with Jack Rily, the Doctor!

CHAPTER CXCIII.

JACK RILY AND MRS. MORTIMER.

The individual whom Mrs. Mortimer thus unexpectedly and unpleasantly encountered, had made a considerable improvement in his personal appearance during the few days that had elapsed since she saw him last.

The old fur cap, the greasy velveteen shooting-jacket, the rusty waistcoat, the corduroy trowsers, and the heavy high-lows, were exchanged for a shining silk hat, a complete suit of black clothes, and a pair of Wellington boots: his shirt was likewise new and clean, and he wore a satin stock instead of the blue cotton handkerchief tied loosely round his neck.

He had evidently endeavoured to make himself look as respectable as he could: but the almost African hue of his complexion—the horrible hare-lip, through the opening of which the large white teeth glistened up to the gums—and the yellow fire that seemed to shine in the small and restless eyes, gave him such a peculiar aspect that it was scarcely possible for any one who passed to avoid noticing him.

"Mrs. Mortimer, my beloved tiger-cat, how are you?" he exclaimed, grasping the old woman's hand and shaking it violently.

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Rily: but pray do not detain me now, there's a good soul—for I have not a moment to spare——"

"I shan't detain you, old beauty," interrupted Jack; "because I'll just do myself the pleasure of walking along with you. Come—take my arm—you needn't be ashamed to do so now: I think I'm pretty tidily rigged—eh?"

Thus speaking, he glanced complacently over his own person, and then bestowed a look upon the outward appearance of Mrs. Mortimer, who, as we have already observed, was dressed with unusual gaiety.

"Come, my dear—take my arm," exclaimed the Doctor.

"Really, Mr. Rily, you must excuse me," said the old woman, who was most anxious to get away from the vicinity of the bank, but by no means desirous of remaining in the company of the Doctor: "I have a particular matter to attend to immediately! If, however, you desire to see me, I shall be most happy to meet you this evening——"

"This fiddlestick!" interrupted Jack Rily, impatiently. "You know that you never kept the appointment you made with me after that Stamford Street affair the other day—when you went away with the young girl in the cab; and yet you assured me that there was money to be got through her——"

"Well, well—I have not time to talk of the matter now," said Mrs. Mortimer, angrily: "and I *must* take my leave of you."

"Lord bless you! I'm not going to be put off in this fashion, old lady," cried Jack. "It suits me to have a little further chat with you—and I'm determined the whim shall be gratified. So take my arm at once, and come along. If we stand here palavering, we shall soon have a mob about us—because it isn't every day that two such handsome people as you and I are seen together," he added, with a horrible chuckle.

"But perhaps you are not going my way," said Mrs. Mortimer, still hesitating to take the proffered arm, and deeply vexed at this encounter.

"Oh! yes I am—because I'll go any way you like," responded Jack Rily, in the most accommodating spirit.

"Well—you shall be my companion for a short time," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, affecting to laugh in good humour; and, taking his arm, she proceeded with him along the Strand.

"I met our friend Vitriol Bob last night at a public-house," observed Jack, who seemed quite proud of having the hideous old woman clinging to him. "He looked remarkably savage when he saw me in my bran new toggery—for he thought to himself that the money which purchased it ought to have belonged to him. I hadn't seen him since the night in Stamford Street; and, as he had the impudence to stare at me in a threatening manner, I went up to him and whispered in his ear, '*What about old Torrens, Bob?*' He turned quite livid with rage, and ground his teeth together; then, after a few moments' consideration, he said—also in a whisper—'*If it wasn't that you knew that secret, I'd serve you out nicely, old fellow: but I'll be even with you yet, I dare say.*'—'*Whenever you like, Bob,*' said I; and then we sate down in different parts of the room and stared at each other all the time we were smoking our pipes. But not another word

passed between us; and the other people who were present, knowing that we were excellent pals until lately, wondered what the devil was the matter."

"And did he bury the dead body, do you know?" inquired Mrs. Mortimer.

"I didn't put the question to him," answered Jack Rily. "Nothing more passed between us than what I have just told you: but I have no doubt that he laid old Torrens two or three feet under the kitchen floor in the Haunted House. And now, how do you suppose that I and Vitriol Bob stand with regard to each other?"

"As enemies, I should suppose," replied Mrs. Mortimer, wondering by what means she could possibly shake off her disagreeable companion.

"As mortal—implacable—unrelenting enemies," continued the man, lowering his voice: for his loud talking had already attracted the notice of the passers-by in the Strand, and he had just caught sight of a policeman who appeared to be eyeing him rather suspiciously. "Yes—as bitter enemies," he repeated. "Not that I have any resentment *now* against Bob: because my revenge is gratified, and I am more than even with him. But as he will take the first opportunity to thrust a knife into my ribs, or dash his vitriol bottle in my face, whenever he catches me in a lonely place,—why, I must be prepared to struggle with him to the very death. So, my old tiger-cat," added the Doctor, with amazing cheerfulness, considering the gravity of the topic, "whenever he and I do so meet, only one of us will walk away alive. That's as certain as that you're leaning on my arm, and that I'm proud of your company."

"Is Vitriol Bob, as you call him, such a desperate fellow?" inquired Mrs. Mortimer, wishing the Doctor at the hottest place she could think of.

"Why, I've told you all about him before," exclaimed Jack. "And now let me give you a little piece of advice about yourself, old gal ____"

"About me!" repeated Mrs. Mortimer, with a shudder occasioned by a presentiment of what she was going to hear.

"Yes—about you, my tiger-cat," repeated the Doctor. "Remember that Vitriol Bob never forgets or forgives—and he owes you *one*. That's all! But, when I think of it, I shall constitute myself your lawful protector—because I never *did* meet any woman so precious ugly as you are; and ugliness, when joined to ferocity, is beauty in my eyes—as I have before told you."

"Well, well—we will discuss all these points another time," said Mrs. Mortimer. "I must leave you here," she added, stopping suddenly short at the corner of Wellington Street, leading to Waterloo Bridge.

"Your way is mine," observed Jack Rily, coolly, as he compelled her to walk on. "But, by the bye, what were you doing in that bank at the door of which I met you?"

"I merely went in to see a clerk of my acquaintance," replied the old woman, cursing in her heart the odious companion who thus pertinaciously attached himself to her.

"Come, that won't do, old gal!" exclaimed Jack, as he paid the toll for them both at the gate of the bridge. "I am so well acquainted with all the rigs and moves of London life, as to be able to tell in a moment whether a person coming out of a bank has been to receive money, or not. If it's a gentleman, he feels at his breeches-pocket to see that the cash is all safe—or he buttons his coat over his breast which proves that the notes are in his waistcoat. If it's a woman, she gripes her reticule precious tight—or smoothes down her dress just over where her pocket is—or else settles her shawl over her bosom, when the notes are there. This last was precisely what you did; and therefore, my old tiger-cat, I know that you've got money in the bosom of your dress as well as if I saw you put it there."

"You're quite wrong for once in your life, Mr. Rily," said Mrs. Mortimer, trembling at the remarks which had just fallen upon her ears.

"Then why does your arm shake so as it hangs in mine?" demanded the Doctor, with an imperturbability which frightened the old woman more than if he had actually used threats: for, little as she had seen of him, she was well enough acquainted with his character to perceive that he was meditating mischief.

"My arm did *not* shake," cried Mrs. Mortimer, mastering up all her courage and presence of mind, "But here we are at the end of the bridge, and I must bid you good-bye. When shall we meet again?"

"We are not going to separate in a hurry, I can tell you," said the Doctor: "so don't think it. You know I love you," he added with a horrible grin, which opened his harelip so wide that he seemed to be an ogre about to devour her; "and I love much more still the bank-notes that you have got in your bosom. Besides, it is my duty to protect you from Vitriol Bob; and, in addition to all this, I think we shall be able to knock up a very cozie partnership together."

"And suppose that I decline the honour you intend me?" asked the old woman, assuming a tone of bitter sarcasm in order to induce Rily to believe that she was not afraid—though, in reality, her heart was sinking within her.

"In the case which you have suggested, I shall force you to do as I choose and act as I desire," coolly responded the Doctor.

“Force me, indeed!” repeated the old woman, withdrawing her arm, and stopping short in the Waterloo Road.

“Yes—force you,” said Jack Rily, compelling her to take his arm again and also to walk on. “You had better not provoke me, because I am not the man to stick at trifles; and if you make a noise and raise a mob, I will swear black and blue that you are my wife—that you have bolted with my money—and that the notes are concealed somewhere about your person. Then, if the police should interfere, you will have to give an account of how you became possessed of the notes aforesaid;—and I dare say, from the estimate I have formed of your character, you would not like to be questioned on that point. In a word, then—unless I am mightily deceived—you have committed some nice little bit of roguery; and I mean to go halves with you.”

This tirade was spun out to such a length and delivered in such a measured tone of coolness, that Mrs. Mortimer, who was perfectly astounded at the menaces with which it opened, had leisure to recover her self-possession: but the rapid survey of her position which she was enabled to take while the Doctor was finishing his harangue, was far from consolatory. She had indeed committed a little roguery, and would indeed be sorry to be questioned by the police; and she knew, moreover, that Jack Rily was quite capable of carrying all his threats into immediate execution.

What, then, was she to do? There was no alternative but to bend to circumstances—make the best of a bad job—and trust to the chapter of accidents so as to avail herself of any occurrence that might turn up in her favour.

“Well—you keep silent, old gal,” said the Doctor, after a short pause. “Is it that you don’t admire me sufficiently to take me as a husband, in the fashion of leaping over the broom-stick?”

“It is of the utmost importance that I should attend to certain pressing matters,” returned Mrs. Mortimer; “and afterwards I shall be happy to fall into all your plans and projects.”

“Well, we will attend to the pressing matters together,” said the Doctor. “A husband and wife must have no secrets from each other. But since we have come this way, and as my abode happens to lie in the immediate neighbourhood, I propose at once to introduce you thereto and install you as mistress of the place. I have got a comfortable crib—for Torrens’s money did wonders for me as you may well suppose.”

At this moment a project flashed to the mind of the old woman. What if she were to yield, without farther hesitation or remonstrance, to the Doctor’s proposals, and watch her opportunity either to murder him or escape when he was asleep? By wheedling herself into his confidence, she would know where he deposited the money which, she feared, must pass from her hands into his own; and she could repossess herself of it, if he were disposed of, or if she were wakeful while he slept.

“I do not mind accompanying you to your lodgings,” she said; “and there we can talk over the whole business much better than in the open street.”

“There! now you are getting into a better frame of mind,” observed Jack Rily. “This way:”—and he turned into the low streets lying on the left-hand side of the Waterloo Road, between Upper Stamford Street and the New Cut.

The neighbourhood alluded to swarms with brothels of the most infamous description; and half-naked women may be seen at all hours lounging about at the doors, and endeavouring to entice into their dens any respectable-looking men who happen to pass that way. Robberies are of frequent occurrence in those houses of ill fame; and the great aim of the vile females inhabiting them, is to entrap persons who are the worse for liquor and whose appearance denotes a well-filled purse. Neighbourhoods of this kind should be shunned by all decent persons, as if a pestilence were raging there!

It was into Roupel-street that Jack Rily conducted Mrs. Mortimer; and when he had introduced her to a small but well furnished parlour, with a bed-chamber communicating by means of folding-doors, he produced a bottle of brandy, saying, “Now let us drink to our happy meeting this day!”

Filling two glasses with the potent liquor, he handed one to the old woman, who swallowed the contents greedily: for she felt that she stood in need of a stimulant.

“Now, my beautiful tiger-cat,” exclaimed the Doctor, as he drew down the blind over the window, “I am about to subject you to a little ceremony which may be perhaps looked upon as the least thing uncourteous; but it must be accomplished all the same. So don’t let us have any bother about it.”

Thus speaking, he approached the cupboard whence he had taken the brandy, and drawing forth a huge clasp-knife, he touched a spring which made the blade fly open and remain fixed as if it were a dagger.

“You do not mean to hurt me?” exclaimed the old woman, now becoming terribly alarmed—so much so, that she sank exhausted into a chair, while her looks were fixed appealingly on the man’s countenance.

“Not unless you grow obstreperous or have any of your nonsense,” said Jack. “I love you too well to harm you,” he added, with a leer that made him more hideously ugly than ever: “but I must have my own way all the same. So just be so kind as to place upon the table the Bank-notes which you have got in the bosom of your gown. It is but fair that I should have a wife who can bring me a dowry—and you must leave it to my generosity,” he went on to say, with a chuckling laugh, “how much I shall settle upon you afterwards.”

While he was thus speaking, Mrs. Mortimer rapidly revolved in her mind all the chances that were for or against her at that moment. Were she to scream and attempt resistance, could she succeed in alarming the neighbourhood before the miscreant would have plunged his dagger into her?—or, indeed, would he have recourse to such an extreme measure at all? These questions she at once decided against herself; and, reverting to her former project of affecting obedience, she thrust her hand into her bosom, dexterously separated a couple of the notes from the rest of the bundle, and threw those two upon the table.

Jack Rily instantly snatched them up; and when he perceived that they were for *a thousand pounds* each, he could scarcely contain his joy.

Flinging the terrible clasp-knife on the floor, he rushed upon the old woman, who was seized with too sudden and too profound a terror to permit her even to give utterance to the faintest ejaculation—for she thought that he intended to murder her: but her cruel apprehensions fled in another moment when the loathsome monster, throwing his arms about her neck, began to embrace and fondle her as if she were a blooming beauty of seventeen instead of a hideous harridan upwards of sixty. Nevertheless, old and polluted as she was, and inured to all circumstances of disgust as her term of transportation had rendered her, she revolted with a sickening sensation from the pawings and caresses of the hare-lipped wretch who had thus enfolded her in his horrible embrace. She therefore struggled to rid herself of him—to escape from his arms: but he, almost maddened with the joy which the sight of the bank-notes had raised up in his breast, hugged her only the more tightly in proportion as her resistance became the more desperate.

“By heavens! I’ll kiss you again, old gal!” he exclaimed. “I care not how ugly the world may consider you——Be quiet now, can’t you?——to me you’re a paragon of beauty——Perdition! let go of me, you hell-cat——there! now you’re magnificent in your rage—that’s the humour I like to see a woman in——Hey-dey! what’s that?”

And, as he uttered this ejaculation, he suddenly quitted his hold upon Mrs. Mortimer, and pounced upon something that had rolled on the floor.

It was the bundle of Bank-notes, which had fallen from the old woman’s dress during the struggle.

“By Jove! here’s a treasure—a fortune—a King’s ransom!” ejaculated the Doctor, scarcely able to believe his eyes, as he hastily turned over the notes with his hands. “My God! it is impossible!” he cried, his wonderment increasing to such a pitch, that he began to think he must be insane: then, a sudden idea striking him, he turned abruptly towards Mrs. Mortimer, who had sunk back, exhausted and overwhelmed with rage and grief, into the chair. “Ah! I understand it all now,” he said, his voice changing in a moment to the low tone of solemn mystery: “you are a nice old girl, you are! Yes—yes—I understand it at last! These are all queer screens[26]—and you went into the bank to smash[27] some of them. By Jove! it’s glorious.”

Mrs. Mortimer, who was gasping for breath, could make no reply: her mouth was parched—her tongue was as dry as if she had been travelling for hours over a desert without tasting water.

“And yet,” resumed Jack Rily, scrutinising the notes more narrowly still, “these are precious good imitations—too good to be imitations, indeed. I know enough of Bank-notes—aye, and of forged ones too—to see that these are the genuine flimsies. Blood and thunder! what a glorious old wretch you are!” he cried, again surveying her with a joy that was entirely unfeigned and amounted almost to admiration. “I suppose you have committed some splendid forgery. But of course it must be something of that kind,” he added, a sudden reminiscence striking him: “or else you wouldn’t have been so deucedly alarmed when I threatened just now to kick up a row in the streets and attract the notice of the police. So, you perceive, that I was pretty keen in my surmises. I knew you had money concealed in your bosom—and I was equally well convinced you had not obtained it by means that would bear inquiry. However, here it is—in my possession—and it can’t be in safer hands. I’ll just sit down quietly, and count how much there is.”

Thus speaking, the monster picked up his clasp-knife, which he closed and consigned to his pocket; and he next proceeded to inspect the Bank-notes. But when he discovered the enormous sum to which they amounted, his astonishment grew to such an extreme as even to subdue his joy; and, shaking his head slowly, he observed, “This is such a heavy affair that the police will leave no stone unturned to detect the holders of the notes. Whatever we do, must be done at once; and in order that I should be able to judge what course to pursue, you must give me all the particulars of the transaction.”

Mrs. Mortimer was struck by the truth of this observation: for she knew that the moment the forgery was detected, payment of the notes would be stopped, and advertisements announcing the usual caution would be inserted in the newspapers.

“Well, I suppose there is no use in disguising the real truth,” she exclaimed, recovering her self-possession; “and I will tell you all about it in a few words. A certain nobleman——”

“Who is he?” demanded Rily. “Come—speak out plainly.”

“The Marquis of Delmour, since you must know,” returned the old woman.

“And what did he do,” asked the man, impatiently.

“He gave me a cheque for six hundred pounds for a particular service that I rendered him; and he also gave my daughter——”

“Ah! you have got a daughter, eh?” exclaimed Jack Rily. “Is she anything like yourself?”

“She is as beautiful as an angel,” answered Mrs. Mortimer, a scintillation of a mother’s pride flashing at the moment in her bosom: “but as depraved and dissolute as a demoness,” she added almost immediately. “Well, this Marquis of Delmour was wheedled by her out of a cheque for sixty thousand pounds; and though my daughter kept it quiet enough, I found out the secret. So away I sped—back to England I came——”

“Where did all this happen, then?” demanded Jack.

“In Paris—three days ago,” replied Mrs. Mortimer. “On my arrival in London, my course was easy——”

“You may almost say *natural*,” interrupted the Doctor. “I understand the business plainly enough at present. You altered your six hundred pound draft into one for sixty thousand—and you have thus forestalled your daughter?”

“That is precisely how the matter stands,” said the old woman.

“And when is it likely that your daughter will be in London to present *her* cheque?” asked the Doctor.

“I should say that I had about twelve hours’ start of her,” was the response; “and then, as she would not travel by night—having a

handsome young foreigner as her companion—the circumstance of her stopping to sleep on the road would delay her pretty nearly another twelve hours. Besides, she believes me to be still in Paris—she has not the least idea of my sudden return to England; and therefore she has no particular motive to induce her to adopt any extraordinary speed."

"Well, well," cried the Doctor, impatiently: "but all this palaver does not answer my question. When do you expect your daughter will reach London?"

"This evening," replied the old woman: "too late to present her cheque at the bank. And there *are* means—yes, there are means," she continued in a musing tone, "which, if skilfully adopted, would compel my daughter to refrain from offering her draft at all, and likewise force her to leave us in undisturbed possession of the money."

"And those means?" demanded Jack Rily, his eyes brightening.

"Before I explain myself, let us come to a thorough understanding," said Mrs. Mortimer. "Will you restore me one-half of the amount you now hold in your possession? I am content to abandon the other half to you."

"Yes, that is a bargain," answered Jack Rily; "for I see that you do not relish the idea of living with me altogether, and that you will leave me when this matter is properly settled. Is it not so?"

"Well, such is indeed my intention," responded the old woman.

"Our relative position now stands in this manner," continued Jack Rily: "there are sixty thousand pounds' worth of good notes. With all my connexion amongst fences and receivers of such flimsy, I could not manage to obtain gold for more than two or three thousand in the course of the day; and to-morrow morning your daughter may present her cheque, when a discovery will take place, and all the rest of the notes will be useless. As for going over to the continent, and endeavouring to pass them there, the thing would be ridiculous; for the advertisements in the newspapers would put all the money-changers in Europe upon their guard. Thus far, then, the notes are not worth more than two or three thousand pounds to me. But, on the other hand, you say that you have the means of stopping your daughter's mouth, and compelling her to put up with the loss. In this case, the whole amount of notes becomes available; and therefore we will share and share alike."

"Then give me my moiety at once," said the old woman, with greedy impatience.

"No such thing!" ejaculated Rily: "I must have some guarantee that you act properly in this business; and you can have no hesitation in putting your trust in me, because you have had a proof of my good feeling before. I have not forgotten that you saved my life in the struggle with Vitriol Bob; and the same feeling that made me give you half the spoil *then*, will prompt me to act with equal fairness now. You are therefore at liberty to depart when you choose, and to go where you like: the notes will remain in my possession—and when you come back to me with the assurance that you have prevented your daughter from taking any step that may lead to an explosion of the whole business, your share shall be immediately forthcoming. I have now put the matter in the proper light; and with such a good understanding, there can be no quarrelling. As to whether you afterwards choose to become my broom-stick wife, I must leave it entirely to yourself: for though I should be as happy as a king in the possession of your old person and sixty thousand pounds, yet I shall be able to console myself for your loss by means of the thirty thousand that will remain to me."

During this long tirade, all the first portion of which was delivered in a tone of business-like seriousness, Mrs. Mortimer was hastily reflecting upon the improvement that had so unexpectedly taken place in the aspect of her affairs: for she now found herself at liberty to leave the monster whom she loathed and abhorred, and she had every chance of regaining and being able to make use of the moiety of the Bank-notes.

She accordingly assented to the conditions proposed by the Doctor, leaving the broom-stick marriage "an open question;" and having settled her disordered attire, she took her departure—not however before she had been compelled to submit to another hugging on the part of the hare-lipped wretch whose caresses were so revolting and intolerable.

CHAPTER CXCIV.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER AGAIN.

It was about five o'clock in the evening of the same day on which these events occurred, that Laura Mortimer and the Count of Carignano, attended by Rosalie, arrived in London by the South Eastern Railway; and they immediately repaired to an hotel at the west-end of the town.

Although the young Italian nobleman had experienced sufficient leisure for reflection with regard to the step which he was about to take, the enthusiasm of his passion had not undergone the least abatement: on the contrary, the more he saw of Laura, and the longer he was in her company, the more ardently did he burn to make her his wife.

Nor can this infatuation on his part be a subject of wonder or surprise with our readers: for when it is remembered that the artful creature united the most winning ways and captivating manners to the most transcendent loveliness, and that the Count of Carignano had the warm Italian blood flowing in his veins,—when, too, it is recollected that the syren maintained an incessant fire upon his heart with the artillery of her charms and her fascinations—never permitting the conversation to droop throughout the journey, and never seeming wearied of lavishing the tenderest caresses upon her handsome companion,—when all these circumstances are taken into consideration, it cannot be a matter of wonderment if the silken chains in which Lorenzo was ensnared, were completely rivetted.

There was also this fact which served to strengthen *his* love and *her* power: namely, that she had not invited him to return to her in Paris—she had not sought to retain him within the sphere of her influence on the occasion of their first amour—she had not played the part of a mere adventuress or husband-hunter towards him. No: she had dismissed him with the understanding that their connexion could not be renewed—that she could neither become his wife nor his mistress;—and the young man had of his own accord flown back to her, as a suppliant for her hand! That she *could* be an adventuress or a husband-hunter, never therefore entered his imagination—even if for an instant he paused to ponder with any degree of seriousness upon her character; and so far from considering that he was bestowing any favour upon her by making her the sharer of his wealth and title, he looked upon himself as the party owing the obligation—he regarded himself as the happy individual who had the greater reason to rejoice at the connexion.

On her part, Laura Mortimer was most anxious that the marriage-knot should be tied as speedily as possible: for she naturally longed to place beyond all possibility of doubt or disappointment the brilliant destiny that had suddenly developed itself to her view. Even the possession of the cheque for sixty thousand pounds was a secondary consideration, in comparison with her desire to secure that proud title of Countess which was now within her reach.

Having partaken of a hasty dinner at the hotel, Laura and her intended husband repaired without delay to a fashionable house-agent in the neighbourhood; and it happened that he had upon his list a furnished villa of which possession might be taken at an hour's notice. It was situated in Westbourne Place, Pimlico, and was in perfect readiness for the reception of occupants. Thither the Count, Laura, and the house-agent immediately proceeded; and as the villa fully corresponded, in all its conveniences and appointments, with the description given, an arrangement was effected upon the spot for the tenancy.

Laura and the Count returned, however, to the hotel for that night; and early in the morning they repaired to Doctors' Commons, where the young nobleman speedily obtained a special license. Thence, attended by Rosalie, they drove to a church at no very great distance; and by eleven o'clock the hands of Laura Mortimer and the Count of Carignano were united at the altar.

The incidents of this forenoon had, however, been closely watched by Mrs. Mortimer.

The wily old woman, upon quitting the Doctor the day before, had reasoned thus within herself:—

"Laura has captivated a young Italian nobleman *whom she feels she can love—whom she already loves—and who possesses a proud title and princely revenues*. Those were the very words which she used when she communicated her matrimonial intentions to me in Paris. I know her well enough to be fully convinced that she will not delay a moment after her return to London, in securing her admirer. A special license must be the means—and, as her intended husband is a foreigner, Laura will no doubt accompany him, at least into the neighbourhood of Doctors' Commons. Even the presentation of her cheque at the banker's will be quite a secondary matter, when compared with the grand object of securing the coronet which she so much covets!"

It was in consequence of these reflections that Mrs. Mortimer rose early in the morning and repaired to the district of Doctors' Commons, where it is no difficult matter to become an observer without being observed, in the maze of narrow streets and little courts forming that neighbourhood. Nor was she mistaken in her conjecture—neither had she long to wait. In a short time a carriage—hired

from the hotel—made its appearance, and a handsome young man, with a clear olive complexion and a glossy moustache, alighted. A lady thrust out her head to give him a few whispered instructions; and the beauteous countenance was not so completely shaded by the white bonnet and the veil, but that Mrs. Mortimer, from the nook where she had concealed herself, could recognise the features of her daughter. In a short time the handsome Italian returned, his own countenance glowing with delight; and the moment he re-entered the vehicle, it drove away. Mrs. Mortimer had a cab in attendance; and she followed the carriage to within sight of the church at which it stopped. She then dismissed the cab, and boldly entered the church, in order to become perfectly convinced that no unexpected accident should interfere with the marriage ceremony. Seating herself in a pew at a distance from the altar, she could behold everything without being observed by those whom she was thus watching. She saw Laura converse for a few moments with the sexton, who immediately afterwards hurried away; and in about a quarter of an hour he returned in company with the clergyman and the clerk. The ceremony then took place; and when the Count of Carignano was leading Laura back to the carriage, Rosalie being in close attendance upon them, Mrs. Mortimer suddenly emerged from the pew.

For an instant her daughter started and seemed profoundly vexed at this abrupt and unaccountable appearance of her parent; but in the next moment she recovered her self-possession, and, assuming a smiling countenance, said, “I thought you were in Paris; this therefore is an unexpected pleasure. Permit me, Lorenzo,” she added, turning, towards her husband, “to present my mother, who has thus accidentally happened to enter, *for her own devotions*, the very church where our marriage has taken place.”

As she uttered these words, Laura glanced with imperious signification at the old woman, as much as to enjoin her not to undeceive the Count relative to the accidental nature of this meeting: for the bride now understood full well that her mother had been watching her movements—though for what purpose she could not possibly divine.

“I am delighted to have the honour of an introduction to Mrs. Mortimer,” said the Count, taking the old woman’s hand: “and I hope that she approves of the alliance which her daughter has just formed?”

“Oh! assuredly, my lord,” answered the harridan: “but I regret that I was not duly invited to be present at the ceremony. However, I am not the less contented that it should have taken place; and as my stay in London is very short, your lordship will perhaps excuse me if I crave a few minutes’ private conversation with my daughter.”

“You may accompany us to the house which we have taken, mother,” said Laura: “and my dear Lorenzo will there grant us an opportunity of discoursing alone——on family matters——for a short time.”

“Certainly!” exclaimed the nobleman, who was too happy to offer an objection to anything proposed by his charming wife, and who saw nothing sinister nor strange in the present scene, unless indeed it were the sudden and unexpected presence of the mother: but as she had offered no objection to the match, he did not choose to trouble his own felicity with any conjecture as to the cause of her abrupt appearance on the occasion.

The bride, bridegroom, Mrs. Mortimer, and Rosalie (who had acted as bridemaid) accordingly entered the carriage, which drove away at a rapid pace towards Pimlico.

During the ride the conversation was of that general nature which settled upon no particular topic, and which therefore needs no detail here; and on the arrival of the party at the beautiful little villa in Westbourne Place, Mrs. Mortimer and Laura were speedily closetted together.

The moment they were thus alone, Laura’s countenance suddenly changed; and her features assumed an expression of something more than sternness—for it was rage—as she said in an imperious tone, “Why have you been watching my movements?—and how dared you thus to intrude yourself upon me at such a time and place?”

“Because it is of the utmost importance that I should confer with you at once on a subject of deep interest to us both,” replied Mrs. Mortimer, adopting a voice and manner of such cool insolence as to convince the shrewd and penetrating Laura that some circumstance had transpired to enable the old woman to proclaim her independence.

“And of what nature is that subject?” inquired the young lady, still treating her mother with a coolness almost amounting to disdain.

“In one sense, I am completely in your power: in another sense, you are entirely in mine,” returned Mrs. Mortimer; “and therefore mutual concessions are necessary to enable us both to enjoy peace, and follow our own ways unmolested.”

“You must explain yourself more fully yet,” said Laura, believing the announcement that *she* was in her mother’s power to allude to the secrets which the old woman might reveal relative to the dissoluteness of her former life. “If you desire me to render you any service,” she added, after a few moments’ pause, “you should not address me in the shape of menaces; because you know my disposition well enough to be fully aware that I am not likely to yield to them, even though my own interests should suffer by my obstinacy in that respect.”

“Perhaps you will talk differently in a few minutes,” observed the old woman. “If we now stand face to face as enemies, it is your own fault.”

“We will not re-argue all the points involved in that accusation,” said Laura. “Remember the scene in Suffolk Street—remember also

the remarks which passed between us the other evening in Paris; and then cease to charge me with the misunderstandings that may have sprung up between us. You desired to play the despot's part—I resisted—and in these few words all our differences are summed up. But I imagine that those differences were settled, and that an arrangement was made, whereby you were to dwell apart from me and receive a quarterly stipend of two hundred pounds. Have you thought better of the business?—or do you require some other terms?"

"Yes—I require other terms, indeed," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer: then, fixing her eyes full upon the countenance of her daughter, she said, "I am in possession of a secret which would ruin you——"

"Enough, mother!" ejaculated Laura, her beauteous countenance becoming scarlet with rage. "I will hear no more—for I understand your menace. But now listen to *me*! You fancy that I am in your power:—you think that if you seek my husband and reveal to him all the particulars of my past life—my amours—my profligacy,—you flatter yourself, I say, that his love will turn to hatred, and that he will discard me! Now, I dare you to do your worst—I fear you not! In the first place, you shall not see my husband again: in the second, you could succeed in working no change in his sentiments towards me. I would give you the lie to every word you uttered! He knows that I am not a goddess of purity: but I should have little difficulty in persuading him that you are magnifying a comparatively venial frailty into a monstrous dissoluteness. And now, mother, you may leave me as speedily as you choose—and spare me the pain of thrusting you from my doors by main force."

Sublime and grand in the majesty of her beauty was the voluptuous—wanton—unprincipled Perdita,—(for on this occasion we must give her the name which so admirably represents her character),—as, drawn up to her full height, and with heaving bosom, flashing eyes, and expanding nostrils, she thus addressed her mother. Having laid aside her bonnet, shawl, and long white gloves, she seemed like a Pythoness in her bridal garments; and her manner was as energetic and awe-inspiring, as her voice was emphatic and determined in its full silver tones.

But the old woman lost not her composure: on the contrary, she listened to her daughter with the calm insolence of one possessing a last argument the enunciation of which would crush and overwhelm.

"One word, Laura," she said, in a voice that commanded the young lady's attention: "one word—and then act as you choose. If I ere now adopted a tone of menace, it was not with the intention of wielding such paltry and poor weapons as those to which you have alluded. I had not *then*, and have not *now*, the slightest intention of venting my spite in petty tittle-tattle relative to your amours: I will not afford you the chance," she added, with keen sarcasm, "of using your sophistry for the purpose of colouring your dissoluteness so as to give it the air of a mere feminine frailty."

"Cease this long preface, and come to the point at once," said Laura, a vague fear coming over her, but which she concealed beneath a cold and rigid expression of countenance: at the same time, she saw full well that her mother was really possessed of some secret power whereof she was determined to make the most.

"My preface is done," continued Mrs. Mortimer; "and now for the matter to which it was to lead. You have this day married the Count of Carignano?"

"You need scarcely ask that question," said Laura; "since you have ere now accompanied us from the church where the ceremony was performed."

"And you will henceforth style yourself *Countess of Carignano?*" proceeded the old woman, still adopting an interrogatory style.

"Certainly," responded Laura: "I shall use the title to which marriage has given me a right. But to what point, may I once more ask, is all this long discourse to come?"

"To *this*," answered the old woman, approaching her daughter and sinking her voice to a low whisper: "to *this*," she repeated, her countenance becoming stern and resolute, while she abruptly stamped her foot imperiously upon the carpet: "to *this*, Laura—that your marriage of to-day is no marriage at all—that you consequently have no more right than I to the title of Countess—and that you have drawn down upon your head the peril of a prosecution for *bigamy*!"

An ice-chill came upon the heart of the young lady as these withering words met her ears: but, by means of an effort so powerful that it was anguish even to exercise it,—yes, agony thus to restrain her pent-up rage from finding a vent in a furious outburst,—she preserved an outward calmness which astonished her mother, who had expected to bring her down as an abject suppliant upon her knees.

"You must still explain yourself farther," said Laura, in a cold tone.

"What! you affect not to understand me?" exclaimed the old woman. "Or would you have the insolence to deny that you are already married to Charles Hatfield?"

"I do not condescend to a falsehood upon the subject—at least with *you*," responded Laura, contemptuously: though internally her agitation was immense.

"And yet you *did* deny it in Paris," said the old woman. "But I was aware of the fact at the time—and I cherished the secret, well knowing that it would serve me some day or another. I little thought, however, that I should so soon be compelled to make use of it."

“And for what purpose have you now proclaimed your knowledge thereof?” demanded Laura, a gleam of joy lighting up in her soul as she perceived that her mother was vexed and embarrassed by the calmness with which her menaces were received.

“In a word,” resumed the old woman, “we are in the power of each other. You can transport *me*—and I can transport *you*.”

“Again must I request you to explain yourself,” said Laura. “You are evidently fencing with something that you wish, yet fear to communicate.”

“I will speak out at once,” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer. “The cheque which the Marquis of Delmour gave me for six hundred pounds, I altered in such a way as to make it represent sixty thousand; and I yesterday obtained the amount from the bankers. If you present *your* cheque, I shall be ruined; and therefore I propose a compromise.”

“And by way of opening the negociation, you level menaces at my head,” said Laura, who, though at first startled by the announcement of the tremendous fraud perpetrated by her mother, had speedily recovered her self-possession.

“What, then, is your decision?” asked the old woman, trembling from head to foot, and no longer able to conceal the horrible fears that had come upon her: for she began to fancy that her daughter would not yield even to the threats that had been used to coerce her. “What is your decision, I repeat?”

“To refuse all compromise—to accept the gauntlet which you threw down at first, and which you would now gladly take back again—to place myself in a condition of open hostility to you!” answered Laura, her countenance growing stern and pale, and her lips quivering slightly.

“But it will be transportation for us both,” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer: “I for forgery—you for bigamy!”

“Permit me to give you *my* view of the case,” said Laura. “I hold a cheque for sixty thousand pounds, which I shall present to-morrow; and the money must be paid to me. The bankers will be the sufferers by the forgery—not I, nor the Marquis of Delmour. This disposes of one part of the question. For the rest, I have only to observe that even if I were tried and convicted for bigamy, a fortune of sixty thousand pounds would be no mean consolation during, perhaps, imprisonment for two years or transportation for seven. I am not, however, so sure that any prosecution of the kind will take place, be you never so vindictive: for I question whether you will have the courage to open your lips to accuse *me* of bigamy, seeing that it would not only be *forgery* with which I should charge you—but *murder!*”

“Murder!” repeated the old woman, half in indignation and half in terror: “what mean you?”

“I mean that Mr. Torrens, your husband, *met with a violent death*,” answered Laura,—“that you yourself gave me this information—and that you came over to London to be revenged upon him for his conduct of former times! Now, mother,” she exclaimed, her countenance suddenly becoming radiant with triumph,—“*now* will you dare to repeat your menaces against me?”

The old woman staggered back a few paces, and sank into a chair. The tables had been completely turned against her: she had come to conquer—and she must depart conquered;—she had sought out Laura in the hope of reducing her to submission—she was herself now crushed and overwhelmed.

There was something shocking in the mortal enmity which had thus sprung up between the mother and daughter,—the former threatening transportation—the latter pointing to the gibbet looming in the distance!

“But you know—you know, in your own heart, that I did *not* take the life of Torrens?” suddenly ejaculated the old woman, starting from her seat.

“I know nothing more than what you yourself told me, mother,” said Laura; “and if the matter should happen to go before the magistrate for investigation, I shall only state *what I do know*—and shall not assist your cause with any conjecture relative to your innocence.”

“And would you send me to the scaffold?” demanded the wretched woman, her voice becoming plaintive and mournful: “would you place me in such a position that I must inevitably sink beneath a mass of circumstantial evidence, and be condemned as a murderess?”

“Would you send your own child into transportation, the horrors of which you yourself have experienced?” asked Laura, bitterly.

“Oh! my God—this is a punishment for all my crimes!” exclaimed the miserable Mrs. Mortimer, a pang of remorse suddenly shooting through her heart like a barbed and fiery arrow.

“You should have calculated all the consequences before you came hither to menace me,” observed Laura, still in a cold and severe tone—a tone that was unpitying and merciless.

“Can nothing move you?” asked the wretched woman, now completely subdued and cast down—overwhelmed and spirit-broken.

“Nothing!” responded Laura, sternly. “You may do your worst—I fear you not; and henceforth I acknowledge you not as my mother!”

Saturated with crimes—steeped in profligacy as the old woman's soul was, nevertheless this sudden renunciation of her by her own daughter went like a death-pang to her heart. She fell back again into the seat from which she had started a few minutes previously—a deadly pallor came over her countenance, rendering it hideous and ghastly as if the finger of the Destroyer were upon her—and her breath came in long and difficult sobs.

But her daughter stood gazing unmoved on this piteous spectacle,—stood like an avenging goddess, in her white robes, as if about to immolate her victim upon an altar!

"Give me a glass of water, Laura—for the love of God, a glass of water!" gasped the old woman at length, as she extended her arms piteously towards the relentless being, whose heart, so voluptuously tender beneath the influence of love, was hard as adamant against the appeals of her parent.

"Nothing—no, not even a drop of water, nor a crust of bread shall you receive beneath my roof," was the unpitying, remorseless answer.

"Then my curse be upon you—my curse be upon your dwelling, and all whom it contains!" cried the old woman, suddenly recovering her own energy and firmness—for the last words of her daughter had goaded her to desperation.

"The curses of fiends turn to blessings," said Laura, in a calm and deliberate voice.

"But a mother's curse is a terrible—terrible thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, fixing her haggard eyes intently upon her daughter, who returned the gaze with looks of proud disdain and haughty defiance.

The old woman then rose slowly from her seat, and as slowly walked towards the door; on reaching which she turned round, and said, "Is there no way of restoring peace between us?"

"None," was the resolute and laconic answer.

Mrs. Mortimer hesitated yet for a few moments; then, as if suddenly embracing a desperate resolve, or struck by some terrible idea of vengeance, she abruptly quitted the room.

Laura listened, with suspended breath, to hear whether there was any one in the hall for her mother to speak to; but her apprehensions on this head were speedily relieved, and in a few moments the front door closed behind the old woman.

The Count of Carignano, who had watched her departure from the drawing-room window, now hastened to join his lovely wife.

"The interview has been a long one—and, I fear, not altogether pleasant, dearest," he exclaimed, as he clasped Laura in his arms.

"My mother wished to exercise over me a despotism to which I cannot yield," responded the bride. "But wherefore did you conjecture that our meeting was disagreeable?"

"Became your countenance is very pale, my love," answered the Count, in a voice full of tenderness. "Ah! now it is growing animated—and the colour of the rose is returning to your lovely cheeks."

"Yes," murmured the fascinating woman, as she wound her snowy arms about her husband's neck, "it is because your presence has restored me to happiness, and banished from my mind the unpleasant impressions excited by my mother's behaviour. But we shall see her no more—and naught can now interfere with our perfect felicity."

"This assurance delights me," answered the Count, gazing with a joyous admiration upon the splendid creature who had that morning become his bride.

CHAPTER CXCV.

HORRORS.

It will be recollected that Mrs. Mortimer was far from being unprovided with money—her share of the spoil obtained from Torrens still being in her possession, with the trifling deduction of the few pounds she had expended in travelling, clothes, and maintenance, during the interval that had elapsed since the occurrences in Stamford Street.

The bulk of the amount thus remaining to her had been carefully sewn in her stays, so that it had altogether escaped the notice of Jack Rily: and thus the old woman was not destitute of resources.

But the sum in her possession was a mere trifle when compared with that which she had hoped to acquire from the forgery; and she now resolved to leave no stone unturned—no measure unattempted, however desperate, in order to accomplish her aim. Besides, she longed—she craved to wreak a terrific vengeance upon her daughter,—yes—upon her own daughter: for the remorse and the softer feelings which had ere now found an avenue into her breast, when Laura renounced her, were only evanescent and short-lived. We have moreover seen that this temporary weakness was speedily succeeded by the desperation produced by a terrible resolve to which her mind came as it were all in a moment!

Impelled by this sinister influence, Mrs. Mortimer lost no time in repairing to Roupel Street, where she found Jack Rily lolling in a chair, smoking his pipe and enjoying a quart of half-and-half.

“Well, my old tiger-cat, what news?” he exclaimed, the moment Mrs. Mortimer made her appearance. “Have you succeeded with your beautiful daughter?”

“Very far from it,” was the answer. “And now,” she added, ere the Doctor had time to give vent to the oath which rose to his lips through the vexation of disappointment,—“and now the matter has come to that extreme point when nothing but a desperate step can prevent the presentation of the genuine cheque to-morrow.”

“Are you sure it will not be presented to-day?” demanded Jack Rily.

“Yes; my daughter said that she should present it *to-morrow*,” responded Mrs. Mortimer; “and I have every reason to believe that she will not go near the bank to-day. In fact, she was married this morning to a young Italian nobleman, whom she loves deeply, and whom she will not therefore quit, even for an hour, on her wedding-day.”

“Well, and what do you propose?” asked Jack Rily, fixing upon her a significant look, which shewed that he already more than half divined what was passing in her bosom.

“Are you man enough to risk all—every thing—for the sake of that thirty thousand pounds which will become your share if we succeed?” demanded the old woman, returning the look with one of equally ominous meaning.

“I am man enough to do any thing for such a sum!” he answered, sinking his voice to a low whisper, and laying down his pipe—a proof that he considered the topic of discourse to be growing too serious to permit any abstraction of the thoughts.

“Then you understand me?” said Mrs. Mortimer, leaning forward, and surveying him with a penetration which appeared to read the secrets of his inmost soul.

“Yes—I understand you, my tiger-cat,” replied the man; and he drew his hand significantly across his throat.

“Well, and will you do it?” she asked.

“But it is your own daughter,” he observed, shuddering at the atrocity of the woman’s mind which could calmly contemplate such a fearful deed.

“She has renounced me,” was the laconic answer.

“Nevertheless, you are still her mother,” persisted Jack Rily.

“I discard her—for ever!” responded the horrible old woman.

“Well—you astounded me at first,” said the Doctor, in a slow tone, as he reflected profoundly upon the extreme step suggested: “but I can look at the business with a more steady eye *now*. I always thought that I was bad enough: but, by God! you beat anything I ever knew in the shape of wickedness.”

“Then you refuse—you decline?” exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, interrogatively, while rage convulsed her entire frame—for she dreaded lest the money should be lost, and Laura escape her vengeance.

“By Satan!” cried the Doctor; “if you have pluck enough to propose, I am not the man to refuse to execute the scheme. But how do I know that when the critical moment comes, remorse won’t seize on you, and you’ll cry off?”

“When I have made up my mind to anything, I am not to be deterred by difficulty—danger—or compunction,” answered the old woman. “I implored the ungrateful girl to give me a glass of water, when I was choking—and she refused. What mercy can I have towards her?”

“None,” responded Jack Rily. “But you must enter into farther explanations, old tiger-cat: because at present I’m pretty well in the dark relative to the precise nature of your plans, and the way in which they are to be executed. It’s now four o’clock in the afternoon—and we must settle everything without delay, if it’s to be done *to-night*.”

“It *is* for to-night,” said the old woman, emphatically. “My daughter and her husband have taken a house in Pimlico——”

“How many servants?” demanded Jack Rily.

“I cannot exactly answer the question: but I know that there is a French lady’s maid; and I saw an English valet, who had been recommended by the house-agent——”

“Never mind who recommended him,” interrupted the Doctor, impatiently; “he is there—and that’s enough for us. All I care about knowing is how many people we may have to deal with.”

“But the venture must be made at any risk,” observed Mrs. Mortimer. “It is of the highest consequence to us to gain possession of the genuine cheque——”

“And put the holder of it out of the way,” added Jack Rily. “Oh! I understand your drift plainly enough: but I wish to see my course clear—because I’d better do the best I can with the notes under existing circumstances, rather than get a bullet through my brain or find myself laid by the heels in Newgate some time between this and to-morrow morning.”

“Certainly—certainly,” remarked Mrs. Mortimer. “Well—upon what do you decide?”

“To risk the business,” answered Jack, starting from his seat. “And now I’ll just go and take a quiet walk down into Pimlico, for the purpose of surveying the premises. Whereabouts is it?”

“Westbourne Place, No.——,” replied Mrs. Mortimer.

“Well—you can meet me again down in that neighbourhood at about midnight,” said the Doctor. “Where shall the place of appointment be?”

“In Sloane Square, if you like,” observed the old woman.

“Good—precisely at midnight. And now be off—because I am going to hide the Bank-notes so that nobody may be able to find them during my absence,” said the Doctor, with a meaning look. “Of course I need hardly tell you that if you are scheming or manœuvring to get me into a plant down at Pimlico, you’ll never go away alive to make a boast of it.”

“The idea that I should act in such a way, is ridiculous,” returned Mrs. Mortimer.

“Well—there is no harm in giving you the caution, old tiger-cat,” remarked the Doctor, carelessly. “So tramp off—and be punctual to our appointment.”

“I shall not fail,” said the horrible woman, who thereupon took her departure.

How she passed the remainder of that day, we know not. Suffice it to say that the leisure-time which she had for reflection did not induce her to change her mind nor swerve from her purpose: on the contrary, as she entered Sloane Square a few minutes before midnight, it was with a determination to take her share in the awful tragedy which she contemplated—namely, the murder of her own daughter and the Count of Carignano. Bad and depraved as she was, never in her life until this occasion had she thought so calmly and coolly of shedding blood: for if on the previous day she had harboured the design of assassinating Jack Rily, in order to regain possession of the Bank-notes, it was not without a cold shudder, even though there was something like aggravation to inspire the idea. But now she had brought herself—or circumstances had tutored her—to survey with a diabolical tranquillity the hideous, appalling crime which she had in view; and as she walked along, she clutched with savage triumph a clasp-knife that she had purchased during the evening.

Precisely as the clock struck twelve Jack Rily joined her.

“Well, you have not altered your mind?” he said.

“It is rather for me to ask you that question,” was her response.

“Oh, I am resolute enough!” he observed; and through the semi-obscurity of the night she could see his large white teeth flashing hideously between the opening in his lip. “I have taken a good survey of the premises,” he continued, “and know exactly how to proceed. Have you got any weapon, old tiger-cat?”

“This,” she replied, placing the clasp-knife in his hand.

He opened the blade—felt it—closed it again—and, returning the knife to his companion, said, “That will do. But there is one thing that troubles me a little,” he added, after a few moments’ hesitation; “and I’ll be hanged if I can get it off my mind. Yet—perdition seize it!—I am no coward either.”

“What have you to fear, then?” demanded the old woman, hastily.

“Why, to tell you the truth——but come along farther away from the lamps——to tell you the truth, as I was jogging quietly down Sloane Street just now,” continued Rily, glancing furtively around, “some one, coming hastily up from a narrow street on the right-hand side, passed just in front of me. We almost ran against each other, and I caught a glimpse of the fellow’s countenance——”

“Who was he?” asked Mrs. Mortimer, shuddering in anticipation of the reply.

“Vitriol Bob,” was the answer.

“I thought you were going to say so,” exclaimed the old woman. “But perhaps he did not notice you—and even if he did, I suppose you are not afraid that he will attempt any mischief?”

“Whether he noticed me or not, I can’t say,” replied the Doctor; “because the encounter was so abrupt—so sudden—that he was off again in an instant. But if he did, I am well aware that he is capable of anything. However, I don’t mean to let *that* prey upon my mind, I can tell you.”

“And yet it *does* seem to have depressed you a little,” said Mrs. Mortimer.

“Well—I’d rather it shouldn’t have happened—that’s all!” ejaculated the ruffian, forcing himself to assume a gaiety which he did not altogether feel; for, though no coward, yet the incident of his meeting with his sworn foe in the manner described, had troubled him.

Doubtless the man’s mind, contemplating a diabolical crime, was more disposed to superstitious terrors, and to acknowledge the influence of presentiments, than on ordinary occasions: hence the vague uneasiness and undefined apprehensions that had seized upon him.

Mrs. Mortimer caught the dispiriting effects of the encounter which her confederate had experienced with one of the most desperate ruffians in London; and such a chill fell upon her mind, that she was about to propose the abandonment of the scheme, when Jack Rily suddenly exclaimed, “Well thought of! I’ve something in my pocket that will do us good!”

With these words he produced a flask of brandy, which he handed to the old woman, who drank deeply: he then applied it to his own lips, and drained it of its contents.

“Now I feel all right again!” he cried, as he restored the empty bottle to his pocket. “There’s nothing like a drop of the bingo at a crisis of this nature.”

“Nothing!” observed Mrs. Mortimer, assentingly: for she likewise felt all her resolution—or rather hard-heartedness—suddenly revive under the influence of the alcohol.

“Now, then, let us proceed to business,” said Jack. “I have got my own clasp-knife—a darkey[28]—and a small jimmey,”[29] he continued; “and blowed if it shall be my fault, should we fail in the crack[30] to-night——”

“And all that is to follow,” added Mrs. Mortimer, to whom the brandy had imparted a ferociousness which made her thirst as it were to drink her own daughter’s blood.

The two miscreants—male and female—now proceeded in silence; and as they entered Westbourne Place a lovely moon broke forth from behind a cloud hitherto dark and menacing.

“This is the house,” said Mrs. Mortimer, when they came within sight of the dwelling where Laura and the Count of Carignano were slumbering in each other’s arms.

“I know it, old gal,” responded Jack Rily. “We must turn into the lane that leads down by the side of the premises. Come along—quick—there’s a person approaching from behind.”

And, followed by the old woman, he darted into the alley which separated the Count of Carignano’s abode from the neighbouring row of houses.

At the back of the villa there was a small garden, the boundary-wall of which was of no great height; and the Doctor, in the survey of the premises which he took during the evening, had made up his mind to effect an entry in the rear of the building.

“All is quiet,” he said, in a low whisper to his companion. “I will climb on to the top of the wall, and then help you up. We will soon make light work of it.”

But scarcely were these words uttered, when a dark shadow appeared at the end of the lane—and in another moment Jack Rily and Mrs. Mortimer beheld a man hastening towards them.

The old woman instinctively drew close up to her powerful confederate for protection, in case mischief should be intended; and scarcely was this movement effected, when the cause of apprehension was close up to the spot where she and Rily were standing in the deep shade of the wall.

At that instant the moon-beams fell fully upon the man’s countenance; and a cry of horror burst from the lips of Mrs. Mortimer as she recognised her terrible enemy—Vitriol Bob! Simultaneously with that cry, an ejaculation of rage escaped from Jack Rily, who, dashing the old woman away from him, sprang towards the formidable foe.

But ere the sounds of the cry and the ejaculation had died in the air, Vitriol Bob, nimbly eluding the attack of the Doctor, raised above his head *something* which his right hand grasped; and although the blow was intended for Jack Rily, it fell with an ominous crash full upon the countenance of Mrs. Mortimer, who, striving to escape, but bewildered by terror, was running across the lane, in front of Vitriol Bob, at the instant.

Then—O heavens! what a shriek of agony—what a yell of indescribable anguish broke upon the silence of the night—rending the air with its piercing sound, and raising echoes of even more horrifying wildness throughout the neighbourhood.

Vitriol Bob fled in one direction—Jack Rily in another; and the old woman was abandoned, alike by friend and foe, to her wretched fate!

But—see! the lights gleam in the windows of the very villa which was to have been the scene of a horrible murder: the painful yells, which still continue to beat the air with their agonising vibrations, have aroused the Count of Carignano—aroused also the lovely creature in whose arms he was sleeping. The valet and Rosalie likewise start from their respective couches; and the young Italian nobleman and the man-servant, having hastily thrown on some clothing, descend into the street.

The cries proceed from the lane: they rush to the spot—and there upon the ground they behold a female writhing like a stricken snake, evidently in the most horrible tortures.

What can it mean?

They do not wait to ask the question; but, raising the wretched sufferer from the ground, they bear her into the house—her shrieks and

screams lacerating their ears all the time, and her contortions and writhings being so powerful that they can scarcely carry her along.

The neighbours have likewise been alarmed; but none have imitated the example of the generous young Italian, and descended from their bed-rooms to afford assistance. They look forth from their windows—satisfy themselves that aid *is* at hand—and, believing the uproar to be created by some poor woman in a fit, close the curtains and hasten back to bed again.

In the meantime the Count of Carignano and his valet have borne the writhing—yelling sufferer into the hall; and Laura descends the stairs with a candle in her hand. She has thrown on a dressing-gown, and thrust her naked feet into slippers; and her magnificent hair floats in messy modulations and luxuriant waves over her fine shoulders and her ample bosom.

But scarcely do the rays of the light fall upon the countenance of the suffering wretch, when the Count of Carignano starts back in horror, exclaiming, “Merciful God! do my eyes deceive me?—is it possible? Laura, dearest——”

“’Tis my mother!” cried the young lady, hastening up to the spot where the old woman lay writhing and screaming fearfully upon the mat.

“Ah! that voice!” said the dying Mrs. Mortimer, suddenly desisting from the outpourings of ineffable agony, as the musical tones of her daughter fell upon her ears: “Laura—is it indeed you? Come near—give me your hand—I cannot see you——My God! I am blind—the fiend—the wretch——Come near, I say——Oh! I am dying—and this is the beginning of hell——”

“Mother—mother!” exclaimed Laura, whose heart was touched by witnessing the appalling pain that writhed the form of the old woman.

“Forgive me, my child—forgive me,” gasped the dying wretch: “I came to——But all is growing dark in my mind as well as my eyes ——forgive me, I say—forgive me——Oh! God!” she suddenly shrieked forth,—“this—*this* that I feel now must be Death!”

As these words fell from the old woman’s tongue amidst gasps of agony, convulsions seized upon her—and she expired in the most shocking agonies.

CHAPTER CXCVI.

RESOLUTIONS.

We must now return to Lord William Trevelyan, who, in pursuance of the promise made to the Marquis of Delmour, proceeded, the moment after that nobleman had left him, to the villa at Bayswater, which he reached shortly after mid-day; and he was at once conducted into the presence of Mrs. Sefton.

This lady was alone in the parlour; and the young nobleman immediately perceived that she had been weeping—although she endeavoured to conceal the fact beneath a smiling countenance as she rose to welcome him.

"My dear friend," she said, in a voice rendered tremulous by deep emotions; "how can I ever sufficiently thank you for your generosity—your unparalleled goodness, in adopting such measures to procure the liberation of Sir Gilbert Heathcote?"

"You have, then, seen him?" observed Trevelyan.

"He has but this moment left me," was the slow and mournful response: and, after a short pause, Mrs. Sefton said, as she sank back into her chair, "Our interview was at first a most joyous one—but at the end most melancholy."

"I cannot understand you," exclaimed Trevelyan, seating himself near her.

"Nevertheless, it is not my intention to affect any farther mystery, with regard to myself or my affairs, towards you," said Mrs. Sefton, hastily wiping away the tears that had started to her eyes, and composing her features with the sudden resolution of one who has determined upon the particular course which duty suggests. "Your conduct—the generosity of your disposition—and the attachment which you experience for my beloved daughter, are all inducements and reasons wherefore I should at once communicate to you all my plans."

She again paused for a few moments, and then continued in the following manner:—

"The dearest hope of my life was accomplished on that day when my darling Agnes was restored to me: and since we have together occupied this secluded but delightful spot, I have had leisure to reflect upon those duties which I owe to my daughter. Moreover, I have well weighed all the circumstances of her position and my own; and I cannot blind my eyes to the fact that a great sacrifice must be made on my part to her reputation—her welfare—her purity of soul."

"I begin to understand you now, my dear friend," said Lord William Trevelyan, his countenance lighting up with the animation of joy: for he felt assured that he had not formed a wrong estimate of Mrs. Sefton's character, when he attributed to her the most amiable qualifications and excellent principles, in spite of her connexion with Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

"Oh! could you suspect even for an instant that I should permit my own selfish passion to triumph over my affection for that dear daughter who has been so miraculously restored to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton. "No, my lord—no, my esteemed friend—I am not a woman of such a despicable description! Not an hour has elapsed since, in this very room, I said to Sir Gilbert Heathcote, '*We must separate, my well-beloved—and perhaps for a long, long time—if not for ever!*' He understood me—he appreciated my motives; and he scarcely sought to reason against my resolution—But, oh! this yielding—this assent on his part, was all the more generous—all the more praiseworthy—all the more noble!" cried Mrs. Sefton, in enthusiastic admiration of the absent baronet's character: "for I must no longer keep the fact a secret from you, my dear friend—although I blush to acknowledge it——But you will not think the worse of Agnes on account of her mother's crime——"

"Heaven forbid that I should be so unjust!" ejaculated Trevelyan, in an impassioned tone of profound sincerity.

"Thanks for that assurance—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed Mrs. Sefton. "Yes—she indeed is pure and virtuous; and I would sooner perish by my own hand than present to her an example of demoralisation in my own conduct. And it is this same sentiment that animates Sir Gilbert Heathcote—that has induced him to sacrifice all his own happiness to her welfare—so that she may never have to think ill of *her mother*! And now, my dear friend, you can probably conjecture the truth which my lips scarcely dare frame?—you can perhaps divine wherefore Sir Gilbert Heathcote is so deeply—so profoundly interested in the welfare of Agnes?"

"Yes—I comprehend it all!" cried Trevelyan.

"And now you must look upon me with loathing—with abhorrence," murmured Mrs. Sefton, burying her countenance in her hands:

“you must despise and contemn the adulterous woman who allowed her husband to exist in the belief that another’s child was his own!”

“No—no, my dear madam,” exclaimed the young nobleman; “I entertain no such feelings towards you. I am acquainted with all your history—yes, all——”

“All!” she repeated, in a tone of surprise: then, suddenly recollecting herself, she said, “Oh! true—Sir Gilbert told me that my husband was to call upon you this morning; and his lordship has therefore given you *his* version of our marriage-history.”

“Indeed, my dear friend,” returned Trevelyan, “he not only corroborated every thing you had already made known to me, but gave me so many additional details, all speaking in your favour—or at least in extenuation——”

“I am glad that the Marquis does me so much justice,” interrupted Mrs. Sefton: “heaven knows that I wish him all possible happiness! And that he *has* endeavoured to obliterate all recollection of me from his mind, I am well aware; and in the arms of his mistresses he has sought relief from any sense of injury or wrong that he may have experienced. I do not mention this fact for the base and unworthy purpose of disparaging the man whom I know that I *have* injured: but it is in justice to myself——”

“Ah! my dear lady, let us turn away from this topic as soon as possible,” interrupted Trevelyan.

“Cheerfully—most cheerfully!” ejaculated Mrs. Sefton. “We will speak of Agnes—and of the resolutions which a sense of duty towards her has engendered on the part of Sir Gilbert and myself. Thus stand all our relative positions:—Should Sir Gilbert Heathcote become a frequent visitor at this house, the tongue of scandal would soon find food for its morbid appetite in this neighbourhood; and the discredit into which I should fall—the opprobrium heaped upon me, would be reflected upon my innocent daughter. That is one grave and important consideration. Another is that, even if the former did not exist, or if Sir Gilbert merely called occasionally in the light of a friend, it would be impossible, situated as we are, to avoid little familiarities or marks of affection, which would inevitably appear strange and extraordinary to Agnes, and by degrees shock her pure mind. Lastly, your lordship has honoured her with your attachment—you have demanded of me her hand in marriage when the suitable time shall arrive;—and in the interval the guardianship of the treasure which is to become your own, rests with me. I must fulfil that trust in a manner that will give you no cause to blush for the wife whom you will have to introduce to the world. It is known in some few quarters already—it may become generally known eventually, that the Marquis and Marchioness of Delmour have long ceased to dwell together: but the actual cause of this separation has never transpired, and need not. Thus, hitherto, nothing has occurred to reflect dishonour upon the name of Lady Agnes; and it behoves alike her mother, and *him who is her real father*, to pursue such a line of conduct as may be most suitable to the welfare, happiness, and peace of that beloved child.”

“I thank you—most cordially, most sincerely do I thank you,” exclaimed Lord William Trevelyan, “for all the resolutions you have adopted, and all the assurances you have now given me! Yes—I am indeed interested in the welfare of your charming daughter; and the generous sacrifices which yourself and Sir Gilbert have decided upon making, for her benefit, prove how noble are your hearts!”

“Nay—now you compliment us too highly,” said Mrs. Sefton, with a smile. “We have determined upon performing our duty;—and if, by so doing,” she continued, in a more serious strain, “I can convince you that the equivocal position in which I have so many years been placed, has not destroyed the sense of rectitude and the true feelings of a mother in my breast, I shall yet be able to receive the assurances of your friendship without a blush, and without experiencing a sense of shame in your presence.”

“Look upon me as your intended son-in-law, my excellent friend!” exclaimed Lord William. “My opinion of you is as high as if I were ignorant altogether of that equivocal position to which you allude; and my sentiments towards Sir Gilbert Heathcote are of the warmest description. For the sake of that daughter whom he dares not acknowledge as such, he renounces your society—he tears himself away from you—he abjures the companionship of her whom he has loved so faithfully for many, many years! This is a self-sacrifice—a generous devotion which cannot be too deeply appreciated. And now, my dear friend,” continued the young nobleman, “it is my turn to give certain explanations. In a word, I have this morning seen your husband, as you are already aware—and he implored me to become instrumental in restoring his daughter to his care. To speak candidly, I came hither for the purpose of reasoning with you on the propriety of yielding to that desire on his part——”

“Oh! you would not separate me from my Agnes?” exclaimed Mrs. Sefton, clasping her hands in an appealing manner, while her countenance suddenly became pale and expressive of the acute anguish which the bare idea caused her to experience.

“No—not after all you have now told me!” cried Trevelyan, in a tone so emphatic as to be completely re-assuring. “I have such illimitable confidence in you that it would be an insult,—nay, more—a flagrant wrong,—to entertain the notion under existing circumstances. I shall call upon the Marquis of Delmour this evening or to-morrow, and candidly inform him that I can no longer recommend the separation of Lady Agnes from her mother.”

“I return you my sincerest thanks for this proof of confidence which you give me,” said Mrs. Sefton. “You had not, however, heard all the resolutions upon which Sir Gilbert and myself have this morning agreed; and now I have to make known to you a step that is about to be taken, and which is rendered necessary by the perseverance that the Marquis of Delmour is certain to exert with a view to regain possession of Agnes. I propose to take her to France, where we may dwell in some peaceful seclusion, until the two remaining years of her minority be passed.”

“And during those two years,” demanded Trevelyan, in a mournful tone, “am I to be debarred from the pleasure of beholding her whom I love so well?”

“I do not attempt to establish any interdiction of the kind,” said Mrs. Sefton, with a smile. “You will of course be made acquainted with the place of our abode; and your correspondence or your visits—or both—will be received with delight.”

“In this case, I must not offer a single objection to your plan,” exclaimed Trevelyan, his countenance lighting up again.

“And had I recommended you neither to visit nor correspond,” said Mrs. Sefton, in an arch tone of semi-reproach, “should you have opposed our departure?”

“Oh! no—no: do not think that I am so selfish!” he cried. “I should have considered this to be the day of self-devotion for all who are interested in the welfare of your beautiful—your amiable Agnes. But I behold her in the garden!” he exclaimed, as he looked towards the window opening on the lawn at the back of the villa. “Have I your permission to join her there for a few minutes?”

Mrs. Sefton signified her assent with a smile and a graceful gesture; and in a few moments Trevelyan was by the side of the beauteous Agnes in the garden.

The young lady was mournful at first—because her mother had already communicated to her their intended departure for the continent: but when Trevelyan, turning the discourse upon that topic, gave her to understand that he had received permission to visit them wheresoever they might fix their abode, and correspond with them frequently,—when he even ventured so far as to hint how it was more than probable that he would follow them to the same place, and establish his own temporary dwelling there, so as to be able to see them every day,—then was it that the young maiden’s countenance brightened up, and Trevelyan gathered therefrom the silent but eloquent assurance that he was not indifferent to her.

The few minutes which he had obtained permission to pass with Agnes grew into hours; and when, between four and five o’clock in the evening, Mrs. Sefton came herself to announce to the youthful pair in the garden that dinner was already served up, he uttered an ejaculation of surprise that it could be so late! Agnes said nothing—but cast down her eyes, and blushed deeply; and her mother, who knew what love was and all its symptoms, was now fully convinced that her daughter’s gentle heart was well disposed towards the noble suitor for her hand.

CHAPTER CXCVII.

THE MARQUIS OF DELMOUR.

On the following morning, Lord William Trevelyan called upon the Marquis of Delmour, whom he found pacing his apartment in great agitation.

The old nobleman had two sources of annoyance at that moment: the first was the suspense in which he existed relative to the result of his endeavours to regain possession of Agnes, whom he devotedly loved;—and the other was in respect to Laura Mortimer.

He had heard from his bankers on the previous evening that the cheque for sixty thousand pounds had been duly presented and cashed; and he therefore concluded that the young lady had arrived in London. But why had she not written to him? His impatience to receive a note from her was in proportion to the madness—the intensity, of that passion with which her transcendent loveliness and her syren witcheries had inspired him; and his excited imagination conjured up a thousand reasons for this silence. He fancied that some accident might have occurred to her,—or that she had written, and her letter had miscarried; in which case she herself would be marvelling at his tardiness in repairing to her,—or that she had changed her mind, and repented of the promise she had made to become the old man's mistress. Then jealousy took possession of his soul; and he could scarcely control within reasonable bounds the emotions that agitated in his breast.

The arrival of Trevelyan, however, promised to relieve him of at least one cause of suspense and anxiety; and, the moment the young nobleman entered the apartment, the Marquis rushed precipitately forward to meet him.

"In pursuance of my promise," said Lord William, when the usual compliments were interchanged, "I called upon her ladyship—Mrs. Sefton, I mean, yesterday—and had a long interview with her."

"And the result?" demanded, the Marquis, impatiently.

"I regret to state that, after all I heard upon the occasion, I cannot either recommend the withdrawal of Lady Agnes from her mother's charge, or interfere any farther in this family matter," responded the young nobleman. "Mrs. Sefton will see Sir Gilbert Heathcote no more, and will devote herself to that maternal care which she is so well qualified to bestow upon her daughter."

"Then, my lord," exclaimed the Marquis, impetuously, "I shall at once appeal to the tribunals of my country for that redress which I ought to have demanded long ago."

"Pardon me, my lord," said Trevelyan, "for reminding you that there is much to be considered ere you put this threat into execution. By giving publicity to your unhappy family-affairs, you may to some extent act injuriously to the welfare of your daughter."

"True!" ejaculated the old nobleman, struck by the observation. "And yet am I to remain quiet and tranquil beneath this additional wrong which is thus thrust upon me by her who in law is still my wife?"

"For your daughter's sake you must endure it—if a wrong it indeed be," answered Trevelyan solemnly.

"And Agnes—has she learnt the secret of her birth?—does she cling to her mother, in preference to me?—does she devote not a single thought to the father who has ever behaved with so much tenderness towards her?" demanded the Marquis. "Reply, my lord, to all these questions."

"Your daughter still believes herself to be plain Miss Agnes," was the answer; "and she is not taught to forget her father."

"But what must she think of the strange circumstance, that while she believes herself to be the bearer of her father's name of Vernon, her mother is known by that of Sefton?" asked the nobleman.

"She has adopted the latter name, as a natural consequence of her restoration to the maternal parent," was the reply; "but her pure and artless mind cherishes not the curiosity which, in ordinary cases, would prompt many questions relative to all these points. She imagines, generally, that particular causes of unhappiness have led to the separation of her parents, and that the adoption of different names was the necessary result. For the rest, believe me that she will be well cared for by her mother, and that she will never be tutored to think of you otherwise than with respect and gratitude."

"Is she happy with her mother—happier than she was in her own cottage, under my care?" inquired the Marquis, after a long panic,

during which he seemed to reflect deeply.

“She is happy, my lord,” responded Trevelyan: “but I will not aver that she is *happier* than she was. She thinks of you constantly—speaks of you often——”

“Then I will do nothing that shall interfere with her tranquillity—nothing that shall bring into the light of publicity those circumstances that would give her so much pain,” interrupted the Marquis, who, though sensual, jealous, and imperious in disposition,—though addicted to pleasures of a profligate description,—was nevertheless characterised by many lofty feelings and generous sentiments, as indeed the whole tenour of his conduct towards Agnes had fully proven.

Lord William Trevelyan thanked him for the assurances which he had just given, and shortly afterwards took his leave, highly rejoiced at the manner in which the interview had terminated.

It must be observed that the passion which the Marquis of Delmour had formed for Laura Mortimer and the hope which he entertained of speedily possessing her as his mistress, had in a slight degree diminished the intensity of his anxiety to recover Agnes; inasmuch as his arrangements in respect to Laura had not only served to occupy his mind—abstract his thoughts somewhat from the contemplation of the loss of his daughter—and hold forth the promise of a solace to be derived from the society of that lovely creature whose unaccountable silence nevertheless tormented him sadly.

The day passed—and still no communication arrived. Let it be remembered it was on this self-same day that Laura and the Count were married; and it was during the following night that Mrs. Mortimer met her dreadful death in the manner already described.

The ensuing morning found the Marquis pale, agitated, and racked by a thousand anxious fears, amongst which jealousy was often uppermost as he revolved in his mind all the possible reasons that could account for the protracted silence of the young lady.

He sate down to breakfast for form’s sake—but ate nothing. Never did his gilded saloons appear more desolate—more lonely;—and yet it was not to them that he had contemplated bringing his beautiful mistress!

Presently the morning papers were laid upon the table; and mechanically casting his eyes over one of them, he observed a short article, headed “Diabolical Outrage and Frightful Death.”

He commenced the perusal of the account; and the apathy with which he began, speedily changed into the most intense interest: for the article ran thus:—

“Last night, shortly after the hour of twelve, the inhabitants of Westbourne Place and the immediate neighbourhood were thrown into the greatest alarm by the sudden outburst of the most dreadful screaming, as of a female in mortal agonies. These terrific signs of distress appeared to emanate from a narrow lane, passing by the side of a beautiful villa in the occupation of the Count and Countess of Carignano, who, it appears, had been married in the morning, and had only entered their new abode immediately after the ceremony. His lordship, attended by his valet, lost no time in descending to the succour of the afflicted person, whoever it might be; and they discovered an elderly lady in the agonies of death. They conveyed her into the villa, where, to the horror of the Count and his lovely bride, it was found that the dying woman was none other than Mrs. Mortimer, the mother of the Countess. Medical assistance was promptly sent for; but before the nearest surgeon could arrive death had terminated the sufferings of the lamented lady. The horrible nature of those sufferings can be readily understood, when, on surgical examination, it transpired that an immense quantity of the strongest vitriol had been thrown over her; and there were proofs that the bottle containing the burning fluid had been broken over her head. The affair is involved in some mystery: but it is presumed that, while repairing to her daughter’s abode, she must have missed her way and got into the lane, where some murderous ruffian, undeserving of the name of a man, perpetrated the frightful outrage. Our readers may remember that this is not the only case of the terrible use of vitriol which we have recently been so painfully compelled to record; and, from all we can learn, there is a monster in human shape, well known to the police, and bearing the significant though horrible denomination of *Vitriol Robert*—or more familiarly, *Vitriol Bob*—who has for some time past infested the metropolis, and who makes use of the burning liquid as an adjunct to his predatory attacks on the unwary in lone or dark neighbourhoods. The above are all the particulars which we have been as yet able to obtain, owing to the advanced period of the night when the diabolical outrage was perpetrated.

This narrative, detailed with all the mannerism of an export penny-a-liner, excited the jealous rage of the Marquis of Delmour almost to madness.

The whole thing was as clear as daylight! The Mrs. Mortimer who had met her death in such a dreadful way, was evidently the old woman whom he had seen on several occasions; and she *was*, after all, the mother of Laura! The perfidious Laura herself had become the wife of another;—and the Marquis was compelled to open his eyes to the fact that he had been most egregiously duped by an adventuress.

Hastily summoning his carriage, the Marquis proceeded direct to his bankers’; where he found that the sixty thousand pounds had indeed been paid; but, on farther inquiry, he ascertained that an old woman had presented the cheque. The description of the recipient was then given by the clerk who cashed the draft; and the Marquis became convinced that she was none other than Mrs. Mortimer. The bankers perceiving that he was anxious to learn who had actually obtained the money, produced the cheque itself, the female’s name being written on the back in token of acquittal; and there were the words—Martha Mortimer.

In a mechanical way, and while deliberating what step next to take, the enraged nobleman cast his eyes over the draft; when he started convulsively—for he instantly detected the forgery, or rather alteration, that had been effected: and then, in his furious excitement, the principal facts of the story came out—showing how he had been induced to give the cheque.

All was now amazement and alarm in the bank-parlour; and one of the partners in the firm suggested the propriety of repairing immediately to the dwelling of the Count of Carignano, for the purpose of communicating with the Countess relative to the transaction. But the Marquis, who by this time had grown somewhat more cool, began to reflect that any publicity which was given to the matter would only cover him with ridicule; and as the money was not of such consequence to him as the avoidance of the shame attendant on the business, he wisely resolved to hush up the whole affair.

The bankers were by no means averse to this amicable mode of adjustment, inasmuch as it relieved them from all doubt or uncertainty, and all possibility of dispute relative to the party on whom the loss consequent on the forgery was to fall; and they therefore readily consented to retain the transaction profoundly secret. At the same time, they understood fully that they were not to pay the genuine cheque for sixty thousand pounds, in case of its presentation; the Marquis resolving to take time to consider what course he should pursue with regard to that portion of the business.

The old nobleman drove home again; and, on his arrival at his stately mansion, he shut himself up in his own chamber to reflect upon the startling revelations of that day.

Not for an instant did he entertain the idea of seeking an interview with Laura. Such a step was useless: for she had no doubt married, he reasoned, according to her taste. Moreover, his pride revolted at the bare idea of undergoing the humiliation and shame of being laughed at by one who would probably care nothing for any reproaches that might be levelled against her.

But how was he to recover the cheque? It was valid in her hands: for even if she had connived at her mother's forgery, the collusion could not be brought home to her. Still, the Marquis did not at all admire the idea of paying another sixty thousand—especially for one who had so grossly deluded him.

By degrees the old nobleman's thoughts became so bewildering that he felt as if he were going mad. He had lost his daughter—he had lost his mistress—he had been duped out of his money—and, vile though Laura evidently was, he nevertheless still adored her image with a devouring passion.

He walked up and down his room in a state of excitement that was increasing cruelly, and that produced a hurry in the brain—a confusion in the ideas—a delirium in the imagination.

The fever of his reflections augmented to such a height that he began to conjure up a variety of evils and annoyances which did not really exist. He pictured to himself his bankers laughing heartily at his folly—retelling the scandal as an excellent joke—and propagating the most offensive rumours all over the town. He fancied that he beheld his friends and acquaintances endeavouring to conceal their satirical smiles as they accosted him—he beheld the entire House of Lords forgetting their dignity and whispering together in a significant manner as he entered the assembly. Then his thoughts suddenly travelled to Agnes; and all his ancient doubts and fears relative to his paternity in respect to her, returned with overpowering violence; until he felt convinced that she was indeed the offspring of an adulterous connexion between his wife and Sir Gilbert Heathcote. Lastly, by a rapid transition, his imagination wandered to the abode of the Count and Countessa of Carignano; and he pictured the lovely—seducing—voluptuous Laura in the arms of a rival!

All these reflections maddened the old man—deprived him of his reason—rendered him desperate—and made life appear to him a burthen of anguish and an intolerable misfortune.

He did not remember his boundless wealth—his proud titles—his stately mansions—and all the means of pleasure, enjoyment, and solace that were within his reach: his morbid condition of mind obtained such a potent sway over him, that he only saw in himself a lone—desolate—wretched old man,—deprived of his daughter—deprived of his mistress—deprived of his money—and with the myriad fingers of scorn pointing towards him.

Though the sun was shining joyously, and its golden beams penetrated into the chamber through the opening in the rich drapery,—yet all seemed dark—dreary—and cheerless to the miserable Marquis of Delmour: his powerful intellect—his vigorous understanding—his moral courage, were all subdued—crushed—overwhelmed beneath a weight of trifling realities and tremendous fancies.

In this state of mind the miserable man suddenly rushed to his toilette-case—seized his razor—and inflicted a ghastly wound upon his throat.

At the same instant that he fell—the blood pouring forth like a torrent—a valet entered the room, bearing a letter upon a silver tray.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

CASTELCICALA.

Turn we now to the State of Castelcicala—that lovely land which lies between the northern frontiers of the Neapolitan dominions and the southern confines of the Papal territory.

It was a glorious morning—and bright and varied were the hues which the sea took from the rosy clouds, as a splendid war-steamer advanced rapidly over the bosom of the waters.

The Royal Standard of Castelcicala floated from the main-mast; and upon the deck was a group of officers in magnificent uniforms, gathered around a young man of tall form and noble air, who was attired in deep black. But upon his breast a star denoted his sovereign rank; and his commanding, though unaffected demeanour well became the chieftain of a mighty State.

That gallant steamer was the *Torione*, the pride of the Royal Navy of Castelcicala—that young man was Richard Markham, now become the Grand Duke of the principality which he had rescued from slavery—and amongst the aides-de-camp in attendance was his enthusiastic admirer, the erring but deeply repentant Charles Hatfield.

Shortly after ten o'clock on this glorious morning the steamer came within sight of Montoni, the capital of Castelcicala; and as soon as the Royal Standard was descried by those in that city who were earnestly watching the arrival of their new monarch, the artillery of the batteries and the cannon of the ships in the harbour thundered forth a salute in honour of the illustrious prince.

In an hour and a half the steamer swept gallantly into the fine port of Montoni; the yards of all the vessels were manned; and the welkin rang with enthusiastic shouts of welcome.

Richard—or, as we should rather call him, Ricardo—was deeply affected by these demonstrations, which he acknowledged with many graceful bows; and when he landed amongst the greatest concourse of multitudes ever assembled on the quays of Montoni, and amidst the most joyous cries and the thunder of the artillery, he retained his hat in his hand as a proof of respect to that Sovereign People from whom his power emanated.

The royal carriages were in attendance; and as he rode along the streets towards the palace, the vast crowds kept pace with the vehicles, cheering and waving their hats and handkerchiefs all the way. The windows and balconies were filled with gentlemen and elegantly-dressed ladies; and flowers were thrown forth by fair hands in token of the general delight which attended upon the arrival of the warrior-prince.

As on the day after the memorable battle of Montoni, which gave peace and freedom to Castelcicala, the bells were ringing in every tower, and the cannon were still vomiting forth their thunder, their fire, and their smoke, when the Grand Duke Ricardo alighted at the entrance of the palace. There—upon the marble steps—stood the joy of his heart, the charming and well-beloved Isabella, with their two children, the little Prince Alberto and the Princess Eliza—so called after a valued friend.[31] In company with Isabella were her mother (now Dowager Grand Duchess), Ricardo's sister the Princess Katherine, and her husband Prince Mario. All were dressed in deep mourning: but the presence of Ricardo evoked smiles as well as tears,—and those who wept for the loss of the late lamented Grand Duke, found consolation and experienced a source of ineffable joy in the possession of him who had become his successor.

Moreover, the funeral of the departed one had already taken place; and there was consequently no sad ceremony to be performed which might revive the bitterness of grief.

That evening Montoni was brilliantly illuminated; and the streets were thronged with multitudes who made a general holiday on the occasion of the arrival of that excellent prince to whom they owed so much.

And it was a glorious spectacle to behold the appearance of the people in that capital of the most prosperous country in the whole world. Not a mendicant was to be seen: the loathsome rags and hideous emblems of poverty which meet the eye in every thoroughfare and in every corner of London, had ceased to exist in Montoni. The industrious classes were all cheerful in looks and neat in attire; and instead of the emaciated women, and pale, sickly children observable in such appalling numbers in the British metropolis, the wives of the working-men were all comely and contented, and their offspring ruddy with the hues of vigorous health. Oh! it was a blessed—blessed thing to behold those gay and happy multitudes—rendered thus gay and thus happy by means of good institutions, honest Ministers, and a Parliament chosen by the entire male adult population!

Though the streets were thus thronged to excess, and the houses of entertainment were crowded, the utmost order, sobriety, and

tranquillity prevailed. There were no police visible: because none were required. Every citizen, whether employer or employed—whether capitalist or mechanic—whether gentleman or artizan—whether landowner or labourer, was himself a policeman, as it were, in his own good conduct and excellent example. *For from the time that liberal and enlightened institutions, involving the true spirit of Republicanism, were applied to Castelcicala, the regular police-force had been abolished and no necessity arose for its revival.*

Such was the aspect of the capital of Castelcicala—that model State where Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality were acknowledged principles, practically known and duly appreciated.

On the ensuing morning the Grand Duke Ricardo proceeded to the Chamber of Deputies, where the Senators were also assembled on the occasion. The galleries were crowded with ladies and gentlemen; and the whole of the diplomatic corps were in the seats allotted to them. Even though all present were in deep mourning for the late sovereign, the aspect of the spacious hall was far from gloomy, though solemn and imposing.

The arrival of the new Grand Duke was expected with the most intense interest. It was well known that not only had he suggested the principal reforms which Duke Alberto had applied to Castelcicala, but that he was even far more liberal in his political opinions than his departed father-in-law. It was consequently anticipated that on the present occasion he would enunciate the line of policy which it was his intention to adopt; and every one felt convinced that this would prove a day memorable in the history of Castelcicala.

We should observe that on the platform of the Chamber, instead of the throne being placed for the reception of the Grand Duke, a simple arm-chair was raised about three feet higher than that occupied by the President of the Deputies; and instead of the royal standard flowing with its graceful drapery over-head, the tricolour was suspended to the wall. These changes, it was well known, had been effected by order of the Grand Duke himself; and all present were aware that his Sovereign Highness was not the man merely to displace the symbols of royalty without having some congenial and practical object in view.

At half-past ten o'clock the Ministers entered and took their seats amidst loud applause from the galleries; for this was the same Cabinet that Ricardo had nominated five years previously, during his brief Regency; and its policy had been such as to gain for it the enthusiastic affection of the nation and the admiration of the whole civilised world.

Shortly after the arrival of those high functionaries, the Royal Family appeared in the Chamber, amidst deafening cheers, and took their seats upon the platform, behind the President's desk; and in a few minutes the roar of the artillery on the ramparts announced to the capital that the Grand Duke had quitted the palace on his way to the legislative assembly.

It was precisely at eleven that Ricardo, attended by his staff, entered the hall; and his presence was the signal for a more hearty renewal of the cheering, while the ladies in the galleries waved their snowy handkerchiefs in unfeigned welcome.

But it was almost immediately noticed that the Grand Duke appeared—not in the royal robes worn on such occasions by all his predecessors—but in the uniform of a Field-Marshal, with a black crape round his left arm in token of mourning for the late monarch. He was decorated only with the Castelcicalan Order of Knighthood, and did not even wear upon his breast the star that denoted his sovereign rank. These circumstances gave a sharper edge to the keenness of curiosity; and when the cheering, which was loud and long, died away beneath the lofty roof of the spacious hall, the silence that ensued was deep and solemn as that of the tomb.

Then the Grand Duke, rising from the arm-chair which he had for a few moments occupied, addressed the assembly in the following manner:

"My Lords and Gentlemen,—You have recently experienced a great and grievous loss in the death of a wise, enlightened, and virtuous Sovereign, whose brief but glorious reign was devoted to those measures best calculated to ensure the happiness, prosperity, and morality of the Castelcicalan people. The name of Alberto will live in history so long as the world shall endure; and his memory will be cherished in the hearts of this and all succeeding generations of the inhabitants of that clime which his wisdom and his example have so supremely blessed.

"Had I consulted my own private feelings, I should have allowed some time to elapse ere I appeared before you to shadow forth that line of policy which it is my duty to recommend to your deliberations: I should have craved leisure to weep over the loss of my illustrious father-in-law, and meditate upon those grand lessons which his memorable reign have taught us. But I feel that the welfare of an entire people is too solemnly important and too sacred a thing to be for even a moment lost sight of; and that when the head of a State is called away to the tomb, his successor must devote no time to a grief which cannot recall the departed, but must at once take up without intermission the grand work of reform that was progressing at the period of Death's arrival. For it is a great and flagrant wrong for those who are entrusted with power, to interpose delays in the proper exercise thereof; and that man is a traitor to his country and deserves execration who dares to intimate that there is no need of haste in accomplishing a great national good.

"These are the motives which have induced me to appear thus before you even at so early a period that the remains of my lamented predecessor can scarcely be said to have grown cold in the tomb: but I repeat that if men accept the responsibilities of power and office, they must permit no considerations to retard them in the performance of their duty and the fulfilment of their high vicarious mission.

"Last evening I assembled the Ministers around me, and submitted to them the views which I had some time ago matured, and which I proposed to put into practice so soon as the natural course of events and the will of the Sovereign People should place me at the head

of affairs. The Ministers were unanimous in adopting those views, and cheerfully undertook to lay them in the usual manner before the Legislative Assemblies. But in the meantime, it behoves me briefly to detail the nature of these plans which are thus deemed suitable to the interests and in accordance with the just rights of the Castelcicalans.

“In the first place I propose that the form of Government shall be Republican, not merely in institutions, but likewise in name; and in order that this idea may be fully carried out, it will be necessary that certain sacrifices should be made in particular quarters. I now especially allude to the class denominated the *nobility*. The existence of aristocratic titles is totally incompatible with the purity and simplicity of Republicanism; and the country therefore expects from the patriotism of the nobles a ready concession of these invidious distinctions,—distinctions which are nothing more nor less than the relics of feudal barbarism. For my part, I cheerfully undertake to set the example, if example be indeed required to induce men to the performance of their duty. With this determination I have come before you to-day,—not as the Grand Duke of Castelcicala—not as a Sovereign-Prince,—but as the First Magistrate of the State, retaining only that military rank which I have won upon the fields of victory. From this moment, then, you may know me, and I wish to be known only, as General Markham; and this same abnegation of title I proclaim on the part of my beloved wife, my revered mother-in-law, and the rest of the Royal Family.”

During several parts of his speech, Ricardo had been frequently interrupted by outbursts of enthusiastic cheering: but when he reached this solemn and important climax, the whole assembly rose and greeted him with the most joyous shouts—the most fervent applause that ever expressed the unfeigned admiration of a generous patriotism. The ladies in the galleries absolutely wept in the excitement of their feelings: for never—never was seen so sublime a spectacle as this of a mighty Prince casting his crown, his sceptre, and his titles at the feet of the Goddess of Liberty!

"I accept with ineffable pleasure this demonstration of approval," resumed Ricardo, after a long pause; "and it gave me unspeakable delight to behold the Peers themselves joining as enthusiastically as the rest in those evidences of assent. When all titles are abolished, save those which properly and necessarily belong to the various grades of naval and military rank, the vanity attending upon the pride of birth will perish through a deserved inanition, and emulation will point to the only true aristocracy,—namely, that of VIRTUE and of MIND. The Ministers will accordingly propose to you such measures as may tend effectually to establish Republican Institutions in this State. They will recommend the abolition of the Upper House, and the retention only of the Chamber of Deputies, which must be numerically strengthened. They will propose that the Chief Magistrate, to be denominated *President*, shall be chosen for a period of three years, and liable to re-election. The power of *veto*, the privilege of making peace or declaring war, and other attributes purely monarchical, will not he conceded to the President, but must exist in the Chamber itself; and instead of the effigy of the ruler upon the current coin, the arms of the Republic should be impressed. Every public act and deed must be accomplished in the name of the Sovereign People, the President serving the purpose of the executive agent, as responsible for his own conduct as the Ministers themselves are held to be for theirs. These and other reforms, all tending to the prompt and complete establishment of pure Republican Institutions, will be at once submitted to your deliberations.

"I have not the slightest doubt that the moment the news of all that is passing within these walls, shall reach the ears of the other potentates of Italy, remonstrances will be poured in by their diplomatic agents resident in Montoni;—and perhaps even menaces may be used. I however feel convinced that no argument which may be adopted in such remonstrances can possibly blind your eyes to the beauty of Freedom and the excellence of Liberty: and as for the menaces, I need only observe that a Castelcicalan army, animated by a republican spirit, would prove invincible."

These words again elicited the most tremendous cheering: and after another long pause, Ricardo wound up his address in the following manner:—

"All of you who are here present well remember the condition of the country previously to the accession of the late Grand Duke. Poverty, and its invariable handmaids—squalor, filth and demoralisation—presided over the lot of the industrious classes. Oppression was felt everywhere—happiness existed only in the mansions of a favoured few. The people were looked upon as the serfs and slaves of the rich oligarchy; and the very vitals of a healthy state of society were thus corrupt and rotten. But a change came over the country: it was decreed that every man should have fair wages for fair work; and that all able and willing to work, should have work found for them. In order to accomplish these aims, it was necessary to set about reclaiming the waste lands in those districts where they lay; and in others, the owners of estates were by a just law compelled to throw certain portions of their parks and pleasure-grounds into a corn cultivation, and to level all their game-preserves for the same purpose. What have been the results of these measures? Labour has been abundant, and wages high: employment has extirpated mendicancy; and squalor, filth, and demoralisation exist no longer within the confines of Castelcicala. But what would I have you infer from these facts? That if the people of this country have already so largely and so admirably profited by liberal institutions,—if the reforms hitherto accomplished have so materially enhanced the general prosperity, producing abundance, happiness, and contentment,—who shall be able to divine to what point that prosperity may arrive, under the pure, simple, and truly Christian institutions of republicanism."

Having thus spoken, with the tone, manner, and eloquence of deep conviction, General Markham—for so we must now denominate him—bowed to the assembly, and withdrew amidst applause which was prolonged for some minutes after he had quitted the spacious hall.

His wife and illustrious relatives left the platform at the same time;—and now behold this illustrious family returning to the palace, attended by the grateful and rejoicing myriads, who, having assembled round the Chamber, had already received the intelligence of the memorable proceedings that had taken place within;—proceedings which in a single hour had accomplished the most effectual and yet utterly bloodless revolution ever known in any age or in any country!

CHAPTER CXCIX.

THE MARCHIONESS OF DELMOUR.

The Marquis of Delmour awoke, as it were from a deep trance; and, opening his languid eyes, he beheld a female form bending over him. He attempted to speak: but the lady placed one slender finger on her lips in token of silence;—and, closing his eyes again, the old nobleman endeavoured to collect his scattered ideas—or rather, to dispel the mist which hung over them.

It struck him that the countenance which he had just seen was not unknown to him;—and as he dwelt upon it in imagination, it gradually became more familiar,—while, by imperceptible degrees, it awoke reminiscences of the past—some of pleasure, but most of pain,—until an idea of the real truth dawned in upon the mind of the Marquis.

Then again he opened his eyes;—and though long years had elapsed since last he beheld that countenance, each feature—each lineament was immediately recognised. But so confused were his thoughts that he could not recollect why a feeling of aversion and repugnance prevented him from experiencing joy at the presence of her who was standing, in painful suspense, by his bed-side.

At last, as reason asserted her empire, a knowledge of who she was and all the incidents associated with her revived in his soul; while, at the same time and with a species of under-current of the reflections, a feeling of what had happened to himself and why he was stretched in his couch came slowly upon him. They he suddenly raised his hand to his throat; and the bandage *there* convinced him that the last reminiscence which had just stolen into his mind, was indeed too true!

Averting his eyes from the mournful and plaintive countenance which was still bending over him, he groaned aloud in very bitterness:—and then a deep silence ensued in the chamber.

Several minutes elapsed, during which the burning tears streamed down the lady's face: but she subdued the sobs that almost choked her—for she would not for worlds permit any evidence of her own deep grief to disturb the meditations of the enfeebled nobleman. On his side, he was absorbed in profound thought,—the incidents of the past rapidly becoming more definite and vivid in his memory, until there were few things left in uncertainty or doubt—and nothing in oblivion.

Slowly turning towards the lady, the Marquis saw that she was overwhelmed with sorrow—although she hastily wiped away her tears;—and moved—deeply moved by this spectacle, as well as influenced by a host of tender recollections, the old man extended his hand towards her, murmuring, "My wife! is it indeed she who is now watching by my side?"

"O heaven! he recollects me—he will forgive me!" she exclaimed, in a tone of the liveliest joy; and carrying her husband's emaciated hand to her lips, she covered it with kisses.

"Sophia," said the old man, in a low voice and speaking with difficulty, "we meet after a long—long separation. But let us forget the past——"

"Is it possible that *you* can forget it?" asked Mrs. Sefton—or rather the Marchioness of Delmour; and bending her burning face over his hand which she still retained in both her own, she added in a tone so low that it seemed as if she feared even to hear her own words, "You have so much to pardon! But I never viewed my conduct in this light until I came and beheld you stretched upon the bed of—of ——"

"Of death," said the Marquis, his pale countenance becoming, if possible, more ghastly pallid still.

"No—no," exclaimed the Marchioness, with the excitement of voice and the gesture of despair; "you must not talk nor think thus despondingly! But tell me, my husband—tell me—oh! say, can you forgive me for the past?"

"We have much to forgive on either side, Sophia," responded the Marquis: "and as I was the first cause of dissension between us—as I indeed was the author of all your unhappiness, by forcing you into a marriage which you abhorred—'tis for me to demand pardon first. Tell me, then, Sophia—tell me that you *can* pardon me for all the misery I have been the wretched means of heaping upon your head?"

"Oh! yes—yes!" exclaimed the lady, the tears again pouring in torrents down her cheeks: "would to heaven that I could prove to you how deeply sensible I am of this kindness which you now manifest towards me!"

"Then you forgive me!" cried the nobleman, pressing her hand tenderly, while joy beamed in his eyes hitherto dim with the glazing influence of a mortal enervation:—"then you forgive me!" he repeated, his voice becoming stronger.

“Yes—oh! yes—a thousand times *yes*!” she exclaimed; and bending over him, she pressed her lips upon his cold forehead. “But do you pardon me likewise?” she asked, after a few moments’ pause.

“It was I who provoked all that has occurred—I who was the unhappy means of blighting the pure affections of your youth,” returned the Marquis; “and therefore—whatever may have been the consequences—I am bound to pardon and forget. Alas! Sophia, often and often—and with feelings of ineffable pain and anguish—have I thought of that fatal day when, long years ago, I levelled at you a terrible accusation. But I was a coward—and I was cruel thus to have taxed you with a fault which at that period my jealous suspicions alone——”

“To what do you allude?” demanded the Marchioness, inwardly shocked, and with her heart bleeding as she asked the question: for she divined too well to what her husband *did* allude—and she was almost crushed with a devouring sense of shame.

“Oh! if you can have forgotten that fatal day,” exclaimed the Marquis, whose sight was too dim, and whose mental powers of perception were too weak to enable him to understand rightly his wife’s present emotions,—“then are you happy indeed! For, alas! I referred to the day on which we separated, sixteen or seventeen years ago—I cannot now remember accurately how many have passed since then——”

“And why allude to that unhappy epoch?” asked the lady, in a low and tremulous tone.

“Because I wish to convince you that I am indeed repentant for all the share which I took in sealing our misery,” replied the nobleman. “On that memorable day, I accused you of infidelity towards me—and yet subsequent reflection has convinced me that you were innocent *then*! Oh! never—never shall I forget that tone in which you breathed the fatal words—‘*All is now at an end between you and me! We part—for ever!*’ I have thought since—aye, and I have said that you resembled what would be a sculptor’s or an artist’s conception of *Injured Innocence*; and then, when I adjured you in the name of your infant daughter to stay, you uttered a wild cry and fled! That cry rings in my ears now—has vibrated in my brain ever since——”

“Oh! in the name of heaven, proceed not thus!” murmured the Marchioness, covering her face with her hands and sobbing bitterly.

But wherefore, did she thus weep?—wherefore were her emotions so powerful? Why was her heart thus wrung until every fibre appeared to be stretched to its utmost power of tension? It was because on the occasion to which the Marquis referred, *guilt* and not *innocence* had made her voice hollow and thick as she breathed the words which decreed an eternal separation!—it was because that wild cry had been wrung from her by the appeal that was made in the name of the infant child whom she knew to be the offspring of her amour with Sir Gilbert Heathcote! But there are times when *Conscious Guilt* so much resembles *Injured Innocence*, that the most keen observer may be deceived;—and such was the fact in the case now alluded to.

A long pause ensued—during which the Marquis, still totally ignorant of the real nature of his wife’s emotions, gazed upon her with an affectionate interest that was rapidly growing into a resuscitated love.

“Weep not, dearest,” he at length said;—“weep not, I implore you!”

“I weep, because I feel that I am so completely unworthy of your present kindness,” responded the Marchioness, withdrawing her hands from her face, and bending her tearful eyes with an expression of such mournfulness and such profound penitence upon her husband, that had he the power to raise himself in the bed, he would have snatched her to his bosom.

“It is now my turn to implore you not to dwell longer upon the past,” he said, taking one of her hands and conveying it to his lips. “We have promised mutual forgiveness. You have pardoned me for forcing you into a marriage which caused all your unhappiness: and I have pardoned you for your connexion with Sir Gilbert Heathcote since the period of our separation. This is the understanding between us, Sophia—and now we are friends again. But tell me, my dear wife—tell me how long I have been stretched on this bed, and how you came thus to be here to minister unto me?”

“Four days have elapsed since you—since—” began the Marchioness, hesitating how to allude to the dreadful attempt at suicide which her husband had committed.

“Oh! name not the horrible deed!” he groaned forth, writhing in anguish.

“But it is not known—save to three or four persons,” hastily observed his wife, well aware that this assurance would prove consolatory.

“Heaven be thanked!” murmured the old nobleman, clasping his hands fervently. “And now tell me, my dear Sophia, how you came to learn the shocking intelligence?”

“If you will compose yourself as much as you can, and speak but little, I will explain every thing to you,” she answered, assuming, with captivating tenderness of tone and manner, the position of wife and nurse.

“One word first!” exclaimed the Marquis. “Agnes—”

“Is here—beneath your roof,” was the reply.

“My daughter again near me!” he murmured, joy animating his countenance: but in another moment a cloud overspread his features, as he said hesitatingly, “Does she know of the dreadful attempt that I made upon my life?”

“Heaven forbid!” ejaculated the Marchioness, shocked at the bare idea. “That circumstance has been religiously withheld from her. She is however now aware that she is the daughter of the Marquis of Delmour, and not of plain Mr. Vernon; and she believes you to be dangerously ill. She has indeed been my companion for hours together by your bed-side——”

“Dearest Agnes!” exclaimed the nobleman, with an effusion of tenderness in his tone. “I will see her presently—when I am more composed,” he added. “And now give me the promised explanations relative to all I have asked you.”

“Listen, then, my dear husband—and do not interrupt me. Yon have already spoken too much, considering your depressed and enfeebled state; and Sir John Lascelles, when he calls again, will be angry with me for permitting you to use such exertions. Oh! you know not how kind—how attentive he has been! But you will shortly have an opportunity of thanking him with your own lips—for he will be here in an hour. Though the room be darkened, it is now about eleven o’clock in the morning; and he will call at noon. Compose yourself, therefore; and I will give you all the details you require.”

The Marchioness arranged her husband’s pillows—kissed his forehead once more—and then, seating herself by his bed-side, proceeded as follows:—

“That excellent young nobleman, Lord William Trevelyan, called upon me a few days ago, in consequence of an interview which he had had with you. It was relative to Agnes. I assured him that Sir Gilbert Heathcote and myself had come to an understanding that we should see each other no more; and I likewise informed Lord William that it was my intention to repair with Agnes to the Continent. But after he had taken his departure, I reflected profoundly upon the plans I had somewhat too hastily determined to adopt;—and another project suggested itself. For you may believe me when I solemnly avow that all my solicitude was relative to Agnes. Her present happiness and her future welfare in the world alone occupied my attention. Thus was it that the thought stole into my mind, of how unfortunate it was for her to be separated from the father whom she loved so well, and how prejudicial to her interests the equivocal position of her mother was likely to become. Then I resolved to see *you*—to throw myself upon your mercy—to implore forgiveness for the past—and to beseech you that we might all dwell once again beneath the same roof! For I reflected that as you had shown so much forbearance in never appealing to the courts of justice to divorce me legally—and as you had rather manifested every inclination to envelope in secrecy the causes of our unfortunate differences,—the conviction gained upon my mind that you were generous enough to be capable of still farther sacrifices for the sake of Agnes. Oh! you can comprehend a mother’s solicitude, my dear husband——”

“Yes—yes: proceed!” exclaimed the Marquis, powerfully affected.

“Well—animated with the hopes inspired by all these considerations,” resumed the Marchioness, “I passed the night in meditating upon the best course to adopt in order to procure an interview with you,—an interview after so long a separation! At length I determined to pen a brief note, stating that family affairs of the utmost importance to us both had induced me to take this step; and a letter to that effect did I accordingly write on the following morning. But when I had completed this much of my task, another idea struck me,—which was to become the personal bearer of my own note. I will now candidly admit that I shrank from undertaking a task which might appear to you to evince a matchless audacity and presumption; but when I thought of Agnes, I resolved to risk any mortification or shame which could possibly be inflicted upon me.”

“Oh! no mortification—no shame!” cried the nobleman. “Would to heaven that you had only come in time to——to——”

“Hush!” exclaimed the Marchioness, placing her finger upon her lip: “you promised that you would listen, without exerting yourself to speak.”

“Proceed, dearest,” said the Marquis, who all this while had one of his wife’s hands locked in his own.

“Summoning all my courage to my aid,” she resumed, “I resolved on presenting myself at your abode. I arrived—I sent up the letter by your valet: but in a few minutes he came rushing down the stairs with a countenance that had horror depicted in every lineament. I shall not however dwell upon this portion of my adventure. You may probably conjecture how dreadful was my alarm—how great my grief, when I learnt from the broken sentences in which the man spoke, the frightful intelligence of the condition in which he had found you. Then I revealed to him who I was; and, recovering my presence of mind, bade him place a seal on his lips with regard to every one save the doctor, whom I dispatched him to fetch. In a few moments I was with you: I stanched the blood—I did all that an unassisted and inexperienced woman could do in such a case. Sir John Lascelles arrived—and the information he gave me, after inspecting the wound, was reassuring. I then resolved to remain with you; and I sent the valet to fetch Agnes. This is all the explanation that I have to give;—unless indeed I should add that I communicated with Lord William Trevelyan, who, as a generous friend and as the intended husband of Agnes——”

“Has he visited this chamber?” asked the old nobleman, hastily.

“Yes,” was the reply. “Considering that he was alike in your confidence and in mine, I did not think it either grateful or prudent to leave him unacquainted with all that had occurred. The secret therefore rests with him, the good physician, the valet, and myself; and the household generally believes that you were found in a fit, which has been followed by a dangerous illness.”

“My dearest wife,” said the Marquis, after a long pause, “were there no circumstances which compelled me, as an honest man, to ask *your* pardon for the past, in the same way as you have demanded and obtained my forgiveness,—all that you have now told me would efface from my memory every thing that it had ever cherished to your prejudice. The delicacy you have displayed—your generosity—your watchfulness——”

“Nay—I cannot permit you thus to exert yourself,” interrupted the Marchioness, placing her hand upon his mouth.

“But you *must* permit me to declare how deep is the gratitude that I experience for your conduct towards me,” he said. “Oh! my beloved wife—for so I must again call you—I was mad at the time when I laid violent hands upon myself!”

“Oh! speak not of *that*!” exclaimed the lady. “My God! was it in consequence of that last interview which you had with Trevelyan ——”

“No—no,” interrupted the Marquis: “do not blame yourself in any way! It was *not* on account of the determination which you had expressed, and which he explained to me, to retain Agnes in your care. No—alas! a far less worthy cause——But tell me,” he exclaimed, suddenly checking himself, as an idea struck him: “has there been any communication made from my bankers——”

“Do not harass yourself with matters of business,” said the Marchioness, in a tone expressive of the deepest solicitude.

“Nay—if I am to endure the tortures of suspense, I shall never recover,” exclaimed the nobleman, with strong emphasis. “Besides, I see by your manner that something *has* occurred, Sophia——”

“Well—I will explain every thing,” said the Marchioness; “and then your mind will be relieved: for I see that it is useless to expect you to compose yourself while any cause of vexation or excitement exists. Tranquillise your mind, therefore, relative to the matter which is now uppermost in your thoughts. Your honour has been duly cared for—no exposure has given existence to shame or humiliation.”

“Oh! again—again I thank you, my generous wife,” cried the Marquis. “But pray give me an explanation of all this!”

“I will do so without farther preface,” she said. “In the course of the day following the mournful one whose chief incident made me an inmate of the house to which I only came in the first instance as a visitor, the principal partner in the banking firm in the Strand called with an earnest request to see you immediately. In pursuance of certain orders which I had given to the servants relative to any visitors who might come upon business, I was immediately made acquainted with the banker’s presence; and I hastened to the room where he was waiting. I assured him that you had been seized with a sudden fit, and were unable to see any one; and, as I had already made myself known in the house as your wife, I informed him that I was the Marchioness of Delmour. He said that it was of the greatest consequence for him to see you; and I replied that you were insensible to all that was passing around you. He appeared much annoyed —indeed bewildered by this announcement; and I conjured him to be candid with me. He then stated that a forgery had been committed upon the bank, your name having been already used to procure the sum of sixty thousand pounds; that the legitimate owner of the cheque had just called to obtain the cash, and was actually waiting at the bank at that instant; and that he himself had come to require final instructions from *you*, as the lady was resolute in enforcing her demand. Pardon me, my husband,” continued the Marchioness, “if I tell you I suspected that the affair was one which you would be unwilling to have exposed; and, indeed, on a little farther conversation with the banker, I heard sufficient to convince me that such was the fact. I accordingly took it upon myself to desire him to effect a compromise with the lady in question: but she being obstinate, he paid the entire amount. This result he subsequently called to communicate to me; and I hope that you will at least approve of my motives, if not of the instructions that I gave.”

“I approve of both,” answered the Marquis; “and I again thank you, Sophia, for the delicacy which you have exhibited in my behalf.”

At this moment a knock at the door of the chamber was heard; and Sir John Lascelles immediately afterwards made his appearance.

The worthy physician was much delighted at the sudden and unexpected improvement which had manifested itself in his patient: and, after a few inquiries of a purely professional nature, he turned towards the Marchioness, saying, “To her ladyship, my lord, are you indebted for your life. Her prompt attention and the singular presence of mind with which she adopted the proper—indeed, the only effectual course, immediately after the discovery of your alarming condition—saved your lordship from a speedy death. During the four days and four nights which have elapsed since the occurrence,” continued Sir John Lascelles, alluding as delicately as he could to the attempted suicide, “her ladyship has been constant and unwearied in her attendance at your bed-side. In order to retain the sad secret within as narrow a circle as possible, her ladyship would not even permit a nurse to be engaged;—but, unassisted, she has sustained all the cares—all the anxieties—and all the fatigues inevitably associated with daily watchings and long vigils. Pardon me, madam, for speaking thus enthusiastically; but, throughout my experience, which embraces a lengthened series of years, I never—never beheld such devotion.”

“I thank you, doctor,” said the nobleman, “for dwelling with such emphasis upon conduct as noble as it is generous. Certain differences —trifling in reality, and all in consequence of faults on *my* side,” continued the Marquis, “had long kept us apart. But we are now reunited, never again to separate until Death shall lay his hand upon me, Doctor,” added the nobleman, after a short pause,—while the Marchioness was weeping through deep emotion,—“should you ever hear any one allude to our protracted separation, I beg—I implore you to declare, upon the authority of my own avowal, that I alone was the offending party, and that her ladyship has generously forgiven me every thing.”

“I shall not wait to hear people allude to this matter, ere I myself broach the subject, in order to volunteer that explanation,” said Sir John Lascelles, who, firmly believing all that the Marquis had uttered, naturally considered that the most ample justice should be done towards a lady who had exhibited such a noble devotion to her husband under such peculiar circumstances.

When the physician had taken his leave, after prescribing certain medicines and giving the instructions necessary in the case, the Marchioness bent over her husband, and with deeply blushing countenance, said, “If there were anything at all deserving of praise in my conduct, yours is beyond all commendation: for I have merely performed a duty—whereas you have proved yourself to be the most generous of men. Oh! how can I ever sufficiently thank you, my dear husband, for having thus disarmed scandal of its weapons—thereby saving my honour even from the faintest breath of suspicion? And in order to do this, you have taken upon yourself the odium which attaches itself to the separation of man and wife.”

“I need—I deserve no thanks,” said the Marquis. “You have saved my life—you have recalled me to existence: to you am I indebted for that leisure which, by God’s mercy, may yet be afforded me wherein to repent of the heinous crime I have committed in laying violent hands upon myself. Sir John Lascelles goes much into society—he is intimate in all the first houses at the West End: and he will be careful to propagate the intelligence which I gave him. You may therefore hold up your head proudly, Sophia: for *your* secret is also retained within as narrow a circle as my own. And now as you have eased my mind on so many points, let me relieve you from any shadow of uncertainty that may hang over yours, in respect to the cause of this dreadful deed, the fatal results of which were averted only by your timely aid. It was through disappointment in respect to that very lady who presented herself at my bankers’——”

“Enough!” exclaimed the Marchioness: “we have already had too many painful revelations this day,” she added, in a low and affectionate tone. “If you are now strong enough to see her, I will fetch Agnes to remain with us for a few minutes.”

The Marquis joyfully assented; and Sophia, having arranged the collar of his linen in such a manner that the bandage on the throat could not be observed, quitted the room. She however almost immediately returned, followed by her daughter, who was overwhelmed with delight to find him whom she believed to be her father so much improved.

But when the Marchioness contemplated the heart-felt joy with which her husband welcomed Agnes to his arms, she was stricken with remorse at the deceit she was practising upon him,—permitting him to regard that beauteous girl as his own offspring! Could she, however, destroy an illusion which gave him so much delight, and was the source of so much happiness?—will our readers blame her for cherishing this secret in her own breast, instead of uselessly destroying the fabric of domestic peace which had once more been built up in that lordly mansion?

After this interview with Agnes, the Marquis shortly fell into a deep and refreshing slumber, which continued until the evening.

On the following morning he was so much farther improved, that when Trevelyan called, he insisted upon seeing that good young nobleman, who was delighted beyond measure to find that such a signal change had taken place in his condition.

CHAPTER CC.

JACK RILY AND THE LAWYER'S CLERK.

It was about nine in the evening, and Mr. John Rily, *alias* the Doctor, was seated in his chamber at the house in Roupel Street, smoking his pipe and pondering upon the best mode of disposing of the Bank-notes that were in his possession.

He had seen by the newspapers that his late companion, Mrs. Mortimer, had died from the effects of the terrible punishment inflicted upon her by Vitriol Bob: but he had not observed any advertisement proclaiming the notes that had been derived from the forgery;—and the journals were likewise silent respecting the forgery itself.

The Doctor accordingly concluded that the fraud remained undetected, and that the legitimate cheque had not been presented; and as several days had now elapsed since the notes had found their way into his possession, he began seriously to meditate how he could convert them into gold.

It may seem a singular thing to some that a man having in his possession sixty thousand pounds' *worth*, was at a loss for the means to realise the amount: but such is often the predicament in which thieves are placed.

For thus stood the matter in respect to Jack Rily:—If he were to take a quantity of the notes to the Bank of England, his appearance might be so much against him as to excite suspicion: for he was not endowed with vanity sufficient to blind his eyes to the fact that his outward aspect was of the most villanously hang-dog description it was possible to conceive. Besides, he was not certain that the notes might not have been privately stopped. Again, if he applied to the "fences" and receivers of stolen property with whom he was acquainted, he knew that they could not cash more than two or three thousand pounds' worth of the notes; and in doing even this much, they might mulct him of one-half the value. Besides, they were only to be trusted by men in such desperate circumstances as to leave no other alternative: whereas the Doctor had plenty of gold remaining from his share of the plunder derived from the adventure in the Haunted Houses. Lastly in the catalogue of difficulties now enumerated, Jack Rily had heard from a friend so much of the galleys in France, that he did not at all relish the idea of repairing to that country and standing the chance of visiting those places by attempting to pass notes concerning which private information might have been sent, for any thing he knew to the contrary, to the various money-changers.

All these considerations were occupying the Doctor's thoughts on the evening alluded to; when his landlord entered to acquaint him that a gentleman named Green desired to speak to him.

"Ah! my old school-pal!" ejaculated Rily, joyfully: "show him up by all means!"

And during the short interval which elapsed ere the attorney's clerk made his appearance, the Doctor placed the brandy-bottle, a couple of tumblers, and a clean pipe upon the table.

By the time these preparations were completed, Mr. Green entered the room, and was received with the familiarity of a long-standing acquaintance.

"Well, it is quite an age since I saw you last!" exclaimed the Doctor, as soon as his visitor was seated. "What have you been doing with yourself? Still drudging on at old Heathcote's?"

"Just the same—or rather worse," was the reply.

"I'm sorry to hear that," observed the Doctor. "Come, help yourself. But how came you to find me out in my new quarters?"

"I was passing by here yesterday to serve a writ upon a poor devil in this street," answered Mr. Green, "and I twigged you at the window. You didn't see me: but I made up my mind to give you a call—and so here I am."

"And I feel devilish glad to see you," responded Jack Rily. "You may observe that my circumstances have improved a trifle or so, of late."

"Ah! I wish to heaven that *mine* would show any proof of amendment," said Green, with a profound sigh, as he helped himself to a tumbler of brandy-and-water. "I made a couple of hundred pounds the other day—it was an affair of giving information about a lunatic-asylum in which Heathcote had locked up his own brother;—and because I treated myself to this new suit of clothes," he added, glancing down at his dress, "the old villain declared that I must have robbed him to procure the money. Oh! how I long to be

revenged on that man!”

“Well, I don’t suppose it’s so very difficult,” observed Rily: “at least I should think, from all you have told me at different times, that you know enough about him to make him quake in his shoes.”

“Yes—yes—but—then,” stammered the clerk, with the hesitation of one who longs to open his heart to another, yet shrinks from the avowal of a villany even to the ears of a villain.

“But what?” demanded the Doctor, relighting his pipe. “If you’ve come to consult me, then out with everything at once. Do nothing by halves, old fellow—I never do.”

“Well, you see—the truth is—that—I—I am in the man’s power—completely in his power,” responded Green: “and now he’s making my life so wretched—oh! so wretched, that I think of running away to America with my two hundred pounds. But then I know that he would move heaven and earth to find me out; he would advertise me—give a description of my person—swear that I had robbed him, or something of that kind;—anything, indeed, would he do to revenge himself upon me. He is one of those despicable characters that cherish the bitterest—the most fiend-like malignity.”

“And what is he doing to you now?” demanded Jack, smoking his pipe at his ease while his friend was thus pouring forth his complaints.

“What doesn’t he do, you should rather ask me,” exclaimed Green, in a tone of mingled rage, hate, and despair. “As I just now told you, he put his brother Sir Gilbert into a lunatic asylum, in the hope of getting into his own hands the management of all the baronet’s property—and doubtless in the expectation likewise that grief would send the unfortunate gentleman to his last home. Well, Sir Gilbert escaped——”

“Through your connivance, eh?” interrupted the Doctor, with a knowing chuckle.

“Yes—with my connivance,” responded Green; “and it is the suspicion of this fact that makes Heathcote so intolerable in his conduct towards me. Besides, seeing me with a new suit of clothes, he swore that if I had not robbed him I must have been bribed to give information relative to the place where his brother was confined. It was all in vain that I reminded him of my salary being quite sufficient to keep me in decent attire——”

“Why, don’t you see,” again interrupted the Doctor,—“when once a man has got a certain suspicion into his head, he won’t very easily part with it. He cherishes it—feeds upon it—sleeps upon it—dreams of it, just as a young girl does of her first love.”

“I suppose that this must be the case,” said Green. “At all events, I have been made so miserable by Heathcote for the last few days, that it was like a ray of hope when I saw you at the window of this room yesterday; and I determined to come and chat with you over the matter.”

“And yet I don’t see very well how I can assist you, since you declare that you are completely in Heathcote’s power,” observed Jack Rily. “But you must tell me every thing.”

“Well—there’s no use in denying, then, that Heathcote can transport me if he chooses,” said Green. “Some years ago I—I—committed—a—a forgery——”

“Oh! that’s nothing,” exclaimed Jack, assuming a consolatory tone. “But go on.”

“Nothing do you call it!” cried the clerk, looking apprehensively around him, as if he were fearful that the very walls had ears. “In a month’s time a thousand pounds must be forthcoming—or I shall be transported. Up to this time Heathcote has all along given me to understand that he will replace the money for me: but this business of his brother’s escape and two or three other matters that have gone wrong with him lately——”

“I understand you,” said Jack Rily: “they have put the kyebosh upon it.”

“The what?” demanded Green, unskilled in slang phrases.

“Put a stopper on the affair, I mean,” explained the Doctor, whom an idea had struck while his companion was talking; and this idea was that Mr. Green might be made instrumental in procuring cash for a considerable portion of the Bank-notes.

“I am indeed afraid that Heathcote will not assist me,” pursued the wretched clerk; “and if he does not, I cannot say what will become of me. In fact there is no use in buoying myself up with the hope that Heathcote *will* do any thing for me: he himself has lost money lately in several ways—and moreover his temper is terribly soured by this affair about his brother.”

“Is Sir Gilbert taking steps to punish him, then?” asked Jack.

“Oh! no—he is too generous and too forgiving in his disposition,” replied Green: “but he has compelled the two surgeons who signed the certificate of insanity, to give him a counter-declaration—and indeed a confession to the effect that they were bribed to sign the

document on the strength of which he was placed in the mad-house. There is consequently the danger of all this becoming known; and Heathcote, finding his reputation to be hanging by a thread, has grown as it were desperate,—not caring what may happen to himself—still less what may befall *me*."

"I should think, then, that if you had a thousand pounds, you would fancy yourself a very lucky fellow, and be able to defy Heathcote altogether," observed Jack Rily.

"I would give the last ten years of my life to reach such happiness," said the clerk. "But it is useless—vain to hope—"

"Will you give a few hours of your time and a little of your ingenuity?" demanded the Doctor, now fixing upon him a look full of deep and mysterious meaning.

"Do not banter me—do not make a jest of my misfortune," exclaimed Green.

"By Satan! I never was more serious in my life," returned the Doctor. "Nay—you may stare at me as you will: but the thousand pounds are nearer within your reach than you fancy—and you might still keep your two hundred pounds for your own purposes."

"Pray explain yourself!" cried the clerk, not daring to yield to the hope which suddenly appeared to rise up before him. "Keep me not in suspense, I conjure you! Can you do anything for me?—can you put me into the way——"

"Yes—I can," answered the Doctor, emphatically. "And now you may as well tell me candidly that you thought I *might* be able to assist you, when you resolved upon calling here. Because, since we were at school together—which is many long years ago—our paths in life have been so different, that it is not very likely you would have honoured me by your company without some pressing motive."

"You must at the same time admit that whenever I have met you, I have always spoken civilly to you—and sometimes stood treat," added Green, diffidently.

"Once or twice," observed Jack. "But that don't matter one way or the other. I asked you a question: and before I open my mind any farther——"

"Well—I candidly admit, then," interrupted Green, wishing to bring the matter to the point as speedily as possible—"I candidly admit that I *did* hope you could help me in some way or another. But it was only the hope of a desperate man: for as to the idea that you could assist me to eight hundred or a thousand pounds, it would have been insane to harbour it even for an instant. To speak more frankly still, I almost thought of asking you to let me join you in your own way of life, although I hardly know what your pursuits positively are."

"They require courage and firmness, at all events," answered Jack Rily, with a coarse laugh; "whereas you have got into such cursed cringing, bowing, and scraping ways, that you are only fit for a toad-eater. Excuse me for speaking frankly—but as we are talking on matters of business——"

"Quite correct," interrupted Green, swallowing his resentment: for he felt but little pleased at the home-truth which had just been told him. "And now for the information which is to relieve me from such cruel suspense."

"First answer me one or two questions," said the Doctor. "I suppose you are often in the habit of changing Bank-notes for your master?"

"Yes: but not to any considerable amount at a time," answered Green: "he is too suspicious to trust me with a sum sufficiently large to tempt me to run away with it."

"Nevertheless, I suppose you could manage to change a few heavy notes, if you had them?" pursued the Doctor.

"Heavy notes?" repeated Green, turning pale and trembling. "Are they—fo—or—ged?"

"Not they!" exclaimed Rily, half disgusted with his timorous companion. "They are genuine Bank of England flimsies: but as they didn't come into my hands in a very regular manner, and as my appearance isn't altogether in my favour, I can't pass them myself."

"Oh! I—I—can get cash for them," said Green, with all the eagerness of a man in a desperate predicament. "Heathcote's bankers would do me as many as you can possibly have."

"I question it," observed the Doctor, drily. "Would they cash you two notes for a thousand each?"

"Yes—yes: assuredly they would," was the prompt answer.

"And you must know other places——"

"Several—several," interrupted Green, anticipating the remainder of the questions. "But would it not be shorter to go to the Bank of England at once?"

“Well—I think it would,” responded Jack.

“Unless—unless—there’s any fear—any danger, I mean—I——”

“Curse upon your fears and dangers!” ejaculated the hare-lipped villain, savagely: “there are none at all—only, as I just now said, I can’t go myself. But if you can get ten thousand changed to-morrow, you may have one thousand for your own purposes.”

Mr. Green could not find words to express his gratitude in return for this assurance: he was overwhelmed with a delight which he had not experienced for years. The thought of emancipating himself from the thraldom of his despot-master was too brilliant—too dazzling to gaze upon. He could not believe that there was anything beyond a mere chance in his favour:—that the matter was a certainty, he dared not imagine.

But when Jack Rily displayed a few of the notes, and mysteriously hinted that they were the produce of a forgery which could not possibly be detected, Mr. Green started from his chair, and actually danced for joy!

CHAPTER CCI.

MR. HEATHCOTE AND HIS CLERK.

It was five o'clock in the morning of the day after the interview described in the last chapter; and Mr. Heathcote was seated at the writing-table in his private office.

He was busily occupied with papers;—for his was a disposition that could not endure idleness. Even when vexed and annoyed—as he was at present—it was impossible for him to remain inactive. Had he been an author, he would have eclipsed Walter Scott or Paul de Koek in the number of his works.

There was a deep gloom upon his brow and a sinister light in his restless eyes, as he bent over the parchment-deeds which he was inspecting; and from time to time he cast an anxious glance towards the door.

At length be rang the bell; and the junior clerk answered the summons.

"Has not Mr. Green made his appearance *yet*?" demanded the lawyer, with an emphasis on the last word.

"No, sir—he has not," was the reply, given timidly—for the young man beheld both the gloom on the brow and the gleaming in the eye.

“Not yet!” ejaculated Heathcote, fiercely, and frowning in his own peculiar fashion at the same time. “Nor sent either?” he added, interrogatively.

“No, sir,” responded the junior clerk.

“This is strange—very strange,” murmured the lawyer. “He can’t be ill—poor devils like him cannot afford to be unwell. But if he were,—if he *did* happen to be so indisposed that be couldn’t shut his eyes to the fact,—he would have sent word. You know where he lives? demanded Mr. Heathcote, abruptly addressing himself to the young man.

“Yes, sir,” was the answer.

“Then go to his lodgings directly,” exclaimed the lawyer, in an imperious tone; “and if you find him at home, tell him that I am very angry indeed at his absence. Should he be ill, you must desire him to get out of bed, take a cab, and come to me at once to give an account of his conduct. Two guineas a-week, indeed, to a fellow who takes it into his head to be ill!”

And with this humane reflection Mr. Heathcote was about to resume his work, while the young clerk was turning towards the door, when Mr. Green suddenly made his appearance.

“Oh! you are come at last, sir—are you?” cried the lawyer, glancing up at the clock. “A quarter past five—and the office hours are from nine till six. What the deuce does this mean, sir?”

“I had a little business to transact, sir,” answered the head clerk, closing the door by which the junior functionary had just evaporated.

“A little business!” repeated Mr. Heathcote, staring at the man in unfeigned amazement: for he could not possibly conceive how Mr. Green should have any affairs of his own to attend to.

“Yes, sir—a little business,” returned the head clerk, who, though now feeling comparatively independent of his master could not shake off an obsequiousness of manner, which had become habitual to him. “Is it strange, sir, that for once in a way I should have taken the holiday which was certain to be refused if solicited beforehand?”

“Have you been drinking, Mr. Green—or are you mad—to talk to me in this style?” demanded Heathcote, surveying his clerk with more than usual attention.

“I have had nothing to drink, sir, beyond a single glass of sherry—and I beg to inform you that I am *not* crazy,” answered the head clerk, growing a trifle bolder.

“A glass of sherry!” repeated Heathcote, again evincing the most unfeigned astonishment. “How is it possible, sir, that you can indulge in such extravagances and pay for them honestly? A few days ago you ventured to appear before me in a new suit of clothes, with the gloss actually on them—whereas your regular office-suit had not been thread-bare more than two years. Let me tell you, sir, that I take note of these things: I observe the most minute symptoms of change in a man’s character or habits; and no one can deceive *me*, Mr. Green—no one can deceive *me*,” repeated the lawyer, looking hard at the individual whom he thus addressed, as much as to say that he had suspected something wrong and was now certain of it.

“Well, sir—and who has attempted to deceive you?” asked Green, in a bolder tone than had ever yet characterised his language when in the presence of his hitherto dreaded master.

“Who has attempted to deceive me!” vociferated Heathcote, his lips becoming white and quivering with rage. “You, sir—*you* have made the endeavour—you are making it now! But it will not do, Mr. Green—it will not do. Take care of yourself! New suits of clothes—sherry—a day’s absence without leave, and even without the humble apology that should mark your return,—all this is suspicious, sir—very suspicious, let me tell you.”

“Suspicious of what?” demanded the head clerk, approaching Mr. Heathcote’s desk, and looking steadily across it at that gentleman.

“That you were either bribed in my brother’s affair—or that you have robbed me,” was the immediate answer.

“You are a liar, sir—a deliberate liar,” exclaimed Green, now beginning to experience the first feelings of exultation at the independence which he was enabled to assert.

The lawyer could make no reply: he was amazed—bewildered—stupefied!

“Yes, sir,” continued Green, his voice now losing all its obsequiousness and his manner rising completely above servility,—“you are a liar if you say that I robbed you! Where was the chance, even if I had possessed the inclination, of pilfering even a single farthing? You know that you reckon up the office-money to the very last penny—and that if I tell you how a box of lucifers, or a piece of tape, or any other trifling article was required, you were always sure to say we were very extravagant in that front-office. These are truths, sir; and therefore how dare you pretend to believe in the possibility of my robbing you?”

“Mr. Green—Mr. Green,” exclaimed Heathcote, absolutely frightened at his head clerk’s manner: “what is the cause of all this excitement?”

The lawyer was frightened, we say,—because his conscience told him that something had occurred to place Mr. Green upon a more independent footing with regard to him; and the greater became such independence on the part of one who had long been his tool and instrument, the less secure was the lawyer himself in his own position. In fact, when a wretched being who had long grovelled in the dust at his feet, suddenly started up and dared to look him in the face,—it was a sign that the fabric of despotism was shaken and was tottering to its fall. Mr. Heathcote felt all this—and he trembled for a moment,—trembled with a cold and death-like shudder, as he beheld his clerk’s eyes glaring savagely at him; and it was under the influence of this sensation that he uttered the words which, by proving his own weakness, gave Green additional courage.

“You ask what is the cause of all this excitement,” exclaimed the latter: “and yet only a few minutes have elapsed since you dared to accuse me of having robbed you.”

“A man who has committed a forgery, may very well be suspected of theft,” returned Heathcote, who, having recovered his presence of mind, answered with his usual brutality of manner.

“And what may you not be accused of, then?” demanded Green, scarcely able to restrain himself from flying like a tiger-cat at his master: “for what have you not committed?”

“By heaven, Mr. Green, this shall last no longer!” ejaculated Heathcote, starting from his seat: “you are drunk, sir—you have been drinking, I tell you. Come—be reasonable,” he continued, almost in a coaxing tone: “go home quietly—and be here early in the morning to make an apology for your present bad conduct. I promise to forgive you.”

“Forgive me!” repeated Green:—“forgive me!” he exclaimed again, with a chuckling laugh which did Mr. Heathcote harm to hear it: “I have done nothing, sir, that needs forgiveness—and if I was to kick you thrice round this room where you have tyrannised over me for twelve years, it would only be paying back a minute portion of all I owe you.”

“Mr. Green, you will provoke me to do something desperate,” retorted Heathcote, in a low, thick tone, as he approached his head clerk to read in that individual’s countenance the solution of his present enigmatical conduct: “you will provoke me, I say—and then you will be sorry for your rashness. Consider—reflect—in another month’s time the thousand pounds must positively be forthcoming——”

“Will you replace it for me?” demanded Green, abruptly.

“You know what I have always said——”

“Yes—and I now know likewise what you have always *meant*,” interrupted Green, darting a look full of malignant hate and savage spite at the lawyer. “For twelve long years, sir, I have been your slave—your vile and abject slave. I was a criminal, it is true, when I first came to you—for I had committed that forgery which you detected, and which placed me in your power. But I had still the feelings of a man—whereas you soon imbued me with such ideas and reduced me to such a miserable state of servitude, that I have wept bitter, bitter tears at the thought of my own deep degradation. I could have lied for you—I could have committed perjury for you—I could have performed all the meannesses and condescended to do all the vile and low trickery which form part and parcel of your business:—but when I found myself used as a mere tool and instrument and treated like a spaniel, without ever having a single kind word uttered to cheer me beneath a yoke of crushing despotism——”

“You have had two guineas a week, paid with scrupulous regularity,” interposed Heathcote, who, from the tenour of the observations which Green had just made, began to fancy that he was only excited by liquor to make vague and general complaints, but that he was still as much in his power as ever.

“Two guineas a-week!” repeated the man, indignantly: “you are always dinning that fact in my ears. But heaven knows that were my salary six times as much, it would not repay me for all the cruelty I have endured at your hands—nor for all that one is obliged to *see* and *go through* while in your employment. I had some tender feelings once: but they have long ago been stifled by the horrible spectacles of woe and misery which have been forced upon my sight, and which have sprung from your detestable covetousness. I have seen children starving—mothers weeping over their dying babes—while the fathers and husbands have been languishing in gaol,—yes, in the debtor’s gaol where you have thrown them, and where some of them have died, cursing the name of James Heathcote! Yes, sir—I have seen all this: and what is more—aye, and worse, too—far worse—I have been an involuntary instrument, as your clerk, in causing much of that awful misery, the mere thought of which almost drives me mad. Talk of the black turpitude of murdering with a dagger or a pistol!—why, it is a mercy to the slow—lingering—piece-meal murders which you and men of your stamp are constantly perpetrating. *For as true as there is a God in heaven, there are more slow and cold-blooded murders committed in one year by a certain class of attorneys, than are recorded in the annals of Newgate for a whole century!*”

Heathcote’s fears had all returned by rapid degrees as his head clerk, turning full upon him, levelled at his head the terrible charges summed up in the preceding speech: but when these last words fell upon his ear, he grew ghastly pale, and, staggering back a few paces, sank into his chair,—*for he knew how sternly true was the appalling accusation!*

“Ah! well may your eyes glare upon me in horror,” resumed Green: “but it is high time that you should hear a few home truths—even

though they come from such lips as mine. For you doubtless think that it is all very fine to issue a writ—refuse delay—decline everything in the shape of compromise—and then seize upon the goods of your victim, or clap him into gaol:—but it is we who sit in the outer office—we clerks, who can best penetrate into the effects of such a heartless course. When we see the door open, and the miserable wretch come in with *care* as legibly written on his countenance as if it were printed in letters on a piece of paper,—and when he comes crawling up to our desk, as if *his* utter self-abasement would be so pleasing to us clerks as to induce us to say a good word in his behalf to *you*,—then, when he asks in a tone of anguish which is ready to burst forth into a flood of tears, '*Do you think it likely that Mr. Heathcote will give me time?*'—it is *then*, I say, that the real feelings of such poor wretches transpire, and the murderous effects of the harsh proceedings adopted by lawyers of *your* stamp become painfully apparent."

"To what is all this to lead, Mr. Green?" demanded Heathcote, in a low and subdued tone: for it struck him that such a long address could only be meant to herald some evil tidings, to which his clerk, in the refinement of vindictive cruelty, sought to impart a more vivid poignancy by prefatory delays.

"To what is all this to lead?" repeated Green: "why—to your utter confusion, black-hearted old man that you are! Think of the conversation that took place between us a few days ago: did I not then tell you that there were many deaths to be laid to your door? And I was right! You sent off Thompson to prison—his wife and child perished, and he cut his throat:—*you* are the murderer of those three human beings! The man Beale, whom you likewise threw into Whitecross Street, died in the infirmary of that gaol—died of a broken heart, sir;—and *you* were his murderer! Hundreds and hundreds of deaths have you caused in the same way,—*hundreds and hundreds of legal murders!*"

"Green—Mr. Green!" gasped the lawyer, writhing as if he were a dwarf in the grasp of a giant: then, wondering why he should thus put up with the insolence of his clerk, and falling back upon the belief that the man could not possibly conduct himself in such a way unless he were under the influence of liquor, he suddenly started from his seat, exclaiming, "By heaven! sir, you have gone so far that all hope of forgiveness on my part is impossible."

"I care nothing for your pardon—and shall not even condescend to solicit it," replied Mr. Green, in a tone of complete and unmistakeable defiance. "I am going to leave you at once——"

"Leave me!" ejaculated Heathcote, who had hitherto believed it to be impossible that his clerk could throw off the chains of servitude and thraldom which had been so firmly rivetted upon him: "leave me!" he repeated: "yes—oh! yes," he added, his countenance assuming an expression of the most diabolical sardonism;—"yes—you shall indeed leave me—but it will be to change your quarters for a cell in Newgate!"

"Perhaps *you* will be the first to repair thither," said Green, with a chuckle that seemed to grate upon the lawyer's ears like the sound emitted by the process of sharpening the teeth of a saw.

"In less than two hours, Mr. Green, Clarence Villiers shall be made acquainted with the fact that the thousand pounds have long ceased to be in the Bank of England," exclaimed Heathcote.

"The thousand pounds are there, sir—yes, *there* at this very minute," answered Green, in a tone of assurance which convinced Heathcote that the man was speaking the truth. "And what is more, sir, Mr. Villiers knows all—and has forgiven all! This morning did I replace the money; this afternoon did I repair to Brompton to throw myself at the feet of Mr. Villiers—confess everything—and implore his pardon. Oh! sir, he is a generous man—and he forgave me. '*You have been guilty of a terrible breach of trust—nay, a heinous crime, Mr. Green,*' he said; '*but you have atoned for your turpitude. It is our duty in this world to forgive where true contrition is manifested; and I will take care to hold you harmless in this case, should it ever transpire that the money had been sold out.*'—I wept while I thanked him; and I said, '*But I have a bitter enemy who is acquainted with the whole transaction: what can be done to save me from disgrace, should he inform against me?*'—'*He cannot prove that you forged my name,*' responded Villiers: '*I alone can prove that; and under present circumstances, I would not for worlds inflict an injury upon you.*' I again thanked him, and took my leave. You now perceive, Mr. Heathcote, that so far from being in *your* power, *you* are entirely in mine. The other day you told me that you would crush me as if I were a worm—that you would send me to Newgate—that you would abandon me to my fate—and that you would even *help* to have me shipped for eternal exile. I thank you for all your kind intentions, sir," added Green, in a tone of bitter satire; "and I mean to show my gratitude by exposing you and your villany to the utmost of my ability."

"And what injury can *you* do me, reptile?" exclaimed Heathcote, quivering with rage.

"What injury!" repeated Green: "I can ruin you!" he added, speaking loudly and triumphantly. "Oh! I am acquainted with far more of your dark transactions and nefarious schemes than you can possibly imagine. The deeds that are contained therein," he added, pointing to the japanned tin-boxes, "are not sealed books to me. I have read them all—yes, *all*—and have gleaned enough information to enable me to bring upon you such a host of ruined and defrauded clients, that you would never dare to face them even for a moment. Ah! you may turn pale as death—and your eyes may glare with rage: but it is not the less true that I hold you in my power. If you destroy those deeds, you then annihilate the only documents which prove your title to the vast property which you have accumulated: if you do not destroy them, you leave in existence the damning evidences of your villany. At this very moment there are old men and old women struggling on in the bitterest penury, and cursing the life from which they have not the moral courage to fly through the medium of suicide,—some of them in the workhouse—others dependent on the bounty of relatives;—and all these have been plunged into this appalling misery by *you*! But every step you took to enmesh and ensnare them—every scheme you devised to get them completely into

your power, so that you might wrench from them the last acre of their lands and the last guinea of their fortunes,—all—all has been illegal—fraudulent—extortionate—vile! Oh! it will alone prove a fine harvest for me, when I again take out my certificate to practise as an attorney—which I am about to do,—it will be a splendid commencement, I say, to take up the causes of all those persons and compel you to render an account to your ruined clients. This, sir, is what I am about to do: and now it shall be war between us—war to the very knife,—and ere many months have elapsed, you will bitterly repent your conduct to one who only asked for a little kindness in return for his faithful—far too faithful services."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Green abruptly quitted the office, leaving James Heathcote in a state of mind not even to be envied by a criminal about to ascend the steps of the scaffold.

CHAPTER CCII.

JACK RILY AND VITRIOL BOB.

Mr. Green had so well managed matters in respect to the Bank-notes, that in the course of a few hours he had contrived to obtain cash for about twelve thousand pounds' worth; and the Doctor was so delighted at his success, that he had testified his satisfaction by making him a present of a couple of thousand for himself.

Being now a rich man, Mr. Rily resolved to quit his lodgings in Roupel-street and take superior apartments in a better neighbourhood. Then it struck him, as he was walking leisurely along in the City, after having parted from Green, that it would be far more agreeable to become the possessor of a nice little cottage in a pleasant suburb; and, while this idea was uppermost in his mind, he happened to observe in the window of a house-agent an announcement to the effect that "several elegant and desirable villas were to be let on lease or sold, in the most delightful part of Pentonville." The Doctor entered the office, obtained a card to view the premises thus advertised, and, taking a cab, proceeded straight to the suburb indicated.

Having nothing particular to do, Jack Rily spent several hours in inspecting the villas, and at length fixed upon one which he resolved to purchase. The individual who had built the houses on speculation, and who was compelled to dispose of one on any terms before he could possibly finish another, resided close at hand; and a bargain being speedily concluded, a particular hour on the following day was agreed upon as the time for a final settlement.

Jack Rily, having proceeded thus far in his arrangements, entered a public-house which had lately been built on an eminence within a quarter of a mile of the New Model Prison; and there he ordered some dinner—for it was now four o'clock in the afternoon. The repast over, he took a seat at an open window which commanded a view of Copenhagen Fields and all the neighbouring district; and with his pipe and some hot brandy-and-water he was enjoying himself to his heart's content, when he was suddenly startled by the appearance of Vitriol Bob, who happened to pass that way.

Though a brave, fearless, and desperate man, the Doctor nevertheless uttered an ejaculation of mingled surprise and annoyance; and his enemy, who would not have otherwise perceived him, instantly glanced towards the window. Their looks met—and a diabolical scowl distorted the countenance of Vitriol Bob,—while Jack Rily, immediately recovering his presence of mind, surveyed the miscreant with cool defiance.

Vitriol Bob appeared to hesitate for a moment what course to pursue: then, suddenly making up his mind, he entered the public-room where the Doctor was seated.

Taking a chair at another table, he rang the bell and ordered some spirits-and-water, in payment for which he threw down a sovereign, receiving the change.

When the waiter had disappeared, and the two villains were alone together, Vitriol Bob looked maliciously at Jack Rily, as much as to say, "You see I am not without money;" and then he glanced complacently at the new suit of black which he had on.

For a change had taken place in Vitriol Bob's appearance; and he seemed to be "in high feather," as well as his enemy the Doctor. His huge black whiskers had been trimmed, oiled, and curled—a process that did not however materially mitigate the hang-dog expression of his countenance: for his small, reptile eyes still glared ferociously from beneath his thick, overhanging brows,—his lips were as usual of a livid hue,—and his broken nose positively appeared more flat on his face than ever.

"Your health, Jack," said the miscreant, nodding with a kind of malignant familiarity, as he raised the steaming glass to his lips.

"Thank'ee kindly, Bob," returned the Doctor, in a tone of mock civility.

"Now that we have met at last, old feller, we won't part again in a hurry," observed Vitriol Bob after a pause, during which he lighted a cigar.

"Just as you choose, my tulip," said Rily, calmly puffing away and contemplating the thin blueish vapour which curled lazily from the bowl of his pipe out of the window.

"You and I have a score to settle, you know, Jack," continued Vitriol Bob; "and it seems as if the Devil had thrown us in each other's way this evenin' on purpose to reggilate our accounts."

“Oh! that’s the construction you put upon it, eh?” said the Doctor. “Well—just as you like.”

“You know that you used me shameful in that Stamford-street business t’other day,” proceeded Vitriol Bob.

“It was only what you deserved for the trick you played me, old fellow,” retorted the Doctor, but with amazing coolness alike of tone and manner.

“I don’t deny that I bilked you out of a part of your reglars in the matter alluded to,” said Bob: “but it didn’t deserve such a return as you gived me in the Haunted House. Thank God, I had my revenge on the old o’oman t’other night.”

“Yes—she’s disposed of,” observed Jack; “and I can’t forgive you for it, Bob—even if you wished us to be friends. She was a fine old creature,—and I had an affection for her, because she was the ugliest wretch I ever saw in the shape of a woman—and her spirit was admirable.”

“I meant the blow for *you*, Jack,” said Vitriol Bob: “but it’s just as well now that the bottle broke over her, since you and me have met again.”

“Have you got another bottle in your pocket, Bob?” demanded the Doctor: “because if we are to have a tuzzle for it before we part, I may as well put myself on as equal terms with you as possible.”

“I shan’t take no unfair advantage, Jack,” was the reply: and, as the villain thus spoke, he slapped his hands against the skirts of his coat his breeches’ pockets, and his breast, to convince his antagonist that he had no bottle about his person.

“There’s nothing like fair play, Bob,” returned the Doctor; “and therefore if you like to feel about me to convince yourself that I have no fire-arms, you’re welcome.”

“I’ll take your word for it, Jack,” responded Vitriol Bob. “But I suppose you have got a clasp-knife.”

“I never go without one,” was the answer: “and it’s as sharp as a razor.”

“So is mine,” observed the other miscreant; and then there was a long pause, during which the two men contemplated each other with a calmness and serenity that would have prevented even the most acute observer from noticing the malignant light that gleamed in the depths of their eyes.

And while the one continued to puff his pipe in a leisurely manner, the other smoked his cigar with equal ease; so that they appeared to be two friends enjoying themselves in a pleasant way in the cool of the evening.

“I suppose I interrupted some sport t’other night, Jack,” said Vitriol Bob, at length breaking the silence. “You and the old o’oman wasn’t out together at that hour for nothink—particklerly in such a neighbourhood.”

“Yes—we were going to do a little business together,” observed the Doctor. “You first twigged me in Sloane Street. I saw you!”

“I knowed you did: but you didn’t suspect that I follered you.”

“Rather,” said Jack Rily. “At least, I thought it very probable.”

“You’re aweer that the old o’oman’s dead, I suppose?”

“I said as much just now. ’Twas in the papers,” remarked Jack Rily.

“Yes—I read it in the *Adwertiser*,” responded Vitriol Bob.

There was another pause, during which the two miscreants had their glasses replenished. The Doctor also refilled his pipe, and the other lighted a second cigar.

“We’ll make ourselves comfortable, Jack,” said Vitriol Bob, “as long as you like: and whenever you feel disposed to go, mind that I shall be arter you.”

“Well—I can’t prevent *that*,” observed the Doctor, coolly. “You’ve a right to walk which way you choose in this free country.”

“Thank’ee for giving me the information,” said Bob, in a satirical tone. “But of course I mean to stick to you till you’re so wearied of my company that you *must* come to a last struggle either to shake me off altogether, or perish yourself. For, mind, if I catch you asleep, Jack, I shall stick my clasp-knife into you up to the haft.”

“I’m obliged to you for letting me know your kind intentions beforehand,” observed the Doctor: “because I shall adopt precisely the same mode of warfare.”

“Now, then, we understand each other,” said Vitriol Bob; “and that’s a comfort. But it’s a great pity that two such fine fellers as you

and me should be at loggerheads. Howsomever, it can't be helped—and a reconcilement, or whatever they call it, is impossible. Your life or mine, Jack—that's the question to be decided now."

"Depend upon it, old fellow, that you'll be a croaker before morning," returned the Doctor, as he raised his glass to his lips.

"No—it's you that'll be a stiff'un, my boy," was the pleasant retort.

"Time must show. Remember that it's no infant you'll have to deal with."

"I should have beat you that night in the Haunted House, Jack, if the old o'oman hadn't come to your assistance," observed Vitriol Bob, with a low but diabolical chuckle.

"Yes—but it was because I slipped over something, old fellow," was the answer; "and I shall take care to keep more steady on my pins next time."

"Depend upon it that when the death-struggle *does* come, Jack, the fust that slips will be the dead 'un. Did you ever hear of the Kentuckian fashion of dealing with an enemy?" demanded Vitriol Bob.

"Never," was the reply. "But I dare say it's something damnable—as bad, perhaps, as breaking a vitriol-bottle over a person's face—or else you wouldn't know anything about it."

"You're right there, Jack: it's *gouging* that I mean."

"And what's gouging, pray?"

"Tearing a fellow's eye out of its socket," answered Vitriol Bob.

"One can play at that game as well as another," observed the Doctor, totally unmoved by the horrid nature of the conversation.

"To be sure: and we shall sooner or later see who beats at it."

Another pause succeeded this last remark of Vitriol Bob; and again did the two men sit contemplating each his enemy with a composure that was unnatural and dreadful to a degree under the circumstances.

Time wore on in this manner: their glasses were frequently replenished—and yet the liquor appeared not to produce the least effect upon them; but, cool, collected, and self-possessed, they sate measuring each other's form and calculating its strength, until darkness insensibly stole upon them. The waiter then entered to light the gas; and several frequenters of the house began to drop in to take their evening's allowance of alcoholic drink and stupifying tobacco.

At length Jack Rily rose, and, looking hard at his enemy, said, "I am going *now*."

"Wery well," returned Vitriol Bob: "I'll keep you company."

There was nothing in these observations to excite either the curiosity or the suspicions of the other persons in the public-house-parlour: nevertheless, those words had a terrible significancy for the two men who had exchanged them.

The Doctor walked leisurely out of the room first; and Vitriol Bob followed him. But the instant they were outside the premises, the former turned abruptly round upon his enemy, saying, "Come, let us proceed abreast: I don't mean to give you a chance of stabbing me from behind."

"Just as you like," observed Vitriol Bob; and he placed himself at the Doctor's right hand, leaving an interval of about a couple of feet between them.

In this manner they walked on in silence,—each occupied with his own peculiar reflections.

Vitriol Bob was intent only on vengeance,—dread, full, complete, and diabolical vengeance; and, though he seemed to be looking straight forward, he was nevertheless watching his companion with the sidelong glances of his reptile-like eyes.

Jack Rily was calculating in his mind what course he should adopt. He was naturally as brave as a lion: but he did not perceive any advantage in risking his life in a struggle that, even were he victorious, would produce neither profit nor glory. The only possible good that could result to him from a triumphant issue of the quarrel, would be the removal of a bitter, inveterate, and determined enemy. Nevertheless, the Doctor had most potent reasons to induce him to avoid this deadly encounter. He had just obtained a vast sum of money, and had the means of realising five times as much: the world, therefore, had suddenly assumed a smiling aspect in his eyes. He had already resolved to abandon his nefarious pursuits, which indeed were no longer necessary—and settle down quietly in the cottage for the purchase of which he had that day concluded a bargain;—and all these prospects were to be staked on the hazard of a die—risked fearfully at the bidding of the miscreant who was walking by his side!

At one moment the Doctor seriously thought of giving his companion into charge to the first corps of policemen whom they might

encounter; for this was the hour when the little detachments of constables went about relieving their comrades on duty. But that idea was abandoned almost as soon as formed: inasmuch as Jack Rily had all his money about him, and he knew that if he handed Vitriol Bob over to the police as the murderer of Torrens or of Mrs. Mortimer, the miscreant would unhesitatingly turn round with some charge that would at least place him (the Doctor) in temporary restraint, and lead to an examination of his person.

Jack Rily therefore came to the determination of pushing on into the heart of London, well knowing that Vitriol Bob's object was not to assail him in any neighbourhood where the contest was likely to be observed and prevented, but to drive him by dint of persecution, dogging, and a hateful companionship, into the open country, where through very desperation the Doctor should make up his mind to settle the matter decisively by a struggle on equal terms. Feeling convinced that this was his enemy's purpose, Jack Rily resolved either to weary him out or give him the slip if possible—or else to seize an opportunity of stabbing him suddenly in some place where an immediate escape was practicable.

We must again observe it was through no cowardice that the Doctor was desirous of avoiding a conflict from which only one could possibly depart alive: but he had so many inducements to cling to existence, that he saw no advantage in risking them all in a quarrel where the personal animosity was entirely on the other side.

In the course of half an hour they arrived in the vicinity of the Angel at Islington; and Jack Rily, now breaking the silence which had lasted since they quitted the public-house at Pentonville, said, "This walking makes one thirsty: let's have some beer."

"Willingly," answered Vitriol Bob: "and we'll drink out of the same pot to make people believe we're friends."

They accordingly entered a gin-shop and shared a pot of porter at the bar; after which they resumed their walk, passing down the City Road. They kept abreast, and preserved a deep silence,—each watching the movements of the other—the Doctor in the hope of being able to give his companion a sudden thrust with his knife—and Vitriol Bob for the purpose of preventing the escape of his enemy.

It was ten o'clock when they came within sight of the Bank of England; and as they passed under its solid wall, Jack Rily wondered whether he should be alive to keep an appointment which he had with Green for eleven next morning in order to have some more of his notes changed by that individual.

"All the money in that there place, old feller, won't save one or t'other of us from death before many hours is gone by," observed Vitriol Bob, in a low and ferocious tone.

"You must make the best use of your time, then," returned Jack; "since you've got a presentiment that it's so near."

"No—it's you that had better say your prayers," retorted the miscreant. "But what's the use of keeping both your hands in your pockets? If you think you'll be able to draw out your knife suddenly and give me a poke under the ribs, you're uncommonly mistaken."

"I wasn't dreaming of such a thing," answered Jack Rily, for the first time showing a slight degree of confusion in his manner.

"It's false, old feller," said Vitriol Bob: "you've got the clasp-knife open in your pocket—I know you have. The gas-lights is strong enough about there to enable a sharp-sighted chap, like me, to twig all that goes on."

"It's you that speaks false," returned Jack Rily, still keeping his hands in his pockets.

And, again relapsing into silence, they pursued their way.

Passing in front of the Exchange, and up Cornhill, they turned into Birchin Lane. There Jack Rily hesitated for an instant which way to proceed: but suddenly recollecting that in a little passage to the left there was a public-house called the Bengal Arms, he said, "There's a crib here where they sell capital ale."

"Let's have some," cried Vitriol Bob. "You go on fust—the place is too narrer for us both."

"No—you go first," said the Doctor.

"In this way then," responded Vitriol Bob: and stepping nimbly in front of his companion, he turned round and walked backwards along the passage until it suddenly grew wider opposite the door of the Bengal Arms.

Jack Rily laughed at this manœuvre: but he was in reality disappointed—for had Vitriol Bob acted with less precaution, he would have assuredly received the whole length of the Doctor's formidable knife in his back, ere he had proceeded half way up the passage.

"We'll go into the parlour here," said Jack, "and have some bread and cheese. I'm hungry."

"So am I," observed Vitriol Bob, in a dry, laconic tone which denoted the terrible determination that inspired the man's mind,—a determination never to part from his companion until one of them should be no more! There was something awful—something frightfully revolting and hideously appalling in the circumstance of those two miscreants thus wandering about together in a manner that appeared amicable enough to all who beheld them,—two wretches possessing the hearts of fiends and the external ugliness of monsters,—two incarnate demons capable of any turpitude, however black the dye!

CHAPTER CCIII.

THE BENGAL ARMS.—RENEWED WANDERINGS.

The parlour at the Bengal Arms is—or at least was at the time whereof we are writing—a long, low, dingy room, very dark in the day-time and indifferently lighted in the evening. It is always filled with a motley assembly of guests; and ale is the beverage most in request—while to one who indulges in a cigar, at least ten patronise the unaffected enjoyment of the clay-pipe.

On the present occasion the company was numerous: the tobacco-smoke hung like a dense mist in the place, the gas-burners showing dimly through the pestiferous haze;—and the heat was intense.

Jack Rily and Vitriol Bob contrived to find room at one of the tables; and a slip-shod waiter supplied them in due time with a pot of ale and bread and cheese, to the discussion of which they addressed themselves in a manner affording not the slightest suspicion of the deadly enmity which existed between them.

While they were thus engaged they had an opportunity of listening to the conversation that was taking place amongst the other guests.

"Well, for my part," said a little, stout, podgy individual, with a bald head and a round, red, good-humoured countenance, "I have always been taught to look on the City institootions as the blessedest things ever inwented."

"And I maintain that they're the foulest abuses in the universe," exclaimed a tall, thin, sallow-faced individual, striking the table with his clenched fist as he spoke. "Why should everything east of Temple Bar be different from everything west?" he demanded, looking sternly round upon the company as if to defy any one to answer his questions. "Why should it be necessary to have barristers as magistrates in Westminster, and fat stupid old Aldermen in the City?—why should the ridiculous ostentation, useless trappings, and preposterous display of the Mayoralty be maintained for so miserably small a fraction of the great metropolis? Talk of your City Institutions, indeed!—they are either the most awful nonsense that ever made grown up persons look more absurd than little boys playing with paper cocked-hats and wooden swords—or else they are rottenness and corruption. When the Municipal Corporations were reformed in 1835, why was the City of London omitted! Did not Lord John Russell then pledge himself *most solemnly and sacredly* to bring in a separate bill for the London Corporation?—and has this promise, almost amounting to a vow, ever been fulfilled? No: and why? Because every Government, one after another, is afraid to lose the political support of this precious Corporation. And to these selfish considerations is sacrificed every principle of justice, propriety, and common sense. Look at the rascally extravagance and vile profusion which characterise the Corporation. The parish of St. Marylebone, with its hundred and forty thousand inhabitants, only expends *a hundred and twenty-eight thousand pounds* for those parochial purposes which cost the City, with a population of ten thousand less than the other, nearly *a million*! The difference is that Marylebone is governed by an intelligent vestry—whereas London is under a stupid Corporation! Look, again, at the iniquities perpetrated by the Aldermen in their capacity as licensing magistrates—the gross partiality that they show towards some publicans, and the inveterate hostility they manifest towards others. The *rights of the freemen* are a scandal and a shame—many able mechanics and other operatives being frequently driven from the City on account of their inability to pay the money for taking up their freedom.[32] Then again, look at the preposterous power which the Lord Mayor enjoys of stopping up all the thoroughfares and impeding business in every shape and way, on any occasion when it may suit him and his bloated, guzzling, purse-proud adherents to pass in their gingerbread coaches through the City. Is this consistent with British freedom?—is it compatible with the rights or interests of the citizens? Faugh!"

And the speaker resumed his pipe, in deep disgust at the abuses which he had thus succinctly, but most truly enumerated.

"Well, I don't know—but I like all our old institutions," said the bald-headed man, with the stolid obstinacy and contemptible narrow-mindedness which so frequently characterise the John Bullism of a certain class. "The wisdom of our ancestors——"

"The wisdom of the devil!" ejaculated the tall, sallow-faced individual who had held forth on the City abuses. "That is a fool's reason for admiring established and inveterate corruption. The wisdom of our ancestors, indeed! Why—those ancestors believed in the divine right of Kings, and were sincere in praying on the 30th of January as if Charles the First was really a Martyr instead of a Traitor. Our ancestors, too, put faith in witches—aye, and burnt them also! It was our ancestors who kindled the fires in Smithfield where persons suffered at the stake; and our ancestors advocated the most blood-thirsty code of laws in Europe, in virtue of which men were strung up by dozens at a time at the Old Bailey. Our ancestors prosecuted writers for their political and religious opinions, and seemed to take a delight in everything that gratified the inhuman ambition of Kings and Queens, to the prejudice of real freedom. Our ancestors, in fact, were the most ignorant—besotted—bloody-minded miscreants that ever disgraced God's earth; and any man who turns an adoring glance upon the deeds of those ruffians, deserves to be hooted out of all decent society."

Having thus delivered his sentiments on the subject, the sallow-faced individual was about to resume his pipe, when, another idea occurring to him, he suddenly burst forth again in the following terms:—

"But who are those people that generalise so inanely when they speak of the wisdom of our ancestors? They are persons who inherit all the old, wretched, and worn-out prejudices of their forefathers, without having the intellect or the courage to think for themselves. They are the statesmen who gladly fall back upon any argument in order to defend the monstrous abuses of our institutions against the enlightening influence of reform. They are the churchmen who are deeply interested in preserving the loaves and fishes of which their ancestors in the hierarchy plundered the nation. They are, in fact, all those individuals who have anything to lose by wholesome innovation, and everything to gain by the maintenance of a system so thoroughly rotten, corrupt, and loathsome that it infects and demoralizes every grade of society. The Peer eulogises the wisdom of his ancestors, because they handed down to him usurped privileges and an hereditary rank the principle of which is a crying shame. The Member of the House of Commons speaks of the wisdom of his ancestors, because he holds his seat through the frightful corruption introduced by them into the electoral system. The placeman talks of the wisdom of his ancestors, because they invented sinecures and distributed with the lavish hand of robbers the gold which they wrung from the marrow and the sinew of the industrious millions. The parson praises the wisdom of his ancestors, because they invented the atrocious system of allowing a rector to enjoy five thousand a-year for doing nothing, and paying his curate ninety pounds a-year for doing everything. The lawyer praises the wisdom of his ancestors, because they devised such myriads of insane, stupid, unjust, rascally, and contradictory enactments, that a man cannot move hand or foot even in the most trivial and common sense affairs, without the intervention of an attorney: and wherever that common sense does exist on one side, law is almost sure to be on the other; in the same way that wherever justice *is*, there law *is not*. For my part, I do firmly believe that there is not a more wretched and oppressed country in all the world than England—nor a more duped, deceived, gulled, and humbugged people on the face of the earth than the English. Talk of freedom, indeed: why, almost every institution you have is in favour of the rich and against the poor!"

"I can't say that I see it," observed the bald-pated man, in the usually dogmatic tone of confirmed obstinacy and unmitigated ignorance.

"Then you must be blind!" ejaculated the other, his emphasis indicating sovereign contempt for the individual whom he addressed. "Look at the Game Laws: are they made for the rich or for the poor? Are not thousands of miserable creatures thrown into gaols for daring to kill a hare or a pheasant, because, forsooth! it interferes with the sport of the 'squire? Do not the rich ride when out hunting through the corn-fields of their tenants?—and what redress can the latter obtain? Then, again, look at the state of the law generally. What chance has a poor man of bringing a wealthy oppressor to justice?—who can go to Westminster Hall without a pocket full of gold? Why, the very Railway Companies make it a boast that by means of capital they can ruin—aye, and break the heart of any poor antagonist in a law-court, let his cause be ever so just! Look, too, at the privileges enjoyed by the landowners: what proportion of the taxes do they bear in comparison with the industrious, toiling, starving peasantry or mechanics on those estates? Look at the condition of our taxation: are not all the necessaries of life subjected to frightful imposts, while the luxuries are comparatively cheap to the favoured few who can obtain them? What is the proportion between the duty on a poor man's horse and cart and a rich man's carriage and four?—what the proportion between the poor man's beer and spirits and the rich man's foreign wines? Again, if a scion of the aristocracy wants money, he is provided with a good place if not an absolute sinecure; whereas the poor man is sent to die a lingering and degraded death in that awful gaol denominated a work-house. Look at the combination of capital against labour. If capitalists and monopolists lower wages, there is no redress save by means of *a strike* on the part of the workmen; and *a strike* is looked upon as something akin to rebellion against the Sovereign. In every way is the law in favour of the rich—in every way is it grinding and oppressive to the poor."

A profound silence followed these observations: for every one present, save the bald-pated man, perceived their truth and recognized their justice,—and even *he* had not impudence enough to venture a denial which he could not sustain by argument.

"What we require, then," resumed the sallow-faced individual, at length breaking the long pause, "is an entire reform,—a radical reform, and not a measure bearing the name without any of the reality. I love my country and my countrymen as well as any British subject: but it makes my heart bleed to witness the misery which exists throughout the sphere of our industrious population;—and it makes my blood boil to think that nothing is done to remedy the crying evils and reform the tremendous abuses which I have this night enumerated."

The discourse was now taken up by several other individuals present, the bald-headed gentleman declining to pursue it farther; and the sallow-faced guest fearlessly and ably dissected the whole social and governmental system, concluding with an emphatic declaration that the community should agitate morally, but unweariedly, for those reforms which were so much needed.

It was twelve o'clock when Jack Rily and Vitriol Bob issued from the Bengal Arms; and passing through George Yard, they entered Lombard Street.

Thence they proceeded towards London Bridge, over which they walked in a leisurely manner—side by side—watching each other—and maintaining a profound silence.

Down the Blackfriars' Road they went; and on reaching the obelisk in St. George's Fields, the Doctor paused for a few minutes to make up his mind what course to pursue.

He was already wearied—and a mental irritation was growing upon him in spite of his characteristic recklessness and indifference: he required rest—and he knew that he could obtain none so long as his terrible enemy was by his side.

"Perhaps I may weary him out," thought the Doctor to himself: "or if I lead him into the open country I shall perhaps be able to give him the slip. Otherwise we must fight it out in some place where no interruption need be dreaded."

Influenced by these ideas, Jack Rily resumed his wanderings, Vitriol Bob still remaining by his side like the ghost of some murdered victim.

They proceeded towards the Elephant and Castle; and on reaching that celebrated tavern, they once more refreshed themselves with beer, as the establishment was still open in consequence of some parochial entertainment that was given there on that particular evening.

On issuing from the house, the two men proceeded along the Kent Road.

Nearly an hour had now elapsed since they had last exchanged a word; for the feeling of desperate irritation was growing stronger and stronger on the part of Jack Rily—while Vitriol Bob was becoming impatient of this delay in the gratification of his implacable vengeance.

But delight filled the soul of the latter when he found that his companion was taking a direction that led into the open country; and, breaking the long silence which had prevailed, he said tauntingly, "You are getting tired, Jack."

"Not a bit," replied the Doctor, assuming a cheerful tone.

"Oh! yes—you are, old feller," exclaimed Vitriol Bob: "you drag your feet along as if you was."

"I could walk all night without being wearied so much as you are now," returned the Doctor: and, thus speaking, he mended his pace.

"I never felt less tired than I am at present, Jack," said Vitriol Bob: "but you are failing in spite of this pretended briskness. You can't keep it up."

"You shall see," answered the Doctor, his irritation augmenting fearfully.

Vitriol Bob made no further observation upon the subject; and the two miscreants walked on, side by side, until they reached the Green Man at Blackheath.

There was no tavern—no beer-shop open; and both were thirsty, alike with fatigue and the workings of evil passions.

Seating himself upon a bench fixed against the wall of a public-house, Jack Rily could not help gnashing his teeth with rage; and as he maintained his looks fixed upon the countenance of his enemy, his eyes glared with a savage and ferocious malignity. The moon-light enabled Vitriol Bob to catch the full significancy of that expression which distorted the Doctor's features; and, sitting down close by his side, he said, "You are growing desperate now, Jack: I knowed I should disturb your coolness and composure before long."

"By God! you're right, my man!" ejaculated the Doctor, unable to restrain his irritation. "I had no enmity against you at first—I would have shaken hands with you and been as good friends as ever—aye, and have given you more money than you've ever yet seen in all your life,—given it to you as a present! But now I hate and detest you—I loathe and abhor you! Damnation! I could stick my knife into you this very minute!"

"Two can play at that game," returned Vitriol Bob, savagely. "But remember that we're talking tolerably loud just underneath the windows of this 'ere public; and I don't feel at all inclined to be baulked of the satisfaction——"

"Of a last and desperate struggle, eh?" exclaimed the Doctor, starting up. "Well—we will not delay it much longer. Come along:—it is pretty near time that this child's play was put an end to—I am getting sick of it."

“Bless ye, I’ve no such excitement,” said Vitriol Bob, rising from the bench and again placing himself by the side of his companion: “I raythe like it than anythink else. We’ve had a nice walk—plenty of refreshments—and now and then a cozie little bit of chat—besides the advantage of hearing them political sermons in at the Bengal Arms: and so I don’t think you can say we’ve spent the time wery disagreeably.”

All this was said to irritate the Doctor still more; for Vitriol Bob, well acquainted with the disposition of his enemy, knew that when once he was thus excited it was impossible for him to regain his composure.

Jack Rily made no answer—but continued his way in silence, weariness gaining upon his body as rapidly as bitter ferocity was acquiring a more potent influence over his mind.

CHAPTER CCIV.

THE CATASTROPHE.

It was two o'clock in the morning when the Doctor and Vitriol Bob ascended Shooter's Hill.

Both were much fatigued—but the former far more so than the latter.

The moon rode high in the heavens, which were spangled with thousands of stars; and every feature of the scene was brought out into strong relief by the pure silvery light that filled the air.

The countenance of Jack Rily was ghastly pale and hideous to gaze upon—his large teeth gleaming through the opening in his upper lip, and his eyes glaring like those of a wild beast about to spring upon its prey;—whereas the features of Vitriol Bob denoted a stern—dogged—ferocious determination.

Having reached the top of the hill, the two men paused as if by mutual though tacit consent; and glancing rapidly along the road in each direction, they neither saw nor heard anything that threatened to interfere with the deadly purpose on which they were now both intent.

No sound of vehicles met their ears—no human forms dotted the long highway which, with its white dust, had the appearance of a river traversing the dark plains.

"Well—are you pretty nearly tired out, Jack?" demanded Vitriol Bob.

"I am as fresh as ever," answered the Doctor.

"But you're afraid, old feller," exclaimed the other.

"Not afraid of *you*!" retorted Jack Rily, contemptuously.

"You would have run away if you could," said his enemy.

"You are a liar, Bob," was the savage response.

"No—it's you that tells the lie, Jack. I've watched you narrerly—and I could see all that was a-passing in your mind as plain as if it was a book."

"But you can't read a book, Bob, when you have it open before you."

"There you're wrong, Doctor: I've had my hedication as well as you."

"And a pretty use you've made of it! But I don't see any use in our standing palavering here: I want to get back to London—and so the sooner you let me polish you off, the better."

"I'm as anxious to come to the scratch as you. Where shall it be?"

"In the field close by, Bob. We may be interrupted in the road."

"And yet there's nothink and no one to be seen."

"Never mind. We'll make as sure as possible," observed the Doctor, who throughout this rapid and laconic colloquy had endeavoured to appear as collected and as composed as possible: but his words had hissed through his teeth—for his mouth was as parched as if he had been swallowing the dry dust of the road.

"Let's over the hedge, then," said Vitriol Bob.

The two men accordingly made their way into the adjoining field; and having proceeded to a short distance down the sloping meadow, they suddenly stopped short and confronted each other.

“Shall it be here?” demanded Vitriol Bob.

“Yes,” responded Jack Rily; and drawing his clasp-knife, which was already open, from his pocket, he sprang with a savage howl upon his enemy.

But Vitriol Bob was also prepared with his sharp weapon; and catching the Doctor’s right arm with his left hand, he inflicted a wound upon the shoulder upon his foe. Then the two men closed completely upon each other—and the death-struggle commenced!

It was an appalling spectacle,—the knives flashing in the pure moon-light—and the eyes of the miscreants glaring savagely, while they writhed in each other’s embrace, savage howls bursting from them at short intervals.

In less than a minute they were covered with blood: but the nature of the contest only permitted them to inflict hideous gashes and not decisive wounds upon each other. But suddenly Jack Rily’s foot slipped, and he fell backward—bringing however his adversary down upon him: for the left hand of each held a firm grasp upon the collar of the other.

As they thus tumbled, Vitriol Bob endeavoured to plant his knife in the breast of his antagonist—but the spring of the weapon broke, and the blade suddenly closing as it glanced over the Doctor’s shoulder, cut through its owner’s fingers to the very bone. A yell of mingled rage and pain escaped him; but the chances were at the same moment equalised by the fact of Rily’s clasp-knife escaping from his hand.

The death-struggle was now continued by mere brute force; and the Doctor succeeded in getting uppermost. At the same time he seized upon Vitriol Bob’s nose with his large sharp teeth and bit it completely off—in spite of the almost superhuman efforts of the other to resist this savage attack.

Yelling horribly with the pain, and with his countenance bathed in blood, Vitriol Bob once more got his foe beneath him; and the Doctor echoed those appalling cries of agony as he felt the fore-finger of his adversary’s left hand thrust into one of his eyes. Frightful—terrific—revolting was the contest at this crisis,—the two miscreants writhing, struggling, convulsing like snakes in each other’s grasp,—and the ferocious process of gouging inflicting the agonies of hell upon the maddened Jack Rily.

’Twas done: the eye was literally torn out of its socket; but the pain excited the Doctor to the most tremendous efforts in order to wreak a deadly vengeance upon his foe. And as they rolled over on the blood-stained sward, Rily’s hand came in contact with the knife which he had ere now lost; and clutching it with a savage yell of triumph, he plunged it into Vitriol Bob’s throat.

The miscreant, mortally wounded, rolled over on the grass with a gurgling sound coming from between his lips; and Jack Rily was immediately upon him, brandishing the fatal weapon.

Then, at that moment, as the moon-light fell fully upon the countenance of Vitriol Bob, as he gazed up at his victorious enemy, what fiendish hate—what impotent rage—what diabolical malignity were depicted upon those distorted features and expressed in every lineament of that blood-smeared face,—a face rendered the more frightful by the loss of the nose.

“Who will return to London this morning, Bob?” demanded Jack Rily, scarcely able to articulate, so parched was his throat—so agonising was the pain in the socket whence the eye had been torn out. “Ah! you can’t answer—but you know well enough what the reply should be!”

Vitriol Bob made a sudden and desperate effort to throw his enemy off him: but he was easily overpowered—and in another moment the Doctor drove the sharp blade of the knife through the man’s right eye, deep into the brain.

So strong was the convulsive spasm which shot through the form of Vitriol Bob, that the Doctor was hurled completely off him: but all danger of a renewal of the contest was past—Jack Rily’s enemy was no more!

The conqueror lay for some minutes upon the sward, so exhausted that it almost seemed possible to give up the ghost at a gasp: it appeared, in fact, as if he retained a spark of life within himself by his own free will—but that were he to breathe even too hard, existence would become extinct that moment.

A sensation of numbness came over him, deadening the pain which his eyeless socket occasioned him; and for nearly ten minutes a sort of dreamy repose stole upon the man, the incidents of the night becoming confused and all his ideas jumbling together pell-mell.

But suddenly—swift as the lightning darts forth from the thunder-cloud upon the obscurity of a stormy sky—a feeling of all that had happened and where he was sprang up in the Doctor’s soul; and half rising from his recumbent posture, he gazed wildly around with the visual organ that was still left.

The motionless corpse of his slaughtered enemy lay near;—and the moon-light rendered the ghastly countenance fearfully visible.

The pain in the socket now returned with renewed force; and the Doctor, raising himself up with difficulty, began to drag his heavy limbs slowly away from the scene of a horrible contest and a dreadful death.

He was wounded in many places; and the anguish which he now again endured through the loss of his eye, was maddening him.

At the bottom of the field there was a pond; and Jack Rily, on reaching the bank of the stagnant pool, felt that he could at that moment give all the money he possessed for a single glass of pure water. A draught from that pond would be delicious: but how was he to obtain it? He might stoop down, and endeavour to raise it with his hand—or he might even fill his hat: but the bank was steep all round—and the wretched man was so exhausted and enfeebled that he knew he should fall in and most likely be suffocated.

Seating himself upon the bank, he maintained his one eye fixed upon the pond in which the moonbeams were reflected; and at the expiration of a few minutes he resolved to make an attempt to assuage his burning thirst, even though the consequences should be fatal.

Stooping cautiously down, he succeeded in filling his hat; but as he was drawing it up, he overbalanced himself, and fell headlong into the water.

The pond was deep: but Jack Rily managed to drag himself out;—and on gaining the bank he fainted.

How long he remained in a senseless state, he knew not: or whether a deep sleep had succeeded the fit, he was likewise unable to conjecture. Certain it was, however, that on awaking slowly from what appeared to have been a profound trance, a stronger light than that which he had last seen fell upon his view—for the sun had just risen.

Then all the horrors of the past night came back to the wretch's memory; and, though the pain in his eyeless socket was much mitigated, it was still poignant enough to wring bitter imprecations from his lips.

He endeavoured to rise: but he was as stiff all over as if he had been beaten soundly with a thick stick wielded by a strong hand—and he was also weakened by loss of blood and the fatigues which he had undergone.

He longed to get back to London, not only in order to have surgical assistance to assuage the pain consequent on the frightful injury he had sustained by the loss of his eye; but also because he was fearful that the body of his murdered enemy would be shortly discovered and his own arrest follow as a matter of course.

Therefore, although he would have given worlds to be enabled to lie on the grass for hours longer, he raised himself up, and moved slowly away across the fields.

But how could he enter London in the broad day-light—covered with blood and maimed as he was? One course only appeared open to him: namely, to remain concealed somewhere until night, and then return to his lodgings. Accordingly, he lay down under a hedge at the distance of about a mile from the scene of the previous night's deadly contest; and again did he sink into a deep trance.

From this he was awakened by the sounds of voices; and starting up, he heard people talking on the other side of the hedge. They were labourers—and having discovered the corpse of Vitriol Bob in the field adjoining Shooter's Hill, they were hurrying back to the farm to which they belonged, in order to give an alarm. Their pace was rapid—their remarks denoted indescribable horror—and Jack Rily remained a breathless listener until they were out of sight and hearing.

He then rose and moved off across the fields as quickly as he could drag himself along.

The sun was now high in the heavens; and he thereby knew that it was nearly mid-day. Not a breath of wind stirred the air; and the heat was stifling.

He had bandaged his head in such a way with his handkerchief as to conceal the frightful injury which he had received by the loss of his eye: but the pain he experienced was excruciating.

In a short time he reached a rivulet, where he washed himself; and he was likewise enabled to slake his thirst. A turnip plucked from a field afforded him a sorry meal;—and thus was a man having thousands of pounds secured about his person, reduced to the most miserable shifts and compelled to wander about in the most deplorable condition that it is possible to conceive.

Never had the time appeared to pass with such leaden wings;—and, oh! how the man longed for night to fall. Not more ardently did Wellington at Waterloo crave for the coming of the obscurity of evening, when, beaten and hopeless, he was in full retreat ere the Prussians made their appearance to change the fortune of the day and win the victory which England so arrogantly claims, not more earnestly did the Iron Duke desire the presence of the darkness on that occasion, than Jack Rily in the present instance.

At last the sun was sinking in the western horizon; and the Doctor bent his steps towards the metropolis which lay at a distance of about seven miles.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, when Jack Rily entered the southern suburbs; and he succeeded in gaining his lodgings in Roupel Street without attracting any particular observation. A surgeon with whom he was acquainted, and who did not ask any questions so long as he was well paid, dressed his wounds: and the Doctor began to think the victory over his mortal enemy cheaply bought by the loss of an eye. The black patch which he was compelled to wear, certainly increased the hideousness of his countenance: but as vanity was not one of his failings, this circumstance did not so much trouble him as the inconvenience and the pain attendant upon the loss of the optic.

In the course of the ensuing day, the report spread all over London that the body of a man, frightfully mutilated, had been discovered in

a field near Shooter's Hill; and that it had been removed to a public-house at Blackheath, in order to lie there for recognition. A minute description of the clothing which the corpse had on, was given in the newspapers and also in placards posted in the principal thoroughfares of the metropolis; and it was likewise stated that the clasp-knife, with which the mortal blow was struck, had been left by the murderer sticking in the victim's head.

Now it happened that Mary Calvert—*alias* Pig-faced Moll—and whom the reader will recollect to have been already represented as Vitriol Bob's paramour, was alarmed by the protracted absence of her fancy-man; and while wandering about in search of him at his usual haunts, she observed one of the placards.

The attire therein specified exactly corresponded with the dress which Vitriol Bob wore when he quitted her two days previously; and she at once went to the public-house where the body was lying. A glance was sufficient to convince her that her suspicions were well founded; and on examining the clasp-knife, she instantly recognised it as one which she had frequently seen in the possession of Jack Rily.

Everything was now clearly apparent to Molly Calvert. She knew the deadly animosity that Vitriol Bob had nourished against the Doctor: she was likewise acquainted with the intention of her paramour to wreak his vengeance upon that individual on the first suitable occasion;—and she therefore concluded that a deadly conflict had taken place between them, ending in the murder of her fancy-man.

From the public-house where the body lay, she proceeded straight to a police-station, where she gave such information as led to an immediate search after the Doctor. In the course of the next day a member of the Detectives ascertained that Jack Rily had recently been living in Roupel Street, and that he had only quitted his lodgings there the preceding evening. For the Doctor, alarmed by the publicity given to the discovery of Vitriol Bob's body, had deemed it prudent to flit.

Several days elapsed without affording the police any clue to his whereabouts: but at the expiration of a week Molly Calvert herself one evening traced him to an obscure pot-house in one of the vilest parts of Bethnal Green; and he was immediately arrested.

Upon his person was found a vast sum in gold and bank-notes—but chiefly consisting of the latter; and this amount was accordingly seized by the officers. Jack Rily was then locked up for the night, and on the following morning he was taken before a magistrate.

When charged with the murder of Vitriol Bob, he at once admitted that he had been the cause of that individual's death, but declared that it was in self-defence. His story was corroborated by many circumstances, amongst which the loss of his eye was not the least; for the organ had been found, as it was torn out of its socket, close by the corpse. The gashes which the man had received—Vitriol Bob's own clasp-knife, discovered on the fatal spot—and the evident marks of a fearful struggle having taken place,—all proved that the deed was neither cold-blooded nor accomplished by surprise. On the other hand, might not Jack Rily have himself provoked the contest which terminated so fatally to his opponent? This point the magistrate left to a jury to decide; and the Doctor was ordered to be committed for trial. Relative to the money found upon his person, he persisted in declaring that it was his own, and that he had come by it honestly,—but from what source he refused to state.

CHAPTER CCV.

THE CASTELCICALAN REPUBLIC.

Castelcicala became a Republic; and Richard Markham had the immortal honour of founding a purely democratic government in the finest State belonging to the Italian Peninsula.

The Chamber of Senators voted by an immense majority the very measure which deprived them of their rank of Peers, and abolished titles of nobility altogether. This species of suicidal process, adopted in obedience to the popular will, the interests of the community at large, and the dictates of a consummate civilisation, presented a glorious spectacle to the eyes of all the world. And these good men who thus sacrificed their own family interests to those of their country, experienced a rich reward in the enthusiasm with which they were received by the people when the result of the division on the third reading of the Bill was made known. For no empty honours could outvie that applause which grateful myriads thus poured forth; and if Dukes, Marquises, Counts, Viscounts, and Barons went home that day denuded of those titles, they had the proud recompense of a conviction that their names would shine all the more resplendently in history through their own unartificial light. Their's was now the aristocracy of VIRTUE and INTELLIGENCE!

The Chamber of Peers was abolished; but all those who had voted in favour of the Government measures were returned by a grateful people as members of the National Assembly which was now convoked—the new system admitting of only one House of Parliament. The moment that august body met, one of its earliest duties was to frame the new Constitution; and this was done on the broadest and most liberal principles. It was resolved, amongst other matters thus definitively settled, that the President of the Republic should be elected on the principle of universal suffrage, and for three years; and we need scarcely inform our readers that there was not even any opposition attempted against General Markham.

But in the meantime—for these proceedings occupied upwards of two months—the other Italian States had become seriously alarmed at the establishment of Democracy in Castelcicala; and the diplomatic agents of Naples, Rome, Tuscany, and Sardinia were ordered by their respective Governments to demand their passports. These were instantaneously granted; and shortly after the departure of the envoys, a league was formed by the Sovereigns of the States which we have named for the purpose of compelling Castelcicala to return into the sisterhood of monarchical countries. Protocols first poured into the Foreign Office at Montoni; and these were logically answered by the Minister presiding over that department. Menaces followed;—and these were treated with a firmness proving how confidently General Markham and his Cabinet relied upon the Castelcicalans to defend the institutions which they had consecrated. An ultimatum, threatening immediate hostilities, was now signed by that blood-thirsty miscreant the King of Naples—by the weak, timid, and vacillating Pope Pius IX.—by the Grand Duke of Tuscany—and by Charles Albert, King of Sardinia. To this document Richard Markham replied, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, insisting upon the right of the Castelcicalans, as a free people, to choose their own form of Government; and the argument was so well sustained by a mass of reasoning, that the King of Sardinia and the Grand-Duke of Tuscany withdrew from the league, re-accrediting their diplomatic agents to the Castelcicalan Republic. The timid Pope was frightened by a knowledge of Markham's military prowess into a similar course; and the tyrant Ferdinand of Naples was left alone in hostility against the newly-established Democracy.

This monarch—obstinate, self-willed, and blood-thirsty, like all the Bourbons—was not disheartened by what he called the "defection" of the Pontiff, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the King of Piedmont; but he immediately declared war against the Castelcicalan Republic. Thereupon General Markham commenced the most active preparations, not only to prevent an invasion, but to carry hostilities into the enemy's country. In a short time an army of twenty-six thousand men was collected in the south of the State; and Richard, having taken leave of his family, proceeded to join it, attended by a numerous staff, of which Charles Hatfield was a member. The executive power was in the meantime delegated to Signor Bassano, the General's brother-in-law; and the utmost enthusiasm pervaded the entire Castelcicalan population, so great was the confidence entertained in the valour of the army and the skill of its commander.

It was in the first week of December, 1846, that the Castelcicalan forces commenced their march towards the Neapolitan frontier. Intelligence had already arrived to the effect that the Neapolitans, to the number of forty thousand men, were advancing under the command of General Avellino; but Markham, well knowing that the spirit of a republican army was far greater than that which animates troops belonging to a monarchy, was not daunted by this immense numerical superiority on the part of the enemy. He was deeply impressed with the opinion that Napoleon Bonaparte had damped the ardour of his soldiers by exchanging the consular cap for the imperial crown: his knowledge of French history told him that Bonaparte's grandest victories were gained with a republican army;—and he was likewise well aware that the Neapolitan troops loathed and abhorred the monarch who had sent them out to fight against liberal institutions. He therefore resolved to push on and meet the enemy; for his generous nature contemplated with horror the prospect of an invasion of the fertile plains of Castelcicala by an army which even in its own country acted the lawless and ferocious

part of a horde of plunderers and ravagers.

On the 7th of December, General Markham entered the Neapolitan territory at the head of his troops; and on the same evening he encamped beneath the walls of Casino, which surrendered without the least attempt at resistance. Here he waited four days in the hope that the Neapolitans would advance to the attack: but hearing that they had halted to rest awhile at Sabino—a place about sixty miles distant—he determined to continue his march. Accordingly, in the afternoon of the 13th, he came within sight of General Avellino's army, which he found to be occupying a strong position at a short distance from Sabino.

General Markham ascended an elevated flat to reconnoitre the precise distribution of the Neapolitans, and he was speedily convinced that an immense advantage might be gained by placing the artillery upon that height. The task was a difficult one to accomplish: but nothing was impossible to an active commander and enthusiastic troops;—and thus in a few hours, hollows were filled up, projections levelled, and a pathway cleared for the ascent of the cannon. Meantime General Avellino had made no movement on his side; and ere sunset the work of establishing the artillery on the eminence was complete.

The inactivity of the enemy during the entire afternoon led Markham to believe that Avellino meditated an attack in the course of the night; and the Castelcicalans were therefore fully prepared to give the Neapolitans a warm reception. But hour after hour passed without any indication of the approach of the enemy; and General Markham resolved to take the initiative at day-break.

Scarcely had the sun risen on the morning of the 14th of December, when the action commenced by a smart fire on the part of the Castelcicalan light troops, commanded by an active and gallant officer in whom the General had full confidence. The Neapolitans were thereby dislodged from an apparently inaccessible position near Sabino; and the result was that the Castelcicalans were enabled to stretch out upon the plains so as to threaten the enemy's flanks. Both armies were soon within cannon shot; and by nine o'clock in the forenoon the action became general.

The manœuvres on the Castelcicalan side were performed with a marvellous precision, fully compensating for the numerical inferiority of Markham's troops; and by mid-day they had succeeded in gaining possession of a wood which covered one of the enemy's corps. At the same time the cannon upon the height were scattering death throughout the Neapolitan ranks; and General Avellino ordered up his reserve of cavalry to take a share in the conflict. Markham was well prepared for this proceeding; and at the head of his cuirassiers he dashed against the new-comers. This charge was made with an impetuosity altogether irresistible; and the Neapolitans were thrown into disorder in that part of the field. The Castelcicalans pursued their advantage; and by four o'clock in the afternoon the enemy were completely overwhelmed.

The Neapolitan loss was immense: upwards of twelve thousand men of that army lay dead upon the field—while an equal number had been made prisoners. On Markham's side the number of killed did not exceed two thousand; but the generous-hearted young man considered his splendid victory to be dearly bought even by means of that sacrifice—and the eyes which flashed with the fires of heroism on the battle-field, now melted into tears at the evidences of the sanguinary fight.

We should observe that the conduct of Charles Hatfield was admirable throughout this memorable day. In the charge upon the Neapolitan cavalry, he comported himself in a manner that more than once gained for him the approval of his commander; and when the strife was over and the victory was won, Markham complimented him on his prowess in the presence of the officers gathered about him at the time.

The booty acquired by this great battle was immense; for the Neapolitans who survived the conflict were compelled to retreat with such precipitation as to leave all their baggage and artillery in the hands of their enemy.

On the following day Markham set his army in motion towards the capital, at the gates of which he was determined to force the King to acknowledge the Castelcicalan Republic. But in his progress through the Neapolitan dominions, he adopted the most rigorous measures to protect the innocent inhabitants from plunder or wrong at the hands of his victorious troops; and he issued a proclamation to the effect that any soldier found guilty of an act of oppression or outrage, should be expelled the army and deprived of his civil rights as a Castelcicalan citizen.

It was at about mid-day on the 17th of December that Markham came within sight of Naples; and he was then met by plenipotentiaries sent by King Ferdinand to treat for an armistice, preparatory to negociations for peace. The victorious General received the deputies with the utmost courtesy; he however bade them observe that it was not for him to *treat*—but to *dictate*. Thereupon he drew up the conditions on which he would spare the capital and retire from the kingdom,—those terms being the acknowledgment of the Castelcicalan Republic, the payment of all the expenses incurred by Castelcicala in consequence of this war, and a guarantee against the renewal of hostilities on the same pretence.

To these conditions Ferdinand refused to accede; and the citizens of Naples were called upon to arm in defence of the capital. But the people rose up as one man within the walls of the city, and threatened to dethrone the King unless he accepted the terms set forth by General Markham. The blood-thirsty Ferdinand was accordingly compelled to submit to the demands of the Castelcicalan General; and the conditions being fulfilled in the course of a few days, Markham began to retrace his way to the State which he had thus a second time saved from destruction.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm with which the victorious General and his army were received on their return to Castelcicala. The roads were lined with a grateful population, anxious to catch a glimpse of the hero and to testify their joy at the

conquest which he had achieved over the enemy. Triumphal arches were raised—flags were waving in all directions—towns were illuminated—municipal corporations appeared with congratulatory addresses—and the peasantry made bonfires on the hills as proofs of their delight.

When the army approached Montoni, the General's family came out to meet him: and Isabella experienced more sincere pride in embracing a husband whose citizen name it was an honour to bear, than if he still wore a princely title and held a sovereign rank.

Peace was thus ensured to Castelcicala; and the Republic was firmly established, not only by the will of the people, but likewise by the prowess of the army.

Charles Hatfield, who, as one of the General's aides-de-camp, already held the rank of lieutenant, was now invested with a captaincy; and one of the members of the National Assembly happening to die at the time, the constituency thus left temporarily unrepresented, offered to elect him as their deputy. But he felt anxious to return to England; for letters reached him about this period, informing him that Mr. Hatfield's health had latterly caused serious apprehensions to his relatives and friends;—and the young man accordingly demanded leave of absence for a period. This was granted without hesitation; and Charles Hatfield took his departure, laden with presents from Markham and his family, and attended with their sincerest wishes for his prosperity.

CHAPTER CCVI.

CHARLES HATFIELD IN LONDON AGAIN.

The information which Charles Hatfield had received respecting his father's health, was too true. Indeed, the accounts were purposely mitigated in order to alarm him as little as possible; and on his arrival at Lord Ellingham's mansion in Pall Mall, he found Mr. Hatfield confined to his bed.

Charles was greatly shocked at this circumstance: for he could not help fancying that his conduct had contributed mainly to undermine his father's health; but Mr. Hatfield reassured him on that head by declaring that a severe cold was the commencement of his illness.

"Were I thrown upon this bed of sickness by any fault of yours, Charles," he said, pressing his son's hand affectionately in both his own, "your behaviour during your short sojourn in Italy would speedily raise me from it. Not only have the newspapers mentioned your name in a manner highly creditable to you: but General Markham has sent us accounts of the most satisfactory nature concerning you."

These words were gratifying indeed to the young man.

"I can assure you, my revered parent," he said, "that I am indeed fully and completely changed. The image of that vile woman whom we will not name, is loathsome and abhorrent to me—and I would as readily come in contact with a serpent, as meet her again. Respecting that insane ambition which animated me at the same time I formed that disastrous attachment,—an ambition which prompted me to aspire to a noble title,—it has all vanished as if it had never been. I have contemplated Republican institutions—I have seen a mighty Prince and all his family lay aside their high rank without regret and abandon their titles with cheerfulness and at their own free will,—I have likewise beheld the magnates of the land following the same example, so that the equality of citizenship may be fully established;—and I am now astonished that I could ever have aspired to mere titular distinction. My eyes have been opened to the fact that men may be great and rise to fame, without those adventitious aids which savour of feudal barbarism;—and I am prouder of that rank of *Captain* which the battle of Sabino gave me in the army of Republican Castelcicala, than I could possibly be were the coronet of Ellingham placed upon my brow. Oh! how happy should I feel, could we all proceed to Castelcicala and settle for life in that beautiful city of Montoni which I love so well: yes—all of us to fix our habitation there," continued Charles, with the enthusiasm that was characteristic of his nature,—"you—my dear mother, who received me so kindly—the excellent Earl and his amiable Countess—myself—"

"And what is to become of poor Lady Frances?" asked Mr. Hatfield, with a smile in spite of his severe indisposition. "Wherefore is she not included in your list? Do you think that the Earl and the Countess would leave their amiable and lovely daughter behind them?"

Charles Hatfield blushed deeply as his father thus addressed him.

"Well, my dear boy—you make no reply," resumed Mr. Hatfield, with the smile—and a smile of ineffable satisfaction it was—still playing upon his pale countenance: "has Lady Frances offended you? Did she not receive you on your arrival ere now with as much kindness as the rest?"

"Oh! yes—yes," exclaimed Charles; "and she appeared to me more exquisitely beautiful than ever! Fool that I was—insensate dolt—idiot—madman, ever to place myself in a position which——"

"Do not excite yourself thus, my dear boy," interrupted Mr. Hatfield. "You admire Lady Frances?" he observed, after a short pause, and now attentively watching his son's countenance.

"My God! do not ask me that question, my dear father!" ejaculated Charles, with an expression of deep anguish on his features. "I love my beautiful cousin—I love her—and she cannot be mine! Oh! since I have been absent I have pondered on her image—I have cherished it as if it were that of a guardian angel! I have compared the amiability and excellence of Frances with the character of *that woman*—and you may judge how resplendently the charming girl shines by means of such a contrast!"

"And you may hope—yes, you may hope, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, raising himself partially up in the bed. "Happiness yet awaits you."

"Happiness—hope—my dear father!" ejaculated Charles; "you speak in enigmas—you——"

"Nay—I speak only what I mean; and all I say is intelligible," interrupted Mr. Hatfield. "I tell you that you may hope for happiness—

that Lady Frances may yet become your wife!”

“Is it possible?” cried the young man, clasping his hands in the wildness of his joy. “But how? Is that woman dead?” he demanded, speaking with strange rapidity of utterance.

“No—she is not dead,” responded his father: “but she has married again!”

“Married!” ejaculated Charles. “And yet I do not see how that circumstance will alter my position,” he added, in a desponding tone.

“Listen attentively—and do not excite yourself at one moment, and in the next give way to despair,” said Mr. Hatfield.

Charles seated himself at his father’s bed-side, and prepared to hear with attention the words that were about to be addressed to him.

“Some time ago—when it was first resolved that you should proceed to Italy for a short time,” said Mr. Hatfield, “the Earl of Ellingham communicated to me the generous views which he entertained with regard to you. He observed that, as you had already discarded the woman who had ensnared you, and as she had agreed never more to molest you, you were morally severed in respect to the matrimonial bond. He moreover declared that should this woman contract another marriage and thereby prove that such severance was complete, it would be a despicable fastidiousness and a contemptible affectation to tell you *that you must never know matrimonial happiness, but that you must remain in your present false position, a husband without a wife, for the remainder of your days*. Those were the very words which his lordship used, Charles, on the occasion to which I am alluding.”

“Oh! am I to understand—” exclaimed the young man.

“Silence!” interrupted Mr. Hatfield: “be not impatient nor impetuous—but hear me out. Lord Ellingham continued to observe that if the woman should contract a new marriage, and if *you*, Charles, manifested contrition for the past,—if your conduct were such as to afford sure guarantees for the future,—and if your attachment for Lady Frances should revive,—under all those circumstances the Earl declared that he should not consider himself justified in stamping the unhappiness alike of yourself and his daughter by refusing his consent to your union.”

“Do I hear aright?” exclaimed Charles, a giddiness coming over him through excessive joy. “Oh! what generosity on the part of the Earl!”

“Yes—his sentiments on this subject were fraught with liberality,” returned Mr. Hatfield. “He argued in the following manner:—A young man is ensnared into an alliance with a woman whom he believed to be pure, but whom in a few hours he discovered to be a demon of pollution. They separate upon written conditions of the most positive character,—a private arrangement being deemed preferable to the public scandal of an appeal to the tribunals. This woman marries again—and every remnant of a claim which she might have had upon the individual whom she had ensnared and deluded, ceases at once. There is a complete snapping of the bond—a total severance of the tie; and her conduct by the fact of the second marriage proves that she so understands it. The law may certainly proclaim the first marriage to be the only legal one: but morality, which holds marriage to be a covenant between two parties, revolts against the principle which the code establishes. It is upon these grounds that the Earl of Ellingham will give you the hand of his lovely and amiable daughter.”

It were useless to attempt to describe the joy which filled the soul of Charles Hatfield when these tidings met his ears. He seized his father’s hand and pressed it to his lips with grateful fervour: then, promising to return in a few minutes, he flew to the library where he understood the Earl to be at the moment; and casting himself at the feet of that good nobleman, he implored pardon for his past conduct, declaring that nothing should induce him to swerve from the path of rectitude in future.

The Earl of Ellingham raised the contrite young man—embraced him affectionately—and bade him throw a complete veil over all that related to his unfortunate marriage. His lordship then repeated, but more concisely, the observations which Mr. Hatfield had already made to his son; and at the conclusion of the interview he said, “And now, Charles, if your inclinations really and truly prompt you to take the step, you have my permission to solicit Lady Frances to allow you to become the suitor for her hand.”

Captain Hatfield expressed his liveliest gratitude in suitable terms; and hastening back to his father, he narrated all that had just occurred between himself and the Earl. Mr. Hatfield was cheered and delighted by the spectacle of his son’s happiness, and bade him repair to the drawing-room to pass an hour with the ladies.

We need scarcely state that Lady Georgiana was much pleased by the return of Charles to England, especially as he had so highly distinguished himself in the Neapolitan campaign. Nor less was the Countess of Ellingham—the amiable Esther—gratified by an event which restored the missing one to the family circle: while Lady Frances attempted not to conceal the joy that the young soldier’s presence afforded her.

It is not, however, our purpose to dwell upon this subject:—for we have now to relate an incident which led to consequences of great importance to several persons who have figured in our narrative.

The day after Charles Hatfield’s arrival in London, he was proceeding on foot up Regent Street, in order to pay a visit to his tailor for the purpose of making some additions to his wardrobe, when he met Captain Barthelma: for Laura’s husband had lost his title of Count

of Carignano, in consequence of the establishment of the Republic in Castelcicala.

The young Italian was alone; and the meeting between the two was most friendly and cordial,—for during the short time that they were acquainted, Charles had observed many excellent qualities on the part of Barthelma, who on his side was enraptured with the heroic conduct that Captain Hatfield had displayed at the battle of Sabino, a full narrative of which had duly appeared in the English newspapers.

Taking the arm of Charles, Captain Barthelma walked with him up Regent Street; and for some time they conversed upon the late Neapolitan campaign—the glorious destinies of Republican Castelcicala—the noble conduct of President Markham—and various other matters connected with the Italian's native land.

"It has grieved me greatly in one sense," observed Barthelma, "that I should have been absent from my post about the person of General Markham at a time when such momentous incidents were taking place. But on the other hand I rejoice in my withdrawal from that hero's service, inasmuch as I thereby secured the hand of one of the most lovely—nay, *the* most lovely woman in the world."

“I congratulate you most sincerely upon having formed an alliance which appears to afford you so much happiness,” answered Charles; “and I hope to have the honour of being presented to the signora—for I presume you have espoused a lady belonging to your own country.”

“No—she is an Englishwoman,” returned Captain Barthelma; “and you have seen her.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Charles.

“Yes—you have seen her,” repeated the Italian. “But tell me—do you recollect that day when you, Lieutenant Di Ponta, and myself walked together in the Champs Elysées in consequence of a mysterious note which we received from a pretended Spanish refugee ——”

“Oh! yes—yes—I well remember that day!” exclaimed Captain Hatfield. “Indeed, how could I ever forget it?”

“You speak with excitement, my dear friend,” said Barthelma, surprised at his companion’s manner, but entertaining not the slightest suspicion of the real cause of his agitation.

“Ah! if you only knew all!” observed the young man. “But I will tell you enough to warn you against falling into the power of the vilest woman that ever wore an angel shape to conceal a demon heart: I will reveal to you sufficient to place you on your guard against that syren, should you ever happen to encounter her. For her disposition is such that, to gratify her wantonness, her caprice, or her avarice, she would as readily prey upon a married as on an unmarried man.”

“Indeed! you interest me,” said the Castelcicalan, still altogether unsuspicious of the real meaning of the allusion.

“Yes—but the interest will soon become of an appalling character,” resumed Charles, speaking in a tone of deep solemnity. “For there is in the world a woman whose loveliness is so superhuman and whose witchery is so irresistible that she would move the heart of an anchorite. This woman was born in Newgate, where her mother was incarcerated on a charge of forgery, and whence she was soon afterwards transported to Australia. The child was called *Perdita*, or ‘The Lost One;’ and the mother took the babe with her to her place of exile. Years passed away—and Perdita had grown up to a lovely girl. But the natural wantonness of her disposition manifested itself at a very early age; and her profligacy soon became notorious at Sydney. Well, in due time the mother returned to England, Perdita accompanying her; and in London did those women commence their grand scheme of preying upon the public. Alas! shall I confess how weak—how mad—how insensate I was? But the delirium has passed away—and I now look back upon it with a loathing which prevents me from contemplating it coolly. For I was ensnared by that vile Perdita—and I became her victim. I proceeded with her to Paris; and my father followed to rescue me from ruin. He discovered the place of our abode, and painted the character of that woman in such frightful—such appalling colours, without the least exaggeration, that I was reduced to despair on account of the conduct which I had pursued. I quitted Paris—returned to London—and was then received into the service of General Markham. But you ere now asked me if I remembered the day when yourself Di Ponta and I walked together in the Champs Elysées. You shall now judge whether I have reason to retain the incident in my memory. For you, Barthelma, cannot have forgotten that lady who so much attracted your notice, and who purposely let fall her parasol——But, heavens! what is the matter with you?” ejaculated Captain Hatfield, perceiving that his companion started as if a ghastly spectre had suddenly sprang up before him.

“My God! is it possible?—that woman—in the Champs Elysées—” gasped the young Italian, a deadly pallor overspreading his countenance, while he staggered backward and would have fallen had not Charles sustained him by the arm.

“That woman—for a lady I can scarcely call her—was Perdita Mortimer,” said Hatfield, emphatically.

“Oh! malediction upon the hateful syren!” exclaimed Barthelma, terribly excited.

“Compose yourself!—what is the matter?” cried Charles. “You will attract observation—the people will notice you——”

“I am composed—yes, I am cool and collected now,” murmured the unhappy young Italian, all his tremendous imprudence bursting upon his comprehension like a thunder-storm. “Here—let us pass up this street—it is comparatively deserted—and we can converse more at our ease,” he faltered painfully, as he dragged his companion up New Burlington Street.

A suspicion had in the meantime flashed to the imagination of Charles Hatfield. Was it possible that Barthelma could have married the profligate Perdita, or Laura? He himself had not learnt from his father how he knew that the syren-demoness was married again, or whom she had thus ensnared;—and the Italian’s sudden excitement could not be accounted for otherwise than by the fact that he had made her his wife.

“My God! this intelligence is overwhelming!” murmured Captain Barthelma. “Oh! my dear friend,” he exclaimed, turning with the abruptness of an almost maddening excitement towards Hatfield, “pity me—pity me; that woman of whom you have spoken is——”

“Is what?” demanded Charles impatiently.

“My wife!” responded Barthelma;—and the moment the words were uttered his excitement gave way to a blank despair.

“Malediction upon my communicativeness—my insane garrulity!” ejaculated Charles. “I shall never—never forgive myself for having made these most uncalled-for revelations!”

“Do not blame yourself, my dear friend,” returned the young Italian, in a tone of the deepest melancholy: “you knew not how painfully your words would affect me—you could not anticipate that the warning which you generously intended to convey would come far too late!”

“And, after all, there may be some error—some mistake,” cried Charles, catching at a straw on behalf of his afflicted companion: “the woman whom I mean may not be the same as the lady whom you have espoused——”

“Yes—yes: ’tis the same!” ejaculated the Italian, impatiently: “Laura Mortimer—the beauteous creature whom we saw in the Champs Elysées, and whose mother met with a horrible death some months ago.”

“Ah! that old woman is no more!” exclaimed Charles. “But of what nature was the death of which you speak so shudderingly?”

“The frightful incident occurred when you were in Italy,” answered Barthelma. “Some villain broke a bottle of aqua-fortis or vitriol over her head—and she died in fearful agonies. But I must leave you now, my dear friend,” said the Castelcicalan, with wild abruptness of manner; and hastily wringing both of Hatfield’s hands, he darted away and was out of sight in a few moments.

CHAPTER CCVII.

MR. GREEN'S OFFICE.

On the same morning, and at about the same time that Charles Hatfield and Captain Barthelma thus encountered each other in Regent Street, certain incidents of importance to the thread of our narrative occurred elsewhere.

We must request the reader to accompany us to a newly fitted up suite of offices in Warwick Court, Holborn; and in the private room we shall find Mr. Green seated at a desk covered with papers.

A material alteration had taken place in the external appearance of this individual. He was well dressed—looked clean and neat—and wore an air of assurance instead of the downcast, obsequious, grovelling demeanour that had characterised him when in the service of Mr. Heathcote.

His private room was neatly furnished and had a business-like aspect: in the front office two clerks were busily employed in drawing up statements to be laid before counsel in several heavy suits; and in the passage outside a process-server was waiting for instructions.

Mr. Green had drawn his table near the fire that blazed in the grate—for the reader must remember that several months had elapsed since the adventures of this individual with Jack Rily, and it was now the commencement of February, 1847.

The cheerful flames roared half-way up the chimney;—and as Green felt the genial heat diffusing a glow throughout his frame, he smiled triumphantly as he contrasted his present position with what it was in those times when he was compelled to sit without a fire, from nine in the morning till six in the evening, on the hard high stool in Heathcote's front office. Now he was a solicitor on his own account—had his name once more in the Law List—could look with complacency into his banker's book—and, when business was over for the day, had nothing to do but to step into an omnibus and ride as far as the door of his neat little dwelling at Bayswater.

No wonder, then, that Mr. Green's countenance had lost its downcast look and its haggard, broken-hearted expression: no wonder that hope beamed in his eyes, and that his tone and manner had recovered the assurance, if not the actual dignity, of former days.

On the particular morning of which we are writing, Mr. Green was more than usually elate; and as he looked over the papers that lay before him, the inward exultation which he experienced imparted the glow of animation to his features.

Presently the door opened and his junior clerk appeared, saying, "Mr. Heathcote, sir."

"Let him walk in," returned Green, assuming a cold tone: but his heart was palpitating violently with mingled feelings of joy, triumph, and insatiate revenge.

In a few moments James Heathcote entered the room.

But, oh! how changed was that man, not only in countenance but also in deportment! His face was thin—haggard—care-worn: his eyes, sunken in their sockets, were dim and glazed;—his form was bowed;—and in the course of a few months his hair had turned from an iron grey to a stainless white. His aspect was deplorable; and his manner was indicative of deep mental distress—anxiety—suffering—and humiliation.

"Sit down, sir," said Green, in a patronising tone.

Heathcote placed his hat upon the floor and took a chair: then, fixing his hollow eyes upon his ex-clerk, he was about to open his business—but, unable to bear up against the tide of reminiscences that rushed to his soul, he burst into tears.

Green affected not to notice this ebullition of grief; but deliberately poked the fire.

For a few minutes the old lawyer sate sobbing in the presence of the man whom he had trampled upon during the long period of his vassalage; and at length recovering sufficient composure to enable his tongue to give utterance to the ideas that were uppermost, he said, "Mr. Green, you are doubtless astonished to receive a visit from *me*!"

"Not at all, sir: I expected it," was the laconic reply.

"And wherefore should you have expected it?" asked Heathcote, anxiously.

“Because the result of yesterday’s trial in the Court of Queen’s Bench places you completely in the power of my victorious client,” responded Green; “and you are likewise well aware that every other action pending against you must he decided in the same manner.”

“Yes—I cannot close my eyes to that fact,” observed Heathcote, actually wringing his hands.

“And therefore you are ruined—totally ruined,” returned Green, with a demoniac smile of triumph.

“Ruined—totally ruined!” repeated Heathcote, with that mechanical unconsciousness which is indicative of despair—blank despair.

“Not only ruined in pocket, but in character likewise,” resumed Green, his tone becoming merciless—nay, absolutely savage and ferocious. “That long trial of yesterday—a trial which occupied eight hours—revealed you in your true colours to all the world. The counsel whom I employed, tore you to pieces. All your chicanery was unravelled—all your manœvres traced, followed up, and exposed—all your fraudulent proceedings dragged to light. Oh! you, who never spared a human being, Mr. Heathcote, were not spared yesterday: you, who never pitied a living soul, were not pitied yesterday! The barrister resembled a giant, and you a dwarf whom he held up writhing and shrieking in presence of the whole court—aye, the whole country. Every newspaper published this morning, contains a long account of the proceedings;—and by this time your character stinks in the nostrils of the entire profession.”

“Then am I not sufficiently punished, Mr. Green?” asked Heathcote, the tears rolling down his thin, emaciated, and sallow countenance. “Since you first commenced these numerous suits against me, I have not known a moment’s peace. Sleep has scarcely ever visited my pillow: the awful gulph of infamy and disgrace was always yawning at my feet. Look at me, Mr. Green—look at me! Am I not changed? My God! I am twenty years older than I was on that day when you quitted me in such anger and with such dreadful threats!”

“And those threats shall be fulfilled to the very letter—yes, to the very letter,” said Mr. Green, in a tone of unmitigated bitterness. “I told you that there should be war between us—war to the very knife;—and I have kept my word! I told you that ere a few months had elapsed, you would bitterly repent your conduct to one who only asked for a little kindness in return for his faithful services;—and you have already repented! But my memory is immortal, Mr. Heathcote—and I can never, never forget the injuries, the insults, the degradations, and the wrongs I have received at your hands. My thirst for revenge is therefore insatiable—and this very day shall I adopt another and still more important proceeding with regard to you.”

“My God! all this amounts to a persecution!” ejaculated Heathcote, literally writhing upon his chair.

“Call it what you will, sir,” responded Green, savagely: “no words—no entreaties—no menaces—no prayers on your part can stay me in the course which I am adopting.”

“And that course?” said Heathcote, shuddering with apprehension.

“Is an indictment at the Old Bailey for conspiracy,” answered Green.

“No—no: you cannot do it!” cried Heathcote, now becoming dreadfully excited.

“You are lawyer enough to know that I *can* do it,” rejoined Green, with a smile of infernal triumph. “The evidence obtained from yesterday’s proceedings inculpated another person with you in the fraud—the damnable fraud that you practised upon my client years ago; and at this very moment my clerks are drawing up the statement to be submitted to counsel with a view to an indictment against yourself and your accomplice!”

“I could have borne everything but this!” exclaimed the miserable man, covering his face with his two thin hands, and then shaking his head wildly, as if in a species of hysteria.

“Yes—and you suspected that such would be the course that I should adopt,” resumed Green: “for it is precisely the measure that you yourself would have taken in similar circumstances. What you have done to others, Mr. Heathcote, shall now be done to you;—and it were as reasonable to implore the forbearance of a ravenous tiger, as to appeal to me for mercy!”

“One word, Mr. Green—one word!” ejaculated Heathcote, starting from his seat. “I will at once—yes, this very moment—surrender up all the various sums and properties you claim on behalf of the numerous clients whom you represent *against* me,—I will satisfy and liquidate all your demands—leaving myself a beggar—yes, a beggar upon the face of the earth—on condition that you abandon this criminal prosecution!”

“Peruse that list of my clients and the amount of their claims,” said Green, handing the wretched man a paper.

“The sum is enormous—frightful!” exclaimed Heathcote, his countenance becoming hideous to gaze upon.

“And to that amount must be added a thousand pounds to satisfy me for the costs which I shall lose by the compromise,” returned Green, with implacable coldness both of tone and manner.

“As God is my judge, I cannot command that additional thousand pounds which you stipulate for!” cried Heathcote, trembling with nervous excitement.

“Then apply to your brother, Sir Gilbert,” responded Green, a sardonic smile curling his lips.

“He is not in England—he has gone abroad, I know not whither!” exclaimed the miserable man. “Months have now elapsed since his mistress became reconciled to her husband, the Marquis of Delmour—and Gilbert suddenly quitted England about the same time. He refused to see me previous to his departure: he rejected my proposals—my humble proposals for a reconciliation. Therefore, were I even acquainted with his present abode, it would be useless and vain to apply to him for succour.”

“Thus is it that all your grand schemes—your magnificent designs—your comprehensive plans, have fallen in with a tremendous crash, burying you in the ruins!” said Green, in a slow and measured tone that was torturing and intolerable with its diabolical sardonism. “Well,” he continued, after a few moments’ pause, “I will renounce the demand of the thousand pounds, on condition that you at once—and ere you quit my presence—assign all your property, of whatever kind, with a view to the liquidation of these claims and the settlement of all the suits pending against you.”

“I will do so,” said Heathcote, “provided that you give me an undertaking to abandon all criminal proceedings against me.”

“Agreed,” was the response; and the two lawyers drew up certain documents which they forthwith exchanged: and we may observe that whereas Green’s handwriting was firm, clear, and legible, that of his discomfited opponent was trembling, blotted, and indicative of a terrible excitement.

“My ruin—my utter ruin is now consummated!” groaned Heathcote, wringing his hands bitterly. “All that I had heaped up for my old age——”

“And that you had obtained at the sacrifice of the happiness of hundreds,” interrupted Green, his tone suddenly assuming the savage triumph of one who gloats over the downfall of a hated enemy. “But we will not prolong our interview, sir. The day of retribution has come at last—and in a few minutes I have wreaked the pent-up vengeance of long years. Begone, sir—offend me not another moment with your presence! My head clerk shall accompany you to your own office in order that you may place in his hands the securities and the documents specified in the agreement that you have given me.”

Heathcote made no reply: but turning hastily away, took his departure, followed by Green’s managing man, who received the necessary instructions from his master.

Scarcely had the ruined lawyer thus quitted the establishment of his flourishing and merciless oppressor, when a lady wearing a thick black veil entered the front office and requested an immediate interview with Mr. Green. The junior clerk delivered this message to his employer, and the lady was forthwith introduced to the legal gentleman’s presence in the comfortable back room.

A rapid glance at his visitress convinced Mr. Green that she was likely to prove no ordinary client: for the elegance of her dress, the gracefulness of her demeanour, and the dignity of her gait bespoke a lady of distinction;—and when, on taking the chair which he hastened to place for her accommodation, she raised her veil, he was struck by the transcendent beauty of the countenance thus revealed to him.

“We are alone together, sir,” said the lovely stranger, looking intently around: “but can listeners overhear anything that may pass between us?”

“There is no need of apprehension on that head, madam,” answered Green. “Speak freely—and without reserve.”

“I have called upon business of great importance to myself, and which may prove most lucrative to you,” continued the lady.

“Before we proceed farther, madam,” said the lawyer, “may I request to be informed who recommended you to me?”

“A client of yours who resides in Pimlico, and with whom I am acquainted,” answered the beautiful woman. “Perhaps you have heard mention made of my name. I *was* the Countess of Carignano: but I presume that, since my husband’s native land has become a Republic and abolished titles of nobility, I must introduce myself to you as Signora Barthelma.”

“I have heard of you, madam,” responded Green: “and I shall be delighted to number you amongst my clients.”

“It is for this purpose that I have addressed myself to you to-day,” observed Laura. “But I must at once inform you that the object of my visit is scarcely connected with law.”

“If I can serve you, madam——” began Green, who was completely fascinated by her beauty and her manners.

“And serve yourself also?” added Laura: “yes—you can do both! Know, then, that I cherish a rancourous—burning hatred against two individuals—father and son—and that the time has now come for me to wreak my vengeance upon them. The son has just returned from Italy—I saw his arrival mentioned in this morning’s paper; and not another day—not another hour can I rest ere a train be laid that must lead to the explosion of all the happiness they now expect to enjoy.”

“And who are these persons, madam?” asked Green.

“Their name is Hatfield—and they reside at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, in Pall Mall,” responded Laura. “I am acquainted with a terrific secret regarding that family—a secret which would make the hair of all England’s proud aristocracy stand on end—a secret, in fine, that now affords me the means of humbling my two mortal enemies in the dust. Will you, sir, become the instrument of my vengeance?—will you perform my bidding in all respects? I know that I ask a great deal—that I am about to involve you in no trifling nor unimportant enterprise—and that the business does not with propriety come within the sphere of your professional avocations. But the recompense shall be most liberal; and I proffer this note for five hundred pounds as an earnest of my intentions in that respect.”

Green’s eyes glistened at the sight of this generous gift; and he hastened to assure Signora Barthelma that he not only undertook her business with cheerfulness, but would enter into it with as much enthusiasm as if he were interested in it from personal feeling.

“I thought that I was not deceived in your character, from what I had heard,” observed Laura. “For let there be no mistake nor misunderstanding between us, Mr. Green,” she continued, fixing her fine, large grey eyes intently upon him: “*you* have no objection to make money—*I* have money to dispense amongst those who serve me;—*you* will not feel qualmish nor entertain a maudlin sentiment of honour in matters that are likely to prove lucrative—and *I* am ready to pay handsomely for the assistance which you can render me.”

“Proceed, madam,” said Green: “we understand each other.”

“Good!” ejaculated Laura; “and now listen attentively. I am about to communicate to you secrets of the most startling character; and it is by the use which must be made of those revelations, that my vengeance is to be gratified. At the same time you are to act in this matter without suffering it to be known that you are instigated by me. If questioned respecting the manner in which you became acquainted with these tremendous secrets, you must give some evasive reply; and if my name be suggested as your probable informant, you must declare boldly that you never even heard of me in your life. For those whom I am anxious to crush—overwhelm—and cover with confusion, might tell certain tales of a disagreeable nature concerning myself: but if they be kept in ignorance that it is I who am in the background, they will remain silent in these respects. You see that I am candid with you, Mr. Green.”

“And that very frankness, madam, renders me the more anxious to serve you,” answered the unprincipled attorney.

“Thanks for this assurance,” said Laura, delighted at having found so ready and willing an instrument to carry out her vindictive designs. “And now for these tremendous secrets to which I have already alluded! Learn, then, that the elder Mr. Hatfield of whom I have spoken, and who is a gentleman apparently of high respectability and enjoying a good reputation,—learn, I say, that he is in reality none other than the celebrated highwayman Thomas Rainford of former times! Yes—you may well start and be amazed, Mr. Green,” continued Laura, emphatically: “but it is the truth—the solemn truth! And it is nothing to that revelation which I have next to make. For this Mr. Hatfield, or rather Thomas Rainford, was the elder son of the late Earl of Ellingham; and, being legitimately born, he is the rightful possessor of the peerage and the entailed estates.”

“This is most wonderful!” ejaculated Green, staring almost stupidly with amazement.

“I have yet other revelations to make,” continued Laura, in a tone of subdued triumph. “Thomas Rainford married a certain Lady Georgiana Hatfield, and adopted *her* name. They have a son, whose name is Charles, and who passes as their nephew, because he is illegitimate. It is this son whose arrival in London yesterday is announced in this morning’s journals. The same paragraph which records his return from Italy, hints at the probability of his shortly leading Lady Frances Ellingham to the altar. You know the sickening, fulsome terms in which such matters are glanced at in the department of fashionable intelligence? But before such marriage shall take place, it is my purpose to carry woe—desolation of heart—infamy—disgrace—and the deepest, deepest humiliation into that proud mansion! I care not that these Hatfields should remain in ignorance of the fact that it is really I who strike the blow: ’twill be sufficient for me to be convinced that the blow itself *is* struck. Do you begin to comprehend me?”

“I understand you altogether and completely, madam!” exclaimed Green. “You would have me repair forthwith to Ellingham House, and by seeking some cause of dispute with one or more of its inmates, seize the opportunity to proclaim aloud all the tremendous secrets which you have just revealed to me. Is not this your purpose?”

“It is,” responded Laura: then, in a lower but more emphatic tone, she added, “And take care that the whole proceeding be accompanied with such circumstances of notoriety, that it must inevitably engage the attention of the public press. In a word, contrive that all those revelations shall appear in print, Mr. Green; and a thousand guineas shall be your recompense!”

“It shall be done, madam—it shall be done,” answered the lawyer, his heart exulting at the idea of the munificent reward thus promised.

“To-morrow I shall visit you again,” said Laura. “But remember, this affair rests between you and me! Should you ever encounter me when I am walking or riding out with my husband, you will not appear to know me: we are strangers to each other everywhere save within the four walls of this room!”

“I understand and will obey all your wishes, madam,” returned Green.

The lovely but vindictive and profligate woman then took her departure; and the lawyer lost no time in repairing to Pall Mall.

CHAPTER CCVIII.

PERDITA, THE LOST ONE!

IT was about three o'clock in the afternoon when Laura reached the villa on Westbourne Terrace; and, having laid aside her bonnet and handsome furs, she proceeded to the drawing-room, where, as Rosalie had already informed her, her husband Lorenzo was anxiously awaiting her presence.

The fact that he should have stated to the servant his desire that she would speedily return home, was a proceeding so unusual on his part, appearing, as it did, to imply annoyance at her absence, that it roused the haughty temper of the imperious Laura; and for the first time since their marriage, she wore a frown upon her features when she entered his presence.

It was also for the first time that *his* handsome countenance denoted a storm raging within his breast, and all the pent-up violence of which was about to explode against the deceitful, wanton creature into whose character he had obtained so complete but fatal an insight that morning.

"You have been asking for me, Lorenzo?" said Laura, in a cold tone, as she seated herself with an air of exhaustion upon a sofa.

"Yes, madam—I was most anxious to see you as soon as possible," answered the Italian, turning abruptly away from the window at which he had been standing, and now advancing towards her. "When I came home an hour ago I was surprised to find that you had been absent since mid-day."

"And pray, Lorenzo, am I to be kept a prisoner in this house?" demanded Laura, in a tone of unfeigned surprise. "I had certain purchases to make at different shops—and I went out in the carriage for the purpose. Permit me to observe that your conduct is undignified in the extreme, since you so far forget yourself as to express your feelings to my lady's-maid."

"My God! and were I to proclaim my feelings to the whole world, there would be but little cause for wonder!" exclaimed the Italian, vehemently; and as he spoke, he thrust his hand into his bosom, and clutched a dagger which he had concealed there.

But his eyes fell upon the countenance of his wife,—that countenance so glorious in its beauty, though now with the sombre cloud overshadowing it;—and he would have slain her then and there, had not his glance thus suddenly embraced all the loveliness of her features and all the rich contours of her splendid form. For, like a whelming tide, rushed to his soul a thousand tender reminiscences,—vividly recalling to his imagination all the joys and delights he had experienced in her arms—the fervid passion he had seen reflected in those magnificent eyes—the luscious kisses he had imprinted on those lips—the wanton playfulness with which her long luxuriant hair had oft-times swept across his cheeks—the ineffable bliss that had filled his raptured soul when his head was pillowed on that glowing, swelling bosom, which now palpitated with haughty indignation,—oh! he thought of all this, and he felt that he could not slay one so exquisitely lovely—so transcendently beautiful!

"Assuredly, your humour is strange to-day, Lorenzo," said Laura, who, though longing to make it up with the man whom she really and sincerely loved, nevertheless was resolved to exact the homage which all women under such circumstances require—namely, the first overture towards a reconciliation. "At one moment your eyes glare savagely upon me as if I had given you some mortal offence;—and now they assume an expression of pity and commiseration. Come, sir, confess that you have entertained some outrageous suspicion—that you are jealous of me—and I shall take the avowal as a proof of affection. Do this," she added, a faint smile of encouragement appearing upon her lips, and allowing a glimpse of her brilliant teeth; "do this, Lorenzo—and I will pardon your unkindness."

"Pardon *me*!" exclaimed the Italian, bitterly—for the conduct of his wife now appeared to him to be aggravated by levity and flippancy of the most irritating nature, though in reality she was totally ignorant of the fact that grave and serious charges were agitating in his mind against her: "pardon *me*!" he repeated, his tone now assuming a fierceness that began to amaze and even alarm the young woman, whose conscience, as the reader is well aware, was not the clearest in the world. "Oh! this is indeed a hideous mockery—a cool, deliberate insult," he continued,—"yes—a vile insult, to offer to pardon *me*! What have I ever done to offend *you*—or merit *your* forbearance or *your* forgiveness? My God! 'tis I who have been generous and confiding—and 'tis you who have been the gross deceiver and the unprincipled hypocrite!"

"These are harsh words, Lorenzo," exclaimed Laura, rising from the sofa, and drawing herself up to her full height; and though, not tall in stature, there was nevertheless something regal and majestically imperious in her air and bearing: "yes—they are harsh words, I repeat—and they may lead to a quarrel which no subsequent regrets nor apologies can repair."

“Let the quarrel be eternal—or to the very death!” returned Lorenzo, his handsome countenance now distorted with rage. “Oh! I am sick of this world with its hideous deceits—its hollow hearts—its boundless profligacy! I care not how soon I throw off the coil of this life’s trammels: but with my last breath shall I curse—bitterly, bitterly curse—the odious name of *Perdita*!”

“Ah!” ejaculated the guilty woman, now perceiving that she was indeed unmasked: but almost immediately recovering her self-possession, she approached her husband and said in her softest, most seductive tones, “You have heard evil reports concerning me, Lorenzo: and I hope ere you prejudge me, that I shall be allowed an opportunity to give a full explanation. Consider my position:—it is that of a friendless and orphan woman, about to lose, perhaps, the only being on earth whom she ever loved, or who has ever sincerely loved her!”

“Oh! how is it that such a demon heart is harboured in such an angelic form!” cried Lorenzo Barthelma, surveying her for a moment with mingled pity and admiration: then immediately afterwards, a full sense of all her tremendous profligacy and deceit springing up in his soul, his eyes glared upon her with the ferocity of a lynx, and a feeling of deep and burning hatred took possession of him.

“If you refuse me a hearing—if you intend to cast me off with contumely and insult,” said Perdita, her own eyes flashing fire in their turn—but it seemed like living fire!—“if such be your intentions,” she continued, in a tone of mingled bitterness and haughty indifference, “the sooner this interview be terminated, the better.”

And she advanced towards the door, her bosom heaving with convulsions almost to bursting from its confinement.

“No—no—you shall not leave me yet, nor thus!” cried the Italian, darting after and catching her violently by the arm. “You *shall* have the opportunity of explanation which you desire; and God help you in the task!”

Thus speaking he forced her back to the sofa; and then locked the door of the apartment, putting the key in his pocket.

“This behaviour on your part, signor,” said Perdita, assuming a composure which she did not—could not feel, “is alike mean and cowardly. You seek to intimidate me—and that is mean: you use violence towards me—and that is cowardly. What have you heard against me? Name the calumniator, and recite the calumnies. But if the accusation resolve itself into *this,*—that I was frail—weak—unchaste before I became your wife, remember that I never deceived you on that subject! You yourself were my paramour before you were my husband; and when you offered me your hand, I reminded you that it was no virgin-bride whom you would receive to the bridal-bed. Ere now you called me *Perdita*—and I admit that such is my Christian name. But am I responsible for the circumstances which induced my mother to bestow it upon me? You are doubtless aware, from the same source whence you have gleaned evil tidings concerning me, that I was born in Newgate, and that my maternal parent gave me that odious name in a moment of contrition. Well—is this my fault? Be just, Lorenzo—I do not ask you to be generous;—but again I say, be just!”

“I have listened to you with attention, Perdita—and I am bound to declare that you seek to veil a hideous depravity beneath the most specious sophistry,” said Barthelma, speaking in a slow, measured tone, but with a concentrated fury in his soul. “I do not reproach you for your mother’s crimes—I commiserate you on that score. But I feel indignant—oh! bitterly, bitterly indignant at all the treachery—the perfidy you have practised towards me! I knew that you were unchaste, as you yourself express it—but I believed that it was mere frailty on your part, and not inveterate profligacy? Oh! Perdita, how dared you bring to the marriage-bed of an honourable man a body polluted with all the vice and iniquity of a penal colony, and which had been for years common as that of the vilest prostitute? I gave you a noble name—circumstances have robbed it of its aristocratic lustre—but it is still honourable;—and now how is it menaced? You have lavished your favours upon hundreds—you have led a life of such frightful wantonness, young in years as you are, that your soul has grown old in iniquity! Oh! I know it all—I know everything, Perdita: all the intricacies of your character are revealed to me—I have read the mysteries of its darkest depths—and my eyes are at length opened to the astounding folly that I perpetrated in linking my fate with such as you!”

“Then let us separate at once,” exclaimed Perdita, her cheeks flushing with indignation. “Wherefore prolong this interview? Our quarrel has gone too far and become too serious ever to admit of pardon or oblivion.”

“It is not I who will seek such reconciliation,” returned Barthelma, with terrible malignity in his tone and manner. “I loved you, Perdita—God only knows how tenderly, how sincerely, how devotedly I loved you! I would have died for you,—aye, and should have rejoiced to surrender up my life, could such a sacrifice have benefitted you! Confident, frank, and full of generous candour, I gave you the love of an honourable man;—and you deceived me! Oh! I am now no stranger to all your syren wiles—your Circean witcheries: I recognise all that artifice and all that duplicity in many of the circumstances which marked our first meetings, and which rivetted the chains that you threw around me. What! do you suppose that I can consent to live and become the scorn, the laughing-stock, and the scandal of all who know me?—and think you that I will permit *you* to go forth into the world and point me out with taunting finger to the first idiot whom you may win as your paramour? My God! the thought is maddening—it sears my very brain!”

And so terrible became the young Italian’s aspect,—with his flashing eyes, convulsing countenance, and quivering lips,—that Perdita, now seriously alarmed, rushed to the door, forgetting that it was locked.

But it opened not to her touch, and, with a cry of terror, she turned towards her husband, who was evidently exercising superhuman efforts to restrain the fury that boiled in his breast and darted in lightning-shafts from his wild eyes.

“O Lorenzo—Lorenzo!” she exclaimed, joining her hands together; “what do you mean to do?—what is it that you require of me? My

God! I know that I have been wicked—vile—profligate: but I have been faithful to you—I have never ceased to love you from the first moment we met! That day in the Champs Elysées has ever been a bright one—aye, the brightest on which my retrospective looks could dwell—"

"That day in the Champs Elysées," repeated Barthelma, in a low and hollow tone, "is one accursed in my memory and in my life! Wretch—profligate—shameless wanton," he exclaimed, all his infuriate passion now bursting forth,—"how dare you allude to that day?—how can you think of it without the crimson blush of shame? For whose sake did you deck yourself out so meretriciously on that occasion?—whose jealousy was it to inspire, that you bent your warm and lustful looks on me that day?—whom to beguile and win back to your arms, perhaps, was that deceptive note written that induced me, Di Ponta, and Charles Hatfield—"

"Ah! then you know every thing!" exclaimed Perdita, suddenly throwing off the suppliant air and the appealing looks which she had ere now assumed, and resolving to act with the energy natural to her character. "It is useless, signor, to prolong this painful interview: I have already made the same observation—and I now wish you to understand that I will not remain a prisoner any longer here. Open that door and let me depart—or I shall summon the servants."

Thus speaking, she advanced towards the bell-pull.

"You menace me—you dare to menace me?" exclaimed Barthelma, springing forward and confronting her so as to bar the way; and his whole frame was quivering with a rage that appeared ready to burst forth into the ungovernable fury of a perfect madness.

"How dare you thus coerce me?" demanded Perdita, her eyes flashing fire. "Out of my path, coward—unless you intend to enact the Italian bravo in this country where men are wont to be brave and chivalrous."

And, as she spoke, she pushed him disdainfully aside.

But ere the eye had time to wink or the heart to palpitate once—and while a sound, between a cry and a yell, of frenzied rage burst from the lips of the maddened Barthelma,—his dagger flashed before the sight of Perdita, and was instantly buried deep in her bosom.

A thrilling, agonising scream proclaimed her mortal agony—then ceased suddenly; and, staggering forward a few paces, she fell heavily on the carpet—and expired!

Barthelma stood for a few moments rivetted to the spot, silent and motionless with horror at the deed which he had perpetrated; while in his soul a revulsion of feeling took place with the whelming rapidity that marks the ebb of a portentous tide.

A mortal dread came over him—and then he burst into an agony of tears; and throwing himself on the still palpitating body of her whose wondrous beauty had been his pride and his joy, he began to lament her death in the most passionate terms.

But suddenly there was a sound as of several footsteps rushing up the stairs—and then came a loud knocking at the door, and the voices of the valet, Rosalie, and another servant demanding what was the matter and what meant the piercing scream that had reached their ears.

Then Barthelma recollected that, as a murderer, he would receive a murderer's doom; and in a moment to his appalled soul started up all the grim and terrible array of the criminal tribunal—the executioner—the assembled myriads—and the gibbet!

All the frenzy of his maddening mind returned;—and tearing forth the stiletto from the bosom of his slaughtered wife, he plunged it deep into his own breast.

At the same instant the door of the apartment was forced in; and the horror-stricken domestics caught sight of their master just at the moment that he fell upon the corpse of their mistress!

So perished this youthful pair,—each endowed with a beauty of no ordinary kind!

Yes—thus died the tender, impassioned Lorenzo, and the profligate, wanton Perdita!

The world has seen no loveliness superior to hers, nor known a depravity more inveterate.

But was she to be blamed only, and not pitied in the slightest degree? It were unjust thus to regard her memory:—for, when her eyes first saw the light, had some kind hand been nigh to receive the innocent babe—to bear it away from that Newgate-cell which was the ominous scene of its birth—to rear it tenderly and save it from passing in the arms of a felon-mother into a penal settlement,—then to foster and cherish the growing girl with a true maternal care—bend her mind to the contemplation of virtue, and protect it from all bad influences—preserve her soul from the effects of vile examples, and inculcate principles of chastity, rectitude, and religion,—Oh! then would the prison-born Perdita have given by her conduct a refutation to her name, and she would have haply excelled in every accomplishment, every amiable characteristic, and every endearing qualification that combine like brilliant gems to form for the chaste woman's brow a diadem such as angels wear!

Oh! my Lady Duchess—or you, highborn daughter of some proud Peer whose line of ancestry may be traced back to the period of the Norman Conquest,—look not with unmitigated disgust upon the character of Perdita, the *Lost One*! Let pity temper the feeling;—for—though the truth which we are about to tell may be not over palatable—yet is the moral which the Lost One's history affords deserving of consideration. Suppose, my Lady Duchess—or you, highborn maiden,—suppose that either of you had been ushered into this world under such circumstances as those which attended on the birth of Perdita;—suppose that you first saw the light in Newgate—that you had been taken by a vile mother to the far-off place of her exile—that you had been reared where temptations abounded and virtuous influences were unknown—and that every example you had before you was evil and profligate,—what would have been the result? Do not dare to say, my Lady Duchess—or you, highborn maiden—that an innate perception of right and wrong, and a natural inclination to virtue, would have preserved you pure, and chaste, and untainted throughout the terrible ordeal! No—no—you would have fallen as Perdita fell—you would have been dragged through the mire of demoralisation as she was—you would have imbibed the infectious poison of vice as she did,—and, under such circumstances, you, my Lady Duchess—and you, highborn maiden—would have justified and illustrated in your own lives the history of the Lost One!

What, then, do we wish to impress upon our readers?—what do we seek to impress upon the Legislature and the Government? That it is better to adopt means to prevent crime, than to study how to punish it when it is committed. We have a thousand laws which proclaim how a man may be sent to the treadmill, or to the bulks, or to the penal colonies, or to the gibbet: but we have none devising measures to keep him away from those places. Everything is to punish—nothing to prevent. The codes are crowded with enactments inflicting penalties upon grown-up criminals,—but do not contain a single statute for the protection of the children of the poor against contamination. Look at those emaciated little beings rolling about all day long in the gutters, or eating the offal off dust-heaps: does the law stretch forth its hand and pluck them out of that filth which is only too painfully emblematical of the moral mire in which their minds are likewise wallowing? No: the law allows them to play on unheeded; but when, a few years afterwards, these unhappy creatures, who can neither read nor write, and have no idea of God nor hope nor heaven, pilfer a slice of rusty bacon or a morsel of cheese from a shop-board in order to satisfy the cravings of hunger—*then* does the Law thrust forth its long arm and its great hand, and seize upon the victims of——what?—its own neglect!

Yes: those are truths which we are never wearied of insisting upon. Session after session is frittered away in party squabbles; but what remedial steps are taken to moralise, christianise, and civilise the children of the poor?

CHAPTER CCIX.

MR. GREEN'S MISSION.

In the meantime Mr. Green had taken a cab, and ordered himself to be driven to the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall.

While he was proceeding thither, he threw himself back in the vehicle and gave way to a variety of pleasurable reflections. He considered his prospects to be most brilliant; and he believed that he was on the high road to amass as considerable a fortune as that which his late master Heathcote had once enjoyed. It was fortunate for him that he had applied to Jack Rily in the hour of his need: the Doctor had proved of the greatest assistance to him;—and he resolved to run down to Woolwich some day and call upon his old friend at the hulks. For Jack Rily had been tried for the murder of Vitriol Bob, and acquitted of the capital charge: but he was condemned to two years' imprisonment in a convict-ship for manslaughter, the police having appeared to give him a character which by no means recommended him to the good opinion of the jury nor the mercy of the Court. As for the immense quantity of Bank-notes found upon his person at the time of his arrest, he had positively refused to give any satisfactory account concerning them; and as no one stood forward to claim them, nor to throw any light upon this mysterious subject, they were declared to be forfeited to the Crown on the prisoner's conviction for manslaughter.

Pondering upon these and other matters, Mr. Green arrived in due course at the noble mansion in Pall Mall; and on inquiring for Mr. Hatfield, he was informed that this gentleman was ill in bed.

"But my business is of the most urgent character," said the attorney; "and I must see him."

The domestic to whom this assurance was given, conducted Mr. Green into a parlour, and hastened to report to the Earl of Ellingham the presence of the visitor.

The nobleman accordingly repaired to the room in which Green was waiting, and represented to him that Mr. Hatfield was too much indisposed to receive any stranger.

"If, however," added the Earl, "you will communicate to me the nature of the affair which has brought you hither, your object will be gained as readily as if you saw Mr. Hatfield. He is an intimate friend of mine—indeed, a bosom friend," said the nobleman, emphatically; "and we have no secrets from each other."

"I must respectfully decline to open my business to your lordship in the first instance," returned Mr. Green. "But I should be glad if your lordship would witness what I have to say to Mr. Hatfield."

"Your card informs me that you are an attorney, sir," said the Earl of Ellingham: "may I ask if the object of your visit be of a legal nature?—because in that case, you would do well to address yourself to my solicitor."

"You must excuse me, my lord," was the laconic answer, "if I decline giving any explanations."

"Although I consider your behaviour to be far from courteous, Mr. Green," said the Earl, "I will communicate to Mr. Hatfield your desire to have an interview with him; and perhaps, under the circumstances, he may see you."

"Good, my lord," responded the attorney. "I am in no particular hurry—and will cheerfully wait an hour or two in order to have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hatfield."

The Earl of Ellingham forthwith repaired to his half-brother's room, and mentioned to him all that had occurred. Mr. Hatfield, though feeling weak after the long illness which he had experienced, considered the behaviour of the visitor to be so extraordinary that it was advisable to grant the interview demanded.

Lord Ellingham accordingly returned to the parlour, and thence conducted the attorney to the chamber where Mr. Hatfield was lying in bed.

The invalid cast a rapid and searching glance at Green as he entered the room; but he recognised in the visitor no one with whom he remembered to have ever been acquainted.

Scarcely was the door closed, when it opened again—and the Countess of Ellingham, accompanied by Lady Georgiana, made her appearance: but, on perceiving a stranger, they both drew back and were about to withdraw.

“There are no secrets here, ladies—no secrets, I can assure you,” exclaimed Mr. Green, with a smirking expression of countenance, which, nevertheless, had a deep malignity in it.

“In that case, come in,” said Lord Ellingham; and the two ladies accordingly entered the room.

“Will you now explain the object of your visit, sir?” asked Mr. Hatfield, who had observed the sinister aspect which the attorney’s features had ere now assumed, and who entertained a vague presentiment of evil.

“I must begin by informing you,” said Green, taking a seat, and glancing around on those present, as much as to intimate that he spoke to no one in particular, but was addressing them all collectively,—“I must begin by informing you that I am a very extraordinary person in one respect—which is, that I am constantly ferretting about amongst old papers, musty documents, and ancient records; and while engaged in this occupation I frequently light upon strange secrets—very strange indeed.”

While he was yet uttering these last words, the rapid look which he threw around convinced him that he had already made a most unpleasant impression upon his auditory: for the ladies both turned pale and started—while the Earl and Mr. Hatfield exchanged glances significant of alarm.

“Yes—such is the case,” continued Mr. Green, chuckling inwardly, though maintaining an external composure: “and amongst the most singular—the most astounding of the secrets which I have thus dragged to light, the one that I have discovered in connexion with your lordship’s family, is not the least remarkable.”

As he thus spoke, the attorney fixed his eyes upon the nobleman, who coloured deeply in spite of himself: for it naturally struck him that Green alluded to matters with which the reader is already well acquainted. The same apprehension seized upon Hatfield, Lady Georgiana, and the Countess of Ellingham; and the suspense which the lawyer’s auditory now endured, was poignant in the extreme.

“Your lordship can of course conjecture to what I allude,” continued Green; “and you, Mr. Hatfield,” he added, turning towards the invalid, “cannot possibly misunderstand me.”

Lady Georgiana rose from the seat which she had taken on entering the room, and proceeded to place herself instinctively as it were near the head of the couch, so as to be close to her husband. It was a movement which said as eloquently as if her lips had simultaneously explained it—“This man menaces evil: but I am near to console you with all the sympathy of a loving wife.”

“Mr. Green,” exclaimed the Earl of Ellingham, after a few moments’ reflection, “I appeal to you whether it will not be better that these matters at which you have glanced should be discussed privately between yourself and me. Mr. Hatfield has been ill—very ill: and it would be cruel to excite him at the moment when he is approaching convalescence.”

“I have already stated to your lordship that whatever communication I have to make must be in the presence of witnesses,” returned the implacable Green. “I presume that this lady,” he added, with a gentle inclination of his head towards the invalid’s wife, “is Lady Georgiana Hatfield?”

“You are correct, sir,” observed the lady herself, with a haughty tone and distant manner.

“And this lady is the Countess of Ellingham, doubtless?” said Green, altogether unabashed.

The beautiful Esther bowed in an affirmative reply.

“But what mean these questions, sir?” demanded the Earl, impatiently. “Surely you will not use language that may prove outrageous to the feelings of ladies who have never offended you?”

“If the truths which I am about to utter should prove so very disagreeable to hear, my lord,” responded Green, “they must be equally unpleasant to cherish in the depths of the soul. In a word, you are doubtless all too much accustomed to contemplate these truths to be liable to any startling effect when they are shaped in words and whispered to the ear.”

“This is an insolence of behaviour, sir, which I cannot—will not tolerate,” exclaimed the Earl of Ellingham. “You shall not force your way into the bosom of a family with a view to play upon their feelings with a cruelty that is as refined as it is unaccountable.”

“Very good, my lord,” returned Green, rising from his seat, and taking up his hat; “I can as easily proclaim from the head of the stairs—or in the hall of your mansion—every thing I know relative to your family, as I can talk the matter quietly over with you in this room.”

And the villain was moving towards the door, when Lord Ellingham caught him by the arm, saying, “Nay—you must not leave us thus! What object have you in view?—what use do you propose to make of the secrets which you have discovered? Speak frankly—candidly—openly: is it money that you require?”

A new idea flashed to the mind of Mr. Green, as these words fell upon his ears.

By serving Signora Barthelma he would gain a thousand guineas, half of which sum was already in his possession: he had therefore

only another five hundred to receive—and it was possible that he might obtain as many thousands by striking a bargain with the nobleman and making a market of the secrets in his possession.

“Wherefore does your lordship ask me if I require money?” he demanded, by way of sounding the Earl’s intentions.

“Because I am rich enough to bribe you,” was the unhesitating response: for the nobleman had already formed a pretty accurate idea of the attorney’s character.

Green paused—reflected—and began to grow embarrassed. He knew not how to act—how much to demand—what terms to propose. Fearful of spoiling all, by carrying his extortionate views too high, he was likewise apprehensive of losing a large by agreeing to take a small amount.

The Earl guessed what was passing in his mind; and, pointing to writing materials that lay upon the table, he said, “Draw a cheque—and I will sign it.”

Mr. Green sat down, and with trembling hand wrote a draft for five thousand pounds.

Lord Ellingham glanced over it, and immediately affixed his signature to the document, inserting the names of his bankers in the corner.

“Stop!” ejaculated Mr. Hatfield, starting up in his couch: “Arthur, retain that cheque—let not the villain take it!”

And the Earl of Ellingham instantly obeyed this injunction; while Green turned, with a countenance livid through rage and disappointment, towards the invalid.

“Not one shilling shall this man extort from us!” continued Mr. Hatfield, powerfully excited. “His story is a fabrication! There are no documents in existence which can have revealed our family secrets to him. He has been sent hither by an enemy—and who that enemy is I can too well divine!”

“Yes—yes—I understand you!” cried the Earl, the name of *Perdita* suggesting itself immediately to his memory: but at the same time he recollected that neither the Countess of Ellingham nor Lady Georgiana was acquainted with the secret of that fatal marriage which Charles had contracted.

“Vile—despicable tool that you are!” resumed Mr. Hatfield, addressing himself to the attorney: “I can see through all your conduct as if your very soul were transparent! The vengeance of an enemy sent you hither—and the demand which the Earl of Ellingham made respecting your object, was suggestive of this extortionate deed that you sought to perpetrate. Begone, sir—do your worst—we fear you not! You may reveal family matters that may cause pain—but you can do no serious injury: for if you allude to the secrets which I myself am referring to, your malignant aim is completely baffled—inasmuch as the documents that could alone corroborate your assertions, are no longer in existence. I myself destroyed them!”

And thoroughly exhausted, Mr. Hatfield sank back upon the pillow.

At this moment the door was hastily opened; and Clarence Villiers rushed into the room.

“Pardon this abrupt intrusion,” he exclaimed, not immediately noticing Green: “but I have news of some importance—though of horrible interest—to communicate. That woman Perdita, who ensnared my friend Charles with her wiles and witcheries, is no more!”

“Dead?” cried Mr. Hatfield, again starting up in the couch.

“Murdered—assassinated—and by her own husband!” ejaculated Villiers. “I was driving past Westbourne Terrace ere now—I saw a crowd—I heard appalling rumours—I enquired the cause—and I learnt the outline of the frightful tragedy! She is dead—and Barthelma, her husband, who destroyed her, has perished by his own hand!”

“Then Charles is beyond all danger for the future!” exclaimed Mr. Hatfield;—and again did he fall back on his pillow.

Lady Georgiana and the Countess of Ellingham hastened to administer restoratives to the invalid: although they themselves were greatly excited by the intelligence which had just arrived—for, it will be remembered, they were aware that Charles had fled from London with an abandoned woman who had gained a powerful ascendancy over him; and horrified as they were at the tidings of the murder, they could not help feeling that all apprehension of a relapse on the young man’s part into the meshes of the intriguing Perdita, was now suddenly removed.

While the ladies were ministering to Mr. Hatfield, Clarence Villiers had turned and recognised Green, who was standing stupefied and motionless at the sudden news which revealed to him that his fair client Perdita Barthelma had been murdered!

“Ah! Mr. Green,” exclaimed Villiers, in astonishment at beholding the attorney in the room; “what brings you hither?”

“Do you know this person, Clarence?” demanded the Earl, bending his looks with mingled indignation and abhorrence upon the man.

“I have been acquainted with him for many years——” began Villiers.

“Stop, sir!” cried the nobleman, again seizing the arm of the attorney, who was making for the door. “Before you leave us, you shall be thoroughly unmasked in the presence of a gentleman who appears to address you as a friend.”

“Let me go, my lord!” exclaimed Green, struggling to get away; for he knew that Villiers could reveal a secret which would at once place the infamy of his character beyond question: “let me go, I say—you have no right to detain me against my will!”

“You shall remain yet a few minutes!” cried the Earl, holding his arm with a strong grasp. “This villain,” continued the nobleman, turning towards Clarence, “came hither as the instrument of that woman Perdita’s vengeance! That such is the fact, I have no doubt. But in a short time he changed his character—he began to act a part for himself—he played the scoundrel on his own account—and he attempted to extort from me the sum of five thousand pounds, as the purchase-money for retaining all the secrets which Perdita could alone have revealed to him!”

“You offered me the money—and the amount was not extravagant, considering the purpose for which it was to have been given,” said Green, glancing anxiously at Clarence Villiers.

“I told you to name your own terms—and you drew up this draft,” exclaimed the Earl, exhibiting the slip of paper.

“Then, by heaven! forbearance in respect to such a man as you, is a positive crime on my part!” said Villiers, in an excited tone; and, seizing the wretched attorney by the collar, he cried, “You go not hence, Mr. Green, save in the custody of an officer, and under an accusation of forgery!”

“Forgery!” exclaimed the Earl, in amazement; and at the same time the ladies and Mr. Hatfield became interested observers of the scene that was now passing.

“Yes—forgery, my lord!” cried Villiers, still retaining his hold upon Green. “This man was left joint trustee with myself, on behalf of a youth who had a small sum bequeathed to him: the money was sold out of the funds years ago, my signature to the power of attorney being forged! That forgery was perpetrated by the villain before you. Some six months ago he replaced the money—he called upon me—he confessed the deed—he avowed his contrition—and I promised to shield him. But now, my lord—*now*, that he dares to set himself up as the persecutor of those whom I have so many reasons to esteem and revere,—*now*, that he has ventured to direct his villanies against the peace of an amiable family,—I cannot—will not—must not spare him!”

“No, Clarence—you shall keep your promise,” said the Earl; “and perhaps the man may be moved by gratitude to repentance.”

“My promise was conditional, my lord,” exclaimed Villiers: “and if he have represented it otherwise to a living soul, he has uttered a falsehood. I declared to him at the time that I would forgive him, provided he undertook to enter upon the ways of rectitude and honesty: and it is he who has now forfeited his solemn pledge to that effect! No mercy, then, for this bad—this heartless man!”

“One word!” cried Green, in a menacing tone. “Fulfil your threat, Mr. Villiers, and I will at once—without the slightest hesitation or remorse—proclaim to all the world that the man known as Mr. Hatfield—”

“Silence, villain!” thundered Clarence: “silence!—or I will strangle you!”

“No—no—you shall not coerce me! I *will* speak out!” cried Green, struggling to disengage himself from the strong grasp in which he was held. “Mark what I say—hear me—hear me, all of you! Mr. Hatfield bears an assumed name—he is the Earl’s eldest brother—the heir to the title—aye, and also Thomas Rainford, who was hanged at Horsemonger Lane Gaol!”

A blow from the clenched fist of Villiers felled the attorney as these last words burst from his lips;—and at the same instant a wild shriek, uttered by Lady Georgiana, rang through the room. For Mr. Hatfield had sunk back upon the pillow, with a low moan and a death-like pallor of countenance;—and almost immediately afterwards, blood oozed from his mouth.

All was now confusion and dismay in the chamber of the invalid: but at this juncture, Sir John Lascelles made his appearance. A few words, hurriedly spoken by the Earl of Ellingham, conveyed to the physician an idea of what had caused the relapse of his patient; and the worthy man speedily ordered the requisite restoratives. But these were all in vain:—Mr. Hatfield had broken a blood-vessel internally—and a few minutes after the arrival of the doctor, he expired without a groan!

We must draw a veil over the scene of sorrow which the chamber of death presented, and which we cannot find words to describe. The intensity of that anguish was increased by the almost frantic grief of Charles Hatfield, who, having been out for several hours upon his own and his father’s business, returned but a few minutes too late to witness the sad catastrophe.

He threw himself upon the corpse of his sire—uttered the most passionate lamentations—and even pushed his mother aside when she endeavoured to console him.

But at length a reaction came; and the violence of the young man's grief gave way to a profound sorrow,—a sorrow that was deeply, deeply shared by many other hearts!

In the confusion that had taken place when Lady Georgiana's scream echoed through the room, denoting the occurrence of something dreadful,—Green had risen from the floor and made his escape, inwardly cursing himself for having undertaken to become the agent of Perdita's vengeance.

But Villiers, who entertained the most sincere friendship for Mr. Hatfield, and who was goaded almost to madness by the conduct of the vile attorney towards the man whom he thus loved as a brother, vowed that such infamy should not go unpunished. Scarcely, therefore, had the terrible conviction burst upon all present in the chamber of death, that Mr. Hatfield was indeed no more, when Villiers rushed franticly in pursuit of him whom he looked upon as the murderer!

The chase was successful—and in less than half an hour, Green was in custody on a charge of forgery!

CONCLUSION.

Our narrative is about to close: but ere we lay aside the pen, a few observations are requisite in order to render the history of each prominent character as complete as possible. Several have already been disposed of: but there yet remain many in whose fate the reader may feel more or less interested; and we accordingly proceed to sum up in a few words all the particulars which are wanting to the faithful accomplishment of our task.

Mr. Green in due time figured at the Old Bailey, where Clarence Villiers appeared to prosecute him for forgery; but the prisoner pleaded guilty in order to obtain the merciful consideration of the court, and was sentenced to transportation for seven years, instead of for the term of his natural life. Preparatory, however, to his expatriation, he was lodged in one of the convict-hulks at Woolwich; and there he encountered his friend Jack Rily the Doctor, who, instead of consoling the wretched attorney, only laughed at him for the tears which he shed and the useless repinings to which he gave vent. Mr. Green is at this present moment occupied in the healthy but disagreeable task of repairing the high roads in Van Diemen's Land, in company with some of the greatest scoundrels that ever disgraced the human species; and he even looks back with bitter regret to those times when he was the oppressed, crushed, and despised instrument of James Heathcote. Nor was it a source of solace to Mr. Green when one fine morning, about ten months ago, he recognised the Doctor in a new-comer who was thus added to the gang of convicts: for Mr. Rily, having endeavoured to stir up his brethren in the Woolwich hulk to rebellion, was discovered in the attempt and forthwith packed off to the island which Nature had in the origin made a terrestrial paradise, but which the English Government has converted into "a den of thieves."

James Heathcote, being utterly ruined by the transfer of all his property for the benefit of the numerous clients whom he had robbed,—for this affair was completely carried out by Green's head clerk,—was compelled to abandon his fine house and take a humble office where he strove hard to reconstruct his once extensive business. But the exposure which his character had received in the Court of Queen's Bench, proved a fatal blow to his prospects and an insurmountable obstacle in his path; and at the end of six months, being unable to pay his rent, he was turned out of the little nook to which he had retired, and plunged into the deepest poverty. At this juncture his brother Sir Gilbert returned to England; and James wrote him a penitential letter, imploring his succour. The baronet refused to see him, but generously undertook to allow him two guineas a-week in order to keep him from starving; and on this pittance —for such it is in comparison with the wealth he once possessed—the broken-down, baffled, and dispirited man still subsists in some suburb of the metropolis.

The Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks has experienced many ups and downs since we last saw him at the lunatic asylum in Bethnal Green. It appears that one evening Dr. Swinton gave a grand supper to the relatives and friends of his pensioners, who were present on the occasion as usual; and that previously to the repast being served up, the Doctor had been holding forth in a highly eulogistic style upon the excellent qualities, Christian virtues, and profound piety of his chaplain. Now the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks was out at the time, the Doctor both declaring and believing that "the good man had gone to pay his usual evening visits to the poor in the neighbourhood;" and the guests were all very anxious for the return of the worthy individual who possessed such numerous claims upon their esteem, veneration, and respect. But the truth was—and the truth *must* be told—that the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks, instead of visiting the poor or even dreaming of such a thing, was smoking his pipe and drinking his gin-and-water at the *Cat and the Fiddle* in Globe Town; and as he happened to take an extra pipe and two extra glasses on this particular occasion, the fumes thereof became more potent than the odour of sanctity. The consequence was that on his return to the lunatic asylum, his walk was so unsteady and irregular that his progress up the gravel walk to the front door resembled that of a ship tacking about in the Channel; and when he entered the supper-room, just as the company were sitting down to the well-spread table, his nose was so red, his cheeks were so flushed, and his eyes so vacant and watery, that the Doctor inquired in a tone of bland anxiety if he were unwell? "No, sir—I am quite well—and I am all right!" was the somewhat savage answer.—"Then will you have the kindness to ask a blessing, Mr. Sheepshanks?" said the Doctor. —"No, sir," responded the pious gentleman: "I will see you and the blessing at the devil first. You're drunk, sir—and I'm ashamed of you."—It would be impossible to describe the dismay—we might almost term it horrified amazement—which this peremptory refusal to say grace, and the scandalous attack upon Dr. Swinton's sobriety, produced amongst the guests. The physician himself started up in a furious rage, forgetful of all his propriety; and applying his right foot to the proper quarter, he kicked the Reverend Mr. Sheepshanks ignominiously forth from the lunatic asylum. On the following morning this pious gentleman, who was endowed with so many Christian virtues, awoke in a station-house to a sense of his altered position; but when introduced to the notice of a magistrate for being "drunk and disorderly, and kicking up a row at Dr. Swinton's door," he boldly proclaimed himself a martyr, and held forth at great length, and in a peculiar nasal drone, on the vanities of this world. The magistrate was, however, compelled to cut him short, by inflicting a fine: but as Mr. Sheepshanks had exhausted all his pecuniary resources at the *Cat and the Fiddle* on the preceding evening, he was doomed to extend his experience of worldly vanities beneath the roof of the House of Correction. There he found that the treadmill was one of the most uncomfortable vanities he had ever yet encountered; and the redness of his nose was considerably subdued by the prison skilly. On his emancipation at the end of a week, he took up his abode at the house of a poor widow with whom

he was acquainted, and whom he induced to convert her front-parlour into a receptacle for prayer-meetings. This succeeded very well for a few months, the congregation being delighted with Mr. Sheepshanks' discourse, and a tolerable amount of pence being collected every evening in furtherance of the pious gentleman's holy purpose of supplying the benighted Esquimaux with flannel-jackets and religious tracts: but the widow proving at length to be in the family-way, and Mr. Sheepshanks not choosing to wait to have the paternity of the expected offspring fixed upon his reverend shoulders, his sudden evaporation from the neighbourhood led to the break-up of the prayer-meetings and the total ruin of the unfortunate woman. What became of Mr. Sheepshanks for the next six months, we cannot say: but one fine Sunday morning he turned up at the Obelisk in St. George's Fields, where he addressed a crowd in his usual strain. His discourse was however suddenly cut short by the presence of the poor widow, who, wrapped in rags and with a baby in her arms, was begging in that neighbourhood; and when the reverend gentleman's delinquencies were proclaimed by the miserable woman, he was hooted, pelted, and maltreated all up the Westminster-road, until he managed to escape from his assailants by diving into one of the narrow streets leading out of that great thoroughfare. After this affair, the pious man again disappeared for a season; and when we last heard of him, he had given up preaching as a trade which he had thoroughly worn out, and had betaken himself to the highly respectable and cheering avocation of beating the drum and playing the month-organ—*alias* pandean pipes—for a colleague who exhibited a Punch and Judy show.

We must now direct attention to Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis. Upon the strength of the handsome pecuniary present made to them by Lord William Trevelyan, the former forthwith dubbed himself *Major*; and for the first six weeks after this self-bestowed elevation, he was under the disagreeable necessity of thrashing his bosom friend soundly at least once a day for being oblivious of the new rank and calling him *Captain*. At length he succeeded in completely beating into the head of Frank Curtis that he was really a Major; and when they were seated together of an evening over their whisky-and-water, at some public-house, the gallant Irishman never failed to recount to his companion all the military services he had rendered the State, and all the splendours of his paternal mansion of Blunderbuss Park, Connemara. These statements, though ostensibly addressed to Mr. Frank Curtis, were really intended for the behoof of the frequenters of the parlours where they were enunciated; and the quiet tradesmen into whose ears the flaming narratives were thus dinned, ended by being particularly proud of the acquaintance of Major Gorman O'Blunderbuss. At length, what with succulent dinners at eating-houses and oceans of "potheen" every evening, the sum so liberally given by Lord William Trevelyan came to a termination; and the two friends were one day holding a council of war—or rather sitting in "committee of ways and means"—when a paragraph in the newspaper informed them that Lady Blunt and her son had been upset in a boat during an aquatic excursion at Richmond, and drowned "in spite of all the efforts made by the footman to save them." Up jumped both the Major and Frank Curtis in ectasies of joy, dissolving themselves as a committee then and there by kicking over the table; and away they sped to the mansion in Jermyn Street. The Intelligence was true: Lady Blunt and her son were no more;—and the stout footman was disconsolate. There was no will; and Frank Curtis accordingly found himself, as if by magic, the heir-at-law to all those possessions from which his uncle had sought to exclude him years ago. The day on which the remains of the deceased lady and her son were consigned to the tomb, was the happiest that Major O'Blunderbuss and his friend had ever passed in their lives: for the gallant officer resolved to make a regular Irish wake of it, and the good "potheen" circulated so rapidly that the assembled mourners alarmed the whole street with their noise and laughter. And a most refreshing spectacle was it when Major O'Blunderbuss, with a view to enhance the hilarity of the scene, kicked the stout footman completely out of the house and tossed his clothes and wages ignominiously from the window. In the course of a few days the two friends paid a visit to Mr. Strongitharms, the celebrated engraver in St. James's Street, for the purpose of having their cards printed with their armorial bearings on the top; and when Frank blandly directed the shopman who took the order to write down in his book the names of *Mr. Curtis* and *Major O'Bluntherbuss*, the latter exclaimed in a tone of mingled indignation and disgust, "Be Jasus! Frank, and your mimory grows worse and worse ivery day: for, be the holy poker-r! and isn't it *Colonel O'Bluntherbuss* that I am, the new rank being conferred upon me by her Gracious Majesty for my services in the East Indies?"—The shopman wrote down *Colonel O'Blunderbuss* accordingly; and as a colonel is the gallant gentleman known at the present day. Reader, if you happen to be passing along Jermyn Street any time in the evening after five o'clock, you will hear such shouts of laughter and peals of merriment issuing from one of the houses, that there can be no mistake as to the identity of that dwelling. We need not tell you the number of the mansion, because you cannot fail to discover where Colonel O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis reside by means of the uproarious sounds that emanate from the front-parlour, in spite of the closed shutters and heavy draperies. And to tell you the truth, the neighbours look upon that house as a complete nuisance; and rents are falling rapidly in the immediate neighbourhood—for quiet old bachelor-gentlemen, families, and even young blades about town, are frightened away from the lodgings that are let in the three or four nearest tenements on either side of the one where the two friends have settled themselves. But these worthies care nothing for the opinion of their neighbours and are deaf to all remonstrances: they lead a jolly life after their own hearts and in their own peculiar fashion—and to witness them in their happy domesticity, a stranger unacquainted with their history could not tell that the house and the fortune both belonged to Frank Curtis, for the Colonel is as much master of both dwelling and purse as his devoted friend.

Although Rosalie, the French lady's-maid, has not performed a very conspicuous part on the stage of our narrative, we are nevertheless induced to trace her career up to the present time. Compelled to appear as a witness at the Coroner's Inquest which was holden upon her late master and mistress, she attracted the notice of a young baronet who attended the proceedings through motives of curiosity: and as the overtures which he subsequently made her, were far from displeasing, she accepted them after a due amount of affected hesitation. The baronet was rich, and provided in a sumptuous manner for his mistress. He hired and furnished a house for her accommodation in a fashionable street at the West End—bought her a brougham and pair of handsome bays—took for her use a box at the Opera—and allowed her fifty guineas a month for her domestic expenses. In return for this generosity, she treated him with a capriciousness that would have been intolerable on the part of a sensible man, but which only confirmed the insensate spendthrift's infatuation. Rosalie's conduct was a matter of calculation, and not the unavoidable result of a wilful disposition. She knew that she had only to be kind and winning, in order to coax him into any extravagant expenditure which would minister to her enjoyments; and her

smiles were thus literally purchased with gold and diamonds. Six months only did the baronet's fortune stand this wanton devastation; and when he could no longer draw cheques for the sums which she required, she at once accepted the "protection" of an old nobleman who made her very handsome offers, and who was in his dotage. But now mark the wayward inconsistency of this woman's conduct! The moment she ceased to be dependent upon the baronet, she conceived a violent affection for him—was never happy save when in his society—bestowed upon him two-thirds of the money which she received from the ancient peer—and even stinted herself to supply his extravagances. She never treated him with the slightest indication of caprice—but served him as if she were a purchased slave, and he a Pacha. He gave way to intemperance, and in his drunken freaks would beat and ill-use her. She endured it all without a murmur, so long as he would *forgive* her when he was sober! At length the old nobleman died one day of indigestion—and Rosalie passed into the keeping of a Bishop. The Right Reverend Father was one of the most staunch supporters of all measures for the better observance of the Sabbath. He hated Sunday trading as something a shade or two worse than wilful murder—and no one declaimed more eloquently than he against the steam-boats plying on the Lord's Day. He even wished to prevent the railway-trains from running on the Sabbath; and his heart rejoiced when he read in the newspapers that apple-women, orange-girls, and shrimp-boys had been taken into custody for attempting to earn a penny to buy a meal on the "day of rest." But every Sunday evening this respectable old prelate made it a rule to dine with his mistress—aye, and remain with her too until past twelve at night; and heaven only knows what lying excuses he made to his wife for these intervals of absence. He was, however, far more stingy towards Rosalie than the deceased nobleman; and she accordingly cut him in favour of his Archdeacon, who was as unmitigated an old sinner as himself. Meantime the baronet continued to be the young woman's real favourite; and when he happened to find himself locked up in the Queen's Bench Prison, she never failed to visit him every day. Her diamonds—her jewels—her rings—her very watch she pawned to raise the sum necessary to procure his release; although the more his temper grew soured by adversity, the more brutal became his conduct towards her. From the keeping of the Archdeacon, she passed into that of a wealthy tradesman who had a splendid establishment in Regent Street. He likewise had a wife and six children; but he neglected them for the sake of his mistress—and while he grudged the former even common necessaries, he lavished all his gains upon the latter. At length he learnt that Rosalie was constantly visited by the baronet; and he broke off the connexion. No admirer immediately appearing to supply his place, the Frenchwoman wrote a very pretty letter to the Bishop, complimenting him upon his last speech against Sunday-trading, and declaring how much pleasure she should experience if he would honour her with a visit. The invitation was irresistible—the prelate went—and the result was that Rosalie once more became his mistress. The renewal of their connexion has not since been interrupted; and the baronet is still the object of the young woman's affection—still the recipient of two-thirds of all the money she can obtain—and still the only person in the world who would dare to raise his hand against her.

For nearly a year after his attempted suicide, the Marquis of Delmour lived happily with his wife, the past being buried in oblivion. Lady Delmour devoted herself to her husband as far as her own blighted and crushed affections would permit; and she at least had the supreme felicity of witnessing the unalloyed happiness which was experienced by Lord William Trevelyan and the lovely Agnes, who were united about six months after the reconciliation of the young lady's parents, the consent of the Lord Chancellor being obtained to sanction the marriage. But in the summer of 1847 the Marquis of Delmour was seized with a sudden and alarming illness; and in spite of the unwearied attentions of Sir John Lascelles and Lady Delmour, the old nobleman succumbed to the tyrant sway of Death. Upwards of a year has elapsed since that event; and we observe by a recent paragraph in the newspapers that the Marchioness has bestowed her hand upon Sir Gilbert Heathcote.

Lord William Trevelyan and Agnes are as happy as mortals can hope to be on earth. Their mode of life is somewhat secluded—for it is in each other's society that their enjoyment of existence consists. Their charity is unbounded, but bestowed privately and unostentatiously; and although you will never hear the name of Lord William Trevelyan proclaimed from the platform of Exeter Hall, amidst a list of liberal subscribers to Missionary Societies and other legalised swindles and robberies of the same class, yet rest assured that many and many a poor family has reason to bless that good nobleman and his amiable wife.

Timothy Splint, *alias* Tim the Snammer, continues the occupant of a fine farm in the backwoods of the United States: indeed, the property has spread out to an extent which renders the denomination of "estate" the more correct one. Joshua Pedlar and his wife have prospered equally well in Canada; and they are now in possession of a large mercantile establishment at Quebec. Mrs. Bunce is dead: but her husband still resides at Saint Peter's Port in Guernsey, and earns a very comfortable livelihood. Jeffreys leads a steady, industrious life at Liverpool, where he has became a substantial merchant, and is deservedly respected. Had all these persons been consigned to the horrors of transportation to a penal colony, their redemption from sin would have become an impossibility: but when placed in a condition to earn an honourable independence, even *murderers* may be put to a better use than hanging them like dogs, or sending them into the midst of a vile community where their example would only produce a deeper demoralisation.

Poor Mr. Bubbleton Styles, having failed in getting up his Railway Company, was compelled to pass through the Insolvents' Court; and during the eighteen months which have elapsed since that event, he has turned his attention to at least a dozen different occupations. On his discharge from the process of white-washing in Portugal Street, he became a wine-merchant: but finding that this market was completely glutted, he entered the coal and coke trade—with may be a little dealing in slates as a necessary adjunct thereto. This speculation not succeeding "for want of capital," Mr. Styles turned drysalter—then town-traveller for an ale-brewer—then commission-agent for a house in the woollen line—and then something else. But none of these occupations answering his purpose, and hearing of the good luck which had befallen his friends O'Blunderbuss and Curtis, he put on his last clean shirt and paid them a visit. His reception was not at first very encouraging, inasmuch as the gallant Irishman commenced by knocking him down and bunging up his right eye, for the simple reason that Mr. Styles was unaware of that formidable gentleman's elevation to the rank of *Colonel*, and had called him *Captain*: but when explanations took place, complete harmony was restored; and the worthy Bubbleton, having been made uncommonly drunk by his two friends, received a cheque for a hundred guineas to enable him to begin the world again. He has

made the recommencement accordingly, and seems in a fair way to get a living by adhering to one particular occupation instead of having a hundred upon his hands at the same time.

Clarence Villiers and Adelais continue to reside at Brompton. They are well off in a pecuniary point of view; and though the ardent love of their youth has mellowed down into a deep attachment, still are they as happy in each other's society as they were in those days when the marriage-state was as yet new with them. And often and often, when seated together of an evening, do they speak with never-failing gratitude and regret of poor Tom Rain!

Our readers will doubtless recollect the manuscript which Lord William Trevelyan discovered at the lunatic-asylum in Bethnal Green, and which recorded the experiences of a victim to that detestable system of quackery which the law allows. We may as well observe that in the course of a short tour which the young nobleman and his wife took to the south of France, a few months back, Trevelyan encountered Mr. Macdonald, the author of that lamentable history. This gentleman had completely recovered his mental equilibrium, and was living in a strict but happy seclusion with his Editha and their son. Trevelyan communicated to him the circumstances under which he had found the manuscript, and the motives which had induced him to convey it away from its place of concealment in the mad-house. Macdonald expressed his fervent gratitude for the young nobleman's generosity; and the papers were consigned to the flames. We will not mention the name of the town where Mr. Macdonald is residing: for, were we guilty of such imprudence, the extortioner would be assuredly sent after him.

We have now to speak of the inmates of Ellingham House. Reader, the family circle there is as happy as the mournful reminiscence of Mr. Hatfield's sudden death will permit. Charles has become the husband of the beautiful and accomplished Lady Frances; and the youthful pair continue to dwell at the Earl's mansion. Lady Georgiana is likewise a permanent resident beneath the same roof; and her son amply repays her by his affectionate devotion for any temporary uneasiness or grief which he might have caused her at the lamentable period of his connexion with Perdita. Sir John Lascelles is a frequent visitor at the mansion in Pall Mall; and we need scarcely add that he is always a welcome guest.

The Republic of Castelcicala flourishes under the free institutions which General Markham gave it. It is the Model-State in Europe; and appears to be the solution of a problem whether it is possible for honest rulers, a conscientious legislature, and a democratic system to extirpate poverty from a country, and make an entire people contented, free, and prosperous. There the Rights of Labour are recognised in all the plenitude of industry's claims: there no man who is willing to work, can possibly starve. Mendicity is unknown throughout the Republic; and when the Castelcicalans read paragraphs translated from the English papers into their own prints, and detailing how men, women, and children *die of starvation*—aye, and very frequently too—in the British Islands, they say to each other, "It is a hideous mockery to pretend that true freedom has any existence *there*!"

But, thank God! the tide of liberal sentiments is rolling rapidly over Europe—sweeping away the remnants of feudal barbarism—levelling all oppressive institutions—compelling tyrants to bend to the will of the masses—and giving such an impulse to enlightened notions as the world never saw before. And may that tide still flow on with unabating force—not wearing off the asperities of barbaric systems by degrees, but whirling all abuses away at once and in a moment;—not proceeding without certainty or uniformity, like a stream that is sometimes free and sometimes checked—but rushing on in a channel that is broad and deep;—not here diverted from its course by some obstacle—nor there dammed up until the weight of its waters break down the impediment,—but rolling on with a mighty and irresistible volume, and expanding into a glorious and illimitable flood!

THE END.

[ADVERTISEMENT.]

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FOOTNOTES:

[1] Booty, plunder.

[2] Secured.

[3] White Upper Coat: synonymous with "White Poodle."

[4] Handkerchief.

[5] Pocket.

[6] Strip.

[7] Pawn the coat.

[8] Gin.

[9] Stomach.

[10] Head.

[11] Judges.

[12] Transported.

[13] Barrister.

[14] Teeth.

[15] A thief who sneaks down areas to see what he can steal In kitchens.

[16] Prison.

[17] Burglary.

[18] West-street, Smithfield.

[19] Gave him a share.

[20] Informer.

[21] Turnkey.

[22] The Hulks.

[23] Waistcoat-pocket.

[24] Hands.

[25] Stealing a lady's reticule from her pretty arm.

[26] The Burglar.

[27] Public-house.

[28] Gunpowder.

[29] A companion.

[30] Chaplain.

[31] The Gallows.

[32] Passing forged notes.

[33] Friends.

[34] Informed.

[35] Sixpence.

[36] Bad Meat.

[37] Dark lantern.

[38] Implements used by burglars.

[39] Receiver of Stolen Goods.

[40] Swell-mobites.

[41] Swell-mobites who affect to be dissenting ministers, and preach in the open air in order to collect crowds, upon whose pockets their confederates work.

[42] Common thieves.

[43] Thieves who steal pocket-handkerchiefs.

[44] Swell-mobites, who steal from the compters in shops, while their confederates make some trifling purchase. These thieves often contrive to empty the till.

[45] Persons who pass false money.

[46] Persons who pass forged bank-notes at races, fairs, etc.

[47] Common Cheats.

[48] Gentlemanly—agreeable.

[49] Hands.

[50] Hanging.

[51] Inform, give warning.

[52] Sovereigns.

[53] Flash houses.

[54] A thief who frequents theatres.

[55] Pulpit

[56] A Jew fence: a receiver of stolen goods.

[57] 1s. 6d.

[58] The drop.

[59] A watch seal.

[60] Served to deceive the unwary.

[61] Pocket book.

[62] Watch.

[63] Jack Ketch.

[64] Utterer of false sovereigns.

[65] A convict returned from transportation before his time.

[66] Hanged.

[67] A juvenile thief.

[68] Privately whipped in prison.

[69] This song is entirely original.

[70] Burst it open.

[71] Surgeon.

[72] The author begs it to be fully understood that his own sentiments relative to courts and court etiquette, &c., must not be identified with the opinions of these ladies who are now conversing together.

[73] Four-penny piece.

[74] "We have not gone to bed."

[75] The causes which produce prostitution are as follows:

I. Natural causes:—1. Licentiousness of inclination. 2. Irritability of temper. 3. Pride and love of dress. 4. Dishonesty, and desire of property. 5. Indolence.

II. Accidental causes:—1. Seduction. 2. Inconsiderate and ill-sorted marriages. 3. Inadequate remuneration for female work. 4. Want of employment. 5. Intemperance. 6. Poverty. 7. Want of proper looking after their servants on the part of masters and mistresses. 8. Ignorance. 9. Bad example of parents. 10. Harsh and unkind treatment by parents and other relations. 11. Attendance on evening dancing schools, and dancing parties. 12. Theatre going. 13. The publication of improper works, and obscene prints. 14. The countenance and reward given to vice. 15. The small encouragement given to virtue.

The proportions amongst those females who have deviated from the path of virtue may be quoted as follows:—

1. One-fourth from being servants in taverns and public-houses, where they have been seduced by men frequenting these places of dissipation and temptation.

2. One-fourth from the intermixture of the sexes in factories, and those employed in workhouses, shops, &c.

3. One-fourth by procuresses, or females who visit country towns, markets, and places of worship, for the purpose of decoying good-looking girls of all classes.

4. One-fourth may be divided into four classes:—1. Such as being indolent, or possessing bad tempers, leave their situations. 2. Those who are driven to that awful course by young men making false promises. 3. Children who have been urged by their mothers to become prostitutes for a livelihood. 4. Daughters of clergymen, half-pay officers, &c., who are left portionless orphans.

[76] "The process of parliamentary reporting, and the qualifications of those by whom the task is performed, cannot be adequately described within the narrow limits of this article; but it is hoped that the reader may be enabled to form some idea of both from the following brief outline. Every publication not copying from, or abridging any other, but giving original reports, keeps one of a series of reporters constantly in the gallery of the lords, and another in the commons. These, like sentinels, are at stated periods relieved by their colleagues, when they take advantage of the interval to transcribe their notes, in order to be ready again to resume the duty of note-taking, and afterwards that of transcription for the press. A succession of reporters for each establishment is thus maintained; and the process of writing from their notes is never interrupted until an account of the whole debates of the evening has been committed to the hands of the primer. There are only seven publications for which a reporter is constantly in attendance; and these include the London morning papers, from which all others that give debates are under the necessity of copying or abridging them. The number of reporters maintained by each varies from ten or eleven to seventeen or eighteen. They are for the most part gentlemen of liberal education—many have graduated at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, or Dublin; and they must all possess a competent knowledge of the multifarious subjects which come under the consideration of Parliament. The expedition and ability with which their duties are performed must be admitted by every one who attends a debate and afterwards reads a newspaper, while the correctness and rapidity with which their manuscript is put in type and printed, has long been a subject of surprise and admiration."—*The Parliamentary Companion.*

[77] Commencement of Book V.

[78] The French terms for the various steps and features of the ballet-dance are—*jetés*, *balances*, *rondes de jambes*, *fouettes*, *cabrioles*, *pirouettes sur le coude-pied*, *sauts de basques*, *pas de bourrés*, and *entre-chats à quatre*, *à six*, and *à huit*.

[79] The Dietary Table of Clerkenwell New Prison, already quoted at page 190, is as follows:—

	Soup.	Gruel.	Meat.	Bread.
	Pints.	*Pints.*	*Ounces.*	*Ounces.*
Monday	..	2½	..	20
Tuesday	..	1½	6	20
Wednesday	..	2½	..	20
Thursday	..	2½	..	20
Friday	1	1½	..	20
Saturday	..	1½	6	20
Sunday	1	1½	..	20
Total Weekly Allowance	2	13½	12	140

[80] It is too frequently the habit to throw the blame of the diabolical nature of some of the clauses of the New Poor Law upon the masters of workhouses: whereas the whole vituperation should be levelled against the guardians who issue the dietary-tables, from the conditions of which the masters dare not deviate. We have no doubt that there are many masters of workhouses who are humane and kind-hearted men. Indeed, having inspected several of those establishments for the purpose of collecting information to aid us in the episode to which this note is appended, we have been enabled to ascertain that such is really the fact. Amongst others, we must signalize the Edmonton and Tottenham Union House, the master of which is Mr. Barraclough. This gentleman is a man of a most benevolent heart, and exerts himself in every way to ameliorate the condition of those entrusted to his charge. The guardians of that particular Union are, moreover, worthy, liberal-minded and considerate men, who sanction and encourage Mr. Barraclough in his humane endeavours to make the inmates of the workhouse as little sensible of their degraded condition as possible. Would that all boards of guardians merited the same encomium!

[81] The products of ordinary combustion are sufficiently poisonous. The gases produced by the decomposition of the dead are partially soluble in water; and a fatty pellicle is instantly formed in large quantities. The wood, saturated with these dissolved gases, and used as fuel (a frequent occurrence in poor neighbourhoods, and in the vicinity of metropolitan grave-yards), must diffuse, in addition to the exhalations constantly given off from bodies in vaults, and on the earth's surface, vast volumes of gaseous poison. Hence many of those maladies whose source, symptoms, and principles defy medical experience either to explain or cure.

[82] In case the reader should doubt the accuracy of any of the statements relative to the employment of the youth of both sexes in the English coal-mines, which he may find in this chapter, we beg to refer him to the "*Report* and *Appendix to the Report*, of the Children's Employment Commission, presented to Both Houses of Parliament by command of Her Majesty, in 1842."

[83] "Explosions of carbonated hydrogen gas, which is usually called by the miners 'sulphur,' sometimes prove very destructive, not only by scorching to death, but by the suffocation of foul air after the explosion is over, and also by the violence by which persons are driven before it, or are smothered by the ruins thrown down upon them."—*Appendix to First Report.*

[84] "Amongst the children and young persons I remarked that some of the muscles were developed to a degree amounting to a deformity; for example, the muscles of the back and loins stood from the body, and appeared almost like a rope passing under the skin."—*Report.*

[85] See *Report*, page 43, section 194.

[86] Secured the money.

[87] Informer—spy.

[88] In prison.

[89] St. Giles's.

[90] Coal-mine.

[91] Rum-punch.

[92] Wife.

[93] Take something to drink.

[94] Beggar with Matches.

[95] Soldiers.

[96] Treasury

[97] Smoking a pipe.

[98] Drinking mug.

[99] Drinking

[100] The porter.

FOOTNOTES:

1 See the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

2 See Chapter LIX.

3 See Chapter LXIV.

4 See last paragraph of Chapter LXV.

5 See Chapter LXXIX.

6 This was when Rainford quitted the packet-ship at Guernsey, and commenced his career as the Blackamoor.

7 See first paragraph, second column, page 28, of this Volume of the Second Series.

8 "An obscure threepenny print, called the *Daily News*, published in its impression of November 2nd, an article purporting to be a notice of the leading works belonging to the sphere of Cheap Literature, but in which a vile, cowardly, and ruffian-like attack was made upon Mrs. Reynolds's novel of 'GRETNA GREEN.' The article alluded to appeared in the evening of the same date in the *Express*, a paper made up from the contents of the other, but of whose existence we were totally unaware until the occurrence of the matter in question. The attack, though evidently written by some silly boy, was so savage and malignant, and was made up of such a pack of atrocious lies, that it became necessary to take some kind of notice of it, although neither the *Daily News* nor its evening reflex enjoy a circulation or an influence sufficient to effect the amount of mischief which the dastardly scribe sought to accomplish. Our solicitors were accordingly instructed to write to the Editors of the *News* and *Express*, requiring a complete contradiction to the libel, or menacing an action as the alternative. The letter which our legal advisers despatched was a gentlemanly and talented remonstrance, which soon brought the stupid Editors of the *Daily News* and the *Express* to reason. Bradbury and Evans, the proprietors of those threepenny prints, shook in their shoes at the idea of an action, they already having enough law business on their hands in consequence of their treatment of Messrs. Powell and Wareing:—and, accordingly, the *News* and *Express* ate their own words, on Tuesday, Nov. 9th, in the following terms:—

"'We have received a letter, protesting against Mrs. S. F. Reynolds' work of "GRETNA GREEN" being included in that list of popular works described as marked by "looseness, warmth of colouring in criminal scenes, and the false glow cast around guilty indulgencies." We must admit that "GRETNA GREEN" does not merit this; and that, whatever its faults it certainly contains nothing derogatory to the character or delicacy of a lady writer.'

"Now let our readers mark well the atrocity of the proceeding on the part of the *News* and the *Express*. They first denounce 'GRETNA GREEN' in the strongest terms: they are afterwards compelled, *by the fear of law proceedings*, to 'admit that "GRETNA GREEN" does not merit this, and that it contains nothing derogatory to the character or delicacy of a lady writer.' Then how dared the wretched scribe to act such a miscreant's part as to accuse a lady of writing with 'looseness,' when he must have known the charge to be unfounded? He told a downright, deliberate, wilful lie: he has proclaimed himself, and likewise admitted himself to be, an abominable liar! And as such we denounce him.

"But of what value can criticisms of the *News* and *Express* be, when a contemptible scribe is thus allowed to make the columns of these prints the vehicle for his own beastly malignity? What authority can belong to a reviewer who is obliged to say on the 9th of November, 'I was guilty of a foul, cowardly, and unjustifiable calumny against a lady's character on the 2nd of November.' And these two papers belong to men who are so very particular that they turned off their sub—editors. Messrs. Powell and Wareing, because, forsooth, these gentlemen gave insertion to a particular bankruptcy case which the bankrupt himself had written to implore Bradbury and Evans *not* to publish!

"We hope the contemptible slanderer who 'does the criticisms' for the *News* and *Express* will treat his readers (two grown-up persons and a small boy for the *News*, and the small boy without the grown-up persons for the *Express*) with an account of the origin, progress, and present condition of those threepenny things. If so, he must state how the *News* first came out at five-pence with the intention of smashing every thing,—how Charles Dickens was the man entrusted with the obstetric process of introducing this phenomenon to the world,—how froth was never so frothy, and vapouring never so vapoury, as when the bills, placards, and advertisements appeared,—and how the mountain at last brought forth a mouse! In fact, no failure was ever more miserable—more ludicrous—more contemptible than that of the *Daily News*. When a friend once

spoke of his uppermost garment to Brummell, the ‘exquisite,’ laying his finger upon the collar thereof, said, ‘Do you call this thing a coat?’—and when the *News* first came out, people held it up between the tips of their forefinger and thumb, and asked each other innocently, ‘Do you call this thing a newspaper?’ Well, after continuing remarkably sickly for some time, and seeing the utter folly of hoping to compete with the established daily newspapers, Bradbury and Evans—dear, kind, worthy souls!—said one morning to each other, ‘This will never do: the public will not be gulled—we must really sell our wares at what they are worth;’—and so down went the price of the *News* to twopence-halfpenny! ‘Hurrah for the *cheap* newspaper press!’ vociferated they who now affect to look down with contempt on cheap literature altogether: and forthwith they fetch Mr. Dilk all the way from the *Athenæum* office in Wellington Street to manage their paper for them. And such management as it has been! Mr. Dilk knows about as much of newspapers in general as he does of courtesy in the *Athenæum* in particular;—and Bradbury and Evans very soon found that a twopenny-halfpenny daily thing was ‘no go.’ The price is accordingly raised to threepence; and, just to eke out by hook and by crook, the *Express* is issued as an evening paper, its contents being precisely those of the *News*, with perhaps half-a-dozen lines of new matter just to make a show under the head of ‘Latest Intelligence.’ Thus has the *Daily News* been tinkered about in all shapes and ways, with the hope of establishing it on some kind of basis or another;—and, after such a career, it fancies itself to be respectable and influential enough to undertake the duties of Mentor! But it has entrusted the office to a disgusting twaddler who scruples not to season his mawkish composition with diabolical lies, as a make-shift for ‘Attic salt.’ However, enough of this for the present:—we have compelled the *News* and the *Express* to acknowledge themselves to be slanderers;—but we are afraid that after all they have got the better of us, inasmuch as they probably provoked us only for the purpose of obtaining *a gratuitous advertisement* through the medium of any reply which might be made to them in The Miscellany.”—*Reynolds's Miscellany, No. 56.*

9 The readers of the First Series of “The Mysteries of London” will recollect the character of Lady Adeline Enfield in the “History of an Unfortunate Woman.” Lady Caroline Jerningham is drawn expressly in contrast with that heroine,—one of the objects of “The Mysteries of London” being to depict the good and the bad—the generous and the selfish—of all classes of society.

10 Fact.

11 Fact. This incident shows how the Ministers of the Established Church will at times unscrupulously set the laws of the land at defiance.

12 Equivalent to “Miss” in English.

13 The Industrious classes in Great Britain should take into their serious consideration the ensuing plan, which the operatives in France have submitted to the Provisional Government. The basis of a similar scheme might be established in London; and there are doubtless many persons, possessing the intelligence required for the initiative of the grand work, who would devote a few hours per week, without fee or reward, to the foundation of so glorious an institution. The plan alluded to is conceived as follows; but we have substituted the equivalent sums of English money for the French coins specified in the original document;—

“Petition for a bill to establish a National Pension Fund for every workman that has attained the age of fifty-five years.

“Every citizen of the two sexes from seventeen to fifty-five years of age shall be bound to pay each day one farthing, or 7½*d.* per month, or 7*s.* 6*d.* per annum; every town or village shall be bound to pay for the totality of its inhabitants.

“Every workman employing workmen or servants is bound to keep back this amount from their wages, and is to be considered responsible therefore.

“Every father of a family who is unfortunate, and has several mouths to support, shall be *de jure* exempted from paying his annual quota until such time as his family shall be able to work.

“Are excluded from the advantages of the pension-fund all persons having a revenue above 32*l.* a year; the most severe laws to be made against such persons as should rob the money of the poor.

“A scale of pension is to be fixed, giving 20*l.* a year at 55 years, 28*l.* at 65 years, and 44*l.* at 75 years.

“The pension-fund is to be for all citizens: thus bankers, notaries, advocates, in a word, all persons who may have been favoured by fortune all their life-time, will have as much right to it, if they become unfortunate, as the workman who all his life-time has known only labour and privation.

“What workman is there who cannot save 1¾d. per week? Who is there that would not blush to receive alms when age shall have weakened his strength and courage?

“The pension which he will receive will be the economy of his whole life; and if he throws a glance backwards, it will be to bless the progress of civilisation.

“The day on which this law will pass, the payment of the pension may commence; since from the age of 17 to 55 all citizens will contribute to the common stock; and since the funds, in place of being capitalised, will be distributed every year. During

15 years the State will have little to add in order to complete the pensions, but after that period it will every year have some sacrifice to make. Let, during the fifteen years, the money hitherto spent on royalty be capitalised. Let the resources of the Civil List be added to them, and the sum will be more than sufficient. If fears are entertained not to obtain a sum sufficient to pay all the pensions, let the diamonds of the crown be sold. The most glorious crown of a government aught to be the happiness of the people."

14 Witness the noble conduct of the Parisian operatives, as described in the following extract from the *Constitutional* newspaper:—

"We have already stated that by the care of the Minister of the Interior prompt measures had been taken to ensure the preservation of the furniture and other articles of value at the Tuileries. The following are some further details:—The citizen Chalon d'Argé, one of the special commissaries appointed by the minister, after having concerted with Captain St. Amand, commandant of the Tuileries, proceeded to an inventory of the jewels, objects of art, &c., found there. These gentlemen soon ascertained that the people had respected the various articles scattered about. The apartment of the Duke de Nemours had alone been thrown into disorder, but nothing was taken away. The apartments of the other members of the royal family remained intact. Not a picture was touched in the saloons of the late Duke of Orleans, containing, as they did, a celebrated collection. The most valuable pictures were taken to the Louvre, under the direction of M. Mérinée. A great quantity of coined money was found in the different apartments; a man of the people conceived the idea of throwing all this money into a baignoire, over which he placed a coverlet, so as to give it the appearance of a couch. He then placed himself on it, and waited in that position until some persons came up who could save the treasure which he had collected. To give an idea of the wealth thus preserved, we may state that on Saturday alone four fourgons, and on Sunday two others, transported to the Treasury masses of silver plate, as well as coffers containing the diamonds of the ex-princesses. In these fourgons there was property to the amount of several millions. The same people which had contributed to save these valuable articles helped to pack them up, and escorted them to the national Treasury. It was a touching sight to behold these hard hands taking up with the greatest precautions diamonds, necklaces, jewels of all kinds. It is useless to say that not an article in the inventory was missing. When M. Bastide and M. Bixio, who had been entrusted by the Provisional Government to take charge of the jewels and other valuable property left behind in the Tuileries, and which had been collected and packed up by men of the people, and an inventory taken of them under the superintendence of a student of the Polytechnic School, and a National Guard, the Government commissioners found the chests, trunks, and other packages in which they had been placed, under the charge of some of the people who had been employed in collecting them. When the whole were removed, one of the men went up to M. Bastide, and said, '*Sir, we have been forgotten since yesterday. It is now twelve o'clock, and we have not yet anything to eat. Can you order me some bread?* All present were deeply affected by this proof of disinterested fidelity to men, resisting the temptation of property at their command greater in value than any they had ever before seen, and demanding a piece of bread as their only reward. M. Bastide repeatedly urged the man who spoke to him to give his name, but he constantly refused, saying—'*We want nothing more. We can earn our food by our labour. To-morrow we shall return to work, and to-day ask only for the bread we have been unable to obtain.*' They were then fed, and took their departure with the same resolution."

15 At the "monster meeting" in Trafalgar-square, on Monday, March 6th, we were called upon to preside in the absence of Mr. Cochrane. The *London Telegraph* contained the ensuing sketch or outline of the speech which we delivered on that occasion, and which we now transfer to the pages of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" simply for the purpose of convincing our readers that we are not afraid to proclaim in all possible ways the opinions which we have for years promulgated through the medium of our writings:—

"Mr. Reynolds rose, and, suggesting that the parties present should form a meeting to congratulate the Parisians on their recent triumph, addressed the meeting. He had been voted to preside at this assembly, in the absence of Mr. Cochrane. Where that gentleman was, he could not say. His conduct was, at least, extraordinary, in convening a meeting which he neglected to attend. He (Mr. Reynolds) must beg of the meeting to be orderly; it was moral force which would gain their ends for them. Let them, therefore, show that, though met to demand their rights, they knew how to conduct themselves. The French revolution was a glorious triumph of public feeling. The French had recognised the rights of the working-classes. What the people of this country wanted was, that every man who was willing to work and fit for work should have work to do. (Loud cheers.) The working-classes only wanted fair wages. They were willing to give the fair value of labour for them. (Hear.) The right of labour had been recognised in France; and the rights of labour must be recognised in England. Let them not take the leading articles of aristocratic newspapers as the public voice; but let them listen to the shout which they would now hear from thousands of people met to express their adhesion to the principles of liberty. (Loud cheers). This meeting had been called to oppose the income-tax. Let them show by their cheers that they were opposed to all oppressive taxation. But let them be peaceable. Let there be no disturbance. Let them show the police and the Government-spies in plain clothes, that the working-classes of England could conduct themselves in a quiet orderly manner when met to discuss their wrongs. Mr. Reynolds sat down amidst the most vociferous cheering."

In the evening of the same day we attended another "monster meeting" held on Clerkenwell Green, on which occasion the following outline of the speech which we delivered was given by the *London Telegraph* and other newspapers:—

"Mr. Reynolds, the well-known author, next spoke at some length. He drew attention to the meeting which had taken place that day in Trafalgar-square, and commented on the aggressive conduct of the police. The time, he also contended, was come,

when they ought no longer to mince matters. (Cheers.) The people of France had really done their duty, and it now remained with the people of this country to do the same. They were bound to demand their rights by every moral means; and if they were forced to have recourse to bloodshed, their oppressors would have to account for the result, not themselves. (Cheers.) He rejoiced at the exhibition of feeling that had taken place in France. (Cheers.) The people had raised a man to power, who had turned round and sought, by a large array of armed forces, to crush them. (Groans.) They, however, he rejoiced to find, gave him his deserts, and hurled him from his throne. (Cheers.) He was now in this country—an exiled villain. (Cheers.) Far, indeed, was it from him (the speaker) to wish that the tyrant should be molested or disturbed while suffering in a foreign land the pangs of remorse. No; he wished him to remain harmless and in insignificance. (Hear, hear.) But he did not see why the gallant and noble people of France were to be insulted by the feelings of sympathy which Her Majesty and some other personages were exhibiting towards the exiled tyrant (Hear.) He complained of this, and particularly that the people of England should be identified with the anti-liberal opinions of those persons. (Hear, hear.) What, if the gallant people of France were to be so exasperated as to declare war against this country, would the hard-working people of England, Scotland, and Ireland consent to be war-taxed became of the caprice of a number of individuals—(no, no)—who, while wallowing in luxury, had no sympathy whatever with the masses of their fellow-creatures suffering from sickness and starvation? Mr. Reynolds, at some length, very ably and forcibly dwelt on the evils of class-legislation, and showed, from his writings, that he had ever been the friend of the working-men. He concluded, amidst much cheering, by proposing the first resolution."

16 Letting the thieves know that he was aware of the fact of the robbery, and demanding a portion for himself. This is a common practice amongst thieves; and the claim of the person thus "declaring on" is seldom disputed, even though he had nothing to do with the robbery.

17 Share of the plunder.

18 This mighty warrior *ran away* from London when danger was apprehended in consequence of the glorious democratic meeting of 250,000 enlightened working men, at Kennington Common, on the 10th of April, 1848.

19 The memorable day of the 10th of April, 1848.

20 With deep sorrow and indignation we have frequently noticed blackguard boys and dirty vagabonds insult private soldiers in the streets. Nothing can be more reprehensible than such conduct as this; but we are sure that the British soldier is too enlightened and too generous-hearted to suppose that any respectable working-man would treat him with indignity. There is and ought to be a deep sympathy between the military and the operative-classes,—both alike being diabolically oppressed by the aristocratic and wealthy classes, and both having rights to claim, privileges to acquire, abuses to rectify, and tyranny to subdue. In the name of common sense and common justice, let no insult ever be offered to the private soldier who conducts himself properly.

21 It may seem astonishing how any respectable journals could be induced to lend themselves to such disgraceful puffery: but we will give our readers some little explanation upon the subject. The fact is that the quacks pay in the first instance for the insertion of the puffs as "paragraph-advertisements," and then quote them as being the editorial opinions of the newspapers in which they are thus inserted! We quote from some of the quack-advertisements a few specimens of these "*ad captandum*" notices:—

"The task of preparing and producing the work entitled * * * *, by Messrs. * * *, though apparently not one of magnitude, demands a most intimate acquaintance with the mysteries of a profession of the highest character. To say that the author has produced a volume which cannot be otherwise considered than as a treasure, and a blessing to the community, is not saying too much; and being written by a duly qualified medical practitioner, its pages give evidence of the results of much personal investigation, and great researches in the study of medicine. In a word, the work has merits which develope no superficial attainments, and we cordially and most earnestly recommend it for general perusal.—*Weekly Chronicle.*"

"To the gay and thoughtless we trust this little work will serve as a beacon to warn them of the danger attendant upon the too rash indulgence of their passions; whilst to some it may serve as a monitor in the hour of temptation, and to the afflicted as a sure guide to health.—*Chronicle.*"

"Their long experience and reputation is the patient's guarantee, and well deserves for the work its immense circulation. —*Era.*"

"This is a medical publication, ably written, and developes the treatment of a class of painful maladies which has too long been the prey of the illiterate and the designing.—*United Service Gazette.*"

"The author of this singular and talented work is a legally qualified medical man, who has had considerable experience in the treatment of the various disorders arising from the follies of early indiscretion. The engravings demonstrate the consequences of excesses, and, by its perusal, many questions may be satisfactorily replied to that admit of no appeal, even to the most confidential friend.—*Era.*"

To explain more fully still the proceedings of the quacks and the artfulness of quackery, we refer our readers to the *Weekly*

Dispatch of Sunday, July 2; and at the bottom of a column (not in the regular advertising department) will be found the ensuing advertisement:—

"[ADVERTISEMENT.]—Holloway's Pills an excellent Remedy for Indigestion, Bilious and Liver Complaints.—All painful and distressing sensations arising from these complaints (which are too well known to sufferers to require a description here of their symptoms) may be easily removed by a few doses of this inestimable medicine; for such is its efficacy, that the most debilitated constitutions are effectually strengthened, and the aversion to motion overcome, thus giving buoyancy to the spirits, creating an appetite, and promoting digestion. At this season, when epidemics are so prevalent, these pills should be taken, as they surpass every other remedy as a preventative of disorders, even of the most malignant kind. Sold by all Druggists, and at Professor Holloway's Establishment, 244, Strand, London."

This advertisement was of course duly paid for: but Mr. Holloway may now, if he choose to do so, quote the *Dispatch* as having recommended the efficacy of his medicines to "strengthen the most debilitated constitutions;" and the public, trusting to such a powerful and honest authority as the *Dispatch*, will be induced to purchase the pills. Our readers can now comprehend how the medical quacks obtain reviews of their obscene books.

22 Luck.

23 Piece of luck.

24 Money.

25 In a publication entitled *The Medical Adviser*, and issued some years ago, we find the following observations relative to quacks and quackery:—"The legislators in almost every civilized society have considered them as pests and a disgrace to every country where they are to be found, and penal laws have therefore been enacted for the suppression of quackery. The Colleges of Physicians were instituted in different kingdoms of Europe, to examine all persons who undertook the practice of the art, to inspect all drugs in the apothecaries' shops, and destroy such as were unfit; and there can be no doubt but their power extended to the examinations of nostrums in general, and on their report, the vendors were subject to severe penalties. In the reign of James I., an order of council, grounded on former laws, was issued for the apprehension of all quacks, in order to their being examined by the censors of the College of Physicians; on that occasion several mountebanks, water-tasters, ague-charmers, and vendors of nostrums were fined, imprisoned, and banished. This wholesome severity, it may be supposed, checked the evil for a time; but in the reign of William III. it became again necessary to put the laws in force against these base vermin and miscreants, in consequence of which many of them, when examined, confessed their utter ignorance to such a degree, as to be unable either to read or write; others, it was found, had been attempting to procure abortion in unfortunate single women; several of them were discovered to be fortune-tellers, match-makers, frauders, pimps, and bawds; some of these miscreants were set in the pillory, some put on horseback with their faces to the horse's tail, with their noses and lips slit, and their necks decorated with a collar of urinals, and afterwards whipped, imprisoned, branded, and banished."

The victims of quacks might even now show the scoundrels, if they chose, that there are laws in existence fully strong enough to punish them; and we should advise those who have been plundered to state their cases to their solicitors. It is intolerable that the public should be prayed upon by a set of villains who live in splendid mansions, ride in their carriages, and maintain luxurious tables at the expense of the unfortunate dupes whom their advertisements entrap.

Several years ago, Mr. Charles Dunne, a surgeon, presented to Parliament a petition against Quackery; and in that well reasoned document we find the ensuing paragraph, which, we feel convinced, our readers will peruse with interest:—

"That the mal-practices of quack doctors are wisely guarded against in every country of Europe, except Britain; for no person (under pain of fine and imprisonment), is allowed to take the charge of the sick, or even to direct the application of medicines, without having gone through the proper ordeals of examination as to his professional knowledge and acquirements. In England it is notorious that we have not only carpenters, tailors, bricklayers' labourers, lead-pencil-makers, Jews old clothes men, journeymen, linen-drapers, and men of colour, but even women quacks, who practise their duplicities on the unwary and unthinking part of the public, by plundering all those who have the folly to approach them, whilst many are absolutely deprived of life by them, and others, who have the misfortune to escape death, are left to drag on a miserable existence with an entirely broken constitution for the remainder of their days. The baneful effects, too, of patent medicines, as they are called, deserve particular notice, the composition of which is formed in such a manner as to render their administration at all times dangerous, and but too often fraught with death; whereas, on the Continent, no medicines (similar to those with us called patent) are permitted to be sold, without first having been analyzed by the constituted chemical authorities, and duly examined by the respective faculties of medicine. It is clear from what occurs in law, divinity, and physic, that a foundation or competent education by a course of study, is essentially necessary to exercise any of these different departments, and whoever exercises them without this education cannot possibly do it with advantage to the community. For an unscientific knowledge of the treatment of any disease, even if occasionally successful in its object, can never be trusted to; for if any unforeseen circumstance should arise, such practitioner can neither avert the mischief, nor find means to relieve the patient, as a man of real science would do;—mere experience alone, devoid of science, can have no other claim on public notice than as empiricism, and, like a seaman, incapable of taking an observation when anything

inauspicious occurs at sea, is unable to direct his course. Empiricism in all professions being the opposite to science, and directed by no regular principle but the knowledge of one or two isolated facts, is evidently hostile to the advancement of liberal principles, and too often ruinous to those confiding in such hollow pretensions. Empiricism, therefore, in religion, law, politics, and physic, is the hydra to be guarded against, as the bane of real knowledge and improvement; and wherever encouraged, such empiricism is always subversive of the best interests of mankind. The great object of legislation should be to impose a wholesome restraint on any attempt calculated to overstep the just and fair bounds, which the welfare of the people requires."

26 Flash, or fictitious, notes.

27 Pass off, or change.

28 Dark lanthorn.

29 A crow-bar used by burglars.

30 Burglary.

31 Eliza Sydney. See First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

32 This was the case with the celebrated Watt, the improver of the steam-engine. He was driven from the city of London, at the commencement of his career, through his inability to pay the fine, then amounting to 40*l*. This fact remains on record to the immortal disgrace of the Corporation.

THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON

BY

GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS